

## COMMUNITY CONNECTOR TRANSIT STUDY

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Meeting Date: March 6, 2025

Presenter: Ally Holmqvist, Senior  
Transportation Planner

Department: Planning, Development and  
Research

Length: 45 minutes

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### BACKGROUND

Metro's [Regional Transportation Plan](#) is a blueprint to guide investments for all forms or “modes” of travel – motor vehicle, transit, bicycle and walking – and the movement of goods and freight throughout the Portland metropolitan region. It identifies current and future transportation needs, investments needed to meet those needs and what funds the region expects to have available over the next 25 years to make those investments a reality. Metro updates the Plan every five years. CORE advised on the 2023 update to the plan and the 2028 update is right around the corner.

A key function of the Regional Transportation Plan is that it establishes a vision and goals for our transportation future that is supported by a set of policies that outline an approach for meeting the desired outcomes. There are overarching topical policies (including equity) and policies for each different mode of transportation and there is a strategy providing guidance for how the region can invest, coordinate, plan and take other action in ways that best reflect those policies. These strategies are “components” of the plan.



### BACKGROUND

Transit itself as a form of transportation includes many different modes that serve different functions within the network. The Regional Transit Strategy includes its own components guiding how the different tools in the transit toolbox can play different but coordinated roles toward seeing the outcomes we want for transit in the future and achieving our broader vision for regional mobility.

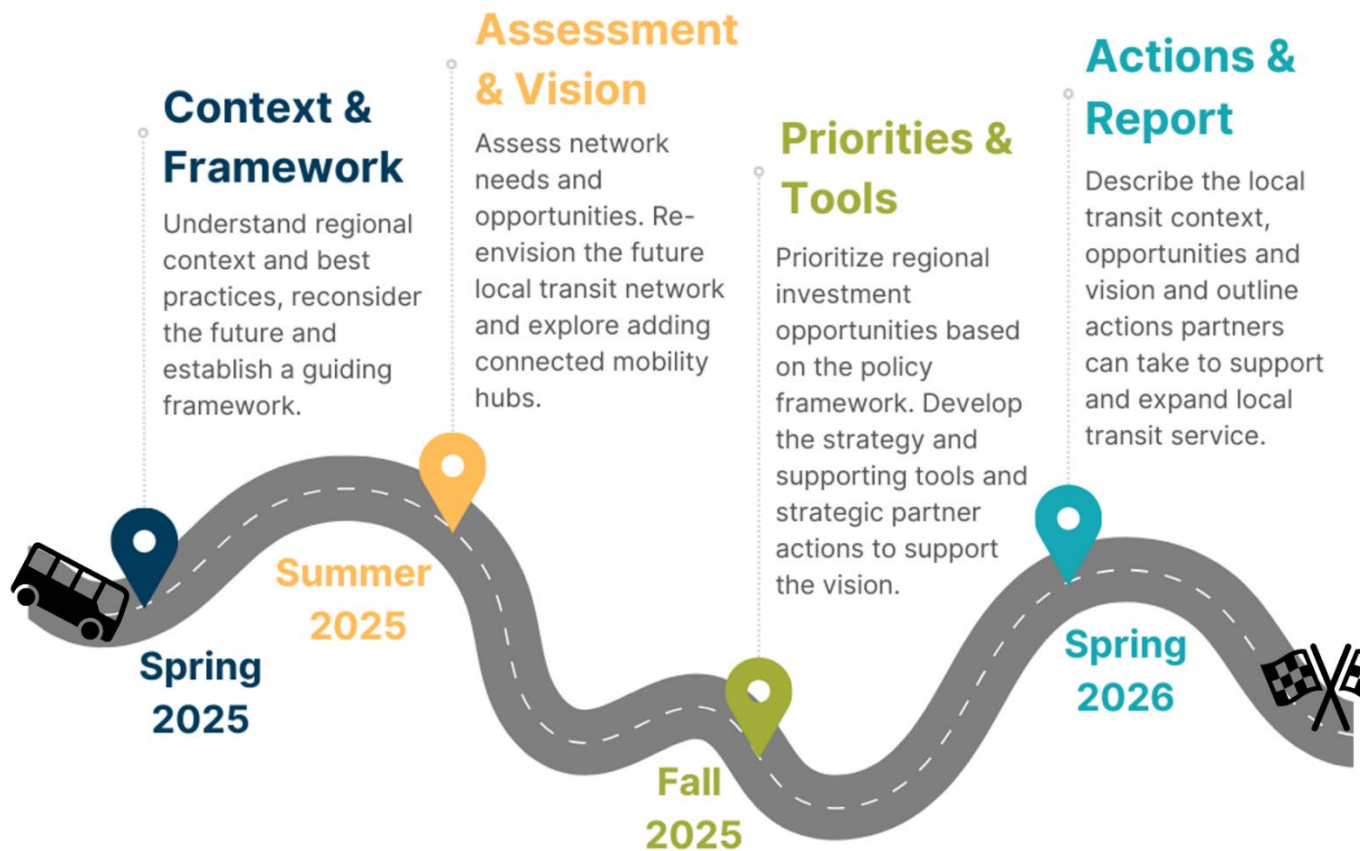
Recent work by Metro and agency partners has resulted in specific strategies for applying almost all the tools in our transit toolbox – from intercity connections like Amtrak to high

