

Paul L Evans
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 20



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

February 2, 2023

The Honorable Chris Gorsek, State Senator
The Honorable Susan McLain, State Representative
Joint Committee on Transportation
82nd Legislative Assembly

Ref: HB 2781

Chairs Gorsek & McLain:

Thank you for scheduling this hearing for House Bill 2781 (HB 2781). HB 2781 is, at heart, a relatively simple piece of legislation: it adds a twenty-ninth (29th) type of special district (page 2, line 9). To ensure a targeted use of this type of district, a negotiation resulted in tightening the scope of the possibility of a “Capitol City Region” bridge district; only four counties were included in the language.

This is a critical point: enumeration of these counties does not establish a district; rather, it contains the possibility of a bridge district into an area within those four counties.

Section 2: outlines the specific counties: Benton, Marion, Polk, and Yamhill Counties, that a bridge district could, if formed through the formalized special district petition process, be included. Unfortunately, some folks need to understand what this section does. The enumeration of counties does not establish a district; rather, it contains the possibility of a bridge district to only an area within those four counties.

Section 3: outlines the mechanics of developing an elected board. Truth be told, this may need to be amended to clarify the process for instances where a county may not be included in the district area. That said, I am very open to your suggestions for improving the clarity and effectiveness of an elected special district board.

Sections 4 & 5: outline the powers a bridge district may exercise if a bridge district is established through a petition supported by a majority of the people potentially included. These sections essentially mirror powers exercised by other special districts throughout the State of Oregon. Chief among these powers is the ability to accept funding for operations and sustainability.

Section 12: establishes a legal sunset to this measure should support for a bridge district fail to materialize. In simplest terms, HB 2781 provides the communities disproportionately impacted by a lack of adequate crossings of the Willamette River in an area near the Capitol a targeted tool for forming a special district for the singular purpose of building and sustaining regional infrastructure – if and only if – the people living in the area want it.

When considering the utility of HB 2781, I ask us to draw upon an experience that happened not so far from here. The construction of the Golden Gate Bridge was made possible because of the creation of a special district. Otherwise, construction would not have started on January 5, 1933. There – as here – a crossing was needed. And there, as here, the local cities and county had vastly differing perspectives on what to do, where to do it, and who would be responsible once it was built. I believe that lesson can, and should, be applied here.

In closing, thank you for your consideration of HB 2781. It provides a tool outside the usual process that is too reliant upon city and county decision-making. The political environment has worsened since the last time a serious bridge proposal was formally considered. We need less talk; we need greater flexibility for those willing to work in common cause to build regional support for a costly but critical series of infrastructure investments. Please let me know if you have any questions or require additional information from my office.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'P. H. C.', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Cc: State Senator Brian Boquist
State Representative Shelly Boshart Davis