

CHAPTER 4

AN INCREMENTAL APPROACH TO BUILDING A REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM - INITIATIVE #1

INTRODUCTION

A [new report by USPIRG Education Fund](#) details the long-term decline of driving throughout the country. The average American drives 7.6 percent fewer miles today than when per-capita driving peaked in 2004, while the proportion of workers commuting by private vehicle—either alone or in a carpool—declined in 99 out of 100 of America’s most populous urbanized areas between 2000 and the 2007-2011 period averaged in U.S. Census data. Finding that variations in the economy did not appear to be responsible for these trends, the report concludes that, “The time has come for cities and states to shift their transportation priorities away from investments in expensive, unnecessary new highways, and toward the maintenance and repair of our existing infrastructure and the development of new transportation choices for Americans.”

It is easy to dismiss this urban-oriented study as irrelevant to rural Eastern Idaho and Western Wyoming. However, it does explain why a growing percentage of those visiting our national parks from the Nation’s urban centers and other countries expect to have alternatives to driving a private vehicle. Recognizing this trend back in the 1980s, the Town of Jackson launched a public transit system to serve visiting skiers and resort employees, and the private sector responded with bus tours and airport shuttles. Having traditionally focused on mobility for their disabled and senior populations, many eastern Idaho counties and communities are now seeking to expand their mobility services to the general population.

Multi-Modal Initiative #1 aims to improve the intra-city and intercity public transportation services across the four consortium counties while improving connections between Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks, adjacent counties and neighboring states. This chapter explores these four public transportation goals:

- 1. Enhance Intra-city and Commuter Bus Services within each Consortium County**
- 2. Expand Intercity Bus Services to Improve Connectivity across the Western Greater Yellowstone Region**
- 3. Advance an Integrated Public Transportation Network that Links the Region’s National Parks and Outdoor Recreation Areas**
- 4. Preserve Future Options for Using the Region’s Historic Rail Infrastructure and Right-of-Ways**



GOAL 1 – ENHANCE INTRA-CITY AND COMMUTER BUS SERVICES WITHIN EACH CONSORTIUM COUNTY

Since none of the four consortium counties are covered by a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), each of the 11 local governments on the consortium steering committee has been independently responsible for dealing with its public transportation challenges. The most coordination has been seen in Jackson Hole as the Town of Jackson and Teton County have built the START system, plus both Teton counties have worked closely in building commuter service over Teton Pass. Communities in Fremont, Madison and Teton counties have engaged in less coordination, but have annually contributed funding in support of demand-response services provided first by CART Inc. and since 2006, by the Targhee Regional Public Transportation Authority (TRPTA). Because TRPTA annually receives the largest share of rural transportation subsidies in Eastern Idaho’s District 6, it is instructive to examine its activities in each consortium county and contrast its approach with what has happened over in Wyoming.

I. Town of Jackson and Teton County, Wyoming

Of the four counties in the Western Greater Yellowstone Consortium, Teton County, Wyoming, has been the most aggressive in pursuing alternative transportation strategies and reducing auto-centric travel. Teton County has joined with the Town of Jackson to establish visionary principles with respect to multi-modal transportation and has built the START Bus ridership to more than 800,000 per year. The following excerpts from the Jackson/Teton County Comprehensive Plan (2012) underscore this commitment, including strategies that will be best pursued in cooperation with consortium counties:

Principle 7.1—Meet future transportation demand through the use of alternative modes

Our transportation goal is to increase the use of alternative modes of transportation within the community to meet our future transportation demand. To achieve this goal, a year-round mode shift away from the single occupancy motor vehicle will be required. A combination of increased transit mode share along major corridors and the completion and use of an integrated transportation system that includes opportunities for rideshare, walking, and biking will all be needed to increase the use of alternative modes.

- *Discuss with neighboring jurisdictions and State and Federal officials the costs and benefits of funding sources and planning options, such as a Regional Transportation Authority.*
- *Continue START service to Teton County, Idaho and Lincoln County, Wyoming, and explore other measures to limit the impacts of commuters on the ecosystem and the region.*
- *Pursue transit service between Jackson and the airport/Grand Teton National Park, and other strategic route expansions.*



Principle 7.2—Create a safe, efficient, interconnected, multimodal transportation network

The community’s transportation network will be based upon the provision of “complete streets” that address the needs of all users, with an emphasis on providing alternative transportation options. The connectivity, redundancy and efficiency of the network will encourage the desired mode shift and meet our community’s Ecosystem Stewardship Common Value.

