

Exploring the Role of Regional Transportation Projects as Rural Economy Drivers



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Center for Transportation Advancement and Regional Development with support from the Federal Highway Administration

Public transportation contributes to economic growth in rural areas and has the potential to create jobs, stimulate development and redevelopment, increase business revenues and profits, reduce personal transportation costs, increase value and income for property owners, and benefit local and state tax revenues. As residents and business owners pursue these and other benefits, the demand for coordinated public transportation planning and operations in rural areas grows. Regional development organizations (RDOs), transit agencies, counties, municipalities and others are looking for creative ways to meet this growing demand.

Some RDOs conduct transportation planning through their rural transportation planning organizations (RPOs) and also operate regional rural transit service. In addition to planning for public transit, RPOs may also complete Coordinated Human Service Transportation Plans or have a mobility management position on their staff. Transit officials often participate on RPOs' and small MPOs' transportation policy or technical committees, helping to make decisions about multimodal regional transportation priorities.

Rural, suburban and urban communities recognize that transportation systems and economic challenges do not heed jurisdictional boundaries. The interdependence of these communities necessitates a comprehensive, collaborative problem-solving approach. RDOs and other stakeholders must partner to address regional transportation concerns; they cannot do it alone.

The following case studies explore three transportation-led economic development projects in Vermont, Alabama and Oregon. In each example, the RDO plays a different, vital role as facilitator, operator, administrator, funder, and/or staff support. These case studies provide examples of ways in which RDOs are uniquely positioned to carry out regional transportation projects that improve access to jobs and opportunities and spur regional economic growth.

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The term regional development organization (RDO) is used to describe the national network of multi-jurisdictional planning and development organizations that provide administrative, professional and technical assistance to more than 2,000 counties and 15,000 municipalities across the nation. These public entities are often known locally as: councils of government, area development districts, economic development districts, planning and development districts, planning and development commissions, regional development commissions, regional planning commissions and regional councils.

The role of RDOs in transportation planning has changed over time. Historically, planning and prioritization of transportation projects was the sole responsibility of state departments of transportation (DOTs). The passage of federal transportation legislation in the 1990s, however, set the stage for enhancing the participation of rural local officials in statewide transportation planning. Unlike metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), whose responsibilities and funding have been set in federal law since the 1960s, there is no federal definition or specific funding streams for rural transportation planning organizations (RPOs). However, states are increasingly turning to RPOs to assist with conducting outreach to rural local officials and the public and to conduct regional-level planning. In 2011, the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) Research Foundation conducted a national scan of RDOs to determine their level of involvement in rural transportation planning. Of the 217 RDOs in 42 states who responded, 83 percent of RDOs (181 organizations) in 30 states have rural transportation planning responsibilities to act as an RPO or similar entity. This recent NADO Research Foundation research also found that 52 percent of RPOs conduct public transportation planning and 55 percent complete coordinated human services transportation planning as part of their work programs, and far more consider transit as part of their regional decisionmaking process.

Vermont

Brattleboro:

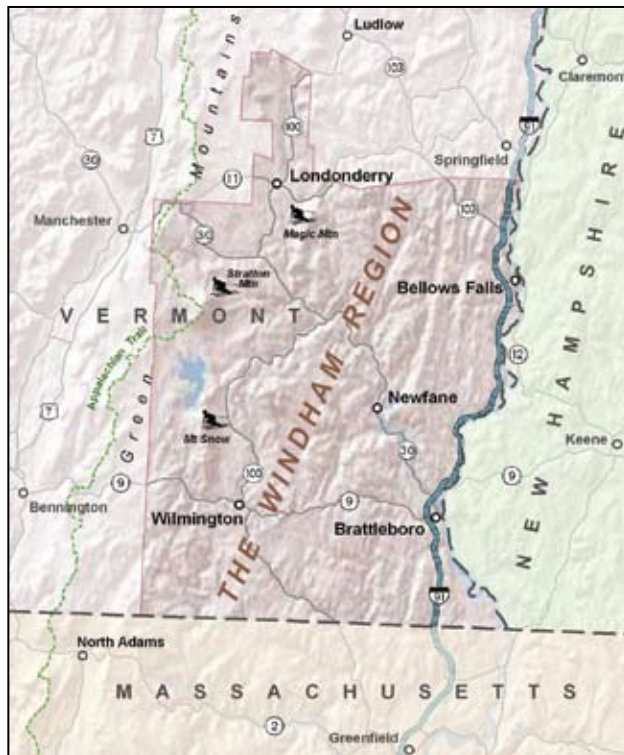
Intermodal Facility Sparks Revitalization

The Town of Brattleboro, Vermont and the Windham Regional Commission joined forces, combining projects and funding sources, and together embarked on a two-pronged initiative to help revitalize a small New England downtown. The project included the construction of a passenger intermodal transportation hub and improvements to the town's Amtrak station, Union Station. The Transportation Center, which opened in late 2003, has increased the accessibility of and coordination between transportation modes and improved overall service while increasing the vitality of downtown Brattleboro. Further progress is expected upon the completion of improvements to Union Station, which are currently underway.

Brattleboro is located in southeastern Vermont along the Connecticut River, across from New Hampshire. Approximately 12,000 people live in Brattleboro, and nearly 45,000 live in the region. The Windham Regional Commission (WRC) is an association of 27 towns in southeastern Vermont, including Brattleboro, and is one of the state's 11 regional planning commissions. WRC's activities include providing technical assistance to local jurisdictions, conducting regional planning studies and managing regional and municipal projects.

