

PORTLAND AFOOT

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



September 2010:

THE SCAPEGOAT ISSUE

while you wait: who to blame, what to hope, where to text, why to worry, how to help

Arriving Now Four stories you can't miss this month



1 Bus ballot?
TriMet's board lobbed voters a **\$125 million property tax renewal** Aug. 11 – \$8 a year per \$100,000 – saying it'd go to help people with disabilities. It's the first time the agency has asked for extra help **fixing unusable bus stops** and **speeding up the purchase of low-floor, air-conditioned buses.**

WHAT IT MEANS
Don't trust your ballot. About **40% of the cash might not be used for the stated purpose**, execs said after the vote. Because they planned to buy new buses anyway, the agency would get about **\$50 million for whatever it wants.**

HOW TRIMET COULD USE IT
<http://pdx.be/BusBallot>

2 Geeky graffiti
NoPo Nintendo afcionados smiled at some summer "vandalism" after an artistic Mario Kart fan stenciled a **banana, a mushroom and other power-ups** on the Williams Avenue bike lane, BikePortland.org reported Aug. 18. "Glad to see the blue shell and bullet didn't make the list," Marcus Griffith commented. "However, the lightning could explain the increase in mini bikes around town."

3 Dumb crooks
If only all MAX punks were as sharp as the thugs who allegedly attacked Paul Steigleder Aug. 2. When he flashed a badge and told two men to **stop drinking and smoking on the platform** at Gateway TC, he says they followed him and his wife to Clackamas, then came at him with a rock. At

which point they learned that Steigleder, a Clackamas sheriff's lieutenant, and his wife Debbie, a Portland cop, **knew how to fight back.** The pair were nabbed after fleeing into a department store.

THE WHOLE STORY
<http://pdx.be/TheWrongGuy>

4 Good news
TriMet's creepy robot voices took a back seat Aug. 17 when the agency introduced **one of the country's first ad-supported arrival-times-by-text services.** Text any stop ID to 27299 for instant info, and maybe a local coupon. Mobile Marketing LLC of Beaverton says it can pay for the service **by selling \$10,000 a month in ads**, and TriMet operations will get a cut. Knowing when the bus is coming never sounded better. 

HOW TO FIND YOUR STOP ID
<http://pdx.be/StopID>

ONLY ON THE BUS



Dick

TriMet No. 70



a clinical therapist by now. Maybe that's what she was studying.

So he lumbers in and takes the opposite seat from the woman getting the therapy. And the therapy goes on with the three of them!

Then the bus stops again and this guy gets on with a baby on his back and a pet carrier. And he sits and they all start talking. The woman says, "Nice dog!"

And he says, "That's not a dog. That's a pet monkey."

And she says, "Yeah!"

This young gentleman kept staring straight ahead the whole time.

The expression on his face was, *Why would you assume it's a dog?*

This conversation goes on to Lloyd Center, where I have to get off. The rest of the bus is chortling and laughing, but there's this young Asian gentleman who's been looking straight ahead the whole time with a very non-committal stare.

He gets off. I was right behind him. And maybe 10 steps from the bus door he goes like this.

(Dick slowly shakes his head.)

And I just started laughing.

What's your favorite bus story? Call 503-662-2871. Storytellers get a gift card to our favorite bar or coffee shop. 

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How's the mail working out?

This is our second issue using the technology formerly known as "third class mail."

It's called "standard mail," thank you very much.

Anyway, could you tell us when it arrived? It'd be a big help: <http://pdx.be/MailSpeed>

There was a mistake last month. The Bike There! map now costs \$9. Sorry about that.

Cover and "Street Talk" photos by the charming Mike Schoenholtz.

<http://PortlandAfoot.org>

\$14 per year. Details on back.

Always on your side.

Street Talk Five questions and someone worth asking

*All summer, 5-year-old enviro justice group OPAL has sent its staffers to ride PDX's buses, warning commuters about service changes (pdx.be/2010cuts), building a list of riders who want to save their buses and becoming Portland's **loudest voice against the cuts.** We met OPAL's 31-year-old lead organizer outside her Division office to talk **transpo** and **the black exodus from inner Northeast.***

What could TriMet do to improve?

We asked customer service why they were adjusting schedules. She said people wait anyway. Customer service lady! Come on now! Being late is already putting them in a situation of losing jobs, not getting their kids to health care. It's crazy. Kids are going to drop out of school because they can't get there.

