



## Public Hearing Staff Report I-205/Portland Mall MAX Light Rail Project

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On March 15, 2006, TriMet held a public hearing to gather comments on the proposed I-205/Portland Mall MAX Light Rail Project. Dean Phillips presided as hearing's officer and a court reporter recorded oral testimony. TriMet General Manager Fred Hansen attended the hearing to listen to each comment. Thirty-one people provided oral testimony during the hearing and 23 individuals submitted written testimony. Copies of the oral and written testimony are included with this report.

The following are responses to questions and issues raised in oral and written testimony.

### Public Involvement Process

Seven people said they liked the public involvement process.

- Monica Beemer, executive director of Sisters of the Road Café and member of the Project's Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), said she was impressed by the level of citizen involvement in the process and found it welcoming and inclusive.
- Howard Weiner, owner of Cal Skate and a CAC member, was very supportive of the inclusive process, saying, "We've been at the table."
- Phil Kalberer, president of Kalberer Company and CAC Chair, noted that countless public involvement hours that have been spent on the current design.
- Stan Lewis, transit rider and CAC member, lauded the CAC work.
- Michael Levine, representative of Independent Living Resources, TriMet's Committee on Accessible Transportation (CAT) and a CAC member, was appreciative of the attention paid to the disabled community by the Project.
- Jan Campbell, CAT Chair and CAC member, also was appreciative of the attention paid to issues for seniors and persons with disabilities.
- Steve Fosler, principal of Fosler Portland Architecture LLC and CAC member, said that the CAC acted as an independent reviewer of the Project.

Two people did not like the public involvement process.

- In comments submitted in writing, Renee Fellman, president of the Downtown Neighborhood Association, said that the public involvement process was flawed, "not inclusive, and complete information critical to decision making has not been available to the public."
- Also in written testimony, Terry Parker said that TriMet has a "bully attitude" with regard to the Project.

**Response:** TriMet integrates extensive public involvement activities into every phase of its projects. To ensure consistent information and to facilitate dependable lines of communication with the general public and specific downtown communities, the Project team is implementing a community relations program to ensure that the Project serves community needs and mitigates,

as much as possible, the negative effects of construction on businesses and neighborhoods along the downtown route. The purpose of this process is to provide information and an opportunity for the public to comment on the proposed Project's scope, design, schedule and impacts. Our public involvement process will continue through the Project's completion.

Community outreach consists of regular communication with downtown businesses, organizations and communities through neighborhood associations and local civic and business organizations; monthly meetings of the Citizens Advisory Committee; postcard mailings; quarterly open houses showcasing project concepts; transit rider alerts; hundreds of news stories on TV, radio and in newspapers (including several front page stories); postings on TriMet's website; and email alerts sent to subscribers who wanted to keep up-to-date on the Project. Through these channels, outreach efforts reached thousands of riders and downtown stakeholders.

During the Conceptual Design Phase (spring 2003 to May 2004), Project staff examined several platform design alternatives for how light rail trains might operate on the Portland Mall. A 14-member citizens advisory committee (CAC) reviewed these options with staff in weekly meetings over the course of more than a year. Plans also were shared with TriMet's Committee on Accessible Transportation (CAT), which consists of riders who advocate for seniors and persons with disabilities. The CAC has since been expanded to 24 members to include representatives from the CAT, the bike community and small business owners.

### **Portland Mall Design**

Three people said they liked the planned Mall design.

- Stan Lewis said the design is safe and balances many interests.
- Phil Kalberer said the current design is superior to the left side alignment previously considered, especially in the North Mall.
- The Portland Design Commission submitted a letter signed by Michael McCulloch, Chair, and Paul Schlesinger, member, endorsing the project and saying that:
  - Wayfinding is an important element that shouldn't be overlooked.
  - The existing intersection circle element should be kept.
  - Alternative South Mall street lighting fixtures should be examined.
  - Alternative tactile warning design solutions are encouraged.

