Partnerships and Stewardship; Regional Transportation System Connectivity

Section Overview

This section of the report reinforces the importance of and need for ongoing partnerships for the long term stewardship and sustainability of the Zion Canyon transportation system. Potential opportunities to strengthen regional coordination and to work towards a connected regional transportation network are also addressed.

Objective of Analysis

The objective of this element of the technical analysis was to identify the partners and stakeholders involved in the Zion Canyon transportation system and better define each of their roles and responsibilities as the shuttle and related facilities move into the second decade of operation. It is anticipated that the key partners will continue to work closely together in long range transportation planning efforts for the region in order to build consistency and cohesiveness between efforts and identify joint funding opportunities.

Another objective of this analysis was to coordinate with local and regional transportation interests to explore long range opportunities for better transit connectivity between Springdale and regional portals to serve needs of visitors and employees. The work has identified existing public and semi-private transportation systems (to the extent that these exist) to provide transportation between Springdale/Zion National Park and other cities, towns, and airports within Washington County and the surrounding region. Local and regional transportation interests were contacted to learn if any such plans were in place and to gauge interest in the potential of more regional transit connectivity.

Another related objective was to discern the long range potential for visitors to enjoy a completely car-free experience as part of their visit to Zion National Park. Existing or planned opportunities for visitors to be able to fly to Las Vegas or St. George and travel to Springdale via public transportation or modestly-priced private transportation were evaluated.

Analysis Approach

To assess partnership and stewardship roles and responsibilities, workshop sessions were held at the park in November 2008 and March 2009. Existing and potential partners in the Zion Canyon transportation system were identified and their potential roles and responsibilities related to the system and its facilities were defined.

In addition, during the course of the technical analysis, the consultant team gathered regional transportation information, studies, and plans and conducted interviews and research with regional transportation contacts (Washington County, MPO, Transit Agencies, St. George

Partners Roles and Responsibilities Exercise, November 19, 2008 Workshop

Airport, Dixie State College, Tour Companies, UDOT, etc.) to confirm current plans and projects underway and to better understand their existing and potential relationship to the Zion Canyon transportation system. Team members also coordinated with the Dixie Metropolitan Planning Organization and the Five County Association of Governments, speaking with transportation planning professionals in the region, who provided insight to future transportation plans within most of Washington County. Planning documents for the new St. George airport, currently in the construction phase, were reviewed along with long and short term project lists identified by Utah Department of Transportation for Washington County.

Team members researched private and public options for transit/transportation for reaching Springdale/Zion National Park from McCarran International Airport in Las Vegas and the St. George airport without renting a car.

Observations and Findings

The following observations and findings have been compiled for this section.

The Need for Strong Partnerships

Strong ongoing partnerships will be critical for continued successful operation of the Zion Canyon transportation system. In the financial analysis summarized in Section 9, it is projected that the shuttle system will reach a point where annual operating and maintenance costs exceed revenues within the next few years. There will also be upcoming costs associated with vehicle replacement, signing and wayfinding needs, streetscape maintenance and pedestrian and bicycle improvements. Aside from funding needs, which partners can work together to resolve, there are ongoing responsibilities related to maintenance and operations, as well as planning for future programs and projects that will require a well-coordinated effort.

Partners and Stakeholders Workshop, November 19, 2008

Partners – Existing and Potential

Representatives from the National Park Service, Town of Springdale, UDOT, Springdale Visitors Bureau, and other agencies and organizations participated in the workshop session on November 19, 2008. One of the objectives of the session was to list all existing and potential partners related to the Zion Canyon transportation system. The following partners were listed by the meeting participants. Additional information about several of these partners is provided later in this section.

