

Bartow County Transit Development Plan
Stakeholder Interview Summary
January 2017

Introduction

The consultant team, in coordination with Bartow County Transit (BCT) and Cartersville-Bartow Metropolitan Planning Organization (CBMPO) identified a list of key stakeholders to seek input from in developing the Transit Development Plan (TDP). Nineteen stakeholder interviews were conducted by phone and in person between October and November 2016. A summary of stakeholder responses and common themes are presented in this report.

Stakeholder Interview Questions

The following list of questions guided the stakeholder interview discussion:

1. What are the primary destinations in Bartow County? What travel patterns have you observed? (i.e. when is the travel occurring and how are people traveling?)
2. How often and where do you travel to other destinations within Bartow County?
3. In general, how do you view public transportation both currently and for the future?
4. What is your perception of the current BCT services and facilities?
5. What barriers do you see to transit service in Bartow County?
6. a. What opportunities do you see for an expanded transit system within the Bartow County - both currently and in the future?
b. Who would be the primary users of this service?
7. a. What opportunities do you see for an expanded transit system to destinations outside Bartow County - both currently and in the future?
b. Who would be the primary users of this service?
8. What do you think would affect someone's decision to use transit? (convenience, stops, schedule, quality, image, safety, understanding of service)
9. Do you have any other ideas for enhancing the BCT system?
10. Are there any other comments or observations you have about the study or transit in general?

Summary of Responses

What are the primary destinations in Bartow County?

Primary destinations identified by stakeholders included:

- Commercial Centers
 - Specific locations included Bartow Marketplace, Walmart, Kroger Marketplace, and Downtown Cartersville as a whole (particularly the commercial center bound by Highway 113, Highway 41, Main Street, and Tennessee Street).

- Medical and social service facilities
 - Specific locations included the Allatoona Resource Center, and clusters of social services located along Glade Road in south Bartow County, Douglas Street in Cartersville, and Adairsville, which is currently underserved by transit.
- Government facilities
 - The Department of Labor, Division of Family and Children Services, City Hall, and the County Courthouse were identified as primary destinations.
- Education centers
 - Specific locations included Georgia Highlands College, Chattahoochee Technical College, and schools within the Bartow County School District.
- Employment centers
 - Locations identified as employment centers included Old Mill Road/South Erwin Street, Highway 113/Riverside Drive, West Avenue/Ampacet Drive, Industrial Park Rd NE between Highway 411 and Old Grassdale Rd, Cass White Road, and Browns Farm Road/Riverside Road (airport area)
- Regional destinations/tourist attractions
 - Specific locations identified included LakePoint Sporting Community, Tellus Science Museum, Booth Western Art Museum, Downtown Cartersville, Lake Allatoona and Red Top Mountain, and Barnsley Gardens

What travel patterns have you observed?

Stakeholders agreed that automobile travel was most common in Bartow County, with most people driving to get to and from work. Because many employment centers tend to be off the beaten path, one stakeholder noted they are often difficult to access via alternative modes of transportation. These travel patterns tend to cause congestion in the morning and evenings in Cartersville, Euharlee, and Emerson along the I-75 corridor.

Pedestrian travel is primarily limited to Tennessee Street and Main Street within Cartersville, and is not seen in most other parts of the county due to development patterns. Transit can be used for trips to the doctor, or to the grocery store, but tends to be utilized by older people as the hours of service are limited to early in the day.

How often and where do you travel to other destinations within Bartow County?

Other destinations identified by stakeholders included:

- Cities of Emerson and Adairsville
- Special interest destinations

In general, how do you view public transportation both currently and for the future?

Fourteen interviewees responded positively towards public transportation, while five had neutral responses. Those with a positive perception cited it as an essential service to elderly, low-income and disabled residents; a potential solution to serve the increasingly urban nature of Bartow County and alleviate congestion; and possible opportunity to connect to regional destinations within the greater

Atlanta region. One stakeholder noted that it would be very useful and make a difference for the tourist economy in Bartow County.

Those with neutral responses were often unsure about the current need for transit in Bartow County, particularly given the costs associated with it. Some stated that it could be a viable option for the future, but were unsure of the current demand for transit. The overall sentiment was that it would need to be studied appropriately to determine the viability of transit.

What is your perception of the current BCT services and facilities?

The perceptions of current BCT services and facilities were mixed, with six interviewees giving positive response, eight neutral, and five negative. Positive respondents felt that BCT services and facilities were effectively meeting the needs of seniors and disabled residents, and praised the leadership of BCT despite limited resources. Neutral responses generally came from those who were unfamiliar with the service, or had never used it themselves.

Those with negative perception of BCT services stated that the on-demand system was extremely limiting, and only functional for a certain segment of the population (elderly and disabled). Many noted that the current service is not robust enough, and they would like to see it serve the whole county at a greater scale. Negative respondents often felt that the transit system was stretched thin with a lack of resources.

What barriers do you see to transit service in Bartow County?

In order of frequency, responses from stakeholders can be roughly characterized as follows:

1. Geographic distribution of people and places in Bartow County
2. Funding
3. Stigma associated with transit
4. Lack of resources
5. Current span of service hours
6. Lack of understanding of available services
7. Overcoming the expectations of current door-to-door service, as future modes of fixed-route transit become available

What opportunities do you see for an expanded transit system within the Bartow County - both currently and in the future? Who would be the primary users of this service?

Opportunities identified by stakeholders included:

- Expanding hours of service and area of coverage
 - Many stakeholders felt that the current hours of service are limiting to potential CT riders – particularly employees, as transit service does not operate throughout the typical workday. Service area was also a concern for many stakeholders, who hoped to

see the entire county covered by BCT. Increasing the number of drivers and sizes of buses were other opportunities identified.

