

CHAPTER 2 – PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Transit Development Plan for Chatham Area Transit includes an extensive public outreach program designed to solicit input from members of the general public, current users of the system, community leaders, key policy decision-makers and other transportation stakeholders in the Savannah and Chatham County region.

This chapter reports on the various aspects of the program, including stakeholder interviews held at the beginning of the study, focus groups convening community groups, Teleride users, Tybee Island residents and major employers in the region, and public drop-in sessions to solicit specific service and operations concerns from passengers at major transit locations.

Stakeholder Interviews

Extensive one-on-one interviews were conducted with various community leaders, elected officials, policy makers, and individuals or groups with a vested interest in transportation in the Chatham County region. All of these stakeholders share a concern for the future of the region as well as the mobility of its residents.

The consultant team conducted interviews over the course of four days in January 2006 and later in April. The list of participants is included below. Typically, meetings lasted between 30 minutes and one hour, during which the open discussion focused on such topics as the quality of service provided by CAT, the transportation needs of the community and/or the clientele or residents represented by the individual(s) being interviewed, the perceived future transportation needs of the community and the region, and what changes have occurred in the past five years that have impacted transportation and travel in the region.

All of the interviews were conducted with the understanding that the comments made by individuals would be kept in confidence by the consulting team and only used to create a summary of findings based on input from all participants. This protocol encouraged greater candor during the interview process and ultimately allows for more valuable, productive input from the stakeholders.

Participating Stakeholders January - April 2006

Name	Affiliation
Mr. Michael Brown	City of Savannah
Dr. Otis Johnson	City of Savannah
Mr. Russ Abolt	Chatham County
Mr. Mark Wilkes	Chatham County-Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission
Mr. Thomas Thomson	Chatham County-Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission
Mr. Eric Winger	Savannah Economic Development Authority
Mr. Lynn Pitts	Savannah Economic Development Authority
Mr. William Hubbard	Savannah Area Chamber of Commerce
Mr. Mark McDonald	Historic Savannah Foundation
Mr. William Broker	Georgia Legal Services Program
Mr. Bruce Chong	Savannah College of Art and Design
Mr. Daniel Dodd	Step Up - Savannah's Poverty Reduction Initiative
Mr. Richard Collins	Housing Authority of Savannah
Mr. Richard Edwards	United Way of the Coastal Empire
Ms. Lise Sundrla	Savannah Development and Renewal Authority
Ms. Susan Meyers	Savannah Development and Renewal Authority
Mr. Tony Cooper	Savannah Development and Renewal Authority
Ms. Charlotte Rehmert	Chatham County Department of Family and Children Services
Ms. Susan Bragg	Chatham County Department of Family and Children Services
Ms. Jody McIntyre	Savannah Marriott Riverfront
Mr. Jim Brignati	Armstrong Atlantic State University

Operations/Service

Regarding the services currently operated within the CAT system, the majority of stakeholders interviewed agreed that transit coverage in the City of Savannah was comprehensive and that the core routes serve the city well. Lengthy travel times were mentioned by some, typically in the context of passengers who require one or more transfers between bus routes to complete their journeys.

While regionalization is a topic on the minds of many, the consultant team also heard on several occasions how the maintenance of the traditional core services in downtown Savannah remains important. Several stakeholders expressed concern that the traditional route network not be oversimplified for the sake of greater geographic coverage in the region. Rather, expansion should come at appropriate times and with support of municipalities and employers in areas not currently part of the Transit District.

The CAT Shuttle was mentioned frequently as a service with potential, but one that may not be run in the most effective manner. To some, the shuttle should serve as a vehicle for moving visitors around Savannah and connecting popular tourist locations throughout the town with a fare-free and simple service. To others, a fare-free mobility option for residents in the downtown area or just outside the historic downtown is a worthy service, and thus locations

such as shopping (e.g., Kroger's on E. Gwinnett) and medical or municipal facilities should continue to be included in the loop as well. The question remains whether or not to serve– or how to best serve– these two markets with a single service.

