

CHAPTER 6

EXPANDING TRANSPORTATION CHOICES

Over several years, the region has embarked on a concerted effort to identify available transportation options and address transportation needs of everyone. Valley Regional Transit (VRT), the regional **public transportation authority** for Ada and Canyon Counties, completed a *Transportation Service Coordination Plan* in 2007. This plan identified better coordination of existing transportation services as one of the priorities in improving mobility and access for the people typically most dependent on public transportation services.

Local Public Transportation

Resources

Public transportation is typically the local transportation of people by public conveyance, and the vehicles and system engaged in such transportation. Public transportation systems provide low cost mobility for people who do not, or cannot, operate a motor vehicle because of personal choice, income, disability, or age. An important characteristic of affordable public transportation service is that it provides regular access to as many destinations as possible.

As the region is learning about the existing transportation resources and gaps, strategies and programs are being developed to address unmet transportation needs. Mobility management is an approach that focuses on using all available resources to augment and advance travel options for all people, rather than concentrating on a particular mode of transportation, such as the automobile. Mobility management establishes partnerships and collaboration throughout the community and emphasizes a customer focus in meeting the transportation needs.

There are 37 different public transportation services in the ten-county area of southwest Idaho (in 2009); including services provided by transit agencies, senior centers, and health care and social service providers. This diversity creates a challenge to mobility management in that it has proven difficult to gather information about specific service areas, riders, funding sources and costs, and to effectively coordinate and share transportation resources.

In 1994, the Idaho State Legislators passed a law (Title 40, Chapter 21) giving citizens the opportunity to vote on the formation of **public transportation authorities**. The purpose was to establish a single governmental agency oriented entirely toward public transportation needs within a county or region. This authority, a political subdivision of the state of Idaho, is under the supervision of and directly responsible to local governments and provides public transportation services, encourages private transportation programs, and coordinates both public and private transportation programs, services, and support functions.

Public transportation is a shared passenger transportation service available for use by the general public, as distinct from modes such as taxis or car pools which are not shared by strangers without private arrangement.

The major public transportation providers in southwest Idaho are discussed below.

Valley Regional Transit¹ was established by vote in 1998 as the regional public transportation authority for Ada and Canyon Counties. Valley Ride, operated by VRT, provides fixed-route services to the cities of Boise, Nampa, Caldwell, and Garden City; operates inter-county transportation routes between Ada and Canyon Counties (through the cities of Meridian, Middleton, Star, and Eagle); and has over 860 bus stops in the Treasure Valley. Paratransit services are available in the cities of Nampa, Caldwell, Boise, and Garden City. Paratransit is a door-to-door service for people who have special needs and live within a ¾ - mile of a fixed route. In calendar year 2009, Valley Ride provided a total of 1,433,078 one-way passenger trips in its service area (Figure 6-1).

