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DigitalCT staff’s hand-drawn map of the Oregon Transit Tour
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From the Editor

Transit Across Oregon

Click anywhere on the above image to view Editor-in-Chief Scott Bogren shares his reflections on the Oregon Transit Trail.
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Voices from the Community

In the Oregon Transit Trail edition of DigitalCT, the CTPodcast page features two important conversations. To subscribe to the CTPodcast, go to http://ctpodcast.blogspot.com/ or search “The CTPodcast” in iTunes. Click on the microphone beside each entry to listen.

Trillium Solutions’ Aaron Antrim, Talks Transit Technology

Aaron Antrim, Principal of Portland’s Trillium Solutions, joins the CT Podcast to discuss the evolution of transit scheduling trip planning and mapping technologies. “We work with transit agencies on making their systems easier to navigate,” says Antrim of Trillium’s goal. In this wide-ranging discussion, Antrim covers such vital topics as the power of multi-modalism, the future of real-time scheduling, the significance of industry-standard data formats and how Trillium’s work enables more responsive transit networks. During the podcast, Antrim references a key resource — The Many Uses of GTFS Data: Opening the Door to Transit and Multimodal Applications — that he authored along with CUTR’s Sean Barbeau. It can be accessed here.

Wheeler County Community Transportation’s Candy Humphreys

Candy Humphreys, Program Coordinator for Wheeler County Community Transportation, discusses her county’s all-volunteer transportation network, which she ran – one point – out of her own home driveway.
MAP-21 Reauthorization: Hurry Up...and Wait

By Scott Bogren

On Thursday, July 30, the Senate passed a six-year MAP-21 reauthorization — the DRIVE Act — by a vote of 65-34. The vote was a culmination of two weeks of vigorous work by the Senate to beat the current extension’s July 31 deadline with the hopes of the House taking up the bill. In the end, the House wouldn’t go for it, and it passed a 3-month extension on Wednesday, July 29 by a 385-84 vote and promptly went into recess, effectively forcing the Senate to accept another (the 13th, by my counting) extension of federal surface transportation legislation. Two hours after passing the DRIVE Act, the Senate also passed its version of the House extension (91-4), leaving only the President to sign the bill into law and thus establishing October 31 as the new MAP-21 extension deadline.

Though progress has been made, the hurdle that has stood in the way of reauthorization all along - namely, finding the necessary revenue to add to current Highway Trust Fund (HTF) receipts - remains. Both the House in its extension and the Senate in the DRIVE Act continue to augment current HTF receipts with a collection of budget tricks and non-transportation-related offsets. In other words, the key challenge to a sustainable, long-term surface transportation bill has not been dealt with and tax reform and/or a gas tax increase are not a part of either of these proposals.

A Closer Look at the Senate’s DRIVE Act

The DRIVE Act is a six-year bill that offers only between two and three years’ worth of funding. In fact, the Congressional Budget Office, in its assessment of the DRIVE Act, finds that it will be $51 billion short of what it authorizes.

Overall, the bill proposes to raise funding of public transportation from MAP-21’s $10.7 billion level in FY 2015 up to $13.4 billion in 2021. This growth is obviously welcome, but falls short of all estimates of need in the public transportation field. Key points in the DRIVE Act include:

- The key formula programs - Sections 5307, 5310 and 5311 - all see growth in the DRIVE Act. For more details, go here.
- Dedicated bus capital - a key CTAA objective in the MAP-21 reauthorization process - sees real progress with additional revenue dedicated to the Section 5339 program’s formula (including raising the state set-aside from $1.25 million per state to $2 million) as well as the creation of a discretionary or competitive program at $180 million per year with 10 percent of that total dedicated to rural operators.
- Operating flexibility - At long last, demand-response transit operators in urban areas with fewer than 100 buses will be afforded the same operating funding flexibility in their Section 5307 funds as their fixed-route counterparts. The DRIVE Act also employs language that CTAA helped craft to develop a Temporary and Targeted Operating Assistance program that will act as a safety net against widespread service cuts and raised fares in the occasion of an economic downturn like we experienced in 2009.
- Coordination - Two new coordination programs are found In the proposal’s Sec-
Small Transit Intensive Cities (STIC) - The DRIVE Act proposes to raise the current STIC set aside in Section 5307 from 1.5 percent to 2.0 percent.

Dedicated Bus Capital Amendment Fails to Make the DRIVE Act

Sen. Jerry Moran (R-Kan.) led an effort in the Senate to amend the DRIVE Act to increase dedicated bus capital investment beyond what the bill already calls for. This amendment (Amendment 2271) enjoyed a growing and bi-partisan number of co-sponsors including Senators Donnelly (D-Ind.), Blunt (R-Mo.), Udall (D-N.M.), Burr (R-N.C.), Murray (D-Wash.), Grassley (R-Iowa), Heller (R-Nev.), Merkley (D-Ore.), Fischer (R-Neb.) and Cantwell (D-Wash.). Though the amendment didn’t make it into the final version of the DRIVE Act, CTAA would like to thank Sen. Moran and all the co-sponsors for their hard work on behalf of dedicated bus capital investment.
CT Fast Mail

The perfect compliment to Digital CT is our bi-weekly E-Newsletter, CT Fast Mail. Delivering the latest news on transit policy from the nation’s capitol, developments from across the country, research and analysis publications and information on resources and technical assistance from the Community Transportation Association and other partners, CT Fast Mail is the most direct location for the most relevant news and updates in the industry.

And it’s free to sign-up! Simply send an email to fastmail@ctaa.org and you’ll be connected with the next issue of CT Fast Mail. In the meantime, view the latest edition at www.ctaa.org.
Looking south along the west bank of the Willamette River in Portland’s South Waterfront district.

No visit to Tillamook would be complete without a visit to the Tillamook County Creamery Association’s famous cheese plant.

The Yaquina Bay Bridge in Newport – opened in 1936 – is so iconic it also serves as the logo for Lincoln County Transit.

A mix of pine forests and rocky coves mark the Pacific shores between Tillamook and Newport.

Although the Ducks’ football team garners most national attention today, the University of Oregon’s track program is steeped in tradition, associated with legendary names like Bill Hayward, Bill Bowerman and Steve Prefontaine.
The majesty of Crater Lake deserves its own page, above in full panoramic view. DigitalCT’s team of Editor-in-Chief Scott Bogren (left) and Editor Rich Sampson (right) note the visit as the visual highlight of the trip.
A Series of Meaningful Connections

By Scott Bogren

It was the beginning of the end of a long week. All told, DigitalCT Editor Rich Sampson and I had covered some 800 miles visiting community and public transit systems across Oregon, stretching from the Columbia River to the north, Pacific Ocean to the west and just above the California border to the south. In four days we stopped in on eight operators — and yes, no two were the same.

Just before we headed to the Portland Airport to venture home, we had breakfast with Aaron Antrim and Thomas Craig of Trillium — a local technology firm dedicated to using the web to make public transportation simple. Somehow, the conversation turned to what Aaron called meaningful connections, as we discussed all that we’d seen the previous four days. Instantly, I knew I had metaphor for all that we’d seen.

Across Oregon, we saw all types of service across a varied geographic tableau. Each of the urban operators — Lane Transit in Eugene/Springfield, Cherriots in Salem/Keizer, Rogue Valley Transportation District in Medford and Corvallis Transit — were as unique as the cities they serve. Rural operators in Klamath Falls (Basin Transit), Newport (Lincoln County Transit) and Tillamook (Tillamook County Transit District) offered us the combined spirit of innovation and commitment we’ve come to expect from such operators and their leaders. In Portland, Ride Connection proved that expertly serving older adults, people with disabilities and non-emergency medical trips can be done with both efficiency and heart.

Along the way, some common themes emerged — shared characteristics that each of the systems we visited exhibited. I recount them here as they represent the best traits in community and public transportation, qualities to which all our readers should strive.

Customer Focus: Ride Connection’s Executive Director, Elaine Wells, didn’t need to tell us about the customer focus through which all of her agency’s operations revolve.
We saw it as we rode along with Lowell as he took a dialysis patient not home from her Monday three-hour session, but back to the hospital so she could be with her husband who had been medivaced to Portland from Roseberg in south-central Oregon after a traumatic automobile collision. Tillamook Transit’s Doug Pilant loves nothing better than taking a local passenger’s call and helping them connect with work or shopping on the system. In Klamath Falls, Basin Transit (BT) General Manager Ernie Palmer left our meeting to head to a local community board meeting — not long after he’d stressed that community involvement and participation from all BT employees was the key to the agency’s sterling local reputation. Cherriot’s Allan Pollack allocates eight hours annually for each employee to volunteer in the community during normal business hours. Whether it was passenger or community focused, these systems understand their customers.

**Trying Something New:** Change was a constant theme of our discussions in Oregon, and each of the systems we visited sought new approaches to evolve their operations and remain relevant in their communities. Lincoln County’s Cynda Bruce smiled broadly when talking about the regional rural connection service that greatly enhances her operation’s reach into cities like Salem and Portland, and all along the state’s Northern Pacific Coast through the the North by Northwest Connector. As soon as we got to Eugene, Lane Transit’s beautiful and efficient Bus Rapid Transit system (EmX) rolled by on its grassy, dedicated right of way, packed with standees headed to the University of Oregon. In Corvallis, home to the University of Oregon’s rival Oregon State University, residents have enjoyed fare-free transit since 2011, with a unique utility fee funding mechanism investing in the service. During our travels we heard, too, about great ideas that, for a variety of reasons, hadn’t worked. These setbacks, however, hadn’t dampened the spirit of innovation. Julie Brown, General Manager of the Rogue Valley Transit District summed it up: “If a need for transportation pops up in the community, we go after it.” Ernie Palmer simply had a framed sign on the wall by his office that stated: Excellence is not perfection.

**Remaining Resolute:** Several of the systems we dropped in on had lost local funding referenda, only to return to the voters and eventually win. The leaders we visited with often spoke about past service cuts, and then reinstatements or even expansions. Each understood that perseverance and determination weren’t just useful skillsets — they are absolute essentials. No sooner had Pollack recounted a series of setbacks the type of which could shutter some operations, than he noted, “We’ve gone through the tough times, now it’s time to capitalize on all the opportunities in front of us.”

The western half of Oregon (the part of the state we could realistically cover in a week) is wondrous. From the snow-capped majesty of Mount Hood looming over Portland on a warm spring evening to the sound and fury of the Pacific Ocean on a misty morning; from the unbelievably blue waters of Crater Lake to the Willamette River Valley’s bucolic splendor, we enjoyed it all. But most of all, we enjoyed the listening, learning and inspiration. More than 200 years ago, Lewis and Clark’s Voyage of Discovery ended in Oregon. Rich and I only hope that in our description of this transit voyage we adequately convey the dynamic ideas and dedicated leadership that we encountered at every visit on our eight-system tour. Meaningful connections, indeed. **CT**
Oregon’s Innovative Approach to an Alternative to the State Gas Tax

By Pamela Friedman

As Congress works on new surface transportation legislation replacing 2012’s MAP-21, the issue of how to pay for the highway and public transportation program remains the central challenge. Currently the pay-fors for the Senate’s DRIVE Act (see page __ for more – ed), as well as the offsets for the House’s 5-month extension, include a variety of gimmicks and schemes that actively seek to avoid answering the vexing question of how to properly invest in the nation’s surface transportation network that all agree is central to our economic prosperity. If the DRIVE Act were to pass as currently written, between 2008 and 2021 more than $100 billion in general fund revenue will have been transferred to the Highway Trust Fund.

In many of the surface transportation investment discussions – including those commissioned by federal law as part of both MAP-21 and SAFETEA-LU, vehicle miles travelled (VMT) has emerged as a sensible way to continue the user-pays investment stream in the transportation program. The state of Oregon has taken the VMT concept a step further, and actually launched a pilot program, the results of which will no doubt play a key role in future transportation investment debates.

Oregon is conducting a pilot study that assesses drivers for the miles they drive. Rather than a tax on fuel consumption, the vehicle miles traveled keys mileage fees to the amount of vehicle travel. State transportation officials view VMT fees as an alternative to the gas tax and are testing the concept’s viability.

State and federal gas taxes currently account for just over half of Oregon’s highway and transit funds. But even with a 2009 increase in the state tax, the fund suffered. Increasing fuel efficiency and hybrid and electric vehicle use means drivers are buying less gas, and thus generating less revenue. Newer vehicles, powered by electricity or compressed natural gas do not pay the gas tax because they do not use gasoline.

Supported by the state DOT and implemented on July 1, 2015, Oregon’s innovative new program is designed to gauge public opinion and to collect data for the state legislature to use in evaluating the program and planning for its possible extension. Known as OReGO, the program assesses participating volunteers a charge of 1.5 cents for each mile driven and issue a credit in return for the 30 cents a gallon state tax paid at the pump.

Oregon previously conducted two pilot projects to test road usage charging, resulting in legislation to create OReGO and launch it statewide. Oregon State Bill 810, passed in 2013 established the program and the per mile rate. The rate of 1.5 cents per mile was designed to be revenue-neutral for the state fuel tax and equates to the state’s current vehicle fleet fuel economy, which
Oregon’s Mileage-Based User Fees

is approximately 20 mpg. The per-mile rate for the pilot program will remain unchanged unless legislative action dictates otherwise. Revenues collected will be deposited into Oregon’s State Highway Fund, with 50 percent allocated to the state, 30 percent to counties and 20 percent to cities.

OreGO is open to up to 5,000 volunteers, who can opt out at any time. To date, 420 participants have registered. The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) continues to recruit volunteers through ads, public service announcements and social media platforms. The three private-sector partners from which participants can choose to manage their accounts are also actively recruiting volunteers.

Each vehicle will have a mileage reporting device (MRD) installed to collect data on how much it is driven and to where. Program volunteers can choose from Azuga, ODOT Account Manager powered by Sanef IMS Technologies America and Verizon Telematics to enroll their vehicles. Devices can be plugged into the vehicles’ on board data port by the driver.

