

Date: March 27, 2024

To: Board of Directors

From: Sam Desue, Jr.

Subject: **ORDINANCE NO. 378 OF THE TRI-COUNTY METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION DISTRICT OF OREGON (TRIMET) TO CLOSE THE SKIDMORE FOUNTAIN MAX STATION (FIRST READING AND PUBLIC HEARING)**

1. Purpose of Item

This Ordinance requests that the TriMet Board of Directors (Board) authorize the General Manager to permanently close the Skidmore Fountain MAX Station.

2. Type of Agenda Item

- ☐ Initial Contract
- ☐ Contract Modification
- ☒ Other: Ordinance

3. Reason for Board Action

The closure of the Skidmore Fountain MAX Station is a service change that requires the passage of an ordinance, which will require two readings and the opportunity for a public hearing.

4. Type of Action

- ☐ Resolution
- ☒ Ordinance 1st Reading and Public Hearing
- ☐ Ordinance 2nd Reading
- ☐ Other _____

5. Background

Shortly after the opening of Westside MAX Red and Blue Lines and as the transit system developed, TriMet began receiving comments and complaints about the excessive time it took for the MAX to move through downtown due to the close spacing of stations and frequent stops. Because some can walk faster than the MAX moves among downtown stations, it was said not to be worthy of its name “Metropolitan Area Express.” Potential riders have pointed to the slow travel times and number of stops downtown as discouraging use of MAX.

The best transit system design strikes the right balance between speed and convenience in order to maximize ridership and serve the community. If a light rail train is not moving quickly, the value of the investment in dedicated right-of-way and high capacity trains may be significantly eroded. At a time when commute times are getting longer, it became imperative to examine every opportunity to speed up MAX.

Therefore, in 2019 TriMet conducted a station optimization study to determine whether closure of some downtown stations could improve MAX system efficiency while retaining convenience, and if so, which stations would be most appropriate to close. In doing so, TriMet conducted community outreach and engagement, performed a Title VI equity analysis, and obtained a systems engineering report.

As a result, TriMet identified the Kings Hill/SW Salmon, Mall/SW 4th Ave, Mall/SW 5th Ave, and Skidmore Fountain MAX stations as the best candidates for closure. These four stations were selected because of their proximity to other stations, station access area, ridership, and safety. TriMet determined that consolidation of these four MAX stations with nearby alternatives would help optimize the balance of speed and convenience in the system. Significantly, Skidmore Fountain MAX Station is only two blocks from the Old Town/Chinatown MAX Station.

During extensive outreach about the proposed station closures, TriMet and the Board received a significant amount of public comment, most of which objected to the closure of the Skidmore Fountain Station. However, some also objected to the closure of the Kings Hill/SW Salmon Station. There were almost no objections to the closure of the Mall/SW 4th Ave and Mall/SW 5th Ave stations.

In June 2019, the Board held the first readings and public hearings on Ordinances that would close the Kings Hill/SW Salmon, Mall/SW 4th, and Mall/SW 5th MAX stations, but deferred the closure the Skidmore Fountain Station. Instead, via Resolution No. 19-06-47, the Board authorized a three year review and evaluation of the proposed closure of the Skidmore Fountain MAX station. This was to permit further evaluation of safety, security and development around the station, including investments directed at increasing ridership.

In July 2019, the Board adopted Ordinance No. 355, authorizing the closure of the Kings Hill Station, and adopted Ordinance No. 356, authorizing the closure of the two Mall stations. The two Mall stations were to be permanently closed no sooner than March 1, 2020. The Kings Hill Station also was to be closed no sooner than March 1, 2020, but for a period of not less than one year. The mandated closure of the Kings Hill Station was to allow further evaluation of ridership, transit system speed, on-time performance and safety resulting from the closure.

