

Regional Transit Coordination Study

EXPLORING OPTIONS FOR IMPROVED COOPERATION

Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission

CHARLOTTESVILLE-ALBEMARLE METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION | FEBRUARY 2017

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
OVERVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS	4
THE REGION'S TRANSIT SYSTEMS	6
CAT	6
JAUNT	7
UTS	8
COORDINATION STUDY PROCESS.....	8
STEP I. REVIEW OF EXISTING DOCUMENTS	9
STEP II. DECISION-MAKER QUESTIONNAIRE	9
STEP III. INTERVIEWS	9
STEP IV. BENCHMARKING	10
EXISTING COORDINATION EFFORTS	11
CAT SERVICE IN ALBEMARLE COUNTY	11
CAT/JAUNT SUB-RECIPIENT AGREEMENT	13
CAT/UNIVERSITY SERVICE	13
JAUNT/UNIVERSITY SERVICE	14
BUS STOP COORDINATION	14
MEMBERSHIP ON JAUNT BOARD	14
REMIX SERVICE	14
PARTICIPATION WITH MPO	14
2008 REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY STUDY	14
CHANGING CONDITIONS FUELING BUILDING TENSIONS	16
ALBEMARLE COUNTY IS URBANIZING	16
THE COUNTY CONTRIBUTION TO CAT	16
TURNOVER.....	16
RECOMMENDATIONS	17
PURPOSE:	17
CONCLUSION	21
APPENDIX A: UTS SERVICE AREA.....	25
APPENDIX B: SURVEY RESPONSE RESULTS	25
APPENDIX C: CITY-COUNTY REVENUE SHARING AGREEMENT	25
APPENDIX D: LIST OF MID-ATLANTIC TRANSIT AUTHORITIES	25
APPENDIX E: CITY MEMO EXPLAINING THE CAT'S FUNDING FORMULA	25
APPENDIX F: CAT/JAUNT MOU FOR ADA COMPLIMENTARY SERVICES	25
APPENDIX G: US 29 EXPRESS ROUTE – MAP.....	25
APPENDIX H: UTS, CAT AND JAUNT JOINT SIGNAGE AT DESIGNATED BUS STOPS	25
APPENDIX I: 2008 CHARLOTTESVILLE-ALBEMARLE RTA FINAL REPORT	25
APPENDIX J: ENABLING LEGISLATION §33.2-2800	25
APPENDIX K: EXAMPLE OF TRANSIT SERVICE CONTRACT: CITY OF CLEMSON, SC	25

Acknowledgements

This study explores options for improving coordination among the Charlottesville-Albemarle Metropolitan Planning Area's transit providers, as well as localities. While the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission (TJPDC) and Charlottesville-Albemarle Metropolitan Planning Organization (CA-MPO) conducted this study, several other groups played a significant part in conducting this work, including State agencies, transit staff, local departments, elected officials and other stakeholders. The TJPDC and CA-MPO would like to thank those who contributed their time, resources and creativity to this examination.

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Executive Summary

For over 40 years, three separate transit systems have continuously served the Charlottesville-Albemarle urbanized area, or Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA). While these independent systems have different missions and objectives, they contribute to the overall success of the community's transit commitments. CAT, JAUNT and UTS all contribute to successes of providing mobility and accessibility to riders throughout the region. Despite decades of accomplishments and coexistence, there is a growing and pressing need to confront renewed controversy with how these systems communicate, make decisions and coordinate with their partners, namely the City and County governments. Under this environment there is a need to:

- Improve coordination between transit providers;
- Formalize transit agreements, to bring greater certainty and clarity to these relationships; and,
- Settle long-standing debates regarding authority, responsibility and obligations for transit services.

While conducting work on this *Transit Coordination Study*, the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission (TJPDC) and Charlottesville-Albemarle Metropolitan Planning Organization (CA-MPO) worked closely with Charlottesville City Council, Charlottesville Area Transit (CAT), the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors, JAUNT, and University Transit Services (UTS). As staff facilitated discussions and interpreted feedback, this effort revealed several opportunities for improving continued communication, coordination and collaboration between the identified transit partners. In the ensuing pages, this study also explores specific strategies for advancing solutions to the more recent debates, as part of an overall policy recommendation for decision-makers to consider:

The Charlottesville-Albemarle Urbanized Area should establish a Regional Transit Partnership (RTP), guided by an advisory board whose membership would be consistent to that of a formal authority and whose charge is to provide a venue for continued communication, coordination and collaboration between transit providers, localities and citizens. The RTP could be a precursor to a Regional Transit Authority (RTA) and could serve as the interim body, responsible for ushering the development of an RTA, if the region determines to consolidate transit systems into a single entity.

The conclusions of this study are a result of a year-long process. TJPDC staff reviewed every known document related to the region's transit operations. The concept of the RTP arose from investigations of those materials and from individual interviews with the Board of Supervisors, City Council, JAUNT Corporation Board and transit staff. In a review of existing RTAs, staff found that establishing an authority would require an investment of several years, before the organization is fully established. During the years of consideration and preparation, the RTP could function as an informal authority, to:

- Establish greater trust between partners;
- Build momentum for an authority;
- Test logistical aspects of an authority; and,
- Make incremental improvements to transit coordination and services.

While the RTP operates under its charge, if the region decided not to establish an official RTA, then the Advisory Board could function as a venue for organizing the needs of CAT, JAUNT, City and County.

Overview of Recommendations

While an RTA would be the most direct and comprehensive way to coordinate transit, establishing an authority could be an enormous effort of research, financial and legal documentation and considerable resources. During that time, the existing problems would still exist and there would be no guarantee that the region would successfully form an RTA, as there are several potentially controversial decisions involved with establishing an authority.

To address existing problems with haste and to lay the foundation for the opportunity of an RTA, staff recommends more immediate actions, with establishment of the RTP Advisory Board.

Other than recommendations, the RTP Advisory Board would be responsible for additional transit products and deliverables. These deliverables would be focused on ensuring continued communication, coordination and collaboration. Documents and responsibilities include:

- **Drafting Formal Agreements:** The advisory Board would review existing arrangements and transit relationships, drafting formal contracts and agreements focused on payment for services. The initial and primary task would be to address the most pressing problem, the overly complicated web of informal arrangements.
- **Integrating Transit into Decision-Making:** The RTP Advisory Board would work to integrate greater transit considerations into planning efforts around the region. The Board would have involvement with the MPO's Long Range Transportation Plan, vetting transit-related recommendations. It would also provide recommendations to local planning efforts and projects.
- **A Joint Regional Transit Plan:** Currently, the three transit providers have entirely separate planning documents. CAT and JAUNT must update their Transit Development Plan (TDP) every five years. Currently, these efforts are done separately, but DRPT staff indicated that there may be opportunities to have a combined or better coordinated planning process. Whether done through the TDP or as a document that later consolidates planning recommendations, the RTP would be responsible for overseeing the region's transit planning process.
- **Update RTA Study:** The last RTA study dates nearly nine years. The RTP Advisory Board, in coordination with the CA-MPO, should update the plan and develop a new report that will help the region determine if an RTA is feasible. The report should also address the many controversial decisions that are needed to establish an RTA.
- **RTP Bylaws and Mission:** This advisory board would be responsible for developing and maintaining its own bylaws, to ensure that the group operates within its defined authority.

