

Chapter 6 Regional and MTA Goals and Priorities

The *Strategic Master Plan* provides a long range guide to MTA for investment in resources which take time to accumulate including infrastructure, customer loyalty, a good public image and excellent employees. In concert with the Metropolitan Government of Nashville-Davidson County (Metro), the Nashville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), Cumberland Region Tomorrow (CRT), the Nashville Regional Transit Authority (RTA), the Mid Cumberland Human Resource Agency (MCHRA) and other organizations concerned with regional transportation, the MTA will strive to serve and encourage corridors of transit friendly land use—higher density residential and employment areas, pedestrian friendly environments and a mix of destinations. In addition, with the passage of the Enabling Legislation for Dedicated Funding, MTA will work in concert with these entities towards establishing a dedicated funding stream in order to expand and improve services. The *Strategic Master Plan* lays out the short, mid-term and long-term programs and projects that help to reach the regional longer term goals.

This chapter addresses both the MTA goals as well as the transportation goals of the region, of which MTA is a significant player. Through the public outreach in this project, many comments were received about the desire to get to places outside of Metro/Davidson County. This indicates the nature of travel in regions – while it may start in one defined service area, the destination may be on the other side of a geographic boundary that is not served. Important economic hubs like Franklin/Cool Springs, Smyrna/Murfreesboro/MTSU, and Hendersonville/Gallatin require mobility connections to Metro. For the most part, these connections cannot be made today. They are not expressly the concern of MTA today given the geographic boundaries of the service area, but the ability to connect throughout the region is increasingly an issue. As the region wrestles with potential solutions to regional mobility and funding transit service, MTA should be an active participant in the dialog. The future of transit in the Nashville metropolitan region is bright. There is active discussion and political leaders are coalescing in support of regional transit funding and service.

Regional Transportation Goals from the Long Range Transportation Plan and Corridor Studies

In this section, the goals of the Regional 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan are reviewed for their relationship to the long range direction of the MTA. This section also reviews the many corridor studies that the region has been involved in. These all will have some impact on MTA, from the potential to share right-of-way or provide higher capacity services in a corridor to the potential need to interface with suburban services.

Although MTA serves Nashville/Davidson County, it plays a role in the larger region. It does this by providing services that go beyond Davidson County such as Route 96 to Murfreesboro, and by overseeing the service of the Regional Transit Authority including the Music City Star, the region's initial foray into regional rail transportation. Given that Nashville is the center of the region, and that the need for transit service does not stop at the Davidson County line, there is potential for MTA to be a part of a greater regional system or for the MTA to play a larger, more regional role, in the future.

The Nashville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) has taken a lead in looking at a future vision that emphasizes alternative modes like public transportation, and it is sponsoring studies that look out into the future. Following is a discussion of regional goals and corridor studies sponsored by the MPO.

The Regional Vision

The region has endorsed goals for the future that aim towards more focused development that would be transit friendly.¹ As the MPO develops updated versions of the Long Range Transportation Plan, MTA should remain engaged in the process. As is appropriate for regional goals, the MPO Long Range Plan goals are very general and should be relatively easy for the MTA to work within. The more that local and regional goals align, the easier coordination is to accomplish.

The text boxes below and on the next page state the goals and objectives from the Long Range Transportation Plan which support public transportation and transit supportive land use and development.

Goal 1: Link Land Use & Transportation

Encourage local governments to develop land use policies and plans that enhance the quality of life and that recognize the relationship between land use and the transportation system.

- Enhance the residential and economic environment and reduce travel demand by clustering development, encouraging mixed-use development, and **providing alternatives to the automobile for short trips**.
- Maximize the use of existing roadways and minimize the need for new roadways through measures such as ridesharing, **transit service**, and HOV lanes.

Goal 2: Regional Mobility through a Multi-modal System

Achieve enhanced mobility by providing an intermodal and multimodal transportation system that supports safe, efficient and convenient travel options for the movement of people and goods.

- Acknowledge and address the wide range of trip needs by the public and offer a reasonable **choice of transportation alternatives** to the low occupancy vehicle to satisfy these needs:
 - Provide pedestrian walkways and bikeways and integrate them into the region's transportation system;
 - Devise ways to accommodate frequent short trips, such as **shuttles** and pedestrian walkways, in high density activity centers such as the central business district and suburban residential, retail, and office centers.

