Benton County Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund

Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

March 15, 2019 from 8:00 AM – 12:00 PM
Benton County Public Works
Upper Conference Room #205
360 S.W. Avery Avenue
Corvallis, Oregon  97333

Committee Members Present:  Meredith Williams (OSU), Linda Modrell (Vice-Chair), Hal Brauner (LB Loop), Gary Stockhoff (ex-officio, Benton County), Nick Meltzer (ex-officio, CAMPO), Dylan Horne (Chair), Janeece Cook (Strengthening Rural Families), Mary Steckel (City of Corvallis/CTS), Pat Hare (City of Adair Village), Commissioner Annabelle Jaramillo (BOC – STIF Committee Liaison)

Staff Members Present:  Lisa Scherf (QE Representative), Lee Lazaro (BC Representative), Debie Wyne (BC Public Works), Cathy Williams (Recorder)

Guests: Barry Hoffman (Albany Transit/Linn-Benton Loop); Tim Bates (Corvallis Transit System); James Feldmann (ODOT Region 2 Planning); Mark Bernard (ODOT Public Transit)

1.  Call Meeting to Order
The meeting was called to order at 8:06 AM by Dylan Horne, Committee Chair.  He asked attendees to introduce themselves.

2.  Public Comments
There were no public comments received since the last meeting.

3.  Approve Minutes of January 18, 2019
After clarifying the day’s schedule, Mary Steckel made a motion to approve the January 18th Committee minutes as submitted.  Janeece Cook seconded the motion and all approved.  (Note: Minutes from the March 4 meeting were not yet finalized and will be presented at the next STIF Committee meeting.)

4.  Old Business

 a)  STIF Formula Projects – Review Staff Report:  Lisa Scherf reviewed Attachment A titled “Benton County STIF Advisory Committee Formula Project Summary by FY – March 15, 2019”.  She explained the shortage of funds indicated in red font, which exceeds the 100% level Countywide allocation amount.  The good news is that the overage from the original list presented at the last meeting has been reduced from over $500,000 down to just $148,200.  Some duplicate project submissions between the County, the COG,
and the Loop have been eliminated, and the Loop budget submission has also been clarified with more refined actual operations requirements for the biennium. The Committee now needs to determine a total of $148,200 in project reductions to make up for the difference in total STIF funds to be received versus total requested projects costs. It was confirmed by Mark Bernard that the final list of projects need to be listed in priority order, since there will be no amending of STIF Plans once they are submitted to ODOT. Therefore, any Plan changes should be made now, as agreed upon by Committee members at this meeting.

Committee Deliberations: Lisa began a review of the current project requests, and asked if there were any potential savings that could be realized. Nick Meltzer offered to reduce $5,000 in 99W planning project match, from the list, as the COG could provide that separately. Mary Steckel offered to contribute $90,000 toward the balance needed, from the CTS mid-life bus renovation project. She also agreed to put $55,000 from the project request to upgrade CTS camera system toward this amount. Ms. Steckel stated that additionally, some of the proposed CTS bus stop amenities were scalable, stop by stop, and could be moved to the 130% list. This was confirmed by Tim Bates.

Janeece Cooke requested pilot project information for the 99 Express from eight years ago when that service began to Monroe. Ms. Cooke suggested this could be used as reference resource material, to shorten the process to expand service to Monroe. Ms. Scherf replied that there was no formal study done, but Staff did a lot of outreach to that community to determine their needs at that time. After completion of the 99W study, it is hopeful that transit service would be in place by the end of the next biennium. Beginning ridership service would potentially be at least once per week and would be open to the general public. Mr. Lazaro told Ms. Cooke he would look through the County files, and forward any information about the original 99W study to her. He also noted his contacts with the Monroe senior center, and that there was a separate need for a senior shopper shuttle serving Monroe, Junction City, with a weekly trip to Corvallis.

Meredith Williams requested to not list the Linn-Benton Loop (excluding North Albany) separately, but to list them under the County, and Mary Steckel also suggested the Council of Governments and Benton County projects be combined in one group, with individual sub-allocations for those. Ms. Williams requested that these changes be added to the spreadsheet, to show how the sub-allocations are being calculated. Annabelle Jaramillo agreed that this would simplify the review for the Board of Commissioners as well.

