

<b>TOPIC</b>	Valley Regional Transit Annual Update
<b>DATE</b>	May 2, 2023
<b>STAFF MEMBER</b>	Stephen Hunt

## Introduction

Elaine Clegg became the new CEO of Valley Regional Transit in Mach of 2023. This memo outlines her new Better Bus Initiative, FY2022 accomplishments and performance reporting.

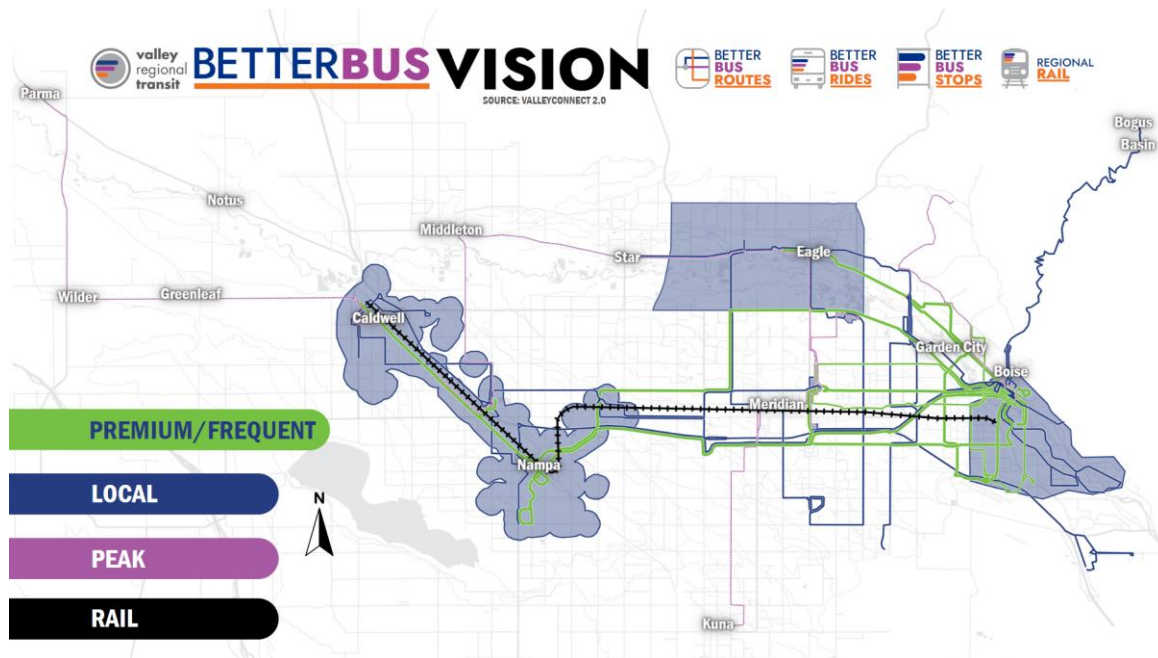
- FY2024 Service Concepts and Budget Development
- Better Bus Initiative
- FY 2022 Accomplishments
- FY 2022 Performance Evaluation

## Better Bus Initiative

Under the new leadership of Elaine Clegg, Valley Regional Transit has launched a Better Bus Initiative. This initiative is focused on getting community and public input on how we take the next step from the Valley Connect 2.0 vision. This initiative is consistent with the direction VRT received from the City of Boise to explore ways to improve ridership and funding outcomes within existing budget limits.

