

# TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM #5

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Project #: 27091

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**Project:** Gorge Regional Transit Strategy (GRTS) Phase 2

**Subject:** Regional Transit Solutions

## INTRODUCTION

This memorandum explores different strategies for regional transit service delivery, decision-making, organizational structures, funding, and engagement with partner organizations that achieve the regional Vision and Goals as established in Phase 1 and in Memo #4: Regional Transit Service Vision and Funding Opportunities. The information is presented primarily as a 'menu of options' and builds on prior tasks. A range of potential performance measures or methods to track outcomes is included.

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## PROJECT VISION AND GOALS

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The Gorge Regional Transit Strategy Phase 1 developed a collective vision statement and goal areas that reflect the needs and values of the bistate region. That vision statement is as follows:

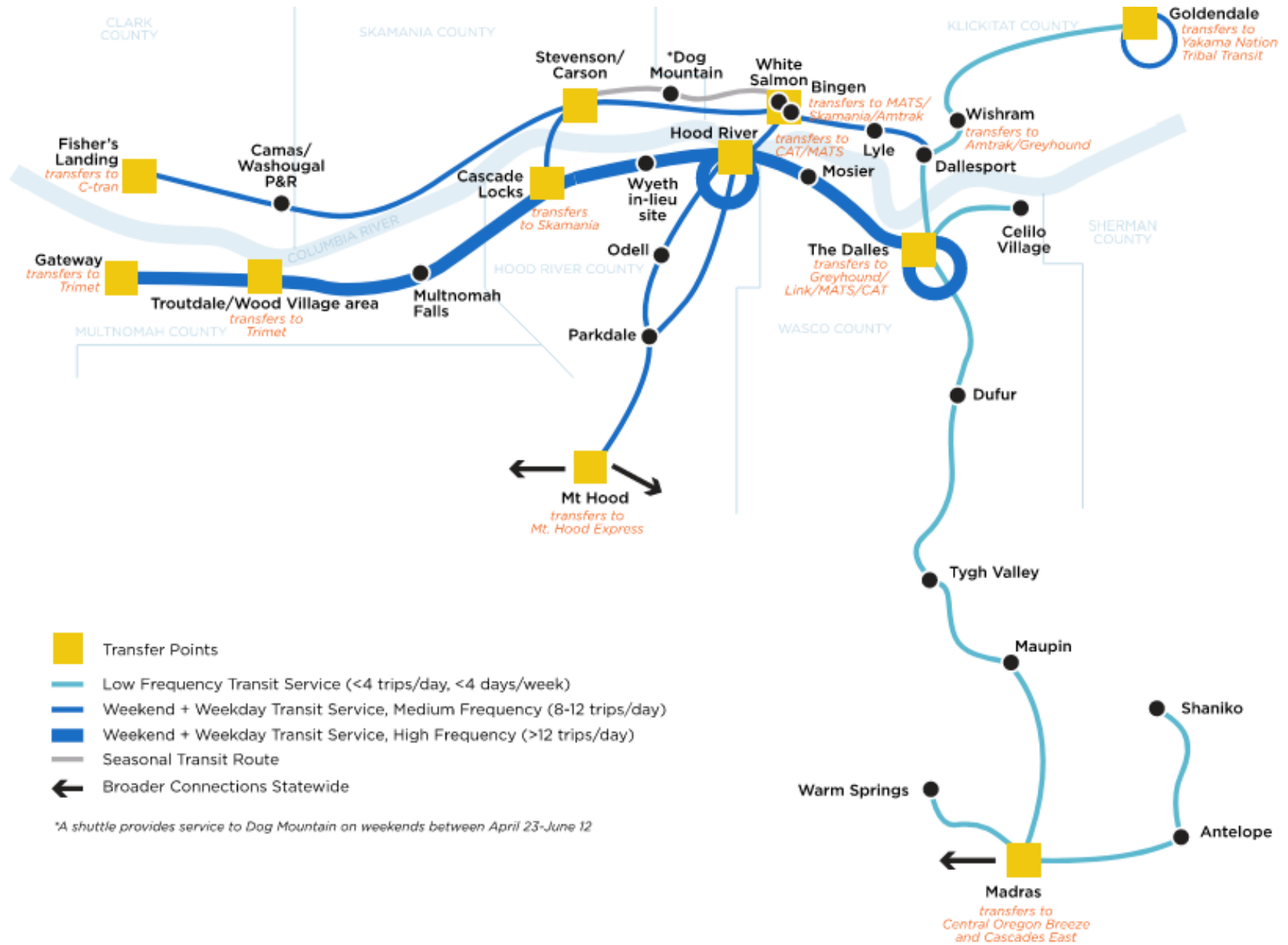
*Public transit supports thriving Columbia River Gorge communities by providing access to critical services, higher education, jobs, and outdoor recreation while protecting the natural wonders of the Gorge.*

Figure 1 illustrates the preferred vision map developed based on an analysis of gaps and opportunities and discussions with the project advisory committee and stakeholder advisory groups. Cities and communities that are already served by transit or that were included in adopted planning documents were included on the map. Additional key stop locations/communities to serve were added through the vision refinement process conducted with advisory groups.

This preferred strategy map represents a potential 5-10 year service level vision that includes service seven days a week on most routes, with a target of 60-90 minute frequency service along each route and a new direct connection from White Salmon to Dallesport. To achieve this level of service, additional funding is required. Higher levels of service are needed to fully implement the vision in the longer term.

To implement the regional vision, the Gorge TransLink partners and local agencies need to work together to expand local transit routes; coordinate timetables with each other; increase the area that can be reached by carshare, vanshare, and carpools; and expand access to transportation network companies like Uber, Lyft, and local taxis to provide connections to/from regional transit.

Figure 1. Preferred Regional Transit Strategy Map



## MENU OF OPTIONS

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This section presents the menu of options for regional transit service delivery, decision-making and organizational structures, funding, and engagement with partner organizations. For each of these options, the section includes considerations of the following:

- The degree to which an option will help achieve the Project Vision and Goals
- The short- and long-term capacity and budgetary implications for Partner Agencies
- The timeframe for implementation including 2-, 5- and 10-year horizons
- The constraints, including any Partner Agency policy conflicts, and proposed solutions for agency alignment

### Decision-Making and Organizational Structures

In Technical Memo 4, the project team presented an overview of various organizational scenarios that the Alliance could implement to improve the regional decision-making process:

- Scenario 0: Status Quo
- Scenario 1: Enhanced Status Quo
- Scenario 2: Regional Transit Advisory Board
- Scenarios 3A and 3B: Joint transportation districts (Hood River/Wasco, and Skamania/Klickitat)
- Scenario 3C: Single-county transportation districts
- Scenario 4: Regional Cooperative (Co-Op) or Transportation Management Organization (TMO)
- Scenario 5: New Bi-State Governmental Agency

Technical Memo 4 also outlined criteria to be used to screen the different scenarios, based on input from the Advisory Committee. In this memo, we provide a preliminary rating of whether each scenario would be better, worse, or about the same as the status quo, using the screening criteria bulleted below and considering input from the Advisory Committee and partner agency elected officials during the Key Initiatives Work Session.

### Screening Criteria

- System Clarity for Customers and the General Public
  - Clarity of system information for different types of users (commuters, residents, tourists)
  - Clarity of regional roles and responsibilities
  - Identifiable regional brand
- Government Accountability, Oversight, and Policymaking
  - Elected official engagement in, and understanding of, regional transit matters
  - Consistency of rider policies across the region
  - Consistency of internal policies, such as contracting standards and employee compensation
  - Suitability of the scenario, given other local, regional, state, and natural resource policies in the Gorge
  - Potential to align with land use planning processes
- Regional Equity

- Ability to achieve balanced decisions that do not unduly favor the needs of some over others
- Comparable voice/representation for residents in each county
- Improved transit opportunities in each county
- Avoiding disproportionate focus on the needs of people outside the region
- Operational Efficiency
  - Economy of scale for major purchases, such as maintenance facilities, fleet, other equipment, stop furnishings, etc.
  - Efficiency of administrative functions
  - Efficiency of maintenance activities
  - Streamlined communications and dispatching across the region
  - Efficiency and communication of day-to-day route, stop and scheduling decisions
  - Potential to streamline long-range transit development plans
  - Consistency of data collection and performance reporting processes
  - Access to resources for emergencies
- Agency Staff Burden and Expertise
  - Impact on existing agency labor burden
  - Access to skilled and experienced transit staff
- Funding
  - Potential for new revenue streams
  - Effect on current revenue streams
  - Legitimacy of the Alliance in the eyes of funders and legislators

The scale used to rate scenarios based on the criteria listed above is as follows:

### **Screening Ratings**



Much better than status quo



Somewhat better than status quo



No effective change



Somewhat worse than status quo



Much worse than status quo

The complexity of the implementation process varies significantly between scenarios. So as a final screening activity, we rate the realistic potential for implementing each scenario, using the following scale:

### **Implementation Complexity Ratings**

- 1** - Minimal or no barriers to implementation

- 2** - One or two complicating factors
- 3** - Several complicating factors
- 4** - Many complicating factors
- 5** - Not likely feasible to implement

The cost to implement each scenario will depend on many factors, including how much of the facilitation/formational effort can be absorbed by MCEDD and the partner agencies. For comparison purposes, the following high-level scale was used, assuming a full-service consulting team would be hired at market rates to facilitate implementation, with MCEDD and partner agency staff in advisory roles only.

