Regional Transportation Summit: November 30, 2001

Executive Summary, First-Level Overview, And Supporting Materials

Report to
Summit Participants and
COMPASS Board of Directors

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Executive Summary

Do we address future Treasure Valley transportation system needs by limiting needs to fit existing revenue forecasts or by seeking enhanced funding?

The Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho (COMPASS) asked this question and more of 150 area leaders at the first Treasure Valley Regional Transportation Summit on November 30, 2001.

The Summit

There were three objectives for the Summit:

- Educating participants,
- Discussing challenges facing southwestern Idaho's future transportation system, and
- Assessing participants' recommended strategies and priorities for meeting those challenges.

To accomplish the objectives, participants were divided equally into twenty small groups. The Summit's agenda provided for informational presentations interspersed with facilitated discussions during which group participants collectively answered several sets of questions. Findings as presented in this summary were derived from tabulation and categorization of the recorded responses to these questions. This process, of course, did not lend itself to statistical analyses. It did, however, provide a substantive listing of recorded opinions from which general conclusions were drawn.

Key Findings

1. Summit participants overwhelmingly acknowledged the gravity of Treasure Valley transportation system needs. They further agreed that revenue estimates (projected as "likely future revenue") leave significant portions of those needs unfunded. No doubt, funding challenges are enormous and resources are sorely inadequate.

2. Participants were generally willing to support enhanced funding provided, however, that the search for enhanced funding would not be the only solution; transportation professionals must also participate by judiciously limiting their statements of "needs".

3. Engaging the public in the transportation discussion was a priority for participants.

4. The question of which funding sources should be pursued to enhance existing revenue forecasts generated no clear answers. Most participants recognized that significant enhancements to local funding sources were important and generally

acceptable. Nevertheless, there was little agreement on which local sources should be pursued.

5. Public transportation was recognized as an important focus for an improved transportation system. Support for and emphasis on public transportation remained strong throughout the day. Again, however, there was no consensus on how and in what priority order to meet this and other transportation needs of Treasure Valley.

6. Participants believe the transportation needs of the Treasure Valley should be addressed through a comprehensive transportation system, one based on a plan that embraces all forms of transportation, one that implements a widely shared vision and one that is coordinated across all implementing agencies.

7. Participants supported a blue ribbon panel, composed of a broad spectrum of Treasure Valley participants, to further refine priorities and initiate discussion of particular funding enhancement proposals. Nevertheless, substantive comments were also made to emphasize “doing something” rather than completing one study after another with little or no implementation.

First-Level Overview

Key Concerns

The following pages summarize comments and concerns gathered from participants during the first Treasure Valley Regional Transportation Summit and build a framework for short- and long-term agendas. The opinions are many; the solutions diverse. But all are worth examining if the Treasure Valley is to make wise use of existing resources and launch necessary efforts for a balanced, safe and sustainable transportation system.

Understanding what residents of the Treasure Valley want from their transportation system is as important to the formation of transportation policy as facts and figures. State and local governments, private businesses, academic institutions and interest groups, communities and individuals must all be partners in addressing transportation challenges. Collectively, these groups inaugurated this effort to broaden and revitalize that transportation partnership, to generate new ways of looking at problems and to tap new sources of revenue. That's why COMPASS, as the regional transportation planning organization, looked to Treasure Valley's leadership to help address the needs.

Summary

Five broad areas were identified for detailed presentation of tabulated comments from all participants:

I Transportation funding;
II Public transportation;
III Collaboration and planning;
IV Infrastructure improvements/corridor preservation; and
V Public involvement/education.

The remainder of this report consists of the actual tabulated results of each of the discussion elements from the summit agenda.

