Public Transportation Plan

This chapter describes public transportation services currently operating within Benton County, forecasts future public transportation needs, lists current policies and necessary policy changes, and describes the preferred alternatives for improving public transportation throughout the County (section 5.4). It also includes a summary of a recent Intercity Transit Feasibility Study performed by a private firm.

5.1 Existing Conditions

5.1.1 Description of Service

The Corvallis Transit System (CTS) currently provides local transit service within the City of Corvallis, and the Linn-Benton Loop connects Corvallis, Linn-Benton Community College (LBCC), and Albany. Greyhound provides intercity bus service to points north and south, and the Valley Retriever provides service from Newport on the west to Bend in the east. Regular shuttle service is currently provided to the Eugene Airport. In addition, regular shuttle service is provided from Corvallis to Albany, from which another shuttle provides service to Portland International Airport.

CTS operates eight routes within the City of Corvallis, with bus service at one-hour headways on weekdays and Saturdays. The bus system provides service within five blocks of virtually all residences within the City, and service to all major employment areas and shopping centers. In the past, the public has suggested service to areas outside the Corvallis city limits, such as Philomath and Crescent Valley High School, and service to Philomath was added in 2000. CTS connects to the Linn-Benton Loop at the downtown transfer center and on the Oregon State University campus. An improved intermodal transfer center downtown, with bicycle parking and additional shelter space, is planned and has been funded. CTS provides regular service to major generators in the county, including OSU and Hewlett Packard.

Albany Transit provided weekday a.m. and p.m. peak service during 1994–95 at 30-minute headways between North Albany and downtown Albany, serving Springhill Drive, Quarry Road, North Albany Road, Gibson Hill Drive, Crocker Lane, and adjacent subdivisions. The route connected in downtown Albany to Albany Transit’s other two routes and to the Linn-Benton Loop. This service was terminated in 1995, due to funding constraints and low ridership. North Albany is still served during the peak hour by the Linn-Benton Loop, but most Loop trips are oriented towards the community college. The Loop also provides on-demand service to the Amtrak depot in Albany.

The Linn-Benton Loop is operated by the Albany Transit System, with funding assistance from Benton County, the City of Corvallis, and Linn-Benton Community College. The Loop provides eight weekday trips between Oregon State University, downtown Corvallis, Linn-Benton Community College, and
downtown Albany, with peak-hour trips also stopping in North Albany and at Hewlett-Packard. Three additional trips travel only between LBCC and either Corvallis or Albany. The Loop connects to CTS in downtown Corvallis and at OSU, to Amtrak at the Albany depot, and to the Albany Transit System at LBCC and downtown Albany. The Loop bus is equipped with a bicycle rack.

Greyhound provides daily service from the bus depot in downtown Corvallis north to Albany, Salem, and Portland, and south to Eugene. The Valley Retriever provides three weekday trips, two Saturday trips, and one Sunday trip between Corvallis and Newport, with stops in Philomath, Blodgett, Burnt Woods, Eddyville, and Toledo. The Valley Retriever also provides two weekday trips and one weekend trip east to downtown Albany and the Albany Amtrak station, with one trip Monday-Saturday continuing to and from Salem, Mill city, Detroit, Sisters, and Bend. The Linn Shuttle provides a Lebanon, Sweet Home, Albany route.

Transportation services for senior citizens and persons with disabilities are provided by the Benton County Dial-A-Bus/County Cruiser within Benton County and by Call-A-Bus within the City of Albany. Dial-A-Bus services are available in the Corvallis area Monday through Friday between 7 a.m. and 4 p.m. (7 p.m. for Americans With Disabilities Act-eligible riders) and between 10:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. on Saturdays. These services include demand-responsive service providing door-to-door transportation, rural rounds providing scheduled transportation services on a rotational basis to rural communities, and contract services providing transportation to and from work for citizens associated with designated agencies.

5.1.2 Transit Demand and Existing Capacity

Ridership information that is readily available from the local transit service providers revealed that transit capacity exceeds existing demands in all but a few cases. Benton County’s Dial-A-Bus service has had occasion to turn away patrons due to the inability to provide service at the time(s) requested. Although isolated, these occurrences are significant, as these patrons are partially or wholly dependent on public transit.

