

2.1. SUMMARY OF AVAILABLE SERVICES

Fixed-route service is currently available within the city limits of Gastonia; demand-response transportation is provided to the areas outside Gastonia; and an express route links commuters to Charlotte. However, these services are limited in terms of hours, frequency, and geographic coverage.

Gastonia Transit

Gastonia Transit operates nine fixed routes, using a fleet of six active buses (eight total buses are available, including seven 35-foot diesel buses and one 40-foot compressed natural gas bus). Service is provided generally between the hours of 5:00 AM and 6:30 PM on weekdays, and between 8:00 AM and 6:00 PM on Saturdays. No service is operated on Sundays or on most holidays. The regular fare for fixed-route service is \$1.00, and a reduced fare for elderly and disabled passengers is available for \$0.50. Transfers to connect between routes are free.

All routes operate according to a “pulse” schedule, in which buses meet at the downtown transfer center (Bradley Station) to enable passengers to transfer between routes. Most routes are completed in a 45-minute cycle, with the exception of the Westfield / Franklin Square route, which operates on a 60-minute cycle. Two buses operate on the Westfield / Franklin Square route, enabling service to be provided every 30 minutes. On the other routes, buses are interlined, meaning that a bus will serve one route on a 45-minute cycle (including layover time), then serve a different route for the next 45-minute cycle before returning to the original route. Therefore, even though the other routes are completed in 45 minutes, service is only available every 90 minutes. Exhibit 2-1 illustrates the operating characteristics of each route. The route map of current GT routes is shown in Appendix E.

Exhibit 2-1: Gastonia Transit Route Operating Characteristics

Route Number	Route Name	Hours of Operation	Cycle Time	Frequency of Service
1	Arlington	M-F: 6:45 AM – 5:50 PM	45 minutes	90 minutes
2	Myrtle	M-F: 5:15 AM – 6:33 PM	45 minutes	45 minutes
3	Highland	M-F: 5:15 AM – 5:43 PM Sat: 8:00 AM – 5:45 PM	M-F: 45 min. Sat: 60 min.	M-F: 90 min. Sat: 60 min.
3A	Highland	M-F: 6:00 AM – 6:33 PM	45 minutes	90 minutes
4	S. York / Linwood	M-F: 6:00 AM – 6:32 PM Sat: 8:00 AM – 4:42 PM	M-F: 45 min. Sat: 60 min.	M-F: 90 min. Sat: 120 min.
5	Hospital	M-F: 6:00 AM – 6:33 PM	45 minutes	90 minutes
7	Westfield / Franklin Square	M-F: 5:35 AM – 6:12 PM Sat: 8:00 AM – 5:48 PM	60 minutes	60 minutes
7A	Westfield / Franklin Square	M-F: 7:05 AM – 5:43 PM	60 minutes	60 minutes
8	Marietta	M-F: 5:15 AM – 5:50 PM Sat: 9:00 AM – 5:48 PM	M-F: 45 min. Sat: 60 min.	M-F: 90 min. Sat: 120 min.

Complementary paratransit service to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is provided within ¾-mile of any fixed route. Three paratransit vans

are used for these trips, and service is operated during the same days and hours as the fixed route service. Passengers must call at least one day in advance to schedule a ride. The cost for ADA service is \$2.00 per trip.

Gaston County ACCESS

Gaston County ACCESS is the designated community transportation provider in Gaston County, providing human service-related transportation services for anyone in the county, as well as general public transportation services for residents living outside of the area served by Gastonia Transit fixed routes. ACCESS operates “subscription” services, which pick up and drop off regularly-scheduled recurring passenger trips; demand-response services, which are scheduled according to specific trip requests; and one deviated fixed route (geared to general public transportation) operating between Bradley Station in downtown Gastonia and Gaston College in Dallas. The majority of ACCESS trips are demand-response trips operated under contract with various human service agencies in the county. General public transportation is also provided on a demand-response basis if space on the vehicles is available.

