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Oregon doesn't have limits on political spending for anyone. Instead, the state relies on strict public disclosure of campaign-related financing. "That's basically the hammer we have to identify and root out corruption," Moore says.

Moore says that during elections, donors like Parks find completely legal ways to make the money a little trickier to follow. Instead of donating directly to anti-light rail groups, donors can write checks to groups with more innocuous names, like the Oregon Family Farms PAC and the Oregon Small Business Association PAC, who then turn the money over to the anti-light rail campaigns.

In Clackamas, Moore says, the players in the anti-rapid transit game are changing. "In the '90s it was more of the anti-tax fringe who were primarily running those campaigns," he says. "This represents a much bigger, more firmly established effort."

It's part of a new strategy that conservatives are employing in Oregon, Moore says. "These big funders have changed their strategy entirely," he says. "They certainly have deemphasized their statewide campaigns and their statewide efforts because they lose so consistently and instead are focused on building up local strongholds."

But Moore says that he thinks anti-rapid transit campaign in Clackamas is larger than just anti-public transit sentiment. "What it is more than anything, I think, is an extension of a basic anti-government, anti-public services campaign that's being waged all around the country."

Mayor Kitty Piercy says that a similar philosophy is present in Eugene. "Along with some folks who legitimately are very worried about the future of their businesses — and I'm very sensitive to their needs — there's also a driving philosophical force going across this country, and we're no exception to that," Piercy says. "Part of that philosophical force says, 'Don't spend any of the country's resources on things like rail and transit.'"

Convinced EmX is BEST

While OMOT has been vocal in its opposition to the West 11th EmX extension, its supporters haven't made as much noise — until now.

Better Eugene-Springfield Transit (BEST) formed as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in May 2012 when its members decided that the "quiet majority" needed a voice.

BEST members include members of the political spectrum ranging from the Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce to the Oregon League of Conservation Voters (OLCV).

"It provides better transit service," BEST member Rob Zako says. "It's a little less expensive per rider, so it allows us to use our limited transit dollars more effectively, and it supports the kind of growth we want to see in our community in an environmentally more sustainable way."

Laura Potter of the Chamber says the EmX system is one of the biggest things Eugene can do for economic development. "It's a way to achieve the positive economic and social benefits of light rail without the infrastructure costs traditionally associated with light rail," she says. Two of those benefits, she says, are the way a predictable ridership can contribute to a customer base and the way it aids redevelopment.

"We've seen on light rail systems an intensity of use of retail, of business, of homes because you have that transit right there," Potter says. "EmX is poised to do the same thing. To some extent, we've already seen that along the Franklin corridor, and I think we'll continue to see that along the Gateway corridor."

Potter says another aspect is the direction of cash flow during the construction process. "It's also important because it brings federal dollars into our community for infrastructure improvements, and it creates approximately 1,200 jobs over the life of the construction — those are temporary jobs, but for people that are in the construction field and looking for work and laid off, that's a big deal," she says. "And those dollars not only go into the infrastructure and the jobs, but then they go back into the economy in a multitude of other ways."

Ashley Miller of the OLCV says the convenience factor of bus rapid transit is often the difference between whether mass transit will work in everyday people's lives. "Right now, a 30-minute wait for the bus and then a 30-minute ride on the bus is prohibitive for a lot of people, whereas something that's like the bus rapid transit acts like light rail," she says. "It gets you there really quickly and has the dedicated stops. I think the biggest piece for the environment is that this is something that is easy for people to use and will lower the carbon footprint here in Eugene."

The Chamber of Commerce statement on the West 11th EmX acknowledges the controversy around the topic. "Because of inconsistent city planning, a number of properties and buildings are vulnerable to losses of property and street access," Potter reads. "The Chamber recognizes that property owners may be adversely affected, and therefore we urge LTD to fairly compensate property owners as they work to mitigate these effects."

Mia Nelson of 1,000 Friends of Oregon says that leaving things as they are now or adding the West 11th EmX isn't really the choice City Council is making. "We can't keep things they way they are," she says. "Things are going to change no matter what we do." The choice, Nelson says, is between a future with or without EmX — while Eugene's population is expected to rise by 30,000 people or more in the next two decades.