Marketing materials for the CAT Shuttle were also raised as a concern, particularly the fact that the pamphlet distributed throughout the community did not indicate that the shuttle does not operate on holidays. Both this lack of information and the lack of holiday service were seen to present difficulties to visitors who may wish to use the shuttle. (Both corrections have since been made.)

The Liberty Parking Shuttle was highlighted by several stakeholders as an example of an effective partnership between the City of Savannah and CAT, both as a mobility option for commuters and as a tool in the city's efforts to manage parking in the crowded historic downtown. It was noted, however, that a continuing problem exists for some customers who aren't easily able to distinguish the different CAT Shuttle and Liberty Parking Shuttle services. More than one stakeholder suggested that the CAT Shuttle, when using a vintage trolley-style vehicle, evokes an image of a slow moving, leisurely vehicle, rather than an efficient mode of transportation. While downtown Savannah is driven in large part by tourism, and a certain historic look is appealing to some, many stakeholders felt that CAT's equipment and image should reflect more contemporary styling and efficiency of a modern system.

Unmet Needs

The primary unmet need identified throughout the course of the stakeholder interview process was the inability to serve all of Chatham County due to the political boundaries of the Transit District. In addition, several smaller concerns were voiced. From a customer service perspective, stakeholders felt that tickets and fare media should be available at more public locations throughout the community, as well as on the Internet.

Perceptions

In almost every interview conducted, the notion of public perceptions of CAT's service was brought up for discussion. Almost without exception, stakeholders referred to the transit system in Savannah as an option of last resort, or as the only transportation option for lower income residents. Whether the views of the stakeholders themselves or notions relayed from their constituents, the message was clear: CAT's service, however effective, is not seen as a mode of choice for discretionary riders who are able to commute or travel with their own automobiles. Those who have the option of driving their own cars do, rather than considering public transportation as an alternative.

Many of the stakeholders interviewed expressed a hope and desire that the class image of CAT's constituency would be dispelled, most specifically through marketing efforts aimed at

white collar workers and discretionary or choice riders. When this discussion was pursued, it was also interesting to note that any fears about safety or crime aboard CAT buses were limited. While the lower income, urban demographic was seen to be the primary market for the system, reasons for discretionary riders not using the buses did not necessarily focus on a fear factor, rather the traditional argument of convenience and time savings for those who own and can afford to drive their own vehicles to work or other destinations. Crime was deemed a concern in the City of Savannah, and by extension some interviewees expressed concerns about safety while waiting for buses on the street, but safety aboard the vehicles was not a serious issue in these conversations.

At the same time, this notion of transit as a means of transportation for the lower income members of the community was not always viewed as a problem or liability for CAT. For those who work with disadvantaged or lower income populations, often in the process of finding employment and providing the means to access jobs, CAT plays a critical role in advancing these efforts. This sentiment echoed the belief that CAT should not lose sight of its core market, and thus avoid any over-simplification or reduction in services in the downtown Savannah area.

Future Demands

The Chatham County region is growing rapidly, both in its residential and business sectors. Growth and development are occurring within the City of Savannah and Chatham County, and throughout the region and neighboring counties. Many businesses that are growing in the outer reaches of Chatham County or areas such as Effingham County cite transportation as a challenge in attracting or retaining workers. This is particularly true of manufacturing or warehousing interests that rely on workers during several shifts in a 24 hour period. Therefore, service expansion outside the current Transit District is seen as a necessary step to keep pace with growing job markets and to connect large employers with a strong employment base that exists within the city now.

A combination of an aging population and Chatham County's attractiveness as a retirement destination are reflected in growth in the number of senior citizens in the region. Seniors are often more likely to use, or indeed are forced to rely on, public transportation. Several stakeholders voiced an interest in expanding dial-a-ride and demand-responsive services, in part as a tool for accommodating and better serving this growing senior population, in part as a more flexible and less conspicuous option for neighborhoods and areas with insufficient demand for fixed route services.

