

8. Public Involvement

The COA will have a significant impact for many residents and decision makers in Broward County. One of the critical components of a COA is Stakeholder Outreach, as this helps identify many of the core issues currently affecting the system at all levels – from the rider to upper management to local decision makers. Such input will provide a framework for future policy and service decisions. Along with the expertise of Dickey Consulting (DCS), TMD and BCT implemented an outreach plan that successfully gathered input regarding BCT system issues, concerns, suggestions, perceptions, and needs from a wide variety of stakeholders.

External stakeholders included Palm Tran, Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), Miami-Dade Transit (MDT), South Florida Commuter Services (SFCS), and South Florida Regional Transportation Authority (SFRTA). The public outreach process also included discussions with the Broward County Board of County Commissioners (BoCC), BCT internal staff, and the general public. This section summarizes the outcome of the external and internal stakeholders meetings that were conducted as part of the COA outreach process.

Throughout August, October, and November of 2009, members of BCT staff, TMD, and DCS organized and conducted meetings with stakeholders relating to the BCT COA. This public outreach provided an opportunity both to inform stakeholders of the COA process and to solicit input on BCT's service strengths and areas for future improvement.

8.1 External Stakeholder Meetings

External stakeholder meetings were held with several different transportation organizations during October 2009. These organizations have relationships with BCT in terms of providing related transit services or providing funding and oversight to South Florida transportation systems.

South Florida Commuter Services (SFCS) – Meeting Date: 10/6/2009

SFCS promotes ride sharing options for South Florida commuters, and provides information regarding carpooling, vanpooling, and transit options for commuter travel. One of the common themes discussed at the meeting was the heavy reliance on private automobiles by South Florida residents and how few utilize existing transit services. Several ideas were discussed in an effort to increase transit usage among commuters in South Florida.

- BCT is interested in Rapid Bus services as a means to achieve high capacity, frequent service. SFCS believes that strong Rapid corridors and expanded Commuter services with a focus on park and rides will appeal to the current non-riding public. In order to overcome the perceived stigma of transit, the services must be convenient, easy-to-use, attractive and comfortable.
- SFCS also expressed concerns with current BCT fleet age. Their reasoning was connected to possible schedule delays caused by equipment failure. BCT's current schedule adherence issues, however, are more related to operator behavior and route scheduling than mechanical failures. Newer vehicles could, however, improve the perceived attractiveness of BCT services.

- Overall, SFCS, BCT and TMD agreed that a marketing scheme should be developed that targets non-riding commuters. The information should show potential customers how to use BCT services and how transit can provide a positive experience for their commute.

Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) – Meeting Date: 10/6/2009

The Florida Department of Transportation acknowledged that BCT is the most efficient transit system in the state of Florida and that overall it has done a good job at providing transit service to its customers given its limited resources. Several concerns discussed at the meeting included coordination with other agencies in the region and expansion of services:

- FDOT acknowledged that BCT is the most efficient system in Florida, coming in at \$1.80 in subsidy per passenger boarding. BCT serves existing customers well with current bus services. FDOT feels, however, that BCT simply focuses on serving these existing customers and has not expressed interest in expanding their focus or in moving people regionally. Significant projects on which FDOT would like to coordinate with BCT include highway managed lanes, express bus service, and passenger rail service on the FEC corridor.
- The FEC corridor is a priority for FDOT members, who believe that it has the potential to provide a strong rail linkage throughout the South Florida area. Since it runs closer to the coast, the FEC corridor serves more population-dense and downtown core areas than Tri-Rail. FDOT feels that BCT has not offered support or willingness to coordinate on the FEC corridor, perhaps because BCT feels that the rail corridor would provide more competition within the region for funding and ridership.
- In terms of current services, FDOT stated that BCT is a true grid system and would like to see more routes which serve multiple corridors, depending on travel patterns. FDOT feels that more information is needed regarding origin and destination patterns in the region to provide the most efficient bus services for customers.
- As the meeting closed, FDOT expressed overall discontent regarding BCT's lack of coordination with other agencies, feeling that the lack of communication hurts regional transportation initiatives specifically with regard to the FEC corridor. This aside, FDOT remained hopeful and was open to the idea of BCT managing an express bus study on Oakland Park Boulevard.

