

PORTLAND AFOOT

*PDX's 10-minute newsmagazine
on buses, bikes, and low-car life*



September 2011:

THE DO-IT-YOURSELF ISSUE



Minneapolis bikeshare photo by Sharyn Morrow (flickr)

1 Bike share

15 years after the sprockets fell off PDX's communal yellow bikes, the city agreed Aug. 17 to **reboot public bikesharing**, but with an ownership-society spin. Modeled on popular Zipcar-like systems in Paris, D.C. and Minneapolis, it might grow to **5,000 shared bikes** by 2014.

WHY IT MATTERS

Is this a public priority? "If this is **such a good idea**, I don't know why the private sector hasn't done it," said Amanda Fritz, council's only "no" vote. But bikeshare fans said it'll transform downtown, especially if **the first 30 minutes are free**.

WHAT BIKES COST IN DC & MN

<http://pdx.be/BikeSharePrices>

2 Streetcar switch

No more free streetcar? PSU students and Pearl retirees would have to cough up \$2.10 per ticket if **Portland Streetcar drops out of downtown's free-fare zone**, Streetcar Executive Director Rick Gustafson said Sept. 8. Streetcar expansion is forcing its directors to face a decision this fall. But would the streetcar actually **hire any fare inspectors**? There's no plan in place, Gustafson said.

HOW TO WEIGH IN

<http://pdx.be/StreetcarFares>

3 Youthpass fight

Portland Public high schoolers **aren't giving up their free TriMet passes without a struggle**. Oregon's legislature has let the statewide program (used in Portland only by PPS) expire on Dec. 31, but the Multnomah Youth Commission **spread the warning at every high school**

registration in August and is joining transit riders' group OPAL to lobby for new money next year. (Disclosure: OPAL is a Portland Afoot partner, too.) **Possible grand bargain:** adult fares rise 2¢, high schoolers agree to pipe down.

PLUG INTO THE CAMPAIGN

<http://pdx.be/StudentPass>

4 Good news

Credit where it's due: TriMet **held its annual fare hike below inflation** (slightly) and **increased service** (very slightly) in September. The news is less nice for **monthly buyers**, whose passes rose 5%, and **TriMet's union**, whose higher health bills cut service costs. If workers win their legal battle, this could fall apart. But for now, some monthpass holders might want to reconsider **buying tickets by the book**.

WHICH PASS TO BUY?

<http://pdx.be/TheNewMath>

Sunshine city.

There was an error in July's Street Talk interview – Klamath Falls has both buses and taxis, as you'd expect in any city of 20,000. We should've checked that.

Also, from August: Tienken left that housing agency in '03.

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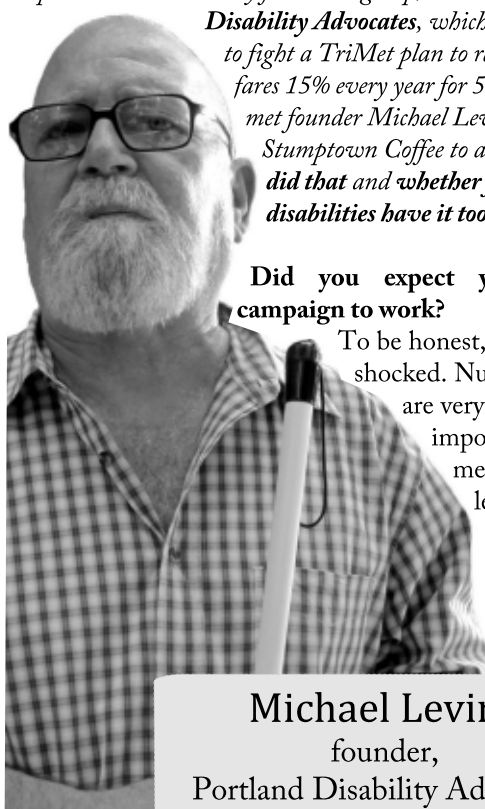
In plain sight.

