



Chapter 7 — Transit Element Introduction

For many residents in Sumter, taking transit is a necessity rather than a choice. These residents without access to private automobiles depend on transit for access to jobs, medical care, services, and many other aspects of daily life. As the region grows and development patterns shift, convenient and reliable transit service becomes more important, and in some ways, more difficult. This Transit Element identifies local issues related to transit as well as strategies aimed to enhance access and mobility for all residents of the region, particularly the one-third of us who cannot drive—children and the elderly, persons with disabilities, and those who cannot afford a car.

One of the goals of the *SUATS Long-Range Transportation Plan* is to provide viable transportation alternatives to decrease dependence on the automobile, in turn decreasing the demand on the existing transportation system. One way to encourage transit use is to develop around each stop a safe, comfortable customer delivery system complete with attractive and convenient amenities. And because most regular transit users walk or bike to and from the stop, a network of sidewalks, safe street crossings, and lighting should complement the amenities provided at the stop.

The efficiency of transit also depends on an interconnected system of roads and highways suitable for bus traffic and bicycle and pedestrian features that provide access to transit stops. Transit cannot be considered in isolation, and the strategies presented in this chapter support improvements to the larger transportation system.



Santee Waterlee Regional Transportation Authority

Transit and Urban Form

Based on community discussions, many people agree that they would use transit if service was fast, frequent, dependable, and easy to use. While such criteria requires a complete system of roads, sidewalks, and bikeways, transit also must provide connections to the places people need to go at a time when they need to get there. As a result, transit must be introduced or expanded within a framework of transit-supportive urban form. Two development types that maximize potential transit ridership include transit-oriented development and transit-ready development.

Transit-oriented developments (TODs) provide a mixture of residential and commercial uses focused around a transit station or bus stop. The transit stop is surrounded by relatively high density development that spreads out as you move away from the center. The scale of a TOD generally is limited to ¼- to ½-mile in diameter to establish the walkability of the neighborhood. The design of such places maximizes access to transit and support walking and biking between destinations.

In locations that lack existing transit facilities or demand to support a TOD, regulations and guidelines that support transit-ready development should be enforced. Transit-ready development describes the coordinated design of new neighborhoods and activity centers that supports future transit expansion. Like TODs, transit-ready developments include a mixture of land uses, pedestrian-friendly design, appropriate locations and/or routes for transit, an interconnected network of internal streets, and appropriate densities supportive of future transit use.

While transit-oriented and transit-ready developments represent ideal urban form for transit destinations, many existing single-use locations in Sumter are viable long-term facilities. The mall, grocery stores, and business parks are just a few examples of vital destinations for many Sumter residents, and while their urban design may not be ideal for transit, they are locations where access to public transportation continues to be an important priority.



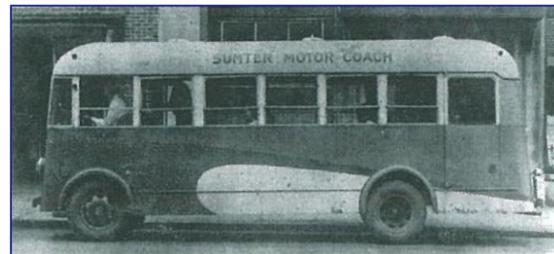
Transit-Oriented Development



History of Transit in Sumter

The transportation options available to Sumter residents are constantly evolving. The National Interstate and Highway Defense Act of 1956 brought increased access to the area, and as a result, the region is now encircled by three Interstate Highways: I-95, I-20, and I-26. In 1973, the state legislature passed a series of laws (South Carolina Code of Laws Section 58-225-30) in response to a need for public transportation throughout South Carolina. The effects of those laws in Sumter became evident in 1978, when the Santee Wateree Regional Transportation Authority (SWRTA) was created following the closure of the Sumter Bus Company. Initially, the new transportation authority served the rural counties of the Santee Lynches region including Sumter, Clarendon, Kershaw, and Lee.

Since then, SWRTA has expanded the type and geographic reach of its services. Today, the footprint of SWRTA covers more than 5,000 square miles in eight counties with a variety of services such as Medicaid Transportation, paratransit, commuter, and fixed-route services. As a result, SWRTA is the second largest small urban and rural public transportation system in South Carolina.



Sumter Motor Coach, 1941
 (Source: Santee Wateree Regional Transportation Authority)

Existing Transit Services

Public transportation services are provided by the Santee Wateree Regional Transportation Authority. SWRTA provides fixed-route service in the City of Sumter and commuter and paratransit (dial-a-ride) services in the surrounding region. In addition to SWRTA, several private transportation and taxicab companies provide local transportation services, and Southeastern Stages (Greyhound) provides intercity bus service. In addition to these existing services, several groups actively advocate for the mobility needs of the general public throughout the region. The Regional Transit Council, which formed in 2004, includes members from public and private transportation providers, human service agencies, faith-based and community organizations, and advocates. The Council seeks to enhance the freedom of mobility by promoting transit services, assisting with transit planning, and pursuing funds for improved services.

