

Communities in Motion: The Regional Long-Range Transportation Plan

Summary “Communities in Conversation”

Final Public Involvement Approach
Public Comment Period: April 18 – May 19, 2006

June 2006

Communities in Motion: Regional Long-Range Transportation Plan is a partnership between the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho (COMPASS) and the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) and involves Ada, Boise, Canyon, Elmore, Gem and Payette counties



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Communities in Motion: Regional Transportation Plan</i> —Public Involvement.....	4
Vision	
Philosophy	
Purpose of Public Involvement	
Public Participation Process, 2003 – 2006.....	4
“Communities in Conversation”	5
Background	
Public Comment Summary.....	7
Support for growth scenario	7
Support for transit.....	9
Support for roadways.....	9
Other.....	11
General support for plan.....	12
“Communities in Conversation” Public Involvement Process	13
Development of Meeting Materials.....	13
Notification and Distribution of Meeting Materials.....	14
Meeting Formats and Outcomes.....	16
Evaluation.....	17

Communities in Motion: Regional Long-Range Transportation Plan -- Public Involvement

Vision

We envision a Treasure Valley where quality of life is enhanced and communities are connected by an innovative, effective, multi-modal transportation system.

— COMPASS Board, September 2003

Public involvement philosophy

COMPASS will seek representation from the wider community, will reach an underserved population, will offer a range of educational opportunities, and will provide public input to planners and decision-makers in a timely manner.

Purpose of Public Involvement

Public and stakeholder involvement, crucial to the success of *Communities in Motion*, was **comprehensive, effective, and meaningful**. The public involvement approach was a dynamic process that responded to emerging needs and was tied to thematic phases that built and enhanced public participation throughout the planning process. During the three-year *Communities in Motion* project, there were several opportunities and a diversity of ways for the public to participate, including five community cafés, two sets of workshops, two sets of open houses, over 40 speaker's bureau presentations, the culminating "Communities in Conversation" meeting-in-a-bag event, and two public hearings.



These opportunities drew people from throughout Ada, Boise, Canyon, Elmore, Gem and Payette counties, encouraging them to participate in the development of *Communities in Motion*. From the public involvement process, almost 4,000 people have been added to the project database, almost 2,000 attended at least one event, and nearly 800 attended an average of 2.1 events.

The goals for *Communities in Motion* public involvement were to:

- Provide an open planning process with many opportunities for public participation.
- Communicate accurate, understandable, and timely information to the public.
- Gather input by providing people with meaningful opportunities to participate.
- Comply with requirements of Title VI Civil Rights Act of 1964 to ensure all citizens regardless of race or income had the opportunity to participate.
- Build upon previous COMPASS *Communities in Motion* public involvement efforts.
- Ask elected officials from partnering counties to determine the appropriate level of public involvement for their communities.

Public Participation Process, 2003 – 2006

“Leading, Learning Communicating”	“Choice, Awareness, Participation”	“Expanding, Collecting, Sharing”
January – June 2003 +	October 2003 -- January 2004	June 2004 +
<p>Communications strategy developed: project named, graphics designed, database created, website constructed: www.communitiesinmotion.org</p> <p>Regional Transportation Task Force meetings</p> <p>Attended public meetings of other agencies throughout planning process for on-going outreach</p>	<p>Community cafés</p> <p>Education forums – kick-off event</p> <p>Assessment of public involvement in region</p>	<p>Plan Coordination Team formed</p> <p>Steering Committee formed</p> <p>Partnering counties included</p> <p>Open house public meetings for <i>Destination 2030: Limited Plan Update – Long-Range Plan for Ada County</i> in October 2004.</p>
“Expanding, Collecting, Sharing”		
November 2004	February 2005	March – September 2005
<p>Workshops: Community participants identified land use preferences using maps and chip sets representing different types of land use. With community input and technical analysis, four land use scenarios emerged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Satellite Cities ▪ Workshop Average ▪ Concentrated Mixed-Use Corridors ▪ Trend 	<p>Workshops: Community participants reviewed four land use scenarios. They selected a land use scenario and identified transportation system improvements. After public input and technical review, three scenarios moved forward in the process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Blended (based on Satellite Cities) ▪ Concentrated Mixed-Use Corridors ▪ Trend 	<p>Open houses and Speakers’ Bureau presentations: Three land use scenarios were presented to the public in March and April, 2005.</p> <p>Community education sessions (5)</p> <p>Public comments were shared with the COMPASS Board.</p>
“Reviewing, Evaluating, Adopting”		
May – June 2005	October 2005	January – September 2006
<p>COMPASS Board evaluates scenarios in May and selects a preferred land use in June</p>	<p>Open houses reviewed transportation options for “Community Choices” (Based on Satellite Cities) and “Trend” land use scenarios.</p> <p>People preferred “Community Choices” 6:1</p>	<p><i>Communities in Motion: Regional Long-Range Transportation Plan</i> drafted. Public comment period: April 18 – May 19, 2006, including “Communities in Conversation” meetings</p> <p>Adoption: Autumn 2006</p>

