

**OGDEN-WEBER STATE UNIVERSITY TRANSIT CORRIDOR ALTERNATIVES
ANALYSIS/ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT - DISCUSSION PAPER
Confirming the Purpose and Need: Updates of April 26, 2009**

The following text show edits to the initial purpose and need statement that was provided to the Federal Transit Administration in February 2009. The original text was also distributed to the public as part of the Early Scoping Process. Based on public comments and suggestions from the Management Committee at its April 15 workshop, the following edits show proposed updates to the working version of the Purpose and Need statement for the project.

Purpose and Need Statement

PURPOSE OF THE PROPOSED ACTION:

The purpose of the Ogden-Weber State University Transit Corridor Project is to provide high-capacity, efficient transit service that:

- (1) improves the level of service and increases transit ridership between the Ogden Intermodal Center, the Ogden Central Business District, Weber State University, and McKay-Dee Hospital and intermediate destinations;
- (2) assists in achieving local and regional economic, land use and community development goals outlined in general plans and related planning studies,
- (3) is cost-effective, affordable and provides the opportunity for more travel choices; and,
- (4) enjoys wide public and stakeholder support, and encourages partnerships among agencies, businesses and organizations in the corridor.

REGIONAL CONTEXT:

The proposed transit corridor project is included as a high priority transit capital investment project in the Wasatch Front Regional Council Transportation Plan Update 2007-2030. This area-wide long range transportation plan for Salt Lake, Davis and Weber Counties was developed by the Wasatch Front Regional Council (WFRC) working closely with the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT), UTA, and the Utah Division of Air Quality (DAQ), and city and county members of the WFRC. This project is the primary major capital investment transit project listed in the WFRC Transportation Plan for Weber County, and it is programmed for implementation in Phase I of the Plan (by 2015). It is also listed in UDOT's current Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (2009 to 2014). Within the project vicinity, there are other planned transit, roadway and non-motorized system improvement projects that are phased through 2030, including

several complementary transit improvement projects that could help increase transit capacity and ridership in the Ogden/Layton urbanized area.

NEED STATEMENT:

This Major Investment in Transit is needed because population and employment growth in both the study area and the Wasatch Front Region will cause increased travel demand. More modal choices are necessary to prevent reliance on the automobile and diminished levels of service on key highway corridors. A major investment in transit in the study area that connects major activity centers can play a significant role in sustaining mobility in the City of Ogden and the Region. Reduction in the growth of automobile demand, particularly in congested corridors in Ogden can have a significant positive benefit on air quality and travel time savings for commuters. The need is for a balanced, multimodal solution to meet future demand for travel. The proposed major capital investment transit project must:

1. Provide high-capacity, rapid transit service in the corridor connecting the McKay Dee Hospital/Weber State University Area, Downtown Ogden, the Ogden Intermodal Center and intermediate destinations.

There is a strong and growing demand for transit service in the Ogden-Layton Urbanized Area, which is one of Utah's largest population and employment centers. In addition to the recently completed FrontRunner commuter rail service connecting from Ogden to Salt Lake City, UTA currently operates local and express bus service in the study area. Three of the most heavily used routes in the area (Routes 455, 603 and 640) serve many of the same markets as the proposed transit project, and have a combined daily ridership of nearly 5,000. The existing transit routes use several of the area's busiest arterials, and they experience lower reliability and longer travel times during heavily congested peak periods. Still, ridership on these routes has been growing, with a notable increase in the last year as FrontRunner service began and ridership between Weber State University and downtown Ogden increased.

UTA anticipates increased demand for high capacity transit service in the area, based on recently adopted plans by the City of Ogden. These plans will increase housing opportunities in the downtown area and revitalize neighborhoods along the corridor. Also, Weber State University and McKay Dee Hospital each have significant expansion plans that will require improved transportation systems.

WSU projects a 75% increase in student population (17,000 to 30,000) between now and the year 2030. Student housing on and near campus is very limited, and a majority of students must commute to campus now and in the future. The current WSU Transportation Master Plan established a 25% minimum transit mode share goal for all trips to and from WSU by 2030. The campus is very constrained and increasing transit ridership will both alleviate the need for additional parking on and near campus and will improve the level of service on all adjacent roadways, particularly Harrison Blvd.