Goal 2: Regional Mobility through a Multi-modal System (continued)

- Enhance and encourage intermodal travel by:
 - integrating **local public ground transportation** with intercity travel facilities such as airports and bus terminals;
 - **Improving the operation of transportation modes** competing with low occupancy automobiles through traffic management techniques such as queue bypass lanes for buses, HOV lanes and priority parking for high occupancy vehicles.
- **Promote the development of an effective transit system in the five-county region** by:
 - **Determining the appropriate transit technology and support facilities to meet the mobility needs of the public throughout the five-county region;**
 - **Examining the financial feasibility of establishing and/or expanding transit service in various travel corridors and encouraging the adoption of a dedicated funding source to achieve long term service goals.**

Goal 3: Reduce Congestion

Address traffic congestion through strategies that seek first to reduce vehicle-trip demand and second, to increase the operating capacity of the existing and planned transportation system.

- Encourage measures that reduce the number of vehicle trips and miles traveled, such as: **transit**, high-occupancy vehicle facilities, mixed land use patterns, telecommuting, parking management, and trip reduction ordinances.

Goal 4: Relationship between Transportation, Air Quality & Energy Conservation

Maintain and improve the quality of the natural environment through the implementation of transportation policies and programs that reduce vehicle emissions and energy demand.

- Increase person-trip capacity in deficient travel corridors with improvements that carry greater numbers of persons, such as **mass transit**, park and ride lots, and HOV lanes.
- In cooperation with managers of publicly and privately operated fleets of vehicles, **encourage the use of clean, alternatively fueled motor vehicles.**

Goal 5: Manage Financial Resources Efficiently

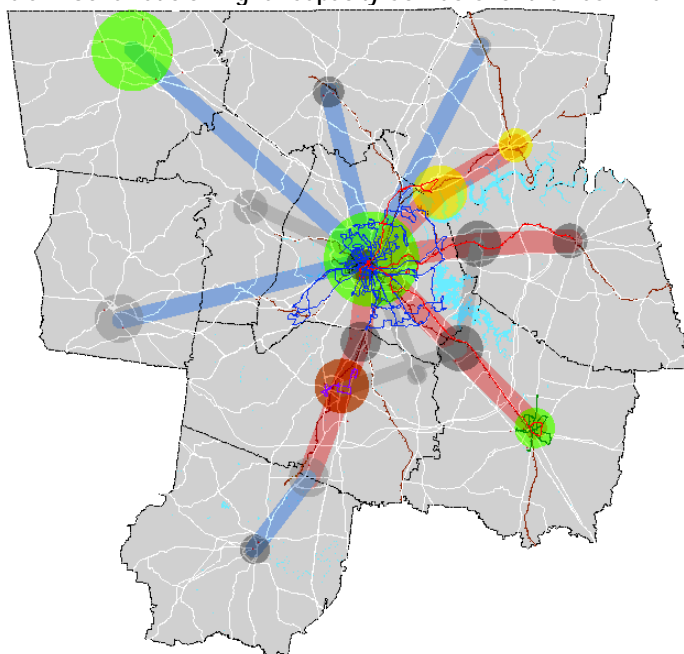
The regional transportation plan and the implementation of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) must be based on an effective evaluation and screening process that considers cost (capital, operating and maintenance) constraints in selecting the highest priority short and long-range improvements and programs.

- Reduce transportation costs by supporting use of **energy-efficient transportation modes** and developing intermodal transportation facilities which promote the easy transfer of people and goods between modes.

Corridor Studies and Increased Transit Capacity

The MPO in cooperation with Metro and the MTA have been pursuing the 2nd Goal of the Regional 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan in a set of corridor studies looking to develop improved higher capacity transit service. The regional transportation concept reflects a series of higher capacity services from outlying areas coming into downtown Nashville as well as some cross-town connections. Figure 6-1 shows a schematic of higher capacity corridors radiating from downtown Nashville, with satellite nodes outside of downtown Nashville. ⁱⁱ However, the way in which the high capacity corridors are defined and the specific technology to be used has not yet been determined except in the east corridor. Following is a discussion of progress being made towards implementing high capacity transit service.

