

Memo



Metro

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Date: Monday, March 27, 2017
To: Metro Council and interested parties
From: Jamie Snook, Principal Planner
Subject: Regional Transit Strategy draft policy framework and vision

Purpose

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide an update to the Metro Council on the development of the Regional Transit Strategy (RTS) policy framework, vision and emerging transit strategies. The Regional Transit Strategy is a collaborative effort to create a single coordinated transit vision and implementation strategy. The objectives of the RTS are to:

- Implement the 2040 Growth Concept and Climate Smart Strategy
- Update RTP transit-related policies and performance measures
- Update the current Regional Transit Network Map and High Capacity Transit Map
- Update the Transit System Expansion Policy
- Recommend a coordinated strategy for future transit investments and identify potential partnerships, strategies and funding sources for implementation.

Action Requested

There is no formal action requested. Staff is seeking feedback from the Metro Council regarding the following issues:

1. We are proposing to update the current transit related RTP policies to include the transit vision to make transit more frequent, convenient, accessible and affordable for everyone. Is the Metro Council comfortable with these goals as establishing our policy framework?
2. Since 2009 when the HCT System Plan was adopted, there have been several changes to how we categorize some of the potential transit corridors. Is the Metro Council comfortable with the changes to the I-5 bridge crossing, Lake Oswego to Portland, Gresham to Damascus, Southwest Corridor and Powell Division lines?
3. Enhanced Transit is a way of grouping a suite of potential transit improvements underneath an overall policy framework. This framework is grounded in joint cooperation between the local governments and the transit provider. Are you comfortable with this framework and the policy goal of implementing localized and corridor-wide transit improvements quickly, that it represents?
4. As we are building consensus on the policy framework and vision, we are starting the conversation regarding how to prioritize regional capital investments in transit. Does the Metro Council have specific ideas regarding criteria that we should explore as we go through this process?

Background

This is a critical time to consider how transit fits into our larger regional goals. The Climate Smart Strategy, adopted in 2014, provided clear direction to invest more in our transit system in order to meet regional goals and objectives related to sustainability and carbon emissions. Current growth rates will require us to expand transit service in order to provide people with transportation options and minimize congestion. Significant and coordinated investment is needed to continue to provide equivalent service as our region grows; increasing service and access will require dedicated funding, policies, and coordination from all jurisdictions. Transit also helps the region

meet its equity and access goals as it is a primary mode of transportation for people with disabilities and youth, providing them with a way to get to work, school, and attain access to daily needs. Investments in transit should increase access, provide more transportation options for residents and workers, and improve air quality, reduce peak hour congestion.

In 2009, the region concluded a process to create the first high capacity transit system plan since the 1980s. This plan defined a tiered list of HCT corridors for prioritization, which was adopted into the RTP in 2010. Since the HCT plan adoption, the region has moved forward with the top two priorities: Southwest Corridor and Powell-Division Corridor. *See Attachment 1, 2009 HCT System map.*

However, since 2009, a number of changes have occurred that necessitate updating the HCT plan. For example:

- The Lake Oswego Transit and I-5 Bridge Replacement projects were identified as moving forward toward project development at the time of approval. However, these projects are currently on hold;
- An HCT line was identified that connected the town center of Damascus, which recently voted to disincorporate; and
- The Division bus rapid transit project is moving forward and will meet some critical near term needs in one part of the Powell-Division corridor; the Powell corridor HCT needs remain unmet.

These changes, as well as other regional developments, should be reflected in the Regional Transit Strategy. However, we are focusing the Regional Transit Strategy more broadly so that it serves as policy guidance for how new transit lines and service are developed, rather than simply a set of lines on the map.

The RTS will inform as the transit component of the 2018 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) update and will provide a coordinated vision and strategy for transit in the Portland metropolitan area. This is an important time to update the Regional Transit Vision. With continued regional growth come challenges such as more congestion, higher housing prices, and strained access to employment. Residents, elected officials, and community organizations view increased transit service as a critical part of the overall solution to these challenges. If we want to become the region we envisioned in our 2040 Growth Concept and in the 2014 Climate Smart Strategy, we must continue improving transit's accessibility, service, reliability, and reach.

Updating the Policy Framework

The 2010 RTP and the 2009 HCT System Plan focused mainly on capital investments to improve the transit system. The RTS will coordinate the operational, capital and transit supportive elements to make transit work more efficiently and effectively for everyone. The RTS vision is in response to the community needs as a whole, and is as much about improving operations as it is building high capacity transit.

We are building a strong Regional Transit Vision that coordinates plans and priorities of our regional partners. Building off of the Climate Smart Strategy, the

"The greatest barriers to the use of public transportation are time and reliability. If people can't count on transit to get them there at a specific time, they're not going to use it."

Adria Decker Dismuke, Milwaukie resident

regional transit vision is to make transit more frequent, convenient, accessible and affordable for everyone. Below are the goals identified to support our overall regional transit vision:

To make transit more frequent:

- Align frequency and type of transit service to meet existing and projected demand and transit needs.
- Support the implementation of adopted local and regional land use and transportation visions

To make transit more convenient:

- Make transit more convenient for everyone and competitive with driving by improving transit speed and reliability through priority treatments (e.g., signal priority, bus lanes, queue jumps, etc.) and other strategies.
- Improve customer experience by ensuring seamless connections between various transit providers, including transfers, route and schedule information and payment options.

