



Rock Region
METRO

Strategic Plan Summary Report

2016



In Association with
The Communications
Group
GCR Inc.





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As downtown Little Rock grows upward,
the region expands outward. MOVE
Central Arkansas provides an opportunity
for members of the public and regional
leaders to define how transit can improve
Central Arkansas and better serve the
needs of our communities.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Transit has the potential to serve people who are not currently users. Residents of Central Arkansas enjoy recreational bicycle trails, walkable shopping districts, a wide array of cultural and sporting activities, and other amenities that come with being a resident of the region. They also face increasing sprawl, growing congestion, and longer travel times as key destinations become less centralized. To maintain itself as a great place for younger residents and older adults to live, to meet growing employment opportunities, and to support the needs of the low-income residents, students, people with disabilities, and others, transit must become more frequent, comfortable, reliable and convenient.

An improved transit network can be an important part of the region. Other regions that have embraced investment in transit have seen growing economic development opportunities and the benefits that come along with pedestrian-oriented development. Focusing on transit also allows the region to take a proactive approach in establishing development patterns around transit investment, rather than trying to solve congestion problems at a later date.

MOVE Central Arkansas is a plan intended to advance Rock Region METRO, making it a core element of the regional transportation infrastructure. This plan represents the culmination of efforts made by large numbers of stakeholders, a set of multidisciplinary consulting firms, and staff from the transit agency. Working together, a wide range of needs were identified and evaluated to develop a strategic approach for transit service in central Arkansas.

To achieve Rock Region METRO's goals, additional investment in transit will ultimately be necessary. The transit agency has taken the step to place a levy on the ballot to voters in Pulaski County for March 2016, requesting a one-quarter cent sales tax to support ongoing transit operations and investment in new services, which include Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service in Little Rock, route enhancements in North Little Rock, expanded express bus services, more frequent bus routes operating in the highest density areas, and shuttles or flexible routes in lower density portions of Pulaski County, including local services within Sherwood, Jacksonville, and Maumelle. Success at the ballot box will allow for these investment priorities to be carried forward; without increased funding, Rock Region METRO can implement modest enhancements, but will be unable to meet all of its service goals.



A strong transit system can attract new markets. The River Cities Travel Center is situated adjacent to new employment, residential, and tourism sites.

PRIMARY OPPORTUNITIES

The November 2014 State of the System Report highlighted existing transit services, their performance, information from peer regions, existing funding, and preliminary development opportunities. One of the key elements of that report was a set of opportunities for the transit system. The report noted that the transit system is mature and has supported Central Arkansas for many years, that ridership is steady and has even grown slightly over time, and that the system has not changed significantly for several decades.

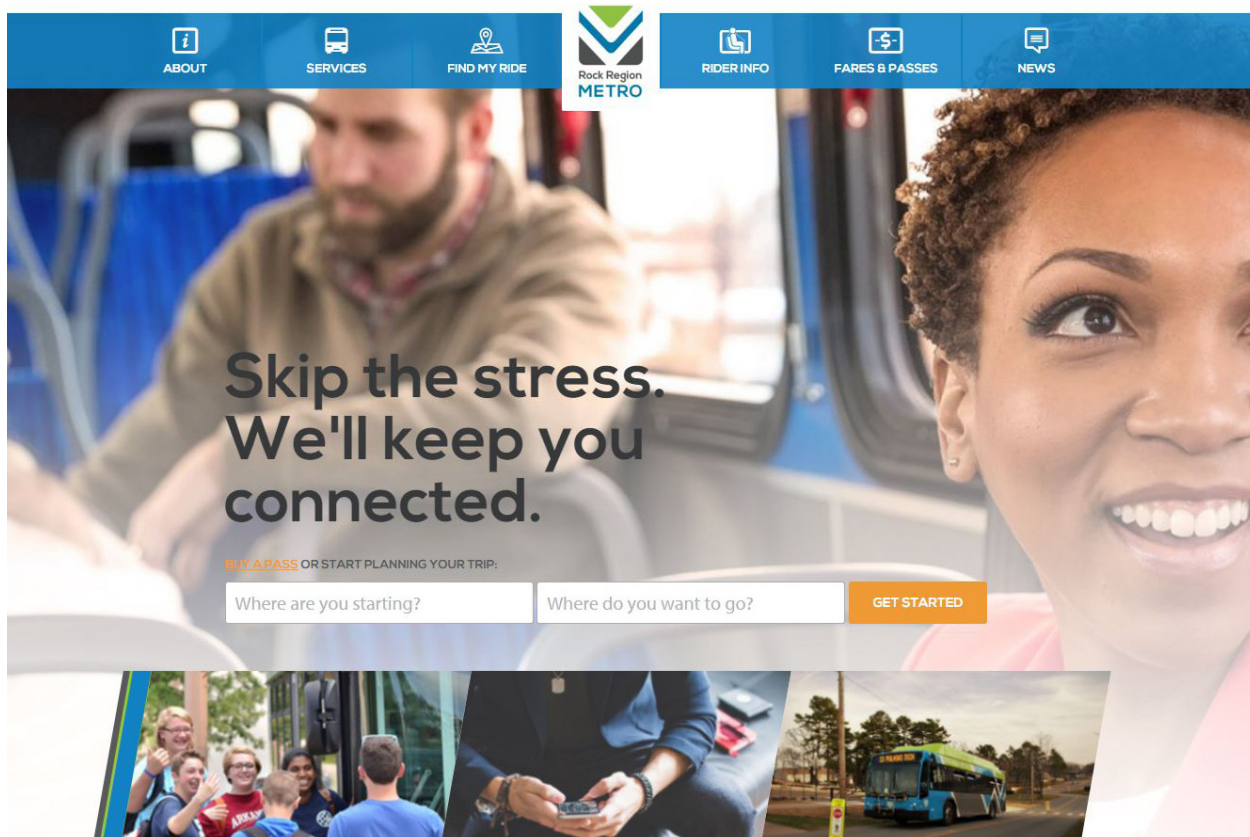
Opportunities for the system to grow were identified as follows:

- **System Design.** Existing service levels and frequencies do not reflect demand or the importance of the route in the overall network. Opportunities exist to make adjustments to service levels to better match the service with demand and to offer different types of service in different areas.
- **System Frequency and Span.** The most frequent routes operate with headways of 30 minutes, with many others operating with headways between 35-40 minutes. Many routes also have irregular departure patterns. To attract more ridership markets, the transit system will need to invest more resources into the system and expand frequency and service span.
- **Passenger Amenities and Infrastructure.** Although the transit system has more than 1,600 bus stops, only 99 have shelters (about 6%) and only eight of these shelters are owned by METRO. One of the most consistently expressed challenges is the lack of sufficient amenities for riders in terms of safe, comfortable areas to wait for the bus that are easy to identify as bus stops. Installing stop amenities based on ridership data would ensure that popular destinations have comfortable and attractive waiting areas.
- **More and Different Types of Transit Service:** As METRO becomes a viable transportation choice for more people, it will need to expand the types of service it offers the community, with transit service that is fast and frequent to get people to Midtown, the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR), and the Capitol Complex. Services must also include options that circulate through Central Arkansas's growing communities like Jacksonville and Sherwood, so that residents can get around locally and connect to regional services.



The transit system has been an active player in Central Arkansas, but most people have limited experience riding the bus (often for special events or an out-of-service car). Service enhancements can build ridership.

- **Facilitate Transfers Outside of Downtown Little Rock:** Consistent with providing more local service, METRO may also restructure some services, so that residents of Sherwood and North Little Rock can travel to McCain Mall without traveling into downtown first or residents of Maumelle have easier access to destinations in West Little Rock. This type of service may require a transfer between routes but would be faster and more convenient than travel into downtown Little Rock. Transfers can also be made more efficient by timing connections and more comfortable by building mini-hubs or super stops where people are likely to transfer.
- **Accessible Information:** Providing good information about the transit service, in real time and through sources that can be viewed on smart phones or accessed by cell phones is an important part of making transit service attractive.
- **Increased weekend service:** Many, but not all of METRO's routes operate on Saturdays, while only a handful operate on Sundays. People continue to travel on weekend days for many reasons, including getting to work and attending to their personal errands. Part of making METRO's service more useful to more people will require operating more weekend service.



Information that is readily available online, on bus signs, printed materials and via METRO's real-time app allow people to take advantage of services available to them.

RECOMMENDED SERVICE: PREFERRED SCENARIO

Based on the extensive data and market analysis presented in the State of the System Report, a comprehensive transit service scenario was developed, drawing together key service improvement strategies that meet the needs of transit riders in a financially feasible manner. These improvements include route alignment changes, new service types, the elimination of unproductive service, and changes to the hours and days of service. Moreover, the Preferred Scenario features the creation of BRT lines along key transit corridors—a new signature project that demonstrates the innovative thinking of the rebranded transit agency.

The consulting team worked closely with transit agency planning staff and a broad array of stakeholders to develop several transit improvement scenarios that would address transit riders' needs while considering various assumptions about available funding. Ultimately, a Preferred Scenario was selected by the Rock Region METRO Board. Under the Preferred Scenario, Rock Region METRO would not make any changes to the existing Links paratransit program or METRO Streetcar, which would continue to operate as it is currently structured.

The fixed routes would be restructured into a tiered classification, grouping services with similar characteristics, as shown in Figure 1.

The proposed BRT service is an operation along the Capitol Avenue, Markham Street, 12th Street, and University Avenue corridors. These routes are intended to provide frequent, reliable transit service in key corridors to support economic development and enhance quality of life for Central Arkansas residents and visitors alike.

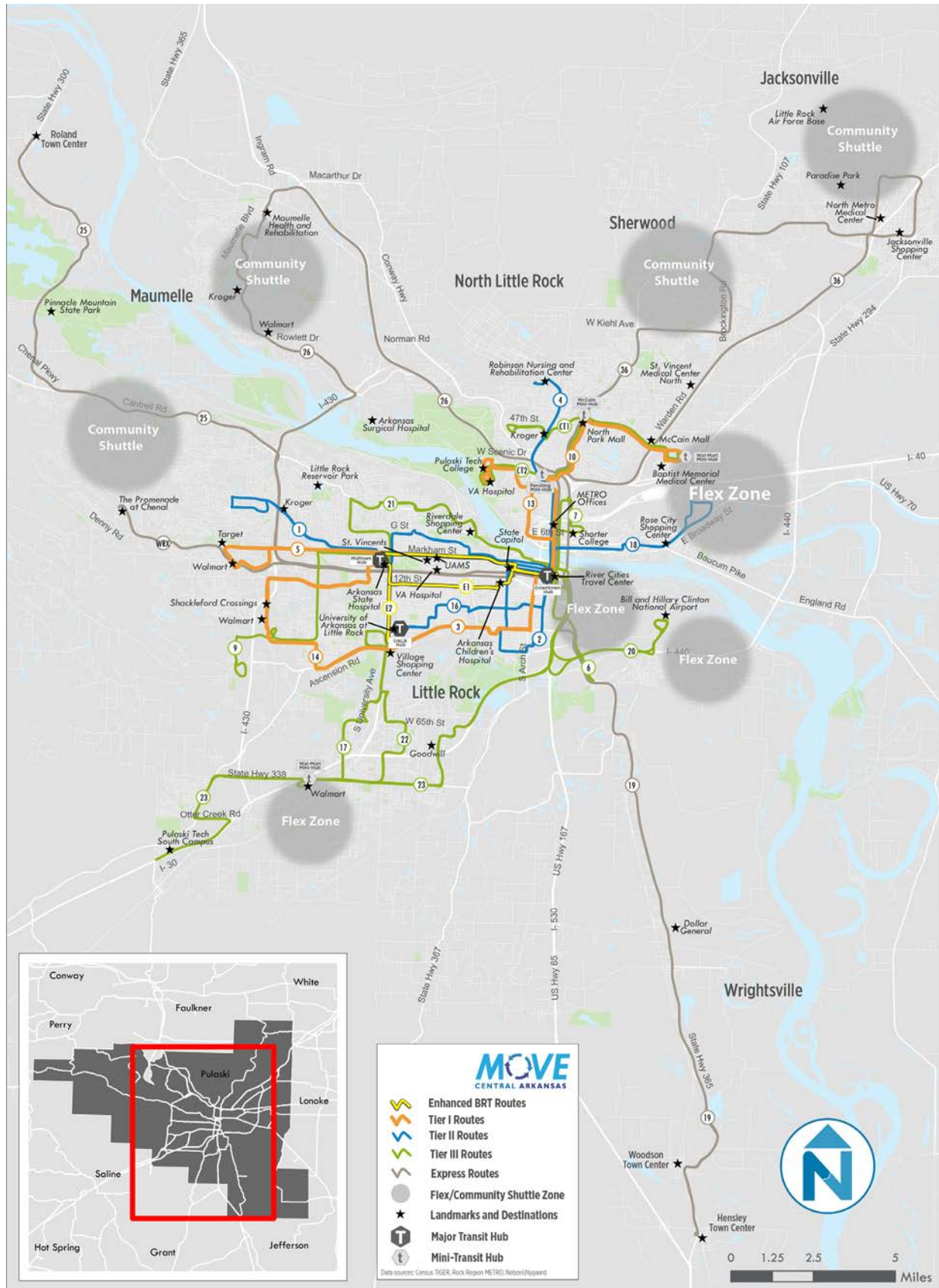
FIGURE 1: SERVICE CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

Service Classification	Service Characteristics
Enhanced	<p>High-frequency, high seating capacity rapid transit service linking the region's top economic engines / activity centers (Downtown, Capitol, Midtown, hospitals, UALR).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum weekday service frequency: 15 minutes peak / 20 minutes off-peak • Minimum weekday span of service: 16 hours per day • Minimum service days: Daily (with adjusted weekend service levels) • Technology: Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)
Tier I	<p>Fixed-route service along corridors with highest ridership potential.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum weekday service frequency: 30 minutes peak / 30 minutes off-peak • Minimum weekday span of service: 14 hours per day • Minimum service days: Daily (with adjusted weekend service levels) • Technology: 40 ft. transit bus
Tier II	<p>Fixed-route service along corridors with moderate ridership potential.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum weekday service frequency: 30 minutes peak / 60 minutes off-peak • Minimum weekday span of service: 14 hours per day • Minimum service days: Daily (with adjusted weekend service levels) • Technology: 35-40 ft. transit bus
Tier III	<p>Fixed-route service along corridors with potential to support baseline level service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum weekday service frequency: 60 minutes peak / 60 minutes off-peak • Minimum weekday span of service: 12 hours per day • Minimum service days: Daily • Technology: 30-35 ft. transit bus
Flex	<p>On-call service for areas with limited ridership potential.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum weekday span of service: 12 hours per day • Minimum service days: Weekdays only • Technology: Van-based cutaway bus
Community Shuttle	<p>Local fixed-route or on-call circulators providing baseline service to suburban communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum weekday span of service: 12 hours per day • Minimum service days: Weekdays only • Technology: Van-based cutaway bus
Express	<p>Commuter-focused service connecting suburban communities with Little Rock employment hubs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum weekday span of service: 7 hours per day (peak periods + one mid-day trip) • Minimum service days: Weekdays only • Technology: 40 ft. transit bus or commuter coach

Figure 2 illustrates the Preferred Scenario with the routes shaded based on the tier of service proposed. In addition to the fixed routes, flex routes and community shuttles are proposed in some portions of the service area. The specific design and operating parameters for these yet-to-be determined services will be developed at a later date with an objective of providing pick-ups and drop-offs based on rider requests and the provision of connections to the existing fixed-route transit network.

Overall, these transit service improvement strategies would result in an estimated ridership increase of 29% to 35% and the transit network in Central Arkansas will be improved by providing coverage to more areas in a more efficient manner, and by providing high-frequency service where it is needed most.

FIGURE 2: PREFERRED SERVICE SCENARIO



FUNDING PLAN

Implementing the Preferred Scenario will require a significant and sustained effort by local and regional organizations to identify, secure, and efficiently use new sources of funding. The long-term contribution of new facilities and services in fulfilling community goals will depend upon stable funding and regular monitoring.

One of the outcomes of this planning process envisioned by METRO staff and Board members was that METRO would achieve some financial independence, allowing for increased funding for transit services that would achieve higher numbers of riders and meet the agency's mobility goals.

The Preferred Scenario assumes that operating costs will approach \$28 million annually for the baseline year of the analysis, and would be projected to increase slightly – based on inflation and increases in labor or fuel costs – for each subsequent year. Capital costs are projected to exceed \$113 million, with about 60% of costs for

BRT construction covered by Federal grants. This is annualized to a local share of about \$8.9 million (over 20 years, using traditional municipal bonds). As a result, annual locally generated funds required for the Preferred Scenario with dedicated-lane BRT service will be about \$30.5 million, as shown in Figure 3. The last column of the figure illustrates that capital costs could be reduced from \$113 million to about \$72 million, with an annual local funding requirement of \$6.2 million if BRT service were to be operated in a mix of dedicated lanes and lanes shared with vehicular traffic.

Potential funding sources to pay for the expanded service are limited. Sales tax is currently capped at 0.25% under state law, which would generate approximately \$18.2 million annually, meaning a sales tax alone would not cover the increased cost of service. However, Figure 5 shows that sales tax dollars in addition to existing levels of local partner funding would support the Preferred Scenario. A tourism tax is also an option for the City of Little Rock, as shown in the figure.



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FIGURE 3: SUMMARY OF ANNUAL LOCAL OPERATING AND CAPITAL FUNDS REQUIRED (BASELINE YEAR)

	Status Quo Service	Preferred Scenario (Dedicated-Lane BRT)	Preferred Scenario Alternative Mix Shared- and Dedicated-Lane BRT
Annual Local Operating Funds Required	\$7,152	\$21,599,840	\$21,599,840
Annual Local Capital Funds Required	\$0	\$8,900,000	\$6,200,000
Total Annual Local Funds Required	\$7,152	\$30,499,840	\$27,789,840

Source: Costs from Rock Region METRO; service plan by Nelson\Nygaard with GCR Inc.

FIGURE 4: FUNDING OPTIONS FOR PREFERRED SCENARIO



**New compressed natural gas (CNG) buses
outfitted in the Rock Region METRO livery
were put into service in August 2015.**



MARKETING/BRANDING

Rock Region METRO serves a diverse region and addresses the needs of many different markets. The new name captures Central Arkansas's importance as a regional center with Little Rock at its core: thriving urban, suburban and rural communities are all linked as part of an expanding metropolitan area transit network.

Based on several months of design work and focus groups, in January 2015 the transit agency Board selected Rock Region Metropolitan Transit Authority as the new name for CATA, with the system to be referred to as Rock Region METRO or METRO. The design of the logo is a chevron with three colors – green, gray, and blue, offset by white. Rock Region METRO staff have replaced bus stops signs, updated the system website, applied the brand to the system's new real-time information app, and will be repainting vehicles and updating the system's assets as the rebranding is completed.



**Rock Region
METRO**

COMMUNITY INPUT

Community input was a critical component of developing the strategic plan for Rock Region METRO. Conferring with stakeholders such as elected officials, business leaders, and human service agency representatives ensured the planning process was grounded in an understanding of needs, concerns, potential improvements, and likely investment strategies that would be successful. Public meetings, on-line comment forms, and public opinion polls provided information about how the broader community values transit services and how transit compares to other regional infrastructure and investment priorities.

To gather information from a broad range of community members, the following efforts were conducted as part of this planning process to assess public perceptions and determine short- and long-term transit needs:

- **Stakeholder interviews.** The consulting team conducted one-on-one and group stakeholder interviews with transit operators, political leaders, city and regional government staff, and leaders from community organizations, businesses, and higher education institutions.
- **Standing Committees.** A Coordinating Committee and a Blue Ribbon Commission were established to bring together community stakeholders, transit users, and regional leaders to discuss strategic planning topics and provide input as the planning effort moved forward.

- **Public Opinion Polls.** The consulting team conducted two rounds of public opinion polls to gauge support for transit and potential transit investment.

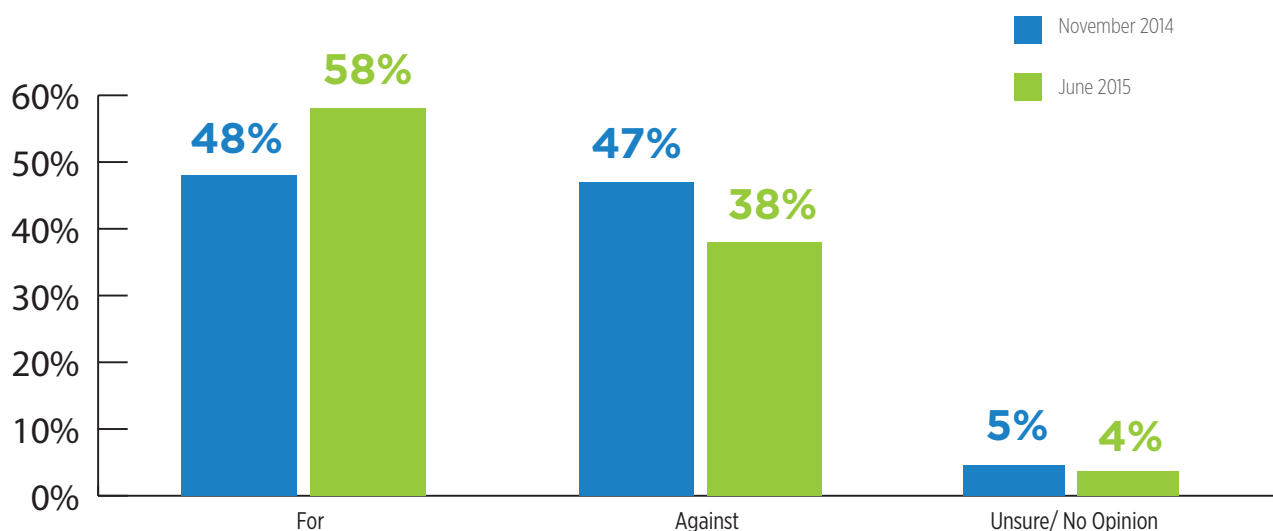
The public opinion polls were conducted with registered voters in Pulaski County. The objectives of the first poll were to assess overall impressions of transit service; identify top transportation priorities; and gauge voter acceptance of a possible tax increase that would fund transit investments. The objective of the second poll was to assess perspectives of transportation in the current community context; consider transit's role as an economic development tool; understand perspectives of current and proposed transit services; and understand willingness to support a new sales tax and increased funding for transit.

The polls indicated that there is currently a strong base of support for increasing taxes to fund additional public transportation services in Pulaski County. The November 2014 poll found 48% of respondents in "support" of a new tax. The June 2015 poll found higher levels of support with 58% of respondents in favor. The specific questions and formats of the polls were different, so it is difficult to make a direct comparison and conclude that "support" grew by ten percentage points. Nevertheless, the polls demonstrate tangible support for a sales tax to support increased and expanded transit services.



Community engagement was a key component of the planning process. The Coordinating Committee met five times over the course of the study.

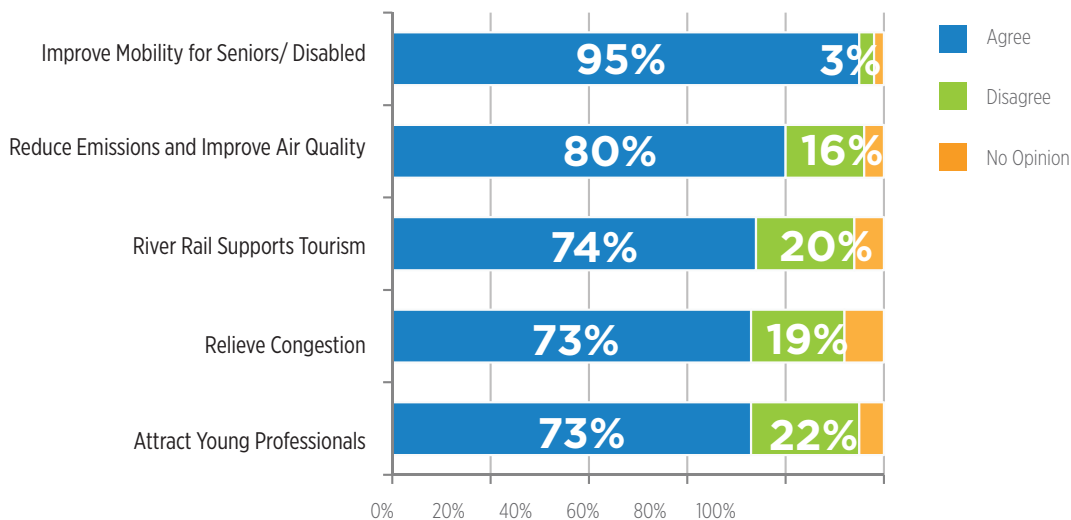
FIGURE 5: WILLINGNESS TO SUPPORT A NEW TAX MEASURE FOR PUBLIC TRANSIT



Respondents indicated that public transit is important in Pulaski County and additional investments in public transit are needed. They were particularly supportive of transit in its role of improving mobility for seniors and reducing environmental impacts.

Respondents agreed that transit plays an important role in the region. In particular, they felt strongly that transit can support regional efforts to improve mobility for seniors and the disabled, reduce emissions, attract younger professionals, facilitate tourism via the METRO Streetcar service, and alleviate congestion.

FIGURE 6: ROLE OF PUBLIC TRANSIT IN CENTRAL ARKANSAS



NEXT STEPS

Ensuring the public understands what potential service changes might mean is an important task that has been undertaken by Rock Region METRO staff. A series of public meetings was held recently, and ongoing outreach will continue to build awareness among Central Arkansas's diverse communities.