<u>I. Transportation Funding</u>

i. The biggest challenge to addressing the valley's transportation needs was overwhelmingly identified as funding.

ii. The magnitude of the funding shortfall to meet future transportation needs in the Treasure Valley most surprised the participants. The cost of maintaining roads was also surprising to them.

iii. When asked "how has the information presented during the summit changed how you think about the transportation system needs," participants ranked addressing funding needs immediately as a high priority. This conclusion persisted through all discussion sessions.

iv. Seeking additional sources of revenue was the most identified solution by participants to meet transportation needs. Participants suggested a wide variety of funding options with the most support being given to:

- increasing user fees (i.e. toll roads, increasing the fuel tax or vehicle registration fees)

- dedicating parking fees to transportation;
- allowing for a local option sales tax to fund transportation projects; and
- taxing vehicles as personal property to fund public transportation.

v. When asked "what is your preference in how to address the transportation funding deficiencies facing the Treasure Valley over the next 20 years," participants overwhelmingly said "Limit needs to essential items; then seek enhanced funding for the essential items."

II. Public Transportation

i. Providing a safe and efficient public transportation was identified as one of the top challenges facing communities individually and the Treasure Valley collectively.

ii. If participants were empowered to prioritize and implement transportation solutions "today", more stated they would improve public transportation than any other action.

iii. Increasing funding for public transportation is a moderate to high priority according to most participants.

iv. Some participants were surprised at potential decreases in revenue facing BUS and VIATrans. Some participants were also surprised at the low usage of public transportation and the viability of car and van pooling.

v. Information presented by summit organizers changed some of the participants' opinions about the need for improvements to public transportation. These changes were reflected in increased emphasis on public transportation solutions as the day progressed.

vi. Knowing more about "how, why and when people move in the public transportation system" was identified as additional information that would be useful to participants.

III. Coordination and Planning

i. Understanding how transportation plans fit together was one of the expectations participants had of the summit. It was also one of the top goals and expectations for the future.

ii. Proper planning and research were selected as two of the larger challenges facing communities and the Treasure Valley.

iii. If participants were empowered to rank and implement transportation solutions "today", developing functional and realistic transportation plans as well as consolidating transportation organizations were listed as high priorities.

iv. A lack of identified inter-agency solutions to transportation problems surprised a high percentage of participants.

v. When asked "how has the information presented changed how you think about the transportation system needs," participants emphasized three priorities: the need for a plan, the need for a common vision of the future transportation system, and coordination among agencies.

vi. A strategic and integrated plan among transportation entities would assist participants in moving forward in the decision-making process.

vii. Even though land use planning was not one of the top priorities in any single question, participants suggested a need for a stronger connection between land use and transportation decisions in the responses to most question.

IV. Infrastructure Improvements/Corridor Preservation

i. Solving the problems of Interstate 84 through the Treasure Valley was identified as one of the greatest challenges facing the area. Building north/south connections was also identified as a challenge.

ii. If participants were empowered to rank and implement transportation solutions "today", building a bypass to Interstate 84 through the Treasure Valley was ranked as a high priority early in the day, fading to "also-ran" status by the third discussion session. Widening and adding high occupant vehicle lanes to Interstate 84 were also identified as immediate priorities.

iii. When participants were given a second opportunity to prioritize and implement solutions "today", roadway and railway corridor preservation jumped to one of the highest priorities.

iv. Even though corridor preservation was not one of the top priorities in any single question, it appeared in the responses of every question.

V. Public Involvement/Education

i. The overwhelming expectation of participants was learning more about transportation issues, problems and needs.

ii. Educating the public and developing a transportation plan based on that input were identified as major challenges facing southwestern Idaho.

iii. If participants were empowered to rank and implement transportation solutions "today", getting more public involvement and educating the public were listed as a priority.

iv. Listening to the public and demonstrating how additional revenue could enhance the transportation system would improve chances of increasing funding participants said.

v. If a "blue ribbon" panel was established to further review these issues, seeking public involvement would be one of its top priorities, according to participants.

