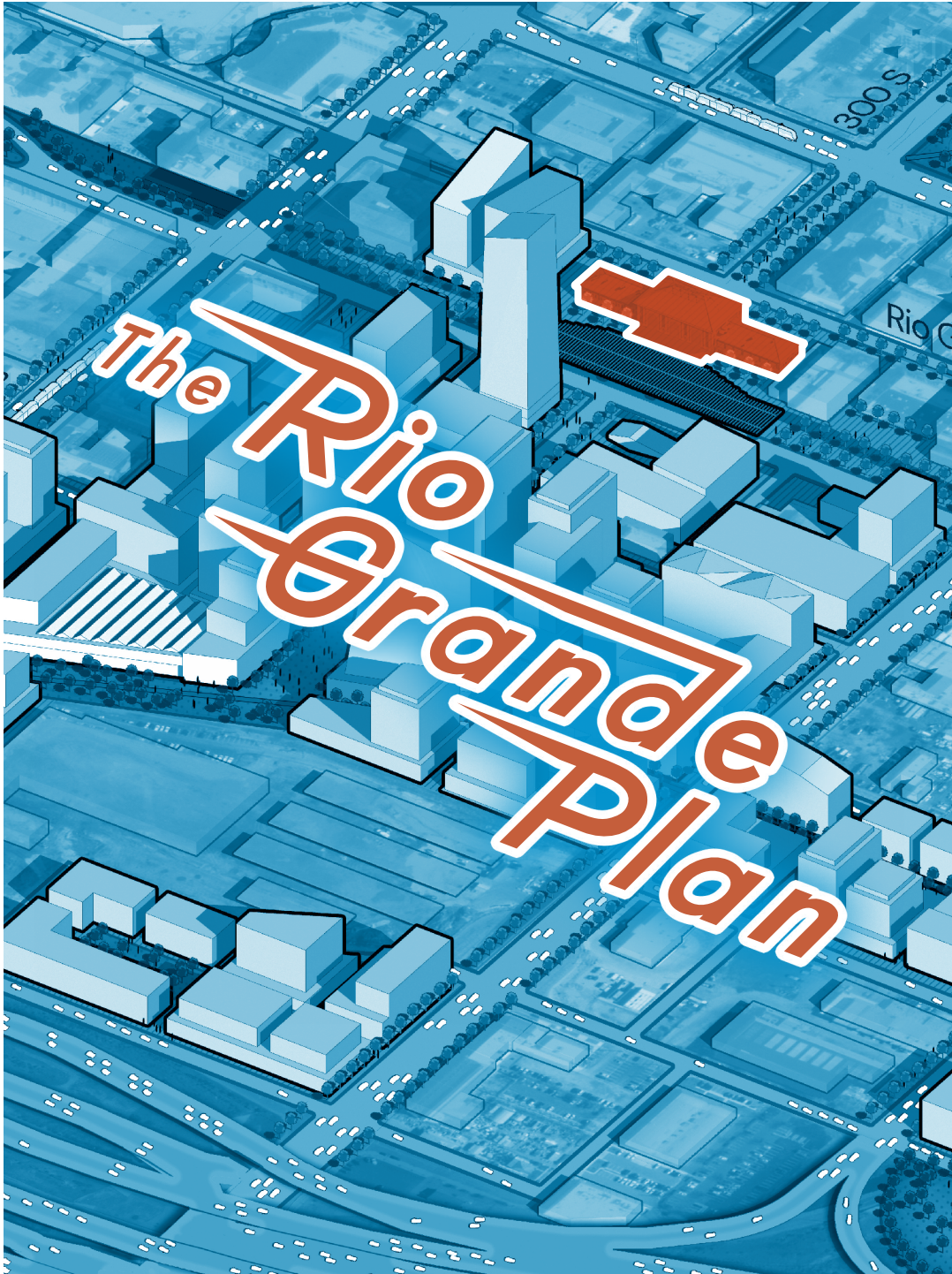
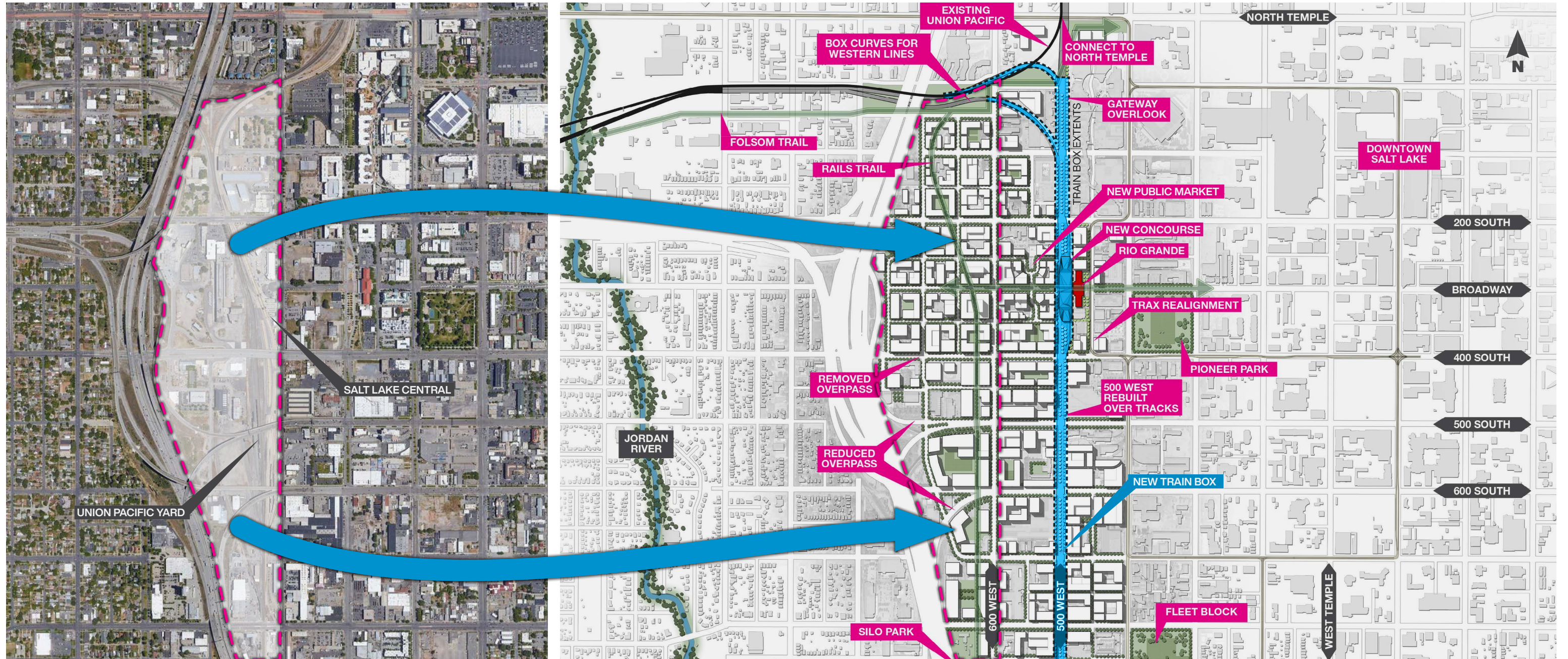


