

Clark County High Capacity Transit System Study
Task Force Meeting #15
6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Monday, October 20, 2008
Clark County Public Service Center – 6th Floor Training Room
1300 Franklin Street
Vancouver, WA 98660

DRAFT Summary

Members present:

Doug Ballou (Clark County Neighborhoods)
Gail Bauhs (Human Service Transportation)
Mike Bomar (Building Industry Association)
Bob Byrd (Identity Clark County)
Lora Caine (Friends of Clark County)
Eva Cobb (Clark County Leadership)
Todd Horenstein (School Transportation)
Dick Malin (Vancouver NHA West)
Ross Montgomery (Vancouver NHA East)
Kathy McDonald (C-TRAN User)
David Rowe (C-VAN User, C-TRAN)
Ian Sutton (Downtown Vancouver Employer)

Staff:

Dale Robins (RTC)
Dean Lookingbill (RTC)
Seth Gallant (URS)
Jeanne Lawson (JLA)
Kalin Schmoltdt (JLA)

Other:

Debbie Elven-Snyder (C-TRAN)
Jeff Hamm (C-TRAN)

Members absent:

Bob Knight (Clark College)

Purpose of Meeting:

- Review study milestones and proposed system
- High Capacity Transit System recommendation
- Priority Corridor guidance

Welcome/Committee Business

Review agenda – Dean Lookingbill explained that the group will review the study milestones and the proposed system before discussing the system recommendation and providing guidance on the selection of a priority corridor. While the committee will not be issuing a formal recommendation, the committee’s advice will be carried forward to the decision makers. This should be the last Task Force meeting.

Jeff Hamm thanked the committee on behalf of C-TRAN. He said that the future ridership and capacity demands on C-TRAN are becoming clearer and that the recommendations of the committee will be helpful as C-TRAN moves into the 20 Year Plan process. He encouraged the group to remain engaged.

Lawson reminded the group that the team had used the summer to pull together the guidance from the Task Force and Steering Committees into a proposed system plan. The committee had raised the question of how the proposed system compares to a no-HCT option and a general assessment of how well the proposed system meets the goals and objectives has been prepared in response. Lawson said that the assessment should serve as a generalized tool that is open to revision.

Approve of Sept. 15, 2008 meeting summary – David Rowe said that his comments on page 3 should be put in the context of concerns about elevators being used as restrooms in the absence of park-and-ride restroom facilities.

Ross Montgomery noted that the mention of an 18th Street park-and-ride in the vicinity of I-205 was absent from the description of Scenario 6. The facility was described as possibly replacing the existing Evergreen park-and-ride.

Milestones review

Dale Robins provided a brief overview of the study milestones. He briefly noted the study goals and objectives, corridor narrowing and mode narrowing, the corridor analysis, development of the system scenarios, and ultimately the proposed system.

Proposed Clark County High Capacity Transit System

Lookingbill noted that the FTA will require an Alternatives Analysis process before making a final decision on any specific corridor. If considered by the FTA, exact alignments and elements such as the amount of exclusive guideway will be revisited in depth. Lookingbill summarized the component corridors within the proposed system from the draft HCT Study Summary:

- **Highway 99** – Would use center-running BRT and mixed traffic operations along Main Street and Highway to provide service between Salmon Creek and downtown Vancouver. The route would circulate through downtown to avoid the need for a transfer. The corridor includes park-and-rides at 78th and 99th. The recommended alignment would preserve two traffic lanes in each direction. Facilitates around 7,000 boardings per day and is priced at \$80 million.
- **Fourth Plain** – Would use exclusive lane BRT-Hybrid and mixed traffic operations along Fourth Plain to provide service between downtown Vancouver and NE Ward Road. The exclusive lane would require reducing Fourth Plain from a four lane facility to two lanes. Facilitates around 9,000 boardings per day and is priced at \$152 million.
- **I-205** – The I-205 alignment would serve as a new transit corridor and would use a mixed traffic version of BRT with amenities such as direct access ramps and bus-on-shoulder service over the Columbia River. The alignment would provide all day service between Salmon Creek and Gateway. Facilitates 9,900 boardings per day and is priced at \$80 million. In addition to the all day service, express bus service to downtown Portland would be added at peak hours.
- **Mill Plain** – Would use BRT-Lite operating in mixed traffic along Mill Plain except in the congested area at I-205 where it would use a new crossing structure. The alignment connects to downtown Vancouver and splits at 164th to provide access to the Clark College satellite campus and the Fishers Landing transit center. Facilitates 6,500 daily boardings and is priced at \$60 million.