capacity transit like MAX light rail, Frequent Express rapid bus (2-Division), streetcar and WES to regional and local bus service. What’s missing is a strategy for community connectors which is something there is a lot of regional momentum around right now with changes to State funding and new services and service providers in Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington counties.

Community connector transit is a type of public transportation that typically uses smaller vehicles (think shuttles or vans) to get people to work, school, shops, the doctor or parks. It often is more flexible than a bus – from going off-route to pick up or drop off riders to being by-request whenever and wherever needed (like Uber or Lyft). This flexibility can help people travel to light rail or frequent bus routes that may stop a mile or more away from their home or destination.

Community members, partners and leaders have raised concerns about certain areas in the region lacking access to bus service. [The Community Connector Transit Study](#) will explore how community connector transit solutions could expand the network and improve transit in areas with limited access. Through this study, Metro will recommend a regional strategy for enhancing the public transit system with community connectors and identify where to allocate resources for improvements first. The outcomes of the work will inform updates to the next Regional Transportation Plan, which is planned to begin in a few years.

**Figure 1. Study Timeline and Milestones**



## **COUNCIL ENGAGEMENT & KEY DATES**

### **Phase 1: Existing Conditions and Best Practices (complete)**

August 2024: Summary of Past Public Transit Feedback

October 15, 2024: Council Work Session – Introduction, Scope and Policy Considerations

Fall 2024/Winter 2025: Inventory and Best Practices Review with Partners

### **Phase 2: Needs, Opportunities and Vision (current)**

February-May 2025: Public Engagement – Community Connector Needs and Visioning

March 5, 2025: CORE Meeting – Project Process Equity Framework

April 1, 2025: Council Work Session – Policy Framework, Visioning and Engagement Plan

July 2025: Draft Vision Map Review with Partners

### **Phase 3: Regional Priorities**

June-September 2025: Public Engagement – Community Connector Regional Priorities

October 8, 2025: *Proposed CORE Meeting – Equity Framework Priorities Outcomes*

October 14, 2025: Council Work Session – Priorities and Strategies

### **Phase 4: Tools and Report**

March 17, 2026: Council Work Session – Report, Recommendations and Tools

March-April 2026: Engaged local organizations and partners invited draft report review

May 28, 2026: Council Action – Report Acceptance (for incorporation as part of 2028 RTP)

### **Prior CORE Engagement:**

None. This is the first time this study has come to CORE at a point where feedback can inform how we approach our opportunities assessment and community engagement, as well as an opportunity to advise Council. A second meeting is proposed for CORE to collaborate on the outcomes of these efforts, particularly in evaluating how the prioritized opportunities can best address the needs and priorities of marginalized communities (both based on location and feedback).

