



GORGE TRANSIT STRATEGY WORKING GROUP MEETING #3

MEETING SUMMARY

Date: Tuesday, January 26, 2021

Time: 1:00 – 3:00 p.m.

Location: Zoom Meeting

Participants:

Wayne Stewart, Historic Columbia River
Highway Advisory Committee

Kristina Babcock, Clackamas County

Bill Baumann, Human Services Council

Allison Boyd, Multnomah County
Transportation

Lynn Burditt, Forest Service

Sharon Carter, Klickitat County Senior
Services - Mt. Adams Transportation
Service

Annick Chalier, Hood River Energy Council

Caron Coates, Congresswoman Jaime
Herrera Beutler

Colleen Coleman, City of Mosier

Theresa Conley, ODOT (Central Oregon
Region)

Angie Coulter, CTANW

Matthew Cramer, WSDOT

David Duncan, Gray Line of Portland

Valerie Egon, ODOT

Seth English-Young, FHWA-WFL

Patty Fink, Columbia Area Transit

Kevin Gorman, Friends of the Columbia
Gorge

Ty Graves, Columbia Area Transit

Michael Kelly, Human Services Council

Jason Kelly, ODOT

Leana Kinley, City of Stevenson

Laurie Lebowsky, WSDOT - Southwest
Region

Terra Lingley, ODOT

Dale McCabe, City of The Dalles

Nadja McConville, ODHS

Sophie Miller, Skamania County Senior
Services

Rita Rathkey, Opportunity Connections

Emily Reed, Columbia Gorge Tourism
Alliance

Dale Robins, RTC

Eliot Rose, Metro

Amy Schlappi, Columbia Area Transit

Jon Snyder, Gov. Inslee's Policy Office

Jill Sprance-Carr, Washington State Parks

Lexi Stickel, PacificSource Community
Solutions - Columbia Gorge CCO

Maya Sullivan, Insitu

Britta Willson, Providence Hood River
Volunteers in Action and the Aging in
the Gorge Alliance

Marta Yera Cronin, CGCC

A J Zelada, Friends of the Historic Columbia
River Highway

Gordon Zimmerman, City of Cascade Locks

Staff: Kathy Fitzpatrick, MCEDD; Jessica Metta, MCEDD, Jessica Pickul, JLA; Nicole Metildi, JLA

Meeting Goals:

1. Report out on the feedback received from the Working Group on the Project Goals, Vision, and opportunities to support the strategy moving forward.
2. Discuss the Gaps Analysis findings and gather substantive feedback.
3. Gather feedback on key components of the Vision Statement.

Welcome, Introductions, and Agenda Overview

Jessica Pickul, JLA Public Involvement, welcomed the group, and reviewed the agenda.

Project Update

Kathy Fitzpatrick, MCEDD, gave a **project update** and reviewed the **objectives of Phase I:**

- Strengthen partnerships
- Synthesize existing and ongoing planning efforts
- Complete foundational assessments (gap, capacity, opportunity analysis)
- Develop a high-level regional vision, which will provide a foundation for Phase 2

Kathy noted that the project management team (PMT) is conducting **one-on-one meetings with organizations that were unable to make it to the virtual Working Group sessions** to gather their thoughts and feedback.

Phase II will begin in July of this year and will include outlining tasks for the consultant, which will include a feasibility analysis and data collection for the region.

Kathy **reviewed the Phase 1 schedule** with the group and noted the next key milestones:

- April: Working Group Session #4 will look at the final memo
- Between April and June, Kathy and the PMT will gather any final feedback regarding the gaps, vision statement, and goals
- June: MCEDD Board will adopt the final regional transit strategy memo

Goal Areas and Goal Statement Work

Kathy shared that the group started with 25 goals and the PMT has **refined them to three goal areas** with feedback from the survey and last Working Group session. They are as follows:

- **Community Vitality**
 - Access/Equity

- Environment/Climate/Resiliency
- Regional Traffic Management
- **Regional Coordination**
 - Built Environment and Connectivity
 - Financial Sustainability
- **High Quality Service and Experience**

Kathy asked the group for their thoughts about these goal areas and if it makes sense to nest **“Financial Sustainability”** and **“Environmental Stewardship and Natural Access”** under other goal areas, or if they should be elevated to their own goal areas.

