



Testimony by City of Wilsonville Mayor Julie Fitzgerald Supporting SB 1572:

Legislation Provides Opportunity to Improve I-5 Commuting Between Portland Metro Area–North Willamette Valley With Reliable High-Capacity Transit Option

Scheduled for public hearing on Feb. 13, 2024, before
the Joint Committee On Transportation

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

I am testifying in strong support of SB 1572, which sponsors an ODOT study of extending TriMet’s WES commuter train from Wilsonville to Salem, with stops in Donald, Woodburn and Keizer — growing communities aspiring to improve transportation options as a vital component of their economic-development efforts.

The City of Wilsonville operates the South Metro Area Regional Transit (SMART) agency, which collaborates with the Salem Area Mass Transit District to share the Monday through Friday commuter “1X Express” bus route on I-5 between Wilsonville and Salem. SMART buses also meet each WES train to provide the last-mile connection to local area employers. SMART also provides regular service to Canby and Tualatin, and plans routes also to Oregon City.

As traffic congestion on the South Portland Metro and North Willamette Valley I-5 corridor continues to worsen, commuters, shoppers and those with medical appointments would welcome a public-transit alternative unaffected by ever increasing highway traffic congestion. As a commuter train, WES is unimpeded by highway traffic congestion, offering the potential for a reliable transportation option that connects to major metro areas.

As ODOT undertakes the I-205 Toll Project and Regional Mobility Pricing Project (RMPP) for tolling I-5 and I-205 in the Portland metro region, equity issues of impacts to low-income populations of tolls to North Willamette Valley commuters are of concern. The lack of sufficient reliable, public-transit commute options along I-5 from Salem/Keizer to Portland area makes a non-highway mobility option like WES more attractive.

The City believes that the WES study of a potential extension provides the state an opportunity to leverage substantial Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funds for commuter rail service connecting the Portland METRO and Salem-Keizer SKATS—two Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) Transportation Management Areas (TMAs)—and that can increase greatly WES ridership.

The City understands that the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) has concerns over the timeframe for the study, which seeks to provide key information timely to the legislature for the proposed “2025 Transportation Package.” **The City believes that the proposed eight-month study timeframe is sufficient to undertake the two primary components needed for the WES Extension Study:**

1. Update ODOT’s prior 2010 WES Extension Study (“Oregon Rail Study Appendix I: Wilsonville to Salem Commuter Rail Assessment, April 2010”) that looked primarily at technical issues of an extension, such as rail replacement, operations and siding extension costs. Updating technical infrastructure and operational costs should be relatively straightforward.
2. The other component of the Study will take more work that is completely do-able: identifying and resolving transportation-access issues to new commuter rail stations and related land-use issues where a commuter train station may be outside the UGB, as in the case of Woodburn.

Since the proposed Westside Express Advisory Committee has representatives of all the key stakeholders, the study is well positioned to timely analyze and resolve transportation and land-use issues. That is, primary stakeholders include the principle cities involved—namely Donald, Keizer, Salem, Wilsonville and Woodburn—and the relevant public-transit systems—Salem Area Mass Transit District, SMART, Woodburn Transit and Yamhill County Transit—as well as land-use/transportation planning organizations that include the Mid-Willamette Valley Council of Governments, 1000 Friends of Oregon and the Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates, plus ODOT also.

The City appreciates your consideration and urges a Do-Pass vote on SB 1572 with a referral to Ways and Means. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Julie Fitzgerald, Mayor
City of Wilsonville

Enclosure:

“Support SB 1572 – ODOT Study Connecting Portland Metro-Area WES Commuter Train to Salem/Keizer Metro, Extending from Wilsonville to Salem,” Portland–Salem/Keizer Metro Areas WES I-5 Commuter Rail Extension Study Coalition, 2/9/2024

Support SB 1572 – ODOT Study Connecting Portland Metro-Area WES Commuter Train to Salem/Keizer Metro, Extending from Wilsonville to Salem

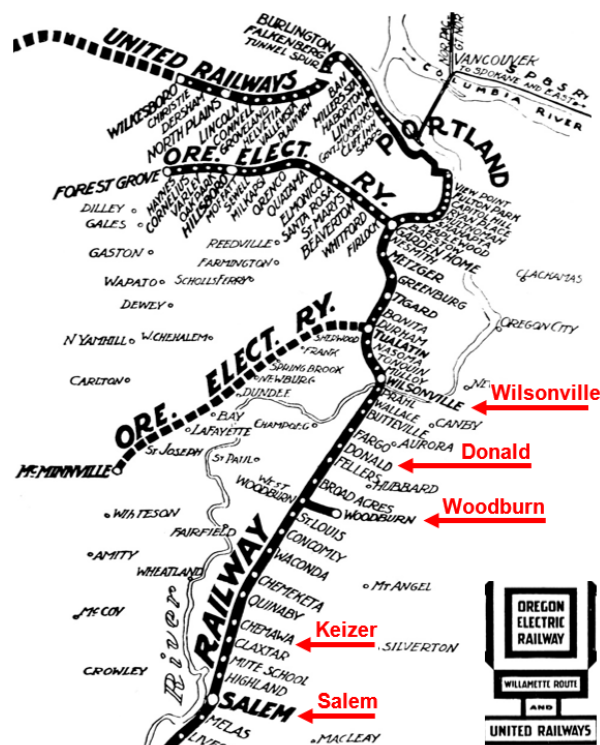
Portland–Salem/Keizer Metro Areas WES I-5 Commuter Rail Extension Study Coalition

With 27 legislators as co-sponsors, SB 1572 is a bipartisan, bicameral legislative concept to advance high-capacity transit option for Oregonians and visitors.

SB 1572 creates a multi-organizational task force—the Westside Express Advisory Committee—composed of local governments, transit agencies, railroads and public-interest groups to study extending the current rush-hour-only Westside Express Service (WES) commuter train from the current southern terminus in Wilsonville for 31 miles to Salem, with stops in Donald, Woodburn and Keizer. The bill calls for ODOT to report back to the legislature in December 2024 with study findings and recommendations. A similar bill during the 2023 session, HB 2662, passed unanimously by the Joint Committee on Transportation.

- **Increasing population** of Portland metro and North Willamette Valley region needs mobility options, especially for commuters and seniors, many who require transportation for jobs, education and medical appointments.
- **I-5 traffic congestion continues to worsen** and prospective ODOT tolling of I-205 and I-5 in Portland metro area requires a reliable public-transit alternative unaffected by highway traffic congestion and tolls.
- **Additional Federal Transit Administration (FTA) support** for high-capacity transit WES commuter rail service connecting METRO and SKATS—two federally-designated Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) Transportation Management Areas (TMAs)—that can increase ridership.
- **Transit commuting and shopping option supports economic-development efforts** of North Willamette Valley communities.
- **Use of former Oregon Electric Railway line**, now owned by Portland & Western and BNSF Railroads, which support the WES extension study, that operated 1908 – 1933.

- **SB 1572 is supported** by the Cities of Aurora, Beaverton, Donald, Hubbard, Keizer, Salem, Wilsonville and Woodburn; the Mid-Willamette Valley Council of Governments; Salem Area Mass Transit District (“Cherriots”), SMART (South Metro Area Regional Transit) and Yamhill County Transit; 1000 Friends of Oregon; Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates, Travel Salem; and the railroads.



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