There was considerable discussion regarding $40,220 requested by the Corvallis Boys & Girls Club (BGC) for transportation for the Training Teens for Tomorrow program for high school students. This service would be provided by Benton County, through current contract with Dial-A-Bus. Committee members Pat Hare and Janeece Cook spoke very
strongly about the need for the program, as there were few projects on the proposed list directly serving rural areas. Barry Hoffman offered to move $10,000 for the Linn-Benton Loop bus stop amenities project to the 130% list to add $10,000 toward the BGC program. Lee Lazaro noted that $10,000 from the Dispatch system upgrade project could also be deferred to the 130% list, for this purpose. Mary Steckel reduced the engine rebuild project a second time in order to meet total desired amount of $40,000 for the BGC project.

There was considerable discussion by the Committee about the priority ranking. Chair Dylan Horne reviewed the current priority list, noting that the projects had been listed in tentative priority order on the worksheet by staff, based on factors including the statewide STIF Priority factors met and the Oregon Public Transportation Plan factors, as well as the number of low-income households served and high-school students served. Lisa Scherf noted that the agency’s own ranking of their proposed projects was also a major consideration in the proposed ranking.

Hal Brauner suggested that the new bus for the Linn-Benton Loop should be moved to the top of the list, as Loop service expansion could not proceed without the new bus. Mary Steckel suggested that operations projects with a continuing need for future funding should be prioritized at the top of the list, in the event the current projected 100% funding level should fall short. Projects at the bottom of the list could potentially fall off. The Committee agreed to this, noting that the agency ranking should also be taken into account. Other Committee members made additional comments and suggestions about the ranked order, generally in keeping with the main points already made.

Meredith Williams inquired about the transit support position. Lisa Scherf, supported by Tim Bates and Lee Lazaro, noted the importance of this position to support the existing sole-staff transit coordinators with the STIF expansion projects. Workloads have already increased, and will continue to increase with the addition of STIF funds, and the new position is urgently needed to support the expansion. Ms. Scherf noted that project administration is specifically allowed under STIF rules, as a fundable expense.

Following further discussion by the Committee, Lisa Scherf recapped the revised project priority ranking of 100% list projects in order for the Committee, on the large-screen displayed worksheet. She noted this would include moving all of the project reductions that had been discussed to the 130% list:

1. Linn-Benton Loop Bus - $264,000
2. CTS Service Expansion - $1,973,700
3. CTS/Benton County Transit Support Position - $202,000
4. Match for Benton County Federal Bus Grant - $44,100
5. Contribution To Albany Transit System Bus for North Albany Service - $75,000
6. Match for Philomath Connection Replacement Bus - $89,400
7. BGC Training Teens for Tomorrow Transportation - $40,000
8. Match for COG 99W Corridor Evaluation and Feasibility Study - $77,740
9. Expanded Linn-Benton Loop Operations - $156,500
10. Philomath Connection Service Expansion - $55,000
11. Albany Transit System Service Expansion in North Albany - $75,000
12. CTS/Philomath Connection Bus Garage Expansion - $550,000
13. Benton County Service Expansion – Fixed Route - $51,510
14. Benton County Service Expansion – Demand Response - $82,860
15. Benton County Computer-Aided Dispatch System - $110,000
16. Mid-Life Rebuild for Two CTS Buses - $90,000
17. Match for Benton County Coast to Valley Expansion Grant - $39,400
18. Philomath Connection Bus Stop Amenities - $12,600
19. CTS Bus Stop Amenities Phase I - $33,190

The amended total of projects came to $4,022,000, which Ms. Scherf noted was the exact amount of the revised ODOT December estimate for 100% level STIF funding for the County.

**Ms. Steckel made a motion to submit revised BC STIF Advisory Committee Formula Project Summary for Ranking. Janeece Cook seconded the motion.**

Committee Members then discussed the 130% list. The Committee was in agreement that all deferred project requests from the 100% list should be moved to the top of the 130% list, in priority order as determined by the agency ranking. Lisa Scherf recapped the items which would be moved to the head of the 130% list. These included $130,000 for three CTS mid-life bus rebuilds; $42,810 in CTS bus stop amenities; the CTS Camera System enhancement project at 55,000; $10,000 from the Benton County Dispatch system project; and $10,000 for Linn-Benton Loop bus stop amenities. The existing original 130% list projects would remain in place, including the CTS Electrification project ($900,000); additional Philomath service expansion ($47,000); and a small amount in reserves ($11,790). These project amounts totaled to the additional $1,206,600 in 130% level funds in ODOT’s December STIF estimate.

