



AORTA
Association of Oregon Rail and
Transit Advocates

HB3231 & HB3233: Joint Committee on Transportation, 2-4-25

It's time to reunite Oregon through re-connection

To the Oregon Legislative Joint Committee on Transportation,

The [Association of Oregon Rail & Transit Advocates](#) (AORTA) enthusiastically supports HB3231 and HB3233. These bills recognize the power of rail to connect our communities and enhance the ability to do just that.

The Pacific Northwest has ideal geography for passenger service along an existing, continuous north/south rail corridor. ODOT's 2021 Passenger Rail Service Development Plan already outlines the path for increasing current Amtrak Cascades service from 2 to 6 daily round trips between Portland and Eugene. ODOT and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) have issued a "Tier 1" Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision for these improvements. The Cascades Corridor entered the FRA's Corridor Identification and Development (CID) Program in 2023 through joint participation by ODOT and Washington State DOT. We applaud the additional call to action in these bills.

Further long-term incremental improvements would lead Cascades to being time-competitive with both driving and flying within the region, but with greater frequency than flying and less emissions per user-mile. Rail brings travelers—and by extension, economic activation—directly into the centers of cities and towns rather than their periphery. Trains are a cost-effective way to reduce drive-alone trips along this corridor.

As the framework established in HB3233 gets underway and the three state and provincial transportation agencies begin their collaboration, we ask the JCT and ODOT to ensure transit growth and corridor enhancements are felt across the state, and do not end at Portland Union Station as a southern terminus. Communities from Klamath Falls to Portland want faster, more frequent, and more reliable train schedules. This legislation lays the groundwork for a potential inter-state rail compact that could collaboratively manage all Pacific NW intercity passenger rail service, providing a conduit for FRA funding designated for that purpose.

Oregonians have also shown their support for restoring former Amtrak service east of Portland to Hermiston, Pendleton, LaGrande, Baker City, Ontario, and east via Boise to Salt Lake City and Denver. This corridor connects with the Cascades Corridor, and should be addressed by Oregon's Passenger Rail Plan by specifically directing ODOT to declare their intent to apply to the CID grant program when funding becomes available. The Idaho Transportation Department and the city of Boise should be invited to be co-applicants.

We support studying Cascadia High Speed Rail (HSR), but a start-from-scratch new-alignment HSR route should be an addition, not an alternative, to improving the Cascades Corridor. Service increases, track upgrades, curve reductions, and multi-tracking projects along the existing corridor could incrementally develop a faster and more frequent system serving more communities sooner, at a fraction of the cost of HSR. Germany's Intercity Express (ICE) service has demonstrated the success of this approach, providing city center to city center times competitive with air travel.

¹ Oregon Passenger Rail Service Development Plan, Oregon Department of Transportation (February 2021)
https://www.oregon.gov/odot/RPTD/RPTD%20Document%20Library/Final_Oregon_Passenger_Rail_Service_Development_Plan.pdf

Whether governance of our rail improvements moves to a new agency or remains a function of ODOT, and whether Oregon turns more toward higher-performance rail or full HSR, these endeavours require resources. We need more than well-intentioned plans. It is time for our statewide passenger rail and transit services to receive dedicated and sustainable funding.

Adequate, dedicated funding for intercity transit and rail would have transformative effects for our state, and would be the most impactful investment in Oregon's transportation future that you could make. This funding would enable a host of critical projects to move forward, such as the capital investment of the previously-mentioned 2021 Passenger Rail Service Development Plan.

There is a pressing need to invest in and improve existing intercity bus service, which would give Oregon the benefits of a robust multi-modal transportation system. The ODOT-operated POINT bus service fills gaps between trains, and is an integral part of the Cascades service between Portland and Eugene, but POINT buses also serve other communities across Oregon. We hope to see improved rail and bus service coordinated across the State as plans are developed. Securing dedicated and reliable intercity bus service along the I-84 corridor, Rogue Valley area and across rural Oregon, is crucial. This can be accomplished by subsidizing the POINT intercity bus service at the same per-capita rate as Colorado's highly successful intercity bus service, "Bustang".

Sufficient funding would also allow staff to prepare for longer-term improvements to Oregon's rail and intercity transit system, as well as plan for zero-emissions service on Amtrak Cascades and other rail corridors. Road users would also benefit. An ongoing grade-separation initiative would not only allow faster trains, but would eliminate deadly grade-crossings around the state that result in delay, inconvenience, injury, and death of motorists and pedestrians.

Investing in public multi-modal transit provides economic resilience, climate resilience, and community resilience. Because of this, AORTA supports a do-pass recommendation on HB3231 and HB3233, along with significant fiscal support, to ensure all Oregonians are culturally and socially connected via an accessible, reliable and sustainable transportation system across the state.

