

HB 2662 (2023 Regular Legislative Session)

ODOT Public Transportation Division Study of TriMet's WES Commuter Train North Willamette Valley Extension from Wilsonville to Salem, with Stops in Donald, Woodburn and Keizer



ISSUE:

Although the City of Wilsonville's South Metro Area Regional Transit (SMART) agency and Salem Area Mass Transit District share the Monday through Friday commuter "1X Express" bus route on I-5 between Wilsonville and Salem, as traffic congestion on the South Portland Metro and North Willamette Valley I-5 corridor continues to worsen, commuters could welcome a public-transit alternative unaffected by ever increasing highway traffic congestion.

Additionally, as ODOT undertakes the I-205 Toll Project and Regional Mobility Pricing Project (RMPP) for tolling all of I-5 and I-205 in the Portland metro region, issues of impacts to low-income populations of tolls to North Willamette Valley commuters will surface; to-date, most of ODOT's outreach has been to Portland-area communities. The lack of sufficient alternative, public-transit commute options along I-5 from Salem/Keizer area to Portland area makes a non-highway mobility option more attractive.

Major new traffic-generators along I-5 south of Wilsonville include that could increase traffic on the South Metro/North Willamette Valley portion of I-5 are now underway:

- a new 3.6-million-square-foot Amazon warehouse in Woodburn under construction that is to be served by hundreds of delivery trucks and with anticipated employment of approximately 1,500 workers set to open in 2023;
- a new Siletz Tribe Casino/Hotel entertainment complex in North Salem/Keizer area is planned with a total of 1,473 direct jobs at the casino-hotel complex where a vast majority of patrons are anticipated to come from the Portland metro region, resulting in over 7,800 new weekday trips.

Long-term population projections indicate that the Portland Metro / North Willamette Valley region will continue to be one of Oregon's fastest-growing areas.

The old Oregon Electric Railway, a 122-mile passenger rail line between Portland and Eugene, was an interurban railroad that operated from 1908 to 1933. The rail line passes through Wilsonville and has a dedicated right-of-way that is not affected by traffic congestion on the highway or local roads, allowing the provision of reliable public-transit service no matter the roadway traffic conditions.

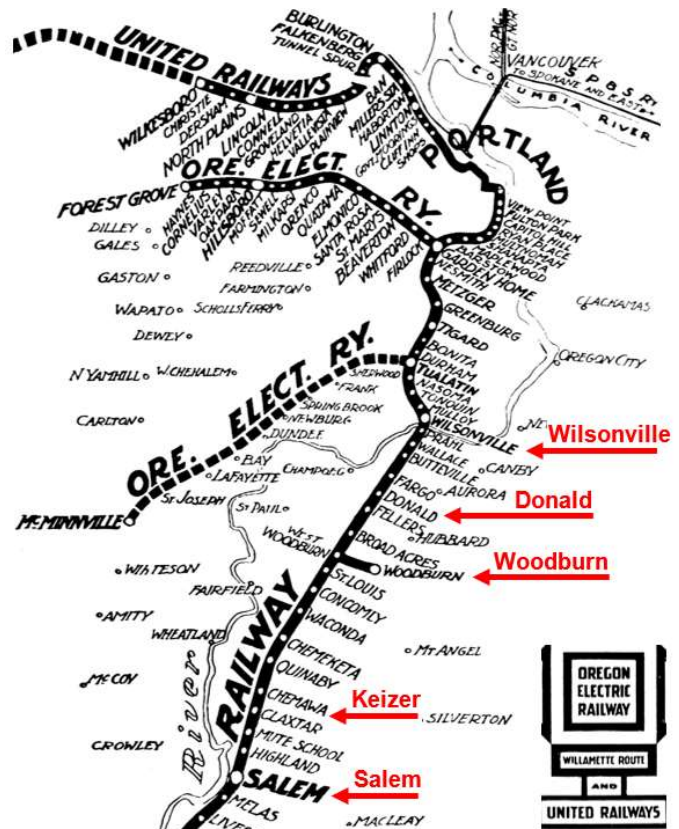


TriMet's Westside Express Service (WES)

commuter train began service in 2009, with stops along the 14.7-mile run at the transit centers of Beaverton, Tigard, Tualatin and Wilsonville. WES runs Monday through Friday during the morning and evening commute "rush hours." WES operates on a portion of the old Oregon Electric Railway now owned by Portland and Western Railroad.

