

Coordinated Transportation Plan

Gorge Translink

June 2007



Prepared by: Mid-Columbia Economic Development District

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Introduction

Overview

This document combines information contained in the coordinated transportation plans prepared for Skamania and Klickitat counties in Washington and Sherman, Wasco, and Hood River counties in Oregon. The plans are focused on addressing the transportation needs of low income individuals, individuals with disabilities, and seniors. This combined plan takes the findings from each individual plan, combining them to address regional issues concerning all entities and discussing common themes that have emerged for each of the transportation providers. The Gorge Translink Coordinated Transportation Plan was developed to articulate the combined needs and issues of providers and discuss means by which local providers can interact.

Purpose

As a rural region with many areas that often lack the employment, medical, higher education, social service, and other services that residents need, transportation plays a vital role in communities. The coordinated transportation plans developed in each county have focused specifically on three groups of people who are particularly affected by access to public transportation resources: individuals with low income, individuals with disabilities, and elderly individuals. This plan, as a combination of those and of the transportation demands placed on transportation providers in the Mid-Columbia region, also focuses on these target populations. Gorge Translink has been formed to create another avenue for collaboration between counties in the Mid-Columbia. Transportation providers in these counties cannot meet all of the demands placed on their system. Collaboration through Gorge Translink has the potential to reduce some of these many demands.

Area Covered

Washington

- Skamania County
- Klickitat County

Oregon

- Hood River County
- Wasco County
- Sherman County

Region Demographics

Overview

GorgeTranslink area is composed of five rural counties in the Mid-Columbia region. This region encompasses 7,500 square miles and has an estimated population of 75,677 people. There is one major metropolitan area to the west: Portland/Vancouver. Major transportation routes through the area include Interstate 84 which runs east/west along the Oregon side of the Columbia River, SR-14 which runs east/west along the Washington side of the river, US 97 which runs north/south in both states. There are four bridges crossing the Columbia River, which divides the Washington counties from their Oregon counterparts. Toll bridges are located at Cascade Locks/Stevenson and Hood River/White Salmon. Free bridges are located at The Dalles/Dallesport and Biggs.

Skamania County

Skamania County is located along the north banks of the Columbia River in southern Washington. Stevenson, the county seat, lies approximately 45 miles east of Portland, Oregon/Vancouver. The county covers approximately 1,600 square miles. It is home to about 10,000 residents, with the majority living in the southern most part of the county near SR-14, a major east-west state highway.

Klickitat County

Klickitat County is located along the north banks of the Columbia River in south-central Washington. The county covers an expanse of 1,880 square miles and includes part of the Yakama Indian Reservation. Goldendale, with a population of 3,760 is the largest city in the county and also the county seat. Total population for the county is approximately 19,000 people. About two thirds of the population resides in unincorporated areas of the county.

Sherman County

Sherman County covers a geographic area of 831 square miles. With a population of 1,750, there are approximately 2.1 citizens per square mile. Incorporated cities include Rufus, Wasco, Moro and Grass Valley. Unincorporated communities include Biggs and Kent. Major transportation corridors include US 97 and Interstate 84.

Wasco County

Wasco County is located on the northern border of Oregon between Hood River and Sherman counties. The county covers 2,381 square miles with an average of approximately 10 people per square mile.¹ It is bordered by the Columbia River to the north, Deschutes River to the east, Warm Springs Reservation to the south, and Mt. Hood National Forest to the west. Incorporated cities include The Dalles (county seat), Dufur, Maupin, Mosier, Antelope, and Shaniko. Antelope (59 people) and Shaniko (26 people), however, are smaller than many CDP's and unincorporated areas.

Hood River County

Hood River County is located on the northern border of Oregon along the Columbia River between Wasco and Multnomah counties. The county covers 534 square miles with an average of approximately 39 people per square mile.¹ Incorporated cities include Hood River and Cascade Locks. Hood River is the most populated community in the county with a total population in 2000 of 5,831. Population in 2000 was 1,115 for Cascade Locks.

Demographics

The following information is from the 2000 US Census.

