



(Somali American Council of Oregon)

Support SB 1553 A: Safe, Accessible Transit for All

The Oregon Transit Association (OTA) and the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) are supporting SB 1553 A, which would apply the crime of Interfering with Public Transportation (IPT)—a Class A misdemeanor—to the use of illicit drugs on public transit. The bill would also classify drug use on transit as a drug-designated misdemeanor, providing individuals convicted of the crime with access to state-funded treatment in many instances.

This legislation is a necessary additional tool to help transit agencies keep the widespread public use of fentanyl and other illicit drugs off of Oregon’s public transportation systems. **Unlike sidewalks and other open public spaces, transit riders on board can’t simply cross the street to get away from illicit drug use.** Even when waiting outside for a bus or train, they are often unable to avoid being exposed to illicit drug use as they must remain at a designated stop or station to board their transit vehicle.

Public transit must feel safe and accessible for everyone, and particularly for the families, essential workers, high school students, individuals with disabilities, and other Oregonians who depend on transit as a lifeline to jobs, education, and health care. Transit riders and employees should not have to worry about the unpredictable and potentially dangerous behavior of people who are using illicit drugs on public transit systems, nor fear the potential for health risks due to exposure to fumes, needles and residue.

Most transit security personnel are unarmed and trained in de-escalation, and police response is always a last resort. However, in situations where law enforcement involvement proves necessary, this bill will provide them with the tools they need to help keep illicit drug use off of public transportation and send a clear message that transit is a drug-free zone.

A safe and reliable public transportation system is a vital public resource, as well as an important tool for economic development and community revitalization. SB 1553 A will help ensure that transit feels safe and accessible for everyone.

Impacts of Drug Use on Transit Across the State

- **Tillamook County Transportation District** was forced to close its transit center to the public due to prevalent drug use and multiple drug smoke exposure incidents involving its employees.
- **TriMet** surveys show over a 30% drop in riders feeling safe on buses and trains over the past six years.
- **Lane Transit District** recorded 130 drug use incidents on its system from January-October of 2023.
- **Ride Connection** partners with schools to provide transit training to youth with disabilities. Schools complain about their students finding drug paraphernalia including used needles on transit vehicles.
- **Lincoln County Transit** recently dealt with an adult rider selling illicit drugs to minors on board.

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