

CHAPTER FOUR: Demand Estimation and Needs Assessment

INTRODUCTION

One particular task in the development of this TDP includes the preparation of estimates of demand for public transit over the five-year planning period, the assessment of mobility needs in Gainesville, and a brief review of alternative methods for increasing mobility through transit system improvements. This chapter summarizes the results of this effort and leads into the final task of the TDP, which identifies and evaluates alternatives and recommendations.

Various methods exist for estimating the demand for transit service and assessing unmet mobility needs. The demand estimation techniques used in this document rely on data and findings from all previous tasks as well as operating data collected from other sources. The proposed goals and initiatives from Chapter Two and the existing levels and perceptions of service are also considered in assessing the need for improved service.

This chapter also includes a needs assessment that summarizes relevant information concerning unmet demand, the service area, service span and frequency, type of service, and multimodal linkages that may contribute to improving public transit service and mobility for residents of Gainesville.

CURRENT AND FUTURE DEMAND FOR TRANSIT SERVICE

There are several different methods available to estimate the level of demand for transit service in Gainesville. Demand may be estimated by using trend analysis, peer review comparisons, fare and service elasticities, census tract analysis, and from interviews and surveys. The following sections provide estimates for fixed-route transit demand in Gainesville using trend analysis methods.

Ridership Trends

Since fiscal year 2000, passenger trips at RTS have increased from 5.2 million to over 8.1 million in fiscal year 2005. This increase in ridership can be attributed to service changes implemented by RTS and the increased level of demand from students at the University of Florida.

A trend analysis of past ridership figures suggests that passenger trip increases over the next five years would produce similar figures to the existing passenger productivity rates used for service estimates. Therefore, RTS used existing passengers per hour in FY 2005 in conjunction with the five-year service plan to expand fixed route services discussed in Chapter Four to estimate ridership increases over the next five years. Essentially, Table IV-1 below shows that as fixed route service hours increase, passenger productivity will increase at approximately the same rate. As shown in Table IV-1, fixed route service hours increase at a rate of approximately 5 to 7 percent each year.

**Table IV-1
Projected Fixed-Route Ridership for Gainesville RTS
Fixed Route Revenue Hour Expansion**

	FY 2005 (Actual)	FY 2006	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011
Fixed Route Revenue Hours	235,765	257,866	275,003	295,302	308,900	322,309	337,236
Passengers Per Hour	34.6	35.0	35.0	35.0	35.0	35.0	35.0
Ridership	8,152,989	9,025,310	9,625,105	10,335,570	10,811,500	11,280,815	11,803,260

***NOTE:** Estimation based on FY 2006 year-to-date values (October 2004 – March 2005)

Demand-Responsive Service Ridership Estimates

Americans with Disabilities Act

In addition to requiring transit agencies to provide accessible, fixed-route bus service, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 requires transit operators to provide complementary paratransit service. Federal regulations define the service criteria that must be met when implementing complementary paratransit service. The six service criteria, described in Section 37.31 of the federal regulations (49 CFR Part 37), include the following:

- Service area
- Response time
- Fares
- Trip purpose
- Hours and days of service
- Capacity constraints

Section 37.123 of the ADA regulations describes the eligibility standards for the paratransit service. To be eligible for ADA complementary paratransit services, persons must be unable to use fixed-route service for some or all of their trips because of the nature of their disabilities. A person who is blind or uses a wheelchair, for example, is not automatically eligible for ADA paratransit unless he or she is specifically unable to use the fixed-route service.

ADA requires public transit systems to prepare a *Complementary Paratransit Plan* describing the system's implementation plan for ADA paratransit service, and to provide annual updates to the plan. Although RTS reported its full compliance with the complementary paratransit provisions as of January 1997, there have been changes in the approach to this commitment over the past few years. In previous years, RTS had been providing mini-bus service that operated a mixture of ADA trips and trips assigned from the local Community Transportation Coordinator. In early 1998, RTS changed its policy and is now only providing trips for ADA eligible persons. Also in 1998, RTS contracted with the Center for Independent Living (CIL) to conduct a recertification of all eligible individuals to match the eligibility criteria as defined by the FTA. Approximately 3,025 individuals are certified to use RTS paratransit service.

