

Valley Regional Transit
Focus Groups

Summary Report
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Study Background & Objectives

Valley Regional Transit is developing a survey to provide information to help develop messages to build support for public transportation, increase support from the community for the current *Communities in Motion* long range public transportation plan and the proposed expansion of the valley's public transportation services, and to increase ridership on public transportation and/or use of alternative modes of transportation in the Treasure Valley. In order to further understand the level of awareness of and support for public transportation in the Treasure Valley, Valley Regional Transit and Northwest Research Group (NWRG) conducted exploratory research to:

- ~ Identify the type of public transportation system residents would support and/or ride (e.g., Rapid transit, bus, rail, rideshare, etc.).
- ~ Measure residents' attitudes as to the economic and/or other public value of having a strong public transportation system and its impact on the region's overall quality of life.
- ~ Test possible messages that will achieve the following: (1) increase regional support for funding public transportation, (2) encourage use of public transportation alternatives (bus, rideshare, etc.), and (3) test the proposed advertising campaign.
- ~ Obtain residents' overall support for employer outreach programs, and measure overall awareness of employer programs.

Four focus groups were conducted with business owners and residents in the Treasure Valley and were held at Northwest Research Group in Boise, Idaho over the course of three evenings – July 24, 2006 through July 26, 2006. The first focus group was with Small Business owners in the Treasure Valley. Ten business owners were recruited; eight of whom ultimately participated in the groups. Note one participant was paid and sent from the group as further screening indicated that he worked in transportation planning and had atypical knowledge of the local system.

The other three groups were composed of residents in the Treasure Valley. The residential groups were segmented based on the extent to which individuals support and are willing to pay for public transportation services as follows:

- ~ ***Strong Supporters***: Participants in this group all indicated that they strongly support having public transportation services available in the region and are strongly willing to pay to have these services available. Thirteen participants were recruited for this group, ten of whom ultimately participated.
- ~ ***Supporters***: Participants in this group had mixed but still positive opinions. To qualify all had to at least somewhat support having public transportation services available in the region or be at least somewhat willing to pay to have these services available. Twelve participants were recruited for this group, six of whom ultimately participated.
- ~ ***Non-Supporters / Opponents***. The original plan called for this group to be comprised of area residents who were not likely to support having additional public transportation services available, ***and*** were not willing to pay to have these services available. Perhaps a surprise, this turned out to be a relatively small percentage of those contacted. Therefore, participants in this group had to be negative on at least one dimension – that is they were not likely to support having additional public transportation services available, ***and/or*** were not willing to pay to

have these services available. Eight participants were recruited for this group, five of whom ultimately participated. Of those who participated, most were at least somewhat supportive of having public transportation services available but were unwilling to pay to have these services.

Respondents were recruited via telephone and had to meet the following screening criteria to qualify for the groups:

- ~ Not be employed by a marketing research firm, an advertising agency, a utility or transportation company, the media, a state or local elected official, or the city or government.
- ~ Currently live in the Treasure Valley.
- ~ For the business group only – employ 100 people or less.
- ~ Plan to register and vote in the next election.
- ~ Not participated in a focus group in the last year.
- ~ Be 18 years of age or older.

All participants were likely voters – that is, they were registered voters and indicated that they plan to vote in the next elections. Also, participants represented a good mix of Ada and Canyon County residents and demographic characteristics (gender, age, income, etc.)

This report begins with a discussion of the study's *major findings*. *Study conclusions* are then presented. The report ends with additional information about *focus group research*.

Major Findings

The following are the key findings of the study. The report is organized to reflect the general order and flow of the questions asked, the follow-up conversation, and the general subject matter.

Direct quotations from group participants are in italics offset by a gray bar. Also in italics and in a slightly smaller font, are fact card and item text, and questions from the discussion guide. Comments, observations, and insights not in italics are those of Northwest Research Group's analysis of the groups' comments and dynamics.

It should be noted that some statements made by participants may not accurately reflect a real or true situation. This information is useful in that it indicates what a participant believes to be true and/or reflects their current state of awareness and knowledge.

Warm-Up / General Attitudes toward Public Transportation

Values versus Issues in the Treasure Valley

Participants were asked to discuss what they valued most about living in the Treasure Valley. The majority of participants liked how the valley continues to have a small town feel to it, but has all of the qualities of a bigger city. Participants also felt that the Treasure Valley has a high quality of life and it's a great place to raise a family. Finally, participants liked the fact that there are outdoor activities close by.

"It's a great place to have a family and to have kids."

"I love that it's not too big; it's growing, it's growing all the time, but having moved from Portland to here {here is better}."

"There's a variety of culture; you can do anything you want basically here. Sports, teams, on weekends you can do anything you want. Still a 'small town feel' with big city choices."

"It's close to the mountains and places to recreate. There's a variety of different places and things around the area. People like to do biking here in Idaho, and rafting, and kayaking, and mountain hiking, and all that."

"It's got all of the things you would see in a much larger town, but we're smaller."

After discussing what they valued the most about the Treasure Valley, participants were asked to discuss what they saw as the biggest issues facing the area. Every group mentioned growth. More specifically, participants were concerned about urban sprawl and the lack of infrastructure to handle the growth. Transportation was also a major issue. The majority of the participants felt that the Treasure Valley needs to be some sort of available and accessible transportation; all agreed that current public transportation services were inadequate.

"Growth – we don't have a suitable structure to handle all those people coming in, in such a fast-pace."

"I live on the corner of GreenHurst and Happy Valley, and Happy Valley has been closed about a month. I can't get anywhere without having to drive 30 minutes to shop."

"There is no public transportation that you can depend on in this Valley, it's just not there; therefore, you got more people on the roads than these roads can handle. And people are in a hurry, people are frustrated, doing stupid things, and if we have a serious, decent public transportation system that encompassed Mountain Home to Caldwell, everybody would be so much happier."

“Housing is a problem; urban sprawl is occurring.”

