

---

## 5. ANALYSIS AND COMPARISON

---

### COMPARISON OF SYSTEM PERFORMANCE

The four systems in Pitt County have varying levels of performance, reflecting the different nature of their operations. Collectively, the four systems carried 1.4 million annual riders over 1.4 million annual miles for a cost of \$2.1 million. An average of one passenger was carried per mile of service, at a cost per rider of \$1.55 and a cost per mile of \$1.50. **Exhibit 5-1** shows the relative performance of each system.

**Exhibit 5-1**  
**System Performance Statistics**

Category	GREAT	PATS	ECU	PCMH	Total
Annual Riders (99-00)	193,670	67,365	780,418	323,857	1,365,310
Annual Miles	213,159	752,901	278,923	164,116	1,409,099
Annual Operations Cost	\$639,477	\$570,876	\$477,126	\$430,585	\$2,118,064
Passengers/Mile	0.91	0.09	2.80	1.97	0.97
Cost/Passenger	\$3.30	\$8.47	\$0.61	\$1.33	\$1.55
Cost/Mile	\$3.00	\$0.76	\$1.71	\$2.62	\$1.50

Operations Cost excludes capital items; ECU ridership is from '00-'01 school year

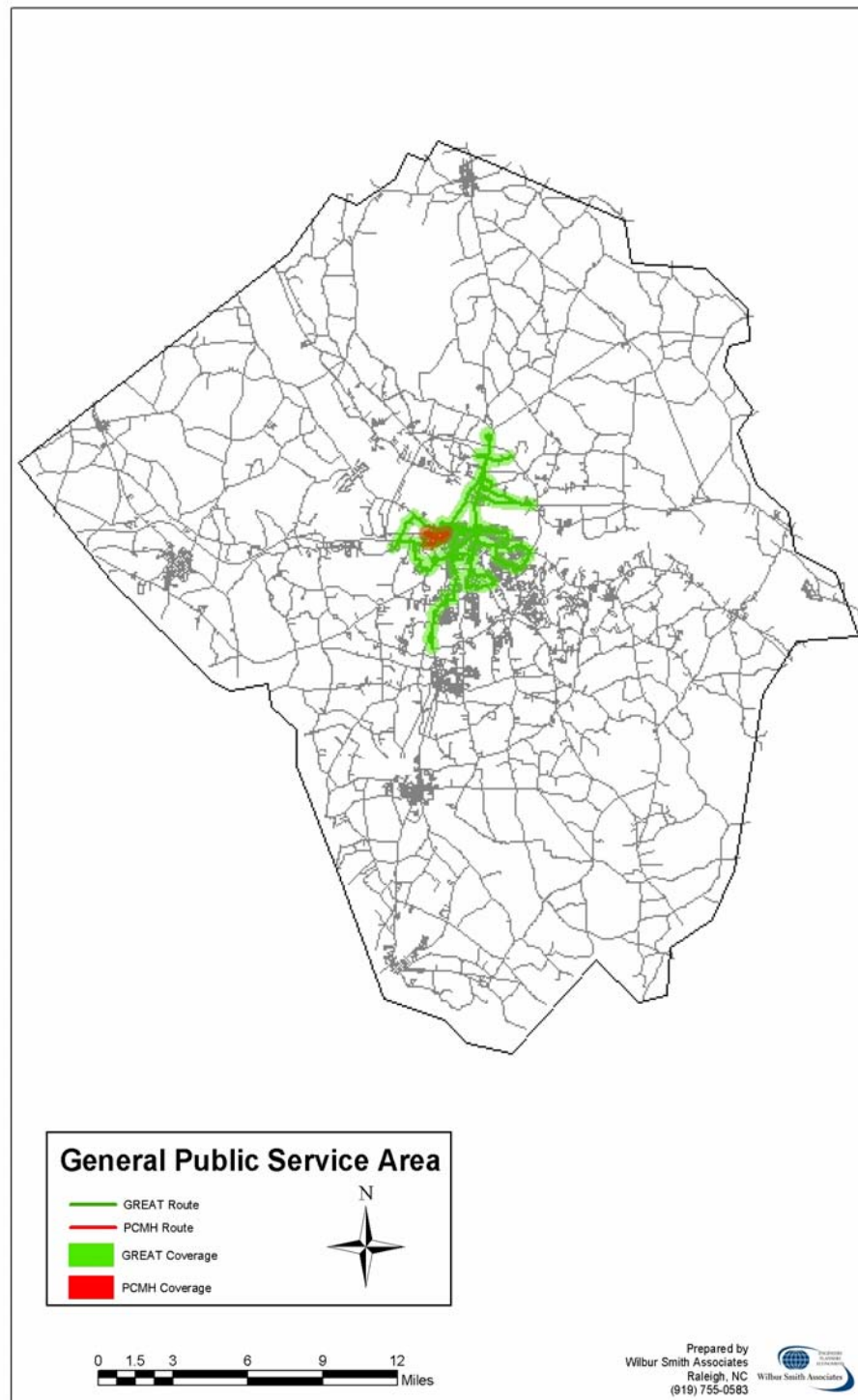
Within the overall performance, there are significant variations. East Carolina University carried the most riders in absolute terms and on a per mile basis. This performance reflects the nature of a transit system geared to a university setting, where a lot of students make multiple daily trips over short distances. Closely following is the Pitt County Memorial Hospital system, which operates over short distances, and carries its riders at least twice per day. The two public systems, which serve a wider audience over greater distances, incur a higher cost per passenger and lower levels of passengers per mile. PATS performance on these measures is significantly depressed by the demand-response nature of its service. Demand-response services, by their form of operation, do not carry large number of riders on common trips.

