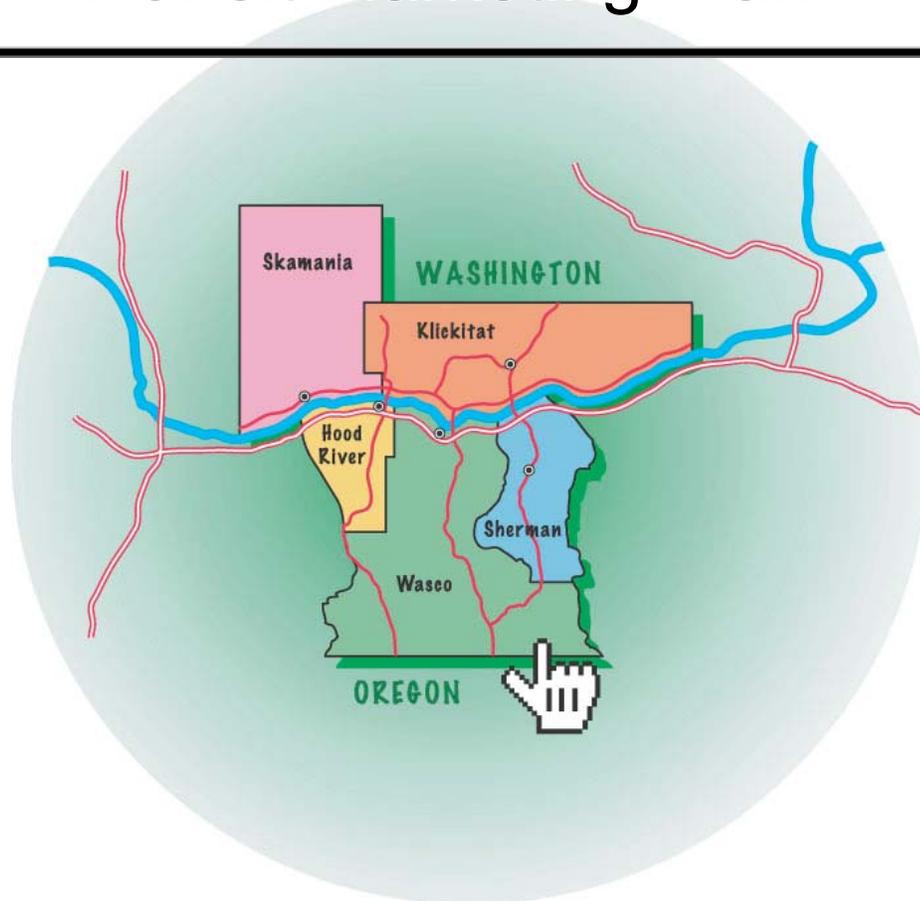


# Gorge Trans-Link Transit Marketing Plan

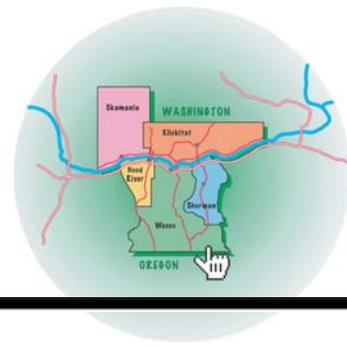
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**Prepared for:  
The Mid-Columbia Economic Development District**

DRAFT  
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# Introduction

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This document will outline a plan for marketing public transit services within a five county region which includes Hood River, Wasco and Sherman Counties in Oregon and Skamania and Klickitat Counties in Washington.

The plan has been developed to reflect the current service situation within the five counties, as well as recommended coordination strategies developed in the initial phase of this project.

The marketing strategies described herein have been developed utilizing the strategic marketing process illustrated at the right. As such, the strategies flow naturally from the current situation within the study area and are created to address specific objectives and target segments.



This plan was developed in conjunction with the *Travel Needs and Coordination Strategies* report previously submitted and hence is based on the same broad sources of information.

# Executive Summary

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The Plan begins with a brief statement of the challenges facing the Mid-Columbia transit providers in filling their role as a transportation safety net. Key among these challenges, which were identified during the needs assessment and detailed in the *Travel Needs and Coordination Strategies* report, are the broadly scattered transportation needs within the region and the lack of familiarity with public transportation among the residents.

Based on the current situation, five marketing objectives have been identified.

- Establish a regional transit identity that will enhance service coordination and marketing efforts.
- Improve the user-friendless and ease-of-access of transit services throughout the five-county region.
- Build awareness for the transit services that are available and how to access them.
- Create an image for the transit network which is inclusive of all potential user groups.
- Encourage usage among target markets with transportation needs.

In seeking to build transit awareness and usage, the mid-Columbia providers must address a variety of target groups. Some have immediate potential to use public transportation, while others are unlikely to do so until a more extensive transit network is established. The plan examines the potential among:

- Seniors
- Persons with Disabilities
- Low Income Families
- Low Income Hispanic Families
- Workers Commuting Within the Region
- Workers Commuting Outside the Region
- College Students
- Visitors
- Gatekeepers

The core of the Marketing Plan is a set of recommended strategies and tactics which are organized around the five identified marketing objectives. Strategies which are detailed within the plan include:

- Establish Regional Transit Identity or Brand
  - Select regional name under which to market transit services – *Gorge Trans-Link*
  - Develop logo
  - Establish position for new “brand”
  - Decal all vehicles with new identity
  - Include regional identity in all regional and local communications materials
  
- Enhance User-Friendliness
  - Establish regional telephone information center with bilingual capability
  - Maintain phone directory “yellow-pages” listing
  - Produce regional transit information guide and poster
  - Establish distribution network for passenger guide
  - Establish regional web-site
  - Establish and publish consistent region-wide fare policy
  
