



Let's talk viewpoints

# How can transportation serve our communities?

## MODERATOR

**Don Hamilton**, politics and transportation reporter, Portland Tribune

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## PANELISTS

**Tom Brian**, chair, Washington County Commission

**Fred Hansen**, general manager, Tri-Met

**John Russell**, president, Russell Development Company, Inc.; Oregon Transportation Commission

**Ellen Vanderslice**, architect, AIA; president, America Walks

**Bill Wyatt**, executive director, Port of Portland

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Panelists were asked to share their overall vision for developing a transportation strategy for the region taking into account the following questions:

1. What would be the impact of your strategy on urban form (land use)? How would your strategy enhance goods movement and access to jobs? Generally, would your strategy encourage compact or diverse land use patterns?
2. How would your strategy protect or enhance neighborhoods and the environment?
3. How would your strategy deal with traffic congestion? How would it deal with reliability and service?
4. How would you fund your strategy? How does this differ from current funding priorities, policies, and legal restrictions, as you are aware of them?
5. Does your strategy require new infrastructure to accommodate growth?
6. Is there public support for your strategy? If so, describe it. If not, how would you garner and keep public support?

The panelist's written responses are attached.



**METRO**

PEOPLE PLACES  
OPEN SPACES



Fred Hansen

Fred Hansen has extensive experience in public service. Before coming to Tri-Met in October, 1998, he served for 4 years as Deputy Administrator for the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in Washington, DC where he managed EPA's day-to-day operations.

Before the EPA, he headed the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality for 10 years. He also served as Deputy State Treasurer in Salem, as well as a previous stint in Washington, DC, where he worked at the Capitol as Executive Officer of the Peace Corps.

Hansen grew up in Beaverton and graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Oregon. He has a master's degree from McMaster University in Canada and completed a year of doctorate work at the Johns Hopkins University.

The Future of our Transit System  
by Fred Hansen

2002 Regional Conference  
March 15, 2002

We have much to be proud of in our transit system today. And the regional vision does and should include transit for the future mobility of people and goods/service as well as building communities.

Overall, Tri-Met is experiencing a record growth in ridership. The Westside MAX system has exceeded all expectations in its ability to attract new riders. When we began building Westside MAX, the projections showed that we should expect 57,000 rides per day on MAX by the year 2005. We're way ahead of schedule. We surpassed the 2005 projection last May - 5 years ahead of schedule - and we're continuing to grow each month. Right now, we are probably at about where we thought we would be in 2008.

More people are taking the bus. For example, we made significant improvements in service and amenities along line 33 McLoughlin (downtown Portland Milwaukie to OC) - providing a bus every 15 minutes during the day, seven days a week. We also improved the stops and shelters and provided more information. The payback for those improvements was close to a 60 percent increase in weekday ridership from 1998 to 2001.

Overall, the number of riders using our transit system is growing about 5 percent a year. Between MAX and our buses we provided more than 84 million rides last fiscal year.

You may be asking – why should I invest more in transit? What's in it for me? I'm here to suggest that our region benefits greatly from transit investments in the metropolitan area, even if it doesn't come to your front door. Let me offer some reasons.

***Transit is what knits our community together.***

### **Connecting communities**

Part of the reason that Tri-Met - and MAX in particular - is successful is that we have built a system that takes people to places they want to go. We are fortunate in our region to have many special places that people want to visit. We connect people with jobs, with recreational opportunities, shopping, and to other people.

Two years ago, we partnered with KOIN to offer a free ride day. We saw people use the system to make connections to their community. There was the family going from Gateway to downtown on MAX for lunch, back to Gresham for dessert, then returning to Gateway to retrieve their car for the drive back home to Oregon City.

There were the two senior citizens, friends for many decades, one living in Portland the other in Vancouver, who met on a bus and decided to go to Tualatin, Tigard and King city - a chance to explore the region and places they had never visited before.

These are stories of a community knit together by our public transportation system. These trips could have been made much more easily by car, but weren't. Only when they could use our transit system did people take full advantage of exploring our region. We see people on our system every day taking their out-of-town friends and relatives to the Zoo or downtown. They take their friends on a MAX adventure to look at the deepest transit tunnel in North America. We see people every day going from East County to Hillsboro because MAX will take them there, and it is fun and interesting to ride.