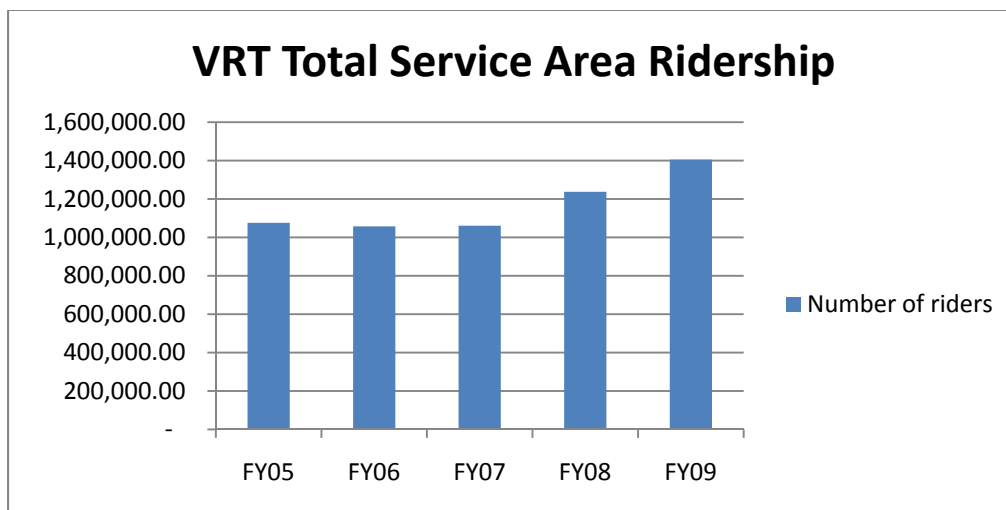


Figure 6-1: Valley Regional Transit Total Service Area Ridership

Treasure Valley Transit² is the rural transit provider for eight counties in and around the Treasure Valley. It is also a Medicaid transportation provider; Medicaid trips comprise about 12% of its overall services. Treasure Valley Transit provides transportation for the developmentally disabled in Canyon County along with individual Medicaid trips. It operates Valley County Connections and McCall Transit service in Valley County and Mountain Home Community Transit in Elmore County. Treasure Valley Transit operates Snake River Transit in Payette County, Idaho, and Malheur County, Oregon. In calendar year 2009, Treasure Valley Transit provided a total of 137,848 one-way passenger trips in its combined service area.

¹ <http://www.valleyride.org/>

² <http://www.treasurevalleytransit.com/>

Ada County Highway District Commuteride³ is best known for its vanpools, but it also promotes public transportation, carpooling, bicycling, and walking. Commuteride’s vanpool routes extend from Ontario, Oregon, to Mountain Home, Idaho, and from Emmett, Idaho, to Melba and Kuna, Idaho. While most vanpools bring commuters into Boise area employment centers, there are also “reverse” routes from Boise to the Mountain Home Air Force Base.

Park-and-ride lots are an integral part of public transportation options and both VRT and Commuteride have them. COMPASS will be collecting information about the use of the current park-and-ride lots, as well as studying where and how they could be expanded in the future. In calendar year 2009, Commuteride provided a total of 253,295 one-way passenger trips in its over 80 vanpools, which saved 13.3 million single-occupancy vehicle-miles-traveled.

Other, smaller transportation service providers are included in the *3C Local Mobility Plan* (2009)⁴.

Public Transportation and Housing Choices

A recent study about typical transportation expenditures⁵ found that residents in areas with high quality public transportation saved about \$660 annually in total transportation costs. In a COMPASS analysis looking at housing costs and transportation, the range of housing affordability changed significantly when transportation costs are factored in the housing cost⁶. Table 6-1 displays varying levels of density and location requirements to support different public transportation modes. This information is displayed as a graphic in the *Mobility Management Development Guidebook*⁷.

³ <http://www.commuteride.com>

⁴ <http://www.compassidaho.org/documents/prodserv/reports/3CLMMNPlanAppendices.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.vtpi.org/raisetaxes.pdf>

⁶ http://www.compassidaho.org/documents/prodserv/reports/MobilityManagementDevelopmentGuidebook_finalstandard.pdf

⁷ http://www.compassidaho.org/documents/prodserv/reports/MobilityManagementDevelopmentGuidebook_finalstandard.pdf

Table 6-1: Transit Service Levels and Land Use

Mode	Service Type	Minimum Density (Dwelling Units Per Acre)	Area and Location
Demand Response	Demand response serving general public (not just people with disabilities)	3.5 to 6	Community-wide
Minimum Local Bus	1/2-mile route spacing, 20 trips per day	4	Neighborhood
Intermediate Local Bus	1/2-mile route spacing, 40 trips per day	7	Neighborhood
Frequent Local Bus	1/2-mile route spacing, 120 trips per day	15	Neighborhood
Express Bus – Pedestrian Access	Five buses during two-hour peak period	15	Average density over 20-square-mile area within 10 to 15 miles of a large downtown
Express Bus – Auto Access	Five to ten buses during two-hour peak period	15	Average density over 20-square-mile tributary area, within 10 to 15 miles of a large downtown
Light Rail	Five minute headways or better during peak hour	9	Within walking distance of transit line, serving large downtown
Rapid Transit	Five minute headways or better during peak hour	12	Within walking distance of transit stations serving large downtown
Commuter Rail	Twenty trains a day	1 to 2	Serving very large downtown

In September 2006, the VRT Board of Directors approved a six-year plan to develop a regional public transportation system in the Treasure Valley. The plan, called *Treasure Valley in Transit*, is a comprehensive plan to expand bus and rapid transit service in the Treasure Valley. It would provide bus services to all cities in Ada and Canyon Counties, and begins the groundwork to develop a high-capacity transit corridor between Ada and Canyon Counties. Currently, the funding to implement the plan is not available.

