

# Can we fund an attractive transit system in Boise? The answer is yes.

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I am glad to see the Idaho Statesman and other local media shining a spotlight on the need to improve public transportation in the Treasure Valley. Having worked toward a long-term funding solution and system improvements for our public transit system for many years, I was excited to serve as chair of Valley Regional Transit (VRT) last year to further that advocacy.

Let's be clear; the overriding driver of our poor transit system is the dearth of legislative support for meaningful state funding or allowing a dedicated local funding source. While there are many reasons ridership has suffered recently, including historically low gas prices, the system just doesn't have enough revenue to meet the needs of the valley. The lack of funding options leaves local elected officials with few choices.



As a Boise City Council member, I have supported increasing the city of Boise's commitment to VRT; such as bringing forward a proposal two years ago to increase peak-hour frequency and extend service hours on Boise's two busiest routes, State Street and Fairview Avenue. That service improvement has resulted in higher ridership.

We know that better service will attract more riders, but the city of Boise can commit to only so much support by ourselves. Our commitment is already significant and outsized for the region at over \$30 per person inside the city of Boise.

It's time for a valley-wide effort. That is why, from my position as VRT chair, I brought forward an initiative to understand how much it would cost to fund a reliable, 15-16 hours per day/7-day a week bus system with 15-minute frequencies on premium corridors and service across the Treasure Valley.

Although not yet complete, this effort will help you understand how increased funding can build the transit system that our valley needs to be successful economically in the 21st century. You need better transit service to keep the rest of the transportation system functional; roadway congestion will simply outgrow our ability to alleviate it without transportation choices.

Already underway was a 20-year projection of transit service needs along with identification of the corridors ripe for premium service. Building on that 20-year projection, VRT produced a six-year plan as required by the Federal Transit Administration, but we have done that planning before, and without a path to funding it's meaningless.

Based on what we knew from that work, as chair I asked that we also produce a plan that would tell us what kind of service we could provide if the system had \$15 million more per year. That plan is underway and looks promising. Funding in that ballpark appears to be enough to pay for the bus system described above that we need as the heart of a successful regional transit system in the future.

The next question is how to find the money. There are several ideas on the table, and we'll spend the next few months determining which one(s) could work.

In the transition from chair to past-chair last month, I made a commitment to the VRT board and the organization to champion this process to its end goal —



identifying and asking for support for funding to get this system built and working everyday toward that end; I hope you'll join me.

*Elaine Clegg is Boise City Council president and past chair of the Valley Regional Transit board of directors.*

Read more here: <http://www.idahostatesman.com/opinion/readers-opinion/article131896329.html#storylink=cpy>