

Study Process

Under the guidance of a Technical Advisory Committee, the study team undertook a detailed study to determine current and future needs for public transportation in Washington County, and opportunities for improvement, including improvements to existing service, new service options, and more effective institutional arrangements for providing public transportation services.

In particular, the study team undertook the following tasks:

- *Existing Conditions Inventory and Analysis:* the study team compiled and assessed data covering two major areas - the supply characteristics of the existing transit services and how they are utilized; and the demographics, land use patterns, and socioeconomic conditions which constitute the demand/community characteristics of the area. Particular attention was directed towards finding opportunities to improve existing transit services and identifying underserved population groups and geographic areas in Washington County.
- *Public Involvement:* the study team also conducted an extensive public outreach program designed to achieve several objectives: to keep the public informed throughout the study process; to identify needs and preferences for public transportation services; and to obtain public feedback concerning possible transit service improvement concepts.
- *Preparation of Study Recommendations:* using the findings of the existing conditions analysis and the public outreach program, the study team developed recommendations for transit service improvements and new institutional arrangements among transit service providers in Washington County.

An important principle guiding the study has been the need to identify recommendations that are financially feasible given the current and future transit funding environment in Pennsylvania. In practice, this has meant carefully considering where unmet demand for transit services (either new or expanded) exists in the study area. It has also meant matching that demand with the appropriate level of transit service.

Financial feasibility was a key principle in developing the transit service recommendations.

Existing Conditions Inventory and Analysis **Community Characteristics**

The analysis of community characteristics considered several factors to assess the current and future need for public transportation services in Washington County, including:

- Population growth trends and concentration
- Location of “transit-dependent” populations
- Development trends
- Commuter patterns

The key findings and conclusions of this analysis are discussed below.

Population

- Population in the Study Area is concentrated in the I-79 and Mon Valley corridors.
- The Study Area population has declined slightly in recent years
- In contrast, the I-79 Corridor has grown at a moderate rate in the same period. In fact, several communities in this corridor have grown quite rapidly.
- Of the six municipalities with populations of 10,000 or more, five are located in the I-79 Corridor and one is located in the Mon Valley Corridor.

Population Density

Consistent with the largely rural character of the Study Area, most municipalities exhibit low population densities. A handful of communities in the I-79 Corridor and the Mon Valley Corridor have residential housing densities of 4 or more housing units per acre, the threshold at which a minimal level of regular fixed-route bus service may become feasible. Most of the other municipalities fall well below this threshold.

Target Groups for Transit

- The Mon Valley Corridor has relatively higher percentages of the “target groups” for transit – e.g., people in poverty, who lack a car, have a disability, or are 65 years and older – when compared to the Study Area as a whole.

While the population of Washington County has declined slightly in recent years, that of the I-79 Corridor has grown at a moderate rate, and several communities have grown quite rapidly.

- Several Mon Valley communities – Charleroi, Donora, and Monessen in particular – have notably higher percentages of these target groups.
- The I-79 Corridor generally has lower percentages of the target groups than the Study Area as a whole. The city of Washington stands out as an exception in the corridor; it typically has significantly higher percentages of the target groups than the other I-79 communities.
- The area outside of the main population corridors generally resembles the Study Area as a whole in the percentage of the target groups.
- The cluster of Bentleyville, Cokeburg, Marianna, and West Bethlehem located south of I-79 between Washington and the Mon Valley, as well as the municipalities of West Alexander and Claysville along I-70 near West Virginia, exhibit relatively higher percentages of the target groups.

Development Trends

- The I-79 Corridor accounted for almost two-thirds of all the residential building permits issued in the Study Area between 2001 and 2005.
- North Strabane, Peters, and South Strabane Townships in particular have exhibited the most residential development activity.
- Just two municipalities in the Mon Valley Corridor (Rostraver and California) and three in the rest of the Study Area (Nottingham, Mount Pleasant, and Donegal) have issued as many as 100 building permits in this period.
- Large employers in the Study Area are concentrated in the I-79 Corridor.
- Southpointe Business Park in Canonsburg has emerged as a major employment center.