“Because of urban sprawl, the cost of houses [has increased]; I mean, I live in the North End, and I can’t afford my house if I were to buy it now.”

“One of the issues that we see as more developments get built on the outskirts of the North, that it brings traffic straight through down the roads that we consider to be neighborhood roads. And we don’t see anything being done about the traffic plan to handle that, except to count the number of cars coming down a neighborhood road like in front of my house, because I see them all the time out of my house.”

Awareness of Public Transportation

The participants were asked if they were aware of any growth management and/or transportation plans for the Treasure Valley. For the most part, participants were not aware of the *Blueprint for Growth* or *Communities in Motion* plans. In addition, none were aware of proposed plans to improve and expand the existing public transportation system. However, some participants were familiar with a plan proposed by former Mayor Brent Cole to build a rail system connecting Boise, Meridian, Nampa and Caldwell. Some remembered the demonstration Regio Sprinter project.

“I heard recently that there is a master plan that’s been three years in the making that’s almost ready, and it’s probably a five-year plan for controlling growth.”

“Mayor Cole was talking about the rail system, and we had information on the rail system, then; and then, nothing.”

“There used to be a rail system that came all the way downtown, and they’ve taken out a lot of the rail systems. It seems like when Brent Cole was the mayor, that the railroads deeded all of the right of ways to the city.”

“I remember reading something in the newspaper - it was a number of years ago, I mean, ten or plus years ago - about trying to build a bus lane from Nampa area to Boise on the freeway to accommodate for the bus transit system.”

While all participants were aware that there are public transportation services in the valley, few were aware of the actual services provided and/or the systems’ names. A few of the participants thought it was called Boise Ride while others recalled that it is / was called The Bus. Participants were also aware of Commuteride, having seen the vans; however, they were not aware of how it worked. Finally, some of the participants were familiar with Treasure Valley Transit operating in Nampa.

“Now, they have a small transit system in Canyon County, but it runs once an hour, and it’s not dependable. So people you actually do tell them, ‘Oh well, the transit system comes,’ they’re like ‘Oh no! Never mind because the bus will pass by, and another one won’t pass by for another hour.’ - So, all the people get turned off from that.”

“It doesn’t have anything identifying it, so people don’t know about it.”

“You know in some of the cities it’s the BART, it’s the metro, it’s the thing, and everybody knows what that is as a public transportation piece.”

“I think it’s called The Bus.”

“Valley something; what is it? RideLine.”

Participants were more aware of the vanpool program.

“The carpool commuting from Nampa to Boise with the vans they have – Commuteride is that what it’s called?”

The majority of participants had lived in or visited other metropolitan areas and ridden their public transportation system. Many of the participants had experience with large public transportation systems in major metropolitan areas such as New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Atlanta, and Washington D.C. When asked about their experience with public transportation systems in smaller metro areas, participants mentioned riding the rail (i.e., MAX) and bus systems in Portland OR, Salt Lake City UT, and Denver CO and the bus system in Seattle WA. One participant mentioned the effectiveness of the public transportation system in Billings, MT.

“Around Seattle, the smaller outlying towns in Kent, they do have bus routes that pass every 15 minutes, every half-an-hour at the most. It was nice because if you knew you missed the first bus, there was another bus, and they were running from whatever time in the morning till ten o’clock at night.”

“In Billings, MT, where I went to school, I was always taking the bus from an area they called The Heights down to the city to the main campus. {What was good?} I think it was the layout of the city; there’s like two or three major areas of main parts of the town, and there was just a main road that connected all three; and the buses were able to travel relatively quickly, and I don’t think they have the congestion problems we have in Boise on our roads.”

“Portland’s bus system; the bus and the MAX. I used the bus to work there when I was going to college. I used the MAX and the bus system out there. They have an awesome system because they have the MAX, which is the rail or whatever, and then, they would have buses that would connect you from there to pretty much anywhere you want to go. If you wanted to do something, it took you almost anywhere. And it didn’t cover just Portland proper; it covered all of the outlying areas as well.”

“Well, between BART and Portland, if we could figure out a way to merge those two systems, then we’d be set.”

“We do have public transportation, but I have been to England and Europe, and over there they have public transportation. You can step out the door, you can get on a bus, you can go down the next corner, and get on another bus that goes someplace else - over here, we don’t have the capability - or you can get on a train. When the train arrives, you get off the train, and go someplace else. I can travel all over Europe, and never have to worry about having a car. I can’t do that in Treasure Valley.”

“The metro system in Washington D.C. is so clean and accessible.”

“Atlanta, Georgia has a great rail system.”

After discussing the transportation services available in the area, participants were asked what components are critical to a high-quality and effective public transportation system. Reliability and accessibility were the two most important factors participants believed to be critical to a high-quality and effective transportation system. It would also need to operate during hours when people want / need to travel, make frequent stops, and operate at reasonable cost. They also mentioned that if there was a light rail system, there would need to be buses to take you to your final destination.

“Enough buses that can run on schedule. More buses running so if you miss the bus you know one is coming in a few minutes.”

“If there is light rail, you need a bus to take you to your final destination.”

“It should encourage people to use it”

“It has to be economical; it has to be one that doesn’t cause everyone’s taxes to skyrocket, because then, everyone’s going to fight it, and people are going to avoid it just because it makes the taxes go up.”

“Affordable and it has to be accessible. And I lived in Denver; they have a great public transportation system because they connect to all the outlying communities.”

Value of Public Transportation

Positive Reasons in Having Public Transportation

Participants from each group were asked to write a list of all the positive benefits of having a strong and effective public transportation system in the Treasure Valley. The top reasons were for environmental quality (specifically air quality), time savings, and to improve traffic flow / reduce congestion. Note that air quality was mentioned as the top reason by all groups except for Group 4 (Non-Supporters).