South Florida Regional Transportation Authority (SFRTA) – Meeting Date: 10/9/2009

The South Florida Regional Transportation Authority is the agency in charge of operating Tri-Rail service in South Florida. Important concerns discussed included the Strategic Regional Planning Study, connectivity among the different transit agencies, Broward MPO 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan, and top projects planned.

- SFRTA cites poor connectivity as a major issue with South Florida transportation. Tri-Rail is successful in Miami, yet experiences poor bus connections in Broward. About 80-90 percent of shuttle service in Broward has been cut and SFRTA is in the midst of alleviating the problem.

- SFRTA expressed concerns with the Broward MPO 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan. Members felt that light rail transit was not necessary on both the Oakland and Sunrise corridors. SFRTA's top projects are the Jupiter extension, the I-95 train connection to Downtown Miami, a streetcar along Broward, and the Dadeland managed lanes and express bus service.

Palm Tran – Meeting Date: 10/20/2009

Palm Tran noted many positive aspects about BCT including its larger service area, longer span of service, and higher frequency service as compared to Palm Tran. The common themes discussed at the meeting were the need for increased coordination among transit agencies and regional connections.

- While BCT has a history of providing service into Palm Beach County, recent budgetary cutbacks have led to fewer connections between Broward County and Palm Beach County. BCT no longer serves major destinations like the Town Center Mall, FAU campus, and Belle Glades, which hinders connections with Palm Tran. Palm Tran believes that there is an unmet need for regional connectivity within South Florida, and that there is a “disconnect” between policy and budget for regional transit service. Areas like Boca Raton continue to grow but experience poor coordination of services. In order for Palm Tran to be successful, regional connections must exist on a larger scale.
- Palm Tran feels that future success lies in attracting more ridership from non-transit-dependent customers. In order to do this, transit must be competitive with driving and include more express and commuter services. Dedicated funding is needed for operating these services. BCT should prioritize implementing express service and LRT, paying attention to destination-based markets and new technologies.
- Palm Tran recommended that BCT contact the following groups to further inform the COA: the Chambers of Commerce (both Statewide and Regional), senior communities, disabled communities, universities and colleges, and mall owners in Palm Beach.

Miami-Dade Transit (MDT)– Meeting Date: 10/29/2009

Much like FDOT, MDT agrees with BCT in that more regional planning is needed. Particular areas for coordination include fare policy (MDT is presently working with BCT on the EASY Card) and also additional funding for Tri-Rail. Tri-Rail uses a regional fare policy which experiences difficulty because there is not yet a regional fare system between MDT, BCT and Palm-Tran.

Broward County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) – Meeting Date: 10/6/09

The COA public involvement team met with the Broward County MPO to discuss its relationship with BCT as well as the state of transit in Broward County. Communication between BCT and the Broward MPO has improved overall; the MPO has been more responsive to land use and transportation issues affecting the county and has worked to increase cooperation with BCT and other agencies in the region. Other issues included in the discussion include:

- The MPO will dictate how federal transportation funding is distributed in the county with the 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP).

- Currently the MPO cannot provide all of the funding necessary to implement all of the 2035 L RTP Cost Feasible Plan. Total revenue available for the Cost Feasible Plan is \$8.5 billion and the range of required funding from the Needs Plan is \$9 to 20 billion.
- Additional sources of revenue are being considered by the MPO in order to fund planned transit improvements. Possible options include a transit surtax on sales tax, a vehicle miles traveled (VMT) tax, and Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Districts.
- Out of the proposed Rapid Bus corridors, Broward Blvd. is viewed as the top candidate corridor for service enhancements.

8.2 Internal Stakeholder Meetings

Part of the COA process included collecting input and comments from various departments in the BCT organization including Management, Marketing, Human Resources, IT, Accounting, Operations, and Service and Capital Planning. This process was aimed at developing insight into how internal employees view the BCT system and what they felt were the strengths, weaknesses, and ways to improve. The following discussion summarizes the internal staff comments in terms of administrative staff and bus operators.

8.2.1 Administrative Staff Comments

Current Success at BCT

Given the limited funding and economically constrained environment, BCT is performing well at providing services to customers. Overall performance of the system is high when compared to peer systems. Some of BCT's current accomplishments and success that were noted by BCT staff include:

- Improved relationship and communication between BCT, FDOT, Broward MPO, and BoCC.
- Securing funding and revenue to operate Express routes along I-95 and I-595.
- New buses, technology, and amenities through grants and capital funding.

