

Regional Coordination

In addition to the Blaine County government and the five cities therein, community partners in transportation mobility include:

Blaine County Recreation District

Blaine County Regional Transportation Committee

Blaine County School District

Environmental Resource Center (ERC)

Idaho Transportation Department (ITD), including its subsets like the Office of Highway Safety

Mountain Rides Transportation Authority

The Senior Connection

Sun Valley Resort

Baseline Characteristics:

TRANSPORTATION MOBILITY

Though classified as a minor arterial,¹²⁵ State Highway 75 represents the north-south spine of Blaine County and is by far its busiest roadway.¹²⁶ To the south– SH75 connects with US Highway 93 in rural Lincoln County,¹²⁷ then to the nearest metropolitan area and the region’s largest city, Twin Falls.¹²⁸ The 116-mile stretch of SH75– between Shoshone and Stanley, to the north in Custer County– is federally designated as the Sawtooth Scenic Byway for its cultural, historic, natural, recreational and scenic qualities.¹²⁹ Local zoning aims to protect the qualities of the byway by prohibiting billboards, limiting commercial development beyond the cities, preserving hillside open space, and managing landscape features within the County’s Scenic Highway Overlay District.¹³⁰

As SH75 moves through the Wood River Valley, it doubles as Main Street for the Bellevue, Hailey and Ketchum downtown cores. At points SH75 is just two lanes, although it repeatedly swells to five. While the speed limit is posted at 25 MPH in the downtown sections, the majority of the corridor is posted at 55 MPH and subject to a higher design speed.^{131,132} Crossing Main Street in Hailey at Croy Street means crossing more than 60 feet of pavement. In Bellevue at Broadford Road, it means crossing more than 80 feet of pavement. Wider roads are known to compromise safety, especially for pedestrians and bicyclists, because wider lanes and roads accommodate higher vehicle speeds¹³³ and lower visibility/sight distance.¹³⁴ The descriptor “stroads” draws attention to the safety issues associated with multi-lane arterials like Blaine County’s Main Streets on SH75.¹³⁵ Aside from bus pull-outs and a forthcoming Park n’ Ride mid-valley, there is no other infrastructure on SH75 designed to give transit or high-occupancy vehicles an advantage over cars.^{136,137}

Travel behavior patterns on State Highway 75 are seasonal, peaking annually in July as tourists and summer contractors¹³⁸ take to the roads. Average daily traffic (ADT) counts on State Highway 75 peaked in July 2021 with an average of roughly 21,400 vehicle trips per day.¹³⁹ Tallies have generally stayed above pre-pandemic levels since, with some 20,300 average daily trips in July 2023 and no fewer than 12,600 daily trips in all other months.¹⁴⁰

Regionally, jobs are concentrated in the Wood River Valley—places where housing costs are traditionally highest.¹⁴¹ The employment hubs in the Wood River Valley attract commuters from across the county and well outside it, spanning southern-central Idaho.¹⁴² In 2021, 34.8% of workers in Blaine County traveled 50 miles or more to their jobs, whereas 34.3% of workers traveled less than 10 miles to their jobs.¹⁴³ The remaining 30.9% of commuters traveled an average distance between 10 to 50 miles to their jobs– with 24.5% commuting between 10 and 24 miles, and 6.4% traveling between 25 and 50 miles to their jobs.¹⁴⁴

Increasing rates of vehicle trips exacerbate regional issues and counter Blaine County’s goals for a “multimodal” transportation system.¹⁴⁵ Transportation was the county’s largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in 2018, contributing 40% of all carbon dioxide.¹⁴⁶ And, crash data ending in 2021 shows a “concerning trend” on State Highway 75, the valley’s main spine, according to ITD.¹⁴⁷ From 2018 to 2022, drivers reported 1,581 total crashes in Blaine County; 27 were fatal and 53 resulted in serious injuries.¹⁴⁸ Of those crashes, more than one in five involved wildlife and 45% occurred on state roads.¹⁴⁹ Vehicle trips not only have high safety and environmental costs, they are also materially expensive. Various levels of government are exploring mechanisms to recoup the costs that vehicles impose on roadway preservation and maintenance, by vehicle miles traveled and weight classifications.^{150,151}

