



Benton County
Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund
Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
May 26, 2022

*Hybrid meeting using Teams for virtual access and the
Sunset Meeting Room for those attending in person.*

Committee Members Present: Hal Brauner (Chair), Meredith Williams (OSU-Vice Chair), Greg Gescher (City of Corvallis), Janeece Cook (Advocate), Tim Bates (City of Corvallis), Axel Deininger (Advocate), Robin de la Mora (Advocate), Nathan Mart (Advocate), Gary Stockhoff (ex-officio), Emma Chavez for Nick Meltzer (ex-officio).

Staff Members Present: Lisa Scherf, Brad Dillingham, Tiffany Plemmons.

Guests (all via Teams): Kate Williams (Director of Advocacy Support with the Disability Equity Center - DEC), Kristen Jocums (elected volunteer President - National Federation of the Blind, Linn Benton Chapter and paratransit rider), JoeHahn (Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Program Coordinator for Benton County), Mark Bernard (ODOT), Sally Utt (paratransit rider and Secretary for the National Federation of the Blind, Linn Benton Chapter), Jasper Smith (Benton County Developmental Diversity Division Manager), Rebecca Olson (Board Member of the Disability Equity Center).

1. Call Meeting to Order

The meeting was called to order at 3:00 PM by Hal Brauner, Chair, after about 30 minutes of technical difficulties. Introductions were made of all attendees.

2. Approve Minutes of STIF Advisory Committee Meeting – October 7, 2021

Chair Brauner requested a motion to approve minutes for the STIF Advisory Committee meeting. A motion was made and seconded to approve minutes. The minutes were approved.

3. Approve Minutes of STAC Meeting – December 9, 2021

Chair Brauner requested a motion to approve minutes for the STAC Meeting. A motion was made and seconded to approve minutes. The minutes were approved.

4. Public Comments

Chair Brauner requested the names of all members of the public who were planning to speak. They were: Kristen Jocums, Sally Utt, Kate Williams, and Rebecca Olsen.

Jocums highlighted her concerns over operational changes to the paratransit program that the City and County have made recently. Specifically, she had concerns with service scheduling windows. She felt that prior to the changes that were implemented during the pandemic, her service used to be better. That included having the ability to have a 30 minute scheduling window around the appointment – to be available 15 min before the ride and be able to wait 15 minutes after the ride. This meant a total time commitment to be somewhere was 45 min pre-pandemic. She stated that now she is asked to schedule a time that is up to an hour before/after the appointment and to also

be available 15 minutes before/after that time. This equates to committing 2 ½ hours of time for a round trip to go across Corvallis. She would like the committees to advise the Board of Commissioners to insure that the voices of the disability community are heard in the future. She has been told that the paratransit system meets the Federal Transit Administration requirements, in line with other paratransit systems in the country, but doesn't believe the County should strive for mediocrity. Jocums requested the bylaws be revised by the committee per her written suggestions. She also requested that the City/County return its paratransit service model back to what it was prior to the operational changes.

Chair Brauner thanked Jocums for her comments and then recognized visitor Sally Utt.

Sally Utt stated that she uses the fixed route system, Benton Area Transit, and paratransit, and expressed confusion over the parameters of the paratransit service. Utt also echoed Jocums' concerns regarding the scheduling windows provided by the paratransit and BAT Lift services. She believes longer waiting times are a consequence of the service serving more passengers per vehicle, rather than individually. Utt also described her concerns about the service shifting from a door-to-door service to a curb-to-curb service and that the proposed bylaws were going to require just one representative of or person with a disability. Finally, she mentioned her struggles with the County's new transition into a new billing process.

Committee Member Tim Bates introduced himself to Utt. He asked Utt about which service she was using because paratransit users do not require a fare and therefore should not be billed by the County. Utt explained that she sometimes uses the service (BAT Lift) to leave the paratransit boundary and that she used to pay Dial-a-Bus, the County's contractor, directly, but now is required to pay the County for rides. Bates offered to follow-up with Utt after the meeting to help resolve the confusion.

