Mobilizing Public Access to Countywide Transportation (MPACT)
A YVCOG Transportation Policy Board Standing Committee
Minutes of Thursday, October 28, 2021, 2:00 p.m.

Present:
Jan Ollivier, People For People
Gracie Sexton, People For People
Madelyn Carlson, People For People
Tom Gaulke, Entrust
Linda Howell, WSDOT
Janna Lewis-Clark, Pahto Public Passage
Mathew Taylor, City of Selah
Greg Story, Yakima Transit
Alan Adolf, YVCOG
Vickie Steven, ProTran Transportation
Rocky Wallace, City of Selah
Tami Hayward, YVCOG

Call to Order and Introductions/Welcome – Jan Ollivier
MPACT Chair, Jan Ollivier, called the October 28, 2021, meeting to order at 2:06 with introductions by all present.

YVCOG Position Update – Alan
YVCOG is in the process of bringing on another Associate Transportation Planner, since the departure of the last planner in mid-August. After the first round of interviews, another call has gone out to fill the position. That person will be the primary contact and facilitator of MPACT, and the main facilitator of the next round of consolidated grant applications. We are hoping to have someone on board by January 2022. Recommendations to the position are appreciated.

Catch-up Since COVID – Impacts on Your Agency – All, roundtable Has your Human Services Transportation Needs changed for your agency? Are these changes short- or long-term?
People For People – (Gracie), ridership took a huge dive at the onset of the pandemic. We immediately implemented safety protocols, PPE for all our drivers and staff, plexiglass safety shields on all buses. We worked hard on keeping our drivers busy and in business, a small fraction of our drivers self-quarantined, but the majority stayed on. With the support from WSDOT & ALTC, we were able to coordinate pick up and delivery of groceries, medical prescriptions, we assisted our MOW department to deliver frozen meals to homebound seniors, and boxes of from local food banks. We continue to provide some of these services. (Jan) – we still have the need to continue preservation for our service and vehicles. We also see a greater need for more service.
(Madelyn)– every industry is facing challenges in recruiting employees. There is a huge driver shortage across the nation, and recruitment is difficult agency wide. We manage the 211 service, and the statewide 211 system out of the office in Yakima. The 211-service exploded after we contracted with the Department of Health to provide the response for the DOH COVID Information Hotline. We hired 30 additional staff to man the lines from 6 am-10 pm, 7-days per week. The calls went from 500 per day to over 10,000 per day when the vaccines became available for our senior population. Seniors were calling with questions and to get scheduled. An additional 350 staff were hired and trained within a two-week period to help. MOW frozen meals requests grew since our dining meal sites closed. Home delivery of frozen meals went from about 100,000 meals per year to over 144,000. Employment & Training services continued, and with Worksource closed as the main entry point for people looking for training service, our staff shifted, and we had some case managers meeting with clients in parking lots and virtual. As an agency overall, we are still in a hybrid model. We shifted to teleworking for all positions that didn’t have
to have face to face, and we continue to have staff coming in, as needed. We also continue with social distancing, wearing a mask and mask requirements on all service vehicles. Our Medicaid Broker rides also dropped dramatically, trips are increasing, but still down 30%.

**Entrust** – (Tom), I echo the same issues with transportation as People For People. We saw an immediate drop off in ridership, as well. The service started back up again, then we had to shut down again in June. It’s been a rollercoaster ride with ridership and service. We struggle with availability of purchasing and replacing our vehicles, due to the high-cost increases. We are also struggling with staff recruitment.

**City of Selah** – (Rocky), I’m in a new position with Selah as of August 16th; shortly after a long-time Selah employee lost their life due to complications from COVID. We have a small staff and at one time we had four (4) staff out. It’s been a difficult year.

**Yakima Transit** – (Greg), all service has continued as normal. No changes to the service or fares. Since the inception of COVID, we’ve had 9 employees get COVID, no deaths, and a few employees took time off and returned to work. We put plexiglass barriers in all our buses. We have six (6) new buses on order and expect them in a year. We sanitize our coaches daily with the purchase of a new fogging machine. We’re required to wear masks in the office when around others, but not in our individual offices. Our drivers continue to wear masks and gloves, it is still a requirement, and they prefer it that way. Since we didn’t reduce or remove our fares, we don’t have the same issues that other transits are having, such as an increase in ridership of non-destination riders. This helped keep our numbers lower for social distancing. We also had a standby bus at the transit center, and it was dispatched if we got above our passenger limit on any other bus. At one time our numbers were down 65-75%. Those numbers have come up significantly. Currently we are down 35%. Our vanpool has never come back. Currently we’re only running two (2) vans, and we have fifteen (15) vans sitting. We have experienced some staff shortages.

