

**Prineville Transit Stakeholder Meeting**  
**April 1, 2013**  
**2pm-4pm**  
**Prineville City Hall**

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**Attendees:**

Jason Carr (Partnership to End Poverty, COIC Board)  
Brenda Comini (CCF)  
Russ Deboodt (Economic Development of Central Oregon)  
Muriel DeLaVergne Brown (Health Department)  
Scott Edelman (City of Prineville)  
Ken Fahlgren (Crook County Administration)  
Angie Gilley (Director, Prineville Veterans Services)  
Tim Harris (City of Prineville Planning Commission)  
Carly Rachocki (Crook County Health Department)  
Betty Roppe (City of Prineville, Mayor)  
Sharon Vail (Rimrock Health Alliance)  
Holli Van Wert (Prineville Chamber of Commerce)

**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 brief introduction of the purpose of the meeting in the context of the Regional Transit Master Plan (RTMP) process. He explained that COIC was there to receive feedback about potential funding options into the future for Crook County/Prineville transit service. Scott Edelman added that on the RTMP Technical Committee he learned that Prineville is expected to have increased demand (more demand than Madras and other communities) for transit based on population growth and commuting patterns. He felt this would be important when planning into the future.

**Current Transit Service**

Karen and Scott explained current transit service in Prineville: local public dial-a-ride and community connector shuttles. They explained that most community connector service is fixed route, but that two stops (the School Bus Turnaround and Juniper Canyon Firehall) require reservations and are only offered at certain times of day. Karen explained that since these locations are more remote, it is important to offer service and access for people but CET saves a lot of money by limiting the number of times a bus will travel to those areas in a day.

Karen and Scott continued by explaining the evolution of COIC operating transit and how Scott Cooper (former Crook County judge) requested that COIC offer transit in Prineville because the local soroptimist bus was struggling. Scott A. explained that Scott C. had envisioned a regional system that would give Prineville residents greater connectivity to Central Oregon. COIC was able to access some funding that had previously not been used in Central Oregon in order to offer regional public transit.

In the current climate, Scott identified that transit should be included in the new Crook County Transportation Systems Plan. He emphasized that planning for and building roads doesn't ensure access and mobility for everyone.

**Surveys**

Scott explained that COIC conducted surveys as a part of the RTMP planning process. He shared that they had far fewer respondents on the local public bus and drivers may be asked to emphasize the importance of the survey to the riders in the future. Overall, the highest request from local public bus riders was for same day rides

for convenience. He also shared that most Community Connector riders are heavy users, 2-5 times a week because they use it to travel to school and work. Tim Harris asked if ridership is higher in the winter because people don't want to drive on icy/slick roads. Karen explained that ridership usually dips during school breaks – summer, spring break and winter break. June and July are usually the lowest times for ridership.

Scott moved on to the surveys that COIC completed at the Senior Meal and Public Meeting held on August 20, 2012. He explained that COIC asked “Should Prineville have local bus service?” at the senior meal because in the past they had expressed discontent with the service (in general) after their specialized service (soroptimist bus) went away.

He continued that better advertising had come up in most meetings and that COIC/CET had just started a marketing campaign including radio advertising. The meeting attendees suggested using The Round Up and the Chamber to spread the word. Holli Van Wert explained that the Chamber just needed a flyer and they would be happy to spread the information and that an electronic copy would be ideal to email out. Scott asked whether the Chamber, City Hall or County had received flyers in the past few weeks (they were supposed to via the local driver), but they all responded no.

**Action Item:** Karen and Scott to find out what happened to the local flyers and to send electronic files to the meeting attendees.

### **Service Plan**

Scott and Karen moved on to service planning and explained that in the beginning they assumed that the highest demand for service would be during normal commuting hours. However, the demand has been highest during midday (3pm is a peak time in most communities). Karen explained that as of today a 5:22pm community connector was eliminated due to underuse. Angie Gilley asked whether that was one of the shuttles that Veterans would frequently take. Karen explained that it was eliminated because no one was using it. Also, she explained that when they eliminated some runs in October they did not see a drop in ridership because people just shifted to the remaining shuttle trips.

Scott and Karen explained that into the future, when looking at a midterm service plan, the consultants for the RTMP process identified adding additional stops within Prineville for the Community Connector (such as one at the BiMart end of town). The idea is that the Community Connector would provide a sort of limited fixed route local service. They continued with a brief discussion of the existing Park & Ride Lot at Les Schwab and how the location is not ideal for accessibility.

