

# TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM #4: PEER PROVIDER ANALYSIS AND TRANSIT INNOVATIONS

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Final TM#4 – Peer Provider Analysis and Transit Innovations

RE: Link Lane Transit Development Plan

## Table of Contents

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Introduction.....	1
Peer Analysis.....	1
Examples of Innovative Services.....	6
Fare Structure and Funding .....	13
Management, Partnerships, and Marketing.....	15
Conclusion and Next Steps .....	20

## Introduction

This memorandum provides an analysis of peer providers and innovative transit services and solutions being used in settings similar to Link Lane’s. The intent of this work is to identify potential innovative strategies and solutions for consideration in *Memo #5: Service Options Evaluation* in order to efficiently and equitably meet rural Lane County needs. *Memo #5* will also consider traditional transit services and programs, such as fixed-route transit service and supporting capital improvements.

## Peer Analysis

A peer analysis was conducted with three peer transit providers who operate in environments similar to Lane County and with resources similar to those of Link Lane, as well as aspirational peer transit providers who operate services LCOG is interested in pursuing. The three transit providers and their services are Fort Erie On-Demand, RideConnection’s Door-to-Door Service, and Winnebago County Catch-a-Ride and other programs. The following sections describe key characteristics of each of these service providers and the innovative service strategy each is employing.

## Fort Erie On-Demand

### Key Characteristics

Key characteristics about the service and service area:<sup>1</sup>

- **Service Area Size:** 64 square miles
- **Service Area Population:** 32,901 residents
- **Service Area Density:** 514 people per square mile
- **Number of Operating Vehicles:** 6 minivans
- **Fare Structure:** \$3 per ride
- **Ridership:** 5,000 monthly riders (2022)
- **Ridership Demographic Characteristics:** Information not available.
- **Operating Cost:** \$1.4 million
- **Administration Cost:** Included in operating costs.
- **Funding Sources:** Federal programs (Canadian), regional transit special levy (property taxes), city contributions

### Innovative Service Strategies

In October 2021, Fort Erie, Ontario implemented a mobility-on-demand system integrated with smartphone software to replace its fixed-route community bus system, which consisted of four buses with three routes, each with a roughly 1-hour, one-way loop. The prior system had relatively low ridership with limited access for the rural area. The new service utilizes a fleet of six minivans, two of which are retrofitted with wheelchair-accessible ramps, to provide on-demand, curb-to-curb service. The system may require a passenger that requests a standard, non-wheelchair, van to walk up to a quarter mile to their pickup location to optimize vehicle routing while providing origin-to-destination service.

The booking, dispatching, and routing software of the on-demand system and an associated smartphone app are provided by the company Pantonium. The smartphone app uses a proprietary algorithm and is similar to common transportation network company apps, from which customers can request a ride and track the vehicle's location ("On Demand Transit – Rider App"). To ensure equity in the service and access for those without smartphones or data, the town council approved the inclusion of a customer service desk where rides can be booked via standard telephone (often referred to as "dial-a-ride"). This service desk is managed by Regional Limousine. Rides can also be scheduled via a webpage.

A ride can be booked either in advance or for as soon as possible (much like ride-hailing services). If the customer uses the app, the location of the minivan servicing the call is displayed in real time. Fort Erie provides direct service to a few popular stops where passengers can board without booking ahead, such as the local Walmart, if a customer is at one of these locations and happens to see a Fort Erie Transit vehicle with space available.

A ride costs the customer \$3 (the same as a single-ride bus fare in the prior system) for service to anywhere in Fort Erie. There are multiple payment options. Each van is equipped to accept cash, debit, credit, and smart cards with preloaded passes. Smart cards can be reloaded with the driver or online.

The on-demand system proved effective in providing service, eclipsing pre-pandemic ridership by 40%, decreasing greenhouse gas emissions per ride by 63%, and decreasing the cost to the town per ride by 29%.

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<sup>1</sup> [Fort Erie On-Demand Transit Case Study \(nrel.gov\)](#)

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

Key challenges for the service include:

- Passengers not cancelling their trips, leading to “ghost stops” and wasted operating costs.
- “Deadheading”, or operating without any rides, occurring between passenger pick-ups.

Lessons learned include:

- Implementing a strong driver training program, include more one-on-one training, is essential for smooth operations.
- A fully on-demand system has lower scalability, so a hybrid or fixed option may be better if demand is high.

## RideConnection Door-to-Door

### Key Characteristics

Key characteristics about the service and service area:

- **Service Area Size:** Roughly 600 sq. mi. (Washington County outside of TriMet service area)
- **Service Area Population:** 45,000 (Washington County outside of TriMet service area)
- **Service Area Density:** 90 people per square mile
- **Number of Operating Vehicles:** 22
- **Fare Structure:** Free
- **Ridership:** 76,380 (NTD 2021, demand-response only)
- **Ridership Demographic Characteristics:** Primarily older adults and people with disabilities
- **Operating Cost:** \$9.8 million across all demand-response programs
- **Administration Cost:** Included in operating costs.
- **Funding Sources:** Federal programs (Section 5310/STF), state funding (STIF), corporate and individual donations

### Innovative Service Strategies

RideConnection is a private, non-profit organization based in Portland, Oregon. The RideConnection network is made up of a collection of agencies who serve older adults and people with disabilities as well as low-income individuals and the general public by offering a variety of transportation options in Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington counties. RideConnection provides 500,000 rides and supports more than 2,000 individuals with training and access to public transportation each year.

RideConnection’s Door-to-Door began under TriMet in the 1980’s for older adults and people with disabilities, with RideConnection established to take over the service in 1988. The program provides rides for any purpose including medical, meals, shopping, recreation, and volunteering or work. The service area for this program is Washington County, outside the TriMet service area. Rides can be completed beyond Washington County should the schedule allow. Services are prioritized for older adults and people with disabilities, but open to the general public. Most services are available Monday through Friday, and there is no cost though donations are welcome. Riders can request rides through calling the RideConnection Service Center, or via the online ride request tool. Rides should be scheduled four days in advance.

RideConnection also runs five RideAbout shuttles located in a number of neighborhoods in Multnomah and Washington counties. Each shuttle makes regular visits to grocery stores, community stores, and recreational

areas. Shuttles operate on different days and visit a variety of locations depending on the neighborhood. Drivers offer assistance with shopping bags, if needed. Seats on the shuttle can be reserved by calling RideConnection.

