Concept of Operations

A Yellowstone-Teton Regional Transportation System





Acknowledgments

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Executive Summary

This Concept of Operations Plan presents a three-state transportation system that could serve the Yellowstone-Teton region. The unique ideas proposed by this plan came from a year-long series of public roundtable discussions that were held throughout the region and engaged over 100 stakeholders from businesses, agencies and the public. In addition to the roundtables conducted in 2008 the plan builds upon an ongoing regional dialogue that has been underway since 1999.

The foundations of this Plan are five elements that will enable the communities of the region to cooperate in an unprecedented fashion. They are:

- 1. Creation of a transportation cooperative, a proven business model that will maximize use and integration of transportation resources
- 2. A process for closing service gaps and matching modal interfaces
- 3. Visibility and accessibility through a diversity of information sources
- 4. Embracing the concept of complete streets and pathways for transportation corridors
- 5. An ongoing process for funding transportation infrastructure

Aspects of these foundational elements are currently being addressed by state transportation departments, local communities, and/or private entities. For example, the Idaho Transportation Department's Division of Public Transportation has developed a framework called "Idaho's Mobility and Access Pathway" (IMAP). IMAP's approach to public transportation reflects the emergence of a new paradigm and the implementation of a system based on moving people instead of the mode of transportation. IMAP contributes to both the voluntary cooperative model and a more complete information system.

The START transit system in Jackson, Wyoming, is one community-based system that has already tackled complex jurisdictional boundary issues and is now serving citizens of Teton County, Idaho. Similar innovation can be seen in Montana with the Streamline and Skyline transit systems serving Bozeman and Big Sky, and the Pocatello Regional Transit system serving portions of northern Utah. These communities and others have also developed pathway systems to encourage non-motorized travel. Some are carrying significant volumes of people and are designed to work in concert with transit and the needs of employers and residents.

Private carriers also have expanded their business bases with interstate routes to serve regional airports such as Salt Lake City, Jackson, Billings, Bozeman, Pocatello, and Idaho Falls. There is also a large contingent of smaller private and not-for-profit service providers who focus mainly on social services, but who represent a major portion of passenger miles and government expenditures.

The time is right for these and many other grassroots services to reach their full potential and provide an integrated regional system that meets the needs of residents and the millions of tourists who visit the region from all over the world. With appreciation to the many individuals throughout the region who donated their time and expertise, this plan describes how such a system should be designed.

1 Purpose of Document

This document describes the framework and stakeholder processes that have produced a recommended concept for a regional transportation system. As embodied in the report's title this description is a "concept of operations" that outlines the key operational details and explains how such a system would be an improvement over the status quo as well as a proposed path forward.

This is accomplished by first introducing in Section 4 the history of the region's transportation infrastructure and the current state of the system. Section 5 then examines why change is needed and how it might be accomplished. Section 6 provides an analysis of the alternatives considered including the "no action" or status quo alternative. Section 7 then describes the five key elements that are proposed as the basis for the recommended system followed by a brief conclusion that recognizes some of the strategies that will be required for successful implementation.

2 Scope of the System

The system is the network of transportation services that moves people and commodities throughout the Yellowstone-Teton region. This tri-state region is bound together by an economy based on two national parks, seven national forests, rich agricultural lands, and unparalleled recreational opportunities. But mobility in this unique landscape can be a challenge.

In December 2005 civic, business and government leaders from Idaho, Montana and Wyoming came together at Grand Targhee Resort to analyze these issues and discuss the prospects for a regional transportation system. Since that time volunteers from all three states have been working to advance the concept. As a result, in January 2008, the Idaho Transportation Commission granted \$30,000 to the Yellowstone Business Partnership to lead development of a "Concept of Operations" plan to connect major retail centers with destination resorts, gateway communities and neighboring national parks. In addition, the Partnership's Rural Business Opportunity Grant from USDA Rural Development has made it possible to involve all those who want a say in improving mobility across the tri-state region.

To gain the widest possible input a series of four "regional roundtables" were held in West Yellowstone, Montana; Mammoth, Wyoming; Rexburg, Idaho; and Bozeman, Montana. Participants included public and private transportation providers, state DOT officials, Native Americans, business owners, mayors, Park managers, and human services providers. Through these roundtables and related meetings (such as the 2008 YBP annual conference and the Seasonality Summit held in Cody, Wyoming) a wealth of information was gathered on how people use the existing system and what they see as unmet needs. Evidence on how these stakeholders drove the process and influenced the consultants' thinking can be found in Section 5 of this report, "The Rationale for Change". Highlights from each roundtable meeting can also be accessed through the YBP website, the first hyperlink in the next section, "Reference Documents".

With volatile oil markets, the need to reduce carbon emissions, and increased mobility demands there is no better time to examine the region's transportation issues. Cost-effective solutions can be crafted to respond to community needs and power a weakened economy while maintaining the health of this extraordinary ecosystem. Towns like Jackson, Bozeman and Big Sky are moving forward thanks to creative partnerships that make pooling resources a mutually beneficial strategy. Additional lessons can be learned from larger cities like Billings and Pocatello that have been running fixed-route bus systems for years. Imagine the possibilities if the two national parks and seven national forests, three states, 25 counties, multiple cities and regional businesses all come together to enhance the mobility of their citizens, workers and visitors!

3 Referenced Documents

The following documents contain relevant information used in this study. If hyperlinks to the documents were available they also listed. The project team used versions that were current at the time this study was drafted; note that more recent versions may be available from the original source.

Yellowstone Business Partnership project web page <u>http://www.yellowstonebusiness.org/transportation/</u>

"A Vision for 2050", Interim Report of APTA's TransitVision 2050 Task Force http://www.apta.com/about/committees/framework_08.cfm

California Coordinated Plan Resources Center Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plans <u>http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/MassTrans/Docs-Pdfs/CoordinatedPlng/MODOC.pdf</u>

"Idaho's Mobility and Access Pathway" (IMAP) http://itd.idaho.gov/publictransportation/statewide_mobility_plan.htm

"Transit Development Plan 2008 Update", Southern Teton Area Rapid Transit, Town of Jackson Wyoming <u>WY START TDP 2008.doc</u> 324k

4 Background

4.1 History

Human travel in the greater Yellowstone-Teton region extends back at least 10,000 years and possibly earlier. For certain, those first hearty visitors were all pedestrians, traveling long distances on foot and establishing very functional trail systems. Native Americans moved in and through the entire region for many centuries simply and successfully by walking.

The introduction of the horse approximately 300 years ago in the Yellowstone-Teton region was the next significant transportation change. Horses could carry much heavier loads than people and pack dogs, and allowed native communities to grow and thrive in the greater Yellowstone area. The horses followed the existing human trails at first, and from these wagon roads grew as settlers and traders would start to expand transportation options.



Figure 1 - Gallatin Valley Transportation History

The advent of the Railroad Age from the mid1800's into the early 1900's was a dramatic change in the West that allowed communities in the Yellowstone-Teton region to establish and prosper. Rail provided direct connections to eastern markets, and helped bring early settlers to the west. The Railroads also opened the opportunity to start developing tourism-related businesses. The focal point of early tourism promotion was Yellowstone National Park, which was founded in 1872 but stayed remote until the advent of rail access. At one time, Yellowstone boasted of multiple rail access towns, including Livingston, Montana, that served as the main access to the north entry of Yellowstone. Other "gateways" included Bozeman, West Yellowstone, Ashton, Victor, Cody, as well as Riverton and Rock Springs with connecting stagecoach service. In the 1930's, Yellowstone National Park had over 300 buses and touring coaches, boasting the second largest such fleet in the United States.

The first automobile entered Yellowstone on July 31, 1915. It was a Ford Model T, and horsedrawn vehicles were prohibited by 1917. The Yellowstone Park Transportation Company (Y.P.T. Co.) was designated as the sole park transportation concessionaire, and it was required to buy 116 touring cars and motor buses for use in the 1917 summer season. These vehicles, like the stagecoaches, were also painted yellow, and were manufactured by the White Motor Company of Cleveland, Ohio.

The automobile quickly became the dominant means of travel to Yellowstone. Slowly the rail access was reduced and the importance of rail diminished until no rail access remained. The first autos followed the early stagecoach routes, and these were upgraded with paved roads over the decades.

The automobile was convenient, fast, and at first seemed to be the perfect solution needed for park access and tourism. But as traffic volumes began to rise in the 1960's and have continued to

increase since, the negative aspects of over-reliance on one mode of park access began to show. When choices became limited to driving automobiles and RVs to enjoy the park, visitors without access to a motor vehicle had only an expensive guided tour option to see parts of the park. Likewise, visitors wishing to enjoy a bicycle ride in the park were increasingly concerned with their personal safety as traffic volumes and speeds increased dramatically over the second half of the 20th century.



Average Daily Traffic Over Teton Pass 1965 - 2008

Figure 2 – Increasing Traffic Volumes

4.2 Current Situation

The meaning of transportation for people who live in the predominantly rural Yellowstone-Teton region varies widely. Yet for everyone transportation is a crucial service. The ability to access personal, public, pedestrian, or bike transportation is fundamental to connect with employment opportunities, health and medical services, educational services, and the community at large.

The region's basic federal and state arterial highway, bridge and road system is well established and essentially fully constructed. The three states and multiple federal agencies maintain various Transportation Improvement Programs and carry out construction projects and planning, usually in separate programs with limited coordination between agencies. The local road systems are also largely constructed. The local agencies at town, city and county level also maintain the current local road systems. There are incremental new road additions as population has expanded in the region.

Personal cars are the prominent mode of transportation at this time and will remain a significant mode share in the foreseeable future. Presently, quality public transportation, bicycle lanes, pathways and sidewalks are missing or incomplete around the region, restricting travel options and affecting the livability of a community and its ability to encourage a healthy lifestyle.

The region has some bus service presently, which includes charter services, intercity services, general public transportation (also known as community transportation), and human service transportation. Some vanpools, like carpools, are also currently operating that allow groups of people to share a ride.

One of the issues facing transportation services in this three-state region is that there are many political boundaries to cross. While transportation needs rarely align with political boundaries (county, state boundaries, etc.), operators must adhere to transportation laws that can vary significantly between states and federal lands (such as national parks and forests). Further, the state and federal agencies are likely to have different transportation goals, which have led to disjointed planning and conflicting funding priorities.

The appropriate mix of modes for a community depends on the community characteristics, funding, and the groups of people who will use the service. The remainder of this section provides information on the various modes of transportation available in this region, including travel by air, rail, non-motorized modes, and private and public transportation.

4.2.1 Air Travel

Within the 25 counties that YBP identifies as the Yellowstone-Teton region, there is scheduled air service to eight airports: Idaho Falls and Pocatello (Idaho); Billings, Bozeman and West Yellowstone (Montana) and Cody, Riverton and Jackson (Wyoming). Salt Lake City, Utah is not within the defined region, but there is scheduled surface transportation to the airport from

within the region by private transportation operators. Salt Lake City is the largest and busiest airport, followed by Billings Logan International Airport, with Bozeman and Jackson close behind. The number of people using these airports is shown in the following table.

2006 Passenger Boardings
10,289,129
403,645
318,115
274,031
152,146
34,458
15,469
14,184
4,031

Travel to any of these airports is based on the schedule of the particular airlines that service the airport, and the level of service is often seasonal, with the number of flights varying depending upon the time of year. The best example is Jackson Hole where the air service is subsidized and thus highly seasonal with summer and winter peaking. Further, the West Yellowstone Airport currently has airline service only during the summer (June-September), although the airport and community is evaluating year-round service.

While there are various airports and airlines that provide access to the region, once a visitor arrives at one of the airports, they typically need to transfer to a surface mode of transportation to complete their trip. This Concept of Operations Plan focuses on the surface impacts of air travel in the greater Yellowstone-Teton region.

4.2.2 Rail Travel

While rail travel was once one of the primary modes of surface transportation to access the region, it has dwindled in its role as a mode of travel to get to the Yellowstone-Teton. In fact, Amtrak's service to the region only gets as close as Salt Lake City, Utah in the south, and Havre/Shelby, Montana in the north. The only passenger rail service that actually is within the region is a private tour service offered by GrandLuxe Rail Journeys, which provides rail service to Livingston, Montana (the original gateway community for Yellowstone National Park), and Idaho Falls, Idaho. Even though the GrandLuxe Rail Journeys provide rail travel to the region, visitors must still transfer to a chartered motor coach (bus) to complete their trip.

4.2.3 Private Transportation Providers

One option for travelers arriving by air or rail is to transfer to a chartered motor coach, or other private transportation options. Private transportation options include chartered bus services, scheduled services such as Greyhound or Salt Lake Express, or more individualized services such as small tour or taxi operators.

Chartered buses and tour and taxi operators provide the most flexibility for travel options, but are often the most costly option. Scheduled services typically have a lower cost, but the scheduled service may be limited. For instance, Greyhound and Salt Lake Express average only two to three trips per day to many of the communities within the region. Some of these trips can be at odd times of the day, such as 4:30 a.m.

While there are definite limitations to the existing private transportation options in the region, they provide a vital link between the other modes in the area and are an important part of the overall transportation system in the greater Yellowstone-Teton region.

