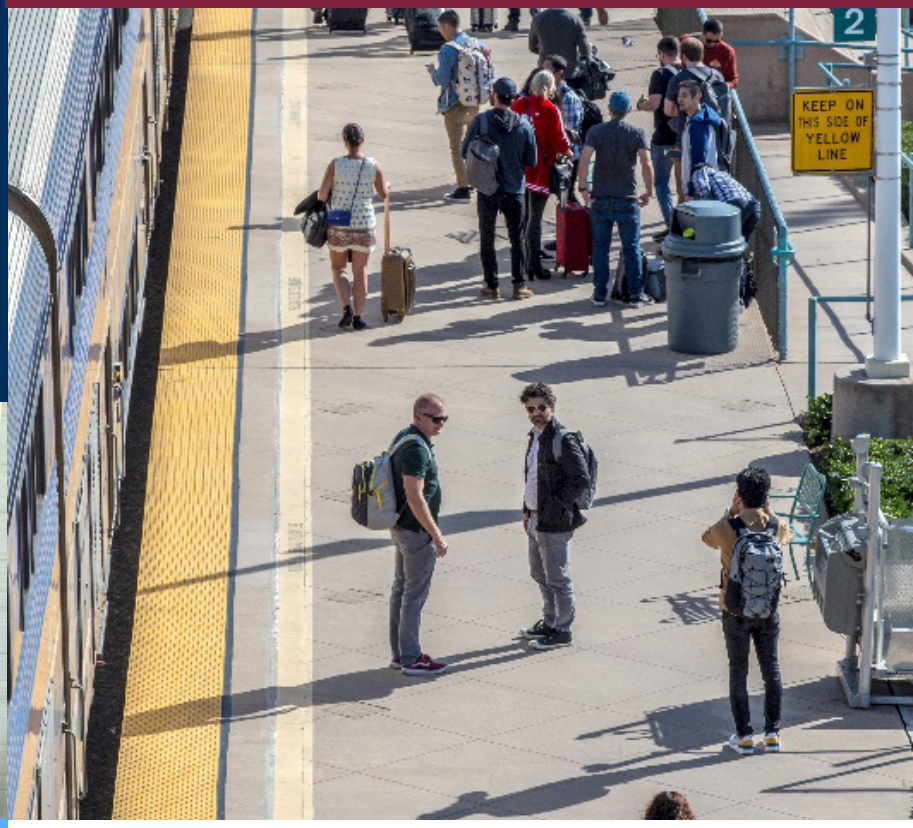


LET'S RIDE TREASURE VALLEY

Planning and Environmental Linkages Study Report

Executive Summary

Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho (COMPASS)

January 2026

What is the purpose of this study?

LET'S RIDE TREASURE VALLEY

Rapid population growth, increasing travel demand along east-west corridors, and the forecasted increase in travel time on the Interstate 84/Interstate 184 (I-84/I-184) corridor prompted the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho (COMPASS) and its member agencies to initiate the Let's Ride Treasure Valley Study. Consistent with the regional vision and goals outlined in the region's long-range transportation plan, *Communities in Motion 2050*, this study examines a future high-capacity transit connection east to west across the Treasure Valley region. In combination with land use planning and policies pursued by local jurisdictions, high-capacity transit solutions evaluated in this study are intended to support the goals and objectives of *Communities in Motion 2050*, as well as other relevant local and regional plans.

The study area is in Ada and Canyon Counties and covers the Treasure Valley generally south of the Boise River in southwestern Idaho, running east to west between the cities of Boise and Caldwell. Along with the cities of Meridian and Nampa, also located in the study area, these communities comprise four of the five largest cities in the state of Idaho.

