



Benton County
Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund
Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
March 25, 2024

Virtual, 10:00 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 Transit Riders
David Rabinowitz - Bicycle and Pedestrian Advocate
Gary Stockhoff - Ex-officio

Committee Members Absent: Nick Meltzer - Representative of Local Government

Staff: Lisa Scherf - Public Transportation Services Supervisor
Tiffany Plemmons - Transit Program Assistant

Guests: Tim Bates – City of Corvallis
Rory Rowan - City of Corvallis
John Gardner – Dial-a-Bus user
Sally Utt – Dial-a-Bus and BAT Lift user

1. Call Meeting to Order

Chair Henry called the meeting to order at 10:05 am attendees introduced themselves.

2. Public Comments

John Gardner – Gardner stated he is no longer a BAT Lift client and subscribes to a private service with Dial-a-Bus. He does not like how things have changed over the last few years regarding use of County vehicles for special trips and having to stay within Benton County boundary.

3. Approval of December 11, 2023, Meeting Minutes

There were concerns about what was not included in the December 11, 2023, minutes. After a brief discussion, Cook made a motion to consider the minutes, rather than approve, and Jocums seconded.

Following discussion, Scherf summarized requested corrections that Jocums wanted added to the minutes in question:

- 1) Having the Committee discuss operational issues becoming part of the Committee's purview
- 2) Staff agreed to send email notices regarding the March meeting and did not do so
- 3) Staff agreed to provide the cost and ride time windows within the VIA Software and did not do so
- 4) Allegations that staff had not returned phone calls from some community members
- 5) Chair Henry had requested Jocums bring back a work group proposal.

Bronstein had a correction to Item 7, Update on FY23-25 Benton County STIF projects. The minutes said that Committee Member Nick Meltzer stated the Linn Benton Loop Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) is considering recommending expanded summer hours operate year-round. This is not accurate; instead, the TAC evaluated ridership for expanded summer service and was considering continuing expanded summer service in future summers.

Chair Henry asked if the Committee preferred to vote on accepting the corrected minutes or postpone voting on minutes until the next meeting. **Jocums motioned to postpone, Cook seconded, and the motion passed.**

4. CTS Solar Project Update

Tim Bates reported that following a structural engineering assessment, it was determined the roof of the garage will not support the planned solar panels. This means the money will be returned to the reserves. Accounting for the \$2,800 spent on bid advertising and analysis, \$237,200 will back into STIF reserves.

5. Review of STIF Process and Plan Development

Scherf presented a high-level overview on the STIF program, including project and plan development. She explained how the former Special Transportation Fund and STIF monies were merged at the State level, how matching funds work, the source of the funds, and the development of the formulas for distribution. The staff report provides more information on this.

6. Presentation on Committee Work Group Formation

Jocums presented her written proposal for a Committee work group, included in the meeting packet. She hopes the work group could address issues of concern to BAT clients in a more collaborative way. The proposal would include a Committee member to chair the group, a rider, a County staff person, and a Dial-a-Bus representative. She believes this is necessary to review what has been happening with service levels and to look at future needs as they relate to funding. She gave the example of funding a new dispatching system which she said was neither needed nor wanted and resulted in issues for passengers.

Chair Henry thanked Jocums and asked if other Committee members had thoughts. Rabinowitz stated he is a former volunteer driver and is familiar with how the dispatching system used to operate before the new software, and he agrees with the concept of a group reviewing the service. He questioned whether this is a function of the STIF Committee and that a different group was more appropriate for operational issues. Hunter-Zaworski suggested that the rider(s) in the work group represent people with sensory, cognitive, and physical disabilities because the needs of each are very different. Cook agreed with Rabinowitz that another group might be better for this purpose. She noted that another group who should be considered for representation are people unable to read.

Jocums stated that there is a need to problem solve and the Committee represents a mechanism. Bronstein stated she is weighing what Jocums and Rabinowitz have stated about purview. Section 2, Item 6 of the Bylaws has language about this: "Establish, as needed, Work Groups to provide the Committee with additional input on STIF Formula projects." Bronstein wondered if that language is related more to how currently funded projects are going, or whether work groups are useful for deciding which projects to fund. Scherf said she could answer that, having participated in the State's rules committee for the STIF program. There was a robust discussion during rule-writing about work groups and how they would be used. The intent of that language was in the event there was a need for a deeper dive on some projects to gain additional information when the STIF Plan was being developed, particularly if there wasn't

enough money to fully fund submitted projects. Scherf was emphatic that the intent was not to provide operational oversight.

Jocums said there was another section that refers to being able to oversee how current projects are being implemented and review funding for future projects. Rabinowitz asked what standing the group would have with Benton County in this kind of role. It seemed it would be limited to reducing future funding requests, and he didn't think that was a good way to operate. He couldn't think of another place in the County where a committee would function this way.

In response to a question from Gescher about whether there is another way to address these issues within the County, Stockhoff said this group is advisory to the Board of Commissioners. During the last cycle, the Committee recommended projects, the Board had an opportunity to ask questions and ultimately approved them. It's always possible an outside group could weigh in to the Board on the advisability of funding projects that have been recommended by the Committee.

Bronstein suggested another place oversight could take place is the City's Multimodal Operational Advisory Committee, where members of the community can present operational issues. Jocums said her suggestion wasn't about reviewing staff's work, but about considering the need for specific projects. In this case, she opined that the dispatching software upgrade wasn't needed and that it negatively impacted the rider community. She thinks there should be input on implementation of projects that includes the wider community, the County, and the vendor so that appropriate decisions can be made. Rabinowitz stated that he drove for the service contractor for about 10 years and he believed they desperately needed new software. Perhaps the solution didn't work as planned, but he opined that a committee like this can't get into the details of a procurement. Bronstein acknowledged what Jocums is expressing and understands the need to confirm that projects align with the needs of the community. At its core, the Committee is intended to function as representatives of the broader community.

Chair Henry suggested that staff develop options for next steps and bring them to the next meeting. Cook believes this group does have a role in reviewing how projects are delivered and perhaps Benton County could have a similar multimodal group like Corvallis'. Gescher supported Chair Henry's suggestion to bring back options for the Committee to consider. **Rabinowitz moved that the Committee request staff develop a proposal for reviewing the operation of Benton Area Transit and present it at the next meeting. Jocums seconded.** Cook requested information about what didn't work about the dispatching software.

The motion passed.

7. Adjournment 11:40 am