Like many areas in the country, Savannah and Chatham County are also experiencing a growth in the Hispanic population. Generally referred to in the context of lower-wage employment and shift work, this population was seen by stakeholders to present a growing market, often with communities concentrated in certain parts of Savannah or Chatham County. Additionally, CAT

and other agencies will have to provide bilingual information where appropriate and market services accordingly to enfranchise the Hispanic population.

Regionalization

Regionalization remains a principal topic of discussion for many stakeholders, whether it be in terms of economic development, transportation and mobility, or tourism. Many interviewees noted the growing importance of connecting Savannah and Chatham County with neighboring counties and municipalities, particularly to provide employers a greater base for hiring workers. Congestion was cited as a growing concern in areas such as Effingham County, as more workers commute to areas including West Chatham County, the airport, or downtown Savannah.

Certain stakeholders suggested that CAT retain its focus on Chatham County in the near future rather than seeking larger stature or relationships in Georgia or even South Carolina. Contract services are an option to extend transit to neighbors such as Effingham County, and CAT could take on the role of a mobility manager in the region, promoting not only fixed route transit but also vanpooling, ride sharing, and other more flexible transportation options.

The first step in becoming a regional transportation provider, according to several stakeholders, is to become a true county-wide provider. The current Transit District limits CAT's ability to fully connect and serve Chatham County. As one stakeholder noted, now is the time to begin to think regionally. The concept of tying sewer and water expansion from the City of Savannah to outlying areas with participation in the Transit District was mentioned as a possible means to increase CAT's geographic coverage. At the same time, this would help develop the region in a comprehensive fashion, linking new development with public transportation and focusing development efforts around transit and intermodal nodes. Simply put, as development grows throughout Chatham County, the public transit system should grow with it as an integral component to regional mobility.

Building on this theme of regional mobility, several stakeholders emphasized the potential for water transportation as a potential tool. In particular, ferry service to Hilton Head, South Carolina was seen as a natural link, along with concepts for services throughout the region's Intracoastal Waterway.

Focus Groups

Employer Focus Group – April 27, 2006

The first focus group convened as part of the TDP project brought together representatives from major employers in Savannah and Chatham County. The purpose of the meeting was to solicit feedback from these employers regarding their needs for transportation, any challenges

or opportunities they are facing, and how they view CAT as a transportation provider in the region.

The session began with introductions and a welcome from the study team, followed by an overview of the one-hour session and the meeting format. The study team's facilitator stated that the participants might have questions which CAT staff can address, however, to ensure that all of the pertinent TDP-related questions were answered and that everyone would have a chance to speak, questions would be answered at the end of the session. The facilitator reiterated that the session would last one hour.

A discussion was guided by the following questions:

Q: *Does CAT currently serve your company site(s)?*

All participants responded to this question and stated CAT served most of the sites with bus service, and in one instance (the Westin on Hutchinson Island) with the Savannah Belles Ferries. A couple of organizations had sites outside of the Transit District. The representative from the Westin noted that while 60% of employees use the Savannah Belles Ferries, the hotel (and Hutchinson Island) could benefit from bus service as well.

Q: *What percentage of your employees uses public transportation?*

Few participants had specific numbers, but most employers reported that relatively few of their employees do use CAT. None had undertaken surveys within their organizations to address transportation issues, with the exception of Gulfstream, which reported that approximate 25 employees take the bus.

The City of Savannah representative present observed only one Broughton Street office employee taking the bus. All participants reported that hourly wage earners were the primary users.

Union Mission reported that their clients rely heavily on CAT.

