

5.3 TRANSIT SYSTEM

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the services and programs of transit provider Rogue Valley Transportation District (RVTB), which reaches most of the RVMPO area (see service area map at the end of this chapter).

Although the public has consistently voiced support for expanded transit service during outreach for this RTP update, RVTB has struggled to maintain service at a modest level due to a lack of funding. Users tend to be the transit-dependent riders, which includes low income, young, old and disabled residents of the region. Long-range planning by RVTB shows that for transit service to expand, local support – beyond the existing property tax – will have to increase.



LIMITATIONS OF TRANSIT USE

Reasons for the current modest use in transit include:

- The region is small and does not suffer from long delays caused by major traffic congestion;
- Growth is occurring at the urban fringe at relatively low densities (3-4 housing units per acre) whereas the transit industry's national standard is that a density of about 7 housing units per acre is needed to generate enough riders to warrant a bus line.

Nationally, and elsewhere around the world, “viable” bus transit does not mean self-supporting financially, only that the route will have riders and be productive. An RVMPO study, the North-South Travel Demand Study, was completed in 2010 that examined the densities that would be necessary to enhance transit opportunities on the Hwy. 99 corridor from Ashland to Central Point.

Another factor affecting transit growth is that new bus hours require new funding. Even the nation's most successful transit systems achieve only a little over 40 percent return on farebox revenues. Lower density systems such as RVTD's achieve around 20 percent on farebox, which means that every dollar in RVTD fare revenue must be supplemented by \$4 in funding from other sources. RVTD's lack of a stable long-term funding base is the biggest reason for the limited transit service levels. Unmet demands of many types have been identified, but cannot yet be satisfied.

FUTURE DEMAND

The outlook for transit indicates greater demand, and with demand a greater opportunity to expand service. Transit ridership has been increasing, even as gasoline prices have stabilized. Additionally, several jurisdictions are proceeding with planning for higher-density Transit Oriented Development within cities. This planning work began with the RVMPO's Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) in the late 1990s that has yielded proposals for eight TOD sites.

Since 2001, a large portion of the region's federal transportation money has been directed to support transit. Half of the region's Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) allocation is dedicated to transit enhancement, and the STBG funds remaining along with Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funds are awarded through a competitive process among all RVMPO jurisdictions.

EXISTING SERVICE

RVTD provides public transportation to the cities of Ashland, Talent, Phoenix, Medford, White City, Central Point, and Jacksonville. Daily fixed route service begins as early as 5 a.m. RVTD operates 9 routes in a radial network configuration. Headways vary between 20 and 60 minutes, and service is operated Monday – Friday with limited service on Saturdays. Although RVTD has struggled with stable funding in recent years resulting in service reductions (2007 and 2015 saw more than 30% reduction in revenue hours), the district was successful with passing a 5-year property tax worth 13 cents per thousand. The additional funds sustained current service levels, added two routes, added Saturday service and improved frequency on 3 routes.

RVTD has 26 fixed route vehicles, the majority of which are powered by Compressed Natural Gas (CNG). The 35' buses have an average seated capacity of 30 passengers. RVTD has one major transfer point, the Front Street Transfer Station in downtown Medford. The Front Street Transfer Station can accommodate up to ten transit vehicles at any given time. RVTD currently utilizes seven of the spaces for the regular fixed route service. An intercity connection is provided at the station through Greyhound and Josephine Community Transit. Additional intercity connection can be made from RVTD's fixed route system to the Greyhound depots in Medford and Ashland.

RVTD also offers a paratransit service, Valley Lift, which provides curb-to-curb transportation for disabled and older adult passengers. The Valley Lift service, which is mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), has a service boundary of .75 miles around the fixed route network. RVTD also operates a non-emergency

medical transportation brokering operation called TransLink. The TransLink Call Center is a centralized transportation brokerage facility. It operates in five counties – Coos, Douglas, Curry, Jackson and Josephine. It offers ride reservation, scheduling, and financial management services under contract to the Oregon Medical Assistance Program (OMAP) and the Community Care Organizations, to handle non-emergency medical rides.

RVTD also runs a Transportation Options program, and conducts community outreach, travel training and offers specialized programs such as ridesharing coordination and incentives and subsidized transit passes for employers and students. RVTD is the regional network administrator for the Drive Less Connect rideshare website and works with major employers to promote signing up worksites to the network. RVTD coordinates several events each year including the Oregon Drives Less Challenge in the fall, Rogue Commute Challenge in the spring and oversees individualized marketing programs and coordinates Safe Routes to School events.

