

Oregon Department of Transportation

# VISION AROUND THE MOUNTAIN

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

AUGUST 2021

**N** NELSON  
NYGAARD

**ei** enviroissues

# WHAT IS VISION AROUND THE MOUNTAIN (VAM)?

Stakeholders have long envisioned continuous, convenient public transportation connecting to and from the mountain.

Mt. Hood draws local, national, and international visitors, and supports a bustling year-round economy. But traffic and parking headaches threaten the mountain economy, the natural environment, and equitable access to jobs and recreation.

**Vision Around the Mountain**, or **VAM** is the result of months of collaboration between stakeholders looking toward our future.

## PROJECT GOALS

1. Establish a long-term, regional transit vision for public transportation serving Mt. Hood via OR 35, US 26, and I-84
2. Create strategies and actions supporting the regional Vision housed within a Framework 4 Action (F4A)
3. Secure partnerships to continue implementing the Vision
4. Provide a list of projects for the transit element of the Mt. Hood Multimodal Transportation Plan update

## STUDY AREA

VAM focused on two primary transit corridors:

- OR 35 between Hood River and Mt. Hood
- US 26 between Portland and Mt. Hood

We acknowledge the critical role I-84 transit plays in realizing the Vision.

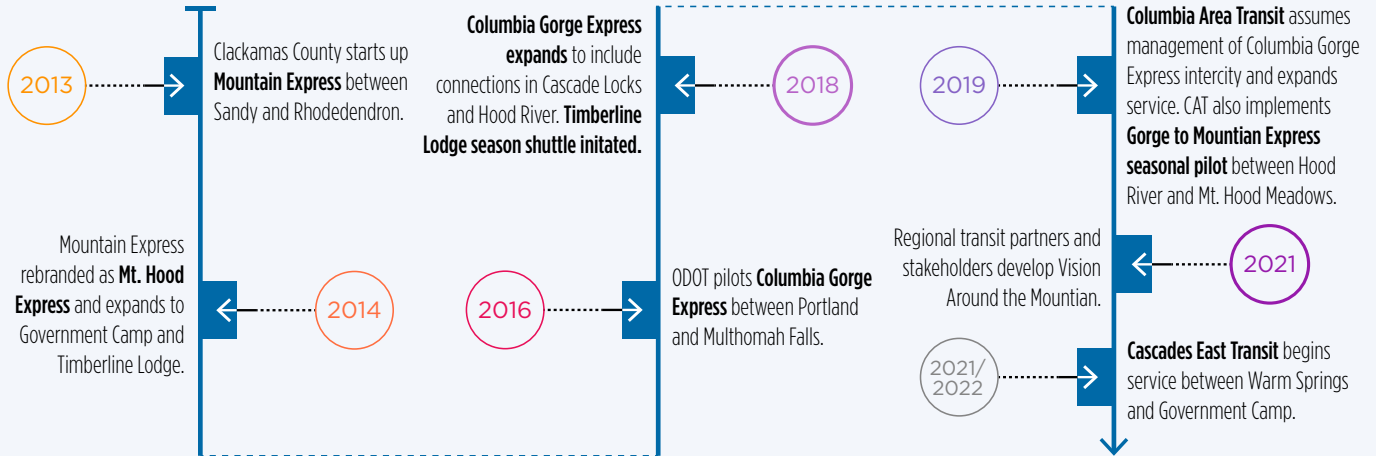


There is exciting work happening to create a vision for transit in the greater Gorge area that encompasses both Oregon and Washington. Our intent is that the energy developed in VAM can highlight potential for coordination between Mt. Hood and Gorge transportation providers.

