

## Meeting Notes

### **La Pine Transit Stakeholder Meeting March 27, 2013 2pm-4pm La Pine Parks and Recreation, John C. Johnson Building**

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#### **Attendees:**

Monte Dammarell (Upper Deschutes River Coalition, Cascade CommunityNetwork)  
Peter Russell (Deschutes County)  
Shelly McKittrick (La Pine Health)  
Josie Hanneman (Deschutes Public Library)  
Mike Waggoner (Citizens Action Group (CAG))  
Molly Baker Ray (RPTAC/CAG)  
John Wurst (St. Vincent de Paul)  
Arlo Fertig (La Pine Parks and Recreation)  
Steven Hasson (City of La Pine)  
Joan Johnson (City of La Pine Volunteer)

#### **Staff:**

Scott Aycock, Karen Friend, and Tamara Geiger (Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council)

#### **Introductions**

The attendees introduced themselves and the organizations they represent. Scott gave a quick overview of the meeting plan to review draft service plans for La Pine and discuss new ways to provide local funding for transit.

#### **Current Transit Service**

Scott explained the current transit service in La Pine: local public bus service (dial-a-ride with service area just outside the UGB) and Community Connector shuttles to Bend. He explained that the dial-a-ride system requires a reservation the day before and that CET had previously offered same day rides but had to eliminate them as funding cuts started over a year ago. Karen added that CET recognizes that people want convenience, but same day rides are not an efficient use of the system. Scott explained that CET is currently able to provide local rides before and after normal service hours through a grant that will expire at the end of June. Karen explained that it makes more sense for the early and late rides to continue, but to cut times in the middle of the day at the end of June. Arlo Fertig (La Pine Parks and Recreation) added that La Pine needs buses because a lot of people don't drive. He included that it's important that the shuttles are able to handle bikes because people will ride their bikes to the shuttle and at their destination.

Scott explained that when CET started, La Pine was the only community with its own public bus service (Central Cascade Lines, CCL). CCL provided local service in La Pine and a Bend-La Pine shuttle until they folded and CET was asked to provide service. Many people have asked for service for all of South County, but the lack of density would require the area to be broken up into corridors (x corridor gets service on Monday, y corridor on Tuesday, etc).

The current demographics for La Pine (Census data) understate the population because they only include the City. Scott explained that CET estimates a population of 4-5,000 in the CET service area and about 10,000 for all of south Deschutes County. There was some disagreement about the population estimates, and Scott added that it has been a challenge for COIC to properly estimate the population.

**Action Item:** Determine an accurate population estimate for southern Deschutes County.

The group asked Karen why the Community Connector doesn't stop in Sunriver. She explained that it took about 12-15 minutes to stop in Sunriver and riders were mad because it added time and no one was using it.

Arlo added they also stopped in Sunriver when he drove for CCL and had the same experience. Monte added that the Sunriver Resort used to have a vanpool but they stopped because no one was using it. The group agreed that the rising price of gas may drive more employees to want a service like a vanpool. Scott mentioned that there is also the possibility to take visitors to and from Sunriver. Arlo explained, however, that Sunriver doesn't want their visitors to leave the resort. Monte suggested that CET reach out to the large resorts to get them involved and potentially help subsidize the system in order to bring more visitors in. He suggested contacting Kelsey Card who is the director of Sunriver Resort and lives in La Pine.

The group continued to review the La Pine demographic data. Scott explained that the census no longer collects disability data for small areas but that anecdotally he has heard that La Pine has a higher rate than Deschutes County as a whole. John Wurst (St. Vincent de Paul) countered that it seems anyone with a disability is heading to Bend or to the Valley because La Pine does not have the amenities they need to have a high quality of life. He also mentioned that while other food pantries in the region have experienced a 13-15% growth in demand, from 2011-2013 demand for the La Pine food pantry was flat or going down. His explanation was the lack of local jobs and far distance to travel to work centers (like Bend) means that people come to La Pine for a short period of time but then pack up and move on when they realize that La Pine doesn't have the services they need. He explained this is also demonstrated by different people accessing the food pantry from year to year. Molly added that a lot of people retire in La Pine but then move to Bend because they want to be closer to medical facilities. Scott asked whether CET can enhance mobility and access so that people can live where they want to.

The group discussed how to provide the best local service in La Pine. The following suggestions emerged:

- Earlier in the morning and later in the evening Community Connectors to Bend (Teachers and librarians need this schedule)
- A south Bend Community Connector stop (Walmart)
- Earlier local service (Shifts at Jeld-Wen start at 5:30am)
- Split shift for local service in order to offer earlier and later rides (dead time 10am-2pm)
- Better connection with The Breeze
- Better outreach and advertising of bus service
- The best option may be carpools/vanpools for some jobs

Scott added that another goal of the meeting was to continue to build and foster the local community relationship with CET and that CET wants to involve more people in the fundamental decision making process. Monte agreed that the whole area is working on public-private partnerships because no one can pay for all of the needs on their own. Scott added that Molly Baker Ray is the official La Pine representative for RPTAC and will bring any comments they have to the meetings (every other month in Redmond).

