

# TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM #1

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April 14, 2025

Project# 30857

To: Benton Area Transit Staff: Gary Stockhoff, PE; Lisa Scherf; Charlene Pech

From: Nick Meltzer, PE; Amy Griffiths, PE; Susie Wright, PE; Jim Hamre, Kittelson & Associates, Inc.

RE: Benton County Transit Current Services Assessment

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## INTRODUCTION

Kittelison & Associates, Inc. (Kittelison) is assisting Benton County with a program assessment of their transit service, known as Benton Area Transit (BAT). The consultant team reviewed information provided by Benton County, Corvallis Transit System (CTS), National Transit Database (NTD), and Benton County's current contract with Dial-A-Bus (DAB). The assessment provides a baseline for comparing alternative service delivery models and how they may impact costs and levels of service.

## EXISTING SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL

Benton County provides regional transit service to Benton County and nearby communities through its program – BAT. The regional transit service includes the 99 Express from Corvallis to Adair Village, and the Coast to Valley from Albany to Newport. The Coast to Valley is operated in partnership with Lincoln County. BAT also provides a countywide demand response service for seniors and people with disabilities, as well, and operates paratransit service within the cities of Corvallis and Philomath for the fixed route services provided by the City of Corvallis, known as Corvallis Transit System (CTS) and the Philomath Connection (PC).

Benton County and the City of Corvallis maintain a mutually beneficial relationship in staffing and support of their respective programs, and with the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIF) increased funding for transit, the two agencies recognize the importance of coordinating service. As organizational staffing and leadership changes over time, each agency expressed a desire to ensure coordination for the benefit of riders over time.

BAT services are currently provided through a private contractor. BAT's contract is particularly unique as it is operated through a *non-profit* contractor, which poses different risks and benefits compared to traditional private for-profit contractors. Contract renewals have had limited to no competition, and the current contractor is facing driver challenges like other transit agencies post pandemic; however, they are exacerbated by the reliance on volunteer drivers for some services. This is creating a negative impact on service, and with increased state and federal oversight, BAT is exploring how to structure their program for success over the next 20 years.

## EXISTING TRANSIT SERVICE

Four different transit systems operate in and throughout Benton County. In addition to the services provided by BAT, CTS operates fixed route service within the Corvallis Urban Growth Boundary. CTS also

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operates the Philomath Connection, a fixed route service between Philomath and Corvallis, on behalf of the City of Philomath. The Linn Benton Loop, operated by Albany Transit System, provides service between Oregon State University and Linn Benton Community College, as well as between the city centers of Corvallis and Albany, including through North Albany, which is part of Benton County. Oregon State University (OSU) also operates a transit service for university students on campus called the Beaver Bus. The Beaver Bus includes three shuttle routes on OSU campus.

While the Coast to Valley is a marketed service between Newport and Albany, Benton Area Transit shares operations with Lincoln County, with each agency providing two buses and running two trips per day.

The specific services BAT provides are listed below. While BAT Lift is collectively marketed as the Demand Response service, it is comprised of three individual services with separate revenue streams. As such each subservice is listed.

- **Coast to Valley Express:** The Coast to Valley Express is a regional transit bus service between Newport, Corvallis, and Albany provided through a partnership by BAT and Lincoln County Transit. This route is a commuter bus that covers approximately 130 miles roundtrip and has 12 stops in each direction. It is part of a longstanding five-county collaboration known as the NW Connector.
- **99 Express:** The 99 Express is a bus service between Corvallis, Lewisburg, and Adair Village. This route is a commuter bus that covers approximately 20 miles roundtrip and makes 14 stops per run.
- **BAT Lift (Countywide):** BAT provides wheelchair-accessible, demand-response transportation for seniors (ages 65 and older) and individuals with disabilities throughout Benton County. BAT Lift is a service provided by Benton County for trips starting and ending in Benton County. Riders must be approved in order to be eligible for transit service.
- **BAT Lift (Paratransit):** Paratransit for the Corvallis Transit System and Philomath Connection fixed route services is also provided through BAT Lift. Both paratransit and countywide service operate with the same vehicles and dispatch service. However, BAT Paratransit is funded through CTS and federal 5310 Small Urban funds to provide service for people who live within 3/4 mile of a CTS or PC bus route<sup>1</sup> and have a disability that prevents them from accessing the urban bus service.
- **BAT Lift (DD 53):** DD 53 Services are public or private transportation services provided to individuals with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) receiving services from a Community Developmental Disabilities Program (CDDP) for the individual to gain access to a community-based state plan (K-plan) and waiver services, activities and resources. As the funding source is from social service agencies compared to traditional transportation sources, the ridership and costs are tracked separately.

Benton Area Transit operates a mixture of services with fares and fareless services. A major focus area of STIF funding included in the statewide rules is providing additional service to students and low income persons. Benton Area Transit, along with many other agencies across the state, is addressing this by eliminating fares from services that typically have fares, through a STIF project subsidy. Both fares and/or

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<sup>1</sup> CTS provides additional fixed-route transit services in Corvallis and Philomath. These local bus routes connect with the regional transit services offered by BAT at the Downtown Transit Center. While enrollment in the City's program automatically qualifies the rider for the County's program, the reverse is not true.

STIF funds are imperative for matching the significant federal funding sources that help BAT operate throughout the county.

Table 1 summarizes existing transit services by destination, frequency, time of operations, and cost of fare. Figure 1 shows a map of BAT transit services. Additional route maps and timetables are provided in Appendix A.

**Table 1. Summary of Existing Transit Services**

Service	Fares	Service Hours	Frequency	Destinations
<b>Coast to Valley Express</b>	\$1 to \$6 per trip on a zone-based fare system	- 7-days per week from 5:45 AM – 6:55 PM	4x per day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provides service between Newport and Albany</li> <li>- Connections with CTS services</li> </ul>
<b>99 Express</b>	Fareless through STIF	- Monday-Friday from 6:45 AM -6:45 PM	4x per day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provides service between Corvallis and Adair Village</li> <li>- Connections with CTS services</li> </ul>
<b>BAT Lift (Countywide)</b>	Fareless through STIF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Monday- Friday from 8:00 AM – 7:00 PM</li> <li>- Saturdays from 8:30 AM – 6:00 PM</li> </ul>	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provides service throughout Benton County</li> </ul>
<b>BAT Lift (Paratransit)</b>	Fareless	- BAT Paratransit Service is offered during the service hours covered by CTS and PC bus routes.	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide service for people who live within 3/4 mile of a Corvallis Transit System or Philomath Connection bus route</li> </ul>

