

the city's first light rail line.

But LTD General Manager Mark Pangborn said even if LTD wanted light rail, it couldn't get the needed federal grant money from the Bush administration. "We were told flat out by the federal transit agency" that the region was too small for rail, he said. "They said you're not even in the ball game."

The Bush administration publicly clashed last month with Portland over funding a new streetcar line. *The Oregonian* reported that top Bush officials are rejecting light rail, arguing that BRT is more cost efficient.

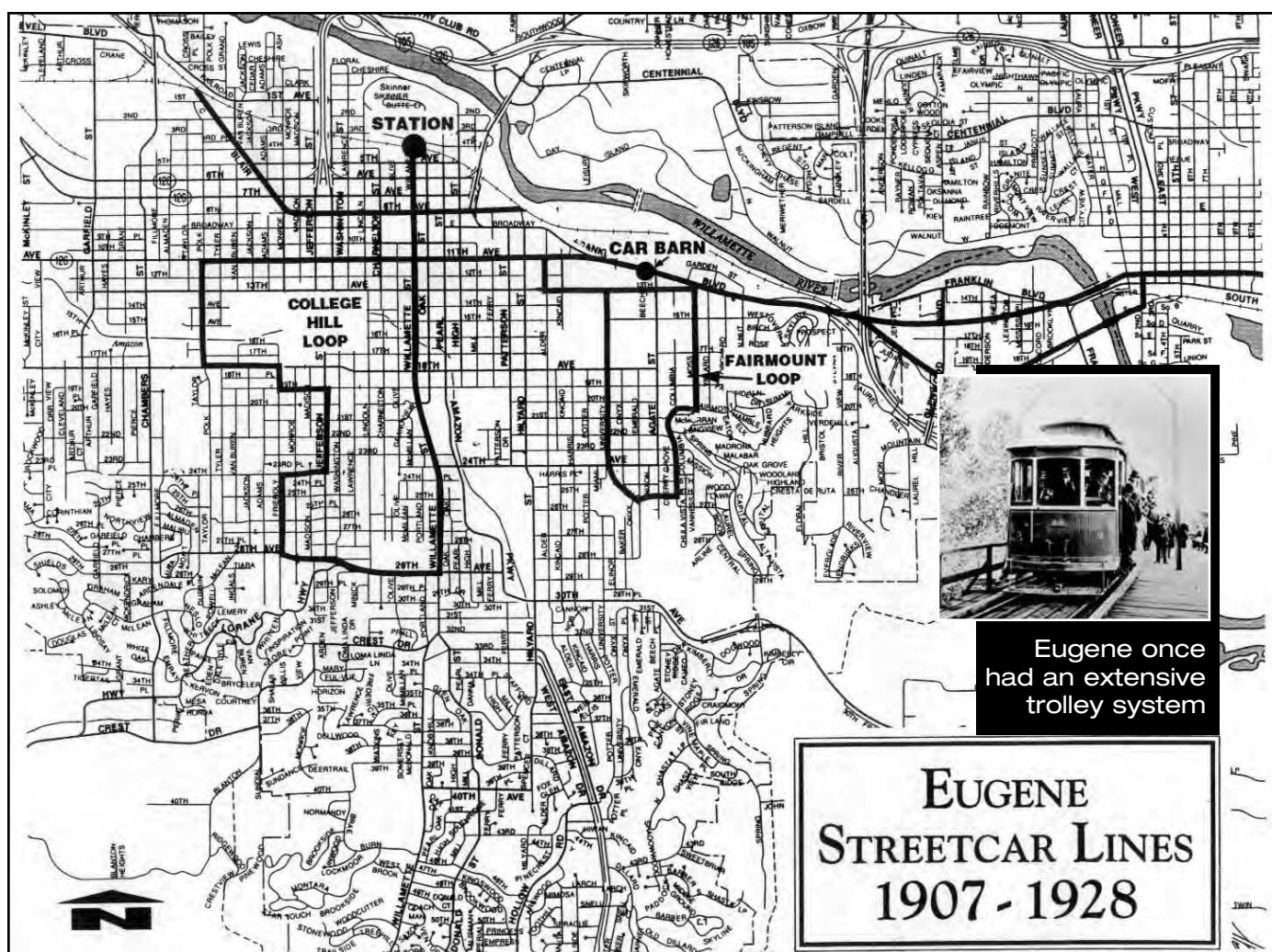
But siding against trolleys with a lame duck president who's intensely unpopular locally may be the wrong place for LTD to be. Local Congressman Peter DeFazio, who chairs a key House transportation committee, blasted the Bush administration's opposition to light rail as "totally misanthropic," and light rail advocates predict the federal BRT bias will end after November.

Bettman said Eugene shouldn't wait for LTD to come around on streetcars. "The city should do it instead of LTD," she said, citing the example of how the city of Portland, not TriMet, built its successful streetcar system.

Diethelm agrees that the city should establish its own streetcar authority. "I don't think LTD should do it," he said. "They don't want to do it."

"Right now LTD is sucking up every available dollar," Bettman said of the available federal funding. "We need to take back some of that authority to receive transit money."

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Shelley Poticha notes that many cities use rail's cool factor as "a key amenity in attracting the highly desirable 'creative class' to local economies."

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