



Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund Program: A Report to the Joint Committee on Transportation

Executive Summary

The [Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund](#) (STIF) Program was introduced by House Bill 2017 to fund public transportation improvements across Oregon. Since it was first implemented for the 2019 to 2021 biennium, Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) has allocated \$285 million in STIF Program funds to Qualified Entities and other transportation providers for a wide range of system enhancements. Qualified Entities are direct recipients of STIF Formula funds and include counties in which no part of a Mass Transit District or Transportation District exists, Mass Transit Districts, Transportation Districts, and Indian Tribes.

Investments from the STIF Program have helped to make transportation in Oregon more equitable and affordable by supporting reduced-fare programs, expanded service coverage, and increased service frequency to low-income communities. This program has advanced greenhouse gas emission reduction efforts by funding the transition to low-emission vehicles, with 50 new low- or no-emission vehicles purchased during the first program cycle. Funds have supported expanded connectivity across Oregon’s multimodal network through transit service, infrastructure, and technology improvements.

The STIF Program has assisted transit providers in responding to multiple natural disasters and public health crises, demonstrating the value of public transportation as not just a means to complete a journey, but a vital piece of the social and economic fabric in both rural and urban areas. STIF-supported transit providers stepped up during the COVID-19 pandemic to deliver meals to older adults; they provided free rides to vaccination sites; they enabled evacuations during the devastating 2020 wildfire season; and they acted as mobile cooling centers during the record-breaking heatwaves in 2021.

This report highlights the achievements that STIF-funded transportation providers made during an incredibly challenging period. It also details the steps ODOT has taken to implement Senate Bill 1601, which preserves transportation programs that support older adults and people with disabilities. There is a great deal of work left to do, but in the first two years (Figure 1), the STIF Program laid the foundation for a truly multimodal transportation system that is accessible, equitable and sustainable.

