

PORTLAND SAFOOT

*PDX's 10-minute newsmagazine
about buses, bikes & low-car life*



December 2012:

THE APOCALYPSE ISSUE

- *Bridges that lift with a bang*
- *Effective whimpering to the TriMet lost and found*
- *Who to sit next to when the world falls down*



1

Rail split

The political divide between Portland and its suburbs has never looked more like a pair of steel tracks. On the same night that **Portlanders sent streetcar superfan Charlie Hales to City Hall**, Clackamas, Clark County and Tigard passed anti-MAX ballot issues or voted in candidates who'd turned their races into referendums against light rail.

Hales photo: Thomas Boyd, The Oregonian

WHY IT MATTERS

With 82% of Tigard saying voters must OK rail spending and 57% of urban Clark County refusing a tax hike for major transit, the odds of north or southwest MAX just tumbled. Vancouver's congresswoman called the vote "**marching orders to oppose the planned I-5 bridge.**"

WHAT DO VOTERS WANT?

<http://pdx.be/FreeBridgePlease>



2

Silent trumpet

Isn't it a little odd for a big black man to spend his day in a Mickey Mouse hat entertaining white people? Wanda Broadous asked Workin' Kirk Reeves when she saw him on the street in 2004. "**This is what I like to do,**" he replied. "**I want to be a big star one day.**" 100 Portlanders of many colors met under the Hawthorne Bridge Nov. 18 to mourn the suicide of Reeves, famous to everyone who passed his curb. Broadous, 65, said she'd asked Reeves on his first (platonic) date and later became his agent and landlord. "I had never met such a humble man," she said.

FUND RAISED FOR STATUE

<http://pdx.be/WorkingKirk>

3

Good news

There's a bright side to the bizarrely transit-less new Maps application Apple forced onto its mobile devices this fall: While low-car smartphone users waited for the

return of Google Maps (it arrived last night), many ran into **indie apps that do some transit tasks even better than Google.** Downloads "really picked up" after Apple's goof, said Sam Vermette of The Transit App, whose beautiful new program lets you plan TriMet trips using a lightning-fast business name search.

THE FOUR BEST TRIMET APPS

<http://pdx.be/FourBestApps>

4

Parking fix

"It's time we put the parking wars to rest" on Northwest 23rd, Mayor Sam Adams said Nov. 30. After 30 years of argument, **meters are coming to the packed streets of NW Portland next year**, he said. Residents and workers will pay \$60 a year to use the public space for their car. The end of automotive handouts mark an especially poignant moment for the dense, prosperous district, since the "free hugs" people all moved to Belmont years ago. 

Sealed, delivered.

We've wanted for years to create the enclosed instruction sheet on getting a cheap transit pass at no cost to your employer. Thanks in part to reader Bjorn W., it's here & online at pdx.be/PreTaxTransit.

Last issue's "cause of the month" misnamed the benefactor of Leach Botanical Garden. It was Katie. Sorry about that.

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\$14 a year: pdx.be/subscribe

Take a heap and pass it on.

Easy riding One trick to optimize your trip

The problem

First of all, it's raining so hard that even Portlanders are carrying umbrellas. Second of all, yours is on the seat of the bus you just got off.



The tip

Unless you actually label your possessions with contact information, **TriMet will almost never contact you about a lost item.** Instead, you will not recover your item unless you keep calling the lost and found every few days to see if it's come in.

For example

"If we find your item, we will contact you using the information you provided," TriMet reassuringly claims after you report a loss. Though technically true, this claim applies only to items that have *already made their way into TriMet's lost and found database* by the time a TriMet staffer gets your report. Since this process can take a day or three, immediate calls to TriMet's lost and found are almost always useless; the agency keeps a database of its found items, but no



dabboj (Flickr)

database of items that have been reported as lost.

Since TriMet presumably receives fewer lost item reports than lost items, this practice seems a little odd, but we're chalking it up as TriMet's way of saying that labeling our stuff won't kill us. That, or that putting our wet umbrellas anywhere besides our feet was a serious breach of bus etiquette. 

Cause of the month: Each month, we give 2% of ad + subscription revenue to a charity picked by a random paying subscriber. For December, Rebecca R. sends \$10 to local nonprofit news outlet Street Roots "for their unwavering commitment to social justice (and for their always-amusing April Fool's issue)." pdx.be/StreetRoots

PDX.be links: If you have a smartphone, download a scanner app (say, i-Nigma), point your camera at this 2D barcode and it'll send you to an online list of all the month's goodies: pdx.be/dec12links





Solar power works in Portland.