The program is open all types of automobiles, but limits are placed on the number of miles per gallon per vehicle. Up to 1,500 participating vehicles can get less than 17 miles per gallon. The same number must get between 17-22 miles per gallon. Participating drivers will still pay the gas tax when they fill their tanks, but will receive a monthly credit or bill for the difference in taxes paid at the pump.

The concept is not without detractors however. Civil libertarians and economists have raised concerns because mileage tracking meters can track and record all private vehicle movement. To address these concerns, Oregon’s legislation allows volunteers to choose the tracking technology and provider most comfortable to them. For vehicles choosing to use GPS to count miles and determine out-of-state travel, information on vehicle location will not be reported to ODOT. Nor will mileage data be sold. Limits are also imposed on who can access the information. The data is destroyed 30 days after payment processing.

Others are concerned because the potential cost to small businesses that use vehicles to provide services, noting that the cost would be passed on to consumers. However, small businesses have been invited to participate and some are among the current volunteers. Future options to address business concerns may include discounts or adjustments offered to small business operators, or an assessment of a different per mile rate. These decisions will be made by the state legislature or a possible referendum.

The fairness of the VMT for rural drivers has also raised questions about the tax. Many assume that because rural residents drive longer distances, they do so more infrequently. Research actually indicated that the number of miles driven by rural residents is often less than those driven by urban drivers.

Oregon is the first of a number of states exploring the VMT option for transportation investment. Other states considering similar pay-per-mile programs include California, Colorado and Washington. Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Maine, North Carolina, and Wisconsin are also investigating the option.
ConnectOregon: Offering Transit Operators a Needed Boost

Throughout the DigitalCT’s Oregon Transit Tour, system leadership often pointed to the amount of local property tax investment they received as the key part of their local match strategy. Next, the discussion typically turned to how little the state actually invested in transit — and then they’d focus on ConnectOregon funds and how this funding source was invaluable.

“ConnectOregon money was a God-send,” said one, while another noted: “this project wouldn’t have been possible without Connect Oregon funding.”

The fact is that the state of Oregon does invest in transit. In 2012, the state spent $32 million (source: 2014 AASHTO State Transit Funding Survey) or $8.38 per capita or public transportation. Yet the Connect Oregon program, which is counted in that 2012 figure, has clearly made a difference when it comes to new buses or completing a facility.

In 2005 the Oregon state legislature created ConnectOregon to invest in multimodal transportation projects. The program’s goal was to invest in non-highway infrastructure projects that promote economic development. The legislature has invested $100 million in lottery-backed revenue bonds in each of the subsequent three biennia (2005-2007, 2007-2009 and 2009-2011), with an additional $40 million set aside of 2011-2013.

A competitive program, ConnectOregon has seen more than 400 applicants during its first four funding cycles with 203 projects being selected for funding (see list here).

The Oregon Department of Transportation is quick to note about the ConnectOregon program: “ConnectOregon projects have resulted in success from creating job opportunities to retaining major employers. The projects have also resulted in reduced transportation costs, barriers to economic development removed and improved safety.”
Ride Connection: Portland’s Hidden Transportation Gem

By Scott Bogren

With its extensive network of buses, light rail, streetcars and yes, even an aerial tram, Portland, Oregon offers local residents a variety of public transit options unlike any other in North American. The diverse collection of mobility options has transformed downtown Portland into a dense, walkable and sustainable city. But there’s more to what makes the Rose City and its environs transit-centric, a service that serves the rest of the city’s residents.

Outside of that downtown core, to the east in the city’s Gateway area, a recently finished, modern structure heralds the arrival of Portland’s hidden public transportation gem to its new facility. Now in its seventh home, Ride Connection offers a more diverse array of people-centered transportation services than downtown Portland has transit modes. From volunteer driving to travel training, fare relief to mobility management, non-emergency medical transportation to neighborhood shuttles, Ride Connection’s services touch thousands of Oregonians each day — always with an emphasis on customer service.

And if Ride Connection’s myriad mobility services seem smart, efficient and responsive, that’s likely due to the organization’s dedicated staff and to its CEO, Elaine Wells — a soft spoken, self-effacing and egalitarian leader who has been with the agency for a quarter century.

“It’s all about the customers here,” says Wells as she welcomed the DigitalICT team to Ride Connection’s headquarters on a bright, crisp April morning that most certainly belied the Pacific Northwest’s dreary reputation. “Without our customers, we might as well turn off the lights and go home.”

Volunteers Make it All Work

Ride Connection’s lifeblood is volunteers — to do the travel training, to take people to medical appointments and to wherever they need to go. In 2013-14, Ride Connection logged nearly 50,000 volunteer hours, amounting to over a million dollars in value.

“Volunteers are so important around here,” says Wells of Ride Connection’s constantly seeking new volunteer recruitment avenues,
“we better always be recruiting, constantly.” Currently, the system enjoys the good work of 450 volunteers, though Wells and her staff acknowledge they would like to have another 150-200.

“Volunteer recruitment never ends for us,” says Eileen Collins Mastel. “The need is ongoing and never changes, we need a constant flow of volunteers.” She estimates that Ride Connection needs five volunteers for every one full-time employee.

Keeping new volunteers flowing into the agency is a full-time job. Recently, Ride Connection has begun to use videos to spotlight the organization’s unique role in the Portland area, as well as for volunteer recruitment. The videos tell the agency’s overall story, as well as spotlight specific services like dialysis transportation.

“We use them [the videos] to tell our story,” says Wells. “They’re easy for people to access, can be shared via social media and have unique application.”

One such application is at Oil Can Henry’s — a quick oil change retailer with franchises across Oregon. In the greater Portland region, Oil Can Henry’s agreed to run Ride Connection’s videos in its waiting room as customers waited while their cars were being maintained.

“It’s an ideal audience for us,” says Eileen. “We’re targeting people who drive and have their own cars, so it’s perfect.”

A Dialysis Trip

Lowell Landgrebe is one such volunteer, driving for Ride Connection for the past 9 months. A retired former electrician from North Dakota, Landgrebe has resided in the Portland area for 20 years and enjoys the chance to give something back.

“This is my kind of thing,” says Landgrebe as he pilots one of Ride Connection’s new hybrid Hyundai automobiles with the DigitalCT team in the back seat — bound for a dialysis patient pick-up. “I really didn’t know...
Volunteering for 2-4 hours once a week with Ride Connection, Landgrebe hears from dispatch as we arrive at the Hollywood clinic that the patient is running a little behind schedule. He notes that this is not uncommon, and then talks further about how transporting people in such frail conditions as dialysis patients, in addition to transporting veterans, is why he volunteers his time.

“Our clients know that a volunteer driver will never leave them,” says Julie Wilcke, Chief Operating Officer and the person responsible for the vision around the dialysis project.

When the patient is ready, he heads into the facility, emerging in a matter of minutes with Tracy, who transfers into the vehicle’s front seat while her wheelchair is stowed in the car’s trunk.

Tracy’s back story is — as is often the case — a unique one. Her husband was involved in a terrible car accident in southern Oregon, and transported up to Portland for emergent care. Tracy came along and stays with him at the hospital. But she needs to go to dialysis twice a week.

“I learned about the transportation from Ride Connection at the dialysis clinic,” says Tracy with a weary smile. “They [officials at the clinic] told me we’ve got someone that can help you and I wasn’t going to argue. I haven’t met anyone at Ride Connection I haven’t liked. “ Landgrebe smiles broadly at that comment.

Ongoing Innovation

At Ride Connection, volunteers can choose to either use their own car, or one of the agency’s vehicles, including newly-acquired, lightly-used hybrid Hyundai sedans from a deal with Enterprise. The clean and shiny new vehicles fit in well at the less than a year old Glisan Commons location that now serves as home to the agency’s administrative and service staff, as well as space for Ride Connection driver and staff training that is also made available for community groups and nonprofit organizations.

“We have to look at vehicles like these because not only serve some of our customers very well, they also will lower our costs,” says Wells. Currently, Ride Connection has 117 total vehicles in its fleet strategically positioned throughout the region to respond to effectively to service assignments.

Very much by design, the new Glisan facility, which opened July 23, 2014, embodies both the spirit and utility of Ride Connection. With utilitarian cement floors, vibrantly
Ride Connection's new Glisan facility was designed to be welcoming and relaxing for employees (above) but also scalable to the community that surrounds it (above right).

Ride Connection includes an adjacent 60-unit senior housing building and Wells dreams of one day including a day care center. Ride Connection’s office is space is located on the ground floor, while the upper four floors feature 67 apartments for people just entering the workforce. Ride Connection secured a $2.75 million Connect Oregon grant for the project along with a $2 million Federal Transit Administration livability grant as a transit-oriented development, with local foundations, ODOT, and private donations filling out the remainder of the $5.2 million needed for Ride Connection’s facility.

“We hope that the seniors living in the adjacent facility become an excellent source of volunteers for Ride Connection,” says Eileen.

The weekend before DigitalCT arrived, Glisan facility staff teamed with community residents on a neighborhood cleaning event.

“It’s important that we meet with and work with community members so they’re comfortable with what we’re doing,” says Wells.

“It’s also a great way to find new volunteers.”

From Humble Beginnings

What’s known today as Ride Connection was founded in 1986 project of TriMet, Portland region’s urban transit system. The project was launched when a citizen’s committee formed by TriMet, recommended that a volunteer-based program might better meet the transportation needs of older adults and people with disabilities.

Then-Portland City Councilman Earl Blumenauer (today, an eight-term member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Oregon’s 3rd Congressional District) thought it would be a great idea to bring together human service transportation into a single entity and in 1988, Ride Connection was born with what it calls, “a vision to serve older adults and people with disabilities with a more adaptable, accessible service than traditional public transit.

In 1988, that project incorporated as a private, nonprofit organization named Volunteer Transportation, Inc., that strictly coordinated volunteers — it provided no actual transportation.

Ride Connection did 11,700 trips that first year. Last year, it provided more than 430,000 rides deploying a network of nearly 700 drivers, two-thirds of whom are volunteers.

“The relationship between TriMet and Ride
Ride Connection represents a unique blending of public and private resources and serves as a model of effective regional cooperation and collaboration,” says Wells.

The agency remained on this track for 13 years until 1999, when state funding permitted the agency to augment its volunteer trips with paid driver services.

“We became the central coordinating body for vehicle purchase and driver oversight at that time, which fundamentally changed the organization,” says Wells. “At that time, we changed our name to Ride Connection to better reflect what we do.”

Travel Training Writ Large

It was during this time that TriMet looked to reduce what it was spending on ADA complimentary paratransit, and thus Ride Connection’s RideWise program was born. Because both Ride Connection and TriMet’s paratransit were seeing swift growth, both agencies were immediately interested in travel training as a way to both help local residents better access the burgeoning fixed-route transit network, but also to reduce demand for more expensive paratransit service.

Mike Mullins is Ride Connection’s Mobility Manager and runs the RideWise program. RideWise, along with the agency’s information and referral services, has become a significant Ride Connection service that promotes independence by providing both information and training — including one-on-one travel training — based on an individual’s need and ability level.

“We look at each individual’s transportation landscape and determine which is the most cost-effective,” says Mullins. “I like to think of travel training as freedom because it’s about improving people’s lives and not just saving money.”

Last year, Ride Connection trained nearly 250 people to use Portland’s transit network — which the agency says resulted in more than 43,000 transit trips. The average training time exceeded 12 hours and the initial interviewing and assessments typically takes place in the customer’s home. Additionally, more than 30 Ride Ambassadors (another Ride Connection service) led more than 1,400 people in group transit trips with the goal of making them more comfortable in using transit while learning in a relaxed and fun setting.

“Teach them to ride and their lives really take off,” says Mullins.

Urban Transit in Portland? Stay Tuned...

As the lede to this article notes, Portland’s large-scale transit network – comprised of many forms of bus and rail – is recognized nationwide for its vibrancy and uniqueness, especially by news outlets. In our sister publication, RAIL Magazine, we’ve previously covered both TriMet’s WES regional rail line and the Portland Streetcar network.

With Community Transportation EXPO 2016 set for Portland (May 22 – 27, 2016), we’ll feature a full-length profile piece on TriMet and its role as the region’s fixed-route public transportation provider. Stay tuned for that story in our EXPO 2016 print edition of Community Transportation as well as in our Fast Mail electronic newsletter and promotional emails for EXPO next spring.

Additionally, EXPO 2016 will feature our first day-long version of the annual EXPO Transit Tour on Monday, May 23. The tour will visit the most distinctive elements of Portland’s transit network, including MAX light-rail, WES regional rail, the Portland Streetcar, the Portland Arial Tram, Union Station and the soon-to-be-completed Tilikum Crossing bridge (see photo below), the nation’s only bridge dedicated solely to transit, bicycle and pedestrian use. EXPO 2016 will also include site visits to operations facilities of both Ride Connection and TriMet.
Ride Connection has also brought this suite of travel training services to 13 local school districts with 20 separate programs designed to help students better access and utilize transit. Local residents with developmental disabilities are another key target audience of the travel training services. Often, answering an individual’s transportation challenge is just the beginning.

“Sometimes the call for transportation is just the first, priority need that has arisen,” says Mullins. “Issues like food, security and health care come up and help us close the gap between social services and transportation.”

**NEMT: An Uncertain Future**

Non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) has long been a staple of Ride Connection, even though they have not been a Medicaid service provider. Previously, TriMet brokered those trips, but all of that changed with the advent of the Affordable Care Act and the state of Oregon’s adoptions of a Coordinated Care Organization (CCO) structure. Sixteen different CCOs have now been approved by the Oregon Health Plan. In Ride Connection’s Portland region, that means a new broker, Access2Care.

The agency provides a good deal of NEMT service but to non-Medicaid clients. The nature of the current structure makes it difficult for Ride Connection to increase its involvement in Medicaid transportation programs. For Wells and her colleagues, the urgency and importance of professional, responsive mobility in the continuum of care means they’re unwilling to cut corners when lives are on the line.

