

4.2.1 Piedmont Authority for Regional Transportation (PART)

Public transportation provides mobility choices to everyone but is especially important to older adults, students, households without automobiles, persons with physical or mental impairments, and those burdened by the high cost of operating an automobile. It is an efficient, low-cost, high-capacity means of providing mobility throughout the community and gives everyone more choices in how to travel. In recently years it has become apparent that Millennial's, persons born between 1982 and 2003, are choosing to live in communities where automobile travel is a second option. They are embracing communities where cycling, walking and transit are preferred options. Public comments to the MPO on the 2035 LRTP Update reflect the fact that improved transit services are widely seen as a key element of the area's future transportation system.

From a transportation planning perspective the public interest and demand for an improved transit system is often lost amidst other transportation infrastructure needs. Transit is interconnected with all eight federally mandated transportation planning factors. A good public transportation system supports the economy by connecting people with jobs. It is a key element to reducing poverty and providing opportunities for everyone. Transit can be an equalizer, provides the same access to jobs, goods, services and entertainment, at the same cost

A well-integrated, connected public transportation network:

- Provides mobility to the transit-dependent (those with few or no other travel choices),
- Ensures that transportation is not a barrier to accessing employment, services, or other needs,
- Provides travel choices to the community and the region,
- Mitigates growth in traffic congestion,
- Contributes towards improved air quality and reduced dependence on fossil fuels, and
- Supports livable, compact patterns of development.

to everyone. In recent years the high cost of transportation has become a discussion point. Driving distance is not the only factor from individuals dependent on automobile travel, insurance, fuel, vehicle cost, and maintenance account for 31% on average of a family's income in Guilford County. A well-connected and integrated public transportation network enhances connectivity across and between modes for people, allowing travelers to make part of a trip by transit and part by another mode. By reducing the need to add roadway capacity, public transportation promotes efficient management and operation and emphasizes preservation of the existing transportation network. Safety and security are key elements of a high-quality transit system.

Public transportation directly increases accessibility and mobility of people and promotes quality of life by providing more travel choices. Numerous communities across the country have enhanced their traditional bus transit systems and expand transit choices to include Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), street cars, and light and commuter rail. The local economic benefit of a robust transit system is well documented. Transit promotes mixed use multi-storied development, which on a per acre basis generates more tax revenue than less dense suburban development. In our region freight and logistics is a significant employment sector. Public transit can indirectly increase freight mobility by removing cars from the roads giving the Triad a competitive advantage over other freight hubs across the county.

A transit system that allows people to drive less is crucial for reduced environmental impact and energy conservation. Transit systems are vital in areas of state and local planned growth, especially in areas of compact development, which uses less raw land than low-density development and can support higher levels of transit service.

Description of Existing Services

Established in 1997, PART provides regional transportation planning and coordination functions and operates a regional transit system. Its members include the four Triad MPOs (Burlington-Graham, High Point, Greensboro and Winston-Salem); the counties of Alamance, Davidson, Davie, Forsyth, Guilford, Randolph, Rockingham, Stokes, Surry, and Yadkin; and the cities of Burlington, Greensboro, High Point and Winston-Salem.