### **Local Bus Survey**

Scott reviewed the survey taken by local public bus riders in La Pine. The data showed that same day rides was their most desired improvement. However, Scott and Karen reviewed that it is operationally very difficult to provide same day rides efficiently. Monte asked about the cost of switching from the dial-a-ride system to a fixed-route. Karen explained that when Bend switched over it was almost cost neutral because of very high demand. A cost neutral fixed-route service in La Pine would only support a bus going up and down the highway, and wouldn't be able to provide nearly the coverage area that dial-a-ride does. Molly suggested a fixed-route service that goes into the pocket neighborhoods at specific times every day – maybe just two vans could do it and offer 2 pick up times in the AM and 2 in the PM. Scott explained that the cost is enormous when you consider having to provide complementary dial-a-ride for paratransit. Molly wondered if they could do it on a volunteer basis. Scott explained to the group that CET is developing a volunteer program and they were going to coordinate with the existing Volunteers in Action (which currently coordinates volunteer rides for seniors and people with disabilities). Since CET has an existing brokerage system and call center, it could match the best volunteer/available volunteer with a desired ride. Unfortunately, VIA did not have the capacity to expand to a larger public volunteer ride service. Scott added that if La Pine wanted to work on a community based volunteer program then CET would do its best to coordinate.

Shelley McKittrick (La Pine Health Clinic) asked about the brokerage system that is in place and explained that many clients who come to the health clinic have no idea that they can get transportation to Bend for free through OHP+. Karen replied that a lack of awareness made sense because the brokerage system has low utilization compared to other systems.

### **Service Development and Funding**

Scott continued to the discussion of local funding for La Pine service. He explained that start up funding has dwindled and that the state Business Energy Tax Credit is sunsetting. He included that CET hopes to improve the farebox recovery rate (currently 10.5%) and has listened to La Pine residents who have offered to pay higher fares. The next process is to determine consistent local funding, such as a transit utility fee. The difficulty is how to assess the fee when there are so many people that live outside the service area. The group suggested approaching Mid-State Electric (a cooperative) about assessing a fee on electric bills.

For short term service changes the group suggested looking into the peak hours of day for ridership. They felt that preserving the early morning and later evening local service was very important, and so would be preferable to cut hours in the middle of the day if there is low ridership.

**Action Item:** Scott and Karen to review “time of ride” data and perhaps create a hole in service in the middle of the day to preserve early and late rides.

Into the future, La Pine has low projected growth for local service but medium growth in shuttle service. Shuttle service perhaps should be prioritized for expansion in the future.

### **Budget**

La Pine needs to provide \$74,201.25 locally to maintain current service (for FY 15). They currently provide \$5,000 through the CAG. The group again turned to the idea of assessing a utility fee to the people who live within the service area through Midstate.

**Action Item:** Scott and Karen to approach Midstate to discuss the utility fee.

Karen and Scott explained that group pass programs are contract income and can also be used as local match. The group questioned the city’s economic development plan and how it may attract the kinds of businesses that could support transit. Steven Hasson (City of La Pine) explained that the industrial park has been built and the city is planning to hire an economic development coordinator dedicated exclusively to its development. Deschutes County will pay \$20,000 for a part time economic development coordinator and La Pine will match it (primarily through raising property tax from \$1.90 to its cap at \$1.98). Also, they are in the process of developing a local economic development committee (LED) that will interface with the local ED coordinator. Scott explained that transit is reactive to economic development. Monte countered that with the midterm service plan CET is not being reactive, but being proactive. Having the plan moving forward will be a good way to coordinate with economic development.

Moving back to the \$74,000 question, Scott asked about the public utility fee and how it could be levied when most don’t have transit service. Also, what would be Midstate’s incentive to do it. The group explained that as a cooperative they have strong ties to the community and are interested in community development. Monte also mentioned that northern south county would like the Parks and Recreation district expanded, and maybe local transit service could be a part of the expansion. Scott expressed interest in this idea because the parks district is a public entity and transit measures tend to do well when they are bundled with other services. The group suggested a presentation at the Chamber breakfast to get the businesses on board since they could help sell support transit. Steven Hasson also recommended that the group not discount the city’s future participation in transit since priorities change all the time and so does the constituency.

The meeting adjourned with plans to stay in contact and to pursue researching the proposed potential revenue sources.