

CHAPTER 11

PUBLIC TRANSIT





A PRODUCT OF THE
Western Piedmont
Council of Governments

**Greater Hickory Metropolitan
Planning Organization**

1880 2nd Ave NW | Hickory, NC 28601
828.322.9191 | www.wpcog.org

CURRENT TRENDS

According to the Eno Center for Transportation, national public transit trends include concerns surrounding funding, workforce development, and declining ridership. In addition to these concerns, there are new hopes and fears that come along with changing transportation technology.

Funding

FARES

Currently, fares for Fixed or Flex Route Service is \$1.25, while demand response and paratransit services are \$2.50.

FTA

Greenway receives funds from Sections 5307, 5310, and 5311, which accounted for \$4.06 million of the organization's revenues in FY 2020-2021.

NCDOT

Greenway received \$167,210 from the State Maintenance Assistance Plan (SMAP) funds for FY 22.

LOCAL ASSISTANCE

Greenway receives assistance from several municipalities and other organizations in the region including the cities of Hickory, Newton, Conover, Taylorsville, Morganton, Drexel, Valdese, and Rutherford College, the counties of Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba, as well as Western Piedmont Community College, Burke Community Foundation, and Blue Ridge Healthcare, totaling \$424,000. Contract revenues add another \$1.25 million.

RIDERSHIP

Like the rest of the nation, the Hickory region has witnessed a decline in ridership over the last several years. Nationally, public transit declined by 5.8% from 2014-2017, according to Eno. However, the Hickory region saw a far greater decline of approximately 31% during that same time frame. Further, the COVID-19 pandemic drastically decreased ridership, despite the elimination of fares, and resulted in an approximately 11% drop in ridership from 2019 (pre-pandemic) to 2020.

LIFESTYLE

Gas Prices – Adjusted for inflation, gas prices have fallen since 2010 by 2.8%. Falling gas prices have been linked with decreased bus ridership. According to research conducted by University of Kentucky, for a one unit decrease in gas prices, public transit ridership declines by 10.6%.

Population changes – From 2014 to 2019, the region's population remained practically the same, having grown by less than 1%. Intuitively, increasing population has a positive effect on transit ridership.

Employment rates – From 2010 to 2020, the labor force in the Hickory Metro has declined by 3.1%. Increased employment is correlated with increased transit ridership, so it is possible that the current demographic has resulted in a decline in transit use.

Car-free households – The number of households with no vehicle has a positive correlation with public transit ridership. From 2010 to 2019, the Hickory Metro has witnessed a 17% decrease in the number of households without a vehicle, possibly reducing transit ridership.

TNCs – Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) have been controversial in terms of their impact on public transit use in recent years. However, a few studies have argued that services such as Uber and Lyft have led to transit declines in cities where they operate. Ridehailing services have been available in the region for a few years.

TECHNOLOGY

Vehicle Sharing – Vehicle sharing refers to sharing transportation modes such as cars, bikes, scooters, etc. Companies like ZipCar and Lime enable users to borrow vehicles to get around. The impact of such technologies is controversial, with some urbanists stating that vehicle sharing will complement transit, and others strongly arguing that vehicle sharing is a substitute and will decrease transit ridership.

Ridehailing – Ridehailing is like a modernized taxi system, allowing users to hail a ride from their smartphones. As stated previously, ridehailing's impact on public transit is also ambiguous.

Travel Demand Management – Travel demand management is a combination of policies intended to mitigate traffic congestion, partially through encouraging public transit use.

Transit Oriented Development – Transit oriented development is a land use strategy that seeks to encourage transit usage by building a suitable environment for transit. Examples include multi-use developments, denser uses, and overall keeping transit in mind when building a new site, neighborhood, etc.

Telework – Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, teleworking was on the rise. However, since the pandemic, it is likely that telework will have an even larger impact than it previously did. If people are working from home, they will not need to use transit.

Smartphone Apps – Community members have expressed a strong interest in an app for Greenway transit riders with capabilities that range from tap touch payment systems to directions to live transit maps. Currently, Google Maps does offer directions for buses in the region and the organization has an app that shows buses in real time.

Available Services

PUBLIC

Currently, public transit services are offered by WPRTA, and the Departments of Social Services in Catawba and Caldwell Counties.

WPRTA

WPRTA offers seven fixed routes in Hickory, Conover, and Newton, two flex routes; one in Burke County, one flex route in Taylorsville, and is evaluating the potential for routes in Caldwell County as well. In addition to fixed and flex route services, WPRTA (Greenway) also offered demand-response transportation, meaning that riders can schedule specific trips ahead of time throughout the entire four-county region.

CATAWBA COUNTY AND CALDWELL COUNTY DSS

The Department of Social Services (DSS) offers Medicaid transportation. Medicaid transportation is only for customers going to medical appointments covered by Medicaid.

