

SPOKANE TRANSIT AUTHORITY

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING

October 2, 2024

AGENDA ITEM 4A1 : CONNECT SPOKANE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN: FINAL ADOPTION OF PLAN UPDATE (RESOLUTION)

REFERRAL COMMITTEE: n/a

SUBMITTED BY: Karl Otterstrom, Chief Planning & Development Officer
Brian Jennings, Deputy Director for Community Development

SUMMARY: Connect Spokane is STA’s Comprehensive Plan that sets forth a vision and policy framework to help guide decisions made by the Board of Directors, staff, and partnering agencies for at least the next 30 years. Phase 2 of the multi-year, major update to the plan is anticipated to be completed this month, subject to Board adoption of the final draft document.

BACKGROUND: The Connect Spokane Phase 2 Update was initiated in July 2023, consistent with the Planning & Development Committee’s 2023 Work Program. A more detailed scope of work for the plan update was presented to the Board in September 2023 and identified several elements requiring a more substantial review and possible update.

Redlines of the draft changes in the Phase 2 elements were presented during the Committee’s July 2024 meeting, and following stakeholder feedback, a revised redline draft presented at the September 2024 Committee meeting, with a public hearing held at the September 19, 2024, Board meeting. Three oral and written comments were received as part of the public hearing.

One commenter advocated against new policies that enable mobility on demand projects, noting greater overall effectiveness associated with fixed route services. Two commenters advocated for greater consideration of rail-based investments in the plan. In one case, the commenter recommended rail be considered the default mode for all future High Performance Transit (HPT) investments. One commenter expressed support for the new Transit Equity and Inclusion element, as well as a new eligibility-based fare program policy. The commenter also recommended changes to the new element, incorporating the concept of belonging to the element, while moving discussion of environmental justice to a separate section of the plan.

Staff reviewed testimony received and have prepared the following analysis which ultimately resulted in making no changes to the final draft plan available online:

<https://www.spokanetransit.com/projects/comprehensive-plan/>

Mobility on Demand

Spokane Transit’s best performing routes serve higher density areas with plentiful destinations connected by frequent, easy to use transit. High Performance Transit (HPT) maintains its preeminence in generating ridership and supporting walkable communities. That focus, admittedly, does not address areas of low-density development, especially those that feature multiple physical barriers, such as steep

slopes, disjointed road networks and water features. Fixed Route service is generally inappropriate for such areas. Mobility on Demand (MOD) does not deliver greater ridership or more cost-effective service. It does, however, provide access and coverage, expanding the reach of transit for more residents of STA's public transportation benefit area, by connecting new areas to major transit stations and transit centers. The proposed new policies do not oblige STA to provide the service, but merely enable their inception should the Board wish to advance them in the future.

Rail Investments

The timeline and costs for new rail projects in the United States and in a community with the relative density of Spokane point to rubber-tired transit as being the most practical response to encouraging more transit ridership in a reasonable timeframe. This, however, does not preclude the consideration of rail in corridors and demand patterns that could warrant it in the future.

Transit Equity and Inclusion

STA welcomes the continued discussion of ways to advance equity in connection to its core mission of providing public transportation to the region. In staff's efforts to benchmark the draft element to equity framework, strategy documents, and policies consistent with other transit agencies, staff did not identify agencies using the concept of "belonging" in reference to external facing equity strategies. As such, its use in the context of public transportation is not yet developed. Regarding the recommendation to relocate discussion of environmental justice to another point in the plan, United States Department of Transportation (US DOT) guidance published since 2020 have integrated these terms without compromising the importance of either. This precedence is reflected in the draft plan.

SUMMARY OF CHANGES

The table below summarizes the changes to the various elements of the plan. The objective is to seek approval by the STA Board of Directors on October 17, 2024.

| Element | Summary of Change |
|--------------------------|---|
| High Performance Transit | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Continued evolution of HPT map with new class/mode descriptionsUpdated accompanying table to be consistent with class/modes and outputs from <i>Connect 2035</i> strategic plan network evaluation |
| Fixed Route Element | <ul style="list-style-type: none">No proposed changes. Service growth opportunities to be addressed in <i>Connect 2035</i>. |
| Paratransit | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Clarified that the paratransit boundary is bounded by the PTBA boundaryClarified that if a geographic area is surrounded by Fixed Route service, but lies outside the ¼-mile buffer of Fixed Route service, that area will still receive paratransit service, consistent with federal regulation |

| Element | Summary of Change |
|---|---|
| Flexible Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated with new shared mobility language to create framework for defining service attributes • Added definitions for shared mobility, mobility hubs, mobility on demand • Added criteria for identification and design of mobility on demand projects |
| Communications and Public Input | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Added public participation spectrum • Updated outreach tools to reflect current best practices in public engagement, including consistent partner coordination • Updated "Public Input Categories" table |
| Revenues and Fares | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor language update throughout for consistency • Four new policies related to fares, addressing fare programs and rider contribution to the cost of service |
| Regional Transportation, Land Use, and Economic Development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated element title to acknowledge economic development • Added economic development and transit-oriented development into element goal and policy language • Updated transit oriented development (TOD) and land acquisition policies to be more active and identify opportunities for STA to engage in TOD partnerships |
| Sustainability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor updates to language • Minor reorganization |
| Transit Equity and Inclusion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created new Element with goal, principles, and policies • Moved Title VI policies from Annex 2 into main body of comprehensive plan |

RECOMMENDATION TO COMMITTEE: Recommend the Board approve, by resolution, the Phase 2 updates to the Connect Spokane comprehensive plan as presented.