



Travel and Tourism

INTRODUCTION

Would you like to visit—or move to—a place that is consistently listed as one of the best for recreation, wineries, or fly-fishing? What about a place known for its safe drivers and caring and happy people? Or, maybe a place recognized as most attractive for young professionals, active families, or retirees? The place that matches all of these is the Treasure Valley, which regularly appears on a multitude of “best places” lists.¹ It’s no wonder so many people are traveling to the Treasure Valley to check out the outdoor recreation, to enjoy the shopping and dining, and to stay here to enjoy those things year-round (Figure 1).

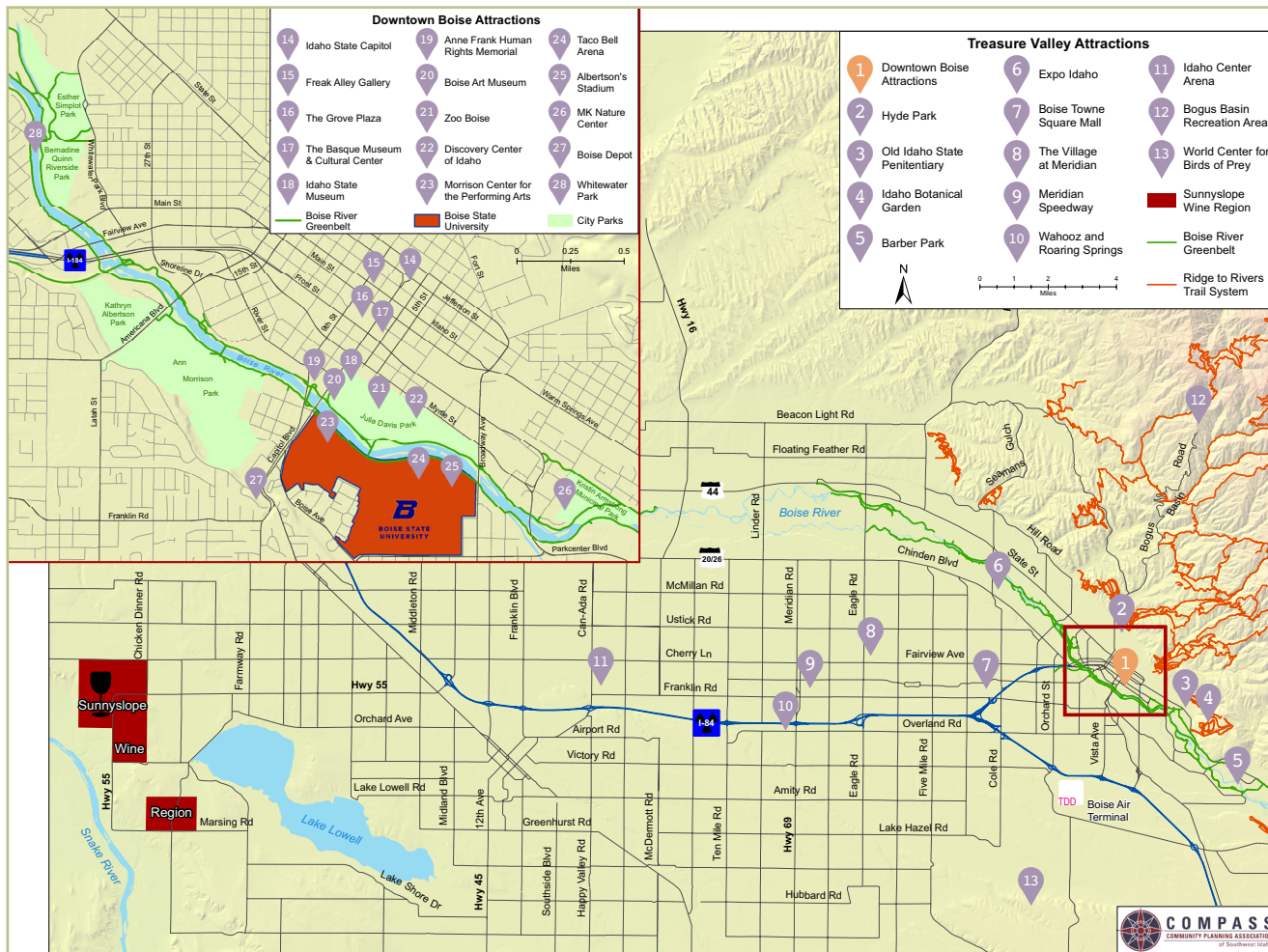


Figure 1. Treasure Valley attractions

Tourism is Idaho’s third-largest industry, behind agriculture and technology.² In southwest Idaho, tourism employs over 13,000 people and generates \$1.4 billion in traveler spending.³ It is estimated that out-of-town visitors to conventions in downtown Boise contribute approximately \$217 per person per day in spending.⁴



People come to the Treasure Valley, often via the City of Boise, for many different reasons. Most fall under one of three categories: those who are visiting friends and family, those who want to experience the outdoors, and those who want to tour the region (Figure 2).⁵ The most popular visitor season is summer, though there isn't much drop-off in the other seasons, as the Treasure Valley serves as a base for a myriad of outdoor recreation opportunities, is home to many attractions, and hosts many events throughout the year (Figures 3 and 4).⁶



Figure 2. Top reasons visitors come to Idaho. Source: Idaho Tourism.

While travelers bring their wallets into the region, they also bring additional transportation needs. The Treasure Valley faces challenges in attracting and serving tourists, including isolation from other population centers, traffic congestion during major events, limited public transportation, and gaps in our regional bicycle and pedestrian system.

