



FY2027 BUDGET MESSAGE

DRAFT

JUNE 17, 2026

Budget Message

Purpose of the Budget

In compliance with the State of Oregon Local Budget Law, the 2026-2027 (FY27) Budget beginning July 1, 2026, and ending June 30, 2027 for Hood River County Transportation District (the District, dba Columbia Area Transit or CAT), is submitted to the Budget Committee for approval. As prepared and submitted, the annual budget is intended to serve as a financial plan for the Board's goals for the coming fiscal year. To that end the Budget should:

- Outline the forecasted expenditure requirements to meet those goals and the proposed means for financing those requirements.
- Provide a financial overview of the use and deployment of personnel, materials and services, and capital for Administrative and Operating expenditures during the fiscal year.
- Offer guidance to the Board and District on overall operational priorities and expenditures.

The District's Budget is prepared on the cash basis of accounting.

Accomplishments of Fiscal Year 2026

During FY26 the District made significant progress toward achieving Board goals to enhance local services and maintain and expand access for residents and visitors in other Gorge communities as well as the Portland Metropolitan area.

Key outcomes included:

- 4-agency Gorge Transit Pass is in its fifth year. Gorge TransLink providers continue to work together to improve rider experience and operational efficiencies.
- Contracted with Skamania County, City of Stevenson, and the U.S. Forest Service to provide the Dog Mountain Shuttle for the sixth year.
- Provided the Gorge-To-Mountain Express service in-house for the fifth year.
- Partnered with the City of Hood River on the Downtown Employee Pass program for the fifth year. A new IGA was executed to continue the program for three more years.
- Two new cutaways and one new modified transit van were purchased and placed into operation. These vehicles should reduce required repairs and expenses, in addition to being more fuel efficient.
- Two new 35-50ft vehicles that can be used on the Columbia Gorge Express and seasonal services are expected to be purchased and placed into operation before June 30, 2026.
- Worked with the Forest Service, ODOT and other partners to ensure the success of the Multnomah Falls I-84 permit program and continuation of the program in the Summer of 2026.
- Gorge Transit Connect (low-income) fare program has expanded to new partner organizations.
- Released a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a consultant to complete the planning, design, and construction (as funding allows) for the CAT Transit Facility Development Program.
- Transitioned the Upper Valley deviated fixed route into a fixed route.
- Increased the efficiency of the Hood River City route by adding bus stops at strategic locations to reduce the need for flag stops and relocated bus stops that were in parking lots.
- Implemented improved dispatch and vehicle maintenance tracking software.

Overall Economic Outlook

The overall economic outlook for Hood River County Transportation District is good, if current funding sources remain stable and the Iran war does not exponentially increase fuel, materials, and services costs for a sustained amount of time.

The District is cautiously optimistic that current funding streams and awarded federal grants will not be impacted by federal and state government uncertainty long-term.

This upcoming year will be the second year of the 25-27 biennium. This year the District will continue using Federal 5311 formula funds to fund the Hood River City, Upper Valley, and Dial-A-Ride services while leveraging Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF) formula funds to pay for match requirements. This will allow the District to use local funds (property and transit tax revenues) to match capital grants and ensure the reserve and contingency balances remain healthy to protect the District from delays in reimbursements for federal grants.

Board Goals for Fiscal Year 2027

The Board has outlined the following goals for the FY27 Budget:

