



Public Transit 101

June 2022

Different kinds of transit serve the diverse needs for transportation of greater Portland. Where a lot of people need to travel farther, quickly to major job centers MAX works best, but where some people live far from a bus or train stop or need to get to specific destinations a shuttle is better. Trains, buses, shuttles and other options are all important and work together as a larger system—like a skeleton—to help people get where they need to go. Our work to update the High Capacity Transit Strategy will envision a stronger backbone for the network, while also setting the stage for future work to look at potential solutions improving its connections.



Inter-City

Inter-city transit takes people long distances, usually between regions and states, with few stops along the way – think AMTRAK or Greyhound from Portland to Eugene or Seattle. It is an express train or bus that takes a similar amount of time as driving. It can also be high or ultra-high speed, traveling up to 374 miles per hour with only a few stops. Metro is participating in a partner effort led by the Washington Department of Transportation looking at ultra-high speed rail to connect Portland, Seattle and Vancouver B.C.



High Capacity

High capacity transit moves a lot of people quickly and often – our network’s limbs and backbone. These trains or buses take a more direct route with fewer (but better) stops across longer distances. MAX or WES trains carry people between places within the region today, but could also move people between Portland and Salem in the future. TriMet’s first rapid bus project, Division Transit, includes longer buses that carry more people and changes to the street that move buses faster.



Enhanced and Frequent

Enhanced transit includes streetcars and “better” buses. It comes more often and is more reliable and can get people to their destinations faster. Examples are the Portland Streetcar and frequent bus lines – where the bus arrives every 15 minutes or less most of the day, every day. This is where improvements to traffic lights that give buses priority and to the street that give buses their own space to travel or pass traffic have the biggest impact.



Photo courtesy of SMART



Photo courtesy of Ride Connection



Bus

Buses are the “ribs” of our transit network that reach more people and places in the region. They have varying routes and schedules to serve different community needs. Buses take people to destinations within their neighborhood as well as other cities and counties. They connect to the MAX, Streetcar and WES (our network’s “spine”) and to each other. Buses may come more or less often (from every 20 minutes to an hour or more). They may have more or less stops, but) and generally stop more often than enhanced or high capacity transit.

Shuttles and Vans

Shuttles and vans play a key role in getting people to a particular job center or taking them their last mile home from the MAX or WES – more like fingers connected to an arm. They are smaller than a bus, moving less people, and often have more flexibility in their route – they may have areas with no stops where riders flag it like a taxi, may make a stop off-route by request, may take people door-to-door from their home to their desired destination or something in-between. This type of service changes based on requests made by riders by hand wave or phone – but microtransit is using new technology to allow people to schedule and track a pick-up and/or drop-off online or by phone app. Shuttles and vans can also be used for different purposes to meet specific community needs – vanpools where co-workers coordinate travel to job sites, shuttles with routes and schedules for shift or farming work, or door-to-door paratransit for people with disabilities or mobility issues.

And more!

While these are the most common types of transit in our region and state, there are many other types of transit. The Portland Aerial Tram that connects the South Waterfront to the Oregon Health and Science University campus or the proposed Frog Ferry river taxi that could connect Vancouver, WA with central Portland in the future are just a few examples. We outline future work to consider new, innovative and improved transit solutions in our Regional Transportation Plan.