

TO: Joint Committee on Transportation, Oregon Legislature 2023 Session  
FROM: Douglas R. Allen  
SUBJECT: HB 2662 - Testimony  
DATE: February 21, 2023

Co-Chairs Gorsek and McLain; Vice-Chairs Boquist and Boshart Davis; Members of the Committee:

My name is Doug Allen. I am Portland Area Vice President of AORTA-Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates, speaking today for myself. I offer the following points in support of HB 2662:

1. The Oregon Electric track between Wilsonville and Salem is under-utilized, and could offer an attractive passenger service. Much of the right-of-way is owned by the State of Oregon, and the current freight operator has proven experience operating the existing WES passenger service.
2. This is an opportunity to better-utilize existing WES infrastructure. WES operates infrequently, only during weekday rush hours, and so it is expensive on a per-rider basis, even though it offers a quick trip. Adding service to WES, and extending some trips to Salem, will make the entire operation much more attractive and useful, and could help relieve I-5 congestion.

During the 1980's, following deregulation of inter-city bus service, I helped form a company that took over a former money-losing Greyhound bus route. We believed that the public is attracted to frequent, reliable, fast service, between desired destinations. We doubled the service that Greyhound had been providing, and ultimately ended up with four times their ridership. We operated seven days a week, 365 days a year. WES has potential for much higher ridership.

3. The study should investigate appropriate governance structures and funding sources to determine the best way to oversee operation of the entire WES service between Beaverton and Salem. Fares should be compatible with TriMet north of Wilsonville.
4. The current connection in Wilsonville between WES trains and the SMART and Cherriots bus service is a disincentive to travel between Salem and Washington County, whereas a continuous train trip could be more reliable and attractive, and would connect with frequent MAX light rail service in Beaverton to western Washington County and the entire Portland region.
5. This is not high-speed rail, nor is it competition for the Amtrak Cascades. WES trains could stop at Donald, Woodburn, and Keizer. Washington County travelers to Salem would avoid a trip to Union Station or Oregon City to catch Amtrak. It would operate more frequently than the long-distance Amtrak service, and could have a cheaper cost structure than Amtrak service, with local operation and locally maintained equipment.
6. Extending WES to Salem was studied in 2009 by HDR Engineering, at the time WES was opened. The tracks, structures, and current freight service have also been studied as part of the high speed rail corridor environmental analysis, which ultimately selected the Union Pacific tracks for Amtrak Cascades expansion. Much of the technical work has already been done.
7. Please apply for federal "Corridor ID" funding for the study, which has no match requirements.