Kate Williams introduced herself as the next speaker. She advocated for more accessibility for people with disabilities and claimed that accessibility measures she had previously proposed have not been met. She expressed frustration with the technical difficulties experienced with the Microsoft Teams platform that made it difficult for the attendees with disabilities to join the meeting, noting a colleague who decided not to attend the meeting because of the struggle of attending virtually. She echoed the concerns about the City's paratransit operational changes noted by Jocums and Utt. Williams also requested that there be more representation on the new committee for people with disabilities.

Chair Brauner thanked Williams for her comments and then introduced Rebecca Olson. She expressed concerns similar to those of the other visitors, stating that she believes what was once a wonderful service that went above and beyond has become largely inaccessible. She stated that this was reflected in the struggles with joining this conversation merging two committees. Olson finds this baffling and frustrating - particularly in the time where folks with disabilities have been disproportionately affected by Covid and are already experiencing more exclusion from the community than of any other marginalized group. She noted that it is frustrating for her to hear Utt describe her experience with a service which once met her needs. Olson has a colleague who is a member of the WINGS transition program, which is for young people who experience disabilities

exiting high school and before entering the next stage of their life. Most of the people who use the program also use paratransit and were successfully traveling to their WINGS transition program or their job site prior to Covid. She states that she is hearing they are now struggling to make appointments, internships and jobs on time during a time where there has been so much hurt, loss and disregard for the disabled community. Olson is left feeling that this is a community that doesn't want disabled people. She is frustrated to see more inclusive services stripped down to the bare minimum ADA requirements and voiced support for the proposed amendments to the STIF bylaws that were submitted by Jocums and the National Federation of the Blind.

Chair Brauner thanked Olsen for providing comments. He added that the merging of the two existing committees into one was not a choice made by staff but instead, is the result of the State of Oregon merging two funding streams. Chair Brauner then asked the Committee if anyone had anything that they wanted to add.

Committee Member Janeece Cook asked about what the process would be for people who are on the existing committees who want to continue to service on the new committee. Cook expressed frustration about the lack of bus transportation to rural Benton County and added that many individuals with disabilities would benefit from the addition of service.

Jocums interjected by stating that applications have been submitted for the existing STAC and that the Board of Commissioners have not acted on it. She stated that more individuals would likely apply if more spots were available on the committee.

Chair Brauner provided reassurance that balanced representation on the new committee will be a goal.

Bates added clarifying details to the discussion: 1) Paratransit is a federally mandated service and the service states that someone has to call at least one day in advance in order to get a ride. In the past, Dial-a-Bus (Benton County's contractor), offered to provide same day rides, sometimes on very short notice, but that is not the way paratransit is set up. 2) Paratransit is intended to mirror services provided by Corvallis Transit System (CTS) and Philomath Connection (PC). Like the bigger buses, it is meant as a shared system with multiple people in one vehicle. 3) Paratransit service has not been cut. Corvallis is experiencing a driver shortage and its fixed-route service has been cut. Technically, paratransit service could be cut commensurate with the fixed-route service cuts, but it has not been. It was kept on as if CTS and PC were running at full service. Bates then offered to accept any phone calls or correspondence after the meeting.

Jocums claimed that Dial-a-Bus (DAB) was able to supplement the paratransit service provided by City of Corvallis and Benton County with its own funding and that Benton County had cut funding to Dial-a-Bus during the pandemic. DAB maintained service levels with its own funds and ran out of money.

Kate Williams expressed her interest in joining the new committee.

Chair Brauner stated he will move the meeting along, as there are other agenda items that need to be addressed.

5. Unanticipated Projects of Regional Significance (UPRS)

Dillingham provided a brief summary of the UPRS STIF Project and described the three projects being proposed. The project were: 1) City of Corvallis and the Philomath Connection request for an additional \$60,000 for the Transit Program Assistant position; 2) Benton Area Transit for \$7,000 to purchase GPS units for the Benton Area Transit fleet; and 3) Oregon Cascades West Council of Governments for \$12,500 as additional match towards their OSU Mobility Hub project. The group decided to address each proposed project one at a time.