### GENERAL PUBLIC SERVICE

There are two transit services in Pitt County that are open to riders without restrictions – GREAT and PCMH. GREAT routes are available to anyone who pays a fare, and PCMH routes are available to anyone traveling on the hospital campus. ECU's routes are technically limited to ECU students, although student ID's are not checked as a regular practice. PATS service is available to clients of the funding social service organizations, although the general public could ride on already scheduled vehicle trips on a space available basis. With these limitations, neither ECU nor PATS can be considered as providing "general public" service.

**Exhibit 5-2** shows the relatively small portion of the county with general public service, defined as the area within one-quarter mile of bus service. Not included in the coverage area are the high priority areas for general public service, as shown in Exhibits 3-7 and 3-8.

### Exhibit 5-2 General Public Service Coverage



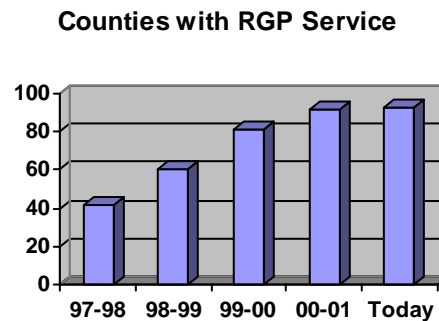
Over the course of the study, several public comments were received in support of extension of general public service into the county, as described in more detail in Chapter 2. From the stakeholders, officials from Winterville and Ayden were supportive, as were some of the Pitt County Commissioners. The public expressed support for the idea in the public forums. In the ECU Student Survey, the number one suggested improvement was increased services and routes; at least some of these comments were from county residents. There was also caution expressed about any extension of services, primarily from the existing social service agencies that support PATS. Their main concern was that any expansion of service would not diminish the quality of the service they currently receive.

### Other Counties' Experience with RGP

To overcome situations such as exist in Pitt County where the majority of the area does not have transit service available, the North Carolina Department of Transportation has had a program in place for several years that encourages all counties to offer Rural General Public (RGP) service. This program is a direct outreach from the 1997 *Transit 2001* study. For rural areas, the mission called for in *Transit 2001* is

“to provide mobility to North Carolina citizens in rural areas to improve their access to jobs, medical and human services, educational and training opportunities, and social activities through coordinated, safe, effective and efficient public transportation systems.”

The rural areas of the state have been gaining additional transit services and expenditures in recent years. The number of counties with rural general public services has steadily increased from 42 in '97-'98 to 93 in FY 2001. This growth in RGP services came from Human Service transit providers (such as PATS) expanding their services to be open to all riders. This expansion represents substantial progress toward the *Transit 2001* goal of universal access.



Just within the past two years, 17 counties expanded their Human Service transportation to RGP service. In the eastern part of the state, counties recently expanding their transit service to one serving all county residents are:

- Carteret
- Dare
- Gates
- Greene
- Lenoir (2001)
- Martin
- Onslow
- Washington
- Wilson

Only seven of 100 counties (7 percent) continue to offer only Human Service transportation and do not receive RGP monies. The remaining counties are:

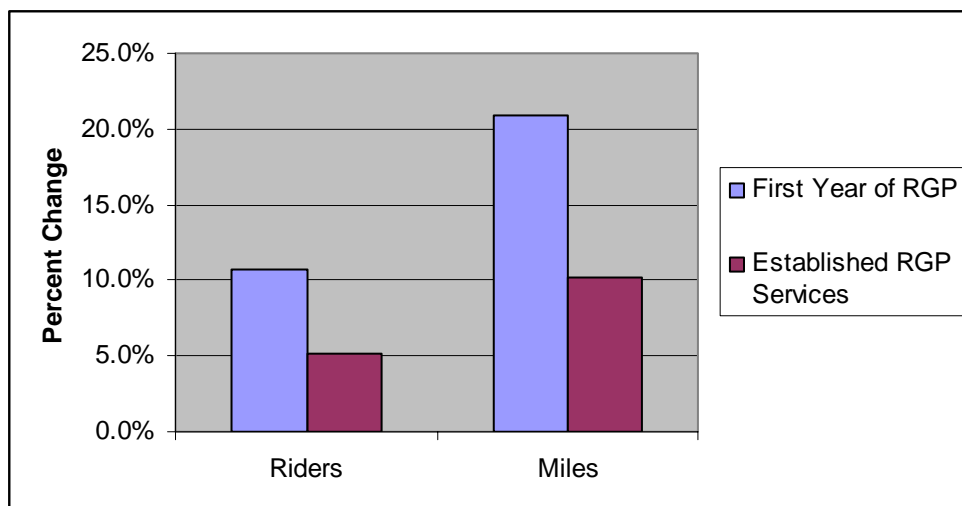
- Brunswick (may expand in 2004)
- Forsyth
- McDowell
- Montgomery
- Pender (may expand in 2004/05)
- **Pitt**
- Tyrrell (consolidated in 2001)

With the potential expansions, Pitt will be one of only five counties that do not offer transit service to all of its residents.

