Union County Public Transit Advisory Council

A G E N D A

- Call to Order / Roll Call
- Consent Agenda
  - Minutes from 07-16-2014
  - Board / Council Report
  - Staff Advisory Memos
  - Applications for Membership
- Consider Applications for Membership
- Consider FY 2015 Meeting Schedule
- Update on AMP and Coordinated Plan
- Staff Reports
  - Manager’s Report
  - Alternative Modes Report
- Old Business
- New Business
- Adjournment

August 20, 2014
3:00 PM
La Grande, OR
Union County Public Transit
Advisory Council
Minutes for July 16, 2014

Voting Members in Attendance: Daniel Bullock, Nora Croucher, Yvonne Hill, Manny Elguera, Terry De Spain
Voting Members Absent: Saira Siddiqui, Joe Kresse
Non Voting Staff Members in Attendance: Margaret Davidson, Frank Thomas
Non Voting Guests Present: Six participants from the community of Elgin

Introductions and Call to Order:
The meeting was called to order by Chairman Bullock at 3:00 pm in the Conference Room at Northeast Oregon Public Transit in La Grande.

Consent Agenda:
There being no corrections to the items in the Consent Agenda, Terry moved to approve and Manny seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Entertain Local Input:
The council opened the agenda for local input. A member of the Elgin congregation asked how today’s meeting was advertised. Frank replied that it had been marketed very poorly. A staff member visited the community earlier in the week to promote our special routes to the Union County Fair. He promoted the Council meeting while he was at it. However, he reported that the Council’s By Laws require us to meet in every community we serve at least once per year. Staff’s goal is more ambitious than that – so this will not be the last bite at the apple. We’ll be back in a couple of months with much better promotions.

Frank asked the Elgin congregation what marketing channels would be most effective in the community. They indicated that posters at the Post Office and local banks worked well. They also said that the Food Bank makes distributions on Wednesdays and that leaflets in food boxes have a broad reach.

Frank passed out fliers and brochures advertising our services and those of the new Medicaid brokerage.

Consider Application for Membership from Linda Hayes:
Daniel motioned to approve Linda Hayes to the Council as a Member at Large representing Elgin. Yvonne seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Manager’s Report:
Frank reported that the new Medicaid broker we are working with is a huge improvement over Cascades East Ride Center. He said that their level of technology was a little frustrating – much like going a decade backwards. However, they genuinely want to serve medically frail people. Feeling like we have an honest to goodness partner in the business makes us willing to accommodate a lot. The technology will improve.
Frank reported on last month’s informal query of the perception of parking problems in downtown La Grande. He indicated that a completely non scientific group of willing participants from our Facebook following were largely unconcerned about parking downtown. Of our 16 respondents only 7 (44%) indicated that there is definitely or sometimes a downtown parking problem.

Frank reported that the agency has managed to preserve Greyhound. Our first day as an agent will be July 21st. The Regional Manager will be coming in to train staff.

Frank thanked the Council for their flexibility in scheduling that would allow him to attend the Transit Planning Training in Salem. He indicated that it was important to train sooner and in Salem rather than later and in Pendleton. He said it was important to speak the same language as everyone else so we can fine tune our plans but it is also important to learn with our more urban partners who have systems similar to ours. We just don’t have as much in common with our rural neighbors anymore.

Frank reported out on our SOLWest service. He said the numbers came in at about a third of what he was hoping for. The weather was really bad both days and it was our first year so no one really knew what to expect. The Governor greeted the driver and thanked him for our service. We also got a follow up visit from a local investor who may be very interested in helping us develop support infrastructure for electric vehicles. Sometimes the payoff for taking local risks comes in exposure to opportunity as well as passengers in seats.

Frank reported that staff is gearing up for Shrine and Fair week. He said it would be our busiest week of the year with many extra routes and opportunities to connect. He said that it will be our very first year experimenting with direct access for Union and Elgin. If it works he intends to pitch it to the underwriters every year.

Frank reported that Union County Public Transit was awarded the Coordinated Care Organization grant we applied for in the spring. Of the $100,000 proposal we have been granted $50,000 which means we will need to meet with the partners to prioritize services and delivery schemes. He’s pleased to be one of the only Transportation projects in the state that was selected.

