

Wichita Transit – Model for Sustainability

1 OVERVIEW- THE CHALLENGE

Wichita Transit has struggled to reach sustainability under the current funding model. During the 2016-17 budget process, the Transit Fund was forecasted to have a significant shortfall of \$2 million. Since that time, new routes and fares have been implemented, and the short term outlook for the next few years has improved. Nonetheless, the Transit Fund is not sustainable in the long term, and current and future solutions to create long term Transit Fund sustainability need to be identified. The Transit Fund is projected to be sustainable through 2018 only because of reduced capital requirements, as well as the use of Federal funds to finance those improvements. Transit’s carryover balance of Federal funds is expected to diminish by the end of 2018. This coincides with the last bus purchase for the next several years. Any future capital requirements after 2018 may directly impair the Transit Fund’s condition. Revenues are static or dropping causing Wichita Transit to borrow money from the City or defer maintenance and the purchase of capital items to continue operating at scheduled levels.

Peer Agency Funding Sources

Transit Authority	Directly Generated	Federal Funds	State Funds	Local Funds	Population	Local Contribution Per Capita
Wichita Transit	\$2,909,139 (21%)	\$5,195,037 (37%)	\$1,553,619 (11%)	\$3,902,625 (28%)	384,445	\$10.15
Topeka Metro	\$246,467 (3%)	\$1,946,247 (26%)	\$460,462 (6%)	\$4,666,966 (62%)	127,473	\$36.61
Mountain Metro (Colorado Springs)	\$3,739,626 (22%)	\$4,123,496 (24%)	\$65,787 (1%)	\$9,017,756 (53%)	559,409	\$16.12
Tulsa Transit	\$2,619,707 (15%)	\$5,047,375 (29%)	\$1,092,500 (6%)	\$7,450,000 (43%)	400,000	\$18.63
Omaha Metro	\$4,921,345 (19%)	\$7,256,508 (27%)	\$610,209 (2%)	\$13,298,245 (50%)	670,153	\$19.84
Central Arkansas Transit	\$2,264,195 (15%)	\$2,041,334 (13%)	\$521,170 (3%)	\$10,331,905 (67%)	162,250	\$63.68
Des Moines Area Regional Transit	\$7,640,483 (36%)	\$5,895,229 (28%)	\$1,155,669 (5%)	\$6,194,942 (29%)	374,910	\$16.52

Source: National Transit Database, 2012. Note: Percentages do not add fully to 100%

Wichita Transit operates a low level of service in comparison to peer cities, and local funds cover a disproportionately smaller portion of the total budget than peer cities as can be seen in the comparison of per capita local contributions above. If Wichita Transit received \$16.12 per capita in local funding, that would equate to \$6,197,253 per year, or \$2,422,173 more than budgeted for 2017.

In order to be sustainable beyond 2018, a predictable source of local funds needs to be identified. Until such time predictable funding sources are identified, Wichita Transit must modify current operations to become sustainable within local limits. This document is intended to suggest potential uses for \$4 million over a four-year period to create a more sustainable transit system. While \$4 million cannot solve Wichita transit’s long-term funding issues, it can be used as a catalyst to reshape the system so that it will be more sustainable in the long term once predictable funding is identified.

The information in this document will build on community planning efforts, public input, and recent adjustments in transit service. The plan for sustainability includes several key activities:

- Reinventing transit service to be more creative and diverse
- Establishing partnerships to create greater support and opportunity for service collaboration
- Longer-term considerations for regional cooperation and collaboration.

2 GUIDING DOCUMENTS

Wichita Transit has taken steps toward sustainability over the last four years by engaging the public in efforts to examine the system and needs. Transit cost centers have been reviewed for efficiencies, a reorganization was completed, and internal and consultant-led planning has been completed. In addition, other community planning activities have addressed the needs of transit. Through these efforts, key guiding documents were developed:

- Project Downtown – The Master Plan for Wichita (2010)
- The Transit Vision Plan (2013)
- The Coordinated Public Transit - Human Services Plan (2013)
- Transit Advisory Board Strategic Plan (2105)
- Community Investments Plan (2015)

2.1 PROJECT DOWNTOWN

Project Downtown notes that on-street and off-street parking should carry a charge and that on-street parking should be 25%-35% higher than off-street parking. The plan recommends creating a downtown parking district, hiring a downtown parking director and management staff to maintain facilities, conduct system planning and enforcement. Project Downtown states that sufficient mass transit alternatives should be provided to reduce the need for parking. Walkability is important for downtown areas and transit can “extend the walk” in downtown Wichita. It was recommended to implement 4 Q-lines in the downtown area in the short-term after the Project Downtown was adopted. An additional 2 Q-lines were recommended for the longer term to facilitate additional park and ride lots for events. The current downtown is automobile –centric which has negative impacts on downtown. A walkable environment will require expanded transit.