Santee Wateree Regional Transportation Authority

The Santee Wateree Regional Transportation Authority (SWRTA) offers fixed route and ADA service in the City of Sumter. As the regional provider of public transportation, SWRTA also makes available Medicaid transportation services in Calhoun and Orangeburg counties.

Fixed Route Service

Fixed route service in the City of Sumter consists of a “hub and spoke” layout with seven routes (or spokes) originating from a hub located at the transfer point on North Magnolia Street between Calhoun Street and Hampton Avenue. Each route operates on 1-hour headways except the Shaw Shuttle (2-hour headway) and the Vocational Rehab route (4 times per day). The hub and spoke layout of the SWRTA fixed-route system emphasizes trips originating from or destined to the downtown area. Table 7.1 on the next page lists each route with operating hours and frequency. The routes are shown in Figure 7.1.

All fixed-routes are serviced by ADA accessible buses. Standard fare for these routes is \$0.75 with discounted fares of \$0.35 available for senior citizens and persons with disabilities. Trips to Cherryvale cost \$1.00 for full-paying riders or \$0.50 for senior citizens and persons with disabilities. Trips to Shaw AFB cost \$1.25 or \$0.60. Children under the age of 6 can ride all routes free of charge.

SWRTA Mission Statement

Santee Wateree Regional Transportation Authority is committed to providing safe, efficient and cost effective accessible public transportation service to the residents within our service areas. We accomplish this with a dedicated team of well trained, professional and customer service oriented employees.



SWRTA Bus, 2006

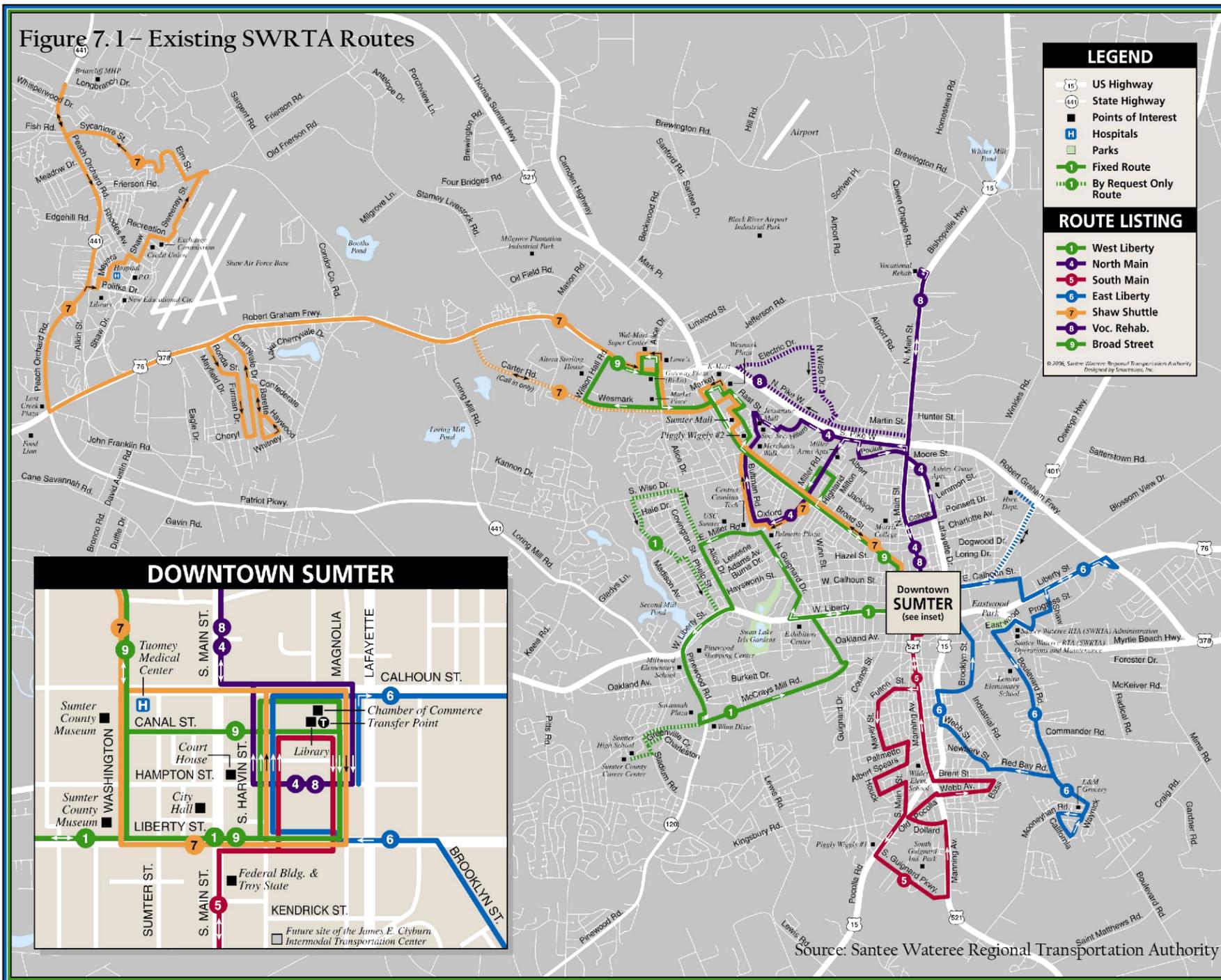


Table 7.1 – Fixed Route Operations in Sumter

Route	Name	Operating Hours	Frequency
1	West Liberty	6:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.	60 minutes
4	North Main	6:10 a.m. to 4:47 p.m.	60 minutes
5	South Main	6:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.	60 minutes
6	East Liberty	6:10 a.m. to 4:50 p.m.	60 minutes
7	Shaw Shuttle	6:10 a.m. to 5:45 p.m.	120 minutes*
8	Vocational Rehab	8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.	4 times per day
9	Broad Street	6:10 a.m. to 5:52 p.m.	60 minutes

