

Date: August 31, 2007
To: Transportation Policy Alternatives Committee (TPAC)
From: Phil Selinger, Project Planning Director
Subject: TriMet Comments on “Wheels to Wealth”

The Cascade Policy Institute and the author of “Wheels to Wealth: A Pilot Project to Examine the Feasibility of Promoting Low-Income Auto Ownership as a Transit Strategy”, are to be commended for exploring ways to expand job access for low-income members of our society. This is a long-standing priority for the development of our regional public transportation system.

Aspects of this proposal are already being done and others would actually inhibit the intended outcomes. There would be constraints on the use of funds for the proposed program.

- There are multiple roles of public transit. One of those as stated in the “Wheels to Wealth” paper is “to get people out of their cars”, but the fundamental role is to provide basic transportation services for the transit-dependent members of our community who may be elderly, disabled or of limited income. TriMet’s Title VI reporting and the attached map show that TriMet does a good job of fulfilling that role. Taking resources from public transit to provide cars for low-income populations would be counterproductive. The proposal would cut options available for many (including dependent riders) to provide cars for a few.
- It is expensive to own and operate an automobile – certainly more than an \$836 all-zone annual transit pass. AAA¹ calculates an annual automobile operating cost of \$9,498 annually - \$5,373 if the cost of the automobile is taken out of the equation. Eventually that automobile will have to be replaced by either the proposed program or the low-income household. Many low-income households would have difficulty sustaining this auto ownership expense.
- The cost of car ownership can be mitigated if carpooling or car sharing is a part of the mix. The program would then line up with employer vanpool programs that have been a long-standing regional travel options strategy.

¹ “Your Driving Costs: How much are you really paying to drive”, AAA Association Communication, Heathrow, FL, 2007

