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Jim Hansen, President
Ada County Highway District
3775 Adams Street
Garden City, ID 83714

Dear President Hansen,

I want to convey my thanks to the commission members and your staff for your ongoing work to address the transportation goals and needs of such a wide variety of constituents across the county.

At a joint meeting in 2009, ACHD asked the City of Boise to articulate the city's vision for transportation as it relates to our Comprehensive Plan. The result was the Transportation Action Plan that our staff has been working on over the past year with a broad cross-section of ACHD employees, including the director and several deputy directors.

While we strongly support public engagement, the City of Boise has concerns regarding ACHD's approach for conducting a survey of public opinion on road, bike and pedestrian priorities in Boise. We believe these plans, which have not been part of the discussions at the ongoing interagency work sessions conducted between our staffs over the past year, could upset the balance of interests that we are just beginning to see in our planning processes. We worry that this proposed approach could yield results contrary to the intent of ACHD's Transportation & Land Use Integration Plan, which has a specified goal of creating "a roadway network that balances the needs of all users – motorists, pedestrians, cyclists, transit and people with disabilities – with streets that complement the build environment."

Of course, we place great value on the role of public opinion data in the policy making process – in fact, the City of Boise utilizes regular citizen surveys to inform budget and policy priorities. However, we understand that such data has limitations as an effective public policy tool. As a result, we worry about basing transportation policy decisions that could impact generations of Boiseans on a hurriedly created survey that ignores the perspectives of ACHD's varied constituencies and may not be as thoughtfully crafted as it could be.

We understand that ACHD is a county-wide agency. But, it would be unfair for City of Boise residents to be subject to policies developed as a result of the opinions of someone who isn't a resident of our city. To be effective, such a survey must be conducted in a way that takes each municipality's planning priorities into account.

Boise's prioritization of more dense, mixed-use land development, with the accompanying need for accommodating pedestrians, bicycles and public transportation, is partly the result

of its place as a mature, central city with a large proportion of built-out roadways. These priorities also reflect the values and wishes of our constituents. Residents of other cities in the region may support their municipalities' continued pursuit of lower development densities and a greater emphasis on vehicular travel. Similarly, we believe the majority of Boise's residents prefer the strategic vision charted by their elected city officials in Blueprint Boise, our city's comprehensive plan. We think our residents would be ill-served by a blanket county-wide survey that does not take public perspectives of the various geographies into account.

Additionally, the City of Boise's transportation priorities are a direct outgrowth of our effort to create a holistic approach to planning that takes into account land use, economic development, density, place making, and any number of other planning best practices. Accurately gauging public opinion about such complex and nuanced outcomes would be very difficult, if not impossible, through the proposed survey. For example, one draft survey question asked respondents about the possibility of congestion impacts from redesigning Orchard Street to accommodate a turn-lane, bike lane and on-street parking – without any mention of the safety, better service for a diversity of users, economic development and other potential benefits for the surrounding neighborhoods and businesses. This singular focus on automobile-based transportation ignores everything we know about urban planning best practices – and is a perfect example of the limitation of these types of surveys.

To provide just a bit more context on our perspective, we recently conducted an exhaustive audit, called Boise Competes, to chart our city's Boise's economic development strengths and weaknesses. As part of this process, we conducted focus groups Boise businesses, including their human resources professionals responsible for employee recruitment and some of their new employees who recently moved to Boise. In these interviews, these businesses and their employees voiced the need for a deeper diversification of transportation choices beyond the automobile again and again.

This is not a surprising sentiment. Cities large and small around the world are diversifying their traditional streets to more fully utilize the public asset and to offer citizens greater transportation choices, whether their goal is to address air quality, economic development, sky-rocketing obesity rates, changing demographic preferences or quality of life. We believe it is essential that any tools used to inform ACHD's transportation planning process must take these trending best-practices into account.

Again, the City of Boise is very pleased with the cooperative relationship between our two agencies. However, we ask that ACHD not move forward with the proposed public opinion survey because it could be detrimental to our recent progress on the integration of transportation and strategic city planning. Instead, we ask ACHD to complete the current public outreach effort involving bicycle lanes on Capitol Boulevard. If ACHD then determines further public input is needed, we recommend a joint meeting between ACHD and the City of Boise to explore more effective options for that engagement.

Thank you for your willingness to hear our perspective on this very important matter.

Sincerely,



David H. Bieter
Mayor