



September 2024

Survey Seeks Public Feedback for *Connect 2035*



A survey is underway to receive public feedback on *Connect 2035*. The input will help influence which projects are prioritized and how best to invest in the community's growth over the next 10 years. **The survey is open through Monday, September 30.**

Connect 2035 is Spokane Transit's plan for bus, Paratransit, and Rideshare services through 2035. This plan builds on the achievements of the current 10-year strategic plan, *STA Moving Forward*, and focuses on meeting new needs while investing in equity, sustainability, and community growth.

STA recently undertook an extensive process to identify the transit initiatives that may be included in the *Connect 2035* plan. The agency is exploring various options for transit improvements, such as increasing service on existing routes, launching mobility-on-demand projects, creating a new Reduced Fare program for low-income individuals, and encouraging transit-friendly development.

Community feedback will help STA prioritize initiatives and identify a package of investments for local growth. With staff support, the STA Board of Directors will determine which initiatives are incorporated into the draft *Connect 2035* plan, which is expected to be published in late October 2024.

Take the survey at spokanetransit.com/survey2035.

To stay up to date on the latest developments and outreach efforts for *Connect 2035*, sign up for emails at spokanetransit.com/connect2035. Any questions, suggestions, or feedback to share about *Connect 2035* may also be directed to connect2035@spokanetransit.com.



Back to School



Above: Youth board an STA bus at the Plaza

The new school year is here. Thanks to the Youth Ride Free program, made possible by funding from the Move Ahead Washington transportation package and supported by the Climate Commitment Act, all youth 18 and under gain unlimited access to reliable, public transportation while learning valuable transit skills.

But since students, especially younger ones, may not have much experience using public transit, here's a reminder on how they can ride free on STA.

Youth can tap their Rider's License Connect card on the fare validator as they board. STA's partnership with Spokane Public Schools (SPS) also allows SPS high school students to use their student ID as a bus pass. If a youth is not an SPS high schooler, they can still show their student ID to the bus driver as they board. However, if a student has no card, they should tell the driver their age before boarding to ride without fare.

STA encourages students to use their Rider's License or SPS student ID as they

board.

“Tapping the card helps build good transit habits and allows us to track rider data, which in turn improves our service, particularly on school routes,” explained Carly Cortright, STA’s Chief Communications & Customer Service Officer.

In recent years, STA has made significant adjustments to accommodate K-12 riders, like the 223 and 294 routes that serve local high schools. As a community partner, the agency continues to attend school events and has promoted educational materials to make using transit as easy and comfortable as possible for youth.

“STA is an integral part of the community by providing students with dependable transportation options,” said Cortright. “This year, for example, we are proud to partner with SPS on their Engage IRL initiative that encourages youth to disconnect from their devices and participate in sports and arts activities.”

As students embark on a new academic year, STA remains focused on providing excellent service and helping students travel safely while promoting the benefits of public transit for the next generation.

For more information on the Youth Ride Free program, visit spokanetransit.com/youth. For more information on Spokane Public Schools’ Engage IRL program, visit engageirl.com.



Multilingual Transit Training for Local Nonprofits



Above: An STA sign indicating how limited-English proficiency individuals may receive language assistance

Earlier this year, STA's Business Development team conducted multilingual training sessions to help non-English-speaking community members navigate the bus system. The team led presentations at Latinos En Spokane and Thrive International, with STA providing translated materials like route schedules for distribution.

Latinos En Spokane initially reached out to STA for bus fare resources, and during discussions, the idea of training the nonprofit's team emerged. Thrive International, who were recipients of last year's Surplus Van Grant program, also benefitted from training sessions.

The presentation at Latinos En Spokane was directed at case managers, while at Thrive, STA's team spoke directly to Russian-speaking clients. The sessions prompted many questions about available transit resources, highlighting the community's interest in accessing public transportation.

Feedback from the sessions suggested that while translated materials are useful, alternative communication methods, such as infographics and visuals, would benefit those with limited literacy.