RTS is continuing its contract MV Transportation, the local Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC), to provide complementary ADA paratransit service. RTS has also continued to purchase vehicles to lease to the CTC.

By contracting with the local CTC to provide demand response service, RTS is in line with many other transit systems in the state that have utilized Florida's coordinated transportation system to meet their responsibilities. Table IV-2 below provides estimates of eligible persons and ridership over the five-year period.

**Table IV-2
ADA-Eligible Person and Trip Projections**

Projection	Year					
	2006*	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Number of Persons Certified ADA-Eligible	3,067	3,527	4,056	4,665	5,364	6,169
Number of ADA Paratransit Trips Provided	27,900*	32,085	36,898	42,432	48,797	56,117

*NOTE: Estimates for 2007 through 2011 based on projected fifteen percent increase per year.

Fixed-route service improvements such as route extensions and realignments, and lengthening of the span of service during the day have definite implications with regard to ADA requirements. Complementary paratransit service must be provided during the hours of normal fixed-route operation, and must be made available to all eligible persons within three-quarters of one mile of a fixed route. Therefore, such proposals as expanded evening or introduction of service to new areas will also expand the hours or geographic service coverage that will be required for complementary ADA service and, thus, increase the projected number of ADA trips.

NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

There are a number of opportunities for RTS to take a strategic approach not only in expanding services but also in capitalizing on recent events to improve overall image, importance to the community, customer bases, and community support. Setting a course for capitalizing on these opportunities, starts with looking at RTS' facilities and bus stop infrastructure.

Facilities and Transit Infrastructure (Amenities)

RTS can use business relationships as a means of placing new transit infrastructure along its bus routes. Facilities and infrastructure (or bus stop amenities) form a base of assets for transit used to highlight issues of importance to Gainesville. Similar to the "Adopt-a-Highway" program, RTS can foster community ownership of transit facilities by having community groups sponsor shelters and facilities. As part of the sponsorship, RTS could promote clean-up days whereby the sponsor would pick up trash around the transit facility. Such sponsorship gives exposure to both RTS and the community group, which would have a plaque or other form placed on the facility.

Bicycle parking facilities need to be added to transit stops with high passenger usage. An example of where bicycle parking facilities should be placed is throughout the University of Florida campus, downtown, and at bus stops where passenger shelters are located. Automatic Passenger Counters (APCs) technology can be used to collect more accurate information regarding passenger boardings and alightings (exiting bus).

Special Event Transportation Services

RTS currently provides transit services for park-and-ride lots associated with University of Florida football and basketball games. This type of special event transportation can be expanded to other events such as downtown art festivals and other events wherein traffic and parking are an issue. Special event transportation provides an additional benefit besides good will and exposure. It is a means for RTS to engage in product sampling for those members of the community who would otherwise never experience using our services.

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) maintains strict guidelines that must be followed for transit agencies providing charter services. Limited capital and human resources have also limited RTS' abilities to focus on expanding its special event transportation services.

Community Service

Community service enables the transit system to provide one-time special transportation services for a community group. As with special event transportation, community service can be used as a product sampling opportunity. However, it can also be used to target specific markets that RTS is attempting to expand. For instance, if RTS was seeking to expand the senior and youth markets, then it could target community service to events involving only those groups. Community service is a cost-efficient way to use equipment and human resources.

EXISTING AND NEW MARKETS

Existing Customer Bases

Although the existing customer base for RTS includes traditional transit markets and university students, it does not follow the same trends as the rest of the State. Furthermore, RTS has been experiencing a reduction in the rate of ridership growth. RTS is currently examining its existing transit market and looking at ways to modify its existing transit system to better meet the needs of the community, and developing strategies to identify and reach untapped markets within the urban area.

Below are ways RTS plans to continue increasing ridership with existing and new customers.