Figure 1. Timeline of key STIF Program milestones

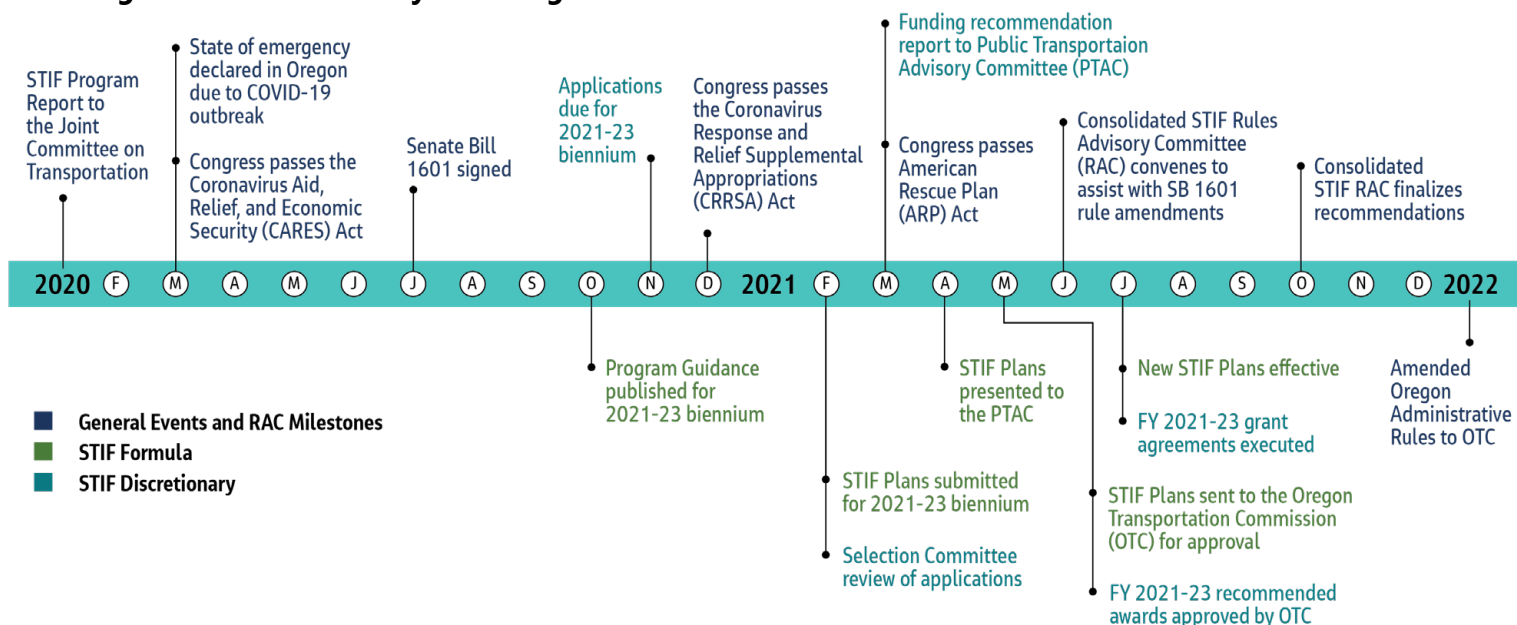


Figure 2. High level STIF Program outcomes in fiscal year 2019 to 2021

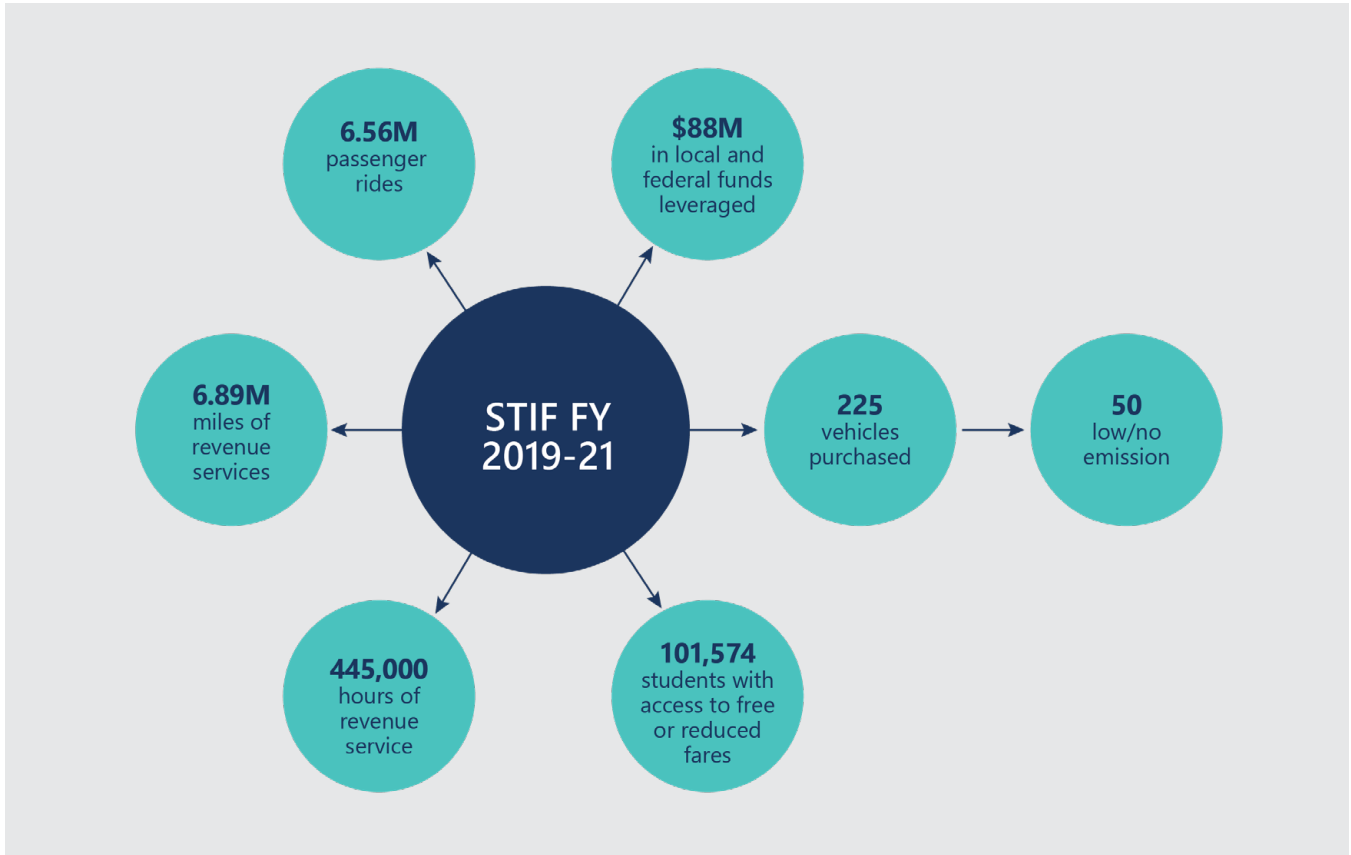


Figure 3. STIF Formula and Discretionary fund vehicle purchases

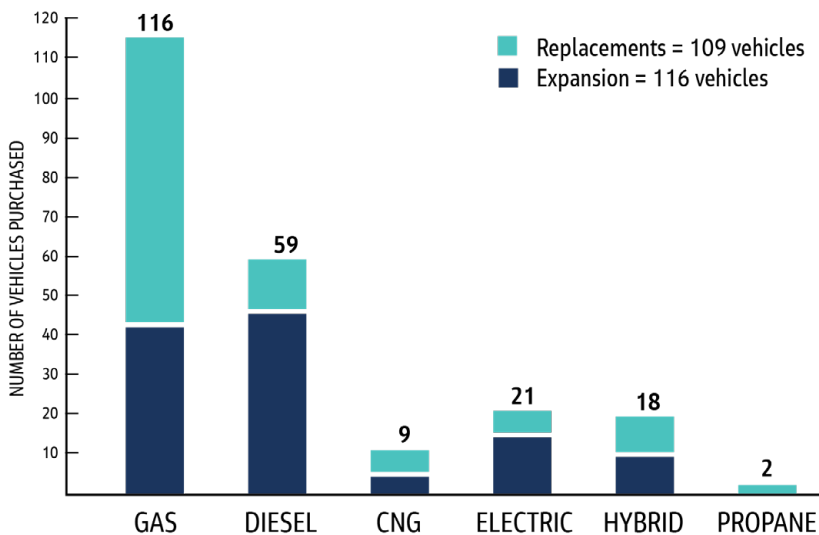
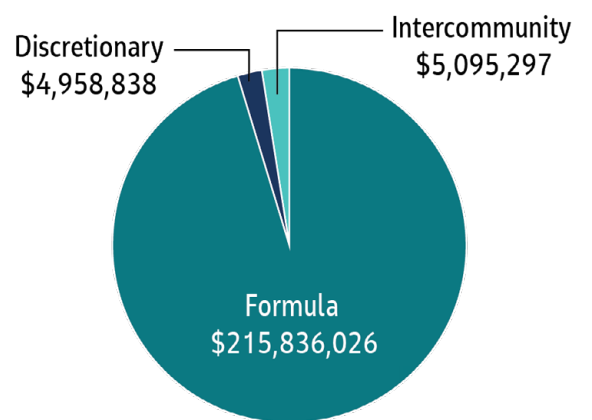


Figure 4. STIF Program funds distributed to providers in fiscal year 2019-21



Public transportation stepped up and took charge during crisis

On March 8, 2020, not yet a year into STIF Program implementation, Governor Brown declared a state of emergency in Oregon in response to the COVID-19 outbreak and pending pandemic. In September 2020, wildfires devastated dozens of communities across the state. During these and other state crises, public transportation has been a critical tool for saving lives and maintaining access to jobs and public services.