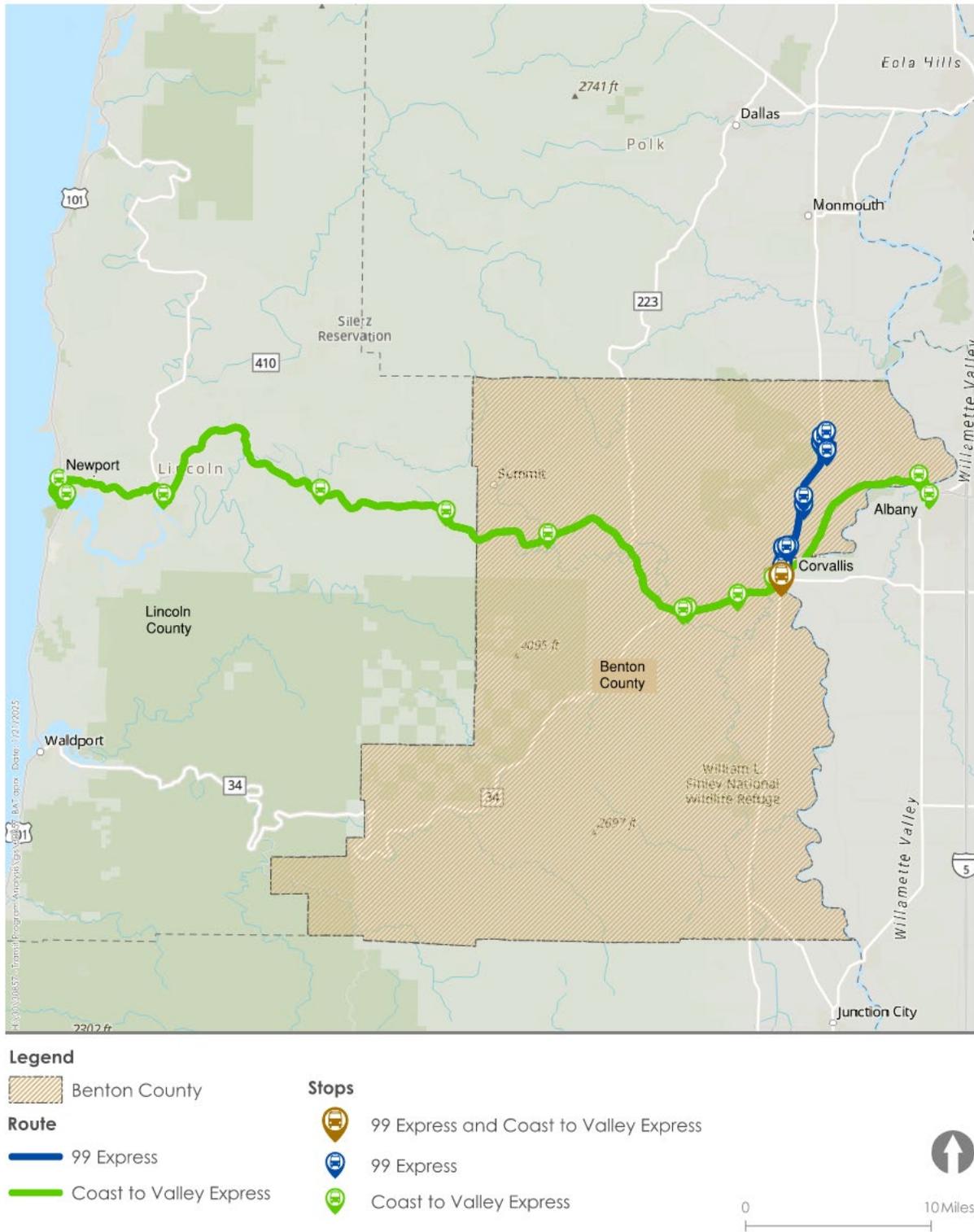


Figure 1. Existing Transit Service

## OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT

Kittelton evaluated information provided by Benton Area Transit including their fleet characteristics, operating budget, and current ridership. Collectively this data sets the stage for comparing BAT to peer agencies of similar size and scope.

### Fleet

BAT currently owns and operates 16 vehicles. The average age of the active fleet is approximately 5 years. Eleven vehicles, or almost 70% of the fleet, will achieve their expected useful life (EUL) within the next 5 years. Table 2 summarizes existing fleet information.

**Table 2. Transit Fleet**

Asset Number	Asset Model	Mode <sup>1</sup>	Year	Seating Capacity	Odometer Reading (miles)	EUL (years)	Fuel Type
163	FORD TRANSIT WAGON	DR	2016	8	154,685	8	Gasoline
172	FORD TRANSIT WAGON	CB/DR	2018	10	96,487	8	Gasoline
173	DODGE GRAND CARAVAN	CB/DR	2018	5	76,216	8	Gasoline
174	DODGE GRAND CARAVAN	CB/DR	2018	5	76,668	8	Gasoline
178	FORD TRANSIT 350 HD CUTAWAY	DR	2019	9	86,620	10	Gasoline
179	FORD TRANSIT 350 HD CUTAWAY	DR	2019	9	92,694	10	Gasoline
180	FORD TRANSIT 350 HD CUTAWAY	DR	2019	9	76,502	10	Gasoline
182	FORD F-550	CB	2019	26	95,452	10	Gasoline
183	FORD F-550	CB	2019	24	145,100	10	Gasoline
184	FORD TRANSIT 350 HD CUTAWAY	DR	2019	9	100,394	10	Gasoline
206001	FORD F-550	CB	2020	26	170,496	10	Gasoline
206002	FORD E-450 <sup>2</sup>	CB	2023	25	20,902	10	Gasoline
206003	FORD E-450 <sup>2</sup>	CB	2023	25	14,363	10	Gasoline
206004	CHRYSLER VOYAGER <sup>2</sup>	DR	2023	5	12,587	8	Gasoline
206005	CHRYSLER VOYAGER <sup>2</sup>	DR	2023	5	9,993	8	Gasoline
206006	CHRYSLER VOYAGER <sup>2</sup>	DR	2023	5	4,974	8	Gasoline

Source: Benton County (2024), National Transit Database (2023)

<sup>1</sup>CB = Commuter Bus, DR = Demand Response

<sup>2</sup> Information of these vehicles was estimated using typical asset information.

## Operating Revenues and Expenditures

In 2018, Oregon passed HB2017, which created a new payroll tax and dedicated it to the expansion of transit across the state. The Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF) collects one tenth of one percent of employee payroll and 90 percent of these funds are redistributed to “qualified entities” according to the payroll amount collected in their region. Benton County is the qualified entity and distributes money to public transit providers in the County region including Corvallis Transit System, the Philomath Connection, Benton Area Transit, Albany Transit System (including Linn Benton Loop), and Oregon Cascades West Council of Governments (OCWCOG). While OCWCOG does not directly operate transit service they plan and administer regionally significant transit projects across the region.

With the additional STIF monies, Benton Area Transit has increased service, made most of its service fareless, and leveraged the associated additional local revenue to match federal 5310 and 5311 funds. As part of a longstanding agreement with Corvallis Transit System and the Philomath Connection, Benton Area Transit provides the federally required paratransit service within ¾ of mile of fixed route service, for which they are reimbursed by Corvallis and the federal 5310 Small Urban funds.

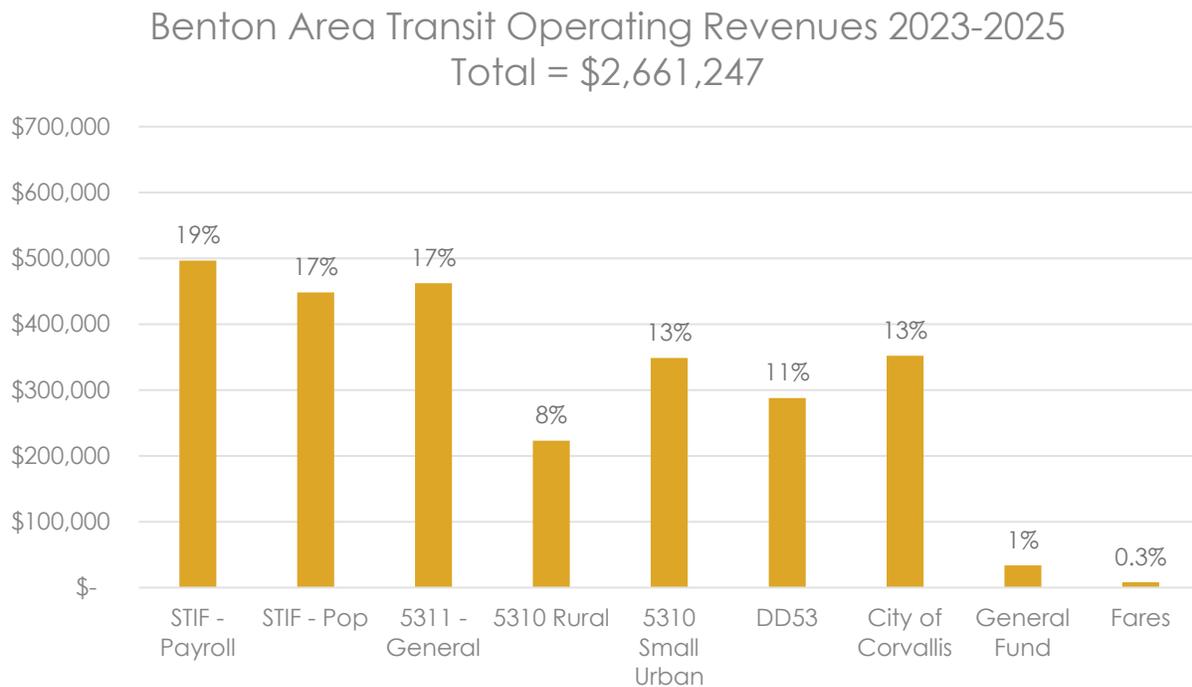
Benton Area Transit’s biennial revenue for 2023-2025 is approximately \$4.7 million. Kittelson focused the budget review on operating funds, removing any one-time capital expenses. In reviewing information submitted by BAT, two large capital sources exist in this biennium: remaining CARES funds, and a STIF Discretionary grant for 99W Pilot operations. After removing those funds, the estimated operating revenue for BAT is \$2.7 million over two years, or approximately \$1.3 million per year.

