

Submitter: Richard Sheperd
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Transportation
Measure: HB3224

Dear Co-Chairs McLain and Gorsek, Co-Chairs Boshart Davis and Boquist, and Members of the Joint Transportation Committee,

I want to voice some concerns about the proposed bill, HB 3224, the bill to direct ODOT, ODE, and DEQ to study Streetcar in Salem.

The city of Salem deserves high quality, efficient, and frequent transit. This bill is an important step to realizing the potential for a terrific transit network in our State's Capitol. However, I would ask that a friendly amendment be introduced to expand the focus of the study to "any high-capacity transit", as the current bill limits the possibility that other transit vehicles that may be even better suited for the Salem area. Additionally, I would ask that if the bill moves forward to only evaluate Streetcar that additional requirements be set out to explore public-private funding options.

As pointed out by other advocates, the needs of Salem are quite unique. The need for a better transit connections across the river, along with a circulator for downtown were expressed. Employers have expressed interest in Light Rail, and others have expressed interest in reducing Greenhouse Gas emissions.

To be clear, I don't mean to dismiss Streetcar. I love riding the Streetcar in Portland. However, the lack of dedicated Right of Way means it gets stuck in traffic, and the frequency is very poor at one vehicle every 30 minutes making it difficult to catch.

Another city that has had to deal with both downtown circulation, a major University, and crossing the Willamette River is the city of Eugene. After evaluating multiple options, Eugene went with a Bus-Rapid Transit (BRT) system, now called the Emerald Express (EmX).

With Salem and Eugene's Urban population neck and neck at around 270,000, BRT might prove to be a better next step for the city. The EmX system features 15 minute frequency, 40-foot long busses capable of carrying over 100 passengers, all-door level boarding, off-board fare collection, and a dedicated Bus-Only lane. Eugene's BRT provides many of the benefits of Light Rail at a fraction of the cost.

It would be prudent for taxpayers to see all of options on the table, and to identify which options would most impact GHG emissions and congestion. I would encourage a friendly amendment to expand the scope to "any high capacity transit," not just Streetcar. Salem deserves a complete transportation network, without becoming beholden to a specific technology.

In other cities, Streetcar has primarily been used as an opportunity to revive their downtowns, and has been built in other cities by leverage private funding from Local Improvement Districts, Tax Increment Financing, and even selling air rights. All of these options can help ease the burden on tax payers, while ensuring real estate development doesn't get a "free lunch" for all of the benefits offered by the Streetcar service.

In particular, Portland's streetcar was particularly successful because it helped revitalize the Pearl District, a former industrial district. Only \$5M came from the federal government, and I will submit a breakdown of the initial costs for Portland's Central City streetcar project (pay attention to the funding from Local-Improvement Districts).

Salem could do something similar. Unfortunately, nothing is stated in the bill to direct the study to identify private sources of funds to ease the burden on taxpayers, or to ensure affordable housing can be built along the route to avoid gentrification.

Should the bill continue to focus on Streetcar, I would encourage the committee ensure that private-public funding sources are explored.

In summary, either ensure all high-capacity transit options are studied so taxpayer dollars can be spent most effectively, and/or require private-public partnerships so Salem taxpayers are not turning out their pockets to enrich private real-estate developers.

Sincerely,
Richard Sheperd