Commuting Patterns

- The cities of Washington and Pittsburgh are the most significant individual commuting destinations for Study Area residents.
- Substantial commuting activity occurs within both the I-79 and Mon Valley Corridors. This is particularly the case in the I-79 Corridor, which has a larger number of commuting trips within a more concentrated area. In each case, the number of intra-corridor commuting trips exceeds those made to Washington and Pittsburgh.

Southpointe Business Park in Canonsburg has emerged as a major employment center.

More people commute among I-79 corridor communities than from the corridor into Pittsburgh.

Demand for fixed route bus service is concentrated in the City of Washington and along the I-79 and Mid Mon Valley corridors.

Light rail transit service is currently not feasible in Washington County.

Washington County currently lacks the population and development density needed to support light rail transit service.

- A substantial number of people from the adjacent municipalities commute to the city of Washington.
- More Mon Valley Corridor residents commute to the I-79 Corridor than to Pittsburgh.
- Very few I-79 Corridor residents commute to the Mon Valley Corridor.
- Relatively few Study Area residents commute to Robinson Town Center and the Airport Corridor.

Conclusions

The preceding analysis of community characteristics of the Study Area suggests the following conclusions

- Population, employers, and commercial activity are largely concentrated in the City of Washington and the I-79 and Mon Valley Corridors. Outside of these areas, there is little warrant for fixed-route transit service. Within these areas, fixed route bus service may be supportable.
- The centers of development in Washington County currently lack the requisite volume and density of population and commercial development to support light rail transit service.
- Most new development activity in the Study Area, both residential and commercial, is occurring in the I-79 Corridor, reinforcing this area as a center of population and economic activity. Much of that development, however, is suburban in character. Lower densities and relatively affluent households may not translate into a significant demand for transit services.
- The target populations for transit are concentrated largely in communities where fixed-route transit service is available. (Whether or not that service is meeting their needs is a separate question.) Members of these groups can be found throughout the Study Area, or course. Meeting their transportation needs, particularly in lower-density areas, will require alternatives to fixed-route transit service (such as the existing paratransit service offered by WCTA).
- Fixed-route transit service is available to commuters going into Pittsburgh from the two corridors. Other important commuter flows in the study area, however, are not currently served by appropriate tran-

sit routes. These include the flow of commuters into Washington city from adjacent townships, or the commuting between I-79 Corridor communities.

Public Transportation Resources

The analysis of public transportation resources considered the following system and performance measures of the three transit agencies in Washington County:

- **Services**
 - » Routes/Service Types
 - » Statistics (hours/miles/vehicles)
 - » Ridership
 - » Fares
- **Service Coverage**
 - » Unserved areas
 - » Unserved major trip attractors
- **Service Levels**
 - » Headway
 - » Span
 - » Directness
 - » Speed
- **Route/Service Performance**
 - » Productivity
 - » Financial

The key findings and conclusions of this analysis are discussed below.

City of Washington/GG&C

The City of Washington through its contract operator, GG&C Bus Company, provides two types of fixed route bus service. The first type is the local service provided within the City of Washington. The second type is the commuter service that is provided from the City of Washington to downtown Pittsburgh.

GG&C Bus Company provides local fixed route bus service within the City of Washington and commuter service to downtown Pittsburgh.



Local Routes

Three local routes extend from downtown Washington to the following outlying areas:

- the major shopping areas located to the northeast of the City including Trinity Point, Strabane Square and Washington Mall
- the Washington Hospital and the Shop-N-Save along West Chestnut Street
- the western portions of the City as well as the Shop-N-Save along West Chestnut Street

One bus provides service on all three routes throughout each weekday. Another bus supplements service on each of the three routes during a portion of each weekday. One bus provides service on all three routes on Saturday with one exception -- one trip is made on the route that serves the western portions of the City by the Commuter route returning from Allegheny County. There is no service on Sunday.

All the three local routes only serve the midday period. On Saturday, a similar service span to the weekday span is operated. Typically each local route operates with a span of between 5 ½ and 8 ½ hours each weekday and between four and seven hours on Saturday. These routes are not geared for work trip purposes but rather for midday shopping and other trip purposes. The weekday service span is from 8:00 AM to 3:40 PM, while the weekend service span is from 8:45 AM to 3:55 PM. A uniform frequency of service does not exist.

The base fare for the local service is a flat fare charge of \$1.10, which is relatively low compared with other base fares for Class 3 systems throughout Pennsylvania.