Figure 6-1: Schematic of Higher Capacity Corridors for the Nashville Region



East Corridor Commuter Rail

The East Corridor Commuter Rail Music City Star is an early implementation of a higher capacity transit alternative that Metro Government of Nashville-Davidson county has played a critical role in supporting. The MTA also was a vital partner in this effort in the beginning and is playing an increasing support role currently. The East Corridor Commuter Rail implementation occurred ahead of concentrated development and its ridership has been developing more slowly than hoped. Development of higher quality transportation alternatives in other corridors is likely, therefore, to be more cautious.

The SE Corridor Study

This study was completed in 2007 and covered a corridor stretching from Downtown Nashville and the Vanderbilt – West End area to Murfreesboro. This is a promising corridor for transit due to the fact that densities along the corridor are higher than other Nashville corridors. Murfreesboro is the largest city outside of Nashville in the MPO area. It includes the region's largest employment destinations: downtown Nashville, the Vanderbilt-West End area adjacent to downtown Nashville, and downtown Murfreesboro. Other destinations within the corridor include Nashville Airport, Dell, Interchange City, Starwood Amphitheater, Nissan plant, Treveca Nazarene University, Middle Tennessee State

University, and the downtowns of LaVergne and Smyrna. Ridership on the MTA bus routes (12 Nolensville Road and 15 Murfreesboro Road) in this corridor puts them in the top 4 routes of the MTA.

Nonetheless, the recommendations of the SE Corridor Study were for a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) that did not include much capital investment in higher capacity transit. The LPA was “a combination of phased bus service enhancements, including development of express bus and skip-stop bus services on I-24 and Murfreesboro Road (US 41/70S), and extended local bus service on Murfreesboro Road. Other improvements include bus “stations” at key locations, queue jump and signal improvements at intersections and interchanges to allow buses to bypass congested traffic conditions, and ultimately short sections of busway to further enhance the speed of bus travel in the corridor.”

The NE Corridor Study

The Northeast Corridor Study is looking to identify high capacity transit service and corresponding land use plans for the corridor between downtown Nashville, Rivergate, Hendersonville and Gallatin. While this study is not far enough along to draw conclusions, a very limited access service seems to be what is being considered. From the MTA's perspective, this corridor has the top performing bus routes in the system. Route 26 Gallatin Road carries the greatest ridership and Route 23 Dickerson Road has the highest passengers per hour. The MTA is working on a BRT implementation in this corridor between downtown Nashville and the Rivergate area. As will be discussed in Chapter 7 of this plan, some of the recommended BRT stops in the NE Corridor Study are the same as those recommended for the MTA's Gallatin Road BRT.

Conclusions from the East Corridor Music City Star and Corridor Studies

The greater Nashville area has the local leadership and momentum to move transit up to the next level. Since 2009 enactment of legislation enabling dedicated transit funding, the Mayor of Nashville has called for a caucus of Mayor's to examine how best to move forward with dedicated funding for transit. As this effort progresses, MTA can continue to build support for transit by making incremental transit improvements and illustrating the benefit to the public during this tough economic time. The existing transit services and the perception of the quality of service can help lay the foundation for future actions which are more far reaching.

Other Regional Goals and Priorities

In addition to the Nashville MPO, the region has a number of other regional organizations which have worked to promote and/or provide alternative regional public transportation services. These organizations include Cumberland Region Tomorrow, the Mid-Cumberland Human Resource Agency, the Nashville Regional Transportation Authority and several others.

Cumberland Region Tomorrow

Cumberland Region Tomorrow (CRT) is a private, non-profit, citizen-based regional organization working with many public and private sector partners, dedicated to planning for the future livability and economic vitality of the CRT 10-county region. CRT supports and encourages quality growth through improved planning, emphasizing land-use, transportation and preservation of the rural landscape and character of the region's communities.

CRT has developed principles to guide the region's future development to ensure that the 10 county region will grow in a quality way which also ensures long-term competitiveness. These principles include two that relate especially to public transportation. These are to:

- Link land use and transportation planning to promote an integrated framework to guide growth and development
- Think and act regionally to ensure our future livability and economic vitality

CRT along with the Nashville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) hosted the annual Convening the Region Summit in May 2009 that focused on “Regional Transit System Development.” This summit provided case studies from other regions (Denver, Charlotte and Austin) which have been successful in greatly improving their transit systems and getting regional financial support in doing so. The Summit also included a call to action by Nashville Mayor Karl Dean and other Mayors from the region to come together and create a unique regional approach to transit planning, funding and implementation.

