

Testimony on SB 1202
Before the Joint Committee on Transportation
March 8, 2025, Dan L. McFarling, Aloha, OR

Co-Chairs Sen Gorsek and Rep McLain, Co-Vice Chairs Starr and Boshart Davis, Committee Members:

DO PASS It is a myth that building and maintaining railways is more expensive than roadways.

Rail is the **only** form of modern transport evolving through **private** investment. Railway transport is:

- Safe
- Economical
- Environmental
- Equitable

Like some railways, many early roads were constructed through public-private partnership – land grants. Far too few are aware that Oregon road builders received far more “land grants” than railway companies.¹ Road builders received 1,008,027 hectares of public land, railways received 642,856. Why do we not hear about the “free land” given to “road builders?” – because the companies building these early toll roads failed to make a profit and turned over responsibilities for construction and maintenance to local and state government. Roads became a government, or taxpayer, burden. Unlike railways, roads are not profitable.

Railways, the first “big business,” were generally profitable – so profitable they exerted *too much* control over public policy. We rarely hear about road building companies because these for-profit companies “disappeared” soon *after* receiving public land. We read about the “big, bad” railways, sometimes deserving of that reputation, because they remain in the *private, for-profit* sector.

Rail is the only form of transportation which primarily relies on **private investment** to acquire right-of-way (ROW), improve ROW, maintain ROW, provide signal system/traffic control, and their own law enforcement agency. Furthermore, rail ROW and improvements are subject to taxation – helping provide the local services upon which we all depend. Other modes of transport rely in part or in whole on taxpayer dollars and public backed bonds for their tax-free ROW and services.

In some corridors road transport *is* the only reasonable and affordable option - the volume of passenger and freight traffic can be inadequate to justify the capital investment in rail, especially in “farm to city.”²

We need a comprehensive transportation system – roads, aviation, water and rail. Each mode has an essential role to play in moving people and freight. Some modes, especially roadways, *require* public subsidy, direct and indirect. Prior to and after World War II, railway transport (passenger and freight), *and public transportation*, existed in the private, for-profit sector. Road transport, especially long-haul road transport, became much more prominent only after huge subsidies and public policies promoted increased dependency on roads.

Railway transport, in many corridors, especially in congested areas, is more economical for most transport needs than road transport.

Railways. Safe. Economical. Environmental. Equitable.

¹ Atlas of Oregon, University of Oregon, 1976, pp 10-11 (*Please read this referenmce!*)

² The “Good Roads Movement” in the 1880s was promoted primarily by farmers who need to get their product to the railway corridor, and bicyclists