

Study Findings

Public Transportation Service Plan

The recommended service plan for Washington County includes the following major components:

- Improve existing fixed-route services in the Washington City and the Mid Mon Valley areas,
- Improve public information and marketing in Washington City,
- Expand regional services between Washington City and Allegheny County,
- Make Washington City local services more attractive so as to encourage paratransit riders to switch to fixed route services,
- Provide new services in the I-79 urban corridor north of Washington City, and
- Provide new rural services through a “Rover Bus” concept.

The recommended transit service improvements address the Study Goals in various ways:

- Improvements to existing fixed route service in the City of Washington and the Mid Mon Valley, as well as efforts to shift paratransit riders to the Washington City fixed route service, will achieve greater efficiencies in the provision of transit services.
- New service to the I-79 Corridor as well as the rural Rover Bus Service will address unmet needs for transit services in the Study Area.
- Modifications to local and commuter services in the Mid Mon Valley and expansion of local and commuter services in the City of Washington will achieve an updating of routes and levels of service to reflect current travel needs.
- New service to the I-79 corridor will address the principal growth area of Washington County and an area targeted for investment in the Washington County Comprehensive Plan.
- Consistent with the challenging transit funding environment in the Commonwealth, several of the recommended transit service improvements involve little or no cost, while others are presented with both lower and higher-cost alternatives.

New service to the I-79 corridor will address the principal growth area of Washington County.

Washington City Local Service

Alternative 1 would involve one single route covering the entire service area provided by the existing three routes. Hours of service would expand to 10 hours on weekdays (from 7:00 AM to 5:00 PM) and to 8 hours on Saturdays (from 9:00AM to 5:00PM). The frequency of service or headway would be a uniform two hours.

Alternative 2 would include three separate routes very similar to the current service. However, the routes would be operated on an even headway with a full service span from 7:00AM to 5:00PM on weekdays and 9:00AM to 5:00PM on Saturdays.

Alternative 3 would include four separate routes, with three the same as Alternative 2 and one new route, the Purple route. The routes would be operated on an even headway with a full service span from 7:00AM to 5:00PM on weekdays and 9:00AM to 5:00PM on Saturdays (the same as Alternative 2).

Whichever of these alternatives is chosen, various activities to improve public information and marketing of bus services for the Washington City system should be undertaken. These activities would include:

- installation of bus stop signs along the local routes
- preparation of a schedule including a map showing the local routings
- distribution of the public schedules and map as well as promotion/marketing of the services.

Data from the detailed review of the WCTA driver logs indicates that there are paratransit riders that travel within the service area of the fixed route bus services, especially in the Washington City area. Thus, there is an opportunity to attract some of these Washington Rides paratransit users to the fixed-route service

This transfer of paratransit riders to fixed route service could be accomplished in two ways. The first way is through a public information and marketing campaign to inform paratransit users who are senior citizens that they could use existing fixed route services for certain trips for free (the Free Transit Program, funded with state lottery proceeds, provides for free service for senior citizens). This campaign would be conducted as part of the public information/marketing program for Washington City services just described.

There is an opportunity to attract paratransit users to an improved fixed-route bus service in the City of Washington.

The second approach is to revise the existing Washington City service so that it would be more attractive to those riders that use paratransit service. This would be accomplished by having the fixed-route deviate off of the main route alignment for a certain distance, say about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile. This would permit many of the passengers to be picked up at their curb.

As a result of this new route deviation service, Washington Rides could reduce service in the Washington City area by about two to three vehicles a day. This reduction would offset the additional cost associated with adding another bus to the deviated fixed-route service.

Washington City Regional Service

The recommended plan is to initially double the amount of service between Washington City and Allegheny County. During the AM and PM peak periods, four buses would provide a peak period headway of 45 minutes. Buses would be scheduled to leave Washington City in the morning at 5:30AM, 6:15AM, 7:00AM and 7:45AM. Thereafter, two buses would be used and would provide service on a 90-minute headway. Saturday service would also be operated similar to midday service with a 90-minute headway and 10-hour service span.

The expanded regional route would use local highways from Washington City to Canonsburg and then I-79 to I-279 to the West Busway for trips into downtown Pittsburgh. (Permission would need to be obtained from PAAC for use of their West Busway.) The route would serve the park-n-ride lots along the route. Some of the return trips from Allegheny County could be revised to connect with the PAAC South Hills LRV station and proceed to Peters Township and Southpointe before returning to Washington City.

