



CITY OF HOOD RIVER

211 2nd Street, Hood River, OR 97031 Phone: 541-386-1488

May 21, 2025

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

As Mayor of Hood River, I am writing to express support for increasing the Special Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF) payroll tax rate higher than the proposed .08% to ultimately reach the necessary 0.5% by 2032.

The current proposal to raise the STIF rate to 0.08% falls far short of what is needed. Without a more robust investment, our local transit provider, Hood River County Transportation District, dba Columbia Area Transit – CAT, will be forced to make difficult service cuts, including to the Hood River City route, which is especially concerning for the City as this route is a lifeline for many of our most vulnerable residents—particularly our seniors who no longer drive but who can remain independent in their homes thanks to the current level of transit service.

Local transit allows residents to shop for groceries, access healthcare, and stay engaged in community life. Our community has witnessed firsthand the transformative power of public transit. Young adults with disabilities, for example, have gained independence and secured employment by learning to use CAT services with the help of CAT's travel trainer program. These are real, measurable improvements in people's lives that depend on stable, adequate transit funding.

The City of Hood River has a strong partnership with Columbia Area Transit. Our joint downtown employee transit pass program addresses the City's parking challenges. This program's popularity speaks for itself, with participation increasing by 10% each year and enthusiastic support from our downtown businesses. Transit is also integral to our affordable housing initiatives. Transit-oriented development reduces construction costs and, crucially, helps working families by lowering the combined burden of housing and transportation expenses.

Transit is a vital service that fuels a robust local economy and ensures that all our residents can fully participate in community life. A phased increase in the STIF payroll tax rate to 0.5% is essential to maintain and expand critical transit services in Hood River and throughout our region. We urge your support to ensure that all Oregonians—especially our most vulnerable neighbors—can continue to access the opportunities and independence that public transit provides.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Paul Blackburn, Mayor
City of Hood River