- Build Awareness
  - Work with social service agencies and other gatekeeper organizations to build awareness of Trans-Link and its component services
  - Maximize media exposure for regional transit activities through regular news releases
  - Implement Introductory PSA campaign to promote availability of guide and website
  
- Create an Inclusive Image
  - Create and implement testimonial advertising campaign
  - Conduct Spanish language advertising and outreach
  
- Encourage Usage
  - Conduct targeted marketing and outreach to high potential users
  - “Try Transit” grocery bag stuffer promotion
  - Shuttle services to special events

# The Challenges

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The public transportation providers serving the five-county study area face the challenge of using very limited resources to meet the diverse transportation needs of a broadly scattered population. Given the difficulty of this challenge, there is a consensus that transit's role in the Mid-Columbia Gorge region is:

*To serve the general public, but primarily function as a safety net for those that are unable to transport themselves, such as seniors, people with disabilities and individuals without dependable vehicles.*

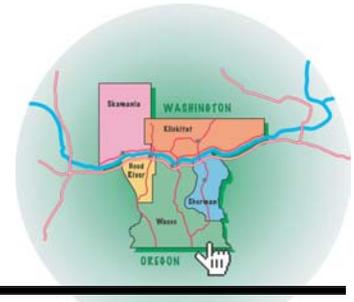
The providers know from experience that serving even this limited role presents a variety of challenges. First is the fact that those with a need for public transportation tend to have broadly scattered travel needs – many of which are regional rather than local. The initial phase of this project, which addressed how to begin coordinating services throughout the region, was a first step in addressing this challenge.

The second key challenge is the fact that the service area population is not familiar with the use of public transportation nor are they aware of what services are available. This problem is compounded by the nature of demand response transportation, which tends to be invisible to non-users or seen as available only to special populations. It is also complicated by the constant shifting of the market with a need for public transit. While some elderly and disabled residents will be long-term users of transit, many individuals simply need transportation on a short term basis – when they are between jobs or looking for work, when their vehicles is inoperable, when temporary injury prevents driving or when they need to travel to a location that is out of their local area. This group is constantly changing and is very unlikely to be aware of how to access transit when a need arises.

This second challenge is the one that we will address in this marketing plan – how to insure that when residents of the Mid-Columbia Gorge region need the “safety net” of public transportation they are able to easily access it. Achieving this goal will require an on-going communications effort to build awareness among the general public and key target markets and to insure that, when a need arises, effective passenger information is readily available.

# Marketing Objectives

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Given the challenge just described, the transit marketing effort for the Mid-Columbia Gorge must address five key objectives:

- **Establish a regional transit identity that will enhance service coordination and marketing efforts.**  
Establishing a regional identity will allow the five counties to work jointly to build awareness for their services and to communicate that regional travel is possible via public transportation.
- **Improve the user-friendless and ease-of-access of transit services throughout the five-county region.**  
Most potential users have little experience with transit, particularly demand response service. Current passenger information materials are fragmented and difficult for novice users to understand. Hence making the services, both local and regional, easier to understand and use will be a critical element in building usage.
- **Build awareness for the transit services that are available and how to access them.**  
Creating awareness that local and regional public transportation services are available and where to go to find out about them will be a primary objective of this plan. When the need to use transit arises, we want an awareness of the available services to be in place.
- **Create an image for the transit network which is inclusive of all potential user groups.**  
Beyond awareness, the marketing effort must seek to create an image of public transportation as a valuable community service that is available to everyone – not just seniors, persons with disabilities or the very poor.
- **Encourage usage among target markets with transportation needs.**  
The final and ultimate objective of the plan will be to encourage those who need transportation to use the available services.

# Target Markets

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The following target groups are those identified by the stakeholders as groups with some level of need for public transportation. Some of these groups can be effectively served with the current services. Others cannot be well served now, due to limited hours and scope of transit services, but may become more relevant as the transit network expands.

## ■ Seniors

Seniors are, and will continue to be, among the core users of public transportation within the region. They make up 11-18% of the population in each county and their numbers are growing. Their travel needs include medical, shopping and social trips within their local communities, as well as medical travel to health care providers in other Mid-Columbia communities as well as outside the region. Many also desire to travel between gorge communities to expand their shopping options. Coordination of services may expand their potential for using transit.

Most seniors do not consider using public transportation until they are unable to drive themselves. Hence it is important to build awareness of the services among the general population as well as among social service agencies and medical providers who work with aging individuals.

## ■ Persons with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities are another core constituency for transit usage. Their disabilities often cause them to be long term, regular users of public transportation. This is the group most likely to currently use public transit for work, as well as for basic travel needs. Social service programs generally provide effective channels for communicating with these individuals and their families.

## ■ Low Income Families

Low income families are the third group with a definite need for public transportation services and are likely the group where the greatest unrealized ridership potential exists. Often these individuals, unless they are Medicaid recipients, are unaware that public transportation is available to them. Similarly, they may have travel needs (for example the need to travel between Gorge communities for shopping, medical

visits or job training) which have not previously been well served by the transit network.

#### ■ Low Income Hispanic Families

This group is clearly a subset of the previous segment. However, the fact that many Hispanic persons, especially migrant workers, speak little or no English means that customized communications efforts will be required.

#### ■ Workers Commuting Within the Region

Many of the region's residents work in relatively low-wage service jobs and could benefit from having an economical public transportation option. This is particularly true for workers who travel between outlying communities and employment centers in The Dalles and Hood River. However, at the present time, the potential to serve this need is constrained by limited hours of service within local communities and very limited inter-city services (the jobs access services between Klickitat County and The Dalles/Hood River are the exceptions). This will become an increasingly important market as the service network develops.