### **Why are you coming to CORE? Using the Public Participation spectrum, where is CORE's impact at this particular meeting? How will CORE feedback be used?**

At this meeting, staff is looking to involve CORE to advise staff on the following questions:

- Is the proposed application of Metro's Racial Equity Framework the right approach given the study's desired outcomes? Where do you see strengths/gaps in this approach?
- In reviewing staff's benefits and burdens analysis and associated study actions, what has not been considered that should be before proceeding with the major assessment milestones?

First, staff will take CORE's feedback to a meeting with the Department's new Equity Alliance (see description in the section below) later this month to revise the Racial Equity Framework Project Worksheet, particularly around highlighting actions and next steps to apply to the overall study workplan. CORE feedback will also be presented to advise

Council as they provide input at the April 1 Work Session. This feedback, along with partner and community input, will influence the assessment work that will be used to develop the community connector vision and the approach to prioritizing the vision opportunities, as well as the associated plan for engagement taking place this spring/summer.

Staff proposes a follow-up meeting involving CORE in late summer focused on the proposed outcomes of the prioritization phase towards ensuring that community feedback and priorities are reflected in the resulting.

A key outcome of the study will be making recommendations to update the transit component of the Regional Transportation Plan. CORE's feedback in the(se) meeting(s) will influence those recommendations and then CORE will likely also advise Council on those and other key topics as part of the 2028 update process (capacity-permitting).

### **STRATEGIC PLAN Context**

Metro staff are supporting this work and application of the racial equity framework in a couple of ways. A Project Management Team including internal staff from different divisions within the department (Investment Areas, Transit-Oriented Development and Regional Travel Options) meets bi-weekly to guide the study. Staff who have utilized the racial equity framework and/or are members of the Equity Alliance are on that team. Additionally, the Planning, Development and Research department has a new staff Equity Alliance that advises project teams on equitable decision-making (supporting steps 1 and 5 of Metro's racial equity framework). This study is one of the team's focus areas and we will be engaging the alliance to think through key equity considerations similar to CORE, as well as in thinking through how to best respond to CORE's input and feedback in project actions.

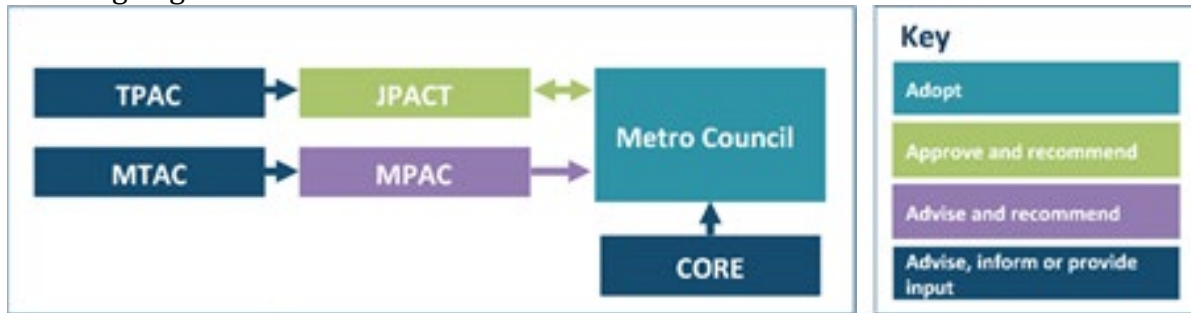
**Table 1 Community Connector Transit Study Racial Equity Framework Implementation**

