

STIF Discretionary Coordination Meeting Pilot: Project Assessment and Recommendations

December 15, 2022

Project Description

As part of the FY 2019-21 Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund Discretionary Program (STIF-D), the Oregon Department of Transportation identified several funded projects with “deliverables related to the acquisition and use of passenger-facing transit technology. Objectives of such technology include improving coordination between service providers, providing universal fare options to passengers, and providing passengers with tools that advance trip planning and the expression of real-time vehicle tracking data.”¹ Due to the statewide significance of these projects, ODOT set an award condition that the grantees coordinate their projects, with the goal to “improve statewide network connectivity and improve the passenger experience.” The intent of this coordination was not to burden the grantees, but instead to provide an opportunity to improve their project outcomes and connect with other transit agencies.

ODOT Public Transportation Division (PTD) contracted with Full Path Transit Technology (Full Path) to lead a series of meetings for grantees, with some support from Trillium Solutions (Trillium). The purpose of the meetings was to provide a dedicated space for participants to:

1. Share knowledge about successes and failures of technology implementation in their transportation programs.
2. Discuss opportunities to collaborate that could result in improved efficiency or project outcomes, including as to service and product procurement processes.
3. Encourage the involved agencies to make procurement and data development choices that do not unnecessarily conflict with those choices made by neighboring transit agencies.

¹ *Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund: Discretionary and Statewide Transit Network Fund Programs, Report to PTAC on STIF Selection Committee, Funding Recommendations.* Available at: <https://www.oregon.gov/odot/RPTD/RPTD%20Committee%20Meeting%20Documents/STIF-Disc-and-Statewide-Transit-Network-Funding-Recommendation-Report-to-PTAC-WebVersion.pdf>

Grantee Projects

Grantees and their projects included the following:

- **City of Wilsonville (SMART)**: “SMART Intelligent Transportation System” (Agreement #33785)
- **Clackamas County Social Services**: “Regional Integrated Fare Collection System Analysis” (Agreement #33802)
- **Mid-Columbia Economic Development District (MCEDD)**: “Gorge TransLink Alliance Mobility Management Project” (Agreement #33810)
- **Oregon Cascades West Council of Governments (OCWCOG)**: “Providing a Seamless Transit Experience” (Agreement #33812)
- **Ride Connection and Washington County**: “Community Transit and Demand Response System Technology Capital Improvements” (Agreement #33792)
- **Tillamook County Transportation District (TCTD)**: “NWOTA Website Trip Planner Enhancement Project” (Agreement #33814)

Sunset Empire Transportation District (SETD) was invited to join the cohort, but their grant was not conditioned on participation. Their project, “Astoria - Portland Inter-community,” included a technology task within a larger operations project.

Sorting Projects into Three Tracks

Recognizing several themes running through these projects, Full Path organized these grantees into three “tracks” based on similarities in project focus. Two of the tracks paired distinct yet related themes.

Grantees	Track 1	Track 2		Track 3	
	E-fare	Operations ²	In-vehicle Hardware	Tech Supporting Coordination ³	Rider-Facing Travel Information
SMART		x	x		x
Clackamas Co.	x			x	
MCEDD				x	x
OCWCOG	x			x	x
Washington County		x	x		x
SETD	x			x	x
TCTD				x	x

² In this context, “Operations” refers to the back-office technology tools that support daily operations of scheduling, dispatching, and reporting.

³ “Tech Supporting Coordination” refers to technology that is shared by multiple agencies.

The tracks were used to shape meeting agendas, so that project updates could be grouped according to similar themes. This structure was also intended to make it easier for agencies to identify the relevant portion(s) of a meeting so that, if faced with scheduling demands, they could attend only the portion of the meeting that was most relevant to them. In practice, most of the attendees stayed for the entire meeting.

Quarterly Meetings

Full Path facilitated nine meetings with the six grantees, although the original requirement for grantees was to attend seven meetings. The grant period for these six agreements was originally scheduled to end in June 2021, but it was extended to December 2021 to allow more time for meaningful coordination and accommodate technology procurement schedules. As a result, ODOT arranged for Full Path to facilitate two additional meetings. Attendance at these two meetings were optional for all grantees.

Meeting invitations were sent to representatives from each grantee organization and any partnering organizations. ODOT PTD staff were also invited. Total attendance, including the facilitator, averaged 20 people (13 from grantee organizations, 5 from ODOT, and 2 from Full Path/Trillium). The size of the meetings promoted participation. Larger meetings often result in participation from only a few people, and smaller meetings often lack the energy to keep everyone engaged. The coordination meetings were characterized by a high level of candor among grantees about their progress and the challenges to project implementation.

