



February 21, 2023

Representative Susan McLain and Senator Chris Gorsek
Joint Committee on Transportation
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: HB 2662

Co-Chair McLain, Co-Chair Gorsek and Members of the Committee:

TriMet is Oregon's largest transit provider, serving more than 1.6 million people across our 533-square mile service territory. Our service includes 80 bus lines, 1 Frequent Express bus rapid transit line, 5 MAX light rail lines, our LIFT paratransit service, and the WES commuter rail line. TriMet is neutral on HB 2662, but we have several clarifications and requests that we would like to put on the record.

Under TriMet's charter, we cannot operate transit service outside of our service territory, and while we do operate WES, heavy passenger rail is not one of our core competencies as a transit agency. We recommend creating a state-chartered public corporation or some form of rail authority to extend and operate the WES line between Wilsonville and Salem, as TriMet is not the appropriate entity to oversee that project or operate that service.

House Bill 2662 calls for ODOT, in collaboration with TriMet, to study issues related to extending WES including increasing the frequency and hours of service. We currently only run WES on weekdays during the morning and afternoon rush hours, with trains every 45 minutes. Part of the reason for those limited service hours is that we lease the tracks that WES uses from Portland Western Railroad. Under the terms of our lease agreement, we are only allowed to run WES on their tracks during those windows of time on weekdays.

The frequency of WES service is also limited because WES ridership is low and the operations and maintenance costs for heavy commuter rail are high. TriMet has some concerns about the opportunity cost of being directed to increase WES service as a component of extending the service to Salem. Our plans for our limited funds include expanding our bus service with a focus on low-income, high ridership areas, continuing our transition to a zero-emission bus fleet, and a new bus rapid transit line on 82nd Avenue. We want to make sure that pressure to increase TriMet's investment in WES would not result in less funding for these other priorities.

If the state does move forward with extending WES to Salem, TriMet would support having the rail authority or other entity that operates the extension take over the operation of the existing WES line from Beaverton to Wilsonville as well. We believe that WES service would run more smoothly if the entire line is operated by a single entity. Relatedly, since TriMet currently operates WES under a 50-year lease agreement with Portland Western Railroad, we think that exploring the mechanics of transferring that lease to a rail authority or other entity is an important part of study proposed by HB 2662.

TriMet supports expanding the high-capacity transportation options available to Oregonians, and we would be happy to consult with ODOT on study that incorporates these considerations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Miles Pengilly', written over a light-colored rectangular background.

Miles Pengilly
State Government Affairs Manager
TriMet