PRIVATE

Private transportation companies in the region include Abby Cab, Burke Christian Tours, Handi-Care, Hickory Hop, Lyft, PACE, Uber, PremierCare Transportation, and Diamond Cab.

Existing Conditions

GOVERNANCE

Greenway Public Transportation is a Regional Transit Authority formed under Chapter 160A, Article 25, North Carolina State Statutes. The primary purpose of Greenway Public Transportation is to administer, manage and operate fixed route bus service and demand-response service, in and around the Unifour region.

Greenway is under the direction of the Board of Directors. The Board of Directors is made up of representatives from each of the four counties and the cities of Hickory, Newton, and Conover.

Routes and Programs

HISTORY OF PUBLIC TRANSIT IN THE GREATER HICKORY REGION

Consolidation of public transportation operations for Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba Counties to form the Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority (WPRTA) took place in July 2008. Before this consolidation, community transportation was provided separately by each county. In Alexander County, community transportation was provided by Alexander County Transportation (ACT); in Burke County, by the Burke County Transit Administration (BCTA); in Caldwell County, by the Caldwell County Area Transit System (CCATS); and in Catawba County, by the Piedmont Wagon Transit System (PWTS). The only areas of the four counties that had fixed route transit at the time of the 2008 consolidation were the Catawba County cities of Hickory, Newton, and Conover, which was provided by the PWTS.

Following an extensive study and implementation process, on July 1, 2008, the Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority officially came into being and became the first combined rural and urban regional transit authority in the State of North Carolina. The transit authority was the result of the consolidation of four independent community transportation providers in each of the respective counties. Officials in Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba counties, along with the municipalities of Hickory, Newton, and Conover, passed resolutions to create the Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority.

MISSION STATEMENT AND GOALS

The mission of the Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority (WPRTA) is to enhance the quality of life in the region by delivering safe, convenient, and environmentally friendly transportation solutions.

Transportation services provided shall be designed to maintain and encourage the use of public transportation and shall contribute to the economic vitality of the community, the conservation of natural resources, and the protection of the environment.

THE GOALS OF WPRTA ARE AS FOLLOWS:

1. Provide cost effective transportation services which optimize the utilization of personnel, vehicles, and other resources.
2. Provide transportation services which meet the mobility needs of the community, within available financial resources.
3. Develop funding options which assure the continued stable operation of transportation services at a public subsidy level acceptable to the community.
4. Develop policies which assure, as much as possible, that transit services are designed and operated to encourage maximum utilization by the community. Service should be provided first in areas where the greatest potential for use exists.
5. Promote the use of public transportation services within the community. This includes both providing adequate and up-to-date information on services available and aggressively marketing the transit system.
6. Expand public transportation to new areas of the community as demand estimates and population densities indicate that service will be sufficiently utilized within established service standards.

CURRENT AVAILABLE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SERVICES OFFERED BY WPRTA

1. Urban fixed route transit services in Hickory, Newton, and Conover
2. Americans with disabilities (ADA) complementary $\frac{3}{4}$ mile paratransit service
3. Flex route service in Taylorsville, including a $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile deviation zone
4. Flex route service in Morganton, including a $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile deviation zone
5. Microtransit service in Morganton, Drexel, Valdese, and Rutherford College
6. Rural and urban general demand response service in Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba Counties
 - » DSS Medicaid transportation program

- » Vocational Rehabilitation Service
- » Burke Literacy
- » Caldwell Family Resource Center
- » Burke Council on Alcoholism
- » Adult Day Care
 - Developmentally disabled groups
 - Home and Community Care Block Grant Programs that service elderly passengers
- » General and medical demand response transportation
- » Private transportation providers operate in Burke County, providing trips brokered by WPRTA
- » Department of Social Services Temporary Assistance for Needy Family (TANF) programs

OTHER PUBLIC HUMAN SERVICE TRANSPORTATION PROVIDERS

- » Catawba County Department of Social Services
- » Caldwell County Department of Social Services

PRIVATE TRANSPORTATION PROVIDERS

- » Abby Cab
- » Ace Cab
- » Burke Christian Tours
- » Catawba County Medical Transportation
- » Catawba Valley Medical Services
- » Handi-Care
- » Hickory Hop
- » Lyft
- » Medivan
- » Premier Transportation
- » PACE
- » Uber
- » Yellow/Diamond Cab

CATAWBA FIXED ROUTE

Beginning July 5th, 2022, Greenway implemented its restructured Catawba Fixed Route. This service, having been in the planning process since 2020, continue to provide service to Hickory, Newton and Conover. The Catawba Fixed Route contains seven different routes, instead of six, which allows riders more efficient travel time to new and already popular destinations. Such destinations include: Walmart in Hickory and Covover, Catawba County Justice Center, Neighborhood Walmart's in Hickory and Newton, Catawba Valley Medical Center and more. Figures 1 & 2 display a map of the new Catawba Fixed Route along with a schedule displaying major stops.