- Maintain current service levels for year-round services, the Gorge-to-Mountain Express, and Dog Mountain Shuttle.
- Update bus stop signage and install permanent bus stop infrastructure on the Hood River City Route.
- Add a bus stop to the Columbia Gorge Express service in Cascade Locks at Forest Lane and WaNaPa Street.
- Continue implementation of the HRCTD Transit Master Plan Update 2023 and the Coordinated Transportation Plan 2024.
- Continue and grow the multi-provider Gorge Transit Pass program and support the regional transit strategy with the goal of improved connectivity throughout the Gorge.
- Complete a fare assessment of the Gorge Transit Pass and one-way fares and discuss a potential increase.
- Continue improvement of the driver training programs.
- Begin planning, design, and construction (as funding allows) of the CAT Transit Facility Development Program.
- Continue to expand outreach to vulnerable communities (i.e. Latino, Native American, seniors, individuals with disabilities etc.) to ensure access and awareness of transit. Ensure website and promotional materials are in plain language and have an accessible user interface.
- Continue to explore innovative options and implement solutions to address specific transportation needs:
 - Local NEMT & Door through Door
 - After hour (hotel/bar/restaurant) shuttle
- Procure new vehicles for local and regional services and maintain the existing fleet
- Continue to leverage technology to improve oversight of operations and reduce inefficiencies.

Overview of the FY27 Budget

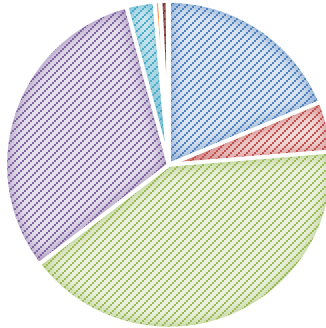
The Fiscal Year 2027 Budget allows for the District to maintain and enhance current services and continue implementation of key projects identified in the Transit Master Plan Update 2023 and the Coordinated Transportation Plan 2024. Our expectation is that ridership will continue to increase and be consistent with the District's ongoing investment.

The budget strategy is outlined in the attached budget. The FY27 Budget has been broken out into resources, administrative requirements, operating requirements, and non-allocated requirements

- **Resources** – The general budget consists of resources from beginning fund balance, federal and state grants, property tax revenues, and a variety of other smaller sources. In addition, the District continues to carry over some STIF Formula funds that were not spent in FY21-23 and FY23-25 funding cycles that can be used as program reserve funds; these funds are expected to be used in FY27. Major resource differences from the prior year are related to capital grants, which fluctuate with the scale and timing of projects.

FY27 BUDGETED RESOURCES

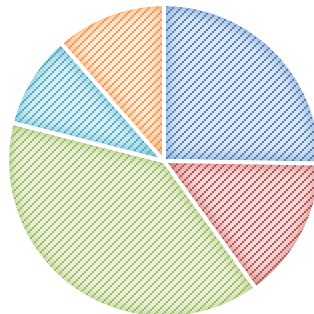
- Beginning Fund Balance
- Fare & Contract Revenue
- Federal Grants
- State Grants
- Property Taxes
- Other Tax Revenue
- Bond & Other Debt Revenue
- Interest Income
- Other Misc Revenue



- **Administrative Requirements** – Under Administrative Requirements staff have included Administrative Materials and Services and Administrative Personnel Services. Administrative Capital Outlay was included under administrative requirements in the FY26 budget, however moving forward staff is including all Capital Outlay separately to provide more clarity between normal administrative costs and large projects.
- **Operating Requirements** – Under Operating Requirements staff have included Operating Materials and Services and Operating Personnel Services. Operating Capital Outlay was included under operating requirements in the FY26, however moving forward staff is including all Capital Outlay separately to provide more clarity between normal operating costs and large projects. Increases in ongoing operating costs are primarily tied to inflation related to economic uncertainty with fuel, supply, and labor resources.
- **Non-Allocated Requirements** – This year staff has included Non-Allocated Capital Outlay for large, long-term projects. In the FY27 budget this includes transit facility development projects and bus purchases. Approximately \$1.7m of non-allocated resources are budgeted as contingency funds and funds reserved for future use.