**Estimated Implementation Cost**

- \$** - Under \$200,000
- \$\$** - \$200,000 to \$500,000
- \$\$\$** - \$500,000 to \$1,000,000
- \$\$\$\$** - Over \$1,000,000

Table 1 shows a high-level summary of how each scenario compares to the status quo using the rating scales described above. A detailed discussion of the reasons behind the ratings for each scenario follows the table.

Key takeaways:

- Scenarios which centralize regional operations (Scenarios 4 and 5) under one organization have the greatest potential to improve clarity of system information for customers and the general public.
- All organizational scenarios provide at least some level of improvement in overall government accountability, policymaking, and oversight; however, scenarios that establish a formal forum for interaction between elected officials (Scenarios 2, 4, and 5) would provide the largest benefits in this area.
- Under nearly all scenarios, the level of service possible in different geographic areas of the region is highly dependent on each county's financial position and how much each existing transit agency can afford to purchase for their residents. The exception to this is a new governmental bi-state agency (Scenario 5). Under that concept, all transit funding for the region would flow to and through a single entity, rather than routing through individual counties and transportation districts. So, the geographic distribution of transit service and programs could be less constrained by what each county can afford to buy.
- Single-county transportation districts in Wasco, Skamania, and Klickitat counties (Scenario 3C) would be challenging, but feasible to implement, and many examples of single-county transit districts exist in both Washington and Oregon. In Washington where transportation benefit districts exist in both Washington and Oregon. In Washington where transportation benefit districts can be formed by cities and counties without a public vote, legislative changes in July 2022 gave transportation benefit districts the authority to also impose a modest sales/use tax without a public

vote. In Oregon, public votes are required to both form a transportation service district and to levy taxes and/or fees to fund it, making implementation more challenging.

- Scenarios that involve joint districting of two or more counties under existing statutes, such as a joint Hood River County/Wasco County transportation district (Scenario 3A), or a joint Skamania County/Klickitat County transportation benefit district (Scenario 3B) are more challenging to implement. In Oregon, a joint district would require successful public elections across two counties, and is not likely feasible to implement.
- Scenarios that create new agencies, such as new transportation districts (Scenario 3), a regional co-op or TMO (Scenario 4), or a new bi-state governmental agency (Scenario 5) would remove the administrative burden of transit programs from existing partner agencies. Of these, the centralized concepts for Scenarios 4 and 5 could give the partners access to potentially greater staff-level expertise than is currently possible since staff at county agencies must often wear multiple hats.
- Scenarios that centralize operations under a single agency (Scenarios 4 and 5) would provide the greatest economy of scale for the region in nearly all aspects of transit program delivery: planning, purchasing, operating, contracting, maintenance, etc.

**Table 1. Organizational Scenario Screening Summary**

Organizational Scenario	System Clarity for Customers and the General Public	Government Accountability, Oversight, and Policy-making	Regional Equity	Operational Efficiency	Agency Staff Burden and Expertise	Funding	Implementation Complexity	Estimated Implementation Cost
<b>Scenario 1: Enhanced Status Quo</b>							<b>1</b>	<b>\$</b>
<b>Scenario 2: Regional Transit Advisory Board</b>							<b>1</b>	<b>\$\$</b>
<b>Scenario 3A&amp;B: Joint Districting</b>							<b>5</b> (OR Counties) <b>3</b> (WA Counties)	<b>\$\$\$\$</b> (OR Counties) <b>\$\$</b> (WA Counties)
<b>Scenario 3C: Single-County Districting*</b>							<b>3</b> (OR Counties) <b>1</b> (WA Counties)	<b>\$\$\$</b> (OR Counties) <b>\$\$</b> (WA Counties)
<b>Scenario 4: Regional Co-op or TMO</b>							<b>2</b>	<b>\$\$\$\$</b>
<b>Scenario 5: Bi-State Governmental Agency</b>							<b>4</b>	<b>\$\$\$\$</b>



Ratings above indicate each scenario's likely impact *for the region overall*, not for individual counties.

**Ratings Legend (with respect to the status quo):**

 Much better  Somewhat better  About the same  Somewhat worse  Much worse

**Implementation complexity:**

**1** – Minimal or no barriers to implementation | **2** – One or two complicating factors | **3** – Several complicating factors | **4** – Many complicating factors | **5** – Not likely feasible

\*Scenario 3C could be combined with Scenario 1, 2 or 4 to improve the funding outlook under those scenarios.

## Scenario 0: Status Quo

**Description.** Scenario 0 is the baseline to which we compare all other scenarios. The status quo assumes no change to the current Gorge TransLink Alliance, which is governed by separate MOUs between each county and MCEDD. The MOUs designate MCEDD as the lead agency for the Alliance and include only high-level statements indicating each agency's broad intent to work with MCEDD. Regional communication and cooperation are ad hoc, without a defined decision-making process.

The current Alliance is a staff-level effort with no decision-making authority. There is no forum for interaction between regional elected officials. Recommendations are carried back to each individual transit agency's governing body for approval.

**System Clarity for Customers and the General Public.** The Gorge TransLink website provides a central point of information about transit services across the region, with schedule information available on all fixed routes on one site. Partner agencies maintain their own individual websites as well.

Multiple agencies operate service across the region, and buses may carry different branding depending on the operator.

**Government Accountability Oversight and Policymaking.** Coordination between current transit agency partners occurs at the staff level. There is currently no formal forum for interaction between elected policymakers at the regional level on transit matters.

**Regional Equity.** Because coordination is at the staff level, there is limited representation for members of the public in regional transit discussions. The type and frequency of transit service in each county varies and depends on each individual transit agency's financial position.

**Operational Efficiency.** Transit agency staff coordinate informally to streamline connections between service providers. Partners have entered into multiple agreements as needed to allow one partner to provide service within a neighboring jurisdiction and could continue to do so. Under the status quo scenario, the group has the ability to develop interagency agreements for any future services to be provided and could also explore things like joint procurement processes that could improve their collective purchasing power. Each agency collects its own data to serve its individual needs, and there is currently no regional performance reporting process.

**Agency Staff Burden and Expertise.** While the Hood River County Transportation District (doing business as Columbia Area Transit, or CAT) has dedicated transit staff, all other partner agencies have limited staff to manage transit operations, and some have other duties for their county in addition to their transit roles.

**Funding Opportunities.** Each partner agency currently determines its own budget for transit planning, operating, maintenance, and capital needs. Each does its own grant writing and grant administration. Only the Hood River County Transportation District has the authority to generate local transit revenue through taxes and fees.

**Implementation Complexity:** 1 – minimal or no barriers.

**Implementation Timeline:** None.


**Implementation Cost:** No cost.


**Policy Conflicts:** None known.

### Scenario 1: Enhanced Status Quo


**Description.** Multiple existing MOUs would be replaced with a single Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or Interagency Agreement (IGA) to clarify expectations of all partners and define decision-making protocols in writing. The group would establish membership dues to help cover the cost of administering and facilitating their joint activities. An annual work plan would be prepared, and the group would form subcommittees to tackle specific topics identified in the work plan, such as improving consistent policies for riders; coordinating day-to-day route, schedule and stop adjustments; regional data collection, etc.


Annually, a joint meeting or "summit" would be held with elected officials from all partner agencies, so that staff could keep policymakers apprised of progress on work plan tasks and solicit their input and direction on regional plans and programs.

 **System Clarity for Customers and the General Public.** Scenario 1 is likely to have limited benefits for public understanding of system information and agency roles and responsibilities. It may be possible to continue working toward branding of fixed route buses, stop locations, printed schedules, etc., with a single identifiable name and logo. However, some confusion for customers may be unavoidable if transit agencies with smaller vehicle inventories need to use vehicles interchangeably for fixed route and separately branded dial-a-ride services. While Scenario 1 could help to clarify interagency responsibilities for the agency partners themselves, roles and responsibilities will still seem complex to the average person.

 **Government Accountability Oversight and Policymaking.** The addition of an annual forum for limited interaction between elected officials could improve understanding of regional transit issues by policymakers. Scenario 1 could also convene a subcommittee to recommend ways to improve consistent policies in limited areas – for example, rider behavior policies. However, establishing consistent standards for contracting and consistent employee compensation packages for transit staff is not likely feasible under this scenario since those types of decisions are embedded in each county's agency-wide policies and procedures that apply to more than just transit.

Scenario 1 would not likely change the way transit programs currently fit within the Gorge's local, regional, state, and natural resource context, and land use planning processes.

 **Regional Equity.** Because the work of the alliance would still be done at the staff level, Scenario 1 would not change representation for regional residents on transit matters. The ability to ensure transit opportunities in all counties would be about the same as it is today. The existing push and pull between some partners' desire to focus principally on service for their own residents, and other partners' interest in attracting visitors to the Gorge would require more interaction between elected officials than Scenario 1 provides, so it is unlikely to be resolved under this scenario.

 **Operational Efficiency.** The basic way that fixed route service is provided would remain unchanged and only incremental improvements in coordinated operations would likely be possible under Scenario

1. For example, a staff-level subcommittee could be convened to develop recommendations for a joint procurement process, so that multiple partners could take advantage of a single procurement effort to buy new vehicles. (This could probably be done today under the status quo scenario, however.) More complex strategies for improving operational efficiency, like establishing shared maintenance facilities, for example, are still likely to be challenging.

