

Purpose and Need Statement

Streetcar Feasibility Study

City of West Sacramento



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1. Introduction

This Purpose and Need Statement is a description of the goals and intended benefits of a proposed streetcar line linking downtowns of West Sacramento, the riverfront, and Sacramento. This statement provides the essential basis for the project. The Purpose and Need Statement is built upon an assessment of existing conditions, regional and local policies and development plans, findings from previous studies and public input. The feasibility study develops information on the project in sufficient detail so that elected officials, public agencies, citizen groups, and other stakeholders can make informed decisions on the most appropriate transit investment, particularly in terms of technology, alignment, and operating plans.

The Purpose and Need Statement serves as a guide for project activities and as a resource for ongoing public involvement during the study. Following completion of the study, the Purpose and Need Statement can be used by local implementing agencies and project staff as the foundation for more detailed planning, environmental documentation and engineering design.

1.1 The Study Process

West Sacramento, Sacramento, the Yolo County Transportation District (YCTD) and the Sacramento Regional Transit District (RT) have entered into a cooperative agreement to plan and design a streetcar line linking the two downtowns. The project is in two phases: Phase 1 is a Feasibility Study, and Phase 2 is Preliminary Engineering. The four cooperating agencies have designated the City of West Sacramento as the overall Project Manager for fast-track development and implementation. The agencies have formed a Policy Steering Committee and a Technical Advisory Committee to guide the project, along with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) to participate as ex-officio members.

Phase 1 is a feasibility study that includes public outreach, analysis of critical physical factors, preliminary planning and evaluation of alternative alignments and technologies, environmental screening, an organizational approach, and a finance plan.

At the completion of Phase 1, the four cooperating agencies will make a determination of whether a streetcar investment is feasible. If the decision is to advance the project, a preferred alternative will be designated identifying an alignment, the technology, stations, a service plan, and a finance plan. Phase 2 encompasses completion of more detailed engineering, environmental review and financing plans.

1.2 Background Information

Streetcars have been an important part of transportation history in Sacramento and West Sacramento. Until 1941, a previous streetcar line linked the two cities across the Tower Bridge. A historic map of the Sacramento Streetcar is presented in Figure 1. Since then, several transit planning studies have examined renewing the rail link between the two cities. In 1992, a rail transit line extension to West Sacramento was proposed in a regional transit systems planning study. That concept was incorporated in local plans and in the Metropolitan Transportation Plan, which identifies a light rail transit line connecting Sacramento and West Sacramento.



Figure 1 Historic Sacramento Streetcar Map

The concept of reintroducing a streetcar line to the region has gained momentum over the past few years in consideration of lower costs, shorter planning and project development time requirements, the adoption and implementation of redevelopment plans by both cities, and prospects for local funding. The Sacramento Regional Transit District completed background studies and sponsored two major public meetings to explore the idea.

West Sacramento, Sacramento, the Yolo County Transportation District (YCTD) and the Sacramento Regional Transit District (RT) are now building upon this increased local interest, and they have initiated the Downtown/Riverfront Streetcar Feasibility Study. These local agencies are examining the potential of streetcar transit to serve as a local urban circulator, to support and enhance development and redevelopment opportunities within the corridor, and to complement and integrate with the existing and planned regional transportation systems.

Recent and ongoing development projects in West Sacramento, along the riverfront, and in downtown Sacramento have generated new commercial space, additional residential units, and energized activity centers within the district. This new development increases the need for attractive mobility options.

The Cities of West Sacramento and Sacramento have other important related projects that are impacting development and the transportation system. These include the Riverfront Master Plan, the Sacramento Valley Station/Railyards, the Triangle Plan, Bridging I-5, and the Docks project. Consideration of a streetcar transit investment must be coordinated with planning for these other related projects.

2. Planning Context

Major transit capital projects, as a result of increased mobility and infrastructure investment, provide an effective impetus for community and economic development as well as a much needed transportation choice. Successful transit investments are “*place-makers*” at least as much as they are “*people-movers*”. That is, these investments can have a powerful effect on the form, character and intensity of development. This has been demonstrated as especially true of streetcar transit investments as they have been implemented recently in other U.S. cities.

Therefore, the policy basis for streetcar should be in the “*place-focused*” land use and development plans in effect at the regional, local, and community level.

