

**RAIL VS. RUBBER**

I visited Eugene Jan. 24-25 specifically to ride and analyze the EmX bus line. I'd like to share my observations and hope they will add to your debate over streetcars vs. BRT (cover story, 1/10). I've been an outspoken supporter of light rail and streetcar lines in Portland a long time. I have that bias. But I am favorably impressed with the EmX line.

There are two overriding aspects of transit system design to consider: the transit system itself and how transit routes will serve existing development and guide future urban growth. The latter is the far more important consideration. Transit users are, first of all, walkers. Because EmX stations are well designed, they should be seen as an appreciable pedestrian amenity for users and to surrounding neighborhoods.

I bring up the development consideration first to elaborate upon a critical 21st century paradigm — development patterns of the 20th century are failing because they are obsolete. The more ideal development pattern now is "infill" rather than sprawl, strip mall, isolated shopping center and grandiose super structure.

Infill should create a complementary

mix of uses and economic elements. The only way to reduce traffic to manageable levels is to guide future development to where more households are less separated from occupation, retail, institution, public amenity, etc. Such development has the potential to be admirable and equitably distributed throughout metropolitan areas.

In my opinion, the EmX system should succeed as well or even better than if it were constructed as a streetcar line. This is not to say Eugene shouldn't build the streetcar line on Willamette proposed in the Jan 24 "Slant" column.

Because of its service frequency and capacity, EmX could form the basis of a "trunkline," especially if it were extended west to, say, Garfield, and some bus lines rerouted to transfer points on the EmX line. This is how light rail systems are typically designed to work.

The proposed streetcar line could also act as a trunkline, similarly creating transfer points to east/west bus lines through the center of town where fewer buses could provide better service. Bus lines throughout the LTD system can be thus streamlined and transfer points offer development potential.



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