

CHAPTER I

Introduction

The Board of Trustees for the Dawson Urban Transportation District contracted with LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc. to prepare an update to the existing five-year Transportation Development Plan (TDP) which expires this year. The plan specifically focuses on the City of Glendive and the immediate surrounding areas.



The Final Report presents a summary of the existing conditions related to transit services and estimates the transit demand for the study area. The report also includes a description of the communities, a review of the existing transportation providers within the study area, and the recommendations that could be implemented over the next five years. The report focuses on public transportation issues for the general public, elderly, disabled, and school children. For some Dawson County and City of Glendive residents, transit service is their only link to work, shopping, health care facilities, and other necessary services.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study's purpose is to analyze and recommend strategies for the Dawson Urban Transportation District which will affect the delivery of public transportation services over the next five years. The TDP describes the existing conditions within Dawson County related to public transit services, discusses future service alternatives, identifies the locally-preferred set of alternatives, and presents an implementation plan for the next five years.

REPORT CONTENTS

Chapter II presents the existing community conditions and the transportation system overview. A summary of community demographics and economics is also provided.



Chapter III discusses the Dawson Urban Transportation District and the other transportation providers within Dawson County. The transit provider information includes a description of services, ridership, fleet characteristics, and finances.

Chapter IV presents the transit needs assessment for Dawson County.

Chapter V offers service alternatives to meet the increasing future transit demands. The alternatives range from “no changes in the existing service” to “expanding to weekend service.” Each alternative is evaluated in terms of its anticipated costs, ridership, and performance as related to the existing operation.

Chapter VI introduces the capital needs and alternatives for the Dawson Urban Transportation District. The potential financial alternatives are discussed, along with their advantages and disadvantages.

Chapter VII reviews the existing funding sources. Additional funding sources are also identified, some of which are based upon the experiences of similar agencies in other states.

Chapter VIII presents transit-friendly land use planning concepts. The concepts are related to general transportation issues within Dawson County, as well as transit-specific issues. Many of the concepts improve auto safety and traffic flows, while at the same time improving transit efficiency and effectiveness.

Chapter IX presents the final recommendations and implementation plan for the years 2005 to 2010. The implementation plan is created in order to give the Dawson Urban Transportation District’s Board and staff a year-by-year outline of the steps needed to implement the plan’s recommendations. Chapter IX also

includes a timeline for the implementation of the short-term projects, in order for the plan's goals to be achieved within the planning horizon.

STUDY APPROACH

As in many regions, the Dawson Urban Transportation District (UTD) is taking a closer look at their transit services and is seeking to find the most effective means of providing those services. Currently, public transportation within Dawson County is provided by Dawson UTD and other transit providers detailed later in this document. A key element in the plan will be to clearly evaluate the unmet needs of the local residents and businesses. The current effort focuses on the feasibility of providing public transit services to meet the community's needs. One important step toward providing an integrated community-wide transportation system is involving key players such as the Dawson UTD Board, City of Glendive, Dawson County, human service agencies, school districts, and Dawson County residents.

Project Team

An initial kick-off meeting was held in Glendive on June 7, 2004. The meeting was attended by the Dawson UTD Board, Montana Department of Transportation, Dawson UTD staff, and other local agencies within the study area who have transportation concerns for the community. The project team discussed the project goals, priorities, and a time line for completion of the final study. The project team also identified the local stakeholders who would be critical in completing the transit study for the area.

A second with the Board meeting was held in late October 2004 to discuss Technical Memoranda #1 and #2, and to provide feedback and comments to the LSC team. Future transit options were also discussed during the meeting.

Stakeholder Meetings

The group of local stakeholders identified by the project team included the following organizations within the City of Glendive area:

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- Aware Group Home
- Boys & Girls Club
- Dawson Community College
- Dawson County Council on Aging
- Dawson County School Districts
- Eastern Montana Industries
- Glendive Medical Center, Extended Care Facility, and Heritage Assisted Living
- Glendive Senior Citizens Center
- Grandview Retirement Home
- Head Start Program
- Youth Assessment Program



The above groups represent both organizations that provide transportation services and those that may have a specific transportation need. As part of the process to identify local transportation issues, the stakeholders were contacted to provide input for the transit study. The LSC team held a series of in-person interviews with the key community representatives from the above agencies. The interviews were open-ended and provided opportunities for the interviewees to make comments or ask questions. The interviews were scheduled at the beginning of the project to ensure that each agency was aware of the study and was included in the transportation needs assessment. The stakeholders were also invited to attend the various board meetings and public meetings held throughout the study period.

