



OREGON DEPARTMENT
of **VETERANS' AFFAIRS**



Oregon
Department
of Transportation

Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs and ODOT Public
Transportation Division

Rural Veterans Healthcare Transportation Grant Program

August 2023

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Background

The Rural Veterans Healthcare Transportation (RVHT) Grant Program was created in 2019 via legislative budget note (Senate Bill 5538 - Package 103). With an initial investment of \$500,000, the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA) engaged the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) Public Transportation Division (PTD) in a partnership to develop and deliver healthcare transit for veterans living in rural areas, including access to physical, mental, and/or behavioral health.

In 2021, RVHT was formalized in House Bill 2139 and given \$650,000 to continue and grow the program. ODOT awarded projects in twelve markets plus a project of statewide significance for the creation of Go Vets Oregon, a veterans-only portal on ODOT's ride matching platform Get There Connect.

For the cycle beginning July 1, 2023, ODVA has made a renewed investment of \$650,000 in the continued development and delivery of the RVHT partnership.

Source Link: [Oregon Senate Bill 5538](#)
[Oregon House Bill 2139](#)
[Oregon Get There Ride Matching Platform](#)
[Oregon Get There Go Vets](#)
[RVHT Projects Approved by OTC on January 10, 2022](#)
[RVHT Projects Approved by OTC on March 10, 2022](#)



New This Cycle

New Administrative Rules:

In previous cycles, ODOT's Special Transportation Fund (STF) Discretionary Grant Program received and distributed RVHT resources. However, effective July 1, 2023, the STF program was consolidated into ODOT's Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF). RVHT wasn't included in the consolidation because its financing strategy is too divergent from the payroll tax and population based apportionments of the updated STIF program. The new Administrative Rules adopted for RVHT may be found at OAR 274-039-0010.

Two-Tiered Competitive Solicitation:

ODOT and ODVA evaluated the RVHT program at the end of fiscal year 2023 for factors such as the cost-effective delivery of rides, miles, hours, outreach and innovative partnership. One outcome was a recognition by ODVA and PTD that Oregon's rural veterans have grown to rely upon many of the services created by the partnership. We are taking a two-tiered approach this cycle to streamline the solicitation and improve the prospects of preservation funding for successful existing projects while continuing the essential role of competition in advancing new initiatives and innovation.

All eligible Counties, Transportation Districts, and Tribes (please note, all of Oregon's Federally-Recognized Tribes are categorically eligible) are encouraged to participate. The process will work as follows:

- 1) Submission of a Letter of Interest (LOI) is a prerequisite for all project proposals under this solicitation. Only projects for which a materially similar LOI has been received will be considered.
- 2) One project per LOI. There is no limit on the number of LOIs a respondent may submit.
- 3) After the submission deadline, the scoring and selection committee will consider LOIs for preservation projects. In addition to the LOI and any optional attachments received, the committee may consider previous performance including (but not limited to) outcome metrics and expenditures from previous cycles, on-time reporting history, local investments, innovative partnerships, most recent PTD risk assessment(s) for the applicant and proposed subrecipient(s), and advice from the Regional Transit Coordinator.
- 4) After consideration of all preservation projects (collectively and individually) relative to the available resources, the committee may choose to fund one or more preservation projects, based directly upon Letter(s) of Interest without further development/submission of proposal materials from the applicant.
- 5) For projects that don't receive direct funding based on LOIs alone as described in Step 4, the committee will invite you to submit a formal application. Guidance on that subsequent application process will be issued in Fall 2023. The committee will share feedback on your LOI with your Regional Transit Coordinator for follow-up, prior to application submittal.

Source Link: [Oregon Administrative Rule 274-039-0010](#)
[RVHT Letter of Interest](#)

Eligibility

For Providers:

A transportation provider is eligible to apply for RVHT funding if:

- A) It is a County, Transportation District, or Federally Recognized Indian Tribe; and
- B) Its proposed area of service has been assigned a Rural-Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) code of 4 through 10, as determined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, as of July 3, 2019 (see Appendix A).

Please note, the RUCA codes described above include areas funded by the federal Highly Rural Veterans Transportation program. The Highly Rural Veterans Transportation program is related to RVHT, but is limited to jurisdictions with fewer than seven people per square mile. **Oregon’s federally-recognized Tribes are eligible to apply irrespective of RUCA coding on their proposed area(s) of service.**

For Passengers:

The term “veteran” will follow the definitions established in ORS 408.225(1)(f), governing eligibility for preference in public employment. Public transit providers receiving funding under the RVHT program are encouraged to incorporate the statute by reference into their process for identifying veterans and recording/reporting their ride statistics.