Doug Ballou suggested including the ridership and cost figures next to the corridor descriptions in the body of the report.

Lookingbill noted that the boarding figures only include HCT ridership. The I-5 and I-205 numbers do not include express bus ridership which adds an additional 2,000-3,000 boardings. Lookingbill noted that actual costs are likely to be higher and that the given cost figures are mostly useful for comparison purposes.

Goals and Objectives

Lawson explained how the goals and objectives could serve as a tool for comparing performance between the proposed system, a non-HCT system and a high performance HCT system (such as LRT). The bar-chart on the comparison sheet is not intended as a precise measurement, only as a general visual impression of how well each system fulfills each objective relative to the others.

Goal 1: The proposed system does well on reliability and ridership. While congestion will continue to grow, the system can slow the rate of increase and add different mobility options.

Doug Ballou asked for an explanation of the reliability difference for the systems. Lookingbill explained that the difference is primarily due to the use of exclusive guideway. Although the bus only system would also be improved, buses would still be hindered by regular traffic. Robins noted that the comparison is really based on schedule reliability, though the chart is not meant to imply that bus-only would be unreliable. Ballou requested a brief but more complete description of what is being measured for each objective and he questioned the “0” rating for a bus-only system. Mike Bomar and Bob Byrd suggested that the bus-only system reliability could be read as a baseline for comparison. Gail Bauhs indicated that the comparison was not as meaningful without a scale. Lawson said that the charts were intended only to give a rough sense of comparison without using a quantifiable scale. She added that the document would only be used as a reference handout for the Steering Committee, not as a public handout. Debbie Elven-Snyder objected to the implication that bus-only service would not be reliable. Ballou suggested leaving the bus-only system off the chart. Eva Cobb urged that the document reiterate that the comparison is for service in 2030, as it is easy to misread the chart as a comparison with the existing system. Seth Gallant suggested removing the horizontal lines to avoid implying that the chart contains quantifiable data. Cobb suggested clarifying the meaning of the high and low scale. Kalin Schmoldt suggested that the bars are only intended to show how well each system performs relative to the other systems, and that a difference in bar size merely indicates that one system generally satisfies the intent of the objective better or worse than the others. The extent of the difference is subjective.

Lawson noted the relatively minor impact of the proposed system on congestion, and added that using a traffic lane for transit could potentially create congestion for regular traffic. The committee suggested shifting the emphasis of the description to *creating mobility*.

Goal 2: The second goal focuses on the transit system by providing connections to centers within the county and to other systems such as TriMet. The existing system also provides access, but with more convoluted connections. Other improvements over the bus-only system include

incremental improvements to the I-205 corridor, new park-and-rides, and bike/pedestrian facilities in support of community goals.

Lawson described the safety and affordability objectives of Goal 2 based on policy and hard to assess. Mike Bomar asked for clarification on “rider affordability.” Lawson suggested changing the objective to “fare” or “ticket price.” The committee also asked for more explanation of why there is not a significant difference between the systems. Robins explained that fares would not be determined until a later time, and that security and safety were an assumed goal for C-TRAN. Todd Horenstein asked whether one system or another would require more effort to make safe. Lookingbill said that higher security would be needed as service increases. Eva Cobb suggested that concerns with safety and security may be better addressed as city and county issues. Lookingbill and Lawson reiterated that treating many security concerns will vary depending on policy. Lora Caine clarified that the objective did not address potential vehicle related accidents and suggested that it be noted as such. Robins confirmed that the objective focused on passenger safety. Dick Malin noted that federal engineers will someday look at the entire system package and include every element needed to make the system work successfully. Lawson said that they were assuming that implementation details would come later in the design phase but she acknowledged the community concern and offered to take the comments to the Steering Committee.

