ATHENS-CLARKE COUNTY

Transit Development Plan

2025–2029

ATHENS-CLARKE COUNTY GEORGIA

TRANSIT

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear neighbors, stakeholders, and elected officials of Athens-Clarke County:

It is with great honor that I present to you the vision for public transportation in our community. The Athens-Clarke County Public Transportation Department (ACCGov Transit) has completed an update to the Transit Development Plan (TDP) for the 2025-2029 period. This update, mandated by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), serves as a guiding document for ACCGov to implement essential enhancements to our public transportation network.

Athens-Clarke County is a thriving community experiencing rapid growth and embodies the allure of opportunities and a high quality of living. However, this growth presents significant challenges to our transportation system, particularly in terms of congestion and gridlock. Drawing upon lessons from the past and the experiences of neighboring communities, we must develop high-quality public transportation alternatives to mitigate the reliance on single-occupancy vehicles. By doing so, we can help preserve the quality of life our community values. The Athens-Clarke County community deserves a comprehensive public transportation network that provides ample access to a wide range of opportunities.

The ACCGov Transit Department conducted extensive community outreach through nine public events and collected over 450 community responses. The feedback received has identified clear themes for ACCGov to prioritize improvements over the next five years, which include:

- Serving more areas of our community
- Providing more direct routes
- Offering increased frequency of service (buses coming more often)
- Extending the span of service (running earlier and later)

The current transit system was designed in 1976 and has not kept up with the evolving needs of our community. Over the years, significant changes have occurred in Athens-Clarke County, yet Athens' transit system has failed to keep pace with the evolving needs of its community. Stakeholders and constituents have consistently expressed concerns that the transit network often falls short, with routes being unnecessarily complex, infrequent, indirect, and ineffective in providing the services our community needs.

Public transportation serves as a valuable asset that fosters social and economic mobility within the Athens-Clarke County community. It is imperative that we effectively utilize this resource to its fullest potential. According to the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), every dollar invested in public transportation yields a substantial economic return of $5. This demonstrates that public transportation not only provides employment opportunities for individuals earning a living wage but also contributes to the overall economic well-being of the community. Additionally, it offers vital mobility options for individuals with disabilities, visitors without personal vehicles, students traveling to school, and access to essential services such as medical care or groceries.

As Athens enters the second half of this decade, public transportation will remain a crucial pillar of our economic growth. It will support the expansion of the University of Georgia's (UGA) medical and veterinary schools, as well as the tourism industry through events hosted by organizations such as NCAA, Classic Center, and UGA golf course. Furthermore, it will play an essential role in maintaining a vibrant downtown area. The continued success of our department hinges on our ability to enhance the public transportation network by implementing more direct routes, increasing frequencies, and improving the overall span of service. While existing resources can be leveraged to optimize the network (e.g. redesigning the public transportation system), additional resources will be necessary to expand the network, extend service hours and frequency, and cover new areas.

I am excited to lead the ACCGov Transit Department through a time of growth and change to better meet the needs of our community. As we move forward, I want to express my sincere gratitude for your review of this plan and your unwavering support in helping us maintain Athens-Clarke County as the thriving and vibrant community we all cherish. The next five years will usher in a new era for public transportation in our community!

Victor Pope

DIRECTOR OF ACC Transit

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GLOSSARY

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)– The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a landmark civil rights law passed in 1990 that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in all areas of public life including jobs, schools, employment and transportation

Athens-Clarke County Transit (ACC Transit)- Athens-Clarke County Transit is the Public Transportation Provider for Athens-Clarke County.

Athens-Clarke County Unified Government (ACC Gov)- Athens-Clarke County Government is the government and comunity services provider for Clarke County and the City of Athens, Georgia. The governments of Clarke County and the City of Athens unified in 1990.

Block Group- A Block Group is a statistical division of a census tract. They are generally thought to contain between 600 and 3,000 people, and are used to present data and control block numbering.

Department of Transportation (DOT)– The Department of Transportation is the federal agency responsible for overseeing national transportation infrastructure and investment. Federal grants are disbursed and awarded by the federal DOT.

Environmental Justice (EJ)– Environmental Justice is the meaningful inclusion and fair treatment of historically marginalized groups within a geographical area.

First-mile/last-mile- This term refers to the beginning and end segments of a person's journey when using public transportation. It's often used to describe the challenge of getting from your starting point to a transit station (first mile) and from the final transit stop to your actual destination (last mile).

Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT)- The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) is the state agency responsible for planning, building, maintaining, and improving Georgia's transportation system. This includes roads and highways, bridges, public transit, rail, and even aspects of aviation and bicycle/pedestrian infrastructure.

Intercity Bus- Intercity bus service, as opposed to Local Bus Service, refers to long-distance bus travel between cities, typically with limited stops and often on major highways or interstates. It's designed to connect people between urban centers, small towns, and rural areas.

Level of Service (LOS)- A qualitative measure that characterizes operational conditions within a traffic stream and their perception by motorists and passengers. The descriptions of individual levels of service characterize these conditions in terms of such factors as speed and travel time, freedom to maneuver, traffic interruptions, and comfort and convenience. It is generally organized into categories A - F which describe how effectively traffic is moving on the roadway.

Local Bus Service- Local bus service is public transportation that operates within a city or metro area, providing frequent stops along a set route to help people get around town. It's designed for shorter trips and daily use—like commuting to work, going to school, shopping, or running errands.

Major Corridors- For the purposes of this plan, the "Major Corridors" are Lexington Highway, Atlanta Highway/Broad Street, Prince Avenue, North Avenue, and Oak/Oconee Street.

Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA)– A Metropolitan Planning Area is a geographic area that determines where the MPO transportation planning process is carried out. It is determined by agreement between the MPO and state governor. The Athens-Clarke County Metropolitan Planning Area is also known as the Madison Athens-Clarke Oconee Regional Transportation Study, or MACORTS, and includes Madison, Athens-Clarke, and Oconee Counties

Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)– A Metropolitan Planning Organization is an organization that administers the metropolitan transportation planning process. It is the primary organization through which Federal and State transportation funds are distributed in areas where population densities exceed 50,000.

Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA)- A Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) is a geographic region defined by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) that centers around a core urban area with a large population—typically at least 50,000 people—and includes surrounding counties that are socially and economically tied to the core, often through commuting.

Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)– The Metropolitan Transportation Plan is a long-range planning document that allocates and governs Federal and State transportation funding for the MPO region. It is updated every 5 years to address current and long-range transportation needs and objectives.

Microtransit- A technology-enabled service that uses multi-passenger vehicles to provide on-demand services with dynamically generated routing. Microtransit services are traditionally provided in designated service areas. Service models include first mile/last mile connections to fixed route services; hub to hub zone-based services; the commingling of ADA complementary paratransit services with general transit service; and point-to-point service within a specific zone or geography.

Mobility Hubs- A mobility hub is a central location where people can access multiple transportation options such as biking, walking and public transit. They can also offer amenities like bike storage, charging stations, and waiting areas.

National Transit Database (NTD)- The National Transit Database gathers information from transit agencies annually including ridership, funding, vehicles, service, hours of operation and safety information.

Paratransit- Paratransit is a type of on-demand, door-to-door transportation service designed for people who can't use regular public buses or trains because of a disability or health condition. It's a key part of making transit systems accessible under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Revenue Service- This term may apply to Revenue Service Miles, Revenue Service Hours, or Revenue Service Trips. Revenue Service refers to the time when a vehicle is available to the general public and there is an expectation of carrying passengers. These passengers either directly pay fares, are subsidized by public policy, or provide payment through some contractual arrangement. Vehicles operated in fare free service are considered in revenue service. Revenue service includes layover and recovery time.

Revenue Vehicle- The vehicles used to provide revenue service for passengers.

Total Passenger Miles- The cumulative sum of the distances ridden by each passenger.

Transit Feasibility Study- The ACC Transit Feasibility Study was conducted in 2016 and explores the feasibility and efficiencies of unified future service in Athens-Clarke County and the University of Georgia (UGA). The initial study completed an assessment of existing conditions and operations, a needs assessment for service expansion and identified the feasibility, opportunities, and service options for a consolidation of services. The link to this study can be found at the end of the Glossary.

Transportation Management Area (TMA)– Transportation Management Area is a geographic, urbanized area with a population of a minimum of 200,000. Athens is not a TMA.

Transit Oriented Development (TOD)– Transit Oriented Development is the development process of designating and planning for high-density developments near transit.

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)- The TIP is a planning document which moves projects into the design / construction process. It is a short-range document which is updated annually through amendments and administrative modifications. Projects must be in the TIP to receive Federal and State highway funding.

Transportation Network Company (TNC)- A Company that uses an online platform (usually a smartphone app) to connect passengers with drivers who provide transportation services using their personal vehicles. Examples of well-known TNCs include Uber, Lyft, and Via.

Transit Asset Management (TAM) Plan- A TAM Plan is a Federal Transit Administration Required document. It is a business model that uses the condition of assets to guide the optimal prioritization of funding at transit properties in order to keep transit networks in a State of Good Repair.

Transit Propensity- Transit Propensity is a method used to identify where there is a need for public transit. It is based on demographics, land use, travel patterns and characteristics of existing transit service, if any. The demographic component takes into account things like population density, socioeconomic status, age, vehicle ownership, race and ethnicity, annual income, and disability status.

Transit Trust Fund Program (TTFP)- The Transit Trust Fund Program is administered by the Georgia Department of Transportation and uses a population-based formula, based on 2020 Census data to distribute state funding to Georgia's counties with existing transit service to further support public transit across the state. Funds are collected by taxes levied on Transportation Network Companies and distributed to the agencies that provide public transportation for these counties.

Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (TSPLOST)– Transportation Special-Purpose Local-Option Sales Tax is a funding mechanism available for funding transportation projects at the local level.

Unlinked Passenger Trips (UPT)- The number of passengers who board public transportation vehicles. Passengers are counted each time they board vehicles no matter how many vehicles they use to travel from their origin to their destination.

Urbanized Area (UZA)- 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. The Census Bureau delineates urban areas after each decennial (every 10 years) census by applying specified criteria to decennial census and other data.

Useful Life- The expected lifetime of property as determined by the vehicle mileage and age, as specified in an agency's Transit Asset Management (TAM) Plan. Useful life of revenue rolling stock begins on the date the vehicle is placed in revenue service and continues until it is removed from service.

Vehicle Revenue Hours (VRH)- The hours that vehicles are scheduled to or actually travel while in revenue service. Vehicle revenue hours include layover/recovery time.

Vulnerable Populations- Vulnerable Populations refer to those populations befitting the Federal Emergency Management Agency's social vulnerability definition of the susceptibility of social groups to the adverse impacts of natural hazards, including disproportionate death, injury, loss, or disruption of livelihood. Social Vulnerability scores are available for communities in all 50 states.

SOURCES

These and other terms may be found within the following Sources:

- ACC Transit Feasibility Study: https://www.accgov.com/DocumentCenter/View/35279/Athens-Transit-Feasibility-Study-Final-Report---No-Appendices?bidId=
- Federal Emergency Management Administration, Social Vulnerability: https://hazards.fema.gov/nri/social-vulnerability
- Federal Transit Administration- Shared Mobility Definitions: https://www.transit.dot.gov/regulations-and-guidance/shared-mobility-definitions#:~:text=Microtransit,provided%20in%20designated%20service%20areas.
- Glossary of Common Transportation Acronyms, US Department of Transportation: https://www.transportation.gov/grants/dot-navigator/glossary-common-transportation-acronyms
- Integrating Demand Management into the Transportation Planning Process: A Desk Reference - Acronym List - FHWA Office of Operations (dot.gov): https://ops.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/fhwahop12035/acros.htm
- National Transit Database (NTD) Glossary: tranist.dot.gov/ntd/national-transit-database-ntd-glossary
- United States Census Bureau, Glossary: https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/about/glossary.html#par_textimage_4

1 INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Athens-Clarke County Transit (ACC Transit) is the transit service provider for the general population of Athens-Clarke County, and coordinates with statewide, regional, and local transportation services to meet the connectivity needs of residents, workers, and students. Since the publication of the previous Transit Development Plan (TDP) in 2018, much has been accomplished by the system and much has changed in the State of Georgia and in Athens-Clarke County as the result of the 2020 Coronavirus pandemic and resulting sociopolitical change. The following report builds on all previous TDPs and reports and studies conducted between 2018 and 2025, while meeting all State and Federal TDP update guidelines. The TDP report will provide a comprehensive review of the service structure and operational performance of transit providers in Athens-Clarke County, public and stakeholder supported goals and objectives, needs and opportunities, and a five year fiscally constrained work program to guide implementation of improvements.

1.1 OVERVIEW

A Transit Development Plan (TDP) is a Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) required plan with a 10-year horizon intended to support the development of an effective multimodal transportation system for the County. The TDP serves as the basis for defining public transit needs which is a prerequisite to receive federal and state funding. TDPs serve as strategic planning documents and define public transportation needs, coordinate with other transportation plans, involve substantial public participation, and explore community goals with decision makers and other stakeholders. Ultimately, the TDP will define alternative courses of action and develop a systematic plan and monitoring program for the implementation of transit improvements throughout the study area.

The TDP process is mandated by both federal and state statutes and is repeated every five years. As ACC Transit embarks on this process, the operational environment will be evaluated alongside considerations for the future of the system. The TDP is a strategic plan based on community values, while remaining responsive to financial and political realities. The vision and strategic direction of the TDP is focused on the future while maintaining consistency with existing local and regional planning efforts. The recommendations developed through the TDP process are guided by local, state and federal stakeholders and provide ACC Transit with a strategic implementation plan for the next 5 years.

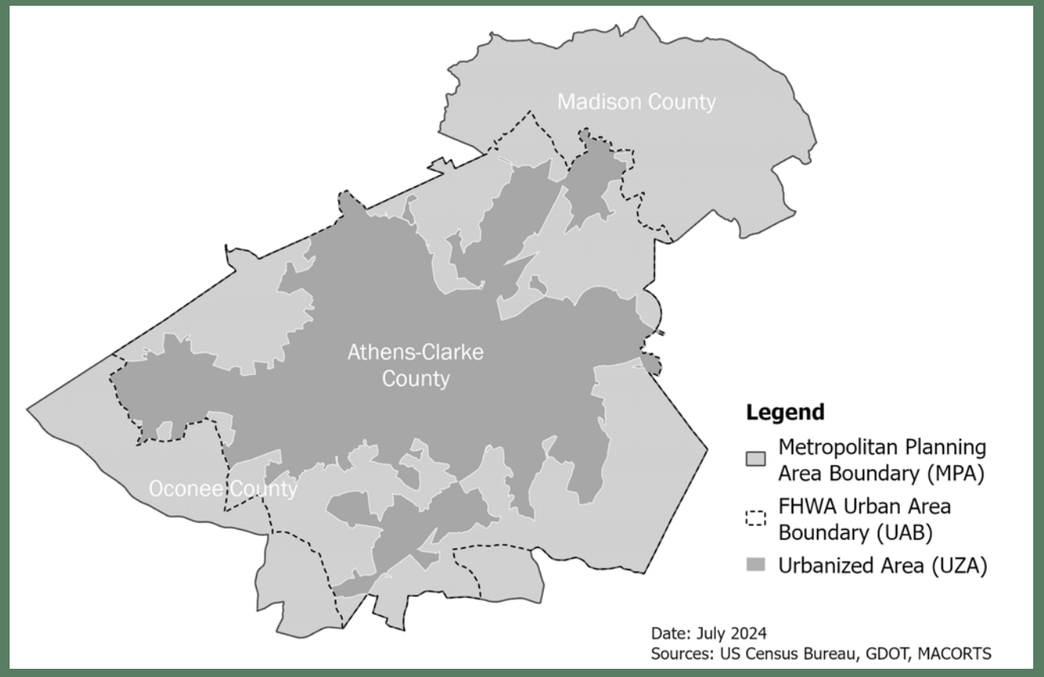


Figure 1: Athens-Clarke County FHWA Urban Area Boundary and Urbanized Area

1.2 SERVICE AREA & HISTORY

ACC Transit is a department of the Athens-Clarke County Unified Government that provides public transportation throughout the Athens Urbanized Area (UZA). The UZA consists of 96 square miles and has a total population of 127,320 as of the 2020 US Census. According to the 2020 NTD Annual Agency Profile, ACC Transit operates and provides service to 44 square miles, with a total population of 119,980.

Based on 2020 National Transit Database data for transit systems that provide fixed route service for UZAs with a population between 100,000 to 150,000, transit service in Athens ranks 12th nationally for unlinked passenger trips, 13th for total passenger miles, and 13th for vehicle revenue hours. For all transit systems within the state of Georgia, ACC Transit ranks 5th for unlinked passenger trips, 6th in total passenger miles, and 5th in annual vehicle revenue hours.

2 PUBLIC AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Public participation strategies for the 2025 ACC Transit TDP engaged with a variety of groups in order to identify the ways to better serve transit customers and opportunities to expand ridership through fun and engaging communications and outreach. The public participation strategies discussed here were designed to gather feedback from specific groups:

1. All citizens in Athens-Clarke County, especially targeting current riders

2. Community leaders that provide a role in guiding ACC Transit or represent the distinct voices of the Athens community

3. Transit dependent populations, or people that use transit for essential trips (work, picking up groceries, etc.)

4. Choice ridership, people who do not depend on public transit, but may use it otherwise (convenience, not wanting to drive, etc.)

Coffee cups sit above a map of Existing Athens-Clarke County Bus Routes displayed at the UGA International Coffee Hour Pop-up Event in January 2023.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the public meetings is two-fold:

- First, the meetings serve to educate the public on the goals and objectives of the project as well as the information that was gathered in the Existing Conditions Report.

