

Tigard SW Corridor Community Letter*

Tuesday, June 19th 2018

Dear Southwest Corridor Steering Committee,

We, Tigard SW Corridor residents, are writing to you to express our concerns and ask that you carefully consider our community-identified needs around staying in place outlined in this letter. With your support, we hope to minimize displacement and reduce negative impacts our communities could face, when or if, the Southwest Corridor MAX line is constructed.

We are optimistic about the opportunities that a new MAX line could bring to the SW Corridor region. Our hope is to stay in our neighborhoods and be able to benefit from increased access to public transportation through better connections to where we need to go, access to living wage jobs in and around the Corridor, and most importantly uphold healthy, affordable and safe housing practices.

We look to you with the hope that you will become an ally in our efforts, create space for us to speak for ourselves, and uplift our voices in systems of institutional power. We invite you to work with us, because we are most at risk of displacement as low-income, working class people, communities of color, immigrants, refugees, and renters.

We understand that historically large transportation projects have led to the displacement of local communities through land acquisition for project construction, land speculation, and redevelopment connected to new light rails. We are already experiencing exponential rent increases, in some cases up to a 300% rent increase from one month to the next. Throughout this economic hardship, our wages remain the same. We fear these trends will only be exacerbated if our local, regional, state and federal governments do not invest in affordable housing now.

We love our communities and we wish to keep growing with our families, friends, and social networks.

Below are our request and specific concerns:

COMMUNITY PRESERVATION

Affordable Housing Preservation and Construction Must be the First Priority.

- Focus on rehabilitation and building affordable housing before any MAX construction begins to ensure that all tenants stay housed in the area before the project breaks ground.
- Ensure that information about the process of rehabilitation and construction of all developments of affordable units is accessible, free of jargon and available in people's preferred language.
- Create an affordable housing protocol that ensures first priority for current residents who might face displacement by the construction of the SW Corridor.
- Ensure that non-citizens who face displacement by SW Corridor construction have equitable access to mitigation relocation funds as citizens.
- Give affordable housing priority to low income Seniors.

Increase Tenant Protections. Housing instability is rapidly becoming the norm throughout the Portland metro region, and most acutely for low-income and moderate-income households. We are already losing our homes to no-fault terminations and excessive rent increases. We need tenant protections that ensure relief, and keep us stably housed.

- Renters need relocation assistance in all Oregon jurisdictions
- Renters need rent stabilization because household wages are not keeping up with the pace of rising rents. We cannot afford to get more than 10% rent increases, and still provide food, transportation, medicine, and the basics for our families.

Expand Tenant Services and Supports. Keeping renters stably housed also includes a suite of services and supports that help people navigate social services and the legal system when housing is at-risk. Local jurisdictions have the power to assist people and families to remain housed while maintaining fair access to safe and healthy housing.

- Education and information about tenant rights and responsibilities, fair housing, and access to legal consultation should be free, or at a very low cost for anyone who needs support, regardless of their ability to pay.
- Renters deeply benefit from programs that help to repair and improve credit history, one of the biggest barriers when seeking housing.
- Create pathways to permanent stable housing through homeownership opportunities and programming directed at residents of color to help close the region's minority homeownership gap.

Access to Stable Housing Rental criteria should focus on rental history, combined with ability to pay. Tenants are often required to provide proof of income three times the amount of the rent. Many of us living in the SW Corridor make minimum wage or just above, are retired, or on fixed

income. Our incomes cannot meet arbitrary criteria that prevents us from gaining housing in our own neighborhoods. We ask that landlords, especially within a 1.5 mile area of the proposed MAX line adhere to rental criteria that works for all income households and to provide exceptions to common practice of charging 3x the amount of rent.

- We ask that all housing providers accommodate tenants to break the barriers that prevent them from renting by:
 - Allowing tenants to apply again without charging a new application fee within 3 months of the first application fee.
 - Provide programs that support financial literacy and home ownership preparation so when new units are ready to rent, tenants can qualify to rent or purchase homes in the neighborhoods they currently live.
 - Provide programs that assist with utility costs for low-income homeowners and renters. In times of inclement heat or cold, unexpected utility expenses can cascade into debt that is hard to recover from, and cause housing instability.
 - Require that no additional utility charges, such as garbage and sewer, be passed on to tenants.

Enforce Fair-Housing Protections. Tenants from various protected classes (both state and federal) in and around the SW Corridor experience fair housing violations every day.

