

PORTLAND AFOOT

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



May 2011:

THE STUDENT ISSUE

- High schoolers fight to save their bus passes
- Dad sprints after safer crosswalks
- Led Zeppelin hits the 14

Arriving Now

Four stories you can't miss this month



1 Bridge gap

Looks like "crunch time" for Interstate 5's **Columbia River Crossing highway expansion**, PortlandTransport.com wrote April 25. As an advisory bill that didn't even include money left Democrats **shouting at each other in Salem hallways**, Gov. Kitzhaber predicted groundbreaking by 2013.

WHY IT MATTERS

It's often called "the bridge," but half of its \$3.3 billion pricetag is **freeway widenings up and down I-5** – widenings that won't be needed if auto use keeps falling, as it has been since 2005 ... before gas spiked or the recession hit.

A HALF-PRICE ALTERNATIVE?
<http://pdx.be/BridgesNotLanes>



2 Midnight Mass

60 well-wishers met in Old Town early Easter morning to remember Dani Sale, 22, and Jenee Hammel, 26, killed a year before when a #9 bus **illegally swung into a crosswalk**. As friends wrote messages on yellow balloons and sent them skyward, Danielle's father David told a reporter he'd never stop pushing TriMet to improve road safety. Then, mid-interview, Sale **sprinted directly onto NW Broadway**, bellowing at a passing car. "Lights were off," Sale later explained.

SALE'S CRUSADE

<http://pdx.be/DavidSale>

3 Hopeful budget

TriMet's board embraced a new budget April 28 that'd hold its September fare hike to inflation (5¢) while **boosting service slightly on 10 crowded buses and the Blue Line**. The big catch: The budget

assumes managers win a total victory over TriMet's union. If an arbitrator sides with workers, the agency would cut \$10-\$12 million, an **exact repeat of 2010's heavy cuts**. So if that happens, which lines get hit? Hard to say – TriMet said it's planning only for the best.

LINES THAT MIGHT IMPROVE

<http://pdx.be/BusRecovery>

4 Good news

Turns out rock stars enjoy funky, walkable shopping districts, too. Midafternoon on April 19, riders on the 14-Hawthorne were startled to realize that **big-haired Led Zeppelin frontman Robert Plant**, 62, was in the bus with them. "He was riding in the back, got off at SE 30th," passenger Chris Dotson wrote that afternoon. **"Apparently he's playing Schnitzer tonight."** Next time, Chris, we're counting on you to start the "Tiny Dancer" sing-along.

ONLY ON THE STREETCAR



Margaret

me to call 911?"

At the end of it, she was sitting with her legs straight out and her back to the door, crying about how she'd lost the baby.

I thought the best thing we could have done was applaud. I think the transvestite would have taken credit. I just couldn't believe everyone was able to ignore this thing that had happened.

Except for me. I immediately wanted to call everyone I knew. It was the best thing that ever happened to me on public transportation.

But I refrained. I try not to use the phone on public transportation.

What's your favorite transit story? Write michael@portlandafoot.org.

like there was going to be blood on it. But there was nothing. I was just marveling.

When the person's talking obnoxiously on the phone, people are kind of looking and making faces. And obviously listening. But the crazier and crazier things got, the more they were thinking, *Don't make eye contact*.

By now she was throwing herself from one side of the streetcar to the other, wailing. You know how people just kind of magically float away from other people? Like opposite ions or something?

I felt kind of guilty. Like I should be like, "Oh, can I help you ma'am? Do you want

Honestly, the best thing we could have done was applaud.

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Moving pictures.

Did you catch us on Channel 8 last month? KGW did a great little spot on our ranking of downtown commuter benefits. Check it out at pdx.be/RankingsOnTV.

Not that Michael was nervous.

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Catch the drift.

Street Talk

Five questions and someone worth asking

In 2005, Ron Ruggiero lost a fight to save \$6 TriMet passes for workers he represented at Legacy Emanuel. But for the local SEIU director, it was the germ of an idea that's fascinated him since – a grand alliance between local enviros and labor unions to pressure big employers to offer better transit benefits. We met near Mount Tabor to talk blue collars, green politics and the difficulty of getting nurses' assistants on bikes.

How long would this transit campaign take?

3-5 years. You'd bring more revenue into the transit system, get more people on transit. You could imagine press conferences: "We're going to take this many tons of carbon out of the atmosphere."

What about bikes? Can you imagine making a case for cashback programs instead of free parking?

Most of our members do physical labor 8-12 hours all day. That's a different dynamic from an office worker, "Oh, I'm going to get some exercise." Transit makes a lot more sense as a first foray.

Do you get blank stares on this from labor types?

I have to care about climate change. In 20-30 years, if we don't deal with it, it's going to be a 20% reduction in GDP permanently. You're not going to have a lot of social justice in that kind of damaged economy.

So how on earth will we stop climate change?

A few years ago I got hit by this: *I've got kids*. When you ask people, "Do you want your kid to grow up in a world where there's environmental chaos?" they're going to say no. And they'll pay any money, make any lifestyle change, to make that happen.

