

Submitter: Tom Lang
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Transportation
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3231

The Pacific Northwest's rail system is a critical component of our regional economy and intercity transportation network. Because freight and passenger rail traffic utilize the same fixed rail infrastructure, investments in one have benefits for the other, resulting in frictionless supply chains and reliable passenger rail service. Despite this connection, the Oregon Department of Transportation is not explicitly required to look at strategies for boosting rail capacity or upgrading and improving railroad track and related infrastructure. The addition of this language codifies the importance of strategically planning for these improvements during the development of passenger rail plans.

Additionally, there has historically been a lack of clarity around which federal funding opportunities have been or are being pursued by Oregon's Department of Transportation related to rail improvement. HB 3231 will address this by requiring summaries of federal rail infrastructure funding applications, denials, and approvals be regularly reported to the Legislature.

HB 3231 will elevate the importance of physical rail improvements in "increasing ridership on passenger trains and increasing ticket revenue" within Oregon's passenger rail plan, and improve transparency on the pursuit of federal funding opportunities. This will be a key feature in improving existing service and expanding passenger rail service across the state. The Pacific NorthWest Economic Region strongly supports this bill.