

Linn County
Transportation Advisory Committee
February 4, 2020
Lebanon Senior Center
80 Tangent Street, Lebanon
MINUTES

Members Present: Tim McQueary; Ken Bronson; Cris Kostol; Sandra Wess;
and Kindra Oliver

Staff Present: Mark Volmert

Visitors: Jeff Walpole, Linn County DD Program; Lisa Scherf, City of
Corvallis; and Brad Dillingham, Benton County
Special/Rural Transportation Program

Call to Order

Tim McQueary called the meeting of the Linn County Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) to order at 12:00 p.m. Members of the committee and members of the audience introduced themselves.

Approval of Minutes: September 24, 2019 Meeting

Motion by Ken Bronson and seconded by Sandra Wess that the minutes of the September 24, 2019 meeting be approved as submitted. The motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment Opportunity

No comments from the public.

Update on OCWCOG “Seamless Transit” Project

Mark Volmert provided a brief update on OCWCOG “Seamless Transit” project funded by an ODOT STIF discretionary grant. During the grant review process the Linn County TAC recommended that a local advisory work group be established to assist OCWCOG and to help provide technical and policy direction. ODOT agreed and a work group was established. The first meeting was held in October and the second meeting was held yesterday. Volmert, Ken Bronson and Kindra Oliver attended the meeting.

The project will, among other items, review the needs and opportunities for driver training, passenger assistance training, improvements of individual websites and the development of a regional website, GPS hardware and software and coordinated ticketing options. The development of a regional website, perhaps building on the Northwest Connector’s website, could provide some “branding” and marketing opportunities. A collective effort regarding paratransit eligibility has been discussed by OCWCOG staff but, at this point, local programs have raised questions about the need and its practicality. Volmert said he brought up the concept of developing a “de-escalation” training program for bus drivers to assist them manage the challenges of disruptive passengers. This may be of particular benefit to drivers who transport people with intellectual/developmental disabilities. Volmert and Bronson discussed the high priority of “low hanging fruit”: driver training, local website assistance and the development and printing of brochures.

Three private businesses that provide “real time” vehicle information services gave a presentation to the work group about their company and examples of transportation programs which utilize some of their wide range of services.

Discussion with Benton County Special/Rural Transportation Program Staff

Lisa Scherf, City of Corvallis Transportation Services Manager, and Brad Dillingham, the recently appointed Benton County Special/Rural Transportation Manager (and a City of Corvallis employee) discussed the current status of Benton County’s program and opportunities to improve the coordination of services.

Scherf indicated Benton County has not recently reviewed its programs and Dillingham’s appointment provides an opportunity to review the programs and develop potential streamlining opportunities and service changes. Tim McQueary welcomed the opportunity to work on improved connectivity.

Scherf and Volmert briefly discussed the similarities and differences between the Benton County Special/Rural Transportation Program and the Linn County program. Benton County, for example, owns most of the vehicles used to transport seniors and people with disabilities and contracts most services with the non-profit Benton County Dial-A-Bus program. Linn County does not own vehicles and allocates funds to local programs; and with state and federal funds contracts with local transportation programs for specific services. Benton County and Linn County each allocate STF funds to local non-profit agencies.

Scherf also noted Benton County’s Coast-to-Valley and Highway 99 Express (Corvallis to Adair Village) service; the Corvallis to Albany Train Station service (which ended a few months ago when the ODOT grant expired); and the Highway 99W (McMinnville to Junction City) fixed route feasibility study that OCWCOG is currently working on.

Dillingham discussed the Benton County Dial-A-Bus service between Corvallis and Albany. Three days per week service with 5 round trips per day. He noted that 25-30% of the riders are Linn County residents. 16 separate individuals were served during the past year and most are ambulatory. Scherf said “since the bus is already in Albany it makes sense to pick up Albany residents who need to travel to Corvallis”. Dillingham indicated Albany residents who are unable to access the Linn-Benton Loop service have no other option to travel to Corvallis. Volmert noted Benton County’s program provides about 100 trip legs per month and Volunteer Caregivers provides about 50 trip legs per month. Dillingham said he was not aware of the Volunteer Caregivers’ service to Corvallis.

Scherf noted the high cost of the Corvallis-to-Albany service (about \$65,000 a year) and Benton County is currently examining the service. Linn County currently allocates \$3,000 per year. Volmert clarified that Linn County does not “fully fund” any transportation service with STF funds. Many non-profit programs receive \$1.00 or less per STF ride. The approximate \$2.50 per ride allocated to Benton County is similar to Linn County’s per ride allocation to public transportation providers. Volmert indicated this a difference between Linn County and Benton County; with Benton County “fully funding” most rides. He noted that Benton County allocates to Albany about \$2.50 per ride provided by Albany Call-A-Ride to North Albany (Benton County) residents.

TAC members thanked Scherf and Dillingham for their attendance and indicated Linn County remains committed to its long-standing partnership with Benton County.

Potential STF-STIF Consolidation

Volmert provided background on the current discussion about a potential consolidation of the STF and STIF programs.

The STF program was established in 1985 and through the years has well served seniors and people with disabilities with a relatively small sum of funds. Revenue from the cigarette tax and other sources, however, continues to decline. This has been offset during the past few biennia by allocations from the state General Fund.

