

EQUITY WORKING GROUP

MAY MEETING NOTES

Location: 421 W Riverside Ave, Suite #500
Date: May 30th, 2025
Time: 4:15 – 5:15 pm
SRTC Staff: Michael Redlinger, Savannah Creasey, Ben Kloskey, Ryan Stewart, Wende Wilbur (Kittleson & Associates on behalf of SRTC)
Attendees: Jared A., Dennis S., Erik L., Allison Z., Monica H., Mason B.

Michael welcomed the group and kicked off the meeting and introduced a new participant to the group. He invited virtual and in-person attendees to briefly introduce themselves. Savannah confirmed that no further attendees needed to have their parking fees covered.

Wende Wilbur and Ryan Stewart presented the group's first agenda item, providing information on the VMT Reduction Framework. Wende began by describing the project purpose and scope, notably to analyze vehicle miles traveled (VMT) in the Spokane region. She explained that VMT essentially refers to the amount of miles that people are driving. As part of their work, Wende et al. did a peer and literature review of what other agencies around the country and around the state of Washington are doing in terms of tracking VMT and setting targets. This includes meeting with a working group and other agencies. They also worked to establish a baseline value for the region and forecast future VMT. Ultimately, the effort provides a toolkit of strategies to reduce peoples' reliance on driving. The work also includes an equity analysis of the proposed strategies to ensure proposed strategies don't detrimentally impact urban or rural communities. The study also included an update to SRTC's Comprehensive Planning Certification Manual. She explained SRTC's responsibility to review transportation as included in each local agency's comprehensive plan.

As part of the presentation, Wende described updates to state government requirements, notably including climate change, resiliency, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) transition plans, inclusion of equity in prioritization of nonmotorized transportation projects and implementing a multi-modal level of service (MMLOS). This update would require agencies to look at ease of movement for pedestrians and bicyclists. WSDOT was also required to develop a process for establishing VMT reduction targets – a responsibility that ultimately falls on regional transportation agencies.

Wende also described a challenge encountered during the study, Notably, data on VMT isn't great and many agencies haven't begun setting targets. Agencies are anticipating additional guidance from WSDOT to help inform their work, but that guidance has not yet been issued. She also described the challenge in applying traditional level of service standards – which are defined in terms of vehicular traffic on a roadway – to active transportation modes.

Wende provided an overview of updates to the Comprehensive Plan Certification Manual. Notably, SRTC is working to shorten and simplify the manual's contents, develop a fillable form for the checklist, update questions to address climate change, resiliency, and multi-modal level of service requirements, and provide guidance regarding VMT targets.

Wende then described three scenarios reviewed as part of this work. In the first scenario, “business as usual”, forecasts what would happen if we do the same work and take the same trajectory that’s currently unfolding around the region. Scenario 2 was based on the region taking an approach to meet the same VMT goals that were set by the state. Scenario 3 was based on 2050 land use as forecasted in the Horizon 2050 MTP update. Wende provided an overview of specific results for each scenario.

While commenting on the study’s fundings, Wende emphasized that the data available to calculate VMT is not very good. SRTC continues monitor VMT and await further guidance from WSDOT regarding target setting. In the mean time, SRTC should continue to monitor VMT on an annual basis using the highway performance monitoring system (HPMS) data that is available.

Jared asked Wende if the available data, despite its quality, is consistent over time. Wende indicated that the data is consistent throughout the study period, and that while better data is available for recent years, it’s unavailable to review VMT further in the past and may be unrealistically be cost-prohibitive for government agencies. WSDOT, SRTC, and peer agencies are instead relying on publicly available HPMS data.

Jared asked a follow-up question, inquiring about a subtle drop in VMT per capita since 2006 – what has been successful and what we could repeat from that success. Wende indicated that the fluctuations are related to changes in the population – but also that there have been incremental improvements in transit, active transportation, and land use density. Jared spoke encouragingly about Spokane’s successful growth without increasing VMT per capita. Wende emphasized the benefit of denser land use. Wende went on to indicate that VMT reduction strategies in rural areas are more limited, centering around increased options for remote work, flexible work schedules, and possible options for vanpool or carpool if enough population commute. Certain VMT reduction strategies may not be realistic depending on the community.

More VMT reduction strategies exist for the urbanized area. Transit enhancements, improving the accessibility and safety of active transportation modes, and denser land use and zoning strategies “move the needle” when it comes to VMT reduction. Other strategies included in the toolkit incentivized non-vehicular commuting through incentives like free bus passes, flexible work schedules, and parking reform. Wende mentioned that parking reform and impact fees are listed strategies, but may be more appropriate for a city like Seattle at this time. The full report includes a rundown of the pros and cons of each potential strategy.

Wende closed her presentation with a discussion of next steps. They hope to have a final plan by June 24th. Erik commented that the Spokane region shouldn’t dismiss the potential benefits of impact fees, specifically referring to the impact of Kootenai County, Idaho commuters on the Spokane region’s transportation network. Wende also indicated that Idaho residents impact Spokane’s VMT per capita numbers in a way that may be more difficult for local planners and policymakers to account for. Monica asked Wende about the impact of the post-covid decline in teleworking and the increasing return to offices. Monica framed her question in terms of the equity analysis that was performed as part of the VMT reduction framework study. Wende indicated that that responsibility to offer telework options or flexible work schedules falls onto employers. Monica asked about incentive programs, such as those utilized by WSDOT in the past – and Wende indicated that SRTC can make informed recommendations and report on our analysis, but it will take initiatives and advocacy beyond SRTC to advocate for changes on the part of employers. Allison mentioned that congestion pricing might encourage more people to use public transit, thus increasing funding for public transportation as well. Wende cautioned

that a robust transit network first needs to be there for vulnerable communities in order to make that tactic successful. Considerations are important to avoid detrimental impacts on more vulnerable users of the transportation system. Wende also clarified that congestion pricing is essentially a toll system – with hours and locations set to maximize benefit. There are also costs associated with implementing a tolling system, including fee-collection.