Ridership information for the Linn-Benton Loop, CTS, and Albany Transit System indicates that the current capacity provided exceeds demands in most cases. However, it should be noted that “quality of service,” the measure of convenience and frequency of service provided, has been identified as a deficiency by users of the transit systems.

The following transit-related deficiencies have been identified within the County:

♦ No fixed-route transit service is provided to urbanized areas adjacent to Corvallis, such as Crescent Valley. (Service to Philomath was started in 2000.)
♦ Only limited transit service is available to senior citizens and persons with disabilities in the rural portions of Benton County.
♦ Residents in Benton County outside the City of Corvallis have no access to regular transit service.
♦ The schedule for the Linn-Benton Loop and the shift-change times at Hewlett-Packard don’t match each other.
♦ No direct public transportation is available to commercial airports in Portland or Eugene.
♦ Transferring between CTS, the Linn-Benton Loop, and Albany Transit System requires payment of up to three separate fares per trip between Corvallis and Albany.
♦ Transit service is not available on Sundays or late evenings.
5.2 Forecast of Future Conditions

5.2.1 Performance Evaluation of the Future No-Build System

An assessment of the no-build transportation system was performed, using the future travel demand estimates assigned to the system. The no-build system assumes the existing transportation system with only those funded projects in adopted Improvement Programs. The same performance evaluation procedures as those used for existing conditions were used for the future no-build evaluation. The performance evaluation of future conditions on the no-build transportation system resulted in the identification of deficiencies in the transit system which are summarized below.

Rapidly growing North Albany will remain without transit service. Service to rural portions of Benton County will remain limited or unavailable. Growth in rural communities will likely create added pressure on already limited public transit resources. However, the Linn-Benton Loop will have excess capacity to accommodate growth during the next 20 years.

Under a no-build transit scenario, new development within the City of Corvallis will be required to provide bus amenities, such as shelters and pullouts, but in most cases would not receive service, since most growth is likely to occur beyond CTS’ existing service area. Under this scenario, CTS ridership would likely only marginally increase, but the mode split between automobiles and buses would likely be shifted more toward automobile use. This would be due to residents of these new developments being forced to drive due to a lack of other options.

Without new service to rural areas of the County, the automobile will continue to be the only transportation mode available to most segments of the rural population, and transportation options for senior citizens and persons with disabilities will continue to be limited. Transit service will continue to be unavailable on Sundays and evenings.

Commuters traveling to work in Corvallis from Linn County communities will continue to lack a viable modal alternative to the private automobile. Payment of up to three separate fares to travel between Corvallis and Albany hinders the use of transit. This form of transit connectivity issue will continue to limit future ridership, resulting in higher auto demand. In addition, inadequate intermodal connectivity, including buses without bicycle racks, must be addressed.

When the Corvallis/Philomath area achieves MPO status, fixed-route transit service will need to be expanded throughout the entire area, along with corresponding paratransit service. The question is how the expanded service will be paid for. A more stable funding source than the current three-year serial levy will also be needed.

Future Demand Estimate

A capacity-based ridership demand model procedure was used to develop the public transit demand estimate. Several scenarios were developed to estimate potential ridership due to expanded transit service. These scenarios are described below.

5.2.2.A Express Bus Service

Express bus service would be operated between Albany and Philomath, with stops at North Albany, Hewlett-Packard, downtown Corvallis, and OSU. Service would be provided at half-hour headways during peak hours and at one-hour headways during weekday off-peak hours and on Saturdays, for a total of 16 weekday trips and 10 Saturday trips. Assuming 50 riders per weekday round trip and 25 riders per Saturday round trip, this service would attract 800 daily weekday riders and 250 Saturday riders. Annual ridership would be approximately 217,000.

Good Samaritan Hospital is the third largest employer in Benton county. During design of express bus service efforts should be made to serve the hospital campus with intercity express bus service.
5.2.2.B  Airport Park-and-Ride
Corvallis Transit System Route 6 would be modified to serve a new park-and-ride lot near the Corvallis Airport, with half-hourly service on weekdays and Saturdays.