“We would like to participate in the Medicaid-supported service but it’s very difficult given the constraints of how the program is currently structured,” says Wells. “It’s a catch-22, because we provide high-quality, customer-focused service but that’s very difficult to do when lowest cost is the primary factor in selecting providers.”

**Leadership in Dialysis Transportation**

Since its inception, Ride Connection has linked local residents with life-sustaining dialysis transportation. More recently, the agency has been involved with the CTAA-Administration for Community Living’s Inclusive Transportation Planning program, developing tools for dialysis education, outreach, advocacy and, of course, volunteer recruitment.

Ride Connection’s Chief Operating Officer Julie Wilcke, who is leading the organization’s dialysis transportation efforts, says, “We know that transportation for outpatient hemodialysis patients is problematic at best. Missed rides and late rides create great distress both mentally and physically for patients, which can limit positive outcomes.”

Using an inclusive planning model, Ride Connection is asking some of its dialysis patients to help design educational and outreach materials with a target market of other transportation providers in the region, as well as dialysis clinics, social workers and patient support groups. A multi-disciplinary advisory council was formed to manage the project, further offering valuable insight and advice.

An initial product that emerged from its dialysis transportation project is a video that Ride Connection now uses to both introduce the valuable role transportation plays in assisting patrons with end stage renal disease, as well as to recruit more volunteer drivers. Yet even producing the video proved a challenge.

“The video was produced and filmed in dialysis units to show the actual conditions that patients face,” says Wilcke. “Getting the dialysis companies to agree to letting us make the video was our greatest challenge. It wasn’t until a social worker with connections made it happen in one company that the video was even possible.”

In the end, Ride Connection’s goal with
this innovative project is simply to continue to improve dialysis transportation for patients, to document successes and to expand available dialysis transportation service.

Developing Ride Connection’s Business

To help Ride Connection continue to thrive and with the objective of reducing the agency’s dependence on public funding sources, Wells hired Emily Motter in 2014 to lead the organization’s fundraising efforts.

“Fundraising is all about relationships,” says Motter.

With Ride Connection’s active community involvement throughout the Portland region, Emily immediately understood that the organization enjoyed literally thousands of these so-called relationships, but too often without a funding perspective. Rather than engage in cold calling, she began trying to build on these existing, and almost always positive, relationships.

“We’re trying to build a culture of philanthropy,” says Emily, “one where potential donors already understand what they’re supporting.”

The Enterprise vehicles sitting in the Glisan Commons facility’s parking lot are tangible proof of the potential power of developing these business relationships. Emily is actively looking to build on that success.

“It’s not hard to get interest from people and organizations in wanting to get involved with a successful company like Ride Connection,” says Emily, whose advice on working with potential partners is deceptively simple: “If you’re doing more than half the talking, you’re talking too much.”

Tackling the Transportation Network Company Challenge

Under Wells’ leadership, it’s clear that Ride Connection takes the concept of partnership development very seriously. The agency is exploring its options with the Transportation Network Companies — Lyft and Uber who have entered the Portland transportation arena.

Last Spring, after much wrangling, the city of Portland agreed to allow the Transportation Network Companies — mainly, Uber and Lyft — to begin operating in the region. The official launch of the TNCs (often erroneously called ride sharing systems — they're more accurately know as ride hailing services) was the Friday before the DigitalCT team arrived in Oregon, under a four-month pilot project. A key tenet in the agreement was that TNC services must meet a standard of service for people with disabilities — one that was both “reasonably prompt” and “equitable.” That’s where Ride Connection enters.

“We heard from both Uber and Lyft right away,” recalls Wells. “We are exploring ways we might work with both companies. We believe there are excellent opportunities in both directions. Currently, Ride Connection is training Uber drivers for accessible service and providing weekend accessible service to Lyft. However, discussions continue on how we can work together to meet the needs of our customers.”
Ride Connection

A Culture of Caring... and Success

From providing TriMet fare grants with local nonprofits to coordinating the work of some 450 volunteers; from operating fixed-route community shuttle buses to teaching people how to ride transit, Ride Connection is a fully fledged public transportation clearinghouse that exists to make vital connections happen — in a wide variety of ways.

The DigitalCT team’s day-long visit revealed a readily apparent organizational culture of customer service, judicious risk taking, embracing change and of, simply, caring.

“In many of our services we are the choice organization to ride with because of our customer service,” says Wells.

A significant portion of Ride Connection’s success and growth can be attributed to the innovation of both Wells and her able leadership team. This is clearly a team that relishes a challenge and that is not tied to the status quo. Wells tells a story about when the organization reached all of the goals in an annual strategic plan. Rather than celebrate, she wondered aloud whether they had aimed high enough.

“It’s not failing,” says Wells, “only learning.”

Mullins points to Ride Connection’s culture of collaboration as one of its bedrock strengths: “Working together, we can be nimble enough to develop the right solutions and stumble on internal bureaucracy.”

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The Community Transportation Association of America has the answer to communications challenges. Our team of communications staff has 50 years of transit experience focusing strictly on effective, cost-effective communications. From speeches and presentations to media relations to social media - and much more - CTA’s communications team is ideally suited to serve the entire public and community transportation industry in this most vital endeavor. Contact Communications Director Scott Bogren at bogren@ctaa.org or 202.247.1921 to get started!
Julie Stephens is the Transit Manager for the City of Sandy as well as the Oregon Delegate to the Community Transportation Association’s State and Tribal Delegate Council. She shared her responses to the following questions with DigitalCT.

DigitalCT: Give us your system’s vital stats: ridership, routes (if applicable), employees, drivers, buses, etc.

Stephens: The City of Sandy operates two fixed routes (Sandy Area Metro, SAM), that become commuter routes outside of the city, to our nearest neighboring communities, Gresham and Estacada. There, connections can be made to TriMet accessing the greater Portland area. We also operate a general public dial-a-ride in the city limits that provides complementary ADA service. Subject to same-day availability, the dial-a-ride will provide trips up to 3-miles from Sandy. Direct (transferless) premium service is provided, subject to eligibility, for seniors and people with disabilities to medical appointments in the greater Portland area.

The fleet consists of 11 vehicles; four 35’ low-floor transit buses; one Freightliner; two cutaways (one low-floor), two accessible mini-vans; and one four-wheel SUV, which we have needed during snow events.

We contract operations with RoJoy Services, Inc. (a DBE), which has approximately 13 full-time drivers, dispatchers and administrators for SAM. The contractor also operates our neighboring service, Mount Hood Express, managed by Clackamas County. They operate from our facility, sharing staff and even interlining a few routes. The total staff for both projects is 23, with approximately 17 full time employees.

Since taking over as transit provider from Tri-Met in 2000, Sandy Transit grew quickly from one bus on one route, providing 77,000 rides in the first year to 11 vehicles on two commuter routes and one dial-a-ride service that provided over 250,000 annual rides between 2007 and 2013 while the service was fareless. In 2013, due to funding changes and to provide equity for businesses which pay a transit tax, a modest fare was implemented. That, with the economic rebound and lower gas prices, has had a significant impact on ridership. Ridership is now trending toward 140,000 annual trips.

DigitalCT: Tell us a bit about the history of the service: when it started, how it came about, the general arc of it’s path to today...
in January 2000. It began with with one route between Sandy and Gresham operating hourly 13 hours a day, six days a week. Monthly ridership jumped from 1000 to 3500 immediately, hitting 77,000 trips in the first year.

Within six months, we had a local dial-a-ride and by September, half-hour headways were added during peak-hours. In 2001, Sandy received the Oregon Transit Association’s Innovative Use of Transportation Alternatives Award.

In July 2003, with Job Access funding, the second route began to the neighboring rural community of Estacada. In 2004, we assisted with the Mountain Express route to the villages of Mt. Hood.

**Stephens:** Sandy transit was housed in the Sandy Senior Center, as that's where transportation needs were first recognized. Seniors needed transportation options as they became unable to drive, especially out of the small town for special medical services. The fixed route offered easy commute options to Gresham and Portland as well as new educational opportunities at Mount Hood Community College in Gresham. I had grandparents tell me that because of the free bus service, they were able to pay the tuition for their grandchildren to continue their education.

The services quickly outgrew the shared office space at the senior center. We began looking for funding opportunities for an administration and operations facility. The city’s public works department also needed a new facility. A joint project to co-locate the operations was envisioned.

**DigitalCT:** What community partners, elected officials, groups, etc. are important supporters of your organization?

**Stephens:** In 2003, I became a board member of the Oregon Transit Association (OTA). I developed relationships and learned to reach out to our State and US representatives. While working internally with other city staff and officials in 2006, I provided this background from the attached Field Ops Facility History:

Transit relies largely on the support of grant funding for capitalization and operations. This
The project has been promoted for several years as a joint project with Public Works. We have enlisted many allies and champions. Sandy’s transit operating facility was first identified in the Oregon Department of Transportation’s Public Transit Plan that helped birth the vision of ConnectOregon (see page 16 – ed) in 2002. In that same year, we furthered the project with Clackamas County’s assistance through the regional transportation plan at Metro and the Joint Policy Advisory Committee on Transportation, where the project was eventually given regional priority. In 2003, Sandy Transit became a board member of the Oregon Transit Association, where we enlisted the association and our colleagues’ help with our Congressional Delegation. By 2006, Representatives Blumenauer and DeFazio secured earmarks of $575K for the transit portion of the joint project in SAFETEA-LU over a four-year period from 2006-2009. Senators Smith and Wyden were responsible for another $375,000 in the 2006 Appropriations Bill. At the transit department’s request, Representative Patty Smith helped keep transit in the Connect Oregon bill. What was to have been the final piece of funding was secured when the project was selected for $800K in funding during the highly competitive Connect Oregon Process. Clackamas County promised to find alternative funding for a higher ranked project in order to pull us into the top tier of funded projects.

I have found collaborations are essential to our success. It starts locally with our Transit Advisory Committee made up of volunteers including seniors, people with disabilities, the Chamber of Commerce, business owners, City Councilors, and neighboring agencies, to county, regional, state and federal partners. We have been a CTAA member since 2000 when I took the CCTM training. Though I didn’t qualify to become certified, I was new to transit and needed the training and the information. I did get the CCTM along the way and became the Oregon Delegate in 2013.

**DigitalCT: What innovations are you most proud of? Alternatively, what are some ongoing challenges?**

**Stephens:** I am proud of many accomplishments including the Sandy Operations Facility for Transit and Public Works that resulted from the efforts described above. We moved in in 2008. It has given us all a comfortable place to work and take pride in. The new Transit Center at Centennial Plaza was completed in 2013 and is the first time the drivers and the public have had access to restrooms at our transit facilities. I’m proud to share these facilities with our neighboring provider, interlining the services we can. Two years ago we partnered with Clackamas County, the U.S. Forest Service, and private partners on the mountain to expand transit service to Timberline Lodge in the Mount Hood Wilderness with funding from the Federal Lands Access Program. SAM is the link from Sandy to TriMet in Portland. Its initial success has secured two more years of funding.

Sustainable funding is a challenge we are currently working on.

I am most proud, however, of the quality of our service, of the exceptional people who show up everyday, bringing their best heart to serve and make transit an essential, and well loved, part of the community.

**DigitalCT: What does the future hold?**

**Stephens:** I am retiring in August. I leave with a deep sense of satisfaction in the success of this transit system, its role in the community and those who will see it into the future. Andi Howell has been the transit assistant for over two years, became a CCTM last year and is prepared, as the new transit manager, to take SAM to new relevance. She will bring technical innovations such as WiFi on buses, electronic media, and lead this great team to serve their community. CT
Community Transportation

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Connecting Northwest Oregon: A Heroic Effort

By Rich Sampson

There’s a story arc common to cartoons and super heroes – that when a set of individual interests combine their efforts together, the result is a force that can do incredible things. In these stories, that group is usually comprised of five people and they’re easily identified by their trademark colors until the super hero they’ve fashioned is greater than the sum of its parts. These kinds of stories have a special resonance to Americans as they exemplify a spirit of unity and achievement, one community and public transportation providers know all too well.

In Northwest Oregon, the result of a similar coming together of individual actors doesn’t exactly produce a super hero, but instead an interconnected regional transit network uniting the state’s coastal communities with its largest population centers in the Willamette Valley. Like these fabled comics, the North by Northwest Connector network is comprised of five partners whose individual elements are distinctly coordinated by colors.

During the second day of our Oregon Transit Tour, we made our way from the Willamette Valley to the Oregon Coast and spent some time with two of the mobility providers at the heart of the North by Northwest Connector system: Tillamook County Transportation District’s The Wave operation and Lincoln County Transit.

Tillamook County Transportation District

Dropping down from the Coast Range mountains through winding, heavily-forested woods on State Route 6, the vibrant agricultural region centered around Tillamook spreads
out in much the same manner as we witnessed when encountering California’s Central Valley on the 2009 edition of this trip. Even by Pacific Northwest standards, this area gets a lot of rain – owing to its proximity to the ocean – which makes for verdant grazing pastures for the dairy cows that produce the milk that becomes the varieties of cheddar and other cheeses for which Tillamook is known nationwide.

The small town of Tillamook itself – population 4,935 as of 2010 – is the heart of the region, which draws Willamette Valley residents to the beaches in the summer and farm workers throughout the year. Serving Tillamook and its surrounding namesake county is The Wave transit network administered by the Tillamook County Transportation District (TCTD).

According to TCTD General Manager Doug Pilant, CCTM, the system came together in the mid 1990s from an “unstructured hodgepodge of volunteer and social service programs” in the area. A 1994 study by the Tillamook Economic Development Council recommended exploring new mobility options for the county. Those organizations offered sporadic service from Tillamook to surrounding communities such as Wheeler, Oceanside and Pacific City. Then in 1996, the state of Oregon approved investment to initiate trips from Tillamook over the mountains to Hillsboro, Beaverton and Portland. Greyhound had abandoned intercity bus service to the coast in the mid 1980s. Operating several times a week, but not daily, riders of the route – which utilized borrowed buses – informally dubbed it The Wave.