The four-story, 120,000-square-foot Transportation Center features over 300 parking spaces, bicycle racks, a lobby and passenger waiting area, public restrooms, a parking enforcement office and street-level commercial space. The new transit hub is served by local and regional buses. Union Station is located nearby.

The construction of the Transportation Center and improvements to Union Station address separate transportation needs in one consolidated effort. Brattleboro has consistently faced a downtown parking shortage as a result of the scarcity of land for surface parking. A 1998 study reported general dissatisfaction with the availability of public parking, found that parking availability was a factor in the decision to come downtown, and concluded that the town needed to expand its parking inventory. Around the



Transportation Center

photo credit: DEW Construction Corporation



photo courtesy of WRC



Transportation Center

same time, Brattleboro and WRC were involved with efforts for improvements to Union Station, a stop on Amtrak's Vermonter route, with funds from the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration (FTA). When additional federal funds became available, the two projects were joined. The Town of Brattleboro led the Transportation Center project, which was completed in 2003. WRC is the Project Manager for the Union Station improvements, which are currently in progress.

Funding for the projects totaled \$9.6 million and originated from federal, state and local sources.

Funding included:

- \$4 million from a local bond
- \$3.5 million from FTA
- \$1 million from the Vermont Downtown Program (\$100,000 each year for 10 years)
- \$800,000 from the Town of Brattleboro parking fund
- \$316,000 in Vermont Agency of Transportation enhancement funds

In addition, WRC has received \$1.35 million since 2000 from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Brownfields Assessment Grant program. WRC utilized some of this funding to conduct environmental site assessments on both the Transportation Center and Union Station project sites. WRC's ability to conduct assessments on these two sites was a crucial first step to their redevelopment. In addition to their brownfields expertise, WRC also provides local

governments with guidance and assistance as they develop their town plans.

The construction of the Transportation Center and improvements at Union Station are elements of a broader effort to revitalize downtown Brattleboro. WRC Associate Director Susan McMahon notes that the Transportation Center project—located along Flat Street just two blocks west of Main Street—“makes that part of town healthier and more vibrant.” Before, says Brattleboro Town Manager Barbara Sondag, “Downtown used to just stop.” Now, the ready supply of parking and two popular retail tenants located in the Transportation Center, Experienced Goods, the Brattleboro Hospice thrift store, and Dottie's, the Brattleboro Food Co-op discount store, draw activity down the street. “The Transportation Center has expanded the downtown feel,” says Sondag.

Since the Transportation Center opened in late 2003, downtown Brattleboro is seeing new signs of life: the Flat Street Brew Pub opened in fall 2005, the New England Youth Theatre, located on the future site of the Brattleboro Arts Campus, opened in early 2007, and renovations to the historic Latchis Hotel and Theatre are ongoing. A mixed-use retail and multi-family residential project is also planned nearby. Without the bus connections and parking provided by the Transportation Center, “We would have seen a different project,” says Sondag, and likely without a residential component.

The new Transportation Center has also improved the quality of transportation services. Three bus lines



photo credit: Andrew Riedl, flickr user photoman82

Union Station platform today

currently service the facility: the Connecticut River Transit Association's (CRT) "The Current" provides on-demand, local, commuter and regional services in Windham, Windsor and Rutland Counties; the Brattleboro "Beeline" (operated by CRT) provides local service in Brattleboro; and the Deerfield Valley Transit Association's (DVTA) "The Moover" provides on-demand, local, seasonal and regional services in Windham and Bennington Counties. Now that there is a transportation hub, says WRC Senior Planner Matt Mann, providers are able to meet and coordinate. It is not uncommon, for example, for bus drivers to synchronize schedules or hold buses for passengers transferring between lines. According to Sondag, the Transportation Center has resulted in "much more convenient systems for users."

