



**WASHINGTON COUNTY TRANSIT COMMITTEE #3
MEETING SUMMARY
MAY 26, 2022, 10:30 AM-12:00 PM
Zoom Virtual Meeting**

Members

Kathryn Harrington, Washington County, Chair
Jolynn Becker, City of Banks
Dwight Brashear, SMART/Wilsonville
Annadiana Johnson, Rider Representative
Stephanie Jones, City of Banks
Teri Lenahan, City of North Plains

Rebecca Miller, Washington County
Michael Ray, TriMet
Deanna Palm, Washington County Chamber
Elaine Wells, Rider Representative
Julie Wilcke Pilmer, Ride Connection

Attendees

Tangerine Behere, Ride Connection
Chris Deffebach, Washington County
Valerie Egon, Oregon Department of Transportation
Reza Farhoodi, Washington County
Roy Rogers, Washington County

Brenda Schaffer, Washington County
Julie Sosnovske, Washington County
Dyami Valentine, Washington County
John Whitman, Ride Connection
Ken Zatarain, WSP

Welcome and Introductions

Chair Kathryn Harrington opened the meeting welcoming members.

Chair Harrington noted the goal for the meeting was to collect committee feedback on the transit investment options that will inform short-term investment strategy for the upcoming biennium and longer-term transit priorities, which were developed with Ride Connection staff who were available to answer questions. Members would also be able to provide suggestions on how the County should solicit input from the public during upcoming outreach activities.

The budget consists of funding from two separate sources: formula funds based on employee payroll tax revenues generated through the Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund and additional regional coordination funds sourced through TriMet that support first/last mile shuttles. TriMet staff have proposed doubling the regional coordination funds from approximately \$3M during the previous biennium to over \$6M, but requires approval from TriMet's House Bill 2017 Advisory Committee. If passed, those funds would be used to advance priorities established during the last funding cycle, in addition to new priorities identified during this round.

STIF Budget Options

Dyami Valentine shared a draft funding forecast for the next biennium, which had changed slightly from the previous version, noting that the forecast was still being refined. He noted that staff is currently assuming some unspent money from the previous biennium due to constraints and challenges in implementing new services as planned caused by the pandemic, as well as additional revenue not accounted for in the FY22/23 budget to be carried forward. There is also regional coordination funding that will be determined by TriMet's HB2017 Committee.

**Department of Land Use & Transportation
Office of the Director**

155 N First Avenue, Suite 350, MS 16, Hillsboro, OR 97124-3072
phone: 503-846-4530 • fax: 503-846-3588
www.co.washington.or.us/lut • lutdir@co.washington.or.us

John Whitman from Ride Connection provided an overview of the existing rural programs. Dyami then shared two options for committee feedback. Overarching themes for the two STIF budget proposal options:

- Option 1 maintains existing and committed programs at relatively unchanged service levels;
- Option 2 shifts funding from door-to-door services to improve service on westLink and enhance interregional coordination.

For demand response services, Julie Wilcke from Ride Connection clarified that these amounts only represent the enhanced portion funded through STIF and is separate from the federal 5311 funds that also fund demand response. While the 5311 funds are flexible and can be used for demand response and WestLink, the STIF requires clearly delineating programs in the budget. Chris Deffebach from Washington County mentioned a key benefit of STIF funds is that they can be used as local match to increase 5311 funds that Ride Connection is entitled to receive.

John also noted that across the different services Ride Connection was seeing 40-50 percent ridership compared to pre-COVID but there was a modest recovery in recent months. That loss of ridership could be attributed to the shifting nature of the commute and the workforce at-large due to the effects of the pandemic, as well as changes in transportation needs in other trips, like increasing telemedicine decreasing the need for medical trips which are traditionally a large percentage of demand response. He added that Ride Connection was looking to improve the demand response service to meet evolving needs.

