

TOPIC	FY2024 Service Change Final Network Proposal
DATE	July 24, 2023
STAFF MEMBER	Kate Dahl

Staff Recommendation/Request

Staff has prepared service proposals that best meet agency goals and respond to public comments received during the concept phase and now asks the Executive Board to consider setting the following public hearing dates 8/31/2023 Nampa, 9/7/2023 Boise, 9/14/2023 Caldwell, and 9/12/2023 Meridian, in preparation for final full board action at the regularly scheduled October 2, 2023 meeting.

Highlights

- Consolidated fixed-route network on highest ridership routes
- Two public engagement periods with excellent response rate and actionable suggestions
- Expanded service areas for complimentary and specialized services

Summary

Valley Regional Transit (VRT) staff has consolidated the FY2023 fixed-route network into a smaller footprint with increased frequency on fixed-route and expanded the service areas of OnDemand, Lyft Late night, Lyft Transit Connections, and Beyond ADA to provide better coverage. The proposed changes will benefit the public by

- Increasing frequency on the Fairview corridor to 15 minutes in the commute period and 30 minutes midday
- Improving cross-town connections with a revised Orchard route running from Hill Road to the Boise Airport connecting all three current premium corridors (3 Vista, 7 Fairview, 9 State) and it will increase cross-town service in west Boise from 60 minutes to every 30 minutes
- Improving west Boise and Meridian connections with a revised route 45 and new all-day connection between Towne Square Mall and the Village at Meridian
- Restoring fixed-route service on the Nampa/Caldwell Boulevard and Garrity in Canyon County
- Adding new fixed-route service in south Caldwell serving Caldwell High School and the YMCA
- Maintaining express service between Caldwell, Nampa, Meridian and Boise
- Expanding the area of VRT transit connections to minimize the impacts in areas of service loss
- Leveraging changes in VRT's specialized services to minimize the impact of a smaller ACCESS service area
- Doubling the number of people within a ¼ mile of 30-minute all-day fixed-route service
- Increasing the number of people within ¼ mile of service that runs every 15 minutes during the commute period by 34%.
- Increasing in annual ridership by an estimated 16%

Despite these improvements, the final proposal will have localized negative impacts including the following

- Loss of service fixed-route to Harris Ranch
- Loss of service along Owyhee, Latah and Roosevelt
- Loss of service on Five Mile, Mc Millan and Curtis
- Loss of service on sections of Maple Grove, Milwaukee, Overland, and the North End
- Reduced service along the Hill Road corridor
- Reduced service area of the 150 – simplified to follow major roadways

The final proposal responded to public comment on the concepts in the following ways

- Maintained peak service on the highly used commute trips of the 10 Hill Road route
- Maintained express service between Caldwell, Nampa, Meridian and Boise
- Restored an early afternoon trip on the route 40
- Maintained service to the Frank Church High School
- Maintained service on Warm Springs
- Maintained service on SE Boise on Route 2
- Improved connections between downtown Meridian, Nampa and Boise
- Expanded the transit connections to areas that are losing service

Introduction

VRT consistently hears “we want better buses”. Riders want the bus to come more often, with better routes that connect home, work, and key destinations. They want accessible, comfortable, and convenient bus stops that include relevant information about where they can go and how they can get there. When VRT first introduced bus service, the focus was on providing routes in as many places as possible to connect passengers across the region. A persistent complaint is “buses are empty”, while this is true sometimes and, in some places, with the growth in the region, the time to grow public transit is now.

The best way for Valley Regional Transit to grow ridership and create a better bus service is to focus our efforts and investments on routes where visible improvements can be made. We can serve our riders in a deeper capacity and bring better value to our ridership and attract new riders. By continuing to demonstrate transit’s value in the region we will attract more funding which will allow us to expand the system in desirable and convenient ways. The time to grow transit is now and the move towards a “Better Bus” network requires changes to take us there. It is staff’s pleasure to introduce the final proposal for the 2024 Network Redesign.

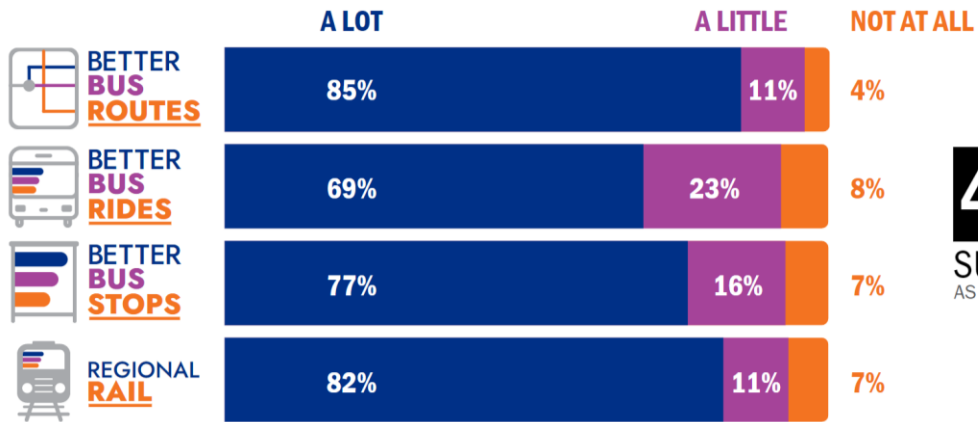
Public Comment and Public Engagement Process

In 2023, Valley Regional Transit launched two public engagement processes to inform future bus service. The Better Bus Initiative kicked off in April, driven by the vision of the new CEO, Elaine Clegg. It consisted of 10 events and a survey that was open for a little over a month. A summary of that survey is shown in figures 1 and 2 below.

