



On A Transit System Long, Long Ago

Background: Main Street of Vancouver with streetcar service and horse-drawn carriages—two different eras in local transportation side by side.

Early Vancouver Transportation

As the 19th century rolled into the 20th and horses and buggies gave way to bicycles, streetcars, and motor cars, mass transit began to serve the Vancouver region. One of the earliest efforts—a horse-drawn railway—transported passengers from downtown to Vancouver Heights before the system was electrified, halted by the Panic of 1893, and then replaced by another line that expanded east.

Rise of the Private Bus Systems

Within another dozen or so years, the Interstate Passenger Service Company of Portland had self-propelled jitney buses departing every 35 minutes from the ferry at the Columbia River and taking passengers also east, past the garrison, and the State School for the Deaf and Blind. Over the years, there was the expected jostling for service by other entities, including the Yacolt Stage Company. The Vancouver Bus Company incorporated in fall 1926 and won the Vancouver City Council's approval for exclusive service within the city and outlying areas.

Operating a mass transit system over the next 40-plus years proved to be a bumpy ride for the Vancouver Bus Company. A series of owners—among them William Thompson, Roy C. Sugg, Carroll Ruby, and finally J.C. Hutchins—added and eliminated routes, typically in response to increased operating costs, labor disputes and dwindling patronage. As the popularity of the

personal automobile grew, Vancouver wasn't the only municipality to encounter transit woes. A third of Americans relied on buses prior to World War II, but transit use dropped to 20 percent by 1960 and then 7 percent by 1968.

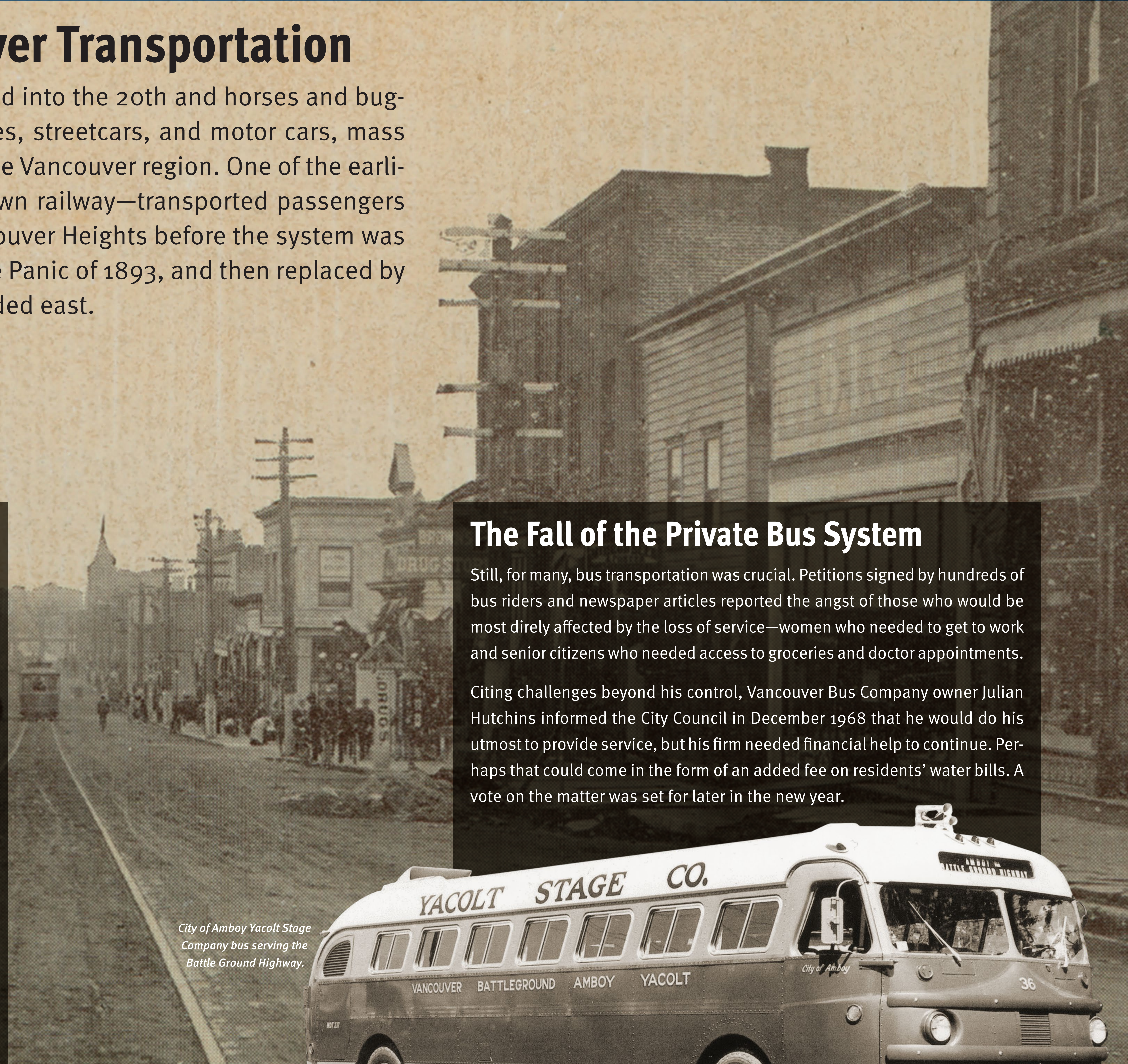
The Fall of the Private Bus System

Still, for many, bus transportation was crucial. Petitions signed by hundreds of bus riders and newspaper articles reported the angst of those who would be most direly affected by the loss of service—women who needed to get to work and senior citizens who needed access to groceries and doctor appointments.

