

Submitter: Matt Krabacher  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Joint Committee On Transportation  
Measure: HB4109

Pioneer Passenger Rail Service Testimony  
Matt Krabacher  
2/8/24

This testimony is in regard to HB 4109-4

My name is Matt Krabacher and I am a resident of Baker City, Oregon and am on the board of AORTA as the Vice President for East Oregon. Born in Portland, Oregon, my family moved to Sandpoint, Idaho when I was ten and have lived in Portland off and on throughout my adult life. I have regularly taken the Empire Builder Amtrak line between Portland and Sandpoint to remain connected with friends and family on either end as well as to access major international airports. Looking back, having access to transit from my rural life in north Idaho to urban centers without the need for car ownership was hugely empowering and has enabled much of my young adult life.

I moved to Baker City two years ago, fully knowing that the Pioneer Line came through here up into the 90s and that, one day, it might be restarted. I have made several trips to both Portland and Boise in my two years here and each time I am reminded that parking alone in downtown Portland for 2-3 days will cost as much as an Amtrak ticket, nevermind fuel or vehicle maintenance costs.

Two months ago, before I joined AORTA, I helped start a grassroots group of people to advocate for passenger rail in this area, mostly in regard to the FRA's ongoing long distance rail study. We ran a petition in Baker County to send into that study to advocate for NE Oregon's desire to restore passenger rail service here. The petition gathered 1090 signatures from Baker county and spawned another parallel petition in Union county that gathered 353 signatures. The 1090 signatures from Baker County means that over 1 in 17 people in our county signed this petition in support of passenger rail service.

To live out here, most people require four wheel drive vehicles to feel comfortable navigating for their daily needs during all times of the year. Given that the only public transportation option is a single greyhound that rolls through once a day (assuming that inclement weather hasn't closed I-84), everyone has to drive everywhere, and since they mostly own 4x4 vehicles, this is immensely expensive and has a high carbon footprint.

The restoration of passenger rail is a popular and bi-partisan issue here. The addition

of reliable, long distance passenger rail service to this area would mean that the longest trips that are made by residents here, such as to airports for travel or for medical services in larger cities, could be reduced. It would also allow reliable access to those services for people that face difficulty with, or an inability to, drive themselves. Our petition shows that people here know this and that they want a public transit option. It shows that passenger rail would be utilized, and would greatly benefit the rural communities of NE Oregon and southern Idaho that have few options other than to drive for long distance travel.

This amendment, HB 4109-4 would direct ODOT to work with Idaho to pursue assistance from the FRA to explore restoring this service. This is essential to the effort of restoring this service. It would send a clear message to the FRA that both Oregon and Idaho are serious about the Pioneer Line and help influence their long distance study decision and it would jump start coordination between Oregon and Idaho to work on the Pioneer Line's restoration.

Thank you for your time today and for acknowledging this major transit deficit in Northeast Oregon.

Matt Krabacher  
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