A large percentage of revenue for BAT comes from STIF Payroll funds and STIF Population funds (formerly Special Transportation Funds). Collectively these state funds represent 36% of the revenue. Federal 5311 and 5310 collectively contribute 38% of the revenue. The City of Corvallis revenue in combination with 5310 Small Urban supports the paratransit service for Corvallis Transit System. Table 3 and Figure 2 display information in a table and graph, respectively.

Expenditures for Benton Area Transit are organized by the different services provided. Paratransit is the largest expense at 25% of the biennial budget, followed by BAT Lift at 19%. The Commuter Bus fixed route service accounts for 24% of the budget collectively. Table 4 and Figure 3 contain the expenditures by service in a table and graph, respectively.

**Table 3. BAT Operating Revenue by Source 2023-2025.** *Note: Administrative Costs are Shared Among Services*

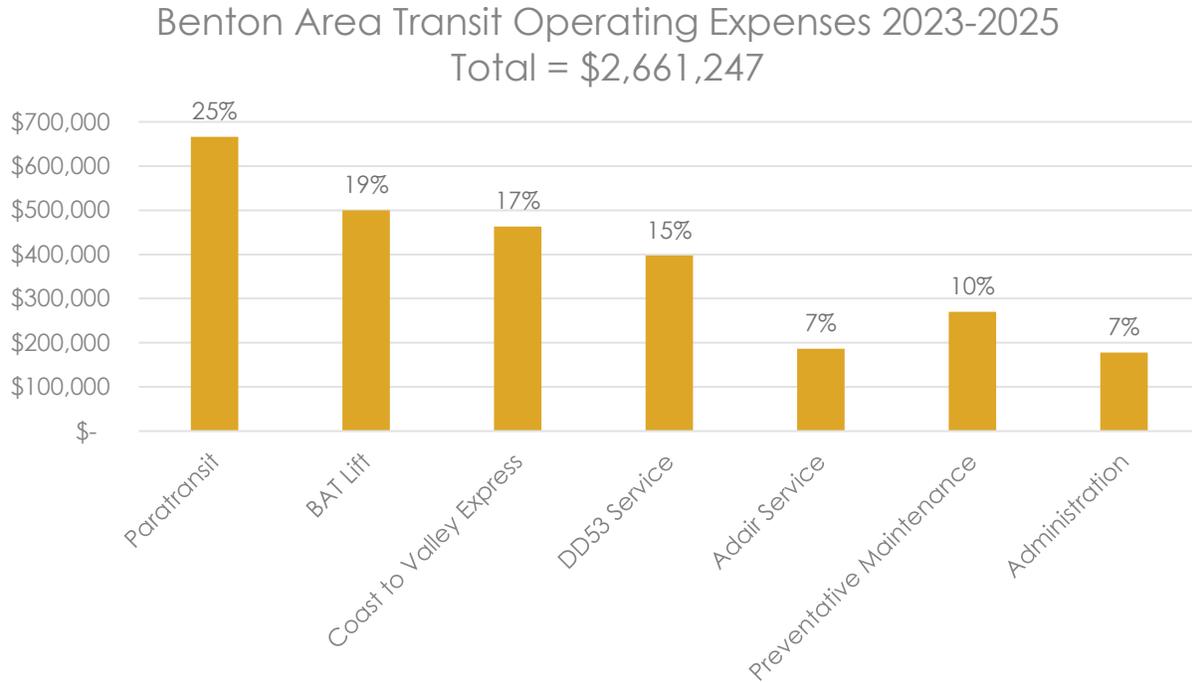
Source	Dollar Amount	Percent
<b>Fixed Route Services (Coast to Valley, 99W Express)</b>	<b>\$1,189,916</b>	<b>45%</b>
STIF - Payroll	\$496,500	19%
5310 Rural	\$223,179	8%
5311 - General	\$462,237	17%
Fares	\$8,000	0.3%
<b>BAT Lift (Paratransit, Countywide Service, DD 53)</b>	<b>\$1,471,331</b>	<b>55%</b>
STIF - Pop	\$448,474	17%
City of Corvallis	\$352,272	13%
5310 Small Urban	\$348,985	13%
DD 53	\$288,000	11%
General Fund	\$33,600	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,661,247</b>	<b>100%</b>



**Figure 2. BAT Operating Revenue by Source, 2023-2025**

**Table 4. BAT Operating Expenses by Service, 2023-2025**

Service	Dollar	Percent
<b>Fixed Route Services (Coast to Valley, 99W Express)</b>	<b>\$649,932</b>	<b>24%</b>
Coast to Valley Express	\$463,150	17%
Adair Service	\$186,782	7%
<b>BAT Lift (Paratransit, Countywide Service, DD 53)</b>	<b>\$1,563,437</b>	<b>59%</b>
Paratransit	\$666,359	25%
Countywide Service	\$499,453	19%
DD 53 Service	\$397,625	15%
<b>Shared Among Services (Administration, Preventive Main.)</b>	<b>\$447,877</b>	<b>17%</b>
Preventative Maintenance	\$269,764	10%
Administration	\$178,113	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,661,247</b>	<b>100%</b>



**Figure 3. BAT Operating Expenses by Service, 2023-2025**

## Ridership

The findings documented herein, and conclusions related to transit tracking and long-term planning rely on accurate ridership data. Ridership information is provided by DAB, and there is scrutiny on the accuracy of this information due to lack of transparency in reporting.

Figure 4 and Figure 6 provide the annual ridership for BAT's commuter bus and demand response routes between 2014-2024, respectively. Ridership was fairly steady for both the Coast to Valley Express and 99 Express before 2020, with the 99 Express generally generating more ridership than the Coast to Valley Express. After 2017, the 99 Express began declining, and both services saw severe drops in ridership during the COVID-19 pandemic, as was typical of most transit systems. In 2021, both services grew in ridership, and have since exceeded its pre-COVID levels.

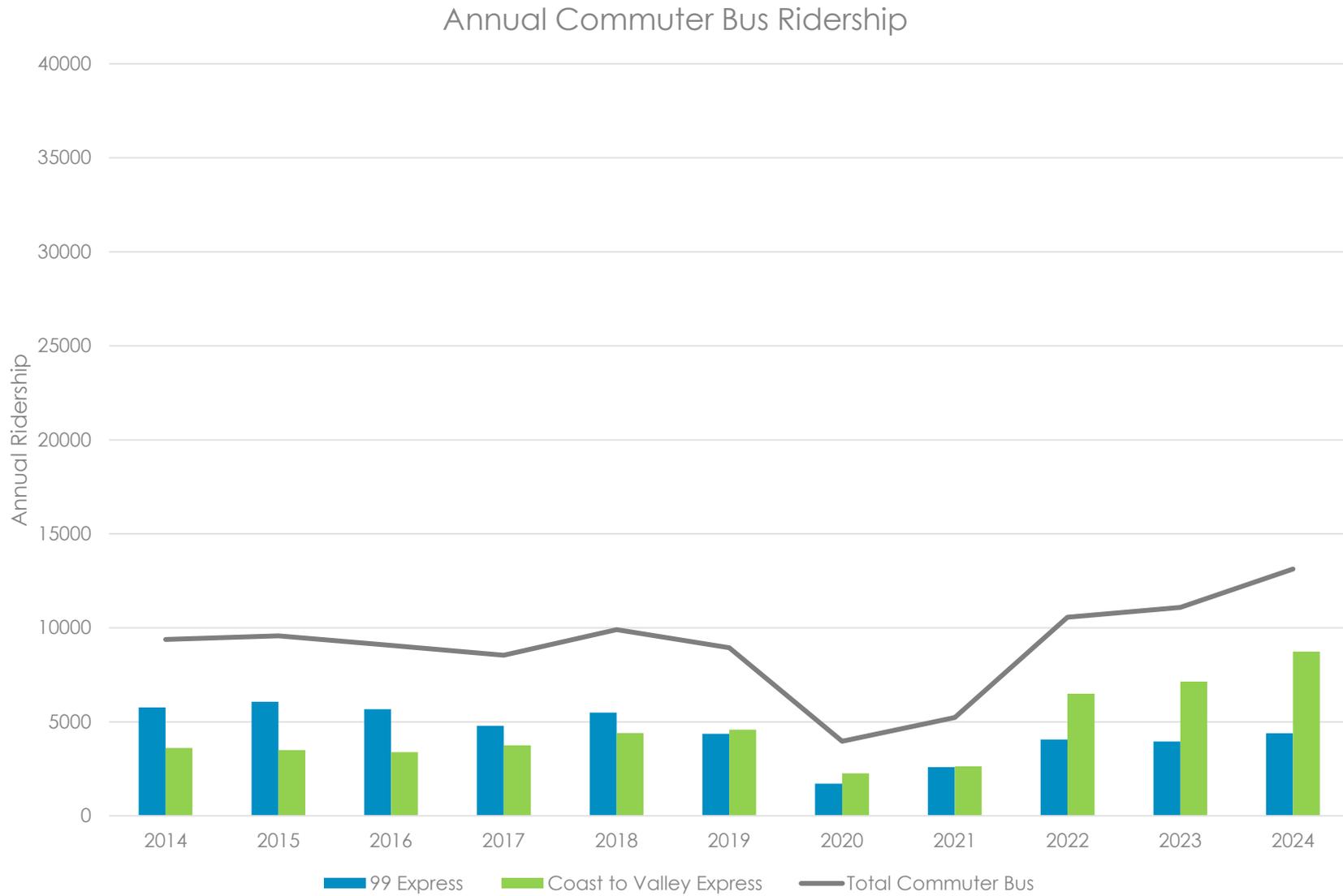
Figure 5 illustrates the monthly ridership for BAT's commuter bus services for July 2023 through December 2024. Ridership on commuter bus routes is relatively constant over the duration of the year, with an average of approximately 1,058 monthly rides over this time period.

