



Summary of Key Interviews

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a brief summary of the key interviews of local community representatives and stakeholders. Interviews were scheduled the week of August 22, 2005. Key community representatives included some of the following:

- Mayor, City of Columbia
- Mayor, City of Centralia
- Boone County Commissioners
- President of Chamber of Commerce
- City Manager, City of Ashland
- Columbia City Council Representatives
- PEDNET
- Missouri University
- United Way
- City Manager, City of Columbia

While these interviews by no means reflect every view of every person in the area, they do provide a great sense of public opinion. Interviewees were asked several open-ended questions, such as the following:

- What are the major transportation issues facing Boone County in the next 5 to 10 years?
- What approaches should be taken to address these issues?
- Is there a role for public transportation in solving some of these issues? Why or why not?
- What is the community's view of public transportation services such as Columbia Transit and OATS?
- Would the community support increased funding to improve public transportation services? If so, in what form (i.e., sales tax, property tax, general funds, other)? If not, why not and what might it take to gain that support?
- Are there specific issues which should be addressed in our current study?



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Respondents were then asked follow-up questions depending on how they answered the questions. Interviewees were also asked to provide additional comments, suggestions, or to ask questions about the study and process. In the interest of anonymity, responses to questions were paraphrased and not attributed to a particular individual, office, or agency. In general, respondents were quite receptive to the idea of coordinating resources in the interest of cost savings, time savings, and numerous other advantages. On the other hand, some respondents did not see the benefit of this effort and believed that if agencies are not coordinating services now, why would they choose to do it in the future? Some respondents also believed that “turf wars” would inhibit agencies from wanting to coordinate services, even if they could realize a benefit.

RESPONSE SUMMARY

The summary of responses is provided as a background on emerging issues in Boone County. The entirety of the responses were considered during this project; however, not all responses are provided. While all interviews followed the same structure, many times follow-up questions were asked to clarify something, address specific comments, probe for a clearer response, or just to gain insight. The responses to the main questions are provided by question. Again, responses are summarized for all respondents. There was a multitude of responses to the questions posed, depending on what community the respondent was from, the age of the respondent, the position the respondent represented, and who the respondent represented. No two responses were exactly the same; however, many of the same themes became apparent from the responses. The common responses as well as those unique responses are presented.

Question #1: What are the major transportation issues facing Boone County in the next 5 to 10 years?

Common Responses

- Many of the respondents felt that the major transportation issues in the coming years are primarily in the rural areas of Boone County. The City of Columbia currently has existing service; however, as the city grows, the transit system has to grow to meet those needs.
- As gas prices rise, people will think about the costs associated with transportation more than they do now.

- Lack of transportation to services is seen as a real problem in the rural areas of the county. Lack of trips to healthcare, shopping, and employment ranked at the top, while trips for recreation and social rank lower.
- Emergency vs. non-emergency medical trips must be addressed.
- Lack of employment trips makes it hard for persons to get to jobs, especially second-shift employment.
- As the urban area continues to grow, the current transportation system will become stretched. There is a need to look at multimodal aspects rather than one solution to transportation.

Other Uncommon Responses

- There is not a transportation issue, rather a social issue.
- There needs to be more funding for roads and bridges, as transit is not that effective.
- There needs to be more frequent service in the county.
- There is a lack of vision and priorities of service and standards.

Question #2: What approaches should be taken to address these issues?

Common Responses

- Coordinate resources, not more resources.
- People who need services should move closer to services, rather than trying to provide transportation to outlying areas.
- The current services need to be marketed. There needs to be a more central location to find information about service.
- Not sure of how to approach this.

Other Uncommon Responses

- Move social service agencies to one central location.
- There needs to be more support for coordination efforts.

Question #3: Is there a role for public transportation in solving some of these issues? Why or why not?

There was not a great deal of response from this question. Many respondents felt that there must be some way of solving some of the issues with transportation; however, few could offer specific ways to do this. Many felt that public transportation is handling some of the issues; however, it could improve, such as operating later at night to provide access to second- or third-shift employment. Commuter

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options were discussed; however, most felt that this would not be effective as most drive their own private vehicle.

Question #4: What is the community's view of public transportation services such as Columbia Transit and OATS?

Common Responses

- There is an awareness of OATS; however, unawareness of all the services they provide in their community.
- OATS works well for medical and shopping; however, it does not do very well for employment transportation.
- Columbia Transit needs to review the routes to determine if they are serving the areas which need the greatest amount of service.
- Paratransit does not work well.
- They don't coordinate now.

Other Uncommon Responses

- Public transit is not effective or cost-efficient.
- Too much money is spent on transportation now.

Question #5: Would the community support increased funding to improve public transportation services? If so, in what form (i.e., sales tax, property tax, general funds, other)? If not, why not and what might it take to gain that support?

Common Responses

Most reported that they did not think there was support for this. The City of Columbia has had success in the past passing tax increases for transportation; however, it is felt that this may be tougher to do in the rural county. This would likely be in the form of a sales tax, as in the past. This is always a heavily debated issue when it comes up on the ballot.

Other Uncommon Responses

A large amount of current tax dollars may be being spent on other transportation issues which do not necessarily help those who truly need alternate forms of transportation.

Question #6: Are there specific issues which should be addressed in our current study?

Common Responses

- Should address the needs of both the disadvantaged and choice riders.
- Must address those gaps in service (i.e., nights, weekends, other) for employment.
- Must be conscious of overall impacts and how coordination impacts current resources.
- What resources really exist? Are these agencies/organizations really willing to coordinate with each other?
- The results should be as thorough an inventory as possible and comprehensively examine the challenge for coordination.

SUMMARY

While the interviews helped to gain insight into support for transportation, as with all types of interviews, no two answers were the same. Generally people felt coordination of service would be a positive approach; however, the challenges and barriers to coordination must be overcome. These include such things as:

- Financial sharing of resources between agencies who compete for this funding;
- A reluctance to give up clients/participants to others;
- Any state and federal regulations prohibiting such coordination efforts;
- Must show that this is advantageous to an agency/organization and political leaders; and
- Must present this information in a clear manner so as not to become confusing.

The interviews provided valuable insight from community leaders and representatives. The information gleaned from interviews—combined with survey responses, public open houses, and focus groups—provide a comprehensive look at community transportation needs and support for coordination efforts.