After realizing the benefits of direct service within and beyond Tillamook, a group of citizens formed a group known as Friends of the Wave to not only maintain support for the 75-mile line to Portland but to combine it with the existing local options and expand service across the 1,000-square mile county. The group’s passionate efforts convinced the county’s Board of Commissioners to create TCTD in 1997. Although county and state sources provided minor contributions to the new system to match federal funds through the section 5311 and 5311f programs, its fares were high and service was infrequent. The Commissioners suggested the Friends of the Wave build support for a county-wide revenue measure to support expanded service and lower fares, but few expected such an effort to be approved by voters. And it wasn’t – the first time, in the spring of 1998. But by that November’s elections, more than 60 percent of Tillamook County voters approved a $.20 per $1,000 property tax to deliver investment to TCTD, which also formalized The Wave as its service brand.

“It was really that citizen-led work of the Friends of the Wave that built support for transit in Tillamook County,” says Pilant, who’s overseen the agency since January 2012 and notes the leadership of the system’s initial General Managers, Sherry Clements, Heather Ornellas and Matt Mumford. “Reve...
nues from the property tax meant lower fares, better vehicles, improved service quality and expanded service coverage and frequency, which made transit a reliable option for many people.”

Although the routes assembled into what became The Wave provided reliable local service with route deviation within Tillamook and nearby communities and intercity access to Portland and the Willamette Valley, residents in more remote stretches of the county sought access to mobility as well. Accordingly, TCTD established its demand-response, curb-to-curb Dial-a-Ride service in 2000 using a mix of volunteer and paid part-time drivers. The county-wide service joined The Wave’s four local fixed routes that have been gradually expanded in reach: one operates within Tillamook, another heads west to Netarts and Oceanside, one reaches north to Manzanita and Cannon Beach and a southerly line connects to Lincoln City.

Today, TCTD provides more than 138,000 annual trips using 22 vehicles operated by 30 drivers organized through the Amalgamated Transit Union and another 11 volunteer drivers in their own vehicles. Two dispatchers and five administrators oversee the system. The system’s ridership growth – which marked its one millionth rider in January 2012 – is staggering considering the demonstration projects in 1996 were carrying 20 passengers a month, but hardly surprising given the enhanced service made possible through local property tax investment. In addition to initiation of Dial-a-Ride service and expanded coverage of The Wave routes, it has expanded service to seven days a week, increased trip frequency and began non-emergency medical transportation. In 2012, the Downtown Tillamook Transit & Visitor’s Center opened – where The Wave routes converge – and a new administration and maintenance facility. Combined, it’s a substantial footprint for community mobility in a county with a total population of 25,000.

“The Wave and TCTD have an outsized presence here, and that’s because it has always been a community-led system,” explains Pilant, who started his career in transit as an intern with Rogue Valley Transit District (see page 43 – ed.) and also spent time with Salem-Keizer Transit (see page 61 – ed.), as well as with systems in California. “This is my passion and it’s easy in a place where there’s a real sense of ownership by the public.”

Lincoln County Transit

After spending the drizzly morning with Doug and his colleagues at TCTD and a quick stop at the Tillamook County Creamery Association’s factory for lunch, we turned south on U.S. Highway 101 towards Lincoln City and Newport. Passing scenic Pacific Ocean overlooks, small fishing villages and paper mills, we made our way to Newport to meet with Cynda Bruce, General Manager of
Connecting Northwest Oregon

Lincoln County Transit (if that name sounds familiar, we profiled another Lincoln County Transit – the one in New Mexico – in our 2012 version of the Transit Tour – ed).

Bruce has been affiliated with Lincoln County Transit (LCT) since 1988, first serving as a volunteer driver then as a paid driver before gradually working her way to the agency’s top post. The operations that eventually would become LCT first emerged in 1969, when Lincoln County supported a single van to serve each of its incorporated cities once a week for trips to medical care, social programs, shopping and other appointments within those communities. While those local shuttle trips were appreciated, requests to the County Commission began to accumulate for service more often than once a week and also for trips between communities. In 1990, a demonstration grant from the state of Oregon established regular, general public transportation in the form of LCT, with deviated fixed-route service running north and south from Newport along U.S. Highway 101 to Lincoln City and Yachats, as well as east-west service from Newport to Toledo and Siletz. Much like other operations in Oregon, the system utilized a blend of paid and volunteer drivers.

Similar to the experience of their neighbors in Tillamook County, a concerned group of citizens combined their voices to form a political action committee to promote dedicated, local revenue to bolster the LCT network. And, like their counterparts to the north, a property tax measure – $.0947 per $1,000 in this instance – was approved by voters in November 1996 on the second try after a first attempt was unsuccessful. The local investment ensured the continuation of LTC’s three local fixed routes – referred to as Transit Intercity service by the agency – along with two loop routes in Lincoln City and Newport as well as county-wide Dial-a-Ride service.

“Everybody wanted public transit and we’re always thankful there’s local money,” says Bruce. “People always seemed to understand the connection between transit and lowering unemployment recidivism and health care costs.”

Reducing recidivism is a theme recurrent among mobility providers that focus on employment transportation and a concept at the heart of the Community Transportation Association’s Joblinks Employment Transportation Center since its inception in 1991. Continued access to dedicated local revenue allowed the system to explore new and better ways to serve the region. It forged a partnership with the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon to provide direct service to tribal members, offering connections between the Tribes’ Spirit Mountain Casino in Grand Ronde and the Chinook Winds Casino in Lincoln City and also contracting with LCT to provide a full route – 10 hours per day, six days a week – for tribal transportation needs. Meanwhile, all tribal members can ride any LCT service free of fare. At the same time, LCT worked with the Veterans Administration clinic in Newport to better coordinate appointments and discharges for veterans using LCT to access care. Meanwhile, LCT established a new option for area residents to reach medical

Vital Stats
Organization: Lincoln County Transit
Manager: Cynda Bruce
Founded: 1969
Annual Ridership: 325,000
Number of Vehicles: 25
Websites: http://www.co.lincoln.or.us/transit

In Their Own Words
LCT General Manager Cynda Bruce discusses the variety of ways the system connects Lincoln County.
Connecting Northwest Oregon

Today, LCT operates 25 vehicles in revenue service – all body-on-chassis style – to provide more than 325,000 annual trips. That effort can be seasonally challenging, as activity swells in summer months as surfers, swimmers and beachgoers flock to Newport and Lincoln City. In addition to serving out-of-town visitors, numerous local workers depend on the system to reach jobs serving tourism-related businesses – hotels, shops and restaurants.

Climbing the Ladder: The North by Northwest Connector

Stretching from north to south along the Oregon coast from the Columbia to Rogue rivers, the small urban areas of Astoria, Cannon Beach, Tillamook, Lincoln City and Newport are mirrored by the state’s larger population centers along the Willamette River: Longview/Kelso, Portland, Salem and Albany. Separating them is the 60 million-year old Oregon Coast Range, with Marys Peak topping the range at more than 4,100 feet. As population has grown along both corridors over the past several decades, finding way to connect the two regions has gained higher priority.

That work began with a series of then-uncoordinated and locally-oriented connections initiated by both TCTD and LCT. The former’s launch of intercity service from Tillamook to Portland in 1996 marked the first publicly-supported option to traverse the Coast Range. LCT followed suit in 2007 with its non-emergency medical transportation service to Corvallis and then its partnership with both the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde (CTRG) and the Confederated Tribes of the Siletz Indians (CTSI) and began to explore service to Spirit Mountain Casino. That effort ultimately produced the Salmon River Highway Travel Options Plan, with involvement from Salem-Keizer Transit and Yamhill County Transit. The CTSI prepared a care in Corvallis in 2007, travelling beyond the county limits for the first time. According to Bruce, the key to these broadening options was the time the organization spent in cultivating relationships.

“We have fantastic relationships with these partners, but you have to maintain those personal relationships,” says Bruce. “If everyone can remember that whether they’re a tribal member, a veteran, a client, people have more important things to do than worry about how programs work. That’s our job to figure out.”
Connecting Northwest Oregon

Section 5311(f) application for intercity service between Lincoln City and Grand Ronde, with CTSI and CTRG providing local match investment.

Meanwhile, TCTD’s and LCT had begun to coordinate transfers between their routes in the small outpost of Otis and The Wave’s northern route ended not all that far from the southernmost stop on the Sunset Empire Transit District’s (SETD) line between Astoria and Cannon Beach.

With momentum established by The Wave and LCT’s east-west service over the mountains – as well as SETD’s similar route between Astoria and Longview/Kelso – could a more intentional, connected network of mobility options close the gaps in northwest Oregon? Yes.

In 2011, Lincoln, Tillamook and SETD partnered with Columbia County Rider (CC Rider) and Benton County Rural Transit (see page 56 – ed) to create the Northwest Oregon Transportation Alliance to improve connectivity in the region. The effort also resulted in the creation of a separate, nonprofit organization – the North by Northwest Transportation Foundation – to oversee fundraising to support the connected network, governed by a board of community members from the five counties represented by their respective transportation systems. The significance of such a widespread collaborative effort cannot be understated, especially in a largely rural region. Indeed, the partnership was recognized by the National Association of Counties with its 2013 Achievement Award.

Both the TCTD’s Pilant and LCT’s Bruce credit three key players in making the Alliance a reality: former Oregon Department of Transportation Area One Regional Manager Carole Richardson and Mary McArthur of the Columbia-Pacific Economic Development District, who were the creative impetuses for the concept and the late Nehalem Mayor, Shirley Kalkhoven, the chief political champion for the effort.

“The combination of ideas from Carole, Mary and Shirley’s political will allowed the Alliance to transition from a concept to reality,” says Pilant, who serves as the Chair of the Connector’s Board of Directors as well as the Treasurer of the Oregon Transit Association (OTA), and TCTD functions as the fiscal agent for the Alliance, a Chapter 190 Entity under Oregon law that functions much like a joint powers authority might elsewhere.

“Those ladies really led the charge,” adds Bruce, the Alliance’s Vice Chair and OTA Board of Directors member. “None of us wanted to let them down. As a result, we got along well, there were no territorial issues.”

In 2011, the Alliance received a one-of-its-kind, three-year demonstration grant from the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) through its Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant Program. The investment allowed the Alliance to operationalize and

Q&A: Carole Richardson

Among the original contributors in the development of a collaborative approach to regional mobility in Northwest Oregon was then-DOT Area One Regional Manager Carole Richardson, PE – now of PLANGENEERING, LLC. We asked Carole to share her recollections of how it all came about – ed.

1) What was the original impetus behind the Northwest Oregon Transit Alliance idea?

For me, a seed was planted when ODOT hired me to manage their Northwest Area office in Astoria in 2003. I learned pretty fast that Oregon’s coastal communities are at a disadvantage when competing for highway improvement funding. Coastal traffic issues are seasonal, unlike the year-round issues the larger inland cities deal with. It’s hard to make the case for major highway investments that might only be needed for half the year.

Oregon’s coast is a phenomenal place to visit, and a significant share of the coastal economy is tourism-based. Most of the communities I worked with were very concerned about the impact of traffic congestion on the visitor experience. But at the same time, they were highly protective of their small town character and were less than enthusiastic about highway expansion. So there was this challenging catch-22.
North by Northwest Connector is a five county alliance of transit agencies committed to providing seamless service between northwest Oregon communities.

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North by Northwest
OxO Connector

be driven
to read
to text
to chat
to take your bike
to surf
to relax
to travel the coast
to connect
to make a difference

greater by degree
less carbon emissions
equals less environmental impact

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While I was working for ODOT, planning for the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial was also underway, and the Astoria area was anticipating a big influx of visitors. The Sunset Empire Transit District in Astoria had temporarily stepped up transit service during that time to improve visitor access to the new Lewis and Clark National Park and other popular destinations. That got me wondering if there was a more permanent transit approach for seasonal visitors that could be done at a much bigger scale.

2) How did you see it all working and what benefits did you see it producing?

Before the project, travel by car was really the only viable option for most visitors. The individual transit agencies were focused mainly on serving disadvantaged populations, and travelling across county lines on transit was either not easy, or not possible at all.

Our main goal was to lay the groundwork for a sustained change in how seasonal travelers could move about and experience the Oregon Coast. We wanted to create and raise awareness of a region-wide system with a single identity, shared fare system, and a coordinated marketing campaign, without having to create a new regional transit agency. Ultimately, we hoped that the idea would reduce fossil fuel use, help to mitigate traffic issues and promote transit as an asset for rural economic development.

3) What were the obstacles to making it happen?

Transit agencies had little available time, money and staff resources, and were necessarily focused on their own immediate service area needs. The biggest obstacles were simply the lack of a forum for coordination and partnering, and the lack of seed money to take a first step.

4) What actually happened to take it from an idea to reality?

Well, it's a story of stars aligning. After I left ODOT for private consulting I was working a lot on grant and funding strategies for various clients. In 2009, I ran across a funding solicitation from the US Department of Energy. The grant was for large energy efficiency programs, like community-wide energy improvements to buildings. But buried in the 72 page notice, there was also a brief statement that transportation projects to reduce fossil fuel emissions could be considered. Alarm bells went off.

There was a very tight grant application deadline and the application itself was unbelievably rigorous, requiring a ton of technical analysis for project justification. Since it was a national solicitation I also knew there would be serious competition for the money. I almost round-filed it. But first I called Shirley Kalkhoven, who was the City of Nehalem's Mayor and a real mover and shaker in northwest Oregon. She was also a great mentor and one of the most practical and politically astute ladies I've ever known. If she told me I was crazy, then maybe I could quit thinking about it.

