

Transportation Options and Community Planning Lead to New Economic Opportunities

Since the creation of its reservation in 1881, the [Spokane Tribe of Indians](#) has been seeking to achieve its vision of sovereignty through self-sufficiency. With a growing population but declining revenues, the tribe struggles with high poverty levels, limited employment opportunities, few transportation choices, and a lack of both infrastructure and housing. These interrelated challenges require innovative solutions and comprehensive, integrated planning.

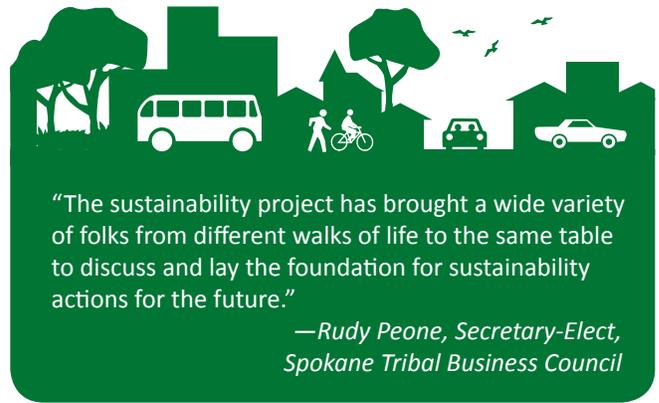
To address these challenges, the tribe partnered with Native American nonprofit Antithesis Research and the Partnership for Sustainable Communities to improve environmental and economic conditions. Through a 2010 HUD Community Challenge Grant, the Spokane Tribe is bringing together community, government, and business leaders to prepare a community master plan to assess the tribe's needs and create integrated solutions for housing, transportation, infrastructure, and economic development.

The Power of Partnership

With a 47 percent unemployment rate on the reservation, the tribe is focused on supporting economic development and helping residents get better access to jobs. One strategy is to



The Moccasin Express provides residents reliable transportation to jobs and amenities. Photo courtesy of the Spokane Tribe of Indians.



improve transportation choices; in 2008, the tribe completed a feasibility study that determined that lack of transportation options was the major reason for long-term unemployment. The study crystallized the problem and put in motion other requests for assistance. In 2009, the tribe received an [FTA Tribal Transit Planning Grant](#) to complete a transit development plan.

"The reservation is 45 miles from Spokane, and there are no transit systems that connect," says Chamisa Radford, the tribe's planning and economic development director. "If you don't have a car or your car breaks down, you lose your job." With funds from the FTA Tribal Transit Program, the state, and the tribe's fuel taxes, the tribe now operates two bus routes and a vanpool service dubbed the Moccasin Express. The tribe is working to locate transit centers near homes and conduct a marketing campaign to increase ridership. Today, the Moccasin Express and two bus routes provide reliable transportation for more than 1,000 riders a month.

Working with the Partnership, the tribe has identified additional community needs, such as addressing the reservation's aging water infrastructure. The tribe is receiving technical assistance in 2012 through [EPA's Smart Growth Implementation Assistance Program](#) to plan for and address water shortages, pipe failures, and sewer system maintenance. Improving the water infrastructure will give the reservation safer, more reliable water and sewer service, which will enhance the quality of life for residents and

support the development of new tribal business enterprises.

“Previously, the tribe had to work with individual departments completely separate from each other,” says Scott Radford, vice chair of Antithesis Research. “There was duplication of work, or the work was not as comprehensive as it could have been. Now, water, transportation, and housing issues are being addressed together at one time.”

The Partnership has also helped inspire collaboration within the tribe, says Chamisa Radford. “We actually have grant writers from

different departments meeting together for the first time, so we can be more strategic about which resources to apply for and how to have a single project meet multiple needs. We are learning a new system, and I see great benefits.”

This case study appears in *Three Years of Helping Communities Achieve Their Visions for Growth and Prosperity*, a report of the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, June 2012. Learn more about the Partnership at www.sustainablecommunities.gov.

