

Jonathan Maus ([00:00](#)):

Welcome to the BikePortland Podcast. I am your host, Jonathan Maus. We need to talk about transit, specifically about the new fare increase that the TriMet board of directors passed at their meeting on Wednesday of this week. You might have seen the coverage on BikePortland where I was actually at the meeting and they raised the fare about 30 cents across the board, not everything went up. Annual and monthly Hop Pass users did not see an increase, but for the most part, as of January 1st next year, transit just got more expensive in Portland. It's a big deal, right? Because the mode of transportation we use is all about competition. As the price of a specific mode goes up, there are some people that makes it less attractive to them and they can't afford it and they've got to do other things.

([00:46](#)):

In this case, you can make the argument that if folks can't afford to ride transit, they are going to be more likely to try to get inside of a car or even in a lot of cases, maybe not make that trip, not get to the hospital, not go meet a friend, not go over to the park, and so on and so forth. We are a low car news outlet. We cover everything having to do with folks that are trying to live without driving so much. Talking about transit and covering transit is something we've always done and I think this fare hike issue is definitely something that is worth our attention. Let's back up a bit. The context here is that TriMet, a lot of other transportation agencies we've been doing coverage about the city of Portland's books in their budget is in very, very bad shape.

([01:27](#)):

That actually deserves its own podcast episode, as well. I'm working on that, but TriMet, also PBOT, and also the Oregon Department of Transportation, to some degree, they are stuck in this place. This really awkward, I hope it's a transitory place. I hope it's a transition to something better. But essentially the funding model for funding transportation in America, it's just really broken and I don't think it matters if you're TriMet, PBOT, ODOT, whatever. We just in this country for some reason have not found a way to really have people understand the value of transportation and fund it in a responsible way. Now, the basic issue that these agencies share is that it's easy for them to get big federal grants for big capital projects like a new bridge or in the case of TriMet, a new MAX line, but it's not that easy and they don't tend to prioritize operations and maintenance.

([02:25](#)):

When I talk about operations from a TriMet perspective, that's stuff like paying bus drivers, paying people to keep transit stations clean, paying to improve safety on the system so that when folks do ride transit, they feel good about it and have a good experience. There's lots of different operational costs that go with these pieces of infrastructure, but unfortunately the way the funding is set up, it's all basically geared toward the big shiny projects. We know what this is like with the Federal Highway Administration building a massive freeway system but not really having the money to maintain it. Now, those bills are due and we aren't able to pay them. There is this problem that we don't have enough money to operate these systems that we build. The other big thing is that sometimes the revenue sources themselves are problematic.

([03:11](#)):

Actually on some of those big federal grants, the local transportation agencies aren't able to just do what they want with that money. There are very strict strings attached to these big federal grants. They can't be flexible with them and maybe fill a budget hole over here with them or use them to make payroll or something like that. These big federal grants are not flexible. They can't be used in a discretionary way, but also another big issue, and there are parallels here between TriMet and let's say PBOT is again where the money is coming from. In a perfect world, some people may say, "We don't

need transit fares," but from TriMet's perspective, even if there are people on the TriMet board that wanted to go fareless, they, it's hard for them to walk away from that fare box revenue.

[\(03:55\)](#):

It may seem like a small drop in the bucket, but in the relative to their operating budget, it's actually important for them in the short term. If you go to a TriMet board member or I'm sure TriMet leadership, trim staff, they would kind of freak out if you were to take away that whatever it was almost 5 million a year in farebox revenue. Then in PBOT's case, an example of that is how PBOT is very committed to reducing their climate change impacts and getting people out of cars, yet both of their main discretionary sort of local funding sources, both of their revenue sources come from what? Driving cars, so right gas tax and parking fees. This tension between where the revenue comes from and the policy goals that these agencies might have, those are just some reasons why the funding of the transportation system is sort of inherently broken and problematic.