### **Challenges and Lessons Learned**

Key challenges for the service include:

- Highly rural area causing the cost per service hour and cost per ride to be relatively high, compared to localized services.
- “Deadheading”, or operating without any rides, occurring between passenger pick-ups.

Lessons learned include:

- Implement a range of transportation options (directly operated, taxis, group rides/carpools) to cover a range of needs.

### **Winnebago County Catch-a-Ride**

#### **Key Characteristics**

Key characteristics about the service and service area:<sup>2</sup>

- **Service Area Size:** 580 square miles
- **Service Area Population:** 170,000 residents
- **Service Area Density:** 293 people per square mile
- **Number of Operating Vehicles:** Pending conversation with Provider – Unable to reach
- **Fare Structure:** \$2 booking fee and federal mileage reimbursement rate of \$0.58 per loaded mile
- **Ridership Demographic Characteristics:** Unemployed, underemployed, disabled, and low-income workers
- **Ridership:** Pending conversation with Provider – Unable to reach
- **Operating Cost:** Pending conversation with Provider – Unable to reach
- **Administration Cost:** Pending conversation with Provider – Unable to reach
- **Funding Sources:** State grants, small fare charge

#### **Innovative Service Strategies**

A rural mobility as a service (MaaS), the Winnebago Catch-A-Ride (WCAR) program was created in 2018 to integrate all available transportation services on one single platform, as well as add a ridesourcing program with volunteer drivers on the Feonix Mobility Rising platform. The WCAR program now subsidizes employment trips for previously unemployed, underemployed, disabled, and low-income workers in Winnebago County. The initial program was funded by an Accessible Transportation Community Initiative grant of \$100,000 and a \$30,000 “Commute to Careers” grant from the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development.

The ridesourcing program, added to address mobility gaps in the county, uses volunteer drivers using their personal vehicles. Riders are charged a \$2 booking fee and a federal mileage reimbursement rate of \$0.58 per loaded mile which makes the service affordable in rural communities. Payment from the riders goes directly to drivers. Riders need to use a call-in number to request rides, but eventually, a smart phone application will be available for riders to request and pay for their rides.

Volunteer drivers for the program are hired by WCAR project partners by conducting multiple outreach meetings within the county, attending career fairs, and advertising on mediums such as Indeed career website, Facebook,

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<sup>2</sup> [Task76Report.pdf \(trb.org\)](#)

etc., As of March 2019, WCAR had six volunteer drivers distributed throughout Winnebago County. However, the WCAR program’s goal was to hire 20 volunteer drivers to meet the unmet transportation needs.

WCAR uses the QRyde technology platform which implements low-cost transportation solutions and can be accessed by call center, website, and smartphone app. QRyde for WCAR is administered and branded by Feonix Mobility Rising. QRyde technology used for WCAR also has a capability to create a centralized list of other transportation services along with the ridesourcing volunteer driver service. Transportation providers who choose to participate in the WCAR program can be listed in the QRyde platform, and riders can access all available transportation options for their area.

Rides are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, given that a volunteer is willing to take the ride. Riders must reside in the service area and be employed, and are eligible for rides until income exceeds income eligibility. Riders can apply on the Winnebago Catch-A-Ride website.

### Challenges and Lessons Learned

Key challenges for the service include:

- Inadequate strength and coverage of internet service make operating a reliable ridesourcing service with a smartphone application difficult.
- During COVID-19, the agency indicated that no volunteer drivers were available mid-2020. It is unclear if volunteer drivers have returned, though this program remains advertised on the WCAR website.

Lessons learned include:

- There is a need to have a better broadband internet coverage in rural communities for technology-enabled services to exist and succeed.

### Peer Comparison Summary

Table 1 compares Link Lane to the peer providers based on service area size, population served, and eligible riders.

**Table 1. Service Area Size and Population - 2021**

Provider	Size	Population Served through Service	Density (pop per square mile)	Eligible Riders
Link Lane	4,722 square miles (Lane County)	370,192 residents (Lane County)	78	General Public
Lane County outside of Eugene-Springfield Urbanized Area	4,635 square miles	99,200 residents	21	General Public
Fort Erie On-Demand	64 square miles	32,901 residents	514	General public
RideConnection Door-to-Door Service	600 square miles	45,000 residents	90	Older adults and people with disabilities
Winnebago County Catch-a-Ride	580 square miles	170,000 residents	293	Residents of Winnebago County who meet employment and income criteria

## Examples of Innovative Services

This section identifies innovative transit services in North America being used to provide services in settings similar to Link Lane's. These innovative transit services were identified using a review of transit-related publications.

Rural Lane County has a low population density, high proportions of seniors and people with disabilities, and limited infrastructure (sidewalks, bike paths) to access fixed-route transit services. As such, transportation options that reduce first/last-mile access issues in partnership with intercommunity connections are critical in serving more of Lane County's rural populations. Transit service models are quickly evolving and changing. Technology and innovation is vastly broadening the scope of options for how Link Lane may serve its rural population.

### Shared-Use Mobility

Shared-Use Mobility (SUM) include transportation services that are shared among users. Examples include public transit; taxis and limousines; ridesourcing; carsharing, bikesharing, and ridesharing programs; microtransit services; scooter-sharing; shuttle services; and neighborhood shuttles. Technology-enabled SUM is much more prominent in urban areas; however, there is great potential to fill mobility gaps in rural communities with SUM.

NCHRP Report 20-65, Task 76 investigated emerging SUM practices and programs primarily from US rural settings. Practices considered include:

- Ridesourcing (TNCs such as Uber, Lyft, Feonix Mobility Rising, etc.)
- Carsharing (Zipcar, Car2go, Enterprise Carshare, etc.)
- Bikesharing (BCycle, Citi Bike, etc.)
- Microtransit (Chariot, Bridj, Via etc.)
- Mobility as a Service (MaaS)

The NCHRP research reviewed eight case studies, including the Winnebago Catch-A-Ride, a peer provider used for this memorandum. In addition, the report developed a Rural SUM Toolkit, consisting of a five task process for agencies considering implementing SUM. The five-step process is summarized below. As shown, the Link Lane Transit Development Plan process follows closely to this best practice.

#### **Task 1: Identify mobility gaps, and determine service needs.**

Gaps and needs can be gathered via input from citizens and community representatives, including existing transit/transportation service providers and recipients, local governments, mobility managers, human service agencies, healthcare providers, local employment firms/companies, and other businesses whose clients rely on affordable transit/transportation services.

