



Benton County
Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund
Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
December 11, 2023

Madison Avenue Meeting Room, 10:30 am – 12:00 pm.

Committee Members Present:

Chair Heidi Henry - Environmental Advocate
Vice-Chair Janece Cook - Representative of Low-income Persons
Kate Hunter-Zaworski - Representative of People 65 and over
Greg Gescher - Public Transportation Service Provider
Sarah Bronstein - Representative of Educational Institutions
Kristen Jocums - Representative of People with Disabilities
Nick Meltzer - Representative of Local Government
David Rabinowitz - Bicycle and Pedestrian Advocate
Gary Stockhoff - Ex-officio

Committee Members Absent: None

Staff: Lisa Scherf - Public Transportation Services Supervisor
Brad Dillingham - Special and Rural Transit Coordinator
Tiffany Plemmons - Transit Program Assistant

Guests: Tim Bates – City of Corvallis
Sally Utt – Community Member

1. Call Meeting to Order

Janece Cook ran late to the meeting and Heidi Henry volunteered to chair it until Cook arrived. Henry called the meeting to order at 10:35 am and attendees introduced themselves.

2. Public Comments

Sally Utt – Ms. Utt stated she relies on ADA paratransit provided through BAT Lift. She said she has been using these services less frequently because it is becoming harder to schedule rides to appointments. She worries that when she gets to an unfamiliar destination, she will no longer get the same help from the driver that she is accustomed to, including getting from the curb to her destination inside a building. It used to be that the driver would help her to the location and make sure she was set up. She is now relying more on other kinds of rides and if she cannot get one, she has to reschedule her appointment. On her most recent paratransit ride, she said that there were several other passengers in the vehicle and the driver dropped off passengers in a non-linear fashion, resulting in a longer-than-necessary trip. She said that rides cannot be requested more than one week in advance.

David Rabinowitz said that these types of issues should be dealt with outside of this meeting, as it is not the purview of the STIF Committee.

3. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

Rabinowitz motioned that Janeece Cook be nominated to continue her role as Vice Chair and Heidi Henry be nominated as Chair of the Benton County STIF Advisory Committee. Jocums seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Approval of January 23, 2023 Minutes

Rabinowitz motioned and Gescher seconded approval of the minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

5. Review of Benton County Updated Title VI Plan (see Staff Report)

Lisa Scherf said Benton County is required to have a Title VI Plan and update it every three years. The County's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Coordinator was consulted on this Plan update.

Scherf said that within Benton County, the number of Cantonese and Mandarin language speakers have joined Spanish language speakers as exceeding the threshold established by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). Therefore, "vital" documents, as defined by FTA, will be made available in written form to Cantonese and Mandarin language speakers. The DEI Coordinator provided more updated and appropriate terminology for the Plan. County Commissioners will review the Plan in late January.

Jocums asked if the inclusion of the phrase "individuals with disabilities" should be uniform throughout the Plan. Scherf said language in the Plan was taken verbatim from FTA regulations, but that she would make sure that the language included is the most current language provided on the FTA website. Rabinowitz asked if phone surveys are to be used, as stated in the Plan. He is dubious of them, citing the historical unreliability of phone surveys, and opined that written surveys are a better method of receiving input.

Jocums motioned for approval of the Plan, subject to updating previously-discussed language. The motion was seconded by Meltzer. The motion passed unanimously.

6. Request to Transfer from Reserves to Philomath Connection Project (see Staff Report)

City of Philomath was not able to complete its 2021-23 STIF project titled "Bus Stop Amenities", in the amount of \$63,000, before June 30, 2023. Philomath was delayed in completing this project due to having to wait for ODOT to complete its work on the same streets as the planned Philomath work.

Rabinowitz motioned, seconded by Meltzer, to approve the request to transfer \$63,000 from reserves to the 2023-25 Philomath Connection project titled "Bus Stop Amenities". The motion passed unanimously.

7. Update on FY23-25 Benton County STIF Projects

In Barry Hoffman's absence, Meltzer reviewed the City of Albany's Loop Expansion project, which began in 2023. The Loop Technical Advisory Committee evaluated ridership for the expanded summer service and is considering continuing that expanded service in future summers.

Dillingham reviewed Benton County STIF projects:

99W Service – This service will operate from McMinnville to Junction City and is still awaiting its debut. Benton County has received the necessary vehicles. Yamhill County, Benton County’s partner in this project, is awaiting receipt of their vehicles. A service plan will then be agreed upon by both agencies and drivers will be hired. A definite start date has not yet been identified.

Coast to Valley Expanded Service – Several connections to Amtrak have been added and ridership numbers indicate it is successful.

Camera System Upgrade – This upgrade began and has already been useful in several onboard incidents.

5311 Formula Match – Used to match federal grants for 99 Express to Adair Village and Coast to Valley service.

Bus Stop Amenities – Bus stop improvements have been made to the 99 Adair Village bus stop at Knoll Terrace Mobile Home Park on Highway 99.