4.2.4 Public Transportation

Public transportation services, sometimes referred to as "mass transit" or "transit", are public systems that do not necessarily cater to any one group, but attempt to serve the general public, senior citizens, persons with disabilities, and visitors/tourists. While these services enhance mobility within their immediate jurisdictions, these systems are mostly focused on "local travel", and do not make interstate trips, although this is changing in certain areas.

Transit systems in the three-state region are operated by county and city governments, urban transportation districts, private providers, and non-profit organizations. Each state's Department of Transportation oversees these local programs, administers federal transit programs, and operates state transportation systems such as the highway system. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) provide federal funding and oversight.

Public transportation services in the region are available, but limited. They include in-town fixed routes (e.g. Streamline in Bozeman, MET Transit in Billings), door-to-door service (e.g., Angel Line in Livingston), and publicly provided intercity services (e.g. Skyline between Bozeman and Big Sky, and Pocatello Regional Transit serving much of SE Idaho). Probably the most advanced system is the Southern Teton Area Rapid Transit or START which provides over 900,000 rides per year. In contrast Targhee Regional Public Transportation Authority (TRPTA), is headquartered in Idaho Falls and heavily dependent on Medicaid support to run it's limited deviated fixed route system.

Rural transit agencies and transportation providers face many challenges in this region: extensive travel distances, limited resources, low population densities, and lack of coordination among multiple providers. Similar to public and social service transportation in urban and metropolitan areas, rural transportation serves local residents and visitors, with the majority being seniors, persons with disabilities, and persons with low incomes. While transportation in "frontier" rural areas is limited, operators provide essential mobility and access to basic living activities, such as health care, social services, shopping, and even recreation. Trips can be local, interregional, intercity, and interstate to regional centers hours away, and often require using two or more transportation providers.

While public transportation systems have increased in number and size over the last two years, it is unlikely that public transportation will become a single solution to transportation issues in the region. The current trends suggest that public transportation services will be key components in the overall future transportation system within the region.

4.2.5 Pathways and Complete Streets

For the purposes of this analysis pathways and complete streets are considered together as part of the concept of a transportation corridor for people rather than just a highway, city street, or pathway. Examining the current inventory of transportation corridors in this context helps frame the discussion necessary to building a more integrated regional system.

Complete Streets are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users. Pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and bus riders of all ages and abilities are able to safely move along and across a complete street. There is currently a "Complete the Streets" movement active in America, a broad based coalition that includes members such as AARP, the Institute of Transportation Engineers, the American Planning Association, the American Public Transportation Association, and Smart Growth America. The Complete Streets goal is to change the way streets and highways are designed and built throughout the country so that transportation agencies must ensure that all road projects result in a complete street appropriate to local context and needs.

In general, the approach of building complete streets is presently uncommon in the three states of Idaho, Montana and Wyoming in the Greater Yellowstone region. Projects routinely improve conditions for motor vehicle traffic first and foremost, and consider transit, pedestrian and bicycle accommodation as secondary or not at all. A more integrated approach is implied by Complete Streets. Regional communities regularly face challenges when seeking design solutions for road construction projects on high-volume State and Federal highways that are also town main streets.

For the past 50 years or more, the primary focus of most transportation systems in the Greater Yellowstone region has been focused on accommodating the private motor vehicle. It was during this half century that rail access for National Park visits was lost, and strip development into gateway communities has appeared.

Wider and faster roads with access to abundant parking have been hallmarks of this approach to mobility. New town streets often have been constructed lacking accessible sidewalks, without space reserved for transit stops, and major land developments have failed to set aside pathway and greenway corridors. At the same time, regional land use decisions have favored segregation of civic and commercial uses from residential uses, and approved hundreds of low-density neighborhoods scattered miles from the daily needs of their residents.

On the positive side, the region does have numerous scenic byways developed over the years. The Beartooth Scenic Byway in Montana and Wyoming is the region's only All American Road, the most prestigious classification of scenic byway. Also in Wyoming is the state-designated Chief Joseph Scenic Byway west of Cody, and Wyoming Centennial Scenic Byway connecting Pinedale, Jackson, and Dubois. In eastern Idaho, state byways include the Teton Scenic Byway, Mesa Falls Scenic Byway, and there is interest in adding a new byway over Teton Pass between Idaho and Wyoming to the list in the future.

In addition, virtually every road in Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks are equivalent to scenic byways, even if not officially recognized. All these scenic byways and park roads have been recognized for one or more of the scenic qualities - archeological, cultural, historic, natural, and recreational - and have been designated to celebrate the incredible beauty and history of the area.

Pathways have been of the most promising new additions to the Greater Yellowstone transportation and recreation systems in the past 15 years. Spurred on by the landmark 1991 ISTEA transportation law, regional communities for the first time had access to significant federal funding sources for bicycle and pedestrian facilities like Pathways.

With access to federal funding and an active population that quickly embraced the first pathways built in the mid-1990s, there has been strong interest and rapid increase in non-motorized Pathways region-wide. Several communities around the Greater Yellowstone have embarked on ambitious Pathway programs, including Bozeman, Jackson Hole, Teton Valley, and Idaho Falls. Additional communities have built new pathways where opportunities existed, such as sections of the old railroad to Yellowstone south of Livingston, Montana, that was converted to a pathway, and the old rail line between Tetonia and Ashton, Idaho, that is slowly being improved.

These new non-motorized Pathways are being used for both transportation and recreation, and are starting to carry measurable volumes of traffic. The Jackson Hole System may be the most extensive in the Yellowstone-Teton region, and it may offer a window into the opportunity for regional pathways in the future. The System has over 40 miles of paved pathways, an adopted Pathways Master Plan to guide future additions, and a model Forest Service/community partnership to manage hundreds of miles of close-to-home backcountry trails. The system is sufficiently mature to serve transportation needs for locals and increasingly is an attraction for tourism businesses and visitors. Over 100 miles of pathways are planned, including a 41-mile system of pathways in Grand Teton National Park. The busiest pathway in Jackson connects Teton Village the Aspens and Wilson, and sees over 1,500 users per day in the summer season.

4.2.6 Summary

In addition to individual vehicle (automobile) travel in the region, the other modes available include air, rail, private and public transportation, and non-motorized options. While these various options/modes do exist, they are substantially incomplete, not well integrated across the region, and are subject to different regulations, depending on the states and/or federal lands in which they operate. The following section provides further information on the drawbacks and limitations of the existing transportation modes within the greater Yellowstone-Teton region.

4.3 Drawbacks and Limitations

The drawbacks and limitations of the existing transportation options in the greater Yellowstone-Teton region will be analyzed based on the gaps in the services, as well as the unmet needs of individuals who travel within the region. For the rail and private and public transportation modes, one overarching issue is the lack of information about these options.

For the rail and private and public transportation modes, there are two overarching issues: the lack of information about these options and regulatory challenges. Travelers cannot use a transportation service if they are unaware of its existence. While "locals" will often know of a public transportation system in the area, they may be less likely to know about private options unless those services are heavily advertised. In addition, a visitor/tourist to the area may be unaware of either public or private transportation options. The state departments of transportation and tourism departments may provide some information on transportation options in the region, but many times that information is not easily accessed on the Internet or by other means. This lack of information is both a drawback to the various modes and a limitation on how many people may use the system.

In addition to a lack of information about the various modes of transportation, the other overarching issue is the variation in regulations among the three states. A recent example of this was the issue of insurance differences between Idaho and Wyoming.

The START public transportation system in Jackson, Wyoming, wanted to establish a route to Victor and Driggs, Idaho, so that it could provide service to employees who live in those communities, but work in Jackson, Wyoming. Due to a difference in regulations concerning insurance coverage, START had to delay the beginning of service and finally resolved the issue by purchasing additional insurance, which annually costs approximately \$10,000.

While air and rail modes have less state regulation, private and public transportation services are much more heavily influenced by individual state regulations. Further, access to and through the Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks is more regulated for private and public transportation providers. The two National Parks do not currently provide public transit service.

There are also major gaps in the regional Pathways and Complete Streets systems. Major gaps are in planning and construction of needed facilities and services, missing information and maps on existing systems, and coordination between various agencies remains incomplete.

The remainder of this section provides more detailed information about the gaps in service for the four modes noted, as well as the unmet needs of travelers.

4.3.1 Gaps in Service

While most individuals expect to transfer from air or rail service to another mode of travel, they also expect a "one-seat ride" on private or public transportation services. However, most public transportation systems, and some private systems require riders to make transfers. In addition to

the need to transfer, some private and public transportation systems do not cover the entire route an individual may want to travel.

A "gap in service" is basically a lack of transportation options/services between a particular origin and destination. For example, if a traveler flies into the Gallatin Field Airport near Bozeman and wants to utilize public transportation to get to West Yellowstone, they cannot make that trip. The first issue is that no public transportation operator currently provides service to the airport. An individual would need to use another mode (or hitch hike) to access a bus stop for either of the public transportation providers in the area – Streamline in Bozeman and Skyline in Big Sky.

While a traveler could board a Skyline bus in the Bozeman area, that service only goes as far as Big Sky (still 40 miles from West Yellowstone). While there is a public transportation provider that operates between West Yellowstone and Bozeman (GALAVAN West), that service only operates that route three times per week, and requires an advanced reservation (known as a demand response system). This system is often booked full by local riders, which means that even if a visitor/tourist was able to find information about this service, they may not be able to get a ride.

Gaps in service in the greater Yellowstone-Teton not only occur because of a physical separation between services, but also because of a long time delay between services offered by transportation providers. Scheduled private and public transportation providers arrange their timetables on factors such as when people need to arrive at work, when airlines may be arriving at the airport, etc. These uncoordinated schedules often make it difficult to transfer to the next leg of a journey. Travelers frequently must wait for long periods before continuing their trip.

In addition, many public and private transportation systems do not run a highly frequent schedule, so that if an individual misses a particular bus (vehicle), they may have to wait several hours, even up to twelve hours or until the next day, to ride on a particular route. For example, Greyhound has only three vehicles that come through the Bozeman, Montana, terminal on a daily basis. Salt Lake Express has ten daily departures from Idaho Falls, Idaho, to the Salt Lake City airport, but it has only one departure from West Yellowstone, Montana, to the Salt Lake City airport.

These gaps in service, whether due to physical or temporal gaps, mean that individuals have a harder time using alternative modes of transportation. The following subsection highlights some of the unmet needs of travelers in the region.

4.3.2 Unmet Needs

A gap or a lack of services means that travelers cannot use modes such as private or public transportation services, and must either rely on an automobile or not make the trip. These unmet needs affect both locals as well as tourists/visitors.

The unmet needs of "locals", or those who live within the greater Yellowstone-Teton region, includes a lack of public transportation service among some of the major corridors within the region, such as:

<u>Idaho</u>

- US 30 & I-15 from Montpelier to Pocatello
- US 91 & I-15 from Preston to Pocatello

Montana

- US 89 from Livingston to Gardiner, Montana;
- I-90 from Livingston to Bozeman, Montana;
- US 287 from West Yellowstone to Ennis, Montana;
- I-90/US 212 from Billings to Red Lodge, Montana;
- US 212 from Red Lodge to Yellowstone National Park

Wyoming

- US 26 & 287 from Lander and Riverton to Jackson;
- Service from Cody to Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks;
- US 14 & I-90 from Cody to Sheridan

While private providers may be contracted for these trips, they are often an expensive option. Further, individuals may not have the information necessary to know what services are available.

Tied into the unmet needs for transportation services is the need for a comprehensive source of information for all of the available transportation services in the region. This source of information should be able to show all the public and private transportation options, which would allow individuals to better plan their travel. They could review schedules, fares, etc., and then determine how to best make their trip.

4.3.3 Summary

There are clearly drawbacks and limitations to the existing transportation system within the region. These drawbacks and limitations are caused by gaps in service and highlight the unmet needs of travelers within the region.

Some of the service limitations are caused by the many jurisdictional boundaries within the region, primarily the state and National Park boundaries. When crossing these boundaries, private and public transportation providers can be subject to differing rules, regulations and requirements. Also, many public transportation providers are limited on the amount of service they can provide due to a lack of adequate funding to meet all the needs of individuals within the region.

There are also travel limitations due to a general lack of complete streets in regional communities, along with incomplete or missing pathways. These gaps reflect a lack of facilities for safe bicycle and pedestrian access, gaps in data collection and planning, and a lack of information on existing facilities for non-motorized modes.

Finally, one drawback (and limitation) on using the existing services in the region is a lack of a centralized source of information about the transportation options available. Travelers cannot use a particular transportation service if they are not aware of its existence.

While this section focused on the drawbacks and limitations of the existing transportation services within the region, the following section provides a foundation for the proposed development of solutions to these issues.

5 The Rationale for Change

The greater Yellowstone-Teton region is challenged by long commute distances, large differences in housing prices based on location, concentrated availability of medical and other facilities, and long distances between airports and tourist attractions. All these factors make it difficult to achieve an efficient and safe transportation system beyond the default mode of private vehicles.

There is no better way to understand the reasons for change than listening to the people who live and visit here. For this project the regional roundtables provided an open forum for learning what transportation services were or weren't working well.

