RFTA Planning Department Monthly Update
January 11th, 2018

RFTA Vision Statement
RFTA pursues excellence and innovation in providing preferred transportation choices that connect and support vibrant communities.

RFTA Planning Department Vision Statement
We will work creatively, cooperatively and comprehensively with our partners in the public, private and nonprofit sectors and other groups to create healthy and vibrant communities.

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Buttermilk Shuttle Pilot

As Aspen continues to boom, the Maroon Creek Road Corridor is experiencing heavier traffic from daily local driving patterns with school campus pickups/drop-offs, Highalnds ski traffic and Highlands hub activity for the very popular Maroon Bells scenic bus tour.

In the summer of 2017, the USFS Aspen-Sopris Ranger District contracted with the accredited USDOT Volpe Center to lead a *Maroon Creek Road Corridor Study*. The purpose of the study is to conduct a corridor analysis (9.5 miles from the SH 82 roundabout to the Maroon Bells entrance) to identify solutions to reduce congestion and maintain a sustainable level of service and high quality experiences for visitors and residents of the Maroon Creek corridor. The data analysis is focused on the summer and fall months to focus on the increasingly pouplar "leaf peepers" that flock to Highlands and the Maroon Bells to see the world class aspen color change. This corridor study also coincides with another study led by the City of Aspen and Charlier and Associates to assess a possible expansion of the Aspen Recreation Center, also on Maroon Creek Rd. Stakeholders have expressed interest in coordinating efficient data collection and consistent public outreach for both studies.

As a stakeholder in both studies, RFTA was asked to operate a Buttermilk Shuttle Pilot to mitigate heavy congestion on Maroon Creek Road leading to Aspen Highlands at the Highlands parking deck. As such, signage and websites directed visitors to park for free at the Buttermilk Ski Area, where RFTA then transported visitors by free shuttle to the Aspen Highlands Ski Area parking deck. Visitors could then transfer to transit buses traveling to Maroon Lake. The two shuttles operated Friday to Sunday between September 8th and October 1st, 2017 (a total of 11 days), during peak leaf-peeping season. Ridership data was collected manually by drivers and supervisors. Some supervisor logs report 1,800 riders in one day; negating the need for scheduled time points! Ridership boomed over the course of September, tracking with the change in the fall foliage. The latter two weekends saw triple the ridership of the former and ridership per trip pushed the upper limits of the shuttle's capacity.

Volpe also collected parking data at Highlands and Buttermilk, tracked traffic flows along Maroon Creek Rd. and even analyzed live video data near the Highlands Village. In conclusion, Volpe noted that "considering that the route of the Buttermilk Shuttle is identical to those of vehicles accessing the Highlands parking lot, one can safely conclude that the shuttle replaced vehicles that its riders would have driven had no shuttle been operating. Assuming an average vehicle occupancy of 2.5 people, a typical day during the study period saw more than 60 fewer cars on Maroon Creek Road than there would have been without the Buttermilk shuttle." Additionally, the Highlands lot experienced heavy occupancy during the weekend of September 29 and 30; without the Buttermilk shuttle, the parking facility would likely have been overwhelmed. RFTA Operations Dept. will continue to work with the study stakeholders to establish a Buttermilk Shuttle route in 2018 that makes sense financially and operationally.

RFTA bus parked at the Maroon Bells Bus Tour loading zone at the Highlands Ski Area Village.

FTA Low or No Emissions (LoNo) Grant Awards

RFTA and the City of Aspen continue to seek funding to catalyze the RFTA Battery Electric Bus (BEB) Project. The primary goals for purchasing electric buses for the valley are to reduce annual maintenance/operating costs associated with CNG and diesel, lower bus noise levels and decrease regional greenhouse gas emissions from dirty diesel buses. The estimated upfront cost of a BEB with a plug-in depot charger ($980k) is difficult to swallow when decision makers are used to budgeting in the range of $700k for a CNG bus or $550k for a diesel bus. The RFTA Board and other regional stakeholders see the longview in making capital purchases that align with financial and environmental sustainability values.

RFTA submitted a FTA Low or No Emissions "LoNo" grant, via the CDOT rural consolidated application process, for 8 buses to kickoff the BEB Project. CDOT was informed that the State will receive a total award of $1.45 million. RFTA will be awarded $715,131 (49% of total) and the rest will be awarded to VIA in Boulder and the Town of Vail. This formula is based on RFTA's total BEB project cost ($4.4 million), as a percentage of the total estimated project costs of all three agencies combined. RFTA expects to execute a contract in January 2018.

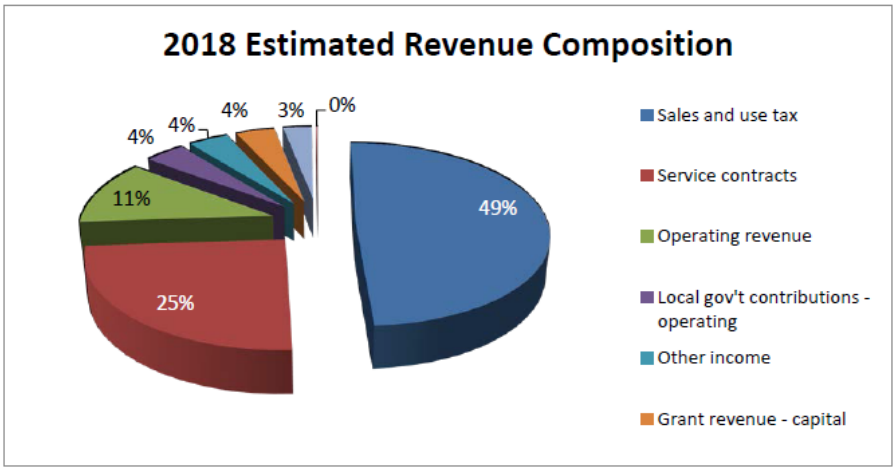
The next steps will be for RFTA to await FTA 5339 grant awards in January 2018 and submit a project application when the VW Mitigation Trust Fund solicits a call for funding in mid-2018. In the meantime, RFTA, Aspen and EOTC will also discuss how much local money is appropriate to contribute toward the exicting BEB Project.

New Flyer zero-emission battery electric bus (BEB) built for Tri-Met in Portland.

2017 Grants Update

As RFTA continues to grow and keep up with regional transit demand and grapple with decreased federal transportation/transit support, it is becoming more important for the authority to seek additional internal and external revenue streams to remain financially sustainable and responsible. Although a percentage of RFTA's funding can be attributed to its farebox recovery (estimated 23%; high for a rural region), this means the other 77% of revenue must source from somewhere else. Although Federal and State grants only make up approximately 7% (3% operating and 4% capital) of all RFTA revenues (see pie chart below), it is important for the Planning Department to proactively seek all appropriate grant opportunities, and manage them responsibly.

According to the most recent grants update report that is distributed to administrative employees at the end of each quarter, RFTA Staff is either managing, awaiting potential grant awards, or awaiting final grant execution for 15 grants. Estimated totals include: $37.5 M in potential requests/awards, $15.9 M in local match and total project costs of $53.4 M (grant awards plus RFTA match). To put this in perspective, RFTA's total budgeted general fund revenues for 2018 are estimated at $44 M. The reason the $37 M in awards seems to make up more than the 7% piece of the RFTA revenue pie is that the grant projects often span two years and there are considerable administrative and capital costs involved in purchasing buses or making facility improvements before the grant funds can be reimbursed from the grantor.



RFTA 2018 Budget Revenue Composition by Source.