

Umatilla County Transportation Advisory Committee
Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Umatilla County Courthouse, Pendleton OR 97801 Room 114
Zoom virtual option
January 19, 2023 2:00PM

AC Members Present: Kim Beck (U.C. CDDP); Staci Kunz (transit consultant); Heidi Zeigler (DHS); Linda Carter (City of Pendleton); Rod Harwood (GOHBI) and Teresa Dutcher (Chair)

AC Members Virtually: JD Tovey (CTUIR/Kayak) and Jose Garcia (New Horizons)

AC Members not in attendance: Jeremy Umbarger (Clearview Meditation)

County Liaison: Megan Davchevski (Transit Coordinator)

Public: None

Chair Dutcher greeted the group and called the Umatilla County Transportation Advisory Committee (UCTAC) meeting to order at 2:00 PM. There were introductions of the UCTAC committee members in the room and online.

Meeting Minutes:

Staci moved to approve the November 29, 2022 minutes as presented. Heidi seconded. Motion passed unanimously 7-0.

Heidi moved to approve the November 30, 2022 minutes as presented. Staci seconded. Motion passed unanimously 7-0.

STIF Discretionary Grants – QE Prioritization:

Megan provided a brief overview of the STIF Discretionary Grant applications received by ODOT. ODOT provides Qualified Entities the option to prioritize STIF Discretionary projects within their boundaries to be considered during ODOT’s decision making process. The Board of Commissioners will make the final decision based off of the UCTAC’s recommendation on February 1, 2023.

Projects:

City of Pendleton is requesting \$128,000 in discretionary dollars to purchase a Ford Transit E 35 gas vehicle. It will have 10 seats and 2 ADA seats and serve the various transit programs.

Linda Carter expressed gratitude for the other STIF funding that was approved for the City of Pendleton. Pendleton is willing to take the #7 spot on the prioritized list, as the project with lowest priority.

City of Hermiston is requesting \$200,000 for purchase of a computer assisted dispatch system which will fund initial startup and second-year software license fees. The software will provide a mobile app for taxi ticket purchasing, scheduling and dispatching for the subsidized taxi ride programs.

CTUIR Kayak is requesting \$314,492.80 for 2 years of operations and maintenance of the La Grande Arrow route, \$360,090 for 2 years of operations of the Hermiston to Boardman Connector route, and \$429,332.80 for 2 years of operations of the Walla Walla Whistler route.

Umatilla County is requesting \$505,892.80 for 2 years of operations and maintenance of the Hermiston

Hopper route and \$228,517.60 for 2 years of operations of the Pilot Rocket route.

All projects have local match requirements based on the funding pot that ODOT chooses to fund the projects with. These numbers are based off the 20% match requirement, although the 5311f grant requires a 50% match.

Discussion and Decision:

Linda asked how much money was requested statewide? Megan said she is not sure, \$13.5 million is available for STIF Discretionary and \$10.8 million for Intercommunity Discretionary statewide.

Linda shared that in her opinion, keeping current routes operating and maintained should be top priority. With routes that are currently operating being first. Rod asked that all of the routes for Kayak be shown on the screen again. The only route not currently operating is the Hermiston to Boardman Connector. Rod asked if we had the ridership numbers available? Megan asked JD if he had recent ridership available.

Megan shared that Intercommunity grants do favor new projects. Linda asked which projects would qualify for Intercommunity dollars? All of Kayak's routes qualify, but it is ODOT and OTC's decision on which pot a project is funded from. Linda shared that ODOT has said that the grants were over applied for.

Rod asked where the match comes from? Some routes have match in the County STIF plan but historically it has come from CTUIR Kayak or from the transit providers' funds.

Linda asked JD how he would prioritize Kayak's routes? The Hopper receives the most ridership followed by the Whistler. He agrees that existing routes should be prioritized first, so the Connector should be towards the end of the list. Staci asked when the Connector busses were ordered? Morrow County ordered their busses earlier, but Kayak ordered around October of last year and the busses are about 24 months out from the order date.

Linda asked if the Pilot Rocket should be prioritized over the Connector? JD said in 2021 the Rocket had 2,000 riders whereas the Hopper had almost 3,000 riders a quarter. The existing services should be prioritized over new services. Linda asked if the Arrow or Rocket should be #3? Staci said for the last 5 years or so all of these routes have been funded by the Intercommunity grant dollars. JD confirmed.