#### ■ Workers Commuting Outside the Region

Many Gorge residents must travel outside the Mid-Columbia region to find employment. In the past they have had no public transportation option. However, the initiation of service between Skamania County and Vancouver is a first link in serving this market. Others will likely be added in time as JARC or other funding becomes available. In the meantime, carpool matching will need to fill the unmet needs.

#### ■ College Students

Columbia Gorge Community College, with a student body of 7000, draws students from throughout the Mid-Columbia region. Some students within The Dalles currently use The Link to travel to the college. A smaller number of college students from Klickitat County also use Mt. Adams Transit System. However, this market, like that of local workers, is limited until the regional network is somewhat more developed.

#### ■ Visitors

Visitors are an extremely important target market for businesses throughout the Gorge, and in time they may be a viable target market for public transit marketing. However, at this time, the nature of the transit services offered (demand response,

limited hours, advance reservation required) are not really geared to the needs of tourists.

## ■ Gatekeepers

Rather than targeting potential transit users directly, many of the strategies outlined in this plan target “gatekeepers.” These are individuals who can provide access to certain constituencies. For example DHS and DSHS case workers are gatekeepers for low income families while Columbia Gorge Community College’s administration is a gatekeeper for their students. The gatekeepers are often in a position to provide low-cost, highly targeted communications channels to their constituents.

# Marketing Strategies



The marketing strategies, which form the core of this plan, have been grouped based on the five key marketing objectives.

## Establish Regional Transit Identity or Brand

Establishing a regional transit identity will allow the five participating counties to jointly market both to potential transit users and to funding sources. The keys to effectively establishing any identity or brand are clarity, consistency and repetition. Following are the initial steps involved in creating a recognizable transit brand within the Mid-Columbia Gorge area.

### ■ Select regional name under which to market transit services

In June, Gorge transportation providers participated in a workshop session to select a regional name for their coalition. The goals in selecting a name were simplicity, memorability and descriptiveness of the group’s mission. After discussion a wide variety of terms and name options, the group came to consensus with the name:

### ***Gorge Trans-Link***

The term “Gorge” was believed to most effectively and efficiently describe the service area; “Trans” communicates the transportation focus of the group; and “Link” represents the group members’ roles as links in the regional transportation network.

### ■ Develop logo

The next step is to create a logo design which provides a graphic representation of the name. The goals for the logo are to be simple and easily read (for example on a vehicle), to be immediately recognizable, and to reinforce the name.

[\[Initial logo alternatives will be presented in conjunction with this draft plan.\]](#)

### ■ Establish position for new “brand”

The new identity will be relevant to three audiences.

- For potential transit users Trans-Link should be positioned as a way to access the public transportation network throughout the Mid-Columbia Gorge region, an easy first step in securing the transportation assistance they need.

- For “gatekeepers” such as social service providers, Trans-Link should represent a point of contact with the regional transit network, a source of information and an opportunity for input.
- For funding agencies Trans-Link should represent a coordinated effort on the part of the Mid-Columbia public transportation providers to meet the regional needs in an effective and efficient manner.

■ **Decal all vehicles with new identity**

One “free” communications vehicle which all of the service providers have available to them is their fleet of buses and vans. These are on the roadways many hours each day and are seen by both transit users and auto drivers. Placing a Trans-Link decal on the rear and/or door side of every vehicle will be a first step in establishing visibility for the new identity and creating the perception that there is a regional network of transportation services. The decal should include the Trans-Link logo, website address and phone number.

■ **Include regional identity in all regional and local guides, websites and other communications materials**

As previously noted, the keys to establishing any brand are consistency and repetition. The Tran-Link logo and message needs to be incorporated into every communications tool relating to public transportation in the Gorge. It should, of course, be the primary identity on regional marketing tools including the guide and website to be created as part of this project. However, it should also be included in the following:

- Printed passenger information materials for member agencies
- Website for member agencies
- News releases, issued by the group or an individual provider
- Promotional materials and advertising for transit services
- Grant funding proposals

## **Enhance User-Friendliness**

The overall goal of this project is to make the transit services available within the Mid-Columbia Gorge region more accessible to those who need them. One major obstacle to accessibility is that the services are difficult to understand and use individually, let alone as a network. Passenger information is fragmented and available from no single source. Hence, an important task of this project is to create a unified transit information program that will provide clear and complete information regarding regional and local transit services within the Gorge. This is, without a doubt, the most important marketing

strategy which the Gorge service providers can undertake. The following strategies call for this coordinated information to be available through a variety of channels.

■ **Establish regional telephone information center with bilingual capability**

Despite growing internet utilization, market research shows that the telephone is still the primary way in which most novice transit users access passenger information. This finding was supported by interviews with gatekeepers for potential transit users within the Gorge. They felt that most individuals who need public transportation do not have internet access and that many, in fact, do not read or even speak English. Hence a unified telephone information center, with bilingual capability, was seen as the most viable means of introducing potential users to the available transit services.

The regional telephone information center should serve as a first point of contact for new transit users. This is the number that will be publicized on regional guides, websites and other promotional materials. It will serve as a clearinghouse for linking callers with the appropriate transportation service providers. In cases where the caller needs strictly local services they would be connected with the appropriate county system. After the initial contact, they would communicate directly with their local providers. Callers needing to travel between counties or to destinations outside the Gorge would need to be provided with assistance in how to make connections between services.

The telephone information center should provide as many of the following services as possible:

- Up-to-date information about all service available in the region
- Ability to transfer calls to the appropriate agency
- Ability to coordinate service connections where appropriate
- Ability to provide Spanish language assistance where the local provider does not have this capability

The regional telephone number should be included in all marketing materials – in fact everywhere that the regional logo is utilized.

