

**Testimony in support of HB4109.4 (rail study amendment), Thursday, February 8, 2024  
Joint Legislative Transportation Committee**

I am a past president of the Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates and from Eugene; I write in support of HB4109.4 to direct ODOT study interstate east-west rail passenger service in anticipation of federal funding.

The recent federal infrastructure bill provides the best opportunity in years to expand service, and several states (Montana, Colorado) have done what we're now asking Oregon to do: a study as a vehicle for federal funding. Inertia seems to be guiding ODOT's non-efforts so far despite federal funding championed by Oregon's own Peter De Fazio.

In 2019 AORTA sponsored a La Grande meeting to promote restoring rail passenger service. We were overwhelmed at the response; about 125 people attended. Substantial support has been expressed in more recent gatherings in Baker City, Ontario and Weiser.

It's easy to think of this as a Portland-Boise train, but it would be even more a Hood River-Ontario, or Hermiston-Portland, or Baker City-Boise, or Ontario-Pocatello train. We heard many express the need to see medical specialists in Boise or Portland, and how passenger train service would make that much easier.

There are fewer and fewer travel options along that route. Greyhound now runs only one daily Portland-Boise bus ... without even a station, just drop off on a curb, in those cities and most if not all stops along the route. That plus off-and-on air service to Pendleton is the only public transportation along that route.

East-west public transportation across Oregon is no better from my home in Eugene. I took the bus from Eugene to see family in Boise a few years ago. From Eugene, there are two transfers: one in Bend and a second in Ontario. Even though it was summer, my Greyhound connection from Ontario to Boise was delayed without explanation. I was fortunate that my brother could come from Boise to pick me up, but other passengers didn't have that option and needed to wait for hours for the connection.

This is implied by this bill, but the needs of the Union Pacific Railroad also must be taken into account in any study. I'm a Union Pacific stockholder and want UP to do well. In the past three decades, California has made great strides in expanding its passenger-rail system and has worked with the same Union Pacific Railroad ... but that cooperation happened because California came to the table with money to fund the additional capacity UP required to host more passenger trains. And the same point was made last year by Portland and Western officials regarding expansion of Tri-Met's Westside Express Service.

Again, it's great to see this kind of proposal before the Legislature and I strongly urge your support.

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