



Peer Community Analysis

INTRODUCTION

An important step in a “new” public transit system is a basic estimation of the type of service, operating budget, and performance measures that need to be met based on “peer” systems in other communities. Data for the analysis were obtained from the projects recently completed by LSC and the 2000 US Census. The following are the peer transit systems in Montana selected for analysis:

- Blackfeet Transit
- Flathead Reservation Transit
- Fort Peck Transportation System
- Dawson County Transit
- Valley County Transit

The above communities were selected based upon general criteria. The characteristics that were considered in this selection were the existing transit systems on other Native American Reservations, the population, and the rural characteristics of the area. The performance measures presented provide a model with the approximate levels of service that need to be met for a new transit system to provide public transportation in the most cost-effective way.

Although every effort was made to find the closest matching peers, no two systems are ever exactly alike. Factors such as the type of service (modified fixed-route, demand-response, etc.), local fare policies, and quality of capital equipment can substantially impact the performance of the individual systems. This peer analysis, therefore, should only be viewed as a rough gauge of a representative sample of similar systems, rather than an exact “report card.”

PEER SYSTEMS

Table VI-1 provides the compilation of data on the peer communities such as the transit provider, area population, type of service, number of vehicles, annual miles, annual hours, annual ridership, operating budget, and performance measures such as passenger per hour, passenger per mile, cost per passenger, cost per hour, cost per mile, and trips per capita. The peer comparison helps come up with a realistic target productivity level, and Crow Reservation can use the following information in seeing how other peer communities are addressing public transit services. The following is a brief text description of each of the peer systems.

**Table VI-1
Peer Community Analysis**

Performance Measures												
Community	Area Population	Service Characteristics	No. of Vehicles	Annual Miles	Annual Hours	Annual Ridership	Operating Budget	Pass per Hour	Pass per Mile	Cost per Pass	Cost per Hour	Trip per Capita
1 Blackfeet Transit, MT	10,100	Demand-Response Paratransit	4	47,716	6,416	23,322	\$149,243	3.6	0.49	\$6.40	\$23.26	2.3
2 Flathead Reservation Transit, MT	26,203	Demand-Response (door-to-door)	6	111,019	12,350	10,507	\$146,117	0.9	0.09	\$13.91	\$11.83	0.4
3 Fort Peck Transportation System, MT	10,321	Modified Fixed-Route/ Modified Demand-Response	9	168,621	9,872	66,011	\$330,625	6.7	0.39	\$5.01	\$33.49	6.4
4 Dawson County Transit, MT	9,059	Demand-Response (door-to-door)	4	59,034	4,160	12,918	\$137,900	3.1	0.22	\$10.68	\$33.15	1.4
5 Valley County Transit, MT	7,675	Demand-Response (door-to-door)	5	64,221	5,013	37,767	\$143,073	7.5	0.59	\$3.79	\$28.54	4.9
AVERAGE	12,672		6	90,122	7,562	30,105	\$181,392	4.36	0.36	\$7.96	\$26.05	2.4

Sources: 2000 Census, LSC 2005.

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Blackfeet Transit, Montana

Blackfeet Transit is an agency under the Human Services Department of the Tribal Government. Blackfeet Transit operates a demand-response system with two or three buses, depending on the demand, to serve their clients. Blackfeet Transit is available to all persons within the Blackfeet Reservation. The primary service area is Browning and the surrounding communities—Starr School, East Glacier, Boarding School, and Lower and Upper Two Medicine. The service is open to the general public. They also provide paratransit service. Blackfeet Transit serves a population of approximately 10,000 people.

Flathead Reservation Transit, Montana

Flathead Reservation Transit is operated by the Department of Human Resource Development (DHRD) of the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation (CSKT). DHRD primarily serves their tribal member clients, but is available to all residents of the Flathead Reservation. Flathead Reservation Transit provides door-to-door service, with rides scheduled through a dispatcher. Flathead Reservation serves a population of approximately 26,000 people.

Fort Peck Transportation System (FPTS), Montana

Fort Peck Transportation System (FPTS) is the sole provider of general public transportation within the Reservation. FPTS provides a modified fixed-route service and a modified demand-response service. The service area population for the FPTS is approximately 10,000 people.

Dawson County Transit, Montana

General public transit service within Dawson County is operated by the Dawson Urban Transportation District (Dawson County Transit). Dawson County Transit primarily serves the City of Glendive and the immediate surrounding area. Dawson County Transit provides door-to-door service with rides scheduled through a dispatcher. The service area population for Dawson County Transit is approximately 9,000 people.

