

Title: The Regional Transportation Brain - "Find the Ride"

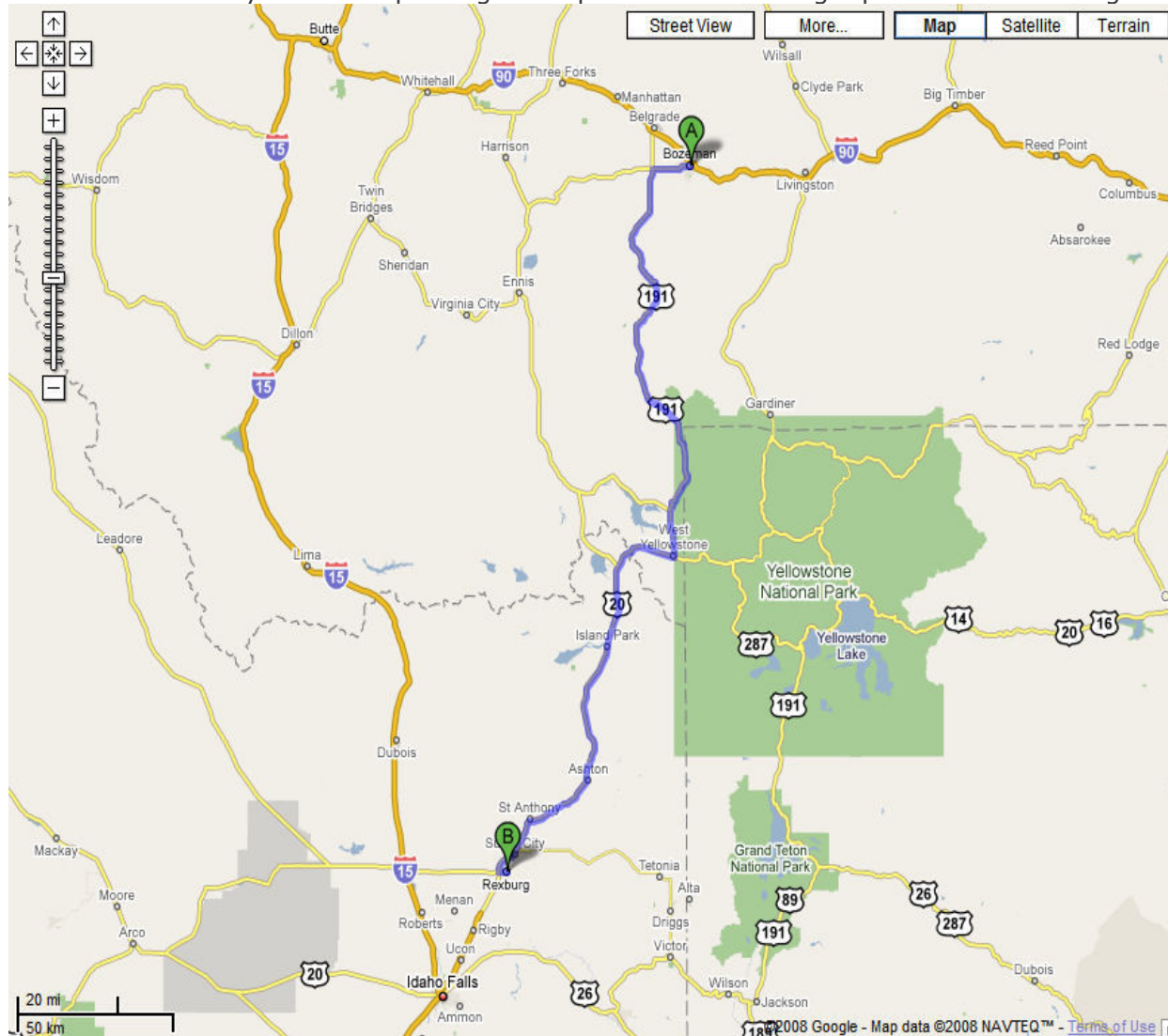
Human Need: Accessing of the variety of transportation resources that are available across the Greater Yellowstone region is an unnecessarily difficult task. Pockets of information reside on provider's web sites or printed schedules, but the human interface is inconsistent and sparse. There is also limited or no information available about how you can connect between services or what the real time status is of a route or vehicle.

Because of this both residents and visitors frequently don't even try to use these services and default to the more familiar security of private and rental vehicles. This barrier also prevents the development of more robust services and the expansion of efficient transportation marketplaces. Services could be better utilized if people had easy and immediate access to an information system that links all public and private providers, offers carpooling options, provides real time information, and offers details on the nature of all routes, pathways, and vehicles.

Description of Service:

This scenario explains how a resident or visitor can move from any origin to any destination using the network of public and private transportation resources. It accommodates the integration of personal vehicle travel, carpools, transit, and non-motorized travel modes.

Consider how someone finds a ride with our existing infrastructure. Assume that a person living in Bozeman, Montana, wants to visit a relative in Rexburg, Idaho, a 198-mile trip shown on the map below. Possible ways of accomplishing the trip other than driving a personal vehicle might be as follows.



