

## One Penny Too Many (no well around)

By Jay Thiemeyer

I clutch two pennies  
From the sidewalk

I reach down and pluck them  
One by one with my good left hand  
Remembering how lucky  
Or unlucky two pennies  
Have always been for me  
And how it was always worse  
If I tried to ignore them  
And leave them there  
On the sidewalk

Overhead a lit sign  
Ignites the sidewalk's rain  
'\$22 - all night parking'  
The sign wants me to know: once,  
I slept in a corner there  
Beneath the hood  
Of a car it was too dark  
To see but no one saw me  
Till dawn  
When the rain had stopped  
And I split  
When the garage attendant kicked my feet  
And not a soul  
At Blanchet's morning feed  
Complained about my smell

One block later  
I saw another penny  
I chose to leave it for the next fella  
The inevitable next fella  
It's winter, cold, always  
Wet, the air is wet  
All the time  
And the shelters are full

Three pennies are much heavier than two  
When two's too few  
For anything except a wish  
In a well or two  
Where the only thing to present  
To that dark gaping hole  
Is the unholy wish  
To get away and forget  
What the pennies remind me of  
And I don't see  
A well anywhere  
And the liquor store doesn't open  
For one more hour

You can't take it  
I am what's been taken

## TriMet fare plan unfair to poorer bus riders

BY JONATHAN OSTAR  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Transit equity means identifying and prioritizing the needs of those who rely on transit the most. Fare increases and service cuts should always be a last resort, yet TriMet is proposing to increase fares, cut services and eliminate round-trip transfers to save money. These changes will hurt regular transit riders who depend on transit the most.

If you're a transit-dependent rider and live in outer Southeast Portland or out in Forest Grove, you rely on the bus as a lifeline: to get to the grocery store, the pharmacy, jobs and job interviews. Right now, if you can't afford a monthly or annual bus pass, you are using cash or single tickets, and you try to get as much use out of that single ticket as possible. This means \$2.10 for a two-zone round-trip to the nearest grocery store. Under TriMet's recent proposal, this simple errand will cost you \$5.00.

TriMet is justifying these fare increases and service cuts with poor data, faulty analysis and a lack of transparency and accountability that leaves transit riders confused and in the dark.

First, TriMet is blaming its bus drivers for wanting the best health care. TriMet claims that the current contract will cost the agency \$5 million to \$10 million more than projected. We all should stand with the union in these negotiations, and they have every incentive to ensure service and ridership are maintained, as this protects their jobs. What's important here is that this cost was foreseeable, and TriMet should not be driving a wedge between drivers and its riders due to its poor management.

Second, TriMet is blaming partisanship



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in Washington DC, projecting \$4 million less in federal grant revenue in the next fiscal year. Regardless of what Congress eventually does with the federal transportation bill, the vast majority of federal dollars that come to TriMet are for capital construction projects, so should have little to no bearing on its service.

Third, TriMet is using too conservative of a forecast in projecting \$3.2 million less in payroll tax revenue. In fiscal year 2011, TriMet used a 4 percent growth rate for payroll tax revenue, but actually received \$7 million more than projected. In fiscal year 2012, TriMet again used a 4 percent growth rate and is on track to again underestimate by \$7 million. For fiscal year 2013, TriMet used a more conservative growth rate of 3.5 percent, meaning it thinks the economy will get worse, not better, and is estimating a shortfall of \$3.2 million. Recent trends show that we will end up with more payroll tax revenue than estimated. Conservative estimates and surpluses are generally good things, but should not be used to justify making such major fare increases, service cuts and policy changes.

And what of TriMet's engagement with those who will be impacted the most by these fare increases? In 2011, OPAL enlisted more than 6,000 transit riders -

primarily from East Portland - who supported extending transfer times to three hours as a way to inject value back into the system for riders who could not afford a transit pass. More than 30 community-based organizations endorsed this campaign goal. What we learned is that TriMet lacks the information and data needed to accurately estimate how this policy change might impact the bottomline or improve people's access to positive, healthy outcomes. This same faulty analysis is now being used to justify the current proposal to eliminate round-trip transfers, all to save, at most, \$3 million dollars, which is less than 1 percent of TriMet's overall \$400 million budget. What we hear from our members, echoed by many transit-dependent riders who attended a TriMet forum at the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization on Feb. 9 was that many people use transit for these short but necessary errands, and won't be able to afford paying \$5 every day they need to leave their homes.

It is time for people who depend on TriMet as a lifeline - low-income people, people of color, people with disabilities, immigrants and refugees, the elderly and youth - to get organized and make our voices heard to maintain our basic rights, demand transit equity, and preserve round-trip transfers.

OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon is a 501c3 grassroots nonprofit empowering low-income communities and people of color to for environmental and social justice. To connect with OPAL to support and join our Bus Riders Unite membership, visit us on the web at [www.opalpd.org](http://www.opalpd.org), or call 503-928-4354.

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