- Second, the meetings serve to gain an understanding of the public's priority areas for additional service. The data gathered helped inform the prioritization of projects for the TDP.

2.1 SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

Three types of public participation were used: 1) general public input meetings, 2) Steering Committee meetings, and 3) focused stakeholder group meetings. General meetings were open to all citizens and targeted current system riders; these were executed as three separate pop-up events, which allowed the project team to meet people where they are already participating in community activities. Steering Committee meetings gathered representative leaders from the local community and solicited their input at key decision points during the process to help guide staff on recommendations and strategic planning. Several focused stakeholder group meetings were held with different groups: two focus meetings were held with local officials to gather input on any specific issues from their expertise in the community, one meeting was held with UGA to discuss future service changes and opportunities for coordination, and one meeting with the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission was held to discuss recent regional transit planning efforts and opportunities for collaboration. A more detailed summary of each of these meetings and the key takeaways is below.

2.1.2 COMMUNITY POP-UP MEETINGS

POP-UP #1- INTERNATIONAL COFFEE HOUR, MEMORIAL BALLROOM

January 20, 2023

Participants at the International Coffee Hour prioritized increased weekend service, followed by maintaining a fare free service, and later evening service. 62 responses were received at this event.

POP-UP #2- ATHENS CLARKE COUNTY MULTIMODAL CENTER
January 20, 2023
The first priority of participants at the Multimodal Station was maintaining a fare free service, followed by later evening service, and increased weekend service. 43 Commuters were engaged at this event.

POP-UP #3- EGG GIVEAWAY, PINEWOOD NEIGHBORHOOD
January 20, 2023
Key interests identified by this group were expansion of routes to provide service to the Pinewood Neighborhood area and on-demand services. About 34 residents were engaged at this event

2.1.3 COMMUNITY SURVEY

A Community Survey was hosted online January 18 to February 28, 2023. The survey contained 22 questions about transit and 6 demographic questions about the survey taker. The goal of the survey was to collect data on potential improvements and rider preferences for the future of Athens-Clarke County Transit. The survey received 432 responses in total, including 8 responses in Spanish.

The results of the survey concluded that cost is a major factor in decisions about transit, with the largest proportion of respondents (116) indicating that they would only ride ACC Transit if it was free. Respondents to the survey also indicated that current and potential riders would like more weekend service, and that riders would also like increased weekday service around peak travel times and later at night.

The following priorities resulted from the Community Survey, completed in 2023:

1. Priorities for investment are service to new areas, more frequent service, and earlier morning service
2. Environmental considerations are a key factor that influences riders decision to take the bus
3. Trips should be provided for free
4. Provide regional service to neighboring areas such as Epps Bridge, Winterville, and Watkinsville

2.1.4 COMMISSIONERS WORKSHOP

Following the Athens-Clarke County Work Session held on November 16, 2023 a virtual survey was prepared and distributed to Mayor and Commission. The goal of the survey was to identify common goals and objectives shared by Athens-Clarke County officials with regards to the TDP. A total of six surveys were completed, and the data collected from each response was analyzed to find common themes.

Based upon the responses, there is a strong desire for the continued expansion of fixed route service while maintaining the existing fare-free pricing structure. An increase in frequency, ridership, and overall system productivity and efficiency were also identified. There was less agreement with regards to expanding the geographic coverage of services provided by ACC Transit, however most responses selected "Other (Let's Discuss)" when asked about providing service outside of Clarke County as opposed to "No."

Connectivity, climate/resilience, and customer satisfaction were other factors which were highlighted by the collected responses as priorities and measures of effectiveness. Maintaining a robust fixed route service with a fare-free structure and high frequency emerged as the overarching goals / objectives based on the responses.

The following themes were heard in the Commissioners workshop:

1. More frequent service
2. Continue conversation about extending service to areas outside of Clarke County
3. Provide faster service with a greater return on investment
4. Continue to offer zero fare services
5. Provide additional fixed route bus service (over vanpool or regional commuter service)
6. Measure the effectiveness of the system using ridership and productivity measures

2.1.5 STAKEHOLDER COMMITTEE

Project staff met with multiple focused stakeholder groups over the course of the project- the Athens-Clarke County Commission and the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission. Through these meetings, both groups brought specialized and focused attention to the issues and opportunities pertaining to their individual organizations in order to enhance the plan and future opportunities for collaboration.

Participants gathered both in-person and virtually for the first Stakeholders Committee Meeting where the project team hosted an interactive discussion including and survey of participants' opinions on various operational policies and procedures for the future of Athens-Clarke County Transit.

The following themes were extrapolated from the Stakeholder Committee Survey:

1. Priorities for investment are service to new areas, more frequent service, and fare free/ reduced fare service
2. Further conversation about extending ACC service to areas outside of Clarke County
3. Provide faster service with a greater return on investment over slower service with more geographic range
4. Provide trips for $1.00 per trip or else free
5. Provide regional service to neighboring areas before providing additional fixed route service
6. Define success of the system using connectivity, ridership/ productivity, and equity

Members of the stakeholder committee provide input at a scheduled meeting in August, 2023.

Public and Stakeholder Committee Meetings

The following meetings with the Stakeholder Committee and Stakeholder Groups were held over the project timeline:

PUBLIC MEETINGS:

Open House and Pop-Up Meetings

- **Meeting 1:** UGA International Coffee Hour, January 2023
- **Meeting 2:** Athens Multimodal Transit Center, January 2023
- **Meeting 3:** Egg Giveaway, January 2023
- **Meeting 4:** Athens Multimodal Transit Center, February 2025

STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS:

Stakeholder Committee

- **Meeting 1:** August 2023
- **Meeting 2:** January 2025

Peer Roundtables and Presentations:

- **Meeting 1:** NEGRC Peer Roundtable, November 2024
- **Meeting 2:** MACORTS TCC Presentation, February 2025
- **Meeting 3:** MACORTS PC Presentation, March 2025

Athens-Clarke County Commission:

- **Meeting 1:** November 2023
- **Meeting 2:** August 2024
- **Meeting 3:** February 2025

2.2 KEY TAKEAWAYS

Through engagement with each of the groups above, a narrative about a shared vision for the future of Athens-Clarke County Transit began to develop, summarized below:

- All groups prioritize faster and more frequent service
- There is a desire for expanded service hours starting with increased weekend service and later evening service
- There is a desire to have further conversations about extending the service geography and regional service
- The policy decision to maintain a fare-free service will require a policy strategy for budget reinforcement

3 EXISTING CONDITIONS

A comprehensive review and analysis of the existing conditions was performed as part of the initial assessment for the TDP. This Existing Conditions analysis provides the foundation for the planning process and the development of recommendations for future service.

ACC Transit provides fixed route and on-demand transit services to the residents of Athens-Clarke County. The system's central connection is the Multi-Modal Transit Center located in the downtown area. The Multi-Modal Transit Center serves as the transfer center for ACC Transit and the University of Georgia transit routes. ACC Transit coordinates closely with the University of Georgia transit system to serve all Athens residents.

3.1 PLAN REVIEW

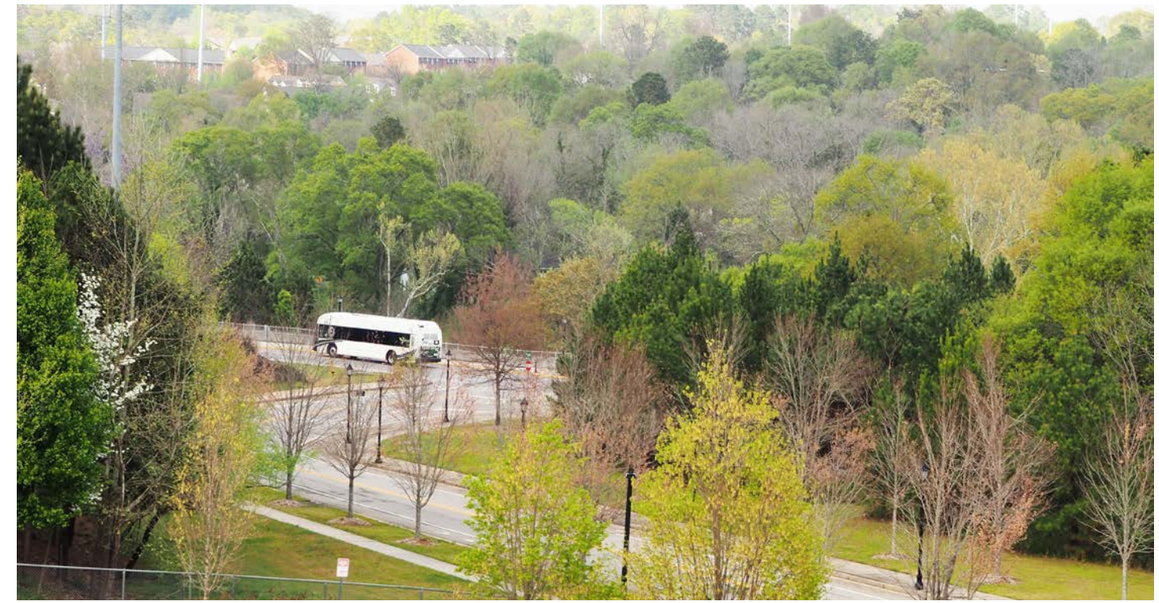
Development of the TDP begins with a review of the current plans which may have impacts on the update of the TDP and recommendations. These plans included the following:

- Athens-Clarke County 2018 TDP
- Madison Athens-Clarke Oconee Regional Transportation Study (MACORTS) 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan
- Athens-Clarke County Comprehensive Plan
- GDOT Statewide Transit Plan

The review of the plans provided insights into the previous associated planning efforts and ensured ongoing consistency with local, regional, and state plans.

3.2 SERVICE PROVIDERS

There are two fixed-route transit service providers in Athens-Clarke County, which includes ACC Transit and the University of Georgia (UGA) Transit System. Currently, ACC Transit operates eighteen (18) weekday fixed routes and accompanying paratransit service with service running Monday through Friday from 6:00 AM to 9:45 PM. Weekend service operates nine (9) routes and runs from 7:15 AM through 6:45 PM. Service does not operate on Observed Holidays.



The UGA Transit System operates twelve (12) fixed routes, as well as paratransit service to the students and faculty of the university community. The UGA system is open to the general public, and carries more passengers than any other university system in the US. The system operates Monday through Friday from 7:00 AM to 7:30 PM, with some routes operating until 9:00 PM. Three routes offer night service from 7:00 PM to 1:00 AM Monday through Wednesday and extending to 3:00 AM Thursday through Saturday. One route operates from 10:00 AM to 7:00 PM on Saturday and 12:00 PM to 9:00 PM on Sunday. The system does not operate during home football games, when the university is closed, or the weekend immediately before or after a holiday. Service is also reduced during the summer.

UGA students are a significant component of the daily travel within Athens-Clarke County. The university has a freshman residency requirement and approximately 10,000 students live on-campus in university affiliated housing. With a total enrollment of over 40,000, approximately 75% of students reside off-campus. There are numerous student-oriented apartment complexes that cater to this demand, several of which provide shuttle service for their residents. These shuttles operate on flexible schedules and drop-off/pick up locations are also flexible.

Greyhound and Groome Transportation provide intercity transit service. Greyhound, operated by Southeastern Stages, has a stop located east of downtown. Groome Transportation offers shuttle service between the Athens area and Atlanta every half hour. The Groome Transportation stops are located where access to ACC Transit is available.

There are numerous taxi companies that operate in Athens, as well as ridesharing services including Uber and Lyft. ACC Transit had partnered with Uber to provide on-demand service, however due to an extreme bus operator shortage, the service ended operations in August, 2023.

Paratransit lift services provide mobility services for transportation disadvantaged populations, including those with disabilities and the elderly. Regional service is provided by the Georgia Department of Human Services and Medicaid Services and the Advantage Behavioral Health Systems provides human services transportation within Athens-Clarke County. Medicaid transportation services are provided by Velstar Medical Transportation.

3.3 SYSTEM AND SERVICE PROFILE

The Athens-Clarke urbanized area consists of 96 square miles and has a total population of 127,320, as of the 2020 US Census. According to the 2020 National Transit Database (NTD) Annual Agency Profile, ACC Transit operates and provides service to 44 square miles, with a total population of 119,980.

Based on 2020 NTD data for transit systems that provide fixed route service for UZAs with a population between 100,000 to 150,000, ACC Transit service ranks 12th nationally for unlinked passenger trips, 13th for total passenger miles, and 13th for vehicle revenue hours. For all transit systems within the state of Georgia, ACC Transit ranks 5th for unlinked passenger trips, 6th in total passenger miles, and 5th in annual vehicle revenue hours.

3.3.1 SERVICE CHARACTERISTICS

ACC Transit operates throughout Athens-Clarke County. Route 30-North Side Circulator does provide service to the VA Clinic located in Madison County just across the county line, but the remainder of the route is within Athens-Clarke County. Routes primarily operate during the weekdays providing service from approximately 6:00 AM to 7:00 PM. Eight routes provide evening service from approximately 7:00 PM to 9:30 PM. Nine routes provide weekend service operating from approximately 7:15 AM to 7:00 PM. Route frequency ranges between 55 minutes and 75 minutes, with the majority of the routes operating at a 60 minute frequency.

3.3.2 FACILITIES

The hub for the current route structure is the Athens Multi-Modal Transportation Center located at 775 East Broad St. in downtown Athens. This facility is the headquarters for ACC Transit, including operations and administration. There are 17 bus bays utilized by ACC Transit and UGA Transit buses on a daily basis.

The ACC Transit Maintenance Facility where vehicle maintenance is performed is located at 325 Pound Street. Parking for transit vehicles, as well as maintenance and operator personnel is also located here.

The Oconee Street Park & Ride is located at the State Route 10, "the Loop" and Oconee St. This park and ride lot provides free parking near downtown Athens that is serviced by two ACC Transit routes – 25 and 27 which are accessed on Oconee Street. Amenities include bicycle racks, bus shelters, and overhead lighting. Service is currently suspended to the Park & Ride lot due to adjacent roadway construction.

3.3.3 VEHICLES

According to data collected prior to publication of the existing conditions report in 2023, in 2021 ACC Transit had 40 revenue vehicles and 14 support vehicles in their inventory. Of these 40 vehicles, 32 are buses and 8 are vans and cutaway vehicles. Further, 37 were available for maximum service and 19 were operated in maximum service. The 19 vehicles operated include 17 bus vehicles and 2 demand response vehicles. Each bus vehicle is equipped with bicycle racks that can accommodate up to 3 adult size bicycles.

ACC Transit vehicles are assigned to routes based on a variety of factors including passenger loads and roadway characteristics, such as roadway lane width. Beginning in 2018, ACC Transit has included hybrid fuel buses in their inventory and is in the process of transitioning to zero-emissions buses by 2035.

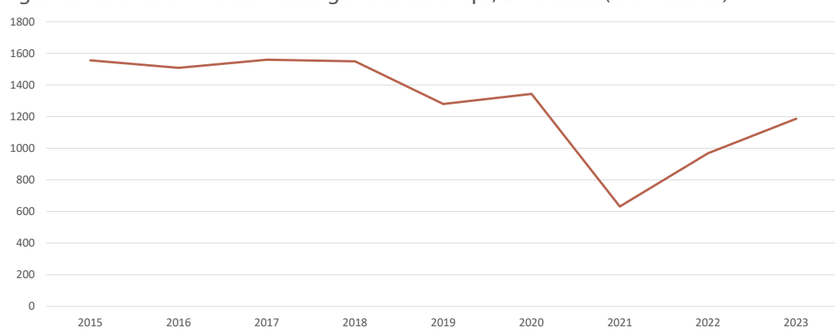
3.4 OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS

3.4.1 PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

The performance evaluation for ACC Transit follows the *Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) Report 141 – A Methodology for Performance Measurement and Peer Comparison in the Public Transportation Industry.* This report provides a process for evaluating the performance of the transit system and the evaluation for this TDP incorporates the most up to date data for ACC Transit that is available.

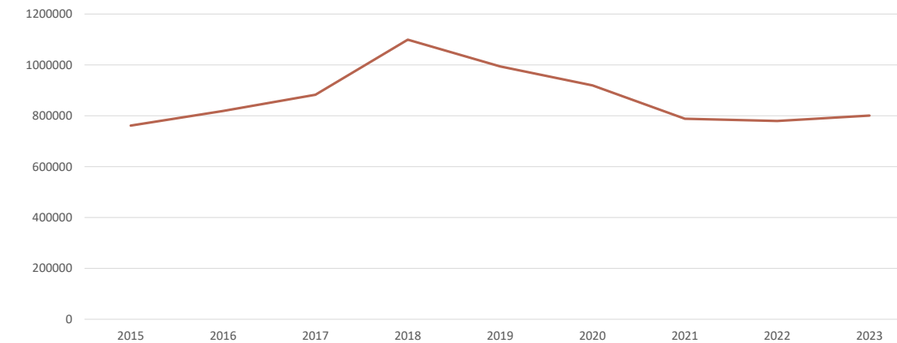
The process evaluates the trends within a system's data in a year-to-year comparison, which also establishes trends. Understanding these trends is helpful in identifying both positive and negative aspects of the system's performance. The data analyzed in this evaluation assessment covers the years from the previous TDP through the most current data available, covering 2015 – 2022. However, it is important to note that the COVID-19 pandemic occurred during this time frame and all transit agencies were affected. The number of passenger trips reached a high in 2017, with a slight decrease in 2018. The effects on transit ridership of the pandemic can be seen in the subsequent years.