Citing challenges beyond his control, Vancouver Bus Company owner Julian Hutchins informed the City Council in December 1968 that he would do his utmost to provide service, but his firm needed financial help to continue. Perhaps that could come in the form of an added fee on residents' water bills. A vote on the matter was set for later in the new year.



People boarding a VBC bus in 1947 on Main Street.



City of Amboy Yacolt Stage Company bus serving the Battle Ground Highway.

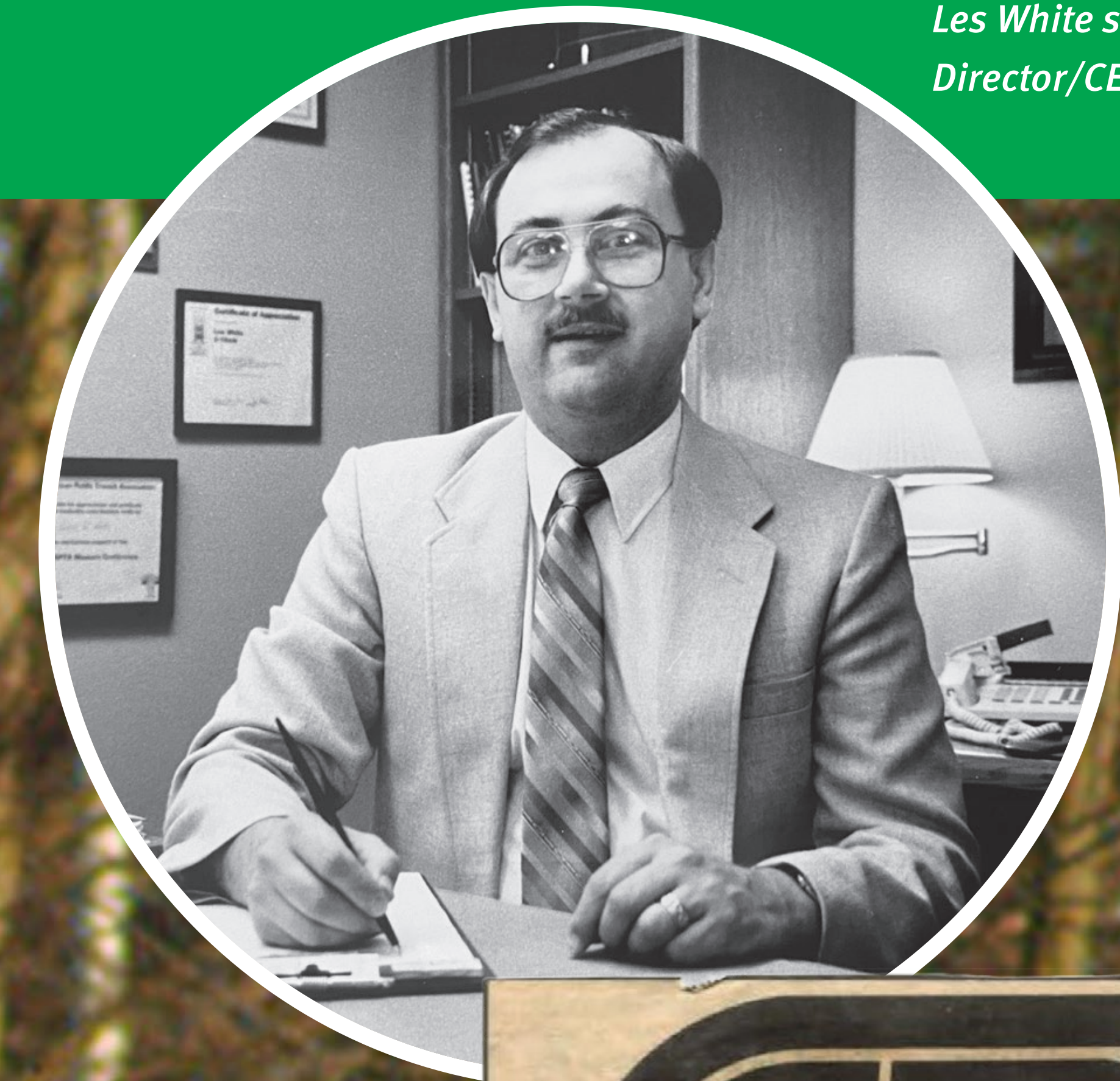


MAIN STREET,
VANCOUVER, WASH.



A New Hope

Les White served as C-TRAN's Executive Director/CEO from 1982 to 1998.



An ad from *The Columbian* announces that Mark and Rick Tolleshaug, twin brothers from Longview, were the contest winners in C-TRAN's logo design competition. Roughly 300 entries were submitted.

Return of the Transit System

Understanding the story of C-TRAN's founding requires a step back to two key moments in the 1970s. As the 1960s came to a close, the future of mass transit in Vancouver was uncertain. The City of Vancouver spent the last few years of the decade anguishing over the question of what to do with the failing Vancouver Bus Company. On March 18, 1969, the Vancouver voters came to the rescue. *The Oregonian* exclaimed, "Vancouver voters decided Tuesday to buy themselves a bus system." The city took over full operations of the ailing transit system by May of that year. The dividend paid by this leap of electoral faith exceeded the wildest expectations of Vancouver residents and city leadership.