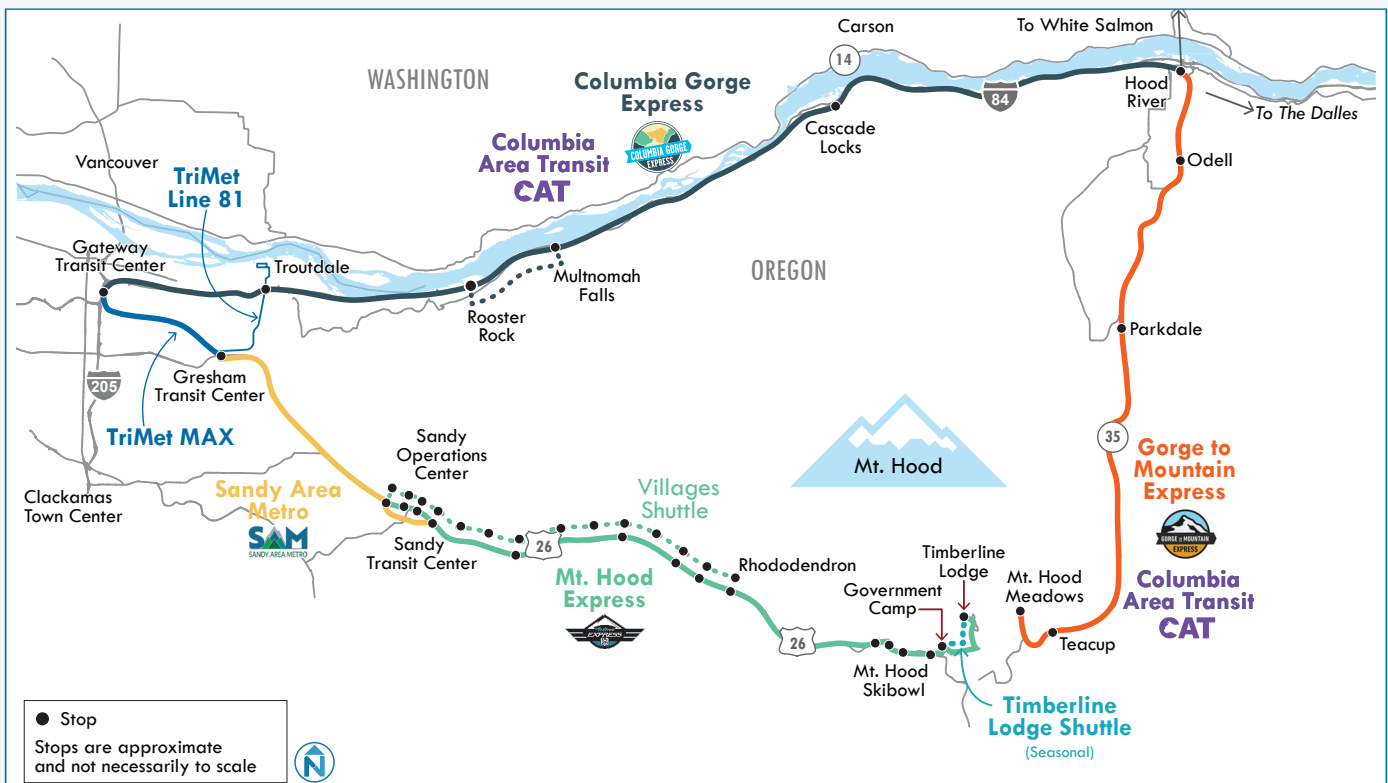
Together we can move toward a bi-state, coordinated approach to public transportation.

# OUR PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION STORY

Public transportation options for getting around the mountain have grown exponentially during the past decade.



Today, several public and private transit services directly connect to Mt. Hood. These providers serve the US 26 and OR 35 corridors. Columbia Gorge Express serving I-84 provides a critical link in creating a continuous loop around the mountain. TriMet is also a critical link, but is not the primary focus of VAM.



Note: additional services that connect to the US 26/OR 35 corridors are not shown.

## OUR VISION JOURNEY

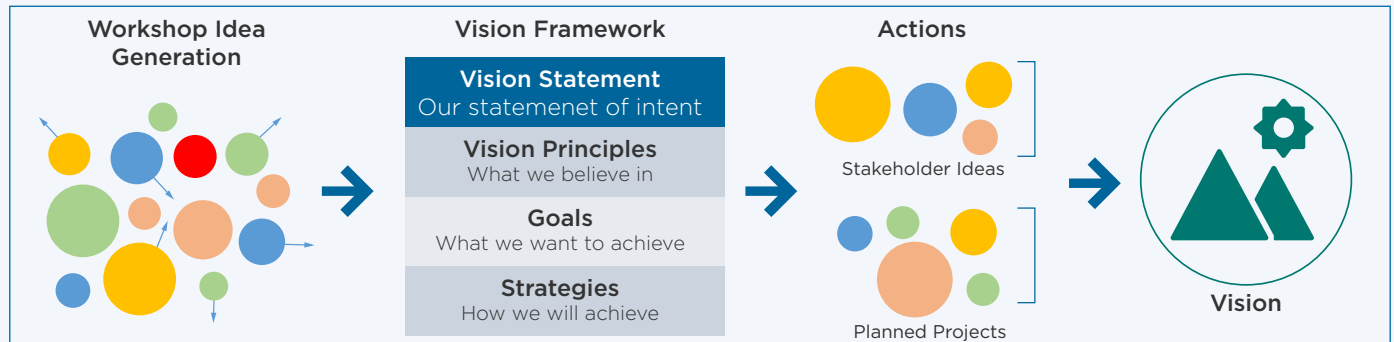
Vision input was gathered through:

