

Linn County  
Transportation Advisory Committee  
September 14, 2021 1:30 pm  
Zoom Teleconference  
MINUTES

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

Staff Present: Mark Volmert

Visitors: Barry Hoffman, City of Albany.

Call to Order

Ken Bronson called the meeting of the Linn County Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) to order at 1:39 p.m. Members of the committee and members of the audience introduced themselves.

JoAnn McQueary, as the recently appointed member of the TAC, was asked to briefly introduce herself. McQueary said she is a “community servant” and looks forward to the opportunity to engage in the transportation effort; particularly the effort in rural communities.

Approval of Minutes: December 29, 2020; January 21, 2021; February 9, 2021; and February 10, 2021 Meetings

Motion by Cris Kostol and seconded by Sandra Wess, that the minutes of the December 29, 2020, January 21, 2021, February 9, 2021 and February 10, 2021 meetings be approved as submitted. The motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment Opportunity

No comments from the public.

Updates from City of Albany, City of Lebanon and the Senior Citizens of Sweet Home regarding their transportation programs including the status of their STIF-funded programs

Barry Hoffman, Albany Transit Manager, provided an update about the Linn-Benton Loop and Albany Transit System. He reported he was promoted to the new position of Transit Manager. Candy Bliss, previously with MTR Western in Corvallis, was hired to replace Hoffman as the Transit Supervisor.

Both programs have been “fareless” since March 2020. The city is discussing this but currently there are no plans to reintroduce fares in the near future. The city, however, has returned to loading passengers through the front door; with a barrier to protect the driver.

Linn-Benton Loop service was significantly reduced in March 2020. It has now largely returned to the pre-COVID service level with the exception of the “Express” service. The STIF-funded expansion is targeted to start on September 27 to line up with the start of OSU and LBCC classes. Hoffman indicated every transit program in the state has been challenged to employ drivers. He is cautiously hopeful that Albany, with its schedule for bringing new drivers on board, will be able to meet the September 27 target. The L-B Loop will stop at LBCC 44 times a day; with 32 buses headed to Corvallis; and 12 headed to the Albany Transit Station.

Hoffman noted the city, working with the L-B Loop partners, is starting the L-B Loop expanded service; but will delay the expansion of Albany Transit System. It is important to fulfill the commitment to the six L-B Loop partners; and to start service at the beginning of the new school year. Mark Volmert said the L-B Loop TAC and the L-B Loop Policy Bard agreed with this approach. It is important to ensure that new service starts in a manner that will ensure new riders will continue to use the service. Albany, which has never before significantly expanded service, needs to first focus on the L-B Loop’s new service; and to roll out ATS’ expanded service when drivers are hired and all plans are in place for a successful start. Hopeful by the end of 2021.

Hoffman provided information about the planned expansion of ATS service. The old three route system will be replaced by a four route service; with longer hours per day. The hub will be centered at the Albany Mall. Volmert noted the Albany Transit Development Plan called for about 40 hours of service per day (medium term plan); and the city included 40 hours per day in its STIF application. The specific plan developed by Albany will provide about 48 hours per day of service. Hoffman said the city is continuing to work with its consultant on the details of schedules. He said the new schedules will ensure that buses will be “on time”.

Kindra Oliver, Lebanon LINX Transportation Director, reported on Lebanon’s Dial-A-Bus and the city’s deviated fixed route service. The deviated fixed route service was suspended, due to COVID, in March 2020; and was reinstated in October 2020. Lebanon’s transportation programs are back to pre-COVID service levels except for the DD program (the WVRC DD program in Lebanon essentially still closed due to COVID).

On July 1 Lebanon expanded its Dial-A-Bus service from three miles outside the city boundaries to five miles. Oliver continues to talk with Brownsville and Scio about potential (limited) STIF-funded service to the two communities.

Ken Bronson noted Dawn Mitchell is transitioning from Executive Director-Operations to Executive Director for all Senior Citizens of Sweet Home programs.

Bronson indicated CARES Act funds were used to acquire a bus decontamination system (every vehicle that is used during the day is decontaminated at night) and to provide “hazard pay” that has enabled the SCSH to retain drivers and thereby continue most service at the pre-COVID level. “Lebanon Express” service between Lebanon and LBCC was suspended for a few months in the spring of 2020 when LBCC closed; but it was re-instated when school reopened.

Sweet Home Dial-A-Bus service has been adjusted to meet needs. The Senior Center was closed for many months. It is currently operating with revisions to its programs (for example, there is no “dine in” options); but this may soon change. Dial-A-Bus service was starting to return to pre-COVID levels until the Delta variant impacted the Senior Center and other programs in Sweet Home.

STIF-funded expansions of Linn Shuttle and Sweet Home Dial-A-Bus service are temporarily delayed due to a lack of drivers.

Bronson noted that the SCSH suspended its DD transportation service in March 2020 due to the COVID-related closure of I/DD centers. In July 2020 told DHS and Linn County it was unable to meet the proposed new DHS contractual requirements; and it was therefore discontinuing its DD transportation service. DHS and Linn County were notified service would not be reinstated until/unless DHS developed an agreement that was acceptable to the SCSH.