“Communities in Conversation”

Final comment opportunity for *Communities in Motion: Regional Long-Range Transportation Plan*



Background

“Communities in Conversation” was the final opportunity for the public to provide input into *Communities in Motion*, the six-county, 20+ year plan that will address issues on the regional transportation system, evaluate the needs for future corridors, and address the effects of growth on transportation. The final comment period began April 18 and ended May 19, 2006; “Communities in Conversation” was the focus from May 5 – 18, 2006. The results concluded that **72% of respondents favor the plan**. Four major themes emerged from the public comments received:

1. Strong support for a regional transit system with walking and biking paths.
2. Strong support for the new growth scenario, particularly keeping jobs, services and homes closer together.
3. Willingness to support increased taxes, especially for public transportation.
4. Support for improving regional corridors.

The focus of the comment period was a special event, “Communities in Conversation.” This was a new approach for gathering public comment about transportation issues in the region and for the Community COMPASS in particular. Rather than presenting the draft *Communities in Motion: Regional Long Range Transportation Plan* to the community in a typical open house setting, residents were asked to host a meeting with their friends, peers and/or colleagues to review and discuss the plan. Meetings were held in homes, places of work, and community centers. Meeting hosts picked the date, time and location of their meeting. The purpose of the meetings was to provide the public with an opportunity to review and provide input on the draft plan, try a new public involvement activity, and give people way to channel their concerns about the future of the region.

Hosts did not need to be experts about *Communities in Motion* to hold a meeting. COMPASS provided materials and offered on-call assistance from May 5 through 18, 2006 – the time period when most “Communities in Conversation” meetings were held. Over 200 bags of meeting materials were distributed to almost 170 people and/or organizations in the six counties comprised of Ada, Boise, Canyon, Elmore, Gem and Payette; of these “hosts,” i.e., those who received a bag of materials, 47 held meetings. A total of 600 people signed-in as participants in these meetings, and many submitted comments who did not attend a meeting but reviewed the material individually. Staff has no idea how many other people reviewed the materials (ideally the other 123 “hosts” who received materials, as well as those with whom they shared the contents of the bag). Additionally, the City of Boise, the City of Eagle, and the Ada County Community Library each held open house public meetings. A number of groups advertised meetings in the local newspaper, thus inviting the wider community.

COMPASS received 370 public comments in the form of: the official comment sheet, letters, email responses, and a comment form designed and distributed by the City of Boise for their open house. This does not include formal letters of comment from member agencies. In addition, COMPASS received petitions with summary comments from residents in the Ustick Road neighborhood (558 signatures), the Bayhill Springs Homeowners group near Ustick Road (195 signatures) and a neighborhood in the Lake Hazel Road area (231 signatures). These groups opposed widening or extending to Ustick and Lake Hazel. These numbers are not part of the totals discussed in the following Public Comment Summary.

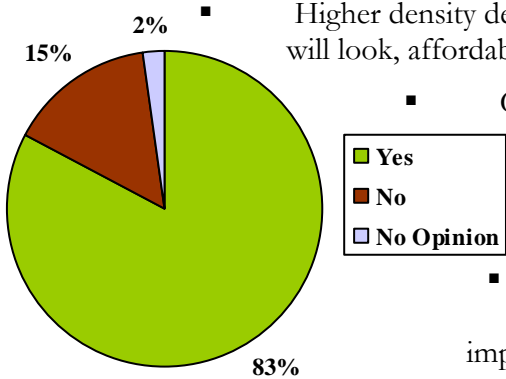
Public Comment Summary

This summary is a general overview of the documented “Communities in Conversation” comments. It is not intended to be statistically reliable, but rather to provide an overview of the public comments received about the draft *Communities in Motion: Regional Long-Range Transportation Plan*. Verbatim transcripts of comments are available at COMPASS or at www.communitiesinmotion.org. The shaded boxes contain the questions on the comment forms.