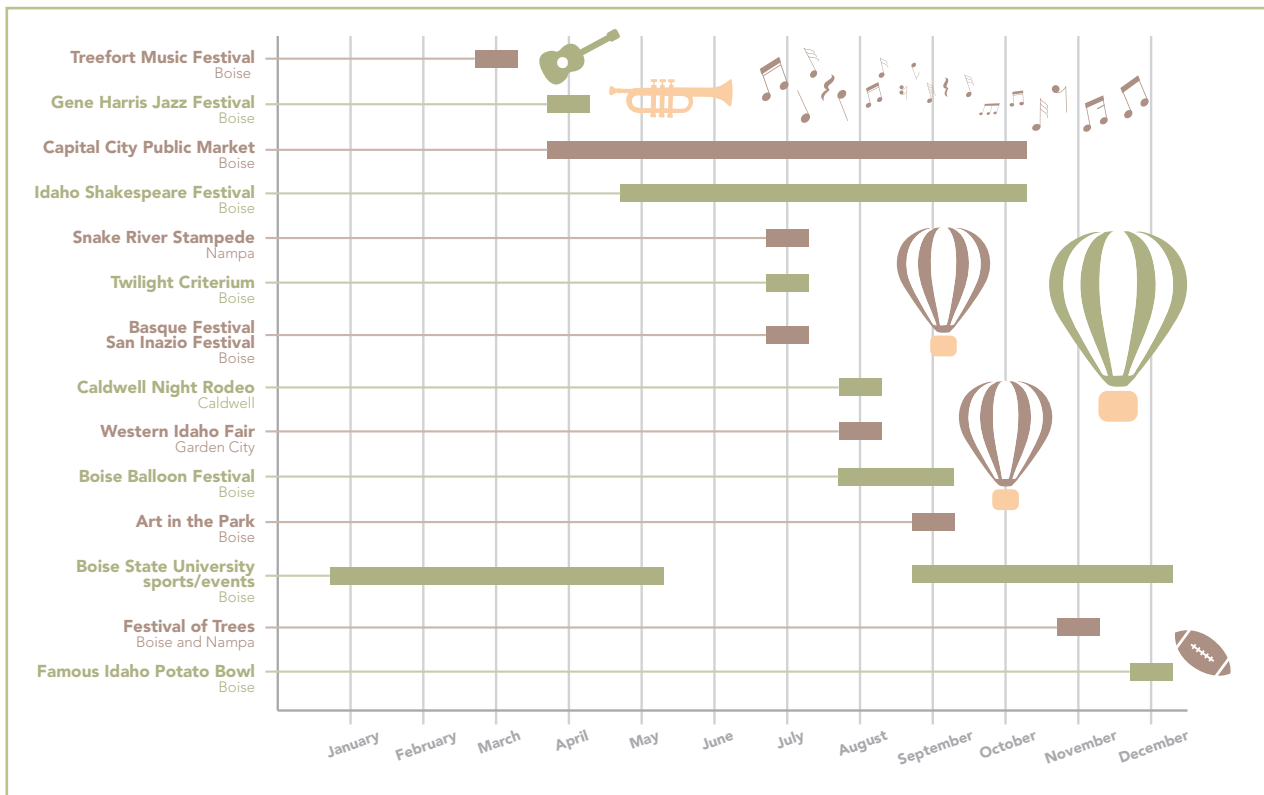


Figure 3. Popular Treasure Valley events

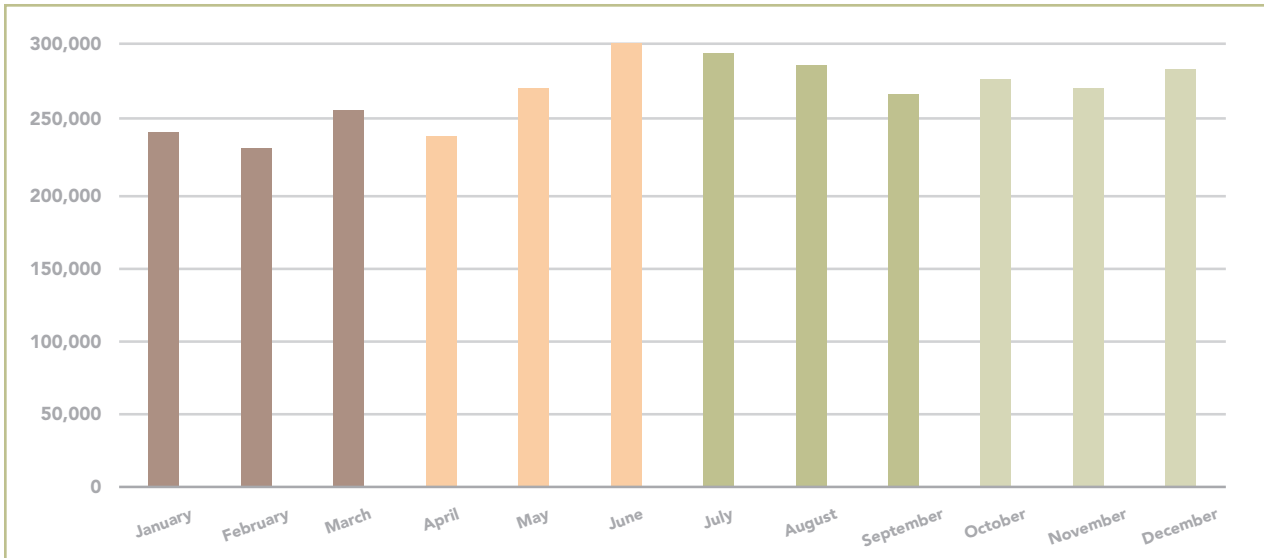


Figure 4. Boise Airport total passengers in 2016. Source: Boise Airport.

FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS

The Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, signed into law on December 4, 2015, expands the scope of consideration of the metropolitan planning organization planning process: “[t]he Secretary shall encourage each metropolitan planning organization to consult with officials responsible for other types of planning activities that are affected by transportation in the area (including State and local planned growth, economic development, *tourism*, natural disaster risk reduction, environmental protection, airport operations, and freight movements) or to coordinate its planning process, to the maximum extent practicable, with such planning activities.” [23 USC 134 (g)(3)(A)]⁷ (emphasis added)

COMPASS has consulted with key regional travel and tourism stakeholders to gain insight into the relationship between travel and tourism and transportation needs and infrastructure. A survey was sent to nine travel and tourism-related businesses and agencies in the Treasure Valley; of those, four provided responses:

- Boise Airport
- Boise Centre
- Boise Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Caldwell Chamber of Commerce

Survey responses are reflected throughout this document; all verbatim responses can be found in the [Appendix](#). In addition to the survey, representatives from local cities and counties were consulted throughout the planning process.



GETTING HERE

The Treasure Valley is the most isolated of any metropolitan area in the continental United States.⁸ As such, travelers aren't likely to stumble upon the Treasure Valley by mistake; they usually head here for a reason. The Treasure Valley can be accessed by automobile, primarily via Interstate 84 from the east or west or State Highway 55 from the north or south, or by airplane, via the Boise Airport. Amtrak passenger train service ended in 1997.⁹ Most travelers to the Treasure Valley come from other parts of the western United States (Figure 5).

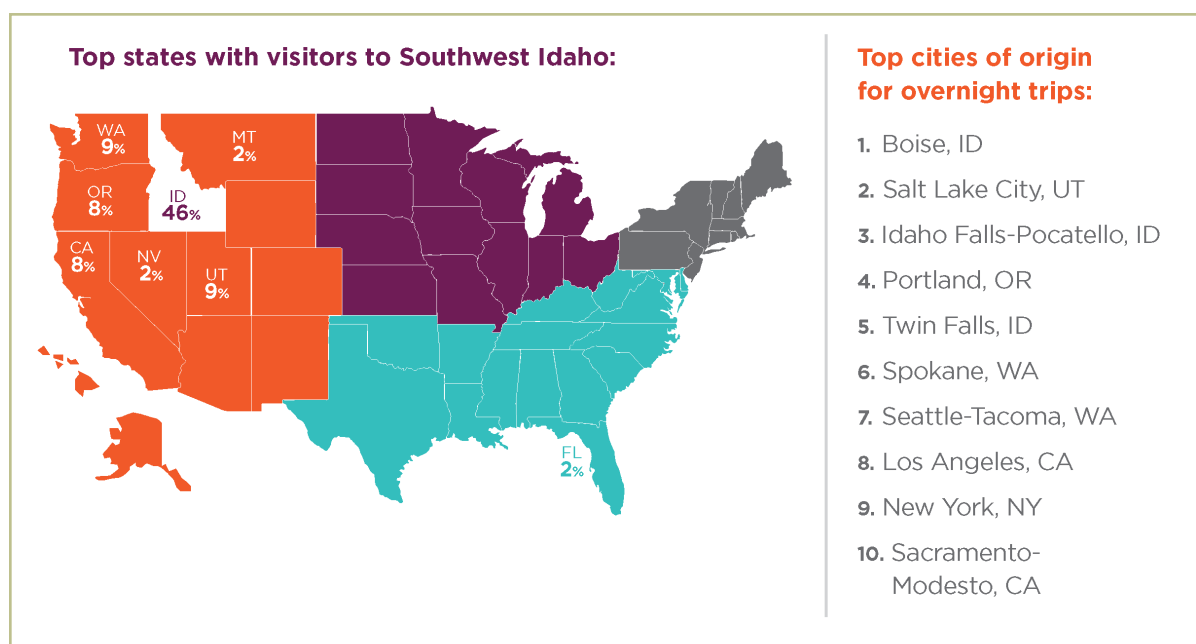


Figure 5. Top cities of origin for southwest Idaho visitors. Source: Idaho Tourism.

Interstate 84 is the only interstate running through the Treasure Valley. It is the most critical corridor in the region and it runs near many of the tourist attractions in the valley. Downtown Boise, the Idaho Center, regional shopping malls, and connections to landmarks outside the Treasure Valley are all connected by I-84. Disruptions to I-84 can seriously impact mobility throughout the region and travelers' access to and from the airport.

The Boise Airport serves 21 different national airports and receives more than 100,000 annual passengers each from Seattle/Tacoma, Denver, Salt Lake City, Portland (Oregon), and Phoenix (Figure 6).¹⁰