One participant noted that **some of these goal areas and the goals under them seem like strategies that help us achieve a goal, rather than goals** themselves. Regional Coordination was one example of being more of a strategy than a goal. There was a suggestion to ask the “5 Whys” to dig into the goals and strategies to help further refine them.

One participant asked what the final “why” for Regional Coordination would be, to which one person answered, “seamless service.” This person noted that one challenge or danger of thinking through the goals is the pitfall of “silo-ing” them. All of the goals for the Gorge Transit Strategy are likely to be interconnected or achieved through overlapping strategies.

Jessica asked the group to send any thoughts regarding the goals to Kathy.

Review Working Group Survey Takeaways

Kathy walked through the feedback from the Working Group survey that asked questions about the goal areas, goal statements, and Vision Statement. The Vision Statement and a gap analysis of the goals will be discussed today.

Takeaways from the survey:

- Total of 38 responses
- People are **inspired to work on the Gorge Transit Strategy** for the following reasons:
 - Desire for a seamless, regionally integrated transit service in the Gorge
 - Equitable and affordable access to transit in the Gorge
 - Opportunity for collaboration, not just coordination
 - Planning for future needs
 - Support the local economy
 - Address congestion/traffic safety
 - Environmental and/or to protect natural resources
- The **goals were prioritized** as follows:
 1. Equitable access

2. Workforce mobility
 3. Service is reliable and seamless
 4. Support local economy
 5. Regional transit coordination
- Respondents noted the following **ways they could invest in the transit strategy**:
 - Funding
 - Lobby and advocate
 - Collaboration and coordination
 - Build awareness: Within participants' organization and with the people they serve
 - Infrastructure: Sidewalks and other safe ways of moving around and accessing or using public transit
 - Integrated planning: Land use planning, regional transit plans, climate action plans, etc.

Kathy shared that the survey feedback was used to refine the goals and vision statement that we will discuss today. Participants can view the full survey results by visiting the MCEDD website.

Vision Statement

Kathy discussed the purpose of the Vision Statement, which is to **encapsulate the hopes and dreams we have for a Gorge Transit Strategy**. She noted that this will be important as the group needs to **envision how regional resources will be shared and utilized across many groups**. The Vision Statement is our **high-level collective vision, a vision that we all share and that each partner organization can help work towards**.

One participant asked who the primary audience is, to which Kathy answered: the members of the Working Group and elected leaders.

Some participants suggested that **a vision statement is more powerful if it is less amorphous and is constricted** (i.e., shorter). A vision statement will help **inform all the communications and messaging for the project**, so it should cater to the decision makers you are trying to persuade.

Kathy wants the **Vision Statement to speak to each organization that is a part of the working group and reflects their needs** so that it **resonates with the stakeholder groups**.

Kathy talked about how we arrived at the draft Vision Statement through Working Group sessions, meeting notes, and the survey results. The top words and concepts that people would like to see in the vision statement are **coordinated services, equitable access, and sustainably funded**.

Current 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.

Jessica opened a **poll asking, “Does the Vision Statement match your vision for the Gorge Transit Strategy?”** Participants responded as follows:

- Yes: 16, 52%
- Yes, with changes: 13, 42%
- No, it’s missing something critical: 2, 6%

Jessica asked participants to share why they responded the way they did to help the PMT further refine the Vision Statement.

Overall, the group expressed that they were **looking for something more succinct, pithy, and meaningful to members of the public and elected officials** and that **connects directly with the purpose of the Gorge Transit Strategy**, possibly in the form of a **tagline and/or a vision paragraph**.

Participants shared the following thoughts in the chat and through discussion:

- This draft **covers everything, but is a bit wordy**
- A participant asked what congressional staffers might change so that this vision statement speaks to elected leaders. One congressional staffer noted that **it is important that people are behind the vision statement**
- A lot of the aspects are right in this draft, we just need to craft it in a way that is **memorable and creates a clear, specific idea in peoples’ minds of what the future could be like**.
- Words like **“seamless use” need to be at the center** of the vision statement.
- The vision statement needs to be **more people-centered**.
- Seems more like a values statement than a vision statement.
- Drop verbiage “we believe that” and drop the “the’s.” Get down to the core words
- What does “sustainably funded” mean?
- One participant noted that **“who” (who is providing this transit system), needs to be defined** and included in a pithy statement. The mission statement could touch upon coordinated access, equitable access, and sustainably funded.
- It would be helpful to **define who the users are, the vision we are going to achieve, and what are we hoping to realize** through this project.
- Many participants also expressed concern that any vision tagline or statement should raise the **transportation needs of residents, not just visitors**.