utah's next big move



via rio grande

RIO GRANDE PLAN OVERVIEW



REROUTING THE RAILS

FrontRunner, Amtrak, and Union Pacific activity downtown would be **completely grade separated**

The trains would run **unconflicted** in a covered trench (train box) beneath 500 West, which could be used as a street again

Zero demolition of housing units would be required

RECONNECTING UTAH

Passenger rail service would be **restored** to the Rio Grande Depot

Utah and the Intermountain West would have the **world-class**, modern train station it deserves

The new station would be capable of **comfortably** hosting new routes to Boise and Las Vegas

REVITALIZING SALT LAKE CITY

Over **75 acres** of downtown-adjacent land would be **opened for redevelopment**

The taxable value of these parcels would increase from \$17 million to **\$2 billion**

Another 50 acres would be revitalized by increased access and proximity

An **entire new city district** could be built with over **2600 housing units**, new green spaces, offices, hotels, entertainment venues, university facilities, a permanent public market, churches, and more

This would be the most transit-oriented development opportunity **in state history**

EXISTING CONDITIONS



photo by Nathan Strain, Via Rio Grande

freight trains block at-grade crossings daily, leading to risky pedestrian encounters and fatalities

AT-GRADE CROSSINGS

Today, **there are eight at-grade railroad crossings** west of downtown that pose significant hazards, both directly and indirectly. Since 1976, 28 incidents have been recorded between people and trains, resulting in 11 major injuries and 4 fatalities. However, the damage goes far beyond these individual tragedies. Each time the gates go down, students cannot get to their schools, workers cannot get to their jobs, essential deliveries cannot be made, and police and rescuers cannot get to emergencies. **Between these eight crossings, the gates activate over 500 times per day—often for extended periods of time—this number is projected to be over 800 times per day as train frequencies increase.**

FREEWAY-STYLE VIADUCTS

The effect of the road overpasses at North Temple, 400, 500, and 600 South cannot be overstated. By disrupting the street grid, drivers and **pedestrians are required to navigate a maze of one-way streets**, blocked roads, and dead ends. The space beneath the bridges has become a magnet for crime and vagrancy, dissuading visitors and development. Furthermore, the complete loss of street frontage along the bridges creates several blocks of isolated parcels unsuited for urban development. **These barriers have played a major role in preventing the redevelopment of the RDA and UTA properties near Salt Lake Central.**



