



COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

CITY COUNCIL of SALT LAKE CITY

TO: City Council
FROM: Russell Weeks, Senior Public Policy Analyst
DATE: September 16, 2015 9:57 AM
RE: **Transit Master Plan Update**

PROJECT TIMELINE:
Briefing: 09/22/2015
SetDate: MM/DD/YY

Legislative Sponsor: **Not Required -
Informational Only**

ISSUE AT-A-GLANCE

Goal of the briefing: To provide the City Council with a general update from Nelson/Nygaard Consulting Associates and the Transportation Division on progress toward preparing a transit master plan and to provide an opportunity for the City Council to give feedback on an “evaluation framework” and other work completed on the plan.

An evaluation framework is the means used to evaluate potential transit service improvements, and to determine priorities for transit service enhancements, capital investments, and supportive programs and policies.

The framework involves a process in which:

- Potential transit corridors are identified for analysis.
- Potential corridors are screened against goals such as generating ridership based on current and projected future land use and demographic characteristics.
- Selected corridors are subjected to a more detailed analysis to determine which corridors are best suited to have high-quality transit service.
- Corridors are prioritized for determining the appropriate high-capacity transit mode or modes for each top-tier corridor.
- Corridors not in the top tier are evaluated for enhancements such as improvements to bus operations, access, passenger experience, speed and reliability, and other items.

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Updated: 9/16/2015 3:08 PM

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- Based on the corridor evaluation, the consultants will prepare a draft transit master plan and a final master plan after the draft is presented.

According to the consultants' timetable, Nelson/Nygaard screened corridors in August and plans to present its Phase I screening results and initial Phase II corridor evaluation results in September to a variety of groups interested in the master plan. It might be noted that the consultants and the Transportation Division have held open houses throughout Salt Lake City since July. The most recent open houses as of this writing are scheduled ones September 17 at Dan's Market in Foothill Village and September 23 at Harmon's Grocery at 135 East 100 South.

POLICY QUESTIONS

1. Transit consultant Jarrett Walker argued at the Seattle American Planning Association conference in Seattle this year and in his book *Human Transit* that straight transit lines are on the whole better than loops because they meet human needs to get from one point to another better. Is his argument valid, and, if it is, should it be a factor in developing a transit master plan?

ADDITIONAL & BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The City Council received a written briefing for its July 28, 2015, meeting. Portions of the written briefing appear in the last part of this report. However, there are three more recent items that may inform City Council discussion with the consultants and Transportation Division. The items are: the publication of the city-wide opinion survey of residents, the decision by the Salt Lake County Council to place a referendum about raising sales tax to help pay for transportation on the November election ballot, and the Utah Transit Authority's Board of Trustees' adoption of a resolution about how UTA would use funds for transit if voters approve the November referendum.

Residents' responses to the City's telephone and on-line survey conducted by Y2 Analytics of Salt Lake City may be of the most immediate interest to the Council's discussion with the consultants and the Transportation Division.

Seventy-five percent of respondents to the on-line survey indicated that investing in public transportation was a priority for them. However, when asked how often they used public transportation in Salt Lake City twenty four percent on the on-line respondents said "Never." Another twenty-seven percent said they used public transportation once or twice a year or less.

In response to questions in on-line and telephone surveys, respondents answered:

Train routes go where I need them to go: On-line - 33 percent agreed or strongly agreed. Telephone - 56 percent agreed or strongly agreed. It should be noted that 43 percent of the on-line respondents neither agreed nor disagreed.

Bus routes go where I need them to go: On-line - 31 percent agreed or strongly agreed. The telephone survey did not include the question. Again, 43 percent of the on-line respondents neither agreed nor disagreed.

Trains come too infrequently for me to use them: On-line - 22 percent agreed or strongly agreed. The telephone survey did not include the question. On-line - 43 percent neither agreed nor disagreed; 35 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

Buses come often enough to be convenient: On-line - 30 percent agreed or strongly agreed. Telephone - 50 percent agreed or strongly agreed.

Buses and trains operate during the hours I need them: On-line - 31 percent agreed or strongly agreed; 33 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed; and 35 percent neither agreed or disagreed. The telephone survey did not include the question.