Mid-Cumberland Human Resource Agency

It is the mission of the Mid-Cumberland Human Resource Agency (MCHRA) to “help people help themselves by providing knowledge and resources to improve the quality of life.” One of the key services provided by MCHRA is public transportation services—particularly services to bring people from outside of Davidson County to Nashville. MCHRA provides rural public transportation service to 12 counties.

Nashville Regional Transportation Authority

Created in 1988, the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) is an agency supported by member communities. It is the mission of the RTA to offer the citizens of Middle Tennessee choices and alternatives on how they commute to work each day and to coordinate local regional transportation services. RTA provides and/or manages regional commuter bus service, vanpools and carpools, and Music City Star commuter rail service. Currently the Nashville MTA has the responsibility of managing the RTA.

The MTA’s Mission

The current mission statement of the MTA is:

“The mission of MTA is to provide public transportation services to our community and its visitors so they can achieve greater mobility and experience a cleaner, healthier environment with less traffic congestion.”

This mission statement states first that the MTA is to serve the community and visitors and improve mobility. Improving mobility for the community implies providing convenient and efficient service that is accessible by all. Improving mobility for visitors implies transit solutions for tourists—particularly where there are concentrations of destinations.

The second part is that the MTA will contribute to a healthier environment and assist in reducing the impacts of traffic congestion. This part of the mission implies a need to attract sufficient patronage to remove automobiles from the roadways to reduce automobile pollution as well as congestion. The mission might also state a concern with reducing the energy consumption of transportation in the area and reducing the carbon footprint or carbon dioxide caused by transportation.

Another consideration for the Board is whether the mission statement should also be concerned with contributing to the economic development of the community. Since investment in higher capacity transit can spur economic development, this might also be a worthy part of the MTA mission.

A potential mission statement to consider might be:

“The mission of MTA is to provide public transportation services to our community and its visitors in order to improve mobility and provide an attractive transportation alternative which can reduce pollution, energy consumption, traffic congestion growth, and can contribute to efficient economic development.”

MTA Priorities and Connections to the Regional Long Range Vision

MTA's Strategic Transit Master Plan needs to allow for a widely divergent set of futures, not unlike other transit agencies around the country. Currently there is activity that suggests the need for a transit system that serves Metro and the region (particularly with the efforts towards establishing dedicated regional funding for transit). The great growth in ridership that was seen and sustained from increased gas prices in 2008 provides a hint at the real mobility role that transit can play in the region. At the same time however, revenue sources have declined and due to tight budgets and fuel price increases, the MTA had to cut service in July of 2008.

While these competing pushes-and-pulls play out, the region is looking to MTA to provide improved service to help meet the need for better energy efficiency and lower cost alternative transportation. If the region moves forward with more ambitious plans for higher capacity transit services that cross county lines, the MTA may be called upon to play a leadership role in providing service for the larger region. An excellent organizational model for this is those locations where interlocal agreements provide the mechanism for a transit agency to serve outlying areas. Interlocal agreements are authorized and governed by the law of each state (e.g., TCA 12-9-101, et seq) but in general are designed to allow local government units to operate more efficiently by allowing them to cooperate in providing services and facilities. In the Charlotte, North Carolina area, Charlotte Area Transit (CATS) was established by an interlocal agreement between Charlotte, the surrounding Mecklinburg County, and the other municipalities in the County. This agreement established the mission, governance and funding of CATS, and also provided that it would be managed by Charlotte's Public Transit Department. CATS has also entered into interlocal agreements with four cities outside of Mecklinburg County. These agreements are contracts that specify what transit services will be provided (e.g., route maps and frequencies of service), for what period, and for what price. Other examples of interlocal agreements to provide transit service can be found in Florida, Washington State, Maine, and Utah.

At a minimum, the MTA will be expected to integrate existing services with new corridor services. If there is an expanded dedicated regional funding source for transit, service priorities that would be appropriate for Davidson County today would also be appropriate for the larger region in the future.