Mid Mon Valley Local Service

MMVTA local routes would see two changes. Service should begin one hour later on both the northbound and southbound portions of the Green Line, since those peak period trips essentially had no ridership. Therefore, the first trip to K-Mart Plaza would leave Charleroi at 7:20AM and the first trip to Donora would leave Charleroi at 7:25AM. A 12:00PM trip to K-Mart and a 12:00PM trip to Donora would be added to replace these two AM trips to better serve the many seniors who use the service for midday shopping.

Commuter service between Washington City and Allegheny County would be doubled under the study recommendations.

Changes to MMVTA regional routes will improve commuter service to Pittsburgh.

Times for the Red Line should be adjusted to provide a convenient transfer to the Green Line for those that wish to travel to Donora or to Rostraver Square, Tri-county Plaza and K-Mart Plaza.

Mid Mon Valley Regional Service

MMVTA Regional routes would include two changes. First, the resources on the midday Route A service could be reduced from one hour to every 90 minutes. The resources saved by this change could be used to extend some of Route A to service to California and thus increase the services on Route B. This change would enable the Route B headway to be improved to about 90-minutes. There would be no affect of these service adjustments on service levels, vehicle needs and operating costs. It is anticipated that there would be a slight ridership improvement.

I-79 Corridor Local/Commuter Service

The proposed I-79 Corridor local/commuter route would serve the Southpointe complex, Canonsburg, Houston, Meadows Race Track/Casino, shopping areas in South Strabane and Washington City. The route would be about 16 miles long. It would take about two hours to complete each round trip.

Two service level alternatives are proposed for this route to reflect the possibility of different funding levels.

Under the lower-cost *Alternative 1*, the service would be operated from 6:00AM to 9:00PM using two buses in the peak period for a 60-minute headway and one bus in the midday, evening and Saturday resulting in a 120-minute headway. This plan would violate generally accepted headway standards for both work and other trip purposes. (Routes that primarily serve work trips should be designed to have a minimum headway of 30 minutes during the peak work trip travel periods. Routes that primarily serve shopping, medical, recreational and similar trip needs should be designed to have a minimum headway of 60 minutes.)

Under the higher-cost *Alternative 2*, the service would be operated from 6:00AM to 9:00PM using four buses in the peak period for a 30-minute headway and two buses in the midday, evening and Saturday resulting in a 60-minute headway. This plan would be consistent with the headway standard for both work and other trip purposes.

New locations such as the Southpointe complex, Canonsburg, and the Meadows Race Track/Casino would receive service with the proposed I-79 Corridor route.

Rural Services

Services in the rural parts of the County would be provided by a concept known as “Rover Bus,” which is fixed route services to an area once or twice a week.

Five rural routes would connect outlying areas with Washington City. Communities that could be served include the Burgettstown area, West Alexander, Marianna, Bentleyville, and Midway and McDonald. While in Washington City, the routes could be aligned to serve the center of downtown, the Hospital and the shopping areas north of I-79.

Three additional rural routes would focus on the Mon Valley. One route would connect the Marianna area with the lower portions of the Mon Valley along the Highway 88 corridor and up through Charleroi. Another route would connect Washington City with the Mon Valley area. The third route would connect the Venetia area with the upper portions of the Mon Valley along Highway 88 and down to Charleroi.

Two of the routes would operate two days a week. Candidates for the two-day a week service would be the Mon Valley and Washington City route as well as the Midway/McDonald/Canonsburg/Washington route. The other six routes would be served one day a week.

The routes would run from 8 AM to 6 PM with a two-hour headway and could offer a limited route deviation service where residents in a certain area could call the day before to have the pick-up arranged closer to their home.

Funding Analysis

State funding for public transportation providers in Pennsylvania was significantly restructured as a result of State Act 44 of 2007. Act 44 altered the sources of state transit assistance, the levels of state funding expected to be available, and many of the requirements and conditions for receiving state funding. The overall intent of the changes enacted through Act 44 was to assure a sustainable program of transit services by providing a funding structure with the following characteristics:

- More predictable levels of funding
- Significant funding increase over historical levels
- Funding sources and levels that should generally track inflation trends
- Streamlined grant programs and grant contracting procedures, and

“Rover Bus” service would provide transit connections to rural parts of Washington County one to two days a week.

Study Findings

- Increased accountability through stronger ties between funding levels and transit system performance.