One interesting note is that all of the groups mentioned that a public transportation system would help connect and/or link the community in the Treasure Valley, and would help make urban communities stronger. All groups also mentioned that there were economic benefits for the community and individual residents to having a high-quality and effective public transportation system. Finally, all groups mentioned that it was important to have a strong public transportation to provide transportation for those who don’t have access to a car, the elderly, those who are disabled, and, to a lesser extent, teens.

Table 1: Group 1 – Small Business

Response	Frequency
Environmental quality / Improve air quality	7
Time savings	6
Ability to move freely	3
Less traffic congestion / fewer vehicles	3
Savings / lower cost to commute	2
Decrease wear and tear on the roads	2
Services / commute for elderly	2
Increase productivity with workers / lower stress	2
Decrease emergency response time	1
Reducing energy demand in the Valley	1
Make urban centers stronger	1
Alternative for those without vehicles	1
Comfortable / safe travel	1
Allow for growth / create an environment for growth	1
Reduce costs for employees	1
Alternative to driving	1
Brings the customers to you	1
Ensures employees get to work	1
Stress level goes down because the system works on a time schedule	1
Access to downtown / parking	1

Table 2: Group 2 – Strong Supporters

Response	Frequency
Pollution control / air quality	7
Avoid accidents / safer travel	4

Response	Frequency
Reduce traffic	3
Connects the community	3
Decrease cost of transportation	3
Accessibility for people with disabilities or without cars	2
Freedom to travel / quality of life	2
Maintain neighborhoods / reduce traffic / retain charm	2
Economic growth	2
Role of government to provide good services	2
Access to entertainment / events / schools / workplace	2
Healthier lifestyle	2
Limit cars in congested areas	1
Maintain appearance / beautiful parks	1
Get to places on time	1
Emergency vehicles can get to places faster	1
Good for businesses	1
Traffic flow	1
Bring people downtown	1
Shorter commute times	1
Help with parking problems	1
I would use it	1
Change the way I do my job; become a role model	1
Easy access	1
Expand job opportunities	1
Change times you would travel	1
Save more money	1

Table 3: Group 3–Supporters

Response	Frequency
Help / reduce air quality / pollution / noise pollution	6
Improve / reduce congestion	4
Encourage economic growth / more high level jobs	3
Improve quality of life / stress free	2
Make it more tourist-friendly / events	2
Improve quality of life for the disabled / handicap / teens / elderly	2
Links the community	2
Create a plan before it's too late	1
Create easier access to downtown	1
Reduce traffic accidents	1
Reduce drunk driving	1
Reduce the isolation factor	1
Reduce fuel cost	1
Smart community / smart growth / fun	1
Integrated system that has all aspect (i.e. light rail, bus, etc.)	1

Response	Frequency
Adding parking availability for tourists	1
Add the bicycle racks to the buses	1
Planned communities vs. sprawl	1
Would come downtown more	1
Access to other parts of the Valley	1
Save money	1
Integrate the entire Treasure Valley	1
Access for other family members	1

Table 4: Group 4 – Opponents

Response	Frequency
Take cars off the road / reduces traffic flow	3
Provide a community feeling / connection	2
Allows easy access for all (teens, senior citizens, disabilities, etc)	2
Keeps the air cleaner / reduce pollution	2
Helps the economy	2
Provides reliability for workforce	1
Freedom of choice / option	1
Provide jobs	1
Realistic city design solutions / design	1
Lower cost	1
Income for the city	1
Convenient for visitors	1
Easier commute	1
Reduce gasoline consumption / overall dependence	1
Make more trips into Boise (downtown)	1
Attend more events	1
Fewer drivers	1
Shorter wait times	1
More money to spend	1

Issues / Challenges in Having a Public Transportation System

As a follow-up, each group was asked what would be the issues and/or challenges to having a public transportation system. Every group mentioned the cost and higher taxes as the primary challenges of having a public transportation system. Related to this were concerns that the system could not be self-supporting and/or that not enough people would ride the system to make it worthwhile. Some participants suggested that there is not the political will to support the system and/or that it would be very difficult to push the process through the system here in Idaho. The Small Business Group thought that it may have a negative economic impact on businesses that are car-reliant or are not centrally located.

Table 5: Group 1 – Small Business

Response	Frequency
Costly - higher taxes (building roads, transportation)	1
Subsidized	1
Have to plan ahead	1
Could increase growth	1
Increase the size of government - unless privately funded	1
Is it cost effective	1
Will enough customers ride	1
Possible negative economical impact on car-reliant businesses or not centrally located	1

Table 6: Group 2 – Strong Supporters

Response	Frequency
Cost	5
Politics on how to get it down / passing it through the government	3
Funding - who is going to pay	2
Some catastrophe / breakdown / strike / accident	2
Accessible and compatible to every lifestyle	1
Maybe a waste of tax dollar due to the volume of people	1
Cost of educating the people	1
Time it would take to implement the system	1
Time it would get the qualified people to work on it	1
Do not see how they could connect the whole Valley - would need to work together	1
Need to get the businesses involved / corporate buy-in	1
Inflexible schedules	1
Safety concerns	1
Need to have the big guys used the bus - big political leaders to be role models for the community	1

Table 7: Group 3–Supporters

Response	Frequency
Politicians raising taxes / where's the money coming from	1
How long is it going to take	1
Who's going to operate it	1
Access downtown but not intrude upon it	1
Smaller units to travel more frequently	1

Table 8: Group 4 – Opponents

Response	Frequency
Increase taxes / cost	1
Time constraints / might not be good enough / takes away freedom to travel when you want	1
When it doesn't work	1
Still have to walk from where you live to a main street to catch it	1

Using Public Transportation

Why Should People Use It

Participants in the small business and strong supporter groups were asked to make a list as to why people in general should ride or use public transportation. Both the small business group and the strong supporters believe people should ride it because it would save residents' money. They also felt it would make the commute time shorter and it would be less stressful for commuters. *Note: the somewhat support group and the opponent group were not asked this question.*