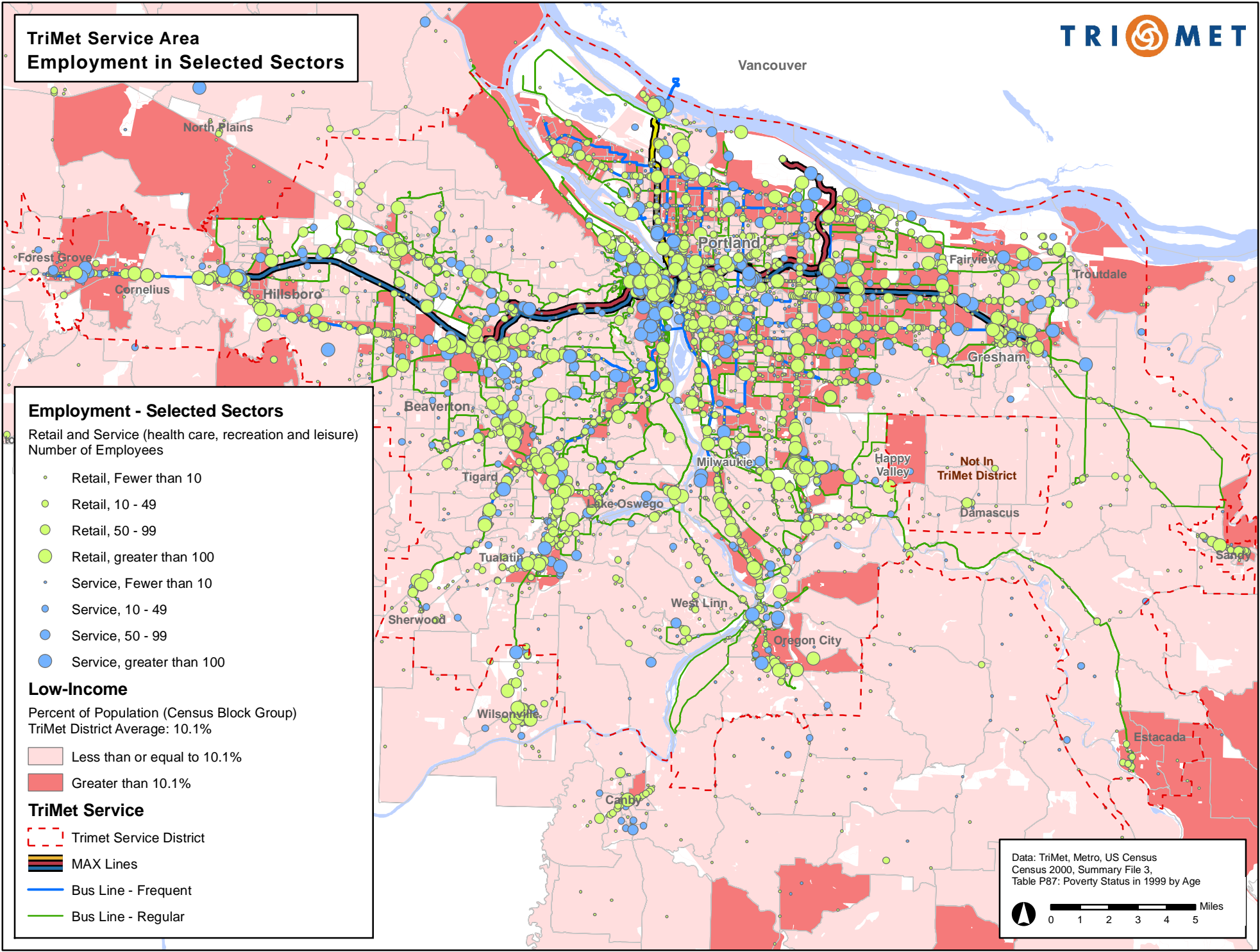
- There is a great need to increase housing opportunities (affordable housing) in places where transit access is available without the expense of car ownership - for all trip purposes. These would include regional and town centers, station areas and main streets. The Portland region is in a much better position in this respect than many other national and rural examples noted in the Cascade proposal.
- The proposal targets existing low-income transit riders on low-performing bus routes. Existing transit riders do not need a car for basic transportation needs. Attention should be directed at populations who cannot use transit at all because of work or residence in rural areas where there are no transit options. Populations within the service area could be served by shuttles or route extensions. Many of these areas, however, are outside of the TriMet service area.
- The region's Jobs Access Reverse Commute (JARC) program administered by TriMet is a mix of strategies to improve job access for disadvantaged communities. The program provides partial funding for the "Ways to Work" program (referenced in the Cascade Policy Institute paper) that is administered by Metropolitan Family Services (MFS). This car loan program issues low-interest car loans for repairs, refinances, and purchases. The Wheels to Wealth proposal would give qualified applicants cars, not loans.
- While providing cars so people can park & ride to transit increases transit access options, park & ride is a major public subsidy. Encouraging non-auto access to transit is a better use of public resources. (e.g. The park & ride spaces would be better used to provide affordable housing options.)
- Large un-funded demands for new bus services have been addressed in part by reallocating resources from the lowest performing routes, however, some low-performing service is based in emerging areas (both residential and employment) and low-income areas. There are often strategic reasons for sustaining that service – and providing access to high-growth employment sites.
- Federal funding programs may not permit expenditure of public transportation resources for the purchase of private-use automobiles. (Other than as noted under the JARC program, above).

There are many valid arguments in the Cascade Policy Institute proposal that need to be addressed, but these needs should not be addressed at the expense of much needed community transit services.

TriMet's analysis of service to both the minority and low-income community that is documented in Title VI reporting to the Federal Transit Administration indicates that it serves those communities well. TriMet would be happy to present these findings to TPAC or other groups.

attachment

TriMet Service Area Employment in Selected Sectors



Employment - Selected Sectors

Retail and Service (health care, recreation and leisure)
Number of Employees

- Retail, Fewer than 10
- Retail, 10 - 49
- Retail, 50 - 99
- Retail, greater than 100
- Service, Fewer than 10
- Service, 10 - 49
- Service, 50 - 99
- Service, greater than 100

Low-Income

Percent of Population (Census Block Group)
TriMet District Average: 10.1%

- Less than or equal to 10.1%
- Greater than 10.1%

TriMet Service

- TriMet Service District
- MAX Lines
- Bus Line - Frequent
- Bus Line - Regular

Data: TriMet, Metro, US Census
Census 2000, Summary File 3,
Table P87: Poverty Status in 1999 by Age