1. **Growth scenarios:** The land use alternative in the draft plan supports changes that result in more high-density housing in existing communities, more open space between and around communities, and building housing, jobs, services and shopping closer together.
Do you support this growth scenario? Yes ___ No ___ No Opinion ___
Please comment.

Of the 309 responses to this question, 256 support the growth scenario, 46 did not support it and 7 had no opinion. The 256 responses that support the growth scenario represent a diversity of answers. The most often repeated comments are:

- Support the concept of communities where shopping, working and living are close together
- Support for open space between cities, bike/ped, pathways, transit near major centers
- Higher density development was supported, however there was concern regarding how it will look, affordability, if the market will support and if it will cause increased crime
- Concern that elected officials do not have the political will to adopt this growth scenario
- Growth needs to be concentrated in the urban areas and neighborhoods need to be preserved
- Support for development in southeast Boise, planned communities and developers need to pay for transportation improvements necessary for their development



Of the 46 responses that did not support the growth scenario, the most often repeated comments are:

- Do not support high density, believe Trend is what is going to occur, scenario does not allow for planned communities
- Concern that higher densities would require more emergency services (police, fire, medical)
- Belief that there is limited interest for significant employers to locate in neighborhoods; jobs, shopping and services should not be in residential areas
- Land use decisions should be made by the cities, not transportation committees
- Slow the growth until we improve our transportation system and include public transportation

2. **Transportation Systems – Transit:** The draft plan supports an expanded public transportation system and more opportunities for walking and cycling. The expanded public transportation system would cost \$1.7 billion and require the region to seek new revenue sources of \$1.1 billion.

Do you support an expanded transit system? Yes ___ No ___ No Opinion ___
Please comment.

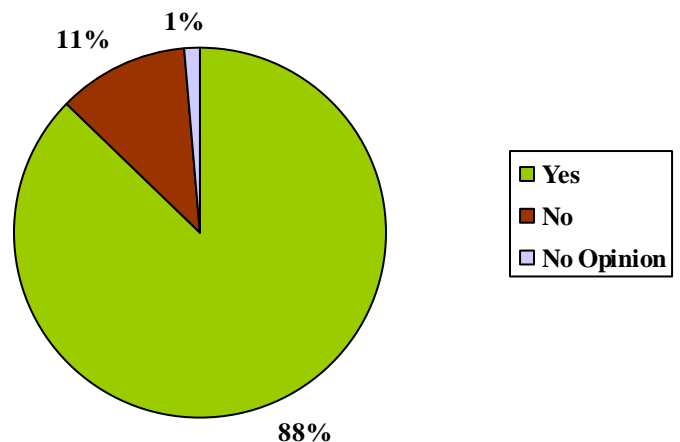
Of the 304 responses to this question, 274 support an expanded transit system, 36 did not support it and 4 had no opinion.

The 274 responses that support an expanded transit system represent a diversity of answers. The most often repeated comments are:

- Overwhelming support for a regional (Caldwell to Mountain Home) public transportation system and believe it will improve our quality of life
- Support for public transportation that is convenient, 24/7, more efficient than the automobile and is built around major centers (BSU, airport, downtown)
- A transit system that connects to a bus system in downtown areas
- Support for outreach and education to increase the use of public transportation in order to expand the system, greater preference for rail and bike/ped system
- Overwhelming support to include bike/ped pathways in transportation system, public transit does not just include buses, pathways must be safe and extend greenbelt
- Support for a rapid bus system, increase the number of routes, park and ride locations and frequency of service
- Include carpool lanes, commuter ride locations, exclusive bus lanes with controlled signals in the transportation system
- There is some support to address the major corridors (Caldwell to Meridian) first before spending money on public transportation
- Others support transit but do not believe its practical today (possibly by 2030), not enough large employers in the urban areas, therefore improve roads

Of the 36 responses that did not support an expanded transit system, the most often repeated comments are:

- Belief that people will not use public transportation, “western” mentality
- If public transportation is not convenient then people will not use it
- Lack of confidence that the Treasure Valley can secure funding



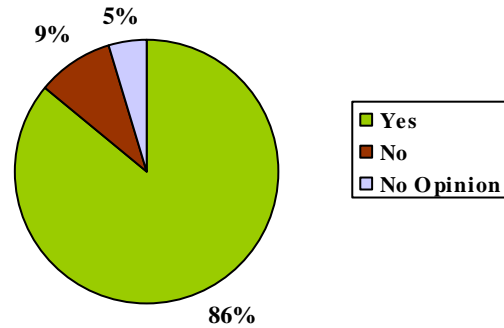
Do you support seeking new revenue sources for transit? Yes ___ No ___ No Opinion ___
Please comment.

