

# Boise Streetcar Information

Fall 2009

## A Boise Streetcar System

**As the Treasure Valley** continues to grow, so will the need for transportation alternatives – ways of moving more people in more efficient, cost-effective, and environmentally friendly ways. The Boise Streetcar System is proposed as one potential component of the community's larger, long-term approach to building a more robust, flexible transportation network.

Streetcars (trolleys) are electric vehicles that travel on the same roads as automobiles but operate on fixed rails. Their primary purpose is to move people within a specific area. The first phase of the streetcar system

proposed for Boise would connect downtown's 36,000 employees, and local residents and tourists to major employment and activity centers in the city's commercial core.

Nearly 10 years of planning studies have recommended such a "downtown circulator" for Boise as a way to transport people throughout downtown, increasing pedestrian traffic and reducing reliance on the automobile.

In short, the goal of a streetcar system is to enhance people's ability to live, work, shop and move about town without a car.

*The purpose of the feasibility study is to explore how a streetcar system might be built and paid for, quantifying who would use it and what specific benefits it would yield, and identifying any obstacles that might prevent its construction.*

## Boise Streetcar Feasibility Study

**Six independent studies\*** since 2000 have envisioned a downtown circulator system as a central component of Boise's future. In 2008 Mayor David Bieter called for a strong effort to make the streetcar system a reality within the next few years. In September 2008 the Downtown Policy Advisory Committee (DPAC) transferred responsibility for a feasibility study to the City of Boise and the Capital City Development Corporation (CCDC). In November 2008 Mayor Bieter and CCDC formed a task force of downtown property owners, and civic and business leaders, to conduct a feasibility study. The purpose of the feasibility study was to build and expand on previous studies by explor-

ing how such a system might be built and paid for, quantifying who would use the system and what specific benefits it would yield, and identifying any obstacles that might prevent its construction.

Gary Michael, retired Albertsons CEO and a downtown Boise resident, was appointed chairman of the Boise Streetcar Task Force (Task Force). The process is currently under way, with the Task Force expected to present its conclusions and action plan to the Boise City Council, Ada County Highway District (ACHD), Valley Regional Transit (VRT), and CCDC Board of Commissioners by the end of 2009 or early 2010. Those agencies will con-

sider whether to proceed, and if so, how and when.

The availability of federal stimulus money has energized the process, and a request for funds was submitted by the federal government's September 15 deadline. Whether or not the request will be granted will not be known until early 2010. Even if the city does not receive stimulus dollars in this round, the federal government is increasingly emphasizing the value of public transportation in general, and rail and streetcars in particular, making it likely other federal funds will be available in the future.

*cont'd. on p. 2*

\* Please see first six studies in Appendix, p. 8

## How it works

### *Boise Streetcar Feasibility Study cont'd.*

More than a dozen North American cities have streetcar systems (including Tacoma, Memphis, and Little Rock). Boise is one of more than 70 cities in the planning stages for new streetcar systems or expansion of existing systems.

Regardless of the availability of federal funding, the process continues as the Task Force examines issues of alignment (best route, stop locations, connection with the proposed multimodal center), capital financing (how to pay for it), benefits analysis (economic development and community benefits), and operating structure and finance (who will run it and pay for ongoing costs). An important part of the Task Force's work will be to consider feedback from key stakeholders and the general public about the project. This input will be considered as part of the Task Force's decision-making process and final recommendations.

**Streetcars are electric vehicles** that share the roads with automobiles, operating along a fixed-rail guideway embedded in the roadway surface. Although streetcars cannot deviate from the path of the guideway, the operator of the streetcar "drives" the vehicle, accelerating and braking to move along with automobile traffic that shares the same lane. Trolleys run on electric power provided by overhead lines, designed to fit in with the streetscape.

A typical modern streetcar can carry up to 110 passengers, replicas of vintage streetcars 60 passengers, and restored vintage streetcars 48 passengers.

Streetcars should not be confused with "light rail," a much heavier vehicle that usually operates on dedicated rails separate from roadways, running at higher speeds with fewer stops, serving primarily to move commuters around the region.