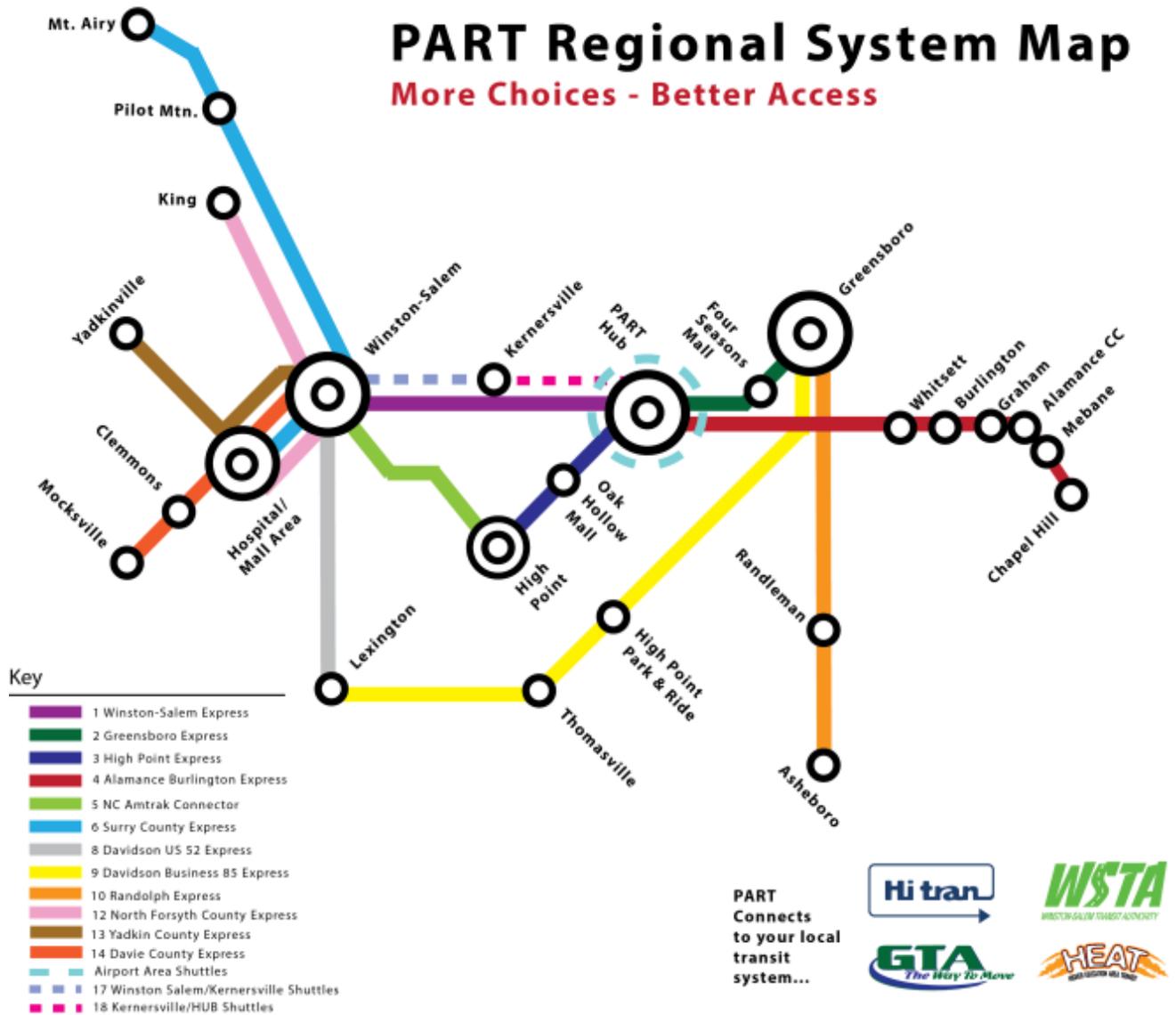
PART's regional programs and projects include:

- Regional transit system (PART Express)
- Regional ridesharing and vanpool program
- Maintains and operates the regional travel model
- Air-quality conformity planning and coordination
- Air quality awareness outreach and education
- Regional land use and transportation planning
- Planning for future regional transit services including passenger rail.

The PART Express system provides regional bus service connecting the city bus systems of Greensboro, High Point, and Winston-Salem and surrounding counties. Service on the three main express routes is every 30 minutes during peak hours and every hour during off-peak travel times. Shuttles provide service in the area around the Piedmont Triad International Airport. PART Express does not provide evening or weekend service, except for its Amtrak Connector.

The PART Ridesharing/Vanpool Program increases the use of alternative transportation in the region by providing individuals and employers with what they need to start a vanpool. The ridesharing staff initiates communication and maintains working relationships with businesses and organizations. Employers benefit through improving worker productivity; expanding the employee labor market; reducing employee's turnover, which saves on training costs; reducing the need for new/expanded parking facilities; and enhancing community and employee relations.