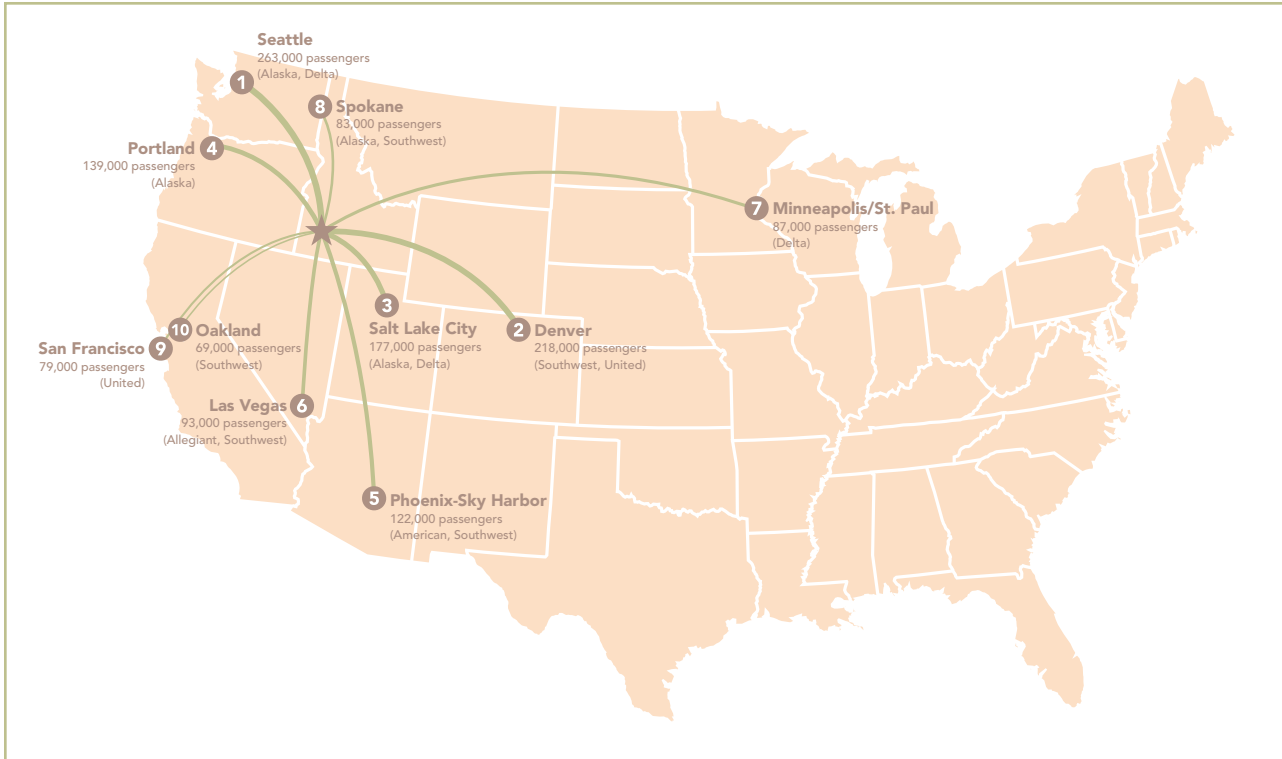


Figure 6. Boise Airport routes. Source of data: Boise Airport.

CHALLENGES

The region must plan to accommodate current and future needs of travelers. This includes expanding needed infrastructure for all modes of travel.

Traffic congestion from one-time or seasonal events can create a tremendous impact on the transportation system. Large events, such as Boise State University football or basketball games, bring tens of thousands of fans to a single location who typically leave at the same time.

A lack of public transportation in the Treasure Valley requires visitors to rent a car to access many locations in the region. For example, those who arrive by air will find only one public transportation route that connects to the Boise Airport (Figure 7). Beyond airport connections, those who wish to travel throughout the region without a car still encounter limited bus coverage (Figure 8).

While many come to southwest Idaho for the outdoor recreation, including cycling and hiking, there are many gaps in the regional trails system. The Boise River Greenbelt truncates just west of the City of Eagle, while an opportunity for using the Union Pacific Railroad corridor as a “rails-with-trails” bikeway remains untapped. Enhanced bicycle infrastructure in the urban core and more accessible routes to mountain trails could encourage more bicycle tourism in the valley.

