

Executive Summary



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The Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), on behalf of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation (CSKTFR), contracted with LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc. (LSC) to provide Technical Assistance in preparing a public transportation plan. The project focuses on the transit needs of the Flathead Reservation for the general public, elderly, disabled, and tribal members; and how to effectively provide transit services to meet those needs. Currently, there is limited general public transportation service provided by the Department of Human Resource Development (DHRD) and other agencies, but no comprehensive transit system. DHRD and several other agencies have recognized the need for improving public transportation on the Flathead Reservation.

There are existing resources in the area used by human service agencies to provide transportation services for their clients. The existing resources represent a significant investment and may provide some of the resources necessary to implement a public transit service. Coordination and consolidation of services typically allow local entities to provide additional and enhanced services to the community using the existing resources. A key issue in the Technical Assistance project was to identify the existing available resources and any additional resources which may be needed to provide public transit service.

STUDY AREA

The Flathead Reservation is located in an area of forested mountains and sheltered valleys just west of the Continental Divide in Montana. The Flathead Reservation covers a total land area of 1,244,000 acres and includes the southern half of Flathead Lake, which provides excellent fishing and recreational opportunities. The Flathead Reservation consists of portions of Lake, Sanders, and Missoula Counties and includes the communities of Polson, Ronan, Pablo, St. Ignatius, Big Arm, Ravalli, Dixon, Cammas, Elmo, and Niarada.

Flathead Reservation is home to three Indian tribes: the Bitterroot Salish, the Upper Pend d'Oreille, and the Kootenai. "Confederated Salish" refers to both the Salish and Pend d'Oreille tribes. Around 4,300 tribal members currently live on the Flathead Reservation, along with representatives of 79 other tribes (as reported by the local school districts, S&K College, and Tribal Health and Human Services). Approximately 2,800 CSKTFR tribal members do not live on the Flathead Reservation.

The territories of these three tribes covered all of western Montana and extended into parts of Idaho, Wyoming, and British Columbia. The 1855 Hellgate Treaty established the Flathead Reservation, but over half a million acres passed out of tribal ownership during the land allotment that began in 1904.

TRANSIT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Chapter IV provides a transportation needs assessment for the Flathead Reservation. The Flathead Reservation has a diverse population. The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes represent approximately one-quarter of the total population on the Flathead Reservation. The transportation needs for the tribes are significant, especially based on the unemployment data, below-poverty data, sparse rural geographic area, and limited job opportunities in the study area.

In order to estimate the transportation needs for the Flathead Reservation, it is important to have a methodology that considers the local demographics, economics, and service characteristics. Chapter IV describes the development of a transit demand model for the study area that can be used to estimate the transit demand. The transit demand estimates are based upon available 2000 US Census data, as presented in Chapter II. The data are used as the baseline 2005 transit demand estimates and 2010 projected demand estimates.

The most recent research for rural transit demand estimation was completed in 1996 as part of the Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) Project A-3: Rural Transit Demand Estimation Techniques. This study, completed by SG Associates, Inc. and LSC, represented the first substantial research into the demand for transit service in rural areas and small communities since the early 1980s. The

study presents a series of formulas relating the number of participants in various types of programs to the observed actual demand for transit service, based upon a database of 185 transit agencies across the country. The TCRP analytical technique uses a logit model approach to estimate transit demand, similar to that commonly used in urban transportation models. The model incorporates an exponential equation which relates the quantity of service and the demographics of the area.

The TCRP analysis procedure considers transit demand in two major categories: “*program demand*” which is generated by transit ridership to and from specific social service programs; and “*non-program demand*” generated by the other mobility needs of the elderly, disabled, and general public (including youth). Examples of non-program trips may include shopping, employment, and medical trips.

As presented in Chapter IV, the model indicates that if a high level of public transit were available on the Flathead Reservation, approximately 33,240 annual trips (non-program trips) would be provided. Currently, less than 20,000 overall (program and non-program trips) annual trips are provided. This information shows the need for additional public transit services on the Flathead Reservation.

When combining the program and non-program estimates based upon the TCRP methodology, the total existing transit demand for the Flathead Reservation is approximately 214,398 annual trips.

$$33,240 \text{ non-program trips} + 181,158 \text{ program trips} =$$

214,398 TOTAL Annual Transit Demand

Assuming approximately 16,000 annual trips were provided, only seven percent of the transit need is being met within the Flathead Reservation based upon the TCRP methodology, as shown in Chapter IV. This number includes the annual trips from mental health agencies, Youth Assessment Center, Veterans’ Home, Head Start, and local group homes. The analysis shows that there is a significant

number of trips not being met on the Flathead Reservation. Therefore, there is a large need for improved transit services in order to meet the community's needs.

RECOMMENDED SERVICE PLAN

Chapter X reviews the details of the preferred transit service alternative including the levels of service, route schedules, operational costs, capital needs, and capital costs. The preferred transit service alternative would be developed in three phases, each of which contains three transit service elements at increasing levels of service. Phase I has 63 daily revenue-hours. Phase II has 91 daily revenue-hours. Phase III has 130 daily revenue-hours. Therefore, the level of service doubles over the next six years. The three phases were created in order to facilitate the coordination of the different transit providers on the Flathead Reservation with DHRD to support one overall transit provider—a new Tribal Transit Department that would operate the preferred transit service alternative.

The preferred transit service alternative is based on three transit service elements. The first element is four fixed routes: a main line operating along Highway 93 from Polson to Ravalli; a northern route operating from Dayton to Pablo; a southern route operating from Alree to Ronan by way of Charlo; and a limited service from Elmo to Hot Springs three times per day. The second transit service element is three demand-response zones based out of Hot Springs, Ronan, Polson, Elmo, and Ravelli. Over the next six years, a medical demand-response service would be added. The third transit service element is commuter service to Missoula and Kalispell, which would initially operate on a limited basis of two to three times per day, and would operate multiple trips per day later in the development of the overall system.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

In the implementation plan, LSC recommends the planning and implementation of Phase I by mid-2006. Phase II, which requires more coordination between agencies and the transfer of funding through the development of intergovernmental agreements or service contracts, should be planned in 2007 and implemented by 2008. Phase III has additional intergovernmental agreements, thereby increasing

the complexity of the service implementation. For this reason, LSC recommends planning Phase III in 2008 and 2009, with implementation in 2010. Each phase should be evaluated prior to implementation of the next phase.

In capital planning, LSC recommends the development and installation of 10 bus stops over the next 10 years. The first bus stops should be located in Polson, Ronan, and Ravalli since these will be the center transfer points of the fixed-route service and regional commuter service. Depending on the Federal Transit Administration and Montana Department of Transportation funding, the transit maintenance and administration facility should be planned and designed in 2006. Construction of the maintenance and administration facility should begin in 2007, with completion by the end of 2008. Until then, the vehicles could operate out of the DHRD office and the Tribal Complex.

The time line is designed to implement the preferred transit service alternative over the next five to six years. This timeframe allows those agencies and government bodies which are dedicating funding to the transit system the time to shift funding. The timeframe also allows for the refinement of the transit services in Phase I, and the development of the bus stops and transit facilities that would be needed by Phases II and III.