Jose Garcia joined the meeting virtually

JD shared the Arrow and Rocket ridership for 2021. The Arrow has more ridership, Linda suggested that it should be #3. Megan shared from quarterly reporting the Rocket ridership appears to be increasing.

The group was in consensus that the top 4 projects, in order, are: Hermiston Hopper, Walla Walla Whistler, La Grande Arrow and Pilot Rocket.

Linda proposed that the Hermiston to Boardman Connector be ranked #5 with Hermiston's dispatch software be ranked #6. Staci shared that she looked at how services will be provided, the dispatch program will be used 7 days a week while the transit routes are only used 5 days a week. She is concerned about waiting for busses, it sounds like they won't be available until October 2024. She asked if the Connector will receive STIF funds in the next biennium? Yes, the Connector will receive STIF dollars as match for this grant request.

Staci said with the dispatch program coordination between the taxi provider and the transit systems will be important. The dispatch program is just for the taxi ticket services. Linda said the Connector will actually produce rides and not just be a software purchase.

Teresa asked for clarification on the software system, will it function for the bus? Staci said no, the approved Transit position will promote all Hermiston transit services. The City of Hermiston wants people to use the

WORC program in coordination with Kayak. Teresa shared she thought it should work with the bus as well, Staci said this was a different module that they are purchasing. Linda asked if the Hermiston Hart utilized iTransit? Megan shared yes, it is. Linda said iTransit is used by Milton-Freewater, Pendleton, Kayak and Valley Transit and provides real-time information to riders.

Linda asked JD if he could address the bus concerns? JD said Susan expects the busses to be delivered by December 2024, but they are exploring the possibility of using used busses. So, it is likely services will start in the second half of 2024.

Staci said the dispatch program could start being used in the beginning of 2024, it would take about 6 months for installation after the grant is awarded.

Rod stated the dispatch software would be used mid 2024 whereas the Connector would be late 2024. Heidi said it would depend on when the busses are delivered.

Jose mentioned that there needs to be more marketing of these services to the Hispanic and Latinx communities. Megan shared that she has gotten some materials translated to Spanish and has been distributing them and is working with a marketing firm to increase outreach. Jose added that he talks to people in the community and the majority don't even know that the bus services are free. There are a lot of families migrating from Central America that don't drive but they aren't aware of the free services. Linda shared that the Pendleton busses all say "free" on them. The other problem is that people don't know where the bus is going and if it will bring them back.

Teresa asked if the group was ready for a motion.

Heidi said that with the dispatch software, there is funding already for a transit coordinator to market the program in English and Spanish. She is leaning toward having the dispatch program as priority #5. Just because the Connector is so far out.

Linda asked once the software is funded, how will the maintenance of the software be funded? Will the City of Hermiston be asking for discretionary dollars again? Staci said no. The license and maintenance fees are \$20,000 a year. Linda said that was a lot, have they looked at others? It will have to go out to bid. Staci said Union County received 5339 funding for this same system. Linda thinks they should go after 5339 instead so our dollars can go farther. Megan looked at ODOT's site and the 5339 funding cycle was last year, so the next funding cycle would be next year. Linda said 5339 cannot be used for operations.

Kim asked if the City of Hermiston would be paying the \$20,000 a year for the license and maintenance of the software? Staci said she wasn't sure, they may ask for STIF plan dollars. Kim asked if iTransit was only for busses? Yes, it works best for fixed routes.

Kim asked what dispatch system is being used in other communities? Staci said she is only aware of Community Connections of Northeast Oregon (CCNO) who is using TripSpark, but they are made up of three counties; Union, Wallowa and Baker.

Rod said if they don't pay the yearly \$20,000 subscription they lose all the benefits. Linda said the City of Pendleton pays Elite monthly for a dispatch person and it is about \$2,000 a month. This is a person manually dispatching dial-a-ride and selling taxi tickets.

Megan asked, because the tablets will be installed in the taxi vehicles, will there be separate vehicles used just for the subsidized rides or will they also be used for private fare rides? Staci said the software will dispatch the rides, private rides will probably be put in there but not included in the revenue miles. Staci didn't know for sure if the taxi vehicles will be separated. Linda didn't like that a publicly funded software would be used for private rides. Megan said ODOT will have an issue with that. Linda agreed.