Of the 281 responses to this question, 242 support seeking new revenue sources for transit, 26 did not support it and 13 had no opinion.

Of the 242 responses that support seeking new revenue sources for transit, the most often repeated comments are:

- Strong support for increasing taxes for public transportation. The most often repeated types of taxes in order of preference are:

- Local option tax
- Gas tax
- Sales tax
- State and Federal funds
- Toll roads
- Impact fees



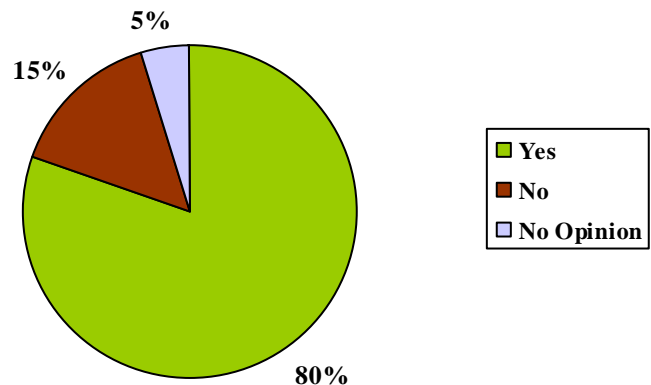
Others include user fees, roadway funds, registration fees, grants and business/employment tax

Of the 26 responses that did not support seeking new revenue sources for transit, the most often repeated comments are:

- Cost is not justified by the need
- Do not increase taxes

3. Transportation Systems – Roadways: The draft plan supports improvements to regional corridors. The cost of the total improvements would be \$2.85 billion, but more than \$600 million in new revenues would be needed to pay for the improvements.
Do you support improvements to regional corridors? Yes ___ No ___ No Opinion ___
Please comment.

Of the 305 responses to this question, 245 support improvements to regional corridors, 46 did not support it and 14 had no opinion.



The 245 responses that support improvements to regional corridors represent a diversity of answers. The most often repeated comments are:

- Make sure transit is considered, support for transit (including bike/ped), improve roadways to be aligned with transit, secure right of way for transit, rail corridor
- Support for improvements to corridors, need improvements immediately, all roads are full, need to improve corridors
- Limit the number of traffic signals, use frontage and backage roads and enforce zoning
- Improve I-84 immediately
- Need to keep pace with growth, underestimated population growth, need to be thinking 50 years out
- Support Kuna Mora Road expressway, S.H. 44, truck alternative for I-84
- Need more interchanges on I-84 (i.e. Five Mile and Cloverdale)
- Do not widen sub regional roadways, i.e. Ustick Road

Of those 46 responses that did not support improvements to regional corridors, the most often repeated comments are:

- Corridors are adequate, no more roads, will not solve the problem
- Improve transit first, make transit a priority
- Do not increase road size through existing neighborhoods
- We cannot build roads and expect high density

Of those 14 responses that had no opinion about regional corridors, the most often repeated comments are:

- No more roads, they will not solve the problem
- Need more information

Do you support seeking new revenue sources for roadways? Yes ___ No ___ No Opinion ___
Please comment.

Of the 283 responses to this question, 217 support seeking new revenue sources for roadways, 51 did not support and 15 had no opinion.

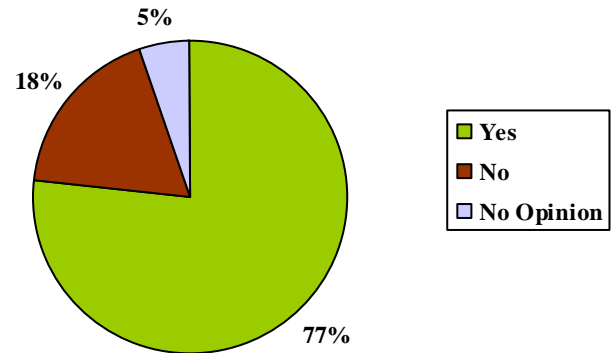
Of the 217 responses that supported new revenue sources for roadways, the most often repeated comments are:

- Support increase in gas tax
- Believe those who use the roads should pay for their expansion and improvement
- Support registration fees (reauthorize ACHD's)
- Support bonding i.e. GARVEE
- Build toll roads
- Use sales tax revenues
- More money needed for transit
- We cannot be taxed for all the needed revenue

- Other sources of revenue suggested are property tax, lottery, parking fees, license fees, luxury tax, county tax and traffic infraction fees

Of the 51 responses that did not support seeking new revenue sources for roadways, the most often repeated comments are:

- Force people to use transit or other modes
- Too costly
- Developers need to be required to pay for their impacts
- Split revenues between transit and roadways



4. Other:

Please provide any additional comments about the draft plan.