Please note, ODVA and ODOT recognize that tribal communities are not defined by geography. As such, **Oregon’s federally-recognized tribes are eligible for reimbursement for RVHT service(s) to their veterans, residing anywhere in the State of Oregon.**

Source Links: [ORS 408.225](#)
[Rural-Urban Community Area \(RUCA\)](#)
[Federal Highly Rural Veterans Transportation Program](#)

Goals, Objectives, and Priorities

The goal of the RVHT Program is to overcome transit-based barriers between veterans living in rural areas and the healthcare services they’ve earned. RVHT’s objective is to inspire innovative local solutions to transit challenges such as:

- Lifeline transit service in bedroom communities.
- Schedules and frequencies that conform to veterans’ needs.
- Appointments with out-of-market specialists and regional veterans hospitals.
- Ongoing appointments for the treatment of chronic conditions.
- Access to behavioral health services, counseling, and support groups.
- Periodic service to screening, detection, diagnosis, and disease prevention events.
- Accessible transit for veterans living with disabilities.

RVHT prioritizes projects with clearly identified needs and innovative, measurable solutions. Anticipated outcomes should be appropriate in scope and scale to the budget and time frame of a grant award. To the maximum extent practicable, proposals should demonstrate coordination of transportation services and resources.

Please note: Applicants are encouraged to **think broadly** about the definition of *healthcare* and related destinations. Veterans do not need to be accessing a facility funded or operated by the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs to qualify for transit services under this program. Moreover, access to goods and services that contribute to a veteran's well-being should be accommodated. These may include (but not be limited to or limited by): community and walk-in clinics, including those staffed by nurse practitioners and/or in proximity to other destinations such as major retailers; vision services, including vision retailers; dentists and denturists; audiology and hearing aid clinics/retailers; physical or occupational therapists; pharmacies and durable medical equipment vendors; smoking cessation and weight loss services; palliative care; and alternative/cultural medical services.

Project Types and Eligible Use

RVHT funding may be used for the following purposes:

- 1) Preservation of efficient and effective services that have been funded under an earlier RVHT competitive solicitation.
- 2) Expansion of such services.
- 3) Creation of new transportation services that support healthcare and healthy living for veterans.
- 4) Planning for, and development of, services that support access to healthcare transportation who are not currently served by an RVHT or federal Rural Veterans Transportation program.

This solicitation will prioritize proposals for operations and purchased services projects. These project types will minimize the recipient's reporting and create (or preserve) immediate benefits for veterans.

While mobility management and planning projects are eligible, we encourage applicants to approach them carefully. RVHT is a highly competitive resource and applicants will need to demonstrate how such investments will **meaningfully and measurably** improve healthcare access outcomes for rural veterans.

We encourage applicants to think holistically about the scope of service necessary to be successful and to allow for these expenditures in their proposed project budgets.

Shared Rides, Costs, and Fares

RVHT seeks to serve the highest number of veterans possible within available resources. Service to veterans in a shared ride mode is encouraged (including with general public passengers sharing common origins, destinations, or routes). **However, the absence of a shared ride option is not a sufficient reason to decline a veteran's travel request for an otherwise eligible trip.**

RVHT is limited to the fully allocated cost of serving veterans. **Incidental civilian costs from shared rides are ineligible.** While the following examples are not exhaustive, they may provide helpful illustrations of the expenses that are reimbursable under RVHT:

Generic shared ride trip: Average cost per ride is one simple method of determining eligible RVHT costs for a veteran using a local fixed route or demand response systems. Cost per ride is all of the expenses in the previous year, quarter, month or cycle of your choosing (optionally, within a specific mode) divided by the total rides delivered within the same parameters. This figure represents the fully allocated cost of a trip. RVHT would expect to pay no more than this figure, per served veteran ride.

Special out-of-market, shared ride trip: A trip that leaves the local area imposes costs beyond the generic ride described above (and therefore requires a different expense model). In these cases, it may be more appropriate to apply fully allocated cost per mile or fully allocated cost per hour – whichever the provider chooses to employ with consistency. The method of establishing costs is the same (total expenses for the selected time period, divided by total miles or revenue service hours).

RVHT would expect to pay the fully allocated cost of only the veterans involved in this trip. For example, for a four hour trip at \$100/Revenue Service Hour, shared by three veterans and one civilian, RVHT would expect to pay \$300.

Dedicated Trip: From time to time, circumstances may arise when the shared ride preference for RVHT will be a poor fit. For example, a veteran may need to travel out of market for care to places (or on days, or at times) when no shared ride demand exists. Alternatively, the unique conditions of a veteran's care needs may make a dedicated driver and vehicle the best service choice. In these instances, RVHT would expect to pay the full cost of delivering the trip. For convenience of consistently calculating these costs, providers may wish to use the cost per hour or cost per mile methods described above.

Veterans (and their Personal Care Attendants) may not be charged a fare, co-pay, **or other fee** for using these services. A veteran may make a donation to providers that are structured to receive them.