The core of each meeting agenda was structured around the three tracks, in which agencies provided project updates. More in-depth, but still brief (10-minute) presentations on each grantee project were also incorporated into the meetings, usually one or two per meeting. Typically, these presentations were made by agency staff, but in some cases, a grantee's consultant made the presentation. In general, these presentations included an overview of the project, updates on project implementation, and lessons learned.

Meeting time was also allocated to discuss agency response to the unprecedented events of COVID-19 pandemic and wildfires. These conversations were not limited to technological elements of the responses to these unprecedented events; topics included changes in ridership and adjusting service offerings in a variety of ways. However, TCTD's project did adapt to incorporate its wildfire response. Their updated website included a change to how dispatchers and other staff in agencies could load service alerts. During the fires, staff took advantage of the alert system, which also pushed alerts out to TransitApp and Google.

Full Path provided written notes following each meeting. All meeting materials, including agendas, notes, recordings, presentation slides, and reports or other documents referenced during meetings were made available in a shared Google drive folder, which will be maintained after the pilot's completion. For the final three meetings, Full Path also saved automated transcripts and video recordings to the archive. This archive contains copies of the grantees'

original proposals, contact information for meeting invitees, and sample Requests for Proposals (RFPs) (some from grantees and some from other agencies).

Effectiveness of Project

Grantee Feedback

In February 2021, Full Path sent a survey to grantees to gather their feedback about the pilot project and to inform ODOT's decision about whether to hold additional meetings (beyond the six that were originally planned). A copy of the survey results is included as Appendix A. Generally speaking, the results reflect positive views of the meetings.

- Respondents indicated that they would seek future discretionary funding for transit technology if that funding were conditioned on participation in a series of coordination meetings.
- With slightly less enthusiasm, they indicated that they would also participate in a series of coordination meetings that were not tied to a specific source of funding.
- Most respondents were interested in additional, optional coordination meetings.
- All respondents agreed that the information sharing aspect of the meetings worked well.
- Almost all respondents felt that the meetings had a positive effect on their decision-making processes during their STIF-D funded projects, citing discussion of lessons learned, detailed information, and RFP preparation.
- Respondents were evenly divided as to whether the meetings helped them form or reinforce their peer networks.

Most of the respondents said that they would prefer to have meetings led by an external facilitator, although the remaining respondents expressed no preference. As the facilitator, Kevin Chambers of Full Path sought to bring his experience with planning and implementing transit technology projects to bear in discussions.

The survey also included questions about technology assessments and technical assistance provided by Trillium and Full Path. Not all of the respondents received these forms of assistance. The limited information provided in responses indicates positive experiences with technology assessments and assistance.

Evidence of Collaboration

An objective of this pilot was to foster opportunities for grantees to build on each other's work. Procurement processes and RFP development are common challenges across agencies, making interagency sharing in these areas especially helpful. To that end, Full Path and Trillium collected past RFPs from similar projects and new RFPs from the grantees in a shared Google

Drive folder. This RFP repository is an ongoing resource for grantees beyond the pilot project's life span.

The grantees participated in peer-to-peer exchange between meetings. For example, Ride Connection shared advice and lessons learned about procuring scheduling and dispatching software with SMART.

It is too soon to present tangible evidence of the long-term impact of the discussions between grantees. However, the meetings provided opportunities to spark creativity across agencies. By gathering people engaged with varied agencies and communities, the pilot offered chances to see what other people are doing to solve similar problems, which has the potential to inform choices and decisions in the future.

Although not attributable to this pilot, grantees gave examples of how they have taken advantage of prior technology successes of other agencies. Notably, MCEDD's and OCWCOG's websites (improved or created under this round of grants) were both modeled conceptually after NWOTA's, with the MCEDD website also reusing elements of NWOTA's underlying software. It is likely that the common coordination processes, co-branding, and website design language that NWOTA, MCEDD, and OCWCOG have developed could be replicated by other regions around the state. A playbook for the development of regional transit networks would advance that effort.

Benefits of ODOT PTD Attendance

In addition to promoting information sharing across transportation providers, the meetings also resulted in knowledge transfer between grantees and ODOT staff. The meetings provided more detail on project progress than is available in grant reports. Staff had additional insight into the grantees' challenges, especially timing issues. The meetings also provided context for grantee activities and helped illustrate what new software and other procurements allow agencies to achieve.

PTD staff who attended these meetings were also able to respond to requests for information from grantees. For example, PTD's Technical Resource Center Coordinator Melani Hanna gathered information on the state of best practices for insurance and cybersecurity for mobile ticketing applications. Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, Melani also shared information about where agencies throughout the state were able to order cleaning supplies.