[\(04:45\)](#):

But let's zero back in on TriMet specifically and this fare hike they voted on this week. From TriMet's perspective, they say that it was long overdue. They say that the new increase, which makes an adult fare about \$2 and 80 cents, there was actually one of the board members at the meeting before casting her yes vote. She was saying that if you actually did the math according to inflation, a \$2 and 80 cent fare today is basically exactly the same as the whatever it was, 30 or 60 cent fare back in like 1969. From TriMet's perspective, this was simply a procedural move. They needed to increase the fares to help offset some of the losses they're having and help them continue to fund the operational side of their system. According to the ordinance that was actually voted on, their maintenance and operation costs have increased on average by about 4.2% annually over the last decade.

[\(05:42\)](#):

About 13.8 million increase on average every year. They're saying it includes stuff like beefed up security on their system. They do get payroll taxes and income from the federal government and other agencies and they, of course, get all sorts of grants and other things to run their system. Recently, they've also gotten money from federal stimulus funding, which they say will be depleted at the end of this fiscal year, but they say that the fare revenue is still a very important part of their operating budget and actually the sources that they use for operation haven't kept pace with their expenses. According to TriMet, they'll start experiencing a deficit as early as their fiscal year in 2026 and they say quote, "At that point, current levels of operations and service delivery will not be sustainable." For all these reasons, TriMet says a fare increase is necessary.

[\(06:36\)](#):

Interestingly enough, TriMet's own equity analysis found that this fare increase would indeed have a disparate impact on low income rider and riders from certain ethnic minority groups, but they were able to go forward with it anyway because they say they're putting in some mitigations to help out those riders who are impacted, like expanding the locations where you can buy a Hop card, maintaining the current monthly fare caps across all the different kind of fares that they have and having other kind of discount programs and improving other kind of discount programs like their Honored Citizen program and their LIFT program and things like that. Like I said, six board members voted for it, one voted against it. That's sort of TriMet's side. They are saying that their financial picture is bad enough that if they don't have this fare box revenue, they're going to be in really bad shape.

[\(07:27\)](#):

Notably TriMet says that they get about 4.9 million every year just through fare income alone. They're saying if they turn the spigot off for fare income, they're going to be down almost \$5 million a year. They say that that will have a pretty big impact on their ability to operate their system if they don't have it. But from the other side of the coin, of course there are transit activists and other folks who rely on transit who just think this is the absolute wrong direction to go and they've fought it pretty hard. OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon who they have a campaign called Bus Riders Unite. They've been organizing folks to speak up against the fare hike. Back in December, we actually ran on BikePortland a guest opinion from a member, one of the organizers with OPAL's Bus Riders Unite campaign, someone named Tristan Isaac.

[\(08:21\)](#):

He's very critical of TriMet's motives here. I'm going to just quote from part of his op-ed. It said, "Fares function less as a critical source of revenue and more as a convenient justification to control who is allowed to ride the transit system by criminalizing homelessness and poverty." Their op-ed goes on to say that "We can surmise that the issues at TriMet stem largely from a lack of visionary leadership rather than a lack of resources." Then the opinion got pretty directly critical of board board members themselves. Where when it said, "With a few exceptions, the board of directors is assembled of retirees, paper pushers and functionaries with dubious qualifications and problematic opinions." Wow. That is from a guest opinion from somebody with OPAL's Bus Riders Unite campaign. It was clear even back in December that these two forces were kind of like coming to a head and that the TriMet board and folks from OPAL were going to meet in a way that was pretty acrimonious and we definitely saw that come to a head on Wednesday.