Counties that expanded their services did so for a variety of reasons, but most counties felt it was part of their governmental responsibilities to offer transit service to all residents. Many poor residents do not receive any social service benefits and are therefore ineligible to take Human Service transportation. This lack of mobility is viewed as hindering their access to improved opportunities, preventing them from finding a better job or even taking care of some of the necessities of life. Instead, these residents must impose upon friends or relatives for trips, or simply not make as many trips.

Wilbur Smith Associates analyzed the changes in ridership and miles of service offered by the transit providers that switched from Human Service to RGP service over the previous four years. On average for counties that expanded service, ridership increased 10.2 percent and miles increased 20.9 percent, while counties that did not expand service averaged ridership increases of only 5.2 percent and mileage increases of 10.7 percent. In other words, allowing the general public to ride on Human Service transportation resulted in growth of twice as many riders and miles of service during the first year of expanded service. **Exhibit 5-3** shows the differences in these two categories.

**Exhibit 5-3**  
**RGP Conversion Effect**



From a quick review of the existing usage of the PATS vehicles, there is excess capacity available. The PATS General Manager supports this observation. The existing service miles could easily accommodate half of the increase in ridership, without having to increase the miles

of service. By using the available capacity more efficiently, general public riders could be carried with no increase in costs.

Assuming Pitt County has the same effect as the average county that has started RGP service, and assuming half of the riders could be accommodated on existing trips, Pitt County would realize a net increase in ridership of 5.0 percent (10.2 percent increase for RGP conversions less 5.2 percent for counties already providing RGP), or 3,382 annual riders. At 255 average operating days per year, this would be an increase of 13 daily riders. Miles are estimated to increase by one-half of the difference, or 5.1 percent, for an annual increase in mileage of 38,473 and a daily increase of 151 miles. At a cost of \$0.76 per mile, this increase would amount to \$29,240 additional costs per year.

### Bus Service Per Capita

Wilbur Smith Associates conducted an analysis of the amount of service provided in Greenville compared with other North Carolina cities of similar size. This analysis examined the annual bus service hours (ignoring vanpool and demand-response/ADA services) compared with the population in the cities. Seven cities with 2000 population between 50,000 and 100,000 were included in this analysis:

- High Point
- Asheville
- Rocky Mount
- Chapel Hill/Carrboro
- Gastonia
- Wilmington
- Greenville

These cities all provide fixed-route bus services within their city limits. Chapel Hill and Carrboro are considered together since the bus service is provided within both cities by the same transit agency. Chapel Hill/Carrboro is unique among this group because the transit provider also operates the UNC-Chapel Hill bus service. This campus bus service is open to the general public, and the effect it has is dramatic on the levels of bus service in the community. **Exhibit 5-4** shows the performance with and without Chapel Hill/Carrboro in the analysis.

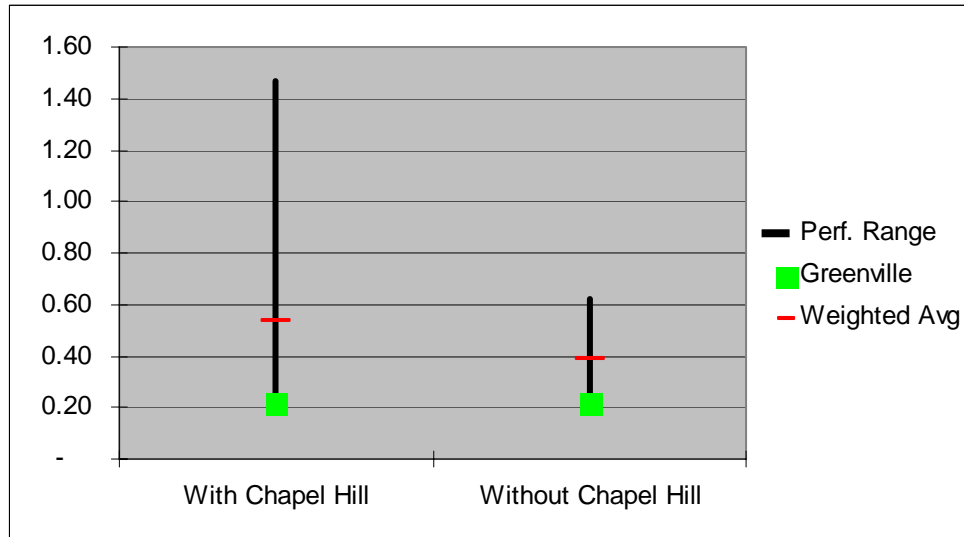
**Exhibit 5-4**  
**2000 Peer Cities Bus Service Hours Per Capita**

Category	With Chapel Hill	Without Chapel Hill
Population	478,709	413,212
Bus Revenue Hours	250,718	157,181
Hours/Capita	0.54	0.39
Range	0.22 – 1.47	0.22 – 0.62

As shown in the above exhibit, the average small city provided annually just over a half-hour of bus service for every resident. Without the Chapel Hill/Carrboro effect, this average drops to over one-third an hour per resident. Chapel Hill/Carrboro provided 1.47 hours per capita, while the next highest level was in Asheville, at 0.62 hours/capita.

In both examinations, Greenville was the city with the lowest number of bus service hours per capita at 0.22 hours. **Exhibit 5-5** graphically shows the range, average, and Greenville performance, with and without Chapel Hill/Carrboro included in the analysis. The level of bus service provided in each city is primarily related to the amount of local money that is invested in transit service.

