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Joint Committee on Transportation, Preservation, and Modernization
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR
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Re: In Support of HB 2017-3

Co-Chairs, committee members, for the record my name is Robert Straker and I live in Oregon City. First, thank you for giving me the chance to come and provide input on this momentous opportunity for our state's future. I have lived in Oregon my entire life. Throughout my life I have seen the degradation of our roads, highways, and bridges while our state sits idly by without making the critical investment that we have needed. I am sure that I do not need to tell this committee about the speed at which our state is growing, 110 people per day are moving to Oregon. While this is happening, those folks increase the load on our transportation system that has not been adequate for the population we already have.

I have utilized TriMet for over 9 years, and like anything, it has its strengths and weaknesses. As time has gone, on and there has been divestment from our transit system, I have witnessed firsthand how TriMet has declined in recent years. The reliability of public transit has not increased to meet the needs of how many people we have living in our state. Our country was built on the idea that you have the freedom to come and go as you please. This freedom is a foundational principle here in our state which has become synonymous with the outdoors and a pioneering spirit. When I look at how our public transportation encourages this principle, I see that we are lacking.

Increasingly, our public transit has become unreliable, unsafe, and unaffordable. This has huge impacts on our wonderful state. Whether it is the freedom to get to work or school on time or the freedom to explore other parts of our beautiful state, our public transit is not upholding this principle. Thankfully, I work at the campus bookstore where I attend college. When I take the bus, it takes me two buses in the morning and two back home at night. As a student, I find myself working in groups or studying in the evening time and the decrease in bus frequency at night impacts my ability to have the time I need to get this work done. This is not an isolated issue either, it is well known by students that when the frequency of busses goes down, transfers become less reliable which only worsens the commute time.

It is because of this very issue that I was forced to start driving. Of course, this opens up a host of other issues though. As I said, I live in Oregon City and I drive downtown often enough to know the high cost and unreliability of parking. Besides the costs of upkeep, insurance, gas, and fees, parking is a hurdle that many Oregonians cannot afford. After parking, our road conditions increase the damage done to individual vehicles, how can we expect working Oregonians to get anywhere if they are constantly having to replace tires or suspension? If I had the money, I would take the car over the bus, because the bus does not run often enough to make it a preferable form of transportation.

I was glad to hear that this committee was assembled in order to meet all the issues that our state is facing. I support all of you and what you are doing to consistently address these investments as time goes on. I would like to stress how important it is that we strike while the iron is hot and we make this investment worth the costs. Thank you for taking time to hear my testimony.

Thank you for your time,

Robert Straker