

February 12, 2024

Senator Floyd Prozanski
Senate Judiciary Committee
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support for SB 1553-1

Chair Prozanski and Members of the Committee:

TriMet is Oregon's largest transit agency, providing more than 1.2 million trips per week to Oregonians across the tri-county Portland metro region. The impacts of the addiction crisis that is ravaging communities across the state are spilling onto Oregon's public transportation systems, including TriMet's. Despite a significant expansion of security presence on our vehicles and property, open drug use has become commonplace throughout our system: TriMet's Safety & Security team received an average of over 260 incident reports per month related to drugs and alcohol from October-December 2023. In light of these challenges, TriMet is supporting SB 1553-1, which would apply the crime of Interfering with Public Transportation (IPT) to the use of illicit drugs on public transit.

Public transportation must feel safe and accessible for everyone, and particularly for the families, essential workers, high school students, individuals with disabilities, and other Oregonians who depend on transit as a lifeline to jobs, education, and essential services. Transit riders and employees should not have to worry about the unpredictable and potentially dangerous behavior of people who are using illicit drugs on public transit systems, nor fear the potential for health risks due to exposure to drug fumes and paraphernalia.

The safety of our riders and employees is of paramount importance to TriMet. Over the last few years, we have gathered feedback from our riders, community-based organizations and the public through our Reimagining Public Safety initiative. Informed by that process, we have made enormous investments and improvements in our safety and security efforts:

- TriMet's FY 2024 safety and security budget is twice the size of our FY 2020 budget, and we have more than doubled the size of our security workforce since the start of 2022.
- We now have more 360 people spread across our various safety and security teams, and we will be hiring additional personnel in the coming year.
- As part of that increase in personnel, TriMet has expanded code enforcement to 24 hours a day.
- We've created a new security operations center that allows riders to report concerning behavior and interact with our security teams 24/7.

- Our 60-person Safety Response Team specifically focuses on identifying people on and around our transit system who in crisis and connecting them with addiction, counseling and housing resources.
- TriMet joined and helped fund a first-of-its-kind study by the University of Washington analyzing fentanyl and methamphetamine residue in the air and on surfaces inside transit vehicles.
- TriMet has more than 8,000 security cameras throughout its system—on all buses and trains, at transit centers, park and rides and inside elevators. Most TriMet buses have monitors in the priority seating area that show camera views from inside the bus to discourage inappropriate behavior.
- TriMet contracts with law enforcement agencies in the jurisdictions it serves to assign officers to the Transit Police Division, which is led by the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office. Transit Police patrol the system and respond to emergencies, investigate crimes, and partner with other law enforcement agencies to conduct safety missions at public safety hot spots along TriMet's system.

Despite all these investments and initiatives, TriMet's annual Attitude & Awareness survey shows that the open use of illicit drugs on and near our transit system has led to a more than 30% drop in riders feeling safe on TriMet buses and trains over the past six years. The declining perception of safety on transit also extends to the broader Portland area community, where only 18% of non-riders currently feel that transit is safe. Twenty-three percent of survey respondents specifically mentioned drug use on TriMet vehicles and at stations.

A transit system is a unique type of public space because people are confined when they ride transit. Unlike sidewalks and other open public spaces, transit riders must wait at designated transit stops and stations, making it difficult to avoid exposure to illicit drug use. For this reason, and because many people depend on public transportation to get around, drug use on transit creates more harm than it does in other public spaces. We believe a more significant consequence is necessary to create a clear understanding that drug use is not permissible on public transportation.

TriMet recognizes the importance of a health-centered approach to addressing substance use disorders. Senate Bill 1553-1 intentionally classifies drug use on transit as drug-designated misdemeanor, allowing individuals convicted of the crime to access state-funded treatment in many instances. Additionally, TriMet security teams are comprised of unarmed personnel trained in de-escalation, and our Safety Response Team is specifically focused on identifying riders in crisis and connecting them with addiction, counseling and housing resources. However, in situations where law enforcement involvement proves necessary, this bill will provide them with the tools they need to effect behavioral change and help keep illicit drug use off transit.

TriMet understands that the addiction crisis facing our state is a complex problem that requires a myriad of long-term solutions. In the near term, we and the communities we serve need help from the state to reclaim our public spaces, including transit, for the collective benefit of all. We

are grateful to the Legislature's attention to these challenges in the 2024 Session, and TriMet looks forward to our continued partnership with you on this effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sam Desue, Jr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sam Desue, Jr.
General Manager
TriMet