Figure 2: ACC Transit Annual Passenger Unlinked Trips, 2015-2023 (*in thousands*)



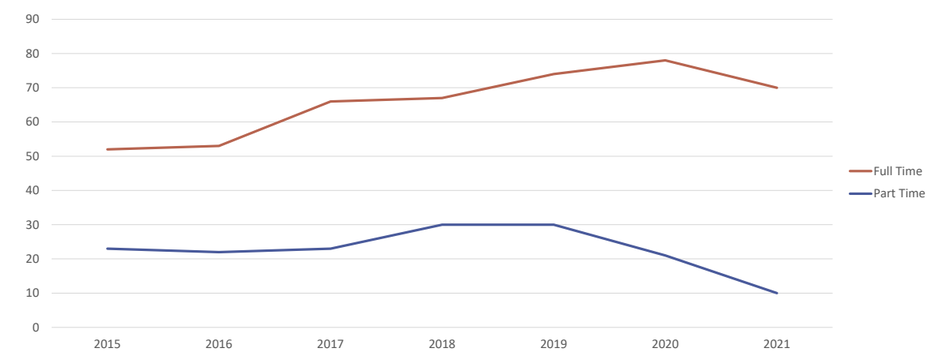
Revenue miles reached a high in 2018, with a slight decrease in 2019 and more significant decreases in 2020 and 2021. As with the passenger trips, this decrease is due to the effects of the pandemic.

Figure 3: ACC Transit Annual Revenue Miles 2015-2023



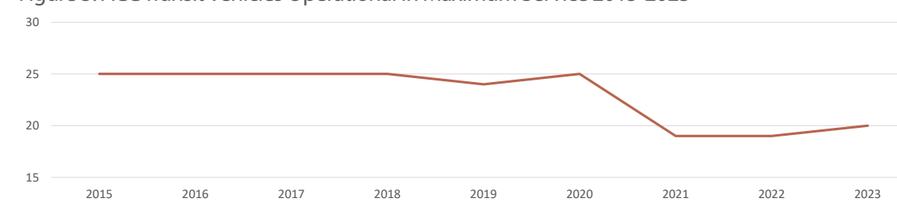
The number of full-time and part time employees reached a high in 2020 and had a significant decline in 2021. As with many transit agencies, ACC Transit is facing a shortage of drivers, resulting in service adjustments.

Figure 4: ACC Transit Full- and Part-Time Employees 2015-2021



The number of vehicles operated in maximum service remained relatively steady from 2015 to 2020 and decreased beginning in 2021. Since 2021, the number of vehicles has increased slightly for a total of 20 vehicles operational in maximum service in 2023.

Figure 5: ACC Transit Vehicles Operational in Maximum Service 2015-2023



3.4.2 SERVICE EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY

There are also established performance measures for fixed route transit systems. The service supply measure compares the population growth with the growth of the transit service. Typically, as an urban area grows, the transit service will also expand to meet the mobility needs of the growing population. Vehicle miles per capita remained relatively constant over the first years of the analysis period and dropped in 2020 and 2021. This drop, as with many of the other measures, display the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on transit.

Passenger trips per capita remained constant from 2015 through 2018 and experienced a slight decrease in 2019 with 2020 resuming the typical rate. However, 2021 shows a significant drop, again resulting from the impacts of the pandemic. The remaining service consumption metrics display the same pattern as the pandemic impacts shown in 2021. This is shown graphically in Figure 2 on the previous pages.

The average speed follows a similar pattern, remaining relatively constant and then showing an increase in 2021, potentially due to the work from home and e-learning practices in place. The average age of the fleet, as well as breakdowns, show an improvement due to new vehicles purchased by the department being entered into the operational rotation.

Additional performance measures are focused on service efficiency. These metrics look at cost efficiencies, operating ratio, vehicle utilization, and average fare. Since 2015, ACC Transit total operating expense have remained relatively constant with a slight decrease overall and a spike in 2020. The additional efficiency measures compare the operating costs to different elements in order to evaluate the unit costs for providing transit service. These efficiency measures are all impacted by the total operating costs for the system and focus on operating expenses per capita, passengers, and trip metrics. These various performance measures show a variable percent change and it is also important to note that the transit system transitioned to a zero-fare system, which impacts the farebox recovery ratio. The data for these measures are displayed in Table 1 on Page 22.

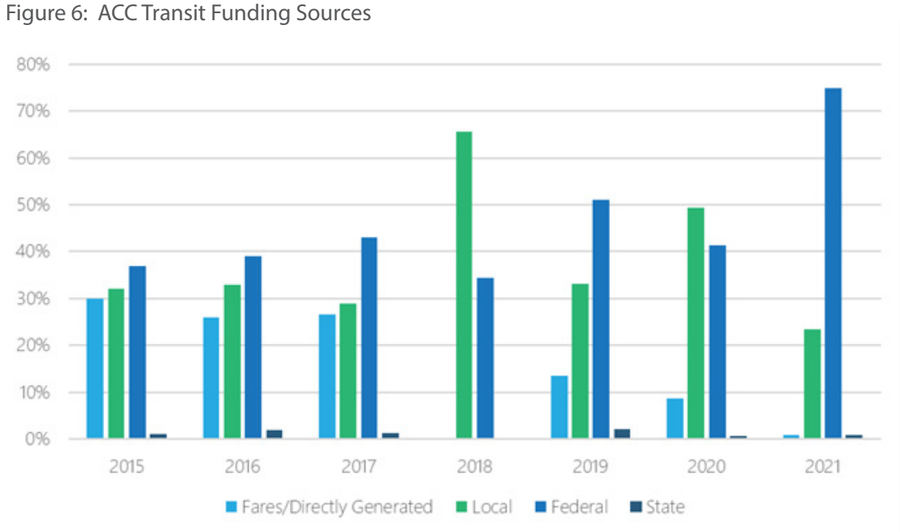
Table 1: ACC Transit Measures of Effectiveness

Measure of Effectiveness	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	% Change (2015 – 2021)
Vehicle Miles Per Capita	6.81	7.24	6.77	8.15	8.00	7.14	6.13	-9.98%
Passenger Trips per Capita	12.97	12.30	12.06	11.98	9.94	10.43	4.90	-62.22%
Passenger Trips per Revenue Mile	2.04	1.84	1.90	1.50	1.40	1.50	0.80	-60.78%
Passenger Trips per Revenue Hour	23.57	21.16	20.10	22.50	15.80	17.60	10.40	-55.87%
Average Speed (RM/RH)	11.54	11.49	11.43	15.12	11.60	11.43	12.48	8.15%
Average Age of Fleet	7.7	8.1	9.1	4.9	5.4	5.5	4.8	-37.66%
Number of Vehicle System Failures	173	270	231	280	218	180	140	-19.07%
Revenue Miles Between Failures	4,401	3,034	3,852	3,704	4,282	4,828	5,393	22.54%
Weekday Span of Service (hours)	16	16	16	16	16	16	13	-18.75%

3.4.3 FUNDING SOURCES

ACC Transit receives funding from a variety of sources at federal, state, and local levels. The levels of funding vary over the years due to capital purchases in the department. As is typical of most transit agencies, the largest share of funding is from federal programs. On the local level, ACC Transit also receives funding from the local option sales tax revenues. Over the years, federal funding has ranged from 34% to a high of 75% in 2021, which included funding from the American Rescue Plan Act which was designed to help agencies mitigate effects of the pandemic.

Figure 6: ACC Transit Funding Sources



3.4.4 DEMAND RESPONSE OPERATIONAL PERFORMANCE METRICS

The operational performance of the demand response system from 2017 through 2021 is also measured by established metrics. The operating expense per passenger mile has increased over 80% during the given time period. The operating expense per passenger trip has also experienced the same type of change, showing an increase of 73%. These measures are impacted by negative trends in ridership as there are some service trips made with only one passenger.

4 VISION, MISSION, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

During the development of the Mission, Goals, and Objectives for the 2025 ACC Transit TDP, three sources served as the foundation.

- 2018 ACC Transit - TDP
- Public and stakeholder survey results
- Local, state, and regional partner goals and objectives

Drawing from these sources ensures consistency with ongoing initiatives and creates cohesive recommendations for the future.

4.1 2018 TDP GOALS

The previous TDP for Athens-Clarke County Transit was completed in 2018 before the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic had manifested in transit departments across the country. The Mission, Goals, and Objectives from that TDP reflect a transit department that is customer service oriented and focused on expanding its capabilities. The current ACC Transit Mission, Goals, and Objectives have evolved to reflect a system emerging into a new era to support new and changing transportation demands in a post pandemic community.

4.2 PUBLIC AND STAKEHOLDER INPUT

As discussed in the Public and Stakeholder Engagement section, as an element of the ACC Transit TDP engagement process, surveys were conducted in 2023 to measure the priorities of three different targeted groups. First, an online survey was issued and open to responses from the general public between January 18 and February 28, 2023. A Stakeholder Advisory Group and a Commissioners Workshop were convened later in the year and were issued surveys that gauged system, service, and community priorities. Each of these efforts is described in greater detail in the Public Engagement Section. Feedback from these sessions was taken into account when developing each of the goals and objectives for the plan.

4.3 PARTNER AGENCY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Pertinent local, regional, and state transit and transportation plans were identified and goals and objectives for each plan were screened for incorporation into the ACC Transit TDP process. Each plan held a unique perspective for the direction of transit depending on their constituency and level of geographic influence. The following plans were evaluated:

- Athens-Clarke County Comprehensive Plan
- Athens In-Motion
- MACORTS 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan
- Northeast Georgia Regional Commission Regional Transit Development Plan
- Georgia Statewide Transit Plan
- Georgia Statewide Strategic Transportation Plan (SSTP)/Georgia Statewide Transportation Plan

In total, the six plans above had approximately 90 distinct goals and objectives, though there are many commonalities across those goals and objectives. To measure the commonalities, all goals and objectives were evaluated to identify common words and numbers of occurrence. The analysis results are shown below.

Table 2: Common Word Occurrences in Peer Plans

36 - Transit	7- Georgia
16- Transportation	6- Services
16- Support	5- Technology
15- Improve	5- Sustainable
14- Access	5- Safe
13- Safety	5- Planning
11- Regional	5- Partnerships
10- Service	5- Maintain
10- Public	5- Facilitate
10- Provide	5- Existing
10- Network	5- County
9- Infrastructure	5- Connectivity
7- Region	5- Community

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4.4 2025 ACC TRANSIT TDP MISSION, GOALS, AND OBJECTIVES

The following Mission, Goals, and Objectives were developed for the Athens-Clarke County Transit 2025 TDP.

MISSION

"Our mission is to provide safe, reliable, and sustainable public transportation that enhances the quality of life for our community. Together, we strive to create a transit system that connects people, supports economic growth, and fosters a vibrant, inclusive, and resilient community."

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Using the input from the previous TDP, stakeholder input, and the goals and objectives of Athens-Clarke County Transit's local, regional, and state partners, a total of seven goals and 21 objectives were created. Objectives are categorized by which goal they address, and all are stated below:

GOAL 1: RESTORE AND ENHANCE ACCESS AND SERVICE TIMES

OBJECTIVE: Review current ACC Transit and peer agency service models and ridership statistics to prioritize routes for more frequent service, expanded service hours, or service model transition

OBJECTIVE: Expand service on ACC Transit's most popular routes and in areas with potential unmet demand to include shorter wait times between buses, additional service hours, and/or re-establishing weekend service

OBJECTIVE: Explore implementation of innovative service models such as microtransit to provide extended service options to customers, especially those in underserved and less dense geographic areas.

GOAL 2: STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS FOR A CONNECTED AND EFFICIENT MULTIMODAL SYSTEM

OBJECTIVE: Work with other local transit and transportation partners such as UGA Transit, Athens Clarke County Transportation and Public Works Department, and bike sharing providers to develop a cohesive and connected multimodal transportation system

OBJECTIVE: Work with community and municipal partners to improve the built environment surrounding ACC Transit bus stops to promote enhanced accessibility and quality of service.

OBJECTIVE: Establish educational programs and campaigns in collaboration with active transportation partners to promote the benefits of public transit and active transportation modes

GOAL 3: ENHANCE REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS, CONNECTIVITY, AND SERVICE

OBJECTIVE: Work within the Athens-Clarke County community, including leadership and elected officials, to explore continued interest in providing service to areas outside Athens-Clarke County

OBJECTIVE: Collaborate with regional partners to develop seamless transit connections across city and county boundaries where other services already exist

OBJECTIVE: Identify funding to support implementation of expanded public transportation services within the Metropolitan Statistical Area

OBJECTIVE: Work with local and regional partners to establish a connected network of transfer hubs to make meaningful and efficient transfers and support the goal of geographical expansion

GOAL 4: PROMOTE SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

OBJECTIVE: Promote environmental stewardship through ongoing efforts to maintain a state of good repair for ACC Transit vehicles

OBJECTIVE: Replace aging fleet vehicles that are phased out of service with fuel efficient, zero-emission or low-emission vehicles

OBJECTIVE: Develop and promote programs that encourage public transit use as an eco-friendly alternative to private vehicles

GOAL 5: INCREASE REVENUE STREAMS TO CONTINUE TO PROVIDE EFFICIENT AND RELIABLE SERVICE

OBJECTIVE: Identify funding and partnerships to support service and create a plan to obtain that funding to support continuation of fare-free service

OBJECTIVE: Monitor and evaluate the impact of fare-free transit on ridership, community well-being, and operational costs

GOAL 6: MAINTAIN ASSETS IN A STATE-OF-GOOD REPAIR

OBJECTIVE: Prioritize the repair and replacement of critical infrastructure components to prevent service disruptions

OBJECTIVE: Regularly evaluate, maintain, and upgrade transit facilities, including stations, transfer facilities, and administrative buildings, to ensure they are safe, clean, and functional

OBJECTIVE: Improve and upgrade outdated technologies such as signal pre-emption, automated passenger counting, and communication systems to ensure reliable real-time and reporting information for passengers, staff, and partners

OBJECTIVE: Develop and maintain a comprehensive asset management database to track the condition and maintenance history of all transit assets

GOAL 7: ENSURE ATHENS-CLARKE COUNTY TRANSIT SYSTEM SAFETY AND SECURITY

OBJECTIVE: Regularly inspect and maintain safety equipment including surveillance systems and fire suppression systems on vehicles and at stations

OBJECTIVE: Provide ongoing training for staff on safety protocols and emergency response procedures

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5 NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The Needs Assessment is conducted as part of the Transit Development Plan process in order to identify key findings that will be considered and incorporated throughout the study. The needs identified through this analysis will guide the outcome of the scenario development task. These key findings summarize the results of the operational assessment completed in the Existing Conditions analysis, highlighting major demographic and economic trends in the study area. Major themes and inputs identified during the Stakeholder and Public Engagement process are also incorporated in this needs assessment.

Figure 7: Objectives of the Needs Assessment from the GDOT TDP Guidebook

5.1 EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Existing Conditions assessment analyzed the population, demographic, and economic state of Athens-Clarke County in order to establish an understanding of the study area at the time of the report publication. Insights into historical trends in Athens-Clarke County help to predict future trends and needs placed on the transit system that this report will seek to address in the Alternatives and Recommendations Analysis. There are three major elements of the existing conditions analysis that inform the needs

The Demographic Analysis examines population trends within Athens-Clarke County, such as race and ethnicity, and factors related to employment, such as income and travel for work.

Land Use Trends focus on the existing and future land use within Athens-Clarke County, including any large destinations and community assets, and large future developments.

The Transportation Trends analysis evaluates the characteristics of the transportation system in Athens-Clarke County that are important to consider in combination with transit in the County.

5.2 DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

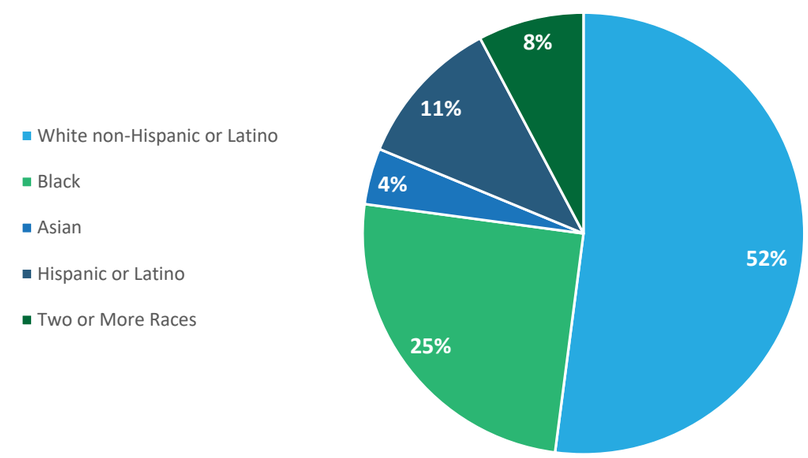
Population and sociodemographic data provide a glimpse into residential patterns among certain populations of people by their sociodemographic characteristics such as race, gender, income or age. This analysis also helps to identify major travel routes taken by employees to work destinations, such as hospitals, schools, warehouses, or other major employers in the area. The identification of these travel patterns assist in assessing the current and potential demand for transit services and/or areas that could be better served by transit.

5.2.1 POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

According to the 2020 Decennial Census, Athens-Clarke County is primarily white and non-Hispanic. Compared to the State of Georgia as a whole, the study area has a smaller proportion of Black residents (State of Georgia, 31%), a similar proportion of Asian residents (4%), a similar population of Hispanic and Latino residents (17%) and a higher proportion of residents of two or more races (7%) or some other race (6%).

English is spoken by 84.7% of the population; 15.3% of the population speaks a language other than English, with 9.6% of residents who primarily speak Spanish at home. The median household income ranges between $48,800 and $58,751, which is approximately 29% less than the State of Georgia median household income. Accordingly, approximately 25% of the population of Athens-Clarke County lives within the federal definition of poverty.

