



**Benton County**  
**Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund**  
**Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes**  
**January 23, 2023**

*Hybrid meeting using both GoTo Meeting and the Madison Avenue Meeting Room.*

**Committee Members Present:**

Chair Hal Brauner - (Representative of Older Adults)  
Vice-Chair Janece Cook - *Virtual* (Representative of Low-income Persons)  
Greg Gescher - (City of Corvallis – Public Transportation Service Provider)  
Meredith Williams - (Representative of Educational Institutions)  
Cameo Perrells - *Virtual* (Representative of People with Disabilities)  
Nick Meltzer - *Virtual* (Representative of Local Government)  
David Rabinowitz - *Virtual* (Bicycle and Pedestrian Advocate)  
Gary Stockhoff - (ex-officio)

**Committee Members Absent:** Heidi Henry (Environmental Advocate)

**Staff:** Lisa Scherf (Transportation Services Supervisor)  
Brad Dillingham (Special and Rural Transit Coordinator)  
Tiffany Plemmons (Transit Program Assistant)

**Guests:** Tim Bates – *Virtual* (City of Corvallis)  
Barry Hoffman - *Virtual* (City of Albany)

**1. Call Meeting to Order**

As Chair Brauner has not yet arrived, Vice-Chair Cook called the meeting to order at 9:03 am and attendees introduced themselves.

**2. Public Comments**

None

**3. Approval of Minutes**

December 12 and 19<sup>th</sup> Meeting minutes – no minutes provided at this meeting.

**4. Review of FY23-25 Benton County STIF Discretionary Projects (see Staff Report)**

Dillingham stated that during the last several meetings, the group has been focused on the STIF Formula funds. Formula funds are based on payroll- and population-based sources and are allocated to Benton County, which then reviews projects to consider use of those funds. Discretionary funds are competitive statewide and consist of “discretionary” and “inter-community discretionary”.

Scherf reviewed the statutory authority for review of these projects, as described in Oregon Revised Statutes (ORS). ORS requires Formula projects to be recommended to the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) by a local “governing body” (Benton County Board of Commissioners). However, the governing body is not a party to the decision process for Discretionary projects and STIF Committees make a recommendation to ODOT, which then has its own review process. Ultimately, the Oregon Transportation Commission makes the final allocation decisions on both categories of projects.

The recommendation from the STIF Committee to ODOT is a thumbs up/thumbs down for each project based on the criteria in the ORS. Staff noted that all these projects meet those criteria. In response to a question about whether the Committee is meant to prioritize the projects. Scherf affirms that they are, though it's not a necessity.

This cycle, there are three applications for discretionary grants within Benton County. The first is from Albany Transit System, which put in for a bus replacement for the Linn Benton Loop, the second is Benton County seeking replacement vehicles, and the third is the OSU and LBCC Mobility Hub construction. Applicants were asked to present their projects.

**1) Albany Transit, Linn Benton Loop - Bus replacement for Linn-Benton Loop service (\$900,000)**  
**Presenter: Barry Hoffman**

ATS/LBCC Loop submitted a STIF discretionary application for a replacement bus, Category A, 35 ft. hybrid/electric bus. It would be the first low emission bus for the Loop. This bus would replace one that was purchased in 2010 which is currently used as a stand-by vehicle. The match for this bus was requested through Formula funds. The \$180,000 total match (assuming a 20% match) was requested as a split between the Benton County and Linn County Qualified Entities, \$90,000 each.

Committee Member Rabinowitz asked if it's possible to get bike racks that hold three bicycles, as he knows there is a demand for more capacity. Hoffman responded that he intends to purchase 3-position racks. In response to a question, Hoffman stated that a 35-foot bus is preferable to a 40-foot one, for easier maneuverability. The 40-foot buses hold just six additional people.

Committee Member Williams asked about vehicle availability. Hoffman stated he will purchase the vehicle through the State of Oregon purchasing contract. While it's unknown what the situation will be when he is ready to order, he has heard it was at least 18 months from the time of order to the time of delivery.

**2) Benton County – Vehicle Purchase (\$700,000)**  
**Presenter: Brad Dillingham**

Dillingham explained that Benton County is applying for four replacement vehicles. One is a Category D vehicle, likely a 25-30 ft. cutaway bus, to be used for the Coast to Valley Express or 99 Express. The other three are Category E, which would replace some smaller vehicles, primarily used for BAT Lift and ADA Paratransit services. All vehicles would be wheelchair accessible. Initially, Benton County planned to ask for five vehicles with a total cost of \$1,015,000. To be more competitive, a larger Category C vehicle was removed, leaving a total cost of \$770,000. A related Formula project request would provide a 20% match. There is enough funding available to order hybrid/electric models for the three smaller vehicles. In response to a question from Rabinowitz, Dillingham noted that there are no hybrid/electric buses within our price range, nor does the County currently have the infrastructure for fully electric vehicles.

Williams asked if BAT is looking towards electrification in the future. Dillingham replied that we could look for a funding opportunity for the infrastructure. Stockhoff shared that the Board of Commissioners is committed to electrifying as well, but the lead time on some of those vehicles is prohibitive for our operational needs, with some vehicles on order even getting canceled entirely. Bates affirmed that these delays were not uncommon.

