Chapter 4. Long Range Service Plan

Overview

This chapter presents the long-range element of the Valley Regional Transit Regional Operations and Capital Improvement Plan. The long-range element includes two conceptual service plans designed for implementation over the six-year period ending in 2012.

Why Two Scenarios?

The Long-Range Plan is based on two service scenarios representing different levels of future growth in the two-county public transportation system. These scenarios are defined by financial projections:

1. Low Growth: Assumes an additional $15.5 million in annual revenues become available through a regional options revenue source.

2. High Growth: Assumes an additional $44.5 million in annual revenues become available through a regional options revenue source.

To provide some perspective, the Low-Growth Scenario still leaves Valley Regional Transit (VRT) behind many peer transit agencies in level of service per capita. The High-Growth Scenario is much more ambitious, providing service levels that meet or exceed many peers in terms of service allocated per capita and includes the addition of a major rail transit corridor project.

Once VRT receives legislative approval to go to the voters with a regional funding measure, more detailed evaluation of what type of regional funding mechanism and its revenue potential will need to be conducted. For the purposes of this study, we assume that a successful measure will produce annual revenue no lower than that projected in the Low-Growth Scenario and no higher than the High-Growth Scenario. This "bookend" approach creates a plan that is much more realistic and flexible. We expect that the Low-Growth Scenario will disappoint most of the agency's constituencies, while the High-Growth Scenario may seem excessive, but with these "bookends" defined, it will

be easy to select elements from the two scenarios to hit any other financial target between them, or to shift priorities within the scenarios.

The Two Scenarios, by Subarea

This section describes the two scenarios in detail, from east to west, beginning with Boise and ending with Canyon County rural services. Subarea descriptions detail service changes relative to the Short-Range Service Plan. The following maps detail long-range service plans for:

- Low-Growth Scenario – Ada County
- Low-Growth Scenario – Canyon County
- High-Growth Scenario – Ada County
- High-Growth Scenario – Canyon County

Figure 4-1 Long Range LOW Growth Scenario – Ada County

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Figure 4-2 Long Range LOW Growth Scenario – Canyon County

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Figure 4-3 Long Range HIGH Growth Scenario – Ada County

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Figure 4-4 Long Range HIGH Growth Scenario – Canyon County

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Boise Core Urban Area (east of Milwaukee, north of Bergeson)

The core area of Boise has the highest aggregate densities in the region and considerable opportunity to redevelop inner-city areas. While the long-range scenarios improve services region wide, the core areas of Boise are where the highest gains in productivity (ridership per unit of operating cost) can be achieved.

The short-range redesign already establishes a grid pattern of services over much of the core area. The long-range scenarios begin to introduce 15-minute all-day frequencies within this area, so that easy connections can be made wherever two lines cross. The 15-minute headway is also the threshold where it becomes possible to use transit without planning your trip around the schedule.

Low-Growth Scenario

In the Low-Growth Scenario, the major corridors in Boise all have improved frequency. Most have frequencies of every 30 minutes all day. Three major lines run every 15 minutes all day: 9-State/Cole, 5-Emerald, and 29-Overland. These form a skeletal structure of high-quality services that can help the city to encourage density in those corridors if desired.

High-Growth Scenario

In the High-Growth Scenario, most Boise area transit lines are upgraded to 15-minute headways all day, forming a grid pattern in which it is easy to transfer between any two routes to complete a trip. Timed connections will continue to exist downtown and at Towne Square Mall, but they will become less important, because the high frequency will permit fast connections regardless of the timing.

In the corridor linking downtown and BSU, service operates every five minutes all day. This service is provided by three routes coming into downtown from the west (Routes 5, 7, and 9), which are extended east on Main/Idaho, south on Broadway, and west on University. This scenario requires a place for three

buses to layover in the central campus, which would be the main value to Valley Regional Transit of a BSU transit center.

Only one other route change is proposed: Line 6 (Orchard/Curtis) would be extended from the short-range scenario, ending at Curtis & Franklin to end at Towne Square Mall. (An alternate extension, continuing north via Curtis and Veteran's Memorial Parkway to State, is also a possibility, but the demand for this is less certain, and it would require extensive study and outreach.)

Boise eastern and southern edge

In the southern and eastern parts of Boise, several areas lack the development density to support all-day fixed route service, and are not zoned to support that density.

Low-Growth Scenario

Service is restored to the area south of Bergeson Road, between I-84 and the River. The southern extremity of the service area is Gowen, but service also extends to the Micron campus and the factory outlets.

Flex Route 23 serves this area with direct connections to fixed routes at the shopping center on Federal Way east of Broadway. A "Flex" area is one in which the bus could divert off route to pick up riders who call ahead. Service is hourly.

