



## CHAPTER 9: INTERMODAL TRANSPORTATION



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## Introduction

The economic success of a region to a large degree depends on its connections to the rest of the world and its ability to facilitate the movement of people and goods across and within its boundaries. Increased competition in today’s global economy rewards those regions that actively plan for and pursue seamless transportation systems, which depend on efficient connections between all modes of travel.

Transportation facilities and service levels are important elements that companies consider when locating to a new area because of the cost savings, increased economic competitiveness, and other efficiencies these regions provide.

The Mesa County region fulfills a role as an important link in the regional, statewide, and national transportation system. At the local level, intermodal planning activities and ongoing improvements that address freight and other needs will help to maintain the region’s economic competitiveness.

Intermodalism is the concept that binds the different travel modes together so that people and freight movements can be made in an efficient manner. Beyond the travel needs of Mesa County residents, there are additional travel considerations for moving freight on rail and truck and for personal inter-regional travel via bus, rail, and plane.



Air, rail, truck, and inter-city bus industries are essential components in the local economy and play a fundamental role in the Mesa County regional transportation system. The 2035 Regional Transportation Plan’s (RTP) modal plans represent a comprehensive effort to build a multi-modal transportation system, but additional efforts are necessary to maintain the economic competitiveness and attractiveness of the region. Since many of these planning elements involve private sector entities, it is desirable to involve them in the planning process.

Intermodal transportation, including the efficient movement of people and goods across modes via intermodal connections, is a priority in the federal SAFETEA-LU legislation. Many of SAFETEA-LU’s required planning factors are directly related to the concept of intermodalism and the efficient, seamless connections that it implies.

This chapter provides background on the other travel modes – aviation, rail, trucking, and intercity buses - that combine with road, transit, and non-motorized systems to make up the full complement of transportation facilities, services, and connections in the Mesa County region.

## Aviation

Commercial aviation for the region is provided by the Grand Junction Regional Airport, formerly known as Walker Field. The facility is owned and operated by the Grand Junction Regional Airport Authority, a political subdivision of the State of Colorado. A seven-member Board of Commissioners governs the Authority. It is western Colorado's largest commercial airport with five airlines providing over 19 daily, non-stop departures to six metropolitan areas in the west and southwest United States (as of February 2011). The Airport also supports air cargo, charter, general aviation, flight school, and some military operations.



The Grand Junction Regional Airport served almost 230,000 passengers (total enplaned passengers) on scheduled flights in 2009. This is almost double the number from only 10 years ago. In 2010, the Airport supported over 61,000 aircraft operations of the following types – commercial air carrier (18%), air taxi/charter (13%), general aviation (61%), and military (8%).

During the development of the 2035 RTP, airport staff were interviewed and participated in Steering Committee meetings in order to identify and address a number of issues related to the Grand Junction Regional Airport as follows:

- Public comments were received that expressed a desire for regular bus service to continue between the Airport and downtown Grand Junction. The Airport is currently served by a Grand Valley Transit bus Route.
- Non-motorized access connecting the Airport with other parts of the urban area is desired.
- Some past planning activities have identified a long-term desire to continue H Road from its existing terminus at Horizon Drive to the east to connect with a future 29 Road interchange at I-70. This may require tunneling under Runway 4/22. The improvement of 29 Road including the interchange between I-70 and US-50 is included in the 2035 financially-constrained roadway plan, but the tunneling and extension of H Road is not.
- Located close to the urban core, proximity of new development, and the potential increase of noise concerns.

