

HB 3401: Train on-time performance.

Testimony for House Committee

Oregon's passenger trains are too often *late* on arrival. There is no faster way to lose customers from passenger rail service than to make riders wait at the platform, or arrive home, or at a meeting, *late*. ODOT cites a drop in on-time performance as one of the key contributing factors in a drop in Amtrak ridership in 2014, after years of consistent and large increases; including a 255% increase in ridership between 1995 and 2013. For a recent period, from 2007-2013 it grew 45%. In order to ensure that Oregon's passenger rail has sustainable ridership in the future we must improve the on-time performance of Oregon's trains. While a long term goal of Oregon passenger rail is improving the speed – and some of the recent investments DO shorten travel time – the critical aspect that needs to be addressed today is ensuring that trains arrive at the time that they are scheduled. Passengers care about speed, sure, but they care even more about options and reliability.

On-time performance of passenger and freight rail has been volatile. In the 2014 fiscal year on time performance, defined as arriving within ten minutes of the scheduled time, varied from 98% in the week of Dec. 14th to as low as 39% the week of February 15th. Even ignoring the data from February to take into account the extreme weather conditions at the time, on time performance was under 90% for nearly half of Fiscal Year 2014. During four of those weeks on time performance was below 80%. One in five trains arrived more than ten minutes late.

For many Amtrak riders, on-time performance is vital to their travel. 12% of riders are commuting to work or school, and an additional 12% are traveling for business reasons. This means that a quarter of riders are expecting to be – need to be – on time for work, a meeting, or a class. Other riders are relying on trains schedules timed to make connections to other travel modes.

Lengthy transit time, or late arrival of freight impacts the delivery of goods for intermodal connections. Tie-ups for freight trains, including the Class III trains using the main line, are problematic as well to keep business competitive and the economy rolling.

Last year, under unusual and unfortunate weather conditions, a manufacturer north of Albany warned it would have to shut down within two days because it hadn't received its supply of raw materials. While the Omaha, Nebraska dispatcher found a way to get trains moving and release the stranded freight train to deliver the materials, it meant another 1 hr 22 min. delay for the passenger train. North Portland Junction is a particularly bad bottleneck.

This bill directs the Department of Transportation to study ways to improve the on-time performance of passenger trains and reduce delays for freight trains. It also directs ODOT to look into infrastructure improvements, for example new sidings, parallel tracks, switching systems at convergence points, and operational changes that can improve on time performance.

Identifying the changes that need to take place in order to improve passenger rail is an essential step toward improving Oregon rail and supporting Oregon's economy.