THE TRANSIT VISION PLAN

The Transit Vision Plan identified six key points for a service improvement plan: 1) Expand existing routes to improve connections and provide a modified grid system. 2) De-emphasize the pulse system. 3) Decreased travel time. 4) Extending the routes to traffic generators. 5) Re-orient routes in the downtown area. 6) Combine routes to provide through-routing.

Of the six key points for improvement, Wichita Transit has been able to extend some routes to travel generators, re-orient routes in downtown to operate on transit corridors, and combine route into pairs to provide through routing. There was an attempt to de-emphasize the pulse system, but with poor frequencies it provided too low of a level of service to be successful. Though some travelers saw their travel time decrease, many had to wait longer for connections. The only way to successfully move away from the pulse system and toward the modified grid is to increase frequencies. The remaining key points can only be accomplished with increased frequencies on the fixed route system.

There were also discussions of expanding services to evenings and Sundays in the Transit Vision plan. Additionally, regional express and expanding local service into bordering cities was proposed to serve the region as a whole.

THE COORDINATED PUBLIC TRANSIT – HUMAN SERVICES PLAN

The Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Plan (Coordinated Plan) was developed for a 3-county area: Sedgwick County, Butler County, and Harvey County. In 2015 the 3-county area expanded to a 7-county area. A new plan has not been developed for the expanded area as of yet. The current plan lists high priority goals and priority goals for each county and the region as a whole.

2.3

The high priority goals for the region are:

- Explore providing part-time paratransit /transit service where service gaps are present.
- Promote responsible use of funds by coordinating rides with other agencies to maximize fleet capacity and minimize trip redundancy.
- Encourage mobility management practices, such as travel training, when feasible.
- Study the feasibility of county/municipal transfer points/locations.

The high priority goals for Sedgwick County are:

- Provide centralized mobility management.
- Coordinate with other agencies to provide rides from unincorporated areas to suburban jobs and services.
- Promote ridership by removing barriers that are transit-prohibitive.
- Promote transit ridership by evaluating and modifying routes as needed.

2.4

TRANSIT ADVISORY BOARD STRATEGIC PLAN

The Transit Advisory Board held a Strategic Planning meeting in the spring of 2015. Three Key strategic issues emerged:

Establish a Positive Community Perception

Create a community understanding of the value of transit to a vibrant community. Provide information that transit benefits both riders and non-riders. Establish a reputation as a high quality, customer focused organization. Answer urban myths about transit. Make it easy to use the system.

Build Strategic Partnerships

Build community partnerships to meet community needs and support long-term system growth. Have a dialogue with our potential partners to hear their needs, educate them on the potential value of transit. Introduce diverse services that meet the needs of our partners.

Stabilize the Transit Budget

2.5

Create a sustainable transit system...a system that has predictable funding, operates efficiently, and has a balanced emphasis on capital and operating costs. Continue efforts to control costs and efficiently allocate resources. Looks for additional ways to fund the system.

COMMUNITY INVESTMENTS PLAN

The Community Investments Plan states that the public transit system would require additional investment to achieve financial stability for the minimal service levels currently provided. The City of Wichita listed Public

Transit as a medium-high priority for investment while Sedgwick County listed public transit as a low priority. Goal 2 was to ‘Improve and increase the movement of goods, people and information with better connectivity and mobility options in our community.’ The second strategy to reach that goal was to ‘Develop and implement a long-term transit system plan that reflects the needs of our Community’. The development of future transit services could support the concept of infill if the routes and services were concentrated in corridors consistent with plans to create infill.

3 CREATING A SUSTAINABLE SYSTEM

In March 2016, Wichita Transit implemented a series of route schedule changes that would realign the system to provide better connections and become the base for the long-term growth of transit in the community. As a next step in the process, Wichita Transit will assess the performance of the existing route structure and look for opportunities to make modifications to the service that will continue to improve opportunities for growth and examine more cost-effective ways to deliver service. It normally takes as long as 18 months to determine the relative success of service changes. Over the next 12 – 18 months transit will focus efforts on evaluating the performance of the new structure. Minor adjustments will be made to improve the performance. There are four keys to long term success for the fixed route system:

- Focus of ongoing evaluation of fixed route performance
- Make efforts to increase ridership through marketing and education
- Consideration of alternative transportation methods that may be more cost effective and support the fixed route system by filling in the gaps.
- Create strategic partnerships to develop service programs.

