



STA Prepares Final Proposed 2024 Budget

In December, STA will finalize and present its 2024 budget to the STA Board of Directors for approval. As the steward of taxpayer dollars within the Public Transportation Benefit Area, STA is committed to transparent and sustainable financial practices for its operating and capital expenditures.

STA Chief Financial Officer Monique Liard underscored the Agency's commitment to fiscal responsibility by noting that STA is a debt-free agency. "The sustainability formula is a bedrock of our process — always spending within our available resources," she said.

Since the end of June, STA has diligently planned its operating and capital budget for the upcoming year's financial needs, balancing funding sources and planned expenses.

In September, an agency-wide departmental roll-up and financial analysis was completed. From this information the 2024 draft budget was derived and first presented to the Planning & Development Committee and the Board at their October meetings.

The proposed budget subsequently progressed to the Board at their November

meeting with a public hearing, which was held on Thursday, November 16. The public hearing provides an opportunity for citizens to pose questions, fostering an inclusive and clear process. To ensure understanding and community engagement, STA produces and disseminates an [informative video summarizing the proposed budget](#).

Lastly, in December, the Board reviews and, barring no changes, adopts the final proposed budget by resolution, marking the culmination of the budgetary process.

Liard emphasized, “One of STA’s organizational priorities is to exemplify financial stewardship, and part of this priority is evidenced in the efficient use of taxpayer funding.” Over 76% of STA’s 2024 operating revenue comes from voter-approved local sales tax.

STA’s commitment to transparency, fiscal responsibility, and community participation ensures that it continues to provide efficient and reliable transit services while upholding the trust placed in it by the taxpayers.

[View the Proposed 2024 Budget](#)



Above: Aerial shot of Division at Wellesley with a Route 25 bus flag.

Division Street BRT Virtual Open House

As part of the public outreach for STA’s Division Street Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project, a virtual open house is scheduled for Wednesday, December 6 at 6:30 PM. The presentation will be geared toward providing an overview of the project’s current progress and outlining key milestones ahead.

“In an effort to keep the public well-informed, the virtual format of the open house

serves as an important platform,” explained Don Skillingstad, Senior Project Manager at STA. “The virtual format actually makes it easier for more people to watch and participate, especially for those for whom physical travel is difficult due to childcare or work schedules. This way, STA can receive broader community engagement compared to solely relying on traditional, in-person meetings.”

A meeting link can be found on [this page](#) and will also be shared on STA’s social media platforms, making it easily accessible for interested participants. No RSVP is required; participants can simply join the meeting.

For those seeking regular updates on the Division Street BRT project, visit the [project webpage](#) and sign up on the email list to stay informed about ongoing developments as well as upcoming events.

Watch this short video on the Division Street BRT project



Connect 2035 Network Assessment

The heart of STA’s strategic plan is the list of initiatives, capital projects, routes, and programs that will improve and expand transit service to the region. In order to help identify those areas of operation with the most opportunity, a network assessment is conducted. The assessment looks at the aspects of operations that most people associate with transit: the buses and their routes. However, this level of analysis is a deeper dive and more comprehensive than what is normally done for annual service revisions and changes.

This network analysis has been completed as STA works on their next 10-year strategic plan, *Connect 2035*, and a summary of the results was presented to the STA Board of Directors at their November Board workshop. The full results of the analysis are anticipated to be published in February 2024.

STA hired consultant Sam Schwartz to take an independent look at the system, its strengths, as well as opportunities for enhancements.

“The assessment emphasized that STA’s system overall works very well,” remarked Karl Otterstrom, Chief Planning & Development Officer at STA. “With the trust and support of the local community, STA has extensively expanded and improved its transit network and service.”

Connect 2035 will build on the improvements made in STA’s current strategic plan, *STA Moving Forward*. Areas for improvement identified by the network assessment analysis include expanded commuter service, increased service in Spokane Valley as it grows, and on-demand service.

The analysis highlighted how Spokane Valley is growing more rapidly than the rest of the region, including its regional job growth, while trips to and within the Valley often require longer travel times and multiple transfers. Expanded facilities and service can be introduced to better serve this region.