[\(09:28\)](#):

On Wednesday at the meeting, it opened up as a normal meeting. There was a public forum where people testified, I think almost everyone that testified from the public was against the fare hike, but while these folks were testifying, there was a rally forming over in Waterfront Park and then the protestors in that rally again, which was organized by OPAL, they marched over to the meeting, came into the meeting, and then the fireworks really started. Folks were yelling, they had signs and they were kind of walking into the front of the meeting. At several occasions, the leader of the board, I believe her name is Dr. Linda Simmons, she just got up and left pretty quickly. But before I kind of go through what happened in the day, let's stick to the timeline and I'll share just a snippet of a few of the folks that showed up to the public hearing to testify. I want to give you a sense of what their arguments against the fare hike were. This first person introduced themselves as Thomas Craig, someone who's ridden TriMet buses for 30 years,

Thomas Craig [\(10:29\)](#):

Vote no on Ordinance 374 and then tomorrow vote with the voice you've been given in every venue you can to find the new long-term multi-billion dollar operational.... Because I have 30 seconds, I'm going to say that word again, operational investments, we need to accomplish the goals we all have. Thank you.

Jonathan Maus [\(10:51\)](#):

This next person is Jay Amici, there with a nonprofit called Unite Oregon. Listen to how she lays out the case for people who are transit dependent and are also on low incomes and don't have any other way to get around.

Jay Amici [\(11:04\)](#):

As someone who depends on public transit to commute and perform daily activities, I'm disheartened that members of this board who are not themselves transit dependent, are considering a fare increase which has a disproportionate impact on low income communities, communities of color, and the environment. While the fare increase may appear to be a small matter, the ramifications are far-reaching, as many have already said. As inflation balloons out of control, more and more people in our community face financial challenges and increasing the cost of public transit would only exacerbate this financial burden. This issue extends beyond matters of economic justice. It is a matter of racial equity, as individuals like myself from communities of color are more likely to depend on public transit as their primary mode of transportation. The bus is pretty much the only public space in Portland that I regularly experience as majority black.

[\(11:54\)](#):

I know that claims have been made that discounts will be available for low income individuals and families. To that, I respond that the poor are not circus animals. We shouldn't have to jump through hoops on your command to access basic services and needs. You may not know this, but it can be a cumbersome process to access discount programs which often require filling out confusing paperwork, traveling across town to a benefits office and waiting in long lines.

[\(12:19\)](#):

Public transit is a public benefit and it should be available without the need to sort through mounds of red tape. Moreover, increasing fares will have a negative impact on the environment. We all know that transportation is one of the biggest sources of greenhouse gas emissions, and TriMet needs to be doing everything in their power to encourage more people to take public transportation, not less. Instead of raising fares, you must explore alternatives that move away from punitive measures such as fare enforcement and make fares accessible to all. It would boggle the mind that you would stake your political integrity on such an inequitable ordinance because is this how you want to be remembered? As the people who made life more difficult for those who are already suffering in a difficult time?

Sam Butler [\(13:00\)](#):

My name is Sam Butler. I am a student at Portland State University. On a personal note, the affordable fares on TriMet services are one of the main things that allows me to live in the city without owning a car and contributes greatly to making college somewhat affordable and convenient for me. I know many other students that feel the same way. Have courage, listen to your constituents today and consider a move towards fareless transit, as other cities are doing.

Jonathan Maus [\(13:26\)](#):

As you could hear, there are quite a diverse range of opinions against this thing, but like I said, as these folks were testifying, there was a rally that had started across the street in the Japanese American Historical Plaza in Waterfront Park, and I talked to a few folks there too, just to kind of get a vibe.

Speaker 5 [\(13:41\)](#):

What do we want?

Crowd [\(13:41\)](#):

No fares.

Speaker 5 [\(13:41\)](#):

What do we want?

Crowd ([13:41](#)):

Free transit.

Speaker 5 ([13:41](#)):

When do we want it?

Crowd ([13:41](#)):

Now.

Speaker 5 ([13:41](#)):

What do we want?

Crowd ([13:41](#)):

Free transit.

Speaker 5 ([13:41](#)):

When do we want it?

Crowd ([13:41](#)):

Now.

Speaker 5 ([13:41](#)):

[inaudible 00:13:55].

Jonathan Maus ([13:58](#)):

Can you tell me what brought you out today?