Dillingham described the City of Corvallis/Philomath Connection project first and Chair Brauner opened up the committee for questions. Vice-Chair Williams asked if other staff positions were funded on an ongoing basis in the biennium using this project. Bates indicated there aren't, and there were no further questions.

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Dillingham described the Oregon Cascades West Council of Governments project and Chair Brauner opened up the committee to questions. There were no questions about this project and Chair Brauner asked for committee member consensus approving the projects. With no objections, the projects were approved by consensus for recommendation to the Benton County Board of Commissioners.

6. STIF/STF Consolidation Bylaws

Scherf began by providing background information on the Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF) and the Special Transportation Fund (STF), as well as an explanation of what has happened with the consolidation of the STIF and STF at the State level.

Scherf explained that the Oregon Department of Transportation convened a Rules Advisory Committee (RAC, which she was appointed to) in 2021 to develop a new set of Oregon Administrative Rules (OARs) for managing the consolidated funding sources. The rules require new bylaws for the new Benton County STIF Advisory Committee and staff is presenting a draft for review by both of the existing committees. She provided a summary of the proposed Bylaws produced by staff, which closely followed the requirements set forth by the new OARs.

Scherf addressed with the Committees the proposed amended bylaws submitted by Jocums and the National Federation of the Blind. She provided clarification regarding the proposed composition of the new committee, stating that the composition of members was taken straight out of the OARs. Scherf noted that the State's RAC developing the OARs included individuals who were representing people with disabilities. These individuals made it very clear that people with disabilities wanted a seat separate from older adults (the two are often combined as "seniors and people with disabilities"). As a result, the final OARs require four separate specific positions on the new

committee, as representatives or individuals who are: 1) a low-income person, 2) a person 65 years old or older, 3) a person with a disability, 4) a representative of a Public Transportation Service Provider (PTSP) or a non-profit entity which provides public transportation services. The remaining advisory committee members can be made up from anyone who is among the 18 categories listed in the OARs, in addition to ex-officio members the BOC wishes to appoint.

In discussing meeting frequency, Scherf noted that the OARs require the new committee to meet a minimum of twice per calendar year, but the frequency of meetings naturally increases in years when a new STIF Plan needs to be developed. In off years, there won't be as much for the group to do. They will not have a role in things like contract negotiations between PTSPs and their contractors, or service and operational issues, as these are the responsibilities of program staff. The primary purpose of the committee will be to provide a recommendation to the Board of Commissioners on the use of the STIF money through the adoption of the Benton County STIF Plan each biennium.

Chair Brauner asked a clarifying question about the County's standards for applying for committee membership, term limits, etc. Ex-officio Committee Member Gary Stockhoff answered that the draft bylaws are written with flexibility, but there is a standard process around County advisory committees. Scherf added that it is likely the Board of Commissioners has decided against adding new members to the existing committees, instead waiting until the new committee is formed to make appointments.

Chair Brauner entertained discussion from the Committee members.

Committee Member Robin de la Mora asked about the transparency for the representation of the nine members; in other words, how can the community be assured that required seats established under the bylines are filled as intended? Scherf answered that the County maintains on its website membership for all its committees and the seat (assuming it is specified) that each individual represents.

Committee Member Greg Gescher spoke about the potential difficulty of finding specific people who satisfy the categories listed in the OARs and noted that publicly describing member's backgrounds would be a balance of transparency and private information. Stockhoff agreed.

Chair Brauner requested to have the comments in the chat listed in the record [they are included at the end of these minutes].

Vice-Chair Meredith Williams inquired about how the representatives for people with disabilities were described in the current STAC bylaws. Scherf answered that with the exception of Tim Bates and Steve Harder, the remainder of the existing membership were for people who were either associated with older adults or people with disabilities professionally, had personal experience, or had a disability and/or were an older adult. Scherf added that this composition made sense for the STAC because that was the specific purpose of that committee. The new committee will be broader and will include general public transportation.