BAT's Lift service also had steady ridership between 2014 and 2020, though ridership gradually declined between 2016 and 2020. In 2020, the Lift service experienced a severe drop in ridership, coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic. While Lift ridership remains below pre-COVID levels.

Figure 7 illustrates the monthly ridership for BAT's demand response services for July 2023 through December 2024. There are some fluctuations in monthly ridership across services. Over this time period, there was an average of 2,679 monthly rides combined on BAT Lift, Paratransit, and DD 53 services<sup>2</sup>.

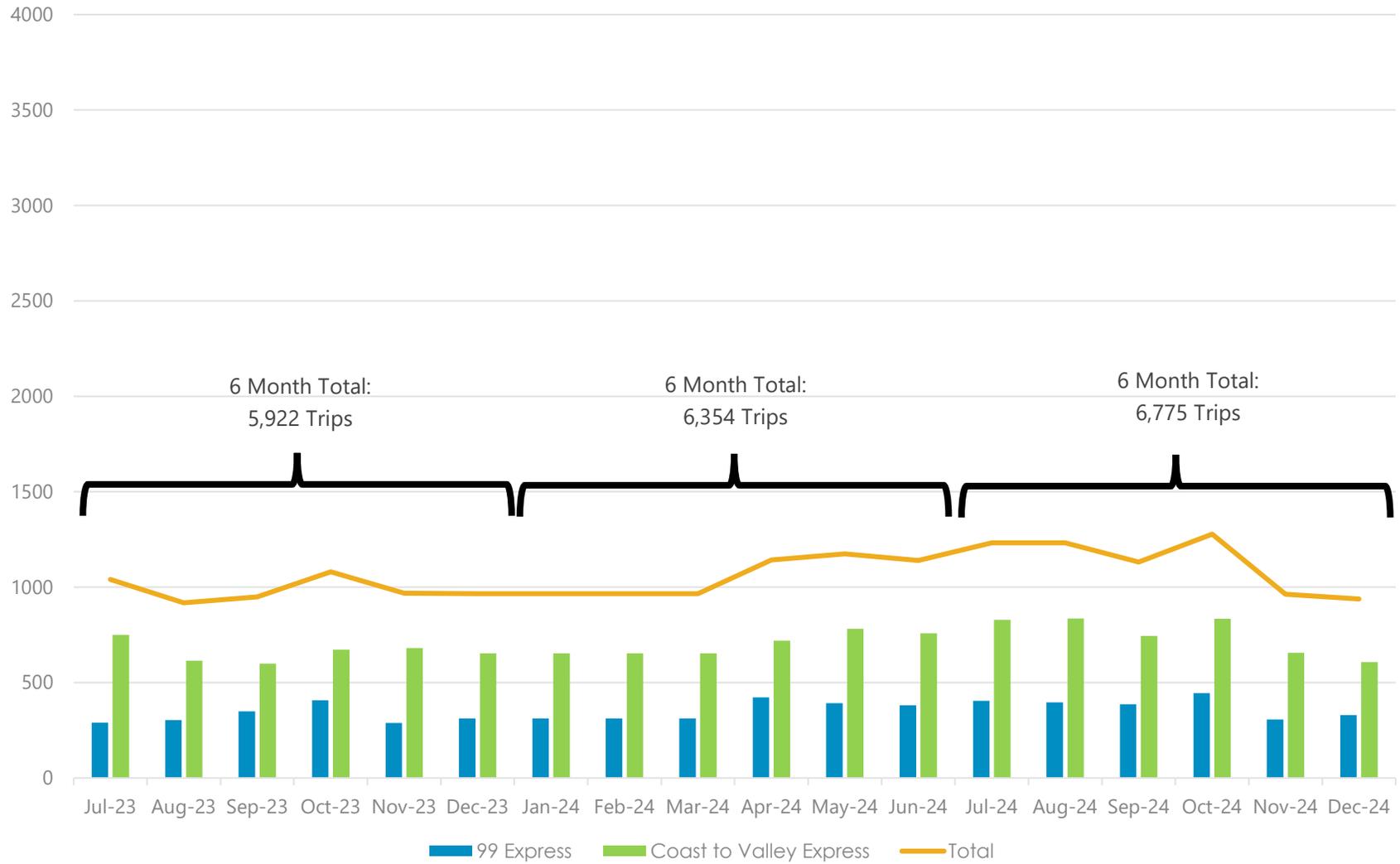
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<sup>2</sup> Transportation Services (DD 53 Services) are public or private transportation supports provided to individuals with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) receiving services from a Community Developmental Disabilities Program (CDDP) for the individual to gain access to community-based state plan (K-plan) and waiver services, activities and resources. Source: <https://www.oregon.gov/odhs/providers-partners/idd/standardsprocedures/transportation-services-non-transit-district-se-53.pdf>