- ☑ Four workshops with representation from 34 organizations
- ☑ A stakeholder survey
- ☑ Small group discussions and one-on-one interviews
- ☑ A scan of recommended actions from previous plans and a list of funded projects

## PROJECT TIMELINE



## HOW THE VISION WAS CREATED



## VISION PARTICIPANTS

Vision was created with input from jurisdictions, transit providers, ski resorts, state and federal agencies, tourism associations, and elected official offices.

- City of Cascade Locks
- City of Gresham
- City of Hood River
- City of Sandy
- City of Wood Village
- Clackamas County
- Multnomah County
- Cascades East Transit
- Columbia Area Transit (CAT)
- Mount Hood Express (MHX)
- Sandy Area Metro (SAM)
- Grey Line of Portland, Big Pink Sightseeing
- TriMet
- Ride Connection
- Mount Hood Meadows
- The Leo Company
- Timberline Lodge
- Mid-Columbia Economic Development District
- Port of Cascade Locks
- Travel Oregon
- Sandy Area Chamber of Commerce
- Clackamas County Tourism and Cultural Affairs
- Columbia Gorge Tourism Alliance
- Visit Hood River
- We Are Camp
- Crosscurrent Collective
- Mount Hood Territory
- United States Forest Service
- Office of Gov. Kate Brown
- Office of Rep. Earl Blumenauer
- Office of Rep. Anna Williams
- Region 1 Area Commission on Transportation
- Oregon Department of Transportation
- United States Department of Transportation

# OUR VISION

Our transit future will be guided by our Vision statement, Vision Principles, Goals, and Strategies.