High-Growth Scenario

The High-Growth Scenario adds two other services.

First, a shuttle serves Micron from the commuter rail line. This shuttle connects with trains at Towne Square Mall station and uses I-84, stopping only to serve the industrial area south of I-84 between Vista and Broadway. (The same shuttle could be operated from a Boise station if the Union Station site is selected, since the running time would be comparable.)

Second, the all-day flex-route service is extended to cover eastern Boise north of the river. From the end of the fixed route system at Old Penitentiary Road, a Flex route would continue southeast to serve developing areas here. These

areas would also have a flex-route connection across the river at Gowen to Micron, the Factory Outlets, and the shopping center on Federal Way east of Broadway.

Eagle and Garden City

In the High-Growth Scenario, a local Flex Route 24 covers Eagle north of the river (and areas of Boise and Garden City west of Glenwood and north of the river). In addition, Route 34 extends south from Eagle, via Eagle Road, to St. Luke's and Meridian Transit Center, also providing connections to the commuter rail line.

Garden City local service along Adams operates hourly in both scenarios. This service flows through to Northgate (Glenwood & State) and on the Hill Road route north of State St. This service is every hour in the Low-Growth Scenario and every 30 minutes in the High-Growth Scenario.

A Highway 44 route provides continuous service linking Boise, Garden City, Eagle, Middleton, Star, and Caldwell. Service operates peak hours every 30 minutes in both scenarios.

Meridian, Kuna, and Western Boise (west of Milwaukee, south of river)

Meridian is currently the largest city in Idaho without any local transit service. In any scenario, the extension of local service throughout most of Meridian would be one of the most substantial changes in coverage.

The proposed Meridian area route structure is focused on a new Meridian Transit Center near Meridian Road. In the High-Growth Scenario, the location is a commuter rail station north of Franklin. In the Low-Growth Scenario, without commuter rail, it could be anywhere between Franklin and I-84, and within a block of Meridian Road.

The following lines would make timed connections to each other at this center:

- Express service (Low-Growth Scenario) or Commuter Rail (High-Growth Scenario) every 30 minutes during peak hours. (The Low-Growth

Scenario's midday express service would also be 30 minutes. Midday commuter rail frequencies might be as low as 90 minutes, but if so these would be supplemented by express bus trips to sustain 30 minute headways in some form.)

- Fixed routes extending east along Overland (Route 33), Franklin (Route 35), Fairview (Route 37), and Ustick (Route 39). All of these routes would flow through to Towne Square Mall at the east end, where they would make connections to many local routes for travel throughout Boise. Frequencies would be every 30-60 minutes in the Low-Growth Scenario, every 15-30 minutes in the High-Growth Scenario.
- Route 35 extends west via Franklin to the Idaho Center area of Nampa, and continues into Nampa Transit Center. Service would be ever 30 minutes in the Low-Growth Scenario, every 15 minutes in the High-Growth Scenario.
- Flex Route 21 would extend southeast to serve developed areas south of Overland, mostly in Boise and the County.
- Route 31 would extend south to Kuna, with service every 60 minutes all day in the Low-Growth Scenario. The High-Growth Scenario would raise the peak service to every 30 minutes.

Finally, in the High-Growth Scenario only:

- Direct all-day service (Route 32) would connect Meridian Transit Center (and Commuter Rail) to Hewlett-Packard via Meridian Road and Chinden.
- Direct all-day service (Route 34) would connect Meridian Transit Center (and Commuter Rail) to Eagle, via Eagle Rd. and St. Luke's
- During peak hours, shuttles (Route 72) would meet trains at Eagle Road station (to/from either direction) and connect to St. Luke's and the business park southeast of Eagle & Overland.

Middleton and Star

A Highway 44 route provides continuous service linking Boise, Garden City, Eagle, Middleton, Star, and Caldwell. Service operates peak hours every 30 minutes in both scenarios.

Nampa and Caldwell

Low-Growth Scenario

In the Low-Growth Scenario, a new all-day route (Route 35) runs every 30 minutes along Franklin between downtown Nampa, Idaho Center, Meridian, and Towne Square Mall. This route connects to the Nampa-Caldwell local service at the west end, and to local Boise service at Towne Square Mall. Connections throughout Meridian are also available from Meridian Transit Center.

Coverage is expanded in northeastern Nampa, with new hourly service (deviation off Route 35) connecting to the Idaho State Hospital area, and also running via Franklin Rd & Birch to serve new residential development.

Service to southern Nampa is upgraded to run every 30 minutes.