Explore the Study Online

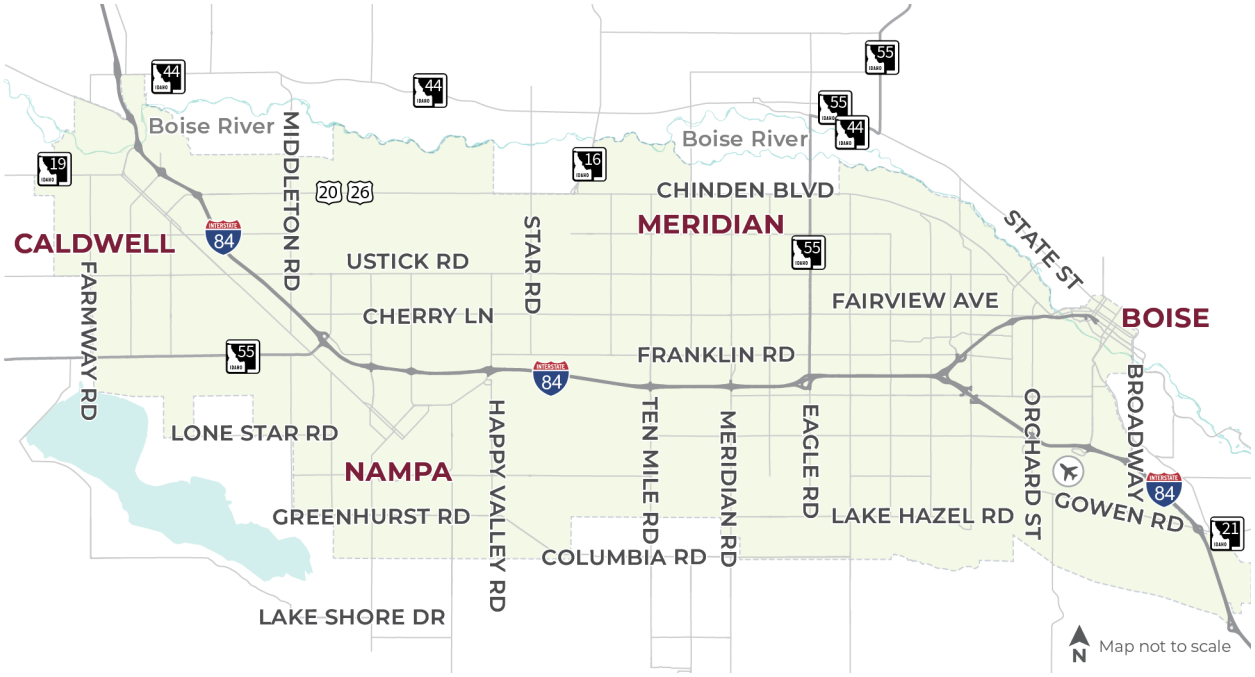
The COMPASS Let's Ride Treasure Valley web page is your one-stop hub for study information including an interactive map showing proposed transit routes and key data layers.

https://compassidaho.org/public-transportation-high-capacity-transit/

The study builds on several previous planning efforts:

- 2003: Rail Corridor Evaluation Study
- 2009: Treasure Valley High-Capacity Transit Study
- 2020: Treasure Valley High-Capacity Transit Study Update
- 2021: COMPASS's All Aboard! Survey

Study Area Map



What is a Planning and Environmental Linkages Study?

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This study was conducted using a Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) process; a collaborative transportation planning process that integrates environmental, community, and economic considerations early in the planning stages, which can shorten the time required to take projects from planning to implementation. By involving various agencies and the public from the beginning, PEL studies help identify transportation issues, develop project needs, and create planning products that can be carried forward into future environmental reviews. The environmental review process is required for federally funded projects under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

In the Let's Ride Treasure Valley Study, the PEL process was used to define the transportation problem, explore and evaluate solutions, and recommend a path forward for future planning and implementation.

PEL Process

COLLECT
Collect information to define the transportation problem the project seeks to address.

DEVELOP
Develop a range of potential transportation solutions to address the transportation problem.

ANALYZE
Screen potential solutions against measures of effectiveness to determine how well they address the transportation problem.

RECOMMEND
Develop recommendations for transportation improvements to address the problem and next steps to advance the project.

The Let's Ride Treasure Valley Study considered:

- Transportation issues, opportunities, and priorities
- Environmental resources concerns and opportunities
- Stakeholder and public input

Post-PEL Project Steps

Preliminary Design and NEPA → Final Design and Permitting → Construction

What is the purpose of the project and why is high-capacity transit needed in the Treasure Valley?

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The purpose of the project and the identified needs are based on the regional planning context, demographic and transportation trends in the study area, and input from the public and stakeholders regarding the transportation issues in the study area.

The purpose of the project is to improve the mobility, accessibility, and efficiency of east-west travel between Boise, Meridian, Nampa, and Caldwell, providing reliable and convenient high-capacity transit service that links key origins and destinations with strong potential for transit use.

Lessen future stress on the region's transportation infrastructure due to population and employment growth.

By 2050, the city areas of Boise, Meridian, Nampa, and Caldwell (within the study area) will account for

78% OF THE REGION'S JOBS.

Ada County Population

2000 → **2023**

+81% growth

2023: 545,000

+35%

2050: 733,000

Canyon County Population

2000 → **2023**

+95% growth

2023: 257,000

+40%

2050: 359,000

Provide greater mobility choice given the region's forecasted deteriorating travel times.