Street Talk

Five questions and someone worth asking

*Sept. 1 didn't mean fare hikes for every Portland transit rider. The 1% of us who have **severe mobility problems** and ride LIFT vans instead of buses have so far been spared. That's a victory for a new group, **Portland***

Disability Advocates**, which continues to fight a TriMet plan to raise LIFT fares 15% every year for 5 years. We met founder Michael Levine at Stumptown Coffee to ask **how he did that and whether folks with disabilities have it too good.



Did you expect your first campaign to work?

To be honest, I was shocked. Numbers are very important: meetings, letters. But this proposal was ludicrous

Michael Levine
founder,
Portland Disability Advocates

– why would you want to see people living on \$675 or less priced off of the service?

Lots of transit riders make less. Why should one group of riders get expensive, top-of-the-line service while other folks' has been getting worse?

It's not top-of-the-line. You have to make your reservation a day in advance. They give you a 30-minute window and you're lucky if they meet it. Then you're stuck on LIFT for 2 or 3 hours. When I found out I could get a fixed-route bus, I sold my house at a loss, moved downtown and felt like I was released from prison.

After fares, what other campaigns do you anticipate?

The transit tracker on the Mall – the audio should be on all the time. They have buttons in 6 different locations: front, side, on an outside bar. At different heights. They think blind people can find these?

Does Portland need another disability group?

We don't have to answer to anybody. If we see that something is wrong, we don't have to be careful. We can just say, "This is wrong!"

What's your favorite Portland secret?

A restaurant-bar, the Rialto. I frequent both for food and to exercise my elbow once in a while.

Levine's group meets monthly: pdx.be/EverybodyRides.

Want your co-workers to leave their cars at home?



Free resources for Portland employers and commuters:
portlandonline.com/SmartTrips



If you're reading this, you'll love SmartTrips' Commuting Blog:
www.CommuterCentral.org



On the line *A great idea within one block of a transit stop*

The Spot A locally owned market with 12,000 square feet of affordable global groceries.

The Lines TriMet 12, 64 and 94; Wilsonville SMART 2X.

The Times 7 a.m.-10 p.m. daily.

The Skinny From Iran, Tibrizi loaves. From Greece, spanikopita pies. From Wisconsin, cheese curds.

The great culinary discoveries of the ages share shelves across the street from the Barbur Transit Center.

It's unclear what the Metro regional government was thinking when it marked this massive highway crossroads, a sterile concrete pentagon between Interstate 5, Southwest Barbur, Taylors Ferry and Capitol Highway, as a future town center with human-friendly mixed-use development. But if urban spice someday takes root here near the edge of Southwest Portland, this top-notch world grocery store, opened in 2004, will be remembered as the first seed of hipness.

Manager Kinaz Eshak competes with the big guys by outthrusting them on inventory, and his produce prices show it: 19¢/lb. for



Barbur World Foods
9845 S.W. Barbur Blvd.

watermelon, 99¢/lb. for plantains, \$4.99/lb. for gold dates, and mangos 99¢ apiece.

The deli, with recipes overseen by the chef of local Lebanese restaurant Ya Hala, has an impressive Mediterranean spread, from hot kebabs to cold baklava. Try the mushroom tart (\$2.75) but skip the Egyptian sambousak meat pocket (\$1.50).

There's also a half-aisle of exotic sweets, starting with 15 varieties of Dagobah chocolate

(\$3.19/2 oz.). In the back, the walk-in beer cooler offers 650 varieties.

It's too bad the street out front, where cars regularly roll over the sidewalk to get from one parking lot to another, is so uninviting. Urban planners in the 60s "just didn't think" of problems like that, said patron Roger Averbek of Ashcreek. But it doesn't dampen Averbek's enthusiasm for either the deli's falafel sandwich (\$4.75) or its neighborhood's long-term future. 

Got a spot? Send your nominations to michael@portlandafoot.org.

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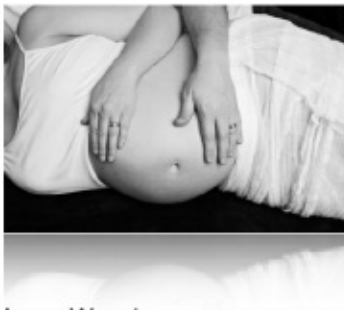
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OK, here's the ! PLAN.

