

Memorandum

Date: December 22, 2023
To: Darren Brugmann, Big Sky Transportation District
From: Dan Cawley and Jason Miller; Fehr & Peers
Subject: **Big Sky Transportation District Five Year Strategic Plan Summary**

The Big Sky Transportation District Five Year Strategic Plan (2024-2028) is a planning effort to comprehensively assess current services, analyze travel demand and market potential, identify areas of need and potential growth, formulate system concepts, and ultimately craft a conclusive plan encompassing financial considerations, phases, and strategies for implementation. This study includes:

- Review of existing conditions
- Analysis of demand, route performance, and financial indicators
- Development of refinement of service and network design
- Performance measures
- Operating and capital plan for the next five years

This memorandum is a standalone summary of the full plan, to be delivered in parallel as the district moves from planning to implementation.

Overview

Big Sky Transportation District (BSTD) serves the greater Big Sky area, offering connections to Bozeman. The authority is poised for an expansion in service capacity and the development of new service options.

Decisions have been made to drive investments in new facilities, vehicles, and service alternatives as well as potential funding sources identified. To best coordinate these upgrades, this strategic plan will guide.

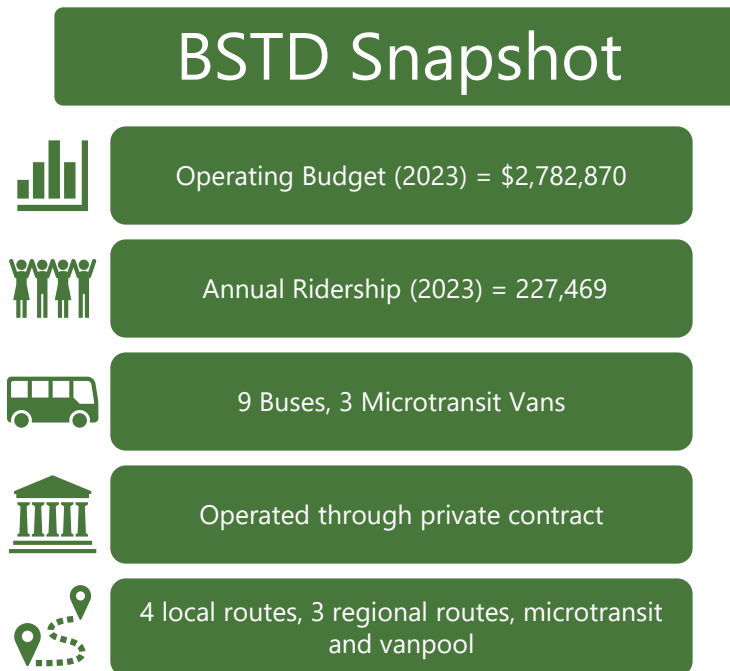


Figure 1: Big Sky Transportation District Snapshot

Plan Purpose and Context

The Plan seeks to address how Big Sky Transportation District (BSTD) should conduct transit operations within its service area while evaluating new route alignments to address the need to accommodate growing demand for transportation options. Recommendations from the plan should guide BSTD's growth and investment over the coming five years. The plan comes at a time when annual ridership has surpassed pre-pandemic levels and visitation to Big Sky surges.

Scenario Development

Based on community input, BSTD Board discussions, opportunity analysis, and an understanding of the existing transportation, five alternative scenarios for growth were developed for review by the BSTD board. These five scenarios are:

- Scenario 1: Enhance local service with stable regional service. (Modest growth)
- Scenario 2: Enhance local service with stable regional service. (Moderate growth)
- Scenario 3: Significantly increase local service and enhance regional service. (High growth)
- Scenario 4: Significantly increase local and regional service. (Extremely High growth):



Services provided under each scenario, along with estimated operating costs and potential ridership growth, are summarized in **Table 1**.

