

## **Chapter 2. Existing Conditions**

This chapter summarizes the findings from the *Existing Conditions Report* produced early in the Regional Operations and Capital Improvement Plan process. Generated in December 2003, the *Existing Conditions Report* conducted an environmental scan of the Valley Ride service area communities, the public transportation services provided, and a broader transportation and land use planning context for Ada and Canyon Counties. The analysis of the existing conditions laid the groundwork for subsequent short- and long-range service planning efforts detailed in Chapter 3 and 4 (Short- and Long-Range Service Plans).

### **Community Characteristics**

Ada County and Canyon County are located in the Treasure Valley of Southwest Idaho. The counties stretch from high desert in the west to the western edge of the Rocky Mountains to the east. The two-county region is also home to many of the state's largest employers and the state capitol.

#### **Ada County**

Situated in Ada County, the Boise urban area is the largest metropolitan area in Idaho. With a population of 185,787, Boise is home to over 60 percent of the residents in Ada County. The city is also home to the state capitol and a large number of the area's major employers including: Boise State University, Micron Technologies, St. Luke's Regional Medical Center, Hewlett Packard and Albertson's. As the state capitol and county seat, Boise is a major center for government jobs in Idaho.

Ada County's other cities lie primarily to the west and northwest of Boise. These include the cities of Star, Meridian, Eagle, Kuna and Garden City. The 2000 US Census found that Ada County has a population of 300,904; that is 46 percent larger than it was in 1990. While every city in the county grew by 45 percent or more during the 1990s, much of the population growth was in outlying communities, such as Eagle and Meridian, located west of Boise. Meridian's population grew an impressive 264 percent over the decade and

Eagle grew by over 230 percent. This is likely the result of the lower cost of land and housing in these areas as well as regional job decentralization.

**Figure 2-1 Ada County Population Comparison**

City	1990 Population	2000 Population	% Change
Boise	125,738	185,787	47.8%
Eagle	3,327	11,085	233.2%
Garden City	6,369	10,624	66.8%
Kuna	1,955	5,382	175.3%
Meridian	9,596	34,919	263.9%
Star	n/a	1,795	n/a

According to the 2000 US Census, 90 percent of Ada County’s population is white and about 5 percent identify themselves as Hispanic. Slightly over seven percent of individuals in the county are living below the poverty level; the median household income is \$46,140. Senior citizens currently make up nine percent of the population, although the senior population is expected to increase significantly in the coming decade as the baby-boomers reach retirement age. Like much of the nation, Ada County has seen an increase in low-wage service sector jobs over the last 10 years.

The majority of Ada County commuters drive alone to work (81%) followed by carpooling/vanpooling (10%) and public transportation, which less than one percent of the population uses for work trips. The average commute time is 19.3 minutes. Residents in the area tend to live and work in the same county. A total of 93 percent of the population work in Ada County and five percent work in Canyon County. Generally, this mirrors demand patterns on commuter services and indicates that reverse commute services (Ada to Canyon) are not likely to be a high priority for public transportation in coming years.

Currently local fixed-route bus service provided by Valley Regional Transit (VRT) is only available in Boise and Garden City. Express bus service running between Nampa and Boise does stop near the highway in Meridian.

## Canyon County

Canyon County, like Ada County, experienced considerable growth from 1990 to 2000. According to the 2000 Census, the county population is 131,441, an increase of about 46 percent from 1990. The county is home to the cities of Caldwell, Greenleaf, Melba, Middleton, Nampa, Notus, Parma and Wilder. Not surprisingly, the most significant growth was in Nampa, which is located close to the eastern border with Ada County and less than 20 miles from downtown Boise. Figure 2-2 provides a more detailed summary of population growth in Canyon County communities between 1990 and 2000.

**Figure 2-2 Canyon County Population Comparison**

City	1990 Population	2000 Population	% Change
Caldwell	18,400	25,967	41.1%
Greenleaf	648	862	33.0%
Melba	252	439	74.2%
Middleton	1,851	2,978	60.9%
Nampa	28,365	51,867	82.9%
Notus	380	458	20.5%
Parma	1,597	1,771	10.9%
Wilder	1,232	1,462	18.7%

Nearly 19 percent of Canyon County residents are Hispanic and 17 percent speak a language other than English at home. Persons 65 years or older are 11 percent of the total population. As a whole, Canyon County is significantly poorer than Ada County. The median household income is \$35,884, about \$10,000 less than Ada County, and about 12 percent of residents live below the poverty level. The most common occupations are in services, manufacturing and retail. Jobs in the construction, communications and entertainment, accommodation and food industries all increased by over 100 percent from 1990 to 2000.

