



Testimony of Bernie Bottomly
Executive Director, Public Policy
TriMet
Senate Committee on Business & Transportation
February 8, 2016
SB 1510

Chair Beyer, members of the committee, I am Bernie Bottomly, Executive Director of Public Policy for TriMet.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of SB 1510. The purpose of this bill is to modestly expand the list of tools that TriMet has that it can use to help the Portland metropolitan region address its transit and transportation challenges.

As our metropolitan transportation system grows in complexity and as congestion pressures increase, more and more we find that the development and funding of transit and transit-supportive projects requires that we take a system-wide, multi-modal approach to addressing these challenges; that may include sidewalks, bike facilities, and roadways as well as transit improvements. This language would give TriMet the necessary authority to seek grants and other outside funding that facilitate multimodal solutions and allow us to address a wider variety of transit-supportive transportation needs to achieve broadly supported community objectives.

In the current statute, TriMet is authorized to invest in a wide variety of transportation facilities where it operates, including sidewalks, roads, highways and bike paths. However, TriMet is restricted from spending funds on transportation facilities on which it does not physically operate, unless the funds are restricted by the Oregon Constitution to road purposes.

Because TriMet does not generate constitutionally restricted revenues nor does it often receive such funds, this restriction limits TriMet's ability to partner with local and regional jurisdictions to address some of the transportation challenges facing the region. For example, TriMet has the ability to use its favorable AAA bond rating to borrow against future federal formula payments – allowing the region to progress important projects now, reduce the cost escalations that come with inflation and defederalize the funds – increasing the buying power of federal grant funds significantly by removing burdensome reporting and bureaucratic requirements.

TriMet has a long record of success in securing federal funding grants to support regional transportation improvement projects. This language would allow us to take more of a systems approach to improving the transit and transit supportive system with those grants. For example, there are sometimes improvements to sidewalks or bike routes that, while not directly on a transit route, nevertheless materially support the use of the transit system. Currently, TriMet cannot participate in efforts to address these gaps in the system. This bill would allow us to expand the potential beneficiaries of these federal funding opportunities to the broader system, not just the portion of the system we are currently operating on.

The language is carefully drafted to limit this expanded authority to very specific external funding sources; proceeds of general obligation bonds approved by voters, grants or contributions from external sources, or revenue bonds that are subject to a reimbursement agreement. The change does not expand TriMet's authority to expend its general operating resources such as the payroll tax beyond its current authorities.

The bill does not impact TriMet's operating resources or divert funds away from delivery of bus or light rail services. However, it will give us an additional tool to work cooperatively with our local and regional partners to address a wider range of the region's system-wide transportation challenges.

We urge your support for SB 1510. Thank you for your consideration of this proposal. I'd be happy to answer any questions.