Table 9: Small Business Group 1

Response	Frequency
Less cost	7
Get there on time / reliable	4
Makes my commute time shorter / less congestion	3
Easy to use / convenient	3
Less stress	3
Can get to town if they are unable to drive	2
Makes my air cleaner / less pollution	2
Cars can be more specific	1
Second car can be for kids instead of having three	1
Could get away with having older cars	1
Less money on maintaining the roads	1
Less demand for gas	1
Freeze up time	1
Can get to where I want to go	1

Table 10: Strong Supporters Group 2

Response	Frequency
Savings of dollars	9
Relaxation time / stress free	4
Accessibility / multitask	4
Everyone is contributing to the environment	2
Better jobs	2
Get you there faster / most convenient	2
Alternative mode of transportation	2
Eliminate parking problems	2
Easier way of doing their shopping	1
Better Emergency Response Time	1
Has to have an advantage of driving	1
Save the wear of your car	1

Types of Trips

Participants in the somewhat support and opponent groups were asked for what types of trips they would use public transportation. Both groups mentioned that they would use it for commuting to and from work, coming downtown for events / entertainment, and running errands. One of the participants mentioned that they would use it for a family outing. *Note: the small business and strong supporter groups were not asked this question.*

“Shopping.”

“Commute to work and home; that would be the number one thing. The second would be tourists and entertainment.”

“Tourist and entertainment”

“I think the elderly would use it to go to their medical appointments.”

“Shopping; a Saturday away from the kids”

Barriers to Riding Public Transportation

Participants were asked what barriers prevent people from using public transportation. Primarily participants were concerned about the cost of funding and educating people about the public transportation system. In addition, they felt they would have to overcome the safety concerns of traveling on public transportation. In addition, they were worried about the availability and convenience of the system – would it be on time and would it get them to where they want to go conveniently?

“What’s more comfortable than driving your own car?”

“A standard of cleanliness. You are not going to get on if it’s gross.”

“In a big city you are worried about getting mugged at a bus stop.”

“I think in our area there is a big difference between income, to where, (like he’s saying), there’s people who clock-in; they’re working at factories and places like that. And then, there’s people who run their own businesses or work for firms or whatever, and they have more schedules that vary to accommodate their business, and that also follow-on with money. And people who are doing that, maybe don’t like spending that extra money to have that flexibility. And people who don’t have that extra money, will not spend on it because they don’t want to look like the poor person riding the bus.”

“If it goes on strike, and you can’t get to work.”

“What happens if there is an accident or if it is not on time?”

“It could be money; depends on how much they’re going to charge you.”

“First of all, the cost, the funding – who is going to pay?”

“Probably the biggest one is going to be the politics in deciding on how to get it done and deciding on what to do.”

“It’s going to take time to do it, to educate people, and to convince them that it’s an opportunity, not a hassle.”

“If you don’t feel safe, you are not going to ride it.”

Finally, many participants said the barrier to riding is simply having no need, and a simple preference for the freedom of driving their own automobile.

Marketing Messages

The groups were asked to review the proposed advertising campaign that Valley Regional Transit is considering to use. Each participant looked at eight billboards and circled what they liked and crossed out what they did not like.

Overall Reactions

Overall, participants felt the message / theme of the billboards was to use public transportation. More specifically, all the groups thought that the message was to encourage them to ride the bus more. They all had a difficult time seeing that it referred to bus, carpool, and vanpool services in the Treasure Valley. No participants felt that the primary message was to support the system.

“Get on board with the idea [of riding].”

“It’s telling you that there’s a bus system and use it.”

“Hop on board – ride the bus.”

“Free up some time; you have free time from the time you get on till you get to your destination.”

“Ride the bus.”

“RideLine is the bus system.”

Reactions to the Tag Line and Graphical Mark

After discussing the overall theme, participants were asked what their initial reactions were to the advertising. The majority of the participants liked the “Hop on Board” tag line used throughout each ad, feeling that its use tied all of the concepts together. Nearly all felt the key message of the tag line was to ride; few picked up on the idea that it could also mean to support public transportation. One participant who did pick up on the idea that the message was both to support and ride public transportation suggested an alternative tag line: “Step on Up.” While all participants were generally positive about the tag line, they did, however, feel it would appeal most to the younger generation.

“I like the Hop on Board theme through all of them; I think that’s catchy.”

“I think kids would understand Hop on Board really well; the younger generation would like it.”

“[The color] it’s just too generic; it’s just, it doesn’t pull you in with the ad. The black and white or even the contrast on each of them, I just don’t...even the words Hop on Board, they don’t encourage, they don’t; it’s vague. The metro, you get that from what that is; Hop on Board – is what? What are you going to get on? It doesn’t have an identifiable theme.”

Participants had mixed feelings about the graphical mark. Many found it confusing or they simply did not understand it.

“It’s something that would make you think on anything but a bus, because there’s only a bus sign here, there’s a little bus, and there’s two cars and a smiley face. So what’s the point?”

“It looks like a wreck.”

“Oh, I see now. It’s a car, bus, and van. I didn’t see that at first. It really doesn’t make a lot of sense to me.”

Reactions to the Specific Messages

Participants were most positive towards the *Leaner / Greener, Smarter Route*, and *Widening the Mind* concepts. They felt they were positive and had generally wide appeal. Several participants noted that they liked the appeal of being “smarter.”

“I like the leaner / greener commute: a soft, nice message with that being.”

“I like the Smarter Route. I think it appeals to making your own choice, being proactive or using your mind to explore different options.”

“I like this widen the mind. We need to widen our minds because we are getting bigger; we’re getting metropolitan.”

There was a mixed reaction toward the *Tell Big Oil Where to Stick It* billboard. Some of the participants found it offensive, especially the small business group; while others felt that it was making a statement, and thought it would capture people’s attention. Most agreed that it would appeal more to a younger audience.

“I am offended by the oil statement; that really is crude to me. The political nature of that statement [is incorrect].”