Skamania County

Total Population	9,872
Percentage of Population 65 years and over.	11.0%
Percentage of disabled individuals	17.5%
Percentage of individuals living below the poverty level.	13.1%
Percentage of individuals that speak a language other than English at home.	4.9%
Mean travel time to work in minutes for workers 16 years and over.	29.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Klickitat County

Total Population	19,161
Percentage of Population 65 years and over.	13.8%
Percentage of disabled individuals	21.4%
Percentage of individuals living below the poverty level.	17.0%
Percentage of individuals that speak a language other than English at home.	10.6%
Mean travel time to work in minutes for workers 16 years and over.	21.9

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Sherman County

Total Population	1,934
Percentage of Population 65 years and over.	18.3%
Percentage of disabled individuals	16.8%
Percentage of individuals living below the poverty level.	14.6%
Percentage of individuals that speak a language other than English at home.	8.0%
Mean travel time to work in minutes for workers 16 years and over.	20.6

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Wasco County

Total Population	23,791
Percentage of Population 65 years and over.	16.7%
Percentage of disabled individuals	19.6%
Percentage of individuals living below the poverty level.	12.9%
Percentage of individuals that speak a language other than English at home.	10.5%

Mean travel time to work in minutes for workers 16 years and over.18.6
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Hood River County

Total Population	20,411
Percentage of Population 65 years and over.	12.9%
Percentage of disabled individuals (5 years and over)	16.8%
Percentage of individuals living below the poverty level.	14.2%
Percentage of individuals that speak a language other than English at home.	24.7%
Mean travel time to work in minutes for workers 16 years and over.	19.1

Common Origins/ Destinations

Transportation providers and the coordinated transportation plans for each county identified common regional destinations for riders. These included The Dalles, Hood River, Portland, Vancouver, and Yakima.

Maps of Gorge Translink area

Mid-Columbia region



Note: map not to scale



Existing Services and Resources

Gorge Translink

In 2001 each county had a self contained transportation system and there was limited inter-county transportation: Greyhound provided 9 routes along Interstate 84 (since reduced) and Amtrak provided 1 trip along Highway 14. That same year, the providers came together to develop Gorge Translink. The project's vision was to create a single source for information, conduct a regional needs assessment, develop a marketing package, and create shared identity for local providers. There are multiple transportation resources that serve each county. The five participating provider's are described below, followed by a brief discussion on regional services and specific county-wide services. A description of Greyhound and Amtrak are also provided as are carpool and vanpool resources, which are common to all counties.

Skamania County: Skamania County Senior Services

The main public transportation provider for Skamania County is Skamania County Senior Services.

Services

Skamania County Senior Services offers dial-a-ride services for Skamania County residents. In addition, the county received Rural Mobility funding in 2004 to established a fixed route service between Skamania County and Clark County.

Fleet

Accessible minivans and two small busses are available for Skamania County Senior Services transportation.

Utilization

Skamania County Senior Services provides more than 15,300 dial-a-ride trips per year and is currently averaging close to 1,200 fixed route trips per month.

Klickitat County: Mount Adams Transportation Service

The main public transportation provider for Klickitat County is Mount Adams Transportation Service, operated by Klickitat County Senior Services.

Services

Mount Adams Transportation (MAT) offers dial-a-ride services for Klickitat County residents. In addition, the county received a federal Job Access grant in 2004 to begin operation of service between White Salmon/Bingen and Hood River. Through this grant, MAT is able to provide morning, midday and evening daily service between these locations.

Fleet

MAT's vehicle fleet includes seven minibuses and one minivan.

Utilization

MAT provides over 25,000 demand response trips per year and is currently averaging close to 70 employment trips between White Salmon/Bingen and Hood River per month.

Sherman County: Sherman County Community Transit

On May 31, 2007, the Sherman County Court assumed operations of the transportation system and assets. Service within Sherman County is planned to continue uninterrupted with this change, keeping to existing schedules and operations. Further information should be provided regarding the extent of these services upon the completion of the Sherman County Coordinated Transportation Plan. Due to the change in service providers, the plan's completion was extended past the time period in which this plan was developed.

Wasco County: Transportation Network

The main public transportation provider for Wasco County is the Transportation Network (formerly known as the Link), which is operated through Mid-Columbia Council of Governments (MCCOG). Although the main office is located in The Dalles, administration is shared with Hood River County's Transportation District to reduce costs and increase coordination of services.

Services

The Transportation Network offers Dial-a-Ride, door-to-door service from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday throughout Wasco County and the City of The Dalles. In addition, it connects to Greyhound for trips to Hood River, Portland, and points east. The fare is \$1.50 one way for riders traveling within the City of The Dalles. The fare increases for travel originating or ending outside of The Dalles.

Fleet

As of September 5, 2006, the Transportation Network owned and operated 10 vehicles. All vehicles are 2001 or newer and in excellent condition. The majority of vehicles are accessible; all but 2 are equipped with wheelchair lifts.