JoAnn McQueary noted her interest in CASA clients who have intellectual/developmental disabilities. Volmert provided some historic context of the DD transportation efforts of the SCSH, the Linn County TAC and the Linn County Board of Commissioners. He said the TAC has spent more time on DD transportation during the past decade than any other program; and ODOT indicated Linn County provided more transportation service to residents with I/DD than any county in the state. The TAC led the effort to obtain Medicaid funds in 2008 when the SCSH DD transportation program would have otherwise ended due to a lack of funds. The TAC and Board of Commissioners have found funds, throughout the years, to provide the

required local match for DHS Medicaid funding. The SCSH has worked exceptionally hard and delivered 15-30 mile rides at a cost of about \$15; compared for example with Benton County's 3-5 mile rides provided at a cost of \$18. Volmert said the SCSH has enjoyed an exceptional transportation partnership effort with Sunshine Industries. Unfortunately DHS placed unreasonable and unrealistic contractual demands on the SCSH which may well have resulted in a \$100,000-200,000 annual deficit for the SCSH.

#### Update on 2019-2021 STIF Fund Balance

Volmert summarized his July 31 memo regarding the June 30, 2021 Linn County STIF account balance.

In December the year end balance was conservatively estimated at \$1,923,000. With a small increase in employee payroll tax revenue and additional carry forward of funds not used by local transportation programs, the June 30 balance was \$2,260,251.

Volmert clarified this includes: \$498,000 of "permanent contingency" funds; about \$500,000 of funds budgeted for 2021-2023 service (allocations exceed projected revenue); and \$500,000+ that will be needed in 2023-2025 to cover the gap between projected revenue and the projected expense to continue services at the 2021-2023 level. Depending on actual revenue and potential adjustments needed to cover increased expenses, that means \$500,000-700,000 could be available for discussion when 2023-2025 STIF allocations are made. He noted this amount is relatively substantial if used for operations; but warned that STIF funds may be needed to acquire vehicles. He noted, for example, federal Section 5310 funds have been used for more than a decade to acquire vehicles for the SCHS. Most of the Section 5310 funds (for vehicles, preventive maintenance and purchased service operations) come from ODOT's transfer of FHWA highway funds to the Section 5310 program. This transfer dates back more than 15 years when there were limited sources of public transportation funds. It is possible that, as ODOT struggles to fund highway maintenance, that the Oregon Transportation Commission could decide at some point, with \$100 million annual STIF resources available to local programs, that the transfer of highway funds to the Section 5310 program is no longer a priority. Recent Class "B" large buses cost \$225,000.

Open "round table" TAC discussion about the TAC and about transportation services including "where we were", "where we are" and "where we want to be in the future"

Members discussed, in a general manner, public transportation in Linn County. Volmert noted the Linn County 2017 Human Services-Public Transportation Coordinated Plan will be updated in 2022. It will provide an opportunity for the TAC, transportation providers and community members to assess current services (which by 2022 will be substantially greater than when the 2017 plan was developed and approved); as well as consider realistic, cost effective service to address unmet needs in a manner than is “good value to taxpayers”, fiscally sustainable and within the capacity of transportation providers.

It was suggested that the TAC invite Commissioner Nyquist to a meeting to discuss “where we are...and where the County thinks we should be” as the County moves forward with the update of the Coordinated Plan.

The TAC could also ask Nyquist the “role of the TAC” and the Board of Commissioners’ expectations of the TAC. Members asked Volmert to follow up on this suggestion with Commissioner Nyquist.

#### Update on Linn County Special/Rural Transportation Coordinator services

Volmert indicated it has been an honor to serve the Linn County BOC, TAC, transportation providers and residents of Linn County for nearly 17 years. There have indeed been many changes and with STIF funds many transportation services that have been discussed for a decade are being implemented.

He said his current contract with the County expires September 30 and, for several reasons, it is “time to pass the torch”. Volmert said he has told the County he is not interested in a new contract.

He thanked the TAC members for their exceptional efforts; including their support of his assignments. He said TAC members have always listened very carefully to community members and transportation providers and asked straight forward and objective questions. “The TAC has been exceptionally fair to all programs and no member has every taken an action in an effort to ‘bring home the bacon’ to a specific program”.

Volmert particularly thanked the three TAC members with longer service than his 17 years: Ted Frazier, Cris Kostol and Sandra Wess. He also acknowledged the exceptional TAC Chairs that have gone before us: Ralph Reid, Wade Doerfler and Tim McQueary. In closing he recognized the remarkable efforts of the transportation

providers including Ken Bronson, Kindra Oliver, Ted Fraizer, Barry Hoffman and Suzanne Driver.

TAC members thanked Volmert for his years of service. Members agreed it would be timely to ask the Board of Commissioners how it plans to staff the special/rural transportation program.

Other Business

None

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 3:15pm.

Submitted by:  
Mark Volmert