

Shenandoah County Public Transit Service Feasibility Study Project Kick-Off Meeting

LOCATION & DATE

Shenandoah County Chamber of Commerce
103 S. Main Street
Woodstock, Virginia

September 10, 2018
10:00 a.m.

PARTICIPANTS

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BACKGROUND

Over the past several years, Shenandoah County non-profit agencies have increasingly identified that the lack of transportation is a barrier for their clients to access services, jobs, medical appointments, educational opportunities, and other important destinations. Concurrently, major employers in the region have indicated that they are having difficulty hiring and retaining workers, as entry level employees tend to face challenges maintaining

stable transportation arrangements. The need for improved access to employment opportunities has become a discussion issue among members of the Shenandoah County Chamber of Commerce. Some of the largest employers even own and operate vehicles to provide work-based transportation for their employees.

Given these issues, the Chamber of Commerce conducted a transit survey in 2017, focusing on reaching out to clients of non-profit agencies. Of the 40 surveys that were completed, 29 indicated that they would use a public transportation service in Shenandoah County. The focus of the Chamber survey was the Route 11 corridor.

Building on this work, the agencies and the Chamber reached out to the Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Commission (NSVRC) to see what could be done to help address the lack of public transportation in Shenandoah County. In response, the NSVRC organized a Shenandoah County Public Transportation Committee that began meeting on a regular basis. The NSVRC contacted the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) and applied for funding assistance to conduct a transit feasibility study. Funds were awarded, and the NSVRC published a request for proposals (RFP) to hire a consultant to assist with the feasibility study. KFH Group was hired as a result of the RFP process and the first study meeting was held on September 10, 2018.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

After a discussion regarding the background of the transit advocacy efforts and primary transit needs, the focus of the meeting moved to the task work to be completed for the feasibility study. Major topics included:

- Can the study provide enough information for a February, 2019 DRPT grant submission? Is this schedule realistic, given the need to garner support from public officials?
- What are the most effective ways to gather public opinion?
- What are the most effective ways to gather input from the major employers in the county?

Outreach Plan

The following outreach methodologies are recommended from the discussion:

- A public survey will be conducted. It will be administered electronically, with paper back-up copies located at key public buildings in the County. KFH Group will provide a draft of the survey and circulate it to study committee members for comment. A Spanish language version will also be created.

- Once the survey is ready, a press release about the study and the survey will be prepared by KFH Group and sent to key local press contacts by NSVRC and the Shenandoah County Chamber of Commerce.
- An employer survey will be conducted. It will also be administered electronically. KFH Group will work with the Chamber to distribute the survey link to employers in Shenandoah County with more than 50 employees.
- The goal for the survey efforts is to have them posted and advertised by the end of September. This schedule will allow the results to be available by the end of October.
- KFH Group staff will also interview important area stakeholders including: a representative from the DSS (Carla Taylor); the Shenandoah Area Agency on Aging; the Supervisor of Student Careers and Business Partnerships at the Shenandoah County Public Schools (Todd Lynn); Valley Health; and the County Administrator.
- KFH Group will also attend a meeting of the Nonprofit Council to gather additional input concerning the need for public transportation in the County.

In addition to working through potential public outreach strategies, KFH Group also provided an overview of the study tasks for the Study Committee to review. These are listed below.

Study Tasks

Task 1: Stakeholder Group and Public Outreach (Focus of discussion for the first meeting)

- Subtask 1.1 – Study Committee
- Subtask 1.2 – Committee Meetings
- Subtask 1.3 – Public Outreach Strategy
- Subtask 1.4 – Project Website
- Subtask 1.5 – Documentation of Public Transit Needs

Task 2: Socio-Economic Data Analysis and Review of Planning Documents

Task 3: System and Service Development

- Subtask 3.1 – Identify and Coordinate with Existing Transportation Providers
- Subtask 3.2 – Service Plans
- Subtask 3.3 – Obstacles and Potential Solutions
- Subtask 3.4 – Connectivity Options

Task 4: Budget and Performance Development

Subtask 4.1 – Analysis of Potential Transportation Providers

Subtask 4.2 – Cost Estimates for Near-term; Mid-range; and Long-term Transit Services

Subtask 4.3 – Estimated Capital and Operations Budgets

Subtask 4.4 – Funding Sources

Task 5: System Governance and Management

Subtask 5.1 – Governance Options

Subtask 5.2 – Management and Operations Options

Subtask 5.3 – Agreements

Subtask 5.4 – Resource Needs

Task 6: Draft and Final Reports

Other Topics

The following additional topics were also discussed:

- A public transit program in Shenandoah County could be a candidate for DRPT's Demonstration Grant Program. This grant program provides a significant amount of state funding (up to 100% - needs to be researched) for an 18-month time period so that new transit programs can be launched. After the demonstration period, the local program would have to be willing and able to support about 50% of the net deficit for operations and about 4% of the capital.
- The study team will also reach out to transit programs in neighboring counties, as regional connectivity in the Shenandoah Valley is important.
- The study team will strive to have enough information available by the end of December, so that a grant application (due in early February) can be prepared, should a feasible concept be developed. Committee members were somewhat divided on this schedule, recognizing that it may not be of long-term benefit to rush through the study process.
- The next study committee meeting will be held after Task 1 (public outreach) and Task 2 (review demographics and previous plans) are completed.