Section 5 of this document explains the human needs that are being poorly met with the current system, followed by a brief discussion of what approach could be taken to improve mobility, safety and efficiency..

5.1 Regional Transportation Roundtables - What We Heard

The YBP project team organized a series of four transportation roundtables that met from April through November 2008. Each roundtable location was chosen to ensure all corners of the region could easily access at least one of the meetings. In between the roundtables the dialogue continued. For example, the annual YBP meeting theme was focused specifically on transportation and for three days attendees heard from international and national experts and provided input on their own perception of local transportation needs. To "walk the talk" approximately one-third of the attendees used transit to arrive at Jackson Lake Lodge, and they reported the ride as a very enjoyable experience.

The roundtables provided a wealth of information.. Transportation providers face problems such as inadequate facilities for cold weather operation, overdependence on Medicaid as baseline funding, and few mechanisms for coordinating routes with other providers. Users frequently

commented that there were no services available to a desired destination, and where there was service they had difficulty finding details on routes and times. Businesses were curtailing operations in some cases because they couldn't find enough local employees. And there was always the issue of funding – never enough to add equipment or start desired new routes.

The team heard from Tribes who have traveled the Yellowstone-Teton for millennia. Their historic trails formed the blueprint for today's highways and trails. Their mobility and use of natural resources shaped a culture that remains part of the Yellowstone-Teton today. Access to historic hunting and fishing grounds and recognition of the role Native Americans played in the development of the region remain an important interest to the Tribes. Tribal communities have similar needs for Pathways and Complete Streets, including the public health benefits of active transportation modes.

The roundtables yielded many promising stories such as successful grassroots efforts to build a local transit system; the passing of a local option tax dedicated to pathways; and a growing understanding that there are alternatives that would be more enjoyable and less costly than a private vehicle.

To capture this extremely valuable roundtable input, the project team expressed what was heard as a set of "human needs" that should form the basis for any discussion of new services. These are described in the next section.

5.2 The Human Needs

There are few transportation options beyond private vehicles for travel in the Yellowstone-Teton community. This limitation wastes energy, degrades the environment, and often causes both residents and visitors to experience high transportation costs and hazardous driving conditions. It restricts access to world-class recreation and tourism facilities for both workers and visitors, and it imposes an undue burden on permanent residents who need access to regional medical and commercial centers.

A major human need in Greater Yellowstone has become the daily commute to work. Lowercost workforce housing has been built in bedroom communities far from employment centers due to home price escalation in high-amenity towns. Historically, people have not had to consider high commuting costs when purchasing a house, but as transportation costs increase due to higher gasoline prices, the distant bedroom communities appear less desirable from a cost perspective.

While the increased housing demand from commuters has been a boost to the bedroom communities, it also has a cost. Community diversity and character suffer when teachers, firemen, hospital workers, and other essential members of the community must drive to a distant home every night. Commuting workers take on a long, dangerous, and expensive commute that reduces their overall quality of life.

If jobs and economic activity are concentrated in communities without regard for transportation and housing needs, the whole region is affected. Transportation should not be used to solve what is basically a workforce housing issue, but it is, nonetheless, a key part of any long-term solution. Even the best examples of successful workforce housing programs only fill about 60% of the housing demand. While a higher percentage would be even better, rational transportation options must be available help address what remains. There is a need for safer more efficient workforce transportation balanced with workforce housing.

Approximately 40% of commuter trips are less than two miles and 25% are less than one mile. These are distances where bicycling and walking are viable alternative modes to work or for local errands, yet most trips are still taken by car. To increase the mode share for bicycle and pedestrian modes, communities need to require safe routes using complete streets or pathways. To achieve this goal, communities need to incorporate Complete Streets into the local planning processes and make major infrastructure investments in bicycle and pedestrian facilities. There is also a need for better information and social marketing to better support the non-motorized modes.

The region must also deal with the seasonality of transportation demand due to the role of tourism in the regional economy. A sizable baseline demand from workforce travel and local recreational travel could provide a year-round foundation for a flexible system such as in Jackson. There is a need to explore ways to shift resources in response to fluctuating demand.

Presently, tourist transportation demands are predominantly satisfied by rental cars with a small portion accommodated by charter services. One major concern with this model is that it results in more vehicles on the roads with drivers unfamiliar with the area and difficult travel conditions. Traveler services can be better integrated into the region, but rules such as those that discourage public transit service to local airports must be changed.

Native Americans participating in the roundtables expressed interest in protection of treaty rights, help with economic development, and seeing that the history and promotion of the region (such as through scenic byways) include the valuable contributions made by native people. There is a need for the transportation system to address each of these needs and to ensure that Tribal stakeholders continue to be engaged.

In both Idaho and Wyoming, transportation providers sponsored by public agencies get affordable insurance through the state insurance pool. The Idaho County Risk Management Program (ICRMP) and its Wyoming equivalent provide cost-effective protection through effective risk management. The program does not exist in Montana. Unfortunately, one risk management tactic is to not cover buses if they go into neighboring states because of concerns with differences in court liability judgments and decisions. Thus providers must either get significantly more expensive open market insurance or remain within the state. This is a major barrier to cross-state public transportation in the Yellowstone-Teton region. There is a need for reciprocal agreements between the states or some equivalent mechanism to remove this jurisdictional obstacle. Demographics show that the fastest growing human need in Greater Yellowstone is an aging population. Even if one maintains their driving privileges into old age, the weather, narrow mountain roads, and rural highways will eventually take their toll and limit mobility. While private providers have stepped in to service this market, it has proven to be an expensive and likely unsustainable drain on social service resources. Some of the public systems are also providing rides to senior citizens, but few options are available for intercity travel to medical centers. There is a need to improve senior's access to goods and services throughout the region.

If all these needs are to be adequately addressed we need to carefully consider what kind of approach is needed and if there is to be change, what kind of change would be best. These two topics are the next to be considered.

5.3 Approach to Improving System

Reaching the full potential of a multimodal, integrated, regional system will take a three-state, coordinated effort inclusive of public and private interests. The reason is that to be fully functional, the individual modes of private vehicles, transit, and non-motorized conveyances must not only be connected to each other, but must also be integrated into the social and structural infrastructure of the cities and businesses that form the three-state regional economy.

A second key element of the approach is to develop infrastructure that creates new opportunities to use alternative transportation modes to get to work, recreate, or shop. <u>This will require</u> pathways, park and ride facilities, highway networks, and transit services that function as a <u>single system</u>. To pay for these changes, government leaders will need to revisit how the entire transportation system is funded and seek feasible ways to fund regional needs.

The third key element is an information system that overlays all the transportation services. People cannot take advantage of a more desirable service unless they are aware of it and are convinced it has merit.

Skeptics may dismiss such a high level of integration in a rural area as impossible to implement due to the dispersed population centers. This skepticism, however, does not take into account the leveraging possible from the world-class natural amenities of the Yellowstone-Teton region, the economic engine supported by this unique landscape, and the technological base that can produce efficiencies through a detailed knowledge of who needs to travel and how they want to do it.

Further economies of scale are possible through coordination of employer-employee interests where employers need reliable cost-effective staffing and employees want affordable, high-amenity socially-desirable lifestyles. Such economies have already been partially demonstrated in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and Big Sky, Montana, where transit systems and pathways have pushed through traditional barriers to begin to meet these needs.

Both Teton County, Wyoming, and Gallatin County, Montana, have built vibrant community transit systems that serve both tourists and residents. Ridership on both systems has increased each year with the Jackson's START system carrying over 900,000 riders in 2008 and Bozeman's Streamline system carrying over 300,000 riders in 2007 (its first full year of operations). There are also numerous specialized transit services that serve single employers or single target markets such as weekly or daily ski buses where riders enjoy a social, party-like experience in addition to a ride.

Another key and developing element of a regional system are the community pathways that are part of nearly every gateway community of the greater Yellowstone-Teton region. These include the Idaho Falls' Greenbelt and Henry's Fork Greenway; the pathways of Harriman Park, Jackson Hole, and Bozeman; and thousands of miles of Forest Service and rails-to-trails segments that could be connected as a continuous circuit that surrounds the region. These pathways are community recreation and tourism industry amenities, but perhaps more importantly, a real transportation alternative. To reach their full potential, pathways need to be physically connected and their access points supported by transit with secure parking for private vehicles.

An integrated system is not just a bus system where traditional wisdom would dictate high population densities and short headways. It is a fundamentally different system where urban efficiencies are augmented by targeted services made viable through the linkage and marketing of airline service, worker commutes, promotion of world-class pathways, and social services for residents.

To make this happen, there must be support for the continued development of local services that will ultimately be linked as regional system. To facilitate this development the following principles should be used in any approach to improving the system:

- With or without a regional transportation system, highway trust fund revenues will likely continue to be oversubscribed, along with predictable increases in the cost of oil. A new economic model is required that can embrace the efficiencies of a regional, multi-modal system while supporting the long term maintenance of the region's highway infrastructure and private vehicle access.
- Local, State, and Federal transportation agencies should rethink highway building and shift to a "Complete Streets" approach to road building.
- Every community should plan, develop, and maintain a local pathway system that serves both recreational needs as well as transportation needs, such as access to the workplace.
- The National Parks are the cornerstone of the region's identity, sustainability, and economy. Needs of Yellowstone and Grand Teton must be addressed by any regional transportation system, and the Parks should be active partners future regional efforts.
- Air and transit services must have as a long-term goal of easy access to a "carless vacation"

- Each gateway to the greater Yellowstone-Teton region should have a community gathering place that serves as a transportation hub with access to commercial centers and with room for casual gatherings such as picnics, concerts, and similar social functions.
- A transportation system that crosses so many jurisdictional boundaries must resolve the legal and administrative obstacles. In doing so, solutions will be collected into a toolkit to provide examples to help future projects.
- An easily accessible information system is an absolute requirement for an effective system, and such a system must serve both local and international users.
- Economic viability is enhanced if the system load can be more evenly distributed to include "off-season" activity.
- Worker access to jobs and housing must be humane and supportive of building diverse communities. Ever longer worker commutes are not a sustainable solution for deficient housing policies.

5.4 Nature of Changes

The system changes being proposed have a common nature; they all are either independently more attractive than current methods or they are more attractive in combination with other modes. Attractiveness means reduced cost, greater convenience, improved environmental and health benefits, and a more enjoyable experience. Ideally all these elements come into play.

These types of changes are fundamental in nature and require a coordinated effort to build new capabilities and infrastructure. Achieving this type and magnitude of change is in no way trivial. For that reason this Concept of Operations Plan is intended to describe one possible alternative for visualizing a regional transportation system. Regional governments and businesses can then evaluate the elements and pace of implementation that best fit their jurisdiction's specific needs.

To better understand the nature of changes, the following examples describe what needs to be implemented:

- An economic model that addresses the highway trust fund issue and invests in all modes
- Marketing the idea of a better way to travel
- An information system that is both regional and global
- Every mode connects to all other modes
- Every community/business has a place that unites transportation, business, and social activities
- New infrastructure for transit and pathways

Just how this might be accomplished is the subject of the next section.

6 Alternatives Considered

6.1 Alternative I - The Status Quo

Jurisdictional boundaries essentially define the system in place today. The transportation departments of the three states are, by funding and political necessity, focused on services within their state. Private providers are free to cross state boundaries once they have met USDOT requirements, but they have limited incentive to provide services that may be less profitable yet are in the public interest.

It is important to understand that there is always a system in place and at work. How it functions may or may not be documented, but a set of relationships and incentives always exists that determines private and public capital investments and other choices. This is true not just for the Greater Yellowstone transportation system, but for any system.

The functional details of the "status quo system" have been described in section 4.0, but there are additional rules and factors that determine which transportation services become viable. It is important to understand how the status quo stacks up as one alternative to other possible choices.

The first thing to consider is how a transportation system is funded. Financial resources and the rules for their use determine what can be built and maintained. In the status quo transportation system for the greater Yellowstone-Teton region, the primary source of funding comes from the consumption of petroleum fuels. The more fuel used, the more federal and state tax dollars are deposited into the Highway Trust Fund and State transportation funds. Other important sources of funding are the portion of property taxes used to maintain roads and large investment by individuals and families in private vehicle ownership.

The second consideration is the legal structure that governs how mobility is achieved. Both state and federal government statutes require or strongly encourage that the vast majority of transportation funding is dedicated to highway construction and maintenance. Another important legal aspect is the effect of jurisdictional boundaries on mobility and infrastructure. Frequently, transportation services stop at a boundary due to insurance concerns. It is also difficult for state and local transportation departments to share resources and responsibilities even when it might result in the best and safest solution to a problem.

A third consideration is cultural and relates to how individuals and businesses perceive the system. This perception determines which transportation services are likely to be used and that succeed. It also strongly influences willingness to use alternatives for moving goods and people.

Given these considerations or rules, what is the effective result of the status quo system? It can be argued that the system as a whole produces an unbalanced economic growth cycle that supports highway construction, vehicle production, the oil industry, and all the associated services necessary to support current levels of private and commercial travel. This description is not intended to place any value judgment on the status quo system – it just describes how the current system functions. Any system will have both "good" and "bad" effects. It is up to the public and their elected officials to choose what is implemented.