**Exhibit 5-5**  
**2000 Bus Service Hours/Capita Range**



## **PATS AND GREAT SERVICE**

A limited examination was made of PATS riders' origins and destinations. For this check, all trips on Wednesday, January 24, 2001 were examined to see how many of the origins and destinations were within the GREAT service area. **Exhibit 5-6** shows the results.

Unfortunately, the data was limited because many addresses could not be plotted on the GIS system due to unrecognized locations. A total of 192 origins were identified as occurring within Pitt County, and 106 of these were plotted. This number does not include GREAT ADA riders. Of the 106 plotted locations, 53 (50%) were within the GREAT service area.

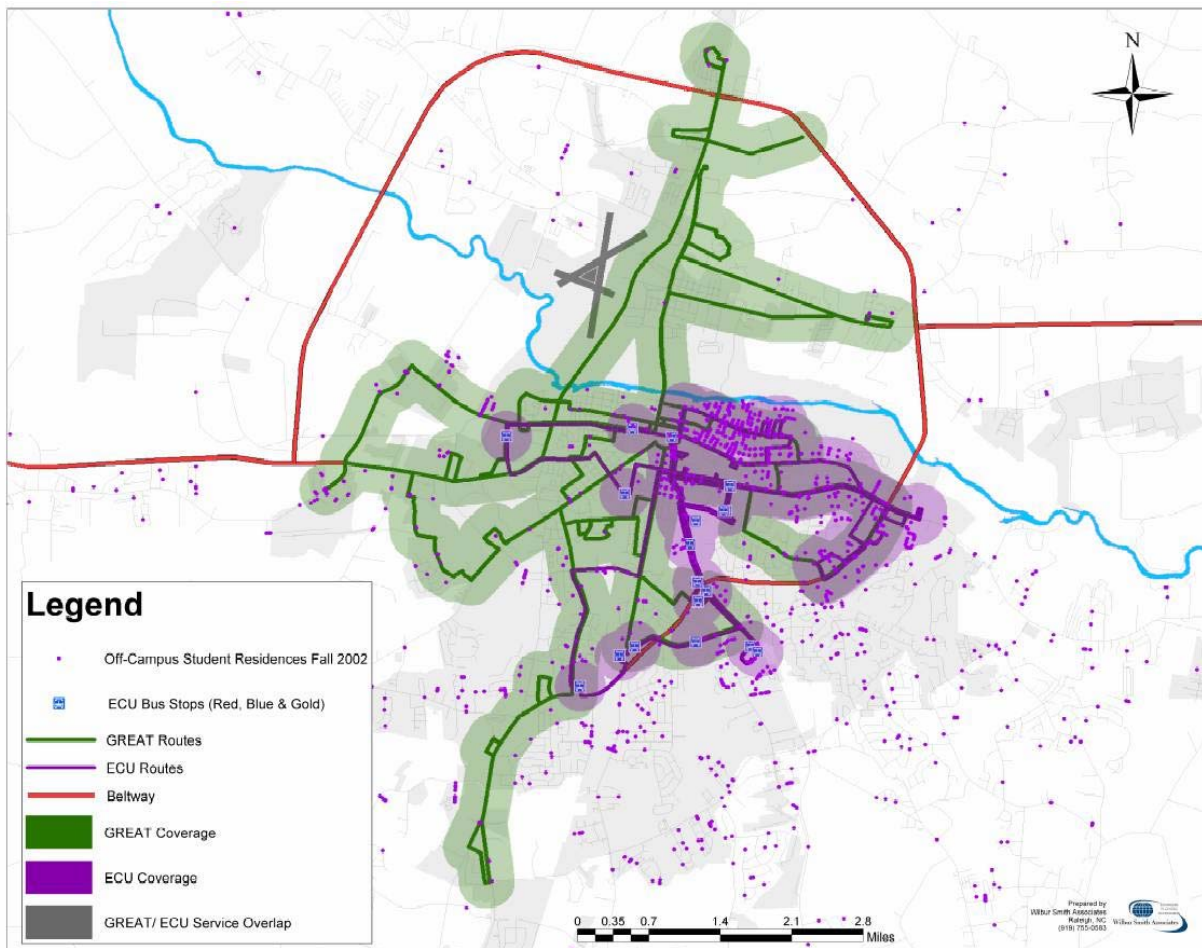
A higher coverage rate was found for destinations. Of the 166 destinations that were identified in Pitt County, 101 were plotted. Of this number, 79 (78%) were within the GREAT service area.

Before concluding that all of these riders could switch to GREAT from PATS, additional examination of the mobility limitations and the match between origins and destinations should be made. On the surface, however, the opportunity for greater cooperation appears to exist.





### Exhibit 5-7 ECU Transit & GREAT Service Coverage



For the student locations, ECU supplied a list of the 5,690 Fall 2002 student residences in Pitt County that were not on-campus addresses. This list is the most comprehensive list of student locations maintained by ECU. There are some limitations to the data in that it relies upon the addresses reported by the students. Some students only report their “permanent” address, usually their parents’ home, not their “local” address. For these students, if their reported address was outside Pitt County, the analysis did not consider them. Similarly, if they reported a Pitt County addresses, but actually lived on campus, their Pitt County address has been included. Despite these limitations, this data is represents the best available information, and should provide an accurate representation of the residential locations of the student.