2.1 City of West Sacramento General Plan and Strategic Plan

The City of West Sacramento General Plan, June 2000, has laid the groundwork for an integration of land use and community development with strategic transportation planning and transit investments. The proposed streetcar project linking the cities of West Sacramento and Sacramento and the riverfront is consistent with and supportive of the stated goals and policies in the General Plan. Some key examples include:

Land Use

Goal: To provide for orderly, well-planned, and balanced growth consistent with the limits imposed by the city's infrastructure and the city's ability to assimilate new growth.

Transportation and Circulation

Goal: To create and maintain a roadway network which will ensure the safe and efficient movement of people and goods throughout the city.

- Land uses which generate high traffic volumes shall be located near major transportation corridors and public transit facilities to minimize vehicle use, congestion, and delay.

Goal: To promote and maintain public and private transit systems that are responsive to the needs of all West Sacramento residents.

- Special consideration shall be given to proposed land uses adjacent to transit routes to ensure compatible and supportive relationships.

Urban Structure and Design

Goal: To promote the development of a cohesive and aesthetically-pleasing urban structure for West Sacramento.

- The City shall use the circulation system and the pedestrian and bicycle pathway system as important structural elements to link and define neighborhoods and districts in West Sacramento.
- The City shall establish the enhancement of the riverfront along the Sacramento River as a major priority.
- The City shall promote the development of a well-defined Central Business District as the center of West Sacramento's civic and cultural life and as the primary pedestrian-oriented commercial center in the city.

Goal: To preserve existing community character and fabric and promote the development of neighborhoods and districts that emphasizes pedestrian convenience.

- The visual impact of automobiles should be minimized in all new development and in the Central Business District.
- New commercial and office development should promote pedestrian convenience over parking considerations, especially in the Central Business District.

Goal: To maintain and enhance the quality of the city's landscape and streetscape.

Goal: To create a distinctive Central Business District which serves as the City's most important civic and pedestrian-oriented commercial area.

Goal: To establish the Triangle Area, as a regional, high-density, waterfront-oriented urban core of the City.

The goals and policies from the General Plan are emphasized in the *City of West Sacramento Strategic Plan, January 2006*. Specifically the Strategic Plan:

- Identifies “West Capitol Avenue: Developing as Our Community’s Downtown” and “Riverfront Alive” as two of the six primary goals for the City.
- “Development as a Transit Hub and Corridor” is a key objective under the West Capital Avenue goal
- “Ease of mobility to/within/from Riverfront” and “Quality Mixed Use Development with People Living along the River” are identified as key objectives for the Riverfront Alive goal.
- A Streetcar Feasibility Study is identified as one of six high priority 2006 Action Items in the Strategic Plan to achieve the City’s goals and objectives.

2.2 City of Sacramento General Plan and Redevelopment Plan

The City of Sacramento General Plan Update, November 2005, emphasizes integrated land use and transit planning and investment. The proposed streetcar project is consistent with and supportive of the stated goals and policies in the General Plan. Some key examples include:

Vision and Guiding Principles

Every neighborhood will be a desirable place to live because of its walkable streets, extensive tree canopy, range of housing choices, mixed use neighborhood centers, great schools, parks and recreation facilities, and easy access to Downtown and jobs.

Sacramento will be linked to the rest of the region by an extensive, efficient and safe network of roadways, bridges, mass transit, bikeways, pedestrian trails, and sidewalks. It will be linked to the rest of California and the world by an international airport, conventional and high-speed passenger rail, interstate highways, and high-speed communication systems.

Land Use: Focus higher density developments and mixed-use projects in areas adjacent to transit stations, along transit corridors and commercial corridors, near job centers, and in strategic opportunity areas throughout the city.

- Use the existing assets of infrastructure and public facilities to increase infill and re-use, while maintaining important qualities of community character.
- Promote livable and well-designed neighborhoods that are walkable and complete, with a mix of uses and services to support improved health and the needs of families, youth, seniors, and a growing population.

Community Design

- Create vibrant public places that serve as gathering places, town centers, and villages for the community.
- Promote the development of complete neighborhoods both in infill and new growth areas that foster a sense of place.
- Protect and replicate the pattern and character of Sacramento's unique and traditional neighborhoods.
- Locate and design buildings, streetscapes, and public spaces that contribute to walkable neighborhoods.
- Promote developments that foster accessibility and connectivity between areas and safely and efficiently accommodate a mixture of cars, transit, bicyclists, and pedestrians.

Mobility

- Develop a balanced, integrated, multi-modal transportation system that is efficient and safe, with frequent service connecting every neighborhood to the rest of the city and the region.
- Provide a variety of transportation choices that promote accessible alternatives to the automobile; including walking, bicycling, and taking transit.
- Expand and improve existing transit systems to encourage higher ridership that will lead to less dependence on the automobile and fossil fuels, and to better air quality.

