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Mode shift of passenger and freight from highway to rail is essential to address climate change, decreasing traffic congestion, roadway maintenance cost, and increasing highway safety. An effective state agency for rail transportation is an important element of mode shift.

Rail transportation has unique characteristics, such as those of aviation and marine navigation. Effective management and oversight require specific education and experience.

Rail is also unique among transportation modes within the scope of state government as it involves responsibility for service as well as infrastructure. Urban and rural non-rail transit share this characteristic and thus the responsibility for rail and non-rail transit should be combined.

US rail transit project costs are generally the highest in the world for equivalent projects. New York University published a report on US transit project costs in 2023. In general, the study found that a lack of rail transportation knowledge and experience led to high cost.

https://transitcosts.com/Final-Report/

Rail transportation involves agreements with railroad corporations that own the infrastructure on which the state provides service. The state is at a substantial disadvantage during access negotiations without substantial knowledge of and experience in railroad infrastructure and operations.

Much of what is considered standard in US rail transportation is insufficient for developing the necessary mode shift from highway to rail. Innovation is crucial. A state rail and transit department staffed by personnel with substantial rail transportation knowledge and experience is needed for developing and evaluating innovative rail transportation proposals.

SB 1202 provides for the organization and framework for an effective and innovative approach to rail transportation.

Climate Rail Alliance enthusiastically supports SB 1202.