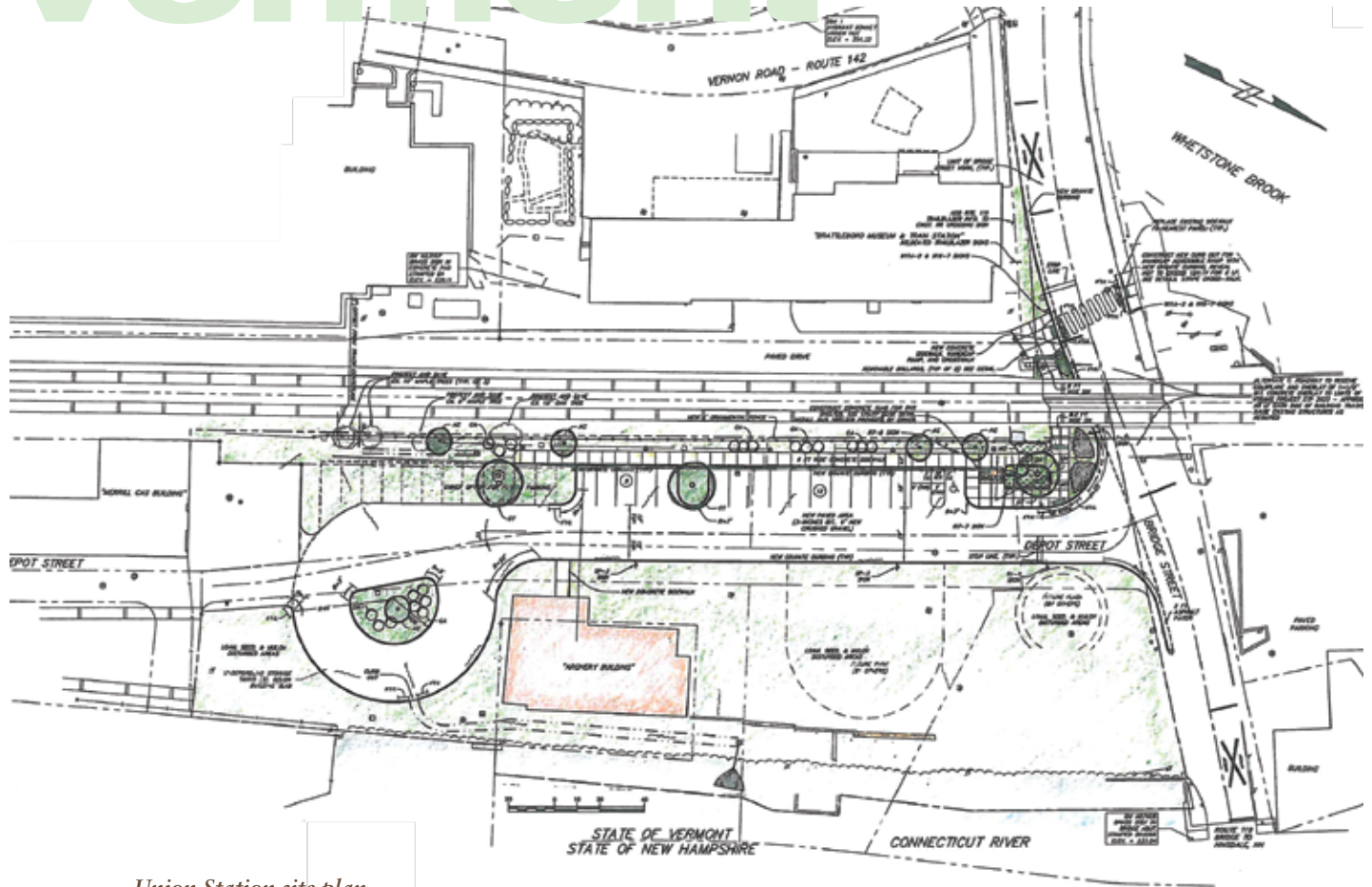
Bob "Woody" Woodworth is a downtown business and building owner and was the chair of the Brattleboro Parking Committee at the time of construction of the Transportation Center. According to Woodworth, additional parking capacity was "sorely needed at the time when [the Transportation Center] was constructed." The Transportation Center replaced an existing surface parking lot and resulted in a net gain of about 250 parking spaces (downtown Brattleboro now has approximately 950 off-street parking spaces total). The new facility provides covered, long-term parking for commuters, residents and employees, and frees up short-term parking for shoppers. As a result, says Woodworth, there are few empty storefronts downtown, the number of downtown residents has increased and there is improved access for residents and visitors, including as pedestrians once they ride to

or park at the Transportation Center. Overall, he says, "There is much less of a perception that you can't come downtown because there is no place to park." Sondag agrees: the garage is "highly utilized," and the ready availability of parking downtown is a "boon for businesses."

Now that the Transportation Center is complete, plans for improving Union Station have commenced. Planned work originally included alterations to the station's building (façade and interior alterations to a small waiting area for Amtrak passengers) and improvements to the parking lot, passenger drop-off area and pedestrian movements across the tracks. However, the scope of the project changed because planned work would have triggered cost-prohibitive improvements to bring the platform into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Instead, improvements were scaled down and will now focus on intermodal connectivity and delineating between different areas of the station to improve safety and pedestrian and vehicular circulation. Improvements to the parking lot, pedestrian facilities, passenger drop-off area, bus stop and bus turn-around are expected to be completed by fall 2011. This will be another phase in the overall Union Station project. Continuing to improve the train station is of regional and town importance, says Mann.

In addition to increasing patron safety and improving on-site circulation, Union Station improvements will better integrate the station into the fabric of downtown Brattleboro and promote intermodal connectivity. According to Sondag, Union Station is currently

Vermont



Union Station site plan

courtesy of WRC

physically and visually separated from downtown Brattleboro. Planned improvements will “enhance the connection” between the two, and “incorporate the train station into downtown.” Together, says Sondag, “the convergence of separate but related projects”—the construction of the Transportation Center, improvements to Union Station, and rail improvements (pending Federal funding)—have the potential to “solidify Brattleboro as a transportation hub.”

Although individuals involved with the project stop short of attributing the revival of Brattleboro’s downtown solely to the Transportation Center, they agree that it was a crucial piece of the overall puzzle. McMahon offers the following advice for RDOs who are considering pursuing projects like the Transportation Center: While spin-off development like they’ve seen in Brattleboro is certainly welcome, an intentional, comprehensive and coordinated revitalization effort is ideal.

Sondag states that cities and towns should employ the assistance of their regional planning commissions and the valuable resources they bring to the table. “Regional commissions have expertise and knowledge that most cities or towns do not have,” she says. Brattleboro relied on WRC’s transportation and brownfields experience. “We wouldn’t have a Transportation Center if it weren’t for them.”

Alabama

South Alabama:

Overcoming Barriers

When it made its first run in November 2007, Baylinec was the first multi-county regional public transportation effort in southern Alabama. The commuter bus service, which has steadily grown in popularity, connects rural residents with job opportunities in the City of Mobile while relieving congestion and reducing vehicle emissions. In August 2008, Main Street Mobile awarded Baylinec the Downtown Innovation Award for “visionary efforts to tie two counties together with public transportation that is fun and reliable and for not relenting even when it really does take an act of Congress to make significant changes.”