There are four major types of improvements in the plan:

- 1) More routes and more frequent service within cities
- 2) More express bus service between cities
- 3) The initiation of rapid transit service
- 4) New transit centers and stops

More specifically, *Treasure Valley in Transit*⁸ will provide:

- Significant increase in bus service
- Bus service for all cities in Ada and Canyon Counties
- More express bus commuter service
- Rapid transit connecting Caldwell, Nampa, Meridian and Boise
- Increase in service frequency up to every 15 to 30 minutes on many routes
- Greater frequency of service during peak demand times than during off peak times (most routes)
- Expanded morning and evening service hours each weekday
- Expanded weekend service and hours
- A circulator service in downtown Boise
- Transit centers and other facilities at major transfer locations

Traffic in the I-84 corridor is expected to double in the next 25 years. The Treasure Valley High Capacity Transit Study began in 2007 in conjunction with VRT and other member agencies and consists of three related planning projects: a multimodal transportation center, a downtown circulator, and an east-west high-capacity corridor.

An analysis to examine possible east-west alignment alternatives needs to consider various transit options, including high-occupancy vehicle lanes, passenger rail, bus rapid transit, and transportation system management strategies. A study to begin this analysis of potential corridors (e.g., “paths” or “alignments”) and potential modes (e.g., types of vehicles) was initiated in 2009 to narrow down options to move forward for a more in-depth study. The link to the results of this study and related documents are provided below⁹.

Cost of Providing Public Transportation

In 2006, *Communities in Motion* described a bus and rail system with rail service between the cities of Nampa and Boise (to Micron). The total capital development cost was estimated to be approximately \$1.28 billion, with initial operating costs of \$14 million, ramping up to \$232 million per year by 2035 (Table 6-2). These estimates include the effects of inflation over the next 25 years. The current service includes 26 routes with an annual operating cost of about \$9 million. At build out, the future system would increase services eleven-fold over current levels, providing seven-day per week service, with approximately 11 times more service hours than the current system.

⁸ For more information, including a map of the planned system, see <http://www.valleyregionaltransit.org/Portals/0/TreasureValleyInTransit/TVTPlan.pdf>

⁹ <http://www.compassidaho.org/documents/specialprojects/HCT%20Study%20Draft%20Final%20Report%20-full%20packet-%20102309.pdf>

Table 6-2: Service Levels and Costs for Optimal Transit System¹⁰

	Routes	Weekday	Saturdays	Sundays	Total
52 local bus routes serving Ada County, includes circulators in Eagle and Meridian	52	\$56,229,888	\$7,614,464	\$3,807,232	\$67,651,584
Downtown Boise Circulator – 2 routes (start with buses and evolve to a streetcar system)	2	\$2,162,688	\$292,864	\$146,432	\$2,601,984
21 local bus routes serving Canyon County including circulators in Caldwell and Nampa	21	\$22,708,224	\$3,075,072	\$1,537,536	\$27,320,832
Rail - Downtown Caldwell to Downtown Boise	1	\$3,194,880	\$432,640	\$216,320	\$3,843,840
Rail - Boise Towne Square Mall to Micron	1	\$3,194,880	\$432,640	\$216,320	\$3,843,840
Bus Rapid Transit along State Street from west of Eagle Road into Downtown Boise	1	\$2,162,688	\$292,864	\$146,432	\$2,601,984
Caldwell into Boise along Ustick Road	1	\$2,162,688	\$292,864	\$146,432	\$2,601,984
Nampa into Boise along Franklin Road	1	\$2,162,688	\$292,864	\$146,432	\$2,601,984
Caldwell into Boise along Chinden Blvd	1	\$2,162,688	\$292,864	\$146,432	\$2,601,984
Between Ada/Canyon and Partnering Counties	5	\$5,406,720	\$732,160	\$366,080	\$6,504,960
Total Routes	86	\$101,548,032	\$13,751,296	\$6,875,648	\$122,174,976

Valley Regional Transit’s “high growth alternative” identified improvements to the regional bus system and other improvements that would ultimately support a rail or rapid transit system through the Boise and Nampa corridor. This system was estimated to cost approximately \$320 million (in 2005 dollars) over its first five years of development, resulting in an annual operating cost of about \$47 million per year in year six, assumed in this analysis to grow over time with inflation and population growth^{11, 12}.