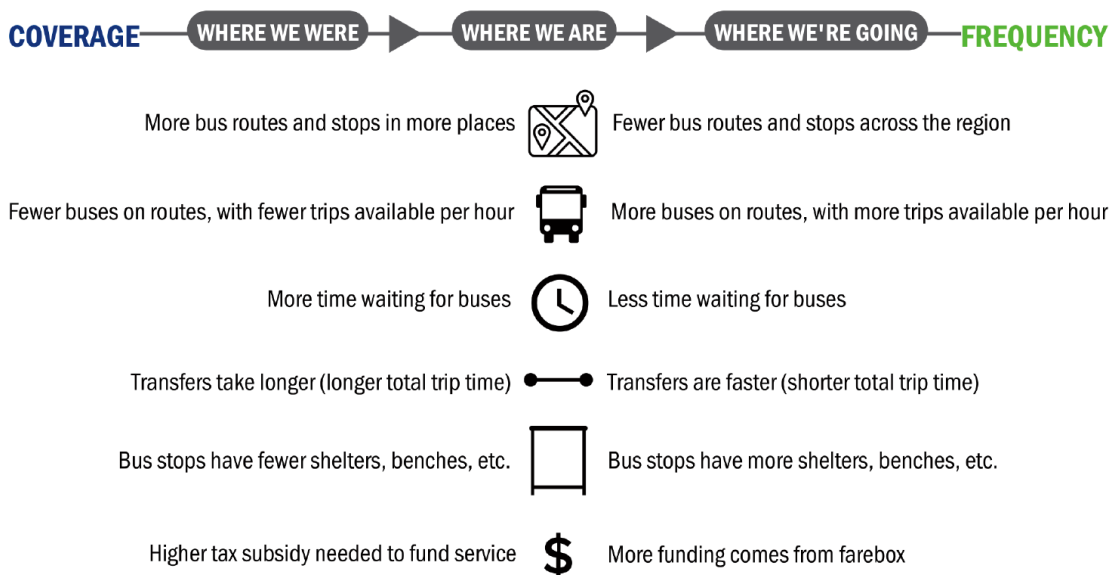
The Better Bus Initiative will explore ways to improve routes, bus stops, and bus rides all with an eye toward the future network. The improved routes of the Better Bus Initiative will focus on creating a grid of more frequent services with regional connections and integration of available technology. Figure 1 below illustrates the future vision found within Valley Connect 2.0.

Figure 1: Frequent Network Vision



This approach prioritizes maximizing service frequency (how often the bus comes) over maximizing service coverage (where the bus goes). The trade-off between service frequency and service coverage is a key feature of any transit network. Transit networks that favor frequency over coverage will have fewer routes that come more often and typically will have higher ridership. Transit networks that favor coverage will have more routes so more parts of the community can access the services, but the services come less often. Figure 2 below illustrates this trade off and how over the years VRT has been shifting toward a higher frequency network.

Figure 2: Coverage vs Frequency Trade-off



Throughout the month of April, VRT surveyed the public to get their feedback on the Better Bus Initiative. VRT received more than 400 respondents to the survey with almost 8% of survey respondents coming from Meridian. Of survey respondents more than 80% of them supported the better bus route concepts, which would provide more frequent service on fewer streets rather lower frequency services on more routes. The Better Bus Initiative is designed to support the region’s interest in building multi-modal corridors that can demonstrate high quality transit service.

**Service Concept Development**

As planned in the FY2023-2027 Transportation Development Plan, VRT identified the need to find service efficiencies and look for potential service reductions in City of Boise. The service proposals that have been developed are built on the Better Bus Initiative principals.

The proposals concentrate service on major corridors and focus on increasing service productivity and transit mobility. VRT will engage the public throughout the month of May to explore the impacts of potential service changes, including reductions and service reallocations. We will revise these draft proposals over the summer and present final proposals for the VRT board to consider in August of 2022.

The majority of the potential impacts are on City of Boise or intercounty services (routes 40, 42, and 45). Because route 30 was launched in October of last year and we are seeing some growth in usage on the route 30, we did not propose changes in this initial draft. We will work with City of Meridian through the draft and final proposal phase to ensure we are responsive to public feedback and community needs.