Baylinec runs two routes daily (Monday through Friday) across Mobile Bay, including two runs into Mobile in the morning and two runs back across the bay in the evening. Trips originate at multiple stops in Baldwin County and terminate at Bienville Square, an activity hub in downtown Mobile. Connections to The Wave Transit System, Mobile’s local bus service, are accessible close to the Bienville Square stop.

Baylinec is operated by the Baldwin Rural Area Transportation System (BRATS). Baldwin County, located on the eastern shore of Mobile Bay along the Alabama Gulf Coast, is one of the top three fastest growing counties in Alabama. Since 1990, the population has grown over 85 percent to 182,265 in 2010, and is projected to increase an additional 70 percent by 2025.

As the population of Baldwin County has grown, so has the number of residents commuting to Mobile. According to Taylor Rider, Director of Transportation at BRATS, many of Baldwin County’s new residents commute to work in Mobile. In 2003, for example, nearly 25 percent of Baldwin County’s labor force commuted to Mobile County.

The South Alabama Regional Planning Commission (SARPC) estimates that approximately 20,000 commuters cross Mobile Bay per day. SARPC provides technical assistance to Mobile, Baldwin, and Escambia Counties and 26 municipalities in southwestern Alabama, and facilitates regional communication,



Baylinec Route 1 Map



Tyrone Parker, The Wave, and Taylor Rider, BRATS

courtesy of BRATS

photo courtesy of BRATS

planning, policymaking, coordination and advocacy. SARPC's Transportation Planning Department provides administrative support and conducts planning activities for the Mobile Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and for rural areas of the region through the SARPC Rural Planning Organization (RPO).

Baldwin County began to consider commuter bus service to Mobile once presented with SARPC's regional transportation statistics, and to realize the importance of coordinating efforts with its neighbor across the bay. The primary purpose of Baylinc is to aid in workforce development by facilitating connections to jobs on both sides of the bay; however, riders also use Baylinc for other purposes, including shopping and medical appointments.

SARPC was instrumental in facilitating Baylinc service by bringing together all stakeholders—BRATS, The Wave, Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT), FTA, Envision Coastal Alabama, federal, state, and elected officials, chambers of commerce, community leaders and others. SARPC's primary role, according to Tom Piper, Senior Transportation Planner at SARPC, was "to get everyone together and start hashing things out." In addition, SARPC helped coordinate funding for the new service.

Baylinc began operating in November 2007, and ridership expanded quickly. In December 2007, 394 passenger trips were recorded; by May 2008, ridership increased to nearly 1,000 passenger trips. Current ridership averages between 1,500 and 1,800 passenger trips per month.

Baylinc benefits individuals, the community and the environment. At a cost of \$1.50 to \$3.00 each way, riders save on gas and Mobile parking fees, while gaining leisure time. For example, instead of driving, Baylinc riders can spend commuting time reading or working. In addition, when commuters ride Baylinc instead of drive, there are fewer cars on the road, which relieves congestion and reduces vehicle emissions. According to Piper, Baylinc "has reduced work-related trips across the Bay."

Baylinc does not directly receive funding from the federal or state government. BRATS receives funding

from FTA's Section 5311 program (Formula Grants for Other than Urbanized Areas), the U.S. Department of Transportation's formula-based funding mechanism for supporting transit in rural areas with populations of less than 50,000. However, according to Rider, 5311 funds are a "non-factor" with respect to Baylinc. Before starting the service, BRATS ensured that there was adequate demand for the service to cover related costs. According to Rider, Baylinc "pays for itself."

The source of federal transit funding for The Wave and BRATS proved to be a major hurdle in planning Baylinc. In contrast to Baldwin County's BRATS, which receives Section 5311 funding, federal funding for Mobile's The Wave stems from FTA's Section 5307 program (Urbanized Area Formula Program). Section 5307 funding supports transit in urban areas with populations over 50,000. So long as BRATS buses stay in Baldwin County and The Wave buses stay in Mobile, there is no cause for concern; however, when rural and urban transit systems cross jurisdictional boundaries, they enter unknown territory.

During the Baylinc planning process, stakeholders disagreed concerning the permissibility of connecting rural and urban transit services. ALDOT hesitated to grant permission for the project. According to Piper, it is a "common misconception that rural services cannot come into urban areas." In order for the project to proceed, stakeholders had to convince ALDOT that the introduction of Baylinc would not create competition between BRATS and The Wave or result in the duplication of services. Important issues negotiated during the process related to the origin of Baylinc trips and the number of stops in Mobile. Ultimately, it was agreed that all Baylinc trips would originate in Baldwin County, and that Baylinc would stop at a single drop-off point in downtown Mobile, instead of the two requested. To a lesser degree, another challenge in the planning process involved coordinating BRATS and The Wave schedules and routes to ensure convenient connections.

The Baylinc project offers lessons for other organizations pursuing regional transit projects. A crucial first step is to enable cooperation between stakeholders. Baylinc stakeholders had been independently talking about a commuter bus service into Mobile for years,



System kickoff with representatives from BRATS and The Wave

photo courtesy of BRATS

but the idea wasn't going anywhere. "We got all players at the table and thought it out," says Piper. "Once we did that, it happened."

Second, local officials should stay informed. Rider stresses that it is important to continually consult with government leaders and transit providers from adjacent jurisdictions. Local officials who remain active will be familiar with local initiatives and issues of regional significance, and will have established relationships that may help facilitate future partnerships or projects.