Speaker 6 ([14:01](#)):

Because I believe that transit should be free, simple answer.

Amanda Brios ([14:07](#)):

I'm Amanda Brios, and I would prefer there not be a increase in fares.

Jonathan Maus ([14:13](#)):

What do you make of TriMet's argument that they desperately need this fare increase to kind of stay above water?

Amanda Brios ([14:18](#)):

Well, I know they have issues with finances, but this is not a way to go about it as far as I'm concerned. I've been riding TriMet since I was 15 years old and I really like it and I really rely on it. Now, that I have less income, I'm really concerned about fares going up. I love TriMet, but I don't love a fare hike idea.

Speaker 8 ([14:39](#)):

Well, I'm tired of watching the planet be incinerated, and I see this as another step in the depraved and kind of nonchalant, feckless attitudes of bureaucrats and the [inaudible 00:14:56] of the bourgeois sitting on the board there looking for ways to patch their budget, which will not offend the people who have the resources that they need to discourage in order to make public services functional.

Jonathan Maus ([15:09](#)):

If TriMet was to say, "Okay, we're not going to do the fare hike and there's going to be some short-term service cuts, but we're going to work in earnest to find a different revenue model and move toward reducing fares as we supplant, as we subsidize in other ways," would you be willing to accept a short-term service reduction?

Speaker 8 ([15:26](#)):

I think personally that would be preferable, but I'm not going to speak for all of the riders. You'd have to look. I think that there might be routes, maybe the routes that are frequented by people who are very affluent. I don't want to hit working class people with service cuts, but it's potentially possible. There's things like the West, which is a complete disaster, it's a nightmare. It's a budget loser, probably it should just be shut down altogether. But there's definitely places where I could see potentially service diminution to save money, as you say, in order to patch over to a different revenue model that can address their budget shortfalls. Yeah, I think it's conceivable.

Jonathan Maus ([16:15](#)):

What do you think next step for activists like you folks that really care about this?

Speaker 8 ([16:19](#)):

I think we need about a thousand people here instead of 40 people, maybe a couple of thousand. We need many thousands of people to descend on them and scare the living crap out of them. That's the answer, the only way that change has ever come about in any societies.

Jonathan Maus ([16:39](#)):

As this rally walked over and came into the meeting, things got tense pretty much as soon as board president Linda Simmons started reading the ordinance number for the fare hike. You can hear the folks in the back of the room start demanding a vote and other things in this clip right here.

Linda Simmons ([16:55](#)):

On Ordinance 374 regarding a fare increase proposal. And I'm going to ask general counsel Shelly Devine to read the ordinance by title only.

Shelly Devine ([17:06](#)):

Thank you, Ms. Board President. Ordinance number 374 of the Tri-County Metropolitan-

Crowd ([17:12](#)):

[inaudible 00:17:16].

Linda Simmons ([17:17](#)):

Please.

Shelly Devine ([17:18](#)):

Ordinance-

Linda Simmons ([17:20](#)):

Please...

Crowd ([17:20](#)):

[inaudible 00:17:25]

Linda Simmons ([17:25](#)):

Please refrain.

([17:25](#)):

Okay.

Jonathan Maus ([17:36](#)):

At that point, the board president had had enough and she just picked up her stack of papers and walked out with the rest of the board members. For a while, I think people assumed that they would come back and it would be just a temporary recess, but it was kind of awkward in the room. There were a bunch of people in suits who were like TriMet staff and other interested folks, and then you had all the protestors and a few minutes passed and there were people yelling into mics and kind of trying to use that platform to talk about why they oppose the fare hikes and whatnot. Then one of the protestors realized that the entire board was just in a different meeting room that was basically right across the hallway. Everybody got up in mass and marched over to right outside that door. This is what that sounded like.

Speaker 11 ([18:20](#)):

Hey, the board members are in the room 150 right outside this door if we all want to go outside the door.

Crowd ([18:25](#)):

Free transit.