Any number of advocacy and affinity groups may work to build support for implementing MOVE Central Arkansas's recommendations. These groups would work in collaboration with staff from Rock Region METRO, Pulaski County's jurisdictions, Metroplan, and other organizations to understand how the service changes will impact communities in the region. They would also work to assess the role residents, employers, developers, and elected officials can play in building grassroots support for additional investment in transit.





INTRODUCTION

MOVE Central Arkansas defines the short-term vision for growth of the local and regional transit network in Central Arkansas.

WHAT IS THIS PLAN?

MOVE Central Arkansas defines the short-term vision for growth of the local and regional transit network in Central Arkansas. The plan has three primary areas of focus:

- A set of recommendations for how the existing network can be reshaped and expanded to better meet the needs of Central Arkansas residents, public agencies, employers and visitors.
- Prioritized opportunities for additional funding to support the refined services and to invest in improvements to support the region's service goals and priorities.
- Development of a new brand, moving the agency from its well worn CAT identity to a regionally focused set of streamlined services functioning under the new moniker Rock Region METRO.

Ultimately, MOVE Central Arkansas is about positioning Rock Region METRO to become an important player in defining how people move in the region, how investments are prioritized, and how public transit can become a valuable part of the regional infrastructure, providing critical links for all residents in the region with a focus on reducing congestion, improving mobility and forging economic progress in the region.

WHY THIS PLAN?

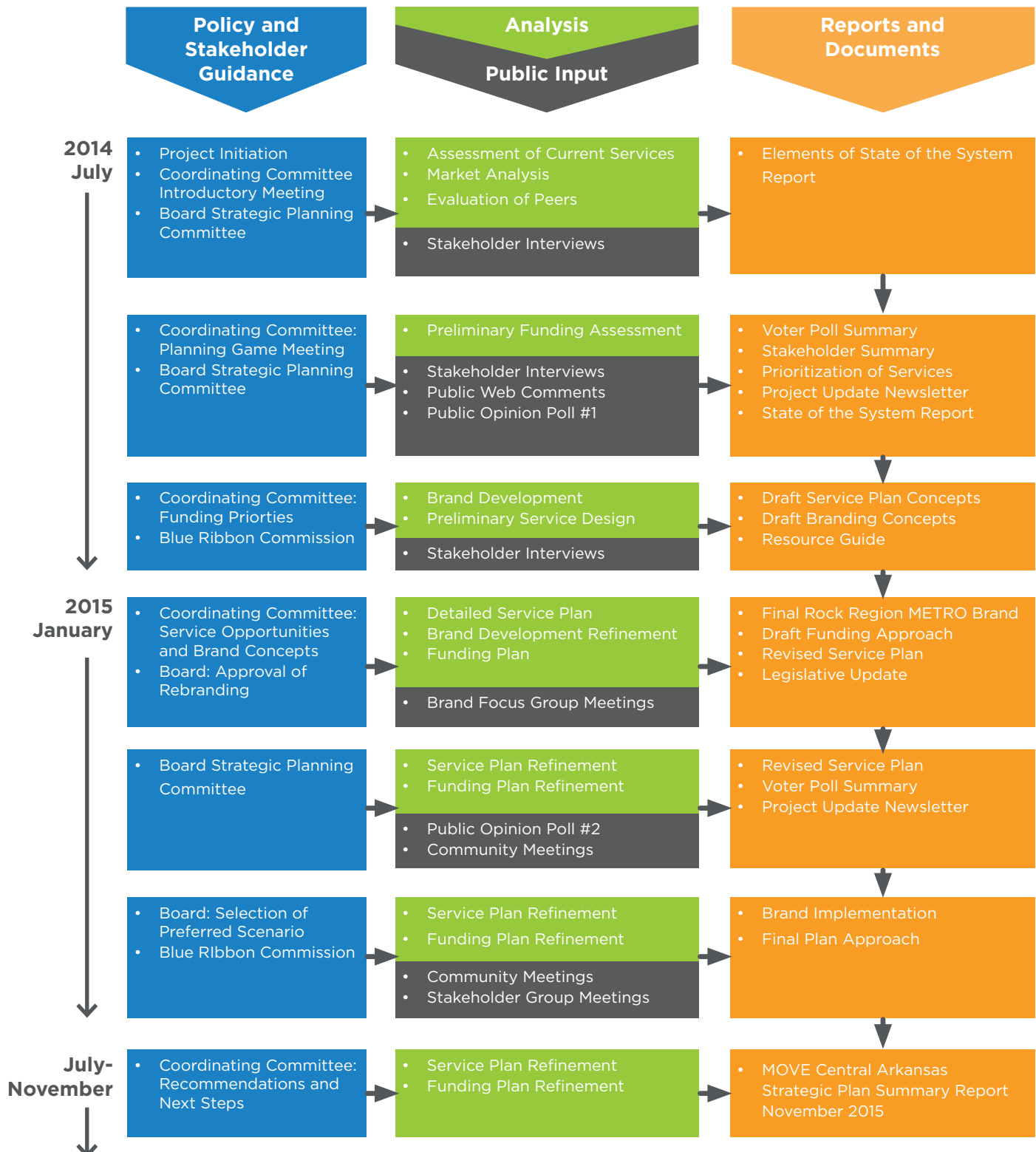
MOVE Central Arkansas provides the framework for a transit investment plan. That is, the outcome of this planning effort moves the region forward to developing specific investment priorities that can be taken to the voters in the form of a tax measure. If the public supports the tools and strategies defined in this planning process and votes in favor of the funding mechanism that is proposed (e.g., sales tax, property tax, other form of tax), then these outcomes can be realized within just a few years. Transit agency and consulting staff have made every effort to work with communities throughout Pulaski County to prioritize needs and develop strategies to address those needs.

Central Arkansas residents have seen the results of aggressive community growth in other Southern cities, where failing downtowns, wide roads, poor sidewalks and pedestrian amenities, and an overabundance of parking have not only resulted in congested highways but also a deteriorating sense of place. Although no plan can be perfect given existing land uses, travel patterns and past policy decisions, MOVE Central Arkansas advances a modest approach to proactive planning for future transportation demands. By focusing on the region's most important corridors and places with the greatest development potential, MOVE Central Arkansas highlights transit investments that can further enhance quality of life, provide more transportation options, and spur economic growth.

THE PROCESS

The planning effort and rebranding implementation took place over a one-and-a-half-year period, initiated in July 2014. Public involvement was a key element of the process as shown in the following figure.

FIGURE 1-1: PROCESS CHART GRAPHIC



THIS REPORT

The MOVE Central Arkansas Strategic Plan Summary Report provides an overview of the major study initiatives undertaken and the outcomes of these initiatives.

This is the second report of the strategic planning effort. The first report, the State of the System, provides (1) an overview of the existing transit system, (2) a market analysis describing who currently rides transit, who the transit markets could be, the relationship between land use and transportation, and local and national trends that will affect Central Arkansas and transit ridership more generally in the coming years, (3) a peer review which compares transit service in Central Arkansas with operations at 13 other transit agencies, (4) an overview of the current funding environment for transit, and (5) best practice opportunities in transit service, transit infrastructure, and supportive amenities.

Following this chapter, the remaining chapters in this Summary Report include:

Chapter 2 | Community Outreach

The importance of soliciting public feedback cannot be understated. This chapter reviews findings from all primary sources of public guidance on this planning effort: stakeholder meetings, voter polls, a Coordinating Committee and a Blue Ribbon Commission.

Chapter 3 | Service Improvement Plan

Defining improved transit services provides a platform for building public support, soliciting funds and rebranding the service. This chapter details the recommended transit service changes and provides information about other alternatives that were also considered.

Chapter 4 | Funding Plan

The funding plan looks at tax alternatives as Rock Region METRO seeks greater financial independence in policy decisions and increased funding for additional service improvements. This chapter provides an overview of costs and proposed taxing mechanisms to fund future transit service.

Chapter 5 | Branding

Significant effort was made to craft a brand for transit in Central Arkansas that would better reflect the diversity of the region and the importance of Little Rock as the economic hub. Chapter 5 discusses the branding process to make transit more identifiable and attractive to build support from current riders and open new ridership markets.



The State of the System report provides important background information that was evaluated in this planning process.



Members of the Coordinating Committee and METRO Board members participate in a planning game activity.

[2]

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Community outreach was a critical component of developing the strategic plan for Rock Region METRO. Conferring with stakeholders in the community—elected officials, business leaders, and human service agency representatives—ensured the planning process was grounded in an understanding of needs, concerns, potential improvements, and likely investment strategies that would be successful. Public meetings, online comment forms, and public opinion polls provided information about how the broader community values transit services and how transit compares to other regional infrastructure and investment priorities.

To elicit information from a broad range of community members, the following efforts were conducted as part of this planning process to assess public perceptions and determine short- and long-term transit needs:

- **Stakeholder interviews.** Perhaps the most effective way to gauge the community's perception of transit and investment needs in general is through interviews with individuals who play a role in funding transit, getting employees to work, getting students to class, and who have a sense of public opinion and voter priorities. The consulting team conducted one-on-one and group stakeholder interviews with transit operators, political leaders, city and regional government staff, and leaders from community organizations, businesses, and higher education institutions.
- **Public Opinion Polls.** The consulting team conducted two rounds of public opinion polls to gauge support for transit and potential transit investment.
- **Standing Committees.** A Coordinating Committee and a Blue Ribbon Commission were established to bring together community stakeholders, transit users, and regional leaders to discuss strategic planning topics and provide input as the planning effort moved forward.

In addition, transit agency staff led a series of public meetings and presentations and had frequent communications and informal meetings with representatives of organizations throughout the region. Information about the planning effort was also provided via a project website with updated presentations and report information.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

As part of the strategic planning effort, members of the consulting team conducted a series of interviews with individuals and organizations that have a stake or interest in the future of Central Arkansas's public transportation system. Stakeholders included elected officials, planning staff, and representatives from community organizations, businesses, and higher education institutions. The study team also spoke with transit riders and transit operational staff (drivers and customer service agents). The purpose of conducting stakeholder interviews was to:

- Understand stakeholder perceptions of public transit in general, as well as public transit services operated and managed by the transit agency.
- Identify transit needs and priorities, including specific service investments that are currently needed or could significantly help Central Arkansas.
- Collect insights into how transit services could and should be funded in Central Arkansas, including stakeholder receptiveness to different funding options.

Methodology

The stakeholder interview process represents a series of conversations held with individuals and small groups of individuals. In most cases, the interviews were conducted with people who represented a single organization, but in a handful of cases, interviews were conducted as focus groups where individuals from similar types of organizations were invited to a joint meeting.

In all cases, interviews were conducted confidentially. At the start of each interview, participants were told that the conversation would be confidential and that they should be encouraged to speak freely. As a result, findings in this report are summarized and are not attributed to specific individuals or groups.

The stakeholder list as developed by transit agency staff, with additional recommendations provided by the Coordinating Committee and stakeholders themselves. In total, the study team spoke with approximately 20 organizations and more than 35 individuals (Figure 2-1).

FIGURE 2-1: STAKEHOLDER LIST

AARP	Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department
City of Little Rock - Mayor's Office, Planning Dept., Bike/Ped Dept.	Metroplan
Acxiom Corporation	Alzheimer's Center
City of North Little Rock - Mayor's Office, Planning Dept.	Pulaski County
Arkansas Cancer Research Center	CATA Board of Directors
City of Sherwood	Pulaski Technical College
Arkansas Children's Hospital	CATA riders
Little Rock Chamber of Commerce	University of Arkansas Little Rock
Arkansas Community Organization	Central Arkansas Library System
Little Rock Downtown Partnership	University of Arkansas Medical School

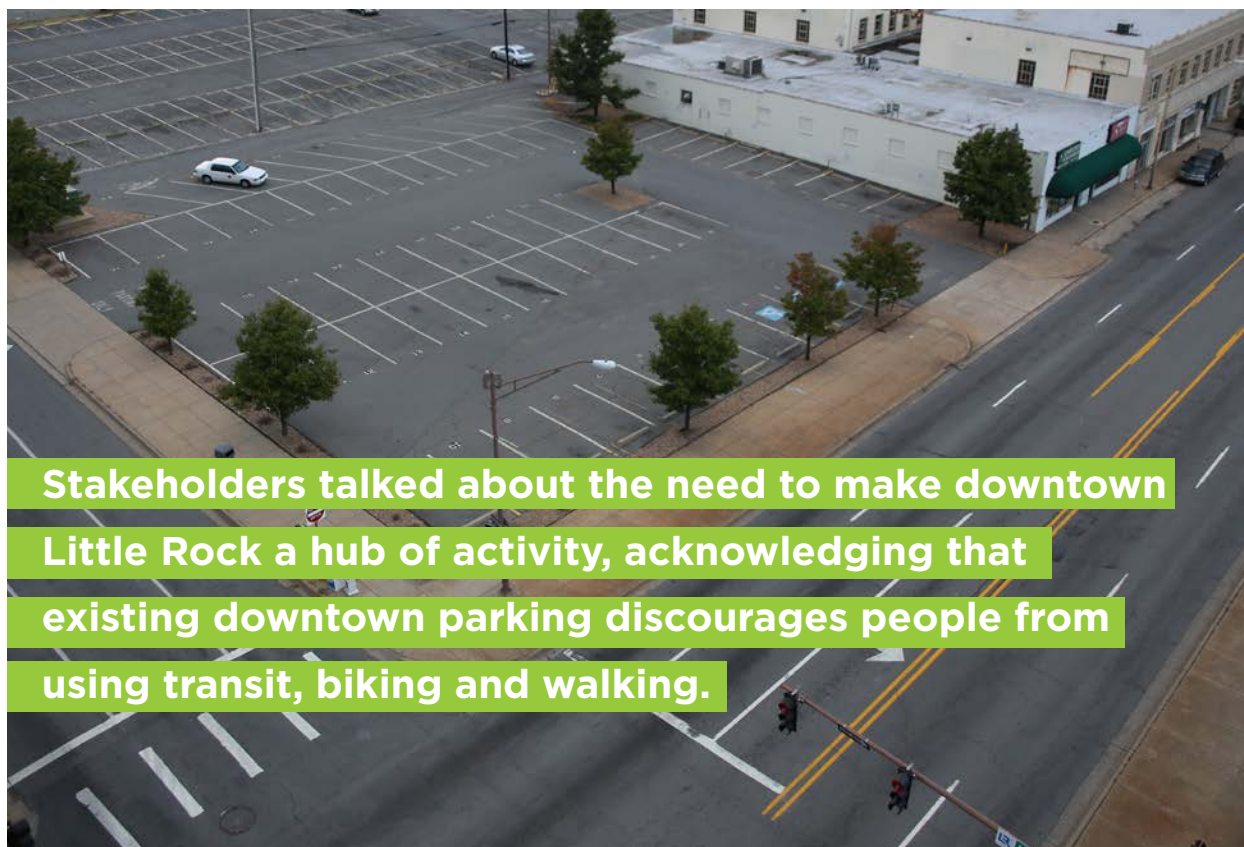


Some stakeholders said CATA had an image problem. MOVE Central Arkansas begins to address some of the weaker perceptions of the system.

Summary of Findings

The most consistent themes heard from the stakeholders are summarized below. More detailed feedback by topic is provided in the following sections.

- **There is a strong level of support for public transportation among the stakeholders.** Many stakeholders said that the transit agency is effective and efficient. Stakeholders also felt strongly that public transportation is an important part of a healthy community and is important for Central Arkansas.
- **Despite strong support overall, a handful of people interviewed expressed ambivalence about public transportation in Central Arkansas.** While not necessarily against transit, these individuals had never used the system, did not know anyone who had used it, and were not convinced of its value.
- **Several stakeholders said public transportation has an image problem.** These stakeholders felt there is an impression among many community leaders and individuals that public transportation is only for people with low incomes and in some cases, older adults. Many believed that the mindset that transit “isn’t for me” impacts the ability of transit to grow and thrive.
- **At the same time, many stakeholders also expressed frustration with the lack of public transportation innovation in Central Arkansas.** They said transit routes and services had not changed substantially for decades. If the goal is to grow or attract funding, the agency needs to offer the community a clear vision and tangible investments that would strengthen and improve service.
- **When asked how transit could be improved,** most stakeholders said they wanted more frequent service, more shelters and passenger amenities, and faster, more direct service. Several stakeholders also said transit needed to strengthen its marketing efforts so more people are aware of the service and understand how to use it.
- **Overall, stakeholders support a dedicated funding source for transit,** although nearly all stakeholders warned that the process of securing funds would be challenging. The balance between optimism and caution varied to the person, with some feeling very positive and others warning that winning support from voters may require more than one attempt. Overall, stakeholders were encouraging and felt that the transit agency should be in it for the long haul and not be easily discouraged.
- **Although stakeholders were in agreement that dedicated funding should be raised** by either sales tax or property tax, they were divided on which type of tax would be most easily approved by voters as a funding source for transit. Both taxes have advantages and disadvantages.
- **Several stakeholders were intrigued at the idea of working with other interests on a tax measure,** such as the bicycle or pedestrian community. Several stakeholders liked the idea of broadening the base and building new partnerships, especially with bicyclists. There was not universal agreement, however, that this would help transit or that it would be necessary to win funding support.



Stakeholders talked about the need to make downtown Little Rock a hub of activity, acknowledging that existing downtown parking discourages people from using transit, biking and walking.

Perceptions of Transportation in the Region and Public Transportation

As part of the stakeholder interview process, the study team asked people about their perceptions of public transportation and the role public transportation does, can, and should play in the region. These conversations led to three themes that were voiced by nearly every stakeholder interviewed:

1. People who participated in the process have tremendous pride and optimism about Central Arkansas and its future.
2. Public transportation in Central Arkansas is almost exclusively a service for people with low incomes.
3. Despite the fact that many do not use the system, the vast majority of the people interviewed said public transportation is important and is a valuable community asset.

Within these consistent themes, stakeholders also offered insights and expressed a variety of opinions about how they perceived the transit agency in the future and the potential for transit in Central Arkansas.

Little Rock and Central Arkansas

Generally speaking, stakeholders and individuals who participated in the interviews expressed pride in the region and optimism for the future of the Central Arkansas. At the same time, many stakeholders noted that Central Arkansas may be “behind the times” with regard to the broader policy debate on land use and transportation. For example, several stakeholders talked about the issues that impact transit service effectiveness—namely land use, parking policy and management, and density. One individual said that in Central Arkansas, “Nothing drives you to transit and there is no reason to use it. There is no congestion to speak of and plenty of parking, most of which is free and there is plenty of space. These are key differences as to why transit works in some places and why it may not work in Central Arkansas.”

In terms of the broader policy debate, stakeholders talked about how important the policy environment is to advancing transit and identified areas where the region has achieved success, but also been challenged.

The Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD) is not in the transit business and is not planning to get into the transit business, nor should it be expected to. AHTD is focused on managing the state highway network and they do not have resources to do much else. At the same time, stakeholders said AHTD appears to be amenable to “complete” street concepts and potentially dedicating right-of-way to transit. Locally, however, work on complete streets has been less successful. The City of Little Rock has been considering a complete streets resolution for several months, but the Little Rock City Board seems to be unwilling or unable to pass it.

Stakeholders talked about growth, and the multitude of projects under way and being planned for the region, including both projects in suburban communities and in downtown Little Rock. These include the Tech Park being developed by UALR as well as several hundred planned residential units in downtown.

Stakeholders directly or indirectly associated with these projects expressed caution, but also hope for how transit could support their investments and projects. Some individuals felt that fast, direct

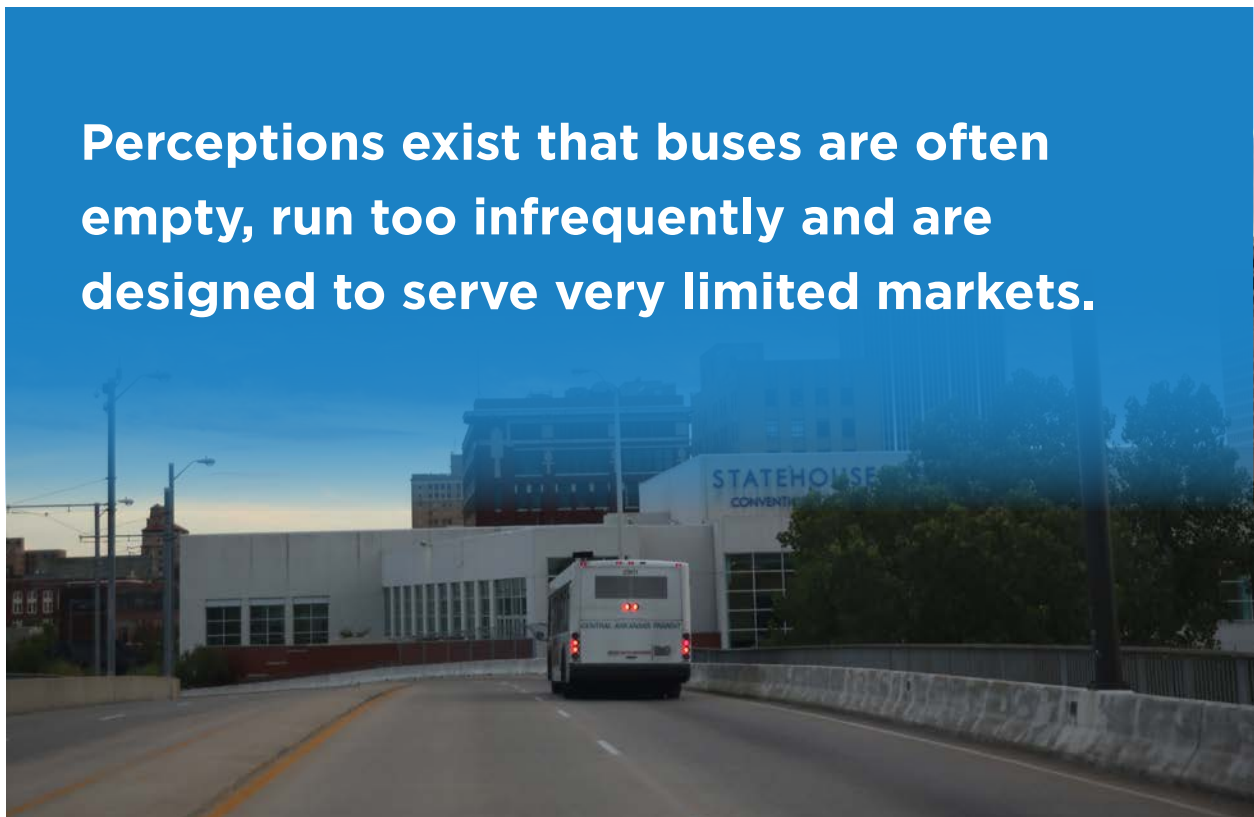
connections between downtown and the Capitol complex, the hospital district, and/or UALR would strengthen the long-term viability of their downtown projects. Most stakeholders indicated, however, that the availability of parking remains essential to accessing their facilities.

Perceptions of the Transit Agency

Although only a handful of the people who participated in the process had significant experience using transit service which was known as CATA at the time of the interviews, nearly all had opinions about the service. The perception of the existing public transportation service available in Central Arkansas was nearly universally described as being “old fashioned” and “out of date.” Several people said the service had not changed substantially for decades and at least one person said the service had not changed since 1975.

Stakeholders fell into two distinct groups with regard to the Streetcar service. The majority were not in favor of the Streetcar, saying the service should not be expanded until the bus service improves. Many stakeholders also complained that no one rides it, the vehicles clog the streets, and the service took money from people who really need it. The other group, consisting mostly of people connected to the tourism industry, were

Perceptions exist that buses are often empty, run too infrequently and are designed to serve very limited markets.



“Great transit could launch Little Rock and Central Arkansas in a way that no one could have imagined.”

positive about the streetcar, saying visitors loved it. These individuals generally believed that the River Rail should be expanded.

With regard to the transit agency, stakeholders were much more positive and sympathetic. They felt that the agency was competent and doing its best with existing resources. Many stakeholders said the agency was underfunded and hamstrung by perpetual funding issues. A smaller subset of the stakeholders warned that the transit system was trying to do too much with what it has and as a result, is “not doing enough things right.”

Stakeholders also expressed some concern about transit agency board leadership, namely that the board has played more of a “caretaker” role rather than actively promoting transit in Central Arkansas. These individuals felt the board may be able to take some credit for the fact that the agency is perceived as competent and efficient, but with that comes responsibility for the lack of innovation and change in the service over the past decades.

Comments about the board also included concerns that it should include more representation from riders and would benefit from being less Little Rock-oriented. Even though there are 12 people on the board, the Little Rock members “run the show,” according to some stakeholders.

Although these comments were not widely expressed, some stakeholders voiced strong opinions about the need to include more riders on the board and/or create a rider group to diversify input. Proponents of the rider group said forming a rider group is a low-cost strategy that would strengthen the agency’s position with the riders and important members of the community, including people who may vote for a transit tax. It was noted that there are many examples of rider groups across the country that successfully complement transit agencies.

Finally, stakeholders also expressed strong support for Rock Region METRO’s executive director, noting that the board did “at least one right thing in the past few years and that is to hire a bright, young individual who is trying to provide some leadership.”

Opportunities

Despite the challenges, people were optimistic about the future of public transportation and were supportive of expanding the service. Some of these stakeholders said the importance of transit to some members of the community cannot be overstated. People may not always realize this because they have a car, but a lot of people rely on transit to perform their daily tasks.

