

OneAthens Public Transportation Implementation Team

June 25, 2007, 2-3:30 PM

Multimodal Transportation Center

Present from Team: Beth Gavrilles (Chair), Butch McDuffie (Athens Transit), Ron Hamlin (UGA Transit), Andrew Neighbors (Advantage), Delene Porter (staff)

Team Members Absent: Peggy Hackett (DHR), Alice Kinman (ACC Commissioner), Dick Field (ACC), John Devine (Northeast Georgia RDC), Ed Graham (Chamber)

- I. Beth welcomed group and reviewed minutes from June 4th. Group approved the minutes.
- II. Beth reviewed the Transportation Team's 3 possible products and asked group to focus on the Local Plan:

Transit Team 3 Product Draft:

- 1) Local Plan- the bullet points of what expansions are needed (TDP, FTP), also add key recommendations from PPA (marketing and post schedule and routes, bus to Atlanta), a price tag for the expansion, a funding strategy
 - 2) Regional Plan- 3 step process of (1) getting the current 5311 counties working together to cross county lines (talk to merchants about incentives/passes), (2) getting counties to add 5311 programs, (3) starting with a possible commuter bus to Atlanta as a precursor to getting the light rail in place
 - 3) Long Term/Advocacy Plan- determine entity that can help develop and collaborate in a state advocacy plan to help fund both Local and Regional systems
- III. To create Local Plan, Butch went over the Transportation Development Plan's section 4.
 - a. TDP Section 4's recommendations closely align with PPA's transit recommendations and give more detail.
 - b. This document could be easily boiled down into bullet points describing what is needed and what the price tag would be.
 - c. The OneAthens Team could also include enhanced evening service since only 8 of the routes currently run at night, early Saturday service (the first bus is at 8am) and Sunday service (there is none currently).
 - d. See below for the excerpts of TDP section 4 and PPA's Transit Recommendations
 - e. For a price tag- the TDP shows that an enhanced Transit system would cost: \$5,343,905 and that Passenger revenue would bring in \$1,952,196. The county currently provides approximately \$2 million in support, leaving only \$1 million additional needed to make the TDP improvements
 - f. The TDP will be revised in October
 - g. The Team can take current TDP and craft the Local Product- Delene will follow up with Butch

- h. Team discussed bus stops- currently 450 around the county, it would be very expensive to post and maintain signs with routes, but phone number is on every sign and the website is accurate. If buses are running more frequently this will help as well.
- IV. Team discussed the possibility of a commuter bus to Atlanta – this would be an interim measure until commuter rail can be established.
 - a. Georgia Regional Transit Authority approached Athens Transit a few years ago to start a bus to Atlanta- GRTA would have provided the bus, but it would have cost \$350,000/yr from ACC to start and then after 2 years ACC would have to pay entire \$650,000 to keep it running.
 - b. This was too great a cost at the time and may still be, but Ron suggested that GRTA could possibly partner with Southeastern Stages, the private company that is already running a service through Athens and Atlanta.
 - c. Maybe Southeastern Stages could take advantage of GRTA’s deal- the market need is there- similar to how the private bus company Peter Pan runs in Massachusetts with support from the state
 - d. Southeastern Stages could use the Multimodal Transportation Center- could lease land to build storage facility if needed
 - e. Ron will get name of contact at Southeastern Stages
 - f. If Team decides to approach Southeastern Stages with the idea, they will bring proposal to OneAthens Chair for support first.
 - g. A bus to Atlanta is part of the Regional Plan...
- V. Andrew gave update on Regional Plan and the current 5311 counties.
 - a. Banks, Jackson, and Greene might participate in a plan to bring shoppers over to Athens as a test run to see if there is interest.
 - b. Andrew and John Devine will continue to follow up one-on-one with other counties that do not currently have 5311 programs.
- VI. Team discussed the Long term/Advocacy Plan as well.
 - a. Department of Transportation is having a meeting on June 27th to discuss the Coordinated Health Services transit plans and may begin to focus on transit.
 - b. There were two bills in the Georgia House last session - one calling for a 1 cent sales tax, the other for a regional sales tax option- so that communities can raise funds for roads or transit.
 - c. Our local delegation (McKillip, Cowser, Heard, Hudgens, etc.) need to know about these bills and if there is support from the Athens community.
 - d. Georgia Transit Association would be a natural partner. Butch chairs GTA’s Legislative Committee and will get copies of their legislative agenda- much like PPA’s recommendations
- VII. Team will schedule next meeting via email but is tentatively looking at July 16th at 2pm.

