

# Regional transit: a dream awaiting funding

By Patrick Cliff  
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Within the last several years, entities throughout Central Oregon have been inching toward offering more public transit options.

*"We could start tomorrow."*

— Scott Aycock,  
COIC program administrator

tors appointments, said Redmond Mayor Alan Unger.

"I think we have to have connectivity," said Unger.

Now the Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council, an organization that provides services throughout Central Oregon, is working on launching a regional transit system to better connect Bend, Redmond, Prineville, Madras, Sisters and La Pine.

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So far, the effort is a collaboration among COIC and the Oregon Department of Transportation, the Central Oregon Council on Aging and several area cities. Scott Aycock, program administrator at COIC, said he wants to expand that group.

The only remaining piece left to launch the effort is funding, but the infrastructure is ready to go, Aycock said.

"We could start tomorrow," he said.

The organization has applied for grants from federal and state agencies, Aycock said, and hopes to know more about funding within the next several weeks.

The project has garnered regional support from various corners, said Mike Schmidt, president and CEO of the Bend Chamber of Commerce.

"We've probably needed this longer than most people want to admit," said Schmidt, also a board member of COIC. "When you hit 50,000 people in Bend, that was probably the trigger point (for the region)."

The first phase of the program would be to bring all Dial-A-Rides under one umbrella, extend hours and provide more trips among communities.

Dial-A-Ride originally provided service to the elderly and handicapped. This service will be available to all people, not just elderly people and those with disability.

To start, the Redmond-Bend route would have about four daily trips — up from a single one. Other routes, such as Prineville to Redmond, would have one daily trip, said Aycock.

The Dial-A-Ride vehicles would all be painted the same, with identical logos, so that passengers would know they were riding in the transit network, said Aycock.

The actual schedules are yet to be determined, said Aycock. "It's a dynamic process," he said.

Eventually, the buses would run prescribed routes through local cities and stop at stations. The program would also have some vehicles larger than the current buses used by Dial-A-Ride.

Depending on the route, fares

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would likely run between \$2.50 and \$6.25, with discounts available for senior citizens and disabled riders.

The transportation project is currently separated in four phases, none of which will begin until COIC knows how much its budget would be. The budget would in large part be defined by how much federal, state and local funding the project receives, said Aycock.

The most important piece of that funding would come from a Federal Transit Administration for rural areas called the 5311 program. Oregon Department of Transportation officials have estimated the FTA could fund between \$200,000 and \$300,000 of the program, said Aycock.

"We've created the proposal, and we are backing into what we can afford," said Aycock.

Affordability has been a problem in the past, when local governments have been faced with funding a transportation network, said Unger.

Unger said local communities are being squeezed by the current economic downturn, and that if communities are going to support the current plan, they will need to know about the funding.

"It'll take money from somewhere, and we'll have to figure that out," said Unger.

Unger, though, said he supports a regional transportation system.

"Our roads are crowded, and if we can start to get out of single occupancy vehicles, that's a good thing," he said.

For now, Aycock waits for funding to come through, though he is confident that it will arrive.

Patrick Cliff can be reached at 633-2161 or at [pcliff@bendbulletin.com](mailto:pcliff@bendbulletin.com).