

Statement of Choice for the “Cowboy Commuter Act” (HB: OSU-515)

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## **Overview**

Rep. Hamilton's bill is designed to expand and modernize Oklahoma's public transportation infrastructure. The Cowboy Commuter Act aims to develop hybrid rail and commuter rail systems that connect major cities, establish statewide bus and van transit services, and integrate a unified mobile transit app, enabling QR code ticketing and contactless payment. This bill ensures ADA-compliant transportation while addressing affordability through subsidized fares and capped ticket prices. It also creates OCRA, the Oklahoma Commuter Rail Authority, and establishes a permanent funding source through the Oklahoma Commuter Rail Development Fund. The bill passed with overwhelming support, 52 in favor and only 1 opposed, which reflects the body's strong response to the need for reliable, accessible transit in our state.

## **Pros and Needs**

This bill addresses one of Oklahoma's biggest challenges: the lack of consistent, modern, and statewide public transportation. For a state with growing cities, expanding populations, and thousands of commuters traveling for work and school, transportation plays a crucial role in determining opportunities. For many Oklahomans, especially low-income individuals, veterans, seniors, and students, access to reliable transit means access to jobs, medical care, education, and connection to their communities.

OSU-515 meets this need by:

- Connecting Oklahoma City, Tulsa, Stillwater, Norman, Lawton, and more through hybrid and commuter rail.
- Providing affordable transportation, with fares capped between \$5–\$20 and discounted 50–100% for those who qualify.
- Ensuring ADA compliance, improving access for people with disabilities.
- Reducing environmental impact through hybrid, electric, and hydrogen vehicles.
- Bringing investment into Oklahoma communities through infrastructure and job creation.

Rural areas often the most forgotten in transportation policy are specifically included in this bill through expanded bus and flexible van services. This is critical because Oklahomans outside metro areas often have *no* transit options at all.

This bill does not impose new taxes on municipalities. Instead, it uses a responsible and transparent funding model through OCRA and the OCRDF. With 2% of the state budget dedicated to transportation development, Oklahoma finally invests in itself in a way that matches the needs of the modern world.

Simply put: this bill increases access, reduces traffic, connects the state, and gives Oklahomans more freedom in how they live and work.

## **Moving the Body**

The biggest task in passing this bill was showing delegates how deeply transportation shapes daily life. Many members of the body have never relied on public transit, and therefore do not immediately recognize its importance. The author did a phenomenal job of illustrating how students, low-income families, and workers depend on transportation to survive—not just to travel. The author spoke on how Oklahoma lags behind other states in mobility and how this bill brings Oklahoma into a new era of opportunity and connectivity.

By emphasizing affordable fares, ADA accessibility, and environmental sustainability, Rep. Hamilton grounded the bill in values that resonated across party lines. Delegates were able to see that this bill wasn't just about trains and buses it was about people, equity, and progress.

The near-unanimous vote of **52–1** reflects the effectiveness of appealing to the body's sense of responsibility and vision for Oklahoma's future. It became clear that this was not just a transportation bill this was an investment in the lives and livelihoods of all Oklahomans.

For that reason, OSU-515 was my favorite bill heard today, and I was proud to advocate in support of it.