Commuter Route

There is one commuter route. Service begins in Wolfdale or at the Jessop Place Park-n-Ride site. Service proceeds through the City of Washington and then north, servicing the communities along Interstate I-79 via Pike Street and then to US Highway 19 and into Allegheny County. During weekdays, most trips proceed to downtown Pittsburgh. However, one weekday trip and both Saturday trips only serve the Port Authority of Allegheny County (PAAC) South Hills Light Rail Transit Station.

Two buses are needed for the weekday commuter service due to the long round trip time. Six round trips between Washington City and Pittsburgh are provided during the week and two round trips on Saturday.

The service span on the Washington City - Pittsburgh route is more geared for work trip purposes. The initial trip to Pittsburgh begins at 5:30AM with the last trip leaving Pittsburgh at 5:15PM. On Saturdays, the service span is from 9:00AM to 3:25PM. There is no commuter service on Sunday.

The City of Washington has a distance-based fare structure for the commuter route. There are five zones for travel on the commuter route, a reasonable number of zones for the distance of the route. The base fare for a trip within one zone is \$1.50. The trip across all five zones would cost \$5.00. This five-zone trip represents the fare for a trip between the City of Washington and Pittsburgh.

The analysis of GG&C performance indicates that ridership (measured in riders per mile or per hour) is very low as well as revenue paid by riders. However, the costs to operate the services are very reasonable.

An analysis of the trends in the fixed route operating statistics shows that between FY 2002 and FY 2006, the number of vehicle miles and vehicle hours increased. However, ridership and revenue declined. The increase in cost over the review period was very minor at about two percent a year.

Mid Mon Valley Transit Authority

MMVTA provides two types of fixed route bus service. The first type is the local service provided throughout Mon Valley focusing on the area surrounding the California University and the communities of Speers, Charleroi, North Charleroi, Belle Vernon, Fayette City, N. Belle Vernon, Rostraver Township, Monessen and Donora. The second type is the commuter service that is provided along the State Highway 88 corridor from the Mon Valley to downtown Pittsburgh.

Local Routes

There are six separate local routes. Two of the routes are operated on Mondays only and connect communities in Washington County with those in Fayette and Westmoreland Counties, including the shopping Plazas in Westmoreland County. Three of the routes are shuttle routes that remain



MMVTA provides local fixed route bus service to communities in the Mon Valley and commuter service into downtown Pittsburgh.



within Washington County. The final local route connects Donora, North Charleroi and Charleroi in Washington County with Monessen Rostraver Twp. and North Belle Vernon in Westmoreland County and Belle Vernon in Fayette County.

MMVTA's local bus routes operate at various times throughout the day on weekdays. Only the Silver - California University route operates on Saturday and Sundays. Two of the local routes operate on Mondays only. Four of the local routes begin service at or near 9:00AM and end service before 5:00PM. These routes are not geared for work trip purposes but rather for midday shopping and other trip purposes. The span of service for the Green route is nearly 12 hours and is provided from 6:20AM to 6:25PM.

The Silver - California University route service span is extensive with weekday service beginning at 7:30AM and ending at 11:30PM. However, when school is not in session, the weekday service ends at 4:30PM. When school is in session, Saturday service begins at 11:00AM and ends at 12:30AM the next morning. However, Saturday service ends at 6:30PM when school is not in session. When school is in session service is provided on Sundays from 9:00AM to 3:30PM. When school is not in session, there is no Sunday service.

The headway on the Gold routes that operate only on Monday is minimal and is measured in number of trips. The Blue, Green and Red routes operate on a 60-minute headway. The headway for the Silver route is extensive and varies from 25 to 35 minutes on weekdays. A 60-minute headway is operated on the Silver route on Saturday and Sunday.

MMVTA has a distance-based fare structure, with 15 zones for travel on the local routes. The base fare for a trip within one zone is \$1.50. The trip across all 15 zones would cost \$5.20.

Commuter Routes

There are two commuter routes. One begins at California University and connects all communities along the State Highway 88 corridor in Washington County up to New Eagle. The other commuter route is the primary one and begins in Speers and travels along the State Highway 88 corridor up through North Charleroi and into Westmoreland County to serve Monessen

and returning to Washington County serving Donora and then along State Highway 88 into Allegheny County and then to downtown Pittsburgh.

