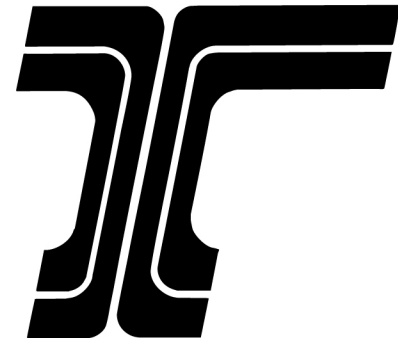


Oregon Department of Transportation



STIF Discretionary and Statewide Transit Network Application: FY 2023-25

Applicant Information

Agency Legal Name

Sunset Empire Transportation District

Project Title

Lower Columbia Connector - Expanded

Agency Legal Address

900 Marine Dr., Astoria, Oregon 97103

Application Contact Name

Jeff Hazen

Application Contact Title

Executive Director

Application Contact Email Address

jeff@ridethebus.org

Application Contact Phone Number

(503) 861-5399

Name of Person Signing Agreement

Debbie Boothe-Schmidt

Title of Person Signing Agreement

Board Chairperson

Email Address of Person Signing Agreement

jeff@ridethebus.org

Phone Number of Person Signing Agreement

503-861-5399

Agency Information

1. Transit Agency Type

Transportation District

1.A Does the agency have any existing grant agreements with ODOT?

Yes

2. What is the main type of service that will be supported by this award?

Fixed Route

3. Would this award support ongoing operations of an existing service?

Yes

3.A Brief history of current project/service. What, if any, elements of the proposed project differ from existing efforts and services?

The Lower Columbia Connector is the northern most route in the Northwest Oregon Transit Alliance (NWOTA), providing public transportation between Astoria and Portland along U.S. Highway 30. It serves cities and communities in both Clatsop and Columbia counties. The current route begins at the Astoria Transit Center in Astoria and terminates at Union Station in Portland.

NWOTA is an inter-agency collaborative program between five public transit organizations that are situated in five counties in Northwest Oregon. This unique consortium manages the regional Northwest Connector bus routes that connects the Willamette Valley with the Northwest Oregon coast and provides critical transit linkage between rural areas and small communities with major cities, tourist attractions, medical facilities, recreational activities, places of work, and many other destinations.

Risk Assessment Information

4. Did your agency have any turnover of management or financial staff in the last two years?

Yes

5. Does your agency have an accounting system that allows you to completely and accurately track the receipt and disbursement of funds related to the award?

Yes

6. What type of accounting system does your agency use?

Automated

7. Does your agency have a system in place that will account for 100 percent of each employee's time?

Yes

8. Did your staff members attend required training and meetings during the previous biennium?

Yes

9. Was your agency audited by the federal government in the past two years?

No

10. Did your agency stay on budget in the past two years?

Yes

Agency Qualifications

11. Describe how your agency has the legal, managerial and operational capacity to perform and report on project progress within the scope, schedule and budget of the anticipated grant agreement. (Description of operational capacity should apply specifically for the workload of

projects in this application.)

Sunset Empire Transportation District operates all facets of public transportation with our own employees in Clatsop County. The leadership team of the District consists of an Executive Director, a Chief Operating Officer, a Finance Manager, a Mobility Management Manager, a Transportation Options Specialist, an Executive Assistant, and a Human Resources Manager. We also have three Driver Supervisors, a Paratransit Supervisor, and a Maintenance Supervisor. Legal counsel is provided by a licensed attorney in Oregon selected by the Board of Commissioners. The Board of Commissioners is the governing body elected to 4-year terms and is responsible for setting District policies and employing the Executive Director. The Executive Director is responsible for the implementation of the policies set by the Board of Commissioners and the overall operation of all facets of the District. This is done through the efforts of the leadership and all other employees of the District.

12. Certification of Compliance

By checking this box, the applicant certifies that if they are awarded funding, they will meet and ensure compliance for the term of the agreement with applicable federal, state and local laws and regulations including, and not limited to, those pertaining to passenger transportation, civil rights, labor, insurance, safety and health.

Yes

13. Do you plan to use a Sub-Recipient or contractor to implement the grant supported activity?

No

14. If you seek the 10 percent match reduction, does the project meet one or more of the four factors identified in OAR 732-044-0005(4)(a)? Select each factor that you believe is exemplified by the proposed project.