**Exhibit 5-8** provides the breakdown of the service available to the students’ homes. Of the total number, ECU Transit uniquely serves 12 percent of the students, and another 44 percent are served by both ECU and GREAT. In total, the ECU Transit service comes within one-quarter mile of 55 percent of the off-campus students. GREAT singly serves 8 percent of the students, and counting the joint service with ECU, 51 percent of the off-campus students are within one-quarter mile of GREAT service.



**Exhibit 5-8**  
**ECU Transit and GREAT Off-Campus Student Coverage**

Service	Number	Percent
ECU Transit only	660	12%
GREAT only	431	8%
PATS only	2,102	37%
ECU and GREAT both	2,497	44%
Total ECU (alone or with GREAT)	3,157	55%
Total GREAT (alone or with ECU)	2,928	51%

Fall 2002 Off-campus student residences in Pitt County

What this table also shows is that 37 percent of the students are only served by PATS; that is, they live more than one-quarter mile from either the ECU Transit or GREAT routes. It also shows that 45 percent of the students are not within walking distance of an ECU Transit route.

The finding of the number of students within walking distance of ECU Transit services reinforces the results of the ECU student survey. In that survey, when asked “What would make use more likely to use ECU Transit or to increase your frequency of use” the top response was for “increased service/routes” which was wanted by a third of all users. The response was greater for current ECU transit users, but even 20 percent students who “never” used the system indicated more routes/service would entice them to use the service. Exhibit 2-9 provides a greater breakdown of the responses.

## **FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Over the course of this study, several questions were raised by the stakeholders regarding the financial implications of any changes. While the development of a financial plan was beyond the scope of this study, several issues were considered that could be used to raise additional local funds for implementation of new general public services. The sections below present the results of these considerations.

### **GREAT Fare Structure**

GREAT’s fares have been in place for several years. Exhibit 4-4 shows the current fare structure for the GREAT system and the estimated breakdown of ridership by fare category. In comparison with Greenville’s peer cities, Greenville has the lowest base fare at \$0.60, other than Chapel Hill/Carrboro, which provides a free-fare system. All other peer cities charge \$0.75 for regular riders. The charge for transferring shows more variability, with Gastonia and Rocky Mount providing free transfers; Asheville and Wilmington charging \$0.10, the same as Greenville; and High Point charging \$0.25.

To estimate the potential revenue gain from increasing fares, four scenarios were examined. These scenarios all assumed that the base fare increased to the peer city average of \$0.75 and that the transfer charge was eliminated. They varied based upon the assumed charge for the multi-ride pass or ticketbook, and whether or not riders decreased based upon the increase in fares. From these scenarios, the additional annual fare revenue that could be raised ranged from \$3,200

to \$14,300. The most likely scenario, which assumes little change in ridership, but a multi-ride discount of approximately 25 percent, results in \$10,500 in additional annual fare revenue.

### **Universal Pass (UPass) Program**

One option for an additional fare instrument for GREAT is the introduction of a UPass program with ECU. As used in other locations throughout the country, a UPass program is implemented in essentially the same fashion as the existing funding for ECU Transit – a modest charge is assessed per each student (and potentially faculty and staff) and in return students (faculty and staff) can ride the transit service for no additional charge.

The principal advantage of a UPass program is that from the students' (faculty and staff) perspective, the cost of taking an ECU Transit bus or a GREAT bus is the same – no fare would be charged upon boarding. Instead, the ECU "One Card" would serve as the GREAT bus pass, and it would just be shown to the driver upon boarding. The student (faculty, staff) would be free to choose the first bus that came along, thereby increasing the effective frequency of service. According to the ECU student survey, 57.0 percent of students indicated they would be "very likely" or "somewhat likely" to use GREAT if they could ride for free by showing their student ID if the bus went where they wanted to go at the time they wanted to travel. Exhibit 2-13 provides a more detailed breakdown of this response.

Wilbur Smith Associates examined the UPass programs at 35 different locations in the nation. The average location assessed a charge of 27 times the base fare. Under the current GREAT fare, this would result in an annual charge of \$16.20 per head, while under the peer group average fare of \$0.75, the annual charge would be \$20.25. Compared with the 2002/03 student transportation fee of \$70 annually, this UPass charge represents an increase of between 23.1 percent and 28.9 percent, depending upon the assumed GREAT fare.

In discussions with the Steering Committee, these charges were viewed as being too great an increase to be implemented at ECU. Part of the concern was related to the perception of the amount of bus service being provided by GREAT, which is at the bottom of its peer group. As a result, a separate consideration was made to determine the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile of the UPass systems. At the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile (10 percent of the properties charge no more than this amount), the price point is 6.6 times the base fare. For GREAT's current fare, this multiple results in an annual UPass charge of \$3.96 per head, while under the peer city fare, the UPass charge would be \$4.95 per head. These amounts represent an increase in the annual student transportation fee between 5.7 percent and 7.1 percent, which is more in line with the 8 percent of the students who are uniquely served by GREAT (Exhibit 5-8). For the entire 22,820 population of ECU, the annual charge could range from \$90,000 to \$113,000.

