



To: Gorge Transit Strategy Working Group

Date: January 20, 2020

From: Kathy Fitzpatrick, Mobility Manager

Subject: Gorge Regional Transit Strategy: Gaps and Capacity Analysis Memo

Gorge Regional Transit Strategy: Background

The purpose of the Gorge Regional Transit Strategy phase 1 is to combine the goals, policies, and prioritizations of local transportation planning efforts in the Columbia Gorge to establish a foundation for a regional strategy and vision for public transportation. Phase 1 objectives include strengthening partnerships, completing local plan assessments, and synthesizing goals and policies into a high-level regional vision. Phase II of the Strategy (to be conducted at later date) will focus on implementation strategies with additional data analysis, ridership forecasts, financial planning, and operational assessments.

Gaps and Capacity Analysis Memo

The Gaps and Capacity Analysis Memo identifies key regional public transportation gaps and opportunities based on the input of stakeholders and the information gathered in the Existing Framework memo. The purpose of this analysis is to inform the Regional Strategy Foundations Memo, which will present a collective stakeholder vision of the regional public transportation system, a summary of the System goals, high level organizational and operational options, and an outline of the Gorge Regional Transit Strategy Phase II.

Summary of Vision and Goal Statements

Key transit system goals emerged from stakeholder participation in the first Working Group Session and survey. The draft goals were refined during the Working Group Session #2 and with the input gathered from the second group survey. The stakeholders participating in this process were given the task of identifying and prioritizing goals for a Columbia Gorge regional public transportation system that if achieved, would help their organizations address the region’s most pressing challenges. These refined goals and responses solicited from the second survey informed the first draft of a vision statement.

The Working Group also identified key goals that are critical to the successful realization of the vision but are not under the authority of the transit providers and will require partnerships and coordination with other jurisdictions. For example, goals related to land use policies can only be achieved by working closely with local land use authorities and goals dependent on the connectivity to transportation systems governed by other agencies will depend on agency coordination.

Draft Vision Statement

We believe that an efficient, coordinated, and sustainably funded public transportation system provides the equitable access to regional resources essential for community vitality and the protection of our natural resources.

Goal Area: Community and Economic Vitality

- The transit system provides **workforce mobility** and commute options that support the local and regional **economies**.
- The transit system enhances resident and visitor **experience of outdoor recreation** in the Gorge and **increases quality of life** for residents while supporting the **local tourism economy**.
- The transit system provides **equitable and affordable access** to Gorge outdoor recreation, health care, higher education, essential services, and jobs, while addressing the social determinants of health prioritized by the Columbia Gorge Health Council.
- The transit system supports local communities by reducing the need for **expensive parking infrastructure** and helping to **manage congestion** in commercial and popular tourist areas.
- The transit system contributes to a **healthy environment and climate** by moving more people with **efficient, low/no-emission vehicles**.

Goal Area: High-Quality Service and Experience

- The regional transit service is **reliable and seamless**.
- Regional transit prioritizes service to **key regional connection points**.
- The transit service is **equitable**, reaching underserved and diverse communities while making them feel welcome and safe.
- Regional providers, services, and routes are **coordinated**, providing **cost efficiencies** for providers and more **efficient service** for riders.

Goal Area: Coordination

- Strong regional **coordination between Transit Providers** creates efficiencies, builds capacity, and enhances service.
- Strong **regional partnerships with key stakeholders** (public and private) increases and diversifies **resource investments** in the transit system.
- Coordination with local emergency management departments supports local and regional **disaster response and resiliency**.
- Strong partnerships and coordination with local planning authorities allow development of **land use policies supportive of multimodal transportation**.
- Strong partnerships with land managers will **protect our natural resources** by integrating planning policies to **reduce congestion and overcrowding** at popular recreation areas.

Goal Area and Goal Alignment Discussion

As the Gorge Regional Transit Strategy process continues, some goal areas may be more nuanced, with varied goals that are an important part of a comprehensive regional vision that represents multiple stakeholders and jurisdictions. The following goals demonstrate how transit can be a part of a larger suite of integrated tools addressing specific regional challenges.

In response to the Working Group comments during the Working Group Session #2, we have reduced the number of goals and goal areas, but there are several goals that the Working Group noted were a priority that may need to be elevated to Goal Area status: Natural Resources and Financial Sustainability.

Access to Natural Areas

Working group members have clearly expressed that equitable access to outdoor recreation is important and that subsequent impact to our natural resources must also be considered through effective management strategies. With good coordination between land managers and transit providers, we can achieve both of those goals by providing equitable access to recreation destinations while protecting these important natural resources.

With good coordination between transit providers and land managers, public transit can be combined with other tools like permitting systems to achieve multiple goals. One example of a successful alignment of the two goals is the Dog Mountain Shuttle project in Skamania County which decreases overcrowding of a popular trailhead by providing a low-cost public shuttle bus as a tool in combination with other agency partner permit and enforcement systems.