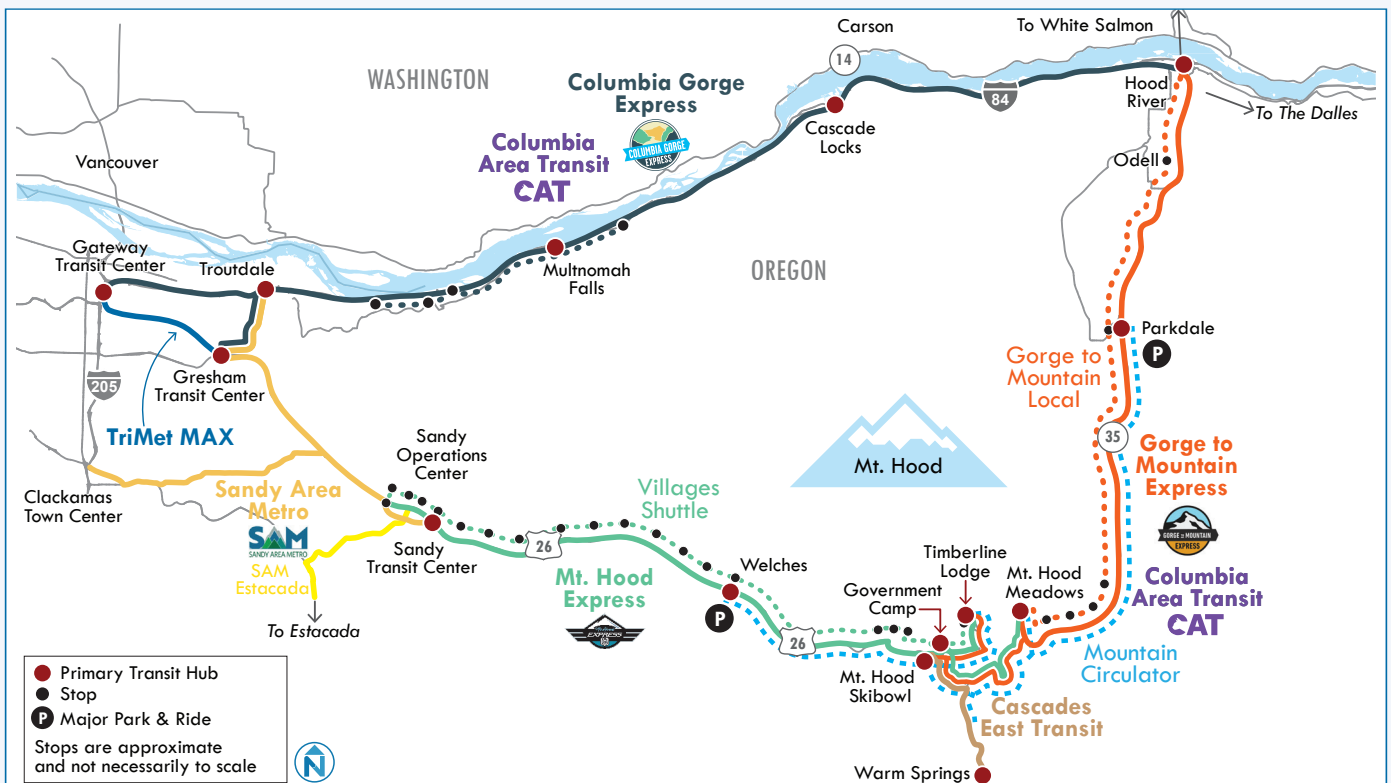
## Definitions

- ☑ **Vision Statement:** Our overarching aspirational statement of intent
- ☑ **Vision Principle:** Components of our vision statement we believe in
- ☑ **Goal Statement:** What we want to achieve - our desired outcomes
- ☑ **Strategy:** How we will achieve our goals - actionable activities
- ☑ **Actions:** Specific steps toward strategies, including ideas generated by stakeholders and projects that are already planned and/or funded

# OUR VISION STATEMENT

Create and sustain a world-class public transit service providing equitable, convenient, and enjoyable access to and throughout the Mt. Hood/Columbia Gorge region for a growing number of visitors, recreationists, employees, and residents. This vision mitigates vehicular impacts, supports regional economies, improves safety, and promotes environmental stewardship.

## Vision Network



## VISION PRINCIPLES

Our Vision Principles represent our shared values.



### World-class User Experience

We believe a customer-focused, convenient, and enjoyable transit service will change the travel behavior of existing users and attract new users



### Managing Congestion

We believe public transit is a critical element in a regional congestion management effort that strives to mitigate congestion and improve safety when accessing key destinations.



### Environmental Stewardship

We believe public transit contributes to responsible use and protection of public lands.



### Economic Vitality

Support tourism and economic development along transit corridors within the region. Provide transit service that meets the needs of the workforce and facilitates regional employment opportunities and job retention.



### Sustainable Funding

We believe a robust public transit service contributes to a vital regional economy by supporting tourism in the Mt. Hood/Columbia Gorge region and its related workforce.



### Equitable Access

We believe equitable transit service reduces barriers to access for all users, including traditionally underserved populations.



### Effective Branding and Marketing

We believe clear, collaborative branding and marketing reaches a broad and diverse audience, achieves high levels of awareness and inspires use of public transit.



### Regional Partnerships and Collaboration

We believe strong regional collaboration and public/private partnerships across the Mt. Hood/Columbia Gorge region contribute to an efficient, effective and equitable public transit service.



## GOALS



G1

### World-class User Experience

Provide passengers throughout the Mt. Hood/Columbia Gorge region with access to dependable and efficient transit services.

G2

Prioritize transit over driving through policy, design of streets and facilities, and pricing.

G3

Make the experience enjoyable by using modern, comfortable equipment with gear storage, WiFi, great views, and entertainment options.

G4

Provide customers with real-time information about travel conditions and transportation options.

G5

Provide a comfortable waiting experience with amenities at transit hubs.



G6

### Managing Congestion

Integrate transit into a larger congestion management strategy that influences changes in travel behavior.

