

Good evening Co-chairs and JCT members.

Thank you for allowing me to speak with you today on this important topic. My name is Matt Krabacher. I am the Eastern Oregon Vice President of AORTA, a passenger rail and public transit advocacy group. I have testified before this committee before and am grateful to have the opportunity to speak to you again today.

I am from Baker City in NE Oregon and when I have spoken to you in the past I talked about the huge desire for passenger rail in my regional community and about the massive need for public transit access across NE Oregon, to provide transportation options to our population to access healthcare, and urban centers. Baker county in particular has a disproportionately large elderly population that requires specialized healthcare that is no longer available in our county, meaning they are now forced to drive long distances, often at night and battling extreme weather in winter. This is because, currently there is no way to traverse the I-84 corridor to or from Baker City or La Grande without a personal vehicle.

Historically we had passenger rail service in the form of the Amtrak Pioneer Route and a robust Greyhound line that ran along I-84. The Pioneer route was discontinued in the 90s and at the beginning of this year that last bus route operating on the I-84 corridor in our area discontinued service, leaving us without any meaningful alternative to personal vehicle transit.

The first time I testified before this committee was just about a year ago when I delivered a petition supporting the restoration of passenger rail in our area. From that HB4109 received an amendment directing ODOT to pursue efforts to work with Idaho on this, however it appears that nothing beyond a phone call and one or two emails between Idaho and ODOT resulted from this. I find it hard to blame ODOT, given that they were given no funding to pursue this and they are institutionally constructed in such a way that they only really work on highways. So it is no surprise to me that very little came of that publicly supported legislative directive. But I do find it extremely concerning.

I believe House Bill 3362 addresses some of the systemic flaws in how our transportation system is developed.

- IF there had been a dedicated and sustainable funding stream for passenger rail and public transit projects last year, then ODOT would likely be better equipped to handle the legislative directive to pursue a federal funding for passenger rail through the CID grant program.
- IF there had been a dedicated and sustainable funding stream for passenger rail and public transit projects last year then *maybe* Baker City would have some other statewide bus system that would allow us to traverse the I-84 to and from our homes.

My point is that nothing meaningful gets done in transportation without long term, reliable funding. Passenger rail and public transit have never had that on a statewide level. Roads and highways have. As a result we have an expansive statewide network of highways and roads

that require increasingly more funding simply to maintain. And we DO NOT have a statewide rail network that would be far more resilient at moving both people and freight with lower maintenance costs. We do have a patchy system of regional buses that receive funds via the STIF funding in what feels like an afterthought, though is still *extremely* valuable to rural communities even in its afterthought form.

HB3362 prices the “externalities” of our car transportation system that future generations are paying (in the form of reduced environmental and water quality). It then directs the revenue raised towards passenger rail service across Oregon, which is a steel wheels on steel rails, meaning less maintenance cost per ton of cargo moved and no tire rubber particulate. It also delivers funding to remediate the damage to our environment and waterways created by our current car/tire based transit system.

To be clear however, that this tax will be a burden on rural communities and if no transit system is put into place to help lift up these already relatively poorer communities, then this tax will simply be a burden. This tax must be accompanied with a plan to create and deliver a meaningful statewide public transit system that can support these communities, by removing their need to drive to cities to receive healthcare, or to access other city services.

To summarize, HB3362 helps to transition Oregonians towards a transportation system that is more efficient, equitable, resilient and environmentally friendly. While, also remediating previously unrecognized damage from our current transportation system. However, by itself it is not nearly enough. Formal creation of a statewide public transit system, that includes and expands upon both the passenger rail networks and bus networks already in place. I am skeptical of ODOTs ability to do this given the institutional structures, but perhaps with adequate funding and the right leadership changes this could be possible. More likely, we need a new entity that has both the formal authority to act/create/modify public transit systems and infrastructure in Oregon, but is also adequately funded to build an efficient, pleasant and equitable system that works for all Oregonians.

Thank you for your time and all of the work you do for Oregon. I look forward to following how this transportation package develops over this session.

With respect,
Matt Krabacher
Eastern Oregon Vice President, AORTA