Not applying for 10% match reduction

15. Will federal funds be used to complete this project?

No

Project Information

16.A Project Title

Lower Columbia Connector - Expanded

16.B Describe the project to be funded. Clearly describe what the requested fund award would be used to accomplish, detailing the specific tasks and deliverables. Where relevant, identify the origin and destination of the proposed service as well as each municipality visited along the route. Please see page 7 of the application instructions for additional guidance on writing a project description.

The expansion of the Lower Columbia Connector Route will add a stop at the Portland International Airport after the current final stop at Union Station in Portland. The route will still begin in Astoria and serve the communities of Svensen, Knappa, and Westport in Clatsop County and the cities of Clatskanie, Rainier, St. Helens, and Scappoose in Columbia County.

Fiscal year 2021-2022 saw a ridership increase of 33%, and fiscal year 2022-2023 YTD increase is 42%.

Currently, riders of this route have to get off at Union Station walk with their luggage about two minutes to the MAX stop at NW 6th and Hoyt to board the MAX Green Line. They ride the Green Line to the east side of the Willamette River and get off at the NW 7th stop. Then they have to get on the MAX Red Line that goes to the airport, again having to carry or roll their luggage with them. Seniors and people with disabilities is the main focus of this expanded service. Seniors and people with disabilities accounts for

14% of the ridership on the Lower Columbia Connector. This will not only benefit seniors and people with disabilities, it will also be a great added service for the general public.

The most common question we receive about the Lower Columbia Connector, whether it is submitted through our website, emailed to us, or via phone call, is do we provide service to the Portland International Airport. It is estimated that approximately 20% of the riders on the eastbound Lower Columbia Connector go on to the airport after arriving at Union Station. While some choose to ride the MAX, others find alternative transportation such as taxis or Uber and Lyft. They choose them because of the convenience of not having to navigate the MAX with their luggage. By adding the airport as a stop, we can reduce the stress of their travel and reduce their travel costs.

This added service is especially important for seniors and people with disabilities. Having the ability to stay on one vehicle for their trip to the airport respects their limitations and will give them peace of mind that we offer a service that is designed specifically with them in mind.

17. What is the minimum project cost that will still allow your project to proceed?

\$850,000.00

18. Select the fund source(s) for which you would like to compete and that you believe your project is eligible to receive. Check all that apply.

STIF Discretionary

STIF Intercommunity Discretionary

FTA Section 5311(f) Intercity

19. Why is this an important project? What are the consequences of this project not receiving funding?

This route has proven to be a major benefit for riders along Highway 30 from Astoria to Scappoose to travel to Portland and leave their vehicle at home. This is shown by the double-digit growth we have experienced last year and are showing this year. Adding the stop at the Portland International Airport will be an important component of additional relevancy and growth for the Lower Columbia Connector. Providing additional opportunities for seniors and people with disabilities will enhance their independence and quality of life. The general public will benefit as well both by this convenience and by helping to reduce congestion along Highway 30 along with the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions due to the reduction of cars travelling, especially single occupancy vehicles. We will have a robust outreach program through marketing of this added stop that will help us reach our goal of a 60% increase in ridership.

Failure to obtain support for the route will impact the lives of the individuals who rely on the service to access medical appointments, employment, shopping and entertainment needs they have. They will have to seek out others to either drive them to Portland or take more expensive transportation such as taxis.

20. Will this project involve breaking ground or any other activity that might require environmental review per federal requirements?

No

Oregon Transportation Commission Investment Priorities

Equity and Public Transportation Service to Low-Income Households

21. Describe how this project would support and improve access for vulnerable populations and/or

historically marginalized communities.

Many of the seniors and people with disabilities also fall into the low-income category. This service will reduce their transportation costs by not having to spend money on the high-priced fuels we are experiencing. The added fare to go to the Portland International Airport will only be \$1.00. The improved access for the vulnerable population will enhance their lives and give them peace of mind that they have a transportation option that will save them money and be a convenient alternative to access the airport. As stated previously, the focus of this added stop is to benefit seniors and people with disabilities, providing equitable transportation options is how we design our system, including this route expansion.

Coordination of Public Transportation Services

22. Describe how this project would improve the passenger experience, benefit multiple transit providers, or involve consolidation, coordination, or resource sharing between agencies, including use of transportation data and technology.

The Lower Columbia Connector route travels along Highway 30 servicing residents of both Clatsop and Columbia Counties. A few years ago, we shared this route with Columbia County Rider. We would serve Astoria to Rainier and Columbia County Rider would serve Rainier to Portland. Columbia County Rider continued to experience financial issues that prevented them from supporting the route. We made the decision to make the entire run from Astoria to Portland allowing them to focus on their local service and to also reduce the transfer in Rainier. This is the philosophy for enhancing this route, increasing the rider experience by eliminating transfers along the route. It also continued the needs of riders in Columbia County to have an affordable and convenient option to travel to and from Portland.