By the mid-1970s, the sleek, modern, gold, white, and blue buses of the city-owned transit system were the talk of the state and beyond. Splashed on the pages of *The Oregonian* was the headline "Vancouver transit system rated as one of the finest in state." By the end of the first year of this experiment in municipal ownership, more than 1,000 additional bus-goers were hopping on the blue-and-gold beauties to make their way across the city.

As the 1970s forged ahead, the city transit system, like many others across the nation, faced the obstacles of a struggling economy, volatile gas prices, and fluctuations in routes and ridership. Despite its struggles as ridership fell drastically at the dawn of the 1980s, the city-owned system remained popular, successful, and solvent, proving that public ownership of the local transit system worked. This was a key factor in the impending development of C-TRAN.

The State Steps In

As the City of Vancouver provided proof of viability when it came to public ownership, the State of Washington provided the other key ingredient for county-wide transit. On July 1, 1975, Washington Governor Daniel J. Evans signed into law a bill establishing Public Transportation Benefit Areas. Rumblings of the use of this

new type of taxing district in Clark County increased by August 1980, and in November of that same year, Clark County residents voted to approve a 0.3 percent sales tax in support of a county-wide bus system. Now with a funding mechanism, officials across the county started the work of making this a reality.

C-TRAN is Born

By March 1981, a fleet of 15 buses delivered local residents to bus stops in Hazel Dell, Vancouver Mall, and Portland. During the transition to a new county-wide system, the leadership saw the need to brand this new system. A design contest was launched to help select a new color scheme, a logo, and, most important, a name for the new transit system. In the following months, the system unveiled the new logo, color scheme, and moniker: Columbia Transit System, or C-TRAN.

C-TRAN's beginning in 1981 spelled the end of the Vancouver Transit System. On April 17, 1981, *The Columbian* reported, "C-TRAN board members Thursday evening sounded the death knell for the Vancouver Transit System by signing a transition agreement for assets and employees." The system that paved the road for C-TRAN was sacrificed in support of the new county-wide system. C-TRAN officially launched its full service on July 6, 1981.

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Year One

Hitting the Ground Running and Expanding Services

With a new name, logo, and colors, C-TRAN quickly unfurled service in all directions throughout Clark County. In 1981 alone, service was expanded to Battle Ground, Brush Prairie, Burton, Camas, Dollars Corner, La Center, Minnehaha, Orchards, Ridgefield, Sifton, Washougal and Yacolt. The new blue and green carriages zoomed into 1982 with growing momentum.

1982 was a banner year for the young Public Transportation Benefit Area. In that year alone, 34 new General Motors buses, purchased with Federal Urban Mass Transit Administration grants, started their 2,419-mile journey from a factory in Pontiac, Michigan to service on the streets of Clark County. Forty-four new electronic fare boxes helped streamline the fare system for riders and drives alike.

