

If you have an opportunity to ride the MAX, Yellow line, or any MAX light rail line, it's very helpful to understanding. Clark County residents have voted AGAINST light rail. It costs \$MILLIONS per mile to construct

## The MAX Yellow Line: A Look Back After 15 Years

September 12, 2019

TriMet's MAX Yellow Line first opened 15 years ago in May 2004. The Yellow Line's Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) made a myriad of predictions for the year 2020, which makes now the perfect time to reflect on what officials promised and what taxpayers and transit riders have since received.

### **Yellow Line History**

The Yellow Line originated in 1988 as a 21-mile project connecting Vancouver, Washington with Downtown Portland and Clackamas Town Center. This plan was scrapped after [Clark County voters defeated a proposal to raise \\$236.5 million in 1995](#) and Oregon voters turned down a \$475 million regional ballot measure in 1998.

Not to be deterred by a lack of voter support, officials developed a shorter alternative in 1999 that would run from the Expo Center to Downtown Portland along Interstate Avenue. This alternative cost \$350 million, 74% of which came from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

The construction of the new alternative was not put to a public vote. Portland officials instead expanded an urban renewal district to include the Interstate Avenue Corridor. Doing so allowed them to appropriate \$30 million in tax increment funds to finance the rail that otherwise would have gone to other tax-collecting jurisdictions, including Multnomah County. The county commissioners opposed expansion of the urban renewal district, but the Portland City Council approved it anyway.

Looking back after fifteen years, we find that key promises made in the FEIS were never kept:

### **1. Frequency of Service**

What We Were Promised: TriMet promised FTA in their Full-Funding Grant Agreement (FFGA) that peak-hour trains would arrive every ten minutes and off-peak trains every 15 minutes. The promised service according to the FEIS was supposed to reach eight trains during peak hours in 2020.

*What We Received:* Instead of having 10-15-minute headways between trains, the Yellow Line runs every 15 minutes during peak-periods and every 30 minutes during other parts of the day.

## **2. Travel Times**

*What We Were Promised:* TriMet predicted travel times to be 24 minutes from Downtown Portland to the Expo Center and 19 minutes from Downtown Portland to N Lombard.<sup>[1]</sup> Light rail speeds were projected to reach 15.3 miles per hour (mph), and bus speeds were projected to be 13.2 mph in 2005.<sup>[2]</sup>

*What We Received:* Actual travel times are slower than predicted. It takes 35 minutes to take light rail from Downtown Portland to the Expo Center and 28 minutes from Downtown Portland to N Lombard, even though light rail has its own exclusive right of way. Actual travel times are 45.8% greater to the Expo Center and 47.4% greater to N Lombard. Actual light rail speeds in the corridor only hit 14.1 mph in 2005 while bus speeds averaged 16.1 mph—significantly faster than predicted.

## **3. High ridership**

*What We Were Promised:* The FEIS forecasted ridership in the corridor to dramatically increase with the building of the Yellow Line. By 2020 the line's ridership was expected to have 18,100 average weekday riders.

*What We Received:* At no point since the Yellow Line opened has ridership met projected levels. In April 2019 ridership only reached 13,270, 26.7% less than projected. This number will not meet 2020 projected levels based upon the negative trend observed over the past three years. From March 2016 to March 2019 ridership levels decreased by 3.6%.

Lower than promised ridership isn't unique to the Yellow Line; every TriMet rail forecast has been wrong, and always wrong on the high side.

See link in title for graph of ridership, and full article.