Finally, Bayline illustrates the power of perseverance. Despite being told repeatedly by ALDOT that rural-urban bus service was impossible, Baldwin County, SARPC, and other partners continued to pursue the project. Both Rider and Piper agree that the most important advice they have to offer to other organizations pursuing regional transit projects is, "Don't give up!"

Bayline service has spurred additional regional transportation projects. In March 2010, the statewide CommuteSmart initiative, which is administered by SARPC in the Mobile area, started the Emergency Ride Home (ERH) program. ERH takes the "fear" out of public transportation by providing up to three

emergency rides home per year in the event of personal or family emergencies or unscheduled overtime. According to Rider, the ERH program is funded primarily by the FTA's Section 5316 Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC) program.

Future projects either currently under exploration or consideration include a ferry service between Mobile and the Eastern Shore, the restoration of a commuter train service into Mobile that had been destroyed by Hurricane Katrina and the mobilization of regional commuter bus service between Baldwin County and the City of Pensacola, Florida.

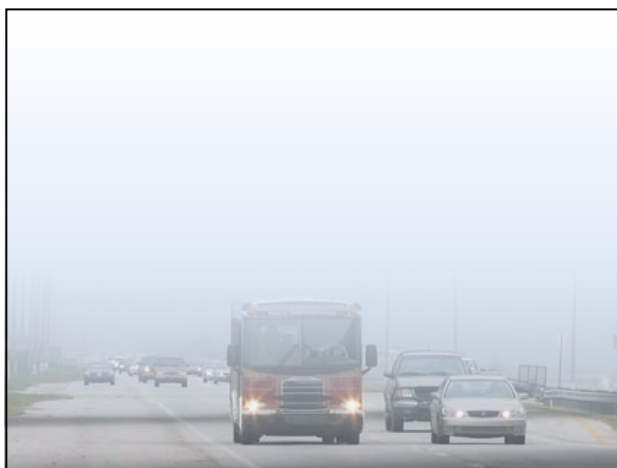


photo courtesy of BRATS

BRATS bus under operation

Oregon

Central Oregon: Connecting Communities

In the span of just a few years, the Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council (COIC), with the support of a host of regional partners, opened a ride brokerage call center, prepared a coordinated regional public transportation plan, designed a bus system, built an intermodal transit hub, and now operates local and regional bus service providing nearly 200,000 rides per year. Over 50 percent of trips are to work or are school-related, which contributes to the local economy and provides affordable, reliable transportation for employees, students and others throughout the region. These accomplishments are commendable even if performed by seasoned professionals. COIC, however—despite limited prior involvement in regional transportation issues—did it all, and made it look easy.

COIC is a council of governments serving three counties and eight cities in central Oregon. COIC manages regional transportation, employment and training, community and economic development and natural resource programs, and provides technical assistance to its membership. COIC serves a population of 201,000 in central Oregon, with 77,000 people residing in Bend, the region's largest city, and 26,000 people residing in the region's second largest city, Redmond.

COIC operates two public transportation systems in Central Oregon: Cascades East Transit (CET) and

Bend Area Transit (BAT). Cascades East Transit (CET) provides bus services for the region, including week-day, on-demand, curb-to-curb local service within communities, and scheduled weekday service between communities on eight point-to-point routes. BAT serves the City of Bend Monday through Saturday on seven fixed routes. Additionally, BAT's Dial-a-Ride program provides daily curb-to-curb local service for the disabled community and low-income older adults not living near a BAT route. CET and BAT merged in the spring of 2011 under the name CET. The merger allows for "seamless" travel between cities in central Oregon and within Bend, more efficient operations and lower costs for the city.

CET began operating on-demand local services in Bend, LaPine, Madras, Prineville, Redmond and Sisters in January 2008. Initially, the new system served low-income, older adult and disabled riders before expanded service for the general public started in July 2008. Finally, CET began operating inter-city shuttles between eight communities in Central Oregon. CET strategically designed intercity service to be on-demand in the beginning. Once enough data was available, CET established fixed schedules based on demand.

Between January 2008 and March 2011, CET provided almost 440,000 rides. Total annual ridership in 2010 represented a 207 percent increase over the 2008 level. CET's fleet has grown from nine to 23 buses to accommodate the system's rapid expansion.



