



U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley (left) tours the new Tilikum Crossing with officials from TriMet and Portland area labor unions. With him are TriMet general manager Neil McFarlane (center) and Willy Myers, executive secretary of the Columbia Pacific Building Trades Council.



Oregon, we're doing it right — creating jobs, investing in our future, and doing it on time and under budget.”

Last summer, after learning that the entire 7.3-mile light rail project would come in roughly \$10 to \$40 million under budget and that the federal government intended to recoup those savings, Merkley contacted the U.S. Department of Transportation in hopes that the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) would allow for part of the savings to be used for further improvements to the project. In response, the FTA allowed TriMet

Pete Bruha and Trent Jones, members of Laborers Local 320, got a surprise visit from Oregon U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley. The two laborers employed by Kiewit Construction said they've been working steady on the bridge for the last two years.

to keep an additional \$3.6 million. From that money, \$2.6 million will fund additional station shelters, \$300,000 will go towards rail switch heaters, and \$705,000 will go towards overhead contact system ice caps. These additions to the project will make traveling in cold weather conditions easier and more comfortable for TriMet workers and commuters and reduce system delays.

“We are so excited for these expansions to the project,” said TriMet General Manager Neil McFarlane. “These extra funds will provide some important improvements to our system that will make for a better riding experience.”

Union officials join Sen. Merkley in walk across Tilikum Crossing

Senator touts bridge as example of needed infrastructure investment

Oregon U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley walked across the new Tilikum Crossing with TriMet and union officials March 30 to celebrate the completion of this phase of the Portland-Milwaukie Light Rail Transit Project. Merkley heralded the nearly all-union project, which came in on time and under budget, as an example of the investments America should be making in the next generation of infrastructure. The transit bridge over the Willamette River will open to the public on Sept. 12.

Union officials joining Merkley on the tour were Barbara Byrd, secretary treasurer of the Oregon AFL-CIO; Willy Myers, executive secretary of the Columbia Pacific Building Trades Council; Robert Camarillo, president of the building trades council and a union rep for Iron Workers Local 29; and Bob Carroll, a union rep for IBEW Local 48.

“This distinctive bridge and this light rail line give Portland a new landmark, but more importantly they both put people to work now and lay the groundwork for the metro area's future economic growth,” Merkley said. “I wish more of my colleagues in Washington would realize that we can't keep shortchanging infrastructure and delude ourselves into thinking we'll still have a world-class economy. Here in

Progressive broadcaster Hightower opens new front to save USPS

By Mark Gruenberg
Press Associates Inc.

WASHINGTON, D.C. (PAI) — Progressive broadcaster Jim Hightower is opening a new front in the multi-union, multi-organization fight to save the U.S. Postal Service from its privatization management and Wall Street interests.

In a March 24 nationwide conference call with activists, Hightower and Postal Workers President Mark Dimondstein outlined avenues people can use to save the embattled agency and the union jobs of Postal Workers, Letter Carriers, Mail Handlers and Rural Letter Carriers threatened by shutdowns and the privatization push.

The new avenues include starting a petition to the White House, where 100,000 signatures will force President Barack Obama to address the issue. Another is joining the 70-organization effort, www.agrandalliance.org to fight for better, ex-

panded service, not cuts.

“Get to your city councils and your mayors — and not just in places where post offices are closing — to say what the post office means to you,” Hightower said.

“To get a letter to the middle of nowhere costs 49 cents. As soon as we get into the privatization-profit model, it could cost \$5 — or maybe not get sent there at all. And if you write down the wrong address, they send it back, for free. Where else can you get all that?”

Dimondstein said the Postal Service takes in \$68 billion a year in revenue, “and Wall Street wants it.”

The campaign comes as Congress' ruling Republicans, with some Democratic help, prepare to renew legislation to close more local post offices, eliminate Saturday services, kill door-to-door service for new customers, and replace well-paying unionized postal em-

ployees with low-paid, no-benefits, nonunion workers.

USPS management claims it needs to make those moves, on top of mail distribution center closings that began in January — and that eliminated overnight delivery even within major cities — to close a multi-billion-dollar yearly deficit.

Hightower and Dimondstein pointed out that USPS actually ran a \$1.4 billion surplus on operations for the year that ended Sept. 30, and another \$1.4 billion surplus for the first three months of the current fiscal year, through last Dec. 31.

The deficit comes from a \$5.5 billion yearly pre-payment of future retirees' health care costs that USPS must fund under a 2006 postal “reform” law pushed through a lame-duck GOP Congress and signed by then-President George W. Bush.



Jim Hightower

The unions have been lobbying for elimination of the pre-paid health care, but lawmakers have so far turned a deaf ear.

Hightower also said activists and citizens should join another union campaign — to allow the nation's 31,000 post offices to become banks for underserved and unserved urban and rural areas. Doing so would provide competition for the big banks, who hate that, he said. It would also provide banking services for the 38 percent of the U.S. zip codes — covering more than a

quarter of the population — with no bank branches.

The post office is well set up to bring in more revenue that way, Dimondstein said.

The campaign for post-offices-as-banks and to eliminate the health care prepayment is part of an overall postal reform package that the Letter Carriers, the Postal Workers and other postal unions have been pushing for several years. They also would let post offices serve as notaries and ship alcoholic beverages.

Hightower and the union leader also urged listeners to support House Resolution 54, a non-binding measure that says lawmakers want to keep six-day service. The unions calculate that eliminating Saturday pickups and deliveries could cost approximately 80,000 middle-class jobs.