The pandemic presented numerous challenges for transit providers. Social distancing requirements and related measures had a profound impact on the use and operation of public transportation, including mandates limiting passenger capacity on all vehicles. Safety measures resulted in significant increases in operating costs to ensure both passenger and driver safety.

Despite increased costs, transit providers alleviated new burdens placed on vulnerable communities by maintaining service availability and using vehicle fleets to support meal delivery, senior transportation, and, ultimately, transportation to vaccination centers. From healthcare to service industry employees, public transportation remained the only option for many workers to get to and from their jobs.

In late March 2020, Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, from which ODOT has distributed over \$40 million to Oregon transit providers. Providers rely on these funds to ensure transit safety, account for rising administrative costs and plummeting fare revenue, and provide hazard pay to drivers and other employees that kept bus routes running during the height of the COVID-19 outbreak.

During the July 2020 Special Session, legislators passed Senate Bill 1601, which, among other measures, allowed recipients to repurpose STIF Formula funds towards maintenance of essential services. Some funds initially intended to expand transit service were needed to preserve crucial existing services that would otherwise be in jeopardy of closure. However, prioritized use of federal relief funds will allow many Qualified Entities to use unspent first-cycle STIF Formula funds on expansion projects in the second STIF Program cycle, as well as address other emerging challenges such as driver retention. The pandemic and wildfires underscored the role transit providers play in ensuring Oregon's resiliency during crisis.



Transit providers supplied buses to transport firefighters and other resources to and from active wildfires.



Driver and passenger safety during the pandemic has been a top priority.



"You can now buy our Link Lane tickets for the Eugene to Florence route as part of your Amtrak ticket and it's all done in one transaction."

-Kelly Clarke, Lane Council of Governments

Investing in equitable transportation outcomes

The STIF Program presents an opportunity for Oregon to establish a more equitable transportation system, one that counteracts the persistent inequity experienced by low-income communities, communities of color, and other historically-marginalized groups. To mitigate this inequity, ODOT must make investments that will improve access to a safe and reliable multimodal transportation network. This includes strategic funding of pedestrian and bike amenities and infrastructure as well as investments in fleet electrification and other low-carbon fuels.

The STIF Program calls for targeted investments to benefit low-income communities. During fiscal year 2019 to 2021, Qualified Entities spent over \$30 million to expand and increase the frequency of bus routes that serve communities with a high percentage of low-income households.

Examples of STIF Program projects during the 2019 to 2021 biennium that target benefits to low-income communities include:

- The Linn Shuttle and the Sweet Home Dial-A-Bus used the STIF Program funds to provide approximately 6,750 combined rides to low-income residents during one fiscal year.
- Yamhill County Transit Area implemented system-wide technological improvements, Dial-A-Ride enhancements, and expanded Saturday service between Grande Ronde and Tigard, each aimed at serving low-income communities.
- Columbia County Rider introduced a reduced-fare program discounting, by half, rides for seniors, people with disabilities, veterans, students, and low-income persons.



“Transportation is a challenge for many seniors in La Pine and the new CET bus stop at our location will provide our community with a safe and accessible transportation service to reach Sunriver without driving a car.”

- Jamie Donahue, Manager, La Pine Senior Center



Kasi is a Sandy Area Metro Shopper Shuttle regular. The Shopper has brought such independence to her life that she rides almost daily. In gratitude to the Shopper Shuttle and because of her love of the trolley, she painted a picture of the Shopper's red trolley as a thank you gift for Sandy Area Metro.

Technical Resource Center: A new program for rural providers

The Technical Resource Center and STIF Program administration was funded by one percent of available STIF Program funds in fiscal year 2019 to 2021. The Technical Resource Center assists rural public transportation providers through innovative training, transportation planning, and information technology. Beginning in fiscal year 2023 to 2025, the Technical Resource Center will be funded by a full one percent of STIF Program funds, allowing for greater outcomes.

