



December 4, 2006

Dear All:

Attached you will find the complete set of recommendations that has been received from the community so far. You have worked very hard to create these solutions to address poverty in our community and to improve the quality of life for all Athenians. Thank you for your work!

There are over 100 recommendations addressing a variety of issues including Education, Early Learning, Dependent Care, the Economy, Housing, Health, Workforce, Mentoring, Service Providers, Transportation, and Adult Education.

Your participation and recommendations have made several things very clear. First, poverty affects all of us. It reflects negatively on our community and limits economic growth. Poverty makes government, education, health care, and social services more expensive not just for the poor, but for everyone.

As a community we have learned that the issues of poverty are interrelated and must be addressed with a holistic approach. High expectations must be maintained not only of our citizens, but also of our institutions. Business as usual is not working. To break the cycle of poverty we need innovation and creativity.

During the next two months we will continue working with the committee chairs and Steering Committee to research and refine the recommendations. The Steering Committee will agree upon the set of PPA recommendations at its retreat in February. These PPA recommendations will be posted on the web and discussed with you at Town Meetings in March prior to them being sent to the Co-Conveners for their approval. Your continued involvement is critical to ultimate success.

Thank you for your commitment to our community!

Sincerely,
Steve Jones, Chairman
Partners For A Prosperous Athens

Partners for a Prosperous Athens Housing & Transportation Committee

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.

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- 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.

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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.

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RECOMMENDATION # 3:

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

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RECOMMENDATION # 4:

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

Strategies:

- 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.

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RECOMMENDATION # 5:

Explore other innovative alternatives to individual automobile ownership.

Strategies:

- 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.
- Look for and implement models where businesses provide a shuttle – e.g. GA Square Mall could provide shopper shuttles on Sunday afternoons.

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RECOMMENDATION #6:

UGA should establish a graduate-level interdisciplinary service learning course to provide support for PPA committees as they continue to explore solutions to Athens-Clarke County's poverty problem.