

Steering TriMet

continued **▲** from front

River Crossing.

On the November ballot, voters in Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington counties will weigh in on a \$125 million bond levy that would be used to upgrade TriMet's aging fleet of buses and make the system more accessible for older and disabled riders.

McFarlane said that the tax revenue will be needed to cope with the region's ballooning elderly population, which he calls a "demographic tsunami."

"This is all about access to our system for people who are elderly or have disabilities," said McFarlane, "and of course by improving access for those particular groups we improve it for everybody."

Some TriMet stops are little more than dirt patches on the side of the road with blue poles marking the bus line. If the bond levy is approved, sidewalk access to bus stops will be improved. Additionally, TriMet will also be able to replace 150 high-floor buses that require riders to climb a set of stairs to board with the new low-floor models, a big improvement for older and disabled passengers.

McFarlane stressed that the levy won't amount to an increase in taxes because it's an extension of an existing one that was approved in 1990 by voters, which taxes property owners at 8 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value.

This year alone TriMet cut four bus lines, reduced the frequency of service on dozens of others buses

and light rail, and raised fares by a nickel in order to cope with a \$27 million budget shortfall.

TriMet has typically raised fares each year to keep pace with inflation, except for the last, usually by a nickel or dime. In 2008, it raised fares from \$1.75 to \$2 to keep up with the skyrocketing price of diesel.

The mass-transit agency has been criticized for raising rates while cutting service and focusing so much on rail.

"I think there's been a perception, and some of it may be real, that we haven't put enough resources into our bus system," said McFarlane, who hopes to focus more on the bus lines during his tenure as TriMet general manager.

However, McFarlane defends the spending on rail as a good long-term investment that is a cost-effective way to move people around. It's also a good use of federal dollars, he said, accounting for about 60 per-

cent of the cost to build the lines.

TriMet, said McFarlane, has been walloped by the economy. Payroll taxes, which fund TriMet, have been slashed as a result of the recession. He said that TriMet has made administrative cuts, but because about 85 percent of its budget is service, some service cuts are inevitable, he said.

"I think that's just sound fiscal management of the system, and I hope the voters have some regard for that," he said.

He also said that the 10 to 20 year outlook for TriMet is good, and he is "bullish" on the overall health of the region. Also, he doesn't expect any big jumps in fares.

McFarlane also offered his thoughts on the Columbia River Crossing, a replacement of the current I-5 bridge between Vancouver and Portland.

"For the first time, I think I see a consensus starting to form," said McFarlane.

Last month, the CRC Projects Sponsors Council approved the Hayden Island interchange and reduced the number of lanes on the bridge from 12 to 10. McFarlane said these developments are positive. He added that Vancouver is becoming more open to the idea of light rail, which he also was pleased about.

McFarlane also mentioned that while at TriMet he hopes to focus on safety. Shortly before he was appointed general manager a bus collided with a group of pedestrians in downtown Portland, killing two and injuring three.

Since then, TriMet has had a comprehensive safety review by outside experts, and McFarlane hopes to continue to evaluate the transit system to make sure that no operators are being asked to do anything unsafe.

"I want every [employee] at TriMet to come to work with a value embedded into them of safety," he said.

Rose Quarter Developement

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Mayor Sam Adams appointed an advisory committee to look into the Rose Quarter re-development last year. Since July, a subcommittee, which includes Jay, has been meeting to examine the potential for a CBA.

"We have the chance to make this right by putting some teeth into this agreement," said Jay last week

at a subcommittee meeting held at the PDC headquarters.

During the public comment period of the meeting several people pointed out that the Rose Quarter was created by the city using eminent domain to seize the property of residents who ended up being displaced, and a CBA seemed appropriate given the area's history.

Charles McGee- the executive director of the Josiah Hill III Clinic,

one of the non-profits that could receive money under the community benefits agreement- invoked a passage from the Bible instructing people to love their neighbor as they do themselves in support of Jay's idea. He also added that with better funding his clinic could serve more people.

However, a presentation by David Logsdon, the manager of the city's spectator facility fund, cast doubt on the viability of the commu-

nity benefits agreement.

Logsdon explained that the city's spectator facility fund is a self-sustaining fund operated by the city. The city receives 6 percent of all ticket sales at the Rose Garden and Memorial Coliseum, which go into the fund and have been used to keep PGE Park up and running.

The Rose Quarter is currently managed by Portland Arena Management LLC, a subsidiary of Vulcan Inc., which is owned by Paul Allen.

Under the agreement the city has with PAM any new tax assessed by the city or Metro on ticket sales

would be deducted dollar-for-dollar off the current 6 percent already going to the city.

The city's deal with Portland Timbers owner Merritt Paulson to build a major league soccer stadium at PGE Park commits all revenue from the fund to go to the financial obligations of the new stadium, said Logsdon.

So any new taxes on ticket sales would make it more difficult for the city to meet its financial obligations to new MLS stadium, and could be shot down.

However, Logsdon said he wasn't sure if the community benefits agreement amounted to a "tax."

"That's an issue you'd want a legal analysis done to," said Logsdon.

Jay seemed to be taken a bit aback by the new information. But later said he remained committed to his vision, and confident that it would reach fruition because of the clear benefits it would bring to the area. He also referred to his proposed \$1.99 charge on tickets as a "service fee."

"It is not a tax; we never want to cuss in public," said Jay jokingly.

Karen Gibson, a professor of urban studies at Portland State University, said that it's still possible to get a robust CBA that will bring jobs and training to the community impacted by the Rose Quarter re-development. But it will require a groundswell of community support.

"People need to make a stink," she said. "They need to get organized."

The subcommittee will meet one last time to finalize its recommendations on Thursday, Sept. 23 at 5:30 p.m. at the Portland Development Commission building. The recommendations will go to a PDC study group as well as a broader committee charged with overseeing the redevelopment of the Rose quarter. City Council will have the final say.

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