OPTP Workshop and Provider Survey Summary

This document summarizes themes and ideas that emerged from the Oregon Public Transportation Plan (OPTP) workshop held at the 2015 Oregon Public Transportation Conference and from the 2015 OPTP online provider survey. The goal of both the survey and workshop was to hear from Oregon public transportation providers to generate ideas and information about trends and opportunities they see, so that these perspectives can be considered during OPTP development. The survey and workshop results illuminate noteworthy current conditions information and also raise important potential policy issues and challenges.

Comparing workshop and survey results

Overall, survey results and information from the conference workshop were complementary, with many common themes. There were a few differences between the survey respondents and workshop participants; for example, the workshop was attended largely by transit agency staff, while the survey respondents tended to be higher-level administrators. Based on anecdotal information, the workshop participants tended to more represent rural areas of the state, while the survey had more of a mix of urban and rural respondents. However, these differences did not result in major differences in the feedback given.

Some major themes identified from both groups are:
- Demographic changes, like the aging population, are expected to affect (and are currently affecting) service

- Concerns about ability to generate local match for funding programs

- Unique challenges of serving rural areas of Oregon with public transportation

- Desire to implement new technologies

- Need for better coordination and connections between services

Oregon Public Transportation Plan Workshop Themes

Approximately 60 Oregon Public Transportation Conference participants attended a two-hour workshop for the OPTP on Wednesday, October 21, 2015.

The primary objective of the workshop was to discuss several topics with public transportation providers to gather their ideas and build on survey themes with more detail and context. Participants engaged in an interactive dialogue about several key topics identified from initial survey responses and earlier stakeholder conversations.

Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) staff provided a summary of the project to provide background information for participants, while the majority of the time was spent on the interactive format of small-group activities and reporting out to the larger group. The following summarizes the major themes and ideas that emerged from the group discussions.

Access and Connections

Three groups discussed the topic of access and connections. Below are ideas and themes that resulted from the conversation.

Communications/Coordination

- Providers are communicating with locals through rider surveys, elected officials, and advisory committees

- To improve, convene a summit or system-wide regional meetings to share knowledge and planning information between providers

- Provide information about services from various providers as single system; create a communication network

- Make use of social media and other newer communication tools

Critical connections to make

- Bicycle and pedestrian networks

- Continuity between adjacent systems, jurisdictions or districts, and to coordinate fares

- Facilitate intermodal connections between providers and Amtrak, airports, park and rides, etc.

Changing demographics

- Transit should serve the different populations that require transit, including aging, younger, and any population that depends solely on public transit

- There are language and technology barriers to accessing transit

Safety and Security

One group, consisting entirely of rural providers, discussed the topic of safety and security. Below are themes and ideas that resulted from the conversation.

System safety

- Driver training is needed to ensure system safety, though accessing training can be an issue such as for rural operators

- Winter road conditions, security of operators, and vehicle maintenance are other safety concerns

- Aging volunteer drivers, sustainability of volunteer driver systems

- In rural areas, lack of cell phone coverage is a concern

Community Perspectives

Two groups discussed the topic of community perspectives. Following are themes and ideas that resulted from the conversation.

Understanding/Accommodating Transit Preferences

- Pay attention to ridership and new employers' needs

- Use advocacy groups, Title VI surveys, advisory committee

- New public engagement strategies needed

- Go to where the people are

- Use new software like Remix

- Develop Transit Development Plan (TDP) to reflect needs of the community

Top Needs

- More vehicles and more frequent service including weekend runs

- Better transit stop facilities

- Improving service often challenging with prevailing land use

- Better blend transportation options programs with transit

Equity Considerations

- Make sure to include transit providers and stakeholders in planning

- Can use on-board "ambassadors" to help those who do not speak English or otherwise need accommodation to use transit

- Consider special pass programs (e.g., student passes)

- Work with Coordinated Care Organizations (CCOs) to address needs of Medicaid populations

Strategic Investment

One group discussed the topic of strategic investment. Below are ideas and themes that resulted from the conversation.

Approaches to Maintaining Service

- Adopt emerging technologies

- Change public perception of transit

- Rethink service delivered & work with affected partners

- Prioritize service (vis a vis Maslow's priority of needs) – identify essential services and organize services in a hierarchy to ensure preservation of the most essential programs

Other considerations
- Concerned about stability of federal funding

- Meeting grant match requirements very difficult for the smallest providers

Creative Funding Ideas
- Consider new tax options

- Partnerships with large agencies/businesses

- Partnerships with state and other agencies with related responsibilities

Transit Operations

Two groups discussed the topic of transit operations. Below are themes and ideas that resulted from the conversation.

