

Submitter: Kevin Kincaid
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Transportation
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3231

Co-Chairs Gorsek and McLain, and members of the Committee,

I am writing in support of HB 3231. In order to serve the transportation needs of the citizens of Oregon while also protecting our environment, the state needs to develop a strong rail network. Highway expansions are expensive, inefficient, and contribute to CO2 emissions and other pollution. The state should be aggressively pursuing rail expansion in order to be a climate leader on transportation, and legislation like this is a necessary step.

In the past years, Oregonians have already shown their interest in train based transit. Amtrak as a whole had a record breaking year in 2024, but specifically in Amtrak Cascades in Oregon there was a surge in ridership in the last year. This was following the increase in daily round trips between Portland and Seattle from 4 to 6. Investing in improvements to train capacity promotes ridership.

There are many different options for how Oregon could improve train transit. On-time performance is often impacted by conflicts with trains in sections where there is only one-track. Purchasing tracks and building two track lines can help with increasing capacity to handle additional trains. There are a number of speed and safety improvements that can be made to increase efficiency. Ignoring high speed rail, there is still conventional trains in the US that far exceed the speed of the Amtrak Cascades line. Increasing the efficiency of trains will increase ridership as they become more efficient than car travel.

This bill is very broad in what strategies ODOT should look into for boosting ridership and capacity, but I believe there should be one amendment. ODOT should be specifically instructed to look into Strategies for expanding network coverage. There are many places in Oregon outside the Amtrak cascade route, and 2 southern Oregon locations are only served by a single daily long distance train. The Amtrak line currently runs through Junction City, but does not have a stop. Oregon needs to expand frequent train travel to the whole state, including eastern Oregon, coastal communities, and the southern cities.

Now is the time for Oregon to begin investing in a cleaner and more efficient method of transportation. I urge you to pass HB 3231 with amendments to ensure that this network seeks to include all of our great state.

Thank you for your time and consideration.