

STAFF REPORT: COMMUNITY CONNECTOR TRANSIT STUDY OUTCOMES AND ACCEPTANCE RESOLUTION PREVIEW

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ISSUE STATEMENT

Trains, buses, shuttles and other options are all important and work together as a larger system to serve the diverse transportation needs of the Portland region, helping people get where they need to go. In conversations during the 2023 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) update, policymakers, partners, and community members expressed concern about areas of the region that still lack access to the regional transit network today and even in the future, but where opportunities may exist to connect to jobs and other essential destinations. We must continue improving transit's accessibility, service, reliability, and reach to continue to strive to become the region we've envisioned.

Community connector transit can unlock more transportation access in the region and make transportation more equitable. This type of transit includes smaller, more nimble modes like shuttles, para-transit, microtransit, vanpools and other last mile transportation services that are not local fixed route bus service. It often is more flexible than a bus – from going off-route to pick up or drop off riders to being by-request whenever needed (like Uber or Lyft). This flexibility can also help people travel to light rail or frequent bus routes that may stop a mile or more away from their home or destination.

A strong foundation of recent regional work, coupled with the suite of local planning efforts by agency partners, set the stage to assess potential solutions for improving community connections to essential destinations and existing and planned frequent transit within the network. Regional momentum around community connector transit has remained strong even within a challenging environment for transit both regionally and nationally. Washington County launched and is now looking to expand greater Portland's first microtransit service (south of the Columbia River) and Clackamas County is preparing to update its Transit Development Plan to identify more potential future shuttle routes.

The Community Connector Transit (CCT) Study brought together greater Portland partners, business representatives and community members to explore opportunities for investing in a local transit system that serves everyone. It determined the role this type of transit can play in providing a service coverage solution as part of the local element of the regional transit vision and identifies recommendations for how partners can work together toward successfully achieving that vision in support of regional goals.

ACTION REQUESTED

Review Resolution No. 26-5588, for the purpose of accepting the findings and recommendations in the Community Connector Transit Study (Exhibit A) as updates to the 2028 Regional Transportation Plan, Climate Smart Strategy, and Regional Transit Strategy (Exhibit B).

Metro Council is anticipated to consider acceptance at the October 1 Council meeting following a recommendation from MPAC and action from JPACT.

ANTICIPATED EFFECTS AND BUDGET IMPACT

The following are anticipated effects of this action:

- The Community Connector Transit Study findings and recommendations will inform adjustments to planning, policy and investment priorities in the 2028 Regional Transportation Plan update (including the Climate Smart Strategy) currently underway.
- An update to the Regional Transit Strategy will occur following the 2028 RTP update to reflect the new and updated 2028 RTP transit planning, policy and investment priorities.
- A targeted review and update of the Regional Transportation Functional Plan will occur following the 2028 RTP update to ensure that the functional plan language and provisions are consistent with and adequately reflect new and updated transit vision and policies adopted in the 2028 RTP.
- The Regional Transportation Functional Plan will subsequently be implemented through future local Transportation System Plan updates.
- The Community Connector Transit Study will inform future regional planning and investment decisions and ongoing performance monitoring to meet state and federal requirements.

No additional financial impact is anticipated beyond the adopted budget.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT & FRAMING COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Planning Process and Community and Stakeholder Engagement

The study was led by a project management team including staff from Metro's Planning, Research and Development, Investment Areas and Land Use and Development Departments. The team met regularly with a Transit Working Group that included partner representatives from SMART, Ride Connection, Cities of Clackamas County (Lake Oswego), Clackamas County, Cities of Multnomah County (Gresham), Multnomah County, Cities of Washington County (Tualatin), Washington County, TriMet, City of Portland, ODOT, C-TRAN and Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council to solicit feedback. The update process included four key phases from Fall 2024 to Summer 2026 with staff returning to Metro Council and advisory committees, agency partners and business and community for guidance to inform each milestone (see Figure 2 on page 5 of the report). This work plan and supporting public engagement approach were developed to align with the timeline for the 2028 RTP update.

For the first phase of the update, input collected through transportation-related engagement over the last ten years informed development of the community connector policy framework. The second and third phases engaged in broader outreach in partnership with community-based organizations to reflect additional input on transit needs and potential opportunities for connector service solutions from community members from communities of color, youth and people with disabilities, who have been historically underrepresented in decision-making. The final phase applied a direct outreach approach to those who provided feedback during the process to review the draft report and recommendations to confirm input was reflected (see page 7 of the report for a summary of study engagement activities and Appendix A for more information).