Jonathan Maus ([18:37](#)):

Then the protest intensified and it moved into the hallway right outside the room where the board members were meeting.

Crowd ([18:47](#)):

Free transit. Rate increase is not fair.

Jonathan Maus ([18:56](#)):

As this started, there was one official who was with TriMet in some capacity. I was never able to get his name or his title, but he came out into the hallway and thought that he'd be able to sort of broker some kind of peace deal between the protestors and the board members.

Speaker 12 ([19:11](#)):

Hey guys, we got an update for you.

Lee Helfin ([19:14](#)):

No fare increase, right?

Speaker 12 ([19:15](#)):

But I was thinking, so what we're trying to do is to come back into an environment in here where the vote can just proceed and the board's ready to do that, but what they need is at least not people moving forward. You guys can... You got signs and you can be loud, you can state your opinion.

Jonathan Maus ([19:34](#)):

He had this idea that if the protestors would just be willing to agree to some modicum of respect for the board members that they would be able to come back out into the room and have the meeting in public. In this next clip, you'll hear from that TriMet rep and then you'll hear from Lee Helfin who is the executive director of OPAL.

Speaker 12 ([19:54](#)):

We can go back in and you know guys can be there. Does that does that sound all right? We'll move back into the room. You guys will be there. It'll be on TV. You guys will be able to state your opinion and we'll move on.

Speaker 19 ([20:04](#)):

Yes.

Speaker 14 ([20:04](#)):

Yeah, we welcome that. Lee, if we want to make a comment before we go in there?

Speaker 12 ([20:08](#)):

Will we be quiet if we got it?

Lee Helfin ([20:10](#)):

Listen, these board members, did any of you vote for these board members?

Crowd ([20:14](#)):

No.

Lee Helfin ([20:14](#)):

What are we voting here today? We're voting on a fare increase. Are any of you in support of a fare increase today?

Crowd ([20:23](#)):

No.

Lee Helfin ([20:23](#)):

That is your vote. That is the vote that's happening today.

Jonathan Maus ([20:28](#)):

There didn't seem to be a lot of agreement or willingness to talk from the OPAL protestors at that point, but ultimately the meeting did get started at least one more time, where the board members came back out into the room to have the meeting in public. But then once it came time for board members to sort of do their remarks right before they were going to vote, it only lasted for about two or three board members before the crowd started getting rowdy again and started yelling and sort of heckling. There was this sense that they were live fact checking the board members and calling them on stuff as they would talk. They were generally not letting them speak as they were trying to explain their various rationales for why they were going to vote yes on the fare hike. Once again, the board president got up and left, but not before she gave the protestors like a stern warning.

Linda Simmons ([21:19](#)):

This is your last warning that if you are disruptive and interfere with any of us talking, this meeting will be recessed and go virtual so that you won't actually be present when the vote is taken, so that's that.

Speaker 19 ([21:38](#)):

You don't respect the people? You don't respect our voices?

Linda Simmons ([21:43](#)):

You don't respect our voice.

Crowd ([21:44](#)):

We haven't-

Linda Simmons ([21:51](#)):

We have not had a chance. We have not had...

Crowd ([21:52](#)):

[inaudible 00:21:56].

Linda Simmons ([21:55](#)):

We're volunteers and we showed up, but we can't do our job if you can't let us.

Lee Helfin ([22:03](#)):

You can't do your job without listening to us and valuing us, and working for us.

Linda Simmons ([22:08](#)):

Okay, I'm going to stop this right now and we're going to continue and I'm going to speak next, and if any one of you opens your mouth-

Crowd ([22:15](#)):

So disrespectful. [inaudible 00:22:15] Linda.

Linda Simmons ([22:15](#)):

This is your test.

Crowd ([22:15](#)):

Does that make yourself feel powerful?

Linda Simmons ([22:15](#)):

First I want to thank all of you who've been a part of this process. You've only been a part of this process for six months.