Sixteen people expressed concerns about the planned Mall design.

- Renee Fellman said that the "serpentine" design wasn't safe, and she opposed cars on the Mall in both written and oral testimony.
- George Crandall, principal, Crandall Arambula Architects, said the design was unsafe.
- Jason Barbour was concerned about bus and train interactions and what would happen in the event of a breakdown.
- Jim Karlock was concerned about safety and the lack of parking on the new Mall.
- Aaron Tarfman said the design was less safe, more expensive, and will take longer to construct than the proposed design with MAX in the left lane and no auto lane.
- Doniel Hart was not supportive of four-to-five-block bus stop spacing in the new design.
- Ron Buel said that light rail on the Mall will result in conflicts with autos, buses and trains.
- Charles Ormsby was concerned about pedestrian safety on the Mall.

- Donna Blair said the current design will cause a bottleneck and prefers a design with rail in the left lane and autos taken off the Mall.
- In written testimony, Diana Swan said she was concerned about pedestrian safety with autos being added to the Mall.
- Pete Colt submitted comments that opposed autos on the Mall.
- Katharine Bang, in written testimony, opposed cars on the Mall and the “weave.”
- Jane Civeletti, via email, also opposed cars on the Mall.
- Garlynn Woodsong said MAX should be in the left lane and cars taken off the Mall.
- In a letter to TriMet, Chris Walker said he was concerned about pedestrian safety, especially for people in wheelchairs and those who are visually impaired.
- Deboarah Pearson Kennedy submitted a comment card asking that no cars be allowed on the Mall and that light rail be restricted to one lane only.

**Response:** In all, 14 design options were considered. Various stakeholder groups selected the right-side design in 2004, because this design serves riders best by maintaining transit boardings on the same side of the street. With bus and light rail concentrated on the right side of the Mall streets, transfers between the two systems will be safe, easy to understand and convenient.

In seeking to design the safest system possible, TriMet will require MAX trains and buses to interact only at controlled signal intersections—when the MAX train is present, it proceeds with a signal, while bus and auto traffic is held at the intersection with a red light. This is how bus, trains and autos currently work throughout the 44-mile MAX system.

Pedestrian and rider safety was a paramount concern in the selection of the right-side alignment. For the pedestrian traveling the length of the Mall, the sidewalk through-zones will be unchanged from today. Signage will be provided to clearly indicate the location of bus stops and station platforms. With a single station or stop per block, transit access will be clearer to passengers. It is anticipated that this simpler design and operation will minimize confusion and contribute to a safe street environment. Pedestrian countdown timers have been successfully used along Interstate MAX and will be added to all intersections to provide more information. Where necessary, overhead, flashing train-warning signs may be added.

Expanding the auto lane from the current 51 to 57 blocks also was supported by various stakeholder groups. Currently, six blocks do not have auto/bike access, requiring cars and bikes to turn off the Mall. It can be confusing, and many enter the “bus only” lane to go the additional block. Adding these six blocks to the Mall will create a continuous auto/bike lane the entire length of the Mall.

Additionally, there have been a few studies looking at opportunities to maintain and enhance downtown’s vitality. The April 2002 “Downtown Portland Retail Strategy” prepared for the Portland Development Commission and Association for Portland Progress, now Portland Business Alliance, recommended strategies to support downtown retail development based on a number of guiding principles, including (from page 9):

*Strengthen Retail Streets that Serve as Connectors*

Effective retail streets that serve as connectors between the different subareas of downtown unite the downtown and strengthen its overall market appeal to

regional residents as well as visitors. Effective retail streets are defined by storefront characteristics, retail, continuity, streets designed for visual linkage and pedestrian friendliness, recognition of transit usage patterns, on-street parking, automobile access and urban amenities (i.e., public art, fountains, etc.). Great retail streets tend to have widths that are in scale with the height of adjacent buildings, and they typically have storefronts on both sides of the street. In downtown Portland, the streets that offer transit service would enjoy greater retail success if automobile traffic and parking were also permitted. This point is most vividly illustrated by the contrast between the portions of Yamhill Street where automobile circulation and parking are permitted and the portion between First and Third Streets where auto traffic and parking are not permitted. The bus Transit Mall is another example of an effective pedestrian and transit district, which severely limits automobile traffic and parking, where retail has not been very successful.

