

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY »

REGIONAL TRANSIT PEER COMMUNITY INVENTORY LESSONS FOR THE MADISON REGION



Peer Community Inventory

In June 2010, Thrive and the Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce submitted a set of **Transit Plan Criteria** to the Dane County RTA Board for consideration during the transit planning process. As a follow-up, Thrive has produced a Peer Community Inventory that applies the criteria to **five comparable regions**.

Each of the five communities studied has engaged transit as an important part of their region’s future. The information included in the inventory was compiled through secondary research and interviews with transit organizations, chambers of commerce, planners, and other groups within the peer community. The inventory aims to document the experiences of peer communities that have recently implemented transit plans and systems, while recognizing that transit represents a long-term investment, with full costs and benefits accruing over a longer horizon. This inventory provides key findings and lessons from multiple perspectives, information than can help inform the Madison Region as it works to develop an effective regional transit plan.

Community Selection

Peer cities were selected using a variety of criteria, including population, presence of a major university, state capital status, transit mode, and the existence of a transit plan or system that was adopted within the last 5–10 years. Larger cities represent the future anticipated growth of the Madison area.

Madison, WI	City	Columbus, Ohio**	Austin, Texas	Nashville, Tennessee	Columbia, South Carolina	Eugene, Oregon
570,025	2009 MSA Population*	1,801,848	1,705,075	1,582,264	744,730	351,109
14%	MSA Population Growth Rate, 2000–2009*	12%	36%	21%	15%	9%
University of Wisconsin - Madison	Major University	Ohio State University	University of Texas	Vanderbilt University	University of South Carolina	University of Oregon
40,000	University Enrollment	63,000	50,000	13,000	27,000	22,000
Yes	State Capital	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Madison Metro	Transit Organization	Columbus, Ohio Transit Authority (COTA)	Capital Metropolitan Transit Authority (CapMetro)	Metro and Regional Transit Authorities (MTA, RTA)	Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority (CMRTA)	Lane Transit District (LTD)
-	Focus of Study	Long-Range Transit Plan	“All Systems Go!” Long-Range Transit Plan	Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and Rail	Creation of CMRTA and Strategic Transit Plan	BRT System
Bus	Transit Modes	Bus	Bus, Rail	Bus, Bus Rapid Transit, Rail	Bus	Bus, Bus Rapid Transit

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau; MSA = Metropolitan Statistical Area

**Thrive Peer Regions, per the annual *State of the Madison Region* report

Key Lessons for the Madison Region

- **Define Community Goals:** Different communities have different concerns and mobility needs. Some consider transit as a congestion relief strategy or a means of providing mobility options; others focus on its role of serving special needs groups. Identification and articulation of the needs and goals of a community is the first step to developing an effective transit system.
- **Plan Comprehensively:** Develop a long-range transit plan as part of the comprehensive regional planning process. Ensure transit service is designed to address the community’s specific goals in conjunction with other transportation modes (such as personal vehicles, biking and walking) and planning elements (such as land use).
- **Consider All Options:** Consider not only alternative types of transit service, but also alternative combinations of services. Moreover, establish priorities that would be executed in phases when funding becomes available.
- **Secure Funding:** Financial sustainability is critical to the success of any transit system. The availability and level of dedicated funding need to be carefully assessed during the planning process.