Utilization of Current Services

The Transportation Network provided transportation for 21,484 passengers from July 1, 2005 through June 30, 2006. Seniors and individuals with disabilities represented a large section of the population using the Network's services. The total number of trips provided to seniors and disabled in the same time period was 13,754. Seniors, in particular, drivers noted, have embraced the service to the fullest extent.

Funding

Operational costs for the Transportation Network's services are covered through:

- Oregon Special Transportation Funds
- Greyhound commissions
- Oregon Division of Medical Assistance Programs (DMAP, formerly OMAP)
- Medicaid (medical). Medicaid transportation service is distributed through the region's Medicaid Brokerage Service, the Mid-Columbia Council of Governments, which also operates the Transportation Network
- Medicaid (non-medical). Medicaid clients receiving community-based care may be authorized for non-medical transportation (e.g. family visits and hair appointments) if it is deemed good for keeping them out of nursing homes.
- City of The Dalles
- Wasco County
- Fares
- Shared administration with Hood River County Transportation District

Financial support allows special needs populations to access transportation services at a minimal cost, keeping fares at a reasonable level.

Hood River County: Columbia Area Transit (CAT)

The main public transportation provider for Hood River County is CAT. Although the main office is located in Hood River, administration is shared with the Transportation Network in Wasco County to reduce costs and increase coordination of services.

Services

CAT offers Dial-a-Ride, door-to-door service from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday throughout Hood River County. In addition, it connects to Greyhound for trips to The Dalles, Portland, and points east.

Fare

Door to door service is offered at a 10% discount to seniors and individuals with disabilities. Regular fares are as follows:

Hood River- \$1.25 each way

Odell- \$1.50 each way

Parkdale- \$2.00 each way

Cascade Locks- \$2.25 each way

The Dalles- \$4 each way

Mosier- \$1.50 each way

Bingen/White Salmon- \$1.25 plus toll (\$3.00)

Fleet

CAT operates a total of seven vehicles.

Utilization of Current Services

CAT provided transportation for 22,552 passengers from July 1, 2005 through June 30, 2006. Seniors and individuals with disabilities represented a large section of the population using CAT's services. The total number of trips provided to seniors in the same time period was 9,943, which is 44% of the total. The total number of trips provided to individuals with disabilities was 8,656, or 38% of the total rides.

Funding

The Hood River County Transportation District, which was formed in 1993 by a vote of Hood River County residents, provides a tax base for the operation of CAT. In addition to the tax base, operational costs for CAT services are covered through:

- Federal Transit Administration Funds
- Business Energy Tax Credit program
- Mass transit payroll taxes
- Greyhound commissions
- Medicaid, medical and non-medical.
- Fares.
- Contract with Mid-Columbia Council of Governments for shared administration

Financial support keeps fares at a reasonable level, allowing special needs populations to access transportation services at a minimal cost.

Greyhound

Greyhound is an inter-city transportation provider offering service along the I-84 corridor. Services were significantly cut back in 2004 following a major reduction in Greyhound's route system, but a hub has been maintained in Hood River and The Dalles.

Service

From Hood River and The Dalles, passengers can travel to (among others) Portland, and points east.

Although Hood River and The Dalles are fortunate to have maintained Greyhound service in the area, passengers planning a day trip to Portland, the nearest major metropolitan area, may experience scheduling difficulties. For example, a person trying to reach Portland and return to Hood River via Greyhound during the course of a single day would need to leave Hood River at 4:35 a.m. and return on a bus departing Portland at 11:30 a.m.

Amtrak

Amtrak provides passenger rail service on the Washington side of the Columbia River. A train station is located in Bingen-White Salmon and in Wishram. Amtrak has a more favorable schedule than Greyhound for people who would like to take a day trip to Portland. For example, using Amtrak, an individual would leave at 8:04 a.m. from Bingen-White Salmon and return on a train departing Portland at 4:45 p.m. the same day.

Carpool/Rideshare (carpoolmatchnw.org)

Carpoolmatchnw.org is a carpool/rideshare service that has the ability to connect commuters. It has limited capability to recognize origins and destinations outside of the Portland/Vancouver area. Informal carpool networks also occur throughout the Gorge. Other options for rideshares include Craigslist and similar social networking sites.

Employer Van Pools

A limited number of employers in the region provide transportation for their workers. There is opportunity for an increase in the number of employer sponsored van pools. One option currently used by the Army Corps of Engineers is VPSI.