Q: *What do you think discourages a higher percentage of people from using CAT to travel to and from your work site(s)?*

Participants listed the following:

- Scheduling – buses do not serve all of their shifts, in particular those working evening hours and are not timely to ensure on-time arrival.
- Convenience – employees having to transfer, run errands after work and drop children off find CAT inconvenient.

- Expense – frequent transfers also pose a financial burden to customers, particularly those with children old enough to require a fare.
- There is a perception that the bus is for low-income residents only and one participant suggested that company officials and prominent people should ride the bus on occasion.
- The Gulfstream representative stated that a shelter was needed at her site as employees have to wait in inclement weather for the bus.
- The Landings representative stated that the bus drop-off at the Landings gate was a long walk from the employment sites.
- The problem of *perceptions* concerning safety, demographics of who uses the system, and concern that transit users are considered “second class” citizens.
- Poor on-time performance and delays.
- Lack of access to municipalities outside of the current Transit District (e.g., Pooler).

Q: *Does your company provide incentives to support public transit use (for example, bus ticket sales on the job site, free or subsidized passes, or other incentives)?*

With the exception of Memorial Health, none of the participants reported purchasing tickets or subsidized passes. Memorial Health stated that food service workers (based on a needs assessment) are given free weekly passes and the hospital provides up to \$36,000 annually in passes to its employees. The challenge for Memorial Health and other employers remains the varied shift times of many employees and the fact that CAT’s service hours do not cover late night/early morning shifts.

Q: *Would your company be able to offer cash incentives to encourage public transit use in the future?*

Several employers indicated that if they were able to see a clear benefit to using CAT services, they would be inclined to provide passes or other incentives to their employees. The number one desire for most employers was to see expanded service hours to accommodate later shift times. Some companies and organizations currently offer their employees financial incentives to work later shifts. Organizations such as Memorial Health and the Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools noted that they could consider adding bus passes as additional incentives if the transit service were available during the hours needed at their sites.

The study team provided a brief description of Commuter Choice programs and listed examples. Some participants stated that they thought such a program was a possibility. Employers can request information and direction on establishing programs at www.commuterchoice.com.

Q: Do you anticipate any changes in your company's operations in the next five years that could impact use of public transit by your employees? What are those changes?

Savannah is growing as a warehouse hub, particularly on the north side of Route 21 near I-95. This growth translates into increased port and logistics and shipping-related employment west of the downtown area, and an increase in shift work for businesses operating around the clock and on weekends. Population growth in Chatham County is also likely to generate new school construction in areas along the I-95 corridor between I-16 and Route 21.

Q: Do you have any general comments or suggestions regarding CAT's services?

Generally speaking, the employers at the focus groups felt that few of their employees use the bus, even though most were served by a route. Discouraging factors, discussed previously, include bus schedules not in sync with schedules for shift work, perceptions that riding the bus may not be safe, and inconvenience for customers who must transfer one or more times each trip to reach their destination. Several employers did express interest in transit as a potential tool to help their employees reach job sites, to expand their employment markets, and to manage growing parking demand at facilities.

At the end of the focus group session, CAT's attending representative provided information on the Transit District which included an overview of how the district was created, funding, and the participating municipalities. Focus group attendees were informed that if CAT does not currently serve sites where some of their company activities occur, then they should advocate for such services through their local elected officials.

The study team also reminded attendees that the purpose of the TDP was to seek options both short and long term for improved transit and public transportation, and that employers are encouraged to think about options beyond the traditional fixed route bus service when considering the mobility of their workers and customers. Van and carpools are two common approaches to employee transportation, however other alternatives exist, including offering incentives to use transit in lieu of free parking, flex hours and telecommuting.

City of Savannah Resident Focus Group – April 27, 2006

A focus group convening residents representing different neighborhood associations in Savannah was held on April 27 at the City of Savannah's Community Services Department on Abercorn Street. Once again, the meeting began with introductions and a welcome by members of the study team, who thanked participants for their attendance and provided an overview of the study process and objectives. Nine residents attended the meeting, representing the following neighborhood groups: Beach Institute, Cuyler-Brownville, Feiler Park, Benjamin Van Clark, Carver Heights, and Ogeecheeton.