Service is provided Monday through Friday between 5:00 AM and 6:00 PM. Passengers must call at least 24 hours in advance to schedule transportation. Service is provided on a curb-to-curb basis, and for medical trips, is for non-emergency transportation only. ACCESS serves all of Gaston County, and makes numerous trips to major out-of-county destinations as well. Service to Charlotte is provided Monday through Friday, and service to Durham, Chapel Hill, and Winston-Salem (for medical appointments) is provided on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Other cities are also served with prior approval. General public fares vary based on location with Gaston County. The one-way fare between Gaston College and Bradley Station in Gastonia is \$1.00.

Other Systems

The Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) operates the Route 85X – Gastonia Express. This route transports passengers from Bradley Station in Gastonia and Abbey Plaza in Belmont to Uptown Charlotte. Park-and-ride facilities are available at both Gaston County stops. Four trips provide service between Gaston County and Charlotte during the morning commute period, and four return trips operate in the afternoon. The current one-way fare for service is \$2.40, although the fare will increase to \$2.60 in July 2007. Ten-ride and monthly passes are also available. Ridership has steadily increased since the service was initiated in 2003, and currently totals over 5,000 passenger trips per month. Funding for the route is shared between the City of Gastonia and the City of Charlotte. Belmont contributes to the Gastonia portion.

The Transportation Administration of Cleveland County (TACC) provides human service and general public transportation in Cleveland County similar to the services provided by ACCESS in Gaston County. TACC makes routine trips to Charlotte several times per week, passing through Gaston County en route. TACC and ACCESS sometimes coordinate trips when special circumstances occur, but TACC typically does not provide transportation for residents of Gaston County.

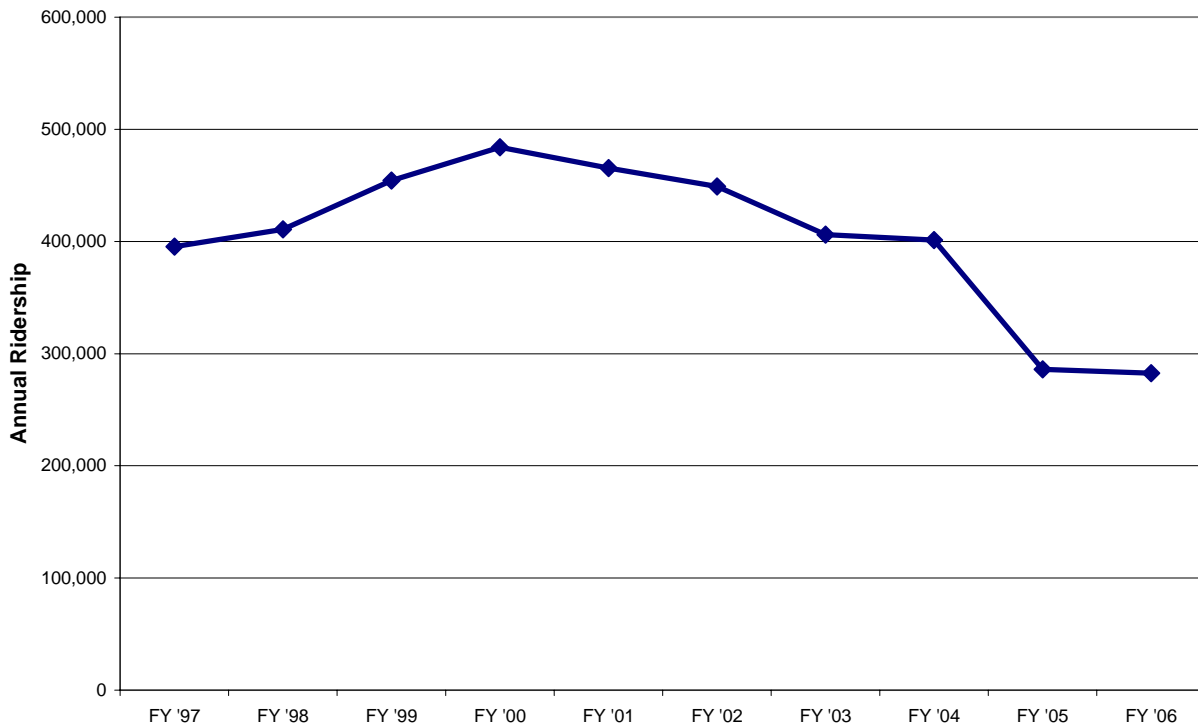
2.2. EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF EXISTING GT SERVICES

Before making suggestions for improvements, it is important to understand how efficiently GT services are operating now. Operating performance was evaluated for the system as a whole, as well as for individual routes.

System-level Analysis

In terms of ridership, GT has experienced a notable decline since the implementation of service frequency changes in 2004. These service changes resulted in a decrease in the frequency of service on most routes from 60 minutes to 90 minutes (interlined loop routes that previously operated with a 30-minute runtime and were modified to run on 45-minute schedules). These changes were implemented as a result of a growing problem related to schedule adherence. New traffic lights, growing traffic congestion, and an increasing number of wheelchair patrons were resulting in buses arriving late to Bradley Station at the conclusion of their runs. Since GT operates as a “pulse” system, with all buses meeting at Bradley Station to enable transfers, one late bus impacts the entire system. In addition, driver morale was a concern because the vehicle operators often did not have time for a break before beginning the next run.

Exhibit 2-2: Gastonia Transit Ridership Trends



At the same time as service frequency decreased, a fare increase of \$0.25 was instituted (from \$0.75 to \$1.00). Even though service remained available to all the areas that were served prior to the route changes (and in some cases, service to new locations was

added), ridership dropped significantly, as illustrated in Exhibit 2-2. Anecdotal evidence from passengers indicates that the fare increase generally was viewed as reasonable by most patrons, so the major decrease in ridership was likely due more to the increased travel times resulting from reduced frequencies, rather than the fare increase.

Ridership has stabilized since the ridership decrease immediately after the service change, but remains about 30% lower than 2004 levels. Exhibit 2-3 illustrates recent trends in additional operational statistics, including vehicle hours, vehicle miles, farebox revenue, and operational expenses. Although vehicle hours and miles have remained virtually constant, ridership has decreased as noted above. Likewise, the significant drop in ridership has offset any increases in fare revenue resulting from the \$0.25 fare increase, and net fare revenue has dropped by almost 6%. Operating expenses have also increased notably, due largely to rising fuel costs.

Exhibit 2-3: Trends in System Operating Data

	<i>FY 04</i>	<i>FY 05</i>	<i>FY 06</i>	<i>% Change</i>
<i>Ridership</i>	401,337	286,073	282,569	-29.6%
<i>Vehicle Hours</i>	20,808	20,777	21,147	1.6%
<i>Vehicle Miles</i>	296,121	289,677	300,871	1.6%
<i>Farebox Revenue</i>	\$172,764	\$148,256	\$162,958	-5.7%
<i>Operational Expenses</i>		\$1,189,261	\$1,448,893	21.8%

Exhibit 2-4 illustrates key system performance measures. Recognizing the ridership drop in combination with consistent vehicle hours and miles of service, the number of passengers per hour and per mile has declined by about 30% since 2004. The average fare paid, taking into account GT's various discounted fares and passes, has risen, but as stated above, these gains have been offset by the decrease in ridership. The operating cost per hour and per mile has also increased in recent years, due to the noted increase in operational costs.

Exhibit 2-4: Trends in System Performance Measures

	<i>FY 04</i>	<i>FY 05</i>	<i>FY 06</i>	<i>% Change</i>
<i>Passengers/Hour</i>	19.29	13.77	13.36	-30.7%
<i>Passengers/Mile</i>	1.36	0.99	0.94	-30.7%
<i>Average Fare Paid</i>	\$0.43	\$0.52	\$0.58	34.0%
<i>Farebox Recovery Ratio</i>		12%	11%	-9.8%
<i>Cost Per Hour</i>		\$57.24	\$68.52	19.7%
<i>Cost Per Mile</i>		\$4.11	\$4.82	17.3%

Route-level Analysis

Ridership trends on individual routes mirror the overall system decreases, with each route registering a significant decline in patronage. However, the decreases are more pronounced on some routes than on others, as shown in Exhibit 2-5. It should be noted that due to route interlining, data for most routes are grouped together. The South Marietta/South York – Linwood routes experienced a drop in ridership of nearly 50% from 2004 and 2005. Other routes had less severe (although still significant) reductions in patronage. Ridership on the Eastridge/Franklin Square route rebounded more in 2006 than ridership on other routes, but in all cases, ridership is well below earlier levels.

