

# CITY COUNCIL COMMUNICATION FORM

**FROM:** Tom Leeson, Deputy City Manager

**THROUGH:** Gary Suiter, City Manager

**DATE:** May 18, 2021

**ITEM:** Regional Transportation Authority

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DIRECTION  
 INFORMATION  
 ORDINANCE  
 MOTION  
 RESOLUTION  
 PROCLAMATION

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## **I. REQUEST/ISSUE & BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

The Innovative Transportation Task Force is made up of representatives from the City of Steamboat Springs, Routt County, Steamboat Ski & Resort Corporation (SSRC), and the Steamboat Springs Chamber. The task force was established in the summer of 2020 to develop recommendations for transportation solutions for the City of Steamboat Springs and region that address the growth in the community both in the short- and long-term, as well as sustainable funding sources to support the transportation needs of the community and the resort.

Very early on in the discussions, the task force identified the need to bifurcate discussions of regional transportation issues from local transportation issues. Although many of the issues are related, the solutions and funding sources can differ significantly. It was this bifurcation that led the task force to invite Commissioner Corrigan to attend the meetings focused on regional transportation.

With both Commissioner Corrigan and City of Steamboat Springs Transit Manager's knowledge, the task force very quickly focused on a Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) as a potential tool and funding mechanism to address many of the regional transportation issues.

The Task Force's efforts are not the first to grapple with transportation and mobility solutions in the Yampa Valley. In fact, an RTA has been discussed for more than 20 years.

### **History**

Prior to 1997, Federal and State requirements dictated that Steamboat Springs Transit had to create a "Transit Development Plan" every 5 years. This pertained to transit services only. In 1998, the "Transit Development Plan" became the "Northwest Colorado Transportation Plan" and included all aspects of transportation for the purposes of receiving State and Federal grants. Although this plan met the requirements for grants, it became apparent that a more focused discussion about transportation needs in the Yampa Valley was needed.

In 1999, a group began meeting to focus on the transportation needs in the Yampa Valley. Several projects were identified including updates to The Yampa Valley Regional Airport and airline guarantee programs, Steamboat Springs Transit (SST) operation and expansion, services, parking, and regional transportation.

In 2008, a new group, called "Transportation Solutions" was formed with representatives from the City, County, Chamber, SSRC, and other community stakeholder groups. The group discussed an RTA and it was identified as one of the more viable options to address transportation issues. The group created a "wish list" for this RTA. These were:

1. Increased funding and frequency for SST
2. Land acquisition for a future garage downtown
3. Extending the core trail
4. Funding for current roads
5. Funding for road improvement
6. Funding to secure commercial air service

In 2019, the concept of an RTA was raised again as part of the City's discussions on fiscal sustainability. Jonathan Flint, Steamboat Springs Transit Manager, presented to City Council on the formation and operation of an RTA. In addition, creating an RTA has been identified as an action item in the draft climate action plan and in the transportation and mobility study, both currently under development in 2021.

### **What is a Regional Transportation Authority?**

An RTA is essentially an agreement between at least two governmental entities that forms a third governmental entity ("the authority") that administers a transportation system with clearly identified boundaries. RTA's can generate revenue by imposing an annual motor vehicle registration fee (not more than \$10), levy a sales or use tax (not to exceed 1%), levy a property tax, issue

and/or reissue bonds, and contract with any other governmental or private source of funding.

RTAs have been used for:

- Facilities
- Sidewalks, Shelters, Pedestrian Crossings, other Infrastructure
- Technology
- Fixed Route bus, Commuter bus, Regional bus
- Paratransit, Senior Van, Vanpool, Rideshare, Transportation Coordination.
- Heavy Rail, Light Rail, Subway, Fixed Guideway, Tramway
- Equipment purchase or lease
- Planning, Development, Surveying and Studies
- Trails
- Roads

There are several successful examples of RTAs in Colorado, including:

- Gunnison Valley Transportation Authority
- Pikes Peak Rural Transportation Authority
- Roaring Fork Transportation Authority
- San Miguel Authority for Regional Transportation
- South Platte Valley Regional Transportation Authority
- Eagle County Regional Transportation Authority

RTAs are governed by a Board of Directors of at least five members, including at least one elected official representing each government entity within the RTA.

