



## Environmental Work in the Transportation Sector

# CAREER PROFILE

**NAME:** Jeff Owen

**TITLE:** Strategic Planning Coordinator

**DEGREE:** Landscape Architecture, City & Regional Planning

**COMPANY:** TriMet

*TriMet provides bus, light rail and commuter rail service in Portland, Oregon and the surrounding region. The transportation options connect people with their community, ease traffic congestion, and reduce air pollution, “making our region a better place to live.”—TriMet.*

**Q.** What is your current role at the organization?

**A.** Currently, my role is the strategic planning coordinator. I first joined TriMet in 2012 as a transportation planner focused on active transportation connections to transit, which includes getting people biking and walking to our transit system. Last year, I transitioned to this role that is strategic planning coordinator, focusing on longer term strategies, and how we are working towards our larger mobility goals in the future. This role includes advocating that our agency utilize national best practices, monitoring performance related outcomes, and creative ways to get where we are going.

It is a blend of being close enough to the service that we deliver for our customers on the street, alongside stepping back to a larger scale to make recommendations for policies or practices that we should consider pushing forward for the agency to deliver improvements for our customers.

**Q.** How did you get to this point in your career? Any key points along that pathway?

**A.** I began with an undergraduate degree in landscape architecture, which focused on the space between buildings and how the built environment works. Next in graduate school I chose a Master’s in city and regional planning program, with a focus around urban design and transportation. This larger planning lens includes a much more complex perspective, from design to economy to housing, and the way our cities and communities interact with each other and grow over time. During both undergraduate and

graduate school, I benefited from combining classroom learning with internships and work-study programs—both in the public sector at a town government, and in the private sector at land use and transportation planning firms. After grad school, my main role at a private firm focused on the Atlanta Beltline—a large and dynamic public project involving planning for trails, park spaces, and future transit service encircling downtown Atlanta. While I loved the role, I decided to move across the country in 2008 and landed in Portland, Oregon. After some part-time work getting my bearings, I began working at a small transit agency south of Portland on the southern edge of our metro region where I focused on active transportation. After a few years, I switched over to working at TriMet, our regional transit agency, keeping my focus on active transportation, but increasing the size and scale of my focus around our entire region.

**Q.** Were there any experiences that helped to best prepare you for the work that you do?

**A.** Because my experience includes both the education piece plus real-world work experience, I feel that was a great way for me to prepare in my career. I've really enjoyed having a good grasp of the design side of the physical world that I got from landscape architecture, including an understanding of dimensions and parameters that designers use to prepare for construction projects in the built environment. For me, that design side is complemented by and expanded with more policy and planning work. I think the combination of education with work internships really prepared me to contribute in the work world right away. As my role includes policy development and regional coordination with our many jurisdictional partners, I am thankful to have both education and work experience. One crucial piece of advice that I took to heart was to gain an understanding of both the public and private sides of the planning and design fields. This combination of how both sides fit together proves very helpful working in the public sector, managing private sector consultants, to produce outcomes on the ground for people moving around our communities.

**Q.** What does a day in the life of your position look like?

**A.** A typical day for me includes many internal and external meetings, but also protecting some time that I need to push forward on my own priorities. My work requires a lot of coordination with jurisdictional partners all around our region and at the state level. I try to plan out my time carefully, but also have to remain flexible for unexpected items that come up and need to be dealt with. I support and advise our executive team, general manager and board members in responding to a range of policy, planning, or political requests. So, I suppose it is a blend of the known and the unknown. It requires me to manage my time the best I can, but also be available and flexible

to help out other people in my agency, or external partners who need support.

**Q.** What skills have you gained in the work? Are these unique or transferable to other disciplines?

**A.** I think time management is really important for the work that I do, and trying to think about when to focus on which efforts to be most effective. It's not a solo effort for me, as much of my work revolves around utilizing and depending on others within my own agency, and outside of it. I try to ask for other peoples' time and expertise carefully and effectively to provide insight into my work. My work depends on frequent and effective collaboration, which is highly transferable to many other lines of work and disciplines.