Other stakeholders talked about how public transportation is critical to the future of Central Arkansas because the transit system is at the crossroads of social, political, and economic issues within the community. These individuals talked about how getting community support and “doing something” with public transportation could help Little Rock move past a lot of history. The old CATA was about “getting maids to the Heights,” and the community needs to move past this so transit can become a service used and valued by all of Central Arkansas. This sentiment was specifically expressed by one individual who said, “Great transit could launch Little Rock and Central Arkansas in a way that no one could have imagined.”

There were also a handful of specific and practical opportunities and concerns, including:

- The closing of the Broadway Bridge is an opportunity to get people to try transit. Although there were different opinions with regards to how long the bridge would be closed, nearly everyone felt that when the bridge was closed, people would be open to new and different ways to get in and out of downtown. This creates an opportunity for Rock Region METRO to encourage them to use transit.
- Many stakeholders liked the idea that the transit agency was doing a strategic plan, but they cautioned against just doing a plan and making a handful of superficial changes, like coming up with a new name, but not substantially changing the service.

Transit Service Needs and Opportunities

Stakeholders nearly universally articulated a need to modernize and update transit service and diversify ridership. Several stakeholders also expressed strong opinions about future transit demand that would be driven by older adults, students, and young professionals (Millennials). Many people felt strongly that diversifying transit ridership to attract more “choice” riders would benefit everyone, including existing riders, because more choice riders would likely be an indication that service is more frequent, more direct, and faster.

Stakeholders had a lot of ideas about how to improve transit service. Ideas were expressed generally (i.e., increase service frequency) rather than specifically (i.e., provide more service on Route 10). As a result, the ideas are organized by theme below and are ordered according to how often the topic was raised.

Service Frequency

The most commonly cited challenge with existing service is frequency. Stakeholders said people need to wait too long between buses and the lack of service frequency is the main reason people are discouraged from riding the bus. The lack of frequency is compounded by the fact that many riders need to travel into downtown Little Rock to change routes, and therefore have to wait even longer for their second bus. In short,

traveling by bus can take a very long time. It also means that people are left to wait and “hang out” at the downtown Travel Center. This results in negative perceptions about the Travel Center and transit riders. Frustration over the lack of service is especially high in the afternoons, when people “really just want to get home.”

Shelters and Passenger Amenities

The desire for more and better shelters was expressed consistently and strongly. One of the individuals interviewed cited a finding of this study, saying, “There is something like 1,500 bus stops, but less than 150 bus shelters.” Several stakeholders talked about the importance of providing shelter and cover to “get people out of the sun and heat,” and that the current situation is “not right.”

Stakeholders also felt the Travel Center needs updating, especially considering it is the place where so many passengers wait. They described the Travel Center as “old, uninviting, and not well policed,” noting that it is difficult for the transit agency to attract advertisers and “no one really wants to spend time there.”

There were also several comments about creating additional “transit hubs” or places where people could transfer between routes instead of having to travel “all the way into downtown Little Rock.” Finally, some of the positive comments about service were related to the vehicles, particularly the low-floor buses and the bicycle racks on all buses.



Simplicity

Riders emphasized the importance of having a transit system that is simple and easy to use. Stakeholders said people riding the bus have busy, complicated lives and making sure transit service is as simple as possible and easy to understand would benefit existing riders and help attract new riders.

Direct Service

The need for more direct service was consistently articulated. For example, students traveling to Pulaski Tech, even if they come from or are going to destinations north like Jacksonville or Sherwood, have to travel into downtown Little Rock to make a transfer at the Travel Center. This makes a relatively short and simple trip much longer and also increases the opportunities for trip delays. One of the issues that have particularly frustrated people at Pulaski Tech is that in addition to having to transfer, Route 13 is a slow route with too many stops. A potential solution would be to operate a handful of express or limited stop service at key times for students.

Marketing and Promotions

Another comment made consistently by stakeholders was that the transit system had not promoted itself well to riders or the broader community. This led to several challenges with the service, namely that people did not know about it or understand how to use it. They also did not know how the agency and service was benefitting the community. According to stakeholders, a dynamic transit agency is always attracting new riders; if you want to get more riders you need to go out and encourage them to get on the bus.

Geographic Expansion

Several stakeholders had ideas about how transit could expand its service geographically. Potential markets that are currently under served include neighborhoods in South Little Rock. This area has very limited service but probably would be a good market.

Several stakeholders also suggested that there should be light rail service or possibly express bus service to the airport.

At least one stakeholder talked about the need for service in downtown that is “nimble” and provides circulation for people traveling between destinations. Several of Little Rock’s activity hubs are too far apart to walk, but too close to make driving convenient. This challenge will increase when the Tech Park opens in downtown. A shuttle was suggested by some stakeholders.



Local circulation in suburban areas and smaller cities in Pulaski County was identified as an important investment opportunity by stakeholders, especially to serve students and seniors.

Other stakeholders talked about ongoing growth in the suburbs and said there is increasing demand for service in the suburbs, including not only service to and from downtown Little Rock, but also within suburban neighborhoods. Stakeholders said suburban communities sometimes feel left out of the conversation and they need to be engaged and included.

At least one stakeholder said transit needs to be careful about new services that are added for political reasons: “There are a lot of people out there who think there is a market for transit and insist on developing service. Often when these services are implemented, they do not perform well.” The lesson here is that Rock Region METRO needs to understand its market and operate service that will work.

U-Pass Programs

Some of the institutional representatives talked about how their facilities and institutions could become more transit-oriented. The idea of a U-Pass or universal pass program where affiliated individuals (students, faculty, staff, employees) pay an annual fee in exchange for access to transit had some appeal. This is a strategy that Rock Region METRO may consider. Some participants talked about parking challenges, but there is limited parking management at the universities or medical facilities.

Funding

One topic raised with stakeholders was funding, including discussions on the need for dedicated transit funding, opinions and reactions to different funding mechanisms, and ideas and lessons learned regarding securing local dollars in Central Arkansas.

Need for Dedicated Funding

There was near universal agreement that the transit agency needs a dedicated funding source because it offers the clearest path to getting more and better transit service in Central Arkansas. Stakeholders said a transit measure in Central Arkansas in the 1990s got nearly 43% of the vote without a big campaign effort.

Since that time support for transit has grown nationally and locally.

Nationally, nearly 70% of sales tax initiatives for transit have passed. Locally, there is growing awareness about Rock Region METRO, and belief that if a campaign is well organized and well funded, it can win.

Stakeholders were in agreement that dedicated transit funding would be a good thing for member jurisdictions, especially the City of Little Rock and the City of North Little Rock, and to a lesser extent, Sherwood, Maumelle and Jacksonville. If the tax burden was taken off of the general fund, communities would be able to reduce the tax burden and/or invest in other services. Given this, stakeholders cautioned that positioning any transit tax so that it was clear to voters that the tax would save funds for the City is a key selling point but also one that needs to be carefully considered to determine whether this would be feasible.

Several stakeholders also voiced caution about pursuing new funding streams. They said people in Central Arkansas feel heavily taxed and are weary of taking on additional taxes. Some of this caution was expressed by stakeholders who had been involved in failed tax measures, or worked hard to win previous tax measures.

There was universal agreement that Rock Region METRO needs to “be in it for the long run” and it will be a big effort to win new funding. The transit agency needs to be focused on being innovative, delivering a good product, measuring success, and promoting their accomplishments. One precedent is the experience of the Verizon Arena. It took several years “and a lot of pain” to find the right model and get it done, but once that model was identified, the community supported it and now “everyone loves it.”

Others cautioned that there is work to be done to get a tax initiative on the ballot. In addition, it might take more than one attempt with the voters.

The transit agency and supporters of transit need to be prepared for this, allow time to get things done, and not get discouraged.

Although a variety of mechanisms were discussed as part of the stakeholder interviews, the type of options that generated the most support included:

Funding Options



- **Sales Tax:** Cities in Central Arkansas have relatively high sales taxes, as the State of Arkansas levies a 6.5% sales tax and Pulaski County another 1%. This makes the sales tax 7.5% before cities and towns add their own taxes to the rate. The City of Little Rock adds another 1.5%, so the rate in Little Rock is 9.0%. North Little Rock adds 1%, making the sales tax 8.5% in that community.

Despite the fact that these rates are already high, several stakeholders still felt the best shot for transit funding would be a sales tax. Stakeholders felt that if the transit agency wanted to ask for sales tax revenue, the request must be clear about what it would buy, including specific services.



- **Property Tax:** Stakeholders generally stated that property taxes in Arkansas are low. In Little Rock, the millage is .7010, or roughly 1.4%. In addition, property taxes include dedicated millage to public services such as the library, roads, and pension funds. There was also a sense that property taxes are less regressive and more palatable to many stakeholders, in part because businesses and property owners pay the tax in proportion to their assets.

Several stakeholders support a property tax over a sales tax, citing the fact that is less regressive and will more fairly tax people who benefit from expanded transit service. However, other stakeholders voiced caution, noting that the recent Pulaski Technical College property tax was not approved by taxpayers.



- **Payroll or Business and Occupation (B&O) Tax:** The idea of taxing businesses, through mechanisms such as payroll or B&O taxes were also discussed. Overall, stakeholders felt that a payroll or B&O tax would be a hard sell in Pulaski County. Some stakeholders said the idea has some appeal because businesses would benefit from expanded transit service, but in the past these mechanisms have not been popular in Central Arkansas. Other stakeholders said that if transit wanted to consider this type of tax, they would need to either not include the restaurant and hotel industries or do a lot of outreach to them before moving forward.



- **Fees (Vehicle Licensing Fees, Rental Car Fees):** Implementing fees for drivers licenses, vehicle registrations, and rental cars is a revenue source for transit agencies around the country. However, in Central Arkansas, most stakeholders were not in favor of using these types of fees to support transit, largely because most people did not think they would raise enough money. Stakeholders also noted that Pulaski County already charges fees on rental cars, which support transit statewide. Several stakeholders also said Bill Clinton lost re-election for governor in 1981 largely because he proposed a vehicle registration fee.

Potential Campaign Partnerships

Several stakeholders liked the idea of building new partnerships and coalitions, notably with bicycling and pedestrian community groups. A handful felt bringing in the bicycling and pedestrian groups would significantly broaden the base and attract more people to the cause. Others were less sure, expressing concern that bringing in the bicycling and pedestrian community could make the process more challenging. Others said bicycling in Little Rock is more about recreation than transportation and that fact tends to divide the constituency rather than unite it. People with lower incomes do not see themselves as recreational cyclists, while transit currently is perceived as a service for people with low incomes. It was unclear to stakeholders if those factors make the two parties allies or too distinct to unite.

Lessons Learned

One of the most successful local tax models in Central Arkansas is the Central Arkansas Library System (CALS), which raises funds through a property tax. CALS has an established millage (.003) that is used to fund the libraries. CALS must go back to the voters periodically to get an increase in millage to support operations and/or to refinance bonds.

CALS asks voters to support the library in their individual jurisdictions, typically through special elections. This decision reflects the challenges associated with getting a countywide tax passed and, while this strategy has been successful, it is also a lot of work. Stakeholders close to the CALS tax measures suggested that the campaigns cost approximately \$100,000 per election and require at least six months of advocacy prior to the election.

Many stakeholders had experience with tax initiatives in Central Arkansas. They offered a number of lessons for Rock Region METRO to consider as it evaluates advancing a dedicated funding source for transit:

- Overall, stakeholders warned against countywide taxes. The last successful countywide sales tax was for the Verizon Arena in 1995.
- Stakeholders said analysis of previous voting records and understanding the individual markets within each community is important to help target any effort.

- One of the key campaign messages should be the benefits of transit to the general public, or “What is in it for me?” Not everyone in Central Arkansas rides transit, but they are able to understand how having better overall public services benefits them. Communicating this message clearly is essential to success.
- Stakeholders said previous experience suggests that support for a transit tax will likely come from highly educated, upper middle class people and people who ride the bus. Likewise, opposition to a transit tax will likely come from less educated, lower income individuals. Stakeholders cautioned that these assumptions should be tested and the campaign should focus on getting out the vote to supportive markets and not spend resources trying to convert markets that are unlikely to support the effort.
- Stakeholders also had suggestions about some of the key constituencies that could help. These include:
 - **Cities:** Dedicated funding for transit may have the potential to help partner cities by allowing them to cut their taxes or invest funds in other programs. Stakeholders said Rock Region METRO should engage cities to get their endorsement and support for the tax.
 - **Business Community:** A lot of residents look to the business community for leadership, especially on issues related to taxing. Getting their approval and support is essential.
 - **Unions:** Labor unions can also be a powerful force in many Central Arkansas communities. If the transit drivers are union employees, they would benefit and could help get out the vote.

“What is in it for me?”

Some stakeholders said dedicated funding could help reduce the need for continued funding from partner jurisdictions, but many stakeholders said that dedicated funds from taxes should supplement existing funding, and not replace it.



ADVISORY COMMITTEES

Over the course of this project, two key groups of stakeholders met to provide input and direction for transit enhancements and investments in the region: the Coordinating Committee and a Blue Ribbon Commission.

Coordinating Committee

During five sessions over the course of the study, the MOVE Central Arkansas Coordinating Committee convened to provide input into the planning effort, share reactions to ideas, and assist in developing strategies to reach out to consumers and engage important community organizations.

Representatives from the following organizations participated in Coordinating Committee meetings:

- American Association for Retired Persons
- Argenta Downtown Council
- Arkansas Department of Human Services
- Arkansas Disability Coalition
- Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department
- Bicycle Advocacy of Central Arkansas
- Bill & Hillary Clinton Airport
- City of Jacksonville
- City of Little Rock (various departments)
- City of Maumelle
- City of North Little Rock (various departments)
- City of Sherwood
- Disability Coalition
- Division of Services for the Blind
- Downtown Little Rock Partnership
- Easter Seals Arkansas
- Herron Horton Architects
- Little Rock Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Metroplan
- North Little Rock Chamber of Commerce
- North Little Rock Convention and Visitors Bureau
- North Little Rock School District
- Pulaski County
- Pulaski Technical College
- Sherwood Chamber of Commerce
- Sierra Club
- University of Arkansas at Little Rock

Meeting 1: July 2014

At the kick-off meeting in July 2014, participants were given an introduction to the study and were asked to discuss their priorities for transit service in the region. Some of the key themes described in this meeting included the following:

- **Many people have positive impressions of transit.** Participants talked about some of the strengths of the system, including that it is safe, clean and environmentally friendly. There is an impression that the buses run on time. Participants voiced a lot of support for transit staff, and especially the drivers who were deemed friendly and helpful.
- **The transit agency has a public perception problem.** There is a sense that the only people who ride the bus are poor, and they only ride because they have no other transportation options. Thus, riding the bus in Central Arkansas has some stigma attached to it. Some participants noted that they see a lot of empty buses driving around, which is seen as a waste of taxpayer money. Several participants said they do not believe service runs frequently enough to be convenient.
- **Two major markets are emerging for transit: Millennials and Baby Boomers.** Millennials are interested in an urban lifestyle, which often means living carfree. Baby Boomers are also looking for options other than driving, sometimes because they have to stop, but also because they are moving to Arkansas from northern cities where they are used to being able to get around by bus. As Central Arkansas develops more housing in downtown areas or denser areas, people are going to want to be able use transit to get around. Certainly, existing transit-dependent groups represent an ongoing market for transit services.
- **Transit has a major opportunity when the Broadway Bridge closes.** The closure of the Broadway Bridge will result in traffic congestion, and it might make some people more willing to try different things. Rock Region METRO should be aggressively marketing its services during this time and potentially considering some new routes to address the forecast increase in demand.
- **Employers should be engaged in the planning process.** Employers need to participate in the planning process so Rock Region METRO can design services around employer needs, shift times and the locations where employees live. It may be helpful to develop an analysis that shows where people live and work and then design bus routes around that information.
- **A number of service improvements are needed.** Several participants talked about the need for a longer service span, improvements to frequencies/headways, and additional commuter services in some areas. While most of the participants indicated they had used transit in other cities (while traveling or on vacation), less than one-half of participants had used transit in Little Rock.
- **Capital investments are an important piece of this planning process.** Opportunities exist for park-and-ride facilities and light rail investments in the future.
- **People like METRO Streetcar.** People appreciate the service, but there is a perception that it “is more entertainment than transportation.” One individual noted, “It is the most fun you can have for a dollar.”
- **Rock Region METRO must invest in its amenities.** Some people mentioned the importance of bus shelters, benches and information at the bus stops. Shelters should protect people from the weather, including standing in the hot sun. One individual said that people want to feel safe walking to the bus and while they are waiting for it.

Meeting 2: September 2014

At a meeting in September 2014, the consulting team conducted a Planning Game exercise with members of the Coordinating Committee and transit agency board members.

The Planning Game served as a tool so groups of stakeholders could get their idea for transit on paper and quickly understand the costs associated with those ideas. Five groups of stakeholders gathered around each table to reach consensus on the design of a transit system that would fit within the transit system's financial limitations. They also considered opportunities for a service design that could be put in place with more funding. The game's primary objective was to build consensus on how a balance could be struck between various competing service design goals and to determine priorities for this strategic planning process.

Each group drew a map of their proposed services and indicated on a game spreadsheet how many vehicles they were using. Generally cautious with resources, the groups' plans emphasized the importance of higher frequency service along primary corridors.

Key outcomes from the session included the following:

- **West Little Rock is an important and growing area.** A western hub was proposed by many participants.
- **Flexible on-demand and dial-a-ride service is appealing.** In lower-density areas and areas with poor fixed route bus services, several groups proposed shuttles or circulators.
- **Better commuter bus service is needed.** Participants expanded on the existing commuter bus network and proposed extensions to the service, bidirectional services, and more frequent services.
- **Higher frequencies are needed across the service area.** Several groups prioritized more frequent service in some of the corridors currently served every 30 minutes or less.
- **Faster buses are more appealing.** Routes with limited stops along straighter alignments were deemed more appealing in most of the groups.



Stakeholders designed their preferred route networks at a Planning Game meeting in September 2014.

Meeting 3: December 2014

The Coordinating Committee came together to discuss investment priorities and services.

The purpose of the meeting was to get consensus on objectives: to attract new riders, to make Rock Region METRO easier to use and understand, to increase service levels, to match service types with demand, to address community concerns, develop a range of services that provide mobility solutions for all of Pulaski County, and to develop a message that is attractive and exciting to voters. The consulting team presented preliminary service alternatives and solicited feedback from participants via a worksheet and group exercise.

Five different service scenarios were presented.

FIGURE 2-2: SERVICE OPTIONS PRESENTED TO COORDINATING COMMITTEE

No.	Option	Benefits
1	Existing Service	Serves 10,000 riders per day Provides basic level of service
2	No Build\No cost Increase	Improves existing service to better meet demand Increases frequency on key routes
3	Bus Service Improvements	Significantly increases frequency Start to attract choice riders
4	Bus Rapid Transit	High capacity, high frequency transit on Central Arkansas' main business districts (Markham, University, W. 12 th)
5	Light Rail Service	High capacity, high frequency light rail on Central Arkansas' main business districts (Markham, University, W. 12 th)
6	Improvements to Regional Bike Network	Improve and complete existing regional bike network Strengthen access to transit service and routes

Participants were positive about the service concepts that required additional funding and reiterated some of the priorities discussed in the previous meeting. Several people expressed concerns about higher costs and much of the discussion was about Arkansas's limited source of funding for public transportation.

The meeting also introduced preliminary branding concepts for discussion by the Coordinating Committee which drew a cool reception and provided an opportunity for more targeted feedback to the design team in crafting a new look and feel for the transit system.

Meeting 4: March 2015

At a meeting in March, participants discussed pursuing dedicated funding without significant system improvements and asserted that strategic investments were critical for gaining public support for transit. Participants discussed whether Central Arkansas should pursue BRT or light rail service and whether transit improvements should include funding for bicycle investments, making any potential tax measure a multi-modal measure rather than funds dedicated only to transit.

Meeting materials included a review of the voter poll, stakeholder interviews and an overview of a 'resource guide, asking participants to discuss their preferences between BRT and rail and between a sales tax and property tax. Some of the highlights from this meeting included the following:

- **The time is right for investing in public transportation.** Participants agreed that now is the time to invest in change in Central Arkansas.
- **There is no logic in raising tax revenues for a status quo cost solution.** If we seek new funding then we need to give them something new.
- **Outlying communities tend to think there is not enough in it for them.** It will be important to look at ways to provide local circulation within the smaller cities in Pulaski County.
- **BRT is appealing.** Even still, participants said they want to hear more about economic development benefits from BRT versus light rail.
- **No consensus exists on the right taxing mechanism.** Participants were split between a sales tax and property tax.
- **The focus on any future tax measure should be on transit alone.** Although there was discussion about expanding potential dedicated funding to include bicycle investments, participants overwhelmingly supported not including bikes in a potential tax measure.



Streetcar service provides an option for excursions and tourists, but could become a more integral part of the transit network in the future.

Meeting 5: July 2015

At a final meeting of the Coordinating Committee in July 2015, the consulting team presented the recommendations of the planning effort and solicited guidance from participants about what the agency should do as it finalizes the rebranding of the system.

One component of the meeting was a presentation of the final poll (*see Page 2-24*). Many participants talked about their interest in moving the recommendations forward, and most said they had a greater awareness of transit and its opportunities to make positive change in Central Arkansas. Rock Region METRO staff indicated they would be reaching out to participants to provide opportunities in the future for involvement in the agency's next steps

Blue Ribbon Commission

Two meetings of a Blue Ribbon Commission were conducted over the course of the MOVE Central Arkansas planning effort.

The Blue Ribbon Commission included executive directors, presidents, mayors, business owners, professors, managers and chairs of committees associated with the following entities:

- Downtown Little Rock Partnership
- Arvest Bank
- Central Arkansas Library System
- Arkansas Public Service Commission
- Clinton School of Public Service
- Metroplan
- City of North Little Rock
- Little Rock Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Patrick Henry Hays
- Governor's Office
- Cross, Gunter, Witherspoon & Galchus
- Hendrix College
- Nabholz Properties
- Moses Tucker Real Estate
- Arkansas Highway Commission
- Pulaski Technical College
- Bowen Law School (UALR)
- University of Arkansas at Little Rock
- Little Rock Technology Park
- Mosaic Templars Cultural Center
- ARVets



The Blue Ribbon Commission was established to achieve the support of key community leaders and representatives of the region's important institutions, critical for an eventual ballot measure on funding transit service. The transit agency and consulting team worked to educate this group (and their constituents) about the role of transit in the Little Rock region and benefits transit provides to the community. They sought to engage the members in decision-making and choosing from among tradeoffs facing Central Arkansas with regard to service planning and investment decisions.

Meeting 1: December 2014

The primary purpose of the first meeting of the Blue Ribbon Commission was to discuss tradeoffs and priorities for investment in transit and transit infrastructure in the region. It was noted that the transit agency was looking to build support for investment in its services, so it can better meet community needs and that the Blue Ribbon Commission was assembled to provide input on approach and ideally support the effort.

Speakers provided an overview of transit services, history, and development, and also emphasized that growth of the transit system and keeping up with best practices is not possible without a funding source that generates sufficient resources for the system to grow and diversify or flexibility to adapt services to regional needs and markets. Jeff Tumlin, an author and speaker with the consulting team, presented “Why Transit is Important in the 21st Century and Why it is Important to Central Arkansas,” providing background that transit is increasingly playing an important role in economic development. He explained this need reflects the expectations of a new workforce and preferences for different lifestyles that include a desire to live and work in communities that are more walkable, bikeable and less reliant on the private automobile. Key discussion points included the fact that transit service and transit-oriented development is a critical part of remaining competitive with other US cities; that transit helps create more opportunities for people living in the community by making employment, shopping and activities accessible to more people; and that transit reflects changing landscapes and addresses congestion, public health and climate change.

Consultants reviewed a preliminary strategic approach to transit which included high-capacity transit on Little Rock’s major streets and increased service on regional corridors, reduced reliance on the River Cities Travel Center for connections and transfers, making express routes more “express,” and operating community circulators in suburban communities (and some urban neighborhoods). An overview of the results from the first voter poll (page 2-26) was also presented.

Blue Ribbon Commission members provided some relevant observations about the information presented, but staff acknowledged that the outcome of this first meeting was to set the tone for the next phase of work and a future meeting with the Blue Ribbon Commission.



