“Redmond Light Rail” Coffee Talk at the Redmond Senior Center

Event Overview
In 2018/19, the Eastside Easy Rider Collaborative is organizing a series of Mobility Coffee Talks in collaboration with senior centers on the Eastside. The goal is to increase awareness of transportation options and focus on underserved populations. The events also aim at increasing the visibility of the EERC in the community. Each event is tailored to the specific needs at the respective location, which is determined together with site staff. The second event took place on Friday, December 7th, 10am-11:30am at the Redmond Senior Center (Fireside Library). Conversations with members of the Senior Center at previous outreach events revealed the Redmond Link Extension as one of topics they were most interested in learning more about. Therefore Ryan Bianchi (Community Outreach Specialist with Sound Transit) was invited for a discussion about the Link light rail that will serve Redmond starting in 2023/2024.

Promotion
The event was embedded in the monthly First Friday Coffee Chat series at the Senior Center where attendees can learn about City of Redmond departments and happenings. Thus, regular attendees of the Senior Center were already familiar with the event format, date, and time. They were informed about the event details through the print/online newsletter Encore!, as well as through flyers that were posted at the Senior Center. In addition, the flyer was circulated (electronically and in-person) through EERC members, the EERC website, the City of Redmond, the newsletter of the King County Mobility Coalition, the Redmond Library, the Community Resource Center, the Providence John Gabriel House, the Together Center, Hopelink Redmond, Fairwinds Retirement Community, the India Association of Western Washington, and English classes of Jewish Family Service. EERC staff support also reached out to Redmond Heights Senior Living, Emma McRedmond Manor, Patricia Harris Manor, and Parkway Apartments to promote the event among older adults. In total, the Coffee Talk was attended by at least 20 people (not including the speaker and three staff persons).

Support
This Coffee Talk was implemented as a collaboration between the EERC and Go Redmond, a program by the City of Redmond that works to inspire the community to embrace a culture of
walking, biking, ridesharing, and transit in Redmond. The Redmond Senior Center played a main role as host, donating refreshments, promoting the event, and providing a gracious space. The event would not have been possible without the dedication of many EERC members from all over the Eastside who participated in work group meetings, drafted program concepts, printed flyers, and/or were present at the day of. Hopelink’s Mobility Management team provided additional staff support to assist during the event with set-up, taking pictures, taking notes, and more. Thank you to everyone involved!

**Course of the event**

Comfortable seating, seasonal refreshments, decoration, and the fireside created a warm and welcoming atmosphere. Attendees were greeted cordially by Marty Boggs on behalf of the Redmond Senior Center. Anna Loffing (EERC staff support) then briefly introduced the Eastside Easy Rider Collaborative and Ryan Bianchi as speaker. Ryan Bianchi provided an overview of the Redmond Link Extension, using a slide show with pictures and renderings of the future stations. He also provided handouts with additional information about the construction project.

Although planning the extension of the Link light rail had started many years earlier, the adoption of Sound Transit 3 through voters in 2016 was the final step to secure funding for the Redmond Link Extension. By 2024, there will be added two new light rail stations in southeast Redmond (serving Marymoor Park), and in Downtown (serving the residential and retail core). These two stations will open a year after the completion of East Link to the Redmond Technology Station (opening in 2023). From Downtown Redmond it will likely take 18 minutes to get to Downtown Bellevue, and 38 minutes to the International District Station. The final stop of this route will be Lynnwood. In addition, by 2024 there will be another route connecting Federal Way, Kent, and Des Moines with Seattle. By this time, there will also be a Bus Rapid Transit connection from Lynnwood to Burien (running on a dedicated high-occupancy vehicle lane on I-405).

Ryan Bianchi shared interesting insights in the planning process with attendees: He explained how this massive construction project came with specific challenges, such as getting train tracks across the I-90 floating bridge. Did you know that four of the five largest floating bridges in the world can be found in Washington? To address this construction challenge, engineers created
off-the-shelf products, used earthquake-proofing for high-rise buildings, and tested the special train tracks at a testing center in New Mexico. The second biggest challenge was the Downtown Bellevue tunneling, which was completed a few months ago through a sequential excavation method by hand. The light rail is operating fully electric and additional traction power substation will be built along the route.