Table Discussion Tabulations

Table Discussion #1

1.1 What are your expectations of today's meeting?

Expectations	**Comments**
To better understand transportation issues, problems and needs	57
To better understand the costs of transportation improvements and clarify funding options	16
To find solutions to problems and prioritize improvements	18
To learn the priorities of others	7
To learn the big picture (putting all the planning together)	7
To improve cooperation and communication	7
Other (examples)	22
To learn the role of elected officials	
To involve legislators in regional transportation	
To voice the needs of smaller communities	
To learn who is making decisions	
To determine if a rail corridor is viable	

Table Discussion #1

1.2 What do you believe is the greatest transportation systems challenge your community/the Treasure Valley faces in 2002 and beyond?

Challenges	Comments
Funding	25
Providing public (mass) transportation	14
Planning and research	9
Developing a plan that is acceptable to the community	7
Building a beltway or bypass	7
Keeping up with growth	6
Land use planning	6
Educating the community	5
Preserving corridors	5
Moving people efficiently	4
Prioritizing infrastructure needs	4
Eliminating gridlock	4
Expanding or solving problems with I-84	4
Building/preserving North-South connections/corridor	3
Problems are not solved by adding lanes to interstate	2
Coordinating among agencies	2
Balancing needs with funding	2
Other (examples)	17
Lack of community vision	
Railroad crossings	
Ketchum/Hailey: problem of congestion on Idaho 75	
Consolidating highway districts	

Table Discussion #1

1.3 If you were transportation czar for a day, what would you do first?

Action	Comments
Improve public (mass) transit system	17
Solve funding problems	13
Build bypass, secondary system, beltway or a southern alternative to I-84	13
Improve I-84 (widen, eliminate congestion, add HOV lanes)	8
Consolidate transportation organizations (eliminate territorialism)	8
Develop functional and realistic transportation plan (vision)	8
Get more public involvement	4
Preserve corridors	4
Educate the community about transportation needs and funding shortfall	4
Streamline projects (look for efficiencies)	3
Widen U.S. 20/26 and Idaho 45	2
Learn solutions used in other communities	3
Make transportation agencies work cooperatively with business community (staggered hours, transit incentives)	2
Other (examples)	19
Add third lane to Garrity Boulevard	
Get legislature to tell us what it can live with	
Reduce taxes	
Correct all system deficiencies	
Get legislature to approval local option sales tax	
Widen arterial roads	
Start looking for long term solutions such as changes to land use	

Table Discussion #2

2.1 What surprised you most about the information presented?

Surprises	Comments
Funding required to meet needs (for example: the magnitude of the funding shortfall, lack of available funding)	20
Lack of identified solutions to problems	12
Sunset of vehicle registration fee	10
No surprises	6
Low cost of meeting funding needs of Canyon County	4
Amount of funding BUS or VIATrans will lose	4
Low utilization and low modal share of public (mass) transit	4
Complexity of issues	3
Cost of maintaining roads	3
Amount of car and van pooling	2
Number of Canyon County highway districts	2
Amount of new growth	2
Ada County Highway District's (ACHD) shortfall	2
All transportation entities have the same challenges	2
Other (examples)	28
Healthy transportation system	
Safety is not a priority	
No free options	
Thought there was more federal funding	
Capacity increase is low priority for Idaho Transportation Department (ITD)	
Deficit was lower than expected	
Cost/expense of bridges	
Lack of land use discussion	
Lack of coordination among agencies	
Progress Canyon County has made	
Strategies are being driven by federal funding	
Everyone wants public transportation but no one wants to pay for it	

Table Discussion #2

2.2 How has the information presented changed how you feel about the transportation system needs?

Change (realization of new need)	**Comments**
Need for a plan, a common vision and coordination among entities	22
Need to address funding (immediately, regionally and through a variety of sources)	20
Need stronger connection between land use decisions and transportation needs	15
Need for improvements to public (mass) transit system	8
Has not changed how I think	7
Need for legislation	7
Reinforced my opinion that people will not give up their cars	3
There is not one solution but many (multi-modal)	3
Transportation congestion is related to workforce time shifts	3
Education is important	3
Need to increase the efficiency of current system	2
Viability of car and van pools	2
Need corridor preservation	2
Others (examples)	33
Alternative transportation goal (25%) is too small	
The longer we wait the further we get behind	
Need roadway improvements as much as public transit	
Everything is so expensive	
Challenge of maintaining system may preclude increasing capacity	
Only building roads is not the answer	
Need to include rural communities in planning	
Need reversible lanes	
Magnitude of situation	
No “out-of- box” thinking	
Don’t see the link between land use and transportation	