Nearly one third of the population works in neighboring Ada County and 65 percent work in Canyon County. Most residents depend on personal vehicles to commute to work. About 77 percent of the population drive alone to work,

approximately 14 percent use a carpool or vanpool, and just 0.3 percent ride public transportation to their place of employment. This is not surprising given the limited transit services operating in Canyon County and the long travel distances between communities. The high percentage of residents using van and carpools does, however, indicate a willingness to use alternatives to the single-occupancy vehicle for regular commute trips.

## **Regional Transit Agencies**

The region has five organizations offering various types of public transportation options including commuter, local fixed route, paratransit and carpool/vanpool. Figures 2-3 through 2-5 describe each of the providers and show their current service areas

**Figure 2-3 Ada and Canyon County Public Transportation Providers**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Type of Services</b>	<b>Service Area</b>
ACHD Commuteride	Vanpool, Carpool and Employer Assistance	Ada County and Canyon County
Commuters Bus	Commuter/Express	Caldwell, Nampa, Middleton, Star, Eagle and Boise
Treasure Valley Metro	Commuter/Express, Mid-day Service	Nampa, Meridian and Boise
Treasure Valley Transit	Fixed-route and Demand Response	Local fixed-route service in Nampa and Caldwell
ValleyRide	Fixed-route service, commuter, paratransit	Boise and Garden City

**Figure 2-4 Existing Service – Boise Area**

**Regional Operations and Capital Improvement Plan**

VALLEY REGIONAL TRANSIT

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**Figure 2-5 Existing Service – Nampa & Caldwell Area**

**Regional Operations and Capital Improvement Plan**

VALLEY REGIONAL TRANSIT

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## Ada County Highway District (ACHD) Commuteride

ACHD Commuteride offers carpools/vanpools, commuter benefits and employer support services in Ada, Canyon and surrounding counties. With over 50 active vanpools in service, the program successfully provides ridesharing options to communities throughout the Treasure Valley. Vanpool commuters qualify for various incentive options, which help subsidize their out-of-pocket expenses. Commuteride has had success providing commute alternatives for trips not currently being served by the area’s fixed route transit systems.

**Figure 2-6 Commuteride Vanpool**

Year	Number of Riders	Passenger Trips	Vehicle Miles Traveled	VMT Avoided
2002	418	117,145	613,540	n/a
2003	440	129,454	669,553	7,100,000

## Commuters Bus

Commuters Bus is a private transportation company that has offered express bus service between Caldwell and Boise, stopping in Downtown Boise, at Boise State University and at the Boise Airport. Commuter Bus will provide this service through February 2005, after which VRT will contract with First Transit for the service. The route provides one trip a day in each direction during the weekday AM and PM peak commute periods. In 2004 Commuters Bus discontinued an express route that connected the Highway 44 communities of Star, Eagle and Middleton to Boise due to lack of funding.

**Figure 2-7 Commuters Bus Productivity**

Name	Boardings	Revenue Hours	Passengers per Hour
Route 1 Nampa/Caldwell	59	3	19.5
Route 2 Middleton/Star/Eagle	24	3	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>13.8</b>

## Treasure Valley Metro (TVM)

Established in June 2000, TVM’s Commuter Express route serves Meridian and Nampa with inbound and outbound trips to downtown Boise and major employers along the route. TVM operates five weekday trips during the AM and PM peak commute periods. TVM also operates a mid-day bus service between the communities of Nampa and Meridian. Daily operations of the Commuter Express route are contracted through an agreement with Treasure Valley Transit.

Treasure Valley Metro’s Commuter Express service provides an average of 118 daily passenger trips. Operating 35 daily revenue hours, the route has an average productivity of 3.4 passengers per revenue hour of service.

**Figure 2-8 Treasure Valley Metro Productivity**

Name	Boardings	Revenue Hours	Passengers per Hour
Commuters Express	118	35	3.4
Mid-day Service	16	8	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>3.0</b>

## Nampa/Caldwell Service

Valley Regional Transit contracts out service in the Canyon County area. Treasure Valley Transit (TVT) has operated the Nampa/Caldwell service and will continue through February 2005. Starting in March 2005 First Transit will be the contracted service provider. The existing has three fixed line routes in the cities of Nampa and Caldwell, which operate 12 hours daily Monday through Friday. The companion demand response system offers door-to-door service throughout most of Canyon County.

Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates conducted a detailed ridership survey for all three Nampa/Caldwell routes on October 23, 2003. On-board surveyors recorded boardings and alightings at each bus stop and flag stop in the local system. The data gathered gives a snapshot of weekday fixed route activity in the communities of Nampa and Caldwell.

**Figure 2-9 Nampa/Caldwell Productivity By Route**

Name	Boardings	Revenue Hours	Passengers per Hour	Peak Frequency	Midday Frequency
Caldwell	83	13	6.4	60	60
Nampa 1	84	12	7.0	60	60
Nampa 2	68	12	5.7	60	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>6.4</b>		

## **ValleyRide**

ValleyRide, a service directly operated by Valley Regional Transit (VRT), operates 20 local fixed line weekday routes and seven Saturday routes in Boise and Garden City. In addition to the fixed-route service, VRT also operates an ADA complementary paratransit service called ACCESS.

Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates conducted a ridecheck on all routes in the ValleyRide Boise/Garden City system over a four-day period from October 20 - October 23, 2003. Ridecheck surveyors counted the boardings and alightings at each stop along the routes. Figure 2-10 shows the productivity for each route in the ValleyRide local fixed-route operating in the cities of Boise and Garden City.

Figure 2-10 ValleyRide Productivity By Route

Route	Name	Boardings	Revenue Hours	Passengers per Hour	Peak Frequency	Midday Frequency
1	Warm Springs	143	9.3	15.5	30	60
3	Vista	222	9.3	24.0	30	60
4	Hillcrest	299	19	15.7	30	60
5	Towne Square Mall	494	20	24.7	30	60
13	Roosevelt	262	20	13.1	30	60
14	Fairview via Maple Grove	272	14	19.4	60	60
14	Fairview via Cole Road	132	8	16.5	60	n/a
16	State Street via Pierce Park	147	8	18.4	60	n/a
16	State Street via 28th Street	282	13	21.7	60	60
17	VA Hospital	124	9	13.8	30	60
18	Hyde Park	124	10.3	12.0	30	60
19	BSU Shuttle	552	22	25.1	15	8
20	Parkcenter	400	22	18.2	30	60
23	Skycliffe Tripper	23	3	7.7	n/a	n/a
23	Skycliffe Express	70	3.5	20.0	60	n/a
24	Garden City	81	6.5	12.5	60	60
25	Five Mile	119	20.5	5.8	30	60
26	Southwest Boise	79	19	4.2	30	60
29	Overland	304	19	16.0	30	60
33	Federal Way	272	20	13.6	30	60
	<b>Total</b>	<b>4,401</b>	<b>275.4</b>	<b>16.0</b>		

## Important Findings and Issues

There are several key findings from the Existing Conditions Report that were influential in the development of the Short-Range Service Plan.

1. **Southwest Boise routes have low productivity.** Routes 25 (Five Mile) and 26 (Southwest Boise) have the lowest productivity of all of the routes in ValleyRide system (5.8 and 4.2 passengers per hour respectively). The primary reason for the poor performance is that the area west of Towne Square Mall is characterized by low-density land use patterns that are difficult to serve with fixed route transit.
2. **Top performing routes.** Five ValleyRide routes average 20 or more passengers per hour (see Figure 2-11). The BSU Shuttle, the 5 (Towne

Square Mall) and the 3 (Vista) each average over 24 passenger boardings per hour. The higher productivity can be attributed to higher densities and key transit generators located along the lines. The ridecheck data suggest that the Towne Square Mall, downtown Boise and BSU are the major activity centers for transit in Boise.

