

Transportation Subcommittee Recommendations DRAFT 11-17-2006

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 to:

- **Expand county-wide routes (The Link)**
- **Increase hours, extent, and frequency of The Lift (on-demand service for people with disabilities) and The Bus (general fixed-route service)**
- **Increase marketing and advertising of routes, services, etc.**
- **Be affordable to those in poverty.**

Strategies

- ACC should increase local funding for Athens Transit. Public transportation should be considered a vital public service, such as 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.
- Seek additional sources of funds.
- 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.

RECOMMENDATION # 2:

Increase safety and infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists. For some low-income Athenians, walking or biking are their only means of transportation.

Strategies

- ACC should build more sidewalks and crosswalks
- ACC should install pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure on heavily traveled transportation corridors where it is currently unsafe for walkers and cyclists who have no affordable transportation alternative
- ACC Police should enforce traffic laws more aggressively

RECOMMENDATION # 3:

Explore ways to make local taxi service more affordable to low income families.

- ACC, citizens, and taxi operators should work together to research different models for taxi service used in cities similar to Athens to determine if there is a viable way to structure Athens' regulations to better meet the needs of low-income families.
- Athens community organizations should fund more taxi vouchers to be distributed by local agencies such as the Athens Area Homeless Shelter, the Ark, etc.

RECOMMENDATION # 4:

Explore other innovative alternatives to individual automobile ownership.

- Research programs such as car-sharing and ride-sharing to determine their feasibility for Athens.
- Large employers should consider options such as van pools, subsidized transit passes, or other means to help employees cut work-related transportation costs.
- Explore low-cost car ownership programs such as the Good News Garage.