**Pahto Public Passage** – (Janna), during the first six (6) months of COVID we ran a shorter 4-hour schedule, then returned to a regular schedule after the 6 months when the Tribe opened back up. Our ridership plummeted 85%. We handed out masks and gloves to riders, we performed daily disinfecting with a fog machine, added plexiglass barriers, and all drivers wear masks and gloves. We’ve had 14 events of possible COVID, which included testing. We had two (2) drivers with COVID, but they returned. No deaths. We have expanded our service and are running weekends. We do not let the homeless ride the bus anymore after we noticed a huge issue. We’re working on getting back to 100% normal.

**Protran** – (Vickie), during the onset of the pandemic, we had 14 volunteer, senior drivers. Since our drivers are volunteers and using their own vehicles, numerous drivers retired and we think it’s the cost of gas, miles and wear and tear on their personal vehicles. Like everyone else, we’re having issues with recruitment. We’re getting the trips referred to us but can’t provide the trips at time due to lack of drivers. We had no COVID contracted via the trips, and only two (2) drivers that were out due to COVID.

**YVCOG** – (Alan), we have followed the same protocols as WSDOT where we are working remotely since day one. I don’t see that it will change, and it looks like it could be a long-term change. In the past working remotely was not a popular thing to do, now it’s normal and not an issue. We’re addressing this topic at the statewide level with CTR on how transit and paratransit will function in the next several years.

**WSDOT** – (Linda H.), every job in my division can be done remotely. We absorbed three of the unvaccinated DOT workers with exemptions so they could move into one of our positions that could telework. There will be a disruption in our maintenance crews, and state troopers that had to be let go. In my division we’re adding people and going strong with all the extra grants that we must manage and track.
Transit Feasibility Study RFP – Alan
Due to difficulty in finding additional program staff, we’ve had an issue moving forward with the Regional Transit Feasibility Study (RTFS). It was originally applied for back when Larry Matson and Brian Galloway were both here and they would have facilitated the effort. Now with the loss of our planner in August, and after a discussion with Linda Howell, we decided to go for outside help to get the study completed. On November 1st we will formally announce an RFP to hire a consultant to do the RTFS. We’ll be looking for all transit related resources in Yakima County, and how we can work better or expand to provide better services to areas where there is very limited transportation service. People For People’s efforts with the current routes in the mid-valley is a great means to gather data. The RFP goes out on November 1st, with a closing date of December 8th, and we hope to have someone hired by the end of January 2022. We’re looking at completion of the document by the same time next year (2022). This will be a first step into gaining a better understanding on all our assets, other studies and ultimately in a few years, looking at instituting a PTBA.

Update of 2018 Human Services Transportation Plan Document - Alan
The last update was in 2018. This is the primary document that grant applicants follow when applying for the consolidated grant process every two years. That process will start again in July of 2022. YVCOG would like to have further discussion with transportation providers in the area on how we address COVID and needs within our region. This document will need to be approved prior to the grant application season. We’ll reach out to all transportation and social agencies for input.

CTR/TDM in a Post-Covid World – Jan/Alan
The committees are looking at revising the CTR law and expanding it for more resources for agencies. There’s a huge move to continue work from home and less commuting. They are encouraging that type of work environment to continue.
Our region took some credit for the reconsideration. The problem that the CTR predecessors in our area faced is that we were very limited in what we could do. The laws were written back in 1994 and haven’t been adjusted since. They were written with large urban areas in mind and their issues with commuting, which doesn’t impact us rural areas as much. The CTR guidelines need to change and get updated. We hope that some of the ideas we’ve shared as a statewide committee are being taken in by the legislature for some changes. YVCOG intends on making a greater push in making CTR activities available to the small businesses in our county.

- Ag and freight are on our radar
- Madelyn will provide the group with PFP’s Agricultural Vanpool Program study

MPACT Executive Board Elections – Jan/Alan
The Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary are on a two-year term, January 2022 – December 2023. We’d like nominations that would start in January 2022 for a two-year period. Any nominations can be emailed to Alan by December 1st. Currently Jan is Chair, Tom is Vice Chair and Brian Galloway was Secretary.

Scheduling for 2022
The HSTP development meetings have been held the last Wednesday of the month, prior to COVID. We can start by scheduling monthly meetings, and we can cancel meetings if there are no pending actions or topics for any month. YVCOG is hiring a public outreach professional, in house. They will do a lot of meeting coordination and public outreach. Depending on the state COVID restrictions we could do in person, or we could have Zoom or Teams format meetings. Technology could be a barrier for some. The ability to have in person meetings must be an option.
Alan will send out calendar invites for scheduled meeting dates.
Member Jurisdiction Updates
No additional updates from the group members.

Next MPACT Meeting
Wednesday, December 15, 2021

Meeting adjourned at 3:03 pm. Minutes submitted by Gracie Sexton, MPACT Member

Jan Ollivier, Chair

Date signed: 12/16/21

Alan Adolf, Attending and Attesting Member

Date signed: December 15, 2021