

Northwest Arkansas Transit Development Plan

Technical Memorandum #1 Documentation of Staff Input

Prepared for:



**RAZORBACK
TRANSIT**

Submitted by:
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1.0 Introduction

The Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission (NWARPC) is leading the effort to complete a Transit Development Plan for the Northwest Arkansas region. The overall objective of this project is to identify near-term, short-range and long-range service recommendations that provide an integrated regional public transportation network and expands opportunities for Northwest Arkansas residents to utilize this network. Several work tasks are being completed to achieve this objective including:

- The collection of Ozark Regional Transit (ORT) and Razorback Transit ridership data at a stop level and trip level basis;
- An on-board survey of ORT and Razorback Transit riders;
- A review of historical ridership trends for both systems;
- Input from staff and drivers for both systems;
- A comprehensive evaluation of existing transit services on a systems and route level basis that is based on collected data;
- Input from representatives of key stakeholder groups, a project advisory committee and from input received at public meetings; and
- A latent demand analysis that is based on existing and projected demographic characteristics of the Northwest Arkansas region.

This Technical Memorandum is one of several that are being prepared as part of this TDP. The *Documentation of Staff Input* summarizes the feedback received during interviews with supervision and bus operators at both Ozark Regional Transit and Razorback Transit during August and September 2010. This input will be used to identify strengths and weaknesses of both systems as service recommendations are developed throughout the project.

2.0 Ozark Regional Transit Staff Comment Summary

Ozark Regional Transit (ORT) fixed route drivers, supervisors and Transportation staff were invited to participate in one of two drop-in meetings to offer service-related feedback that could help guide NWARPC TDP process. The first meeting was between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. on Wednesday, August 4th. The second meeting was between 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. on Friday, August 6th. These time periods were chosen to ensure opportunities for afternoon drivers to comment prior to their shift and morning drivers to comment after their shift. Ten questions were posed to the staff to initiate dialogue and allow common themes to emerge. The questions for discussion and their corresponding responses were:

1. Who rides ORT?

People who don't drive, captive riders, seniors, disabled, growing non-English speaking population, fixed income, college students, low income, dialyses patients, persons who suffer from seizures

2. What are the most popular/busiest stops in the ORT system?

Walmart (any), NWA Mall, North Hills Medical Park, NWACC, Scottsdale Mall, Fayetteville Library, VHS, Social Security, Rogers City Hall, Harps; Harps is not as big a destination anymore

3. Are there route segments that are unutilized?

Route 44 segments east of Walmart on Walnut, would be more productive to go to Pinnacle Hills development, Route 40 Dawn Drive, Sycamore Street, locations for turnarounds that are out of the way (Route 43 White, Baccus, 40th, old St Mary's Hospital and Route 54 White/54th, Baccus)

4. Are there additional places that ORT needs to serve based on customer requests?

Pinnacle Hills, Mercy Hospital, Wedington (Betty Joe), Siloam Springs (casino), Crossover Road (Hwy 45), 71 Business to Lowell/Rogers, US 412, I-540, Walton, MLK, Joyce, Centerton to Walmart HQ, Madison County, Elkins, Rogers/Bentonville – East end of 102 for \$7 haircuts, Samaritan House, New Links Apartments (Rainbow Curve) in Bentonville, Rainbow Curve & Walton (Hotel), 8th & Walton, homeless services (SW 14th & I Street), SW 28th, Touchstone, Dialyses, Harps on Garden, Mission & Crossover (Grad students), corridors – Huntsville, Sunset, New Hope Drive (east of 71), 8th Street, Easy Street (Rogers), 412 to Siloam Springs, needs to serve high schools and junior schools to retain common riders, Walmart (Pleasant Grove in Lowell), St. Mary's Hospital, Farmington High School (college classes)

5. Does the service need to operate earlier? Later?

Should start earlier to catch commuter shifts at 7 a.m. perhaps 5-5:30 a.m.; should run later (more pressing) at least one hour, maybe 9, 10 or 11 p.m. to accommodate employees and college students (NWACC Bentonville), need Saturday service, Sunday service not needed

6. How well do connections work? Where are the problems?

Mostly work pretty well, drivers hold for five minutes, limited staging space at NWA Mall, Route 54 challenged to make connections, afternoon traffic corrupts connections

7. Are there running time shortfalls? Where/when?

Route 40 – not bad when there are no wheelchairs, Lifestyles makes it too tight, too many deviations for available running time

Route 41 – under control, Razorback Road is problematic during school, too many deviations for available running time, 12th & Washington

Route 42 – good shape, no problem

Route 43 – o.k. but would be problematic if service ran all day, tight, too many traffic lights, driving in and out of library, schools, etc.