PARATRANSIT

RVTD offers a paratransit service, Valley Lift, which provides origin-to-destination transportation for disabled and elderly passengers. The Valley Lift service, which is mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), has a service boundary of .75 miles around the fixed route network with the same operating days and timeframes. RVTD also operates a dial-a-ride program in the Upper Rogue communities called the Rogue Valley Connector. This service provides transportation to the communities of Trail, Shady Cove, Eagle Point and White City with connections to RVTD's fixed route bus service in Medford. The RV Connector's primary purpose is to provide transportation options to older adults and people with disabilities.

NON-EMERGENCY MEDICAL TRANSPORTATION

RVTD operates a non-emergency medical transportation service called TransLink. The TransLink Call Center is a centralized transportation brokerage facility. It operates in seven counties – Coos, Douglas, Curry, Lake, Klamath, Jackson and Josephine – but will also provide transportation statewide when members need to travel elsewhere in the state. It offers ride reservation and scheduling under contract to the Oregon Division of Medical Assistance Program (DMAP) to handle non-emergency medical rides. Translink also works with the newly formed Coordinated Care Organizations or “C.C.O.’s” to provide non-emergency medical transportation.

RVTD also runs a Transportation Demand Management program (see Chapter 5.6), and conducts community outreach and offers specialized programs such as vanpooling coordination and incentives for employers. Fare discounts and subsidies also are offered.

FUTURE POTENTIAL SERVICE

RVTD has a long-range plan that identifies and prioritizes specific new routes and services to be implemented as funding becomes available. A primary goal is to connect activity centers with high quality transit service and expand coverage to areas with low-income, older adults and persons with disabilities. RVTD seeks to

attract all types of trips rather than just work trips or trips made by persons who presently have little choice in their mode of travel. RVTD is working on a 2042 Transit Master Plan that should be completed by the end of 2018.

The current plan gives priority to improving service on existing routes by increasing the frequency, adding coverage to underserved areas, expanding the hours of service and adding express or high capacity transit service on Hwy 99. While there are many factors that contribute to transit ridership, the level and frequency of service are important factors in attracting and maintaining a ridership base. Concerns have been raised that the hours of transit operation do not fully meet the demand for general public transit service, particularly for Southern Oregon University and Rogue Community College students, Harry and David Corporation employees, Rogue Regional Medical Center, Providence Hospital and residents of the Veteran's Domiciliary in White City.

Modifications are needed to provide transportation to employees whose shifts begin early in the morning and for employees who work graveyard shifts.

On average, transit studies in similarly sized areas elsewhere have identified a preferred transit plan as one that would begin service at 4 a.m. and continue until 11:30 p.m. On average, weekend service (including Sundays) would begin at 6:30 a.m. and operate until 10 p.m.

TRANSIT-FRIENDLY LAND USE

Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) means the development of higher density nodes of mixed use activity that lend themselves to easier transit service and higher transit ridership. A general industry rule of thumb is that seven dwelling units per acre are required to generate enough riders to justify a bus route. There are active TOD sites in Central Point and Medford. Others have been identified but not yet implemented, including Delta Waters, Highway 62 and 99, Downtown Medford, Barnett/Gateway, and West Medford.

Also, the RVMPO's alternative measures, described in the Land Use Nexus, chapter 5.10, address development density and the relationship of densities to the availability of transit service. As indicated elsewhere in this plan, including the Bicycle and Pedestrian Element, transit relies upon pedestrians for ridership. This makes it particularly important that roadway projects include provisions for sidewalks.

Other features need to be considered when planning for roadway projects. These features might include thicker pavement at transit stops; transit-only right-of-way at congested intersections; construction of bus turnouts; construction of transit passenger shelters; wider sidewalks at transit stops; bicycle facilities near transit stops; and bike racks at transit stations. Consideration of transit infrastructure and capital needs



Twin Creeks TOD Rendering, Central Point

early in street project planning may eliminate redundancy and reduce future expenditures. The construction of a new roadway that makes specific provisions for transit may allow RVTD to leverage funds or switch funds for the construction of transit infrastructure along that roadway. When possible, roadway and transit projects should be coordinated and constructed at the same time.

TRANSPORTATION MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATIONS (TMAs)

A TMA is an organization of employers and transit agencies. Its aim is to help employers provide programs and information to their employees that will increase transit, bicycling, carpooling and vanpooling to work.

It is necessary to attract riders who currently use other modes of transport in order to significantly increase ridership. In order for these people to consider transit as a viable option, there must be sufficient public information about the services available. Encouraging new riders to try the transit option is the vital next step after any service improvements are made.

