

Submitter: Richard Meis

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Transportation

Measure: SB14

Co-chairs Beyer and McLain, Committee members, I am Rick Meis from Halfway and I write this letter as testimony in support of SB-14, concerning Passenger Rail Service in E Oregon sponsored by Senator Chris Gorsek.

I was pretty young when my parents loaded my brother and I on the North Coast Limited to send us all of 200 miles to visit close family friends. It was before Amtrak, probably 1960. In 1971, Amtrak took over the service with the North Coast Hiawatha, which was discontinued in 1979. Train travel is far more pleasant and comfortable than the bus (for long trips) and the stress and cramped nature of flying.

Disappointingly, I never rode the Pioneer, which you are discussing in your hearing today. When my wife and I go east to visit her family and friends, we have to drive about 4 hours to Pasco to catch the Empire Builder. We look forward to only have to drive to Baker City.

The federal bipartisan infrastructure bill set significant resources aside to study rail service nationally. Oregon could benefit from some of that money to determine the feasibility of putting the Pioneer back on the tracks. Senate Bill 14 puts eastern Oregon on track to do that.

An economic benefit is that towns in which the train stops, like Pendleton, La Grande, Baker City and Ontario may see some new jobs. Add to that the near certainty that local businesses will see increased business from people getting on or off the train, or dropping off/picking up friends and family. As an avid train traveler, I know that many Pasco businesses have seen me pass money across the counter when I'm there to catch, or just got off the train.

It would be great to be able to catch the train in Baker and go to Portland or Salt Lake City and beyond. It would be important to be sure that the Pioneer is restored all the way to Salt Lake in order to link with other trains, which would certainly increase ridership.

When we have moved to Eastern Oregon, we were surprised to learn that there are fewer and fewer public transportation options. As Susan and I get older, we have to drive to Boise to see medical specialists. The train would make some of those trips easier without the stress of driving or the discomfort of the bus, a form of travel I used when I was in college.

Working in financial aid at Montana State University for several years, parents of out-of-state students often asked me if there was passenger rail service to Bozeman, to which I had to reply no. Wouldn't it be a boon to students from Ontario to Pendleton and beyond to catch the train.

At a passenger rail meeting in Helena, MT, back in the '90's, consultants gave equally-compared numbers for the total cost (passenger-paid and subsidized) per passenger of different forms of transportation. Behind buses, trains are the least expensive. Air travel is infinitely more costly.

Most of us are aware of and concerned about the climate crisis we face. Passenger rail contributes infinitely less greenhouse gases on a per user basis than cars or air travel. Another positive to moving this bill forward.

There is everything to gain and nothing to lose from moving SB-14 forward in this process.

Thank you for your time.