They enjoy traveling by train where they can avoid the parking hassles and have time to enjoy each other's company rather than the stress of driving.

### **Connecting people to medical, shopping and events**

On September 10th Tri-Met's new Airport MAX line opened with service to within 150 feet of the baggage claim area near Alaska Airlines. This 5.5 mile extension of our light rail system is the first train to the plane on the west coast. It was made possible through a unique public-private partnership among Tri-Met, the City of Portland, the Port of Portland and Bechtel Enterprises. Although the tragic events of September 11<sup>th</sup> prevented many passengers from going to the airport, the MAX system was in place – and became the mode of choice – for hundreds of stranded passengers who needed to go to hotels and other destinations on Tuesday.

We're also seeing big increases in demand for our LIFT and medical transportation services for the elderly and disabled.

The overall numbers are remarkable, but even more important is the fact that more than half of the people who ride Westside MAX are new to transit. They take MAX not only to work, but to Blazer games and other events at the Rose Quarter; to shop downtown or at the Lloyd Center; to visit the Oregon Zoo and Washington Park; the Nature Center at our Merlo Station; to a ballgame at PGE, and now, to the airport.

### **Creating communities and jobs**

We've found that a major side benefit of making an investment in a light rail line is the transit-oriented development that comes along with it. Since Westside MAX was initiated, millions of dollars have been invested in housing and in commercial development. The TOTAL Westside Transit Oriented Development investment includes more than 8,000 new housing units and 856 million dollars.

In the Portland area, we're sitting on the edge of compliance with federal clean air standards. We can't afford to let our region slip into noncompliance. The cost is too high in terms of expensive pollution controls on industry, on limits to opportunities to expand industries and on our health. Tri-Met's service reduces about 4.2 tons per day of smog producing pollutants. This is equivalent to avoiding the imposition of about 10 million dollars a year of additional emission control requirements on existing industry. Another way to look at the air pollution benefit is that Tri-Met provide room in our airshed for about 9 new Intel type industries of 19 new Tektronix type industries. Expanding the transit system helps ensure that we stay within the limits set in the Clean Air Act and allows business to expand.

Transit gives people options to driving alone. Tri-Met help traffic planners manage congestion by taking cars off the roads and highways. Traffic management as the region grows will be crucial to how business is able to move goods and services. This helps free up our roadways for the shipment of goods and providing services. Transportation, whether it is freight mobility or the movement of people, is critical to our well-being. Freight mobility and commerce defines our economic lifblood.

Our award winning transit system helps define us as a region. MAX especially is part of our region's signature. It is part of what makes our region attractive for travelers and is essential to the livability that is a major incentive when recruiting new employees. When you see ads that picture our region in national publications, when you see the lead-in to the local TV news, you'll see MAX featured as part of what identifies this area as a great place to live or visit.

### **Growing the Transit System**

Our success brings new challenges. Because our ridership is growing, we face a constant demand for more service. In the peak commute, our most popular bus lines are crowded. MAX cars are full. Most of our Park & Ride lots are full, many filled by 7:30 AM.

Our need to add service doesn't stop with meeting the demands of increasing ridership. We are being asked to expand to growing urban centers outside the central city. We're being asked to increase service to the suburbs and to provide new service connecting suburb to suburb.

We are taking major steps to build and expand the transit system with the recent addition of Airport MAX, the Portland Streetcar that fits the size, scale and flavor of the urban neighborhoods it serves, working with Washington County on a commuter rail line and are 45% complete on Interstate MAX that will travel from the Rose quarter along Interstate Ave. through North Portland, ending at the EXPO Center. When Interstate MAX is completed in September 2004, it will provide another vital line in the region's transportation system, and bring with it major new investments in transit oriented development.

We're also making major new investment in our bus service, adding an additional 100 shelters this year. We're improving our signage and customer information. Our latest innovation, transit tracker, takes the guesswork out of bus schedules by providing the actual arrival time of the bus or train at a particular stop. Transit Tracker counts down the minutes as the bus approaches. We plan to have Transit Tracker at 70 stops in the coming year.

While we have ambitious plans to expand service and to improve amenities, we are still falling short of the need.

The Regional Transportation Plan, developed by Metro, calls for a greatly expanded bus and rail system with new service to suburbs and new service connecting suburbs to suburb. Although I've outlined our current plans to expand light rail, and build streetcar and commuter rail, it will still serve only part of the region. It doesn't go to Clackamas County. It doesn't go to Vancouver. It doesn't serve most of Washington County. And it doesn't serve Southeast Portland.