TriMet subsequently closed the Mall and Kings Hill stations on March 1, 2020. The minimum one-year trial closure of Kings Hill Station occurred almost simultaneously with the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly affected ridership. Additionally, ongoing construction near the station resulted in postponement of any decision regarding the permanent closure for at least another year.

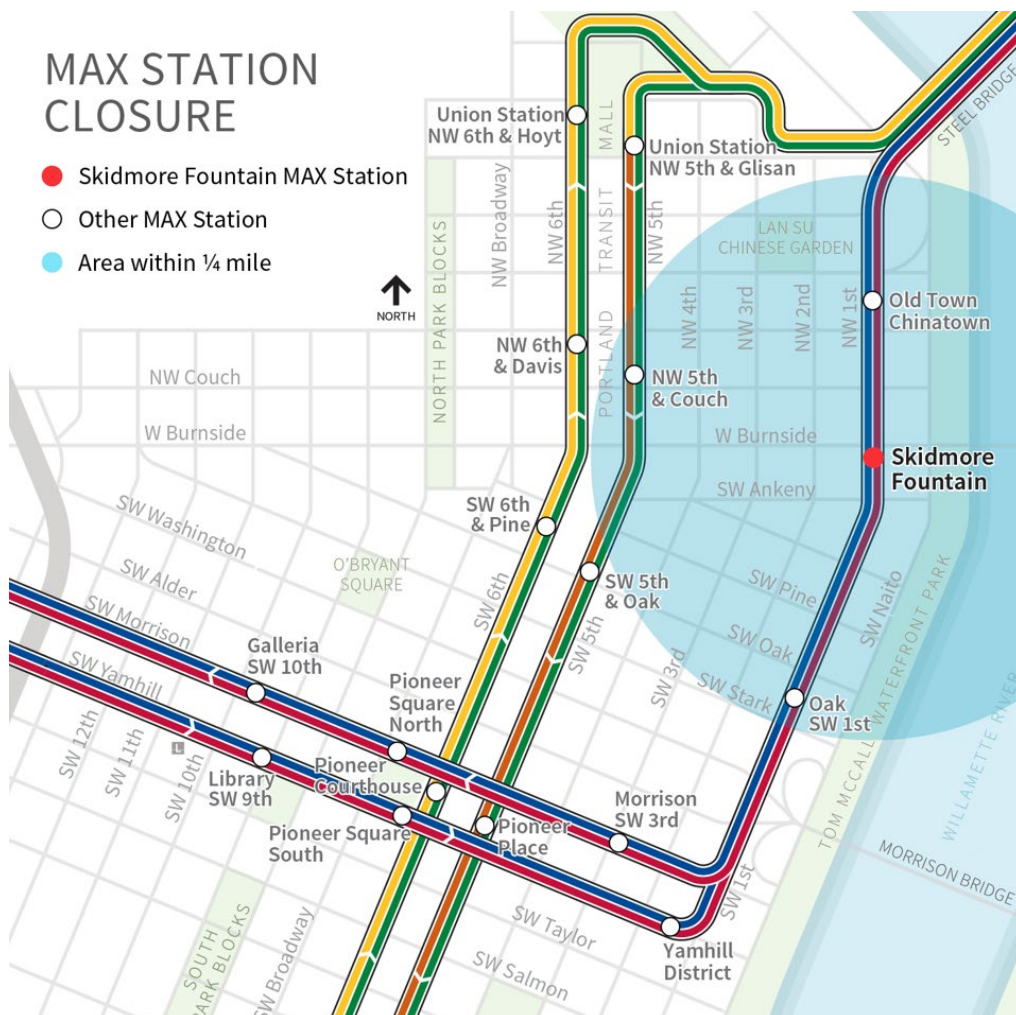
Subsequently, staff evaluated the trial closure and found travel time savings of about two minutes (combined with closure of the Mall stations) and minimal customer complaints. Staff also found that safety issues associated with the island style design of the Kings Hill Station remained.