Kathy noted that **many different tools could be used to express the Gorge Transit Strategy’s vision and goals** – this vision statement cannot be everything. The group could

create a tagline, as well as a vision paragraph, to help address the discussion the group had today.

One person noted that there may be the possibility of bringing in a consultant in Phase II of the project to help write a tagline.

Many participants **brainstormed possible vision statements or “taglines”** in the meeting. They are as follows:

- The absolute best aspects of the gorge are available to everyone without a car. (Many participants liked this statement.)
- All community members can access a Gorge-wide public transportation system
- Equitably connecting people, places, and community
- Get anywhere in the Gorge by transit.
- GORGEously connecting people, places, and communities
- Imagine the Gorge without your car
- Leave your car and love the Gorge
- Love the gorge and leave your car
- The Gorge awaits without your car
- Visit the gorge, leave your car at home.
- Our transportation system will be sustainable and support the quality of life of residents, the health of the environment, and the economic growth of the community. Our transportation system should promote choices in the movement of people and goods and development patterns. Roads, public transit, rail, bicycling and walking should provide safe, efficient, convenient, and affordable access whether or not one owns a car. The design of our transportation system at all scales should be a source of community pride and healthy living. (from cook county)
- Our vision for transit in the Gorge (Gorge Transit) centers on a fast, frequent, and well supported transit system that can shape compact, affordable growth within Gorge communities and foster a low-carbon, low-pollution footprint. The vision integrates other modes ensuring pedestrians, bicyclists and other mobility users can access local transit services directly or without major barriers. It envisions the development and support of local (not global) options like bike share systems run by local businesses, shared-taxi options that use local providers and parking pricing that rewards visitors to move car-free. Residents of and visitors to the Gorge are opting to travel by non-driving options because it is affordable, convenient, functional, reliable, and easy to use. Because of the measure taken, the Gorge meets its climate goals and helps Portland/Vancouver meet theirs.

The PMT will use this feedback to create a final draft Vision Statement that the Working Group will review at their next meeting.

Gaps Analysis Activity

Kathy presented the Gaps Memo and gaps dashboard. The **Gaps Memo focuses on the gaps between where we are today and our goals**. The **gaps dashboard creates a visual of the goals and the gaps**. Gaps and barriers will be identified by providers, stakeholders, and partners through stakeholder interviews and meetings with partner organizations.

Gaps and challenges already noted in the survey include:

- Absence of a regional congestion management plan
- Absence of a plan for how the region will address natural disasters
- Public awareness
- Safety
- Barriers folks with disabilities face when trying to access transit

Kathy asked that folks who mentioned “safety” talk more about **what “safety” means** to them in the breakout groups.

Participants noted that **jurisdictional and institutional barriers** can hinder integration of planning across Washington and Oregon, and that **changing mindsets can also be a barrier**.

Jessica reviewed the **breakout group activity and goals**. Participants were broken into three groups, one for each of the three goal categories: Community and Economic Vitality, High-Quality Service and Experience, and Coordination.

Participants were asked to discuss the gaps for their goal category and to think about the following questions:

- How well are we doing on the goals today?
- What other gaps exist per goal statement today?
- What are the barriers to meeting those gaps?

Breakout Group Report Backs

Jessica asked each breakout group facilitator to share high level notes from their conversations. A full list of facilitator notes from the breakout rooms are included in [Appendix A](#).

- **Group 1: Community and Economic Vitality**
 - The group focused on where the current gaps are and what assets would be needed to advance the goals. They scored each of the goals as follows:
 - The transit system provides workforce mobility and commute options that support the local and regional economies. **Score: 1**
 - Current gaps: Gaps in routes and services in some areas; marketing, outreach to share awareness of service