Valley County Transit, Montana

Valley County Transit (VCT) is operated by Valley County. VCT primarily serves Glasgow, but is available to all residents of Valley County. Valley County Transit provides door-to-door service, with rides scheduled through a dispatcher. VCT also provides transportation on a contract basis to various agencies throughout Valley County. In addition, VCT provides specialized transportation for residents of Valley County and the surrounding communities. The service area population for Valley County Transit is approximately 7,700 people

PEER STATISTICS

The averages for each of the categories are listed at the bottom of Table VI-1. The peer communities were not restricted to a particular type of service offered by a transit system, but demand-response service seemed to be the type of service offered by most similar-sized communities. All of the populations listed were higher than the Crow Reservation, which has a population of 7,336 people. Flathead Reservation had the highest population with approximately 26,000 people.

The following is a short narrative on the results of the peer analysis. The figures provided below reflect the peer communities' data in a graphical manner.

Figure VI-1 presents the comparison of annual passenger-trips (ridership). The average of the five agencies was 30,105 annual trips. The highest ridership was from the Fort Peck Transportation System with 66,011 passengers, while the lowest ridership was from Flathead Reservation Transit with 10,507 passengers. The highest ridership per capita was from Fort Peck Transportation System with 6.4 trips per capita, while the lowest ridership per capita was from Flathead Reservation Transit with 0.4 trips per capita.

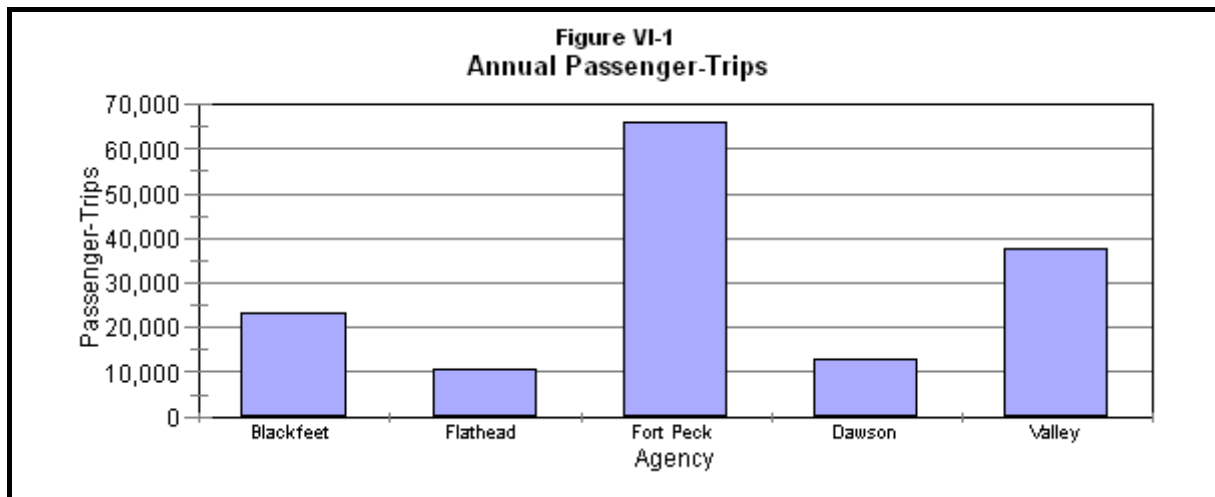
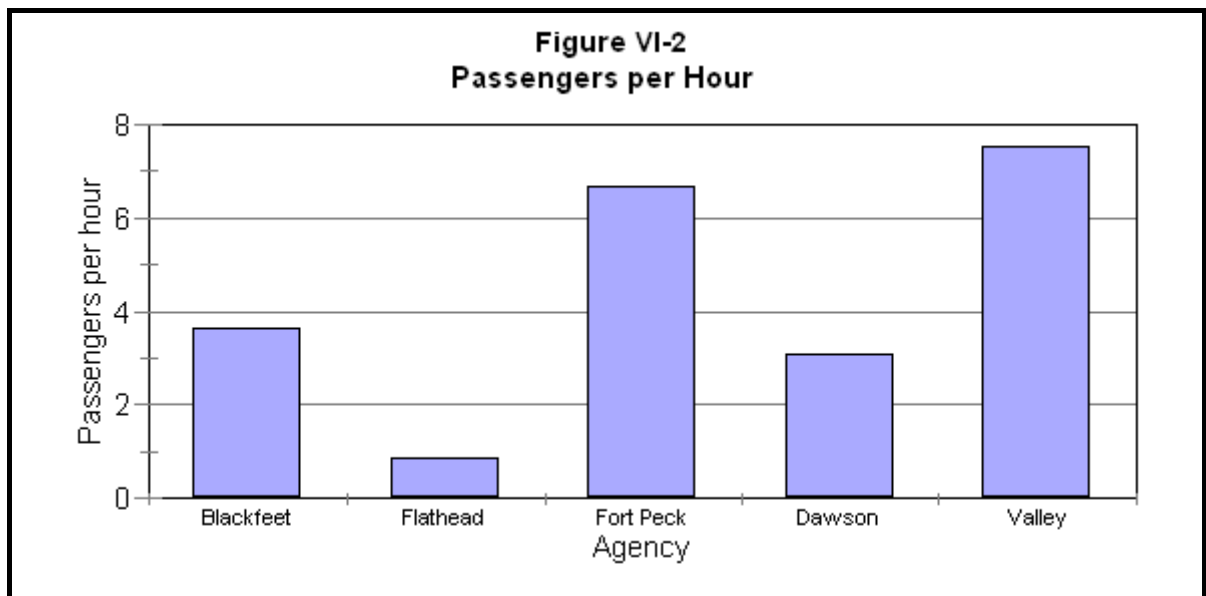
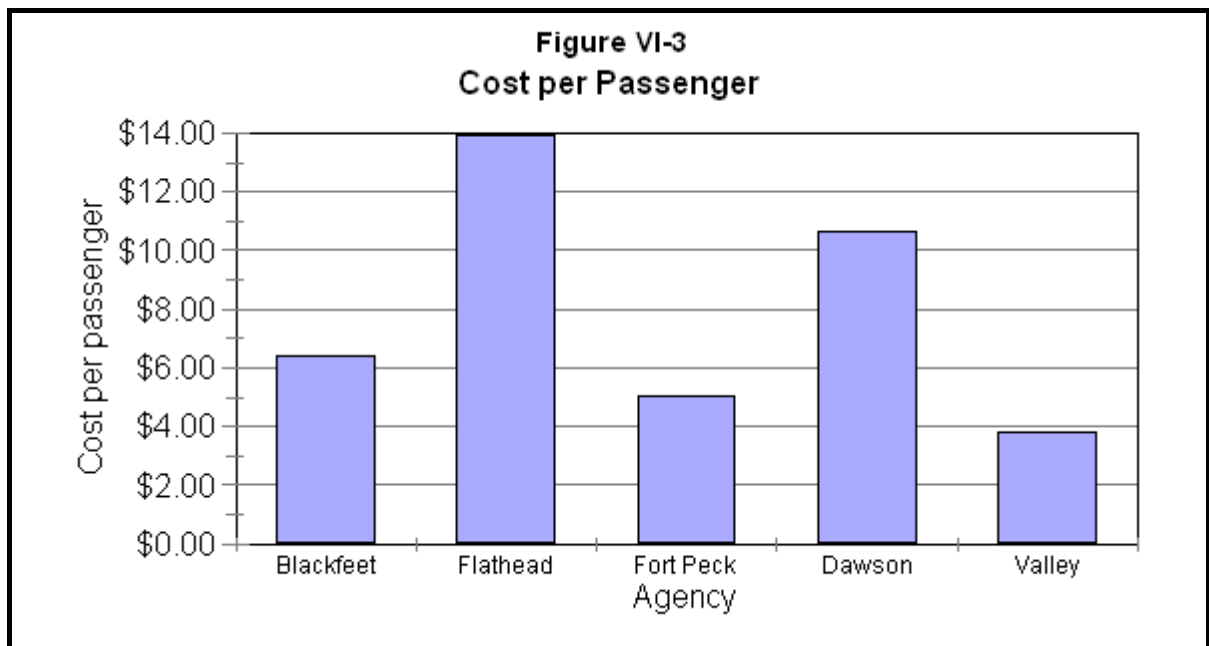