**Problem Statement:**

In an effort to identify the need for a regional transportation solution, the Task Force developed a problem statement that helps to define the “why”:

The lack of a well-funded and coordinated regional transportation system limits opportunities to provide reliable service; to improve mobility choices; and to partner on critical infrastructure and services for all communities within the region. This leads to greater reliance on Single Occupancy Vehicles (SOV), increased costs to commuters, increased traffic and the resulting environmental impacts, and parking problems. In addition to negative impacts to our residents, local businesses and visitors, the lack of a coordinated regional transportation effort hinders economic development.

**Benefits of Regional Transportation System:**

The Task Force identified the following benefits of regional transportation system:

- **Efficiency.** Regional transportation will streamline planning, service, and infrastructure to deliver coordinated transportation and mobility services now and into the future while improving interconnectivity regionally and between services.
- **Economy.** Provides residents, businesses, employees and guests more reliable transportation and mobility options that results in a stronger economy.
- **Reduced Traffic.** Provides a convenient and affordable option that reduces traffic, parking, and road infrastructure/maintenance impacts.
- **Improved Environment.** Fewer and cleaner vehicles on the roads will result in improved air quality and reduced Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions.
- **Sustainable Funding.** Provides long term sustainable funding and leverage to obtain support from grants and/or bonds.
- **Equitable.** Increases affordable mobility options for everyone in our region while meeting the needs of each community.
- **Safety.** Improves roadway safety for drivers, pedestrians, cyclist, and wildlife.
- **Social.** Improved access to cultural, health care services, educational and recreational opportunities.

### **Next Steps:**

If the City Council and County Commissioners support the Task Force pursuing the formation of a Regional Transportation Authority, the next step would be to engage a consultant to provide facilitation and technical expertise on the creation of an RTA in the Yampa Valley. The Task Force recommends broadly looking at the options of roadway expansion, bicycle and pedestrian, micro-transit, vanpool, shared rides, bus, bus rapid transit, elevated guideway, gondola, and rail. Other potential options would also be examined. The Task Force estimates that such an effort to create an RTA would cost roughly \$130,000 - \$150,000, depending on the ultimate scope.

If supported, the City would apply for a Federal 5304 Transit Grant to support the planning and feasibility study this summer. FTA Section 5304 planning funds can be used for a wide variety of transit related support activities including: preparation of transit plans and programs; planning and evaluating a public transit project; and conducting technical studies related to public transit. FTA Section 5304 funds are available for planning projects in rural areas.

The 5304 grants require a 20% match, so if awarded, a match amount of \$26,000-\$30,000 would be required. SSRC has indicated a willingness to financially contribute to the match amount, provided the City and the County also contribute.

Additionally, the Task Force would then reach out to our regional partners to begin discussions and to garner interest in the concept. Our regional partners would include:

- Town of Yampa
- Town of Oak Creek
- Town of Hayden
- City of Craig
- Moffat County
- Clark/Hans Peak/North Routt
- Stagecoach

**II. SUMMARY AND ALTERNATIVES:**

If supported by City Council and the County Commissioners, the City would apply for a Federal 5304 Transit Grant to support the planning and feasibility study this summer. As alternative, the Innovative Transportation Task Force could re-evaluate other regional transportation funding options.

**III. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends City Council and the County Commissioners partner with SSRC to fund the required match for the Federal 5304 Transit Grant.

**IV. FISCAL IMPACT:**

The 5304 grants require a 20% match, so if awarded, a match amount of \$26,000-\$30,000 would be required. SSRC has indicated a willingness to financially contribute to the match amount, provided the City and the County also contribute

**V. LEGAL ISSUES:**

None identified.

**VI. CONFLICTS OR ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES:**

None identified.

**VII. CONSISTENCY WITH COUNCIL GOALS AND POLICIES:**

This is consistent with City Council's sustainable funding goals.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Attachment 1 - Staff Presentation