Link Lane currently participates in a STIF Transportation Planning Committee, which includes other agencies and organizations which may qualify as a Public Transportation Service Provider (PTSP) eligible for STIF funds. The group is comprised of other transit providers, local municipalities, and regional transportation providers to coordinate regional transportation needs and identify STIF's role in addressing needs and barriers.

Finally, rural communities/counties can have preliminary partnerships with organizations such as state DOTs, regional transportation providers, rural transit providers, local government agencies, human service agencies, healthcare organizations, economic/workforce development agencies, local employers, etc., to facilitate potential SUM service planning and implementation. Preliminary partnerships usually include public organizations, but may include private partners.

#### **Task 2: Determine SUM category that best suits the rural community's needs.**

SUM categories include:

### Ridesourcing

Ridesourcing services have the potential to offer on-demand short-distance trips for the elderly, non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) recipients, veterans, and the general public. Traditionally, these kinds of trips are fulfilled by rural transit and/or other specialized transportation services. Rural areas without existing or with insufficient public transit and/or specialized transportation providers might use ridesourcing service providers to offer on-demand trips to target rider groups by using one of the following models:

- 1) creating a rural ridesourcing model to provide trips for intended target riders,
- 2) add ridesourcing services to an already-existing transit/transportation services network to provide first-mile/last-mile connections to existing fixed-route transit services to increase the use and coverage of available services in rural areas, or
- 3) provide on-demand ridesourcing trips to target riders to supplement and complement regular transit/transportation services, not requiring a connection to a fixed-route service.

Successful components of ridesourcing for rural communities include:

- 1) Ridesourcing service with volunteer drivers: Offering ridesourcing trips using volunteer drivers can be a feasible and successful business model, especially in rural communities. Many rural communities already have volunteer driver programs to provide specialized transportation services. If those services are not available, a ridesourcing service can be launched by arranging for volunteer drivers. A volunteer driver ridesourcing platform can be used to help users request and pay for rides using a smartphone app; volunteer drivers receive ride requests on a smartphone app and then coordinate accordingly; and users, drivers, and volunteer program managers perform various trip management activities on smartphone applications and/or web portals. Recruiting and retaining volunteer drivers can be difficult. In addition, background checks should be conducted on volunteer drivers and compensation for increased insurance needs should be considered.
- 2) Contracting drivers: Most rural public transit riders using dial-a-ride, ADA complementary paratransit, and non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) services know the drivers and have trust and confidence in accessing these services. Ridesourcing services in rural areas can be operated by hiring dedicated drivers who undergo an interview process, a background check (including alcohol and drug tests), and vehicle inspections if they use their personal vehicles.
- 3) Definitive hours of operations: If rural communities engage ridesourcing agencies to provide a significant portion of their transportation services, they should strive to ensure the service is available for fixed hours of operation during weekdays and weekends so that riders will have a transportation option within a defined minimum response time. Advance reservations for ridesourcing services can also help improve trip planning and dispatch when needed.
- 4) Using an existing fleet with a ridesourcing platform: Ridesourcing providers may not have wheelchair accessible vehicles or provide ADA accessible trips. If existing transportation providers have ADA compliant wheelchair vehicles, they can potentially be used on a ridesourcing platform with contracted drivers to provide on-demand trips.
- 5) Subsidized rides: While ridesourcing trips are fast, flexible, and reliable, one barrier for rural users is expensive fares. Ridesourcing services could provide affordable trips by subsidizing rides by either setting an affordable and fixed fare for rides while the rest of expenses are covered through secured funding/grants, or a grant/subsidy covering a certain portion of the fare.

Friends of Florence is an existing volunteer-driven transportation option, providing free shuttle service for cancer patients receiving treatment between Florence and Eugene/Springfield.

- 6) Integrating into a rural transportation network: If ridesourcing services are added to existing public transit/transportation services to meet certain mobility gaps, the services can be integrated into the transportation network to complement existing services, and supplement them when needed.

## Carsharing

Carsharing services can meet transportation needs by offering access to an automobile for a short period of time to promote mobility options for residents without vehicles, low-income residents, and for people with a driver’s license looking for independent mobility options. While carsharing services may be cost-prohibitive due to the various fees associated with most services, some initial small-scale subsidized rural carsharing implementations have been successful and have generated revenues at a much higher level than the typical public transit farebox recovery. Some opportunities to promote carshare program when it is appropriate for rural communities include:

- 1) Subsidized carshare program: Subsidize a carshare program by waiving certain user costs (sign-up fee, membership fee, etc.,) and subsidize hourly rates to make the carshare program affordable and attractive for rural residents.
- 2) Operational carshare program regardless of demand: Guarantee a monthly minimum payment for carshare service providers regardless of usage so they can generate sufficient revenue to keep the services operational.
- 3) Engage community partners: Partner with local agencies and/or businesses to a) rent/accept parking spots in parking lots/facilities to park carshare vehicles in strategic locations in the community to attract users, b) set-up kiosks for users without access to smartphones or computers to create user accounts and make reservations, c) generate payroll debit cards or other relevant strategies for users without bank accounts to help pay for and use the carshare service, and d) perform regular maintenance activities.

### Carsharing in San Joaquin Valley, CA

**Summary** A carsharing program in California launched in April 2023 offers electric vehicle access via Miocar to residents.

**Specifics** Provides 20 EVs in five locations located in historically underrepresented neighborhoods for rent 24-hours a day, 7 days a week.

**Impact** Fills critical mobility gap in historically underrepresented communities.

## Bikesharing

Bikesharing services in rural communities can address transportation needs to promote active transportation options for the health and wellness of users; provide affordable transportation options for making short distance trips within the community; and expand the service area of an existing bus system by serving first mile/last mile trips, and connecting multiple frequent destinations. Proper infrastructure is needed to ensure biking is safe in the community in which it is implemented. Additionally, community members have indicated interest in secure bike storage facilities near transit services.

Traditional bikeshare systems that exist in larger cities require a high startup cost for purchasing bikes, setting up stations, building other needed infrastructure, and employing support staff. High levels of ridership to pay for the system and its operations is required, conditions which are not typically found in rural areas. Based on the identified mobility needs, and availability of grants/funding, however, various types of bikeshare systems could be

### Bikesharing in Athens County, OH

**Summary** A bikeshare program in Ohio offers bike access to suburban and rural community residents.

**Specifics** Provides 35 low-cost bikes, tandem bikes, e-bikes, and kids mountain bikes via a ‘library model’ providing free bike checkouts to rural community residents.