On a statewide basis, Act 44 dedicated funding for public transportation is estimated to be approximately \$300 million in 2007-08 (\$250 million for operating assistance and \$50 million for capital assistance), and forecast to escalate to \$400 million by FY 2009-10. An annual average of \$414 million is forecast over the next 10 years.

The proposed transit service improvements will together generate additional operating deficits that must be funded, since fare-box revenues will only be sufficient to cover a small portion of operating costs. There are significant capital costs as well. Table 1 shows funding requirements, including federal, state, and local share amounts, for the proposed service expansions as well as existing transit services.

The estimated local match requirement for the proposed service improvements for 2007-2008 is \$161,196. The estimated local match requirement for existing and proposed service improvements for 2007-2008 is \$304,032.

It should be noted that an additional \$1 million of State operating assistance will be required to fund the recommended transit service improvements. Yet the allocation of State operating assistance to Washington County transit systems will not automatically increase in order to fund the proposed service expansions. State operating funds will be distributed using the formula specified in Act 44, which is only minimally sensitive to local transit service levels. Any increases in state allocations to individual transit systems that could help pay for service expansions will depend on an increase in the overall state funding available.

The proposed transit service improvements would require an estimated \$161,196 in local matching funds annually.

Carrying out many of the study's transit service improvements may have to wait on the anticipated increase in state transit funding under Act 44, as well as on finding new sources of local matching funds.

**Table 1 Funding Requirements
For Proposed Service Expansions and Existing Service, 2007- 2008**

	<i>Additional Deficit/Cost</i>	<i>Federal Share</i>	<i>State Share</i>	<i>Local Share</i>
Operating Deficits¹	\$1,476,615	\$314,342	\$1,010,672	\$151,601
Capital Costs¹	\$2,907,500	\$2,326,000	\$571,905	\$9,595
Total	\$4,384,115	\$2,640,342	\$1,582,577	\$161,196
Total Local Match Requirement, Proposed Service Expansions				\$161,196
Total Local Match Requirement, Existing Transit Services				\$142,836
Total Local Match Requirement, 2007-2008				\$304,032

1. Average of Lower- and Higher-Cost Alternatives

Institutional Analysis

Five institutional alternatives for providing public transportation services in Washington County were evaluated. The alternatives present a range of choices and vary by the

- Degree of institutional change
- Source of local matching funds
- Ease or difficulty of implementation

The institutional alternatives are described below, and the issues involved in their implementation are discussed. This has been structured to provide decision makers with a clear understanding of the broad choices and their implications.

- 1. No Change.** No institutional changes to the existing transportation organizations are made. The three current providers continue to exist as they are today. This alternative does not preclude the possibility that each transit organization periodically would modify its current services, offer new types of services and/or expand the geographic area it services. This alternative also does not preclude the possibility that each transit organization might change its administrative structure and/or procedures. For example, MMVTA could be restructured with a smaller board; the City of Washington, through a competitive bidding process, could select a different transit company than GG&C and then monitor the contract in a more traditional manner. Resolving any conflicts among the transportation organizations, ensuring service coordination, identifying and meeting new transit demands, and obtaining local match monies would be handled on a case-by-case, ad hoc basis.

Issues

- The unique institutional arrangement between the City of Washington and GG&C probably would continue, in which a representative of GG&C functions much as a city staff person in coordinating transit services. The City seems satisfied with this arrangement; yet it depends upon a relationship of trust that has developed over the years between the GG&C's representative and the City. Act 44, however,

The No Change institutional alternative would retain the existing arrangements among the three transit providers in Washington County.

requires competitive bidding of transit service contracts, and in fact the City of Washington and GG&C are preparing a bid package for the city contract, to be issued in early 2008. If a different transit operator is ever selected, or if GG&C's representative ever leaves this position, the basis of this unique arrangement will no longer be present. In anticipation of this possibility, and as resources permit, the City of Washington may well decide to put in place more formal procedures and arrangements to ensure public oversight and accountability.

- It would be possible to implement the study's transit service recommendations under the No Change alternative. The following factors would present difficulties for implementation, however:
 - » Increased local match requirements under Act 44 may make it difficult to carry out the study's service expansion recommendations, if the local match has to come from the communities being served.
 - ◆ Within Washington city, the municipality is undergoing severe financial difficulties, while GG&C's ability, as a for-profit business, to continue providing an increasing local match requirement is uncertain.
 - ◆ Elsewhere in the county, expansion of service, whether by the City of Washington/GG&C or by WCTA, would depend on the political and fiscal vagaries of multiple communities, raising questions about long-term stability and sustainability.
 - » The transit providers could approach Washington County for the required local match funds. But the county may be reluctant to provide funding without obtaining greater county control over the provision of transit services.
 - » Proper oversight and coordination of the recommended intra-county transit services would be a challenge.
 - ◆ The City of Washington is a political entity whose principal duty is to its citizens. The City of Washington/GG&C as the transit provider for other communities would need to develop effective communication and coordination mechanisms with the communities being served to ensure sufficient familiarity with and responsiveness to their evolving needs and requirements. This is particularly true for the rapidly developing I-17/Route 19 corridor.