Table Discussion #2

2.3 What additional information do you need in order to move forward in the decision-making process?

Statements

Need strategic or action plan, blueprint, list of priorities and integrated planning
Need to consolidate efforts, committees and plans/studies
I don't need more information, the public does
Need public involvement process and elected officials to interact with public
Need more time to digest information
Need greater knowledge about how, why and when people move in the transit system
Need to break down big dollars into costs per household projected out when planning
Poll public to determine tolerance to changing habits and paying more
Need a development plan for Canyon County
Need a cost benefit analysis and accurate economical analysis

Questions

What is the level of service we want for our transportation system?
What are all the funding alternatives?
What are our options and possible solutions?
What has worked in other areas?
What will legislators allow?
What is an accurate picture of future transportation without adequate funding?
Where does leadership stand on future transportation needs?
What is the difference between COMPASS and VIATrans?
Who pays for growth?
What other areas similar to ours have enough funding?
How much money is spent on studies?
What are the fiscal impacts on the individual and what benefits will they get?
Who are the players in land use planning?
Are we efficiently using existing funds?
What are the actual costs of driving a car?
What is the willingness of a community to adjust work hours or change commuting habits?
What are citizens willing to pay?

Table Discussion #3

3.1 Should we be seeking additional revenue sources or are there other options you would propose?

Position	**Responses**
Seek additional sources of funding	33
Do not seek additional sources of funding	2
Seek other options first	3

Options (possible solutions to issues, potential funding sources and actions)

Mix of everything	7	User fees	4
Mixed land use planning	4	Look for efficiencies	4
Toll roads	4	Parking fees	3
Impact fees	3	Vehicle registration	3
Gas tax	3	Flex schedules	3
Local option tax	2	Privatize transportation	3
Local option sales and gas tax	3	Look at other communities	2
Vehicle tax	2	Fee for transit lane use	2
Grid system	2	Telecommuting	1
Tax developers	1	Transit users tax breaks	1
Efficient and useable transit	1	Reversible lanes	1
Personal property tax	1	Combine COMPASS/VIATrans	1
Review current funding formulas	1	Property tax	1
HOV lanes	1	Van pool and car pool	1
Work with Congressional Reps.	1	Promote alternative transportation	1
Public/private partnership	1	TMA's	1
Businesses need company cars for employees to use during work days	1	Explore Intelligent Transportation System	1

Comments

Need public awareness and education	3
Show the public what value it gets for its money	2
Listen to what the public believes are the transportation needs and then you will find funding support	

5% transit usage is too low of a goal
Less studying and more action
Seek additional funding but not for transit
Increased revenue must be directly associated with a specific issue or solutions
Transit system needs to be self sufficient

Table Discussion #3

3.2 How high of a priority is increasing funding for public transportation?

Priority (and comments)	Comments
High priority	**31**
The need to get started is now	3
Must be a functional system, if it is the public will use	2
Need higher density development, better land use planning	2
Education (identify compelling reasons)	
Every successful community has an adequate transit system	
High priority but needs public acceptance	
Must be part of the overall solution	
Invest in public transportation while there is still time	
Roads are subsidized, why not transit	
If we don't spend money on transit, we will spend it on air quality	
If congestion becomes too bad, then people and commerce will move away	
The more investment the greater the success	
Need to serve transit dependent	
Moderate priority	**40**
Light rail is not supported by density	3
Corridor preservation at this stage	2
Put resources into the areas where potential is greatest	2
Need to improve bus system	2
Push for light rail	2
Low priority	**21**
The public is not ready, needs higher public support	4
Start with existing funding, start planning, improve system, then look for funding	3
Public transit is horribly expensive for what it does, goal is only 5% of the traveling public	2
Existing system needs to be efficient before seeking funding	2
Needs to be self supporting	2
Public is not willing to pay out-of-pocket	
Use dollars available	
Base priorities on needs of the public rather than wants of the public	
Other comments (28)	