Meeting 2: May 2015

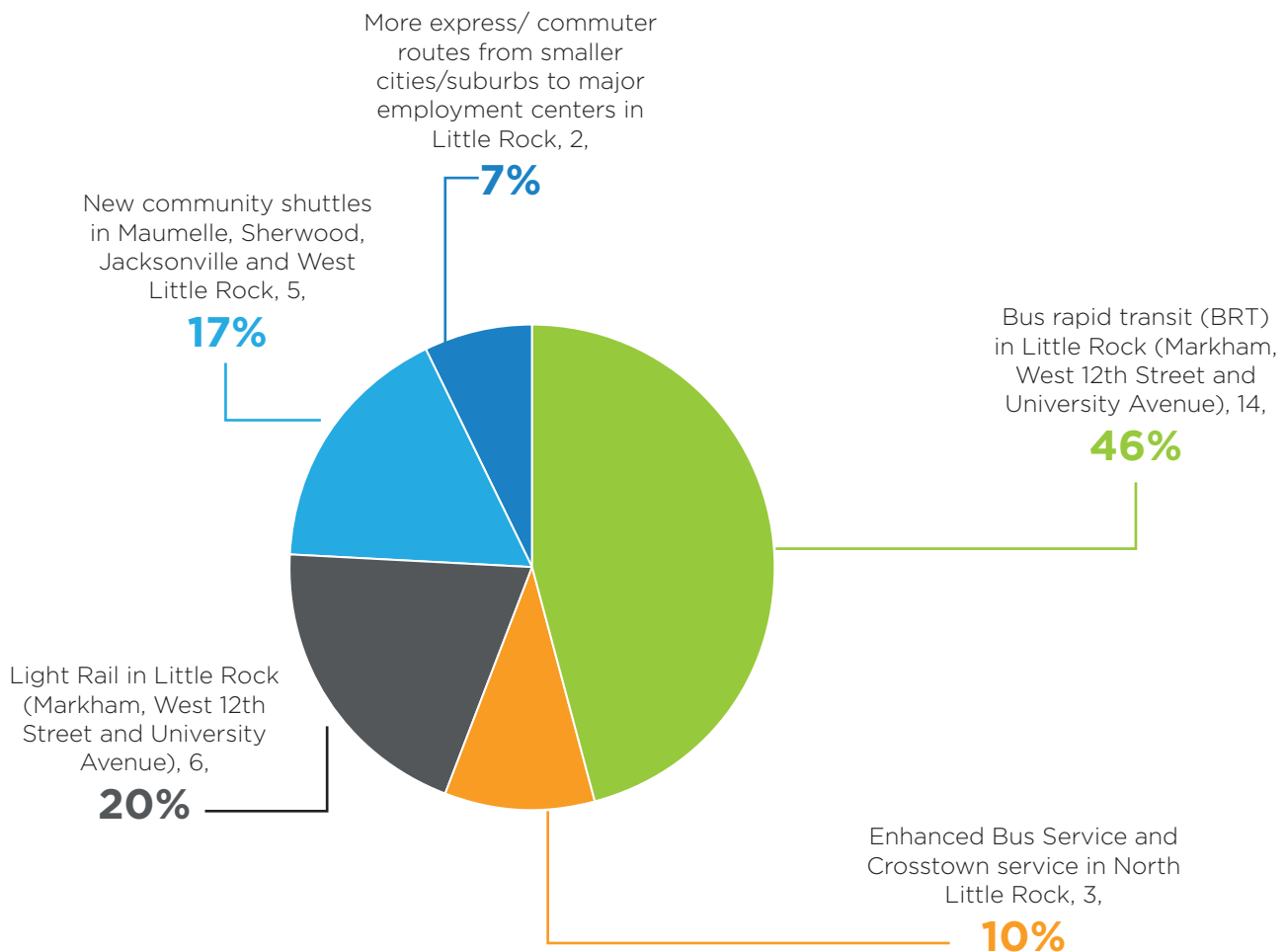
The second meeting of the Blue Ribbon Commission was conducted in May 2015.

The purpose of the meeting was to provide commission members with information about the proposed service changes and the funding requirements to implement them. Much of the discussion centered on various levels of funding that would be required to support the recommended service enhancements. The presentation also included the results of the second voter poll.

One of the key features of this meeting was a dialogue between the consulting team and Blue Ribbon Commission members, who were asked to respond in real time to questions posed by the facilitator. Their responses were recorded using electronic voting devices which registered responses on pie charts and bar graphs as part of a PowerPoint presentation.

Blue Ribbon Commission members were asked which service enhancements would be more important to them. The largest group indicated that BRT service in Little Rock would be their top priority, even though Commission members represent many communities outside of Little Rock. This was followed by light rail and then new community shuttles in Maumelle, Sherwood, Jacksonville and West Little Rock.

FIGURE 2-3: SERVICE ENHANCEMENTS FAVORED BY BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION



These responses reflect the general opinion that greater investment in Little Rock and North Little Rock is more important, overall, than greater investment in other parts of Pulaski County.

FIGURE 2-4: PREFERRED INVESTMENT BY BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION MEMBERS

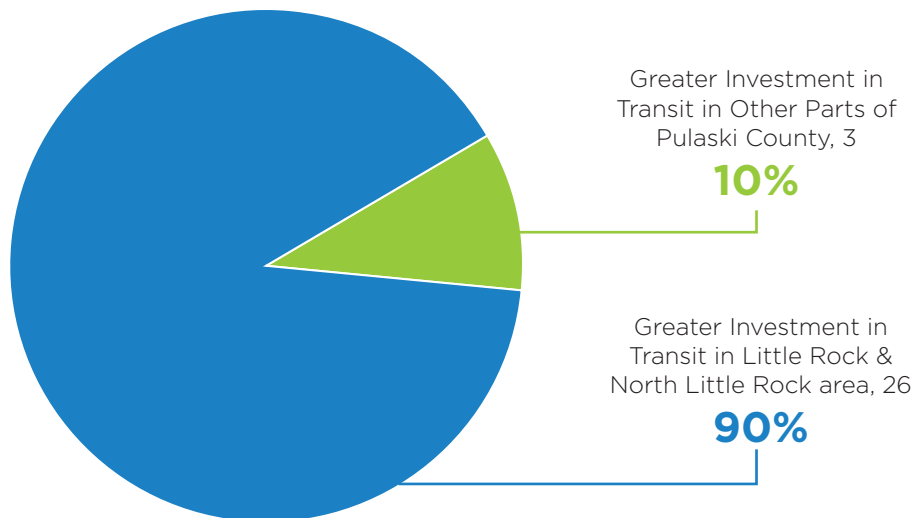
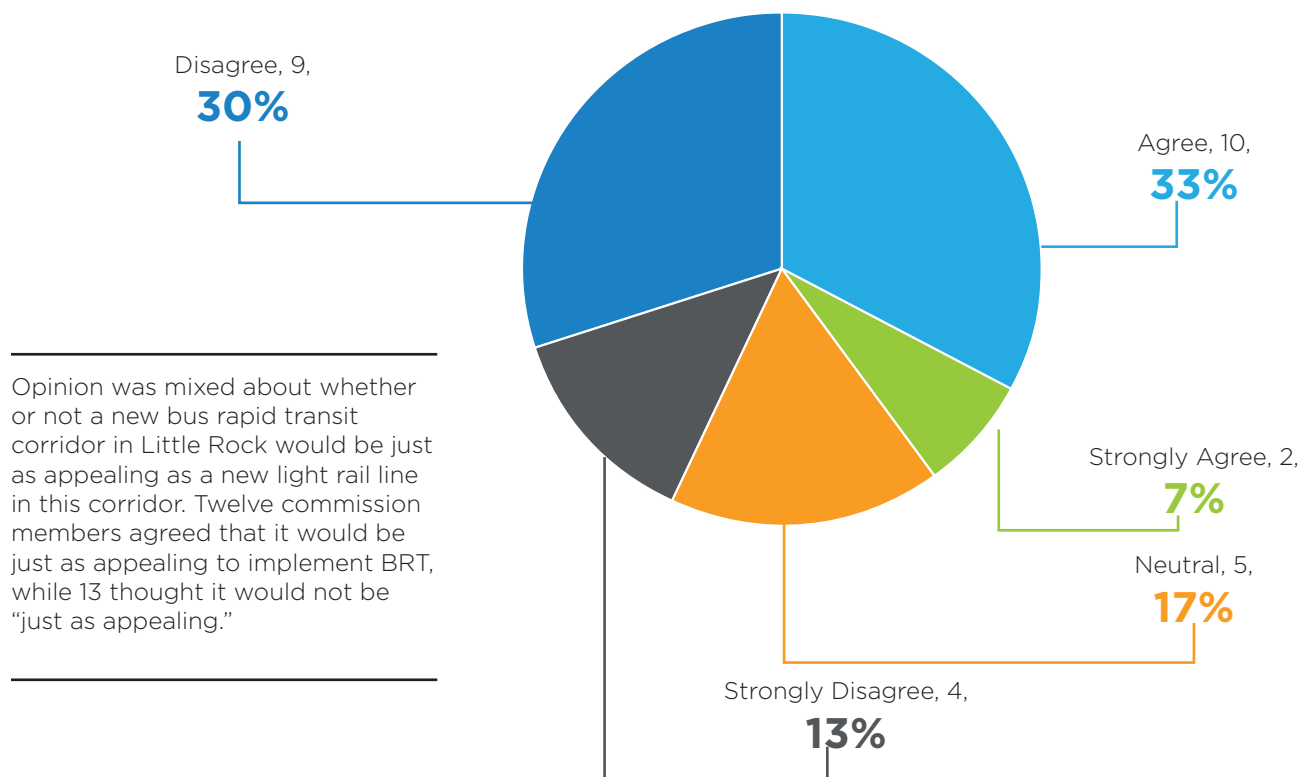
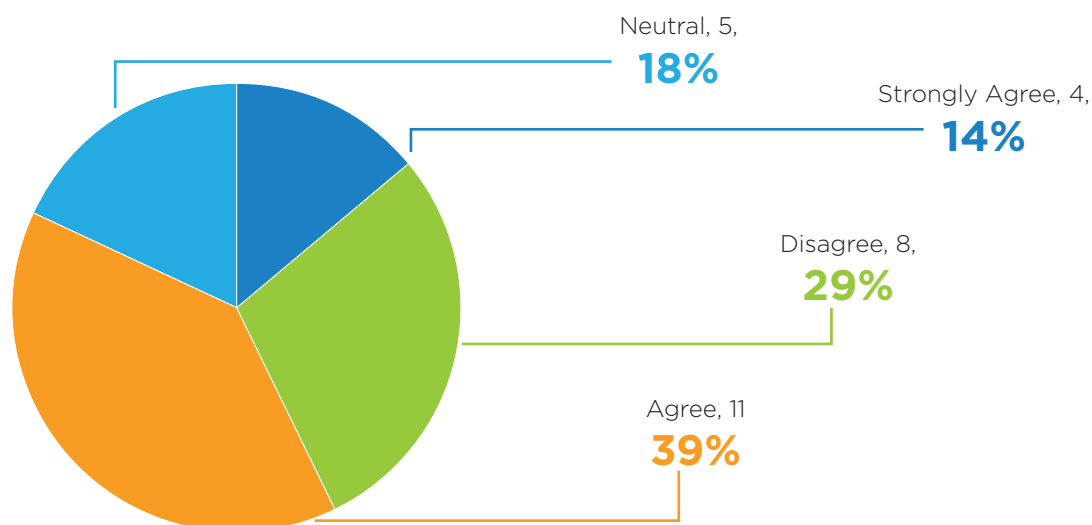


FIGURE 2-5: A NEW BRT LINE WOULD BE JUST AS APPEALING AS A NEW LIGHT RAIL LINE



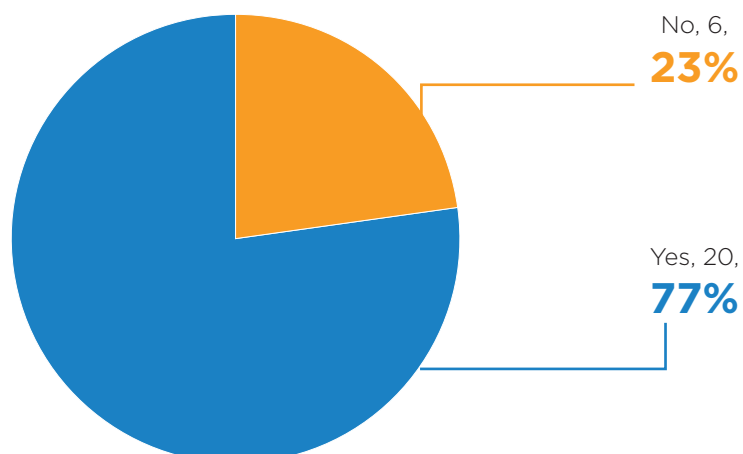
Commission members were then asked whether they agreed with the following statement: If marketed properly, a new Bus Rapid Transit line would be very appealing to voters. A majority agreed that BRT could be very appealing.

FIGURE 2-6: IF MARKETING PROPERLY, A NEW BRT LINE WOULD BE VERY APPEALING TO VOTERS



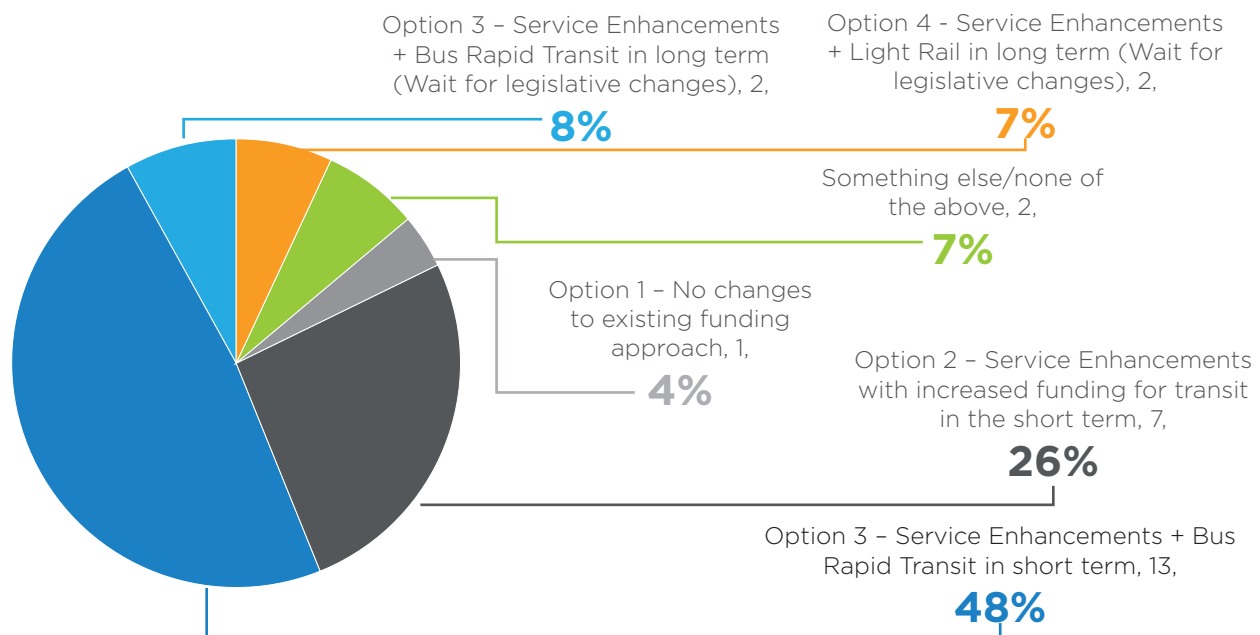
Given the uncertainty about funding, commission members were asked to respond whether they believed the existing funding partners would be obligated to continue supporting transit at the current levels, even with supplemental funding from a sales tax measure. An overwhelming majority of commission members indicated that the existing funds from participating jurisdictions were an obligation of funders, suggesting that these monies should not be replaced by funds from a tax measure but instead should be supplemented with new funds to increase service levels.

FIGURE 2-7: EXISTING FUNDING PARTNERS WOULD BE OBLIGATED TO CONTINUE SUPPORTING TRANSIT AT THE CURRENT LEVELS



Finally, commission members were asked to indicate whether they would advocate for any of several transit service options. A majority indicated they would advocate for service enhancements with BRT (the scenario adopted by the Rock Region METRO Board, as discussed in Chapter 3), with the largest group indicating they felt the enhancements should be implemented in the short term, and a minority suggesting that the enhancements should wait for legislative changes that would make it easier to expand funding for transit.

FIGURE 2-8: FOR WHICH WOULD YOU ADVOCATE?



Overall, when commission members were asked if they would personally advocate for the recommended services, a majority indicated they would.

Residents from throughout Pulaski County were interviewed by pollsters for their opinions about transit and investments in transportation.



PUBLIC OPINION POLLS

The consulting team conducted two opinion polls among registered voters in Pulaski County, when the service operated as CATA. The objectives of the first poll were to assess overall impressions of CATA service; identify top transportation priorities; and gauge voter acceptance of a possible tax increase that would fund transit investments. Similar to the first poll, the objectives of the second poll were to assess perspectives of transportation in the current community context; understand transit's role as an economic development tool; gauge perspectives of current and proposed transit services; and understand willingness to support a new sales tax and increased funding for transit.

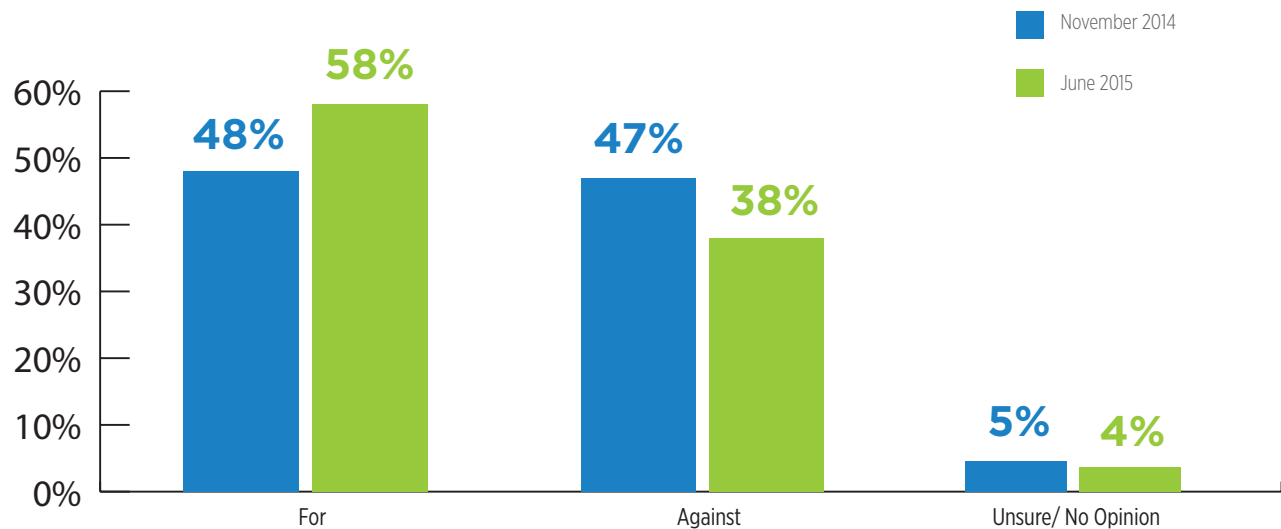
The polls were designed to ensure that the questions focused on key issues and were properly formulated to accurately assess voter opinion. Phone surveys for the first poll were conducted from November 13-17, 2014. Surveys were conducted from June 24-28, 2015 for the second poll. Call periods included both weekends and weekdays, and a combination of 70% land line and 30% wireless phone numbers were used. Quotas were required for gender, geographic location, and age. For both polls, interviews were conducted with 401 adults from the target population.

A brief summary of the results for each poll is provided below, organized by the general themes of the input.



Urban voters are most likely to support transit expansion.

FIGURE 2-9: WILLINGNESS TO SUPPORT A NEW TAX MEASURE FOR PUBLIC TRANSIT



Summary of Key Findings

- The polls indicated that there is currently a strong base of support for increasing taxes to fund additional public transportation services in Pulaski County. The November 2014 poll found 48% of respondents in “support” of a new tax. The June 2015 poll found higher levels of support with 58% of respondents in favor (Figure 2-9).
- The specific questions and formats of the polls were different, so it is difficult to make a direct comparison and conclude that “support” has grown by 10 percentage points. Nevertheless, the polls demonstrate tangible support for a sales tax to support increased and expanded services.
- Respondents believe that public transit is important in Pulaski County and additional investments in public transit are needed.
- Respondents are particularly supportive of transit in its role of improving mobility for seniors and reducing environmental impacts.
- The polls included a limited amount of testing of specific improvements or expenditures plans. A campaign effort will need to test different types of investments to develop the most attractive expenditure plan.
- Passage of any kind of funding initiative is going to require increased visibility of transit to the general public.
- METRO has a good foundation on which to build a voter outreach program, but will need to consistently demonstrate transit’s value to the growth and prosperity of the community.
- Democratic voters and those within the city limits of Little Rock and North Little Rock are most likely to be supportive of transit expansion and the taxes required to support them.
- Young people are supportive, but are also least likely to vote in a special election, and will likely require a specific focus in any future campaign activity.

Public Opinion Poll #1

General Attitudes

The opinion poll asked voters a series of questions about their general attitudes toward a number of topics in Pulaski County. As shown in Figure 2-10 and Figure 2-11, most voters are optimistic about the future, with the belief that Pulaski County is on the “right track” and that the economy will improve over the next year. Men and voters in urban districts were generally more optimistic about the economy than women and voters in rural districts.

FIGURE 2-10: OPINION ON DIRECTION OF PULASKI COUNTY

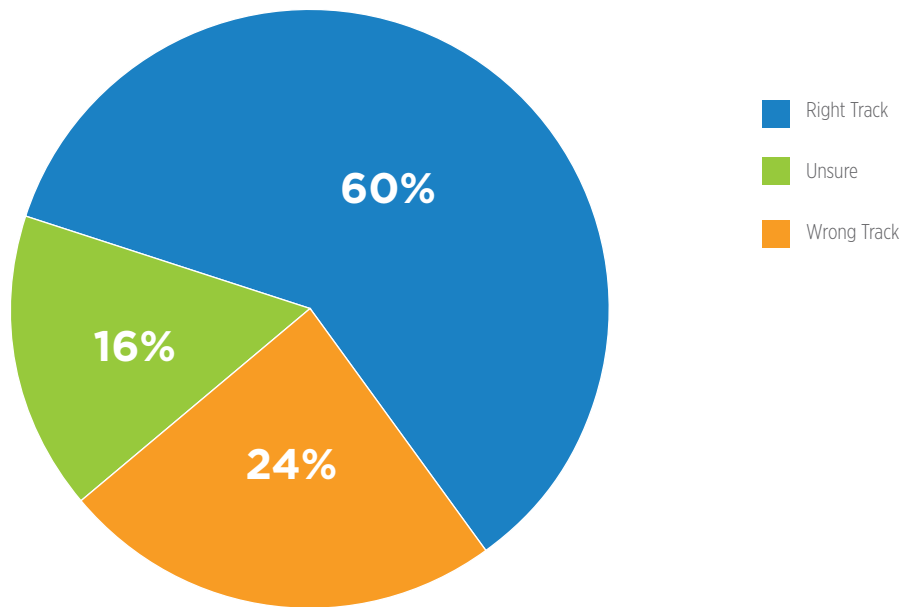
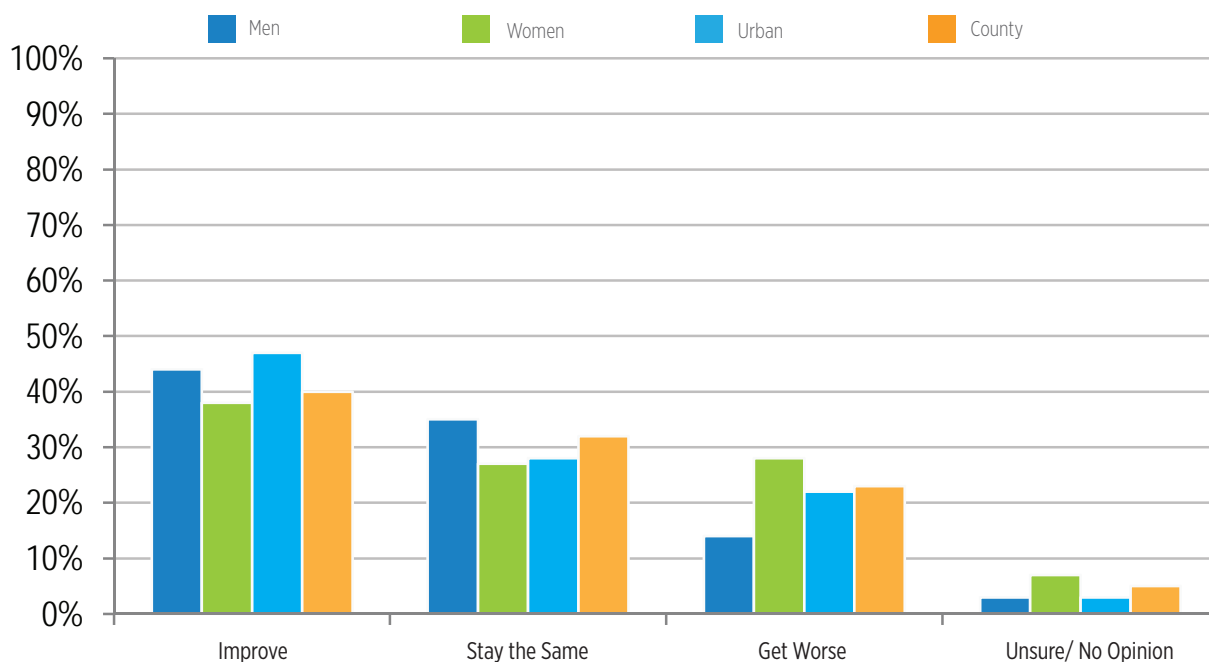


FIGURE 2-11: OPINION ON THE DIRECTION OF ECONOMY IN THE NEXT YEAR



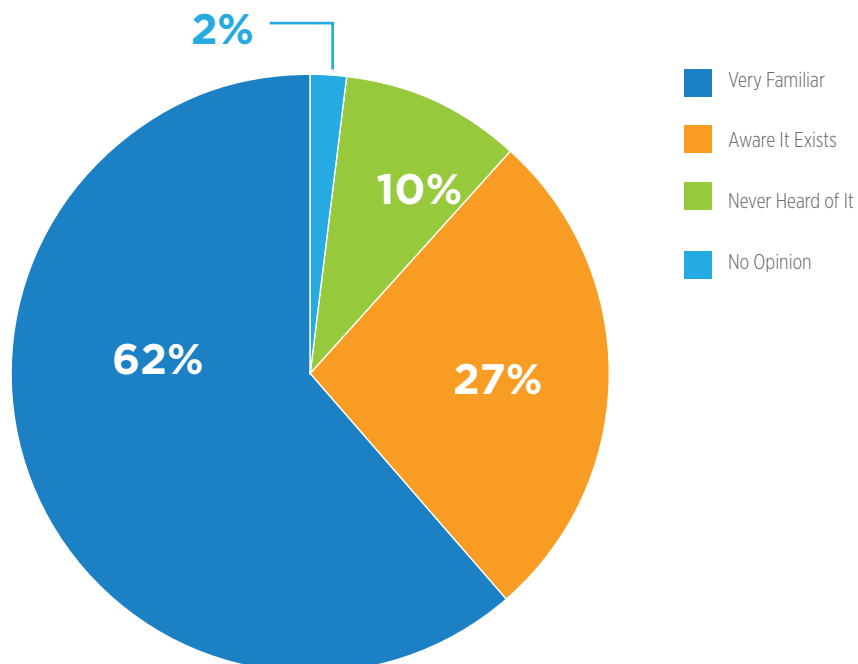
Most poll respondents were familiar with CATA. Many people have used the bus or streetcar.



