



Protect Public Transit Drivers – Support SB 787

Oregon has seen an alarming increase in the number of assaults on transit operators—from fewer than 50 assaults statewide in 2015 to over 200 assaults annually from 2020-2022.

Transit agencies around the state are currently undergoing a historic operator shortage. Experienced operators are retiring and quitting in record numbers, and many have shared that the increased threat of physical violence they face has degraded their working conditions, affected their mental health, and caused them to reevaluate transit as a career path.

Under ORS 163.165, it is already a Class C felony to “intentionally, knowingly or recklessly [cause]...physical injury to the operator of a public transit vehicle while the operator is in control of or operating the vehicle.” **In other words, it is already a felony to assault a bus or train driver while they’re operating a vehicle. Senate Bill 787 would simply extend that same legal penalty to all circumstances when the driver is on duty.**

Due to increases in violence against operators in recent years, many transit buses now have Plexiglas shields separating the driver’s seat from passengers. However, the protection provided by these shields and the enhanced assault penalty in our legal system disappears when our operators exit their vehicles for layovers, to use the restroom, or to investigate a mechanical issue—often in isolated areas late at night and early in the morning. Their assailants know this: **over 90% of operator assaults occur while the vehicle is not in motion.**

Transit workers are essential public servants. **As highly vulnerable workers who perform a critical government function, they must be protected with elevated penalties if they are attacked on the job.**

Would SB 787 have an impact if DAs aren’t currently prosecuting these assaults?

Yes. DAs have confirmed that felony assaults on operators are much more likely to be prosecuted than misdemeanor assaults.

Does SB 787 lower the threshold for being charged with felony assault?

No. Under current law, assaulting a transit operator is only a felony if the assault is *both* “knowing, intentional, or reckless” and “causes physical injury.” This threshold would not change under SB 787.

How would SB 787 actually deter operator assault?

Transit agencies would conduct public information campaigns and post signage to alert riders of the felony penalty. The felony penalty would also reduce repeat offenders—currently a serious issue because riders ride the same routes and sometimes assault the same driver multiple times.