

Submitter: Tobias Hodges
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Transportation
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1202

I am writing today to express strong support for Senate Bill 1202, establishing the Oregon Department of Rail and Transit (ODRT) and the State Rail and Transit Board. SB1202 represents an important opportunity for our state to significantly enhance the effectiveness and accountability of our state rail and transit operations.

Currently, the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) manages a broad portfolio of responsibilities, including highways, roads, bridges, transit, and rail. This breadth has at times diluted focus and accountability, particularly for critical passenger rail and transit projects, which require specialized attention as the state demands sustainable forms of mass transportation and connectivity. By creating a dedicated Department of Rail and Transit, SB1202 ensures focused expertise, clear accountability, and stronger advocacy and grant acquisition specifically for Oregon's rail and transit infrastructure—connecting Oregon communities. It's simply good government.

However, as this committee knows, establishing the ODRT without dedicated funding would severely limit its effectiveness. Reliable, long-term funding must accompany the department's creation to ensure it can fulfill its intended mission. The creation of the ODRT alongside the the Joint Committee on Transportation 2025 Regular Session presents an opportunity to connect initiatives such as Senator Gorsek's tire tax and Oregon Statewide Transit Tax increases to the ODRT. Another idea is redirecting surplus revenue from Oregon's successful Corporate Activity Tax (CAT) toward the ODRT, which would provide stable funding without increasing overall tax burdens. Using the CAT surplus could fund infrastructure and programs like Youth Pass for connecting Oregon youth to education and other extracurricular opportunities. Directly connecting the CAT to the ODRT through the goal of affording our youth educational opportunities could provide substantial long-term funding to the newly created department. Such stable funding not only advances infrastructure projects but also aligns with Oregon's environmental and economic development goals.

In short, Senate Bill 1202 will strengthen Oregon's transportation infrastructure, improve public accountability, and enhance statewide connectivity. I urge you to support this essential step toward a robust, sustainable, and interconnected Oregon, and to support substantial funding for the newly created department.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Toby Hodges
Happy Valley, Oregon