They're talking about getting rid of fare zones.

You should just be able to go wherever you want. I mean, zones? Three-zone or two-zone ticket, you're paying different prices but getting the same benefit.

Where'd you grow up?

A foster home off 28th and Fremont. Look at Northeast now. It's beautiful! Bicyclists, people walking everywhere. Sometimes I don't even want to go there because it's not like it used to be. We all knew each other on the block. We've been shipped out. In east Portland there's nothing for our kids

to do. They go to the MAX, smoke, drink, fight.

If 122nd gets better, won't that all just repeat?

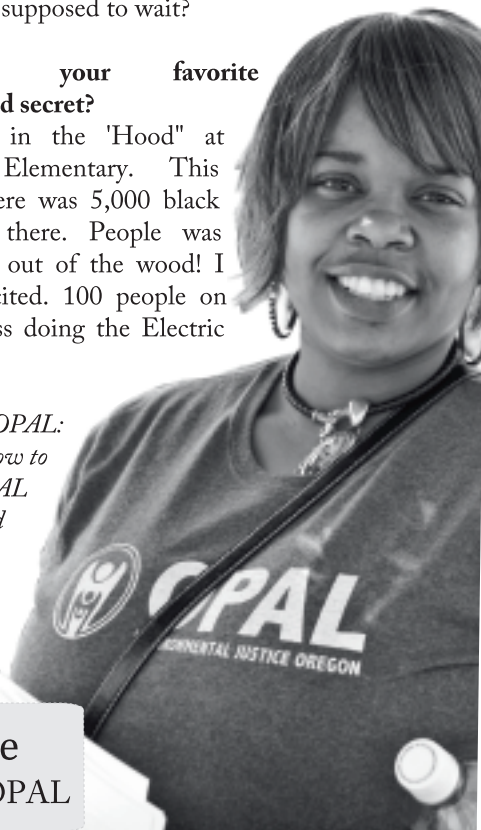
Are we supposed to wait?

What's your favorite Portland secret?

"Good in the 'Hood" at King Elementary. This year there was 5,000 black people there. People was coming out of the wood! I was excited. 100 people on the grass doing the Electric Slide.

pdx.be/OPAL: Learn how to help OPAL or attend Olive's Oct. 23 civil rights event. 

Shannon Olive
lead bus organizer, OPAL





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Our first transfer.



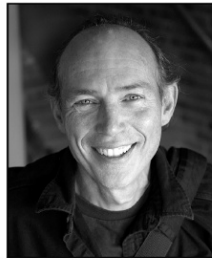
I hope you're enjoying our fourth issue. I think we've kicked the journalism up a notch this month with photography by Michael Shoenholtz and a close look at TriMet's budget mess that you won't see anywhere else.

I'm pleased to announce that we're moving into the second leg of our plan to make Portland more awesome: free subscriptions for low-car commuters. Every year or so, 20% of riders give up and start driving. If you know a workplace looking for free ways to change that number, drop me a line. ☺

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TriMet says **no one's to blame and nothing's to be done about** its year-long spiral of service cuts.

Baloney.

The ride DECISIONS

We've been on the way into TriMet's service crisis for 20 years, and there's lots of blame to go around. But good choices could get us out.



DECIDER:

Tom Walsh

His job: TriMet general manager, 1990-1998
What he did: Negotiated a 1994 union contract TriMet couldn't afford. When his boss said he was threatening to wreck future service, Walsh used political connections to get his boss fired, then claimed he hadn't been involved.

Why it matters: Starting that year, TriMet's cost of putting a bus on the road for an hour – mostly labor – has grown twice as fast as the average large agency's, sucking service dry.

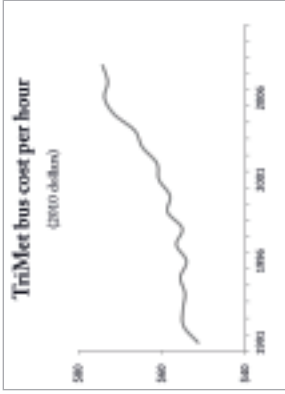
The story: Walsh had political ambitions and good reasons to make friends in the union. When Loren Wyss, the TriMet board president who had hired Walsh, accused him of negotiating in secret and demanded to know how much the proposals would cost,

Walsh ignored him. Instead, he sent a private letter to Wyss' boss, Gov. Barbara Roberts, saying the two couldn't work together. Through an aide, Bob Stacey, the governor pushed Wyss to resign. Walsh denied to The Oregonian that he'd said anything. The contract renewal Walsh signed that year – no

premiums, no deductibles, early retirement, year-end bonuses, full coverage for dependents in retirement – laid the track for TriMet's rocketing bus costs, which broke \$74 an hour in 2008. "A complete political

decision," Stacey recalled Aug. 23.
Where Walsh is now: Running a small construction firm. Chairing a TriMet safety committee.