Mountain Rides Transportation Authority, the local transit agency provides fixed-route bus, demand-response paratransit and non-emergency medical transportation, plus vanpool services. Such transit services increase community mobility options, providing alternatives to vehicle travel. After a dip during the pandemic, transit ridership has continued to grow. Most notably, the north-south Valley Route, the principal commuter service

between Bellevue and Sun Valley, has seen massive year-over-year gains in recent years. Over the course of 2023, the route clocked over 340,000 rides on the Valley Route– about double the number in 2021.¹⁵² Mountain Rides is currently integrating battery electric buses into its fleet, which significantly cut fuel costs and greenhouse gas emissions.¹⁵³ In November 2023, more than 90% of Mountain Rides miles were traveled by electric buses, resulting in an 89% drop in emissions. The transportation authority aims to open a new battery electric bus facility in 2025 to support its fleet.

Mobility options that provide alternatives to single-occupancy vehicle trips align with locally shared goals and policy statements that call for a safe and connected multimodal network.¹⁵⁴ Such goals emphasize providing infrastructure for active transportation modes, as well as end goals that support road safety and reduce travel times for commuters on SH75.¹⁵⁵

Stretching 20 miles from Bellevue to Ketchum, the Wood River Trail– a two-lane “rail-to-trail” paved path¹⁵⁶– offers a major amenity for recreationists and commuters alike.¹⁵⁷ Commonly called the “bike path” in the summer, the BCRD maintains the trail as a groomed Nordic facility in the winter. Active transportation infrastructure throughout the cities and downtown cores connect to the WRT.¹⁵⁸ Example facilities include rectangular rapid flashing beacons (RRFB), bulb-out curbs, in-street pedestrian crossing signs, shared-use paths, bicycle lanes and tracks, sidewalks, ADA curb ramps, and more.¹⁵⁹ The Blaine County Community Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan– published in 2014,¹⁶⁰ then updated in 2016 and 2024– guides bike and pedestrian development across Blaine County.¹⁶¹



Wood River Trail¹⁷⁷

Planning for Mobility

Community design shapes a community’s travel behavior patterns. In turn, the characteristics of a transportation network– including the types of infrastructure and transit services available– influence ongoing land uses and planning. Where people live, work and how they travel in between the two– in addition to other locations– make up travel behavior patterns. Land use and transportation planning are interrelated– just as development patterns affect roadway designs, roadway designs shape travel behavior and the social process of land use planning.¹⁶³

Automobile dependency for everyday basic needs is reflected in land use planning with segmented, single-use zoning districts; long high-speed road segments; disconnected neighborhoods; and sprawled¹⁶⁴ development. Longer distances between basic needs and differing land uses incentivize vehicle travel.¹⁶⁵ By design, transportation networks that lack facilities for walking and bicycling compromise vulnerable road users.^{166,167}

Transportation agencies across the United States have historically, and conventionally, relied on travel demand forecasting tools to re-engineer roads that increase vehicle throughput to increase roadway “capacity.”¹⁶⁸ Yet, case studies from around the country and world demonstrate that expanding roadways to increase “traffic throughput” is only found to temporarily relieve congestion and in the long-term “induce[s] demand.”¹⁶⁹ Planning for car traffic begets car traffic– negatively impacting road safety, community health and access to basic needs.¹⁷⁰

Multimodal streets are more spatially efficient than those designed for private vehicle travel, they accommodate more people per square foot.^{171,172} “Repurposing street space” and measuring throughput or capacity by people, rather than by vehicles, presents a paradigm shift with mobility benefits.¹⁷³ Mobility– the right and act of moving– hinges on accessible design for all people. In order for people of different ages, abilities and means to access everyday basic needs, a transportation network needs to be safe, convenient and connected by design.¹⁷⁴ Beyond the design of a street or roadway, planning for mixed land uses and density in key places¹⁷⁵– for example, alongside transit corridors– shortens trips and increases access to network facilities. Planning for mobility relies on the 3D’s of land use planning: density, diversity and design.¹⁷⁶



Mountain Rides’ Transit Services¹⁶²