- National Park Service
- Town Government of Springdale
- UDOT
- Visitors Bureaus (Springdale and St. George)
- Businesses in Springdale/Chamber of Commerce
- General Community of Springdale
- Washington County
- Five Counties Association of Government
- Zion Canyon Corridor Council (ZC3)
- Southern Utah University (SUU - Regional Services)
- Rural Planning Organization (RPO)
- Zion Natural History Association/Volunteer Program (ZNHA)
- Down Canyon and East Side of Park Communities (Regional Communities) – Governments and Chambers of Commerce
  - Rockville
  - Virgin
  - La Verkin

- Hurricane
- Mt. Carmel
- Kanab
- Fredonia
- St. George
- Toquerville

- Regional Transportation Interests:
  - Dixie Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)
  - Transit Agencies (Sun Tran)
  - St. George Airport
  - Dixie State College
  - Tour Companies

Partner Roles and Responsibilities

After listing existing and potential partners, the workshop session participants were asked to share their perspectives on the primary roles and responsibilities of the key partners listed. The results of this exercise are summarized in Table 8-1 on page 8-5.

Other Roles/Responsibilities Mentioned

In addition to the responsibilities listed in Table 8-1, the following were also mentioned at the November 2008 workshop session.

ZNHA – conduit to potential funding

RPO – conduit to potential funding

Dixie MPO – reviews transportation grant applications, regional transportation coordination, advocacy for bicycle and pedestrian needs, and down canyon (southwest of Springdale) messaging/communications

Regional Transportation System Planning and Connectivity Opportunities

The following information about regional transportation was gathered through phone calls to various transportation interests throughout the region and research over the Internet. Area transit programs, private shuttle services, and planned projects and initiatives are highlighted.

- **Regional Public Transportation** – Currently there is no regional public transportation system that serves Washington County and the surrounding areas. St. George has a bus system with limited service throughout the St. George urban area operated by Sun Tran. Sun Tran's transit network is a limited local public bus system that offers three different routes serving the St. George vicinity. There currently are no plans for developing a public transportation system beyond St. George and Hurricane into Virgin, Rockville, and Springdale.

SunTran van rendering

- **Private Shuttle Transportation** – Private shuttle service is not currently offered from St. George Airport or McCarran International Airport to Springdale or Zion National Park. Semi-private and private van/shuttle operations do exist from the McCarran (Las Vegas) and Salt Lake City airports to St. George, but they do not provide service further northeast on a scheduled basis. Below are the private shuttle programs that serve the region:
  - St. George Express
  - St. George Shuttle
  - Executive Shuttle
  - Go Green Shuttle
  - Desert Shuttle (may no longer be operating)

These shuttles have an average cost of approximately $40 per leg from McCarran to St. George. The Go Green Shuttle based out of St. George serves the corridor from Salt Lake City to St. George. Go Green started its operation in fall 2008. They take pride in their environmentally friendly vehicles that run on natural gas. Currently their only service to Springdale would be through a charter, but this company has expressed interest in expanding

service to Springdale if the opportunity arises.

The only other existing transportation options from St. George to Springdale, other than a guided tour bus, are via driving a car, renting a car, or taking a cab.

- **St. George Airport** – A new airport is planned to be constructed in St. George that will expand the volume and size of planes that can arrive and depart from the runway. This new airport will help to alleviate flight congestion at McCarran and Salt Lake City, thus bringing more tourism directly into the Dixie Region. The long term plan for airport development includes future roadways for connecting the new airport directly with adjacent smaller towns like Washington City and Hurricane. Highway expansions and new interchanges are identified in the St. George Comprehensive Plan, including the major concept of the Dixie Beltway, an expressway loop designed to connect St. George and the surrounding cities to each other and the new airport. New roadways like the Southern Parkway, currently under construction, will connect Washington City directly with the new airport.

Go Green shuttle service van

Transportation Market for Airport to Regional Vacation Destinations Service – The construction of the new airport may prompt the region into further discussion related to developing a unified transportation system to serve communities and cities surrounding St. George in the Dixie Metropolitan Area. Transportation service expansions into Washington County would improve tourism travel throughout the region and bring travelers from St. George to Springdale. *(Continued on page 8-6)*