* One-hour break in service during mid-day



Paratransit (Dial-A-Ride) Service

For residents who meet certain requirements, paratransit service operates in the urban and rural areas of the county. The demand response, or dial-a-ride, service is provided on a contracted rate basis for Medicaid, Department of Social Services, SC Vocational Rehabilitation, Workforce Investment program under the Santee-Lynches Regional Council of Governments, and others. The service also provides county residents the opportunity to ride any county route on a space available basis as a cash client. Qualified passengers living within 3/4-mile of fixed bus routes can use the service for \$1.50 each way. Rural passengers within a 10-mile radius may ride for \$2.00 (ambulatory/walkers) or \$3.00 (non-ambulatory/wheelchair-bound) for every 10-mile radius. Most paratransit vans are ADA accessible.

Carpool and Vanpool Services

Commuters to Myrtle Beach and from Eastover to Columbia (Lower Richland) can take advantage of the authority's commuter service. SWRTA also organizes several vanpool services to link residents of Sumter with employment centers in Columbia and Camden. Similar vanpools operate between Bishopville and Camden.

Often carpool and vanpool involvement fails to reach its potential because potential participants are unable to find persons with similar commuting needs. A recent addition to www.SWRTA.com helps overcome this barrier by providing a web-based interface designed to match commuters with similar travel patterns.



Other Public Transportation Providers

General discussions of public transportation traditionally center on the services similar to those provided by SWRTA, namely fixed-route and paratransit. These transit services are important components of the larger public transportation network that also includes taxis and intercity bus travel.

Taxis

Several taxicab companies operate within the city limits of Sumter, including City Service Cab Company, Liberty Street Taxi, Northside Cab Service, Southside Cab Service, and Yellow Cab Company. These companies provide service based on drop-off, per-mile, and waiting time rates. The number of taxicabs in Sumter has no direct correlation to the level of anticipated ridership for transit. However, the presence of the companies does indicate a need within the Sumter population for a means of travel other than privately owned automobiles.

Greyhound Service

From its terminal at 863 East Liberty Street in Sumter, Greyhound provides service to and from thousand of locations throughout North America, including 20 cities in South Carolina. Fares vary based on the trip's distance and departure date. Table 7.2 shows sample fares for Saturday travel to cities across the United States.

City	Distance from Sumter	Regular Fare	7-Day Advance Purchase Fare
Greenville, SC	153 miles	\$47	\$41
Washington DC	442 miles	\$84	\$53
Orlando	422 miles	\$84	\$53
New York City	671 miles	\$120	\$65
Memphis	648 miles	\$120	\$65
Chicago	849 miles	\$131	\$78
Dallas	1,041 miles	\$154	\$78
Los Angeles	1,041 miles	\$196	\$133
Portland	2,839 miles	\$209	\$149

In addition to the reduced price of advanced purchases, Greyhound offers a variety of discounts for military personnel and companion travel. Schedules for Greyhound service vary by day and time. Station and ticketing hours are Monday through Sunday 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and 8:30 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. More information is available at www.greyhound.com.

Regional Public Transportation

In addition to the services offered by public transportation providers in Sumter, many residents choose to drive larger cities nearby to take advantage of their public transportation options. In particular, Sumter citizens travel to Columbia for air service and Camden for Amtrak service.