After a year and a bit of publication, **we've done the math.** Until you've got maybe 10,000 subscribers (we're closer to 1,000 right now) using a traditional subscription system tracking everybody's expiration every month just doesn't pencil out. It's a big hassle.

Here's how it's going to work instead, at least for now: each November, **everybody who last signed up 12 or more months earlier** will get a chance to renew, for any price they think is right.

Sound good?

Great.

If you'd like to re-up right now, you can do so at any time at <http://pdx.be/Renew>. Thanks for watching this develop with us, and for all the nice words. ⓘ

Southwest Portland's uncompromising, untiring, unelected, infuriating, inspiring, scrounging, bragging, charming, politically savvy, politically incorrect,

Warden of the West

man-hour-counting, fund-raising, bureau-baiting, budget-hating, bourgeois, *je ne sais quoi*, overambitious, undercautious, idealistic, unsympathetic...

dog-walking, hat-battering, glad-handing,



Jim McLaughlin, Marianne Fitzgerald, Bandana Shrestha, Arnold Panitch.

When Don Baack decides Portland needs a trail, he doesn't ask for it – he just builds it. But has Hillsdale's pedestrian privateer burnt his last bridge?

The three-foot wide dirt-and-gravel path winds 750 feet up a steep wooded slope, away from the roar and whistle of Southwest Barbur Boulevard.

Above the half-hidden trail is the Hillsdale neighborhood, Wilson High School, and Oregon Health and Science University, the state's largest employer. Below, the path connects to an aluminum shelter that marks one of TriMet's busiest bus stops, with signs advertising lines 1, 12, 38, 44, 45, 54, 55 and 56.

"I was pretty pleased to find it," said Eric Hanus, 31, a software developer who said he walks the path almost daily, stepping over roots, goatfooting down 30-degree grades, brushing past ferns and volunteer maples on his way home from work. "I was wondering how that got there."

Like most of the dozens of tenants in the low-rent apartment complexes along Barbur, Hanus had no idea that the roughshod, oddly convenient path, along with 30 similar projects that have appeared in the backways of southwest Portland over the last 15 years, was the work of one very unusual man.

Don Baack raised a finger for attention. He had a fluorescent vest around his shoulders and a crinkle around his eye.

The vest came from Baack's closet. The crinkle came from Baack's favorite subject: things he and his friends can do more efficiently than the government.

"It took 'em nine years of planning, 15 months of getting the permits," Baack was recalling of a footbridge they'd built. "And we built the walkway in nine days."

Baack, 74, figures he's on his eighth career. He finished the first, as an Army supply sergeant, at age 20. Then came an engineering degree, an MBA, and decades in the paper and logging industries.

Baack's latest gig pays \$0, though the hours are a little better. And the fringe benefits – 40 miles of low-traffic streets linked by off-road paths, most of them flagged by the brown "SW Trails" markers named after his group – are hard to beat.

Armed with an email list of 1,000 interested citizens, a stack of ragged orange traffic cones and the phone numbers of the city's most compliant bureaucrats, Baack spends 10 to 30 hours most weeks recruiting and directing volunteer work parties to unilaterally build and maintain trails on public land the City of Portland has ignored.

Since Baack began his self-appointed task in 1995, he and his followers have built the most comprehensive non-car transportation network Southwest Portland has.

One Friday last month, Baack and three friends spent the morning chopping overhanging branches from a long-

neglected path alongside Wilson High. Baack rose at 6 a.m. to set his orange cones in parking spaces nearby.

Obediently, cars avoided the spaces, giving Baack and his team a convenient place to dump the 30 cubic yards of brush they cleared from the trail.

"We've found that if we put it on the parking side, it's cleaned up faster than if we put it on the walking side," Baack said, grinning.

Across the lot, Aaron Pruitt, 40, walked his two daughters to a swim lesson. The tall blond man stopped to wave at Baack's squad.

"Thank you!" Pruitt shouted. "It's much needed."

Baack waved back. It was his second shoutout in an hour. "Southwest Trails," he said, gesturing down the pathway.