The efficiency of administrative functions is unlikely to change since each existing transit agency would continue to manage its own transit program, requiring its own separate administrative staff. Multiple agencies would continue to provide fixed-route service, and Scenario 1 would continue the practice of using multiple interagency agreements to allow transit agencies to provide select services in adjoining counties. The group could attempt to consolidate and reduce the number of service providers operating in the region, such as by having multiple partners contract with the same service provider. However, the result is likely to still be a “piecemeal” approach, as described by one Advisory Committee participant, albeit with perhaps fewer “pieces”.



**Agency Staff Burden and Expertise.** Scenario 1 is unlikely to significantly change the labor burden for existing transit agency partners, but additional staff capacity at MCEDD would be needed for a more robust coordination effort. Scenario 1 would not change the level of skill and experience in transit planning and operation that is currently available to each county. The group could explore shared training opportunities now, under the status quo, and Scenario 1 is not likely to appreciably improve those training opportunities.



**Funding Opportunities.** Scenario 1 would have no impact on current revenue streams or funding opportunities.

**Implementation Complexity: 1** – Minimal barriers. The Enhanced Status Quo scenario would be straightforward to implement with a new MOU, or IGA. The chief complicating factor would be finding a way to incrementally increase resources for the ongoing facilitation effort.

**Implementation Timeline:** 6 months to develop a new MOU or IGA.

Implementation Cost: Under \$200,000

**Policy Conflicts:** None known.

## Scenario 2: Regional Transit Advisory Board


**Description.** A board of elected officials (1 or 2 from each county) would be convened as a central policy body on regional transit matters. The board would be created with a new IGA signed by all partners that would define the board’s roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authorities for the regional transit program.


The board’s purpose would be to provide policy-level input on regional transit plans, programs, and initiatives; to prioritize regional transit projects; and to recommend plans and strategies for ultimate adoption by each county’s decision-making body. Alternatively, the board could be vested with the authority to approve regional transit plans and projects outright. Bylaws would be written to describe board member eligibility and expectations, member dues, officers, meetings, and rules of procedure.

A Regional Transit Advisory Board could serve as a long-term policy-level forum for the region, or it could be used as a springboard to help form a new centralized transit organization for the region, such as a

regional cooperative, transportation management organization, or new bi-state governmental agency. (See Scenarios 4 and 5 below.)


The existing staff-level coordinating committee for the Alliance could continue in a technical advisory role to the regional board.

 **System Clarity for Customers and the General Public.** Like Scenario 1, Scenario 2 is likely to have limited benefits for customer and public understanding of system information and agency roles and responsibilities. It may be possible to continue working toward branding of fixed route buses, stop locations, printed schedules, etc., with a single identifiable name and logo. However, some confusion for customers may be unavoidable if transit agencies with smaller vehicle inventories need to use vehicles interchangeably for fixed route and separately branded dial-a-ride services. While Scenario 2 could help to clarify interagency responsibilities for the agency partners themselves, roles and responsibilities will still seem complex to the average person.


 **Government Accountability, Oversight and Policymaking.** Scenario 2 would significantly expand elected official engagement, allowing policymakers from partner counties to interact with each other. Frank discussions at the policy level on divisive issues could help policymakers understand the reasons behind each other's positions, increasing the chance of finding common ground or workable compromises. A board of elected officials would be subject to Oregon's or Washington's open meeting laws<sup>1</sup>, thereby increasing public accountability.

A board of elected officials could help vet strategies for streamlining policies that affect riders. Establishing consistent standards for contracting and consistent employee compensation packages for transit staff would likely remain challenging, though, since these topics are embedded in each county's governing philosophy and decisions in these areas affect more than just transit programs.

Because a regional transit board would be a forum for exchange of information and ideas at the elected level, it could help to confirm the suitability of transit proposals within the nexus of other local, regional, state, and natural resource policies in the Gorge. Scenario 2 would also provide a policy-level forum to better assess how transit projects and programs align with regional land uses.

 **Regional Equity.** A well-balanced regional transit board that includes elected officials from all partner counties would ensure that residents across the region are represented as transit plans and programs are developed. A policy-level board could discuss the needs of residents within the region alongside transit options that increase visitation and come to a joint position on an appropriate balance for the region.


A place at the table for policymakers from each partner county would also ensure that transit improvement opportunities are considered for all parts of the region, although services levels across the region would still depend on the resources available to each county.

 **Operational Efficiency.** A regional transit board would focus on high-level planning and policy issues and would not likely provide operational direction. The way that transit service is provided would remain unchanged. Multiple agencies would continue to provide fixed-route service with multiple


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<sup>1</sup> Open meeting laws would be used from the facilitator's state. For example, if MCEDD continued to facilitate, Oregon's open meeting laws would be used.

interagency agreements as they do today. The regional board could serve as a forum for better elected official understanding of joint maintenance, procurement and contracting issues and opportunities, but those issues and opportunities would be the same as the status quo scenario.

 **Agency Staff Burden and Expertise.** Scenario 2 is unlikely to appreciably change the labor burden for existing transit agency partners; however, the level of ongoing staff support provided by MCEDD to administer and facilitate the new board would significantly increase. (At least double today's effort, and likely more depending on the frequency of board and technical committee meetings and the complexity of issues undertaken by the board.)

Scenario 2 would not change the level of skill and experience in transit planning and operation that is currently available to each county.

 **Funding.** Establishing a regional transit board would not significantly change current or future revenue opportunities. A better coordinated, more efficient regional transit system could ultimately result in increased ridership and farebox revenue.

**Implementation Complexity: 2** – One or two complicating factors. The formational process requires only an IGA and written bylaws. This scenario would be straightforward to implement. The main complicating factor is identifying the resources needed to undertake the formational process, and to cover an increased ongoing facilitation effort.

**Implementation Timeline:** 6 months to develop a new IGA.


**Estimated Implementation Cost:** \$200,000 to \$400,000

**Policy Conflicts/Solutions:** No conflicts if the TAB's role is advisory only. If the partners wish the TAB to have decision-making authority on select topics (such as approving regional plans or prioritizing regional projects for funding), this authority would need to be vested in the advisory board by each existing governing body in the region. Any desired decision-making authorities for the new board could be addressed in the IGA.

### Scenarios 3A and 3B: Joint Districting

**Description.** This concept would create new two-county transportation districts for the Washington and Oregon sides of the Alliance. On the Oregon side, the existing Hood River County Transportation District (doing business as Columbia Area Transit, or CAT), would be expanded to annex Wasco County, or dissolved to create a new two-county special transportation district, under ORS 267 (Scenario 3A). A Transportation Benefit District would be established under RCW 36.73 for Skamania and Klickitat Counties (Scenario 3B). Revenue-generating authorities and board structures are different for Washington and Oregon districts, but the general concept is the same: in each two-county area, a new governing board of elected officials would be established to oversee all transit activities, including funding, planning, operations, and maintenance.

Either of these options could be combined with Scenario 1, 2, or 4, but this evaluation considers them as stand-alone options, to compare to the status quo.

 **System Clarity for Customers and the General Public.** While transit functions would be consolidated in each two-county area, there would still be multiple agencies involved in the planning and delivery of transit programs and services at the regional level. As a result, Scenarios 3A and 3B are not likely to

significantly improve overall customer and public understanding of agency roles and responsibilities throughout the Gorge.



**Government Accountability, Oversight and Policymaking.** Joint districting would establish elected oversight boards focused solely on transit, which would increase elected official engagement within each new district's service area. Transit policies and standards would be more consistent than the status quo, since a single agency would be managing those issues for a two-county area. Contracting standards and employee compensation packages would be consistent across the two counties in each joint district, and no longer tied to all other county functions.



**Regional Equity.** Although each new district would have its own board of elected officials, giving residents within each new two-county district greater representation,<sup>2</sup> regional coordination would remain at the staff level under Scenarios 3A and 3B. Therefore, these scenarios would not appreciably change the representation of regional residents on regional transit matters that affect more than one agency. The ability to ensure transit opportunities in all counties would be about the same as it is today.



**Operational Efficiency.** Scenarios 3A and 3B would consolidate operations in each two-county area, streamlining administrative and maintenance functions, and simplifying day-to-day route, stop and scheduling decisions within each two-county area. From a regional coordination perspective, there would be fewer agencies at the table, which should make the overall coordination effort easier.



**Agency Staff Burden and Expertise.** Consolidating the management and operation of services in two counties would remove transit responsibilities from existing county staff. Since the new district's staff would be focused solely on transit matters, it may be possible for them to develop a higher level of transit knowledge and expertise than is currently feasible for county staff who often wear multiple hats under the status quo.



**Funding.** Joint district scenarios would increase opportunities for local revenue generation when compared to the status quo.

A Skamania/Klickitat Transportation Benefit District would have the authority to implement a 0.1% sales/use tax without voter approval, and could request voter approval of additional amounts (sales tax of up to 0.3%, a vehicle fee, property tax, or impact fees on commercial or industrial development.)