The discussion portion of the session was guided by several questions:

Q: *How many of you use public transit to get to work or to other destinations in the Savannah area? How often?*

Some residents reported that they had used public transit in the past, and three stated that they use it only occasionally and indicated that it was currently not used as their primary means of transportation. One resident used CAT more than other participants as his primary means of transportation to get to work and to run errands on occasion (from the workplace) and found it adequate.

Most participants recognized the value of public transportation as a means of mobility for members of the community who do not own a car, have a physical or mental handicap, or may be elderly and less inclined or able to drive themselves to appointments, shopping, work, etc.

Q: *How many of you have used public transit in other cities/communities?*

There were few participants who had extensive experience using public transit in other communities. One participant had used public transit in New York and in other cities.

Q: *What discourages you from using public transit in Savannah?*

Participants listed the following reasons:

- Crime – participants had heard of alleged incidents that occurred at bus stops and spoke specifically of youth using the bus stops as gathering places and intimidating riders. (Crime on buses was not considered a problem.)
- Timeliness – the buses do not always connect in a timely manner to transfer to another bus and allow passengers to reach their destination on time.
- Transferring – the cost of transferring buses used to be “cheap” but now it is too expensive.
- Convenience – the walk to the nearest bus stop is too far. One resident stated that she likes that the bus goes directly to the hospitals, but the distance from her house to the bus stop is too far.
- Inefficient routes – buses take routes that delay getting to the destination. For example, the CAT Shuttle runs in one direction and you would have to make the entire circuit to get to a destination that might only be one or two stops away in the opposite direction.
- One resident stated that her mother complained about noisy buses that rattle.
- Image – all residents stated that the advertising, particularly the ads related to firearm prosecution, is unattractive.

Q: *What changes in local transit services would encourage you to use CAT?*

For the participants in the focus group, the primary improvements to CAT's service that might entice new or more frequent riders revolve around amenities and the convenience of bus service. More frequent weekend service was noted, along with a common concern about transfers and the lack of a specific transfer fare. Participants also suggested more bus shelters and benches or seating for passengers waiting for buses.

Q: *Do you anticipate having to rely on public transportation in the next five years?*

A couple of respondents stated they anticipated having to use CAT in the future due to gas prices and a dislike for using their cars. One person stated that he anticipated using CAT in the very near future. One resident stated that she will continue occasional use with her grandchildren.

Tybee Island Resident Focus Group – May 4, 2006

This focus group was held at the Tybee Neighbors Association's regularly scheduled monthly meeting on May 4, 2006. The study team's facilitator was asked to provide a presentation on the TDP and the focus group to the membership present. The participants were separated into two focus groups (one pertained to a topic unrelated to the TDP) and met in different rooms. Twelve residents agreed to participate in the CAT focus group with two Tybee Council members present. The Council representatives stated that they wished to sit in and listen, but were active contributors to the discussion.

Residents consisted of a combination of retirees and those still in the workforce. One stated that she commuted daily into Savannah for work using a private vehicle. While several had used public transportation in the past in other communities, none, with the exception of a disabled participant, used CAT. One participant had worked for transit authorities in other cities and another had been a planner/architect in Savannah.

The following is a summary of the questions and responses that framed the discussion:

Q: *Are you aware of any efforts to include Tybee Island in CAT's Transit District?*

Most of the residents were familiar with past requests from Tybee Island businesses to CAT to serve the community. One resident felt that since the issue had been "voted down," there was no need to discuss the matter further. One participant countered that it had been a couple of years since that decision.