There were 225 responses to this question. The responses represent a diversity of answers. The following are the most often repeated comments:

- Support for public transportation, be more aggressive in your planning and implementation efforts, include rail
- Implementation (enforcement) must happen, coordination with cities and counties must occur, need political will to implement, need backing from higher levels
- Plan looks pretty good, support for major concepts
- Not supportive of the plan, it is too light, not representative of what the people expressed in this process, slanted towards community planning
- Support the need for a beltway, southern by pass or I-84 alternative route, like the idea of Kuna Mora Road
- Not enough bike and pedestrian improvements identified in plan
- Do not widen Ustick Road
- Transportation plan needs to come before development. Plan needs to be forward thinking, residential, shopping and work sites need to be closer together, implement densities requirements and boundary limits
- Underestimated growth projections
- Slow down development, support growth moratorium
- Well done process, thanks for the opportunity
- Please do not widen McDermott, Lake Hazel or build Indian Valley
- Please improve I-84, U.S. 20/26, Highway 44, Highway 16, Highway 21

5. General Support for Draft Plan

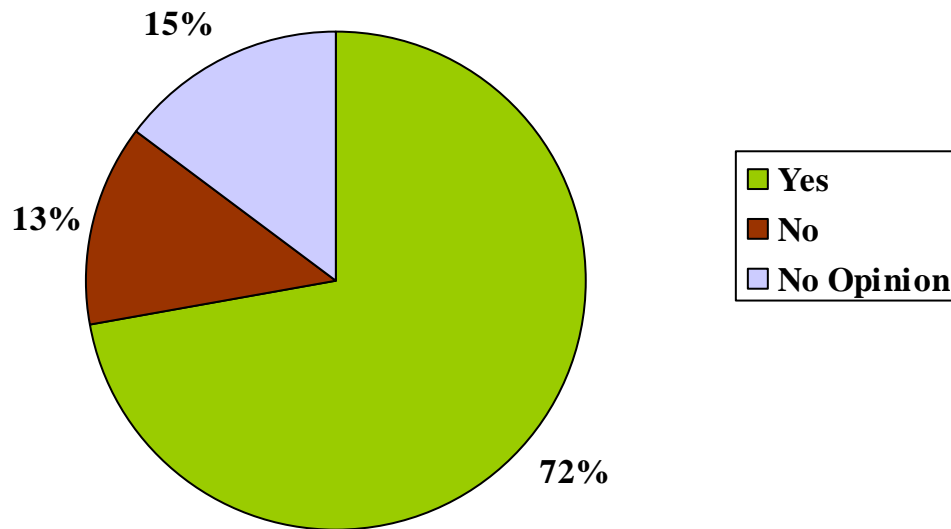
Given what you have seen and heard [in this meeting], which of the following best expresses your thoughts about Communities in Motion?

I support the general recommendations and direction of Communities in Motion.

I do not support the general recommendations and direction of Communities in Motion.

I do not have enough information yet. What information do you need?

- 284 people responded to this question
- 205 people responded that they support the general recommendations and direction of *Communities in Motion*
- 37 did not support the general recommendation and direction
- 42 did not have enough information



“Communities in Conversation” Public Involvement Process

Development of Meeting Materials

COMPASS and RBCI¹ staff spent considerable time and effort developing “Communities in Conversation” meeting materials.

The meeting materials included:

- Invitations to the meeting (to be sent by the host)
- Host Instruction Booklet (detailed instructions and host evaluation questions)
- Welcome and instructional DVD – The purpose of the DVD was to provide an overview of “Communities in Conversation” and the draft regional long-range transportation plan
- The script was written by the “Communities in Conversation” public involvement team and featured an introduction from Meridian Mayor Tammy de Weerd, Boise Mayor David Bieter, Nampa Mayor Tom Dale, Caldwell Mayor Garret Nancolas, and Ada County Commission Chair Judy Peavey-Derr
- Mollie McCarty, Public Affairs Specialist for the Idaho Transportation Department, provided the voiceover for the instruction portion of the DVD
- Sign-in sheets
- Draft *Communities in Motion: Regional Long-Range Transportation Plan* (one hard copy and one CD-ROM)
- Three-page Executive Summary – This summary was intended to provide an overview of *Communities in Motion: Regional Long-Range Transportation Plan*. It was drafted by the public information team.
- Charles Trainor, Director of Planning for COMPASS, narrated a “Powerpoint” slide show with more detail on draft plan, which was “burned” on a CD-ROM
- “Community Choices” Transportation Network map
- Comment sheets
- Yellow notepad to take group discussion notes
- Stamped addressed envelope to return comment sheets
- Planner hotline phone number and schedule
- One page summary of plan in English and Spanish

