

Northwest Arkansas Transit Development Plan

Technical Memorandum #2 Documentation of Public Input

Prepared for:



**RAZORBACK
TRANSIT**

Submitted by:
Connetics Transportation Group
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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 Public Input* summarizes the feedback received during interviews with local stakeholders and the general public. This input will be used to identify strengths and weaknesses of the current public transportation systems as well as opportunities for future growth in the region. It is also important to note that this is not the only means of soliciting public input for this project. An on-board survey is also being conducted as part of this TDP. Its findings will be presented in *Technical Memorandum #4 – On-Board Survey Methodology and Results*.

2.0 Public Input Summary

An important part of the TDP is to reach a broad constituency within the community to solicit input on routes, schedules and service types. This will ensure that the community is involved, given ample opportunity to provide input, and made aware that their issues have been heard and understood.

To achieve these goals, two (2) community meetings were held at strategic locations throughout the TDP study area. This included Tuesday, September 7th at the Fayetteville Public Library from 2 to 6 p.m.; and Thursday, September 9th at the Center for Non-Profits at St. Mary's in Rogers from 2 to 6 p.m. Both locations were selected based on their access to public transit to ensure fair access for all. The community meetings were advertised on-board all ORT and Razorback Transit buses (see Figure 2-1) as well as through local print and television news media outlets. To increase the meeting's reach, the effort was co-located with the NWARPC's Long Range Transportation Plan's public input sessions. The Fayetteville meeting was attended by 81 participants. The Rogers meeting was attended by 47 participants.

Figure 2-1
On-Board Public Meeting Advertisement

HELP US BUILD A GREAT TRANSIT SYSTEM

**THE NWA REGIONAL
PLANNING COMMISSION
OZARK REGIONAL TRANSIT
& RAZORBACK TRANSIT
need YOUR help with designing
improvements for the region's transit**

**FAYETTEVILLE
SEPTEMBER 7 | 2 pm - 6 pm
Fayetteville Public Library
Walker Community Room
401 W. Mountain St.**

**ROGERS
SEPTEMBER 9 | 2 pm - 6 pm
Center for Nonprofits at St. Mary's
Main Lobby Conference Room
1200 W. Walnut St.**

**Your ideas will help guide transit
improvements over the next 25 years**





DIRECTIONS TO EVENTS

**FAYETTEVILLE
SEPTEMBER 7 | 2 pm - 6 pm
Fayetteville Public Library
Walker Community Room
401 W. Mountain St.**



The Public Library is accessible by ORT routes 40 & 41 and a short walk from Brown and Lot 56 Razorback Routes

**ROGERS
SEPTEMBER 9 | 2 pm - 6 pm
Center for Nonprofits at St. Mary's
Main Lobby Conference Room
1200 W. Walnut St.**



The Center for Nonprofits at St. Mary's is accessible by ORT route 44

For more information contact the NWARPC at
479-751-7125
TTY: **1-800-285-1131** or email
Celia Scott-Silkwood at
cscott-silkwood@nwarpc.org



Both meetings were conducted in an “open house” format. The consultant team set up a table with maps of the existing transit service and solicited participants to show them where additional transit service was warranted. A survey was also provided to gauge their familiarity as well as their perceptions of public transit in the area (see Figure 2-2). At the end of the survey form, participants were encouraged to offer ideas and thoughts regarding their perceived strengths, weaknesses and future transit needs in the region.

