

Transit Profile: The Portland area MAX light rail system

Project Description:

Tri-Met, the Portland metropolitan transit agency, operates a 33-mile MAX light rail system. The first segment – Eastside MAX – was opened in 1986; the second segment – Westside MAX – opened in 1998. The entire route has 50 stations. MAX is part of an integrated light rail and bus system that serves the urbanized portion of the three counties in the Portland metropolitan area. In addition to MAX, Tri-Met operates 102 bus routes. Overall Tri-Met ridership has grown 81 straight months, with daily ridership averaging 258,600 boardings, 64,500 of them on MAX.

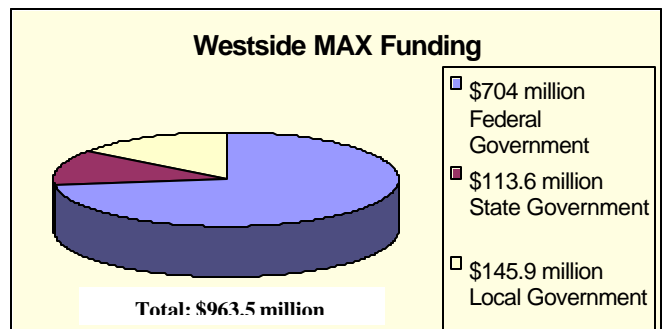
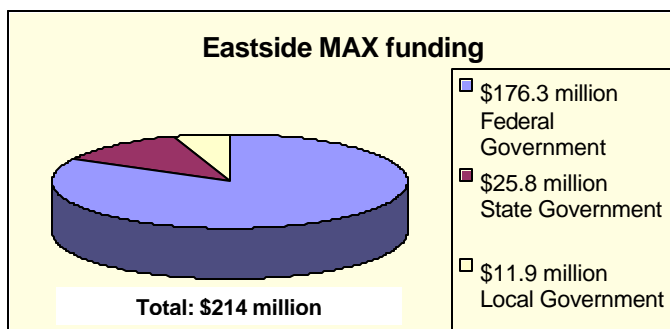
Eastside MAX stretches 15 miles east from downtown Portland to Gresham. Westside MAX was built through large stretches of undeveloped land. Light rail is a catalyst for creating transit-oriented developments near transit stations. By creating new communities within walking distance of MAX, the region can grow and preserve its livability because there is less dependence on the automobile. Westside MAX also travels through two, three-mile tunnels under Portland's West Hills.

Capital Costs:

Both the Eastside and Westside MAX lines were completed on time and on budget. Both projects were within the federal government's full funding grant agreement.

Eastside MAX: Constructed March 1982 to September 1986. The U.S. Department of Transportation funded 83 percent of the \$214 million (1983\$) project; state and local funds paid the remaining 17 percent. Federal funding for the project came largely from trading in funds for an urban freeway and investing in transit and smaller road projects.

Westside MAX: Constructed July 1993 through September 1998. The federal government funded 73 percent of the \$963.5 million project; state and local funds paid the remaining \$259 million. In 1990, Portland area voters approved \$125 million of property tax bonds for local MAX funding of Westside MAX by a 74 percent margin.



Ridership:

Ridership on bus and MAX is at historic highs. As of September 1999, Tri-Met has seen 81 straight months of ridership growth. In September, MAX reached a new record for average daily ridership of 64,500 boardings. Buses accounted for 194,100 weekday boardings.

MAX's weekend popularity continues to grow, too. In 1998, MAX averaged 50,700 rides on weekends, rising 66 percent in 1999 to 76,800 average rides.

In the period from 1990 to 1997 transit ridership in the Portland metropolitan area grew 20 percent faster than the growth in vehicle miles traveled (VMT), 43 percent faster than the growth

in transit service and 40 percent faster than the growth in population. In that period transit ridership grew by 30 percent, VMT grew by 24 percent, Tri-Met service by 17 percent and population by 18 percent.