Efforts accomplished in fiscal year 2019 to 2021 include:

- A Transit Technology Pilot that facilitated technology assessments for ten transportation providers, leading to new e-fare systems, website development and scheduling software that enhance the rider experience and broaden service accessibility.
- A redesign of the Technology Resource Center website to improve access to resources for public transportation planning, technology and training.

During the 2021 to 2023 biennium, ODOT will hire a consultant to expand technology services to additional transit providers and develop a technology price agreement to help providers save money. The price agreement will cover various technologies such as automated passenger counters, automatic vehicle location systems, and demand response dispatch systems.



“I love the earth, the community, and the bus. Not everyone can afford cars or to take a taxi. Our community is so much stronger when it can be inclusive.”

- **Summer Reyes**, frequent rider of Cherriotics, which expanded its Saturday and late evening service for most local routes.



Harney County was able to sustain its route deviation service in fiscal year 2019 on a fare-free basis. This service ran six days a week and served the nearby Burns Paiute Tribe's reservation in coordination with its Tribal Transit program. In fiscal year 2020, STIF Program support enabled Harney County to generate the local match necessary to complete its bus barn expansion project.

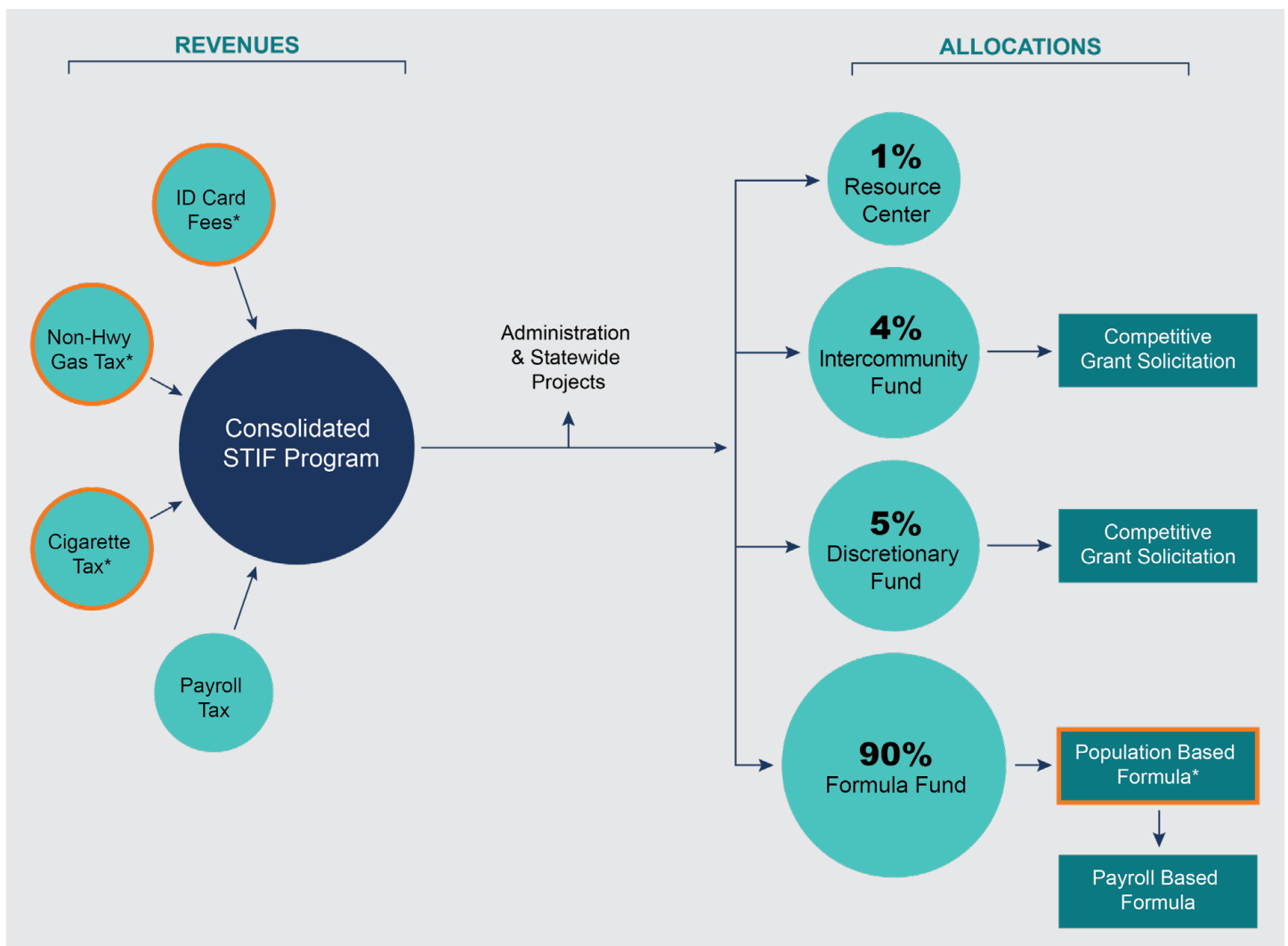
Streamlining state funding: STIF Program consolidation