During the interviews, the stakeholders were provided with an introduction to the project and a further explanation of the Transportation Development Plan update process. The interviews were guided by a set of core questions including the agency's role and relationship to transit services, opinions of existing services, and ideas on how Dawson UTD and other transit providers could better meet the community's needs within the next five years.

The questions, concerns, and ideas from these interviews are presented below. The comments have been paraphrased to honor the confidentiality of the interview process.

- Existing service from Dawson UTD works well for many of the agencies. The agencies would like to see more transportation on weekends, but understand that additional funding is needed for the after-hours service.
- Some agency clients are not accustomed to the phone system at Dawson UTD.
- Coordination among the agencies could be improved for more efficient service to residents. Dawson UTD is willing to provide more service if funding becomes available.
- Increased marketing for Dawson UTD is needed for local residents.
- Training for drivers and administrative staff should continue as needed.
- Dawson UTD continues to face the challenges of real-time pick-ups and educating riders to arrange trips in advance when possible.

Opportunities for Public Involvement

Throughout the planning process, public involvement is key to the success of the community's transit plan. At critical points during the process, public meetings were announced and held. Citizen participation was openly welcomed and appreciated.



The open houses offered community members an opportunity to provide public input regarding transportation issues which should be addressed as part of the Transportation Development Plan. Community residents were asked to comment on the existing and future transit service within Dawson County. The public was given the opportunity to state which service alternatives they think are necessary to address the identified issues and meet the established goals.

Public Open House - June 8, 2004

The first public open house was held on Tuesday, June 8, 2004 at the Glendive Senior Center. The Dawson UTD Board and Dawson UTD staff believe in the “go to the people” approach for public input. A display table with the Dawson UTD

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information was available for residents to review, along with comment sheets for input from residents. The LSC team gave a brief description of the planning process and asked members to fill out comment sheets regarding the Dawson UTD service. Approximately 27 comment sheets were filled out by the residents. Detailed comments are shown in Appendix A.

The following points summarize the comments from the first public meeting:

- Residents were very pleased with the service.
- Residents wanted service extended to weekends and evenings.
- Residents wanted more out-of-town trips.

SUMMARY OF THE ISSUES

During the June 7, 2004 kick-off meeting, the LSC team briefed the Transportation Advisory Committee on the study process to be undertaken over the six-month period. Key stakeholders involved with public transit services were identified. Major issues and concerns regarding public transportation were discussed during the initial meeting.

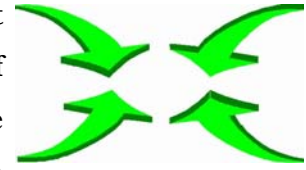


Following is a summary of the major public transportation issues:

- Coordination among the local agencies.
- Initial steps for the Dawson UTD bus barn expansion project.
- Will the growth in the elderly population create more demand for transit?
- Will the transit demand grow even though the county population is decreasing?
- Will additional funding be needed to serve other market segments?
- What is the most effective method of involving the public throughout the study?
- What improvements could Dawson UTD make to their existing communication system? What will be the cost for these improvements?
- Is Dawson UTD maximizing federal and state grants for capital and operational improvements? What additional paperwork is required for these types of funding?
- Continued training for the drivers and administrative staff is needed.

TRANSIT VISION

In developing and updating the Transportation Development Plan, it is necessary to recognize the goals and objectives of public transportation as they determine the direction to be taken within the plan. The goals and objectives, along with corresponding performance standards, provide the specific direction for implementation. The Dawson UTD Board had adopted the transportation goals and objectives for the previous Transportation Development Plan, completed in the year 1999. The updated plan would include revised goals and objectives, focusing on the years 2005 to 2010. The mission statement, goals, and objectives for the Dawson UTD are reviewed below. The mission statement, goals, and objectives typically form a hierarchical structure with the mission statement being the most general. Goals support the achievement of the mission; and objectives support the goals.



