

Growing ridership validates EmX vision

The Lane Transit District has invested heavily in its EmX service, based on the premise that a bus rapid-transit system would push public transportation in the Eugene-Springfield area to a level that could not be achieved with regular bus service. Each successive leg of the EmX service has tested the validity of that premise. Now, with the new west Eugene segment carrying more than 3,500 passengers a day, the system has taken a long step toward proving its value.

The chief advantages of bus rapid-transit are frequency and speed: Passengers never have to wait long for a bus, and with dedicated lanes on some portions of their route the buses move faster than other traffic. The advantage of speed will widen as traffic congestion worsens.

The first leg of the system, between downtown Eugene and downtown Springfield, was bound to be a success — it connects LTD's two transit hubs and serves a densely populated corridor that includes the the University of Oregon. Boardings approach 200,000 in some months. The second leg, a loop serving the Gateway area, was easier to build and less costly, but slower-than-expected job growth along the route has led to disappointing ridership numbers that seldom exceed 60,000 a month. The west Eugene segment has averaged more than 100,000 riders in each of its first nine months. The ridership numbers are trending upward, and would climb steeply if the EmX system is extended north to U.S. Highway 99, the River Road area or both.

LTD now has the backbone of a bus rapid transit system — and its worth is becoming steadily more apparent.