Dyami then went through the regional coordination service proposal inside the TriMet district. In the near term, existing shuttle services would be maintained, with several proposed enhancements to existing services. GroveLink would have Cornelius service expanded to weekdays, North Hillsboro Link would receive additional peak hour frequency and a potential extension of the route, and the Tualatin Shuttle would also be expanded with continued funding for the STIF Discretionary grant funded new Green Line service between Bridgeport Village and the I-205/Stafford interchange. As part of this investment, the Red Line Shuttle would be restructured to serve more neighborhoods in south Tualatin.

The service proposal includes funding for one or two new first/last mile shuttle services that would be initiated, with funding available for new vehicles and operations. The County conducted a shuttle system analysis with ten candidates in areas not well served by fixed-route transit to determine where new shuttles might be implemented using STIF funds. These candidates were placed into near and longer-term priority tiers based on the results of an equity and potential ridership screening:

- Tier 1
 - Witch Hazel/Orengo
 - South Hillsboro
 - South Beaverton/Cooper Mountain
 - Durham/King City
 - Central Tigard
- Tier 2
 - Bethany/Cedar Mill
 - River Terrace/Bull Mountain
- Tier 3
 - Northwest Hillsboro
 - Sherwood
 - Basalt Creek

The County Board will advance a proposal to TriMet HB2017 Advisory Committee based on public comment and recommendations from this and other committees, specifically the Washington County Coordinating Committee. Some additional considerations to help identify near-term funding could be local support, leveraged funding, the cost to provide the service and other qualitative measures.

Staff then asked the committee if there were any missing priorities, and whether there was support in taking the rural service options and regional coordination proposal out for public comment, or if there are any suggestions to modify the proposals. Members were also asked for their thoughts on the shuttle screening results. One member responded that the presentation lacked sufficient detail for the public to understand the proposal without assistance and felt that additional explanatory text would make it work better. Another member expressed satisfaction with the proposal as long as the feedback from the meeting was incorporated into the final product.

Participant questions or comments:

- Do the programs with different options represent separate proposals or do they build on each other? *They represent separate proposals.*
- Is there a concern that demand response ridership may be higher than anticipated if the decision is made to go with Option 2? *Ride Connection has not seen demand meet the previous funding level allocated for demand response during the previous biennium, which is why staff is recommending a lower funding amount that could still meet the existing demand and shifting funds to other priorities. Ride Connection is also thinking of different ways to improve the service and increase demand.*
- How was the funding level determined for Demand Response Option 2? *It was based on historical service trends and how much the County was invoiced for during the previous biennium. Funding could be shifted as needed if demand is higher than anticipated.*
- The TriMet HB2017 Committee has a pot of money allocated for bus stop amenities, would the \$150K amount shown here be in addition to those funds, and how can the County ask for additional funding from that larger pot to fund stop improvements? *The HB2017 committee focuses on TriMet and smaller agencies, while these funds are focused on the rural area and Ride Connection shuttle network, although there may be some overlap with TriMet stops. The Washington County representatives on the HB2017 committee would be best positioned to make a request to increase the allotment for bus stops in the county.*
- Has the rising cost of gasoline been factored into these budgets, both from the standpoint of operating costs and in demand forecasting? *That is something we are considering, as we experienced higher ridership during the previous recession. While we do not have enough data to prove causation, it makes sense that there could be higher demand for public transportation due to high gas prices. This is also why marketing is an important focus, as we have heard that not everyone in the rural community knows that Ride Connection is an option.*
- Is there additional budget available that cover increased operational costs from higher gas prices? *Ride Connection has done some work in estimating inflationary costs, which have risen to 8 percent in the latest draft budget and does decrease the percent of assumed additional revenue that can be put into new service.*
- How much funding is available for the rural area, and is that amount determined by the state? *ODOT provides the County with employee payroll tax revenue projections for the coming biennium, and we create a budget that assumes a 15 percent increase to account for revenue growth based on historical figures. The County can only receive funding up to the level of our planned budget, and so*

any further revenue above and beyond the budgeted amount would be received in the next biennium.

