

The INSIDE

The Week in Review page 2

WHO SAYS THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION IS ANTI-CIVIL RIGHTS?



OPINION pages 6-7



pages 8-10

Arts & ENTERTAINMENT



METRO page 11

CLASSIFIEDS pages 14

CALENDAR page 15

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A TriMet photo shows transit police at the Rose Quarter.

TriMet Budget Battle

Advocates oppose new transit precinct

BY ZACHARY SENN
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Advocates for low-income, transit-dependent communities are challenging TriMet's budget priorities, arguing that an added emphasis on policing comes at the expense of efforts to make public transportation more affordable to riders.

OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon and Bus Riders Unite oppose the transit agency plans to spend \$11 million for the construction of a new transit police facility in northeast Portland and an additional \$1.6 million to support transit police and security operations.

"Bus riders need more accessible, affordable transportation, not more racist policing on our buses!" OPAL declared in a community alert last week.

"Given the current political climate, it's a bad time to be putting more vulnerable populations under a microscope," Shawn Fleek,

the community engagement coordinator at OPAL, told the Portland Observer.

A recent study by the Portland State University Criminal Justice Police Research Institute found that racial disparities in fare enforcement were a fact at TriMet. While no explicit racial bias practice was found, black riders, for example, were more likely to receive harsher penalties for fare evasion, such as exclusions, which bans riders from the TriMet system for up to 90 days.

Currently, TriMet transit police are made up of officers from 15 local law enforcement agencies. The officers are supplemented by a team of civilian fare enforcement supervisors.

The budget increase for the fiscal year starting July 1 would cover the cost of moving one of TriMet's four transit precincts, from inside a parking structure at Old Town to a larger parking facility that's being planned for a new convention hotel serving the Rose Quarter and Oregon Convention Center.

TriMet says that over the long run, the move will save them mon-

ey, as the agency will be purchasing the space instead of renting it. Included are plans for two to three holding cells, and a space that officers can use to interrogate detainees.

Roberta Aldstadt, TriMet's media relations and communications manager, says previous attempts to call the new facility a jail are misconstrued.

Aldstadt says the current Old Town precinct already has two detention rooms. In addition, she says, additional space for the east-side location will mark no substantial shift in transit police procedures or policies.

The current location poses operational challenges and the added emphasis on policing is meant to help both riders and operators feel safe, she says.

"Anybody that's riding the system will tell you that it's beneficial to have police nearby when an incident occurs," Aldstadt explains. "There are some issues with the facility itself, such as water intrusion... Also, the parking is extremely limited."

Fleek argues that increasing

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

Community Forum on Gun Violence

A free community forum addressing gun violence as a public health issue will be held Saturday, April 22 at the Highland Christian Center at 7600 N.E. Glisan St.

Sponsored by Oregon Health Sciences University, Portland

State University and the OHSU-PSU School of Public Health, the session will begin at 10 a.m. and run until 3 p.m. It will offer families and individuals directly impacted by violence, as well as community members interested in

making a difference, a safe venue to collaborate on ideas to reduce gun violence and address the social and society conditions that contribute to it.

For more information or to register, visit ohsu.edu/standtogether.