**NOTE:** Mark Bernard suggested using any difference in allocations at 130% and project requests in a reserve.

Mary Steckel amended her motion to include addition of the prioritized 130% list. Janeece Cooke seconded the motion and all approved, with the exception of Ms. Steckel abstaining from the vote, due to her role with CTS.

5. New Business
a) **STIF Discretionary Projects – Review Staff Report** – Lisa Scherf introduced the topic, noting the Committee’s role to determine a “fund or do not fund” status for each project, which will be provided to ODOT. Priority ranking of the projects is allowed but this is not mandated by ODOT. The Committee may also elect to provide comments to ODOT on any of the projects. This list will not be submitted to the Board of Commissioners for approval, as this is not specified in the Rules. (An informational discussion with the Board is fine and would be provided by staff.)

The Committee Members were unanimous that they did not wish to prioritize the Discretionary projects, merely to review them. It was noted that the projects were a wide-ranging list of different types of projects, coming from a variety of agencies, and that attempting to compare and prioritize them would be very difficult for the Committee.

b) **Develop Recommendation for ODOT** – Ms. Scherf asked Lee Lazaro to review the Discretionary Project List, which he had developed for the Committee. He noted that there are ten projects on the list. They were each given an alphabet identifier for ease of reference, but are not presented in any ranked order by staff. He noted that ODOT, through their state-level Public Transportation Advisory Committee (PTAC) will ultimately determine ranking and funding, for recommendation to the Oregon Transportation Commission.

Mr. Lazaro briefly summarized each of the ten projects, and then Ms. Scherf called upon the transportation providers present to further elaborate and answer any Committee questions about their respective projects. (Mr. Lazaro presented the projects on the list which were submitted by Benton County.)

A) **Corvallis Transit System Service (CTS) Bus ($366,328)** – Tim Bates stated that this project was related to the proposed CTS service expansion in the Formula Funds list. Funds would be used to purchase a new bus, which is required to implement CTS expansion planned with STIF Formula funds. The local match requirement for this bus will be provided through existing CTS federal grant funds.

Hal Brauner inquired if the new CTS bus would be diesel or electric? Lisa Scherf clarified that it would be a diesel engine bus. Tim Bates noted that the 130% Formula projects list includes a project to begin the electrification of CTS buses, including installing the infrastructure and purchasing one new electric bus. The long-term goal is to move CTS to a fully electrified fleet.
B) **Philomath Connection (PC) Bus ($402,300)** – Mr. Bates explained that a new bus is critical to continue service due to one of two PC buses – the main service bus – catastrophically failing recently. It cannot be reasonably repaired and will be sold at auction. He noted that the second PC bus was back-up bus only, and it failed recently also. The back-up bus will be repaired but cannot be used for regular ongoing service. The local match requirement for this bus is in the Formula projects list.

C) **GTFS-Ride: OSU Expansion of Transit Ridership Reporting ($530,781)** – This project was submitted by the OSU Research Office, who originally partnered with ODOT to create GTFS in Oregon, and now wish to expand it beyond fixed-route travel. Three pilot agencies will be selected for the project. Mark Bernard informed the members that Trillium Transit is the Contractor that manages the GTFS data for ODOT and integrates all of the existing programs. Meredith Williams stated that the end goal is to make it more direct and accessible for people to connect transit trips from the origin to destination of their trips, without having to do a lot of research on all the different programs. It was noted that this is a state-wide project but Oregon State University is doing the research, so it ended up in the Benton County list.

The Committee wished to add a comment for ODOT that CTS/Benton County should be one of the three pilot agencies for this project.

D) **Coast to Valley (CTV) Service Expansion – Benton County ($377,132)** – Lee Lazaro informed the Committee that items D and F can be combined for explanation and funding purposes (please see item F below for the project discussion).

E) **Linn-Benton Loop Expansion Bus ($352,000)** – Barry Hoffman informed the Committee that purchase of one new bus is being requested for expanded development of the Loop service. There are currently 2 Loop buses in operation and 1 backup bus. Two additional buses are required for the Loop expansion. One of these buses is requested under the Formula Funds 100% list, and this is the second bus needed.