Senate Bill 1601 introduced additional programmatic efficiencies by consolidating the Special Transportation Fund and STIF Programs. The Special Transportation Fund Program was created in 1985 to provide older adults and people with disabilities with access to health, education, work, social, and recreational opportunities. A consolidated program provides a more secure funding source for these services while also reducing administrative costs.

The [Consolidated STIF Program Rules Advisory Committee](#), launched in June 2021, advised ODOT on administrative rule revisions needed to ensure a smooth transition to a single state-funded public transportation program. Members of the Rules Advisory Committee represented large and small urban, rural, Tribal, and non-government transit providers; counties and cities; advocacy groups; public transportation users; and social and human service groups. The resulting rule changes will increase representation of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities and other transportation-disadvantaged groups on STIF Program advisory committees and support flexible use of program funds. ODOT anticipates Oregon Transportation Commission adoption of the amended rules in January 2022.

The graphic in Figure 5 illustrates the breakdown of fund revenues and allocations for the consolidated STIF Program. Elements noted with an asterisk and highlighted in orange represent historic Special Transportation Fund revenue sources and allocations.

Figure 5. Consolidated Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund Revenue and Allocation Framework





Looking forward: The STIF Program in the coming biennia

The challenges that public transportation has met head-on over the last two years are not isolated events. Future public health emergencies and natural disasters are expected. In addition to preparing for these events, ODOT seeks to establish a multimodal transportation system that is reliably-funded and uplifts all communities. In July 2021, the Oregon Transportation Commission and ODOT released the [Strategic Action Plan](#), which details commission and agency priorities and actions necessary to accomplish the vision of an equitable and sustainable transportation system. Under the Strategic Action Plan’s direction, ODOT will evolve to become responsive to the needs of communities across the state and adaptable to a constantly changing environment.

The resiliency of Oregon’s transportation network and economy will continue to rely on investments made possible by the STIF Program. With climate change impacts worsening, public transportation will continue to be a leader in sustainability by both reducing emissions and traffic congestion. Significant need remains for safer, more accessible transportation. While it will not address all needs, the STIF Program remains integral to building a modern transportation system for users that ride transit, walk, bike, and roll.



Clackamas County launched two new shuttle programs. The services fill gaps from TriMet stops to underserved portions of Oregon City and the Clackamas Industrial Area, providing critical last-mile connections. Both shuttle programs are free to riders.



Zack and his grandma live in Cascade Locks. They like the easy-to-use bike racks that allow them to take Columbia Gorge Express for a Saturday adventure with his new bike, compliments of Mrs. Clause and Anson Bike Buddies.