

Linn County Transportation Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes 11/07/24

Call to order: 2:08 PM

Attendance: Ken Bronson, Kindra Oliver, Dawn Mitchell, Chris Bailey, Reagan Maudlin, Kristin Preston, Barry Hoffman, Marilyn Smith, Annie Holsworth, Charlene Pech, Jeff Babbitt, Cody Franz, Justin Petersen, JoAnn McQueary

Introductions: Ken Bronson, TAC Chair-Retired; Kindra Oliver, Lebanon Senior Center/LINX; Dawn Mitchell, Senior Citizens of Sweet Home, Inc./Linn Shuttle/Dial-A-Bus; Kristen Preston, City of Albany; Barry Hoffman, Albany Transportation/ATS/Paratransit/Linn Benton Loop; Jeff Babbitt, Albany; Reagan Maudlin, Linn County Special/Rural Transportation Coordinator; Annie Holsworth, Senior/Disabled Transit user; Marilyn Smith, Albany City Council; Justin Petersen, Oregon Cascades West Council of Governments; Cody Franz, Oregon Department of Transportation Regional Transit Coordinator; JoAnn McQueary, East Linn County; Chris Bailey, Albany Public Works Director; Charlene Pech, Benton County Special/Rural Transit Coordinator

Minutes: Dawn moves to approve the 10/24/24 minutes as prepared, Marilyn seconds, motion passes unanimously.

Public Comment: None

Meeting Agreements: Reagan reads the meeting agreements to the group.

Vice Chair Appointment: Discussion was held regarding the appointment of Kindra Oliver as Interim Vice Chair. Barry has returned to regular TAC participation, so the group discusses appointing a standard Vice Chair. Kindra nominates Barry Hoffman to serve as Vice Chair, Marilyn seconds. Barry asks about the term of service and the duties of office, which were answered, then indicates that he would be willing to serve in the position. No further conversation was held, the appointment passes unanimously.

25-27 STIF Applications: Ken begins by sharing a brief overview of what was accomplished at the last TAC meeting and directs the start of discussions where they were left off. At the last meeting, Albany's STIF Payroll project applications were heard and the Oregon Cascades West Council of Governments Seamless Transit project.

Reagan speaks to the Administration STIF Payroll project which covers a portion of the expenses associated with QE role and responsibilities; questions were answered during discussion.

Kindra speaks to the Lebanon LINX STIF Payroll project for operations, a handout was provided for the people attending in person. An overview of the LINX program was provided sharing service updates and expansions since the inception of STIF funding. Service statistics were reviewed including: ridership, service miles, and service hours. The LINX request of \$1,920,000 is to sustain existing services and reflects an increase to cover increased operating costs. As ridership has grown from an average of 20,000 to up to 75,000 this FY, we have had a significant need for an administrative staff person to assist with higher level duties, but haven't been able to due to limited resources.

Kindra speaks to the match applications requesting STIF formula funds, pulling the match application for the CAT E bus which was the application for 5310 funds that was pulled during the 5310 discussions. She shares a low expectation for any match funds to be available in 25-27 with the resources available.

Reagan requests that all handouts provided in today's meeting be sent via email after the meeting for distribution to all attendees.

Dawn provides a handout to those in attendance and speaks to projects benefiting Senior Citizens of Sweet Home, Inc. (SCOSHI). The Linn Shuttle is a Linn County commuter service that travels between Foster, Sweet Home, Lebanon, and Albany. History of the Linn Shuttle, expansion, and post COVID ridership were reviewed. The ask for Linn Shuttle has been presented at a reduction to the 23-25 award citing the awareness of limited funds.

Dawn speaks to the Sweet Home services of the Shopper and Dial-A-Bus. Service area and ridership statistics were reviewed as well as the current state of dispatch technology of "a phone call and a clipboard." Despite using a more basic approach, Dawn says that costs associated with upgrading to a software based dispatch and scheduling system are not financially feasible and the current system meets the needs at a good value to taxpayers. The SCOSHI Sweet Home services have also made a lower STIF Payroll request than the award in 23-25 citing an awareness of the limited STIF funds available for 25-27.

Dawn speaks briefly on the match applications sharing the opinion that there may not be funds available for match requests for the 25-27 biennium; she further attests to the importance of maintaining a reserve balance.

This ends the project application presentations for 25-27 STIF Payroll funds.