Public Involvement

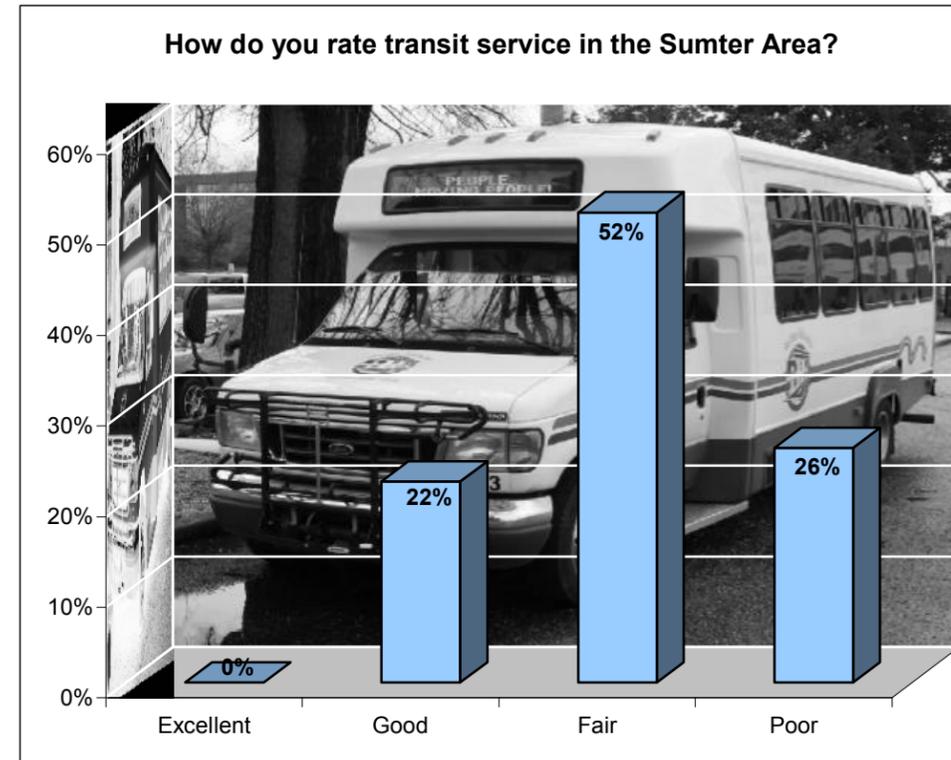
The public expressed their thoughts regarding transit within the Sumter region via a series of public input opportunities including a public survey, public workshop, and during a stakeholder interview with transit administrators.

Public Survey

The public survey was distributed as part of the *SUATS Long-Range Transportation Plan*. When asked to rate transit service in the region, a majority of the respondents rated the service as fair or poor (see graph). No one gave the system an excellent rating.

Respondents to the survey did not indicate a high level of transit ridership. However, survey results did specify what activities would increase transit ridership. Ten percent indicated they would be very likely to use transit if it was improved to include light rail or commuter rail. This information is consistent with comments received during other outreach activities. In total, the public comments confirm a low opinion held by general public when considering public transit. Other ways to improve ridership include better route information, more transit routes with more frequent service, and clean buses and facilities. While vanpools were not identified as a way to increase transit use (90% noted that such improvements would not likely increase their use of transit), most respondents indicated their commutes as being only 1-5 miles (44%) or 5-10 miles (32%).

Another question on the survey asked respondents to divide \$100 among several transportation priorities. When dividing limited funds between transportation initiatives such as traffic calming, roadway improvements, access management, and sidewalks, an average of only \$4.62 was dedicated to public transportation. This amount was less than all other identified categories.



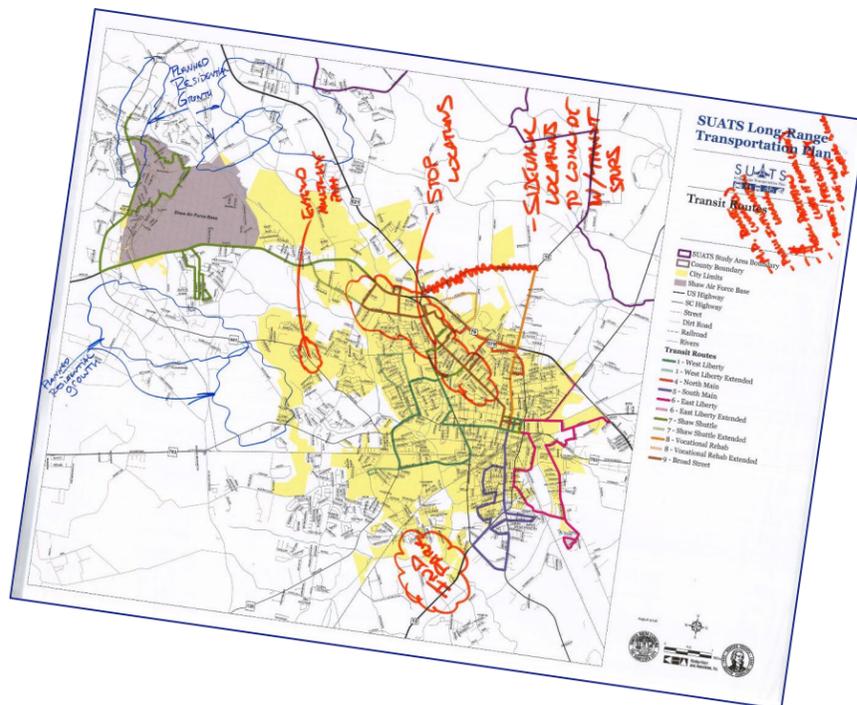


Public Workshop

At the August 10, 2006 public workshop, participants marked up a map displaying existing SWRTA fixed-routes and provided feedback regarding public transportation in the Sumter area. Comments from this process included the identification of the following needs:

- Improved public information (market materials, etc.)
- Increased funding (dedicated local funding source)
- Increased route frequency and additional routes to existing and new employment centers
- Shorter headways (one-way routes are too long)
- Extended hours to Shaw AFB

Participants also called for an improved image of transit, re-evaluation of transit stop locations, and enhanced stops with pedestrian features.