**Impact** Ten years of free bikes to residents.



feasible in rural communities where trip lengths are not excessive and connectivity to other transportation services for longer trip distances is good:

- 1) **Low-cost bikesharing system:** These operations can better suit rural communities as they could be feasible with comparatively lower budgets. The bikes, bike racks, and other needed infrastructure is built to a modest quality to make the program economical and attractive. Some of the low-cost bikesharing systems that are studied in this research effort include Zagster and Motivate.
- 2) **Library Model:** In this system, bikes could be made available for checkout for free in local libraries just like checking out a book or movie. The library bikeshare model is very successful in rural communities as it is convenient and accessible to low-income individuals, and it could effectively make use of already-existing institutions/community resources. While this model is very inexpensive, some grant funding is needed to purchase inexpensive bicycles and perform needed maintenance. Partners such as local bike shops, community volunteers, etc., can support this implementation by maintaining bikes in the system and by advocating for bicycling and active transportation options for health and wellbeing of their rural community.
- 3) **Community bike donations model:** When there is a need for bikesharing services in a rural community, and if there are no sufficient funds and/or facilities available for setting up any of the above bikeshare systems, a bikeshare program can still be implemented by securing donated bicycles and making them available in multiple locations. However, small grants and help from volunteers may be needed for keeping the bikeshare program operational.

## Microtransit

Microtransit services have potential for use in rural communities. SUM providers such as Via Transportation, Inc., have been offering dynamic and on-demand pooled transportation services using vans in both larger urban areas and smaller communities. Microtransit services have been successfully deployed in the smaller community of Arlington, Texas, where the service has essentially replaced the city's existing public transit system and achieved a 97 percent customer satisfaction rate. In Austin, Texas<sup>3</sup>, the regional transit authority uses its custom-branded Pickup app in six different rural communities around the city center. The service started as a small paratransit-focused pilot in 2017, and now has six operational zones in the Austin Metro area, providing flexible on-demand service to urban, suburban, and rural areas. The service aims to:

- address first and last mile connections to popular transit stations,
- eliminate transit deserts by offering the service where traditional forms of public transportation aren't available, and
- replacing fixed-route bus service where certain routes were not performing.

The Austin model can be applied to other suburban and rural communities, opening up potential opportunities for Link Lane to implement microtransit services in targeted zones.

## Mobility as a Service (MAAS)

Mobility as a service (MaaS) platforms for rural communities can integrate existing public transit services, volunteer driver programs, and other specialized transportation services onto one platform so target users and rural residents can access information about various services based on their eligibility; make trip reservations; and pay for the trip, all at one place.

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<sup>3</sup> [On-demand transit at work in Texas - Via Transportation \(ridewithvia.com\)](https://www.ridewithvia.com)

A Rural MaaS platform can also potentially integrate multiple transit/transportation providers within a county or among adjacent counties. Some of the opportunities for implementing rural MaaS platform are summarized below.

- 1) One-stop shop: All available transportation services can be listed on a single platform to determine eligibility and information for various transportation services. MaaS platform can be accessed as a smartphone application and/or as a web portal. Features could be added to the MaaS platform to enable making reservations, producing itineraries, requesting and paying for rides, and enabling trip management. Accessing a rural MaaS platform via a smartphone application and online portal can significantly reduce the effort needed by users to schedule rides.
- 2) Additional SUM services: Apart from developing rural MaaS platform to better manage existing transit/transportation assets and services, more rural SUM implementations can also be considered to meet any existing mobility gaps. These additional rural SUM services can be added to a rural MaaS platform alongside other existing transit/transportation services with features including making reservations and managing and paying for trips.
- 3) Setup alerts and reminders: Some common issues with providing healthcare trips and other categories of trips include trip cancellations and no-shows. These trips, which may be made through volunteer driver programs or other specialized transportation services have to be reserved ahead of time and riders often forget or lose track of their reservations resulting in trip cancellations or no-shows. A rural MaaS platform can resolve these issues by including these transportation services in its platform with features to generate alerts and multiple reminders to the rider after making the reservation and before the trip, as well as providing alerts and reminders to destination contacts if needed.
- 4) Manage volunteer driver programs: Volunteer driver programs are traditionally managed through excel sheets, or third party software which can often present issues with coordinating drivers and occasionally create trip duplications when requests are received from different service providers. Rural MaaS platforms can present an opportunity to effectively manage and coordinate volunteer driver programs.
- 5) Interoperability: Rural transit agencies in adjacent rural communities or counties often have their own unique operational structure and dispatch software. To facilitate travel across rural communities or counties, riders often have to plan and make reservations with multiple transit/transportation providers as individual rural transit agencies do not communicate with each other. A rural MaaS framework can be used to list available transportation services among adjacent rural communities or counties, and can potentially integrate the MaaS framework with individual transit agency software so riders can make a single trip request to travel across rural communities or counties. The MaaS platform can facilitate reservations and gather confirmations from each individual transit/transportation provider.

### **Task 3: Establish Public-Private Partnerships.**

Developing public-private partnerships (PPP) is a critical step in the rural SUM toolkit and in rural SUM implementations because service providers are needed to provide technology, software, and mobility platforms to address rural areas' unique transportation challenges.

### **Task 4: Evaluate Challenges, Accessibility, and Impacts.**

Common challenges involved in SUM implementation include limited funding availability, low demand, gaining trust in the community, adequate broadband coverage, ADA accessibility, and access to smartphone and bank accounts.

### **Task 5: Funding and Implementation.**

Most SUM services are capital-light business models, and benefit more from assistance for operational expenses. Potential funding sources include FTA Formula Funds (5310 & 5311), Mobility On-Demand (MOD) Grants, state funding, Community Initiatives, and other national/state/local grants.

## County On-Demand Services

Several Oregon counties provide on-demand services at the County scale using several different structures.