Why he did it: In 1992, Walsh wrote in TriMet's employee newsletter that he wanted to "abolish the them and us feeling" within TriMet. (Walsh didn't return



calls for comment.)

Just a thought: TriMet's union workers have one of the sweetest health care deals in the USA. Should the union be blamed for negotiating well on its members' behalf? Or TriMet, for negotiating poorly on ours?

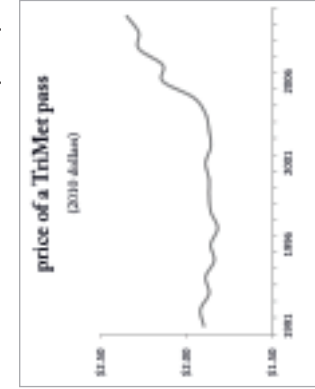
The paper trail: <http://pdx.be/UnionDeal>



DECIDER:

Mae Yih

Her job: Democratic state senator, 1983-2003
What she did: In 1993, it looked as if voters would get to decide whether gas taxes should help support alternatives to driving. Yih switched her vote at the last minute to make sure this didn't happen.



Why it matters: The price of riding TriMet has since

jumped 26%. Auto commuters' price for keeping all of us off their roads every morning? Still \$0.

The story: In 1979, Oregon's legislature passed a referendum to block gas tax from

Where Yih is now: Retired. Living north of Albany.

Why she did it: Yih said Aug. 24 that she didn't remember the 1993 vote, but said she would never have backed such a bill in committee. (The state archives contradict her.) "Gas tax is paid by everybody in Oregon, and TriMet is only benefiting Portland, so it wasn't a fair tax," she said. "They should increase ridership in order to get more money."

Just a thought: They did. Ridership is up 50% despite the price hikes, keeping tens of thousands off the road in Portland alone.

The paper trail: <http://pdx.be/GasVoteSwitch>



DECIDER:

Neil McFarlane

His job: new TriMet general manager in 2010
What he could do: Promise not to spend any general revenue to build new MAX lines until service is restored. Promise voters that if they pass November's ballot issue, TriMet's extra \$50 million will go toward service first.

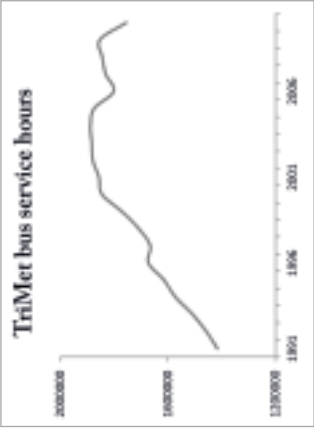
Why it matters: At the same time it cuts bus service for the fourth time in 12 months – back to 1998 levels, despite 230,000 new residents – TriMet is scrambling to put \$39 million into a new \$1.5 billion "Orange" MAX line from PSU to the South

Waterfront, OMSI, Sellwood and Milwaukie.
The story: Until 2006, TriMet used every trick in the book to avoid building MAX with

its all-purpose general fund, which pays for basic service. The Orange Line's \$39 million would be about enough to protect every frequent service bus route for the next 10 years.

Where McFarlane is now: Showing up at rallies against the cuts. Calling TriMet's frequent-service routes –

the 72, 75, 6, 15, 14 and others, which once ran every 15 minutes all day – "the lifeblood of our system." Avoiding specific promises.
What he's been saying: "I know as a rider that



the best service is frequent, regular bus service that you can count on – you can go out your door and you don't have to look at your watch," he told PortlandTransport.com in July. "We're going to have to make some compromises to get through this great recession. But we know what good service is."

Just a thought: If we in the public truly want light rail to southeast Portland, won't we be able to find the money later, too?

The paper trail: <http://pdx.be/NeilsChoice>