

CHAPTER TWO: Goals and Initiatives

Goal # 1: Fulfill the adopted Regional Transit System (RTS) Vision for Transit in Gainesville

Initiatives

1.1 Continue a customer-driven approach to increase ridership.

Rather than designing a rigid product and then attempting to force it on customers, a market-driven approach means that the transit system will design, tailor or modify its transportation services based on the needs or demands of a particular market segment. For instance, UF employees as a market segment may require different products that are more logical for their transportation needs compared to downtown workers, the youth market (public school children) and senior citizens. Taking a market-driven approach to transit service enables the transit provider to treat transit as a business with a focus on gaining more customers and increasing ridership.

1.2 Continue a product approach to give distinction to transit services.

Currently RTS is the name of the transit system and its individual products are called routes. In a product approach, the entire transit system and individual routes and services could be given different names to give them distinction. These approaches can greatly enhance marketing efforts, the visual aspect of the transit system, service packaging, and customer identification with various services. This approach can also play a major role in packaging different enticement programs for different market segments to utilize transit.

RTS has 'branded' several existing transit services with logo identification and catchy, friendly names. Examples are Later Gator (late night bus service), Good Night Gator (designated late night stops on campus), and the Gator Aider (University of Florida football shuttle service).

1.3 Maintain focus on the UF campus as the major regional generator of transit trips.

The route network as it exists attempts to serve the UF campus or origins and destinations throughout the urban area. There is ridership disparity between routes that directly serve UF and those that do not. Clearly, existing data indicates that the University of Florida (UF) and surrounding businesses are the primary regional generator of transit trips. Therefore, the transit system should

focus on UF due to the implications for expanded ridership and balance of the overall transportation system in the region.

Since the implementation of the pre-paid unlimited access program for University of Florida students, faculty and staff, RTS has experienced a tremendous increase in ridership and has continually responded to requests for service enhancements to meet the transportation needs of the University.

RTS staff continues to work with University of Florida Student Government and officials to better meet the transit demands of this major trip generator/attractor.

1.4 Continue to implement practices to ensure the comfort and reliability of the transit system.

RTS has implemented Talking Bus technology on 45 of its buses. Talking Bus is a voice announcement system that lets riders know about upcoming bus stops, including nearby landmarks and transfer points. This especially benefits those riders who are visually impaired.

1.5 Develop a transit system that balances the needs of the transit-dependent with those of the choice rider.

RTS strives to strike a balance between the needs of those who are transit-dependent, and the need to become a viable service designed for the substantially larger market of those who have a choice about using the bus. RTS provides service to major trip generators and attractors such as the UF campus and neighborhood activity centers, and strives to ensure that areas with medium to large concentrations of employment and housing are adequately served.

Goal # 2: Communicate the Role of Transit in the Gainesville Community

Initiatives

2.1 Continue the Community Relations and Public Outreach Program.

A Community Relations and Public Outreach program has the objective of developing two or three general presentations (based on the communications program above) and taking them out into the community. Speaking engagements with homebuilders, the Chamber of Commerce, environmental coalitions, disabled advocates, seniors, university student groups, and school children should be conducted as often as possible. The impact of these efforts is to enhance transit's presence in the community as well as to build relationships on a continual basis. This component is also critical for the transit system to maintain constant feedback from the public as a means of identifying improvements and communicating them effectively.

RTS asks several certified ADA passengers to participate in update to the ADA Complementary Paratransit Service Guide. RTS continues to meet with community groups to identify service issues and improve service on the Eastside of Gainesville.

RTS has partnered with Consultants from the Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR), conducting public forums to gather public opinion and information regarding the community's public transportation system. These public forums have better enabled RTS to gain deeper insight as to the public's perception of transit service in our community, as well the public's priorities for transit service.

2.2 Continue to establish successful partnerships with community groups.

This initiative is already underway by RTS on an informal basis as opportunities present themselves. There are many opportunities with the University of Florida, Santa Fe Community College (SFCC), the Alachua County School Board, environmental groups, sustainable development groups, bicyclists, City of Gainesville and Alachua County Parks, and others interested in the issue of transportation and community. RTS seeks to garner grass roots support for transit and create advocates and spokespersons for the expansion of the transit system. It also requires the transit system to be responsive to its allies in meeting and promoting their interests in the community.

RTS has worked with community, university and local government agencies to promote alternative transportation choices through local group meetings, transportation fairs, and transit-sanctioned events (BBOP).