Shirley was on her way home from Portland and happened to be driving through Astoria when I reached her. Coincidentally I was also in Astoria at the same time for a weekend trip, so we met up at the Wet Dog Café. I showed her the USDOE notice, and we talked about the long-shot chances, the create the North by Northwest CONNETCOR, an initiative to connect the various county-based operations. In addition to an extensive branding and outreach effort designed by Denver-based firm Noble Erickson to clarify the agencies existing routes and connections, a series of new linkages were established:

- Extending The Wave's south route from Otis to Lincoln City – a change that helped to increase ridership on the line by more than 150 percent within a year;
- Expanding The Wave's north route to Cannon Beach and establishing a direct connection with SETD’s service to Astoria;
- Improved connectivity between TCTD, SETD and CC Rider between Longview/Kelso, St. Helens and the Portland region;
- Creation of the Coastal Connector service between Lincoln City and Salem in conjunction with Salem-Keizer Transit, an expansion of LCT’s partnership with the Confederated Tribes to serve Grande Ronde through the Salmon River Highway Travel Options Plan. Although Salem-Keizer Transit was initially planned to operate the service, that agency was unable to and ODOT awarded the grant to LCT. TCTC ultimately joined the Salmon River project to operate the service – which exceeded LCT’s operational capacity – and operations began on Mach 2, 2014;
- Initiation of the Coast-to-Valley Express
Connecting Northwest Oregon

from Newport to Albany, enhancing LCT’s service from Newport to Corvallis that previously only focused on non-emergency transportation;

- Sunday service to all CONNECTOR and many local routes; and

- CONNECTOR three-day ($25) and seven-day ($30) passes (one round-trip from the Willamette Valley to the coast and unlimited travel between Astoria and Yachats.

The new options established an integrated, multi-tier, vertical and horizontal mobility network – supplemented by Amtrak’s Cascades service through the Willamette Valley as well as private intercity bus routes – creating a ladder-like matrix of connectivity throughout the region. With services that are all at once frequent, reliable and easy to understand, the CONNECTOR appeals to a wide array of travel needs, from essential options to reach employment or health care to tourists looking for a way to reach key destinations along the coast or in the valley and college students and faculty accustomed to living less dependent on private automobile ownership.

Beyond delivering the investment to launch the CONNECTOR, the DOE grant also allowed the Foundation breathing room to line-up sustainable funding from an array of sources, including advertising, regional visitor passes, donations from businesses and charitable foundations and Oregon’s energy tax credit program, among others. That diverse, community-driven portfolio of revenue streams pairs well with an effort whose primary mission is connecting community needs with new resources. Going forward, the Alliance is enhancing its website and other real-time information platforms, improving frequency and amenities for riders and investigating new connections to connect with Lane Transit District in Eugene (see page __ – ed) as well as new links further south along the coast.

“It’s not about any director of a system, it’s about the passengers and the services they need,” Bruce says of the CONNECTOR mission. “We haven’t needed to reinvent the wheel here. We already have the leadership

5) What do you think of the idea now that it’s a tangible outcome?

I think they’re a terrific model for regional transit coordination!

There will always be more to do, but the five partners are doing a great job of sustaining their regional connections and service. When we were in the startup phase, there was some speculation that that the whole program might dissolve after the initial grant money was gone. But that didn’t happen. Clearly the right people are at the helm, and they’ve got the determination to keep things moving forward. The group is starting to work on a long-term management plan to increase ridership, prioritize expansion activities and improve the resiliency of their partnership. I can’t wait to see what’s next for them!
and core systems in place. This is about putting them together.”

**A Different Kind of Heroic**

While the weaving, multi-colored lines of the North by Northwest CONNECTOR may not immediately resemble a comic book hero at first blush, there’s no question that heroic work is underway by the Tillamook County Transportation District, Lincoln County Transit and their neighbors in mobilizing northwest Oregon. By their powers combined, trips from Astoria to Albany and Longview to Newport are delivered quicker, easier and more enjoyably. And like most heroic efforts, the job of connecting people, communities and resources never ends.

“You always wish you could do more,” says LCT’s Bruce. “We’ll wake up tomorrow, find out how much transportation is needed and figure out a way to get it done.”

In 2015, CTAA and its subsidiary, the Community Development Transportation Lending Services (CDTLS) will be unveiling Night Train Finance, an all-encompassing finance product for transportation and economic development lending designed to ensure available capital at competitive interest rates. Night Train Finance will offer organizations, communities and individuals finance products that link together transportation, economic development, jobs, environmental issues in innovative ways.

Look for additional information on Night Train Finance in CTAA’s FastMail on the **CTAA website** in the first quarter of 2015, or contact John Hoeveler at hoeveler@ctaa.org or 202.415.9682
Basin Transit: Excellence Served with a Heavy Dose of Common Sense

By Scott Bogren

Early in the Oregon Transit Tour, whenever the DigitalCT team mentioned that Basin Transit in Klamath Falls was on the itinerary, invariably people smiled and said to be sure to say hello to Ernie. It led one to wonder what lied ahead.

It wasn’t until we sat down in Basin Transit General Manager Ernie Palmer’s nondescript offices, just outside downtown Klamath Falls, that we understood. Here was a successful rural public transit operation (Oregon’s most successful when judged by size of budget) that most certainly bore the unmistakable imprint of its leader.

A tall man with a long but well-kept greying beard and piercing eyes, Palmer pulled the chair out from behind his desk and, joined by Basin Transit Assistant Manager Starla Davis, engaged the DigitalCT team in a spirited recitation of his views of rural transit management, the perils of today’s regulatory climate and the importance of community involvement.

“Rural transportation survives on being an integral part of the rural community,” said Palmer. “It’s important that people like us, even if they don’t use us.”

Last year, plenty of local residents used Basin Transportation vehicles, which provided more than 380,000 trips along its five fixed routes (two trunk routes and three feeders) using five buses operating 6:00 a.m. to 7:30 p.m., Monday through Friday and 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Saturday. Fares on the system’s 30-foot buses is $1.50. The system also operates two smaller, ADA complimentary paratransit vehicles as well as being the owner-operator of the Linkville Trolley, providing historic tours in downtown Klamath Falls.

About Klamath

Located at the southern tip of Klamath Lake along the Link River, Klamath Falls has a population of 21,000 — but don’t search too long for the eponymous falls, which are...
really more a set of rapids on the city’s south side. Additionally, the immediately surrounding suburbs have a population of 24,000 — the city and suburbs combined make up the Basin Transit service area. The city is the county seat of Klamath County, which has a population of 41,000 and sits just 25 miles north of the California border and 65 miles south of Crater Lake National Park. It is definitely a high desert locale, averaging only 16 inches of annual precipitation.

Given its location, it is not surprising that timber and lumber production was once the primary industry in Klamath Falls. Today, the Sky Lakes Medical Center is the city’s biggest employers, with the Oregon Institute of Technology (OIT) not far behind. Kingsley Field Air National Guard base is another major employer and local residents have grown accustomed to the comings and goings of the base’s F-15 fighter planes.

Palmer notes wryly that Klamath Falls is not in the Willamette Valley that the majority of Oregon’s population calls home and that includes Portland, Salem and Eugene. “Not everyone wants to live in Portland.”

As the region has changed and adapted economically, students have become an increasingly important customer group for Basin Transit — particularly those attending Klamath Community College and OIT. During spring and winter breaks, for example, Palmer and Davis acknowledge that ridership dips. March, in fact, is the only month in which the Basin Transit Board doesn’t meet. The system offers a $54 annual pass to students.

There was a time when Basin Transit served Crater Lake National Park — an 180,000 square-mile park featuring a stunning dormant volcano now filled with translucently blue water that attracted more than half a million visitors in 2014. Palmer says the 65-mile one-way trip wasn’t feasible to continue.

Basin Transit began operating in Klamath Falls on November 3, 1980 with four buses and 25-cent fares. The system has, from its inception, been constituted as a special services district under Oregon law and six months after it launched voters approved a property tax levy in the amount of 38 cents per thousand dollars of assessed value — a figure that was locked in at 48.2-cents in 1994 when a state measure locked in such rates.

“We were fortunate to get locked in at that high rate,” says Palmer, who joined the system as General Manager in 1992 coming over after a stint in Muskegon, Mich. With little state investment in rural transit, this direct commitment of local property taxes provides Basin Transit with ample local match funds. In fact, Palmer thinks they’re one of the few rural operators that could immediately match any increase in federal rural public transportation funding (Sect. 5310 and 5311).
“It’s the federal money that’s tough for us,” says Palmer, “not the local share.”

Local support for Basin Transit is something that Palmer takes very seriously, as it accounts for nearly two-thirds of the agency’s budget. He cites 1993 and some tough local economic times when the timber industry lagged as the timeframe for when the system and its staff learned to get out in the community and change people’s perception.

“We stake our reputation on community outreach,” says Palmer as Davis nods affirmatively.

This isn’t some idle pledge that sounds nice, but has little reality behind it. No, at Basin Transit community outreach is something in which all employees — beginning with Palmer — play a key role. During the DigitalCT team’s brief stay, Palmer and Davis bring up, literally, dozens of community connections the system actively maintains, everything from Boy Scouts and Little League to the local symphony and Air Force Veterans groups.

“We already have significant and excellent local financial support,” says Palmer, “so these local connections are much friendlier because we’re not always asking for money.”

Basin Transit’s community involvement sometimes takes the agency in unique directions — like sanding local streets during winter weather or plowing a hill-side road for the police department.

“Between Starla and I, there’s nobody we don’t know and work with,” says Palmer. “I really believe that it is who you know and that it is a real responsibility to be active parts of the Klamath Falls community.” On cue, Palmer let’s us know that he’ll have to cut our conversation short because he has a Senior Center board meeting.

While many public and community transit providers currently find themselves in a capital pinch, Basin Transportation’s Assistant Manager, Starla Davis notes: “We have an equipment reserve here, because we are such good stewards of public money.”

Recently, Basin Transit took delivery of two new vehicles that it purchased through funding from the Area Committee on Transportation and Connect Oregon investment (see page 16 — ed).

Basin Transit Field Supervisor Terri Callen took the DigitalCT team on a brief tour of the system’s Klamath Falls operations, highlighted by a visit to the Downtown Transit Center at 7th and Pine — a 30-minute pulse point where multiple routes come together. On cue, three buses — each with passengers already aboard — appear for a brief dwell period, which give the DigitalCT team a chance to talk with one of Basin Transit’s drivers, Tom Wyland, who’s been with the system for 25 years.

“This is such a rewarding job,” says Wyland. “You really see everyday the good
Basin Transit Service

we're doing in the community.”

Basin Transit’s headquarters is a functional space where common sense and economy reigns. While waiting for our meeting and tour to commence, we couldn’t help but hear the office’s Secretary, Candice Shepherd, doing double duty as a paratransit dispatcher.

It’s the kind of place where a framed sign on the wall saying, “Excellence is not Perfection” seems perfectly in place.

With his brand of pragmatism readily on display, it can hardly be a surprise that Palmer has a tough time dealing with some of the bureaucracy (which he is quick to note is ever-increasing) he must endure.

“It’s a crying shame that rural transit’s service orientation has changed so dramatically to a regulatory orientation,” says Palmer, noting that in the 1970s when he began in the field it was 95 percent providing transportation and 5 percent complying with state and federal requirements — a ratio he says has been upended.

Palmer sums up the points he’s trying to make by using a movie theatre metaphor. “They say we can go to the movies, but they give us separate funding for a ticket over here, and then popcorn over here. Why not just give us the entire amount and let us put it all together and trust us to make the best decisions available.”

Long-term success and sustainability are clearly viewed through a prism of community involvement and viable local relationships at Basin Transit. Palmer and his able staff wouldn’t have it any other way.

“We work at it,” says Palmer of the strategy BTS has employed to weave itself so thoroughly into Klamath Falls. “There’s no other way to go about it.”

That pragmatism — one that the DigitalCT team has come to expect when visiting rural public transportation operators — is obvious from the moment one enters the Basin Transit headquarters and is well represented in the no-nonsense way in which the agency serves the city and surrounding suburban region. CT

Summers of Transit Tours Past

Summer’s a great time for a road trip and the staff of DigitalCT (and Community Transportation before it) have been hitting the road each year since 1999, visiting transit providers across a given state. Here’s where we’ve been before (click the link to view):

2014: Georgia | 2013: Minnesota | 2012: New Mexico
2000: Texas | 1999: South Dakota & Indiana
Rogue Valley Transportation District: Making the Impossible...Possible

By Scott Bogren

Pulling up to the Rogue Valley Transportation District (RVTD) headquarters in Medford, Oregon on a bright, sunny afternoon, American flag flapping in a light breeze in front of a pristine facility, the DigitalCT team found an operation at a crossroads — dealing with recent service cuts while planning future expansion. A small framed sign behind RVTD General Manager Julie Brown’s desk summed it up nicely: “It’s kinda fun to do the impossible.”

With a city population of 75,000 (the full metropolitan service area population is just less than 200,000), Medford is Oregon’s fourth most populous urban area. The RVTD serves the greater part of Jackson County that includes not only Medford, but also the cities of Ashland, White City, Phoenix, Talent, Jacksonville and Central Point.

Though not impossible, the service area aligns itself in a difficult-to-serve linear geography that limits RVTD from deploying typical small-urban transit service patterns such as a grid or spoke and hub. Perhaps this explains the system’s prevailing philosophy: an atypical operation for a unique service area.

“We’ve all worked hard to build this system,” says Brown, who began with RVTD 19 years ago as a TDM planner and who has served as general manager for the past 8 years. “It doesn’t happen overnight.”

And the RVTD is just that, a true transportation system that incorporates fixed route bus operations, paratransit service, non-emergency medical transportation, a phenomenal number of bicyclists and more. It’s an urban system with a rural flavor. It’s definitely the first system the DigitalCT staff has encountered that has offered skateboard safety training as part of a safe pedestrian skills program.
History to Today

In 1974, the private transportation company that had served Medford and Jackson County — Mount Ashland Stage Lines — succumbed to bankruptcy after a decade of service. A year later, voters in the area approved the creation of a public transportation district, but saddled the system with a local finance mechanism, a property tax, that was locked at the low rate of 17-cents per thousand dollars in assessed value. Finally, in July of 1977, public transportation returned to the region in the form of Rogue Rapids Transit, a three-bus operation. The system was renamed the RVTD in the early 1990s.