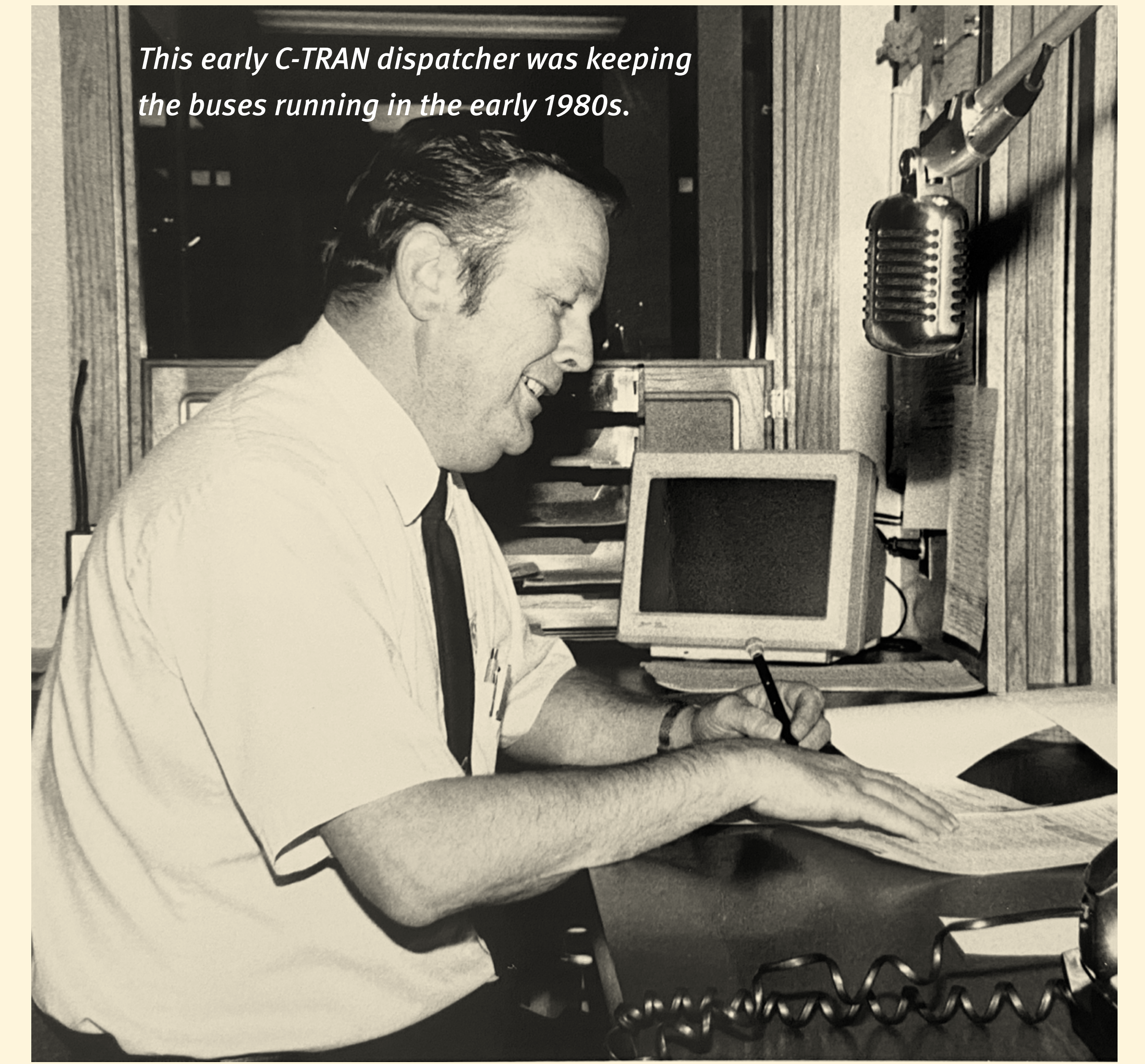
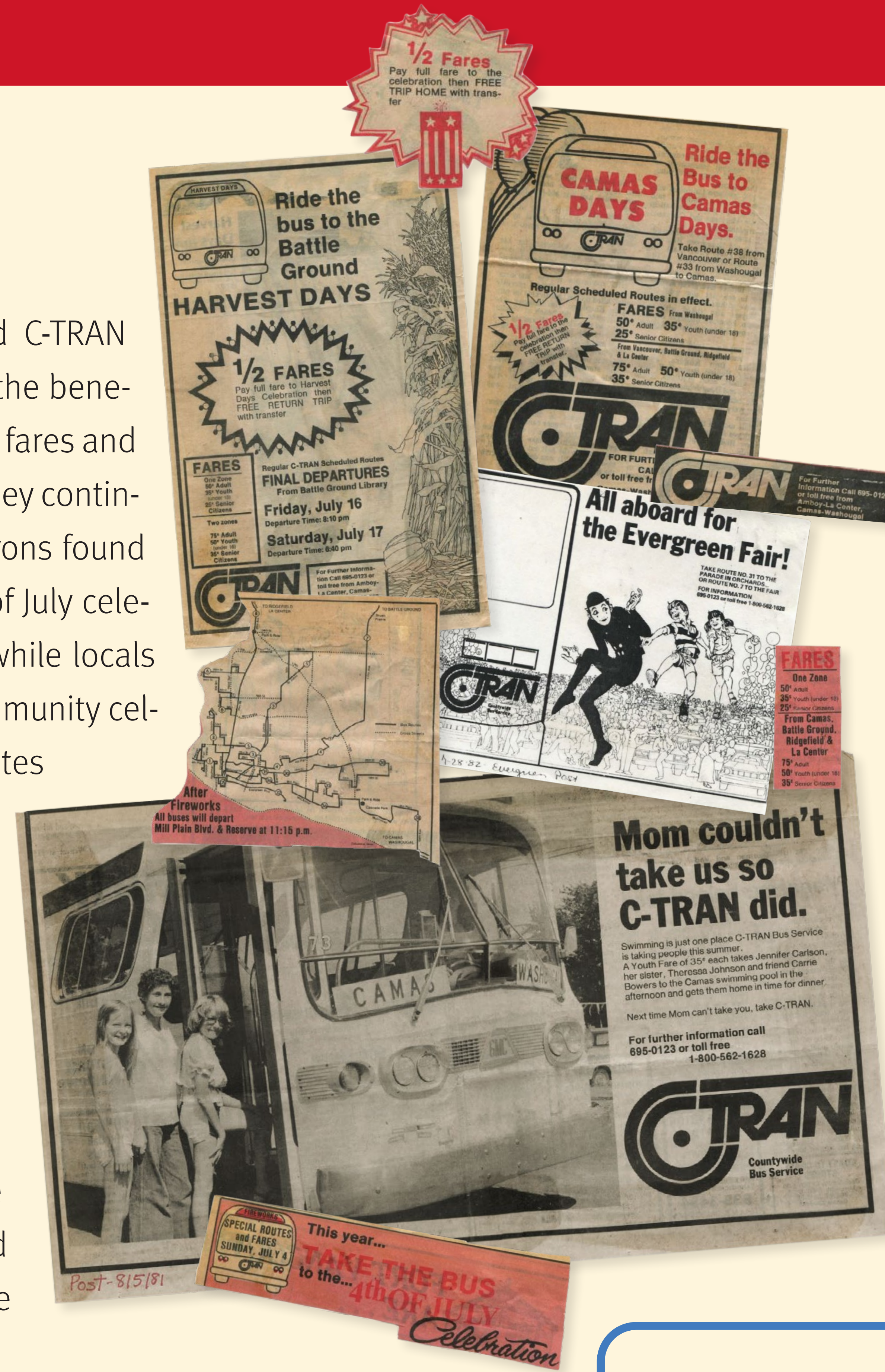
C-TRAN's Board of Directors also awarded a contract to an area non-profit for accessible public transportation for older residents and persons with disabilities. The service was titled Dial-A-Ride. In the summer of 1982, the C-TRAN board also approved the purchase of land on which to build an administration and maintenance headquarters.