Strong existing transit ridership in the corridor and the projections for significantly increased travel demand require a substantial increase in capacity in this corridor. The capacity needed will significantly exceed the capability of the UTA to satisfy the demand with conventional bus service, and a higher capacity mode is needed to achieve operating efficiencies and meet passenger travel

time requirements. Bus Rapid Transit and Streetcar modes will be studied to evaluate their potential to meet this demand. These will be compared against the baseline alternative which will increase existing bus service to try and satisfy future demand at a lower capital cost.

2. Support future growth by providing transportation choices that minimize impacts to the environment and other forms of transportation.

The study corridor connects established, but rapidly growing, activity centers. Importantly, it also connects directly to regional transportation facilities that serve the greater Wasatch Front region. The study area includes both significant origins and destinations for commuter trips. The Downtown and WSU/McKay Dee Hospital area are important destinations for regional trips of all types. The intermediate and surrounding neighborhoods contain a substantial percentage of Ogden's workforce. Many arterial roadways in the study area already experience significant peak period congestion, and increasing capacity will be difficult and disruptive to established neighborhoods. Automobile emissions are a major contributor to the region's air quality concerns, and many short trips within the corridor could be well served by improved transit. Both regional and local plans envision higher capacity transit as part of a comprehensive solution to serve future travel needs by providing a real alternative to automobile trips.

Several areas of Ogden are already undergoing a renaissance that must be sustained with balanced transportation solutions. Revitalization of Downtown Ogden, the East Central neighborhood, and the WSU/McKay Dee Hospital Area are key focus areas of the City's General Plan and sub-area planning. For example, WSU is largely a "commuter campus" that is planning to serve a student and faculty of nearly 25,000 by 2030, compared to 17,000 today. Improved transit service and increased ridership between downtown Ogden and WSU has the potential to reduce the environmental impacts of high rates of automobile use, relieve existing and projected traffic congestion, reduce the demand for parking, and encourage the use of alternative modes. It will also help to facilitate the expansion of the WSU Ogden Campus teaching facilities by reducing the need for additional parking facilities as the campus continues to grow. Increased transit ridership to McKay-Dee Hospital could also facilitate the future growth of its medical campus and medical education programs at WSU.

Providing additional travel choices and increased capacity between these major destinations would help to decrease auto travel through Ogden City. Adding high-capacity transit service would help alleviate congestion, improve air quality and ensure future mobility in key corridors serving Ogden. Several of the streets serving the corridor are part of the state highway system, and these are vital corridors for both local and regional mobility. Transit improvements have the potential to serve many trips and thereby reduce future automobile demand and the growth in congestion. As part of a "shared solution", transit must be integrated into existing roadways without adverse impacts to roadway operations, safety, access and other transportation functions. When properly designed, high capacity transit can carry large numbers of patrons and, significantly, can alleviate the need for disruptive and costly roadway expansion in key corridors.

A major transit investment would also stimulate the economic and lifestyle connections between the WSU/McKay-Dee Area, nearby neighborhoods, and downtown Ogden to include home to work/school, school-to-work, and work-to-play connections. Of note, it could strengthen the synergy between WSU and Downtown Ogden event facilities and thereby increase Ogden's ability to attract conventions and host special events.

A key element of Ogden's renaissance has been the focus on outdoor recreation of all types. Nearby access to world class facilities has led manufacturers of outdoor recreation equipment to relocate to Downtown. Existing and planned facilities near the corridor could be served by improved transit service thereby strengthening this connection between outdoor recreation manufacturing, tourism and economic development.

3. Provide a coordinated collection/distribution service that connects with the FrontRunner and other Regional transit services at the Ogden Intermodal Center.