photo by Trent Nelson, The Salt Lake Tribune

cars and emergency vehicles are often stopped for extended periods of time

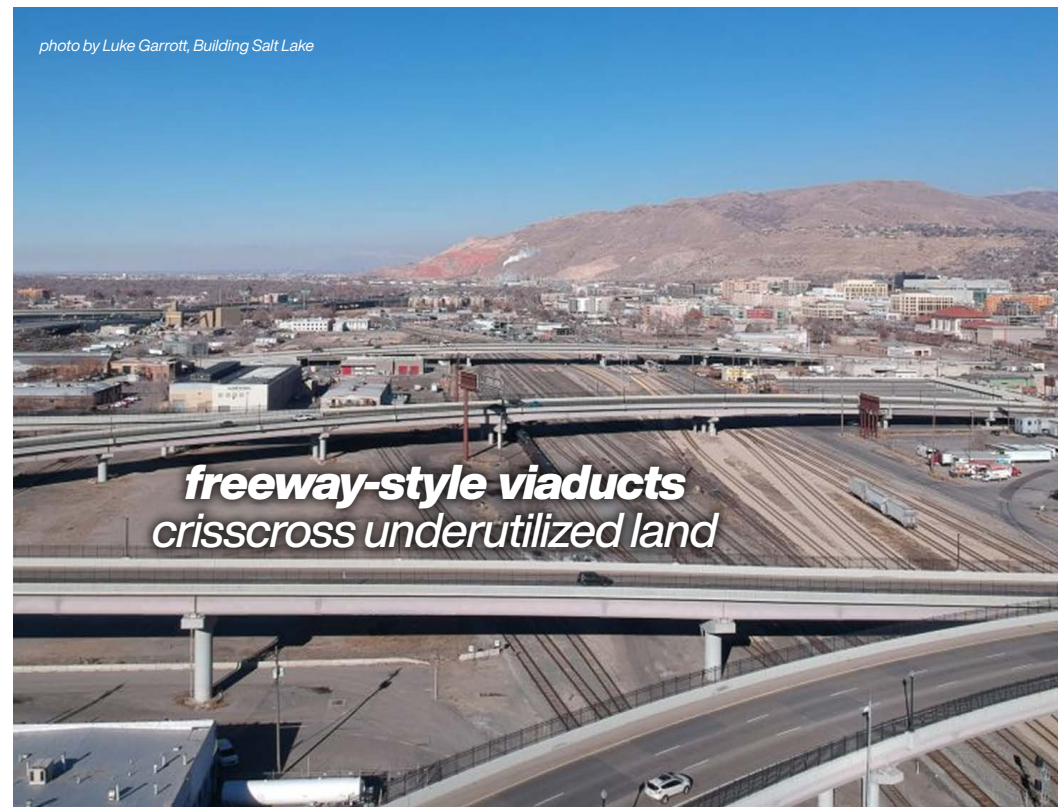


photo by Luke Garrott, Building Salt Lake

freeway-style viaducts crisscross underutilized land

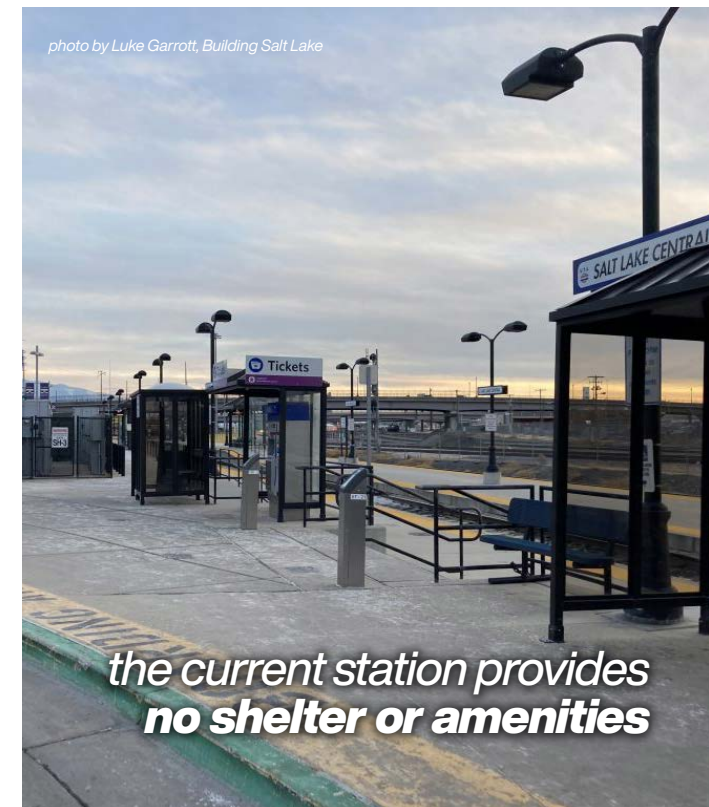


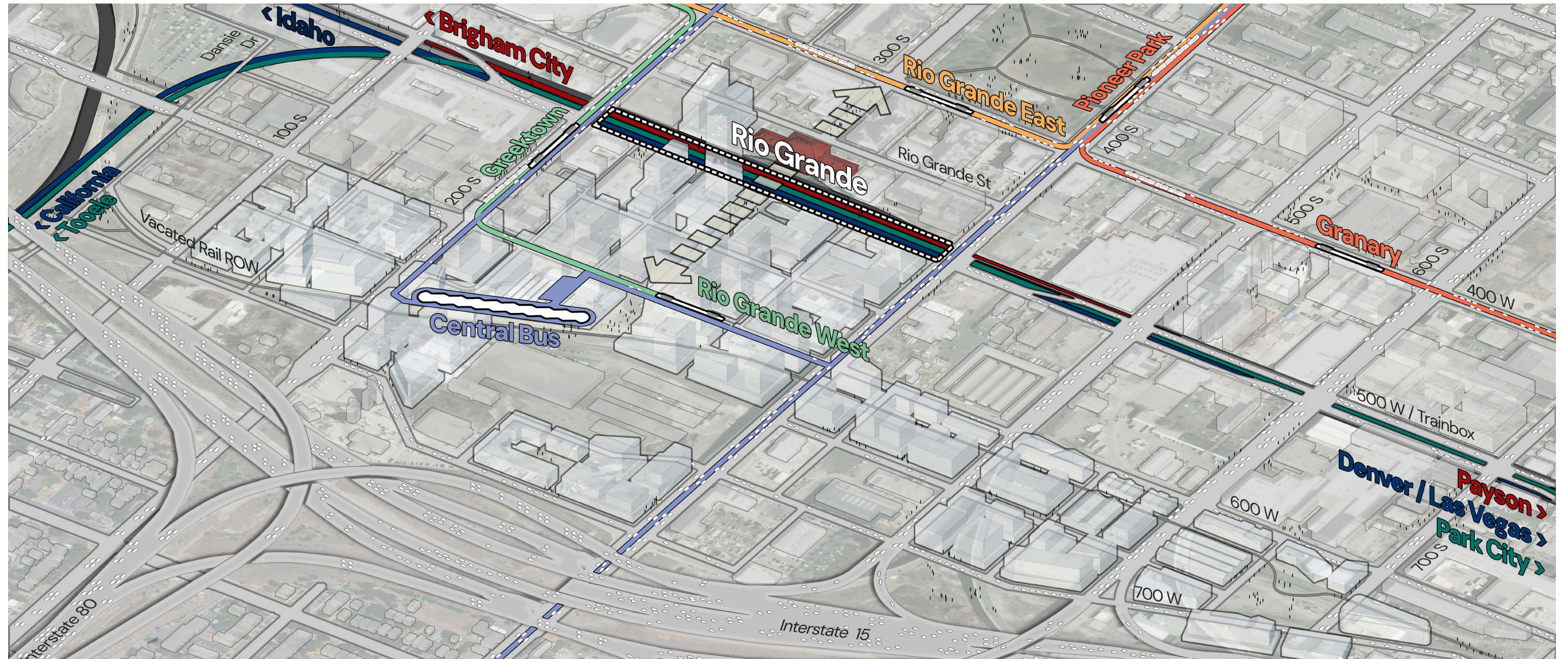
photo by Luke Garrott, Building Salt Lake

the current station provides no shelter or amenities

INADEQUATE CENTRAL STATION

Salt Lake Central Station was built as a temporary solution in 1999, but was never upgraded. **Passengers are forced to cross active railroad tracks** in order to reach their trains, and amenities such as water fountains and restrooms are non-existent. Amtrak passengers have access to a waiting room in a temporary trailer building, while transit riders must wait outside in the elements. Worst of all, **the station is located a mile from the downtown core, making it difficult for pedestrians and drivers to access.** As passenger numbers continue to rise, major upgrades will be required to prevent overcrowding, including bridges, escalators, indoor waiting areas, and basic passenger amenities. Not only will these upgrades be expensive, but they will ultimately fail to solve the station's main problem: it is located in the wrong place.

SOLUTION



UNDERGROUND THE RAILS

Instead of cutting through Salt Lake City at surface level, the **heavy rail lines will be routed underground along the public right-of-way beneath 500 West**. The Rio Grande Plan proposes a two-mile long concrete “train box” with 1% approach grades to the north and south, allowing freight and passenger rail traffic to pass through the city below grade. 500 West, with the city’s new Green Loop, will be rebuilt on top of the train box. **Eight high-traffic railroad crossings will be completely grade separated, allowing free movement of people and cars across the rails**. Three additional streets will be reopened for the first time in decades.

REMOVE THE VIADUCTS

The railyards to the west, which today are used much less than other, larger yards to the north and south, can then be completely reclaimed and remediated for the city, allowing for the **500 South and 600 South viaducts to be cut back all the way to the freeway itself** and replaced with proper city streets, greatly enhancing the “Grand Boulevards” leading into the city. **The 400 South and North Temple viaducts will also be completely removed and replaced with surface streets**. All of this will enable thousands of new homes and jobs to move into a prosperous new mixed-use, transit-oriented Depot District.