On the Oregon side, a Hood River/Wasco transportation district would expand options for local revenue generation into Wasco County, including opportunities for property taxes, business license fees, income

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<sup>2</sup> There is a difference in representation between Transportation Benefit Districts in Washington state and Transportation Service Districts in Oregon. In Washington, a joint Transportation Benefit District would have a governing body of at least five members, including at least one elected official from each participating jurisdiction. This would include representatives from the elected boards of each county and each city where transit service is provided. In Oregon, Transportation service district board members are elected by a vote of the people within the service district boundary. Seven board members would be elected from the two-county area at large, so equitable geographic representation is less assured.

taxes or employer payroll/self-employment taxes. However, all revenue options for Oregon districts must be voter-approved.

These additional revenues could be used to directly fund transit service, and/or to leverage larger amounts of state and federal aid transit funding.

Obtaining voter approval for tax levies for a Transportation District could present challenges depending on the political environment of the area. For a tax levy to be voter-approved, the residents would have to understand the extent of the impact to their taxes as well as the benefits of establishing the levy. Demonstrated success of these transportation districts and clear communication to voters would be necessary.

**Implementation Complexity: 5 (Oregon Counties)** – Not likely feasible; **3 (Washington Counties)** - Several complicating factors.

Both joint districting options are challenging to implement and, for Oregon counties, include complicating factors that are likely insurmountable. In Oregon, a joint district would require votes of the people across a two-county area to form the district, elect board members, and levy taxes or fees to fund it. Feasibility studies would be needed first to understand potential benefits and costs, and extensive public information campaigns would be needed to make the case to voters. These efforts may require multiple attempts over many years, with no guarantee of success.

In Washington where district formation and funding are easier to accomplish, it may be difficult to make the case for a joint Skamania/Klickitat district compared to implementing individual transportation benefit districts for each county.

It is telling that the consultant team could not find suitably comparable examples of two-county districts in either Washington or Oregon in rural regions like the Gorge.

**Implementation Timeline:** The formational process in Washington is entirely an administrative effort, so immediate implementation is theoretically possible; however a six-month timeframe is likely more realistic given the need to convene decisionmakers from across a two-county area.

In Oregon, the formational process could take approximately one year, assuming it culminates in a successful elections process. In Oregon, where board members are elected rather than appointed from existing governing bodies, board elections could be concurrent with the election to form the district, or a subsequent election could be held, adding 6 months to the timeline.

Once a joint district has been formed and board members elected or appointed, an additional 6-month startup period would be advisable to help the new board with internal organization matters, such as hiring a manager, implementing an operational service plan, and developing internal policies and procedures.

In Oregon, if the public vote to form a joint district is not successful (a highly likely scenario in the case of joint districts, which would require a successful vote of the people across two counties) the implementation timeline would need to be extended through future election cycles.

**Estimated Implementation Cost:** Over \$1M for a joint district in Oregon. \$200,000 to \$500,000 for a joint district in Washington.


**Policy Conflicts/Solutions:** None known.





### Scenario 3C: Single-County Districts


**Description.** This scenario would create new transportation districts in each of Wasco, Skamania and Klickitat Counties.<sup>3</sup>

Combining this scenario with either Scenarios 1, 2, or 4, would improve funding opportunities under those other three scenarios. However, this evaluation considers Scenario 3C as stand-alone option, to compare to the status quo.

 **System Clarity for Customers and the General Public.** Compared to the status quo, there would still be a separate agency with transit management responsibilities in each county, and the same issues that exist today related to clarity of system information, regional roles and responsibilities, and regional branding would remain unchanged.

 **Government Accountability, Oversight and Policymaking.** New single-county transportation districts would establish elected oversight boards in each county focused solely on transit, increasing elected official engagement on county-specific transit matters. Collaboration between partner agencies to address things like rider policies, uniform contracting standards and consistent compensation packages for transit employees would be somewhat easier since those issues would no longer be embedded within county government.

 **Regional Equity.** Although people within each new district would be represented by a board of elected officials, regional coordination would still be at the staff level under Scenario 3C. As a result, this scenario would not appreciably change the representation of regional residents on regional transit matters that affect more than one county. The ability to ensure transit opportunities in all counties would be about the same as it is today.

 **Operational Efficiency.** A separate transportation district in each county would not reduce the current coordination effort for the Alliance. Each new district would have its own administrative, planning, maintenance, and operations staff, perpetuating some of the redundancies that currently

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<sup>3</sup> Each state has more than one districting option. In Oregon, a Special Transportation District (ORS 267.520), requires a vote of the people to form, elect board members, and approve revenue levies. Alternatively, a County Service District (ORS 451.487) can be formed in Oregon by a resolution of the county commissioners but must be referred to the voters for approval, and any proposed levies must also be voter-approved. We are assuming the Special Transportation District option for our analysis because it has the advantage of an elected board focused only on transit.

In Washington, a County Transportation Authority (RCW 36.57) can be created by a county and a Transportation Benefit District (RCW36.73.020) can be created by a city or county without a popular vote, and only the revenue levies need voter approval. We are using the Transportation Benefit District option for our analysis because it provides greater opportunities for participation by local cities. Within this memo, the generic term "transportation district" means either a Special Transportation District in Oregon, or a Transportation Benefit District in Washington.

exist across the region. Multiple agencies would continue to provide fixed-route service as they do today.



**Agency Staff Burden and Expertise.** Creation of a new transportation district would remove the burden of managing transit activities from existing county staff. Additionally, since each new district's staff would be focused solely on transit matters, it may be possible for them to develop a higher level of transit knowledge and expertise than is currently feasible for county staff, who often wear multiple hats under the status quo.



**Funding.** An advantage of this scenario is the potential to increase local revenue generation across the region. A Transportation Benefit District in Skamania or Klickitat County would have the authority (with voter approval) to levy a sales tax of up to 0.3%, establish a vehicle fee, levy property tax, or charge an impact fee on commercial or industrial development. A new transportation district in Wasco County would open opportunities for voter-approved property taxes, business license fees, income taxes or employer payroll/self-employment taxes. As with Scenario 3A and 3B, relying on voter approval for tax levies comes with significant barriers and risks in securing adequate funding. These additional revenue streams could be used to directly fund transit service, and/or leverage larger amounts of state and federal aid transit funding.

Klickitat County staff advised that their County Commission currently provides essential funding for transit from their county's general fund. Successful implementation of a transportation district in Klickitat County may lead commissioners to reduce current general fund allocations for transit.

**Implementation Complexity: 3 (Oregon Counties) – Several complicating factors. 2 (Washington Counties) - One or two complicating factors.**

In the Oregon counties, votes of the people would be required to create a new transportation district, elect board members, and establish a tax/fee revenue structure. Financial and other feasibility analyses would be advisable to determine benefits and costs to help make the business case to the public.

For districts on the Washington side, board members would be appointed from existing elected bodies<sup>4</sup>. Legislative changes made in July 2022 gave Transportation Benefit District boards the authority to impose a 0.1% sales/use tax without a public vote. Higher tax rates and other fees still require a public election. Financial and other feasibility analyses would be advisable to help make the business case to the public. It can be difficult to make the case for new taxes to voters, and success may require multiple attempts in more than one election cycle. These challenges notwithstanding, there are numerous examples of successful county-wide transportation districts in Oregon. Therefore, despite an implementation rating of 3 – “several factors complicating implementation” – this is a feasible scenario.

**Implementation Timeline:** The formational process for each district in Washington does not require a public vote, so immediate implementation is theoretically possible. However, a three- to six-month timeline is likely more reasonable for creating a board of decisionmakers from governmental agencies across the county.

In Oregon, each district could take approximately one year to form, assuming the process culminates in successful elections. Board member elections could be concurrent with the election to form the district,

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<sup>4</sup> Klickitat County advised that a Transportation Benefit District was previously formed by resolution for their county, but a voter levy needed to fund the new district was unsuccessful and subsequent levy proposals were not attempted.

or a subsequent election could be held, adding 6 months to the timeline. If the public vote to form a joint district is not successful, the implementation timeline would need to be extended through future election cycles.

Once a joint district has been formed and board members elected or appointed, an additional 6-month startup period would be advisable to help the new board with internal organization matters, such as hiring a manager, implementing an operational service plan, and developing internal policies and procedures.

**Estimated Implementation Cost:** \$500,000 to \$1M for Oregon districts; \$200,000 to \$500,000 for Washington districts.

**Policy Conflicts/Solutions:** None known.

#### **Scenario 4: Regional Cooperative or Transportation Management Organization**

**Description.** Scenario 4 would create a regional cooperative business entity (co-op), or a nonprofit transportation management organization (TMO). The new organization would have its own board and staff and could provide any or all transit services needed in the five-county region. For the purposes of this evaluation, we assume that the co-op or TMO would be a full-service organization responsible for all fixed-route planning, transportation system development, and service delivery, providing a single central transit provider for the region.

The existing transit providers could jointly form the new organization and be “owners” in the case of a co-op, or “members” in the case of a TMO. Ownership or membership need not be limited to the current transit agencies. If desired, owner/member opportunities could be made available to others who may benefit from or help fund transit service in the region. (For example, individual cities, state agencies, large employers, business and tourism groups, social service organizations and others.)

Different laws apply to the formation of co-ops and TMOs, but the general governance concept is similar for both. Owners/members would elect board officers from their ranks and fund the new agency through membership fees and by purchasing services from the new organization.

The board's responsibilities would include hiring a manager; adopting policies and procedures to be followed; developing long-range plans and business strategies; overseeing the organization's budget; establishing internal controls to assure fiduciary responsibilities are met; and retaining auditors and legal counsel as needed.