50% TRAVEL TIME INCREASE

By 2050, travel times between Caldwell and Downtown Boise are **projected to increase by 50%** (peak morning/evening directions).

Transit **reliability will continue to degrade** with growing congestion.

Support the region's east-west travel patterns

The region's focused **east-west travel patterns will persist** between the region's business, governmental, cultural, and educational centers.

31% **By 2050, 31%** of all study area commute trips will focus on **downtown Boise.**

What are the goals and objectives of the project?

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Objectives are specific, achievable, and measurable outcomes that the proposed action aims to achieve. They help define the project's purpose and guide the evaluation of alternatives, especially in complex projects. These objectives were developed with consideration of stakeholder input to address transportation needs in the study area and are organized under broader project goals. While they align with regional plans like *Communities in Motion 2050*, they are tailored to this project and are not meant to cover all regional goals with consideration of stakeholder input.

Goals	Objectives
Improve Transit Connectivity and Mode Share	» Establish a high-capacity transit corridor connecting key regional origins and destinations with strong potential for transit use. » Maximize transit ridership.
Improve Transit Reliability	» Promote reliable and predictable travel through design, operations, and transit priority strategies. » Provide transit service with reliable operations and predictable travel times. » Minimize transit travel times between major origins and destinations. » Appropriately manage impacts to traffic operations.
Expand Travel Choices and Mobility	» Provide regional transit service. » Provide service throughout the day. » Provide efficient transit transfer opportunities for the existing and planned future bus system, active transportation, and potential park and rides. » Manage parking at key transit destinations to promote transit ridership.
Develop Compatible Plans for High-capacity Transit, Land Use, and Transportation	» Prioritize service to areas with opportunities for transit-supportive development, growing populations, or growing employment. » Expand transportation choices to improve access to jobs, services, and resources. » Manage impacts and enhance opportunities to support freight/ goods movement.
Advance Financially Feasible Solutions	» Develop high-capacity transit solutions and promote local policies that align with federal funding criteria. » Preserve the corridor(s) identified for high-capacity transit service. » Develop high-capacity transit solutions with the potential for other funding sources. » Develop high-capacity transit solutions with the potential for phased implementation. » Maintain opportunities for future network expansion.

Who was involved in the study?

LET'S RIDE TREASURE VALLEY

The Let's Ride Treasure Valley Study involved extensive coordination with agencies, stakeholders, and the public to share information and gather input for informed decision-making.

AGENCY COORDINATION

Stakeholder Survey

52 RESPONSES from COMPASS committee members surveyed by the study team with input on desires and concerns regarding the project.

Key Stakeholder Interviews

8 LOCAL LEADER INTERVIEWS showed broad agreement on the need for a new stable funding source and focus on convenience and efficiency of transit service.

Technical Working Group (TWG)

44 REPRESENTATIVES from 24 local, state, and federal agencies were invited to participate in 5 meetings.

Environmental Review Workgroup (ERWG)

30 REPRESENTATIVES from environmental resource agencies, transportation agencies, and tribes were invited to provide input on environmental resource issues.

Transportation Leadership Coordination

8 MEETINGS with the Regional Transportation Advisory Committee and the COMPASS Board and Executive Committee on purpose and need, alternatives, and final recommendations.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Study Web Page

The COMPASS Study web page provides background information, study updates, public engagement materials, the final report, and an interactive map showing proposed transit routes and data used in the study.

Community Working Group

Community representatives, played a key role in the study by identifying community concerns and promoting public involvement.

Public Meetings

3 PHASES OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT, including four open houses and a month-long virtual event, ensured broad community engagement. Each phase of engagement included extensive promotion and online questionnaires that yielded strong participation and valuable public input.

FINAL PHASE OF ENGAGEMENT featured a self-guided online meeting with study updates, evaluation results and a public survey.

1,937 VISITORS

806 PARTICIPANTS

498 SURVEY RESPONSES

How were alternatives evaluated?

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The study team started with a broad range of alternatives to address the purpose, needs, goals, and objectives of the project.

10 **TRANSIT ROUTE OPTIONS**

5 **TRANSIT MODE OPTIONS**

The Let's Ride Treasure Valley Study included three tiers of evaluation to explore a range of alternatives and ultimately develop recommendations. The evaluation result was a final route and mode recommendation to the COMPASS Board of Directors. A multi-tiered evaluation approach allowed routes to be narrowed from a wide range down to a select set and assigned a mode to each route.