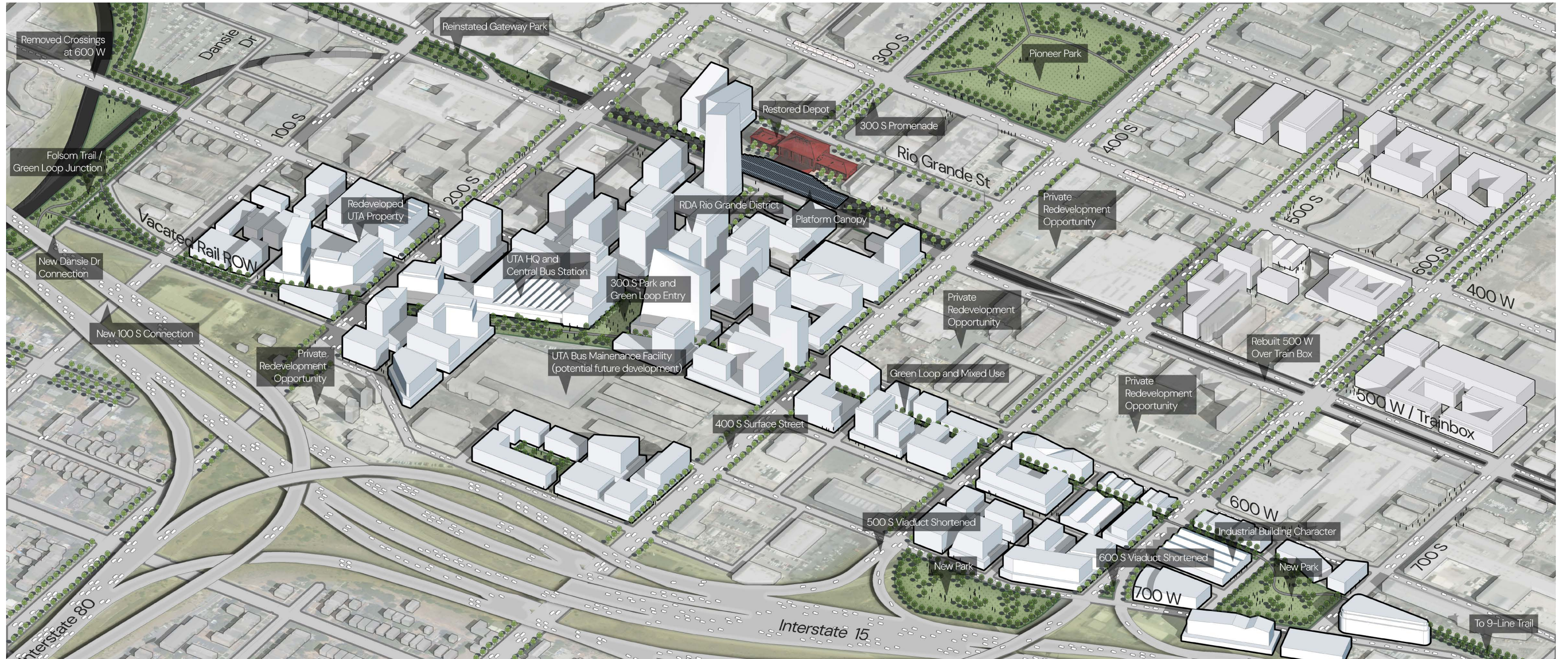
REACTIVATE THE DEPOT

Passenger rail services will make a triumphant return to the historic Rio Grande Depot, located directly adjacent to 500 West. **Both FrontRunner and Amtrak, as well as any future services to other destinations, will arrive to and depart from Salt Lake City underground**, and passengers will be greeted by an impressive piece of Utah’s architectural legacy, reactivated to serve its original purpose. The Depot will provide all of the amenities that Salt Lake Central currently lacks including restrooms, restaurants, services, and proximity to downtown.

NEXUS OF GREEN TRANSPORTATION

The new Rio Grande Central Station, located at the Crossroads of the West, will be positioned to **integrate all modes of transportation, turning a barrier in the city into a gateway to the world**. In addition to providing a proper home for passenger rail in Salt Lake City, the concept fits well with existing transit expansion plans like TechLink and Salt Lake City’s forthcoming Green Loop. **Easier access and density will enable more people to live and work without cars** and the pollution associated with idling at heavy rail crossings will be eliminated. The new station will be a point of pride for the entire state, impressing visitors from around the world just in time for the 2034 Olympics.

OPPORTUNITY



REDEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

By moving the railroad tracks into a train box and removing the railyard, **75+ acres of underutilized land can be opened for redevelopment.** The Rio Grande Plan will also enable the removal of the viaducts, railroad crossings, and abandoned buildings **without the destruction of any existing housing units.** With the Rio Grande Plan and appropriate zoning changes, the SLC RDA estimates that the taxable value of the **directly affected parcels will increase in value from \$17.7 million to \$1.9 billion** (2023 dollars), providing ample opportunities for Tax Increment Financing and other funding mechanisms. Redevelopment and remediation will also improve the development potential of more than 100 acres of additional land adjacent to the railyard.

A NEW THIRD SPACE

A third place is defined as a public, social place outside of home and work where people can connect with their community. The Rio Grande Plan will create a new third place at the Rio Grande Depot. This will be done through public green spaces around the district, restaurants, and other public entertainment. **The Rio Grande Depot can stand as the centerpiece of this new residential and commercial district on the west side of downtown,** helping incentivize more people to move into the area in a higher density, where they can have all their basic needs taken care of in a central location with transit access.