MICROTRANSIT

Beginning April 4th, 2022, Microtransit service became available for use in Burke County. This is a relatively new concept which allows curb to curb same day service upon a simple call to dispatch. Microtransit is available in a large portion of the county in many areas located outside of the current Burke Flex Route. This buffer allows for towns like Rutherford College and Valdese, who were located on the previous Flex Route to continue to utilize Greenway for their needs. Ridership through Microtransit is expected to continue to increase with the rollout of an app that can be used for booking trips. This app will allow riders the ability to book trips from their phone. Additionally, the app will also assist drivers by creating on demand customized routes based on rider locations and destinations. Microtransit can be considered similar to other private ride sharing services such as Uber and Lyft, while instead,

FIGURE 1: CURRENT WPRIA FIXED ROUTE SERVICE – CITIES OF HICKORY, NEWTON, AND CONOVER – IMPLEMENTED JULY 5TH, 2022 *Source: Greenway Public Transportation.*

The map displays the Hickory, North Carolina area, including surrounding regions like North Hicory, Viewmont, Brookford, and Newton. Seven proposed transit routes are highlighted with colored lines. A legend on the right side of the map provides the key for these routes:

- Route 1: Yellow line
- Route 2: Blue line
- Route 3 & Route 4: Red line
- Route 5 & Route 6: Green line
- Route 7: Purple line

Key locations and roads labeled on the map include: North Hicory, Viewmont, Hickory, Brookford, Newton, and various roads such as US-70 SW, 33rd St SW, 2nd Ave NW, and 1st St W. The Hickory Regional Airport is also indicated.

FIGURE 2: CURRENT WPRTA URBAN FIXED ROUTE SERVICE SCHEDULE – CITIES OF HICKORY, NEWTON AND CONOVER –UPDATED AUGUST 15TH, 2022 *Source: Greenway Public Transportation.*

ROUTE 1—WEST HICKORY

Transit Center	1 Center St	Way St	Hickory	1st Avenue SW	Transit Center
8:00 AM	8:00 AM	8:01 AM	8:01 AM	8:01 AM	8:01 AM
8:05 AM	8:05 AM	8:06 AM	8:06 AM	8:06 AM	8:06 AM
8:10 AM	8:10 AM	8:11 AM	8:11 AM	8:11 AM	8:11 AM
8:15 AM	8:15 AM	8:16 AM	8:16 AM	8:16 AM	8:16 AM
8:20 AM	8:20 AM	8:21 AM	8:21 AM	8:21 AM	8:21 AM
8:25 AM	8:25 AM	8:26 AM	8:26 AM	8:26 AM	8:26 AM
8:30 AM	8:30 AM	8:31 AM	8:31 AM	8:31 AM	8:31 AM