- Method 1: Call taxi service and ask for a ride. If the cab company is willing to do that (and regulations allow for cross-state trips), the trip can be accomplished at a high cost.
- Method 2: Take the Galavan West between Bozeman and West Yellowstone. Spend the night in

West Yellowstone and catch the Galavan West route the next day to Rexburg. This service, West Yellowstone's public transportation systems, runs three times a week from West Yellowstone to Bozeman. The other two days it runs to Idaho Falls. The service is open to the general public but is designed around the needs of seniors and people with disabilities living in West Yellowstone.

- Method 3: Take the Skyline Link, Big Sky's public transportation service which runs two or more times per day, for the first portion of the trip. Enjoy some time in Big Sky and catch the Galavan West itinerary from there.
- Method 4: Look for a hotel shuttle, airport shuttle, charter service, or similar services (if any) and arrange for a trip from Bozeman to West Yellowstone (if they allow). Once there, use Salt Lake Express intercity service to get to Rexburg.
- Method 5: Find any options for carpooling or vanpooling.
- Method 6: Ride your bike for a multi-day recreation-based opportunity. Given traffic volumes and road widths, bicyclists may feel more comfortable using U.S. 287 through Ennis instead of U.S. 191.
- Method 7: Combine components of the above methods.

In all these examples, the major drawback is the fact that the duty of planning the trip resides on the customer and it requires extensive phone calls and a higher chance of rejection of service. This is because a charter service might not allow the person to be a passenger on the service. So the existing options are less than ideal and in many cases the trip cannot be made unless driving personal vehicles.

Imagine a system where this person can access a web site, call a traveler information phone number (511), or call a social service phone number (211) to find these available resources and develop an itinerary. Essentially, imagine a localized version of Orbitz.com that focuses on surface transportation without the private vehicle.

Trip planning will help coordinate activities between transportation providers. By defining transportation services electronically, the base level is in place for other applications. By improving the awareness and visibility of transit services to non-users, support for operations and funding will be built.

In our country's major metropolitan areas, a trip planning signifies something different than in the Greater Yellowstone region. For our region, someone looking for a ride should be able to find information through: three digit phone systems (511 and 211); a human service; a local transit agency's website; a statewide website; or the local transportation agency by calling and asking for help. To accomplish this, a public transportation traveler information system must meet the needs of three primary groups of users:

- The public, various transportation users, their care providers and / or case workers
- Transportation providers including public and intercity transit operators
- State or local planners

The system will include as many transportation options (or modes) as available within each county. First, it will include regularly scheduled services, whether public or private. These include local fixed routes (e.g., Streamline), door-to-door services (e.g., Livingston Angel Line), publicly operated intercity services (e.g., the Skyline Link) and links to commercial passenger carriers (i.e. Greyhound and Amtrak). At a later stage, the system could include specialized transportation or travel options. These could include either regularly scheduled services or periodic, special trips. Also, the system could incorporate carpools, shared rides or subsidized transportation via public, human service or tribal vehicles or other options. In addition, the system could include private services from taxis, limousines, shuttles and links to commercial carriers (i.e. Park County Transportation.) Finally, it can include information about the quality and availability of pedestrian and bicycle facilities.

Ideally, the regional traveler information service will serve riders and operators across the region, considering the realities of the Greater Yellowstone's environment. Riders will be able to talk over the phone or in person to a "mobility manager" to find a ride. If riders have access to the Internet, assistance tools will be available online. Oftentimes, the individual seeking trip planning information will

not be the same person who will take the ride. The seeker could be a caretaker, an adult family member, a receptionist, a health care provider or a friend. Whether users are individuals or rural agencies, many will have limited or no access to specialized computer skills or high-speed communications. The system will need to accommodate this reality.