G7

Promote safer travel along transit corridors through education, enforcement, and better transportation options.



G8

### Environmental Stewardship

Reduce the need for more infrastructure to support those driving to the Mt. Hood region.

G9

Ensure that on-site resources (restrooms, trail capacity) can support visitation levels.

G10

Use vehicles that operate with sustainable energy sources (to the extent possible).



G11

### Economic Vitality

Support tourism and economic development along transit corridors within the region.

G12

Provide transit service that meets the needs of the workforce and facilitates regional employment opportunities and job retention.



G13

### Sustainable Funding

Achieve financial security by identifying and balancing diverse and innovative revenue sources.



G14

### Equitable Access

Incorporate equity by addressing barriers that impact people's ability to safely access and use public transportation.



G15

### Effective Branding and Marketing

Develop service branding that is clear and easy to understand for all.

G16

Develop marketing that is welcoming and effective at motivating target markets to use the service.

G17

Leverage existing collaboratives to execute the branding and marketing strategy and achieve high levels of awareness.



G18

### Regional Partnerships and Collaboration

Develop a regional partnership that supports the service's governance, funding, user experience, economic connections, and communications with customers.

G19

Coordinate and build upon regionally significant projects and developments already underway.

## STRATEGIES & ACTIONS (FRAMEWORK 4 ACTION)

The Vision Principles and Goals are oriented around values. Strategies and Actions are specific steps to achieve our values.

A list of 33 Strategies and 83 Actions are documented in the Framework 4 Action (F4A), which is part of the VAM final report.

Strategies bridge the gap between today and the Vision – demonstrating both how to achieve our goals and also providing high-level guidance for partners to build upon today’s foundation.

Actions include upcoming planning studies that will advance VAM forward, funded capital or operations projects, and stakeholder ideas gathered through workshops. The actions in VAM could be carried out by public transportation providers, non-profits, or private operators. VAM’s focus is on finding shared values and goals – the methods of service delivery are a critical next step.

### Governance

Governance is the overarching legal framework through which transit service is funded, managed, and delivered.

- ☑ **Strategy #1:** Determine governance model(s) for operationalizing regional service and achieving VAM goals.

### Transit Routes

Routes refer to where bus routes are located.

- ☑ **Strategy #2:** Maximize use of the existing network of transit providers
- ☑ **Strategy #3:** Create a network of trunk and feeder routes including express, local, and circulator services connecting to and from the mountain.
- ☑ **Strategy #4:** Ensure convenient regional connections between transit providers

### Service Operations

Operations covers aspects of running transit service such as vehicles and fares.

- ☑ **Strategy #5:** Procure high-quality transit vehicles
- ☑ **Strategy #6:** Develop a fare structure that is easy to understand
- ☑ **Strategy #7:** Make the mountain accessible for low-income visitors





## Transit Hubs & Amenities

- ✓ **Strategy #8:** Prioritize access to well-developed sites in the near-term, until policy has been formalized around access to less-developed sites
- ✓ **Strategy #9:** Provide safe and accessible bus stops
- ✓ **Strategy #10:** Develop a network for primary and secondary transit hubs
- ✓ **Strategy #11:** Create park and rides below the snow line

## Passenger Convenience

- ✓ **Strategy #12:** Scale service levels to demand
- ✓ **Strategy #13:** Run service frequently enough so people do not need a schedule
- ✓ **Strategy #14:** Make transit travel times competitive with driving, door to door
- ✓ **Strategy #15:** Make service seamless with no more than one transfer between major destinations
- ✓ **Strategy #16:** Provide real-time travel conditions via web, mobile app, and at transit hubs
- ✓ **Strategy #17:** Support regional travel with integrated trip planner for all operators
- ✓ **Strategy #18:** Make passengers confident knowing they will have a seat on the bus
- ✓ **Strategy #19:** Make waiting areas comfortable with robust passenger amenities
- ✓ **Strategy #20:** Provide ample gear storage both on and off the bus

## Recreation Lands Access & Congestion Management

- ✓ **Strategy #21:** Manage Sno-Park access to improve safety and reduce congestion
- ✓ **Strategy #22:** Undertake data collection to understand mountain usage
- ✓ **Strategy #23:** Use policies and programs to reduce unsafe driving and parking behaviors along US 26 and OR 35
- ✓ **Strategy #24:** Determine desired maximum capacity at recreation sites