- Partnering with schools, employers, and other destinations
 - ships with schools, employers, with after school programs, Chattahoochee Tech, manufacturing employers, LakePoint (public-private partnerships, or separate from BCT)
- Enhancing service by providing fixed routes in denser areas, such as Cartersville or Adairsville
 - Several stakeholders proposed adding one or more fixed route lines to get people between home, work, grocery stores, and shopping.
- Providing regular bus service between Cartersville and outlying cities.
- Meeting the needs of an increasing elderly and youth population who either cannot drive, or would prefer not to drive
- Providing service that would encourage tourists to visit Bartow County historical museums and natural sites, and allow ease of movement between those sites.
- Serving the US 41 and I-75 Corridors

Users identified were primarily residents of Bartow County including workers, elderly, disabled, low-income and youth populations. Tourists were also identified as potential riders to an expanded transit system within Bartow County.

What opportunities do you see for an expanded transit system to destinations outside Bartow County - both currently and in the future? Who would be the primary users of this service?

Opportunities identified by stakeholders included:

- Connecting to regional transit systems such as CobbLinc, MARTA, Rome Transit Department
 - Ten stakeholders indicated connecting to Cobb County as a potential opportunity. Acworth, Kennesaw and Marietta were frequently mentioned cities, with specific destinations including SunTrust Park, medical facilities, and the social security office. Acworth Park and Ride was commonly given as a seemingly logical transfer point to CobbLinc.
 - Six stakeholders indicated connecting to jobs in downtown and metro-Atlanta via as a potential opportunity. Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport in Atlanta was another commonly mentioned destination in the Atlanta-area.
 - Four stakeholders indicated connecting to the city of Rome as a potential opportunity. Specific destinations suggested include doctor's offices, dialysis centers, and government offices.
 - Two stakeholders indicated connecting to jobs in Chattanooga as a potential opportunity.
 - Other counties mentioned as potential opportunities included Cherokee and Gordon Counties.

Users identified for these transit destinations were primarily Bartow County residents needing to access jobs or social services in neighboring counties. Several stakeholders also identified tourists as potential users of expanded transit service, stating that connection to regional destinations like SunTrust Park and Hartsfield-Atlanta International Airport could extend opportunities to leisure travelers wanting to visit Bartow County museums, Lake Point sporting community, and other popular sites.

What do you think would affect someone's decision to use transit?

In order of frequency, stakeholders identified the following as likely to influence someone's decision to use transit:

1. Schedule/reliability
2. Fare/economic need of the rider
3. Convenience
4. Safety
5. Quality and image
6. Understanding the service
7. Location of bus stops

Do you have any other ideas for enhancing the BCT system?

Ideas from stakeholders included:

- Regional coordination to enhance not just Bartow County Transit, but transit in metro Atlanta and the state of Georgia as a whole.
- Potential use of existing freight rail line to connect to Atlanta and/or Chattanooga, TN.
- The City of Rome utilizes their city bus system to get students to and from public schools. This should be evaluated to see if it would be feasible for Bartow County, as it could be a way to help with revenue, and be mutually beneficial to the school system and BCT. It could allow for better utilization of BCT buses at a time of the day that would not necessarily be peak for transit. There are only a handful of Cartersville schools, so it may be possible to coordinate.
- Program to help the elderly utilize BCT with reduced fare or no fare.
- In addition to transit, improvements to sidewalks and pedestrian access are a big need. Cartersville has a sizeable number of pedestrians (especially along Tennessee Street, Bartow Marketplace, and Downtown with lower income housing), and the safety conditions need improvement. Bike improvement considerations should be made as well.
- Examine how to provide service for Highlands College between dorms, apartments, and campus.
- Consider a shuttle or circulator between LakePoint, Avatron, and downtown Cartersville.

Are there any other comments or observations you have about the study or transit in general?

Additional comments from stakeholders included:

- Transportation is the primary hindrance of people getting and keeping jobs, especially jobs that are located in less centralized areas. When considering fixed route service and bus service hours,

make sure to look at employee shift schedules, and coordinate with employers to ensure any changes meet the needs of employees. Coordination should take place with both current and future employers.

- It would be great to see short-term improvements, in addition to longer-term plans. BCT development should start small so community can see it and grow with it. For example, it would be good for BCT to serve SunTrust Park and gain ridership, and then expand to other things. Advertising and awareness is important, and vouchers and promo codes could be used for first-time users. Special fare programs could also be implemented to help those most in need.
- For transit to succeed, it will need to serve multiple purposes, such as getting to work, going to the grocery store or to the movies, and going home. While providing basic service to transit-dependent populations is important, BCT service should not end there – it should be designed for everyone. Finding a way to integrate mass transit into everyday lives will be important for the future.
- BCT drivers have been excellent in serving Meals on Wheels for seniors.

List of Participating Stakeholder Organizations

- Bartow Collaborative
- Bartow County Transit Department
- Bartow County Commissioner
- Bartow County Representatives
- Business Community Representatives
- Business Community Representatives
- City Representatives - Cartersville
- City Representatives - Euharlee
- City Representatives - Kingston
- City Representatives - Taylorsville
- City Representatives - White
- Cartersville DDA
- Chattahoochee Technical College
- Chattahoochee Technical College
- Tellus Science Museum
- Social Services - Douglas Street
- Social Services - Adairsville
- Senior Centers - Bartow County Nutrition Program
- Senior Centers - Cartersville Recreation
- Tourism/Welcome Center