The manager would be responsible for overseeing the agency's physical and financial resources, staff, and accounting system. The manager would also determine employee compensation levels and ensure the board has accurate and relevant information needed to make informed decisions.



**System Clarity for Customers and the General Public.** This scenario would consolidate all fixed-route transit functions and responsibilities under a single entity, allowing consistent branding throughout the region and providing a single point of contact and source of information for customers and the public.



**Government Accountability, Oversight and Policymaking.** Much of the accountability, oversight, and policymaking responsibilities would shift to a new co-op or TMO board, which would be a business entity, not a unit of government. That said, the co-op or TMO board would include elected officials, so “government accountability” is still a valid consideration here. Also, much of the funding for the new

organization would flow through existing governmental agencies, who would retain their current responsibilities for ensuring compliance with grant and funding requirements.

Scenario 4 would establish a single set of policies for riders and resolve current differences in other policy areas. For example, variations in employee compensation packages that currently place some agencies at a disadvantage in the labor market would be eliminated, and the consistency of wages for transit employees across the region could improve.

Differences in contracting standards would also be resolved. For example, existing transit agencies may have different financial incentives or penalties for contractor performance that affect contractors' risk and profit potential. During times when there is high demand for limited contracted services, agencies requiring less favorable contracting terms will be at a disadvantage in the marketplace. Disparities like this would be eliminated under Scenario 4.

A new co-op or TMO would provide a central forum for exchange of information and ideas between regional policymakers, so it could help to confirm the suitability of transit proposals within the nexus of other local, regional, state, and natural resource policies in the Gorge. Scenario 4 would also provide a single policy-level forum to better assess how transit projects and programs align with regional land uses.



**Regional Equity.** The co-op or TMO board could be structured to ensure all geographic areas and broad interests in the region are represented. Board voting methods and other rules of procedure could be structured to avoid unduly favoring the needs of some over others.

Compared to the status quo, a central organization would be in a better position to evaluate and attempt to resolve differences in transit improvement opportunities between counties. However, some opportunities would still be tied to funding flowing through each county. Because of this, some counties would still be able to afford a greater amount of service than others.



**Operational Efficiency.** A co-op or TMO as a regional service provider has significant advantages over the status quo for nearly all aspects of operational efficiency. Administrative functions could be centralized, eliminating existing redundancies. A single organization serving the entire region would wield more buying power than current partner agencies individually, providing an economy of scale for major purchases.

Maintenance functions would be streamlined, and operational practices would be consistent across the region. The regional fleet could be optimized, and backup vehicles and equipment more easily deployed to different parts of the region when needed.

Data collection, regional system performance monitoring and reporting would be streamlined under a central organization.



**Agency Staff Burden and Expertise.** A central co-op or TMO would remove the burden of managing transit activities from existing county staff. Additionally, Scenario 4 could give the entire region access to experts on staff with a significant depth and breadth of transit system management and technical experience.



**Funding.** A central co-op or TMO would allow the Alliance to speak about funding needs with one voice, potentially giving the region greater influence in transit funding decisions at the state level.

Responsibility for securing funding for transit programs and services across the region would likely be shared by existing governmental agencies and the new co-op or TMO. In some cases, the new regional organization may be eligible to apply for grant funding itself. For example, the Federal Transit Administration's non-urbanized area formula program ("5311" program) is commonly used to fund fixed route service outside of metropolitan areas. FTA's rules allow WSDOT or ODOT to award 5311 funds to private operators of public transportation services, such as a regional co-op or a TMO. Conversely, another common funding source for the Oregon side of the Alliance, Oregon's Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF) program, would not permit a co-op or TMO to apply for funds directly. For that grant program, existing counties or transportation districts would still need to apply for funds, and then use them to purchase services from the co-op or TMO. A regional co-op or TMO could provide grant writing services and help with grant compliance reporting to lessen the burden, however. Given the relative ease of administration of this governance option, the additional funding opportunities and the ability to better coordinate applying for and obtaining these funds present significant benefit to Gorge TransLink partners.

A co-op or TMO could also help to raise funds for regional transit, for example by selling advertising or providing opportunities for regional businesses to sponsor certain transit services, activities, or events. With adequate support from the community that the co-op or TMO serves, implementation of these techniques requires minimal effort with a potentially significant capacity to raise revenue.

**Implementation Complexity: 2** – One or two complicating factors. While the facilitation effort to create a new co-op would be significant, the implementation process is straightforward with few barriers. A public vote is not required. A financial feasibility analysis and business plan should be prepared to understand advantages and tradeoffs more thoroughly for the current agency partners. A legal review of statutes that govern co-ops and nonprofit organizations in both Washington and Oregon should also be done to help decide which type of entity would be most advantageous for the region, and where the new organization should be based.

Examples of complicating factors for implementing Scenario 4 are finding the resources needed to facilitate the formational effort; determining whether and how to transfer existing transit vehicles, equipment, and facilities to the new organization; and the need to be cautious about precluding the creation of a new bi-state governmental agency (see Scenario 5).

**Implementation Timeline:** The formational process could take approximately one year. During this time, legal research would be done to determine the most advantageous state statutes under which to organize. A business plan would also be prepared, for agreement by all parties, to determine board composition and staffing, operating plan, capital needs assessment, initial budget proposal, and funding responsibilities. Once formed, an additional six-month startup period would be needed for the new board to establish bylaws, hire staff, and develop policies and procedures for the new organization.

**Implementation Cost:** Over \$1M

**Policy Conflicts/Solutions:** A policy issue for scenario 4 is that there is currently no forum where current transit agency elected officials can interact to jointly discuss advantages and tradeoffs of regionalization and resolve differences. This could be addressed by first implementing Scenario 2.

Legal research beyond the scope of this project would be advisable before further implementation work occurs, to scan for potential conflicts within each partner agency's laws and rules for elected official service on a private organization's board.

## Scenario 5: New Bi-State Government Agency

**Description.** Scenarios 1 through 4 are options available to the alliance today, under existing laws. Conversely, the creation of a new bi-state governmental agency is not possible within current legislation/regulations. This scenario would require new state legislation in both Washington and Oregon. A Congressional act may also be required to adequately fund it.

Like the co-op/TMO concept described above, Scenario 5 would establish a new centralized organization to take over regional transit activities, except that instead of a business or nonprofit entity, a new unit of government would be created.

A bi-state governmental agency would have its own governing board, with members determined by the formational legislation. Since there are no existing laws that prescribe or limit the structure of a new government agency, an endless number of permutations are possible. As a result, it is difficult to precisely describe this scenario.

Federal legislation was recently proposed by Oregon Senator Earl Blumenauer that, if enacted, would create a new Columbia River Gorge Access Committee to oversee multi-jurisdictional transportation strategies within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.<sup>5</sup> This committee would have oversight responsibilities beyond just transit; however, the draft legislation leaves the door open for the Access Committee to create a sub-agency responsible for regional transit planning and operations.

Another potential model for Scenario 5 is the recent Bi-State Bridge Authority legislation enacted by the Washington and Oregon legislatures. In 2022, both state legislators passed bills to form and charter a new bi-state governmental commission, with the authority to manage the construction, maintenance, and operation of bridges across the Columbia River<sup>6</sup>. Development of this legislation was led by an interagency working group of political leaders in the Mid-Columbia region, including elected officials from the cities of Bingen, White Salmon and Hood River; counties of Klickitat and Hood River, and the Port of Hood River.<sup>7</sup>

For the purposes of evaluating this scenario, we assume that a separate regional bi-state transit agency would be created, with the authority to fully manage and operate a regional transit system. While the National Scenic Area does not encompass the Gorge TransLink's entire geographic area, if Senator Blumenauer's proposal is enacted for the National Scenic Area, we assume it would be in the public interest (and agreeable to the existing transit partners) to expand the new transit agency's service area to include the entire Gorge TransLink area.

Under this scenario, the new transit agency would take over all aspects of transit system planning, operation, and management from the existing Gorge TransLink partners. The new bi-state transit agency could have a central board that includes either elected or appointed positions, or both. The board would in turn hire a manager.

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<sup>5</sup> *Legislative Concepts: Recreation Enhancement, wildfire resiliency, and conservation for Mt. Hood and the Columbia River Gorge (2022) Congressman Earl Blumenauer.* Available at: <https://blumenauer.house.gov/issues/environment-and-energy/mt-hood-and-gorge> (Accessed: November 10, 2022).

<sup>6</sup> 81<sup>st</sup> Oregon Legislative Assembly, 2022 Regular Session, House Bill 4089, and 67<sup>th</sup> Washington Legislature, 2022 Regular Session, Senate Bill 5558.

<sup>7</sup> Information on the bi-state working group, including the memo of understanding between the governing boards of all six member agencies is available on the Port of Hood River's website: <https://portofhoodriver.com/bridge/bridge-replacement-bi-state-working-group-bswg/>

Board and manager roles and responsibilities could be essentially the same as for a regional co-op or TMO scenario. That is, board responsibilities would include hiring the manager; adopting policies and procedures for the transit agency; developing long-range strategies; overseeing the organization's funding and budget; establishing internal controls; and retaining auditors and legal counsel as needed. The manager would be responsible to manage and oversee all the agency's physical and financial resources, staff, and accounting system. The manager would also determine employee compensation levels and ensure the board has accurate and relevant information needed to make informed decisions.

