

TRANSIT SERVICE AND FACILITIES

Overview

Transit service in the study area, particularly along Western Avenue, is plentiful, with CDTA Routes 10, 21 and 63 and the UAlbany transportation system in operation along Western Avenue. The CDTA routes also provide direct access to UAlbany, Stuyvesant Plaza and Crossgates Mall.

Existing CDTA service provides area transit users with a range of options both for trip start times and (via transfers) potential destinations outside the neighborhood. Indications are that transit patronage in the area has increased as a result of the #10 (Western Avenue) service's being extended to Crossgates Mall via the Western/Johnston intersection. In addition to enhancing travel opportunities to Crossgates and the other destinations between the Mall's Western Avenue entrance and Johnston Road, this modification also increased Guilderland's attractiveness as a residential location for people who do not have cars, given the number of apartment complexes in and near the study area.

UAlbany students who have paid the mandatory comprehensive fee or have purchased an "all you can ride" semester bus pass may in addition to using the UAlbany bus system ride the following CDTA Routes:

- Route 10 (Western Avenue) – This route does not enter the campus, but it does stop near UAlbany's Western Avenue entrance. Students may ride this route days, evenings and weekends.
- Route 11 (UAlbany Shuttle) – Students may ride this route evenings and weekends
- Route 12 (Washington Avenue) – This route serves UAlbany, but does not enter the Study area. Students may ride this route days, evenings and weekends.
- Route 90 (Troy/Latham/Crossgates) – Students may ride this route after 6:30 PM Friday and all day Saturday.

The issues discussed in the next section and the recommendations subsequently presented concentrate on improving the accommodation of existing transit patrons ("maintaining the base"), enhancing the comfort and convenience of transit use both through the provision of customer amenities and by getting transit closer to specific destinations, potential improvements to transit service, and promotion of transit travel opportunities.

Issues

Service/Schedules

Public meeting participants seemed to have a real understanding of the importance of transit service to the area, and were generally satisfied with the frequency of fixed-route service in the corridor. They tended to express desires for changes only in those areas that might be considered tailoring services to local needs, such as a McKownville circulator service (perhaps akin to CDTA's Shuttle family of services) or express service from the neighborhood to downtown Albany.

Stop Placements/Accommodations

Numerous concerns were expressed during the Study regarding transit stop placements and accommodations (e.g., benches and shelters) at these stops. Concerns raised about stop placements frequently appeared to reflect problems people had in accessing stops which tended to have less to do with distance than about pedestrian accommodations along the way (e.g., continuous sidewalks leading to a stop) or the quality of the stop location itself (e.g., a need to walk through grass, mud or snow to get from a sidewalk to a bus and vice versa).

Generally speaking, the frequency of transit stops in the Study area is related to the amount of residential development on the same side of Western Avenue as a bus. That is, between the City line and Fuller Road, there is a stop along the westbound side at nearly every block (adjacent to the most densely residentially-developed part of the neighborhood), while stops in either direction are more spread out between Crossgates Mall and Johnston Road (with larger land uses, less residential development nearby and fewer commuting destinations).

Need for Transit-Oriented Design

Crossgates Mall and Stuyvesant Plaza offer fairly easy access and internal circulation for transit vehicles. Other existing developments are less compatible with transit vehicles, with this situation being even more problematic in cases such as the Town Center shopping center area where access from the development to the transit stops on Western Avenue is also not completely accommodated.

Attributes of the Crossgates and Stuyvesant Plaza site designs can be used as models for future internal site designs of both larger and mid-sized commercial developments.

Transfer Opportunities

Using combinations of the CDTA #10, #21 and #63 routes, transit users in McKownville and elsewhere in the region have access to a considerable range of travel destinations beyond those along any one of these routes by itself. All of the transit stops on Western Avenue accommodate at least two CDTA routes including the #10. The #10 is a full-day route, while the #21 and #63 are peak period routes destined for particular sites or areas not served by the #10 such as the

Village of Altamont, the Northeastern Industrial Park, and downtown Schenectady. Having information on these travel opportunities readily available to transit users would enhance the potential role of transit for both local and wider-area tripmaking.

