



February 16, 2026

Senate Committee on Transportation
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97701

RE: Support for SB 1544 -3

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

I am writing to express strong support for the SB 1544 -3 amendment, which makes critical improvements to the administration of transit funding in Central Oregon. Cascades East Transit (CET), Central Oregon's transit provider, is operated by the Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council (COIC), a designated Council of Governments that provides services for Crook, Jefferson, and Deschutes counties, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs (CTWS), and the cities of Bend, Culver, La Pine, Madras, Metolius, Prineville, Redmond and Sisters.

Current law requires Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF) dollars to be administered separately through Qualified Entities (QE). The three counties and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs are currently the QEs for Central Oregon. Administering transit funding through four entities creates significant administrative burden and duplicative work—even though the funds support the same regional transit system. The SB 1544 -3 amendment would amend the definition of a Qualified Entity to include an intergovernmental entity such as COIC. This would allow COIC to directly manage regional STIF dollars in a unified manner while counties and CTWS retain final authority and continue using their local STIF committees.

This approach strengthens local control, while solving the inefficiencies created by having four separate bodies manage funding for one regional system. The City of Bend and the Central Oregon region stand to benefit significantly through:

- An estimated 10% reduction in administrative costs, allowing more dollars to go directly into transit service.
- Streamlined decision-making, reducing delays created by multiple layers of approval.
- A unified regional mission, ensuring all jurisdictions work together instead of competing for discretionary funds.
- More investment reaching riders, supporting reliability, expanded service, and CET's ongoing improvements.

This new structure will improve Central Oregon's ability to coordinate and provide transit services to residents throughout the region. I thank Senator Broadman for putting forth this important amendment and I urge your support for SB 1544 -3.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'MK' followed by a flourish.

Melanie Kebler
Mayor, City of Bend