MAX Ridership Growth
(Average weekday boardings)

FY 87	FY 88	FY 89	FY 90	FY 91	FY 92	FY 93	FY 94	FY 95	FY 96	FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
19,500	19,600	19,700	20,500	23,200	24,300	23,700	24,600	26,100	27,000	29,400	31,400	60,100*	64,500**

* Since Westside Light Rail opened in September 1998

** FY 2000 to date (July through September 1999)

MAX ridership has seen steady growth during the past 13 years, with ridership tripling since it opened in 1986. In 1998, MAX ridership grew significantly with the opening of Westside MAX.

The addition of Westside MAX and improved bus service led to a 46 percent increase in transit service in the western corridor. Transit ridership in the corridor rose 137 percent in 1999 to 33,900 average daily trips. Tri-Met now has about 20,000 more daily transit trips on the westside corridor than before MAX opened.

Westside MAX is having an impact on congestion. Between May 1993 and May 1999, transit's share of westbound trips leaving downtown during the evening rush hour increased 5 percent, while the share of drive alone auto trips declined 3 percent.

Other Project Benefits:

MAX connects residential neighborhoods with major employment centers, regional shopping and entertainment facilities. The 33-mile light rail line links the cities of Portland, Gresham, Beaverton and Hillsboro. An Airport MAX extension is under construction and plans are moving forward to expand the regional rail system to North Portland and the Expo Center.

MAX provided 17.8 million rides last year. MAX works because it:

- ?? Removes cars from our roads and helps keep our air clean (when completed, all four light rail lines will reduce air pollution by 1,700 tons each year by 2015).
- ?? Continues to attract new riders – 20,000 new riders in the Westside corridor in the first year
- ?? Is a catalyst for transit-oriented development - \$2.4 billion in new development within walking distance of the stations
- ?? Serves thousands of central city and suburban jobs – Westside serves 24,000 high-tech jobs; Intel gives all its 11,500 employees an annual pass
- ?? Helps defer the need for new highway investments – downtown Portland has become a more vibrant place without adding any new road capacity in over a quarter century
- ?? Helps preserve livable neighborhoods and maintains our quality of life

The Land Use Connection:

Portland's experience with MAX is demonstrating that light rail linked with land-use planning can have a dramatic impact on shaping regional growth. Some \$2.4 billion worth of investment occurred along the MAX line since the decision to build.

Portland's innovative approach to integrating transportation and land-use planning earned Westside MAX the First Place award in the "Livable Communities Transit Competition" from the Federal Transit Administration in 1999. The award recognized Tri-Met's cooperative approach to

building a light rail system that would improve transit service for existing cities and become the heart of new communities being built around MAX stations.

The impact of MAX has been felt from end to end of the line. Development activity is greatest in the downtown and Lloyd District. Downtown, MAX has played an important role in revitalizing the city center. Virtually every parcel of vacant land adjacent to MAX has changed hands, been developed or has plans for future development.

Westside MAX has focused more than \$500 million in new development within an easy walk of the stations. The line has become a magnet for new transit-oriented communities. Projects range from mixed-use, residential/retail developments to suburban redevelopment projects, to entirely new communities created out of greenfields.

New transit-friendly land-use plans are in place around each station. The National Association of Homebuilders recently named the transit-oriented community at Orenco Station the best master-planned community in the United States.

For more information on transit and land use in Portland go to:
<http://www.tri-met.org/reports/dreams98.htm>

Property Values:

MAX's impact on development by all accounts appears to be positive. According to a 1997 Portland State University study, a single family home next to a light rail station on Portland's eastside commands a 10 percent higher price than one 1,000 feet away from the station. "This willingness to pay a premium for single-family housing having light rail access is a significant and positive land-use benefit of the light-rail transit investment."

The assessed value of station area properties has risen faster than the national average, according to a 1993 study. While national assessed values increased by 67.5 percent from 1980-91, the evaluation of several stations shows a more rapid increase: Lloyd Center (+134%); 162nd (+112%); and 181st (+491%).

What Others Say:

☞☞ "America has a lot to learn from Portland and the entire region surrounding Portland... A lot of new ideas start here. They're tested here and they're proven here and then the rest of the country hears about them and comes here to see how they work."