A focus group made up of COMPASS Public Participation Committee (PPC) members, which includes commuters, business owners and other members of the public, reviewed the meeting materials. Based on their input, staff made several changes to improve the materials.

Meeting materials were posted on the project web site: www.communitiesinmotion.org/conversation06.html

¹ RBCI: The public involvement consulting firm working with COMPASS on *Communities in Motion*

All meeting materials were packaged in brown paper bags with a label identifying the project on the front and a label with the Planner Hotline number on the back. The bags also included candy for meeting participants. Staff from COMPASS and RBCI assembled and distributed over 200 bags. Some bags also contained disposable cameras so the host could take photos. Two cameras were returned.

Notification and Distribution of Meeting Materials

Notification

People were notified about “Communities in Conversation” in several ways:

Newsletter – A newsletter was mailed to 3,200 people in February 2006 to provide them with an update about *Communities in Motion* and let them know that in May they would have an opportunity to host their own meeting.

Email – “Save the Date” emails were sent on April 5, 2006 to 1500 people on the COMPASS distribution list to announce the comment period and to let them know that the “Communities in Conversation” event was coming, and again on April 18, 2006 to announce the opening of the comment period and to remind people about the public event. Member agencies and other groups were asked to further distribute the email. For example, the Boise Chamber of Commerce distributed the notice and posted it in their weekly e-news as well.

Postcard – A postcard was sent on April 14, 2006 to more than 3,200 people on the *Communities in Motion* database to let them know that meeting materials would be available for pick up on May 3 and 4, 2006. The postcard asked them to reserve a meeting bag ahead of time. Staff distributed several hundred at additional meetings and organizations throughout the Valley.

CONNECTING TREASURE VALLEY COMMUNITIES

COMMUNITIES IN CONVERSATION

The final opportunity for the public to provide comments on *Communities in Motion* is here, and we need your input!

We invite you to host a meeting and collect comments on the draft regional long-range transportation plan. You pick the location, date, and time, and invite your friends, neighbors, and colleagues; we provide meeting materials.

REGIONAL LONG-RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN 2030

COMMUNITIES IN MOTION

COMPASS

www.communitiesinmotion.org

We value your comments and urge you to participate in “Communities in Conversation.”

To help us plan the number of bags we need, please reserve your meeting materials by calling COMPASS at 855-2558, ext. 222

Your “COMMUNITIES IN CONVERSATION” materials will be available for pickup:

Wednesday - May 3, 2006 - 9 a.m. - 8 p.m.
Hispanic Cultural Center - Lobby
313 Stampede Dr. Nampa

Thursday - May 4, 2006 - 9 a.m. - 8 p.m.
Idaho Historical Museum - Lobby
610 N. Julia Davis Drive, Boise

Communities in Motion team members will be available by phone if you have questions during your meeting. When your meeting is over, return the comment sheets to COMPASS by May 19. Draft plan and supporting documents will be posted on the project website at www.communitiesinmotion.org.

COMMENT PERIOD: April 18 - May 19, 2006
PUBLIC HEARING: May 18, 2006
Call COMPASS at 855-2558, ext. 221 for more information

COMPASS
800 S. Industry Way, Suite 100
Bozeman, MT 59712
www.communitiesinmotion.org

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Personal letter – A personal letter signed by COMPASS Executive Director Matthew Stoll was sent to approximately 100 elected officials, agency leaders and other key stakeholders to inform them about “Communities in Conversation” and to let them know that meeting bags would be delivered to them. Another personal letter was sent to people who participated in the *Communities in Motion* Speaker’s Bureau inviting them to participate and where and when to pick up a bag of meeting materials.

Media –Media releases were sent to all regional media to inform them about the public comment period, the availability of “Communities in Conversation” materials, and to announce two public hearings. The notices asked media to inform their readers, viewers and listeners about the project. The media was also invited to observe a “Communities in Conversation” meeting at Hewlett-Packard, but they did not show up.

