



**County Administrator**

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**Date:** April 10, 2026

**To:** Benton County Board of Commissioners

**From:** Rick Crager, Interim County Administrator

**RE:** Benton Area Transit Project – Scope Adjustment

Over the last month, we have been reviewing public comments related to the Board of Commissioner's (BOC) directions to staff on investigating, analyzing, and developing an implementation plan for self-performing our Benton Area Transit Program (BAT). As we've stated publicly, this plan is being developed for the BOC to review this Fall so that you can determine if it should be considered during the 2027-29 budget process. Despite our best efforts to communicate this, it's clear from comments and feedback given to us by the public that individuals are receiving information from our current contractor that the implementation plan is already a done deal and that BAT services are either entirely going away or will soon be inferior to the services they receive now. This is very unfortunate and has caused a lot of unnecessary stress and emotion to our elderly and disabled citizens. In thinking about how best to consider current public comment in moving forward, I would like to suggest the idea of broadening our project.

As a preface to this idea, it's important to recognize that both current, as well as prior, professional and experienced BAT staff have been clear that our current contracted out model doesn't meet best practices. More specifically, the current model lacks adequate accountability of data and financial information; creates risk of non-compliance with federal and state rules due to contractors mission/practices not always adhering to program direction; assumes some support from a volunteer based model that increases risk associated with safety protocols and efficiency; and produces results (trips per hour) that are longest amongst our peers. As a result of this, there has been a strain on the relationship between the county and contractor which does not lend itself to working collaboratively to balance service with compliance or best practices.

To address this issue, the Kittleson Report recommended three alternative models for us to consider – self perform, contract out, and enhance interagency coordination. Enhancing interagency coordination is not an option at this time as the City of Corvallis is going through their own assessment of how they will operate their transit program. It's important to note that this outcome may also have a bearing on how our program operates related to paratransit services. Of the two remaining options, the self-perform model was chosen over the contract out model primarily due to the fact we have a very limited contractors' market in the mid-valley. This has been proven through past county Request for Proposals that have only rendered responses from our current contractor. More plainly said, we currently have no other contractual options, and as a result, program staff believe the current contractor really has no incentive to abide by the county's directives or best practices as there is no other service delivery option for us to consider. The lack of contract options is why you see most transit providers in Oregon using the self-perform model.

To maintain our current project path while also recognizing concerns shared through public comments, I would like to suggest the BOC consider asking staff to broaden the scope of the project to consider both a self-perform and contract out model. Again, we recognize that there is a limit on contractors to perform the service, however, we have opportunities in the future to enhance our current contract terms, expectations, and performance measures, as well as increase our level of expectations and communication on both contract and federal/state rule compliance. While our current contractor may be the only option under a contract out model, the county can consider developing an enhanced contract that accomplishes the following:

- Creates typical and standard payment terms that are based on billed services that are reimbursed as opposed to fixed payments that aren't tied to services provided.
- Requires routine reporting of program and service data and/or information to establish a higher degree of accountability and oversight.
- Implement performance metrics to measure contractor efficiency and effectiveness which could be tied to both financial incentives and penalties.
- Creates a process for internal audits/reviews that more regularly and robustly reviews compliance with the contract and ensures corrective actions are taken.
- Provides for a funding model that is based on paid or volunteer model that meets county safety expectations as outlined in contract.

Under this broadened project scope, we will continue to develop out a self-perform model so that if our contractor is not able to comply with our more enhanced contractual requirements, then we would have an alternative model available to us and not be in the position we are now with no other service options. This would help mitigate the risk that if for whatever reason our contractor could no longer provide service, the county would be able to call upon

an already developed self-perform model to continue providing critical transportation services to Benton County's elderly and disabled citizens.

By broadening the project work to include both the contract out and self-perform model, the current contractor still has the opportunity to continue as the service provider in the future, albeit under a newly developed contract model that meets best practices and ensures better accountability and compliance. In addition, an increased effort around program monitoring would be established by the county to more effectively administer contract compliance. At the same time, by continuing to develop an implementation plan for a self-performing model, the county will be better positioned to take on services should a contractor not be available or able to meet contractual expectations. In the end, we would be set up to ensure what should be the most important thing for everyone – ensuring high quality, accountable, and compliant services without disruption.

Please let me know if you have any questions regarding this idea of broadening the BAT project scope.