

## EDITORIAL

## TriMet cuts short-sighted compared to the impact

Five-dollar fares. No free rail zone. Reduced lift services for people living with disabilities. Less frequent services for specific bus and train lines. TriMet and the region are in a world of hurt.

It's hard to believe that it has come to this, after knowing for years that without major overhauls the system would be overwhelmed.

According to OPAL, a grassroots nonprofit advocating for environmental and social justice, "Faulty analysis is now being used to justify the current proposal to eliminate round-trip transfers, all to save at most \$3 million dollars."

In addition, TriMet is proposing to eliminate the Free Rail Zone to save \$2.7 million, and cut back on the lift service to save \$400,000. Combined, these cuts equal less than 2 percent of TriMet's annual budget.

**TriMet must find a way to leverage its current and future projects with government and private partners in a way that doesn't ride on the backs of the people who require access to public transportation.**

What isn't reflected in these numbers ending the Free Rail Zone will have on business and tourism by not offering visitors and consumers the ability to travel unencumbered in the downtown zone. There is a

free flow of personal commerce coursing through the Free Rail Zone that will be stifled by new charges for access to the restaurants and shopping in the city's core. An extra \$5 to go to lunch in Chinatown? No thanks.

And compared to the savings, these cuts will disproportionately hurt people experiencing poverty, whose budgets are not expanding with the times but actually contracting. There is no spare change among these riders, for whom public transit isn't a "choice", but the only way to reach their job, their family and their basic needs.

Cutting back on the lift service for people living with a disability in a time when services are being cut both locally and nationally shouldn't even be on the table. In fact, none of these cuts should be on the table. They're short-sighted, and cut the cord for many riders who are making the choice to ride rather than drive, only now the financial benefit is reaching a tipping point.

TriMet must find a way to leverage its current and future projects with government and private partners in a way that doesn't ride on the backs of the people who require access to public transportation.

Having the union be so stubborn concerning their health care benefit package and costs doesn't help either. Don't get us wrong, we're as pro-labor as it gets, but people without any income, insurance or living with a disability shouldn't be on the hook to pay for anyone's co-payments. It may not be the popular thing to say, but it's true and something has to give. This isn't scapegoating the union, or giving a free pass to TriMet officials to blame workers' requests when the going gets tough. The emphasis is on working together, and finding a balance.

We're proud of Portland's transportation system. We're proud of the many different modes of transportation that are offered. We believe in creating new projects like the new orange line being built that will create jobs, spur new small businesses and offer riders a new mode of transportation. But we have to strike a balance that doesn't pit services against the very people who rely on them and want to support them. We're here for TriMet, but it has to be there for us, too

## Filling a small void in a very big way

For those of you new to Street Roots, welcome. The newspaper and vendor program are an essential part of Portland culture, not to mention a lifeline for

more than 75 individuals at any one time. Individuals selling the newspaper purchase it for 25 cents and sell the publication for \$1 in the community.

"I can't tell you how important being able to sell the newspaper

is," Jeffrey McCall, a vendor who sells on SE 39th and Belmont told me this week. "I use the money to literally survive day-in and day-out while I get on my feet. Without the love and support from my customers and being able to be engaged, I don't know what I would do."

Jeffrey's story isn't a new story. Thousands of people live and survive outside in Portland each day. Street Roots fills a small void in people's lives, both economically and emotionally and Street Roots offers a dignified arena for people who have nowhere else to turn. It gives people the opportunity to build community and to make money — something each of us can appreciate.

Working with people on the streets for

more than a decade, I can honestly say that the biggest win I've witnessed over the years is the self-worth people get from selling the newspaper. We all need love.

Instead of being the nameless figure on a street corner asking for money, people in the community begin to know vendors by name. Individuals selling the newspaper are removed from the skids, if only for a few brief hours, to become part of the community in a healthy way.

Readers begin to recognize that Joe or Mary love to fish or knit, maybe they can swing a hammer; possibly they love baseball or literature. People selling the newspaper begin to understand that there's a world outside of the grind of surviving every day on the streets. Hope, love and community are all built. Plus, readers are then rewarded with a publication that is real, relevant and constantly working to provide Portland with a community newspaper that is informative and has heart.

We see these transformations each day, and week at Street Roots, and we sincerely thank you for your support of the newspaper and organization. Without your readership, none of this is possible. If you're just coming on board as a new reader and supporter, again, welcome. If you're a long-time supporter, thank you and keep coming back!



Israel Bayer is the executive director of Street Roots. You can reach him at israel@streetroots.org

## DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

## Suicide a public health issue, not a police issue

It's not a crime to be sad, fearful, frightened or depressed. It's not a crime to have suicidal thoughts, actually it's quite common for persons with active mental illness. But when the response to 1,200-plus persons who call for help with suicidal thoughts is to send the police, that is effectively criminalizing mental illness.

Mental illness is a public health issue, not a public safety issue. The police want to be part of the solution, but they are not suited to be an entire response to the problem.

What is missing are robust, welcoming and engaging community mental health and addiction services. They're missing because leadership from the state legislature, from cities and counties all over the state don't demand them, and they're missing from decades of financial cuts. That a large number of people are both ill and estranged from services is no surprise — it is the default plan.

Our suggestion for persons with mental illness, and friends and family members, is to prepare for crisis by getting the best help

available, follow a plan of recovery, and only call the police when a person is dangerous to others. Note: research shows very few suicidal persons harm others.

Our suggestion for the city is to divert calls from persons who are actively suicidal to the Multnomah County Crisis Line, 503-988-5464. Again, suicide is a public health issue not a police issue.

Our suggestion for the county is it should do a better job of promoting its crisis hotline telephone number, and to fund and build robust, welcoming and engaging community mental health and addiction services. That would make the difference.

Our comment for the police: thank you for acknowledging this problem and stepping forward as part of the solution, but you need the missing parts of the mental health system to be funded, led and managed by others.

Our comment for the general public is that if you want this to change, demand it from your political leadership.

MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION  
Portland

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Send letters to the editor to the Street Roots office, 211 NW Davis St., Portland, OR 97209, or e-mail to joanne@streetroots.org.

## Our mission

Street Roots creates income opportunities for people experiencing homelessness and poverty by producing a newspaper and other media that are catalysts for individual and social change.

Street Roots publishes every two weeks, launching on Fridays, and is available exclusively through our street vendors or by subscription. We are proud members of the North American Street Newspaper Association and the International Network of Street Papers.

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## Street Roots Rose City Resource

Street Roots publishes the Rose City Resource, a comprehensive booklet of services for people experiencing homelessness and poverty. To inquire about getting an order of the Rose City Resource for distribution, please write to pdxrosecityresource@gmail.com. Resources are also available online at www.rosecityresource.org.

## Vendors

Street Roots vendors buy the newspapers for 25 cents each and sell them for \$1, keeping the 75 cents in profit for themselves. In order to keep the cost low to our vendors, we receive additional support from donations and in-kind contributions.



**75¢**  
goes directly to the vendor  
who sold you the paper

**25¢**  
goes toward  
printing costs

Vendor orientations are at 1 p.m. every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at the Street Roots office.