Q: *Are there trends in residential and commercial development that might impact the need for public transportation on the island in the next five years?*

The consensus was that there was an increase in residential units over the past few years, primarily condos and single family units. However, commercial activity had remained relatively stable. Many of the residents felt that because most of the current are, and future residents will be, high income earners, they would always have access to private transportation. One resident felt strongly that the demographics are changing and as the population ages, the need for public transportation would increase. That resident's view was countered by another resident who felt that older people would not take a bus into Savannah as the city frightens them.

Q: *Do you want public transportation on Tybee Island? Why? Why Not?*

(The following responses were provided after the facilitator explained that residents might have an option for CAT services on a "pilot" basis and that there are options to the regular full-size buses. Once this was done, more participants appeared interested in exploring services to the area.)

Five of the fourteen (14) participants felt that they would support CAT on the island, for the following reasons:

- Low income workers employed at the nursing home and hotels need public transportation as they are currently dependent on ride-sharing, which is sometimes unreliable.
- The current population will age and/ or may develop disabilities that would make them dependent on public transportation.
- Tourists without cars have to rely on taxis to get to Tybee which is expensive. Public transportation would allow for greater accessibility to beaches.
- The rising cost of gas would encourage use of public transit in the future.

The remaining participants objected to CAT serving Tybee Island, offering the following comments:

- Inclusion in the Transit District would increase taxes. One resident stated that it would be \$16 a year; another stated that it would be as high as \$50 based on what he understood was the millage rate.
- The demographics on the island do not support public transportation.
- Bus service would bring "riff-raff" who would break into homes.
- Residents would be paying taxes to subsidize an authority that needs increased revenues to support CAT's services in other districts.
- The primary focus should be Tybee Island residents, not businesses. CAT would only serve a small group of people employed in businesses.
- Buses cause pollution.

Q: *If you do want public transportation, who would be the primary users?*

Participants felt that service workers – hotels, nursing homes, some elderly and the disabled would represent the primary demand for new bus service.

Q: *What areas would you like served?*

Around the island and to areas that are isolated, e.g., Spanish Hammock

Q: *Would you want the service to come into downtown Savannah? Other areas?*

Service to downtown Savannah and to Wilmington Island would be desirable.

Q: *What is your perception of CAT in general?*

One resident stated that she uses CAT regularly and has found the agency sensitive to the disabled and the staff polite and helpful. The remaining comments were as follows:

- “CAT is poorly managed, politically motivated as demonstrated by the controversy over the transfer station, which needs to be placed in the old Sears building.”
- “Who are they trying to protect with the dark windows, those riding the buses or are they trying to hide the fact that there are so few riders?”
- “It will be of little use to the people on Tybee.”

Q: *Do you have any general comments or suggestions regarding CAT’s services or the Transit Development Plan?*

One resident simply stated “Stay off Tybee.” Another said that although she found CAT a good service, she did not like having to call for Teleride services four days in advance.

Those in favor of CAT services on the island stated that they would like to form a task force to explore the cost to residents, and to gather more information about services, types of buses/vans available, and interest. They were also open to a pilot/trial run to determine the feasibility of permanent transit service.

This facilitator summarized the primary issues discussed in the session and presented them to the entire group of members at the end of the meeting. CAT’s Executive Director, Mr. Carl Palmer, then spoke to the residents about CAT’s mission and approach to coming into new neighborhoods. He stated that CAT is dedicated to serving the public and its services are need-driven, i.e., a response to requests for transportation, rather than for the sole purpose of increasing ridership. He stressed that CAT does not go where it is not wanted.

The meeting adjourned and the facilitator thanked the group and told them that they can contact CAT in the future if they had additional comments. Contact information was provided (CAT's web address) at the beginning of the meeting.

Teleride / Paratransit Focus Group – March 29, 2007

This focus group was held at the Georgia Infirmary/Adult Day Health Center. Participants included representatives of agencies serving Teleride clients as well as Teleride users. The study team's facilitator spoke directly with eight of the nine participants in advance of the meeting. In the course of planning the focus group, agency representatives were asked to invite two or three Teleride or potential Teleride customers; however, only one agency was able to bring along a user. As a result, the group was smaller than expected.