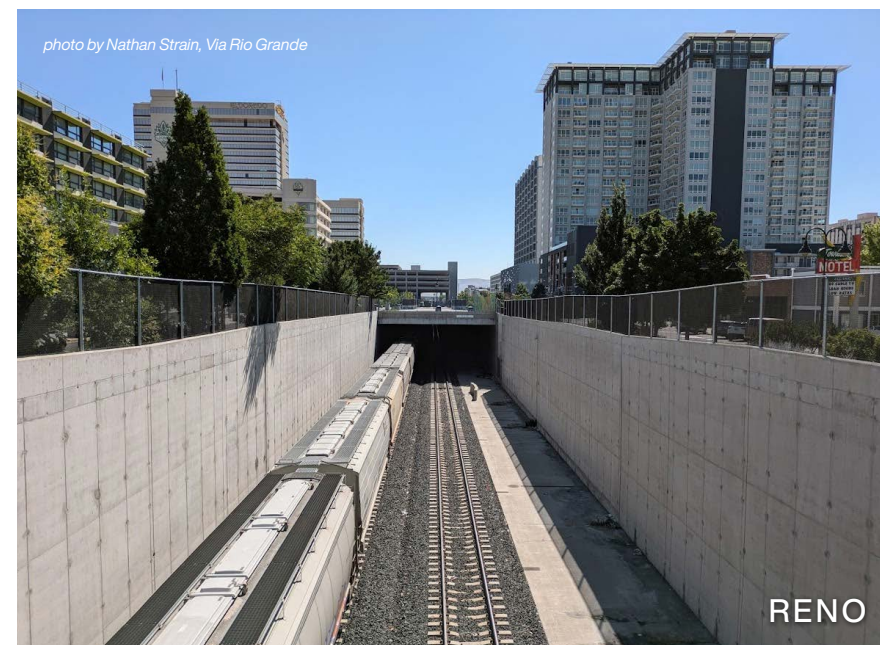
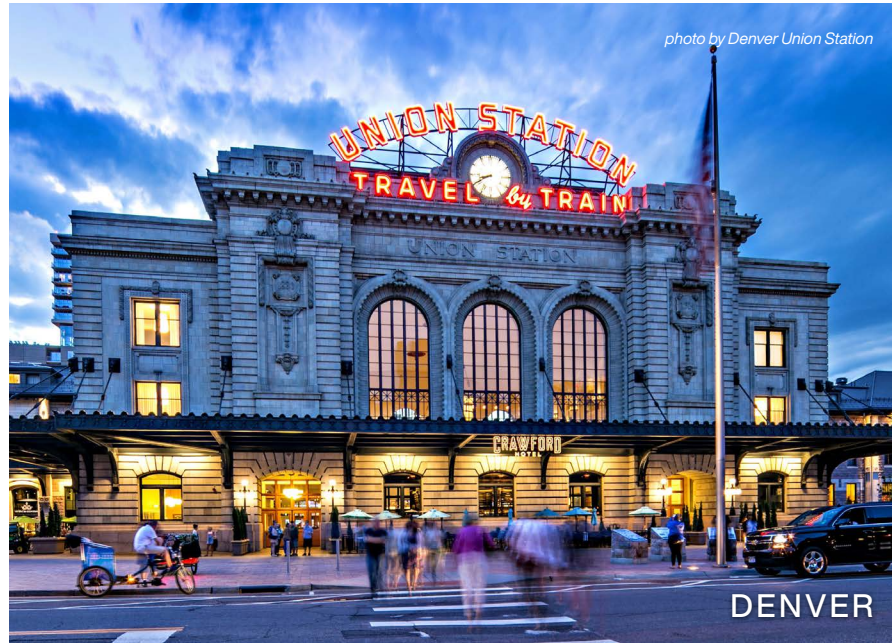
BRIDGING THE EAST-WEST DIVIDE

The Salt Lake City Transportation Department has stated that **the “east-west divide is the single-largest transportation issue in the city.”** The Rio Grande Plan is the only solution that has been formally considered that confronts the east-west divide head-on, completely removing the single largest barrier between the two halves of the city and replacing it with livable city streets. The train box will **remove up to eight at-grade railroad crossings, reopen up to three streets that are currently cut off by the tracks.** This will allow for seamless connections between the east and west sides of the city for cars, people, cyclists, ambulances, and transit.

FEDERAL SUPPORT

In addition to its potential to repay much of the cost over time, **the Rio Grande Plan could be substantially funded using federal dollars.** In 2021, the Biden Administration signed the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) opening up to \$1.2 trillion in infrastructure funding. In 2022, the Build Back Better Act was signed into law allocating an additional \$2.2 trillion in funding for infrastructure projects. As of July 2024, only about 20% of that \$3.4 trillion is fully allocated, meaning there should be nearly \$2.7 trillion in federal infrastructure funding still on the table.

INSPIRATION



SLC // RIO GRANDE DEPOT

Salt Lake City is home to two historic train stations, the Union Pacific Depot (1908) and the Rio Grande Depot (1910). Both of these beautiful structures were separated from the train tracks in the years prior to the 2002 Winter Olympics, with the former being incorporated into the Gateway Mall development. **The Rio Grande Depot, which was sold to the State of Utah in 1977, sits prominently on 500 West and remains a “barrier to development” due to its position blocking 300 South.** It is currently being repaired and reinforced after it sustained damage in the 2020 earthquake and will sit empty once finished.

DENVER // UNION STATION RENOVATION

Twenty years ago, Union Station in Denver, Colorado was in a similar situation as the Rio Grande Depot is today. After a \$500 million public investment (2014 dollars), which removed the old railyards and transformed the old station into the premiere transportation hub in Denver, **the 42-acre Union Station district has generated over \$3.5 billion in private investment and resulted in an entire mixed-use neighborhood with the lowest office vacancy rates in the entire city.** The economic returns were such that the public financing loans were repaid 10 years early.

RENO // RETRAC

The Union Pacific mainline cuts directly through downtown Reno, Nevada and the train traffic used to be a significant barrier to pedestrian and auto traffic. The Reno ReTrac project, which **grade separated all of the downtown crossings by putting the UP mainline into a subgrade concrete train box,** was completed in 2005 at a cost of \$300 million (2004 dollars). During construction, temporary fly routes were utilized so that the freight traffic would not be interrupted. Like the Rio Grande Plan, sections of the concrete structure are completely covered and new public spaces exist on top.