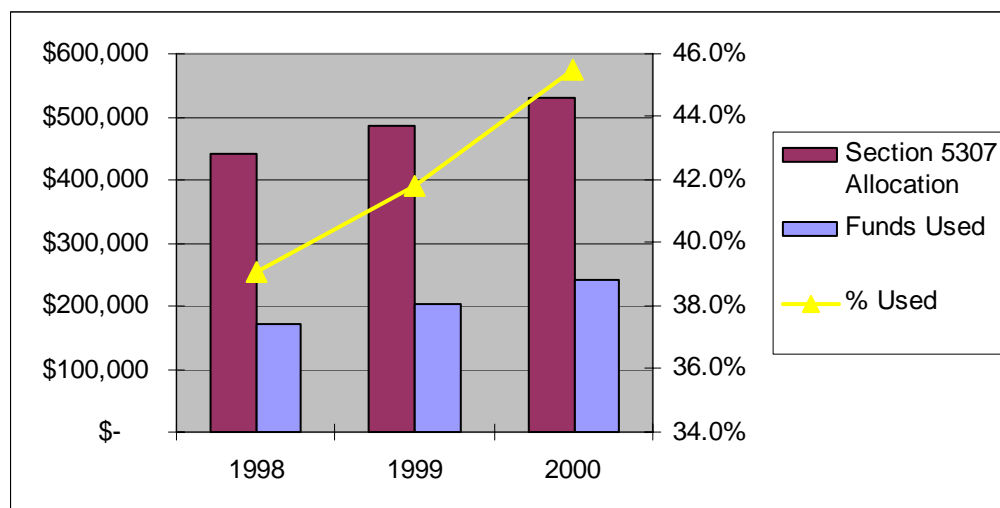
This dollar amount of \$90,000 to \$113,000 represents funding that would flow from ECU to the City of Greenville in exchange for the universal access. The specific amount of funding would be subject to negotiation between ECU and the City. The source of ECU funds would also need to be determined. The above scenario illustrates the potential valuation of the program related to students. A similar analysis is needed for faculty and staff since student fees would not pay for transit services for these groups.

## Utilization of FTA Funding

As noted in Chapter 4, Greenville is allocated funds for public transportation by the Federal Transit Administration under the Section 5307 Urban Area Formula Funds Program. This annual allocation is based upon the population and density of the urbanized area. These funds vary from year-to-year based upon the total amount apportioned by Congress to this program. Over the past decade, these amounts have increased each year.

**Exhibit 5-9** shows the funds that have been allocated to Greenville under this program and the amount of these funds used by Greenville each year. As shown, Greenville has historically used less than half of the available Federal funds, although there has been an increasing trend over time. These unused funds amounted to \$841,000 over the three-year period. The reason for the low usage of these funds stems from the matching grant requirement. FTA requires a one-for-one dollar match from non-Federal sources. Over this period, Greenville has not provided the necessary local match to bring in all of the Federal dollars. If these Federal dollars are not used in Greenville, NCDOT reallocates the money to other jurisdictions.

**Exhibit 5-9**  
**Greenville Section 5307 Fund Use**



## TRANSIT ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

This section examines potential combinations of the four transit providers in the county. Cherry Consulting of the Carolinas examined several potential organizational combinations that were considered to be potentially viable. Four combinations were examined in detail:

- Maintaining four separate organizations
- Combining GREAT and PATS
- Combining GREAT and ECU
- Combining GREAT, PATS, ECU, and PCMH

Other combinations (such as ECU and PCMH) were initially considered but quickly discounted since the degree of overlap of jurisdictions and the potential service improvements and decreased costs were considered to be small. These organizational alternatives are evaluated in detail in a separate Technical Memorandum provided to the Steering Committee. The sections below summarize the findings of that memorandum.

### **Four Separate Transit Organizations**

This option is less consolidated than the current operation. Selected functions are already consolidated, such as the PATS operation of the GREAT ADA service, and ECU's maintenance and vehicle storage being performed by GREAT. Under this option, these coordinated activities would cease and each operator would be responsible for all of their requirements.

The major advantage is the high degree of local control that is possible. The various transportation services in Pitt County all have a pride in their operation, and ECU and PCMH in particular have indicated a preference to remain independent. Their pride and assuredness regarding their differing roles and performance are certainly well earned. Under this option, all providers would remain independent and maintain their separate identities.

The disadvantages are that overall costs may be higher, the patrons do not benefit from a unified service, and funding sources may be missed. A unified organizational structure is not required to implement the service and fare changes discussed in the last chapter, but a revised organization can smooth the implementation and create a clear, unified vision of what is to be accomplished. Separate organizations tend to focus on their individual constituencies to the exclusion of the larger community.

### **Merger of GREAT and PATS**

A combination of the GREAT and PATS services was considered because it brings together the two governmental transit providers. The combination would result in a unified service covering the entire county, with fixed-route bus services in the developed areas of Greenville, and demand-response service in the less populated reaches of the county. PATS already provides the ADA-required demand-response service that complements the GREAT bus routes.

Three potential combinations were considered. One has GREAT operating as the lead agency, essentially taking over the PATS service. The second options considered the reverse – PATS as the lead agency. The third option examined merging the two organizations into a new, separate entity.

#### **Rocky Mount Transit**

The City of Rocky Mount and the Counties of Edgecombe and Nash entered into a joint interlocal agreement to establish a public transportation system for the three jurisdictions. The system is governed by a Board composed of three members – one sitting member from each from the Rocky Mount City Council, Nash County Board of Commissioners, and Edgecombe County Board of Commissioners. The day-to-day operation is the responsibility of the Transit Manager. An Advisory Committee was formed to “offer suggestions and recommendations to the Board.” It is composed of representatives of 24 business, social service, and educational organizations. This system is funded by appropriations from the three governments.