**Figure 2-11 Top 5 Performing Routes**

Route	Name	Pass per Hour
19	BSU Shuttle	25.1
5	Towne Square Mall	24.7
3	Vista	24
16	State Street via 28th St	21.7
23	Skycliffe Express	20

\*Data from October 2003 Ridecheck

3. **Service between the airport and downtown should be more direct.** Current service between downtown Boise and the airport is routed through the neighborhood south of Nez Perce between Roosevelt and Vista making the route slow and less attractive to airline passengers and airport employees. Service needs to be straighter and more direct in order to capture new riders.
4. **Low ridership on Federal Way south of Bergeson.** Some of the least productive segments in the ValleyRide system are located along Federal Way in southeastern Boise. Although the Route 33 (Federal Way) provides service to a major employer (Micron) and a shopping destination (Factory Outlet Mall), very few riders take the bus to this area. In addition, the bus has to travel long distances along unproductive portions of Federal Way and I-84 to access Micron and the outlet mall.
5. **More direct connections between downtown and Towne Square Mall are needed.** Ridecheck data demonstrated that there is a great amount of demand for travel between downtown Boise/BSU and Towne Square Mall. This key market needs to be better addressed with more efficient and direct service. The Short-Range Service Plan uses productive transit

corridors such as Emerald and Fairview to provide faster (straighter) service between these major transit generators.

6. **Reduce number of one-way segments.** A number of routes travel along large one-way loops making the routing less efficient and more difficult for passengers to understand. Two-way routing would provide better service and possibly increase ridership in areas that are now served by one-way loops, such as the neighborhood segments of Routes 4 and 13 in south Boise.
7. **Direct service from Nampa/Caldwell to Towne Square Mall.** Although regional services currently connect downtown Nampa/Caldwell to downtown Boise and the BSU campus, no routes travel to Boise Towne Square Mall.
8. **Improve frequencies on Nampa/Caldwell Boulevard.** The ridecheck data and our fieldwork demonstrated that a large portion of riders in Nampa/Caldwell board and alight at bus stops along the “boulevard”. By implementing 30-minute headways, Nampa/Caldwell service could provide better service to destinations such as Karcher Mall, the transfer point at the Nampa Civic Center and the BSU Canyon County Campus.

## **Financial Characteristics**

This section describes the overall operating budgets and funding sources for each of the five existing public transportation providers in the ValleyRide service area (as of December 2003). Included in the assessment is an agency-by-agency breakdown of operating revenue sources.

**Figure 2-12 Boise Area Transit Agencies Financial Characteristics**

Agency	FY02 Budget	FY03 Budget	Projected FY04 Budget	Revenue Sources
ACHD Commuteride	\$1,250,523	\$1,569,500	\$1,793,615	Federal STP Funds, fares, Federal 5309 funds and ACHD funds
Commuters Bus	N/A	\$236,423	N/A	Fares, FTA 5307 funds, City of Nampa, advertising
Treasure Valley Metro	\$298,350	\$298,350	\$298,350	Federal STP Funds, local matching from the cities of Nampa and Meridian and fares
Treasure Valley Transit	N/A	N/A	\$575,510	FTA 5307, fares, Cities of Nampa and Caldwell
ValleyRide	\$4,595,981	\$4,360,571	\$5,504,497	FTA 5307, fares, advertising, Cities of Boise and Garden City, employer contributions

**ACHD Commuteride**

The majority of funding for the ACHD vanpool program comes from fares. Federal STP funds cover about 27 percent of operating costs, however a percentage of these funds provided through a construction mitigation project will no longer be available as of September 2004. Commuteride also receives revenue from Federal 5309 funds and ACHD.

**Figure 2-13 Commuteride Revenue Sources**

Source	Amount	% of Total Revenue
Federal STP Funds	\$220,000	12.3%
Federal STP funds (WYE)	\$264,375	14.7%
Federal 5309 Funds	\$352,240	19.6%
ACHD Local	\$288,500	16.1%
Vanpool Fares	\$668,500	37.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,793,615</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Note: As of September 30, 2004 Federal STP Funds (WYE) are no longer available.

## **Commuters Bus**

In 2003, Commuters Bus operated its two express routes with a total budget of \$236,423. The current budget is smaller after the discontinuation of the Highway 44 route. Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5307 funds cover more than half of the operating budget. In addition, Commuters Bus relies on funding from fares and contributions by the local jurisdictions in Canyon County.

**Figure 2-14 Commuters Bus Revenue Sources FY2003\***

<b>Source</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>% of Total Revenue</b>
FTA Section 5307	\$192,986	81.6%
Fares	\$40,000	16.9%
City of Nampa	\$3,437	1.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$236,423</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

\* No information available for FY2004.