At the outset of the meeting, participants were informed that although some of them might have provided input to CAT in the past, the focus of this session was to obtain input on how CAT can strengthen Teleride and improve the fixed route buses to make them more user-friendly for Teleride users.

The following questions were used as a discussion guide:

1. How many of you use or have used Teleride? Frequency? Circumstances (e.g., work, medical appointments, shopping).
2. What discourages you from using Teleride?
3. What are the aspects of Teleride that function particularly well?
4. Are there any additional aspects of Teleride that should be changed or strengthened?
5. How many of you use, or have used, the CAT fixed route buses? Please discuss your experiences with those buses, operators, routes, etc.?
6. What aspects of the fixed route buses and related services work effectively for paratransit riders?
7. Are there any aspects of the fixed route buses and related services that need to be altered?
8. Please share with us what it would take for you to begin using, or increase your usage of fixed route buses.
9. Do you have any additional recommendations for CAT?

Five of the participants had used CAT's fixed route buses and Teleride in the past, but only one used the fixed route buses regularly. None of the participants was a daily Teleride user; the most frequent use had been once or twice a week. However, agency representatives reported that their clients used Teleride regularly. When asked about their experiences, with Teleride participants reported the following:

- Drivers talk on their cell phones while driving
- Drivers do not have name tags so it is difficult making complaints against rude drivers
- Drivers are usually 45 minutes behind schedule
- Many drivers are rude, but there are some who are courteous
- Drivers arrive early and leave when passengers are not ready
- The three-day advance notice for service is restrictive and does not encourage use
- Website for complaints does not work

When participants were asked about their experiences with the fixed route buses, and how CAT could make the buses more accessible, they reported the following:

- One participant stated that like Teleride, there are both rude and courteous drivers, but she prefers using the fixed route buses
- Many drivers still do not announce stops or routes, and riders have to inquire about the vehicle's destination
- The lack of appropriate sidewalks and curb cuts in Savannah prohibits use of the buses
- Some drivers lack the experience of the Teleride drivers with regard to restraining wheelchair passengers
- One participant stated that if the #14 was more timely he would use it
- Transfers would make the buses more appealing
- On one occasion, the driver did not offer assistance when the participant fell

Aspects of Teleride and fixed route service that work well:

- Ramps in the new buses are extremely beneficial

Recommendations for CAT

Some of the recommendations were repetitious, but participants provided the following input:

- CAT should train both Teleride and fixed route drivers on how to properly restrain wheelchair passengers and to make announcements (fixed routes) to orient passengers on stops and destinations
- CAT should implement a confirmation number and track patron complaints
- CAT should address the entire transit system to fully address Teleride
- Express buses should vary, for example some should have a couple of stops rather than just one destination to encourage ridership [*note: CAT does not operate express buses at present*]
- CAT should consider traveling off the main route (making a loop through specific areas) as some riders live too far off the main routes

The participants seemed to share similar experiences with both Teleride and the fixed route buses. Generally, there seemed to be some frustration that CAT received similar input in the past and little has changed. One participant felt that CAT's fixed route buses work better for her than Teleride and stated that she would continue to use the regular buses.

Agency representatives who participated seemed to be dissatisfied primarily with reliability and flexibility (e.g., drivers arriving early and leaving when the passengers were not ready). Three of the participants were both agency representatives and disabled.

Public "Drop-In" Sessions

During the development and refinement of service and route recommendations for the study, five public "drop-in" sessions were conducted by the study team to solicit feedback from CAT customers. These informal public interview sessions were held at three major activity locations in the CAT system: the Downtown Loop (Broughton Street at Montgomery Street), the Oglethorpe Mall, and the Wal-Mart on Montgomery Cross Road. Study team members were able to speak with over 200 CAT customers over the course of the five sessions, discussing general issues and feedback as well as specific route recommendations as they related to individual customers.

