

OneAthens Public Transportation Implementation Team
Fanning Institute, April 30, 2007, 2PM-4PM

Present:

Beth Gavrilles, Chair
Butch McDuffie, Athens Transit
Ron Hamlin, UGA Transit
Alice Kinman, ACC Commission
Andrew Neighbors, Advantage Behavioral Health Systems
John Devine, Northeast Georgia RDC
Dick Field, ACC Environmental Coordinator
Delene Porter, PPA Staff

1. Transportation Team reviewed the PPA Transportation Initiative and Recommendations
 - a. Increase dramatically the hours, frequency, and coverage of Athens Transit and develop a regional system by January 2009.
 - b. The focus of this initiative is to increase coverage and accessibility of public transportation in Athens and the surrounding region. This initiative will reduce poverty by providing people access to more jobs in the city and region. A regional bus system will also support the development of our regional economy.
2. Team discussed responsibilities- to report Action Steps/Progress to the PPA Steering Committee by mid- June and to the larger community by mid-July.
3. Team discussed timeline for tackling the parts of this initiative (i.e. expanding Athens Transit services, expanding transportation services specifically for people with disabilities, and developing a regional transit system.)
4. **Expanding Athens Transit-** Butch McDuffie provided an update on:
 - a. Athens Transit's Transit Development Plancalls for increasing frequency of routes so that all routes run at least every 30 minutes, and expanding the Link demand-response service to serve the more rural areas of the county. The TDP will be updated over the next 12 months to recommend more routes, more frequent stops, etc. The TDP fits well with the PPA public transportation recommendations.
 - b. Athens Transit, with the help of Economic Development and Planning Depts., is currently creating a list of changes that will improve Transit access for families living at 80% or less of Area Median Income. This list should be ready in about 3 weeks.
 - c. the Future Development Plan in MACORTS documents has been approved and recommends increasing frequency of all routes to 30 minute intervals
 - d. It currently costs an average of \$55-60 per hour to run a bus. This is the cost before money that is brought in from the fare box.
 - e. Athens Transit and UGA Transit work very closely to serve the county- UGA Transit pays for students who ride Athens Transit, Parking Services Pays for Faculty and Staff to ride Athens Transit

5. Creating a Regional System-

- a. Need to bring others to the table, especially policy makers
- b. Athens has a hub, surrounding counties could run vans into the multimodal station
- c. Need intergovernmental orders/agreements for Athens funded vehicles to go to other counties- need sharing of costs
- d. We should look for examples of areas similar to ours that have successfully expanded their transit systems regionally, and research how they've done it. The MACORTS Technical Coordinating Committee could be asked to follow up on this idea
- e. Southwest RDC has 40 vans covering 7 counties providing rural transit
- f. Need to talk with the Regional Transportation Planning Group headed by Peggy Hatchet with DNR involving Barrow, Madison, and Walton
- g. Would be valuable to have employers print out the zip codes of their payroll and have UGA's Geography Dept. create a GIS map to figure out where most commuters are driving from

6. Exploring Big Ideas-

- a. how paving dollars could be used for bike lanes and sidewalks as well, the issue of people with disabilities being unable to access the bus because of a lack of sidewalks to bus stops was brought up during the PPA process
- b. how do we serve the entire community (not just 80% of AMI)

7. Examining new funding sources-

- a. Athens Transit's buses are purchased using 80% federal funds, 10% state funds, and 10% local funds. Operating expenses (e.g. bus drivers' salaries, maintenance, fuel) are covered by local funds (from property taxes, Campus Transit and UGA Parking Services fees for the use of Athens Transit buses, and farebox revenues) and federal funds.
- b. Local property taxes aren't a realistic source for the increased in operating funds that would be required to expand service as called for in the TDP
- c. Georgia is one of only four or five states that do not provide state funding of transit operating expenses.
- d. Georgia has the lowest gasoline tax in the country (\$.07 per gallon) and those revenues can only be spent on roads
- e. MARTA is the only system in GA with a dedicated sales tax to fund it
- f. Two bills were introduced during this year's legislative session to allow a sales tax for funding road and transit taxes, but neither was voted on. One bill would have allowed 2 or more local governments to put a sales tax referendum on the ballot to fund regional transportation projects, including transit.
- g. 5311, Job Access Reverse Commute Program, and the New Freedom programs all provide Federal funds for rural transportation, but these are limited and require a 50% local match
- h. Dept. of Transportation was looking into leasing Greene County vans for only 10cents per mile- this could be a program they would consider again

