

# The Oregonian

IN MY OPINION

*Ronald A. Buel and George M. Crandall*

February 27, 2006

## **TRIMET'S DOWNTOWN PROJECT: Transit mall remake will degrade city core**

Transit service to downtown Portland is a must. Mass transit is an energy-efficient alternative to the automobile that reduces downtown auto trips and congestion. The trick is to provide quality service while maintaining and improving the downtown business environment.

As critics of TriMet's design for the downtown transit mall, we have been disappointed with The Oregonian's lack of coverage and its recent editorial on the subject ("Transit mall holds up to second-guessing," Feb. 20). There are many flaws in TriMet's design that will degrade, rather than improve, the downtown. The design's shortcomings include:

There are safety issues associated with the plan's untested crisscross design. The buses and trains traveling along the mall will cross paths along every block as they weave in and out from curbside passenger stops. This complicated design has not been tested anywhere in the world. Issues such as pedestrian safety and increased downtown congestion could result from this unproven design scheme.

There is wasted investment. Downtown businesses endorsed a continuous auto lane as a part of the proposed mall design. This lane would be a good idea only if on-street parking were included. It has not been. Therefore, the "drive-by" lane will not materially help businesses along the mall.

There will be a long and disruptive construction period. Construction of the mall will take approximately two years to complete, seriously affecting businesses along Fifth and Sixth avenues from Union Station to beyond Portland State University. Compounding this problem, buses now running along the mall will be moved to busy Third and Fourth avenues, where approximately 150 on-street parking spaces will be removed for bus stops, spreading the disruption farther.

More streets will be affected by transit. When completed, the mall's bus capacity will be decreased substantially, resulting in heavy bus traffic spilling onto other downtown streets. TriMet is only speculating on the routes and schedules for buses that will be displaced from the mall. The public needs to be given concrete facts — the routes, stops and resulting affects on other downtown streets — before a decision to rebuild the mall is made.

The Portland Downtown Neighborhood Association's vote last week to reject TriMet's mall design should be viewed as a wakeup call. The mall's diminished bus capacity and TriMet's 10-pound solution in a 5-pound bag will force buses onto other streets, severely affecting Portland's delicate business environment.

The Oregonian should be asking questions about this crucial project's design rather than giving it a rubber stamp of approval. To assume that well-intentioned agencies know best is a head-in-the-sand approach that may give us another tram scam. We don't need a repeat performance.

Ronald A. Buel is a Portland businessman and former Tri-Met board member. George M. Crandall is a principal in the architectural firm of Crandall-Arambula. Both are members of the advocacy group Riverfront for People.