

# Transportation

## Conditions

One of the reasons Sandpoint flourishes is because of its location along two major highways. Those highways, however, present numerous challenges as the community strives to reconcile the economic benefits of easy access with the drawbacks of congestion and regional truck traffic.

Sandpoint's transportation environment is complex for a town of its size. US Highway 2 and US Highway 95 intersect the town, linking the Canadian border crossing 60 miles to the north with the first major east-west highway south of the 49th parallel. Sandpoint's airport features a 3,500' runway, and as the community's regional and national reputation rises, so too have the number of private jet operations there. Three railway lines cross the city, with more than 45 trains passing through each day. In addition, Sandpoint has been working actively to encourage pedestrian and bicycle travel, labeling itself a pedestrian friendly community and enhancing its pedestrian and bicycle environment.

Recently, the Bonner County Area Transportation Team (BCATT) completed a draft regional transportation study. The study considered all transportation-specific issues, and proposes system improvements



Figure 6.1 - Sandpoint has an unusually complex transportation environment for a town its size, including major highways, multiple rail lines, and a growing airport. (Image source: Studio Cascade, Inc.)

to enhance the transportation environment and facilitate regional flow. Consistent with its regional charge, many of the plan's suggested improvements emphasize regional mobility over local mobility, considering traffic movement through Sandpoint rather than to it, or within City limits.

The Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) continues its efforts to construct the US 95 "Sand Creek Bypass" project in the hopes of reducing the amount of truck traffic transiting Sandpoint's downtown. The decision on whether that byway will be constructed is not within the scope of this comprehensive plan, but the planning concept does address its potential existence.

The draft 2026 Urban Area Transportation Plan contains a complete inventory of transportation facilities in Sandpoint. This inventory, plus on-the-ground experience and comments from the public were used to identify the needs, planning concept, and goals and policies presented in this chapter.

There are three primary functional classifications in Sandpoint. Portions of Cedar Street, Fifth Avenue, Pine Street, and all of Highways 2 and 95 are “Principal Arterials.” Boyer and Division, and Pine Street west of Boyer are classified as “Minor Arterials.” Other major roads, like Main, Cedar Street west of Fifth Avenue, Lincoln, Ontario and Great Northern Road are classified as “Urban Collectors” or “Rural Major Collectors.” The remaining local access streets are classified as “Local Roads.” The plan includes information on generalized link capacities, which show typical Sandpoint roadway capacities per lane, per hour. A functional roadway classifications map is included as appendix D.

The study also analyzed nearly 60 signaled and unsignaled intersections in Sandpoint. The study produced a list of intersections needing improvements including widening, signals, and turn lanes. This list of intersection upgrades can be found in Chapter 5 of the draft Urban Area Transportation Plan.

## Needs

During the public participation process, many participants identified the need for more non-motorized mobility options. With so much traffic traveling through downtown, navigating by bicycle, in a wheelchair, or on foot can be difficult.

Though facilities accommodating all non-automotive traffic are often similar, special concerns for wheelchair-bound citizens were

aired, especially regarding signaled and non-signalized crosswalks downtown, during peak traffic flows and across multiple lanes.

Some participants’ concerns highlighted the need for additional parking in downtown, and sought solutions to ease pressures placed on neighborhoods when on-street parking stalls downtown are full.

Participants also asked for greater connectivity between parks and recreation areas including safe corridors for all types of non-motorized transportation.

## Transportation Improvement Program

The draft 2026 Urban Area Transportation Plan includes a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for Sandpoint. Projects are divided up into short-, medium-, and long-term needs. Short-term projects are scheduled up to five years after the plan’s adoption and include projects that have previously been planned, will correct existing deficiencies, or provide system continuity. The plan estimates \$12 million to complete suggested short-term improvements. Medium-term projects are planned between six and 10 years after the plan is adopted and include projects to correct level of service problems, upgrading roads to urban standards, and projects that take more time to fund. The plan estimates \$60 million to complete suggested medium-term projects. Long-term needs look 10 years into the future and plan for projects with high capital cost, new roadways, and intersection improvements required by increased traffic and development. These long-term needs will require an estimated \$31 million in funding according to the TIP.

The TIP is located in Chapter 7 of the 2026 draft Urban Area Transportation Plan.



Figure 6.2 - Regional, through-town traffic has become an issue in downtown Sandpoint, compromising walkability, utilization of on-street parking, and local automotive transit times. (Image source: Studio Cascade, Inc.)

A functional roadway classifications map is included at the end of this chapter.

## Plan Concept

The planning concept for the transportation chapter is based on the desire to promote transportation systems that work with the existing and future land uses while making it a friendlier place for pedestrians and bicyclists. It is a fundamentally simple concept, but it has important ramifications for the transportation system's design and management.

