

Transit group to trim options

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Committee will choose corridors, modes to study

A few major decisions are expected this week from the committee studying a high-capacity mass transit system for Clark County.

On Thursday, the Clark County High Capacity Transit System, as it's known, will narrow the number of transit modes and corridors under consideration for a Clark County system. It will be the first major decision in the study launched last October.

"This is the first threshold of decision-making in the study," said Dean Lookingbill, transportation director for the Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council, coordinators of the effort. "Now we're going to narrow it to the set of modes and corridors with the most potential."

The project's steering committee is expected to narrow the nine modes considered down to five and 15 corridors to four. The vote will come at a meeting of the steering committee.

Modes expected to make the cut are:

Bus rapid transit, buses running on exclusive lanes: Such systems offer low start-up costs but aren't common in the U.S., although Eugene, Ore., is completing a bus rapid-transit system.

Streetcar: It helps only marginally in congestion because it operates in traffic but might fare well in developing Clark County's low-density areas.

Light rail: Favored for its ability to attract transit-oriented development. Offers high start-up costs but lower operating costs.

Commuter rail: Requires extensive purchase of right-of-way for new track as well as freight access fees and track upgrades. Less economic development potential than streetcar.

Bus rapid transit, light: This is greater bus service that operates in general traffic. Low cost but offers little economic development opportunities because it operates mostly in mixed traffic.

The vote Thursday is expected to eliminate four other modes considered. They are heavy rail, considered too expensive; monorail, with high start-up costs and poor land compatibility; personal rapid transit, which is not high-capacity and won't ease congestion; and water transit, which wouldn't connect well to other methods or attract development.

The criteria used to evaluate corridors included the number of potential riders, congestion, travel time, employment and the socio-economic environment.

Update

Previously: The Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council formed a commission last October to study a Clark County high-capacity mass transit system.

What's new: On Thursday, the group's steering committee will vote to reduce the nine modes studied to five and 15 corridors to four.

What's next: A final choice of mode and method may come sometime next year.

The four corridors expected to be named for more study are:

Interstate 5 between downtown Vancouver and Salmon Creek, including Main Street, Highway 99 and Hazel Dell Avenue. The area includes high density and high congestion, and connects to the Interstate 5 Bridge and Portland.

I-205 between the Columbia River and Salmon Creek, including Andresen Road and 112th Avenue/Chkalov. It also has high congestion, heavy traffic and a direct connection to Portland.

State Highway 500 from Vancouver east to Orchards, including Fourth Plain Boulevard and Burton Road. It serves high-density areas and has high transit use and low-income populations.

State Highway 14 between downtown Vancouver and I-205, including Mill Plain Boulevard and Evergreen Boulevard. The area has heavy rush hour congestion and a high number of trips destined for high-population areas.

Corridors expected to be eliminated from further study include 164th Avenue, Cascade Park, state Highway 502, Padden Parkway, St. Johns Road and Orchards.

"Now we go to more intense work on each corridor and mode," Lookingbill said.

The 14-member task force voting Thursday is made up of representatives of government, businesses, schools, neighborhoods and environmental groups.

A final choice of mode and location may come sometime next year.

The project is unrelated to the Columbia River Crossing, the project studying a new bridge across the Columbia River. Light rail and bus rapid transit are among the alternatives under study for inclusion on a new bridge.

As for building mass transit improvements, no money has been allocated for what eventually will be proposed.

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