■ **Maintain phone directory “yellow-pages” listing**

The first place most people still turn when they need information is the telephone directory. Once the regional telephone information number is established it should be listed in the phone directory. In the white pages, it should be listed under Gorge

Trans-Link. In the yellow pages, it should be listed under transportation and/or bus services along with a small in line ad such as that shown here.

■ **Produce regional transit information guide and poster**

Development of a regional transit information guide is a strategy that was identified by the service providers prior to initiation of this project. It will provide a variety of opportunities for marketing the network. By simply being distributed at locations throughout the region, it will build visibility for the Trans-Link network. Through targeted distribution to gatekeepers, it will allow these individuals to become channels of communication to their clients. By being featured in ads and PSAs, it will provide a call to action – e.g. “Call Trans-Link for your free regional transit guide.”

**Gorge Trans-Link (logo)**

Complete information about public transit services throughout the Mid-Columbia Gorge region:

- Hood River County
  - Wasco County
  - Klickitat County
  - Skamania County
  - Sherman County
  - Portland and Vancouver
- Call 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
*Se Habla Espanol.*

**800-000-0000**

**[www.gorgetrans-link.com](http://www.gorgetrans-link.com)**

There are two primary components to designing and producing the regional guide – content and format.

■ **Content**

The guide should provide the potential user or gatekeeper with the most complete information possible regarding local and regional transportation services available within the Gorge region. There will need to be a balance between the detail of the information provided and the desire to not date the guide by including details that change frequently. However, erring on the side of caution – providing too little information - will make the guide useless.

The guide will include a regional overview, highlighting inter-county services, plus specific information about each of the five county systems, Greyhound and other transportation services including the [www.carpoolmatchnw.org](http://www.carpoolmatchnw.org) service. A detailed outline of the guide’s content is included under “Marketing Tools” on page 29.

■ **Format**

There are a variety of considerations in designing the physical format of the guide. These include:

- *The ability to easily and economically update the information.* This would argue for a pocket folder in which each system's information is a separate insert that can be individually changed.
- *Economy of printing.* This might lead us away from a pocket folder which is likely to have a higher initial cost and towards a small booklet or fold-out piece which could be more easily reproduced.
- *Ease of use and distribution.* A single bound guide is likely to be easier to distribute than a pocket folder with multiple inserts. In addition, it can have a clear effective date which applies to the whole piece, rather than users having to figure out if each piece they have is timely.

It was strongly recommended by a number of stakeholders that, in addition to the guide, a simple poster be prepared which would showcase the regional transit network and tell people how to get more information. Many felt it was critical that this poster be created in Spanish as well as English. These posters will be created in conjunction with creation of the regional guide.

[Sample formats for the guide will be presented along with the oral presentation of this draft.]

#### ■ Establish distribution network for passenger guide

The regional guide will be of little value unless it is broadly distributed. Each Trans-Link member should take responsibility for identifying, establishing and restocking a distribution network within their county. Visibility for the guide and the transit services it represent can be greatly increased through the purchase of plastic brochure holders with the Trans-Link logo, web address and phone number silk screened or decaled on the front (see sample at right).



The network should include high traffic locations within each community, as well as locations specifically frequented by members of the target groups. For example:

- Post Offices
- Senior Centers
- Subsidized housing complexes
- Medical Clinics
- Social Service Office
- Colleges and Training Programs

The regional poster can be used to further increase visibility by being posted in offices and on public bulletin boards throughout the service area. There will be many locations where distribution of the guide might not be appropriate (for example Laundromats or grocery stores) but where the poster can be placed.

## ■ Establish regional web-site

The creation of the regional guide will pave the way for the development of a corresponding website which will mirror the content and look of the regional guide. Initially, the primary audience for the website is likely to be social service agencies investigating transportation options for their clients. However, as internet access and usage continues to expand, more and more end users will use the website as an information tool.

The website will provide all of the information included in the regional guide and will also provide links to websites for individual providers. Because of the ease of updating a website compared to a printed piece, providers may wish to provide more detailed information such as the times of “common” trips on which there is capacity for extra riders.

Steps involved in establishing the website will include:

- *Select and purchase domain name or names.* Currently, several names are available which correspond with the regional identity. These include:
  - Gorgetrans-link.com (also .net and .org)
  - Gorgetranslink.com (also .net and .org)
  - Trans-link.org
- *Design a website consistent with the regional identity and guide.* (This task will be completed as part of this project. See outline of content under “Marketing Tools” on page 29)
- Establish the website with a local host. The website will be established with a web-hosting service in the Gorge area that can provide the group with on-going assistance in terms of updates and technical support.
- Submit site to search engines. The webhost will also be able to assist the providers with submitting the site to search engines. Recommended key words for including in the submissions are: transit, public transportation, transportation, Gorge, Columbia Gorge, Trans-Link, dial-a-ride and bus, as well as the name of each participating jurisdiction.

Once the website is on-line, it will be advantageous to ask other local organizations and agencies to provide a transportation link from their websites – particularly the

county and municipal websites, chamber of commerce websites, Columbia Gorge College and of course the current transit system sites.

■ **Establish region-wide fare policy**

One of the decision factors that riders use in determining whether to use or even investigate a transportation option is cost. This is particularly true for the low-income families and seniors who make up much of the transit market in the Gorge. Current passenger information guides largely ignore the issue of fares, or tell users to call for details. This is likely to lead to a perception on the part of the potential user that the services “must be expensive.”