**Figure 4. Commuter Bus Ridership 2014-2023, Source: Benton County**

### Monthly Commuter Bus Ridership

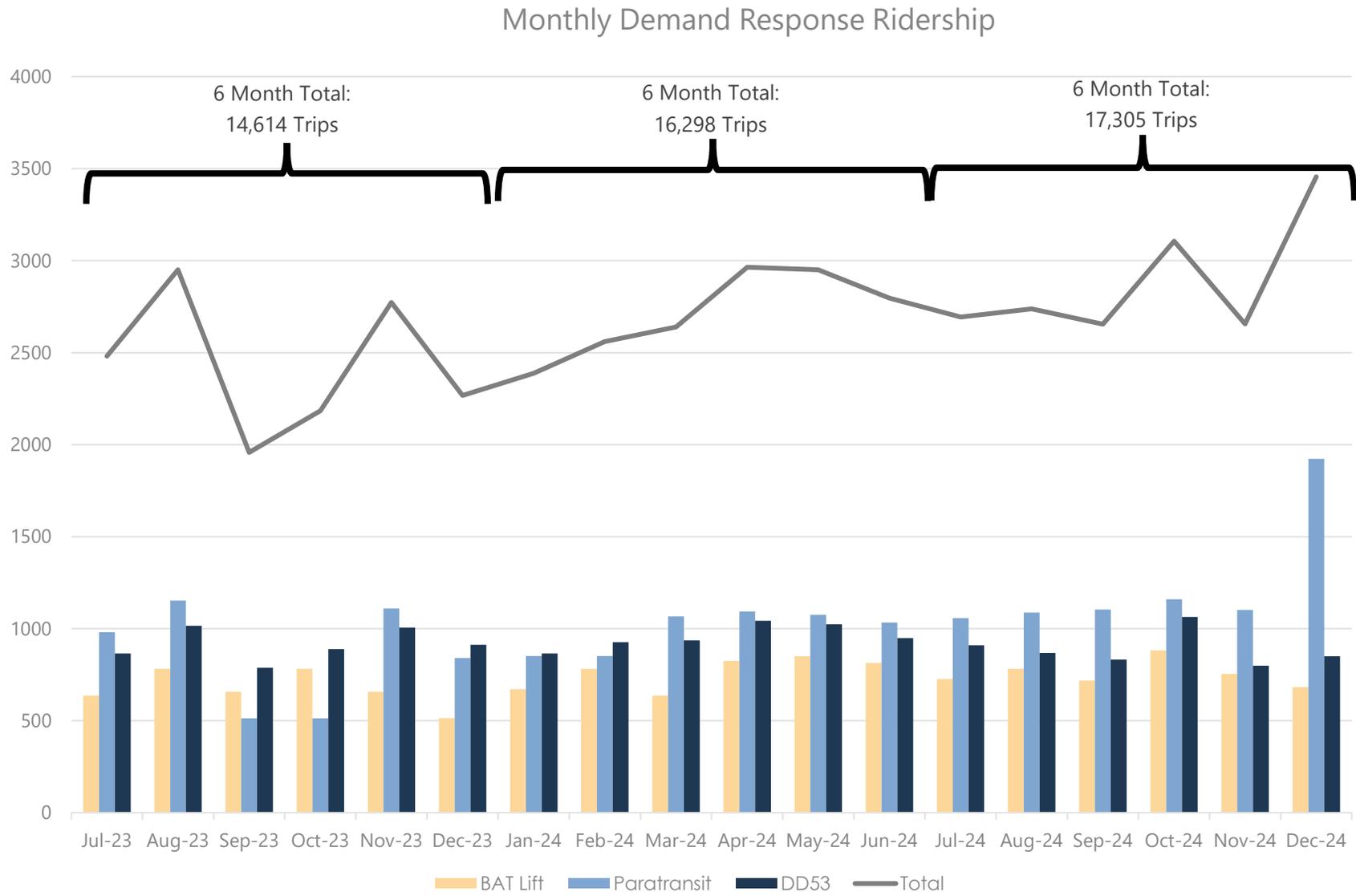


**Figure 5. Commuter Bus Ridership FY24, Source: Benton County**



**Figure 6. Lift Ridership 2014-2023, Source: Benton County<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>3</sup> Note: DD 53 service statistics were only available for FY 24. Ridership statistics for demand response services between 2014-2023 only include combined BAT Lift and Paratransit services.



**Figure 7. Demand Response Ridership; Source: Benton County**

## Reliability

Reliability information, including on-time percentage, missed trips, missed runs, missed blocks, and denied requests is limited and hard to interpret. This makes it challenging and time intensive to understand the overall quality and reliability of transit service in Benton County.

However, BAT staff have mentioned that there is a lack of reliability created by the volunteer-based model for staffing drivers. If DAB were to adjust their model to hire more paid drivers to address driver shortages and reliability, or to try and increase service hours, the costs associated with operating the service would increase.

## Operator Contract

Kittelson reviewed Benton Area Transit's contract with their current contractor. While the contract meets federal requirements and sets expectations for service delivery, the contract lacks mechanisms that require DAB to provide adequate information to support accountability and ongoing review by Benton County. Reliability performance measures are reported to the contracted supervisor by the contracted drivers, but there is no built-in reporting mechanism from the contractor to BAT staff. Additionally, it can be challenging to enforce contract stipulations as there is little to no competition during contract renewal. Additionally, DAB's status as a non-profit makes it challenging to buffer or absorb penalties for noncompliance.

While DAB agrees in their contract to adhere to all federal and state requirements, it is not clear whether there are random audits, quality checks or assurances during the life of the contract to ensure these terms are being met.

The contract is set up on a monthly payment basis with a set fee based on service hours that is pre-paid at the beginning of the month. Depending on ridership levels and service hours, a fee increase can be made to the contractor amount after 3 months. While this arrangement is easy to administer, there is no indication of the contractor's actual costs. As such, the contractor is incentivized to provide lower cost services (including through volunteers) as they still receive the base payment each month even if costs are significantly less. This lack of transparency between Benton County, which is required to provide the service in adherence with state and federal regulations, and the contractor, the party "standing in the County's shoes" for providing it, can make it challenging to understand and track true costs of service delivery.

## Federal and State Compliance

As described in an earlier section, federal and state funding comprises the vast majority of BAT's operating revenue. For Benton Area Transit, ODOT is responsible for ensuring federal compliance of pass-through funds (5310 and 5311) used for operating transit. Over 50% of BAT's annual operating revenue is federally sourced. This funding is tied to several federal and state requirements, including but not limited to ridership, incident and financial reporting, and licensing, training and workplace requirements. Benton County must undergo triennial audits with the Federal Transit Administration to examine performance and adherence to FTA requirements.

The most recent FTA Triennial Review was completed in November 2023. This audit included eight compliance findings and one advisory recommendation, primarily related to accountability and reporting. There were repeat noncompliance findings in this audit, indicating that the County has been unable to address previously identified issues with the current contractor. There was also a separate FTA Drug and Alcohol Compliance Audit, which had 36 findings of noncompliance. Failure to fully resolve audit findings within 90 days may result in a formal finding of noncompliance by the FTA. Continued failure to remedy noncompliance may jeopardize Benton Area Transit's future funding from the FTA. The County is required to report noncompliance findings in grant applications which can impact project rankings and subsequently the ability to receive grant funds. A portion of BAT's funding comes from the DD53 program, which provides people with developmental delays rides to school and work. Recently the funding agency of DD53 raised reliability and ridership concerns. Reliability issues are more significant due to the funding source of DD53, which is Title 504 of the Americans with Disabilities Act. A missed trip for people using this service can directly result in a violation of federal funds. This reinforces the Reliability, Contract and Compliance issues discussed above.

## PEER AGENCY COMPARISON

Transit agencies that receive federal funding are required to report information about service miles, service hours, and ridership to the National Transit Database (NTD). Benton County is classified as an urban provider based on services provided to Corvallis but has similarities to urban and rural providers. The project team identified 10 peer agencies for comparison based on type of service provided, service area characteristics, and proximity to Benton County. Table 5 describes the transit providers included in the peer analysis, including whether they operate based on purchased transit or are directly operated. It also includes a column regarding other fixed-route or deviated fixed route services provided. Entries in **bold** indicate that the peer is similar for that characteristic. Overall, Lincoln County Transit, Casper Area Transit, and Grand Valley Transit have the most characteristics in common with BAT.

**Table 5. Peer Selection**

Provider	Location	Urban/ Rural (iNTD)	Service Provider	Operates Motor Bus?	Commuter Bus			Demand Response			Service Area Size (2023)	Service Area Population (2023)
					Passenger Trips	Revenue Miles	Revenue Hours	Passenger Trips	Revenue Miles	Revenue Hours		
<b>Benton Area Transit</b>	<b>Benton County, OR</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Purchased Transit</b>	X	<b>8,924</b>	<b>122,116</b>	<b>3,662</b>	<b>26,262</b>	<b>195,003</b>	<b>20,374</b>	<b>679 mi<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>96,017</b>
Lincoln County Transit	Lincoln County, OR	Rural	Directly Operated	✓	<b>7,124</b>	<b>91,823</b>	<b>3,240</b>	50,060	137,533	6,118	1,194 mi <sup>2</sup>	50,821
Columbia County Rider Transportation	Columbia County, OR	Rural	Directly Operated	X	<b>10,401</b>	60,764	1,853	9,177	67,520	4,538	<b>688 mi<sup>2</sup></b>	53,880
Josephine Community Transit	Josephine County, OR	<b>Urban</b>	Directly Operated	✓	26,548	250,403	8,146	14,044	90,276	7,937	80 mi <sup>2</sup>	48,000
Mid-Columbia Economic Development District	Wasco County, OR	Rural	Directly Operated	✓	-	-	-	12,704	67,112	6,155	2,395 mi <sup>2</sup>	26,333
Malheur Council on Aging and Community Services	Malheur County, OR	Rural	Directly Operated	✓	310	27,000	955	11,051	110,055	7,880	9,930 mi <sup>2</sup>	32,044
Curry County Public Transit	Curry County, OR	Rural	Directly Operated	✓	-	-	-	13,242	44,991	3,980	1,989 mi <sup>2</sup>	23,296
City of Grand Forks (Cities Area Transit)	City of Grand Forks, ND	<b>Urban</b>	Directly Operated	✓	-	-	-	56,434	241,829	<b>25,767</b>	27 mi <sup>2</sup>	68,224
Casper Area Transit	City of Casper, WY	<b>Urban</b>	Directly Operated	✓	-	-	-	<b>29,455</b>	<b>206,128</b>	<b>16,679</b>	27 mi <sup>2</sup>	57,561
Grand Valley Transit	County of Mesa, CO	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Purchased Transit</b>	✓	-	-	-	<b>28,504</b>	<b>173,630</b>	12,148	69 mi <sup>2</sup>	<b>118,330</b>
City Coach	City of Vacaville, CA	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Purchased Transit</b>	✓	-	-	-	19,191	100,480	7,602	30 mi <sup>2</sup>	<b>102,386</b>
Whatcom Transportation Authority	Whatcom County, WA	<b>Urban</b>	Directly Operated	✓	-	-	-	189,173	882,744	62,613	776 mi <sup>2</sup>	235,629