Economic Development

- Promote strategic development of vacant, underutilized, and infill land, especially along transportation and commercial corridors, to improve the city's economic outlook.
- Improve the jobs-housing balance by siting housing near employment centers.
- Develop a vibrant 24-hour downtown that is a destination for the region and California.
- Develop the city's waterfront to provide a world class urban experience for residents, workers, and visitors.

Environmental Resources

- Encourage sustainable levels of energy and resource consumption through efficient land-use, transportation, building design, construction techniques, waste management, and other infrastructure systems.

The vision and guiding principles are reflected in more detailed neighborhood and subarea development plans, including the ***Merged Downtown Redevelopment Project Area Implementation Plan*** (updated in Jan 2005), the R Street Corridor Plan, and Docks Area Concept Plans.

In 2003, there was a collaborative planning effort between the cities of West Sacramento and Sacramento that resulted in the ***2003 Sacramento Riverfront Master Plan***. The information gathered during the Riverfront Master Plan served not only as an update to the 1994

Sacramento & West Sacramento Riverfront Master Plans, but also laid the foundation for the successful development of both sides of the Sacramento River. The goal of the Docks Area Project is to develop the area into a new riverfront mixed-use neighborhood, including the necessary infrastructure, street circulation, and bicycle and pedestrian access.

Vision and Guiding Principles

Every neighborhood will be a desirable place to live because of its walkable streets, extensive tree canopy, range of housing choices, mixed use neighborhood centers, great schools, parks and recreation facilities, and easy access to Downtown and jobs.

2.3 SACOG Blueprint Principles

The Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) has adopted a Preferred Blueprint Scenario to shape regional growth and development and to guide other public policies and investments. The Blueprint contains seven key Growth Principles (The City of West Sacramento and City of Sacramento plans referenced above are reflective of these policy objectives). The proposed streetcar project is consistent with and supportive of these Principles.

- Transportation Choices
- Mixed-Use Developments
- Compact Development
- Housing Choice and Diversity
- Use of Existing Assets
- Quality Design
- Natural Resources Conservation

3. Statement of Project Purpose and Need

The **purpose** of the streetcar project is to improve transit service and local circulation in order to serve, support and shape existing and proposed development in the core areas of the cities of West Sacramento and Sacramento. This goal is consistent with and, in fact, given high priority in, regional and local plans and policies.

The **need** is for a unique transportation mode that meets the mobility needs of a diverse ridership, promotes desired connectivity, attracts private participation, serves as a development and redevelopment catalyst, and fosters place-making. Downtown Sacramento and the Triangle/Civic Center area of West Sacramento are undergoing intense urban development that is significantly intensifying residential, commercial, office, recreational, civic and cultural land uses. This intense development is generating significantly greater demand for mobility within this area than can be accommodated through trips being made by automobile, particularly once people have arrived to the area from outlying suburban communities. It is impractical and undesirable to construct a sufficient number of parking garages and surface streets to facilitate this travel demand. Therefore, a high capacity transit service is needed to link these areas and provide frequent, reliable and cost-effective mobility throughout this urban core area.

The Yolo County Transportation District (YCTD), Sacramento Regional Transit District (RT) and the cities of West Sacramento and Sacramento have identified the streetcar as a potential tool for improving local circulation, supporting intense and sustainable redevelopment, and complementing the other components of the regional transportation system. Four guiding principles are directing this effort:

- The four local agencies will work cooperatively, with involvement from the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG).
- The aim is to fast track a project, and be in construction on the first rail leg between West Sacramento and downtown Sacramento within five years.
- In the interest of accelerating the project, federal funding will not be sought.
- Funding for the project will involve private sector participation.

The following Goals and Objectives serve as a guide for the streetcar feasibility study. These Goals and Objectives reflect regional and local development plans and adhere to the guiding principles established by the cooperating agencies. These Goals and Objectives also reflect the intended Purpose and Need of the proposed project, and in fact, clearly articulate the opportunity that can be achieved by implementing a successful streetcar investment.

Goal 1: Improve mobility and connectivity between the downtowns of West Sacramento, Sacramento, and the riverfront.

- Provide convenient access and local circulation for major employment, commercial, recreational, and cultural activity centers.

