



Testimony by SMART Director Dwight Brashear Supporting SB 1572:

Legislation Advancing Portland-Salem/Keizer Metro Areas Commuter Rail Connection Could Allow SMART and Other Transit Agencies Increase Local-Area Coverage and Improve ‘Last-Mile’ Connections to Transit Hubs

Scheduled for public hearing on Feb. 13, 2023, before
the Joint Committee On Transportation

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

As the administrator of the Portland metro-area’s other Federal Transit Administration (FTA)-designated Urban Area Transit Operator, I am testifying in strong support of SB 1572.

This visionary legislation provides an opportunity to better understand how a high-capacity transit alternative connecting the Portland Metro and Salem/Keizer Metro Areas unimpeded by I-5 highway traffic congestion (and potential tolls) could improve the daily transportation experience by thousands of commuting workers, students, seniors and other riders.

South Metro Area Regional Transit (SMART) is an agency of the City of Wilsonville, and was formed over 30 years ago in order to provide increased transit service for business employers’ commuting employees, as well as to provide a mobility option for seniors, youth and low-income populations.

As a current Federal Transit Administration funding recipient that has won several millions of dollars of discretionary capital grant applications over the years, SMART understands that the study of a potential high-capacity transit extension that can greatly increase WES ridership provides the State an opportunity to leverage substantial FTA funds for commuter rail service connecting the Portland METRO and Salem-Keizer SKATS—two Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) Transportation Management Areas (TMAs).

With Wilsonville as a key Oregon industrial-production 21,000-worker employment zone, public transit helps to remove single-occupancy vehicles from our highways,

thereby providing more roadway capacity for the timely movement of freight essential to our economy dependent upon trade.

SMART 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 is planning for new routes also to Oregon City.

If WES continued from Wilsonville to Salem, SMART and other transit agencies would be in a position to redeploy bus assets to provide more local-area service, as well as to improve ‘last-mile’ connections between transit hubs, WES train stations and major local destinations served by our transit systems.

As traffic congestion on the South Portland Metro and North Willamette Valley I-5 corridor continues to worsen, commuters, students, 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 unhindered by I-5 highway traffic congestion, offering the potential for a reliable transportation option that connects to major metro areas.

Investing to improve public transit is a smart economic-development strategy recognized by local governments. A study by the American Public Transportation Association found that every \$1 invested in transit generates \$5 in economic return.

SMART appreciates your consideration of this testimony and urges a Do-Pass vote on SB 1572 and subsequent referral to Ways and Means Committee. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Dwight Brashear, SMART Director

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

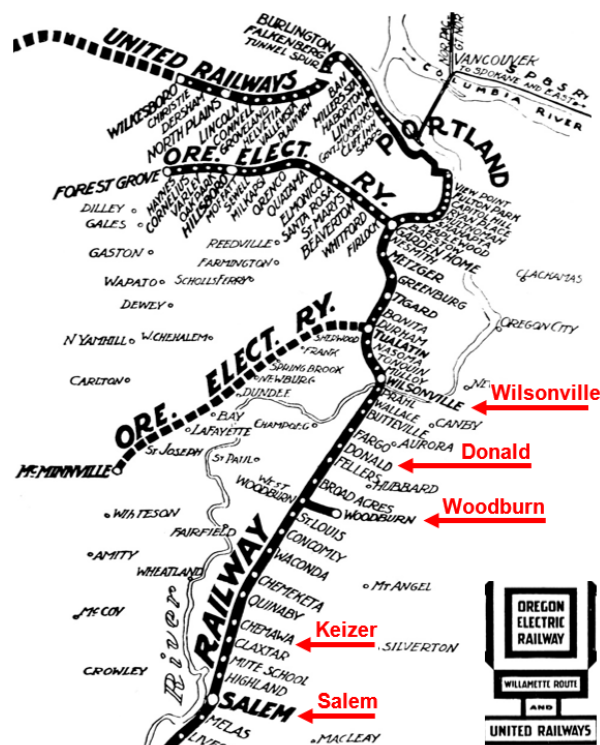
Portland–Salem/Keizer Metro Areas WES I-5 Commuter Rail Extension Study Coalition

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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