Mission Statement

The mission statement establishes the overall direction of an agency and enumerates the most generalized set of actions to be achieved by that agency. The mission statement for Dawson UTD is as follows:

<i>Mission Statement</i>
<i>The mission of the Dawson Urban Transportation District is to provide quality transit service to the residents of Dawson County.</i>

Goals and Objectives

A transportation goal is defined as a purpose or need that should be attained to address a transportation issue. The primary mission of Dawson UTD is to provide quality transit service to the residents of Dawson County, but mainly the City of Glendive. In order to fulfill this mission, a number of goals were identified to guide the future development of public transportation within the county. Each of these goals are designated as either short-term or long-range items. Following each of the goals are the corresponding objectives needed to obtain the goals.

Short-Term Goals and Objectives

Short-term goals are those that can be acted upon or begun immediately, and which may have positive results within a relatively short time frame. Short-term goals include actions that are limited in scope and those that require ongoing efforts. Following are the short-terms goals for Dawson UTD.

Goal #1

Provide and maintain an adequate vehicle fleet to meet the overall requirements of the transit system and the special needs of system riders.

Objectives

- Establish the best possible vehicle maintenance records. Continue to adhere to the manufacturer-recommended periodic maintenance schedules established for each vehicle.
- Continue to conduct a detailed inventory of repairs and maintenance needed for each vehicle on a regular basis. Attempt to resolve any identified problems at least twice a year.
- Explore available options to determine the most cost-effective source of vehicle maintenance services through the Dawson UTD's part-time maintenance supervisor and/or a local mechanic or garage.
- Seek out economical bulk-order prices for fuel and new tires, possibly purchasing these types of replacement supplies under an established county and/or city contract when possible.
- Maintain ongoing electronic records of the age, mileage, condition, and performance of each vehicle for use in future grant applications.
- Plan in advance for the retirement and replacement of each vehicle through the state grant program for new vehicle purchases.
- Appropriate signs should be applied to the Dawson UTD vehicles indicating that the buses stop at railroad crossings.



Goal #2

Maintain an adequate staff of appropriately trained personnel in order to continue operating a quality transit system.

Objectives

- Treat current employees well in an effort to retain the excellent staff (both paid staff and volunteers). This can be accomplished by enhancing the


employee compensation package, instituting various programs which provide recognition and appreciation, and promoting a positive group identity. Some ideas include celebrating employees' birthdays and other special events, acknowledging staff members for their years of service, and providing employees with shirts, jackets, or hats with the Dawson UTD logo.

- Provide staff members with the appropriate training. The staff should be provided with the most recent applicable licensing requirements, certifications, regulations, and procedures. They should also be given opportunities to improve their skills and learn new ideas and techniques. Bus drivers would benefit from training in first aid and CPR, as well as commercial and defensive driving techniques. Establish a mentor program for new drivers, allowing them to learn firsthand from an experienced driver on staff.
- A Dawson UTD dispatcher position should be established. The dispatcher would provide the transit system with a full-time staff person for bus dispatch and administrative assistant duties.

Goal #3

Maintain the existing ridership base, while increasing ridership levels and expanding the types of service offered under the system's operating parameters (service area and times of operation).

Objectives

- Visit with contract clients twice a year regarding the adequacy of services currently being provided and the potential for meeting additional needs.
- Continue to hold monthly meetings with the bus drivers to brainstorm ways to improve transit service or perform operations more efficiently.
- Distribute a rider survey once a year in order to obtain input on the adequacy of transit service. 
- Maintain a driver's log book in each bus to record any complaints that riders make regarding vehicles or service. These concerns should be shared with the Administrator, bus drivers, and Dawson UTD Board. A report of the information should be reviewed at the regular Board of Trustees and bus driver meetings.
- Establish a procedure to record information about the monthly ride ticket-holders and number of tickets issued. Input and maintain an updated database of names, addresses, and telephone numbers for the Dawson UTD riders.
- Continue to promote the transit service. Display the Dawson UTD telephone number on all fleet vehicles and the bus building. List the Dawson UTD telephone number in the regional US West Eastern Montana phone book and Mid-Rivers phone book. Post flyers and cards with the telephone number and hours of operation at various locations around town such as

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the airport, motels, and Greyhound station. Place regular public service announcements with the newspaper, radio, and television.

