

**Wasco County Public Transportation Advisory Committee**

**Agenda**

Monday, April 8, 2024

The Dalles Transit Center, 802 Chenoweth Loop, The Dalles

Remote Option via Zoom: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86426950020>

Or call 719-359-4580, Meeting ID: 864 2695 0020

10:00 – 11:00 AM

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Item</b>
Call to Order and Introductions	10:00	
Minutes Approval <i>January 2024</i>	10:05	Approval
Staff Updates <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Link</li><li>• Travel Trainer</li></ul>	10:10	Information/ Discussion
Wasco County Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan Update in 2024	10:30	Information/ Discussion
Public Comment	10:45	
New Business/ Good of the Order	10:50	
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, January 8, 2024 at 10:00 am

### MCEDD CONFERENCE ROOM & ZOOM TELECONFERENCE

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS:** Louise Sargent (Chair), Lee Bryant, Jesus Mendoza, Tom Tramontina, Celeste Peralta, Melissa Napoli, Rita Rathkey

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

**Guests:** Jovi Arellano (ODOT)

#### CALL TO ORDER/INTRODUCTIONS

Louise Sargent called the meeting to order at 10:00 am. A quorum was present.

#### MINUTES

Louise asked for any questions, comments, or edits on the minutes from the October 9, 2023 meeting. *There were none.*

**Tom Tramontina moved to approve** the minutes as presented. Jesus seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion passed.

#### COMMITTEE MEMBER APPLICATION

Jessica noted that this application will fill Kris Boler's vacant seat that was generally helped to represent the disabled community. Christopher Howell works at Vocational Rehab and has years of experience working with the disabled.

*Discussion: Rita Rathkey supported the nomination, adding that Christopher would be an excellent addition to the committee.*

**Lee Bryant motioned** to recommend Christopher Howell for appointment to the committee. Tom Tramontina seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion carried.

Jessica thanked the group and will take this recommendation to the County Commissioners.

#### GRANT APPLICATIONS

Jessica summarized the grant funding that maintains The Link's current staffing, vehicle and facility needs to keep operations running while continuing to implement the Transit Development Plan. The upcoming grant funding applications cycle deadline is March 12<sup>th</sup>. The request for action today is to prioritize the projects needing funding. This information will be used to write the funding applications and guide spending. This grant will continue to fund The Link's routes in The Dalles past June 30<sup>th</sup>, when the current grant ends.

Jesus listed the capital project priorities: replacing two vans, reader boards, infrastructure for charging equipment to be installed at the Transit Center.

Jessica noted that MCEDD had reserved some funding two years ago to buy hybrid vehicles that never

happened. Today's needs focus on funding current operations, replacing the vehicles that are at end of life, and continuing the transition to electric buses. More bus shelters were not included in this budget. The last shelters that were approved still need to be installed. Jessica opened the floor for feedback and suggestions.

*Discussion: There was discussion about the cost of the reader boards and the need for them. Jesus explained the alternatives that were tried and did not work. Lee pointed out that we need to have infrastructure in place for electric buses before we reserve funding for the buses. Louise agreed that the chargers should be priority. Rita asked about the type of charger, and Jesus answered that it would be the Level 2 overnight charger.*

Jessica summed up the capital projects priorities: EV Charging stations, replacement of two vans, and reader boards. She added that Wasco County would likely be the applicant for The Dalles bus route grant because it would be a better match rate.

## **STAFF UPDATES**

### **The Link**

Jesus informed the group that groundwork to support service to the Native American sites along the river is in process, with stops planned for Celilo Village, Lyle Point and Lone Pine. The license agreement for the bus shelter at 700 Union St. has been moving forward and once completed the contractor can begin to install them. There will also be a shelter installed at MCCAC's Gloria Center in the next few months. For marketing and community outreach, Jesus reported that radio ads have been running and The Link participated in The Dalles Starlight parade. Staffing is finally at capacity with three new drivers added this past quarter. Jesus next went over ridership numbers. The numbers reflect the struggle that The Link experienced with the lack of staffing during the past quarter. Jessica offered to email the ridership numbers to Celeste and Jovi after the meeting.