Traditional Transit Markets

As an industry, we tend to refer to traditional transit markets as the "Transit Dependent," meaning low income persons who cannot afford cars, seniors, and youth under the age of 18. The concept of transit dependency defies logic since there will always be individuals who fit the demographics that commonly define "dependent" and yet those individuals do not use transit. Everyone who boards a transit vehicle is making a choice to do so. RTS has an opportunity to treat its traditional transit markets as any other market segment and become more responsive to their needs and travel patterns to serve them better in the future.

On-board surveys can be used not only to determine the priorities for service improvements, but also to determine real origins and destinations for those routes serving traditional transit markets. The 2001 On-Board Survey of Riders, conducted by consultants performing the Comprehensive Operational Analysis (COA), identified that RTS ridership is far less transit dependent based upon traditional measurements of this condition. Nearly 80% of respondents

said they are licensed drivers and able to drive. In addition, 51% said they had a vehicle available for the transit trip upon which they were surveyed. The data yielded from the Automatic Passenger Counters (APC) has resulted in preliminary recommendations pertaining to route alignments and re-orientation of services to reflect the recorded passenger counts for boardings and alightings on all routes.

Seniors and People with Disabilities

Seniors do not comprise a large percentage of the population in Alachua County (12.6 percent) and are more dispersed throughout Alachua County. In its community outreach efforts, RTS should continue to attempt to visit senior centers to determine ways in which seniors can be better served.

People with disabilities are more likely to live within the urban area and may be accustomed to riding paratransit services for their travel needs. However, as RTS replaces and expands its fleet, there will be more buses with wheelchair and other accessibility features.

Youth under Age 18

In contrast to seniors, the under 18 segment of the population accounts for over 20 percent of Alachua County's population. RTS currently provides service to thirteen elementary schools, four middle schools, five high schools and five private schools in the Gainesville urban area. RTS can expand ridership in this age group by working with the School Board and the individual schools. Many transit systems have school programs where transit agency personnel visit classrooms once a year and discuss the benefits of transit with children. These programs are used to introduce children who may likely be adult riders to the transit system. RTS should also identify whether the School Board has an interest in increasing transit usage to alleviate capacity on regular school bus routes. For middle and high school students, RTS can market the independence and flexibility that comes with fixed route transit service.

University Students

In August 1998, all students enrolled at the University of Florida began paying a per-credit hour fee to have unlimited prepaid access to the transit system. Students have been the largest growth market for RTS. RTS needs to communicate that they are in touch with student transportation needs and is responsive to those needs. As frequency and span of service improvements are made in the coming years, RTS should continue to communicate its response to customer demand. In addition, university students are by definition a dynamic market for transit because each year new freshmen move into the area and seniors graduate. Therefore, RTS has established information systems for incoming freshmen introduced to the transit system for the first time. RTS provides information to students at the summer orientation for incoming freshmen, and works diligently with advertising and marketing consultants to develop services, such as easy to read campus maps, that will aid incoming freshman exposed for the first time to transit.

University of Florida Employees/Commuters

As parking becomes more inconvenient for students on campus, it is likely to also become more inconvenient for employees of the University and medical complex. Fixed route local bus service has not proven to be highly attractive to university employees in past years. However, as RTS begins to expand its product base with express services from park-and-rides, van pools, ride matching for carpooling, and guaranteed ride home programs, RTS may be able to tailor its

services to accommodate university employees. Serving this market is yet another reason that establishing responsiveness and credibility is important to RTS in coming years. As more and more people have a positive experience with the transit agency, there is an increased likelihood that others will follow. The Employee Pass Program for University of Florida employees is a step toward making transit a more attractive travel mode. An employee pass program has been recently developed and implemented for Veteran's Administration Hospital Employees. Approximately 2,000 employees have signed up to receive an RTS sticker that enables them pre-paid unlimited access to RTS transit services.