Finally, flex-route services are added in both Nampa (Flex Route 51) and Caldwell (Flex Route 52.) These provide structured demand-responsive service throughout these cities where fixed-route service is not available. Every hour, these routes connect with the fixed route system so that customers from these areas can make local and regional connections.

High-Growth Scenario

Commuter rail from Nampa causes the Nampa Transit Center to be relocated to the vicinity of 1st Av N and 16th St. A new station north of Idaho Center serves the proposed new BSU campus, and also becomes the major Park-and-Ride for commuters from Canyon County.

Frequency on the Caldwell-Nampa local fixed routes is doubled everywhere, relative to the Low-Growth Scenario. Service runs every 15 minutes all day on Franklin to Meridian and Boise, in southern Nampa, and on the Boulevard linking Nampa and Caldwell. Service runs every 30 minutes on both routes in

northeastern Nampa, and on the branches serving areas on either side of the Boulevard in Caldwell.

Parma, Notus, Wilder, Greenleaf, and Melba

These small cities in rural areas of Canyon County currently have no service except for lifeline mobility for seniors. These cities would be brought into the transit system, with 2-4 trips per day in the Low-Growth Scenario, and service every 60 minutes peak, 120 minutes all day, in the High-Growth Scenario.

Both scenarios use the same route structure:

- Route 60 extends west from downtown Caldwell transfer point via Highway 26/30 to Notus and Parma
- Route 61 extends west from Nampa Transit Center through Caldwell and then west on Highway 19 to Greenleaf, Wilder, and Parma
- Routes 60 and 61 are through-routed in Parma so that passengers from Notus can ride through Parma to Wilder and Greenleaf, and Nampa, and so that passengers from Wilder and Greenleaf can ride through Parma to Notus and Caldwell.
- Route 62 extends south from Nampa Transit Center to Melba. It is through-routed to Route 61 so that passengers from Melba can ride through to Karcher Mall and, if desired, Greenleaf, Wilder, and Parma.

Commuter Rail in High-Growth Scenario

A major feature of the High-Growth Scenario is a commuter rail line linking Nampa, Meridian, and Boise. While designed around the commute, the line would be an important part of regional travel for all purposes. Based on the previous Commuter Rail Study, we have assumed the following:

- Alignment generally follows the main rail line that runs near Franklin from eastern Nampa to western Boise.
- Nampa alignment follows existing tracks from Can-Ada Road swinging south and west to end at approx. 16th St & 1st Av N.

- Two possible approaches to Boise, which require further study:
  - Alignment to historic Union Station, serving BSU, with shuttle connections to downtown.
  - New alignment following an abandoned northerly branch, with new construction to reach downtown Boise directly.
- Trains every 30 minutes during peak hours, every 60-90 minutes during off-peak hours.
- Stations as defined in the Rail Corridor Evaluation (2003) , namely:
  - Nampa: 16th St & 1st Av N
  - Nampa: Can-Ada Rd
  - Meridian: Meridian Transit Center (Meridian Av)
  - Meridian: Eagle Road
  - Boise: Five Mile Road
  - Boise: Towne Square Mall
  - Boise Terminus (Union Station or new downtown location)

Facility Improvements

Several passenger facilities are crucial to the plan, and are described in this section. Further detail about transit centers and their costs is provided in Chapter 6 (Capital and Financial Plan).

Transit Centers

Transit centers are the points where many buses can gather at once so that passengers can make fast connections from one bus to another. These facilities are crucial if the routes are to work together as a system, especially at low frequencies. Transit centers require:

- Design that minimizes:
  - Access and egress time for buses
  - Walk time from one bus to another
  - Walk time between the center and adjacent major destinations.

- Adequate waiting areas for security, and also to give value to the time of customers who may be waiting there. These should all be considered crucial except as noted.
    - Lighting and other measures as needed to provide a sense of security. Lighting should also be adequate for reading at night.
    - Restrooms for drivers within a 3-minute walk. Kiosk sized restrooms, for which drivers carry keys, are sometimes logical if nearby businesses do not have restrooms.
    - Information displays.
    - Distinct signage that identifies the facility and the routes stopping there.
    - Telephones or at least a direct line for ValleyRide information or emergencies.
    - Newsracks and other logical vending (optional but often easy to encourage).
    - Power outlets for customers' personal electronic devices (optional, but only if electricity remains affordable).

The same transit centers are needed in both scenarios. The sizes needed are also similar in both scenarios. The High-Growth Scenario would affect the location of several transit centers, because they would need to be located at commuter rail stations.

The following table shows the transit center requirements.