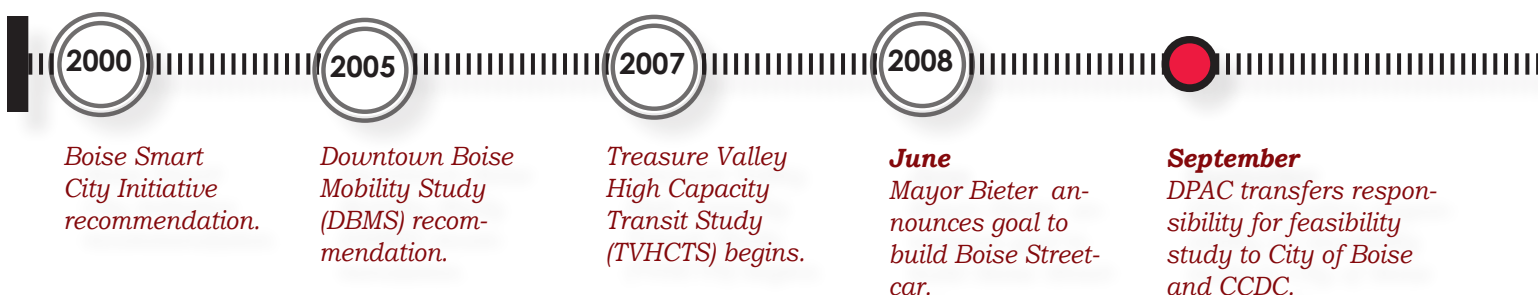
### **Engaging the Public**

*This fall, the Task Force will educate the approximately 900 downtown property and business owners about the process, answer questions and provide additional information.*

*In addition, the City of Boise will be conducting a series of outreach activities including open houses for the general public and presentations to community groups and neighborhood associations.*

*Input will be gathered and provided to the Task Force's Public Information work group who will pass it on to the Task Force as part of its decision-making process and include it in the final report to the Boise City Council and other involved agencies.*