Frank mentioned that the Regional Coordinated Plan – the most important plan in terms of guiding funding in Union, Baker and Wallowa Counties – is due for an update in September. Frank said staff is working a recode for [www.neotransit.org](http://www.neotransit.org) based on input received from the Marketing class at EOU. He said if all goes well you will be able to purchase bus passes online within 30 to 60 days.

Manny inquired about the new portion of route we’ve been experimenting with this summer that provides direct access to La Grande’s hotels. Frank indicated that it is going better than we expected. The one drawback that we didn’t see coming is having to make the left hand turn on to East R Avenue when traffic is heavy.

One of the participants from Elgin asked about the Elgin Stage departure times. Frank shared the rider guide and explained the schedule. Margaret reminded the participants that Elgin is also served by the Wallowa Link that comes through on Mondays and Thursdays. Daniel asked about the charge for the County Fair Route. Frank said that there would be no charge. The Fair Route, Trolley and the Union/Elgin Shuttle were all running free of charge this year.
Alternative Modes Report:
None this month. Staff member absent.

Old Business:
Daniel asked if staff had been able to connect with Laura Hancock from EOU to assist with transit promotions on campus. Frank indicated that we had not. Daniel asked to have the Shrine and Fair promotions emailed to him so he could forward them to Laura. Frank said he would do so this week. We learned this week that there is another football camp taking place on campus at the same time as the Shrine practices. He said that the Shrine kids have special VIP Passes but anyone is welcome to ride.

Terry indicated that the big dead tree on Fourth Street in La Grande (where the new bus shelter is being sighted) was removed.

New Business:
Frank recapped the electric vehicle infrastructure opportunity. He said that Union County is in the perfect geographic location because you have to pass a mountain range to leave (meaning whether you just came over, are getting ready to go over, or both – you need to charge). In terms of County location he said Transit is in the perfect spot. Less than 90 seconds from I-84 and linked to several modes. You can literally take a bus all around town while you are waiting for your car to charge. Frank said he is exploring capital grant opportunities and is looking forward to sharing what he finds with the Council. Consistent with our need to be able to better plan and promote our meetings (especially in the bedroom communities we serve) Daniel said that we need to formalize our meeting schedule. Frank agreed and committed to coming back to the Council with a full recommendation at the August meeting.

Set Next Meeting:
The next meeting was set for August 20th at 3:00 PM in the Main Conference Room at the Transit Center in La Grande.

Adjournment:
There being no further business to bring before the Council, Chairman Bullock adjourned the meeting at 3:44 pm.

Minutes Respectfully Prepared By,

Frank Thomas, Transit Manager

August 4, 2014

Minutes Accepted by:

Daniel Bullock, Chairman
**Summer Activities Projects:**
We wrapped up the official summer projects with mixed results…

- SOL West
  - 80 rides – disappointing results may have been largely weather driven

- Shrine Week
  - 613 rides (up 10% from last year’s record setting 557)

- Union County Fair
  - We partnered with the cub scouts and won a third place on our Fair Parade entry
  - 983 rides (a new record)
    - Up 17% from last year’s 837
    - Up 5% from FY’12’s record year of 938
  - A little over 20 rides delivered from experimental direct access shuttles serving Union and Elgin (not included in totals above)

- Union Grassroots Festival
  - 1 ride – that is not a typo, it was a very disappointing
    - This is the second year we’ve gotten skunked at Grassroots Fest
    - Again, we will not be billing the County for a portion of this partnership
  - Expensive lesson learned is that Grassroots Festival is not an event where transit can play a meaningful role

- Cove Cherry Festival
  - We withdrew from the Cherry Fair Event
    - A large component was built on routing through Union
    - After getting our head handed to us in Grassroots Fest it made sense to live and serve another day

- Highland Games
  - We provided 191 total trips over the weekend
    - 61 provided directly as a result of our Highland Games routes
  - We learned that Sunday service is not likely to be viable any time soon
A lot of what we tried to do with the summer activities projects this year was experimental (SOLWest, Elgin and Union routes to the UC Fair, Highland Games). With the exception of Grassroots Fest, we’ve got some positives to work with in terms of building next year’s Annual Operations Plan and Summer Activities proposal. As tempting as it may be, we can’t look at Highland Games and SOL West through the lens of our over developed expectations for the UC Fair and Shrine week. We’re sort of in on the ground floor with the event planners. There is likely room for all of us to grow. Maybe in a couple of years the events could be of roughly equal size from a transit perspective. Dare to dream, right?!?