Recommendations

Transit riders typically fall into one of two categories – captive or choice. Choice transit riders choose to leave their vehicle at home to save time and money or for other reasons. Captive transit riders use transit because they have no other choice. This may be because they lack access to a personal vehicle or because they have a physical impediment. Captive riders also include those too young to drive, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and those without the financial means to own and operate a personal vehicle.

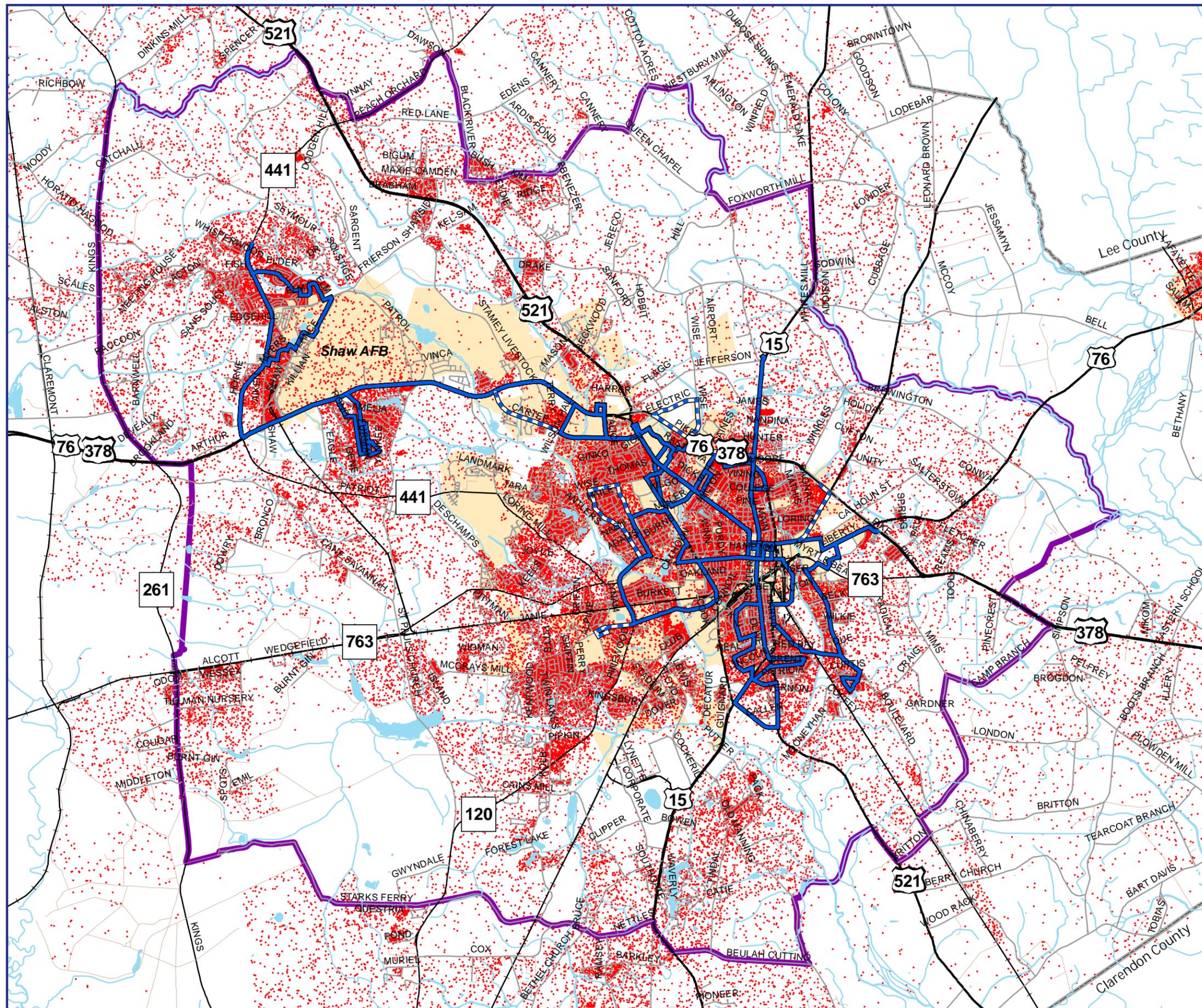
Figures 7.2 and 7.3 show the existing SWRTA fixed-routes in relation to Sumter’s population density and percentage of persons without access to a personal vehicle. Figure 7.2 indicates the more dense areas of the city are served by transit with the exception of southwestern portions of the city between McCrays Mill and Pinewood Roads. Information in Figure 7.3 is based on census block groups, the smallest census geography for which the information is available. While the image indicates households near downtown without access to automobiles are served by bus routes, pockets of households in the county that need transit are forced to rely on paratransit if they qualify or seek alternative options such as taxis.

The recommendations that follow recognize the need to enhance existing service in order to meet the needs of both choice and captive transit users. An underlying goal is to encourage further dialogue regarding the benefits of transit for choice riders and the critical role transit plays in the life of captive users. The recommended improvements were established through analysis and public outreach efforts and balanced with the needs identified for other elements presented in the SUATS Long-Range Transportation Plan. The recommended improvements are grouped by general findings. Many of the recommendations will address more than one finding.