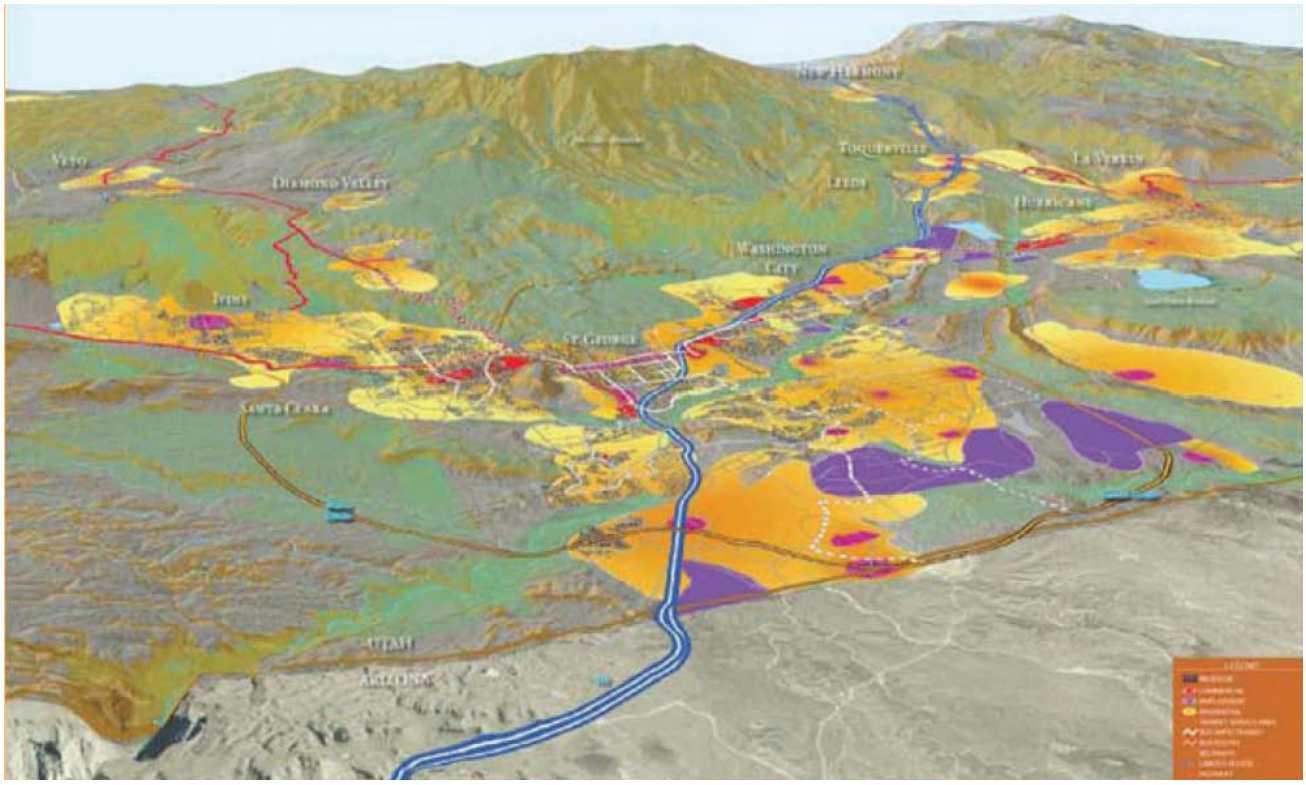

Figure 8-1. VISION DIXIE plan – Making a Better Washington County, 2007

Table 8-1 Perspectives on Partner Roles and Responsibilities

Zion National Park/National Park Service	Springdale – Town Government and Community	UDOT	Shuttle Service Contractor	Springdale Businesses	Visitors Bureaus
Resource protection Visitor experience, enjoyment, and satisfaction Shuttle service provider Facilitate planning for transportation system Financial obligations for shuttle service and vehicles; funding conduit for NPS related funding and other federal funding sources Park reps should walk the streets and talk to people and businesses	Parking and communication (wayfinding) Protect resources in town/resource stewardship in park Support the park Shuttle structures and streetscape maintenance (behind the curb) – includes sidewalks, shuttle stop facilities, and landscape Signage in Springdale (costs, uniformity) Visitor movement along and near the highway/traffic congestion in town Public parking in town (on-street included) Street lighting Historic ditch system	Traffic control and management on highway Turning capacity in right-of-way Highway/road maintenance, paving, striping, and clean up of debris (between the curbs) Pedestrian crosswalks and pedestrian safety Regulatory and traffic signage ITS and 511 program Traffic calming Speed limit adjustments On-street parking areas Stormwater control off highway/shared responsibility with historic ditch system Funding conduit for some state and federal transportation funding programs	Operate a sustainable system Effectively manage the system Interface between the users/visitors and the agency Balance customer satisfaction, productivity, and costs Knowledge of resources (provide information)	Welcome visitors/ visitor hospitality Shared parking for shuttle park and ride "Sales force" for the shuttle system Provide clear, consistent information about how and where to park and ride the shuttle	Visitor communications and development of outreach packet for area hotels and businesses One sheet "Shuttle and Parking How To" Guide Assistance with parking management Advocacy for system "Sales force" for the shuttle system

For more information regarding specific responsibilities and assignments of partners involved in the Zion Canyon transportation system, refer to the Action Plan in Section 9, which was updated and expanded at the March 2009 stakeholders workshop.

This would increase the economic base for all communities along SR 9.

VISION DIXIE - Completed in 2007, the VISION DIXIE plan for Washington County resulted from an inclusive and innovative planning effort that involved a broad spectrum of public and private sector partners from across the county. The purpose of the planning effort was to build a strong vision for tomorrow based on the ideas and values of county residents. The VISION DIXIE planning area encompasses all of Washington County, including the Springdale/Zion National Park area as shown in Figure 8.1. For more about the VISION DIXIE planning effort and to download the plan, visit: http://visiondixie.org/. Public preferences stated in the plan are summarized in the series of principles listed below.