However, a provider shall not ask for or otherwise solicit a donation from RVHT passengers.

Source Links: [National RTAP Cost Allocation Model](#)

General Project Requirements

Pursuant to the crosscutting requirements of PTD funded services, RVHT projects must comply with 49-CFR-Part 37 Transportation services for Individuals with Disabilities (Americans with Disabilities Act) section 37.3 and be coordinated with other transportation programs and services to the maximum extent feasible.

As a condition of RVHT funding, PTD requires completion of a quarterly report. Without a copy of the report attached in OPTIS, the Regional Transit Coordinator will not advance a recipient's Reimbursement Request for payment.

Source Links: [Quarterly Report Sample from 2022-2023](#)

Funding Estimate and Local Match

PTD intends to award up to \$650,000 under this solicitation. No local match is required. However, the project scoring and selection committee may consider a project that features cash or in-kind contributions from an applicant more favorably than one that does not.

As a state resource, an RVHT award may be eligible for use as local match in complementary transit efforts delivered using federal funding. Please consult with your Regional Transit Coordinator if you are unsure (please see Appendix B – Key PTD Staff).

PTD anticipates making 8 to 12 grant awards. The minimum request for a project is \$10,000 and there is no maximum, but we estimate most awards will be between \$50,000 and \$150,000.

Applicants are encouraged to **ask for what the project needs**. Projects should feature a realistic budget and manageable outcomes for a 24month delivery schedule.

Coordination

ODVA and PTD recognize that for some applicants, the available funding may not be sufficient to create and implement a new program. In such cases, we encourage applicants to coordinate with nearby Counties, Districts, and/or Tribes to submit joint-funded and mutually beneficial proposals. Alternatively, neighboring applicants may realize efficiencies by proposing individual purchased services projects that coordinate through a mutual service provider.

We encourage applicants adjacent to those applying for ongoing RVHT projects or those receiving Highly Rural Veterans Transportation support from the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs to explore

preservation and/or expansion opportunities that mutually leverage the available resources and capacities.

Grant Program Schedule

2023	August 28 - RVHT LOI and Solicitation Guidance Released
	September 11 - RVHT LOI solicitation closes
	September 15 - Scoring and selection committee makes LOI recommendations to PTD Administrator
	September 25 - Full RVHT applications and guidance released
	November 1 - Invitations to apply released
2024	December 31 - Full application deadline
	January 17 - Scoring and selection committee makes application funding recommendations to PTD Administrator
	January 19 - Award notifications released
Services become reimbursable on date of fully executed agreement or date of stipulated pre-award authority (if applicable) , whichever comes first	

Additional information and an electronic version of this notice can be found on the Public Transportation Division website and Funding Opportunities pages here: [Funding Opportunities Link](#) . For information about Public Transportation Division resources and services, contact us at 503-986-3300 or ptd@odot.oregon.gov.

Appendix A: RUCA Coding

Rural-Urban Commuter Area (RUCA) Coding is a population density and travel orientation methodology developed by the United States Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health and Human Services. This census-tract-based approach is utilized by the United States Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) to determine rurality. In addition to compatibility with the standard used by the VA, RUCA provides this project with an effective tool to determine eligibility for veterans residing in areas that may be ineligible if we only considered the rurality of their county. For example, please consider

County X:

County X is rural by almost any metric you wish to consider. Its largest city is home to less than 15,000 people. However, one of Oregon's metropolitan communities has been growing across its boarder for the last few decades. A strict county-based definition of rurality may unfairly leave County X classified as ineligible.

County Y:

County Y is geographically large and diverse. Outside of one of Oregon's major metropolitan areas that call it home, there is only one community approaching 10,000 people. There are in fact, over 80 unincorporated communities within its borders. The coastal area of County Y comes up consistently in the veteran's healthcare access conversation as a place where more access services are needed. However, due to an urban area that's a 90-minute drive away, these populations would be ineligible if we applied a county-based population threshold on RVHT.

Primary RUCA coding breaks census tracts down as follows (paraphrasing for ease of understanding and reference):

- 1 – 3 Metro areas (over 50,000 people) with varying levels of primary traffic flow moving between them;
- 4 – 6 Micropolitan areas (10,000 to 49,999 people) with varying levels of primary traffic flow moving within or between an urbanized area.
- 7 – 9 Small town areas (2,500 to 9,999 people) with varying levels of primary traffic flow toward micropolitan or other small town areas.
- 10 Rural areas with primary flow of traffic to a census tract outside the classifications above.

Appendix B: Key PTD Staff

General questions about the RVHT Program and technical assistance inquiries should first be directed to your RTC:

Valerie Egon	Region 1: Portland Metro	971.301.0909	Valerie.EGON@odot.oregon.gov
Arla Miller	Region 2A: Northwest Oregon	503.949.5415	Arla.Miller@odot.oregon.gov
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