Figure 2-2

Northwest Arkansas Transit Opinion Survey

The Northwest Arkansas RPC is presently evaluating ways to improve transit service across the region. Please take a minute to help us by filling out this survey regarding your opinions of bus service. *Thank you for your help!*

1. How familiar are you with ORT and/or Razorback Transit public transportation services?

- ₁ Very Familiar ₂ Somewhat Familiar ₃ Not Familiar At All

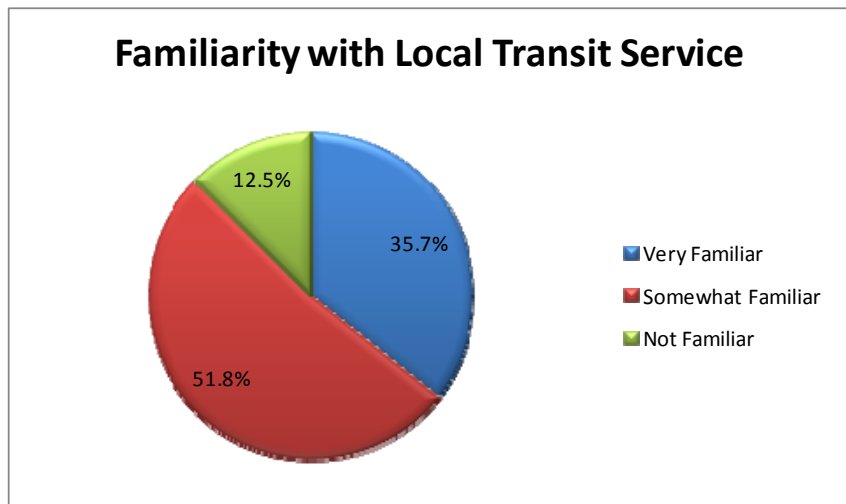
2. How important are the following characteristics to making you more likely to ride transit?

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important	Not Sure
a. Frequent bus service	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
b. Direct bus routes to destinations	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
c. Reliable bus travel times	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
d. Late evening service	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
e. Saturday & Sunday service	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
f. Express or limited-stop bus services	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
g. Park-and-Ride facilities	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
h. Community shuttles near my home or office	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
i. Availability of schedule & route information	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
j. Cost of bus fares	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
k. Security on buses & at transit stations	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
l. Cleanliness of buses & transit stations	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
m. Courtesy/friendliness of bus drivers	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
n. Sidewalk & bike access to bus stops	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
o. Employer incentives to use transit services	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
p. Automobile traffic congestion	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
q. High automobile fuel or parking prices	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
r. Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄

3. Please list any major destinations you would like to see served by an improved regional transit system.

57 respondents completed the questionnaire. Of those, an overwhelming majority had at least some level of familiarity with the local transit service with 36% identifying as being “very familiar”, 52% being “somewhat familiar” and 12% as “not familiar” (see Figure 2-3).

Figure 2-3



The second section of the survey was oriented toward attitudinal perceptions of what makes service successful. All characteristics ranked between “very important” and “somewhat important”. With a score of “1” identifying “very important” characteristics and “3” identifying “not important” characteristics, Table 2-1 ranks the averages of the responses for each of the service characteristics outlined in Question 2.

**Table 2-1
Transit Opinion Survey Service Characteristics Rankings**

Ranking	Service Characteristic	Average Score (1-3)
1	Frequent Bus Service	1.15
2	Reliable Bus Travel Times	1.25
3	Availability of Route and Schedule Information	1.33
4	Cleanliness of Buses and Transit Stations	1.44
5	Direct Bus Routes to Destinations	1.45
6	Security on Buses and at Transit Stations	1.52
6	Sidewalk and Bike Access to Bus Stops	1.52
8	Courtesy and Friendliness of Bus Operators	1.66
9	Community Shuttles Near My Home or Office	1.73
10	Automobile Traffic Congestion	1.77
10	Cost of Bus Fares	1.77
12	High Automobile Fuel or Parking Proce	1.78
13	Saturday and Sunday service	1.79
14	Park-and-Ride Facilities	1.85
15	Late Evening Service	1.87
16	Employer Incentives to Use Transit Service	1.90
17	Express or Limited-Stop Bus Services	1.94

The final section of the survey solicited input for destinations that respondents would like to see served in a new, expanded regional transit system. In Fayetteville, respondents’ most common requests indicated that they would like to see service to:

1. NWA Regional Airport (9 comments)
2. Springdale/Downtown Springdale (5 comments)
3. Wedington Corridor/West Fayetteville (5 comments)
4. Bentonville/Downtown Bentonville (4 comments)
5. West Fork (4 comments)

In Rogers, the most frequent requests were:

1. Pinnacle Hills Mall Area (5 comments)
2. Mercy/St. Mary’s Hospital (4 comments)
3. NWA Regional Airport (2 comments)

3.0 Stakeholder Input Summary

A Project Advisory Committee (PAC) has been assembled to monitor and provide input throughout the TDP process. This diverse panel consists of stakeholders from the NWARPC, ORT and Razorback Transit management, the local jurisdictions, community interest groups and the riding public. During the first PAC meeting in August 2010, members were asked for their input regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the current system, characteristics of an expanded transit network, needed complementary infrastructure (e.g. sidewalks), and transit infrastructure. Some of the comments received were:

- Friendly, timely, helpful, and safe drivers
- Express route from Fayetteville to Rogers is excellent. Timely service.
- Need a commuter service – to plants, Wal-Mart, Tyson – what are the best starting and ending times?
- People with impediments can't get jobs without consistent transportation
- Will need additional mobility infrastructure -- need better sidewalk system
- ORT has to charge and Razorback doesn't (students pay fees) – this can become confusing to some
- Need to coordinate better with Razorback; more of a seamless system
- Without the frequency, not really serving the working public
- NWACC – campus in Bella Vista not served
- ORT – serves a large area, but doesn't have the frequency
- ORT routes are generally loops – not designed as a service of 1st choice, but rather as a last resort
- Paratransit – must schedule in advance -- this is a problem if there is an emergency
- ORT is not a service of speed, but one of necessity
- How important is front door service?
- Must have a multi-modal system
- Install shelters – share these with ORT and Razorback
- Difficult to find out about public transit
- Bus stops and schedules are not visible enough
- There is a possibility of many more people riding the bus if it were easier to ride; but a choice rider might only ride once because the system is so disjointed
- The smaller buses are perceived as paratransit only
- The bad stigma of riding the bus – as “losers” – must stress the environment as the correct thing to do...marketing is important
- Need a robust bus system before starting a train system
- State won't let transit facilities (like shelters) in their Right-of-Way
- Other states such as Louisiana allow for shelters in the ROW as long as there is visibility and no advertising

In addition to the PAC, the Consultant Team also reached out to two of Northwest Arkansas' leading employers – Tyson Foods and Wal-Mart.

Tyson Foods

On September 9, 2010, a meeting was held with Patrick Pilkington and Russell Tooley of Tyson Foods. The purpose of the meeting was to gain a better understanding of Tyson's processing and administrative operations. This discussion included estimated number of employees and operating hours at the major facilities within the Northwest Arkansas region. Locations with parking shortfalls and higher numbers of entry-level wage earners were of particular interest. Tyson also indicated a need to provide transit access to their employment center which is located in Lowell just off of Business 71. At the conclusion of the meeting, Tyson representatives agreed to work with the Consulting Team to provide home zip code/work location pairings to assist with future local and targeted express service planning efforts.

Wal-Mart

On September 8, 2010, a meeting was held with Mike Duncan of Wal-Mart. Like the meeting with Tyson, this meeting was also designed to seek transit service opportunities to Wal-Mart's major facilities – particularly the headquarters complex along 8th Street in Bentonville. The discussion included past survey efforts and an understanding of how employees currently navigate the sprawling complex. Wal-Mart's primary need is for on-campus circulation. However, they are also extremely sensitive to the perception of the company benefiting from tax-payer funded initiatives. Thus, they lean toward self-funding if service to the Wal-Mart Headquarters were to be implemented. Regardless, Mr. Duncan shared information regarding the "four corners" service plan that identified areas in which the highest densities of Wal-Mart's corporate employees lived. Routes were designed and nearly implemented two years ago. However, when gas prices subsided, the plans were shelved awaiting executive approval.