Attendees were curious if the Redmond Transit Center, which is about five to eight blocks away from the future stations, is going to move. Ryan Bianchi explained that Sound Transit is not designing the project with this in mind, but there are efforts to create additional transit staging and improve the bus connections from the Downtown station. Sound Transit is constructing 1,400 additional parking stalls at the SE Redmond Station. Depending upon the station, there will be also ample bike parking with lockers, cages, and racks. Some participants were concerned if these parking spaces would be enough, since people would come all the way from Monroe or Issaquah. Although the light rail will expand the transit capacity on the Eastside significantly, it is not likely that the car traffic will reduce much because of the rapid growth in the region. The conversation continued, touching on topics like efforts to reduce train noise at the stations, accessibility of the Link light rail, connections to regional trails, earthquake preparedness, and more.

After one hour of discussion, the event was opened up to give attendees an opportunity to have one-on-one conversation with Hopelink Mobility staff and EERC members about alternative transportation options in the community, such as volunteer transportation, Access, medical transportation, access to the foodbank, and more. Attendees also took advantage of the opportunity to get their free Pedestrian Visibility Kits with a reflective vest and lights.

**Evaluation**

Overall, the event was successful. It received positive feedback for being well organized, the early set up, and staff that greeted attendees as soon as they arrived. The lively discussion was seen as a great quality of the Coffee Talk – there was enough time for participants to ask questions and share their thoughts about the Redmond Link Extension. They seemed comfortable in engaging, which had also to do with a good group size (20 people). It was an advantage that Marty Boggs was familiar with the attendees and supported the facilitator in keeping the questions close to the topic. The screen and A/V system worked well, although one person noticed an acoustic issue in a small part of the room. There was some noise to
hear from activities in the main gathering area of the Senior Center. However, the use of a microphone alleviated that issue. With more people attending the Coffee Talk than expected, chairs had to be added and the room was a little bit cramped. This negatively impacted the accessibility and made it difficult to navigate the room for participants with mobility devices. This also made it a little bit more challenging to have conversations after the first part of the Coffee Talk because the chairs left less room to move around. It would have been ideal to either have a slightly bigger room or to move to the common area afterwards - although this was occupied by some other activities at the same time. It was also noted that the printed Sound Transit handouts did not have ideal readability because of very small text (in addition, there seemed to be some errors on the handout that were noticed by an attendee). For future events, the EERC should encourage presenters to follow best practices of universal design. It was suggested that the slideshow could have included more pictures for each station and that some construction jargon could have been explained better. Interpretation at future events will make them more inclusive. Although the request was made early, unfortunately ORCA To-Go was not available for this event.

To improve future events, it was suggested to determine “what’s next” for the group. For instance, some people expressed interest in the viaduct closure. At the end of the Coffee Talk some time could have been dedicated to gather feedback on what else people wanted to hear about in case there was an opportunity to have a more regular discussion on transportation needs at the Senior Center. It could also have been communicated better that Hopelink Mobility is on-site every month at the Senior Center and how attendees can become involved with the EERC.

**Follow Up & Next Steps**

- Hopelink’s Mobility Line is available for anyone who needs assistance with identifying alternative transportation options (425-943-6760). In addition, there are monthly Getting Around Puget Sound events at the Senior Center, sometimes with ORCA To-Go.
- As a follow up to the Coffee Talk, Marty Boggs invited the EERC staff support to hold a presentation about transportation options at a future retreat of the Redmond Senior Advisory Committee. Ryan Bianchi was invited to present on the Redmond Link Extension at the same occasion.
- The EERC will continue the series of Coffee Talks in 2019, with events planned for Kirkland, Bellevue, and Sammamish.