Best Friend Express
Transit Development Plan

September 20, 2017
• Service today
• Aiken County demographics
• What we heard
• Transit impacts
• Options for the future
Today’s Best Friend Express

• Green route serves Aiken, the Valley, and connects to Blue Route
• Red route serves Aiken and Whiskey Road
• Blue route connects to Augusta and North Augusta
• Complementary ADA Paratransit service (Dial-A-Ride)
Best Friend Express

- Monday through Friday
- 7:00 am to 7:00 pm
- Every 2 hours
- $2.00 fare
  - $1.00 discounted fare
  - $1.50 student fare
- Passengers ride to run errands, get to work, and get to the doctor
Aiken County Demographics

• Aiken County population increased 15% since 2000
• 7% of households have 0 vehicles available
• 18% of the population is below the poverty level
• 17% of the population are 65 years or older

Source: 2015 American Community Survey
Public Input

• Discussion groups
• Surveys
• Public workshops
• Press releases/media
Discussion Group Feedback

• 27 stakeholders in 5 discussion groups
  • Economic development
  • Medical and education
  • Local and regional government
  • Social services
  • Transportation professionals

• 2 stakeholders in individual interviews
Discussion Group Feedback

• Community lacks understanding of how to use the system
• Transit services are not available during key times for working residents
• Frequency of service and long trip lengths are a problem
• Weekend service needed
• No access to large employment centers
Surveys

• 208 surveys completed
  • Online: 85 completed surveys
  • On-board: 106 completed surveys
  • DAR Telephone: 17 completed surveys
• Spring 2017
Rider Input (Fixed-Route)

• Grateful for service
• 60% use service 3 or more days per week
• 50% are retired or unemployed
• 53% age 55 or older
• 71% do not have working car
• 37% would not make the trip without bus
• 48% rode with discounted fare
• Grateful for service
• Only source of local transportation for 76% of riders
Community Input

• 60% have never tried Best Friend Express
• Majority have favorable view of transit
• Geoffrey*:
  • Works at a restaurant on Whiskey Road
  • His boss only schedules him to work on weekdays because he takes the bus
  • Saturday evening shifts are the best ones at the restaurant, but he can’t get to work

*Names have been changed
Who We Met

• Geoffrey*:
  • Works at a restaurant on Whiskey Road
  • His boss only schedules him to work on weekdays because he takes the bus
  • Saturday evening shifts are the best ones at the restaurant, but he can't get to work

*Solutions have been changed

SOLUTION:
Add Saturday Service
Who We Met

• Mary:
  • Called our customer service center
  • Just got a job at McDonald’s on Whiskey Road
  • Can only ride the bus one direction on the bus as it only runs until 4PM
  • Has to walk home
Who We Met

• Mary:
  • Called our customer service center
  • Just got a job at McDonald's on Whiskey Road
  • Can only ride the bus one direction as it only runs until 4PM
  • Has to walk home

SOLUTION: Increase Service on Red Route
Who We Met

• Ralph:
  • Took the bus to Augusta for medical appointment
  • Appointment ran long so could not catch bus back to Aiken
  • Rented hotel room for evening as cheaper than taxi ride home
  • Took bus home in the morning
  • In his younger days, he would walk and/or hitch back to Aiken
Who We Met

- Ralph:
  - Took the bus to Augusta for medical appointment
  - Appointment ran long so could not catch bus back to Aiken
  - Rented hotel room for evening as cheaper than taxi ride home
  - Took bus home in the morning
  - In his younger days, he would walk and/or hitch back to Aiken

SOLUTION: Add Later Evening Service
Who We Met

• Bob:
  • Aiken Regional Medical Center regularly have patients decline medical services simply because they do not have transportation to get to the appointment.
Who We Met

• Bob:
  • Aiken Regional Medical Center regularly have patients decline medical services because they do not have transportation to the appointment.

