

ARTICLE PUBLISHED FEB 2, 2005

It's time for Round 2 of planning the valley's future

Frank Larvie, a retired engineer living in Nampa, has more than a passing interest in growth and traffic.

Larvie calls himself a "hobbyist," but the pragmatism of the former Morrison Knudsen engineer lingers. For example, Larvie specifically plans his drives into Boise for mid-morning or mid-afternoon to avoid the freeway traffic crunch. And he builds several hours of lead time into trips to the Boise Airport, he said.

His interest prompted Larvie to attend a public workshop in November to help plan the next 20 years of land use, road and transit projects in the Treasure Valley. Larvie plans to attend a workshop this week as part of the "Communities in Motion," a six-county study sponsored by the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho.

Organizers are counting on residents like Larvie to participate in the second round of meetings today in Nampa and Thursday in Boise.

"We have an opportunity here to do some planning that would make the extension of our infrastructure a little less painful, a little less expensive," Larvie said. "This is something that every resident in this community has a stake in." Residents become "players" in a game-like exercise to map how the Treasure Valley should grow.

On table-size maps players get to lay out their ideal transportation system, picturing where roads, freeways bus routes and rail lines would go. Organizers want the public to help decide how transportation dollars should be divided between roads and public transit.

Organizers expect 650 people to participate in the two hearings — 350 people already are signed up.

"I was surprised by the number of people who showed up. It doesn't happen unless it's a controversial topic," COMPASS Executive Director Matt Stoll said.

Most of the 500 participants in the November meetings favored a light-rail line between Caldwell, Nampa and Boise, new Boise River crossings, an alternative roadway south of Interstate 84, denser developments on main streets and along transit corridors, a balance of housing and employment in smaller communities and revitalizing downtowns, Stoll said. A majority of the maps they produced emphasized preserving the Birds of Prey area, agricultural land, the Foothills and corridors along the Payette and Snake rivers.

Meridian resident Rob Knawa said the November workshop he attended was useful, and he plans to go again this week — and bring along a friend.

"My purpose in going is to contribute my limited talents to organizing the growth for the community," said Knawa, a retired project management consultant. "I came here because I wanted to. I love this state."

A better understanding of the true costs of growth, like tax impacts and infrastructure costs, would help players make better decisions, Knawa said. But he recommends people adhere to the process outlined by organizers.

"We all have to follow the rules they have when we go there so we can make the process work," Knawa said. "Whether or not the process is valid, that remains to be seen."

Meanwhile, Larvie said he was surprised by the public's extensive knowledge regarding growth issues. The project deserves public attention, he said.

"It's very much an extrapolation of what is currently happening. I think most people are aware of the patterns of growth the Treasure Valley," he said. "The public doesn't want just a few people deciding our future and growth and land use. The public has shown they want to be involved."

People are invited to participate in the Communities in Motion exercises:

Today: Hispanic Cultural Center, 315 Stampede Dr., Nampa.

- 9 a.m. to noon

- 6 to 9 p.m.

Thursday: Idaho Historical Museum, 610 N. Julia Davis Dr., Boise.

- 9 a.m. to noon

- 1:30 to 4:30 p.m.

- 6 to 9 p.m.

What's next?

The COMPASS Communities in Motion project team will take what it learns at the workshops to help develop a "preferred scenario" for future transportation systems, residential and business development and land and water conservation.

View and comment on the preferred scenario during open houses:

March 29: 4 to 8 p.m., Boise First Community Center.

March 30: noon to 8 p.m., Hispanic Cultural Center in Nampa.

March 31: 9 a.m. to 8 p.m., Idaho Historical Museum in Boise.

About Communities in Motion

Communities in Motion is a 20-year regional growth and transportation study for Ada, Canyon, Elmore, Boise, Gem and Payette Counties. The study is organized by the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho and the Idaho Transportation Department to prepare for expected growth and address the effects of land use on transportation needs.

Ultimately, Communities in Motion will become a long-range transportation plan to outline needs, costs and priorities in the six-county area in 2030.

The Ada County Highway District teamed up with COMPASS project managers for a transportation and land use study of Ada County. "Blueprint for Good Growth" provides specifics on the links between land-use and transportation planning in Ada County. It will determine where growth should occur and is aimed at encouraging the county and its cities to change their comprehensive plans, zoning ordinances and policy manuals to mesh with the study's results.