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Transit Partners Roll Out Service Changes.

Five rural transit agencies in northwestern Oregon collaborate to launch service improvements.

OREGON —Public transportation leaders in Clatsop, Tillamook, Lincoln, Columbia, and Benton counties have teamed up to improve transit connections between their counties. Beginning in January, the group will implement service changes to help make travel by transit more convenient.

The ‘Coast to Valley Express’, which is jointly operated by Lincoln County Transit and Benton County Rural Transit, will now add weekend service and provide a stop at the Amtrak station in Albany. Passengers riding the Coast to Valley Express route were previously asked to change buses at Ellmaker State Park near the Benton/Lincoln county line, to transfer from one transit service to another. However, these two transit agencies are now collaborating to provide direct service all the way from the Amtrak station in Albany to Newport on the coast, without the need for a transfer. “This has been our goal for a long time,” notes Cynda Bruce, executive director for Lincoln County Transit. “Direct service should help make it easier for people to get between the coast and inland communities without having to rely on a car.”

In the northern part of the five-county project area, Columbia County Rider (CC Rider) and Sunset Empire Transportation District (SETD) are also improving their connecting service. Both transit providers are adding weekend service along US30 that will allow coordinated transfers at Westport.

CC Rider will begin offering Sunday service from Westport to Portland in addition to the current Saturday service from St. Helens to Portland along US Highway 30. The Westport connection will allow riders to transfer from SETD to the CCRider system, which will take riders along US Hwy 30 to downtown Portland.

Sunset Empire Transportation District is also working with Tillamook County Transportation District to add weekend service along US101 from Astoria, with coordinated connections in Cannon Beach and Manzanita. The new weekend US101 service will coordinate with the new weekend US30 service to provide full connectivity between Columbia, Clatsop and Tillamook Counties 7-days-a-week.

Other adjustments to connections between Benton, Lincoln, Tillamook, Clatsop and Columbia counties are also in progress, with more to follow as transit agencies continue to collaborate. All buses have bike racks for the convenience of those who want to “bike and ride”.

Bob Kenny, a board member for the Tillamook County Transportation District has been serving as interim director for his transit agency over the past few months. “We are absolutely committed to these partnerships,” he says. “In tight economic times, a cooperative approach is essential.”

The initial service changes are part of a larger project funded by a \$3.5 million US Department of Energy grant, which is aimed at increasing transit use by commuters and visitors in rural northwestern Oregon. Successful strategies piloted by the five-county transit alliance will serve as a national model for other transit providers across the country.