



CHAPTER I

Introduction

On behalf of Washington County Commuter (WCC), the Hagerstown/Eastern Panhandle Metropolitan Planning Organization (HEPMPO) contracted with Michael Baker and LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc. to prepare an updated Transit Development Plan (TDP). The plan specifically focuses on public transportation issues in Washington County, Maryland.

This third interim report presents the preferred service plan and implementation plan. The report focuses on transportation provided by WCC for the general public, minority, elderly, disabled, low-income, and school children populations in Washington County. For some residents, this service is their only link to work, shopping, health care facilities, and other necessary services.



Also included in the report is an analysis of the above population segments in terms of Title VI environmental justice requirements and performance levels.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to analyze and recommend route structures and services that will allow WCC to meet the existing and future transportation needs throughout Washington County. The study will also analyze the routes and transportation services in Washington County in regard to meeting the Title VI environmental justice requirements. The finished product of this study will describe the existing public transit services, discuss the services and other alternatives for meeting existing and future transportation needs, and identify the locally preferred set of transit services that will allow WCC to meet the area's transportation needs now and in the future.

REPORT CONTENTS

Chapter II presents the preferred service plan and maps. Chapter III presents the implementation plan, which includes management and financial plans. Appendix A contains detailed schedules for all the fixed routes. A Title VI Plan for WCC is included in Appendix B of this study. The information in this document will be presented to the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and the public. Their input will be used to refine the preferred service plan.



STUDY APPROACH

As in many regions, WCC is examining its public transit services and is seeking to find the most effective means of providing those services, not only for the general public, but also for those individuals who may be unserved (including the low-income, minority, and non-English-speaking individuals protected under Title VI). A key element in the plan will be to clearly evaluate the unmet needs of these population groups and improve their level of service.

Project Team

One important step toward providing an integrated countywide transportation system is involving key players such as WCC, HEPMPO, the City of Hagerstown, MARC Train, human service agencies, and area residents. An initial kick-off meeting was held in Hagerstown on March 31, 2009. The meeting was attended by representatives of WCC, HEPMPO, Maryland Transit Administration (MTA), the Town of Boonsboro, Area Agency on Aging, Washington County Planning Department, Washington County Economic Development Department, Washington County Department of Social Services, and other agencies.

This project team discussed the project overview, data collection, major transit issues, community issues, public involvement process, schedules, and time line for completion of the final study. The project team also discussed the local stakeholders (TAC members) who are critical in completing the transit study.

A second TAC meeting was held on May 27, 2009 after the public open houses. The purpose of this second meeting was to discuss Technical Memorandum #1 and provide feedback/comments to LSC. At this meeting, LSC conducted a work session on the development of service alternatives. Input from the TAC, public, and drivers was used in the development of the service alternatives presented in this document.

The third TAC meeting was held on July 15, 2009. At this meeting, the LSC team presented the service alternatives. On September 17, 2009, the TAC selected the preferred service alternative during a conference call conducted by LSC.

Opportunities for Public Involvement

Throughout the planning process, public involvement is key to the success of the community's transit plan. At critical points during the process, public meetings have been announced and held where citizen participation was openly welcomed and appreciated. Public open houses were held in May, July, and August 2009. A fourth public meeting is scheduled for October 2009.

Open houses offer community members an opportunity to provide input regarding transportation issues that should be addressed as part of this study. Community residents are asked to comment on the existing and future transit services in Washington County. The public is given the opportunity to state which services and other alternatives they think are necessary in order to address the identified issues and meet the established goals. As an element of the public involvement process, LSC conducted an onboard survey in April 2009 to gather input on the needs of current transit users.

Summary of the Issues

During the March 2009 kick-off meeting, LSC briefed the TAC on the study process to be undertaken over the six-month period. Key stakeholders involved with public transit services in Washington County were identified.

Introduction

The following major issues and concerns regarding public transportation were discussed at the kick-off meeting:

- Improve transit service within Washington County.
- Review the effectiveness and efficiency of the existing route service in order to improve connectivity and route operations.
- Link minority and low-income populations to the activity centers.
- Increase service for the senior population (including adding service to the new senior center).
- Improve transit service to major employment centers (such as the major shopping centers).
- Increase medical transportation service (including adding service to the new hospital).
- Assess the need for Sunday and evening service.
- Increase the number of bus stops in the downtown area.
- Improve the perception of safety on the buses.
- Reduce headways along the routes.
- The local taxi service is not effective in serving the community.
- Congestion is impacting the operation and schedules of the fixed-route service in the City of Hagerstown.
- There is a need for medical transportation out of the region to the Cities of Martinsburg, Baltimore, and Pittsburgh.
- There is a need for transit service in the western portion of Washington County and the Town of Boonsboro.
- There is a need to develop service to the urban growth areas in and around the City of Hagerstown.
- There is a need for regional transportation linkage to Franklin County, Pennsylvania.
- There is a need for improved linkages to the MARC Train.
- There are funding issues for WCC and the MARC Train.