## **FY2022 Accomplishments**

1. **Secured \$8.5M State Street RAISE Grant.** In 2022 VRT was awarded its first ever competitive RAISE grant. These funds will be used to improve transit and non-motorized infrastructure and amenities along the State Street corridor.
2. **Secured \$17.4M Low-No.** In 2022 VRT was also awarded \$17.4 million in federal funds to continue electrifying its transit fleet. This funding will pay for critical charging infrastructure and battery electric vehicles.
3. **Completed the Orchard Facility Master Plan.** The Orchard Facility Master Plan will guide VRT's investments at the Orchard maintenance facility including plans for fleet electrification and expansion
4. **Initiated Orchard lot expansion.** One of the first investments identified in the facility master plan was an expansion of the existing parking lot to make room for more transit vehicles and electric charging equipment. This project broke ground in FY2022 and will be completed in FY2023.
5. **Completed Fairview transit islands.** In coordination with CCDC, VRT provided design comments, review, and enhanced transit amenities for the first of their kind transit islands on Main and Fairview in downtown Boise. These islands have elevated platforms and will serve as a model for other enhanced transit stops on other premium corridors. VRT began serving these islands in FY2022.
6. **Completed Kuna Public Transportation Study.** In partnership with the City of Kuna, VRT completed a public transportation study which explored options for transit expansion to Kuna. The results of this study have been included in the FY2023 TDP.
7. **Completed the FY2023-2027 Transportation Development Plan.** In 2022 VRT was able to complete its first ever five-year service and capital plan. This plan will be updated each year and will serve as a guide for both service and capital projects.
8. **Substantially completed the Regional Vanpool Study.** The Regional Vanpool Study explored how VRT could use vanpool and other shared mobility services to better meet the transportation needs of residents in the Treasure Valley. This important study will help VRT and ACHD Commuteride work together to expand vanpool and find innovative ways to serve the growing non-traditional commute patterns.
9. **Substantially completed the Integrated Mobility Plan.** As part of its commitment to integrated mobility and mobility management, VRT substantially completed the Integrated Mobility Plan, which will guide how VRT will work with its partners to expand transportation demand management practices and drive the use of alternative modes of transportation across the Treasure Valley.
10. **Substantially completed the Bus Stop Typology.** VRT substantially completed the Bus Stop Typology, which will increase the visibility and improve the information available at all VRT bus stops.

## FY 2022 Performance Evaluation

**Ridership is recovering.** Transit ridership is still recovering from the significant impacts of COVID-19. Ridership across the system hit its lowest point in February of 2021 and has been slowly working its way back since then. In FY2022, there were approximately 10% more riders on the fixed route system than in FY2021. This was the first year of ridership increases since before the pandemic (see Table 1). The rate of ridership recovery generally increased throughout FY2022 (see Table 2). That trend has continued in FY2023 with the first quarter of 2023 increasing by 20% over the first quarter of FY2022.

Table 1

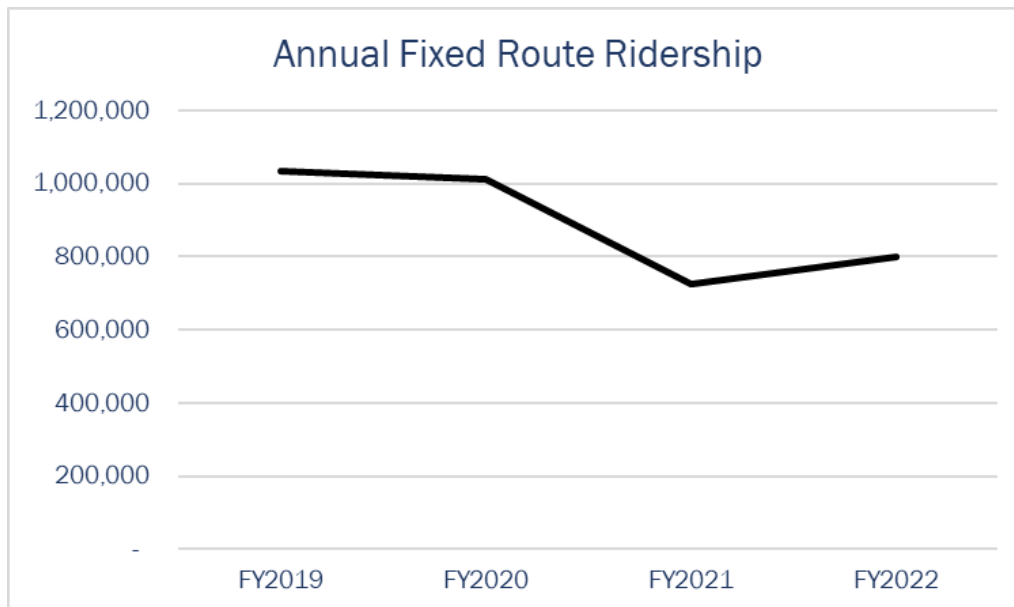
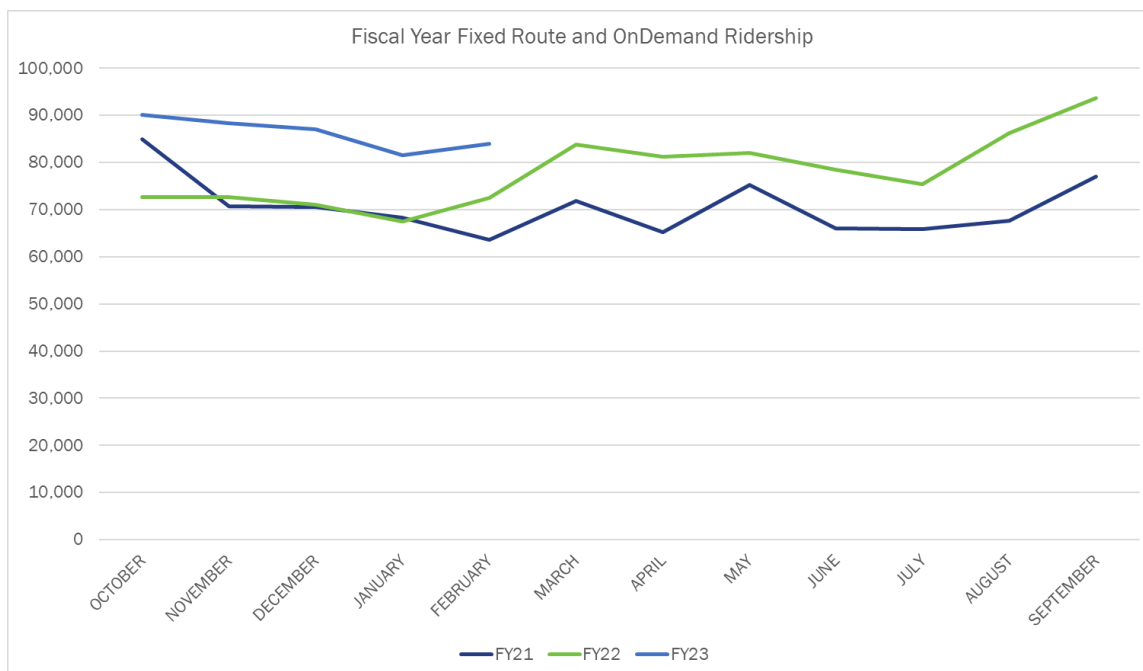