Steps	Study Identified Benefits and Burdens	Actions	Questions
<b>1. Convene an Internal Stakeholder Team</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project Management Team guiding the project has a majority white perspective.</li> <li>PDR Equity Alliance and project engagement consultant (small woman of color-owned business) offer opportunities to bring in additional perspectives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meet with new PDR Equity Alliance to guide project, particularly in incorporating feedback at major milestones (opportunities and priorities)</li> </ul>	<p><i>Are there other study efforts or topics that should be considered by the Equity Alliance?</i></p>
<b>2. Set Racial Equity Most Goals and Outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Study provides an opportunity to support Metro REDI Goals A, B and F to convene and support regional partners to advance racial equity; meaningfully engage communities of color; and advance racial equity in resource allocation.</li> <li>Study provides an opportunity to support PDR REDI goals to use better analysis around impacts to and evaluation outcomes for people of color, prioritize equity in procurement, meeting with CORE, involving youth, updating the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) for more equitable outcomes, and providing opportunities for staff to interact with community members of color.</li> <li>The RTP goals and outcomes were developed with broad community input, to guide study approach and policy recommendations. As a component of that plan, this study must be consistent with and will be guided by those.</li> <li>However, this study, which originated as a response to community and partner feedback, will result in new policy considerations to inform the next update of the RTP. New considerations should be informed by community input, but we've heard the need for balance and intentionality in what input we ask community for. This should be considered in the study work plan and engagement approaches.</li> <li>This study will take a surgical approach to identifying policy updates in the RTP related to the local transit policy (exploring how we can look to increasing transit accessibility with community connectors). It is not within the scope to address other policy areas important to community about transit more broadly (e.g., security, affordability, frequency).</li> <li>Additionally, while improving access is important, there is a trade-off between providing service coverage and service frequency within a limited funding environment. We've heard community interest around both areas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describe how this study fits within the broader RTP framework of transit and transportation policies</li> <li>Ensure study methodologies, approaches and outcomes are guided by the RTP Equity Goals, Objectives &amp; Policies</li> <li>Ensure new policy recommendations resulting from the study are consistent with the RTP framework and consider community input</li> <li>Develop an engagement plan that utilizes past feedback where possible and focuses new asks for input on specific milestones and project needs</li> <li>Refer to the upcoming 2028 RTP update as the right place to bring up other transit policy and trade-off considerations.</li> <li>Pursue avenues for documenting other concerns that arise through the study. (see Step 6 Accountability)</li> <li>Reference other efforts and provide resources where available related to other transit policy considerations</li> </ul>	<p><i>Are there other best practices to consider as part of the study approach?</i></p>
<b>3. Assess Community Conditions and Consider Impacted Communities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We'll be using a mix of data sources from Metro, partners and other government agencies (e.g., US Census). This will allow us to combine sources to mitigate gaps. We are also have equity data layers with information on where the most people from marginalized communities live.</li> <li>However, data sources are subject to institutionalized bias and structural racism and their participation often includes more participation from privileged groups.</li> <li>This study will also create new data and provides an opportunity for continued improvement of our transit resources.</li> <li>Community connector transit can perpetuate inequities by serving or overserving privileged areas and replacing or being provided in lieu of other</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use RTP data as the base for the assessment, which has implemented its own racial equity framework in development</li> <li>Use Metro and TriMet equity data layers, community places data and community input in opportunities assessments to consider where people from marginalized communities live and travel to.</li> <li>Consider how equity metrics are weighted when identifying opportunities and priorities</li> </ul>	<p><i>Are there other impacts to communities that we should consider as part of the study?</i></p> <p><i>Are there other resources or other ways to apply qualitative data that we should explore?</i></p>

