



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recognizing the need for improved public transportation services within Pitt County, the four main transit providers, together with the North Carolina Department of Transportation hired Wilbur Smith Associates (WSA), together with CB&A Research, and Cherry Consulting of the Carolinas to conduct the *Regional Transit Feasibility Study*.

The study examined the need and potential for regionalized transportation services. The four transit services operating within the county are:

- The Greenville Area Transit (GREAT) service – fixed route service throughout the city of Greenville
- Pitt Area Transit System (PATS) – human service agency demand-responsive service throughout the county
- East Carolina University –services for ECU students
- Pitt County Memorial Hospital – parking lot shuttles for its campus.

This study examined the operation of the existing systems and evaluated the desirability of providing a more consolidated or coordinated system in the region. Besides extensive meetings with all of the parties, a separate survey was conducted of ECU students to evaluate their perspectives.

This Executive Summary provides the identified challenges facing public transportation services within Pitt County, and those facing the potential for developing regional transportation services in particular. It concludes that a coordinated, regional service will provide the best overall service for residents in the area, but that the initial

phases should focus on the City of Greenville and Pitt County.

Following the discussion of the Challenges, the Executive Summary provides the Guidelines to be used in developing the Recommendations, and then presents the specific Recommendations for coordinating and regionalized transportation the services.

### CHALLENGES

WSA identified five major Challenges facing this region currently and in the future. These Challenges must be addressed if the area is to provide desirable transit service to the region.

### CHALLENGES

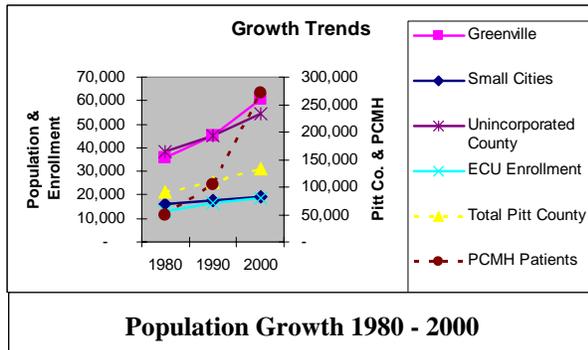
1. Increasing population, enrollment, and patient visits
2. Maintaining air quality
3. Providing and paying for additional parking
4. Providing service to meet the needs
5. Improving service coordination

### Challenge 1: Increasing Population, Enrollment, & Patients

The Greenville and Pitt County area has demonstrated a healthy growth between 1980 and 2000. Greenville’s population increased 69% during this period, Pitt County as a whole grew 48%.

ECU enrollment increased 42% between 1980 and 2000. PCMH has had the most dramatic increases of all parties. Between 1980 and 2000, patient volume increased 459%.

The implication of this growth is that traffic congestion has and will continue to increase, and the demands on parking at ECU and PCMH will continue to grow.



**Challenge 2: Maintaining Air Quality**

While this growth is a demonstration of a healthy economy, it does bring with it increasing concern over quality of life issues. Under the Federal Environmental Protection Agency’s new standards, Pitt County has exceeded the ozone (smog) standard in four of the past seven years. Increases in traffic result in greater levels of air pollution as more cars travel more miles. Public transportation can address this issue by providing alternative means to travel. Buses create less air pollution than individual riders traveling in their separate cars.

**Challenge 3: Providing and Paying for Additional Parking**

Growth brings increased traffic and the need for parking. According to a separate parking study, an additional 2,576 spaces are needed on ECU’s main campus in the next 10 years – a 32 percent increase. The Brody School of Medicine needs an additional 1,568 spaces in the same time period for an increase of 109 percent.

This need for parking directly impacts the community as well. Unless measures are taken to reduce the parking demand by implementing more transit services, more parking spaces must be provided, or the

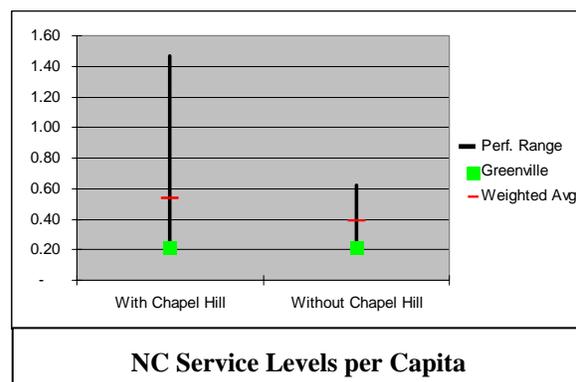
additional cars will spillover into adjacent neighborhoods.

