

Next stop: breakneck buses, speedier service

■ The Lane Transit District's planned Bus Rapid Transit Line could connect Eugene and Springfield by 2003

By Lindsay Buchele
Oregon Daily Emerald

The future of transportation will soon be coming to Eugene in the form of a Bus Rapid Transit Line, a new method of public transportation that Lane Transit District officials say will be faster and more environmentally friendly.

Working closely with the Eugene and Springfield city governments, LTD has been developing the transit line for more than four years. LTD spokesman Ed Bergeron said the need for the transit line is based on the growing problem of traffic congestion in Lane County.

"Our current buses are just too slow," Bergeron said. "They are constantly stopping for passengers and then end up stuck in traffic."

LTD officials got the idea for the Bus Rapid Transit line from similar projects in various European cities and from Brazil's successful transit line. Though similar to a rail line, such as Portland's MAX, the rapid transit line will use bus-like vehicles and will cost far less to build than a rail line.

Some proposed plans for the transit line, which could be completed as early as 2003, include building a separate track and having traffic lights designated for buses, Bergeron said.

Phase 1 is to build a line that will run from downtown Eugene to downtown Springfield, a route that will include stops at the University and Sacred Heart Medical Center.

"It was sort of a political move to have the first line include both cities," BRT project engineer Graham Carey said. "We want to serve both cities in the region and allow both to have a piece of the pie."

This line will eventually replace LTD bus route 11, which covers the same area. Additional lines will be built until all of the current bus routes are replaced, according to current plans.

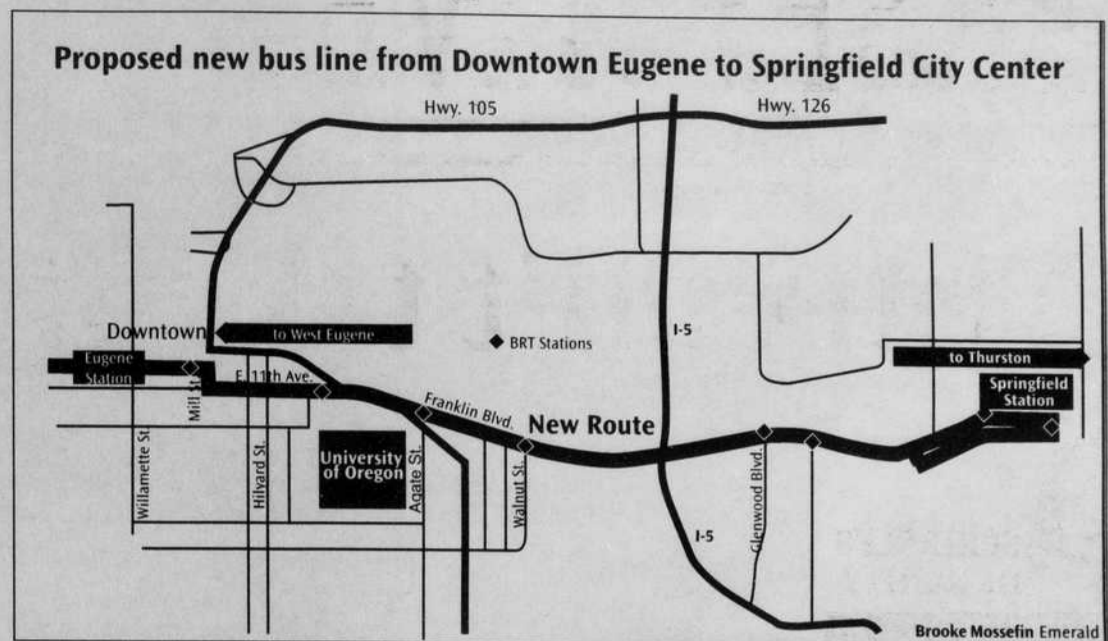
The first line is estimated to take two years to construct, but will have as little of an effect as possible on traffic during the construction, Bergeron said.

"The guideways can be prefabricated and done a block at a time," Bergeron said. "We plan to get this done as soon as possible."