- Provide better connectivity between existing and new central city housing in both cities and these major employment, commercial, recreational, and cultural activity centers.
- Focus civic life, development orientation and recreational amenities along the Sacramento River waterfront shared by the two cities.
- Provide a convenient and attractive means of transportation for residents, workers, customers, and visitors.
- Improve access and opportunities for transit-dependent populations.

Goal 2: Provide a sustainable transit investment to support existing and proposed development in the core areas of the cities of West Sacramento and Sacramento.

- Implement a transit project that supports the existing and planned built environment and which minimizes adverse impacts.
- Utilize transit investment to help shape urban form through reinvestment along selected corridors and districts, utilizing the powerful placemaking effects of a streetcar project.
- Link key destinations in the corridor, including Sacramento Valley Station (Amtrak) in Sacramento and the planned West Sacramento Transit Center.
- Capture the economic benefit from improving transit service in these areas, while creating a distinctive and sustainable urban environment consistent with the SACOG Blueprint principles, goals and strategies.
- Maximize energy efficiency of the transit operation and minimize negative impacts on historic, archaeological, traditional cultural places, parklands, and other public recreation areas.

Goal 3: Maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of the local and regional transit system.

- Attract new riders to the local and regional transit system by providing convenient, frequent, reliable, and attractive transit services.
- Integrate the planned streetcar line or lines with the overall transportation system, including the existing and planned street and roadway network and transit system.
- Complement and ensure compatibility with the existing and future transit system, including light rail, bus and other services.
- Provide convenient access to the transit system using various modes and means of travel (e.g., pedestrian, bicycle, bus, light rail, automobile).
- Develop safe, comfortable, and convenient transit facilities, including stations and stops.
- Select a Phase 1 initial project segment which provides logical and practicable opportunities for expansion of streetcar service through future project phases.

Goal 4: Provide a transit investment that is affordable, in terms of capital and operating expenses, and is implemented on a fast track.

- Minimize capital costs (e.g., not design elaborate stations and systems, generally street running operation, no grade separations, no park and ride lots).
- Minimize net operating and maintenance costs.
- Utilize shared infrastructure where practicable.

- Fast track the planning, design, and construction period to total five years or less (project not planned to pursue federal New Starts funds and project development process).
- Leverage other public and private funding whenever possible.
- Maximize public-private partnership opportunities.

4. Supporting Conditions

Following is a description of the study area's existing conditions, including land use, demographics, physical barriers and features, and transportation facilities and services. A brief summary of how the conditions support the Purpose and Need of the proposed streetcar line is presented in *italics* at the conclusion of each subsection.

4.1 Land Use

Existing land use in the proposed service area is characterized by a compact dense core area in downtown Sacramento and a plan for a walkable, transit-oriented development pattern in the project's study area within West Sacramento. The area includes major activity centers such as the West Sacramento City Hall, the planned West Sacramento Transit Center, a planned facility for the Los Rios Community College, Raley Field, the State Capitol and the Capitol Mall, major state agency buildings, the Crocker Art Museum, Old Sacramento Historic District, a concentration of retail and office destinations, and the Sacramento Convention Center.

Current population and development densities, planned land use, and neighborhood and developer readiness for transit-oriented development make the corridor linking downtown Sacramento, the riverfront, and West Sacramento a favorable environment for high-quality, high-capacity streetcar transit service.

4.2 Historic Districts

The proposed corridor contains and potentially serves the Old Sacramento Historic District.

Providing enhanced transit service to historic neighborhoods, districts and buildings, at an appropriate scale, can improve their long-term viability through connecting them to the larger community while maintaining their attractive historic character. Streetcar Transit service can enhance older urban forms without forcing displacement.



Figure 2 Old Sacramento Historic District

4.3 Opportunity Areas

In addition to areas of historic character, there are various city, neighborhood, and privately sponsored planning and redevelopment efforts that have set the framework for transit-oriented development, neighborhood revitalization, and enhancements to transit service. These include unique but interrelated efforts for downtowns of West Sacramento, Sacramento and the riverfront. This study weaves together the opportunities identified through these efforts – and explores new opportunities – to uncover the best potential routes and phasing for streetcar service.

In turn, the introduction of streetcar transit service helps lift these areas and the streetcar district by catalyzing and focusing new development and community-supporting reinvestment.

