

Technical Memorandum #3

Service and Organizational Alternatives

INTRODUCTION

This technical memorandum presents potential service and organizational alternatives for Garrett County and Garrett Transit Service (GTS) to improve transit services. These alternatives were developed based on a review of current services and input from customers, residents, and other stakeholders. Feedback on these alternatives from GTS staff, the Maryland Department of Transportation Maryland Transit Administration (MDOT MTA), and the Transportation Development Plan (TDP) Advisory Committee will be used to refine the alternatives for inclusion in the draft TDP.

The service alternatives discussed in this document include a summary of potential advantages and disadvantages, as well as estimates of costs and ridership. They focus on:

- Expanded Evening Service
- Saturday Service
- Sunday Service

The cost information for these service alternatives is expressed as the fully allocated costs, which means all program costs on a per unit basis are considered when contemplating expansions. These cost estimates were based on GTS FY2018 operating expenses.

In addition to the service alternatives, this technical memorandum discusses some additional considerations for providing more effective transit services and expanding community awareness of GTS. These options also include a summary of potential advantages and disadvantages, cost estimates, and potential impact on ridership.

EXPANDED EVENING SERVICE

The top improvement expressed by current GTS customers through the rider survey was for service later in the evening. Additionally, community survey respondents noted that the limited hours of operation were the primary reason for not using GTS. This alternative proposes the following:

- An expansion of GTS services in the evening.
- Through this expansion, hours of services marketed to the public would be extended from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Expanded Evening Service Overview

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responds to the top need expressed by current GTS customers, and the number one factor prohibiting more members of the public from using GTS services. • Provides customers with greater flexibility in accessing key destinations, particularly employment opportunities that require later work hours. • Utilizes vehicles in existing fleet. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires additional operating costs for expanded service, including need for expanded dispatch coverage. • Results in additional mileage on current buses, accelerating the vehicle replacement schedule.
Expenses	Ridership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assuming two vehicles would be needed to provide the expanded evening service, this would result in approximately 1,040 annual vehicle hours. • Using the FY2018 operating cost of \$70.09 per hour, estimated annual operating expenses for this expansion would be \$72,894. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While implementing later evening service is the top priority of current customers, expanding service hours will not lend itself to a significant ridership increase. However, to the customers who need these trips they are critical. • Assuming passenger trips per hour would be half of those in FY2018, it is estimated that expanded evening service would result in 2,356 annual passenger trips.

SATURDAY SERVICE

Saturday service was the second most requested service improvement through the rider survey. This request is not surprising; over half of survey respondents reported using GTS for employment trips, and many of these jobs involve Saturday work shifts. This alternative therefore proposes the following:

- Implementation of service on Saturday for eight hours.
- Similar to the proposed expanded evening hours, it is anticipated that two vehicles would be utilized to provide this service.

Saturday Service Overview

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responds to a top need expressed by current GTS customers. • Expands access to important destinations in Garrett County, particularly employment opportunities that require Saturday work hours. • Utilizes vehicles in existing fleet. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires additional operating costs for expanded service, including need for expanded dispatch coverage. • Results in additional mileage on current buses, thereby accelerating the vehicle replacement schedule. • Requires the need to recruit and hire additional drivers and dispatch staff.
Expenses	Ridership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assuming two vehicles would be needed to provide Saturday service for eight hours, this would result in approximately 832 annual vehicle hours. • Using the FY2018 operating cost of \$70.09 per hour, estimated annual operating expenses for this expansion would be \$58,315. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While implementing Saturday service is a top priority of current customers, implementing this service may not lend itself to large ridership numbers. However, to the customers who need these trips -- especially to access jobs -- they are critical. • Assuming passenger trips per hour would be half of those in FY2018, it is estimated that the expanded Saturday service would result in 1,884 annual passenger trips.

SUNDAY SERVICE

After expanded evening and Saturday service, the next most popular improvement requested by rider survey respondents was for Sunday service. Similar to Saturday service this request involves the need to access jobs that require weekend work hours. This alternative therefore proposes the following:

- Implementation of service on Sundays for six hours.
- Similar to the proposed expanded evening and Saturday hours, it is anticipated that two vehicles would be utilized to provide this service.

Sunday Service Overview

<p>Advantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responds to a top need expressed by current GTS customers. • Expands access to important destinations in Garrett County, particularly employment opportunities that require Sunday work hours. • Utilizes vehicles in existing fleet. 	<p>Disadvantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires additional operating costs for expanded service, including need for expanded dispatch coverage. • Results in additional mileage on current buses, thereby accelerating the vehicle replacement schedule. • Requires the need to recruit and hire additional drivers and dispatch staff.
<p>Expenses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assuming two vehicles would be needed to provide Sunday service for six hours, this would result in approximately 624 annual vehicle hours. • Using the FY2018 operating cost of \$70.09 per hour, estimated annual operating expenses for this expansion would be \$43,736. 	<p>Ridership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While implementing Sunday service is a top priority of current customers, implementing this service may not lend itself to large ridership numbers. However, to the customers who need these trips -- especially to access jobs -- they are critical. • Assuming passenger trips per hour would be one third of those in FY2018, it is estimated that the expanded Sunday service would result in 942 annual passenger trips.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED SERVICE ALTERNATIVES

Table 3-1 provides a summary of the proposed service alternatives.