LOS ANGELES // ALAMEDA CORRIDOR

The Alameda Corridor in Los Angeles, California was completed in 2003 at a cost of \$2.4 billion (2002 dollars) and allows freight trains to travel from the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach to downtown railyards and vice versa. **The subgrade concrete train box took four years to build, hosts three parallel tracks, and is over 10 miles long.** Over 200 crossings were grade separated along this length, allowing tens of thousands of people and cars to pass over the busy freight mainlines every day without conflicting with freight operations.

PLAN TIMELINE



GRASSROOTS CONCEPT

The Rio Grande Plan was born in 2020 when two Salt Lake City residents, Christian Lenhart and Cameron Blakely, saw the problems caused by the railroad tracks and envisioned the solution. They created the original Rio Grande Plan and began advocating for local officials and stakeholders to engage with the idea of grade separating the rails downtown and returning service to the venerable Rio Grande Depot. Since then, **a core advocacy group has grown into the volunteer organization known as Via Rio Grande.**

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Since 2022, **Via Rio Grande has developed a significant social media presence and organized two successful public events.** These events have included members of the Salt Lake City Council and Planning Department with the goal of city, state, and federal approval of the plan's implementation. More public outreach is planned in the future including a west-side event in collaboration with Salt Lake City in September of 2024. Via Rio Grande continues to meet with Salt Lake City officials on a regular basis as well as with high-ranking state and county representatives.