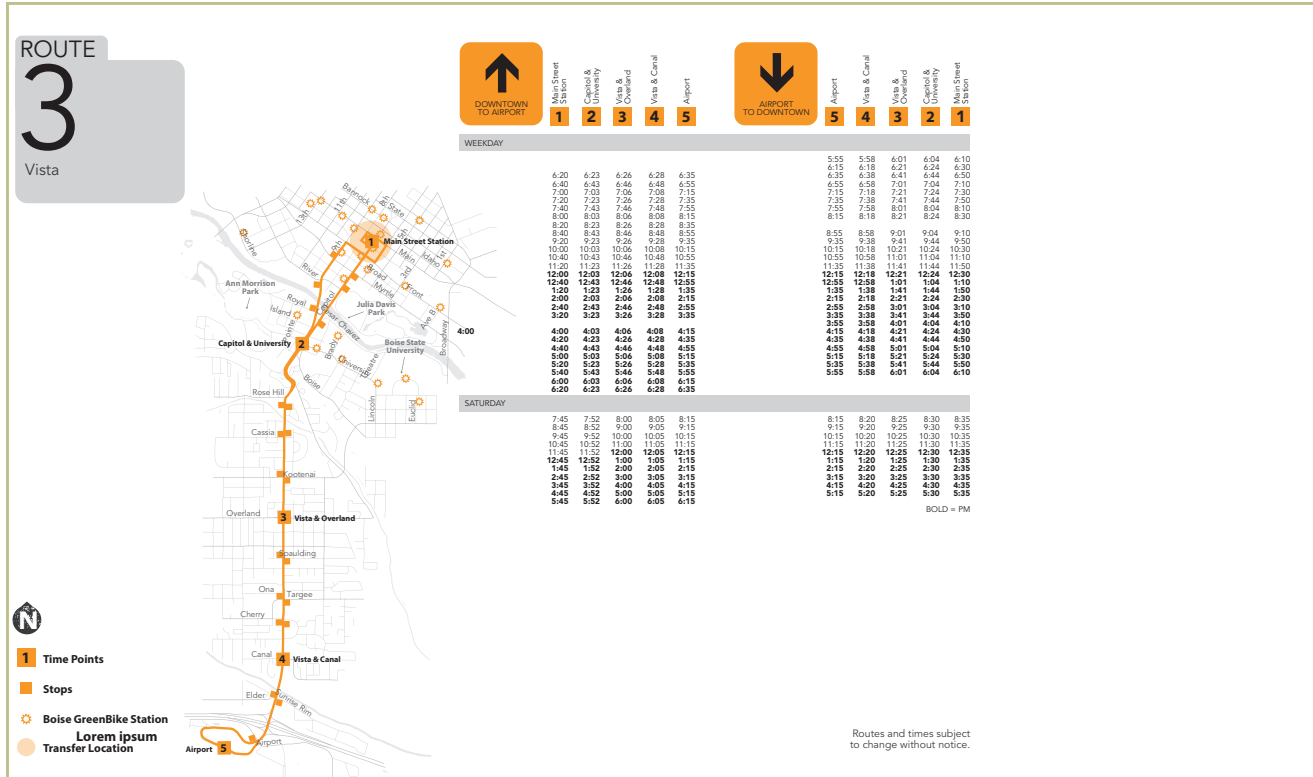


Figure 7. Boise Airport bus schedule

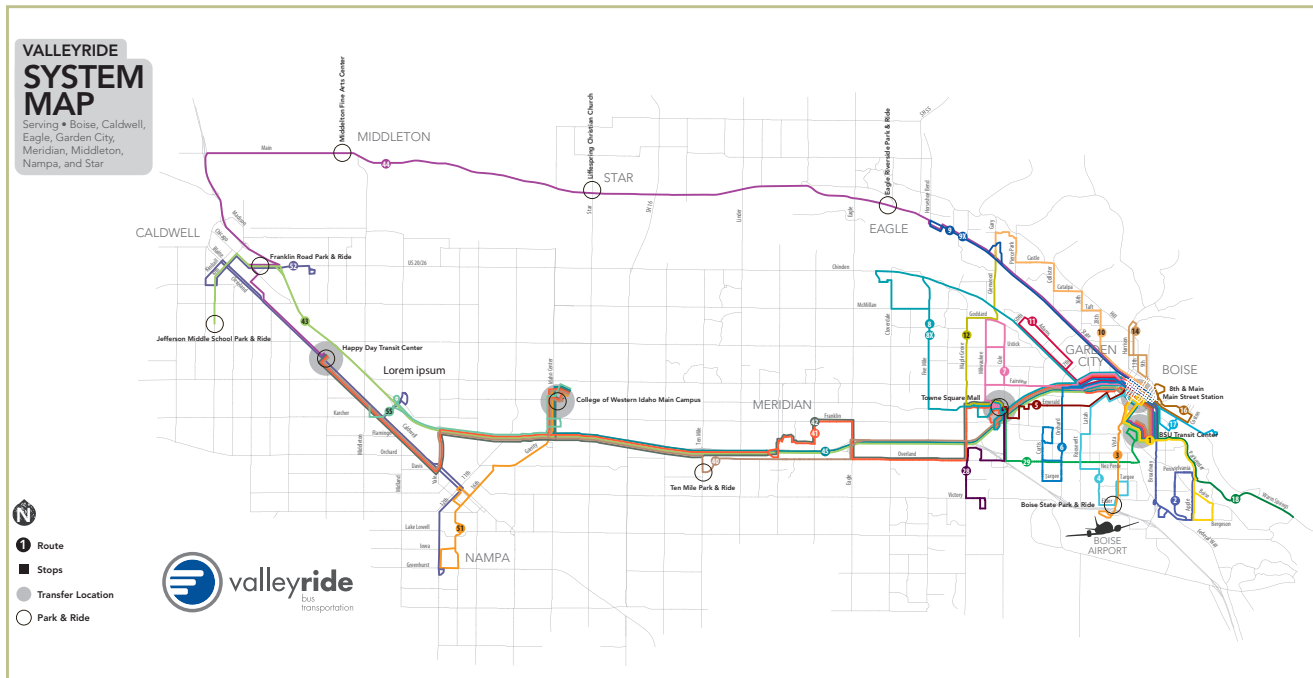


Figure 8. ValleyRide bus system (2017)



SOLUTIONS

Many projects that can address travel and tourism transportation challenges are included in *Communities in Motion 2040 2.0* (CIM 2040 2.0), and are discussed below. Some of these projects are large and will require a significant financial investment—but many improvements can move ahead without costly infrastructure updates. Bike-share programs, ride hailing, carpooling, vehicle-on-demand services, and shuttles from off-site parking can help bridge the gap between travelers and their destinations. These transportation demand management strategies can be helpful for congestion mitigation, especially during events. As the region grows, the need for alternative transportation options will continue to increase.

Roadways

CIM 2040 2.0 identifies many large infrastructure projects, including improvements to sections of Interstate 84, US Highway 20/26, State Highway 44, and State Highway 55, that can help address congestion and regional mobility needs of travelers. Paradoxically, infrastructure construction, which can be a long-term solution for increasing regional mobility, is also a detriment to tourism in the short term.

Learn more about *Communities in Motion 2040 2.0* roadway needs and projects.¹¹

“We also get complaints about the construction projects that cause street closures and detours...but some of the comments about transportation being affected by construction is positive as they see this as growth.”

—Lisa Edens, Senior Sales Manager, Boise Convention and Visitors Bureau, from stakeholder survey

Bicycle and Pedestrian Networks

Bicycle and trail tourism is big business. Some studies indicate that the outdoor recreation economy generates \$887 billion nationally each year.¹² As noted, many travelers to southwest Idaho come for the access to the mountain ranges and urban trails along the Boise River.

The Boise River Greenbelt capitalizes on the prime location through an urban center and as a connection to nearby outdoor destinations. The Boise River Greenbelt currently extends from the east of the City of Boise past the City of Eagle to Eagle Island State Park. While the Boise River Greenbelt provides a 25-mile pathway, there are gaps in the trail and many tourists would enjoy extending their bicycle trip to a multi-day trip. Future plans will ultimately extend the Boise River Greenbelt to the Snake River in the west. This will increase the extent of the corridor as both a recreational and commuter trail and will increase western Ada County and Canyon County's access to this great resource.

