



Public Transit in Portland: a History



Melody Owen



Chandra Bocci



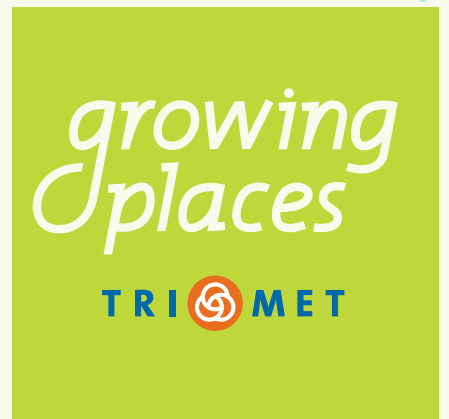
Kristin Mitsu Shiga



Hilary Pfeifer



Meredith Dittmar





Traveling through time

Dear Reader,

Transit plays a critical role in providing options for traveling throughout the region. It connects people to work, school, recreational destinations and essential services. It's not just a commuter service. It's a community asset. And the benefits extend far beyond those who ride.

TriMet's transit system is recognized as a national leader for its connection to land use. By linking land-use planning and transit, we have helped create livable communities, vibrant neighborhoods and provide alternatives to driving.

Transit is also a catalyst for economic development. More than \$10 billion in transit-oriented development has occurred within walking distance of MAX light rail stations since the decision to build in 1980. Developers like the permanence of rail when investing in projects.



Transit is also valued by the community. Most of our riders—81 percent—are choice riders. They have a car available or choose not to own one so they can ride TriMet. With more than 315,000 trips taken each weekday on our buses, MAX Light Rail and WES Commuter Rail, we eliminate 65 million annual car trips. That eases traffic congestion and helps keep our air clean. TriMet carries more people than any other U.S. transit system our size. Our many innovations have drawn the attention of government leaders, planners, transit providers and transit users from around the world.

We didn't start out that way. When TriMet was created in 1969, the former transit agency was facing bankruptcy, with dwindling ridership and little community support. Over the years, we've built partnerships with government agencies, key stakeholders, businesses and the public. This region has come together and created a shared vision that ensures transit continues to play a leading role in this region's livability and growth.

As you look through this publication, you'll see the events that have formed the history of public transportation in the Portland area. You'll also see how far we've come from our early days of horse-drawn streetcars to today with 79 bus lines, a 52-mile light rail network and the state's first commuter rail line, and where we're headed next.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Neil McFarlane". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Neil McFarlane
General Manager
TriMet

Portland's first transit system



Twenty-one years after Portland is officially founded, the city's growth prompts the need for a public transportation system. A horse-drawn streetcar line opens, running along SW 1st Avenue.

Electric streetcars begin service, gradually replacing horse-drawn, cable and steam-powered lines. Installed by land developers to promote new subdivisions, a network eventually extends out to city limits in all directions.



Interurban railway service now extends from Vancouver south to Eugene and Corvallis, and from Gresham and Troutdale west to Forest Grove and McMinnville.

Meanwhile, the "Good Roads" movement takes shape: Oregon embraces the automobile and becomes the first state to pay for roads with a gas tax.

1872

1888

1889

1893

1910

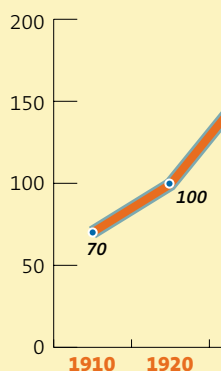
1920s

Steam-operated streetcar lines begin service, developing into a network that serves Hawthorne, Mt. Scott, Mt. Tabor, St. Johns, west Portland, and Vancouver, Washington.



A 16-mile interurban electric railway and high-voltage transmission line are constructed from Willamette Falls in Oregon City to Portland—one of the first attempts at long-distance electrical transmission, and one of the nation's first interurban electric railways. Other interurban lines follow, connecting Portland to its suburbs and outlying towns.