Under any organizational change, the demand-response service would continue to be operated by a private provider under contract, at least initially. Greenville's maintenance facility is not large enough to accommodate both the GREAT and PATS fleets. Over time, the contractor operation could be discontinued if cost-effective, once the new organization had the space and staff to take over this service. It could also remain as a separately operated service, with the responsibility for demand-response transit service.

The principal advantage of this merger is the ability to coordinate service and fares under one organizational structure. As described in a section above and shown in Exhibit 5-6, there is a good deal of overlap between PATS origins and destinations and the fixed-routes provided by GREAT. If PATS riders are ambulatory, they could use the fixed-routes at a much lower cost per rider. A combination of these two groups would also affect the least number of employees; no County employees are dedicated to transit service, and only a few administrative personnel of the City would be affected. Both governmental groups have expressed support for the concept.

The major disadvantage of merging these two groups is the potential costs. Since staffing levels are minimal now, there is little opportunity to save duplicate administrative costs. Additional costs could be incurred if services are expanded to provide more general public service. While these costs would not be directly caused by merging the two organizations, the principal advantage of merging the two groups is to permit a seamless expansion of transit services.

### ***Public Transportation Authorities***

The new entity considered was the creation of a municipal Public Transportation Authority. Such an authority is permitted under current NC Statutes – Chapter 160A, Article 25. This statute allows municipalities (cities or counties either individually or collectively) to form a Public Transportation Authority. This type of authority is not wholly independent of the city or county that creates it; it does not have independent taxing authority, for example.

The principal advantage of an authority is that it creates a degree of independence from both the City and the County. An authority is free to make its own rules and can contract with other agencies or private groups. Unlike a municipal government, the transit authority would be focused only on one task – providing quality transit service in its jurisdiction. A separate authority also eliminates the perception of one governmental group taking over another, as would be the case if either PATS or GREAT was to be the lead.

Under an authority setup, the current City employees dedicated to transit would become employees of the authority. Additional staff positions would be required to provide a General Manager, grants management, and on-street supervision. There are no County employees that would be affected since PATS is entirely provided by a private contractor. At least initially, the demand-response service would continue to be provided by a private contractor, but over time, this service could shift to being operated by the transit authority.

Greenville and Pitt County already have in place an example of this type of organization. The Pitt County-City of Greenville Airport Authority was created in 1967 to manage the affairs of the PGV Airport. This authority was originally governed by a five-member board; in 1979, the board was expanded to by eight members, consisting of three members appointed by the County, three members appointed by the City, and one elected official each from the County and City. The Authority is responsible for all aspects of the airport, including purchasing, selling, operating, and maintaining property; setting fees; and entering into contracts.



### ***Examples of Integrated Rural and Urban Services***

There are several examples of integrated rural and urban services within a county. Within North Carolina, five counties currently offer combined city/county services:

- Boone/Watauga
- Charlotte/Mecklenburg
- Goldsboro/Wayne
- Rocky Mount/Nash-Edgecombe
- Winston-Salem/Forsyth (Human Service only)

In addition, Burlington/Alamance and Wilmington/New Hanover are studying the possibility of offering combined services.

Both Goldsboro and Rocky Mount recently began their integrated services. Rocky Mount has been more successful in the integration because they have a dedicated general manager with the necessary support staff. Goldsboro has suffered due to turnover in the general manager position and lack of support staff.

The rationales vary among the cities/counties for integrating their services. In some cases, the hope was to save money by eliminating duplication of service. These locations differ from Pitt County because they had a significant amount of transit service and staffing to begin with; Pitt County and Greenville offer a more modest level of service with few city/county personnel. The opportunities for cost reduction do not exist. Goldsboro's experience shows that one key element of success is having a dedicated general manager with adequate support staff.

### **Merger of ECU Transit and GREAT**

A second potential combination was the merger of ECU Transit and GREAT. Both of these services provide fixed-route bus service within Greenville, and as shown in Exhibit 5-6, there is overlapping service coverage between these groups.

As with the PATS/GREAT combination, three merger scenarios were considered – ECU in the lead, GREAT in the lead, and a new transit organization.

This combination has several potential advantages toward consolidating services and eliminating duplicate services. Exhibit 5-7 shows there is considerable overlap in the service area of the two systems, and the number of students served. The existing separate organizations do not promote the seamless provision of the services – the general public is not allowed on ECU buses, and ECU students, faculty, and staff have to pay a fare to use GREAT where they can ride for no fare on ECU Transit. A combined organization could work to eliminate these issues.

The principal disadvantage is that any combination of these two organizations was strongly opposed by the existing student-run ECU Student Transit Authority. The students have a substantial amount of justifiable pride in their operation, one of the few student led efforts in the nation. Numerous other universities have their own transit operations, but these are typically run by hired administrators, with students only employed as operators and support staff. At ECU, all employees are students with the exception of a single administrator advisor.

#### **AppalCART**

In the State of North Carolina, the AppalCART system is a good example of these types of mergers. In 1980, Appalachian State University purchased four buses from the city of Roanoke, Virginia to provide student transportation around its campus. Shortly thereafter, Watauga County completed a Transit Development Program study and created a rural transit entity. The County provider and University transportation providers merged in 1982 and operated as a County department until July 1986 when AppalCART, as it is known today, was created.

