

Introduction

Structured interviews were conducted as part of project initiation for the Jackson/Teton Integrated Transportation Plan. The list of interviewees was assembled by Town staff and was intended to include community leaders with a variety of viewpoints. During the course of the interviews, additional interviewees were suggested and these people were also interviewed.

All interviews were conducted by Jim Charlier over a period of time from January 28 through February 25. Eleven of the eighteen were conducted in person at Jackson Town Hall, with Stephanie Hix (Town staff) taking notes. The remaining interviews were over the telephone with Jim Charlier taking notes.

Persons interviewed included:

- Alyson Courtemanch, Jackson Hole Wildlife Foundation Board
- Jim Stanford, Town of Jackson Board
- Armond Acri, Save Historic Jackson Hole
- Rick Howe, Chamber of Commerce
- Alex Norton, County Long Range Planner
- Reed Armijo, former START board member
- Chris Finlay, Grand Teton National Park
- Mike Welch, Friends of Pathways
- Jack Koehler, Friends of Pathways
- Pete Jorgensen, Wyoming Legislature
- Sue Bibey, Teton Village Association
- Brad Mead, Teton County Landowner
- Craig Benjamin, Jackson Hole Community Alliance
- Timothy O'Donoghue, Riverwind Foundation
- Jan Brown, Fremont County, Idaho (Linx Project)
- Bill Resor, Snake River Ranch
- Ben Ellis, Teton County Board
- April Norton, Lohr Family Foundation

The interviews were organized around the following questions, developed jointly by the consultant and town staff:

General Topic: Chapter 7 Multimodal Transportation (Comprehensive Plan)

1. Based on your reading of this chapter, what seems most important to you in terms of implementation?
2. How would you describe “success” based on Chapter 7? How would we know 20 years from now that we had been successful in achieving this vision?



General Topic: Transportation Needs

1. How important is public transit to Jackson Hole? What is the most important public transit need?
2. Is the town walkable? Should it be? Where and why?
3. How important is bicycling to Jackson Hole? Why?
4. Is there a solution for traffic growth? What would it be?

General Topic: Priorities

1. Describe what Jackson Hole should be like at build out. What should the transportation system be like? How should people get around? What would be different than today?
2. For the short term (2017), what should the highest transportation priorities of the Town and County be?
3. What should the highest priorities be for 2025?

The following “word cloud” (<http://www.wordle.net/>) is based on the interview notes. This software gives greater prominence to words that appear more frequently in the source text – in this case the interview notes.



Interviewees were told that their comments would not be published for specific attribution to them as individuals, but rather that the themes, issues and opportunities would be consolidated for all the interviews and provided in a summary format. This summary is presented on the following pages. It is organized by major topics.

Wildlife



There is a heightened awareness of the importance of wildlife in Jackson Hole. The presence of ungulates (elk, moose, deer, bison, pronghorn), predators (mountain lions, bear, wolves), the birds (eagles, swans, etc.) and other species is seen as an important part of the character of the place. Healthy wildlife populations are also thought to be important to the viability of Jackson Hole as a tourism destination.

Interviewees saw a direct linkage between highway traffic volumes and the viability of wildlife populations. They also were interested in whether improved wildlife crossings such as WyDOT has installed elsewhere might be warranted and beneficial in Teton County. Moose-Wilson Road was frequently mentioned as an example of this issue, but the main park roads and other area corridors were also discussed. Some interviewees were concerned about the impact of pathway construction on wildlife corridors. The example of deer crossing West Broadway came up in several interviews. Finally, there was concern that the subject of wildlife is not specifically mentioned in Section 7 of the Comprehensive Plan.

Transit

These interviews revealed a near universal acceptance of public (and private) transit as essential to the region's future. Interviewees drew a connection between traffic volumes and transit service levels: transit is seen as a way to reduce or avoid traffic growth. A few interviews addressed the importance of transit as an amenity or service requirement for tourism – both winter and summer. Others emphasized the role of transit in enabling people to get to work in Jackson and at the Village.