If this description of the status quo system is accurate one can expect that the region's transportation system will continue to evolve along the following lines:

- 1. private vehicles will continue to be the primary mode of transportation for individuals
- 2. the price of petroleum fuels will largely determine how much infrastructure can be maintained and the level of both private and commercial traffic

Pockets of transportation alternatives will arise where the demand is sufficient to overcome resistance, but these will not likely carry a significant portion of traffic.

6.2 Alternative II - Greater Informal Cooperation

Through continued and extended dialogue among the different types of transportation providers and stakeholders, some level of improvement can be accomplished. This project, for example, is one example of this type of cooperation, and it has led to some improvements. Although increased cooperation is not the only cause, it has helped the development of service between Bozeman and Livingston and an examination of more affordable service connecting West Yellowstone into Bozeman. There is recognition among the general public about the benefits of transportation and the need to think regionally, as illustrated in the October 17, 2008, editorial from the Bozeman Daily Chronicle (figure 3 next page).

Friday, October 17, 2008

OUR OPINION

Streamline service recognizes shared economic interests in SW Montana

perators of the Streamline Bus system are to be commended for extending the service to Livingston this month. The move recognizes the fact that Livingston is a part of the greater Southwest Montana market area with significant economic ties to Bozeman and other communities in the region.

Streamline began service just a couple of years ago, with four routes in the Bozeman, Belgrade and Four Corners area. Ridership nearly doubled in the second year of service, reaching 141,000.

Streamline decided to institute the Livingston service through June of next year with the help of a one-time, \$85,000 contribution from Montana State University. The Associated Students of MSU contributes \$135,000 a year to the service, but the university administration had not participated until now.

Given the growing success Streamline has experienced with its Bozeman-Belgrade-Four Corners routes, there's no reason to believe that — given time — the same won't happen with the Livingston service. Many people travel between Bozeman and Livingston daily for business, pleasure and employment. And this past summer's staggering increases in gas prices have driven more and more travelers to look at alternative forms of transportation.

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Besides ASMSU and the MSU administration, Bozeman, Belgrade, Gallatin County and several area nonprofit groups help pay Streamline's operating costs. It makes sense that local government should help provide this service. Not only does it offer significant savings in transportation costs to those who use it, it helps ease traffic congestion and reduce auto emissions that have caused noticeable deterioration in the area's air quality.

But Streamline also helps shore up the increasingly interconnected economic ties of the region — ties that extend to Three Forks and the Big Sky area. Big Sky-area businesses instituted daily bus service between that area and Bozeman several years ago. It would make sense for local governments to lend their financial support to this service as well. It could help ensure the service continues for the many people who commute from Bozeman to work at the hundreds of jobs in Big Sky, at Moonlight Basin and at the Yellowstone Club.

Southwest Montana communities are no longer the economic islands they once were. Although separated by many miles in some cases, communities in Gallatin, Madison and Park counties are interconnected economically and share a common fate.

Public transportation between these communities recognizes these shared interests and helps promote the best interests of all.

Figure 3 – Bozeman Daily Chronicle Editorial – 10/17/2008

Some of the changes discussed in this document can be accomplished through an enhanced network of people who provide transportation, need transportation, and fund transportation. It will be similar to Idaho's Mobility and Access Pathway (IMAP).

The new IMAP program exceeds the federal requirement for coordination, which is a response to the complicated funding system and the potential for duplicated services. Congress now requires all communities to have a locally developed coordination plan to receive FTA funding for the programs tied to seniors, people with disabilities, and job access. In Wyoming and Montana, local areas currently develop coordination plans following federal guidelines. ITD describes their pathway in the following manner.

"IMAP's approach to public transportation reflects the emergence of a new paradigm, and the implementation of a system based on the fundamentals of true "Mobility Management". The emphasis is on moving people instead of the mode of transportation. IMAP presents Idaho's comprehensive mobility management vision and scope within a new paradigm for working with and furthering mobility management in Idaho. IMAP describes how the state and its many stakeholders will restructure and refocus themselves so that a meaningful "Statewide Mobility Management Plan," guided by meeting the needs of the customers through the efforts of local leadership, can be generated and pursued for years to come. It encompasses far more transportation options and coordination efforts than the minimum SAFETEA-LU requirements." (ITD 2008)

The Yellowstone-Teton regional coordination effort built on top of IMAP will give the structure for coordination and mobility management, but the success will depend on adequate resources to allow a coordinating team to maintain and build the trust and information that will lead to people and organizations working together. Because every entity gives up some level of control in favor of better coordinated service, the effort also must encompass charismatic leadership that effectively works with different organizations. Efforts must go beyond the human service agencies and transportation agencies to involve the community and engage the political leaders. If this completed cycle succeeds, more services may be provided because there are more efficient operations, and because more funds have been invested.

One thing that needs to be addressed is insurance. As outlined in "Coordination Myths and Realities" Spring 2008 newsletter, sometimes insurance pools prevent providers from crossing state lines.

"Some states do not recognize insurance pools as rated insurance carriers. An operator whose operations cross state lines should check the policies of all involved states. It is also important to look at the structure of the insurance pool and see if out-of-state transportation is covered, or if the pool is associated with a rated carrier that the adjacent state(s) would honor. The best source of information on what provisions must be met when using an insurance pool or what clarifications need to be made about pool coverage is the applicable state's department of

insurance. For more in-depth experience with this issue, look at the Association of Government Risk Pools (AGRiP) website (<u>www.agrip.org</u>)."

Idaho's insurance pool allows for travel to Oregon, Washington, and Utah, but not to Wyoming or Montana. Wyoming's insurance pool does not allow any out of state travel. Montana does not have an insurance pool, so its public providers do not have any trouble crossing state lines. This issue is beginning to be addressed in Wyoming, where the Cheyenne public transportation provider is planning on taking the issue to the state legislature to allow for travel into Colorado. Providers in the Greater Yellowstone region will need to build upon this effort to remove insurance barriers in crossing state lines between Montana, Idaho and Wyoming.

Better coordination has the potential of incrementally improving transportation connectivity, but it does not achieve an optimum solution. The diverse needs being addressed by this Concept of Operations Plan likely will require a more comprehensive approach that encompasses legal structures, markets and marketing, and public policy.



Figure 4 – The Cycle of Informal Coordination

6.3 Alternative III - Rural Metropolitan Planning Organization and Transportation Authority Alternatives

In considering the range of options available for better service and improved coordination of transportation solutions, existing governmental transportation systems should be considered for Greater Yellowstone communities. This includes the federally created concepts called Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and Transportation Management Areas (TMA). It would also include state created entities called Transportation Authorities. These are further explained below.

6.3.1 Rural MPO and TMA

A Metropolitan Planning Organization, commonly referred to as an MPO, is an association of local agencies that coordinate transportation planning and development activities within a metropolitan area. Establishment of an MPO is required by law in urban areas with populations of more than 50,000 in order for the area to use federal transportation funding.

A Transportation Management Area (TMA) is an area designated by the US Secretary of Transportation, having an urbanized area population of over 200,000, or upon special request from the Governor and the MPO, or under special circumstances designated for the area.

There are three existing MPOs in the Greater Yellowstone – Billings, Montana, Pocatello, Idaho, and Idaho Falls, Idaho. Bozeman possibly will become the fourth MPO in the region in the next census in 2010 due to high population increases in the past eight years. There are no TMAs in our region, but the total Greater Yellowstone region does have over 700,000 people.

The enactment of the 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) ushered in a "renaissance" for MPOs. After a decade or more of being consigned to a minimal role in transportation planning, ISTEA directed additional funding to MPOs, expanded their authority to select projects and mandated new metropolitan planning initiatives.

These changes had their roots in the need to address increasingly difficult transportation problems. The changes in law recognized that the problems could only be effectively addressed through a stronger federal commitment to regional planning.

MPOs and TMAs have more authority than rural regions, including the power to plan and select projects within the area for inclusion in the state STIP.

The passage of SAFETEA-LU in 2005 requires that the statewide transportation planning process and the metropolitan planning process shall provide for consideration of projects and strategies that will protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, improve the quality of life, and promote consistency between transportation improvements and state and local planned growth and economic development patterns [49 USC 5303(g)(3) and 23 USC 134(g)(3)].

While SAFETEA-LU grants transportation authority to MPOs, it is the Census Bureau that designates these areas based on the every 10-year census. The Census Bureau classifies as "urban" all territory, population, and housing units located within an urbanized area or an urban cluster. It delineates urban boundaries to encompass densely settled territory, which consists of core census block groups or blocks that have a population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile and surrounding census blocks that have an overall density of at least 500 people per square mile

In addition, under certain conditions, less densely settled territory may be part of each UA or UC. The Census Bureau's classification of "rural" consists of all territory, population, and housing units located outside of UAs and UCs.

It is currently unknown if it is possible to further expand the existing MPOs, or if it is possible to create a Regional Transportation Management Area that could somehow embrace the Greater Yellowstone holistically. There would be many benefits having three states collaborate in this manner, as has been identified in this Plan. Yet the legal and political feasibility of such a multi-state government-sponsored entity poses unanswered questions, and many barriers can be imagined.

Thus for this Rural MPO or Rural TMA alternative, further research is recommended to assess the realistic feasibility to create such a unique entity. It would require substantial state-level cooperation, and unique legal agreements to expand and/or combine the existing small MPO's in the Greater Yellowstone into the world's first Rural Transportation Management Area.

6.3.2 Transportation Authorities

Perhaps more feasible in the short term is the concept of establishing and coordinating several Transportation Authorities. All three states in the Greater Yellowstone region have some version of a Transportation Authority that is authorized in state statutes, and geographic service areas can be set locally by counties. The state laws, opportunities and constraints vary state to state.

Wyoming

- In Wyoming, State law allows for a *Regional Transportation Authority*, established by resolution of any county commission or by multiple counties and municipalities, to "promote and develop regional air and ground transportation" in the designated area.
- Wyoming law allows up to ¹/₂ mill levy funding, which must be approved by the voters in the defined area.

<u>Idaho</u>

- Idaho State law allows for a *Regional Public Transportation Authority* (Idaho Falls example) to be created to supply transportation services and facilities to district residents and others.
- Law requires a vote to establish, and does not allow a mill levy.

Montana

- Montana State law allows *Urban Transportation Districts* (*Skyline* bus service is an example), to supply transportation services and facilities to district residents and others.
- Law authorizes a mill levy, set by the county commissioners.
- Montana State law separately allows for *a Transportation Improvement Authority*, the purpose is to blend the interests of local, state, and federal governments with the interests of the general public and the business community to build, modify or improve transportation facilities and systems within the area.
- In addition, Montana also has human service transit options, like *Streamline* bus service is organized under the Human Resource Development Council, and other states have similar options for special transit service.

6.3.3 Rural Transportation Authority Recommended next steps:

Because some form of Transportation Authority law exists in all three states, and with one established example working in Big Sky, Montana, the concept has merit. It is recommended that additional research be undertaken to further evaluate the legal and political issues.

In theory, Transportation Authorities could be set up in all three states, and the service area expanded to meet at the state line. Memorandums of Understanding or similar instruments could then be entered into by the three Authorities for collaboration in services provided over the three state region.

It is recommended that future planning research study opportunities for a combination of alternatives, with Transportation Authorities being set up and working along with a Regional Coop. Then the Co-op might be able to provide the umbrella service that linked the region, while the local service could continue to function under its own locally organized Transportation Authority.

6.4 Alternative IV - A Regional Service Cooperative

A nonprofit cooperative is a business model familiar to the rural west that could provide the needed legal and operating structure for a regional transportation system. Rural cooperatives are often formed among agricultural commodity producers, but cooperatives range from retail giants such as Recreational Equipment Inc. to moderately sized food co-ops, to electrical utilities serving dispersed rural communities. Cooperatives also exist to provide banking, child care, affordable housing, and even funeral services. Nationally, only a few transportation cooperatives exist, most frequently to meet the specific needs of dispersed school bus riders, low-income employees or senior citizens.

The following description is provided courtesy of the Northwest Center for Cooperative Development webpage at <u>http://www.nwcdc.coop/</u>

What is a Co-op?

A cooperative is a business owned and controlled by those who use its services. Although cooperatives resemble other businesses in many respects, they are distinctly different in terms of ownership structure and in the distribution of earnings. In a cooperative, member-users finance and operate the business for their mutual benefit. Control is democratic, and earnings are distributed according to patronage provided by the members or retained in the business for overall member benefit.

Co-ops are economic institutions. Consumers form co-ops to obtain improved products and services at better prices. Retail businesses use them to gain benefits of group purchasing or other shared activities, and employees utilize the cooperative form of business to improve their income and equity positions in a company.

Key to the concept, however, is an identifiable economic need which participants recognize and are willing to support financially and with their patronage.

Underlying any co-op is the shared recognition of a common economic need. Cooperatives can meet that need if their members are willing to participate, patronize/utilize the business, and provide financial support.

Features of a Co-op

Like other businesses, cooperatives have similar physical facilities, perform similar functions, and must follow sound business practices. They are incorporated under state laws. The board sets policy and hires a manager to run the day-to-day business.

In other ways, cooperatives are distinctly different from other businesses.