Just as the Boise River Greenbelt follows the path of the river to connect many communities across the Treasure Valley, the Union Pacific Railroad could be a potential rails-with-trails route to connect the largest downtowns in the area, as well as many other tourist attractions. However, currently there is no designated funding source and the Union Pacific Railroad, the owner of the property, is not in favor of a pathway along its rail corridor. COMPASS continues to work toward such a future pathway.

In addition to the Boise River Greenbelt and a potential rails-with-trails system, a proposed Treasure Valley regional bikeway and pathway network—comprising 390 miles of pathways, trails, and roadways—would expand the number of trails and pathways throughout the Treasure Valley. Portions of the regional trail network have already been developed by cities, counties, highway districts, and developers, but significant gaps in the regional pathway network remain (Figure 9).

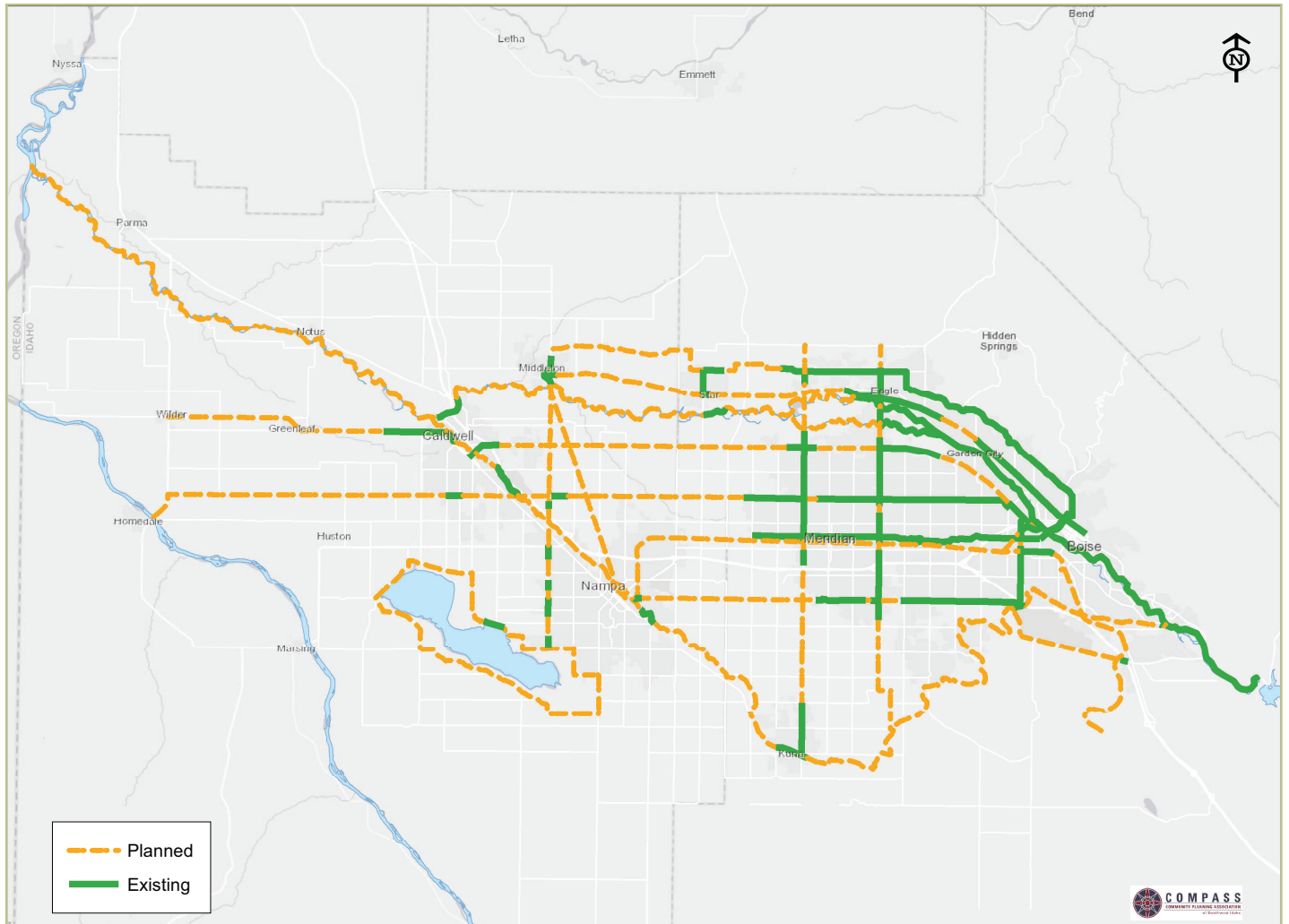


Figure 9. Proposed Treasure Valley regional bikeway and pathway network

Learn more about planning for bicycle and pedestrian networks in the Active Transportation portion of *Communities in Motion 2040 2.0*.¹³

Public Transportation

Some of the traffic impact on all travelers can be mitigated through public transportation options. High-capacity public transportation via streetcar, light rail, or commuter rail can remove vehicles from the system, reducing congestion; improve mobility options for travelers who do not bring a vehicle to the valley; and be an economic boon to the region.¹⁴

The goal for public transportation in the Treasure Valley includes a comprehensive network of fixed route and high capacity services to serve the traveling public.

Existing public transportation options are somewhat limited and do not always meet travelers' needs. Valley Regional Transit¹⁵ operates the regional public transportation system in Ada and Canyon Counties.



