

Submitter: Erik Halstead
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Transportation
Measure: SB1572

Good evening,

For many years I was a transit rider every day from my home in Tigard to my work in downtown Portland. In those years I have seen the impact caused by a singular focus on transit investment only in rail modes (light rail, streetcars and WES Commuter Rail) - by directly disinvesting in bus service and cutting bus service to communities and riders who needed transit the most.

Oregon has not had a good track record with rail investment. WES, in particular, has never met a single ridership goal. Amtrak Cascades between Portland and Eugene, consistently averages a number of boarding rides per train that is about 1/3rd of the capacity of the train - or less than two buses. Investments in freight rail lines also have largely not generated the traffic promised, nor reduced highway traffic.

It's been said that Albert Einstein coined the phrase "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over, but expecting a different result." And this bill, which would authorize yet another passenger rail study, would do just that. We've studied passenger rail in Oregon at least five different times in my 46 year lifetime. They each come to the same conclusion - yes, it's feasible, but it's very expensive and we don't have the money to do it.

One thing that is starkly missing in Oregon is a comprehensive, cohesive, and usable intercity bus system. Greyhound has largely disappeared from the state. POINT is a half-baked collection of four routes - only two of which even connect to each other - and have zero common ticketing, reservation or operating system, aside from a logo and some kind of involvement with ODOT. And we have a haphazard collection of county transit systems, who barely or do not cooperate with each other.

We can change that.

We know that extending WES from Wilsonville to Salem will cost at a minimum \$200 million. We don't have \$200 million. It's that simple. We don't need to spend \$500,000 on consultants to tell us what we already know.

We do have a smaller amount of money. \$10 million would go a long ways towards establishing an intercity transit system for northwestern Oregon - not just for Portland, Oregon City, Salem, Albany and Eugene. Not just for Beaverton, Tigard, Tualatin, Wilsonville, Woodburn, Keizer and Salem. But for communities like Corvallis,

McMinnville, Newberg, Lebanon, Mount Angel, Silverton, and others, that would be ignored by an extension of WES. Hourly bus service seven days a week, with comfortable motorcoaches, would be a huge improvement over just a handful of rush-hour only trains operating just Monday through Friday. It would serve all Oregonians, not just a select few lucky enough to live near a train station. \$10 million would pay to upgrade about two or three miles of track - and absolutely nothing else. No railcars, no stations, no parking lots, and certainly no money to operate the train.

Best of all - it would be the best study of intercity transit that could legitimize the potential of commuter or intercity rail. If the buses are full, rail is the logical upgrade. When the trains are empty, we are simply watching money fly away.

I know elected officials want to put their name on something, particularly something as sexy as a train. But let's be honest - we've studied it to death. We don't have the money. Instead of funding consultants, let's actually make a difference - for our citizens, our visitors, our businesses, our environment, our state. Let's do what we can, that is feasible, realistic, and sorely missing in Oregon. WES is not the answer. WES was never the answer. Let's stop the insanity, and do something that is known to work. And if you're aching to spend \$500,000, I could sure use it to buy two electric vehicles - if WES were built, I'd still need a car at both ends of my commute thanks to the lack of bus service at both ends.

Thank you,

Erik Halstead