Regional Transit Coordination

Three Systems – One Service

In 2008, The Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission (TJPDC) and Charlottesville-Albemarle Metropolitan Planning Organization (CA-MPO) facilitated work on a Regional Transit Authority (RTA) Study that explored the potential for consolidating the region's three transit systems into a single entity. The plan resulted in the State approving enabling legislations in 2009, allowing the region to establish an RTA. The City of Charlottesville also invested in a rebranding effort to account for an Authority, but the region ultimately stopped short of consolidating services.

Nearly eight years later, local decision-makers of the Planning and Coordination Council (PACC) asked the TJPDC/CA-MPO to reexamine opportunities for improved communication, coordination and collaboration on transit matters. The effort would explore operations of the region's three transit providers, Charlottesville Area Transit (CAT), JAUNT and University Transit Service (UTS). Rather than focus specifically on an RTA, the Commission's (TJPDC) assignment was to "review organizational, decision-making and formal communication options for the transit service organizations in the region and to explore partnership opportunities between CAT, JAUNT and UTS to enhance transit service in the region."

The first step was to define a problem statement, as this would provide the foundation for specific strategies. After reviewing all known transit-related documents and interviewing the main transit players, staff identified a primary problem:

The region's transit systems suffer from an overly complex, informal and disorganized system for coordinating with each other and with stakeholders, resulting in:

- *Misunderstandings,*
- *Local conflicts,*
- *Uncertainty and mistrust between stakeholders, and*
- *Lost opportunities.*

For over 40 years, the three transit providers have provided services in the Charlottesville/Albemarle region. In recent years, the complex relationship between transit stakeholders have resulted in conflicts and continued debates. Much of this disagreement revolves around the City and their largest paying customer, Albemarle County. As the items in the above problem statement are currently unresolved, tension between City and County has grown, making it increasingly difficult to facilitate a solution.

By contrast, the University remains largely detached from these disagreements. While UTS offers transit services that benefit the other stakeholders in this discussion, it realizes little, if any, benefit from participating in any formal consolidated authority. UTS also has a unique and separate mission, to serve the needs of students and university staff, as well as to support the University's master plan. While TJPDC staff does not recommend that UTS be grouped into an RTA at this time, the University is a major player and is undeniably a significant transit provider. Consequently, UTS is featured in the following analysis.

Staff began this process with no intention of providing specific recommendations, but planned to develop a menu of options for decision-makers to consider. As the planning process proceeded, staff found there was one clear solution that could immediately address the problem statement and serve as

a compromise between the varied interests in the transit systems. This recommendation is to establish a Regional Transit Partnership (RTP) Advisory Board, as is detailed in the executive summary and in the recommendations section, found on page 17. The following sections explain how staff reached this conclusion and the benefits of this approach.

The Region's Transit Systems

CAT, JAUNT and UTS continue to serve the Charlottesville-Albemarle urbanized area after over 40 years. While these independent systems have different missions and objectives, they contribute to the community's transit commitments. The following is a detailed look at each of those providers.

Mission Statements		
CAT	JAUNT	UTS
CAT aims to be the first choice for area transportation and a one-stop source for integrated transportation information in the area through changes in decisions regarding transportation priorities, land use and development location.	JAUNT safely, courteously and promptly provides public and specialized services to meet community mobility needs.	UTS supports the land use and mobility goals of the University by maintaining and operating fixed route and charter services supporting mobility on-Grounds including remote parking and immediately adjacent neighborhoods. UTS is available to all to provide midday mobility and to provide an alternative to driving and parking.

CAT

In 1975, the City acquired a private bus service called the Yellow Transit Company, which became Charlottesville Transit Service (CTS) and is now known as Charlottesville Area Transit (CAT). Until 2016, the transit division was under Charlottesville's Public Works Department. While the Regional Transit Coordination Study was underway, City Council promoted CAT to a city department. The move is logical, as CAT manages nearly 70 employees and a fleet of 36 buses, more personnel and assets than most existing departments. The Transit Manager now reports directly to the City Manager.

While CAT is a city department, it provides service to the urban core of Albemarle County, with routes going to: the US 29 corridor, Pantops, Piedmont Virginia Community College, 5th Street Station and Old Lynchburg Road. On an annual basis, CAT communicates with the County's Community Development Department on transit services and costs, which are recommended in the County's annual budget.

In terms of governing structure, City Council has the final decision-making authority on transit routes and department budgets. To assist with these decisions, Council created the CAT Advisory Board. Its mission is to "Advocate for services, resources and policies to ensure CAT is an accessible, effective and compelling option for all." This advisory group is tasked with "presenting recommendations to one or more of the following: City Council, CAT or Albemarle County." While the County has a position on the CAT Advisory Board, County officials have expressed their view that there may be legal concerns with that representation.

Additional Information:

- 2016 Gross Expenses: \$7,293,199
- 2016 Gross Revenue: \$7,446,968

- *2016 Net Revenue:* \$153,769
- *Employees:* 68 (21 temporary)
- *Average Annual Ridership:* 2,400,000
- *Fleet:* 36 buses
- *Governing Body:* City Council

JAUNT

In the same year that Charlottesville acquired the Yellow Transit Company, human service organizations formed JAUNT. It started as a 501(c)3 and received federal grants to help subsidize services. In 1982, JAUNT became a public corporation, owned by its five localities: the City of Charlottesville, Albemarle County, Nelson County, Louisa County, and Fluvanna County. Starting with only thirteen vans, the fleet now includes over 80 vehicles. As it grew, JAUNT gained notoriety, earning the Virginia Transit Association's Outstanding Public System Award for Non-Urbanized Areas. The Community Transit Association of America also named JAUNT the National Community Transportation System of the Year Award.

While it was originally the product of service agencies, JAUNT later expanded its role to include commuter routes, which now make up most of its ridership. While CAT and JAUNT started with different missions, the two organizations are now sharing more goals and objectives. The changing role of JAUNT has been a marketing challenge, as many believe service is limited to the elderly or special needs riders. As the Charlottesville area urbanizes, JAUNT has growing concerns with future funding. Once the urbanized area reaches a population of 200,000, the region will enter a new classification under the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and its funding formula. This change will result in significant decreases in funding and would be devastating for JAUNT, making it impossible to continue all existing services. While the region is not expected to reach that threshold for many years, the concern is still looming.