8:35 AM	8:35 AM	8:36 AM	8:36 AM	8:36 AM	8:36 AM
8:40 AM	8:40 AM	8:41 AM	8:41 AM	8:41 AM	8:41 AM
8:45 AM	8:45 AM	8:46 AM	8:46 AM	8:46 AM	8:46 AM
8:50 AM	8:50 AM	8:51 AM	8:51 AM	8:51 AM	8:51 AM
8:55 AM	8:55 AM	8:56 AM	8:56 AM	8:56 AM	8:56 AM
9:00 AM	9:00 AM	9:01 AM	9:01 AM	9:01 AM	9:01 AM
9:05 AM	9:05 AM	9:06 AM	9:06 AM	9:06 AM	9:06 AM
9:10 AM	9:10 AM	9:11 AM	9:11 AM	9:11 AM	9:11 AM
9:15 AM	9:15 AM	9:16 AM	9:16 AM	9:16 AM	9:16 AM
9:20 AM	9:20 AM	9:21 AM	9:21 AM	9:21 AM	9:21 AM
9:25 AM	9:25 AM	9:26 AM	9:26 AM	9:26 AM	9:26 AM
9:30 AM	9:30 AM	9:31 AM	9:31 AM	9:31 AM	9:31 AM
9:35 AM	9:35 AM	9:36 AM	9:36 AM	9:36 AM	9:36 AM
9:40 AM	9:40 AM	9:41 AM	9:41 AM	9:41 AM	9:41 AM
9:45 AM	9:45 AM	9:46 AM	9:46 AM	9:46 AM	9:46 AM
9:50 AM	9:50 AM	9:51 AM	9:51 AM	9:51 AM	9:51 AM
9:55 AM	9:55 AM	9:56 AM	9:56 AM	9:56 AM	9:56 AM
10:00 AM	10:00 AM	10:01 AM	10:01 AM	10:01 AM	10:01 AM
10:05 AM	10:05 AM	10:06 AM	10:06 AM	10:06 AM	10:06 AM
10:10 AM	10:10 AM	10:11 AM	10:11 AM	10:11 AM	10:11 AM
10:15 AM	10:15 AM	10:16 AM	10:16 AM	10:16 AM	10:16 AM
10:20 AM	10:20 AM	10:21 AM	10:21 AM	10:21 AM	10:21 AM
10:25 AM	10:25 AM	10:26 AM	10:26 AM	10:26 AM	10:26 AM
10:30 AM	10:30 AM	10:31 AM	10:31 AM	10:31 AM	10:31 AM
10:35 AM	10:35 AM	10:36 AM	10:36 AM	10:36 AM	10:36 AM
10:40 AM	10:40 AM	10:41 AM	10:41 AM	10:41 AM	10:41 AM
10:45 AM	10:45 AM	10:46 AM	10:46 AM	10:46 AM	10:46 AM
10:50 AM	10:50 AM	10:51 AM	10:51 AM	10:51 AM	10:51 AM
10:55 AM	10:55 AM	10:56 AM	10:56 AM	10:56 AM	10:56 AM
11:00 AM	11:00 AM	11:01 AM	11:01 AM	11:01 AM	11:01 AM
11:05 AM	11:05 AM	11:06 AM	11:06 AM	11:06 AM	11:06 AM
11:10 AM	11:10 AM	11:11 AM	11:11 AM	11:11 AM	11:11 AM
11:15 AM	11:15 AM	11:16 AM	11:16 AM	11:16 AM	11:16 AM
11:20 AM	11:20 AM	11:21 AM	11:21 AM	11:21 AM	11:21 AM
11:25 AM	11:25 AM	11:26 AM	11:26 AM	11:26 AM	11:26 AM
11:30 AM	11:30 AM	11:31 AM	11:31 AM	11:31 AM	11:31 AM
11:35 AM	11:35 AM	11:36 AM	11:36 AM	11:36 AM	11:36 AM
11:40 AM	11:40 AM	11:41 AM	11:41 AM	11:41 AM	11:41 AM
11:45 AM	11:45 AM	11:46 AM	11:46 AM	11:46 AM	11:46 AM
11:50 AM	11:50 AM	11:51 AM	11:51 AM	11:51 AM	11:51 AM
11:55 AM	11:55 AM	11:56 AM	11:56 AM	11:56 AM	11:56 AM
12:00 PM	12:00 PM	12:01 PM	12:01 PM	12:01 PM	12:01 PM
12:05 PM	12:05 PM	12:06 PM	12:06 PM	12:06 PM	12:06 PM
12:10 PM	12:10 PM	12:11 PM	12:11 PM	12:11 PM	12:11 PM
12:15 PM	12:15 PM				

