

Linn County
Transportation Advisory Committee
February 9, 2021 1:30 pm
Zoom Teleconference
MINUTES

Members Present: Tim McQueary; Ken Bronson; Ted Frazier; Cris Kostol; Sandra Wess; and Cindi Robeck

Staff Present: Mark Volmert

Visitors: Suzanne Driver; Volunteer Caregivers; Brittany Maudlin, Sunshine Industries; Lorelei LaVoie, Oregon Mennonite Residential Services; Ashley Bogue, Oregon Cascades West Council of Governments; and Kate Hall, Oregon Cascades West Council of Governments

Call to Order

Tim McQueary called the meeting of the Linn County Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) to order at 1:30 p.m. Members of the committee and members of the audience introduced themselves.

Public Comment Opportunity (not related to STF funding requests or allocations)

No comments from the public.

Discussion regarding the 2021-2022 STF application and review process, including Oregon Government Standards and Practices provisions

Mark Volmert briefly described the 2021-2022 application and review process which is very similar to the process used for several years. He briefly reviewed the public outreach and notification process regarding the availability of STF funds and the application process. Volmert reviewed the December 2020 Linn County STF Guide Book for Applicants. He noted the Linn County Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Plan continues to serve as the guide for the investment of transportation resources.

Volmert reported that ODOT, in October 2020, published the estimated 2021-2023 STF biennial targets. Linn County's allocation estimated was published as \$585,185; nearly identical to the 2019-2021 allocation of \$586,915. Additionally, \$9,636 in 2020-2021 contingency funds will be carried forward; together with \$4,500 not used by Benton County in 2019-2021. A total of \$299,660 per year.

Volmert reported that 8 of the 11 programs that currently receive STF funds submitted requests for 2021-2022 STF funding. The Linn-Benton Loop received \$24,000 in 2020-2021 STF funds and an allocation of 2021-2023 STIF funds will now provide sufficient resources for the Linn-Benton Loop. Chamberlin House received \$5,000 in STF funds. With the COVID pandemic the program has provided significantly fewer rides and decided not to apply for 2021-2022 STF funds. Benton County Dial-A-Bus in the spring of 2020 suspended its Corvallis-Albany service. It did not execute a 2020-2021 agreement with Linn County and decided not to request 2021-2022 STF funds.

Volmert forwarded the 8 applications to TAC members on January 25 and provided a written analytical report regarding the STF program and the applications to the TAC members. He indicated that all of the programs are eligible to receive STF funds, have submitted reports in a generally timely manner in the past year and all requests are consistent with the priorities identified in Linn County's Coordinated Plan.

Volmert reviewed the Oregon Government Standards and Practices provisions. There were no disclosures of conflicts of interest.

Presentations by STF-funded agencies regarding their 2021-2022 applications

Representatives of the programs requesting funds were present and provided updates on their programs and discussed their STF applications. All programs requested the same amount of funding as their 2020-2021 allocation. The representatives responded to questions from TAC members.

Volunteer Caregivers (Suzanne Driver): Requests \$31,240. Driver indicated it has been an unusual year with the COVID pandemic, wildfires and a reduction in resources. Volunteer Caregivers received a reduction in funding from some grant programs which had fewer resources and/or shifted allocations to address the needs related to wildfires. Office staff reduced their hours. Old office equipment has provided challenges in staff working from home.

OCWCOG Senior and Disability Services (Ashley Bogue and Kate Hall): Requests \$16,000. The funds are used to purchase bus tickets for low income residents (historically about 43% of the STF allocation) and to provide gas vouchers (about 57% of the STF allocation). With COVID there have been more gas vouchers and less bus passes; with about 50% fewer total rides provided on a monthly basis in 2020-2021. OCWCOG currently limits the allocation to each qualified resident to \$80 a year but, depending on requests and the STF level of funding, this may increase to \$100.

OCWCOG is currently updating its Area Agency on Aging Plan and is including transportation providers in the plan development effort that includes, for the first time, a focus on transportation.

Sunshine Industries (Brittany Maudlin): Requests \$10,000. COVID has provided significant challenges to the day support program. The small group/work service program (primarily landscape and maintenance contracts) has generally been able to continue. The termination of the Senior Citizens of Sweet Home’s I/DD transportation program (Medicaid Title XIX DD53 Local Match Program) impacted Sunshine Industries’ “hub and spoke” system. With the COVID-related reduction in day support services this impact has been somewhat limited; but when the services ramp up in the coming months this will be a significant challenge. Sunshine Industries is reviewing options. Since the termination of the third party ride program occurred during the COVID-related reduction of clients, and options are still being reviewed, it is difficult to provide a firm estimated increased cost of transportation services. Maudlin said perhaps a 25-30% increase from the pre-COVID quarterly cost of \$37,000-39,000.