**UW-M Training:**
I can’t thank the Council enough for being flexible with our July meeting date (allowing me to participate in this training in Salem). I thought it was important to take the class in Salem – rather than wait for the Pendleton session – because we have more in common with urban systems than our rural neighbors. It was definitely worth the trip, time and trouble. I got to have dinner with the instructor (Edward Beimborn) and a couple of friends in the business both evenings. I learned almost as much picking the brains of those who are actively engaged in growing their systems as I did from the coursework.

One of the lessons I got over dinner – and that will probably stick with me for the rest of my life – had to do with what we measure and why. During the workshop that day Ed has asked us to describe some of our Key Performance Indicators. When the discussion was over I was frankly a little surprised to find that I was responsible for most of the list. When I mentioned it that evening he asked which of our KPIs mattered most to our riders. Of course, it was a rhetorical question. The only metric most passengers care about is On Time Performance or maybe accident/incidents per 1,000 rides. They tend to care a lot more about things that we don’t (perhaps can’t) effectively measure like comfort and cleanliness of a bus, convenience of access and schedule and the perceived value of our established bus fare.

The most effective mobility systems try to optimize their passenger centered outcomes by converging services around the things that matter most to the rider. Sure, we all track performance indicators to make the case for continued support from our underwriters. However, the most reliable means of improving the performance that we measure is learning to think more like a passenger.

**Union County Fair:**
We had a really good run at the County Fair this year. As we mentioned in the front page bullet points, we won the third place ribbon for our entry in the Fair Parade. We reconnected with our friends from Cub Scout Pack 515 to hand out our literature, branded merchandise and candy. It was the first time in many years of participation that our entry was recognized and it was a TON of fun. Staff is looking forward to working with the Cub Scouts to continue this tradition in the future.
We delivered 1,724 rides during Shrine and Fair week this year. That was up a little over 7% from last year’s record of 1,614. Our experimental access to Elgin and Union generated 21 rides (19 of which came from Elgin – Union remains a tough nut to crack). Fortunately, having our Saturday service already in place in La Grande made this one of the most cost effective years in recent history.

There are three takeaway lessons from this year that revolve around a common theme:

1) We really have to improve our marketing.

2) High profile partnerships (County Commissioners, Shrine, Cub Scouts) add a lot of value to a poorly marketed service.

3) Persistence is rewarded. When people get used to seeing you in the same place and time every year, you become an integrated option. That said, stick-to-it-iveness (that really should be a word) is very hard work relative to an effective marketing strategy.

**Greyhound:**
I feel like I should confess that I had ZERO appreciation for how busy Greyhound would be. In our first couple of weeks we earned about as much in commissions as we used to earn in a full month of space rental. I think raw exposure to the market (we’re open all day long, the former franchisee was just open a couple of hours in the morning and a couple of more hours in the evening) has made us busier than we had any reason to expect. It is entirely possible that Greyhound is seasonal, we’re in peak season and just don’t know it. If that doesn’t prove to be the case we may have to put on additional clerical staff…

**Adept Reporting:**
At the first of July I was looking for something in the Adept data and noticed an anomaly. Without going into mind numbing SQL detail, one of the variables we rely on to sort between counties was inconsistently applied by the software. After several calls to Tech Support we resolved to do a one-time fix in SQL to get everyone on the same page and then to change the way our reports resolve for county. This had a nice side benefit of allowing us to resolve for mode (Fixed Route, Paratransit, Intercity, etc.) in a way that eliminates a human data entry step.

**FY 2014 Budget:**
We ran the projections through June. I don’t want to jinx it but I am VERY happy with how the unaudited numbers suggest we ended the year. I anticipate we will have a larger positive carry over than we did last fiscal year. Not bad when you consider we had over $20k of State of Good Repair revenue budgeted that never materialized. FY’14 was a very good year…
**CCO Opportunity:**
At last month’s meeting we reported that we were one of the only Transit projects funded by the recent round of partnership grants with the Coordinated Care Organizations. Originally, $50,000 of a $100,000 request was approved. Since then the grant has grown to $67,745. The Executive Director and I met with a couple of stakeholders (and community partners) last week to flesh out the pharmaceutical delivery portion of the project. I’m hoping we can work on the transit network piece in the next week or so. We’ll have to staff up and start delivering on our prioritized projects quickly.