### **Portland Mall Alignment**

One person noted in his remarks that he supported light rail on 5th and 6th avenues:

- Bob Richardson favored MAX service on 5th and 6th avenues because of land use density and trip attractions on the alignment.

Seven people said they did not like light rail on the Portland Mall.

- Jim Howell, board member and strategic planner for the Association of Oregon Rail Transportation Advocates (AORTA), said that the Green Line should serve the Westside not the Mall and that light rail should be extended down Water Ave. to the future Milwaukie alignment with a transfer at the Rose Quarter.
- Fred Nussbaum, strategic planner, AORTA, said the Green Line should go to Beaverton and that TriMet needs to still show why the 5th and 6th avenue alignment needs to be built.
- Michael Kelly didn't like the alignment because MAX would slow the buses on the Mall.
- Eileen Kohn said that buses are better for the Mall, and light rail will make things too confusing.
- Dave Carter said he prefers a subway.
- Barbara Chapman said that there was too much happening on the Mall.

**Response:** During the last 20 years, a series of studies of potential downtown light rail alignments have been completed and with significant public process. Over and over again, various committees evaluated putting light rail on the Portland Mall, and each time the decision was reaffirmed.

In 1989, the *Downtown Rail Advisory Committee* examined a number of downtown alignments for the Westside Light Rail project. The members of this committee included a cross section of downtown residents, property owners and business owners and examined several alternatives, which included subways and numerous surface alignments before determining that light rail should be located on the Portland Mall.

The plan to put light rail on 5th & 6th avenues was approved through two public processes. This consideration of a 5th and 6th avenue alignment was explored in 1993 through the *Downtown*

*Rail Advisory Committee* that included citizens, business and property owners, and transit riders. This idea was explored again in 1998 through the *Downtown Oversight Committee* process, which included representation from a cross section of downtown interests. Finally, the Mayor's Project Steering Committee confirmed the decision by selecting 5th and 6th avenues as the preferred alignment in 2004.

With the addition of light rail and the reduction in stops, TriMet's modeling indicates that buses will operate on average about 6.5 percent faster than if the project were not completed. This improvement is a direct result of the new design. Bus-stop spacing is anticipated to be on intervals of four to five blocks, instead of the current two-block spacing. Light rail platforms will be every four to five blocks, with bus stops on the blocks in between.

A subway option was evaluated as part of the South/North planning efforts. Subways have been examined and rejected in the past because of the costs and the effect on street activity. The estimated cost in 2006 was \$1.2 billion for a subway that extended from the Lloyd District through downtown, although TriMet believes, given current construction pricing, this figure is too low. For this price, the region could develop the I-205 and Milwaukie light rail alignments and have money left over for other alignments. TriMet also doubts that a subway can meet strict cost effectiveness standards now in place at the Federal Transit Administration.

### **Construction Impacts**

Four people said they were concerned about the construction of light rail on the Mall.

- George Crandall said that the construction would have a negative impact on downtown.
- Terry Parker said that construction should only occur on one street at a time and that buses should operate in both directions on the other street.
- Aaron Tarfman supported the idea of constructing the light rail on one street at a time.
- Ron Buel was concerned about the length of construction.

**Response:** The downtown business community and property owners strongly believe this project will serve as an economic catalyst for the region. As a result, they supported the creation of a Local Improvement District, which taxes downtown property owners to help pay for this project. The 8.3-mile I-205/Portland Mall Light Rail Project will cost \$557.4 million, with federal funds contributing 60 percent. In the short term, this project will bring new jobs and economic activity to the Portland region. The project will generate nearly 7,600 jobs and more than \$260 million in personal income in the Portland area. This project will bring in \$334 million in federal dollars to the Portland area. These federal dollars would have been spent in other cities throughout the United States if not spent in Portland. A healthy and accessible downtown is good for Portland and will attract new jobs.