To make transit more accessible:

- Provide safe and direct biking and walking routes and crossings that connect to transit stops to ensure transit services are fully accessible to people of all ages and abilities.
- Expand community and regional transit service across the region to improve access to jobs and community places.

To make transit more affordable:





- Ensure that transit remains affordable, particularly for those who rely on it the most

Updating our existing transit policies with our regional transit vision and goals provides a framework for what we are trying to achieve as we implement our transit vision. The transit work group is working towards developing updated policies that marry our existing policies with these goals and strategies. These goals do not include the existing policy: **Support expanded commuter rail and intercity transit service to neighboring communities**. This is still an important part of our transit system but since it is outside of Metro's jurisdiction it is a better fit as a policy, rather than a goal.

Additionally, the work group discussed at its last meeting the need to maintain our existing aging system and address existing transit bottlenecks. While our current policies do identify this as a need, it is not specifically called out as a policy. A recommendation could be to add a new policy such as: **Maintain, replace and improve critical elements to the system to maintain safe and reliable operations**.

Attachment 2 describes the potential strategies to support the overall vision that we want to achieve. The following table compares the existing 2014 RTP policies with the goals developed by the Transit Work Group.

Table 1: Existing and Potential Transit Policies

Existing policies		Regional Transit Strategy Goals
Build the total transit network and transit –supportive land uses to leverage investments		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Align frequency and type of transit service to meet existing and projected demand and transit needs. Support the implementation of local and regional land use and transportation visions.
Improve local transit service		
Expand high capacity transit		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make transit more convenient for everyone and competitive with driving by improving transit speed and reliability through priority treatments (e.g., signal priority, bus lanes, queue jumps, etc.) and other strategies. Improve customer experience by ensuring seamless connections between various transit providers, including transfers, information and payment.
Expand regional and local frequent transit service		
Improve pedestrian and bicycle access to transit		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide safe and direct biking and walking routes and crossings and other visibility amenities that connect to stops to make transit more accessible. Expand the system to improve access to jobs and essential destinations/daily needs for everyone.
Support expanded commuter rail and intercity transit service to neighboring communities		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support expanded commuter rail and intercity transit service to neighboring communities
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain, replace and improve critical elements to the system to maintain safe and reliable operations
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that transit remains affordable, particularly for those who rely on it the most

The Transit Work Group and Transit Providers will be working towards updating the existing transit policies to reflect the Regional Transit vision, goals and strategies.

Draft transit network vision

As part of the 2018 RTP update, the Transit Work Group and Transit Providers are charged with updating the Regional Transit Vision and Regional Transit Network Map from the 2014 RTP (*see Attachment 3*). The Regional Transit Network Map presents the long term vision for transit in the region. This includes future transit service improvements and major capital investments. The RTS will identify the transit needs and solutions based on the planning efforts conducted by regional partners.

Together we can coordinate all of these efforts into one unified transit vision and network map. We are working with the Transit Work Group and Transit Provider to identify changes and additions to make transit more frequent, convenient, accessible and affordable. We are working with our partners around the region to help identify where there are needs not being met and where there should be changes to the vision and support the 2018 RTP update.

The Regional Transit Vision will be comprised of three components:

1. **Transit service improvements:** local and regional transit service improvements designed to meet current and projected demand in line with local and regional visions.
2. **Capital investments:** new enhanced transit strategies such as signal priority, queue jumps, etc or high capacity transit options such as bus rapid transit or light rail.
3. **Transit supportive elements:** including policies such as Travel Demand Management and physical improvements such as sidewalks, crossings and complementary land uses.

Regional Transit Vision – Transit service improvements

These include the planned local and regional transit service improvements being developed by transit providers throughout the region. Examples include: TriMet's Service Enhancement Plans, SMART Master Plan, and future Portland Streetcar service lines. These service improvements will be incorporated into a regional transit service typology that reflects the varying needs for different types of transit service throughout the region based on demand and geography, and aligns them with existing and proposed local and regional land use and transportation visions.

Regional Transit Vision – Capital investments

The capital investment component of the regional transit vision includes two types of investments: High Capacity Transit (HCT) and Enhanced Transit Corridors (ETC). These investments are intended to connect regional centers, town centers, and to improve the speed and reliability of major transit lines. Transit providers throughout the region are collaborating on a coordinated transit vision which includes transit service improvements and capital investments

High Capacity Transit (HCT)

In 2009, the region concluded a process to create the first high capacity transit system plan since the 1980s. This plan defined a tiered list of HCT corridors for prioritization, which was adopted into the RTP in 2010. Since the HCT plan adoption, the region has moved forward with the top two priorities: Southwest Corridor and Powell-Division Corridor.