Transit Plan Criteria	Findings from Peer Communities
<p>Planning Process Is the plan transparent to the public?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a long range transit plan that informs the long range transportation planning process by providing detailed identification and analysis of transit alternatives. • Incorporate public input throughout the process. Establish public ownership and identify the needs of riders and non-riders through surveys, focus groups and public meetings.
<p>Development Potential Will development potential change around the transit corridor?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not all communities consider transit oriented development a priority in their transit plan. Among the communities in the inventory, there is little tracking to identify the impact of transit plans or systems on property values.
<p>Employment Impact What is the projected impact on jobs?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The indirect effect of transit on employment statistics is rarely measured after service implementation. Recognizing the difficulty of isolating and accurately projecting this effect, some communities choose not to include employment metrics in their transit alternative analysis.
<p>Congestion To what extent will the proposal impact traffic congestion?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bus travel time improvement is found in communities where buses have a dedicated right of way. The overall effect of transit on congestion ranges from little to moderate, often being hampered by continued traffic growth.
<p>Environment How will the proposal impact the environment?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental impacts of transit services are rarely tracked. While some communities expect air quality improvement due to reduced vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and hence reduced tailpipe emissions, other communities do not regard VMT as a representative measure of environmental impact.
<p>Financial Feasibility Is the proposal financially feasible to build and operate?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tax revenue (sales, vehicle, and payroll tax) is a primary funding source for sustaining transit operations in many of the communities. Financial analysis of transit alternatives should consider conservative tax revenue projections (e.g. in the event of a recession) to ensure long term financial feasibility.
<p>Regional Connectivity Is there connectivity with other transit modes within and beyond the RTA boundaries?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Transit Authorities can generally play an effective role in introducing a regional fare system and coordinating neighboring transit services through transfer centers and park and ride facilities.

Lessons from the Peer Communities

ColumbusOhio

- Transit agencies should encourage community ownership of a transit plan prior to adoption. Engage the public to identify priorities and areas of improvement.
- Work with the regional Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to understand population, employment, and congestion growth projections. Create a plan that addresses these projections.
- MPOs are also a potential funding source. COTA receives money from the region's MPO to purchase new buses.
- Relying on federal funds to pay for operating expenses can delay future capital projects. COTA uses revenues from the sales tax and fares to pay for operations.

EugeneOregon

- Adopt transit modes and systems that can be supported by the region's size and population density.
- Plan bus rapid transit lines on current bus routes that are experiencing the highest ridership and congestion.
- Don't rely on federal funds to pay for operating expenses. LTD uses revenues from the payroll tax and fares to pay for operations.
- Be conservative when projecting future tax revenues. LTD has been forced to cut its operating budget due to a decline in payroll tax revenues.
- Measuring a corridor's transit share before and after implementation helps to illustrate a system's effect on congestion in the corridor. In the case of Eugene, the number of transit users was found to increase from 8% to 12–15%.
- Utilize GIS to track changes in employment and development in a transit corridor over time.

NashvilleTennessee

- Consider opportunities for collaboration between transit agencies within the region. Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) staff also manages the Regional Transit Authority (RTA), although the MTA and RTA remain separate agencies.
- Adopt transit modes and systems that can be supported by the corridor's population density.
- Plan bus rapid transit lines on current bus routes that are experiencing the highest ridership and congestion.

- Failing to provide rail service to downtown destinations in the evening and on weekends limits ridership numbers.
- Don't rely on federal funds to pay for operating expenses. Nashville's RTA is currently relying on stimulus funds to finance operations, which is unsustainable. Secure dedicated funding for operations.
- Consider a regional fare system to better connect transit modes and systems.

ColumbiaSouthCarolina

- Involve the public and relevant organizations in the planning process. Identify main concerns and areas of improvement that need to be addressed.
- Identify multiple alternative funding mechanisms during the planning process. This can help prevent service cuts in the future.
- Local matching funds are necessary to secure significant federal grants.
- Analyze ridership characteristics to identify possible route changes. This analysis led CMRTA to provide more crosstown routes.

AustinTexas

- Develop a transportation system plan that integrates multiple transit modes, rather than only one mode.
- Evaluate alternative transit options during the planning process.
- Complete a detailed financial analysis for all components of the proposed plan.
- Be conservative when projecting future tax revenues. Capital Metro has been forced to cut its budget due to a decline in sales tax revenues.
- Plan future bus rapid transit lines on current bus routes that are experiencing the highest ridership and congestion.
- Establish a strategy for providing paratransit services that are financially feasible.
- Implement a policy for extending service to surrounding communities.



Growing the region's economy in ways that preserve and enhance quality of life

Phone: (608) 443-1962

Email: info@thrivehere.org

Download the full Peer Community Inventory at
www.thrivehere.org/transit