

Testimony of Metro Councilor Ashton Simpson

In Support of SB 715

Joint Committee on Transportation

March 19, 2025



Metro is the elected regional government that serves nearly 1.7 million people in the 24 cities and three counties of the Portland metropolitan area. We provide a broad range of public services that includes land use and transportation planning, solid waste and recycling operations, management of parks and natural areas, and operation of major visitor facilities like the Oregon Convention Center and the Oregon Zoo.

Oregon is at a crossroads for the future. Our friends at Washington Department of Transportation have secured almost \$55M to draft a service development plan for a Cascadia High-Speed Rail project that would connect Portland to Seattle and Vancouver, BC. The project has been accepted into the Federal Railroad Administration's Corridor ID funding pipeline to support not just planning, but environmental, design and construction work.

We are proud partners supporting that project and, alongside ODOT, co-leading the charge to advocate for what is best for Oregon. We have an opportunity to take advantage of the fact that Washington Department of Transportation is moving this game-changing economic-driver and development catalyst of a mobility project forward. And that is what SB 715 is about.

This bill gives us the resources and direction we need to bring the right leadership, agency, business, tribal and community partners together to develop the vision and provide the information we need to ensure the project is planned in a way that maximizes benefits for Oregon.

While we are just a small segment of the project, where and how this ultimately lands in our state is critically important. It's estimated that the project could create 200,000 construction and other related jobs which would employ a workforce for a decade or more. It is also estimated to generate over \$355 billion in economic activity across the megaregion. That's huge! And we want to capture as much of that as possible here in Oregon.

But we have a lot of work to do to understand how this project could be planned and designed to best benefit Oregon. And that's exactly what this Bill will support. It will allow us to:

- Convene the leadership we need to identify and prioritize of this project.
- Engage that leadership – along with community members - to establish our vision and outcomes for high-speed rail.

- Understand the land uses that will best drive economic development and catalyze housing development.
- Identify the conditions needed to achieve maximum economic and community benefits.
- Compare different scenarios for how that should look.
- Recommend potential investments that position Oregon to achieve the desired outcomes and identified benefits.

We understand that this ask comes at a time when the Legislature is grappling with how to maintain our current transportation system. We also understand that this is a big ask for work on something that feels far in the future and hard to prioritize when we're looking at the issues directly in front of us.

But we're asking you to not lose sight of the future. Projects like this take years, and the time to start is now. This investment will provide a better tomorrow for our children for generations to come.

So as I said before – we're at that crossroads. The train is leaving the station quickly and we need to decide now if we're going to get on board or be left behind. We urge you to support SB 715 and continue to move the Cascadia High Speed Rail project forward for Oregon.