

Wasco County Public Transportation Advisory Committee

Agenda

Monday, July 10, 2023

The Dalles Transit Center, 802 Chenoweth Loop, The Dalles

Remote Option via Zoom:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82370564112>

Or call 719-359-4580, Meeting ID: 823 7056 4112

10:00 – 11:00 AM

Topic	Time	Item
Call to Order and Introductions	10:00	
Minutes Approval <i>April 2023</i>	10:05	Approval
Staff Updates <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Link• Travel Trainer• Committee Vacancy	10:07	Information/ Discussion
STIF Plan Implementation	10:30	Information/ Discussion
New Business/ Good of the Order	10:45	
Set Next Meeting and Adjourn	11:00	

The meeting location is accessible to persons with disabilities. If you have a disability that requires any special materials, services or assistance, please contact us at 541-296-2266 (TTY 711) at least 48 hours before the meeting.

WASCO COUNTY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MONDAY, April 10, 2023 at 10:00 am
MCEDD CONFERENCE ROOM & ZOOM TELECONFERENCE

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Louise Sargent (Chair), Jesus Mendoza, Thomas Tramontina, Lee Bryant

STAFF: Jessica Metta (MCEDD Executive Director), Jill Brandt (Administrative Assistant), Sara Crook (Travel Trainer)

Guests: Alice Cannon, Jovi Anderson

CALL TO ORDER/INTRODUCTIONS

Louise Sargent called the meeting to order at 10:03 am. A quorum was present. A short round of introductions took place.

MINUTES

Louise asked for any questions, comments, or edits on the minutes from the January 2023 meeting. There were none.

Lee Bryant motioned to approve the minutes of January 9, 2023 as presented. Thomas Tramontina seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion was carried unanimously.

WASCO COUNTY RURAL TRANSPORTATION EQUITY GRANT

Alice Cannon introduced herself and gave a presentation on the Rural Transportation Equity Grant work. Wasco County received this DLCD grant in partnership with MCEDD to fund research and outreach with South Wasco County in particular, and regional ag transit opportunities in general. The grant's objective is to enhance the county's rural transportation network by integrating those who are unserved or underserved.

Alice explained the findings from the interviews in the South County. Maupin's population doubles plus more in the summer rafting/ recreation season. There are many summer seasonal employment opportunities in Maupin. There is huge difficulty retaining employees in rural places because transportation is a real issue. The Cascades East Transit in Bend opened talk about vanpools, and there is enough travelling back and forth in the winter to support a van going from Maupin up to the mountain.

Alice described significant economic trends in the recreation industry that have impacted Maupin and have created a number of year-round work commute travel to Government Camp and back.

Interviews with farmers have revealed the trend towards more reliance on migrant workers with visas. In the past, Wasco County's seasonal cherry workers came from California with their own cars. Now, the visa program requires that the farmers provide transportation for their employees for access to services. Most, if not all, of the seasonal workers are housed at the farms and many of the farmers were not aware of the Link's Dial a Ride service that the employees can use. The interviews clearly show the need to build awareness for this program, since these farms are within The Link's dial-a-ride service area. Transportation is an issue for many who live in Hood River but need to travel to The Dalles for services.

The need for more travel training is evident. A portion of this equity grant will fund bi-lingual enhancements to The Link's travel training program by paying for the Travel Training videos voice-overs in Spanish. There will also be magnets and posters created in both languages to promote both dial-a-ride and the South County Shuttle. These will be handed out at Cherry Festival, and other local festivals such as the South Wasco Alliance event, health fairs, fire safety and prevention events, and free community meal events. Annual pow wow at high school another opportunity to participate in Health assessment and offering survey in both English and Spanish. The Next Door will offer a focus group for seasonal Spanish-speaking ag employees that will promote awareness of dial a ride and discover barriers. In early June there will be Pre-Cherry Harvest Farm Tour. The Link, represented by either Sara or Jesus, will have a presence at all events to provide bus tours and information about The Link's services. Alice opened the floor for questions.