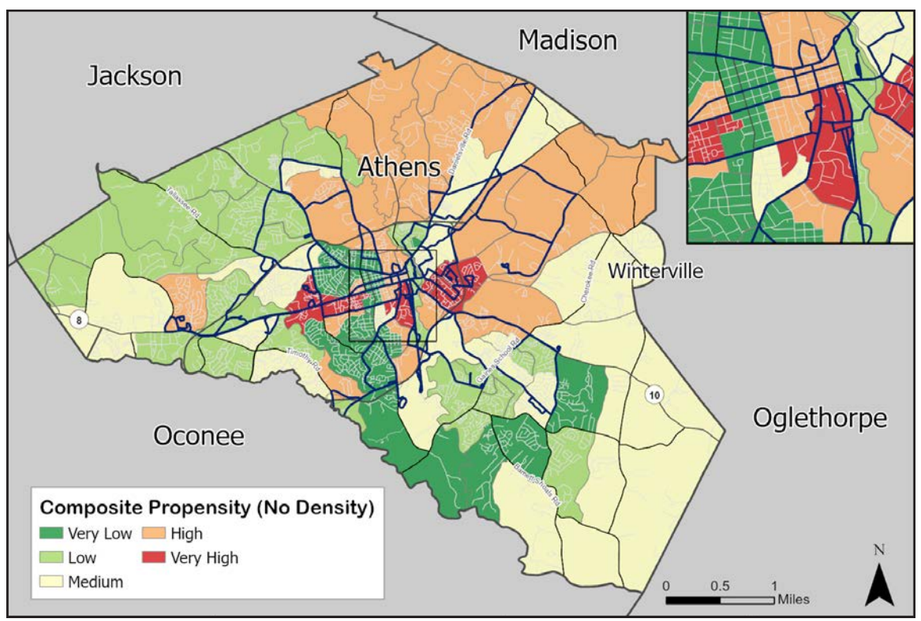
Figure 8: Racial Composition, Athens-Clarke County (Census 2020)



5.3 TRANSIT PROPENSITY

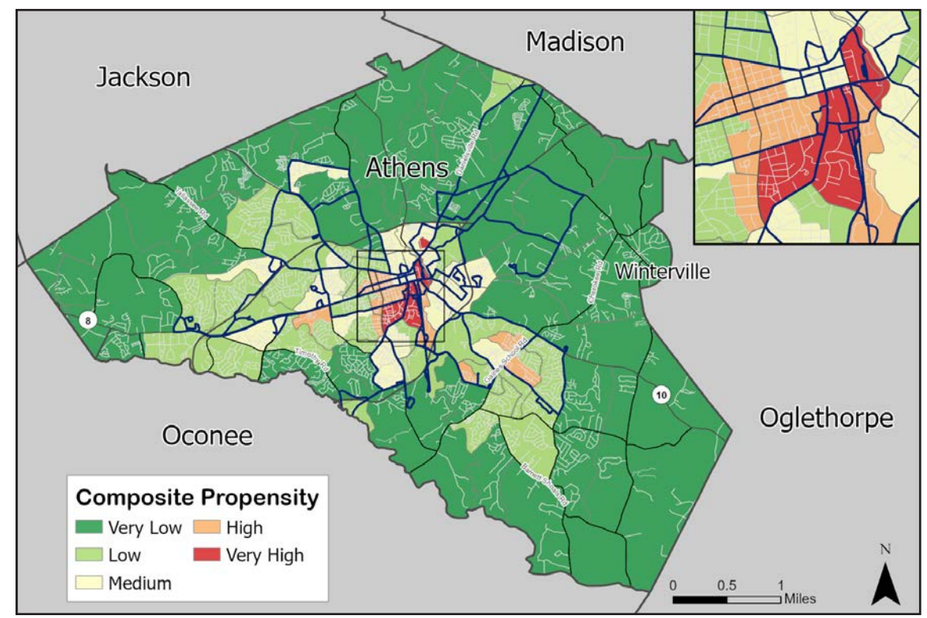
Combined with the demographic analysis, the physical location of certain minority populations can be tied to the likelihood of using transit or determining transit propensity. This transit propensity analysis is used to predict the need for transit service among given populations in the future. Transit propensity calculations include racial minority populations, women, people over the age of 65, low income populations, limited English speaking populations and Households without access to a personal vehicle. The map below shows the composite transit propensity for those populations described without population density included as a weighting factor. Population specific maps for each of the transit propensity groups can be found in the Needs Assessment Technical Memo.

Figure 9: Map of Composite Transit Propensity (without density)



The composite propensity map highlights the origin location of trips for people in the county who are likely to ride transit. As shown on the map, there is a greater proportion of potential transit riders in the northern part of the county, continuing down along the southeastern edge bordering Oglethorpe County.

Figure 10: Map of Composite Transit Propensity (with density)



By comparison, the map above analyzes the composite propensity of all demographic factors along with population density, which has the most significant effect on the total transit propensity of an area. When density is included, the resulting map demonstrates the greatest transit propensity in the downtown and adjacent areas including some of the historic neighborhoods surrounding downtown, and within commercial nodes west and southeast of the downtown core.

5.4 LAND USE

Discussion about the effect of population density on transit propensity highlights the relationship between land use and transportation. This relationship is a well documented balance of each to achieve optimal connectivity and mobility for the residents and visitors of a place.

5.4.1 TRANSIT SUPPORTIVE DENSITY

Rapid population growth in communities across the United States coupled with federal housing policy and incentives increasingly saw large tracts of land on the outskirts of existing cities developed into single family neighborhoods that required new roadways and in turn the use of the personal vehicle to access them. Cities that developed in this fashion struggled to maintain access for residents who did not own a car, while on the other hand, cities developed with a variety of uses closer together and in greater densities were able to maintain connectivity for a wider variety of modes and a nexus between this multimodal connectivity and patterns of land use could be drawn. Accordingly, transit ridership is more sustainable in more dense places with diverse land uses. As there are many modalities of transit ranging from light rail to on-demand services such as dial-a-ride, there exists a spectrum between density and transit service, as demonstrated in the graphic below.

Figure 11: Graphic of Transit Supportive Densities and Transit Type

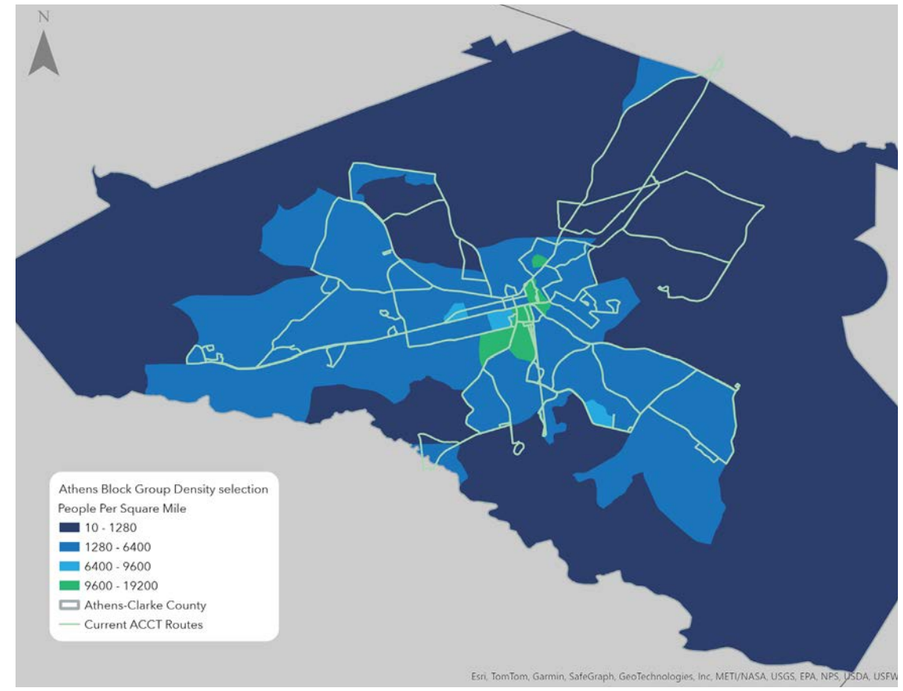
DENSITY

	Rural	Low Density Suburban	Suburban Mixed-use	Neighborhood Mixed-use	Urban Mixed-use	Downtown
Residents Per Acre	<2	2-10	10-15	15-30	30-45	>45
Jobs Per Acre	<2	2-5	5-10	10-15	15-25	>25
Appropriate Transit Types	Rideshare On demand	Rideshare On demand	Local Bus On demand	Local Bus	BRT Rapid Bus Local Bus	BRT Rapid Bus Local Bus Rail
Frequency of Service	On demand	Up to 60 minutes or on demand	30-60 minutes	15-30 minutes	10-15 minutes	10 minutes or better

FREQUENCY

This graphic describes both the residential and employment densities of a place, as well as the type of place where these densities are likely to be found, from downtowns and high density corridors to rural areas. The chart then describes the appropriate types of transit and their relative frequencies that would be appropriate at each of the place types and densities.

Figure 12: Map of Transit Supportive Densities in Athens-Clarke County by Blockgroup



The transit supportive densities typology was applied to Athens-Clarke County on the map above in order to identify the appropriate transit types and frequency of service that should be offered in the County. Residential densities from the United States Census were mapped to Block Groups in the County, which were then displayed according to the "Residents Per Acre" in the chart above.

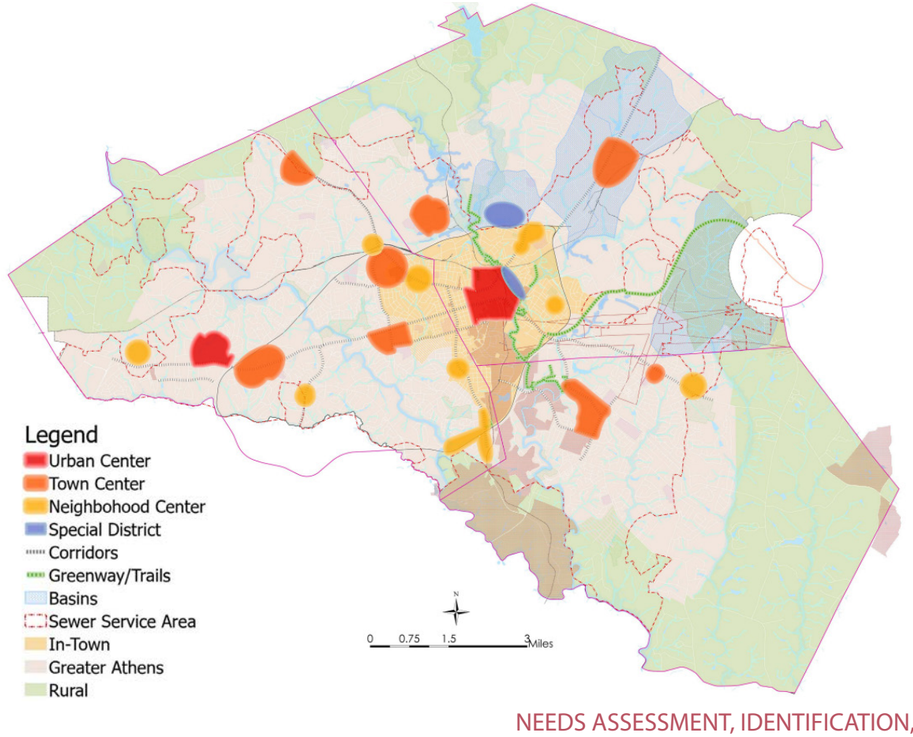
From this application, the majority of land acreage in the county can be categorized under the "Rural" designation of fewer than two residents per acre, as displayed in the dark blue color. This density, along with the "Low Density Suburban" category are best suited for on-demand or rideshare transit at either 60-minute or on-demand frequencies. Closer to the center of the County in the County's historic neighborhoods and the downtown area, densities get slightly higher, reaching the "Neighborhood and Suburban Mixed Use" designation. Local bus with headways of about 15-30 minutes are appropriate for areas of these densities and will be considered when developing recommendations.

5.4.2 FUTURE LAND USE AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The most recent Athens-Clarke County Comprehensive Plan identifies nine categories of character areas for future development. The categories include Downtown, Employment, General Business, Government, Main Street Business, Mixed Density Residential, Traditional Neighborhood, Single Family Residential, and Rural. Areas where commercial use is planned include Downtown, Main Street Business, and General Business. These commercial areas follow the major commercial corridors including Lexington Highway, Atlanta Highway/Broad Street, Prince Avenue, and Oak/Oconee Street. These corridors are also some of the most important corridors for transit because of their ability to provide connections to many destinations including employment, health facilities, retail and employment.

In addition to the future land use identification, five "Guiding Principles" , shown on the adjacent page, for development were identified from the comprehensive planning outreach efforts. These five principles outline a vision for growth that is compact and manages land use to locate people near their destinations, and connecting centers of activity through major corridors at key locations in the city. The vision for Land Use presented in the Future Growth Concept Map has implications for transit in that it aligns closely with transit-supportive Land Use principles of increased density along key corridors that connect a mix of uses condensed in intentional activity centers.

Figure 13: ACC Gov Comprehensive Plan Future Growth Concept Map



Athens-Clarke County Unified Government Comprehensive Plan Growth Concept Map Guiding Principles:

1. Redevelop corridors and nodes that are ripe for transformation

2. Minimize sewer expansion; Grow capacity within the existing network

3. Reduce Travel Distances:
- Localize trips by adding commercial, institutional and amenity uses
- Locate people nearer to destinations (i.e. residences near jobs and activity centers)
- Add street connections to distribute traffic evenly across the network

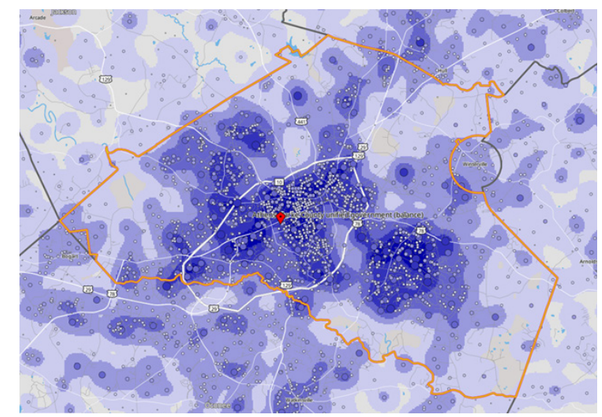
4. Plan for incremental growth in all neighborhoods that are served by the current sewer network

5. Support environmentally and fiscally sustainable growth

5.5 EMPLOYMENT

The largest sector of employment is Athens-Clarke County is the Educational Services sector, with the Healthcare and Social Assistance sector as the second highest employment sector. Accommodation and Food Services, Retail Trade, and Manufacturing are the next highest employment sectors. The University of Georgia is the largest employer, followed by Piedmont Athens Regional Hospital, Clarke County School District and St. Mary's Healthcare System. The Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County and the Caterpillar Athens Plant are also on the list of largest employers.

Figure 14: Heat Map of Employment Locations in Athens-Clarke County

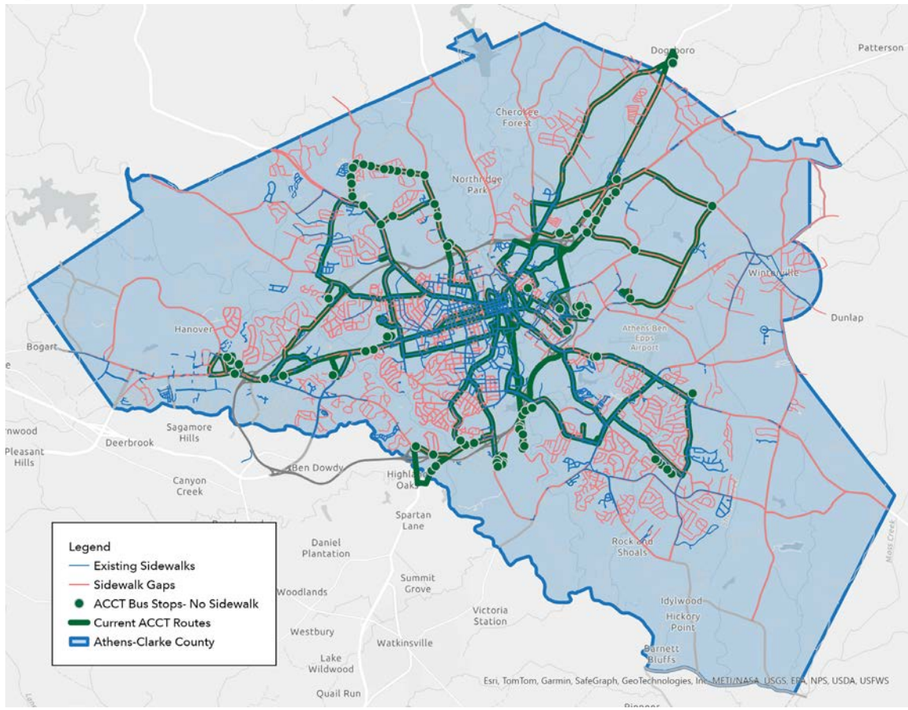


As displayed in the map above, jobs in Athens-Clarke County are relatively evenly distributed throughout the county, with higher concentrations in the downtown and Eastside areas. Over 44% of workers who work in Athens travel less than 10 miles to work, with 20% traveling between 10 and 24 miles. This high proportion of trips make within a relatively short distance provides an opportunity for regional transit to serve the majority of workers.

Approximately 90,000 daily commuter trips were made around Athens-Clarke County in 2021. Of those trips, 27% were residents of Athens-Clarke County leaving the county for work; 50% were workers traveling into Athens-Clarke County from outside of the county; and 23% were workers who live and work within Athens-Clarke County.