Its ValleyConnect 2.0 plan describes intermediate and growth scenarios to develop a comprehensive public transportation system.¹⁶ The plan includes existing or future bus service to most major landmarks and events—enabling travelers to access tourism destinations without the need for a car. **However, this plan is currently unfunded.**

The City of Boise is leading a collaborative effort to develop a “circulator”¹⁷ in downtown Boise. This could accommodate travelers without vehicles as they visit landmarks and events in downtown Boise.

In many urban areas across the nation and the world, commuter rail systems are linking urban and suburban areas, creating an enjoyable way for tourists to see the sights. COMPASS is planning for a commuter rail system from Caldwell to Boise by the year 2040; however, such a system needs a funding mechanism before it can become a reality.

Learn more about CIM 2040 2.0 public transportation initiatives.¹⁸

CONCLUSION

The Treasure Valley offers a variety of traveler and tourist options, from outdoor recreation to high-class shopping and dining to special events. Reliable and robust transportation is key to making these experiences enjoyable and continuing to bring visitors into the valley. Challenges to the transportation system need to be addressed now, including improved roadways, increased public transportation options, and extended bicycle and pedestrian paths.

“I think there needs to be a strong focus on public transportation, especially in downtown core areas. Look at places like Salt Lake City, where there is a rail network that connects the airport to the downtown core, then a series of rail and bus options to take from there.”

—Rebecca Hupp, Director, Boise Airport, from stakeholder survey



NOTES

- 1 "National Accolades," Boise Valley Economic Partnership, <http://www.bvep.org/lifestyle/national-accolades>
- 2 *The Idaho Tourism Effect*, prepared by Dean Runyan, the Idaho Economic Impact Report, and Longwoods International for Idaho Tourism, https://visitidaho.org/content/uploads/2016/09/FINAL_8.23.16_ITC-TopStats-Infographic_PRINT.pdf
- 3 *The Southwest Idaho Tourism Effect*, prepared by Dean Runyan, the Idaho Economic Impact Report, and Longwoods International for Idaho Tourism, https://visitidaho.org/content/uploads/2017/03/Southwest-tourism-Impact-Infographic_update.pdf
- 4 *The 2015 Economic and Fiscal Impacts of the Boise Centre Meetings and Conventions*, prepared for the Greater Boise Auditorium District by Dr. Don Holley and Dr. Patrick Shannon, <http://www.boiseauditorium.com/wp-content/uploads/2015-Economic-Impact-of-Boise-Centre-Final-Report-3-22-2017.pdf>
- 5 See note 2.
- 6 2016 airport statistics, City of Boise, <https://www.iflyboise.com/media/1336/2016-statistics.pdf>
- 7 "Metropolitan transportation planning." *Code of Federal Regulations*. Title 23, 134 (g)(3)(A), <http://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=granuleid:USC-prelim-title23-section134&num=0&edition=prelim>
- 8 "Boise Is Home to More Than Just a Convention Center," New York Travel, <http://nymag.com/travel/article/boise-idaho.html>
- 9 *The Boise Depot Then and Now*, Boise Parks & Recreation Department, <http://parks.cityofboise.org/media/592398/16-1004-thenandnow-bd.pdf>
- 10 Boise air terminal scheduled services, US Department of Transportation Bureau of Transportation Statistics, https://www.transtats.bts.gov/airports.asp?pn=1&Airport=BOI&Airport_Name=Boise,%20ID:%20Boise%20Air%20Terminal&carrier=FACTS
- 11 *Roadways*, CIM 2040 2.0, http://www.compassidaho.org/documents/prodserve/CIM2040_20/TechDocs/Roadways.pdf
- 12 *The Outdoor Recreation Economy*, Outdoor Industry Association, https://outdoorindustry.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/OIA_RecEconomy_FINAL_Single.pdf
- 13 *Active Transportation*, CIM 2040 2.0, http://www.compassidaho.org/documents/prodserve/CIM2040_20/TechDocs/ActiveTransportation.pdf
- 14 *Streetcars and Economic Development: The dynamic linkage between them*, HDR, <http://midtowngreenway.org/files/mgc/ckfinder/files/streetcars%20and%20economic%20development.pdf>
- 15 Valley Regional Transit website: <https://www.valleyregionaltransit.org>
- 16 ValleyConnect 2.0 plan, <https://www.valleyregionaltransit.org/projects-plans/valleyconnect-20/>
- 17 "Downtown Circulator," City of Boise, <https://pds.cityofboise.org/planning/comp/circulator>
- 18 *Public Transportation*, CIM 2040 2.0, http://www.compassidaho.org/documents/prodserve/CIM2040_20/TechDocs/PublicTransportation.pdf



APPENDIX: STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH SURVEY

The following organizations were asked to fill out a short survey asking for input on how transportation improvements in the region can support tourism. Their verbatim responses are below.

- Boise Airport, Rebecca Hupp, Airport Director
- Boise Centre, Pat Rice, Executive Director
- Boise Convention and Visitors Bureau, Lisa Edens, Senior Sales Manager
- Boise Valley Economic Partnership, Charity Nelson, Director of Economic Development
- Caldwell Chamber of Commerce, Teresa Hardin, Executive Director
- Residence Inn Boise Downtown/City Center, Aimee Tylor, General Manager
- Idaho Department of Commerce, Diane Norton, Tourism Manager
- Meridian Chamber of Commerce, Christine Donnell, Chief Executive Officer
- Nampa Chamber of Commerce, Debbie Kling, President/CEO

In what ways have recent transportation projects impacted tourism, either in a positive or negative way, in the Treasure Valley?

Edens: We did have a couple of visitors complain about the chip sealing happening. Complaints about too many one-way streets is very common. We also get complaints about the construction projects that cause street closures and detours...but some of the comments about transportation being affected by construction is positive as they see this as growth.