Crowd ([22:41](#)):

Oh, no we haven't. We've been bus riders for-

Jonathan Maus ([22:47](#)):

That was it. You just heard board president Simmons giving up. That was her last chance she gave folks to not yell and heckle as she was trying to talk. At any rate, I think there was obviously some frustration from the board president that they weren't able to conduct the meeting and they really just wanted to do it without having to go into a... Not a private session because it was still being beamed onto the TV screens, of course, because this thing was also happening on YouTube virtually. But nevertheless, they weren't able to continue doing the meeting in the public. They went into their room and they basically stayed there for good. Now, at this point, the protestors realized that the board members were not going to be coming back to the main meeting room. In sort of like, I don't know, January 6th style, someone said in a comment on one of our posts, the protestors went to the front of the room and took over the seats formally occupied by the board members.

([23:41](#)):

They sat there behind their mics and at one point even held like a mock vote and they were kind of, I think, enjoying the moment holding their signs up high. It was pretty awkward because still in the room across from the protestors were a couple dozen folks in suits, right? These are TriMet staff, the TriMet lawyer, stuff like that, all the sort of TriMet stakeholders that were there that aren't on the board. They were still in the room, but the board was gone and they were just watching it on screen. But in front of the room were all these protestors who were sort of getting more and more animated and more and more sort of aggressive with their criticisms. Some of them were still in the hallway. At this point, they were banging on the walls of the room where the TriMet board members were meeting, and it was a little bit chaotic for sure, but the vote went on.

([24:29](#)):

Each board member gave their remarks and shared why they wanted to increase fares. The one that I heard the most of came from the board's secretary, Ozzie Gonzalez. You might remember Gonzalez's name. He ran for mayor actually against Mayor Ted Wheeler in 2020. He didn't make it out of the

primary. He actually finished fourth, he finished like several thousand votes behind third place, which I think was Teresa Raiford. He finished like 30,000 votes behind Sarah Iannarone, who obviously lost to Mayor Wheeler in 2020. I think Gonzalez had a little bit less than 6% of the vote when he ran. Anyway, that's a side note.

[\(25:09\)](#):

Gonzalez is on the TriMet board and he had a pretty interesting speech before he voted yes. I think I'm going to play most of it, but I want you to listen to specifically to the part where he comes out and directly criticizes OPAL's tactics and actually accuses them of paying people to show up. These are some very serious accusations. As an aside, I actually had a conversation with Gonzalez today, and I'll be doing some more reporting on that next week. But here is Gonzalez's speech explaining why he is going to vote for the fare hike. While you listen to this, you'll definitely hear in the background the shouting and the banging on the wall from the protestors.

Ozzie Gonzalez [\(25:49\)](#):

Because it's an interesting moment right now. We're seeing democracy in action and it's a beautiful thing and we're trying to do our best as a society to make this process a democratic one that's in the end going to give us a system that we can all be proud of. Now, a point I need to make is that fares are a part of the equation and fares, regardless of what path we start to take, will continue to be a part of that formula. Because when even though it's only 10% of our overall cost for a ticket, to not have fares be in the equation puts at risk the other 90%.

[\(26:35\)](#):

We have, for the last 10 years not looked at fares because we've been looking at all of the other potential avenues and try to avoid this at all costs. We're in a position now where trying to address fares is not coming because we haven't looked at every other option. It's because every other option on the table has got us stretched as far as we can take it right now, and fares need to be a part of this. We can't just walk forward without including fares in the conversation. I don't know if 10, 20, 15, 5% is our target, but fares, whether they're coming from the person riding or somebody else subsidizing that have to be part of the overall cost formula. At least that's the way the cookies are crumbling right now, because every other agency in the country is running into the problem of having to figure out how to fill gaps.

