

Chair Bowman, Co-Chairs Drazen and Pham, Members of the House Committee On Rules:

My name is Richard Sheperd, and I am an organizer with the Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates (AORTA). Today I am writing to you on behalf of AORTA and its members all over Oregon. AORTA fights for public transportation, inter-city bus service, and passenger rail. We believe that frequent, abundant, and accessible transportation is an investment which powers our communities, our economy, and our state.

When the Joint Transportation Committee visited Oregonians across the state for the "Roadshow," one clear message rang out at every stop: Oregonians want more frequent, reliable transit. Transit is critical to bringing communities together, as nearly 30% of Oregonians cannot or do not drive due to ability or cost. Frequent, reliable transit is essential to our economy. Oregonians rely on transit to get to doctor's appointments, to work, and to educational opportunities.

AORTA and its members were in support of the most recent version of HB 2025, despite being paired down from the historic investments we had hoped for. HB 2025 with the -28 amendment would have maintained current levels of public transportation and passenger rail service, and conducted studies to examine the governance models of these critical services. Unfortunately, we cannot support HB 3402 with the -3 amendment. The lack of a Statewide Transit Improvement Fund (STIF) increase, nor the necessary funding for passenger rail will lead to cuts to transit service. This will leave too many Oregonians without the essential transit service that Oregonians cried out for during the roadshow across the state.

Oregonians want to ride transit. Amtrak Cascades Rail service between Portland and Eugene broke ridership records in 2022, 2023 and 2024 with 25% growth each year. Oregon is part of rail's nationwide renaissance. Interest has been reinvigorated for a restoration of the Pioneer Route from Boise, Idaho to Portland, reconnecting a part of the state that has historically been left out.

We need more transit, to more places, more often, not less service and disconnected communities.

We urge you and your colleagues to oppose HB 3402, and to work to ensure passenger rail and transit service is not cut out for those 30% of Oregonians who cannot or do not drive. We urge you to pass HB 2025 with the -28 amendment. As you consider your vote, keep in mind those members of your district who rely on public transit.

Sincerely,
Richard Sheperd
The Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates
AORTARail.org