

6. Key Questions for Future Service Planning

This report has described SMART's existing network and demand-response programs and local and regional markets. However, the future development of SMART's network can only be *informed* by such analysis. The actual choices about what SMART should do in the future will be made based on input from the public, stakeholders and elected officials about what values, goals and priorities should shape the agency's service improvement efforts.

Based on our evaluation of existing conditions, we identify several key questions for the future. These are not questions with a technical answer; instead, their resolution will depend on a conversation between SMART and its riders and other community members.

How much should SMART's network focus on WES?

WES was designed to fill a critical regional mobility need - north/south connectivity between Wilsonville and Beaverton, passing through busy, fast-growing places on the way. However, ridership on WES has historically been very low, with the lowest levels occurring during the pandemic. TriMet's operating agreement with FTA is ending during the next decade, which puts the future of the rail line into question.

The WES connection is extremely useful in terms of the places it can open up access to. Currently, there is no replacement that

would be as quick and easy a method of reaching critical network nodes like Tigard or Beaverton Transit Centers. But it is also only available during rush hours, and people in Wilsonville need to travel at all sorts of times beyond the traditional morning and afternoon commuting windows.

As long as WES is the focus on the network, the current network design makes sense. Most areas of Wilsonville are directly connected to WES, making the peak connection north available to as many people as possible.

As a result, there is a major question for SMART and the community it serves: to what degree should your transit network focus on connecting with WES?

When we improve local service, what are the most important priorities? Ridership or coverage?

SMART's local routes serve all parts of Wilsonville, but their service level is highly variable. One important question for the public is what SMART should focus its local service resources on. For example, should it concentrate more service into making busy corridors like Route 4 more useful, even if this meant that it invests less in peak-only services like Route 5 or 6 that serve fewer riders? This is the substance of the ridership-coverage tradeoff described earlier in this document.

However, this question is only particularly relevant if SMART were to change the basic principle of the network away from the current imperative to connect all areas to WES.

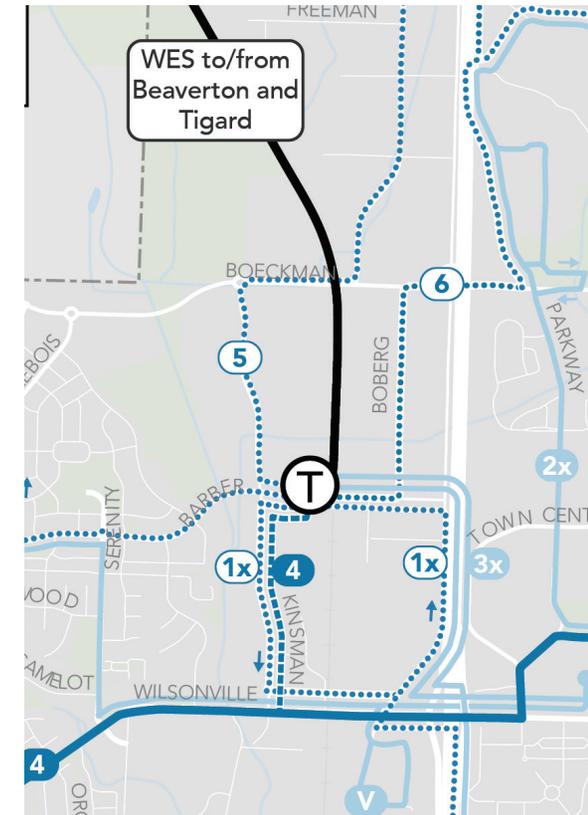


Figure 56: SMART's network converges at the SMART Transit Center and connection to WES. All SMART services reach this point, including Route 4, which deviated to the transit center during rush hours when WES is running.

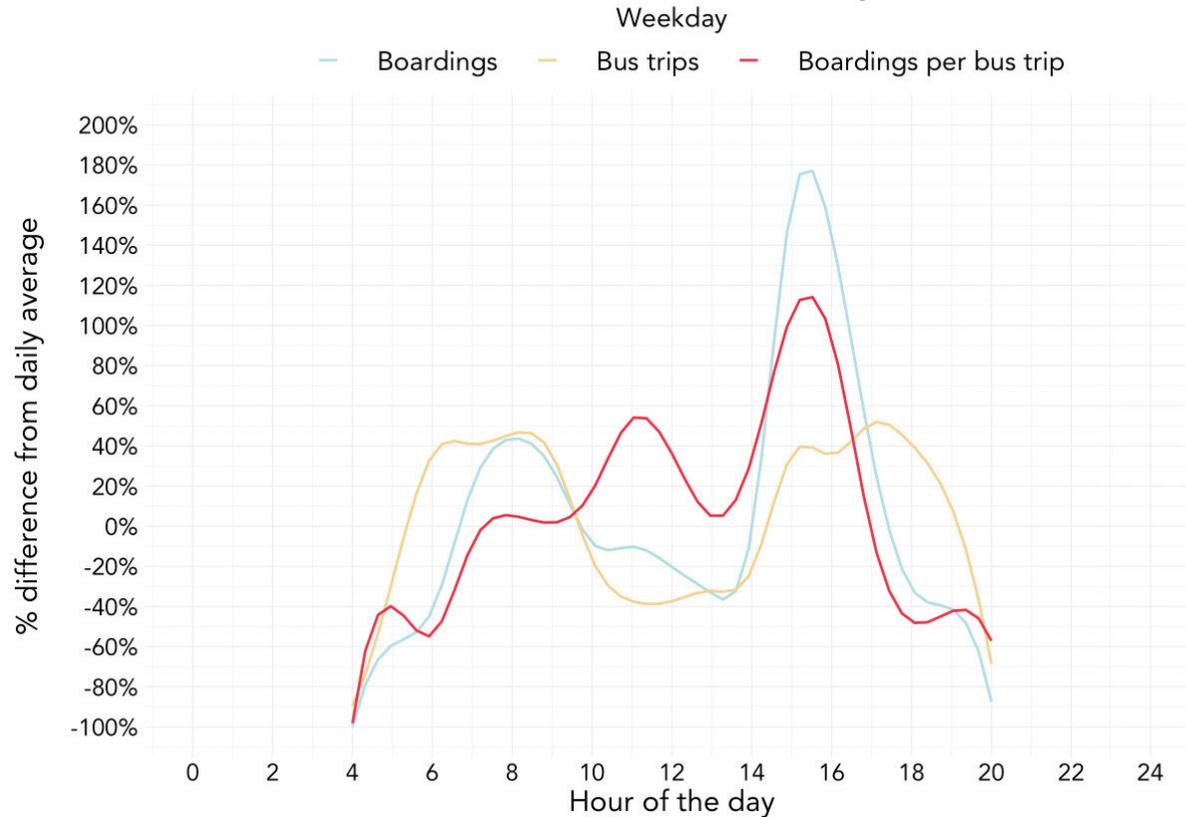
How should SMART balance services oriented towards peak commuters vs. service available at other times?