[\(27:25\)](#):

If fares are not part of that, they're at a disadvantage from all the other agencies. I'm grateful for the agency that we're not putting ourselves in a vulnerable position where we're having to turn off lights and close buildings today. We're being prudent, we're being conservative in looking at this of what the problem will be months from now. Not everybody out there has the luxury to worry about what life is going to be like months from now. It's a luxury we have, but we're utilizing this time to make prudent decisions so that we don't have worse options down the road. I acknowledge all of that and in this moment of democracy on one side, I see a lot of courage. I know that there's no rationale that I can give you today that's going to help make sense of why this is okay to do now.

[\(28:14\)](#):

I read the t-shirt, "No fare increase now. No fare increase ever." I get it. There's never a convenient time for this to happen and it's this inconvenience that's made us last this long looking at every other option under the sun without this. What I want to say is not so much a rationale for why this thing makes sense to me. Although, I believe that with the mitigations in place, we are actually encouraging high ridership, high frequency ridership. We're actually helping lean into the expectation that if we're going to increase fares, well we better be delivering more value. I think TriMet's making good on that. We're doing our

very best, but we are not in this alone. We need a community out there that is willing to be a partner. I love that everybody says they want to work with us.

[\(29:04\)](#):

I've heard this coming from the public. I've heard it today in public discourse. I saw it in letters coming from other elected officials. We heard our representative [inaudible 00:29:14] chime in from Salem to say they want to work with us. Well, I wish you would've said that sooner because we've been working through this for years. This is not new. These issues are not new. Even within [inaudible 00:29:30] and even within our community partners, we've been having this conversation for a while. The message I have is really not so much a rationale, but I want to express what I want from our partners because we are really trying to do something difficult and maintain a system that's viable while simultaneously growing it back. If you want us to have a good system, if you really are on the side of a good reliable public transit system that's going to address climate change, equity, accessibility, and all the things that it can do when we let it shine, well then I'd like to see you really lean into the partnership equation.

[\(30:09\)](#):

Help us find those tax revenues. If Tax the Rich is a solution, help us take that message to Salem, help us get the elected officials to actually do their job instead of just telling us that they stand with us, help us get them to do their job and go to Salem and propose legislation that's going to tax and grow greater tracks than renew for Public Transit. Help us do that. Help us create a culture of ridership that is respectful, that helps us maintain the system clean. But what I'm seeing is very disappointing today, because it's capricious to think that just wanting something is going to get it. It's very destructive to encourage people to evade fares, to be disrespectful to a process. I'm hearing today very, very discouraging messages from our community. When you're celebrating people that are going to evade fares proudly or boycott the system, you're not helping TriMet become better, you're not helping TriMet become more viable, you're not helping TriMet become safer.

[\(31:12\)](#):

If you really want to help us become a bus driver, become a community service worker, become an ambassador for good ridership, help the things stay clean, keep eyes and ears on the system so that we are all taking care of it, because that's what we need. We don't need to be told that "This thing needs to be free," without a path for us to get there. I wish that we had that magic wand that could make this thing free, but I know that I don't have it. I would love for us to be able to look at what's going to make this system strong. I would love for all of this passion and all of this energy and all of this attention to be directed towards actually making solutions. I want to acknowledge the international students that brought some studies today.

[\(32:00\)](#):

That is a beautiful example of the way we work together to contribute to a conversation to learn from one another. I don't know what motivated those students to conduct a survey and bring that knowledge to us, but they have brought more value in six minutes of public testimony, in one meeting, than I'm going to say the five years I've watched OPAL sitting in committees with us. I'm very disappointed when an organization that wants to be at the table doesn't utilize that table to actually bring ideas forward. I'm really disappointed that right now we're confusing democracy by having paid advertising brought to the public forum when people are being paid to come say things, when people don't even know where that money's coming from, that's paying them to come say these things. I think we're tarnishing the premise of democracy, and I believe that anybody who's a tax-exempt organization needs to be very careful when they're leaning into tax policy in this way.