The prospects for the 21st century in the Region are unlimited. It is within our ability to preserve our livability, to continue our healthy economic life, to improve our education system, and ensure all our citizens participate fully in our prosperity. But to accomplish these things, we must create a new vision of what it means to be a part of a community and what each of us must do to make this vision a reality. To reach our goals we must be willing to invest in our public policy, our institutions and our structures.

These are exciting times with exciting questions. There is much to accomplish. The bottom line is that we need you and your ideas to keep transit working in this community.





## **How can transportation serve our communities? A vision for an overall transportation strategy**

*Ellen Vanderslice is a Portland architect and transportation reform activist who moonlights as an award-winning jazz composer. She has been a featured speaker on pedestrian issues at more than two dozen conferences and events around the world. Her architectural practice, Ellen Vanderslice A.I.A. Architect, provides services in community design and action planning for pedestrians. In 1996 she helped to found America Walks, a national non-profit coalition of local pedestrian advocacy groups, and serves as its president. She is also currently president of the Portland-area Willamette Pedestrian Coalition.*

**My family and I live on a quiet, tree-lined street where we know all our neighbors.** Within a ten minute walk of our house there's a park, a neighborhood school, a post office, at least five restaurants, a coffee shop, a copy shop, a grocery coöp, a dry cleaner, a convenience store, a preschool and community center, an art gallery, an architect's office (where I worked for four years), a small industrial plant, our credit union, my parents' home, a wilderness trail, four transit lines and a new branch library. From home, we can get downtown in twenty minutes by bus or fifteen by bicycle. We own an ancient Honda, but have the luxury of letting it sit parked most of the time.

**We could be the poster family for regional transportation choices.** Recently, invited to attend a family friend's gathering in Hillsboro, the four of us arranged to rendezvous at MAX in Goose Hollow during rush hour. My daughter and I caught the bus from our neighborhood, my husband rode from work on his bike and our son walked over from high school. The train was crowded, but as we zipped through "Preposition Pass" and got a look at the solid brake lights on the Sunset, we gave thanks for westside light rail. An eight-block stroll along the sidewalks of a pleasant Hillsboro neighborhood saw us to our destination right on time.

**My family is lucky, we live my transportation vision.** We have many options for how we travel and we have a terrific quality of life. That's partly through our own choices, but also because of many smart decisions and investments that have been made in this region in the past. Can we possibly provide that degree of transportation choice to most of the people who live in the Portland metropolitan region? I believe that we can, and I believe we must continue moving in that direction to have any hope of accommodating growth while preserving the quality of life and the natural environment that we in this region treasure.

**Imagine the future.** Imagine that, through development, redevelopment, and smart investment, we are truly able to achieve an urban fabric of walkable, bikable neighborhoods interlaced with services and employment, parks and open spaces; a fabric punctuated by compact, bustling centers linked by a comprehensive high quality transit network. Would people really walk more, bike more, ride transit more often and shop closer to home? All indicators point to yes.

**The vision has multiple benefits.** Not only is a more balanced transportation system more economical and efficient, more sustainable and easier on the environment, but there are public health consequences, related to increasing people's physical activity, and social consequences, related to decreasing people's sense of isolation, that have the potential to generate significant economic returns on our investment as well.

**Do people really want this future?** We know the residents of our region value our quality of life and our environment. We know that demographics are shifting, favoring more urban living choices. Perhaps now more than ever, people yearn for community and connection. We have the tools to deliver the places that foster these values.

**Good places alone are not enough.** Achieving our vision becomes possible when the steps we are making toward it begin to generate confidence in eventual success. Perhaps we have already entered that positive feedback loop in this region with the popularity of light rail, streetcar transit, and neo-traditional development. We need to implement more and more pieces that are consistent with the vision, and to halt anything that is not consistent, if we really want that future.

**Here are four points I think a comprehensive transportation strategy for the region should address:**

**1. We should change the way we measure success.**

"Congestion" is usually a bad word in transportation. But G.B. Arrington has pointed out that, like cholesterol, there's good congestion and bad congestion. Without activity, a retail area is dead, and lots of activity means congestion.