	<p>needed service, while being less efficient in use of resources. Similarly, ridership as a focus perpetuates past investments made under institutionalized discrimination (the most riders are where there is the most service).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• However, transit access is very important for people who rely on transit in getting to key destinations, including: people with low incomes/affordable housing residents, people of color experiencing displacement, businesses/shift workers, youth, seniors and people with disabilities (for non-medical transport). Community connectors can replace underperforming and/or discontinued fixed route service.</li> <li>• Community connectors are well-received by its users. Ride Connection is doing great work with community organizations to plan and market service.</li> <li>• Transit also is having some security public perception challenges right now. CCT can be a great tool to overcome that perception. However, there is some risk that people with privilege will push for shuttles and/or microtransit in lieu of other options.</li> <li>• More providers can mean more confusing and complicated fare systems that are most difficult to navigate for the most marginalized communities with less technology and banking access and barriers to understanding complicated and separate pricing structures. This can make transfers more difficult.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognize data limitations and look at different sources and levels of data, as well as layer it, in order to mitigate gaps</li> <li>• Use community feedback as a qualitative data layer to consider and/or compare to for the assessment</li> <li>• Make data public on the study website, in report documents and presentations for transparency and partner use</li> <li>• Refer to RTP performance measures for study outcomes to verify that opportunities identified further increase accessibility for EFAs (while understanding there are other destinations of importance)</li> <li>• Include in the study recommendations support and guidance for emulating and expanding Ride Connection's community organization planning and operations partnership</li> <li>• Include in the study recommendations continued support and guidance for continuing fare integration efforts that include more and newer providers</li> </ul>	
<p><b>4. Engage with Most Impacted Communities</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resolution accepting the study outcomes will go through the MPO decision-making structure, but staff is looking to uplift community feedback within that structure. It will also go through a similar public process as part of the RTP update.</li> <li>• There is an opportunity to respond to what we've heard from community and utilize what we've already heard around needs for past feedback in this study. There is a need to ensure that this study respects what we've already heard and avoids asking duplicate questions.</li> <li>• At the same time, there is an opportunity for capacity-building and storytelling through community organization contracts and application of project-specific locational needs feedback. However, changes related to the current environment impacting funding and/or organizational focus could mean that organizational capacity is limited or directed elsewhere.</li> <li>• Many groups have been engaged in prior transit activities and have a history of participation we can build upon. At the same time there are opportunities to engage new interested groups.</li> <li>• There is a need to demonstrate broader engagement, and demonstrate that by location, to assure partners that their communities are heard and get a larger sample. At the same time, intentional engagement with impacted groups and smaller group conversations are valuable to better understand needs of marginalized communities and more detail about those needs.</li> <li>• Similarly, people who are privileged have the most time to participate in broader outreach efforts like surveys or general tabling. More intentional, smaller group conversations can reach people from marginalized groups, but there needs to be compensation for that time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create and utilize a summary of past community transit feedback to inform early needs milestones to respond to what we have already heard</li> <li>• Implement engagement plan as a feedback loop including impacted groups developed based on prior community guidance and balancing broad and intentional outreach (section of the staff report following this table has more information on the proposed approach and reasoning for it)</li> <li>• Be clear and specific when asking community for input on the project and transparent in how that feedback will and will not influence the project</li> <li>• Translate materials into Spanish</li> <li>• Make materials accessible for the general public and people with disabilities, and use a variety of mediums to reach different audiences</li> <li>• Contract with community organizations to hold events where possible. Offer meals and stipends for participation in convened events</li> <li>• Disaggregate and share data with partners to uplift input from their communities and inform future efforts</li> <li>• Explore resources we can provide outside of the scope of this project and Metro's jurisdiction</li> </ul>	<p><i>What is important for staff to consider when approaching communities at a time where there is a lot of uncertainty and a great degree of mistrust in institutions?</i></p> <p><i>What are the ways our relationships with community organizations and members can be more reciprocal?</i></p> <p><i>What resources from agencies and organizations outside Metro should staff have on hand to reference when engaging community to respect that other topics are likely top of mind?</i></p>

