

MERIDIAN RAIL-WITH-TRAIL ACTION PLAN

FINAL PLAN

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Introduction

The City of Meridian is interested in identifying any potential short- and long-term opportunities for locating a trail within the Treasure Valley corridor, without negatively impacting any current or potential future uses.

The city understands that there are several entities with active uses and interests in the corridor. Those entities include:



Idaho Northern train near Black Cat Rd

- Union Pacific Railroad Company is the current owner of the right-of-way, but is leasing the rail line to the Idaho Northern and Pacific Railroad Company and has no active uses within the corridor at this time.
- Idaho Northern and Pacific Railroad Company is currently using this rail line for the transportation and delivery of commercial freight under an operational lease from Union Pacific.
- Nampa Meridian Irrigation District has nearly 3 miles of lateral lines that parallel the railroad corridor, with some of the laterals located within the railroad right-of-way.
- COMPASS has identified the Treasure Valley corridor as a potential bus rapid transit (BRT) and/or high capacity rail transit corridor in several recent studies; and is currently studying the corridor as part of the Treasure Valley High Capacity Transit Study.
- The City of Meridian has identified the corridor as a potential trail corridor in their recent Pathways Master Plan. The City sees the corridor as a potentially strong non-motorized connection between Nampa, Meridian, and Boise that will serve both commuter and recreational needs in the region.

Opportunities & Constraints

Population Growth

The population of Meridian has increased significantly over the past 15 years. The City of Meridian is the fastest growing city in the fastest growing county in Idaho since 1994. The population nearly tripled between 1990 and 2000 and is likely to double again from 2000 to 2010.

Table 1 Population Growth: Meridian and Ada County 1990-2007

Population	1990	2000	2007 (est)
Meridian	9,596	34,919	64,642
Ada County	205,775	300,904	373,406

This explosive growth has started to stress the existing roadway system, resulting in increased traffic and congestion and hazardous conditions for bicyclists and pedestrians, particularly children. This is an excellent opportunity to add to Meridian’s growing pathway network.

Demographics

In addition to the recreational benefits of a pathway, there are two groups of people who benefit enormously from the transportation opportunities a pathway would provide: children and the elderly, and those without vehicles who depend on public forms of transportation. Because children and many elderly people cannot drive, they are largely dependent on themselves and others to transport them. In 2000, nearly thirty percent (27.3%) of the population of Meridian consisted of children under the age of 17, with 11% of those being under the age of 5. An additional 6.4% of the population was people over the age of 65. An opportunity exists to meet the recreational and transportation needs of a large portion of the population who get around on foot, bicycle, motorized and non-motorized mobility device, and skateboard with a comprehensive pathway system.

Trail Access

There are numerous locations along this potential trail corridor for easy access within Meridian. Each street crossing represents an opportunity for access including, from west to east: McDermott Rd, Black Cat Rd, Ten Mile Rd, Linder Rd, Meridian Rd, Main St, 3rd St, Locust Grove and Eagle Rd. In addition to the street crossings, access exists to the corridor at the four irrigation district waterways that cross the railroad corridor.



Locust Road crossing

Access along those routes would have to be negotiated with the Irrigation District. Additional access also currently exists in several of the neighborhoods that back up to the corridor where residents have located gates from their yards directly to the corridor.

Depending on which side of the railroad tracks the trail was located, connections could also be made at the southern ends of West 4th Street, West 3rd Street, West 2nd Street, West 1st Street, East 4th Street, Nola Road; and the northern ends of Nola Road, and East 2nd.

A paved, dedicated access to the corridor would also provide emergency responders (fire, police, EMT) with quicker, more direct routes to deal with emergencies of all types along and near the corridor.

Treasure Valley Corridor

The location of corridor specific opportunities and constraints are highlighted on the series of maps found in Appendix A.

The major opportunity with the railroad corridor lies in the wide (~200 feet, on average) right-of-way. This amount of right-of-way physically provides for the continued use of the corridor as a commercial/freight line, while adding some type of high-capacity transit and a regional trail.