Oregon Mennonite Residential Services (Loralei LaVoie): Requests \$5,000. COVID has impacted group homes. Clients must now be kept in small groups; rather than sometimes combining people into larger groups for some activities. In response to a question, LaVoie indicated Yamhill County’s STF support for OMRS has “improved slightly” in recent years.

Linn Shuttle/Senior Citizens of Sweet Home (Ken Bronson): Requests \$98,000. The Linn Shuttle continues to serve as the “backbone” fixed route program connecting rural East Linn County, Sweet Home, Lebanon and Albany (with Linn-Benton Loop transfers to Corvallis available at LBCC). The Linn Shuttle, unlike many fixed route programs, did not reduce its service with COVID. Its ridership is about 57% of pre-COVID levels; which is perhaps the highest level of fixed route programs in Oregon. The SCSH was the first transit program in Oregon to acquire a specialized bus decontamination system. Using an electrostatically charged system (using far less cleaning chemicals but with far better adherence to surfaces) vehicles are cleaned every day.

The Linn Shuttle continues to provide rides for I/DD clients who can independently ride the bus. Given the unrealistic contractual requirements of DHS, Bronson seriously doubts the SCSH will be able to re-establish the DD53 Local Match Program rides.

Bronson indicated the SCSH and Lebanon are interested in installing bus stop/benches. Manufactured in Eugene, two simple seats are placed on a bus sign. Low cost, easy to

install and essentially no maintenance. While it does not provide shelter from rain or sun, the bus sign/bench provides a place for passengers to seat while waiting for a bus. 12 units could probably be used by the two programs; but a total of 6 would be a good start.

Sweet Home Dial-A-Bus/Senior Citizens of Sweet Home (Ken Bronson): Requests \$23,500. The COVID closure of the Sweet Home Senior Center has impacted the Dial-A-Bus ridership. This year's ridership is about 60% of pre-COVID ridership. The "Shopper" hours were reduced and the current ridership is about 70% of pre-COVID ridership.

Albany Call-A-Ride (Ted Frazier): Requests \$25,000. Frazier indicated the STF funds helps support three programs: senior rides, medical/shopper special rides and ADA rides required by Albany Transit. In particular, it is used for the local match required by FTA Section 5307 and Section 5310. In the past Call-A-Ride used volunteers but the volunteer program was suspended due to COVID. Four full time drivers are used in addition to 2 or 3 part-time drivers. Albany is using a portable decontamination sprayer; cleaning vehicles a couple of days each week. The total ridership is about the same as last year.

Volmert noted that the Albany Call-A-Ride program's budget has increased from about \$500,000 four years ago to more than \$800,000 (not including vehicle purchases). He suggested the city could hire a contractor/consulting firm, with appropriate and specific expertise, to review the program and provide suggestions about how to control/reduce costs. Frazier agreed this would be helpful.

Lebanon Dial-A-Bus/LINX (Mark Volmert for Kindra Oliver): Requests \$43,082. After some COVID-related reduction in service the demand response program (which TAC members know as Lebanon Dial-A-Bus) and the deviated fixed route program are operating at approximately the pre-COVID level. The demand response service now provides rides three miles outside the city's boundaries. With additional STIF funds Lebanon plans to extend this to five miles; and to hopefully provide limited service to Scio and Brownsville. Lebanon continues to closely partner with the Linn Shuttle to enable Lebanon resident to access Sweet Home and Albany; and Corvallis with a Linn-Benton Loop transfer at LBCC.

Public hearing regarding 2021-2022 STF fund allocations

Following the presentation about the programs, Tim McQueary opened the public

hearing. No member of the public requested to speak and McQueary closed the public hearing.

Discussion and recommendations by TAC regarding STF funds

TAC members discussed the available funds which total more than the total funds requested; the appropriate size of a contingency fund; the increase in Section 5310 funds, COVID (Section 5307 and Section 5311) funds and STIF funds allocated to Albany, Lebanon and the Senior Citizens of Sweet Home; and the limited funding options for some of the other programs.

Following the discussion, motion by Cris Kostol and seconded by Sandra Wess that the TAC recommend to the Board of Commissioners the following allocations of 2021-2022 STF funds. The motion passed unanimously.

Lebanon Dial-A-Bus	\$45,000
Sweet Home Dial-A-Bus	\$25,000
Linn Shuttle	\$103,000*
COG Senior/Disabilities Services	\$18,000
Volunteer Caregivers	\$42,160**
OMRS	\$6,500
Sunshine Industries	\$20,000
Albany Call-A-Ride	\$25,000
Contingency	\$15,000
Total	\$299,660

*Includes \$5,000 for bus benches

** Initial \$41,240 allocation increased to \$42,160 to balance the intended budget

Other Business

None

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 3:00.

Submitted by:
Mark Volmert