As a partner in NWOTA, the coordination of public transportation services is why NWOTA was a groundbreaking effort when it began several years ago. We have enhanced the NWOTA website, rolled out the Transit app and the Token Transit app. These apps benefit riders by giving them the technology they seek to plan trips, track bus locations, and purchase fare and pass electronically. The coordinating committee of NWOTA meets monthly to review our services and to plan service enhancements in order to benefit those we serve and those we want to serve. We closely monitor new technology through trade magazines and conferences that is developed. We evaluate the new technology to ensure that it is relevant to our mission and will enhance the relevancy of our service to riders and potential riders. By working together, we are often able to negotiate a better value in the procurement of new technology.

Environmental and Public Health

23. Describe how this project would go beyond providing an alternative to personal car use to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, reduce pollution, and/or support positive health outcomes. How does this project support applicant's climate planning efforts?

This is another crucial component of NWOTA, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and pollution. YTD this fiscal year (July through October), we have reduced 365.1 tons of CO2 have been avoided. Fossil fuels saved total 43,620 YTD and 1,602,910 vehicle miles traveled have been saved. Reducing single occupancy vehicle traveled has been proven by the successful efforts of NWOTA. As we expand this route and increase ridership, these numbers will increase tremendously as we attract new riders that want to use the service to access the airport.

Safety, Security, and Community Livability

24. Describe how the project would increase use and participation in active transportation, and support connections between transit and other travel modes like biking and walking.

The Lower Columbia Connector route provides buses with the capability to carry multiple bicycles either on bike racks or in luggage compartments. The Oregon coast is a major draw for people wanting to visit and ride their bicycles along the coast. We routinely get contacted by people from across the country and across the world that want to know if they can bring bicycles on our buses. Prior to the pandemic, one of

NWOTA's marketing efforts included advertising our service on the Bike Portland website in order to showcase that bicycle riders have an option to leave their car at home and travel to the coast on our buses to ride down the coast. There is another group that we met with last year that was interested in our service and how they could plan a trip utilizing the Connector routes for a group of bicyclists. The two leaders of the group are planning on a test trip for both of them in order to experience what we offer before they plan their group trip. NWOTA's coordinating committee has approved an updated marketing plan now that the pandemic has subsided, and tourism has rebounded on the coast.

25. Describe how the project would support and improve safety of passengers in transit vehicles and safety of other roadway users.

Traveling by public transportation is one of the safest travel modes that people can experience. We do not have any recordable accidents. We equip all of our buses with seatbelts and separate luggage compartments to keep people and their possessions secure. We employ professional drivers who get extensive training in order to perform their job safely. They are coached throughout the year and evaluated annually to ensure that they are performing their duties properly. Because we have larger buses on this route, we can significantly reduce the amount of vehicles on the highway. This reduces congestion and also the opportunity for accidents. We encourage people to ride our bus and use their mobile devices rather than driving themselves and attempting to use their mobile devices.

Statewide Transit Network Connections

26. Describe how this project would support and improve the utility and connectivity of the Statewide Transit Network and/or create a foundation for future Statewide Transit Network improvements.

This project is important and relevant to the connectivity of the Statewide Transit Network because we provide service along Highway 30 and serve both Clatsop and Columbia counties. Highway 30 is a major route to and from the coast for Portland area residents. Without it, Clatsop County and Columbia County residents would be extremely limited with their transportation options to get to and from Portland. Highway 30 is a major route to and from the coast for Portland area residents and our efforts to reduce congestion along the highway are paying off by reducing traffic on the highway and providing people with the ability to travel around the state on public transportation.

Funding and Strategic Investment

27. Describe why investment in this project makes sense from both the perspective of current need and long term Oregon transit needs.

The Oregon Public Transportation Vision states, In 2045, public transportation is an integral, interconnected component of Oregon's transportation system that makes Oregon's diverse cities, towns, and communities work. Because public transportation is convenient, affordable, and efficient, it helps further the state's quality of life and economic vitality and contributes to the health and safety of all residents, while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

This project checks all of the boxes in this important vision. This route serves multiple cities and communities, connects them with multiple modes of transportation, improves the lives the people it serves by making it convenient, affordable and efficient. It also significantly reduces pollution and greenhouse gas emissions which improves the lives of people along the route.

