

Oregon Public Transportation Plan Summary of Stakeholder Interviews

Introduction

The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) is developing a new statewide Oregon Public Transportation Plan (OPTP). The most recent version of the OPTP was adopted in 1997, and many regulatory, demographic, and societal changes have occurred since then, creating a need for a new OPTP to provide a current vision for public transportation and better policy direction for today. Also, the OPTP needs to be updated to be consistent with the current Oregon Transportation Plan (OTP) and other state mode and topic plans.

When complete, the new OPTP will become a part of the Oregon Transportation Plan, which provides the overall policy framework for all statewide mode and topic plans. The Oregon Public Transportation Plan is a mode plan intended to define more specifically the goals, policies and strategies that will guide the management and development of public transportation in the state. The OPTP will be developed through consultation with transportation stakeholders representing a variety of disciplines and interests.

For the purposes of this document, “public transportation” or simply “transit” refers to any service that provides transportation that is generally available to the public and receives some amount of public funding to provide the service. This definition may change as work on the OPTP gets underway, when specific modes and services included in the plan will be determined.

Purpose

As the first step in the planning process, ODOT conducted a number of interviews with a diverse set of public transportation stakeholders from external organizations and within ODOT to determine the scope of the new OPTP and identify key issues to consider during plan development.

Between July and September of 2014 ODOT staff interviewed a total of 30 individuals and six groups representing different public transportation interests across the state, including over 25 external agencies and organizations and 15 internal ODOT staff from different regions, divisions, and agency programs. The interviews were conducted in person or over the telephone. Individuals were asked the same predetermined set of questions designed to assess what issues should be considered in the development of the new OPTP.

This document summarizes themes heard from many of the stakeholders interviewed, both internal to ODOT and from external interests. Please note that the themes discussed below represent the views of OPTP Stakeholder Interviews Summary 2014

people interviewed; these themes may or may not reflect the views of the Oregon Department of Transportation and not all themes may be directly addressed in the plan. (See Appendix A for the list of questions asked and Appendix B for a list of stakeholders interviewed.)

Defining Transit Services and Roles

Interviewees tended to share a very broad and inclusive definition of public transportation services. They identified traditional fixed route and flexible services provided by transit agencies or social service providers as the primary methods of transit, including bus, light rail, bus rapid transit, commuter rail, intercity service, and demand response vehicles. They also acknowledged that transit trips do not exist in isolation, and that walking and bicycling as well as facilities such as park & rides provide important links for transit users. A number of stakeholders indicated that private companies can also provide important links for individuals. This includes bus services such as Bolt or Greyhound, and taxi cabs and private shuttles in some circumstances.

Interviewees tended to share a common conception of the role of transit in the transportation system. Many interviewees mentioned that transit needs to be one of a range of viable choices in the transportation system, enabling travelers to use the most appropriate mode for their need. Most interviewees thought that the role of public transportation is to provide people with effective access to goods, services, employment, and their communities in general. Most interviewees thought that the role of transit is basically the same for both urban and rural areas, however the type of service provided necessarily looks different in these areas. In urban areas populations and destinations are much more densely located, which necessitates transit systems with higher frequency over shorter distances often with multiple types of service or vehicles present. In rural areas, populations and destinations are much more sparsely located, resulting in transit systems that cover long distances with lower frequency.

Discussion of Major Themes

Following are common ideas and issues raised by stakeholders during their interviews.

Funding

Funding was identified as a major issue by nearly all stakeholders interviewed. The interviewees indicated that the varied structures used to obtain funds are complex and time consuming, requiring many hours and often stretching the capacity of staff. This applies to all funding structures including state, federal, and agreements between service providers.

There is also an apparent lack of knowledge about what types of funding sources are available to transit service providers and what the various providers may be eligible to receive. The structure and availability of funding programs was identified as an area where the state can provide guidance and assistance. There is interest in the plan providing better understanding of how transit is funded in Oregon.

The view that funds are limited for the operation of transit was common among interviewees. There was a desire for stable, consistent funding to provide adequate service, expand service, and perform long range planning activities.

Connections between transit systems

Interviewees were interested in connections between neighboring transit systems, and noted that providing such connections is complex and requires additional administrative efforts. They indicated that connections between transit systems and service providers need to be improved in order to achieve a seamless transit system within Oregon and into neighboring states, and to effectively serve the needs of residents.