Several interviewees thought the highest priority for transit service improvements should be fixed route, scheduled service in the town and between South Park subdivisions and town. Others wanted to see services designed for summer tourists and visitors, including service to and within Grand Teton National Park. Others doubted that service to or in the Park would work well. Several interviewees thought commuter transit over Teton Pass and to Star Valley should be improved. A couple of interviewees were interested in the Linx regional transit effort of the Western Greater Yellowstone Consortium, but others discounted it as a failed effort.

When asked about how to fund transit, interviewees generally felt that some sort of local dedicated funding for transit should be established. Sales taxes seemed to be the most favored source for transit revenues, but the specifics of how and when such a source might be established were generally vague. The lodging tax also was mentioned as a potential source of funding for transit operations. Most interviewees believe the public would be supportive of a proposal to provide dedicated funding for transit, although no one knew of any specific polling or surveys to support this conclusion.



A couple of interviewees felt transit should be operated as a fare-free service to increase ridership. Obviously this would increase both the ridership on START routes and the amount of tax revenue required. A couple of interviewees were concerned about the remaining needs of START for maintenance facilities once the current TIGER grant has been spent. The impression given was that only a portion of the ultimate facility needs have been met by the grant.

Land Use and Land Development Patterns

All of the interviewees were at least somewhat familiar with the Comprehensive Plan strategies to manage development patterns in character districts and several had been involved in development of the comprehensive plan update and were well-informed.

Some interviewees expressed skepticism about how much impact “complete neighborhoods” would have on traffic. They noted that much of the remaining privately-owned land in Jackson Hole is held by large landowners with little incentive to do anything other than large-lot, single-family projects. There seems to be good support for the character district vision and the idea of more functional neighborhoods, especially in South Park, but the support seems to be driven more by the perceived opportunity for higher quality of life and lower environmental impact of development than by the expected beneficial impact on traffic growth.

Controversial Street and Road Connections

Most of the interviews devoted significant time to a discussion of “missing link” road and street projects. Interviewees generally are hopeful that this transportation plan can resolve the controversy surrounding these projects. Key connections that people wanted to talk about are described below.

Tribal Trails Connector. The County holds an easement for this corridor, which would connect rural subdivisions along South Park Loop Road directly to WY 22 and would provide a more direct link between South Park and the West Bank. Generally, interviewees felt this is a needed project, but also generally believed that the County would not be able to build it due to opposition from nearby residents.

North Bridge. There was a considerable variety of viewpoints on the subject of a new east-west connecting roadway from north WY 191 across the Snake River to WY 390. Some interviewees think this project is essential and should be featured in the new ITP. Others felt it would be either unwise or impossible to build, or both, due to property acquisition hurdles, environmental issues and the likely cost of the project. Some interviewees felt that, rather than a new highway, a transit/pathway connection could be built that that could provide emergency service redundancy, but would not be open to general traffic circulation.



Spring Gulch Road. This is another corridor that some people envision as a potential bypass route around the town. A number of interviewees expressed concern about the impact that converting this gravel road to a highway would have on the unique character of the lands along this corridor.

East-Connector. A number of people reported that a new-alignment road across South Park (east-west) has been considered and discussed over the years. Interviewees either expressed doubts about the feasibility of that or saw it as something that would only occur in connection with a large development project.

Moose-Wilson Road. This corridor was in the newspapers at the time of the interviews. A debate had emerged about whether the road was within County jurisdiction. Most interviewees felt the Park Service would be the decision-maker about this road, but that it should be regarded for planning purposes as part of the local and regional road network and thus relevant to the ITP. Two issues appear to be subject to debate. The first is whether the Park should do something to restrict the amount of traffic through the corridor and if so how. The second is whether a low-traffic park road would be sufficient for bicycle use, or whether a separate parallel pathway is needed. None of the interviewees advocated “improving” the road itself to a paved, higher-speed design.

In-Town Links. Interviewees were interested in a number of “missing links” in the Town of Jackson. These included a realignment of the Maple Way – Snow King transition, a connection from Perry Street to Millward Avenue, and a realignment of Budge Drive.

Transportation Demand Management

There is general support for the idea that transportation demand management (TDM) should be part of the Integrated Transportation Plan. What this means is less clear, with some variation in what people mean by TDM.