The service span on the Route A – Charleroi-Pittsburgh is extensive. On weekdays, service to Pittsburgh begins at 4:50AM with the last trip leaving Pittsburgh at 11:40PM and ending in Speers at 1:13AM. On Saturdays, the service span is from 6:00AM to 12:43AM the next day. On Sundays, the span is from 8:00AM to 7:42PM.

The service span on Route B – California-New Eagle is also extensive. On weekdays, service begins at 6:30AM and ends at 9:55PM. On Saturdays, the service span is from 8:50AM to 3:55PM. On Sundays, the span is from 11:06AM to 8:22PM.

The headway on the Route A – Charleroi-Pittsburgh route varies by peak travel direction. In the AM peak period travel to Pittsburgh, the headway is about 15 minutes. Off peak midday and evening service to and from Pittsburgh is operated on a 60-minute headway. The PM peak period service from Pittsburgh is operated on about a 20 minute. Service on weekends is limited and is measured by number of round trips operated – six on Saturday and two on Sunday.

The headway for the Route B – California-New Eagle is limited and is measured in terms of number of round trips – three in the morning, two in the afternoon and one in the evening. On Saturday, four round trips are operated and two are operated on Sunday.

There is a distance-based fare for the commuter routes with nearly 20 fare zones for travel to Pittsburgh. The base fare for a trip within one zone is \$1.50. A trip crossing all zones would cost \$7.30. The MMVTA fare structure has more zones than most other transit systems in the United States. The MMVTA has recognized the complicated nature of their fare structure and has developed a proposal for reducing the number of zones and offering multi-ride discounts for those using the Local routes.

MMVTA operates 7 peak period fixed routes that include Local service within Washington, Fayette and Westmoreland Counties as well as Com-muter service to Allegheny County.

The analysis of MMVTA performance indicates that ridership is low (measured in riders per mile or per hour), fare paid by riders is high and the costs to operate the services are reasonable.

An analysis of the trends in the fixed route operating statistics shows that between FY 2002 and FY 2006, the number of vehicle miles decreased while

vehicle hours increased. Over the same period, ridership on the fixed route system decreased by 22.2 percent, cost increased by only 15.8 percent and revenue increase by 6.9 percent due to two fare increases.

Washington County Transportation Authority (WCTA –Washington Rides)



WCTA provides door-to-door paratransit service throughout Washington County for people who are unable to use fixed route transit service due to mobility limitations.

Washington Rides provides door-to-door paratransit service in Washington County and to certain destinations in the nearby counties of Allegheny, Beaver, Greene, Fayette and Westmoreland Counties. Paratransit service provides transportation for people who are unable to use the fixed-route service due to physical, medical or other mobility limitations, or who live outside the fixed-route service area. Unlike fixed-route bus service, paratransit service does not follow fixed routes or schedules. Paratransit riders contact

the transit agency in advance to schedule a pick-up time. The paratransit vehicle provides door-to-door service to any destination within the service area. Often several riders are transported on a given trip.

WCTA directly administers the Washington Rides program and contracts primarily with four separate service providers to operate the trips. These providers include GG&C Bus Company, Laidlaw Transit Services, Tri-County Access, and White Line Taxi, each of which is responsible for providing service in designated areas of the county. On an average day, over 1,200 individual trips are scheduled and provided on the four primary contracted carriers.

There are six primary paratransit services provided through Washington Rides including:

- Shared-Ride Program for Senior Citizens
- Rural Transportation Program for Persons with Disabilities
- Veterans Transportation Program
- Medical Assistance Transportation Program (MATP)
- Welfare-to-Work Transportation Program
- General Public Service

All but the General Public Service provide subsidized transportation services to various transit-dependent populations. In the case of a general public user, the service is not subsidized and the passenger must pay the full cost of the trip.

A fleet of 89 vehicles is used to provide Washington Rides services in Washington County. This includes 8 buses, 45 vans and 36 sedans. There is a mix of ownership of these vehicles with some being owned by the WCTA, some by other public agencies and other by private companies.

Based on the review of various performance measures, the Washington Rides paratransit system generally performs in accordance with typical paratransit service standards as well as its own adopted standards. The review indicates a favorable performance overall.