Mr. Chris Turner, AppalCART's Director, has experienced the evolution of the system. Its growth is evidenced by the eight routes that currently serve both the University and the community. Vans were used at the start-up, but through the years have been replaced by large transit buses. The hours of operation vary depending upon the day of the week and the routes.

Funding sources for AppalCART are passenger fares, student Activity Fees, County taxes, NCDOT allocations, and Federal grants. The operating and capital budgets are approved by the Transit Advisory Board, which is made up of two members from the University. One is the Director of Traffic and Parking, and the other is the Vice Chancellor of Business Development and Student Affairs.

A few other issues were identified in the examination of combining ECU Transit with GREAT. While ECU Transit meets many of the requirements of the FTA, including the requirement for all operators to have a Commercial Drivers License, and have in place an alcohol and drug screening program, ECU Transit does not meet all the requirements. Most notable is that all operators have not had a USDOT physical, and some of the training requirements are not met. Furthermore, the wages and benefits disparity is large between the full-time City employees and the part-time students. Merging these two groups of operators, while not impossible, will require considerable effort to ensure an equitable wage and benefit system is established.

A strong preference was expressed by some members of the ECU community to keep the ECU Transit services reserved for students (and potentially faculty and staff) only, and to not allow the general public to use the service. Additionally, ECU buses are not equipped with fareboxes, which would require the addition of fareboxes, or allowing the general public to ride free if they were allowed on the ECU buses. Unless the ECU services are opened to the general public, the FTA will not consider them as eligible for funding, which diminishes the appeal for combining these two systems.



ECU also operates a substantial number of charters throughout the year, primarily for students and student organizations. Under FTA regulations, the provision of charter service is severely limited, with most charters having to be provided by separate private providers. Under a merger of ECU Transit and GREAT, these charters would be severely curtailed, and could only occur if a private provider did not exist that was willing and able to provide the requested service.

Due to these difficulties, a merger of GREAT and ECU systems was determined by the Steering Committee not to be the best option for improving transit service. The principal benefit of reducing duplicate services can be realized through greater coordination, without going so far as to merge the organizations.

### **Merger of GREAT, PATS, ECU Transit, and PCMH Transportation**

The technical memorandum also examined the potential impacts of merging all four transit operators. Because of the limitations posed by merging four groups under any one of the existing providers, the only potential organization considered viable was to merge through the creation of a new transit authority.

Each of the four providers has a different staffing setup. GREAT's employees fall under the City of Greenville, ECU Transit employees fall under State regulations, and PATS and PCMH employees are part of private organizations. The combination of these differing wages and benefits packages would be twice as complicated as merging ECU and GREAT since four different organizations would be involved. Both ECU and PCMH have a strong commitment to their separate organizations, and enjoy the flexibility provided by operating their own service.

Additionally, no single location exists that is equipped to provide for the operation of all transit services. ECU, PCMH, and PATS all contract separately for the maintenance of their fleets, and the City of Greenville's garage does not have the capacity to maintain all of the fleets. A single storage lot does not exist that is large enough for all four fleets. If the four operations merged, there would be a delay in realizing any efficiencies until a new operating and maintenance facility could be identified and/or constructed.

Given these limitations, the Steering Committee determined that the merger of the four groups was not a desirable option for the near term. In the longer term, as experience is gained with the larger organization and requirements of an authority, the inclusion of the "off-campus" or "community" routes in operation by ECU and PCMH should be considered for inclusion in the authority's services.

### **Chapel Hill & UNC Transit Service**

Mrs. Mary Lou Kuschatka, Chapel Hill Transit's General Manager, reports that the transit system was started for student transportation at the University of North Carolina and to meet the needs of administrative personnel who worked on campus. The service area was, and still is, covers the towns of Carrboro and Chapel Hill and the UNC campus. First year students are not allowed to have personal vehicles on campus so public transportation is critical for them.

For many years, the funding for Chapel Hill Transit's operation, which could not be met through grants and fare receipts, was based upon contributions from each of the three entities – the two towns' taxes, and a portion of the students' Activity Fees. The contribution of each was determined from Origin/Destination studies, i.e. number of passenger boardings and alightings. It is said that none of the "transportation partners", as the towns and transit system refer to themselves, was satisfied with this arrangement because the amount of required funding was never known from one year to the next.

This past year the entities modified the funding program so that all the partners understand it. They can forecast the amount that the service will cost them because the formula for expenditures is based upon population data. The entities' arrangement also defines the methods for funding changes to the services, such as new service requests and route deviations. The following are highlights of the agreement:

- Chapel Hill's portion is slightly more than 46%, UNC is slightly less than 38%, and Carrboro is 16%
- UNC pays the full cost of "university" routes
- If a partner wants to add additional service, it must fund the full cost (\$45 per operating hour is charged, but the actual fully burdened cost is \$60 per hour) during the first year of operation.
- New service must meet the route service standards established by the transit system during the initial year of operation.
- After a year of successful operation, the partners share the costs (listed above) for service continuance.

Due to the ever-growing transportation problem, several changes were made in January 2002:

- All routes (except special events) became free-fare services
- Additional transit routes were established and more frequent service was offered on some routes
- The transportation partners shared in the costs of the changes in proportion to their populations – UNC's contribution doubled from \$2 million to \$4 million annually. A portion of the increase was paid for by a \$17 increase in annual student fees

As a result of going to a free-fare system, the *News & Observer* report that by September 2002, ridership had increased 24 percent.