

Purpose and Need

The **Purpose** of the Central City Transit Alternatives Analysis Project is to: increase transit ridership to, from, and between existing and emerging activity areas within the Spokane downtown area, including the Downtown core, the University District, and the Medical District; directly connect residential areas with major employment centers; help stimulate new development in downtown Spokane that is in support of local and regional land use goals, objectives and plans; and maximize regional support of and investment in the transportation system; while being environmentally sensitive and garnering broad public support.

The **Need** for this project arises from:

- **The opportunity to focus infrastructure investments within the City of Spokane’s Targeted Area Development (TAD) districts, in order to encourage new development in the downtown area.** Many corridors and markets within the study area have potential for new development but lack amenities, including transit service, which would stimulate new development. In 2009, the retail opportunity gap¹ within the City of Spokane was about \$816.7 million. Planning and economic development policy within the City of Spokane has identified key districts for revitalization. The City’s comprehensive plan identified Centers and Corridors for infill development and city staff have developed Targeted Area Development (TAD) districts as an economic development tool. The goal of the Centers and Corridors program is to work with the community to revitalize the pedestrian oriented commercial districts in Spokane while strengthening and diversifying Spokane’s economy. The goal of the TAD approach is to maximize capital investment by aligning infrastructure development with economic opportunity. Both key commercial districts and TADs are located within the study area. Three of six TADs within the city are located in the study area: two within the University District and one within North Bank. Two of the three TADs within the study area are tax increment finance districts, providing the opportunity for district funding as redevelopment occurs.
- **The opportunity to improve transit accessibility, efficiency, and competitiveness for trips within the downtown core.** The public transportation system in Spokane is currently designed as a hub-and-spoke system, with most routes in the study area converging on the downtown Plaza. While this design provides a high level of transit accessibility in heart of downtown, connections to other activity nodes within the downtown core often require a transfer. The lack of direct service and inconvenience of transfers adversely impacts the competitiveness of transit for shorter journeys within the downtown core. For example, there currently is no direct connection between the WSU Spokane campus in the University District and Deaconess Hospital in the Medical District; travelers must transfer at the Downtown Plaza to make that connection with a convenient transfer (less than 10 minutes wait time) feasible only once an hour. Connecting
- **The opportunity to increase regional transit accessibility of downtown activity and employment centers.** Downtown activity nodes like the Medical District attract trips from across the region. However, the existing hub-and-spoke transit network provides significantly less regional accessibility for activity nodes that are not within walking

¹ The retail opportunity gap is the difference between the 2009 demand (consumer expenditures) and the Supply (retail sales). This gap includes all retail sales including eating and drinking places.

distance of the Plaza. Destinations within walking distance of the STA Plaza have a significantly higher transit mode share than those that are not within walking distance. This is in spite of the fact that activity nodes like the University and Medical Districts have other transit supportive factors such as constrained/paid parking and employer-sponsored Commute Trip Reduction (CTR) or other transportation demand management programs. Through improved transit accessibility of these activity centers to the regional transit system, more travelers will elect to use transit for commuting and other trip purposes.

- **The demand for convenient downtown transit service outside of peak periods.** As a 24-hour live, work, and play destination, downtown Spokane has considerably more transit demand in off-peak periods than the region as a whole. However, the infrequent nature of regional 'hub and spoke' services outside of the peak periods underserves the demand for non-commute trips within downtown. For example, during weekday and Saturday evenings, service is only provided every 30-60 minutes between Gonzaga University and the Plaza, with service ending at 9 PM on Saturdays. While a trip from Gonzaga University to the Medical District takes only 16 minutes during peak hours, on weekday evenings this trip can take as long as 50 to 60 minutes. Transit trip times such as these are too long to attract non-commute riders during off-peak hours.
- **The need to overcome existing barriers to pedestrian mobility.** I-90, the Union Pacific and Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroads, and the Spokane River are physical barriers to pedestrian movements in downtown Spokane. These barriers subdivide the downtown area into multiple districts that are challenging or uncomfortable for pedestrians to travel between. Transit can extend the range of the pedestrian by overcoming these barriers and providing practical, comfortable, non-automotive travel options among downtown activity nodes.
- **The challenges that new riders encounter in understanding the existing transit system.** Downtown Spokane is a regional activity center that attracts residents and visitors from across eastern Washington and beyond for services, special events, shopping, and entertainment. The current bus system serves the larger Spokane area beyond the downtown area and can be intimidating and prohibitively complicated to new transit users who may also be unfamiliar with the layout of the city. A system is needed that provides comprehensible transit service in the downtown area to meet the travel needs of new and infrequent users.
- **The projected future traffic congestion in the downtown core.** Congestion and circulation issues are projected to worsen with further population and employment growth and continued economic development in the Spokane area. Since 1999, the vehicle miles traveled per day have doubled in the area and residential homes currently generate more than 10 person trips per day (2008 Spokane MTP). The population of Spokane County is projected to grow by 22 percent, from 441,600 in 2005 to 563,700 by 2030, at a minimum (Intermountain Demographics). Employment is also expected to increase by about 90,000 employees in Spokane County by 2030, with 45,000 additional jobs in the Spokane area (Spokane MTP). The 2008 Update of the Spokane MTP reports that several intersections and roadway segments within the downtown area are expected to be functioning below standard in 2015. Additionally, the MTP lists several priority projects that are not currently scheduled for funding; without these improvements, congestion in downtown Spokane will function below standard by 2015 and will worsen by 2030.