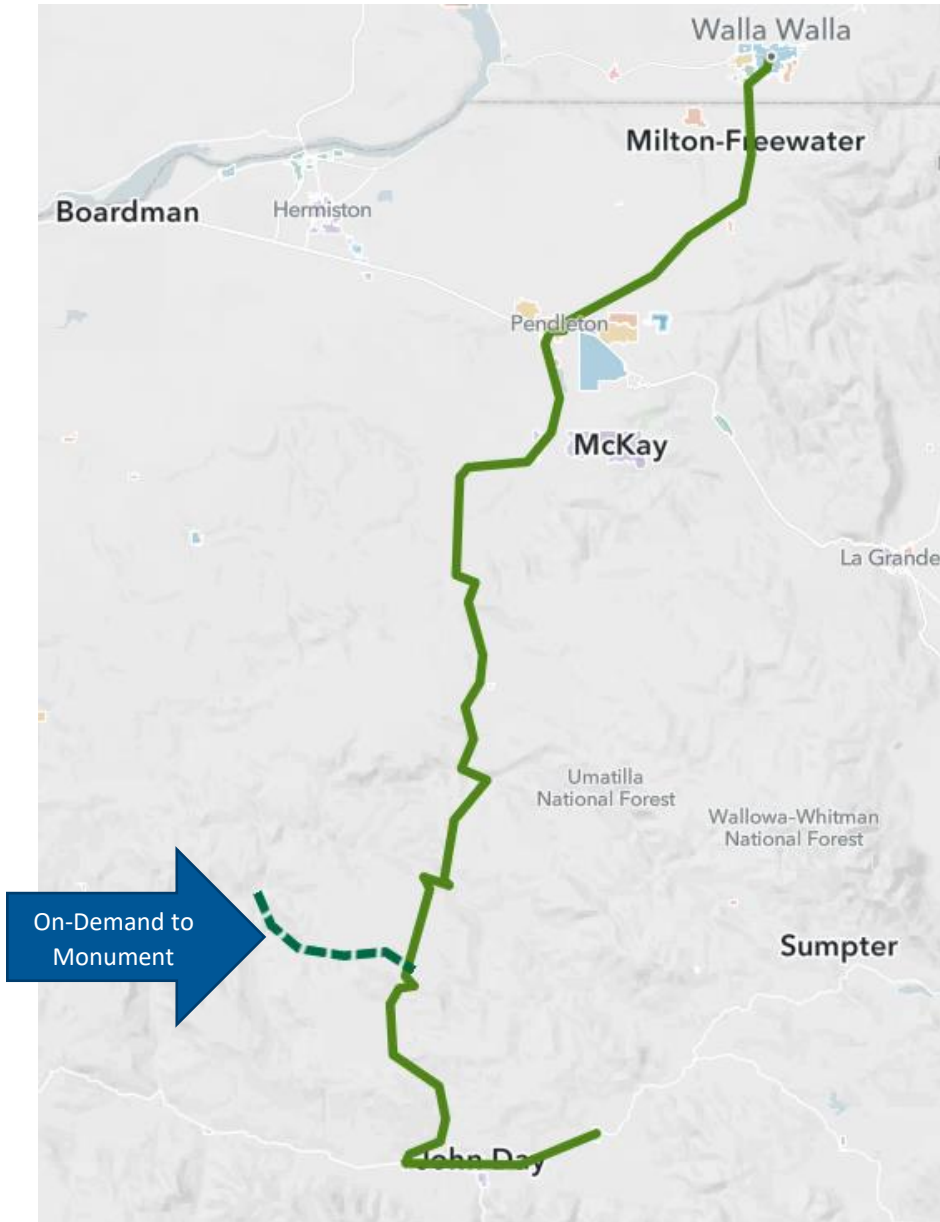
### Countywide Dial-a-Ride

Wasco County provides general public dial-a-ride countywide. Service is available on weekdays, 7 AM to 6 PM, and on Saturdays, 9 AM – 4 PM. Fare is \$1.50 each way, scheduled in-advance and with potential for multiple passenger trips to be linked. While this service is available countywide, Wasco County finds that demand in its major cities typically exceeds their ability to provide long-distance trips to unincorporated Wasco County. This fleet is intermixed with the local deviated fixed-route cutaway buses and dial-a-ride vans, directly-operated by the Mid-Columbia Economic Development District. MCEDD receives funding from FTA Formula Funds (5310 & 5311), state (STIF), and local funds via fares and City of The Dalles contributions.

### On-Demand Rural Connector – Grant County People Mover

The Grant County People Mover offers ten routes throughout Grant County, including two free local loops and eight paid routes. In addition, the Grant County People Mover offers dial-a-ride to any destination in the John Day Valley, available to the general public for \$2.00 per stop; seniors and people with disabilities ride for \$1.00 per stop. One of Grant County People Mover's fixed-route services is their Prairie City to Walla Walla route, shown in solid green in Figure 1. This service operates every Tuesday (except holidays). Grant County People Mover also markets a Monument to Walla Walla service, on request, shown in dashed green in Figure 1. Operationally, Grant County People Mover sends a separate vehicle to Monument and brings any passengers to the Prairie City to Walla Walla service, meeting in Long Creek, and the passenger transfers to the Prairie City bus. The vehicle waits with the passenger until the transfer is made. This provides riders a comfortable first/last-mile option, marketed to reduce confusion caused by transfers, while keeping Grant County People Mover from having to operate multiple long-distance routes. Link Lane might consider this type of service option for small rural population centers, such as the OR 36 corridor. This fleet is intermixed with the local deviated fixed-route cutaway buses and dial-a-ride vans, directly-operated by Grant County Transportation District. Grant County Transportation District receives funding from FTA Formula Funds (5310 & 5311), and state (STIF) funds, in addition to fares.

Figure 1. Grant County People Mover - Prairie City and Monument to Walla Walla



## Fare Structure and Funding

Setting fare structures and options and obtaining new funding streams should consider the potential fare revenue, ridership, and equity impacts to the transit system. This section describes options for funding and operating service and consideration for rider payment options.

### Public-Private Partnerships

Public-private partnerships offer an opportunity for rural transit agencies to provide services that they would otherwise not have the resources to provide. This can include partnering with ridesourcing companies, such as Lyft and Uber, to provide door-to-door services, as well as collaborating with technology and software companies. In addition, agencies often partner with institutions and organizations in their service area to provide discounted rides to certain groups. Examples include:

- Lane Transit District (LTD) has a partnership with the University of Oregon to provide free bus passes for students and employees. LTD also offers a free student transit pass for K-12 students and a free college pass for eligible Lane Community College (LCC) and Pacific University students within the LTD boundary.
- RideConnection got its North Hillsboro Link started in partnership with a chamber of commerce, who provided partial funding.
- Morrow County developed its Boardman – Port of Morrow concept alongside Port employers, who intend to provide curb-to-door improvements and services for its employees.