The major physical constraints fall into one of 4 categories:

- Agricultural
- Physical
- Environmental
- Roadway crossings

Agricultural constraints

The agricultural constraints identified fall into one of two categories: (a) field operations and (b) canal operations.

- (a) Field operations include two major constraints – plantings that are encroaching into the railroad right-of-way, and cropdusting. The planting encroachments occur primarily west of Ten Mile Road, where they approach within 22 feet of the track centerline in some locations. These encroachments are easily identified and dealt with when the need arises. Cropdusting occurs at specific times during the planting and harvesting season, and may have adverse effects on trail operations



Cropduster spraying fields

depending on prevailing winds, method of spraying, and materials being sprayed on the crops.

- (b) Canal operations includes both the lateral lines that Nampa Meridian owns that parallel the corridor, as well the laterals and natural water features that cross the railroad corridor in a north-south direction. In the first case, appropriate safety measures (as identified within the *Meridian Pathways Master Plan*) would have to be taken to ensure physical separation between the any trail users and the irrigation canal. In the second case, small bridges across the water feature would be required in certain locations to ensure a continuous trail.

Physical constraints

The physical constraints identified refer primarily to two different types of physical structures: (a) fences that have been erected along (assumed) lease lines that the property owner has with Union Pacific that narrow the effective use of the corridor; and (b) railroad spur lines serving commercial interests along the corridor.

Both the fences and spur lines are located primarily within the downtown core, directly east of Meridian Road.



Fence line directly adjacent to spur track

Environmental constraints

Environmental constraints refer to those locations where potential wetlands exist. These locations have been identified on the maps in Appendix A. In addition to the wetlands, several large willow trees are located along the corridor, and would require additional measures to accommodate them with any trail location.



Potential wetlands west of Black Cat, south of tracks

Roadway Crossings

There are 6 major roadway crossings and 1 minor roadway crossing within the study area, as summarized in Table 2 below. Several of the crossings would work just fine the way they are now, but the crossings within downtown – Meridian and Main – and the Eagle Road crossing would require immediate enhanced crossing treatments for any trail to function effectively. Other crossings might eventually need additional treatments as the roadway is widened from the current cross-section as part of ACHD’s Capital Improvement Plan.

Trail/Roadway Crossing Analysis

Table 2. Summary of Roadway Crossings and Treatments

Roadway	Roadway Configuration	Current Traffic Controls @ Railroad tracks	Current Traffic Volumes	Future Roadway Configuration	Future Recommended Traffic Controls for Trail
Eagle Rd	4 travel lanes, center turn lane	Overhead warning signs, several lights for when train present	52,000	-	Signal
Locust Grove	4 travel lanes, center turn lane and median	Overhead warning signs, lights, drop arm for when train present	13,250	-	Striped crosswalk, improved median refuge
3rd St E	2 travel lanes	Stop, warning sign	3,200	-	Crosswalk
Main St	2 travel lanes, center turn lane	Overhead warning signs, lights, drop arm for when train present	22,600	Partial couplet with Meridian up to 5 lanes	Signal
Meridian Rd	2 travel lanes	Overhead warning signs, lights, drop arm for when train present	16,000	Partial couplet with Main up to 5 lanes	Signal
Linder Rd	4 travel lanes with two-way center turn lane and median	Overhead warning signs, lights, drop arm for when train present	11,200	5 lanes	Striped crosswalk, improved median refuge
Ten Mile Rd	2 travel lanes	Warning signs, lights for when train present	10,200	5 lanes	Crosswalk with median for 2-stage crossing
Black Cat Rd	2 travel lanes	Stop, warning sign	4,400	5 lanes	Crosswalk with median for 2-stage crossing

Stakeholder Coordination

At the beginning of this process, several stakeholders were identified as being highly important to any discussions about the future of the Treasure Valley corridor. The stakeholders interviewed were:

- Charles Trainor, Director of Planning, COMPASS
- Gregg Larsen, Senior Manager, Real Estate Management, Union Pacific

- Jim Larson, Land Leases / Property Management – Idaho, Union Pacific
- Linda Iverson, Assistant General Manager, Idaho Northern
- Justin Lucas & Shawn Martin, ACHD
- Valley Regional Transit

The key points from each conversation are highlighted below, and summaries are provided in Appendix B.