FY27 BUDGETED REQUIREMENTS

- Personnel Services
- Materials & Services
- Capital Outlay
- Debt Service
- Contingency
- Reserved & Ending Fund Balance



	FY26	BUDGET SUMMARY	FY27
	\$ 14,736,393	TOTAL RESOURCES	\$ 8,528,634

924,290	Total Administrative	595,686
12,611,814	Total Operating	2,764,022
1,160,289	Total Non-Allocated	5,168,926
\$ 14,696,393	TOTAL REQUIREMENTS	\$ 8,528,634

In summary, the FY27 Budget advances the Board’s goals to implement the Transit Master Plan Update 2023 and the Coordinated Transportation Plan 2024, continue efforts to increase ridership, replace aging vehicles, build upon existing partnerships, and expand transit connectivity within the region.

I want to thank the citizens of Hood River County and our riders for the continued support of their public transportation system. The District’s ongoing ability to provide dependable, reasonable, and useful transportation to the community is only possible because of your support.

I look forward to this upcoming year and working with staff, the Board and partner organizations to provide dependable, safe, and consistent public transit services to our community.

Amy Schlappi
Executive Director
Hood River County Transportation District
(dba Columbia Area Transit)

Hood River County Transportation District

dba Columbia Area Transit

Vision

To connect the people and communities of Hood River County with an accessible and more sustainable future.

Mission

We provide safe, reliable, accessible, and efficient public transportation services in Hood River County and offer critical regional connections to Portland, Washington State and throughout the Gorge.

Values

Safety – We will ensure the safety of our employees, customers, and transit systems.

Customer Service – We will work with our customers to meet their needs and exceed their expectations.

Sustainability – We will continuously improve and be accountable for our financial, environmental, and social outcomes.

Integrity – As stewards of public resources, we will use our assets prudently and conduct ourselves honestly and respectfully.

Community Driven – As stakeholders in Hood River County, we strive to ensure our services contribute to the social, cultural, and economic betterment of all residents.

Innovation – We will pursue opportunities to enhance value for our customers.

Collaboration – We will cultivate strong partnerships, community connections and links to other types of travel.

Teamwork – As a team, we celebrate diversity, foster effective communication; and promote advancement and longevity.

Hood River County Transportation District is proud to present the FY27 budget to the public. We are committed to providing safe, reliable, accessible, and sustainable public transit services far into the future.

Highlights of the Budget

Resources

- **Beginning Fund Balance** – Staff anticipates a beginning fund balance of approximately \$1.55m from FY26; of this, \$255k is expected to be Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF) formula funds that were not spent in the FY21-23 and FY23-25 funding cycles that were reserved for bus stop improvements to ensure ADA accessibility but can also be used for Program Reserve funds. \$11k of the restricted funds are from vehicle sales and must be used to purchase new vehicles. The remaining \$1.3m are unallocated funds.
- **Fare & Contract Revenue** – The low-cost annual Gorge Transit Pass program has seen steady 11% growth year over year with a large local following who consistently purchase the Pass each year. Staff are expecting a roughly 4% increase in one-way fares due to a trend of a steady increase in ridership. Due to the loss of the WSDOT contract to operate the Dog Mountain Shuttle, Contract Revenue is expected to increase slightly from previous years as the U.S. Forest Service is covering the gap.
- **Federal Grants** – The anticipated federal revenue consists of 5311 and 5310 formula, and 5310 discretionary funding. This revenue partially funds ongoing operations for the Hood River City Route, Dial-A-Ride, and Upper Valley service, preventative maintenance, and mobility management. The remainder of the anticipated federal funding is tied to several delayed contracts; staff has rolled over funds from FY26 to FY27 for several projects:
 - **Replacement Vehicles:** Two 35-50ft-replacement vehicles that were included in the FY26 Budget, were added to the FY27 budget as they have not yet been delivered and it is unknown if they will arrive before or after July 2026.
 - **2023 FTA Section 5339(b) Discretionary:** In 2023 staff was awarded over \$6 million in FTA Low or No Emission Bus Program grant funds to assist with facility modification and electrification of the fleet. The agreement has not yet been executed and based on FTA guidance a scope change request was submitted by staff to prioritize the facility modification and remove the electrification of the fleet and EV infrastructure from the scope of work.
 - **2024 FTA Section 5339 Discretionary:** In 2024 the District was awarded \$1m to relocate the park and ride so that the current park and ride can be redeveloped into a bus storage and maintenance facility and for the implementation of an interregional transit hub at Lot 1 near the Hood River waterfront. The Request for Proposals (RFP) for a consultant to manage these projects was released in March 2026 and the program is expected to kickoff in the summer of 2026.
- **State Grants** – Anticipated state revenue consists of Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF) formula and discretionary funding. This revenue funds all or partial amounts of ongoing operations for the Columbia Gorge Express, Hood River City Route, Dial-A-Ride, Upper Valley, Gorge-to-Mountain Express, outreach, and mobility projects.
- **Property Taxes** – Property taxes include anticipated revenue from Hood River County property taxes.
- **Other Tax Revenue** – The Statewide Mass Transit Tax and HERT Tax are represented under Other Tax Revenue.
- **Bond & Debt Revenue** – While Bond & Debt Revenue was budgeted for in FY26, the District does not anticipate any of this revenue for FY27.
- **Interest Income** – The District has benefited from interest generated through three Local Government Investment Pool (LGIP) accounts through the Oregon State Treasury and continues to see a healthy year over year growth.
- **Other Revenue** – The District is expecting to sell a portion of the aging fleet and receives insurance credits for completing training through Special Districts Association of Oregon (SDAO).