There was also a sentiment that connections between regions and metropolitan areas need attention. Rural providers noted that longer distance trips between cities and regions can be very difficult, often due to the disjointed and limited amount of service provided. Urban providers noted that their service area generally does not match their commute-shed, so effective connections from neighboring systems into the urban service area were particularly important.

Interviewees expressed the view that there is a general lack of resources to expand service to cover gaps between systems, and a lack of expert knowledge to identify the best service decisions to improve efficiency and facilitate coordination between neighboring service providers.

A prominent idea among stakeholders was that passengers should be able to easily make a trip from origin to destination that covers multiple transit modes and providers using a single trip planning and ticketing method. Scheduling and planning limitations of service providers was expressed as a major barrier to creating the coordination between transit systems that would allow this idea to become reality.

Most interviewees mentioned that facilitating communication, coordination, and connections between systems was an area in which the state can provide guidance or assistance. A system to facilitate shared information, technology, websites, and marketing would help the providers to leverage each other's strengths to provide the best possible service.

Multimodal Connectivity

The interviewees indicated that for the transit system to be effective, it must be connected to the other modes, particularly to bicycle and pedestrian access. No transit trip is made in isolation, as individuals use other modes to access the transit stop and their final destinations. Interviewees noted that:

- First and last mile connectivity concerns could be addressed by the statewide plan; building a connected transit system only works if people can access the system.
- The Public Transportation Plan should be coordinated with other modes plans in a meaningful way that can be represented in the built environment.

- Connections between modes of public transit were also important, such as connecting intercity train service with bus and light rail systems.

Economic Development

Many stakeholders interviewed indicated that public transportation plays an important role in regional economic development. Public transportation was viewed as providing access to jobs and other opportunities to participate in the local economy. Additionally, it was viewed as providing critical community access and mobility for individuals that do not have use of a private automobile or otherwise have limited transportation options. This was emphasized as particularly important in rural and less developed areas where long distances often separate people from employment and commercial centers.

Some interviewees noted that transit service assists in the overall affordability of the community, helping to keep it attractive and livable for younger, older, and lower income populations. Additionally, some employers value transit as an asset when choosing site locations because public transportation allows easier access for customers and employees alike, and may help attract employees.

Access to Essential Services

Similar to employment access, it was noted that public transportation provides vital links for individuals to access goods and services and to be engaged in their community. Interviewees indicated that too often the conversation surrounding public transportation focuses on access to employment or medical care, when in reality people use transit for a variety of trip purposes that should be equally valued. They also noted that the 'transit dependent' population is not necessarily easily defined. Often the demographics and needs of this population vary depending on location and context; and households with only one car or with temporarily disabled members may add to the transit dependent population inconsistently. Interviewees acknowledged it is important to understand the needs of these groups in order to adequately provide service.

Seniors and Persons with Disabilities

Many of the interviewees indicated that public transportation continues to play a vital role in providing transportation for seniors and persons with disabilities who require special services. These groups of people often are unable operate private vehicles, and many now have independent living situations and rely on public transportation for their everyday travel needs. While medical trips are a common need, public transportation also provides a basic level of mobility and access to the community essential to quality of life for these populations.

With changing demographics, some interviewees identified an increased number of seniors using public transportation systems. These interviewees indicated that the state should consider issues related to "aging in place" and access to transit services. Many of the stakeholders also indicated that

the state should consider the relationships between social service providers and transit services; often the roles of these organizations can overlap, which can place them outside their area of expertise.

Public Transit and Long Range Planning

Many of the interviewees indicated that long range transit planning activities are limited and often not adequately performed by transit providers or local jurisdictions alike. Often transit planning activities focus only on the next few years for providers with limited staff and without stable funding. It was expressed that improved longer range planning activities would enhance communication and coordination between transit providers and with state agencies. These individuals indicated that it is important to improve the public transit component of local transportation system plans (TSPs) with guidelines regarding how transit should be addressed during the TSP planning process.

The interviewees also noted that there should be a larger connection between public transit systems and land use planning. The stakeholders indicated that public transit access could be incorporated in the development review process; this would ensure that local jurisdictions included transit supportive land uses into development plans and city codes.

