

Residents: Curb urban sprawl now

Growth: Review of 25-year transportation plan elicits concerns about gridlock, spread of subdivisions into open space

By Dan Black - Idaho Press-Tribune-June 25, 2006

CANYON COUNTY — Treasure Valley residents want local officials to take a tough stand against urban sprawl and traffic gridlock.

The issues rose to the top of concerns collected by the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho, which asked the public to review a proposed regional transportation plan that would guide civic leaders for the next 25 years.

About 72 percent of the 370 people who submitted comments favor measures called for in the plan, according to COMPASS spokeswoman Terri Schorzman.

In particular, they favored:

A regional transit system with walking and biking paths;

Land-use planning to encourage jobs, services and homes close together;

Increased taxes to pay for public transportation;

Improved regional traffic corridors.

COMPASS, directed largely by local elected officials from the Treasure Valley, culled data about growth and transportation in the valley and presented its findings in a report called "Communities in Motion."

The number and quality of public comments on the report means COMPASS must take more time to review and analyze them, a subcommittee told the board this month. Comments will be added to the final document, that, when passed by the COMPASS board, will serve as a guide for the state and local government to make land use and transportation decisions.

Citizens commented on two scenarios.

One forecast the transportation situation in 2030 if residential growth continues at its current trend under current policies. The other scenario included more mass-transit routes, land-use planning that encourages higher-density development near population centers, and preserving open space in the rural countryside.

Schorzman said the agency took a unique course for presenting the reports to the public. Rather than only holding public hearings, COMPASS prepared 200 bags of meeting materials available for anyone who wanted one.

The materials were distributed to 170 "hosts" who could moderate their own public hearing sessions. Many simply reviewed the material themselves; 47 who picked up bags held meetings, Schorzman said. About 600 people signed in at those meetings and of those, 370 submitted formal comments.

The purpose of the meetings was to "try a new public involvement activity, and give people a way to channel their concerns," Schorzman said.

The packet included traffic data, maps and projections for growth in the six-county area.

Comments given by the public were wide-ranging. Some criticized COMPASS for being unable to enforce its recommendations and some blamed local officials for not making developers adhere to principles of well-managed growth.

Other comments emphasized the need to save open space and lamented the high social burden of urban sprawl. Several comments blamed developers for being unimaginative in their residential offerings. Others

blamed spread-out subdivisions for urban decay.

What's next

The full Community Planning Association board voted to push back its deadline to adopt the report by September.

Some comments about the traffic plan

"I grew up in rural Idaho—I prefer to have my home outside of urban areas. My profession, however is tied strongly to the urban core. I still want to have my cake and eat it too."

"I think it is a good idea, but most people want a big house on a big lot. It will take a creative development community and dedicated local leaders to stick to this plan."

"I appreciate plan's link of transportation planning with land-use planning, but this will require leadership, vision and courage to make this paradigm shift happen; the mayors, councils and commissions must make this happen."

"Lets change our community behavior (to a) denser community where people can walk to their hardware, grocery or video store. Force developers to build housing close to places where people live."

Source: Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho