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February 16, 2026

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Senator Bruce Starr  
Senate Committee on Transportation

## RE: Support for SB 1544-3

Chair Gorsek, Vice Chair Weber, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Tammy Baney, and I have the honor of serving as Executive Director of the Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council (COIC), which operates Cascades East Transit as the public transportation service provider for Central Oregon. I am testifying today on behalf of our Board of Directors, which includes representatives of the current qualified entities, Crook, Deschutes, and Jefferson Counties, as well as the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. I am here in support of SB 1544-3.

As reflected in the proposed amendment, this will clarify and modernize the definition of a “qualified entity” to include intergovernmental entities that provide public transportation services on behalf of a county or tribe. In Central Oregon, that intergovernmental entity is COIC.

Under current law, Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF) resources in our region must be administered and funneled separately through each individual county and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, even though COIC is the single transportation service provider operating a unified regional transit system.

This structure creates unnecessary duplication and inefficiency:

- It adds administrative burden and cost to the counties and CTWS.
- It creates delays in decision-making due to multiple layers of approval.
- It requires four independent bodies to manage and make decisions regarding transit services provided by a single operator.
- It complicates service delivery across county lines, even though our riders and routes do not stop at jurisdictional boundaries.

By way of background, when the STIF program was established as part of HB 2017 during the 2017 legislative session, I was serving as Chair of the Oregon Transportation Commission and was deeply involved in the development of HB 2017 and the STIF framework. During those discussions, I raised the concern that Councils of Governments that directly provide transit services were not explicitly included in the definition of qualified entities.

At the time, it was determined that including that clarification could generate additional opposition during a very complex and delicate transportation funding negotiation. There was an understanding that this issue could be addressed at a later date if needed.

SB 1544-3 represents that later date.

This language does not change the fundamental structure or intent of STIF. It simply acknowledges how our region delivers transit services in practice—through an intergovernmental entity operating in concert with our county and tribal partners.

The -3 amendment does not remove authority from counties or the Tribes. COIC intends to continue utilizing county-specific STIF advisory committees to ensure local priorities are heard and respected. What this amendment does is allow us to operate under a more unified organizational framework—one that reflects how transit is actually delivered in Central Oregon. We can align planning, budgeting, reporting, auditing and implementation across the region. We can reduce redundancy and focus on outcomes.

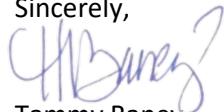
In practical terms, this legislation will:

- Reduce administrative burden and costs by an estimated 10 percent.
- Streamline processes so that more dollars go directly into transit service and to the passengers who rely on it.

At a time when every transportation dollar matters, SB 1544-3 ensures that we are using public funds efficiently, transparently, and in a way that reflects the realities of regional transit service delivery.

On behalf of our Board of Directors and our regional partners, I respectfully ask for your support. Thank you for your service.

Sincerely,



Tammy Baney  
Executive Director  
Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council