With the DigitalCT team traveling around Oregon, it became quickly apparent that Oregon transit operations, both rural and urban, do not simply turn to the state for local share. In the two biggest areas — Portland and Eugene — the systems rely on a local payroll tax. Many of the others, including those we visited in Tillamook, Newport, Klamath Falls, Medford and Salem — rely on a local property tax, but each operator has a different rate, which greatly impacts the system’s finances. The rates were locked by the state in 1994.

“We first passed our rate in 1975 and our rate (17-cents/per thousand dollars in value) is one of the lowest in the state,” says Brown.

To raise local funds, RVTD has to not only pass a referendum, it must attract more than half the district’s voters — a so-called 50-50 resolution (meaning both a majority of voters supporting the concept and a majority of the voters voting). Last November, RVTD has a 13-cent per $1,000 in assessed value increase fail, forcing the system to curtail Saturday and evening service — the same service it had increased to provide three years prior — as well as forego some additional service increases in White City and Rogue Community College.

“I think we fell victim to referendum fatigue,” says Brown. “A local library referendum passed which created an ‘I'm not going to pay for anything more’ attitude from voters.”

“We’re still suffering though the tail end of the recession here in Southern Oregon and Jackson County,” says RVTD Operations/Maintenance Manager Tim D’Alessandro.

The challenge, agree all the RVTD leadership, is finding local match for federal dollars in an area that has a growing population, is in a clean air non-attainment area and that has an increasing student population. RVTD’s Senior Planner, Paige Townsend notes that 87.5 percent of the region’s employers are within a half-mile of the system’s routes, but only 69 percent of the residences can say the same, with anticipated urban growth boundary expansions (Oregon’s way of managing urban containment), residences accessible to transit are forecast to drop to 38.2 percent if service cannot keep up with the pace of growth.
After the system launched its service in 1978, it became readily apparent that hub and spoke or grid service patterns just wouldn’t work. From its inception then as a dial-a-ride operation, RVTD deployed a lot of looping service. Ridership grew and the operation peaked at 12 routes — some with 15-minute headways in downtown Medford — in 1999.

In 1996, RVTD opened the first Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) facility in the state of Oregon, using Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funds. The facility was open to everyone — including the general public.

“We were, in many ways, the CNG guinea pigs,” says Brown. “Today our entire fleet is CNG and the cost savings we achieve allow us to put more service on the street.”

A Connect Oregon III award of more than $700,000 in 2013 helped upgrade the CNG facility.

In FY ’14, RVTD’s ridership was 1.5 million — which includes a loss of nearly 450,000 trips due to the service cuts the system and service area had to endure — along seven routes using 23 buses. Townsend estimates that 10 percent of the ridership is seniors, and another 10 percent is college students (the service area is home to both Rogue Community College and Southern Oregon University).

Fares on RVTD buses are $2, with a reduced fare of $1 for people 62 years of age and older, and for children aged 10-17. Children younger than 10 ride free.

“We’re definitely seeing the trend of millennials driving less, getting their drivers licenses later,” says Townsend. “These younger community residents think it’s just easier to take the bus.”

She also understands that access to the system is not as easy as RVTD leaders would prefer — citing a lack of sidewalks, shelters and other rider enhancements. “We’re working on ensuring that people have a respectable place to wait for the bus,” says Townsend who is quick to remind that all of RVTD’s trips begin and end with another mode and thus pedestrian access to the system is paramount.

One area in which RVTD excels is the use of the bicycle racks that grace the front of every one of its buses. Monthly, the system averages more than 9,000 bikes transported — an extraordinarily high figure given the region’s population — highlighting the agency’s growing role with younger riders.

“We’ve become a real bridge for bicyclists,” says Brown. “We help them access not only the trails in the region, but also jobs and school.”

RVTD’s success in attracting bicyclists points the agency squarely in the direction of...
Rogue Valley Transit District ridesharing, an emphasis that dovetails nicely with the state’s recently introduced Oregon Transportation Options plan, which envisions a safe, affordable and efficient transportation system for residents, employees and visitors. Currently, the system has adopted I-carpool software, which has been adopted statewide.

“We’re not just transit,” says Brown about RVTD’s services. “We’re transportation.”

In addition to its bike rack success story, RVTD is actively exploring ridesharing and vanpooling options that incorporate Transportation Demand Management (TDM) principles, multi-modalism and traditional coordination.

In response to nonprofits desire to offer a low-cost pass, RVTD created the Helping Hands Pass. This pass can be distributed directly by case managers to clients and is good for 6 trips. During the recession RVTD distributed approximately 10,000 20-ride punch card passes to service agency’s at no cost. And while the program was managed well, RVTD leadership knew this model was not sustainable and worked with the agencies to identify a low cost option agency’s could purchase and that was fewer rides. So far nearly 1,000 of the Helping Hands passes have been distributed turning a little profit for RVTD and much needed assistance in the community they serve.

A Commitment to NEMT

Since 2001, RVTD has been a primary non-emergency medical transportation provider in Southern Oregon, contracting with the Oregon Health Authority to connect Medicaid-eligible individuals with the local health care network. Brown and her staff have long understood the intrinsic connection between transportation availability and better health outcomes.

As the state has transitioned its Medicaid program away from a traditional fee-for-service model to Coordinated Care Organizations (CCOs) — 15 such organizations now cover the state and serve nine out of 10 Oregon health plan members — RVTD has emerged as a transportation broker in seven southern Oregon counties, with 38 providers in its network. The system finds itself now working with two CCOs (with several additional CCO deals in the works) brokering more than a quarter million NEMT trips annually.

“We use the lowest cost, most appropriate provider in these trips,” says Brown. “These programs are set up to help people, but too often transportation is an afterthought.”

RVTD also provides driver training and what Brown and her staff call a certainty of quality in the transportation service. But this isn’t to say that the state’s transition to CCOs has gone off without a hitch.

“They [the CCOs]don’t understand both what transportation really is and also how it can help them meet their goals,” says Brown.

RVTD leadership expects growth in its NEMT brokerage services of 3 to 5 percent annually for the foreseeable future.

Looking to the Future: BRT

Speaking of the future — predicted population growth and the overall linear nature of the region’s population density have RVTD leaders looking to a future bus rapid transit line connecting Medford, Phoenix, Talent and Ashland to supplement the existing Route 10 line. In fact, they have already launched a community engagement process focused on just such an expansion.

The corridor already serves approximately 5,500 boardings per day and is used by many riders an inter-city commuter route even though travel times can be 45 minutes or longer, when driving the same distance can take 20 minutes. The service needs are justifiable for BRT and now RVTD is working on getting the community excited about the prospect.
Townsend cites CUTR’s Transit Boardings and Estimation Tool (T-BEST) as being a transit planner’s dream. While bigger transit providers might have a robust modeling tool, most transit providers around the country do not. After being denied a grant in 2009 through the MPO because of a lack of data, Townsend realized that to play in the big leagues the agency would need a way to provide verified ridership data. She found this in the TBEST model and it has been calibrated to work for RVTD, one of the first small urbans in the country to do so.

Nothing Is Impossible

RVTD leadership is committed to navigating the system through it’s current rough waters and to continue to upward trajectory that has characterized the system since it’s inception nearly 40 years ago.

“We have to do right by the community,” says Brown.

In many ways, RVTD has emerged during the past two decades as a model for the multi-faceted, multi-modal, full service transportation network that many communities seek. This is not a traditional transit system mired in traditional service patterns. The agency’s work in NEMT, in ride sharing, in serving local bicyclists as well as its burgeoning BRT plans speak to this dynamism.

Brown sums it up simply: “If it moves, we go after it.” CT

CTAA’s Small Urban Network is working to improve federal transit legislation and policy for smaller cities. If you represent a transit operation in a small-urban community, please contact Scott Bogren at bogren@ctaa.org and be sure to get on our SUN mailing list. We’ll be hosting our first-ever SUN Conference August 12-14 in Denver, Colo. Free registration is still open!
Q&A: Josephine County Transit’s
Scott Chancey

DigitalCT: Give us your system’s vital stats: ridership, routes (if applicable), employees, drivers, buses, etc.

Chancey: Ridership: 196,000 on fixed and commuter routes, 24,000 on paratransit and demand-response services; Vehicles: 20 (13 needed for peak pull-out); Drivers: 22, 3 administrative personnel

DigitalCT: Tell us a bit about the history of the service: when it started, how it came about, the general arc of it’s path to today

Chancey: The system began in 2000 following the departure of a previously privately-operated route between downtown Grant’s Pass and Rogue Community College. Josephine County assumed the service and considered it as a last resort, safety net option for those who couldn’t afford their own vehicles. It was supported through some CMAQ revenues. In 2009, annual ridership was 83,000.

DigitalCT: What is the system’s role in the community: who are you taking and where are they going?

Chancey: Twenty percent of all riders are going to Rogue Community College with passes available through the school. We participate in Oregon’s non-emergency medical transportation brokerage, including many dialysis trips and other health care locations. Additionally, we carry commuters between Grants Pass and Medford, stopping in Rogue River and Gold Hill as requested with five weekday roundtrips. Like most systems, we are crucial for seniors and people with disabilities.

DigitalCT: What community partners, elected officials, groups, etc. are important supporters of your organization?

Chancey: As a county agency, we have good relationships with other Josephine County departments. We also have a strong relationship with the city of Grant’s Pass. There’s an advisory committee that includes riders and representatives from area agencies. We receive good support from the Oregon Department of Transportation’s Region Three office.

DigitalCT: What innovations are you most proud of? Alternatively, what are some ongoing challenges?

Chancey: We’re most proud of our complete system redesign that took place in 2010. Previously, it was a pulse system. We transitioned to a more grid-style network with 16 timed transfer points. We now get where we need to go quickly and directly. Within a year, we doubled our ridership. The mobility level provided is the same. We operate with a skeleton administrative staff and pour every dollar we can into operations.

Scott Chancey is the Transit Program Supervisor for Josephine County Transit located in Grants Pass, Ore. His answers below are transcribed from a phone conversation with DigitalCT Editor Rich Sampson – ed.
The biggest challenge is actually the growth in ridership. We don’t want to under-perform now that we are viewed by the county as an asset. We experience wear and tear on our vehicles because we use them heavily. But it’s a good problem to have.

DigitalCT: What does the future hold?

Chancey: We’re looking into larger vehicles to carry more riders. The county and its residents need to have a discussion on funding. We lack a dedicated local match. That could involve becoming a transit district or involving the city of Grants Pass. A new transit master plan is underway (the last update was in 2000). We’ll be asking what do you want transit in Josephine County to look like and it will involve lots of educational components.
Lane Transit District

Oregon’s Second-Largest City Sets the Standard for Small Urban Transit

By Rich Sampson

In preparing for a transit tour across Oregon, many of those from whom we sought advice were just as quick to recommend a visit to Lane Transit District (LTD) in Eugene as they were the nationally-known examples found in Portland. On our last full day in the state, we made our way to Oregon’s second-largest city – home to the University of Oregon (UO) – and found every reason to consider those recommendations well-founded.

Operating in a region with among the highest per capita rates of transit use, LTD is a fundamental element in the way people around here understand their community, which is to say possessing something a bit remarkable for a place of its size. With transit options ranging from its pioneering Emerald Express (EmX) bus rapid transit (BRT) network to a vibrant employer-purchased transit pass program, LTD fits in well in an area where people expect a bit more of themselves and their community.

EmX: Right-Sized BRT

As we waited to meet with LTD General Manager Ron Kilcoyne at the agency’s offices in the Glenwood section of Eugene-Springfield, a number of the system’s staff were hustling about, preparing for a visit from a group of transit professionals, planners and elected officials from Omaha, Neb., in town to get a first-hand look at EmX. LTD usually hosts several fact-finding missions from small-urban communities interested in BRT each year. What makes this iteration of the enhanced bus concept especially noteworthy?

Since its inception in 1970 – like many transit providers – assuming bus routes previously operated by private companies – the agency served a growing number of riders on its fixed-route and RideSource paratransit services throughout Lane County. With bus lines radiating out in all directions from Eugene and neighboring Springfield, LTD drew a strong mix of UO students, faculty and staff, commuters, people heading to medical appointments and an assortment of other purposes.

As demand grew – particularly on Route 11 along the Willamette River corridor through the UO campus between the downtown cores of Eugene and Springfield – the system sought
out ways to not only serve more people but to serve them better.

In mid-to-late 1990s, Route 11 ridership was regularly operating with crush loads while buses often bunched up due to traffic congestion and passenger loading. LTD and Lane County studied the corridor’s potential for higher-capacity transit options, considering light-rail, BRT and enhanced fixed-route service, among others. In 1996, BRT was selected as the preferred mode and construction commenced, creating a designed route for limited-stop buses that took advantage of the existing wide medians on Franklin Boulevard along the north side of the UO campus to create dedicated, bus-only travel lanes, attractive, permanent stations with level boarding and a traffic signal priority system that would move vehicles more quickly along the route.