Table 1: BSTD Growth Scenarios Comparison

Scenario	Service Hours (Micro ¹)	Service Hours (Fixed Route ²)	Fleet (Micro ¹)	Fleet (Fixed Route ²)	Operations Budget (Micro ¹)	Operations Budget (Fixed Route ²)	Operations Budget (Total)
Current¹	9,000	22,000	3	10	\$594,000	\$2,200,000	\$2,782,870
Scenario 1	13,525	33,519	5	11	\$892,650	\$3,361,875	\$4,254,525
Scenario 2	17,380	31,219	7	10	\$1,147,080	\$3,121,875	\$4,268,955
Scenario 3	17,380	37,356	7	13	\$1,147,080	\$3,735,625	\$4,882,705
Scenario 4 - Preferred	18,293	43,298	7	14	\$1,248,885	\$4,329,750	\$5,578,635

Notes:

1. Microtransit, locally branded as Big Sky Connect.
2. Fixed route service includes all local and regional (Link) routes.

Source: Fehr & Peers.

Evaluation Process

The four scenarios for BSTD’s growth were evaluated against community feedback gathered through an open survey and guided by board member input. The community survey generated 1,850 responses that clarified that employees working in Big Sky are and will continue to be the primary transit market with strong growth anticipated in the secondary market of moving local residents and visitors around the Big Sky community.

Recommended Five-Year Service Plan

With an understanding of anticipated development in the area and associated changes in travel patterns, collaboration with the board revealed that **Scenario 4** is the vision for BSTD’s growth that best balances Big Sky’s needs and goals with fiscal responsibility, described below in **Table 2**. Maps of the preferred scenario routes and service areas are presented in **Figures 2 and 3** attached to this memorandum.



Table 2: Preferred Scenario for BSTD’s Growth

Big Sky Link	YC/SP/Montage Link	Yellow/Orange	Green	Town Center Express	Microtransit
Commuter between Gallatin Mall area (short-term), 4 Corners (long-term) and Big Sky/Moonlight	Commuter between 4 Corners and YC, Montage, and SP	Full Canyon Route up to Big Sky and Moonlight (Similar to how this operates in summer now)	Eliminated in lieu of microtransit	BSTC to Mountain Base Area Express	Maintain existing microtransit zone near Town Center, add new zone serving Big Sky Resort/Moonlight Basin

Source: Fehr & Peers, 2023.

Fulfilling Established Goals

This scenario is structured around five goals that were developed during the planning process, intended to guide decision making over the coming five years:

1. Commit to high investment to expand coverage of BSTD service, especially for local service within the Big Sky Community.
2. Prioritize employees traveling from Gallatin Gateway, Four Corners, and Bozeman in the coming years.
3. Enhance and update existing facilities while developing new facilities throughout the service area.
4. Seek partnerships with private and public entities to facilitate improved service delivery.
5. Prioritize BSTD’s role in bringing Big Sky towards a more sustainable future.

Scenario three is described in greater detail in subsequent sections of this plan.