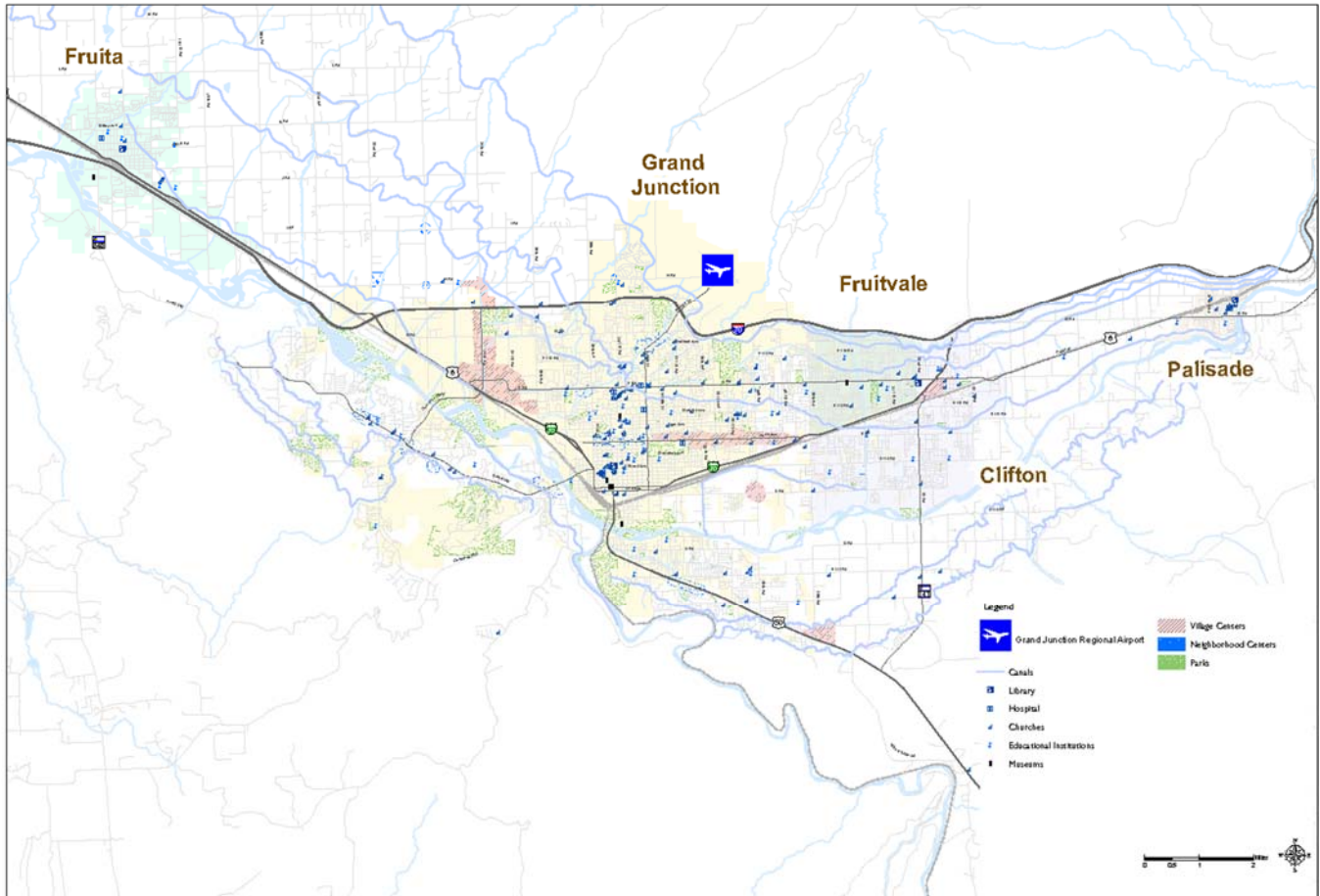


The Grand Junction Regional Airport is an important component of the region's intermodal passenger and freight traffic network. Its location relative to the Mesa County region is shown in Figure 9-1.

In addition to the regional airport, secondary smaller airstrips in the Mack/Loma area and the Gateway area provide alternative runways and hangers for small, private aircraft. Helicopter landing pads exist at St. Mary's Hospital, Foresight Industrial Park and Powderhorn Ski area on the Grand Mesa. An additional helicopter landing pad is proposed in De Beque in conjunction with the new De Beque Fire Station.

**Figure 9-1: Grand Junction Regional Airport**

Please refer to the Map Appendix for a larger version of this map.



## Railroads

The Mesa County region is a key commercial center served by active rail lines for freight transport. There are two freight railroads operating out of Grand Junction - the Union Pacific and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe, both of which run on the same tracks under agreement with the Union Pacific. Amtrak operates the California Zephyr between Denver and San Francisco through Grand Junction daily. The Amtrak passenger station is located at 339 South 1<sup>st</sup> Street in Grand Junction as shown in Figure 9-2 along with the railroad tracks throughout the region.



The railroad first came to Grand Junction in 1882 from Salt Lake City. Soon after, tracks were laid to Montrose to complete the Marshall Pass Route along the Gunnison River. These were originally narrow-gauge tracks but were changed later to standard gauge. In 1890, tracks built by the Rio Grande Junction Railway headed out of Grand Junction to the east along the Colorado River to connect with a line from Glenwood Springs.