The Legislative Concept

House Bill 2662 is co-sponsored by Representative Courtney Neron (HD 26) and Senator Aaron Woods (SD 13) and was pre-session filed for the 2023 regular legislative session. The bill directs the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) Public Transportation Division, Rail Operations & Statewide Multimodal Network Unit — in conjunction with WES sponsor TriMet and WES operator Portland & Western Railroad — to study and



document the various costs, benefits and operational issues of extending the current rush-hour-only Westside Express Service (WES) commuter train from the current southern terminus in Wilsonville to Salem, with potential stops in Donald, Woodburn and Keizer.

Similar legislation was proposed unsuccessfully over multiple legislative sessions by the late Rep. Mitch Greenlick of Portland:

- [HB 2338 \(2013\)](#): Creates Task Force on Extending the Westside Express Service Commuter Line to Salem
- [HB 2553 \(2015\)](#): Creates Task Force on Extending the Westside Express Service Commuter Line to Salem
- [HB 2219 \(2019\)](#): Creates Task Force on Extending the Westside Express Service Commuter Line to Salem

Each of these bills would have created large task forces composed of legislators, community leaders along the route and transit/transportation agency representatives. When provided the opportunity, the City of Wilsonville presented testimony in support of the proposed legislation.

Rather than set-up a large task force that involves considerable effort on behalf of many parties as prior legislative efforts attempted, the proposed legislation sponsors a technical study led by ODOT Public Transportation Division in conjunction with WES sponsor TriMet and WES operator Portland & Western Railroad. The technical study would review the specific operational and locational issues for extending and operating WES on the old Oregon Electric Railway to provide inter-city passenger-rail service for commuters of the North Willamette Valley and South Metro Region using the existing WES trains and Oregon Electric Line/Portland & Western railroad tracks.

Consultants hired by ODOT would be directed to engage with the City Managers' Offices of cities to be potentially served by the WES service extension—including Wilsonville, Donald, Woodburn, Keizer and Salem—in order to better understand local-access and other related issues.

The study would also engage local transit agencies in addition to TriMet to include SMART, Salem-Keizer Mass Transit District and Woodburn Transit that would provide bus

connections to the WES rail stops in Wilsonville, Woodburn, Donald, Keizer and Salem. The transit agencies would be charged to develop “last-mile” connections from WES station stops to each of the communities that they serve.

The legislation calls for ODOT to present the results of the WES North Willamette Valley Extension from Wilsonville to Salem Study to the legislature at the start of the 2024 legislative session. Depending on the results of the study, the legislature may wish at that time to convene a larger task force composed of multiple interests to further advance potential WES extension planning efforts.

In order to fund the study, a general fund or other appropriation is required, with a recommended allocation of \$500,000.

Background Information

The 2018 Portland Metro Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) recommends extending WES commuter-rail service from the Portland metro region—including Beaverton, Tigard, Tualatin and Wilsonville—to Salem/Keizer with a stop in Woodburn.

Utilizing the old Oregon Electric Line right-of-way now licensed by Portland and Western Railroad provides the opportunity for a reliable transit-commute solution independent of I-5 highway traffic conditions. Extension of WES would provide a reliable car-free commute option for the North Willamette Valley/South Metro I-5 Corridor that also provides more highway capacity for trucks and the timely movement of freight.

Through a \$10 million grant under Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA) High Speed Intercity Passenger Rail Program, ODOT Public Transportation Division conducted a nine-year-long rail feasibility study between Portland and Eugene for Amtrak train use. In 2021 FRA selected Alternative 1 for the Oregon Passenger Rail alignment that follows the existing Amtrak Cascades passenger rail route and can accommodate increased passenger rail services by improving track, signal and communication infrastructure. The ODOT *Oregon Rail Plan* of 2020 notes issues with WES, but does not provide any detailed study or recommendations. In essence, no public body has ever conducted a detailed study of inter-city passenger rail for commuters of the North Willamette Valley and South Metro Region using the existing WES trains and Oregon Electric Line/Portland & Western railroad tracks.