FY26	RESOURCES	FY27
\$ 1,060,000	Unallocated Beginning Fund Balance	\$ 1,300,000
240,000	Beginning Restricted Funds	255,000
1,300,000	Total Beginning Fund Balance	1,555,000
363,000	Fare & Contract Revenue	382,000
10,243,927	Federal Grants	3,655,586
1,847,282	State Grants	2,589,048
225,000	Property Taxes	230,000
37,000	Other Tax Revenue	47,000
658,184	Bond & Other Debt Revenue	-
42,000	Interest Income	60,000
20,000	Other Misc Revenue	10,000
\$ 14,736,393	TOTAL RESOURCES	\$ 8,528,634

Administrative Requirements

Administrative Materials and Services:

- **Building Expenses** – Budgeted Building Expenses were increased about \$20k due to expected increase for any maintenance related activities that do not have an existing contract. Additionally, staff expects the need to repair the fire suppression vault drain within the next year.
- **Professional Fees** – Professional fees were reduced as the project management, architectural, engineering, and design expenses for the CAT Transit Facility Development Program were moved to Non-Allocated Capital Outlay.

FY26	Administrative Materials & Services	FY27
\$ 55,000	Building Expenses	\$ 75,000
18,000	Office Supplies	20,000
443,090	Professional Fees	151,862
12,200	Other Administrative Expenses	13,400
\$ 528,290	Total Administrative Materials & Services	\$ 260,262

Administrative Personnel Services:

- **Administrative Wages** – In FY24 staff introduced a formalized pay step chart that is included in Exhibit A which creates an objective understanding of step increases if an employee receives a positive performance review, and an increase is recommended by the manager. This model has been updated from the FY26 structure to include a recommended 2.5% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) increase which is less than the social security COLA of 2.8% due to the current economic environment. There are three FTE's that are included in this category (Executive Director, Office Manager, Project Coordinator).
- **Administrative Taxes** – Taxes are typically assessed as a percentage of wages, and therefore the tax increase is directly related to the increase in wages.
- **Administrative Benefits** – Benefits are expected to decrease 1.6% from FY26, as all three administrative personnel receive health stipends which are reflected in wages rather than benefits.

FY26	Administrative Personnel Services	FY27
\$ 278,000	Wages	\$ 290,730
33,000	Employer Tax	34,178
10,000	Benefits	10,516
\$ 321,000	Total Administrative Personnel Services	\$ 335,424

Administrative Capital Outlay:

- **Administrative Capital Outlay** - Staff included Administrative Capital Outlay as it was included in the FY26 Budget, however moving forward staff is including any Capital Outlay under Non-Allocated to provide more clarity between normal administrative costs and large, long-term projects.

