

HB 3316 – Relating to the Governance of Tri-Met – statement in Support

Chair Read and Members of the House Committee on Transportation & Economic Development

My name is Steve March and I support the concept of changing the governance model for Tri-Met as a concerned citizen, not as the elected County Auditor of Multnomah County or as any official position of the County. This is also not about any member of the Tri-Met Board, but rather the distance between those governing and those closest to the taxpayers and users.

I received a call from a concerned citizen about how Tri-Met manages its budget, as well as personnel and raises; the caller then asked about some accountability in the process. After directing the individual to the Tri-Met website I explained that essentially there is no accountability to the public other than through a Board appointed by the Governor, who in turn appoints the Manager, and, other than budget presentation and financial audits, there appears to be no performance audits or independent review of their operations.

This is not a new situation, and the governance structure is essentially left over from 1969. Over the years, in both the late 90's and mid-2000's, these concerns have come to the surface. I had even written an opinion piece urging that Tri-Met becomes part of Metro in the 90's. While the idea has a lot going for it; the two districts are almost coterminous, Metro has an elected board, and an independently elected Auditor. I recognize it may not be the time for that, but it is the time to start thinking about giving greater accountability to the public, the taxpayers, and the users. The concept presented in the dash-1 amendments does do that. With nearly 25% of the funding comes from tax-paying businesses in the form of payroll taxes, having a board with locally appointed (or elected) members would strengthen the connections and oversight of this vital service.

I appreciate your hearing HB 3316 and considering this issue. If it is not time to pass this bill it is certainly time to study the concept and consider a stronger governance model for this century.

Thank you.

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