This amount of additional parking will require 34-41 acres of land and cost \$5.2 million for the additional parking at the main campus and \$3.1 million at the Brody School. Including shuttle bus costs, the total additional parking related expenses would be \$9.8 million through 2010.

A parking demand study was not available for PCMH, but assuming similar demands, PCMH must more than double the number of parking spaces in just a 10-year period. Assuming 4,600 current spaces, this growth rate would require an additional 6,300 spaces. These spaces will require 52-63 acres and cost \$12.6 million.

**Challenge 4: Providing Service to Meet the Needs**

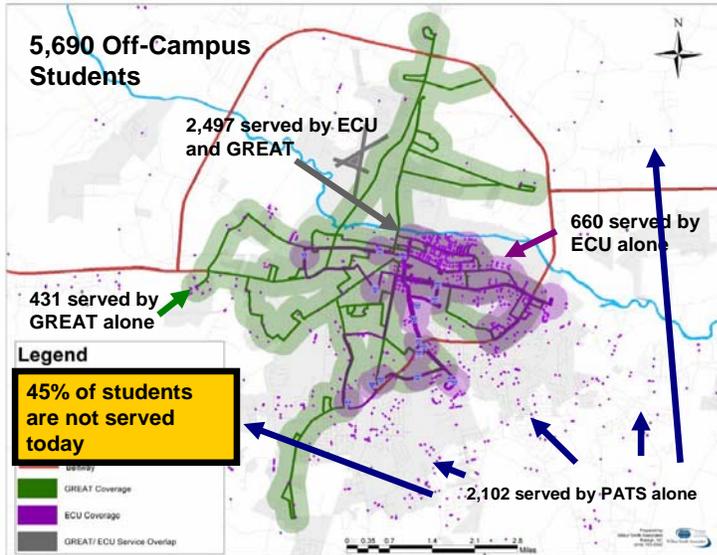
Currently, Greenville has available less general public service per capita than similarly sized cities in North Carolina. To provide the same level of service as other NC cities in 2000, Greenville would need to provide 10,375 additional hours per year, a 79.1 percent increase.



The low levels of general public transit service are directly proportional to the amount of competing service offered by ECU. The City’s ability to offer productive service is hampered by the competing service offered by

ECU. Because the ECU system serves a significant portion of the City's population, The City has also not invested as much funding for transit as have the other cities.

planning of public transportation service. As a result, a seamless transit system is not available to residents since each service is designed for its unique constituency. While this approach results in catered service to the majority of the constituents, certain groups are not well served, principally:



**ECU Students with Bus Service**

- General public riders outside Greenville;
- General public riders along ECU bus routes;
- Off-campus ECU students beyond walking distance of ECU Transit and GREAT; and
- PCMH employees/ patients without automobiles.

A major objective of any change is to improve transit service availability for these groups by coordinating the operations of all providers and allowing greater general public access.

Another unserved population is ECU students who are not within walking distance of the ECU or GREAT routes. While these students can use the remote parking lots, this option requires them to have a car. Of the 5,690 students living off campus in Fall 2002, 45 percent, or 2,102, were not within walking distance of bus service.

**GUIDELINES**

To address these challenges, the Steering Committee and consulting staff developed several guidelines regarding the provision of public transportation services and the organizational structure required to support those services. Specific recommendations to implement these guidelines follow in the next section.

Pitt County (outside of Greenville) remains one of only seven counties in North Carolina without general public service. At a compounded annual growth rate of 1.5 percent, this portion of the county will see 12,000 additional residents without transit service by 2010.