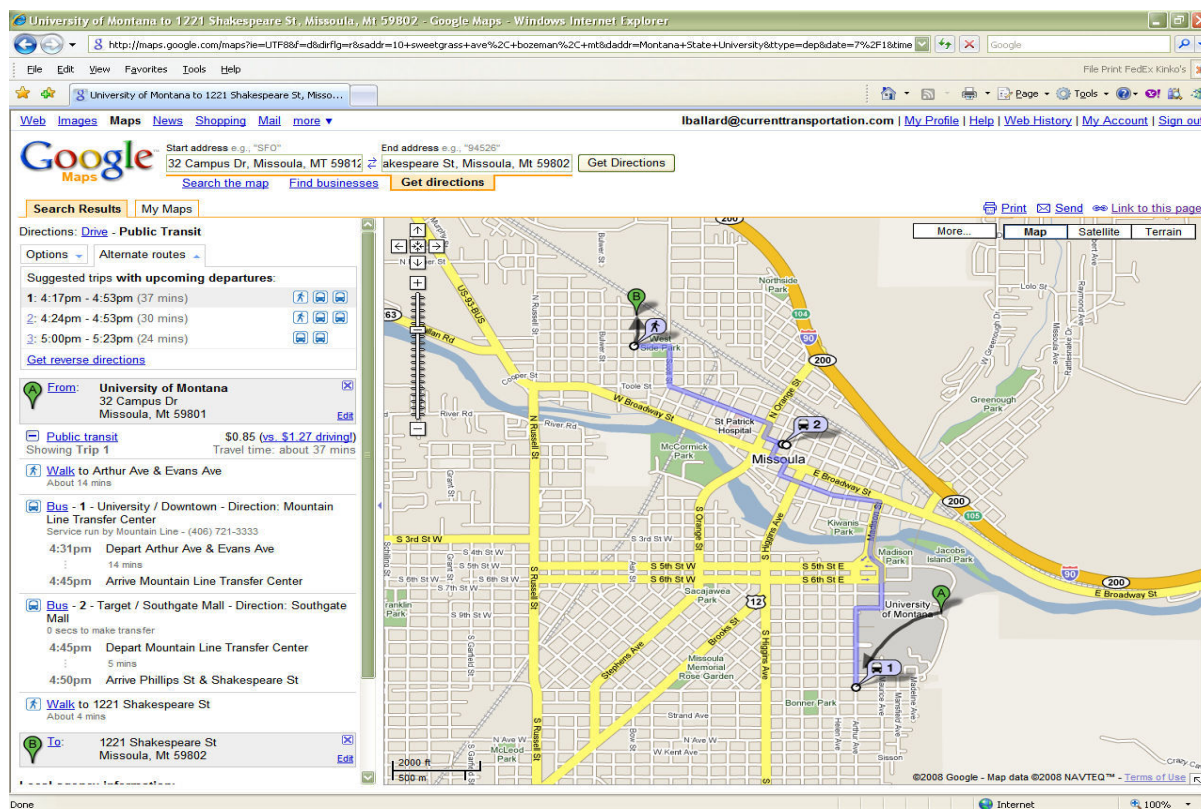
Stakeholders include both the organizations whose primary responsibility is transporting people and the organizations whose primary responsibility is providing care and support to people.

Trip Planning Via Google Transit

For the fixed routes common in our region's urban and large rural areas – Billings, Bozeman, Idaho Falls, Pocatello, and Jackson Hole – and the national parks - the potential rider wants to know:

- "How do I get from A to B"
- "How long will it take?"
- "When do I need to be at the bus stop or train station?"
- "How much will it cost?"




Google Transit offers a solution for this type of public transportation service. It works like Mapquest or Google Maps tailored to transit. The customer enters an origin, a destination, and a travel time, then the application provides an itinerary as shown below for Portland. Larger metropolitan areas have had web-based trip planners for years, but Google Transit makes this service affordable for smaller providers. The transit property provides the route information in the format required by Google. Then Google Transit provides trip planning at no cost to the transit property.








Directions: [Drive](#) - **Public Transit**

Options ▾ [Alternate routes](#) ▾


Suggested trips **with upcoming departures:**

1: 4:17pm - 4:53pm (37 mins)   


2: 4:24pm - 4:53pm (30 mins)   

3: 5:00pm - 5:23pm (24 mins)  


[Get reverse directions](#)


From: **University of Montana** 

32 Campus Dr
Missoula, Mt 59801 [Edit](#)

 **Public transit** \$0.85 (vs. \$1.27 driving!)


Showing Trip 1 Travel time: about 37 mins

 **Walk** to Arthur Ave & Evans Ave
About 14 mins

 **Bus - 1 - University / Downtown - Direction: Mountain Line Transfer Center**


Service run by Mountain Line - (406) 721-3333


4:31pm Depart Arthur Ave & Evans Ave
⋮ 14 mins
4:45pm Arrive Mountain Line Transfer Center

 **Bus - 2 - Target / Southgate Mall - Direction: Southgate Mall**

0 secs to make transfer

4:45pm Depart Mountain Line Transfer Center
⋮ 5 mins
4:50pm Arrive Phillips St & Shakespeare St

 **Walk** to 1221 Shakespeare St
About 4 mins

To: **1221 Shakespeare St** 

Missoula, Mt 59802 [Edit](#)

(expanded itinerary for legibility)

Google Transit currently works only for public, fixed route services. For our remaining services, a large portion of the available services in much of our region. Therefore, we will need something other than this tool to answer the question for the rest of the region:

- "Is it possible to get there?"
- "Which day of the week is best for this trip?"
- "Who can take me?"
- "Are there any carpooling options?"

As a first step to accommodate these services, the "Regional Transportation Brain" at minimum should include for all participating services:

- Name of the transportation service
- Contact Information
- Agency or Company Contact Person
- Address
- Phone Number
- Fax Number
- Email Address
- Website

- Type of service offered
- Description
- Schedules
- Stop locations
- Hours of Operation
- Cost
- ADA Accessibilitiy of Vehicles
- Ability to carry bicycles
- Coverage Area
- Last Record Update
- Expected Date of Next Update

We need to make it easier for the consumer to find a ride, leading to citizens having better access to their community resources and foster a more efficient use of transportation resources. This may also increase ridership; attract new users; and increase customer satisfaction.

Discussion Points

- What types of traveler information do you think residents (and transit users) in this part of Montana need?
- What role does this scenario play with bike and pedestrians?
- What barriers do you see to your organization participating?
- What is missing from this scenario?
- Overall, what information is most important?