- Discuss and coordinate improvements that can be made to the regional transportation system with neighboring jurisdictions.

An Integrated Transportation Plan for Town of Jackson/Teton County

A contract to develop an Integrated Transportation Plan (ITP) for the Town of Jackson and Teton County has been awarded to Charlier Associates of Boulder, CO. In its advertisement for qualified consultants, the two local governments issued this challenge to the prospective bidders:

“...the ITP is not intended to be a conventional transportation master plan based on traditional travel demand modeling with a modest acknowledgement of walking, cycling, transit, and demand management. Rather, the ITP is intended to provide insight into the travel behavior of residents, commuters, visitors, freight providers, and business travelers and to incorporate those insights into the development and implementation of a plan that provides meaningful travel choices, incentives, and a balance of options. Given our Vision to preserve and protect the ecosystem in order to enhance our community character, our community should be a leader in the provision and use of an integrated multi-modal transportation system to meet our future transportation demand.”

RECOMMENDATION 1.1.1: The WGYC governments should monitor and fully participate in the ITP process, particularly with respect to cross-boundary coordination and examination of a Regional Public Transit Authority, one of the study objectives assigned to Charlier Associates.

Southern Teton Area Rapid Transit (START Bus)

START Bus is the public transportation system that serves the residents and visitors of Teton County, Wyoming. START runs bus routes within the Town of Jackson, between Jackson and Teton Village, and two major commuter routes from Star Valley, Wyoming, and Teton County, Idaho.

The START Bus system is cooperatively funded by the Town of Jackson, Teton County, and the federal government. The system has been in operation since 1987 when it was implemented as skier transportation from the town to Teton Village. Today the START Bus serves school-age children, visitors, and the locals in Jackson who seek comfortable, reliable public transportation year-round.

Rising gas prices, increasing awareness of the need for energy conservation, and unprecedented growth in Jackson have helped START triple its ridership since 2000. Vehicle miles have been reduced by over 3 million per year, which translates into an annual savings of approximately 100,000 gallons of fuel. This reduction of fuel consumption has eliminated 1.8 million pounds of carbon emissions each year.

2013-14 WINTER FARES

Within Jackson town limits and north of town	FREE
Jackson – Teton Village: 1 ride (one way)	\$3
Jackson – Teton Village: 1 ride (one way) on Teton Village Road Only	\$1
Jackson – Teton Village: Season Pass	\$125
Jackson – Teton Village 10 Ride Discount Book	\$24

The current bus fleet represents an investment of over \$7.5 million in federal, town and county funds. START plans to build a new LEED Silver bus facility that will allow for indoor storage of the fleet for the first time, and it will allow buses to use biodiesel in the fleet year-round. The new facility will allow for expanded service that will further contribute to a reduction in fuel consumption and carbon emissions. The town and country jointly purchased the land required, and in 2008 Jackson Hole voters approved a \$2.8 million Specific Purpose Excise Tax (SPET) to build the bus facility. When fully completed, the new facility will be used to maintain vehicles operated by START Bus, as well as those by town and county law enforcement, public works and the fire department.

RECOMMENDATION 1.1.2: The RPSD should specify how the entire region will assist in the growth of the START Bus system, including future phases of infrastructure development and expansion of routes to the airport, Grand Teton National Park, and into Idaho.

Private Shuttles and Taxi Services within Teton County, Wyoming

Alltrans runs a variety of transportation services within Jackson Hole, including the contracted shuttle between the Jackson Hole Airport, Jackson, and the Teton Village. Costs range from \$16 one way (\$31 RT) between Jackson and the airport and \$29 (\$50 RT) between the airport and Teton Village. Alltrans also offers intercity bus service and recreation-oriented shuttles that are covered later in this chapter.

Listed below are the taxi services that currently appear on the Jackson Hole Airport web site. Taxi rates from the airport to Jackson are: \$35 for 1-2 people, and to Teton Village-\$60 for 1-2 people.