Member control is generally on a one member, one vote basis. Return on equity capital is generally limited since the purpose of a co-op is to provide a service to its user-owners at the lowest possible cost, rather than generate a profit for investors.

Benefits are tied to usage of the cooperative rather than the amount of investment. Bylaws include a provision establishing the co-op's obligation to return net margins (total income from all sources, minus expenses) to patrons. The net margin is returned to members based on their use of the cooperative, and is called a patronage refund or dividend.

Limiting the return on equity capital helps to keep management decisions focused on providing services attuned to member's needs in an efficient manner.

Cooperatives pay all property and sales taxes required of other business corporations. It is only in the income tax area, that the earnings of cooperative corporations may be treated differently than conventional for-profit organizations. In accordance with specified IRS procedures, net margins distributed to patrons, if taxed, are taxable to the patron rather than the co-op. Margins not distributed (eith er in cash or allocated) to patrons are taxable to the co-op. Conceptually, a transportation cooperative for the Yellowstone-Teton region would need to organize both private and public transportation providers to fill the "gaps" in regional service and to coordinate their regular services to attract more riders. Benefits could accrue to co-op providers who would retain their individual business identities, but adjust and/or expand their services to add riders and thus improve connectivity across the region. Additional benefits could include purchasing through insurance pools, contracting opportunities, demonstration of alternative fuels and/or vehicles such as hybrid buses, and reduced access fees to cross Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks.

Historically cooperatives have organized groups of producers seeking wider markets and higher revenues OR groups of consumers seeking lower prices or better services. Because their motives were considered at cross-purposes, rarely have both producers and consumers organized under one joint cooperative. However, this trend is changing as producers and consumers are finding mutual benefit to having closer association, such as within the local food movement. In Washington a new cooperative is forming of beef producers, restaurants, health food stores and direct consumers to fulfill their mutual interests.

Such a "blended" cooperative would need to be organized in the 25 Idaho, Montana and Wyoming counties – and inside the two national parks -- to ensure the commitment and patronage of those needing rides on the system. Provider and rider members would need to jointly and fairly organize, govern and supervise the system in a manner that would maximize efficiency while avoiding conflict of interest. Rider members could rely on dependable, year-round service while retaining "net margin" dividends based on frequency of use. Information systems that offer one-stop, online ticketing and extensive marketing services would be among the attractions afforded co-op providers. Political support from each state and affected federal agency would be essential, and appropriate financial support from local, state and federal sources would need further exploration.

7 Recommended System

7.1 The Vision – Where We Could Go

The roundtables have shown that there is great interest in building a new type of transportation system for the Yellowstone-Teton region. It will be multimodal, accessible, and sustainable, and it will provide both residents and visitors the ability to move throughout the region without a private vehicle should they choose to.

Such a system would be fostered through a voluntary cooperative that coordinates the available resources, raises capital for investment, and builds a committed membership of both providers and users. Traveler information would be accessible world wide and marketing would make a wide variety of transportation options visible and attractive.

Idaho's Mobility and Access Pathway would be adapted to Montana and Wyoming needs and grow to a tri-state network of stakeholders who can match needs and providers. Where service gaps exist they would be systematically filled in order of priority.

All roadway reconstruction and new highways would be designed as complete streets. Urban pathways would become substantial carriers of workforce and commercial traffic while rural pathway networks expand to circumscribe the Yellowstone-Teton.

Major funding for many of these improvements will come from a national and state recognition that the gas tax should be directly tied to the costs associated with building the most efficient transportation system as opposed to the most consumptive. Efficiency should be rewarded while also raising adequate funding to maintain the desired infrastructure.

7.2 A Transportation Cooperative to Serve Greater Yellowstone

The input received from the four roundtable discussions held across the region highlighted these ideals for a regional transportation system:

- Make inter-city transit a reality
- Empower riders, customers and providers
- Provide multi-modal pathways and complete streets that interconnect with the transit and highway systems
- Help build public system capacity and give private operators new, equal opportunities
- Be eligible for all types of funding
- Transcend politics and insurance challenges
- Be both a broker and information source across state and county boundaries

Of the alternatives discussed, the transportation cooperative model affords the best opportunity to achieve the above goals. The unique geopolitical and seasonal aspects of the Yellowstone-Teton region requires a more integrated and innovative approach than offered under the other three alternatives. The team envisions formation of a regional cooperative over the next two years that will dovetail with and further empower the transportation coordination efforts underway in each state. Formation of a transportation cooperative is recommended using the following timeline, resources and approach:

7.2.1 Form a multi-interest steering committee to address key issues and build support

The Yellowstone Business Partnership is willing to continue its role as project facilitator following acceptance of this Concept Plan by the Idaho Transportation Board. A multi-interest steering committee will be recruited by May 2009 with tri-state representation:

Governmental -1/3 of total

- U.S. Department of Transportation
- Federal land management agencies(National parks, forests, refuges, BLM, BOR)
- State transportation/human service agencies
- Public transit authorities
- Local Governments, Elected officials or staff city/county
- Metropolitan Planning Organizations

Private sector -1/3 of total

- Motorcoach and shuttle services
- Major employers with commuter needs
- Hospitals, retail centers with customer needs
- Major resorts with seasonal employee needs
- Chambers of Commerce
- Economic Development entities

Independent sector -1/3 of total

- University or other research institutions
- Public transportation advocates (CTAA)
- Trails and pathways organizations
- Senior citizen interests
- Special needs advocates
- Historical or cultural societies
- Youth organizations

Four additional seats for other nations:

- Fort Hall Indian Reservation
- Wind River Indian Reservation (2)
- Crow Reservation
- One representative to speak for all other Yellowstone Affiliated Tribes

7.2.2 Outline member categories, requirements

Two categories of Rider Memberships -

- <u>Individual riders such as commuters</u>, recreational users, seasonal residents, youth, seasonal workers, seniors and disabled, and fair-weather drivers
- <u>Businesses that buy rides for others regional hospitals</u>, large retail outlets, outfitters and guides, resorts and lodges, tour operators, large employers, and government agencies
- Open to all who pay Minimum annual or seasonal fee. They may choose advance purchase fare cards or monthly billing service based on base use

Two categories of **Provider Memberships** – qualifying only

- <u>Private Operators such as shuttle services</u>, motor coach operators, taxi services, delivery services that can add rider capacity, and private Medicare-reimbursement providers
- <u>Public Operators such as municipal systems</u>, State-supported intercity services, government motor pools or bus systems, and senior citizen vans
- Providers would agree to minimum competencies and basic fairness in contracting procedures. They would need to comply with all Co-op service standards

7.2.3 Write a feasibility plan by December 2009 while seeking Federal pilot status

Assistance is available from the Cooperative Development Centers that serve Idaho, Montana and Wyoming to prepare a feasibility plan for a transportation cooperative. Funding for such assistance would be granted through USDA in August 2009, with targeted plan completion in December. The Steering Committee would provide data and guidance on the overall plan while seeking long-term support as a demonstration pilot through the new federal highway bill being negotiated.

7.2.4 Incorporate in three states by March 2010

Should the feasibility plan show that this business enterprise is financially and politically viable, a representative number of steering committee members will form a founding, but temporary board of directors for the purpose of incorporating the cooperative in all three states. Actions needed include establishing a corporate office, selection of officers, passage of bylaws and IRS filings. The founding board will proceed with business plan preparation and seeking shareholder investments and other funding to proceed with business and operational planning.

7.2.5 Prepare business plan with basic routes, operating budget and information system by end of 2010

Much of this work will require contracting for technical services to design the key system elements. An experienced transportation professional should be hired to oversee the developmental process, and this person could be the general manager of the cooperative.

7.2.6 Start selling rider memberships and with target launch in May 2011

Only after the framework for a basic system is laid and providers identified will rider memberships be sold. It may be prudent to first recruit business members who will be purchasing multiple rides for customers or employees to gain initial revenue. Election of a permanent board of directors should occur within the first year of operations to ensure democratic representation. A billing system and method of paying dividends must be designed prior to commencement of operations.

7.3 The Information System – Making Assets & Options Visible and Accessible

Information is the public face for the whole system. It includes marketing and accurate, accessible information, available at the home computer during the planning phase or at the finger tips while traveling. The vision is to enable any visitor or resident to immediately recognize how to get from "A" to "B" using an attractive alternative to the private vehicle. As it is helping visitors, it also is enabling providers and funding agencies to plan and operate these transportation options in a cost effective manner.



Software can address rural transit problems, to improve service and coordination using technology tools and streamlined processes. Various technologies can accomplish the following goals:

- Increase operating efficiency of individual providers and cost-benefits of transportation funding in the rural communities;
- Improve coordination among public and human service transportation providers in planning and delivery of services using centralized information services; and
- Provide more access and avenues to traveler information for potential riders.



Figure 5 – A System Model for Trip Planning

An application in the Yellowstone-Teton region can include as many sources of rides as possible. First, it will integrate regularly scheduled services, both public and private. Second, it can include specialized transportation options. These could include regularly scheduled services or special trips. Third, it can incorporate carpools and other shared rides in private vehicles. Finally, it can include private services from taxis, limousines, and similar types of services. In other words, a person can find all information in one place, and different sources are linked together.

The core applications consist of a centralized database serving as the backbone and a software application or multiple software applications serving as user interfaces. Principle access is available through a web-based application uses a web browser, such as Internet Explorer.

More automated systems include on-vehicle equipment. These come at a higher cost and can be added after the basic functions are in place. Equipment includes:

- Automated Vehicle Location or Geographic Positioning System
- Mobile Data Computer in the vehicle
- Passenger counters
- Automated stop enunciators
- Automated fare collection

Most people who need a ride in rural communities will get information from someone they know and trust – the transportation provider themselves or from someone at a social program they use. Some riders will feel more comfortable getting information from the Internet or other pieces of technology. The transportation providers and social service agencies can keep information up to date and comprehensive and share with a wider audience if they use the Internet. A database of service also facilitates production of other non-computer sources of information. Information can be available to the rider or to the rider's agent through the following media:

- Phone call / face-to-face (the person answering the phone can review information in a database)
- Paper brochures
- Desktop Internet: Web or automated emails
- The 511 traveler information phone number
- 2-1-1 human service phone number, which is in limited use in the three-state region
- For more advanced systems in communities with adequate infrastructure, information can automatically fed to a mobile device such as a Blackberry or mobile phone
- Next bus signs at bus stops

Additionally, having such data in a centralized system allows the planners to access that information for future planning. Annual exercises like routing, scheduling etc. can be automated to some degree so that a good initial solution is available for the planners to work with. Also storing data such as resources, operational data etc. allows the planners to develop utilization measures and thus explore avenues for improvement. Finally, functions like planning decisions like vehicle purchase and replacement and selecting locations for bus stop benches or shelters can be supported by the stored information.

Some of what is described here is in the process of implementation in Idaho and in Bozeman and can be done at very low cost. Idaho recently implemented a statewide carpool matching system. Google has developed the trip planning system, which can be used for public fixed route systems. The only cost of implementation is the time involved in structuring a system's schedules so they can be imported into Google. Once that is done, a web user can type in their origin and destination, and Google gives both driving instructions and a transit itinerary. These and other pre-trip user services are the first step in the described information system.

Very similar to the information needs for transit services, there is an equal need for improved information on the available pathways and trails in the Yellowstone-Teton region that should be provided in the future regional transportation system. Most federal agencies have some type of trail map, but not always with the specific pathway and trail information people need. Some communities have local pathways maps. There should be a single source to go to see all the pathways options. This pathway and trail information and map resources should become a valuable product that a Regional Co-op helps to develop and provide to residents and visitors to the Yellowstone-Teton region.

7.4 Complete Streets and Pathways – Building a Multimodal Infrastructure

The emergence of active pathway and trails systems in and around many Yellowstone communities is one of the more encouraging elements discovered during the regional research and heard at the Transportation Roundtable meetings conducted for this Concept Plan. Along with these budding pathway systems, there is also evidence of a fundamental shift in thinking about better ways to build roads.

These trends are commendable and would be built upon in the Recommended System. This section expands on key recommendations for Pathways and Complete Streets components of the future multi-modal system. These two concepts are presented together as they both strongly support pedestrian and bicycle modes, two underserved and highly desirable transportation and recreational components of a regional multimodal system.

7.4.1 Pathways and Trails

One of the great discoveries of the roundtables is the extent and active expansion of pathway and trail systems around the region. There is a surprising diversity and depth of government and non-government pathway and trail programs, and many of these communities have big dreams for the future. The recommended alternative for the Concept Plan is to encourage, mature, and connect these systems.

The Regional Transportation Plan recommendations for Pathways include:

- All the Yellowstone communities would continue and/or start to develop and expand local and regional pathway and trail systems.
- There would be careful integration of the new Co-op transit systems with the improved pathway, pedestrian and bicycle systems.
- Additional federal, state and local investments would be needed for pathways, and communities could consider lessons from Jackson and Bozeman for models to look to.
- The network connectivity of pathways would start to link up regionally, and include better information on long distance bicycle routes and backcountry trail systems.
- Communities would enter into partnerships with tourism entities, health organizations, each other, and a variety of non-profit groups to support pathways and trails.
- The information available about the regional pathways and trails would be greatly expanded, along with information on connectivity to the regional transportation and transit systems. The Co-op would provide much of this improved information.
- A pathway systems exchange network would be encouraged. More mature pathway systems such as Bozeman and Jackson would provide coaching and neighborly support for smaller community pathway systems.

