

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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony. My name is Greg Pack, and I serve as the Board Chair of the 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 beyond the currently proposed 0.08%, with a goal of reaching 0.5% by 2032.

The proposed 0.08% rate falls significantly 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 program—services that are critical lifelines for many of our most vulnerable residents.

CAT plays a vital role in connecting communities throughout the Gorge to the Portland metropolitan area and provides seasonal service to high-demand recreational destinations such as Mt. Hood Meadows and the Dog Mountain Trailhead. These services help reduce traffic congestion and address safety concerns. 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.

Every day, I hear stories about the importance of our services to the community. A few examples include:

- **Charlie**, a 76-year-old resident coping with rising living costs, uses the CAT bus and the \$40 annual Gorge Transit Pass to commute to his job at Walmart. By doing so, he saves over \$7,000 annually. He calls Gorge Transit “the best thing that ever happened to the Gorge.”
- **Joe**, a recently relocated veteran, was feeling isolated until the Veterans’ Service Office connected him with a CAT travel trainer. He now uses CAT to engage with the local Elk’s Club and regularly attends veterans’ events.
- **Carlos**, a young agricultural worker and Portland State University student, relies on CAT to pursue his education and entrepreneurial dreams. Without the financial burden of a car, he saves \$12,000 a year in transportation costs.

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.

Sincerely,
Greg Pack



Board Chair
Hood River County Transportation District (Columbia Area Transit)