

QuickPoint! - WES Commuter Rail Should be Shut Down, Not Expanded

By John A. Charles, Jr.

On March 11 the Joint Transportation Committee of the Oregon Legislature took testimony on HB 3453, which would create a new transit authority with a mission to take over TriMet's Westside Express Service (WES) commuter line and expand it to Eugene.

While I share the enthusiasm of the bill's sponsors for passenger rail, the history of WES shows that a market for commuter rail does not exist.

WES was originally projected to cost \$65 million and open in 2000. It actually cost \$161.2 million and opened in 2009. TriMet predicted that opening-year ridership would average 2,500 average daily boardings. Actual ridership averaged 1,140.

Daily ridership peaked in 2014 at 1,964 daily boardings, then dropped in each successive year. During 2024 WES averaged just 477 boardings per day.

Since each rider typically takes two daily train trips, that means WES only has about 240 actual customers.

With such little ridership, public subsidies are costly. Last year the operating cost per boarding ride on WES averaged \$103, far in excess of the standard TriMet fare of \$2.80.

There is no business case for expanding commuter rail. In fact, taxpayers would be better off if we canceled WES, sold the train cars, and moved the few customers back to buses.

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