## Boise Streetcar Timeline



# Where it goes

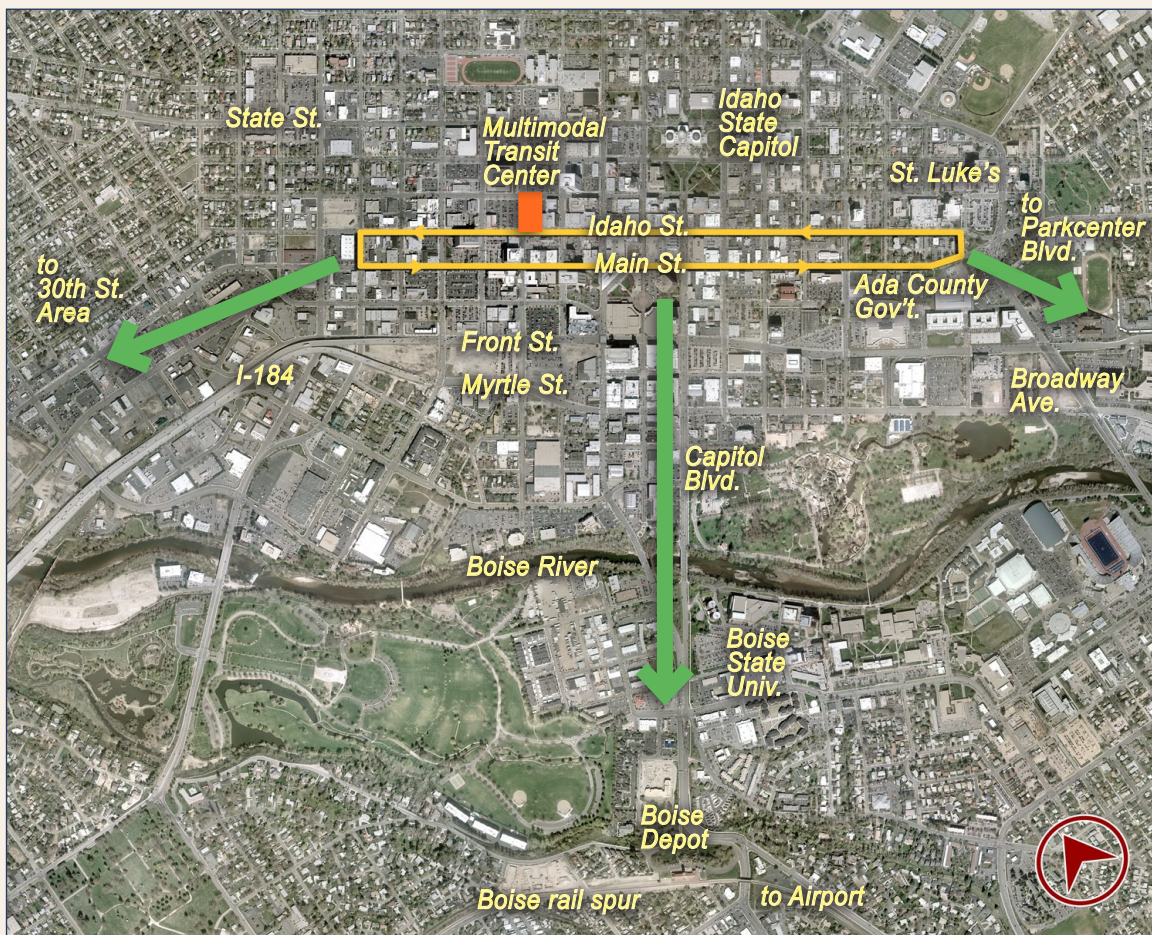
## The route currently under study

(Phase One) is a two-way, 1.15-mile alignment (2.3 total miles of track including loops) running on Main and Idaho streets, and extending from Noble Park near St. Luke's Regional

Medical Center on the east to 15th Street on the west. Phase Two extensions might go to Boise State University or to the Parkcenter Boulevard or 30th Street areas. Other possible connections might include future transit

expansions to the Boise Airport and the Boise Depot. The depot is poised to return to operations as an intercity and/or regional passenger rail facility. Congress is currently considering the revival of Amtrak's Pioneer Line,

with Boise as a key stop between Denver and Portland, and preliminary studies have supported the feasibility of utilizing the existing rail line for a commuter train system connecting Boise to Canyon County.



Planned Phase 1 route shown in yellow, along with the planned Multimodal Transit Center and possible Phase 2 extensions.

2009

### November

Boise Streetcar Task Force formed and agenda established.

### January

Route selected for further study.

### February

Legally possible funding sources; LID framework.

### March

Funding in other cities; alternatives to overhead wires, proceed with low cost/risk option.

## Focus of the region's public transportation system

**Growth is coming.** The population of Ada and Canyon counties is expected to reach one million by 2030. To accommodate this growth in a manner that limits its negative impacts on air quality, traffic congestion, neighborhoods and taxpayers, regional plans have long called for significantly enhancing alternative transportation systems.\*

A streetcar system is a central component of regional transportation and land-use planning. It is not a stand-alone project; rather, it is just one component of a regional transportation system intended to provide commuters with multiple options, regardless of the length or destination of their trip.

Specifically, the streetcar is part of a larger transportation planning effort being conducted by Valley Regional Transit (VRT) and COMPASS to implement a high-capacity transit system that will serve the entire Treasure Valley. The streetcar would operate in concert with a more robust bus system and eventually a commuter rail system.

As envisioned, commuters, shoppers, and visitors would ride commuter rail or buses to a soon-to-be built multi-modal center, currently planned for

\* Please see first six studies in Appendix, p. 8.

11th and Idaho streets, where they can board the streetcar and continue to their downtown destinations.

Without the streetcar system, people would be discouraged from traveling via commuter rail or bus because of the length of the walk once they arrive downtown. Likewise, without a broader bus and commuter rail system, most people would not be able to access the streetcar system without driving (although motorists also will benefit from the streetcar, leaving their cars parked while they travel within downtown for errands or meals).

Each component of the regional system (bus, streetcar, commuter rail) will be funded from different sources and would complement rather than compete with the others. From a financial perspective it is important to have all of these components, because it is critical that the system be fully integrated and utilized to its full potential.

In other communities, streetcar systems have shown the added benefit of appealing to people who traditionally have not used public transportation. Boise today is very car-oriented. The streetcar system can help introduce citizens to new and enhanced public transportation alternatives.

