**Continued from A1** 

Dial-a-ride provided more than 27,000 trips to the Redmond community in 2018 and 2019, with riders most commonly using the service to get to work, medical appointments and shopping. But those numbers dropped to roughly 10,000 trips each year in 2020 and 2021 when COVID-19 hit.

A survey found that more than 75% of respondents — a group composed of the general public, transit stakeholders and city staff and officials — supported moving away from dial-a-ride service to semi-fixed bus routes.

To do so, Hofbauer said the plan is to "start slow, start small, go incremental and build it up."

But to even start slow, CET needs to have enough drivers to staff the routes — a problem that has already pushed back the plan's initial timeline. CET has been facing a driver shortage for the past year, said Hofbauer.

### **New routes**

City staff worked with CET to identify the best locations for stops along the two pilot routes. They held community workshops to solicit feedback, looked at activity and employment centers and worked to identify areas that would be most ADA accessible, according to deputy city manager John Roberts. CET also tried to prioritize access to affordable and family housing, education, childcare and airport needs.

Pete Maxwell, who took a CET bus from Redmond to Bend on July 11 and has ridden buses across the country, said he looks for bus systems that are established and convenient to access. That CET currently isn't charging riders who use their commuter services due to COVID-19 is a bonus, he said, but he doesn't mind paying a small fee if that's what he has to do to have reliable

Hofbauer said he expects CET to reinstate fares at some point in

If the pilot routes work, CET is slated to expand the program, phasing in additional transportation and building up to five fixed bus routes and a microtransit zone over the next several years.

The microtransit zone functions similarly to a shared ride version of an Uber or Lyft service: passengers can request door-to-door service within the designated area without the 24-hour notice that dial-a-ride requires.

The flex buses will be allowed to deviate up to half a mile from their set routes to pick up passengers, though Hofbauer said the exact distance is not yet set in stone.

With half-mile deviation, the two pilot buses will serve 47% of the Redmond population, 84% of job sites and hit 37 of the city's 47 current activity centers, according to the feasibility study. The final route system — with five bus routes and a microtransit zone is projected to serve 87% of Redmond residents, 97% of job sites and 46 activity centers.

CET presented its feasibility study at a 2021 city council workshop. At the meeting, city councilor Clifford Evelyn said he liked that CET and Redmond were thinking ahead and building infrastructure to support Redmond population growth, rather than being caught off-guard without adequate transportation down the line.

Mayor George Endicott voiced his concern that the initial plans did not serve Ridgeview High School — or any of the developments in downtown Redmond. If the Ridgeview area were included in the pilot Southeast route, the entire loop would take about an hour and a half to complete, which Hofbauer said could deter people from using it.

Hofbauer said that full service will likely come two or five years after the pilot program is finished and CET crews have studied the results.

The pilot program will primarily draw funding from the Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund, a payroll tax dedicated to public transportation. CET estimates it will need an additional \$400,000 per year to implement its full flex route system further down the line and \$900,000 for its end goal of a fully operational fixed transit system.

Hofbauer said CET's funding for the later stages of the project are still up in the air.

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# Expion360

**Continued from A1** 

Last month, Expion360 stated in a press release that it had signed a non-binding letter of intent with a company in Asia to purchase lithium battery manufacturing equipment in connection with its plans to build a large-scale lithium cell manufacturing facility in Redmond. The statement did not specify which company is selling the equipment.

For now, Expion360 operates out of a 17,000-square-foot facility in Redmond. A 32,000 square foot plant is under construction and is expected to open by the end of the year. It also recently set up a 10,000-square-foot distribution center in Elkhart, Indiana, where most RVs in the United States are manufactured.

Yozamp is eyeing a piece of land in Redmond's enterprise zone, which contains more than 750 acres of undeveloped land.

Steve Curley, director of the Redmond Economic Development Inc., says talks over the land have started but nothing is contracted. Still, he likes the idea of bringing a technology firm to Redmond that is connected to renewable energy, one that will "generate living wage jobs and expand industrial diversity.