How Were Station Locations Selected?

Within ½ mile of station location

- Population density
- Major trip generators (downtown areas, employment centers, universities, hospitals, commercial hubs, etc.)
- Transit-supportive development (high-density residential, commercial/retail, office, and institutional)

Within ¼ mile of station location

- Local or regional transit routes
- Bike lanes, sidewalks, or shared-use paths

Station locations selected during this study are preliminary and will be finalized during a future project phase.

TIER 1 — Engagement

FATAL FLAW EVALUATION

Answers yes or no if the route supports the purpose and need

TIER 2 — Engagement

DETAILED EVALUATION

Pairs routes carried forward from Tier 1 with modes and provides qualitative and quantitative analysis to rank each route-mode pairing.

TIER 3 — Engagement

FINAL OPTIONS

Evaluates the options carried forward from Tier 2 in more detail, including evaluation of performance and benefits to identify the best option(s) for further evaluation in a future NEPA study.

FUTURE NEPA STUDY

What did this study recommend?

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The Boise Cutoff Commuter Rail Alternative is recommended as the preliminary locally preferred alternative to connect Boise, Meridian, Nampa, and Caldwell with commuter rail service in existing freight rail corridors.

Boise Cutoff Commuter Rail

Design Assumptions

- A second track would be added next to the existing freight rail between Boise and Caldwell
- Commuter and freight trains would share both tracks
- Nine stations are proposed near high-density housing, major destinations, and transit connections.

Operational Assumptions

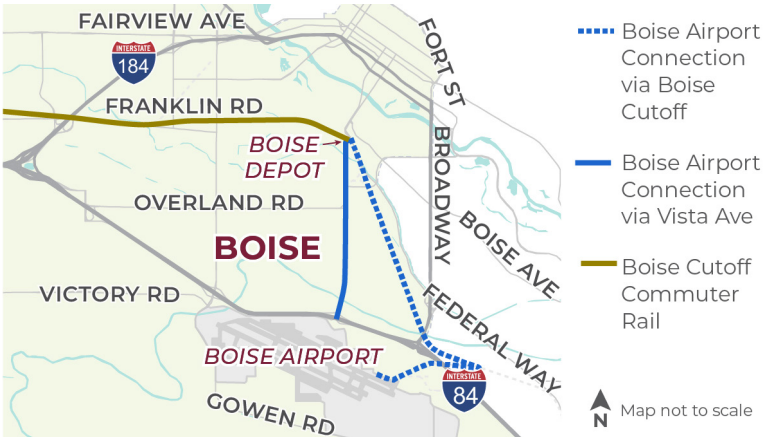
- Five commuter trains would run every 30 minutes on weekdays and every 60 minutes on weekends and holidays.
- Travel time from Boise to Caldwell would be approximately 58 minutes.
- Bus connections would link passengers from the Boise Depot to downtown Boise

Design and operations assumptions will change as planning and design progress.

Connection to Boise Airport

Stakeholders and the public identified the airport as a key connection to help alleviate congestion and address parking issues at the airport. Two potential transit connections to the airport are recommended for future evaluation.

- Provide enhanced bus service along Vista Avenue from the Boise Depot that is coordinated with commuter rail service.
- Extend commuter rail service to the airport from the Boise Depot along the Boise Airport Spur Rail Line.



Why was the Boise Cutoff Commuter Rail Alternative recommended?

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Key Benefits of the Boise Cutoff Commuter Rail Alternative Compared to Other Alternatives Included:

- Projected to attract the most transit riders
- Greatest ability to accommodate future transit demand as population in the region increases
- Fastest and most reliable travel times between Boise, Meridian, Nampa, and Caldwell
- Strongest economic development potential
- Fewest potential residential and commercial property acquisitions/relocations

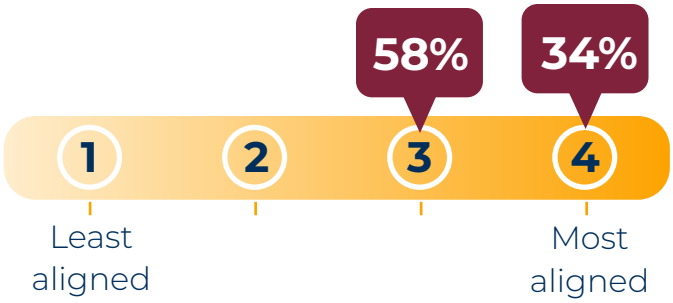
What did the public say about the Boise Cutoff Commuter Rail Alternative?