Financial Sustainability

Financial sustainability has been an important topic of discussion for the Working Group members who want transit services to be affordable, especially for underserved communities, and recognize the need for a foundation of more stable and diverse funding for the regional system. Goal achievement depends on sustainable funding. As this goal represents a high priority for PMT and Working Groups, Financial Sustainability could be classified as a Goal Area.

Aligning the two goals of affordable service and sustainable funding can be accomplished with coordination and partner investment. In rural areas, farebox recovery is not expected to sustain the service, but fare programs like an annual integrated pass system or a commuter pass program purchased by local employers can provide a significant source of funds. The numbers of passes sold have the potential to be much greater than selling single tickets per ride, allowing the passes to be sold at an affordable price for all. Pass programs also allow partners like health care organizations to invest in the system and serve their clients by purchasing and distributing passes in bulk.

Service Area Focus

All the regional transit providers offer Dial-a-Ride services, a valuable transportation service for older adults and for people with disabilities. Although it is the least efficient service for a transportation provider, requiring significantly more labor hours and vehicle miles per passenger, it provides life-saving services for those who cannot use fixed route transit services or who live in remote locations.

However, providing coordinated, high-ridership fixed routes services that serve the urban areas can decrease the overall cost of serving residents in a rural area can free up more funds for dial-a-ride services. Dial-a-Ride services can also be the most viable and effective form of transit in dispersed suburban or rural areas and serve as the most viable service model for bringing people from those dispersed areas into more dense communities served by fixed route.

Although Dial-a-Ride is a critical part of the regional system and is the way that each county serves its most vulnerable populations in all areas of the county, the Working Group is focused on the areas where the most opportunity for regional coordination and regional connectivity is feasible. This focus area covers the two corridors of SR 14 and I-84 which provide the most connectivity between counties and important transit connection points outside of the jurisdictions of the transit providers.

Reconciling the Collective Vision with Existing Conditions (Dashboard next page)

The dashboard below is intended to create a visual snapshot of stakeholder goals, existing resources and services that move the system forward toward those goals, and the existing gaps that must be addressed before the goals can be fully achieved. During the Working Group Session #3, stakeholders will give input on the gaps or the barriers that they think must be overcome to achieve a collective vision for this bi-state region and will assess how well the system is currently meeting the goals.

Conclusion

One of the goals of the Gorge Transit Strategy is to produce a collective vision of public transportation for the Columbia Gorge region. To date, project partners have described their vision of a public transportation system that is seamless, coordinated, and affordable and that provides equitable access to regional resources essential for community vitality, the well-being of residents, and the protection of natural resources. Those working group members who responded to the second survey noted that the primary gaps or barriers between the vision and making the vision real are Participants also identified the partnerships that must be strengthened to meet specific goals that are not under the purview of the transit providers: land use planning authorities, land managers, right of way authorities like cities, counties, and the states.

| Goal Area | Goals | Assessment of current state of goal achievement (High-Medium-Low) | Barriers and Gaps in services and resources supporting goal statements |
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| Community and Economic Vitality | The transit system provides workforce mobility and commute options that support the local and regional economies . | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaps in routes and services in some areas. |
| | The transit system enhances resident and visitor experience of outdoor recreation in the Gorge and increases quality of life for residents while supporting the local tourism economy . | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More transit access to recreation destinations. • Need weekend services. |
| | The transit system provides equitable and affordable access to Gorge outdoor recreation, health care, higher education, essential services, and jobs, while addressing the social determinants of health prioritized by the Columbia Gorge Health Council. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seamless transit needed to Community College. • For those without transportation benefits, access to health care in Portland is difficult. |
| | The transit system supports local communities by reducing the need for expensive parking infrastructure and helping to manage congestion in commercial and popular tourist areas. | | |
| | The transit system contributes to a healthy environment and climate by moving more people with efficient, low/no-emission vehicles . | | |
| High-Quality Service and Experience | The regional transit service is reliable and seamless . | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fare structures are different. |
| | Regional transit prioritizes service to key regional connection points . | | |

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|---------------------|---|--|---|
| | The transit service is equitable , reaching underserved and diverse communities while making them feel welcome and safe. | | |
| | Regional providers, services, and routes are coordinated , providing cost efficiencies for providers and more efficient service for riders. | | |
| Coordination | Strong regional coordination between Transit Providers creates efficiencies, builds capacity, and enhances service. | | |
| | Strong regional partnerships with key stakeholders (public and private) increases and diversifies resource investments in the transit system. | | |
| | Coordination with local emergency management departments supports local and regional disaster response and resiliency . | | |
| | Strong partnerships and coordination with local planning authorities allow development of land use policies supportive of multimodal transportation . | | |
| | Strong partnerships with land managers will protect our natural resources by integrating planning policies to reduce congestion and overcrowding at popular recreation areas. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Scenic Area policies prohibits metered/paid parking. |