- Has the cost of vehicle maintenance been factored into the budget, as well as the ongoing driver shortage that agencies such as TriMet have had to deal with? *Ride Connection's proposed budget assumes cost increases across the board, including an increase in driver wages to \$18.85 per hour, with another increase anticipated later this year to help with recruitment and retention. We will continue to watch the market and inflation rate, but believe we have funds available to cover increased costs and want to provide a competitive wage.*
- Is it possible to shift funding around as demand response needs warrant (such as reducing the budget for WestLink or other programs) or do the two options represent an either-or approach? Having those details laid out would help inform the public during the outreach. *There is some flexibility in the budget for additional demand response service, but additional runs for services like WestLink come at a fixed cost per trip based on the length of the trip. However, expanding weekday service for WestLink would cost more than weekend service, so there are adjustments that could be made to the service proposal if needed to increase demand response.*
- Does the STIF require a certain amount or percentage of the funding to be used for carryover or reserve? Are STIF revenues use or lose? *STIF rules do not allow for reserve, but the County is free to allocate them towards a specific program to meet STIF goals. Funds are not use or lose and can continue to be carried over until they are used.*
- Do development fees for new housing permits help pay for new transit? *Developers have to pay Transportation Development Tax which can help pay for roadway improvements that benefit transit access and operations.*
- As the shuttle system expands, is the County assuming that additional ongoing funding will be needed to maintain the new services on top of the existing shuttles? *We are hopeful but that should be directed towards HB2017 committee, as that was an issue that came up during last biennium and the County had to subsidize cost of living increases from funds outside the TriMet district.*
- Will the materials be clear that only one shuttle out of the ten candidates will be chosen for immediate implementation? *The budget assumes one to two additional service being launched during this biennium. The County can seek discretionary grants or other funding opportunities as they arise, but we want to be clear on what folks can expect for the near-term. All of the candidates will be folded into the Transit Development Plan as longer-term priorities.*
- Has there been an equity lens screening for the shuttle analysis, and if yes, should the County only publicize the Tier 1 options or will we provide the public an opportunity to suggest new areas? *We're reflecting that evaluation as part of the survey, but it is not the only consideration for prioritizing the shuttle options. While we will not communicate these options in tiers necessarily, the County will provide summarized evaluation results.*
- Is the County seeking public input on the entire regional coordination proposal or just about the ten shuttles? *We are seeking feedback on transit needs to help inform both the STIF and regional coordination proposal.*
- Even though TriMet has funding available to expand service, service is currently constricted due to the labor shortage and they are increasing wages to help hire more operators.
- Suggestion to shift demand response riders towards cheaper fixed-route services based on the locational pattern of demand response trips.
- Suggestion to look into the responsibility of health care providers to provide transportation using Medicaid funds that are meant to address social determinants of health (SDOH).

- Suggestion to include both dollar amounts and percentages in the pie charts showing the two service options when soliciting public comment.
- Suggestion to include information about who is benefitted and impacted among priority populations between the different service options.
- Suggestion to consider outside funding from jurisdictions to help pay for a shuttle option that is not in Tier 1.

Community Input Engagement and Outreach Strategy

Dyami Valentine walked through the community input engagement and outreach strategy, which is scheduled to take place during mid-June through mid-July. The engagement will include an online survey, multiple tabling events and stakeholder briefings. The outreach strategy consists of partner notification materials, County and partner interested parties' list and social media, and Community Participation Organizations and other community newsletters.

The Chair suggested getting word out to local chambers of commerce and area businesses in order to hear from them about how to maintain and expand shuttle service. Mayor Lenahan mentioned that outreach materials could be included within City of North Plains' water bills which are sent around the 15th of each month, although they would need to get them with enough advance notice.

Public Comment

- There was no public comment at the meeting.

Next Steps

The Chair reviewed next committee steps, with the final meeting scheduled for the last week of July to review public comment and endorse priorities for the FY24-25 biennium and the Transit Development Plan update.

Adjournment

Chair Harrington thanked committee members for their time and participation and adjourned the meeting at approximately 12:00 p.m.