A vast system of human trails predates written history in the Greater Yellowstone region. This history would be rediscovered and celebrated in the recommended alternative. The Native American Tribes would play an important role in understanding the history of trails.

The proposed Co-op would provide a regional bridge between communities and would encourage information-sharing and further development of local and regional pathways. There is currently no entity that has complete information on the existing or proposed systems. One important function of the Co-op would be as an information clearinghouse for pathways and trails. Information on local systems is not complete, and would need to be updated and integrated with the Co-op transit and other transportation systems information.

During the course of the Plan development, there has been substantial new networking that has developed between the existing local systems at the May 2008 YBP Conference and during the roundtables. This in turn has reinforced the feasibility of enhanced pathway and trails systems, provided new models to learn from, and would be an important element of ramping up pathway efforts around the region.

While many progressive communities have both robust transit systems and active pathways programs, this Concept Plan will further integrate these two modes, especially at the regional information and planning level. The Co-op would be very suitable for this, and it would provide much stronger synergy in the effort to create a truly multi-modal transportation system in the Greater Yellowstone.

7.4.2 Complete Streets:

Communities of all sizes, such as Bozeman, Jackson and Driggs, are increasingly looking at street projects as important opportunities to build better main streets and downtowns. Successful "Complete Street" projects in the Yellowstone region are proving the value of addressing the needs of bicycle, pedestrian and transit modes in new construction. Great streets are needed to support local business, encourage vibrant downtowns, support transit and mixed-use development, and improve safety. Complete Streets are recommended as a key part of a smarter regional transportation system in the future.

The Regional Plan Recommended System for Complete Streets includes:

- The Co-op would help develop, share, and promote model "Complete Streets" policies for the region, and help build on successful examples in Jackson and Bozeman.
- All three State DOTs would adopt and implement "Complete Streets" policies for all Greater Yellowstone state and national highway system road construction projects.
- Federal agencies would adopt "Complete Streets" and context sensitive project development policies for all Greater Yellowstone road construction projects.
- Regional communities and counties would adopt and implement "Complete Streets" policies for all local road construction projects.
- The rural highways interconnecting the Yellowstone region, when being reconstructed would use the Complete Streets approach to better address the full range of needs such as context sensitivity, wildlife impacts, transit service, and providing shoulders or separate paths for long distance bicycle touring routes.

Complete Streets is a new concept but one rapidly gaining national adoption and recognition. Bills to require Complete Streets on all federally funded projects have been introduced in Congress, and the concept is being considered in the new federal Transportation Bill. In the region, Jackson plans to adopt a Complete Streets policy in a new Comprehensive Plan, and Bozeman is considering the concepts in its planning work.

A "Complete Street" is safe, comfortable, and convenient for travel by automobile, foot, bicycle, and transit. We know how to build good streets in America, and fortunately there are some good examples in the Greater Yellowstone – they are the streets where commerce thrives and tourists take photos to bring home.

A Complete Streets approach to community building starts with a progressive policy that ensures that the entire right of way is planned, designed, and operated to provide safe access for all users. This Plan recommends that the local, state, and federal agencies responsible for transportation project development and construction would adopt progressive Complete Streets policies.

Complete Streets policies provide for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit, motorists, and travelers of all ages and abilities. Such policies would create a complete network of roads that serve all users, and serve to *change the transportation planning practice* by integrating the needs of all road users into every project and plan. For example, a Complete Streets Policy changes intersection design so that pedestrians can safely cross the street; changes road reconstruction so that rural bicycling can be safely included, and changes transit so that transit stops are routinely considered along potential transit corridors.

Complete Streets create healthy economic activity – well-designed multi-modal streets are one of the key recommendations of the Concept Plan that would enhance community life, improve public health, reduce environmental impacts and fossil fuel use, and help support tourism economies.

The recommended Complete Streets policies would prompt these changes:

- 1. Retrain planners and engineers
- 2. Restructure procedures
- 3. Rewrite design manuals
- 4. Retool measures to track outcomes

Example of a Complete Street Policy that is being considered for adoption in the Town of Jackson, Wyoming:

Town of Jackson

Complete Streets Policy draft 2008

The safety and convenience of all users of the transportation system shall be accommodated and balanced in the design, operation, and maintenance of all new and retrofit transportation and development projects so that pedestrians, cyclists, transit users, motor vehicle drivers, and people of all ages and abilities are able to travel safely and comfortably within the public right of way in a manner consistent with "Complete Streets" principles.

"Complete Streets" implementation shall be appropriate to the context and function of the street and the surrounding neighborhood, and shall recognize that different streets require balancing user needs and flexible design. The Town of Jackson shall use the latest and best design practices to create a connected, integrated, and comprehensive network of facilities that enables all users to safely travel along and across Jackson streets. Procedures for evaluating Complete Streets projects will be established and will include measures of pedestrian, cyclist, and transit levels of service and use.

Exceptions to providing "Complete Streets" in transportation and development projects shall be made only when:

- 1. Specific modes or users are prohibited by law from using the roadway. In such case, a greater effort shall be made to accommodate these users and modes elsewhere;
- 2. The project consists entirely of ordinary maintenance activities designed to keep assets in serviceable condition (e.g., mowing, cleaning, sweeping, spot repair)
- 3. There exists supportable evidence that there is no current or future need for accommodating specific modes or users;
- 4. Establishment of facilities would be contrary to public health and safety; or
- 5. There exist extraordinary conditions that are documented and approved by the Town of Jackson Public Works Director, the Pathways Coordinator, and the START Director.

7.5 Bridging the Gaps – A Recurring Process for Creating New Services

One of the most important issues highlighted in this Concept of Operations is the lack of regional planning, which makes it difficult to connect people and services in a meaningful manner.

Therefore, moving forward, it is of a high priority to have an entity, such as a Co-op, that could focus on closing the gaps within the region to have a network in place that can connect people and services. This idea builds upon the IMAP program that Idaho has started, in that it is critical to constantly gather input from users on needs and gaps in services, and set up structures to keep people connected through Local Mobility Management Networks, or other similar agencies/organizations.

Previous sections of this document have highlighted a lack of surface transportation options (public and private transportation services). In addition, this document has discussed alternatives for providing a structure to manage (govern) those services within the greater Yellowstone/Teton region. The remainder of this section (7.5) defines a process for creating new services within the region.

The first step in the process is to understand the services that exist within the region and if there are gaps in the services (either a physical or temporal gap, as noted in Section 4). The second step would be to list all the gaps, and go though a process to rank the importance of closing each gap that was identified.

Based on the governance of how the regional system (or systems) are managed, the process of ranking the importance of closing the identified gaps may be done by a single agency (such as a Co-op), or may have to be completed by numerous agencies, such as Transportation Advisory Committees (in Montana) and regional mobility councils in Idaho (through Idaho's Mobility and Access Pathway – IMAP). In either scenario or combination, it would be difficult yet important to have a ranking process in each state (Idaho, Montana and Wyoming) and then try to aggregate those rankings based on regional needs. No matter how the gaps are ranked, the next step would be to identify how to close the gaps which were identified as most important.

If the regional transportation system were operating as a Co-op, Co-op members could bid on the new the new services identified. Co-op members may have a defined territory, and there would be rules governing the difference between public and private transportation members. If however, the region's transportation services remain scattered under different public and private providers operating independently, then the best that could be done would be to try and work through the existing structure to highlight the need for the new service and hope someone would start the service.

Once a new service is started, it would need to be evaluated along with all other new and existing services. This evaluation process would likely happen on an annual basis, and would likely be tied into the fiscal year of the transportation providers (or the Co-op).

Because the process for creating new services is dependent to a large degree upon the governance, ultimately how this process works will depend upon the structure implemented for managing public and private transportation services within the region.

However, the ongoing process, no matter which governance structure (or structures) is in place, is summarized in Figure 1.



Figure 6 – An Ongoing Process for Identifying and Filling Gaps

In addition to being heavily dependent upon the structure of governance for public and private transportation providers, the ability to implement new services to close gaps is also heavily dependent upon funding for these services.

As noted within other sections of this document, a new funding model may be necessary, and certainly public and private partnerships will be critical. As shown in Figure 6, it may be that some existing services are evaluated and discontinued in favor of a new service. Also, a new service may not be evaluated as successful, and be discontinued.

While this section provides the foundation for a process for creating new services, the following section discusses how to create an efficient marketplace in which public and private transportation services (and non-motorized modes) can compete against the individual vehicle (automobile).

7.6 Building an Efficient Marketplace – The Economic Model

If the existing transportation marketplace is driven by petroleum consumption and vehicle sales, one way of envisioning an alternative marketplace is to consider policies that might get away from the negative effects of dwindling gas tax revenues. For example, a market could be based on rewarding energy efficiency rather than consumption.

It is easy to see how buying more fuel and a new car every few years supports an economic model based on growth, but how does one build an economy based on reducing energy intensity? The key lies in providing individuals and businesses a financial benefit or reward for using less energy in their transportation activities.

But who pays for this reward? What generates the funding? The gas tax and highway trust fund are ingenious and easily understood as a way to pay for the current system, but what might the equivalent be in a market based on efficiency?

A gas tax is still the answer, but with the proceeds tied to a transportation efficiency trust fund. The current system almost works, but it has two problems. The first is that the true cost of running a transportation system based on gasoline consumption is much higher than what is reflected at the pump. The second is that the current system requires ever increasing growth in consumption to maintain the markets in fuel, vehicles and support services.

A large part of the solution is to set the fuel tax at a level that provides a reward if one finds more energy efficient ways to go about one's business, but at the same time generates adequate income to the trust fund. If the price point is set properly there will be adequate funding for highway infrastructure as well as transit and pathways.

Under the current system any efficiency improvements actually detract from a state highway department's ability to build and maintain highways. One state transportation official actually expressed his pleasure at seeing more "Hummers on the highways" to counteract dwindling tax revenues. A system based on such a philosophy is clearly unsustainable and lacking in moral principles.

The realities of a finite resource and advancing technology are forcing everyone to reevaluate what makes sense for the future. Governor "Butch" Otter of Idaho recently changed his plan for funding the transportation deficit from increased registration and/or mileage fees to a proposed increase in the state gas tax. The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) also has suggested a need for an increased federal tax as described in Figure 7.





Figure 7 – Fuel Taxes and the Highway Trust Fund

Source: American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, March, 2007

There are good reasons for this change of posture towards gas taxes. These taxes are perhaps the fairest and simplest way of apportioning the costs of building and maintaining the transportation system if the tax reflects the true cost of maintaining all modes in an optimum system.

Historically the Highway Trust Fund in which these taxes are deposited has almost exclusively funded highway projects. This has changed incrementally with successive highway bills to allow a small portion of the trust fund to be used for non-highway uses such as transit, but highways are still the dominant use.

These trends point the way towards a more rational economic model for funding transportation. What if there was a way to fund the entire transportation infrastructure maintenance backlog for the entire United States, including all needed bridge and highway repairs for all fifty states? In the "2006 Conditions and Performance Report" the Federal Highway Administration says this would amount to about \$79B (in constant 2004 dollars) each year through 2024. According to the previously cited AASHTO report this amount could be raised by increasing the federal gas tax by 10 cents per gallon with corresponding cost-share increases by the states. The state cost-share would also likely come from an increase in state gas taxes, so for the purposes of this analysis, an overall 20 cent per gallon increase in the price of gas could repair and maintain the entire nation's highway infrastructure.

Consider that earlier this year gas was priced at upwards of \$4.20 per gallon for regular unleaded. The high prices led to a relatively small (5%) decrease in vehicle miles traveled (VMT's) which implies a fair amount of elasticity in the pricing of gas. As this report is written gas prices have fallen to less than \$1.50 per gallon.

Given this unintended experiment with gas prices it would seem logical that most users would consider 20 cents per gallon a fair trade for well maintained, safe highways and bridges. If that increase was 30 cents per gallon or even less, it is likely that transit and complete streets and pathways could also be well funded. These estimates are not claimed to be a precise analysis of Highway Trust Fund economics, but they do give some scale to how little it might take to fund a much better transportation system.

There are other factors at play that demand a re-examination of how the Highway Trust Fund is funded and apportioned. Consumers are demanding more fuel efficient vehicles which will also reduce gas tax revenue. It would be short sighted to shift to a mileage tax or similar mechanism that essentially would punish energy efficient vehicles and modes. The best choice is to set the gas tax to a level sufficient to build and maintain an integrated transportation system that includes transit, pathways and highways based on the "Complete Streets" concept of transportation corridors.

Now is the time to shift the funding base for the nation's transportation system from consumption to efficiency. Political leadership is needed to ensure that fuel taxes and other fees fund all modes as a complete transportation system. Fuel taxes should not maintained at an artificially low level to subsidize a consumption-based economic model. The distribution of transportation trust fund receipts should be restructured to promote the efficient delivery of transportation services.

