Section 1

Project Background
Introduction

The Northwest Foothills Transportation Study outlines the vision of the future transportation system in the Ada foothills north of the City of Eagle. The study area boundary is from State Highway 16 to the west to State Highway 55 to the east and from Beacon Light Road to the south to the Gem County line to the north. Traffic and regional impact analysis for the study extended beyond the identified boundaries to gain a better understanding of region-wide influences.

This study is the product of a comprehensive land use and transportation integration study involving residents, public agencies, developers, and land owners. It gives an overview of the combined vision for the foothills based on a cooperative process that occurred between August of 2008 and December of 2008.

The fundamental purpose of the Northwest Foothills Transportation Study is to provide a comprehensive vision for the transportation system that will accommodate future development and meet the needs of present and future residents of this area. The vision for this area should serve the diverse land uses planned, while meeting the desires for local residents to continue utilizing the area for its recreational and open space qualities. This study will serve as a guide to delineate the system of roads based on the desires of the local communities and assess the anticipated infrastructure that will be needed to accommodate future growth.
Purpose of the Northwest Foothills Study

In response to development proposals for planned communities (PC’s) in the Northwest foothills, the Ada County Highway District, in coordination with the City of Eagle, Ada County, and regional agencies, initiated a study to assess the impacts and needs of the future transportation system. This plan will function as a policy guide for developing and improving the transportation system as development occurs.

Important steps in the Northwest Foothills Transportation Study were:

- Review of approved land use plans
- Identify environmental conditions and sensitive areas
- Gather input during Public Involvement Open House Meetings
- Coordinate with land use and transportation agencies
- Identify transportation system alternatives and evaluate their impacts
- Determine a preferred transportation system alternative
- Conduct detailed traffic analysis
- Identify a preliminary extraordinary impact fee boundary

It is equally important to understand what this study will not do. The Northwest Foothills Transportation Study does not:

- Justify land use plans
- Endorse future development
- Identify engineered roadway alignments
- Identify the local collector road network

Approximately 85% of the land in the study area is privately-owned. This characteristic combined with unique recreation amenities are the driving force for development opportunity and changes in the needs of the regional infrastructure.

By studying the Northwest Foothills now, the roadway network can be planned before development occurs. This provides a unique opportunity to plan the area in a way that addresses local and regional needs and desires for the future.
Study Process

The study process for the Northwest Foothills Transportation Plan involved important steps to successfully execute the plan. A timeline of the study process was created to show the important steps that occurred.

Project Timeline for the Northwest Foothills Transportation Study
Other Studies Conducted in the Northwest Foothills Area

The studies that have been conducted or are being conducted in the Northwest Foothills study area are:

- The City of Eagle Comprehensive Plan (Adopted)
- Ada County Comprehensive Plan (Adopted)
- The Ada County North Foothills Sub-Area Plan (Not adopted by Ada County)
- Developer funded, State Highway 55 Consortium Study (Phase I finished, Phase II underway, Phase III to be conducted)

The City of Eagle Comprehensive Plan was adopted September 27, 2007 under resolution No. 07-36. The City of Eagle’s Comprehensive Plan provided annexation provisions for property north of Eagle in the foothills area. Property that did not have an annexation path to the City of Eagle could still develop by application through Ada County Development Services. Consequently, the Ada County North Foothills Sub-Area Plan was produced by Ada County in the Summer of 2006 in response to future growth in the Northwest Foothills.

Eagle’s Comprehensive Plan identified future projected development densities for the Northwest Foothills area, as well as future transportation, design, natural resource, public services, and infrastructure guidelines to accommodate growth in the City of Eagle. The development density guidelines identified in the City of Eagle Comprehensive Plan function as the groundwork for the traffic projections and needs identified in the Northwest Foothills Transportation Study. The transportation network identified in the Eagle Comprehensive Plan also provided the initial road network structure that was utilized for this study.

Subsequent studies like the State Highway 55 (SH 55) Consortium study, funded by developers and property owners began projecting future traffic volumes and assessing potential impacts in the study area. The SH 55 Consortium study utilized the transportation network identified in the City of Eagle Comprehensive Plan. The primary goal of the SH 55 Consortium study is to create a plan for identifying the allocation of funding for future transportation improvements as well as a planning-level evaluation of development impacts on the State Highway system and the local roadway system.

The Corridor Preservation Studies of US 20/26 and SH 44 conducted by COMPASS and ITD will identify right-of-way needs, lane configurations (6 lane anticipated recommendation), and environmental assessments for each corridor. These studies as well as the High Volume Intersection Study conducted by COMPASS were considered in the Northwest Foothills Transportation Study.

The Northwest Foothills Transportation Study built upon completed and ongoing studies to coordinate and employ pre-existing efforts. The approach to the Northwest Foothills Transportation Plan was to initiate the study when adequate background data was available for a thorough evaluation while ensuring duplication of efforts was minimized.
Agencies Involved in the Study

Coordination between agencies with a stake in the outcome of this study was crucial to the success of the Final Plan. Key agencies and stakeholders involved in the development of this plan include:

- Ada County Highway District (ACHD)
- City of Eagle
- Ada County
- City of Star
- City of Boise
- Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho (COMPASS)
- The Idaho Transportation Department (ITD)
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- Idaho Department of Lands (IDL)
- Idaho Fish & Game (IDFG)
- Emergency service providers

A project team was assembled that included representatives from many of these agencies to make collaborative decisions and provide valuable input into the project as it evolved. The project team met monthly throughout the duration of the Northwest Foothills Transportation study. In many cases, important decisions for the project were not made until the project team reviewed the methodology and provided understanding or support from their specific agency perspective. This helped to create a truly multi-jurisdictional plan that required acceptance from agencies that could be influenced by the outcome.

Additional input into the final plan was provided by property owners, developers, and area residents. A detailed assessment of the public involvement plan including stakeholder interviews is covered in Section 2, Public Involvement.