Unfortunately, the public transportation system in the Treasure Valley will not improve much beyond what we have today without a local funding source. If the region wants an efficient public transportation network, and local elected officials continue to support the Community Choices vision for the future, the Idaho Legislature must aid the region in finding a way to pay for the system. Table 6-3 provides summary statistics showing how VRT ranks with a sample of public transportation agencies from communities of similar size, communities with high trips per capita, and communities with a mix of rail and bus service.

¹⁰ Based on rates of \$88 per hour for bus operations and \$130 per hour for rail operations. Costs are shown in current dollars for illustration only.

¹¹ http://valleyregionaltransit.org/Portals/0/Studies/ROCIP/Fig4-3_High_Growth_Ada_Co.pdf.

¹² http://valleyregionaltransit.org/Portals/0/Studies/ROCIP/Fig4-4_High_Growth_Canyon_Co.pdf.

Table 6-3: Summary Statistics for Selected Transit Entities¹³

Provider/City	Service Area Population	Total Population 2000 (MSA)	Passenger Miles (million)	Operating funds expended (million)	Total operating expenditures per capita	Operating expenses per passenger mile
Valley Regional Transit	272,625	432,345	5.0	\$8.12	\$29.78	\$1.40
Eugene, OR	272,272	322,959	37.4	\$32.60	\$119.73	\$0.80
Madison, WI	237,433	426,526	44.2	\$44.80	\$188.68	\$0.83
Reno, NV	320,000	339,486	31.7	\$33.20	\$103.75	\$0.82
Spokane, WA	334,900	417,939	49.6	\$50.60	\$151.09	\$0.90
Portland OR	1,253,500	2,265,223	419.5	\$338.40	\$269.96	\$0.93
Salt Lake City, UT	1,744,400	1,333,914	315.2	\$165.40	\$94.82	\$0.60
Denver, CO	261,9000	2,581,506	538.0	\$367.60	\$140.36	\$0.69

What is the effect of not funding an effective public transportation system? Chapter 5 described future roadway conditions with 1.046 million residents in Ada and Canyon Counties. Many roadways are over capacity, especially during peak hours, the magnitude of travel more than doubles from 12 million vehicle miles of travel today to 29 million by 2035. Public transportation would not eliminate congestion or the need to improve roads. With an estimated 95,000 daily transit trips in 2035, the estimated person mile trips by transit would be less than one million. But much of this would occur on the more congested corridors such as along I-84 or State Street (State Highway 44) during peak times. For commuters frustrated by traffic and parking woes, public transportation would provide an effective choice. In some cases public transportation would offer a long-term alternative for corridors, which are constrained from widening due to impacts on business or neighborhoods. And for many residents who cannot drive, public transportation would provide a means for travel to work, shopping, health care, education, family, and friends. Basically, public transportation enables people to remain part of the community even if they cannot drive.

Table 6-3 shows that public transportation use in VRT's service area, as measured by passenger miles, is a fraction of that of the selected agencies of similar size. Similarly, funding per capita is also a fraction of others' levels. It is of interest to note that public transportation expenditures per capita range from \$100 to \$200 for the similarly sized communities of Eugene, Madison, Reno, and Spokane, compared to \$30 by VRT. Funding for the comparable agencies is varied but local funding is the major source for operating expenditures.

¹³ National Transit Database, 2008 Reports.

Revenue Sources

In the Treasure Valley, revenues for local public transportation stem from two sources, federal and general local funds, with no state funding or dedicated local funding for public transportation at this point. Currently, these federal and local sources are directly related to one another because each dollar of federal funding requires either a 50 percent local match for operating expenses or a 20 percent local match for capital expenses. More specifically, the federal match for operating expenses covers a maximum of 50 percent of the system's operating loss -- the difference between operating expenses and fare revenues.”