- A-1 Taxi &Tours
- A Black Car Service
- Alltrans Taxi
- Broncs
- Bullseye Taxi
- Classic Cab
- Cowboy Cab
- EcoTrans Taxi
- Flying T Taxi
- Jackson Hole Taxi
- Old Faithful Taxi
- Old West Transportation
- Pathfinder Taxi
- Snake River Taxi
- Stagecoach Taxi
- Teton Mountain Taxi
- Town & Country Taxi
- UVC Driving Service
- Valley Taxi
- Village Taxi

Jackson Hole Airport – The Jackson Hole Airport is the only commercial airport operating inside the four-county region, and it is serviced by American Airlines, Delta Air Lines, Frontier Airlines, Skywest Airlines and United Airlines seasonally. These airlines provide direct service to Denver, Salt Lake City, Dallas/Ft. Worth, Minneapolis, Chicago, Newark, Atlanta, San Francisco, Houston, and Los Angeles. Winter operations are subsidized by Jackson resorts and business interests as an incentive to visit the Jackson Hole area, which generally results in lower fares than the Idaho Falls Regional Airport.

II. City of Rexburg and Madison County, Idaho

Rexburg is the largest city in the consortium at 25,732, and Madison County is the largest of the region's four counties by population (37,456 in 2012). Despite its size and the growing presence of BYU-Idaho, the county lacks a fixed-route transit system or a specific plan to create one. Here is the excerpt from the 2008 Madison County Comprehensive Plan that relates to public transportation:

Goal 1: Provide a coordinated, connected transportation network to accommodate the accessibility and mobility needs of all Madison County residents, visitors, and businesses.

Objective: Create a County-wide transportation master plan that includes multiple transportation modes, and anticipates future transportation needs.

Objective: Provide an integrated system of sidewalks, bike lanes, and multi-use paths.

With respect to public transportation, the City of Rexburg 2020 Comprehensive Plan does not make specific recommendations, but affirms the goal and objectives of the county plan noted above. The *Envision Madison* planning process that will be completed in 2014 is expected to have more specific guidance for public transportation that will be added to this report and the final Regional Plan for Sustainable Development once adopted by the city and county.

BYU-Idaho

In the year 2000, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS or Mormon Church) announced that Ricks College, the largest private junior college in the United States located in Rexburg, would become a 4-year institution. The campus has expanded rapidly and now operates on a trimester system so students are on campus year-around. Thus, more than 28,000 students attend BYU-Idaho each calendar year, with more than 16,000 full-time students present at any given time. This student enrollment makes BYU-Idaho the largest of all institutions of higher learning in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming.

Interestingly, dormitories hold only 800 students on campus with the majority of housing provided in church-approved privately owned complexes, with many being constructed in close proximity to campus. In addition to promoting a more walkable campus, the school is experimenting with We-Cars (short-term rentals) through Enterprise Rent-a-Car as well as encouraging student carpools. While the university is interested in supporting a fixed-route public transportation system in Rexburg for its students, officials wish to carefully consider all options given the nature of this major investment.

In response to the City's request for additional study, the Linx Co-op requested assistance from the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA). Associate Director Charles Dickson visited the City of Rexburg and the BYU-Idaho campus in December 2013. His final report recommends that the City apply for a CTAA technical assistance grant for 2015 to design a fixed-route transit system best suited to the community and BYU-Idaho students:

The City of Rexburg should seek funding to design a system that fits the needs of the city, maintains local control over the service and is the best fit for the region. Steps in this process would be:

- *Review service in towns with similar characteristics*
- *Begin a process of engaging citizens, BYU-I, students and other stakeholders in a discussion of the need for and goals of a city transit service.*
- *Begin planning for a service that would:*
 - *Maximize travel speeds*
 - *Serve multiple destinations*
 - *Creates maximum benefit for the lowest possible cost*
- *Begin process of applying for a long-term technical assistance grant from the Community Transportation Association of America to accomplish these goals.*