Goal 3: Lawson noted that the proposed system can provide improvement through more reliable service, shorter travel times, and new connections. She cautioned that HCT should not be assumed to automatically yield instantaneous benefits.

Doug Ballou noted that Jack Gonsalves had previously stated that the use of buses does not lead to as much development as HCT systems and some committee members suggested that the bus-only system rating should be reduced. Mike Bomar also suggested elevating the proposed system if it serves growth in the local area.

Goal 4: Lawson noted that the proposed system has been kept along the major corridors and does not cut through neighborhoods. The proposed and high performance systems are rated equally because of how LRT could both divide areas and improve vitality. Mike Bomar asked about the low bus-only system rating. Robins said the rating was due to the ability of HCT to improve livability. Doug Ballou suggested that the difference might not be great enough and that improving transit access could make a bigger difference. Todd Horenstein noted that increased dependence on transit options by 2030 should shift the performance of the systems. The committee suggested raising the high performance system and lowering the bus-only system.

Lora Caine suggested adding “and other plans” to expand the scope of the description of Goal 4, Objective 2.

Lawson noted that the proposed system does not present major right of way impacts. Eva Cobb asked about the variation between the high performance and proposed system. Robins noted that LRT would require more right of way. Dick Malin added that HCT routes can also lead to changes due to increase density. The committee suggested clarifying the right of way impacts within the description. Doug Ballou suggested adding factors such as the effect on property

values, access and density. Eva Cobb suggested making the bar chart clearer with regard to whether the chart indicates more impacts or whether the system better satisfies the objective.

Lora Caine asked why potential gentrification did not have a greater impact. Lawson said that LRT provides benefits to the local population as well as potential impacts. Ross Montgomery asked whether “disadvantaged” includes low-income populations. Lawson agreed that the objective could be simplified. Doug Ballou said that he did not think that gentrification was likely within the corridors. Lawson cited Interstate MAX as an example of the possible changes from HCT investment. Ian Sutton agreed that there is some risk of gentrification, but asked that the description be qualified with notes about the effect on property values and rent.

Goal 5: Lawson noted the approximate annual reduction in vehicle miles traveled with an HCT System. David Rowe asked about the overall percentage reduction and suggested that it was the only way to tell if HCT makes a difference. Lookingbill said that while an electric HCT system could be used, it would have a very small impact on air quality. The difference between the systems primarily reflects increased ridership and corresponding benefits, not significant improvements to the air. Bob Byrd suggested increasing the difference between the systems. The committee requested more statistics.

Lora Caine suggested that a bus-only system could be higher as it does not pose as many construction related impacts. Robins noted that the bus-system would also use new park-and-ride facilities. The committee suggested raising the bus-only system, but not all the way.

Goal 6: Lawson noted that the chart appeared to be mistaken in that the bus-only system should be ranked higher for fundability. She added that “overall cost” is intended to reflect cost effectiveness and that the proposed system is higher because it is the most efficient. Seth Gallant suggested that the fundability rankings could reflect the likelihood of qualifying for federal funds. Doug Ballou added that expanding the system may be based on voter approval which may be contingent on presenting a more appealing system. Lookingbill noted that it will eventually start to make more sense to fund an HCT system as opposed to expanding the bus-only system. Lawson suggested that the ranking should be more intuitive. The committee suggested elevating the bus-only system or providing a better explanation. The committee requested that the discussion be passed on to the Steering Committee.

Lawson noted that the low score on the feasibility goal is what ultimately disqualifies the high performance system. The committee asked that the low score be reflected in the description.

Goal 7: Lawson explained that the proposed system would help protect future corridors. Ross Montgomery asked how the bus-only system protects corridors. Robins said that the flexibility of the bus-only system allows the possibility of enhancing and protecting future guideway.

Robins explained that the comparison is an attempt to show how the proposed HCT system begins to satisfy the study goals but still demonstrates room for improvement.

Lawson summarized the points of revision: showing bus-only on the schedule reliability objective; explain the safety/security comparison; explain fare affordability; adjust the markers

on the vitality of business districts, neighborhood cohesiveness, air quality, noise, fundability, overall cost, and construction and operations. She also offered to show an example to help explain the rating scale. Doug Ballou suggested adding a brief paragraph to summarize what the comparison means and why the proposed system out-performs the others. The committee agreed with the proposed changes.

