

Good afternoon Chair Neron, Vice Chairs Hudson and Wright, members of the Committee on Education,

My name is Noel Mickelberry and I work as the School & Community Travel Options Coordinator at Oregon Metro. I am here today to provide informational testimony on the issues covered by HB 3014 and do not speak for Metro's position as an agency. In my role, I work at the intersection of transportation and education as we fund Safe Routes to School (SRTS) programming in partnership with school districts, nonprofits, and local jurisdictions. The need for a closer partnership between SRTS efforts and school transportation services became apparent in 2020, when the pandemic upended traditional ways of operating.

The challenges we have heard from districts, schools, and families include navigating support for families within 1-1.5 miles of the school who face safety or health hazards, coordinating carpool and transit pass programming when there are not enough school bus drivers to serve all eligible students, the impact of long bus routes on school bus drivers and on kids getting to school on time, and an increase in congestion and traffic management needs at school pick up and drop off. These challenges impact the day-to-day reliability of transportation services and highlight the need to bolster a school transportation system that is often at or over capacity.

In 2021-2022 I worked with school district partners around the state to better understand the rules governing school transportation funding and approved costs – recognizing that flexibility to meet unforeseen challenges was one of the biggest barriers to providing students with the transportation support they need. The following barriers exist within existing administrative rule language:

- Students who live within 1-1.5 miles of school but face a health or safety hazard are eligible for school transportation services, defined in a district's supplemental transportation plan which is approved by the local school board and the State Board of Education. For all students eligible for transportation services, including those in a supplemental transportation plan, districts can pay a stipend to parents to drive their own child to school, or receive transportation by an approved contracted driving service like a taxi, in lieu of school bus transportation. However, they cannot pay to support carpooling of multiple families, crossing guard programs, or school-led walking/biking groups. They also cannot request reimbursement to support the ongoing coordination of these kinds of programs, which may already exist and serve eligible students.
- In addition, districts can request a waiver for providing transportation to secondary students if there is available public transportation, but only if the cost of that service is funded with outside resources. Districts cannot request reimbursement for transit fares for eligible students or for the coordination of an approved transit pass program for eligible students in lieu of school bus transportation.

This legislation would address these barriers in the following ways:

- Programs like crossing guards or adult-led walking/biking groups could help mitigate safety or health hazards already defined by the district in a school's supplemental plan to support kids who live within a mile or mile and a half of their school but are required to receive transportation services from the district due to unsafe conditions.

- Existing school staff could be involved in delivering and coordinating these additional transportation services. School or district coordination of transit pass programs, carpool matching, and walking/biking groups would enable schools to implement or adjust these programs quickly and effectively and address day-to-day needs and challenges. The delivery of these programs by school staff builds community trust in the program and strengthens the connection between staff, families, and students.

Metro's Safe Routes to School program is committed to supporting our local school districts and families to ensure kids get to school safely every day. Existing Safe Routes to School programs can support the implementation of this legislation by providing technical assistance, tools, and resources through our network of Safe Routes to School Coordinators across the state – partnership with school staff is critical to the success of all Safe Routes to School efforts. I appreciate the discussion and involvement of this committee and the legislature in working to address this important task. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Noel Mickelberry