Implementation

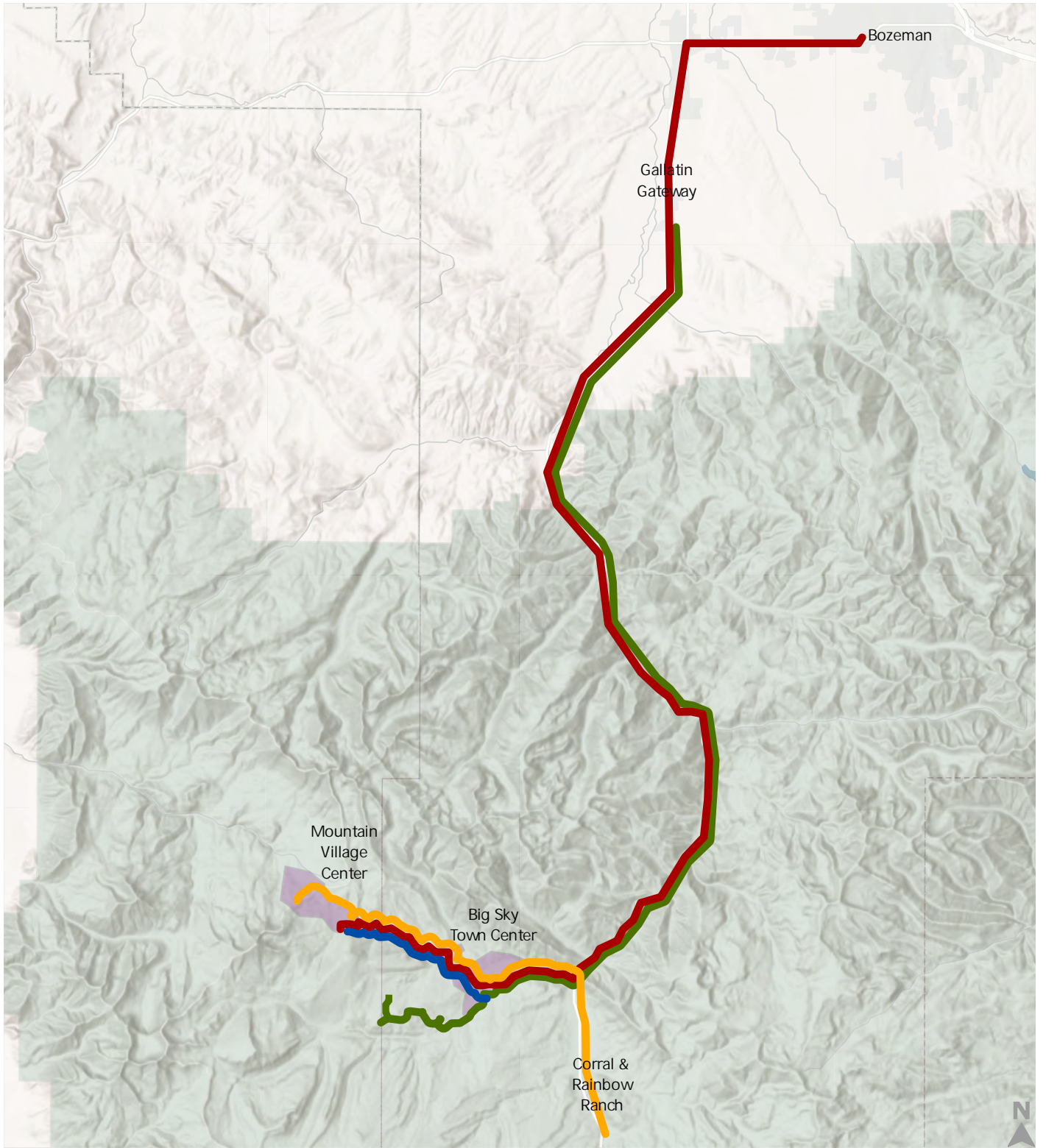
Successful implementation of this plan will depend on reliable, ongoing funding from local and federal sources. To invest in new capital assets and support ongoing operating costs, BSTD should pursue funding through a property tax measure. Further, with the increased service levels and ongoing coordination needs, BSTD should consider additional staff resources to better support the District’s ability to deliver on its mission and ambitious vision for growth. Needs will likely change over the next five years, but the following priority steps should be taken to implement this plan fully, either in sequence or simultaneously:

- BSTD should begin pursuit of new operational funding sources, likely a property tax measure, to expand service and increase capacity as soon as possible.



- Capital funding opportunities, largely from federal sources, must be pursued on a regular basis to ensure new fleet and facilities are available to support expanded service and expected increased ridership.
- To support the successful pursuit of capital funding through grant programs, BSTD must develop a fleet replacement plan in the next six months.
- BSTD should add staff capacity to support this growth, either through contract or full-time staff, with a focus on successful grant writing experience and service planning; this will make available funding sources more accessible.
- BSTD must advance partnership efforts with private entities in Big Sky, including the Yellowstone Club, Montage/Spanish Speaks, and Big Sky Resort, as well as with public entities such as Streamline and the upcoming Gallatin Valley Transit District.
- BSTD should continue to monitor the quality and performance of its current transit service and explore long-term options for service delivery, whether with the current contract operator, a new contract operator (secured through a new competitive procurement), or consideration of BSTD taking some or all operations in-house.
- The BSTD board should continue its current trend of regular meetings and strengthen its operating procedures through adoption of updated bylaws and roles on the board, ensuring a full board of five members is always in place.

As opportunities avail themselves, various implementation priorities should be pursued from both the list above and the full implementation section of this plan. However, the importance of securing additional funding and staff capacity cannot be understated – without more money and at least some additional staff capacity, implementation of this plan will be impossible.

