

# High-Capacity Transit in the Treasure Valley

## *All Aboard! Survey Summary and Results Locally Favored High-Capacity Transit Option: Regional Rail Next Steps*

### **All Aboard! Survey Summary**

To inform an update to *Communities in Motion*, the regional long-range transportation plan for Ada and Canyon Counties, Idaho, the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho (COMPASS) hosted a series of three public surveys from 2019 – 2021.

The [first two surveys](#) (“A Lot Can Change in 30 Years” and “Where Do We Grow From Here?”) focused on future conditions and regional growth patterns. In both surveys, respondents demonstrated an interest in high-capacity transit for the region.



High-capacity transit, generally defined as transit that is faster, carries more people, and provides higher quality services and amenities than a traditional local bus, has been discussed as an option for Ada and Canyon Counties – the Treasure Valley – for many years. To explore potential alignments and modes, a *Treasure Valley High-Capacity Transit Study* was completed in 2009, and [updated](#) in July 2020.

The study focused on four high-capacity transit modes (commuter rail, light rail, bus rapid transit exclusive, and bus rapid transit mixed traffic) and four east-west alignments, all south of the Boise River and roughly parallel to Interstate 84.

Following completion of the study and the first two surveys, COMPASS developed the “All Aboard!” survey to gain a better understanding of public needs, preferences, and destinations regarding future potential high-capacity transit in the Treasure Valley. The survey used an “indirect” approach, focusing on needs and preferences, as opposed to asking about specific alignments or modes, to avoid the influence of pre-conceived notions about specific alignments or modes on results. It was developed with input from COMPASS’ Public Transportation Workgroup, Environmental Review Workgroup, Public Participation Workgroup, Regional Transportation Advisory Committee, and Board of Directors, and was open to the public from January 19 – February 27, 2021.

### **Survey Results**

Over 11,700 people participated in the online survey; an additional 18 comments were received via email. A high-level overview of common themes gleaned from the results is provided below. Full [quantitative results](#) and [open-ended comments](#) are provided on the COMPASS website.

It is important to note that while over 11,700 individuals participated in the survey, participation was voluntary, not randomly generated; thus, results cannot be assumed to be representative of the population as a whole.

Common themes of survey responses included:

- Most respondents use their personal vehicle for transportation today.
- There is a willingness among respondents to use high-capacity transit in the future if it met their needs.
- For high-capacity transit to meet needs, it must be convenient, with an emphasis on ample and well-placed stops to provide easy access, as well as frequent and reliable service.
- Respondents strongly favor investment in a quality system, with the sentiment that a “cheap” system would not serve the intended purpose nor attract ridership, and thus would fail.
- There is a desire to have a flexible system to accommodate special events and adapt to long-term changes in needs.
- Respondents would primarily want to use high-capacity transit for work, school, or a night out; the airport was frequently listed as a specific destination.
- Perceived benefits of high-capacity transit include increased mobility and accessibility for people who cannot or do not drive, positive environmental impacts, and the option to not drive, if desired – from avoiding drinking and driving, to ease of attending big events, to saving time, money, and stress.
  - *The survey did not specifically ask about benefits of high-capacity transit; however, many people noted perceived benefits in their open-ended comments.*

### **Locally Favored High-Capacity Transit Option: Regional Rail**

COMPASS staff used the survey results to identify trends, needs, and common destinations, then compared those to potential transit modes and alignments as identified in the *Treasure Valley High Capacity Transit Study* to narrow options to best serve regional needs and preferences. Based on that analysis, regional rail on the Boise Cutoff alignment was identified as the “locally favored” option, and was approved as such by the COMPASS Board of Directors in June 2021.

Regional rail is a hybrid between commuter rail and light rail. Like commuter rail, regional rail uses the same heavy track *infrastructure* used by freight, but regional rail *service* is more like that of light rail, with more stations than a typical commuter rail system.

### **Next Steps**

Regional rail is included in the *Communities in Motion 2050* Vision, which outlines anticipated regional growth patterns and the transportation system needed to accommodate that growth.

The vision sets the stage for *Communities in Motion 2050*, the regional long-range transportation plan for Ada and Canyon Counties. *Communities in Motion 2050* is scheduled for adoption by the COMPASS Board of Directors in December 2022.

### **Links**

- *Treasure Valley High Capacity Transit Study 2020 Update*
  - [www.compassidaho.org/documents/planning/studies/Treasure\\_Valley\\_High\\_Capacity\\_Transit\\_Study\\_2020\\_Update\\_Final0907.pdf](http://www.compassidaho.org/documents/planning/studies/Treasure_Valley_High_Capacity_Transit_Study_2020_Update_Final0907.pdf)
- Full “All Aboard!” Quantitative Results
  - [www.compassidaho.org/documents/prodserv/CIM2050/Input/AllAboardResults.pdf](http://www.compassidaho.org/documents/prodserv/CIM2050/Input/AllAboardResults.pdf)
- Full “All Aboard!” Open-Ended Comments:
  - [www.compassidaho.org/documents/prodserv/CIM2050/Input/All\\_Aboard\\_OpenEndedComments.pdf](http://www.compassidaho.org/documents/prodserv/CIM2050/Input/All_Aboard_OpenEndedComments.pdf)
- *Communities in Motion 2050* Public Participation Opportunities, including results of all three public surveys
  - [www.compassidaho.org/prodserv/cim2050.htm#outreach](http://www.compassidaho.org/prodserv/cim2050.htm#outreach)