

The Portland Streetcar will connect the downtown streetcar system to eastside landmarks like the Oregon Convention Center (above), the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry, the Rose Quarter and Lloyd District.

Eastside Connection

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downtown and Pearl Free Rail Zone, and people have been used to riding the cars for free over much of the route. That ended this month when TriMet abolished the rail-free zone.

Now you can hop a ride on the streetcar for two hours for \$1, transfer for free to buses or MAX light rail trains for \$2.50, or ride the system all day for \$5. There is also a Youth Fare for \$1 and an Honored Citizen fare for \$1.65.

The streetcar extension cost \$148 million, of which \$75 million came from the Federal Transit Administration. Obtaining the federal monies proved frustrating and impossible under the George W. Bush administration, with federal officials uninterested in a vehicle that was neither faster, nor cheaper to build, than a bus. Streetcar advocates have argued that their system increases public transit ridership, that it is cheaper to operate, and that it spurs development along its route. Since it was first launched, they say, private developers have built more than 10,000 housing units and 5.5 million square feet of commercial space within a block of the streetcar route.

"When you make this kind of public investment, it encourages private investment," Portland Streetcar executive director Rick

Gustafson said at a press preview of the new route. He noted that there are active plans to build 1,000 units of new housing near the new route.

Funding is still an issue for the east side streetcar. Plans call for an extension of the route south from OMSI to the new Light Rail Bridge now under construction, and for the line to hook up with the west side route, forming a loop around the inner city in 2015.

For this to happen, however, Portland Streetcar must come up with another \$7.4 million by year's end. Gustafson hopes to get \$2 million in additional federal monies, the rest in a General Obligation Bond authorized by City Council, which they will ask for later this year. It is theoretically possible to complete the loop after the bridge is built, but it would cost considerably more and would require disruption of light rail service.

Another crucial financial issue is operating funds. Due to budget cutbacks generally, the Streetcar will have only enough money to run a total of 17 trains at a time. With this fleet, west side streetcars will arrive every 16 minutes, and east side ones every 18 minutes, much less than the 12 minute service advocates would like.

Gustafson says he may persuade TriMet to increase funding, which would translate into more frequent

service, if he can show public acceptance for the system.

"Our ridership figures in October and November will be crucial," he says. Prior to instituting a universal fare, the streetcar carried 11,000 passengers a day. Advocates expect to add 5,000 to 6,000 new riders with the new line, Gustafson says, but admits, "It will take time."

Planners are looking for ways to increase the efficiency of the system.

For instance, Gustafson says, a system to coordinate traffic signals with streetcar movement reduced the new route travel time by five minutes. It was one of many challenges Portland Streetcar had to meet during construction. They also had to largely rebuild the Broadway Bridge because engineers were leery of its ability to accommodate the weight of both the tracks and the cars.

"For every pound we added, we had to take a pound off," Gustafson said.

On Northeast Seventh Avenue, to reduce bicycle and streetcar conflicts, they placed parking spaces between the streetcars and bikes, and eliminated it entirely on parts of the avenue. Along the façade of the Convention Center, to avoid getting caught in rush hour congestion, they created an exclusive right of way for the streetcars.

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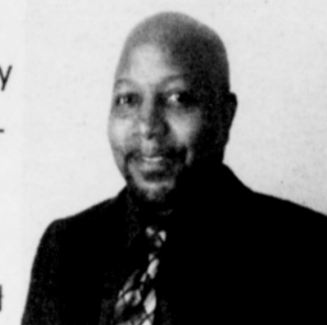
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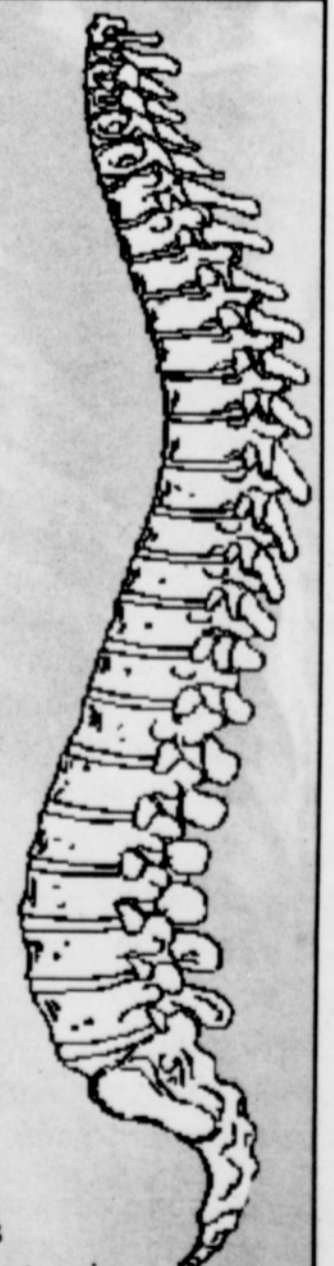
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