



March 24, 2011

The Honorable Co-Chairs Berger and Barnhart and Committee Members:

I am writing in support of House Bill 2533, a proposal to increase the cigarette tax and increase the share directed to the Department of Transportation's Special Transportation Fund (STF).

Transportation for elders and people with disabilities fosters independent and productive lives for individuals who cannot drive or choose not to drive. It allows aging in place, which strengthens community connections and local economies and saves the State higher costs associated with assisted living. It takes frail elders and people with disabilities to medical appointments, shopping, meal sites, physical therapy, to work and to see family and friends.

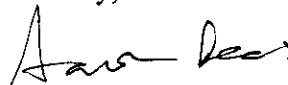
Nationwide, the baby boom is approaching retirement. In the next 25 years, the Portland metro area expects the elderly population to grow more than 150%. By 2025 one out of every five Oregonians will be over age 65. Future demand for service is growing at a rate that is unsustainable.

To help contain costs, TriMet's goal is to attract older adults and people with disabilities to ride fixed-route bus and MAX. Efforts include improving bus stops where use of transit by the elderly and people with disabilities is highest; providing free travel training and individual transportation plans; donating used vehicles to non-profit organizations that transport clients. In early 2010 TriMet opened an eligibility center in Northeast Portland to provide an in-person functional assessment. This will help TriMet determine who can ride the fixed route and who requires LIFT. The RideWise travel training program will be present to help applicants learn their fixed route options and enroll in Rider's Clubs and travel training.

Despite these efforts TriMet will not be able to keep up with demand. House Bill 2533 provides vitally important funding at a time when costs for paratransit services are beginning to skyrocket. Without this funding transit agencies and small providers around the state may be forced to reduce or eliminate service.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We urge your support of HB 2533.

Sincerely,


Aaron Deas
Government Affairs