FIGURE 3: CURRENT SERVICES IN BURKE COUNTY – INCLUDING MORGANTON LOOP AND MICROTRANSIT BUFFER ZONE

Source: Greenway Public Transportation

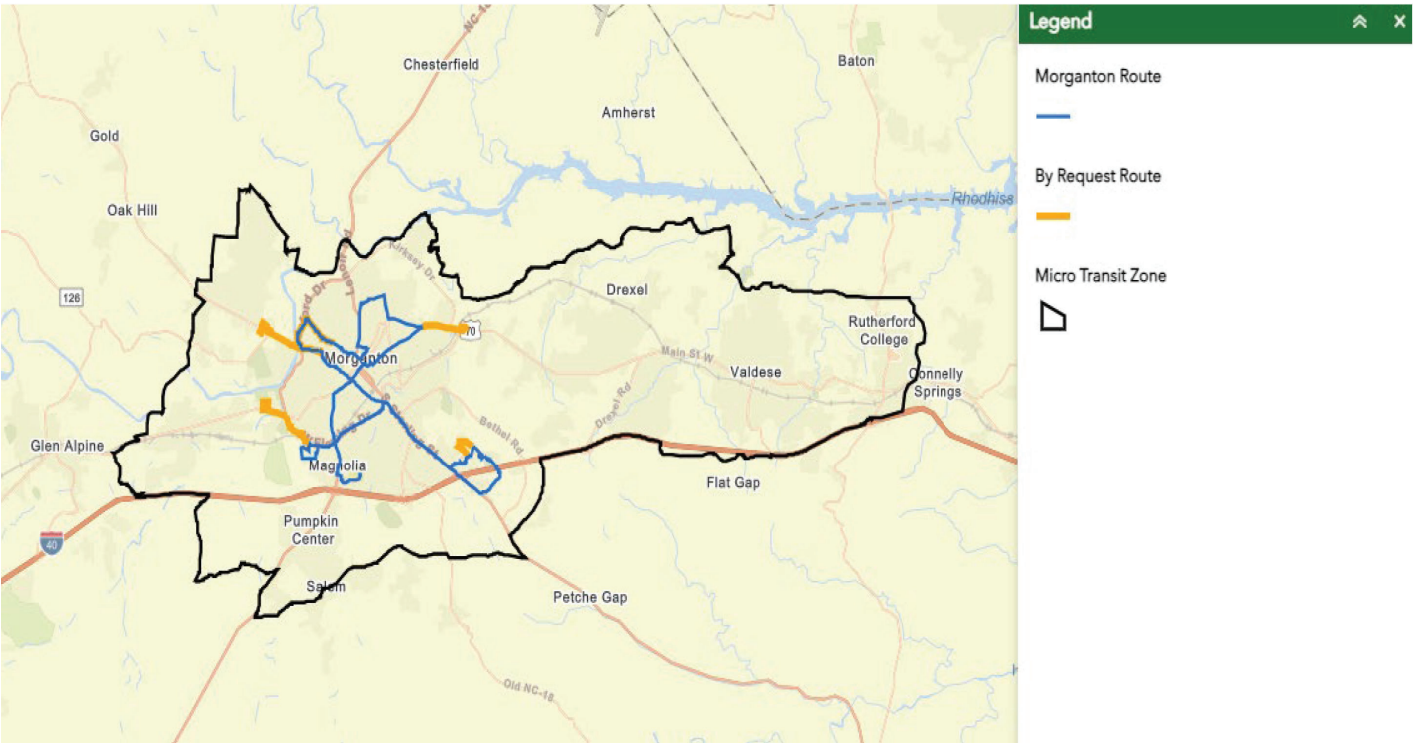


FIGURE 4: BURKE FLEX ROUTE SCHEDULE – IMPLEMENTED APRIL 4TH, 2022

Source: Greenway Public Transportation

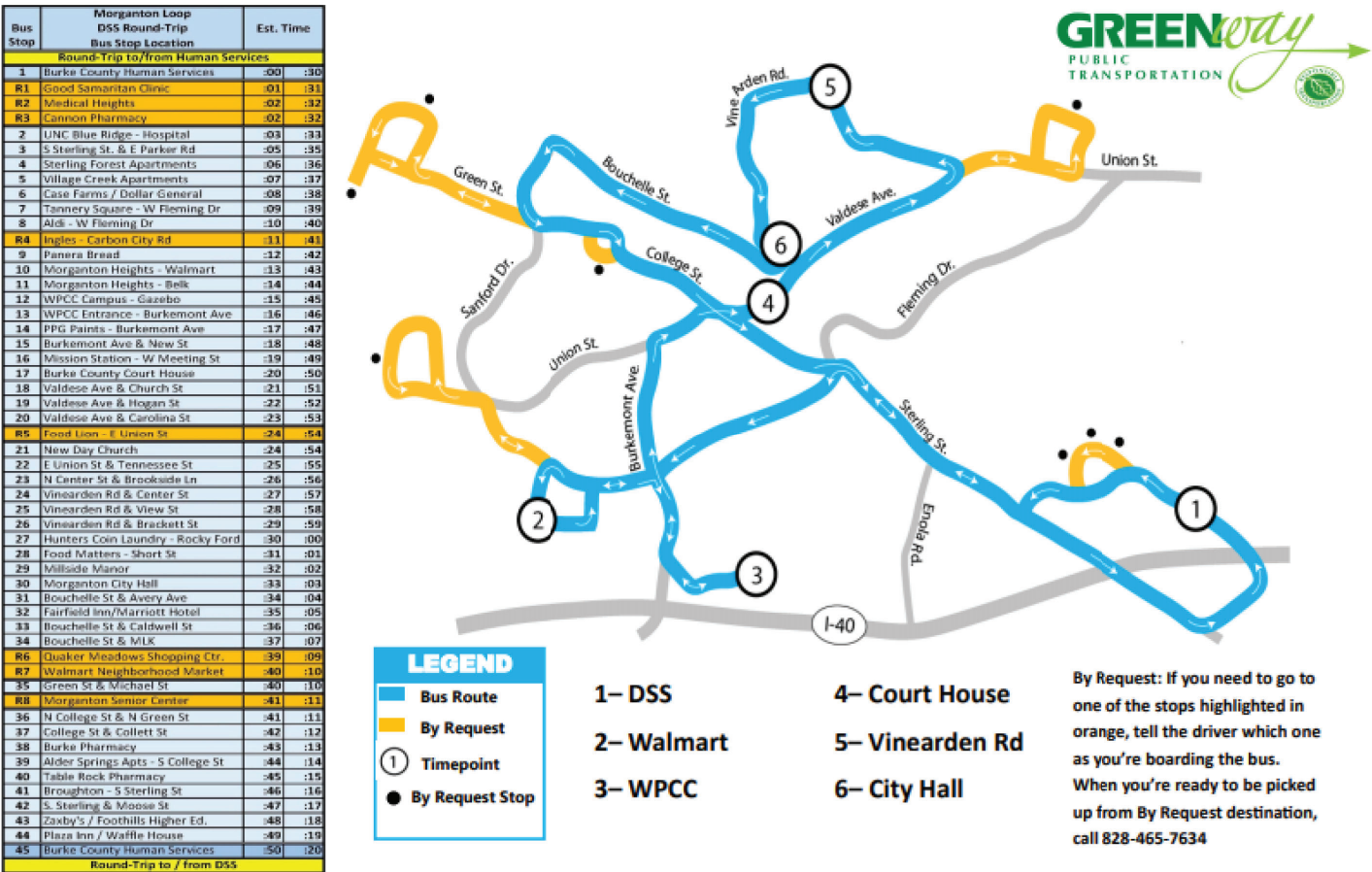


FIGURE 5: CURRENT TAYLORSVILLE FLEX ROUTE

Source: Greenway Public Transportation



Transportation Needs

DEMOGRAPHICS

The 2019 American Community Survey indicated that the population in the four-county area was 366,678 people, remaining stable from the 2010 population of 365,497 people. According to the NC Office of State Budget and Management (NC OSBM), the region is estimated to grow to around 394,871 people by 2030, and to around 437,229 by 2050, growing at a rate of 7.7%, then 10.7%. Further, this growth is expected to be fueled by people emigrating

to the region. Catawba County is expected to grow the most at 25.5% by 2050, with Alexander, Burke, and Caldwell following behind at 18.6, 10.1, and 17.5% respectively.

URBANIZED AREA

There is a Census-designated Urbanized Area in the Western Piedmont Area. This urbanized area is somewhat unusual, as the population density found in some areas within its boundaries would not suggest an “urban” designation. The area has the designation because there are several small municipalities with contiguous borders that combine to have a population that is characterized as “urban”. There is also a significant level of commuting between jurisdictions, which is one of the determinants that the Census uses in its formula to designate urbanized areas. The urbanized area is significant for this project, as the FTA allocates public transit funding to specific urbanized areas.

POPULATION DENSITY

The mean population density of the region is 220 people per square mile, with Catawba County having the most concentrated population (382 people per square mile) and Alexander County have the least concentrated population (141 people per square mile). Burke County has a density of 175 persons per square mile and Caldwell has a density of 173 persons per square mile. Population density is an important demographic feature to study when planning transit services. Typically, fixed-route transit can only be supported in areas with 1,500-2,000 people per square mile or more. Areas with lower densities call for more targeted services, such as deviated fixed-route or demand-response services. The current fixed-route service area exhibits areas of fixed-route density, as do areas of Lenoir.

EMPLOYMENT TRAVEL PATTERNS