Source: NTD 2023, Supplemented by Census Data for Rural Providers Service Area and Population

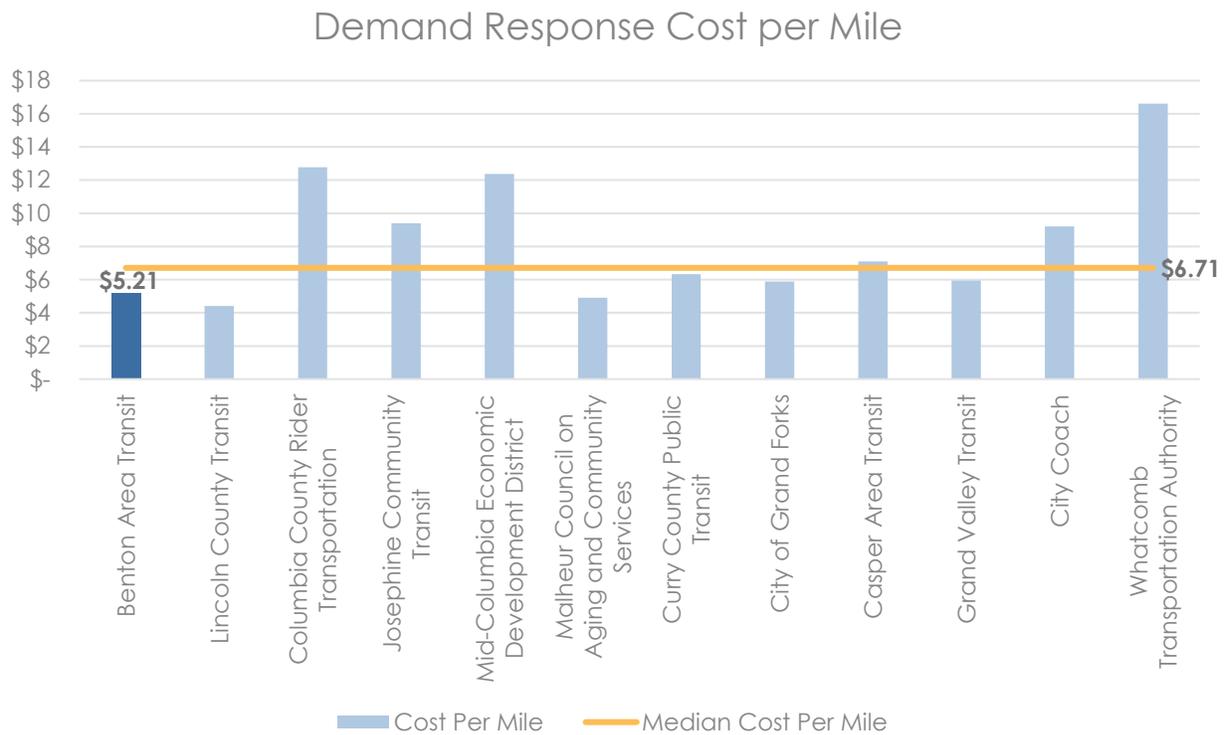
## Demand Response

Table 6 shows several service metrics from 2023 for Benton County and peer agencies for demand response services, respectively. As shown, Benton County provides operating costs per hour, rides per hour, and rides per mile for demand response services that are below the average of its peers. Benton County operates significantly fewer trips per hour than its peers for demand response services, which vary considerably peer to peer, based on the specifics of the service area. However, Benton County also has lower costs per hour than all agencies included in the peer comparison, as this measure is less dependent upon ride efficiency and more related to fixed costs. Figure 8 and Figure 9 display this information graphically.

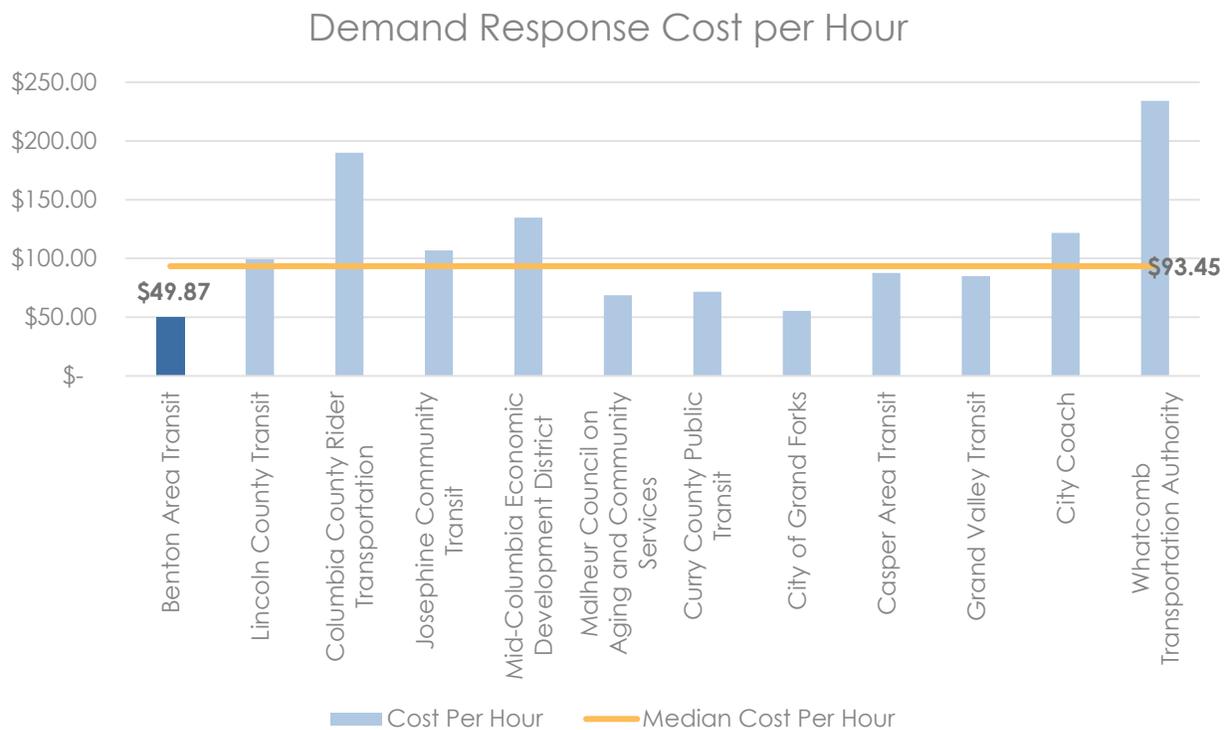
**Table 6. Efficiency and Effectiveness Peer Comparison – Demand Response**

Agency	Service Provider	Total Operating Expense	Cost Per Mile	Cost Per Hour	Cost Per Trip	Trips Per Hour	Percent Fare Revenue
<b>Benton Area Transit</b>	<b>Purchased Transit</b>	<b>\$1,016,041</b>	<b>\$5.21</b>	<b>\$49.87</b>	<b>\$38.69</b>	<b>1.29</b>	<b>0%</b>
Lincoln County Transit	Directly Operated	\$607,482	\$4.42	\$99.29	\$12.14	8.18	8%
Columbia County Rider Transportation	Directly Operated	\$862,574	\$12.78	\$190.08	\$93.99	2.02	3%
Josephine Community Transit	Directly Operated	\$848,702	\$9.40	\$106.93	\$60.43	1.77	3%
Mid-Columbia Economic Development District	Directly Operated	\$830,026	\$12.37	\$134.85	\$65.34	2.06	6%
Malheur Council on Aging and Community Services	Directly Operated	\$541,047	\$4.92	\$68.66	\$48.96	1.40	22%
Curry County Public Transit	Directly Operated	\$284,878	\$6.33	\$71.58	\$21.51	3.33	15%
City of Grand Forks	Directly Operated	\$1,425,980	\$5.90	\$55.34	\$25.27	2.19	11%
Casper Area Transit	Directly Operated	\$1,461,134	\$7.09	\$87.60	\$49.61	1.77	3%
Grand Valley Transit	Purchased Transit	\$1,031,743	\$5.94	\$84.93	\$36.20	2.35	7%
City Coach	Purchased Transit	\$925,817	\$9.21	\$121.79	\$48.24	2.52	3%
Whatcom Transportation Authority	Directly Operated	\$14,656,976	\$16.60	\$234.09	\$77.48	3.02	1%
	<b>Median</b>	<b>\$894,196</b>	<b>\$6.71</b>	<b>\$93.45</b>	<b>\$48.60</b>	<b>2.13</b>	<b>5%</b>
	<b>Average</b>	<b>\$2,041,033</b>	<b>\$8.35</b>	<b>\$108.75</b>	<b>\$48.15</b>	<b>2.66</b>	<b>7%</b>