Media Release dates: April 5, 2006 and May 10, 2006

Media Results:

- 1) Radio interview – KIDO-- with Matt Stoll and Katey Levihn (ACHD), April 27, 2006
- 2) Television interview -- Channel 12 -- with Terri Schorzman, April 25, 2006
- 3) Sample newspaper articles:

Idaho Press Tribune: April 25, 2006: "[Public invited to help with traffic plan;](#)" April 25, 2006: "[Traffic: COMPASS has taken new approach;](#)" April 27, 2006: "[Our View: Locals can help plan for growth.](#)"

The Idaho Statesman. "[Transportation planners produce 25-year plan for six counties,](#)" May 13, 2006; many short notices about "Communities in Conversation" hosted meetings throughout the city (submitted by residents holding the meetings).

Legal Notice – A legal notice was placed in the two major newspapers:

The Idaho Statesman: Legal Notice April 17-18, 2006 – *Communities in Motion* public comment period.

Idaho Press Tribune: Legal Notice April 17-18, 2006 – *Communities in Motion* public comment period.

Display Ad – Display ads ran in *The Idaho Statesman* and in the *Idaho Press-Tribune* from April 15 – 18, 2006. The display ads announced the public comment period and invited readers to host or attend a meeting, or attend the public hearing.

Personal Meetings – COMPASS staff met with several organizations to encourage participation in "Communities in Conversation." This included presentations to the Nampa Rotary, a community group in Eagle, transportation sub-committee at the Boise Chamber of Commerce, the ACHD Neighborhood Advisory Group, Boise State University upper division class on urban politics, and others.

Other – Valley Regional Transit announced the comment period in their bi-monthly newsletter.

Distribution

Distribution of more than 200 meeting bags occurred in two ways. Many were delivered to elected officials, agency leaders and other key stakeholders in Ada, Boise, Canyon, Gem and Payette counties. Deliveries were made by COMPASS staff and RBCI staff. Many people who received a bag, especially those who live farthest from Boise, were grateful for the delivery service and appreciated the effort.

Those who reserved bags were asked to pick them up at one of two locations on May 3, 2006 (Hispanic Cultural Center of Idaho, Nampa) and May 4, 2006 (Idaho Historical Museum, Boise). Staff from COMPASS and RBCI spent 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. at both locations; *Communities in Motion* workshops and open houses were held at these facilities earlier in the planning process and were thus familiar to returning participants.

Personal phone calls were made to those who signed up for a bag but did not pick it up, so that arrangements could be made to get the bag to them. In addition, care was taken to provide disabled and

COMMUNITIES IN MOTION

**The Regional Long-Range Transportation Plan
PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD
APRIL 18 - MAY 19, 2006**

The 30-day public comment period for the draft
**Communities in Motion: The Regional
Long-Range Transportation Plan**
begins Tuesday, April 18, 2006, and closes at
5:00 p.m. on Friday, May 19, 2006

You may learn more about the draft plan by:

- Reviewing the draft document
- Hosting or attending a "Communities in Conversation" meeting between May 3 - 18, 2006
- Attending a public hearing on Thursday, May 18, 2006

The draft plan will be posted on www.communitiesinmotion.org/conversation06.html April 18. For more information about comment opportunities or to receive a printed copy of the draft plan, contact: tschorzman@compassidaho.org, 855-2558, ext. 231

Written comments must be submitted to COMPASS by May 19, 2006

COMMUNITIES IN MOTION COMPASS COMMUNITY PLANNING ASSOCIATION 98814

minority groups with “Communities in Conversation” materials so that their input could be included. As a result, the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired and Idaho Council on Development Disabilities hosted meetings for their peers, and COMPASS staff assisted with getting input from an economically disadvantaged group at St. John’s Cathedral. Staff prepared a one-page summary in both English and Spanish for these meetings.

Personal phone calls were also made after the comment deadline had passed to those who had picked up meeting materials, but did not return them. The intent was to make sure that all comments were gathered as quickly as possible.

Meeting Format and Outcomes

After receiving their meeting materials, hosts were given guidelines about how to invite people to their meeting, how to run the meeting, and how to spark conversation and comments from meeting participants.

Hosts were not expected to be experts about *Communities in Motion* nor about transportation planning, so a “planner hotline” was developed in case questions arose at a meeting that could not be answered by the host or the meeting materials.

The hotline was a cell phone that was given to one COMPASS planner at a time. The planner “on call” kept the phone for a few days, including evenings and weekends. Planners logged six calls; most of the questions were process-based rather than technical.