Additional strategies related to transportation network companies (TNCs, like Uber and Lyft) are described in the *Microtransit* section of this report.

## Fare Policies and Payment Options

### **Adjust the Fare Policy**

It is good practice to review fares regularly (annually, biannually, etc.) to ensure that revenue, ridership, and equity objectives are being met. Based on various fare elasticity studies conducted, it is important to note that the increase in fares negatively impact transit ridership. When fares are initially low, an increase in fares can lead to a greater decline of ridership compared to places where fare are initially higher. \$5 for a daily pass is consistent with several other providers in the County, though more rural providers operate at different fares. For example, Umpqua Transit charges \$2 for a day pass (cheaper) while Lincoln County Transportation Service District charges \$6 for a Yachats – Newport roundtrip (more expensive).

### **Fare-Free**

Some transit agencies choose to provide fare-free services for some or all of their services. While fares help to cover operating and capital costs, reduced or no fares can increase ridership and could subsequently increase some grant revenues where ridership is a formula factor. On average, an increase of 25% to 50% in ridership is

### **Lyft Partnerships with Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) providers**

**Summary** Lyft, has created partnerships with NEMT providers to offer convenient and affordable medical-related transportation to those in need.

**Specifics** Riders needing medical transportation can book a ride through Lyft via partnerships with NEMT providers. Traditional NEMT service is still provided for those who need more accessible vehicles.

**Impact** Reduced wait times, increased ontime performance and cost efficiencies for patients across the United States.

expected by switching to a fare-free transit system, according to a review of urban and small-city transit systems<sup>4</sup>. Oregon Section 5311 funding is awarded on a biennial basis, based on rural service miles (60%) and ridership (40%). Therefore, a ridership increase is likely to cause roughly a 10% to 20% 5311 funding increase for recipients of these funds. Cost savings associated with fare collection (administration for processing time, technology, fare cards, etc.) could be seen in fare-free systems. There are also other factors, such as community benefits from increased access to jobs and healthcare, that would not be captured in a funding and revenue analysis. A challenge from implementing a fare-free service include riders cancelling scheduled trips for demand-response services.

It should be noted that Link Lane instituted a fare free approach during the initial months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ultimately, this resulted in requests from frequent riders and the bus drivers to reinstate fares as they are viewed as a method to aid in appropriate use of the bus and behavior expectations.

## Fare Reciprocity

Currently providers in Lane County have different fares for:

- Services provided by Link Lane: Eugene-Florence Connector
- Services provided by Link Lane: Florence – Yachats Connector
- Services provided by LTD: LTD local service within its service district
- Services provided by LTD via Pacific Crest Bus Lines: Diamond Express to Oakridge
- Service provided by LTD via River Cities Taxi: The Rhody Express local service in Florence
- Services provided by Lincoln County Transportation Service District: Connecting routes be between Yachats and Lincoln County (while outside of Lane County, this service does interline with the Florence-Yachats Connector)
- Services provided by Coos County Area Transit: Connecting routes between Coos Bay and Florence

Fare reciprocity systems allow transit riders to use a single fare medium across different fare payment systems and pricing. This can be established through agreements to honor fare systems of other providers or creating a joint fare system for riders to purchase to use across providers' services. For example, The Gorge TransLink Alliance (Wasco County, Sherman County, Skamania County, Hood River County, and Klickitat County) created a GORge Pass to provide unlimited rides for pass holders on all Gorge fixed-route services. The pass is annual and costs \$40 for adults and \$20 for children. Creating a specific pass for fare reciprocity is also used as a marketing and education technique for transit services in the region. Encouraging tourists to purchase passes rather than driving to the Gorge helped keep the price of the pass lower for local residents while still providing fare revenues for the providers. The Northwest Oregon Transit Alliance (NWOTA, comprised of Clatsop, Columbia, Tillamook, Lincoln, and Benton counties) offers a 3-day and 7-day pass for \$25 and \$30, respectively, that provide one trip from Portland or Albany/Corvallis to the coast, a return trip, and unlimited travel within Clatsop, Tillamook, and Lincoln counties.

LTD has a STIF project that will integrate fares between LCOG and LTD services. This project will be initiated through the upcoming STIF biennium.

### ***Monthly or Many-Ticket Passes***

Equivalent pricing based on a fare structure where one round trip for 20 days equals the monthly pass cost suggests a monthly pass cost of \$100.00 for Link Lane services. As most riders indicated using service several times per week, this option would likely be popular and reduce wait time for riders to pay fares and administrative efforts in processing fares. LTD provides these passes for its local services as well as Rhody Express.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/Planning/Documents/Mosaic-Decrease-or-Eliminate-Transit-Fares.pdf>

**Mobile Ticketing**

Mobile ticketing may reduce the current challenges riders face in obtaining tickets or having the exact transit fare, in cash, on hand, increasing ridership and improving existing rider experience. Mobile ticketing also reduces administrative efforts in collecting and processing fare payment.