People walk or ride bicycles by necessity or by choice. Those who walk or ride purely for recreation place different demands on the transportation systems than those who routinely walk or ride to work, to shop or to

get to school. In any case, the transportation system may need to address different demands in order to provide a safe system for those with recreational needs and routine daily needs.

A significant desire in Sandpoint is to make the City more accessible for pedestrians and non-motorized transportation. This requires creating an environment where residents can accomplish their daily routines without getting in cars, if they wish. Those who walk or ride recreationally find ways to do it, but those who must walk or ride as a matter of daily need often have trouble. Goals and policies addressing these desires are included in this plan.

The land use chapter provides direction on the arrangement of land uses and the design of new development to facilitate walking. This transportation chapter adds to it, suggesting ways that the transportation system can enhance the pedestrian and bicycling environment, making that functional integration that is key to true walkability.

The planning concept also includes maintaining the transportation system's diversity and complexity, calling for the continuance of regional transportation flows through Sandpoint and the permanence of the Sandpoint airport. While much of the focus is on pedestrian scale, the importance of other aspects of the transportation system should not be minimized. Regional connections are vital to the community's economic success, and the airport provides an important opportunity for new types of economic growth.

Another important component of the planning concept concerns the question of the Sand Creek Bypass. Although the plan is constructed to be "bypass neutral," it is of critical importance that downtown viability be maintained as the bypass is constructed.

The growth patterns identified in this plan are centered on a walkable, viable downtown; if the viability of Sandpoint's commercial heart is compromised, land-use patterns will inevitably follow the traffic dispersed by the construction of the bypass.



Figure 6.3 - Retaining - and improving - Sandpoint's walkability was a major theme among participants in the planning process, an objective many of the plan's goals and policies support. (Image source: Studio Cascade, Inc.)

## ☒ Goal T-1: Walkability

*Make Sandpoint a walkable community.*

### Policies

- A** Locate housing in CA-4 and CA-5 areas.
- B** Develop parking requirements that reduce the visual prominence of automobiles.
- C** Develop storefront and building massing requirements to make streetscapes more inviting to pedestrians.
- D** Emphasize linkages between prominent activity areas along walking corridors.
- E** Plan for increased pedestrian and bicycle use, both for recreation and as an important, viable transportation alternative.
- F** Prioritize schools, parks, downtown, libraries and other civic destinations as non motorized routes for the transportation network.
- G** Ensure that pedestrians, bicyclists and the physically handicapped are taken into account when developing signalized intersections.

## ☒ Goal T-2: Transportation Balance

*Reconcile the conflicting demands of mobility and access, providing for efficient movement of people and goods while still providing convenient access to neighborhoods and commercial districts.*

### Policies

- A** Encourage creation of gateway's using hardscapes, landscapes, and signage.
- B** Disperse traffic throughout commercial districts rather than concentrating it on a single arterial.
- C** Designate Truck Routes to protect neighborhoods from commercial traffic.
- D** Facilitate multimodal transportation options.
- E** Facilitate freight movement between industrial districts and the highways.

- F As a community, determine an acceptable level of rush-hour congestion and look for alternatives to widening arterial streets.

### ☒ Goal T-3: Affordability

*Reduce household transportation costs.*

#### Policies

- A Promote and increase housing in commercial districts.
- B Encourage provision of regional public transportation linking employment districts to residential areas.
- C Consider reducing the amount of parking required for residential uses.
- D Require bicycle parking in CA-3B, CA-4, and CA-5 districts.
- E Develop an interconnected multimodal transportation network.
- F Discourage the development of non-through streets, and encourage the development of a grid type road network.

### ☒ Goal T-4: ACI Design

*Facilitate the orderly development of the Area of City Impact.*

#### Policies

- A Consider a grade-separated railroad crossings where appropriate, to ensure the adequate delivery of City services.
- B If developed, design the western bypass to encourage traditional grid network neighborhood development.
- C Facilitate design and development of an interconnected street grid network.
- D Coordinate with Bonner County to identify right of way acquisitions and street design prior to and during subdivision applications.
- E Provide for adequate pedestrian and bicycle safety at railroad crossings.

## ☒ Goal T-5: Airport

*Maintain Sandpoint Airport as a viable and safe part of the community.*

### Policies

- A** Ensure surrounding land uses are compatible with continued aircraft operations.
- B** Work with Bonner County to be aware of airport activity and respond to needs if appropriate.
- C** Provide for safe air navigation by approving appropriate safeguards to ensure that airport operations are conducted in a safe efficient manner.
- D** Promote appropriate land uses adjacent to the airport which would be both compatible and beneficial to the airport and the community
- E** Aid in the reduction of noise impact from aircraft.