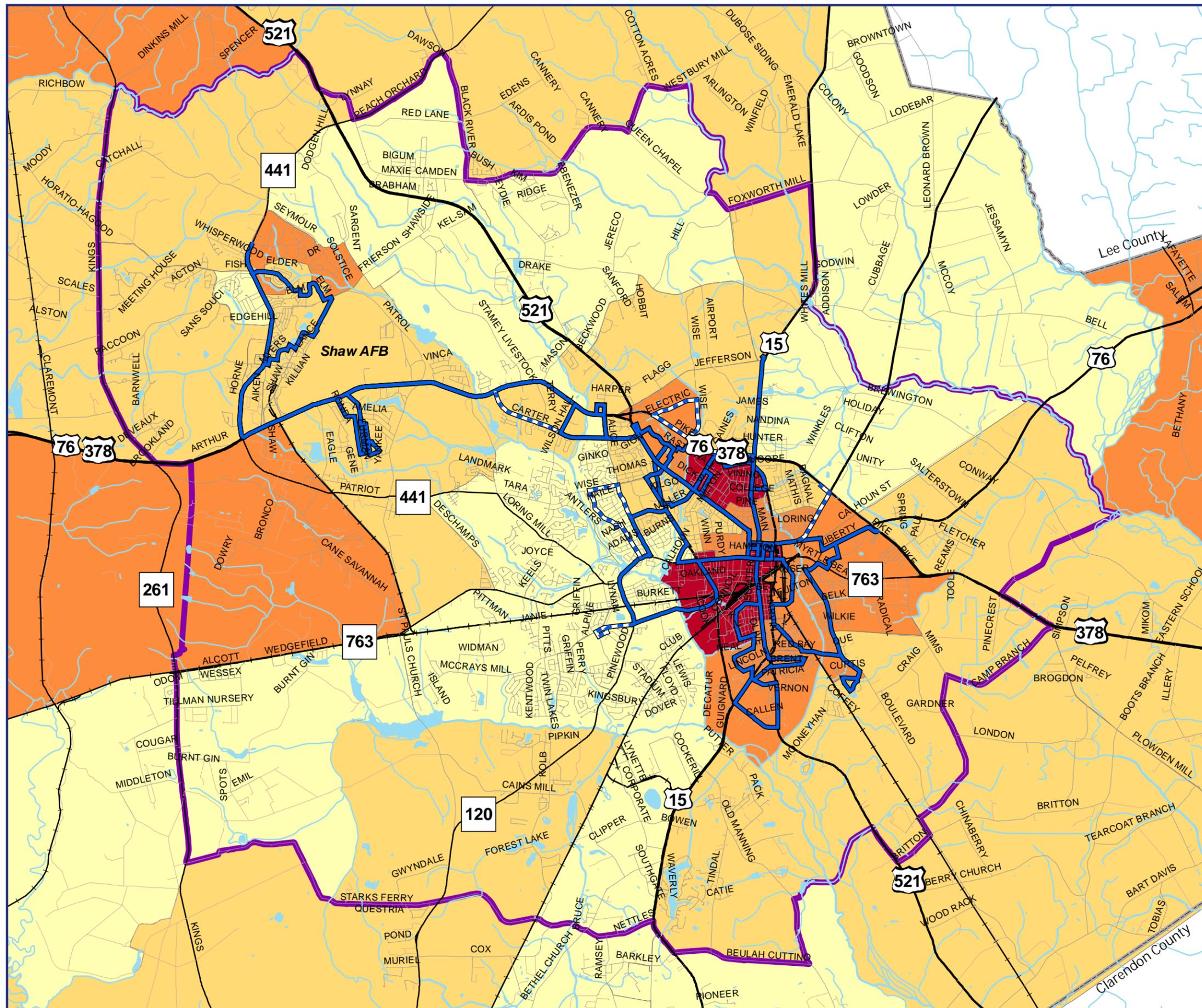
Transit should meet the needs of all users and be coordinated with upgrades to the pedestrian network. Safe sidewalks and curb ramps are critical elements to a complete transit system.

Population Density and Transit Routes



- Legend*
- US Highway
 - SC Highway
 - Street
 - Dirt Road
 - Railroad
 - Bus Route
 - Bus Route Extended
 - Bodies of Water
 - SUATS Study Area Boundary
 - County Boundary
 - City Limits
 - 1 Dot = 1 Person

Vehicles Available and Transit Routes



Legend

- US Highway
 - SC Highway
 - Street
 - Dirt Road
 - Railroad
 - Bus Route
 - Bus Route Extended
 - Bodies of Water
 - SUATS Study Area Boundary
 - County Boundary
- Percent Households without Vehicle*
- Less than 5%
 - 5 to 15%
 - 15 to 30%
 - More than 30%



Finding: Public perception of transit limits its effectiveness. The general perception of transit in the Sumter area is that transit serves only those people without access to or the ability to use personal automobiles. In order to establish transit as a viable mode for choice riders and to encourage those in need of the mobility offered by transit to use the service, public perceptions must be identified and addressed.