RTS staff regularly attends community meetings in an effort to support transit.

2.3 Maintain marketing efforts to UF students.

The data from virtually all the analyses in the Base Data Compilation section of this TDP reveal that the UF student market is the primary market for transit services in Gainesville. There are tremendous opportunities to intensify marketing efforts to this population with enormous ridership gain potential.

RTS participates in the UF freshman orientation sessions (PREVIEW) by informing incoming students and parents about transit service. RTS has also participated in a one-stop business location (Gator One Stop) for newcomers to the area to inform them of transit service.

2.4 Continue marketing efforts to working adults, seniors, and persons with disabilities.

ADA paratransit focus groups have been held to gather input for informational print material supplying information on RTS ADA Complementary Paratransit

services. These meetings have provided a clear understanding of common issues.

Individuals certified for ADA complementary paratransit service are provided unlimited access to the fixed-route transit system. Marketing efforts include advertisements in local newspapers and on local radio stations.

2.5 *Encourage multi-modal practices by considering bicycle and pedestrian needs when implementing changes.*

This initiative has been a focus of RTS when considering changes to service. RTS has installed bicycle racks on all vehicles in its fleet, and considers multi-modal practices when reviewing proposed development and plans. All future bus purchases will have bicycle racks designed to carry three bicycles, which will increase our bicycle carrying capacity by fifty percent.

Implementation of the Transportation Concurrency Exception Area (TCEA) ordinance by City of Gainesville Department of Community Development has provided City staff with tools necessary to require all development projects within the TCEA zones provide for multi-modal access to that project.

2.6 *Continue a customer-oriented approach to transit by more customer-friendly printed transit information materials, customer relations, customer complaints, employee courtesy, and service reliability.*

Superior customer service is a critical factor in retaining and attracting customers. Customer-orientation is a primary focus of RTS ensuring that service improvements result in customer satisfaction with and confidence in the transit system. RTS provides bus operator training to ensure drivers practice excellent customer service. Providing a more pleasing interior environment on buses is another example of customer-orientation. RTS has implemented a new customer service award that is presented at the annual employee banquet.

A customer service recognition plan was developed to reward drivers who deliver superior customer service. Each month RTS nominates an employee of the month. These recognized employees are rewarded with a designated parking space, pins and a certificate. Transit Operators receive refresher training every summer. Customer service training is part of the refresher program.

The RTS planning department recently developed and implemented changes to the bus schedule booklet. New and improved graphics depicting route alignment were introduced during summer 2005, and customer feedback about the changes has been positive. RTS is continuing its efforts to make printed materials and electronic information more user friendly and, as part of that process, we continuously monitor customer comments to ensure our changes our in fact improvements.

Goal # 3: Enhance RTS Facilities to Meet Existing and Future Transit Demands of the Community

Initiatives

- 3.1 *Continue efforts to identify funding sources to enhance the RTS maintenance, administration and operations facilities.*

RTS is experiencing a critical shortage of maintenance, operations and administrative space at its current facility. This critical shortage of space directly impacts the quality and quantity of transit service delivered to the community.

RTS staff will continue to seek funding sources for expansion of its current and future facilities.

- 3.2 *Conduct a study to evaluate current facilities and future expansion needs of RTS.*

Successful facility expansion depends upon the development of a comprehensive master plan to address current and future needs of RTS. Evaluation of the current facilities, as well as an assessment of needs for the future should be a consideration when exploring facility expansion.

- 3.3 *Continue efforts to acquire additional land for on-site facility expansion.*

RTS is exploring options for expansion of its existing maintenance, administration and operations facility. Purchasing additional land to aid in expansion of the existing facility is just one option that could provide the space necessary for enhancement of the existing facility.

RTS staff will continue to work with City of Gainesville staff and local landowners to acquire additional acreage.

- 3.4 *Continue collaborative efforts to construct a new downtown transfer center.*

RTS is working with various agencies in the community, and other departments within the City of Gainesville to construct a new downtown transfer center.

- 3.5 *Establish a transfer center on the University of Florida campus.*

To foster travel from all parts of the urban area to UF and, to make travel to campus more attractive to a wider range of markets, it is critical for RTS to establish a second primary regional transfer center that provides connections in the University area.

In the long run, such a center will assist RTS in orienting a majority of services to the campus while still providing mobility to customers who are traveling to other destinations for work and other purposes.

RTS has proposed the development of an on-campus transfer center to the University of Florida.