Vice President Al Gore at opening ceremonies of Westside MAX on Sept. 12, 1998.

☞☞ "The entire Portland area has shown this nation that it is possible to grow according to our values and build more livable communities where families can walk together, and bike together, and play together."

Vice President Al Gore.

☞☞ "Portland attracts this interest from around the country because instead of accepting ever-escalating levels of traffic, air pollution, sprawl and inner-city decay, it offers a different version of what American cities could look like in the Twenty-first Century."

The Nation, October 13, 1997.

☞☞ "In the past two decades, Portland has succeeded perhaps more than any other Western City in controlling sprawl, fostering public transportation and revitalizing the inner city."

Wall Street Journal, December 26, 1995.

“... few have equaled Portland’s success in devising and implementing strategies for land use and transportation planning that have turned the city’s downtown decline around to make the center a vibrant, growing and prospering core to Portland’s metropolitan area.”
Transit Connections, September 1995.

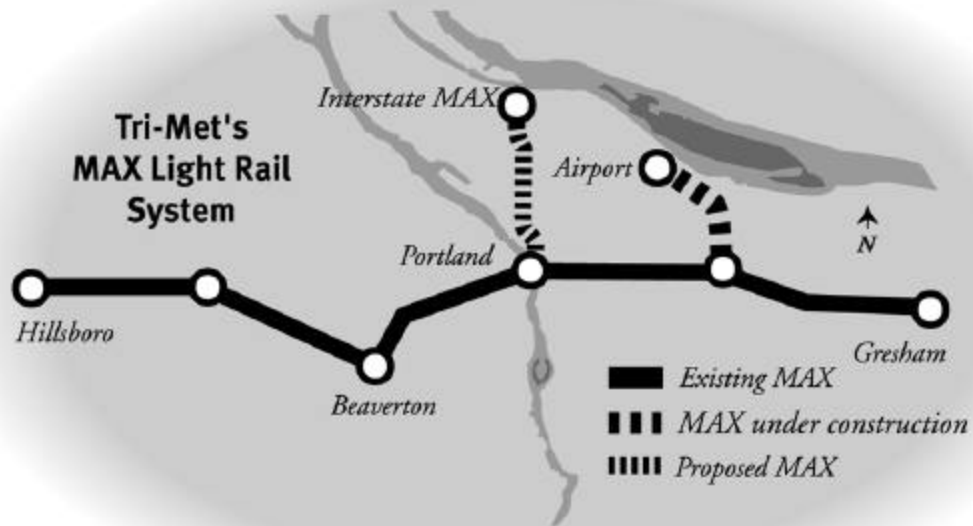
“... the only urban area that appears to be consciously trying to shape itself as a new kind of American city is Portland.”
The New York Times, December 30, 1996.

“But Portland’s transit system is not just a tool for the downtown area. It’s a truly regional system that is guiding and generating growth and development far beyond the central city core.”
American Architectural Foundation, 1995.