Discussion: Lee Bryant expressed her appreciation for all of this work. Louise was curious to hear the results in a few months, on the success of dial-a-ride with the cherry farm workers. Jessica commended Alice on her work that supplements MCEDD's ongoing transportation outreach work.

STAFF UPDATES

Jesus reported on changes in The Link's policies and fares in order to be consistent with our partner regional transit operators (CAT, Mt. Adams Transportation, Skamania County Transportation). He gave examples such as muzzle policies for animals. Community feedback has been requested on changing the fare costs for The Link: to reduce the fixed route to \$1 and increase the dial a ride to \$2. This will be consistent with the other providers and will encourage more fixed route service and less dial a ride. Mt. Adams charges \$1 for fixed route service and \$2 for dial a ride. Both Mt Adams and Skamania Transit charge more for longer rides to cover costs. Jessica pointed out that MCEDD has free Gorge Passes and dial-a-ride passes available to help low-income riders. Jesus asked the committee for feedback on the fare change.

Discussion: Lee agreed that it made sense to change the fares as proposed. Jesus added that the new stops on the fixed routes will lower the distance needed to walk to catch the fixed route service. The committee agreed by consensus to change the fares as proposed. Jesus added that the required public notice period to collect feedback is already in effect.

Jesus continued with his report to note a press release announcing the changes in routes and services went out last week. The fixed-route number of stops has been expanded from eight stops to twenty-one. The extra stops offer better walking distances and increased opportunities for use. Advertising in movie theaters and social media will happen when the updated brochures go out.

Discussion: Louise asked if the extra stops would increase the time between the pickups at any given stop. Jesus explained that the added stops will just shorten the wait time at each stop. There is a four-minute wait at the transit station before the next departure round. Lee expressed her amazement at all the changes since Gerald started driving for the Link. The group all expressed their appreciation for Gerald.

Jesus resumed his report with the status of the RFQ for hybrid buses that was put out and had only one response. The preferred XL Hybrid option was not available, and the only service technician that is available to work on and repair these new buses has been in business only three years, so the reliability is unknown. Jesus is investigating more, but there are no other options available.

The new bus wraps project is nearing completion. The cost has been finalized and the designs were included in the packet. The pictures that will wrap the buses pertain to Wasco County and local area history. The artwork has been shared with local tribes and has been approved by them. Jesus also noted that the marketing magnets and posters that Alice mentioned in her presentation are consistent with this artwork.

Funding updates: The Link has submitted the STIF Formula Grant and Discretionary grants, 5310 and 5311 grants that support dial-a-ride, maintenance and admin costs. The Link has also received a microgrant to buy marketing and educational materials to inform and promote safety in public transit.

Bus shelters update: they are due to arrive on April 25th. They will be installed at sites at One Community Health/ Mid-Columbia Center for Living, Foley Lakes, Waters Edge, and the DHS Office at 7th and Union. East Cascade Works partnered with DHS to contribute funds for the shelter at the Employment office and will be providing up to \$9,000 for installation costs. The shelters are planned to be completed by September.

Vacant Committee Seat: Jessica informed the group that Jim Holycross passed away, leaving his seat vacant. He originally joined the committee to represent South County when he was a resident of Maupin. South County currently has no representation on the committee, and we will be looking for someone who lives down in that area. Rita's term is also ending, and Jessica said that she would check with Rita to see if she wants to be reappointed. MCEDD will get in touch with Wasco County about advertising the open seat.

Travel Training Update: Sara Crook gave a presentation on her current work, which has been focused on restructuring the Gorge Transit Connect program since November. This program consists of a group of community partners who participate in The Link and CAT's low-income pass program. The restructuring has revolved around the cost for Gorge Passes. The program was started with free passes to the organizations that were funded by the startup grant. The program was designed to transition into being more self-supporting as the original grant funding ends. Some of these partner organizations have transportation funding, so this restructuring has involved the creation of a discounted fare for partners. Organizations that have funding and work directly within the Transit Connect program will receive a discount of half price per pass. Social services organizations can fill out a form to request their discounted passes, which Sara will be tracking to inform future grant applications.