Drop-In Sessions Held

Wednesday, May 23, 2007

12pm – 3pm	Oglethorpe Mall
4pm – 7pm	Downtown Loop (Broughton Street at Montgomery Street)

Thursday, May 24, 2007

7am – 10am	Downtown Loop
11am – 2pm	Wal-Mart (Montgomery Cross Road)
3pm – 5pm	Downtown Loop

Summary of Comments Received

Typically, a set of key themes emerges from the numerous public comments. Customer feedback often relates directly to the rider's usual route, or the trip most recently taken, however many customers also provide general feedback applicable throughout the system. The most relevant and common themes collected during this effort are summarized below.

General comments:

- Some of CAT's operators are rude (particularly younger ones)
- Departure coordination between buses at transfer points is poor

- Passes should be sold in more places
- Many customers don't know where to buy passes or find schedule materials
- Buses sometimes don't even stop when customer is at bus stop
- Buses sometimes leave stops early
- Customers want a special transfer fare
- Drivers take long breaks mid-route [*note: this may refer to operator road reliefs, but nonetheless indicates a potential scheduling problem*]
- Drivers don't help customers with information on routes other than their own
- Monthly passes should be good for 30 days from first use rather than for calendar month

Service comments:

- Need longer service span on Sundays (earlier and later hours)
- Need more weekend service on 3A Augusta
- Service to Tybee Island is desirable
- Service to Port Wentworth is desirable
- 13 Coffee Bluff should just serve Coffee Bluff; route is too long, infrequent
- Interest in an express bus from Oglethorpe Mall to downtown Savannah
- 17 Silk Hope needs more frequent service on Saturdays and Sundays
- 6 Crosstown needs more frequent service
- 14 Abercorn on-time performance is poor, particularly in afternoons
- Need a bench/shelter at 33rd & Waters, 69th & Paulsen
- 31 Skidaway needs more frequent Sunday service
- Wilmington Island needs a later evening trip (~9:40pm)

The comments received reflect both specific responses to ideas put forth [by the study team] regarding potential service changes, as well as concerns offered by CAT customers. Feedback gleaned during these sessions allowed the study team to test the viability of specific service changes as well as consider any alternatives that may not have been discussed. The recommendations put forth in this Transportation Development Plan reflect the study team's efforts to synthesize the myriad proposals.

Summary and Next Steps

While viewpoints on the role and value of public transportation in the region vary, some common sentiments were expressed in both stakeholder interviews and during the public focus groups. First, the belief that CAT suffers from an image problem was pervasive. Second, the service provided by CAT is of fundamental importance to the region, particularly in the context of providing a mobility option to lower income residents for both work and social travel. Even on Tybee Island, outside of CAT's current Transit District, public transportation may be more welcome by some residents who recognize the need for service workers to travel to and from the community for employment.

Service expansion beyond the current Transit District to make CAT a truly county-wide system is seen as a priority, while at the same time maintaining the core services that effectively serve a large market in the City of Savannah today. Service expansion will be dependent upon the buy-in of policy-makers in the region as well as the economic support of major employers facing growing need for shift workers and new employment markets.

At each step of the public outreach process, CAT users and stakeholders were reminded that municipalities' participation in the Transit District is a local decision and that CAT is not empowered to expand its service outside the district without this political buy-in. Therefore, to effect change in the region and permit CAT's service area to grow, residents, employers, and community groups are encouraged to lobby their local officials to enter the Transit District.

As CAT seeks to address this need for regional service expansion, maintaining close ties and consistent, ongoing outreach to groups such as those represented in these focus group meetings will remain an important process. CAT staff members are also encouraged to conduct drop-in sessions similar to those conducted during this study to solicit regular input from passengers (and interested non-users) about specific service concerns or suggestions.