What's your favorite Portland secret?

Hell's Belles, an all-female AC/DC tribute band – they play once a year at Dante's. I love AC/DC, and they have the right attitude.

Get in touch with Ruggiero: pdx.be/BlueGreen. Qs & As edited for brevity.

Ron Ruggiero
executive director, SEIU Local 49

follow the rabbit

As our society embraces mobile technology we are becoming more isolated from one another. The bus/MAX/streetcar ride once provided an opportunity to meet others, exchange information and expand our understanding of life. As we plug in, we tune others out. For the health of our community let's reverse the trend via a new interactive transit game!

This month's challenge: cell phone off! - 10 points

1. put bike on bus - **10 points**
2. unplug from music - **20 points**
3. talk to someone - (start anyway you can, work towards deeper topics - "what inspires you lately" is a good one) - **30 points**
4. group conversation - **10 points**
5. give directions to a fellow passenger - **20 points**

By taking a form of transit, walking or biking, you're doing a lot to help - reduce your ecological footprint, financially supporting our transit system, reducing traffic congestion, possibly making a better health choice and possibly finding a new line of work, making a new friend and building community.

Thanks for playing and taking a chance.

For future game pieces, to share your experiences of playing the game, and to re-print and share this information and for game swag and inspiration visit albertideation.com/game - game on!

Happy Year of the Rabbit!



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

The Spot Pagenwood Restoring, a furniture fix-it shop disguised as Portland's most practical antique store.

The Lines Buses 44, 45, 64.

The Times Tues-Sat, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

The Skinny Pagenwood is just one of the star attractions of Multnomah Village, a constellation of deeply quirky businesses tucked between the foothills just southwest of downtown Portland. After Washington Square mall opened in 1973, it nearly killed downtown Multnomah, an early Portland suburb that grew up around an old rail hub.

"In the process of 4 or 5 years, there was 15 antique shops that went in," said Tom Pagenstecher, Pagenwood's owner since 1983. Pagenstecher, a rock guitarist turned woodworker, has held on because of his back room: a furniture restoration business.

If the antique selection seems light on the wacky lamps, that's because Pagenstecher doesn't bother with auctions - he stocks his

shop with whatever quality goods happen to walk in his door. I sprung for a Portland-

made, government-issue paper cutter (\$15) and a Coolidge for President button (\$3) but passed on the gleaming manual typewriter (\$45) and box of tobacco pipes (\$5 each).

Lots of low-car east-siders will probably never make it to Multnomah Village. For a spot 27 minutes from Rose Quarter on the 44, that's a shame. Pagenwood's neighbors include Switch (contemporary clothing and shoes; free tea while

you shop); Sip D'Vine (wine shop, opens "1 pm-ish"); Little Shop of Drawers (jewelry); Lovin Spoonful ("Delicious pies: We make

'em, you bake 'em"); Annie Bloom's Books (the Powell's of Powell's), O'Connors (huge sandwiches, \$8) and Indigo Traders (whose inventory seems to consist mostly of soap and should probably charge people to stand outside the door and breathe).

In fact, Tye Steinbach, co-owner of Thinker Toys, thinks the lack of "one landlord pulling the strings" might be the secret of Multnomah Village's success.

"If somebody has an idea, they start a shop," said "If it turns out to be a good

one, they'll be rewarded, and they'll stay." 

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



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too smart to leave behind

Free TriMet passes for Portland Public high schoolers connect families to the schools they want, free urban parents from taxi duty, recruit the next generation of transit riders, open Portland's riches to 13,000 teens and cost 74¢ a day. As legislators talk about axing the program, will Portland families notice – until it's too late?

It's coming up on 9 a.m. at the Porter-Lang-Freeman household, and the living room is humming like a motor.

Laura, 18, is munching a doughnut. Gabby, 16, has just finished her hair. Bridgette, 15, is keeping track of the cat. All three Jefferson High students are simultaneously typing, nonstop, on their cell phones.

"It's okay if we miss this bus," Bridgette says. "There's another one behind it."

The little house, the family's 10th in 15 years, is the kind of well-kept NoPo rental that keeps a globe of the world in the living room, between the potted plants and the *Firefly* DVDs. Tania Porter, their mom, is off to PSU in the family car; Natalie, the friend who's been living with them, is already out the door, too.

This afternoon, the sisters will scatter: volleyball, softball. Gabby volunteers at the hospital. If Bridgette doesn't have a shift at Bloom's Natural Healthcare, where she works as a secretary's assistant, she might ride downtown to see her uncle.

Time to go. Bridgette Freeman swings a huge duffel bag across one hip and the three head out to catch the 4.

If she'd won an argument with her mother, Freeman would be walking to school – to Roosevelt High, less than a mile away.

"I wanted to go to Roosevelt, only because it was closer," said Freeman, ticking through their 2010 debate. "But it also had a worse reputation. But it also had a better sports team. But Jefferson was state champions."