In terms of governing structure, its Corporation Board is responsible for overseeing JAUNT, by establishing policies and appointing the Executive Director. The Board consists of 14 members, including:

- Four City of Charlottesville representatives,
- Four Albemarle County representatives,
- Two from Louisa County representatives,
- Two Fluvanna County representatives, and
- Two Nelson County representatives.

The CAT Executive Director and MPO Director also sit on the Corporation Board, as nonvoting members.

Additional Information:

- *2016 Gross Expenses:* \$6,856,126
- *2016 Gross Revenue:* \$6,856,125
- *2016 Net Revenue:* (\$.38)
- *Employees:* 22
- *Fleet:* 88 vehicles
- *Average Annual Ridership:* 300,000
- *Governing Body:* JAUNT Corporation Board

UTS

University Transit Service (UTS) started in 1972, three years before CAT and JAUNT. It is a division of the University of Virginia's (UVA) Department of Parking and Transportation (P&T), to compliment parking policy and pricing. The focus of UTS is to provide high frequency transit and/or charter services that support:

- Parking on the periphery of University Grounds for faculty, staff, and students,
- Immediately adjacent student neighborhoods,
- Overall mobility within the service area, and
- The University's land use goals and Campus Plan (known as the Grounds Plan).

UTS offers its riders (which includes the public) free service, thanks to a comprehensive student fee charged to all enrolled students and additional revenue sources. In FY 2016, UTS provided approximately:

- 71,000 fixed route service hours,
- 7,000 charter service hours, and
- 3 million boardings.

The UTS fleet includes 33 transit buses and 4 charter buses. The service area operates predominately on University Grounds but includes Jefferson Park Avenue, 14th Street, Colonnade Drive, Alderman Road, Rugby Road, and Grady Avenue (*Appendix A*). Additionally, the University funds the Charlottesville's Free Trolley Service.

In terms of governing structure, P&T is a division of the University's auxiliary services, along with other departments, such as: Dining, Housing, Bookstore, Printing and Copying, Mailing Services, and the Day Care Center. These departments are under the Vice President for Operations. Several committees provide recommendations on UTS services, as the governing structure includes Student Council, employee councils, and mixed student/staff/faculty committees that provide feedback and guidance. Generally, UTS services are stable and predictable, with only one major service change in the past 30 years.

Additional Information:

- *2016 Gross Expenses:* \$3,811,900
- *2016 Gross Revenue:* \$6,030,200 (Portion of revenue goes to P&T overhead)
- *2016 Net Revenue:* \$918,300
- *Employees:* 52
- *Fleet:* 17 buses
- *Average Annual Ridership:* 3,000,000
- *Governing Body:* University's Vice President for Operations

Coordination Study Process

In November 2015, the Planning and Coordination Council (PACC) asked for the TJPDC/CA-MPO to "review organizational, decision-making and formal communication options for the transit service organizations in the region and to explore partnership opportunities between CAT, JAUNT and UTS to

enhance transit service in the region.” In response, CA-MPO assembled a steering committee that consisted of transit staff from all three providers, as well as other stakeholders. The Committee helped craft the scope of work and supplied all requested documentation that fed into this report. With the Committee’s guidance, staff conducted the following steps.

Step I. Review of Existing Documents

The first and most time-consuming step in this process was a thorough review of all transit documents. The three transit providers (CAT, JAUNT and UTS) provided extensive materials, including: budgets, lists of capital assets, administrative documents, marketing strategies, mission statements, strategic plans, organizational charts, job descriptions, planning documents and other miscellaneous materials. Staff conducted a thorough review of these materials, to:

- Develop a fuller understanding of existing transit operations;
- Determine the most applicable and appropriate follow-up questions for decision-makers; and,
- Draft solutions and recommendations.

Step II. Decision-Maker Questionnaire

Even with extensive transit-related documents from each transit provider and the MPO, staff needed additional information to develop interview questions. Staff knew that interviews with decision-makers and transit staff would be the most important task in the process, as it would likely form the final recommendations. Consequently, staff sent out an electronic questionnaire to members of City Council, Albemarle’s Board of Supervisors and JAUNT’s Corporation Board. This was not a scientific survey and only served to prepare for follow-up interviews.

The questionnaire included 12 questions, designed to identify satisfaction with transit services, coordination and priorities (*Appendix B*). There were 13 completed responses, with 4 partially completed submittals. Those responses revealed that all three bodies (City, County and JAUNT) had some interest in exploring the possibilities of an RTA. It also indicated that there was consensus that while there were many successes with the existing transit services, something needed to be done to improve communication, coordination and collaboration on transit. The survey also revealed the urgency for finding solutions, as some respondents passionately evoked long-standing debates on transit-related matters, showing that concerns over funding and decision making roles have reached critical levels. With this feedback in hand, staff designed interview questions and topics for transit staff and decision-makers.

Step III. Interviews

With a list of talking points and a general understanding of existing issues, staff started its interview process.

Transit Staff

The initial round of interviews involved transit staff. The interviews included tours of the CAT, JAUNT and UTS headquarters. While all transit providers identified successes and admiration for their counterparts, staff found that each office identified a need for improved communication and coordination. Transit staff identified several recommendations for moving forward, with comments ranging from: shared bus maintenance and driver training, to a transit coordination committee and a full transit authority.

City Council

Staff met with three of the five City Councilors. While there was some interest in an RTA, the Council needed more information that proves a tangible benefit to their constituents. One Councilor brought up the idea of a Regional Transportation Partnership, in lieu of or pending an authority, one of the inspirations of the RTP approach. Most participants emphasized the need for a holistic view of transit that included a look at land use policies and future technologies.

Throughout these interviews, there was little support for a Regional Transit Authority. CAT is a City Department. The City is in a solid position to provide its constituents with transit services, free from sacrificing assets and decision-making authority. Despite this position, some Councilors communicated a willingness to explore opportunities, such as an RTA. The main caveat is that there must be a clear benefit to engaging in any proposed arrangements, as the City would be sacrificing assets, intra-city services and authority.

Board of Supervisors

Staff talked with all six members of the Albemarle Board of Supervisors. Among this group, there was more interest in the pursuit of an RTA, though it was not unanimous. Some County officials expressed frustration with the existing City/County arrangement. While transit service is a critical need for an urbanizing county, CAT remains a City department. Consequently, the County Board has no authority or decision-making power. Several Board members were confused or uncertain of how transit service equated to increasing costs, paid to the City. Conflict over the City-County revenue sharing agreement was also apparent, as there was ambiguity over whether those funds contributed to the package of urban services provided to the County, under that agreement (*Appendix C*). There was such frustration among some Board members that they were considering the implications of creating their own transit system or withholding funding during the annual budget process.

JAUNT Corporation Board

Staff met with City and County representatives on JAUNT's Corporation Board, totaling four interviews. These officials had a diverse view on how the transit providers interacted, but all thought there was a need for greater communication, coordination and collaboration. One Board member brought up the concept of a Regional Advisory Board that would act as a precursor of an RTA. This was another instance of inspiration for the RTP recommendation. While all four representatives supported the concept of an RTA, there was a split on whether that should occur at once or incrementally.