Ryan Stewart added that some draft planning products are already available as part of this work, including draft memos and updates to the comprehensive plan certification process. Ryan offered to show full draft materials (as well as WSDOT's final report) to any working group members upon request to SRTC staff. VMT reduction strategies may be reflected in future project prioritization efforts such as SRTC's call for projects.

Michael introduced Mason Burley, CEO of Urbanova, to present the next agenda item, Expansion of Shared Mobility options in Spokane, referring to the expansion of ZEV Co-op in the Spokane region. Mason reviewed the involvement of his predecessor, Kim Zentz, as part of SRTC's Transportation Advisory Committee and other efforts. Through work with Avista, Urbanova was introduced to the work of ZEV Co-op, an electric vehicle carsharing cooperative looking to expand their locations in the Spokane region. While Mason does not work for ZEV, Urbanova believes that ZEV represents a great model when it comes to providing transportation choices.

ZEV Co-op is a nonprofit transportation cooperative with a focus on underserved communities. They operate electric vehicle carshare services that are available to both ZEV Co-op members and the public. Mason described ZEV Co-ops successes in communities around western Washington. ZEV can be a convenient, station-based, and accessible option for people looking for transportation options. For example, instead of buying a second car, a car could be borrowed on an as-needed basis through ZEV.

Mason reviewed ZEV's mission as a co-op. While they are a business that needs to generate revenue, they are uniquely geared towards the needs of their members as well. ZEV has previously received money through WSDOT ZAP (zero emissions access program) grant funding.

Mason then described the process for joining ZEV and/or using a ZEV Co-op vehicle, which involves downloading the app and going through an online orientation. He described the process as being similar to the process to rent a Lime scooter. That process and utility is available to every member of the public. Those who join ZEV as members may access more favorable pricing and other benefits – and employers and other organizations are eligible to join. Mason provided details on the pricing for members and non-members, as well as income-supported pricing – indicating that the service is generally more affordable than a Lyft or Uber and has potential to provide community benefits. The pricing includes the vehicle rental as well as insurance.

Mason described materials that he brought to the meeting for folks to learn more about ZEV, including past examples of ZEV's work. He then went on to describe what ZEV is hoping to do in Spokane. Their first location in this region, on the Gonzaga campus, was launched in June 2024, and has seen 185 bookings in the first 12 months. Though university students are frequent users, the location and its services are open to all members of the public.

ZEV is currently evaluating a set of locations as their potential second site in the Spokane region. Mason described potential benefits for each of the five proposed sites. Those are – the Moran Prairie Park and Ride (5615 S Palouse Hwy), the North Spokane Library (44 E Hawthorne

Rd), Martin Luther King Jr Community Center (500 S Stone St.), West Central/Kendall Yards (1354 W Bridge Ave), and the Spokane Public Library – Thrive International partnership location (6998 N Nevada St).

Mason directed participants and viewers to the ongoing survey regarding the potential locations. Mason provided a QR code on the slide and on his materials. Mason also described recent outreach activities as part of this effort. Mason closed his presentation by indicating a hope that ZEV can open additional locations around the region.

Jared commented that in addition to the five locations listed by Mason, the Garland or north Monroe areas might also be other potentially active sites for a ZEV carsharing facility. Jared also mentioned the Hillyard area, near the Northeast Community Center, as another possibility. Mason also mentioned that the potential sites have to agree to give up space for a potential carsharing and charging location. Jared also asked about potential connections for transit-riders, such as park and rides. Mason mentioned that the terminus of STA transit routes might hold some promise for future locations.

Monica asked about the other factors that go into the selection, aside from the site's willingness to host ZEV and the outcome of the public survey. Mason mentioned that they are looking at the Avista network, lighting, security, foot traffic, and accessibility as guiding principles. Additional feedback on potential criteria is also welcome. Monica then asked about the income-supported tiered pricing described in Mason's presentation and how that might be funded. Mason indicated that it's ZEV's commitment, and that users can demonstrate income-supported eligibility through their community center (just as one example). ZEV is still working out the specific details to ensure the economic viability of their business model and is seeking additional user groups, such as those 55 and over. Still, it remains their commitment to provide income-supported pricing to those in need. Monica cautioned against ZEV becoming a privileged means of transportation that less income-secure residents are unable to use.

Allison asked about the potential range of the vehicles offered through ZEV Co-op. Mason indicated there is a daily rate and a mileage cap, but that the mileage cap may be large enough to allow users to drive to neighboring communities and back to Spokane.

Savannah provided a comment from another participant who was unable to make the meeting, who suggested a location near the Ace Hardware center on South Regal and Palouse Highway. It's on STA route 4 with fifteen-minute service, with nearby multifamily housing. Mason agreed that a location in that area could be a good idea.

With no additional questions from the group, Michael provided closing remarks and indicated that the remainder of the meeting would be held outside SRTC's office, where Mason provided a tour of one of ZEV Co-op's vehicles for interested participants. As part of the vehicle tour, Mason showed off the app used to sign up and borrow a vehicle, how users would start the car, and other features. Michael and Savannah offered to help share Mason's outreach materials through SRTC social media to help spread the word and garner as many survey responses as possible. SRTC staff also mentioned that the agency will be doing some recruitment and outreach for potential Equity Working Group participants over the summer, inviting participants to take materials or help spread the word.

Michael thanked participants and closed out the meeting.