The Host Instruction Booklet, which was included in the bags, asked hosts to:

- Make sure meeting attendees sign in (name and mailing address)
- Watch the DVD
- Look for/invite someone to take notes on the group’s discussion using the notepad provided
- Begin the discussion, using the maps and questions provided
- After the discussion, request participants to fill out a comment sheet
- Collect comments, sign-in sheets and notepads and mail them back to COMPASS in a pre-paid envelope

The “Communities in Conversation” meeting format provided flexibility for those who needed to adapt the format. For example, the City of Boise hosted its own open house and developed its own comment sheet. Other cities provided written comments to COMPASS using formats other than the comment sheets.

In some cases, COMPASS staff also acted as “hosts” when requested:

Boise Metro Chamber of Commerce, Board of Directors, Boise
Friendship Feast at St. John’s Cathedral, Boise
State Senator John McGee, Caldwell
Mountain Home Chamber of Commerce, Mountain Home

Evaluation

“Communities in Conversation” was the first time COMPASS used the “meeting-in-a-bag” format and it was important to learn what the meeting hosts felt worked well and not so well.

Included in the bags was an evaluation form that asked the following questions:

- Did COMPASS provide you the materials necessary to host your meeting? Yes ___ No ___
- Were the materials understandable? Yes ___ No ___
- Were the tasks understandable? Yes ___ No ___
- Was the “planner hotline” helpful? Yes ___ No ___
- Was this a good way to gather public comment? Yes ___ No ___
- Suggestions on other ways to gather public comment

There were 24 evaluation forms and/or other evaluative comments returned. Of the 19 forms:

- 19 felt COMPASS provided the necessary materials to host a meeting. 0 did not.
- 19 felt the materials were understandable. 0 did not.
- 18 felt the tasks were understandable. 1 did not respond.
- 1 felt the “planner hotline” was helpful. 1 did not. 16 did not use it but expressed thanks for having it available. 1 did not respond.
- 14 felt this was a good way to gather public comment. 3 did not. 2 not sure.
- Other suggestions for gathering public comment included: None.

Sample feedback from the comment form:

“I like this format and feel this format would allow more specialized interest from specific areas as well as an expertise of people working and driving in these areas....use more time for this format next time.”

“This was a creative and interesting method but the effectiveness was limited because as a host I did not have the time nor the resources to advertise, promote, and communicate the meeting.”

“Every person who participated liked this format. They also thought if possible larger employers should be encouraged to host several meetings. I had several comments that they felt free to talk in this setting and that they would not normally participate; being at work made it easy.”

“This method isolates worthwhile thoughts, preventing broad consensus-building and the opportunity for public debate. However, this appears to fit the process that seemed to offer no real options after rejecting the overwhelming choice made by the public earlier in the process.”

“It’s difficult for folks to understand and digest all the information in order to give meaningful input and feedback.”



Further Assessment

COMPASS invited randomly selected hosts to attend an evaluation meeting to discuss and evaluate “Communities in Conversation.” The meeting was held on May 30, 2005 at the restaurant Richards in Hyde Park.

Fourteen people attended, in addition to three from COMPASS and one from RBCI. Five others who agreed to be there were unable to attend. The purpose of the meeting was to evaluate what worked well and what did not, what can be improved, and whether or not the process is worthwhile and should be considered again.

The staff learned from the evaluation group that:

- Many people who had never participated attended these meetings—because the meeting came to them. They probably would not have attended a big public meeting.
- The meeting materials were good, particularly the maps and the executive summary
- Several people did not sit through the whole meeting, but participated to some degree and took materials. Meeting allowed that flexibility.
- In general, we needed a longer public comment time—a month or even more. More time would have resulted in more meetings and more time for hosts to prepare for their meetings.
- A training session for meeting hosts would have been helpful.
- Few people read the whole plan.
- Sometimes the executive summary seemed too short and the full report was too long. Perhaps something “in-between” could have been developed.
- It would have been good to highlight that these meetings came at the end of a very long public involvement process and that the work they are viewing came in part from previous public comment.
- COMPASS member agencies should do a better job of taking ownership of the plan and promoting it—this is Boise’s long range transportation plan.
- There could be a lot more education about transportation in general, including: how long it takes to get a project from concept to finish; transportation agencies and what they do; how decisions get made; COMPASS role; and funding challenges.
- These meetings worked because of the connections between people—people directly reaching other people. It would be good to use email more and these kinds of flexible meetings more.

The public involvement team will continue to assess the effectiveness of the approach.