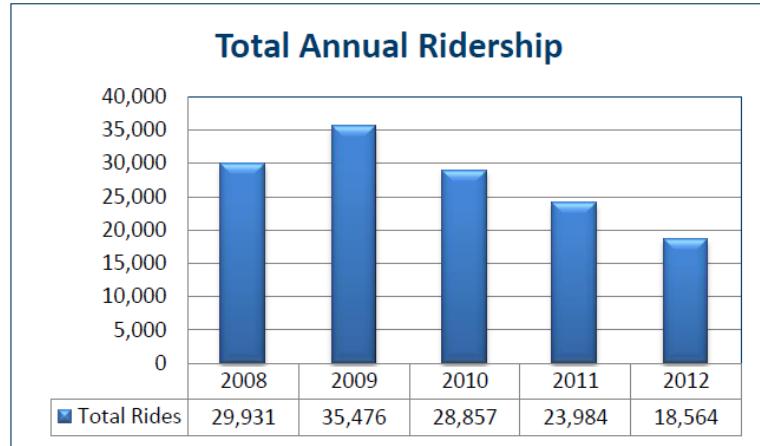
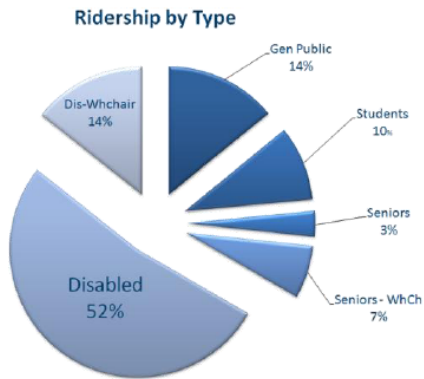
RECOMMENDATION 1.1.3: The WGYC Steering Committee should support Rexburg's CTAA technical assistance application to design a fixed-route system for the City that full integrates with intercity bus routes and schedules to benefit the entire 4-county region.

Targhee Regional Public Transportation Authority (TRPTA)

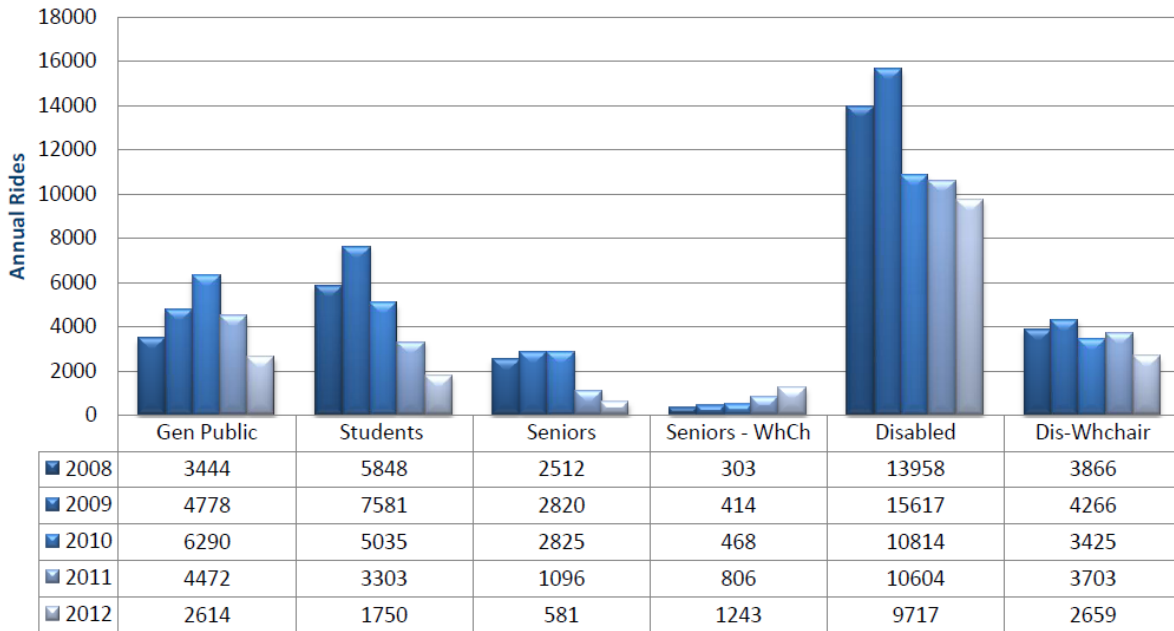
The Targhee Regional Public Transportation Authority is the primary public transportation service in Rexburg. Since acquiring the routes and equipment of CART, Inc. in 2006, TRPTA has provided curb-to-curb service for seniors and the disabled in Rexburg and in rural portions of Madison County and Fremont County including St. Anthony, Sugar City and Teton. Currently TRPTA operates Monday through Friday in Rexburg, 7:00 am to 5:00 pm, with advance reservations required by 4:00 pm the previous day. The demand response service is open to the general public for various purposes such as shopping, medical, social, and other trips. A daily subscription service is also available for persons who need transportation on a re-occurring daily basis.

