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February 8, 2024

Joint Committee on Transportation  
Oregon State Capitol  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: Support for SB 1572 WES Extension Commuter Services to Salem

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

The Mid-Willamette Valley Council of Governments (the COG) is a voluntary association of over 40 local governments. Members include Marion, Polk, and Yamhill counties, 32 cities, 7 special districts, and the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde. Our ongoing mission includes Expanding interaction and improving dialogue among local units of government, “Convenorship” – enhancing collective awareness of major regional issues through seminars and workshops, Coordinating regional planning and development activities, and providing technical assistance and local services tailored to individual needs of member governments.

On behalf of the COG, we wish to extend our support for SB 1572, for a Study of the Extension of Commuter Rail Services to serve our communities in Marion County, all the way to Salem, OR. Specifically, the COG supports the creation of 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-A, passed unanimously by the Joint Committee On Transportation. The COG supports and is willing to continue to support this regional study as noted in the Bills’ language.

The COG’s purpose is to enable the elected officials of the member governments (Our members are Cities, Counties, and Special Districts in Marion, Polk and Yamhill Counties) to jointly identify issues and needs which are regional in scope; achieve concurrence for cooperative actions; plan and recommend governmental action in areas of intergovernmental concern such as health, safety, welfare, and growth. As such, we support SB 1572 and the Study of the issue of Commuter Rail for the following reasons:

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We believe that SB 1572 language in Section 1 Subsection 3, matches our mission:

*The department [ODOT] shall collaborate, through an intergovernmental agreement, with the Mid-Willamette Valley Council of Governments to coordinate, convene and record the meetings of the advisory committee.*

As such, we support SB 1572 and the Study of the issue of Commuter Rail for the following reasons:

- 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'S 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.

We thank you for your consideration of this legislation and look forward to working with our Communities in an effort to effect cooperation and coordination of services, programs, and facilities in the Mid-Willamette Valley Region, and look forward to this collaboration to help plan the future transit needs.

We respectfully urge a DO PASS vote by the Joint Committee on Transportation on SB 1572.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Dadson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Scott F. Dadson, Executive Director