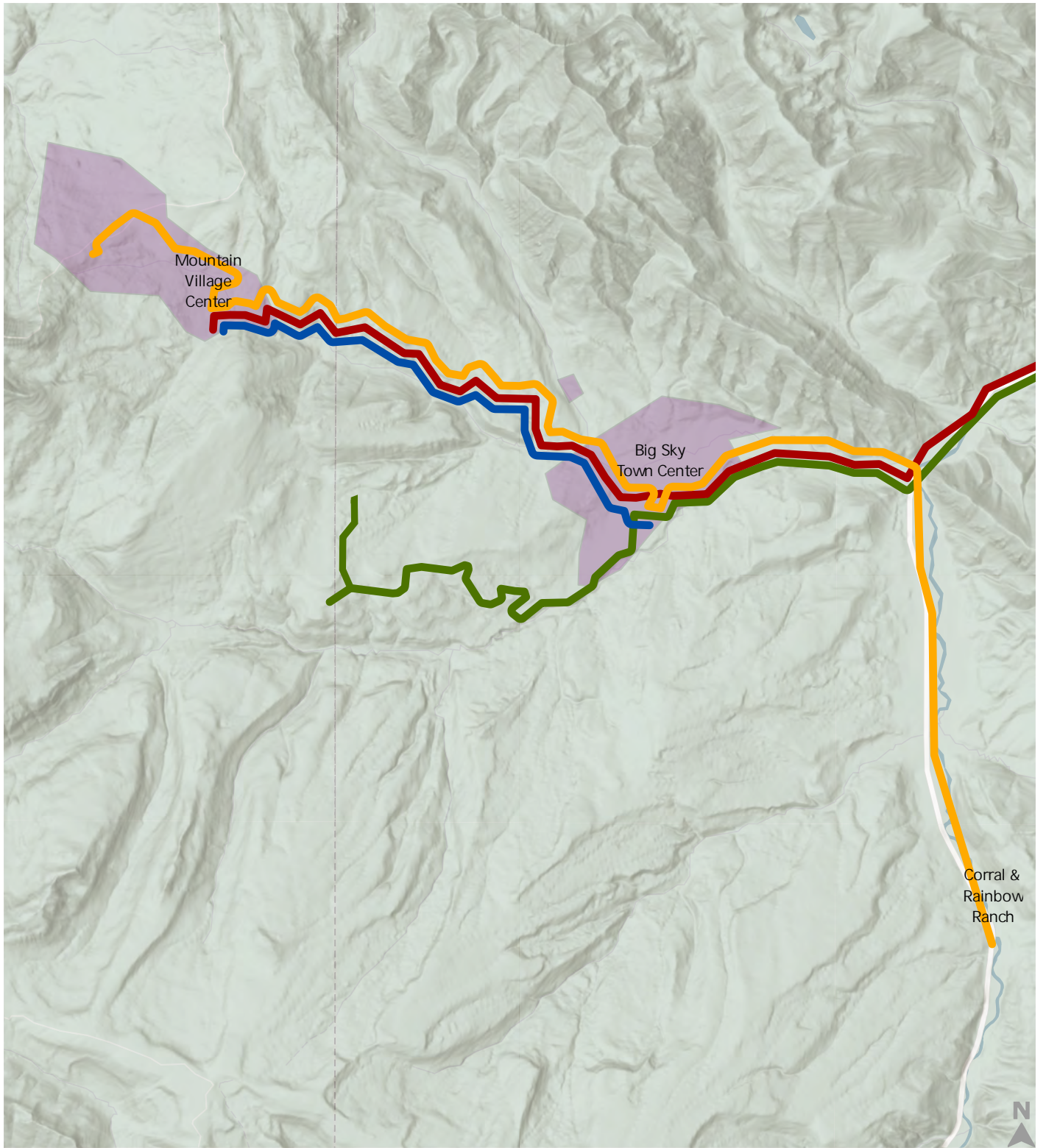


Routes

- Four Corners-TownCenter-Yellowstone Club Link
- The Link (To Bozeman)
- Town Center Express
- Yellow-Orange Canyon
- Microtransit



Figure 2
Preferred Scenario - Regional



Routes






-  Four Corners-TownCenter-Yellowstone Club Link
-  The Link (To Bozeman)
-  Town Center Express
-  Yellow-Orange Canyon
-  Microtransit



Figure 3
Preferred Scenario - Local