List of Better Bus Initiative events

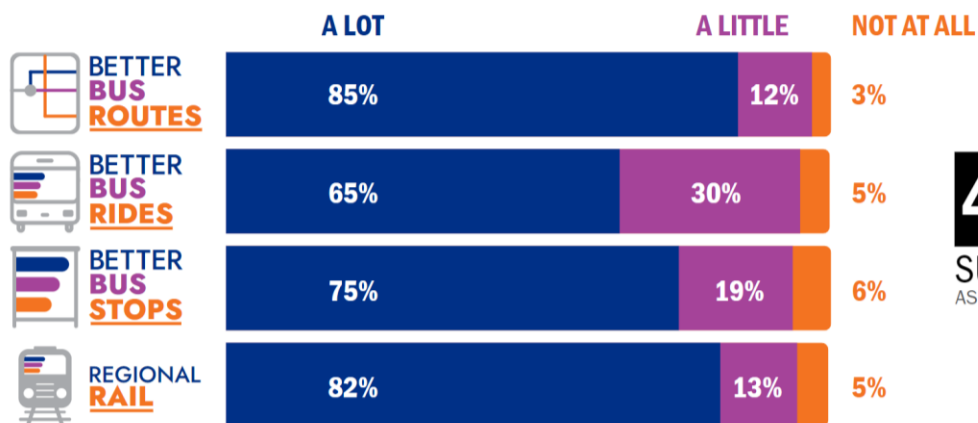
- 3/29: Better Bus popup table, Library! At Hillcrest
- 3/30: Better Bus popup table, Library! At Collister
- 4/4: Better Bus virtual town hall
- 4/5: Better Bus popup table, Library! At Cole and Ustick
- 4/6: Better Bus Open House, Main Street Station
- 4/13: Better Bus virtual town hall
- 4/14: Better Bus Open House, Boise Main Library
- 4/24: Better Bus Open House, Caldwell Library
- 5/25: Better Bus Routes: Bus Network Redesign Open House, Boise City Hall Plaza
- 5/30: Better Bus Routes: Bus Network Redesign Open House, Nampa Public Library

How much do you support your city/county funding these projects?



407
SURVEYS
AS OF 4/18/23

How much do you support these projects?



407
SURVEYS
AS OF 4/18/23

Figures 1 & 2: Better Bus Survey Results

The key takeaway from this engagement was that people supported more transit! Specifically, people wanted to see higher frequency, wider spans, and better improvements overall. The public feedback provided in this survey helped inform VRT staff to review the current route network design and move towards a more frequent grid network, which required consolidating underperforming routes and improving frequency on higher performing routes, which would build ridership, provide convenience through transfers, and improve public perception.

Budget and Proposed Scenarios

Utilizing the direction from the public, leadership, and budget parameters, staff's direction in this service change was to begin the move from a coverage-based system to a more frequency-based system. This required adding frequency on high performing routes where ridership could be increased, and by consolidating or eliminating poor performing routes with lagging ridership, which resulted in a smaller network footprint. Based on anticipated funding levels three scenarios were proposed for public comment. A brief summary of the scenarios are listed below. Figure 3 also compares accessibility of the various scenarios

Scenario A: Same budget, fewer service hours:

This scenario assumed a contribution from our largest local funder, City of Boise, of 5% of property tax revenue and 80,000 annual service hours, which was a cut from 90,000 in the prior year (due to increases in labor costs and inflation).

B: Increased budget, same service hours:

This scenario assumed a contribution from our largest funder, City of Boise, of 5.5% of property tax revenue and 90,000 annual service hours, with increased frequency on routes. The estimated ridership for this network would likely be the highest of all the scenarios presented.

C: Increased budget, same service hours:

This scenario assumed a contribution from our largest funder, City of Boise, of 5.5% of property tax revenue and 90,000 annual service hours, with a focus on coverage. The estimated ridership for this network would likely be in between Scenario A and Scenario B.

Figure 3: Scenario Accessibility Comparisons

Fixed-Route	Population served (1/4 mile of any service)	Jobs served (1/4 mile of any service)	Population served (1/4 mile of service every 15 min.)	Population served (1/4 mile of service 30 min.)	% Frequent	% Coverage
Current	158,000	114,000	21,100	27,800	21%	79%
A	115,500 (-27%)	98,000 (-14%)	21,100 (0%)	29,100 (+5%)	34%	66%
B	115,500 (-27%)	98,000 (-14%)	29,100 (+38%)	62,500 (+125%)	60%	40%
C	115,500 (-27%)	98,000 (-14%)	29,100 (+38%)	29,100 (+5%)	32%	68%

FY2024 Network Redesign Process

The network redesign public engagement process consisted of two open houses and an online platform illustrating the route scenarios and posing route specific survey questions. VRT received a total of 386 survey responses.

- 5/30 Open House Nampa Library
- 5/25 Open House Boise City Hall Plaza

Key takeaways:

There was strong support for increased frequency, span and weekend service. Primary concerns were over loss of service at specific locations and especially for vulnerable populations.

Overall, public engagement has been excellent, with very specific and actionable suggestions which staff has been able to incorporate into the final proposal.

The full summary of comments can be found [here](#).