Sara is also working to train Travel Ambassadors to be a resource for clients and staff at all Transit Connect partner organizations. These ambassadors will know the basics of the routes, GORge Pass purchase and use, trip planning, and more. Sara will remain an active resource to help the Ambassadors.

Sara gave a brief explanation of the Go Vets program and the travel training videos that are in the process of being created by Jesse Larvick. These videos will go through the basics of how to get on the bus, load a bike or other mobility devices such as a walker or wheelchair. The videos will also have Spanish voiceovers as Alice mentioned earlier in her presentation and will use storytelling to illustrate each step. Sara noted that the tagline on the intro video states, "Welcome to your regional transit system!" It will be inclusive of all locations within the Mid-Columbia region.

Jesus reviewed ridership numbers for the last quarter, giving the service miles, one-way and round trips, number of rides serving seniors, number of revenue trips, and service miles with numbers. He noted the decrease in one-way deviated fixed route rides for elders. This was due to some changes in reporting to ensure that fixed route trips are not used as or logged as a dial-a-ride service trip.

Discussion: The Committee was appreciative of Sara's work and are excited to see the videos come out. Tom Tramontina asked if funding was driven by the ridership performance numbers. Jesus said that The Link reports all dial-a-ride statistics to ODOT as part of the grant requirements, but it does not determine our funding.

NEW BUSINESS/ GOOD OF THE ORDER

Jessica introduced Jovi Anderson as ODOT's new regional rep. Jovi explained that she is one month into this position and looking forward to working with the group going forward.

Sara announced that the Dog Mountain Shuttle will be starting on the weekends at the end of April and will run through mid-June.

Jessica informed the group of the progress on the Regional Transit Strategy project. The Transit Strategy is scheduled to be adopted by the MCEDD Board at their June meeting. All Counties will be asked to pass a resolution to form a TAB (Transit Advisory Board) with decision makers (County Commissioners, City reps) on it.

SET NEXT MEETING AND ADJOURN

The next meeting was set for July 10th, to be held in the MCEDD conference room at 10am. Jessica made a note to check on time availability with the absent members for either 10am or 2pm.

Louise Sargent adjourned the meeting at 10:55 am.

Respectfully submitted by Jill Brandt, Administrative Assistant

To: Wasco County Public Transportation Advisory Committee
From: MCEDD Staff
Date: July 5, 2023
Re: Staff Reports

Grants:

- 5311 Federal Grant was awarded to MCEDD and becomes effective July 1, 2023. The grant supports Dial-a-Ride, preventative maintenance, and administration costs. We also heard we were successful in our application for a STIF Discretionary grant to operate the Hood River- The Dalles Intercity Shuttle, and the two transit grants submitted through Wasco County for The Link that support all of our services for the next two years.
- MCEDD Submitted 2 grant applications for CARES funding to add another run on the Intercity Shuttle and provide for a Daily Needs Shuttle to the Tribal in-lieu sites in Wasco and Klickitat Counties. We are waiting to hear decisions.

Vehicles:

- The LINK is moving forward with the bus wraps and had four buses/2 vans wrapped up by the end of June. Optimist Printers will complete installation. See pictures at right.
- The request for Transit Vehicle Price Quote went out via email to vendors but we received an unsuccessful response due to the lack of hybrid vehicle options. We have reached out to ODOT inquiring about modifying the contract to purchase an electric vehicle.



Facilities:

- The Link ordered and received 4 bus shelters and 20 Simme-Seats. Shelters will be installed at One Community Health /Mid-Columbia Center for Living, Water’s Edge, Foley Lakes, and at the State Offices near 5th & Court St.
- MCEDD selected Schuepbach Custom Builders to complete bus shelter installations. The project will commence this summer upon the approval of the Categorical Exclusion Worksheet.