Table 3-1: Garrett County Summary of Alternatives

Project Description	Annual Revenue Service Hours ⁽¹⁾	Annual Operating Expenses ⁽²⁾	Estimated Annual Ridership ⁽³⁾
Expanded Evening Service	1,040	\$72,894	2,356
Saturday Service	832	\$58,315	1,884
Sunday Service	624	\$43,736	942
Totals	2,496	\$174,945	5,182

(1) Assumes two vehicles in operation for extended hours and for weekend services.

(2) Hourly rate based on FY2018 operating cost per hour.

(3) Assumes trips per hour at half of those provided in FY2018 for evening and Saturday service, one third for Sunday service.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Add Automated Scheduling and Passenger Call Reminder Modules to Current Software

GTS is interested in adding an automated scheduling module to their current software program. This upgrade will allow for more efficient services, and is especially important since GTS services are entirely demand response in nature and trips are therefore individually scheduled.

In addition, GTS is looking to add a passenger call module that would provide customers with a reminder call the night before their scheduled ride, and another 15 minutes before their pickup. These reminder calls can greatly reduce “no-shows”, as well as wait times for customers that then impact subsequent pickups on a route.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Builds upon current scheduling software that is well-liked by GTS staff. Provides for more efficient trip scheduling. Reduces no-shows and wait times. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There would be additional costs for upgrading the current software and adding the passenger reminder module.
Expenses	Ridership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GTS has recently obtained a quote from their current scheduling software vendor for the automated scheduling upgrade and the passenger call reminder modules. The start-up cost for both would be \$11,871 based on this quote. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These software upgrades should result in a small increase in ridership, as trips can be scheduled more efficiently – thereby increasing customer satisfaction and capacity to handle additional trips increased. The passenger reminder module will help to reduce wait times and allow routes to stay more on time, again increasing customer satisfaction.

Expand Marketing Efforts

Over 80% of community survey respondents indicated that they were aware of the services provided GTS. However, it was noted by the TDP Advisory Committee that many members of the community may hold the misconception that GTS does not serve the general public and only provides specialized transportation to older adults, low income individuals, and individuals with disabilities.

Therefore, ongoing and expanded marketing efforts are needed to ensure that the community is aware of the services offered by GTS, and to counter the perception that the system is not open to all residents. One consideration is the use of a separate website; and not under the GCCAC site. This arrangement would help to reinforce that GTS services are open to the general public and are not limited to certain population groups that are served through other specific GCCAC programs.

The TDP Advisory Committee also expressed the need for greater transportation options for younger people in Garrett County, with some teenagers waiting longer to obtain a driver’s license and driver’s education no longer being offered in county schools. Development and implementation of a separate GTS website would help to ensure the marketing of services to families and individuals more likely to obtain information through on-line sources.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reinforces that GTS services are open to the public, and not only available to specific population groups. Allows customers to obtain information on GTS services without going through the GCCAC website. Helps to expand the visibility of GTS within Garrett County. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires staff time to develop and maintain a separate GTS website. There would be additional costs for hosting a separate GTS website.
Expenses	Ridership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintaining a separate GTS website would require additional staff time, but since GTS services do not change often it is anticipated that these costs would be minimal. The cost for hosting a separate website will be discussed with GTS and GCCAC, and an estimated cost will be included in the draft TDP. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is likely that implementing a separate GTS website will allow more Garrett residents to access information about GCT, and result in a small increase in ridership.

Form a Transit Advisory Committee (TAC)

While GTS formed an Advisory Committee to serve in an advisory role for the TDP, and conducts regular outreach in the community, many transit agencies have found that it is helpful for them to have an ongoing Transit Advisory Committee (TAC). This TAC is comprised of community stakeholders who have an interest in preserving and enhancing transit in the community. Current members of the TDP Advisory Committee could continue as members of this ongoing TAC.

The role of a TAC is to help the transit program better meet mobility needs in the community by serving as a link between the citizens served by the various entities and public transportation. A TAC is a good community outreach tool for transit programs, as having an ongoing dialogue with stakeholders allows for a greater understanding for transit staff of transit needs in the community, as well as greater understanding by the community of the various constraints faced by the transit program. Working with the proposed TAC, GTS can determine how often the Committee needs to meet to ensure members are engaged in activities and efforts.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a forum for dialogue between the community and GTS. Provides a venue for community networking. Can be a good community relations and marketing tool. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Takes staff time to organize and document Committee meetings and initiatives.
Expenses	Ridership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The expenses associated with forming a TAC are modest and include the cost associated with the staff time spent planning and organizing the meetings, as well as any printing and presentation materials needed for the meetings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While forming a TAC will not have a direct effect on ridership, it may generate ideas that will help boost ridership.