



Legislation Should Provide Opportunity to Study WES Commuter Rail-Service Extension Connecting Portland and Salem/Keizer Metro Areas with a High-Capacity Transit Alternative to Automobile Commuting on Congested I-5

February 5, 2025

Co-Chairs Gorsek and McLain and Members of the Committee:

For over 50 years, 1000 Friends of Oregon has worked with Oregonians to leverage the state's special and unique land use planning program to foster connected, vibrant, and beautiful cities and towns while protecting farms, forests, and iconic scenic areas from sprawl development and irreversible conversion. Our diverse membership unites in favor of legislative concepts and investments that promote smart growth in pursuit for a better quality of life for all, now and for future generations.

We are extremely excited to support HB 3231 which can help boost the quality of life for Oregonians by requiring the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) to include strategies to boost capacity, upgrade and improve railroad track and infrastructure, and monitor federal grant-funding opportunities in the State Rail Plan.

HB 3231 builds on the consensus and momentum created during previous sessions. For example, we know that many of our members, local jurisdictions throughout the Willamette Valley, and a large showing of legislators supported an ODOT study of a potential WES commuter train extension for rail service connecting Salem-Keizer, Donald, Woodburn, and the greater Portland area. The Joint Committee on Transportation twice unanimously voted in favor of advancing a WES Extension Study: HB 2662 in 2023 and SB 1572 in 2024. However, both bills subsequently died in the Ways and Means Committee.

Thanks to the Chief Sponsors, Senator Gorsek and Representative Nathanson, Oregonians have another opportunity in HB 3231 to support a vision for a better future in the Willamette Valley: one in which we connect communities with affordable, reliable, safe, and resilient transportation options. As we see across the world, a maintained rail system enables new economic growth, a seamless transition between urban, suburban and rural areas, and walkable, rollable centers and corridors along these fixed routes' stations.

We must position Oregon to build a future we are excited to live in. We see HB 3231 as helping steer Oregon to do just that.

We offer a friendly amendment to the bill for ODOT to work with DLCD and relevant local jurisdictions on station planning opportunities that can catalyze private investment in housing or economic development opportunities that bring high-quality jobs to Oregonians along the possible new or renewed rail lines. We encourage the Committee to continue to bust down silos that encourage holistic, collaborative approaches to develop and redevelop our cities and towns.

1000 Friends of Oregon appreciates your consideration and urges a Do-Pass vote on HB 3231. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me with any questions. My email address is Sam@friends.org. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Diaz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping "S" and a long, horizontal stroke for the "D".

Sam Diaz
Executive Director
1000 Friends of Oregon