5.2.2.C  Satellite Park-and-Ride
Satellite park-and-ride lots would be established in Alpine, Monroe, Wren, and Adair Village, with shuttle service provided between these locations and Corvallis. An Alpine-Monroe shuttle is estimated to attract 160 daily and 37,000 annual riders. A Wren shuttle is estimated to attract 120 daily and 27,700 annual riders. An Adair Village shuttle is estimated to attract 120 daily and 27,700 annual riders.
5.3 Public Transportation Policies

5.3.1 Existing Policy

The following policies on public transportation are contained in the Benton County Comprehensive Plan. Existing policies will be modified when the new policy recommendations are approved.

Section E: Transportation

5. Benton County shall provide for alternative transportation modes by:
   c. pursuing an effective public transportation system including joint use of school buses and other private transit as resources permit;
   d. pursuing various forms of public transit and paratransit for the handicapped and transportation disadvantaged; [and]

8. When considering major transportation projects, the following concerns will be addressed:
   a. The more energy efficient alternative shall be preferred whenever practicable.
   b. The alternative with the least adverse economic impacts shall be preferred whenever practicable. The economic analysis shall consider long term user costs, travel time, construction costs, maintenance costs, and other economic factors.
   c. Consideration to minimize adverse social, economic and environmental impacts shall occur, including alternative mode considerations.
   d. Physically handicapped and transportation disadvantaged shall be considered in design of facilities.

Section G: Energy, Transportation Energy Conservation Policies

1. Areas zoned for increased housing density should be concentrated along major transportation routes. Limited access to these major routes shall be required to insure planned efficient and safe ingress and egress from developments.

2. The County should support or implement as appropriate the bus loop system connecting Albany, LBCC, Corvallis, and Philomath, as recommended in the Linn-Benton Transit Development Plan (Buttke Report).

3. The County should adopt measures to encourage the use of carpools and mass transit by both public and private employees in the County.

Section H: Environmental Quality, Air Quality Policies

10. The County shall financially support the Albany-Corvallis-Philomath transit loop programs.

5.3.2 New Policy Recommendations

The efforts of reviewing related documents and identifying policy issues with staff, agencies, and the public has resulted in the identification of policies and codes that are recommended for modification. Summarized below are the recommendations.
Purpose
Transit service provides mobility to County residents who do not have access to automobiles, and provides an alternative to driving for those who do. Increasing congestion in the corridors between the County’s major population centers, and the limited funding available to continue to widen roadways, calls for providing transit choices to divert some trips from private automobiles. Transit service must meet the needs both of travelers within the County and those of travelers making connections to other travel modes outside the County, including intercity bus, passenger rail, and air services.

Proposed New Policy
Benton County shall seek ways to provide public transportation choices within the commuter corridors within the county.

The formation of a Transit District is the preferred means of providing intercity and rural transportation services within the region.

5.4 Preferred Alternatives

Rural Transit and Transportation Demand Management (TDM)
The growing population of Corvallis, coupled with rising housing prices, is one cause of a growing amount of long distance commuting from outlying communities into Corvallis. Public transportation service in the rural portions of Benton County, other than intercity passenger service along U.S. 20, is available only to senior citizens and persons with disabilities, which forces rural residents to use their private automobiles for trips, even if it is not their preference.

Transportation Demand Management (TDM) is most appropriately implemented within urban areas, and a TDM program will have a negligible effect on rural county travel. In any case, Benton County supports the cities’ efforts in carrying out TDM plans. Benton County will have its greatest impact in managing transportation demand through the implementation of relatively modest transit improvements.

The preferred alternatives for public transportation include the following. (The first three items are shown in detail in Figure 5-2).

- Satellite Park-and-Ride Shuttle Service in Highway 99W Corridor to Adair Village, Lewisburg, and Monroe [L1]
- Express Bus Service in U.S. 20 Corridor Between Albany and Philomath [L3]
- Support Expanded Corvallis Transit System Service [L4]
- Expand Dial-A-Bus/County Cruiser Service [L5]
- Continued Valley Retriever Service [L6]
- Continued Rural Rounds Service [L7]
- Continued Linn-Benton Loop Service [L8]

Rural transit and TDM projects have two goals: (1) to delay the need for road widening on critical rural highway corridors, such as Highway 99W; and (2) to provide transportation alternatives for residents in rural portions of the County. The satellite park-and-ride lots and shuttle service provide frequent transit connections from communities along the Highway 99W corridor into Corvallis and may encourage some
commuters from outside the County to use transit for part of their trip. Express bus service on U.S. 20 from Albany to Philomath, with associated park-and-ride lots, are recommended in corridors of higher frequency travel. The expanded Dial-A-Bus/County Cruiser service will provide some degree of public transit service to all rural residents for the first time. County support of expanded CTS service to Philomath is recommended. Continued provision of paratransit services currently provided is also recommended.