1. Plan Regionally; Act Locally
2. Maintain Air and Water Quality; Conserve Water
3. Guard our "Signature" Scenic Landscapes
4. Provide Rich, Connected Natural Recreation and Open Spaces
5. Build Balanced Transportation that includes a System of Public Transportation, Connected Roads, and Meaningful Opportunities to Bike and Walk
6. Get "Centered" on Focusing Growth on Walkable, Mixed Use Centers
7. Direct Growth Inward
8. Provide a Broad Range of Housing Types to Meet Diverse Needs
9. Reserve Key Areas for Industry to Grow
10. Focused Public Land Conversion Should Sustain Community Goals and Preserve Critical Lands

Principle #5 objectives are particularly relevant in considering future opportunities for regional connections to the Zion Canyon transportation system:

- *Build a System of Public Transportation* A road system in a constrained geography is difficult to add to and is susceptible to suffocating congestion. This makes public transportation especially important to keep the area from being overwhelmed by gridlock. The transit backbone our downtowns and major centers will need tomorrow need to be put into place today.
- *Preserve Major Road and Transit Corridors* To keep the county moving, and save money, it is also important to preserve corridors for future transportation investments.

- **Dixie Metropolitan Planning Organization** – Established in 2002 after several years of planning and actions to comply with local, federal, and state requirements, the Dixie Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) supports regional planning in the urbanized and urbanizing areas of Washington County, Utah.

  Although Springdale and Zion National Park are outside the MPO jurisdiction, they are important entities to coordinate with regionally in promoting alternative and multi-modal transportation connectivity throughout the SR 9 highway corridor.

  The MPO takes the lead in reviewing applications for certain federal transportation grant programs and also advocates for and supports transit, pedestrian, and bicycle planning throughout the region. The Springdale and Zion Canyon National Park area may not be eligible or competitive for some of the federal transportation programs geared toward urban areas that are administered through the MPO. However, the MPO can provide support and guidance related to other potential funding sources. The MPO also will be an important partner in considering opportunities for better connecting the region and mitigating overall travel demand pressures on SR 9 through a variety of strategies. For more information about the Dixie MPO, visit: http://www.dixiempo.org/

- **Eastern Washington County Rural Planning Organization and Five County Association of Governments** – As the rural counterpart to the Dixie MPO, the Eastern Washington County Rural Planning Organization (RPO), coordinated through the Five County Association of Governments and supports unified planning efforts in Eastern Washington County. It would be good to bring this organization more closely into the fold of future planning related to the Zion Canyon transportation system. For more information about these entities, visit: http://www.fcaog.state.ut.us/