Existing Transit Services

Voters were asked a series of questions about existing transit services and the role of transit in the region. Most voters were aware of CATA, and almost two-thirds of respondents were very familiar with the system (Figure 2-12). Of those, approximately 88% were from locations in Little Rock or North Little Rock.

FIGURE 2-12: LEVEL OF FAMILIARITY WITH CATA



Respondents were also asked about the quality of transit in the region and their experience with using transit. More than 60% of respondents agreed with the statement that Central Arkansas has a good quality public transportation system (Figure 2-13). Within that group, respondents in the 18-44 age cohort, women, and those living in Little Rock and North Little Rock were more likely to find transit of good quality. For example, 86% of those in Little Rock or North Little Rock strongly agreed or agreed, in contrast to only 14% of those living in Maumelle, Jacksonville, or Sherwood. Similarly, for those who currently ride the bus, almost 75% rated their experience as “excellent” or “good” (Figure 2-14).

FIGURE 2-13: LEVEL OF AGREEMENT THAT THE QUALITY OF PUBLIC TRANSIT IN CENTRAL ARKANSAS IS “GOOD”

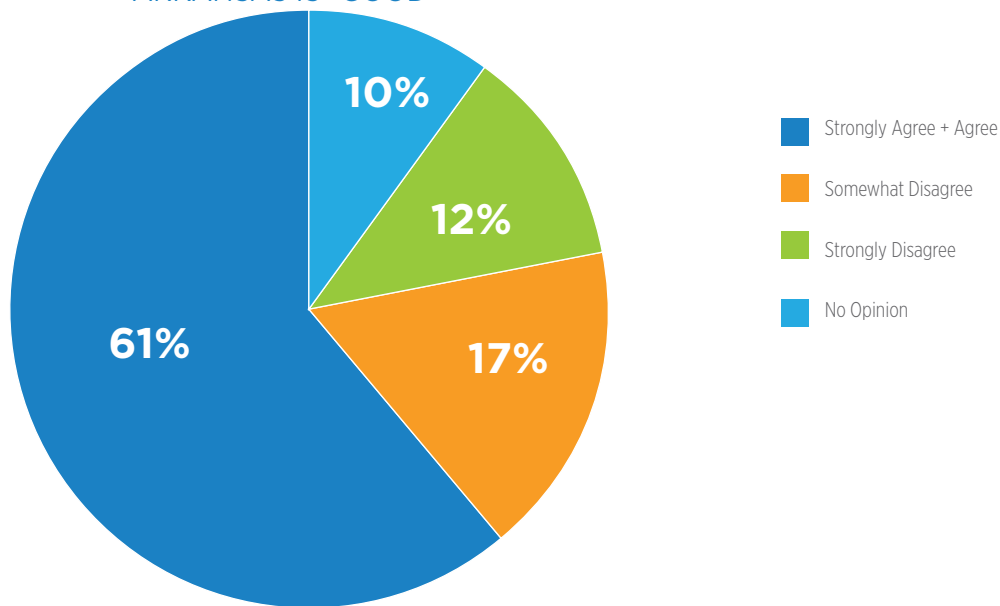
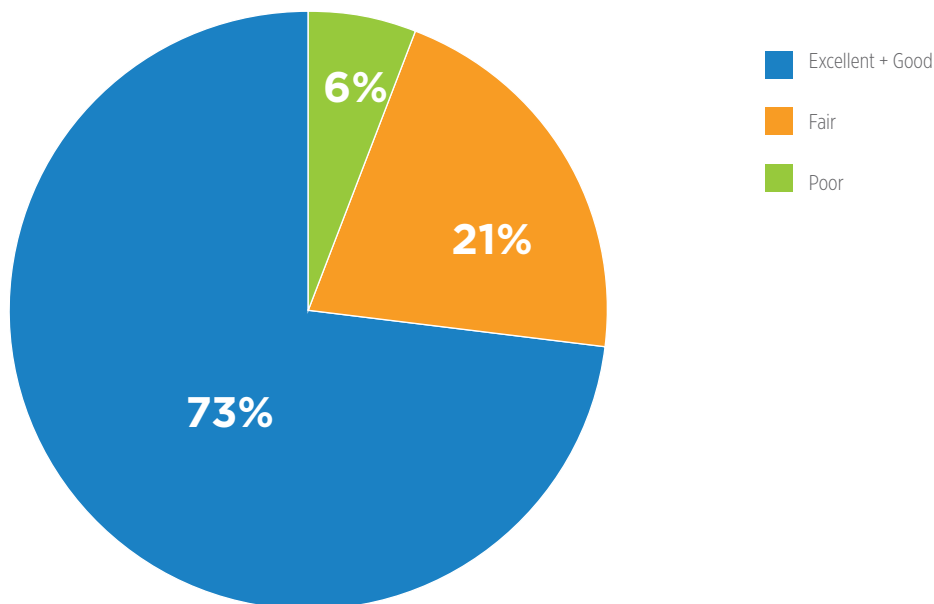


FIGURE 2-14: RATING OF BUS EXPERIENCE



While existing service received generally positive ratings, voters indicated that there were several opportunities for improvement and certain investments that would get them to ride more often. More than half of riders said that service should be increased (Figure 2-5). The improvements that would increase ridership most generally included investments that would speed up transit travel times, such as more express service (notably to the airport), on-time arrivals, and shorter wait times as a result of increased frequency (Figure 2-16). Later evening service was also prioritized.

FIGURE 2-15: OPINION ON AMOUNT OF PUBLIC TRANSIT IN CENTRAL ARKANSAS

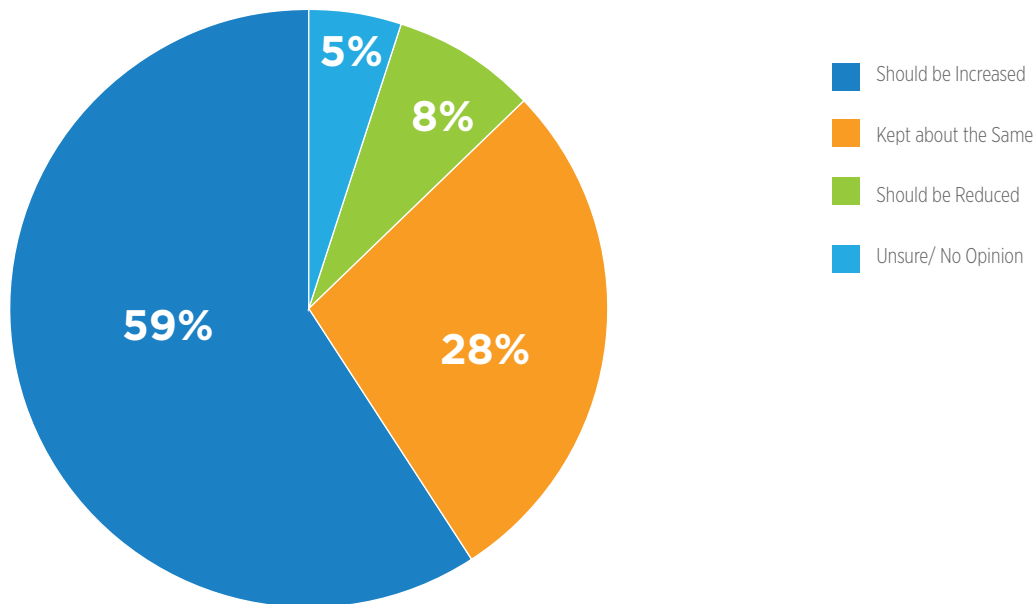
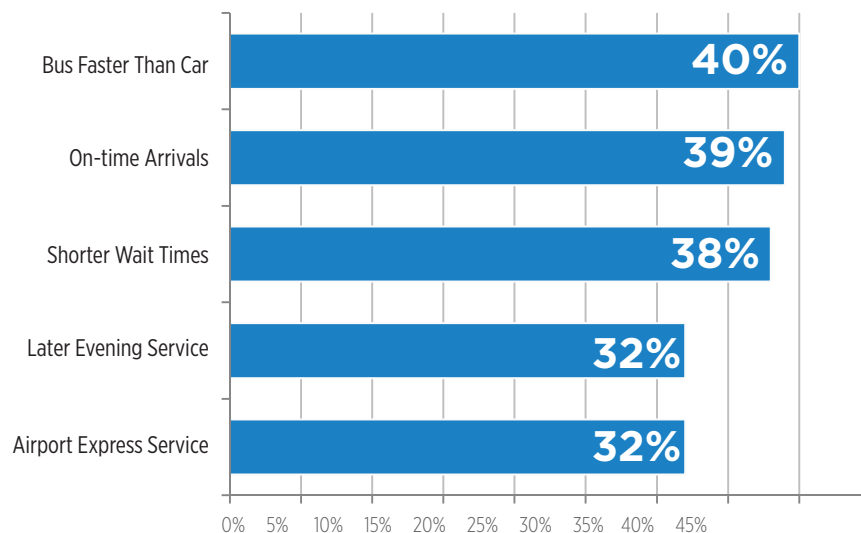
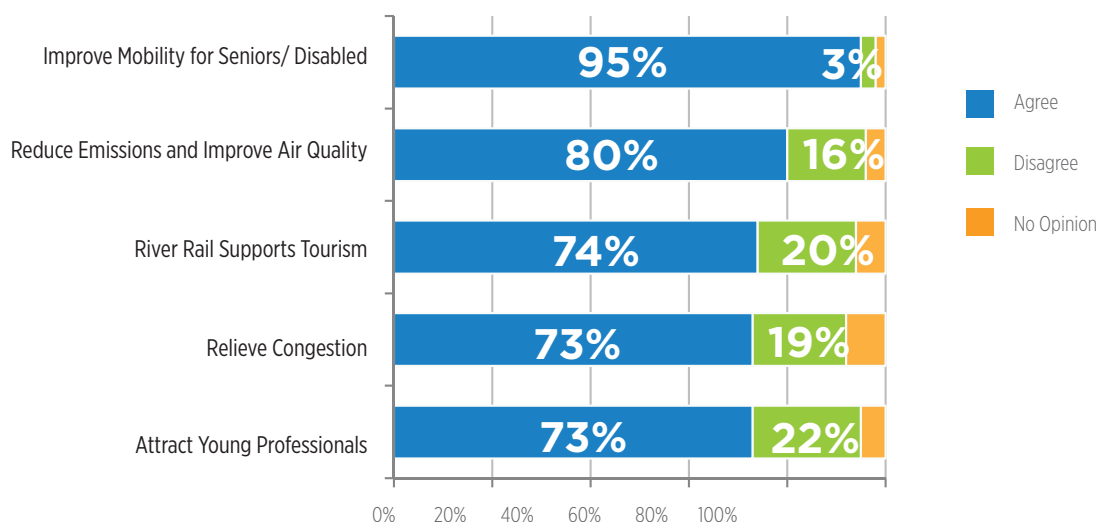


FIGURE 2-16: IMPROVEMENTS MOST LIKELY TO ENCOURAGE RESPONDENTS TO RIDE TRANSIT MORE



Finally, it is important to note that respondents agreed that transit plays an important role in the region. In particular, respondents felt strongly that transit can support regional efforts to improve mobility for seniors and the disabled, reduce emissions, attract younger professionals, facilitate tourism on the streetcar, and alleviate congestion (Figure 2-17).

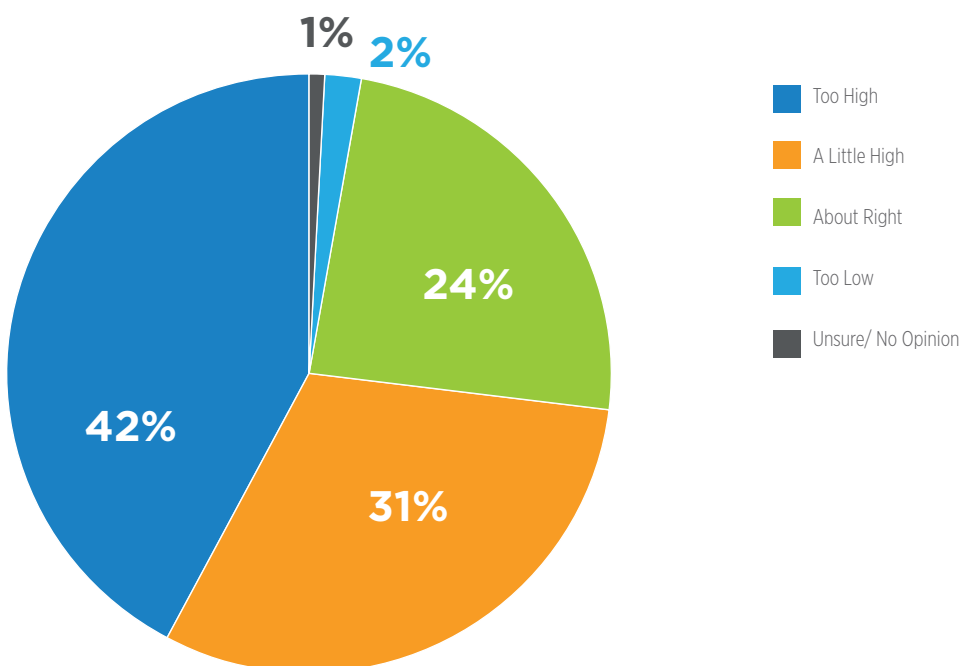
FIGURE 2-17: ROLE OF PUBLIC TRANSIT IN CENTRAL ARKANSAS



Taxes

Voters were asked about their attitudes on the current level of taxes in Pulaski County. Figure 2-18 shows that most voters believe their taxes are too high, but approximately one-third expressed that their taxes “were about right” or “too low,” a finding that was somewhat surprising. These findings suggest an absence of vehement anti-tax sentiment in the county.

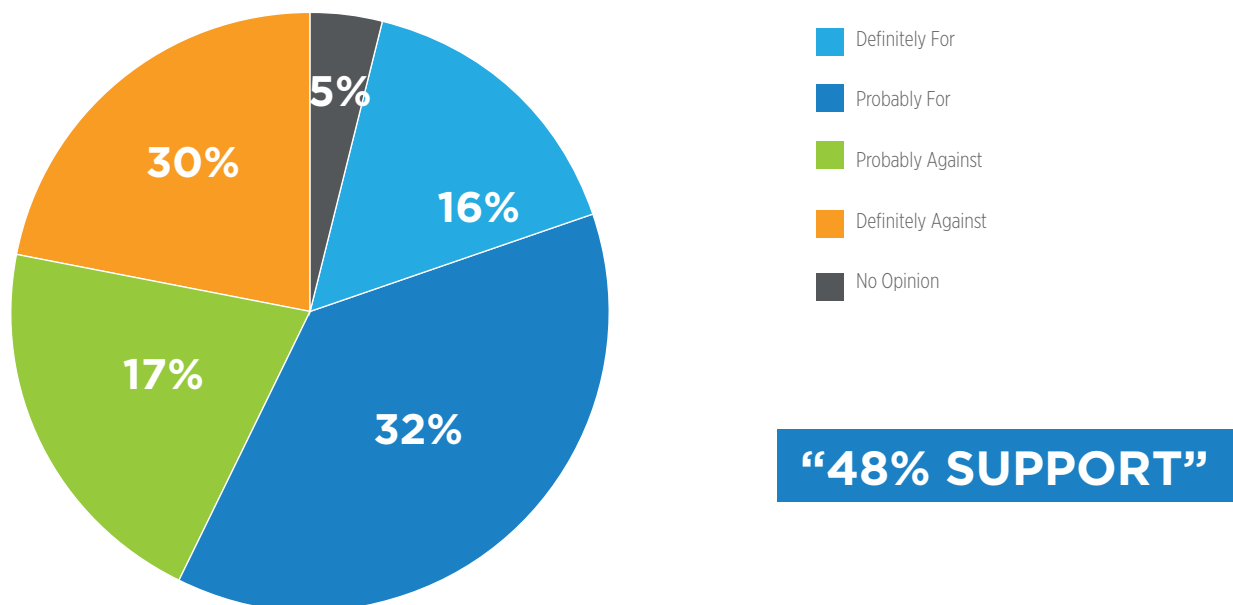
FIGURE 2-18: RESPONDENTS’ OPINION ON LEVEL OF EXISTING TAXES



Voters were also asked about their willingness to support a new tax specifically to improve public transit. As shown in Figure 2-19, almost half of respondents indicated a willingness to support such a tax. About 30% were “definitely against” a tax and another 17% were “probably against” a tax. It is important to note that no specific expenditure programs or lists of improvements were tested in this poll.

When looking at the responses by group, a few trends emerged. Key supporters of the tax include younger voters (18-34 years of age), voters 55 years or older, Hispanics, Democrats, and those living within the city limits of Little Rock and North Little Rock.

FIGURE 2-19: WILLINGNESS TO SUPPORT A PUBLIC TRANSIT TAX MEASURE (POLL #1)



Public Opinion Poll #2

Priority Issues and Importance of Transit

Respondents were first asked about the most important local issue affecting residents of Pulaski County. Respondents indicated that crime and public safety (23%) is the foremost issue in the county. The next two most important issues—jobs (and the economy) and schools—are mentioned by residents at about the same percentages, 20% and 19% respectively. Issues related to transportation were less of a priority among respondents (Figure 2-20). At the same time, when asked about the need for public transit services, 78% of respondents stated that such services were “important” and that there was a strong need for public transit (Figure 2-21).

FIGURE 2-20: MOST IMPORTANT LOCAL ISSUES

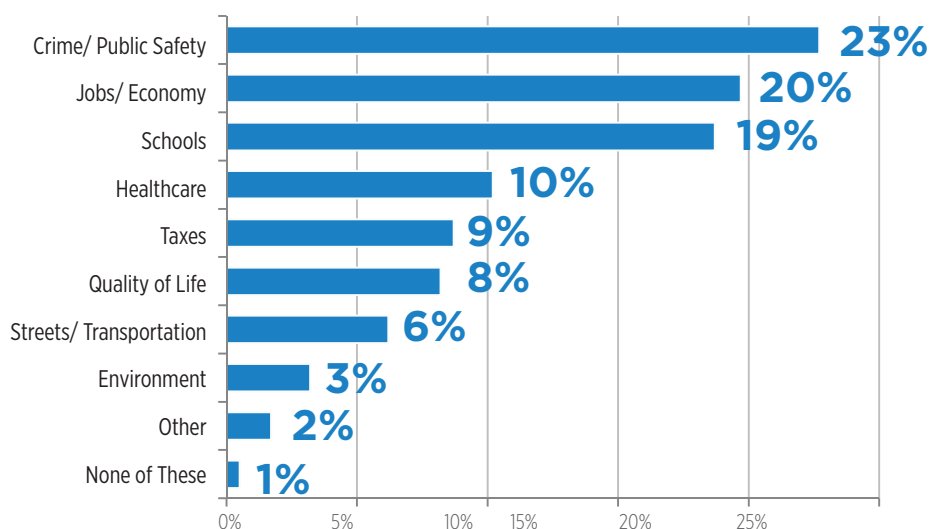
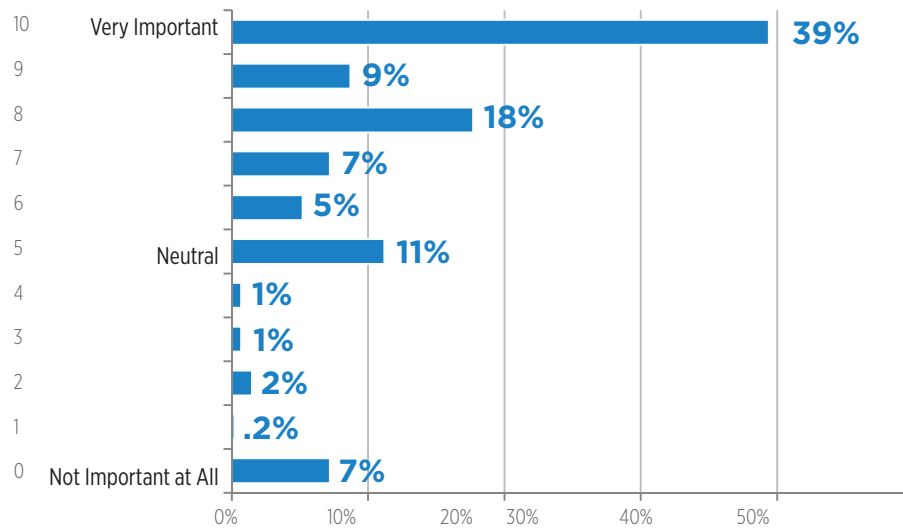
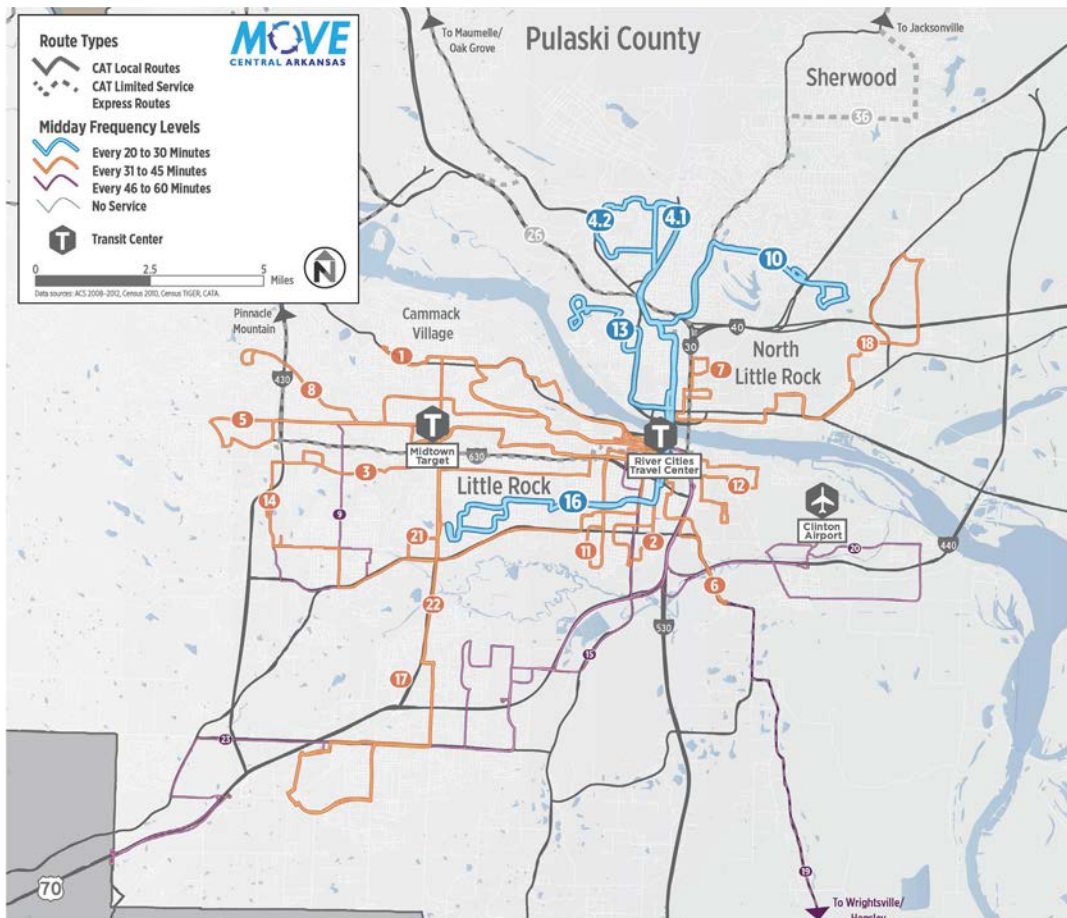


FIGURE 2-21: LEVEL OF IMPORTANCE OF CATA TRANSIT SERVICES



The poll also asked about the need for investing in additional transit services and for what purposes. Figure 2-22 shows that over 60% of respondents either “agree” or “strongly agree” that additional transit services are needed for a variety of reasons. Respondents were particularly supportive of investing in transit to improve mobility for older adults and to attract new jobs, employers, and support local businesses.