Downtown Commuters

The City of Gainesville has long had a desire to support the growth and development of the downtown area. Downtown commuters are likely to have demands and tastes for services similar to those of UF employees. In January and March 1999, RTS conducted surveys of downtown employees to attempt to address their needs with flexible and tailored services. City and county employees began unlimited transit service in Spring 2000. Recently, there has been increased attention on the prospects of a downtown circulator service. In response to this request for downtown shuttle service, RTS has drafted two circulator routes that would provide peak hour transit shuttle service between downtown Gainesville, the University of Florida and nearby employee parking lots within the downtown area.

Area Commuters

RTS is in the process of implementing a Commuter Choice Employer Outreach Program marketing campaign that targets employers and employees to encourage participation in the Federal Government's Commuter Choice Benefits Program and/or RTS' local Employee Bus Pass Program which offers prepaid services to employees. Both programs could potentially reduce the number of peak hour vehicle trips, and subsequent demand for vehicle parking.

PRODUCT APPROACH

In 2001, consultants conducting the Comprehensive Operational Analysis (COA) used stakeholder interviews to identify issues and expectations of the COA. Many stakeholders lauded RTS efforts in recent years for providing transit services designed around the needs of students.

While this effort has focused on the University of Florida and its students, RTS has successfully partnered with Santa Fe Community College (SFCC) to develop and implement pilot projects that include enhanced transit service tailored to the needs of SFCC students.

Other important issues provided by the stakeholder interviews include equity issues, growth expectations, system network design, countywide service, and funding/governance. For a more detailed explanation, please refer to the Regional Transit System Comprehensive Operational Analysis Chapter 2- Study Inputs.

Corresponding to the approach of developing existing and new markets for transit service is the approach of dealing with existing and new services of the transit system. The product approach not only enables the transit agency to target services to specific market segments, it also provides opportunities for developing different product names and logos for services which are offered under the umbrella of the RTS. By developing identity for each service, the customer has his/her own product with which to identify. Examples of this 'branding' are: Gator Aider (UF

football game shuttle service), Later Gator (late night bus service), Late Night Gator (Designated late night bus stops on campus), and Fast Break Shuttle (UF basketball game shuttle service).

The following pages provide an overview of existing and new services for RTS in the five-year timeframe.

Fixed-Route Local Service

Fixed-route local bus service expects to remain the primary focus of RTS service over the next ten years. RTS plans to perform a Comprehensive Operations Analysis (COA) in fiscal year 2007. This analysis will assist in identifying major issues and challenges facing RTS. The COA will address needs of the current customer, existing service, and financial constraints. The following aspects of fixed route service are discussed below:

- Service area;
- Later evening service;
- Improved frequency;
- Evening Service;
- Sunday Service.

Based on the population densities of the Gainesville urban area, the various market segments analyzed in the 1998 TDP, and the low transfer ratio in the service area, RTS is effective in serving a majority of its customer base. Development in the urban area continues to bring growth in the southern and western urban area. In coming years, additional high-density residential development in Gainesville's urbanized area will require expansion of the service area. However, the clear mandate from RTS customers surveyed for the 2001 COA was for improved frequency, evening service, improved Saturday service and Sunday service. RTS will examine the need to design its maintenance facility to accommodate articulated buses, which could handle the higher passenger volumes on specific routes.

Improved Frequency

From the transit agency's perspective, improving frequency resolves the issues of overcrowding and can improve actual running times for each trip in order to maintain frequency.

RTS has been making frequency improvements on heavily traveled routes and increasing the span of service. Increasing frequency will require an increase in the number of buses required to provide increased service. The RTS facility is 30 years old and is designed to accommodate 40 buses. The shortage of space for equipment and personnel directly limits the amount of service RTS can provide to the community.

Evening Service

RTS will continue making gradual service improvements in the evening while considering ways to even out the service span at the system level. For customers who require a transfer in traveling, it would be frustrating to have one route operating later in the evening only to discover that the second route ended earlier. As the University of Florida moves toward a 24-hour campus, request for extended service hours on campus-oriented routes will only continue to increase.

Saturday Service

The potential to enhance existing Saturday service exists for RTS. While existing capital resources are sufficient for such service enhancements, additional operational resources must be identified to successfully implement such service improvements.

