

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Mobility plays a big role in Salt Lake City's economy and quality of life. It helps people get to jobs, homes, schools, and places to have fun. A strong transportation system is closely tied to a successful community. Transportation infrastructure influences how and where people go, which impacts development and investment trends. The way roads, buses, and other transportation options are built and maintained affects where people go and how neighborhoods grow.

What is a Problem Statement?

The **WE Connect Foundation Report** highlights the impacts of major infrastructure barriers such as I-15 and the railroad. While the challenges of the West-East Divide may be familiar to residents who regularly traverse the city, a formally defined and publicly endorsed definition of the problem ensures that proposed solutions remain focused, relevant, and aligned with community needs. **This problem statement will be the foundation for evaluating and screening solutions in the next phase of the project.**

How was the Problem Statement prepared?

The problem statement reflects public sentiment and synthesizes findings from past studies in the area, guiding the development of project goals and objectives. It will also support the identification, screening, and prioritization of potential solutions.

The problem statement was developed through community engagement including the May 2025 public event, stakeholder meetings, a survey of over 1,000 participants, contributions from the Community Advisory Board and Technical Advisory Committee, previous plans and studies, and the WE Connect Foundation Report. These problems are grouped into the following categories:



How will the Problem Statement be used?

The problem statement outlines key issues to be addressed by the West-East Connections Study. It will inform data collection during the “Existing Conditions” phase, helping to identify both community concerns and data-driven challenges that the study aims to address. It will also guide the development of project goals and objectives and inform the screening and prioritization of potential solutions. Together, the problem statement and existing conditions analysis will help identify actionable problems, grounded in both public input and technical data, that the WE Connect process can work to solve.

TRAVEL CHOICE — PROBLEM STATEMENT

Getting around Salt Lake City between the westside and other parts of the city is hard. The railroad corridor, unpredictable train activity and I-15 block the way, and there aren't enough options for people walking, riding a bicycle, or taking transit.

Freedom to move shapes people's connection to community and economic opportunity. In Salt Lake City, barriers created by I-15 and the railroad corridor limit reliable travel opportunities for people moving east to west, add uncertainty to many trips, and expose travelers to unsafe and uncomfortable conditions. Rail gates drop 30 to 100 times per day at at-grade crossings, requiring people to wait, divert, and reconsider travel paths.

Westside residents and travelers experience the impacts of the east-west "divide" in many ways.



They...



1. Take risks to save time – Blocked intersections and long train delays lead some pedestrians to take unsafe actions, like climbing between train cars or navigating tracks on wheels, putting lives at risk rather than face rerouting or waiting for a train to clear the intersection.⁶



2. Find it hard to get around without a car – UTA does not generally operate buses on streets with at-grade rail crossings, meaning west-to-east bus routes are limited. In addition, reliable bicycle and pedestrian crossings are limited to overpasses, many of which are at freeway interchanges or passing through unlit, unprotected spaces that do not feel secure.⁷



3. Travel farther to basic needs, jobs, goods, services, and recreation – Many Westside residents need to travel to the eastside to access grocery stores, shopping, and parks, among other destinations. Almost 40% of WE Connect survey respondents indicate the westside does not have the goods and services they need.⁸



4. Feel limited in their choices – Over 50%, more than 500 responses, of WE Connect Community Survey respondents say they have made choices about where to live, work, go to school, shop, or recreate because of the west-east divide.⁹

6. Community event graphic recorder summary; WE Connect Community Survey Summary, page 12; WE Connect Foundation Report, page 34.

7. WE Connect Foundation Report, pages 19-27; WE Connect Community Survey Summary, pages 14 and 21-22.

8. WE Connect Community Survey Summary, pages 11 and 15-17; WE Connect Foundation Report, pages 41-42.

9. WE Connect Community Survey Summary, page 7.

HEALTH AND SAFETY — PROBLEM STATEMENT

Westside neighborhoods face health and safety problems, like bad air, difficult street and railroad crossings, and poor access to care. These issues make life harder and less healthy.

Environmental and infrastructure conditions on the Westside contribute to disproportionate health and safety risks, pedestrian fatalities, and exposure to pollutants. Without targeted investments in clean air, safe streets, and accessible care, the well-being of Westside communities will remain compromised.

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They...



- 1. Worry about air pollution** – Car-centered infrastructure and frequent vehicle idling worsen air quality, contributing to respiratory issues, especially for children and older adults.¹⁰



- 2. Are stressed by the unpredictability** – Unreliable travel times increase daily stress, reduce time with family, and make it harder to access healthcare, jobs, and other essentials.¹¹



- 3. Avoid walking or bicycling on the Westside or traveling to areas outside of Westside neighborhoods** – Poor lighting, lack of protected paths or bikeways, and confusing or unsafe crossings discourage active transportation, limiting healthy movement and increasing reliance on cars.¹²



- 4. Worry that emergency services might not reach them in time** – Traffic congestion and blocked crossings can delay emergency response times, putting residents at greater risk during critical health or safety incidents. Emergency services, including police, fire, and ambulance, plan their routes differently to navigate railroad crossings.¹³



10. WE Connect Foundation Report, pages 32-33.

11. Community event graphic recorder summary; WE Connect Community Survey Summary, page 20-23.

12. WE Connect Foundation Report, pages 19-21, 25, and 34; Community event graphic recorder summary; WE Connect Community Survey Summary, page 18-20.