Regional planning is also needed to address the need for greater connectivity of city, rural, and statewide alternative transportation systems. Commuter service in the Highway 34 corridor between Corvallis and Lebanon has not been addressed in the preferred alternative. Planning should include both the public and private sector. Operators of the Willamette & Pacific Railroad (WPRR) have expressed the hope that it will become economically possible to restore passenger rail service to the coast, though there are no plans for this in the foreseeable future. Passenger rail service between Corvallis and Albany is also included in the vision for Benton County’s future.

The proposed public transit plan consists of four major parts:

1. Expanding bus service in the U.S. 20 corridor between Philomath and Albany
2. Providing shuttle service in the Highway 99W corridor between Monroe and Adair Village
3. Expanding transit availability and service frequency throughout rural Benton County
4. Continuing existing rural transit services

5.4.1 Express Bus Service in U.S. 20 Corridor Between Albany & Philomath [L3]

The U.S. 20 corridor is currently the most congested in Benton County, connecting the major population centers in the County and passing by two of the area’s largest employers, as well as providing an important route from the Willamette Valley to the coast. The only public transportation services currently operating in this corridor are the Linn-Benton Loop, which provides five weekday peak hour one-way trips between Albany and Corvallis via U.S. 20, and the Valley Retriever’s Corvallis-Newport route, which provides three weekday trips between Philomath and Corvallis, two Saturday trips, and one Sunday trip.

The proposed express bus service would operate six days a week in the U.S. 20 corridor between Philomath and Albany, with six stops located at Philomath, Oregon State University, downtown Corvallis, Hewlett Packard, North Albany, and the Amtrak station in Albany.

Shared parking arrangements would facilitate improvement and use of existing parking facilities to provide three park-and-ride lots in Albany, North Albany, and Philomath, each with an estimated capacity of 150 spaces. The exact routing and park-and-ride lot locations would be determined during service planning prior to the development of service. Consideration for serving the Good Samaritan Hospital Complex should be further evaluated during planning and development of express bus service.

Express bus service would be provided during the following times:

Weekdays: 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., 30-minute headways
9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., 60-minute headways

Saturdays: 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., 60-minute headways

Express bus service is desirable in the U.S. 20 corridor to provide reliable transportation alternatives for those who cannot or prefer not to drive, and to provide some measure of relief to traffic congestion on U.S. 20. Provision of frequent transit service during commute periods will also provide the foundation needed for the City of Corvallis to develop successful transportation demand management programs, which will help reduce traffic on roads in unincorporated areas of the County. Express bus service would substantially increase the amount of transit service provided within the corridor (from 3-5 weekday trips currently to 17 and from 0-2 Saturday trips currently to 10). Express bus service would attract an estimated 800 riders daily.
A decision will need to be made on how to administer the service. There are three public transit systems in the Albany/Corvallis area (Albany Transit System, Corvallis Transit System, and the Linn-Benton Loop). The potential also exists to create a transit district, which would have a broader range of options for funding sources, and would provide opportunities to better coordinate transit services. This may be coordinated through the development of a regional transit plan between Linn and Benton Counties. However, a regional system administered through a transit district would also mean that individual communities might have less political influence and control. It further requires the establishment of a new, unique governing body along with the costs inherent therein. The voters must approve the creation of a transit or transportation district. In any case, it is imperative that the expanded transit service recommended in this plan be well coordinated with local service currently provided.

5.4.2 Satellite Park-and-Ride Shuttle Service in Highway 99W Corridor to Adair Village, Lewisburg, and Monroe [L1]
   Park-and-Ride Lots in Monroe, Lewisburg, and Adair Village [L2]
Public transportation service is not available in the Highway 99W corridor at present. Greyhound currently operates one bus a day between Corvallis and Eugene via Junction City, but this bus does not stop in Monroe.