**Mobility Wallet**

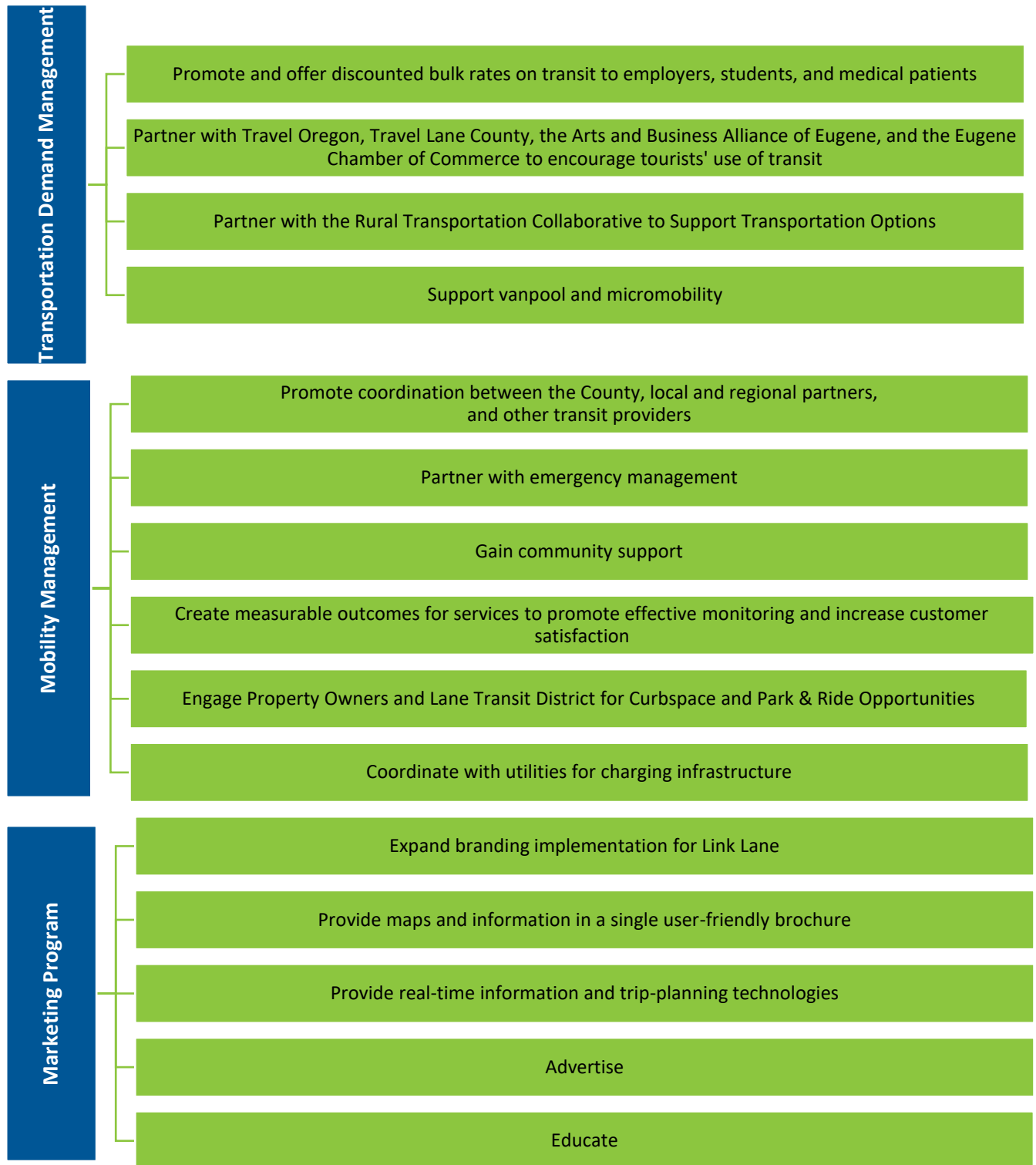
Mobility wallets are an app that allows riders to pay for bikeshare, scootershare, carshare, transit providers, and more using one platform. This provides easier connections between modes for riders and creates a more seamless transportation network in Lane County. Riders may deposit money via the application, or alternatively, deposit cash at the LCOG office or other locations.

## Management, Partnerships, and Marketing

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A coordinated, targeted, and effective public information and marketing campaign would help publicize and encourage people to use transit. This section provides transportation demand management, mobility management, and marketing program recommendations for Link Lane, summarized in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Management and Marketing Summary





## Transportation Demand Management Strategies

Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategies aim to shift behavior towards more efficient use of transportation facilities. While LCOG and other providers implement many of these strategies, additional programs and partnerships could help expand transit awareness and use. The following strategies and partnerships can help shift behavior towards transit use:

- **Promote and offer discounted bulk rates on transit to employers, employees, students, and medical patients.** Offering incentives to employees, students, and medical patients to take transit can increase awareness and decrease the cost of transit for routine trips. In turn, the number of single-occupancy vehicle trips and the number of parking spaces needed at employment centers, schools, and hospitals could be reduced. LTD already implements this strategy. The bulk discount strategy is particularly effective if fare reciprocity and/or monthly fare passes are created. Table 2 provides a list of the largest employers in Lane County that could be considered for partnerships. These employers are largely focused in the Eugene/Springfield area, and rural employers should also be engaged. There are several large rural employers in Lane County, for example private employers include:
  - Three River Casino
  - King Estate
  - Lochmead Dairy (Junction City)
  - Rosboro (Springfield and Veneta)
  - Camas Country Mill (Junction City)
- **Partner with Travel Oregon, Travel Lane County, the Arts and Business Alliance of Eugene, and the Eugene Chamber of Commerce to encourage tourists' use of transit.** Partnering with tourist and business organizations informs and encourages tourists to use transit when they visit Lane County.
- **Partner with the Rural Transportation Collaborative to Support Transportation Options.** Lane County Rural Transportation Collaborative's mission is to improve transportation program delivery to rural communities through a coordinated approach that meets communities where they are. Member agencies include the Safe Lane Coalition, Lane County Safe Routes to School, Lane Council of Government's Rural Transportation Options Program, and Lane County Transportation Planning. Examples of Transportation Options strategies member agencies have deployed include: free lights and visibility gear through an annual "Be Seen, Be Safe" campaign, assistance with planning bus trips using services like Link Lane, South Lane Wheels, and LTD's rural routes, carpool and vanpool matching using GetThereOregon.org, and promotion of the annual Get There Challenge rewards program.
- **Support Vanpool and Micromobility.** Link Lane can pursue funding to subsidize vanpools. Additionally, by encouraging micromobility (such as bikeshare), Link Lane can support connections to transit services. Commute Options provides a vanpool management program that can decrease management needs. Additionally, shared charging facilities could be used to support electric bikeshare or scootershare for first/last-mile connections.

**Table 2. Largest Employers in Lane County**

Employer	# of Employees (2021 Total)	% of Total Employment
Peace Health Corp	5,347	3.54%
University of Oregon	5,038	3.34%
Eugene 4J School District	2,347	1.56%
U.S. Government	1,813	1.20%
Oregon State Government	1,805	1.20%
City of Eugene	1,733	1.15%
Lane Community College	1,721	1.14%
Lane County Government	1,552	1.03%
Springfield School District	1,130	0.75%
McKenzie Willamette Medical	1,060	0.70%
<b>Total Principal Employer</b>	<b>23,546</b>	<b>15.61%</b>

Source: Oregon Employment Department; Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce

## Mobility Management Strategies

Management strategies are those that LCOG and other transit providers can conduct behind-the-scenes for effective implementation.