- ◆ WCTA as the provider would need to coordinate closely with both the City of Washington/GG&C and MMVTA to ensure proper integration of the recommended intra-county services with existing local services.

2. **Washington County Transit Coordination Council.** The three providers of public transportation would create a coordinating body. The participating organizations would enter into an agreement that defines the purposes of the Council. The by-laws would stipulate who would represent each transportation organization on the Council; identify any additional Council members; determine the funding obligations; and set forth other appropriate operational rules and conditions. While lacking direct authority, the Transit Coordination Council could do several useful functions. It could convene regular interagency consultations; encourage unified policies; facilitate coordination and expansion of services; centralize information about routes, fares, and schedules; do joint purchasing; and share other administrative tasks.

Like the No Change alternative, this alternative includes the possibility that each transit organization would periodically modify its current services, offer new types of services, and/or expand the geographic area it serves. As services change, the Coordination Council would provide a venue for resolving any conflicts, promoting coordination, and obtaining needed local matching funds. In addition, each transit organization might change its administrative structure and/or procedures as described in the No Change alternative.

Issues

- The chief advantage of this alternative would be the enhanced coordination among the transit providers, which would help encourage appropriate integration of the proposed intra-county services with existing local services. It could also facilitate orderly planning and implementation of future transit service expansions.
- This alternative shares the problems of the No Change alternative concerning sustainable provisions for public accountability in the City of Washington and the ability to raise local match funds.

The Transit Coordination Council alternative would establish a coordinating body to facilitate consultation and coordination among the transit providers.

Under the Partial Consolidation alternative, WCTA would assume responsibility for transit services throughout the study area, excluding the area served by MMVTA.

3. Partial Consolidation. WCTA provides all transit services for all of Washington County except for the Mid Mon Valley. WCTA assumes responsibility for the public transportation services provided by the City of Washington as well as any new fixed route services outside the area served by MMVTA. WCTA continues to provide its paratransit services. It would engage a private operator for fixed route services through a competitive bidding process. One change to the board structure would be appropriate: transferring the board seat designated for a private transportation provider to the City of Washington. This change would ensure that the City is adequately represented, while eliminating any conflict of interest as WCTA expands its transit responsibilities. The County would pay the local match as a nearly county-wide service would be offered. This arrangement avoids the time-consuming and uncertain process of soliciting funds from the many communities being served.

This alternative recognizes the distinctly different transit demands in the Mid Mon Valley. It eliminates the City of Washington's responsibility for providing transit services, while maintaining its oversight. And, this alternative recognizes WCTA's record of strategically improving all aspects of its operation, which bodes well for its capacity to undertake fixed route services. Finally, this alternative constitutes a less radical change than full consolidation.

MMVTA would continue to provide fixed-route transit services for the Mid Mon Valley.

Issues

- WCTA has county-wide accountability and jurisdiction, which provides a sound institutional basis for implementing county-wide transit service recommendations.
- WCTA does not have experience managing fixed-route transit services. However, its track record in managing paratransit services suggests that it has the capacity to effectively provide fixed-route services as well.
- WCTA is accountable to the Washington County Commissioners, which increases the likelihood that Washington County would agree to provide the required local match funds.

- MMVTA would remain as the transit provider for the Mid Mon Valley under this alternative. Its board structure provides a workable basis for ensuring public accountability; it has demonstrated the ability to provide quality transit services; while the distinct identity and different transit needs of the Mon Valley communities calls for a distinct transit organization with close ties to the area.
- The feasibility of this alternative is largely a political and financial question: will the elected officials of the City of Washington and Washington County support this new way of organizing the provision of transit services throughout the county? Will Washington County agree to provide local match funds throughout the county? The prospect of sufficient local match funds from the county to support the expansion of transit services in Washington City, as well as City representation on the WCTA board, may provide sufficient incentives to win the City's support for this alternative.