It's never been cheaper to go solar, and half of local homes can do it profitably. If it's right for you, your installation will support Portland Afoot, too.

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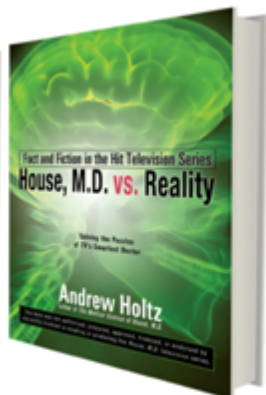
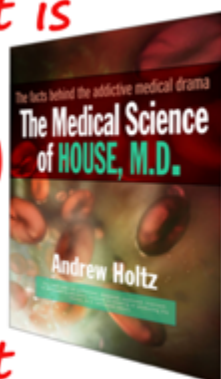
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What is Fact

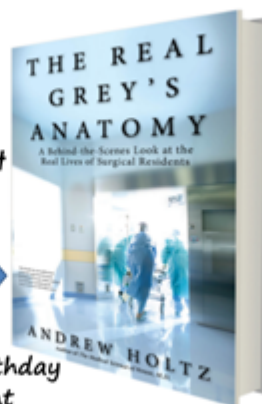


What is Fiction...



Based on the real lives of surgeons at Portland's OHSU

*or your holiday/birthday gift recipient



Special Offer for Portland Afoot Readers

You know TV shows aren't real... yet there are kernels of truth mixed in the dramatic fictions.

Former CNN Medical Correspondent and Portland Afoot Subscriber Andrew Holtz, MPH reveals how real doctors really do it.

Details at pdx.be/TVbooks

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I am a person- and relationship-oriented counselor who works with individuals and couples. If you want to talk to someone about living the right way for you, give me a call.

日本語がわかります

I work with Couples and Individuals.

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(503) 839-4825

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How to let your employees buy transit passes with pretax income

a surprisingly straightforward guide for small and small-ish businesses, by Portland Afoot

WHY IT'S A NO-BRAINER

- 1 It's free to an employer.** The company actually saves a little on its own payroll tax. (Note: if you contract out payroll, you might have to pay for setup.)
- 2 It lets most employees save 20% to 30% on public transit costs every month.** For an example of the math, see the form at pdx.be/PretaxSavings.

WHO QUALIFIES FOR IT

- 1** Any permanent employee, unless you're an S corp and the employee owns more than 2% of the company. (Independent contractors and the self-employed aren't eligible.)
- 2** Long-term temp workers: Any leased employee that your company has "directly supervised or controlled" on a "substantially full-time basis" for at least a year.

HOW YOU SET IT UP

- 1** Any employee who's interested just has to OK the statement at right. Digital agreement (including email) is fine.
- 2** Reduce each such employee's monthly paycheck by her monthly transit budget. That sum doesn't count as taxable wages, so the employee's taxes will fall.
- 3** Use your own payroll savings to buy passes or ticket books from TriMet. (See right for contact info.) Treat this as a business expense like anything else.

WHAT WORKERS NEED TO AGREE TO

Here's the text, in full, that an employee who's interested in saving money on TriMet needs to agree to. This is based on the text used by Clackamas County for its own employees.

"I authorize Payroll, on the first check of each month, to deduct from my wages \$50 for two TriMet ticket books until further notice. I also authorize Payroll to adjust this amount to accommodate fare increases."

You can have employees agree to this statement by paper, email or web survey. Set the deduction schedule however you want. You can also let employees choose monthly passes instead of ticket books. You'll want to mention the monthly deadline by which they need to OK this statement, and tell them how to opt out. For links to a couple sample sheets, see <http://pdx.be/SamplePretaxForm>.

WHAT TO TELL YOUR ACCOUNTANT

- 1** This deduction is allowed under Internal Revenue Code Section 132. They can see p. 6 of this file: pdx.be/PretaxFAQ.
- 2** It can be deducted from taxable wages just like a Section 125 insurance premium. It's a qualified transportation benefit, as described on p. 20 of this file: pdx.be/FringeBenefits.

WHERE TO LEARN MORE

To set up monthly purchasing of TriMet fares, call Employer Programs: (503) 962-7670. For monthly C-Tran passes, call Ron Baird: (360) 906-7377. Tell them you're setting up pretax transit for your workers.

Not a boss? Then print this out & show it to your boss!

Did this guide help? Please tell us, so we can brag and/or improve it! Write michael@portlandafoot.org. 

No Exit

Bridges will tumble, rail lines will shut off and fuel will run low.