Rail transit ridership grows with new residential suburbs springing up around the rail lines, making the center of one urban rail system.



growing places

Several interurban rail lines discontinue passenger service as ridership declines. The aging streetcar system begins converting to buses and trolleybuses. In time, Portland enjoys an extensive trolleybus network, particularly on the east side.



The last streetcar runs as ridership drops sharply after the war. As the Portland region continues to grow, the new suburbs beyond the old transit network become increasingly dependent on automobiles, and traffic congestion soon becomes a concern.



The Columbia Region Association of Governments (CRAG), a new regional planning agency, is set up to coordinate the Portland-Vancouver Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (PVMATS). It provides the first comprehensive analysis of travel demand in the region, assuming no constraints on highway travel.

1930s

1944

1950

1958

1959

shippers peak, potential areas and growing up along the coast. Making Portland one of the largest cities in the West.

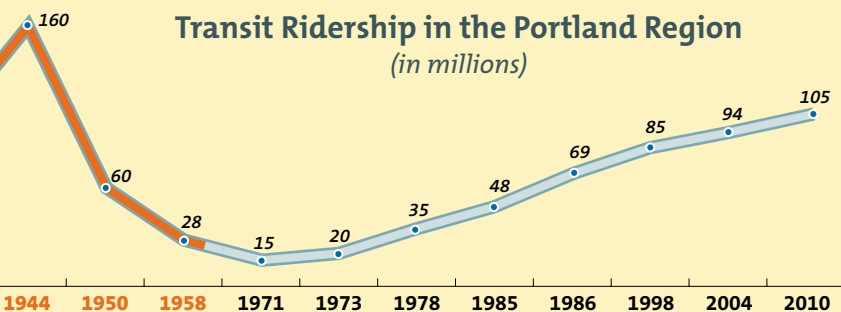


Portland-area transit ridership peaks at an all-time high during World War II, due in part to limited availability of automobiles and Portland's extensive transit infrastructure.

The pioneer interurban electric rail line to Oregon City and the trolleybuses die out as ridership declines to less than a fifth of its wartime level. The transit system now consists of gas buses operated by seven different bus companies.



Transit Ridership in the Portland Region
(in millions)





The Portland-Vancouver Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (PVMATS) results in a "Transportation Plan for 1990" that recommends 54 major new highway projects, many of them freeways and expressways. It predicts the declining bus system will remain insignificant as a transportation source except for the rush-hour commute to downtown. The Oregon Legislature adopts Senate Bill 100 establishing land-use laws to protect livability and prevent sprawl.

The newly passed Federal Aid Highway Act allows states to transfer funds from segments of the Interstate system no longer required to fund alternative road or transit projects. Shortly after, local jurisdictions formally reject the \$400 million Mt. Hood Freeway project in response to citizen outcry. The region seeks to transfer some of the funds to transit projects. The Oregon Public Utility Commission publishes a report proposing a regional light rail system based largely on existing railroad right-of-ways.

1969

1971

Early 1973

Late 1973

1974

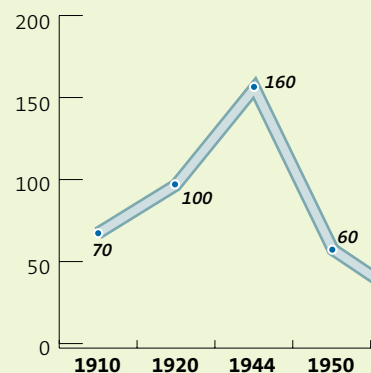
Portland's transit ridership continues to fall. The Rose City Transit Company, faced with bankruptcy, demands a major fare hike, threatening to discontinue all service. The Oregon Legislature passes House Bill 1808 allowing the creation of transit districts and providing them with the power to raise revenue through a payroll tax. The Portland region establishes the Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon, called TriMet, to take over the local bus systems and provide regional transit service.



