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QuickPoint! – TriMet Drops Ridership Estimate by 13% for Tigard Light Rail

By John A. Charles, Jr.

After eight years of bragging that the proposed light rail line to Tigard would result in average daily ridership of 43,000, TriMet has quietly dropped the estimate to 37,500.

This “bait-and-switch” was totally predictable. At the start of every rail planning process, TriMet creates a high ridership estimate to get local politicians excited. Once the politicians agree to help fund the project, ridership forecasts are revised downwards. Eventually construction begins, and just before opening day, ridership estimates are lowered again.

At that point, it’s too late for politicians to back out.

TriMet promised Milwaukie officials that there would be 19,450 average daily rides on the Orange line in 2020. The actual ridership today is 12,160—63% of the forecast.

For the Blue line, ridership today is only 50% of the 2020 forecast.

The worst performer is the Yellow line, where ridership is a paltry 38% of the 2020 forecast.

While ridership is always low, construction costs are always high. For the Tigard line, cost estimates have gone up by 58% just since 2016. The current estimate is \$2.85 billion.

Tigard light rail will be the most wasteful project in state history, if it ever gets built. The time to pull the plug is now.

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

