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Please contact:

Cascade Policy Institute
4850 SW Scholls Ferry Rd.
Suite 103
Portland, Oregon 97225

Phone: (503) 242-0900
Fax: (503) 242-3822

www.cascadepolicy.org
info@cascadepolicy.org

4850 SW Scholls Ferry Road
Suite 103
Portland, Oregon 97225

t: 503.242.0900
f: 503.242.3822
info@cascadepolicy.org
www.cascadepolicy.org

QuickPoint! – Does PCC-Sylvania Need a Light Rail Tunnel?

By Emma Newman

Metro and TriMet are jointly considering an expansion of the light rail system to PCC-Sylvania in SW Portland, by building a tunnel to the campus from Barbur Boulevard. The tunneling would have a significant impact on the surrounding neighborhood, forcing many homeowners to move away while still requiring PCC students to make a long walk to their classes.

Currently, 84 percent of PCC students drive to school, even with the campus being served by both shuttles and busses. If this tunnel plan is chosen, Oregon taxpayers will be saddled with paying half of the two billion dollar cost.

When asked at what point the costs of building new transit outweigh the benefits, a Metro spokesperson responded that “transportation planning is more an art than a science.”

An alternative plan under consideration is a rapid bus line which would also service PCC-Sylvania. While this would be about half the cost and much less inconvenient than digging a rail tunnel, it still would be a response to a need that doesn’t exist.

Despite the low ridership of current transit options, transportation officials continue to follow the mantra of “if you build it they will come,” rather than follow the laws of supply and demand.

Emma Newman is a research associate at Cascade Policy Institute, Oregon’s free market think tank. She is a student at George Fox University, where she is studying Economics and Computer Science.