F) **Coast to Valley Service Expansion – Lincoln County ($721,800)** – Mr. Lazaro explained that this service is a partnership between Benton County and Lincoln County. Each provides two round-trips per day between Newport and Corvallis/Albany. Funds are needed to purchase a new bus to add two additional round-trips per day. This would be providing a total of 8 round-trips, 7 days per week and all trips would continue to the Albany Amtrak Station (presently only half the runs go all the way to Albany). This proposed expansion would also absorb the current Corvallis to Amtrak Connector service, by adding pick-up and drop-off sites in Corvallis for train-bound passengers. The cost difference between the two Counties reflects union vs. non-union labor forces.
G) 99W Corridor Transit Feasibility Analysis and Implementation ($744,606) – Nick Meltzer (OCWCOG) explained that this project can be broken up into phases, so it is scalable if necessary for funding purposes. Phase I is the corridor planning evaluation and transit feasibility study. The corridor being studied is from Junction City to McMinnville. If the evaluation determines that transit service on the corridor is feasible, Phase II would then be a bus purchase, and Phase III would be operation of a pilot transit service on the corridor.

Committee members inquired as to sustained funding for the operations component. Mark Bernard clarified that under the STIF Discretionary rules, a pilot project funded in this cycle can then be funded under the Discretionary program for one additional biennium (2021-23) as an initial operations project. After that, it would be expected that the service would find sustainable ongoing funding, such as the STIF Formula program.

H) Providing a Seamless Transit Experience ($447,977) – Mr. Lazaro explained how transit travel between Linn, Benton, and Lincoln counties could be complicated due to the variety of schedules and routes, and the need to change bus services in various hub locations. The transit coordinators in these three counties spend a considerable amount of time and resources assisting travelers with trip development. This project, proposed through the OCWCOG, would create and staff a central tri-county website and call number for potential travelers to find transit trip information; routes and schedules; and learn how to make connections to get to their destinations.

I) NWOTA Website Trip Planner Enhancement Project ($134,840) – Mr. Lazaro explained that there is a Northwest Connector website, serving the Willamette Valley counties with connections to and along the Northern Oregon Coast. Five counties are current members with Yamhill County as a potential new partner. The new website, developed through an ODOT Grant, is very robust and includes a trip planner for travel along the Oregon Coast. The Connector promotes a single-pass card system to travel throughout the system for a specified period (3-day or 7-day), at a one-time cost. However, the online trip planner uses basic Google Transit, which does not distinguish between Connector transit providers and other private or public providers. Often times the “recommended trip” does not inform riders they will be changing transit services and their pass will not be honored, at a sometimes-significant additional expense to them. Funding for this project would be used to develop a “customized trip planner” unique to the Connector system, making it easier for commuters to plan their trips solely with the Connector service.

J) Central Oregon Breeze Bus ($148,000) – Mr. Lazaro explained that Central Oregon Breeze from Bend, a private for-profit transit carrier, would be the provider, working in partnership with the Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council. He noted that the
Breeze currently contracts with ODOT for part of the “Point” Amtrak Thruway bus service, so they are a reliable company. Monies are requested to purchase new 35’ over-the-road transit bus. It was noted by Committee members that the proposal focused mainly on Portland areas, and the plan submitted was vague. However, the proposal does state they will explore the expansion of service from the Bend/Redmond area to Corvallis. Committee members noted the clear OSU connection with the OSU satellite campus in Bend.

The Committee wished to add a comment for ODOT that while they did not see a clear connection to Benton County for this project, that in itself was not a reason not to fund it, if it provides a needed regional service.

_Hal Brauner made motion to accept all projects, with comments for item C that Benton County would be one of the three pilot agencies for the project, and item J that this project is not connected directly to our area, but no reason not to fund either. Linda Modrell seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved by the Committee._

6. **Next Steps** – Lisa Scherf will get notes from this meeting included into Board packet information, then forward documents to the BOC to discuss at their work session on April 2nd, 2019. She also requested Committee members leave tentative dates on their calendars, although they may not all be needed.

   a) **Tuesday, April 2nd at 10AM – Board of Commissioners Work Session**
   b) **Tuesday, April 16th at 12PM – Board of Commissioners Meeting**
   c) **Wednesday, May 1st – STIF Plans due to ODOT**

**Conclusion:** The meeting adjourned at 11:49 AM.

**Next Meeting:** _TBD – April 1st meeting cancelled_. Mr. Lazaro noted that the Committee might need to meet again after May 1st, if ODOT should decide to kick the STIF Plan back for any revisions that required Committee review and approval.