The proposed shuttle service would provide public transportation service to rural population centers that currently have no service by developing park-and-ride lots in Monroe, Lewisburg, and Adair Village, and providing shuttle service from these locations into Corvallis. Stop locations, routing, and the potential for diverting to Alpine and Bellfountain would be determined during the service planning process prior to the development of service. Service would be operated at 60-minute intervals between 6 a.m. and 8 p.m. weekdays and between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. Saturdays. As with the U.S. 20 corridor express buses, a decision will need to be made about how to administer the service.

5.4.3 Enhance and Expand Dial-A-Bus/County Cruiser Service [L5]
Public transportation in the rural portions of Benton County is currently provided in a number of ways. The County Cruiser is the demand responsive car and van service provided by Dial-A-Bus, which is available to senior citizens and persons with disabilities. The number of trips between rural communities and Corvallis during a week is extremely limited, as there is no dedicated vehicle fleet for this service. The County Cruiser service should be enhanced and expanded, as funding and demand allows. Priorities for service improvements are:

1. Purchasing one or more vehicles to be dedicated to this service, providing a visible transit presence in rural communities
2. Expanding service eligibility to cover all members of the public
3. Expanding the number of days that service is provided to rural communities

This service will provide an alternative to the private automobile for residents of rural Benton County.

5.4.4 Continued Valley Retriever Service [L6]
The Valley Retriever provides three weekday trips, two Saturday trips, and one Sunday trip between Corvallis and Newport, with stops in Philomath, Blodgett, Burnt Woods, Eddyville, and Toledo. The Valley Retriever also provides two weekday trips and one weekend trip east to downtown Albany and the Albany Amtrak station, with one trip Monday-Saturday continuing to and from Salem, Mill City, Detroit, Sisters, and Bend.

5.4.5 Continued Rural Rounds Service [L7]
Rural Rounds is planned to provide scheduled transportation services on a rotational basis to rural communities. Vans provided by Benton County are expected to be driven by trained volunteers to provide service to rural communities in the County. Past experience with this service has been mixed. While
ridership has been relatively low, public input from citizens in many of the rural communities indicated that this service provides a valuable link for the transit-dependent. Grant funds are currently available to develop this service. Future service levels should respond to demand.

5.4.6 Continued Linn-Benton Loop Service [L8]
The Linn-Benton Loop is operated by the Albany Transit System, with funding assistance from Benton County, the City of Corvallis, and Linn-Benton Community College. The Loop provides eight weekday trips between Oregon State University, downtown Corvallis, Linn-Benton Community College, and downtown Albany, with peak-hour trips also stopping in North Albany and at Hewlett-Packard. Three additional trips travel only between LBCC and either Corvallis or Albany. The Loop connects to CTS in downtown Corvallis and at OSU, to Amtrak at the Albany depot, and to the Albany Transit System at LBCC and downtown Albany. The Loop bus is equipped with a bicycle rack.

5.4.7 Support Expanded Corvallis Transit System Service to Philomath [L4]
The Corvallis-Philomath area will soon become a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). According to the Oregon Transportation Planning Rule, MPO’s must provide regular transit service within their boundaries. Thus, Corvallis Transit System service may be required to serve Philomath. Service to Philomath was initiated in 2000. Benton County supports this transit expansion, and should coordinate its services with the expanded CTS service.

5.4.8 Coordination
Three public fixed-route transit operators, two paratransit providers, and two intercity carriers currently operate within Benton County. This plan proposes two new transit services and expansion of a third. Coordination of services is essential to meet the following objectives:

- Minimizing transfer times between different services
- Avoiding duplication of service
- Integrating fares structures and transfer policies, and developing a single ticket system
- Providing for adequately sized intermodal facilities
- Assuring that all transit services are bicycle friendly

5.5 Intercity Transit Feasibility Study
In June 1999 Nelson/Nygaard Consulting Associates completed a Regional Public Transportation Plan. The effort led by the Cascades West Council of Governments (CWCOG) evaluates the feasibility of intercity transit in Linn and Benton Counties. The project was partially funded by a grant from the Transportation and Growth Management (TGM) Program, a joint program of the Oregon Department of Transportation and the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development. The CWCOG formed a Steering Committee representing local jurisdictions, major employers, current transportation providers, and citizens from the around the two counties. The Steering Committee provided guidance and feedback.