**Guideline 1: Provide General Public Service to All Residents**

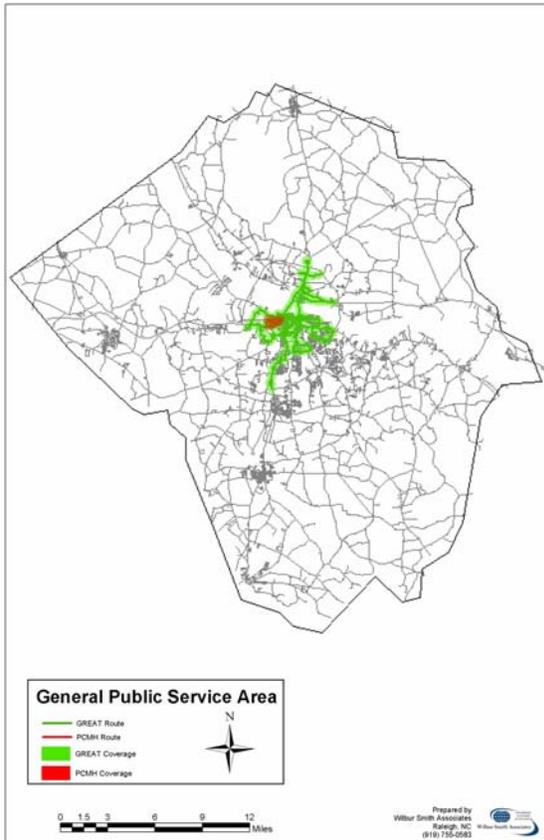
**Challenge 5: Improving Service Coordination**

Pitt County is one of only seven counties in the state without general public transit services. During the public meetings, several groups requested service, and the Census analysis indicated the areas around Winterville, Ayden, and Simpson have the

The four transportation providers do not make a deliberate effort to coordinate their services. No one group is responsible for overall

greatest potential needs. Funds are available from both Federal and State sources to help pay for the increased service.

locations. A single, unified service open to the general public should be provided.



**Guideline 4: Provide Separate Internal Shuttles**

Both ECU and PCMH have some services that are designed exclusively for internal travel needs. Routes that operate internal to the campuses, such as parking shuttles, should continue to be provided by each group.

**GUIDELINES**

1. Transit service should be available to all residents
2. More transit service should be provided
3. Don't provide "exclusive" transit service to areas of general interest
4. Exclusive service (shuttles) can be provided for internal trips
5. Transit services should connect
6. Transit service should be high quality
7. An integrated fare system should be provided
8. The transit organization should reinforce the service
9. Funding and staffing should meet the needs
10. Federal and state funds should be fully used

**Guideline 2: Increase General Public Service**

The general public should be provided with similar levels of service in Greenville as the average level for smaller cities in North Carolina.

**Guideline 3: Don't Provide Separate, Services to Areas of General Interest**

Competing services to areas of general interest should be avoided. Where more than one operator provides service to these locations, productivity suffers. Of particular concern are the services provided to medical and shopping

**Guideline 5: Provide Connections Among Services**

Even though PCMH and ECU may continue to operate separate shuttle systems, their systems should connect to the general public services. PCMH's shuttles should provide the local distribution for travel within their campus, and riders from ECU and GREAT's routes should be able to transfer to the PCMH shuttles. Similarly, ECU's and GREAT's routes should connect to permit faculty, staff, and students to use GREAT routes to reach the campus and the ECU Transit routes to reach their building.



### **Guideline 6: Provide High Quality Transit Service**

A high quality service is paramount to attracting new riders and keeping current riders. Vehicles should be replaced at the end of their useful life and replacement vehicles should be high quality. Besides high-quality vehicles, passenger amenities should be provided, especially at major transfer locations. These amenities can include benches, shelters, and potentially more elaborate transit centers.

Frequent service should be provided on all routes to attract the choice rider, subject to budgetary limits. Most small cities provide service at least every 30 minutes during peaks and every 60 minutes during off-peak times.

### **Guideline 7: Establish an Integrated, Fare System**

In order to attract general public riders to PATS, a consistent fare is needed, that is set at a premium level to reflect the premium service being provided. The fare structure should reduce the barriers to using transit while maintaining the financial solvency of the services. This guideline includes the elimination of a separate fare to transfer between PATS and GREAT and between the GREAT routes, and the adoption of a UPass program with major employers and ECU.

