Picking a Best Mode for Spokane Transit
Karl Otterstrom AICP
Rail-Volution 10/22/2013
The O. W. R. & N. Steel Bridge, across the Spokane River and Monroe Street Bridge, Spokane, Wash.
Spokane’s Transit History

- First electric streetcar began 1889
- Streetcar ridership peaked around 1910 with 37.9 million rides in 1910
- Streetcars replaced with buses in 1936
- Bus ridership peaked in 1944 with 26 million rides
- Spokane United Railways’ bus system sold to National City Lines in 1945
- City of Spokane acquired bus system in 1968
- Spokane Transit created in 1981 to provide a regional public transportation system
1980-2006 Spokane Transit Planning

- Regional discourse on the future of transit focused one mode and one corridor
  - Light Rail
  - Abandoned Freight Corridor

- After multiple studies and years of debate, failure of two regional advisory ballot measures on light rail suggested a new vision was needed
High Performance Transit Network

- High Performance transit is defined as all-day, two way, frequent and premium transit service
- Network concept introduced in 2009 adopted as part of comprehensive plan in 2010
- Departure from single corridor, single mode vision
- Vision is decidedly “mode neutral”
- Tied to land use plans and visions as well transportation system demands
Central City Line

- One important corridor in the High Performance Transit Network vision
Alternatives Analysis Milestones

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project Start:</td>
<td>March 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose and Need:</td>
<td>March – September 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of Alternatives:</td>
<td>March – September 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrowing of Alternatives:</td>
<td>October – December 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corridor Selection:</td>
<td>February 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode Selection:</td>
<td>June 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locally Preferred Alternative Adopted</td>
<td>July 2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2010-2011 Central City Line Mode Debate

- Enhanced Bus
- Modern Electric Trolley
- Modern Streetcar
### Common Attributes of ALL Modes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fundamental Service Characteristics</strong>*</td>
<td>More service, over more hours, to support the vitality of the urban core</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Substantial Transit Stations</strong>*</td>
<td>Safe, well-lit shelters with amenities such as benches and real-time information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distinctive Branding</strong>*</td>
<td>A unique identity from other transit routes – logo, colors, service maps, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speed and Reliability</strong></td>
<td>Transit Signal Priority*, Low Floor Boarding*, and other features to reduce delay and maintain service reliability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Right of Way Flexibility</strong></td>
<td>All modes can adapt to Mixed-Traffic, Contraflow Lanes, and other treatments suited to an urban environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
STA share of operating and capital requirements requires full 1/10 sales tax increase.
Costs are representative; further engineering required for preliminary cost estimates.
Mode Choice Evaluation and Decision Framework

- Mode Choice?
  - Is the mode appropriate to the level of demand and operating conditions?
- Rider Experience
  - What is the passenger experience, both in the vehicle and at stations?
- Service and Operations
- Environment
  - How does the mode contribute to the natural and urban environments?
- Cost Effectiveness
  - Is the mode affordable to build, own, and operate? Are costs proportionate to benefits?
Downtown Feedback on Mode Options

- Generally, respondents perceived that Modern Streetcar and Modern Electric Trolley (MET) could positively influence development.
- A major disadvantage of the Modern Streetcar was the cost.
- Many believed the primary advantage of the MET was the ability to be permanent and appealing at a lower price than the streetcar.
- Low cost was the most cited advantage of the Enhanced Bus.
Overall Input Summary

- Consensus among groups on a preferred first alignment
- Sounding Board: In a brief poll of members, slight majority favored Modern Streetcar, others split between Enhanced Bus and MET
- March 2011 Open House: Majority favored Modern Streetcar with “don’t know” and MET ahead of Enhanced Bus
- Downtown Business Groups: Survey results indicate strong majority prefer MET(62%); most could accept Streetcar; Enhanced Bus was least acceptable option
Locally Preferred Alternative

Central City Transit Project - Locally Preferred Alternative

Legend:
- Locally Preferred Alternative Alignment
- Central Business District Alignment Alternatives
- Proposed Spokane Community College Extension
- Preliminary STA Station Locations
- Preliminary Downtown Station Options
- Potential Maintenance Facility Locations
- Spokane Transit Authority Plaza
- Intersections
- Principal Arterials
- Local Streets
- Railroads

Detail Area

Spokane Transit
Current Status

- Amending the LPA to expand the corridor definition
- Working to encourage US bus manufacturers to consider our vehicle type and design
- Preparing for Preliminary Engineering funded through state and federal grants
- Laying groundwork for overall funding strategy including future ballot measure
Lessons Learned

- Collaboration and inclusion goes a lot of way in good decision making and ownership of outcomes
- Bringing developers in early to consider impacts improves credibility of the planning process
- Spokane made a decision right-sized for Spokane; results may vary in other communities