Federal Public Transportation Revenues

About 80 percent of federal public transportation funding comes from the Highway Trust Fund's dedicated Mass Transit Account. Federal funding accounts for about 40 percent of VRT's annual budget and is used for preventative maintenance, capital expenditures, and other activities. Once an area reaches a population of 200,000 people, or becomes a Transportation Management Area, federal funds can no longer be used for operations. This restriction already limits available funding in Ada County, and will probably affect available funds in Canyon County after the release of the new urbanized area demographic data from the U.S. Census Bureau by 2012.

Local Public Transportation Revenues

Local revenues come in the form of contributions made by municipalities' general funds (in proportion to their level of service) and from per capita fees that recover VRT administrative expenditures. Operating revenues are generated from enterprise activities, including cash fares, sales of bus passes, and advertising revenues. VRT has long-desired a dedicated local revenue source, such as a local property tax on automobiles or a sales tax increment. All of the future development alternatives in VRT's Capital Improvement Plan are based on obtaining a dedicated local revenue source of some magnitude¹⁴. Without a dedicated local funding source, the service and system would be expected to increase only to accommodate population growth. Refer to Chapter 12 for more in-depth discussion of funding issues.

Figure 6-2 shows the estimated level of local revenues needed to support a highly developed public transportation system, assuming federal revenues increasing at the rate described above and the continuing lack of any state support.

¹⁴ Valley Regional Transit, *Regional Operations and Capital Improvement Plan*. Nelson/Nygaard Consulting Associates, pp 6-30,31. 2005

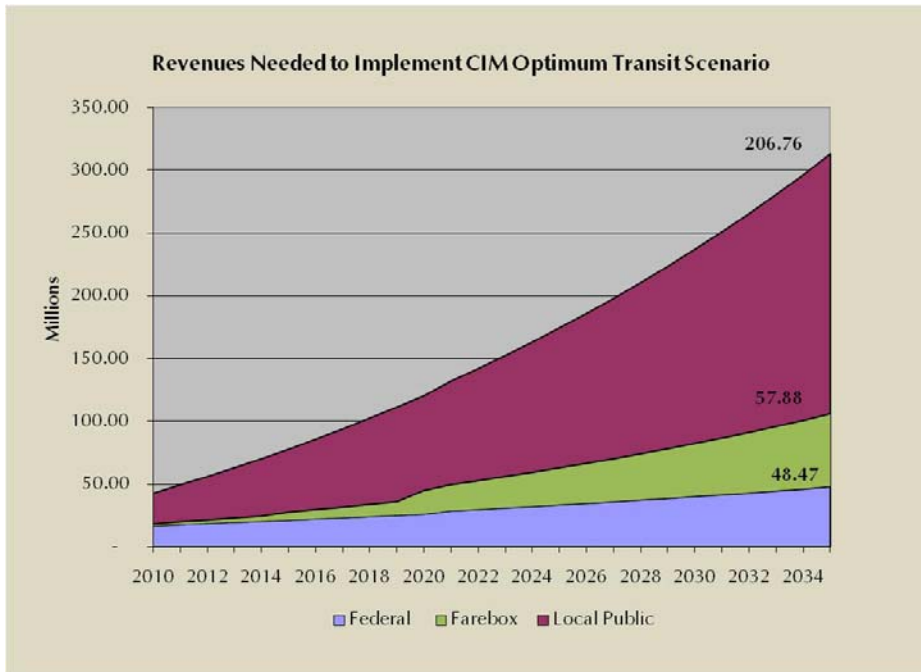


Figure 6-2: Local Revenues Needed to Implement the Planned Transit System

The estimated level of local funding to build the planned transit system averages approximately \$102 million per year including inflation (ramping from \$24.4 million in 2010 to \$206.8 million in 2035). In terms of 2009 expenses and population, this amounts to about \$430 per household in 2010. The current roadway spending amounts to about \$310 per capita; fully funded roadway projects would cost about \$500 per capita by year 2020.

Bike and Pathways

Ada County has a long history of bikeway planning dating back to the 1970s. As a result there is a 30 mile plus greenbelt that runs along the Boise River and over 150 miles of on-street bike lanes. Ada County¹⁵ was designated a “Bicycle Friendly Community” by the League of American Bicyclists in 2008. Canyon County has been placing more attention to bicycle transportation in the last decade. Nampa has a bicycle advisory committee and Caldwell has adopted a new “Pathways and Bike Route Master Plan.” Figure 6-3 depicts the current bikeway map for Ada and Canyon Counties.