Buses and trains do not run late enough at night: On-line - 52 percent either agreed or strongly agreed; 37 percent neither agreed nor disagreed; and 11 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed.

A couple other things might be noted from the surveys. First, 60 percent of respondents on-line rated bicycle lane availability as fair to excellent, and 48 percent indicated they use a bicycle lane or trail several times a year or more. Of the remaining respondents, 38 percent said they had never used a bicycle lane or trail. In the telephone survey 33 percent of respondents said they had used a bicycle lane or trail several times a year or more, and 54 percent said they had never used them. Second, respondents in both surveys indicated that they felt safe walking during the day in their neighborhoods and downtown by fairly wide margins. The margins dropped - in some cases significantly - when people were asked about walking at night. Respondents' activities and perceptions may have bearing on any first-mile-last-mile transit considerations.

It also might be noted that 78 percent of on-line respondents said they shopped in the downtown Salt Lake City area at least several times a year. Forty-nine percent of the telephone respondents said they shopped in the downtown area at least several times a year. Seventy-four percent of the on-line respondents also said they shopped in the Sugar House area at least several times a year.

The Utah Transit Authority recently expanded Sunday service on its three TRAX lines and the Sugar House "S" Line hours to match the TRAX schedule. The action is in keeping with the UTA Board's resolution adopted August 26, 2015, that pledges if Salt Lake County residents approve a one-fourth cent sales tax increase the regional agency would use its share of the revenue to emphasize improved bus service, including improving bus frequency, operating times, and weekend service. Clearly, approval of the sales tax would affect UTA's and Salt Lake City's approaches to implementing a Salt Lake City transit master plan.

As indicated earlier in this report, Council staff prepared a written briefing for the Council's July 28 meeting. The basis of the report was an update of Nelson/Nygaard Consulting and the Transportation Division having published a *State of the System Fact Book* in June. As in July, Council staff has summarized Chapter 5 titled *Rider Demographics* later in this report.

The full *Fact Book* remains available electronically at <http://slcrides.org>.

According to the *Fact Book*, a summary of the book, and the earlier transmittal from Mayor Ralph Becker's Administration:

- Four out of five transit trips in Salt Lake City are non-commuter trips.

- Some high density areas in Salt Lake City do not show high transit rider boardings. The areas include the east downtown, parts of the Liberty Wells neighborhood, Sugar House, and neighborhoods west of Interstate 15.
- One of the major service gaps is between the Downtown's primary transit transfer points and the densest areas of the City in eastern downtown. It might be noted that most primary transit transfer point points are along the I-15, Main Street, and State Street corridors.
- People who: are older, or may have disabilities, or may have lower incomes, or have no access to an automobile are more likely to use transit if it is available. However, some neighborhoods where those people live have lower transit boardings. Areas identified with a transit share lower than the citywide average are the Capitol Hill/Avenues neighborhoods, Sugar House/East Bench neighborhoods, Rose Park, and Glendale.
- Frequent service is limited outside of weekday workday commute times, particularly on weekends.
- UTA's program of changing bus routes during the year "undermines the City's ability to organize growth around transit."
- Although bus stop amenities are better in Salt Lake City than in the rest of UTA's service area, 83 percent of bus stops in the City do not have a bench or a shelter.
- University of Utah students make up a significant - 25 percent - portion of transit passengers in Salt Lake City.

Who Rides Transit in Salt Lake City?

- Fifty-eight percent of transit riders are male. Sixty-two percent of riders are age 34 or younger. Fifty-two percent of riders are "transit dependent" - meaning they have no access to a vehicle, may not have a driver's license, may be unable to afford another kind of transportation, may be disabled, or may be elderly.
- The ethnicity of transit riders closely matches the Salt Lake City population as a whole. Seventy-nine percent identify themselves as Caucasian, thirteen percent identify themselves as Hispanic followed by Asian, African American, and Native Americans.
- Sixty-one percent of UTA passengers in Salt Lake City have a household income of less than \$50,000 - due in part to the number of University of Utah students who ride transit. Forty-eight percent of passengers have full-time jobs. Fifteen percent are employed part-time.
- Sixty-six percent of Salt Lake City passengers use UTA five or more days per week. Another 21 percent use transit three to four days per week.