The four-mile, $25 million EmX Green Line opened for service on January 14, 2007. New infrastructure constructed for EmX reduced trips from 22 minutes on Route 11 to 16 minutes and boosted ridership by 60 percent within a year. In 2009, LTD opened the 7.8-mile Gateway Line EmX extension from downtown Springfield north along the newly-constructed Pioneer Parkway and dedicated lanes on other roads to reach Sacred Heart Medical Center at River Bend. Today, more than 2.8 million riders board EmX buses each year, impressive considering Eugene’s population stands at 160,000 with another 60,000 in Springfield, averaging more than 9 rides a year for every resident in both communities. EmX

LTD General Manager Ron Kilkoyne shares his thoughts on the system’s innovative tendencies.
Lane Transit District

The Competitive Edge: Making Community and Public Transit the Best Alternative for Medical Transportation

Today there is never-before-seen complexity in the non-emergency medical transportation field. Limited funding combined with growing patient loads has states seeking intermediaries that can control costs through competition. Community and public transportation providers must become efficient, safe, cost-effective and accountable to maintain these important medical transportation services. The Community Transportation Association, in response to requests from its members, is introducing a new initiative this fall —the Competitive Edge — which will give community and public transit providers the tools, resources and benefits they need to make them central players in this new medical transportation environment. Here’s what the Competitive Edge encompasses:

1. The Competitive Edge Training
CTAA has developed an all-new training course that combines and emphasizes the following topics:
• Value: Determining the true cost of service
• Pricing: Lowering your costs to be competitive
• Negotiation: Winning through persuasion
• Accountability: Building a recordkeeping and reporting process
• Training: Focusing on the patient

2. Valuable CTAA Member Benefits
As part of the Competitive Edge initiative, the Association has developed a cohesive set of benefits to ensure your operation is efficient and cost-effective:
• The Insurance Store: Through an exclusive agreement with Newtek, members can access the best coverage at the lowest price.
• Energy Program: CTAA members pay less for fuel and energy with our FleetCards program and other energy management initiatives.

3. Access to the Transit Industry’s Best Resources and Training
You don’t need to have all the answers, you need to have access to them when you need them. Here’s how the Competitive Edge helps:
• Peers and Information Sharing: CTAA will put you in contact with your industry peers, where you can learn from experience
• On-Line Library and Resource Holdings: The most timely resources, news and research, all housed on CTAA’s medical transportation website
• CTAA staff: Our professional staff are always available to offer analysis and insight

Valuable CTAA Member Benefits
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• Energy Program: CTAA members pay less for fuel and energy with our FleetCards program and other energy management initiatives.

Please go to www.ctaa.org/competitiveedge to learn how you can bring the Competitive Edge to your state. As always, CTAA training staff are available to help tailor this new program to your precise needs. Please call Charles Dickson at 202.247.8356 or email dickson@ctaa.org for all the details on this unique opportunity!
Lane Transit District

Do you have your Environmental Commitment pocket card?

LTD's Environmental Commitment and point 2 point programs are just two of the agency's numerous innovative initiatives.

Lane Transit District

semesters and service hours spanning from 6:00 a.m. – 11:45 p.m. on weekdays.

But simply running a lot of buses to and from UO isn’t the only element that binds LTD so closely to the region. According to the agency’s surveys, more than 30 percent of riders do not possess a driver’s license or own a vehicle. That means reliable, frequent and affordable mobility options are crucial for everyone.

The importance of a robust transit network is evidenced through LTD’s Group Pass Program. The initiative provides discounted monthly passes to all employees at each participating employer aimed at ensuring workers a reliable, affordable way to get to work while reducing congestion along with the need for additional parking at business locations. More than 80 companies and organizations participate in the Group Pass Program, with UO representing the largest employer in the program.

“The Group Pass Program shows why our ridership is so much broader than just students,” says Kilcoyne, himself a regular LTD rider, who notes maintaining affordable fares as a key priority for the system. “Reasonable fares help us prove our value. We’re a community resource and our fares reflect that.”

Building on its core fixed-route and paratransit services, LTD is working to advance mobility options to enhance its transit network through the point 2 point initiative. A collaboration between LTD, Lane County, the cities of Coburg, Eugene and Springfield, the Lane Council of Governments, the Lane Regional Air Protection Agency and the Oregon Department of Transportation developed point 2 point to help people locate and use their transportation options, ranging from biking and walking to park-and-ride, carsharing, vanpooling and telework. The program includes special focus channels for community groups, schools and businesses.

“At LTD we believe in providing people the independence to achieve their goals, creating a more vibrant, sustainable and equitable community,” says Kilcoyne. “Point2Point is essential to carrying out this mission promoting and facilitating alternatives to single car usage and ownership.”

Digging New Wells

Inasmuch as LTD has established a robust presence for transit in Eugene and throughout Lane County, the scope of the agency’s influence on future mobility options depends on securing a long-term, diversified set of investment streams to support both operations and capital expenses. In relation to funding mechanisms that support transit providers in similar communities elsewhere, LTD does well: along with Portland’s TriMet, LTD is authorized under state law to collect payroll taxes from Lane County residents. Currently, the system receives $0.07 per $1,000 of taxable income per resident. LTD’s Board of Directors – as per state law – also has the unilateral authority to increase that rate to $0.08, which it is expected to consider this fall, with an increase coming in 2016 or 2017 pending the Board’s decision. The increased revenue will allow for incremental restoration of service that was reduced following the 2008 economic downturn.
Having guaranteed local payroll tax revenue largely compensates for low levels of state support for transit programs, which includes the lack of a statewide sales tax. However, like nearly all mobility providers, costs to maintain current and expanded service levels will continue to rise and within a decade, the revenue gains by the $0.01 property tax increase will likely be neutralized.

That long-term reality produces tension with LTD’s mission of improving transit options for Lane County. Kilcoyne notes the Envision Eugene and Springfield 2030 long-range plans prioritize continued expansion of high-frequency transit corridors for EmX and other enhanced routes – such as connections like River Road to Santa Clara and Coburg Road in Eugene – as well as closing service gaps in places like North Eugene and Southeast Springfield. The current fixed-route structure funnels all lines to Eugene or Springfield, but has limited grid-style connectivity. A creative mix of revenue streams is the only way to achieve such vibrant levels of service – including existing revenue from riders’ fares, says Kilcoyne.

“The need for high-frequency service in high-density corridors won’t go away in the future, even if we figure out things like automated vehicles,” Kilcoyne says. “What we’re talking about is the need for new revenue, not going back to the same well of payroll taxes again. When you can’t go to the well again, you need to start digging new wells.”

Kilcoyne points to a range of ideas to diversify revenue, citing the utility fee model employed by the Corvallis Transit System (see page 56 – ed) as one example and encouraging federal programs designed to incentivize – not punish – innovation. LTD shares the industry’s struggles with the substantial reductions in federal bus capital investment under MAP-21 – a “huge concern,” according to Kilcoyne. And while the kinds of public-private partnerships so often championed by federal and state officials are worth investigating, he cautions against an investment strategy too reliant on private-sector contributions.

“The private sector does not work on altruism, so there’s always an additional cost or risk assumed by the public, which politicians are too willing to gloss over,” he says. “What we need to figure out is an appropriate balance between federal, state and local funds with enough overall money to make a difference. We can’t buy buses one or two at a time for a system of this size because of the administra-
Lane Transit District

tive and procurement costs. Without strong and predictable funding levels, we’re all just fighting over the scraps.”

As much as inconsistent and insuffient funding levels and programs continue to impact LTD’s current and long-term decision-making, the agency has cultivated a productive relationship with its local chapter of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), which represents the system’s drivers, mechanics and customer service representatives. The most recent round of negotiations concluded well ahead of the contract’s expiration date and produced an agreement sustainable and beneficial to both the employees and LTD’s budget.

“We had a committed team for the negotiations process on both sides between labor and management,” says Kilcoyne. “It’s a testament to everyone who works here in the pride they take in serving the community.”

“Kilcoyne’s willingness to collaborate bridged the gap between administration and rank-and-file employees,” ATU Local Chapter 757 Executive Board Officer Carl Faddis told the Eugene Register Guard. “We trust the LTD Board of Directors will continue his commitment to teamwork and open communication.”

Avoiding Calcification

Our profiles of community and public transportation providers seldom close with examples of how a given system responds to retirements. In the case of Kilcoyne and LTD, the manner in which the agency addressed a small wave of retirements – 12 in all – in 2013 and 2014 is illustrative of how it perceives not administering the day-to-day functions of its duties but, more broadly, its philosophy towards ongoing innovation.

“It’s easy to become calcified,” says Kilcoyne, explaining the integration of new talent created paths for reorganization. “You avoid that with a balance of maintaining institutional knowledge while bringing in fresh thinking. You always need new blood but if you do a good job, there’s going to be opportunities to make a statement.”

Transit in Action

EmX stations – like the Walnut Station shown here – feature level platform boarding and other design elements commonly found with light-rail transit facilities.
After experiencing the confluence of energy and innovation that’s found in a university community like Eugene, the DigitalCT staff continued its trek north to another junction of activity and ideas: Corvallis, home to Oregon State University. The rivalry between Oregon’s largest colleges – separated by just over 40 miles – is one that permeated every stop of our trip. Even folks who didn’t attend either institution usually had a take on the clash of their respective football teams, an annual meeting referred to as the civil war.

At first blush, our noontime meeting in Corvallis could have the appearance of a more localized rivalry, as both the city of Corvallis and surrounding Benton County operate distinct mobility networks. And, indeed, as their corresponding managers – Tim Bates and Lee Lazaro – joined us in the conference room at the city’s Public Works Department offices, a colorful array of service brochures was fanned out before us. But as we waded into the details of the portfolio of options with Bates and Lazaro, a better football metaphor began to emerge: a huddle of different elements that combine to form a team-like approach to connecting Corvallis and Benton County.

Corvallis Transit System: Fareless, But Not Free

Every quarter, Corvallis residents receive a bill in the mail for their share of the city’s utilities, things like water, power, sewers and trash collection. Among these line items is one that does not appear in a similar way in any other community in the nation: a Transit Operations Fee. Approved by the Corvallis City Council in 2011, the fee allowed the Corvallis Transit System (CTS) to operate its fixed-route bus, Dial-A-Bus paratransit and Night Owl light-night services fare-free, increasing the network’s ridership by more than 37 percent in its first year, from more than 884,000 annual trips in fiscal year 2010-2011 to more than 1.1 million the following year.
Vital Stats

Organization: Corvallis Transit System
Manager: Tim Bates
Founded: 1981
Annual Ridership: 1.175 million
Number of Vehicles: 12
Website: http://www.corvallisoregon.gov/index.aspx?page=167

For the city’s residents, the fee is a tremendous bargain. Using an average trip cost model developed by the Institute of Traffic Engineers, the average single-family home currently pays $3.55 per month – or $42.5 per year – in Transit Operations Fees, while commercial and industrial properties pay different rates based on size and type of business. The fee is adjusted each year through approval from the City Council based on fuel prices, but can never be reduced below $2.75 per month for single-family homes. Investment from the fund means anyone in Corvallis – whether they’re a home or business owner, a renter, OSU students or visitors – has access to unlimited CTS service to move around the community. Nonetheless, establishing the fee was no easy task when it was under consideration in late 2010 and early 2011, according to CTA Coordinator Tim Bates.

“There’s a lot less acrimony now that it’s established,” says Bates, who’s served as the system’s administrator since 2007. “It’s become entrenched in the community. Social service agencies depend on reliable travel for their clients.”

Revenues from the fee delivered more than $1.2 million in investment for CTS in fiscal year 2012-2013, far more than the annual $400,000 previously allocated by the city from general fund revenues. The funds previously directed for CTS are now reinvested in other community services, including police, fire, parks and recreation programs (an informative FAQ on the Fee is available here). The system supplements the Transit Operations Fee with federal and state investment along with a direct contribution from OSU, with students accounting for more than 40 percent of CTS ridership.

“OSU markets transit access as a key feature for students, especially international students,” Bates says, also noting the system’s bike racks often exceed capacity as students blend biking and transit to complete the first and last miles of their trips.

In addition to CTS’ 13 fixed routes in Corvallis that meet at the Downtown Transit Center, Dial-A-Bus – which Benton County jointly operates county-wide – and the Night Owl service, CTS also operates the Philomath Connection under contract to the city of Philomath. All services in
Corvallis and Benton County are operated by First Student under contract, a partnership that first began in 1981 with the Dorsey Bus Company – ultimately acquired by First Student – after the city purchased its first three buses in 1979. The city previously subsidized a private bus company from 1970 to 1981. Today, more than 1.175 million riders ride the system’s 12 buses and benefit from recently-implemented real-time bus arrival information on a web-based platform. In the future, Bates would like to increase frequency to 15-minute or better service across the system.

“Greater frequency is our number one priority,” says Bates. “We would like to have our riders not need to look at a schedule.”

Benton County Transportation: Solutions for a Variety of Needs

As Oregon’s third-smallest county by total area and with 55,000 of its 85,000 residents living in Corvallis, Benton County’s mobility needs are largely focused on connections to and from its largest city. To that end, the county’s transportation programs – organized under the Special Transportation Fund of its Public Works department – jointly operates the Dial-A-Bus program with CTS. The service is dedicated to seniors and people with disabilities and is organized into four zones covering the entire county. And while Dial-A-Bus is free for trips within Corvallis and is charged on a quarterly basis for rides outside the city limits. According to Lee Lazaro, the county’s Special Transportation Coordinator, the program started 36 years ago under the auspices of Benton County’s senior center and grew as demand increased among people with disabilities and seniors for county-wide connections.

“It’s the heart of the county’s public transportation network and is a crucial part of daily life for Benton County seniors and people with disabilities,” says Lazaro, who previously spent time at the Oregon Department of Transportation.

Beyond the countywide reach of Dial-A-Bus are a trio of fixed-route services tailored to connect Corvallis with outlying communities. Within Benton County, the 99 Express links Adair Village and Corvallis, primarily along route 99W. The line’s four weekday roundtrips offer affordable $.75-cent fares for adults with $.35-cent rates for people with disabilities, seniors, Medicare recipients and youth. Discounts are available for multi-ride coupon books or monthly passes.

The Linn-Benton Loop extends across the Willamette River from Corvallis to serve downtown Albany in Linn County on a loop structure, as its name implies. Major destinations include OSU, Hewlett Packard’s (HP) location on the north side of Corvallis, the North Albany Park and Ride site, Linn-Benton Community College (LBCC) and the historic 1906 Albany Station, which serves Amtrak’s Cascades and Coast Starlight trains, Valley Retriever intercity buses and the Albany Transit System. On weekdays, a more direct route operates between Albany and Corvallis, with the full loop route continuing on Saturdays. Riders with ID cards issued by HBCC, OSU, HP or Samaritan Health Services ride for free.

