

TESTIMONY IN FAVOR OF HB 3453 – MARCH 11, 2025

I am testifying on behalf of the Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates (AORTA) in favor of HB 3453.

Freight rail is the least subsidized mode of transport in Oregon. Unlike roads, most Oregon railroads are privately owned and pay property taxes.

Many of these rail lines, that once offered passenger service, run parallel to congested roads. **Now is the time to take back our tracks.**

The ODOT Highway Division is having difficulty funding work to keep Oregon's roads in a state of good repair. This has limited the resources available to expand road capacity.

In the past, due to roads having a dedicated funding source, decision makers focused on road projects. Little thought was given to other modes to add capacity and address congestion.

Considering these factors, now is the time to consider other options. Commuter rail offers an opportunity to deal with these issues using fewer tax dollars than road expansion. Less land is taken off the tax rolls.

The cost of infrastructure and rolling stock to extend WES to Salem would only be a fraction of expanding I-5 through Salem. The resulting project would support efficient passenger and freight operations and provide more capacity than the I-5 freeway.

Connecting city and regional transit services would link the WES extension to many communities in the upper Willamette Valley. Even Lincoln City would have access to WES.

Convenient schedules with service though out the day and into the evening would attract thousands of riders. These would be people who were not in vehicles on I-5 or 217.

Environmental concerns could also be met using green energy, like hydrogen or electricity, to propel the trains.

AORTA supports HB 3453 because it is realistic and provides many benefits for Oregon. A great public private partnership opportunity.

Robert Krebs, Salem Oregon for the Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates (AORTA)