

Road planners dream big

▼ **TRAFFIC:** Agency report for Treasure Valley identifies commuting corridors, better mass transit and mixed uses for land

By Dan Black
Idaho Press-Tribune

TREASURE VALLEY — Imagine an express train that takes commuters from Nampa and Caldwell to Boise, or a new beltway that skirts the bogged-down freeway, or new developments that put jobs, stores and residences within walking distance.

These aspects of a regional transportation plan may seem far-fetched, but "they give people choices," said Charles Trainor, chief planner for Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho.

Trainor is finishing up a regional guide to beat gridlock that could be adopted by city and county governments. It stands on strategies to decrease traffic jams including:

- Better "corridors" or expressways that take lots of cars quickly to key spots.

- Land-use planning that decreases auto trips by putting commercial zones closer to residential areas.

- Mass transit, including a possible commuter rail from Caldwell to Boise, to ease auto congestion and help the valley's air quality.

These and many other goals are part of a 25-year plan that Trainor is polishing with some final editing.

Community Planning Association spokeswoman Terri Schorzman said the "Communities In Motion" document will likely be ready for the full board's approval at its monthly meeting Aug. 8.

The planning agency studied the valley's traffic, population and growth trends and foresaw dire traffic gridlock across the valley by the year 2030. It proposed some alternatives and explained them to the public in a series of meetings and hearings this spring.

Residents' opinions are being addressed in the final version, Trainor told the board at its monthly meeting this week. The board consists of local government officials in Ada and Canyon counties. It will be up to the board to implement positions taken in the final document.

The recommendations in the report "espouse a certain vision," Trainor said, but he hopes that local governments follow up the plan's approval with concrete action.

"People are tired of studies," Trainor said. "They want us to do something."

As officials reviewed some final additions and deletions from the plan this week, some divisions surfaced.

Boise City Councilwoman Elaine Clegg questioned whether the regional goals put forth in the plan were taking precedent over preserving the needs of individual neighborhoods.

Meridian Mayor Tammy De Weerd, the chairwoman, reminded the board that the Community Planning Association is designed to help everyone in the valley with a more efficient transportation plan.

Caldwell Mayor Garret Nancolas echoed that concern, saying that corridors such as U.S. Highway 20-26 pass through several local jurisdictions and that a regional approach is critical.

What's Communities in Motion?

Communities in Motion is the name of the regional long-range transportation plan being developed by Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho in partnership with the Idaho Transportation Department. The name is meant to illustrate that Treasure Valley communities are growing rapidly and need transportation systems that help people and the goods and services they need to move between and within communities effectively. The name also implies changing values and new directions for the region.

Clegg countered that protecting neighborhoods will help the whole region.

Eagle Mayor Nancy Merrill added that "we've got to look at quality of life, not just efficiency."

John Franden, a commissioner with the Ada County Highway District, responded that board members need not be too worried with specific language in the document, "because this is a living document," and will be amended from time to time.

Schorzman noted that the document tries to prod local government to take a regional approach to transportation issues with specific measures, but not too specific.

For instance, it asks local governments to submit their draft comprehensive plans and amendments to COMPASS for review and recommendation, but doesn't make those agencies adhere to changes.

Mass transit uncertainties

Trainor said Tuesday that the parts of the plan calling for public

Roads: get new long-term plan

transit don't get very specific, especially regarding funding.

Valley Regional Transit, which manages the area's bus systems, recently announced it hoped the Legislature will allow the valley to vote on a local sales tax to pay for a bus system. Much of its federal money will soon be unavailable because the greater Boise area will be considered too populous for it to continue to qualify for grants.

Trainor said the plan intentionally makes "broad assumptions" about transit and its effects to "tell you the magnitude" of public transportation on overall traffic.

In the valley, only 2 or 3 percent of trips likely will be made by mass transit. That rate will be higher downtown, he said, which is typical of any city.

He said in Denver, which is at about 2 million people, about 7 percent of commuters take the bus. And in downtown Portland, about 40 percent of all trips are made with the transit system.

Commuter corridors

The valley's transportation scene is colored in large part by the many workers who drive across the valley to get to their jobs. That creates a need for new east-west routes and will challenge developers to locate higher-density projects closer to businesses, according to the plan.

Many metropolitan areas have a beltway that encircles the most densely populated cities, but in the Treasure Valley conditions are different, Trainor said. Instead of growing outward in all directions, the valley is growing from east to west, hemmed in by the foothills on the north and the desert and Snake River on the south.

"It's more linear," he said.

Possible east-west corridors might include higher usage of Kuna-Mora Road, U.S. Highway 20-26, Cloverdale Road, and Idaho Highway 44.

Possible north-south corridors would be at Cloverdale Road and at McDermott Road. Planning for those corridors would require local governments to buy rights of way and plan and zone for possible busy roads.

Making Cloverdale Road, an arterial could affect those existing neighborhoods, Trainor said, which might not be popular.

Land-use planning changes

Throughout the plan, the Community Planning Association report calls on its member organizations to adopt standards that minimize driving, especially by allowing higher-density residential development near downtown or commercial centers and by allowing stores close to subdivisions.

Both measures will decrease driving and will allow governments to preserve open space, the report says.

According to the plan, COMPASS will take an inventory and track the amount of farmland, and "work with local governments to implement a coordinated regional open space plan."

Although many of the details and suggestions in the Communities in Motion Plan seem distant, Trainor said residents need to take a long-term perspective. He said at one point the Karcher Interchange was merely a far-off idea.

"Eventually," he said, "at some point it does happen."