On a number of fronts it would be a win-win," said Curley. "You have the property taxes and the job growth. From an environmental standpoint, it's positive, and it would be one of few facilities in the U.S. that would be manufacturing those types of batteries."

In addition to boosting the tax base,

the facility would offer Redmond more manufacturing jobs — around 300 people could be employed at the lithium cell plant. They would be joining a growing company. Yozamp said Expion360 has experienced "double to triple" year-over-year growth, but declined to elaborate on specific num-

If the company manages to buy the land it needs in Redmond, groundbreaking could occur as soon as 2024, and construction of the facility will take another 48 months.

Funding for the project hasn't started but Expion360 went public in April, giving the company greater access to capital. It raised around \$15 million. The company also raises cash through the sale of products outside its battery line — it also sells solar panels, inverters, and chargers.

Expion360's lithium batteries are used mainly in recreation vehicles but also have found their way into boats, homes, and businesses. The batteries are used to power many features of the recreational vehicle, including air-conditioning, DC furnaces, lights, TVs, and all of the vehicle's jacks.

The typical Expion 360 battery pack contains 120 cells welded together in a single pack that is about the size of a car battery.

Lithium batteries cost around four times more than lead-acid batteries that power most RVs today. But lithium packs tend to last longer with less maintenance. They are also lighter and have a higher capacity compared to traditional lead-acid batteries.

China currently leads the world in the lithium battery supply chain, controlling more than 70% of the total global lithium-ion battery manufacturing capacity. Expion360's plant could put a dent in that percentage, potentially reducing reliance on foreign manufacturers.

Shifting production and the sourcing of materials to the U.S. does not necessarily mean an increase in the costs for consumers. Yozamp says he expects prices will remain competitive due to automation and the use of robots to reduce labor costs.

"We anticipate it will be roughly the same costs because we will have more automation than they do in China," he

In addition to gaining better control over the company's supply chain, Yozamp also wants to head off competition for lithium as car manufacturers like Tesla and General Motors try to lock up lithium supplies for their bat-

"The EV market is going to drive lithium (supplies). The focus of our company is to alleviate constraints," he

Yozamp says by bringing the production of the cells to the U.S., quality control can be monitored right down to the source of the lithium, something that cannot be done when the cell manufacturer is overseas. Nevada is one possible source of raw lithium for Expion360's cells, he said.

"We will be seeking a U.S. supply chain when we onshore and build out the large-scale lithium plant," said Yozamp. "We will win long term if we can control our supply chain."

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### **Business**

**Continued from A1** 

The bar now has about 15 employees, most of whom work part time. As more customers hear about the space, Olson said it's starting to fill up.

"People are excited to get back out, congregating," Olson said. "This town's really built on a community feel."

### **Arome**

Wine bar manager Lydia DeRoss said the community reception at Arome has also been positive, despite the shop having to push back its opening date due to flooding.

With its first location established in Hood River five years ago, Arome opened its Redmond storefront at 432

"People are excited to get back out, congregating. This town's really built on a community feel."

- Nick Olson, owner of Otto's Landing

SW Sixth St. this May.

The space features a retail section complete with cooking supplies, spice blends and flavor-infused oils and vinegars — and a wine bar.

Janice Bell, the store's owner, said she'd been looking to open a second location, and Redmond fit the bill perfectly. After some discussion with the city, she and her husband purchased the spot in May 2021.

It was mid-pandemic, but Bell

said COVID-19 actually benefited the store after an initial business slowdown. She credited expanding Arome's online presence and the number of people who turned to cooking at home as restaurants closed.

Now with the store open and a grand opening ceremony set for Aug. 5, during the art walk in Redmond. Bell said the new location has been great.

"I've actually had people come in and thank me for bringing the store to Redmond, which is amazing," she said. "It's a great thing to hear from your customers because it feels like it should be going in the other direction."

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