Challenges of Technology Coordination

Grantees faced numerous challenges in implementing their projects. These challenges emerged in the meetings in part due to the willingness of participants to share their difficulties openly. The technology landscape for small transit providers is ever-changing and not yet mature. As described by Regional Transit Coordinator (RTC) Mark Bernard, implementing technology projects requires "dealing with competitors in emerging markets". This complexity is present

regardless of the type of technology project or whether it is undertaken by one provider or by a coalition of providers seeking a shared solution.

Some of the grantees' challenges were specific to projects that involved interagency coordination. For example, for agencies that coordinate their services, the appeal of adopting a common ticketing system is strong. However, the steps to achieve that goal are complex, with the difficulties mostly not relating to technology. Instead, the challenges most often center on building consensus among agencies about priorities, processes, and timelines.

Similarly, when agencies seek to share or align software or other technology assets, there are extra layers of legal review necessary. Given that procurement processes are generally already time-consuming, adding additional obstacles can further complicate or at least lengthen the implementation timeline.

These issues benefit from an early infusion of sufficient resources. Upfront investment can be helpful at the design and implementation stages of projects, or even before that, in the development of a clear vision for what "regional public transportation" should look like. For example, a significant element in the success of NWOTA's launch can be attributed to the \$3.5 million in seed funding it received from the US Department of Energy in 2010. While these funds supported many different budget categories, it is notable for this report's purposes that funds were allocated to support the significant planning efforts needed. All subsequent technology investments for NWOTA have been built upon that foundation.

Considerations for Future Cohorts and Other ODOT Programming

This pilot effort introduced numerous ideas that can be used to inform future iterations of a similar cohort of technology-focused grantees as well as other PTD programming. The following are Full Path's top process improvement recommendations for future coordination efforts.

Always Clarify Coordination Goals and Means

As with any programming, any future requirement for grantees to participate in a similar cohort should have an explicitly stated goal or goals. Those goals should be used to shape program design and evaluation efforts, so that everyone who is participating knows what the intention behind the program is and how well that intention is being achieved. Because coordination can take a multitude of forms and requires investment of staff time, concrete descriptions of what the coordination will require of grantees should be provided to the extent possible.

Explore Different Ways to Structure Meetings

Although this cohort reported that they appreciated the chance to hear about each other's projects, it is worth exploring whether a different meeting structure (e.g., one with less reliance on project updates) would be beneficial. Possibilities include:

- Hold separate meetings by project track, to allow for more focused discussions. Participation in meetings outside of one's track could be made optional. A larger group meeting could be held to share lessons learned from each smaller group.
- Invite guest speakers, from outside the grantee group, who have already implemented comparable programs, whether or not they are from agencies of similar size. This could include members of the pilot cohort as well as other agencies in the state.
- Establish a theme for each meeting agenda, perhaps decided upon by the group itself, rather than structuring around project updates.
- Group providers by geography and/or agency size.

Connecting This Effort to Other PTD Efforts

When ODOT's peer-to-peer exchange program can be fully implemented and in-person work restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic are lifted, PTD staff should consider exploring the role that this pilot's grantees can play in the peer-to-peer program. Specifically, these grantees could be good candidates for this program, because they have experience sharing their successes and challenges with others. Full Path is most familiar with the grantees and so can only comment on their apparent comfort with transparently offering lessons learned. ODOT should of course draw on their knowledge of the full community of transportation providers in the state.

It may also be worth considering how project outcomes could be shared across the state to help other providers develop their STIF-D grant applications and/or their technology planning efforts. Sharing could take multiple forms, including conference presentations, project summaries posted on the PTD website, or with the help of RTCs.

Understanding ODOT's Role in These Meetings

Although a survey about the pilot was given to the grantee participants, the PTD staff who participated in these meetings were not formally surveyed. Understandably, the ability of each individual PTD staff member to attend meetings consistently was limited due to competing responsibilities. Nevertheless, every meeting included some PTD staff, and gaining their feedback would be valuable. For example, hearing about the real-time challenges and successes during project implementation is distinctly different from reading an end-of-project grant report. Ideally, ODOT would be able to use similar coordination meetings to inform their programming, to identify areas where PTD can better support providers, and to study areas that PTD has found to present the greatest challenges to project planning and implementation.