### **Guideline 8: Establish a New Organizational Structure**

A new organizational structure is desirable for transit services in this region. With the growth in population, employment, enrollment, and medical visits, the jurisdictional barriers should be dropped. Trips are being made regardless of the political boundaries in place.

### **Guideline 9: Provide Sufficient Funding & Staffing**

A dedicated funding source for transit other than collected fares is essential for providing the high quality service and expanded transit service desired by residents. A unified public transportation organization should have a dedicated funding source.

Additional staffing will be required to implement the changes and establish a high-quality service. The current staffing levels at the County and City are inadequate for this role, and new positions are required to provide general management, planning, scheduling, dispatching, and street supervision.

### **Guideline 10: Fully Use Federal & State Funding Sources**

GREAT does not use the full amount of Federal funds appropriated to Greenville due to the lack of viable service areas. From 1998 to 2000, the Federal §5307 Program appropriated \$1.5 million to Greenville, of which Greenville used \$600,000. A remaining \$800,000 was not used due to the level of service being provided by ECU to areas that otherwise could be served by GREAT.

PATS does not use State funds available to support the provision of general public services. These RGP (rural general public) funds are estimated by NCDOT to total \$25,000 to \$45,000 annually. The actual allocation will be dependant upon the productivity of the service in comparison with all RGP recipients.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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#### Short Term

1. Create Transit Working Group
2. Open PATS service to the general public
3. Convert ECU Red & Blue to general public service
4. ECU & PCMH continue operation of other routes
5. Develop vehicle procurement plan
6. Revise fare structure
7. Use all available Federal & State funds
8. Create new Public Transportation Authority

#### Long Term

9. Review legislation
10. Expand authority membership
11. Continue service expansion
12. Continue capital enhancements

The recommendations provide more details on the general guidelines. A two-phased implementation is recommended. Phase I focuses on expanding and enhancing the level of general public service throughout the region and improving the service and fare coordination among the providers. Phase II focuses on expansion of the transit authority for the region and the creation of a sound financing source for its responsibilities.

composed of members of GREAT, PATS, ECU, and PCMH. This group will have the responsibility of developing the implementation plan for the recommendations.

### **Recommendation 2: Open the PATS Service to the General Public**

PATS should allow the general public to use its services as soon as practical. Based upon experience with other North Carolina counties that have undergone a similar change, ridership could increase by 5 percent, which would result in an annual ridership increase of 3,400 riders.

### **Recommendation 3: Convert the ECU Red and Blue Routes to General Public Services**

Two ECU routes serve areas of interest to the general public – the Red and Blue routes. The Red route provides a connection between the ECU main campus and the PCMH campus. The Blue route connects the ECU main campus to multiple shopping destinations. Converting these routes to general public service will greatly increase the level of service available to area residents.

These routes should be converted to general public services operating as “express” services providing fast connections between downtown/ECU and PCMH or the shopping areas. Service should be offered at least every 30 minutes.

The consensus reached by the Steering Committee is that GREAT should operate these routes. ECU drivers do not meet all of the safety training requirements of the Federal Transit Administration; and ECU buses do not have fareboxes.

### **Phase I – Short-Term**

Phase I covers the initial two years of the recommendations. They can all be implemented within 24 months of adoption, provided all parties work in harmony.

### **Recommendation 1: Create a Transit Working Group**

The Steering Committee for this study has provided a forum for the discussion of transit issues within the region, and has provided the opportunity for all groups to stay informed. The function of this group should continue after the completion of this study. A transit working group should be established



**Recommendation 4:  
ECU & PCMH Continue Operating  
Their Exclusive Shuttle Services**

The current PCMH parking lot shuttles should continue to be operated by PCMH since it serves exclusively the PCMH population, but they should remain open to anyone traveling within the campus. Convenient transfer locations should be established for these connections, with a location near the Brody School being the most important.

ECU provided service should be limited to the university campuses and, in the short-term, where the demand exceeds the capacity of the general public service. This criterion covers all ECU routes except the Red and Blue discussed above. In the longer term, as additional public service is provided, the off-campus services should be converted to general public services.