Final Scenario Description

Overall, the final network proposal represents a smaller network footprint, with routes consolidated onto the highest performing routes (i.e. routes with highest ridership). Some were rerouted to service the most popular stops, increased frequency, and provided more transfer opportunities. Approximately 8% of existing riders are on routes or at stops that would lose fixed-route service. This service loss is expected to be more than offset by ridership growth in corridors that are receiving additional service.

A list of routes and types of changes is shown below. Figures 4 and 5 compare current and proposed service networks. Figures 6 and 7 compare populations served and cost considerations.

Routes eliminated/consolidated:

1, 4, 7A, 43

Routes restructured:

6, 8, 8x, 12, 29, 16, 17

Routes with no or minimal changes:

2, 3, 5, 28, 9, 150, 160

Routes with Saturday Service:

2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 12, 29

Routes with increased frequency or added trips:

7B, 8x, 12, 42

Routes with wider spans:

6, 8

New routes

56, 58

Figure 4: FY2023 Current Network

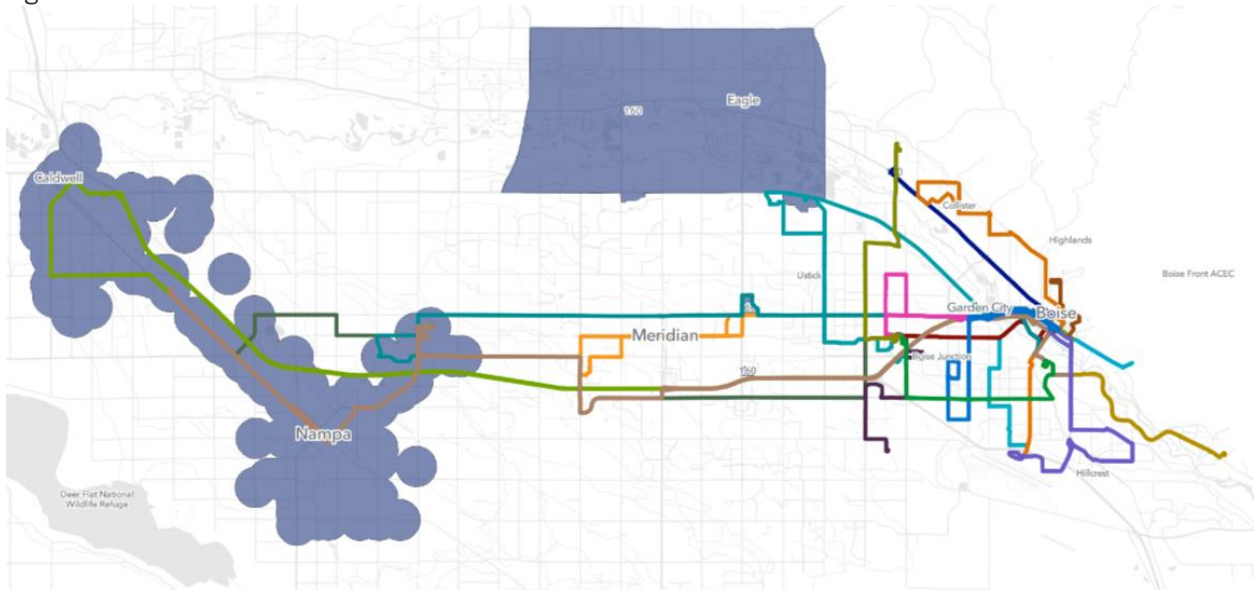


Figure 5: FY2024 Final Network Proposal

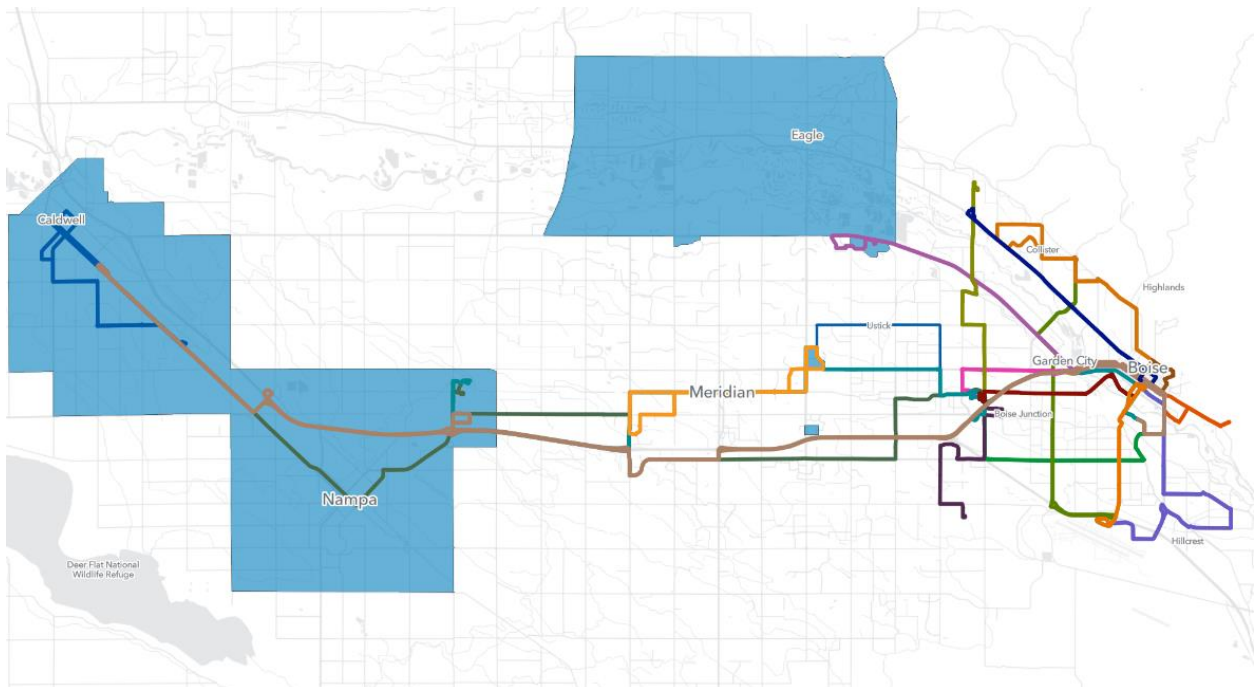


Figure 6: Ridership numbers for Final Proposal

Fixed-route network	Population served (1/4 mile of any service)	Jobs served (1/4 mile of any service)	Population served (1/4 mile of service every ,15 min.)	Population served (1/4 mile of service 30 min.)	% Frequent	% Coverage	Annual ridership (based on estimated 2023)
Current	158,000	114,000	19,400	19,400	21%	79%	996,508
Final Proposal	145,000 (-9%)	113,000 (-1%)	28,400 (+34%)	38,900 (+100%)	32%	68%	1,153,098 (+16%)

Figure 7: Budget Comparison

Fixed-route	Annual Hours	Annual Riders	Estimated Annual Cost
2023	89,831	897,322	\$8.98M
2024	98,539	1,053,910	\$9.85M
% change	9.7%	18%	9.7%

Complimentary Transportation Services

Additional transportation services are available in conjunction with fixed-route that are dependent on the network design these include:

1. **ACCESS** provides transportation within $\frac{3}{4}$ of mile of fixed-routes to persons with disabilities to the nearest bus stop. Figures 8 and 9 show the current and proposed ACCESS areas.

In the proposed network, the $\frac{3}{4}$ of mile buffer shifted and several gaps are identified in red in Figure 10 below. ACCESS service is not required on limited stop routes such as Routes 45 and 42 where stop spacing exceeds $\frac{1}{2}$ mile between stops. Between October 2022 and June 2023, ACCESS provided 24,484 rides, 8.46% of those are located in the areas expected to lose service (Figure 10 below).

The “Beyond ADA” services VRT is in the final stages of planning will provide transportation options to seniors and persons with disabilities in the areas losing ACCESS service.