“I think the Tell Big Oil Where to Stick is pretty funny because everyone is a little upset about the gas prices, and we feel very helpless.”

Participants did not like or understand the *To Break From the Car Payment* billboard. They did not find the message believable as few people would be giving up their car entirely.

“If you were using to break from the car payment leash, again, that’s kind of like sticking it to the oil company. You might think that, but I don’t think it is appropriate for certainly an advertising campaign or getting people to...they aren’t going to do it because they think that they’ll get a less car payment or a lesser car payment.”

“I don’t think that the car dealerships would like to take a break from car payments.”

“We are so used to be independent; we just jump on a car and go where we want, when we want. Again, we are so independent I don’t think you’re going to get people to get off their car completely.”

The majority of participants would like to see fewer words in all of the billboards and the graphics made simpler. Many participants had difficulty with reading the phone number; some suggested having a web address as well. Finally, as noted earlier, many people felt that RideLine was the name of the bus system, rather than an information line to contact.

“You can’t read it. There are too many words; especially if you are on a bus or driving by.”

“You have to have their number big that you are going to call to get your bus.”

“And the only thing I would add to it and to all of them somewhere along the road is a www [address] for route information. People could get on the Internet - they could see what the routes are; they could see what the times are.”

Overall Services and Funding Options for Public Transportation

Types of Services

Participants were asked what types of services would be essential to have in a good public transportation system in the Treasure Valley. The groups felt that it would need to have a bus system, commuter lanes, and light rail.

“Commuter lanes on the freeways.”

“Light rail, needs to be like Portland – needs to go four or five different directions, but Boise may not be big enough yet for that.”

“Needs to be accessible within reason – In residential areas, I would think a few blocks of wherever it is you’re getting, and/or a parking facility that you see in the bigger cities to commute and ride: you can drive your car to a spot, and then be able to park it and take the transportation.”

“Reasonable hours of services. There has to be decisions made as to when to begin and when to end.”

“Regular routes on time and smaller buses.”

“Clear cut; easy to see the times.”

“For me it would be the points of connection; for me it would be how easy is it for me to get from my house to a pick-up spot. Do I have to walk a long way or can I park? Something of that sort to get to that point, and then getting to where I need to be.”

“It would have to be quick; we wouldn’t want it to take longer than it is to drive there.”

“What I would like to see is a hub downtown and destinations out there so that, let’s say I live in Meridian and I wanted to go to the airport, I could come downtown and switch in the hub, and go down to the airport.”

Funding Alternatives

Participants were asked how public transportation could be funded. Generally, they felt that it needed to be funded by multiple methods. They indicated funding would need to come from federal and state funds / grants, sales tax, bonds, etc. The Small Business group said it would be a good idea to have larger employers pay for some of the costs related to building a public transportation system.

“The costs should go to the larger employers who have more employees.”

“Divert some of the money from roads to public transportation.”

“I think multiple sources; there’s the federal grants. So it’s federal funding and state funding, but it’s not going to get a lot of support in the state funding because the counties will absolutely not see any value. Then you get into city and county [funding].”

The Small Business group was asked their thoughts regarding a local option tax. The majority of them felt it would be fair because everyone would be paying the same amount.

“Local option tax makes it fair because everyone will pay the same.”

For the residential groups, participants were asked what their initial reaction would be if there was an initiative in the ballot for a sales tax to fund transportation. Participants felt that in order to support a local option tax, there would need to be a good plan in place. In addition, they wondered how long it would take to build the system and how it would affect them personally.

“Well, I think you have to first, you have to tee up with the benefits - reduce congestion; is congestion worth a penny?”

“Need to have a good plan. It would have to be encompassing, and it would have to be subject to public input.”

“How long is it going to be? Because like a lot of sales taxes going up and down, it will go up to fund something and then it comes back down. How long is that going to take?”

“Compensate me, Washington has an 8 percent sales tax, but they don’t tax me on food – I need something like that.”

“Is this short term or long term?”

“Glad to do it; let’s go ahead, the benefits are there.”

“No, not for a bus system – if it was a good system they would have to prove it to me that it is going to work.”

“Why does it have to be a tax? Is there another option?”

Study Conclusions

It was clear from the focus groups that there are significant opportunities to increase area residents' awareness of the current plans for transportation planning and expanded public transportation services. It will be essential to increase this awareness before it is possible to garner support for these plans.

It was also clear from the focus groups that while nearly all participants were generally open to and/or supportive of the general concept of additional public transportation services, they were less open to and/or supportive of different mechanisms for funding. Much of this resistance may be a function of lack of awareness of the different mechanisms and how they work.

With some tweaks, the general message and execution of the campaign should be effective. Care should be taken in using messages that could be construed as highly negative. Clutter should be avoided and the name of the bus and number to call should be clearer. Finally, a web address should be included.

Focus Group Research

Strengths and Limitations

Focus groups are used to develop in-depth insights into key issues, rather than quantitatively precise measures. Groups are guided by an outline of open-ended, unstructured questions, designed to probe participants' knowledge of and attitudes toward specific topics of interest. The user of this research is reminded that focus groups are qualitative research and these findings should not be extrapolated to the general population as a whole without further quantitative research, using a probability sample. The results of focus groups should not be considered reliable in the "statistical sense." It is not possible to exactly replicate the recruiting of the respondents, nor can the moderator ask the same specific questions of each respondent, or probe in the exact same manner from group to group.

Focus group research is intended to provide an initial, exploratory step in determining in-depth feelings, awareness, attitudes, and opinions. The following biases are generally inherent to qualitative research, and are listed to remind the user that the data presented cannot be projected to the entire universe of individuals in the study area.

- ~ Focus group participants tend to be more outgoing and more assertive than individuals who decline to participate.
- ~ Respondents "self-select" themselves. That is, they are people who are not only willing to participate in a group discussion, but are also available on the night the group is scheduled.
- ~ Individuals who attend focus groups are usually more willing to express their opinions and may have more strongly held opinions than those who decline to participate.
- ~ People in groups may respond differently to a question than if asked the same question individually.

