



FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR A YELLOWSTONE-TETON REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

The Yellowstone Business Partnership (YBP) has been granted \$200,000 in rural transit stimulus funds to explore the feasibility of a Yellowstone-Teton Regional Transportation Cooperative. The feasibility study will evaluate the technical, economic and legal considerations associated with operating a multi-state transportation system under a co-op business model as recommended in the 2008 report, *Concept of Operations Plan for a Yellowstone-Teton Regional Transportation System*. The long-term goal is to bring together all willing public and private operators who can link their transportation services into a comprehensive service network to meet the needs of Co-op riders and visitors to the region. The Co-op concept needs to be evaluated and then demonstrated for applicability in coordinating all willing public transportation providers in the Yellowstone-Teton region.

Background

Human activity in the Greater Yellowstone has always depended on how one gets around. Its wild country is punctuated by soaring mountain ranges, harsh winters, unique wildlife, and vibrant rural communities. From its beginnings in the 1870's, road building has been the dominant force in shaping the region's transportation systems. While railroads and busses played a major role in the early history of the region, the private automobile is by far the dominant force of today's transportation system. New technologies in transit and communications present an opportunity to provide attractive transportation alternatives that make fuller use of the region's transportation infrastructure from highways to pathways.

In December 2005 civic, business and government leaders from Idaho, Montana and Wyoming came together at Grand Targhee Resort to analyze these issues and discuss the prospects for a regional transportation system. Since that time volunteers from all three states have been working to advance the concept. As a result, in January 2008 the Idaho Transportation Board granted \$30,000 to the Yellowstone Business Partnership to lead development of a "Concept of Operations" plan to connect our communities and our neighboring national parks. Additional funds were raised from Partners for Prosperity in Eastern Idaho and USDA Rural Development to complete this plan in December 2008. It recommends:

1. Creation of a transportation cooperative, a proven business model that will maximize use and integration of transportation resources
2. A process for closing service gaps and matching modal interfaces
3. Visibility and accessibility through a diversity of information sources
4. Embracing the concept of Complete Streets and Pathways for transportation corridors
5. An ongoing process for funding transportation infrastructure

YBP and its partners realize there are many social, economic and environmental reasons to enhance mobility and improve the overall travel experience in Greater Yellowstone. Businesses will have much to gain if workers may commute more reliably and safely; if visitors with a variety of travel options decide to extend their stay; and if residents can benefit from a regional system of public transportation services that connect to a network of recreational trails.

Moving Forward

A **Project Steering Committee** is now being formed to fully engage interested riders, agencies, stakeholders, and public and private transportation providers in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming. Volunteers are asked to serve for one year and are being recruited from the 25 counties in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming that surround Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks (30+ million acres). Please go to www.yellowstonebusiness.org to complete the volunteer application form. The directors of the USDA Cooperative Development Centers that cover these three states have committed to assist with this study and subsequent pilot demonstration:

- **Diane Gasaway**, Northwest Co-op Development Center, Olympia, WA
- **Brian Gion**, Montana Cooperative Development Center, Great Falls, MT
- **Ben Rainbolt**, Rocky Mountain Farmer's Union Co-op Development Center, Colorado

Feasibility Study Budget using Rural Transit Federal Stimulus – June 1 to October 31, 2009

\$40,000 – YBP salaries/taxes/benefits
20,000 – Team travel; all related meeting and publication costs
100,000 – Subcontractor services
40,000 – Indirect costs @ 25%
\$200,000 – Total project cost

Feasibility Study Outline (Proposed for completion within five months)

1. Overall Project Description including Proposed Co-op Structure and Management
2. Ecosystem Setting, Jurisdictional Challenges and Need for Regional Transportation System
3. Market Potential for Services and Markets to Be Served (current and future)
4. Assessment of Service Provider Capacity and Procurement Potential (including labor)
5. Technical Characteristics and Specifications (cross-boundary legal & insurance issues)
6. System Development Schedule and Pilot Plan (including online information/reservation systems)
7. Capital Requirements and Investment Schedule (to launch by May 2010)
8. Sales and Marketing Plan (memberships, online ticket sales)
9. Projected Operating Costs and Net Revenue/Benefits
10. Economic Feasibility of the Transportation Cooperative
11. Financial Plan for Pilot and Full Operations Phases

2009 Project Timeline

May 20 – Volunteer Steering Committee holds first official meeting with staff and advisors to finalize Feasibility Study Outline and discuss need for \$100,000 of anticipated contract work.

Mid-July – Sixth Regional Transportation Roundtable at mid-point of Feasibility Study process

Mid-October – Seventh Roundtable meeting for presentation of final draft of Feasibility Study. Final report submitted to Idaho Transportation Department by deadline.

November – Steering Committee meets to make Go/No Go decision on incorporating a co-op based on final study recommendations. If the committee votes “yes”, a two-year pilot demonstration will proceed

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