**Recommendation 5:  
Develop a Vehicle Procurement Plan**

GREAT and PATS should replace vehicles past their useful life. A coordinated vehicle procurement plan should be developed to spread out vehicle purchases, thereby lessening the need to incur large expenses in one year.

**Recommendation 6:  
Revise the Fare Structure**

The opening of PATS service to the general public requires the establishment of a regular fare for general public riders. PATS should establish the general public fare at an initial level of \$5.00 per one-way trip. This premium fare reflects the door-to-door service offered by PATS the higher fare can help control the potential demand and additional expenses of the service.

Along with the set PATS fare, GREAT’s fare structure should be overhauled. The separate transfer charge should be eliminated, since riders view this as a penalty, and it discourages transit use. Fares should be increased to base fare of \$0.75 [recently implemented]. Monthly passes should be offered at at least a 10 percent discount.

A UPass program is recommended for GREAT and ECU whereby all students (and potentially faculty and staff) can use the One Card as their transit pass. This access would be paid for through a fee structure at the university. The individual ECU rider would no longer be required to have cash to ride the GREAT bus.

**Recommendation 7:  
Maximize the Use of Federal & State  
Transit Funds**

As noted, Federal and State monies are available to help pay for the expenses of the added general public service. These monies should be aggressively sought to maximize the return to the community. Any increase in Federal funds will require additional matching funds at the state or local level. Conversion of the ECU routes will afford the opportunity to pursue additional Federal funds.

**Recommendation 8:  
Create a New Public Transit Authority**

The City and County should create a Public Transportation Authority, which would initially include the PATS and GREAT services. This authority can be created under existing legislation. This authority should be established similar to the Pitt County Airport Authority, and be an interlocal agency





between Pitt County and Greenville. This authority would have responsibility for the operation of all “general interest” transit services in the county, but would not be responsible for the exclusive internal shuttle services offered by PCMH and ECU. Under the current legislation, Pitt County, City of Greenville, and others would have to provide the local match of available State and Federal funds otherwise available to the Authority.

### **Phase II – Long-Term**

Phase II covers the period more than two years beyond the adoption of the recommendations. How long it takes to implement the changes depends upon the length of time required to reach agreement on the individual points. The creation of a new transit organization can begin during Phase I, but it will take more than one year to fully implement the changes.

### **Recommendation 9: Review Authority Legislation**

The area should lobby to change the legislation to establish a dedicated transit funding source. Current legislation limits the ability of a PTA to raise its own funds. A long-term dedicated source of funding will allow the transit authority to invest with confidence in additional services and capital facilities. It also opens the potential for borrowing funds backed by the future receipts from the funding. Having new legislation passed will require a multi-year strategy before the Legislature is likely to create new authorizing legislation.

### **Recommendation 10: Expand Authority Membership**

While Recommendation 8 concentrates on the merger of GREAT and PATS service into a

new authority, the ultimate authority should include membership of ECU and PCMH. A single authority with responsibility for all transit services provides for the greatest coordination of services and eliminates jurisdictional boundary concerns.

### **Recommendation 11: Continue Service Expansion**

Recommendation 2 added approximately 40 percent of the hours needed to bring Greenville up to the peer average. During Phase II, service should continue to be expanded to bring Greenville up to the average service levels. Specific areas for service expansion could include increasing the frequency or span of service on existing routes where ridership is strongest, or establishing new routes to other areas of the city, such as unserved concentrations of ECU students.

### **Recommendation 12: Continue Capital Enhancements**

The vehicle procurement schedule should continue to be followed in Phase II so that the fleet is regularly being refreshed. Additionally, the new transit authority should work with ECU and PCMH to identify locations for potential transit or intermodal centers. Specific locations have not been identified, but the general areas are the Mendenhall Student Center, downtown Greenville, and the Brody School of Medicine. The 2004 State TIP already includes an intermodal center in Greenville. Transit centers should include shelters, benches, windbreaks, vending machines, and other amenities. Potentially they could include restrooms, either limited for the drivers’ use only, or open to the general public.