¹⁵ <http://www.achdidaho.org/Projects/PublicProject.aspx?ProjectID=77>

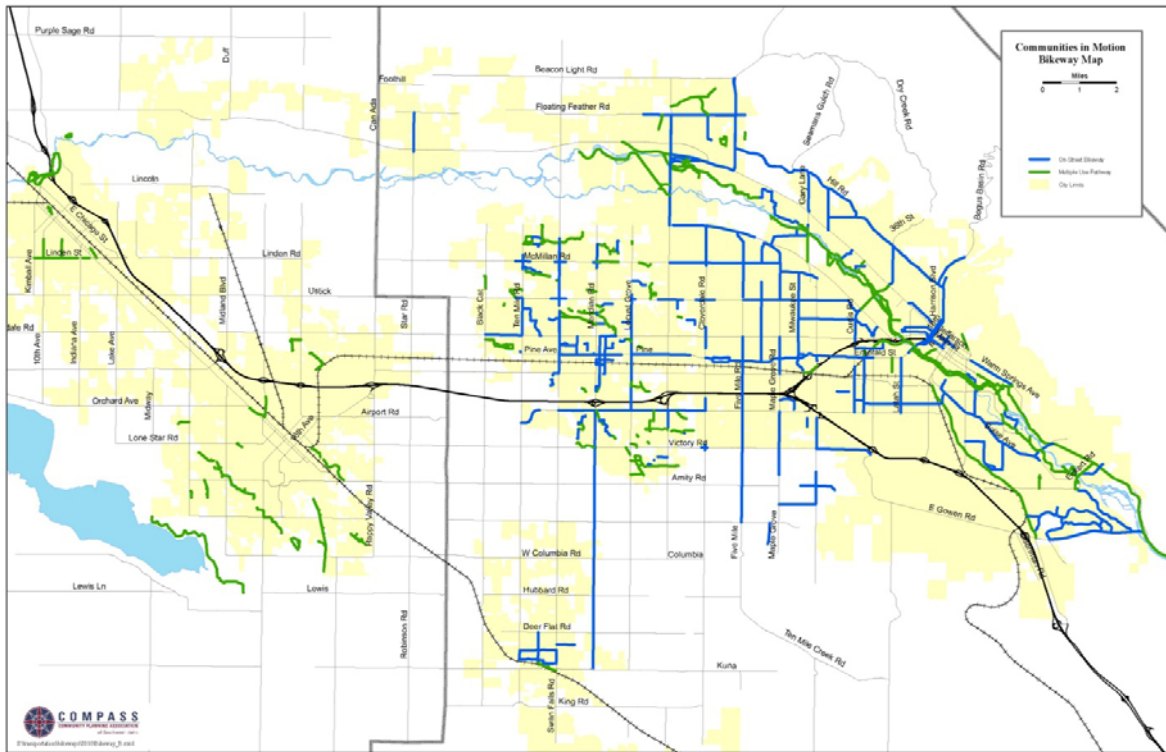


Figure 6-3: Ada and Canyon County Bikeways

Safe Routes to Schools

Safe Routes to Schools is a national program designed to encourage students to walk and bike to school to promote a healthy lifestyle, reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality, and enhance quality of life in our communities. The Boise School District has the largest program in the valley; the Treasure Valley Family YMCA¹⁶ is the lead agency for the Boise program. They use “The Five Es” - Education, Encouragement, Enforcement, Engineering, and Evaluation - to make routes safer, children and parents more knowledgeable, and the community more engaged so that more children will walk and bike to school.

Ada County Highway District¹⁷ has worked with Safe Routes to Schools and has installed a variety of features over the years to make it safer to walk to school. Those improvements include school speed zone flashing beacons, paths and sidewalks, as well as raised curbs, which provide a physical separation between pedestrians, bikes, and motorists.

¹⁶ <http://www.walkitbikeit.org/home>

¹⁷ <http://www.achdidaho.org/Community/ACHDSRTS.aspx>

Complete Streets

A concept that is becoming more popular in the United States is “complete streets.” The concept is that roadways should be planned, designed, and constructed with the needs of all users, not simply motorists, in mind. How this is implemented varies greatly from region to region.