ALWAYS WINNERS

In 1982, C-TRAN won a safety award from the American Public Transportation Association. The accolade pertained to "special achievement" in safe operation among transit systems serving an urban area with a population of 100,000 to 200,000. This was the first of many awards C-TRAN has won.

Let's Celebrate

It was a time for celebration, and C-TRAN found itself in a partying mood, to the benefit of Clark County residents. Special fares and routes were the flavor of the year; they continue to this day. Patriotic patrons found special fares to the Fourth of July celebration at Fort Vancouver; while locals looking to connect with community celebrations found special routes set up for Amboy's Territorial Days, Battle Ground's Harvest Days, and East Clark County's famed Camas Days. The special Clark County Fair route was another favorite. Many Clark County residents have found themselves taking the satisfying, sleepy ride home on C-TRAN after a day of food and fun at the fair. The fair shuttles have remained a popular program since.



This early C-TRAN dispatcher was keeping the buses running in the early 1980s.

Skepticism and Success

Despite the rapid expansion of service and community engagement, some were skeptical of the new system. Vancouver business leaders and the Clark County Economic Council provided C-TRAN with a frosty reception and only reluctantly sanctioned C-TRAN's planned headquarters complex. "Go ahead and build your \$4.6 million headquarters, but we'll be paying closer attention in the future," noted a member of the Clark County Economic Council. This was in spite of a projected 80 percent of the complex being federally funded.

Surprisingly, the public, with its penchant for kindness to C-TRAN, wasn't particularly supportive, either. Disapproving letters to the editor flowed into *The Columbian*. One concerned citizen wrote, "From my observations, the loneliest people in the county must be the drivers for the new C-TRAN buses."

However, this concern from the business community and Clark County citizenry resided in a more anecdotal realm than hard facts and reality. By August 1982, ridership on C-TRAN was breaking records. In that month, ridership was 111,102. In the first full year of operations, C-TRAN's total ridership was a staggering 1,216,114.

NOT ALL WERE ABOARD

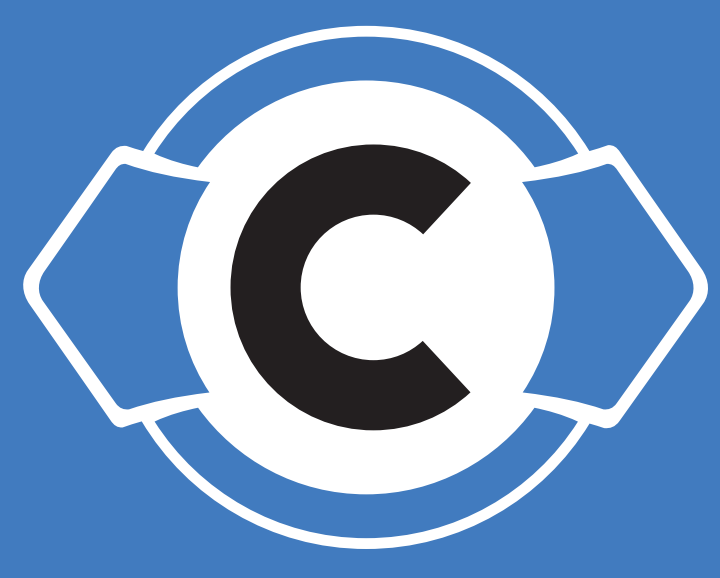
Although 55.7 percent of the county's voters approved a 0.3 percent sales tax measure to help expand bus service beyond Vancouver's city limits, people in more than two-thirds of county precincts voted against the proposal. All but four precincts in Vancouver's urban service area voted for the Public Transportation Benefit Area.

YOU GOT TWO HOURS, HOT SHOT

A creative early challenge for C-TRAN took place when sixteen Covington Junior High students were dropped at different locations around Vancouver and given two hours to return to school using C-TRAN. Only one of the students failed to make it back in time.



An old-school C-TRAN bus produced by Mercedes.



Gaining Momentum

Opening day at the 7th Street Transit Center in 1984.



In 1984, the new, sleek 65th Operation Center opened with the capacity to handle the next 20 years of C-TRAN's growth.



Seventh Street Transit Center

1982 also saw the beginning of C-TRAN's network of transit centers with the initiation of the 7th Street Transit Center in downtown Vancouver. In that year, C-TRAN searched fervently for an appropriate home for their downtown bus mall, though this didn't happen without some consternation. *The Columbian* reported that efforts to install a downtown bus mall "continues to be an exercise in frustration for governmental decision-makers." In the end, a

point north of 7th Street just off Main found sanction from both C-TRAN and city leaders.

With the questions of location settled, C-TRAN's Board of Directors quickly adopted a design plan for the proposed downtown Vancouver bus mall, and work began and finished in 1984. In the years to follow, plans for a second transit center resulted in the Vancouver Mall Transit Center, on the north side of the mall.

Operations Center

In early 1982, C-TRAN put an incredibly successful first year of operations in the rear-view mirror and pushed forward to boundless potential; going from 0 to 60, the nascent transit system roared through the 1980s.