- 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. **Score: 1**
 - There is a lot of excitement for building transit around trailheads and existing cultural amenities.
 - 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. **Score: 1**
 - Gaps: There are some shortfalls in regard to equitable access. There is some difference between Oregon and Washington here.
 - 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. **Score: 2**
 - The transit system contributes to a healthy environment and climate by moving more people with efficient, low/no-emission vehicles. **Score: 1**
 - Gaps: Investment hasn't been made in infrastructure that could support low/no-emission vehicles, especially for long trips that people have to make using electric vehicles.
- **Group 2: High-Quality Service and Experience**
 - The regional transit service is reliable and seamless. **Score: 2.75**
 - Gaps: Coordinated trip planning tools, more integration between services in order to be seamless, encouraging folks to get onto transit, different providers and funding sources, rural can be a barrier – less population density, residents wanting to drive everywhere
 - Regional transit prioritizes service to key regional connection points. **Score: 3.75**
 - Gaps: Historic highway has more recreation sites, need more connection points between providers, tourists, residents, and transit dependent populations have different needs, allowing time between different transit connections provided by different providers, bring people into the community to spend money
 - The transit service is equitable, reaching underserved and diverse communities while making them feel welcome and safe. **Score: 2.25**
 - Gaps: Unsafe conditions, lack of sidewalks, hard to walk to bus stops
- **Group 3: Coordination**
 - There was some general concern that the Vision Statement may not reflect the realities of the Gorge – it's not just about “getting folks out of the car.”
 - Strong regional coordination between Transit Providers creates efficiencies, builds capacity, and enhances service. **Score: 3 - 4**
 - Several folks felt that we were moving in the right direction in terms of connection between regional providers.

- A regional pass will be critical to enhanced coordination. However, if service isn't there, a regional pass isn't going to have an immediate affect for residents. There was a question about whether the current governance structure will allow for a regional pass to grow/be implemented.
 - Commuter-focus limits the viability of a transit system for some residents.
- Strong regional partnerships with key stakeholders (public and private) provides sustainable and diversified funding sources. **Score: 3**
 - Current policies might prohibit metered parking and present a barrier for funding sources.
 - Do we have higher-level management from agencies engaged to affect change?
- Coordination with local emergency management departments supports local and regional disaster response and resiliency. **Score: 1**
- Strong partnerships and coordination with local planning authorities allow development of land use policies supportive of multimodal transportation. **Score: 3**
 - Does the governance structure support us getting to our regional vision? Or can the individual providers coordinate to create a seamless outcome?
- Strong partnerships with land managers will protect our natural resources by integrating planning policies to reduce congestion and overcrowding at popular recreation areas. **Score: 2**
- *Note: Scores that were assigned to the goals in the Google Sheet do not reflect the conversation the group had, there is still some conversation that needs to occur.*

Jessica wrapped-up the breakout room report-backs by thanking everyone for engaging in this activity and noting that there is still room for improving the goals, getting the word out, and looking into funding sources. **The project management team will send a follow-up email to this meeting to gather more feedback on the goals and gaps dashboard.**

Kathy noted that we still need to get agency input on the gaps dashboard and that the PMT will talk with partner agencies and members of the Working Group not present at the meeting between now and the next Working Group session.

One participant noted that the Forest Service is limited by Congress, which doesn't allow the Forest Service to charge entrance fees or parking fees. However, this could potentially change. Another participant noted that all Recreation Intensity Classification parking zones have spots allowed for transit parking

Wrap Up and Next Steps

Kathy thanked everyone for attending and discussed what is coming next. The Working Group has one more session together in April (date to be determined) where this group will:

- Review a final draft of the regional Vision Statement, existing framework, gaps and capacity analysis, and high-level funding options and opportunities.
- Outline Phase II, which will entail thinking about what kind of research the group wants a consulting group to do.

Kathy noted that the PMT is looking into coordinating with other transportation and transit services that are *not* public providers.

Jessica thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

APPENDIX A: BREAKOUT GROUP NOTES

The following are the gap dashboards that groups filled out in during the breakout groups.

Group 1: Community and Economic Vitality

Goals	How are we doing with this today? Scale of 1 - 5, with 1 as 'Needs much improvement' and 5 as 'Very successful'	Current Gaps to achieving this goal?	What are the Barriers to achieving this goal?
The transit system provides workforce mobility and commute options that support the local and regional economies.	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaps in routes and services in some areas. •Marketing, outreach to share awareness of service/ 	
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.	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More transit access to recreation destinations. • Need (frequent) weekend services. •Transit to trailheads (and ADA accessible trails like Mosier Tunnels/Waterfront Trail in TD) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •ADA Access •Messaging speaks to community members living in the Gorge as well as tourism
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.	1	<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. • Easy transportation to MCMC Urgent Care at Water's Edge •Seamless parking passes, e.g., Parking kitty / phone accts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •ADA Access •Older Adults
The transit system supports local communities by reducing the need for expensive parking infrastructure and helping to manage	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Increased frequency •Connectivity on the WA side 	