5.6 TRANSPORTATION CHARACTERISTICS

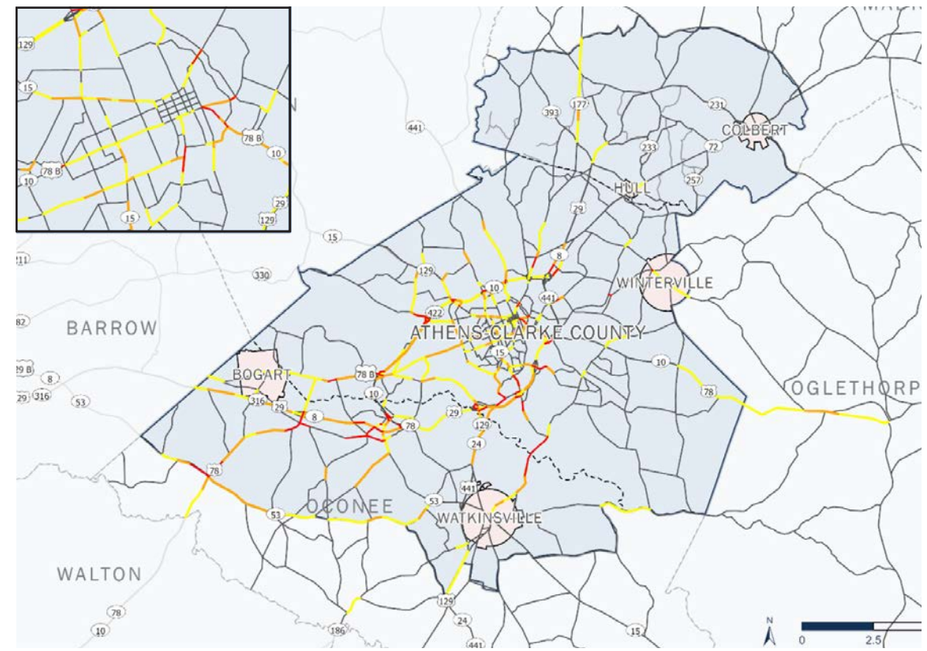
Figure 15: Sidewalk and Bus Stop Locations



Transit planning must consider the range of mobility options and choices residents make in their daily lives. This consideration includes the analysis of existing and future travel trends, including travel time reliability, mode split, and first and last mile access to transit. The majority of residents (74%) have access to two or more vehicles. On the other hand, in 26% of households no personal vehicle or only one vehicle is available, which may contribute to the need for transit access. Further, in Athens-Clarke County, 5% of the population currently relies on some mode other than a vehicle to get to work.

The significant roadway corridors that carry the greatest number of users are primarily classified as freeways and principal arterials. These roadways, such as SR 10 Loop and other major US highways provide the highest capacity and higher speeds. Level of Service (LOS), measures the performance of a roadway and is rated A (free-flow conditions) through F (gridlock). The roadway system primarily functions at LOS D and LOS E, with some roadway segments operating at LOS F. LOS is an important measure to identify

Figure 16: Roadway Level of Service (LOS)



corridors where transit investment may help congestion. The bicycle and pedestrian networks are crucial in providing connectivity and first- and last- mile connections to the transit system. Convenient first and last mile facility connections leads to the overall success of transit and The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires transit systems to be accessible to people with disabilities. This includes boarding areas that are connected by ADA compliant sidewalks or pedestrian routes. Currently there are 498 bus stops and 80% of those stops are adjacent to a sidewalk.

5.7 NEEDS

Based on the analysis, the following needs were identified:

Table 3: Identified Transit Needs

NEEDS	STRATEGIES
PEOPLE BASED	> Connect people to jobs and essential services > Serve the most vulnerable users of the transportation system
LAND USE BASED	> Encourage transit supportive land use on key corridors to sustain increased transit service
TRANSPORTATION BASED	> Provide faster transit service on key corridors throughout the County > Explore opportunities for additional modes of service, such as micromobility to balance demand and mobility
PARTNERSHIPS	Develop Strategic Partnerships with: > UGA Transit to eliminate service redundancies, support health campus expansion, and facilitate student mobility > Neighboring municipalities to explore service area expansion and regional transit service > Departments within ACC Gov to support the implementation of other need-based strategies such as multimodal connectivity and transit supportive land use > Other transportation departments and disciplines to create multimodal connectivity between transit and other transportation modes
FINANCIAL	> Connect people to jobs and essential services > Serve the most vulnerable users of the transportation system

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6 ALTERNATIVES AND STRATEGIES

Proposed solutions are presented here through a system and services strategy framework focused on developing and implementing strategies to deliver effective transit service by identifying transit need, strategies to address that need, and funding options to implement service.

A key goal of the alternatives and strategies is to improve upon the existing service model to better cater to the needs of the user groups identified earlier in the plan. This requires tailoring ACC Transit services to meet the specific mobility needs of the user groups discussed in the Existing Conditions, Public Engagement, Goals and Objectives, and Needs Identification sections.

These strategies call for utilizing a number of tools to optimize transit services to reduce headways, provide service to new areas, and introducing microtransit zone service to cater to the needs of the less dense urban and rural portions of the county. The strategies also address existing regional employment-driven demand by proposing shuttle and commuter express services designed to expand economic opportunity by providing connections to employers.

6.1 STRATEGY TYPES

There are three categories of recommendations made in this plan, described below:

1. The first category makes recommendations for Planning, Programming and Administrative Strategies. This strategy type recommends planning and programs that should be undertaken by ACC Transit. Administrative upgrades are included to improve overall operations and expertise within the agency as a whole.

2. Second, Capital Strategies address the capital assets such as buildings, buses and other service vehicles, maintenance centers and other non-financial assets that are critical to providing transit service.

3. Finally, Operational Strategies address modes, routes, timing, stop and station placement and all characteristics relating to service operations by Athens-Clarke County Transit.

Each of these strategy types as well as the specific recommendations for ACC Transit will be explained in further detail on the following pages.

6.2 PLANNING, PROGRAMMING, AND ADMINISTRATIVE STRATEGIES

The first type of recommendation presented here addresses plans, programs, and administrative strategies. These are the necessary backbone of the successful future implementation of any service optimization or changes. Plans and programs can provide crucial support for the policies and initiatives that ACC Transit wishes to undertake, and administrative strategies set up the implementation framework for plans and policies and the capital and operations strategies that put them into action.

Not only are these strategies a crucial first step in setting up and maintaining a successful system, the Federal Government requires many of the plans and studies recommended in this document in order to be eligible for funding assistance from the Federal Transit Administration and others. The table below shows recommended planning strategies. It includes a timeline for each strategy of short- (5 years), mid- (10 years) or long-term (20 years).

6.2.1 PLANNING SCENARIOS

Table 4: Planning Strategies

Project No.	Planning Horizon	Improvement Name	Description
P1	Short Term	Bus Route and Network Redesign	Conduct a bus network redesign to optimize the current resources of ACC Transit.
P2	Short Term	Fare Policy Study	Conduct a fare policy study and funding recommendations in order to create a financially sound system.
P3	Short Term	Zero Emission Vehicles Fleet Transition Plan	Conduct a Zero Emission Vehicles Fleet Transition Plan to identify potential propulsion systems and implementation .of supporting infrastructure including a cost/ benefit analysis. This plan will be conducted in tandem with Mobility Hub developments.
P4	Short Term	UGA/ACCT Efficiency Study	Conduct the UGA/ACCT Efficiency Study in order to reduce and/ or eliminate duplicate service and optimize service for both systems.

Project No.	Planning Horizon	Improvement Name	Description
P5	Short Term	First- and Last-Mile Infrastructure Program	Partner with ACC Gov Transportation and Public Works Department to participate in the Bike and Pedestrian Improvement Program and Vision Zero Implementation as Identified in the 2023-2028 Comprehensive Community Work Program.
P6	Short Term	Transit Oriented Development Program	Develop a Transit Oriented Development Plan jointly with the ACC Gov Office of Planning to encourage transit supportive densities along key corridors identified in the Comprehensive Plan and the TDP.
P7	Mid- Term	Regional Connections	Study connections to other transit efforts in Athens-Clarke County and the surrounding region.
P8	Long Term	Multimodal Corridor Protections Program	Work with the ACC Gov office of Downtown Transportation Improvement, Lexington Highway Corridor Improvement, Atlanta Highway Corridor Improvement, and Prince Avenue Corridor Improvement projects as identified in the 2023-2028 Comprehensive Plan Community Work Program to preserve infrastructure for future transit expansion Opportunities.

6.2.2 PROGRAMMING STRATEGIES

The programs outlined here include initiatives and projects that will ensure that transit service in Athens-Clarke County continues to be an efficient and flexible system with the ability to respond to changing dynamics in the community.

Table 5: Programming Strategies

Project No.	Planning Horizon	Improvement Name	Description
P9	Short Term	Strategic Grant Application Program	Develop a Strategic Grant Application Program using the list of discretionary and formula grants provided in the TDP financial strategies. Identify local matching funds to improve performance of competitive grant applications.
P10	Short Term	Innovative Service Delivery Program	Develop a program to plan, deliver, and manage new service types recommended in the operations strategies. Identify technologies and partnerships necessary to deliver these services.

Project No.	Planning Horizon	Improvement Name	Description
P11	Short Term	Strategic Collaboration Program	Develop a program to identify and participate in ongoing plans and studies conducted by peer agencies and departments.
P12	Short Term	Technology Program	Develop a program to monitor, analyze and strategically implement new technologies as they are developed.
P13	Short Term	Intergovernmental Agreement Service Delivery Program	Prepare and negotiate intergovernmental agreements for services offered in adjacent municipalities.

6.2.3 ADMINISTRATIVE STRATEGIES

The following administrative changes are recommended for ACC Transit:

Table 6: Administrative Strategies

Project No.	Planning Horizon	Improvement Name	Description
P14	Short Term	NTD Reporting	Complete annual NTD reporting requirement.
P15	Short Term	Driver Safety and De-escalation Training	Conduct conflict de-escalation and safety training for drivers.
P16	Short Term	Driver Contingency Planning Training	Conduct contingency planning training to assist drivers with navigating spontaneous rerouting in response to roadway closures, obstacles, etc.
P17	Short Term	Agency Rebranding	Conduct an agency-wide marketing and branding update to Athens Transit brand and brand materials.
P18	Short Term	Operations Planner	Add an operations planner to ACC Transit staff.
P19	Short Term	Compliance Specialist	Add a compliance specialist to Athens-Clarke County staff.
P20	Short Term	Service Changes Customer Education Campaign	Market and educate customers about service changes as they arise from this plan.

6.3 CAPITAL STRATEGIES

The ACC Transit Development Plan provides a phased set of recommendations that require, in addition to the previous strategies discussed, capital investments. The capital strategies described in this plan fall into two categories, Facilities and Vehicles, that will provide the supporting infrastructure on which the operational strategies rely.

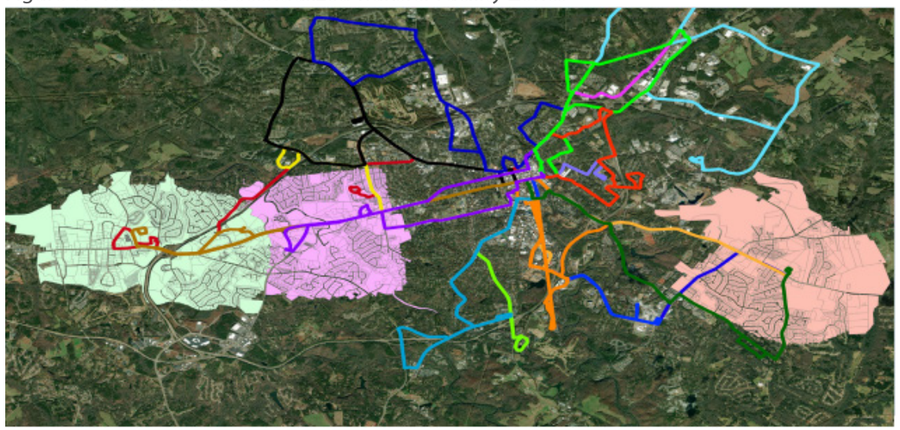
6.3.1 FACILITIES

Two facility types appear in this plan, mobility hubs and a maintenance facility. Both are described in more detail below:

Mobility Hub

A mobility hub is a place where people can connect to multiple modes of transportation to make their trip as safe, efficient and reliable as possible. Mobility Hubs enable access to multiple transportation modes in a central location, including public transit, bike shares, ride shares, and vanpools as well as EV charging stations and park and ride infrastructure. Three locations were identified for future mobility hubs as part of the ACC Transit Decentralized Tranfer Facilities Study completed in 2022. Three potential zones have been identified. Each area has specific locations that would be advantageous for transit riders to reduce travel times between different transit routes. These three zones are shown in the map below.

Figure 17: ACC Transit Decentralized Transfer Facility Zones



These transit facilities will allow for driver reprieve, provide protection from weather and a safe waiting area for passengers. Mobility hubs also offer the opportunity to transfer to other regional services such as Greyhound bus or other future regional connections.

Operations and Maintenance Facility

The new planned Operations and Maintenance Facility is needed to provide space for the operation and maintenance of ACC Transit Vehicles. A new facility would offer the opportunity to implement zero emissions vehicle charging infrastructure and a training facility for new and seasoned drivers.

6.3.2 VEHICLES

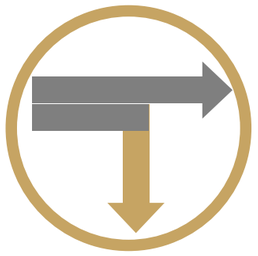
Vehicle capital investments in the plan fall into three categories:

> Maintain a State of Good Repair for current rolling stock
> Procure expansion buses, vans and support fleet vehicles
> Transition existing fleet to zero emissions alternative

Currently, ACC Transit operates a fleet of 32 buses, 8 vans or cutaway buses, and 14 support vehicles. As explained in the next section, any expansion of services or provision of new modes of transportation will require the procurement of additional vehicles to supplement the existing fleet and to provide new service. As both the existing vehicles and new vehicles age and accrue mileage, they will be replaced with new zero emissions vehicles on a rolling basis throughout the planning time frame. The FTA required Transit Asset Management (TAM) Plan sets replacement requirements and defines the replacement schedule for vehicles.

6.4 OPERATIONAL STRATEGIES

Transit System and Operations Strategies presented in this chapter fall within three service improvement categories:



ROUTE ALIGNMENT

- Existing Alignment
- High Coverage
- High Frequency

FREQUENCY

- 30 Minute Headways
- 60 minute Headways

SERVICE TYPES

- Microtransit
- Caterpillar Shuttle
- Commuter Express

6.4.1 ROUTE ALIGNMENT

Route Alignment describes the particular course a bus takes along the road network during service. Adjustments to route alignment can include adjustments to individual bus routes, or could add or remove a route in order to change the geography that the overall system covers.

Changes to an individual route might include lengthening the route in order to provide transit service to new areas or shortening a route, which could allow for faster service with the same capital investment into vehicles. Route alignment adjustments can also be implemented in order to provide more direct travel paths, optimize service times, reduce round trip headways, or accommodate new destinations.

This study compares three different route alignment scenarios. The first uses the existing alignment of the bus routes in the Athens-Clarke County system in order to provide a backdrop against which to compare potential changes. The second scenario, called the "High Coverage" scenario in the graphic above, maintains most of the geographic coverage of the current system but implements certain route optimizations to eliminate large looped routes in low-density areas, provide service to new developments and to coordinate with other transit providers like UGA Transit to reduce service overlap.

6.4.2 FREQUENCY

Frequency refers to how often a bus comes to a particular stop. This is sometimes also called the "headway" on a route. For the purposes of this study, two headways were used, 60 minutes and 30 minutes. Athens-Clarke County transit currently operates service that runs an average of approximately 60-minute headways and this frequency was included as it was determined appropriate per the discussion of transit supportive land use and density in the Needs Analysis.

Reduction of headways was identified as a priority by all groups that were involved in the Public Engagement stage. Thirty-minute service was also identified as an appropriate headway for local bus in certain land use and population densities identified in the Needs Analysis and therefore was included.

6.4.3 NEW SERVICE MODES

The third and final adjustment made to operations that was analyzed is the addition of three different service types to those currently operated by ACC Transit. In addition to fixed route bus and the accompanying on-demand paratransit service, a new microtransit service offers the opportunity to provide transit service coverage to new areas while remaining appropriate for the areas of the County with lower population and employment densities. The service type strategies also address existing regional employment-driven demand by proposing shuttle and commuter express services designed to expand economic opportunity by providing connections to employers.

WHAT IS MICROTRANSIT?

Microtransit is technology-enabled shared transportation that combines traditional fixed route service and ride hailing technology. This flexible transit service uses a mobile app to schedule trips between a requested pick up and drop off location. This service operates similarly to ride-hailing services like Uber, with a few differences. Public microtransit rides are shared with other passengers and service can be limited to predetermined zones and certain qualifying destinations outside of the zone.

6.4.4 FIXED ROUTE BUS SCENARIOS

There are three scenarios presented in this plan for fixed route bus service. Each scenario combines the route alignments from Page 50 with both the 30-minute and the 60-minute frequencies. As mentioned in the previous section, the first scenario assumes the current alignment of buses in the Athens-Clarke County system, and is called the "Existing Alignment Scenario". This alignment in combination with 60-minute headways is included as a control or a baseline scenario presented in comparison to the two additional scenarios. There were no changes made to current routes, stops, or number of buses or drivers required to run the route.

The second scenario is called the "High Coverage Alignment" Scenario and the third scenarios is called the "High Frequency Alignment" Scenario. These two scenarios suggest changes to routes and schedules in order to achieve the goals and objectives established in the plan. The second scenario makes select changes to the current routes in order to have a system that maintains high coverage. This scenario is similar to the current system that also provides coverage to a large geographic area with a few key differences in routes in order to respond to changes in development in Athens.