Most people agree that transit needs to provide additional services. Existing services have mostly modest frequencies.

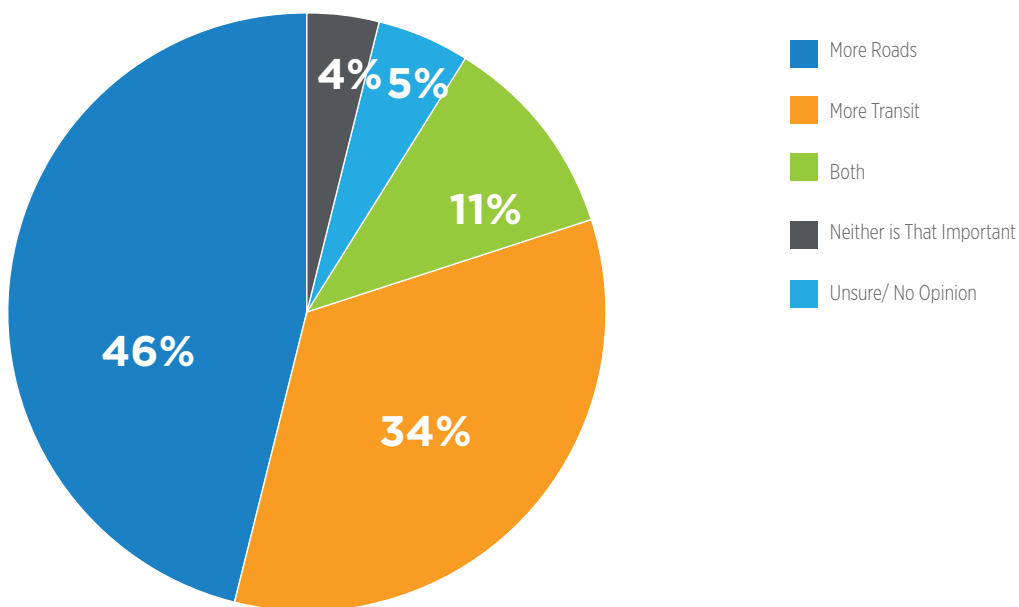
FIGURE 2-22: LEVEL OF AGREEMENT FOR REASONS TO INVEST IN MORE TRANSIT

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Unsure / No Opinion
CATA needs to provide more transportation services to help local businesses compete for jobs in the new economy.	10%	18%	48%	20%	6%
	28%		67%		
CATA needs to provide more public transportation options to attract new jobs and employers.	7%	20%	46%	23%	5%
	26%		69%		
CATA needs to provide more public transportation options to attract Millennials and young job-seekers to our area.	7%	24%	42%	22%	5%
	31%		65%		
CATA needs to provide more public transportation options to keep our young professionals in the area.	8%	26%	42%	20%	4%
	34%		62%		
CATA needs to provide more transportation options for older adults and retiree residents in the area.	5%	16%	44%	32%	3%
	21%		76%		

Priority Investments

Respondents were asked generally about how transportation resources should be spent, and when given the choice between generic categories of “roads” and “transit,” 46% stated that roads should be the focus. By contrast, 34% said transit should be the focus, while 11% said both. Only 4% said that neither is important (Figure 2-23).

FIGURE 2-23: WHAT SHOULD BE THE FOCUS OF TRANSPORTATION SPENDING?



Most residents think roads should be an investment priority. But with bike paths and other alternatives changing the way people travel in the region, transit was deemed almost as important.



Respondents were also presented with transportation projects or programs and asked to prioritize them. Across a host of projects or programs (Figure 2-24), respondents rated several as being a “high priority” issue or option. Respondents are obviously concerned about road repair and maintenance, as “Maintain Streets, Roads, and Highways” and “Improve Local Streets” received the highest priority rankings. At the same time, however, the lowest priority item was “Build More Roads,” which 31% of respondents said was a “Low Priority” or “No Priority at All.” The highest priority transit investment was “More Direct Bus Routes that Run More Frequently,” with 75% of respondents stating that it is a “medium” or “high” priority.

FIGURE 2-24: LEVEL OF PRIORITY FOR TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS/PROGRAMS

Project/Program	No Priority at All	Low Priority	Medium Priority	High Priority	Don't Know
Build More Roads	9%	22%	34%	34%	1%
Widen Existing Roads	6%	12%	33%	47%	2%
Expand Commuter Hour and Midday Express Bus Routes	5%	20%	33%	36%	6%
Maintain Streets, Roads, and Highways	1%	2%	11%	84%	1%
Reduce Traffic on I-30 and I-40	5%	11%	26%	53%	5%
Start BRT Service	6%	23%	37%	30%	5%
More Direct Bus Routes that Run More Frequently	6%	17%	30%	45%	2%
Start Bus Service Earlier and Run Later	4%	17%	33%	41%	5%
I-30 Bridge Replacement Project	4%	13%	26%	51%	6%
Improve Local Streets	1%	5%	22%	70%	2%

Taxes

Respondents were asked about the willingness to support a sales tax increase for transportation if presented with that option. Respondents were also asked a follow-up question to determine the intensity of their support or opposition to a sales tax. Figure 2-25 shows that 58% of respondents are “probably for” or “definitely for” a sales tax increase. Conversely, those respondents against a tax are a sizeable group as well (at 38%); yet, the intensity of opposition is softer than that of those who support a tax, as those “definitely against a tax” (16%) are six percentage points less than those “against a tax” (22%).

The poll also sought to understand what might make voters more or less likely to support a tax (Figure 2-26). A number of different facts and messages about the tax were read and respondents were asked how that might influence their decision on the tax. All of the messages were shown to increase the likelihood to vote for a tax, but the message that seemed to be most influential was that additional investments in transit would grow the economy and reduce environmental impacts. The message that a new tax would add shuttles in Maumelle, Sherwood and Jacksonville appeared to be the least likely to increase support for a new tax.

FIGURE 2-25: WILLINGNESS TO SUPPORT A PUBLIC TRANSIT TAX MEASURE (POLL #2)

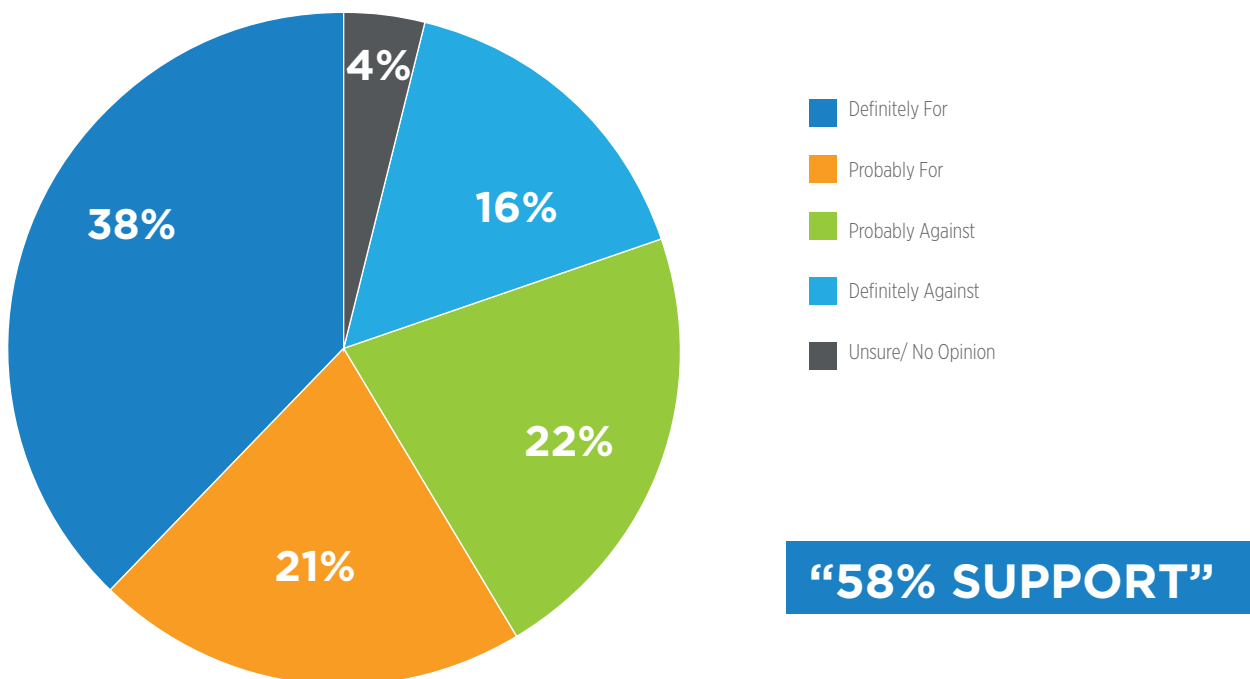


FIGURE 2-26: LIKELIHOOD TO SUPPORT PUBLIC TRANSIT TAX BASED ON CERTAIN MESSAGES

Type of Improvement	Less Likely	More Likely	Unsure / Don't Know
Funding for transportation service across our communities is largely paid for with local tax dollars - over 12 million dollars annually. This level of funding limits what public transportation services can be provided. Increased funding would allow for additional bus routes, more and better bus shelters for passengers, and new buses. Knowing this information, would you be more likely or less likely to support an increased sales tax?	35%	57%	7%
An increase in local funds would improve existing bus service with more routes providing direct connections across the area without traveling to downtown. Knowing this information would you be more likely or less likely to support an increased sales tax?	37%	56%	7%
An increase in local funds would introduce new community shuttles or circulators in Maumelle, Sherwood and Jacksonville. Knowing this information would you be more likely or less likely to support an increased sales tax?	41%	53%	6%
Upgrading the existing public transportation equipment and investing in new equipment will allow transit to grow our economy while reducing environmental impacts. Knowing this, would you be more or less likely to support an increased tax?	34%	61%	6%

The importance of better transit service to and from Jacksonville and other smaller cities was included among the survey investment priorities.



[3]

SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

As previous sections of this report have highlighted, this is a prime opportunity to improve transit service in Central Arkansas. Given the nationwide changes in travel patterns and methods, as well as the opinions expressed by various stakeholders, public transit is a valuable community asset and critical to enhancing the quality of life and supporting economic growth. However, stakeholders expressed concerns about existing public transit service in Central Arkansas, desiring more frequent service, more passenger amenities, and faster, more direct service.

With these priorities in mind, a comprehensive transit service scenario was developed, drawing together key service improvement strategies that meet the needs of transit riders in a financially feasible manner. These improvements include route alignment changes, new service types, the elimination of unproductive service, and changes to the hours and days of service. Moreover, this scenario features the creation of BRT lines along key transit corridors, establishing new signature projects that would demonstrate the innovative thinking of the rebranded transit agency.

DESIGN APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The consulting team worked closely with transit agency planning staff and a broad array of stakeholders to develop several transit improvement scenarios that would address transit riders' needs while considering various assumptions about available funding. The information gathered and analyzed on the existing state of the system identified inefficiencies in the overall system, which were addressed in all transit scenarios. Each scenario incorporated these service changes but with different financial constraints based on potential revenue sources.

These scenarios were:

- **Scenario 1: Modest Changes** was a nearly cost-neutral option that featured relatively minor modifications to the existing network. Changes were designed to address inefficiencies in the existing network and to better align service with demand. Some routes were simplified, eliminating duplicative coverage or combining them to reduce the need to transfer between routes.
- **Scenario 2: Service Enhancements** built on the changes included in Scenario 1, but featured improved frequencies and new services that could be established with revenue generated from a dedicated sales tax that would replace existing funding provided by METRO's funding partners. The scenario also included significantly expanded flex services, community shuttles, and new fixed-route services, including new cross-town routes and a new express route between West Little Rock and downtown.
- **Scenarios 3+4: Service Enhancements with BRT or light rail** considered how services could be enhanced by retaining existing local funding in addition to a new dedicated sales

tax. In addition to the changes proposed by Scenarios 1 and 2, Scenario 3 includes enhanced transit corridors featuring BRT, while Scenario 4 features light rail on the same corridor.

Service design guidelines provide a general framework for designing, scheduling, and operating transit services. The guidelines not only include service characteristics such as frequency and span of service, but also include the Service Design Principles.

Service Design Principles

- **Alignment:** The specific alignments of transit routes should be as direct as possible, in order to minimize travel time for passengers while maintaining access. Routes should serve major destinations, besides downtown Little Rock. In addition, multiple routes should not operate in the same corridor unless their schedules are staggered to maximize service frequency.
- **Stop location and spacing:** Services that emphasize speed (e.g. Bus Rapid Transit) should have fewer stops, while services that emphasize accessibility should have more frequent stops.
- **Scheduling:** Routes should be consistent in both directions and operate at regular intervals (headways) to make it easy for transit riders to know when and where to catch the bus. The hours and days of service for each route should correspond to the needs of transit users when possible.
- **Amenities:** Seating, lighting, informational signage, trash receptacles, and other elements should be provided at transit stops for the convenience, comfort, and security of pedestrians and transit patrons. This principle resonates strongly with the concerns heard from the Central Arkansas community, who felt that the existing transit service's amenities were sparse and substantially inadequate.
- **Wayfinding:** Signage should be placed at key locations indicating transit stops, routes, and connections with other key destinations and corridors. These design measures are intended to help transit riders and other travelers orient themselves and "find their way."
- **Multimodal connections:** Routes will be designed in such a way to facilitate connections among and between routes and other forms of transportation, such as walking and biking.

METRO Links paratransit would continue to operate as it does in the proposed service scenario.

PREFERRED SCENARIO

After consultation with METRO staff and large numbers of stakeholders weighing the merits of each scenario, Scenario 3 was selected as the Preferred Scenario, providing the most cost-effective level of transit improvement with respect to the level of funding available. The estimated annual operating cost for this scenario is \$28,000,000.



METRO Links

Under the Preferred Scenario, Rock Region METRO would not make any changes to the existing Links program. This service providing transportation to people with disabilities will continue to operate as it currently does. In the future, METRO may consider integrating Links with the flex routes and community shuttles recommended under this Preferred Scenario.

METRO Streetcar

Under this Preferred Scenario, the METRO Streetcar will continue to operate as it is currently structured. It is generally well-received by the community, particularly for the role it plays in attracting tourists and supporting economic growth in the downtown area. In the future, METRO may consider establishing connections or transfer points between the streetcar and the updated transit services proposed under the Preferred Scenario to facilitate transfers and enhance service.

Residents and visitors enjoy traveling on METRO Streetcar vehicles.



Fixed Route Service

Route Classification

All of the scenarios, including the Preferred one, restructured existing routes into a tiered classification, grouping services with similar characteristics. Not only does this reorganization allow METRO to focus limited resources on higher performing corridors, but it also assists transit rider comprehension of the transit services available across the system within a given “tier” of service. In this way, the transit system becomes more efficient and effective in its operations as well as management.

Certain corridors within the Central Arkansas region have population, employment, land use, and existing transit ridership characteristics that indicate the potential for high ridership. Other corridors support more modest service levels, and as a result have corresponding levels of service, including weekday-only service and demand-response service. These corridors are grouped accordingly within each of the seven service classifications, matching service levels with service demand. These are described in the table below.

FIGURE 3-1: SERVICE CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

Service Classification	Service Characteristics
Enhanced	<p>High-frequency, high seating capacity rapid transit service linking the region's top economic engines / activity center (Downtown, Capitol, Midtown, hospitals, UALR).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum weekday service frequency: 15 minutes peak / 20 minutes off-peak • Minimum weekday span of service: 16 hours per day • Minimum service days: Daily (with adjusted weekend service levels) • Technology: Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)
Tier I	<p>Fixed-route service along corridors with highest ridership potential.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum weekday service frequency: 30 minutes peak / 30 minutes off-peak • Minimum weekday span of service: 14 hours per day • Minimum service days: Daily (with adjusted weekend service levels) • Technology: 40 ft. transit bus
Tier II	<p>Fixed-route service along corridors with moderate ridership potential.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum weekday service frequency: 30 minutes peak / 60 minutes off-peak • Minimum weekday span of service: 14 hours per day • Minimum service days: Daily (with adjusted weekend service levels) • Technology: 35-40 ft. transit bus
Tier III	<p>Fixed-route service along corridors with potential to support baseline level service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum weekday service frequency: 60 minutes peak / 60 minutes off-peak • Minimum weekday span of service: 12 hours per day • Minimum service days: Daily • Technology: 30-35 ft. transit bus
Flex	<p>On-call service for areas with limited ridership potential.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum weekday span of service: 12 hours per day • Minimum service days: Weekdays only • Technology: Van-based cutaway bus
Community Shuttle	<p>Local fixed-route or on-call circulators providing baseline service to suburban communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum weekday span of service: 12 hours per day • Minimum service days: Weekdays only • Technology: Van-based cutaway bus
Express	<p>Commuter-focused service connecting suburban communities with Little Rock employment hubs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum weekday span of service: 7 hours per day (peak periods + one mid-day trip) • Minimum service days: Weekdays only • Technology: 40 ft. transit bus or commuter coach

Proposed Changes to Existing Routes

Under the Preferred Scenario, this reorganization of transit service covers a series of adjustments, new services, and elimination of unnecessary or redundant services. Several routes will run more frequently, especially during peak commute hours. Hours and days of service for each route have been adjusted in order to better align service with demand, and encourage ridership. Route alignment was also adjusted in order to provide more direct travel, making transit faster and more reliable.

New Service

Several new fixed route services were established, including two BRT corridors that will connect downtown, midtown, and UALR, running along Markham Street, West 12th Street and University Avenue. Other new services include two cross-town routes to create elements of a grid system, facilitating more direct travel to key destinations. This scenario also establishes three community shuttles for the Maumelle, Jacksonville, and Sherwood areas, and creates “flex” zones that provide on-demand transit service.

Eliminated Service

Due to new service or realigned routes, redundant services have been eliminated.

- Route 8 was eliminated, with its service area covered by Routes 1 and 21.
- Route 11 was eliminated, with its service area covered by Routes 2 and 14.

- Route 15 was eliminated, with its service area covered by Route 22.
- Route 12 has been replaced by a new flex route service in East Little Rock.

More detailed descriptions of proposed changes to each individual route follow.

Proposed New Services

Enhanced/BRT

This tier of transit service consists of high-frequency and high-seating-capacity BRT service along Capitol Avenue, Markham Street, 12th Street, and University Avenue. These routes are intended to provide frequent, reliable transit service in key corridors to support economic development and enhance quality of life for Central Arkansas residents and visitors alike. This type of rapid transit service represents a long-term investment on the part of Rock Region METRO, attracting new riders and stimulating private sector development and investment along the corridor in ways that traditional bus service often cannot. Much like the METRO Streetcar, these BRT corridors will help transform the western part of downtown Little Rock.

Associated with these benefits are various capital improvements, including construction of transit hubs in the midtown area and UALR, with multiple bus bays and enhanced passenger amenities, including real-time next-bus arrival information. Better amenities will be throughout the corridor as well, with improved sidewalks, seating, signage, and information.

FIGURE 3-2: ENHANCED (BRT) SERVICES

Proposed Route	Description	Service Details			Benefits
		Day	Hours of Service	Frequency	
E1	Establish bus rapid transit corridor between downtown and midtown	Weekdays	16	15-minute peak, 20-minute off-peak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will provide service in line with levels of demand and ridership • Will stimulate economic development • Establish an iconic project for the transit agency
		Saturdays	14	Every 20 minutes	
		Sundays	14	Every 30 minutes	
E2	Establish bus rapid transit corridor between midtown and UALR	Weekdays	16	15-minute peak, 20-minute off-peak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will provide service in line with levels of demand of ridership • Will stimulate economic development • Establish an iconic project for the transit agency
		Saturdays	14	Every 20 minutes	
		Sundays	14	Every 30 minutes	

Tier I Services

This tier of transit service consists of several fixed transit routes serving corridors with the highest ridership potential. Routes that pass through midtown and UALR, such as 3 and 14, will connect to new transit hubs established by the new Enhanced BRT service. These transit hubs will provide a better passenger experience and facilitate transfers between services.

FIGURE 3-3: TIER I SERVICES

Proposed Route	Description	Service Details			Benefits
		Day	Hours of Service	Frequency	
3 – Baptist Medical Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service between downtown and midtown replaced by routes E1 and E2 Remaining route serves midtown, Shackleford Road, Walmart and UALR 	Weekdays	14	Every 30 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will provide service in line with levels of demand of ridership Will connect route with major destinations and support new transit hubs
		Saturdays	13	Every hour	
		Sundays	12	Every hour	
5 – West Markham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service between downtown and midtown replaced by routes E1 and E2 Remaining route serves Markham between midtown and Bowman Rd. Walmart 	Weekdays	14	20-minute peak, 30-minute off-peak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will provide service in line with levels of demand of ridership Will connect route with major destinations and support new transit hubs
		Saturdays	14	Every 30 minutes	
		Sundays	14	Every hour	
10 – McCain Mall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> McCain Mall circulation is replaced with enhanced amenities on McCain Blvd. and a shorter loop through Walmart/ Baptist Hospital 	Weekdays	14	20-minute peak, 30-minute off-peak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will maximize the potential for increased ridership
		Saturdays	14	Every 30 minutes	
		Sundays	14	Every hour	
13 – Pulaski Technical College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stops within one block each other are consolidated Overall streamlining of route alignment 	Weekdays	14	20-minute peak, 30-minute off-peak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will offer more predictable schedules in line with demand for service Will increase speed and improve on-time performance
		Saturdays	13	Every hour	
		Sundays	12	Every hour	
14 – Rosedale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No longer serves area west of University Ave. (covered by Route 3) Remaining route connects downtown with UALR Stops within one block each other are consolidated 	Weekdays	16	20-minute peak, 30-minute off-peak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will offer more predictable schedules in line with demand for service Will connect route with major destinations and support new transit hubs Will increase speed and improve on-time performance
		Saturdays	14	Every 30 minutes	
		Sundays	14	Every hour	

Tier II Services – 4, 16, 18

This tier of transit service consists of several fixed routes serving corridors with moderate ridership potential. As such, service is less frequent than those at the Tier I level, but generally operates at 30- to 60-minute headways. Some routes have been modified in order to provide more direct, reliable transit service with expanded hours of operation.

FIGURE 3-4: TIER II SERVICES

Proposed Route	Description	Service Details			Benefits
		Day	Hours of Service	Frequency	
1 – Pulaski Heights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides service that was formerly covered by Route 8 Route is extended to Napa Valley Dr. 	Weekdays	15	30-minute peak, 1-hour off-peak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offers more predictable schedules in line with demand for service Serves additional retail destinations and high-density housing
		Saturdays	13	Every hour	
		Sundays	12	Every hour	
2 – South Main	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stops within one block of each other are consolidated Provides service formerly covered by Route 11 	Weekdays	15	30-minute peak, 1-hour off-peak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offers more predictable schedules in line with demand for service Will increase speed and improve on-time performance Enables more direct travel between transportation corridors
		Saturdays	13	Every hour	
		Sundays	12	Every hour	
4 – Levy/Amboy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serves 47th St and Parkway Dr as part of a new cross-town route to McCain Mall/ Walmart via Kroger at Camp Robinson Rd. (CT1) Service extended by one mile along Camp Robinson Rd to Donovan Briley Blvd. 	Weekdays	15	30-minute peak, 1-hour off-peak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enables more direct cross-town travel in north Little Rock Offers more predictable schedules in line with demand for transit service Serves additional high-density housing
		Saturdays	13	Every hour	
		Sundays	12	Every hour	
16 – UALR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides bi-directional service that serves a new transit hub at UALR 	Weekdays	15	30-minute peak, 1-hour off-peak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will offer more predictable schedules in line with demand for service Will increase speed and improve on-time performance
		Saturdays	13	Every hour	
		Sundays	12	Every hour	
18 – McAlmont	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serves East Broadway instead of Sam Evans No longer covers area north of Emily St. (covered by new on-call transit service) 	Weekdays	15	30-minute peak, 1-hour off-peak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishes a more focused, productive transit service route Offers more predictable schedules in line with demand for service
		Saturdays	13	Every hour	
		Sundays	12	Every hour	

Service recommendations prioritize more direct access to McCain Mall from locations in North Little Rock.



Tier III Services

This tier of service consists of fixed routes that provide a basic level of transit service. As such, these routes run hourly, with 15 hours of service every weekday. This tier also includes the creation of the new cross-town bus routes, enabling more connections among transit services and providing more efficient coverage of Central Arkansas. These services create opportunities to encourage transfers outside of downtown Little Rock; smaller transit hubs or “super-stops” can be developed at key transfer and boarding locations to accommodate more passengers and provide enhanced amenities.