<p><b>5. Apply a Racial Equity Lens to Recommend Decision &amp; Implementation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ultimately, the MPO decision-making framework includes primarily agency partners, though there are community representatives, and does not include a community steering committee. In that case, staff must ensure the process ensures other avenues for ensuring community priorities are reflected in the outcomes.</li> <li>• The assessment will include all sorts of data in its evaluation, but there is a need to circle back and check that the outcomes align with what we heard from community about needs and with regional equity goals and performance measures. With so many data points being considered, if we don't uplift equity focus areas we could move the needle in the wrong direction regarding access and investments for marginalized communities.</li> <li>• Transit is historically underfunded though it is relied upon by marginalized communities. While funding is part of the study recommendations, this will be even more of a challenge in the near future for transit and transportation of all kinds (as more modes compete within smaller funding pots). We need more dedicated State and local funding to realize this and other transit plans. The RTP is a long-term investment guide, making this effort still worthwhile, but it does make commitments difficult.</li> <li>• New tools and resources that result from the study could aid advocates in working toward funding scenarios that best meet transit equity needs. This study can also inform grant funding applications that Metro could lead if opportunities arise in the future.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PDR Equity Alliance advises on priorities outcomes and engagement plan includes a major milestone specifically on priorities</li> <li>• Present summarized feedback to frame work with the Transit Working Group and decision-making within MPO structure</li> <li>• Use community priorities as a criteria in the prioritization assessment approach</li> <li>• Reflect benefits and burdens and funding, advocacy and partnership needs in recommendations</li> <li>• Explore developing a study report card related to RTP outcomes, including how new service/planning aligns with equity areas</li> <li>• Look for opportunities for coordinated grants or to support local grant applications that can be used for implementation</li> </ul>	<p><i>For a more balanced perspective, would CORE be interested in checking our work on incorporating community feedback?</i></p>
<p><b>6. Communicate Decision and Ensure Accountability</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will not be able to incorporate everything we hear into this study and much of the feedback we hear will be beyond the scope of the study. Regardless, there is a need to close the loop with communities engaged as part of Step 4 to share the final outcomes and provide information on how their input influenced the outcome.</li> <li>• Outcomes from this study are incorporated into the RTP which guides future transportation investment decisions and has a public process for updates that is repeated every 5 years and is very visible in involving Metro's advisory committees. Equity assessments are also done as part of each RTP within the frame of the full project list as well to incorporate the latest data and report on equity transit measures.</li> <li>• However, as a study of the future, this plan doesn't result in visible or guaranteed implementation. The desired outcome is changes to a long-range funding strategy and future plans by local partners that support improved transit access, particularly for those who rely on it. Staff may not be able to point to any concrete or tangible outcomes for years which can be disenfranchising for community members who participated.</li> <li>• Similarly, because these outcomes are planning actions and recommendations rather than commitments, it is difficult to report on achievements outside of that the RTP continues to move the needle on its equity metrics.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop fact sheets for each engagement milestone for how input will influence the project</li> <li>• Include community input sidebars in the report to document feedback (including out of scope recurring themes related to the effort) and include engagement summaries as appendices as a record</li> <li>• Directly invite engaged groups to review the draft report, highlighting where and how their input was used and incorporate follow-up comments in the final draft</li> <li>• Create some final materials that communicate and spotlight what we heard from community to uplift that feedback for other and/or future efforts by Metro and/or partners. Focus on needs and potential solutions and implementing partners if possible</li> <li>• Make recommendations for changes in the 2028 RTP update within the framework of regional goals and outcomes</li> <li>• Explore opportunities for creating a standing report card on transit vision implementation. Demonstrate how the work is slowly moving the needle on transit performance</li> </ul>	<p><i>Recognizing that we likely won't see implementation for several if not many years, what actions can staff take to maintain trust beyond being clear and transparent in what this future plan is and what community input can do within it?</i></p> <p><i>Given that we it is difficult to track outcomes around implementation, do other ways of reporting performance resonate as useful tools (e.g., transit vision report card updated with each RTP)?</i></p>

The Community Connector Transit Study uses the decision-making framework that Metro applies for transportation planning implementation activities under the Regional Transportation Plan as required under the agency’s federal designation as a Metropolitan Planning Organization:



To foster more collaboration and opportunities for co-created development with local agency partners, the study includes additional avenues for these partners to provide more detailed and specific feedback (especially around consistency with existing plans, programs and operations):

- Transit Working Group Meetings: City, County and Regional Transit Agency staff with expertise on transit needs, considerations, planning and implementation
- Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington County Coordinating Committee Presentations: County-convened groups including additional City staff and policymakers not participating in other agency committees

Community feedback will be incorporated into each of the four major project phases of the CCT Study. How that happens will look a bit different though depending on the phase. The approach is designed to build from the wealth of transit feedback we’ve heard to date to utilize what we already know and can uplift regarding community needs, focus on key geographic and priority considerations for the study to ensure that the outcomes accurately address those needs, and conclude with two-way communication to circle back and clearly articulate how and where community feedback influenced the study outcomes (using the study report which will document the work, lessons learned, input received, results and products developed).

