

6.1. OVERVIEW OF PLAN

Based on the array of baseline system and expansion strategies discussed in Sections 4 and 5, a series of recommendations has been established. These recommendations address concerns regarding the efficiency of the current system, as well as opportunities for future expansion. Eight primary action items are defined based on public and stakeholder input, demographic analyses, and examinations of current services. These action items include a variety of improvements, including restructuring of existing services, initiation of new services, and extended hours of operation.

The implementation plan was designed to develop responsive strategies to transit needs, using public input to prioritize the recommended improvements. Additionally, the plan provides a realistic program that can be implemented in a phased approach, based on funding availability. A variety of funding sources could be tapped to implement the recommended projects, and each strategy is linked to the most appropriate funding sources. It is important to note that the projects contained in the implementation plan are presented in the recommended order of priority, but funding availability may dictate adjustments to the order of implementation. For example, if Bessemer City elects to fully fund the Bessemer City Flexroute (Priority #5) immediately, there is no reason to wait on other jurisdictions to participate in funding Priorities #2-4 first.

It is important to ensure that the existing system is operating as efficiently as possible, before taking on expansion projects. Based on the significant decrease in ridership since the last service changes in 2004, a top priority for Gastonia Transit is to restructure the current system to reduce the travel times for customers to the extent possible. After the system restructuring is complete, a series of expansion projects can further enhance mobility options for current and future customers. An overview of the prioritized implementation plan is shown in Exhibit 6-1, and each of the proposed projects is discussed in Section 6-2.

Exhibit 6-1: Implementation Plan

	Project	Annual Operating Costs	Capital Costs
1	Implement Baseline Alternative 1	\$1,513,000	\$0
2	Extend service until 9 PM (weekdays only)	\$295,000	\$0
3	Initiate East Gaston Flexroute (weekdays until 9:30 PM; Saturdays until 6:30 PM)	\$95,000	\$60,000
4	Modify fixed-route service to that of Baseline Alternative 2 (extended service on New Hope Road, more frequent service on Shannon Bradley route, more Saturday service)	\$284,000	\$0
5	Initiate Bessemer City Flexroute (weekdays until 9:30 PM; Saturdays until 6:30 PM)	\$95,000	\$60,000
6	Extend Saturday service until 9 PM (maintain existing frequency and routes)	\$66,000	\$0
7	Add South Union Road route	\$325,000	\$60,000
8	Add Downtown Trolley route	\$203,000	\$75,000 - \$300,000
TOTAL		\$2,876,000	\$255,000-\$480,000

It is anticipated that the proposed implementation plan may take several years to implement, based on funding availability. However, continuing to progress toward implementing the recommendations will result in a much improved transit system.

6.2. PROPOSED PROJECTS

#1: Implement Baseline Alternative #1

An action item under this plan for Gastonia Transit is to begin the process of restructuring the current system to operate according to the concept described as Baseline Alternative #1. This concept is described in detail in Section 4, but is focused on providing a more effective service design within the constraints of the existing operating budget (same hours of service and same number of vehicles in operation). Please refer to Section 4 for details regarding Baseline Alternative #1, including the proposed route network.

Estimated Costs:

- Annual operating costs: \$1,513,000
(estimated 2007 costs of existing operations)
- Capital costs: \$0
(no new equipment required)

Funding Sources:

- Existing funding sources (current operating budget)

Responsible Party:

- Gastonia Transit

Intermediate Action Items:

- Confirm details of proposed routing and scheduling
- Develop public education and marketing plan for service change
- Prepare new route maps and schedules
- Prepare to move “bus stop” signs as needed
- Obtain permission to enter private property where necessary (e.g. Food Lion shopping center at intersection of Franklin Blvd. and Edgewood Rd.)

#2: Extend Weekday Service to 9 PM

The most requested improvement by the public is for extended evening service. This project would extend weekday service on all routes to approximately 9 PM. No additional changes to the route structure or frequency of service would occur in association with this project. For more information, please see Section 5.4.

Estimated Costs:

- Annual operating costs: \$295,000
- Capital costs: \$0
(no new equipment required)

Funding Sources:

- Federal / state operating assistance, passenger fares, local funding from City of Gastonia

Responsible Party:

- Gastonia Transit

#3: Initiate East Gaston Flexroute

New service would be provided between Franklin Square in Gastonia and Little Rock Road in Charlotte via US 74, with demand-response deviations to serve portions of Belmont, Mount Holly, McAdenville, Cramerton, and Lowell. Connections to GT fixed routes would be provided at Franklin Square, and connections with CATS Route 5 would be enabled at Little Rock Road. Weekday service would be provided between 5:30 AM and 9:30 PM, and Saturday service would be provided between 7:30 AM and 6:30 PM. Gaston County ACCESS is the recommended operator of this route. For more information, please see Section 5.2.