FIGURE 3-5: TIER III SERVICES

Proposed Route	Description	Service Details			Benefits
		Day	Hours of Service	Frequency	
CT1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishes new cross-town route from Parkway Dr to McCain Mall/ Walmart along 47th St and McCain Blvd via Kroger at Camp Robinson Rd. 	Weekdays	15	Every hour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creates more cross-town connections with other transit routes, which enables more direct travel to key destinations
		Saturdays	12	Every hour	
		Sundays	12	Every hour	
CT2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishes new cross-town route from VA Hospital and Pulaski Tech to McCain Mall/Walmart along Pershing Blvd, JFK Dr, and McCain Blvd 	Weekdays	15	Every hour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creates more cross-town connections with other transit routes, which enables more direct travel to key destinations
		Saturdays	12	Every hour	
		Sundays	12	Every hour	
6 – Granite Mountain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extends current route to Granite Mountain Circle 	Weekdays	15	Every hour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offers more predictable schedules in line with demand for transit service Establishes a more focused, productive transit service route Serves additional high-density housing
		Saturdays	13	Every hour	
		Sundays	12	Every hour	
7 – East 9 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serves Main St and Maple St instead of Olive St 	Weekdays	15	Every hour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will offer more predictable schedules in line with demand for service Establishes a more focused, productive transit service route
		Saturdays	13	Every hour	
		Sundays	12	Every hour	
9 – West Central/ Barrow Rd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extends route to Bowman Rd No longer serves Colonel Glenn Rd (covered partly by Route 14) 	Weekdays	15	Every hour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides transit service to key destinations to increase ridership Establishes a more focused, productive transit service route
		Saturdays	12	Every hour	
		Sundays	12	Every hour	
17 – Mabelvale/ Downtown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connects UALR and Walmart via Baseline Rd Crosses I-30 at Chicot Rd Serves neighborhoods south of I-30 No longer connects UALR with downtown (covered by E1 and E2) 	Weekdays	15	Every hour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will provide service in line with levels of demand of ridership Serves high-density housing along Chicot Rd Offers more predictable schedules in line with demand for service Supports new transit hub at UALR
		Saturdays	12	Every hour	
		Sundays	12	Every hour	
20 – Airport/ College Station	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides service between downtown and airport 	Weekdays	15	Every hour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishes a more focused, productive transit service route
		Saturdays	12	Every hour	
		Sundays	12	Every hour	

21 – University Avenue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides service between downtown and midtown transit hubs Extends service to Mississippi Ave (formerly covered by Routes 1 and 8) No longer connects midtown and UALR (covered by E1 and E2) 	Weekdays	15	Every hour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will provide service in line with levels of demand of ridership Establishes a more focused, productive transit service route
		Saturdays	13	Every hour	
		Sundays	12	Every hour	
22 – Mabelvale/ Midtown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connects UALR and Walmart via Baseline Rd Provides service east of University Ave, including Lancaster Rd Serves neighborhoods south of I-30 No longer connects downtown and UALR (covered by E1 and E2) 	Weekdays	15	Every hour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serves additional high-density housing Will offer more predictable schedules in line with demand for service
		Saturdays	13	Every hour	
		Sundays	12	Every hour	
23 – Baseline/ Southwest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No changes to alignment 	Weekdays	15	Every hour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will offer more predictable schedules in line with demand for service
		Saturdays	12	Every hour	
		Sundays	12	Every hour	



Express Service – 19, 25, 26, 36, WLR Express

This tier of service consists of commuter-focused transit service connecting suburban communities with employment hubs in Little Rock. As such, there is no weekend service, but there is at least one midday trip on each route to allow for commuting flexibility or for people to make non-commute trips for a few hours of shopping or a medical appointment. A park-and-ride location that can also serve as an enhanced transit shelter will be developed for each of the express services. Existing parking facilities will be used as much as possible, in order to take advantage of existing spaces that are typically under-utilized during traditional commuting hours. Park-and-ride facilities paired with Express routes will expand the potential ridership market for each route.

FIGURE 3-6: EXPRESS SERVICES

Proposed Route	Description	Service Details			Benefits
		Day	Hours of Service	Frequency	
19 – Hensley Express	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops a park-and-ride in Hensley New stop at transit hub in midtown as connection to Route 25 	Weekdays	8	Every hour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides more opportunities to access transit service Eliminates need to transfer between downtown and midtown destinations
		Saturdays	None	n/a	
		Sundays	None	n/a	
25 – Pinnacle Mountain Express	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops a park-and-ride in Roland New stop at transit hub in midtown as connection to Route 19 	Weekdays	8	Every hour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides more opportunities to access transit service Eliminates need to transfer between downtown and midtown destinations
		Saturdays	None	n/a	
		Sundays	None	n/a	
26 – Maumelle/ Oak Grove Express	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishes a park-and-ride in Morgan New stop at transit hub in midtown as connection to Route 36 	Weekdays	8	Every hour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides more opportunities to access transit service Eliminates need to transfer between downtown and midtown destinations
		Saturdays	None	n/a	
		Sundays	None	n/a	
36 – Jacksonville/ Sherwood Express	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops park-and-rides in Jacksonville and Sherwood New stop at transit hub in midtown as connection to Route 26 	Weekdays	8	Every hour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides more opportunities to access transit service Eliminates need to transfer between downtown and midtown destinations
		Saturdays	None	n/a	
		Sundays	None	n/a	
West Little Rock Express	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishes new transit service providing limited-stop service along Chenal Parkway, and express service on I-630 to downtown Little Rock 	Weekdays	8	Every hour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serves the increasing number of commuters in west Little Rock
		Saturdays	None	n/a	
		Sundays	None	n/a	

Flex Routes – ELR, NLR, WLR, Airport Area, SLR

Flex routes are deviated routes that provide on-demand service within a given area. Pick-ups and drop-offs are based on rider requests, and can connect transit riders with the existing fixed route transit network. These flex routes build on existing services by establishing new service areas with dedicated flex routes to the north and east of downtown Little Rock.

FIGURE 3-7: FLEX ROUTES

Proposed Route	Description	Service Details			Benefits
		Day	Hours of Service	Frequency	
ELR Flex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Replaces Route 12 with on-call transit service 	Weekdays	12	Demand-responsive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides transit service more in line with low-density environment Establishes a more focused, productive transit service route
		Saturdays	None	n/a	
		Sundays	None	n/a	
NLR Flex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishes new on-call service anchored at McCain Blvd. Walmart, and extends to East 50th St. to the north, Eureka Garden Rd to the east, and US-70 to the south 	Weekdays	12	Demand-responsive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will provide service in line with levels of demand of ridership
		Saturdays	None	n/a	
		Sundays	None	n/a	
WLR Flex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishes a park-and-ride in Morgan New stop at transit hub in midtown as connection to Route 36 	Weekdays	12	Demand-responsive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides more opportunities to access transit service Eliminates need to transfer between downtown and midtown destinations
		Saturdays	None	n/a	
		Sundays	None	n/a	
Airport Area Flex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishes a new on-call service anchored at Clinton Regional Airport, and serving College Station neighborhood and Little Rock Port Industrial Park 	Weekdays	12	Demand-responsive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will provide service in line with levels of demand of ridership
		Saturdays	None	n/a	
		Sundays	None	n/a	
SLR Flex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishes new local on-call service anchored at Baseline Rd. Walmart, serving neighborhoods south of I-30 between Mabelvale and Geyer Springs Rd. 	Weekdays	12	Demand-responsive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will provide service in line with levels of demand of ridership
		Saturdays	None	n/a	
		Sundays	None	n/a	

Flex route service in the airport area and elsewhere provides a more adaptable service option in a traditionally lower-ridership area.



Community Shuttles – Maumelle, Sherwood, Jacksonville

This tier of service establishes a shuttle for each of three communities in Central Arkansas. These services can function as a flex route, providing on-demand service based on rider requests, or as a route-deviated service, with a bus that can deviate from the route up to a certain distance in order to accommodate passenger needs. Both methods of community shuttles allow for improved local transit access and provide connections to the rest of the fixed-route transit network.

FIGURE 3-8: COMMUNITY SHUTTLES

Proposed Route	Description	Service Details			Benefits
		Day	Hours of Service	Frequency	
Maumelle shuttle	Establishes a community shuttle program to provide local circulation and connections to Express bus routes	Weekdays	12	Demand-responsive	Provides more opportunities to access transit service for low-density communities
		Saturdays	None	n/a	
		Sundays	None	n/a	
Sherwood shuttle	Establishes a community shuttle program to provide local circulation and connections to Express bus routes	Weekdays	12	Demand-responsive	Provides more opportunities to access transit service for low-density communities
		Saturdays	None	n/a	
		Sundays	None	n/a	
Jacksonville shuttle	Establishes a community shuttle program to provide local circulation and connections to Express bus routes	Weekdays	12	Demand-responsive	Provides more opportunities to access transit service for low-density communities
		Saturdays	None	n/a	
		Sundays	None	n/a	
		Saturdays	None	n/a	
		Sundays	None	n/a	

Capital Investment

Some of these tiers of transit service correspond to specific capital investments; for instance, creation of BRT corridors will allow for better passenger amenities throughout the corridor. Overall, this Preferred Scenario involves the following capital investments:

- Purchase of new vehicles
 - 14 Bus Rapid Transit vehicles
 - Two additional buses to meet peak-period service requirements
 - Seven small buses for Flex service
- Construct new shelters and improve existing ones
 - “Super-stops” at key transfer locations, such as Pershing Boulevard in North Little Rock, McCain Mall, and area Walmarts
 - More shelters with benches, especially at high-ridership locations
- Strategic development of parking facilities
 - Five park-and-ride lots on Express Route corridors
- Roadway and pedestrian improvements
 - Safer waiting and crossing areas, better signage and wayfinding for transfers, and connections to major destinations

Benefits

Overall, these transit service improvement strategies would result in an estimated ridership increase of 29% to 35% within a few years of implementation. Regardless, the overall transit network in Central Arkansas will be improved by providing coverage to more areas in a more efficient manner, and by providing high-frequency service where it is needed most. The combination of the aforementioned service and capital improvements will significantly improve passenger experience, and create a transit system that is attractive to new riders.

FIGURE 3-9: PREFERRED SCENARIO

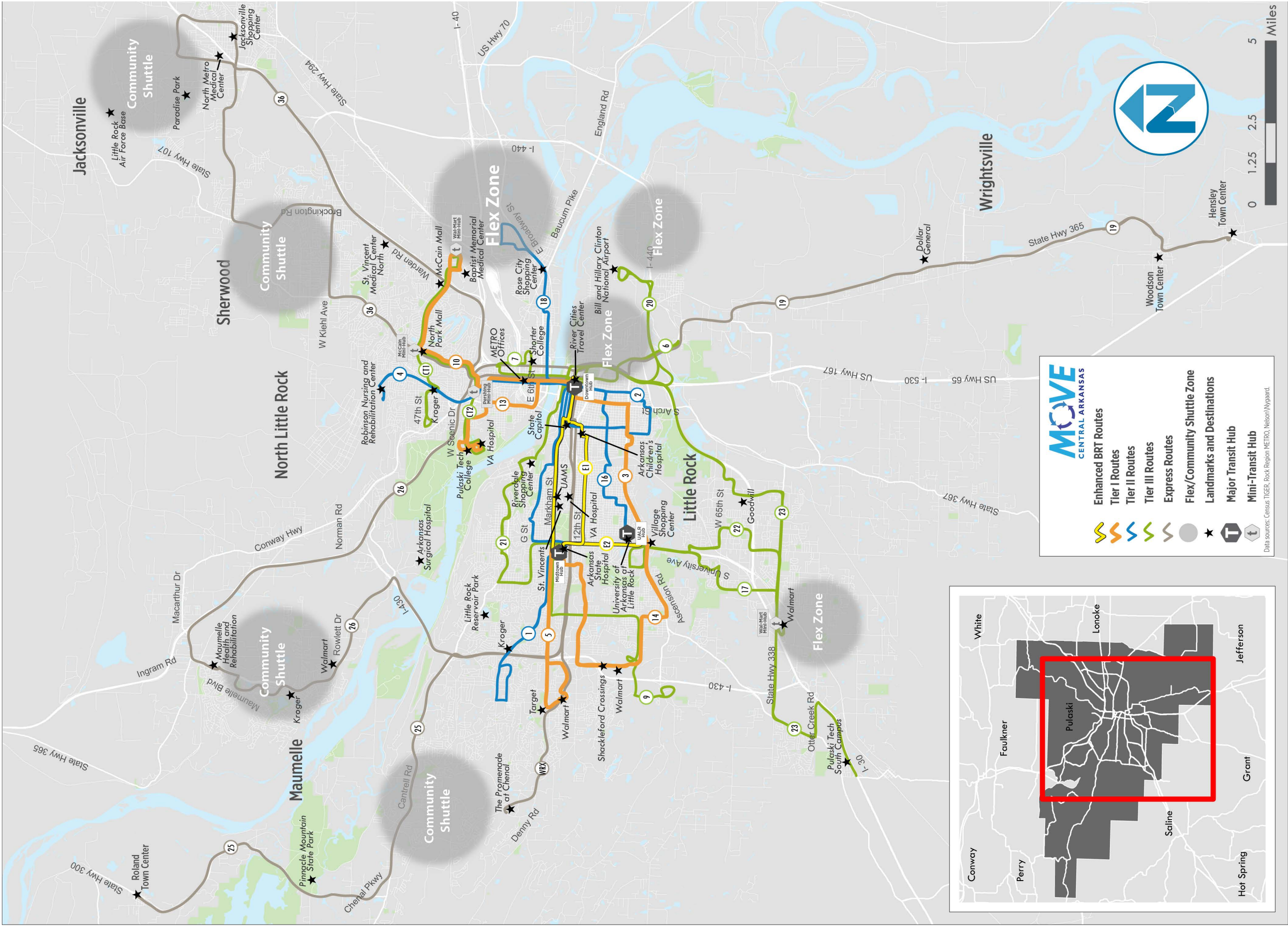



FIGURE 3-10: BUS RAPID TRANSIT

WHAT IS BUS RAPID TRANSIT?

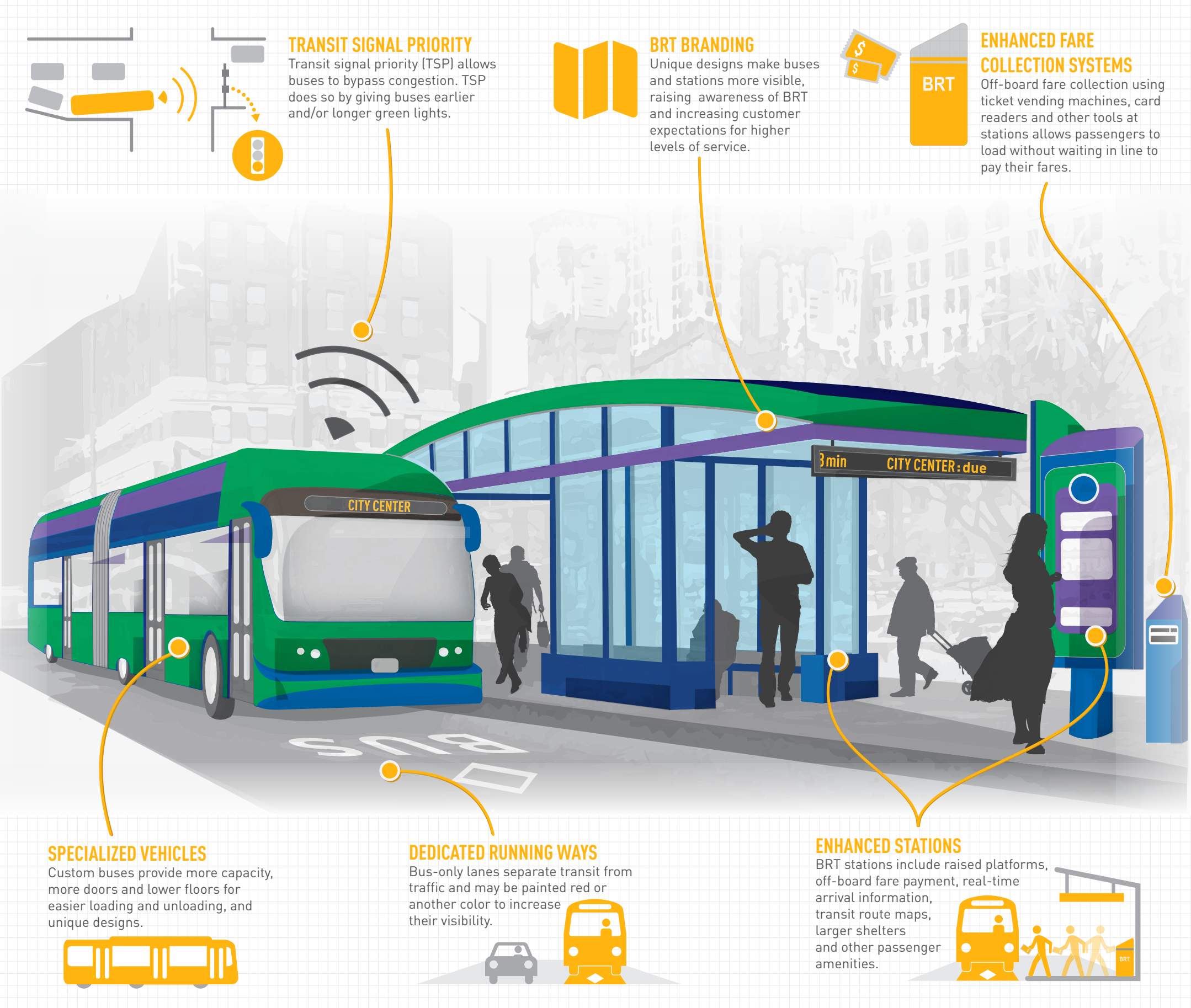


Rock Region
METRO

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is a high-quality transit service featuring reduced travel times, greater reliability, greater passenger comfort, and unique branding to increase visibility and awareness. These features are accomplished using:

- **Bus-only lanes and transit signal priority** – roadway and intersection improvements allowing buses to bypass congestion.
- **Enhanced stations** – stations designed to further reduce delay (for example, by making platforms level with bus floors so that no steps are required) and improve the customer experience by providing off-board fare payment, larger shelters, real-time arrival information, and other amenities.
- **Specialized vehicles** – custom buses with more space, low floors to ease loading and unloading, and unique branding.
- **Frequent service** – in addition to reduced travel times and greater reliability, BRT service operates more frequently and over longer hours.

Rock Region METRO, July 2015



[4]

FUNDING PLAN

Implementing the Preferred Scenario will require a significant and sustained effort by local and regional organizations to identify, secure, and efficiently use new sources of funding. The long-term contribution of new facilities and services in fulfilling community goals will depend upon stable funding and regular monitoring.

State and federal funding sources for transit (including funding for both capital investments and operations) are increasingly scarce and competitive. Looking at all funding sources under current FTA formula grant programs, METRO receives \$5.7 million per year to support its operations and capital program. State funding is minimal —about 2% of annual revenues— with about \$12.7 million coming from local funding provided by the transit agency's funding partners, which are the primary jurisdictions in which METRO operates.

Capital funding programs, such as the Federal New Starts and Small Starts programs require project sponsors, including cities and transit agencies, to demonstrate that new projects will meet criteria for cost-effectiveness. Moreover, federal agencies, including the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD), now partner to ensure that grant programs meet coordinated mobility, housing, and environmental goals.

MOVE Central Arkansas provides an opportunity for tiered levels of service than can be evaluated for further investments and service expansion (or reductions in service) based on performance, typically measured by ridership and productivity. Early successes from the MOVE Central Arkansas effort are critical to ensure future projects and services garner needed funding. When transit customers, voters, employers, and elected officials see meaningful improvements to the system, they are more apt to lend support for additional funding and investment in transit. To this end, Rock Region METRO's early efforts to modify services, rebrand the system and introduce updated public information tools increases the visibility of the system and begins to draw support for other investments in transportation.

This chapter summarizes the funding need and the limited options for growth of the METRO system to address the goals set forth in the MOVE Central Arkansas strategic planning process.

Additional funding is necessary to give Rock Region METRO the autonomy to improve service, implement new BRT lines, and build a transit network better suited to this growing region.



REVENUE REQUIREMENTS

One of the outcomes of this planning process envisioned by METRO staff and board members was that METRO would achieve some financial independence, allowing for increased funding for transit services that would achieve higher numbers of riders and meet the agency's mobility goals.

Revenue requirements are based on two components of future service. The first is the funding to cover operations, in the Preferred Scenario this means additional services on all modes. The second component is the capital investment which will vary depending on the extent of dedicated right-of-way reserved for BRT service.

Operating Costs

The Preferred Scenario assumes that operating costs will approach \$28 million annually for the baseline year of the analysis, and would be projected to increase slightly – based on inflation and increases in labor or fuel costs – for each subsequent year. Thus, in this funding plan chapter, the focus is on the baseline year.

Costs were estimated based on anticipated increases to existing operating costs due to an expansion of operations and management staff. Under the Preferred Scenario, the assumption is that total service hours would increase systemwide and that operating costs would increase from a status quo level of approximately 228,500 hours to more than 354,500 hours. As a result of administrative and operating cost increases and more service hours, total baseline year operating costs are projected to increase by more than \$10 million.

Figure 4-1 illustrates the total operating cost estimates and the revenue estimates, showing an annual gap in operating costs which can be addressed with any combination of local funding including the existing monies from METRO's funding partners (the local jurisdictions where service operates) and/or tax dollars generated through a new funding mechanism. Under the Preferred Scenario, the assumption is that METRO's funding partners are no longer the primary local revenue source. Currently, local operating dollars from funding partners (approximately \$12.7 million annually) cover status quo services and could be used to cover a portion of the increased operating costs under the Preferred Scenario.

FIGURE 4-1: ANNUAL OPERATING FUNDS GAP (BASELINE YEAR): STATUS QUO SERVICE LEVELS VERSUS PREFERRED SCENARIO

		Status Quo Service	Preferred Scenario
Service Hours			
	Bus	174,974	226,702
	Streetcar	11,667	12,834
	DR	35,744	41,106
	Flex	6,120	21,420
	BRT	-	56,055
	Total	228,505	354,546
Service Costs		\$17,529,000	\$27,982,317
Existing Revenues			
	Fares	\$2,272,465	\$3,545,965
	Other Operating	\$270,427	\$270,427
	State	\$275,000	\$275,000
	Federal	\$2,291,084	\$2,291,084
	Local		
	Total	\$5,108,976	\$6,382,476
Local Operating Funds Required		\$12,420,024	\$21,599,840

Source: Costs from Rock Region METRO; service plan by Nelson\Nygaard with GCR Inc.

Capital Costs

The Preferred Scenario features a significant investment in BRT service. BRT projects typically rely on a high level of federal funding. The split between federal, state and local dollars varies between projects, but federal funds typically make up more than half of capital costs. BRT lines in Pittsburgh, Las Vegas, Kansas City, Eugene (Oregon), and Cleveland have all been implemented with approximately 80% of capital funding coming from federal sources. Many BRT projects have relied on FTA 5309 Bus, Bus Facility, and New Starts, Small Starts and Core Capacity Improvement Projects specifically to fund less capital-intensive projects such as BRT.

Although most BRT projects receive substantial federal funding, selected BRT projects have been implemented almost exclusively with state and local funds, such as the Orange Line in Los Angeles, largely funded through a countywide sales tax (although some vehicle and station capital costs funded through New Starts) and the Silver Line in Boston (Phase 1, which was built entirely with state and local funds).

The capital expenses for the Preferred Scenario include a mix of vehicle replacements, shelters and stops, technology enhancements and other system updates that would be carried out even if BRT service were not included in the scenario. Implementing BRT service will require a large local funding share and a dedicated revenue stream that would likely be financed through traditional municipal bonds. In projecting capital funding requirements, it is assumed that 60% of costs are generated at the local level (to support a federal match) and that the local share is financed using municipal bonds. These assumptions provide the basis for approximate annual capital costs as shown in Figure 4-2. A more detailed analysis is required to reflect time value of money and

precise financing capacity.

To achieve any dedicated funding based on current state funding limitations and the availability of locally generated monies, a taxing mechanism is necessary: it is the only way to support increased operations and capital needs and the introduction of BRT and enhanced bus services, and is discussed on page 4-6.