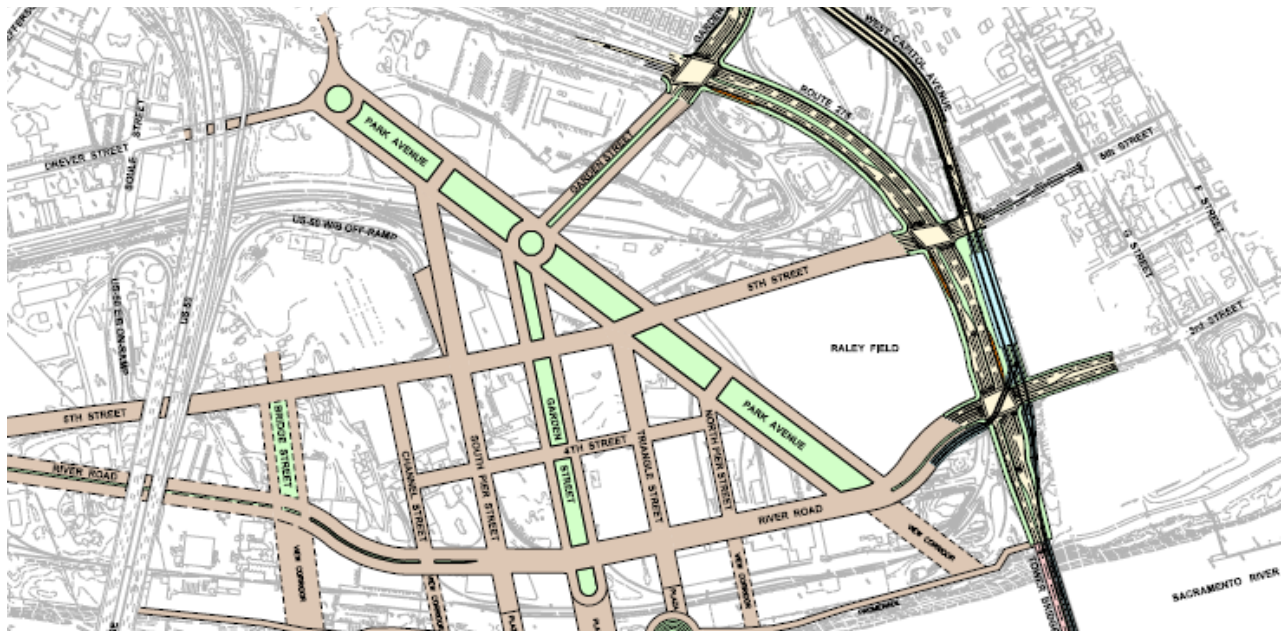


Figure 3 Street configuration in the Triangle Specific Plan Map

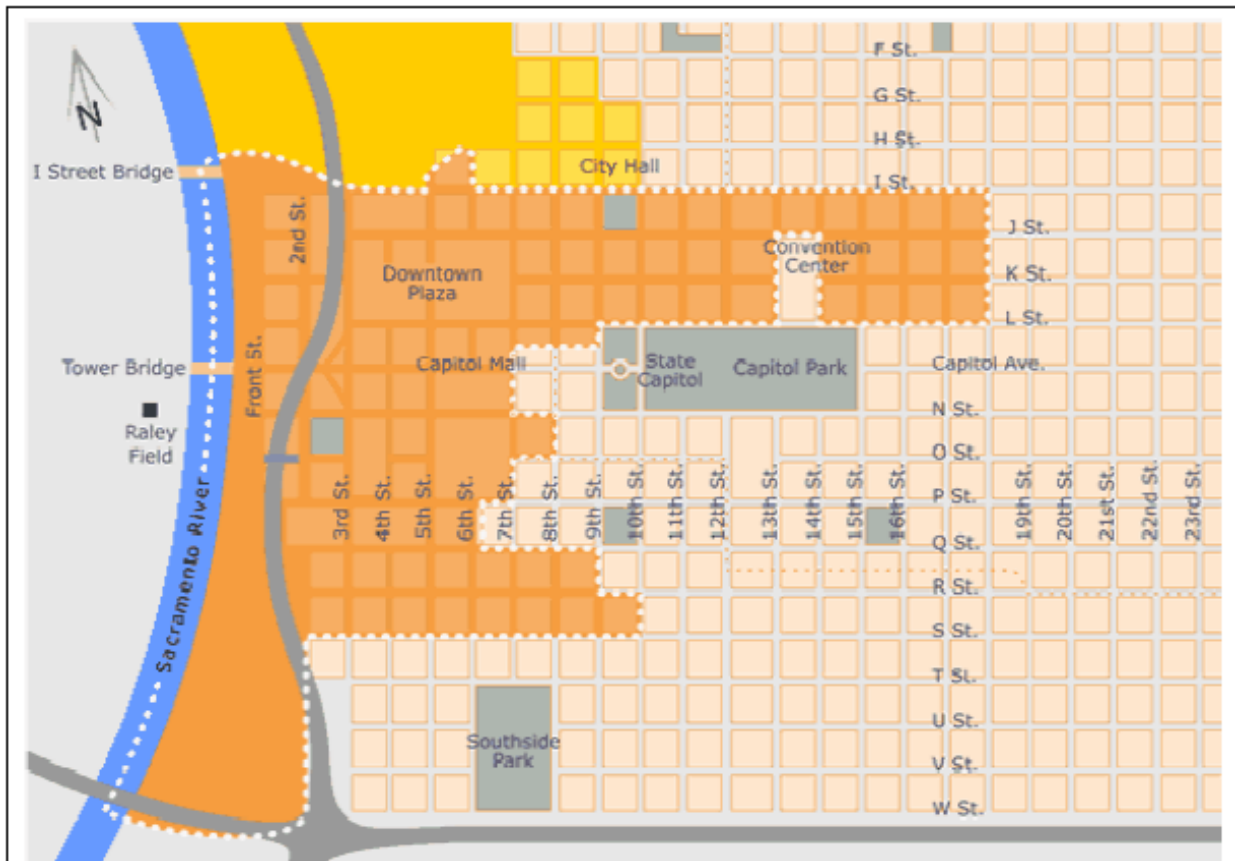


Figure 4 Downtown Sacramento Redevelopment Project Area

4.4 Transit Dependent Populations

The proposed district does include concentrations of transit dependent populations, including students, elderly and lower income residents.

Streetcar transit, as an addition to and enhancement of the existing Regional Transit District and Yolo County bus and light rail transit network, can improve transit options for transit-dependent populations.

4.5 Physical Barriers and Features

The natural and built environment in the central core includes a number of physical barriers and features. Foremost among these are the Sacramento River and the historic Tower Bridge that crosses it, linking the two communities.

Providing high quality streetcar transit service in the concentrated areas of downtown West Sacramento, Sacramento and the riverfront could help utilize the “barrier” or “constraint” of limited transportation access as an asset for the livability of this area.



Figure 5 Historic Tower Bridge

4.6 Transportation Facilities and Services

The following sections describe existing transportation facilities and services in the central core, including roadways, bike and pedestrian facilities, bus and light rail transit services and parking.

4.6.1 Roadway Facilities

The roadway facilities in study area range from local streets to major arterials. Several key roadways – from a transportation movement and symbolic standpoint – are undergoing enhancements.

Sufficient roadway capacity exists to allow the consideration of a number of feasible corridors for streetcar service. There are opportunities to reallocate the capacity of some of these rights-of-way in order to better support the plans and policies which have been adopted by the two cities.

4.6.2 Bike and Pedestrian