Employment travel patterns based on the 2018 LODES data were compiled and analyzed by the WPCOG. This analysis showed that Catawba County is significant employment destination for the three other study counties. Additionally, Mecklenburg County has become a popular commuting destination since the last LCP. These data provide another opportunity for the regionalization of public transit services. The following commuting patterns were indicated in the WPCOG analysis.

From Alexander County - 3,956 commuters to Catawba County

From Burke County - 5,703 commuters to Catawba County

From Caldwell County - 6,554 commuters to Catawba County

From Catawba County - 6,345 commuters to Mecklenburg County

From Unifour Region - 10,321 commuters to Mecklenburg County

DEMOGRAPHICS INDICATING TRANSIT NEEDS

The need for transportation services in an area is a function of the demographic and economic characteristics of the population, their access to alternative forms of transportation (personal vehicles and trucks), and their physical and mental abilities to operate a vehicle.

Need is a relative concept, rather than an absolute one, and so an examination of need must provide for a comparison between areas or population groupings. It may not include a figure for the number of trips “needed” by the population in that area or group, because such a figure is inherently subjective and dependent upon the definition of need. “Need” is likely to be much larger than “demand,” which is the number of trips likely to be taken at a particular fare and service level.

Accordingly, this analysis uses 2015-2019 American Community Survey data to present relative need in the study area. Relative need is calculated by ranking each Census and the 2015-2019 American Community Survey regarding the density and the percentage of the population in each of the following groups:

- » Elderly persons 60-64 years of age
- » Elderly persons 65 years of age and above
- » Persons with disabilities, non-institutional, aged 18-64
- » Persons with incomes below the poverty level
- » Households with no vehicle available for use

This information is analyzed in two ways. The density of persons in each of these categories has been ranked, and the rankings summed to provide an overall ranking for each Census Tract in the four counties. The high need areas in terms of people displaying transportation dependent characteristics are in the Hickory area, Newton, part of Conover, part of Maiden, in the US 321-A corridor between Granite Falls and Lenoir, the northwest quadrant of Lenoir, in Morganton, along the US 70 Corridor in the vicinity of Valdese, along the Burke County/Catawba County border (north of Interstate 40), and in Taylorsville.

