SERVICEPLAN2020 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Austin metropolitan area has grown tremendously over the past few decades. Capital Metro's long-range transit plan, *All Systems Go*, lays out an ambitious plan to expand transit service along with the growing population and employment over the next 20 years.

Capital Metro contracted with Perteet, Inc., in 2009 to conduct a comprehensive operations analysis of the existing fixed route bus system and develop ServicePlan2020, a 10-year plan to improve bus service and implement elements of *All Systems Go.*

Specific goals of ServicePlan2020 included:

- Improving route directness and system connectivity
- Increasing ridership
- Increase cost effectiveness of bus operations

The recommendations comprising ServicePlan2020 were developed using ridership data, stakeholder interviews, demographic data, customer comments, employee input, route reconnaissance, previous comprehensive planning documents and current land use plans.

The ServicePlan2020 team employed an inclusive process that encouraged ongoing participation and input by staff, interested citizens, stakeholders and the board.

ServicePlan2020 has three major components:

- A system-wide and route-level assessment showing the strengths and weaknesses of the system
- A market assessment showing the location and extent of unmet mobility needs
- A comprehensive list of service change recommendations designed to improve ridership, reduce service duplication and improve system connectivity

Service Analysis and Market Research

A ridership and operations analysis of Capital Metro's services was conducted. Ridership data was from the Fall 2008 service period and on-time performance data was obtained from the September 2008 trends report. The ridership data was analyzed to determine the ridership patterns for each route on a stop level, segment level, and a route level. The specific strengths and weaknesses of each route were identified. The data analysis was supplemented by extensive field work, which consisted of field observations of each bus route in the system. Every bus route had at least three different observations. A series of initial recommendations were developed as a result of the technical analysis and field work.

To support service analysis, a state-of-the-practice methodology was applied to rate transit competitiveness across the three-county Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO) region. This approach combined demographics, travel patterns, land use characteristics, congestion data, parking costs, and other variables to provide a quantitative measure of the relative potential for transit ridership, regardless of the level of transit service that is provided at a location. Accordingly, the approach captures the transit potential from riders and non-riders, as well as served and unserved markets. A travel demand analysis that identified the relative magnitude of park-and-ride opportunities in the CAMPO region was also conducted.

Community Involvement

ServicePlan2020 included a multi-step community involvement plan to engage the public early in the program and keep them engaged. An iterative course of action was adopted to give multiple opportunities for feedback.

Interviews with several board members were held in February 2009 to help provide policy guidance. The overriding theme discussed by the board members was a desire to have a transparent, defensible method for any of the service changes. Other principles were to maintain service to the transit-dependent population, to build upon existing productive services, and to be more proactive in expanding Capital Metro service to growing areas. Updates were given to the Board during the course of public involvement, which included both high-level updates in Board meetings as well as individual briefings about potential changes that were being developed.

Two different Advisory Committees were created to provide feedback on how to structure the service plan recommendations and to offer an opportunity for participants to give feedback on the actual recommendations. The Technical Advisory Committee consisted of regional governmental and transportation agencies as well as representatives from educational providers while the Community Advisory Committee consisted of community advocate groups, social service organizations, participating suburban communities and transit rider groups. Advisory Committee meetings were held in April, July and November of 2009 to obtain ideas for changes to the system and receive feedback on initial alternatives. Recommendations were adjusted as a result of what was heard from the committees.

Staff input included a kickoff meeting, a survey, and two sets of meetings with bus operators. The first set of meetings was designed to receive feedback on the current system and recommendations for improvements. The second set of meetings provided a means to receive feedback from operators on two different service alternatives that were developed as a result of the analysis and their input. Changes were made to the initial recommendations based on feedback from bus operators.

A ServicePlan2020 website was created to both disseminate information and receive feedback. Two separate surveys were created to collect data on potential route changes. The first survey provided the public a forum to suggest improvements to the system. A second survey was created to ascertain the impacts of the preferred alternative.

Two separate sets of public meetings were held in an open house setting and included boards depicting the proposed route changes. The first set of meetings were held in August 2009 at five different locations throughout the Austin area and provided the public an opportunity to respond to the initial service recommendations. The second set of meetings were held in November 2009 to receive feedback on the revised service plan.