Some of the issues with the current system that were raised within this review include the fact that much of the passenger activity on the system is clustered in specific areas or along certain corridors. Also, a large portion of the trips are provided between 8:00 AM and 11:00 AM and between 2:00 PM and 4:00 PM. Another issue raised is the fact that service is currently being provided to some passengers under the Persons with Disabilities program that should be covered under MMVTA's ADA complementary paratransit service. In terms of the composition of demand, this review showed that demand from the MATP has grown significantly over the past two years. Lastly, this analysis also showed that service on the Washington Rides system is currently being provided with a fairly aged fleet.

Institutional Profile

The study team also examined the institutional arrangements that govern how the three transit agencies provide public transportation services in Washington County. The transit providers are independent and quite different entities. Each service provider has its own particular governing structure, funding criteria, and mission that reflect the different time and circumstances of their creation.

City of Washington/GG&C

Since the early 1980's, the City of Washington has made transit services available to its residents through a contract with GG&C Bus Company. These services replaced several bankrupted private operations and were made possible through specifically authorized state subsidies. The Mayor has overall

*GG&C operates
fixed route transit
services under contract
with the City of
Washington.*

responsibility acting upon authority that City Council granted to him. These responsibilities involve 3 functions. First, as the public transit sponsor, the City submits applications for and receives capital and operating assistance from the state and federal governments. Second, the City contracts with GG&C to handle all aspects of the transit service and pays for these many services by “passing through” the state and federal operating assistance to GG&C. Third, the City maintains the necessary and appropriate records.

GG&C operates the fixed route services for the City of Washington under a contract that has been annually renewed. As a third class city, Washington is not required to competitively bid this particular contract. GG&C operates the bus service, maintains the transit fleet, and in a unique arrangement, also performs all transit administrative functions and all grant management for the City. On behalf of the City, GG&C also is responsible for keeping informed of ever-changing federal and state programs and regulations and serving on the SPC Transit Operators Committee. Finally, in recent years, GG&C has assumed responsibility for marketing and system planning.

GG&C also holds contracts with neighboring East Washington Borough and South Strabane, Canton, and Chartiers Townships. These municipalities pay GG&C relatively nominal fees, and the monies are used as local match to leverage federal and state operating assistance. GG&C also offers shared ride services under contract with the Washington County Transit Authority and owns, maintains, and operates school buses.

Mid Mon Valley Transit Authority

The Mid Mon Valley Transit Authority was created in 1985 to provide transit services to the Mid Mon Valley, a region that has long had a separate identity from the three counties that it straddles, for reasons of geography, culture, and economic character. The mid-1980s were a time when the steel industry in the region had collapsed and the already-depressed local economy of the Mid Mon Valley was further devastated. Three bus companies providing some transit service were on the brink of closing. However, the 1980 Census found for the first time that 21 Mid-Mon Valley communities located in Washington, Westmoreland, and Fayette Counties qualified as the Monessen Urbanized Area. As an Urbanized Area, these communities were eligible to receive federal and state transit operating assistance. MMVTA was created to be the designated recipient of these monies and so insure that transit services could continue.

MMVTA's mission is to provide transit services for its member municipalities and so help to revitalize the Mid Mon Valley. A 21-member board governs MMVTA. Each member municipality appoints its representative. The board member must be a taxpayer in, maintain a business in, or be a citizen of the municipality being represented. The Board meets monthly.

MMVTA is a non-operating authority. 88 Transit has secured the contract for commuter service since 1985 and for local service since 1996 under a competitive bid process.

Over the years, MMVTA has replaced its bus fleet as it aged and modified service and fares. In recent years, services for California University students have been substantially expanded with financial support from the University. Notably, a modern transit center was opened in Charleroi. MMVTA is now in the process of building a bus maintenance facility.

Washington County Transportation Authority

The Washington County Commissioners created the Washington County Transit Authority (WCTS) in 2001. WCTA was incorporated "...to coordinate, manage, and oversee all federal and/or state subsidized transportation programs in Washington County, and to undertake and perform all services or actions attendant thereto..." In 2003 in an effort to further clarify its purpose, WCTA restated its mission, "To promote and provide high quality, cost-effective transportation to the citizens of Washington County and surrounding areas as appropriate, especially older adults, persons with disabilities, veterans, and economically disadvantaged individuals, including those on Medial Assistance."