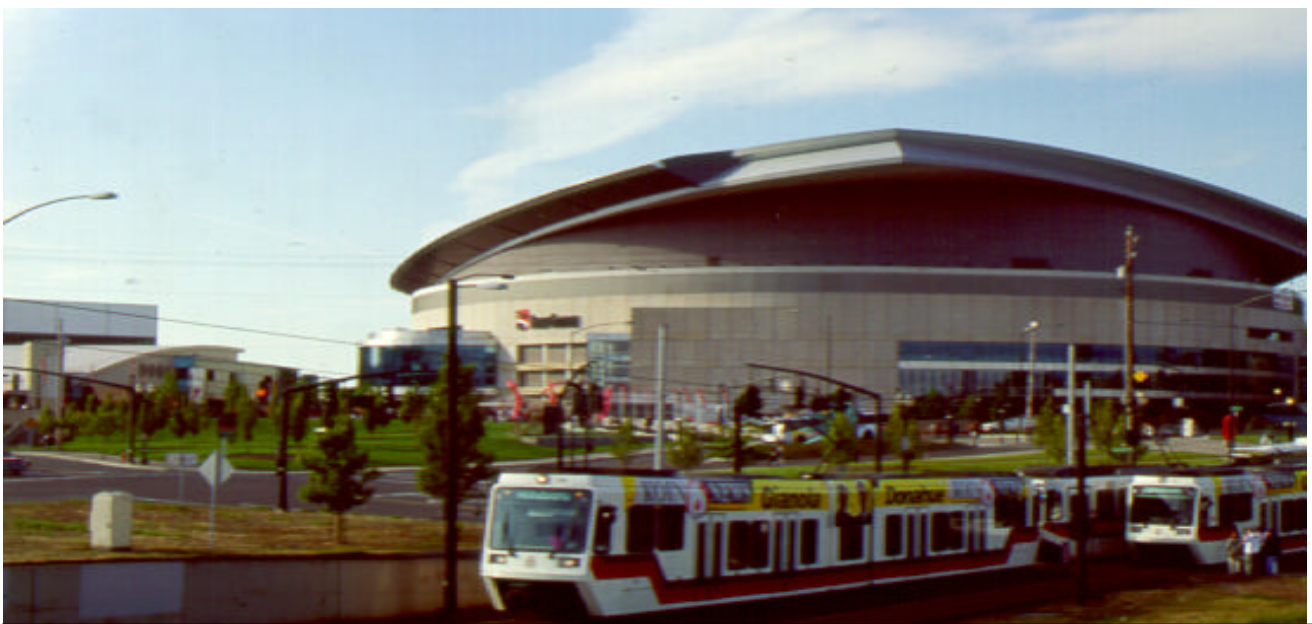
“Portland’s metropolitan growth boundaries, exemplary public transit system, and mixed-use pedestrian friendly urbanity, make it better than almost any other American city.”
The Seaside Institute, *The Seaside Prize 1995*.

“Portland has used its transportation system as a pro-active element to create a livable, vibrant community with a thoroughly wonderful downtown...”
Tampa Tribune-Times, Sunday, Oct. 1, 1995.

Rail System Map:
Photos:



MAX arrives at Sunset Transit Center in Beaverton



MAX drops off riders at Pioneer Square in downtown Portland



MAX traveling through Portland's Goose Hollow neighborhood

Community Support:

Choice ridership amounts to 92 percent of MAX light rail rides, according to Tri-Met's Attitude & Awareness Survey (Nov. 1998). These riders have a car available but choose light rail because they prefer to use it. Overall approval ratings of East and Westside MAX have been around 90 percent during the past several years.

Extensions:

Two additional extensions are in progress. The Airport MAX line is now under construction and scheduled for completion in fall 2001. Local funding for Interstate MAX in North Portland was just completed and the project now seeks federal funds.

Airport MAX is a \$125 million, 5.5-mile extension developed through an innovative public/private venture involving the Port of Portland, Tri-Met, the city of Portland, Portland Development Commission and Bechtel Enterprises. Because of this private/public venture, Airport MAX requires no additional property tax dollars, state general funds or federal new starts monies. Bechtel Enterprises contributed \$28.3 million toward the \$125 million light rail project. In return, Bechtel, in partnership with Trammell Crow Company, will develop a 120-acre, transit-oriented development at the entrance to the airport. Around 11,000 jobs and \$400 million worth of hospitality, entertainment, retail and office space will be built at the site, called CascadeStation, when build out is completed in 2015.

Interstate MAX is a proposed \$350 million, 5.6-mile extension connecting MAX to the Expo Center along N. Interstate Avenue. A renewed streetscape through MAX construction and an enterprise zone under the Portland Development Commission will encourage redevelopment opportunities to this onetime main gateway to Portland. If adequate federal funds are appropriated, construction of this extension could begin in 2001, with opening set for fall 2004.

Links:

<http://www.tri-met.org>

<http://www.lightrail.net>

<http://~samc/max/>

<http://www.multnomah.lib.or.us/metro/transpo/transpo.html>

Contacts:

Mary Fetsch, Tri-Met Director of Communications, (503) 962-6403.