As indicated in the figure below, ridership on TRPTA for the "Rural Rexburg Area" decreased by 48% between 2009 and 2012 after peaking at 35,476 riders in 2009. By 2012, 14% of the riders were identified as "general public" with two-thirds of the riders classified as disabled clients. Much of the decline is attributed to use of the new statewide Medicare transportation brokerage that has reduced TRPTA's percentage of Medicare/Medicaid riders. However, because the service is subsidized by FTA 5310 and 5311 funds, TRPTA is able to meet mobility needs of many seniors and disabled persons with minimal match required from the local governments. As noted in Chapter 2, the District Coordinating Council responsible for recommending ITD funding allocations for public transportation has continued to fund TRPTA as the only provider with available equipment and a history of satisfying the need for demand-response in rural counties.

TRPTA – Rural Rexburg Service



Ridership Trends by Type



Avg. Rides/Day 73

73

Medicaid Rides 10,541

10,541

% 3rd-Party Paid 56.8%

56.8%



In contrast, the ability of TRPTA to successfully manage and build ridership on fixed-route bus systems has yet to be evaluated in the City of Idaho Falls since the service started in February 2013. TRPTA has proposed a fixed-route pilot system for the City of Rexburg in 2014-15 using surplus UTA buses for which it is seeking financial support from the city, county and BYU-Idaho. As noted above, these entities have voiced a preference for further feasibility studies prior to launching a full system in Rexburg, so this apparent conflict will likely be resolved through the 5311 funding process for 2015.

Other service providers in the Rexburg vicinity include:

- **Development Workshop, Inc.** – The Development Workshop is a community rehabilitation program that provides vocational training, paid employment, and placement services to individuals with disabilities. Its mission is “to assist individuals who have a disability or who are disadvantaged to recognize and to achieve their chosen level of economic and social independence.” Development Workshop is a private, non-profit corporation that manufactures a wide variety of products under contract for private industry including many prominent names in the sporting goods industry, automotive aftermarket, cosmetics, and government agencies. DWI provides transportation funding and service coordination for its employees who live in Fremont, Madison, and Teton Counties, and work at the Upper Valley Industries facility in Rexburg.
- **Private Shuttle Services**
 - **Rexburg Taxi Greengo** – Operates a pick-up truck for both passenger and moving service
 - **Rollin Shuttle** - Rollin Shuttle Services is a door-to-door provider of non-emergent medical transportation services that operates in Madison County and across eastern Idaho.
 - **RPM Shuttle** – This shuttle service launched in fall 2013 to serve BYU-Idaho students who shop downtown or in the vicinity of Walmart. Scheduled operations were Tuesday-Friday, from 4:00-9:00 pm and Saturday from 12 noon-9:00 pm. Fares were \$2.00 each way. In March 2014 the service suspended its scheduled service due to high costs.
- **Eastern Idaho Community Action Partnership (EICAP)** - This private nonprofit organization provides a variety of services to residents in Fremont, Madison and Teton counties who are low income, elderly, or have disabilities. EICAP is the Area VI Agency on Aging and funds rural transportation services for seniors to access meals and medical appointments through:
 - South Fremont County Senior Citizens Center, with locations in Ashton and St. Anthony
 - Teton Valley Senior Center in Driggs

Rideshare Online– Residents of Madison, Fremont and Teton counties can be matched with others interested in sharing rides using carpools and vanpools by using the statewide rideshare program, (found online at www.rideshareonline.com). This program was created in partnership with state and public transportation providers in Washington State, and the website expanded to include all of Idaho as well.