- i. The NEGA RDC could help the local governments in the region to explore funding and partnerships, perhaps starting by hosting a regional Public Transportation summit
 - j. Many ideas have not been explored like parking fees for ACC lots, combined with ACC providing Athens Transit passes to employees, as a way to increase ridership
 - k. Need to promote the federal tax breaks available to businesses that provide their employees with public transportation subsidies
8. Need for a Legislative Advocacy Plan
- a. Need to have a plan to advocate for support for public transportation at the state level, such as:
 - i. Constitutional change so that gas tax revenue can fund transit
 - ii. Bills to allow referenda on Local Option Sales Tax funding for transit
 - b. State level advocacy will need the support of local governments in the region
 - c. State level advocacy will need the support of the local legislative delegations. Perhaps we should invite a State legislative staffer from our local area delegation to meet with us.
 - d. May need a public education strategy in general to bring employers and the non-public-transit-user community into the process
9. Next meeting will be held May 21, 2007 at 2pm at Fanning
10. Assignments:
- a. Andrew Neighbors will talk to Greene County Planner and create a summary of the 5311, Job Access, and New Freedom Federal funds
 - b. John Devine will talk to Madison County planner Doug Appler and ask about creating an RDC Workshop for potential county partners for a Regional System
 - c. Butch McDuffie will complete Athens Transit expansion priorities
 - d. Ron Hamlin will research regional best practices
 - e. Beth Gavrilles will find out about getting a GIS intern

Transportation Subcommittee Recommendations

DRAFT 12/12/2006

Our recommendations address the relationship between transportation and poverty. Access to reliable, affordable transportation is an important component in overcoming poverty. The inability to afford reliable transportation can serve as a barrier to getting and keeping a job; participating in school activities; and accessing services.

Furthermore, the costs of automobile ownership – often the only option for low-income families living beyond the reach of public transportation – can be as high as 40% of the gross income of a family of four living at the federal poverty rate. If such a family could devote some of those transportation dollars to housing, they could begin building equity.

RECOMMENDATION # 1:

Increase the capacity of Athens Transit within Athens-Clarke County. Athens Transit does a good job of providing public transportation with the resources it has, but those resources are not sufficient to allow it to fully meet the needs of those who depend upon it as their sole means of transportation. Athens Transit needs additional resources to allow it to:

- **Increase hours, extent, and frequency of The Bus (general fixed-route service) to 24 hour per day, 7 days per week.**
- **Increase the number of available vans and drivers for The Lift (on-demand service for people with disabilities) and expand coverage times and area.**
- **Expand county-wide routes (The Link).**
- **Increase marketing and advertising of routes, services, etc. Create, post at bus stops, and distribute comprehensive route map and schedule.**
- **Make the Multi-Modal center more accessible to downtown. It is currently difficult for elderly people and those with disabilities to get to downtown locations from the Multi-Modal Center.**
- **Be affordable to those with low incomes.**

Strategies:

- ACC should increase local funding for Athens Transit. Public transportation should be considered a vital public service, like police or fire protection, that the community can not afford *not* to adequately fund.
- PPA conveners and participants should lobby the General Assembly to enact legislation proposed by the Georgia Transit Association, the Georgia Municipal Association, and the Association of County Commissioners of Georgia to increase the amount and flexibility of state funding available to Athens Transit. Specific proposals requiring action by the General Assembly include:
 - Establish a Transportation Infrastructure Fee on motor fuel tax purchases that could be used for various purposes including funding transit; this fee could be made revenue neutral with an accompanying TIF income tax credit.
 - Authorize local governments to place a Local Option Sales Tax referendum on the ballot; this tax would be used to fund local transit operating and capital costs.
 - Authorize cities and counties jointly or regionally to impose a “Local Option Transportation Tax” of up to 7.5 cents per gallon on the sale of motor fuel to address local transportation needs, including transit.
 - Appropriate funds for operating assistance for transit systems.
 - Provide additional state funds to increase the state’s share of the 20% non-federal match required for federally-funded transit capital projects.
 - Pass a state constitutional amendment necessary to allow for a local sales tax for operational and capital funding of local transit systems, and pass general legislation to extend the statewide exemption of funds raised by local option sales taxes for public transit corporations and authorities from the existing 2% cap on local sales taxes.
 - Pass legislation allowing a state individual income tax credit for persons who purchase their own transit fare cards or have other qualified personal mass transportation expenses.
- ACC should seek additional sources of funds for Athens Transit.

- ACC Planning Department should take public transportation into account as the Comprehensive Land Use Plan is updated. Park and ride facilities, bus shelters, accessible bus stops and sidewalks, and existing or proposed bus routes should be included in the coordinated and comprehensive planning process.
- Athens community organizations should fund more transit passes to be distributed by local agencies such as the Athens Area Homeless Shelter, the Ark, etc.
- Athens Transit should make it easier for elderly people and those with disabilities to get from the Multi-Modal Center to downtown locations, possibly by running a shuttle or adding regular stops at City Hall to more routes.
- ACC and other large employers should make arrangements, similar to UGA's, for their employees to take Athens Transit to work without having to pay at the fare box.

RECOMMENDATION #2:

Establish a regional public transportation system. Expanding the geographical scope of public transportation to include our neighboring counties, as well as access to the Atlanta area, would expand the economic opportunities of those who rely on public transportation to get to work, shopping, and services.

Strategies:

- The ACC Mayor & Commission should begin working with Athens Transit and neighboring counties to establish a regional public transportation system.
- ACC should explore funding options for regional transportation systems. There are funds available through the federal government to fund regional transportation for different populations (e.g., people with disabilities, elderly people, and people with very low incomes.) A grant writer will be needed to access such funds. The Statewide Independent Living Council is a 501(c)(3) organization and would be willing to assist.