



Updating STA's Comprehensive Plan

STA is in the process of updating its comprehensive plan, *Connect Spokane*. The plan sets forth the vision and policy framework to guide decisions that will further STA's mission for the next 30 years. The comprehensive plan requires revisiting every few years as significant milestones are reached or the external environment changes to ensure alignment with STA's overall mission and vision.

Connect Spokane was last updated by the STA Board of Directors in May 2022, which with the update focused on elements related to Spokane Transit's strategic plan at the time. Currently the Board's Planning & Development Committee is tasked with revising the plan and with support from STA planning staff will be gathering input from the community to finalize recommendations to the Board for updates. The committee anticipates completing this update by May 2024.

Karl Otterstrom, Chief Planning & Development Officer at STA, explained, "These updates are important because they help guide the overall direction of decision making for transit development in the region."

For example, the goals of increasing accessibility, transitioning to sustainable technology, and improving customer service are all set out in the comprehensive plan. The successful launch of the all-electric City Line Bus Rapid Transit route is one notable outcome flowing ultimately from the policy guidelines outlined in

Otterstrom added, “There will be opportunities for the public to engage with the update process.”

While specific dates for engagement are still to be determined, community members can learn more [here](#).



Left to right: Steven Chaves, Bryon Adams, Charles Meyersberg, Don McElfresh, Gayzell Rhodes, Sarah Cazee-Widhalm, and Kyle Trotchie

STA Wins Award for Educational Video

STA won the Grand Award at the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) AdWheel Awards for the video [How to Ride STA](#) in the *Best Marketing and Communications Educational Initiative* category. Unlike First Prize winners, which are judged against entries in groups of similar-sized transit agencies in multiple sub-categories, Grand Award winners are considered the best in North America in the overall category.

“This is a top industry award and recognition for STA,” said Chief Communications & Customer Service Officer Carly Cortright. Out of 300 entries, STA was one of fifteen agencies to receive a grand prize and one of four to be recognized for agencies its size.

How to Ride STA is a nearly 7-minute video on using the STA system, presented in a humorous tone. The video was produced in 2022 as STA was preparing to introduce the new zero-fare policy for youth. At the same time, Spokane Public Schools was reducing its yellow school bus service and planning to give STA bus passes to high school students.

To help with the communication strategy on zero fare, the Marketing and Communications (Marcom) department at STA employed Ferris High School student Charles Meyersberg.

“I didn’t know what to expect when I first started working with STA and this video,” said Meyersberg. “But I was so excited that a transit agency could be making a video like this. I knew it was going to be a lot of fun while also being educational.”

Staff that worked on the video included Bryon Adams, Sarah Cazee-Widhalm, Steven Chaves, Leland Crown, Carly Cortright, Nathan Mauger, Don McElfresh, Charles Meyersberg, Dylan Nusbaum, Brandon Ropez-Betty, Gayzell Rhodes, Josh Stoddard, and Kyle Trotchie.



Division Street BRT Neighborhood Meetings

The Division Street Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project recently took a major step forward. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) approved the project’s entry into the Small Starts Project Development phase under the FTA’s Capital Investment Grants program. Following this approval, STA will meet with neighborhood councils along the route to bring them up to speed on the status of the project since the last update earlier this year and to share what STA is doing next.

Division Street BRT will convert the existing Route 25, which carries nearly one million passengers each year along Division Street, to bus rapid transit service, with new stations and roadway modifications that will provide faster and more reliable zero-emission bus service. This will be implemented in conjunction with the completion of the North-South Corridor Highway in 2030. Project partners include the City of Spokane, Spokane County, Washington State Department of Transportation, and Spokane Regional Transportation Council.

“We want to maintain and deepen engagement with the neighborhoods,” explained Don Skillingstad, Senior Project Manager at STA, “and inform them about the project’s latest developments.”

The update will involve establishing station locations and preferred forms of communication as well as receiving feedback from the neighborhood councils about what’s important for them with regard to the Division Street BRT project.

As the project progresses, the broader public, especially property owners and businesses, will have opportunities to learn about the project as well as engage in feedback.

Skillingstad noted, “We’re very early in the project, so much of it is still high level, but this early engagement with the neighborhoods and community is essential to the project’s success.”



Connect 2035 Community Engagement

STA Moving Forward is STA’s current 10-year strategic plan, establishing projects to maintain and expand transit service across the region with funding approved by voters in 2016. As that plan draws to a close in 2025, STA is beginning the next phase of community engagement and outreach for its next 10-year strategic plan, *Connect 2035*. Phase 2 engagement will focus on gathering important feedback from the community in order to understand what the most important transit initiatives are for them, whether it pertains to service, amenities, or infrastructure.

“This phase will help bring to the public’s attention the strategic planning that STA is engaged in,” explained Carly Cortright, Chief Communications & Customer Service Officer. “And it will inform them on how they can participate in that feedback process

so that our planning efforts are aligned with the needs of the community.”