Performance Measures and Standards

Stakeholders believed that the new OPTP should demonstrate the value of public transportation within the larger transportation system. Most interviewees indicated interest in seeing various types of performance measures and standards for transit service and operations appropriate to different sized communities. Some interviewees indicated performance measures should be considered that address cooperation and collaboration between providers. With clearly defined measures and standards, transit providers would have understood levels of service to strive for and further support in funding conversations with their communities, the state, and their legislators. While interviewees were interested in the state providing different types and levels of measures they can use to evaluate their service, all indicated it is important to preserve local control of system design to ensure the system adequately meets local needs.

Role of State/ODOT

Nearly all of the interviewees clearly had interest in seeing the role of the state and ODOT regarding providing and operating transit systems expanded. The stakeholders acknowledged that many of the issues identified above could be addressed through increased assistance and guidance on the part of ODOT. Coordination among the multiple agencies involved in public transportation was also of interest to interviewees, including agencies such as Human Services and Veteran's Affairs that purchase and occasionally provide transit service. A further opportunity was noted for the various state agencies to collaborate and leverage one another's strengths to help ensure coordinated services.

Areas where there was interest in the state having an increased role included the following:

Expert Guidance and Support

- The state could provide expertise and guidance to public transit providers and agencies regarding planning, operations, management, communications, collaboration, and technology. Transit providers would like to improve and innovate in these areas, but staff capacity is often limited or devoted to regular operations. Many interviewees mentioned that the state could consider providing readily available technical assistance in these areas and set standards or expectations where appropriate.

Collaboration and Data Sharing

- The state could facilitate collaboration including sharing data between transit providers to help fill service gaps, particularly between systems, coordinate schedules, and maximize service efficiency.
- The state could help local providers supply riders with a shared portal for transit system information, such as by setting standards for such systems including data standards, or by providing a statewide technology solution that local providers can utilize.
- ODOT could play a role to improve information sharing between transit providers and among state agencies. This might include communication with ODOT maintenance districts for targeted road maintenance that will benefit transit operations, and with social service agencies to coordinate existing services and eliminate duplicate transportation services.

Resource Allocation

- There was interest in state and other funding support to meet the needs of public transit in Oregon and put the mode on par with other transportation options and investments.

Further Opportunities

During the interviews, stakeholders identified a number of other opportunities that the plan could provide or capitalize on to improve not only public transportation, but the entire state transportation system, and make progress toward other statewide goals.

Further opportunities identified by interviewees include:

- The plan is an opportunity to help the state meet a variety of its planning goals, for example, it can help set up transit to help meet greenhouse gas targets and help with efficiencies needed by the state energy plan.
- The plan could help the state's transit providers prepare for demographic and social changes including an increased number of older persons and younger persons with different priorities and expectations than older cohorts.
- The new OPTP can help transit be successful, which is important for an efficient transportation system.
- The plan is an opportunity to assist with communication and education about public transit. It could help dispel myths about who does and does not use transit. It could also help make the

case for public transit as a part of the statewide transportation system, and help agencies communicate with shared messages to their communities, and to community and statewide leaders.

- The plan is an opportunity to consider how to be creative and innovative with public transit solutions, remain flexible as new solutions arise with many coming changes in technology and vehicles, and continue Oregon's leadership in pursuing more sustainable transportation.

Conclusion

The stakeholders interviewed provided valuable information about the variety of issues and needs affecting public transportation in Oregon. These individuals represented a wide array of public transportation disciplines and interests in Oregon, their experiences provided valuable perspectives on how to better provide transit services throughout the state. The information gathered through the interviews will be used to inform ODOT and the plan Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) as work begins on a new Oregon Public Transportation Plan.

The PAC will be formed in early 2015 and will likely have their first meeting in the summer. The PAC will be the steering committee for the plan and will use information in this document and generated during plan development to assist ODOT in shaping a new OPTP. Plan development includes research, defining existing conditions and needs, developing a vision, goals, and policies, identifying possible performance measures, etc. Plan development is expected to take about two years from when the PAC begins its work in 2015. Please follow the plan website for more information and opportunities to participate. The Oregon Public Transportation Plan website is at:

<http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/TD/TP/Pages/optp.aspx> .