Figure 8: 2023 ACCESS Service Area

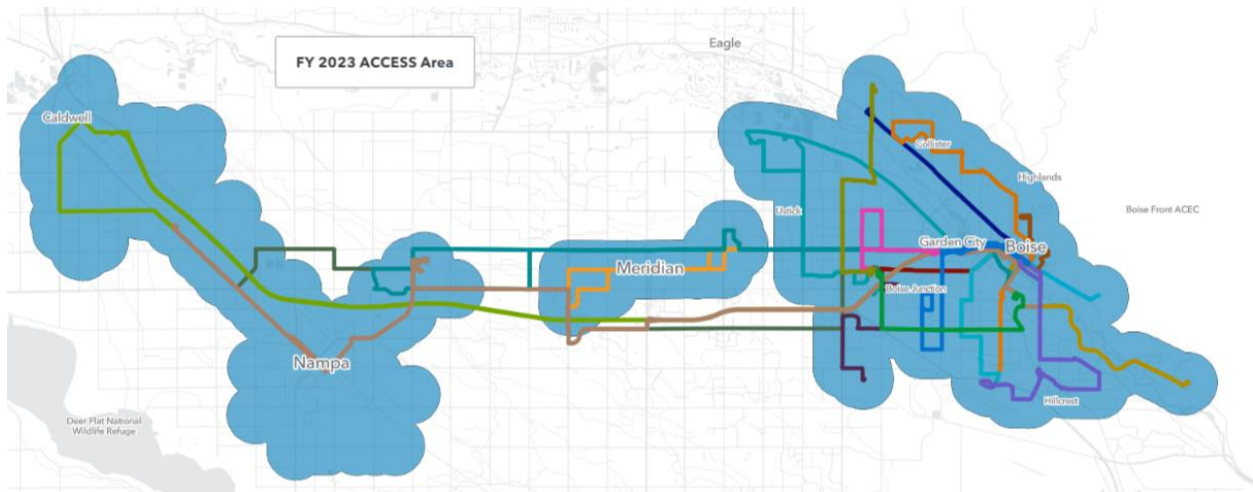


Figure 9: 2024 Proposed ACCESS Service Area

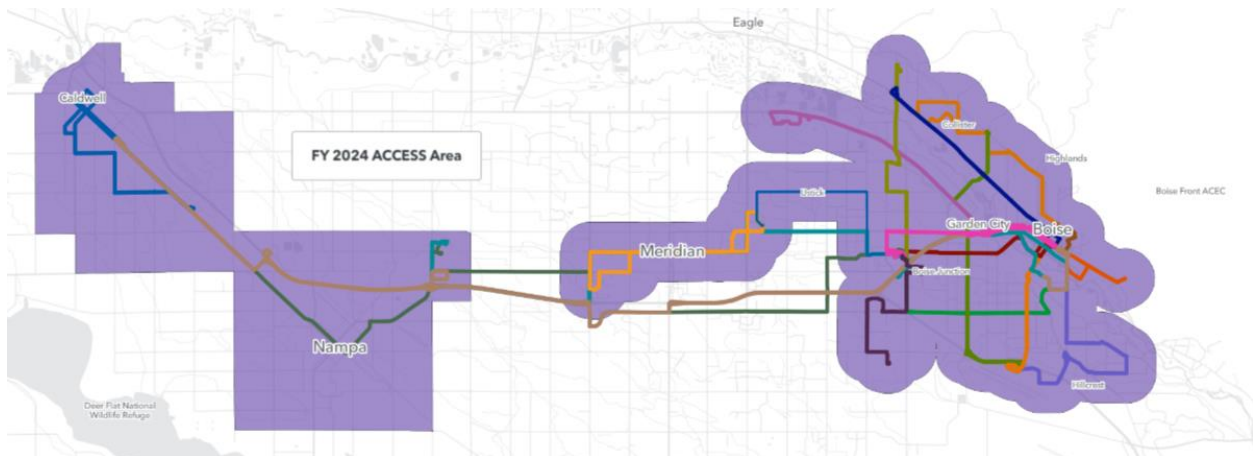