COIC region map

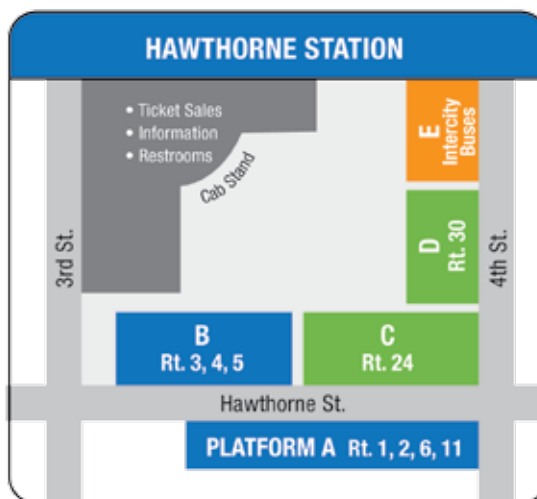
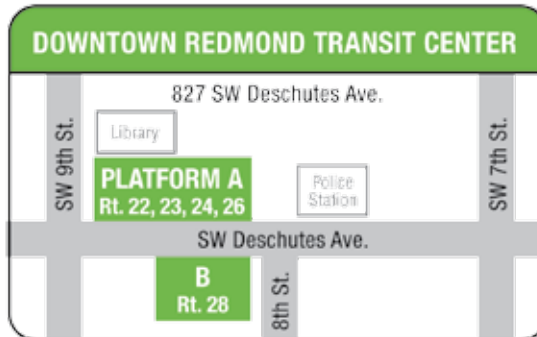
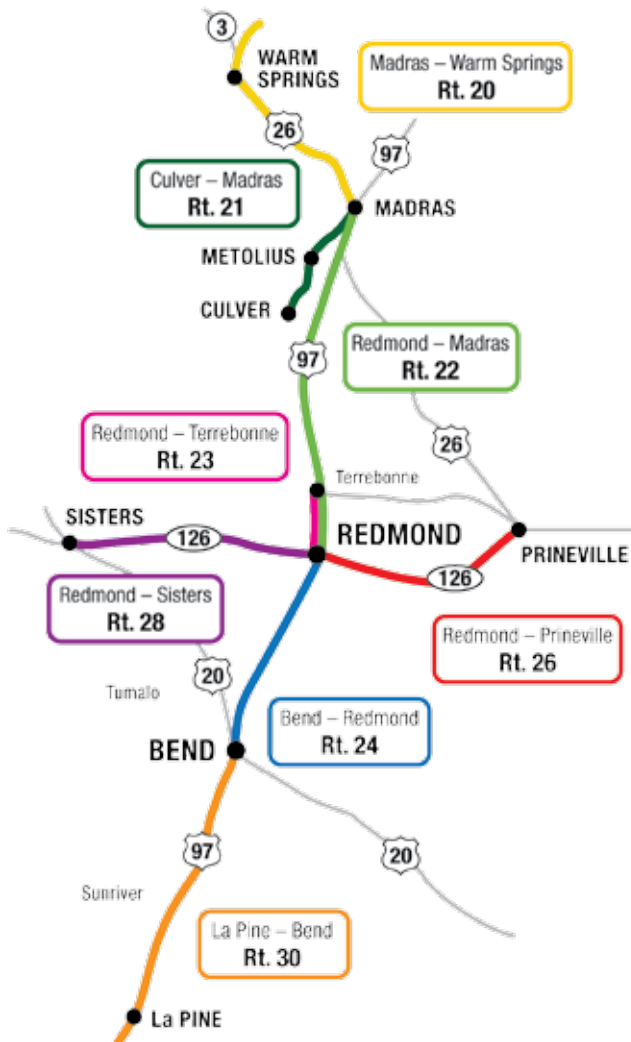
CET Ridership January 2008 – March 2011

Year	Ridership
2008	63,380
2009	127,903
2010	194,592
2011	53,589 (1st Quarter)
TOTAL	439,464

Source: Ridership data January 2008 through March 2011, COIC.



cascades east transit REGIONAL SYSTEM MAP



CET system map

Currently, approximately 31 percent of CET ridership is between communities, and the remainder of rides (69 percent) occurs within communities. Although CET ridership generally is increasing, regional ridership is growing at twice the rate of local rides, in part due to an expansion of intercity service to meet unmet demand. In February 2011, for example, ridership within communities grew 61 percent from the previous year, while ridership between communities grew 127 percent.

The system's ridership is also changing from a transit-dependent population (low-income, older adult and disabled customers) to a population that chooses public transit over other available transportation options. CET provides affordable transportation options to students, workers and others in the region, helping boost the local economy. As evidence, the purpose of trips has changed dramatically over time. When CET first began operations, a mere 15 percent of rides were to work or school; today, they represent 50 percent of CET rides.



courtesy of COIC

Redmond ribbon cutting

Serving the general public, including workers and students, was not necessarily part of the original plan. As part of its low-income health plan, the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) assists clients with transportation to and from medical appointments. Many clients covered by the plan were traveling outside of their local communities to access health care providers. In an effort to minimize costs, DHS mandated that all such medical rides be provided through competitive regional brokerages to match client needs with affordable, appropriate transportation. COIC opened a call center providing brokerage services for the region in the mid-2000s.