But when the Big One strikes, 20-minute neighborhoods, bikes and even food carts may save Portland.

by Bill Lascher

Very, very slowly, about 29 miles beneath you, 50 quadrillion tons of bedrock are bending toward the day when low-car life in Portland ceases to be optional.

Someday, maybe tomorrow, a 700-mile stretch of Northwest coast known as the Cascadia Subduction Zone will rupture with a quake equal in strength or stronger than the one that struck Japan last year. Such a temblor, or even a more moderate one centered on one of three faults under the city, will likely shatter Portland's brittle infrastructure.

Even the bridges and overpasses that aren't immediately damaged by swinging counterweights or sliding soils (see map) will be shut down for inspections, shutting off food and fuel deliveries to much of the city for at least two days. And the blockages may last a long time if inspectors can't reach the structures, or if aftershocks start the whole process over again.

That would be bad.

Interstate 84, Interstate 5 and the Willamette and Columbia rivers may all be impassable, city documents report. But those damages would only deepen the problem that is likely to follow even a moderate earthquake near the city: a crippling shortage of motor fuel.

Broken lines

Superstorm Sandy forced New Yorkers to wait in line. A Northwest quake could shut off Oregon's energy and fuel supply almost completely.

Oregon is one of 16 states that processes no oil of its own. Ninety percent of its refined petroleum arrives by either an insecure pipeline or a tanker from Puget Sound. A quake could fracture the pipe, a tsunami could block the shipping channel and shaking could destroy the vulnerable storage facilities that serve the entire state.

All fuel that makes it to Portland arrives in a six-mile zone of tank farms and terminals built

along the wet soils of the Willamette River, between Sauvie Island and the Fremont Bridge. This critical energy infrastructure hub also houses electric transmission stations and natural gas terminals, and the entire area is at risk of damage from even a moderate quake, let alone a cataclysm.

Pipelines, piers and fuel tanks there – storing, on average, 3 to 5 days of fuel – were all built in a liquefaction zone, before codes accounted for the area's seismic dangers. Only three storage tanks have been prepared for liquefaction.

“Western Oregon will likely face an electrical blackout, extended natural gas service outages, liquid fuel shortage, as well as damage and losses in the tens of billions of dollars in a future major Cascadia earthquake,” a report from the state Department of Geology and

Moving Out: With the Fremont Bridge “expected to suffer significant damage during a large earthquake,” it’s a little awkward that the city keeps a bunch of its transportation equipment in, um, the Albina Maintenance Yard directly underneath. There’s a plan to move to a new site in Southwest “very soon,” the city says. Might want to step on that one, guys.

Bottleneck: Tsunami damage to the shipping channel near Astoria, among other obstacles, may block fuel tankers from delivering new supplies along the Columbia River.

Planning on Empty: TriMet has garages on both sides of the Willamette, so the buses that haven't been diverted to replace MAX trains (which would all be sidelined by a blackout) might run on newly redesigned routes – but not for long. Each bus yard keeps just a week's worth of diesel on hand. Emergency bus route changes are made on a “situational basis,” says TriMet emergency manager Michael McGuire, so the city's temporary transit map will be redrawn on deadline.

The Big Float The city may work with the Coast Guard and other jurisdictions to press the Portland Spirit and other boats into service to transport emergency supplies. The National Guard might deploy float bridges. Expect some private citizens to take to kayaks and yachts to cross the Willamette – maybe even to make a water taxi business out of it.

The Burnside Connection: The only local bridge that won't be shut down by either counterweights (which are likely to swing out of control, causing indefinite bridge lifts) or unstable soil will become PDX's crucial crosstown link. Of all our highway bridges, even I-205's, only the Marquam has been retrofitted for survival.

Photos: cover & tanker by Bill Lascher, Fremont Bridge by K. Kendall, Burnside Bridge by Ian Sane, kayaker by ACOE Los Angeles, radio user by Garry Knight.

Mineral Industries warned in August.

MAX trains will go offline, their overhead electrical wires useless. Highways are likely to be blocked. City officials will ask Portlanders to stay put for at least five days in their broken city.

And that's when we're likely to discover that Portland will be better off in an apocalypse than it looks.

Biking to resilience

It turns out Portland has been preparing for disaster for a generation. We just didn't know it.

“Portland's thriving alternative transportation and food networks, including cargo bikes and food carts, will be recruited to assist with the delivery of food, fuel, water, medical supplies, etc.,

to each of these neighborhood hubs,” says an April 2012 appendix to the city's emergency operations plan.