- *Publish local and regional fares*

We recommend that the regional guide and website address fares more clearly using an origin/destination fare table such as that shown below:

<b>From/To</b>	<b>Cascade Locks</b>	<b>Hood River</b>	<b>The Dalles</b>	<b>Moro</b>	<b>Stevenson</b>	<b>Goldendale</b>	<b>White Salmon</b>	<b>Portland</b>	<b>Vancouver</b>
Cascade Locks									
Hood River									
The Dalles									
Moro									
Stevenson									
Goldendale									
White Salmon									
Portland									
Vancouver									

Color coding can be used to distinguish senior/disabled from regular fares and even to identify the system most likely to be providing the service. While it is unlikely that the table can include every Origin/Destination pair and fare, it can provide users with a good idea of what to expect.

Creating such a chart will require that the providers make decisions about what to charge if and when a seat is available on a cross-jurisdictional trip and will insure that those charges are consistent.

- *Consider subsidizing Greyhound and/or Amtrak fares for regional travel by local residents*

Currently, some regional trips which are not provided by the public transportation providers can be provided by Greyhound (e.g. between the Dalles, Hood River,

Cascade Locks and Portland) or Amtrak (e.g. Bingen to Portland). In fact, the Medicaid brokerage uses Greyhound to provide some longer distance trips.

However, the fares on these services are prohibitive for most local residents needing a “transportation safety net.” For example, a round trip between The Dalles and Hood River on Greyhound is \$15.00 while a trip from Bingen to Vancouver is \$32.00. Therefore, the providers may wish to pursue grant funding to be used to subsidize fares for defined trips within the region made by local residents. As demand for these services develops, it may eventually become more cost effective to provide the trips directly rather than subsidize the private providers.

## Build Awareness

Making potential transit users more aware of the transit services available and how to use them is the overriding goal of this plan. To accomplish this goal, we must eventually build awareness among the general public. However, first we must build awareness among those individuals and organizations that provide assistance to groups most likely to have a need for public transportation – the gatekeepers who work with low income families, senior citizens, job seekers and persons with disabilities.

### ■ Work with social service agencies and other gatekeeper organizations to build awareness of Trans-Link and its component services

Gatekeepers are an important channel for reaching those with the greatest need for public transportation – low income families, the unemployed, seniors, persons with disabilities. Agencies such as DHS and WorkSource often act as “salespeople” for transit services. However, to be effective “salespeople” they must be fully aware of what services are available and how they work. Hence an important strategy for Trans-Link will be to build awareness among and relationships with gatekeepers representing diverse ridership groups. The following tactics outline an approach for establishing and maintaining contact with a network of key gatekeepers. (The individual providers likely already undertake some of these activities.)

#### ▪ *Establish gatekeeper network*

The first tactic in implementing this strategy is the development of a list of relevant gatekeepers in each county. Much of this work was done in identifying stakeholders to be interviewed as part of this project. The beginnings of a list are included in Appendix A. It is important for each gatekeeper that a contact,

address, phone number and e-mail address be identified to facilitate on-going communications.

- *Conduct outreach to gatekeepers in each county*  
Once the regional guide and website are available, it will be important to make a personal contact with every gatekeeper on the list to introduce them to the Trans-Link network and make them aware of its purpose. These outreach efforts should be undertaken by the provider in each county, however in some instances it may be helpful to involve adjoining jurisdictions (particularly where agencies, such as DHS and DSHS serve multiple counties). The gatekeepers can be visited individually or in small groups with similar services and clientele. The inter-agency meetings might be an appropriate venue for reaching several groups at once. It is important, however, that the meetings be personal in nature – a chance for both education and input.

#### **Basic Gatekeeper Network**

- Low Income Families
  - Social Service Programs
  - Health Clinics
- Senior Citizens
  - Senior Centers
  - Assisted Living Facilities
  - Nutrition Programs
- Persons with Disabilities
  - Shelter workshops
  - Service providers
- Unemployed
  - DHS
  - WorkSource
  - Workforce Investment
- Hispanic Community
  - La Clinica
  - Nuestra Comunidad

The format of the meetings is likely to vary from agency to agency, however each should include the following components.

- Explain what Gorge Trans-Link is and why it was formed.
  - Describe the types of coordination efforts being undertaken and how they will lead to a regional service network.
  - Review the regional guide and provide them with a supply of guides.
  - Ask them to discuss the transportation needs of their constituents and what types of coordination might aid them.
  - Ask them to participate in making their constituents aware of transit services by distributing the regional guide, posting the regional poster and including articles in their internal newsletters.
- 
- *Conduct annual gatekeeper forum*  
The meetings with the gatekeepers should not be one-time occurrences. They should be the beginning of an on-going communications effort. One way to facilitate this would be to plan an annual gatekeeper forum where all individuals/organizations on the list are invited to attend a session to hear about

the evolution of the transit network as well as to discuss issues they are encountering related to transportation. The forums might be held in each county or on a regional basis – possibly one on each side of the Gorge.

- *Publish periodic gatekeeper newsletter*

Another recommended tool for maintaining communications with the gatekeepers is a periodic newsletter. This need not be an elaborate production, but simply an update regarding changes in the transportation network. For example as “semi-scheduled” trips are added between key locations, the newsletter could be used to let gatekeepers know in case those trips are relevant to their clients. The newsletter should be published as needed, but at least twice a year to maintain a minimum level of contact.

- *Provide gatekeepers with guides, posters and newsletter articles*

To aid the gatekeepers in their role as “salespeople” for transit service, they should be provided with supplies of regional transit guides, posters in English and Spanish and periodic articles for inclusion in their in-house newsletters (if appropriate).

- **Maximize media exposure for regional transit activities through regular news releases**

Collectively, the transportation providers that make up Trans-Link are much more newsworthy than they are individually. Hence the network should be used as a mechanism for implementing an aggressive public relations effort. Develop a news release calendar with input from all group members and update it quarterly. Issue news releases to all newspapers and radio stations within the region. In addition, the news releases should be sent to organizations which publish newsletters including the Chambers of Commerce, Senior Centers, College, etc. (These should be identified during the initial outreach to gatekeepers).