Sunday Service

Based on the number of requests RTS receives for Sunday service, there exists a large demand for Sunday service in the community. The University of Florida Student Government and officials requested Sunday service on the campus East-West Circulator. This enhanced route began in Fall 2002 and continues to operate. Realizing the opportunity to enhance and develop Sunday service in the community, RTS collaborated with University of Florida and Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) to develop nine (9) new Sunday bus routes as a demonstration project. With funding support from the FDOT and the University of Florida, Sunday service is scheduled to begin operating in the fall of 2006.

Alternative Programs and Services

Support for new alternative programs has come from sources outside of RTS. For instance, express service from park-and-ride lots is one component of the 2020 Long Range Transportation Plan. The Florida Department of Transportation has supported the establishment of a commuter assistance program by entering into a partnership with RTS through a service development grant. Below is an overview of alternative programs for RTS.

Commuter Assistance Program

The Commuter Assistance Program is designed to provide a set of flexible and tailored services to meet the demands of commuters with busy lifestyles.

The goal of the RTS Commuter Assistance Program is to assist in alleviating congestion on urban roadways during peak hour commuting times. RTS' marketing efforts have targeted corridors within the Gainesville Urban Area with poor or failing levels of service in an attempt to improve transit patronage and in reduce traffic congestion. This program also seeks to create a more positive transit image through planned outreach initiatives.

Commuter Choice Employer Outreach Program

RTS' Commuter Choice Employer Outreach Program marketing campaign targets employers and employees along congested corridors within the Gainesville Urban Area. Through a marketing program, employees are informed about RTS routes and services. Employers offer their employees up to \$100.00 per month tax-free for transit benefits. The employers pay no payroll taxes on the benefit, and employees pay no income or payroll taxes on the benefit.

Employers have the option of implementing an Employee Bus Pass Program that offers prepaid service to employees. Both programs, the Commuter Choice Employee Outreach and Employee Bus Pass program, will reduce the number of vehicle trips during peak travel times. To date, RTS is working with the University of Florida, the North Florida / South Georgia Veterans Health System, and the Shands Hospital.

North Florida/ South Georgia Veterans Health System (NF/SG) Employee Bus Pass Program

The City of Gainesville entered into an interlocal agreement to provide 2,000 NF/SG employees unlimited access to transit, for a term of one year from May 1, 2006 through April 20, 2007 at cost of \$4.50 per employee.

The University of Florida Shands Hospital

The City of Gainesville entered into an interlocal agreement to provide 7,949 Shands Hospital employees unlimited access to transit for a one-year term beginning February 1, 2006 through January 31, 2007 at a cost of \$4.50 per employee.

Future Outreach Efforts

Future outreach activities will focus on identifying businesses along congested corridors. Employees and their employers along these corridors could take advantage of the Employer Outreach Bus Pass Program and reduce congestion simultaneously.

Proposed Services

A central service is the provision of vanpools wherein a group of commuters who live close to each other and travel to the same employer lease a van on a monthly basis and share expenses and driving duties. Vans are usually purchased through federal grants and then either administered by the transit agency or a private contractor. The cost of leasing turned over to the customers covers insurance, maintenance, and depreciation on the vehicle. Customers are then directly responsible for fuel costs on a monthly basis.

Vanpools have been known to form as a result of the transit agency soliciting companies and as a result of customers themselves forming a group and soliciting the transit agency. The success of vanpools is usually tied to major employment sites wherein employees live some distance away from the employer. In those instances, vanpools are more economical and convenient to the customers who use them. Vanpools are beneficial when it is not as feasible or convenient for commuters to use fixed-route transit services.

The development of Work for Gain Economic Self-Sufficiency (WAGES) services has helped identify an additional group of individuals in need of flexible transportation services. Vanpools could potentially provide the flexible transportation services that many WAGES program recipients require. Vanpools may also benefit residents in some of Gainesville's neighboring rural communities, such as Archer and Newberry, where lack of ridership would not support fixed route transit service.