Scott and Karen also explained that COIC received a small amount of funding from ODOT to develop a volunteer based transportation network for rural areas. This pilot project was conceived after COIC decreased the size of the local service areas (October 2012) and many communities began asking for a service alternative (like a volunteer system). COIC intended to offer their existing brokerage system and call center to a volunteer ride program (like Volunteers in Action) in order to bolster the existing volunteer ride system. Unfortunately Volunteers in Action did not feel that they had the capacity to expand and so running the volunteer program has fallen on COIC. Ken Fahlgren added that there was a lot of local interest in the volunteer program when he brought it up at a few community meetings. The senior center was willing to offer an indoor pick up and drop off waiting area and that the Band of Brothers all volunteered to be drivers. Karen responded that having enough volunteers was one of COIC's biggest fears in starting the system. Angie added that there have been some veterans pretending not to know that they needed a voucher or to pay \$5 for a ride with the new veterans' transportation program. Scott added that COIC hadn't discussed a fare for the volunteer ride but had recognized that there is an enormous need and good partnership potential. They continued that the limitation has been the staff time required to work through insurance issues and that in July (when the ODOT funding comes) they will have more resources dedicated to developing a strong program. Scott emphasized that the program would be designed for occasional rides, not something that someone would rely on to get to work every day.

Scott moved forward to the Service Plans put together by Nelson Nygaard that provide an overview of where transit service could head into the future based on the demand estimates. He explained that the plan for the short term is to live within the financial means of the system. He went over the potential future service plan and commuter demand, pointing out that Prineville-Bend commuting is relatively high and so there may be interest in a CC shuttle directly connecting Prineville-Bend. The meeting attendees added that there are a lot of commuters traveling into Prineville from Redmond and Powell Butte very early in the morning (6am).

## **Funding**

Scott continued by explaining the current budget breakdown for the system. He explained that the 10% farebox recovery rate is general across the region and that COIC is in the midst of a fare review because they expect the COIC Board to desire a higher farebox recovery rate. Karen related that it's difficult to pinpoint an "industry standard" for the farebox recovery for rural systems. In general, COIC's goal has been 15%. Scott explained that federal funding has remained fairly stable and that STF funding (state funding) may fluctuate based on competition with other priorities. Scott explained that in general as a transit system grows the federal dollars become a smaller percentage of the operating costs and the percentage of local dollars gets larger. Karen reiterated that the general evolution is for a transit system to wean itself off of grants for operating expenses.

The group continued with a discussion of the potential midterm (3-10 years) additions to service as provided by Nelson Nygaard. Karen noted that service would continue into the evening to meet demand especially for later college classes. She also mentioned that in La Pine they had discussed stopping service during the slowest parts of the day in order to save money. The group was interested in this concept for Prineville as well. Scott and Karen explained that regardless of the funding question, the midterm plan is about offering a menu of the highest priority potential for added service.

Karen and Scott proceeded to the funding deficit explaining that the current cost to provide current service in Prineville is \$76,000/year. Currently, Crook County contributes \$10,000 and the City of Prineville contributes \$10,000. Prineville/Crook County needs to contribute an extra \$56,000 to maintain the current level of service. Scott explained that there are certain ways to augment funding: such as group pass programs and other public-private partnerships but that the successful systems around the state have a dedicated funding source. Karen explained that CET is by far the largest system that doesn't have a dedicated funding source, but added that it is also the newest. They explained that a transit district will need to be created in order to pass a property or payroll tax (both Eugene and Salem use these) and that the tax would need business community support. Continuing to the other options they explained that Corvallis passed a utility fee and Ashland a sales tax because it would also charge visitors. Russ DeBoodt added that the students at OSU pay a lot for transit service as a part of their student fees. They also reviewed other taxes that are not viable options: local gas tax (not legal to use it for transit), Vehicle Registration Fee (at its statutory limit) and property tax may not be allowed in some areas because of compression. Scott explained that because each community in Central Oregon is different and has different needs for service the funding will probably not be a regional solution, but will be community specific.