Table Discussion #3

3.3 If you were transportation czar for a day, what would you do first?

Action	**Comments**	
Question	**#1.3**	**#3.3**
Improve public (mass) transit system	17	16
Solve funding problems	13	14
Preserve corridors	4	11
Consolidate transportation organizations (eliminate territorialism)	8	8
Develop functional and realistic transportation plan (vision)	8	8
Streamline projects (look for efficiencies)	3	5
Build bypass, secondary system, beltway or a southern alternative to I-84	13	4
Improve I-84 (widen, eliminate congestion, add HOV lanes)	8	4
Make transportation agencies work cooperatively with business community (staggered hours, transit incentives)	2	3
Educate the community about transportation needs and funding shortfall	4	3
Get more public involvement	4	
Widen U.S. 20/26 and Idaho 45	2	
Learn solutions used in other communities	3	
Comments not made during discussion 1, question 2		
Coordinate land use and transportation improvements		5
Get started now (implement completed plans)		4
Other (examples)	19	22
Add third lane to Garrity Boulevard		
Get legislature to tell us what it can live with		
Reduce taxes		
Correct all system deficiencies		
Get legislature to approval local option sales tax		
Widen arterial roads		
Start looking for long term solutions such as changes to land use		
Comments not made during discussion 1, question 2		
Dumb question		
Toll roads		
Build east/west corridor		
Accelerate the construction of current projects		

Table Discussion #3

3.4 Is there a role for a "blue ribbon" panel to review these issues in more detail and bring recommendations back to this (or a similar) group? Is so, who would you recommend serve on this panel?

Role	**Responses**
Yes	22
No	15
Comments without a yes/no answer	60
<u>Comments</u>	
Role for COMPASS	10
Blue Ribbon panel should bring more opportunity for public involvement, should include public involvement process or public education campaign	9
Strongly believe a "blue ribbon panel is not necessary"	6
Role for VIATrans	2
Blue Ribbon panel should not include elected officials	2
Blue Ribbon panel should be created for the sole purpose of solving funding issues (outcome should be taken directly to legislature)	2
Blue Ribbon panel should include a cross section of people (the following is a list of potential panel members:)	43

- Powerful people
- Political representatives
- Technical experts
- Stage agencies
- Office of the Governor
- ITD
- Legislature
- Elected officials
- AIC and IAC
- Steve Miller
- Business community/Chamber
- Similar to summit participants
- Someone who does not know the issues
- Developers
- Airport representatives
- Land use planner
- Major employers
- Special interest groups
- Disadvantaged groups
- Average taxpayer
- Local highway districts
- General public
- Representatives of successful transit authorities

<u>Other</u> (examples)	17
Paralysis by analysis	
Who will take the risk of saying this is a priority? This is a political and financial risk?	
Need new leadership	
Stop talking and get to work	

Table Discussion #3

Making Ends Meet

1. What is your preference in how to address the transportation funding deficiencies facing the Treasure Valley over the next 20 years?

Limit needs to fix existing revenue projects	2
Seek enhanced funding	23
Combination of limiting needs and enhanced funding	36
Other	7

2. If you are willing to consider enhanced funding, how would you prefer to meet the funding needs?

Primarily federal funds	9
Primarily local funds	25
Primarily state funds	7
Other	20
Federal and local funds	1
Federal, local and state	5
Local and state funds	5
Local, state and other funds	1
Local and other funds	1

3. How should this be accomplished?

Expand existing revenue sources	5
Expand new revenue sources	10
Utilize expansion of both existing and new revenue resources	54
Other	3

Supporting Materials

- Press coverage
- Letter of invitation
- Agenda
- Attendees
- Presentations (PowerPoint)
- Discussion questions