As community engagement kicks off, STA has launched a website (<https://spokanetransit.com/connect2035>) dedicated to *Connect 2035* that will inform the public of the strategic plan and invite them to get involved in the public feedback process. Community engagement will occur throughout 2024 ahead of the adoption of Phase 2 of *Connect 2035* in December 2024.



Above: A rider taps their Connect card on the fare validator

Connect: One Year Later

One year ago, STA’s Connect Fare Collection System debuted, increasing accessibility and value for customers and making it easier to pay bus fare. Its adoption rate by riders has also been noteworthy.

“We’ve seen a nearly 60 percent adoption rate of the new fare system in just one year, which has exceeded expectations and shown a readiness by our region for a modernized way to ride,” said Chief Financial Officer Monique Liard. “We were able to launch the new system significantly under budget.”

The rollout process included educating riders on what the new system offered and how to use it. The Connect Fare Collection System added new features like fare capping, a mobile app, and new and expanded reduced fare categories.

“We were changing a fundamental aspect of riding the bus, which is why STA invested so much effort into educating the public,” said Liard.

With the help of the Communications department at STA, more than two dozen how-

to videos and guides were created along with new sections of the STA website to ensure easy accessibility to this information. Customer Service played a vital role in answering questions and educating riders at the STA Plaza.

Moving forward, STA plans to improve the functionality of the app and transition all the Universal Transit Access Pass (UTAP) programs over to the Connect Fare Collection System. This program includes higher education institutions and local governments, who have already converted to Connect. With the completion of this transition next school year, college students will be able to use their mobile devices for fare validation.

Riders can learn more about the Connect Fare System, the Connect card, and how to sign up at www.spokanetransit.com/connectcard/.



Above: A City Line bus in Browne's Addition

2024 Service Revisions

STA regularly revisits and adjusts its system in order to offer the best service to riders while taking stock of available and anticipated resources. The service changes typically implemented in January, May, and September of each year are planned and decided in advance following a formal review process called “service revisions.”

“Service revisions affect every aspect of STA’s service as well as every department,” explained Karl Otterstrom, Chief Planning & Development Officer. “They provide a concrete view of what will change, what resources are required to implement those changes, how those changes will occur, and on what timeframe.”

Next year’s service revisions are underway at STA. Some improvements that are slated for 2024 include increasing City Line service frequency to seven-and-a-half

minutes during peak weekday hours, expanding Route 11 service between the Arena and downtown to run on nights and weekends, and more.

The overall process that culminates in what revisions will be implemented follows several steps:

1. STA's Service Development Department drafts a preliminary proposal of goals and ideas for improvements to the system, which is presented to the STA Board for initial input.
2. The service revision proposal enters a public outreach phase that gathers responses from the community, riders, STA drivers and staff, as well as neighborhood councils. Rider surveys, workshops, websites, and informational material are used to gather input. "Public feedback is critical during the service revisions process," emphasized Otterstrom.
3. These recommendations are collected to form an updated draft, which is brought back to the Board for another round of public input, including a public hearing before the Board.
4. Finally, after the public hearing, the draft turns into a final recommendation directed to the STA Board of Directors for approval.

Not only do service revisions establish a directive of what will be happening over the next year in STA's system, they ensure that STA's vision, goals, and mission are continuously implemented at every level of service and interaction within the community.

[Click here to learn more and provide feedback](#)



Above: Riders boarding City Line

City Line: First Quarter Performance

City Line has completed its first three months of service since being launched this summer and is performing very well, serving an average of 2,000 riders per day with total ridership reaching over 161,000 during its first 90 days.

“It immediately jumped to the top four busiest routes in our system,” explained Brandon Rapez-Betty, Chief Operations Officer at STA, “and it carries the most passengers per mile of any route.” Although some other routes, such as Route 4 Monroe-Regal and 25 Division, carry more riders overall, the shorter route length of City Line and its central location contribute to carrying more people per mile.”

City Line has brought an all-new level of transit service to Eastern Washington. In January 2024, service frequency will increase to seven-and-a-half minutes during peak weekday hours. Midday frequency is planned to increase to 10 minutes during weekdays in May 2024. “That level of frequency was the original commitment,” noted Rapez-Betty.

“We have much to be thankful for,” acknowledged Rapez-Betty. “The full implementation of City Line as Eastern Washington’s first Bus Rapid Transit line has been a long-term effort involving many people. It’s a very exciting time.”

STA is hiring coach operators and offering a \$3,000 hiring bonus to new employees. Visit our careers page for more information on open positions:

www.spokanetransit.com/careers.

Come Work for STA!

Join one of the best employers in the region and advance your career.
Visit our [careers page](#) for all open positions.

Open positions:

[Facilities Laborer](#)

[Associate Transit Planner](#)

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

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STA.

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