DEPLOYMENT OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES – ITS

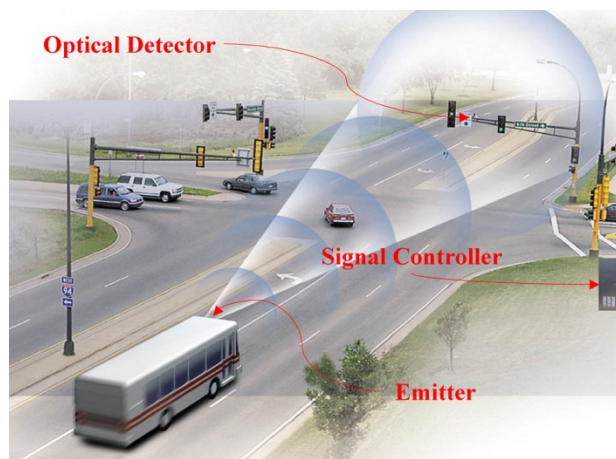
Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) is an umbrella term that covers electronic and high tech installations that can help transportation efficiency and safety. For transit, two ITS installations that can help RVTD are:

- Automatic Vehicle Location technology – using global positioning, the bus reports its location and can be used to monitor and inform riders (at the bus stop or online) about delays and wait times. Such systems also play a vital role in transit safety and security issues.
- Traffic signaling devices that can enable a traffic signal to be tripped in favor of the bus and speed up its trip when delays have been encountered.

BUS RAPID TRANSIT (BRT)

BRT is an intermediate transit technology now being developed in a number of locations including Eugene. It

consists of high quality buses (reclining seats, tinted windows, air conditioning, tray tables etc) using a special lane on the roadway. A full transitway is a two-way corridor, usually in the median of a freeway, that has flyover ramps to enable buses and other permitted vehicles (e.g. vanpools and carpools) to enter and exit the transitway without having to weave through traffic in the other freeway lanes. Locations where a BRT system may someday work



well in the Rogue Valley include the Hwy. 62 Expressway median, and the Hwy. 99 corridor between Ashland and Central Point. Other programs that may help reduce reliance on single-occupant vehicles include:

Vanpools – The employer or the transit agency purchases a ten or more-seat van and makes it available for commuting to the worksite. Employees using the van are responsible for everything from driving to fuel and seeing to maintenance. The transit agency or employer pays for the initial capital cost of the vehicle and provides work place assistance in finding riders and supporting the program. The precise array of operating costs covered may vary – just fuel, oil and washing, or also insurance and maintenance. Vanpool programs work best when a number of workers are going to the same or nearby sites, yet there is not enough demand to run a fixed route bus to that location. Examples in the Rogue Valley include various major employers in White City, Bear Creek Corporation and some employers in Medford.

Worker-Driver Buses – Worker-driver buses are operated very similarly to vanpools and are successful when even larger numbers of employees (30-40 instead of the 10-15 of a vanpool) want to go to the same worksite at the same time. There is the added challenge of the driver finding adequate parking for a bus near his/her home. In the Rogue Valley it seems likely that vanpools are a better place to start, reserving the idea of worker-driver buses for the future if high density vanpool demand emerges.

Subscription Bus Routes – A subscription bus route is a form of demand-responsive transit. The route is tailored to the pick-up locations of a specific group of riders. Unlike the vanpool or worker-driver bus, a subscription bus has a transit agency driver and thus costs more. There have been many requests for Grants Pass to Medford bus service; a subscription bus route might be the answer. However, a smaller scale and less expensive answer would be to start with vanpool services. Institutional changes would be needed since RVTD cannot provide service to Grants Pass under current law and district configuration.

RTP TRANSIT SERVICE

In 2014 RVTD pursued a local property tax to sustain and add a modest service increase. After the failure of the levy RVTD was forced to cut headways and sections of routes in 2015. RVTD pursued the same property tax levy of 13 cents per thousand in May of 2016 and was successful with a 61% vote in favor. The levy maintains current service levels and also helps meet increasing demand on public transportation. It restored Saturday bus service and increased frequency on bus routes that are experiencing overcrowding, including Route 10 which serves Medford, Phoenix, Talent and Ashland and Route 24 which serves Barnett Rd. in east Medford. Service in Southwest Medford is being expanded to provide a route to South Medford High School and surrounding neighborhoods. It also provides a limited commuter service from downtown Medford to Rogue Community College's Table Rock Campus.

The special levy is available for a 5 year period and RVTD will need to ask the local voters again for continued funding in 2021 to continue providing the additional services and to maintain service over the course of the next 10 years. RVTD is also

working with other transit providers in the state to secure state funding, either through general fund or taxes to improve public transportation in the state. It is unclear whether a funding stream from the legislature would be for a biennium or provide permanent support for operations.

If RVTB is unable to secure funds locally for another 5 year period or through the Oregon legislature service cuts would need to be made beginning in 2022 to maintain a base level of service.

Current transit routes are mapped on the following page.

Map 5.3.1: RVTD Transit Routes

