5.3 TRANSIT SYSTEM

INTRODUCTION

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

Between 2017 and the development of this RTP, RVTD has expanded services due to the new Special Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF), providing RVTD with approximately $3 Million in new revenues each year. Users tend to be the transit-dependent riders, which includes low income, young, older adults and persons living disabilities. RVTD developed the 2040 Transit Master Plan in 2019 identifying further transit improvements in a short-, mid- and long-range list of enhancements. However, the document's Finance Chapter shows that to meet the mid- and long-range additional revenues will need to be secured beyond the current sources.

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.
- Although there are restricted time parking zones in some areas, most parking is free.
- Gas prices have decreased significantly since the Great Recession, as low as $1.50 per gallon during recent years.
- 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.

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. The new STIF revenues have allowed for new routes to be added and increasing convenience on existing routes by improving frequency. RVTD was making advancements until COVID-19 caused a global pandemic in early 2020 that required services to the be shut down due to a loss of drivers willing to come to work. RVTD operated at a much lower level for approximately 2 years due to the pandemic.

FUTURE DEMAND

Through the 2040 TMP, RVTD utilized a Transit Supportive Area (TSA) definition in part of its analysis to determine which services are viable. The TSA is comprised of seven or more HH per acre or ten or more employees per acre. If the complete short-term enhancement list is implemented RVTD will be serving 64% of these areas within ¼ mile. The analysis also identifies that 62% of all MPO residents and 86% of all MPO employees will be within ¼ miles of transit service. These metrics show the low-density land pattern in the MPO area and the inability for RVTD to serve them efficiently. Population trends however continue to show a higher-than-average older adult, disabled and low-income population living in Jackson County than when compared to Oregon. These populations tend to use transit more frequently than other segments.

Since 2001, a large portion of the region's federal transportation money has been directed to support transit. $700,000 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. A portion of the STIF revenues have also been used to expand a route to the city of Eagle Point. RVTD now serves eight cities covering approximately 70 square miles. Pre-COVID levels of service included thirteen routes operating Monday – Friday between 5:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. and Saturdays between 7:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. Headways vary between 20 and 60 minutes and implemented its first Express route between Medford and Ashland using STIF revenues. The conventional radial network has shifted more toward a grid system allowing transfers to be completed outside of the Medford city center. Although RVTD gained new stable funding in recent years and from the passing of a 5-year property tax worth 13 cents per thousand in 2016, there were several service cuts made in 2006, 20012 and again in 2015. The new STIF and special levy revenues sustained current service levels, added seven routes, added Saturday service and improved frequency on four routes.

RVTD has forty fixed route vehicles, the majority of which are powered by Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) and are35' in length with an average seated capacity of 33 passengers. RVTD added 30' buses to the fleet in 2018 for lower density neighborhood routes with an average seated capacity of 29 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. In 2019 RVTD worked with the City of Medford to secure bus parking on the opposite side of Front St. to add capacity. Three satellite routes were added in 2019 that required smaller transfer sites to be developed using curbside space. An intercity connection is provided at the Front Street Station through Greyhound and Josephine Community Transit.

RVTD also offers a paratransit service, Valley Lift, which provides curb-to-curb transportation for eligible 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 and provides approximately 50,000 trips annually. 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 dispatched trips 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 Get There rideshare website and works with major employers to promote signing up worksites to the network. RVTD coordinates several events each year including the Oregon Get There Challenge in the fall, Rogue Commute Challenge in the spring and oversees individualized marketing.

MICROTRANSIT

RVTD began a new general public, demand response service in Ashland using STIF Discretionary funds in 2019. This service is beginning as a pilot and uses Ford Transit vans equipped with a wheelchair lift and a passenger boarding door. Much like fixed

route service, the driver primarily stays in their seat, accepts fare payment and does not typically assist passengers unless needing a wheelchair secured. The service provides same day reservations using a mobile app within the Ashland city limits.

Future Potential Service

RVTD adopted its 2040 Transit Master Plan in 2019 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. The 2040 TMP utilized the Transit Boarding Estimation Tool (TBEST), Place types tool from DLCD and JEMnR travel model to analyze scenarios for services through 2042.