No clear path to the future currently exists for the MTA, but this plan provides a measured, systematic, and analysis driven direction for MTA to follow. The future currently has more potential 'up side' than it has in years, but the financial realities continue to press in on the short term actions. Because of the divergent set of potential futures that the MTA may face, it is increasingly important to be prepared for the growth, even if there are short term system shrinkages that need to occur.

As a result of the feedback from the public combined with research on transit and what is needed to make it grow, a multi-pronged set of priorities will be used to guide the longer term future of MTA services.

Priorities for Improving Service

There are many demands on the MTA including providing better service frequency and longer hours of service on existing routes, providing circulator services for downtown tourists and businesses, providing service in unserved areas, and providing better information about the service. The public process for this project asked the question many times about what the future priorities should be, given there was sufficient budget to make improvements.

After listening to the many comments and looking at the results of questionnaires and other research, this planning process established five strategic service priorities for allocating funding for public transportation. These priorities are listed below:

- More buses more often (increase frequency of buses on key routes)
- Faster transit trips (fewer bus stops, traffic signal priority, avoid going downtown to transfer)
- Serve unserved areas (connect to areas that do not have service today)

- Make service easier to use (signage, better access to information, “How to Ride” training, simpler schedules, simple fare payment methods)
- Improve the image of transit (marketing, nicer buses, nicer shelters & benches at stops)

The suggested approach for using the five priority areas is for MTA to try to make progress in each of these whenever there is opportunity to make service improvements. Given that there is reasonably good transit coverage in Davidson County, the major part (60 to 80 percent) of new funding for operations and capital should be aimed at frequency improvements and speed improvements. Some funding, however, should be reserved to serve unserved areas, to make service simpler, and to improve the image of transit. The *Service Delivery Policy* provides more guidance for designing service in some of these priority areas.

A Longer Range Vision

As part of the public process for the *Strategic Transit Master Plan*, an all day stakeholder meeting was held on December 16, 2008. Attending the event were over 30 participants, including two members of the MTA Board and representatives from the Mayor’s Office, TDOT, Cumberland Region Tomorrow, Nashville Downtown Partnership, MTA/Walk/Bike Nashville, Fifty Forward, the Council on Aging, Nashville Area MPO, TACIR, Transit Now, HPI, ULI Infrastructure Committee, Gresham Smith and Partners, Littlejohn Engineering Associates, Metro Social Services, Metro Planning, Vanderbilt University, Center for Independent Living, Nashville Civic Design Center, Neighborhood Resources Center, Green Ribbon Mobility Committee, Butler’s Run, several MTA staff members and TranSystems staff. At the end of the day participants divided into groups to consider what the long-term vision for public transportation should be. While the groups did not all come to the same set of recommendations, there were some common themes about the future including:

- There would be a regional approach to transit with a dedicated funding source.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Smart growth and transit friendly development (also called transit oriented development or TOD) would be implemented, and the MTA would play a role in the planning process to encourage transit friendly design. There would be a density bonus to reward TOD concepts.
- The MTA would use vehicles powered with alternative energy/clean fuels.
- There would be an integrated multimodal system including bikes/sidewalks/transit and the MTA would help encourage these modes. Planning for these alternative modes would be coordinated.
- Transit would provide high-capacity regional connections with dedicated right of ways.
- MTA service would be the rival of its peers. Coverage would be expanded.
- Mini-hubs would be implemented to improve cross-town connections. The suburban fringe would be transformed into town centers, with MTA service linked to these.
- The downtown and inner neighborhoods would be connected with a downtown circulator or streetcars.

While the MTA doesn’t have the authority to implement this vision in its entirety, it can encourage transit friendly development through participation in the planning process, and can work towards the types of service offerings anticipated in this longer range vision.

Summary

Chapter 6 discussed regional long range planning, goals and objectives, and the MTA mission and proposed priorities for improving service. Despite the current economic challenges in the region, there appears to be a broad consensus around the importance of increased and improved public transportation service and funding for that service.

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- i 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan (Adopted Oct. 19, 2005 and Amended Nov 14, 2007), Nashville MPO, p. 83.
 - ii From a presentation on dedicated funding by the Nashville MPO at http://www.nashvillempo.org/docs/MPO_DedicatedFunding_110408.pdf page 12.
 - iii Progress was made in achieving a regional approach to public transportation with the recently enacted enabling legislation for public transportation