A similar analysis is performed using the same data but calculating the percentage of the population in each of the categories for each Census tract, and then ranking the percentages and summing the rankings to produce an overall ranking of the percentages. This is done to determine if areas that have small populations might also have a high percentage of that population in need of transportation services. This analysis shows a somewhat different pattern, with more of the rural areas showing needs, as would be expected. There are several areas that exhibit high transit needs based on the density and the percentage analyses, and these are: Morganton, Valdese, the northwest quadrant of Lenoir, along the Burke County/Catawba County border (north of Interstate 40), areas along the US 321-A Corridor between Granite Falls and Lenoir, portions of the Cities of Hickory, Newton, and Conover, Taylorsville, and Maiden.

Goals and Policies

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES AND POTENTIAL PROJECTS

Recommended strategies and potential projects were derived from two major sources: the 2008 WPRTA Implementation Plan, plus the 2013, 2017, and 2021 Coordinated Plan Workshops. This section documents these strategies and projects.

While the WPRTA Implementation Plan was not primarily a service planning study, some logical service expansion ideas were discussed during development of the Plan. These concepts are based on the configuration of the urbanized area, coupled with the current demand for human service agency-based trips. The funding flexibility currently permitted for Federal Section 5307 transit providers in small urban areas would allow the introduction of deviated fixed-route services in the two urbanized corridors that do not currently have regular route service. Human service agency-based trips can be provided along these routes and the revenues derived from the agencies can be used as local match for the federal funds.

These corridors include the Lenoir to Hickory Corridor along US 321-A and the Morganton to Hickory Corridor along US 70. These corridor routes would have a fixed schedule with specific pick-up points, with some additional time added to the schedule for deviations. In order to make this service cost effective, it is proposed that these routes be based on the current human service agency demand for service in these corridors, with the current human service riders scheduled on these routes.

Other new services that could be developed in the region were cited in the 2009 Local Coordinated Transportation

Plan and were reinforced in 2013, 2017, and 2021 Local Coordinated Transportation Plan workshops and surveys. Possible future service includes the following:

- » Corridor service from Taylorsville to Hickory (NC 16 and NC 127)
- » Corridor service from Taylorsville to Statesville (US 64 and NC 90)
- » Circulator service in Morganton (implemented in 2018)
- » Circulator service in Lenoir
- » Connectivity between Hildebran and Hickory
- » Additional specific employment transportation service with extended hours/days of service
- » Additional rural general public demand response/other modes of service delivery
- » Additional human service contractual trips
- » Additional urban general public demand response/other modes of service delivery
- » Additional group type trips to support senior and disabled transportation to destinations such as congregate meals, group shopping, dialysis and more

IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES

In addition to identifying the region's transportation needs and what activities to coordinate, the Local Coordinated Plan Steering Committee also considered its priorities and how to implement them.

As indicated by the facilitators at the planning workshop, one goal of the planning process was to examine public transportation services that are provided within the four counties of Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba. The needs and activities identified by the workshops and surveys in terms of their priorities demand certain actions that are essential in the implementation of the Local Coordinated Plan. Actions that require little funding or have already begun should be part of the first phase of implementation. Others may require more time to implement because they require federal and state participation.

The following sections detail action items by type of activity.

WPRTA EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

In an effort to meet some of the identified needs, it is necessary to provide information and coordinate with stakeholders: the Departments of Social Services and other human service agencies, such as, Exodus House, Centro Latino, and faith-based organizations and, indeed, the NC Department of Transportation-Public Transportation Division, on how best to address these needs. Local businesses are also important. The implementation of the fixed route service in Taylorsville is a successful outcome of WPRTA education and outreach efforts with the elected officials of the town.

PROMOTE COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND MARKETING

WPRTA should utilize outreach techniques in order to better engage the public for the continued development and implementation of the coordinated planning process. Some techniques include a once-a-year open house for the general public and inviting representatives from the public to Transportation Advisory Board meetings. The latter may also involve training participants about the technical and policy issues surrounding transportation and transit planning.

IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES TO INCREASE FUNDING FOR HUMAN SERVICE TRANSPORTATION TO MEET SOME OF THE SPECIFIC NEEDS THAT ARE IDENTIFIED IN THE PLAN

The Transportation Advisory Board can develop a common message regarding the need to enhance human service transportation in the region and to identify specific methods to communicate these needs to decision makers. For example, it may prove helpful to develop fact sheets and other educational materials to inform local Boards of Commissioners and City and Town Councils of regional human service coordination goals, including the need for additional funding. It could also be beneficial to coordinate visits to elected officials to present the materials in person. A long-term strategy could also consist of identifying and seeking future opportunities, which have the

potential for a dedicated funding to support human service transportation services and programs.

Some grant programs, such as Transportation for Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities (Section 5310), may also be available to assist in implementing programs to support the region's coordination goals. The WPRTA should seek out such opportunities and prepare grant applications. One opportunity in which both the WPCOG and WPRTA participate in, alongside the GHMPO is the 5310 Call for Projects Workshop. This workshop is held every two years with the most recent workshop being held on September 30th, 2022.