Ken opens the discussions by summing up the available resource for the biennium.

Questions from the room included a focus on any potential of maintaining a reserve with varying opinions and concerns. It was asked if there was a formal policy regarding STIF reserves; although a few people had shared some past conversations that occurred at the onset of STIF funding, nothing formal was included in the Linn County Coordinated Plan or the Linn County Sub-Allocation Method to address a reserve. There was a general consensus that the Linn County Board of Commissioners are ultimately responsible for approving the STIF Plan and that a plan without a reserve may not be received favorably by that body. Marilyn recommended that the topic of a policy directly addressing STIF reserves be revisited at another time.

Marilyn also states she is of the opinion that the reserves should be allocated in 25-27, maybe not in whole, but that the circumstances this year meet the intent of the reserve. The question of how much reserve can be retained was still outstanding.

Kindra suggests a methodology of taking all of the Match requests off the table, reducing all remaining project requests, except SCOSHI (who already reduced their ask from the prior biennium) and the Linn County Administrative project, to the 23-25 award levels that there would be a remainder of \$122,024 for a reserve. Dawn comments that she would like to see a reserve higher than that if at all possible and suggests a minimum of a \$200,000 reserve. A \$200K reserve would require making additional cuts to project in the sum of \$78,000.

Reagan mentions that if awards are not to directly include match projects, providers could elect to use a portion of their awards to secure a placeholder in the STIF Plan for their match project(s); this would allow some flexibility of funds during the biennium.

A ten minute break was called at: 3:50 PM

Meeting resumes: 4:00 PM

During break, the suggested methodology had been transcribed into a visual which was posted on the board.

Kindra suggests looking at any additional cuts as a weighted distribution to reach the proposed reserve goal of \$200K. After looking at the numbers using this methodology, Marilyn suggests that the group accept a lower reserve at the \$122K level to sustain providers at 23-25 levels. Barry agrees with this statement.

Dawn shares that the reserve being that low poses a large concern for her and offers that SCOSHI could reduce services on holidays to match the holiday closure schedule of ATS and LINX. Doing so would allow SCOSHI to contribute an additional \$30K towards reserve; this further reduces the Linn Shuttle request by a \$20K and the Sweet Home services by \$10K, bringing the reserve to \$152K. Kindra shares Dawn's concerns and offers to reduce the LINX amount ask by an additional \$20K to increase the reserve to \$172K. LINX is already facing a shortfall and not sure what the additional reduced amount equates to in service levels, but also feels the reserve should be higher. Kindra asks if there's any other applicants present who might consider voluntarily reducing their ask from the proposed 23-25 levels to contribute to a higher reserve.

Barry states that there has been an established understanding of duplicity and shared responsibility between Linn County and Benton County regarding the support of the Linn Benton Loop, which has fallen short on the Linn County side regarding contributing funds. He further states that the LB Loop is governed by a Board and so he feels it would be inappropriate to voluntarily reduce the ask for that service. Ken agrees with Barry's statement and shares his understanding of those circumstances.

Chris states that the Albany programs are already in a deficit in 23-25. She shares that the ATS expansion had requested about \$2M to expand in 23-25 and was awarded \$1.2M and that the costs to expand are \$2M, which they have accomplished in service but anticipate running into financial shortages before the end of the current biennium. She states that receiving again the same amount is going to cause significant strain on the ATS program and that they don't know where else to get the money they need to continue the program at the expanded levels. Kindra asks about how the other contributing funds work, mentioning she has seen LB Loop/AMPO notes that refer to FY20-21 "draw down" of federal funds. Chris shares how the other resources work and why they have historically been difficult to leverage due to the match required and eligible match resources. Chris adds that even though funds can rollover, if match to access them is not available, they cannot access them.

Chris questions the methodology of the proposed reduced awards from the applications, citing the source of the resources and percentages of collected revenues in the different areas. Ken states that programs that provide services in those areas are eligible to receive some of the resources collected from those areas, pointing directly to the Linn County Linn Shuttle Commuter service provided by SCOSHI. Chris makes the rebuttal that their area collected 58% of the STIF Payroll resource and are only requesting 45%, she disagrees with the methodology of reducing that further and asks where in the documents it says it's allowed. Kindra points out that in the Linn County Sub-Allocation method it directly states that revenues collected are to be a starting point and not an entitlement, it further states

that other criteria may be applied to determine awards. Kindra references the Linn County Coordinated Plan, as early as the 2017 revision and more recent revisions which states, “preservation of existing services,” as the first and highest priority in Linn County and that this methodology reflects a sensitivity to preserving all of the services in Linn County at the levels previously funded and to the degree possible within the limited resources.