Use of Videotapes

The focus groups were videotaped and participants were aware they were being taped. These tapes greatly enhance the benefits of this report. A written report cannot precisely express the non-verbal information captured in a discussion – for example body language, length of time before respondents answer a question. It is also difficult to identify issues such as peer pressure, which may be evident by viewing the tape. The tapes provide a more "first hand" experience with the participants. In reading this report and viewing the tapes, it is important for the user to keep the following in mind:

- ~ The participants are real people responding spontaneously. Not every moment of the group is meaningful, not every question works, and not every response is quotable.
- ~ Sometimes the group discussion can diverge from the topic of interest and/or not follow the specific flow of the discussion guide. It is the role of the moderator to guide the group and to determine if a response is on topic. Moreover, it is the role of the moderator to use the responses in a group to determine the best flow for the discussion rather than rigidly adhering to a pre-established schedule and flow.
- ~ There may not always be a consensus among respondents. Qualitative research is designed to generate a range of responses, develop hypotheses, and deepen understanding.

In reading this report and viewing the videotapes, it is important to read and listen carefully to what is being said. The reader should avoid selective listening to support a preconceived point of view. It is important to be alert to shades of meaning and word selection.

Appendix

Screener

INTRODUCTION

Hello, my name is [NAME], I'm calling from Northwest Research Group [on behalf of CLIENT NAME] and we're conducting a very brief and important research study with residents in your area regarding **public transportation issues**. Let me assure you this is not a sales call, the study is being conducted for research purposes only. Your opinions are very important to us and everything you say will be kept strictly confidential. This call may be monitored to ensure quality.

FOCUS GROUP EXPLANATION – READ IF NECESSARY

What we are doing is recruiting participants for a Focus Group Discussion [on behalf of CLIENT NAME] where participants will share their opinions and ideas about **public transportation issues**. The Group is relaxed and informal, it only lasts 90 minutes and we are offering **\$50.00** for participation. All I would need to do is ask you a few questions to see what Group and category you would fall under for the Project and this would only take a few minutes.

1. **[RESIDENTIAL]** For this study, I need to speak with the male or female head of the household who is 18 years of age and older. Would that be you?

IF NO ONE IN THE HOUSEHOLD 18 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER THANK AND TERMINATE

2. **[BUSINESS]** For this study, I need to speak with the manager / owner in your company, would that be you?

3. Do you or does any member of your family currently work for or have you / any member of your family worked / retired from any of the following types of businesses? **READ LIST**

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| A market research firm | <input type="checkbox"/> TERMINATE |
| An advertising agency | <input type="checkbox"/> TERMINATE |
| A utility company | <input type="checkbox"/> TERMINATE |
| The media | <input type="checkbox"/> TERMINATE |
| The Public Utilities Commission | <input type="checkbox"/> TERMINATE |
| A state or local elected official | <input type="checkbox"/> TERMINATE |
| City or county government | <input type="checkbox"/> TERMINATE |
| None of the above | <input type="checkbox"/> CONTINUE |

5. **[BUSINESS]** How long have you been in business in the Treasure Valley? (List Response)

RECRUIT A MIX

6. **[BUSINESS]** In what city / town is your business located?

- | | |
|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Boise | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Meridian | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Eagle | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Star | <input type="checkbox"/> RECRUIT A MIX |
| Kuna | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Nampa | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Caldwell | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other | <input type="checkbox"/> GET SPECIFICS, CONTINUE AND SAVE |

7. **[BUSINESS]** How many people are employed at your site?

- Home Site CONTINUE
- 5 people or less CONTINUE
- 100 people or less CONTINUE
- More than 100 people TERMINATE

7a. **[BUSINESS]** Are you a member of the Boise Metro Chamber of Commerce?

- YES
- NO RECRUIT A MIX
- DON'T KNOW / REFUSED

8. **[RESIDENTIAL]** What county do you live in?

- Ada County
- Canyon County RECRUIT A MIX; AT LEAST 2 FROM CANYON
- Other GET SPECIFICS, SAVE

9. **[RESIDENTIAL]** How long have you lived in the Treasure Valley?

- Less than 2 Years
- Two to Five Years RECRUIT A MIX
- Five or More Years

10. Are you registered to vote in the state of Idaho?

- YES SKIP TO Q12
- NO
- DON'T KNOW / REFUSED

11. Do you plan to register and vote in the next election?

- YES
- NO TERMINATE
- DON'T KNOW / REFUSED TERMINATE

12. **[ALL]** Would you support or oppose having public transportation services available in the Treasure Valley? Would that be strongly or somewhat support / oppose?

- 1. Strongly Oppose
- 2. Somewhat Oppose
- 3. No Opinion / Undecided
- 4. Somewhat Support
- 5. Strongly Support

13. **[ALL]** How willing are you to pay to have public transportation services available in the Treasure Valley? Would that be strongly or somewhat willing / unwilling?

- 1. Strongly Unwilling
- 2. Somewhat Unwilling
- 3. No Opinion / Undecided
- 4. Somewhat Willing
- 5. Strongly Willing

IF RESPONDENT ANSWERS THE FOLLOWING:

**IF BUSINESS – RECRUIT A MIX FOR GROUP 1
IF RESIDENT AND Q12 = 5 AND Q13 = 5 – RECRUIT TO GROUP 2**

Rent RECRUIT A MIX
 Own

21. In order to ensure that we include all segments of the population in our research, please stop me when I read the category that best identifies your household income. Please include all household income before taxes.

Under \$15,000
 \$15,000-29,000
 \$30,000-49,000
 \$50,000-74,999 RECRUIT A MIX
 \$75,000-99,999
 \$100,000 +
 DK/REF

22. Gender

Male
 Female RECRUIT A MIX

23. [BUSINESS] What type of business do you own or manage?