## **Treasure Valley Metro**

Treasure Valley Metro’s budget is \$298,350 a year. The commuter and midday service is contracted out to a private service provider. Most of the funding for the commuter bus service comes from federal STP funds with local matching funds from the City of Nampa and the City of Meridian. The municipalities pay for 100 percent of the midday service.

**Figure 2-15 Treasure Valley Metro (Peak Hour & Mid-day)**

Source	Amount	% of Total Revenue
Federal STP Funds (WYE)	\$185,750	62.3%
Local	\$67,000	22.5%
Fares	\$45,600	15.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$298,350</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Note: As of September 30, 2004 Federal STP Funds (WYE) will no longer be available.

### **Nampa/Caldwell**

As of April 2003, ValleyRide funds fixed-route operations, planning and demand/response services in Nampa and Caldwell. ValleyRide primarily uses FTA 5307 funds to pay for the contract service (see Figure 2-16).

**Figure 2-16 Nampa/Caldwell Transit Revenue Sources**

Source	Amount	% of Total Revenue
ValleyRide – Operations	\$394,885	68.6%
ValleyRide – Planning	\$73,451	12.8%
ValleyRide - Demand/Response	\$107,174	18.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$575,510</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

### **ValleyRide**

There are five primary operating revenue sources that support Valley Regional Transit’s ValleyRide service: (1) FTA Section 5307 funds, (2) funds from the City of Boise, (3) farebox revenues, (4) contributions from area employers and (5) advertising revenue. As of 2005, VRT will no longer be eligible to use FTA 5307 funds for ValleyRide operations due to the reclassification of Boise as a large urbanized area. The new designation was a result of a substantial increase in population recorded in the 2000 census.

**Figure 2-17 ValleyRide Revenue Sources FY 2004**

Source	Amount	% of Total Revenue
FTA Section 5307	\$1,800,000	32.7%
Cities of Boise and Garden City <sup>1</sup>	\$2,500,000	45.4%
Fares	\$652,000	11.8%
Employer Contributions	\$308,081	5.6%
Advertising	\$244,416	4.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$5,504,497</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

<sup>1</sup> The local contribution is based on miles of service operated within each jurisdiction with Boise providing a vast majority of local revenues.

## Document Review

Three recent planning processes are particularly relevant to the development of the Regional Operations and Capital Improvement Plan (ROCIP). The *Transit Development Plan Technical Memorandum*, the *Five-Year Strategic Plan* and the *Rail Corridor Evaluation* have all been completed in the last three years and were designed to provide a strategic policy framework for the ROCIP. These three study efforts are summarized in the following sections.

### Transit Development Plan (TDP)

The *TDP* Technical Memorandum is a broad based policy study, which provides the baseline regional service allocation policy on which the ROCIP Long-Range Plan details are constructed. Service classifications and target performance measures developed in the TDP were integrated into ROCIP service planning and design efforts.

### Five-Year Strategic Plan

The 2002 *Five-Year Strategic Plan* outlines key organizational goals and specific strategies for achieving these goals. The plan includes mission and vision statements, organizational structure recommendations and implementation strategies. Five high-level priorities from the Strategic Plan were fundamental

in the development of ROCIP service, capital, finance and organizational plan elements.

- Priority One: Secure Stable Funding
- Priority Two: Public Education/Public outreach
- Priority Three: Providing Efficient Services / Maximize Service
- Priority Four: Develop, Improve, and Increase Partnerships
- Priority Five: Develop a Rail Strategy

### **Rail Corridor Evaluation Study**

A *Rail Corridor Evaluation Study* of the Boise Cut-Off rail corridor was completed in April 2003. The study examined the costs, benefits and barriers to acquiring and implementing commuter rail service on the Boise Cut-Off alignment between Idaho Center and the Boise Depot Station.

The study determined that the corridor could be brought up to the condition necessary to operate heavy-commuter rail services at speeds up to 60 miles per hour with minor track improvements, significant tie replacement, crossing improvements and the installation of a centralized train control and signal system.

### **2002 Public Opinion Survey**

In 2002, Valley Regional Transit polled a sample of Treasure Valley residents to determine attitudes toward public transportation in general, future needs, and support for funding public transportation service described in the conceptual service framework from the Transportation Development Plan Technical Memorandum. The survey collected basic public opinion data on awareness, use of, and attitude toward public transportation; potential service demand and barriers; and the perceived value of public transportation to the region.



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**Regional Operations and Capital Improvement Plan**

VALLEY REGIONAL TRANSIT