In 2001, the Texas Transportation Institute ranked the Portland region 8th-worst in the nation for traffic congestion. Interestingly, Portland also ranks eighth on the list of U.S. cities with the most transportation choices. If you rank the list of regions according to travel delay per person, Portland falls to 22<sup>nd</sup>. So, we may have congestion in this region, but it's not slowing us down as much as it would if workers didn't have the choice to take transit, walk and bike.

Scott Parker notes that when an empty bus goes by, some call it waste, but when a street has no cars on it, engineers give it the highest level-of-service rating, "A." Of course, we now understand that congestion is a self-regulating system. The more we try to "get our grades up" by adding capacity, the more the demand. It's time to revisit how we measure success. Who wants their streets graded "D" or "F!" But instead of aiming for empty streets, let's dump the dumb grades.

**2. We should exploit information technologies to maximize the efficiency of our existing and future transportation systems.**

In my lifetime, our collective capacity to manage information has undergone an incredible revolution. Despite the hype about Intelligent Transportation Systems, however, the real potential for applying information technology (IT) to transportation has hardly begun to be tapped.

Countries like Finland are developing the concept of “green transportation logistics,” where goods movement and deliveries make use of IT to improve efficiency and reduce impact on the road network. In this country, UPS has been a leader in applying IT to parcel delivery. Goods movement is an important part of our regional economy, and Portland could be on the cutting edge once again by developing a regional approach to managing goods movement with information technology. Granted much of the information is proprietary, so there are some hurdles to get over, but it’s worth exploring.

For transit users, information is power. Using GPS, Tri-Met now knows where its vehicles are and has just begun making that information available on the web for some routes. But IT applied to moving people could be much more. Because it could maximize efficiency, it could enable flexible transit using jitneys or vans to effectively serve areas that aren’t dense enough to support fixed transit. That, in turn, could take a load off soccer moms!

**3. We should charge users of the transportation system according to the demands they place on it.**

Most of our highway funding comes from fuel taxes, but as hybrid vehicles, electric vehicles and the other modes proliferate, we need to think again about how we collect money from system users.

A matinee is cheaper than prime time at the movies. Late night long distance is free, on some phone plans. But in the Portland region, it costs the same to travel on the highway or the bus whether you go at rush hour or in the wee hours. Does this makes sense? People should pay more to use the system when they are adding to congestion. They should also pay more to use the system when they take a greater toll on the pavement. They should pay more to use the system when they add more emissions to the airshed. They should pay more – much more! – to drive the “rat run” through a neighborhood instead of the highway.

Information technologies could make it possible to collect variable user fees that are dynamically calculated to cover the projected costs of operating, maintaining, and carefully growing the transportation system. Add in concepts like insurance-by-the-mile, and pretty soon each of us could inform our mode choice, our time of travel choice and our route choice with apples-to-apples cost comparisons.

**4. We should complete the pedestrian, bicycle and transit networks in the region.**

Networks work when they are complete and connected. The network for travel by automobile in this region is pretty well complete and connected. The same cannot yet be said for the other modes. Let’s fix that, as soon as possible.



**Bill Wyatt**  
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Bill Wyatt is the Executive Director of the Port of Portland. He began working at the Port on October 1, 2001.

A native Oregonian, Wyatt has been active in the state and region's political and business circles over the past 30 years. He represented Clatsop and Columbia counties as a member of the Oregon House of Representatives from 1974 to 1976, and he spent time doing government affairs work for the Oregon State Employees Association and the City of Portland.

In 1981, he became Executive Director/President of the Association for Portland Progress before taking over as President of the Oregon Business Council in 1987. Wyatt joined the Governor's Office as Chief of Staff in 1995. As Chief of Staff, he was an integral part of the team which oversaw the operations of the state's agencies and divisions, comprised of 46,000 employees with an annual budget of over \$11 billion. Wyatt is a board member of numerous non-profit boards, including Oregon Public Broadcasting. He has also served as Chair of the Urban League of Portland, and was a board member for Crabbe-Huson Funds.

The Port of Portland, the second oldest Port on the West Coast, provides facilities and services to move cargo and people through its five marine terminals, and four airports (Portland International Airport, Troutdale, Hillsboro and Mulino).

Although the Port boundaries are limited to Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington counties, its impacts are felt throughout the Northwest in terms of supporting thousands of jobs and strengthening the region's economy.

