

Co-Chairs, Co-Vice Chairs, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony. My name is Amy Schlappi and I serve as the Executive Director for Hood River County Transportation District, doing business as Columbia Area Transit (CAT). I am writing to express strong support for increasing the Special Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF) payroll tax rate higher than the proposed .08% to ultimately reach the goal of 0.5% by 2032.

CAT plays a vital role by reducing transportation barriers within Hood River County, connecting communities throughout the Gorge to the Portland metropolitan area, and providing service to high-demand recreational destinations such as Multnomah Falls, and seasonally to Mt. Hood Meadows and the Dog Mountain Trailhead. CAT is a critical partner in the congestion reduction and mitigation plans of these popular sites.

Ridership continues to grow steadily—by approximately 10% each year. In the past year alone, CAT provided over 85,000 rides, connecting residents to employment, healthcare, groceries, education, and more. In a county with fewer than 24,000 residents, this impact is substantial.

The proposed 0.08% falls short of what is required to sustain and expand essential transit services. Without a more substantial and sustained investment, CAT will be forced to make painful service reductions. This includes potential cuts to our Hood River City and Upper Valley routes, as well as to our Dial-a-Ride services that are critical lifelines for many of our most vulnerable residents. Service reductions will also affect CAT's 25 employees, who play a crucial role in supporting our community.

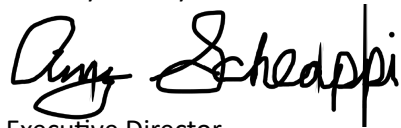
Costs are rising, and many are beyond our control. Here are some examples of expenses that STIF funds assist with:

1. **Vehicle Insurance:** Since 2015, CAT's vehicle insurance has increased from \$1,115 per vehicle to \$2,650. This is on average a 15% increase each year.
2. **Medical and Dental Benefits for Employees:** Since 2015, CAT's health insurance expense has increased from \$510 per person to \$1,057. This is on average a 12% increase each year.
3. **Vehicle Purchases:** In 2019 CAT purchased a vehicle for \$78,828 and in 2023 a similar transit vehicle was purchased for \$153,585. In four years the cost of a standard small transit vehicle has doubled.

Public transit is not just a means of transportation, it is a critical service that underpins economic vitality, social inclusion, and community resilience. A phased increase of the STIF payroll tax rate to 0.5% is necessary to preserve and grow transit services in Hood River County and across our state.

I respectfully urge your support for this investment, which will ensure that all Oregonians—especially those who rely on transit the most—can continue to access the opportunities and independence that public transportation makes possible.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy Schlappi". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Amy" and last name "Schlappi" clearly legible.

Executive Director

Hood River County Transportation District
Db a Columbia Area Transit