In addition, my role often involves critical thinking, framing policy options and trade-offs, making recommendations to our leadership team, and finding consensus among many partners in moving towards good outcomes for transit, mobility, and the growth of our region.

**Q.** What do you enjoy most about your job?

**A.** I enjoy the blend of delivering on the ground, tangible results for people to benefit from, plus thinking through policy and planning issues that are more long term, nuanced, or nebulous. We provide mobility service for people to get to their jobs, to school, to shop, to see family or friends, and move around their communities. So, there is a lot of direct tangible results from the work that we do. But I also enjoy the policy work that is more vague or more long-term or abstract. If I only worked to deliver physical projects, that would not be fulfilling to me. Or, if I worked 100% on policy that was long-term, and it was harder to see results on the ground soon enough, that would also be frustrating for me. So, I enjoy the mix of both of those things.

**Q.** What are some of the challenges you have faced in the work? How did you overcome them?

**A.** I deal with bureaucracy, both directly at my agency, and in working with

partners. We are a big agency and we work with other governmental agencies. There are a lot of processes that are necessary and good for making sure that we are spending public money the best way that we can, and that we are responsible to tax payers. But, it's also a challenge because it can be frustrating to be slowed down on an innovative idea, maybe related to an emerging technology, which does not mesh well with a larger, slower, more thorough process that is already in place or adopted. So that can be frustrating if you are trying to move quickly, but still respect processes that are in place.

**Q.** What are some of your own personal characteristics and values that make you a good fit for this type of work?

**A.** I am able to find peace in knowing that my role is essentially advocacy within bureaucracy. I am asked to push for what is best, and that might be slightly outside of the realm of what most people think is easily achievable, but balancing that push with knowing that there are a lot of on-the-ground realities that often resist change. You have to be really hopeful and proactive and aggressive in chasing after a bigger vision, but then you also have to be ready to come back down to earth and negotiate with everyone else who might want something different than you. If

someone in this position were totally advocacy-minded, they would likely be very frustrated. But, if someone in this position was only concerned about protecting the bureaucracy and immediate implications of new ideas, they would likely not be effective in working towards the larger vision of where we should be heading. So, I think that it is a blend of knowing when to push for something bigger, and knowing when to focus on what we can accomplish in a shorter period of time, that can still drive us towards that larger vision.

**Q.** What is something that you want people to know about the work that you do?

**A.** I would encourage someone to really follow their passion, but also be ready to temper those hopes and dreams with what they can accomplish within a given amount of time. I just think that blend is really important to someone's happiness in their career trajectory. I am trying to help make the world a better place by working to provide improved mobility solutions that people want and need, but the work is tough. New challenges and opportunities will continue to emerge into the future, and we should be ready to evaluate the options carefully, in order to invest in the best ones to carry us into the future.↔

## Overview of Position as it Relates to Transportation

In the field of TDM, a strategic planning coordinator conducts an array of essential functions related to transportation. Strategic planning coordinators: track and analyze federal, state and local legislation policy related to transportation; prepare and present company policies to the public; respond to requests for information related to policies and performance; provide data analysis for projects; participate in the development and implementation of a visionary mobility program, among other duties.

## Strategic Planning Coordinator

Communicate and work to implement those goals and policies through federal, state, and regional partnerships and coordination. Coordinate with the Directors of Service Delivery, Operating Projects, and Marketing/ Communications to develop annual plans and strategies. Represent the organizational interests with state, regional, and local government policy staff. Represent the organization at meetings with Metro, various jurisdictions, agencies and the public in matters related to policies, environmental plans and efforts. Strategic Planning Coordinators also ensure a commitment to safety through consistent and professional behaviors in performance of job requirements that demonstrate safety is a fundamental value that guides all aspects of our work.