The 2040 TMP gives priority to, adding coverage to underserved areas by adding several new routes, improving service on existing routes by increasing the frequency, expanding the hours of service and adding express or high capacity transit service on Hwy 99, Hwy 62, Barnett Rd. and W. Main St. 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 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 4:00 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. Generally, transit seeks to serve areas that have at least seven dwelling units per acre or 10 employees 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.

Twin Creeks TOD Rendering, Central Point

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 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.

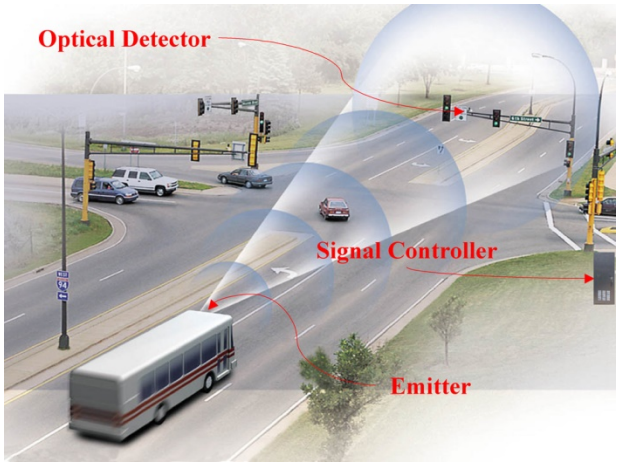
It is necessary to attract riders who currently use other modes of transport in order to significantly increase ridership. In order for these people to consider transit as a viable option, there must be sufficient public information about the services available. Encouraging new riders to try the transit 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, three 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. RVTD has had such as system in place since 2012.

- 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. RVTD has secured a Federal grant and is working with local jurisdictions to install TSP along Hwy 99.



- Mobile fare or e-fare- Allows passengers to purchase and load fare onto mobile ticketing apps or a plastic RFID cards providing convenience and flexibility for passengers and drivers. Additionally, with the COVID pandemic cashless systems were highly encouraged; passengers use of RVTD's cashless fare products are approximately 65% of all fare transactions.

BUS RAPID TRANSIT (BRT)

BRT is an intermediate transit technology now being developed in a number of locations including Eugene. It consists of high capacity, low-floor buses often using a special dedicated lane on the roadway. Locations where a BRT system may someday work well in the Rogue Valley include the Hwy. 62, Hwy. 99 between Ashland and Central Point, Barnett Rd. and W. Main St. in Medford. Other programs that may help reduce reliance on single-occupant vehicles include:

Vanpools – The employer or the transit agency leases or 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, Harry and David, Amy's Kitchen, Tolo and some employers in Medford.

PTASP TARGETS

The Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan (PTASP) regulation, at 49 CFR Part 673, requires covered public transportation providers and States to establish Safety Performance Targets (SPTs) to address the Safety Performance Measures (SPMs) identified in the National Public Transportation Safety Plan (NSP) (49 CFR § 673.11(a)(3)).

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION AGENCY SAFETY PLAN PERFORMANCE TARGETS					
Mode of Transit Service	**Fatalities**	**Injuries**	**Safety Events**	**System Reliability**	**Mileage Increment**
Fixed Route Bus	0.00	0.528	0.528	7,200	100,000
Demand Response	0.00	0.00	0.00	63,000	50,000

TAM Plan Targets

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Transit Asset Management (TAM) Final Rule was published July 26, 2016 in the Federal Register and became effective October 1, 2016. The final rule defines the term state of good repair and establishes minimum Federal requirements for transit asset management. This applies to all recipients of Federal financial assistance under 49 U.S.C. Chapter 53 who own, operate, or manage public transportation capital assets. The TAM rule specifies that an asset is in a state of good repair if it is in a condition sufficient for it to operate at a full level of performance. The rule also provides state of good repair standards.

https://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/RPTD/Pages/Transit-Asset-Management.aspx

Current transit routes are mapped on the following page.

Map 5.3.1: RVTD Transit Routes