Study Outcomes to be Moved Forward in Regional Efforts

The Regional Transit Strategy (RTS), adopted in 2018, established the future vision for the regional transit network that is rooted in the 2040 Growth Concept and is expanded and carried forward in the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). Together, these documents establish the vision and goals for regional transit. The RTP includes a local transit component that complements the Climate Smart Strategy and RTS, which includes a description of local transit needs, the Regional Transit Vision System Concept and Network Map, local transit policies, a list of 2030 and 2045 Fiscally Constrained and 2045 Strategic local transit projects, and topics for future study and planning efforts.

A key outcome of the CCT Study is recommendations for updates to the RTP and RTS, as well as the Regional Transportation Functional Plan and Urban Growth Management Functional Plan. The 2028 RTP update is already underway. Study information about existing conditions, changing trends, lessons learned, community needs, opportunities and best practice solutions is recommended to update the needs analysis in RTP Chapter 4. Additional findings and associated recommendations are summarized below. An update to the RTS is anticipated following updates to the Future Vision and the 2028 RTP update.

How Community Connectors Fit into the Regional Transit Vision and Policy Framework

There are many tools in the transit toolbox for implementing the regional vision to better serve growing communities and achieve regional goals of equity, climate, economy, safety, and mobility. Community connector transit is one of these tools. Local connectors can expand the transportation network and improve transit in areas with limited access.

Community connectors are best used where transit does not exist today and in areas where traditional transit service is not viable. They provide a mobility solution for lower-density suburban and exurban areas typically at the regional edge. This is particularly important as gentrification patterns have pushed more communities that rely on transit to these areas that are less traditionally transit-supportive. Community connectors are most efficiently used to facilitate first and last-mile connections to frequent and high-capacity transit to extend the reach of the existing network. However, they can also link neighborhoods with local jobs and community places (including regional recreation sites only accessible by car today) and employees to their employment center (especially sites with shift work where off-peak service is needed) to improve access. Where local bus service is planned for the future, community connectors can bridge the gap to build ridership for future service. RTP

Transit Policy 5 for local transit and Transit Policy 2 for an equitable system are recommended to be revised to reflect this information as part of the 2028 RTP update.

Figure 1 on page 2 of the report shows the proposed RTP policy framework for how each transit tool can be applied to maximize benefits and leverage other tools to best work together as a system, as updated to reflect the role of community connectors. This RTP Regional Transit Vision System Concept figure and explanatory text are recommended to be revised to include this information as part of the 2028 RTP update.

Similarly, Figure 4 on page 10 of the report describes the role of each transit classification or “tool” and the conditions under which it is most efficient in meeting community transit needs, as updated to incorporate community connectors. Community connectors can serve lower density areas or even destinations with lower frequency and span, but may operate at times of day when demand is lower or be “on-call”. Smaller vehicle sizes usually mean they move less people than the bus and other types of transit and so they can have higher operating costs per passenger. A shuttle with a set or flexible route may have some stop amenities, which may even be temporary, but microtransit providing door-to-door service may not. This figure under RTP Transit Policy 1 is recommended to be revised to include this information as part of the 2028 RTP update.

This updated vision and policy framework identified future community connector service opportunity areas that could possibly both benefit from and support first-last mile transit solutions. These identified opportunity areas (Figure 7 on page 38 of the report) are recommended to replace community/jobs connectors currently included on the RTP [Regional Transit Network Vision Map](#) as part of the 2028 RTP update.

How Mobility Hubs Fit into the Regional Transit Vision and Policy Framework

Especially as we plan for shuttles to link to frequent and high-capacity transit – it is important to ensure these connections and connection points are convenient and comfortable. Mobility hubs are places where people can easily access and efficiently transfer between different types of transit and transportation options. These places combine transit service and resources, first and last-mile transportation options and wayfinding (i.e., walking and bicycling routes, bikeshare, rideshare), and stop and community amenities together to create vibrant, people-centered spaces that support equity, sustainability, and community vitality through the creation of mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods near transit aligned with the 2040 Growth Concept. Core and desired elements that should or could be found within a mobility hub depend on their “typology” or their function within the network based on the scale and nature of transit and other mobility connections that occur and land use and community context.

This vision and policy framework led to the identification of regional hubs supporting a mix of many transit services where additional investment in mobility elements and features creating a more convenient and comfortable experience would provide the most benefit to the most people. Both the policy framework (Figure 17 and 18 on pages 52 and 54-5) of the report information and the resulting identified mobility hubs (Figure 20 on page 60 of the report) are recommended to update RTP Transit Policy 9 as part of the 2028 RTP update.

Two resources developed by the study provide visual examples and guidance to encourage cooperative partnership by regional and local agencies to implement mobility hubs together in ways that reflect their typology and respond to local character: Mobility Hub Toolkit (Appendix J to the report) and the Mobility Hub Implementation Toolkit (Appendix H to the report to be a companion document to Metro’s Livable Streets Design Guide).