With a clear vision for its future, C-TRAN leadership didn't lose any time planning for stability and longevity. They launched a search to find a suitable home for operations and maintenance needs. Former lettuce fields owned by the Ezetta family provided the land needed for this endeavor. Quickly, C-TRAN's 65th Avenue Operations and Maintenance center took shape. The entire project was completed ahead of schedule, and in 1983, C-TRAN's leadership moved from humble digs in downtown Vancouver to their modern facility to the east.



DID YOU KNOW? Completed in 1982, the Glenn L. Jackson Memorial Bridge gave the Portland-Vancouver area its second Columbia River crossing. There to head the inaugural journey into Oregon were four C-TRAN buses carrying approximately seventy eager and lucky listeners of Vancouver's local radio station KVAN. Cheers erupted as the buses sped across the state line and C-TRAN rolled into a new era of interstate travel.

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As the hum of bus wheels crisscrossed the county, C-TRAN saw the need to serve all residents. Partnering with a local non-profit, door-to-door transportation service, Dial-A-Ride, was a move intended to expand access for older and patrons with disabilities. However, Dial-A-Ride services were limited to doctors' appointments, work, and shopping for necessary household goods.

Despite a concerted effort on behalf of C-TRAN and Dial-A-Ride, members of the community promptly brought attention to the enduring limitations faced by patrons with disabilities. As Dial-A-Ride rolled into 1984, limited funds continued to relegate riders to essential destinations on a circumscribed appointment-based system. Public comments quickly blossomed into large questions of availability and accessibility. The question of the day: Continue and expand Dial-A-Ride service? Or incorporate accessibility through retrofitting C-TRAN's current fleet with wheelchair lifts? In the end, C-TRAN's Board of Directors moved forward with increased funding and restructuring of the program.

Dial-A-Ride to C-VAN

Soon a new system for transporting older residents and persons with disabilities emerged from the tumult of Dial-A-Ride's growing pains. In mid-1985, C-TRAN launched its second generation of door-to-door service, C-VAN. Dial-A-Vehicle Systems, a California-based national leader in dial-a-ride programs, now managed the enterprise. This new partner brought on new drivers and dispatchers and initiated employee training courses in first aid, CPR, and defensive driving. From this transitional beginning, C-VAN has remained a recognizable part of C-TRAN's multifaceted network across Clark County. C-VAN and C-TRAN's other initial growth in the 1980s continued well into the 1990s.



One of the many iterations of C-VAN.



Growth and Ground Lost

Continuing Expansion

As C-TRAN exited the 1980s, it continued with momentum into the 1990s. It opened another transit center, the Evergreen Transit Center, expanded service to Sundays, and grew annual ridership to more than 2 million, nearly doubling its annual average from the previous decade. All points were poised for celebration, and in 1991, C-TRAN closed out its first decade of service.

1993 saw exponential growth in ridership and was the starting line for a run of record-breaking years. C-TRAN leaped from its early decade numbers of 2 million riders annually to top out at more than 6 million by 1997, making it one of the fastest growing transit systems in the United States.



C-TRAN was often looked to as the savior of commuters during construction on the Interstate Bridge, including a major closure in 1997.

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New Initiatives (Environment, Youth, and Going Digital)

Never pleased with holding the line, in the mid-1990s C-TRAN focused on a number of forward-thinking and innovative initiatives. Keeping an eye on the future, C-TRAN conjured up a number of wicked youth ridership programs, such as C-Pass and Summer Blast Pass, which focused on local community college students and youth on summer break, respectively.

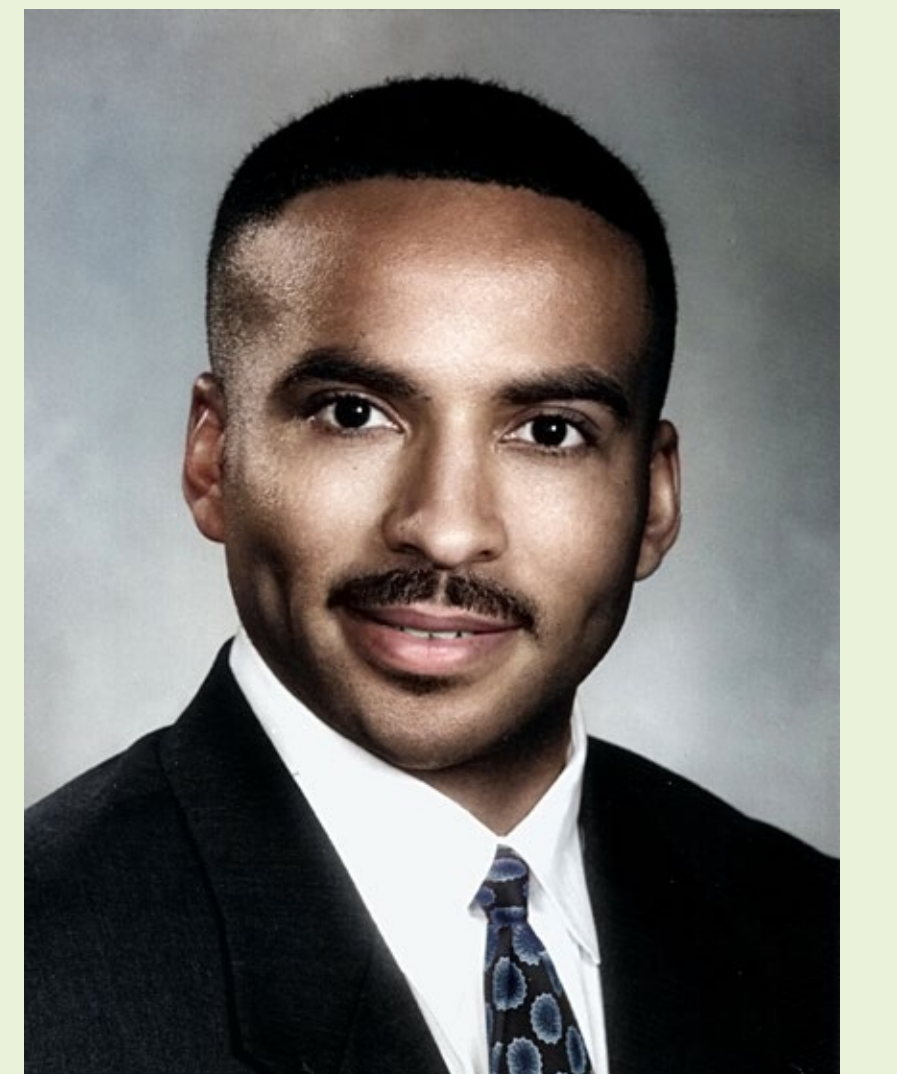
Truly understanding the long view, environmental initiatives became a hallmark of C-TRAN's community-centered efforts at this time. Warm

