



# Peer Community Analysis

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the most important steps in evaluating a public transit system is a basic comparison of the type of service, operating budget, and performance measures that are being met, based on peer systems in other communities. Data for the analysis were obtained from projects that were recently completed by LSC and from the 2007 National Transit Database. The



following peer locations were chosen for comparison: Harrisonburg, Virginia; Williamsport, Pennsylvania; Springfield, Ohio; Martinsburg, West Virginia; Elmira, New York; Frederick, Maryland; Lebanon, Pennsylvania; Binghamton, New York; and Erie, Pennsylvania.

The communities selected for comparison were chosen using general criteria. The characteristics that were considered in this selection were the presence of existing transit systems, similar population, and the urban characteristics of the area. Geographic location and size factored greatly into the decision regarding which communities to present. Communities of similar size that have a substantial university/college presence were excluded because college student populations often influence transit system performance significantly. The performance measures presented provide a model depicting the approximate levels of service that should be met for a transit system to provide public transportation in a cost-effective way.

Even though care was taken to find the closest matching peer communities, no two systems are 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 individual systems. This peer analysis, therefore, should be viewed as a rough gauge of a representative sample of similar systems rather than an exact reporting.

## PEER COMMUNITY TRANSIT SERVICES

In order to get a better sense of the approximate level of cost and efficiency of providing transit in Washington County, it is important to examine the performance of services that peer communities provide in more detail. All of the peer systems have a service area population comparable to that of Washington County. The size of the community was combined with other factors, such as the relative amount of service and vehicles operated in maximum service, to create Table VIII-1, showing various levels of performance.

## LOCAL PEER STATISTICS

Table VIII-1 shows the compilation of data from the peer communities. The averages for each of the categories are listed at the bottom of the table. The average population for the peer communities was slightly over 108,000 residents. The lowest service area population for any of the communities was 52,647 for Harrisonburg, Virginia, while the highest population is represented by Erie, Pennsylvania at 189,872. The service population for Washington County is roughly 120,326 people.



Figure VIII-1 presents the comparison of the annual ridership for the peer communities' fixed-route services. The average of the agencies was 1,148,496 annual trips. The highest annual ridership was in Binghamton, New York with 2,970,612 annual passengers. The lowest ridership occurred in Martinsburg, West Virginia with 115,148. Washington County has a ridership that is less than all but two of the systems, with 357,930 passengers.

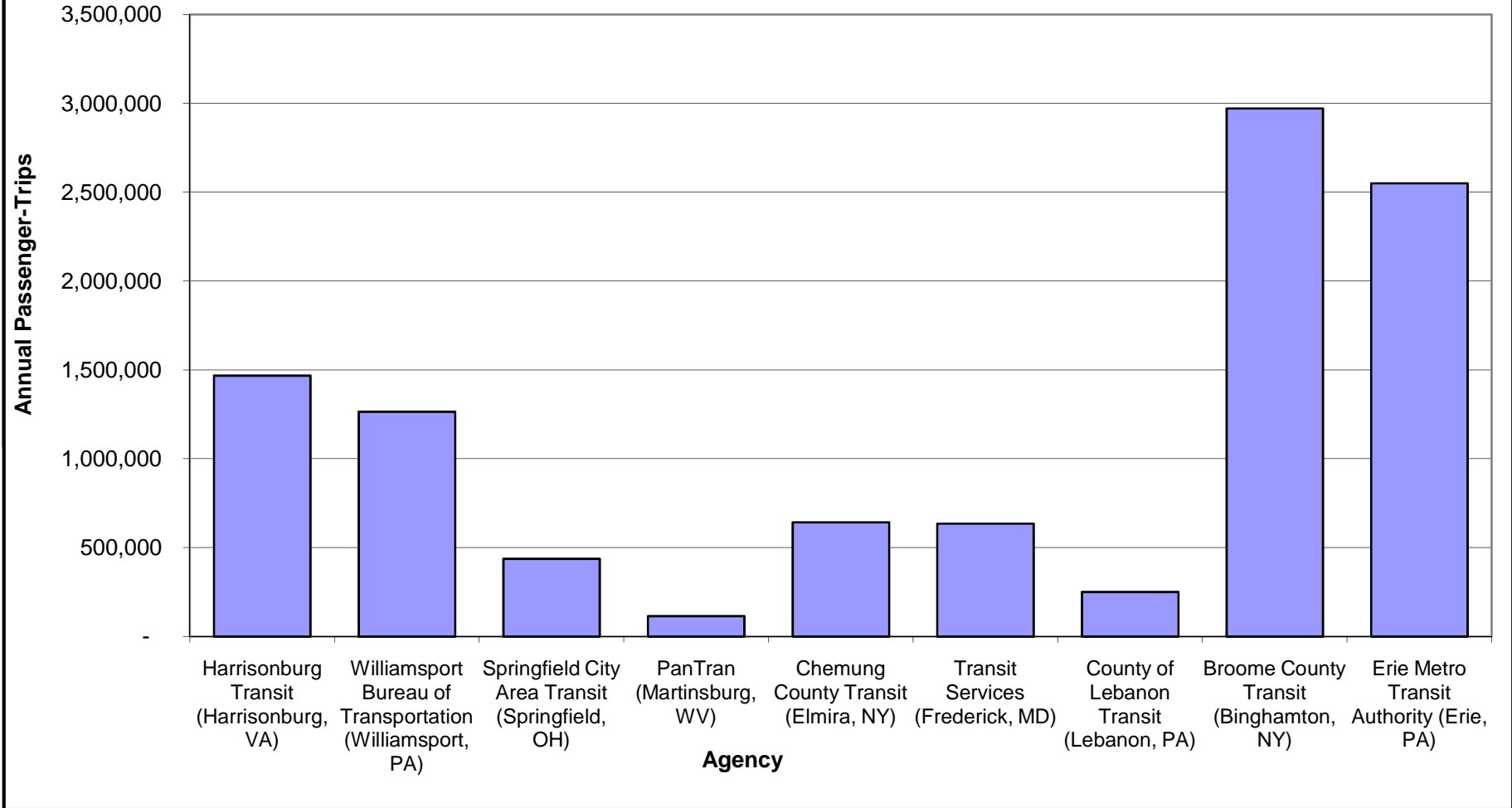
**Table VIII-1  
Peer Community Analysis  
Performance Measures**

<b>Transit System - Location</b>	<b>Area Population</b>	<b>No. of Vehicles</b>	<b>One-Way Cost</b>	<b>Monthly Pass.</b>	<b>Annual Miles</b>	<b>Annual Hours</b>	<b>Annual Ridership</b>	<b>Operating Budget</b>	<b>Pass. per Hour</b>	<b>Pass. per Mile</b>	<b>Cost per Pass.</b>	<b>Cost per Hour</b>	<b>Cost per Mile</b>	<b>Trips per Capita</b>
Harrisonburg Transit (Harrisonburg, VA)	52,647	18	\$1.00	N/A	428,255	43,588	1,468,943	\$2,123,947	33.70	3.43	\$1.45	\$48.73	\$4.96	27.90
Williamsport Bureau of Transportation (Williamsport, PA)	69,764	23	\$2.00	\$35.00	865,246	53,796	1,264,990	\$4,047,339	23.51	1.46	\$3.20	\$75.23	\$4.68	18.13
Springfield City Area Transit (Springfield, OH)	73,675	11	\$0.75	N/A	231,150	20,578	436,890	\$1,394,054	21.23	1.89	\$3.19	\$67.74	\$6.03	5.93
PanTran (Martinsburg, WV)	89,153	9	\$2.00	N/A	274,038	17,838	115,148	\$821,740	6.46	0.42	\$7.14	\$46.07	\$3.00	1.29
Chemung County Transit (Elmira, NY)	95,195	18	\$1.25	\$45.00	793,885	39,310	642,980	\$3,831,985	16.36	0.81	\$5.96	\$97.48	\$4.83	6.75
Transit Services (Frederick, MD)	119,114	20	\$1.25	\$45.00	678,077	61,229	635,086	\$3,444,926	10.37	0.94	\$5.42	\$56.26	\$5.08	5.33
County of Lebanon Transit (Lebanon, PA)	120,323	11	\$1.80	\$65.00	408,436	27,658	251,366	\$1,755,852	9.09	0.62	\$6.99	\$63.48	\$4.30	2.09
Broome County Transit (Binghamton, NY)	165,000	38	\$1.25	\$43.75	1,401,512	114,639	2,970,612	\$8,747,532	25.91	2.12	\$2.94	\$76.31	\$6.24	18.00
Erie Metro Transit Authority (Erie, PA)	189,872	55	\$1.10	\$35.00	1,571,412	132,030	2,550,449	\$9,430,536	19.32	1.62	\$3.70	\$71.43	\$6.00	13.43
<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>108,305</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>\$1.38</b>	<b>\$44.79</b>	<b>739,112</b>	<b>56,741</b>	<b>1,148,496</b>	<b>\$3,955,323</b>	<b>20.24</b>	<b>1.55</b>	<b>\$3.44</b>	<b>\$69.71</b>	<b>\$5.35</b>	<b>10.60</b>
<i>County Transit (Hagerstown, MD)</i>	<i>120,326</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>\$1.25</i>	<i>\$50.00</i>	<i>410,144</i>	<i>26,599</i>	<i>357,930</i>	<i>\$1,493,742</i>	<i>13.46</i>	<i>0.87</i>	<i>\$4.17</i>	<i>\$56.16</i>	<i>\$3.64</i>	<i>2.97</i>

Sources: NTD 2007, LSC 2009.

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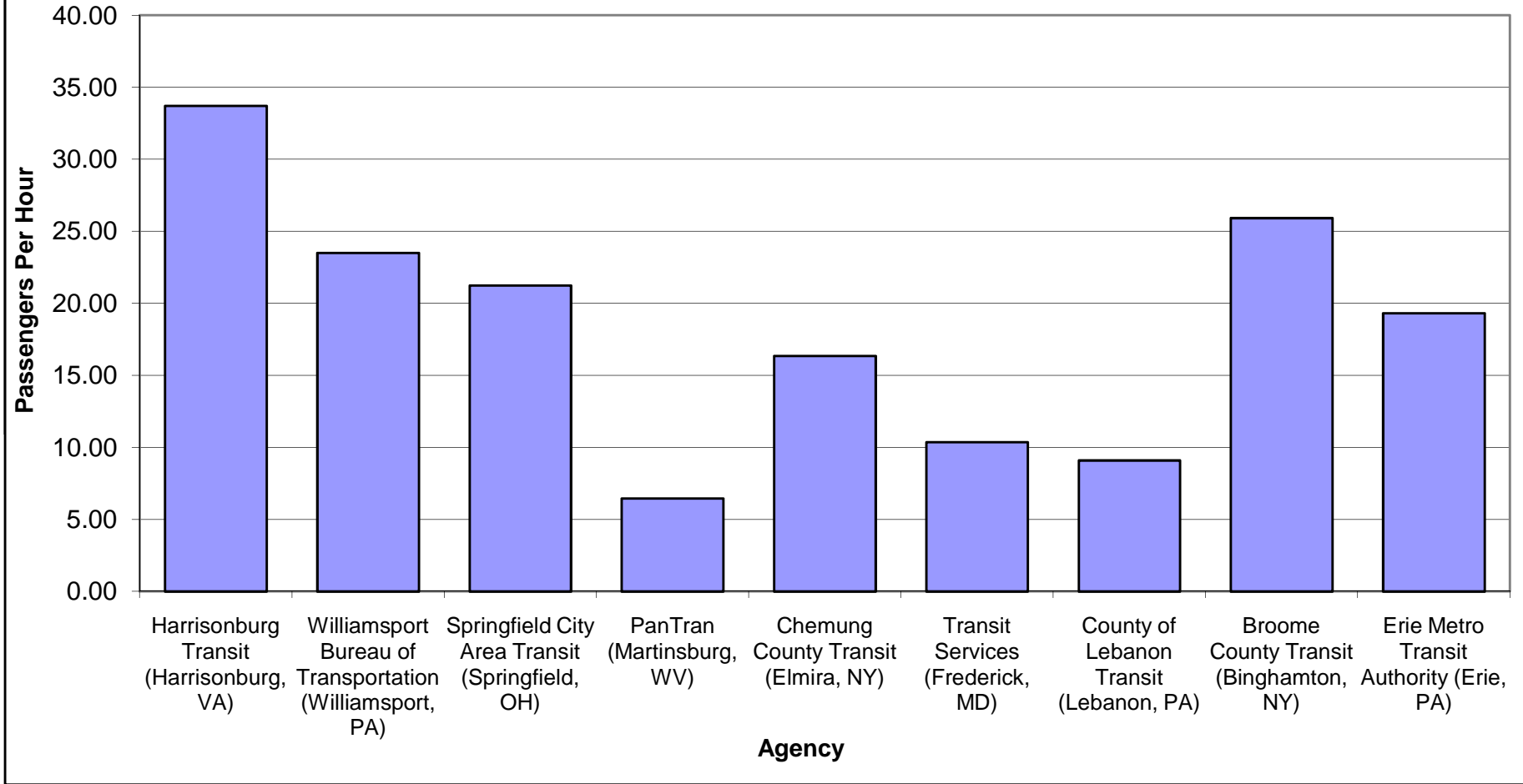
**Figure VIII-1  
Annual Passenger-Trips**



## *Peer Community Analysis*

Figure VIII-2 shows the comparison of passenger-trips per hour by agency. Passenger-trips per hour were calculated for each of the agencies, with an average of 20.24 passengers per hour. This represents the number of passengers per revenue-hour, not the number of passengers per hour of operation for the system. It is a generally held rule of thumb in transit planning that a productivity measure over ten passengers per hour is an approximate threshold for running fixed-route service. All but two of the peer communities are above this threshold. The community with the lowest number of passengers per hour was PanTran, serving the eastern panhandle of West Virginia, which has approximately 6.46 passengers per hour. In contrast, the community with the greatest number of passengers per hour is Harrisonburg, Virginia with almost 34 passengers per hour.

**Figure VIII-2  
Passengers Per Hour**



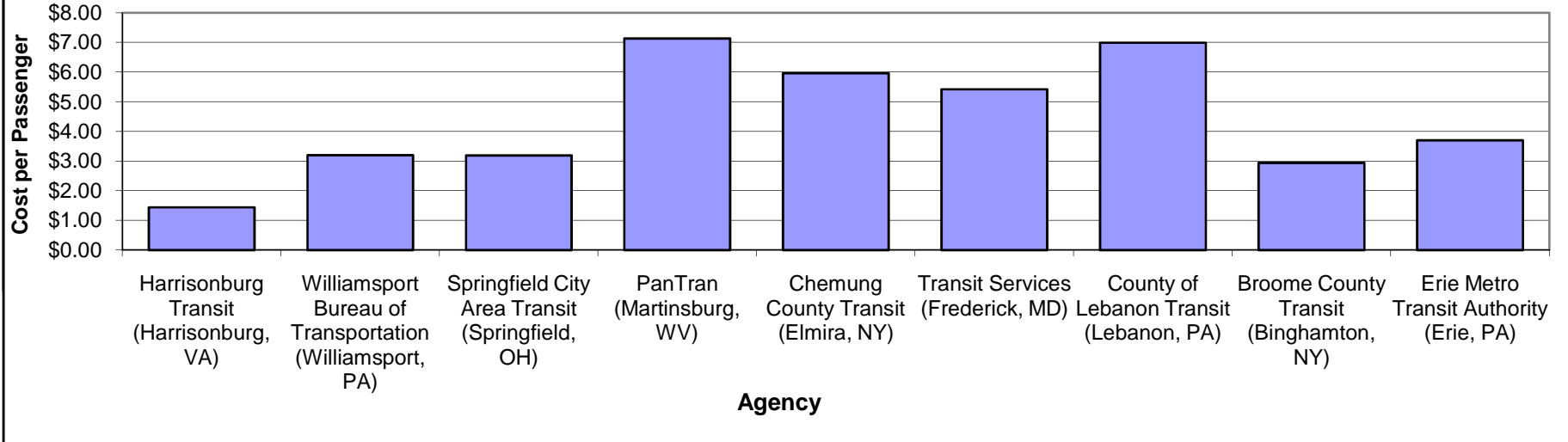
## *Peer Community Analysis*

The cost per passenger was calculated for each of the nine agencies, with an average of \$3.44. Figure VIII-3 shows the cost per passenger comparison. The most cost-effective transit system of the peer systems was Harrisonburg Transit, with a cost per passenger of \$1.45. The most costly peer system was PanTran, with a cost per passenger of \$7.14. Washington County is slightly above the average for the peer communities, operating at a cost of \$4.17 per passenger.

Other averages calculated were the passengers per mile (at 1.55 passengers), the trips per capita (at 10.6 trips), the average cost per vehicle-hour (\$69.71), and the average cost per vehicle-mile at \$5.35. These performance measures can all be seen in comparison in Table VIII-1.

As presented in Table VIII-1, the operating budget was also reported by each agency, with an average of \$3,955,393. There was, however, a large range in the operating budgets of the peer communities that were selected. The agency that had the lowest operating budget is PanTran with a budget of roughly \$822,000, and the highest budget was in Erie, with an operating budget of \$9,430,536.

**Figure VIII-3  
Cost Per Passenger**



## **SUMMARY**

In the analysis of the information presented in Table VIII-1 and Figures VIII-1 through VIII-3, a definitive pattern arises. Based on the peer community analysis, Washington County has a budget and annual revenue-hours that represent the lower end of the spectrum. Using the averages of the nine peer communities provides a solid comparison regarding the operating costs, ridership, and other performance measures. Washington County appears to be operating at a comparatively low cost per hour at more than thirteen dollars less than the average of the systems. The fact that Washington County is somewhat underperforming in terms of ridership is related to the level of service provided compared to the peer communities. All of the peer communities have similar populations, but Washington County is operating a relatively low level of service in comparison.