

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive Summary

The purpose of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan is to provide a long-term blueprint for the region in addressing transportation needs brought about by continued growth and development. Addressing the region's transportation needs will require existing and future investments in streets, roads, highways, public transportation, and bike/pedestrian facilities. Providing transportation choices reduces dependency on the single occupant vehicle, which accounts for over 88% of all trips taken in Spokane County.

The identification of those transportation projects that are needed to address growth and development have been developed by evaluating the current growth patterns and forecasting the growth and development across the metropolitan area. Using an independent population forecasting technique, Intermountain Demographics (IMD) predicted that Spokane County's population will increase from 441,600 persons in 2005 to more than 563,700 by 2030. All of Spokane County is forecasted to increase by more than 122,000 residents, a gain of more than 22 percent. This means more travel into and through the region and greater demands being placed on the existing transportation system, whether its roads or public transportation.

Some areas are fully built out, such as the near north side and south hill of the City of Spokane. However, these areas can still expect to see increased traffic volumes as new employment opportunities are created in retail and commercial centers and land previously in industrial development are converted to a wide range of uses from medium density residential to high rise residential and the introduction of mixed use developments such as Kendall Yards. This continued redevelopment activity will necessitate reconstruction and rehabilitation of existing streets to ensure there is an adequate provision for traffic and public transportation opportunities.

Similarly, areas in Spokane Valley, Liberty Lake, Mead, and West Plains are also experiencing rapidly expanding residential and commercial areas that will attract new trips to areas that have been previously semi-rural and rural agricultural environments. This will bring about transportation and other infrastructure needs that will necessitate the reconstruction and/or expansion of many single lane roads into 3-lane and 5-lane facilities. Existing roads such as Bigelow Gulch, Forker, 8th Avenue, Hayford, Five-Mile, and Hatch Road on the south hill will experience traffic volumes that exceed their current capacity within the next 20 years, requiring the need to plan for their reconstruction concurrent with growth.

In rural areas to the north and south of the urbanized area, growth is also anticipated. With continued widening of U.S. 395 and U.S. 2, the construction of interchanges on S.R. 195 and programmed safety improvements outside of Spokane County north to Colville and Sandpoint, will bring about travel time improvements increasing development pressure that has been historically

tempered. Additionally, it is apparent the Spokane and Coeur d'Alene areas have been discovered by national development companies, as evidenced by the growing number of high-end developments being processed by local jurisdictions. The result will be increased traffic on secondary roads that provide access to State Highways and Interstate 90, with growing demands to make improvements on traditionally low volume roads.

WSDOT, SRTC, and local jurisdictions are currently assessing the long-term transportation needs of the I-90 corridor on the east side of Spokane County. When the recommendations and financial plans for the series of recommended projects are approved by the WSDOT and SRTC, they will be incorporated into the MTP.

Funding the MTP

The planned projects contained in the MTP do not address all of the transportation needs in the metropolitan area. This is due to the fact that by federal law, the MTP must be financially constrained to what can be reasonably funded. By that the MTP must forecast future revenues and expenditures that can reasonably be anticipated over the life of the plan. This has two affects:

1. Future revenues can be anticipated so long as they are legally available and/or there has been some historical trend developed for existing revenue sources. Gas taxes, weight fees, registration fees, developer fees, and State or Federal grant programs have a long history of utilization in both the State and Spokane County. For the purpose of the MTP, SRTC used a rolling 10-year average of historical funding using traditional sources to forecast potential funding through 2030. This approach takes into account past increases as well as actual historical changes in the county's economy to predict the future. The net affect is a reasonable forecast of future revenues, not a hard forecast of future revenues. They should be considered as orders of magnitude forecasts and local and state forecasts are a better prediction for individual projects or programs

To address revenue sources that do not have a history of utilization in Spokane County, an estimate has been developed using a mid-range value tied to an historical growth projection. The revenue source with the most predictability where this would apply would be the local option vehicle registration fee. A registration fee level is set per vehicle and then tied to the historical rate of growth for vehicles registered in Spokane County. Once again the net affect is a reasonable forecast of future revenues, should the local option be exercised in the future.

The current revenue estimates indicate approximately a 3.01% annualized growth rate for transportation funding sources between now and 2030.

2. Expenditures can be reasonably anticipated as well using historical inflation rates. SRTC once again used a rolling average over the past 10 years to predict future costs for transportation investments as well as operations and maintenance costs to accommodate the cyclical nature of the economy rather than today's hyper-inflation rates for construction materials that are impacting current construction projects. It should

Transportation expenditures by major cost category were independently forecast using the historical figures. Operations, maintenance, reconstruction, and new construction all have differing factors influencing the inflation of expenditures in their category. As an example, operations are influenced by personnel cost of living, medical benefits coverage, fuel, and equipment replacement costs. New construction can be impacted by new design and engineering standards, escalating right of way costs, the cost of obtaining financing, material costs and availability of contractors to do the work.

In each of those conditions, the MTP must estimate the potential revenues and expenditures and indicate the cost of projects in Year of Expenditure dollars. So an estimated project cost today, must be inflated to take into account the year in which it is expected to be constructed. For the long term projects in the 2030 time frame, inflation can be as high as 230% of today's estimated cost.

Accomplishing this formidable task will necessitate the need for accessing multiple funding sources rather than the historical practice of single source funding. This could include local option transportation funding sources, state sources, developer impact fees, LIFT financing or local improvement districts. The MTP will be amended over time as various options are implemented or discarded through the public decision making process.

Public Transportation

Clearly one of the least utilized transportation choices currently in Spokane County is public transportation. During the past several years Spokane Transit Authority has been challenged to rebuild their service after the impact of Washington State's Initiative 695, which effectively cut STA's revenues instantly in half. STA's successful ballot measure to increase the local option sales tax to .6% along with a significant route review process has resulted in improved efficiencies and ridership advancements. 0.3% of the existing 0.6% has a sunset clause associated with it and is up for vote in 2008.

With rising fuel costs it is anticipated that STA will be called upon to take on a bigger role in the community to provide transportation choices to both captive and discretionary riders, whether it's through fixed route, demand response or vanpool services. At the time of developing this plan, STA has been in the

process of creating a strategic plan for the agency. Since the strategic plan and the final recommendations have yet to be published, those elements will be considered for incorporation into the MTP during the update cycle in 2008

Conclusion:

It was once said that there are simple solutions to complex problems, however, they are generally the wrong solutions. In the case of providing a safe and efficient transportation system for the Spokane Metropolitan Area, there are no simple solutions, nor are there any cheap solutions. Given the limited funding resources available to address the regional and local transportation needs, our transportation system investments will need to be strategic, long lasting, and operationally sustainable.

Through a continuing, coordinated, and comprehensive transportation planning process, ideas will be developed, the public's views will be sought, and the elected officials in the region will set the course for the future. It is ultimately the residents of Spokane County, through their participation in meetings and through their ability to vote, who decide what is best for Spokane County.