



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

HB 3316-A

Chief Sponsor: Rep. Gorsek

Sponsors: Rep. Hoyle, Rep. Parrish

House Committee on Rules

Public Hearing May 8, 2013 3:00 p.m., Hearing Room 50

Good afternoon Chair Garrett and members of the committee. For the record, I'm Chris Gorsek, State Representative for House District 49, which includes the cities of Troutdale, Wood Village, Fairview, and Gresham.

House Bill 3316-A is a bill with a simple goal, to improve the accountability and responsiveness of the TriMet board by increasing local control through a new appointment process. Under this legislation, the new board would have two appointments each from Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington Counties, the Metro Board, and the City of Portland. The governor would retain one appointee. Multnomah County's appointees must reside outside the city limits of Portland.

By giving appointments to local governments, we increase TriMet's accountability to the elected officials it works with on a daily basis, increase the access that riders have to the bodies that appoint board members, and improve geographic balance. As board members make decisions on modes of transportation, service cuts, and fare increases, riders need to know that their concerns will be heard. It is much easier for them to lobby their city councilor, metro board member or county commissioner, than it is to lobby the governor or a TriMet board member.

In addition to geographic imbalance, currently half of the current board members live in Portland, board members do not provide a decent representation of the riders TriMet serves. A 2012 Oregonian survey asked the board this question, "How frequently do you ride TriMet?" Only one member was a frequent rider. The remaining answers were; "very little", "several times a month", "occasionally", "weekly or less", "weekends", and "about once a month." How can board members who do not use TriMet on a regular basis truly represent the needs of TriMet riders?

Now, this bill is not just about this board or this governor. This bill is about the board a decade from now, about governors who will be elected 10, 15, and 20 years from now. Having spoken to TriMet several times during the course of this bill, it is clear that various governors have different levels of interest in the board. While the interest of various governors may change, I can guarantee you that the local governments included in this bill will always have a vested interest in doing their due diligence when selecting board members.

There are systemic, long-term problems that have not been addressed properly by past and current TriMet Boards. Decisions like the inordinate focus on light rail at the expense of more flexible bus lines, a gambit on a diesel contract that lost TriMet millions of dollars, and the construction of light rail stations that are open and do not require the purchase of a pass to access, losing TriMet revenue and posing a security risk for riders.

I understand that this bill addresses a large problem and that TriMet has numerous issues that it must address. However, keeping the status quo of a governor appointed board, the process that created boards that led TriMet into its current predicament, is a mistake. The people who live within the boundaries of TriMet deserve better and I hear their concerns time and time again when I'm knocking on doors, attending town halls, or just out in my district. The time to address these concerns is now and HB 3316 provides a way to do so.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify today.