Route 44 – low ridership volume, easy to maintain schedule, loose, relaxed schedule, could do more

Route 46 – covers a lot of ground and easy to lose time, very tight, power chairs, minimal ridership at senior center

Route 47 – fine, sitting time at one end but allows for wheelchair delays

Route 50 – only one trip so no problems, no ridership, doesn't run early enough in the afternoon

Route 54 – so far, so good, needs adjustment at NWACC to make connections further downstream, schedule is very dependent on college students and the NWACC schedule

Route 55 – 10-minute one-way trip is too constrained, would operate better at 30-minute frequency, no riders, scheduled break interferes with connections

8. What delays you most?

Traffic light timing (College Avenue @ VA Hospital), traffic, flag stops, wheelchairs, disabled passengers, waiting for connections, fare media

9. Name three things that work really well at ORT

Mechanics/maintenance, dispatch, driver courtesy, good people, treated with respect, teamwork, personal service

10. Name three things that ORT struggles with

Scheduling, quick to reprimand, slow to show appreciation, unnecessary radio communications (transfers), payscale, living wage, all forms of communication (admin, training, etc.), route directions (turn by turn) out of date, level of service (frequency), lack (or knowledge) of written procedure, operators feel many procedures unnecessary

3.0 Razorback Transit Staff Comment Summary

Razorback Transit fixed route drivers, supervisors and Transportation staff were invited to participate in a drop-in meeting to offer service-related feedback that could help guide NWARPC TDP process. The meeting was conducted between 1 p.m. and 4 p.m. on Wednesday, September 8th. This time period was chosen to ensure opportunities for afternoon drivers to comment prior to their shift and morning drivers to comment after their shift. The date was selected to ensure maximum bus operator participation and staffing associated with the start of the University of Arkansas school year. Given the unique mission and operating conditions at Razorback Transit, a more free-flow discussion of operating concerns and input was conducted. Highlights from those discussions are outlined below:

Areas that need service

- East area of Fayetteville – east of College
- The Cliffs Apartments, out on Crossover Road
- North/south route along Hwy 112
- Joyce & Crossover – social security office over there
- The Links apartment complex out on Wedington (they have their own private shuttle to U of A)
- Turtle Creek Road/Turtle Creek Apartments – upper end and student housing
- Salvation Army at 15th St. and US 71
- The Meadowlands out on Wedington
- The Wal-Mart on Hwy 62 towards Farmington and housing ¼-½ mile past the Wal-Mart
- Holland, Camellia areas in Farmington
- South part of town along Hwy 71 – lower income area
- Up and down Crossover (Hwy 265, East side of US 71)
- Old Wire Road
- Mission and Crossover
- Township Road
- Drake and Gregg (apartments going up in there – one for disabled, one for students)
- U of A electrical engineering area on south 71

Run Time issues

- Brown Route – have to hustle to make trip in 20 minutes
- Blue route

Other Items

- Transfers to ORT occur at Hillcrest Towers, at Mall, at Methodist church, at Library and Central Parking
- Razorback yard will need to be expanded if bus service is to be expanded
- Too much bus service on short routes that have common stops (e.g., along Pomfret, Green routes)
- Red route could use another bus to attract more riders with 30-minute service instead of 60-minutes. Route should also start earlier (6:30 a.m.)
- Purple routing should be added to the Green Reduced schedule
- Maple Hill and Maple Hill Express – perhaps too much service to Maple Hill between the two routes

- Extra personnel needed for cleaning buses. Buses look kind of scrappy. Would provide Razorback with a more positive image.
- Note that Tan and Green are running 2 buses in the a.m. until ridership calms down (beginning at 7:00).
- Paratransit – Razorback PT gets complaints from riders about ORT paratransit. People tend to gravitate towards Razorback PT instead of ORT paratransit when there's a choice – mostly because of the free fare, but also because ORT seems to refuse service to customers more often.
- Paratransit use is high near the intersection of Drake & Gregg.
- Razorback Transit bus operators are not familiar with ORT schedules and are at a loss when trying to assist passengers who are trying to navigate between the two systems