



# Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor

Department of Transportation

Director's Office

355 Capitol St. NE, MS 11

Salem, OR 97301

**DATE:** February 13, 2024

**TO:** Joint Committee on Transportation

**FROM:** Lindsay Baker, Assistant Director, Government and External Relations  
Oregon Department of Transportation

**SUBJECT:** SB 1572 –Westside Express Service commuter rail extension study

## INTRODUCTION

Senate Bill 1572 directs the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT), in consultation with the Westside Express Advisory Committee, to conduct a study on expanding the Westside Express Service (WES) commuter line to Salem. The measure directs ODOT to convene the Westside Express Advisory Committee and enter into an intergovernmental agreement with the Mid-Willamette Valley Council of Governments (MWVCOG) to administer the advisory committee. The measure appropriates \$500,000 of General Funds to ODOT for the purpose of carrying out the study and requires the department to identify and pursue federal funding opportunities. The measure requires a study be submitted to the Legislature no later than December 1, 2024.

## DISCUSSION

After passage of House Bill 2408 (2009 Session), ODOT conducted a statewide rail study on the capacity, availability, and efficiency of rail transportation in Oregon. ODOT issued the [Oregon Rail Study](#) in August 2010, including assessment of extending the WES commuter rail line from Wilsonville to Salem (see Appendix I). Building on previous commuter rail studies, the assessment focused on five critical components necessary to extend the WES commuter rail line: outreach to the railroad track owners, data collection, operating plan assumptions, data analysis, and feasibility analysis. The assessment ultimately concluded extending the WES commuter rail from Wilsonville to Salem is technically feasible, but faces many operational, financial, and political challenges.

Rail is a critical component of a safe, efficient, and accessible multimodal transportation system. ODOT appreciates the legislature's thoughtfulness in bringing partners together to work towards advancing Oregon's passenger rail system.

SB 1572 directs ODOT to study issues related to extending the WES commuter rail line to Salem and report back to the Legislature by December 1, 2024. The measure directs ODOT to convene an 18-member advisory comprised of local governments, transit agencies, railroad owners, and advocacy organizations. The committee is charged with advising the department on all aspects of the study, including "land use and transportation issues" and "specific operational and location issues... and potential operators." The measure directs ODOT to an intergovernmental

agreement with the Mid-Willamette Valley Council of Governments (MWVCOG) to coordinate, convene, and record the meetings of the advisory committee.

As currently drafted, the report date of December 1, 2024 poses logistical challenges, limiting the department's ability to convene an advisory committee, establish an intergovernmental agreement with the MWVCOG, identify and apply for federal funding opportunities, receive input from the advisory committee, and conduct a comprehensive study of this scope and scale within the proposed timeframe. Additionally, it is probable the department will need to hire a consultant to conduct the study, increasing the time needed to perform this work.

ODOT offers the following changes for the committee's consideration:

- ODOT can perform a gap analysis of the 2010 Wilsonville to Salem Commuter Rail Assessment to update and refresh data (originally generated in 2009). This gap analysis would evaluate any changes since 2009 in route characteristics, operating plan assumptions, capital and operating cost estimates, and ridership forecasting.
- MWVCOG and ODOT can convene an advisory committee to develop recommendations regarding governance, railroad owner approval, and potential funding sources for capital and operations. An advisory committee comprised of local and regional elected leaders, transit operators, railroad owners, and other advocacy organizations can develop consensus recommendations or options for legislative consideration on governance, operational, and financial challenges necessary to make this project successful.

Creating two parallel and coordinated work efforts within the measure, directing ODOT to conduct a technical data refresh and simultaneously directing the advisory committee to address outstanding governance, operational, and financing issues, best positions the project for success within the proposed timeframe and enables more informed and fruitful consideration during the 2025 legislative session.

## **SUMMARY**

SB 1572 requires ODOT to convene the Westside Express Advisory Committee and conduct a study on expanding the WES commuter rail line from Wilsonville to Salem. ODOT offers for consideration an alternative path to gathering updated data and developing recommendations or options for outstanding governance, operational, and financial questions within the desired time frame.

ODOT appreciates the legislature's consideration and the bill sponsors' leadership to strengthen Oregon's passenger rail system.

Please feel free to reach out to me with any additional questions.