Targeted neighborhood outreach supplemented the public meetings to ensure that specific concerns were heard and addressed through neighborhood association meetings or block walking. Eleven groups were provided an opportunity to provide feedback and as a result, adjustments were made to the plan.

The meetings identified several routing changes that received strong public feedback and some with conflicting messages. In order to clarify the opinions of current riders on projected changes, targeted route surveys conducted on specific routes. Additional non-route specific intercept surveys were held at several key transfer locations.

Final Recommendations

The final recommendations developed for ServicePlan2020 are the culmination of market research, service analysis, field work, and community involvement. Some phasing of recommendations is recommended to account for both finances and the need for certain capital projects to become available. The resultant recommendations are based on our prioritizing each of these divergent inputs.

The short-term recommendations are fiscally constrained. Longer range recommendations utilize more resources than currently programmed, but represent a framework for transit improvements over the next decade. The following is a summary of the ServicePlan2020 recommendations.

- MetroRapid and Frequent Service Corridors: implement a network of frequent bus routes throughout the urbanized area. Frequent Service Corridors can either be MetroRapid routes, or regular fixed routes.

- Downtown Austin: improve speed and reliability and customer amenities; consolidate routes on main corridors and reduce the number of bus stops.

- East Austin: improve frequency on several routes; improve route directness; use flexible service in low-density areas; provide direct service from East Austin to the South Congress Transit Center; improve connectivity to Cross Park and Rutherford areas.

- West Austin: consolidate UT and regular fixed routes into two full-time routes; the Lake Austin route should operate as a "Frequent Service Route" year-round; replace fixed-route bus service with flexible service in several lower density neighborhoods.

- North Central Austin: improve directness and frequency of trips to the Cameron and St. John's areas and Rutherford shopping; improve directness to East Austin.

- North Austin: consolidate several feeder routes into a crosstown route; delete service to low-ridership areas; adjust commuter services commensurate with demand once the Red Line begins.

- South Central Austin: delete service from underperforming neighborhood routes; improve connectivity and frequency from South Congress Transit Center to East Austin and Barton Creek Square Mall.

- South Austin: shift the focal point of service in South Austin from Bluff Springs to Southpark Meadows and extend South Austin routes to more destinations.

- Southeast: improve frequency and directness between downtown, Riverside and ABIA. Provide a direct connection to Ben White Boulevard and the South Congress Transit Center.

- Southwest Austin: increase park-and-ride service in the SH 71 West and South Loop 1 (Mopac) corridors; reduce the level of local bus service in some neighborhoods; extend service further south to serve new development.

- University of Texas: utilize existing regular service routes to supplement or replace UT Shuttles; adjust frequencies by day based on demand.

- Mueller Redevelopment Area: in the short-term, connect the high density residential areas along Mueller and Aldrich directly to downtown and UT; in the next ten years, connect Mueller with downtown and UT via a MetroRapid corridor.

- New Commuter Service: add commuter service from the east, south, and southwest; add regional park-and-rides in Manor, the I-35 South corridor, south Mopac, and in the SH 71 West corridors.

- New Flexible Service for the following areas: a Tarrytown Flexible Service route should replace three existing fixed-routes; a Decker – Springdale route should serve areas of East Austin; and a Riata – Millwood – Domain route should connect residential and commercial areas of Northwest Austin with the Domain and Kramer Station.

Several capital projects must be completed to support select service recommendations, including:

- Downtown bus stop improvement program – Improvements to the Guadalupe / Lavaca corridors must be made, including accessible sidewalks, bus stop shelters, and bus lanes.

- Regional Park-and-Rides – Parking facilities must be completed prior to commuter service initiation.

- Southpark Meadows Transit Center – Additional service to Southpark Meadows cannot be added until a more suitable terminal location is available.

- MetroRapid Infrastructure – transit signal priority, stations, shelters, bus lanes, and terminal locations.

- Downtown Austin Transit Center – while not immediately critical to the success of ServicePlan2020, it could enhance customer experience within Downtown Austin.

Conclusions

ServicePlan2020 represents the first comprehensive examination of the entire Capital Metro fixed-route system in the past ten years. Its adoption by the Board will set a guiding course for improvements in bus service across the service area, resulting in higher ridership, better use of limited agency resources, and enhanced service for customers.