Currently, there is a deficiency in the UTA system connecting activity centers located in the greater Wasatch Front Region to population centers located in Ogden. This bidirectional demand cannot be served adequately unless a higher capacity transit service is provided to connect with FrontRunner. The result would be a balanced, integrated transportation network with no mode being required to do more than it can

The project will increase the transit options for people wishing to access the regional transit system from the highly transit dependent East Central Community and complement existing UTA Route 603 local bus service. It will also provide an improved transit connection from the FrontRunner to significant activity centers in Ogden. These include major recreational and entertainment activities in downtown Ogden, academic and regional activities at Weber State University, and better access to McKay-Dee Hospital, the County's largest medical facility.

Implementation of higher capacity transit service in the corridor will allow UTA's Mount Ogden Service District to provide more efficient service throughout its service area. Rather than serving the high demand Ogden-WSU corridor with more busses that must operate in mixed-flow traffic, it will be able to re-orient resources to better serve Ogden and Weber County transit dependent and low income populations in areas not served by the corridor. It will also allow UDOT to maintain an acceptable level of service on existing roadways, particularly Harrison Boulevard, as the student/faculty population of WSU increases from 17,000 to approximately 23,500 by 2030.

4. Create public transportation improvements that support the revitalization of Downtown and the long term plans of WSU and McKay Dee Hospital Center, and provide benefits to its neighborhoods and citizens, including low income and minority populations.

The study area encompasses a wide range of established neighborhoods, community facilities, as well as locations with substantial development and redevelopment opportunities. Accelerating such development is a major goal of the Cities of Ogden and South Ogden. The potential for such development is especially significant in downtown Ogden. Future high density development along Washington Boulevard could provide a rich mix of housing, jobs, shopping and recreational choices. Ogden has branded itself as the recreational capital of Utah, and in doing such, its unique identity can be accentuated by providing a safe, convenient and highly visible method of public transportation that better serves the City's image and needs.

The benefits of this new transit investment promise to go beyond redevelopment. Ogden's population includes a very high percentage of minority populations (22%) compared to the state's other urbanized areas. The area also has substantial populations of low income and transit-dependent households. Most of these communities reside in the neighborhoods that would be easily served by this corridor (½ mile or less), and they would benefit from the higher levels of transit

service connecting them to both local and regional employment, education and health care centers, as well as public services, recreational and commercial facilities.

Additional benefits realized throughout the community will include increased retail sales taxes and increased property values and tax revenue. A strong possibility exists for innovative financing of further capital improvements, including tax-increment financing, which in turn can prove additional amenities such as open space, plazas and parks. The Ogden City Council is considering a transit overlay zone along the selected corridor to supplement existing zoning. This measure is expected to increase Transit Oriented Development (TOD) opportunities significantly. A new transit line is expected to provide 3 -10 times the value of the initial investment for the public and private sectors and for both new and existing residents, creating a strong sense of community and of place. The current study will attempt to quantify this return on investment and include this information in the Small Starts Report.

5. Provide new, high-capacity transit service that improves accessibility to riders and increases frequency, connectivity, reliability, comfort, travel time, simple routing, capacity, convenience, and marketability.

UTA's past experience has shown that a wide range of Utah travelers will choose transit if the service is reliable, and relatively competitive with the automobile in travel time. Weber County has strongly supported local sales tax referenda for improved transit, and there is an expectation that service in this corridor will include these attributes. The institutional and governmental partners that instituted this study have coalesced around this need to the extent that it is an essential component of the solution.

The project will allow transit service to avoid future transit system reliability problems due to severe congestion projected for the vicinity of WSU and McKay-Dee Hospital. The project should also identify stations/stops which are perceptively more accessible, safe, and comfortable, with pedestrian connections to activity centers. Additional improvements to transit service could include improved vehicles, decreased transit travel times, increased vehicle arrival frequencies, and simplified routing. To help raise the visibility of transit in the area, the new service must have a distinct identity that emphasizes its high quality and attractiveness to riders.

One aspect of improved service would be to serve WSU campus trips originating in Davis County with northbound FrontRunner (reverse commute direction) and provide a new rapid transit connection to the campus. Potentially, this could help alleviate traffic congestion on Harrison Boulevard near the campus during peak periods and would be an attractive alternative for students and faculty through UTA's Eco Pass program. Some of these same travelers might also be served by re-directed bus service that is supplanted by the project, thus further increasing total system ridership.