- **Zion Canyon Trail** – Planning and design activities are underway for a multi-use trail/path in Zion Canyon that will connect Springdale with Rockville (and may extend further to the southwest in the long term future). The trail will be constructed through Springdale to the Pa' rus Trail in Zion National Park. A feasibility study for the trail was completed in 2007 as a joint project between UDOT and the Town of Springdale. Currently, UDOT has $125,000 set aside for phase one of the Zion Canyon Trail improvements in Springdale, which will extend from Rockville to River Park. The vision for phase one will be to build the trail/path along the SR 9 corridor. Construction of the first section of the trail will begin in 2009. This section will start at the pull off area south of the Majestic View Lodge and continue to the Silver Bear. Figure 8.2 below shows the Alternative 1 alignment for all phases of the trail through Springdale. Once constructed, this trail/path will provide the opportunity for visitors to bicycle or walk from their accommodations to the park, and it will expand general recreation and transportation opportunities for the community.

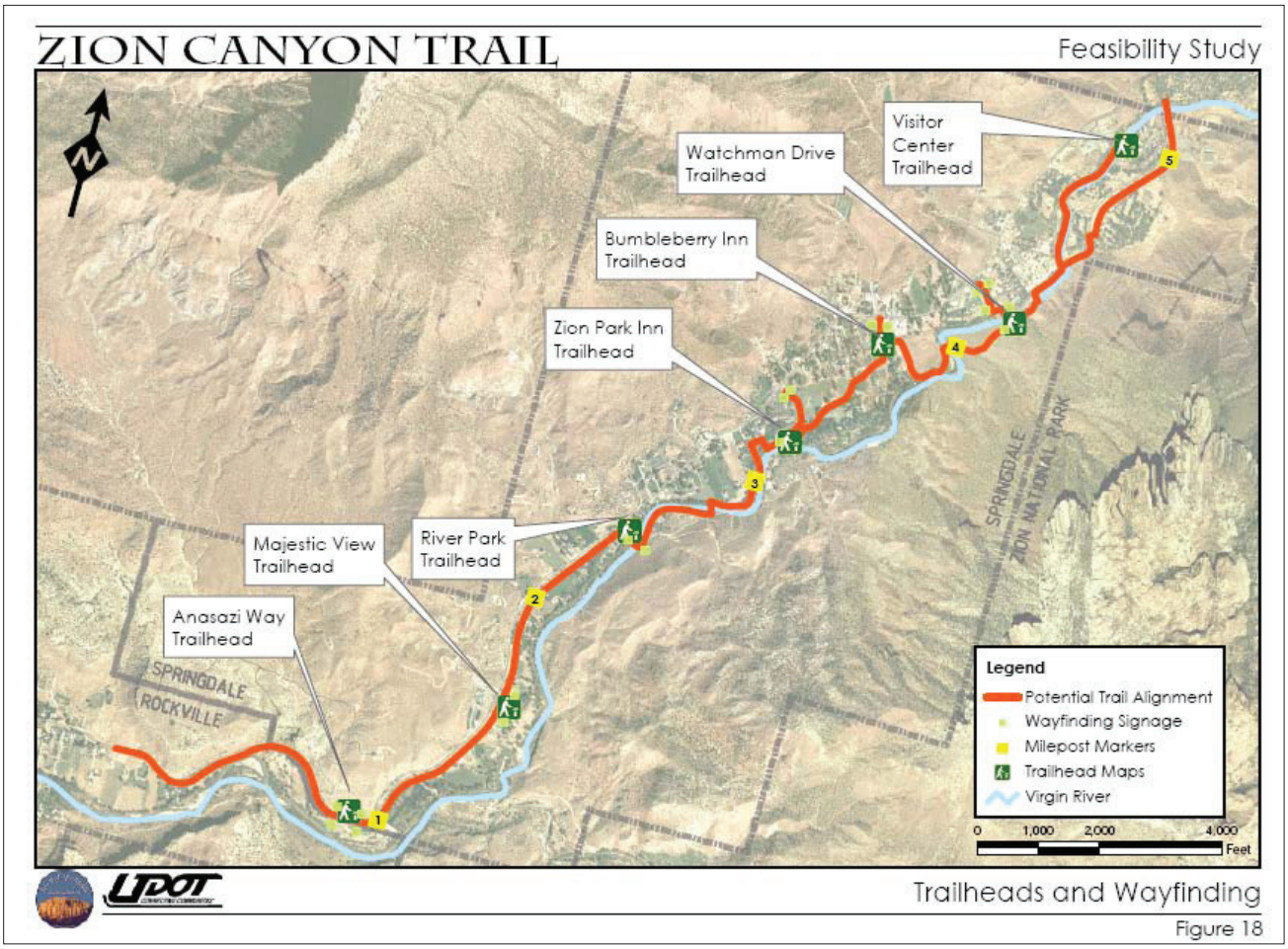

Figure 8-2 Proposed Zion Canyon Trail in Springdale

Two alternatives have been identified for connecting the Zion Canyon Trail to the Pa' rus Trail, as described below.

- River Station Option (Option 3A) - This alignment retains the trail on the north/west side of the Virgin River past the Cliffrose Motel and the IMAX Theater, tying into the River Station entrance to Zion National Park. (See Section 5 for image.)
- Watchman Campground Option (Option 3B) - This trail option crosses the Virgin River from the RV park and enters Zion National Park via Watchman Campground. (See Section 5 for image.)

There is an important opportunity for joint partnership in this project. With planning and design of the trail in Springdale, new trailheads will be developed. Information kiosks and signs at these trailheads could serve multiple functions, such as orienting visitors to the trail, as well as to the Zion Canyon shuttle system and the locations of shuttle stops and parking areas in Springdale. Interpretive panels at the trailheads could promote and educate visitors about the region's commitment to environmental stewardship and provide guidelines for use of public lands. Springdale, UDOT, and Zion National Park could partner in seeking funds for these kiosks and may be able to leverage the funding for the existing trail project as a matching fund for selected grant programs.