Transportation Needs

Gorge Translink Needs

The five counties which compose the Gorge Translink region each have prepared their own coordinated transportation plan. In addition, the major transportation agencies in these counties have also come together to develop a scope of work for a consultant, Nelson/Nygaard and Associates, and meet to refine their needs. Finally, a marketing plan and transportation needs and coordinated strategies plan were completed in 2003. From these sources the following were identified as common gaps and goals for Gorge Translink:

- Increase employer vanpool usage and develop new rideshare options
- Improve connectivity between transportation agencies (counties)
- Increase the visibility of Gorge Translink through marketing efforts
- Maintain existing services
- Improve communication between agencies through the use of radio or other equipment
- Establish a common fare and develop methodology for cost sharing
- Formalize Gorge Translink stakeholder group through a mobility manager

Skamania Needs

In the coordinated transportation plan prepared by Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council in December 2006, the following gaps in transportation service for elderly, low income, and disabled individuals were identified:

- Extended evening and weekend service
- Additional park and rides
- Additional transit amenities
- Daily access to neighboring counties
- Marketing, education, and outreach
- Additional in-county demand-responsive service

Klickitat Needs

In the coordinated transportation plan prepared by Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council in December 2006, the following gaps in transportation service were identified:

- Extended evening and weekend service
- Daily access to neighboring counties
- Marketing, education, and outreach
- Additional in-county demand-responsive service

Sherman County needs

The Sherman County plan remains in draft form at this date (June 2007). Needs currently identified include:

- Marketing
- Participate in GorgeTranslink
- Maintain existing services
- Test expanded routes

Wasco County needs

Transportation needs directly addressed in the Wasco County plan included:

- Increasing operating hours to include morning, evening and weekend service.
- Providing better transportation connections with GorgeTranslink partners
- Offering affordable travel to Portland.
- Increasing marketing of existing services.
- Providing options for travel within South Wasco County
- Increasing the number of volunteer drivers for Wamic Senior Bus, a service operating in South Wasco County in conjunction with the Transportation Network.

Hood River County needs

The Hood River County coordinated transportation plan was completed by Mid-Columbia Economic Development District in April 2007. The following were identified as needs:

- Increasing operating hours to include morning, evening and weekend service.
- Offering affordable travel to Portland.
- Increasing marketing of existing services.
- Continuing CAT services. Existing public transportation services are vital to the communities they serve.
- Creating a better connection to Wasco and Skamania counties.
- Increasing use of the rideshare system
- Building for CAT

Changing Conditions

Events that may change the regional transportation picture include the following:

- Hood River received special transportation funding to begin offering service to and from The Dalles.
- Biggs Bridge will close temporarily for maintenance. WSDOT is encouraging the use of carpooling for regular commuters. The closure will have a large effect on the region.
- Through a grant, Gorge Translink providers were able to receive radios with enough stations to be able to communicate between all counties. This is the first step in purchasing equipment to allow for adequate communication
- A consultant, Nelson/Nygaard Associates, was hired and additional assistance is being provided by Community Transit Association of America (CTAA) for Gorge Translink. A copy of their work plan is attached.
- Cascade Locks may become the site of a Warm Springs Casino. Warm Springs is currently completing their Environmental Impact Statement for the project.
- Affordable housing is increasingly becoming a concern in the region. A forum held in Hood River specifically identified transportation providers as a key to getting individuals from areas with affordable housing to their workplace.

Proposed Goals for Gorge Translink

Sustain existing services

A wealth of public and private transportation resources exists throughout the Columbia River Gorge. These are vital services and must be maintained at their current level.

Market Gorge Translink

Education and marketing about transportation services in a coordinated manner has been a goal of GorgeTransLink since its inception. The marketing plan, completed in 2003 is a resource for these activities. Local providers have made a commitment to purchase additional decals for new vehicles and the website has been updated.

Increase connectivity between counties

Providers should strive to make a smooth connection to one another. Overall, increased participation in GorgeTransLink is encouraged as a means for creating better connections.

Encourage Employer Vanpools and Rideshare Options

Employer vanpool options should be encouraged for businesses in the Mid-Columbia. Some employers have had success with these services and it would decrease the burden placed on other public transportation services. Additional rideshare options could also be a potential area for exploration.

Develop Common Fare Structure

In addition to the need to improve communication between providers, a common fare was identified as a potential area for improvement. The providers all seek to maintain their independence, but common fares would help riders make the transition between systems. In addition, the common fare structure should be developed in conjunction with a cost sharing process.

Formalize Gorge Translink

Gorge Translink should become a more formalized group, specifically seeking a mobility manager to help accomplish the increasing need for providing regional transportation by making connections to individual providers in the five counties.