Figure 4-5 Transit Center Needs

Facility	Size (buses)	General Location	Locational Issues by Scenario	
			Low	High
Downtown Boise	12	Between Front & Jefferson, 5th & 12th	See Downtown Boise Mobility Study.	Could be co-located with commuter rail, but not essential.
Towne Square Mall	8	Mall vicinity	Existing site could be used if expanded.	Site near commuter rail station preferred, though some routes would flow through existing site.
Meridian	8	Near Meridian or Main, between I-84 and rail line.	Closer to I-84 preferred, for express bus access.	Site on commuter rail line.
East Nampa	4	Can-Ada Road between I-84 and rail line. **Also an important Park-and-Ride.**	Closer to I-84 preferred, for express bus access.	Site on commuter rail line. Should be planned in conjunction with adjacent proposed BSU campus.
Nampa	6	Downtown or Civic Center	West of Civic Center	Commuter rail station proposed at 16th St.
Caldwell	5	Downtown, near 10th & Blaine/Cleveland.	Same	Same

Park-and-Rides

Low-Growth Scenario

The Low-Growth Scenario makes use of the existing Meridian Park-and-Ride at Main & Overland. If no commuter rail is planned, this facility should be expanded to serve as the primary Park-and-Ride point for all of Meridian and Kuna, since it is much more cost-effective to serve with express service than St. Luke's, the other site now used for this purpose.

Some Park-and-Ride capacity will be needed in the vicinity of Towne Square Mall, for access to the express services. This does not need to be right at the mall transit center, but could be anywhere in the mall vicinity so long as it is convenient for access from both I-84 to and from the west and I-184 to and from the east.

In Nampa, some Park-and-Ride can be accommodated at a site near of the Nampa Transit Center, but a larger Park-and-Ride facility should also be planned on Can-Ada Road or Garrity Boulevard as close as possible to the I-84 interchange, since this is the one point where motorists from throughout Canyon County can connect to express services without traveling out of direction.

High-Growth Scenario

In the High-Growth Scenario, major new Park-and-Rides would occur mostly at commuter rail stations, though there would also be small ones in Caldwell and along the Highway 44 corridor.

Parking at commuter rail stations would mostly be funded as part of the commuter rail project. However:

- The largest Park-and-Ride in the region, with the potential to need 100-200 stalls, would be at the station near Can-Ada Road in eastern Nampa. This should be integrated with the design of the proposed adjacent BSU campus, as well as with commuter rail.
- The Eagle Road and Five Mile Road stations should also be focal points for Park-and-Ride. These stations have the fewest local transit connections, and are located in auto-oriented areas where Park-and-Ride is easier to integrate into local planning. (Some parking may be appropriate at almost all stations.)

Phasing/Priority for Long-Range Improvements

What if Valley Regional Transit (VRT) successfully passes a regional options source that is somewhere between the Low- and High-Growth Scenario? What if a regional source fails, but funding increases incrementally through other sources? Even if VRT is able to increase its annual operating revenues substantially, service improvements will have to be phased in to allow time for capital fleet purchases and facilities development. The Long-Range Plan is designed to provide "bookend" scenarios that show what is possible given presumed low and high regional options funding scenarios. When the time

comes for VRT to put together a ballot proposal, it will likely have to select some projects from the two scenarios and exclude others. Therefore, it is not so important that the long-range plan answer the question, "What timeline do we implement various service improvements under?" Instead, it needs to address the question, "How do we choose what services to include in a ballot measure, given projected revenues won't fund them all?"

Capital Issues Governing Improvement Sequence

If Valley Regional Transit does pass a regional options source, it will be important that some new service hit the street quickly.

The capital necessities of phasing suggest the following implementation sequence:

1. Changes that do not require new buses or facilities: For all routes that currently have more peak service than midday service, increase midday service to the peak level (if this is frequency is envisioned in the approved plan). This benefit occurs mostly in Boise, where almost all routes would be brought up to no worse than every 30 minutes all day. This requires no new buses, and can usually be handled quickly. Frequency additions are also easy to handle in terms of public information.

2. Changes that require new buses, but where interim facilities are workable. Frequency upgrades on Nampa-Caldwell local service, and the remaining upgrades on existing Boise routes, fall in this category. If fleet replacement is occurring when the decision is made to expand service, the older buses can be retained for a year or two pending the arrival of new fleet triggered by the expansion, and this can permit service to start sooner.

3. Changes that require major new facilities: Two services are in this category:

    - Meridian and western Boise local network, including Kuna. This network requires expansion of Towne Square Mall transit center to a capacity of roughly eight buses, plus a new Meridian Transit Center

with a capacity of roughly 8-10 buses. The locations of these facilities also depend on whether commuter rail is planned.