- Offer reduced fares to attract ridership during slower periods. Run periodic special promotions such as children summer passes or shopper fares during the holiday season.

Goal #4

Provide and maintain an adequate and exclusive communication system for the vehicle fleet to ensure uninterrupted communication between the riders and dispatcher/drivers.

Objectives

- Continue to research various options for the communication system (including radios and cellular phones) through local equipment providers. Compare system capabilities with the Dawson UTD's communication needs. Select and purchase a system which will allow the bus drivers and dispatcher to communicate with the public without interruption or sharing of air time.
- Obtain a communication system for use on trips outside of the City of Glendive. This may require separate or supplemental equipment.

Goal #5

Continue to provide for the economic sustainability of the transit system.

Objectives

- Obtain a user-friendly accounting software program that would allow the Administrator to monitor operations (revenues and expenses). The program should be capable of providing accurate and up-to-date financial information such as staffing hours, ridership levels, revenues by source, and expenses by category. Dawson UTD should ensure appropriate training for new software programs.
- Continue to take advantage of all applicable state and federal grants to provide funding for the system's operational and capital expenses.
- Establish a vehicle replacement fund to provide the local match funds required to obtain federal grants for purchasing new fleet vehicles when necessary (about every three years). Allocate local contributions and local taxes, if available, on an annual basis to the vehicle replacement fund.
- Establish a facility fund (similar to that described above) to provide the local match funds for the construction, repair, replacement, and enlargement of the facility that houses the transit operations.

- Levy the maximum amount of mills that are legally allowed by Montana and the legislature. Note that the Dawson UTD mill levy is at the allowed maximum.
- Review the internal controls used regarding bus fares. Develop a more effective method of collecting and accounting for bus fares.

Long-Range Goals and Objectives

The long-range goals require more time to complete and are aimed at enhancing the overall operation of the transit system. Once accomplished, the long-range goals will assist and provide direction for the transit agency. The following long-range goals were developed for Dawson UTD.

Goal #6

Enlarge the current facility to accommodate the vehicles, storage area, meeting room, and dispatch area. This will require at least a 50-foot by 50-foot addition onto the current facility.

Objectives

- Develop detailed plans for an addition to the current facility. The plans should include an additional office/meeting space, dispatch/radio equipment room, storage room, bus repair area, and bus storage.
- Obtain funds to fulfill any remaining facility requirements. The local match funds could be used to obtain a state or federal grant. Cooperation could also be requested from local contractors and building suppliers to provide in-kind contributions or discounted material and labor costs to help prepare the site or construct the addition to the current building.

Goal #7

Expand the Dawson UTD boundaries to include more of Dawson County.

Objectives

- Continue to work with community groups and the general public in the development of an educational program regarding the benefits of expanding Dawson UTD to include the whole county. Work with the Dawson County Commissioners, Dawson County Council on Aging, Glendive 55+ Club, Retired Service Volunteer Program, City of Glendive, Town of Richey, and other individuals in Dawson County to meet this goal.
- Obtain funds to pay for expanding Dawson UTD to include the entire county.

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Goal #8

Provide expanded service hours and service areas, as needed, in order to meet the new demands identified by current and potential riders.

Objectives

- Explore new service times and locations on a limited basis, based upon feedback received from riders and requests from the Dawson County residents.
- Explore opportunities to provide special transit services for community and area events such as the Medora musical performance, Dawson County fair and rodeo, and community college/local sports activities. Offer occasional day or overnight trips to out-of-town locations for the regional sports tournaments, concerts, shopping, Montana state fair, rodeos, and other activities of interest to the local residents.