

Submitter:

Dan Jaffee

On Behalf Of:

Committee:

House Committee On Transportation

Measure, Appointment or Topic:

HB4008

Dear Committee Chair and Members of the Committee on Transportation:

I am writing to urge you to support HB 4008, but also to strengthen the language around needed funding levels and options to be researched and proposed by the Task Force.

It is no exaggeration to say that public transit systems in Oregon are facing an existential threat. Here in Portland, the recently-announced cuts TriMet plans to implement to address its \$300 million shortfall are shocking: completely abandoning part of one MAX light-rail line (completed only a decade ago), eliminating entire bus routes, dramatically reducing service on many other routes, all despite planned fare increases. This story is tragically being repeated across the state.

It is unacceptable that legislative leaders would tolerate allowing TriMet--long a nation-leading transit system--and other public transit systems around the state to deteriorate in this way. Despite pandemic-era ridership declines (which have been partly reversed for most systems), the need for robust public transit is greater than ever: our population continues to grow; low-income and rural residents often lack cars and desperately need more frequent and faster transit service to access jobs, medical care, and other services; and greenhouse gas emissions from fossil-fuel transportation are our biggest emissions source contributing to climate change. Transit is the most environmentally sustainable mode of transportation, aside from bicycles.

Our public transit infrastructure represents a precious, multi-generational investment, using the payroll and other taxes paid by residents over many decades. When that infrastructure deteriorates, and if service frequency or coverage falls, many riders will abandon transit and reluctantly turn to far more polluting and congestion-producing auto travel. Once lost to transit, those riders will be very difficult to bring back to public transit. I believe that allowing TriMet and other transit systems to collapse is a mistake of historic proportions that will be harshly judged by future generations.

This situation cannot be allowed to continue. The Task Force created by HB 4008 must pursue and advocate for truly ambitious, robust funding mechanisms. I want to stress that these funding mechanisms cannot simply put transit on "life support" or merely restore the service cuts of the past few years. Instead, the new funding mechanisms must guarantee a higher, stable level of funding that will automatically rise commensurate with inflation and population growth, so that transit systems can

confidently invest in long-term planning, system expansion, steadily more frequent service, and new modes including Bus Rapid Transit, and so that riders can rely on robust and steadily improving service over the long run. Please amend the language in HB 4008 to clarify that the proposed funding mechanisms must achieve these goals.

However, any funding mechanism adopted in the 2027 legislative session will not take effect until later in 2027 or 2028. This will come too late to save Oregon's transit systems from devastating and possibly irreversible damage. I urge the committee and legislative leadership to also pass legislation to pass a one- to two-year stopgap funding measure for all public transit systems, until the Task Force's recommendations can be implemented and the new funding streams begins to flow. Given the debacle over the 2025 transportation funding measure, the most logical mechanism now available is to legislatively authorize Oregon public transit systems to make a one-time increase in their local payroll tax rates--ideally doubling the current maximum rates for all transit systems.

Please pass HB 4008, with the amendments described above, and also introduce and pass a separate, emergency stop-gap funding mechanism for Oregon transit systems.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Dan Jaffee
Portland