Chris states that the Albany ATS expansion is an existing service and that it was underfunded in 23-25 and to look forward into 25-27 at the same amount of funds would not allow enough resources to preserve at the expanded level, “we said we needed \$2M for the expansion in 23-25 and we’re going to have to spend \$2M.” Kindra mentioned that LINX also asked for a higher amount last biennium for an deviated fixed route expansion in an effort to respond to the significant increased demand for service, as noted earlier and in the handout. Due to limited funds for FY23-25, we took the proposed expansion off the table and reduced our ask for maintaining service. The City of Lebanon opted to not move forward with the expansion as we didn’t have any other funding to do so. LINX did recently submit a discretionary grant and we continue to look for other funding opportunities to maintain service and continue to endeavor to meet the continued increase demand for transportation in the communities we are serving. Kindra comments on some confusion around the circumstances of Albany going forward with the ATS expansion despite known available resources; “not having been in the room for those conversations,” it’s hard to understand. No additional reduction was offered by Albany to contribute to the reserve.

Reagan asks if a representative of OCWCOG would like to comment on their Seamless Transit application, now being considered at the 23-25 award levels, on whether or not a voluntary reduction towards the reserve is possible. Justin shares that the requested amount is really what is needed and determined by services delivered to the area, however, he offered a contribution and reduced the ask by a further \$1K, raising the reserve to \$173K.

Marilyn moves that the TAC accept the proposed award levels and reserve as the recommendations, Annie seconds.

During discussion, Reagan suggests reading the record of proposed awards for clarity prior to vote. She revisits the Albany request to carry forward the existing 23-25 Match award for the LB Bus of \$90K, which does not affect the estimated resources in 25-27, for clarity to be included and it was agreed to be included in the reading.

Some discussion was held regarding potential of any applicants to have a placeholder from their award to a Match project to retain flexibility of available funds; Albany was the only participant requesting \$1K of their ATS recommended award be used to create a placeholder for the ATS Bus match project. It was made very clear that creating a placeholder would not increase the award recommendation, it would only allow flexibility of the resource.

Reagan also addresses that ODOT has recommended over estimating the STIF Plan again in 25-27, which also occurred in 23-25, to allow for any potential inflated or reserve payments. This artificial inflation could be designated again to reserves if the TAC sees fit.

It was agreed that Reagan would first read the proposed awards, including the LB carryforward bus project, and finish the motion on the table, then the topic of inflating the STIF plan beyond estimate would be addressed.

Reagan reads the proposed recommendations for the 25-27 STIF Plan:

Linn County Administration	\$315,000
OCWCOG Seamless Transit	\$49,000
SCOSHI Dial-A-Bus	\$467,000
LC SCOSHI Linn Shuttle	\$820,000
Lebanon LINX	\$1,598,000
Linn Benton Loop	\$782,000
Albany ATS	\$1,275,850
Albany Match for LB Bus	\$90,000 (Carryforward project form 23-25)
Albany Match for ATS Bus	\$1,000 (Placeholder)
Reserve Project	\$173,024
TOTAL	\$5,570,874

The group agrees to the accuracy, Ken states it's been moved and seconded. No further discussion, motion passes.

Barry moves to over estimate the 25-27 STIF Plan by 20% as advised by ODOT to capture any potential of additional or inflated payments in 25-27 and that any additional funds received above estimate would be designated to the reserve project, Marilyn seconds, motion passes unanimously.

TAC Meeting Schedule: Marilyn suggests retaining the meeting on 11/14 to begin discussion on creating a policy addressing STIF Reserves; the group agrees. The meeting on 11/21 is deemed unnecessary and will be canceled.

Other Business: None

Next meeting: 11/14/2024 at 3:00 PM, Location: Basement Meeting Room at the Linn County Courthouse, 300 SW 4th Ave. Albany, OR 97322.

Meeting Adjourned: 4:56 PM

Meeting Minutes prepared by: Reagan Maudlin, Linn County Special/Rural Transportation Coordinator

Approved: 11/14/2024