PART also provides regional out-of-county non-emergency medical transportation/express bus service from the Triad connecting to the UNC Hospital System. This route was recently upgraded with an additional stop in Mebane and a connection with Triangle Transit. This connection is the first of its kind in the state and perhaps the country.



PART Regional System Map

Ridership & Finances

As noted before, the PART Express system provides regional bus service connecting the city bus systems of Greensboro, High Point, and Winston-Salem and surrounding counties. This core service was started in 2002, funded by a 5% tax on rental car receipts collected in Guilford and Forsyth Counties.

Funding for the system is made possible by the enabling legislation allowing PART to levy a rental car tax of up to 5% and/or a vehicle registration fee of up to \$5 per year with the approval of each affected county. The system is financed primarily by a rental car tax authorized by Guilford and Forsyth Counties. During the first several years of operation PART generated revenue surpluses. In 2005, PART began offering outlying counties in the region service. The counties were given the choice of instituting a vehicle registration fee or a rental car tax, despite having minimal rental car tax business based in the county. All outlying counties except Randolph approved a rental car tax as well, but this generates little revenue. Randolph County imposed a \$1 vehicle registration fee. The basic strategy was to run the service until the revenue surplus was exhausted and then seek additional local revenues.

This, combined with the impact of the recession that began in 2008 and changes in airport travel patterns that lead to decreased rental car activities contributing significantly to PART's budget shortfalls. Prior to 2010 PART received an average of \$3.2M in rental car proceeds. During FY 2011 that revenue declined to \$2.4M. During 2012 the PART Board failed to rally support to increase operating revenue through the introduction of or increasing an existing vehicle registration fee from the member counties. In FY 2012 Forsyth and Guilford County contributed funding support from their general budget to support the PART Express services operated in the urbanized area. In FY2013 the city of Winston-Salem made available operating funds from the STP-DA budget to support the operation in their urbanized area.

In response to declining revenue PART made service cuts across its system. Beginning in FY 2013 PART reduced services on its routes to stay within a balanced operating budget that provides services on all operating corridors. PART has worked to stabilize its finances at this time in an effort to fit its service expenses within its revenue base. PART will continue to work on identifying operating efficiencies and seeking additional operating funds from local and federal sources including any available Federal 5307 and 5311 federal transit funds from NCDOT as well to CMAQ from the MPOs and/or NCDOT to supplement these efforts.

By FY 14 PART's financial picture had stabilized and improved. It has passed two year ending financial audits with no findings and has establish several routes that were cut in FY 13. PARTs total ridership in 2014 was is expected to be up 5% from the 2011 level of 719,474 unlinked passenger trips.

Planning & Technical Program

Between 2000 and 2008 PART studied regional transit options in the Triad, comparing regional rail versus bus rapid transit alternatives. The first study, a Major Investment Study completed in 2003 was found unsatisfactory by FTA in that the ridership projections did not meet FTA requirements. The second study, an Alternatives Analysis also fell short, under 5000 riders per day, substantially shy of FTA New Starts minimum operating criteria. Since that time this project has been dormant. This system is shown in the CTP but is not a part of the fiscally constrained 2040 MTP (see the discussion section for more details). Along with this, the High Point Planning Department has continued planning for activity centers to begin creating nodes of higher-density development that could support a future fixed-guideway transit system. Future planning work and related efforts may yet lead to a viable fixed-guideway system in the region.

In 2008 PART completed a Seamless Mobility Study that included the urbanized area operators and identified programs that could be jointly developed among all systems in the urbanized area to increase the efficiency of service and conveniences to the traveling public. PART completed a *Regional Transit Development Plan in 2010* that made recommendations for both the PART system and about the local operations. Future PART recommendations in this LRTP consider the recommendations of that study. Funding options for future transit enhancements was made possible in 2009 by the State Legislator. It expanded the vehicle registration option from \$5.00 to \$8.00 and gave Guilford and Forsyth Counties a ½ sales tax option similar to Charlotte and the Triangle area.