Bus Routes:

- As of April 17, 2023, The Link has significantly increased the numbers of stops on the Blue and Red Fixed Routes. We will have updated brochures to hand out at the meeting. Hours of operations expanded from 7am to 7pm beginning July 3, 2023.
- The Link assumed operating responsibility for The Dalles to Hood River Intercity shuttle effective July 1, 2023. The Link will provide the service 7 days a week, five trips per day on weekdays and three trips per day on the weekends.

- July 1, 2023 also marked the beginning of Sunday DAR service, 9am to 4pm.

Fare Changes: On May 17, 2023, The Link held an Open House to hear feedback from the public regarding fare changes. We also collected feedback via a survey. As approved by the PTAC, The Link proposed increasing the Dial-a-Ride from \$1.50 to \$2.00 and reducing fixed route fare from \$1.50 to \$1.00. Public input on the fare changes was mostly positive. Accordingly, the new fares for The Link went into effect on May 29.

Policy Updates: Policies were updated to align with the Regional Providers. Changes include updates to pets, service animals, bikes, who can ride for free, luggage, bags, strollers, age limit and ridership service suspension policy. As one example, The Link will be changing free rides for youth to 10 and under. Clients will find the updates in the new fixed route The Link's brochures.

Celebrations and Outreach

- We celebrated The Link's 26th anniversary with pizza and games on May 19 (picture on left). Jill Brandt did a great job on social media posts around the event to highlight all our staff.
- We also participated in the Cherry Fest Parade in April (picture on right) and had a booth at the resource fair, Pride parade, and at the One Community Health Express Clinic Grand Opening in June.



Planning

- The work with Wasco County Planning department to increase outreach has concluded with the Wasco County Board of County Commissioners adopting the Transit Development Plan at their July 5 meeting. The Board had questions about outreach and ridership. Staff can bring more details about these two topics for discussion at the next PTAC meeting to receive PTAC input.
- Through the outreach grant received by Wasco County Planning, they purchased for The Link 2,000 postcards, 40 posters, 250 South County brochures, 200 Fare Programs and Gorge Transit Connect flyers, 600 fridge magnets, and one year of movie theater advertising. The grant also paid for all the designer time for all these materials and Spanish-language voiceovers for the Travel Training videos.

Committee: We continue recruiting for a South County resident for the PTAC and welcome suggestions.

The Link's quarterly ridership figures will be brought to the meeting.

MCEDD Travel Training Program

- MCEDD Travel Trainer Sara Crook manages the Gorge Transit Connect program, the Go Vets Columbia Gorge program, and is available to assist individuals with their travel training needs. Her work is focused mostly on Wasco and Hood River Counties due to funding sources. Highlights of her work the last few months include participation in The Dalles Cherry Festival, the Maupin Daze celebration, South Wasco Health Fair, and multiple local powwows. Sara has also been working with Special Olympics participants to help them use public transit to get to their events.
- Travel Training Videos: The videography work is complete with great footage of the transit centers, staff, and bus drivers, and beautiful drone footage of the bus routes throughout the Gorge. We should have these posted very shortly to the Gorgetranslink.com's Travel Training webpage. These videos are evergreen products that will assist the travel training program and include versions with Spanish language voiceovers.

Gorge Translink Alliance

MCEDD's Mobility Manager coordinates the Alliance which seeks to enhance regional connectivity and develop a seamless network of transportation services in the five-county region. These providers include Mt Adams Transportation Service (Klickitat County), Skamania County Transit, Columbia Area Transit (CAT), the Link (Wasco County), and Sherman County Community Transit.

Coordination Projects

MCEDD's Mobility Manager continue to convene a series of workshops designed to align policies, design a universal rack card template for visual consistency of schedules and routes, and to modify timetables to improve transfers between services. The Mobility Manager is also working with different consultants to assist the Gorge TransLink to develop a streamlined and universal data collection system, design an enhanced regional schedule for upcoming grant proposals, and to host a transit skills training workshop that has been high on the transit providers' priority list.