- Promote Coordination between the County, Local and Regional Partners, and other Transit Providers.** Coordination between Link Lane, Lane County, and local partners – including other transit providers and local jurisdictions in the area – will lead to a comprehensive and efficient system in which users can travel seamlessly inter- and intra-regionally.
- Partner with Emergency Management.** Transportation is a critical component of responses to disasters such as wildfires and earthquakes, particularly for people without access to vehicles and who need mobility assistance or require other means to access essentials such as food and medical care. Join emergency operations team meetings to establish strategies for emergency response. Strategies to become a key stakeholder in Lane County’s Emergency Management planning, response, recovery, and mitigation activities include building relationships with the key emergency management officials, identifying capabilities and limitations of services and resources, inventorying residents and pockets of populations with special needs (physical disabilities, low income, limited-English populations), and engaging the organizations who serve those people with emergency planning efforts.
- Gain Community Support.** Gain community support by creating and supporting local programs, meeting the needs of many transit markets, promoting the service, and building consensus. Additionally, investment with communities such as tribes and Latino/a/Hispanic populations is critical to trust-building and gathering feedback, especially as these communities have historically been mistreated by government entities. Understanding not only the service needs, but how these populations would like to be engaged, can enhance relationships and build opportunities across Lane County.

- **Create Measurable Outcomes for Services to Promote Effective Monitoring and Increase Customer Satisfaction.** Monitor performance over time to evaluate the outcomes of providing and expanding service. Engage community members to improve customer satisfaction, retain existing riders, and attract new riders.
- **Engage Property Owners, including other transit providers and ODOT, for Curbspace and Park & Ride Opportunities.** Link Lane can pursue dedicated bus pullouts, park & ride opportunities, or shared amenities with transit providers, ODOT, and property owners, both public and private.
- **Coordinate with utilities for charging infrastructure.** Working toward an electric fleet requires coordination not only with property owners, as previously noted, but also with utility providers themselves. Coordinate with regional clean energy partners to identify opportunities for additional charging stations, including those open to the public. At present, Link Lane has barriers to a fully electric fleet due to a lack of charging infrastructure, limitations on electric vehicle ranges (with Eugene – Florence exceeding most mileage ranges), and has recently purchased non-electric vehicles whose expected useful life (EUL) will last the agency at least 5 years until they're in need of replacement.

## Marketing and Information Strategy

The following describes actions to improve customer service and information that can be implemented in the short-term and that should be maintained on a long-term basis. Awareness of existing service can be a sizable barrier for accessing transit, especially for households with low English proficiency and immigrant populations. Providing education and awareness can help connect potential riders to existing services.

- **Expand Branding Implementation for Link Lane.** Link Lane has established branding for its services, including specific colors, logos, and graphics. Branding is the foundation of the marketing strategy and provides an identity and image to potential customers. It helps create immediate recognition of all aspects of the service. Key elements of visible marketing tools include the name, logo, vehicle colors and graphics, and bus stop signage and facilities. It is important to be consistent with colors and graphics for maximum effect. A distinctive base color used consistently on transit vehicles and facilities becomes the “color of the bus” in the community. Vehicle graphics, bus stop signage, shelters, and benches enhance transit visibility throughout the community; their style, color, and quality should be consistent. Bus stops and shelters are a convenient place to provide additional information about routes, schedules, and deviation zones.
- **Continue to Provide Maps and Information in a Single User-Friendly Brochure.** Printed brochures and rack-cards can be designed and distributed to various target audiences to promote transit services. The main element of this kind of promotion is to vary the communication style for distinct target groups while encouraging all to use the same transit service. A printed brochure or rack-card should include one or more route maps showing all routes, bus stop locations, landmarks, and key destinations clearly depicted. How-to-ride information should also be included, including but not limited to fares, fare media. Contact information that includes a website address, telephone number, and reference to a trip planning app (when available) should be provided. Link Lane has this for its services, and should promote creation of these for other services as well.
- **Provide Real-Time Information and Trip-Planning Technologies.** Real-time bus arrival and route information helps improve the ridership experience by reducing passenger wait times at the stop (passengers know when they should leave for the stop) and provides confidence that a bus has not

been missed. With longer headways creating long waits if a bus is missed, real-time information helps reassure riders that their bus is on the way. Information on all transit routes could be provided via Link Lane’s website, smartphones, “push” technologies such as text messages, and telephone support. ODOT provides support for converting real-time bus arrival information to be compatible with applications such as Google Maps and Transit.

- Advertise.** Advertising via different media can help attract a range of riders. Display advertising of transit services in free weekday shopping papers and other local papers distributed in the community is a potential tool to introduce and promote service that can generate ridership. Other ways of promoting the service include radio spots; social media such as Facebook and Next Door; email blasts, and via attendance or sponsorship of local events. Partner with other transit providers in the region to continue supporting a marketing campaign for transit services including fare reciprocity and/or monthly fare passes when they are available. Local events could include general public events like the Florence Rhododendron Festival, Oregon Country Fair, and Prefontaine Classic Track & Field Meet, or more day-to-day events like farmer’s markets and local library events.
- Educate.** Provide a Travel Training Program Manager to teach local, rural, and underserved populations how to use available public transit services in Lane County. As outlined in the Lane Coordinated Public Transportation Plan, most riders (93.7%) do not need assistance. Those in need of assistance identified need for bus stop announcements, lifts or ramps to board the bus, using service animals, or requiring personal assistance. Focus travel training programs on teaching both agency staff and riders how to use public transit and support primary needs for assistance (travel training and travel ambassadors). These programs need bicultural messaging and need to be carefully designed to support veteran, tribe members, older adults and elders, youth, and people with developmental disabilities. The programs could engage people from these groups who are already using the bus system as travel trainers. In addition, providing bilingual staff to assist with trip planning and education would lower barriers for immigrants, refugees, and other marginalized groups to access transit.

**RideConnection Bilingual Staff**  
 RideConnection, a transit provider in Washington County, Oregon, provides several bilingual staff who work specifically with linguistically/culturally specific communities. This helps connect people who need transit service with existing services available.

## Conclusion and Next Steps

This memorandum was reviewed with the Project Management Team (PMT), will be reviewed with the Project Advisory Committee (PAC), and will be used to inform *TM#5: Service Options Evaluation* and the final Transit Development Plan.