- Require all landlords to understand their responsibilities and rights under fair housing laws, and the consequences if they are found to discriminate.
- Provide a mechanism for tenants to file complaints without fear of retaliation, further intimidation, or harassment - which often results in trumped up fines, neglect of basic repairs, and even no-cause termination. In some situations, tenants are afraid to report needed repairs for fear that a discriminatory landlord will report them to immigration officials, regardless of their status.

TRANSPORTATION

The proposed Southwest Corridor Light Rail project will enhance transit along the corridor, but will not fully serve the needs of residents along the corridor. In order to effectively serve all of the community it is critical that there is a full investment in bus service to serve the community until a MAX line is built and ensure that the entire region has access to transit.

- To that end, we recommend the following:
 - Incorporate better bus connections and services in order for us to make connections from our communities to the new MAX line.

- The SW Corridor community is diverse and home to populations of linguistically isolated communities. Additional language announcements are needed on the system.
- Swiftly implement the Southwest Service Enhancement Plan, adding bus service throughout Tigard, Tualatin and the surrounding area, to ensure residents have bus service within walking distance from most homes, businesses, services and places of recreation. As TriMet has already had three years to implement the plan, we are asking for no further delay, and to start adding bus routes and services immediately.
- Ensure that the bus service is safe, reliable, and frequent. Many minority populations often work early morning or late night shifts or on weekends, and bus service must match the hours of operation for businesses in the area. Too many bus routes stop operating at approximately 9:00 PM or earlier, leaving late-night workers stranded and unable to travel.
- We need a system that is less punitive and that issues warnings instead of fines in the event that as riders, we are not able to prove that we have a paid ticket, monthly or annual pass. A person whose sole offense is not paying or having sufficient fare to ride should not be considered a criminal and subject to harsh and cruel punishments.

While it is recognized TriMet depends upon fare revenue to cover a portion of its operating expenses, the punitive fine of \$200 and court costs is out of proportion for merely failing to pay \$2.50.

TriMet can, and should: consider the totality of the circumstance, provide warnings to first time offenders, offer alternatives that can be resolved within a short time that avoid a citation and criminal record (for example, allow a rider to purchase a “\$10 penalty fare” within one week to satisfy the violation; in exchange the violation will also serve as a day pass for the remainder of the day) and allow riders to make an immediate payment in lieu of a citation (for example, require a \$5 day pass to be purchased)

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Transit must be a safe and welcoming place for any person who wants to travel, but cannot travel by other means. Public transit unites our community regardless of socioeconomic status or other identifiers, and the operation of our transit system should reflect the community as a whole.

- Any rider should feel safe and welcomed aboard public transit, and should not fear the presence of law enforcement or security, whose purpose should be the safety of the riders as well as transit agency employees. Law enforcement and security personnel working on the transit system should be trained with the understanding

that they are public servants whose job it is to ensure the safety of the riders, and not to treat every rider as a potential criminal or suspect.

- TriMet law enforcement and security personnel have no justification asking for a person's immigration status. This practice is in violation of ORS 181A.820, and our public transit system is, and should be, open for any person to ride, regardless of any factor. Swift action should be taken to hold accountable any employee or agent who violates ORS 181A.820.
- Ensure that bus stops are safe and accessible. TriMet, along with Metro, the Oregon Department of Transportation, Washington County, the City of Tigard and other surrounding cities, must work together to prioritize the improvement of pedestrian access to, from and around bus stops. Riders should be able to expect a safe walking route, such as a sidewalk, to and from a bus stop as well as a safe place to wait for the bus; a well-lit bus stop, and preferably a shelter, bench, and an informational sign to inform riders of the bus schedule and route.
- We need safety lighting and landscape, surrounding all the bus and MAX stops. Particularly better lighting on Ash Ave
- We need proper crossing and traffic lighting by the new MAX line and all bus stops
- Bathrooms in and near the MAX and buses are needed. All riders but especially children, elderly, and long commuters should have this basic service available
- The transit system in our community needs to ensure that residents can easily reach major retail and service areas, such as grocery stores like WinCo, Fred Meyer, Safeway and Albertsons.
- The proposed light rail routes through Tigard and by Ash Ave, have significant negative impacts to lower income housing populations, and any impact needs to be addressed ensuring that impacted families and persons be able to retain housing within the neighborhood.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

There is fear in the Latinxs, undocumented and other immigrant and refugee community about engaging with some City workers. We would like to see more efforts from government employees and elected officials to engage with our communities and more diverse and trained personnel that understand our community's—needs.

ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

Ensure that small businesses, particularly those owned and operated by people of color, immigrants, or refugees have the opportunity and funds to stay in SW Corridor area

