



Date: March 11, 2015

To: Chair McKeown and members of the House Committee on Transportation and Economic Development

RE: Support for Student Transit Pass Funding and HB 2979 and HB 2639

Thank you for the opportunity to support funding for a student transit pass program, and specifically HB 2979 and HB 2639. I would like to provide background on TriMet's current program.

The Student Pass Program has been a collaborative partnership between TriMet, the Portland Public School District (PPS), and the City of Portland. Since 2009, over 12,500 high school students in the PPS District have received free transit passes. The Pass Program was created and initially fully funded through a State of Oregon Business Energy Tax Credit (BETC) program. However, since elimination of the BETC funding in 2011, the program has been approved only on a year-to-year basis, and has survived through the contributions of the participating partners.

Without access to regular yellow school bus service that is available to other school districts, the Student Pass Program serves as a vital link for PPS high school students to get to school, to become engaged in community activities, and to take advantage of employment opportunities across the region. The program is extremely well utilized, as over 90% of students report using TriMet.

Many students rely on TriMet as their primary source of transportation to get to school, and have been doing so since PPS received a waiver for yellow bus service under ORS 527.043. TriMet has long provided additional transit service to schools during peak morning and afternoon travel times to support students and reduce crowding on vehicles. Funding to operate the program and replace the lost revenue from free student passes, however, has been unpredictable and renewed only annually. The cost of the program is \$2.9 million per year, of which each partner currently contributes one-third, or nearly \$1 million.

TriMet supports the creation of a student pass program that provides a dedicated long-term funding solution to preserve and expand the student transit pass program. Other student in our region could benefit from an expanded program and HB 2979 and HB 2639 are different but important concepts that begin to address this need.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Aaron Deas".

Aaron Deas
Manager, Government Affairs