During construction, supporting businesses on 5th and 6th avenues is critical to the success of this Project. TriMet is taking a number of steps to support businesses in the construction zone. TriMet and its contractor are implementing lessons learned from past construction projects that are critical to businesses in the construction zone.

Civil construction on the Mall is scheduled to begin in mid-January 2007. Maintaining business and pedestrian access is critical to the construction plans. TriMet is working closely with its contractors to speed the pace of construction and ensure that customers always have access to

businesses. Crews will work in three-to-four block segments for up to eight weeks in each of the Mall segments (North, Central and South Mall), then move to the next work zone, ensuring that construction impacts are minimized. This construction plan will mean that major construction in front of one business will last no longer than eight weeks.

TriMet also is working with downtown business leaders and the Portland Development Commission on plans that will enhance the long-term economic benefits of the Mall and encourage visitors to come downtown during construction.

### **Buses Routed off the Mall During Construction**

Ten people said they were concerned about buses being routed off the Mall during construction.

- In written testimony, Renee Fellman asked if there are “other transit system design concepts that can reduce the economic impacts related to the removal of on-street parking and increased bus/auto congestion on other streets when buses are displaced from the Mall during construction.”
- In a letter, Fred Nussbaum said that the true impacts on transit users during construction are still “hazy.”
- George Crandall said he was concerned about moving buses off the Mall during light rail construction.
- Doniel Hart expressed concerns about delayed buses going down 3rd and 4th avenues during the construction period.
- Ernest Argetsinger said he was concerned about the impact that additional buses on Columbia and Jefferson streets will have on the Goose Hollow neighborhood.
- Jason Barbour wondered where C-TRAN buses would go during the construction period.
- Deborah Pearson Kennedy asked that buses be routed north of Burnside.
- Arnold Panitch said in written testimony that he wants his routes to remain grouped during the construction phase.
- Via email, Robert McKinley asked that Line 58 be routed up the Mall.
- Susan Warncke said in writing that she prefers to see buses on 3rd & 4th, 10th & 11th, and Columbia and Jefferson.
- One person (name unknown) said that noise, vibrations and fumes from buses on Columbia in Goose Hollow will have a negative impact on his home (written).

**Response:** During construction on the Portland Mall, all buses must be temporarily relocated to other downtown streets to maintain safe and reliable service for transit riders. In February, TriMet presented two options for temporary bus relocation for public comment. These options would relocate Portland Mall bus service to pairs of streets: 3rd and 4th, Columbia and Jefferson, 10th and 11th, and Glisan and Everett. Stops will be positioned to facilitate easy transfers from line to line and allow riders to conveniently transfer to downtown MAX service.

C-TRAN has proposed to relocate its Portland Mall service to Washington and Salmon streets, which currently have bus service, with transfer opportunities at 3rd and 4th avenues. These proposed changes are expected to be permanent.

### **Buses Routed off the Mall After Construction**

Three people said that they were concerned about where the bus routes would be located once light rail construction is completed.

- Renee Fellman said in written testimony that, “TriMet has not fully addressed the economic impacts caused by displaced buses from the Mall onto additional downtown streets.”
- Jim Karlock said he was concerned about buses being moved off the Mall.
- Terry Parker said in written testimony that TriMet is breaking a promise to return buses to the Mall once light rail opens.