Finally, the third scenario presents the opportunity to have high-frequency service, especially along major corridors and during peak times in morning and evening commute hours. This is called the "High Frequency" scenario.

It is important to note that while these scenarios require an alignment to be specified in order to predict route statistics and cost, the most important takeaways are the concepts being demonstrated for the overall system, rather than any individual alignment. Alignments for individual routes may ultimately vary from what is presented here due to the introduction of new data or limitations during the implementation phase.

Table 7: Proposed Fixed Route Bus Scenario Operating Statistics

SCENARIO A

Existing Alignment		
Routes	18	
Route Miles	213.07	
Population	66,400	
Jobs	44,600	
Frequency	60 minutes	30 minutes
Vehicles	27	44
Vehicles + 20% Spare	33	52
Total Annual Trips	147,575	282,505

SCENARIO B

High Coverage Alignment		
Routes	18	
Route Miles	189.12	
Population	60,100	
Jobs	40,300	
Frequency	60 minutes	30 minutes
Vehicles	23	39
Vehicles + 20% Spare	28	47
Total Annual Trips	330,080	615,420

SCENARIO C

High Frequency Alignment		
Routes	19	
Route Miles	178.02	
Population	53,500	
Jobs	36,000	
Frequency	60 minutes	30 minutes
Vehicles	19	34
Vehicles + 20% Spare	23	41
Total Annual Trips	341,560	670,800

Figure 18: Proposed Alignments for Fixed Route Bus Scenario A- Existing Alignment

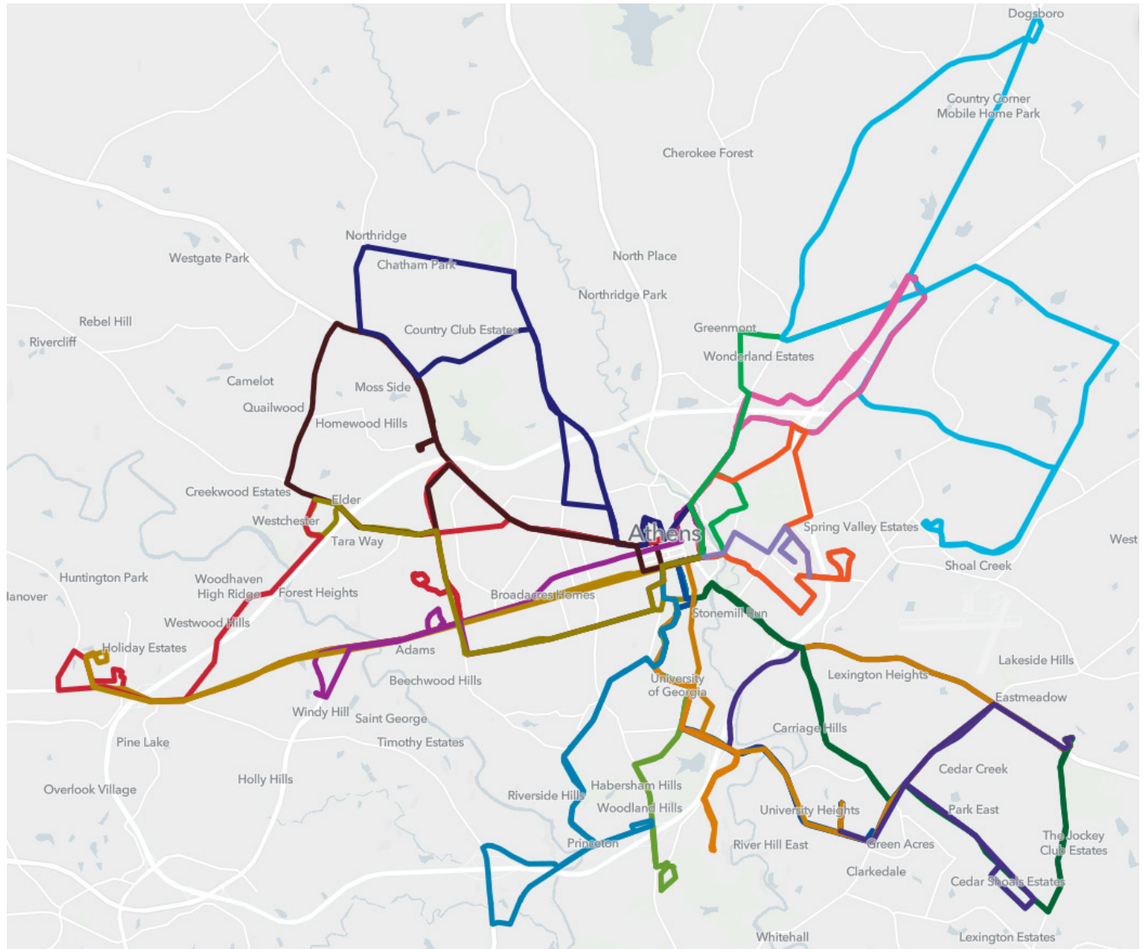
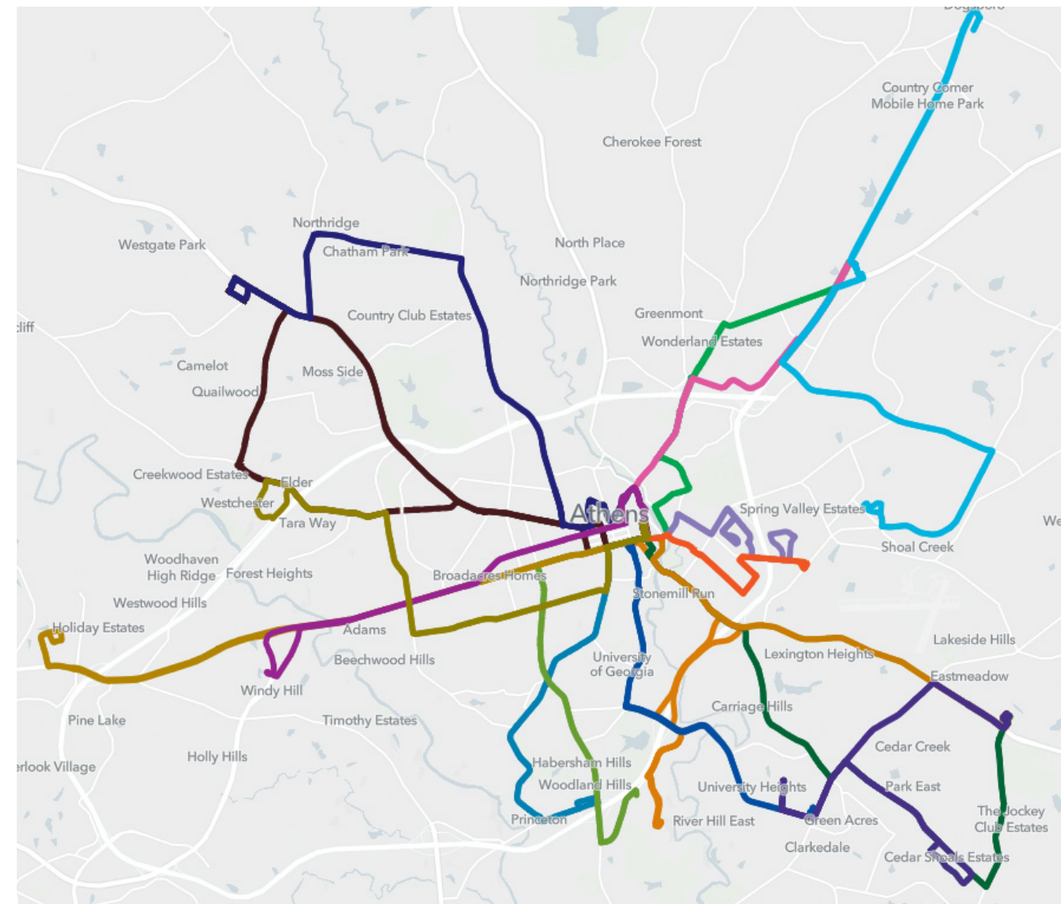


Figure 13 depicts the TDP Service Scenario A including alignments of existing routes. These routes have not been changed from the existing alignment.

- A- Existing- 1 North Ave
- A- Existing- 2 East Athens / Nellie B
- A- Existing- 3 East Athens Northside
- A- Existing- 5 Beechwood / Baxter
- A- Existing- 6 Hancock / Baxter
- A- Existing- 7 Prince Ave
- A- Existing- 8 Barber / Vincent
- A- Existing- 9 Macon Hwy / 5 Points
- A- Existing- 12 Riverbend
- A- Existing- 14 Lumpkin / S Milledge
- A- Existing- 20 Georgia Square Mall
- A- Existing- 21 West Athens
- A- Existing- 22 East Side Circulator
- A- Existing- 24 Athens Tech
- A- Existing- 25 Lexington
- A- Existing- 26 College Station
- A- Existing- 27 Barnett Shoals
- A- Existing- 30 North Side Circulator

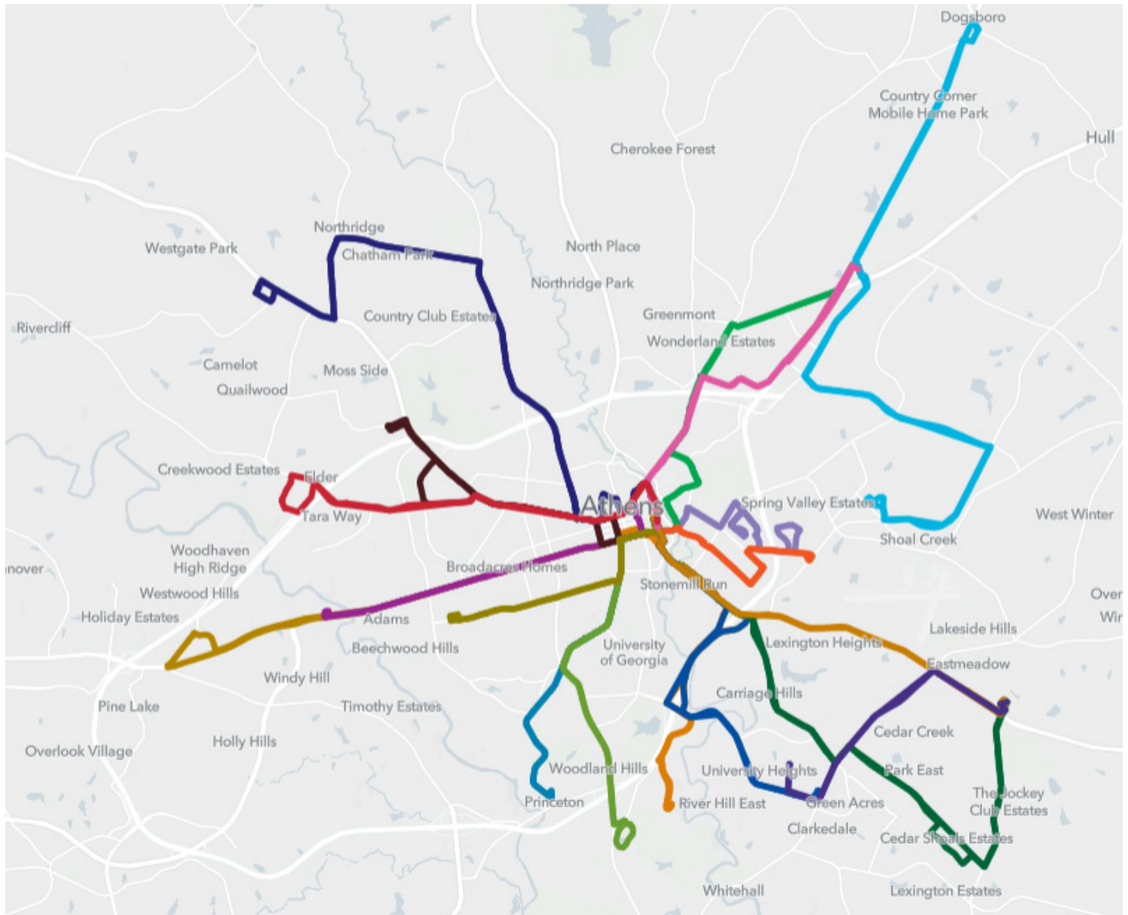
Figure 19: Proposed Alignments for Fixed Route Bus Scenario B- High Coverage Alignment



- B- Coverage- 1 North Ave
- B- Coverage- 2 East Athens
- B- Coverage- 3 East Athens North
- B- Coverage- 5 Beechwood / Baxter
- B- Coverage- 6 Hancock/Baxter
- B- Coverage- 7 Prince Ave
- B- Coverage- 7b Prince / Oglethorpe
- B- Coverage- 8 Barber / Vincent
- B- Coverage- 9 Macon Hwy / 5 Pts.
- B- Coverage- 12 Riverbend
- B- Coverage- 14 Lumpkin / S Mill.
- B- Coverage- 20 GA Square Mall
- B- Coverage- 22 East Side Circulator
- B- Coverage- 24 Athens Tech
- B- Coverage- 25 Lexington
- B- Coverage- 26 College Station
- B- Coverage- 27 Barnett Shoals
- B- Coverage- 30 North Side Circ.

Figure 14 depicts the TDP Service Scenario B including alignments of the "High Coverage" scenario. Many routes in this scenario have been edited to remove loops and reduce service redundancy.

Figure 20: Proposed Alignments for Fixed Route Bus Scenario C- High Frequency Alignment



- C- Frequency- 1 North Ave
- C- Frequency- 2 East Athens
- C- Frequency- 3 East Athens North
- C- Frequency- 5 Beechwood / Baxter
- C- Frequency- 6 Hancock / Baxter
- C- Frequency- 7 Prince Ave
- C- Frequency- 7b Prince Ave
- C- Frequency- 8 Barber / Vincent
- C- Frequency- 9 Macon Hwy / 5 Pts.
- C- Frequency- 12 Riverbend
- C- Frequency- 14 Lumpkin / S Mill.
- C- Frequency- 20 GA Square Mall
- C- Frequency- 21 West Athens
- C- Frequency- 22 East Side Circ.
- C- Frequency- 24 Athens Tech
- C- Frequency- 25 Lexington
- C- Frequency- 26 College Station
- C- Frequency- 27 Barnett Shoals
- C- Frequency- 30 North Side Circ.

Figure 15 depicts the TDP Service Scenario C including alignments of the "High Frequency" Scenario. Many routes in this scenario have been edited to remove loops and reduce service redundancy.

6.4.5 MICROTRANSIT SCENARIOS

Microtransit is a demand-responsive system that can provide flexible routes and rides on-demand. It can be especially useful in suburban or rural contexts where people and destinations are further apart. Microtransit can reach more vulnerable riders due to its flexibility, and it reduces inequality to access by providing transportation options to areas of the county that have less population and employment density.

The microtransit scenarios presented here are proposed in the areas with less density identified in the Needs Assessment. These areas exist in an outer ring on the edge of the county surrounding the central downtown. The scenarios are proposed in phases that will allow for the moderated implementation of a new service type over time. This provides an opportunity to adjust service to the specific context in which they operate in Athens and offers funding phasing opportunities as well. A map showing each of the zones is presented below and more details about each zone are available on the opposite page.

Each of the zones were designed to include points of interest within the zone. Points of interest are destinations that generate high trip volumes and therefore are predicted to be a primary source of microtransit trips within the zone. These are described for each zone on the opposite page. While these Points of Interest appear within a specific zone, settings may be applied that allow riders to access the Points of Interest of another zone while initiating a ride. For example, a rider who lives near Southeast Clarke Park in the Athens Eastside zone may wish to ride to the airport, located in the Athens Northside Zone, and would be able to select this as a destination within the app software in addition to any destination within the Athens Eastside Zone where the trip was started.

Figure 21: Proposed Microtransit Zones

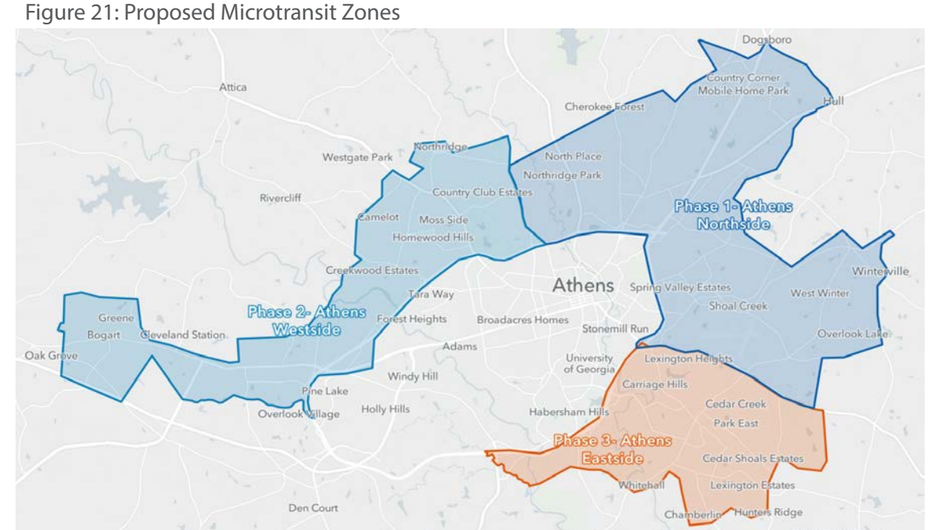


Table 8: Proposed Microtransit Zone Operating Statistics

Phase 1- Athens Northside	
Zones	1
Route Miles	24 sq. mi.
Population	13,200
Jobs	7,600
Frequency	30 minute avg. wait time
Vehicles	2
Vehicles + 20% Spare	3
Estimated Weekly Ridership	231 rides/week

The Phase 1 Microtransit zone covers 24 square miles on the Northeast side of Athens-Clarke County. The zone includes the area that previously piloted on-demand transit and would cover the geographic area that is currently served by Route 30 and portions of routes 1 and 24.

