



General Meeting Report

I-15 Expansion – Plans, Pros & Cons

September 20, 2023

[Recording](#)

Attendance

- 5 guest panelists
- 11 in-person attendees
- 22 attendees on Zoom
- Meeting conducted and moderated by Linda Smith, LWVSL Program Director

Guest Panelists

- Tiffany Pocock, Director of Program Development, UDOT
- Julianne Sabula, Transit Program Manager, Salt Lake City Department of Transportation
- Meisei Gonzalez, Communications Director, HEAL Utah
- Dan R. Strong, President, Westside Coalition

Note: Leif Elder, UDOT's Director of Policy and Legislative Services, answered audience questions for Tiffany Pocock, who had to leave early.

Topic Summary

In our first General Meeting of the year, League of Women Voters of Salt Lake (LWVSL) members and guests heard from experts and community leaders on the pros and cons of expanding I-15.

Tiffany Pocock, Director of Program Development for the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT), kicked off the discussion by presenting background information about Utah's Regional Transportation Plan, which looks at statewide growth and transportation needs from 2019 to 2050. I-15 expansion is one of more than 53 planned projects and improvements for transportation within the study area. She explained that several realities—including aging infrastructure, safety concerns and growth—make I-15 expansion necessary. Benefits of the project include improved safety, better connected communities, a strengthened economy and improved mobility for all users (drivers, transit users, bicyclists and pedestrians).

The Salt Lake City Department of Transportation's Transit Program Manager, **Julianne Sabula**, thanked the UDOT team for engaging the community and considering diverse alternatives and perspectives. She said that while Salt Lake City opposes I-15 expansion, it does support several elements of the project, including a new interchange at the north end of the city, a redesign of the 600 North interchange and a protected bike path on Beck Street. Concerns with the project include the historical context in which I-15 divided the city into east and west sides, with a history of redlining westside neighborhoods. The impacts on health, economic opportunity, access to fresh food and proximity to pollution persist today. Sabula also discussed the city's high in-commuter population and described how the need for parking affects housing costs.

Meisei Gonzalez, Communications Director for HEAL Utah, echoed the city's concerns about air quality. He noted that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has classified both Salt Lake and Davis counties as nonattainment areas, meaning our air quality is worse than national air quality standards. As part of its environmental justice work, the EPA is currently studying higher concentrations of pollution in Salt Lake City's westside communities, which may be linked to higher rates of asthma and shorter life expectancy compared to the eastside. HEAL Utah is concerned about impacts on respiratory health from elevated vehicle emissions and higher exposure to particulate matter, especially for vulnerable populations and low-income and minority communities. Instead of I-15 expansion, HEAL Utah supports greater investment in public transit, active transportation infrastructure, urban planning and land use and micro-mobility options. Gonzalez noted that some of these solutions are being considered as UDOT works on the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for this project. Beyond air pollution, additional community concerns include displacement, economic impact and safety.

Westside Coalition President **Dan R. Strong** offered an "on the ground" perspective as a resident of one of the communities affected by the project. A theme of his presentation was how citizens can reverse some of the historical trends that have adversely affected westside communities for decades (e.g., redlining, housing and economic disparities, biases). The I-15 Expansion Project, he said, is an opportunity to stop these trends, in part because I-15 and the railroad tracks have formed a kind of "original sin" that divided Salt Lake City and led to industrialization of the westside and related disadvantages for people who live there. The health and economic effects of this and other infrastructure projects on otherwise vibrant, diverse westside neighborhoods include people leaving or wanting to leave, which creates a vicious cycle as westside schools are targeted for closure. The Westside Coalition opposes I-15 expansion and believes investment in transit offers a better solution, particularly with improved east-west connectivity.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

- Both Pocock and Strong noted that the current I-15 Expansion is just one of several transportation projects, which include future widenings of I-80, I-215, Redwood Road and Legacy Parkway. Strong said these may particularly affect westside neighborhoods.