Topics for news releases should include:

- The creation of Trans-Link and its purpose (see sample news release in appendix)
- Introduction of the Regional Transit Guide and Website
- Establishment of the regional phone number
- Arrival of new buses at any system
- Service changes or enhancements
- Opportunities for regional travel

- Recruitment of volunteer drivers

In addition to standard news releases, consider developing feature stories about individuals who are successfully using the system. These stories will allow others to understand that the service is available for them when they need it.

An additional opportunity for media exposure is available by participating in local public affairs programs. We heard from several gatekeepers about the popularity of a morning public affairs program on KHIR. A letter or call to all of the radio stations would likely be sufficient to solicit some opportunities to appear as a guest on radio talk shows.

## ■ Implement Introductory PSA campaign to promote availability of guide and website

Radio and TV stations will generally air public service announcements (PSAs) on a space available basis. In addition, when public service agencies purchase advertising, they will often give them two for one placements – one guaranteed PSA for each paid spot.

When the regional guide and website are introduced, PSAs should be distributed to all local radio stations. PSAs are generally provided in 15 and 30 second formats to be read live on the radio (see sample PSA in appendix).

It may also be possible to work with the local cable TV provider (Charter Communications) to create a 10 or 15 second television PSA. At the simplest, this might be a slide photograph of the regional guide to be shown with a voice-over similar to the radio announcement.

(If funding is available for paid advertising, paid radio spots with PSA bonuses would increase exposure).

## Create an Inclusive Image

One challenge that the Gorge providers share with rural transit providers throughout the country is the perception that public transportation is only available to particular groups – seniors, persons with disabilities, Medicaid recipients – because often in the past this was the case. An objective for Trans-Link in all of its communications efforts should be to create a more inclusive image for the network – a public service that is available to

anyone who needs it either temporarily or on an on-going basis. Two strategies which specifically address this objective are outlined here.

■ **Create and implement testimonial advertising campaign**

Customer testimonials are an effective and highlight credible communications strategy, especially in small communities. By identifying and highlighting transit users who are demographically similar to potential users we can communicate the message that public transportation is in fact “for people like you.” The key is creating an effective testimonial campaign is to feature a diverse group of riders who represent different target

groups and different ways of using public transit. For example, these might include a senior citizen in Klickitat who uses the bus for shopping in the Dalles, a young Hispanic woman who uses CAT to take her kids to the doctor in Hood River, a college student who uses Link to travel to CGCC, a worker in Skamania County who uses the new service to Vancouver, a rider who connects to Greyhound for medical trips to Portland. You might even include a volunteer driver in one ad as a means of recruiting volunteers. While it will be impossible to include every type of passenger or every service, the objective is to show that the public transportation network – Trans-Link – is available to everyone and can meet a diverse set of needs.

▪ *Recruit testimonials*

Bus operators and dispatchers are generally very helpful in identifying riders who are suitable testimonial candidates. If the person is willing, make sure they understand that their photo and/or comments will be used in the newspaper and on the radio. Generally it is nice to offer them a small gift for their time – possibly a number of free rides or a gift certificate for lunch.

▪ *Select advertising media*

Generally, the consultant recommends local newspaper as the primary medium for a testimonial campaign as it allows for the use of a rider’s photograph along with their name. However, stakeholder interviews indicate that, in the Gorge,

Countywide public bus service connecting:

- Angels Camp
- Arnold
- Avery
- Columbia College
- Copperopolis
- Copper Cove
- Jackson
- La Canfora
- Makulino Hill
- Moulin Ranch
- Murphys
- San Andreas
- Villicito
- Valley Springs
- West Point

**“The bus is a blessing for me.”**

— Zelma Altmeyer  
San Andreas

Zelma doesn't like asking friends for a ride. And with the new Calaveras Transit she doesn't have to. Zelma rides the bus to the post office, hairdresser, shopping and doctor's appointments. She calls ahead and they deviate to pick her up right at her door. You too can enjoy the convenience and freedom of Calaveras Transit. Call today for a free First Time Riders Guide.

**754-4450**  
Your ride is here.

**CALAVERAS**  
TRANSIT

radio is the channel by which most people get local information and therefore the stronger advertising medium. In addition, radio stations are generally willing to work with non-profit or public service clients to provide free PSAs in addition to paid airtime. Hence, the campaign should use radio as the primary medium with newspaper as a support medium.

- *Develop ads and commercials*

The campaign will be composed of a series of (5 or more) identically formatted ads/commercials featuring different riders. To develop the print testimonial ads begin by meeting with each passenger individually to interview and photograph them at a familiar location. The interview should address what transportation service they use and how they use it, what benefits they derive from it, generally what their experience with public transit has been. Generally, during the interview, the rider will say something that makes a great headline. The quote selected for the headline should highlight a specific benefit that the rider derives from using public transit. The ad copy should describe how the riders uses public transportation and address additional benefits it offers. Each ad should end by positioning Tran-Link as an easy way to access public transit service throughout the Gorge region and should include reference to the regional guide, website and phone number.

**Copy points for Testimonial Ads**

- Identify rider (name, occupation, hometown)
- Describe how rider uses transit services (type of service, trip purpose, destination)
- Describe benefits rider derives from service (mobility, economy, independence)
- Define Trans-Link as a regional transportation network (identify the five counties/systems)
- Include the phone number and web-site address with an invitation to call for or pick up the free regional transit guide
- Trans-Link logo

Creating testimonial ads for radio is somewhat more challenging and will require the assistance of a radio producer – possibly from one of the local radio stations. The commercials can feature the actual voices of the testimonials (most effective) or simply use their names along with quotes read by an announcer. As with the print ads, the commercials should end by providing the methods to access the Trans-Link system.