Appendix A: OPTP Stakeholder Interview Questions

The Oregon Department of Transportation is preparing to develop a new Oregon Public Transportation Plan (OPTP), replacing the 1997 version. The new OPTP will establish a long range vision for public transportation in the state, and refine and apply the policy direction of the Oregon Transportation Plan to public transit. The plan will also describe the role for public transportation within Oregon's transportation system and seek to link transit policies with fiscal realities.

The purpose of the interviews is to seek input from public transportation stakeholders and experts on roles of transit, gaps in current policy, and opportunities and constraints to help establish the scope of the new plan.

Interview Questions

1. How would you define "public transportation;" what types of vehicles and services come to mind?
2. What is your vision of a good transportation system for Oregon? What do you see as the role of public transportation in this vision?
3. What are the different roles of public transit in the state transportation system? Is the role different in urban areas and rural areas?
4. What barriers and opportunities do you see for providing of an integrated statewide public transportation system for Oregon?
5. Recognizing that public transportation systems in Oregon are developed, financed, or owned and operated at the local or regional level, how can a new statewide plan assist with service decisions and facilitate a seamless public transportation system?
6. How do you think a new Oregon Public Transportation Plan would affect the work that you do?
7. What are the key issues or topics that should be considered as part of developing the new Oregon Public Transportation Plan?
8. Is there anything else you would like to tell us or that we should be aware of as we prepare to develop a new Oregon Public Transportation Plan?

Appendix B: OPTP Stakeholders Interviewed

External Stakeholder Interviewees

| Name | Organization | Title |
|---|--|--|
| Eric Belt | Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs | Veterans Services Administrator |
| Lisa Scherf | City of Corvallis | Transportation Services Supervisor |
| Meredith Williams, Rebecca Houghtaling | Oregon State University | Associate Director of Transportation Services, Senior Planner |
| Doug Pilant | Tillamook Co. Transit District | General Manager |
| Jeremy Emerson | Oregon Health Authority | Deputy Chief Operations Officer |
| Lee Girard | Multnomah Co. Aging Services | Community Access Manager |
| Andy Cotugno, Elissa Gertler | Metro | Senior Policy Advisor, Planning and Development Director |
| Elaine Wells | Ride Connection | Executive Director |
| Kelly Ross | Oregon Transit Association | Manager |
| Mike Burton | Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians | Economic Development & Financial Services |
| Steve Allen | South Metro Area Regional Transit | Operations Manager |
| Amanda Hoey | Mid-Columbia Economic Development District | Executive Director |
| Margaret Davidson | Community Connections of North East Oregon | Executive Director |
| Dave Tovey, Deb Crosswell, JD Tovey | Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation | Executive Director, Deputy Executive Director, Planning Director |

ODOT Internal Stakeholder Interviewees

| Name | Title |
|--------------------|--|
| Paul Mather | Highway Division Administrator |
| Troy Costales | Safety Division Administrator |
| Gregg DalPonte | Motor Carrier Division Administrator |
| Matthew Barnes | Transit Network Program Manager |
| Sue Geneisse | Transportation Growth Management Planner |
| Jack Svadlenak | Transportation Economist |
| Kirsten Pennington | Planning Manager; Region 1 |
| Jessica Horning | Transit & Active Trans Liaison; Region 1 |
| Arthur Anderson | Area Manager; Region 3 |
| Jim Bryant | Principal Planner; Region 4 |
| Amy Pfeiffer | Senior Project Lead; Region 4 |
| Monte Grove | Region Manager; Region 5 |

External Group Interviews included:

- Participants in the Metropolitan Planning Organization-Transit District group meeting hosted by Lane Council of Governments on July 11, 2014. Stakeholders present included representatives of the Salem-Keizer Area, Corvallis Area, Central Lane, Bend, Portland Area, and Albany Area MPOs and the Lane and Rogue Valley Transit Districts, with representatives of ODOT and the Federal Highway Administration.
- Participants in the Major Providers meeting hosted by ODOT on August 16, 2014 including leaders of the Tri-Met, Salem-Keizer, Lane, and Rogue Valley Transit Districts.
- Oregon Public Transit Advisory Committee members at their meeting on September 8, 2014.

ODOT Internal Group Interviews included:

- ODOT Region 2 Planning staff members at their July 21, 2014 meeting.
- ODOT Region Transit Coordinators at their August 4, 2014 meeting.