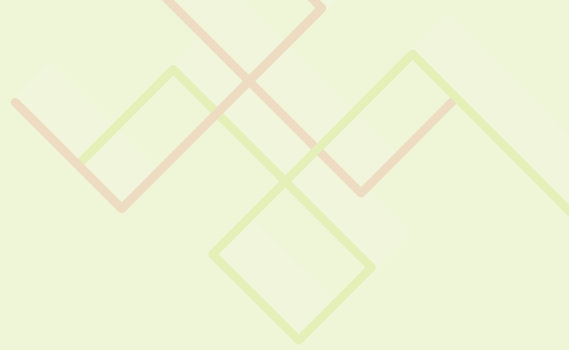
TriMet completes an "immediate action plan" and a "1990 Master Plan" to reverse the transit system's decline. It recommends consolidating all local bus service under TriMet, concentrating downtown service on transit malls along 5th and 6th avenues, building suburban Park & Ride lots, developing transitways in major corridors and expanding the number of buses.

The region sees a resurgence in transit usage as public concerns about the environment mount. Downtown parking limits are enforced, along with new emissions standards for automobiles.

TriMet is formed



growing places



Free rides downtown



Fareless Square opens, creating a fare-free zone in downtown Portland to promote transit riding within downtown. It also seeks to reduce air pollution by eliminating short auto trips.

Metro adopts the urban growth boundary (UGB) to manage regional land use and development.



Melody Owen

Banfield Light Rail—named the Metropolitan Area Express, or MAX for short—opens on a 15-mile alignment between the suburb of Gresham and downtown Portland.

1975

1978

1979

1980

1986



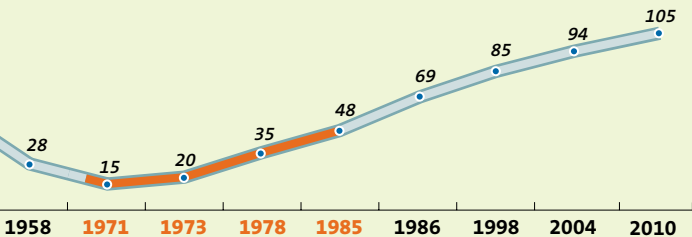
The downtown Portland Transit Mall opens on 5th and 6th avenues. Light rail is chosen for the Eastside corridor. Voters replace CRAG with Metro, an elected regional government with responsibility to plan for the region's future.



The Banfield Light Rail project receives federal approval for construction. Though used in Europe, the only modern US light rail has just opened in San Diego. Portland officials decide its bare bones treatment is not right for here and begin to develop their own approach. Metro adopts a new Regional Transportation Plan to focus growth within the UGB and around light rail.

Transit Ridership in the Portland Region

(in millions)



MAX built with freeway fund

Westside MAX construction begins with the 3-mile twin tunnels under Portland's West Hills.



Metro adopts the Region 2040 Growth Concept, focusing on increased density along major transportation and light rail corridors to avoid sprawl into farmlands. Support for a downtown streetcar line grows as close-in westside Portland neighborhoods strain from growth and urban revival.

1991

1993

1994

1995

1998



Portland's "Vintage Trolley" reintroduces streetcar service to Portland with working replicas of the Council Crest cars running on existing MAX tracks, largely as an historic attraction for visitors.

The downtown Transit Mall is expanded north of Burnside to Union Station, opening up access to Chinatown, the Greyhound Bus station and the Amtrak station, while advancing development in the area.

An 18-mile light rail extension opens from downtown Portland through the western suburb of Beaverton to Hillsboro, serving the fast-growing high-tech corridor in Washington County. The Westside MAX extension connects with the eastside line in downtown, creating a single 33-mile alignment that will eventually be called the MAX Blue Line.

Four Frequent Service bus lines are established, with service every 15 minutes or better every day.