**Open Invitation:**
Staff wishes to invite any Board Member or Advisory Councilor who may wish to ride the Trolley in the Cove Cherry Fair Parade (Saturday August 16) to RSVP via email (frank@ccno.org) – Councilor Nora Croucher is pictured to the right riding the Trolley during the recent Union County Fair Parade. Cove is a lot more fun – you can throw candy from the open windows. 😊 Board Members are also welcome to attend the Council’s next regular meeting in La Grande. It will be held on August 20th at 3:00 PM in the main conference room at the Public Transit Hub.

Thanks again for your support and allowing us to do this for a living…
Since we began formal meeting in February I am astounded by how much productive work has come out of this Council. Looking back it’s easy to see how some of our most basic housekeeping functions sort of got sidelined while we worked on more pressing projects. At our meeting in August we will attempt to formalize our meeting dates for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2015. In future fiscal years it may be a good idea to do this at the same time we approve our Annual Operations Plan…

In developing the proposed schedule staff has made a couple of assumptions:

1) We assumed a monthly meeting. Our By Laws require us to meet a minimum of six times per year. Staff feels like we have a ways to go before the workload will allow an every other month schedule. Moreover, we think that by the time we clear our docket there will likely be other stuff to consider – at least for the foreseeable future...

2) We assumed that meeting in Elgin and Union is as important to the Council as it is to staff. The By Laws require us to meet in Elgin and Union a minimum of once per year (each). Staff thinks we need to be in the communities where we provide service more often in order to avoid becoming too La Grande centric.

3) We assumed that the rhythm we’ve fallen into (third Wednesday at 3pm) works for everyone.

We’re happy to make changes and evolve in order to keep a good thing going. With these things in mind staff proposes the following schedule for the balance of Fiscal Year 2015.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 20, 2014</td>
<td>3:00 PM</td>
<td>La Grande</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 17, 2014</td>
<td>3:00 PM</td>
<td>Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 15, 2014</td>
<td>3:00 PM</td>
<td>La Grande</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 19, 2014</td>
<td>3:00 PM</td>
<td>Elgin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 17, 2014*</td>
<td>3:00 PM</td>
<td>La Grande</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 21, 2014</td>
<td>3:00 PM</td>
<td>Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 18, 2014</td>
<td>3:00 PM</td>
<td>La Grande</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 18, 2014</td>
<td>3:00 PM</td>
<td>Elgin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 22, 2014</td>
<td>3:00 PM</td>
<td>La Grande</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 20, 2014*</td>
<td>3:00 PM</td>
<td>Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 17, 2014</td>
<td>3:00 PM</td>
<td>La Grande</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rather than a pure rotation (Elgin, La Grande, Union, repeat) staff recommends La Grande as a pivot point for our first year. Our reasoning is that it will triple the visitation required by our By Laws while helping us avoid – as much as possible – travel on potentially icy roads.

The asterisk in December means that the Council may elect to cancel the La Grande meeting for the Christmas Holiday. The asterisk in May means that we may have to move our date a little bit in order to accommodate the budget process (we need to submit our recommendation to the Board of Directors in time for them to approve before the next fiscal year begins).

We’re looking forward to hearing your ideas at our meeting in August.
Staff will not be presenting the Asset Management Plan and the Coordinated Plan Amendments for formal adoption in August. As we probably mentioned a couple of meetings ago, we bit off a lot this summer in our activity partnership with the County Commissioners. These projects simply got away from us while we were trying to keep up with everything else.

The good news is the Asset Management Plan is done. It’s posted to our website. We’re following it. In terms of best practices we DO need you to consider and adopt it – otherwise, the public comment processes that vetted it to begin with would be incomplete and frankly, a little silly. However, this one will keep for another meeting. We have a more pressing issue to wrestle with…

For most of the same reasons cited in the first paragraph, we won’t be bringing you Coordinate Plan Amendment Recommendations in August either. Our staffing was simply spread too thin to work in the requisite public meetings in July. Instead, we will schedule them for August and bring the recommendations before you in September. This will still allow us to submit to the Union County STF Committee before the end of September (the deadline) to update the plan.

Once updated, the plan will be fine for at least two years. It is slated for a complete rewrite next fiscal year so what we’re doing in September is essentially housekeeping. Staff will be prepared to give you all the gory details at our August meeting.