

# Valley Regional Transit Public Involvement Policy

*The public plays a critical role in the success and vitality of public transportation in the Treasure Valley. Public input in all phases of transit – from route planning to fare structures – is essential.*

*The guiding principles in the Valley Regional Transit (VRT) Strategic Plan recognize the importance of public input. These principles stress the importance of teamwork, communication and customer service. Public comment is a vital element in accomplishing these principles.*

*The following policy outlines the local process for soliciting and considering public comment prior to implementing fare changes, service changes or adjustments, or adoption of, or modifications to, the (VRT) annual budget.*

## Definitions

**Fare change** - any change to an existing, established fare rate or fare type applicable to regular fixed route or paratransit service which results in a different fare rate than is currently in effect.

**Route miles** - the total number of miles included in a single fixed-line route or a fixed-route transit system network.

**Revenue vehicle miles** - the distance traveled from the point of the first passenger pick-up to the last passenger drop-off, as long as the vehicle does not return to the dispatch point.

A **major service adjustment** is any action that increases or decreases services hours and/or service miles by *at least* 10 percent of the entire system.

A **minor service adjustment** is any action that reduces service hours and/or service miles by less than 10 percent of the entire system, or results in time point changes.

A **major service change** is defined as:

- **An adjustment affecting** 25 percent or more of the number of route miles of a single route; or
- **An adjustment affecting** 25 percent or more of the number of revenue vehicle miles of a single route commuted on a daily basis for the day(s) impacted by the change.

An **open house** is a public forum to provide an opportunity for the public to learn about a project or proposed operational changes and to solicit public comment prior to any public hearing.

A **public meeting** is designed to: facilitate participation in the decision-making process; assist the public in gaining an informed view of a proposed project at any level of the public transportation project development process; and gather public comment.

A **public hearing** is a special type of public meeting that requires the publication and posting of a legal notice within a specified time. The main purpose of a public hearing is to provide an opportunity for the public to make comments for or against a proposal. A public hearing may be scheduled when a specific statute requires one, or when public input is desired on a sensitive or controversial issue.

**Title VI** of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, prohibits discrimination based upon race, color or national origin. Specifically 42 USC 2000d states that “no person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination to any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”

The **VRT Service Change Workgroup** is a panel made up of staff from ValleyRide Boise operations, ValleyRide Caldwell operations, and from Valley Regional Transit. The responsibilities of the workgroup include: reviewing public comment and suggestions on transit services; developing service changes that will improve system performance and maximize existing resources; determine the type of public involvement and outreach required for minor service changes or adjustments.

## **Early Public Involvement**

Public comment regarding service development is encouraged and accepted on an ongoing basis. All suggestions are reviewed by VRT planning staff and the VRT Service Change Workgroup. VRT will also actively seek input during the biennial Rider and Non-Rider Survey.

All major service analysis and planning may include early outreach activities that engage the public in planning prior to major service change proposals being brought forward for public comment. These early outreach activities and may include rider/non-rider survey; workshops; focus groups; scenario planning; social media; and marketing and tell stories.

## **Public Involvement Processes**

Events requiring a public process will include, but not limited to:

- A major service change or adjustment
- Any fare change
- Valley Regional Transit budget adoption

The public input process includes, but is not limited to, public hearings, public meetings, open houses, and written or electronic (online) comment forms. VRT staff will develop recommendations as to the appropriate type and level of public input required. The VRT Board will review these recommendations and determine the method or methods to be used to collect public input.

A public hearing is mandatory when a fare change or any major service change or adjustment is proposed or prior to the board adoption of, or changes to, the annual budget. A determination is made related to each proposal as to the appropriate scheduling

of the public hearing. If service changes are temporary in nature for evaluation for the proposal, the hearing will be held after the pilot period and the evaluation is completed. For changes in fares or significant service changes, the hearing will be held prior to initiation of action.

The Board can delegate to the Executive Board the ability to review and any proposal involving minor service adjustments/modifications. The Board or Executive Board can either approve the minor changes/modifications or request that a public hearing, open house or public meeting be held. If the Executive Board approves the minor service adjustments/modifications, they may be subject to a review by legal counsel before being included on the consent agenda at the next VRT Board meeting.