## Task Force Members

*Gary Michael, Chairman*

*Trudy Anderson*

*Clay Carley*

*Ed Dahlberg*

*Mike Fery*

*Liz Fitzgerald*

*Mike Gwartney*

*Dale Higer*

*George Iliff*

*Jeffrey Jackson*

*Jim Kissler*

*Terry Little*

*Cheryl Larabee*

*John May*

*Pat McMurray*

*Dan Minor*

*Bruce Newcomb*

*Derick O'Neill*

*Skip Oppenheimer*

*Joey Perry*

*Phil Reberger*

*Mike Reuling*

*Mark Rivers*

*Charles Rountree*

*Heather Sabala*

*Karen Sander*

*Scott Schoenherr*

*Mike Shirley*

*Maggie Soderberg*

*Jim Tomlinson*

*Mark Warner*

*Mike Wilson*

*Chuck Winder*

*Rachel Winer*



### **April**

*Discuss draft streetcar economic impact analysis.*

### **May**

*Federal funding opportunities; proceed with effort to obtain.*

### **June**

*No meeting.*

### **July**

*Ridership/Market study; conceptual engineering findings, Little Rock streetcar visit.*

## Who will use it?

**Once the streetcar is built**, residents and visitors will be able to fully experience and enjoy the downtown's retail, sports and cultural amenities without the need for a car. People will be able to live closer to where they work. In other cities this has encouraged high-quality, high-density downtown housing. Downtown workers will be able to move about the town on business, enjoy lunch and shop; commuters will be able to leave their cars at home. Visitors and tourists arriving by air will be able to fully experience the downtown area without a car.

Again, in other cities with streetcar systems this has encouraged high-quality businesses to stay in the downtown area and has attracted new businesses—encouraging upper-end office development, boosting property values, and solidifying the city's position as the economic, social, educational, financial, and cultural core of the region.

A ridership assessment of the Boise streetcar, prepared by URS Corporation, estimates that between 400,000 and 500,000 trips would be made during the first year of operation (pro-

posed for 2012), or about 1,200 to 1,600 trips on an average weekday.\* This assessment assumed free fare; even a modest fare charge could significantly decrease ridership. The assessment also assumes a 15-minute frequency or "headway," which is the interval between streetcar arrivals. Reducing the headway to 10 minutes could produce significantly more riders.

\* Please see item #9 in Appendix, p. 8.

## Who benefits?

### Downtown

**Experience in other cities** with similar systems shows that streetcars serve as a catalyst for economic development. Studies in cities similar to Boise demonstrate that commercial development increases sharply in both volume and intensity within three blocks of a new streetcar line, encouraging reinvestment, economic growth, and neighborhood vitality.

A streetcar system focuses development along the route, connecting

the existing economic engines of the city and bringing new residents and jobs. Because it is a commitment—fixed tracks, unlike bus routes, are relatively permanent—a streetcar system encourages high-quality development along the rails.

Residents are typically willing to pay a premium to live along streetcar routes, and property values reflect that. Streetcar systems typically increase the number of people who

live along the line and enable more people to patronize nearby businesses.

The economic benefits assessment\* conducted on behalf of CCDC as part of the streetcar feasibility study concludes that the value of new development attributable to a streetcar system would total \$207 million by 2030. A study prepared as part of the federal TIGER funding application

\* Please see item #7 in Appendix, p. 8.

### August

*Work groups: Outreach, Funding, Future Phases, Public Information; draft operations plan.*

### September

*Boise City submits TIGER application; work groups continue.*

### October-December

*Complete ACHD and utility provider reviews; work groups continue; conclude feasibility study.*

## Who benefits? cont'd.

suggests that development directly attributable to the streetcar can be expected to generate over \$8 million annually in new state and local tax revenues by 2030.\*

Independent reports by cities similar to Boise show desirable benefits from their streetcar systems. Little Rock, Arkansas, began streetcar operations in 2004 and since that time reports \$400 million in investment and 600 residential units within two blocks of the alignment. Tampa, Florida, has been operating for seven years and reports \$1 billion in private investment and 2,740 residential units within three blocks. Kenosha, Wisconsin, began operation nearly 10 years ago and cites \$150 million in development, \$150 million in proposed development, and 250 residential units within three blocks. Memphis, Tennessee, cites \$2 billion in development within three blocks over the past five years.

Boise has consistently ranked high on national surveys for livability, business opportunity, and cultural and recreational values. To maintain these

\* Please see item #11 in Appendix, p 8.

high standards and to make the city an even better place to live, steps must be taken to accommodate the growth that will inevitably come. The alternative could be more congestion, air pollution, and in the worst case more sprawl as new development and cultural activities disperse with no hub, requiring the creation of new roads, additional police and fire resources and other municipal services. This is an expensive proposition that can be avoided by accommodating higher-density growth within existing areas.

