

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 12, 2022

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# *Ben Franklin Transit Board to Discuss Reduction in Sales Tax Collection* for Transit Services in Special Workshop and Board Meeting this Week

On Wednesday, July 13, the Ben Franklin Transit (BFT) Board of Directors will conduct a special workshop meeting to further consider the passing of a resolution regarding a reduction in sales tax collection for BFT services. The resulting impacts on transit services, if passed, will be outlined, and discussed. They will vote on the resolution during the regularly scheduled board meeting on Thursday, July 14.

If the Board approves the resolution, BFT’s General Manager will be directed to request that the Benton and Franklin County Auditors place upon the ballot for the next general election, a proposition to “reduce the imposed sales and use tax. This proposition would reduce the authorized sales and use tax Ben Franklin Transit is permitted to impose from six-tenths (6/10ths) of one percent (1%) to five-tenths (5/10ths) of one percent (1%) within portions of Benton and Franklin Counties.

**Potential Outcomes:**

In March of 2022, Washington’s legislature passed a 16-year funding program to support and grow the state’s transportation sector. The funding package, named *Move Ahead Washington*, offered additional Transit Support Grant funding (being called the Zero-Fare for Kids grant) for operating and capital expenses only, to transit agencies meeting specific criteria.

Grant Eligibility:

* Transit Agencies only
* Agencies must have a policy established by October 1, 2022, that provides riders 18 years of age and younger zero-fare on ALL modes.
* If an agency misses the October 1, 2022 deadline, they not be eligible for funds in the funding cycle and will have to wait until the
* Must maintain or increase your sales tax authority for which was established effective January 1, 2022.
* Must meet specific criteria which support overburdened communities; criteria to be determined by WSDOT.

**- MORE -**

# *Ben Franklin Transit Board to Discuss Reduction in Sales Tax Collection* in Special Workshop and Board Meeting this Week (Continued)

If the BFT Board chooses to move forward with the resolution outlined, Ben Franklin Transit will not be eligible for the estimated annual allocation of Transit Support Grants– $3.4M/year x 16 years. [(CLICK HERE](https://www.dropbox.com/s/rpdsoo40b0skrbb/Transit%20Support%20Grants%20Est.%20Annual%20Distribution%20Formula.pdf?dl=0) to see estimate provided by WSTA).

However, BFT will still be eligible to receive funding of grants including Regional Mobility, Green Transit, Bus and Bus Facility, and Special Needs Grants. This includes the following projects submitted in FY2021:

* $10.56M for Fleet Electrification – Electric Bus Replacements for existing Diesel Fleet (12), Bus Charging Equipment (Bus Base) and Bus Charging Equipment (Transit Hubs)
* $4.25m for Long Range Service Corridor – Redesign Frequent Bus Routes, Service using Existing Diesel Vehicles, Upgraded Accessible Bus Stops with Shelters, and Seating; Bus Stop Improvements, including land acquisitions where additional right-of-way is needed for ADA compliant sidewalks and Bus Stops.
* $8.4M for Mobility Hubs – Southridge, Benton City and Process; land acquisition, parking, bus shelters, electric bus charging

## HOW TO ATTEND:

Per RCW 42.30.030, these meetings are open to the public.

The public is welcome to attend both meetings in-person or virtually via Zoom. [Agendas and Zoom links](https://www.bft.org/about/agendas-minutes/) can be found at BFT.org. Spanish translation will be offered for each meeting via Zoom. Meetings will be held at Ben Franklin Transit Board Room located at 1000 Columbia Park Trail in Richland for those that prefer to attend in- person. Public comment will be accepted at the Board Meeting only.

## About Ben Franklin Transit:

Ben Franklin Transit (BFT) is the public transportation system for the Tri-Cities area of Benton and Franklin Counties in southeastern Washington State. BFT’s Public Transportation Benefit Area is 616-square miles and serves the cities of Kennewick, Pasco, Richland, West Richland, Benton City, Prosser, and Finley. Our guiding purpose is to provide safe, reliable, affordable transportation to the community in support of personal mobility, economic diversity, and growth.

In 2022, Ben Franklin Transit celebrates 40 years of providing essential transportation services to this community. Since its inaugural trip in May of 1982, BFT has grown from 45 to over 382 vehicles including buses, Dial-A-Ride, Vanpool, and CONNECT. The agency now services around one thousand bus stops and has grown from less than 60 to over 425 employees.

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