Nobody's told the cart owners yet. But since carts can become rolling mess halls and their pods are well-known gathering spaces, Portland Bureau of Emergency Management spokesman Randy Neves says it makes “perfect sense” for carts to help if they're able.

Another tool in Portland's disaster arsenal has drawn more attention: its robust bike culture.

Indeed, the earthquake appendix says bicycles may be the “most practical” way for anyone to get around if a quake damages pipelines.

Ethan Jewett, a leader in the official neighborhood emergency team (NET) for the Woodlawn area, noted that bike sales skyrocketed in Japan after its 2011 quake.

“Many of the functions in a response, of going to get supplies, of carrying communication equipment, of doing the NET mission, of residents doing supply runs – they all can be facilitated by bikes,” Jewett says.

With maybe 5% of pedal trips in the city already happening on bikes that can haul cargo – that's the rough estimate from Clever Cycles' Eva Frazier – Portland is unusually ready for action. It's a good reason to own a wrench, a

patch kit, and more tubes than you think you need, says Jewett. After all, your neighbors might need a tuneup, too.

Chipping in

But Jewett also admits that not everyone can ride a bike, and that Portlanders are far less prepared for a quake than the Japanese were.

He said it's also important to get to know your neighbors, their needs, and who's been trained in emergency response. The city's official plan estimates that its NETs will triple in size after a disaster as uninjured survivors look for ways to help.

And that's the final way Portland's low-car culture will be useful in a disaster: It's helped us build a city whose citizens interact.

And as prepared as people like Jewett may be, many

of us struggle to put food on the table, let alone in a disaster kit.

“There are a lot of people over here in this neighborhood for whom tonight's meal is an emergency,” said Jewett. “They're not going to be buying extra batteries. They probably don't have a flashlight, so these are our neighbors and I think that we're going to be taking them in.”

Bill Lascher is a Portland-based freelance journalist: lascheratlarge.com.

The Low-Car Disaster Index

121,743 - population increase in downtown Portland each weekday

1950-1982 - time period in which most Oregon bridges were built; modern seismic standards weren't enacted until 1990

159 - number of bridges and overpasses owned by the city of Portland that will need inspections

1700 - number of unreinforced masonry buildings in Portland, a “large portion” of which are close to major transportation routes

48 - number of sites in Portland's new BEECN citywide radio network for the public to communicate after a disaster ►

200 - Percentage by which one Japanese company's bicycle sales increased after its 2011 quake



ONLY ON THE BUS



Tyler
TriMet #45

I started riding the bus about a year ago. It's funny – there are so many people on the bus that we don't know their names, but we definitely know them. They always get off at the same stop, you know?

This woman and I would get off at the same bus stop. We lived in the same complex, and she would always beat me home. I would be so pissed. *How did she get like 20 feet ahead of me?* I would run through the Dairy Queen. We'd be, like, speedwalking to and from the bus.

She's 10 years older than me, shorter, round in the face, dark hair, very fashionable. She likes to wear an owl ring. I went on like that for a good three months.

I'm gay, and the two gay guys at the front of the bus and I were looking at each other like *I think you're part of my team*. And there was one guy they were friends with that I wanted to be friends with. He's just super extroverted, totally willing to talk to anybody. So we started talking.

In the beginning, almost all of us had one headphone in. But you could tell the woman was always listening. Finally I said, "It's okay to laugh. This is a stupid conversation, y'know."

So now it's the five of us. We almost always commandeer the back few seats. I sit on the left, Carolyn right across from me, John in the corner next to Carolyn and Scott and Kirk sit next to each other in the middle.

After a few months, we started to go to the bar together on Fridays.

I'm 26. Carolyn and John are 36. Scott and Kirk are married, probably early 50s.

The fact that we're still allowed on the 45 I think is amazing. Like, last night we started talking about how it is sacriligious to mix

eggnog with anything except maybe brandy.

Kirk said, "I love it so thick that you get it stuck in the back of your throat." And I said "Oh, I love it so thick that you gotta swallow twice."

Then we started
drinking together
on Fridays.

And then Carolyn goes, "We *are* still talking about eggnog, right?" And then the whole bus started laughing. And I turn bright

red, because this is a very inappropriate conversation all of a sudden.

It's our first Thanksgiving and Christmas together. If you're on the 45 at 4:30 and want to talk, talk. We'll probably talk to you.

If it's silly, we might laugh at you.

As told to editor Michael Andersen.

What's your favorite TriMet story? Write onlyonthebus@portlandafoot.org. 

Electronic mail.

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