Also reaching beyond Benton County is the Coast to Valley Express, operated in partnership with Lincoln County Transit (see page 29 – ed). As part of the North By North West Connector network, the Coast to Valley Express operates four daily roundtrips – including weekends – that link Corvallis with Newport, as well as select trips that continue to Albany. Benton & Lincoln counties alternate which agency supplies the vehicle and driver, each providing two roundtrips per

Vital Stats

**Organization:** Benton County Special Transportation Fund  
**Manager:** Lee Lazaro  
**Founded:** 1979  
**Annual Ridership:** 84,000  
**Number of Vehicles:** 18  
**Website:** [http://www.co.benton.or.us/pw/stf/](http://www.co.benton.or.us/pw/stf/)
day. The $10 one-way fare – $7 for seniors, people with disabilities and youth – reflects the route’s 50-plus mile, two-hour schedule that functions more like intercity bus service.

For Lazaro, the range of the county’s service offerings is driven by a single factor: responsiveness to the county’s mobility needs.

“We operate a lot of different types of service, but it’s all based on where people need to go,” says Lazaro. “We’re always working to refine the options to make sure they’re efficient and structured to meet needs as they change.”

It Takes Two

The synergies between the transportation programs offered by Benton County and the city of Corvallis is evidenced by their respective managers’ offices located just steps apart from each other. During the brief time the DigitalCT staff spent with Bates and Lazaro, the benefits of such a vast array of options – ranging from CTS’ fareless network in Corvallis to the tripartite regional routes coordinated by Benton County – are not found in their numbers but in efficacy.

“We do what we do because it’s worked, getting people to work, school, appointments, both here in Corvallis and across the county,” says Bates. “From a community perspective, we have the interest and ability to help improve quality of life.” CT
By Rich Sampson

As we entered the tidy, compact state capital city of Salem, the orderly street grid and well-appointed office buildings led us to Courthouse Square in the heart of town. With a growing population currently topping 160,000, the city has all the markings of a small-urban area: a vibrant downtown area – bolstered here by the state government – the modern economic engines of eds and meds (education and medicine) and a dynamic public transportation network known locally as Cherriots and formally as Salem-Keizer Transit.

Scurrying through the block-long transit center at Courthouse Square are more than a dozen Cherriots routes that span the system’s namesake cities. Inspired by Salem’s Cherry City moniker – due to the region’s output from cherry trees, both fruit and lumber – more than 3.6 million riders board the system’s portfolio of mobility options and take advantage of increasingly growing connectivity throughout and beyond the Mid-Willamette Valley.

Branches of Service

A series of glass relief panels are fastened along the walls and meeting rooms at Salem-Keizer Transit’s offices in Courthouse Square, as well as serving as the protective shelters of the system’s bus stops. The same motif also functions as the background for Cherriots’ website. The artwork incorporates a tree-themed map of the network’s routes and services and emphasizes not so much where its vehicles go but – more importantly – what outcomes its activity produces for the region: the ability to get from home to work, health care, recreation and shopping, among other destinations.

That work of making possible these core so-
Salem-Keizer Transit

Societal benefits is not only limited to Cherriots’ network of 26 fixed-route bus lines in Salem and Keizer – 24 local, two express – although the operation comprises the bulk of the agency’s 3.6 million annual ridership, moving more than 10,000 riders per day. A look at Salem-Keizer Transit’s portfolio of additional services includes seven other innovative elements that help connect a region beyond the cities of Salem and Keizer:

- **Chemeketa Area Regional Transportation System (CARTS):** a rural mobility network throughout Marion and Polk counties managed by Salem-Keizer Transit – supported by federal Section 5311 investment – offers five fixed and three flexible, deviated routes to link an additional 17 communities;

- **The West Salem Connector:** launched on June 1 as a one-year pilot project, the Connector is a free, real-time shuttle blending concepts of ridesharing, a community circulator and demand-responsive service linking residences and neighborhoods in West Salem to Cherriots fixed-routes and other area destinations;

- **CherryLift:** the agency’s origin-to-destination option specifically tailored to meet the needs of people with disabilities beyond Cherriots routes;

- **RED Line:** supplemental to CherryLift, this demand-response operation geared towards both seniors and people with disabilities has no eligibility requirements and operates on designated weekdays in Northeast, Southeast, South and West Salem as well as Keizer to specified shopping locations in those neighborhoods;

- **Non-Emergency Medical Transportation:** through the state’s brokerage system, participants in the Oregon Health Plan can access service to medical appointments, treatments and other ongoing care 24 hours per day, seven days a week;

- **TripLink Call Center:** a one-call center coordinating the agency’s range of responsive mobility options through the CARTS, CherryLift, RED Line and Non-Emergent Medical Transportation, open on weekdays from 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. and 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Saturdays; and

- **Transportation Options Program for Employers and Employees:** managing mobility options specifically targeted to both employees and employers, including the Cherriots Rideshare program, ridematching through Oregon’s Drive Less Connect initiative, commuter incentives, emergency ride home, employer transit passes and assistance with vanpool information and formation of vanpool groups.

The wealth of transportation opportunities managed by Salem-Keizer Transit – those provided directly as well as those it coordinates – makes plain the organization’s vision, mission and values, clearly displayed throughout the agency’s offices as well as its transit centers and vehicles. Simply put, the system’s

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**Vital Stats**

**Organization:** Salem-Keizer Transit  
**Manager:** Allan Pollock  
**Founded:** 1979  
**Annual Ridership:** 3,600,000  
**Number of Vehicles:** 64  
**Website:** [www.cherriots.org](http://www.cherriots.org)

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**In Their Own Words**

Salem-Keizer Transit General Manager Allan Pollock describes the crucial elements in building community support for transit.
Salem-Keizer Transit’s CARTS rural transit network (above) spans throughout Marion and Polk counties. Meanwhile, its Transportation Options Program focuses on the mobility needs of both employees and employers (below).

CherryLift (below) complements the Cherriots fixed-route network with service for people with disabilities.

Salem-Keizer Transit identity is built upon far more than operating buses. Instead, it provides options that enhance community livability by connecting people with places and doing so by stressing values like safety, customer excellence, communication, innovation and accountability.

“We do not want to be tied to any one way of getting people where they need to go,” explains Salem-Keizer Transit General Manager Allan Pollock, who also currently serves as the President of the Oregon Transit Association. “We leverage the inherent value of the Cherriots fixed-route network by connecting to it as often as we can, but there are other needs that require more adaptable strategies.”

The organization now known as Salem-Keizer Transit – operating more than 125 vehicles and employing more than 300 workers – started first as the Salem Area Mass Transit District in 1979, assuming the operations of the city’s transit system and broadening its reach to Keizer. A series of successful property tax measures were approved by voters in the mid-1980s and ‘90s, allowing the system to expand service and options, resulting in annual ridership of more than five million by the time the current Salem-Keizer Transit name was adopted and the Courthouse Square Transit Center in 2003.

But in 2008, the same voters who had endorsed additional revenues for the system in the past rejected additional investment to support the costs of the expanded network. The loss of increased local funds led the
agency to cancel Saturday service, reduce evening service hours and adjust its route structure. For the agency, the shifting stances of voters caused a reassessment of the system’s priorities.

“It’s easier to get people to vote yes when the outcome will be more than they have now,” says Pollock, who joined the agency in 2007 after beginning his transit career with the Orange County Transportation Authority and Montebello Bus Lines in Southern California. “Votes to maintain what you have are harder to come by. We needed to do a better job explaining how service benefits people directly and figuring out how we align our operations to meet their needs.”

Preparing a Campaign

The failure of the 2008 funding measure to support Salem-Keizer Transit did change how much service the agency provided and when it operated. Predictably, ridership suffered, falling from more than five million passengers per year in 2008 to 3.4 million today. But along with service restructuring came a new strategic plan in 2011 to position the agency to operate within constrained funding parameters while also preparing for restored investment in the future. It re-envisioned the Cherriots network from a pulse-based system to one based on neighborhood circulators and transit centers along with high-frequency corridors. Meanwhile, it also employed mobility management principles to simplify and strengthen the demand-responsive programs and embolden its employment-focused options through the Rideshare and Employer/Employee Transportation Options programs. Pollock notes the role of the organization’s directly-elected Board of Directors as crucial in re-aligning its direction following the 2008 defeat at the polls.

“Our board has a certain level of understanding and a knowledge base of their communities’ priorities and needs,” says Pollock, who’s worked with 17 board members at Salem-Keizer Transit during his eight-year tenure. “It was tough at times, but we kept our heads up and the board allowed us to re-focus on what we already did well and on what we could improve.”

One of the elements of repositioning the system’s place in the community was the creation of the Citizen Advisory Committee in 2011. In addition to the decision-making authority of the board and the targeted guidance of the Special Transportation Fund Advisory Committee to the CARTS, CherryLift and RED Line programs, the 13 members of the Citizen Advisory Committee helps the agency better understand unmet needs, provides input on plans and helps advocate for the system among the public and its elected officials. The group includes seats designated for a paratransit user, a bicycle/pedestrian advocate, representatives of social service agencies, employers, health care providers, the school district and the youth and ethnic communities.

“We’re always working on how to make ourselves more visible in the community and the Citizen Advisory Committee helps with that,” says Pollock. “The question is, ‘how do more non-riders understand the value?’ This group is crucial to answering that question.”

Armed with an active board and a community-driven advisory group, Salem-Keizer Transit is preparing for another vote in November to restore and expand investment in the system, an initiative dubbed Moving Forward. With input from Portland-based consultant Jarrett Walker, the agency is reconfiguring the Cherriots network under phase one of the plan. Beginning on September 8, it will increase frequency on its busiest routes, improve schedule reliability and consistency as well as add more cross-town routes for fewer transfers.

“We asked the community what kind of ser-
The simplified but more frequent structure for Cherriots under phase one of Moving Forward (right) takes effect beginning September 8, 2015.

vice they wanted to see. The Moving Forward system improvement plan reflects that feedback,” says Pollock. “But, in order to implement phase two, additional revenue is required.”

In this year’s November election, voters will have their say on a 0.21 percent business payroll levy, forecasted to yield the system approximately $5 million per year. The new investment would allow for the resumption of Saturday service – which would ultimately expand to Sundays and holidays, as well – along with expanded evening hours of service and a student bus pass program.

Of course, as a public agency, the organization cannot take a formal stance on the outcome of any measures before the voters. But it hopes to integrate the lessons from recent, successful measures to support the school district and road infrastructure by explaining the direct results of their investment and how it benefits citizens individually. Pollock also believes the rollout of Moving Forward’s phase one reforms to Cherriots immediately preceding the vote will signal to voters the agency’s commitment to responsive, efficient service.

“All agree we need the service. Every day we get requests for weekend and evening service. The question is how do we pay for it,” says Pollack. “We’ve been waiting patiently to restore service. We want to tell our story very well, but the time is now.”

Connecting Beyond Cherry City

Just considering the family of mobility options provided or managed by Salem-Keizer Transit, the system does more than its fair share in linking communities in the immediate region it serves. It’s CARTS rural mobility network spans two counties while Cherriots connects directly with Amtrak’s Cascades and Coast Starlight trains and private intercity bus carriers in

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Through partnerships with neighboring transit providers, Salem-Keizer Transit has expanded its reach beyond Marion and Polk counties.

The 1X route is operated in tandem with Wilsonville’s South Metro Area Regional Transit (SMART) to connect the downtown transit centers in Salem and Keizer with Wilsonville, 27 miles to the northeast. There, in addition to connections with five SMART routes, riders can also transfer to TriMet’s WES regional rail service to Beaverton and the MAX light-rail network.

In a similar fashion, Cherriots’ 2X line offers eight daily round trips from Salem to the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde’s Spirit Mountain Casino in Grande Ronde, where connections are available to Lincoln County Transit’s Coastal Connector service to Lincoln City. The 2X route connects with Oregon’s North by Northwest Connector network of regional mobility options (see page 29 – ed). Along with Amtrak’s historic 1918 Salem Depot, Salem-Keizer Transit’s Courthouse Square and Keizer Station – which opened in 2013 with an array of environmentally-friendly and customer service amenities – combine to form a trio of anchors for community connectivity.

“When we have critical mass of service – namely at Courthouse Square and Keizer Transit Center – it boosts our visibility to the general public while also making for easy, comfortable connections for our riders,” says Pollock, who notes Keizer Transit Center was intentionally positioned to host expanded WES service south from Wilsonville in the future.

Not Just For Other People

During our visits to Oregon’s mobility providers, a theme of eager volunteerism was not difficult to spot. This was no less true during our time spent with Pollock and his colleagues at Salem-Keizer Transit, who are all encouraged to spend up to eight hours of paid work time per year engaged in volunteer activities, ranging from youth groups to business associations. While there’s unquestionably benefits to the agency by it’s employees taking active roles in their communities, this community-first spirit – codified in its statement of vision, mission and values – says as much about how the system perceives its role in “making a positive difference.”

“We’re not just a service for ‘other people,’” says Pollock. “We spend a lot of time talking to people about how what we do impacts them. It impacts us, too, and always for the better.”

CT
Where’s Transit Notes?

Many long-time readers of Community Transportation Magazine — in both its print and digital formats — might recognize that this is the first edition of the publication in more than a decade to not include a Transit Notes section. This is no oversight. CTAA now provides both daily and bi-monthly collections of national transit news and notes in its twitter feed and FastMail e-newsletter, respectively. In other words, you don’t have to wait for the next edition of DigitalCT to get the community and public transportation news coverage you’ve come to expect from us. Just follow @CTMag1 on twitter or subscribe for free to FastMail right on the CTAA website homepage at www.ctaa.org.
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