As a strategic planning coordinator, Jeff: supports general managers, board members, and the executive team on a range of strategic issues; represents TriMet locally, regionally, at the state

level, and at national events and conferences; coordinates the internal TriMet New Mobility Work Group across all divisions and departments; leads planning coordination efforts with regional partners and elected leaders, jurisdiction staff; tracks and analyzes federal, state, and local legislation and policy related to transportation, land use, sustainability, livability, and funding and forecasting outlook for transit opportunities; develops policy recommendations for internal agency practices and partner jurisdictions; and presents policy, plans, and projects to regional elected leaders and TriMet Board of Directors.

### Automated & Connected Systems

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— Jeff Owen

## Overview of General Skills and Requirements

A Master's Degree in Public Administration, Planning, Communication or another related field is required to become a Strategic Planning Coordinator. Additionally, most companies look for a minimum of six years of credited experience with increasingly responsible professional experiences in municipal administrations. Companies also desire someone who has worked

in the development of public policy, who has a working knowledge of transit and experience working at a transit agency.





## About TriMet

TriMet, more formally known as the Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon, is a public agency that operates mass transit in a region that spans most of the Portland metropolitan area in the U.S. state of Oregon. TriMet started operating a light rail system named MAX in 1986, as well as a commuter rail line in 2009. It also provides the operators and maintenance personnel for the City of Portland-owned Portland Streetcar system.

Source: [trimet.org](http://trimet.org)

## GLOSSARY

- ▶ **Active Transportation** – a form of transportation of people and sometimes goods, that only uses the physical activity of the human for being the locomotion.
- ▶ **Mobility as a Service** – the shift away from personally-owned modes of transportation and towards mobility solutions that are consumed as a service.

## Type of Planning Projects Carried Out at TriMet

### WORKING WITH PORT OF PORTLAND

Jeff is on the 30-member [committee](#) which is working to create a long-range development plan for Portland International Airport over three years.

### TRIMET BIKE PLAN

This project resulted in the [TriMet Bike Plan](#) — a roadmap that will help guide future investments in biking infrastructure and amenities, including access to transit stops, expanding parking options, and accommodating bikes onboard buses and trains. The goal of the plan is to make bike+transit trips easier, safer, and more convenient for people.

### OREGON AUTONOMOUS VEHICLE TASK FORCE

Jeff serves on the [task force](#) for autonomous vehicles (AVs) which looks into how AVs intersect with issues including licensing and registration, insurance and liability, law enforcement and accident reporting, and cybersecurity.

## Key Skills

- ▶ **Reading Comprehension** – Reading work-related information.
- ▶ **Complex Problem Solving** – Noticing a problem and figuring out the best way to solve it.
- ▶ **Critical Thinking** – Thinking about the pros and cons of different ways to solve a problem.
- ▶ **Active Listening** – Listening to others, not interrupting, and asking good questions.
- ▶ **Judgment and Decision Making** – Thinking about the pros and cons of different options and picking the best one.
- ▶ **Coordination** – Changing what is done based on other people’s actions.
- ▶ **Active Learning** – Figuring out how to use new ideas or things.
- ▶ **Systems Evaluation** – Measuring how well a system is working and how to improve it.
- ▶ **Systems Analysis** – Figuring out how a system should work and how changes in the future will affect it.
- ▶ **Time Management** – Managing your time and the time of other people.
- ▶ **Monitoring** – Keeping track of how well people and/or groups are doing in order to make improvements.

## Abilities Needed for Success

- ▶ **Written Comprehension** – Reading and understanding what is written.
- ▶ **Oral Expression** – Effective spoken communication.
- ▶ **Written Expression** – Effective communication in written form.
- ▶ **Deductive Reasoning** – Using rules to solve problems.
- ▶ **Inductive Reasoning** – Making general rules or coming up with answers from lots of detailed information.
- ▶ **Oral Comprehension** – Listening and understanding what people say.
- ▶ **Problem Sensitivity** – Noticing when problems happen.
- ▶ **Fluency of Ideas** – Coming up with lots of ideas.
- ▶ **Near Vision** – Seeing details up close.
- ▶ **Originality** – Creating new and original ideas.
- ▶ **Information Ordering** – Ordering or arranging things.
- ▶ **Visualization** – Imagining how something will look after it is moved around or changed.



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