Challenges
- Maintenance costs and wait time for repair

- Equipment operated beyond useful life

- Logistical issues related to isolation of rural systems

- Attracting qualified staff and training drivers

- Technology upgrade costs

- "Color of money" affects flexibility

- Understanding what types of service and activities to prioritize
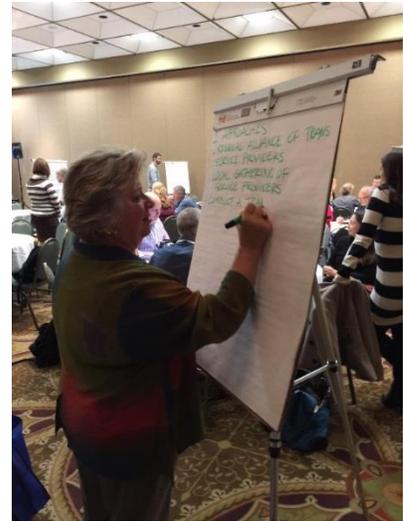
Strategies
- Regional/peer communication to identify interagency partnerships to maximize capacity

- Increased financial help/partnership opportunities with the state

- More flexibility with funding dollars

- Share resources between systems (e.g., trainers)

Suggestions
- ODOT in-field partnerships to communicate with Regional Transit Coordinators (RTCs) about road conditions, etc.

- Coordinate and supply technology to allow communication between systems/programs

- State facilitation of technology transfer; establishment of standards

- Streamline procurement

Provider Survey Themes

ODOT conducted a short, non-scientific survey of Oregon public transportation providers in September and October, 2015. The purpose of the survey was to ask for providers' feedback to help identify issues, trends, opportunities, and challenges they are facing as they provide service to our communities. The information provided by respondents will be considered by project staff and stakeholders as the new OPTP is developed.

ODOT staff advertised the survey through emails to providers and at the Oregon Public Transportation Conference. A total of 43 responses were submitted to the survey. Typical respondents are the General Manager or Transportation Manager of a public transportation service provider, representing locales throughout the state. Based on the responses received, the project team identified the following themes.

Key Trends
- Increased demands due to aging population
- Changing demand due to other demographic changes (e.g., income, millennial generation)
- Serving large, rural areas with a real need for public transportation
- Growing communities
- Growing ridership
- Funding challenges

Technologies to be implemented
- Automatic vehicle identification (AVI)/Automatic vehicle location (AVL) technologies
- On-board Global Positioning System (GPS)
- Real-time info via app/phone/web
- Passenger counters
- If already have AVL, transit signal priority (TSP) or E-Fare (mobile payment or other system)

Use of volunteers and coordination with others
- Respondents are a mix of providers that use or do not use volunteers
- Volunteers are often drivers, particularly for on-demand/non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) service
- Many providers offer information about neighboring or related services
- Efforts are undertaken to coordinate schedules with neighboring providers
- Most use surveys to communicate with riders
- Several providers participate in networks with monthly to quarterly coordination meetings with multiple partners and neighboring transit systems
- There is not a lot of coordination with other agencies regarding marketing or websites

Key Issues

- Funding stability
  - Local match (or inability to meet due to funding measures or other)
  - Local funding availability or willingness
- Safety and security
  - Accessing and waiting at stops
  - In vehicle behaviors
  - Vandalism
  - Roadway safety, safe stops on highways
  - Fleet reliability and maintenance
  - Aging volunteer drivers
- Interconnections
  - No fare reciprocity/transfer mechanism
  - Opportunity/need for regional and inter-regional connectivity, services
- Growth
  - More people riding transit, but without an increase in funding
  - Growing population, growing cities, but not necessarily where service is
- Aging and demographic changes
  - Affordable housing/living often not where transit is/can easily serve
  - Aging drivers, driver recruitment and training
  - Growing need for medical transport
- Communication
  - Communicating benefits and roles of transit, both urban and rural, to riders and community
  - Communicating transit services available

Opportunities

- Growth and partnerships
- Improving connections, locally and regionally
- Better technology improving user experience
- Increased public interest and use of transit
- Improved customer service