

ODOT Funding for Passenger Train Service

I am here to support a \$10.4 million budget for ODOT passenger rail.

Maintaining passenger rail service in Oregon is vital to maintaining investment in Oregon's economic future. Passenger rail is a necessary component of Oregon's transportation system that works to connect people from all over Oregon to schools, jobs, medical services, families, and events.

The Cascades trains run on the Union Pacific line in the Willamette Valley. But public transportation is important to connect people from all over the state. ODOT has developed a public transportation network to provide inter-city service connecting people from different regions of the state to other regions. Bus routes and schedules are designed to connect with intercity passenger trains. Losing the passenger trains would put some of that well-developed POINT bus system in jeopardy. You'll recognize where this service runs. In the northwest region: Astoria, Seaside and Cannon Beach; connecting central and eastern Oregon: Chemult, Bend, and Redmond; Burns, Vale and Ontario; and connecting southern Oregon: Klamath Falls, Medford, Ashland, Grants Pass, Cave Junction, and Brookings.

Passenger rail is an environmentally friendly and safe mode of transportation. It supports land use goals. It supports community development.

I can't imagine planning a future without this part of our intermodal system.

I can't imagine a future where we've abandoned inter-city trains and rely only on highway-based travel.

The rest of the country probably can't imagine it, either. Remember that we're one of the nation's designated high speed rail corridors. The federal government recognizes the need for passenger train service on the 466-mile corridor between Eugene and Vancouver B.C. If we abandon the Oregon part of that corridor, we've got a black mark on our record, one that would be hard to erase, and hard to recover from.

Some of the people who use inter-city trains have cars, they just find it preferable to travel for work by train; you can make the most of the travel time since you can work – or you can nap (-:-). Nearly half of the train riders don't have access to a car. Many of those are at the younger and older ends of the age spectrum. Some seniors, even those who do still drive, prefer to travel by train, where possible. You'll see that you have a letter from AARP supporting this investment in passenger rail. Students and youth make up a disproportionate amount of the ridership. Young people aren't getting a driver license at nearly the rate they used to. In 1999, 34,000 teen licenses were issued. In 2000, the first year of Oregon's new teen driver policy, it dropped to 29,000. It's been declining since then, varying between 23,000 and 27,000 a year; last year it was at 26,000.

This is not just about funding passenger rail for this session; it is about keeping it alive for the future. If the Cascades train service between Eugene and Portland closes down, 200,000 riders a year would be forced to find some other way to get

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around. Moreover, it's unlikely that ODOT would be able to easily add the service back the service in the future. It would be extremely costly to ramp up again. You can't just mothball the trains, give up the schedule time on the Union Pacific track, and then expect to pick it back up in a couple of years.

Oregon invests in every transportation mode. The amount going to rail, or trains, is small compared to how much we spend on highways and other modes. The 70-member Oregon Transportation Forum, with members ranging from Coos Siskiyou Shippers and Association of General Contractors to Oregon Trucking Association, Vehicle Dealers, and AAA, endorse this investment in trains.

We shouldn't abandon this part of our transportation network in the budget, and abandon it for the future.