Appendix A: STIF Discretionary Technology Coordination Pilot Survey

Anonymized Results

Six respondents total

1. Would you seek future discretionary funding for transit technology if that funding were conditioned on participation in a series of coordination meetings? (Scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "definitely not" and 5 being "absolutely yes")

- 5: 4 respondents
- 4: 2 respondents
- No responses in any other category

2. Would you participate in a series of coordination meetings where they were not tied to a specific source of funding? (Scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "definitely not" and 5 being "absolutely yes")

- 5: 1 respondent
- 4: 3 respondents
- 3: 2 respondents
- No responses in any other category

3. The coordination meetings are scheduled to end in April 2021, but the STIF grants have been extended to December 2021. If ODOT were able to offer them, would you be interested in additional coordination meetings during the grant extension period?

- Yes: 4
- No: 2

4. What about the coordination meetings worked well for you? If not applicable, enter 'N/A'

- Gives the opportunity for Q&A
- Good to hear about other projects and connect on the program in general
- Hearing other agencies around the state with similar projects discussing challenges and exchanging information. It was especially helpful to network and speak offline regarding specific projects.
- Interesting to hear what others are doing
- Sharing info with partners at the front end is very helpful
- The round-table updates on all the projects were helpful--hearing about the progress and process as providers vetted or implemented new technologies.

5. Do you have suggested improvements if a similar cohort were formed in the future? If not applicable, enter 'N/A'

- I think the meetings flowed smoothly, but combining different types of projects, even if separated by agenda items made for larger groups and difficult for everyone to find availability. I believe separating groups by project type or "break out" meetings in between, say larger quarterly meetings, would be beneficial for everyone.
- I would not have the meetings go on for so many months.
- It is especially relevant to hear what projects neighboring transit providers are considering or implementing. If you have multiple groups, I would group them by proximity. Also relevant would be grouping providers by size.
- N/A
- N/A
- no

Appendix A: STIF Discretionary Technology Coordination Pilot Survey

Anonymized Results

Six respondents total

6. What meeting topics were especially interesting to you? Check all that apply.

- Track 1: Traveler information and inter-agency coordination: 5 respondents
- Track 2: Operations and in-vehicle hardware: 4 respondents
- Track 3: E-fare: 3 respondents

7. What additional topics do you wish had been part of these meetings? If not applicable, enter 'N/A'

- Discussion of renewable resources for transit
- N/A
- N/A
- na
- not sure, maybe wayfinding amenities
- Safety and Security in regards to technology hardware/software

8a. Have the coordination meetings benefitted decision-making for your STIF-funded project?

- Yes: 5 respondents
- No: 1 respondent

8b. How have the coordination meetings benefitted decision-making for your STIF-funded project? If not applicable, enter 'N/A'

- It is helpful to discuss lessons learned
- More detailed information
- na
- Recommendation from the group streamlined research and ideas were integrated into the RFP.
- [Agency] hasn't made any technology-adoption decisions that were directly impacted by the coordination meetings, but the coordination meetings have provided a good foundation of information for future decision-making.

9a. Did your participation help you form or reinforce a peer network?

- Yes: 3 respondents
- No: 3 respondents

9b. Please share your thoughts on how your peer network has or has not changed. If not applicable, enter 'N/A'

- I continue to be in touch with some of the agencies involved and believe that will continue well into the future.
- learn about other agencies seeking the same solutions as you
- N/A
- N/A
- N/A
- There is a better sense of having a state-connected transit team

10a. Did Trillium/Full Path complete a written assessment of your agency's technology use?

- Yes: 3 respondents
- No: 3 respondents

Appendix A: STIF Discretionary Technology Coordination Pilot Survey

Anonymized Results

Six respondents total

10b. Please share your thoughts about the assessment. How helpful was it? What was helpful about it? If not applicable, enter 'N/A'

- N/A
- The assessment was a good snapshot of where our agency was and recommendations for what would be beneficial from a technology perspective.
- The assessment was for one of the providers that I represent. The provider will be able to use the assessment to understand their own needs more clearly and to narrow down feature options.

11a. Did Trillium/Full Path provide your agency with technical assistance?

- Yes: 3 respondents
- No: 3 respondents

11b. Please share your thoughts about the technical assistance you received. How helpful was it? What was helpful about it? If not applicable, enter 'N/A'

- Helped support AVL data
- Please note that my last two responses would have been "not sure." Someone else would track that.
- Trillium/Full Path was helpful in giving recommendations throughout our RFP. It helped us clarify parameters around what exactly we were requiring from potential proposers.

12. If you were involved in a similar cohort/coordination effort, what kind of facilitation would you prefer?

- Meetings led by an external facilitator (as with this effort): 4 respondents
- No preference: 2 respondents