

MEMORANDUM

DATE: September 2, 2025

TO: Harper Thompson, President
Coos County Transportation District

Cc: Commissioners: Melissa Dovenspike; Mike Claasen; Tara Johnson; Doug Veysey.
Phil Taylor; Shira Johnson; Melissa Metz, General Manager

SUBJECT: Board Practices Assessment - Consultant's Impressions and Recommendations

FROM: Jim Knight, Senior Consultant, SDAO

It was a great privilege to have the opportunity to facilitate the Board Practices Assessment (BPA). I appreciate the Board's openness and honesty in addressing the issues involved in discussing the Key Areas of the BPA. In addition, it was encouraging to see the Board fully engaged in conveying their opinions and input in response to the BPA questions, and subsequent discussions.

Consultant's Impressions and Recommendations are outlined below. I will do a 60-day follow-up to check progress and offer additional consulting support. My sincere thanks for your participation in the Board Practices Assessment. This work does make a difference and helps demonstrate to your community your combined desires and determination to work together, and to continue to make this a great organization.

Impressions

Like many other Oregon Special Districts, Coos County Transportation District (CCTD), is constantly challenged with not having sufficient financial resources to meet its needs in nearly every operational and management sector of the organization. This has been made clear in the Board's responses and comments during the BPA process. The good news is that this is an organization of committed staff and board members that obviously deeply cares about the organization, its customers, and its mission to the communities they serve. I came away with the sense that this Board and its General Manager have great respect for one another and work well together. Most importantly, there is a great commitment towards ensuring that the primary customer base of the organization – its riders, experience safe, comfortable, and timely services, to every extent possible.

Recommendations

I. Governance: Oregon Government Ethics Commission (OGEC) administers and enforces Oregon's Government Ethics Laws for the benefit of Oregon's citizens. They do this through a strong commitment to the education of elected and appointed public officials. As Public officials, please be aware that you must know that public officials are held personally responsible for complying with the provisions in Oregon Government Ethics law. Please take time to read the information that is provided for Public Officials at OGEC's website. Please note that this is not, in any way, a criticism of how your organization currently operates. This is simply a recommendation to stay current in your knowledge of OGEC's policies and rules. Recently, SDAO has been approved by OGEC to conduct Public Meeting Laws (PML) training for all SDAO Special District member organizations. OGEC mandates that all new Public Officials participate and complete and obtain a Certificate of Completion of this training. Additionally, all Public Officials must periodically complete PML training to refresh their understanding of OGEC's policies and procedures. Please acquaint yourselves with OGEC's policies at OGEC's website. You will find a wealth of valuable information that will assist you.

II. Addressing Financial Challenges - Throughout our conversations during the BPA, financial challenges were a common theme and predominant in our discussions. *"... if we only had more financial resources, we could: provide more services; hire more staff; expand our routes and schedules; improve/increase transportation vehicles; create better and safer bus stops; remove some burdens from our General Manager..."* and probably much more. I recognize:

- Current funding resources are becoming even more challenging to obtain.
- Federal funding resources are drying up, which tremendously impacts State and Local grant opportunities.
- Lack of Federal funding, and a lack of confidence that this will improve in the foreseeable future, truly impacts State and Local funding and their corresponding budgets. Budgets at the State and local government levels are forced to make radical cuts that are impacting CCTD's abilities to maintain services at the levels that are needed in your community.
- I understand and appreciate that the predominant percentage of your customer base, your riders, are the most vulnerable of your citizens and patrons. They utilize the services that CCTD provides, because they must, or have little to no, other options to meet their transportation needs. Most likely, this ridership can barely afford the cost of the current fares, let alone be burdened with increased cost of bus/transportation fares.
- The CCTD team (Commissioners, Staff) strikes me as a team that does not give up, even under the most dire of circumstances, in identifying new resources and strategies in maintaining and improving your organization's resources.

Here are a few suggestions:

- Review and/or familiarize yourself with your current Marketing and Business Development Strategies. Determine if the strategies are still current and viable. Is there anything that is missing, are there any new ideas worth pursuing?
- Seek input from community members, business leaders, economic and community development partners, riders, and seek new input as to how to raise new capital to address pressing issues. A Public Involvement Seminar/Workshop (not a Commission Meeting) can be an excellent format for this type of a meeting. You will need a much larger facility to meet in for this type of meeting. Wrestle with an impactful and purposeful Agenda that generates an understanding of the Organization's pressing needs and how much it will cost to meet those needs. Obtain input from the participants as to how to tackle these challenges.
- Reach out to Business Oregon and invite them for a tour of your facilities and equipment, take them for rides on your routes, meet with your riders, and share with them your challenges and concerns for your future. This can be far more impactful if you can arrange for participation from your Local and State Government elected officials during the visit from Business Oregon Representatives. Help them understand your critical needs and what will happen if those needs are not met. Identify the impacts to the riders and the community at large, at what would occur if you had to radically cut the level of current service. Even worse, what would happen if you had to terminate the services all together?
- Compile a list of specific funding needs you require, to simply maintain just the current level of service. Identify what financial resources you will really require providing the level of services that are truly needed.
- Keep current, your records of the demographics of your riders. (Volume of riders; personal income levels and ages – if possible, and destinations); identify why your transportation services are critical to the ongoing health and safety of your communities; where and when your riders travel and why)

Essentially, organize your critical needs through the accumulation of data, which identifies: the reasons to better fund public transit, and why doing so is good for your community, and how your organization helps keep the community healthy. Remind yourselves and the community and stakeholders (frequently) why this Transportation District was created in the first place and why it's an important partner that helps maintain a healthy Community. Also, tell the story of what would happen if you can't continue and the subsequent probable impacts on the communities that you currently serve.

- When you are confident that Business Oregon and other stakeholders and business leaders truly understands your current conditions and financial needs, the same for your elected officials (local; state and federal), and you have clear, precise documentation and

data of why it is important to support your needs, and you have demonstrated support from local businesses and other supporters to help, then:

- Seek grant funding and contributions for the creation of a new “Business Development, Funding and Marketing Strategy” performed by a transportation industry consultant that can demonstrate their ability and successful experience to create such a plan.
- Next, consider hiring a professional grant writer that has successful experience in obtaining various grants that can fund some of your most critical needs.
- Consider hiring a team (through grants) that can develop fund raising events and programs that focus on local community residents, businesses, and the largest employers, to help support “The Community’s Transit Company.”

Since financial support from State, Local and Federal sources are continuing to dry up for the foreseeable future, a “grassroots driven effort” for the financial well-being of the District will be critically important in your future fund-raising efforts.

You are a remarkable Board and Staff that have already faced and overcome many challenges and obstacles. You should be very proud of what you have accomplished. I’m very impressed at how well you work together and your obvious dedication to your Board responsibilities and the support you have for your General Manager and the staff. I appreciate the opportunity to meet with you and learn about your district. Please know that SDAO is here to help you in any way that we can. We have a number of services that we can provide you with, to help assist you in the future. I will provide links to those services in my email. Please don’t hesitate to reach out to me if there are any questions or comments in my report regarding the BPA. Please reach out to me if there is anything that I or SDAO can provide to help your amazing organization.

I wish you all the best in your future endeavors. It was a pleasure to meet all of you.

Sincerely,

Jim Knight

Sr. Consultant, SDAO