Table 2



**On-time performance is high or improving.** Although there are individual routes that do not yet meet the 90% on-time target service in Ada County is either meeting our 90% on-time target or improving and as a whole the Ada County services have an all-day on time performance of 91%. In the PM Peak period, when traffic is heaviest, on time performance is 87% on time.

The longer intercounty services, including those that serve Meridian are subject to a greater degree of traffic variation and on-time performance for those services is 76% all day and 71% in the PM peak. We will continue to monitor on-time performance on these routes and make changes to improve it over time.

**Meridian Fixed Route Service 30, 40, 42, and 45**

In October of 2022 VRT worked with the City of Meridian to launch the route 30 Pine which connects Ten Mile Crossing to the Village during the peak hours. In the first quarter of operation (October to January) there were more than 1,500 boardings on this route. Which based on previous post pandemic services launches is more than we were forecasting for the first quarter of operations. Preliminary ridership numbers for the second quarter also show over 1,500 boardings. To be sustainable, this ridership will need to continue to grow.

Routes 40 and 42 continue to recover ridership from the pandemic. FY2022 ridership is up significantly over FY2021 and that trend is continuing into the first quarter of 2023.

*Table 3: Intercounty Ridership Growth*

Route	FY 2021	FY 2022	% Change	2022 1st Qtr.	2023 1st Qtr.	% Change
40	11,320	14,592	29%	2,942	3,921	33%
42	19,669	22,316	13%	5,260	6,731	28%