## Marketing, Branding, & Customer Engagement

- ✓ **Strategy #25:** Conduct outreach targeted at underserved populations to understand their transit needs
- ✓ **Strategy #26:** Develop a fun, attractive, light-hearted brand
- ✓ **Strategy #27:** Appeal to a broad audience
- ✓ **Strategy #28:** Promote service through tourism agencies, hotels, destinations, etc.
- ✓ **Strategy #29:** Find ways of integrating information about the area's history as part of the bus ride
- ✓ **Strategy #30:** Develop public awareness and education campaigns

## Planning and Policy

- ✓ **Strategy #31:** Leverage transit investments in continued development and land use planning
- ✓ **Strategy #32:** Update local and regional policies to support transit
- ✓ **Strategy #33:** Implement user fees and use pricing to incentivize behavior change



If transit is cheaper, more fun, accessible for all, and helps sustain the mountain we love by reducing carbon in a personally measurable way, people will use the system and like it!”

“[I envision] A transit system that is an attractive alternative even for those with access to a private vehicle

- Stakeholder survey



## FUNDING THE VISION

One of the primary hurdles to realizing the Vision is the cost associated with providing additional transit services and associated amenities. It is estimated that the annual operating cost of all existing providers is approximately **\$2 million/year** in 2021 but to operate the core network Vision would be close to **\$5 million/year** for enhanced service frequencies operating every day and year-round. In addition to annual operating costs, the full Vision would also require additional capital costs for new vehicles, new transit hubs, park and ride facilities, etc.

To fund transit, most providers typically utilize a mix of traditional (state and federal) as well as other funding sources (local subsidies, fares, advertising, etc.). And, while existing providers in the VAM network are also partially funded through private contributions from ski resorts, other innovative sources will need to be secured. Identifying the right mix of funding requires much more exploration. Some potential sources that could be used to fulfill the vision include:

### Traditional Sources

#### State

- STIF

#### Federal

- 5307
- 5311
- FLAP

#### Other

- Local Subsidies
- Fares Advertising



### New/Innovative Sources

#### Pooled resources

Leverage higher local match

Congestion pricing

Added private contributions

#### Parking

- Increase Sno-Park fees
- Changes for preferred parking

## BUILDING LEADERSHIP

A critical next step is to develop an interagency leadership group that will continue pursuing the Vision. A critical path topic for this Leadership group is governance models. Transit is currently provided through a blend of multiple models that has benefits and constraints that affect staffing levels, ability to access certain funds, and ability to leverage funds.

As discussed in the Framework 4 Action, VAM leadership should evaluate what a governance model needs to achieve and assess how well existing governance structures meet those needs. The steps below describe how VAM leadership can approach building leadership and reaching a decision point around governance through phased steps:

- ☑ **Communication/Coordination.** The first phase is for study participants, acting independently, to continue engaging with each other on a regular basis to better coordinate existing services.
- ☑ **Enhanced Coordination/Collaboration.** The next phase is to identify other partners necessary for carrying the vision forward and to ensure full representation of partners and other stakeholders.
- ☑ **Vision Stewardship.** The final phase is to formalize the group, identify a leadership team to implement the vision, and merge select (or all) functions by mutual consent.



## A CALL FOR ACTION

Completing this Vision document is an important milestone in addressing future mobility needs to and around the mountain. The value of this visioning process is to organize priorities and goals and create a path forward. This milestone, along with the many years of dedication by numerous partners, will prepare the region for another decade of improving mobility to and around the mountain. And yet, there is much more work to be done to fully realize the vision. The next phase, and perhaps the most critical, is to maintain the momentum gained from this visioning process.

The Framework 4 Action establishes actionable strategies that are organized in a way that they do not all need to be completed at once or in any specific sequence. It is also important to note that the strategies developed in this vision document are intended to supplement, not supersede, other planning efforts.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Oregon Department of Transportation collaborated with dozens of stakeholders from Summer 2020 to Summer 2021 to develop a regional vision for public transportation to, from, and around Mt. Hood.



This project was made possible through the generous local support from Clackamas County, the City of Sandy, and the Hood River County Transportation District, as well as our partners at the Federal Highway Administration.



## PROJECT TEAM

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