Scott then asked the group for their ideas for future service. The primary idea was for service to have gaps/holes where it is underutilized in order to better support the times of day when it's needed. Next he asked the group for their ideas about funding. Jason asked whether the regional funding option was based on establishing a regional transit district. Scott responded yes but that the geography of the district would be tricky. He explained that when Bend last tried to create a transit district they made the decision to include Deschutes River Woods and the measure failed. Looking at the voting geography, the measure probably would have passed if they had excluded Deschutes River Woods. Jason continued that a regional vote may be the only way for it to apply to Prineville (it would probably fail in Prineville but because it passed regionwide they would still have to pay for it). Scott related that the polling is very tight and that there are other areas that would also vote against it and make it fail. Betty continued that in Crook County people do not want to pay for services that they are not using. Scott related that it's a misperception because the people are already paying for it with the County and City contributions. A dedicated fund is the way to remove it from the General Fund permanently and allow those dollars to be spent on other things.

The discussion continued with the group explaining that the current level of service is not very convenient for people with other options. This prevents them from seeing the value and makes it more likely that they would vote against it. Scott explained that this is the chicken and egg problem that CET is facing: they can't raise funds without proof of strong service and they can't provide strong service without funds. Karen explained that the amount of money needed, when it's spread across the population, is not very much for a great amount of service. She gave the example that if everyone paid \$.30/thousand as a regional property tax then there could be tri-county fixed-route service that is well funded and a lot of additional opportunity. Realistically, the tax on Prineville residents only needs to be \$.08/thousand. Jason suggested that the whole system would operate most efficiently as a regional system if there is a regional vote. This way the system will not be impeded by individual

communities that can't get the funding together and the communities would maintain connectivity as the region grows. Scott explained that it sounds great but its hard to sell to someone living in rural parts of the counties that they should pay for it too. Karen agreed that it's hard to sell, but that connections on both ends of an inter-community trip are essential to a strong service.

Scott continued that its clear based on the number of people being served that there is a need for transit. He added that if gas cost \$8/gallon transit would be a much easier sell since the mileage separating the cities is significant. Holli suggested doing some advertising (in regards to a tax) that \$33/year for transit service is much better than \$50 every three days to fill your tank. She added that with businesses getting hit up for money left and right it will be easier to show them how to save money based on something they know they are already spending money on. Scott added that even in the best developed systems the majority of people don't actually use it but they know someone who does and have a broader awareness that its good for their community. However, its been hard for COIC to establish that understanding/awareness of transit in Central Oregon. He explained that COIC is interested in any option – a vote or a partnership of agencies, however the community stakeholders figure that it could best be supported. Tim Harris added that if a vote is required then COIC/CET will need to act fairly quickly.

Some asked what would happen if COIC did not come up with the funding? Would the outlying communities be cut first? Karen explained that CET would shrink services to stay within the funding means they have and would continue to offer service to those communities that were contributing (although the service may need to be reduced). Holli added that while it may not be a popular idea, a community often realizes they need something after they've lost it. Maybe the only solution is for transit service to have to go away in order to gain wide public support for it coming back.

The conversation about a ballot measure continued. Betty Roppe asked if the ballot measure was for the tri-counties and it passed in Deschutes but failed in Jefferson and Crook what would happen? Scott explained that majority rules but he is still unclear as to whether they would need three separate measures (for the three counties) or just one. COIC will potentially need two processes: one vote to create the transit district and a second for the funding. The district could initially be unfunded and then they would go back and ask the voters for money. He added that COIC needed to look at Metro/TriMet/Lane County Transit Districts as examples to find out how they formed. Also, he added that COIC assumed that they need to invest some time and money with an attorney and a survey of likely voters.

**Action Item:** COIC to research the formation of other transit districts.

Scott moved forward and asked if there was any chance the city would consider a utility fee. Jason responded that forcing a tax on people is very difficult and unpopular. He thought it would be better as something they voted on. He added that it would be interesting to see what surveying reveals, although he felt pretty confident that the voters would say no to a transit tax but may be willing to create the unfunded district. The group also suggested that the City and County hear from some riders who rely on the service – since they generally do not hear from them. Also that marketing and education would be key to raising awareness of transit's importance. Scott E. offered that while a utility fee is not likely, there are pages included in the city's water/sewer bill for advertising services and that CET could have a half-page or a page included in the mailer.

**Action Item:** Scott A. to submit information to Scott E. to be included in the utility bill.

Scott thanked the stakeholders for their time, committed to updating them on any process as it moves forward and the meeting adjourned.