### **Travel Trainer**

Sara Crook reported that the Gorge Transit Connect program is the focus of her winter activity. Sara explained that the costs for mobility and fare assistance for low-income riders have been shifted to the social service organization partners who distribute the passes. The program started with an initial grant that paid for these passes and has now evolved so that the partner organizations who have funding for this can purchase the passes at 50% off for their riders. There are now 15 partners in the program, and this winter's newest partner is the Food Bank.

Regional transportation coordination between the four transit agencies is ongoing as the providers continue to make improvements on the connections for riders between counties (less wait time).

Sara has been doing outreach at the Native American in-lieu sites to distribute the fifty passes that were purchased by the grant that MCEDD secured for Native American transportation needs. Outreach for the Go Vets program has also given out ten passes to vets this year. Sara asked for any questions or comments. *The group voiced appreciation for Sara's work.*

## **STIF PLAN IMPLEMENTATION**

Jessica opened up the discussion on the proposed budget reductions. Jessica thanked Jovi for providing the information that STIF funding allocations will be decreased, which was the basis for the revised budget in the packet. The original \$1.9 million dollar budget has now been reduced to \$1.3M.

Jessica explained that the priority was to preserve Deviated Fixed Route service, which meant eliminating or reducing other categories. Dial-a-ride service will not change and The Dalles to Hood River service will not change. The South County ridership has not been sufficient to double the service next year as the Transit Development Plan recommended. Ridership numbers support maintaining the service on Tuesdays and Thursdays with one round trip per day. The Vanpooling subsidy was reduced by half and could be cut all the way if needed. MCEDD has been working to build momentum with employers for this service and Jessica was hesitant to cut funding completely. The EcoLane upgrades to improve riders' ability to reserve their own rides and track buses in real time was cut. The Driveroo software upgrade was purchased and is now operational. The grant match for bus shelters has been cut. The grant match reserve was reduced, as was money for general marketing. These cuts will get us to our budget estimates. She opened the floor for questions.

*Discussion: Rita asked if this revised budget was realistic. Lee asked if the vans that The Link planned to replace were being used for vanpooling. Jessica answered that the vanpool program's vans were through Enterprise and not The Link's vans. Tom asked which employers would utilize vanpools. Jessica replied that the vanpooling focus was on employers in South Wasco County. There are a few Maupin residents who travel up to Mt. Hood Meadows to work as well as Ag employers, especially in the packing houses, who could benefit from this service. Jovi commented that she was pleased to sit in on this discussion and hear the advisory group's awareness of the community's needs and their ability to work within fiscal restraints.*

## **FINAL CLIMATE ACTION PLAN REPORT**

Jesus introduced Christoph Zurcher, a lead on the NetZero project that The Link participated in, to present the project's final report. Christoph shared The Link's Climate Action Plan summary with recommendations for the fleet transition to renewable energy, employee commuting and travel, and other changes MCEDD and The Link can make to decrease overall emissions.

He went into depth with the descriptions of the categories of scope of emissions. Scope 1 emissions are the direct use of gas, methane and fossil fuels. Scope 2 emissions are the "upstream" energy and encompass the emissions generated in the manufacture of vehicles and parts, buildings. There are also the production emissions created by making the equipment used to produce the electricity - the infrastructure of the grid. Scope 3 are indirect emissions and are the hardest to identify, such as employee commuting, business travel, tires purchase, construction equipment use. While these are not directly produced by the transit agency, these emissions are owned by the agency that uses them.

Fleet fuels were the biggest emissions source to be addressed. Gasoline fleet fuel was recommended to be reduced by 50% by 2035 and 100% by 2050. Technology (battery technology specifically) is expected to change to make this possible. The easiest transition will be to switch to renewable energy sources for electricity. There are good hydro and wind energy options here in the Northwest, and most electricity providers offer a renewable energy option that MCEDD can enroll in. The grid itself is not going renewable as quickly as hoped for because the infrastructure needs upgrades. Much of the change will depend on how quickly the grid changes.

For The Link's fleet transition, the report recommended beginning with two electric vehicles for routes operating within The Dalles. Hybrid electric vehicles are not a fleet option because they are not available in the size that we need. The long rural routes are a challenge and any option for electric vehicles on rural routes will require infrastructure changes to the routes as well as schedule changes to allow time for

charging. The expected wait for the tech advancements is 5-10 years and hydrogen fuel cell technology may well be a more viable option than battery technology. Hydrogen hubs are being developed in WA with the goal of providing vehicle fuel. There is also an initiative in Oregon to make I5 a hydrogen corridor, which will help the overall advancement and adoption to hydrogen. Hydrogen fuel will give vehicles a similar range and fueling capacity as internal combustion engines.