Transit patrons, pedestrians, bicyclists, elderly, persons with disabilities, and children are examples of “other users” to be considered. These were specifically noted in proposed federal legislation in 2009. That legislation would have required provision for such users in any federally funded project.¹⁸ Exemption for a project from meeting these provisions would have required establishing a procedure with specific criteria and evaluations.

A new federal surface transportation act to replace SAFETEA-LU may include some requirement for a complete streets approach. An update is likely to be adopted after August 2010.

COMPASS adopted a complete streets policy in August 2009 to promote roadways with an appropriate balance for motorists, bicyclists, transit, and pedestrians of all ages and abilities. By considering all users of roads, communities can increase their safety, efficiency, and economic vitality. The COMPASS policy includes the following provisions:

1. Identify how all users will be served when designing new or reconstructed roadways.
2. Provide opportunities for involvement with stakeholders throughout the planning process.
3. Consider context of existing and planned land uses.
4. Provide practical and affordable solutions which balance user needs, construction costs, and environmental benefits.
5. Network transportation modes to optimally connect homes, jobs, schools, shops, families and friends.
6. Include appropriate access management practices for safe and efficient movement of users.
7. Promote a visually appealing environment to improve the transportation experience.

Consideration of these elements will be part of the project prioritization process.

As an example of a mobility function a “complete” street can help fulfill, bikeways can increase access and connectivity in a way that provides people with more choices to meet their transportation needs.

Similarly, sidewalks and other facilities that provide for safe and connected walking environments can enhance access throughout and between neighborhoods. The complete streets policy envisions a Treasure Valley where roadways are designed to be safe, efficient, and viable and provide an appropriate balance for all users including, motorists, bicyclists, transit, and pedestrians of all ages and abilities.

¹⁸ H. R. 1443. Introduced in March 11, 2009 and referred to the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

Challenges and Opportunities

Public transportation systems face challenges in meeting a multitude of needs. Speedy and reliable service, regular stops, and flexible schedules can increase ridership. Land use strategies, such as mixed-use land development, transit-oriented development, and pedestrian and bike-friendly streets can all promote transportation choices. Identifying, and better planning for, public transportation destinations such as parks, schools, and major employment centers will enhance accessibility to the system. These efforts may be aided by a federal initiative: The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of Transportation, and the Environmental Protection Agency are working in partnership to promote and support sustainable communities and better integration of federal programs and funding. One of the goals of this partnership is to support multi-jurisdictional regional planning efforts that integrate housing, economic development, and transportation decision-making in a manner that empowers jurisdictions to consider the interdependent challenges of economic growth, social equity, and environmental impact simultaneously.

Those who need public transportation the most, such as people with disabilities, older individuals, the youth, and people with low incomes, may not be able to use it due to barriers such as limited hours and days of operations, lack of routes, or lack of sidewalks and pathways leading to a bus stop.

There are several steps transit agencies can take to narrow the gaps to meet public transportation needs, including better coordination of transportation resources, and introduction of new technologies, such as reader boards or text messages to enhance information and service delivery to public transportation users. Identifying a variety of funding strategies is critical for providing public transportation systems that work effectively to serve the public. Public transportation systems, like roads, typically rely on funds from federal, state, local, and private sector sources – in addition to fare box revenues.

Additional funding is also needed for determining the high capacity transit option for the region. The *Treasure Valley High Capacity Transit Study*, complete in 2009, recommended several alignment/mode combinations to be considered for the detailed analysis in the next phase of the alternatives analysis: Boise Cutoff light rail, Boise Cutoff bus rapid transit (BRT), Franklin Road BRT-exclusive, Fairview Avenue BRT-exclusive, Boise Cutoff commuter rail (potential inclusion), and Franklin Road light rail (potential inclusion).

Development of performance measures to track public transportation in the region is underway to inform investments and efficiency. Upcoming projects include establishing a “functional classification” system for public transportation, which could then be factored in to a mode split percentage by transportation corridors.

To learn more about the Treasure Valley High Capacity Transit Study, please visit the website:

<http://www.compassidaho.org/prodserv/specialprojects-tvhcts.htm>