

Submitter: Bill Bradley  
On Behalf Of: ATU 757  
Committee: House Committee On Judiciary  
Measure: SB1553

Chair Kropf and members of the House Judiciary Committee,

On behalf of Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757, I urge you to take action on SB 1553A. This bill would include the active use of illicit drugs in and around Oregon's public transit systems as a crime of Interfering with Public Transportation. It's crucial for creating a safer environment for passengers and employees, while also providing essential state-funded resources and treatment for those struggling with addiction.

Illicit drug use in transit vehicles, shelters, and stations poses significant challenges. These areas offer shelter from the wind and provide warmth, making them preferred locations for drug use because the vapors/smoke do not disperse, allowing the users to maximize their high. University of Washington found that 98% of transit vehicle surfaces were contaminated with drug residue, specifically meth or fentanyl. However, this behavior not only harms the user but also creates mental distress for transit employees who encounter individuals passed out, leading to calls for emergency services.

Transit operators have reported they felt unsafe to continue in service after breathing in secondhand fumes. It leads to disruptions in transit services, as vehicles may need to be aired out or cleaned, impacting the free movement of passengers. If transit is not seen as reliable, riders may choose to find other means of getting to where they need to go, creating issues in achieving climate and transportation policy goals. It's for these reasons we believe the Class A Misdemeanor is warranted as the potential harm to others is higher for this activity than simple possession.

Addressing this issue is paramount as our state invests in transit services and infrastructure. Safety is a primary concern for passengers and our members, and active drug use undermines the accessibility and usefulness of transit. Without effective tools for transit agencies and law enforcement, our transit systems will continue to suffer, affecting both travel of riders and the livelihoods of our members.

I urge the committee to advance this bill for the betterment of our communities and transit systems.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Bill Bradley, Executive Board Officer, ATU 757