Then Freeman was accepted into Jefferson Middle College, a program that sends Jeff students to classes at Portland Community College. And that, Freeman said, was that.

"My mom was like, 'No. You're going to Jefferson,'" she said.

Today, Freeman says she's glad she did. She loves the small, close-knit school, where she's the only freshman taking college courses, she said.

"I'm going to have my associate's degree by the time I'm a senior, for free," Freeman said, in awe. "I'm saving, like, \$40,000."

After school, she rides the 4 to volleyball practice at SEI, a nonprofit youth center off Mississippi. Her coordinator at SEI, which also offers academic support, has been impressed.

"He basically told me a couple months ago, 'Bridgette, you're on your way to valedictorian,'" Freeman said proudly.

The sun is setting over Portland City Hall, but the committee to save the YouthPass is just warming up.

Leaning on the end of the table in Mayor Sam Adams' third-floor meeting room, Todd Diskin holds up a one-page flyer he's put together at the request of the Multnomah Youth Commission.

"Your TriMet YouthPass is at risk!" it says. "Take action today!"

"The Portland Schools Foundation may be able to help with the mailing," Diskin, a 45-year-old city staffer, tells the four teens at the

table, members of the youth commission's sustainability committee. "Not with the postage, but with getting a nonprofit rate. That would mean adding their logo somewhere."

The teens pass around the flyer, a grayscale photocopy that will be printed and mailed to PPS high schoolers. It'll cost \$3,600, scraped together from the mayor's office budget.

The youth commissioners are worried. Will students understand that they're just being asked to sign and mail a postcard?

"Most students who have YouthPasses don't even know where it comes from," says Cleveland sophomore Miles Ingram. "As far as they know, it just kind of drops out of the sky."

To Freeman's family and the thousands of others that now use the passes daily, it must have seemed that way.

When Jefferson and Franklin high schools rolled out the program in 2009 – it expanded to every PPS high school and alternative school last fall – it wasn't the fruit of an expensive legislative campaign or public budget battle.

Instead, it was the work of the Multnomah Youth Commission, a low-profile group of teen volunteers who meet after school.

When former Mayor Tom Potter spent a week at Jefferson in 2008, he concluded that one of the troubled school's biggest problems was a lack of reliable transportation. One survey from earlier in the decade found that 11% of north and northeast high schoolers dropped out for transportation-related reasons.

Districtwide, 46% of PPS students fail to graduate on time.

In 2008, TriMet was free only to poor students who lived more than 1.5 miles from school and who – unlike, for example, Bridgette Freeman – attended their neighborhood school.

Potter asked the MYC to look for a solution. With the help of city staff, they found one: A state conservation tax credit, already in use in Eugene, that could be used to pay for anything that reduced auto travel.

Youth commissioners lined up meetings – TriMet, city council, school board – and explained how a bus pass can change a teen's life.

"We had ideas about this, but the MYC really spearheaded," PPS transportation director Andy Leibenguth said last month. "They got all the boards and the commissions to agree."

It worked. By 2010, the three agencies were collaborating on a \$3.5 million program to give free citywide transportation to 13,000 urban teens. Today, 80% of students say they use the passes every week.

It was a huge victory for the MYC, founded 15 years ago as one of the country's first municipal advisory bodies that consist entirely of people under 21.

"That's what put the Youth Commission on the map," said Julie Petrokubi, a political scientist at the University of Wisconsin studying the MYC for her doctoral thesis. "It's what gets the kids to come."



Round photos, from top: Bridgette Freeman, Todd Diskin, Katherine Westmoreland. All photos of Freeman by Michael Schoenholtz.

State Rep. Tobias Read has heard quite enough good ideas for spending Oregon's shrinking tax revenue.

Everyone in Oregon, the Beaverton Democrat said, has a favorite program. What they don't all have, he said, is an argument.

Read, who co-chairs the House transportation committee that may decide whether the state's keeps putting \$2.7 million toward YouthPass, said that to survive, a program has to be as important as anything else the state does.

"The argument needs to be that this is more important than days of school," Read told PortlandAfoot.org on April 5. "More important than people getting their medication."

MYC members think YouthPass, whose annual cost is about the same as three hours of a school day at Portland Public, meets Read's standard. They've got until a May revenue forecast to make their case.

TriMet, city and school district have all offered help, but none made YouthPass a top legislative priority. Though MYC members signed up to be policy advisors, not political organizers, they've taken on the task more or less alone.

In the end, said Katherine Westmoreland, a senior on the commission, the only people who understand how much YouthPass matters to teens may be teens themselves.

"I think it'd be taken a lot more seriously," she said, "if it was 13,000 voters that were going to have free bus passes taken away."

Want to weigh in? For the latest, visit <http://pdx.be/StudentPass>.

YouthPass facts

PPS high schoolers who...

13,000

...can use their ID as a TriMet pass during the school year

80%

...ride TriMet once a week or more

25%

...ride TriMet to reach a job

6%

never ride

Source: in-class PPS surveys

Weigh in

pdx.be/StudentPass