Boise's civic and elected leaders are considering how best to recapture a strong economy with a competitive advantage in attracting jobs, talent, businesses, and investment dollars. A streetcar system has, in other communities, proven an asset in this regard.

### Environment

Streetcars can significantly improve air quality by reducing demand for car trips and offering affordable transportation choices. This is important to Boise, which is dangerously

close to violating federal air quality standards. The Idaho Department of Environmental Quality has described transportation as the No. 1 source of pollution in the state—risking human health, and inviting the economic and regulatory burdens associated with federal “nonattainment” status.\*\*

### People

A streetcar system is designed to enhance people's ability to live, work, shop, and move about town without a car. By expanding people's mobility choices, the streetcar can enhance their quality of life. It will be easier for people to live near their place of work and for downtown residents to stretch their “neighborhood.”

The public has increasingly adopted the values of sustainability, energy independence, and environmental awareness. Providing clean-energy mobility alternatives—such as a streetcar system—enables the public to better live by these values.

\*\* Governor's Conference on Air Quality in the Treasure Valley: Practical Paths to Clean Air, 2003.



**January**  
*Task Force feasibility study report and final recommendations to City Council.*

**January**  
*TIGER grants announced (latest).*

**Spring**  
*City Council decision on funding, operations and whether to proceed.*

# Paying to build the Streetcar System

**Using best available estimates**, the first phase could be built for about \$60 million. That includes tracks, power lines and the three streetcars necessary for 10-minute headways.

Boise faces more fiscal constraints relative to transit funding than do many other cities around the nation that have built or are planning streetcar systems. Direct state transit funding is not available and no dedicated local transit funding from any source has been granted by the state legislature to either the City of Boise or VRT. The City would need to seek a two-thirds voter-approved general obligation bond to raise

property taxes on all properties within the city limits.

Another potential source of funding is the creation of a Local Improvement District (LID). Initially it appeared necessary to rely heavily on an assessment of property owners along the route, through an LID. It now appears possible that a significant portion of the initial capital investment could come from federal funding. The City of Boise submitted an application in September 2009 requesting \$40 million. Every member of Idaho's congressional delegation supported this request.

Current thinking is that \$10-\$15 million would come from an LID assessment on properties (within three blocks of the route) that stand to benefit most directly from the streetcar system. The remainder would come from the City and CCDC. Through this public-private investment strategy, federal funding would finance 2/3 of the project, and local government and property owners together would cover 1/3, with property owners contributing between 15%-25% of the total project cost, similar to the financing arrangements found in other communities.

The LID would affect approximately 900 property owners and their tenants. The Economic Benefits Assessment conducted for CCDC suggests that in return for their investment in the streetcar system through the LID, property owners would benefit from increased values as a result of added development and land valuation increases. Retail tenants would benefit from more customers and more exposure for their businesses, and many employers would benefit from a reduced need to provide expensive parking.

Under the LID, property owners would pay in proportion to the degree in which they benefit. They could be assessed on the size of their property, adjusted depending upon whether they were one, two, or three blocks from the route (see chart at left).

<i>LID Assessment Formula (based on current estimates)</i>		
<b>Assessment Formula</b>	<b>\$15 million LID</b>	<b>\$10 million LID</b>
<i>Land only (a)</i>	<i>\$2.45 per square foot</i>	<i>\$1.63 per square foot</i>
<i>Rail line frontage (b)</i>	<i>\$30 per lineal foot</i>	<i>\$20 per lineal foot</i>
<i>Zone A (property within one block of line)*</i>	<i>1 x (a+b)</i>	<i>1 x (a+b)</i>
<i>Zone B (property within two blocks of line)*</i>	<i>.6667 x (a)</i>	<i>.6667 x (a)</i>
<i>Zone C (property within three blocks of line)*</i>	<i>.3333 x (a)</i>	<i>.3333 x (a)</i>
<b>Note 1:</b> <i>Assessment on property classified "residential" by the Ada County Assessor is calculated by multiplying the above rates by .40.</i>		
<b>Note 2:</b> <i>Assessments are lump sums; may be financed with City over 20 years.</i>		
<i>* please see proposed route, page 3</i>		



**Spring/Summer**  
*(If directed to proceed): preliminary, final engineering; vehicle engineering and design.*

**Fall**  
*Begin construction.*

**January**  
*Streetcar system completed.*

# Operation Costs

**Based on other cities** with a similar system, annual operations are estimated to be around \$1 million to \$1.5 million for the first phase. This would be funded from a variety of

sources that could include parking fees, taxing district revenues, general funds, advertising and sponsorships. The Task Force is just now beginning to consider these and other options.