As we look toward long-term development of the system, the focus should be on operating services in areas that have the best opportunity to attract transit riders. Services must operate at a level that can attract riders, and the method of service delivery should be appropriate to the demand.

3.1

EVALUATE FIXED ROUTE SYSTEM

Wichita Transit currently operates 17 fixed routes. In the recent service adjustment, routes were streamlined, moved to major corridors and extended to new traffic generators at the edges of the city. The current routes utilize 34 buses at peak to provide service operating on either a 30 minute or 60 frequency. During the next 12 to 18 months, Wichita Transit will evaluate the route structure and system performance, and examine opportunities to improve frequencies of routes and focus fixed routes more narrowly in corridors. The discussion of flexible service delivery will provide a range of services that can be used to augment traditional transit service 3.2 by extending access to unserved areas or times or by replacing segments of the fixed route system that do not meet performance goals. The introduction of services utilizing smaller vehicles or private operators to provide service could enhance public transit in areas where fixed route service may not have high demand or high usage.

BUILD RIDERSHIP THROUGH MARKETING AND EDUCATION EFFORTS

A well-developed public education program is critical to educate the public on transit opportunities, increase awareness, and build transit ridership. Wichita Transit proposes budgeting a position to develop and undertake public education activities, and coordinate transit marketing efforts with the Communications Office. The transit staff position will develop and implement programs to generate transit ridership through education, outreach and partnerships.

The position would be responsible for developing educational materials on the benefits of transit and how to ride transit. The position will also work with stakeholders (businesses, schools, Chamber) to develop programs that meet their specific needs. The public education position will be actively engaged in public outreach to assist with the travel training program and collect feedback on system performance.

The Communications Office has responsibility for the overall development and implementation of citywide marketing initiatives. The transit staff position will coordinate with Communications on the development of marketing strategies and materials related to transit activities. Market research and rider surveys will be an important part of the job to make sure Wichita Transit continues to meet the needs of the current passengers, and starts to meet the needs of those still in need of service or those who may choose to use the service.

3.2.1.1 Guiding Documents

Project Downtown, The Transit Vision Plan, The Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Plan, Transit Advisory Board Strategic Plan, and Community Investments Plan

3.2.1.2 Cost Estimate

The expected cost of the position would be between \$80,000 and \$110,000 depending on selection of benefits and incoming wage. Additionally, a marketing budget of \$100,000 would need to be created on an annual basis to support efforts.

FLEXIBLE SERVICE DELIVERY

3.3

3.3.1 Hold a Mobility Management Symposium with Stakeholders

Mobility Management is a strategic approach to providing services in the community. The goal is to coordinate services for increased efficiencies and improved customer service. A more efficient model of service can provide savings and in turn a funding source for additional service. A higher level of customer service can be provided by offering additional services that meet different needs. Mobility Management is focused on public transportation agencies providing creative solutions for mobility in the community, and coordinating with or supporting other agencies providing services that increase community mobility.

Wichita Transit proposes utilizing a Mobility Management expert to facilitate discussions with stakeholders on needs, opportunities for partnerships, and strategic coordination of services. Wichita Transit will invite potential partners and stakeholders to the symposium to brainstorm mobility solutions in the community. This activity could consist of one or more symposiums. The discussions would seek to set goals and develop creative ways to deliver services with a goal to move toward sustainability. The ideas below are examples of creative service delivery that could be considered during the symposiums.

3.3.1.1 Guiding Documents

This could be a way to address needs or strategies identified in each guiding document.

3.3.1.2 Cost Estimate

Wichita Transit estimates it would cost about \$3,000 to bring in a mobility management specialist to facilitate a symposium and write a report one time.

3.3.2 Expansion of Feeder Service

Wichita Transit currently provides feeder services on the west side of Wichita in place of bus service. The service has been met with some success offering a unique service in areas not served by fixed route bus service. The feeder service concept can be expanded to operate in other areas of the city to connect routes operating in more of a spine fashion. The combination of flexible service with a more efficient fixed route system could expand transportation options cost effectively. Feeder service can be considered in areas where fixed route

transit may not realize significant ridership, or it can provide more flexible coverage to neighborhoods with low density. In addition, flex service concepts can be used in partnership with private transportation providers to operate during times that fixed route transit does not operate. Long term, feeder service can be expanded in other areas of Wichita or surrounding communities in order to provide additional options for people looking for alternatives to the automobile.

