

Submitter: R A Fontes
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Transportation
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3453

Part of me really, really wants to just hold my nose and support this measure.

It would allow TriMet to completely get out from under WES at almost no cost. Alternatively, if TriMet were to just shut it down, the district would be obligated by contract to dispose of all TriMet property (rolling stock, buildings, platforms, other structures, etc.) on P&W railroad property and to keep subsidizing P&W's dispatching and track maintenance costs into 2059. Altogether, TriMet would save hundreds of millions of dollars, about enough to offer 100,000 hours of additional bus service each year over continued operation.

And maybe, some of that additional service might be to finally drop headways on the 35 bus to 15 minutes. That's a carrot TriMet has been holding in front of riders for decades.

WES has been a never-ending chain of debacles since well before service even started—remember Colorado Railcar? Ridership has always been abysmal. TriMet reported December 24 ridership at 409 rides per day, which would be about 200 round-trip riders plus a few more one-way. Cherriots reports that the 1X Salem to Wilsonville Express (16 trips weekdays in each direction) averaged less than four riders per trip in 2024. That's over 20% better than 2023. The Oregon Point Bus only provides four trips per direction per day between Tualatin and Salem. All that, plus the lack of direct bus service from Beaverton, Tigard, Hillsboro or other Washington County locations to Salem suggests that current demand is not enough to support continued operation of WES, let alone its extension south.

The bottom line is that, in the extremely unlikely event that a competent and thorough analysis showed that the proposal would both provide economical service and better meet people's needs than alternatives such as express buses and/or carpools, then it would be worthy of support.