- Full development of intercounty express service. These will require Park-and-Ride facilities on a larger scale than existing now, especially in Nampa.

4. Large capital projects with extensive planning and environmental work. Commuter rail, and its dedicated feeder shuttles, would likely be the last to be implemented, because of the long lead-time required for the planning and environmental work, as well as significant construction that would probably be involved at stations, particularly the Boise terminus.

Increments for Use in Developing Final Plan

The Regional Operations and Planning Committee and the ValleyRide Board of Directors indicated that frequency improvements on key corridors in Boise (Emerald, Overland, Vista, Fairview, State) are a top priority when new funding becomes available. A successful ballot measure will, however, need to be sensitive to the interests of voters in rural and currently underserved areas, such as Meridian. Ultimately, the development of a successful ballot measure will require ValleyRide to weigh the inevitable tradeoff - to invest in services that will attract the most riders or to expand service area coverage to provide regional equity. To simplify and focus these choices, we have outlined a number of separable "service packages" in the following table. These are provided for different geographic areas within the low- and high-growth service proposals. While some elements of these "packages" could be implemented separately, this format provides a means for outlining essential policy choices on service priority as part of a successful regional strategy.

Figure 4-6 Long Range Service Packages and Policy Considerations

Service Package	Description	Policy Direction on Priority
Boise Midday Frequency Improvements	-Increase midday frequencies to peak level on all routes that have midday/peak split	"Quick action" project if regional source is approved or if local funding becomes available in Boise.
Boise Low	-15 minute service on Overland, Emerald, Cole and Milwaukee -30 minute service on most other major corridors -SE and SW Flex service	Top priority service frequency improvements. Should be included in any ballot measure proposal.
Boise High (In addition to Boise Low)	-15 Minute service on full network, except 30 minute service on Chinden, Adams, Warm Springs and north hillside route -Eagle Flex Service	High priority if higher end of funding spectrum is achieved. On the lower end of the spectrum should be secondary to regional equity issues.
Meridian Low	-30 Minute connections to Boise and Nampa via Route 35 -60 Minute service on Overland -60 Minute all day service on Ustick and Fairview	Low-end Meridian improvements are essential to provide regional equity needed for feasible ballot measure.
Meridian High (In addition to Meridian Low)	-15 Minute connections to Boise and Nampa via Route 35 -30 Minute all day service on Ustick and Fairview -30 Minute service on Overland -30/60 service to Chinden/HP via Meridian	Secondary priority after Boise frequency improvements if high end of funding spectrum is achieved.
Nampa-Caldwell Low	-30 Minute service on Boulevard and South Nampa routes -60 Minute service on Garrity, Franklin and Caldwell local -Flex service in east & west Nampa -Flex service in south/southeast & northeast Caldwell	High priority improvements, ideally implemented in conjunction with Boise Low and Intercounty Low services.

Service Package	Description	Policy Direction on Priority
Nampa-Caldwell High (In addition to Nampa-Caldwell Low)	-15 Minute service on Boulevard, South Nampa and Garrity routes -30 Minute service on Franklin and Caldwell local	Moderate priority for 2012 timeframe. Boise frequency improvements and intercounty commuter services have higher precedence.
Rural Low	-60 Minute all day service to Kuna -2 to 4 trips per day to Notus, Parma, Wilder and Greenleaf	Important for regional equity in a ballot measure.
Rural High	-30 Minute all day service to Kuna -30 Minute peak service to Notus, Parma, Wilder and Greenleaf	Secondary improvement, should wait until low-end improvements are implemented and performing well.
Intercounty Network Low	-30 Minute local service between Nampa, Meridian and Boise on Franklin -30/60 all day limited stop express service between Nampa, Meridian and Boise/BSU -30 Minute peak only non-stop service between Nampa and Boise/BSU -30 Minute peak only service on Hwy 44 originating in Caldwell	This level of intercounty commute services is minimum requirement for a ballot measure that will address obvious Canyon – Ada commute issues.
Intercounty Network High	-15 Minute local service between Nampa, Meridian and Boise on Franklin -30 Minute peak only service on Hwy 44 originating in Caldwell -Commuter Rail (see below)	Largely dependent on the political need to address intercounty commute traffic congestion, LOS degradation. (See below)
Commuter Rail	-30 Minute peak only heavy passenger rail service between Nampa, Meridian and Boise on Cut-Off Rail Corridor	Requires measure that achieves higher end of funding spectrum. Need to assess political costs/benefits of including in ballot measure package. Higher acceptance of rail as SOV alternative could have positive impact on measure success. Conversely, perception of overbuild could backfire.

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