- *Implement region-wide campaign*

The testimonial campaign should be a long term effort implemented in bi-annual flights of 6-8 weeks. This means that the ads and commercials should be run as intensively as possible for a 6-8 week period twice each year. Ads should be rotated during the period to create an impression of inclusive diversity.

## ■ Conduct Spanish language advertising and outreach

Due to lack of awareness and a language barrier, the Hispanic community has not extensively used the local transit services. This is one audience where a particular effort will be needed to create the perception that the transit network is also for them.

The first step is to insure that those who do not speak Spanish can access the network. Having at least one person who speaks Spanish at the regional phone number will be important. This person can provide information and assist with making reservations (in cases where the actual provider does not have Spanish speaker personnel).

A second step is to publish at least basic information in Spanish. The Spanish language regional poster (which can also be reproduced as a flyer and/or print ad) will convey the basic information that there are transit services throughout the five-county region and that information can be gotten in Spanish by call the regional number.

Opportunities for communicating with the Hispanic community via the media are very limited. They include:

- KIHR Spanish Language Program
- Health Currents – Hood River Hospital Newsletter
- Hispanic News – statewide newspaper

It was stressed by stakeholders who were interviewed regarding the Hispanic community that more direct outreach efforts, involving distribution of posters and flier in conjunction with personal contacts, are likely to be more effective. Venues for reaching the Hispanic community include:

- La Clinica
- Spanish language church services
- Migrant Education parent meetings
- Head Start program
- Gorge Soccer League
- Housing for People
- Hispanic Outreach and Prevention
- Families First
- DHS

Given the limited staff time and resources available for outreach by the local transit agencies, it is recommended that you establish a relationship with key gatekeepers for the Hispanic population and ask them to aid in this effort. Excellent candidates include:

- La Clinica
- Nuestra Comunidad
- Migrant Education

## Encourage Usage

As the current mission of the Gorge Trans-Link providers is primarily to provide a safety net of transit service, simply creating awareness and inclusiveness will encourage those who need transportation to access the system.

As the transit network evolves, particularly, once regular fixed route service has been established, different types of marketing strategies will become viable. Following are brief descriptions of a few possible ridership-oriented strategies to consider for the future:

### ■ Conduct targeted marketing and outreach for specific services

As new services are introduced to the network, it will be necessary to conduct specific, targeted marketing efforts, in addition to the on-going regional program. For example, the new jobs oriented service between Skamania County and Vancouver must be marketed to individuals in Skamania County needing to travel to Vancouver for work or training programs. This can be accomplished by conveying very specific messages (details about the route, schedule and cost of the Vancouver service) through many of the same channels we have discussed for the regional effort:

- News release to local newspapers and radio stations.
- Flyer distributed through DSHS, WorkSource and other employment oriented agencies.
- Posters at social service offices, the post office, grocery store and other high traffic locations.
- Introductory ad in local paper including route and schedule details.
- Bus side sign on Skamania vehicles promoting “Daily Bus Service from Stevenson to Vancouver, only \$X.XX.”

As another example, the addition of bike racks to vehicles within the region would warrant targeted marketing through local bike shops (to reach biking enthusiasts and

bike renters) and through the Chambers of Commerce/Visitors Centers to reach visitors who have brought their bikes along. In this case it will be very important to make the gatekeepers (bike shop and visitor center employees) aware of the services and to provide them with targeted literature they can pass on to their customers.

As each new service or service enhancement is added, the Gorge providers should determine what target groups will benefit from the service, then identify gatekeeper organizations and/or communications channels for reaching those groups as directly as possible.

## ■ Conduct targeted marketing and outreach to high potential users

In striving to generate increased transit ridership, the most effective efforts are generally those which target high potential user groups with tailored, highly relevant messages. When the Trans-Link network is more established and the providers are ready to more aggressively promote ridership, there are several target groups which can be solicited through these types of targeted promotional efforts.

### ▪ *Seniors*

Seniors who have driven most of their lives often come to transit with a high level of uncertainty and fear. This can best be addressed by personal interaction such as outreach presentation, rather than simply through advertising or promotional materials.

The Gorge providers can solicit opportunities to make presentations to groups of seniors at senior centers, senior complex resident's meetings, senior nutrition programs, assisted living facilities or other venues. These presentations should address how the transit network works, where it can take you and reduced fares available to seniors. The presentation should be followed by a trip planning session so participants can get personalized information. They should be left with a regional guide, a free "trial ride" ticket and possibly an inexpensive specialty item (such as a magnet with the telephone information number). One system I am familiar with served ice cream at their presentations to encourage participation.

- *College Students*

Ridership among students at Columbia Gorge Community College is likely to remain limited until more direct service and longer service hours are available. At that time, a number of very direct communications opportunities exist. These include:

- Inclusion of information in the campus newsletter (presently overseen by Dennis Whitehead)
- Creation of a free standing transit information display for placement in the student center or other high traffic location on campus
- Distribution of transit flyer to students at orientation
- Posters on campus bulletin boards
- Sale of transit passes by the campus bookstore



Free standing transit information display.

- *Visitors*

The travel needs of visitors are not generally well met by demand response services. Attracting visitor ridership generally requires the provision of services that are highly convenient and specialized, such as shuttle service between downtown Hood River and key tourist destinations. As new services are developed which might be more attractive to visitors, they can best be promoted through cooperative efforts with:

- Chambers of Commerce and Visitors Centers
- Hotels
- Forest Service and National Parks facilities

To be effective, the transit information provided to visitors must be designed to be very specific to their needs. They are unlikely to wade through a lot of general information to figure out how to use the transit service.