**Response:** All of the buses currently on the Mall can operate efficiently with the addition of light rail. However, given the fact that a train will arrive every five minutes much of the day and that trains can carry five times the capacity of buses, TriMet is working with the City of Portland Office of Transportation on how bus service can be changed to improve overall transit access downtown. TriMet modeling projects at least a 30 percent increase in transit capacity on the Mall depending on the configuration of the light rail vehicles and bus service. Given the increased capacity to move riders along the Mall with the predictability and frequency of light rail, TriMet is considering moving some buses permanently onto Jefferson and Columbia streets. This would allow for increased transit service to the growing west end and better connections to Westside MAX service and OHSU shuttles.

### **Light Rail Service**

Three people don’t support light rail transportation.

- John Charles said that the Mall should be for buses only because they are less expensive and provide higher capacity.
- Jim Karlock said he doesn’t support light rail because trains hit too many people.
- Terry Parker said he doesn’t support light rail because auto users pay for light rail through gas taxes.

Two people requested an expansion of light rail service.

- David Johnson said he was supportive of light rail service and wanted to see MAX extend its routes.
- John Bartles said he was happy to see light rail downtown.

**Response:** As regional decision-makers considered how this region should grow, the preservation of open space and rural areas was a priority. Compact urban form is more efficient to serve than uncontrolled sprawl. Metro’s 2040 Framework Plan is based on active regional and town centers interconnected by the family of light rail and bus services. The selection of light rail as the primary transit mode in principal corridors and connecting major regional and city centers fits the land use and development needs of the region. Light rail, various types of bus services, together with auto, bike and walk access connections make a total transportation system that is integrated with our communities.

- Protecting Oregon’s values: The Portland region’s urban growth boundary grew only 1.2 percent in the last 25 years. Light rail helps to support a compact urban area characterized by comparatively short trips and livable communities. Portland remains surrounded by pristine rural areas, a fundamental for Oregonians.
- Long-term cost efficiencies: Light rail is a significant up-front investment of up to \$60 million per mile, depending on whether it is operating in street or in open trackway. Bus modes, including the advanced concepts of bus rapid transit, are far less expensive to

install, however, in principal travel corridors where light rail will be well utilized, light rail costs less to operate per passenger carried. Over time this cost-efficiency is critical. A light rail train carries 226 riders comfortably, 332 under peak conditions. A bus carries 51 riders comfortably or 64 under peak conditions. Light rail trains last 40 years; buses last 15 years. Light rail trains have five times the capacity and costs less per passenger to operate.

- Downtown vitality: TriMet and C-TRAN carry 46 percent of the downtown work trips. This helps to reduce roadway congestion and parking requirements, but putting all of these trips on buses in the long run would choke downtown Portland. Light rail is able to efficiently replace many downtown-bound bus routes, without compromising the vitality of downtown.
- Customers respond to light rail: There are many travelers who enjoy the attributes of light rail including:
  - Permanence and predictability for the occasional rider
  - Relatively quiet operation and zero emissions—a good fit in urban settings
  - Wide doors and spacious interiors
  - Smooth ride quality
  - Reliable operation with fewer starts and stops
- Travel speeds: Express or freeway buses will travel quickly in uncongested freeway conditions. TriMet and C-TRAN operate express routes, but they are point-to-point with no stops in between. Light rail reaches speeds of 55 miles per hour between stations, but stops lower the *average* speed of this mode, just as buses must slow when they stop to serve passengers.
- Economic development and transit share: The permanence of light rail and its ability to influence and support compact, mixed-use development around stations makes it an important tool that supports this region’s growth management plan. To date, more than \$3.8 billion in new development has occurred along light rail since the decision to build. Additionally, local improvement districts within two to three blocks of the Portland Streetcar alignment have seen \$2.3 billion in private development constructed, which has resulted in 7,300 residential units. While quality bus service also can have some of this influence, the influence is more evident worldwide around rail transit.
- Infrastructure cost savings: The region’s development policies and transportation investments have produced a compact region that has saved billions of dollars in public and utility infrastructure costs, including costly urban freeways, neighborhood disruptions and increased air pollution. Westside MAX service provides capacity equivalent to building another one and a half freeway lanes on the westbound Sunset Highway. This scale of benefits could not have been achieved with a bus-based plan.
- Balanced transportation system: Light rail is part of a balanced transportation system that also includes roads, freeways, bike routes, sidewalks, and other modes of transit including buses and, in the future, bus rapid transit (BRT) where appropriate. Light rail works with the road system, crossing only local streets at grade and in coordination with the roadway

signal system. Current weekday MAX ridership is 96,500, about one-third of TriMet's total transit ridership.

