



Main Office • 133 SW 2nd Ave, Ste 201 • Portland, OR 97204
Willamette Valley Office • 454 Willamette St, Ste 213 • Eugene, OR 97401
Southern Oregon Office • PO Box 2442 • Grants Pass, OR 97528

June 11, 2020

TriMet Board of Directors
1800 SW 1st Avenue, Suite 300
Portland, OR 97201

RE: TriMet 2020 Budget Priorities & Defunding Policing on Public Transit

Dear Members of the TriMet Board of Directors and TriMet Leadership,

1000 Friends of Oregon stands in solidarity with OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon, Unite Oregon, and the Portland African American Leadership Forum (PAALF), among other community of color and Black-led and organizations and organizers, in demanding TriMet to defund and end policing on public transportation, and in seeking criminal justice reform that decriminalizes using our transit system.

1000 Friends of Oregon roots our land use and planning advocacy in our mission, which “is working with Oregonians to enhance our quality of life by building livable urban and rural communities, protecting family farms and forests, and conserving natural areas.” While there are long and important racist histories in¹ farm, forest, and working lands and within urban and livable communities, as an organization we want to acknowledge that we have remained silent on the issue of policing on public transportation for too long. As people of color (POC) have rightly called out for some time, policing and systems of enforcement on public transit are integrated with systems of white supremacy. This results in differing experiences and expectations for white riders than for riders of color and, in turn, has created a system that does not create safety for riders of color and Black riders and instead directly threatens their lives and the accessibility of public transit.

Oregon’s Land Use Planning Goal 12 requires that localities provide “a safe, convenient and economic transportation system, and asks for communities to address the needs of the transportation disadvantaged.” Policing and criminalizing transit use does not meet the needs of communities of color who might be transportation disadvantaged, and makes using public transit less safe for riders of color and Black riders. We know that POC are targeted by law enforcement at higher rates; for example, in places like the Los Angeles Metropolitan Area, Black people make up 19% of the region’s riders but 60% of arrests by transit officers². Data

¹ <https://www.oregon.gov/lcd/OP/Documents/goalssummary.pdf>

² <https://la.streetsblog.org/2017/01/05/strategy-center-files-civil-rights-complaint-against-metro-fare-enforcement/>

across the nation³ shows that POC, and in particular Black people, are cited for fare evasion at disproportionate rates compared to white people.

Given that “Portland police searched African Americans at more than twice the rate of white motorists and pedestrians⁴,” it is probable that similarly disproportionate and racist outcomes are occurring on transit. The enforcement system, created to punish transit infractions, is also a racist component of our transportation system. The systemic racism is reflected in TriMet’s funding of public transit police, makes transit unsafe for the POC that do use it, and deters more from even stepping aboard a TriMet train or bus. This limits transit accessibility and undermines the goals that transit supports including: reversing historical racial marginalization, providing access to jobs, mitigating climate change, and increasing transportation safety.

It is past time to defund any part of TriMet’s budget that supports policing and enforcement, and to reinvest those funds in effective public safety strategies and transit accessibility for Black and POC communities. This challenge presents an opportunity to reimagine public safety and equity in our public transit system. Trimet can reinvest money from their police spending into service improvements for underserved Black and other communities of color in East and North Portland, fareless transit, affordable housing projects needed to offset a legacy of gentrification and displacement created from the Yellow Line and other transportation projects that forced out Black and other communities of color⁵, and safety systems such as transit ambassadors⁶ that are co-developed and overseen by the community.

Following Oregon’s Land Use and Planning Goal 1, community engagement should be at the heart of all reinvested funds, and we look to the input of POC and Black led organizations and leaders in this time to help identify how we can all work towards meaningful systems change. Dismantling racially oppressive structures within our transit system will not only make it safer for everyone, but also create a system that works better and is closer to the needs of riders.

We urge TriMet to think boldly about systematic changes that remove economic barriers to all, such as creating a police free and fareless system. We stand ready to partner and uplift the work of those who are experts as we all seek to create a more just and racially equitable transportation system. Here at 1000 Friends of Oregon, we know that we can work together to reinvest in our communities, and create bold system change that creates healthy, livable, and safe communities for all, including for Black and other people of color. All communities should have easy access to services and stores through connected pedestrian

³ <https://www.cssny.org/news/entry/findings-from-new-css-analysis-show-racial-disparities-in-fare-evasion-info>

⁴ <https://www.oregonlive.com/crime/2019/12/portland-police-more-likely-to-arrest-search-Black-people-than-white-analysis-shows.html>

⁵ Gibson, Page 6: http://kingneighborhood.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/BLEEDING-ALBINA_-A-HISTORY-OF-COMMUNITY-DISINVESTMENT-1940%E2%80%932000.pdf

⁶ <https://www.bart.gov/news/articles/2020/news20200109>

and transit networks that improve quality of life and combat climate change. These urban spaces need to be a reality for every Oregonian, including for Black and other communities of color. Dismantling oppressive structures such as transit policing is a critical first step in reimagining our transit system, creating actual public safety, and striving towards racial justice.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
1000 Friends of Oregon

Russ Hoeflich
Executive Director

Brett Morgan
Metro Regional Advocacy Manager