Goal # 4: Increase Service Availability

Initiatives

- 4.1 *Maintain focus on service enhancements providing greater system frequency, later weekday service, improve Saturday service and Sunday service.*

Previous surveys have reported that more frequent service was the highest priority, followed by later weekday service and Sunday service. In response, RTS continues to improve and adjust service with respect to these requests and available operating funds. In addition, RTS will begin operating nine new Sunday service routes beginning August 2006. Sunday service is made possible through FDOT service development funds and the University of Florida.

- 4.2 *Continue development of seasonal schedules that correspond to University of Florida sessions.*

Seasonal schedules are effective in saving resources and operating funds by reducing frequency of service on system and campus routes during the summer months when ridership drops due to reduced enrollment. The TDP therefore reflects this as a full initiative because it enables RTS to allocate resources in fall, winter, and spring when ridership is heavier and more service is needed.

Although ridership has been steadily increasing since implementation of the pre-paid unlimited access program with the University of Florida, RTS is continuing with seasonal schedules, where the frequency and length of service is reduced in the summer due to less ridership.

- 4.3 *Establish direct "express" routings between high-density residential areas and major trip generators and attractors such as the UF campus.*

RTS will continue its efforts to establish more direct and rapid travel between high - density residential areas and major trip generators and attractors.

The existing transit network in southwest Gainesville is designed for direct travel between origin and destination. Routes 1, 9, 12, 34, 35, and 36 provide direct service between the southwest portion of the urbanized Gainesville area and the University of Florida campus. Southwest Gainesville has a high concentration of UF student housing and several commercial activity centers.

4.4 *Focus on partnerships to fund transit service improvements.*

Partnerships with existing and potential partners in the public and private sectors are vital to continuing service improvements. As RTS continues to grow and expand, future planning should center on strengthening existing relationships and cultivating potential new partners.

Together, RTS and the University of Florida have cultivated a strong positive relationship, fostered by frequent communications and meetings between RTS and UF staff. UF students and officials continue to serve as members of the RTS Citizen's Advisory Board.

4.5 *Enhance the current service review process consisting of RTS staff and bus operators.*

The process has the objective of monitoring product and system performance and to be a conduit of feedback from passengers, bus operators, and the public. Decisions related to service changes, route modifications, and schedule changes are made under this process.

RTS had placed comment boxes on all the buses to learn how to better serve passengers. A suggestion box has been made available in the driver break room for ongoing input. Transit Supervisor meetings provide an opportunity to get suggestions on how to enhance service. Staff meetings between operations and planning staff should be held to ensure facilitation of information sharing between planning and operations as service changes, route modifications, and schedule changes are considered.

4.6 *Continue to replace existing vehicles with vehicles that meet all Americans with Disabilities Act standards.*

RTS has attained the goal of a 100% accessible fleet of buses. RTS is now beginning to purchase only low-floor buses with wheelchair lifts that are easily deployed and stowed either manually or electronically. This change will reduce the number of service interruptions due to malfunctioning lift equipment.

4.7 *Establish a contract with the local Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC) for Complementary Paratransit Services under the Americans with Disabilities Act.*

RTS currently contracts out its obligation to provide paratransit service to the Alachua County Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC), MV Transportation. The contract with MV Transportation began on October 1, 2005, and will expire on September 30, 2006. Per local policy, demand response service is provided door to door. RTS is currently evaluating MV's performance to determine whether or not to continue its contract or issue a new RFP for ADA paratransit services.

Goal # 5: Enhance the Presence of Transit through Fixed Facilities and Transit-Oriented Design

Initiatives

5.1.1 *Incorporate transit-oriented design into development and redevelopment projects within the service area.*

Both Alachua County and the City of Gainesville believe that land use, zoning, and development regulations need to deal with the issue of design for transit circulation and transit infrastructure. Since the TDP must be in compliance with adopted local plans, it is important for RTS staff to participate in any revisions to language in comprehensive plans and development regulations to achieve this initiative.

RTS continues to work with the City and County Planning Departments to promote incorporation of transit infrastructure as a mode of traffic mitigation for new developments. RTS reviews County zoning agenda items to ensure transit infrastructure and transit oriented design issues are addressed along new developments. RTS is also in the process of developing a Transit-Oriented Design Guideline manual for persons and organizations involved in local land development.

RTS is now included in all First Step meetings to provide transit comments on proposed future development and redevelopment within the City of Gainesville. Involvement at this stage of the development process will ensure that transit issues are addressed early on in the process.