For scope 2 emissions, the recommendation is for the Transit center to switch over to a Heat pump system. And the Scope 3 recommendations is to encourage remote work and incentivize low carbon commute options. He added that business travel should also be evaluated.

Christoph shared the greenhouse emissions tracker inventory. The baseline numbers were established in 2021 with this project. The graph shows 2035 goals and will update each year when The Link's information is added. Cristoph will review this tool with Jesus in detail. He opened the floor for questions. *There were none.*

Jesus thanked Christoph for sharing the report with the group.

### **NEW BUSINESS/ GOOD OF THE ORDER**

Louise brought up a complaint about the service in Maupin that was registered by Tom McDowell from Wamic. Riders are not able to use the bus because the understanding is that the only way to take the shopping bus is to meet at the store. The people who need this service generally have mobility assistance issues and can't get to the store. Jesus explained that the drivers can deviate up to a quarter mile, and folks can call in to dispatch and request door service if they are in town in either Maupin or Wamic.

Melissa suggested that this information could be added to the Maupin city newsletter. The newsletter goes out to everyone in the area who is hooked up to water and sewer. Louise asked to add in the information that a disabled rider's helper rides for free. Jessica promised to write up a full description of The Link's service to post out to the community. Melissa also suggested adding this to the new South Wasco Times and Jessica assured her that The Link has ad in the paper.

### **SET NEXT MEETING AND ADJOURN**

The next meeting was set for April 8<sup>th</sup>, to be held in the MCEDD conference room at 10am.

Louise Sargent adjourned the meeting at 11:03am.

*Respectfully submitted by Jill Brandt, Administrative Assistant*



To: Wasco County Public Transportation Advisory Committee

From: MCEDD Staff

Date: April 2, 2024

**Re: Staff Updates**

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## **UPDATES FOR THE LINK**

### **Grants:**

- We applied for several grant opportunities in March and hope to hear positive news in May. The grant applications included the following:
  1. 2024-2026 Discretionary Vehicle Replacement. This will allow us to replace Van 22 with a Ford E-Transit to initiate fleet transition from gas-powered to electric vehicles. \$144k project.
  2. 5339 Buses and Bus Facility application allows us to complete the installation of 12 Simme-Seats and complete the construction associated with the installation of two (2) electric chargers. \$51k project.
  3. 5310 Discretionary Grant provides funds for the continuation of the deviated fixed route operations in The Dalles. This service is designed with seniors and disabled in mind to be able to reach key destinations that include medical, educational, employment, and social services. \$1.1M project for two years of service.
- MCEDD received an ODOT Grant Agreement for two projects funded through CARES 5311(F). One project is to add one additional run between The Dalles and Hood River from four (4) to five (5) times on weekdays effective February 19, 2024. The bus now leaves The Dalles Transit Center at 6:30am, 8:00am, 10:45am, 1:45pm and 4:45pm. The second project is to create a Daily Need Shuttle to serve Native American In-Lieu fishing sites. This project is still in the planning phase. Kathy has set up a committee to advise The Link how to best serve Celilo Village, Lone Pine, and Lyle Point.

### **Capital Projects:**

- **Bus Shelters:** The environmental review form has been completed and submitted to ODOT's Regional Transit Coordinator for the fourth and final site for bus shelters in The Dalles. The fourth site will be MCCAC's new facility, the Gloria Center. The Link also received a quote within the grant budget from Schuepbach Construction for the installation of the four shelters. We need some agreements and approved engineering first before construction can begin.
- **Vehicles:** We received approval from ODOT to amend our grant that would replace two of our vehicles with gas-powered vehicles after we determined that hybrid vehicles at our vehicle size are not an option. We expect to have the final contract amendment soon and will issue the RFQ for the vehicles. Delivery is expected to take at least nine months after the order is placed.

### **Marketing/Outreach:**

- Service updates to The Dalles- Hood River service and Deviated Fixed Routes were announced through multiple mediums including: press release, Columbia Gorge News, The Dalles radio

stations, social media, and printed marketing materials.