A Challenging Second Half of the Decade

C-TRAN's service and ridership remained strong during the second half of the 1990s, but there was trouble ahead. In 1995, C-TRAN was presented with its first electoral defeat as voters rejected a sales tax proposal that would have extended the Portland area's light rail system to Clark County. Just two years later, C-TRAN was facing capacity issues as the Evergreen Transit Center outstripped its capacity to serve riders from that location. However, these problems were minor compared to what came next.

In the lead-up to 1999, C-TRAN saw an initiative on the horizon that could have cut deeply into its funding. Initiative 695 brought to Washington voters the opportunity to repeal the motor vehicle excise tax. A campaign was formed, and many in the community pushed fervently for its defeat. The measure ultimately passed and significantly reduced funding to transit agencies across the state. This included a \$12 million annual cut to C-TRAN. With this loss of revenue, C-TRAN was forced to slash 40 percent of its yearly operating budget. After a decade-and-a-half of growth and expansions, C-TRAN faced tough decisions as it worked to forge a new path forward.

In 1999, C-TRAN brings its paratransit service, C-VAN, in-house to be fully operated by C-TRAN staff.



Keith Parker was named Executive Director/CEO in 1998.



Channel card advertising Clean Air Action Days.



Rough Roads and Forging a New Path

Turbulent Times

Initiative 695 eliminated the motor vehicle excise tax and created a dent in state revenue that helped fund public transportation services across Washington. This initiative posed a significant roadblock for C-TRAN, whose budget was slashed by 40 percent in the wake of its approval. In an effort to keep buses rolling, routes were cut county-wide. Eighty positions were eliminated, leaving the transportation agency with a skeleton crew of bus drivers. Even the popular Fourth of July service was not immune to cutbacks.

Ridership, greatly affected by service cuts, fell from 7.7 million in 1999 to 6.6 million in 2000. By the end of 2001, C-TRAN had spent roughly \$5.3 million of its capital reserves to maintain operations. In an effort to recuperate losses, C-TRAN's board of directors partnered with Obie Media in 2001 to begin

selling advertising space on buses. Only commercial ads were permitted—a policy that was revisited in 2002 when several members of the board recognized the agency had missed out on thousands of dollars by declining non-profit advertisements.

By 2002, C-TRAN welcomed a modest increase in budget and services. Despite financial setbacks, C-TRAN continued construction on the 99th Street Transit Center and gradually replaced paratransit and commuter buses in an attempt to garner ridership and expand service. The transit agency continued to see service and employee cutbacks. To stave off its losses, the agency repeatedly dipped into its reserves. By 2003, only a third of the funds remained.

Battle for the Budget and Continued Contraction

Running on fumes by 2004, C-TRAN's Board of Directors proposed a measure to increase sales tax by 0.3 percent in lieu of a second major cutback on services and employees.

The measure was swiftly rejected by voters and in 2005 C-TRAN was forced to cut routes down to cover only the boundaries of Battle Ground, Camas, La Center, Ridgefield, Vancouver and

its urban growth boundary, Washougal, and Yacolt. In a continued effort to pump the brakes on its hemorrhaging revenue, C-TRAN had all but run out of steam by the close of 2005 and, in a last-ditch effort to remain in operation, the agency once again presented voters with a newly trimmed tax increase proposal. As voters hit the polls, C-TRAN held its breath.



Lynne Griffith was named C-TRAN Executive Director/CEO in 2000.

Background: The opening of 99th Street Transit Center ushers in a new era for the local transit agency.



In honor of 2001's National Try Transit Week, C-TRAN encouraged residents to catch a ride aboard one of its various transit offerings. To bolster celebrations and encourage community pride and ownership through volunteering, citizens were invited to submit a logo design for the agency's new Bus Shelter Mural and Adopt-a-Stop program. The winner of the Try Transit Week Promotion received a 2001 bus pass and a \$25 gift certificate to The Olive Garden.

End of an Era and Dawn of a New C-TRAN

This time, the voters of Clark County came to C-TRAN's rescue, opening up a new era for the transit system. The tax measure overwhelmingly passed, and with a moderate increase in funding, C-TRAN eased out of 2005 and into one of its "most dynamic eras."

