

**Written Testimony of Samuel Aldridge**

**Prepared for the Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Capital Construction**

**Newport, Oregon**

**April 14, 2023**

***Re: Support for Nehalem River Bridge Pile Restoration  
on the Port of Tillamook Bay/Oregon Coast Scenic Railroad***

My name is Sam, and I am the Railroad Superintendent for Oregon Coast Scenic Railroad (OCSR), a Class III short line railroad, located in Garibaldi, in Tillamook County. This railroad is worth nearly \$12 million to the county economy every year and has been experiencing large growth over the last few years.

I have prepared this testimony to respectfully pursue your support for a \$750,000 appropriation to restore the piling under the 2<sup>nd</sup> Crossing of the Nehalem River Railroad Bridge near Mohler in Tillamook County, as requested through Tillamook County legislators Senator Weber and Representative Javadi.

This project has the support of numerous parties, has the support of Nehalem Bay Fire District; the Tillamook Coast Visitors Association; the City of Wheeler, the Port of Garibaldi, the Port of Tillamook Bay; Twins Ranch Railriders, Oregon Coast Scenic Railroad, and many others. It will restore several miles of railroad access up the Nehalem River Valley, and result in numerous benefits, including:

- **Wildfire Prevention/Suppression** - OCSR's 40,000-gallon firefighting train will be able to access further up the Nehalem Valley to help with firefighting efforts in heavily forested areas, including areas of state forest. OCSR already works closely with several fire departments regarding the deployment of the train under red flag conditions. It is for this reason that the project has received the support of the Nehalem Bay Fire District and other local firefighting agencies.
- **Economic Impact** - The project is anticipated to have a significant economic impact to the county with a benefit of around \$300,000 per year once fully completed, and will also open the door to further economic growth by enabling other projects further up the rail line to happen that would provide another \$200,000 per year in economic impact. These benefits primarily arise from Oregon Coast Scenic Railroad and Twins Ranch Railriders increasing tourist numbers through new programs, with the result of increased retail sales, restaurant visitation, and overnight stays in Tillamook County.
- **Trail and Accessibility Benefits** – The Nehalem Valley is planned to be a dual rail/trail corridor and OCSR is working with the Salmonberry Trail Foundation to ensure this bridge is dual mode compatible. This dual-purpose design also allows for greater access by the public to the Nehalem Valley than previously possible, for example people with ADA considerations that may have struggled with a trail for a long distance can explore further by utilizing a train/trail combination.
- **River Health** – There are currently environmental concerns as the Nehalem River Bridge is in danger of failing should storm debris impact the degraded pilings and break them, potentially causing.

One big strength of this project is that it is shovel ready. Oregon Coast Scenic Railroad has already had the necessary engineering completed at its own expense, has started permitting conversations with the Army Corps of Engineers, Environmental Protection Agency, and National Marine Fisheries. This means that the work could be completed in a single season once funding is secured.

The bulk of the construction work was quoted at \$813,000 in March of 2023, accounting for prevailing wages, with the estimated total cost, including contingency, being \$910,000. Oregon Coast Scenic Railroad, a 501(c)(3) non-profit heritage group, is providing \$160,000 from its budget towards the project, giving approximately an 18% match.

This project has the potential to bring great economic growth to an underserved and rural area of our wonderful state. Not only that, but it will also help preserve our natural resources against the ever-increasing threat of wildfire that has become so present in recent summers, bringing benefits well beyond Tillamook County. It is therefore of no surprise that the project has the support of so many local groups.

With that said, I hope that you will seriously consider this funding request and thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light gray background. The signature reads "S. R. Aldridge" in a cursive, flowing script.

Samuel Aldridge