

For Immediate Release
Contact Jon Hunt
503.232.9144

December 19, 2011

Fix the budget shortfall now TriMet: no more lip service

TriMet claims it is facing a 2013 budget shortfall to the tune of 12 to 17 million dollars. They blame it on many things, including their unionized workforce. One thing TriMet and General Manager McFarlane don't tell the public, is that they could erase nearly two-thirds of that shortfall, right now, on their own.

How? By TriMet ending expensive private contracts and operating elderly and disabled transportation (paratransit) services in-house. In their 1998 collective bargaining agreement, TriMet and the Union agreed to jointly select an outside audit firm to conduct a thorough analysis of the cost to continue to subcontract paratransit services versus the cost to perform the service in-house. The parties further agreed that the Union and TriMet will jointly instruct and receive information from the audit firm selected to perform the analysis.

After years of litigation over TriMet's refusal to participate in the audit, an independent audit completed on February 20, 2008 by Lauka & Associates, certified public accountants, estimated an immediate, annual savings of over 3.6 million dollars if TriMet did away with contractors and operated the service directly. This amount of savings was based on the 2004/05 fiscal budget year. For a pdf of the independent audit go to <http://www.atu757.org/forms/LaukaLiftAuditReport.pdf>

Current estimated savings, calculated by applying the same annual contract increases given by TriMet to private paratransit contractors over the last six years, are estimated to be over 7 million dollars a year if elderly and disabled transportation services were operated in-house today by TriMet. TriMet can't dispute the 2008 audit findings since it was based on information they, TriMet provided. Since the audit model has already been created, current projected savings can be easily calculated by supplying the new budget figures.

"Even if they only saved taxpayers a million dollars, TriMet needs to bring the service in-house now," said Jonathan Hunt, President of Amalgamated Transit Union local 757. "But, here they have the opportunity to save taxpayers over 7 million dollars, it is a no-brainer," claims Hunt.

While they cannot dispute the numbers, Hunt believes TriMet will argue they can't bring the service in-house now because of private provider contracts in place. "That is pure hogwash" says Hunt, "They can end those contracts anytime they want, they have done it before in the past!"

Another reason for TriMet to bring its paratransit operations in-house, is the imminent strikes pending with its private paratransit contractors in Multnomah and Washington Counties. By bringing the paratransit service operation in-house, employees would be prohibited from striking, the same as other TriMet employees.

TriMet recently produced a flyer and directed First Transit employees to hand them out to customers on their bus. In the flyer, TriMet warns of future Lift fare increases, blaming some of the increases on union contracts. "Those increases would not be necessary if TriMet cut out the middle man," said Hunt. "In fact, they would be able to lower Lift fares," Hunt claimed.

Hunt says it is time for TriMet to stop paying "lip service" about cutting costs and saving taxpayer money. It is time to bring the elderly and disabled transportation service in-house, and keep the money in our community, rather than send it to Scotland where First Transit is based. Bringing the service in-house now would make up nearly *two thirds* of the budget shortfall TriMet claims it is currently facing. It is time to tell the contractor, **the jig is up!**

For more information, go to www.atu757.org and follow us on Facebook at AmagamatedTransitPdx.