Source: NTD, 2023



**Figure 8. Average Cost per Vehicle Revenue Mile for Demand Response Services, Source: NTD 2023**



**Figure 9. Average Cost per Vehicle Revenue Hour for Demand Response Services, Source: NTD 2023**

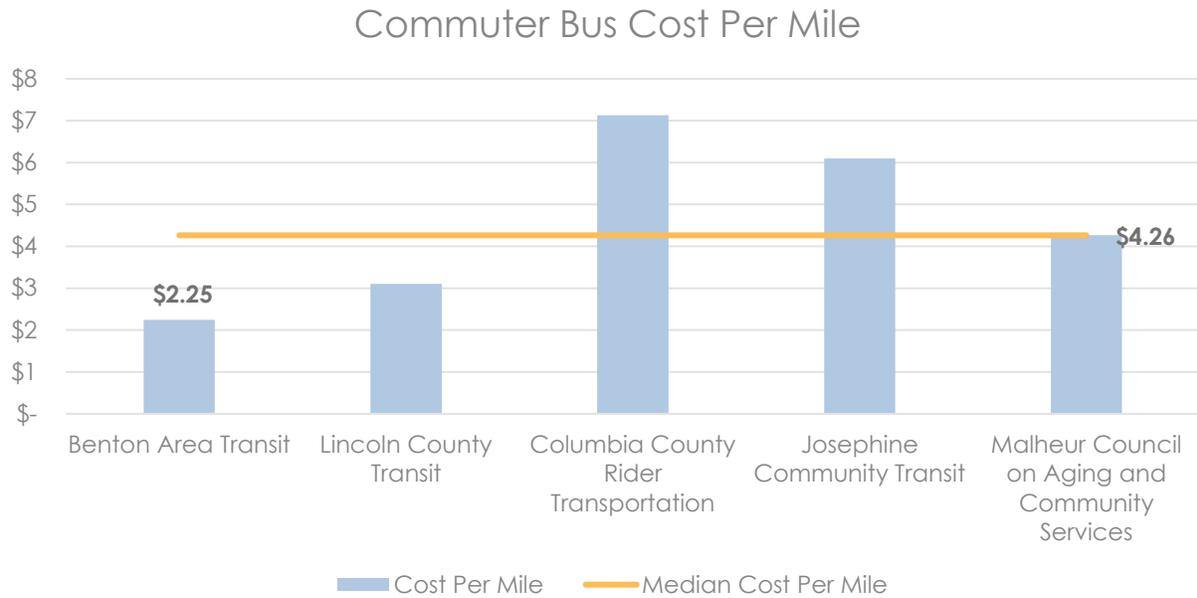
## Commuter Bus

Table 7 shows several service metrics from 2023 for Benton County and peer agencies for commuter bus services. As shown, Benton County’s operating costs per hour, rides per hour, and rides per mile for commuter bus services are below the average of its peers. Benton County operates the median trips per hour of its peers for commuter bus services but has the lowest costs per hour which is indicative of low fixed costs compared to other agencies. Figure 10 and Figure 11 display this information graphically.

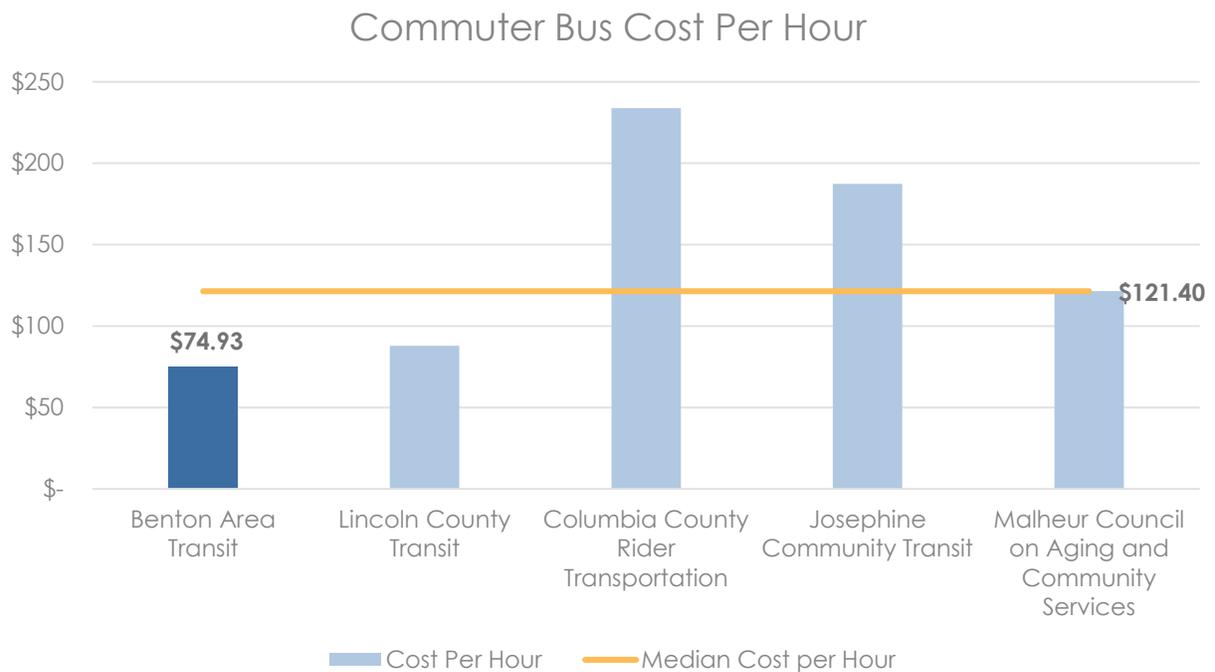
**Table 7. Efficiency and Effectiveness Peer Comparison – Commuter Bus**

Agency	Service Provider	Total Operating Expense	Cost Per Mile	Cost Per Hour	Cost Per Trip	Trips per Hour
Benton Area Transit	Purchased Transit	\$274,392	\$2.25	\$74.93	\$30.75	2.44
Lincoln County Transit	Directly Operated	\$284,812	\$3.10	\$87.90	\$39.98	2.20
Columbia County Rider Transportation	Directly Operated	\$433,478	\$7.13	\$233.93	\$41.68	5.61
Josephine Community Transit	Directly Operated	\$1,526,253	\$6.10	\$187.36	\$57.49	3.26
Malheur County on Aging and Community Services	Directly Operated	\$115,933	\$4.26	\$121.40	\$373.98	0.32
	<b>Median</b>	<b>\$284,812</b>	<b>\$4.26</b>	<b>\$121.40</b>	<b>\$41.68</b>	<b>2.44</b>
	<b>Average</b>	<b>\$526,974</b>	<b>\$4.57</b>	<b>\$141.11</b>	<b>\$108.77</b>	<b>2.77</b>

Source: NTD, 2023



**Figure 10. Average Operating Costs per Vehicle Revenue Mile for Commuter Bus Services, Source: NTD 2023**



**Figure 11. Average Cost per Vehicle Revenue Hour for Commuter Bus Services, Source: NTD 2023**

## FINDINGS

The following findings are based on reviewing data provided by Benton Area Transit and comparing it with several agency peers:

