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QuickPoint! - Legislative committee wants to extend commuter rail to Salem at a cost of \$118 per ride

By John A. Charles, Jr.

On February 22, the Joint Committee on Transportation of the Oregon Legislature unanimously approved SB 1572, which would appropriate \$250,000 to ODOT to study the feasibility of extending TriMet's Westside Express Service (WES) train from Wilsonville to Salem.

The committee did this despite the fact that average daily ridership on WES was down to 370 in January. With so few riders, the average operations cost per ride was \$118.

By comparison, the average operations cost per ride for TriMet's frequent bus service in January was \$6.68, and \$9.35 for light rail.

WES opened in 2009 and runs from Beaverton to Wilsonville. Service is limited to weekdays, and only during peak hours. Trains arrive every 45 minutes.

The peak year for WES ridership was 2014, when it averaged 2,010 boardings in January. Since then, ridership has dropped by 82%.

SB 1572 now sits in the Legislative Ways and Means Committee, awaiting approval of the \$250,000 budget request. We don't need a 10-month study to decide that extending commuter rail to Salem is a poor use of taxpayer funds. Lawmakers should let the bill die a quiet death.

John A. Charles, Jr. is President and CEO of Cascade Policy Institute, Oregon's free market public policy research organization.

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