Enabled by state funding, C-TRAN rolled out its first fleet of environmentally friendly buses in 2006. The buses ran on ultra-low-sulfur diesel and headed the agency's new effort to reduce emissions. In addition, a select number of buses on popular Vancouver routes were replaced by the B-100, a bus that ran entirely on biodiesel.

Despite previous setbacks, C-TRAN celebrated its twenty-fifth year of operations in style with the opening of the

99th Street Transit Center. The station provided more equitable geographical access despite the closure of the Seventh Street Transit Center in downtown Vancouver, and boasted a turn-of-the-century aesthetic with C-TRAN's new minimalistic logo and color scheme.

By 2008, C-TRAN's brand had evolved to encompass a more environmentally conscious model. A fleet of hybrid diesel-electric buses crisscrossed the streets of Clark County, boasting "Earth Day Every Day" and a sleek gray paint scheme. The agency also outfitted its transit centers, maintenance shop, and administrative building with energy-efficient lighting and air systems. Such improvements brought with them a 19 percent increase in ridership and a decrease in operational expenses.

In 2008, C-TRAN's logo got a new, sleek modern look.





C-TRAN: Today and the Next Forty Years

C-TRAN Awakens

C-TRAN continued to hit the pavement running into the second decade of the twenty-first century with plans to increase its revenue and further expand its services throughout Southwest Washington. With the approval of a 0.2 percent sales tax increase in 2011, C-TRAN got to work on consolidating its operations and pushing new initiatives. In 2012, C-TRAN reopened the Salmon Creek Park and Ride in a new location, in addition to its numerous other park-and-ride facilities.



Jeff Hamm was named C-TRAN Executive Director/CEO in 2007.



POETRY MOVES

As C-TRAN reclaimed the visual real estate on its buses from advertisers, it moved to provide opportunities for creative expression. The Poetry Moves program is a beautiful example of community-centered connections, displaying the work of local authors on board every C-TRAN bus.

Poetry Matters
Anand Tawker
Vancouver, Washington

OCTOBER 2020

Between the ineffable and the eloquent
In that liminal space, like the time before the dawn
You exist as a mélange of words and feelings in some inchoate form
Intimations of lines to come, as word silhouettes become emergent
Your presence is felt ever more, and you are determined to be born
Midwifed by emotion, long labor, and nurtured with care
You become the poem.

ARTS+TRAN **poetrymoves**

C-TRAN Today and the Next 40 Years

C-TRAN was cruising into the last years of the decade when, in 2017, CEO Jeff Hamm retired and Shawn M. Donaghy stepped up to the post as Chief Executive Officer. Donaghy oversaw the launch of the Hop Fastpass electronic fare system, a cooperative partnership between C-TRAN, TriMet, and the Portland Streetcar. Moving forward, C-TRAN also discontinued paid advertising on its buses.

C-TRAN continued its ambitious development with ideas for new projects and initiatives. In 2018, C-TRAN began its plans for a second bus rapid transit line dedicated to the Mill Plain corridor. This project, once realized, would be a huge expansion for the company and would increase service on another one of the region's key corridors. Also by 2018, hybrid buses represented more than half of C-TRAN's fixed-route fleet as the agency had gradually replaced older diesel-only vehicles during the previous decade.



Shawn M. Donaghy was named C-TRAN Executive Director/CEO in 2017.

The Vine

C-TRAN shifted into high gear in 2014 when the Board of Directors approved the use of reserve funds to pay for its local share of an entirely new project, a bus rapid transit line. The construction of the line, named The Vine, began in 2015 with plans to serve the Fourth Plain corridor. During its construction, the C-TRAN board underwent its own revamping as a new jurisdiction system re-determined the composition of the ten-member body. The Vine was completed in 2017 and blazed a new path as it went into service as the first bus rapid transit system in the Portland-Vancouver region. During this period, C-TRAN reaped the benefits of its expanded system with an overall ridership increase that year, topping 6 million in 2017.

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C-TRAN's 2019 Mid-Sized Transit System of the Year from APTA.

C-TRAN's enterprising did not go unnoticed, and in 2019 it was named Mid-Sized Transit System of the Year by the American Public Transportation Association. That same year, C-TRAN was recognized for its sustainability efforts when it became a certified Green Business through the Clark County Business program. While celebrating these achievements and its progress as a company, C-TRAN also marked the opening of its new administrative office on Northeast 51st Circle in Vancouver, part of a larger facilities plan as the operation outgrows its original headquarters on Northeast 65th Avenue.

C-TRAN's coast along the road of success, however, was cut short in 2020 as the world was seized by the COVID-19 pandemic. Meeting the issue head on, C-TRAN issued a number of operational changes to ensure the safety of its riders and passengers. During the pandemic, ridership for public transport systems across the country plummeted, and, while less severely, so did the number of C-TRAN's patrons. Despite these setbacks, C-TRAN has weathered the storm and shows no signs of reversing its history of expansion, innovation, and progress as the world moves forward past the pandemic and into tomorrow.

THAT'S A WRAP

C-TRAN has found an inventive way to connect its riders across Clark County with vivid and beautifully designed wraps representing each of the communities in C-TRAN's service area.

Construction on The Vine progresses at Washington and 12th Street.



After completion, the same station serves riders looking to make connections at the busy intersection.



C-TRAN brings our history along with us, such as this yellow seat dedication in honor of Rosa Parks.