Summary of Regional Planning Efforts and Opportunities

As noted above, regional planning efforts are constantly evaluating the need for roadway improvements, public transportation systems and multi-modal transportation opportunities for both the near and long term. Discussions with transportation related agencies in the region indicate that the potential timeframe for a public transportation system likely is a long way out. For the area within the Dixie Metropolitan Region (beyond St. George), such a system would not be expected for decades. However,

Public Workshop, Springdale Community Center, November 19, 2008

a privately operated shuttle service between St. George and communities to the northeast via the SR 9 corridor, with the ultimate destination being Springdale, may be a more plausible possibility within the next ten years. The growing interest in taking "car free" vacations (due to the rising cost of fuel and environmental influences) may further expedite this opportunity. The private market may recognize and serve this opportunity more rapidly than a public initiated transportation program.

There are a variety of opportunities for regional transportation planning and coordination with many concurrent initiatives and a lot of political will in moving toward a well connected future. The VISION DIXIE principle, "Plan Regionally; Act Locally" is a good principle for guiding ongoing transportation coordination and planning efforts related to the Zion Canyon transportation system.

Recommendations

A Call for Partnerships and Stewardship for the Zion Canyon Transportation System

Ongoing operations of the Zion Canyon transportation system will require significant resources. While Zion National Park will continue to have primary responsibility for annual operations and maintenance of the shuttle system, the park will be faced with some tough decisions in the future.

- Shuttle service cutbacks may be needed in the coming years unless supplemental funding resources can be found.
- The park will seek federal funding to replace the shuttle fleet; however, funding sources are becoming increasingly limited and competitive.
- The Springdale streetscape and shuttle facilities will require ongoing maintenance and repairs.
- Wayfinding and enhanced visitor communication efforts will require near term funding, while development of new parking areas, pathways, and other improvements will require additional funding over the long term.

How Will All These Needs be Met?