- Another UDOT project, to double track and electrify Frontrunner in Davis and Salt Lake counties, was widely supported by all panelists.
- Those opposed to I-15 expansion mentioned the concept of **induced traffic**, in which expanding lane capacity increases traffic and traffic delay, beyond what would be expected as a result solely of population growth.
- All panelists applauded the news that UDOT now believes it can complete the project without demolishing any SLC homes.
- UDOT encouraged League members to **stay involved in the process**. It is currently working on the draft EIS. Once that is released, UDOT will hold public hearings and a 45-day public comment period. Then it will respond to comments and prepare a Final EIS. The timeline is yet to be determined.
- Citizens who want alternative (non roadway) solutions for managing transportation and growth should advocate directly with their state lawmakers and the governor—particularly asking them to allocate more funds to the Transit-Transportation Investment Fund (T-TIF, for public transit) and the Active-Transportation Investment Fund (A-TIF, trail networks for walking and biking).
- In closing, Sabula noted that throughout the country, in the states and at the federal level, we are spending far more to subsidize driving than to subsidize transit. “That mix has got to shift,” she said. “We as a nation have built a machinery to crank out freeways. It takes a long time to undo that... and it’s really the voices of people that help make that happen.”

RECORDING

Click [here](#) to watch a full recording of the meeting.

ORGANIZATIONS AND RESOURCES

- UDOT Study Team contact information
 Phone: 385.220.5797
 Email: i15eis@utah.gov
 Website: i15eis.udot.utah.gov
 Facebook: facebook.com/groups/udoti15eis *(Follow this group for updates on the EIS)*
- Salt Lake City Transportation Division
 Phone: Julianne Sabula – 801.535.6678
 Website: <https://www.slc.gov/transportation/>
 Email: julianne.sabula@slcgov.com
- HEAL Utah Comment Portal

<https://www.healutah.org/submit-public-comment-on-the-proposed-expansion-of-i-15/>

(Comments will be sent to the Utah Division of Transportation, the Wasatch Front Regional Council and the Utah Legislature.)

- The Westside Coalition
westsideslc.org
- State Transportation Commission
<https://www.udot.utah.gov/connect/about-us/commission/>
- Transportation for America
T4america.org
- Wasatch Front Regional Council
<https://wfrc.org/>

Unit Meeting Discussion Points

As local units discuss this topic with their members, here are some discussion points you may want to consider:

1. What aspects of the presentation did you find most compelling? Frustrating? Hopeful?
2. What is *your* opinion about I-15 Expansion? Are you for or against?
3. In what ways did the presentation change or solidify your opinion?
4. Does the League of Women Voters have [national](#), [state](#) or [local](#) studies/positions that empower LWVSL to take a side on this issue?
 - a. If yes:
 - i. Should we take a public position?
(Please note the studies/positions we should cite.)
 - ii. What should League advocacy look like?
(What specific actions do we recommend? Who should take these actions? Our board? Observers? Our social media team? Should our advocacy take place at the state level?)
 - b. If no:
 - i. Should we do our own study to develop a consensus position?
(Are individuals in your unit interested in leading or joining a study group?)
 - ii. What studies have other groups done that we could build on?
5. What steps could individual members of our unit take to advocate independently on this issue?
6. How should League members stay involved in the EIS process?
7. What action items do we have from this discussion?
8. What is our follow-up plan?

Other League Business

In addition to previewing coming events, we covered the following:

- Heard a report from Observer Corps Chair Kirby Croyle
- Welcomed new members (13 have joined since June)
- Announced that Utah Physicians for a Healthy Environment (UPHE) and others have brought a lawsuit against the state to protect the Great Salt Lake. Their claim is that Utah's "public trust doctrine" requires the state to protect and preserve the lake, and the state should be ordered to ensure sufficient water for the lake to achieve a sustainable level. UPHE is accepting donations to support the suit.