Figure 10: ACCESS areas losing and gaining service

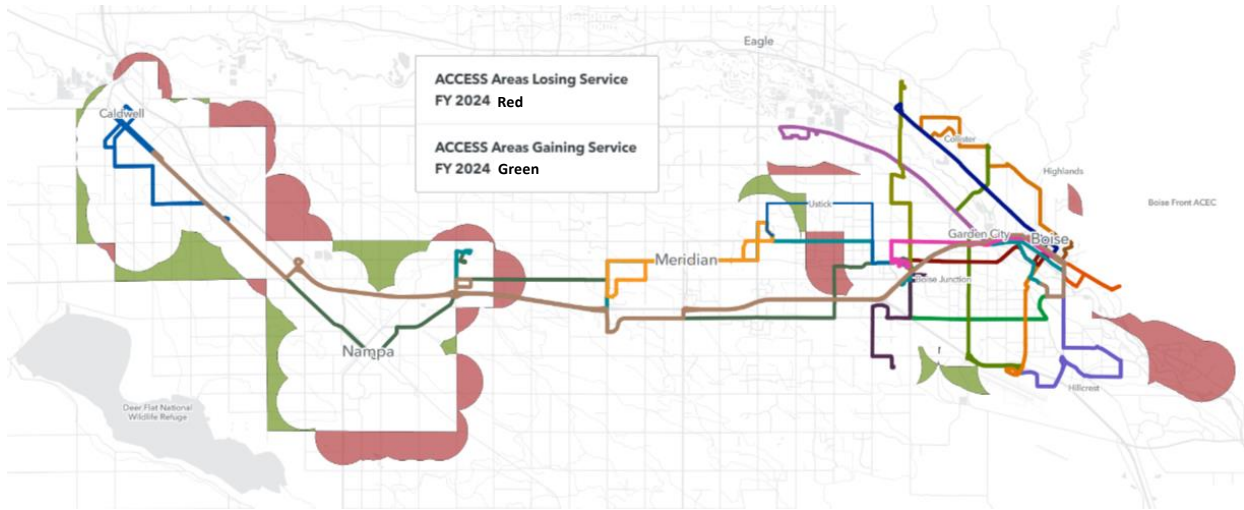
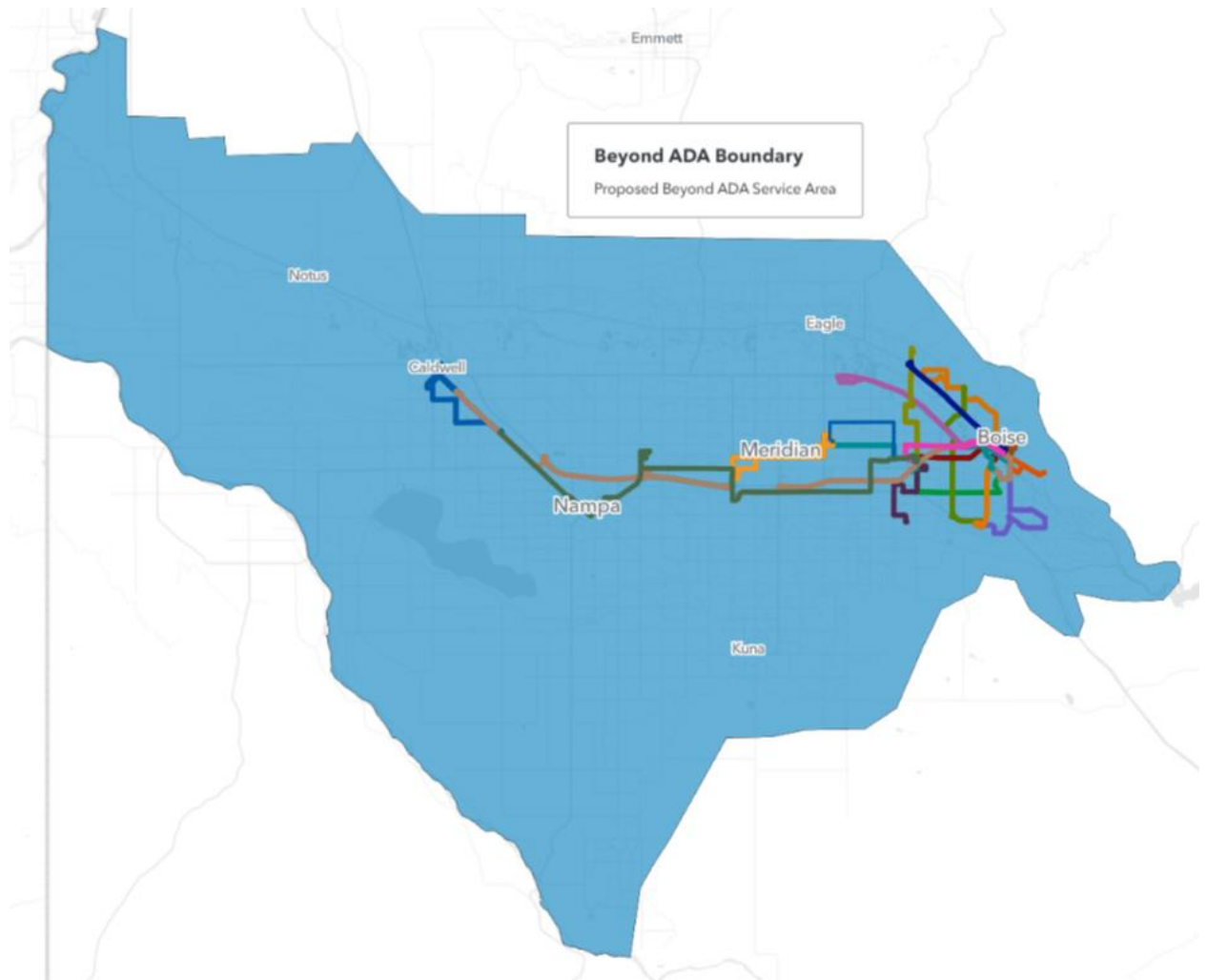