Chair Brauner stated he is in favor of having the committees recommend adoption of the the bylaws that were proposed by staff. The membership language in Article 6 is straight out of the State OARs. He believes the committees should not weigh in on Jocums' suggestions related to vacancies, appointments and meetings, as that language is likely standard across County advisory committees and the Board of Commissioners has the discretion to deviate from their boilerplate if they wish.

Chair Brauner also suggested forwarding the proposed amendments provided by Jocums to the Board of Commissioners as additional information.

Cook suggested that the committee dive deeper into the composition of the new committee members and to think about potentially increasing the number of specifically designated positions. She asked how the future committee members would be appointed and if the existing committee members will have a spot on the new committee. Stockhoff responded that the transition process from the existing committees to the new one would need to be run by the County Counsel. He believes that all interested people, including existing members, would need to fill out an application. Stockhoff stated that the goal is to have the committee up and functioning by the end of September.

Vice-Chair Williams stated her recommendation to the group that no changes be made to the required membership positions as proposed, since the draft bylaws reflect the requirements of the State.

Bates and Gescher both expressed their concerns about requiring the new committee to have more prescriptive seats than what is being proposed in the draft bylaws, citing that it is hard to find and retain members who have to be from a specific demographic. Vice-Chair Williams agreed. She questioned why the draft bylaws list PTSP as a possible category, since it was already a mandatory seat per the State OARs. Scherf stated that the 18 member categories and four required seats are listed in the OARs, so they have to be included as possible members. However, the Board of Commissioners still has a lot of flexibility in who is appointed, including ex-officio members. Chair Brauner noted that PTSPs often attend STIF meetings whether they are on the committee or not.

Chair Brauner asked the committees if there were any other comments; there were none. By consensus, the committees recommended the proposed bylaws to the Board of Commissioners for consideration, along with the draft with Jocums' comments. Chair Brauner expressed appreciation for all the effort of the two committees and the hope that the new committee will carry on the tradition of representing transit and all of its different users in the country.

Members of the committees spoke about their frustrations with the technology issue and thanked everyone for their attendance and patience.

Adjournment: 4:30 PM

Next Meeting: TBD

Microsoft Teams chat below (minus talk about early connection issues):

[5/26/2022 3:16 PM] Janeece Cook (Guest)

Since I don't have transportation available in rural benton county, can someone explain the definition of paratransit.

[5/26/2022 3:20 PM] Kate (she/her) - Disability Equity Center (Guest)

It is transportation service that supplements big typically urban public transit systems by providing individualized rides to elderly and folks with disabilities.

[5/26/2022 3:30 PM]

JoeHahn (he/they) (Guest) left the chat.

[5/26/2022 3:32 PM] Kate (she/her) - Disability Equity Center (Guest)

How is speaking?

[5/26/2022 3:32 PM] Kate (she/her) - Disability Equity Center (Guest)

WHO lol

[5/26/2022 3:32 PM] Plemmons, Tiffany

Chair, Hal Brauner

[5/26/2022 3:32 PM] Kate (she/her) - Disability Equity Center (Guest)

Thanks

[5/26/2022 3:37 PM] Kate (she/her) - Disability Equity Center (Guest)

To clarify, it is the federally mandated MINIMUM requirements that you are referencing, yes?

[5/26/2022 4:04 PM] Kate (she/her) - Disability Equity Center (Guest)

There is a significant difference in a person with lived experience and a representative. Who determines an appropriate "representative" for this community? I also heard that these OAR stated minimums; is there resistance to holding designated space for more than one disabled person and/or low income, etc?

[5/26/2022 4:12 PM] Kate (she/her) - Disability Equity Center (Guest)

It is so unfortunate to watch a space like STAC that once was held, at least in its design, for disabled voices in special transportation, to get lost to a single seat on the combo committee.