Exhibit 2-5: Ridership Trends by Route

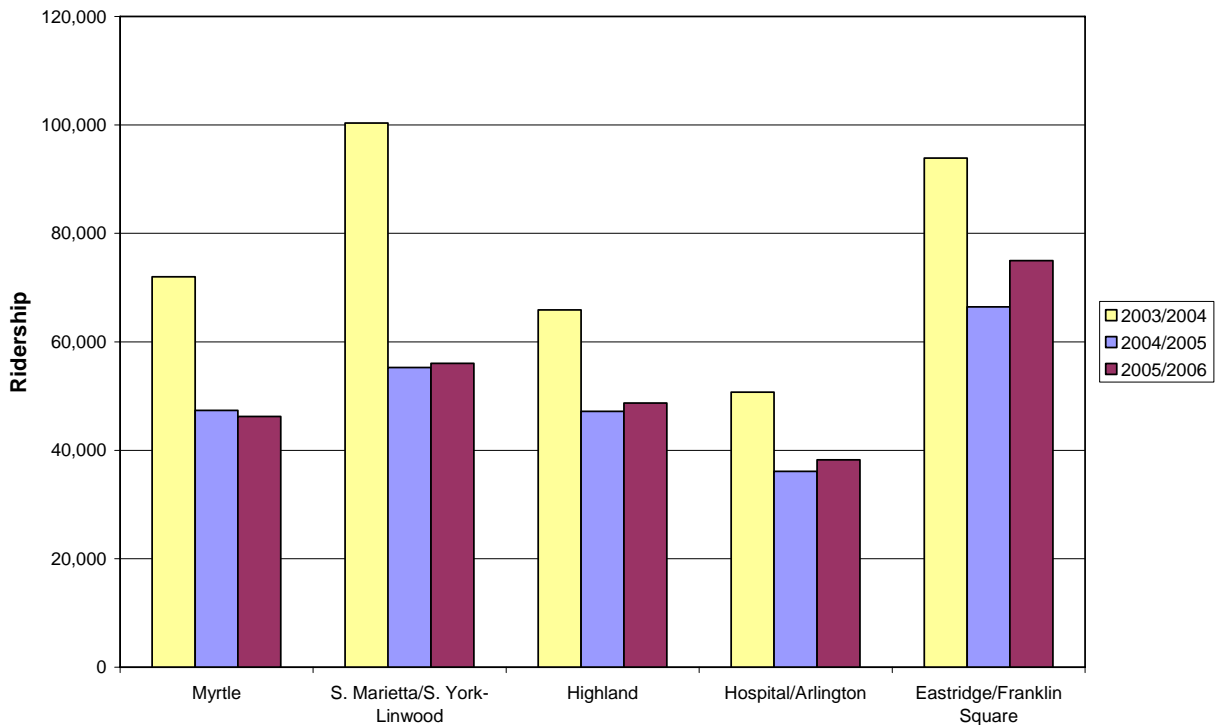


Exhibit 2-6 illustrates additional annual operating statistics by route, using 2006 data. A notable finding from these data is that there is little variation among the routes in terms of passengers per hour. In relation to the amount of service provided on each route, ridership is quite consistent. To some extent, this consistency is a function of operations under a “pulse” system, in which many passengers transfer between routes to complete their trips.

Exhibit 2-6: Key Annual Operating Statistics by Route (2006)

	Myrtle	S. Marietta / S. York-Linwood	Highland	Hospital / Arlington	Eastridge / Franklin Square	Unclassified	Total
Ridership	46,244	56,044	48,707	38,263	74,951	18,360	282,569
Vehicle Hours	3,443	3,953	3,953	3,188	6,503		21,147
Farebox Revenue	\$22,279	\$26,591	\$21,949	\$16,055	\$35,847	\$40,237	\$162,958
Passengers/Hour	13.43	14.18	12.32	12.00	11.53		13.36

Peer Group Analysis

Gastonia Transit system data were examined alongside other small urban transit systems in North Carolina to gain perspective on how GT's operations compare with others in the state. The cities chosen for comparison were based on the fact that all of the systems operate a similar number of vehicles as Gastonia. Hickory and Wilson operate four vehicles in peak service; Gastonia, Concord / Kannapolis, and Rocky Mount all operate six vehicles, and High Point operates eleven vehicles.