The Union Depot was constructed in 1905/6 near the intersection of First Street and Pitkin Avenue. In 1909, an electrically powered streetcar system was opened by the Grand Junction and Grand River Valley Railway; and by 1910 the Interurban line between Grand Junction and Fruita was completed. Previous to this, the city had horse-drawn streetcars. In February 2010, the Union Depot was added to the list of Colorado's most endangered places.

During the development of the 2035 RTP, the railroad-related discussions included ongoing implementation of the railroad crossing and roadway safety improvement programs; concerns with increased truck traffic on local streets due to increased mining and other activities; and ideas for utilizing existing track and right-of-way to connect Mesa County with the Denver region via high-speed rail and to reconnect Grand Junction and Fruita with a commuter rail system. Railroads in the Mesa County region are shown in Figure 9-2.

### Historic Grand Junction Railroad Depot

The vacant and deteriorated historic Grand Junction Railroad Depot building is located on Business Loop I-70 (U.S. 6 & 50), adjacent to the tracks of the Amtrak's California Zephyr and Union Pacific and Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroads in downtown Grand Junction.



- The building is privately owned and is in need of repair and rehabilitation.
- It has been recognized as a significant building to the State of Colorado and the nation and has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places.
- It has become a major eyesore in downtown Grand Junction. It is closed and boarded up and is surrounded by a chain link fence.
- The depot building is highly visible to the thousands of travelers who pass through Grand Junction riding on Amtrak daily and the motorists who travel past the depot on Business Loop I-70 (U.S. 6 & 50).



- The station is severed from the downtown pedestrian sidewalks by a heavily travelled highway, Business Loop I-70.

The Friends of the Grand Junction Railroad Depot, a non-profit group of concerned citizens in Western Colorado, have the shared goal of restoring and revitalizing the historic railroad depot in downtown Grand Junction as an important transportation hub, tourist gateway and commercial center.

Through the right combination of investment, restoration and rehabilitation:

- The building can be restored and reused as an Amtrak passenger railroad station with a combination of other potential uses such as a coffee shop, tourist information center, art gallery, and other uses.
- The U.S. 50 (Ute Pitkin) road alignment could be revised to provide a safe pedestrian crossing from the station to the downtown area connecting the depot to the hotels, restaurants and retail stores in downtown Grand Junction. Improvements such as a crosswalk with a traffic light, pedestrian overpass and urban design solutions would reconnect the depot to downtown.
- Off-street parking could be managed to allow for short and long term parking shared with other users. Other buildings and uses in the area such as the Starvin' Arvin's Restaurant, the Pufferbelly commercial building and the station master's building ("depot") could provide compatible accessory uses.

