
Highway 99, Fourth Plain eyed for transit corridors

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Regional transportation planners are narrowing the options for selecting high-capacity transit corridors.

A new study suggests Highway 99 or Fourth Plain Boulevard, both bisecting Vancouver's urban core, have the best chance of carrying the most riders at the least cost.

"Those seem to be the best-performing corridors in terms of ridership and cost-effectiveness," said Dean Lookingbill, executive director of the Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council. "They're two corridors that have good transit ridership in them."

The RTC expects to adopt a long-term transit plan by the end of the year. C-Tran, Clark County's transit agency, then will adopt a 20-year plan targeting investments in extra-large buses running on dedicated lanes.

Jeff Hamm, C-Tran's executive director, suggested Highway 99 in the Salmon Creek area might make the most sense as the first-priority corridor. He said the highway has more space to create dedicated transit lanes and associated stations.

"Highway 99's going to be easier than Fourth Plain," he said during a steering committee meeting Wednesday.

As the county's population grows, Vancouver and Clark County officials would then plan for mixed-use forms of transit-oriented development. The idea is to maximize the benefits of high-capacity transit by delivering plenty of potential riders who live, work or recreate near the corridors.

Bill Ganley, a Battle Ground city councilman who serves on the RTC board, said he's concerned about concentrating a higher portion of the county's future population along urban corridors primarily in Vancouver.

He noted that high-capacity transit corridors, once envisioned reaching as far as Battle Ground and other smaller cities, have been narrowed just to Vancouver.

"I'm really concerned that, as we grow, people will probably live in Vancouver," he said. "I just want to make sure we have that information. If that's what the citizens of Battle Ground or Camas or Washougal want to have, that would be fine."

Smaller towns will still be served by existing C-Tran bus service.

Because of the relatively high cost of constructing light rail, a task force advising the RTC favors bus rapid transit as the best alternative for Clark County's immediate future.

The system generally involves buses with their own dedicated lane, fewer stops and quicker trips than standard buses.

Questioned on Wednesday by Vancouver City Councilwoman Jeanne Harris, Lookingbill said the dedicated lanes and stations could be converted to light rail if it makes sense in the future.

"You could go in and replace rubber tires with electric rails," Lookingbill said.