Figure 11: ACCESS Comparison

ACCESS	Population within service area	Jobs within service area	Service area square miles
2023	385,100	180,000	129.8
2024	367,800	178,000	121
% change	-4.7%	-1%	-7.3%

- Beyond ADA** will provide service to seniors and persons with disabilities within Ada and Canyon Counties. Previously, transportation was contracted to a number of individual companies with different service areas and hours of operation. These service areas overlapped in some cases and in some cases, there were significant gaps in service. By consolidating the program under the VRT umbrella and creating one service area including both counties and one set of hours of operation it essentially creates a safety net that fills any gaps created by the shift in the access buffer. Individuals that may have formally utilized ACCESS and now find themselves outside the area, can simply switch providers to Beyond ADA. In fact, they may find it more convenient in some circumstances as they may go to their destination directly without transferring to fixed-route. A key difference is an individual is guaranteed a ride with ACCESS, they are not guaranteed a ride under Beyond ADA.

Figure 12: 2024 Beyond ADA Service Area



3. **Lyft Transit Connections** provides OnDemand services within a designated area within 2 miles of a fixed route to a bus stop for \$2 (riders pay more to travel beyond the 2 miles). This service assists those with first mile and last mile connections and 1 mile beyond. Due to the network redesign which reduces coverage, this service area has been expanded to capture the entire transit network in Boise and is extended west to Cloverdale Road, south to west Victory Road, and extends to southeast Boise as illustrated in the figures below. Ridership on this service in 2023 included 3,665 rides, by 173 unique riders at about 229 trips/month. The expanded area provides access to 130,900 (+151%) more people, and 73,500 (+171%) more jobs.

