

**COLUMBIA COUNTY CITIZEN TRANSIT ADVISORY COMMITTEE AND
STATEWIDE TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT FUND COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES**

Meeting Date: May 17, 2022

Time: 4:00 P.M.

Place: Columbia County Transit, St. Helens, OR

Present: Bill Eagle; Claudia Eagle, Marty Rowe, Blanche Katz (virtual)

Absent: Scott Burge; Charlotte Hart, Dena Chesney

Staff: John Dreeszen, Transit Director

Guests: Arla Miller, Kathy Kleczek (virtual), Alta Lynch (virtual), Frank Urbansky (virtual)

Call to Order (CCRTAC): Chair B. Eagle called the meeting to order at 4:17 P.M.

Approval of March 15, 2022 Meeting Minutes: The Committee approved the March 15, 2022 meeting minutes unanimously.

Public Comments: The Committee paused for public comment and Kathy Kleczek, from NW Transportation Options, noted that she is aware Columbia County Rider is facing some challenges. She offered to help with organization of van pools for employers with utilization of Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF) grant money.

Grant & Budget Updates: Mr. Dreeszen shared that recently he presented the Transit Department budget for Fiscal Year 22-23 to the Columbia County Budget Committee. The budget includes a reserve from STIF grants that will carry over from Fiscal Year 21-22 with a sum of approximately \$300,000. These reserves will be used for further improvements within CC Rider. In addition to the reserve, Columbia County will contribute \$50,000 from the Economic Development Fund to the Transit department. As of this meeting, Mr. Dreeszen has not heard of any changes to the proposed budget and has knowledge that it has been approved by vote.

Mr. Dreeszen went on to describe three separate Five Year Budget Projections that were shared on Facebook the week prior. These projections were created in preparation for the Transit Budget presentation and for the two upcoming public forums. The first budget projection titled

‘No Change in Current Service Level’ outlines how the Transit Department would end this year fiscally (with a surplus) and projects that every fiscal year following 22-23 would amount to a growing deficit. The projected deficit would be the result of maintaining a service contract with MTR Western in which their service fee increases significantly and will continue increasing yearly.

The second budget projection is titled ‘DAR Plus 1 Morning, 1 Evening Effective 10-1-22’. This projection suggests that CC Rider decrease Line 1 service from its current 3 morning and 3 afternoon/evening runs to 1 morning and 1 afternoon/evening run. Mr. Dreeszen did want to point out that while ridership for Line 1 has been steadily increasing, it is nowhere near pre-pandemic numbers. This projection surmises that entering into the proposed contract with MTR Western, while decreasing Line 1 service, would only result in a modest deficit by the end of the 27-28 fiscal year.

The third budget projection is titled ‘Elimination of Line 1 Services 10-1-22’. This projection is based solely on CC Rider operating Dial-A-Ride service and nothing else. At first glance it appears that fiscally this is the best option to avoid a deficit, however Mr. Dreeszen explains that although a surplus appears for Fiscal Years 2023 through 2028, the surplus begins to decrease yearly and will ultimately result in a deficit.

Chair B. Eagle commented that every projection is like a ‘Catch 22’, however these projections do not take into account the rising fuel costs and how that pushes individuals to look for more affordable ways of transportation. Chair B. Eagle continued to stress that by cutting services it would ultimately cut ridership even further and therefore create less of an incentive for the community to utilize CC Rider. Finally, Chair B. Eagle stated, that if the County Commissioners want to continue county growth, they need to support the transportation system. Columbia County is one of the few counties in the state that does not have dependable source of funding such as a special transit tax. A decrease in service would directly affect those that depend on this service to get to work.

In regards to the projections, Mr. Dreeszen will share the feedback from this committee as well as any comments that arise from the public forums.

Due to technical difficulties the live video recording abruptly stopped at 4:56PM and connection was unable to be reestablished. CCRATAC committee members and guests continued discussions as recorded by a manual recording device

Arla Miller, Regional Transit Coordinator, shared that with the passing of the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), funds for public transit will be increased 30-40% but funds need to be matched locally in order to be awarded. CC Rider subsists almost entirely

on federal and state funds therefore it is unlikely that Columbia County will match what the Act could potentially provide.

Committee Member Rowe asked what the effect would be if CC Rider solely operated Dial-A-Ride and then gradually brought back services like Line 1. Mr. Dreeszen explained that there are several things to consider. One being that there are several vehicles on order, 2 of which are solely for the purpose of Line 1 service. Another strong consideration would be the diminishing confidence Columbia County residents would have with CC Rider if Line 1 was completely dissolved. Ultimately the decision of whether or not to cut or dissolve Line 1 to prioritize Dial-A-Ride rests on the fact that many lives depend on the Dial-A-Ride service.

Committee Member Rowe is interested in putting another transit levy onto the local ballot, however Mr. Dreeszen is skeptical given the low support it garnered the time previous. Chair B. Eagle remembers that there were influential community members that publicly came out against a levy.

Service Updates: None.

Committee Round Table: Chair B. Eagle wanted to discuss what committee members and guests believed would be the best option for CC Rider to avoid large financial deficits within the coming years. Mr. Dreeszen believes that keeping the grant money within the county, whether that be only with Dial-A-Ride or a Line that only operates in the county, would be the best course of action. Committee Member Rowe also agrees with this sentiment.

Adjourn: The meeting adjourned at 5:00 P.M.