Agriculture
 Construction RECRUIT MIX OF BUSINESS TYPES
 Manufacturing
 Retailing
 Services
 Other _____

INVITATION

As further part of our research, we are inviting a group of people like yourself to participate in a focus group discussion regarding **GROUP TOPIC**. Let me assure you that absolutely no attempt will be made to sell you any types of products or services - these discussion groups are held for research purposes only. We'd just like to hear your honest opinions. The group will be relaxed and informal, and you will simply be involved in an exchange of ideas and opinions with **RANGE OF PARTICIPANTS** other people like yourself.

[ALTERNATE SAVE & INVITE: According to the information you have given me you have qualified for the group however the quota you represent is currently filled. We would like to keep your information on our Alternates list in case there are any cancellations. The group would take place on **[CHECK MATRIX]**. It will last approximately **LENGTH**, and at the conclusion of the discussion, we would be pleased to present you with a cash honorarium of **\$50.00** in appreciation of your time. If there are any changes to the group would you be willing to participate? **[RECORD INFORMATION ON FRONT] IF YES:** Great, we will be calling you back if additional Participants are needed. Thank you very much for your time.]

RECRUIT INVITE: The discussion will be held at the offices of **[LOCATION NAME & CITY]**. The group will take place on **[CHECK MATRIX]** at **[LOCATION ADDRESS]**. It will last approximately **[LENGTH]**, and at the conclusion of the discussion, we will be pleased to present you with a cash honorarium of **[\$50.00]** in appreciation of your time. Will you be available to attend this discussion?

GROUP # 1 EMPLOYERS / SMALL BUSINESS NWRG, MONDAY, 7/24/06, 5:30 PM	GROUP # 2 STRONG SUPPORTERS NWRG, TUESDAY, 7/25/06, 5:30 PM
GROUP # 3 SOMEWHAT SUPPORT NWRG, TUESDAY, 7/25/06, 8:00 PM	GROUP # 4 OPPONENTS NWRG, WEDNESDAY, 7/26/06, 5:30 PM

[IF YES CONTINUE; OTHERWISE GET DETAILS AND RECORD ON FRONT]

Great, we'll be sending you a letter to confirm this invitation, along with directions to the facility so I will need to get some contact information from you **[RECORD INFORMATION ON FRONT PAGE]:**

PHONE NUMBERS – We will need to follow up and ensure that you have received your Confirmation Letter. Someone will also be calling you the day before the Group to verify your participation and to answer any questions you may have. It is very important that we are able to get a hold of you at any time during the day so what would be the best Phone Number for us to reach you during Daytime Hours? And what would be the best Phone Number for us to reach you during the Evening Hours?

EMAIL ADDRESS / FAX NUMBER – In case we have any difficulty sending the letter by regular mail or if we need to send any information to you at the last minute, do you have an E-Mail Address and / or a Fax Number we can send that information through?

[HAVE RESPONDENT RECORD GROUP INFORMATION]. We do ask that participants show up about 15 minutes early to get checked in and make sure the group gets started right on time. Light snacks and refreshments are provided before the group. We also need you to bring a picture ID so we can verify that you are the person we have recruited for the group. If you need reading glasses be sure to bring those as well. For this project, it is very important that we are able to count on your attendance so if, for any reason, you find yourself unable to join us or if you have any questions, please call us at **1-866-461-0700** as soon as possible. We really appreciate your willingness to participate and look forward to meeting you soon.

ANSWERING MACHINE SCRIPT

Hello, this is **[NAME]** with Northwest Research Group, an independent opinion research firm. Today/Tonight we are conducting a survey [on behalf of **CLIENT NAME**] about **GROUP TOPIC** and are trying to reach **[INTENDED RESPONDENT]**. Let me assure you that this is not a sales call.

Your participation in this research project is **very** important and we would appreciate a return call. You can reach us **toll-free** at **1-866-461-0700** and ask for **[CODE NAME (IF APPLICABLE)]** at extension **[RECORD NUMBER]** between **CALLBACK TIMES**. Thank you very much for your time and have a nice day/evening.

Moderator's Guide

Introduction

- Purpose of focus groups.
- Opinions / how you feel and why.
- No right or wrong answers.
- Expect agreement / disagreement.
- Encourage synergism / talk one at a time.
- Recruiting process / source of list / you represent audience.
- How results will be used.
- Tape / others watching.
- PERSONAL INTROS – Name, occupation, length of residence, etc.
 - How long have you lived in the Treasure Valley? If recent resident where did you move here from? Did they have public transportation services where you lived? Did you use them?

Warm Up

- What do you value most about living in the Treasure Valley / doing business in the Treasure Valley?
- What do you see as the biggest issues facing the Treasure Valley today? How well do you think the region is addressing these issues?
- What do you believe are the greatest transportation challenges our region / community is currently facing?
 - What is that an important issue for you? How does [EACH ISSUE] impact you in your daily life?
- Tell me what you know about the current / proposed plans for public transportation services in the Valley. What have you heard about these plans? Where did you hear about these plans?
 - What are your initial reactions to the proposed plans for public transportation services?

General Attitudes Toward Public Transportation

- Who do you think uses public transportation services in the Valley?
 - Bus?
 - Commuteride?
 - Other alternatives modes?
- What do you think motivates these people to use public transportation services?
 - Bus?
 - Commuteride?
 - Other alternatives modes?

- Have you ever used / considered using public transportation services in the Valley
 - Bus?
 - Commuteride?
 - Other alternative modes?
- What do you think you are doing personally, as a family, to reduce congestion, improve air quality, and generally improve the quality of life in the region?

Value Of Public Transportation

Everyone has different reasons for thinking the way they do about certain subjects or issues. There are really no right or wrong ways you can think about these things. They are just the way you think. For this next section of the discussion, I want to get a sense of how you think or feel about the role a high-quality and effective public transportation system plays in a community. Do not consider Boise's current system in this exercise. Instead use think about what a strong or effective public transportation system is and respond accordingly. Before we get into actually talking about this, I want to have you do a little quiet thinking / writing for me.