The Regional Public Transportation Plan concludes that enhancing intercity transit in Linn and Benton Counties is feasible, and that enhanced service as recommended would operate within reasonable industry standards for transit productivity and efficiency. The Existing Conditions section of the Regional Public Transportation Plan demonstrates the need for enhanced intercity service, which was supported through a phone survey and the interdependence of the communities within the region.

The Existing Conditions section presents background information on the communities, current travel, existing transit services, and future growth projections. It also provides information about intercity transit
in similar communities around the country. The telephone survey found strong support for enhanced intercity transit among the general public. Current travel patterns indicate high levels of travel between different communities in Linn and Benton Counties, indicating that new travel options for these trips would be welcomed. A peer review profiles systems from around the country that offer intercity transit service in regions similar to Linn and Benton Counties, showing that other communities have found the motivation and funding to offer service similar to that proposed in the Regional Public Transportation Plan.

The long-term plan presents an intercity transit system that would provide service to all of the larger communities in Linn and Benton Counties. It maximizes integration with local transit service, relying heavily on Corvallis Transit System and Albany Transit System for local circulation within these two communities. Four routes would provide service between Albany, Corvallis, Lebanon, Philomath, and Sweet Home, while serving such important locations as Linn-Benton Community College and Hewlett-Packard. Together with Dial-A-Bus for elderly and disabled passengers and carpool/vanpool services, the plan presents a complete intercity public transportation system for the two counties. The service design reflects goals that were developed and refined by the Steering Committee.

The short-term plan offers various options for service to provide incremental steps toward the long-term plan. The Regional Public Transportation Plan details options for links between different communities, along with the purpose, cost, and service details of each option. The Steering Committee identified three links to pursue first (in no particular order):

♦ Albany-Corvallis Link
♦ Corvallis-Philomath Link
♦ Lebanon-Corvallis/Albany Link

The Plan reviewed governance alternatives for future intercity transit service in Linn and Benton Counties and concluded that expanded service would likely take one of two forms:

♦ Continuation and expansion of the Linn-Benton Loop Transit Commission
♦ Establishment of a Transportation District

The Steering Committee recommended expansion of the existing Linn-Benton Loop governance structure. At least in the short term, this allows for incremental growth as community interest and political will (and therefore financing) allow.

The current structure has the benefit of being flexible and allowing community support for intercity service to coalesce over time. However, it also has several drawbacks. First, several funding sources are available only to transportation districts. This includes the In-Lieu payroll tax, which would represent a large sum of money. Also, without a transportation district, the service will rely on a mix of different sources from multiple jurisdictions. Unless these are dedicated funds, long term stability of the funding is questionable.

For the longer term, any intercity service should preserve the option of forming a transportation district. Though this would raise integration issues between intercity service and the existing local service, it would provide a stable funding source. In order to form a transportation district; a majority of voters must approve the formation. The main reason for forming a transportation district would be to secure additional, reliable funding.

The City of Corvallis is considering initiation of a Corvallis area transportation district in the near term. Once a district is formed, additional areas can be annexed to the district by vote of the annexing area. Based upon LBCC voting trends, it is likely that support for transit is higher in Benton County than Linn County. It should be recognized that if Corvallis has already organized a transportation district it may be more difficult to bring Linn County communities into the district in the future.

The Regional Public Transportation Plan concludes with a review of current land use plans and codes for their level of support of effective and efficient transit. A strategy is presented to integrate transit and land-use by defining intercity transit corridors, so that communities can focus land use efforts and transit service to provide the best benefit and support the most effective transit service.
The Nelson/Nygaard Regional Public Transportation Plan does not support the Highway 99W Shuttle Service between Monroe and Adair Village that is proposed in this Benton County Transportation System Plan. The Nelson/Nygaard Plan proposes continuation of Dial-A-Bus and carpool/vanpool efforts in this corridor. Other public transportation enhancements proposed in the Benton County Plan are supported by the Nelson/Nygaard plan.