The Zion Canyon transportation system has been a huge success and a nationwide model for environmental sustainability and enhanced visitor access in national parks. Representatives from Zion National Park, Springdale, UDOT, and other agencies and organizations have been coordinating on a regular basis, but the time has come for these partners to jointly define opportunities for additional funding and resources to support the system. Ongoing partnership and stewardship responsibilities should be more clearly defined, and all parties should be working together to actively plan for the successful future of the transportation system.

Ongoing Partner Coordination and Communications

Ongoing, more frequent and focused coordination and communication regionally between the key partners and interests related to transportation, and specifically related to the Zion Canyon transportation system, will be important. A new "Zion Canyon Transportation Committee" (or other name) should be formed – either by expanding the focus of one of the existing committees or by creating a new committee. There are three organizations meeting regularly now that are good candidates for being involved in or leading a specific "Zion Canyon Transportation Committee."

- **Springdale Parking Committee** – This committee includes representatives from Zion National Park and the town of Springdale, and its work has been focused on parking and visitor communications/signing related to parking. It is recommended that this committee be expanded to cover a broader focus related to transportation.
- **ZC3 – Zion Canyon Corridor Council** – A regional planning initiative/organization that is striving to apply Principle 1 of the recently completed Washington County VISION DIXIE planning process: "Plan Regionally, Act Locally." This is an informal group without strict membership requirements (currently). Participants in the ZC3 are: Springdale, Rockville, Virgin, La Verkin, Hurricane, Zion National Park, BLM St. George Field Office, SITLA, UDOT, Southern Utah University (SUU) Regional Services, Utah Department of Environmental Quality, and the Five County Association of Governments.

  The council meets regularly to coordinate and plan for the State Route 9 corridor as a gateway to Zion National Park. SUU provides technical assistance and funding for planning efforts and also is working jointly with Utah State University's Landscape Architecture & Environmental Planning Program on an extensive corridor study that

will provide alternatives for future growth, development, and other critical elements identified by ZC3.

This group would be a good foundation from which to build a broader "Zion Canyon Transportation Committee" around; however, it is unclear if the committee would want to take on the transportation planning and coordination efforts specific to the Zion Canyon transportation system. In any case, ZC3 will be a very important partner in planning for transportation in the corridor and in seeking funds for various projects.

- **Eastern Washington County RPO and the Five County Association of Governments** – See previous discussion in this section for more information.

Zion National Park and Springdale officials should participate in and coordinate with these organizations on a regular basis, as well as with UDOT, the Dixie MPO, and other agencies and organizations, to explore regional transportation opportunities and work towards implementation of programs and projects. Teaming with these organizations will benefit the tourism and economic base for the entire region. The "Plan Regionally; Act Locally" approach is consistent with the region's vision to address growth and change over the next three decades.

Regional Transportation System Connectivity

- As a long range option, it may be appropriate for the region to enter into very early planning discussions related to the vision for either a private, semi-private, or public transportation system from St. George to other SR 9 corridor destinations, terminating at Springdale/Zion National Park. As a first phase, this system may be no more than a privately run shuttle system operating daily between the St. George airport and Springdale. Over time, the service level and system characteristics could grow based on demand and changes in travel behavior.
- As a very long term vision, the region could consider and study the potential for more innovative systems such as a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) or other type of high capacity transit system with more frequent service in the corridor. A high capacity transit system would reduce overall traffic on SR 9, while also reducing congestion through the small towns along SR 9, SR 18, and I-15. Environmental benefits, such as reduced fossil fuel emissions, cleaner air quality, and less energy consumption could be realized, reducing the region's overall carbon footprint. A system of this type would also reliably and consistently support opportunities for a truly "car free" vacation experience to Zion National Park. Springdale and Zion National Park Service employees living in Virgin or Hurricane or other small towns along the SR 9 corridor could make use of the system to commute from and to work. Another point to consider is that there are a high number of European travelers who come to Zion. Culturally, Europeans are used to traveling via transit, and some may actually prefer this type of travel to motor vehicle use. A high capacity transit system may also help to draw more tourists into the neighboring towns and cities with the opportunity to efficiently travel to and from Springdale and Zion National Park.