[\(32:56\)](#):

I'm really disappointed in the way in which we're exhibiting democracy, by the way in which we're confusing working together from working against a process. We aren't even allowed to hear each other comfortably. I'm afraid that most of what I say isn't going to be heard by the folks that I would wish would hear it. I would love for OPAL Bus Riders Unite and the organizations that care so much about transit to sit down at the table and help us figure out how to make this thing shine bright. But I'm not seeing any of that happening right now.

[\(33:29\)](#):

This Monday morning quarterbacking happening from our public agency partners isn't helping either. I'm severely disappointed in how absent they are when it's time to come up with solutions and how somehow it's some sort of political protection to tell us what they think we should be doing and to say, "I look forward to working with you." There's many that we've been trying to get a call back, trying to get them to participate, but I'm not seeing it. I'm going to just close by saying that I really would love to see all of this attention and energy to be directed in a proactive, solutions oriented direction. We're far from that today.

[\(34:11\)](#):

I hope for the best interests of our community and the public transit system at large, that we're able to walk into the next few years with more riders, with more workers, with more drivers, and with a community that is proud to lift up TriMet and all of the mobility options. Right now, it feels more like our partners want to see us fail than they want to see us succeed. That's that part breaks my heart. I'm just going to stop there and say, let's exercise our courage and let's vote with our hearts. Regardless of how people vote today, tomorrow still brings the challenge of trying to make the system viable. I think that's where the real work is. Thank you.

Jonathan Maus [\(35:05\)](#):

That was it, and here's the roll call, and here's the final vote.

Linda Simmons [\(35:09\)](#):

I'll now ask general counsel Shelly Devine to hold the roll call vote.

Shelly Devine [\(35:14\)](#):

On Ordinance 374. I'll start with Director Gonzalez.

Ozzie Gonzalez [\(35:19\)](#):

My vote is yes.

Shelly Devine [\(35:21\)](#):

Director Edwards?

Keith Edwards [\(35:23\)](#):

Yes.

Shelly Devine [\(35:24\)](#):

Director Lewis?

LaVerne Lewis ([35:27](#)):

Yes.

Shelly Devine ([35:27](#)):

Director Simmons?

Linda Simmons ([35:28](#)):

Yes.

Shelly Devine ([35:30](#)):

Director Bauman?

Lori Irish Bauman ([35:31](#)):

Yes.

Shelly Devine ([35:32](#)):

Director Kim?

Thomas Kim ([35:34](#)):

Yes.

Shelly Devine ([35:35](#)):

Director Wai?

Kathy Wai ([35:35](#)):

No.

Shelly Devine ([35:35](#)):

Ordinance 374 passes.

Jonathan Maus ([35:39](#)):

After that, there really wasn't much left for the protestors to do. It didn't mean that they stopped doing something though. They were still at this point staking out the room that the board members were in. Several of them were pounding on the walls repeatedly. Basically, the last thing the protestors did was they waited for each board member to leave, and as they left, they yelled, "Cowards, face us, shame on you," and all this other stuff as the board members left and that was it.

([36:10](#)):

Pretty interesting meeting. I don't cover TriMet as closely as I cover some other issues, but boy, I guess I picked quite a meeting to go to because this one was super interesting and I think it does reveal some important fault lines in this debate. Like I said before, I talked to Gonzalez today to ask him about these really serious accusations he's leveling at OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon, and he's saying that they are maybe in violation of their tax-exempt nonprofit status and the like. I'm going to be doing some stories on that next week, so watch for that in the future.

This transcript was exported on May 30, 2023 - view latest version [here](#).

[\(36:44\)](#):

That'll do it for this episode. I hope you enjoyed this sort of inside look at the TriMet Board meeting and stay tuned for more coverage. As always, thank you for listening. I really appreciate everyone's support out there, especially if you are a subscriber, if you're a paying contributor to BikePortland, you are awesome and I really appreciate it. We need as many people as possible to sign up to keep BikePortland going strong. The BikePortland Podcast is a production of Pedal Town Media Incorporated. I'm your host, Jonathan Maus, and until next time, I'll see you in the streets.