ASSUMPTIONS REGARDING CAPITAL COSTS:

- **60% local (non-federal) share for total project costs**
- **Capital costs are cash flowed over time horizon, 2015-2026, to minimize annual need**
- **Tax revenues are flat**
- **Local share is financed via municipal bonds based on:**

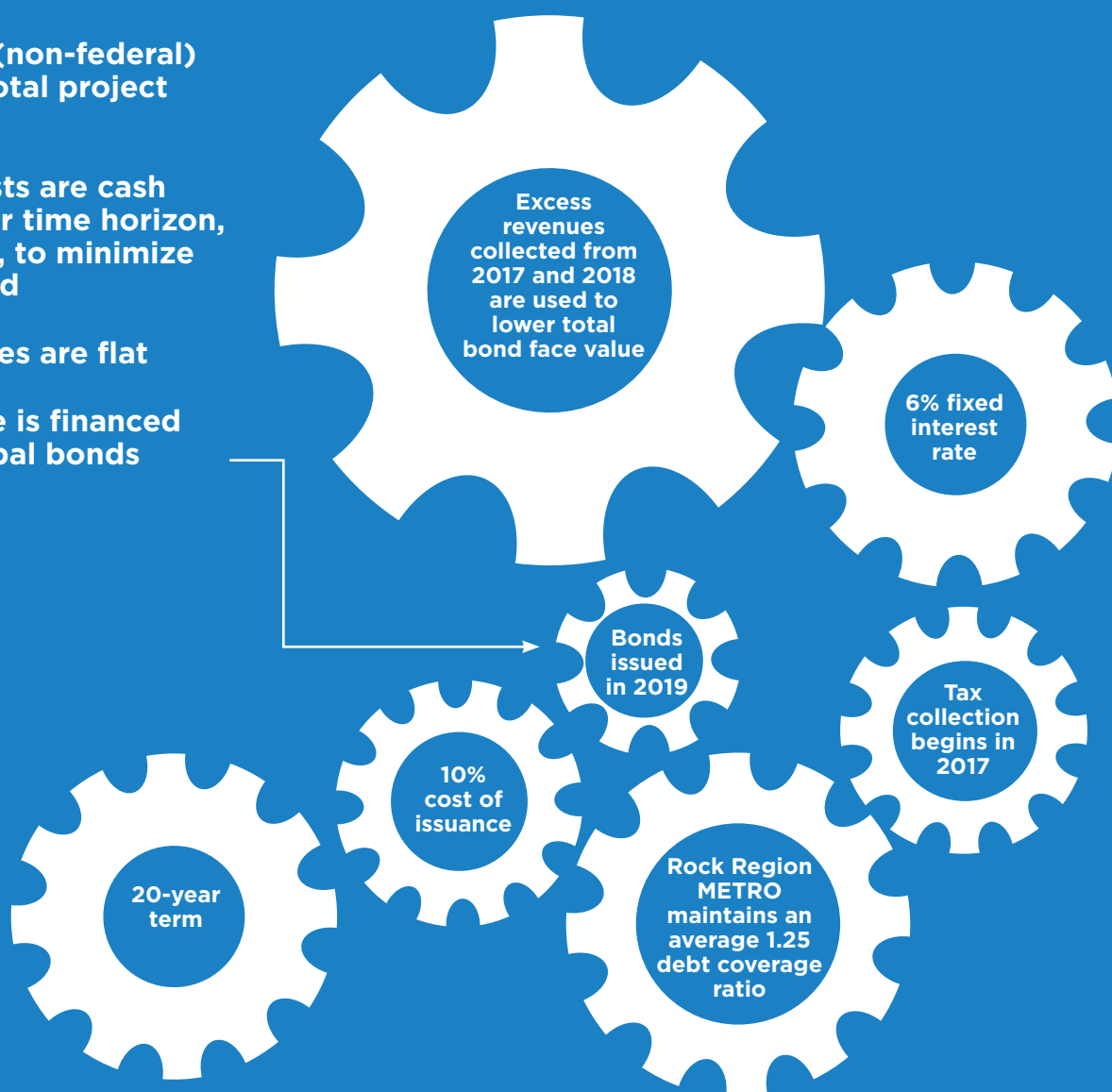


FIGURE 4-2: ANNUAL CAPITAL FUNDS GAP (BASELINE YEAR): STATUS QUO SERVICE LEVELS VERSUS PREFERRED SCENARIO

		Status Quo Service	Preferred Scenario (Dedicated-Lane BRT)
Capital Expenditures			
	Fleet Replacement (2015-2026)	\$5,450,050	\$5,450,050
	Expansion Vehicles	\$22,500	\$750,000
	Bus Shelters / Stations	\$500,000	\$700,000
	Enhanced Service Vehicles and Guideway	-	\$106,512,000
	Other Capital	\$72,500	\$72,500
Total		\$549,550	\$113,484,550
Average Annual Local Cost		\$549,550	\$6,986,950
Estimated Annual Debt Service		-	\$8,735,487
Existing Revenue		\$475,000	\$475,000
Annual Local Capital Funds Required		\$0	\$8,900,000

Source: Costs from Rock Region METRO; service plan by Nelson\Nygaard with GCR Inc.

Although capital costs are significant, they can vary depending on the level of investment required for the BRT services. For this analysis, the plan assumes that BRT service would operate in a dedicated right-of-way with a high level of amenity. This dedicated-lane BRT service is more costly to construct; opportunities for value engineering exist, which could result in some segments of the BRT service to operate as “BRT ‘Light’,” where buses would share lanes with cars and stops may have a more modest design. The rationale for reductions in costs is based on input from the City of Little Rock and is discussed on page 4-10, but in terms of annual capital need, the shared-and dedicated-lane BRT is estimated in this document at approximately \$2.7 million less per year than fully dedicated-lane BRT (from \$8.7 million in annual debt service to \$6.0 million annually).

Total Annual Costs

The previous discussion estimates approximate annual funding requirements to meet estimated capital requirements. The combined estimated annual need for operating and capital costs for the Preferred Scenario is shown in Figure 4-3. Overall, annual costs for the Preferred Scenario are projected to be \$30.5 million (but could be reduced under a shared- and dedicated-lane BRT scenario as shown in the third column of the figure).

FIGURE 4-3: SUMMARY OF ANNUAL LOCAL OPERATING AND CAPITAL FUNDS REQUIRED (BASELINE YEAR)

	Status Quo Service	Preferred Scenario (Dedicated-Lane BRT)	Preferred Scenario Alternative Mix Shared- and Dedicated-Lane BRT
Annual Local Operating Funds Required	\$7,152	\$21,599,840	\$21,599,840
Annual Local Capital Funds Required	\$0	\$8,900,000	\$6,200,000
Total Annual Local Funds Required	\$7,152	\$30,499,840	\$27,789,840

Source: Costs from Rock Region METRO; service plan by Nelson\Nygaard with GCR Inc.

NEW REVENUE ALTERNATIVES

A limited number of revenue alternatives are available to fund the annual need described above. The limitation is due, in part, to current statutory regulations affecting each potential local revenue alternative.

Based on an in-depth analysis, potential funding sources are very limited.

In addition to continued funds from existing funding partners, alternatives considered are a sales tax, property tax, improvement districts, and a tourism tax in Little Rock. These alternatives, organized by likelihood of success in providing funds for METRO's Preferred Scenario and the potential amount of funding each could provide are shown in Figure 4-4 and described below.

FIGURE 4-4: LOCAL FUNDING SOURCES TO FILL GAP

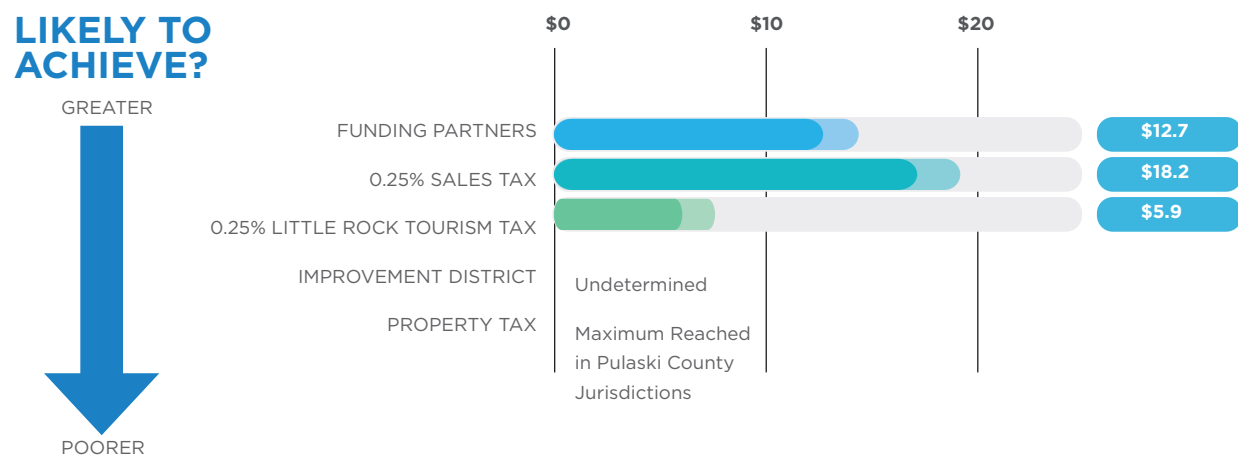


Figure 4-5 illustrates total annual funding requirements for the Preferred Scenario, with potential funding allocations making use of sales tax dollars and tourism tax dollars. The graphic shows that sales tax dollars in addition to existing levels of local partner funding would support the preferred alternative. An "Option 2" is shown in the figure to illustrate that Little Rock has some flexibility: it could reduce its share of funding and, with a successful increase in its tourism tax, could still fund the Preferred Scenario with dedicated lane-BRT service. Likewise, the Preferred Scenario alternative (with a mix of shared- and dedicated-lane BRT service), would allow for a reduction in Little Rock's contribution and an equivalent reduction in capital investment (this is not shown in this figure).

PRIMARY ASSUMPTIONS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

Sales tax is currently capped at 0.25% under current State law and would generate approximately \$18.2 million county-wide, based on 2014 data.

If agreements were made to redirect general fund appropriations supported by **existing property taxes** from METRO funding partners to independently fund the agency, a net-neutral revenue initiative would generate \$12.7 million.

An **additional property tax** could be levied by METRO funding partners only for capital costs at the county level, in municipalities or a combination. Due to a lack of successful property tax measures in recent years, this strategy was not identified as a priority.

Changes to State law, which cannot be undertaken until the 2017 session, are necessary for additional revenue including increasing the **sales tax cap**, allowing additional property millage, and/or modifying an improvement district as a viable option.

FIGURE 4-5: FUNDING OPTIONS FOR PREFERRED SCENARIO



Sales Tax

Existing Regulations

Arkansas state law currently allows a maximum of 0.25% or one-quarter cent sales and use tax for public mass transit facilities.¹ This limitation applies to all uses of funds, including both operating and capital costs. Individual cities or towns may put the matter before its voters, with tax rates applied only within their jurisdiction. This 0.25% maximum presents a limitation for METRO, effectively restricting the potential level of funding for transit, regardless of actual need. As a result, while METRO staff and some board members initially expressed an interest in replacing the dollars it receives from its funding partners with dedicated funding from a sales or other type of tax, the .25% maximum would make it infeasible to do this and fund the Preferred Scenario, necessitating continued funding from the funding partners, as described above.

Some stakeholders expressed a strong need for METRO to work with legislators to revise this limitation. Any changes to State regulations would have to occur during the next available legislative session.

Revenue Generation

A hypothetical analysis shows what replacing the funding from partner jurisdictions would require (in terms of a sales tax rate necessary to generate funds required meet the estimated annual needs). As allowed by state law, a sales tax could be implemented either at a countywide level or separately via all participating municipalities. Both options are shown in Figure 4-6.

Why is this infeasible? The need exceeds what could be collected with the cap. Numbers shown in *italics* exceed the state statutory limitations of 0.25%.

Changes to state laws would make it easier to pursue and organize funding for transit.



¹ ACA §§ 26-73-110:112

FIGURE 4-6: SALES TAX RATES REQUIRED TO FUND TOTAL REVENUE NEED

		Status Quo Service	Preferred Scenario (Dedicated-Lane BRT)
Countywide Option		\$12,420,024	\$30,499,840
Pulaski County		0.17%	<i>0.42%</i>
Municipal Option		\$12,420,024	\$30,499,840
	Little Rock	0.22%	<i>0.54%</i>
	North Little Rock	0.16%	<i>0.38%</i>
	Maumelle	0.05%	0.12%
	Jacksonville	0.03%	0.08%
	Sherwood	0.04%	0.09%

Source: METRO; City of Little Rock; City of North Little Rock; City of Maumelle; City of Jacksonville; City of Sherwood; Pulaski County; Analysis by GCR Inc. Note: Numbers in italics are not allowable under current state law.

These revenue estimates can be further separated based on only meeting the Operating and Capital needs, as shown in Figures 4-7 and 4-8 respectively. Similar to above, numbers shown in italics currently exceed state statutory limitations of 0.25%. The analysis shows that if voters were to be asked to support a sales tax measure strictly for capital costs, the tax revenue generated would be sufficient to cover the cost of the Preferred Scenario, but the high operating costs would continue to leave a budget gap.

FIGURE 4-7: SALES TAX RATES REQUIRED TO FUND OPERATIONS-ONLY REVENUE GAP

		Status Quo Service	Preferred Scenario (Dedicated-Lane BRT)
Countywide Option		\$12,420,024	\$21,599,840
Pulaski County		0.17%	<i>0.30%</i>
Municipal Option		\$12,420,024	\$21,599,840
	Little Rock	0.22%	<i>0.38%</i>
	North Little Rock	0.16%	<i>0.27%</i>
	Maumelle	0.05%	0.09%
	Jacksonville	0.03%	0.05%
	Sherwood	0.04%	0.06%

Source: METRO; City of Little Rock; City of North Little Rock; City of Maumelle; City of Jacksonville; City of Sherwood; Pulaski County; Analysis by GCR Inc. Note: Numbers in italics are not allowable under current state law.

FIGURE 4-8: SALES TAX RATES REQUIRED TO FUND CAPITAL-ONLY REVENUE GAP

		Status Quo Service	Preferred Scenario (Dedicated-Lane BRT)
Countywide Option		\$12,420,024	\$8,900,000
Pulaski County		0.17%	0.12%
Municipal Option		\$12,420,024	\$8,900,000
	Little Rock	0.22%	0.16%
	North Little Rock	0.16%	0.11%
	Maumelle	0.05%	0.04%
	Jacksonville	0.03%	0.02%
	Sherwood	0.04%	0.03%

Source: METRO; City of Little Rock; City of North Little Rock; City of Maumelle; City of Jacksonville; City of Sherwood; Pulaski County; Analysis by GCR Inc.

With sales tax dollars capped at .25%, METRO has no short-term option of seeking sales tax funds to replace existing funding provided by METRO's funding partners.

Can Little Rock Spend Less and Still Get More?

Currently the City of Little Rock is the largest contributor of the funding partners at \$8.7 million annually. Without its contributions, the remaining funding partners (Cities of North Little Rock, Sherwood, Maumelle, and Pulaski County) are projected to contribute \$3.9 million in 2015. A new sales tax at the current cap is projected to generate \$18.2 million; maximizing the City of Little Rock's Tourism Tax is projected generate about \$6.0 million. The total additional revenue available for Rock Region METRO if Little Rock maximized its Tourism Tax in this scenario is \$28.1 million, leaving a gap of about \$2.4 million.

By applying this entire funding shortfall to the amount of funding available for capital costs, the funds available annually for capital investments would be reduced to about \$6.4 million. As a result, the total amount of available local funds for BRT capital investments would be reduced from \$106.5 million to \$72.5 million. This figure serves as the basis for a reduction in capital investment in the Preferred Scenario Alternative, which would feature a mix of shared- and dedicated-lane BRT service instead of the preferred dedicated-lane service (see Figure 4-3)

FIGURE 4-9: BRT SERVICE IMPLICATIONS: TOTAL LOCALLY GENERATED CAPITAL FUNDS BASED ON LITTLE ROCK'S MECHANISM FOR TRANSIT PARTNER FUNDING

	Assumes Little Rock Provides Existing Levels of Funding for METRO	Assumes Little Rock Replaces Existing Funding with Tourism Tax Funds
Impact on BRT Service Design	Dedicated-Lane BRT	Mix Shared- and Dedicated-Lane BRT
Annual Debt Service Payment	\$8,740,000	\$6,010,000
Total Bond Issued	100,200,000	\$68,880,000
Reserve Amount & Cost of Issuance	(\$10,650,000)	(\$7,650,000)
Capital Reserve Contribution (2017-2019)	\$16,970,000	\$11,260,000
Total Local Funds Available	\$106,510,000	\$72,460,000

Property Tax

Local governments, counties and municipalities have the power to levy taxes upon real and personal property.² State law caps the amount that can be levied at 5 mils (or 1.5% of revenues) to the support their general funds.³

Based on current legal review, dedicating revenue to a transit agency does not seem likely to avoid this regulatory cap as the taxing authority is still deriving monies from local government. Currently, Pulaski County and all municipalities meet the maximum of property taxes allowed by law. Thus, no new property taxes may be levied at this time for operations. However, two options are available to access property tax revenues.

First, METRO's funding partners could elect to redirect a portion of current property taxes to the transit agency. Because current revenue from the partner jurisdictions is appropriated annually

from general funds, this could be help to maintain funding at existing levels for all parties, but also provide METRO with some financial independence and dedicated revenue to fund operations and capital improvements. This option would have a net neutral fiscal impact to funding partners' jurisdictions and to property owners.

Second, following State law, funding partner jurisdictions could initiate an additional property tax millage in excess of the 5 mil cap if it is dedicated specifically for capital improvements and their financing. With respect to the Preferred Scenario, the challenge with this is that capital-intensive elements of the plan are focused around the BRT lines which would operate within Little Rock, meaning it would be unlikely METRO could achieve funding from its other funding partners for this purpose.

² Ark. Const. Art. 16, § 5

³ Ark. Const. Art. 16, § 9; Ark. Code Ann. § 26-25-101

Improvement District

Based on current State regulations, improvement districts are perhaps the most appropriate mechanism for public transit agencies to establish a dedicated revenue stream.⁴

Improvement district revenues are typically derived from a fee on real property values. The restrictions and implementation requirements of improvement districts vary considerably depending on their application. Current law offers no specific definition of “public transit” and thus a transit improvement district must default to a general municipal improvement district, which has burdensome approval requirements including the need for a petition of people claiming two-thirds of all owners’ property values and a hearing to determine whether the signatures meet the two-thirds requirement.

Although this should be a promising option for funding, particularly for funding capital improvements, new legislation would greatly facilitate more realistic implementation requirements for an improvement district dedicated to public transit.

Implementation

Getting the Measure on the Ballot

With a sales tax as the most appropriate option in the short term to provide dedicated funding for Rock Region METRO’s expansion, a levy will need to be placed on the ballot.

The Pulaski County Quorum Court may call for the levy of a countywide sales or use tax.⁵ The election must be held within 120 days of Quorum Court issuing an ordinance calling for the election. Alternatively, the Quorum Court may file a petition requesting the vote of a countywide sales and use tax. Such a petition must be signed by a minimum of fifteen percent (15%) of county voters and filed with the county clerk. The election must be held within 120 days of the filing of the petition.

In November 2015, the Rock Region METRO Board voted to ask the Pulaski County Quorum Court to call a referendum on a quarter-cent sales tax to be voted on in March 2016, during the primary election.

The Pulaski County Quorum Court must notify the Board of Election Commissioners that the measure has been referred to the vote of the people and will submit a copy of the ballot title to the Board of Election Commissioners. The form of the ballot title submitted to county voters is set forth by statute. The ballot must contain the effective date of the tax, the designated purpose(s) of the tax, and the termination date of the tax.

Any taxes levied by Pulaski County will be collected by the Arkansas Department of Finance and Administration, and the State Treasurer retains three percent (3%) of all taxes collected as a processing fee for services performed by the State.

There is a provision that allows for municipalities to adopt the ordinance calling for the election, should METRO consider pursuing that approach instead.

To get a property tax measure on the ballot would be similar to the process for a sales tax, with the type of tax being specified in the proposed ordinance, as well as the manner of assessment.

Regional Mobility Authorities

In 2008 the State passed Act 389 allowing for the creation of Regional Mobility Authorities (RMA) to address transportation needs. An RMA is a regional governmental agency that can be formed by contiguous counties to build, operate, maintain, expand or fund transportation projects including transit.

RMAs may choose to work on projects in partnership with other public agencies and may also receive projects transferred from another public agency. RMAs are authorized to receive funding from the following sources:

- Tolls, if approved by voters
- County and/or city sales taxes (which can be levied and bonded on behalf of the RMA), if approved by voters
- Motor vehicle fees, if approved by voters
- Turnback funds, from member cities and counties
- Bus and parking fares
- State funds
- Federal funds

The current structure of RMAs is primarily intended for multi-county initiatives; sales and property tax limitations likely apply, but an RMA may be a useful approach to support the goals of the MOVE Central Arkansas planning effort.

⁴ ACA § 14-334-108

⁵ METRO must first issue a resolution setting forth the basis for requesting the issuance of an Ordinance by the County Quorum Court.



Rock Ro

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BRANDING

The renaming of the Central Arkansas Transit Authority to the Rock Region Metropolitan Transit Authority is one element of comprehensive effort to reframe the perception of transit. Rock Region METRO serves a diverse region and addresses the needs of many different markets. The new name captures Central Arkansas' importance as a regional center with Little Rock at its core: thriving urban, suburban and rural communities are all linked as part of an expanding metropolitan area transit network.

OVERVIEW

In combination with the service redesign effort, the transit agency set out to refresh its image and improve the region's perceptions and understanding of transit service.

CATA had operated for many years in Central Arkansas, but with limited ridership markets — primarily seniors, people with disabilities, people with very low incomes, and students. Trying to rebuild its share of the regional transportation market, the transit agency embarked on a rebranding effort to redesign the name and imagery of the system. The objective was to take a system that was perceived as being marginally useful for most of the population and make it something that everybody would recognize and value as a part of the regional infrastructure.

To initiate the rebranding of the service, the consulting team conducted a series of meetings with transit agency staff. In these meetings, staff talked about potential names, themes, and images that they would like to see on transit vehicles and in facilities.

Consulting team designers began to develop potential concepts around specific names and themes. These were reviewed with staff and with members of the Coordinating Committee, as well as the transit agency Board, to solicit input that the designers used for a second round of branding concept development.

After multiple sets of development, the consulting team refined four different brand options using different names and design concepts. These were presented to the Coordinating Committee, Blue Ribbon Commission, and members of the public through a series of focus group meetings that sought input from both transit users and non-users.



FOCUS GROUP DIRECTION

The focus groups were organized to identify preferences for the system name, logo design, and color palettes related to rebranding. With a professional moderator from a third-party research firm, the focus groups consisted of 12 small group discussions that included riders and non-riders, younger and older representatives, and residents of the urban area and the smaller cities. Each small group of up to four participants took part in a 45-minute discussion (total of 43 participants). The vast majority of participants (33 of 43) expressed a strong preference for the name Rock Region METRO because they felt it better represented a “big city” or “growing city.” Participants talked about CATA as “a government program for poor people” where they envisioned Rock Region METRO would be an amenity or attraction of the city or region.

Several brand attributes were assigned to Rock Region METRO by participants, including the following:

- Fun, new, cool
- Interesting
- Source of civic pride even if I don’t ride
- “Makes me want to ride”
- “Doesn’t sound like public transportation”
- “Feels like a bigger city”
- Would rather call it “the METRO” than “the bus”
- Encourages integration into vocabulary: “taking the Metro”
- “Gives me a sense of geographic space”

“I feel happy, like I’d be happy to get on that bus”

Brand attributes assigned to CAT or CATA included the following:

- Government agency
- “Old”
- Efficient but boring, invisible
- “Not going anywhere”
- No excitement
- Stigma of only for poor people or those whose “car broke down”
- CATA means little to those polled
- When told what the acronym means, people interpret “Central Arkansas” in a myriad of ways

Four different designs were presented to focus group participants who selected their preferred design. Although there was no consensus on the preferred design, the design ultimately selected received one vote more than the second highest ranked design. Ultimately, the selected design was referred to as classy, modern, stylish, and sophisticated and several participants noted that the design looked better on the bus than any of the other designs. Respondents reacted to some bus stop and bus designs with positive comments like, “I feel happy, like I’d be happy to get on that bus,” and, “It looks updated,” and, “I want to get see the inside!”



BRAND INTRODUCTION

After additional refinements by staff and the consulting team, in January 2015 the transit agency Board selected Rock Region Metropolitan Transit Authority as the new name for CATA, with the system to be referred to as Rock Region METRO or METRO.

Highlights of the brand are presented on the following pages.

Logo Design

The design of the logo is a chevron with three colors – green, gray, and blue, offset by white.

FIGURE 5-1: ROCK REGION METRO LOGO



Standard Logo Space Constrained



Service Brands

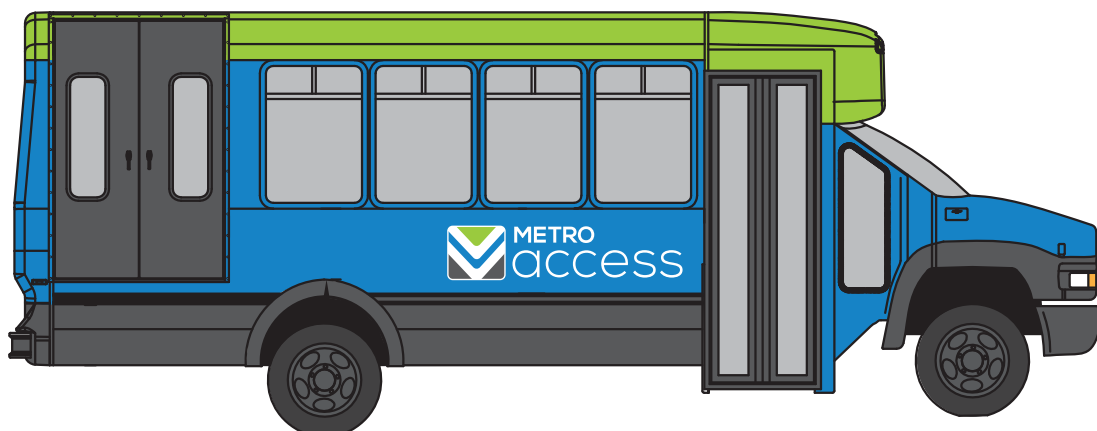
Each of the services offered by Rock Region METRO has its own name. For each name, one design is proposed for display on vehicles and in public information materials. It is assumed that METRO Rapid services will bring in the orange color as a means of illustrating the distinctiveness of the service.

FIGURE 5-2: NAMES FOR ROCK REGION METRO SERVICE TYPES



Designs were prepared for the buses and amenities. Local buses and a concept for paratransit vehicles are shown in the figure below.

Bus



Other Amenities

Rock Region Metro staff have replaced bus stops signs, updated the system website, applied the brand to the system's new real-time information app, and will be repainting vehicles and updating the system's assets as the rebranding is completed.



POWERED BY CLEAN NATURAL GAS

Rock Region METRO