FY26	Administrative Capital Outlay	FY27
\$ 75,000	Total Administrative Capital Outlay	\$ -

Operating Requirements

Operating Materials and Services:

- **Fuel** – Due to the Iran war, gasoline and diesel prices remain volatile; staff have allowed for an additional buffer in case prices increase or remain high for an extended period.
- **Vehicle Expenses** – Staff is expecting an increase in Vehicle Expenses by over \$100K from FY26 due to repairs and tires being particularly susceptible to pricing increases during times of economic uncertainty. Vehicle Insurance is expected to increase due to the addition of two new large buses and an anticipated 13% rate increase.
- **Operation Expenses** – Radios, fleet maintenance software, fleet tracking software and data for driver tablets are expected to remain stable. This year staff relocated expenses for merchant fees, shop supplies, and bus stop maintenance expenses which accounts for the increase from FY26.
- **Driver Expenses** – The driver training, medical exams, and drug testing remains relatively stable. Staff updated the Gorge-To-Mountain Express uniform to include high-visibility bibs, which was a great safety improvement when drivers are chaining. Additionally, the operations team has been hiring more part-time drivers which assists with covering seasonal routes and PTO requests, resulting in increased onboarding and uniform costs.
- **Advertising and Marketing** – The expected expense remains relatively similar to FY26. The low cost remains possible due to the success of the Gorge Transit Pass marketing partnership with the four Gorge Transit Agencies. This partnership has required fewer District resources to increase regional awareness. The District will continue to use the available resources for local marketing efforts.
- **Grant/Contract/Match Distributions** – Expenses included in this category are Gorge Transit Pass distributions to other providers, contracting out the staffing of the Multnomah Falls Exit 31 permit program, and match paid to MCEDD for Travel Training and Mobility Management services.

FY26	Operating Materials & Services	FY27
\$ 250,000	Fuel	\$ 324,000
228,800	Vehicle Expenses	362,000
29,820	Operation Expenses	60,920
13,000	Driver Expenses	20,000
13,500	Advertising & Marketing	17,500
171,000	Grant/Contract/Match Distributions	216,975
\$ 706,120	Total Operating Materials & Services	\$ 1,001,395

Operating Personnel Services:

- **Operations Wages** - Wages have steadily increased due to annual wage increases and staffing changes. There are five FTE's (one Transit Operations Manager and four Field Supervisors) that are included in Operating Personnel Services and considered office staff not drivers. An additional Field Supervisor was added this past year (an increase from three) and the dispatcher position was removed. This allows for more Field Supervisor coverage and sustainable shifts. These employees are included in the salary scale detailed in Exhibit A. Driver's pay increase structure is described in detail in the Union Contract.
- **Operations Taxes** – Taxes are typically assessed as a percentage of wages, and therefore the tax increase is directly related to the increase in wages.
- **Operations Benefits** – Benefits are expected to decrease 1.6% from FY26. This is due to a lower average age of District employees. Additionally, several operating personnel waive their insurance and receive health stipends instead, which is reflected in wages rather than benefits.

FY26	Operating Personnel Services	FY27
\$ 1,250,500	Wages	\$ 1,364,708
171,000	Employer Tax	172,590
222,788	Benefits	225,329
\$ 1,644,288	Total Operating Personnel Services	\$ 1,762,627

Operating Capital Outlay:

- **Operating Capital Outlay** – Staff included Operating Capital Outlay as it was included in the FY26 Budget, however, moving forward staff is including any Capital Outlay under Non-Allocated to provide more clarity between normal operating costs and large, long-term projects.