5.2 *Incorporate transit -oriented design into roadway improvements.*

RTS must capitalize on leadership support and continue this initiative at the MTPo level to enhance the presence and functioning of transit on congested corridors.

RTS staff is represented in the Technical Advisory Committee and Design Team which both report to the MTPo. RTS requests that appropriate transit infrastructure and roadway design is incorporated into new projects.

5.3 *Establish a Transit Infrastructure Program that improves the transit experience, promotes fun, accommodates development, and incorporates public participation in the design process.*

Transit infrastructure includes passenger shelters, information kiosks at bus stops, street furniture, trashcans, etc. The program has the objective of being flexible enough to incorporate different design features based on compatibility with surrounding land uses, customer demand, artistic and creative elements, and community values.

Also, the program should address the replacement of existing passenger shelters to become more aesthetically pleasing and incorporate bus stop kiosks with schedule information.

Kiosks have been added at many bus stops so that passengers are able to see when the next bus is scheduled to arrive. RTS is working with the University of Florida to create shelters to place on campus. RTS is reviewing incorporation of bicycle parking at transit stops. RTS maintains priority lists of heavily used bus stops to place passenger shelters. RTS plans on creating a formal Transit Infrastructure Design Program in conjunction with Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR) and Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT).

- 5.4 *Continue evaluation of bus stops and stations to provide for improvements of shelters, route information, bicycle parking and other transit infrastructure.*

RTS regularly maintains its bus stops and in the process evaluates appropriate infrastructure for each stop. Customer requests are considered at such time.

Goal # 6: Use Technology and Innovative Approaches in the Provision of Transit Services

Initiatives

- 6.1 *Continue investigating the use of alternative fuel buses.*

Alternative fuel buses can reduce air pollution and improve system efficiency. However, due to range restrictions, alternative fuels should be implemented on routes with shorter distances.

RTS recently participated in a project conducted by the Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR) that is examining the characteristics of alternative fuels and establishing a database for performance comparisons. RTS will continue to participate in efforts that make alternative fuels a more viable alternative for transit agencies to use.

- 6.2 *Continue to match vehicle size with daily passenger volume.*

This objective is intended to allocate transit service supply to areas with greater demand and to promote RTS's image as an efficient transit service provider. This initiative can alleviate crowding on routes with higher ridership by operating larger buses on busier routes.

Street size and character are other factors considered when determining appropriate size of vehicle. For instance, neighborhood circulators connecting downtown to nearby residential areas require smaller sized vehicles.

6.3 *Continue to explore and implement solutions that increase productivity and reduce travel time delays.*

This initiative is intended to enhance transit service so that transit can operate on schedule and be less subject to traffic delays. RTS continues to work with of City of Gainesville departments and the FDOT to develop ideas for improving route performance.

RTS also recognizes the impact of route delays on systemwide performance, and believes that the purchase of low-floor wheelchair lift equipped buses is one solution to help reduce dwelling times and service interruptions thereby improving overall performance.

RTS continues to plan for the implementation of a CAD/AVL system and associated technologies that improve system performance. Implementation issues will be addressed in the Intelligent Transportation System plan that RTS is currently developing.

6.4 *Integrate Intelligent Transportation System technology (ITS) to maintain and enhance operations planning.*

RTS has been awarded a grant in the form of technical assistance from the Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR) to develop and implement an ITS plan. This plan will serve as a guide for all new technology purchases and will focus on integrating existing technology employed at RTS.

RTS is in the process of procuring software that improves the analysis of data from the existing farebox data collection system. This software is expected to be implemented before spring 2006.

6.5 *Pursue efforts to implement alternative approaches for providing enhanced bus service, such as Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), along transportation corridors identified in the MTPO 2025 Transportation Plan.*

RTS is conducting a BRT feasibility study scheduled to begin June 2007. The study will identify corridors in the Gainesville Urban Area with potential to support the operation of a BRT system. This study will consider transportation projects put forth in the MTPO 2025 Transportation Plan.

6.6 *Purchase software in conjunction with the development of the vanpool and ridematching program proposed to FDOT as a service development proposal.*

This initiative will help RTS serve community mobility needs and minimize the operation of fixed routes in lower density portions of Alachua County. It could also assist RTS to develop new markets that are not inclined to use fixed route service. RTS believes this will also be a useful tool for a customer base that is likely to use park and ride facilities and shuttle bus services.