

Submitter: Doug Allen
On Behalf Of: AORTA Board of Directors
Committee: House Committee On Transportation
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4008

AORTA-Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates supports formation of the Transit Funding Task Force through HB 4008. At a time when we are seeing transit operators across the state slash service, we must come together as a state to come up with more reliable funding sources and strategies.

However, we remain concerned that only two representatives will be representing "consumers" of public transit (one "transportation safety organization" and one "representative of transit riders who utilize a low-income transit pass program"), and that there are no members focused on the needs of Intercity Transit operations or riders. 1/3rd of Oregonians cannot drive due to age, ability, cost, or otherwise. With AAA estimating the average yearly cost of vehicle ownership at nearly \$13,000/year, we are seeing increasing demand for Intercity Transit across our state to get to jobs, school, and hospital appointments.

AORTA advocates for access to Intercity Rail and Transit to connect the entire state. Intercity transit is a tool to create greater economic vitality, unlocking more housing opportunities and jobs, all while achieving greater fiscal and environmental sustainability. To achieve this, we see a need to include an Intercity Transit advocacy organization as a critical component to ensuring Intercity Transit riders are heard.

Intercity operators must be part of the solution to address congestion by providing an alternative to Single-Occupancy Vehicles. The demand is already here, with the Cascades rail service from Eugene to Portland seeing the highest ridership in its history in 2024! An Intercity transit operator is crucial to include in this task force to identify areas of partnership, coordination, and planning to give more Oregonians more opportunities.

Last session, AORTA pushed for the establishment of the Department of Transit and Rail (DOTR). We continue to see this as a necessary step for Oregon to realize the advantages of greater coordination, standardization, and efficiency across transit agencies to deliver better service across the state. In Switzerland, the "Transport Alliances (Verkehrsverbunds)" ensure transit agencies across the country not only coordinate standards, assist with unified tendering and procurement, and offer seamless fare payments/seat reservations, but also ensures coordinated timetables so you will never wait more than a few minutes to transfer from bus to rail (and vice-versa). Establishing the DOTR should be a necessary part of the funding package, as it will help ensure transit operators can deliver the best experience to riders, all while removing duplicate procedures and processes.

We ask the Committee to support HB 4008 with an amendment to add one seat for Intercity Transit Advocates, and one seat for an Intercity Transit Operator.

AORTA will continue to advocate for the necessary reforms to achieve a statewide transit network that is coordinated, efficient, and seamless. We look forward to working with the Legislators to deliver Oregonians a statewide transit network that will truly make our state residents feel connected to one another.

Doug Allen, Vice-President, AORTA-Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates