

CHAPTER I

Introduction

The Eastern Panhandle Transit Authority contracted with LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc. to prepare a Transit Service Evaluation. The study specifically focuses on the public transportation issues in Berkeley and Jefferson Counties, West Virginia; a feasibility analysis for Morgan County, West Virginia; and service to Williamsport, Maryland.

This report presents a summary of the existing conditions related to transit services and estimates the transit demand for the study area. Information in this report includes a description of the communities and a review of the existing transportation providers within the study area with recommendations to improve the service. The report focuses on transportation for the general public, elderly, disabled, and students. The general public transportation service in Berkeley and Jefferson Counties is PanTran. For some residents, this service is their only link to work, shopping, health care facilities, and other necessary services.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to analyze and recommend strategies for PanTran Transit which will affect the delivery of public transportation services over the next five years. The study describes the existing conditions in the Eastern Panhandle Region related to public transit services, discusses service and other alternatives for meeting needs into the future, identifies the locally-preferred set of alternatives, and presents an implementation plan for the next five years.

REPORT CONTENTS

Chapter II presents a transportation system overview along with the existing community conditions, demographics, and economics.



Introduction

A discussion of PanTran Transit and the other transportation providers within the Eastern Panhandle Region is provided in Chapter III. The transportation provider information includes a description of services, ridership, fleet characteristics, and finances.

Chapter IV presents the transit needs assessment for PanTran.

Chapter V reviews the results of the onboard survey that was conducted by LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc.

Chapter VI presents the results of the boarding and alighting survey that was conducted by LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc.

An analysis of each route is presented in Chapter VII.

Chapters VIII presents the goals and objectives for the short-term and long-term development of the transit system throughout the Eastern Panhandle Region, based on the issues presented in the surveys and route analysis.

Chapter IX presents the alternative systems and services developed by LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc. to improve the transit system. The alternatives range from no changes in the existing service, to restructuring the service, to expanding the service. Each alternative is evaluated in terms of its anticipated costs, ridership, and performance as related to the existing operations.

Chapter X introduces the capital needs and alternatives for PanTran.

Chapter XI presents the potential financial alternatives, along with their advantages and disadvantages. Existing funding sources are reviewed. Additional funding sources are identified, some of which are based upon the experiences of similar agencies in other states.

Transit-friendly land use planning concepts are presented in Chapter XII. The concepts are related to general transportation issues within PanTran 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 XIII presents the implementation plan which includes the final recommendations and fiscally-constrained plan for the PanTran transit system.

STUDY APPROACH

As in many regions, PanTran is examining their public transit services and is seeking to find the most effective means of providing those services. Public transportation in the Eastern Panhandle Region is currently provided by PanTran and other transit providers, as detailed later in this document. A key element in the plan was to clearly evaluate the unmet needs of the local residents and businesses throughout the region. The current effort focuses on the feasibility of providing public transit services in order to meet the community's needs and provide links to employment areas outside the existing service area. One important step toward providing an integrated regionwide transportation system is involving key players such as the PanTran Board; Hagerstown/Eastern Panhandle Metropolitan Planning Organization (HEPMPO) - Region 9 Planning; City of Martinsburg, West Virginia; MARC train; Washington County, Maryland; Berkeley County, West Virginia; Jefferson County, West Virginia; Morgan County, West Virginia; human service agencies; and residents of the Eastern Panhandle Region.

Project Team

An initial "kick-off" Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meeting was held in Martinsburg, West Virginia on February 1, 2005. The meeting was attended by Berkeley County Board members, PanTran staff, PanTran Board members, City of Martinsburg staff, and HEPMPPO - Region 9 Planning and Development staff. This project team discussed the project overview, data collection, major transit issues, open houses, schedules, and timeline for completion of the final study. The project team also discussed the local stakeholders who would be critical in completing the transit study for the area.

Public Involvement

Throughout the planning process, public involvement is key to the success of the transit plan for the community. At critical points during the process, public meetings were held where citizens could participate in the planning process. The first set of meetings included three public open houses conducted at the Martinsburg senior center, mall, and public library. The Board meeting was held on March 7, 2005. The purpose of the Board meeting was to discuss Technical Memorandum #1 and provide feedback and comments to the LSC team.

Technical Memorandum #2 was discussed at the second set of meetings. As in the first set of meetings, LSC conducted open houses at the Martinsburg senior center and public library. LSC conducted a roundtable discussion with several of the region's key agencies including HEPMPO - Region 9 Planning, Martinsburg Chamber of Commerce, and Jefferson County Commissioners. Citizens were also invited and did attend the roundtable meeting. The Board meeting was held on April 11, 2005. At both the roundtable meeting and Board meeting, the major issue was the result of the onboard surveys (conducted on the buses and MARC trains).

The third set of meetings was held on May 9 and 10, 2005. These meetings introduced the alternatives for services, capital, funding, and institutional/organizational recommendations.

Four public open houses were scheduled for March, April, May, and July 2005. The open houses have offered the community an opportunity to provide public input regarding the transportation issues which should be addressed as part of the Transit Service Plan. Community residents were asked to comment on the existing and future transit services in Berkeley and Jefferson Counties. The public was given the opportunity to state which services and other alternatives they think are necessary in order to address the identified issues and meet the established goals.

Summary of the Issues

During the February 2005 “kick-off” meeting, LSC briefed the Board members on the study process to be undertaken over the six-month period. The key stakeholders involved with public transit services were identified.

The following major issues and concerns regarding public transportation were discussed:

- Increase and secure local funding in order to replace the existing state funding and to obtain additional funding for service improvements.
- Improve the service in the existing service areas of Berkeley and Jefferson Counties.
- Expand transit service to Morgan County.
- Improve the transit linkages to Maryland and Virginia by improving the service and coordination with out-of-state transit agencies.
- Improve the access and linkages with the MARC train that serves the City of Martinsburg.
- Improve the service to the major employment centers (such as the Judicial Center) throughout the Eastern Panhandle Region.
- Improve the overall image of PanTran.
- Improve the access for the community youth involved in after-school activities.
- Develop more effective brochures and signage.
- Improve the condition of and access to transit shelters and benches.
- Develop more effective transit system routes.
- Improve the level of advertising conducted on the buses.
- Improve the paratransit service and coordination with the fixed-route services.
- Improve the service and linkage of the non-emergency medical transit trips.
- Improve the access to recreation and tourist locations throughout the Eastern Panhandle Region.