

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MARION AND POLK COUNTIES

POSITION: Public Transportation in Marion & Polk Counties (2013)

A metropolitan area the size of Salem-Keizer needs an integrated multi-modal transportation network to support the employment, education, commerce, civic, and social activities within the Urban Growth Boundary. An effective, efficient, accessible and safe transit system is a key part of such a network for the mobility of workers, students, seniors, shoppers, and visitors. This is especially true for low-income residents, persons with disabilities, and those who do not own or drive cars. Affordable transportation improves access to jobs, training, court and medical appointments, and social services (and thus can reduce costs of additional social supports).

Members of the League of Women Voters of Marion-Polk Counties believe an effective urban transit system should:

- Serve residential, educational, business, and industrial areas
- Be based on residential and employment densities and the location of schools and colleges
- Be based primarily on usage but should include additional routes to currently unserved areas to promote ridership
- Directly connect some origins and destinations in addition to routing through a central hub

Transit stops should be:

- Safe (off roadway, lighted at night, accessible by sidewalk or pad and, wherever feasible, sheltered from weather)
- Wheelchair accessible
- Preferably no more than ¼ mile from homes and destinations

Transit service should be available at least Monday through Saturday, including evenings. Service should be at frequent intervals, especially at peak commute times. Limited Sunday service would benefit many, but is a lower priority.

Multi-modal connections between Salem-Keizer and the other communities in Marion and Polk Counties are also very important for residents and visitors.

The League supports a network of routes outside the Urban Growth Boundary that:

- Serves as many residential, business, educational, and industrial areas as feasible
- Is coordinated with Cherriots schedules
- Is scheduled to permit college students and workers to commute during reasonable morning and evening hours as well as provide adequate mid-day service to and from Salem

The League recognizes the range of federal, state, and local funding sources supporting the Salem-Keizer transit system today, as well as the competition for these current sources, the growing demand, and the rising costs of transit and other worthy public services.

In Salem-Keizer reliance on property taxes for much of the local share of transit places an additional pressure on property taxpayers who already fund most local government infrastructure and services as well as the local share of public education costs. Our high share of tax-exempt properties, limits on voter willingness to support levies, and other factors mean that our local property taxes generate less revenue for transit than payroll taxes, which are the funding base for other transit systems in the state. While property taxes are a relatively stable and dependable revenue source, transit funding is not keeping pace with need. Levy failures in 2006 and 2008 resulted in elimination of some routes and all of Saturday service. And limitations due to compression* will affect future property tax collections and levies.

- Compression is explained on the Oregon Department of Revenue website at <http://www.oregon.gov/DOR/ptd/Pages/property.aspx>

Oregon has fewer options for revenue sharing with transit districts than most states due to lack of a state sales tax and a constitutional prohibition on use of the state gas tax for transit.

Currently none of the cities in Marion or Polk Counties provides any funds for the regional CARTS service or for Cherriots' regular route or paratransit service.

The League supports a mix of funding for transit operations that includes:

- Property taxes
- Passenger fares
- Payroll taxes (requiring local vote)
- Contributions by: ° Cities ° Counties ° The State of Oregon ° The federal government (especially adding funding for federally-mandated paratransit)
- Sponsorships and public-private partnerships
- Hotel/Motel taxes

The League supports publicly-funded single-use day passes for low-income persons (such as those currently provided by Cherriots and distributed by the United Way to non-profit service organizations) or, in the case of court litigants, potentially distributed by law enforcement.

The League supports the Cherriots employer pass incentive program to reduce traffic and parking pressure.

The League supports free or reduced-fare passes for youth to promote participation in before-and after-school activities as well as encouraging transit use.

Many large and mid-sized communities have combined federal and local funding to build streetcar or bus rapid transit lines, realizing economic development as well as transportation benefits. A 2005 Salem study found that a streetcar line would provide transportation and

economic development benefits. Recent studies indicate that successful projects have required strong local leadership to develop community support and to obtain funding.

The League supports the pursuit of grant funding by Salem or Keizer and the Transit Board for efficient enhanced transit modes, such as bus rapid transit or streetcars. Funding for local construction match and ongoing operations of such a system should be identified in advance and could include a similar mix of the sources indicated above, with the addition of Local Improvement Districts, Urban Renewal Funds, or Transportation Systems Development Charges.

The League supports increased transit-oriented development and redevelopment to significantly improve the efficiency of public transit and increase ridership. The League also places a high priority on cities integrating transit access with the planning or permitting of any new construction or redevelopment. Failure to adequately consider bus access in the past has resulted in destinations with little or no transit availability.

Since all Cherriots regular-route buses are currently wheelchair accessible, improved sidewalk access to bus stops has the potential to reduce use of costly paratransit trips as well as greatly improve walkability in and between neighborhoods. The League supports a targeted sidewalk improvement program with priorities on corridors that enable access to transit stops.