RECOMMENDATION 1.1.4: The WGYC governments should request that any transportation providers in rural Madison and Fremont counties that receive public funding demonstrate their commitment to regional coordination, joint marketing of transit services, and connectivity with both public and private intercity and interstate bus services.

III. Transportation Needs in Teton County, Idaho

From 2000 to 2010, Teton County, Idaho was one of the fastest growing counties in the nation and it experienced its largest ever development boom/bust cycle. Thousands of acres of private and vacant land, low-priced homes, land speculation and few regulatory barriers led to sprawling and unoccupied development. The resulting oversupply of residential lots combined with misguided federal mortgage policies and the resultant boom/bust caused a depressed local real estate market and the economy, which was largely based on residential construction, is still suffering today.

A new Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 2012 to address these issues, and transportation was one of five major components. Specifically, Teton County states that it will strive to: *Create and maintain a well-connected, multimodal network of transportation infrastructure to provide convenient and safe mobility for all residents, visitors and businesses. Guiding Principles include:*

- *Create convenient, safe timely, sustainable, efficient and year-round options for multimodal transportation that satisfy a multitude of needs*
- *Provide a well-connected transportation network in Teton Valley*
- *Develop regional connections*
- *Develop transportation appropriate for a rural community, respectful of the unique character of Teton Valley*

The **Teton Valley Mobility Advisory Committee (TVMAC)** includes representatives from the county, cities of Driggs and Victor, Grand Targhee Resort, and Teton Valley Trails and Pathways who together are working to implement this goal and guiding principles. The City of Driggs Transportation Plan, dating back to 2007, recognizes the need for regional connectivity and establishment of both a downtown transit hub and bus storage facility to better support the valley's public transportation services. The Victor Comprehensive Plan likewise seeks to improve public transportation services and connectivity throughout Teton Valley, with four major goals and 21 policies listed in its transportation chapter. Improvements to and increased use of the existing Pioneer Park Park and Ride facility and a mobility-oriented use of the former Railroad Depot are among the projects Victor is pursuing.

RECOMMENDATION 1.1.5: HUD Grant managers should meet regularly with TVMAC through 2014 to ensure that the final RPSD reflects local government priorities in Teton Valley and that the Consortium consider support of their funding requests to help build the regional system.

Driggs Bus Storage Facility

This 5,000 square foot facility to be constructed on City property is designed to place indoors the buses from multiple providers. A grant for \$321,000 in 5311 funding has been proposed for FY 2015.

Targhee Regional Public Transportation Authority (TRPTA)

Served by CART buses through 2006, Driggs and Victor now receive their demand-response transportation services from TRPTA Monday through Friday from 7:00 am to 5:00 pm with two buses stationed full-time in Teton Valley. The 5311 federal subsidy for this service is proposed at \$69,538 for fiscal year 2015.

START Bus Commuter Service between Driggs and Jackson

Two fixed-route runs operate Monday through Friday with Driggs departures at 6:25 and 7:05 am with afternoon departures from Jackson (Snow King) at 3:35 and 5:10 pm. Cost is \$8/trip although most commuters buy or are provided by their employers either a 10-ride discount book (\$42) or \$105 monthly passes. A subsidy of \$90,000 in 5311 funding has been requested of ITD by START for FY 2015.

Grand Targhee Resort Shuttle

Grand Targhee Resort runs 3 bus routes per day in the winter months to help skiers safely access the mountain using a public shuttle. Not only is parking is limited at the ski hill, but shuttle riders can avoid dangerous curves on the steep 9-mile access road to the base resort facilities. Fares are \$2 each way, with a 12-ride, \$20 pass available or a \$150 season’s pass for unlimited rides. The Blue Line originates in Victor and serves the south end of Teton Valley. The Yellow Line originates at employee housing at the north end of Driggs (Buffalo Junction) and the Purple Line starts at the Driggs Community Center.

The Resort owns its own rolling stock, but is operating with an ITD subsidy administered by the City of Driggs. Each year the City purchases services to operate the shuttle based on a bid process, with a subsidy of \$59,000 requested for FY 2015.