Hardin: Construction creates uneasiness for tourists. They do not know how to navigate detours so they simply drive by. Hotels, restaurants, wineries, special events all of these are impacted negatively by a lot of transportation projects. Transportation projects create timelines that delay not increase efficiency. Slower traffic creates frustration and tempers flare during transportation projects resulting in more accidents. As our cities grow we are going to need alternative ways to travel throughout the valley.

Hupp: Air service plays a large role in Idaho's tourism, in many cases the Boise Airport is the gateway to southern Idaho. Since 2014 the Boise Airport has seen new nonstop destinations added including; Houston, Chicago Midway, Reno, Dallas and Phoenix-Mesa. The addition of these large markets creates a convenient travel, an aspect that is appealing when deciding one's next vacation.

Rice: I would say that widening streets and creating better pedestrian flow in certain areas is a benefit, but overall I don't think the projects have had a direct impact on tourism in general.

What improvements would you make to transportation to positively affect tourism? Please be as specific as possible.

Edens: We would like to see more mobility for bikes. We get comments about how many bicyclists are using our sidewalks. We would like better connectivity from Boise State to downtown.

Hardin: Light Rail would help to alleviate the I-84 corridor. Light Rail is used across Europe and Canada taking the load off main infrastructure and allowing both locals and tourists quicker, safer travel. Special bus routes from City to City on weekends and evenings for special events.



Hupp: I think there needs to be a strong focus on public transportation, especially in downtown core areas. Look at places like Salt Lake City, where there is a rail network that connects the airport to the downtown core, then a series of rail and bus options to take from there. It's simple to you, and convenient for visitors. I think the Treasure Valley could benefit from something similar.

Rice: Circulator routes between perimeter hotel properties as well as those on the fringe of downtown. Parkcenter/Broadway; Red Lion and The Riverside; airport and Vista. In addition, continued improvements to access of the Greenbelt and from there to all areas of town is vital.

How will travel and tourism change in the Treasure Valley in the next few decades? Will it require different transportation infrastructure to meet demands?

Edens: Tourism is growing in our community and we see a need for a light rail to connect the airport to downtown especially and one also heading east and west. We also see a huge need for way-finding signs throughout our community.

Hardin: Our Valley is continuing to grow at an incredibly fast pace. As the Treasure Valley grows it will be necessary to have numerous ways of alternate travel for local people and tourists. Individual car travel cannot be the only way to navigate the valley.

Hupp: Passenger traffic has been steadily growing at the Boise Airport since 2009. This year, we are on pace, and expect to have a record year in terms of total travelers. As growth continues in the Treasure Valley the airport will need to expand to accommodate the increase in aircraft and passenger traffic. Expansions could include a new concourse, parking garages, and an additional runway.

Rice: Transportation from hotels to the Convention Center will continue to be a challenge since there is no "one convention hotel" with 400 plus rooms. As witnessed by the Epidemiologists in June with 1,600 people, they had to use 13 hotels and the District helped contribute to bus transportation to ensure smooth movement of participants. In order to garner more large conventions of 800+ transportation will be key.

What would you want Treasure Valley residents to know about your organization's role in travel and tourism?

Edens: The Boise CVB spends over \$1 million dollars annually marketing, promoting and selling the Boise metro area nationally and internationally, as a location for business travelers, meeting and convention attendees, sporting events and leisure/cultural travelers. The Boise CVB offers free visitor information at boise.org and our visitor information center, which will be located at 11th and Front Street, Boise by late Jan. 2018. Almost all of visitors to the Treasure Valley have a local connection in some way. If you are a local resident who is involved in a national or regional organization feel free to connect with the expert sales team at the Boise CVB to help bring your meeting/convention or sporting event to Boise.

Hardin: Our Chamber is very concerned about the safety and a timely manner in which local families and tourists can commute to and from cities throughout the Treasure Valley

Hupp: We are constantly told "how awesome it is to fly through our airport", it is something we take great pride in. Focusing on the passenger experience is very important for us. As the main gateway for tourism in southern Idaho, we want visitors to have an excellent first impression of our valley.



While we have exceptional air service for a market our size (second in seats per capita, second in average lowest airfare) we are focused on air service development. We meet with the airlines multiple times per year in order to recruit additional air service and to get an understanding of how the current service is performing. We're partners, if the airlines are successful in Boise then we'll continue to thrive as an airport.

Rice: The convention center, according to studies by Boise State University, currently provides more than \$23M in economic impact. The Centre has more than 200 people on payroll, making it a large employer for the community. The Centre provides the Valley with a place to hold major events, particularly fund raising activities that generate millions of dollars annually for a variety of organizations.

What else would you like us to know?

Edens: As tourism grows we will get more motor coach tours and larger groups needing busing to events so the need for bus parking and loading and unloading bus areas will increase dramatically. As far as air transportation goes, we would really like to have direct flights to Atlanta, DC and New York!

Hardin: We think you are doing a great job of investing in new ways to accomplish better ways for transportation in the Treasure Valley.

Hupp: The Boise Airport is a department of the City of Boise, where we are focused on creating the most livable city in the country. One way we can accomplish that goal is as we grow, we do it responsibly. We understand we have a large carbon footprint, and we highly focused on reducing the footprint with sustainable initiatives. This year, the airport installed 12 solar panels that will create hot water for half of the airport, reducing fossil fuel emissions. Next year, we'll be opening a remodeled fire station on the airport that will be LEED green building certified.

Rice: The expansion, completed July 2017, can now hold large conventions up to 1,600 or multiple smaller conventions and local events we were unable to do in the past. Out of town visitors contribute approximately \$277 per person per day in spending according to Boise State University and the more visitors we can bring to Boise, the better the overall economy.