We further assume that Congress would provide designated funding that could be used to staff and manage the regional transit agency, and that as a governmental entity, the new transit agency would also be eligible to receive funding from existing state and federal funding programs.



**System Clarity for Customers and the General Public.** This scenario would consolidate all fixed-route transit functions and responsibilities under a single service provider, allowing consistent branding throughout the region and providing a single point of contact and source of information for customers and the public.



**Government Accountability, Oversight and Policymaking.** Scenario 5 would establish a single set of policies for riders and resolve current differences in other policy areas. For example, variations in employee compensation packages that currently place some agencies at a disadvantage in the labor market would be eliminated, and a consistent pay scale would apply to transit employees across the region. Existing differences in contracting standards between current agencies would also be eliminated.

A new bi-state government agency would provide a central forum for exchange of information and ideas between regional policymakers, so it could help to confirm the suitability of transit proposals within the nexus of other local, regional, state, and natural resource policies in the Gorge. Scenario 5 would also provide a single policy-level forum to better assess how transit projects and programs align with regional land uses.



**Regional Equity.** The ability of a new governmental agency to make decisions that do not unduly favor the needs of some over others will depend on how the transit policy board is structured. Based on similar cases where new government agencies are created through federal legislation (like the rules that guide metropolitan planning organization formation, or legislation that created similar regional planning and transit agencies for the Tahoe area in California and Nevada), it is likely that a broadly inclusive transit policy board would be required, possibly supported by additional advisory committees to broaden participation opportunities even further.

Because Senator Blumenauer's draft legislation is focused on the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, it is logical to assume that any resulting bi-state transit agency could be asked to consider tourism and the needs of transit users from outside the region, which may be a controversial element for some existing Alliance partners. A best-case scenario would allocate additional funding and resources to the new agency to permit a more robust tourism focus without diluting the needs of residents in the region.

Of all scenarios in our list, a new bi-state agency would likely be in the best position to ensure that transit opportunities are improved in each county. Because funding would flow directly to the new bi-state

agency rather than routing through individual counties and transportation districts, the distribution of transit service and programs would be less constrained by what each county can afford to buy.



**Operational Efficiency.** Scenario 5 has significant advantages over the status quo for nearly all aspects of operational efficiency. All administrative and operating functions would be centralized, eliminating existing redundancies.

Maintenance functions would be streamlined, and operational practices would be consistent across the region. The regional fleet could be optimized, and backup vehicles and equipment more easily deployed to different parts of the region when needed.

Data collection, regional system performance monitoring and reporting would be streamlined under the new bi-state agency.



**Agency Staff Burden and Expertise.** A new bi-state governmental transit agency would remove the burden of managing transit activities from existing county staff. Additionally, Scenario 5 could give the entire region access to experts on staff with significant depth and breadth of transit system management and technical experience.



**Funding.** Depending on the legislation enacted to fund a new bi-state transit agency, this scenario has significant potential to increase the amount of funding available to the region. At a minimum, legislation should allocate sufficient state or federal funding to manage and staff the new agency and ensure the agency is eligible to receive funds from other existing state and federal funding programs. Legislation could also be enacted to authorize the new agency to generate local revenue through regional taxes or fees. If legislative barriers were removed, Scenario 5 would offer a feasible path to obtaining consistent and adequate revenue.

A new bi-state agency could have considerable "clout", on par with large transit agencies in metropolitan areas. It would serve as a national model for regional transit system consolidation across more than one state and could help to shape future transit state and federal funding policies.

**Implementation Complexity: 4** – Many complicating factors. Senator Blumenauer's draft proposal for modernizing transportation in the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area, and the recent Bi-State Bridge Authority example in the Mid-Columbia region, elevate the feasibility of this scenario. However, there are numerous complicating factors. For example (this is by no means an inclusive list):

- Legislation would need to be written and enacted in both Washington and Oregon to create the new bi-state agency.
- A Congressional act would be needed to provide the new agency with access to federal aid funds.
- Formational legislation would need to identify a source of funding for staffing and administering the new bi-state agency.
- Formational legislation would need to determine how to treat existing transportation districts after the new bi-state agency is created. For example, if a new bi-state agency is vested with the authority to levy regional taxes or fees, that may conflict with local revenue structures already in place for CAT and any other county transportation districts that may be formed in the interim. Taking this point further, if a new bi-state agency is designated as the principal transit service



provider for the region, there may no longer be a need or role for any local transportation districts in the region.

- Draft congressional legislation under consideration appears to cover only the National Scenic Area along the Columbia River, meaning that only portions of counties within the Gorge TransLink's five county area would be covered. Creating a new decision-making body that bifurcates rather than encompasses the Alliance's existing service area could be awkward.
- At this time, there is no policy-level forum for transit agency elected officials to jointly review, evaluate, and help to shape a legislative proposal that could have extensive, far-reaching consequences for their constituents. (Implementing Scenario 2, Regional Transit Advisory Board, in the near term could help with this, however.)

**Implementation Timeline:** The formational process for this scenario could take approximately 1 to 3 years, or more. The timeline would be dependent on the speed with which Congress and each state legislature is prepared to act.

Under the current legislative proposal for the Gorge National Scenic Area, a parent agency, the Columbia River Gorge Access Committee, would be created first; then a new governmental transit agency could be subsequently formed under the Access Committee's authority.

A business plan could be prepared to determine board composition, staffing, operating plan, capital needs assessment, and initial budget. A funding plan would follow, which should include a plan for the continuation or dissolution of any existing transit agencies in the region. A public elections process may be needed to establish new local revenue streams, and possibly to elect policy board members that are not appointed positions.

**Policy Conflicts/Solutions:** A policy issue for Scenario 5 is that there is currently no forum where current transit agency elected officials can interact to jointly discuss advantages and tradeoffs of regionalization and resolve differences. This could be addressed by first implementing Scenario 2.

### Funding Opportunities Across Scenarios

All scenarios other than the current status quo (Scenario 0) present new opportunities for increasing coordination among the Gorge TransLink partners. Scenarios 1 and 2 offer better policymaking and government oversight (albeit limited under Scenario 1), potentially increasing public perception of the reliability of the transit systems. Scenarios 4 and 5 positively impact the operational efficiency and government oversight of the regional transit system. Scenario 3 would unlock the possibility for a significant amount of new local revenue through district levies.

Additionally, Scenarios 4 and 5 improve system cohesion, supporting a more consistent approach to branding and marketing across the region. A transit system that is designed and managed more cohesively, operates more efficiently, and communicates services clearly to the public has the potential to attract more ridership and associated farebox revenue, advertising revenue, and donations.

Additionally, Scenarios 3 through 5 could meaningfully improve Gorge TransLink partners' ability to leverage state and federal grant funds available from FTA and FHWA. Gorge TransLink partners have previously leveraged such funding as a designated sub-recipient.

Table 2 below, summarizes the funding opportunities potentially made available through each scenario. The table provides a qualitative assessment about the relative ease across scenarios of generating additional revenue from each source. This assessment does not include considerations about political viability or adequacy of specific revenue sources.

**Table 2. Funding Opportunities Summary**

Potential New Revenue Opportunity <sup>1</sup>	Opportunity to increase farebox revenues	Opportunity to increase advertising and fundraising revenue	Introduction of Tax Levy	Allocation of additional state or federal revenue	Opportunity to increase federal grant disbursements
<b>Scenario 1:</b> Enhanced Status Quo	Low	Low	None	None	Low
<b>Scenario 2:</b> Regional Transit Advisory Board	Low	Low	None	None	Low
<b>Scenario 3A&amp;B:</b> Joint Districts	Medium	Low	High	None	Medium
<b>Scenario 3C:</b> Single-County Districts	Low	Low	High	None	Medium
<b>Scenario 4:</b> Regional Co-op or TMO	High	High	None	None	Medium
<b>Scenario 5:</b> Bi-State Governmental Agency	High	High	Unknown <sup>2</sup>	High	High

<sup>1</sup>Scenario 4 could be combined with 3A, 3B, or 3C to unlock tax levy revenue options in addition to the potential revenues identified for Scenario 4 alone.

<sup>2</sup> The potential to increase funding opportunities under a bi-state governmental agency would depend on future legislation and is uncertain at this time.

### Additional Funding Sources

The Gorge TransLink service to the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area presents an opportunity for leveraging this funding source through a demonstration that public transportation in the region helps to sustain and increase access to national forests.

These programs include the congressionally chartered National Forest Foundation's Innovative Finance for National Forest (IFNF) Grant program, the congressionally chartered National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) grants, the Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) and others.

### Innovative Finance for National Forest (IFNF) Grant program

In most cases, the objectives for these grants include improving not only the financial sustainability of these areas but also the economic and environmental benefits to communities and visitors. For example, the congressionally-chartered National Forest Foundation's Innovative Finance for National Forest (IFNF) grant program specifically seeks to improve the financial sustainability of the National Forest System to ensure its preservation and the benefits to visitors and communities. The Task 4 memo discusses some of the successful applications for these funds, including the Inyo National Forest in

California and Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest in Washington, to develop plans for financing infrastructure improvements to increase tourist access.

### National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) grants

Similarly, the congressionally-chartered National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) grants seek to “sustain, restore, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats” with grants awarded to federal, state, and local governments, and nonprofit organizations, and whose previous grants have included supporting building green structures for public transit, reducing pollution to watersheds and increasing education around stormwater and watershed pollution.

### Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP)

The Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) is part of the Infrastructure Investment Jobs Act which allocated \$11.6 million to Washington and \$37.8 million to Oregon to increase access to federal lands through improved roads and transit services.

### Service Opportunities

Table 3 summarizes the existing service level, vision for future service level, coordination needs, implementation needs, and paratransit requirements for each route according to the regional vision map illustrated in Figure 1. The primary themes are summarized below:

- The service vision includes adding lifeline service (<4 trips/day, <4 days/week) for the following routes:
  - The Dalles – Dufur – Tygh Valley – Maupin – Madras (with connections to Warm Springs, Shaniko, and Antelope)
  - The Dalles – Celilo Village
  - Bingen – Lyle – Dallesport
- Weekend fixed-route service is only provided along routes from Hood River. Providing weekend service across routes and expanding service hours in the evening is a need for most routes.
- The only services with paratransit requirements are the local routes. Each county has a different method of meeting paratransit requirements. Mt. Adams Transportation Services (MATS) provides deviations along a route that could qualify as an intercity route, and therefore does not require complementary paratransit, to provide a wider coverage area.

Each route update includes a timeframe for implementation:

- The **2-Year Horizon** includes updates that could be implemented by redistributing resources, identifying smaller grants, or that are already planned for near-term updates by agencies.
- The **5-Year Horizon** includes high-priority updates that would require substantial additional funding, such as adding weekend and expanding evening service.
- The **10-Year Horizon** includes updates that require substantial additional funding and are secondary priorities.

**Table 3. Coordination and Implementation for the Vision for Future Service**

Route	Existing Service Level	Vision for Future Service Level	Coordination and Implementation Needs	Paratransit Requirements <sup>8</sup>	Timeframe for Implementation (2-, 5-, and 10-Year Horizons)
<b>Hood River – Local Routes</b>	<i>Hood River</i> Everyday 7:45am-7:15pm 16 trips/day	Expand evening service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate major stops and schedules to facilitate transfers between services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local fixed-route: Paratransit service is required</li> <li>Currently met by providing complementary paratransit</li> </ul>	5 Year
<b>Hood River – Mosier – The Dalles</b>	<i>The Dalles</i> Everyday 9:30am-3:50pm 4 trips/day	Add evening service Increase frequency to at least 12 trips/day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate schedule to maximize efficiency transferring to the Columbia Gorge Express</li> <li>Identify funding to provide additional frequency and evening service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intercity route: Paratransit service not required</li> </ul>	5 Year
<b>Hood River – Wyeth – Cascade Locks – Multnomah Falls – Troutdale/Wood Village – Portland</b>	<i>Columbia Gorge Express</i> Everyday 5:30am-7:30pm 13 trips/day	Expand evening service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify funding and expand staff to extend evening service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intercity route: Paratransit service not required</li> </ul>	10 Year
<b>Hood River – Odell – Parkdale</b>	<i>Upper Valley</i> Weekdays 7:30am-6:15pm 8 trips/day	Add weekend service Expand evening service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify funding and expand staff to extend evening service and add weekend service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intercity route: Paratransit service not required</li> </ul>	5 Year
<b>Hood River – Bridge of the Gods</b>	<i>Cascade Locks</i> Everyday 5:30am-7:35pm 12 trips/day	Expand evening service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify funding and expand staff to extend evening service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intercity route: Paratransit service not required</li> </ul>	5 Year

<sup>8</sup> Additional details about how paratransit requirements can be met are provided in the following section.

Route	Existing Service Level	Vision for Future Service Level	Coordination and Implementation Needs	Paratransit Requirements <sup>9</sup>	Timeframe for Implementation (2-, 5-, and 10-Year Horizons)
<b>Hood River – Parkdale – Mt. Hood</b>	<i>Gorge-To-Mountain Express</i> Seasonal <sup>9</sup>	Provide year-round service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify funding and expand staff to provide year-round service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intercity route: Paratransit service not required</li> </ul>	2 Year
<b>Hood River – Dog Mountain</b>	<i>Dog Mountain Shuttle</i> Seasonal Weekends 7:30am-5:50pm 2 trips/day between Hood River—Dog Mountain, additional between Skamania Fairgrounds – Dog Mountain	Increase frequency between Hood River-Dog Mountain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide more frequent service between Hood River-Dog Mountain</li> <li>Coordinate schedule to maximize efficiency transferring to and from the Columbia Gorge Express</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intercity route: Paratransit service not required</li> </ul>	2 Year
<b>White Salmon – Bingen – Hood River</b>	<i>White Salmon to Hood River Loop</i> Weekdays 7am-7pm 9 trips/day	Add weekend service Expand weekday service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate providers to contract weekend service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intercity route: Paratransit service not required</li> </ul>	5 Year
<b>The Dalles – Local Routes</b>	<i>Red Line, Blue Line</i> Weekdays 7:00am-5:40pm 9 trips/day (Red), 16 trips/day (Blue)	Add weekend service Expand weekday service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate major stops and schedules to facilitate transfers between services</li> <li>Coordinate schedule to maximize efficiency transferring to and from the Columbia Gorge Express</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local fixed-route: Paratransit service is required</li> <li>Currently met by providing deviations</li> </ul>	5 Year
<b>The Dalles – Dufur – Tygh Valley – Maupin</b>	<i>South County Shuttle</i> Tuesdays 1 trip/week	—	—	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intercity route: Paratransit service not required</li> </ul>	N/A

<sup>9</sup> CAT recently received a grant to convert this service to year-round.

Route	Existing Service Level	Vision for Future Service Level	Coordination and Implementation Needs	Paratransit Requirements <sup>8</sup>	Timeframe for Implementation (2-, 5-, and 10-Year Horizons)
<b>The Dalles – Dufur – Tygh Valley – Maupin – Madras (with connections to Warm Springs, Shaniko, and Antelope)</b>	—	Add service <4 trips/day, <4 days/week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pursue funding for lifeline service, time to facilitate regional transfers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intercity route: Paratransit service not required</li> </ul>	10 Year
<b>The Dalles – Celilo Village</b>	—	Add service <4 trips/day, <4 days/week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pursue funding for lifeline service, time to facilitate regional transfers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intercity route: Paratransit service not required</li> </ul>	5 Year
<b>Goldendale – Local Route<sup>10</sup></b>	<i>Goldendale City Green Route</i> Weekdays 7am-7pm 7 trips/day	Add weekend service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate providers to contract weekend service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local fixed route: Paratransit service is required</li> <li>Currently met by providing dial-a-ride</li> </ul>	5 Year
<b>Goldendale – The Dalles</b>	<i>Goldendale to The Dalles</i> Weekdays 7am-7pm 4 trips/day	Add weekend service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate providers to contract weekend service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intercity route: Paratransit service not required</li> </ul>	5 Year
<b>Bingen – Vancouver</b>	<i>Bingen - Stevenson - Vancouver Route</i> Weekdays 5:30am-8:00pm 7 trips/day	Add weekend service Increase frequency to at least 8 trips/day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate providers to contract weekend service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intercity route: Paratransit service not required</li> <li>Deviations are still provided to expand service area</li> </ul>	5 Year
<b>Bingen – Lyle – Dallesport</b>	—	Add service <4 trips/day, <4 days/week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pursue funding for lifeline service, time to facilitate regional transfers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intercity route: Paratransit service not required</li> </ul>	5 Year

<sup>10</sup> Includes interlining service with Goldendale – The Dalles Route

### Paratransit Requirements

Complementary ADA paratransit service or route deviation is required where local fixed-route bus services are provided, and must provide the same service span of the fixed route and be available within ¼ mile of the route. Intercity routes do not trigger complementary ADA paratransit requirements, however if there are too many stops along portions of the route the route then it may no longer be classified as an intercity route and complementary ADA paratransit would be required. FTA defines intercity bus service as regularly scheduled bus service for the general public which operates with limited stops over fixed routes connecting two or more urban areas not in close proximity. Typically, limited stops mean up to approximately three stops in an urban area. Different sections of the same route can be classified differently: for example, a route with many stops in two cities but only a couple of stops between could trigger the need for paratransit within ¼ mile of the stops in each city but not along the full route.

Paratransit requirements can be met by providing deviations from local transit routes or by providing complementary paratransit service (dial-a-ride).

Benefits and drawbacks of providing deviations along transit routes include:

Benefits	Drawbacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Complementary ADA paratransit is not required on either intercity or local transit routes if these routes deviate. This reduces potential financial liability to serve increasing demand for ride requests.</li> <li>● Providing deviations can help expand the reach of a transit route: supporting first-mile/last-mile access to and from destinations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Providing deviations can make it difficult to reliably maintain a fixed transit schedule, depending on the number of deviation requests.</li> <li>● Buffering route schedules to allow for deviations increases the travel time.</li> </ul>

Currently, Hood River County and Wasco County have separate local and intercity routes. Sherman County, Skamania County, and Klickitat County do not have separate intercity and local routes. In Hood River County and Wasco County, intercity routes do not need to deviate, especially as local routes are able to deviate to expand the reach of the transit system without impacting the schedule of the intercity route. In Skamania County, local and intercity service are provided on a single route, and deviations are currently used to expand the reach of the transit route.

### Gaps and Opportunities

Table 4 outlines potential initiatives to address gaps and opportunities. It also identifies which governance model(s) facilitate these initiatives and the recommended timeframe for implementation.