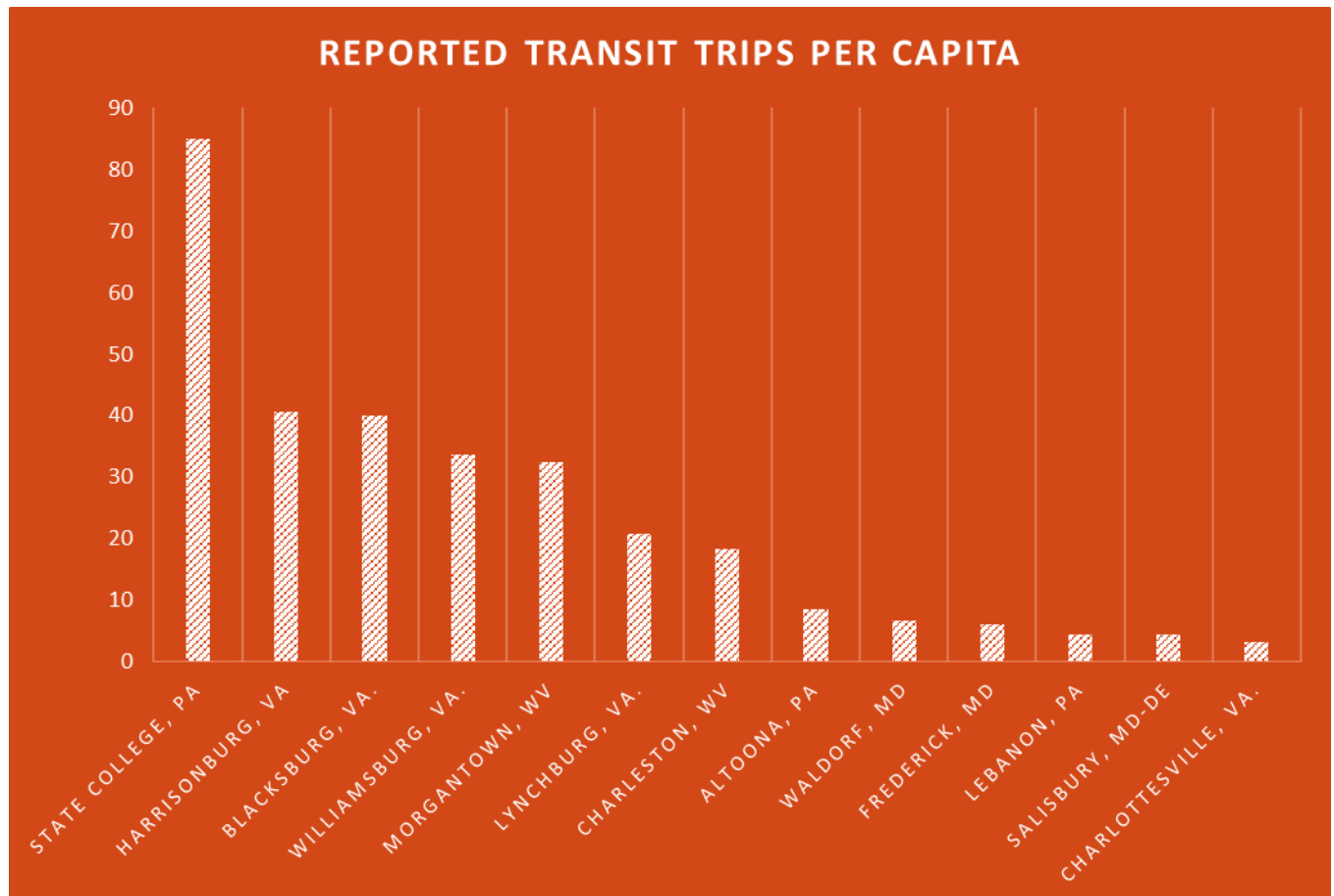
Local Executives

In the last round of interviews, staff met with the County Executive and City Manager. This discussion revealed more information on how the City and County interacted on transit matters. There was also discussion on formal service and payment agreements and making changes that would improve cross-communication, between City and County.

Step IV. Benchmarking

Staff conducted a review of existing transit systems and authorities in the mid-Atlantic region (*Appendix D*). The Virginia Transit Association (VTA) and Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) also provided guidance on benchmarking. The main conclusion from this review is that establishing an RTA can be a time-consuming process, filled with a multitude of controversial decisions. The City and County may need to confront an expensive, multi-year process to restart an RTA initiative.

Staff also compared the Charlottesville-Albemarle region to other transit systems across the mid-Atlantic area. In a 2014 report, reported on by FiveThirtyEight, Reuben Fischer-Baum compared transit ridership of urbanized areas across America. While the U.S. has 415 urbanized areas, he ranked transit ridership for the 290 metro areas that reported numbers to FTA's National Transit Database (NTD). Charlottesville ranked 263rd in transit ridership, with 3.2 riders per capita. Of all similar urbanized areas in the mid-Atlantic region (between 60,000 and 150,000 people), the Charlottesville area ranked last.



The difference in transit ridership could be due to how regions reported their number to the NTD. State College has a unified system, including student ridership, whereas Charlottesville numbers likely came only from CAT. It is currently unknown whether these numbers provide a fair comparison of ridership but highlights a need for transit planning and continued benchmarking.

Existing Coordination Efforts

Over the past 40 years, the region's three transit providers have worked together on various collaborative efforts, ranging from informal communications to formal agreements. The following is an inventory of existing transit-related coordination in the Charlottesville-Albemarle urbanized area.

CAT Service in Albemarle County

Albemarle County is CAT's largest paying customer, with payment for services approved in the annual budgeting process of the City and County. There are no formal contracts between the City and County

for transit services. There are also no formally adopted procedures for vetting changes in CAT service to the County. Consequently, the City/County arrangement is more vulnerable to controversy and debate.

According to one of Albemarle's previous transportation planners, the City/County transit arrangement dates back to at least the early 1990s, though CA-MPO staff could not find records on those earlier years. This arrangement is critically important to all parties involved, as CAT's County routes:

- Constitute a significant share of CAT's ridership;
- Allow the City to match federal and state funds with the County's contribution;
- Allow City residents to access destinations in the County;
- Allow County residents to access destinations in the City; and,
- Support intra locality services, within the City and County.

