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Safer Transport of Oil by Rail Legislation Clears the Oregon House

Bill requires safety and response plans for worst case scenarios

SALEM – Legislation years in the making to improve the safety of trains transporting oil through Oregon passed the Oregon House of Representatives today.

The legislation, [House Bill 2209](#), requires railroads that own or operate “high hazard train routes” to develop detailed safety and environmental response plans and demonstrate the ability to respond to and cover the cost of an oil spill. It also authorizes a fee on the railroads to support the state’s efforts to respond in the event of a train derailment or spill.

Rep. Barbara Smith Warner (D-Portland) has been a leading champion in efforts to improve oil train safety since joining the legislature in 2014. Incidents in recent years, including a 2016 oil train derailment near Mosier, Ore., have brought additional attention to the issue.

“It has been an eye-opening experience to work on this issue, especially in a post-Mosier world where we know firsthand the dangers of an oil train derailment, and how lucky we were the first time around,” Rep. Smith Warner said. “While there are a lot of restrictions on what states can accomplish due to the relevant federal regulations, I believe HB 2209 encompasses all that we are permitted to do to reclaim some safety and peace of mind for Oregonians. I wish it hadn’t taken so long, but I am proud of the final result.”

This session, Rep. Paul Evans, the chair of the House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness, led a workgroup process with Rep. John Lively (D-Springfield), Rep. Rick Lewis (R-Silverton) and Rep. Mark Meek (D-Oregon City) to finalize legislation.

“This bill gets us where we need to be today; it is an instrument for moving toward a better, more prepared tomorrow,” Rep. Evans said. “It is paid for by the users of our railways; it is aligned with benchmark safety and security protocols; and it is the beginning, rather than the end, of the conversation about making our railways – even more sustainable over time.”

The legislation, which passed 56 to 3, now goes to the Oregon Senate for consideration.

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