



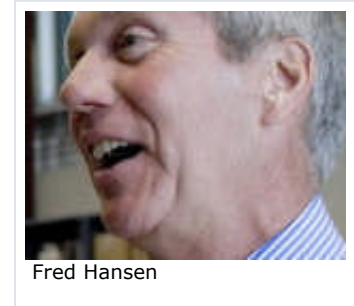
Missing the point on WES commuter rail

By Galen Barnett, The Oregonian

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The state's first commuter rail line has been in the works for 15 years. But recent coverage in The Oregonian misses some key points regarding the Westside Express Service commuter rail project ("Railcar deal cost TriMet millions," Dec. 14).

Fact No. 1: In purchasing the railcars for WES, TriMet had to comply with the federal Buy America law. Only one American firm -- Colorado Railcar Manufacturing -- manufactures the vehicles we needed.



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Fact No. 2: The Diesel Multiple Unit trains selected for WES are the only ones that meet federal safety standards allowing commuter trains to operate with active freight trains. Portland & Western Railroad controls the tracks upon which the WES trains will operate, and the company required that freight trains continue to operate on the tracks along with commuter trains. The DMU trains were also selected for this corridor because they provide for ease of operation (an operator cab at both ends), their size fits the Beaverton Transit Center, and TriMet can add future service outside the current "rush-hour only" schedule and safely share the tracks with freight trains.

Fact No. 3: Colorado Railcar Manufacturing has a track record of producing quality vehicles for transit agencies. TriMet management was aware that CRM had experienced financial difficulties. But there were only two options: purchase vehicles from CRM and do everything in our power to limit the risk of our investment or abandon the commuter rail project altogether. After exploring every possible alternative, TriMet decided to proceed with CRM and put risk-management measures in place, including a \$3 million Letter of Credit to the contract to cover possible cost overruns.

Fact No. 4: When CRM's financial difficulties escalated, TriMet took additional steps to protect its investment. We enlisted help from the Federal Transit Administration to ensure that CRM was building TriMet's vehicles. We provided engineering and on-site technical oversight of CRM. And finally, we developed an alternative plan to complete the cars locally if CRM went bankrupt.

CRM breached its contract with TriMet and lied about its current financial problems, causing delays and cost escalation. CRM's troubles increased the WES vehicle budget by \$7.8 million. The Letter of Credit will reduce that by \$3 million. This is the first time that TriMet has faced this kind of situation with a contractor on a major project. We concluded the most cost-effective path was to get the cars as complete as possible at CRM before moving them to Wilsonville and our maintenance facility. Any other course of action would have cost even more money and caused further delays.

Calculated risks are often part of the process in major projects such as MAX light rail and WES commuter rail. In building the Westside MAX line, TriMet made the decision to build a three-mile tunnel instead of putting the track adjacent to U.S. 26, along Portland's West Hills. That decision carried risk, caused delays and cost \$90 million. But with the steep incline and potential exposure to the winter elements, the tunnel was the right decision. The calculated risk was worth taking

Will the risk prove worth it for WES commuter rail? We believe so. When WES opens for business, it will offer rush-hour service to and from Beaverton, Tigard, Tualatin and Wilsonville. As the state's first commuter rail line, it will provide another important transportation option in our region.

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