Gorge Pass Marketing

The GORge Pass Marketing grant project continues to build momentum on GORge Pass sales. The grant project runs through August of 2023 and many project activities will occur during these busy summer months. The providers recently updated the pass to be good for a rolling 12 months from whenever the pass was purchased, providing more value to riders.

Gorge Regional Transit Strategy Adopted!

At their June meeting, the MCEDD Board of Directors



EXPLORE
CONNECT | PROTECT

**GORge
Pass** 
.com

Click here to collect your free
2023 annual pass for transit to the
mountain, airport, city, or trailheads.

*Each collected pass to be matched with a
donation to the Gorge Equity Fund.*

formally passed a Resolution adopting the Gorge Regional Transit Strategy! This multi-year project developed a roadmap for a regionally coordinated and integrated public transportation system across the five counties. As next steps, first each of the five transportation provider boards will also consider adoption of the Strategy. And MCEDD has already received ODOT and WSDOT grants to move forward with implementation of Strategy recommendations, including the formation of a Regional Transit Advisory Board. Read the final strategy here: <https://gorgetranslink.com/gorge-transit-strategy/>

Wasco County Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF) Formula Fund Plan
 Project List for July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2025

Project Name	Project Description
Routes & Connections	
Deviated Fixed Route	Continues to operate Deviated Fixed Route in The Dalles. Year 1 is match for the existing grant. Year 2 assumes no grant received, covers weekday and Saturday service.
South County Service	Service to South County twice per day, two times per week.
Dial-a-Ride	Dial-a-ride service from 6am to 8pm on weekdays and from 9am to 4pm on Saturday and Sunday.
The Dalles-Hood River Service	Provides 20% match needed for service between Hood River and The Dalles. Four times per day on weekdays and three times per day on Sat/ Sun.
Vanpooling Subsidy	Subsidizes two vanpools to support transportation beyond what The Link can easily provide.
Fleet and Technology	
Hybrid Bus (12/2)	Provides grant match to purchase hybrid vehicles in both Fiscal Years. Assumes some cost increases.
Readerboards	Adds readerboards to the sides of all existing buses with bilingual messaging in FY24. This project would only be funded if STIF estimates come in higher.
Ecolane Upgrade #1	One-time fee for Ecolane mobile app (self-booking, self-vehicle tracking) and annual fee for one year.
Ecolane upgrade #2	One-time fee for Ecolane improvements (pre/post inspections, customer service tracking, robocalls) and annual fee for one year.
Facilities & Bus Shelters	
Bus Shelters	Match to apply for a grant in FY25 to purchase/ install bus shelters.
Bike Racks	Purchases bike racks to install at all shelters in FY24.

Administrative Support	
Grant Match Reserve	Creation of a general grant match reserve fund that could be used as needed to match grants for capital or operations. Any additional STIF funds would be placed here.
Administrative Support	General planning and grant management support at 10% of total.
Marketing	
General Marketing	Billboards, brochures, print media, radio, movie theaters and other marketing costs to promote The Link in general.
Gorge Pass Marketing	Marketing specific to the Gorge Pass used as grant match.
Free Fares for Low-Income	Provides free dial-a-ride tickets and Gorge Passes for low-income residents, distributed through the Gorge Transit Connect program.
Spanish Language Outreach	Spanish-language advertising/ marketing materials and cultural-sensitivity training.
High School (9-12) Promotional	Free rides for high-school students at 1% of total funds received. Outreach materials for high school students.
Planning & Mobility Management	
Mobility Management	Staff support to set up vanpools, outreach to older adults, exploring other services to improve transit for seniors, disabled, low-income, Native American and Limited English Proficiency populations. Also support to update the coordinated plan in 2024.
Travel Trainer	Staff support to provide training on how to use the transit system and promote The Link at public events.