In 2014 PART in cooperation with the Piedmont Triad Regional Council and numerous other partners completed Piedmont Together, a regional vision designed to build a resilient, prosperous economy and a better quality of life for all Piedmont Triad residents. Transportation, specifically the lack of mobility choices, is a major element of the vision.

Regional Transit Development Plan

A Regional Transit Development Plan (RTDP) was undertaken by PART to explore the development of a sustainable, effective and efficient regional transportation system. The RTDP's goal was to work with communities, residents, stakeholders and transit systems of the Piedmont Triad to 1) identify ways to manage the benefits and challenges of growth; 2) recognize its impact on our region's transportation system; and 3) address these challenges in a sustainable fashion that is sensitive to residents, resources and the environment.

Future Service Enhancements

Analysis focuses on Hi tran and PART because they are the major providers of fixed-route local and regional transit in the MPO area. Beginning with each agency's plans and goals, the analysis predicts the amount of future revenue and compares it to projected costs for capital purchases and costs for maintenance and operations. The analysis factors in the need to replace buses on a regular schedule.

Restoration of services cut that took place in 2011, 2012, and 2013 will be the first priority. The LRTP assumes this will occur by the end of calendar year 2015 (in the 2015 network year). In addition to seeking operating efficiencies PART will seek local funds, any available FTA Section 5307 and 5311 funds from NCDOT, and possibly CMAQ grants to enable this to happen.

PART will work directly with transit systems in the regional to establish a Mobility Management or Regional Call Center for the Triad. PART has developed the space to accommodate the Regional Call Center. Planning for the implementation of a mobility management call center began in 2014. The cost associated with this project will be associated with personnel needed to perform the call taking and scheduling functions. A tentative opening date for the center is August 2015.

PART's second priority is completing its intermodal passenger transfer and bus maintenance facility. PART received Section 5309 Earmark funds from 2006-2009 as part of SAFTEA- LU for the construction of an Intermodal Transportation Center. PART has purchased property over the past 3-4 years, and will work directly with FTA on the scoping of the construction project to accommodate the intended purposes of the federal earmark. A total budget for upcoming construction is established at \$11M. Preliminary design is completed and construction is estimated to begin in mid-2015 with a completion date of late 2016.

The PART TDM / Vanpool Program has shown steady growth during FY2012. PART anticipates expanding the overall fleet to accommodate vanpool expansion during FY2014-2017 for the vehicle purchases, as well as regular vehicle replacements through 2025 to support the Regional Program.

In January 2015 PART revised Route 4, the Medical Connector, and connected up with Triangle Transit in Mebane. A transit stop was added at the Mebane Oaks Road exit off I-40. This is the first connection of two regional systems in the state and perhaps the country. Passengers can transfer between the two systems making transit travel between the two regions more accessible and affordable. PART also plans to establish a weekend service to compliment the services operated by the urban operators.

In the next 10 years, PART's vision is to establish several service enhancements during the next twenty years. All these enhancements will be subject establishment of a locally dedicated fund source and greater participation from its member counties. The enhancements include:

Short Term - Next 5 years

- Open Mobility Management Center

- Construct new passenger facility, transfer hub and maintenance facility
- Limited weekend service
- Extended evening service
- Greater frequency on Surry, Davidson and Randolph County routes

Mid-term – 5 to 10 Years

- Greater frequency between Greensboro, High Point and Winston-Salem
- Re-activate planning for passenger rail service between Greensboro and Winston-Salem
- Service extension into Rockingham County
- Increase service accessibility to the Piedmont Triad International Airport

Long Term – Greater than 10 years

- Connect to transit systems in the Charlotte Metro Region
- Begin development of passenger rail service between Greensboro and Winston-Salem.

General Transit Recommendations

The following recommendations provide strategic directions for continued improvement of transit services through 2035.

Extend transit services to activity centers.

As existing activity centers evolve and new centers develop, it is important to provide public transportation to these areas. Nodes of mixed-use development may serve as trip generators for employment, shopping, and residential trips. Providing those areas with transit services as they are developed can encourage their residents and visitors to use transit regularly.

Enhance the attractiveness, convenience and efficiency of transit services.

