

# **Testimony for the Joint Committee on Transportation**

## **March 11, 2025 Hearing**

**Brian Vitulli, General Manager – Tillamook County Transportation District**

Good evening, Co-Chairs McLain and Gorsek, Vice Chairs Boshart Davis and Starr, and members of the Joint Committee on Transportation. My name is Brian Vitulli, and I am the General Manager of the Tillamook County Transportation District. Thank you for the opportunity to share with you the essential services my organization provides and how important increased State support is for what we do.

We provide a variety of public transportation options throughout northwest Oregon, including local deviated fixed-route bus services, an intercity bus route that connects Tillamook to Portland, general public Dial-A-Ride, and a non-emergency medical transportation brokerage for Tillamook, Clatsop, and Columbia counties.

Please refer to the map showing our transit service area. With a population of approximately 27,500, Tillamook County residents are spread throughout the 1,100 square miles of rugged, rural, north coast Oregon landscape. For FY 2023-2024, we provided nearly 120,000 trips, serving individuals traveling to work, people with disabilities, seniors, youth going to school, and many others who have no other transportation option. Some of our customers ride out of necessity just to restock their cupboards. Like many rural areas in Oregon, a high percentage of residents in our county live in a food desert, and access to groceries is limited and sometimes only feasible by the public transit services we provide them. Others just ride to socialize and combat isolation. I've heard Tillamook has one taxi, not one taxi company, literally one taxi car operating during weekdays; and one Uber driver that would cost someone 28x more than our Route 2 service to travel 9.5 miles from Tillamook to Oceanside. We support our community by providing opportunity, independence, accessibility and mobility, and sometimes life sustaining services.

All the key components of providing essential transit services for our customers cost more: replace vehicles, employee wages, fuel, vehicle and building maintenance. The additional dollars from the STIF Program are now being absorbed by cost escalation in nearly every facet of our operations. We have gone from 'what new services can we provide' to 'how do we maintain what we have' or in many cases 'what is our budget deficit and what services are we going to have to discontinue?'

While the STIF program has been an invaluable lifeline to my District, I'd like to take a moment to share with you the stories of some of our riders and how the essential services we provide throughout this rural region, ends up being a lifeline to them.

Let's call him John. John is one of our daily riders who goes to the CODA Recovery Center's Opioid Treatment Program in Seaside, well outside of TCTD's service area, for treatment that isn't available in Tillamook County. On average our District provides 110 trips per month to CODA's Recovery Center for medically urgent treatment. These patients do not have their own transportation and rely on our 90-mile round trip service for their five-day a week care. This is an essential need.

Michael is a disabled veteran using an electric wheelchair for mobility due to a leg amputation. Since there are no veteran clinics in Tillamook County, veterans have to go to Camp Rilea (Clatsop County), or to Lincoln City, Hillsboro, Portland, or Vancouver. Lincoln City is closest, but still is 45 miles, one-way.

Michael was asked about the impact our services have on his health and quality of life, and he had this to share:

“I have been in Tillamook all my life, except when I was in the military. When the dialysis center left Tillamook one year ago, I didn’t know how I would receive my life sustaining services. The County’s Disabled American Veterans vehicle doesn’t take people in wheelchairs, so I had no way to get to any of the dialysis centers. Tillamook County Transportation District literally saved my life.”

If you were not aware, the only dialysis center in the Tillamook area closed one year ago, leaving numerous dialysis patients with no way to get to life-sustaining treatment. We are still providing transportation for up to 12 individuals for life-sustaining dialysis care, two to three times per week to Forest Grove, Lincoln City, and Astoria. Locations, well outside of our service area. The critical care provided to these citizens would not be possible without funding support from the STIF Program.

Martin also needs regular dialysis treatment. Occasionally, Martin is joined by Pat and they share a vehicle to Forest Grove. Another customer, Patrick, is vision impaired, and his wife takes him to the dialysis clinic on Saturdays and relies on our DAR service for transportation on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Without the Tillamook County Transportation District providing these lifeline transportation services for John, Michael, Martin, Pat, Patrick, and many others, it shakes me to think where they would be without the care they so critically need.

We’ve just seen how one, rural public transportation provider, with funding from the STIF Program, can have an incredible impact on the lives of many. I’d now like to share other ways our customers have benefitted from the STIF Program, and what additional investment can do going forward.

### **Benefits of STIF Can Be Seen in our Community Today**

TCTD has relied greatly on STIF for the expansion and continued operations of services and for projects and programs that benefit our customers and enhance where we live. TCTD and the community it serves has benefited from the following STIF-sponsored projects:

- Subrecipient operations support for local human service organizations
- Enhanced deviated fixed-route and Dial-A-Ride services
- Reduced fare program
- Short- and long-term transit planning and human service transportation coordination
- Continued operating funds and capital rolling stock purchases.
- And as you just heard, STIF Contingency funds is allowing us to provide life sustaining transportation for dialysis patients in our area to treatment centers far outside. STIF has allowed the District to absorb these unexpected costs without impacting our other services.

### **Using STIF to Plan for a More Impactful Future**

With an expanded allocation of STIF dollars, it would enable TCTD to:

- Explore innovative service models that could accommodate more customers, more efficiently; and implement those innovations to be more beneficial to vulnerable populations and attractive to choice riders
- Increase frequencies on higher-ridership in-county routes

- Implement additional intercity Coastliner service between Tillamook and Portland, with connections to Amtrak at Union Station
- Acquire transit vehicles to support the operation of the abovementioned improvements
- Advance efforts toward transitioning District vehicles to low- or zero-emission technologies.

By providing more convenience and reliability to existing service and incorporating more of the types of services that our current and future customers want, the Tillamook County Transportation District can expand its reach by continuing to connect people to employment opportunities, medical care, and shopping and social needs. An increased STIF allocation can make that happen in Tillamook County and throughout Oregon.

Thank you again for allowing me to share my stories.

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## About Tillamook County Transportation District

TCTD provides a range of transportation services to customers throughout Tillamook County, with routes traveling into Clatsop, Lincoln, Washington, and Multnomah counties.

With a county population of approximately 27,400 residents living within 1,100 square miles, a majority of its residents are scattered among seven incorporated cities and 14 unincorporated communities. Around 80% of the County's residents live along U.S. Route 101. The City of Tillamook serves as the county seat and is the largest population center in the County with just over 5,200 people.

Operating a fleet of approximately 30 vehicles, ridership has responded positively since the pandemic. The past year, TCTD provided nearly 120,000 passenger trips. Despite being challenged with a shortage of available transit drivers, made worse by a shortage of affordable housing, the District continues to provide essential transportation services to a large rural environment.

## Reach Out

Please contact Brian Vitulli at 503.842.3115 or [bvitulli@tillamookbus.com](mailto:bvitulli@tillamookbus.com) for more information.