COMPASS

- Looking at options for high capacity transit in several corridors through Meridian, one corridor is the railroad corridor. Conducting a pre-Alternatives Analysis currently, will be conducting full Alternatives Analysis starting in 2010 for transit modal options.
- Any pathway would be complementary to the transit system and provide an additional route to transit stations
- Union Pacific probably willing seller of the full Boise cut-off track system (~ 44 miles)

Union Pacific

- Would be interested in selling the entire corridor, but is not interested in selling a portion of the corridor.
- While UP has an operational lease with Idaho Northern, UP is still the underlying land owner and control all operations within the corridor.
- All licenses are for a single specific use, so for example, the irrigation district has a license to service and operate the ditch, but would not have the right to provide access for a trail.
- UP is not inclined at this time to provide access for a trail along the corridor

Idaho Northern

- Has an operational lease with Union Pacific that extends eight (8) feet from centerline of rail.
- Runs one train per week currently, ~ 10:00 am eastbound, 3:00 pm westbound.
- Idaho Northern does have need for some maintenance vehicle access to corridor.
- Meridian Fire Department has expressed an interest to Idaho Northern in having a paved access road along the corridor to provide enhanced access for fire prevention.

Ada County Highway District

- McDermott is likely to become a limited-access expressway, railroad will require undercrossing of new facility, trail could use as well.
- Eagle Road through the railroad crossing owned by ITD.
- Most corridors not signal coordinated.

Valley Regional Transit

- All transit options are still under consideration for the corridor – includes heavy commuter rail, bus rapid transit, and light rail transit.

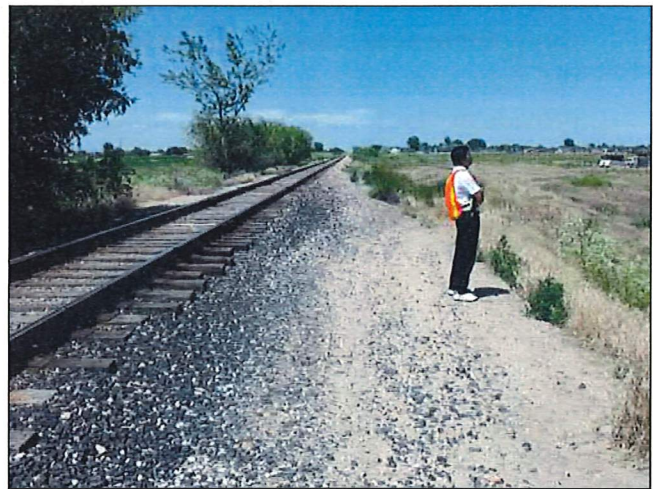
Fatal Flaws Analysis

The fatal flaws analysis can be divided into two main categories – physical and jurisdictional.

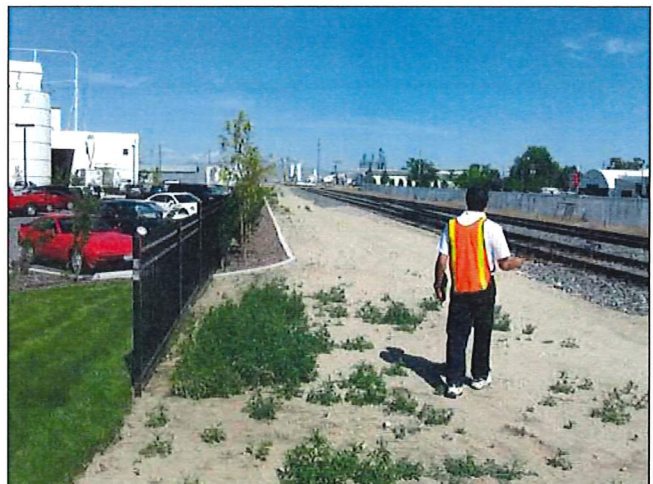
Physical Fatal Flaws

There are no overwhelming physical fatal flaws that can be identified at this stage of the project. There are specific issues and locations that will require additional treatments and further study that may be unable to be resolved in the short-term given the existing uses of the corridor. These are:

- ~ 700 feet west of Ten Mile Road – a very narrow section of the railroad where it crosses a north-south lateral. The maintenance road is directly adjacent to the railroad tracks within the operational lease of Idaho Northern. There is approximately 19’5” from the centerline of the track to the edge of the canal.
- Meridian City Hall – this is one of the tightest locations in the corridor, with only 67’5” between fences at this location. There is 28’3” between the rail centerline and the City Hall fence.