80% of respondents believe it is the...

BEST CHOICE FOR TREASURE VALLEY

BOISE CUTOFF ROUTE (commuter rail)

92% of respondents believe the proposed station locations align with major origins and destinations



TOP THREE REASONS

respondents believe their choice is best for the region

1. **25%** Efficiency
2. **23%** Transit Ridership
3. **21%** Reliability

TOP THREE CHALLENGES

to implementing high-capacity transit service

1. **24%** Property acquisition
2. **21%** Increased taxes to pay for construction and/or high-capacity transit service
3. **20%** Impact to traffic at transit route crossings

What environmental resources were considered?

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The PEL study considered environmental resources in the development and evaluation of high-capacity transit solutions to address the purpose and need. These included resources for which stakeholders expressed concern, resources with regulatory requirements relevant during early project planning, and resources with the potential to influence decision-making during this PEL Study. All environmental resources as required by NEPA will be identified and evaluated during future project phases.

Environmental Resources	Potential Impacts from the Boise Cutoff Commuter Rail Alternative
Farmland	Impacts to about 1 acre of prime farmland and farmland of statewide importance are anticipated. However, if planned growth and development in the study area occurs, land currently designated as prime or statewide-important farmland may no longer be subject to Farmland Protection Policy Act requirements.
Historic Resources	The rail corridor intersects numerous historic resources and may have adverse effects to several resources either listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.
Recreation Properties	Impacts are relatively minor and include the Boise Depot Park and a section of unnamed trail near North Milwaukee Street.
Transit Noise and Vibration	Nearby residences and other sensitive receptors may experience impacts from increased train operations, horn noise at at-grade rail crossings, and increased vehicle traffic near stations. Train movement over tracks can also cause ground vibration.
Air Quality	The corridor is located in an area that meets federal air quality standards and doesn't require special review under the Clean Air Act. Because the project would not add major new capacity or significantly increase harmful emissions, air quality impacts are expected to be minimal.
Hazardous Materials	Soil and groundwater contamination at five sites pose a moderate risk for property acquisition and construction. Bridge replacements and building renovations or demolitions may require surveys for regulated materials such as asbestos and lead.
Aquatic Resources	The conceptual design identified 24 waterway crossings that may be impacted from modification or replacement of bridges and culverts to accommodate a second track. Preliminary analysis also indicates potential impacts to about a quarter-acre of wetlands.
Floodplains	The conceptual design identified nine locations in or directly adjacent to designated floodplains where floodplain encroachment is possible based on modification or replacement of existing bridges or culverts needed to accommodate the second track.
Sensitive Species	Because the project follows an active freight rail corridor, impacts to sensitive species are anticipated to be minimal. Disturbance to habitat or migratory birds could occur where the project would parallel or cross waterways.

What are the next steps to implement the project?

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Optimize the Design Concept

Cost can be a challenge for implementing major projects. Simplifying the design and phasing the improvements over time can reduce costs. It is recommended that various strategies be explored to reduce capital costs, such as:

- Shorter initial phase (Boise to Nampa)
- Shorter/simplified station platforms
- Peak period service or reduced headways
- Shorter trainsets with previously used equipment
- Phased double track construction

Continue Coordination with Railroads

The study team coordinated with the two freight railroad owners throughout this study to keep them informed on the study and better understand freight operations in the rail corridors. Any future use of these rail corridors will require detailed agreements. In future project phases, the local lead agency and project sponsor will need to undertake formal consultation and agreements with the freight railroads. This coordination may include the following topics and result in additional agreements:

- Access easements
- Capital improvements and costs
- Railroad operations
- Asset maintenance

Establish Local Transit Revenue Source

High-capacity transit projects are often funded through a combination of local and federal funding sources. Even with generous federal support for the project, dedicated local funding is needed for both capital construction and the ultimate operation of the system. At present, the State of Idaho and local jurisdictions lack a dedicated funding source to support public transportation. Elsewhere in the US, many local agencies implement a dedicated sales tax for transit or identify another local revenue source to fund ongoing operations or to repay capital construction bonds.

Pursue Federal Funding

Many high-capacity transit projects in the United States are funded through the Federal Transit Administration Capital Investment Grant (CIG) program. Following design optimization, cost estimates and ridership projections should be developed that meet standards for a CIG New Starts application. The CIG New Starts program can cover up to 80% of eligible project costs; however, projects that provide more than 50% of the project costs in local funding are far more competitive for CIG funding.