Recommendations:

- **Conduct a ridership survey.** A focused ridership survey with proper distribution will go a long way in determining overall levels of customer satisfaction and help identify issues of importance for transit users. The results of the survey should help reaffirm the transit initiatives launched as part of the *SUATS Long-Range Transportation Plan* while also serving as a prelude to a new transit master plan.
- **Develop a transit master plan.** A transit master plan should be developed to explore multiple alternatives and detailed solutions for the near- and long-term transit needs of the Sumter community. The master plan should include a detailed review of existing conditions (ridership trends, travel times, customer preferences, etc.), recommended bus routes and service improvements, recommended delivery system upgrades (bus stops, sidewalks, etc.), implementation strategies, and funding resources. A detailed plan coordinated with the recommendations presented throughout the *SUATS Long-Range Transportation Plan* can help inform the land development review process in addition to transportation project prioritization.
- **Introduce a coordinated marketing plan.** The indication in the survey that the public does not want to spend more money on transit shows the benefits of this mode of travel is not reaching the general public. A marketing effort through print and broadcast media outlets should be coordinated with improved signage and informational handouts (route maps, fare books, etc.). SCDOT is exploring how to approach some of these issues on a statewide basis, which should provide opportunities for local agencies to collaborate.

Finding: Transit does not fulfill the existing needs of some captive users. As shown in Figures 7.2 and 7.3, SWRTA's routes provide critical access to persons that require transit to access jobs and services. Additional routes or changes to existing routes can fill holes in the region's transit service without incurring unnecessary costs. In addition, the frequency and operating hours of some routes need to be altered to meet the needs of existing and potential customers.

Recommendations:

- **Extend duration of routes.** Extending the duration of routes, particularly during the evening for Route 7 Shaw Shuttle, will accommodate evening commutes for the region's largest employment generator.
- **Utilize the master planning process to assess current service and explore changes in route frequency and duration.** The transit master plan should be targeted to the needs of captive users while accommodating potential increases in choice riders. Public outreach efforts for the LRTP identified a need to re-evaluate the location, frequency, and headway times between transit stops, a process that should be a key component of the transit master planning process. Discussions with the community and analysis of existing conditions show the overall route system accommodates many of the more dense areas in Sumter. However, changes to some routes or the addition of new routes is needed to serve the growing population in the southwest planning area along Loring Mill Road, McCrays Mill Road, Wedgefield Highway, and Pinewood Road.
- **Improve the quality of taxicab services.** The presence of taxi companies is indicative of the need to give residents and visitors a means of travel other than privately owned automobiles. However, compared to other South Carolina metropolitan areas the taxi companies in Sumter provide a lower quality of service, which adversely could impact customer service as well as the image Sumter is trying to create for the area. City and County officials should investigate how other metropolitan areas have been able to improve the quality of their taxicab services without causing undue financial hardships on this industry.



Transit should provide access to single-use destinations for choice and captive users.



Finding: Hub and spoke design may become ineffective as the region grows. The hub and spoke layout of the SWRTA fixed-route system supports the downtown area by emphasizing trips originating from or destined to the downtown area. The long headways created by these one-way routes may become outdated as the region’s activity centers become more diverse.

Recommendations:

- **Identify satellite transfer stations for future expansion.** As the system grows to accommodate new demand, locations near emerging activity centers where multiple routes converge should be designated as satellite transfer stations. The exact location of these facilities should be determined through additional study and in coordination with property owners, SWRTA, and local officials. Amenities at these stops should be enhanced to include shelters, informational boards, benches, route information, and bus pull-outs.

Finding: Transit must be flexible to growth within the region. Growth in Sumter will increase the burden on the area’s transportation system and will bring to the region more persons dependent upon public transportation for their daily traveling needs. Both situations require a flexible system designed to grow with the region and meet changing travel patterns and trends.

Recommendations:

- **Promote coordination and collaborative partnerships between the urban and rural transportation programs of SWRTA as well as with other public transit and human service agencies.** Fixed-route and paratransit services provide complementary services that reach out to those with easy access to a bus stop as well as rural residents who depend on public transportation to access services and employment. The existing partnership between these two segments of SWRTA should continue to be evaluated to ensure no gaps in coverage exist. As part of the Regional Transit Council at the Santee-Lynches Council of Governments (COG), SWRTA is working other regional partners to provide comprehensive transit service. Current efforts include coordinating Section 5310 (elderly and persons with disabilities) programs and Medicaid services with the Lower Savannah COG as well as working to develop a SmartRide program in the Orangeburg area. SWRTA also works closely with the Central Midlands COG and coordinates with CMRTA in Columbia for its SmartRide and Eastover Services. These partnerships should be enhanced where appropriate.

- **Utilize technology to ensure reliability of the transit system.** Because the extent of SWRTA’s coverage area – 5,000 sq. mi. – is so large, emerging technology designed to coordinate scheduling, determine efficient routes, and provide real-time information to customers should be implemented. SWRTA currently utilizes a Route Match Scheduling and Dispatch Program for its paratransit (dial-a-ride) service. In 2004, SWRTA became the first transit system in the state to operate the Palmetto 800 system, a radio communication-based public safety network. Such progressive use of technology should be encouraged. The ability to provide real time information to customers should be explored as funding permits.
- **Future routes should be responsive to future land use patterns.** SWRTA should work alongside the City and County planning departments to ensure transit service is considered in future development projects. In locations with larger scale development and redevelopment impacts, the review process should ensure transit-ready development features such as a mixture of land uses at appropriate densities, interconnected streets, and pedestrian-friendly design.
- **Civic land uses should be within walking distance of public transit.** Civic land uses such as libraries, parks, city/county administration, and social services should be located within walking distance of public transit service. Existing transit routes and amenities should be evaluated to ensure equal accessibility to those choosing to ride transit. In addition, when evaluating locations for future public facilities the ability to provide access via transit should be a priority.
- **Maximize the use of the James E. Clyburn Intermodal Transportation Center.** Named for Sumter native and U.S Representative James E. Clyburn, the redeveloped historic warehouse at Harvin and Telephone Streets will open in Spring 2008 as a hub for local and regional bus service as well as intercity and interstate bus service provided by Southeastern Stages (Greyhound). The Center also will house offices for SWRTA and rent office space to other companies. The strategic location of this project can serve as a catalyst for the revitalization of the southern edge of the central business district. Its location adjacent to the city’s CSX rail yard also can help support the potential long-term implementation of Amtrak service or commuter rail from Greenville through Charleston by way of Sumter.



Construction of the James E. Clyburn Intermodal Transportation Center



Finding: Services for commuters must be a priority for the regional transportation system. Many residents of the Sumter region depend on jobs in other locations – whether service jobs in Myrtle Beach or government jobs in Columbia. Services designed to encourage alternatives to single-occupant private vehicles can help alleviate traffic congestion at the regional level.

Recommendations:

- **Expand carpool matching service.** The current carpool matching service offered through AlterNetRides on the SWRTA homepage provides a forum to match potential carpoolers. This service should be promoted through the coordinated marketing plan as a way to save commuters time and money.
- **Expand SmartRide service in the Sumter market.** SmartRide is marketed as a safe, comfortable, and convenient commuter service between Camden, Lugoff, and Columbia. The current vanpool from Sumter to Columbia operates as a SmartRider Service and has carried more than 17 people for more than three years. To provide opportunities for more riders, vehicle capacity should be added as funding permits. In addition, vanpools can provide an opportunity for focused commuter purposes.



Finding: Focus is needed on increasing passenger amenities such as sidewalks, shelters, and benches. A successful and thriving transit system depends on a system of safe and convenient sidewalks and bikeways to delivery users to transit stops. The stops themselves should provide a safe and comfortable environment while users wait for the bus to arrive.

Recommendations:

- **Coordinate upgrades to transit stops with improvements to the pedestrian and bicycle network.** The SUATS Long-Range Transportation Plan recommends strategic sidewalks and bikeways designed to connect activity centers and neighborhoods. Improvements to the pedestrian and bicycle network, especially those constructed as part of new road construction and/or widening, should be coordinated with existing and future transit needs.
- **Enhance bus stops.** Current bus stops are little more than a sign on the side of the road. To encourage new riders and better accommodate existing users, bus stops should be enhanced to include benches and shelters. Initial locations for transit stop improvements should be identified during the master planning process. Where possible, partnerships between SWRTA and land owners should be established to provide funding for shelter construction with the understanding the land owner can advertise his or her property on the shelter. In locations where sheltered bus stops are not possible or necessary, bus stop signs should be updated to include route information.



Existing bus stop in Sumter



Enhanced bus stop



Conclusion

Many of the recommendations for transit in Sumter involve promoting transit as a safe, convenient, and dependable form of transportation. An improved image and appearance can be achieved using short-term, low-cost measures. Long-term solutions target improvements for captive and choice riders to ensure transit exists as a sustainable transportation alternative. For overall success to be achieved, Sumter must make a commitment to provide and support alternative modes of travel. Efforts independent of SCDOT and SWRTA must be initiated to promote mobility choices throughout the City and County.

Strategies for transit extend beyond the realm of what typically is considered transit planning. Many of the strategies presented throughout the *SUATS Long-Range Transportation Plan* can help make transit a viable alternative for residents and visitors. Improving roadways and creating a more connected roadway network can allow transit vehicles to service people more efficiently.

Constructing a consistent bicycle and pedestrian network can help residents move between bus stops and their final destination. Coordinating the land use and transportation decision-making process ensure new development – whether roads, homes, offices, or shops – support existing and future transit service.

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, transit enhances the access and mobility for those who have no other transportation options. The transit-dependent population will continue to grow as the Baby Boomer generation ages. At the same time, the City continues to reach out to the senior population and market the area as an attractive place for retirees. Improvements to transit service will help make the area a more attractive location for retirees.

Perhaps the two most critical elements for transit to flourish in the region is progressive planning and dedicated funding. A more detailed transit master plan can explore the underlying issues presented in this chapter and help develop comprehensive strategies to ensure the fulfillment of long-term needs of choice and captive riders. Likewise, local and regional planning efforts should continue to leverage on-going statewide transit planning efforts. As for funding, SWRTA notes the region often does not pursue federal grants due to a lack of local and state match funds. Dedicated funding for transit must be emphasized.