Northside Microtransit Points of Interest:

- Walmart Supercenter
- Athens Technical College
- Athens-Ben Epps Airport
- Athens VA Clinic
- Oconee Street Park & Ride
- Department of Motor Vehicles

Phase 2- Athens Westside	
Zones	2
Route Miles	38.9 sq. mi.
Population	30,600
Jobs	14,000
Frequency	30 minute avg. wait time
Vehicles	5
Vehicles + 20% Spare	6
Estimated Weekly Ridership	600 rides/week

Phase 2 of the microtransit portion of the plan would cover almost 15 square miles on the north and west sides of the county. The zone contains access to the site of the new mobility center at Georgia Square Mall and includes connections with bus routes 7, 8, 20, and 21.

Westside Microtransit Points of Interest:

- Publix Supermarket at Oak Grove (Jefferson Rd.)
- Georgia Square Mall
- Caterpillar Plant
- Advantage Behavioral Health

Phase 3- Athens Eastside	
Zones	3
Route Miles	50 sq. mi.
Population	52,300
Jobs	18,000
Frequency	30 minute avg. wait time
Vehicles	7
Vehicles + 20% Spare	9
Estimated Weekly Ridership	926 rides/week

The final microtransit phase covers about 11 square miles on Athens' eastside. This zone is adjacent to and would have access to points of interest within the Northside zone. Current bus routes 9, 12, 14, 22 and 27 all enter this zone.

Eastside Microtransit Points of Interest:

- UGA Park & Ride on Research Dr.
- Eastside Kroger
- Southeast Clarke Park

6.4.6 BOGART EMPLOYEE SHUTTLE

Additional modes can also introduce service to a destination in a way that is more targeted and tailored to the specific needs of a particular group. The Bogart Employee shuttle presented in this scenario provides shuttle service to transport employees to the Caterpillar Plant in Bogart, Georgia as well as other partnering employers in Bogart. It would operate from Athens-Clarke County Transit Facilities to Bogart.

Two scenarios for the shuttle are presented below. The second option, presented in Figure 23, requires travel to the Multimodal Transit Center in downtown Athens. However, as presented in the capital strategies section, a decentralized mobility hub is planned for the site of the existing Georgia Square Mall. Upon completion of this facility, the shuttle would be able to utilize that location for pickup and transfers for the shuttle service. With trip times at half of the time required to reach the MMTC, shuttle service to the Georgia Square Mall site provides faster service for a reduced cost.

Both scenarios assume the utilization of a single shuttle van that would seat up to 15 passengers. The shuttle to the MMTC operates on a 60-minute headway and is able to provide 4 round trips in the morning and the evening, while the shuttle to the Mall Site affords 30 minute headways and 7 round trips in the morning and 7 round trips in the evening. Timetables for both options are provided on the opposite page for comparison.

Figure 22: Proposed Bogart Employee Shuttle Alignment 1- Georgia Square Mall Mobility Hub

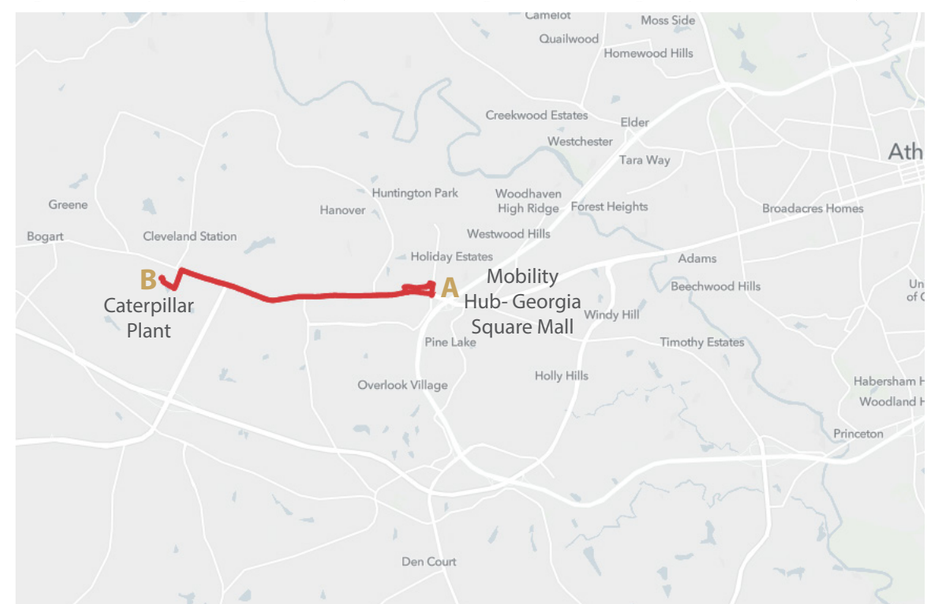


Figure 23: Proposed Bogart Employee Shuttle Alignment 2- Multimodal Transit Center

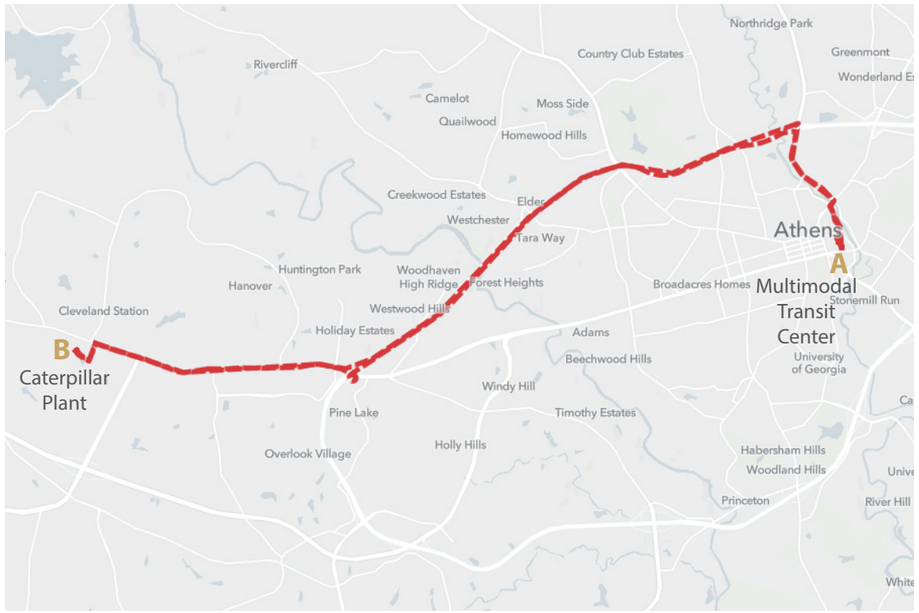


Figure 24: Sample Timetables for Proposed Bogart Employee Shuttle

To Multimodal Transit Center

06:00 – 09:00 · Every 30 min · 7 trips (Outbound)

Days	Pattern	Runtime	13	
M - F	A	13 min	06:00	06:13
M - F	A	13 min	06:30	06:43
M - F	A	13 min	07:00	07:13
M - F	A	13 min	07:30	07:43
M - F	A	13 min	08:00	08:13
M - F	A	13 min	08:30	08:43
M - F	A	13 min	09:00	09:13

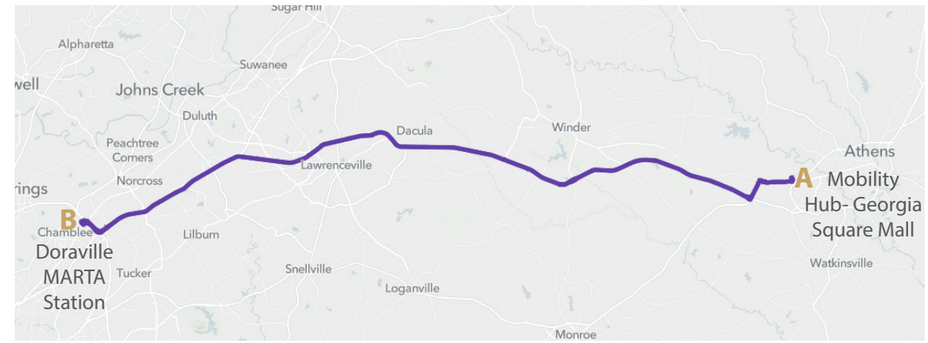
To GA Square Mall

06:00 – 09:00 · Every 60 min · 4 trips (Outbound)

Days	Pattern	Runtime	43	
M - F	B	43 min	06:00	06:43
M - F	B	43 min	07:00	07:43
M - F	B	43 min	08:00	08:43
M - F	B	43 min	09:00	09:43

6.4.7 ATLANTA COMMUTER EXPRESS BUS

Figure 25: Route Alignment for Atlanta Commuter Express Bus



The third and final additional mode included in this analysis is a commuter service between the site of the future Georgia Square Mall Multimodal Transfer Center and the Doraville MARTA Station. The alignment presented picks up and drops off at the GA Square Mall Transit, leveraging the park and ride infrastructure that the mall site facility will include. However, short term routing to the MMTC downtown may be necessary during the construction of the Mall Site Center.

This scenario requires three buses to operate service. The service would provide three round trips during morning service, and four round trips in the afternoon and evening. Sample timetables for this service are shown below.

Figure 26: Sample Timetables for Atlanta Commuter Express Bus

Morning Commute

05:30 – 08:00 · Every 75 min · 8 trips (3 Outbound, 5 Inbound)

Days	Pattern	Runtime	62	
M - F	A	62 min	05:30	06:32
M - F	A	62 min	06:45	07:47
M - F	A	62 min	08:00	09:02

Evening Commute

13:45 – 17:30 · Every 75 min · 10 trips (4 Outbound, 6 Inbound)

Days	Pattern	Runtime	62	
M - F	A	62 min	13:45	14:47
M - F	A	62 min	15:00	16:02
M - F	A	62 min	16:15	17:17
M - F	A	62 min	17:30	18:32

7 FINANCIAL AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The Athens-Clarke County Transit Development Plan recommends a refined combination of the strategies and scenarios that are outlined in the previous chapter. Implementing these recommendations will require coordinated efforts including development of new plans, programs, and policies, expansion of existing partnerships and establishment of new ones, capital procurement, community engagement and education, and operational service changes, to name a few.

In order to set ACC Transit up for successful implementation, the following plan was developed to provide detailed guidance in order to achieve the goals of the plan and improve and expand transit service for the residents and visitors of Athens-Clarke County.

7.1 IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

The implementation Plan includes several components that are necessary in order to advance the ACC Transit Development Plan. These components are outlined below.

Implementation Strategies

Financial Phasing
Partnerships
Procurement & Talent Acquisition

Implementation Schedule

Short-Term: Years 0-5
Mid-Term: Years 6-10
Long Term: Years 11-20

Financial Plan

Detailed Cost Estimates
Revenue Sources
Discretionary Funding Opportunities

7.2 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

The following strategies will position ACC Transit for successful implementation of the Transit Development Plan:

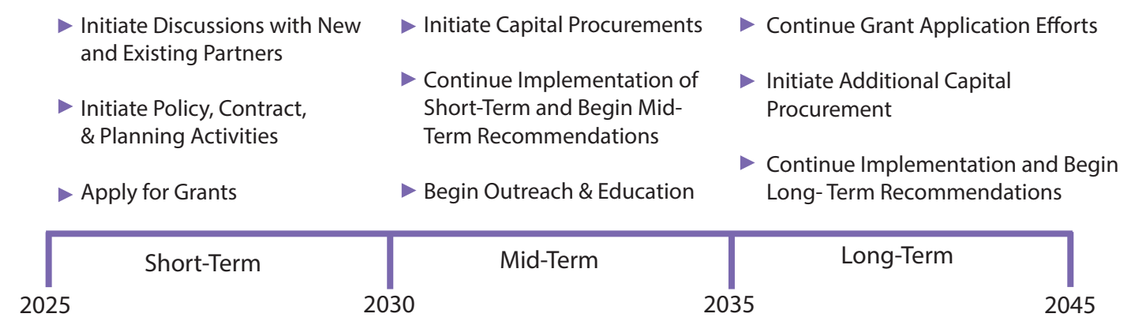
Financial Phasing	Partnerships	Procurement & Talent Acquisition
Use existing resources to update existing service Apply for new grant sources for TDP recommendations	Schedule meetings with new and existing partners to identify opportunities Develop agreements, contracts, and memorandums to codify partnerships	Prepare ads for competitive bids for contract services Procure vehicles, support equipment and technology Hire, train and retain staff

7.3 IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

The implementation timeline presented below provides an overview of implementation tasks for each of three time frames, short-term (Years 0-5), mid-term (Years 6-10) and long-term (Years 11-20). Short-term tasks focus on maintaining existing services while critical capital infrastructure is procured and grant funding is secured for new and expanded services. Mid-term and long-term initiatives build on those short-term initiatives and expand services to meet increasing demand using the expanded capital and operational resources. A more detailed schedule can be found by project in the "Alternatives and Strategies" Chapter of the report.

Figure 27: Key ACC TDP Implementation Dates

SCHEDULE:



7.4 FINANCIAL PLAN

Athens-Clarke County Transit (ACC Transit) is currently utilizing three main funding sources for capital and operating revenues including federal, state, and local funding. This section identifies existing funding sources, projects future funding, and specifies additional funding needs and sources.

7.4.1 FUNDING HISTORY

Historically, ACC Transit has been the exclusive local recipient of 5307 urbanized formula funding, however in 2014 the University of Georgia began voluntary reporting to FTA's National Transit Database (NTD) and initiated negotiations to receive a portion of these funds. In 2024 the Athens 5307 apportionment included $4,825,071 federal funds eligible for both capital and operating uses.

In 2023 GDOT Intermodal Division launched a new program to provide state funding for transit projects. The Transit Trust Fund Program (TTFP) is a population-based formula program, based on 2020 Census data, distributing state funding to Georgia's transit systems. While limited in scope, the TTFP awarded ACC Transit $174,844 in 2025. These funds are administered via annual application and can be used for capital and operating.

In 2018 Athens-Clarke County voters approved a $0.01 Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (TSPLOST). Transit capital and operating funds were identified in the TSPLOST project list, introducing a new local funding source for the system. Voters again approved TSPLOST in 2022 which included transit system and service improvements.

49 U.S. Code § 5307 - Urbanized Area Formula Grants

The distribution of Urbanized Area Formula Funds (49 U.S.C. 5307 grant) to transit providers in urbanized areas of the United States is administered by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

An Urbanized Area (UZA) is an incorporated area with a population of 50,000 or more that is designated as such by the U.S. Census Bureau. For UZAs with population under 200,000, the federal funds are apportioned to the governor of each state for distribution.

The distribution of these funds is overseen by the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT). For urbanized areas with 200,000 in population and over, funds are apportioned and flow directly to a designated recipient selected locally to apply for and receive federal funds.

According to the 2020 US Census, the population for the Athens-Clarke County's UZA is below the 200,000-population threshold, therefore ACC Transit is a subrecipient to GDOT Intermodal Division for all FTA apportionments.

1- Congress established the NTD to be the Nation's primary source for information and statistics on the transit systems of the United States. Statute requires that recipients or beneficiaries of grants from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) under the Urbanized Area Formula Program (§5307) or Other than Urbanized Area (Rural) Formula Program (§5311) submit data to the NTD.

While ACC Transit historically charged passenger fares, in 2020 the agency began offering zero-fare services as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the post-pandemic recovery the system has remained fare free.

A snapshot of current ACC Transit funding is provided in the table below:

Table 9: ACC Transit Current Funding Sources

Funding Type	Description	Match
Federal Operating	Section 5307 Formula Grants for Urban Areas	50% Federal, 50% Local
Federal Capital	Section 5307 Formula Grant for Urban Areas	80% Federal, 20% Local
Federal Discretionary	Section 5339: Bus and Bus Facilities	Varies (min. 20% Local)
State	Transit Trust Fund Formula Allocations	100% State
Local General Funds	Athens-Clarke County General Funds (typically used as match for Federal Grants and operating deficits)	100% Local
TSPLOST – Capital and Operating	Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax – Approved by Referendum	100% Local

The 2018 ACC Transit TDP identified local funding strategies and policies as a risk for the agency specifying that reliance on local general funds limits the agency's ability to project future funding and over reliance on Federal funds presents substantial risk as these revenue sources have historically varied. Additionally, as the MACORTS urbanized region continues to grow, changes in how federal formula funding can be used are likely to occur .

US Census Urban Population and Federal Funding

< 200,000	> 200,000
Capital and Operating	Operating

2- Urbanized Area Formula Grants - 5307 | FTA - For urbanized areas with populations less than 200,000, operating assistance is an eligible expense. Urbanized areas of 200,000 or more may not use funds for operating assistance unless identified by FTA as eligible under 49 U.S.C. 5307(a)(2) and (3). Eligibility is largely dependent of the number of revenue vehicles operating at peak service.