Spotlight on Parks

Whether or not regional parks are accessible by transit is an important equity consideration. Natural areas contribute to better physical and mental health, have deep cultural significance, and are often sites of major community events – all important aspects of quality of life. At the same time, pursuing transportation demand management strategies help protect natural resources by limiting parking to preserve land and reducing air and environmental impacts from vehicle traffic.

Work done as part of the Parks Transit Access Strategy (Appendix F to the report) found that only 3% of people living in equity focus areas cannot access any regional parks within an hour trip on transit. However, still about 27% of regional parks are not accessible by transit, many of which do have cultural significance, and another 34% have some access that could be improved. The Strategy identifies opportunities both where the existing fixed route service network could be adjusted to increase regional park transit access and where a shuttle could leverage a connection to a high capacity transit line to extend service to a nearby grouping of regional parks. It also outlines the specific considerations needed in planning for parks transit service, including using outreach and pilots to understand recreation behavior, addressing site circulation constraints early, building community connections to support and get the word out about new service, and exploring public-private diversified funding and cost-sharing strategies. These are opportunities that the region can capitalize on as they arise, which may be eligible for different revenue streams than those available for traditional fixed-route transit (e.g., parks parking revenue, private sponsorship).

Strategies for Implementing Community Connectors and Mobility Hubs

The opportunity areas and mobility hub locations are further categorized as near, medium- or long or future-term investment opportunities based on their readiness for investment. The purpose being to support a coordinated regional approach to investment in these services, help set partners up for coordinated funding requests in the future and align the region on shared goals for using scarce funding. The readiness outcomes provide a framework for how these service area and hub opportunities can also be incorporated into local Transportation System Plan (TSP) transit plan maps and Transit Development Plan (TDP) vision maps, as well as the RTP. This information conceptualized in Figure 22 on page 66 of the report is recommended to update the mobility corridor descriptions in Appendix V and encourage collaborative work with agency partners to consider revisions to project or “bucket” investments in RTP Chapter 6 and RTP Appendix A and B as part of the 2028 RTP update.

Looking ahead, advancing ideas described in this report will require continued attention to equity, accessibility, and affordability. Pilot projects, incremental implementation, and performance monitoring provide opportunities to learn, refine approaches, and ensure that investments are delivering benefits. This study establishes a foundation for future phases of service planning and implementation. Additional data, tools, study and/or to support implementation for incorporation in RTP Chapter 8 are recommended to be collaboratively identified with partners as part of the 2028 RTP update.

Advancing community connector and mobility hub opportunities will require balancing near-term implementation with long-term flexibility, recognizing that service types may change over time as land use, travel demand, and transit networks continue to grow and adapt. The CCT Study outlines forward-looking actions that, rather than prescribing specific projects or service decisions, focus on implementation readiness, coordination, and Metro’s role as a regional convener and technical resource. These are recommended to be incorporated into the RTS which is proposed to be updated following the 2028 RTP update (and as such would also incorporate all revisions adopted, including those outlined above).

Table 1. Recommendations for Regional Actions

Implementation Focus	Summary
Community Connectors	
Advocate for increased funding at the state level.	Make the case for CCT and explore joint grant applications for federal and state funding for the region.
Identify additional regional funding sources for CCT.	Explore opportunities for public-private partnerships and provide examples of how jurisdictions can use TDM to fund CCT.
Make the most of existing funding.	Streamline STIF reporting procedures and transit permitting processes. Establish templates or standards for service contracting. Make more use of technical assistance programs. Coordinate federal reporting on TAM and PTASP. Improve pedestrian and bike access to existing transit.
Establish a venue for regional transit coordination.	Form transit provider coordination working groups to help identify and plan for regional transit facility needs and formalize benchmarks for types of transit service.
Improve information-sharing to the public.	Expand coordinated marketing and trip-planning tools to improve awareness of services.
Clarify Metro’s role.	Reinforce Metro’s role as a regional convener and technical resource.
Enable implementation through standard tools.	Develop MOUs, IGAs, and guidance for partners.
Support program integration and incremental delivery.	Leverage TSMO, TDM, and RTO programs for phased implementation.
Advance access, affordability, and inclusion.	Support transportation wallets, accessibility, and equity-focused programs.

