ACHD, COMPASS partner on new park-and-ride study

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A sign points to the park and ride near Overland and Eagle in Meridian in 2013. Aaric Bryan/Meridian Press file

The Ada County Highway District and the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho are partnering to study “park and ride” around the Treasure Valley.
The $100,000 study will be a joint project, and include representatives from the Idaho Transportation Department, Valley Regional Transit and the Federal Highway Administration.

ACHD Commuteride — the district’s transportation efficiency, smart commute and rideshare program — will be providing a majority of the funding for the project at $85,000, while COMPASS will provide the remaining $15,000 and will manage the study while providing data.

Park and ride is a series of parking lots where commuters can leave their vehicles and join other commuters in a carpool or on public transportation. The highway district owns five of those lots and leases land for another three, plus has memorandums of understanding on another 25 facilities around the Treasure Valley. Find a map of those lots here.

The district’s annual budget for the ACHD Commuteride is $2.9 million per year, with most of that going to its vanpool operations, according to Nicole DuBois, ACHD spokeswoman.

ACHD has been using the park-and-ride system in its vanpool program for years. Last year, some 8,000 people used ACHD park-and-ride lots. This larger, regional study will look at where other park-and-ride mechanisms could offer the greatest impact.

As populations in and around the Treasure Valley continue to grow, congestion becomes worse. Carpools and vanpools are one way to reduce the number of cars on the road.

The study will be folded into COMPASS’s Communities in Motion 2050 long-range transportation plan along with ACHD’s Strategic Plan, according to an ACHD Study Purpose document.

“This park-and-ride study’s main purpose is to support an increase in non-single occupancy vehicle options,” said Rachel Haukkala, an assistant planner with COMPASS. “The biggest thing is properly locating park-and-ride facilities … that will maximize the use of transportation funds.”

The study will identify a number of “catchment areas,” neighborhoods and other areas that could funnel into a park-and-ride lot. And those lots might be built specifically for park and ride or made in informal, already built lots like grocery or big box stores.
Maureen Gresham, ACHD’s Commuteride program manager, said the vanpool program is already using informal meeting places like Albertson’s parking lots as meeting points for poolers.

Haukkala said the study would provide a better vision of where those potential park and ride lots might go, and will potentially make an impact on the daily commute into Boise.

“The plan will help us understand where there are needs for park-and-ride facilities and the people who will benefit are carpools to meet and go into the city,” Haukkala said. “The goal is to really reduce traffic congestion, to help the parking situation in downtown Boise, and there are air quality benefits.”