- Ad purchased in the South Wasco Times to increase awareness of the South Wasco County shuttle.
- High School Flyers distributed to increase awareness of the free rides for students 9-12<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Continued to advertise fixed route through Movie Theater Ad.
- Presented transit information to The Dalles Lion's Club and The Dalles Rotary.

### **Spanish Language Outreach:**

Operations Manager is exploring opportunities to reach the Spanish speaking population in Wasco County. Some of the options identified include:

- 1) Radio Advertising – in the past we have used Radio Tierra.
- 2) Flyers – could distribute at Library, Michoacan, C Market, etc.
- 3) Posters – Could print posters and work with Oregon State University – Fruit Extension Wasco County to identify seasonal employers to share information with.
- 4) Printed materials – postcards, stickers, etc.
- 5) Other recommendations?

### **Service:**

The Link slightly reduced the frequency of the Blue Route in The Dalles to operate on a one- hour basis from 7:00am to 7:00pm on weekdays. This service reduction will allow us to increase Dial-a- Ride service. The decision to increase Dial-a-Ride service was based on ridership data from the past year as well as current and future funding guidelines that direct our service to focus on the specific needs in Wasco County for Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) and transportation for Students, the Elderly and Disabled, and Low-Income individuals who require door-to-door service. The service change took effect March 4, 2024.

### **Service Change Challenges:**

In going through the service change, The Link had anticipated challenges that required longer planning. One of the chief concerns included the connectivity between The Dalles Red and Blue deviated fixed routes and the intercity service to Hood River. Steps that we have taken since to address the concerns include:

- 1) Meeting with regional transit partners to discuss the issue and become acquainted with the seasonal service change.
- 2) Review for consistency with the Wasco County Transit Development Plan (TDP).
- 3) Reviewed ridership information.
- 4) Consultation with Jarrett Walker and Associates who assist with transit route planning.
- 5) Revisiting fixed route service to determine how to best align connectivity.

Next steps include introducing a new fixed route schedule by April 27, 2024. Our focus will continue to follow the TDP recommendations and keep adverse impacts low, while establishing positive connections with the intercity service and other regional transit partners in the Gorge.

### **TRAVEL TRAINING UPDATE**

*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 in*

Wasco and Hood River Counties. MCEDD also manages the Klickitat and Skamania County travel training program which includes a travel trainer, Eve Elderwell. Eve supports MCEDD's Inclusive Outreach and Education public transportation project in Klickitat and Skamania Counties and provides travel training support to Mt. Adams Transportation Services and Skamania County Transit.

Gorge Transit Connect: MCEDD recently received \$11,000 in funds from a Supporting Health for All through Reinvestment (SHARE) program that will purchase no-cost Gorge Transit Passes for community members with low incomes of Hood River and Wasco Counties. The Gorge Transit Passes are distributed through the Gorge Transit Connect program, which works with regional partners and social service agencies to provide resources and travel training services to partner staff and their clients.

Eve Elderwell has been reaching out to partner agencies and organizations in Klickitat and Skamania Counties to encourage active participation in the Gorge Transit Connect program and to develop streamlined and bulk purchase systems for transit passes.

Do you live in the Gorge?

Are you curious about how to make our new transit system work for you?

**Consider riding the bus!**

**GOOD FOR YOU**

- Avoid parking hassles
- Use it to commute
- Hike without permits
- Connect to Portland + the airport
- Stress less, enjoy the views

**GOOD FOR THE GORGE**

- Reduce congestion
- Give equitable access to the outdoors
- Fewer visitors in cars
- Preserve the beauty of the region
- Connect affordable housing, healthcare, jobs

**Not sure how to start? A Travel Trainer is here for you!**

A Travel Trainer can help you plan your bus trip from start to finish. They can answer your questions, help you read a bus schedule, and more. They can even ride the bus with you so that you can be sure to get where you need to go.