In March of 2022, as the result of TriMet's evaluation of the closure of the Kings Hill Station, the General Manager submitted a memorandum to the Board recommending that the Kings Hill Station remain closed. As of early 2024, removal of all platform amenities at both the Mall and Kings Hill stations was underway or completed.

By July of 2022, the Skidmore Fountain MAX Station had been evaluated over the three year period authorized by Resolution No. 19-06-47. In 2023, TriMet confirmed that several large employers had left the Skidmore Fountain area and ridership at the station remained low. Plans for replacement of the Burnside Bridge above the station were also in progress, which would require a full closure of the station for about five years in any event, beginning in 2026. From December 2023 through February 2024, TriMet conducted additional outreach about the proposed permanent closure of the station, and found more support and little opposition to the closure. Therefore, the proposal to permanently close the Skidmore Fountain Station has been renewed.

This Ordinance would authorize the General Manager to permanently close the Skidmore Fountain MAX Station at any time after the effective date of the Ordinance. However, TriMet plans to close the station no sooner than August 24, 2025. This delayed closure would allow TriMet to develop a budget, engage a design team, mobilize personnel, and carry out the required train signal changes, so that the closure can be completed prior to the construction work on the Burnside Bridge. It would also permit the Station to remain open for the Saturday Market at that location in the meantime.

The Skidmore Fountain MAX station proposed for closure (shown in red) and its proximity to other downtown MAX stations is illustrated on the map below.



6. Diversity

As part of its review of the MAX station optimization plan that proposed closing four MAX stations in downtown Portland, including the Skidmore Fountain station, TriMet staff performed a Title VI analysis of the potential impact of the closures on minority and low income populations. The Title VI analysis found there is a lower than average concentration of minority residents in the areas served by the four stations and that within a half mile of each station slated for closure there are alternative stations available. Therefore, the proposed closures would have no disparate impact on minority populations.

Further, while the areas surrounding each of the stations have higher than average concentrations of low income residents, because there are alternative stations available within a half mile of each station slated for closure, the proposed closures would have no disproportionate burden on low income populations.

These conclusions remain valid today.

7. Financial/Budget Impact

TriMet previously incurred approximately \$225,000 in costs related to modifying the systems that manage train movements in order to support the future closure of the Skidmore Fountain Station. For the permanent closure of the Station, TriMet anticipates spending up to \$450,000 to modify the right-of-way in order to transition the Station and its appurtenances to different ultimate uses, pending further study. At the same time, some Operations and Maintenance cost savings may be realized as a result of the permanent closure.

8. Impact if Not Approved

If the Board chooses not to adopt this Ordinance, the Skidmore Fountain MAX Station would remain open, and continue contributing to MAX system inefficiencies. Permanent closure of the Station will eliminate ambiguities regarding the Station's status, and removal of Station-related amenities may reduce potential legal liabilities.

ORDINANCE NO. 378

**ORDINANCE NO. 378 OF THE TRI-COUNTY METROPOLITAN
TRANSPORTATION DISTRICT OF OREGON (TRIMET) TO CLOSE
THE SKIDMORE FOUNTAIN MAX STATION (FIRST READING AND
PUBLIC HEARING)**

The Board of Directors of the Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon (Board), pursuant to the authority of Oregon Revised Statutes Chapter 267, after having considered the public testimony presented and having reviewed, considered and approved the Title VI equity analysis concerning the effects of the MAX station closures, including the Skidmore Fountain MAX Station, does hereby ordain and decree the following Ordinance:

Section 1- Closure of the Skidmore Fountain MAX Station

The General Manager is authorized to permanently close the Skidmore Fountain MAX Station upon the effective date of this Ordinance No. 378.

Section 2- Effective/Operative Dates

This Ordinance No. 378 shall be effective thirty days after the date of its Second Reading, and operative upon the decision of the General Manager.

Dated: March 27, 2024

Presiding Officer

Attest:

Recording Secretary

Approved as to Legal Sufficiency:



Legal Department