Bike Racks on Buses

The #10 and #63 are two of CDTA's "Bikeable Bus" routes, with all buses on these routes equipped with bike racks capable of holding two bicycles. Continuing the theme just discussed, this opens up opportunities for longer-distance travel with bicycles both for commuting purposes and for others such as recreation (e.g., putting a bicycle on a bus and going up to Schenectady to access the Mohawk River section of the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail).

Miscellany

- Crossings near Transit Stops: Safe pedestrian crossings near transit stops are among the keys to transit's realizing its potential in any area. Most regular transit users in the area will need to cross Western Avenue either at the beginning or end of their travels (e.g., to get on a bus in the morning, or to go home in the evening). In addition to the provision of a clearly delineated pedestrian area, pedestrian signals and other amenities, it is critical particularly in the wintertime that lighting at intersections be sufficient for motorists to see pedestrians crossing.
- Maintenance: Across the region, many of CDTA's current shelters were installed as elements of the traffic mitigation packages required by localities as conditions of approval for proposed developments. CDTA advises that if additional shelters are provided through such means or through municipal purchase, they will maintain them if the shelters meet CDTA standards. CDTA does not plow the areas near bus stops, instead relying on local regulations and cooperation; for example, should a new shelter be installed at a stop along Western Avenue, CDTA would request that the Town sidewalk snow removal machine make a pass in front of the shelters. The Town recently purchased a new machine which has been seen as a substantial improvement to its capabilities in this regard.

Another interesting note regarding maintenance of facilities near stops was that when the Town recently began clearing the areas near existing Western Avenue sidewalks of overhanging bushes and overgrown lawn/soil areas, the realization was that some of these sidewalks were significantly wider than had been thought.

- Right-of-Way: An additional issue regarding potential shelters in the corridor is that at some locations, the NYSDOT right-of-way ends at or close to the inside edge of the sidewalk. Should shelter installation be pursued at such locations (such as the Town Center area), it would be necessary to secure permission from the owner of the property where the shelter would actually be located.

- Details: There are also some potential conflicts between shelters and adjacent parcel improvements which would need to be resolved prior to shelter location. As one example, the Town Center property has an automatic sprinkler systems installed which covers right up to the Western Avenue sidewalk area; some people approaching or standing outside a shelter near this location could get wet while waiting for a bus, particularly on a windy day.

Recommendations

TRN-1: Install Shelters at Western Avenue Bus Stops

- Description: Install shelters at the following bus stops (in priority order):
 - McKown Road (eastbound side)
 - SUNY (westbound side)
 - 1450 Western (eastbound side; currently has bench)
 - 1700 Western/Town Center (eastbound side – near Price Chopper)
 - Fuller Road (eastbound side, near Dentist’s Office/Burger King)
 - Church Road (westbound side, past intersection)
 - Stuyvesant Plaza main driveway (westbound side, past driveway)
 - SUNY (westbound side)
 - Arcadia Avenue (eastbound side)

Transit stops and these proposed shelter locations are presented in Figure 3-1 on the following page.

- Estimated Cost: \$36,000 - \$108,000 depending on the type of shelter desired at each location (\$4,000 per shelter for basic shelters, up to \$12,000 per shelter for more elaborate facilities with peaked roofs and other features which could make the shelters more visually consistent with the surrounding area).
- Additional Notes: CDTA is currently pursuing funding for a program that would enable it to install shelters at a number of locations on its system. If they are successful, the potential exists to have one or more of the shelters listed above included in this program. Also, CDTA recently secured a \$285,000 State Multi-Modal Program grant for improvements to intersections near transit stops, with these improvements potentially including the installation of transit shelters. Three packages of intersection improvements recommended in the “Traffic Operations” chapter – for Western/UAlbany (IS-1), Western/McKown/Norwood (IS-2) and Western/Fuller (IS-4) have been discussed with CDTA and flagged as the highest priorities for pursuit under the Multi-Modal Program project.