6. Create a more visible presence for transit in Ogden.

A high visible transit investment would help attract riders destined for the major community facilities along the corridor, and it would extend the accentuated regional access and exposure that FrontRunner commuter rail provides to the Ogden Central Business District. It would support travel to and from event locations such as Lindquist Field, the Ogden City Amphitheater, the Ogden Egyptian Theater, the Ogden Eccles Conference Center, the rapidly developing "Junction"

Entertainment Subdivision, as well as events facilities at WSU, including the stadium and Dee Events Center.

Tourism supports Utah's economy and development of this industry is vital to Ogden's future as well. A highly visible transit system that links key activity centers in the corridor will convey a sense of "place" for visitors and will help sustain the revitalization that is taking place in Downtown Ogden.

The City also has goals to re-establish transit as an integral part of the community. Ogden was originally known as Junction City and was the connecting point for the transcontinental railroad. The City has a strong railroad heritage and was once home to a network of streetcars that helped establish the people-oriented scale and structure of the City's downtown and adjacent neighborhoods, including several historic districts. As of 1935, the general study area had six rail lines located on many of the major streets serving the project area:

- 24th Street between Wall Avenue and Washington Boulevard
- 25th Street between Wall Avenue and Polk Avenue
- 27th Street between Jefferson Avenue and Van Buren Avenue
- All of Washington Boulevard

In addition, there were rail lines on Lincoln Avenue and Wall Avenue between 31st Street and 24th Street as well as segments of Jefferson Avenue, 28th Street, and 31st Streets. The Ogden Rapid Transit Company operated these services, which were abandoned in 1947.

Experience has shown that a visible presence is important to increasing transit ridership. Capital improvements on a transit alignment create in the potential transit patron an easy to understand system, as well as a sense of permanence and reliability that may not otherwise be perceived in transit.

The visible presence of transit will remind travelers that there is an option to the automobile and will give a visual clue to homeowners and businesses that could benefit from good transit access. Well-designed transit projects with high levels of service also create opportunities for both public and private partnerships to create more livable and walkable streets with development that supports the use of transit.

FrontRunner service from Ogden to Salt Lake City has enjoyed robust ridership, and a more frequent, efficient and visible connection to City neighborhoods and activity centers will increase Frontrunner patronage, thus further accentuating UTA system ridership.

7. Create a cost-effective project that improves transit service while maintaining the financial health of the UTA and its partners.

Increased ridership, combined with cost-effectiveness, are the keys to realizing a successful transit investment. The region has already identified this corridor as a high priority for a major transit investment, and has a strong array of potential sources and partnerships to help support its development and operation.

Ogden-WSU Transit Corridor AA/EIS
Updates to the Purpose and Need Statement (April 26, 2009)

The citizens of Ogden and Weber County strongly supported the November 2007 County Option Transportation sales tax referendum. The on-going collection of this tax provides a firm financial basis for UTA and Weber County to participate with the FTA in funding the proposed project. However, local and regional transportation needs generally far exceed available federal, regional, and local funding. For this reason, project benefits must be commensurate with its costs and the costs should be allocated based upon benefits received. Application of tax revenue to both the capital and operations and maintenance costs of this project will be justified through the development of an implementable and cost-effective project.

The project will be planned and designed within a tightly constrained capital cost budget. Every effort will be made to select an alignment that minimizes private property acquisition. The mode chosen will be compatible with automobile speeds and movements and will require little or no diminishment in trip capacity or time.

UTA has an unparalleled history of delivering major capital projects within commitments made to the community and the FTA. UTA supports the need for improvements in this corridor and the desires of the City of Ogden and Weber County to apply on-going sales tax revenue to this purpose.

The project sponsors anticipate that a major transit investment in this corridor will be compliant with existing FTA New Starts/Small Starts guidance in terms of cost-benefit and transportation system user benefits.