Improve coordination and system consistency.	Promote fare integration, GTFS participation, and shared trip-planning.
Track outcomes and define what comes next.	Use pilots and metrics to inform future studies and RTP updates.
Funding research and advocacy.	Support coalition-building and future funding opportunities.
Mobility Hubs	
Pilot and retrofit existing assets.	Use pilots and targeted retrofits at existing transit nodes to test hub concepts.
Integrate mobility hub elements into development cycles.	Embed hub elements into capital and redevelopment projects.
Establish cross-agency governance.	Define roles among agencies for delivery and operations.
Manage curb space flexibly.	Use adaptable curb management strategies.
Plan for long-term operations and maintenance.	Establish plans for life-cycle costs and performance monitoring.
Secure site control.	Identify and secure sites through partnerships and agreements.
Establish the technology framework.	Coordinate platforms, data sharing, and digital tools.
Update local land use codes.	Encourage jurisdictions to formally define and enable mobility hubs.
Establish sustainable funding models.	Identify capital and operating funding and cost-sharing approaches.

GTFS = general transit feed specification; ODOT = Oregon Department of Transportation; PTASP = Public Transportation Agency Safety Plans; STIF = Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund; TAM = transit asset management; TDM = transportation demand management; IGA = intergovernmental agreement; MOU = memorandum of understanding; RTO = Regional Travel Options; RTP = regional transportation plan; TMSO = transportation system management and operations

Implementation of CCT and mobility hubs will depend on strong regional coordination and shared responsibility. Metro’s role as a convener and technical resource will be particularly important in supporting alignment across jurisdictions, facilitating consistent practices, and integrating CCT services into regional planning and funding programs. Local partners — including transit agencies, counties, cities, park agencies, and community organizations — will continue to lead in designing, funding, and operating services that reflect local context and priorities. By continuing to work collaboratively and approaching transit as an integrated regional system, Metro and its partners can advance a flexible and resilient CCT network that supports regional goals for equity, mobility, climate action, and access to opportunity.

ANALYSIS/INFORMATION

Known Opposition. None known.

Legal Antecedents. Several federal, state and regional laws relate to this action.

Federal regulations:

- 23 U.S. Code 134: Metropolitan Transportation Planning.
- 23 U.S.C. 150: National goals and performance management measures.
- 23 CFR 450 and 771: USDOT rules that govern updates to RTPs.
- Clean Air Act [42 U.S.C. 7401 and 23 U.S.C. 109(j)], as amended.
- US EPA transportation conformity rules (40 CFR, parts 51 and 93).
- Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21, 2012).
- Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act, 2015).
- Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA, 2020).

State laws and actions include:

- Statewide planning goals
- Oregon Transportation Planning Rules (OAR Chapter 660, Division 12)
- Oregon Transportation Plan and implementing modal plans, including the Oregon Public Transportation Plan and Oregon State Rail Plan
- Oregon Clean Air Act State Implementation Plan (SIP)
- Oregon Metropolitan Greenhouse Gas Reduction Targets Rules (OAR Chapter 660, Division 44)
- Governor's Executive Order 20-04 on Climate Change, signed in March 2020.

Metro Council actions include:

- Ordinance No. 14-1346B (For the Purpose of Adopting the Climate Smart Communities Strategy and Amending the Regional Framework Plan to Comply with State Law), adopted by the Metro Council on December 18, 2014.
- Resolution No. 16-4708 (For the Purpose of Approving the Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion), adopted by the Metro Council on June 23, 2016.
- Ordinance No. 18-1421 (For the Purpose of Amending the 2014 Regional Transportation Plan to Comply with Federal and State Law and Amending the Regional Framework Plan), adopted by the Metro Council on Dec. 6, 2018.
- Resolution No. 18-4892 (For the Purpose of Adopting the 2018 Regional Transit Strategy and Replacing the 2009 High Capacity Transit System Plan), adopted by Metro Council on Dec. 6, 2018.
- Ordinance No. 23-1496, For the Purpose of Amending the 2018 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) to Comply with Federal and State Law and Amending the Regional Framework Plan, adopted on November 30, 2023.
- Resolution No. 26-5563 For the Purpose of Approving the Regional Transportation Demand Management Strategy as a Topical Plan of the Regional Transportation Plan and Accepting Recommendations for Updates to the 2028 Regional Transportation Plan and Climate Smart Strategy
- Resolution No. 26-55XX Regional Vanpool Action Plan, to be considered for adoption by the Metro Council on October 1, 2026.

- Resolution No. 26-5614 (For the Purpose of Adopting the Work Plan and Engagement Plan for the 2028 Regional Transportation Plan Update), to be considered for adoption by the Metro Council on October 1, 2026.

Attachments

- Attachment 1: Draft Resolution No. 26-5588 (Accepting the Findings and Recommendations in the Community Connector Transit Study as Updates to the 2028 Regional Transportation Plan, Climate Smart Strategy, and Regional Transit Strategy)
- Attachment 2: Draft Exhibit A to Resolution No. 26-5588 (Study Report)
- Attachment 3: Draft Exhibit B to Resolution No. 26-5588 (Moving Forward the CCT Study Recommendations)
- Attachment 4: Project Milestone Work Plan
- Attachment 5: Executive Summary