Another service is ridematching, whereby there is a central advertised telephone number for customers to call and provide information on their home and work addresses. Through GIS-based software, information is fed into a system and matched with other commuters in the area who are seeking a carpool situation.

Work for Gain Economic Self-sufficiency (WAGES) case managers currently gather data from WAGES recipients regarding transportation needs. This information can be used in GIS-based software to identify employee/employer locations and provide ridematching. RTS works with the

Alachua Bradford Regional Workforce Development Board (ABRWDB) by providing transportation to WAGES customers who need access to childcare, education and training, medical services, and employment.

In addition to the services themselves, a commuter assistance program usually has a number of supportive services including a Guaranteed Ride Home Program, which provides vouchers for customers to receive a limited number of taxi trips when an emergency arises causing them to leave work early. Other supportive services include Employee Transportation Coordinator training within companies, pass programs for bus service, and other services tailored to the needs of a customer or customer group.

RTS is currently developing a commuter assistance project to create a Car Pool Parking/ Cash Out proposal. Recommendations of this program include:

- Reserving a nominal number of prime downtown parking spaces for employees who carpool to work
- Implementation of an employee parking lot shuttle
- Creation of an employee transportation benefits program consisting of a parking cash out program
- Continued support of subsidized transit access

Express Service

RTS continues to investigate the feasibility of express service with customer needs and demands in mind. For instance, park-and-ride locations, number of trips, direct travel, and alternatives for emergencies (e.g. a Guaranteed ride Home Program) are likely to be important issues for potential customers of this service. As the largest employer in the region, and the largest generator of trips on the road network in the peak periods, the University of Florida campus continues to be a prime candidate for express service.

In the fall of 1998, RTS began operating an express service between the Oaks Mall and the University of Florida. A joint agreement was established that allowed RTS to operate the UF Express service (Route 100) from the parking area immediately south of the Oaks Mall in exchange for asphalt surface and striping maintenance. This express service was discontinued in the summer of 2000 due to low ridership productivity: Although ridership ranged from 4,000 passengers per month in September 1998 to just over 1,000 passengers per month in the summer of 2000, other fixed-route services operating between the Oaks Mall and UF (Routes 5 and 20) were three times as productive as the UF Express service.

Commuter Assistance research funding will continue to address the feasibility of operating express services within the Gainesville urban area. In addition, as express routes become more feasible, RTS will reconsider the possibility of providing express service from remote locations to UF and Downtown Gainesville.

Bus Advertising Program

One means of supporting the business community while at the same time generating additional revenues for transit services is a bus advertising program. Adhesive graphics can transform into moving art that conveys a message or advertisement for a product, service or business. Strict artistic standards are usually applied and advertisements are limited to any product or service that can be purchased by a minor. This type of policy rules out advertising for tobacco, alcohol,

the lottery, adult entertainment, and/or other services or services deemed objectionable to the community.

Currently, in return for advertising, RTS accepts a monthly payment for advertisements and does not participate in trade-in-kind partnerships. For instance, media outlets such as newspapers or television and radio stations may provide time slots or space to RTS in return for bus advertising. Businesses may provide transit access to their property, construct transit amenities, or implement employer transportation packages to encourage their employees to use alternative forms of transportation. These trade-in-kind partnerships are used by many transit properties and RTS should consider them in the future.

In addition to the business community, RTS can use the bus advertising program to promote other agencies that are of importance to Gainesville. This is another aspect of forming relationships with other community jewels.

Any advertising program must be reviewed on a regular basis to assess the achievement or progress toward meeting financial and aesthetic goals. Some of the questions to be asked include: is the program self-funding, is the appearance of the advertising copy interfering with the overall appearance of the fleet, what are the comments from riders and other residents?

Community Outreach/Corporate Communications

Community outreach is another important step in getting to know the community that is getting to know transit. Although RTS proactively seeks any and all opportunities to give presentations in the community, RTS has been catapulted into the public spotlight due to the instant success of the prepaid unlimited access partnership between RTS and the University of Florida. This recent attention provides RTS another vehicle for educating the public about transit and transit related issues, as well as helps to generate increased feedback from the public in the form of "letters to the editor", phone calls and e-mailed comments and/or suggestions.