8 Conclusions

For more than 60 years a transportation model based on the private automobile has served to spur economic growth in Greater Yellowstone. Does this remain the best model for the future? Today, communities are finding they have to "import" workers via long daily commutes. Visitors are often surprised by a lack of transit to world-famous destinations. Many local residents are recognizing the untapped, economic potential of a regional network of pathways through some of the most beautiful landscapes on earth. This whole effort has been about exploring if there is a better way to get connected.

Perhaps one of the most poignant insights into how an auto-centric transportation system affects the quality of our lives came at the 2008 YBP Conference at Jackson Lake Lodge. In a breakout session to discuss this concept plan, a visually impaired participant told an eye-opening story of being stranded in an Idaho city far from home after his bus dropped him off at a bus terminal that had closed for the night. He had done nothing more than try to return home after attending a public meeting that was of interest to him but the system - our system - failed him.

Such failures are not accidents. They come from the day-to-day decisions made by each of us. We have allowed, more than chosen, a national transportation infrastructure that is designed to favor and perpetuate a single mode above all others. This has withered the efficacy of alternative modes to the point where they poorly serve the public and, in truth, provide no real alternative.

But there are alternatives, and the recommendations in this concept of operations plan point a way forward to achieve a truly multimodal transportation system that can be more effective, efficient, and more desirable than a single mode system. Each of the five elements described above must be implemented, but it is "doable".

The structural model of a regional transportation co-op is one key, and in its best embodiment it can address the failure of the system described above. If the system is implemented well, no one should fear being left stranded whether they are old or young, tourist or resident, blind or with full vision.

Appendices

<u>Appendix A – Roundtable Highlights</u>

A detailed summary of each of the Regional Roundtable meetings can be downloaded from the following links on the Yellowstone Business Partnership website:

April 24 - West Yellowstone, Montana

http://www.yellowstonebusiness.org/datafiles/Roundtable_Meeting_4-24-08.pdf

July 2 - Mammoth Hot Springs in Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming

http://www.yellowstonebusiness.org/datafiles/July_2_Roundtable_Highlights.pdf

September 10 - Rexburg, Idaho

http://www.yellowstonebusiness.org/datafiles/MEETING%20HIGHLIGHTS%209-10-08.pdf

November 12 - Bozeman, Montana

http://www.yellowstonebusiness.org/datafiles/Rdtbl%20MEETING%20HIGHLIGHTS%2011-12-08.pdf

<u>Appendix B – Roundtable Participants</u>

This appendix contains a list of all stakeholders who participated in the four Regional Roundtables held in 2008. Seventeen of the participants attended two or more of the roundtables.

Last	First	Affiliation	City	Stat
				e
Allums	Audrey	MDT	Helena	MT
Babbitt	Kyle	Island Park Gem Team	Island Park	ID
Bailey	Nancy	Park County, WY Planning &	Cody	WY
		Zoning Commissioner	D 11	-
Bala	Ed	ITD District V	Pocatello	ID
Ballard	Lisa	Current Transportation Solutions	Bozeman	MT
Barna	Basil	Concept Plan Project Chair	Idaho Falls	ID
Bean	Anthony	Yellowstone Airport	W. Yellowstone	MT
Beck	Barb	Beck Consulting	Red Lodge	MT
Benediktson	Karen	MT Assn for the Blind	Bozeman	MT
Berg	Bill	Cool Works	Gardiner	MT
Binggeli	Ron	Pocatello Regional Transit	Pocatello	ID
Brady	Jack	YBP Board of Directors	Layton	UT
Broncho	Claudeo	Shoshone-Bannock Tribes	Fort Hall	ID
Brown	Janice	YBP Executive Director	Idaho Falls	ID
Bullock	Ken	Partners for Prosperity	Blackfoot	ID
Bullock	Lynn	Partners for Prosperity	Blackfoot	ID
Chaudhari	Jaydeep	Western Transportation Inst	Bozeman	MT
Clarkson	Jack	West Yell Chamber	W Yellowstone	MT
Cole	Tom	ITD District VI	Rigby	ID
Cornwell	Karen	ITD Advisory Comm.	Idaho Falls	ID
Costello	Marysue	West Yellowstone Chamber	West Yellowstone	MT
Danczyk	Gary	Grand Teton National Park	Moose	WY
DeMott	Kathryn	Lava Adventures & Lodging	Lava Hot Springs	ID
Douglass	Rich	WYDOT	Cheyenne	WY
Durham	Roger	Bozeman Trail, Inc	Bozeman	MT
Eaton	Dave	Transportation Advisory Comm	Livingston	MT
Eickstedt	Ingrid	Powell Valley Community	Powell	WY
		Education		
Evanoff	Jim	Yellowstone National Park	YNP	WY
Forseth	Eric	Rimrock Trailways VP	Billings	MT
Gilpin	Joe	Alta Planning	Bozeman	MT
Green	Jim	MT Railroad Passengers Assn	Billings	MT
Hazelbaker	Lee	Galavan	Bozeman	MT

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Hellekson	Stacey	Engineering, Inc.	Bozeman	MT
Higgins	Susan	Bozeman Sub-region Facilitator	Bozeman	MT
Hippler	Michelle	Sustainable Solutions, Inc	Billings	MT
House	Marguerite	Buffalo Bill Historical Center	Cody	WY
Howard	Mike	Motor Coach Industries	Great Falls	MT
Howe	Mel/Sue	Streamline Rider	Bozeman	MT
Jones	Kimberly	Cody Chamber of Commerce	Cody	WY
Kack	David	Western Transportation Institute	Bozeman	MT
Kelly	Virginia	GY Coordinating Committee	Bozeman	MT
Kennedy	Janet	MILP-Streamline rider	Bozeman	MT
Kirkham	Billie	Kirkham & Associates, LLC	Riverton	WY
Klessens	James	Forward Cody WY, Inc.	Cody	WY
Knorr	Lisa	Big Sky Transportation Dist	Big Sky	MT
Krause	John	ID Dept of Transportation	Boise	ID
Kyrias	Randy	ITD Boise Headquarters	Boise	ID
Lamb	Jennifer	National Outdoor Leadership School	Lander	WY
Lange	Ted	Gallatin Valley Land Trust	Bozeman	MT
Lindner	Colleen	Streamline Committee	Bozeman	MT
Lowe	Wendy	P2 Solutions	Idaho Falls	ID
Madsen	Shannon	USDA Rural Development	Blackfoot	ID
Maj	Mary	Shoshone National Forest	Cody	WY
Martin	Dan	Karst Stage	Bozeman	MT
McCabe	Wayne	Voluntary Firefighters	Pocatello	ID
McClure	Nancy	Buffalo Bill Historical Center	Cody	WY
McCulloch	Donna	MT Assn for the Blind	Bozeman	MT
Miyoski	Jeanne	Teton Valley Chamber	Driggs	ID
Obringer	Mark	Teton County	Jackson	WY
Pearson	John	Alltrans	Jackson	WY
Peirce	Melinda	Streamline Rider	Bozeman	MT
Perkins	Jerry	Karst Stage, President	Bozeman	MT
Philip	Deepu	Current Transportation Solutions	Bozeman	MT
Pope	Kathy	Salt Lake Express	Rexburg	ID
Pratt	Beth	Xanterra Parks and Resorts	YNP	WY
Price	Tom	Salt Lake Express	Rexburg	ID
Pullar	Shari	Big Sky Economic Development Corporation	Billings	MT
Racehorse	Sherwin	Consultant - SE ID	Blackfoot	ID
Read	Elizabeth	Rep. Bob Stevens	Rexburg	ID
Reese	Mary Lee	YBP Supporter	Bozeman	MT
Roach	Lorraine	The Hingston Roach Group, Inc	Grangeville	ID
Roberson	Randy	Yellowstone Vacations	W. Yellowstone	MT
Rogers	Reid	Teton Valley Chamber	Driggs	ID
Rupp	Jeffrey	Human Resource Development	Bozeman	MT

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		Council		
Sarles	Linda	Park County Transport	Livingston	MT
Sayer	Laurel	Congr. Mike Simpson Office	Idaho Falls	ID
Schechter	Jonathan	The Charture Institute	Jackson	WY
Self	Doug	Driggs Planner	Driggs	ID
Seymour	Lynn	TRPTA	Idaho Falls	ID
Shaw	Bill	ITD District VI	Rigby	ID
Shea	Paul	Yellowstone Historic Center	W. Yellowstone	MT
Shuptrine	Sandy	Y-T Clean Energy Coalition	Jackson	WY
Siegel	Arnie	West Yellowstone Foundation	W. Yellowstone	MT
Sniffin	Bill	Wyoming, Inc.	Lander	WY
Solan	Sean	Wind River Transportation Authority	Riverton	WY
Soloman	Tim	Regional Development Alliance	Idaho Falls	ID
Spencer	Kathaleen	City of Cody Planning Office	Cody	WY
Stauffer	Dave	YBP Board Chair	Red Lodge	MT
Stevens	Bob	Little Falcon Farm	Helena	MT
Taylor	Garth	ID Dept of Parks & Recreation	Idaho Falls	ID
Thomure	Christina	Grand Targhee Resort	Alta	WY
Tobey	Frank	First Transit		TN
Trautman	Laurie	Big Sky Institute	Bozeman	MT
Tuell	Yvette	Shoshone-Bannock Tribes	Fort Hall	ID
Vaessen	Maryjean	West Yellowstone Foundation	W. Yellowstone	MT
VonAken	John	MT Railroad Passengers Assn	Billings	MT
Wackerly	Michael	START Bus System	Jackson	WY
Wade	Claudia	Park County Travel Council	Cody	WY
Wenger	Ron	Billings Transit	Billings	MT
West	Darrell	Bonneville MPO	Idaho Falls	ID
Wicks	Beth	MT Assn for the Blind	Bozeman	MT
Witt	Stephanie	Boise State University	Boise	ID
Young	Tim	JH Friends of Pathways	Jackson	WY

Appendix C - Scenarios

One of the tools used during the project deliberations and discussions with stakeholders was the concept of a "scenario" whereby an idea being proposed as a transportation service would be written up as a scenario. A completed scenario starts with a statement of the human need and then describes an aspect of the larger regional system from the perspective of the user and affected stakeholders. It specifies what triggers the service, who or what performs each step, when communications occur and what information is being communicated. The scenarios capture segments of the system so that each stakeholder can clearly see how the system would function on smaller scale.

In addition to the four scenarios described in this appendix there are a number of additional scenario ideas include as titled concepts for future reference. They are:

- * Jurisdictional Boundary Toolkit (what has worked and why)
- * Linking of Pathways
- * Connect the Parks
- * Event Transportation
- * New Services for Worker Commutes
- * Off Season Vacations
- * Business Funding for Transportation

1. Carless Vacations

Title: A Carless Vacation

Human Need: There are few if any transportation options beyond private (owned or rented) vehicles for travel between gateway communities (communities with airline or Greyhound service) and Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks. Other than chartering buses or using taxis, there are few options for people who want to experience these natural wonders. This limitation often causes visitors to experience high transportation costs; and compromises safety for both the visitors and local residents.

Description of Service: The vision of this service is to provide several low cost travel options, that could coordinate (schedule compatibility) with more expensive options, that will provide travelers the ability to travel from gateway communities to Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks. It is possible that this service would be available by connecting existing public transportation services in the area, and enhancing the visibility of private options, including tour options within the parks.

The ability to create this network is possible, as partnerships are possible through coordination of existing public transportation systems, that can offer services not only to visitors, but to local residents who need to travel for employment, medical, education or any "mobility" reason. Partnerships are also possible, as larger, fixed route transit systems exist in Bozeman and Big Sky, Montana; as well as Jackson, Wyoming (with service to Driggs and Victor, Idaho); and Idaho Falls and Pocatello, Idaho.

The system described herein is not just a public transportation system (or network of systems), but is a way to connect gateway communities to service and attractions in the greater Yellowstone-Teton area. It is also a way to link public transportation systems to private service, such as interpretive tours, or using private systems to "fill in the gaps" if public services are not available.

Actions: To make the above described service possible, the continued development of local services that will ultimately be linked as regional system, are necessary. To facilitate this development the following principles are proposed:

- * Gateway communities must meet at least twice per year to discuss plans for integrating air service with transit options, with a long-term goal or creating access to a "carless vacation" option.
- * Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks are the cornerstone of the region's identity, sustainability, and economy. Their needs must be addressed by any regional transportation system that provides for a carless vacation.
- * The Offices of Tourism in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming should work with the National Parks to market the idea of a carless vacation, and focus on the reduction of the visitors' impacts on the Parks.
- * A transportation system that crosses so many jurisdictional boundaries must solve diverse legal and administrative obstacles. The Departments of Transportation in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming should meet to discuss issues such as insurance, funding and other issues that may hinder the movement of public transportation services across jurisdictional boundaries.
- * Easily accessible information about transportation options (both public and private) is vital to ensure an effective system. The information must be integrated into local, regional and statewide information portals, and information must serve both local and international users.
- * Economic viability is enhanced if the system load can be more evenly distributed to include "off-season" activity. This includes shared vehicles between systems that may have more seasonal peaks of services.