### **Independent Review of the Project**

Five people asked that transportation experts conduct an independent review of TriMet's plans to extend light rail down the Portland Mall.

- In written testimony, Renee Fellman requested that the Mayor and the City Council in consultation with the Downtown Neighborhood Association and other stakeholders select the panel members.
- George Crandall, Jim Howell, Fred Nussbaum and Ron Buel supported this request.

**Response:** TriMet's rail projects require extensive independent reviews to receive funding from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). The FTA requires that all projects undergo a comprehensive and rigorous evaluation, which TriMet and other transit agencies must follow, to evaluate strategies for addressing transportation problems and ensure project viability through engineering, design, construction, operation and maintenance.

The I-205/Portland Mall Project will go through a number of rigorous safety reviews by staff, consultants, state and federal regulators. The following is a summary of the independent reviews for this project to date.

- PB Transit and Rail Systems, a national expert firm in rail safety operations and related pedestrian and vehicle safety, conducted a Preliminary Hazard Analysis (PHA), which is a complete and thorough review of the project regarding all aspects of safety. In this document, possible hazards are identified and several mitigations are suggested to address every hazard. TriMet will incorporate these items into the Safety Certification Process to ensure every hazard is addressed and mitigated properly.
- TriMet requested a peer review to focus on operational aspects of the Mall and the interaction between buses, light rail vehicles, pedestrians and general traffic. This group was assembled with assistance from the United States Department of Transportation Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) Peer-to-Peer program and facilitated by the Safety Management Program of the American Public Transportation Association.
- Throughout the project, the Project Management Oversight Consultant (PMO), an FTA contracted engineering technical firm, oversees all aspects of any federally funded project we undertake. It has specialty subcontractors reviewing designs, costs, schedules, safety plans and issues, and every other aspect of the project.
- The PMO also oversees a comprehensive Risk Assessment evaluating cost and schedule risks, including safety issues. The Risk Assessment was completed in February 2005 and the project scored very high on this initial Risk Assessment. An updated Risk Assessment will be completed in summer 2006.

## **Additional Comments**

- Cindy Idler was concerned about transfers on Lines 77 and 31 (oral).
- Leon Chavarria-Aguilar testified that bus drivers have more patience than doctors (oral).
- Martha Perez was concerned about what would happen to Line 17. She suggested during a natural disaster that supplies could be delivered into town via buses (oral).
- Deborah Pearson Kennedy suggested that the Portland Mall become a green space/bicycle/pedestrian area with fuel-efficient transit (written).
- Terry Parker objected to curb extensions and buses stopping in traffic on 3rd & 4th avenues (written).
- Bob Richardson and Garlynn Woodsong submitted suggestions to increase train capacity on the Steel Bridge (written).
- Jim Howell said that the plan doesn't address increasing demand for MAX service on the Westside or the bottleneck problems at the Steel Bridge and suggested the need for an Eastside, north/south, Water Ave. route, connecting with the rest of the MAX system at the Rose Quarter (written).
- Mary Dove said that changes to the Mall would impact everyone, especially the street people downtown (written).
- Maija Spencer said that space should be found for bicycles on the Mall, supported good design and art on the Mall, and asked that fares not be raised to fund light rail on the Mall (written).
- J. Bessio said that stop closure notices should say where the alternate stops are located and the duration of the closure (written).
- Chris Walker said there should be more security on MAX, more bus service to the Westside and that LIFT service is inadequate and has uncomfortable seating (written).