

Testimony of Aaron Deas
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TriMet
Senate Committee on Business & Transportation
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SB 1521

Chair Beyer, members of the committee, I am Aaron Deas, Manager of Government Affairs for TriMet.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of SB 1521.

First, we would like to express our appreciation to Senator Courtney for introducing this legislation and to the committee for taking it up. We're grateful for Senator Courtney and the committee's interest in and concern for the future of Oregon's public transportation services and programs.

Transit districts have multiple missions – we connect people with job opportunities, we help address congestion pressures on clogged roadways and we provide a critical safety net for people who rely on public transportation to meet their basic human needs – the elderly, people with disabilities and low-income individuals and families.

This legislation would provide a critical tool for transit and municipal transportation districts to meet the most basic transportation needs of these communities. For smaller transit programs across the state, who have struggled to find the funds just to scrape by, who've had to make do with old equipment that should have been retired years ago, this will be an opportunity to finally improve and expand services and perhaps move beyond starvation mode.

For larger districts like TriMet, this tool could potentially help provide the resources needed to address critical challenges in the fast-growing metropolitan area. This tool could directly or indirectly help TriMet to:

- Achieve the service levels called for in the Portland area Regional Transportation Plan to respond to congestion and avoid the loss of 6,500 permanent jobs and \$844 million annually in congestion-related costs by the year 2025
- Expand connections between the increasingly dispersed areas of affordable housing in the region and key middle-income employment centers such as the Columbia Corridor, Troutdale Reynolds Industrial Park, and the regional industrial reserves in Washington and Clackamas counties
- Support the levels of transit service needed to meet the region's Climate Smart Solutions strategy
- Explore with our partners opportunities to address the concerns of low income riders for a low income fare or an expanded fare subsidy program
- Build on the success of our partnership with the City of Portland and Portland Public Schools in providing a student pass program, particularly in areas with significant low income student populations like Centennial, David Douglass, Parkrose and Reynolds and other districts around the region that have high proportions of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch programs

- Recognizing that all transit users are pedestrians or bike riders before and after they use our system, allow us to more fully partner with cities, counties, Metro and community groups to fill in the gaps in the transit supportive infrastructure of the region, the sidewalks, bike facilities, ADA ramps and safe routes to schools that allow riders to connect to and from the transit system.

Of course, before our board would be in a position to even contemplate using this additional authority, a much fuller discussion with the business community, our local and regional government partners, community groups and other stakeholders in the region would be needed to reach consensus on the right level of resource and the appropriate deployment of new and expanded services.

Once again, we would like to thank Senator Courtney and the committee for bringing this bill forward to give us a platform for continuing to explore opportunities to address the pressing transportation needs of Oregon's transit-reliant, low income, elderly, youth and people with disabilities populations. We heartily welcome this effort and we look forward to working with the committee and the many interested stakeholders to move this conversation forward.