13. WE Connect Foundation Report, page 34; Focus Group Meeting Summary and Notes Discussions held June 18-26, 2025, Emergency Services.

ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY – PROBLEM STATEMENT






People living on the Westside face more challenges getting to jobs, schools, and training because of barriers like I-15 and unpredictable train activity. These barriers make it harder for them to access opportunities within their community.

The physical divide created by I-15 and the rail corridors has deepened demographic and workforce disparities between the Westside and the rest of the city. These mobility barriers limit access to employment, education, training, and professional networks. As a result, Westside residents face reduced job opportunities, longer commutes, and fewer pathways to economic advancement. These conditions reinforce cycles of poverty, hinder workforce participation, and contribute to demographic stagnation and out-migration.

Westside residents and travelers experience the impacts of the east-west “divide” in many ways.



They...

-  **1. Have trouble accessing good-paying jobs** – Limited east-west transit options make it harder to access employment centers, especially for those without a car, reducing job choices and income potential.¹
-  **2. Spend more time traveling and less time with family** – Long, unpredictable travel times cut into personal time, strain family responsibilities, and reduce quality of life.²
-  **3. Experience disruptions to work and business operations** – Unpredictable train traffic delays employees, disrupts deliveries, and creates uncertainty for local businesses trying to serve their communities.³
-  **4. Miss training and education opportunities** – Barriers to reaching schools, job training programs, and higher education institutions limit skill development and career advancement.⁴
-  **5. Feel disconnected from the city's economic growth** – While other areas benefit from continued growth and higher concentrations of commercial activity, Westside residents often feel left behind due to physical and economic isolation.⁵

1. CAB #3 summary, page 5; WE Connect Foundation Report, page 12.

2. WE Connect Foundation Report, page 18; WE Connect Community Survey Summary, page 20.

3. WE Connect Foundation Report, page 18; Community event graphic recorder summary; WE Connect Community Survey Summary, pages 18-19.

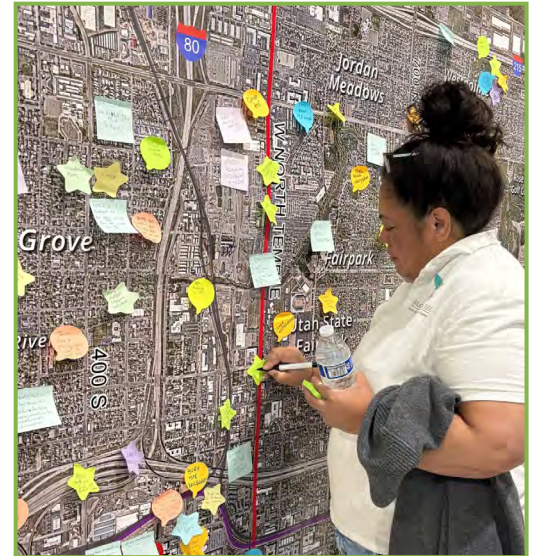
4. WE Connect Community Survey Summary, page 7; WE Connect Foundation Report, page 10.

5. WE Connect Foundation Report, page 43; WE Connect Community Survey Summary, pages 15-17.

COMMUNITY VIBRANCY — PROBLEM STATEMENT

Westside neighborhoods offer fewer housing options and have seen less investment in public and private spaces over time. These challenges can make it harder for residents to thrive and take full pride in their surroundings, despite the strong sense of community that historically exists.

Westside communities are split by North Temple and I-80 into two disconnected, predominantly single-family neighborhoods. While relatively affordable compared to Salt Lake City overall, these areas suffer from limited housing diversity, a lack of quality public spaces, and dispersed community assets. These conditions have made neighborhoods less livable, less equitable, and more vulnerable to displacement. Residents face barriers to accessing childcare, healthcare, and other essential services — including delayed emergency response due to blocked railroad crossings. The lack of access to resources has reinforced economic divides, limited mobility, increased social isolation, and contributed to a decline in community pride.



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They...



1. Struggle to find homes that fit needs and budgets – A lack of diverse housing options and limited room for new development accelerates gentrification, displacement and disrupts intergenerational stability.¹⁴



2. Feel cut off from the rest of the city – Limited transportation options and infrastructure barriers reduce access to jobs, services, and social connections.¹⁵



3. Find it harder to access healthcare, education, and opportunities – Disparities in access to essential services affect health outcomes, economic mobility, and quality of life. School buses must plan their routes differently to navigate railroad crossings.¹⁶



4. Feel like their neighborhoods are overlooked – Underinvestment in public infrastructure hinders the success of local small businesses, weakening the neighborhood culture, identity, and sense of pride.¹⁷

14. WE Connect Foundation Report, pages 39-40.

15. Community event graphic recorder summary; WE Connect Foundation Report, pages 12 and 27.

16. Focus Group Meeting Summary and Notes Discussions held June 18-26, 2025, SLC Schools – Transportation; WE Connect Foundation Report, pages 12 and 27.

17. WE Connect Community Survey Summary, page 20; WE Connect Foundation Report, page 11.