Despite the mutual benefits, there are long-standing debates on the existing City/County arrangement. The central disagreements revolve around funding and the authority to make decisions, where some County officials feel that Albemarle has little (if no) representation. In terms of funding, the City currently uses a formula from 2008, developed by the previous director of CAT. According to a 2007 City memo, the formula addresses a previous problem with funding (*Appendix E*). When the County requested additional routes, there may not have been additional state or federal funding, known as federal operating assistance (FOA), to provide those service. Expanded County routes and services would increase the total operating costs for CAT, while state and federal funding remained flat. An equal share of the FOA means that the City would have to increase its contribution from the general fund, to operate existing services. The City argued that County funding in past years was significantly less than the cost of providing CAT services. With adoption of the 2008 funding formula, the City and County agreed to an approach to costing CAT service expansion that fully shares projected federal and state federal operating assistance. At the same time, the formula required that the County fully fund the required local match for all aspects of CAT service: driving, maintenance, customer service and other necessary transit functions.

While there is a funding formula in place, it is not intuitive and may create confusion for County officials. Since FY11, Albemarle's contribution for CAT service rose 62%, from \$648,004 to \$1,052,124. Several County Board members expressed concern with these increases, as there appeared to be miscommunication between the City and County on the details of expanded services and costs. In FY17, County funds contributed to five separate routes, including Route 1,3,5,10 and 11. While Route 7 serves the County, Albemarle does not contribute funding for that service.

County Contribution to CAT Services			
<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Contribution</u>	<u>Annual Increase</u>	<u>Cumulative Increase</u>
FY11	\$648,004	0%	0%
FY12	\$648,004	0%	0%
FY13	\$722,555	12%	12%
FY14	\$768,273	6%	19%
FY15	\$860,875	12%	33%
FY16	\$905,477	5%	40%
FY17	\$1,052,124	16%	62%

Sub-Recommendations:

If the region were to establish an RTP Advisory Board, its first tasks could be to:

- **Establish a Venue:** There should be a venue to communicate and coordinate on City/County transit services. This Regional Transit Partnership would work through technical matters of funding and services, giving the County clearer representation and influence over County services. It could also work in concert with the City's existing Transit Advisory Board.
- **Adopt a Formal Contract:** The City and County should adopt a formal annual contract for CAT services, laying out expectations for costs, services and procedures. A formal contract would bring more certainty to the City/County arrangement.

CAT/JAUNT Sub-Recipient Agreement

CAT partnered with JAUNT to provide the region's required ADA Paratransit Services, with Federal 5307 pass-through funds (*Appendix F*). The agreement provides funding for services to riders with mobility limitation, under ADA. With the pass-through, CAT can avoid investments in smaller buses and take advantage of JAUNT's existing paratransit services. Additionally, JAUNT receives additional funding to serve one of its core functions. JAUNT provides a 50% match with local and state funds and receives 24% of CAT's annual Section 5307 operating allocation from FTA. JAUNT submits requests for reimbursement to the City, with CAT conducting audits twice a year.

While this is a successful arrangement, there is a need for greater communication between CAT and JAUNT. Under the pass-through agreement, JAUNT must match its services with CAT's hours and routes. In 2016, there were two known instances of miscommunication. First, CAT ran buses on a national holiday without notifying JAUNT, who had to organize unscheduled buses and drivers to meet the pass-through agreement. In the second case, CAT provided a new route to the 5th Street Station development with a delayed notification to JAUNT, who then had to expand the footprint of its services to meet the

Sub-Recommendations:

While CAT and JAUNT staff are commonly in the same meeting, there are few opportunities to discuss coordination on services, per the pass-through agreement. The proposed RTP Advisory Board should be a venue for CAT and JAUNT to communicate specifically on transit services.

service.

CAT/University Service

In the late 1990s, the City and University engaged in an unwritten agreement to coordinate transit services. In 1999, CAT started its Free Trolley service, funded with University contributions. Today, the Trolley is CAT's most successful route, with the highest ridership. In 2008, UTS started to provide free service to the public, functioning as a public provider for the areas within and around University Grounds. Annually, the University contributes \$65,000 for the Trolley service. In FY16, UTS paid CAT approximately \$160,000, including the Trolley and reciprocal ridership for the public.

While this is considered to be a successful arrangement, there are no formal contracts or agreements. Consequently, CAT's most popular route, a critical component to the overall system, is secured with an ad hoc agreement. From the University perspective, the Trolley is also beneficial to its services. Without

a formal agreement, there are also misunderstandings and occasional conflicts about reciprocal service, as CAT will not provide routes in areas where there is competing, free transit service.

Sub-Recommendations:

While staff does not recommend that UTS be part of an RTA, UVA could at least participate on the RTP. In this venue, the City and University should engage in a formal (yet flexible) contract on the Trolley and reciprocal services.

JAUNT/University Service

JAUNT and UTS are currently coordinating on two separate services: Route 29 Express and service to Crozet (*Appendix G*). While JAUNT provides the service, UTS agreed to pay for the fares of UVA riders.

Bus Stop Coordination

UTS shares approximately 15 bus stops with CAT, with stops that also serve JAUNT riders. In these areas, signage could be confusing and cluttered. To address this, UTS worked with the other providers to develop standards for joint signage (*Appendix H*).

Membership on JAUNT Board

JAUNT is a public corporation and provides transit services to its members and surrounding areas. To recover costs, localities provide subsidies for JAUNT services, which vary by locality and depending on service levels. In the Charlottesville/Albemarle area, JAUNT provides on-demand services, along with commuter routes to and from the urbanized area.

Remix Service

In 2016, City Council approved CAT's effort to secure a transit planning platform, called Remix (www.remix.com). The software offers interactive maps that allows transit operators to identify routes, service hours and stops that best serve the public. Remix provides cost estimates for various inputs, providing instant analysis on proposed transit services. The City secured this powerful software with JAUNT, who contributed to the license.

Participation with MPO

All three transit providers participate with the MPO, sitting on committees and the Policy Board. The MPO provides a venue for limited communication between CAT, JAUNT, UTS, City and the County. Through this venue, the transit providers and localities coordinate on studies, such as this Regional Transit Coordination Study and the 2008 Regional Transit Authority Study. The three providers, along with RideShare, also provide regular reports to the Policy Board. Perhaps most importantly, the MPO manages the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), which qualifies CAT and JAUNT for federal funding.

2008 Regional Transit Authority Study

In 2008, Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. completed work on a report that explored the formation of a Regional Transit Authority for the Charlottesville-Albemarle urbanized area (*Appendix I*). All three transit providers, along with the City and County, cooperated with the development of this study. The TJPDC/CA-MPO administered the effort and guided the consulting team, as this was a regional initiative.