Because SMART’s service is built around WES, many of its routes primarily serve the needs of people commuting during the rush hours. Routes 5 and 6 only operate when WES is running, and regional services like 2X and 3X run extra trips during this period, or have their schedules aligned with WES arrivals. This approach to network design maximizes the usefulness of the network during the rush hour periods when many people need to travel.

This rush hour focus comes at a cost. For example, the areas served by Route 5 and 6 aren’t reachable at all during the middle of the day, or on Saturdays. The extra trips Route 2X makes during rush hour are trips it can’t make later in the evening, or earlier in the morning.

Since the onset of the pandemic, the commuting patterns of the workers whose schedules were previously most aligned with the traditional rush hour (office and professional workers) have changed dramatically. Most major cities’ downtown cores are still challenged by much higher vacancy rates than before the pandemic, and commute-oriented services operated by TriMet and other large transit agencies have lagged in ridership recovery compared to routes oriented toward the all-day demand generated by retail and service workers, and the customers that visit their places of employment.

SMART Service and Ridership - 2022



Source: SMART boardings data and GTFS from April 2022

Figure 57: SMART Service and Ridership by Hour

Earlier in this report, we examined the chart shown above, which compares ridership and service level throughout the day. Ridership and service (number of trips) are both higher during the rush hours than during the midday or evening, but importantly, the number of people who board each trip doesn’t drop in the midday. This is evidence that people are finding SMART’s service useful throughout the

midday, even though there is less service offered.

These observations about the rush hour raise an important question for future service planning: is this focus on the rush hour the right service design, given current performance and changing travel patterns? Ultimately, this is again a question about what people value - a service that is easier

to use during rush hour, or a service that is available over a wider range of hours, perhaps even on weekends?

How should SMART balance improvements to regional or local services?

In the 2017 TMP process, one of the major questions for the public and stakeholders was about whether SMART’s network should focus more or less on local or regional services. While some regional services can be funded through grants or interagency partnerships, it is also important to gain greater understanding from the public about whether SMART should focus on making it easier to get around Wilsonville, or making it easier to travel between Wilsonville and neighboring communities.

When we improve regional service, what are the most important destinations to serve?

This document has reviewed a range of data describing some of SMART’s potential regional markets, like the table of commute trips between Wilsonville and other destinations shown on this page. There are good reasons to make investments in service improvements oriented north, northeast, and south toward Salem. So one of the most important questions for the public to inform SMART’s future planning is which of these connections are the highest priority for Wilsonville’s residents?

City	Direction	Total Trips	Pct of Total
Portland	W/NW, E/NE	4644	15%
Wilsonville	Local	1802	11%
Tualatin	W/NW	1416	4%
Beaverton	W/NW	1399	4%
Tigard	W/NW	1394	4%
Salem	S	1137	4%
Hillsboro	W/NW	1025	3%
Lake Oswego	W/NW	934	3%
Woodburn	S	725	2%
Canby	E/NE	718	2%
Oregon City	E/NE	612	2%
Sherwood	W/NW	575	2%
West Linn	W/NW	517	2%
Newberg	W/NW	495	2%
Gresham	E/NE	444	1%
Aloha	W/NW	406	1%
Vancouver	W/NW	258	1%
Milwaukie	E/NE	256	1%
Keizer	S	246	1%
Happy Valley	E/NE	211	1%
Eugene	S	206	1%
Albany	S	176	1%
McMinnville	W/NW	175	1%
Hubbard	S	161	1%
Oak Grove	E/NE	158	<1%

Figure 58: Commute trips to and from Wilsonville (top 25)

Next Steps

This report is only the first step in this project. It lays out the current conditions of the network and poses questions, but this report cannot determine what SMART should do to improve its network in the future. Those questions can only be answered through engagement with the community that SMART serves.

In late summer and fall 2022, SMART will conduct an engagement process focused on these very questions. Using online and in-person methods, the agency will ask the public to help it determine what it should be focusing on in the coming years as it seeks to improve service.



Figure 59: SMART TMP Update Project Timeline