- **Fixed Route Ridership has Increased Over the Last Ten Years, While Demand Response Ridership has Decreased.** Ridership between 2014 and 2019 for commuter bus and paratransit services was relatively constant. After the COVID-19 pandemic, total commuter bus ridership for 2022 exceeded pre-COVID levels by more than 10 percent. Meanwhile, annual demand response ridership is down by over 20 percent compared to pre-2020 levels. All of the increase in commuter bus ridership is from the Coast to Valley.
- **Ridership and Reliability Data Cannot be Verified.** The existing contractor self-reports reliability and ridership data, which is then provided to Benton County. With no mechanism in place for quality control or quality assurance, and the lack of automatic passenger counting technology, it is challenging to hold the contractor accountable as required by oversight agencies.
- **Overall, Benton Area Transit's Non-Profit Contracted Model Provides Service at a Lower-than-Average Cost.** BAT's fixed route and demand response service costs are below both the average and median costs compared with ten agency peers. However, Benton Area Transit also operates significantly fewer trips per house than its peers for demand response services, which could indicate a lack of efficiency in assigning and delivering rides. Beyond peer agencies, BAT's contractor's hourly service costs are more than 80 percent lower than the national average for purchased transportation. This is likely due to Benton County historically providing office and technology services free of charge, and the use of volunteer drivers by the contractor.
- **Benton County's Funding is at Risk Due to FTA Noncompliance.** The FTA Triennial Review included eight compliance findings and one advisory recommendation. The FTA Drug and Alcohol Compliance Audit had 36 compliance findings. Benton County is required to report these findings when applying for grants, and failure to remedy noncompliance can jeopardize BAT's future funding from FTA.
- **Non-Profit Contracting with Volunteer Drivers Creates Challenges with Scaling.** There are driver shortages, and it is unlikely that the contractor could support an increase in service hours while relying on volunteer drivers. Hiring additional drivers could create significant increases in operations costs.
- **Demand Response Service is Expensive to Operate.** Noting that BAT's contracted model is efficient and less costly than their peers, Demand Response service is expensive for a transit agency to provide. Collectively it accounts for over half of BAT's annual budget.
- **Identify Total Available Funding to Benton County.** In order to plan for a reliable and sustainable transit agency, it is important to understand if an agency is capturing the total amount of funding available, and whether an emergency fund exists for one-time overages or grant match opportunities.
- **Clarify Efficiencies in Collaborating with Corvallis to Provide Service.** Benton County contracts with the City of Corvallis to provide staffing for Benton Area Transit, and with this arrangement receives additional support from a Transportation Supervisor and Transportation Assistant, as well as knowledge-sharing with a peer. As Benton County considers whether to bring operations in-house, the details of this arrangement are needed to fully understand the costs and benefits of adjusting the current approach.

- **Balance Long Term Capital and Expansion Needs with Ongoing Operational Funding.** As Benton County plans for the future, understanding both capital needs (e.g. vehicle, facility, and equipment purchases), and expansion plans (e.g. 99W pilot) becomes important to ensure annual operating funds can provide the desired service levels over time while maintaining a state of good repair.

## NEXT STEPS

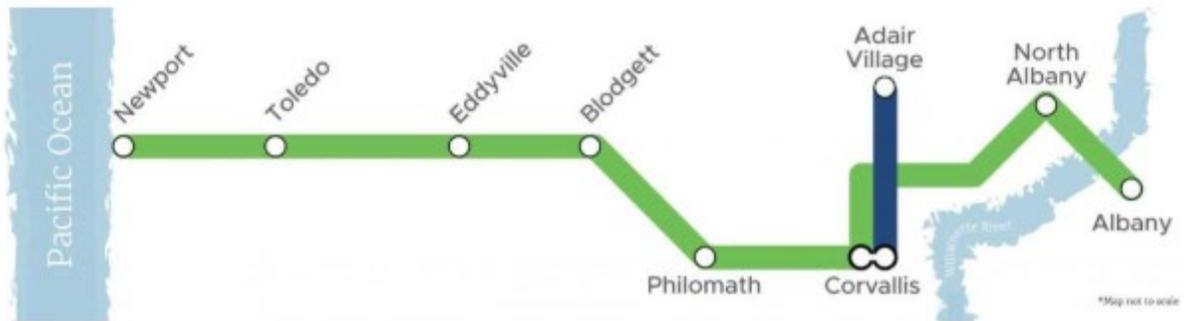
Based on the information documented herein, the PMT will conduct a workshop with County leadership to discuss and better understand what the County hopes to achieve by updating their transit service model. Additionally, the project team will interview up to three of the peer agencies to help the County understand other options for operational structures for their services for both Benton County and Corvallis Transit System.

## Appendix A. Transit Routes and Timetables

## COAST TO VALLEY EXPRESS (NW CONNECTOR)

The Coast to Valley Express is a regional transit bus service between Newport, Corvallis, and Albany provided through a partnership by BAT and Lincoln County Transit, and included in the NW Connector alliance of five counties. This route is shown in green in Figure A- 1, and the timetable is included in Figure A- 2.

**Figure A- 1. NW Connector**



Source: Benton County

Figure A- 2. NW Connector Timetable

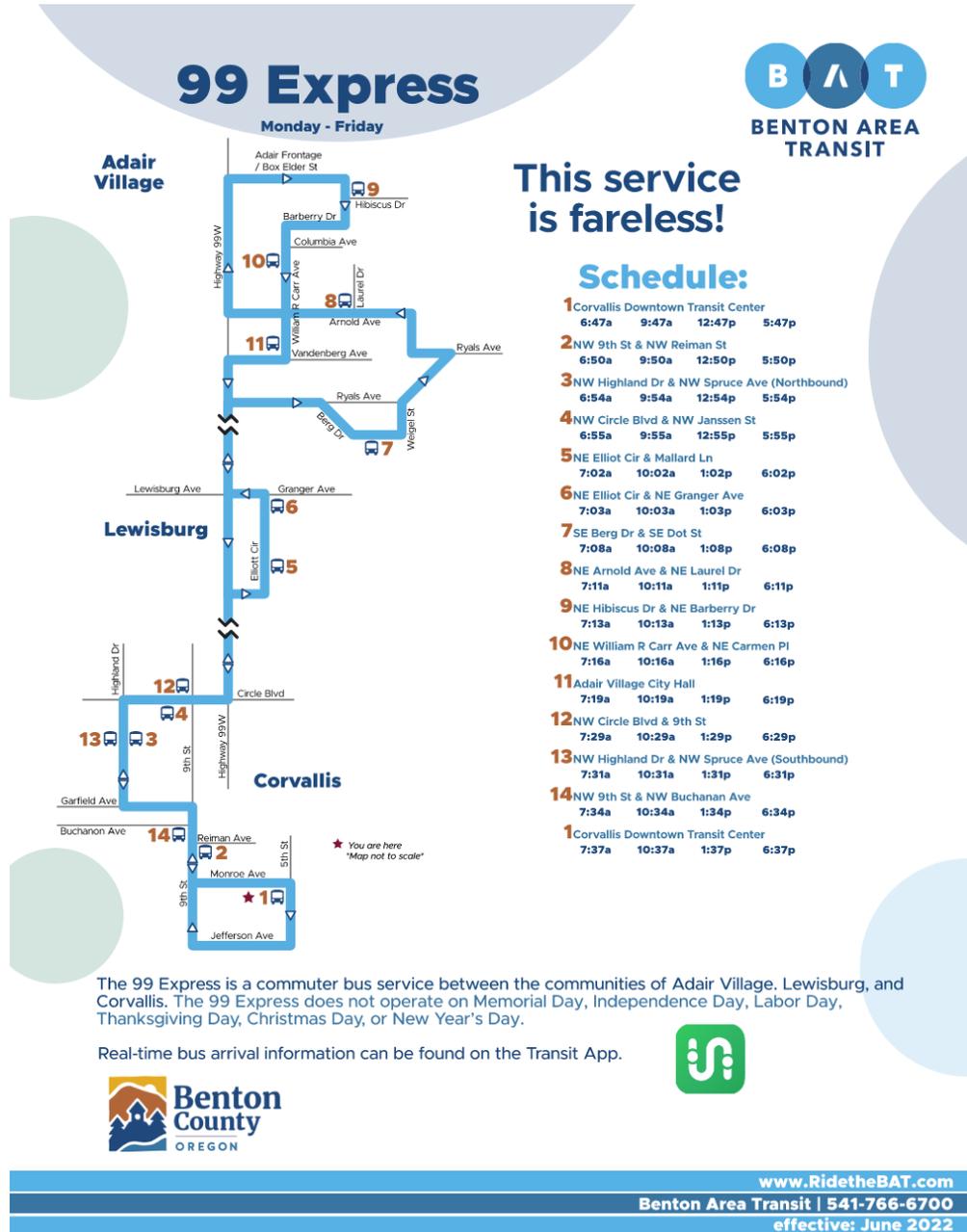


Source: Benton County

# 99 EXPRESS

The 99 Express is a bus service between Corvallis, Lewisburg, and Adair Village. This route and timetable are shown in blue in Figure A- 3.

Figure A- 3. 99 Express



Source: Benton County