



OPAL
Environmental Justice Oregon

opalpdx.org

3202 SE 82nd Ave, Suite B, Portland, OR 97266 | 503-774-4503

August 23rd, 2018

To: HB 2017 Transit Advisory Committee

CC: Doug Kelsey-General Manager, TriMet
TriMet Board of Directors

RE: Public Transportation Improvement Plan

HB 2017 will bring an influx of approximately \$49 million in new revenue for the TriMet service district covering Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington counties. Legislators funded this investment through a regressive tax on the wages of individuals employed in Oregon, disproportionately impacting low income communities, for whom this tax is a greater burden. The HB 2017 Transit Advisory Committee has the ability to allocate funding to improve and invest in transit service within the TriMet service district, focusing on improvements in low income communities and communities of color. In understanding the funding allocation proposal that has been presented to the HB 2017 Transit Advisory Committee, it is essential to consider whether the proposal was created with an equity analysis throughout. There are a series of unanswered questions which we emphasize should be addressed prior to any vote to approve the funding allocation for HB 2017. **Committee members need complete information, and ample time to process it, to make an informed decision on how funding should be distributed.**

The purpose of the Statewide Transit Improvement Fund is “to offer Oregon public transportation providers in both urban and rural areas a funding source to invest in improved public transportation services that meet the needs of their communities.” In looking at the recently-proposed funding allocation, we refer to four overarching questions that OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon posed to the advisory committee in June:

- *Are funding decisions made that center the experiences and needs of transit-dependent individuals, youth, low income individuals, communities of color, seniors and individuals with disabilities?*
- *Do funding decisions increase TriMet ridership?*
- *Are recommendations coming directly from transit-dependent communities?*
- *Is an equity and environmental justice analysis applied to decision-making before decisions are made?*

In evaluating the funding proposal as a whole, our communities have multiple concerns that must be addressed prior to supporting a final funding decision.

One-Time Capital Funds

How was the allocation of one time capital funds decided? HB 2017 provides \$50 million in one-time capital funds. The decision-making process for TriMet’s proposed allocation of these funds has been unclear. **We as committee members and stakeholders have not been assured that these additions will benefit communities, such as East Portland, which has experienced a lack of investment and are exposed to higher percentage of environmental burdens.** The funding distribution as it currently stands is \$10 million for Enhanced Transit Concepts (ETC) in comparison to \$28 million towards a non-diesel bus program. There has not been discussion around TriMet’s reasoning for less investment into ETC than into a non-diesel bus program.

Non-Diesel Bus Program

What opportunities to increase ridership and enhance service are foregone by prioritization of non-diesel buses? An equity analysis around the non-diesel bus program proposed within the funding allocation is needed prior to final approval of the funding proposal by the Transit Advisory Committee. In addition TriMet has made no commitment that any investment in non-diesel electrified busses will benefit low-income, transit-dependent communities and communities of color across the TriMet service district. A single electrified bus can cost upwards of \$1M per bus, without increasing ridership, without addressing the historical inequity of investment in communities of color and low income, and without expanding service into the region's underserved areas. Evaluating the potential for a long term non-diesel bus program prompts questions of where bus lines will be placed, from which garages buses are deployed, and which communities will directly benefit from reduced diesel bus usage. **There has been no equity analysis and mapping around system-wide tradeoffs, and the benefits and burdens to our communities, in investing in a non-diesel bus program with these funds.** Until a report is completed on the non-diesel bus program's equity implications, no decision on funding this program should be made. This equity analysis should include missed opportunities to increase ridership and enhance service. This is essential information in order to make an informed decision around where funding should be distributed both within one time capital investments and the ongoing HB2017 funding allocation.

Student Transportation

What opportunities exist to expand youth ridership? \$5 million of HB 2017 funds are currently unallocated, with a bare-minimum allocation of \$490,000 for student transportation. HB 2017 presents a historic opportunity to reshape the current YouthPass program, which only exists for three Portland Schools, to create a long term pathway toward a sustainable YouthPass program that is fully funded for high school-aged youth across the TriMet service district. HB 2017 funding should enhance service near schools in the service district, fully fund YouthPass at school districts that have already received access to the program, and expand access to more high schools. This strategy invests in long-term ridership and meets a 22-year priority of transit-dependent youth of color. Expanding and strengthening access to the YouthPass program will increase access to grow existing ridership and invest in future transit riders. A YouthPass program funded through HB 2017 addresses current geographic inequities in accessing the YouthPass program. The payroll wage tax funding stream provided by HB 2017 will continue to grow in the coming years as more wage earners join the workforce across the region, creating a more stable source of funding for the YouthPass program. **It is essential to revisit the cost of YouthPass for TriMet.** The current analysis utilized to understand YouthPass cost was conducted by ECONorthwest in 2011. The cost of free transit passes on TriMet was only evaluated through Portland Public Schools. Since 2011, the YouthPass program has expanded to Parkrose School District and David Douglas School District. An analysis around the cost of an expanded YouthPass program throughout the TriMet Service District should be provided in order to understand how the current allocation of \$490,000 fits into a regional strategy to provide student transportation to an expanded number of high school students within the district.

We believe that until the above questions are answered to the full satisfaction of the community, that the submission of the final local plan should not take place.