System discussion and recommendation

Mike Bomar asked whether there would be discussion of a priority corridor. Lookingbill said that the team wanted to avoid getting hung-up on a priority corridor selection at this point, as it seems to make more sense for C-TRAN to make that choice as the transit operator dealing with financial questions regarding their bus system. The committee's feedback will be passed on to C-TRAN, though it will not be a formal recommendation. Lawson clarified that recommendations on the system would go to the RTC board and recommendations on the priority corridor would go to C-TRAN. Both recommendations would go through the Steering Committee.

Ross Montgomery said that he was under the impression that the committee would be deciding between Scenario 5 and Scenario 6. Lookingbill said that the only difference was the incremental improvements on I-205 which were incorporated based on the committee feedback. Lawson reminded the group that they had requested preservation of future exclusive guideway and providing basic service within the corridor.

Lawson asked the committee whether it would recommend forwarding the proposed system to the Steering Committee to then be recommended to the RTC board. The committee agreed, though Mike Bomar urged that the recommendation also include discussion and possible consensus of whether Fourth Plain and Highway 99 should be recommended as priority corridors.

Eva Cobb asked why Mike Bomar preferred Highway 99 and Fourth Plain. Bomar noted that existing Highway 99 revitalization efforts and housing densities are appropriate and would benefit from HCT. He also noted Fourth Plain's existing development plan. He suggested that a case could be argued for either corridor as a good starting point.

Gail Bauhs confirmed that a priority corridor recommendation would be subject to further analysis of alignment options and modes. Lookingbill confirmed that federal guidelines will require revisiting potential corridors. This will not be a final decision on a representative alignment or mode as there is not enough information yet to be definitive.

Lora Caine asked about phasing options. Lookingbill said that phasing would be a C-TRAN decision and would be based on implementing logical phases of a transit system.

David Rowe noted that the preservation of the Chelatchie Prairie corridor should also consider protection from Battle Ground to Portland for future needs. Lawson said that it would not be appropriate to introduce new wording at this point without discussion from the group. Lookingbill said that the extension to Portland has not been studied and cannot be reflected in the system map, though it is a piece of the study process. He offered to identify the committee's

concerns to the Steering Committee. Lawson noted that the Chelatchie Prairie corridor is identified as a long-term possibility.

Priority Corridor guidance

Lawson noted the corridor comparison sheet. Robins summarized the features of each corridor and noted that Jack Gonsalves had recommended looking for the most implementable and successful corridors.

Bob Byrd asked about cost/benefit analysis of the corridors. Robins reminded the group of the previous cost and ridership analysis.

Lora Caine noted that Mill Plain appeared to be a neutral option, but suggested that it doesn't feel like a priority. Robins agreed that the corridor would be less visible and would have less of an impact on the overall system. Lookingbill suggested that the selection should not be based on the sum of the ratings, but a discussion of transit goals and policy.

Todd Horenstein asked why ridership on Highway 99 was rated as "moderate." Robins noted that the ridership is not the highest and Fourth Plain performs better. He noted that the ridership could change with the new land use plan but the effect of those changes are currently unknown.

Lawson asked the group to indicate their preference for the corridors by using red, yellow, and green cards. The results were as follows:

- **Mill Plain:** All red (no), with two yellows.
- **I-205:** All red (no), with two yellows.
- **Fourth Plain:** All green (yes).
- **Highway 99:** All green (yes), with two yellows.

Lawson asked whether the group strongly preferred Fourth Plain over Highway 99. The group expressed slightly more support for Fourth Plain. Todd Horenstein suggested that the ultimate decision should be based on further evaluation. Lora Caine noted potential changes in redeveloping areas that could favor one corridor or another. Robins agreed that either corridor could evolve into a better candidate.

Lookingbill said that the committee discussion and recommendation of the proposed system plan would be taken to the Steering Committee along with an expression of general support for Highway 99 and Fourth plain as priority corridors.

Next Steps

The Steering Committee will meet at 4 p.m. on Oct. 30 at WSDOT.

Thanks to the committee

Lawson and the study team thanked the committee for their participation in the study process.

Close