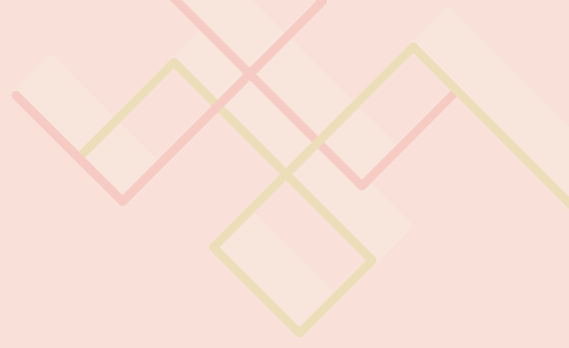
An Oregon-only light rail project to replace the original South-North extension proposal fails in the region, but is supported within Multnomah County and the city of Portland.



Chandra Bocci

Streetcars return (almost)

growing places



Airport, modern streetcar lines built



Airport MAX Red Line construction begins, as does construction of the Portland Streetcar.

Modern streetcars return to North America with the opening of the Portland Streetcar.



TRIMET

TriMet adopts a new, up-to-date look, the first change in over 20 years. The hyphen in the name is dropped, a new color palette is selected and all vehicles will boast the new look.

1999

2000

July 2001

Sept. 2001

Spring 2002

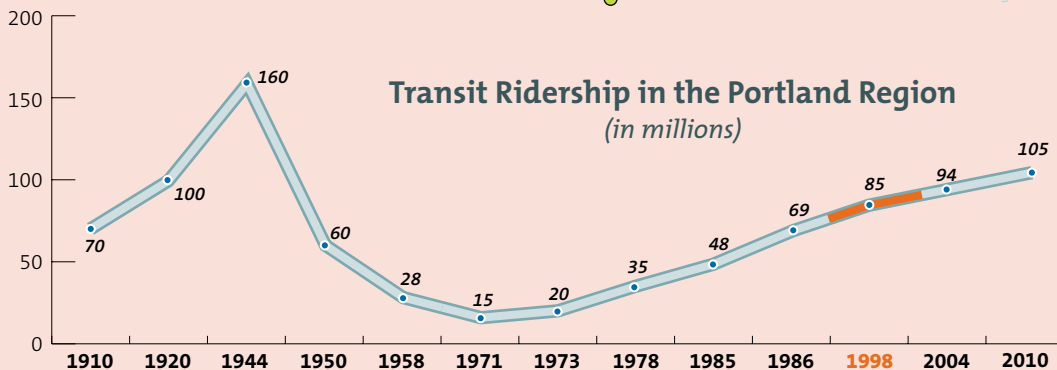


Construction begins on Interstate MAX Yellow Line, which will serve north and northeast Portland. Studies begin on a possible commuter rail line in Washington County.

Service begins on Airport MAX Red Line, the first train-to-plane service on the West Coast. Fareless Square is extended to the Lloyd District, across the Willamette River from downtown.



Kristin Mitsu Shiga



Twelve more bus lines are upgraded to Frequent Service, bringing the total to 16. Riders flock to these comfortable buses with 15-minute service, proving that adding frequency and amenities to existing routes is more effective at attracting riders than offering new, infrequent routes.



Mark Richardson Smith

Hilary Pfeifer



Interstate MAX Yellow Line opens its 5.8-mile extension from the Rose Quarter Transit Center to the Expo Center ahead of schedule and millions under budget.

Portland Streetcar passenger service is extended from Portland State University to SW Moody and Gibbs in the South Waterfront District, where it connects with the Portland Aerial Tram. The Streetcar line is six miles total, with 40 platform stops.