Visitor oriented brochure

■ “Try Transit” grocery bag stuffer promotion

One thing that every resident in the service area has in common is the need to shop for groceries. As a group, the Trans-Link providers could ask the grocery stores in the region to participate in a joint promotion over a single three day period (e.g. Thursday through Saturday). They would be provided with promotional fliers to be placed in every shopping bag. Each flyer would include a coupon for a free round trip along with basic information about available transit services. Those who use their free ride coupons would be entered in a drawing for a free grocery shopping spree. *This kind of promotion is appropriate only for fixed route service.*

■ Shuttle services to special events

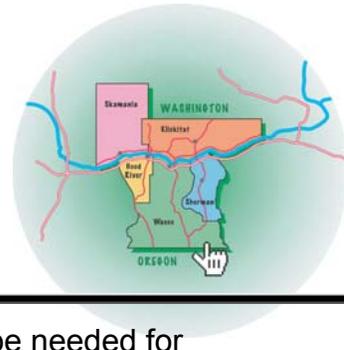
Many transit systems have found that they can broaden their base of users and supporters by providing specialized services such as shuttles to special events. Residents and visitors who have little need for general transit services, often find these useful as they are direct, convenient and allow them to avoid traffic congestion and parking concerns. Over time, the tourism oriented Gorge economy is likely to present a variety of opportunities for such services. For example:

- Ski shuttle service such as that provided by CAT already
- Shuttles to special events at the Maryhill winery and amphitheater near Goldendale
- Shuttles connecting tour boats with downtown Hood River and The Dalles

To promote ridership of such special services, the transit providers will want to work in cooperation with the event promoters. For example tour boat operators can let passengers know that there will be a shuttle available when they get off the boat; the winery can include information about shuttle services in ads and promotional materials for events at the amphitheater.



Sample Grocery Bag Stuffer



# Marketing Tools

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Following are descriptions of the marketing tools which will be needed for implementation of this plan. The initial set of tools – logo, regional guide and website, will be developed as part of this project.

## To be developed under this project:

### ■ Logo

### ■ Vehicle Decal Design

Will include logo, phone number and website address

### ■ Regional Guide

The guide will include the following components:

- Gorge Trans-Link Regional Network
  - Five-county map highlighting the area served by each of the five demand response services
  - Route Lines showing inter-county fixed routes (Greyhound, Skamania-Vancouver route, Klickitat-Hood River, Klickitat-The Dalles routes)
  - Fare Chart showing the relevant fare between all major communities
  - Reference to regional phone center and website
- Hood River County/Columbia Area Transit
- Wasco County/Link
- Sherman County/Sherman County Bus
- Skamania County/Skamania Transportation
- Klickitat County/Mount Adams Transportation
- Medicaid Brokerages – Oregon and Washington
- Greyhound, Amtrak and other regional services
- Carpoolmatchnw.org

For each provider a two page spread will include:

- Service Area Map
- Service Description
- Fares
- Reservation Information
- Other information

### ■ Regional Poster (English and Spanish)

The guide will mirror the information included in the regional section of the guide and will emphasize the phone number and website.

The Spanish version of the information will include the statement “We Speak Spanish” to convey that Spanish language personnel are available to assist callers.

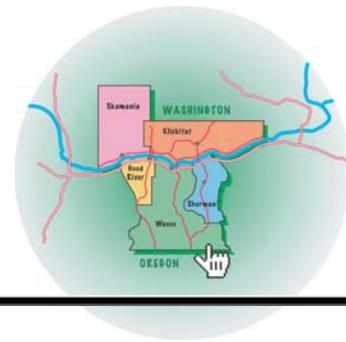
- **Regional Website**

The website will be an internet enabled version of the regional guide. The home page will provide regional information, including the regional map. From there, visitors will be able to link to each of the specific service pages by clicking on navigation buttons or locations on the map. While the site will not initially be fully bilingual, there will be a Spanish language note referring individuals to the regional telephone number.

## **Additional tools which will need to be developed:**

- **News Releases**
- **Public Service Announcements**
- **Testimonial Campaign**
- **Spanish Language Advertising**

# Implementation Guidelines

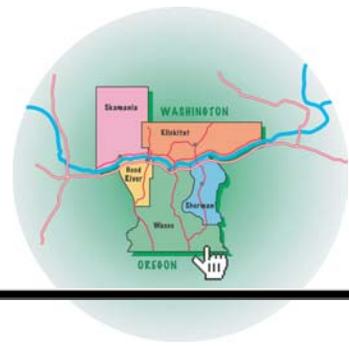


	Strategy	Budget
<b>STAGE ONE</b>	Develop Regional Identity	Project
	Produce Vehicle Decals	printing
	Develop and Produce Regional Guide & Poster	\$3500-4500*
	Develop Regional Website	Project
	Implement Regional Phone Number	???
<b>STAGE TWO</b>	Establish Distribution Network for Regional Guide & Poster	\$750
	Maintain Regional Website	\$1000/year
	PSAs to Introduce Regional Guide and Website	Staff
	Establish Gatekeeper Network	Staff
	Implement News Release Calendar	Staff
<b>STAGE THREE</b>	Maintain Regional Guide Distribution	printing
	Maintain Regional Website	\$1000/year
	Implement Testimonial Campaign	\$12,500
	Conduct Spanish Language Advertising	\$2,500
<b>LONG TERM</b>	Targeted Ridership Programs	???
	Grocery Bag Stuffer Campaign	\$3,500
	Special Event Services for Visitors and Residents	???

\* Rough estimate for printing 5000 guides and a smaller quantity of posters

# Appendix

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Gatekeeper List

Media List

Regional Guide Distribution Locations

Sample PSA

Sample News Release

Sample Testimonial Ad Campaign