

LTD HISTORY

In 1969, the Oregon Legislature passed an enabling statute, ORS 267, defining how transit districts could be formed. The impetus for this legislation came from the Portland metropolitan area. The private transit companies in the Portland area, faced with escalating operating costs and declining revenues, were unable to continue to operate. To prevent the loss of bus service, the private companies were purchased by a newly organized Portland Transit District. This organization, now known as Tri-Met, was the first public transit district in Oregon authorized under the provisions of ORS 267.

The privately owned bus company in the Eugene-Springfield area was the Emerald Transportation System, Inc. Faced with bankruptcy, the company notified the public that it would be unable to continue to operate and the City of Eugene temporarily assumed responsibility of the operating deficit. At this point the cities of Eugene and Springfield, and Lane County petitioned Governor Tom McCall to establish a transit district for Lane County. Lane Transit District was incorporated on June 28, 1970. The first Board of Directors were sworn into office on June 30th. The Emerald Transportation System, Inc. had operated a fleet of 20 vehicles, consisting of 18 small former school buses and two vans, collectively known as the "green meanies." This fleet and related garage facilities were purchased and the District began operation on November 23, 1970. At this time, the system carried approximately 2,200 passengers per weekday.

Among the first tasks of the newly appointed Board were the establishment of a service boundary and the selection of a method of taxation. The service boundary was drawn to include only the Eugene-Springfield metropolitan area. The method of taxation which was selected was a payroll tax. The principal goal set by this first Board of Directors was the continuation of the service that had been provided by Emerald Transportation.

Significant changes in routing and scheduling did not occur until 1972, when the District purchased 12 new Twincoaches and put them into operation. The "green meanies" were gradually phased out. Actual expansion of routes and schedules did not occur until twenty-one 36-passenger diesel buses were purchased from the Southern California Rapid Transit District.

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Lane Transit District moved from the Emerald Transportation facility at 5th and Oak to its present location in 1973. The new facilities at 8th & Garfield were rented until funds were available to purchase all the properties at the new location. Most capital purchases, like buses and garage facilities, were made possible by special grants from the federal Urban Mass Transportation Administration.

Public response to the improved service made possible by the new buses was immediate. Ridership doubled within a period of three months. By the end of the 1972-73 fiscal year, American Transit Association statistics reported LTD as leading the nation in percentage of ridership increase. This increase in ridership was credited to extensive service increases, to the effective use of the advertising media, to the ready availability of transit information, and to the new, smooth and quiet buses.

By 1974, ridership growth achieved the level that had been projected for 1977. During the gas crises of 1974 ridership demand exceeded the capacity of the existing fleet. For a short time it was possible to rent additional buses from Tri-Met in Portland. However, Tri-Met's ridership also increased, and they could no longer spare the vehicles. In early 1974, eleven diesel buses were purchased from School Bus Services of Portland. These buses averaged 21 years in age and seat either 45 to 47 passengers. The additional buses enabled the District to meet ridership demands.

The next significant service expansion occurred in March 1975. Aided by a grant of \$135,000 from Lane County, LTD was able to expand service to outlying communities. To implement this program, eight used coaches were purchased in February from Baltimore, Maryland. These buses, which averaged 13 years in age and can seat up to 49 passengers, are now used to operate routes serving Veneta, Junction City, McKenzie Bridge, Lowell and Dexter. With the existing buses, service was also extended to Coburg and Marcola.

All of these service changes have been reflected by a growth within the District. The 20 "green meanies" and 35 employees have evolved into a fleet of 59 buses and 200 employees. Twenty additional new buses are expected by September 1976, and these will be used to replace the #200 series of buses that were originally purchased from Los Angeles.

At the October 1975 meeting, the LTD Board unanimously adopted a dial-a-bus program for seniors and handicapped to be implemented in the summer of 1976. The base fare for this new service is 60¢. Dial-A-Bus is a cross between a bus and a taxi.

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It will be operated with small, radio dispatched vehicles which will be equipped with wheelchair lifts. Curb-to-curb service will be available to eligible patrons. The Eugene-Springfield area has been divided into four zones, and a total of 27 destinations will be served.