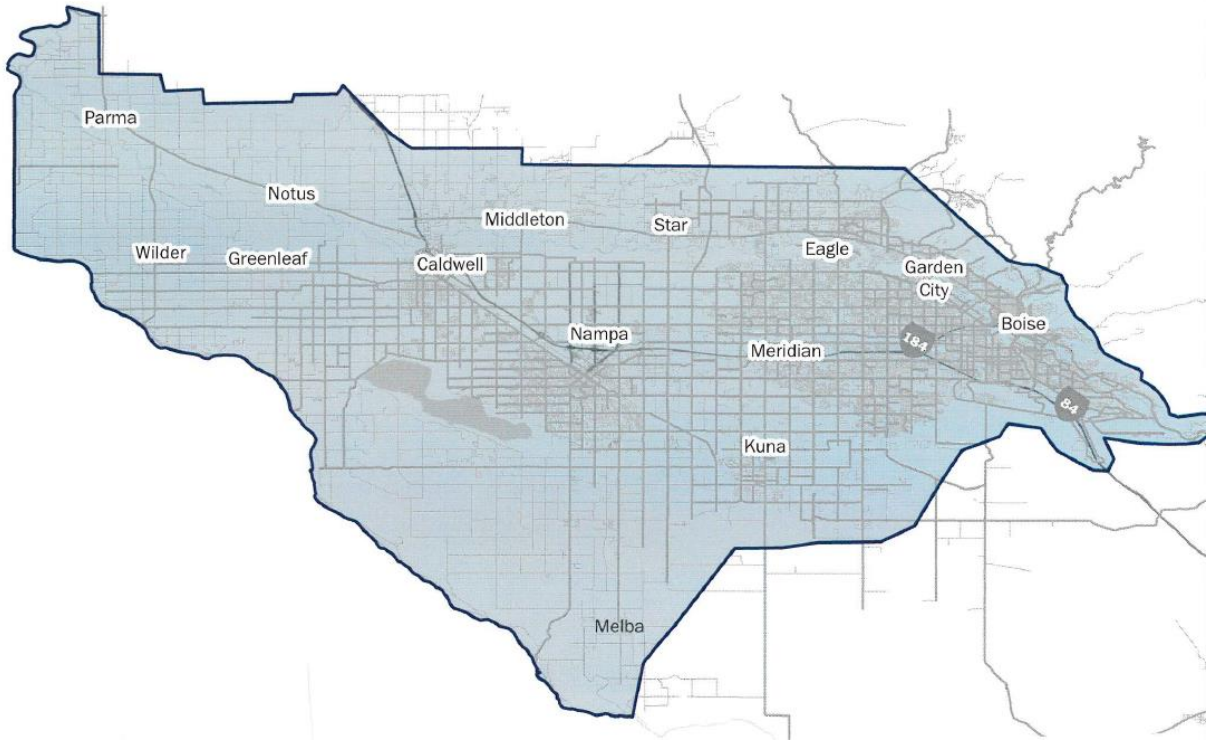
Also in October VRT restructured the route 45 which resulted in it serving the Village at Meridian, and Fairview Ave. Ridership is up on the 45 is up 4% over the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter ridership from FY2021.

**Beyond ADA Project**

VRT is working to build accessible capacity through an efficient and coordinated on-demand solution that will expand service to areas where traditional fixed-route and paratransit services are limited. VRT created a steering committee that included VRT staff as well as key stakeholders. Figure 3 below represents the proposed service area.

Figure 3: Beyond ADA Proposed Service Area

### Beyond ADA Proposed Service Area



VRT staff met with all service providers and several riders to document what is and is not working from their perspective, including staff from Harvest Transit. Using the data collected from feedback from service providers and riders, VRT staff created a new service model. The proposed service model includes:

- Customers access service through one single number to call for scheduling, canceling, changing, or inquiring about rides
- Consistent operating hours
- Services are fully accessible
- Service area includes current specialized transportation service area
- Rides are available for any activity or destination customers want to access within the defined service area
- Rides can be booked using a mobile app, a web app, or by phone
- Rides can be booked in advance, same day, or on-demand
- All service providers will use VRT scheduling software
- Vehicles and customer facing information will be VRT branded and easily identified by customers
- The service is safe, clean, reliable and customers are served by well-trained and professional contracted operators
- A phased implementation schedule
- Customer supports are directly provided by VRT Help Desk or VRT mobility integration staff
- Customers can travel within or between Ada and Canyon counties



- Customers can make connections to other regional services including fixed-route, ADA paratransit and rural senior center transportation

The new service model was presented to the steering committee, the Area Agency on Aging, VRT's Regional Advisory Council, as well as the VRT Board of Directors. It was recommended that VRT staff finalize the new operating model for VRT Executive Board approval in August, with a launch date in October 2023.

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