

Submitter: Robinson Foster
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Transportation
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3233

Robinson Foster comment on HB 3233:

It is core Climate Rail Alliance policy that the Oregon Department of Transportation, the Washington State Department of Transportation, and the British Columbia Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure work together to develop plans to operate and fund rail transportation.

For example, support the Intercity Passenger Rail Improvement Priorities, (HB 1837 <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2025-26/Pdf/Bills/House%20Bills/1837.pdf> and SB 5667, <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2025-26/Pdf/Bills/Senate%20Bills/5667.pdf?q=20250204201412>).

in the Washington Legislature by passing similar zero dollar policy statement language in the Oregon legislature. As ODOT and WS DOT are partners providing Amtrak Cascades service, it's mutually beneficial. After all, WS DOT's service segment starts in Portland!

To explain just one of the HB 1837 and SB 5667 provisions, a reliable 2.5-hour Seattle-Portland Amtrak Cascades travel time needs to be achieved if the Eugene-Portland, and Portland-Seattle-Vancouver, BC segments are to work together to be a market success creating mode shift.

Here's how: A reliable 2.5-hour Seattle-Portland Amtrak Cascades travel time saves one hour of travel time compared to the existing train's 3.5-hour travel time.

The savings is important to market the service because driving between the Portland and Seattle metros is also about 3.5 hours.

However, to get to and from the train station takes, on average, about 30 minutes. Therefore, to have at least the same driving travel time, the Amtrak Cascades need to achieve a 2.5-hour Seattle-Portland travel time to accomplish mode shift from car to train, allowing 30 minutes at each end for station access.

Steps that WS DOT needs to take to achieve its 2.5-hour Portland-Seattle service include a highway and rail relocation project in the vicinity of Nisqually, and installation of new crossovers in Kelso and Centralia, (see the Amtrak Cascades Improvement Program 2024 by Tom White of the Climate Rail Alliance, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HwB3QqqX8G8jSiMCgwLNFPgc7g2y_eg/view).

Likewise, ODOT needs about one billion dollars to improve its Portland-Eugene Amtrak Cascades service, (see the 2021 ODOT plan, <https://www.oregon.gov/odot/RPTD/RPTD%20Document%20Library/OPR-CIP-Tier-1-FEIS-and-Record-of-Decision.pdf>)

Please cross reference my comments on HB 3233 with my comments on HB 3231 that there are many innovative and iconoclastic freight services, too, with which to collaborate with the Washington State Department of Transportation and the British Columbia Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure.

For example, no freight rail intermodal service exists between Vancouver, BC and California, therefore WS DOT and ODOT bear all the highway costs related to that significant, daily trucking volume, paid for by Oregon and Washington taxpayers.

What trucks pay in taxes are not 100% of the cost to maintain the highways they operate on. And trucks especially don't pay 100% of the cost when negative externalities like highway safety and climate change are factored.

At the same time, the private, regional, monopoly railroads, in our case the Union Pacific Railroad and BNSF Railway, are unable or unwilling to invest in the track capacity needed for innovative, iconoclastic freight rail services.

Therefore a joint power agreement is needed to contractually establish the terms of a mutually beneficial, public-private partnership for freight rail and passenger rail service.

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I am a member of Climate Rail Alliance and the Association of Oregon Rail & Transit Advocates. Both organizations are members of the Move Oregon Forward Coalition, a project of 1000 Friends of Oregon. The above remarks are my own. The organizations have not yet taken a position on them.