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QuickPoint! – SW Corridor Project: A Net Negative for the Environment

By John A. Charles, Jr.

Portland politicians claim to be concerned about carbon dioxide emissions and climate change. That's why so many of them support TriMet's proposed 12-mile light rail line from Portland to Bridgeport Village near Tigard. They think it will reduce fossil fuel use.

Their assumptions are wrong.

According to the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the project, energy used during construction of the rail project will equal 5.9 trillion Btu. Much of this will be in the form of fossil fuels needed to power the heavy equipment. Additional energy will be used to manufacture the rail cars, tracks, and overhead wires.

The EIS claims that the negative environmental consequences of construction will be made up by energy saved from operations of the train. However, the operational savings are so small it would take 61 years to mitigate the carbon dioxide emissions of construction.

2035 Daily Vehicle Miles Traveled and Energy Consumption

Vehicle Type	Daily VMT – No build option	Million Btu/Day – No build option	Daily VMT With Light Rail	Million Btu/Day With Light Rail
Passenger vehicle	51,474,286	249,084	51,415,071	248,798
Heavy-duty trucks	3,389,982	73,132	3,389,288	73,117
Transit bus	100,122	3,546	97,501	3,453
Light rail	19,189	1,247	21,200	1,377
TOTAL	54,983,579	327,009	54,923,060	326,745

Source: Draft EIS, SW Corridor Project

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Unfortunately, all of the light rail cars will need to be replaced before then. Building new cars will require more energy, resulting in additional CO₂ emissions and a longer payback period.

Light rail is not a solution to a perceived climate change problem; it IS a climate change problem. Any further planning for the SW Corridor project should be terminated.

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