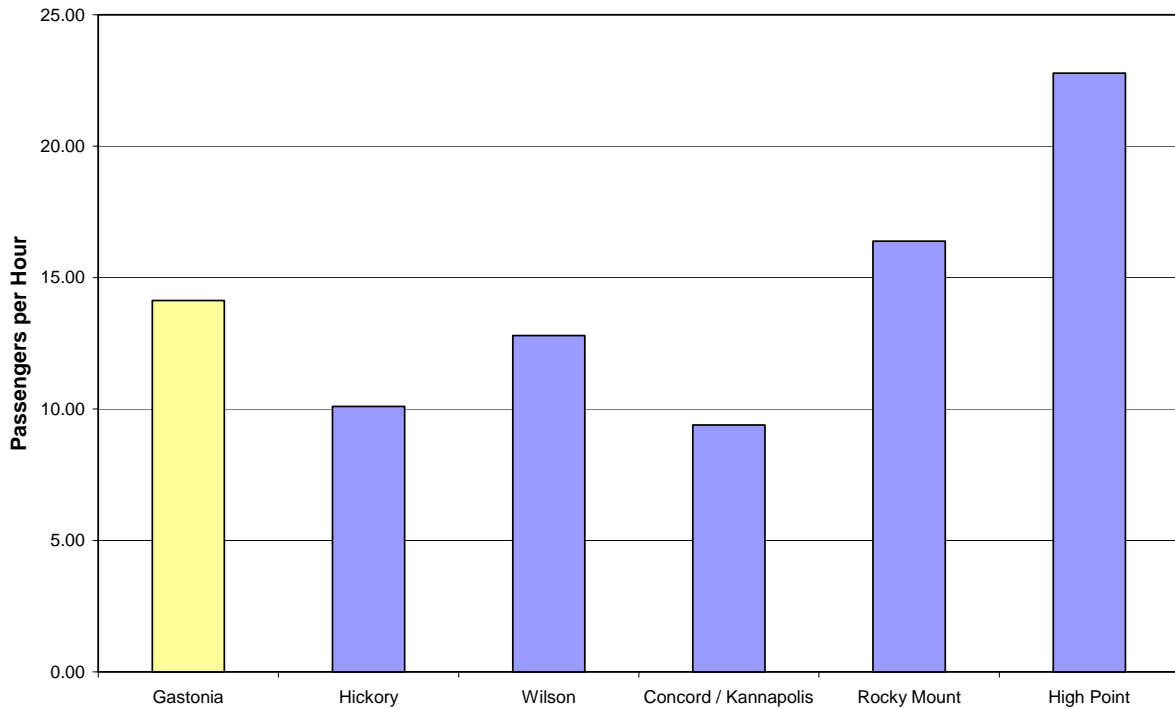
Exhibit 2-7 summarizes key operational characteristics of Gastonia Transit as compared to the peer systems, using 2005 data. As can be seen in the table, Gastonia compares favorably to the peer systems in many categories. An important point in this analysis is that Gastonia still is well within the range of the peer group even after experiencing a 30% decrease in ridership.

Exhibit 2-7: Peer Group Operating Data

	Gastonia	Hickory	Wilson	Concord / Kannapolis	Rocky Mount	High Point
Passengers	293,643	159,683	161,429	232,325	297,958	675,883
Revenue Bus Miles	291,555	189,193	190,471	434,293	302,431	407,772
Revenue Bus Hours	20,777	15,806	12,618	24,735	18,178	29,668
Total Expenses	\$1,303,347	\$926,684	\$672,596	\$1,711,300	\$720,981	\$1,756,152
Farebox Revenue	\$156,671	\$115,266	\$71,441	\$114,153	\$95,593	\$375,477
Passengers per Bus Hour	14.13	10.10	12.79	9.39	16.39	22.78
Farebox Recovery Ratio	12%	12%	18%	7%	20%	23%
Operating Cost per Hour	\$62.73	\$58.63	\$53.30	\$69.19	\$39.66	\$59.19

