

# **Gorge Transit Strategy Working Group Survey**

## **Survey Results Summary**

Prepared for

MCEDD

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## Introduction

MCEDD conducted an online survey between January 8 – 14, 2021 for working group participants to give feedback on the draft goal statements and vision for the Gorge Transit Strategy. The survey also gave respondents the opportunity to share their thoughts on the gaps that exist and must be considered before a Gorge regional transit system vision can be realized.

## Overall Participation and Notification

Overall, the project team received **38 survey responses**. Working group participants were informed about the survey via an email from the project management team.

## Feedback Summary

### Survey Responses

#### 1. *What inspires your organization to participate in the Gorge Transit Strategy process?*

Overall, participants said that they are inspired to participate in the Gorge Transit Strategy process for several reasons:

- **Connection:** Desire for seamless, well-connected, and regionally integrated transportation system within the Gorge
- **Access and equity:** Desire to make sure that all members of our community (regardless of ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, age, ability, etc.) are able to access jobs and services throughout the Gorge; Provide affordable, convenient public transit options; Expand access to rural workforce.
- **Collaboration:** Opportunity for partnership and collaboration among transit providers, agencies, organizations, and communities
- **Anticipate future transportation needs of the area** (i.e., population growth, aging population, growing workforce, etc.)
- **Support local economy:** Create a transit system that supports the local economy and drives community development
- **Cars:** Address automobile congestion and safety in the area
- **Environment:** Decarbonization/electrification of regional transportation infrastructure.

#### 2. *There are many important goals for the Gorge Transit Strategy to consider, so we need your help prioritizing them. Please rank the following Gorge Transit Strategy goal statements in order of importance.*

Overall, participants ranked the goals for the Gorge Transit Strategy **in the following order**.

1. The transit system provides equitable access to Gorge outdoor recreation, health care, higher education, essential services, and jobs, addressing the social determinants of health prioritized by the Columbia Gorge Health Council.
2. The transit system provides workforce mobility and commute options, supporting the local economy.
3. The regional transit service is reliable and seamless.
4. The transit service is equitable and affordable, reaching underserved and diverse communities while making them feel welcome and safe.
5. Regional providers, services, and routes are coordinated, providing cost efficiencies for providers and more efficient service for riders.
6. Strong regional coordination between Transit Providers creates efficiencies, builds capacity, and enhances service.
7. Regional transit prioritizes service to key regional connection points.
8. The transit system enhances resident and visitor experience of outdoor recreation in the Gorge, increasing quality of life for residents and supporting the local tourism economy.
9. The transit system contributes to a healthy environment and climate by moving more people with efficient, low/no-emission vehicles.
10. 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.
11. Strong regional partnerships with key stakeholders (public and private) increases and diversifies resource investments in the transit system.
12. Strong partnerships and coordination with local planning authorities allow development of land use policies supportive of transit and multimodal transportation.
13. Coordination with local emergency management departments supports local and regional disaster response and resiliency.
14. Strong partnerships with land managers and integrated planning and policies protect our natural resources by reducing congestion and overcrowding at popular recreation areas.

3. *If you could only choose three priority words or concepts to include in the Gorge Transit Strategy vision statement, what would they be?*

Of the twelve priority words and concepts presented to the working group members, “**coordinated services**” was the most popular, with a little under half (15) of all respondents choosing it as one of their top three priority words or concepts to include in the vision statement.

About a third of respondents (12), chose “**equitable access**,” and more than a quarter of respondents (10-11) chose “**sustainably funded**,” “**connected**,” or “**efficient**.” “Provider and stakeholder coordination” and “natural resource protection” were chosen the least (2-3 times).

Three respondents chose “Other” and wrote in the following words and concepts: principles, smart growth/bike-ped-transit supportive, priority places, reliable fuel, and specialized to community needs.

4. *When considering the updated goals for the Gorge Transit Strategy from the perspective of your organization, what are the most pressing gaps, barriers, and/or concerns?*

Many respondents were concerned about **funding** and how a regional transportation would be funded. **Reliable service, connectivity** between transportation routes, different communities, and schedules, and service **coordination** across the region were the next most mentioned concerns.

Other pressing concerns and gaps identified when considering the updated goals for the Gorge Transit Strategy include (in no particular order):

- Absence of a **congestion management** plan
- Impact on the **environment** and how **natural disasters** might impact transportation in the area
- **Redundancy in the goals** as they are currently written
- **Safety** and how a regional transportation plan may make the area safer
- **Barriers older adults and people with disabilities face** in accessing **fixed route stops**
- **Public awareness** of public transit
- **Decentralized management of rural transit** in the Columbia River Gorge.
- **Access** for residents of rural communities

5. *Of the Gorge Transit Strategy goals (listed below), which goals can your organization support?*

All fourteen goals had at least a third of respondents (11 or more) indicate that their organization could support them.

More than half of respondents (19 or more) felt that their organization could support the following six goals, which are listed in order of how often they were chosen by participants:

1. The transit system provides equitable access to Gorge outdoor recreation, health care, higher education, essential services, and jobs, addressing the social determinants of health prioritized by the Columbia Gorge Health Council.
2. The transit system provides workforce mobility and commute options, supporting the local economy.
3. The regional transit service is reliable and seamless.
4. The transit service is equitable and affordable, reaching underserved and diverse communities while making them feel welcome and safe.
5. Strong regional coordination between Transit Providers creates efficiencies, builds capacity, and enhances service.

6. Strong regional partnerships with key stakeholders (public and private) increases and diversifies resource investments in the transit system.

The first four goals listed above were also chosen as the four most important goals for the Gorge Transit Strategy in Question #2.

## 6. *How might your organization support the goals you selected above?*

Many respondents noted that their organization could support the goals they selected in the following ways:

- **Funding:** Help with fundraising, grant writing, using their agency's funds for this effort, or through toll waivers
- **Lobby and advocate** at the local, regional, and state level for support and funding
- **Collaborate and coordinate:** Many expressed a desire to collaborate and coordinate across organizations and agencies
- **Build awareness** among the public to increase ridership and usage of the future transportation system
- **Infrastructure:** Help plan for and support the necessary infrastructure for the transportation system (especially electric infrastructure)
- **Regional transportation plans:** Incorporate the Gorge Transit Strategy goals into regional transportation plans

## 7. *Is there anything else you want to share with the Project Management Team before the next meeting?*

Many respondents noted that creating **connectivity** between communities and cities in the region is very important, as is **equitable access**. This is an important consideration for rural providers as they must cover long distances to make connections. Others noted the need to address and/or recognize the **climate change benefits** of a regional public transit system and plan in the Gorge Transit Strategy.

In terms of the goals that participants provided feedback on, several participants noted the **need to pare down the goals** as there is some redundancy between them. The objectives could then provide greater clarity for "higher-level" goals

The project management team should consider **the different needs and decision making structures of each agency** and public transit provider.

One respondent brought up the idea of instituting a **seven-county, bi-state tax district** to support and fund a coordinated, regional transportation system.

## Participant Information

### *Organization and type*

Of the 38 respondents to the survey, 29 different organizations were represented.

Half of the organizations were either local governments (9) or transportation providers (8). Seven organizations were nonprofits. One respondent did not provide an organization and instead noted that they were a resident of Hood River County and depended upon public transit to travel in the area.