- On the piece of paper in front of you, I'd like you to make a list of all the POSITIVE reasons why it is important for the Treasure Valley to have a strong / effective public transportation system.
 - Discuss and record a complete list.
- Now think about your own personal situation. On the piece of paper in front of you I'd like to list all of the POSITIVE reasons why public transportation is important to you individually in your own life.
 - Discuss and record a complete list.
- Now out of all the reasons we have listed up here, I'd like you to tell me. . .
 - Which ONE you feel is the most important reason for the COMMUNITY to have a strong public transportation system. Then write down the second most important.
 - Which ONE you feel is the most important reason for you individually to have a strong public transportation system. Then write down the second most important.
- Now let's focus on why these are important reasons for our region to have a strong public transportation system. Let's start with the most important reason we have identified.
 - In what ways does that benefit the community? If a public transportation system provides [BENEFIT CITED], what does this do for the community?
 - DO THE SAME FOR THE SECOND MOST IMPORTANT REASON
- Now that we have discussed ways in which public transportation benefits a community, let's focus on any drawbacks – again to the community – of public transportation. Before we talk, we're going to write again. Please write down all the reasons public transportation does not benefit the community. In other words, tell me why people don't want to support or fund transportation?
- And now thinking about you personally, what are all the reasons why public transportation does not benefit YOU?

- Now out of all the reasons we have listed, tell me which ONE you feel is the most important reasons that having a strong public transportation system is not beneficial for the COMMUNITY? For YOU?
- What challenges would these drawbacks present in your community or what problems occur because of it?

Using Public Transportation

We're going to do something very similar here again. But now I want you to think about using public transportation. Again, everyone has different reasons for thinking the way they do about certain subjects or issues. There are really no right or wrong ways you can think about these things. They are just the way you think. For this next section of the discussion, I want to get a sense of how you think or feel about using public transportation.

- On the piece of paper in front of you, I'd like you to make a list of all the POSITIVE reasons for using public transportation in general. That is, why should anyone / everyone should use / considering using public transportation.
 - Discuss and record a complete list.
- Now think about your own personal situation. On the piece of paper in front of you I'd like to list all of the POSITIVE reasons why YOU PERSONALLY should use / consider using public transportation.
 - Discuss and record a complete list.
- Now out of all the reasons we have listed up here, I'd like you to tell me. . .
 - Which ONE you feel is the most important reason for people in general to use / consider using public transportation? Then write down the second most important.
 - Which ONE you feel is the most important reason for you individually to use / consider using public transportation? Then write down the second most important.
- Now let's focus on why these are important reasons for people to use / consider using public transportation? . Let's start with the most important reason we have identified.
 - In what ways does that benefit people / you? If the public transportation system in the Valley could provide [BENEFIT CITED], what does this do for people / you?
 - DO THE SAME FOR THE SECOND MOST IMPORTANT REASON
- Now that we have discussed reasons why people / you should use / consider using public transportation, let's focus on any drawbacks of public transportation. Before we talk, we're going to write again. Please write down all the reasons why you think people in general do not use public transportation – don't just focus on why people don't use the service here – but generally why you think people don't use public transportation. In other words, tell me why people don't want to use / consider using public transportation?
- And now thinking about YOU PERSONALLY, what are all the reasons why YOU personally don't want to use / consider using public transportation?
- Now out of all the reasons we have listed, tell me which ONE you feel is the most important reasons why PEOPLE GENERALLY do not use / consider using public transportation. Again don't just focus on why people don't use the service here but generally why they don't? For YOU?
- Now thinking about all the positives and negatives we have discussed here, I want you to just take a moment and think about making an argument for using / considering using public transportation. Assume that there is reasonably good service available – i.e., that there is

service going to where you want to go, it is relatively frequent (like every 30 minutes or so), etc. Imagine yourself having to convince a friend or neighbor to use or at least consider using public transportation. Write down on your paper, what you would say that you think would be convincing.

Marketing Messages

I think I now have a pretty good understanding of your views toward public transportation in general and reasons for riding / not riding. I would now like to present you with some possible message statements about public transportation and riding public transportation and see what you think of them.

As we go through these, keep in mind your own situation and how this type of message would affect you personally. I'm going to show these message statements one at a time. Before we discuss them, I want you to take your time and read / look at them carefully and make notes if you like. Also as you read / look at them circle the key words that you like and cross out those that you don't like. NOTE: I would have to have each participant have a copy of the message statements to work with individually, rather than using boards. Can this be done?

Then for discussion:

- What is the main idea/overall theme of the concept? What specifically does this message say to you?
- What action is the concept promoting? What are you being asked to do?
- Who do you think this message would appeal to? Does it appeal to you?

Now looking at these all together and thinking of them as a campaign – an overall theme message.

- Do the components of the messages all fit together? Are there some parts that work best? What don't work? Are there some parts that don't belong? Should something be added?
- Now look at all these messages together. Please rate each message in terms of how favorable and compelling it is in terms of making PEOPLE IN GENERAL think about using public transportation?
- Now rate each message in terms of how favorable and compelling it is in terms of making YOU PERSONALLY think about using public transportation?

Close

- The one thing we have not talked about is the actual quality of the public transportation system here in the Treasure Valley. I'd like you to take the last of this discussion and think about what you think an effective transportation system here in the Treasure Valley would look like.
 - What types of services should an effective public transportation system here in the TV offer / have? How essential are each of these components? List all.
 - If you had to give up one of these components, what would you be willing to give up first? Next?
 - What is absolutely essential to have in order for you to (1) support funding such a system? (2) considering using such a system?
 - What would you be willing to give up where you would still (1) considering using the system and (2) support funding / building the system.
- Finally, when all is said and done, what is it that needs to be said / done to help you to support / build support for improved public transportation services here in the valley? To get you to consider using public transportation services here in the TV?

Message Boards







