

City of Spokane and Downtown Spokane Partnership

Downtown Spokane Streetcar

Alternative Routes Analysis, Public Outreach & Funding Strategy

The City of Spokane (City) and the Downtown Spokane Partnership (DSP) desire to move forward the necessary analysis for a future downtown streetcar system in Spokane. This request is for a \$600,000 Alternatives Analysis to include a scoping assessment that identifies alternative routes, modeling, public outreach and education, preparation of SEPA documents and a preliminary funding strategy. The City and DSP seek equal amounts of \$300,000 from the State of Washington and the federal government to support this necessary next-step analysis.

Background

In 2006, a Streetcar Feasibility Study was commissioned by the Spokane Regional Transportation Council, Spokane Transit Authority, and the Downtown Spokane Partnership to investigate the viability of reestablishing a streetcar system within Downtown Spokane. The previous system had been removed almost a century ago to accommodate car and bus travel. The study found that a downtown streetcar system is feasible.



A streetcar system is highly effective in transporting large numbers of visitors and employees short distances within an urban setting, but it also is very much prized for its economic opportunities. Cities with more recent streetcar investments credit the streetcar line with encouraging infill development, an important goal of the City's Comprehensive Plan and consistent with the State's Growth Management Act. For example, Memphis has over 4,000 new housing units built within a block of its line that passes through a former underutilized industrial area. The introduction of streetcar lines is credited with providing a focus that organized and promoted infill and redevelopment activities.

Populations Served

Downtown Spokane is host to a number of significant destinations located near its core or along its periphery. While many of the destinations are within a comfortable pedestrian range, many others are outside the distance considered easily accessible. These destinations include but are not limited to: Downtown Core (27,000 employees and 2,100 housing units), Medical Center (18,000 employees and 1,950 high school students), University District (2,400 students and 260 staff), City Government Center (2,000 employees), County Government Complex (2,000 employees), North Bank/Arena Area (700,000 visitors annually), Kendall Yards (1 million square feet commercial space and 2,600 housing units), and the Spokane Convention Center (estimated 200,000 visitors annually).



Current travel to these significant destinations is generally by car, which in turn produces impacts to air quality, congestion, and constrained parking. A shuttle-type system does not currently exist. However, the recent U.S. Figure Skating Championships in Spokane demonstrated the effectiveness of transporting large numbers of visitors and employees in an efficient manner, and reduced parking concerns and accessibility.

Development Potential

The Spokane Streetcar feasibility study included an evaluation of development potential based upon investment realized in other cities. Development formulas were applied to existing structures for renovation potential and to vacant land for new development potential resulting in a “ballpark” estimate of approximately \$350 million in investment.

While a streetcar system extends available transportation choices, it also extends the walking capability of employees and visitors alike. Most important, the streetcar is a catalyst for economic development, as it demonstrates a commitment and permanence. Development density greatly increases within several blocks of streetcar lines, such as in Portland, Oregon, where the streetcar system is credited with over \$2 billion in new development adjacent to its streetcar line.

For more information:

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