Jarrett Walker, Sustainable Cities Eugene's 2012 expert-in-residence, says that opening the West 11th EmX extension in 2017, as LTD plans, is not at all unreasonable at this phase in the West 11th corridor's growth. "It may seem premature to be talking about traffic congestion in Eugene, especially out west, but the city is going to grow," he says. "Installing BRT before it is urgently needed allows future growth to orient itself around the stations. That means that the future city will have better pedestrian environments and shorter walks between transit and destinations, which is great way to permanently lock in transit's sustainability and attractiveness. But that only happens effectively if there's a BRT line in place when that development is occurring, so that investors in the development can see the mobility benefit on day one. That's why it's perfectly appropriate to implement these lines before much growth has occurred, so long as that growth is planned and expected."

Piercy says that the West 11th corridor is key in the all of the planning related to the city's predicted growth. "Really, every plan we have, everything that we're working to accomplish from compact neighborhoods, 20-minute

neighborhoods, all of those things that we're trying to do to maintain the livability of our area, depend on having a successful transit system," she says.

All of those goals and plans, Piercy says, involve reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT). "We have seen a real drop in traffic VMT for our area," she says, and with EmX she thinks the number could continue to fall, even as the population rises.

Politics and math

As the City Council readies for its Sept. 26 work session, which could include a vote on the EmX, both sides are readying to make their case. Piercy, who has long advocated for the EmX, says she'll break a tie in favor of the EmX if there's a 4-4 split on the council. "From the standpoint that any of us would use to see if something is working, if we should continue to do it, it's been a total success story," she says of the EmX system. "It beat the usage predictions for 20 years in the first year."

The last step of the review process, LTD spokesperson Andy Vobora says, is the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Environmental Assessment (EA), which LTD is working on its responses to now. In addition to almost 300 other responses, OMOT submitted the response that it hired Dorsey and Whitney to write.

Vobora says LTD's initial response to the OMOT document depends on the part of the OMOT document you're reading because different parts seem to send different messages. "For example, in one part of it the consultant makes the comment that there's 118 documents and details are buried in these documents and kind of criticized the process for having all these documents that people can't understand. And in another part of their comments they say that we haven't provided enough information or been transparent," Vobora says.

Vobora says the cost analysis in the OMOT document, which estimates operating costs at \$4.3 million annually compared to LTD's estimation of \$1.2 million annually, "looked at a projection for bus service miles that are traveled by the regular system and EmX out into the future, 2031, and calculated costs that would be incurred by the district at opening day."

Vobora says LTD uses two different methods to estimate cost. The first is a fully allocated cost model, which Vobora says is conservative because it uses higher overhead costs than will actually be implemented. "When you actually implement a new service like that one leg of EmX, you don't hire an additional general manager or a new director or a marketing rep or a finance clerk," he says.

The other, more detailed analysis uses 2017 dollars and uses a different gasoline average, and Vobora says the cost of operation in that estimate drops by several hundred thousand dollars.

"We're not trying to sell something, and they are. They're trying to put forward an agenda of this is low-cost, this is going to be less expensive, and it's not," Clarke of OMOT says. "It's based on wrong fuel consumptions for today as well as future gas prices."

Vobora says that they do have an estimate that takes future gas prices into account, and regarding the fuel consumption numbers, "We've always found that a little puzzling because we've been operating EmX service now for five and a half years. We know what it costs to operate the service and we've learned more over that time as we've had experience with the specifics of the maintenance of those buses, the fuel economy, all those different things it takes to put that service in place."

Walker says that canceling the project now could cause big problems getting funding from the FTA in the future. "As I understand it, the West 11th project is now past the point where it can be revised further without losing the FTA funding, so the options are really just two: Accept the federal funding and build the project as now designed, or reject that funding and go back to the drawing board," he says. "The second option is infuriating to FTA, because they've invested a lot of time and effort and planning money in this project as well. So understandably, once a city has a track record of doing years of planning and then building nothing, FTA will be less impressed with any future proposals out of that city."

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