Figure VI-2 shows the comparison of passenger-trips per hour by agency. Passenger-trips per hour were calculated for each of the five agencies, with an average of four passengers per hour. It is generally held that a productivity measure of less than five passengers per hour or less is the threshold for conducting demand-response operations. If a system exceeds a threshold of ten passengers per hour, the system should consider switching to fixed-route service in order to be able to meet those needs. Between these two thresholds, a hybrid service (such as a modified fixed-route or a flex route) may be considered. Three of the five transit systems which had less than five passengers per hour were Blackfeet Transit, Flathead Reservation Transit, and Dawson Urban Transit. These systems have a demand-response service. The remaining two transit systems—Fort Peck Transportation Systems and Valley County Transit—are between the two thresholds ranging from five to eight passengers per hour. Fort Peck Transportation System operates a modified fixed-route and a modified demand-response service, while Valley Transit operates a demand-response service.



The cost per passenger was calculated for each of the five agencies with an average of \$7.96. Figure VI-3 shows the comparison of the cost per passenger. The most cost-effective transit system of the peer communities was Valley County Transit with a cost of \$3.79 per passenger. The most costly peer community was Flathead Reservation Transit with a cost of \$13.91 per passenger.



Other averages calculated were the passengers per mile (at 0.36 passengers) and cost per revenue-hour at \$26.05. The operating budget was also reported by each agency, with an average of \$181,342.

SUMMARY

In the analysis of the information presented in Table VI-1 and the previous figures, a pattern does arise. Based on the peer community analysis, the new transit program on the Crow Reservation will need to decide the type of service and service area depending on budget and population. Ridership and trips per capita, on the other hand, are highly dependent on the quality and type of service. Most importantly, the peer community analysis helps determine the approximate cost of operating the new transit service.