Interviewees generally regard the Teton Village TDM program (required by the County) as a significant success. Use of the Stilson lot, transit ridership to the Village, growth in the Village without concurrent growth in traffic – these outcomes seem to be what people have in mind when they talk about TDM. That would seem to imply interest in a regulatory approach oriented to new development. Other elements of typical TDM programs – marketing, bus pass programs, special events, employer outreach, etc. – were not mentioned much by interviewees. When these were brought up, the reaction was generally good. A couple of interviewees suggested that a TDM program for visitors and tourists would be an important step to take. But an unanswered question was: who would implement a TDM program?



Walkability of Town

There is general agreement that the Town of Jackson is not very walkable. Interviewees felt that the town core around the square is a good pedestrian environment, but the rest of the town is not. People are particularly concerned about West Jackson, where apparently there are few sidewalks and large blocks.

The recent experience with Redmond Street came up in several of the interviews. Most interviewees felt the result of the project was good, but thought that implementation had not gone well and that neighborhood opposition was increased by the approach to project delivery. Several interviewees talked about South Cache and the need for a pedestrian corridor there. Interviewees generally felt the Town needs a prioritized list of pedestrian improvements. Some mentioned a proposal to turn two of the Town Square blocks (E. Deloney Ave. and Center Street) into more pedestrian-oriented streets. It was acknowledged that there is business community resistance to this idea.

Viability of Jackson Hole as a Tourist Destination

A number of interviewees were concerned that visitorship has stopped growing in Jackson Hole. Although regional traffic has been growing and there has been growth in National Park visitorship, the recession and recovery cycle has obscured the trends. Several people felt that Jackson Hole is losing ground as a destination. There is some difference of opinion about whether this is occurring and if so what should be done about it. Traffic congestion is seen as a negative factor, although different interviewees had different ideas about whether anything could be done about that. There is interest in a “sustainability branding” concept for Jackson Hole – similar to the Canary Initiative in Aspen.

Public Involvement

Interviewees were in agreement that a strong, transparent public process will be essential to development of a successful Integrated Transportation Plan. However, there is substantial meeting fatigue and frustration with the number of meetings and events that people are asked to attend. There are a variety of opinions about why the comprehensive plan update took so long to complete, but a common theme appears to be the need to proactively manage public understanding and expectations.

This project – as currently scoped and budgeted – provides for two major public events (June and October) in addition to two more JIM (joint town and county board) meetings. Interviewees were generally positive about the idea of using a webinar format as a way to provide increased transparency and information availability without holding too many meetings.



Bicycling and Pathways

Support for bicycle facilities in Jackson Hole was universal among these interviewees. People generally feel bicycling is valuable for its quality of life benefits and for enhancing the appeal of Jackson Hole for low-impact tourism. People generally like and use the pathway network, but don't think it plays a major role in alleviating traffic. There is also a general sense of "what's next" in terms of pathway development. A couple of interviewees opined that the program seems to have momentum that goes beyond needs. There is also some concern about how coordinated the pathways and transit programs are.

Data and Forecasts

The most common theme in these interviews was the perceived need for better data and information about trends and transportation interrelationships. Nearly every interviewee expressed desire for "indicators" or "metrics" to clarify choices. Interviewees felt that if better data were available it would bolster their positions on projects and other issues, although there were a range of opinions about what the right choices would be for those projects and issues. Information gaps include project cost information, travel and traffic forecasts, traffic congestion (especially relative to the LOS D goal in the comprehensive plan), and potential future transit ridership.

Coordination with WyDOT

Another common theme emerging from the interviews was a shared perception that improved coordination with Wyoming Department of Transportation (WyDOT) is essential. Interviewees advised that meeting with WyDOT early and keeping them involved in the process would be important to the success of the ITP.

Other Topics

A number of interviewees stressed that they want this plan to be "innovative." When pressed, they generally meant that ideas should not be discounted just because they might be unprecedented, or radical, or expensive.

A couple of interviewees were concerned about the lack of public awareness of the comprehensive plan. It was noted that most of the new Town Board members were not involved in developing the plan. There was also concern about a "schism" between the Town and County, which might prevent effective action on transportation initiatives.

There is general support and enthusiasm for local and regional efforts to increase availability of alternative motor vehicle fuels and power sources.

Finally, there is at least some interest in possible future rail transit connections between Town and Teton Village.