RTS' success has received national recognition in three trade journals. An article was published in Passenger Transport's May 6, 2002 Bus and Paratransit Conference issue entitled, *Transit Effort Helps Gainesville, Florida Boost City Revenue by \$2.5 Million*. RTS was also highlighted in the March / April 2003 issue of Busline Magazine, *RTS: Public Transit is Gaining in Gainesville* and the April 2004 issue of Mass Transit, *RTS Gainesville's Small Wonder*.

The Public Forum Outreach Program, developed by RTS, uses innovative audience polling techniques to help increase public comment and input into the transit planning process. Other examples of community outreach/corporate communications include the Chamber of Commerce, the Homebuilders Association, Rotary and other club gatherings, and the University of Florida Student Senate. Speaking engagements should focus on RTS' vision for transit, its desires for improvements to achieve that vision, and the importance of improvements to the community. Speaking engagements are also a great time to receive input from the public on issues of importance related to transportation and to establish contacts for potential partnerships.

Joint Promotions/Sponsorship of Community Events

Visibility for transit can be achieved through joint promotions and sponsorships wherein RTS and other partners pool resources in order to gain media exposure showing each in a positive light. As an example, RTS could join forces with a business partner and the Hippodrome to sponsor a show or season of shows. Promotions and sponsorships should further the vision of

RTS to make transit a fun and enjoyable experience that is accessible to all. The goal should always be to further position transit in the marketplace without draining huge financial resources from the transit system. Care should always be taken in deciding on events and promotions to maximize exposure and minimize financial expenditures. Events that will likely receive press coverage are good examples since the exposure would entail a mixture of paid and free media.

RTS Budgetary constraints have had an impact on the number of joint promotions and sponsored community events that are conducted in the City of Gainesville. There exists a need at RTS to develop and implement a criteria protocol to follow when choosing joint promotions and sponsorship opportunities within the community.

North Florida / South Georgia Veterans Health System (NF/SG) Employee Bus Pass Program

RTS staff partnered with NF/SG public relations to coordinate distribution of payroll inserts and posting brochure announcements to successfully market the Employee Bus Pass Program. RTS and NF/SG staff distributed over 350 bus pass stickers to employees. Additional bus pass stickers are available for employees who request them, and will be distributed by NF/SG staff.

Informal feedback from employees participating in the Employee Bus Pass Program indicate that more employees would commute to work by bus if there was direct service to the Veterans Administration Hospital originating west of Interstate 75.

GO-RTS.com Umbrella Marketing Campaign

RTS' umbrella marketing campaign is an important outlet for RTS to fulfill its vision and to address issues regarding transit image improvement. The campaign also assists in fostering community partnerships, positioning transit in the marketplace, and building customer confidence and trust. Building community support and increasing ridership are also important.

The GO-RTS.com marketing program consists of mass media directing riders to the RTS web site for transit information. It includes targeted radio and print publications, government access television, interior bus cards, participation in the Gainesville Kids Start Fair, Bike, Hike and Bus Week and other community events. This program includes website updates and maintenance.

Reauthorization of the Transportation Bill Campaign

RTS marketing is participating in the Public Transportation Partnership for Tomorrow (PT)² program initiated by the American Public Transportation Association (APTA). The goal of this national initiative was to achieve the best results on the reauthorization of the Transportation bill. In accordance with the (PT)² program, RTS placed emphasis on targeting and addressing the needs of the aging population as well as the younger, student age bus riders. As the number of Gainesville urban area residents who are looking for public transportation increases, the need for awareness campaigns is more crucial than ever.

The Road Ahead Public Relations Plan

RTS implemented a public relations campaign entitled: The Road Ahead. The purpose of the campaign was to inform and educate target audiences about RTS' past achievements, present challenges, and future strategies. The primary message conveys the importance of RTS's expansion plans and the introduction of the Commuter Choice Employer Outreach Program. The secondary message celebrated 30 years of transit service in the Gainesville urban area.