Figure 13: 2023 Lyft Transit Connections Service Area

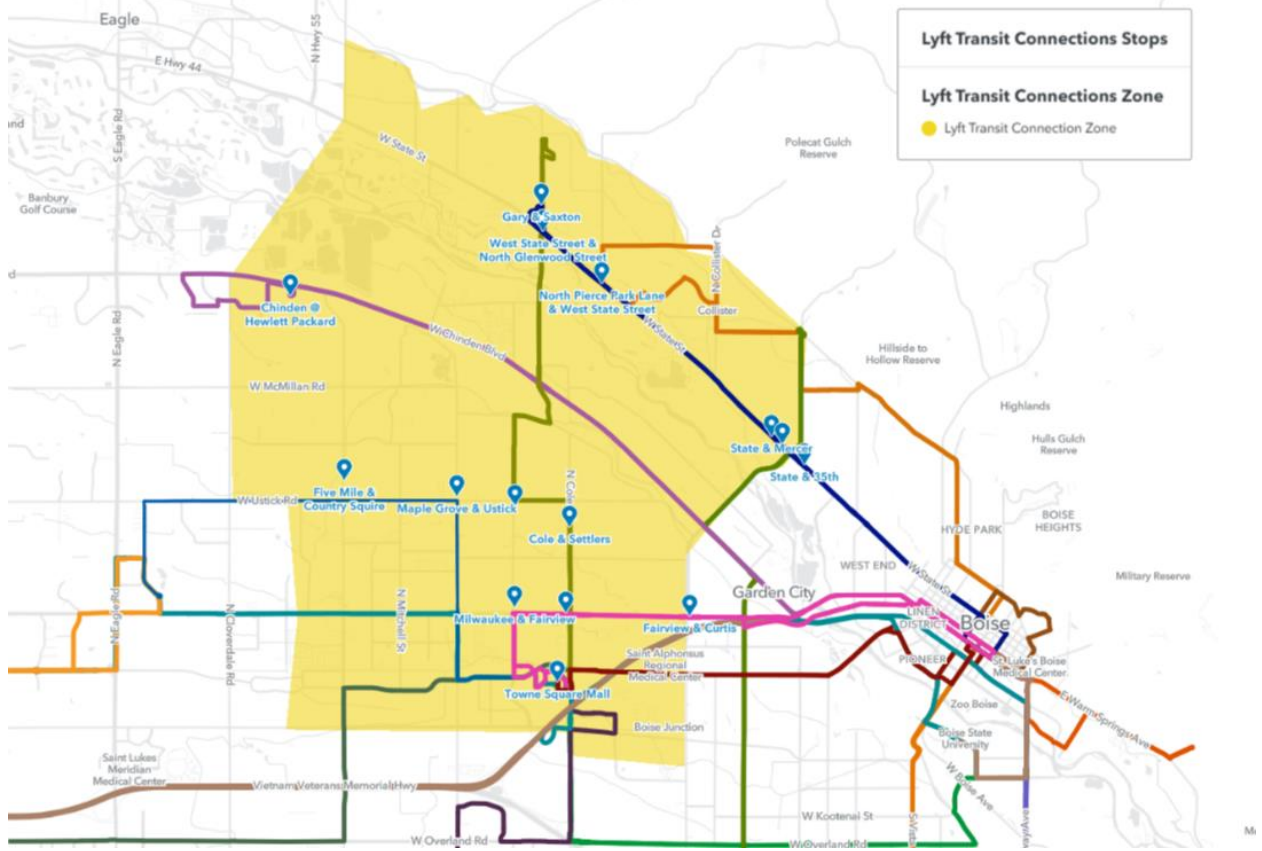


Figure 14: 2024 Proposed Lyft Transit Connections Service Area

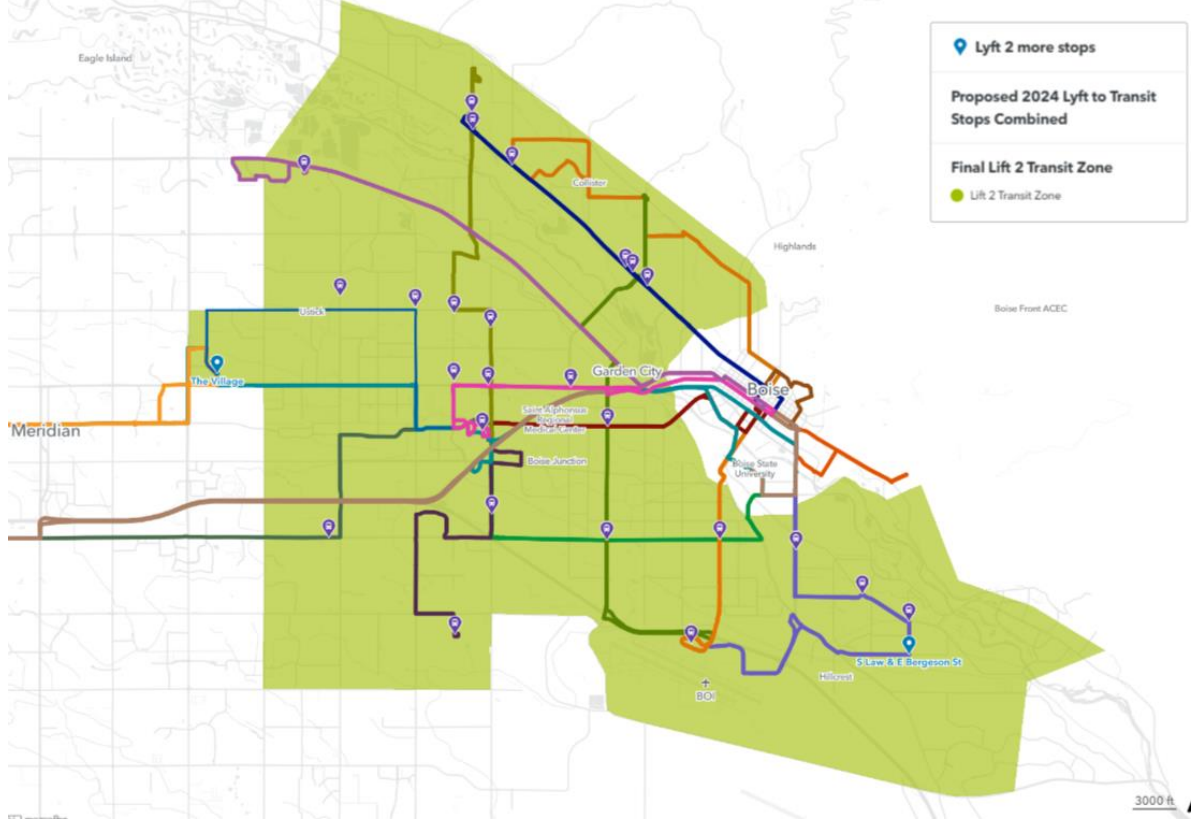


Figure 15: Lyft Transit Connections Comparison

Lyft Transit connections	Population within service area	Jobs within service area	Service area square miles	Total number of stops
2023	86,500	42,900	22.2	14
2024	199,300	93,800	59.4	27
% change	+130%	+118%	+168%	+93%

- VRT Late Night** provides OnDemand services to low-income individuals after hours when busses are not running. Based on research of minimum wage monthly incomes of \$1250/month which are often tied to service work and later work hours, it was revealed Meridian had clusters of potential riders that could benefit from transit through this service. As a result, VRT is proposing to expand the area through City of Meridian to capture these clusters. Ridership on Late Night for 2023 includes 618 rides by 23 unique individuals at an average of 40 rides/month on this service. This expansion provides access to 17,200 (+5%) more people, and 20,400 (+12%) more jobs.

