



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®  
OF OREGON**

February 1, 2016

To: House Committee on Transportation and Economic Development  
Representative Caddy McKeown, Chair  
Representative John Davis, Vice Chair  
Representative Chris Gorsek, Vice Chair  
Email: [hted.exhibits@state.or.us](mailto:hted.exhibits@state.or.us)

Re: HB 4078 – Transit Expansion Fund - **SUPPORT**

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan, grassroots political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. The League of Women Voters of Oregon supports HB 4078, creating a new transit grant program. Support for this bill stems from our national League positions on meeting basic human needs, our air quality and climate change positions that also refer to the benefits of reduced vehicular traffic. Finally, our state League has positions that support energy conservation and the state's land use laws that clearly tie land use, transportation, and environmental quality.

While our transit providers have been able to modernize their fleets to clean-burning buses with state and federal assistance, they have not been able to use them to capacity due to operating shortages. The measure recognizes the difficulty that smaller communities, and our transit systems without payroll taxes, currently face. The shortages confronting these systems are most critical for the funding of operations. It is our understanding that grants made available from HB 4078's proposed Transit Expansion Fund could be used for operations if that is part of a development plan submitted with a successful grant request.

The need for transit funding is clear all around Oregon. Our Lane County League has worked to support their transit system, as has our Deschutes County League. As one of the eligible transit providers identified in Section 2 of the measure, the Salem-Keizer Transit District is unique among the three largest metropolitan transit operators of the state in that it does not assess any payroll tax. Local support for the system instead comes from a dedicated property tax, as well as passenger fares. Raising the property tax for transit has not been feasible recently because, of course, property tax payers already fund most local government and school services and much of the area now faces compression.

A 2012 study by our Marion-Polk County League members found that due to limited funding, our capitol city and third largest transit system is no longer able to provide what we consider adequate service. Saturday service was eliminated in 2009 and late evening service is not available. While recent route consolidation has resulted in efficiencies and improved service on some routes, it has been at the expense of closing other routes. The local League's study documented the negative effects of the earlier cuts on the independence of community

members, especially those with few transportation options. This story can be duplicated in other cities throughout Oregon.

Underlying our support for HB 4078 is our premise that an integrated multi-modal transportation network supports employment, education, and commerce, as well as civic and social activities. An effective transit system is a key part of such a network for the mobility of workers, students, seniors, shoppers, and visitors. This is especially true for low-income residents, persons with disabilities, and those who do not own or drive cars. We also believe that affordable transportation can help reduce costs of some social services by improving access to jobs, training, court and medical appointments, and to the social services themselves.

Needless to say, these social and environmental benefits will only be achieved under this measure if a source of revenue can be identified and directed to the new fund. We recognize the difficulty of this task due to constitutional limitations on use of fuel tax and vehicle registration fees and ongoing pressures on the General Fund. But we believe that healthy public transportation can be an economic driver that helps build stronger communities and improve tax bases. Looking at the potential for federal funds seems a reasonable consideration.

Oregonians need a working public transit system. We urge your support for HB 4078.

Sincerely,



Norman Turrill  
President



Janet Adkins  
Transportation Portfolio



Sandra Gangle