There are a significant number of bicycle and pedestrian friendly areas that link downtown West Sacramento, Sacramento and riverfront. This area features an impressive grid of sidewalks and generous on- and off-street bicycling facilities. These are important features in enhancing the potential service areas for streetcars.

Emphasis on bicycle and pedestrian modes as opposed to increased automobile capacity creates an environment conducive to transit. There are opportunities, particularly in the Triangle Specific Plan Area, in the Capitol Mall, and in the Railyards Area, to design or re-design streets as more “complete streets” in concert with the streetcar project, improving the ability of these streets to safely and attractively accommodate all modes of travel and supporting transit-oriented development.

4.6.3 Transit

Existing transit service is provided by the Regional Transit District (RTD) and the Yolo County Transportation District. RTD is the regional transit provider and offers a variety of services ranging from fixed local and express bus services, light rail, and paratransit services.

A streetcar transit system could serve as an urban circulator and provide a higher-capacity system integrating function in the overall transit network.

4.6.4 Parking

There is a large inventory of on- and off-street parking already in place in the portion of the study area which lies in Sacramento. In West Sacramento, although there is some on- and off-street parking already in place, the parking “scenario” is largely to be determined by a combination of minimum and maximum requirements to be applied to redevelopment projects, and the creation of on-street parking spaces through street re-designs. As this redevelopment occurs, this portion of West Sacramento will become “parking-constrained...i.e. its parking environment will transition from suburban to urban.

Providing better access and circulation to these parking-constrained areas would have positive effects, including providing a lower-cost alternative to driving to paid parking, more efficient utilization of the existing parking inventory, and avoiding the need for some additional parking spaces as further redevelopment occurs.