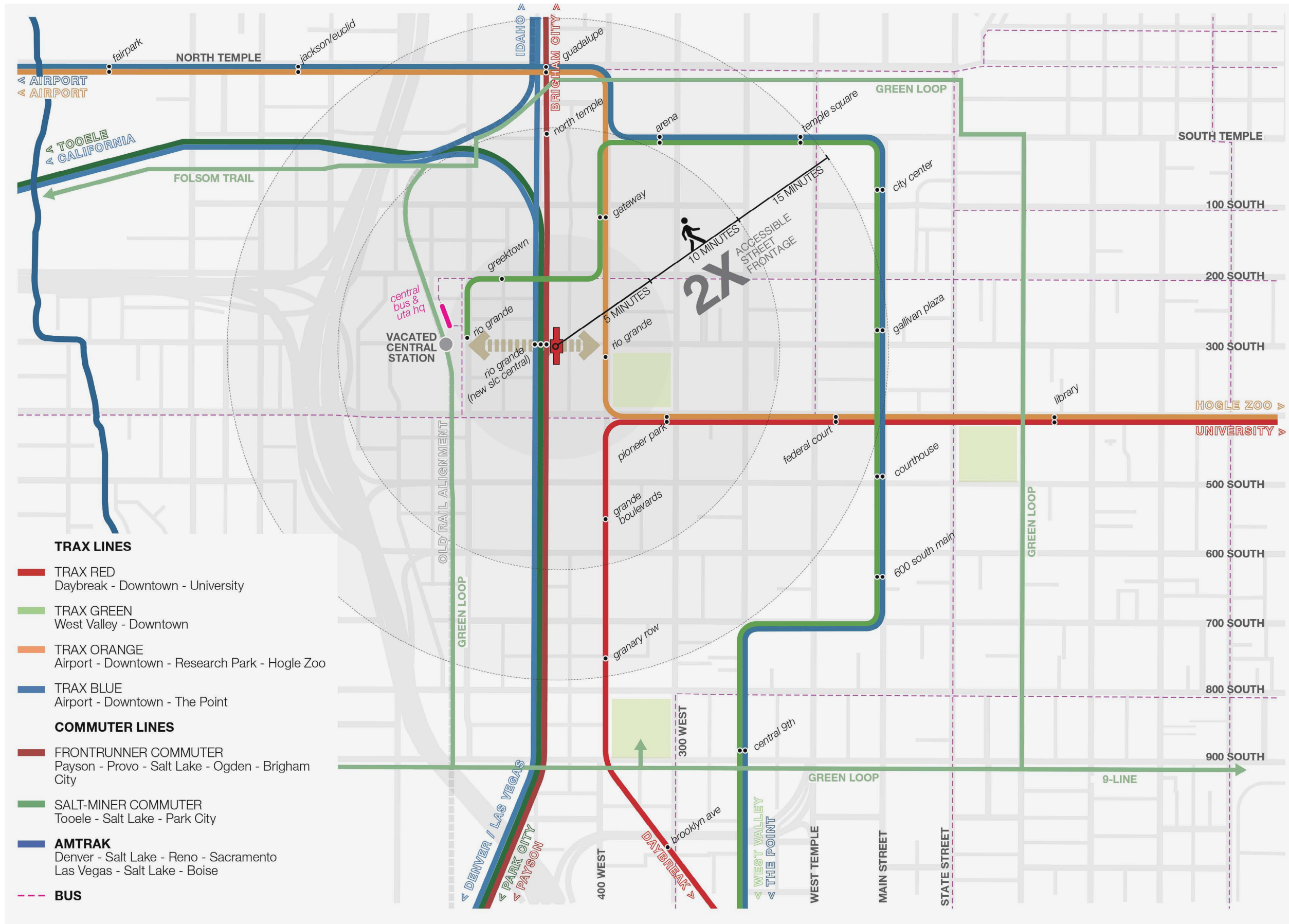
KIMLEY HORN SCREENING ANALYSIS

In 2022, **Salt Lake City contracted the professional engineering firm Kimley Horn to conduct an analysis of the costs and benefits of the Rio Grande Plan.** After engaging with stakeholders including Union Pacific and the Utah Transit Authority, the scope of the concept was increased substantially. Maps of the new configuration and necessary property acquisitions were created and a rough order-of-magnitude (ROM) cost estimate was generated. In 2023 dollars, the firm estimated the cost to be \$3-5 billion. More detailed analysis and stakeholder engagement will be required to refine this estimate further.

RECONNECTING COMMUNITIES GRANT

In 2023, Salt Lake City has also applied for and received funds from the United States Department of Transportation to study causes and solutions to the city's significant east-west divide. The grant application, which was submitted in conjunction with UTA and UDOT as well as other stakeholders, specifically calls out the **Rio Grande Plan as a possible approach to addressing the divide in a meaningful way.** The Reconnecting Communities Study is expected to be underway by the end of 2024.

CITY CONNECTION



ACCESS AND WALKABILITY

Transit and pedestrian routes create a basic framework around which a city operates. Even though the Rio Grande Depot is only a block and a half east of Salt Lake Central Station, the implications for the downtown core will be significant.

For pedestrians, the Rio Grande Depot is within easy walking distance of much more of downtown than the current transit center, meaning not all passengers will need to transfer to TRAX or buses to reach destinations such as the Delta Center and the Granary District. In fact, Rio Grande Plan makes **twice as much street-frontage accessible to pedestrians**, greatly expanding the area that will benefit from increased foot traffic. By moving transit closer to the city center, **Salt Lake City can finally have the accessible and walkable downtown** it has been building toward.

NETWORK INTEGRATION

With the Rio Grande Plan, the new central station at the **Rio Grande Depot can be easily integrated into a downtown TRAX loop** like the one envisioned by UTA's TechLink study. The future Orange line, which will run from the University of Utah to the airport, would be able to turn directly onto 400 West and stop a half-block from the Depot before continuing on its route. This is in contrast to the current central station, which would require a longer route with more turns. The **Rio Grande Plan will also integrate well with Salt Lake City's planned Green Loop** as well as enable **significant improvements to UTA bus routing to the west side** of the city.

UNLOCK THE DEPOT DISTRICT

The RDA's **Rio Grande District** project area, which encompasses 11-acres of land between the Rio Grande Depot and the current central station, has been very slow to develop over the 25 years since the rails were moved to their current location. This is partially because it is **surrounded by barriers on all sides**: railyards to the west, freeway viaducts to the north and south, and a historic train station the east. **The Rio Grande Plan will completely remove all of these barriers** to access, allowing people to access and live in these areas much more easily. The Depot itself is transformed from being a barrier to being the entryway to the city.

REGIONAL CONNECTION



THE MISSING PIECE

Salt Lake City is currently experiencing an unprecedented amount of investment in housing, entertainment, sports, and culture. **The Depot District has the opportunity to be the bridge** between historic Temple Square, City Creek, the Delta Center and adjacent entertainment district, and the new Power District with its potential Major League Baseball stadium. More than that, at the geographic center of it all is the 114 year old Rio Grande Depot, a beautiful, historic train station **perfectly positioned to become an attraction of its own and the premiere gateway to the city** for both residents and visitors alike.

By opening up the city grid and deconflicting the trains passing through, **the Rio Grande Plan promises to be the missing piece of our infrastructure puzzle** that elected officials and city planners have been seeking for decades.

INTERCITY RAIL HUB

A strong circulation system needs a strong heart, and the Rio Grande Plan promises to give the entire state of Utah the vigorous heart it deserves. With efforts underway to extend and double-track FrontRunner as well as to reactivate Amtrak lines to Las Vegas and Boise, **Utah needs to be ready to comfortably host more trains and rail travelers** as they make their way to and through Salt Lake City. The Rio Grande Plan gives the entire region a **world-class centerpiece central station**, one that will impress both national and international visitors as they arrive from the airport or leave on their journeys to towns and cities across the Beehive State and beyond.

The Rio Grande Plan

SHARE THE PLAN

Help spread the word—email this document to your friends and family. Follow our social media and engage with our posts.

SIGN OUR PETITION

Our change.org campaign aims to bridge Salt Lake City's east-west divide while preserving the historic Rio Grande Depot.

ATTEND OUR EVENTS

We work to have a monthly public event. Come learn more about the plan, share your thoughts, and ask us your questions!

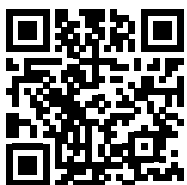
JOIN OUR RANKS

We are a grassroots volunteer organization working to make Utah even better. Join our Discord or DM us on our social media. We'd love to have you on board!

ENGAGE WITH YOUR LEADERS

Attend local town halls, write your elected officials—let them know YOU want the Rio Grande Plan built!

FOLLOW US



thanks!

info@riograndeplansaltlakecity.org