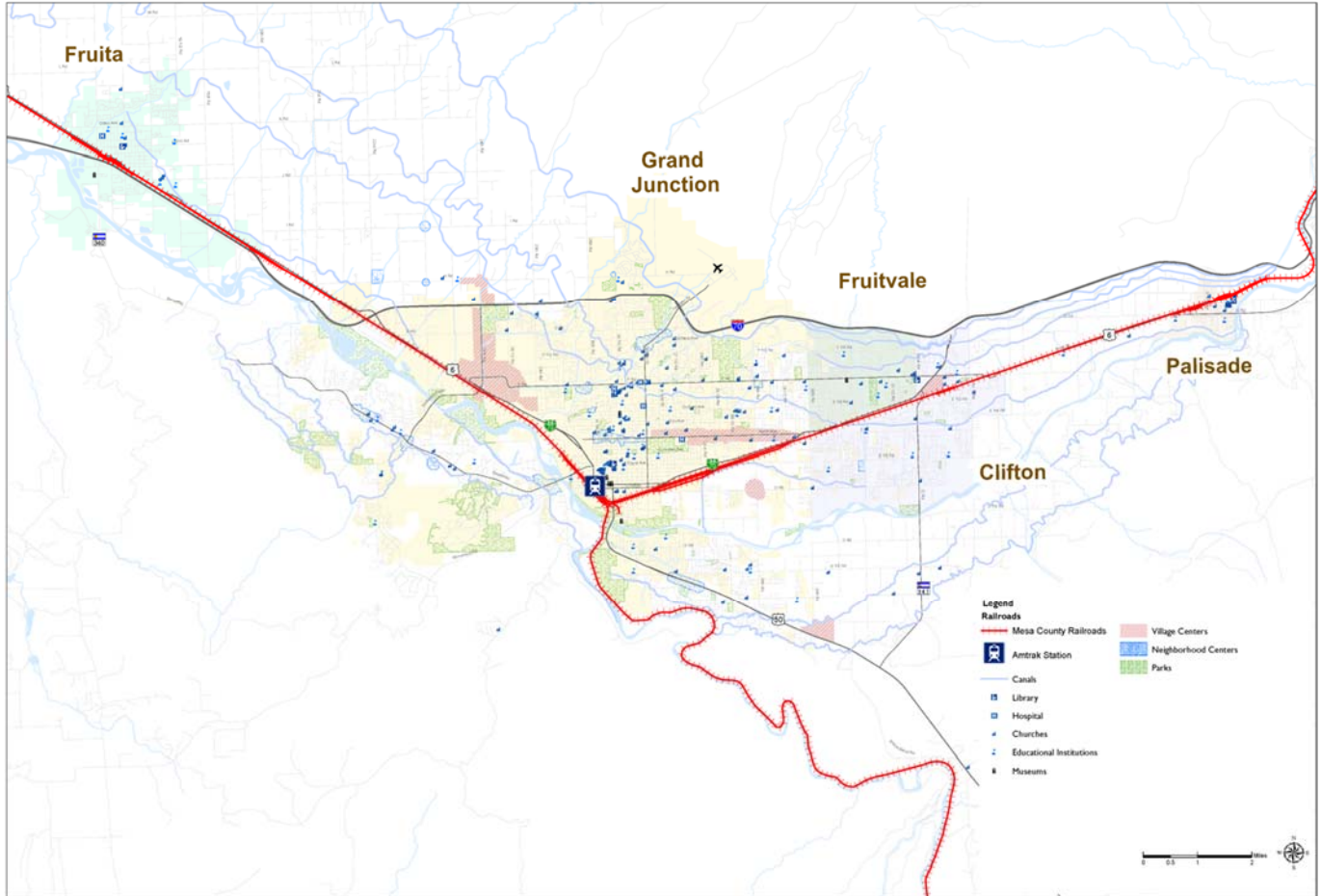
#### **Actions Taken by the Friends Group to Save the Depot**

- Interested Citizens Formed the Friends Group, a private non-profit group dedicated to preserving and restoring the historic depot in 2009.
- The Friends Group held two open houses with over 100 people in attendance.
- The City of Grand Junction with the assistance of the Friends Group, applied for, and received a structural feasibility grant from the Colorado Historic Society (\$15,000: \$10,000 Colorado Historic Society grant; \$5,000 local match City of Grant Junction).
- The City of Grand Junction hired Satterpaul and Associates, architects, to prepare a structural feasibility study; the study was completed in 2010.
- The City of Grand Junction with the assistance from the Friends Group applied for and received a grant to hire a landscape architecture student from the Colorado Division of Local Affairs to prepare an urban design study of the area around the depot and to show how it could be connected to downtown and Main Street.
- This study was completed in 2010.
- Both studies were presented to the Grand Junction Downtown Development Authority and the Grand Junction Lions Club and received favorable comments.
- The City of Grand Junction with the assistance of the Grand Junction Downtown Development Authority and Alpine Bank applied for and received a \$270,000 grant (\$135,000 Colorado Historic fund; \$135,000 local match) for the exterior rehabilitation of the Depot.
- Attempts have been made to attract long term renters including Amtrak, Enterprise Rental Car, art studios, etc.

Federal and State assistance is needed to prepare final designs and construct the urban design improvements on Business Loop I-70 that would include the parking, circulation and pedestrian improvements. The overall goal is to improve the Depot and the area around it as an important transportation hub, tourist gateway and commercial center in downtown Grand Junction.

**Figure 9-2: Railroads in the Mesa County Region**

Please refer to the Map Appendix for a larger version of this map.



## Freight and Truck Routes



Freight movements invariably impact land uses, especially along the corridors utilized by truck and rail traffic. The level of impact is often intensified when sensitive uses, such as neighborhoods, schools, parks, and so forth, occur along these routes. Proper long range planning and coordination with appropriate land use planners can serve to alleviate these impacts in the future and correct problems made in the past. This may include periodic designation and update of truck routes, implementation of additional limited-access roadway facilities, and other techniques.