**Table 4. Gaps and Opportunities**

Gap or Opportunity	Explanation	Opportunity	Initiatives	Governance	Timeframe (2-, 5-, and 10-Year Horizons)
<p><b>Connections between Local Routes and Intercity Routes</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some intercity routes currently have limited stop locations and stops located further outside the downtown core depending on the location of the transit center</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intercity routes should include key stops at medical facilities, downtown areas, and colleges to increase connectivity to local routes and facilitate one-seat rides to popular destinations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate stop locations: serve multiple key stops in each city to support transfers between providers and increase the number of trips that do not require a transfer</li> <li>Coordinate with all five counties before moving the locations of these key stops to minimize potential disruptions to connecting routes</li> </ul>	<p>All</p>	<p>2-Year</p>
<p><b>First-Mile/ Last-Mile Access</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is limited local transit and active transportation infrastructure supporting connections to regional transit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dial-a-ride, park-and-rides, mobility hubs, electric bikes, electric carshares, transportation network companies, and carpools can help provide these connections and serve rural areas</li> <li>Improve active transportation infrastructure so that it is comfortable for people of all ages and abilities and meets Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility standards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partner with local government to prioritize transportation projects improving walking and biking facilities in connecting to transit routes</li> <li>Pursue grant funding to support electrification initiatives</li> <li>Partner with employers to facilitate carpool and vanpool programs</li> <li>Explore opportunities to construct park-and-rides or mobility hubs</li> </ul>	<p>All</p>	<p>2-Year</p>



Gap or Opportunity	Explanation	Opportunity	Initiatives	Governance	Timeframe (2-, 5-, and 10-Year Horizons)
<b>Timed Transfers to Columbia Gorge Express</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transfers to/from the Columbia Gorge Express without excessive delays are critical to having a usable transit system providing access throughout the Gorge</li> <li>• It is challenging to provide timed transfers when there is limited frequency of connecting routes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate transit timetables to maximize the efficiency of transfers for all providers to/from the Columbia Gorge Express</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify primary transit stop(s) in each community for transfers between services</li> <li>• Coordinate schedules to maximize efficiencies of transfers. This coordination is limited in the near-term by current frequencies</li> <li>• In the longer term, increase frequency of connecting routes to match service frequency of the Columbia Gorge Express to facilitate smooth transfers between services</li> </ul>	All	2-Year
<b>Population Density</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low population density in rural areas of the region are difficult to efficiently serve with fixed-route transit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on providing dial-a-ride, supporting carpools and vanpools, and supporting first-mile/last-mile connections to fixed route transit</li> <li>• Promote transit-supportive land uses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to utilize a combination of routes and service types to support a balance of productivity and coverage</li> <li>• Partner with local government to prioritize transit-supportive development patterns</li> </ul>	All	Ongoing

Gap or Opportunity	Explanation	Opportunity	Initiatives	Governance	Timeframe (2-, 5-, and 10-Year Horizons)
<b>Geography</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many of the denser cities and recreation destinations are located along the SR-14 and I-84 corridors; however, many destinations are located off of these facilities and have safety, topographical, or ownership constraints</li> <li>• Drive times along SR-14 and I-84 can vary significantly due to congestion and construction</li> <li>• The Columbia River Gorge Natural Scenic Area is a protected area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase stops along existing intercity transit routes, and at the beginning and ends including stops in downtowns, to provide access to more communities and recreational destinations</li> <li>• Add intercity routes to key urban areas along the SR-14 and I-84 area that are not currently serviced</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create consistent policies regarding flag stops, call stops, and deviations, where possible. Clearly advertise these policies.</li> <li>• Provide additional service and stops at cities and major destinations along the SR-14 and I-84 corridor. Coordinate with other agencies (such as parks and recreation) to ensure sufficient space for safe transit stops</li> <li>• Build in buffer time at peak periods to account for congestion. Provide real-time vehicle arrival information so that riders can track buses that may be running behind schedule due to construction or congestion</li> <li>• Add a connection between White Salmon and Dallesport serving Lyle and other destinations</li> </ul>	<p>All</p> <p>However, Scenario 3 and Scenario 5 are supportive of the additional funding needed to accommodate the service expansion</p>	<p>5 -Year</p>
<b>Seasonality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tourism and recreation volumes and destinations differ between seasons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase services or provide additional services during peak season for different destinations</li> <li>• Providing peak-season service could support mode shift and reduce congestion at these times</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As funding for services incrementally becomes available, start by providing new or increased services during peak seasons</li> <li>• Seasonal permits provide opportunities to increase revenue and encourage transit use during peak season</li> </ul>	<p>All</p>	<p>2-Year</p>

Gap or Opportunity	Explanation	Opportunity	Initiatives	Governance	Timeframe (2-, 5-, and 10-Year Horizons)
<b>Marketing and Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transit service would benefit from increased marketing, branding, and public awareness of existing services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage information sharing with community-based partners and employers, and continue building on recent marketing efforts from the Gorge TransLink Alliance</li> <li>In more rural areas where public transit may not be as prominent, clear marketing is important to increase ridership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue developing the Gorge TransLink website, working towards consolidating resources where riders can gather information across services on a single page that could be printed out</li> <li>Implement consistent branding of buses and bus stops</li> <li>Implement a consistent route naming convention across providers</li> <li>Coordinate data collection across counties</li> </ul>	All	2-Year
<b>Service Hours</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited evening and weekend services are provided</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide weekend fixed-route transit services across the network allowing residents and visitors in Wasco County, Klickitat County, and Skamania County to connect intercity routes with access to recreation, jobs and shopping on weekends. Weekend connections for Washington cities, Mosier, and Mt. Hood will greatly increase access to recreation for residents and visitors</li> <li>Expand evening service on both weekdays and weekends (stakeholder advisory group members particularly emphasized the need to expand evening and weekend service between Hood River, Bingen, and White Salmon)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contracting with private and public providers can help provide staffing needed to expand service hours where current drivers are at maximum capacity.</li> <li>Providing weekend service across agencies supports connections across the counties for residents and tourists to access recreation, shopping, and employment. Expanding evening service supports access for people with later shifts or utilizing transit after standard work hours.</li> <li>Coordinate intercity and local transit schedules so that riders of intercity routes can connect locally to the first and last runs of the day.</li> </ul>	Scenario 3 and Scenario 5 are needed to provide sufficient funding to accommodate the service expansion	5-Year

Gap or Opportunity	Explanation	Opportunity	Initiatives	Governance	Timeframe (2-, 5-, and 10-Year Horizons)
<b>Medical rides that are not reimbursable</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providers in various counties provide medical rides that do not qualify as reimbursable non-emergency medical rides (NEMT)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partner between agencies to provide these rides and support long-haul rides to Portland</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance education about and support connections for medical rides to Portland</li> </ul>	All	2-Year
<b>Private Partnerships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate between public and private providers to serve congested tourism areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build on partnerships with existing private shuttles to continue serving, or expand, access to popular destinations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contract with private and public providers to expand transit service. Service can be contracted for evenings, weekends, or for all services</li> <li>Partner with private providers to facilitate transfers between public and private transportation services</li> </ul>	All	5-Year
<b>Electrification</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No transit vehicles for any provider of the Gorge TransLink Alliance are currently hybrid or electric</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Converting vehicle fleets to hybrid and electric vehicles requires vehicles with sufficient range and proper charging stations</li> <li>In the long term, electric vehicle fleets can help reduce both maintenance and fueling costs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pursue grant funding to support electrification initiatives</li> <li>Construct charging and alternative fueling facilities to support the purchase of hybrid or fully electric vehicles</li> </ul>	All	10-Year
<b>Staff Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of sufficient staffing (especially drivers) makes it challenging to provide and increase service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aligning compensation can help reduce competition and staff turnover</li> <li>Maximizing the increased economy of scale: help make staff time go farther by sharing resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate between agencies to align compensation packages that reduce competition between counties and increase the appeal of the staff positions overall</li> <li>Under certain government scenarios, staff could be hired under the umbrella of an agency, facilitating ease of optimizing staff schedules</li> </ul>	All, especially Scenario 4 and Scenario 5	2-Year

## MONITORING PROGRAM

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Consistent data collection across the study area should be used to monitor both transit performance and the outcomes of implementing the Gorge Regional Transit Strategies recommendations over time. In many cases, these performance measures are already tracked as part of Federal Transit Administration reporting requirements. This program enables a dynamic system where service adjustments can be implemented and justified following performance evaluations. The relative importance of each metric may differ by county based on population demographics and needs.

- Regional Equity and Connectivity
  - Geographic coverage
  - Service Span
  - Service Frequency
  - Connections to other routes/providers
- Operational Efficiency
  - Rides per hour
  - Cost per ride
  - Cost per hour
  - Total capital costs
  - Total annual opportunity costs
  - System ease of use
- Accessibility and Connectivity
  - Bus stop amenities
  - Bicycle and pedestrian connections
  - Population served
  - Employment served
  - Transit-dependent populations served
  - Number of service request denials
- System Clarity for Customers and the General Public
  - On-time performance (Not currently available)
- Sustainability
  - Fleet fuel efficiencies
  - Annual energy consumption

## NEXT STEPS

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The information from this memo and from Memo #4 will inform the Key Initiatives Workshop.