A joint public hearing also may be scheduled by VRT and the governing body of a municipality, county or highway district where citizens are affected by a proposal or when public input is desired.

In order to ensure the maximum opportunity for public input and involvement in the decision process regarding major service changes and/or adjustments and fare increases, VRT will adhere to the following outreach procedures:

- 1.) Provide at least a 14-day advance notice of a public hearing regarding major service changes or fare increases in Spanish and English.
- 2.) Customers and the public will be informed of the proposed change, comment process and public hearings by way of newspaper and/or radio notices, news releases, notices inside buses and at the Downtown Boise Transit Mall, the Boise Towne Square Mall Transit Center, the Boise State University Transit Center, and the Happy Day Transit Center, postings at the VRT administrative office in Meridian and community centers and businesses that are frequented by the various segments of our growing diverse population, notices on the Valley Regional Transit and ValleyRide websites, and through social media outlets.
- 3.) All input and comments, including minutes of public hearings, and VRT staff recommendations, shall be provided to the VRT Board of Directors prior to any decision prior to any major service change, fare changes, or adoption of the VRT budget.

Valley Regional Transit will make every effort to ensure that:

- Public hearings and other meetings will be held at times and locations that are accessible for minorities, persons with disabilities and the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) populations.
- Special accommodations to the event and alternate formats for informational materials are available or can be made available with advance notice of at least 48 hours.
- Meetings are coordinated with community-based organizations and agencies, and that VRT maintains and updates a database with contact information for these groups.

In addition, Valley Regional Transit will consider radio, television, or newspaper ads that serve LEP populations and collecting public comment through the use of personal interviews or through the use of audio and visual equipment.

## Minor Service Changes

The following processes can be used for soliciting and considering public comment prior to minor transit service changes:

- An **open house**. See definition above
- A **public meeting**. See definition above.

The VRT Service Change Work Group will determine the need for public input during the development of any proposed minor transit service changes. Customers and the public will be informed of any outreach efforts to collect input on proposed minor service changes. The methods used to inform customers and the public will include some or all of the outreach options defined in the major service change section of this policy.

## Public Hearings

The VRT Executive Board will approve the scheduling of any public hearing. The details of any proposed hearing, including the location and the makeup of the panel that will hear testimony, will be provided to the Executive Board as it considers a staff request for a public hearing.

VRT's Community Relations Manager will be responsible for scheduling a hearing. Other responsibilities of the Community Relations Manager include ensuring that proper public notice is given, identifying the appropriate location(s), ensuring a panel of board members/elected officials is present to listen to testimony, and that the comments made during the hearing are recorded.

A public hearing concerning service or fare changes will be scheduled enough time in advance to allow for an additional public comment period and review of all public input by VRT staff.

The public hearing on the proposed VRT budget for the next fiscal year shall be held during a regular or special meeting of the Board of Directors. Notice of any public hearing for budget adoption shall be posted at least 10 calendar days prior to the date of the board meeting.

A public notice for *any* public hearing shall be posted in at least one (1) conspicuous place in the county or counties affected by the proposal. A copy of the notice also shall be published in accordance with Section §§ 40-206 Idaho Code.

## Development of Draft Changes in Service or Fare Changes

Upon completion of a public hearing, public meeting or open house on proposed service/fare changes, a 10-day period for additional written comment will be scheduled. At the end of this period, the Community Relations Manager will prepare a written summary analysis and report on the disposition of any and all comments received during this public comment period and at the public hearing.

VRT staff may draft proposals for major changes in services or in fares based on consideration of public comment. The recommendations will be sent to the Board for evaluation and consideration. The Board may choose to act on the recommendation or require additional public input.

## **Budget Adoption**

After completion of a hearing on the proposed VRT annual budget or changes to the budget, the Board may choose to act on the budget as proposed, suggest changes before acting on the budget, or hold additional public hearings.

## **Publication of a Notice of Major Service Changes or Adjustments, or Fare Changes**

After final approval by the Board, a notice will be published in the local newspaper for any major service change, major service adjustment, and/or fare changes. Notices will be posted at the Downtown Boise Transit Mall, the Boise Towne Square Mall Transit Center, the Happy Day Transit Center, at the VRT administrative offices in Meridian, on the Valley Regional Transit and ValleyRide websites, and on social media outlets.