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QuickPoint! – TriMet’s Great Disappearing Act

By John A. Charles, Jr.

During the 2003 session of the Oregon State Legislature, TriMet sought an increase in the regional payroll tax rate. In public testimony, TriMet General Manager Fred Hansen said, “*TriMet’s proposed payroll tax increase will be used exclusively to provide new or enhanced transit service.*”

The legislature approved TriMet’s request, and the payroll tax rate went up every January for ten straight years. By the end of 2014, TriMet had received \$34.4 million in new payroll tax revenues attributable to rate increases. Yet during that same decade, the *miles* of transit service offered to patrons actually **dropped** by 14%, while the *hours* of service declined by 5%.

Like a magic show, TriMet tried to distract the audience by pointing to grand celebrations for the opening of the WES commuter rail line and the Green MAX line, both of which opened in 2009. But overall service levels were reduced five times in six years, the opposite of what was promised in 2003.

[TriMet’s proposed budget for 2015-16](#) was released last week. It calls for “expanding service through the opening of the Portland-Milwaukie light rail line.” Once again, all the attention will be on new trains, while total service levels will still be far below the levels we had in 2003.

State legislators should be asking TriMet where all the money went. But sadly, no one in Salem cares about results.

John A. Charles, Jr. is President and CEO of Cascade Policy Institute, Oregon’s free market public policy research organization.