Estimated Costs:

- Annual operating costs: \$95,000
(\$83,000 for weekday service until 9:30 PM, plus \$12,000 for Saturday service until 6:30 PM. Estimated costs are based on ACCESS' unit operating costs)
- Capital costs: \$60,000
(one new minibus / light transit vehicle)

Funding Sources:

- NCDOT Rural General Public funds, passenger fares, local funding from towns served and / or Gaston County

Responsible Party:

- Gaston County ACCESS (coordinated with Gastonia Transit and CATS)

Intermediate Action Items:

- Work closely with towns along the proposed route to develop appropriate boundaries for the "deviation zone"

#4: Expand Fixed Route Service to Baseline Alternative 2

This project would modify the service design from that of Baseline Alternative 1 to that of Baseline Alternative 2. One additional bus would be added on weekdays (total of seven buses in operation), and one additional bus would be added on Saturdays (total of four buses in operation). The majority of the route structure would remain the same as in Baseline Alternative 1, but Route 2 would be extended to serve the Ashbrook High School area, and more frequent service would be available on Route 5. For more details, please refer to Section 4.3.

Estimated Costs:

- Annual operating costs: \$284,000
(\$238,000 to modify route structure, plus \$46,000 in incremental costs for extended service until 9 PM)
- Capital costs: \$0
(one additional vehicle is required; use one of existing spare vehicles rather than purchasing new vehicle)

Funding Sources:

- Federal / state operating assistance, passenger fares, local funding from City of Gastonia

Responsible Party:

- Gastonia Transit

#5: Initiate Bessemer City Flexroute

Demand-response service would be provided within a designated zone in and around Bessemer City. Passengers could travel to destinations within the designated zone, or connections could be made to GT fixed routes at Dixie Village. Weekday service would be provided between 5:30 AM and 9:30 PM, and Saturday service would be provided between 7:30 AM and 6:30 PM. Gaston County ACCESS is the recommended operator of this service. For more information, please see Section 5.2.

Estimated Costs:

- Annual operating costs: \$95,000
(\$83,000 for weekday service until 9:30 PM, plus \$12,000 for Saturday service until 6:30 PM. Estimated costs are based on ACCESS' unit operating costs)
- Capital costs: \$60,000
(one new minibus / light transit vehicle)

Funding Sources:

- NCDOT Rural General Public funds, passenger fares, local funding from Bessemer City

Responsible Party:

- Gaston County ACCESS (coordinated with Gastonia Transit)

Intermediate Action Items:

- Work closely with Bessemer City to develop appropriate boundaries for the flexroute zone

#6: Extend Saturday Service to 9 PM

Building upon the earlier project to extend the hours of weekday service, this project would extend Saturday service on all Saturday routes (including newly-initiated flexroutes) to approximately 9 PM. No additional changes to the route structure or frequency of service would occur in association with this project. For more information, please see Section 5.4.

Estimated Costs:

- Annual operating costs: \$66,000
(\$60,000 for fixed-route service extensions, plus \$6,000 for flexroute service extensions)
- Capital costs: \$0

Funding Sources:

- Federal / state operating assistance, passenger fares, local funding from City of Gastonia, other towns served and / or Gaston County

Responsible Party:

- Gastonia Transit and Gaston County ACCESS (for flexroute service)

#7: Add South Union Road Route

This project would create a new fixed route on Union Road extending from Bradley Station south to the Robinwood Road area. The route would operate on weekdays and Saturdays until 9 PM (consistent with the other routes). It is recommended that a minibus be used for operations on this route, in recognition of the potential for lighter ridership loads in comparison to other fixed routes. For further details, please see Section 5.2.

Estimated Costs:

- Annual operating costs: \$325,000
(\$277,000 for weekday service until 9 PM, plus \$48,000 for Saturday service until 9 PM)
- Capital costs: \$60,000
(one new minibus / light transit vehicle)

Funding Sources:

- Federal / state operating assistance, passenger fares, local funding from City of Gastonia

Responsible Party:

- Gastonia Transit

#8: Add Downtown Trolley Route

A downtown circulator route would be provided using a replica trolley vehicle. The intent of this route is to connect downtown businesses and law offices with the County Court House and other facilities. It is noted that additional downtown development would need to occur to give such a route a higher potential for success. The service would operate on weekdays between 7 AM and 6 PM. For more information, please refer to Section 5.2.

Estimated Costs:

- Annual operating costs: \$203,000
(weekday service between 7 AM and 6 PM)
- Capital costs: \$75,000 - \$300,000
(range of costs for replica trolley vehicle, lease or purchase)

Funding Sources:

- Business community contributions, passenger fares

Responsible Party:

- Gastonia Transit

6.3. ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the eight major recommendations described above, two additional projects are suggested based on public and stakeholder input:

- Study the feasibility of vanpool service; and
- Add bike racks to GT buses.

Vanpool service is used in a number of different areas in North Carolina and around the country to connect workers to job sites in areas where there may not be sufficient demand for dedicated transit services, but commuting workers have common destinations. As discussed in Section 5, CATS has a well-developed vanpool program, including several vanpools that originate in Gaston County. It is recommended that the Gaston Urban Area MPO conduct a more detailed study of the potential need for vanpool service specifically targeting major employment sites in Gaston County. Such a study would include an in-depth analysis of commuting patterns to major industrial plants and other employment centers, and would gauge the interest of employers in supporting vanpool services. Presentations from companies that organize and operate vanpools could also be made.

The addition of bicycle racks on buses is another low-cost enhancement that would enhance the area's network of bicycle infrastructure. Racks holding two or three bicycles can easily be added to the existing bus fleet, and would be beneficial for bicyclists looking to use transit for a portion of their trip. Direct access to the Greenway starting at Lineberger Park would be available through transit, as well as access to numerous other destinations.