

To the Committee,

My name is Joseph Widner and I have been the Owner/Operator of the CENTRAL OREGON BREEZE since 2006. The Breeze has always been a family owned and operated business since its inception and our focus has always been to be an accessible community service focused on meeting the transportation needs of the community while providing livable wage jobs and a safe and customer service focused experience.

The Breeze Bus has been an Intercity Rural Bus Service between Central Oregon and the Portland area for over 30 Years now. We have provided this service to the communities along Hwy 97, Hwy 26 over Mt. Hood and into the Portland area under the name Central Oregon Breeze since 1992; but in the 7 years Prior to that we provided Transportation in the Bend and Central Oregon area with taxis and Airport Shuttles. The Breeze Bus provides Stops in Bend, Redmond, Madras, Warm Springs, Government Camp, Welches, Sandy, Gresham MAX, Portland Airport, and Downtown Portland Union Station Amtrak. We Travel through Deschutes, Jefferson, Wasco, Clackmas, and Multnomah Counties 6 days a week, but it is not uncommon for our passengers to also include residents and visitors of/to Lake, Crook, Harney, And Washington Counties. We make connections with many other transit services like Tri-met, CET, S.A.M. C-Tran, TCDT/The Wave, Amtrak, Oregon Point Buses, and the flights and services at PDX. For a rough sandbagged/conservative estimate of Total Passenger Road Miles Provided over our time in Business (1 passenger traveling 1 mile with our service since 1992) would be over 52 Million Passenger Miles Traveled in 30 Years+ of service.

I offer this information to explain who we are and where we have come, but now let me address where we are now.

Since 2020 Covid has obviously changed everything- We were forced into laying off all but 1 employee. We maintained essential services 2 days a week in the weeks following Governor Brown's stay-at-home orders. This government order reversed cash flow for the company and drained 2 months of operational funds in less then 2 weeks. The Breeze was able to work with ODOT PTD and transition some 5311(f) Capital Grant Funds into Operational Funds with FTA's assistance. This along with short term debt instruments kept the service open for another month. I quickly turned to the SBA PPP Program and EIDL UL Disaster Loan program for assistance to bring back some staff, pay for fuel and insurance and we again keep crawling forward to the next line of assistance, the CARES Act Grants through the FTA which were a 100% no match grant. This allowed us to again move forward- add back Sunday Service and Wednesday Service. This added service was very much needed. Countless numbers of passengers expressed their appreciation for our service during the pandemic as they had to either travel to assist family, travel to provide essential services (like contact tracers), or were just trying to access much needed government or medical services. Even the Prisons and Correction Departments need to have access to transit to move people and stay in compliance with the courts. In the end our recovery to 6 days a week of service has been slow, metered, and only possible through the assistance of the State of Oregon, ODOT PTD, Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council, the Federal Transportation Administration, the CARES Act and now the Oregon State Transportation Improvement Fund. Without these measures, grants and assistance our service and MANY MANY others would have disappeared.

This is a testament to the success of a system we worked together to create out of NEED. But this system was created to be a temporary patch, and while it wasn't perfect, and it has served us well, it has come at a cost. Ridership recovery for our service is at best 70% of what it was in 2019. The

acquisition of Bus Drivers, while difficult prior to Covid, is now a clear impediment to the full return of services like ours. Drivers are now making 100% more than their average wages in 2019 and prior. We have improved/increased Employee Benefits as well as wages to compete with the other Bus Driver positions available, the majority of which are Municipal/Local Government or Department of Education Jobs offering PERS and Full Insurance packages. While at the same time the ability to acquire a Passenger Endorsed Commercial Drivers License has become much more difficult. Regulations and Rules now require specific Classroom Training, in addition to behind the wheel training, and tested standards. It is near impossible for a citizen to access a CDL with a Passenger Endorsement in Oregon WITHOUT being hired, trained, certified, and licensed through a Government entity prior to gaining a License. As a result these new standards and covid the population of CDL Passenger Drivers has decreased dramatically. Regulations, Compliance, Training Mandates have all increased in cost of time and money. Costs for Insurance, Fuel, Staffing/Wages, Equipment, Parts, Mechanical Services have ALL Skyrocketed. The quality of Equipment, Warranties, Parts, and Services have all deminised. The AVERAGE COST PER SERVICE mile for our service over the last 2 years is ranging from 180% to 250% of what it was in 2019.

Soon the CARES Act Funds will disappear, long before complete recovery of our transit system AND a comprehensive funding plan needs to be in place and prepared to address this brave new world we face in Transit. We also face an increased need for access to transportation, an economy no longer designed to cover the real world costs of Transit through simple fare-box income, and a system of regulation requiring greater cost for compliance and equipment. Now is not the time to let out any slack on our lines; now is the time to shore our footing, trim the sails and keep pushing forward. The State of Oregon wants greater access to public transportation and less reliance on personal vehicles, the public needs greater access to transportation and the services and resources that transport will get them too. Now is the time to shore up the funding to maintain these services into the next decade, not just the next year. The communities these services have served for decades deserve our continued concerted efforts and nothing less.

Thank you for your time.

**Joseph Widner**  
**Central Oregon Breeze**  
**C.A.C. Transportation Inc.**