After significant time and debate, the planning process lead to several recommendations for establishing an RTA and securing capital investments for new services. The region acted on those recommendations, gaining the State General Assembly's permission to establish an RTA, with the 2009 passage of §33.2-2800 (*Appendix J*). A major obstacle to the formation of the RTA was failed attempts to secure enabling legislation for funding the Authority. While the region still could have formed an RTA, the lack of taxing power made the task more difficult. In the end, this earlier attempt failed, due to several contributing factors:

- **The discussion was confused with considerations for new services and capital investments.** This may have been the biggest failure of the 2008 study. Rather than assessing the organizational aspects of creating an authority, the report confused the discussion with cost estimates for a Bus Rapid Transit system and other capital investments. When the estimated costs of an RTA reached over \$100 million, many decision-makers disengaged. The clear majority of those funds were for capital costs and had nothing to do with establishing an Authority.
- **There were discrepancies in employee benefits that would have significantly increased operational costs under an RTA.** At the time of the RTA debate, CAT employees received higher wages and benefits, as compared to their counterparts at JAUNT. If the region established an RTA, the cost of combining JAUNT and CAT employees under the same pay grades and benefits was a major obstacle. The costs of the JAUNT services would have increased with no clear funding source to reimburse those expenses due to the failed attempt to secure enabling legislation for new revenues.
- **The transfer of capital was too great for several decision-makers to accept.** Since CAT was a City service, under the Public Works Department, all assets fell under the City's authority, even though most capital is secured with Federal funds. At the time, the City Manager prepared a report of what assets would be transferred to the proposed Authority. The assets were significant enough to create controversy with the City's decision-makers.
- **There was a lack of political will to establish the RTA.** There may never have been political will, especially from the City, to establish an RTA. While there was long debate and study of the proposal, elected officials did not seem to see the benefits of pursuing the consolidation of transit assets and operations. Even today, there is no clear consensus from either locality on whether to reinitiate an RTA approach.
- **The process of forming an RTA includes a series of controversial decisions that require trust.** Local officials may be less aware of this obstacle, but it may be the greatest challenge to moving forward. Establishing an RTA is not a simple decision of yes or no. If the region decides to move forward with an RTA, it will require years of focus and commitment, full of controversial decisions. Who will be on the Authority Board? Who will have voting power and will all parties have the same number of votes? Will the service area expand to the surrounding rural areas? What redundant positions will be eliminated? Is the City willing to sacrifice intra-city services for a more regional coverage model? The list of decisions is seemingly endless. Most importantly, negotiations of this magnitude require a strong, trusting relationship between both parties. In 2008 and today, the City and County need to cultivate a stronger relationship.

Renewed Discussion of RTA:

Since the 2008 study, local officials occasionally restart the RTA discussion, which inevitably stalls from the same challenges and obstacles listed above. In 2016, there was renewed pressure from Albemarle County officials to reexamine the RTA approach. An Authority may be able to address concerns with CAT's existing service arrangement. Politically, this new push lacks clear consensus from either elected body. On the County's Board, some members believe that there are more pressing matters that need their attention, even though transit is still a priority. On Charlottesville's Council, most members are uncertain that an RTA would be more beneficial to the City and believe that less formal efforts could address existing concerns. From the University perspective, there is no interest or reason for engaging in an RTA.

Changing Conditions Fueling Building Tensions

After 40 years of partnerships, there may be some who wonder as to why transit is suddenly such a controversial issue. The renewed controversy over transit likely comes from several changing conditions that highlight the confusing web of relationships between stakeholders. The following conditions are the most likely culprits to the renewed tensions between City and County.

Albemarle County is urbanizing

Formally a rural county, Albemarle continues to urbanize, especially around its inner growth areas. According to Weldon Cooper's 2015 estimates, Albemarle's urban area (within the MPO) almost doubles the population of the City. With 87,096 residents in urban Albemarle and 48,210 citizens in Charlottesville, there is an increasing demand and need for transit. Additionally, as the cost of living continues to increase within the City limits, more lower income households are pushed to areas of the County, including the Georgetown Road area. With sensitive populations in need of transportation, the City/County arrangement becomes more critical than ever.

The County Contribution to CAT

As shown earlier, the County's contribution to CAT services increased by over 60% in the last six years, from \$648,004 to \$1,052,124. As there is building pressure for localities to balance their budgets while meeting the increasing demand for public services, the rising cost for transit services undoubtedly causes tension. Added to this pressure, there is growing confusion over the complicated cost formula that the City uses to calculate contributions. While the County paid for CAT service for many years, there is added scrutiny when a budget line item surpasses \$1 million.

Turnover

There was significant turnover in local departments over the last few years. The County hired a new transportation planner, the direct contact to CAT on County services, then had to rehire the position after the original staffer left. During this transition, there were instances of miscommunication that caused tension between the County Board and CAT. At the City, CAT leadership changed in the last several years, with new staff in key positions. There was also turnover at JAUNT, with the hire of a new Executive Director, who started to establish a new direction for the Corporation. There were also changes on City Council and the County Board. With new personalities, changing missions and loss of institutional processes, there was a greater chance of miscommunication and controversies.

Recommendations

The TJPDC/CA-MPO was tasked with exploring options for addressing perceived problems with the coordination of transit in the region. During this process, staff realized that there first needed to be a clear definition of the problem. After interviews with elected officials, boards and staff, as well as the review of all transit-related documents, staff drafted a problem statement:

The region's transit systems suffer from an overly complex, informal and disorganized system for coordinating with each other and with stakeholders, resulting in:

- *Misunderstandings,*
- *Local conflicts,*
- *Uncertainty and mistrust between stakeholders; and*
- *Lost opportunities.*

While an RTA would be the most direct and comprehensive way of addressing the stated problem, establishing an authority takes years of effort and considerable resources. During that time, the existing problems would still exist and there would be no guarantee that the region would successfully form an RTA, as there are several potentially controversial decisions involved with establishing an authority. To address the stated problem with haste and to lay the foundation for the opportunity of an RTA, staff recommends more immediate actions. The formal recommendation is that:

The Charlottesville-Albemarle Urbanized Area should establish a Regional Transit Partnership (RTP), headed by an advisory board whose membership would be consistent to that of a formal authority and whose charge is to provide a venue for greater communication, coordination and collaboration between transit providers, localities and citizens. The RTP would be a precursor to a Regional Transit Authority (RTA) and could serve as the interim body, responsible for ushering development of an RTA, if the region determines to establish an authority between the applicable localities, CAT and JAUNT.

Engaging in an RTA would be the equivalent of a marriage, but with no option of a future separation or divorce. If Charlottesville, Albemarle and JAUNT establish an RTA, there will be no turning back. Consequently, all parties will need more assurances and trust before moving forward. It is for this reason that staff recommends the immediate establishment of the RTP, to serve as an advisory board for the region's transit systems.

The following are considerations and steps for implementing this recommendation.

Purpose:

The RTP would serve four main objectives:

1. **Build the City/County Relationship.** As trust appears to be a major obstacle to engaging in a consolidated transit system, establishing an advisory board would help the region build relationships and momentum for future successes.
2. **Test an RTA structure.** The RTP would provide a probationary version of an RTA that allows all parties to become more familiar with the concept of a consolidated transit system;
3. **Address problems now.** The advisory board would provide immediate attention for facing the pressing concerns and issues, as laid out in the problem statement;

4. **Create a formal means of sharing information.** An RTP created by MOU would create a formal mechanism of identifying important data sets and decision making information that becomes required to be provided by service providers at set intervals.
5. **Integrating transit into other decision-making:** The Board would ensure that transit would receive greater consideration in regional and local planning efforts; and,
6. **Preparing for an RTA.** By establishing the RTP Advisory Board as soon as possible, the region will have a venue for negotiating and studying an RTA that could benefit all partners in the region.