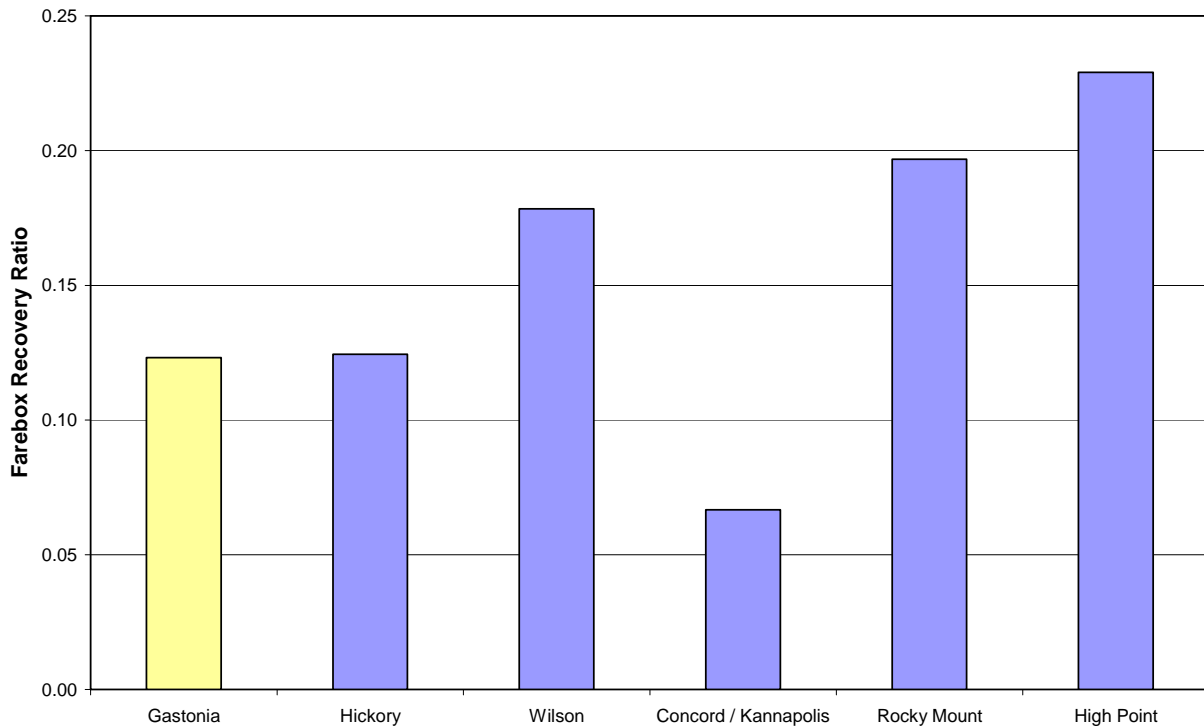
Exhibits 2-8 and 2-9 further illustrate two of these key data. In terms of passengers per hour, Gastonia's statistics are more favorable than those of Concord / Kannapolis, Hickory, and Wilson, and trails those of Rocky Mount and High Point. If ridership levels prior to the 2004 service cut had been maintained, Gastonia would trail only High Point in this group.

Exhibit 2-8: Comparison of Passengers per Hour Data (2005)



With regard to farebox recovery ratio, Gastonia trails High Point, Rocky Mount, and Wilson, and has the same percentage as Hickory. Gastonia's farebox recovery ratio is higher than that of Concord / Kannapolis.

Exhibit 2-9: Comparison of Farebox Recovery Ratio Data (2005)



2.3. CURRENT COORDINATION EFFORTS

Presently, transit coordination efforts in Gaston County are limited. Gastonia Transit and Gaston County ACCESS operate independently, although ACCESS does transport passengers to Gaston College from GT's Bradley Station. As part of this planning process, administrative staff members from both agencies have met to discuss possible coordination opportunities resulting from this plan, including a coordinated transfer agreement and coordinated scheduling of new routes. Although few coordination efforts have occurred up until this point, both GT and ACCESS are enthusiastic about working together in the future.