

City-to-city bus service may be on the horizon

■ Consolidation of Dial-a-Ride services a first step in the process

Scott Hammers

Spokesman staff

A fixed-route transit system for Redmond may be closer than it appears.

Last week, the Redmond City Council approved the sale of two busses to Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council (COIC). Previously used by the Central Oregon Council on Aging in the Dial-a-Ride program, primarily by seniors and the disabled, the busses are now part of a growing fleet assembled by COIC.

Since the start of the year, COIC has taken over the busses and the Dial-a-Ride program in La Pine, Madras, Redmond and Sisters. The organization was already managing the Prineville/Crook County Dial-a-Ride program. Now, according to Scott Acock of COIC, they're ready to start

building up the system to serve the broader public under the name "Cascades East Transit."

Acock said COIC is waiting to hear back from the Oregon Department of Transportation regarding a grant request submitted in December. If its request is approved - and local governments agree to chip in - COIC could greatly expand its service, particularly as far as trips from one city to another are concerned.

Currently, COIC offers one round trip per day between Madras and Redmond, Prineville and Redmond, and Redmond and Bend. The busses from Madras and Prineville are timed to arrive at the transfer station at the Redmond Workforce Center so that a rider could continue on to Bend. Under the proposal submitted to ODOT, trips be-

See **TRANSIT**, page 9

TRANSIT

Continued from page 1

tween Redmond and Madras or Prineville would increase to four a day, while trips between Redmond and Bend would increase to five.

"Ten years ago there was much less awareness and reality of the interdependence of the communities," Acock said. "Now business, local governments, chambers of commerce, etc. are really starting to see themselves as members of a region. Employees are coming from different towns, people come to Bend for health or recreation or restaurants or whatever. It's not just that, it's folks that live in Prineville and work in Madras and vice-versa; folks that live in Prineville and work in Redmond and vice-versa. It's happening in all of the communities right now."

While the expanded service would not be a true fixed-route system where passengers can get on board near their homes without making prior arrangements, Acock said the multiple trips per day to surrounding communities would make the service more practical for commuters.

COIC is part of a regional partnership called the Central Oregon Area Commission on Transportation (COACT), which includes representation from all local governments as well as state and federal agencies. The

group has designated COIC to head up efforts to develop a regional system - including Bend, which operates the only city transit system in Central Oregon.

Redmond has been a leader among local governments in helping COIC get a transit system up and running, Acock said. As part of the bus deal, the city has agreed to pay up to \$16,000 a year to COIC for bus maintenance, as well as \$3,500 to go towards fuel cost. The money counts towards the local match COIC is required to secure to be eligible for the ODOT grant and other sources of grant funding.

Acock said while a regional system is the goal, the Dial-a-Ride system will remain intact into the future. A full-scale regional system with regular service probably isn't feasible right now, he said, but those who rely on public transportation should expect improved service.

"There are folks who are transit dependent - which tends to be seniors, disabled, low income folks. They don't have opportunities to do basic things because of transportation, whether it's their own inherent limitations (such as) they can't drive, or the cost of fuel, cost of maintaining a car," he said.

"If we're going to serve those people, they need that public transportation system. We think we can pull it off before we do some Cadillac system."