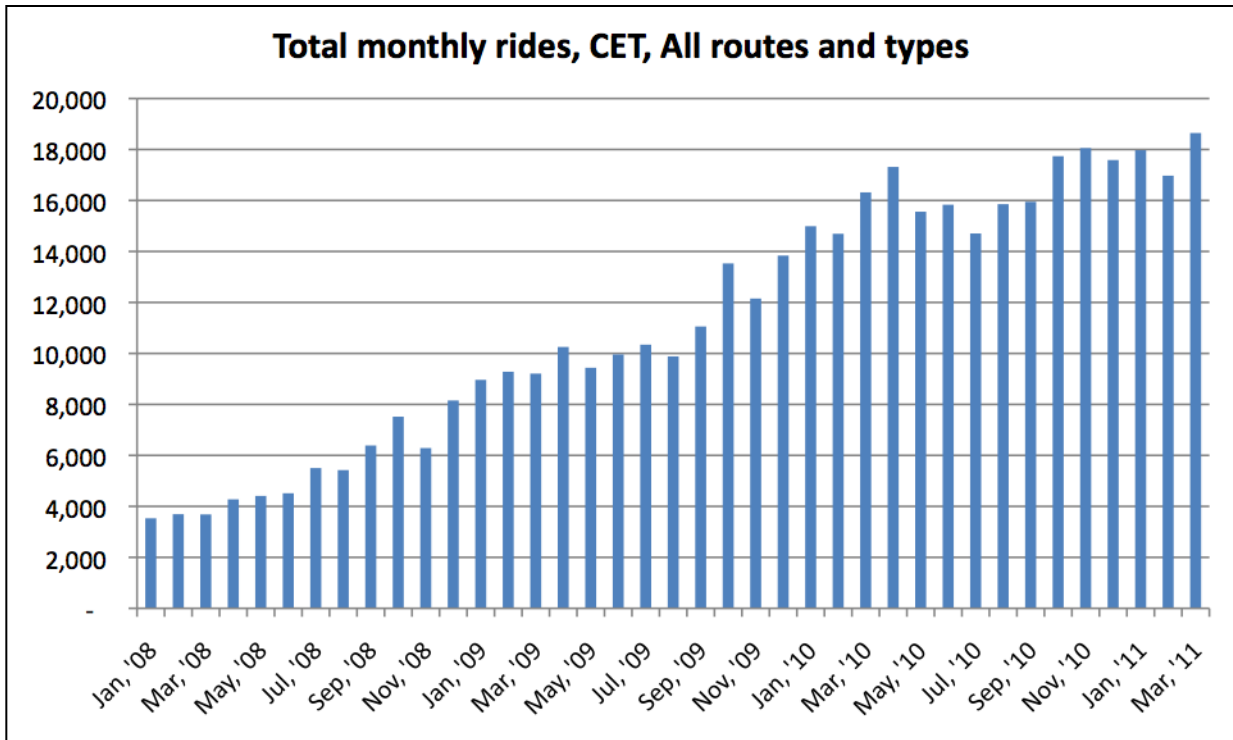
Around the same time, employers in Central Oregon pushed for more reliable and affordable transportation options for their employees, and the state called on DHS and the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) to better coordinate social services and transit funds. ODOT subsequently contracted with COIC to develop coordinated human services public transportation plans for the region. At the time, however, no organization in Central Oregon seemed up to the task of taking on regional public transportation operations. COIC, which was now operating the call center and workforce programs in communities throughout the region, stepped up to the plate, and plans for CET followed.

Funding for CET is derived from a number of different sources. COIC aimed to support CET equally through funding from the federal government (1/3),

local government (1/3) and private business (1/3). However, due to the state of the economy, the business community contribution has been much less than expected. CET is currently funded by FTA (through ODOT), ODOT, DHS, the Central Oregon Council on Aging (COCOA) and other nonprofit providers of transportation services for the elderly and/or disabled, local governments and earned income from fares and advertising.

Throughout the process of establishing and operating CET, COCOA has been a key partner. According to Scott Aycock, COIC Transportation Planner, many social service organizations believe that they are uniquely equipped to deliver services to the elderly, disabled and low-income populations, often leading to tensions between social service and transit providers when public transportation is the service to be provided. In this instance, says Aycock, COCOA “handed funding over to COIC with the hope that COIC would match [it] with transit and local funds. It was a big risk on their part, but they provided early leadership.” Other organizations followed suit.

COCOA also helped COIC secure support for CET from the community. Aycock says that some of the smaller communities were not comfortable taking on the role of helping to provide public transportation, asserting that local governments are not in the business of providing social services. COCOA and the other “early adopter” social service agencies stepped up to advocate for CET—at one point the Opportu-



Change in CET ridership over time

nity Foundation brought disabled clients to speak at public meetings in support of public transportation. According to Aycock, this strategy—making the issue personal and emotional—ultimately gained the support of small communities in the region.

Moving forward, COIC hopes to establish new partnerships with the business community. Central Oregon is home to many resort communities providing skiing, snowboarding, golf and other recreational activities. These resorts draw residents, visitors and tourists and have huge staffs, providing many jobs in the region. COIC is exploring opportunities to partner with resorts to improve access for residents, visitors and tourists and also to provide affordable transportation options for resort employees.

Integral to the efficient functioning of CET was the construction of a regional intermodal transit center in Bend. Bend was served by inter-regional (coach) buses prior to the construction of the facility, but the city lacked a place where travelers could transfer between inter-regional, intra-regional, or local bus systems. In 2008, Bend received a \$2.8 million ConnectOregon II grant to develop a regional intermodal transit center. ConnectOregon is a statewide program, ad-

ministered by ODOT, which invests in transportation infrastructure. ConnectOregon focuses on improving connections between modes to strengthen, diversify and improve the efficiency of Oregon's transportation system. When Bend was unable to provide the grant's required 20 percent match, the city entered into discussions with COIC. In February 2009, the two parties arrived at an agreement for the grant to be transferred from Bend to COIC which then secured a loan to cover the required match.

The intermodal transit center, known as Hawthorne Station, opened in April 2011. It is located in the remodeled Cascade Natural Gas building on 3rd Street, the central boulevard in Bend. Hawthorne Station serves as a hub for CET's eight intra-regional shuttles, local BAT buses and a handful of inter-regional providers. The facility provides transportation information, restrooms and a waiting area. The project vision includes future bicycle and pedestrian connections. Recent data indicates that CET ridership continues to climb and that the demand for public transportation in Central Oregon remains strong. Although past attempts to establish a voter-approved transit district in Bend have failed, Aycock believes that eventually, Central Oregon will have a region-wide transit



photo credit: Anna Lucey

Intermodal Transit Center in Bend

district, such that the bus systems will be operated by a separate entity with its own elected board. In the meantime, COIC will continue to operate CET, explore new partnership opportunities, and seek out ways to better serve the region's residents and employees.