If the RTP determines that a full RTA is infeasible or not timely, then this Advisory Board would still have addressed the problem statement and brought greater communication, cooperation and coordination between transit stakeholders. This approach allows the region to immediately begin work on an RTA, while also tackling pressing issues.

Function:

The RTP would be an advisory board that provides recommendations to CAT, JAUNT and stakeholders (City and County officials, as well as other institutions). As this is a regional effort that focuses on the Charlottesville-Albemarle Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA), it would be most appropriate if the CA-MPO staffed the RTP. The CA-MPO is also responsible for federal funding to CAT and JAUNT, through the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) process. The CA-MPO would:

- Take meeting minutes;
- Prepare meeting packets;
- Coordinate studies and analysis for board studies;
- Facilitate transit continued communication, cooperation and coordination; and,
- Forward all recommendations to the appropriate entity.

The RTP would send recommendations to:

- CAT staff,
- City Council,
- The Board of Supervisors,
- The JAUNT Board,
- UTS, and
- Other stakeholders.

Staff recommends that the City maintain their Transit Advisory Board, to provide focus to micro-related issues, collecting feedback from riders and proposing tweaks to services. The RTP Board would focus on macro-scaled issues, working with the Transit Advisory Board to develop comprehensive recommendations.

Funding:

As this is a regional transportation effort, the CA-MPO would staff the RTP Advisory Board with its annual work program funds. The RTP's work would be included in the CA-MPO's Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), which makes those activities eligible for federal and state funding.

Composition:

The composition of the RTP may change with time, as the Board meets and identifies an improved membership structure. As a starting point, staff recommends that the RTP include the following membership. As with many boards, there would be voting and non-voting members.

Voting Members	Non-Voting Members
Members representing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charlottesville City Council • Albemarle Board of Supervisors • JAUNT Corporation Board • CA-MPO • DRPT 	Members representing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAT staff • JAUNT staff • UTS staff • Green County Transit • Martha Jefferson Hospital • UVA Hospital • Charlottesville School System • Albemarle County School System • Piedmont Virginia Community College

DRPT recommended that the RTP Advisory Board include other stakeholders, like Martha Jefferson Hospital, as they have unique transit needs.

Deliverables:

Other than recommendations, the RTP Advisory Board would be responsible for additional transit products and deliverables. These deliverables would be focused on ensuring continued communication, coordination and collaboration. Documents and responsibilities include:

- **Drafting Formal Agreements:** The advisory Board would review existing arrangements and transit relationships, reviewing and drafting if necessary, formal contracts and agreements. The initial and primary task would be to address the most pressing problem, the overly complicated web of arrangements.
- **Integrating Transit into Decision-Making:** The RTP Advisory Board would work to integrate greater transit considerations into planning efforts around the region. The Board would have involvement with the MPO's Long Range Transportation Plan, vetting transit-related recommendations. It would also provide recommendations to local planning efforts and projects.
- **A Joint Regional Transit Plan:** Currently, the three transit providers have entirely separate planning documents. CAT and JAUNT must update their Transit Development Plan (TPD) every five years. Currently, these efforts are done separately, but DRPT staff indicated that there may be opportunities to have a combined or better coordinated planning process. Whether done through the TDP or as a document that later consolidates planning recommendations, the RTP would be responsible for overseeing the region's transit planning process.
- **Update RTA Study:** The last RTA study dates nearly nine years. The RTP Advisory Board, in coordination with the CA-MPO, should update the plan and develop a new report that will help

the region determine if an RTA is feasible. The report should also address the many controversial decisions that are needed to establish an RTA.

- **RTP Bylaws and Mission:** This advisory board would be responsible for developing and maintaining its own bylaws, to ensure that the group operates within its defined authority.

Timeline:

As there are more immediate needs with coordinating transit systems, staff recommends that the RTP Advisory Board be established as soon as possible. Waiting to address the stated problems under an RTA, which may never be created, would be of little help to the region. The following timeline is a rough outline for the RTP Advisory Board to resolve pending concerns, while planning for future opportunities.

Task 1: Approval of Concept

February – April 2017

The Board of Supervisors and City Council will hold a joint meeting on February 16th, to discuss transit coordination. If both elected bodies agree on the concept, then CA-MPO staff can begin to organize the planning and administration of the RTP. Staff may also make a presentation to PACC in February and a presentation to the MPO Policy Board on February 22nd, for approval of concept.

Task 2: Formalizing Structure and Procedures

March – June 2017

CA-MPO staff would draft a formal structure for the RTP that includes board membership, procedures, relationships with governing bodies and MOUs. Members of the RTP would have their legal counsel review the proposed structure, to verify legal aspects of the RTP.

Task 3: Securing MPO Funding

March – May 2017

The CA-MPO will include a line item and estimated costs for RTP activities, under the Fiscal Year 2018 UPWP. This will secure federal and state funding for staffing and administering the RTP.

Task 4: Formal Approval

May and June 2017

All governing boards would need to approve the final RTP proposal and MOUs, to formally establish the RTP. The Board of Supervisors, City Council and JAUNT Corporation Board would provide these approvals, through resolution.

Task 5: Convene the RTP Advisory Board

July 2017

At the beginning of FY18, the RTP Advisory Board would convene its first meeting, approving a set of bylaws, mission and annual work program.

Task 6: Address Immediate Needs

September – December 2017

As its first focus, the RTP Advisory Board would work to address and refine the region's problem statement. Specifically, the Board would:

1. **Formalize Agreements:** The primary objective should be improving the relationship between CAT and its biggest client, Albemarle County. The RTP should work with the City and County staff to develop a contract for services, based on examples secured by CA-MPO staff (*Appendix K*). The RTP Advisory Board should also draft agreements between CAT and UTS, for the Trolley and reciprocal services. These contracts may be renewed on an annual basis, but they will be critical in formalizing services and compensation. The process will allow all parties to communicate their needs and ensure a more collaborative solution, even if the final arrangement results in no changes to services or costs.
2. **Improve Communication:** The RTP will formalize a venue for CAT, JAUNT and UTS to communicate on new routes, stops, grant applications, driver training and other opportunities for collaboration.
3. **Shared Facilities and Operations:** The RTP will explore opportunities for shared vehicles maintenance and storage, as well as shared office space. Shared facilities could be a transition to a potential RTA, if the region decides to move forward with that option.

Task 7: Pursue RTA Assessment 2018

The next step would be an exploration of an RTA. The County and JAUNT would need to show how the City would benefit from a consolidated system. The RTP Advisory Board would also need to negotiate the many difficult decisions that goes into establishing an RTA. Most notably, the parties would need to focus discussion on funding an RTA.