2018 TDP- FUNDING POLICY RISKS

"ACC Transit is a department of the Athens-Clarke County Unified Government. The resulting organizational and funding arrangements currently in place present some limitations for the system. One such limitation is the fact that there is not a dedicated source of local revenue for the transit system. The system must compete with every other department in the Athens-Clarke County Unified Government on an annual basis for a portion of the General Fund revenues. The lack of dedicated funding , as well as the inability of the system to predict the level of local funding for a given year hinders ACC Transit's efforts to grow and better serve the community. ACC Transit is highly successful with efforts to acquire grant funding to supplement the standard formula funding provided by the FTA. This ongoing success has allowed the system to sustain a high level of service for the community, without significant financial burden on the municipal general funds. The benefit of this successful discretionary funding program is a system that can grow beyond the constraints of the local transit budget. However, this funding stream also leaves the ACC Transit System vulnerable to changes in funding accessibility. If historical values of discretionary funding were no longer available, the current approach could result in abrupt demand for increased local funding to sustain existing levels of service, or extreme service cuts to match funding constraints. These two areas of financial vulnerability should be considered as policy decisions are evaluated. "

Following the adoption of the 2018 ACC Transit TDP, Athens-Clarke County enacted a number of policy and funding strategy changes that fundamentally changed the future revenue projections for the system. These changes include the following:

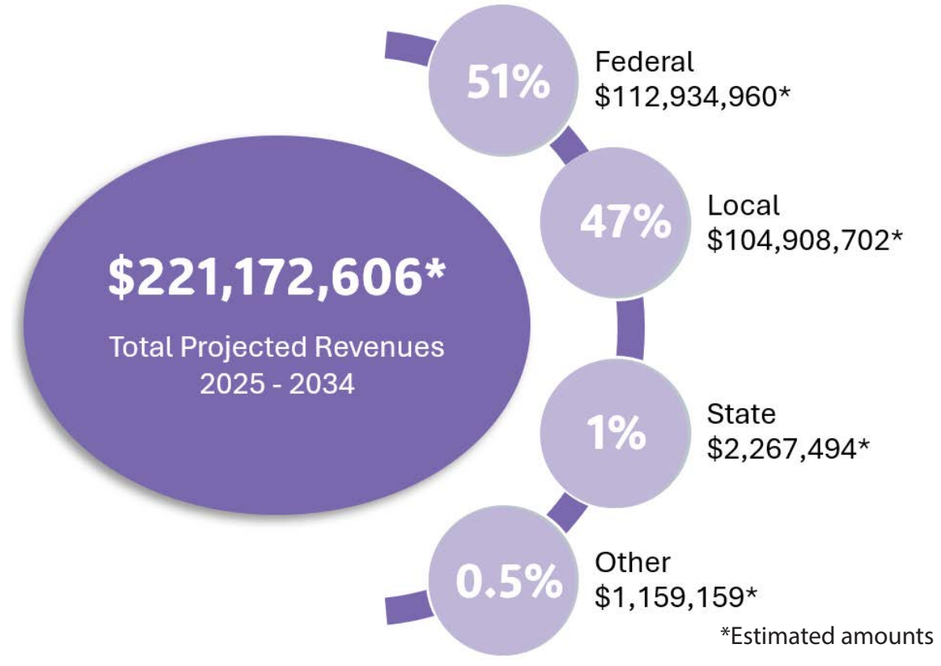
Zero Fare Services ----------> Reduced Revenues (including bulk pass sales)
TSPLOST Funding ----------> Replaced General Fund Revenue
Federal Funding ---------->UGA Transit Applies for a Portion of Federal Funds

While zero fare service implementation was directly tied to the COVID-19 pandemic, and reduced federal funding resulted from the University of Georgia applying for formula funds; the transition to TSPLOST funded service and reduced reliance on federal grant funding achieved the recommendations of the 2018 TDP.

7.4.2 FUTURE FUNDING PROJECTIONS

Future funding sources for ACC Transit are anticipated to remain consistent through the TDP plan horizon. Section 5307 Urban Formula funds, discretionary federal funds, and local funding, comprised exclusively by TSPLOST revenues, equate for 98% of the system's anticipated revenues through 2034.

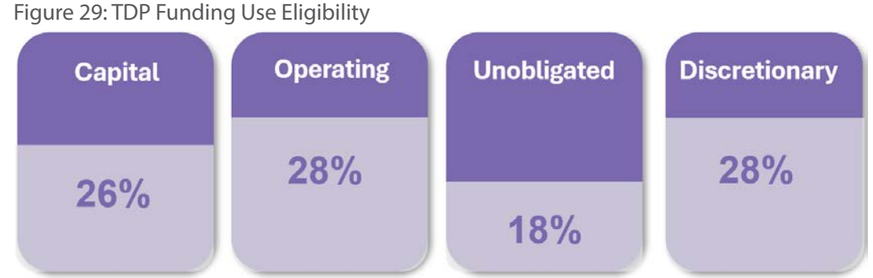
Figure 28: ACC Transit Projected Funding by Source



Each of the projected funding sources identified in the TDP are subject to regulations that dictate their use. These funds fall into two primary categories including Capital and Operating. Revenues specified in these categories must be allocated to eligible expenditures within those categories. For example, capital revenues can be spent on facilities, rolling stock, planning, etc. Operating revenues are dedicated to expenses such as salaries, utilities, fuel, etc. Estimations for each of these projected revenue sources is shown above. Note that these numbers are estimations and can fluctuate based on funding availability and eligibility.

Two additional revenue categories are presented in the TDP including unobligated funding that is eligible for both capital and operating expenditures, and discretionary funding that is not distributed by formula and is therefore dictated by the rules and regulations tied to the grant application.

Figure 29: TDP Funding Use Eligibility



7.4.3 TDP ESTIMATED OPERATING COSTS

In order to determine the feasibility of the TDP system and service recommendations, estimated operating and capital costs were prepared in 2024 dollars and projected to Year of Expenditure (YOE) costs for short-term, mid-term, and long-term scenarios. Operating costs are presented by mode including Fixed Route Local Bus, ADA Paratransit, Microtransit, Commuter Express, and Regional Employment Shuttle services.

The following table summarizes the projected operating costs by phase and service type. These figures include an annual inflation rate of 2% and averages the cost for each implementation phase to achieve an average annual operating cost.

Table 10: TDP Projected Average Annual Operating Cost

		Existing Service	Short-Term	Mid-Term	Long-Term
Fixed Route - Hybrid Scenario	Existing	$ 6,604,033	-	-	-
	Efficiency + Frequency	-	$ 6,660,061	-	-
	Hybrid Service Phase I	-	-	$ 10,312,135	-
	Hybrid Service Phase II	-	-	-	$ 10,406,537
ADA Paratransit	Existing	$ 807,041	-	-	-
	Efficiency + Frequency	-	$ 825,290	-	-
	Hybrid Service Phase I	-	-	$ 863,084	-
	Hybrid Service Phase II	-	-	-	$ 916,046
Microtransit	Zone: 1	-	$ 780,605	$ 854,066	$ 1,011,693
	Zone: 2	-	-	$ 1,325,966	$ 1,570,686
	Zone: 3	-	-	-	$ 998,308
Commuter Express	GA Sq Mall to Gwinnett	-	-	$ 558,734.21	$ 654,548.68
Employment Shuttle	Caterpillar Plant	-	-	$ 87,644.58	$ 102,674.30
	Total Ave Annual Operating Cost	$ 7,411,074	$ 8,265,957	$ 14,001,629	$ 15,660,493

The current cost to operate the ACC Transit system is approximately $7.5 million annually. The service needs and growth objectives identified during the planning process introduces new modes of service and enhancements to existing fixed route and ADA paratransit services. These enhancements, paired with annual inflation, projects a 10% increase in operating cost in the short-term plan horizon.

The mid-term plan recommendations presents the largest increase in operating costs with a 41% increase from short-term funding projections and 47% from existing system costs. This larger increase represents operational investments concentrated in the mid-term due to required vehicle procurement, facility construction, planning, and funding activities that will be initiated in the short-term time frame to prepare for the larger investments.

The long-term operational strategies proposes a 10% increase from mid-term average annual costs, and 52.7% from current investment levels. The long-term recommendations are an aggregate of short-term, mid-term and long-term service strategies and includes annual inflation factors.

7.4.4 TDP ESTIMATED CAPITAL COSTS

The TDP capital needs assessment includes recommendations that fall within three primary categories: Infrastructure, Rolling Stock, and Capital Planning. Within these categories recommended investments incorporate legacy projects in various stages of program delivery, investments to maintain a state of good repair, new expansion investments, and capital planning needed to support implementation efforts.

Similar to the costs associated with operating recommendations, capital needs far outpace available local, state, and federal formula funds available for the system. It is also important to note that capital investments must be made 12-18 months before additional service is initiated to allow for procurement of vehicles and implementation of supporting infrastructure including ADA compliant bus stops for new fixed route services.

The following table summarizes the TDP recommended capital investments and associated costs in 2025 dollars.

Table 11: TDP Projected Capital Costs in 2025 Dollars

		Short-Term	Mid-Term	Long-Term
Facilities	Level 2 Mobility Hub: SE Clarke Park	-	$ 4,959,127	-
	Level 2 Mobility Hub: Georgia Square Mall	$ 2,414,335	-	-
	Level 3 Mobility Hub: Atlanta Hwy	-	$ 1,810,751	-
	New Operations, Maintenance, and Training Facility	-	$ 106,167,720	-
Rolling Stock	SGR: Replacement Bus, Van, & Support Vehicles	$ 9,206,710	$16,857,040	$ 69,955,003
	Expansion Vehicles – Bus, Paratransit, and Support	$12,800,165	-	-
	Microtransit Fleet Expansion and Replacement Vehicles	$ 440,856	$440,856	$440,856
	Employment Shuttle Vehicles	$ 146,952	$ 146,952	$ 146,952
Capital Planning	Bus Route and Network Redesign	$ 300,000		
	Fare Policy	$ 75,000		
	UGA / ACCT Efficiency	$ 300,000		
	Zero Emissions Fleet Transition	$ 175,000		
	First and Last Mile Connectivity	$ 198,000		
	Transit Oriented Development	$ 290,000		
	Regional Connections		$ 150,000	
	Multimodal Corridor Protection			$ 125,000
	Total Ave Annual Operating Cost	$ 26,347,018	$ 130,532,446	$ 70,667,811

7.4.5 TDP ADMINISTRATIVE, ENHANCEMENT, AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE COSTS

In addition to capital and service investments, the TDP identified other enhancements needed to support system expansion and to improve the overall customer experience. These items are summarized in the table on the opposite page.

Table 12: TDP Planning, Programming, and Administrative Recommendations

TDP Strategy	Notes
Strategic Grant Application Program	Develop a Strategic Grant Application Program using the list of discretionary and formula grants provided in the TDP financial strategies recommendations. Identify local matching funds to improve performance of competitive grant applications.
Intergovernmental Agreement(s)	Prepare and negotiate intergovernmental agreements for services offered in adjacent municipalities.
Service Delivery and Implementation Management	Develop a program to plan, deliver, and manage new service types recommended in the operations strategies. Identify technologies and partnerships necessary to deliver these services.
Strategic Technology Integration Program	Develop a program to monitor, analyze and strategically implement new technologies as they are developed.
Compliance Management and Reporting	Complete annual NTD reporting requirement. In the immediate term, this may require external assistance. Additional staff may be needed to oversee compliance as more complex funding programs are introduced.
Driver Safety, De-Escalation, and Contingency Training	Conduct conflict de-escalation and safety training for drivers. Conduct contingency planning training to assist drivers with navigating spontaneous rerouting in response to roadway closures, obstacles, etc.
Service Changes Customer Education and Awareness Campaign	Market and educate customers about service changes as they arise from this plan. This recommendation may require supplemental staff support and resources.
Agency Rebranding	Conduct an agency-wide marketing and branding update to Athens Transit brand standards and materials. This rebranding should be conducted in conjunction with the service and system investments marketing and awareness campaign.

The costs associated with these recommendations include unique variables. A majority of these recommendations can be carried out by existing ACC Transit staff, thereby limiting or eliminating additional costs. As the system grows and expands, it is likely that additional full time staff will need to be added including a Compliance Specialist and Operations Planner. Support services may also be required for system rebranding and marketing campaigns.

7.4.6 POTENTIAL FUTURE REVENUE SOURCES

The ACC Transit TDP recommends an ambitious program of capital, operational, and administrative recommendations. These desired improvements vastly outpace available Federal and State formula and local TSPLOST funding. Additional discretionary grant sources will be needed to supplement existing programmed funds, and alternative funding partnerships should be prioritized. The following funding sources are available to Georgia Transit Agencies.

FEDERAL FUNDING

FTA SECTION 5311 FORMULA GRANTS FOR RURAL AREAS

The TDP recommends microtransit zones that operate in both urban and rural territories. Eligible activities under Section 5311 include planning, capital and operating expenses. The federal share is 80% for capital projects and 50% for operating assistance. GDOT is the designated recipient of Section 5311 funds and is responsible for administering and distributing funds to subrecipients.

FTA SECTION 5339 BUS AND BUS FACILITIES GRANTS

Section 5339 also includes two discretionary elements: a bus and bus facilities competitive program that considers asset age and condition, and a low or no emission vehicle grant program. This program should be considered for the Operations and Maintenance Facility, Mobility Hubs, and the Zero Emissions Bus (ZEB) Transition.

REBUILDING AMERICAN INFRASTRUCTURE WITH SUSTAINABILITY AND EQUITY (RAISE)

The Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity, or RAISE discretionary grant program, is a federal source ACC Transit may be able to leverage for future funding opportunities. This highly competitive pool of funding is targeted for infrastructure investments of significant local or regional impact. The flexibility of funding does provide an opportunity for future capital investment. This funding program is best suited for the proposed Operations, Maintenance, and Training Facility.

STATE FUNDING

TRANSIT TRUST FUND PROGRAM (TTFP)

The Transit Trust Fund Program (TTFP) collects fees on for-hire ground transportation. The TTFP uses the 2020 Census population data to distribute funding to counties with transit service. GDOT accepts applications annually. These funds are limited and scope and should be used for small capital purchases and capital planning initiatives needed to advance TDP recommendations.

LOCAL FUNDING

GENERAL FUNDS

ACC Gov has, in recent years, reduced the local general fund contribution to public transit. This funding source should continue to be evaluated to support implementation of the TDP where funding shortfalls are identified. This funding source will also remain critical in the instance that Federal and State formula funding is withdrawn, and/or future TSPLOST referendum are not successful.

TRANSPORTATION SPECIAL PURPOSE LOCAL OPTION SALES TAX (SPLOST)

The Transportation SPLOST is a sales tax used to fund capital, operating and maintenance of transportation projects, including public transit. Counties that authorize a T-SPLOST through a referendum can impose a levy of up to 1% for up to five years. The TDP recommends the continuation of TSPLOST as a primary funding strategy for both capital and operating funds for the system. While TSPLOST referendums have historically been successful, contingency planning will be critical to ensure continuation of service in the instance they are approved by voters in the future.

OTHER FUNDS

FAREBOX

ACC Transit operates a zero fare system. The TDP recommended Fare Policy Update will establish future goals, objectives, and anticipated funding strategies.

ADVERTISING

ACC Transit currently leverages advertising and should continue to support this campaign to maintain a diversified revenue portfolio.

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

The TDP recommends employee shuttles that support regional employers and travel needs. Partner agencies, municipalities, and industries should be engaged to identify potential financial partnerships. Additionally, ACC Gov internal departments should work collaboratively to identify potential joint projects to reduce cost and increase efficiencies of scale in implementation efforts. For example, the ACC Gov Public Works Department has a strong track record of sidewalk and bike facility project delivery. The first and last mile connectivity initiative could be completed as a collaborative project leveraging existing staff and resources.

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8 CONCLUSIONS

The Transit Development Plan helps to answer the who, what when, where why, and how of transit planning in Athens-Clarke County.

Key Findings, which are comprised of information from the Existing Conditions Report, Public and Stakeholder Engagement, and Needs Analysis demonstrate a need for ACC Transit expansion of service in order to meet the demands of a demographically, geographically, and economically diverse county.

The alternatives analysis then presents several scenarios for improving service including optimization of existing routes, shortening headways along key corridors, strategic capital and infrastructure investments and diversification of transit modes.

Finally, the funding and implementation plan offers funding and partnership considerations for the recommendations and improvements suggested in the plan, and then outlines a phased approach for investment to successfully deliver plan recommendations.

The ACC Transit TDP recommends an ambitious program of capital, operational, and administrative recommendations. These desired improvements vastly outpace available Federal and State formula and local TSPLOST funding that is available and additional discretionary grant sources will be needed to supplement existing programmed funds. Accordingly, alternative funding partnerships should be prioritized in order to successfully deliver plan recommendations.

WHAT'S NEXT:

- Initiate discussions and coordination with Regional, State, and Local Partners
- Initiate procurement, contracting, and planning activities needed to apply for discretionary grant funding opportunities
- Begin education and outreach to the public about short-term operations recommendations and changes that will be made and initiate those changes.
- Initiate priority policy and planning activities

The development of this Transit Development Plan has been grounded in a careful evaluation of our current transit system and shaped by the voices of the community we serve. Through robust public engagement, residents, riders, and community leaders shared their experiences, priorities, and aspirations—helping us better understand both the strengths of our existing services and the opportunities for meaningful growth.

This plan outlines a clear path forward to expand service coverage, increase frequency, and improve the overall reliability and accessibility of transit throughout the county. These improvements are designed not only to make transit more convenient and responsive but also to strengthen connections between neighborhoods, job centers, educational institutions, healthcare, and other essential services.

Over the next twenty years, we will implement the recommendations outlined in this plan in phases—prioritizing projects based on community need, funding availability, and coordination with supporting infrastructure investments. As we move forward, we remain committed to transparency, accountability, and continued public input to ensure our transit system evolves in step with the needs of our growing and changing community.

Transit is more than just a way to get from one place to another. It is an engine for economic opportunity, a tool for environmental sustainability, and a cornerstone of equity and accessibility. A strong transit system supports local businesses, reduces traffic congestion, promotes public health, and ensures that every resident—regardless of income, age, or ability—can participate fully in community life.

With this plan, we have a roadmap to a more connected, inclusive, and prosperous future. Together, we can build a transit system that works for everyone.

TRANSIT

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Athens, GA 30601

RS&H