Truck Routes in the Mesa County region have been established by Grand Junction but not in the other local jurisdictions. Large trucks of more than three tons must use the approved Truck Routes when traveling in the region, although they may deviate from these routes when making local deliveries. Truck routes are not shown in the 2035 RTP because they are developed through a separate process, can change from time to time, and are specific to each local jurisdiction that chooses to adopt them.

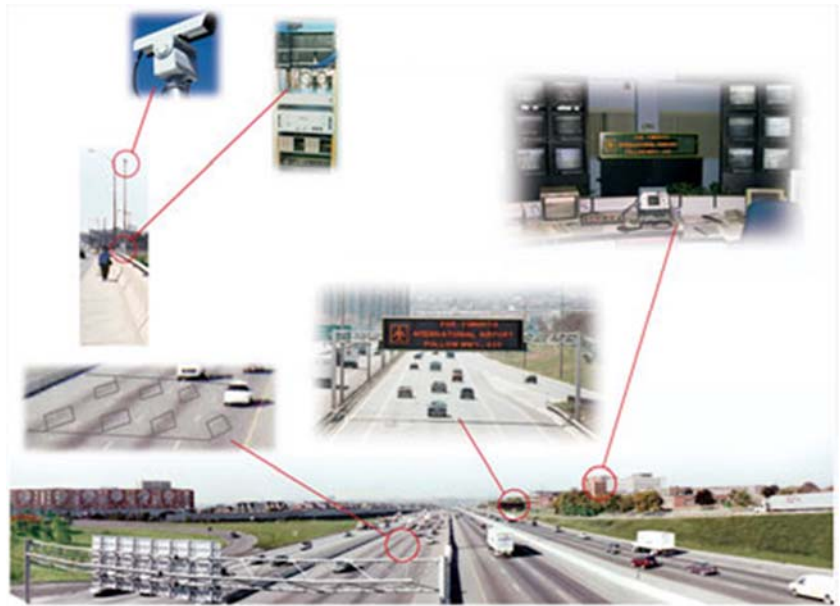
Freight is an important topic that deserves additional planning and consideration in future Plan development efforts. Federal legislation stresses the need to integrate freight issues with other planning efforts. Freight planning can identify future economic development opportunities and assist with making the roadway network more facilitating for truck traffic. During the development of the 2035 RTP, the study team met with freight interests as presented in Chapter 2, *Community Involvement*, to discuss their needs, issues, and concerns as they relate to the long range transportation planning process.

It is important to note that freight issues go beyond roadway transportation and should include planning for efficient connections of rail, truck/road, and aviation.



## Intelligent Transportation Systems

The implementation of intelligent transportation systems in the region improves the safety, efficiency, and cost effectiveness of the transportation system and the quality of the travel experience from a user perspective. Intelligent transportation systems include a wide variety of approaches to coordinate systems and communicate problems and solutions to planners, engineers, and the public. They rely primarily on information and communications technology to enhance the transportation system rather than costly infrastructure improvements.



The City of Grand Junction began planning a communications backbone in 1998. Implementation of a signal communications system began in 2000 with the first fiber optic cable installed for communications with eleven traffic signals. Since then, the City has placed fiber optic cable for communications with a total of 81 signals connected. With the completion of the 29 Road project over I 70B, an additional four traffic signals will be connected through the fiber optic cable. The project will also install radio communications to four existing traffic signals.

As part of the communications system, the City of Grand Junction operates 14 pan, tilt, zoom cameras placed strategically throughout its system. Photos from the PTZ cameras are posted on the City's web page and updated approximately every 15 minutes for public information. The City Transportation Engineering Division has partnered with its IT Department as well as Mesa County's IT Department to be able to utilize the fiber optic network for telephone and computer connection. The City's IT Department has installed a 900 MHz radio system that accesses the fiber network to provide communications to outlying city facilities. The City recently completed a redundant loop for emergency services communications between the Police Department and the Sheriff's Department, building from the original fiber optic communications.

The City of Grand Junction has placed conduit for future communications for CDOT in the I-70B project in the joint trench with utilities that are being relocated. CDOT has a long-term plan to bring its fiber optic network west to Grand Junction.

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