People, especially in rural areas, don't always think of public transportation. By having the buses on this route branded with the Lower Columbia Connector logo, and through outreach and marketing efforts, we bring awareness to people that there is an alternative to driving. This is especially relevant with the high cost of fuel right now.

28. If this project will last beyond the 2023-25 biennium, describe the plan for ongoing funding

including match. If not applicable, type N/A.

This important project will last beyond the upcoming biennium. As we grow ridership and increase fare revenue, we anticipate seeking less funding in the future through discretionary operating grants. It is likely that STIF Formula funds will be increasingly used as well in the future. The Transportation Advisory Committee and the Board of Commissioners will be discussing this during next month's meetings.

29. Does this project depend on other funding sources including other discretionary grants whose outcomes are uncertain? If yes, please list those fund sources. If not applicable, type N/A.

It will be recommended to the Transportation Advisory Committee that STIF Formula funds be used along with other local funds be used as match. This will include property taxes and timber harvest funds. The Board has made this expanded route a top priority during their recent work session on strategic priorities for the 23-25 biennium. They will be adopting the strategic policy plan and their meeting on December 9th.

30. Capital Asset Purchases

Describe proposed capital purchases. If no capital assets are included in your application, type N/A.

N/A

Project Details

Task Category

- Project Administration
- Operating
- Preventive Maintenance

Project Administration

Give a brief (1-3 sentences) description of this project cost.

Project administration will include the amount that we were awarded for this biennium with the addition of funds for marketing of the expanded route.

Total Task Cost (Grant Amount + Match Amount)

\$60,000.00

Project Task and Match Amounts

20% Match Rate Calculations

**Grant Amount - STIF Discretionary/STIF
Intercommunity/5311f (80% State/Fed Share)**
\$48,000.00

**Match Amount - STIF Discretionary/STIF
Intercommunity/5311f (20% Local Share)**
\$12,000.00

Operating

Give a brief (1-3 sentences) description of this project cost.

Operating assistance will be used for the costs involved with the project.

Total Task Cost (Grant Amount + Match Amount)

\$876,945.00

Project Task and Match Amounts

50% Match Rate Calculations

Grant Amount - 5311f (50% Fed Share)
\$438,472.50

Match Amount - 5311f (50% Local Share)
\$438,472.50

20% Match Rate Calculations

**Grant Amount - STIF Discretionary/STIF
Intercommunity (80% State Share)**
\$701,556.00

**Match Amount - STIF Discretionary/STIF
Intercommunity (20% Local Share)**
\$175,389.00

Preventive Maintenance

Give a brief (1-3 sentences) description of this project cost.

Preventive Maintenance will support the reliability of the fleet used for this project.

Total Task Cost (Grant Amount + Match Amount)
\$94,755.00

Project Task and Match Amounts

20% Match Rate Calculations

**Grant Amount - STIF Discretionary/STIF
Intercommunity/5311f (80% State/Fed Share)**
\$75,804.00

**Match Amount - STIF Discretionary/STIF
Intercommunity/5311f (20% Local Share)**
\$18,951.00

Application Totals

Match Sources

Match Sources	Amount
State	\$206,340.00

Are matching funds of at least 20% of project costs available if the project is awarded?

Yes

What percent of funds will be used for demand response transportation?

0%

Percent of funds used for fixed route transportation

100%

Note on Application Totals: If applying for 5311(f) Operating, a 50% match rate is applied to identified Operating costs. However, the application form automatically applies a 20% match rate to the full Project Cost, including Operating costs. Therefore, Section 5311(f) applicants should ensure the accuracy of the Total Task Cost for each Task Category, as the 20% match rate will only apply to non-Operating costs in a 5311(f) grant award. The form is unable to calculate an accurate application total using two different match rates.

Application Totals Summary By Task - 20% Match Rate

Task Category	Task Project Cost	Task Grant Amount	Task Match Amount
Vehicle Expansion	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Vehicle Replacement	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Equipment Purchase	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Facility Purchase	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Signs/Shelters	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Planning	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Project Administration	\$60,000.00	\$48,000.00	\$12,000.00
Operating	\$876,945.00	\$701,556.00	\$175,389.00
Preventive Maintenance	\$94,755.00	\$75,804.00	\$18,951.00
Mobility Management	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
	Total Project Cost: \$1,031,700.00	Total Grant Amount: \$825,360.00	Total Match Amount: \$206,340.00

Application Totals Summary By Task - 5311(f) Operations Only

Task Category	Task Project Cost	Task Grant Amount	Task Match Amount
Operating	\$876,945.00	\$438,472.50	\$438,472.50