Three years ago, local and regional public transportation options were unavailable to Central Oregonians. Today, CET provides almost 18,000 rides per month. Building a successful public transit system did not come about without some sweat and tears. COIC learned valuable lessons which may be helpful to other regional planning commissions embarking on similar projects.

On building support: Create a story of the problem and have data available to demonstrate a need for the proposed service. Says Aycock, when you're working with small, rural communities, organizations must "talk to the personal nature of the needs" to ensure community buy-in. For example, the Opportunity Foundation enlisted the help of the disabled community at public meetings to gain support for CET.

On addressing turf wars: Employ the assistance of an outside entity to act as a neutral convener and facilitator. The facilitator should assist interested parties to identify the problem, develop solutions, and help sort through implementation responsibilities. "Most regional entities have no stick and precious little carrot," says Aycock. In Oregon, Oregon Solutions, a state agency, arbitrates and provides a neutral environment for solving regional problems. The involvement of the neutral entity, says Aycock, was "really critical" and "took the pressure off of us."

On designing services: Have realistic expectations about what services you can provide given the resources available. For example, according to Aycock, income from fares is unlikely to cover costs, and rural regions simply do not have the density to support some types of transit systems, such as light rail. "You cannot get the Cadillac version to start... you will get the Pinto. But that Pinto can really help many people," says Aycock.

Conclusion

Regional transportation projects can—and do—improve access to jobs and opportunities and contribute to local economic growth. These case studies demonstrate successful partnerships between RDOs and local governments in transportation-led economic development projects. RDOs can convene key players and bring staff, data, financial resources and specialized skills to the table. They can supply regional transportation data or operate a regional bus service, and everything in between. Regional challenges require regional, collaborative solutions. Local jurisdictions, regional planning commissions and state partners must work together to combine resources in order to best solve regional problems.

Vermont
Alabama
Oregon

For more information about the regional development organizations profiled here, visit the following websites:

Alabama

South Alabama Regional Planning Commission
www.sarpc.org

Oregon

Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council
www.coic.org

Vermont

Windham Regional Commission
www.windhamregional.org

Special thanks to the following for participating in interviews:

Alabama

Baldwin Rural Area Transportation System

- B. Taylor Rider, Director of Transportation

South Alabama Regional Transportation Commission

- Tom Piper, Senior Transportation Planner

Oregon

Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council

- Scott Aycock, Transportation Planner

Vermont

Burrows Specialized Sports

- Bob “Woody” Woodworth, Owner

Town of Brattleboro, VT

- Barbara Sondag, Town Manager

Windham Regional Commission

- Matt Mann, Senior Planner – Transportation

- Susan McMahon, Associate Director



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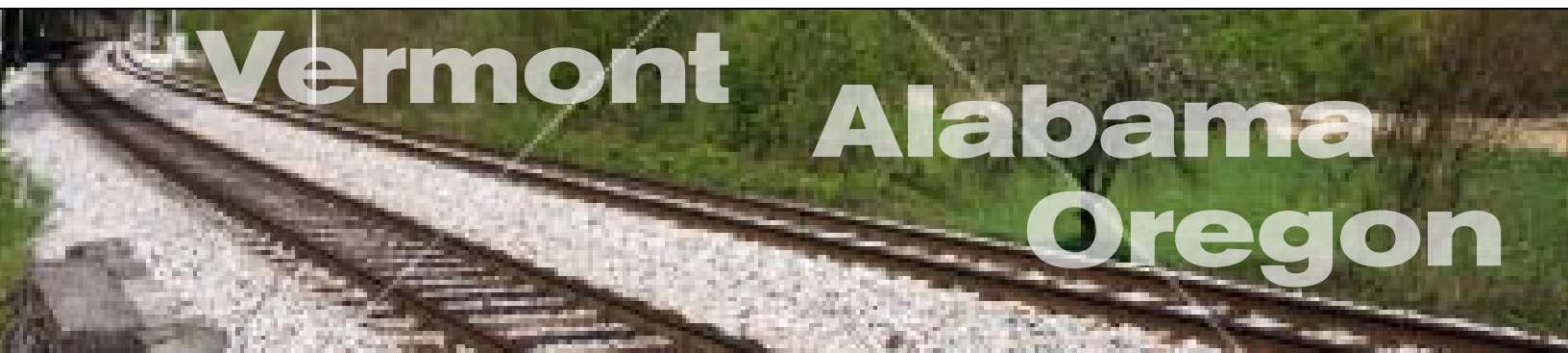
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About the NADO Research Foundation

Founded in 1988, the NADO Research Foundation is the nonprofit research affiliate of the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO). The NADO Research Foundation identifies, studies and promotes regional solutions and approaches to improving local prosperity and services through the nationwide network of regional development organizations. The Research Foundation shares best practices and offers professional development training, analyzes the impact of federal policies and programs on regional development organizations and examines the latest developments and trends in small metropolitan and rural America. Most importantly, the Research Foundation is helping bridge the communications gap among practitioners, researchers and policy makers.

This report was researched and written by NADO Research Foundation Graduate Fellow Claire Gron, with guidance from Deputy Executive Director Laurie Thompson, Senior Program Manager Carrie Kissel and Program Manager Kathy Nothstine.

We thank all the individuals who provided information and photographs and those who consented to be interviewed.

This material is based upon work supported by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) under Agreement No. DTFH61-06-H-00029. Any opinions, findings and conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of FHWA or the NADO Research Foundation.