“Not only will the line be compatible with cars, it will cost 10 percent less than comparable rail lines.”

Ed Bergeron
spokesman
Lane Transit District

LTD officials agree the impor-



tant thing is to begin the construction quickly.

"We need to get started with this project when congestion levels aren't at a gridlock," Carey said. "Right now there is the space, we need to do it and if we wait, it could cause some problems."

Concerns have been raised by everyone from environmental groups, which are concerned about which trees will be cut down, to business owners in Glenwood, who are worried about the lines hindering their incoming traffic.

Bergeron said the plans are being developed to meet environ-

mental concerns as well as keeping business traffic intact. The vehicles that will be used on the lines, which are being manufactured in France, are also being designed to meet the current 2004 clean-air standards.

"We're doing everything we can to please everyone without compromising our plans," LTD transit planner Lisa Gardner said.

Seventeen cities across the United States have begun planning for similar transit lines.

"Not only will the line be compatible with cars, it will cost 10 percent less than comparable rail lines," Bergeron said.

The plan is receiving \$9 million in federal funding and a possible \$3 million in local funding, as long as city governments approve the plan.

"We are anticipating complete approval from the local governments," Gardner said. She also said the plan can go ahead without local approval, but LTD is committed to working together with local government.

Carey added that the project will require no additional taxes thanks to the federal funding, and the cost of riding the new line will be the same as the current bus rates.

Optional student health coverage stakes claim in Oregon

■ A Student Health Center advisory committee will survey the health needs of the University community

By Brooke Ross
Oregon Daily Emerald

Oregon University System administrators have asked health center staff at each Oregon university to look into providing students with optional health care through an OUS-managed plan, a move that could make college life more convenient for students.

Elizabeth Dickenson, risk manager for OUS, said if the student insurance plan comes into effect, it will be affordable because it will likely be added to student fees.

"We want students to be aware of what goes into providing health care and have the chance to provide their input for what the final product will offer," she said.

Dr. Gerald Fleischli, director of the Student Health Center, said there is an increasing need for students to have their own health insurance policies, because it is inconvenient and dangerous for out of town students to be covered under their parents' health maintenance organizations. He said in times of illness or injury, many health care providers will not cover patients out of the provider's vicinity, in order to keep costs down.

He said he has seen patients for everything from seizures to ankle fractures who could not be treated in Eugene because their parents' insurance did not cover the area.

"Students think they have good insurance, until they realize it often doesn't count here," he said.

To determine if student insurance can become a reality, OUS schools are collecting information about students' health concerns.

The University's Student Health Advisory Committee, an administrative group of students, faculty and staff, is reaching out to students with a three-question survey to determine their health care needs.

The SHAC exists as a communication link between student health centers and students in providing information about students' health needs and concerns.

Amy Biggs, vice chairwoman of the SHAC and a junior general science and psychology major, is working to give students the option for insurance.

“This makes affordable health care an issue for everyone.”

Amy Biggs
vice chairwoman
Student Health
Advisory Committee

"Our goal is to find out what the students really want and need," she said.

Biggs said she and the other students have been sending out the survey over the last two weeks to find out what students want in terms of health care, and to also find new ideas and concerns they may have.

She said a mass e-mail announcing the survey has been sent out to Greek students, non-traditional students and international students. Open forums may also be planned for the future, she said, adding that students are invited to complete the survey themselves on the Student Health Center Web page.

"Including everyone is the only way to satisfy everyone," she said.

Biggs said once the SHAC com-

pletes its survey data, they will combine it with other OUS schools and send out a request for information to insurance companies to get an idea of how much this project would cost.

Biggs said the University is ahead of other schools in collecting students' health concerns.

"We have the largest population, so it's extra important that we make sure our students' demands are met," she said.

Dickenson said it is important to provide affordable health care to students, since coverage is becoming more expensive. She said in-

surance costs are going up, because only people who know they need insurance are buying it.

"This makes affordable health care an issue for everyone," she said. "None of us have a crystal ball and know when we'll need coverage."

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