4. **City of Washington – WCTA Contract.** The City of Washington enters into a contract with WCTA to provide their fixed route, public transit services. WCTA contracts with a private company to operate and maintain the buses that the City owns. WCTA provides the administrative and planning services. Several assumptions are made with this alternative. First, WCTA, with the agreement of the City of Washington, could implement the recommended service improvements within the City. Second, WCTA could implement the services recommended for rural communities and communities in the I-79/Route 19 corridor. Third, this alternative presumes that the City of Washington could end its relationship with WCTA if it proved to be unsatisfactory. In effect, this alternative provides a trial basis for the Partial Consolidation alternative and delays – if not avoids -- the process of changing the current institutional arrangement. Finally, this alternative presumes that the County would provide the local match. County matching funds appear to be necessary and appropriate, because (a) the City of Washington/GG&C local match arrangement may not be sustainable over the long term; (b) securing local match monies from the several communities being served is a time-consuming and uncertain process; and (c) the county has adequate fiscal capacity.

Under the City of Washington-WCTA Contract, WCTA would provide transit services for the City of Washington under contract.

Under the Full Consolidation alternative, WCTA would provide all fixed and paratransit services in the study area, and MMVTA would be dissolved.

Issues

- This alternative, as noted above, represents in effect a trial run of the Partial Consolidation alternative and shares many of its advantages. It would permit the City of Washington to test whether a greater county role in managing and funding city transit services would be advantageous.
- This alternative appears to make most sense as an interim step. If the City would decide to continue relying on WCTA to provide transit services, a cleaner arrangement administratively would be the Partial Consolidation alternative.
- The City of Washington would retain greater direct control over its transit services through the contractual arrangement with WCTA. Yet a decision to opt out of the contract might put in jeopardy any local match funds provided by Washington County and would once again raise the question of how the City would meet the local match requirement.

5. Full Consolidation. WCTA provides all fixed route and paratransit services for Washington County. The City of Washington/GG&C would no longer offer transit services and MMVTA would be dissolved. WCTA would enter into agreements with Westmoreland and Fayette Counties to provide continued transit services to their respective Mid Mon Valley communities. Westmoreland and Fayette Counties would directly – or indirectly through community assessments – pay the proportionate share of local match. Washington County would provide the local match for its municipalities. This arrangement avoids the time-consuming and uncertain process of soliciting funds from the many communities being served.

Issues

- This alternative would provide Washington County with the greatest degree of control over transit services throughout the county. WCTA oversight could facilitate the coordination of services in the Mid Mon Valley with services in the rest of Washington County.
- Yet the existing MMVTA services as well as this study's recommended service improvements for MMVTA are focused largely on meeting local transportation needs in the Mid Mon Valley and providing com-

muter service into Pittsburgh. The issue of intra-county coordination does not appear to be a crucial issue for the Mid Mon Valley at this time.

- It is not clear that WCTA oversight of transit services within the Mid Mon Valley would be more effective than that of the MMVTA. Both board structures provide workable mechanisms for ensuring accountability.
- Full Consolidation would require an extensive and possibly contentious administrative process. Each of MMVTA's member municipalities would be required to pass a resolution approving dissolution of the Authority. These municipalities may be reluctant to cede control of their transit services to a county-wide entity. Mid Mon Valley communities might be concerned whether WCTA would have the same sense of responsibility to the Mid Mon Valley as MMVTA. The Valley has always had a separate identity from the remainder of Washington County.

Summary

The Washington County Transit Study is intended to provide the sponsoring transit agencies with clear guidance for improving transit services in Washington County. The study examines how existing transit services are currently organized and provided. It assesses the current and future demand for transit services, with particular attention to identifying underserved areas and populations in the study area. It also compiles and evaluates public input from across the study area to better understand public needs and preferences for transit services.

Based on this analysis and input, the study recommends transit service improvements that include no cost and low cost improvements as well as more substantial service expansions, and improvements to existing transit services as well as new services to previously unserved parts of the study area. The study also assesses the funding requirements to carry out the transit service improvements and the possible sources of those funds. Finally, the study evaluates different institutional arrangements among the transit agencies for providing public transportation services in the study area.

The successful implementation of the study recommendations will depend upon the collaborative efforts of the City of Washington/GG&C, the Mid Mon Valley Transit Authority, and the Washington County Transpor-

Study Findings

tation Authority. Perhaps the central issue will be identifying a sufficient and stable source (or sources) of the local matching funds required to pay for the recommended transit service improvements.