FY26	Operating Capital Outlay	FY27
\$ 10,261,406	Total Operating Capital Outlay	\$ -

Non-Allocated:

As the District does not plan to spend all available resources in the current year, staff has budgeted the remaining \$5m of resources as follows:

- **Capital Outlay** – In FY27 the District added a Capital Outlay section in Non-Allocated for large, long-term projects. This reduces confusion between normal administrative or operating expenses and expenses related to large projects. The breakdown of anticipated costs are included in the graph below and broken out per project.

Match Requirements - Special Projects	Total Cost	Match
Two 35-50 ft Vehicles	\$ 601,806	\$ 61,806
2023 5339(b) Gas Vehicles	1,542,480	308,496
Transit Facility Site Development Proj. 1 Interregional Transit Hub	250,000	50,000
Transit Facility Site Development Proj. 2 New Bus Barn and Maintenance Facility	700,000	140,000
Transit Facility Site Development Proj. 3 Relocation of Park & Ride	427,000	85,400
Bus Stop Infrastructure	10,000	
Total	\$ 3,531,286	\$ 645,702

- **Debt Service** – In FY26 the District had set aside 10% of the anticipated loan that would have been needed for the large electric vehicles grant match expense to account for associated interest and fees. However, since a scope change request has been submitted to the FTA to remove the electric vehicles from the grant scope of work Debt Service has been removed from the FY27 budget.
- **Contingency** – The District plans to reserve approximately three months of operating expenses, or \$800K, as contingency funds, in the event a major, unexpected disruption causes significant adjustment to budgeted expense.
- **Reserved for Future Use** – Approximately \$947K of unallocated resources are reserved for spending in future years.

FY26	Non-Allocated	FY27
\$ -	Capital Outlay	\$ 3,531,286
65,818	Debt Service	-
294,471	Contingency	800,000
800,000	Reserved for Future Expenditure	837,640
40,000	Ending Fund Balance	-
\$ 1,200,289	Total Non-Allocated	\$ 5,168,926

Exhibit A: Staff Salary Scale

Salary Scale Policy:

- The Base rate represents the starting pay for a position.
- Step 1 may be granted after the employee successfully completes the probationary period and receives a positive performance evaluation.
- Subsequent step increases will occur annually on July 1, subject to manager approval.
- Employees who receive an overall rating of “Does Not Meet Expectations” on their annual performance review will not advance to the next step until sufficient improvement is demonstrated.

Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) Policy:

In addition to the annual step increases shown in the salary scale, each year the Budget Committee determines the Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) to take effect at the start of the new fiscal year (July 1). The COLA may range from 0% to a maximum of 5%, depending on budget capacity. When funding permits, the District aims to align its COLA with the Social Security COLA.

Promotions to Higher Classifications:

When an employee is promoted to a position within a higher job classification and salary range, they will be placed at the next highest pay step within the new range.

For example: A Dispatcher at Step 7 who is promoted to a Field Supervisor role may be placed at Step 1 or higher within the Field Supervisor pay scale, depending on the structure of the salary range.

For FY27 Budget Committee is recommending a 2.8% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) increase to be in line with the social security COLA to assist employees with the impact of inflation and other economic pressures. In the graph below the bold numbers indicate the current steps and positions of District office employees.

Office Wage Scale (2.5% Step & Variable Paygrade) - 2.8% COLA								
Position	Base	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7
Executive Director	\$98,688	\$101,155	\$103,684	\$106,276	\$108,933	\$111,656	\$114,448	\$117,309
Transit Operations Manager	\$79,773	\$81,767	\$83,811	\$85,907	\$88,054	\$90,256	\$92,512	\$94,825
Office Manager	\$78,745	\$80,713	\$82,731	\$84,800	\$86,920	\$89,093	\$91,320	\$93,603
Field Supervisor	\$64,764	\$66,383	\$68,043	\$69,744	\$71,487	\$73,275	\$75,106	\$76,984
Project Coordinator (Hourly)	\$59,165	\$60,644	\$62,160	\$63,714	\$65,307	\$66,940	\$68,613	\$70,329
Total Wage Cost for FY27	\$630,065							