

Plans to shape county's transit future gain approval Included are four options for high-capacity transit

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By [ERIK ROBINSON](#), **Columbian Staff Writer**

Imagine this scene, sometime around the year 2028:

Fourth Plain Boulevard, once a sprawling five-lane thoroughfare bisecting Vancouver's midsection, now accommodates one lane of traffic in each direction.

In the middle of the roadway, buses fly past in their own dedicated lanes. In the roughly seven miles between Clark College and 162nd Avenue, extra-large buses stop only at five stations to pick up passengers swarming in from bustling urban neighborhoods.

Coordinated traffic signals allow the buses to whisk away passengers on a rubber-wheeled express.

Sound unlikely?

That's one of four theoretical visions formally adopted Tuesday by the Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council. The blueprint identifies four corridors for high-capacity transit across Clark County: Fourth Plain, Highway 99, Mill Plain Boulevard and Interstate 205 all the way to Portland's Gateway transit center.

Depending on the corridor, the estimated construction costs range from \$60 million to \$152 million.

The RTC now will hand off the recommendations to the C-Tran board of directors. Clark County's public transit agency then will select its top priority, adopt a 20-year development plan and begin to muster resources to build the corridor.

The corridors include a mixture of strategies: Buses running on dedicated lanes; buses in mixed traffic, or a hybrid of mixed and dedicated lanes; and, in the case of I-205 south of Mill Plain into Oregon's Gateway Transit Center near Interstate 84, buses zooming along specially dedicated shoulder lanes only when traffic is congested.

The study adopted Tuesday suggests Fourth Plain or Highway 99 best justifies the investment because they are already heavily used by bus riders.

Betty Sue Morris, an outgoing Clark County commissioner who serves on the transportation council, led a round of glowing endorsements before the council unanimously approved the recommendations Tuesday night at the county Public Service Center in downtown Vancouver.

"I came to this board in 1996 as a true nonbeliever in high-capacity transit at all," Morris said. "I think this is spectacular."

Vancouver Mayor Royce Pollard agreed.

"I hope people pay attention to it, and it doesn't just go on a shelf," he said.

Tuesday's action formalized the broad outline of a plan that had been settled for some time. Citizen groups and elected officials earlier this year pared down the corridors to the county's urban core and dropped light rail as a possibility, at least initially.

The council's recommendation does not affect the ongoing discussion about a new bridge over the Columbia River. Under plans currently under discussion, the new Interstate 5 span would include a light rail connection from Clark College to the Portland line's current terminus at the Expo Center near Delta Park.