The Road Ahead public relations plan includes design, printing and insertion of 31,000 tabloid inserts into the *Gainesville Sun*; a press conference in conjunction with a radio remote and radio schedule; informative table top display and festive roll out of several new buses; invitation, interior bus cards, radio schedule and posters to promote the event and an employee recognition meeting. Research will be conducted to establish and monitor results of this campaign. This campaign includes targeted radio and print publications, interior bus cards, specialty items, video for government access television, and participation in special events.

Commuter Choice Employer Outreach Program

RTS uses a combination of print and broadcast, direct mail, information kits, brochures, payroll inserts, posters and personal visits with employers to market the Commuter Benefits Program and the Employee Bus Pass Program. Collateral materials such as employee notifications, payroll inserts, pass vouchers, bus pass cards and identification stickers are distributed to employers who participate in these programs. The RTS website (www.go-rts.com) explains the procedures and benefits of the Employee Bus Pass Program to both employers and employees. The RTS website also provides links to related sites and a calculator for computing cost savings associated with the use of public transportation.

Criteria for Success

There will be two measures for evaluating the effectiveness of the above mentioned marketing programs. The first will measure the number of businesses and employees who take advantage of RTS' Commuter Benefits Program and / or Employee Bus Pass Program. The second measure will be to conduct exit interviews to determine the number of new riders, level of customer satisfaction, RTS service awareness and where riders get their transit schedule information (website, schedule booklet, etc).

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

Marketing and communications play an important role in helping RTS fulfill its vision through:

- ◆ Improving image;
- ◆ Positioning transit in the marketplace;
- ◆ Building customer confidence and trust;
- ◆ Building community support;
- ◆ Increasing ridership; and
- ◆ Fostering partnerships

Setting a course for building support for public transportation starts with looking at what makes Gainesville a vital community. What makes Gainesville unique and what issues are currently addressing? Community values in Gainesville consist of a number of social and economic interests including:

- ◆ Business;
- ◆ Downtown Gainesville;
- ◆ Parks and Recreation;

- ◆ Culture and the Arts;
- ◆ Major Medical facilities;
- ◆ Environmental Advocacy Groups;
- ◆ Homebuilders and Developers;
- ◆ Established Neighborhoods;
- ◆ School System;
- ◆ University and Colleges;
- ◆ Apartment complexes;
- ◆ Social and Community Services;
- ◆ State Government facilities

The challenge for RTS is to understand the needs and interests of each of these entities for developing partnerships and joint opportunities to promote the interests of transit in Gainesville.

The challenge begins with relationships. Means by which RTS could cultivate these interests are outlined below.

In addition to fostering community support, RTS believes an opportunity exists to increase involvement from university students. RTS believes in providing students with practical experiences while in an educational setting, and to that end, sees an opportunity for students and faculty to participate in the development of a cost effective marketing and communications plan. Many departments at the University of Florida offer courses that encompass the components of a marketing and communications plan (i.e., Marketing, Public Relations, Fine Arts, Journalism, Business Administration, and Music). In addition, Gainesville has a business community that must conduct the same activities for their companies. RTS could communicate these ideas with students, professors, and local businesses to develop a marketing and communications plan for future implementation.

One idea would be to enlist the help of an interested professor to offer an interdisciplinary course or seminar to students. The course would be structured to provide exposure to all of the major facets of marketing and communications with the prospect to hear guest speakers from the transit industry. Groups of students from major disciplines would be assigned to professors and business professionals for an opportunity to each create a Marketing and Communications Plan for RTS.

RTS would establish the parameters of the plan by providing a framework that would address the following topics:

- ◆ Transit logos and packaging,
- ◆ Corporate Communications,
- ◆ Promotions,
- ◆ Target Markets,
- ◆ Community Relations,
- ◆ Transit Alliances,
- ◆ Marketing, and
- ◆ Media/Advertising.

RTS would judge the proposals based on content, quality and cost effectiveness, and award the best three proposals with a choice of a monetary prize, small scholarship, or perhaps a summer internship to interested participants.