

CHAPTER 13

FOSTERING SUSTAINABILITY AND LIVABILITY

The *Communities in Motion* plan of 2006 included the following goals, carried forward in this update:

- Connections
 - Provide options for safe access and mobility in a cost-effective manner in the region.
- Coordination
 - Achieve better inter-jurisdictional coordination of transportation and land use planning.
- Environment
 - Minimize transportation impact to people, cultural resources, and the environment.
- Information
 - Coordinate data gathering and dispense better information.

Communities in Motion also highlights the following guiding principles for land use:

- Plan for growth and share in benefits and costs
- Facilitate growth in cities and areas of impact to efficiently use public infrastructure
- Promote economic vitality and housing choices for all residents while retaining natural beauty
- Support a successful central city to maintain regional economic health and vitality
- Coordinate transportation and land use decisions to support travel choices

While the 2006 plan stopped short of discussing how these goals and principles tie to sustainability and livability, they have guided member agencies and the region toward steps in that direction. For example, many of the updated comprehensive plans are embracing sustainability and livability as their core values, and the annual *Communities in Motion Performance Monitoring Report* tracks progress toward the above goals. This updated plan more explicitly ties *Communities in Motion* goals and guiding principles to sustainability and livability.

Sustainable Communities Initiative

In June 2009, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) joined together to design the Partnership for Sustainable Communities. The goal of the program is to support multi-jurisdictional regional efforts that integrate housing, economic development, transportation, water infrastructure, and environmental planning, and assist regional entities and consortia of local governments with integrated decision-making.

The resulting “Sustainable Communities Initiative” is based on the six “Livability Principles” listed below. The goals and guiding principles reflect these livability principles.

1. Provide more transportation choices
2. Promote equitable, affordable housing
3. Increase economic competitiveness
4. Support existing communities
5. Leverage federal investment
6. Value communities and neighborhoods

Provide More Transportation Choices

The region has engaged in a broad-based planning effort to identify needs and gaps in transportation services throughout a six-county area, with specific emphasis on people who do not drive a car (Chapter 6). The plan also prioritized strategies to meet the needs and to seek funding for implementation. The COMPASS Board adopted a Complete Streets policy to better enable consideration of all transportation modes and users’ needs.

Promote Equitable, Affordable Housing

While the connection between housing density and transportation choices has been addressed in regional plans, this update represents a new partnership between housing agencies and the regional transportation planning agency. COMPASS has documented the effect of transportation cost (due to distance from employment) on housing affordability. That information provides a powerful tool to coordinate housing and economic development (job centers) with the need for affordable housing and transportation (Chapter 4).

Enhance Economic Competitiveness

The new focus on connecting housing, jobs, and transportation choices creates economic opportunities and helps address some of the region’s shortcomings in terms of economic competitiveness. One of the factors businesses look at when they consider locations is the quality and extent of public transportation. A future growth pattern that brings homes, jobs, and services closer together will reduce the need to travel and encourage use of alternative travel modes such as walking and biking.

Support Existing Communities

The Community Choices land use scenario supports growth in areas of city impact and thereby helps reduce the need to consume farmland and open space (Chapter 3). It also encourages a greater diversity of housing and puts more of that housing near jobs and services. More townhomes, patio homes, and apartments will be provided near planned public transportation services.

Community Choices is a more compact growth pattern that will more likely support transit, walking, and biking. Some of the increased density would occur from the greater diversity of housing types, but some would also come from decreased lot sizes for single-family housing. Lots of less than 5,000 square feet can attain the needed density with more careful design.

Coordinate Policies and Leverage Investment

One example of the coordination is the regional effort in mobility management to help leverage investment in transportation services and infrastructure by human service providers and transportation providers (Chapter 6). This effort started in early 2000s and resulted in the first *Transportation Service Coordination Plan*, adopted by Valley Regional Transit in 2006. This effort has since continued as part of the regional local mobility planning effort undertaken by COMPASS for the *Southwest Idaho Mobility Management Plan*¹.

The partnerships formed during this *Communities in Motion* update provide an opportunity to expand coordination into sustainability, livability, housing, and other infrastructure investment.

Value Communities and Neighborhoods

The Community Choices land use scenario emphasizes a more compact development with design elements that favor expanded effectiveness of public transportation, walking, and biking, and is identified as the targeted scenario for implementation through this plan (Chapter 3). Growth occurring outside the targeted growth areas under Community Choices will not be a priority for public funding of transportation projects.

Developing a Sustainable, Livable Region

The graphic on the following pages (Figure 13-1) illustrates the types of coordination needed to bring about a truly sustainable, livable community. COMPASS is already working with many of the organizations listed and plans to engage others to continue to improve the regional planning process.

¹ <http://www.compassidaho.org/documents/prodserv/reports/3CLMMNPlanSep%202009.pdf>
<http://www.compassidaho.org/documents/prodserv/reports/3CLMMNPlanAppendices.pdf>