Service Advertising – Used to advertise new services and service updates to the public.

Bates updated Corvallis and Philomath STIF projects.

Transit Support Position – This project funds the position that is currently held by Tiffany Plemmons. Tiffany is a vital part of supporting both Corvallis Transit System and Benton Area Transit.

Bus Stop Amenities – This project will fund as-yet-identified shelter locations that may receive a replacement shelter or a bus stop location that will get its first shelter. The bulk of the project in the previous STIF biennium was used for the transit plaza at Kings Blvd. and Monroe Avenue, a site that is the de facto OSU Transit Plaza.

Meltzer reviewed the Council of Governments (COG) STIF projects:

Seamless Transit Continuing Operations – Ongoing and used to support real-time vehicle information.

OSU Mobility Hub Construction Match – 60% design has been completed and the COG is awaiting 90% design from the contractor.

8. Meeting Notices

Jocums said that the Oregon Attorney General’s recommendation is to provide a two-week notification of a meeting for those persons who have requested a notification. Scherf said the STIF Committee discussed this issue at a previous STIF meeting and the Committee voted to approve a one-week notification period, which is standard for other public meetings in Benton County. Scherf and Stockhoff reiterated that the Bylaws call for a one-week notice period for meetings, and agreed to speak with Benton County Counsel on the legality of notification timelines. When asked whether a list of interested parties had been provided, Jocums stated that the National Federation of the Blind had asked the County to be directly notified about the meeting and wasn’t. Scherf apologized for that lack of notification. Jocums committed to providing Stockhoff with a list of interested parties that she is aware of. Scherf said the Committee could ask for a two-week notification on meeting date/location and a one-week notification for the full meeting packet. She noted that in the past, Committee meeting dates were established for the year and published and suggested doing so again.

9. Paratransit Discussion

Jocums said that she and some others she knows were against the merger between the former Special Transportation Advisory Committee (STAC) and the STIF Committee. Scherf reminded the Committee that merging these committees was the result of ODOT merging two funding streams and writing new Oregon Administrative Rules describing Committee requirements.

Jocums voiced her displeasure with the County's recently-implemented scheduling software, saying that it has been a "nightmare" for users to navigate. Some users have opted to stop scheduling rides. Jocums made a motion to create a working group or task force to monitor, review, and discuss issues with the City's paratransit service and the County's BAT Lift service. She suggested that the task force would be comprised of a Dial-A-Bus representative, Benton County, several members of the STIF Committee, and others to be determined by the STIF Committee. Scherf said the STIF Committee was never meant to address operational issues; however, it is possible to form a separate task force. Meltzer asked if it were appropriate for the County Commissioners to be the entity to form a task force to deal with operational issues.

Stockhoff said the dispatch software that was implemented in September has been the culprit for the ride scheduling issues. Along with Dial-A-Bus schedulers, Scherf and Stockhoff met with the software contractor in an attempt to resolve these issues. Some, but not all, of the issues were resolved at the meeting. Jocums said it was her understanding that the software was purchased without input from Dial-A-Bus, the County's operations contactor. Stockhoff strongly refuted this, stating that two Dial-A-Bus supervisors were on the selection panel, gave their input and supported selecting the chosen vendor. Jocums asked why the former system was replaced. Stockhoff said the former software was 20 years old and soon to be too old to be supported. The vendor for the former software was notified of the procurement and did not submit a response to the County's RFP for new software. Henry asked who community members could contact with their scheduling issues. Dillingham said that for operational and access issues with the software, users should contact Dial-a-Bus staff with their issues, because they use the software on a daily basis. For more general concerns and complaints, users should contact Brad Dillingham. Jocums stated that this method isn't working, as she has contacted staff in the past and not received a response. Dillingham noted he has been out of the office for weeks with family issues. In response to a question from Jocums, staff responded that the software purchase cost was in the range of \$90,000.

Jocums asked for clarification of the 15-minute pickup "window" of paratransit passengers. Dillingham described this window as being within 15 minutes before and after the requested time, which is well within the Federal Transit Administration's 30-minute window requirement. Rabinowitz, himself a former Dial-a-Bus driver, said it is incumbent upon the passengers to be ready at the scheduled time so as not to throw off the schedule of other passengers.

Scherf said that regarding Ms. Utt's disappointment with drivers no longer accompanying passengers to their appointments, the County has been strongly advised by the FTA that drivers are not permitted to lose sight of their vehicle or go into buildings, known as "through the door" service. If a passenger needs that level of assistance to get to their appointments, they need to provide their own Personal Care Attendant. Hunter-Zaworski stated that this is also her understanding of FTA regulations.

Chair Henry requested that Jocums bring back a proposal regarding working groups for the Committee to consider.

10. Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 12:10 p.m.