Enhanced Transit Corridors

The Enhanced Transit Corridors (ETC) concept has been developed as a way to quickly implement transit projects that increase speed, capacity and reliability in congested and heavily used transit corridors. As the region grows, these transit corridors often bear the brunt of congestion concerns, which has significant negative impacts on transit's speed and reliability. These improvements tend to be relatively low cost, context sensitive, and quickly deployed when compared to HCT projects. This concept is not necessarily new, but helps provide a framework for advancing an array of improvements to transit corridors where they would provide the greatest benefit. These improvements can include technological improvements, such as next-generation, connected vehicle-based Transit Signal Improvement, and off-board payments to infrastructural improvements, such as queue jumps and transit-only rights of way.

While there are numerous possible packages of improvements that could be implemented, Enhanced Transit Corridors could be grouped into two major categories (Levels 1 & 2), based on the type, intensity, and extent of the investments deployed and requested by the partner jurisdiction. The key distinctions between the two typologies are the intensity of improvements and potential funding mechanisms.

The ETC concept builds off of the Service Enhancement Plan (SEP) to restore and expand transit service or could be prioritized through the updated System Expansion Policy. The ETC is an opportunity to provide speed and reliability to corridors that need it most.

ETC Level 1 consists of smaller scale enhanced transit improvements, most likely ranging from \$10-\$50 million. These are lower intensity investments that could include spot improvements on more than one line, modest improvements throughout a corridor or focused investments on key segments of a corridor. Typical ETC Level 1 improvements could include:

- More frequent service
- Wide stop spacing
- Improved stops with shelter amenities, bike racks, real-time arrival information, and improved lighting
- Next-generation transit signal priority
- Right-turn-except-bus lanes or Business Access and Transit (BAT) lanes where feasible/needed

ETC Level 2 consists of medium to large scale enhanced transit improvements, likely to include FTA as a funding partner and range from \$50 - \$300 million (FTA Capital Investment Grant, Small Starts maximum funding levels). These are higher intensity levels of investments in infrastructure treatments to meet corridor-wide transit needs. Projects identified here would need to meet the System Expansion Policy criteria and FTA Capital Investment Grant Small Starts requirements. Typical ETC Level 2 are inclusive of the Level 1 improvements, but also may include:

- Longer articulated buses and in some cases streetcar
- Level or near-level boarding platforms
- Exclusive transit lanes / grade separation crossings where feasible/needed

(See attachment 4 description of Enhanced Transit Corridors for more detailed information.)

Transit vision – transit supportive elements

The regional transit vision also includes policy advancing and defining transit supportive elements. These are infrastructure improvements, programs, policies, and strategies that bolster demand for and improve access to transit in the region. These supportive elements include efforts such as Travel Demand Management (TDM) strategies such as individualized and employer-based travel training, mixed use and higher intensity development with managed parking, improved pedestrian and bicycle safety and connections, integrated trip planning and payment systems, and transit signal priority.

At our February Transit Work Group Meeting and our March Regional Transit Provider Meeting, we looked at potential changes to the regional transit network. The regional transit network map will continue to evolve as we continue to have more conversations about the transit needs and potential solutions. Some changes discussed at transit work group include:

- Removal of an HCT line to Damascus and replaced with a future HCT connection from Gresham to Happy Valley and connecting Pleasant Valley.
- Added new potential “Enhanced Transit Corridors”
- Updated the Portland Streetcar projects
- Changed the Lake Oswego to Portland Transit Project and HCT connection to Vancouver, Washington as future projects and not planned projects
- Identified bottleneck areas for improvement
- Identified areas for first/last mile connections
- Identified potential express bus locations
- Ensure connections to regional transit providers around the region

Transit System Expansion Policy framework

The System Expansion Policy is designed to help jurisdictions move projects towards implementation. The purpose of the System Expansion Policy is to:

1. Clearly articulate the decision-making process by which future HCT corridors will be advanced for regional investment
2. Establish minimum requirements for HCT corridor working groups to inform local jurisdictions as they work to advance their priorities for future HCT
3. Define quantitative and qualitative performance measures to guide local land use and transportation planning and investment decisions
4. Outlines the process for updating the 2035 RTP, including Potential future RTP amendments, for future HCT investment decisions

The HCT Plan and System Expansion Policy support the region's vision defined by the 2040 Growth Concept. Since the adoption of the HCT Plan and the System Expansion Policy, the region adopted the Six Desired Outcomes and completed the Climate Smart Strategy, while TriMet completed their Service Enhancement Plans and SMART embarked upon their Transit Master Plan. Other jurisdictions have continued to develop localized plans and policies that support transit improvements and investments in the region. The System Expansion Policy is intended to integrate all of these strategies together and help the region identify a process for focusing on transit projects that will yield the highest outcomes and enhance local goals.

The Transit Work Group and Transit Providers are working towards simplifying the evaluation framework identified in the HCT System Plan to provide a clear and transparent process for moving capital investments forward towards implementation.

Next Steps

We are continuing to work with regional partners through the Transit Work Group to help define the Regional Transit Vision in more detail as well as develop a clear and transparent Regional Transit. Below is a short list of next steps:

- Continue to update the Transit System Expansion Policy
- Continue to build a compelling transit vision
- Coordinate transit related efforts in support of the "Call for Projects" phase of the 2018 RTP Update