The STIF program was approved during the 2017 session of the Legislative Assembly and was limited to “public transportation”. Except for some contract opportunities for non-profit agencies that provide “open to the general public” services, STIF funding is limited to public agencies that provide “public transportation”. This means, for example, demand response programs that serve seniors and people with disabilities are not eligible for STIF funds.

The 2019 Legislative Assembly approved a \$10 million allocation to the STF program from STIF funds (in lieu of state General Funds). The Legislative Assembly asked ODOT to review a possible consolidation of the STF and STIF programs.

Volmert reported that ODOT established a 17 person work group (which included Lisa Scherf) to review a possible consolidation. ODOT staff essentially quickly took the “recommend no change” option off the table. The work group provided two options to the Oregon Transportation Commission. The OTC has forwarded a recommendation to the Legislative Assembly for consideration during its February session.

Volmert indicated the consolidation of the two funding streams seems like a logical and beneficial effort. Increasing STIF revenue (linked to wages which usually increase) will help offset declining STF revenue (linked to falling revenue from cigarette tax and DMV identification cards). He expressed caution, however, about the potential negative impact on small non-profit agencies. The STIF application and reporting requirements are substantially more difficult and expensive than the STF application and reporting requirements. This would not perhaps impact large transit districts (which usually either retain all STF funds or contract with a single very large non-profit agency for senior/people with disabilities transportation services); but could very well negatively impact programs in small and medium sized counties.

Scherf indicated she “did not have answers to the questions”. She said it was not clear whether/how a consolidation of the two programs would be handled in state statute or administrative rules. Scherf said she was less concerned than Volmert about the potential negative (application and reporting) impact on small non-profit agencies. She also noted the “potential” to increase the current one-tenth of one percent (0.001) payroll tax on employees to 0.0015; which would, if approved at some point, provide substantial additional resources.

Linn County 2020-2021 STF Program

Volmert indicated 2020-2021 STF applications have been received from the 11 programs that current receive STF funds. He distributed the applications to TAC

members and said he would forward a summary/analytical report prior to the March 10 TAC meeting. Dillingham said, based on information received at today's meeting, Benton County may revise its application.

Support of Applications for Federal Section 5310/5339 Statewide Discretionary Grant Funds

Volmert reported that ODOT is soliciting applications for two grant programs: (1) Federal Transit Administration's Section 5310 funds allocated to Oregon. The biennial Section 5310 funds allocated to counties which Linn County allocated last year to local programs for vehicles, preventive maintenance and purchase service are federal highway funds that the OTC transfers to the Section 5310 program; and (2) FTA Section 5339 bus and capital projects. The grant funds from these two programs may be used to acquire buses and to support public transportation facilities.

Ken Bronson indicated he would likely apply for funds to acquire a small van to be used by the Sweet Home "Shopper" program. An estimated cost of \$110,000. He will also review potential grant options to help fund the replacement of a propane tank.

Motion by Cris Kostol and seconded by Sandra Wess to authorize the TAC Chair to sign a letter supporting the grant application of the Senior Citizens of Sweet Home.

Bronson indicated a Section 5339-funded 32 passenger bus was delivered in September. He expects a Section 5310-funded 32 passenger bus to be delivered next week. A Section 5310-funded 24 passenger bus should be delivered in March.

Update on Albany Transit System

Volmert reported he met with Albany staff yesterday regarding expanded service of the Albany Transit System. He reminded TAC members that the STIF allocation recommended last March by the TAC and subsequently approved by the Board of Commissioners, coupled with AAMPO/Albany Section 5307 funds, will provide two new urban buses (\$440,000 each) and operational expenses to approximately double the current ATS service. The expanded service requires two new buses and Albany has not yet ordered the buses. There is currently a delay because the new ODOT bus purchase list does not include a Gillig bus and the Washington State list has expired. Delivery will take 12-15 months. Albany also needs to build on the Albany Transit Plan and develop a new transit service plan including specific routes and schedules.

The Linn-Benton Loop, which was allocated Linn County and Benton County STIF funds to approximately double its current service, also needs two new buses in order to implement the service expansion. A few hours of additional evening service between LBCC and Corvallis, which did not require a new bus, was initiated yesterday.

Discussion with Linn County Health Department Staff Regarding Transportation for People with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities

Volmert indicated Jeff Sneddon, after the agenda was sent out, asked for the opportunity to provide the TAC with an update on I/DD transportation including his discussions with DHS.

Jeff Walpole said he expected Sneddon to be at the meeting. He indicated Sneddon had not discussed DHS updates with him.

Volmert indicated, based on recent emails, there appears to be some confusion about potential changes to DHS' guidelines and the Linn County DD program's effort to develop agreements between Linn County and Lebanon/Senior Citizens of Sweet Home; and perhaps an amendment to an existing agreement between DHS and the Linn County DD program.

A question was raised about the status of the Linn County Developmental Disabilities Advisory Board. Walpole did not know the status of appointments. Volmert said the Board of Commissioners recently re-appointed the two members whose terms expired. He said there are five current vacancies on the DDAB. Cris Kostol indicated she knows a well qualified person who may be interested in serving on the DDAB. Kostol will follow up with the Linn County Health Administrator's office and Volmert will provide Kostol with contact information regarding the Board of Commissioners office.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 1:52 p.m.

Submitted by:

Mark Volmert