Figure 16: 2023 Lyft Late Night Service Area

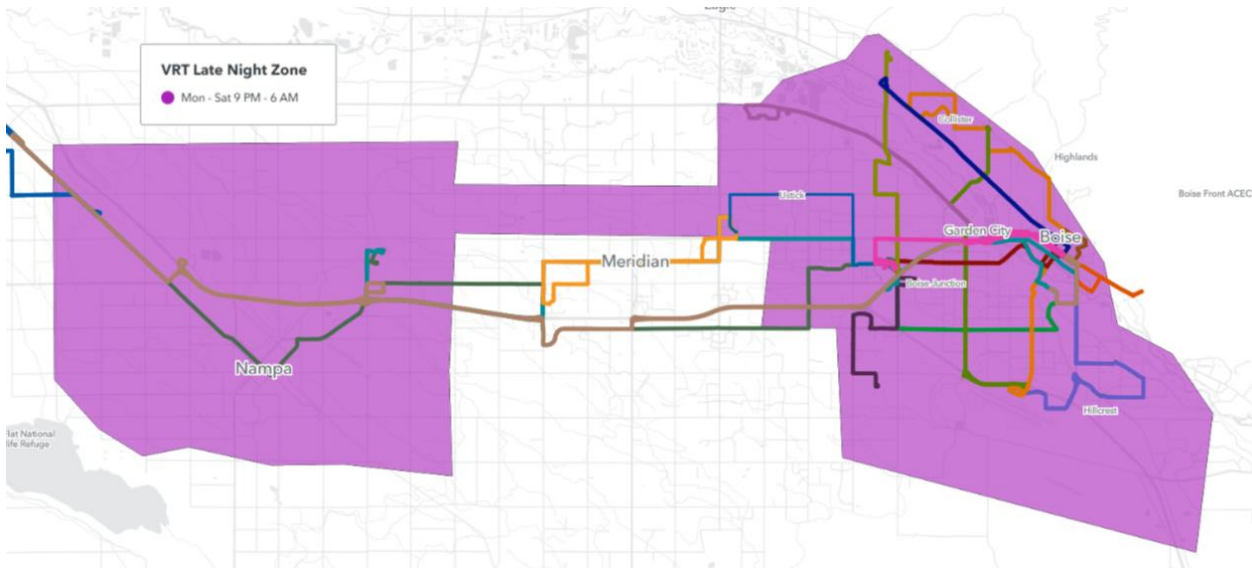


Figure 17: 2024 Proposed Lyft Late Night Service Area

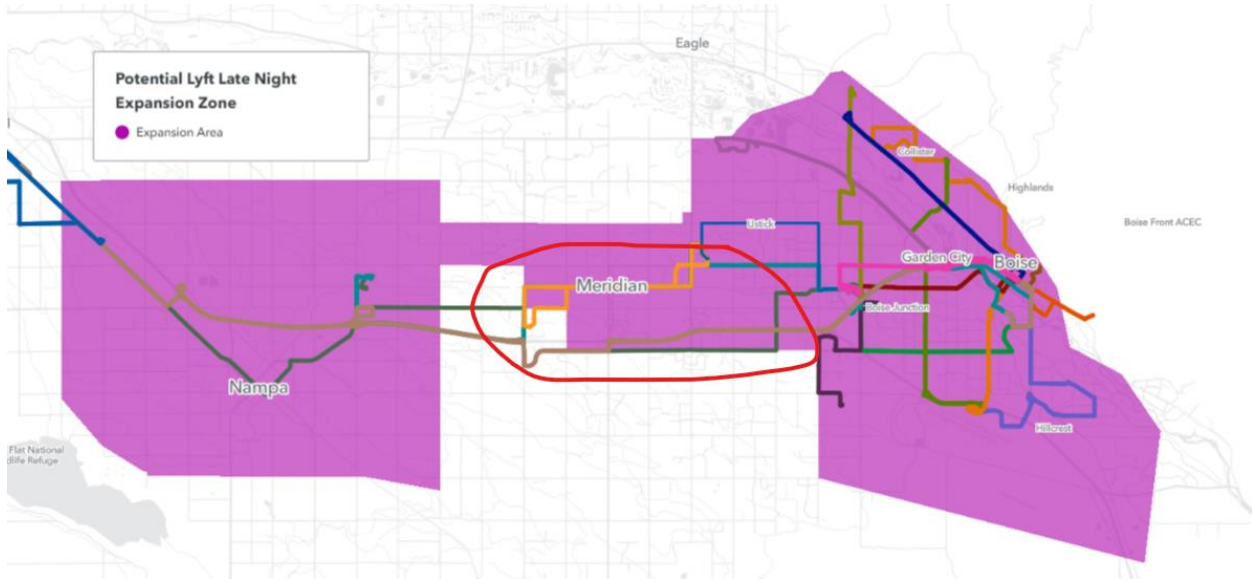


Figure 18: Lyft Late Night Comparison

Lyft Late Night	Population within service area	Jobs within service area	Service area square miles
2023	355,100	164,700	142.7
2024	372,300	185,100	149.4
% change	+4.8%	+12.4%	+4.7%

Implication (policy and/or financial)

The network redesign would align with strategies in Valley Connect 2.0 and drive an update to the Transportation Development Plan 2024-2028.

More Information

Attachment 1: FY2024 Final Proposal Route Descriptions

For detailed information contact:

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