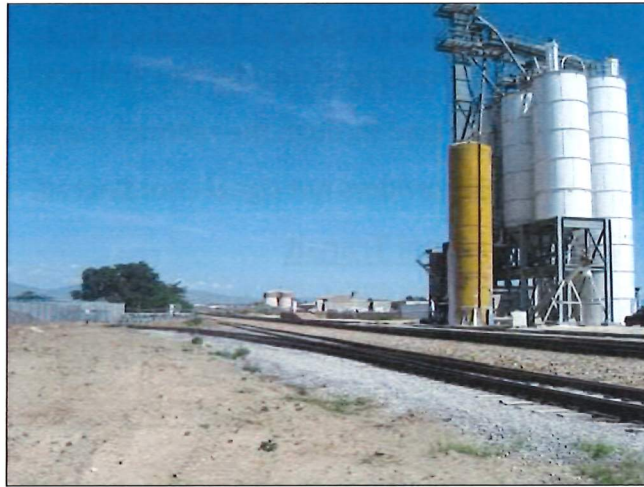


Vegetation visible on south side of tracks, looking at 19’5” space



Narrow setback @ Meridian City Hall

- East of Main Street – This is the most difficult section of the entire corridor, due to the number and location of spur lines coming off the main line and serving the adjacent businesses, as well as licensed encroachments into the corridor which narrow the effective use of the corridor considerably.
- Eagle Road crossing.



Existing commercial uses, including the concrete plant, and their related spur tracks make trail development more difficult

Jurisdictional Fatal Flaws

In working with the various stakeholders, one jurisdictional fatal flaw was identified at this point in time. Union Pacific railroad, as the sole property owner of the corridor, has the right to provide or deny access to any user group, and Union Pacific is not inclined to provide access for a trail at this time.

Next Steps

There are a number of actions that the City of Meridian can take now to move the idea of a rail-with-trail forward to position the City for a time when the rail corridor is available for trail development.

Action Items

- Do legal research – perhaps by a city attorney - to gain a full understanding of the licenses held in the corridor.
- Encourage/support the formation of a Treasure Valley Trails Advocacy Group to move the idea forward independently of the City (see this website for an example in the Portland-area: <http://npgreenway.org/index.aspx>)
- Organize an inter-governmental coalition of elected officials and staff from Caldwell, Nampa, Meridian, and Boise to initiate and continue the conversation of a regional trail connection along the rail corridor.
- Ensure that the Treasure Valley Rail-with-Trail appears in all relevant local and regional adopted plans. Few infrastructure projects are realized without an adopted plan. Even more rare is the implementation of a multi-city/multi-modal transportation initiative involving many agencies and stakeholders without memoranda of understanding and adopted local and regional plans.
- Work with COMPASS on the High Capacity Transit Study to ensure that if and when the railroad corridor is selected for further study, any study includes a trail component.
- Work with Idaho Northern, the Meridian Fire Department, Meridian Police, and possibly the Nampa Meridian Irrigation District to explore the option of a multi-modal accessway that would serve: trail users, emergency response vehicles, rail maintenance vehicles, and irrigation maintenance vehicles. This accessway would also serve as a more permanent fire break, providing additional safety to residents along the corridor.
- Work with ACHD to identify any potential road/railroad crossings that might be available for closure in exchange for trail rights along a portion of the corridor.
- Conduct a comprehensive feasibility study of the corridor to engage all stakeholders. Ideally, the study would include team members with extensive experience working with/for Union Pacific on similar projects.