WPRTA should research and document potential funding opportunities for human services transportation and transportation related activities. They will also work with local, state, and federal agencies to discover or create matching opportunities for federal transportation grants, and assist determining the most effective use of these funds. Given the changing funding landscape at the state and national level, and the simultaneously increasing costs and need for public transportation, this activity should be ongoing in nature.

IMPLEMENT TRAVEL TRAINING PROGRAMS

WPRTA should continue to utilize and promote the development of programs that raise awareness among individuals of the transportation options that are available to them and instruct them as to how to access and navigate the transportation system. Such a program can include published materials, classroom style sessions, and volunteer travel escort partners. WPRTA currently provides these materials along with travel training at no cost.

IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES FOR POOLING OR SHARING HUMAN SERVICE TRANSPORTATION AGENCY FUNDING ACROSS THE SERVICE AREA

Transportation funds are received by a multitude of human service agencies located within the service area. Developing better communication and coordination of this funding would maximize the availability of funding to the community. Referral of clients to other appropriate agencies for transportation funding is important for optimization of all available transportation funds.

FACILITATE SCHEDULE COORDINATION AT MAJOR CONNECTIONS

Improved schedule coordination could make connections easier to plan and potentially reduce wait times for riders. WPRTA should continue to work with operators to refine timetables and coordinate route schedules.

MAINTAIN GIS DATABASE OF DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

WPCOG will continue to maintain data on the population within the regional planning area. In addition to obtaining such data from traditional sources WPCOG will seek opportunities to expand its demographic databases through pursuing and building data sharing partnerships.

MAINTAIN GIS DATABASE OF REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT AND ACTIVITY CENTERS

WPCOG will continue to utilize existing datasets work with partner agencies (primarily municipal planning departments) to develop geographic databases of current and future land uses in order to better understand regional employment and activity centers.

INVENTORY CONDITIONS AND INSTALL AMENITIES AT AND AROUND TRANSIT STOPS THAT ENCOURAGE PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE ACCESS

An inventory of current conditions and a geographic assessment of deficiencies are required to ascertain priorities toward improving pedestrian and bicycle access. Other similar inventory efforts should be encouraged and undertaken. These and comparable efforts should be utilized to identify priority locations for the installation of pedestrian and bicycle accessibility amenities. Improvements should be installed or facilities retrofitted in collaboration with municipal agencies.

CONDUCT AN EVALUATION OF PROGRAMS ACTIVITIES ON AN ANNUAL BASIS; REPORT FINDINGS TO THE TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD

Collect data and monitoring the coordination activities. The resulting information should be compared to the

expectations developed as a short-term strategy. It is also important to document a more qualitative assessment of coordination activities to assess barriers that may have prevented successful program implementation, lessons learned or strategies that have been proven especially effective. The results of this evaluation should be shared with relevant stakeholder groups and future work should be modified to meet revised expectations.

EXPAND OR ADJUST SERVICE IN UNDERSERVED OR INAPPROPRIATELY SERVED AREAS OR TIME PERIODS

Efforts should be made to identify gaps or deficiencies in the fixed route system and strategies developed to supplement or adjust to a service level more appropriate to the needs of the transportation disadvantaged population. Data and surveys can inform decisions as to where service should be added or extended to better serve, for example, group housing or workplaces for the disabled, medical facilities for the elderly, or employment centers with opportunities for the training or hiring of low-income persons.

ADJUST FLEET SIZES AND/OR OPERATIONS WHERE EXISTING SERVICE IS INAPPROPRIATE

Work to identify and secure the funding necessary to allow transit operators or demand service providers to purchase new vans or paratransit vehicles or supplement operations in order to more appropriately meet the needs of their customers. Such resources, however, should only be directed toward expansions of service that decrease identified regional gaps in service and won't contribute to duplicative service between agencies.

IMPLEMENT MOBILITY MANAGEMENT TECHNOLOGIES

Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) technologies that assist in regional trip planning and coordinated service delivery include such online system mapping and trip planning, automatic vehicle location, electronic fare payment and collection systems, communications equipment, and computer aided dispatch. The TAB can assist service providers in determining the need for such technologies and the best means to finance technology projects. The council can also assist in facilitating the inter-agency coordination required for their success and ensure their appropriate implementation in the context of region-wide mobility management.

WPRTA TITLE VI POLICY

The WPRTA is committed to ensuring that no person is excluded from participation in or denied the benefits of its services on the basis of race, color or national origin per Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended.

No person or group of persons will be discriminated against with regard to fares, routing, scheduling, or quality of transportation service that WPRTA / Greenway Public Transportation furnishes on the basis of race, color or national origin. Frequency of service, age and quality of Greenway Public Transportation vehicles assigned to routes, quality of Greenway Public Transportation stations serving Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba counties, and the cities of Conover, Hickory and Newton, and location of routes will not be determined on the basis of race, color or national origin.