"There are many barriers people face, from understanding services to overcoming language obstacles," said STA Business Development Manager Dainon Setzer. "It's important we provide these resources and opportunities, and we're excited to see these efforts grow."

Thrive has requested more presentations, especially for Arabic speakers, and STA plans to continue expanding to other nonprofit organizations who work with individuals with limited English proficiency.

As part of ongoing feedback with these and other organizations, STA has also implemented and enhanced accessibility features on its website, such as improved language translation options as well as a dedicated language assistance page, which may be found at spokanetransit.com/lep.



Paratransit Call Volumes Return to Pre-COVID Levels



Above: Reservationist Toby Herman in the Paratransit call center

STA Paratransit's call center recently returned to pre-COVID volumes in daily calls. In total, the call center handles between 600 to 800 calls per day.

The increase in ridership and calls can be attributed to several factors. One is the population growth in the Spokane area. Another cause is the transition from temporary Paratransit riders who used the service intermittently during COVID into permanent customers. Once normal operations resumed after the pandemic, Paratransit experienced a surge of new applicants.

Due to the surge in call volume and ridership, same-day ride scheduling has become nearly impossible, in contrast with pre-COVID operations. As a result, Paratransit advises customers to call three to seven days ahead for the best availability.

With a team of eight full-time Reservationists rotating throughout the week, five to seven are typically in the office daily. The team works seven days a week, eight hours a day, including holidays, and each Reservationist can take around 120 calls a day. In addition to trip scheduling, Reservationists manage ride confirmations, cancellations, and questions related to the Connect Fare System, which launched in October 2022. This includes tasks such as reloading cards and explaining how the system works, which has slightly increased call times.

"The Paratransit team is essential in providing vital transportation for those with limited access," said STA Chief Operations Officer Brandon Ropez-Betty. "We take pride in serving our community and are pleased to meet the high demand."

To learn more about Paratransit service as well as eligibility, visit spokanetransit.com/paratransit.

STA To Replace Valley Service Center Bus Washer



Above: A Paratransit van in a bus washer

A much-needed upgrade is coming to the Spokane Valley Service Center, STA's bus washing, fueling, and storage facility on South Bowdish Road. The current bus wash has been in use since the early 1990s and will be replaced with a modern, more efficient system.

"It's the right time for a replacement," said Senior Project Manager Jessica Kelch. "Having a new bus wash with newer features will be a great addition."

One of the newer features on the new bus wash is water reclamation. This will allow the system to reuse about 80% of the water from previous washes, significantly reducing water waste while maintaining high cleaning standards.

Other features of the newer bus washes include seasonal adjustments: during the winter, a sprayer cleans underneath the vehicles to remove residual deicer chemicals; during summer, the front brushes are turned off to speed up wash time since vehicles don't become as dirty. Bus washes are also equipped with a sensor to detect what type of vehicle is being washed, saving time from having to manually adjust for each vehicle entering the wash.

Construction on the new washer is scheduled to begin on October 7 and anticipated

“It went excellently,” said STA Chief Operations Officer Brandon Rapez-Betty, who participated in the cleanup. “The weather was great, and it was a wonderful opportunity for both socializing and helping our local environment.”

The Downriver Disc Golf Course has become the staple location for when STA participates in the river cleanup. Originally chosen for its family-friendly environment to encourage wider participation, it has now become a tradition.

One of the best parts of the event was the camaraderie among volunteers from different STA departments, some of whom had never met before. They shared outdoors and camping stories while working together. After the cleanup, some volunteers stayed behind to play a round of disc golf and received thanks from other golfers for their volunteer efforts.

“It was great to see people come together, have fun, and make a difference,” Rapez-Betty added. “I especially want to thank Haley Wilson and Spokane Transit employees, friends, and family members who participated in the annual cleanup. This group walked miles, collected trash, and made the river a cleaner, better place!”



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