The first phase of context gathering has focused on major themes heard related to community needs in recent prior transit project outreach. In conversations during the recent 2023 RTP update, policymakers, partners, and community members expressed concern about areas of the region that still lack access to the regional transit network today and even in the future, but where opportunities may exist to connect to jobs and other essential destinations. These themes guided the focus of best practices research into what cases and how community connectors can be successfully used as tools to meet the needs identified. A summary of the key takeaways is included below.

- *Explore expanding service, particularly to dense, growing areas and town centers and community hubs in suburban communities and the Metro region urban edges.*
- *Connect more neighborhoods to essential destinations, including first- and last- mile frequent transit connections, to expand access to transit.*



- *Make more connections with community hubs in Washington and Clackamas counties.*
- *Prioritize needs of marginalized communities and reducing climate impact.*
- *Look for opportunities to fill gaps in transit service to places like major employers and job centers, schools, health care services and regional destination parks.*
- *Provide transportation hubs at key connections and at the ends of transit lines to improve transfers, including across agencies and modes. Make them safe and comfortable by integrating amenities and community benefits.*
- *Work with transit providers, local agencies and other partners early to improve collaboration and coordinate investment strategies to create more seamless systems, improve implementation, and be competitive for funding. Provide tools to support future partnership and implementation.*

The assessment and vision (Phase 2) and prioritization (Phase 3) tasks are the major milestone outcomes of the study and where community and partner engagement are focused. Table 2 below outlines the proposed engagement activities planned for community or partner group(s) identified as likely benefitting from and/or being burdened by the study outcomes. A range of activities are included to reach different audiences within each group and balance broader participation around general questions with more focused input opportunities around more specific questions.

**Table 2. Assessment and Prioritization Draft Engagement Implementation Approach**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Major Milestone Potential Engagement Activities (Phases 2 &amp; 3)</b>
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CBO contracted activities (select)</li> <li>- CBO Focus Groups (broad regional invitation)</li> <li>- Event Tabling (focus on CBO-hosted, but also other local events)</li> <li>- Surveys</li> </ul>
Tribes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Portland Tribal Offices Consultations and Survey Flyering (Phase 2)</li> <li>- Tribal Member Workshops by County</li> </ul>
Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Targeted Chamber Presentations (regional &amp; equity focus, Phase 2):</li> <li>- Chamber County Roundtables (all local chambers, Phase 3)</li> </ul>
Other target groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Flyering and/or direct survey community notice/sharing to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Commute staff partners</li> <li>o School staff partners</li> <li>o Affordable housing sites/providers</li> <li>o Local youth commissions</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Events in partnership with youth and disability organizations</li> <li>- Parks Events (in partnership with Metro Parks &amp; Nature)</li> </ul>
Local Agency Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Transit Providers Workshops</li> <li>- Clackamas County Small Providers Meeting Presentations</li> <li>- Local staff workshops</li> </ul>

The approach for applying the input gathered through these activities is: 1) collect input from community members and partners on key needs and transit gaps to influence the opportunity areas and mobility hubs assessment results and 2) return to community members and partners to check if the resulting vision meets those needs and collect input

on priorities within it to influence what areas are planned for nearer vs. longer-term investments. In similar past efforts we have used this geographically-specific feedback to create input heat maps (which can be disaggregated) in each phase to be used as an additional data input – particularly to cross-check that the opportunity and mobility hub areas and priorities assessment scoring outcomes are aligning with where community members are expressing needs. This allows the project team to make additional adjustments and also communicate and advocate for community priorities in discussions with both agency partners and decision-makers.

The final phase of finalizing the tools and drafting the report will apply a direct outreach approach to those who provided feedback during the process. We plan to email representatives of those organizations directly, inviting their review and comment on the draft report and recommendations and describing how and where (by document page) their input was reflected.

#### **ATTACHMENTS**

1. Transit 101 Fact Sheet
2. Fact Sheet #1: About the Community Connector Transit Study
3. CCT Study Engagement Plan
4. Past Transit Engagement Feedback Summary
5. PDR Racial Equity Framework Worksheet