 Eve Elderwell is the Travel Trainer for Klickitat and Skamania Counties.  
Phone: (808) 769-8061  
Email: eve@gorgepass.com

 Sara Crook is the Travel Trainer for Hood River and Wasco Counties.  
Phone: (541) 400-0419  
Email: sara@mcedd.org



## **GORGE TRANSLINK ALLIANCE UPDATES**

*MCEDD's Mobility Manager Kathy Fitzpatrick 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.*

### *Implementation of the Gorge Regional Transit Strategy*

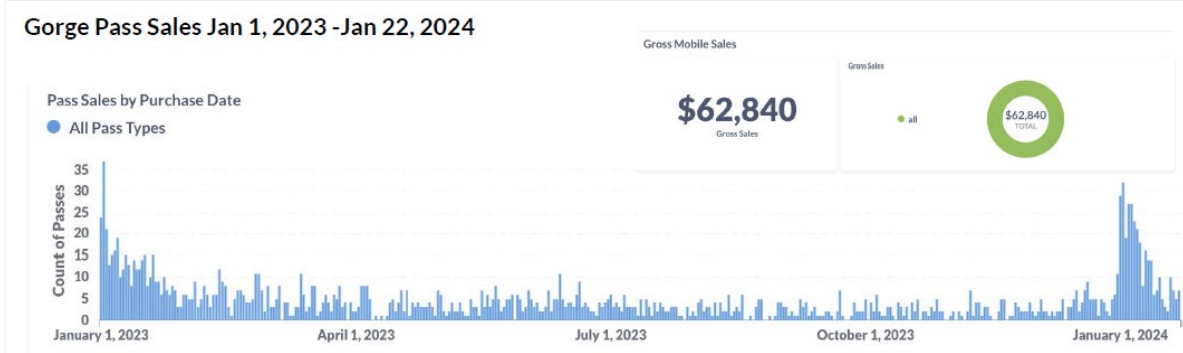
The Gorge TransLink Alliance has embarked on a series of workshops in 2024, all with the focus on improving coordination of the regional transit system, increasing efficiencies, and increasing ridership. The priority has been a system-wide alignment of routes to minimize wait time when riders are transferring from one route to another and increase or decrease frequencies where needed. The public transportation providers have been working during workshop sessions and in one-on-one sessions to optimize the regional network and will roll out these improvements at the same time in May of this year.

Optimizing routes and schedules first involves interviewing riders on-board to understand their needs and gaps in the system. Eve Elderwell (WA Travel Trainer) and Kathy (Mobility Manager) have been riding the buses between the counties to learn more about ridership patterns across county lines. Many of these riders are commuting to work and rely on public transportation to stay in the workforce.

The Gorge TransLink Alliance providers are also implementing a new coordinated data management strategy which will provide regional data that can be used to improve both intra- and inter-city routes and can be used to present ridership trends.

### *2023 Gorge Transit Pass Sales*

Gorge Transit Pass sales have been increasing every year, with \$62,840.00 in gross sales in 2023.



Wasco  
County

Coordinated Human Services  
Public Transportation Plan



2020-2024

Prepared by:

Mid-Columbia Economic  
Development District

Adopted December 2020

WASCO COUNTY  
**TRANSIT**  
**DEVELOPMENT PLAN**  
THE LINK PUBLIC TRANSIT



JUNE 2022

**THE GORGE  
REGIONAL  
TRANSIT STRATEGY**



GORGE TRANSLINK

JUNE  
2023

**Wasco County Coordinated Human Services Public Transportation Plan Update**  
Kathy Fitzpatrick, MCEDD Regional Mobility Manager

# What is a Coordinated Human Services Public Transportation Plan?

- Helps local transportation providers and communities improve transportation services
- Evaluates community resources
- Documents the needs of four target populations
- Identifies strategies to address the gaps/barriers



# Who are the 4 Target Populations?

1. Older Adults and Elders
2. Low income individuals
3. Individuals with disabilities
4. Limited English Proficiency (LEP) individuals



# Outreach for the 2022 TDP

- Onboard surveys
- Online surveys
- Historic ridership data
- Outreach calls to community organizations, agencies, businesses

2024 Coordinated Plan surveys



# Needs Summary



Increase Frequency



Extend Service Hours



Increase Weekend Service



Improve Efficiency of Route Service



Update Tools and Technology



Increase Education and Marketing



Improve Bus Stop Amenities and Access



Update Vehicle Fleet



# Strategy Categories

- Sustain Existing Transportation Services
- Operations
- Service Expansion
- Stable Funding
- Marketing, Education, Outreach
- Planning and Coordination