Under current law, the LID assessment under consideration could fund only capital expenditures, not the ongoing operating costs of the system.

## For more information...

- To obtain copies of any of the studies or reports referenced in this document, or to view Task Force agendas, minutes and hand outs, please visit the CCDC Web site at: [www.ccdcboise.com/streetcar](http://www.ccdcboise.com/streetcar).

- If you have any questions regarding the work of the Task Force, please contact:

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The City of Boise tasked CCDC with project management of the Boise Streetcar Feasibility Study. CCDC is Boise's redevelopment agency. To find out more, visit [www.ccdcboise.com](http://www.ccdcboise.com).



CAPITAL CITY DEVELOPMENT CORP.



## Appendix: Studies, Reports and Assessments

1. Valley Regional Transit's 2007 Transportation Service Coordination Plan <http://www.valleyregionaltransit.org/PROJECTSSTUDIES/REGIONALTRANSPORTATIONSERVICECOORDINATIONPLAN/tabid/115/Default.aspx>
2. Communities in Motion – a planning process that identified a broad vision for future land use and transportation in the Treasure Valley out to the year 2030. [www.compassidaho.org/prodserv/cim2035-update.htm](http://www.compassidaho.org/prodserv/cim2035-update.htm)
3. Boise Smart City Initiative Committee Report -- 2002 (revised 2006) [http://www.ccdcboise.com/Documents/SC\\_committee\\_report\\_for\\_screen.pdf](http://www.ccdcboise.com/Documents/SC_committee_report_for_screen.pdf)
4. Downtown Boise Mobility Study -- The DBMS was initiated in 2003 as a joint effort between Valley Regional Transit, Boise City, CCDC, Ada County Highway District, BSU, Idaho Transportation Department, and the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho. Its purpose was to develop a comprehensive approach to mobility within downtown Boise and for people traveling to, from and through the downtown area. [www.valleyregionaltransit.org/PROJECTSSTUDIES/DOWNTOWNMOBILITYSTUDY/tabid/77/default.aspx](http://www.valleyregionaltransit.org/PROJECTSSTUDIES/DOWNTOWNMOBILITYSTUDY/tabid/77/default.aspx)
5. Treasure Valley High Capacity Transit Study -- Initiated in 2007 by Valley Regional Transit and COMPASS and consisting of three interrelated planning projects: the multimodal transit center, the downtown circulator (streetcar), and the I-84 high priority transit corridor. [www.compassidaho.org/prodserv/specialprojects-tvhcts.htm](http://www.compassidaho.org/prodserv/specialprojects-tvhcts.htm)
6. Blueprint Boise – Boise City Comprehensive Plan Update -- Draft 3/9/09, ongoing. <http://www.cityofboise.org/blueprintboise/>
7. Downtown Boise Streetcar Economic Benefits Assessment -- updated LID Area Analysis. Prepared for the Capital City Development Corporation, September 25, 2009, E.D. Hovee & Company, LLC, Economic and Development Services, Vancouver, WA.
8. Streetcar Task Force, Executive Summary and Background Information -- November 3, 2008.
9. Downtown Boise Streetcar Market Evaluation and Ridership Survey -- April 15, 2009, URS Corporation.
10. Portland Streetcar Development Impacts -- prepared for Portland Streetcar, Inc., November 2005, by E.D. Hovee & Company. [http://www.portlandstreetcar.org/pdf/development\\_200804\\_report.pdf](http://www.portlandstreetcar.org/pdf/development_200804_report.pdf)
11. Boise Streetcar Economic and Carbon Footprint Analysis--Prepared by E.D. Hovee for TIGER application, Sept. 11, 2009; <http://boisestreetcar.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/boise-streetcar-economic-carbon-analysis-report-final-draft-9-11-09-1.pdf>.