WCTA is governed by a 9-member board that meets monthly. The County Commissioners appoint the Board members to represent the four geographic regions of the county and several transit constituencies.

WCTA is a non-operating authority; it provides shared ride services through competitively bid contracts with private operators. The current 3-year contracts were executed in 2005 with GG&C Bus Company, Tri-County Access, White Line Taxi, Laidlaw Transit Services, and Southwestern Pennsylvania Area Agency on Aging.

WCTA adopted a Strategic Plan in 2004. The Plan, which is updated annually, presents a 5-year program of projects concerning all aspects of WCTA's mission. And, WCTA has developed and instituted "Washington Rides" -- both a brand name and a comprehensive marketing program that

MMVTA contracts with 88 Transit to obtain local and commuter transit services.

WCTA provides shared ride services through contracts with several private operators.

A Stakeholder Committee met four times over the course of the study and provided input from a variety of interests.

includes a logo, website, brochures, and concerted outreach to state and local, civic and government organizations.

Public Involvement

The goal of the public involvement program was to gather meaningful information about needs and preferences related to transit service in Washington County. To properly represent the range of interests countywide, the study team gathered input from current service providers, government, agency and institutional officials and the general public.

A **Technical Advisory Committee** guided the study and met regularly. A **Stakeholder Committee** met four times over the course of the study and provided input from a variety of interests including the State and County perspectives, local communities, business, educational institutions, and human service agencies.

During each phase of the public involvement program, multiple opportunities were provided for information and exchange with the public.

The goals during Phase I were to build awareness for the Study and the availability of transit service in Washington County in general as well as solicit input into transit needs. Feedback was incorporated into the Base Conditions/Inventory analysis.

During Phase II, public feedback on the preliminary service concepts was sought through a series of public meetings and intercept survey events at geographically dispersed locations around the County as well as through the project website.



Phase III involved presenting draft study recommendations for further input to government, agency and institutional officials and the general public through a series of briefing meetings and a final stakeholder committee meeting.

Summary of Public Input

The objectives of the public involvement program were twofold, primarily to obtain input from the public (transit and non-transit users) regarding specific transit service alternatives that may affect

them and secondarily, to build general awareness of transit (non-transit users) in Washington County. The specific goal was to secure a sufficient number of responses (150 transit users and 300 non-transit users) from people who may be affected by proposed service changes. The goal of building awareness was achieved once the primary objective was accomplished.



A brief summary of key results is provided below:

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Total Responses</i>	<i>No. of Non-transit</i>	<i>No. of Transit Users</i>
CalU Online Survey	300	192	108
Intercept Surveys – Belle Vernon City of Washington Canonsburg County Fair Burgettstown	187	161	26
Total	487	353	134

- Lack of awareness of current transit service availability -While respondents to the CalU survey were aware that public transportation service exists, most did not have knowledge of the specifics such as routes and schedules.
- Low current transit service usage – 14% of respondents to the intercept surveys said they currently use transit.
- 45% of participants in the intercept survey said they would use the modified or new service alternatives with the most popular concepts being the I-79 Local/Commuter Route and the Rover Bus Service.
- More hour specific, reliable and frequent transit service was the primary need among the employer focus group participants.
 - » Stops need to be at specific locations in close proximity to employers and workforce residences.
 - » Waiting times for service need to be less than 15 minutes.
 - » Ensure route interconnectivity to promote maximum ridership because it is so easy and convenient to get in, out, and around Washington County.

The study conducted over 480 surveys of both transit users and non-transit users.

Just 14% of intercept survey respondents said they currently use transit.

45% of participants in the intercept survey said they would use the modified or new service alternatives, with the most popular concepts being the I-79 Local/Commuter Route between City of Washington and Southpointe and the Rover Bus Service to rural parts of Washington County.

Study Process

Another key need for study area employers is more transit service into and out of Pittsburgh.

- The second most important need among employers was more transit service into and out of Pittsburgh.
 - » Provide quicker, express service.
 - » The service created needs to be hour specific, reliable, and frequent.
 - » Use more long-range thinking and consider other transit options.