Chair Brauner arrived late and apologized for doing so, then assumed his role as Chair for the meeting.

**3) Oregon Cascades West Council of Governments OSU/LBCC Mobility Hub – (\$3,000,000)**  
**Presenter: Nick Meltzer**

Committee Member Meltzer explained that the total Discretionary grant request is for \$3 million and includes both mobility hubs, \$1.5 million for each campus. A prior Discretionary grant funded the project to a 60% design, and they hope to receive this one to complete design and construction.

Rabinowitz opined that he finds both projects to be primarily cosmetic and serving only students. He continued that OSU could spend its own money to serve students and that he planned to vote against this request. Meltzer responded that the money funding these grants comes from employees in the region. It is State money and these mobility hubs connect services that cross the entire region, both east-west and north-south. The Coast to Valley Express will use it, Linn Benton Loop, Corvallis Transit System, Philomath Connection, and private bus services. He stated he does not believe it will serve just students.

Committee Member Perrells asked if any thought was given to placing the hub at Reser Stadium, rather than in this location. Meltzer explained that the location was chosen due to the existing services already servicing that stop, as noted above. Williams added that an OSU campus vision document identified this as an optimal location for a mobility hub. The intent of the project is to provide not just aesthetic appeal, but transit user amenities to encourage transit use. OSU is trying to discourage staff from driving to campus and students from bringing cars to Corvallis from other locations, so there are higher level goals this project is intended to address. Scherf stated that 10 years ago, before Meltzer's time at OCWCOG, their office did a study to determine the best locations for mobility hubs adjacent to campus. The study concluded these would be at 26<sup>th</sup> and Jefferson (in the middle of campus), this location, or 26<sup>th</sup> and Monroe.

Dillingham stated that the Coast to Valley Express, a service of Benton Area Transit, currently stops inside the McNary lot, the location of the planned mobility hub. As noted already, there are CTS, Loop and other bus stops in the area, and this mobility hub would conveniently consolidate all the stops into one location.

Rabinowitz opined it would be more reasonable for the university to start taking steps right now without this big expenditure, by first of all getting rid of the parking and putting bus stops in there. Covered benches and extra bike parking could be added to demonstrate this is valuable. He still doesn't see this project as a valuable investment. Williams explained that OSU has already done that and there is no longer parking in that pull through area. Dillingham reiterated that the Coast to Valley has a stop within the former parking lot. Williams stated that there is conversation happening right now with Groome Transportation about moving from the Hilton Garden Inn location to this one.

Committee Member Perrells asked if the mobility hub will also be a transfer station for drivers to change shifts and Scherf responded no. There aren't facilities such as a break room, restrooms, or driver parking to accommodate that use.

Committee Member Gescher asked about the LBCC part of the project. Meltzer explained that the match funding from Formula funds has been set aside by the Linn County STIF Committee, which reviewed the mobility hub Discretionary grant application last week but did not send a recommendation forward. Scherf said it's not clear what would happen if one hub location was recommended, but not

both. Gescher said he thinks it's a good project, but wondered if a \$3 million ask in a statewide fund of \$23 million might be a heavy lift.

The Committee had a discussion about how to prioritize the projects. Chair Brauner suggested the Committee let ODOT know we thought all the projects were worthy and high priority, and that the Committee had a hard time prioritizing them. Scherf stated that as staff, if she had to determine highest priority, it would be for the bus replacements. If pressed for prioritization, Brauner said his would be: 1 - Benton County vehicle replacements, 2 - mobility hub, and 3 - Linn Benton Loop bus replacement. Rabinowitz would put the Benton County vehicle replacements as first priority, Linn County bus replacement as second priority, and would remove the Mobility Hub from the list entirely. He again noted his objection to the cost of the hub and his belief that it's a cosmetic project. He said he understands not everyone agrees, but wants his opinion noted. Brauner disagreed about removing the Mobility Hub project but could see it ranking third. Williams agreed with Chair Brauner that we should let ODOT decide the prioritization, but said that if the Committee wants to prioritize them, she would agree with Chair Brauner's order.

Committee Member Gescher moved to support all three projects assuming they meet the criteria; Committee Member Williams seconded. Committee Member Rabinowitz stated he wants to separate the projects and if they aren't, he will vote no on all three. Chair Brauner stated that members have the choice to vote no, but there is already a motion before the group to support all three. The motion passed by a 5-1 vote, with Committee Member Rabinowitz voting no.

Chair Brauner asked the Committee about a preference on prioritizing the projects. Committee Member Williams made a motion to not prioritize the projects and Committee Member Rabinowitz seconded. The motion passed 4-2. Chair Brauner stated he wants it noted that the majority of the Committee believed all three projects are valuable and should be funded.

Bates expressed his thanks to Committee Member Williams, who is leaving OSU employment. The Committee wondered if the education representative has to be from OSU and Scherf said it does not.

**4) Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned at 10:05 am.