Microtransit, or on-demand service, is a way to serve lower-density areas that still have a high need for mobility options or where land use is challenging for traditional transit, such as when there are no sidewalks for safe, ADA-compliant stops. STA anticipates introducing a one-year pilot program for on-demand service in order to test its viability. Potential locations for this pilot program include Latah Valley and Five Mile.

“There will be room for public input,” noted Otterstrom, “But we are still in the early stages of an ongoing process. However, we welcome the public to stay up to date on progress.”

In order to stay informed on the latest developments for *Connect 2035*, visit spokanetransit.com/connect2035 and sign up for email updates.



Stay Up to Date on Snow Detours

As winter approaches, STA is geared up to be your reliable transportation choice on snowy days.

Many bus routes travel through areas prone to blockages during snow and ice storms, particularly on hills and narrow streets with parked cars. To tackle these challenges, STA has pre-planned detours that anticipate such conditions, allowing customers to know alternate routes and plan their journeys accordingly.

To keep riders informed, affected routes will be highlighted in red on the [routes page](#), with an “Alert” tab providing detailed information. Snow detours are also outlined on route maps, found in the printed bus schedules and PDFs on STA’s website through the routes page.

For Paratransit services, unrestricted service will be provided under most conditions. As with route detours, Paratransit service is restricted only when conditions require it and for the shortest possible time to minimize inconvenience for passengers.

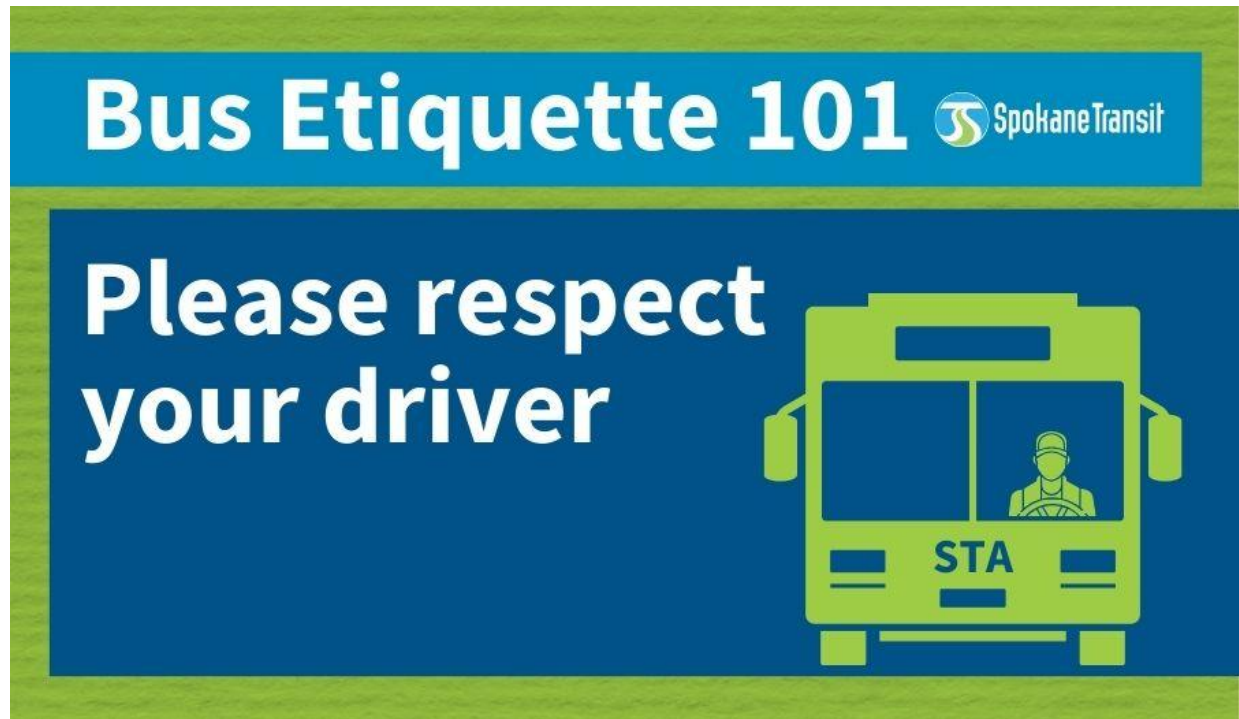
In order to stay up to date with detours and cancellations, [sign up for STA Notifications](#). Riders can customize their alerts by selecting specific routes that they wish to be notified about. They also have the flexibility to choose their preferred notification method—text message, email, or both—and set the timing for receiving alerts.