Fall 2002

2003

May 2004

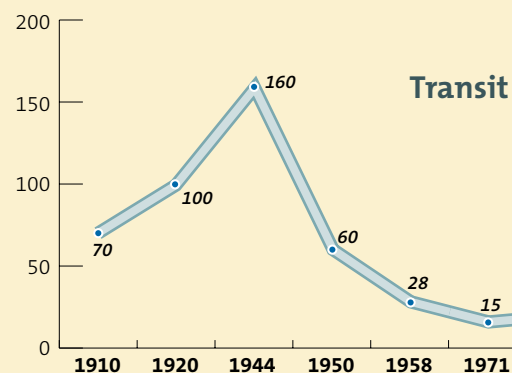
2005

Oct. 2006

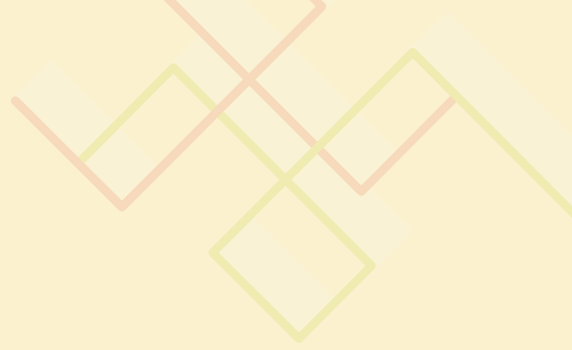


Metro and local governments approve the South Corridor Project, outlining transportation options for Clackamas County. Phase 1 includes an 8.3-mile light rail project from Gateway Transit Center to Clackamas Town Center and along the Portland Mall between Union Station and PSU. Phase 2 includes a proposed 6-mile extension from downtown Portland to Milwaukie. TriMet develops a Transit Investment Plan (TIP), a rolling five-year guide for directing transit and transportation investment in the region.

In March, Portland Streetcar was extended 0.6 miles to RiverPlace. In October, it was extended 0.6 miles to Gibbs.



growing places



The 14.7-mile WES (Westside Express Service) Commuter Rail line opened using existing freight tracks. WES is the first suburb-to-suburb commuter rail lines in the nation. It provides weekday rush hour service between Beaverton, Tigard, Tualatin and Wilsonville, connects to MAX Light Rail in Beaverton and adds a welcome alternative to I-5/Highway 217 for commuters in Washington and Clackamas counties.

Aug. 2007



Portland Streetcar is extended 0.4 miles to Lowell; the South Waterfront District. This extension lengthens the Streetcar line to eight miles total with 46 platform stops.

Feb. 2009

Construction began on the Portland Streetcar Loop Project. The Loop is a 3.3 mile extension of the Streetcar line connecting Downtown Portland to the Eastside and south to OMSI.

Aug. 2009

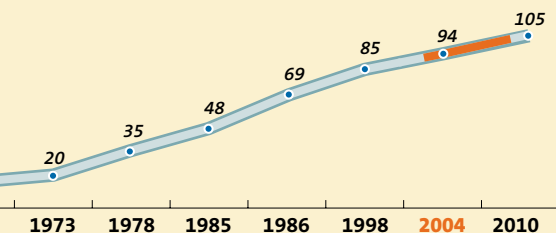
Sept. 2009

Meredith Dittmar



TriMet's fifth MAX line, the 8.2 mile Green Line opens, connecting Clackamas County to downtown Portland. It is the first light rail extension into Clackamas County and achieves the major milestone of light rail connecting all three counties in TriMet's region. The MAX system is now a 52-mile system with 84 stations.

Ridership in the Portland Region (in millions)



Future plans for public transit in Portland and the surrounding communities

The Portland-Milwaukie Light Rail Project will create a 7.3-mile light rail line connecting Portland and Milwaukie. Construction is expected to begin in 2011, with the line opening in 2015.

The Portland Streetcar Loop Project is currently under construction, and will extend service from the Pearl District in NW Portland, across the Broadway Bridge to the Lloyd Center area and south through the Central Industrial Eastside to the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry. Service is scheduled to begin in 2012.

The Columbia River Crossing is a bridge, transit and highway improvement project connecting Vancouver, Washington and Portland, Oregon. A new I-5 bridge will include a light rail line to Clark College in Vancouver. Once construction begins, it is expected to last five to seven years.

The Lake Oswego-Portland Transit Project is exploring options for improving travel between Lake Oswego and Portland, possibly by extending the Portland Streetcar along the Willamette Shore Line right of way, a former freight rail route between Lake Oswego and Portland that runs along the Willamette River.

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