

Chapter 5 – Mobility Strategies

People who need help with transportation in order to meet their day-to-day needs have a number of options available to them, but as we’ve seen, there are still gaps in service and barriers to be overcome.

This chapter spells out five strategic mobility objectives and supportive implementation strategies for each. Strategies work to make special needs transportation more efficient, more accessible, and more available to those who need it while improving overall rural mobility for all. The overarching aim is to preserve and enhance the network of coordinated services people rely on today, improving upon it with innovative approaches tailored to specific needs and opportunities in this region.

1. Operate services that provide access and mobility for Okanogan County residents.

These strategies help sustain existing services, so we maintain this strong base for future growth and expansion, and where possible, expand those services or establish new kinds of service that meet unmet needs.

Strategies:

- a. Sustain operations of existing transportation services and service levels for providers currently supporting rural mobility in the Okanogan County region, including public, tribal, non-profit, and private carrier services
- b. Increase service to extend the hours of operation and/or service frequency and/or days of operation and/or expand or create new service for underserved areas
- c. Improve access within and between Colville Tribes districts and increase connectivity between tribal government services in Nespelem and HUD housing in Omak and Malott
- d. Introduce on-demand “first-miles/last-miles,” “collect and connect,” or other services that get people to and from established fixed-route services efficiently
- e. Improve access to VA facilities, medical services, and intermodal transportation facilities in Spokane with a new Travel Washington intercity bus route between Omak and Spokane via Nespelem
- f. Improve transportation access to behavioral health clinics and substance use disorder treatment centers
- g. Provide for Non-Emergency Medical Transport (NEMT) services for people who are not on Medicaid to support patient discharges from hospitals, behavioral health transport, veterans transport, or other medically necessary travel needs

2. Manage mobility to make travel easier and more efficient for all.

These strategies make it easier for people to get the information they need to plan their trips and to travel.

Strategies:

- a. Increase public awareness of available services through promotions, branding, outreach, or other measures that increase the visibility of existing services
- b. Develop and deploy travel training programs to help people learn how to use the available services confidently and make connections with other systems
- c. Develop and promote coordinated online and print resources to inform and educate about all mobility resources available within the region and connecting services, and promote this information to service providers as well as the public
- d. Improve the ability of people to access transit information and make trip reservations for paratransit and door-to-door services
- e. Hire multilingual staff to assist with trip planning and travel training for the public
- f. Deploy community-based programs that meet unserved needs of a particular group or geographic area
- g. Ensure WA 211 service provider information for the Okanogan County region is current and complete
- h. Convene HSTP stakeholders on a regular basis (e.g. 1-2 times/year) to strengthen cross-sector relationships and coordination between transportation, health, and human services providers, and foster new partnerships and innovative approaches tailored to the unique needs of the Okanogan region

3. Manage assets and keep them in a State of Good Repair.

These strategies support essential asset management and entail purchase of vehicles, equipment, and technology assets.

Strategies:

- a. Maintain and replace vehicles to ensure State of Good Repair and transit asset management standards in accordance with Useful Life Benchmarks by vehicle type
- b. Establish a permanent base of operations for transit, including maintenance and administrative facilities that support TranGO and OCTN operations
- c. Incorporate onboard vehicle technologies that enhance safety, system performance, and fleet management
- d. Update communications equipment as needed, including the capacity to communicate with other entities to enhance coordination, operational efficiency, and emergency response

- e. Integrate advanced technologies where they can improve dispatching, routing, or coordination of services
- f. Introduce zero-emission vehicles and supporting infrastructure into vehicle fleets when appropriate, recognizing the demands of rural service and avoiding technologies that would reduce the reliability or availability of service

4. Make travel more accessible.

These strategies entail small construction and infrastructure projects that make it easier for more people to access available services.

Strategies:

- a. Install curbside traveler amenities to make waiting for transit or share-ride service more comfortable and secure, including such things as shelters, benches, lighting, receptacles, and signage
- b. Improve sidewalk and crosswalk access to and from transit stops to meet ADA standards
- c. Establish park-and-ride facilities in Brewster, Tonasket and Twisp, at a minimum, to improve connectivity with TranGO, Apple Line, and other intersecting transportation services as well as support increased efficiency in the delivery of frontier-country mobility
- d. Implement Complete Street treatments in CCT HUDs and other places where improving walk and bike facilities can increase access to transit and other services

5. Plan how to improve service and address unmet needs.

These strategies involve planning and coordination that promotes strong relationships and which may lead to future measures that help to overcome obstacles that hinder rural mobility.

Strategies:

- a. Evaluate access and connectivity needs within and between the Confederated Colville Tribes districts, and identify service strategies and implementation measures that will provide better access for tribal members to government services in Nespelem and other community destinations
- b. Conduct emergency management planning and evacuation coordination preparedness training with a focus on the needs of people who don't drive or have access to a vehicle and considering the latest technological advancements
- c. Explore whether innovative rural service measures could have value in increasing access to existing services, such as on-demand micro-transit "collect and connect" service with timed connections to TranGO or Apple Line service, or other measures tailored to meet specific rural mobility needs in the Okanogan region
- d. Evaluate new app-based technologies for their potential to enhance service and if warranted, conduct a pilot test to determine suitability for wider deployment

- e. Explore the potential for vehicle sharing or “vehicle maintenance as a service” agreements to overcome service obstacles, with a particular focus on the services and needs of tribal, non-profit, non-traditional, or community based transportation service providers
- f. Complete a bus stop inventory and assessment to identify needed access improvements that can make it easier for more people to use transit for more of their trips

Other Strategic Endeavors

The strategies above identify measures that transportation providers can take to improve rural access and mobility, provided there is adequate funding and other resources to deliver those programs.

There are additional measures that would improve access and mobility but they are beyond the control of local service providers to address. These measures would enhance the ability of local service providers to deliver existing and future mobility programs.

- ❖ Preserve the advanced care resources and basic health services located in Okanogan County because if they close and more people are required to travel longer distances for health services, the transportation and access issues will grow in magnitude
- ❖ Align the service boundaries for mobility grants to reflect the Accountable Communities of Health service boundaries with their coordinated care alliance of providers, minimizing mobility gaps due to grant restrictions
- ❖ Require private carriers receiving Travel Washington funding for service like the Apple Line to assign a local point of contact liaison for rural transit agencies and also, work to provide timed connections within each transit PTBA to expand access to intercity bus service to more people in more places
- ❖ Promote closer coordination between WSDOT Public Transportation Division and the Health Care Authority on efforts pertaining to access to rural health services and the role of reliable transportation in health care outcomes, particularly regarding transportation coordination for the Rural Health Transformation Program as well as the regional Accountable Communities of Health and local community care hubs and Recovery Navigator programs
- ❖ Reduce the need to travel by increasing broadband access to rural households enabling telehealth, remote work, and distance-based learning opportunities
- ❖ Promote location-efficiency and accessibility when siting new facilities that serve seniors, veterans, people with disabilities, and those with low income