



# KOOTENAI COUNTY

## PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

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### MEMO

**TO:** County Commissioners

**FROM:** Transit Department

**DATE:** January 6, 2026

**SUBJECT:** Replacement of End-of-Life Paratransit Buses to Meet Federal Safety and Reliability Requirements

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this memo is to request approval to proceed with the purchase of four replacement paratransit buses using existing federal and state grant funding that is already secured and designated for this purpose. Continuing to operate these buses requires repeated temporary repairs that are no longer cost-effective and pull funding away from critical fleet maintenance needs. This request does not expand transit service, add routes, or increase operating budgets. It is a necessary replacement action driven by federal compliance requirements, safety considerations, and fiscal responsibility.

#### **Need**

Four 2016 Chevy Express 4500 paratransit buses have exceeded the Federal Transit Administration's defined useful life of 150,000 miles or five years and are experiencing chronic mechanical failures. Continued operation requires repeated temporary repairs that are no longer cost-effective and divert limited maintenance funds from other fleet needs.

#### **Federal Compliance and Risk Mitigation**

FTA guidance requires grant recipients to operate safe, reliable, and well-maintained vehicles. Once vehicles exceed useful life and demonstrate recurring major failures, replacement, not continued rehabilitation, is the federally expected action. Failure to comply exposes the County and its partners to:

- Increased safety, reliability, and liability risks for passengers and drivers
- Service disruptions, missed trips, and emergency vehicle shortages
- Audit findings and potential jeopardy to future federal grant eligibility

Approving replacement ensures this communities good standing with federal and state funding partners.

### **Condition of Existing Vehicles (To Be Replaced)**

- **Unit 7 (180,737 miles):** Transmission replacement, repeated A/C and electrical failures, suspension, exhaust, and cooling system issues; excessive downtime.
- **Unit 8 (177,759 miles):** Engine, fuel system, suspension, and exhaust failures; transmission replacement; increasingly frequent breakdowns.
- **Unit 54 (147,396 miles):** Transmission replacement and recurring engine misfires; now limited to emergency-only use.
- **Unit 57 (150,123 miles):** Critically low engine oil pressure requiring an engine replacement exceeding \$8,000, in addition to ongoing reliability issues.
- Over half of the fleet is meeting or exceeding their useful life.

### **Grant Funding Summary (Already Secured)**

Current available grant funding and cash match totals **\$978,380.72**, consisting of:

- ITD 5310 – 2023 Demand Response Vehicle: **\$212,500.00**
- ITD 5310 – 2023 Demand Response Van: **\$155,000.00**
- ITD 5339 – 2023 Five Paratransit Buses: **\$115,880.72**
- ITD 5339 – 2025 Paratransit Buses (tabled for BOCC approval on funding agreement): **\$495,000.00**

These amounts include both federal and required cash match and cannot be used for maintenance or repairs, these are dedicated grant funds used only for vehicle replacement.

### **Procurement and Cost Control**

The proposed purchase consists of:

- **Four Arboc SOF 26' paratransit buses** at \$188,464 each: **\$753,856**
- **Designer decals (2 units): \$15,666**
- **Total procurement cost: \$769,522**

Sufficient grant funding is being made available to fully cover this purchase. Delaying acquisition could result in multiple grant terminations for non-performance. In addition,

further delay will result in continued spending of limited local resources on short-term repairs, which require a higher local matching share. Vehicle production and delivery has consistently had very long lead times. We expect it will take a minimum of 12 months before delivery of the first vehicle.

**Request**

Approval to move forward with the purchase of four replacement paratransit vehicles, using the grant funding available through ITD and Federal Transit Administration.

- Maintains the essential safety, security, and reliability of the fleet
- Eliminates ongoing and increasingly more costly maintenance and emergency repair on vehicles that are, or are about to, age out;
- The budgeted expenditure is consistent with existing paratransit operating conditions, and consistent with Federal grant agreements for fleet management.