Rod asked if this will provide better ridership data? Staci said yes. Linda said they only look at type of services, not necessarily where people are going or are being picked up.

Rod said he sees the benefit in seeing common pick up and drop off locations. Linda agreed, this was more common with ride sharing which has stopped since the Covid-19 Pandemic hit.

Heidi said she supported the dispatch software being ranked #5 and the Connector being #6 since the busses are so far out. Staci agreed.

Kim said she thought the Connector should be #5 and the dispatch software #6. Linda agreed with Kim.

JD said he tries to separate himself, but looking at the number of people served and bringing services to a whole new community outweighs a dispatch software. He is 100% behind Hermiston but has questions about this proposal. What are the funds being used for, are they going to a private company? Who is going to own the software, the City or taxi company? Are private rides going to utilize this software? ODOT will have a huge problem. If dispatch was being run by the City that would make him feel better. How many people are expected to be served by this software? What are the expected rides and how is it supporting something that isn't being served now?

Staci said the City will own the license and they will also be using it to sell taxi tickets through the program. City staff will also use it to pull reports. Rod asked how the software will increase ridership? Staci said their transit coordinator will have to conduct outreach to get people signed up.

Jose asked if it would be possible to get more information on the software package? He agrees with JD that it needs to be determined if the City or private company will be operating the software. Teresa stated that the UCTAC needs to decide on prioritization so that it can go before the Board of Commissioners on February 1st. We need to ask the questions now and get the best answers we can.

Rod asked who will be running the software? Staci said the City will be running the finance part of it for the taxi tickets and pulling the reports to import into OPTIS. The taxi company will use the dispatch services for dispatching, scheduling and routing. Rod asked when it will pay for itself? It's \$200,000 and then \$20,000 a year for licensing so when will it pay for itself? Staci said they are looking at rolling it out to increase ridership. Right now, they are giving about 48,000 rides a year. Rod asked how much the ridership he will increase? Staci wasn't sure.

Rod said there are a lot of good things that could come out of this, but in comparison to the Connector. Jose said the Connector is so far out and the taxi services are already operating maybe the dispatch software should be prioritized first. Staci said marketing for both projects is necessary.

Linda said the dispatch software application doesn't reference ridership or increasing ridership. Staci asked Jose if he has heard any interest about the Connector in Boardman? Jose said no, but there are a lot of transit issues in that area. Megan said she gets a lot of interest about when the route will begin.

JD shared that the dispatch software isn't necessarily the best use of funds, but it will also be used now instead of later which will likely happen with the Connector.

Rod thought that the Connector should be ranked #5 and the dispatch software #6. He wishes there was more information about the dispatch software.

JD doesn't want to feel self-serving but the Connector should be ranked #5 and the dispatch software #6. Heidi said she was okay with that. ODOT will make the final decision regardless.

Linda moved that the UCTAC recommend the following STIF Discretionary Grant prioritization list:

1. Hermiston Hopper
2. Walla Walla Whistler
3. La Grande Arrow
4. Pilot Rocket
5. Hermiston to Boardman Connector
6. Hermiston Dispatch Software purchase
7. Pendleton vehicle purchase

Heidi seconded. Motion carried 8-0.

Other Business: Megan shared that the Til Taylor bus shelter has been installed. Emigrant Avenue was closed up until this last week and ODOT confirmed this morning that the road construction is complete and the transit busses can begin stopping at Til Taylor again. Construction is 90% done and the remainder will be complete in 2024.

Linda asked when her term expires? The terms started over with the UCTAC creation so terms started over. Linda, Kim and Jeremy Umbarger have two-year terms that end July 2024. Linda asked if Jeremy is still involved? Megan said she will reach out to him and see what is going on.

Staci asked if the group needs to meet to go over the System Sustainability policy? Megan said if the committee wants to re-visit the policy we can schedule a special meeting to review. JD thinks it would be good to re-visit the policy and once the pot is full we can use the money as a local discretionary program. Teresa pointed out that JD was a strong supporter of the rainy-day fund during the STIF rulemaking. Megan will reach out to Angie if she has any suggestions on the dollar amount.

Heidi shared she will be gone the end of February and first part of March. Linda said she will be gone the end of March and Rod shared he is spending more time on the road providing in-person trainings.

Meeting adjourned at 3:12 pm.

Submitted by Megan Davchevski, Umatilla County Transit Coordinator