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.	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Infrastructure to support electric vehicles (WA side) •Cost prohibitive for EV vehicles 	•Lack of Infrastructure

Group 2: High-Quality Service and Experience

Goals	How are we doing with this today? Scale of 1 - 5, with 1 as 'Needs much improvement' and 5 as 'Very successful'	Current Gaps to achieving this goal?	What are the Barriers to achieving this goal?
The regional transit service is reliable and seamless.	2.75	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fare structures are different for each provider. • Some funding sources can restrict the ability to serve everyone regionally. Infrastructure (wifi, stops, shelters, etc) - Insufficient integration in transit service to be seamless -Coordinated trip planning tools for the rider -Branding- single name that everyone goes to. - Pass that works for all systems -access that reaches where people are least likely to have cars -how to capture one-time visitor and get them into transit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Different funding sources for different transportation providers. -Multi-jurisdictional environment. -Rural environment is a barrier - lower population density, less common tool than in urban areas. -Easy driving access and free parking does not encourage ridership. - Low ridership means less frequent service. - Rural populations self-select for being able to drive. -Service frequency and demand are a complex barrier. -Trying to integrate all systems is a barrier itself.

Regional transit prioritizes service to key regional connection points.	3.75	-Transit on historic hwy - Multiple multi-provider connection points within communities, like in The Dalles and Portland. -Transit to more recreation sites.	-Trying to serve visitors vs transit-dependent residents are different needs. - Metro-area recreationalists on transit need systems that allow them to spend money in local communities.
The transit service is equitable, reaching underserved and diverse communities while making them feel welcome and safe.	2.25	-Unsafe conditions to walk to bus stops. - Communities of color: how to provide opportunity for them to feel welcome and safe	
Regional providers, services, and routes are coordinated, providing cost efficiencies for providers and more efficient service for riders			

Group 3: Coordination

Goals	How are we doing with this today? Scale of 1 - 5, with 1 as 'Needs much improvement' and 5 as 'Very successful'	Current Gaps to achieving this goal?	What are the Barriers to achieving this goal?
Strong regional coordination between Transit Providers creates efficiencies, builds capacity, and enhances service.	3-4	Gorge - PDX connections don't currently mesh in an effective way. Commuter focus limits viability for some residents	Regional Pass. First mile / last mile from the more connected regional system along I-84.
Strong regional partnerships with key stakeholders (public	3	Employer programs, FS, others. Coordinating with	Do we have higher level managers from agencies engaged to

and private) provides sustainable and diversified funding sources.		private operators and other transportation services.	affect change? Other social determinants of health / access to childcare or services to support people who are trying to access transit?
Coordination with local emergency management departments supports local and regional disaster response and resiliency.	1		
Strong partnerships and coordination with local planning authorities allow development of land use policies supportive of multimodal transportation.	3		Does the governance structure support us getting to our regional vision? Or can the individual providers coordinate to create a seamless outcome?
Strong partnerships with land managers will protect our natural resources by integrating planning policies to reduce congestion and overcrowding at popular recreation areas.	2	Forest Service is limited by congress in their authorities to implement metered/paid parking	

Additional Notes:

- Concern that we understand realities of Gorge - it's not just about "getting folks out of the car" but people in Gorge depend on transit - vision needs to reflect this.
- Bidirectional travel is critical and it is important that we remember the dual needs of residents & visitors
- Interest in planning for transit needs to include all stakeholders and agencies to create the vision - Do we have the right people in the room?
- Connections to job opportunities in PDX still not viable. We need Economic Development here in the Gorge
- A good start to coordination
- Utilize as a tool to get into/out of Portland without relying on single trips. Regional pass needs associated service to make sense

- vision statement needs to be realistic. Set challenging goals; Do we have the "regional/local" governance to achieve the goals with the small diffused system that we have now.
- lots of progress; Kathy's role and linking the role and connecting the partners has made a difference bistate, multiple city, lots of agencies but still a lot of progress
- All Recreation Intensity Classification parking zones have spots allowed for Transit parking