Conclusion

Throughout the interview process, elected officials and staff consistently came back to one issue that obstructed progress on transit, the lack of a strong relationship between City and County. Specifically, City and County officials simply lack faith in their counterparts thinking regionally. This is an obvious problem that most either deny or avoid, but trust is critical. The relationship between City and County fluctuates and is occasionally defined with feelings of resentment. If both parties cannot confront this fractured relationship, then the region is unlikely to find a solution that will benefit all parties.

While the matter of trust transcends the discussion of transit, one Board of Supervisor put it best by saying, “the City and County need to rack up some wins, together.” Creating an RTA is a long and demanding process that requires one thing above all others, a solid and trusting relationship. Currently, that vital element does not exist. The logical question is then, “how to build this relationship?” Staff believes that the best way to bring City and County together is to “rack up some wins, together.” The Regional Transit Partnership would accomplish that objective, by allowing all parties to build success and momentum with obtainable objectives, creating the foundation for taking on more substantial goals in the future.

Acronyms

The following acronyms may be used in this report.

ADA: Americans with Disabilities Act

BRT: Bus Rapid Transit

CA-MPO: Charlottesville-Albemarle Metropolitan Planning Organization

CAT: Charlottesville Area Transit

CTS: Charlottesville Transit System

DRPT: Department of Rail and Public Transportation

FHWA: Federal Highway Administration

FOA: Federal Operating Assistance

FTA: Federal Transit Administration

MOU: Memorandum of Understanding

MPA: Metropolitan Planning Area

MPO: Metropolitan Planning Organization

NTD: National Transit Database

P&T: Parking and Transportation

PACC: Planning and Coordination Council

RTA: Regional Transit Authority

RTP: Regional Transit Partnership

TDP: Transit Development Plan

TIP: Transportation Improvement Program

TJPDC: Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission

UPWP: Unified Planning Work Program

UTS: University Transit System

UVA: University of Virginia

VTA: Virginia Transit Association

Glossary

The following terms may be used in this report.

5307 Federal Funds: The Urbanized Area Formula Funding program (49 U.S.C. 5307) makes federal resources available to urbanized areas and to governors for transit capital and operating assistance in urbanized areas and for transportation-related planning. An urbanized area is an incorporated area with a population of 50,000 or more that is designated as such by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.

Bus Rapid Transit: This is a bus-based mass transit system which, generally, has specialized design, services and infrastructure to improve system quality and remove the typical causes of delay. Sometimes described as a "surface subway", BRT aims to combine the capacity and speed of light-rail or metro with the flexibility, lower cost and simplicity of a bus system.

City: Unless otherwise specified, this refers to the City of Charlottesville.

County: Unless otherwise specified, this refers to Albemarle County.

Demand Response Bus Service: See *Paratransit*.

Fixed Route Service: This includes public bus service that comprises most transit systems throughout the Commonwealth and the nation. Fixed route services follow a published route and schedule. ~*DRPT*

Long Range Transportation Plan: The Long Range Transportation Plan looks ahead two decades to assess future transportation projects vital for our region. The plan considers all modes of transportation including highways, roads, bus, rail, bicycle, pedestrian and air.

Metropolitan Planning Area: The MPO planning area boundaries are established by each local MPO, according to the federal metropolitan planning regulations. The MPA is intended to include at a minimum the approved FHWA Urban Area Boundary 2000 FHWA - Federal Aid Urbanized Area Boundaries, plus the adjacent area that the MPO anticipates may become urbanized during the life of the 20 year timeframe of the regional long range transportation plan.

Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO): The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1962 requires, as a condition attached to federal transportation financial assistance, that transportation projects in urbanized areas of 50,000 or more in population be based on a continuing, comprehensive, and comprehensive urban transportation planning process undertaken cooperatively by the states and local governments.

Para-transit: Demand Response Bus Service is structured upon requests for service to and from a specific location directly from individual passengers or their agents. Service is during fixed hours and within a restricted zone, but does not operate on a fixed-route or a published schedule. In Virginia, transit operators may restrict eligibility to disabled passengers under guidelines per the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), in which case the service is considered “ADA complementary paratransit”. If no fixed-route service exists, transit operators may leave service open to the general public (often referred to as “Dial-a-Ride” service). Some demand response services operate as “deviated fixed routes” whereby an operator runs fixed-route service but has the flexibility to go off route for a limited distance to pick-up and drop-off passengers. ~DRPT

Staff: Unless otherwise specified, this refers to staff from the TJPDC/CA-MPO, who conducted this study.

Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission (TJPDC): A Planning District Commission serving Charlottesville and Albemarle, Fluvanna, Greene, Louisa and Nelson Counties. The TJPDC is directed by a twelve-member board, consisting of two representatives appointed by each local governing board, more than half of whom are local elected officials. The TJPDC seeks to serve its local governments by providing regional vision, collaborative leadership and professional service to develop effective solutions.

Transportation Improvement Program: This is a prioritized listing/program of transportation projects covering a period of four years that is developed and formally adopted by an MPO as part of the metropolitan transportation planning process, consistent with the metropolitan transportation plan, and required for projects to be eligible for federal funding (under title 23 U.S.C. and title 49 U.S.C. Chapter 53). The TIP represents projects from the most recently adopted Long Range Transportation Plan, which is adopted by the MPO. Activities listed for Charlottesville Area Transit (CAT) and JAUNT are projects and programs expected to obligate federal funds over the coming four-year period. The primary sponsor of funding for these activities is the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

Transit Development Plan: These plans help transit operators improve their efficiency and effectiveness by identifying the need and required resources for modifying and enhancing services provided to the general public and also help operators effectively execute planning, funding, and implementation of public transit services. These plans provide a solid foundation for funding requests and feed directly into the programming process. To capture the benefit of this planning tool, DRPT requires that any public transit operator receiving state funding prepare, adopt, and submit a TDP. ~ DRPT

Unified Planning Work Program: The UPWP identifies all activities to be undertaken in the MPO area for the coming fiscal year. The document provides a mechanism for coordinating transportation planning activities in the region, and is required as a basis and condition for all federal funding assistance for transportation planning by the joint metropolitan planning regulations of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

Appendices

Appendix A: UTS Service Area

Appendix B: Survey Response Results

Appendix C: City-County Revenue Sharing Agreement

Appendix D: List of Mid-Atlantic Transit Authorities

Appendix E: City Memo Explaining the CAT's Funding Formula

Appendix F: CAT/JAUNT MOU for ADA Complimentary Services

Appendix G: US 29 Express Route – Map

Appendix H: UTS, CAT and JAUNT Joint Signage at Designated Bus Stops

Appendix I: 2008 Charlottesville-Albemarle RTA Final Report

Appendix J: Enabling Legislation §33.2-2800

Appendix K: Example of Transit Service Contract: City of Clemson, SC