To attract choice riders, public transportation must be easy to use. In many cases, transit trips inevitably take longer than trips in private vehicles, but an attractive and convenient service can help overcome this disadvantage. Strategic elements to enhance public transit include improved information for riders, better facilities such as shelters and benches, and visually appealing vehicles with comfortable seats and amenities such as in-vehicle wireless Internet access. Using hybrid vehicles or other alternative fuel technologies will also increase attractiveness of transit while helping to meet important environmental goals.

Support effective regional transit with strong local transit.

Regional transit systems such as PART rely on local systems to provide portions of many trips. As demand for effective transportation between municipalities continues to grow, this general policy recommendation reflects the need for continued coordination between local and regional systems.

Explicitly consider transit in land-use planning and development.

For fixed route transit to be effective, efficient, and attractive, it needs well-connected nodes of development with dense, mixed-use, walkable centers. In the absence of a single destination for all residents, low-density residential development is poorly suited for traditional transit service. It is also expensive to serve with alternative forms of transit such as shared-ride vans.

Coordinate transit facilities with roadway improvements.

Working together often yields overall cost savings. Road-building agencies should provide transit operators the chance to review and comment on design plans. Transit agencies should take that opportunity to collaborate

on potential transit-related facilities, such as bus turn-outs, bus-stop pads, shelters, and sidewalks. In the long term, facilities such as dedicated bus lanes or traffic signal preemption technology could also be incorporated into this process.

Use pedestrian & bicycle projects to support public transportation service.

Every trip on public transportation begins and ends with a trip as a pedestrian or bicyclist. For example, even park-and-ride trips include a short walk from a park-and-ride space to a bus stop. Therefore, the area's pedestrian and bicycle network is a vital supporting feature of the area's transit system. High-quality, accessible, and attractive sidewalks and bicycle facilities paralleling or connecting with transit routes can improve transit's service area without changing routes or stops. Transit agencies should continue working to help prioritize sidewalk and bicycle construction projects and should consider funding partnerships to expedite these projects.

Identify new markets for transit and how best to serve them.

Identifying niche markets and targeting services to them are vitally important ways to expand transit's reach. Hi tran and Davidson County Transit has had recent success in serving the college-student market in the High Point MPO. In addition to identifying existing markets, it is often possible to enhance or create markets using policy choices. For example, replacing free parking with appropriately priced parking in key destinations such as downtown or college campuses can encourage commuters to switch to transit.

Implementation

The transit improvement action items summarized below should guide implementation actions over the planning period. Within each section, items are ordered roughly from higher to lower priority, but changing conditions will affect priorities. Lower priorities can be considered to be illustrative projects that might receive funding if resources permit.

Service Improvements

- Extend service to activity centers.
- Implement cross-town routes to provide service between destinations without stopping downtown.
- Increase the frequency of service on existing routes.
- Establish park-and-ride lots along major corridors.
- Develop route connections and regional transfer hubs with PART.

Marketing/Information

- Expand marketing to help existing and future riders use public transportation.
- Increase the number of outlets where Hi tran information can be accessed and where bus passes may be purchased.

Infrastructure/Technology

- Focus on essential infrastructure, such as high-quality buses, shelters, and customer information.
- Expedite the bus shelter installation program
- Continue coordination with City staff regarding the sidewalk improvement program, emphasizing access to bus stops and sidewalk connections from bus stops to major destinations.

Transit and Land Use

- Support the recommendations of Piedmont Together and explore ways to better people to housing and jobs in an equitable, effective and affordable manner.
- Encourage transit-oriented development and transit-supportive development through appropriate policies and procedures in local development ordinances and the development review process.
- Consider the impacts of parking policies on Hi tran ridership and how to adjust those policies to promote transit use.

Transit Planning and Coordination

- Update the long-range transit plan for Hi tran and reassess long-range transit plans for PART.
- Continue and expand regional coordination efforts and work toward enhanced funding sources for regional transit services.
- Continue participation with efforts to plan and implement the Southeast High-Speed Rail project.
- Partner with other MPO's and PART to secure planning funds to update the Regional Transit Development Plan.