Baack happily chats up each passer-by. Each new friend helps to balance out an enemy.

Because Baack most certainly has enemies.

And here's the thing: they may be right.

An old fridge was humming in the corner of a back room at the Multnomah Arts Center as the board of Southwest Neighborhoods, Inc., divvied up Don Baack's unfinished business.

Baack hasn't attended the nonprofit

group's meetings in person since June. But his name kept coming up like a drumbeat.

"No. 9 – this is part of Don's Red Electric trail," said Marianne Fitzgerald, SWNI's new president,

working her way down a list of duties to be ended or reassigned. "No. 21, work to improve the infrastructure on the 4T Trail route. 4T is Don's, so we propose to discontinue."

Baack says he and his volunteers decided this summer to secede from SWNI, a city-chartered umbrella group, because its new leaders were making meetings boring by questioning Baack's methods and priorities.

An example: Fitzgerald told Baack to hammer out a budget for the \$15,000 or so that SW Trails keeps in SWNI's federally regulated bank accounts. Fitzgerald calls

this process "fiscal responsibility." Baack calls it "organizational gobbledygook that didn't do anything for anybody."

But Baack's critics have a deeper worry about his gravel trail network, too.

"It's just not enough," said Roger Averbeck, chair of SWNI's transportation committee. "It's bare bones and it's better than nothing and people use it, but only the fitter segment of the population."

By acting outside the system, they say, Baack gives the city an excuse never to build the sidewalks almost everyone in Southwest, Baack included, claims to want.

"In many ways, trails are the enemy of solving the problem," said Jim McLoughlin, SWNI's vice president.

Baack's little army of volunteers see it differently. They love to tell how Baack once finished a half-mile trail in Himes Park: At each trail head, his group left a pile of gravel, a stack of buckets and a handmade sign with instructions for trail users to fill a bucket on their way past. Two months later, the path was graveled.

Baack isn't just a rogue actor, his allies argue. He's an organizer. He's a movement builder. He's mortar.

"We call him the Mayor," said Arnold Panitch, 70, a retired sociology professor who lives in Hillsdale. "He's got the power."

But that's just it, a reporter said. Baack doesn't actually have any power.

"No, no, no, no," Panitch said. "He got the power from the people."

How it's done

Don Baack's six tips for urban trail-building:
pdx.be/BuildItYourself

Where to walk

Portland Afoot's directory:
pdx.be/WalkingGroups





It was late summer. A Saturday, early evening, and I was going out to Gresham to hear a taiko group perform at the library – it's an Asian drumming group. A whole visual experience. It's got a storied history in Japan.

Afterward I'm riding home, westbound, and within a block after leaving downtown Gresham, all of a sudden police cars come from every direction – flashing lights, no sirens – and surround the bus.

I've never seen this before in person: They had rifles. Not aiming, but at the ready.

So one of them gets on and another follows him in. I'm not paying much attention – I was looking out the window at the other officers. The officer walks just past my seat and says "Stand up. Put your hands behind your back."

He had to say it twice. And then I figured out, *Oh God. He's talking to me.*

You know, "What have you been doing?" "What's this?" "Do you have any sharp objects on you?"

I was saying, "Gosh, I went to the library and I watched a nice performance."

It seemed like a long time, but it could only have been a minute or two. The other officer came up and said, "It's okay. It's not him."

What it was was they'd gotten a call about somebody showing a gun at the transit center. They said it was a bald guy with a backpack.

I was bald, there's no doubt about it. My head has been shaved for years.

*Oh, God, I realized.
He's talking to me.*

Then they said, "Hold the bus. Do you want to go back to Portland?" I was like, "Yes, I'd like to get out of this town."

We walked past this gentleman they were looking for, who had been sitting two seats from the front. He was sitting on the street; they were standing around him with their rifles, two officers on either side.

And this other guy was not bald. He had a *receding hairline*.

The irony is that the officer who walked me out was also bald. 

As told to editor Michael Andersen. What's your favorite transit story? Write michael@portlandafoot.org or call 503-On-a-Bus-1. Storytellers get a gift card to our favorite bar or coffee shop.

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