While STA works to ensure riders are promptly updated on detours and changes, it’s essential for customers to stay tuned to traffic and weather reports that may impact bus service.

STA remains committed to providing reliable and safe transportation for the Spokane community during snowy days.

[Sign up for STA Notifications](#)

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STA Launches Rider Etiquette Campaign

STA is taking a proactive approach to ensure a smooth and courteous bus experience for all riders, with the launch of a new campaign focused on etiquette and best ridership practices. The initiative aims to foster a respectful environment on buses, emphasizing the importance of courtesy, consideration, and listening to the bus driver.

“Using our survey feedback, we know our riders value the good behavior of other riders,” said Carly Cortright, Chief Communications & Customer Service Officer at STA. “As we grow ridership through our zero-fare program for youth 18 and under, who ride free, we realized we had an opportunity to educate both new and seasoned riders on some bus riding basics.”

To maximize visibility, the campaign utilizes multiple channels. Videos are being broadcasted at bus stations, while informative signage is being installed in every bus. The messages cover a range of topics, including the importance of respecting the bus driver, other riders, transit property, and general courtesies when the bus is crowded.

Cortright emphasized the importance of collaborative efforts to enhance the efficiency of the bus system during peak hours. "In instances where certain routes experience high demand, particularly when school gets out, it helps for passengers to move towards the back of the bus," she said. "This simple act of consideration minimizes delays and ensures that everyone can get onboard smoothly."

By incorporating these reminders into the daily commute, STA aims to create a safer and more enjoyable experience for all passengers. The campaign is not only a practical guide to proper bus etiquette but also serves as a community-wide effort to

instill values of respect and consideration among riders, especially the younger demographic.

“We believe that by instilling these values early on, we are not just shaping responsible commuters, but contributing to the overall well-being of our community. It's about fostering a sense of shared responsibility for a positive transit experience,” remarked Cortright.



2024 Service Revisions Public Outreach

STA is wrapping up plans for the proposed 2024 service revisions, by incorporating the results of the public outreach phase. The agency revisits and adjusts its system to offer the best service to its riders while taking stock of available and anticipated resources. More significant changes are vetted through a service revisions process that includes multiple steps for input and review, culminating in action by the STA Board of Directors.

“The results of these revisions are implemented through service changes that typically occur in January, May, and September of each year,” explained Karl Otterstrom, Chief Planning & Development Officer at STA. “Changes are scaled to reflect programmed investments, changes in operating conditions, and customer and employee input.”

Public outreach and feedback play a crucial role in STA’s service revisions, particularly when modifying routes and schedules. The goal is to meet the needs of the community while maximizing the overall benefit of the transit service. Hence STA consistently adjusts recommendations based on community feedback.

Various methods are used to seek feedback, including an online survey, announcements on buses, social media posts, signs at affected bus stops, and

direct outreach. For the most recent survey, over 300 responses have been received.

Notable feedback themes included support for increased frequency on City Line as well as very positive reception to extending Route 11 service to nights and weekends, allowing customers to ride to events at North Bank venues. Additionally, there was strong support for more frequent service for Route 28 and improvements to Route 27.

Otterstrom commented, “We received good feedback that was appropriate for the scale of changes. We make use of many channels of feedback and aggregated data collection and analysis when preparing these revisions.”

Looking ahead, STA plans to conduct another round of outreach to further spread awareness and gather feedback. A public hearing, scheduled for the January 18 Board meeting, will provide a formal platform for community input as well.

Ultimately, these efforts will contribute to a final recommendation to the STA Board on February 15. If approved, the proposed changes will take effect in May and September 2024.

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Interested in serving your community? STA is also hiring [coach operators](#).

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