SOLUTION: Add More Service
Impacts of Transit

- $1.00 investment in transit
  - = $3.00 in business sales
  - = $1.70 in GDP growth
- Increased productivity due to reliable attendance by employee

*Economic Impact of Public Transportation Investment, 2014 Update, American Public Transportation Association
Impacts of Best Friend Express

• Directly employs 9 FTEs
• Participate in Tri-Development Center employment program to clean vehicles
• Purchase >$37,000 in fuel annually
• Walmart estimates $750,000 in lost sales if Best Friend Express did not run (3 locations)
• Hire local small business maintenance and repair shops
Impacts of Best Friend Express

Annual Operating & Capital Expenditures

- **Annual Expenditure**: $634,763
- **Local Match**: $94,500
- **Economic Impact**: $1,904,289
- **GDP Growth**: $1,079,097

Current

**GREAT INSIGHTS. GREATER OUTCOMES.**

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Impacts of Best Friend Express

Annual Operating & Capital Expenditures

- **$376,500** unused federal funds annually
- **$634,763** annual expenditure
- **$94,500** local match
- **$1,904,289** economic impact
- **$1,079,097** GDP growth

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Transit Improvement Options

- Efficiency improvements
- Additional service on the Red Route
- Saturday service & later evening service
- Project Jackson Service
- Improve Frequency (1-hour headways)
- New Routes
- Transition to a traditional bus stop system
- Increased marketing/investment in technology
Efficiency Tweaks

• Green Route alignment changes to remove unproductive portion and replace with more productive alignment
• No change to budget
Red Route Improvements

- Currently has three runs per day

7:30  10:30  2:30
Red Route Improvements

- Add two runs per day (12:30 and 4:30)
- Increased operating cost
- No capital investment
Add Saturday Service

- Operate same schedule as weekday service
- Increased operating expenditure (fixed route and DAR)
- No capital expenditure required
Add Saturday Service

Annual Operating Expenditure

- $124,848 Annual Expenditure
- $38,889 Local Match
- $374,544 Economic Impact
- $212,242 GDP Growth

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Project Jackson Service

• Occasional service to Project Jackson
• Assumptions
  • 12 days per year
  • 6 hours of service per event (4 pm to 10 pm)
• Circulator for restaurants, shops, and entertainment center
• Increased operating expenditure
• May require vehicle purchase
• Tourism funding?
Project Jackson Service

Annual Operating Expenditure
(12 days per year)

- Annual Expenditure: $3,456
- Local Match: $1,175
- Economic Impact: $10,368
- GDP Growth: $5,875

Improvement
Project Jackson Service

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Startup Expenditure</th>
<th>Local Match</th>
<th>Economic Impact</th>
<th>GDP Growth</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$68,263</td>
<td>$13,652</td>
<td>$204,789</td>
<td>$116,047</td>
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</tbody>
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Improvement
Improve Frequency

• Current: 2-hour headways
• Goal: 1-hour headways
• Increased operating expenditure
• Purchase 3 vehicles
Annual Operating Expenditure

- **$375,456**
- **$127,655**
- **$1,126,368**
- **$638,275**

**Improvement**
Improve Frequency

Startup Vehicle Expenditure

- $204,789
- $40,956

Local Match

- $614,367

Economic Impact

- $348,141

GDP Growth

Improvement

Lower Savannah Council of Governments

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New Route

• Exit 5 Park-and-Ride/Walmart/North Augusta
• Savannah River Site/New Ellenton
• Increased operating expenditure
• Purchase vehicles
New Route

Startup Vehicle Expenditure

- $68,263
- $13,652
- $204,789
- $116,047

Local Match: $13,652
Economic Impact: $204,789
GDP Growth: $116,047

Improvement
Transition to Traditional Bus Stops

• Current: Flag Stop System
• Goal: Traditional Bus Stop System
• Requires ADA compliance
• Negotiate with property owners
• No change in operating cost
• Increased capital expenditures (stop and shelter infrastructure)
Marketing/Technology

• Increased marketing
  • Travel training
  • University events
  • Videos
  • Improve website

• Technology Investment
  • Smart phone app with real-time information
Strategic Plan

• Efficiency improvements
• Additional service on the Red Route
• Saturday service
• Increased marketing/investment in technology
• Project Jackson service
• New routes
• Transition to traditional bus stops