4.0 Transit Concept Plan of the Transit Development Plan

4.1 PROPOSED SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

Key elements of the Transit Concept Plan include:

- **More Frequent Service** – Increasing frequency to 30-minute service on West Broad Street/Atlanta Highway, Oconee Street/Lexington Road, Prince Avenue, Oglethorpe Avenue, Barber Street, Alps Road/Hawthorne Avenue, Baxter Street, Lumpkin Street, Milledge Avenue, and College Station Road/Gaines School Road. The North Avenue corridor, Broad Street, and the UGA oriented routes already have 30-minute or better service frequency. This represents the ‘core service’ and will provide frequent and accessible service on Athens-Clarke County’s major, most congested corridors.
- **Evening Service** – Providing evening service on selected routes that provide accessibility to jobs, hospitals, retail stores and other facilities with late evening hours of operation.
- **Early Saturday Service** – Providing earlier Saturday service on selected routes that provide accessibility to jobs. This element also adds Saturday service to the Prince Avenue and Oglethorpe Avenue corridors.
- **Extended Routes and New Routes** – The new downtown Multi-Modal Transit Center provides an opportunity to extend coverage on three existing northeast routes: #1 North Avenue would be extended up Danielsville Road; #2 East Athens would be extended to major employers in the Hancock Industrial Way, Olympic Drive, and Indian Hills Road area; and #24 Athens Tech would be extended to major employers in the growing northeast Athens industrial area. Adding evening service on #24 will provide access to evening classes at the GED Building and Athens Tech and more direct service between the major employers, residential areas, the GED Building and Athens Tech will provide a synergy for recruiting, training and retaining manufacturing, service and other employees.
A new route, #29 MLK / US441 / Sandy Creek Park, would serve the MLK Jr. Drive area, US 441 (Commerce Road) corridor, connecting to Sandy Creek Park and a proposed park and ride lot along US 441.
- **Route Realignments** – Several route modifications are recommended to remove existing large loop operations on the #5/#7, #8, and #25/#26 and provide more direct two-way routings with shorter travel times. While the operation of large loops is often necessary due to budgetary constraints, this design results in circuitous trips for most riders, tends to be confusing to riders and thus can impact a route’s ridership potential. Recommended changes would be implemented simultaneously for routes #5, #7 and #8 (splitting into #8A and #8B) in order to preserve existing route coverage as would the changes to #25 and #26. The recommended improvements provide more direct connections between residential areas, employers, community facilities such as St. Mary’s Hospital and Athens Regional Medical Center, and commercial areas along the affected routes. Finally, routes #6 and #6A would be consolidated to improve the overall service level in the W. Broad Street and Hancock Avenue corridors.
- **New Neighborhood Circulator Routes** – Development of a network of Neighborhood Circulator routes using smaller vehicles to serve the lower density areas of Athens-Clarke County. These routes would operate as a flexible routing, demand responsive service for 12.5 hours per day, Monday – Friday in their assigned service area. The routes would connect to proposed superstops so that passengers could transfer to fixed routes if necessary. This service element would build on the service areas defined for the existing #30 and #31 “The Link” routes; expansion of the two existing service areas and adding two new service areas are recommended for this Transit Concept Plan.

PPA Transportation Sub-Committee (6)

1. 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.
2. 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. *And 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.*

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.*
 - *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.*
 - *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.*
3. Increase safety and infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists. For some low-income Athenians, walking or biking are their only means of transportation.
4. Explore ways to make local taxi service more affordable to low income families.
5. Explore other innovative alternatives to individual automobile ownership (i.e. car-sharing, van pools, low-cost ownership programs, etc.).
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.