3.3.2.1 Guiding Documents

The Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Plan, Transit Advisory Board Strategic Plan, and Community Investments Plan

3.3.2.2 Cost Estimate

The average cost of a demand-response ride in 2015 was \$29.43. Current feeder service in west Wichita provides about 40 rides per week. Each zone that is developed is estimated to cost approximately \$60,000 per year. It should be noted that the west side service has not been advertised. If advertised, costs could become higher.

3.3.3 Voucher Program for low-demand hours

Voucher programs are flexible transportation options that focus on the rider rather than a particular type of service. These programs provide a voucher that the consumer can use on different forms of transit (cabs, Uber etc.) to complete a trip. A voucher program can fill in service gaps providing access to areas not serviced by traditional bus service or during low demand times such as evenings or Sundays. A voucher program is normally designed to serve certain segments of the population, such as those trying to get to jobs after regular service hours or in areas not served by the traditional system. In addition the voucher program could be designed to serve low income populations with connections to jobs, medical care and access to healthy foods.

Vouchers are used by the consumer to pay for a portion of a demand-response ride in a taxi or similar same-day demand-response service. Parameters for the program would be set to determine eligibility.

3.3.3.1 Guiding Documents

The Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Plan, Transit Advisory Board Strategic Plan, and Community Investments Plan

3.3.3.2 Cost Estimate

A budget would need to be set for the program. Based on the determined budget, a maximum voucher allowance would be calculated. Wichita Transit could work with taxi companies to calculate the average cost of taxi rides in Wichita, and the average cost could be used to set the maximum allowance. For example, if the average taxi ride was \$20, Wichita Transit could set the maximum taxi allowance at \$20 to make the ride more affordable. If an estimated 50 riders received a \$20 voucher each week, the annual cost would be \$52,000.

3.3.4 Expand Vanpool Program

The current vanpool program operated by Wichita Transit has two vanpools. Vanpool programs are successful for businesses in which employees live close together, go to one location, work all day at that location, and get off work at the same time. Distances should be fairly far and involve travel from one city/community to another.

3.3.4.1 Guiding Documents

The Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Plan, Transit Advisory Board Strategic Plan, and Community Investments Plan

3.3.4.2 Cost Estimate

Wichita Transit has a contract with VRide to provide vanpools and pays VRide \$300 a month for each vanpool. VRide provides the van, gives the driver a gas card and charges each person riding in the vehicle a fare except the driver. VRide determines a reasonable fare in order to cover costs and make their profit based on the subsidy

provided by Wichita Transit, the number of riders, and distance traveled. Any additional vanpools would be subsidized at \$300 per month. Wichita Transit is able to count the vanpool miles and passengers on state and Federal reports which contributes to apportionments. Wichita Transit would like to make a goal of doubling the number of vanpools each year. The first year (2016) cost for two vanpools is \$7,200. Costs for additional years are listed in the table found at the back of the document.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Public Transit exists to provide mobility for residents in order to take advantage of opportunities available in the community, such as jobs, education, entertainment, and medical treatment. Strategic partnerships are important to make sure the system is structured to meet need, and can lead to improved efficiency. Service enhancements that serve partners with a base of likely transit riders can also increase ridership in specific service areas. Entities that serve many in a dense area with limited or expensive parking are good strategic partners. Below are some strategic partnerships identified by the Transit Advisory Board.

3.4.1 Wichita State University

University settings are great for transit success. Often there is limited parking on campuses to accommodate the faculty, staff and students. Wichita State University (WSU) is expanding both the student base and facilities with the development of the Innovation Campus. As both increase there will be a need to address parking and transportation issues. The coordination of transit services with the current university routes could provide more efficient service and improved access for students and staff. As parking issues grow, the introduction of special university pass products could stimulate ridership. Utilizing a concept called “Unlimited Access” Wichita State can participate in the support of the transit system and in return receive greatly discounted transit fares. Unlimited access can also benefit students and staff by giving them access to the entire fixed route system.

3.4.1.1 Guiding Documents

The Transit Vision Plan, Transit Advisory Board Strategic Plan, and Community Investments Plan

3.4.1.2 Cost Estimate

Wichita Transit already has service in place on the WSU campus. Service would need to be designed for WSU to accommodate their park and ride lot and additional hours for weekday evenings. Additionally, higher frequencies may be needed during some hours. Wichita State would be required to provide financial support in order to implement the service improvements.