2. Connecting Existing Systems

Title: Connecting Existing Systems, as an example transportation for Paradise Valley-Livingston-Bozeman

Human Need: Employees, people with limited mobility, visitors, and residents need to move around the region, and many cannot drive themselves or would prefer not to drive. Pieces of the transportation network to support the community's needs are in place, but for the most part, the needs outstrip the services. Often, the existing services are islands of services, and the links between these islands are very limited. We will look at the situation in Montana between Bozeman, Livingston, and the north entrance to Yellowstone National Park as an example of this problem that exists across the region.

Description of Service:

Imagine a transportation network that allows people to get around and reduces the amount of vehicles on our roads:

- Available, accessible, and affordable transportation allows Livingston seniors and residents with disabilities to go to Bozeman any day of the week to see a specialist at the hospital or go shopping at Walmart; transportation also allows them to have dinner with a friend in town or go to an evening event at the high school.
- People with limited mobility living in Clyde Park or other outlying communities can access services in Livingston.
- Printing for Less employees and other people who work in Livingston take a bus from their home in Bozeman to their job in Livingston 30 miles away.
- Livingston residents take a bus to their jobs in Bozeman.
- Employees from Yellowstone, Xanterra, and Chico share a bus with visitors and customers from Livingston to Emmigrant (30 miles) and Mammoth Hot Springs (60 miles).
- Seasonal employees and hikers in Yellowstone no longer have to hitchhike but rather can take a shuttle; bicyclists can bus one way and bike the other way.
- Guided bus and snow coach tours give visitors more quality information about Yellowstone than they can get from their individualized car trip.
- A family lands at the Bozeman airport for their vacation to Yellowstone and has their vacation without having to rent a car.
- People who want to drive their own car can do so.
- A fleet of accessible vehicles and a database of residents who need transportation is available in case of emergency evacuation.

We have some transportation resources already in place. In 2006, the Streamline bus system started in Bozeman. Angel Line, a program of the Park County Senior Center, provides dial-a-ride transportation to seniors and people with disabilities in Livingston and across the county.

Livingston Taxi offers taxi services, while Park County Transportation provides transportation to Gallatin Field. Karst Stage and First Group (formerly Laidlaw) provide charter services. Rimrock and Greyhound offer intercity services along I-90. Some human service and medical facilities offer transportation to their clients, including the program for adults with disabilities and the assisted living facilities. Yellowstone runs an employee shuttle four days a week that carries people from Livingston into the park. In total, between 15 and 20 vans and buses are available in Park County for public agencies and social service agencies, not including school buses. In addition, there are the vehicles operated by several private transportation businesses.

The services offered in these vehicles are usually sporadic, sometimes unreliable, sometimes costly, and most do not serve the transportation need at the time of need. As a result, too often people drive their car, hitch-hike, or do without. As a final possibility, some people with disabilities use costly ambulances, sometimes the only accessible mode, as a mode of transportation to accomplish non-emergency medical transportation.

If existing services can be effectively networked and improved, if we can overcome tourism and consider the needs of everyone instead of the individual constituency, we can fill some of the gaps. We will need to find additional ways to pay for transportation to fill more or the gaps.

We need a more robust network of private and public services that are linked as a regional system. It needs to be easy for people to figure out what transportation resources are available, how much a service costs, and when it runs. We need to put people who need transportation into vehicles with empty seats. We need the service to be attractive.

This leaves some questions for discussion:

- What services need to be included?
- What can we do to help key players work together to make this happen?
- How do we make it attractive?
- What do we do to build awareness and make it easy to understand?
- How do we pay for it?

3. Community Gathering Places

Title: Community Gathering Places

Human Need: Many communities of the Y-T have followed traditional development patterns where the downtown core has given way to dispersed development and big box or convenience store commercial centers. This is true even in smaller gateway communities with populations less than 5,000. The reasons for this are many, but the result is a community where almost all activities are dependent on private vehicles to access services.

The human need therefore, is to be able to access basic services without reliance on a private vehicle but with the ability to use their private vehicle or alternative modes when desired - in other words the need is to have a choice.

Description of Service: The service being proposed in this scenario is to provide a location in every community of the Y-T that serves as a community gathering place, and a transportation and commercial services hub. By combining these fundamental human services in a common area a number of important benefits can be realized:

- 1. Transportation services become much more visible and easy to access.
- 2. With forethought, a common style can help brand these services and make them more identifiable to both residents and visitors.
- 3. Proximity of shops, transit, pathways, and social events will enhance energy efficiency as well as the economy.

Each community gathering place will first serve as a place where you can leave one mode of transportation and access another. After all, you have to get there before you can do anything! This includes private vehicles so there is a park-and-ride element to the service, but depending on the traffic level the P&R could be serviced by a short transit link.

The social aspects of the Community Gathering Place help people become familiar with the nexus of services available. Whether it is a summer concert, a winter ice skate, or a family picnic, the place becomes recognized as a pleasant place to be in and of itself. Our region abounds with places similar to this concept. In many cases the only thing missing is the transportation element. Jackson's Town Square is one example, and the Idaho Falls Green belt another. While Jackson has somewhat addressed the transportation element with a new parking garage there is probably more that could be done.

Bozeman is building a new downtown intermodal facility that somewhat fills the role of the Community Gathering Place. The parking garage will also be the downtown hub for passengers wanting to ride the Streamline bus system. It includes indoor space where people can wait for the bus or get brochures about Bozeman. We also have the opportunity right now to use the indoor space for something such as an unmanned community art space. The structure also has retail spaces at street level, where perhaps a coffee shop or another gathering place can set up shop. The location is one block off Main Street.

There are also a few things that the Community Gathering Place is not. It is most definitely not a bus station, nor is it just a park within a few blocks of some shops, or a gravel lot where you can leave your car and catch a bus or carpool.

The most successful examples are when a community sees its Community Gathering Place as a central part of its identity. This is a place where anyone can stop for a while and maybe run into a friend or meet a person from across the world – a place where there is information, good food, and maybe a place to buy a band-aid.

Ok, sounds nice, but how do you do it? The keys are in flexibility and a long term vision. Each community will have a different geography, may or may not have easy land availability, and will certainly have its own personality. Perhaps there isn't funding for a transit center building in the near future, but there may well be grant availability for a sheltered stop near the pathway and street. Maybe the green space isn't adequate for a large music concert, but it can host a farmer's market distributed along a broad walkway.

Skeptics may question why a transportation system has a Community Gathering Place as a core value. It is because transportation is not an infrastructure separate from those other things that keep us alive - housing, markets, water, waste disposal, and government structures. Like these other basic infrastructures transportation is a manifestation of a fundamental human need and it can't be properly designed without recognizing how it fits into a community.

4. Find a Ride

Title: The Regional Transportation Brain - "Find the Ride"

Human Need: Accessing of the variety of transportation resources that are available across the Greater Yellowstone region is an unnecessarily difficult task. Pockets of information reside on provider's web sites or printed schedules, but the human interface is inconsistent and sparse. There is also limited or no information available about how you can connect between services or what the real time status is of a route or vehicle.

Because of this both residents and visitors frequently don't even try to use these services and default to the more familiar security of private and rental vehicles. This barrier also prevents the development of more robust services and the expansion of efficient transportation marketplaces. Services could be better utilized if people had easy and immediate access to an information system that links all public and private providers, offers carpooling options, provides real time information, and offers details on the nature of all routes, pathways, and vehicles.

Description of Service: This scenario explains how a resident or visitor can move from any origin to any destination using the network of public and private transportation resources. It accommodates the integration of personal vehicle travel, carpools, transit, and non-motorized travel modes.

Consider how someone finds a ride with our existing infrastructure. Assume that a person living in Bozeman, Montana, wants to visit a relative in Rexburg, Idaho, a 198-mile trip shown on the map below. Possible ways of accomplishing the trip other than driving a personal vehicle might be as follows.

- Method 1: Call taxi service and ask for a ride. If the cab company is willing to do that (and regulations allow for cross-state trips), the trip can be accomplished at a high cost.
- Method 2: Take the Galavan West between Bozeman and West Yellowstone. Spend the
 night in West Yellowstone and catch the Galavan West route the next day to
 Rexburg. This service, West Yellowstone's public transportation systems, runs three
 times a week from West Yellowstone to Bozeman. The other two days it runs to Idaho
 Falls. The service is open to the general public but is designed around the needs of
 seniors and people with disabilities living in West Yellowstone.
- Method 3: Take the Skyline Link, Big Sky's public transportation service which runs two or more times per day, for the first portion of the trip. Enjoy some time in Big Sky and catch the Galavan West itinerary from there.
- Method 4: Look for a hotel shuttle, airport shuttle, charter service, or similar services (if any) and arrange for a trip from Bozeman to West Yellowstone (if they allow). Once there, use Salt Lake Express intercity service to get to Rexburg.
- Method 5: Find any options for carpooling or vanpooling.

- Method 6: Ride your bike for a multi-day recreation-based opportunity. Given traffic volumes and road widths, bicyclists may feel more comfortable using U.S. 287 through Ennis instead of U.S. 191.
- Method 7: Combine components of the above methods.



In all these examples, the major drawback is the fact that the duty of planning the trip resides on the customer and it requires extensive phone calls and a higher chance of rejection of service. This is because a charter service might not allow the person to be a passenger on the service. So the existing options are less than ideal and in many cases the trip cannot be made unless driving personal vehicles.

Imagine a system where this person can access a web site, call a traveler information phone number (511), or call a social service phone number (211) to find these available resources and

develop an itinerary. Essentially, imagine a localized version of Orbitz.com that focuses on surface transportation without the private vehicle.

Trip planning will help coordinate activities between transportation providers. By defining transportation services electronically, the base level is in place for other applications. By improving the awareness and visibility of transit services to non-users, support for operations and funding will be built.

In our country's major metropolitan areas, a trip planning signifies something different than in the Greater Yellowstone region. For our region, someone looking for a ride should be able to find information through: three digit phone systems (511 and 211); a human service; a local transit agency's website; a statewide website; or the local transportation agency by calling and asking for help. To accomplish this, a public transportation traveler information system must meet the needs of three primary groups of users:

- The public, various transportation users, their care providers and / or case workers
- Transportation providers including public and intercity transit operators
- State or local planners

The system will include as many transportation options (or modes) as available within each county. First, it will include regularly scheduled services, whether public or private. These include local fixed routes (e.g., Streamline), door-to-door services (e.g., Livingston Angel Line), publicly operated intercity services (e.g., the Skyline Link) and links to commercial passenger carriers (i.e. Greyhound and Amtrak). At a later stage, the system could include specialized transportation or travel options. These could include either regularly scheduled services or periodic, special trips. Also, the system could incorporate carpools, shared rides or subsidized transportation via public, human service or tribal vehicles or other options. In addition, the system could include private services from taxis, limousines, shuttles and links to commercial carriers (i.e. Park County Transportation.) Finally, it can include information about the quality and availability of pedestrian and bicycle facilities.

Ideally, the regional traveler information service will serve riders and operators across the region, considering the realities of the Greater Yellowstone's environment. Riders will be able to talk over the phone or in person to a "mobility manager" to find a ride. If riders have access to the Internet, assistance tools will be available online. Oftentimes, the individual seeking trip planning information will not be the same person who will take the ride. The seeker could be a caretaker, an adult family member, a receptionist, a health care provider or a friend. Whether users are individuals or rural agencies, many will have limited or no access to specialized computer skills or high-speed communications. The system will need to accommodate this reality.

Stakeholders include both the organizations whose primary responsibility is transporting people and the organizations whose primary responsibility is providing care and support to people.

Trip Planning Via Google Transit

For the fixed routes common in our region's urban and large rural areas – Billings, Bozeman, Idaho Falls, Pocatello, and Jackson Hole – and the national parks - the potential rider wants to know:

- "How do I get from A to B"
- "How long will it take?"
- "When do I need to be at the bus stop or train station?"
- "How much will it cost?"

Google Transit offers a solution for this type of public transportation service. It works like MapQuest or Google Maps tailored to transit. The customer enters an origin, a destination, and a travel time, then the application provides an itinerary as shown below for Portland. Larger metropolitan areas have had web-based trip planners for years, but Google Transit makes this service affordable for smaller providers. The transit property provides the route information in the format required by Google. Then Google Transit provides trip planning at no cost to the transit property.





Google Transit currently works only for public, fixed route services that run at least once a day. It will not work for our remaining services, a large portion of the available services in much of our region. Therefore, we will need something other than this tool to answer the question for the rest of the region:

- "Is it possible to get there?"
- "Which day of the week is best for this trip?"
- "Who can take me?"
- "Are there any carpooling options?"

As a first step to accommodate these services, the "Regional Transportation Brain" at minimum should include for all participating services:

- Name of the transportation service
- Contact Information
- Agency or Company Contact Person
 - o Address
 - Phone Number
 - Fax Number
 - Email Address
 - Website
- Type of service offered
- Description
- Schedules
- Stop locations
- Hours of Operation
- Cost
- ADA Accessibility of Vehicles
- Ability to carry bicycles
- Coverage Area
- Last Record Update
- Expected Date of Next Update

We need to make it easier for the consumer to find a ride, leading to citizens having better access to their community resources and foster a more efficient use of transportation resources. This may also increase ridership; attract new users; and increase customer satisfaction.