*Please click on FIGURE 3-1 on the Web page
for the Transit Map*

TRN-2: Promote CDTA Travel Opportunities for College Student Travel

- Description: CDTA and UAlbany to work to better promote transit travel opportunities for the student community.
- Estimated Cost: Minor staff time costs, perhaps some modest cost associated with the development of promotional aids.
- Additional Notes: Could be a model for efforts at other area colleges and major employment sites.

TRN-3: Enhance Traveler Information

- Description: Increase the availability of information on transit services, statuses, transfer opportunities and tripmaking assistance through the use of electronic signboards at major transit stops, enhanced CDTA Web site tools, kiosks at UAlbany, Stuyvesant Plaza and Crossgates Mall.
- Estimated Cost: \$170,000 for four signboards at an average installed cost of \$7,500 apiece, \$5,000 for Web site improvements, and three touch-screen kiosks at \$15,000 apiece.
- Additional Notes: Could be progressed as part of a systemwide effort.

TRN-4: Explore Transit Priority Opportunities for the Western Avenue Corridor

- Description: Assess the potential for the use of transit signal priority (extended green phases or early changes to green to enable approaching buses to continue on their ways without stopping) along Western Avenue. The initial effort required would take the form of a feasibility study which would include modeling of traffic along the Western Avenue corridor, with likely endpoints for the corridor to be from Route 155 in Guilderland to Washington Avenue in Albany.
- Estimated Cost: \$75,000 to \$100,000 for the feasibility study.
- Additional Notes: CDTA is currently progressing transit priority on Route 5 between downtown Albany and downtown Schenectady as part of a project to upgrade traffic signals along this corridor. A positive outcome for this project could create a momentum for transit priority in other corridors such as Western Avenue. There is a project on the draft 2003-2008 CDTC TIP (Project A435) which would see deployment of transit priority along Washington and Western Avenues in 2007 or 2008.

TRN-5: Explore Opportunities for Express CDTA Service from McKownville

- Description: Examine the potential for converting the #63 route to express service east of Fuller/Western (by way of Fuller Road and I-90 or the State Office Campus).
- Estimated Cost: Examination could be progressed as an internal effort in the course of other general service planning activities.
- Additional Notes: While the conversion of the #63 service would require transfers by patrons traveling between the bypassed area and points to the west, the #10 route provides frequent service in the bypassed area; the frequency of service along the #10 would minimize the waits associated with these transfers.

Note on Intermodal Facilitation

Transit's success in realizing its ridership potential is dependent on a number of factors including accessibility of individual stops. It is thus important to ensure that pedestrians, cyclists and motorists (the latter particularly for park-and-ride) have comfortable, safe routes to transit stops and appropriate facilities at these stops wherever possible. To do this, several planning and programmatic steps can be taken, including the following:

- Elevating the Construction/Rehabilitation Priority of Sidewalks Approaching Transit Stops: "Looking outward" from individual stops (particularly high current or potential patronage stops), needed sidewalk improvement or construction projects can be assigned higher priorities in capital programs.
- Exploring Additional Pedestrian and Cyclist Treatments: Crosswalks, wide paved shoulders, and traffic signals with pedestrian phases and/or pedestrian button-actuated "NO TURN ON RED" indications can improve the ease of walking to bus stops.
- Destination Treatments: Park-and-ride lot and general transit stops can be improved to provide the basic amenities needed to enhance transit's attractiveness, through such measures as providing bike storage racks or lockers at bus stops, paving and sanctioning "unofficial" park-and-ride lots, and improving the safety and ease with which turn and crossing movements to and from stops can be made.
- Policy Measures: The Town takes responsibility for sidewalk maintenance at present, with the additional measure of an ordinance prohibiting the plowing of snow onto sidewalks providing additional assurance of the accessibility of these facilities. While the Town's efforts include clearing snow from sidewalks near transit stops, paying special attention to the accessibility of buses from transit stops (e.g., in clearing "cut-through" paths across utility strips) would enhance the comfort of wintertime transit users.