

## Average number of transit rides each year per Oregonian

### Our strategy

ODOT Public Transportation Division (PTD) partners with local transit providers to offer safe and cost-effective public transportation. This system supports the state's economy and quality of life across diverse geographies and people. Public transportation is vital to provide access to essential services, transportation for those who cannot or choose not to drive, and to reduce congestion and greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, demand for public transportation in Oregon is expected to grow in response to changing demographics.

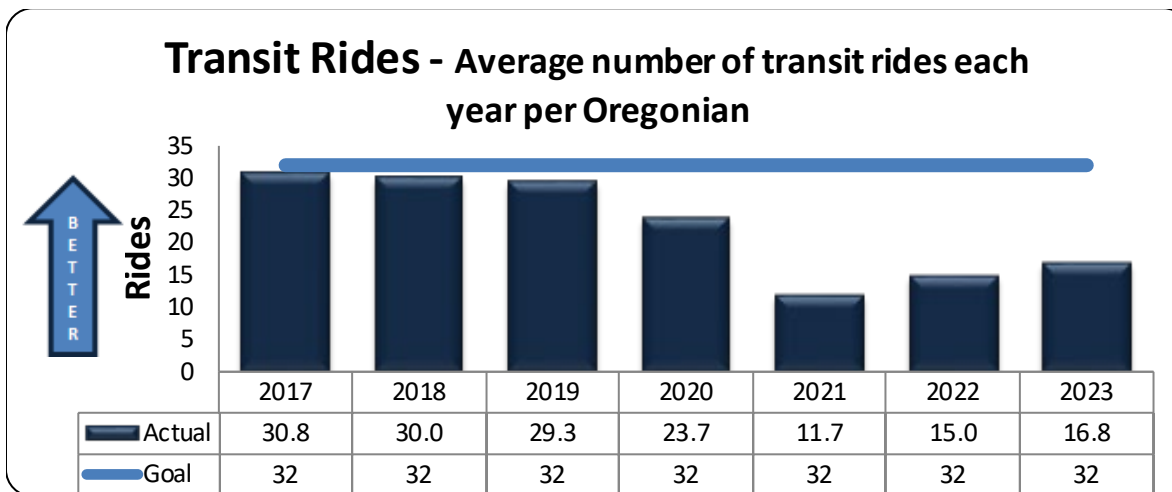
In 2018, the Oregon Transportation Commission adopted the *Oregon Public Transportation Plan (OPTP)* that outlines policies to support increased ridership, improved transit outreach, comprehensive planning for transit, and better transit facilities. Public transportation is an integral component of Oregon's multimodal transportation system that helps Oregon's diverse communities work by getting people where they want to go. The Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF) was included as part of the [HB 2017 Keep Oregon Moving](#) to provide

additional, stable funding to local transit providers.

In addition, one goal of ODOT's [Strategic Action Plan](#), approved by the Oregon Transportation Commission (March 2023), is to improve access to active and public transportation. Success will be measured by the increase in the percentage of agency funding dedicated to projects and programs that improve equitable access to these modes. Strong partnerships with local transit providers to enhance investments in public transportation are key to this outcome.

### About the target

The target was set in 2018, based on 2011-2016 ridership, with an expectation that it be evaluated after three to five years. Transit ridership per capita began declining several



Please Note: The most recent fiscal year data is based on leading indicators from the Oregon Public Transit Information System (OPTIS) and the latest Certified Population Estimate from Portland State University's (PSU) Population Research Center. Both of these data sources may undergo minor revisions in the following fiscal year when PSU updates its estimate and OPTIS is reconciled to the National Transit Database (NTD) data. The NTD, considered the gold standard for outcomes in the public transit industry, is typically not published until 12 to 18 months after the close of a given fiscal year.

### Fact

Increased federal funding during the pandemic allowed transit providers to make efforts to maintain service availability and to support meal delivery, senior transportation, and vaccination transportation.

# Transit rides, cont.

years before the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## How we are doing

While outperforming the national average on rides per capita, Oregon has seen a substantial decline in public transit use because of COVID-19.

Complete 2024 data is not yet available, but ridership was at its lowest in the spring and summer of 2021 and has been steadily recovering since. Increasing ridership is an ODOT priority, but for many agencies, it may take several years before it returns to pre-COVID levels. PTD will continue to analyze the impacts of the pandemic and timing for recovery and determine if the target remains reasonable.



## Factors affecting results and what needs to be done

ODOT Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF) funds were just starting to improve ridership when services had to be reduced because of COVID-19 safeguards. Oregon transit agencies took necessary precautions to ensure the safety of riders and drivers during the pandemic. They are now dealing with the effects of inflation, supply chain disruptions that delay procurement for new buses, staffing shortages, and safety concerns.

Public transit providers actively identify their local needs and priorities. It's crucial to increase ridership, but they also require STIF funds to add or replace buses, extend routes, boost service frequency, acquire technology, install passenger shelters, and enhance service planning. As ridership grows, the demand for transportation options will surpass available service in less than a decade.

It's time to act and support the enhancement of our local transit system. Ridership is affected by internal factors – ones that transit agencies can control – such as service quantity and quality, fares, and reliability. Ridership is also affected by external factors – those that transit agencies cannot control – such as demographics, population growth, car ownership, fuel prices, teleworking, and perceptions of personal safety on transit. For example, Oregon's population over 65 years of age has grown over 40 percent in the past decade, and the substantial number of people teleworking during COVID have been slow to return to the office, or opted to continue working remotely.

Because congestion and climate concerns are increasing, the importance of alternatives to single occupancy vehicles and strategic investments in priority multimodal corridors should contribute to the State's

goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and congestion management.

TriMet, Cherriots (Salem Area Mass Transit), and Lane Transit District currently provide over 90 percent of all transit trips in Oregon. Although all Oregon public transit providers are investing to increase ridership, the largest agencies will provide the largest gains for this measure.

## About the data

Smaller and rural providers report ridership to the PTD Oregon Public Transit Information System (OPTIS) database on a quarterly basis. Larger, urban providers report ridership annually to the National Transit Database (NTD); this information is typically released one full year after transit agencies provide their data. Population data used to calculate the measure uses the July 2023 certified population estimates from the Population Research Center of Portland State University.

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## Data sources

Oregon Public Transit Information System;  
National Transit Database; Portland State University, Population Research Center