3.4.2 Wichita Public Schools, USD 259

The Wichita Public School District spends approximately \$29 million on transportation services for students in Wichita. Only students that live further than 2.5 miles from their school are offered school bus services, leaving many students with long walks or parents with disruptive drop-off and pick-up schedules. USD 259 has struggled to provide services in recent years due to budgetary issues at the state level. Given the budgetary issues, it seems that Wichita Transit and USD 259 could work on a plan to collaborate in areas where service is duplicated. Wichita Transit has routes that go by several USD 259 schools that students could ride. Wichita Transit would propose a pilot program that could coordinate service for select middle schools and high schools. USD 259 and Wichita Transit would work together to map school stops and Wichita Transit routes to see where students could be accommodated. Frequencies could be improved in areas of need to provide enough service and match students with their school start times.

3.4.2.1 Guiding Documents

The Transit Vision Plan, The Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Plan, Transit Advisory Board Strategic Plan, and Community Investments Plan

3.4.2.2 Cost Estimate

Wichita Transit already has service in place going by several USD 259 schools. Service would need to be designed to target school schedules. Proposed pilots would be schools on or very near current routes. Higher frequencies may be needed during some hours to accommodate the loads and school start times. It would be expected for USD 259 to provide financial support for increased services.

3.4.3 Businesses Partners

Public transit provides access to work, and the work trip is typically the largest reason for using the bus. Therefore partnerships with the business community are important. The transit system route structure serves downtown businesses and several other employment centers. Wichita Transit would engage in conversation with local businesses to establish a working relationship to promote transit to employees. Transit would seek companies willing to subsidize the cost of bus passes for their employees making transit a more affordable means of transportation. Employer subsidy of bus fares can result in tax benefits to the employers.

3.4.3.1 Guiding Documents

Project Downtown, The Transit Vision Plan, Transit Advisory Board Strategic Plan

3.4.3.2 Cost Estimate

Wichita Transit would only need to invest staff time for this project. Staff time could include coordinating with companies to develop a customized program, trip planning, and travel training riders. Marketing staff would be responsible for working with employers to develop custom programs.

3.4.4 Partner with Other Jurisdictions in the Urbanized Area to Coordinate Service Provision

Wichita Transit receives Federal and State apportionments based on service provisions and characteristics of the urbanized area, not just the City of Wichita. Wichita Transit passes through a small amount of Federal funds to the City of Derby and Butler County. Sedgwick County was a recent recipient, but no longer receives the pass-through funds. Wichita Transit proposes working with other communities to coordinate services in order to share costs and offer a higher level of service to those in need. Wichita Transit has heard from some communities that they would like to see better service in their area or links to the Wichita Transit system:

- Derby runs a good operation but sometimes reaches capacity on their one van and could use help providing additional service or linking riders to Wichita Transit's system.
- Butler County only operates one day a week in Andover. Wichita Transit could coordinate with Butler County and Andover to provide better service in Andover and link Andover residents to the Wichita Transit System.
- Hayesville has expressed interest in Wichita Transit providing service linking their citizens to the fixed route system.
- Sedgwick County only provides medical trips for Sedgwick County residents and will only take passengers into Wichita, not to other cities in the County.

3.4.4.1 Guiding Documents

The Transit Vision Plan, The Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Plan, and Community Investments Plan

3.4.4.2 Cost Estimate

Wichita Transit would use staff time to meet with other communities, design service for them and develop a cost estimate and cost sharing model. Costs will vary. Transit could look at simply extending some routes, using a demand-response system to make linkages, or even a commuter express involving park and ride lots.

4 COST ESTIMATE TABLE

The below cost table gives an estimated budget based on the items presented in this document. Many of the items can be scaled to different sizes as needed to meet the budget and customer need. Improvement made to the fixed route service are the most expensive but don't even begin to get to the level of service needed to meet the need for choice or dependent riders in a City the size of Wichita. Improvement decisions would be finalized after the current route system runs for 18 months and a targeted marketing campaign is completed.

<u>Activity</u>	<u>2017</u>	<u>2018</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>
Marketing and Education	\$200,000	\$204,000	\$208,080	\$212,242
Transportation Symposium	\$3,000	-	-	-
Feeder Service	\$60,000	\$124,800	\$129,792	\$134,984
Voucher Program	\$52,000	\$52,000	\$52,000	\$52,000
Vanpool Program	\$7,200	\$14,400	\$28,800	\$57,600
Subtotal:	\$322,200	\$395,200	\$418,672	\$456,825
Fixed Route Adjustments and Frequencies	-	\$562,500	\$780,000	\$811,200
Total Expenditures:	\$322,200	\$957,700	\$1,198,672	\$1,268,025
Carryover Amount:	\$677,800	\$720,100	\$521,428	\$253,403