The new branding and overhaul of BCT's fleet has a positive effect overall on the system and staff felt that BCT should continue with these improvements.

Service on the Street

Some of the most common concerns and needs expressed amongst BCT staff with regards to service on the street included:

- Lack of adequate on-street supervision of operators and bus service.
- Need for additional operator training in terms of customer service. Staff felt that some operators are not very courteous and/or helpful to customers. In-service training could also help improve fare collection issues between operators and customers.

Service design suggestions raised by several staff members aimed at improving BCT service included:

- Improved route directness.
- Greater connectivity to improve transfers.
- Need for improved passenger amenities, such as bus shelters.

Organization, Governance, and Policy

Organizational issues are still an area of contention for BCT, where there is still room for much improvement. Many felt that there is a pervasive lack of cooperation between the various sections of BCT as well as “territorialism” among the different Divisions of Broward County. Examples within BCT include:

- Detachment and lack of communication between Service and Capital Planning, Scheduling, and Operations.
- Decisions are too often made by small segments of the organization without consideration for the rest of the BCT organization.

Governance issues most commonly cited by staff members include:

- Lack of communication regarding the functions of different managers.
- Need for improved communication between all departments, especially when service changes are proposed and adopted.

Most staff members felt that BCT’s organizational structure is overly bureaucratic. This is evidenced by the apparent disconnect between various sections when it comes to Service and Capital Planning, Operations, and Maintenance as well as the procurement process to purchase new equipment. Without improved communication, the system will continue to operate in a more fragmented manner and such fragmentation can lead to distrust within the agency’s different sections. That distrust has been expressed as leading to a culture of “fear” among some.

Outside of the agency, some felt that the BoCC and politicians should to be more receptive to BCT’s needs and concerns. There is a general feeling that the county does not fully support BCT, especially with regards to funding, and that the BoCC has too many other priorities to give due attention to BCT.

Regional Role

Given that Broward County lies in the middle of the Miami-Ft. Lauderdale-Palm Beach Metropolitan area, it is seen as a natural intermediary for the three counties. With three separate county structures and four different agencies operating transit service, it is important that BCT take an active role in transit policy for the South Florida region. Funding is very competitive, as all four agencies operating transit services see themselves as a sole entity rather than part of a larger regional network, and therefore lack regional goals. FDOT has been assuming the regional leadership role, but has done so with more of a road and rail perspective rather than giving due support to bus transportation. Some felt that BCT has more credibility to drive the transit process within the region, and that they should take a more direct role in assisting overall mobility between the three counties.

8.2.2 BCT Future Priorities

Organizational

Staff felt that BCT should work to design and develop a solid, comprehensive core mission statement and vision with explicit goals and objectives laid out. It needs to be clear what BCT’s goals are as well as its overall role in the region with regards to transit.

- BCT should take on a greater role in countywide and regional transit planning rather than letting FDOT take on those responsibilities.
- BCT should improve its efforts in defining the roles and responsibilities of its staff members and ensuring that proper communication occurs across all levels. Staff members felt that there should be an open forum that allows all levels of BCT staff to communicate with each other.
- Managers should focus on staff development instead of internal meetings, as additional training would be beneficial to the organization.

Operational

Some of the most common operational improvements suggested by administrative staff members included:

- Increased frequency
- Longer span of service
- Improvements in fare collection
- Rapid Bus and limited-stop express service
- Improvements in monitoring service with more on-street supervision
- Additional customer service training
- Additional marketing of BCT services to help attract choice riders

BCT should focus on improving relations with its own employees as well as its customers. By doing so, BCT stands to improve employee morale which can affect the quality of service that is delivered to its customers. BCT needs to help improve operator and customer relations through additional training, but also needs to address its overall security issues. Currently there is a need to make operators feel safer and feel that their needs are being met. Improvements in fare collection policy is one area that BCT should address in improving security for operators, as fare evasion is seen as a common issue on BCT buses.

Governance and Policy

As the transit planning process in the region is currently fragmented, BCT should aim to take a larger, more substantive role in regional planning initiatives. Expanding its influence in areas such as land use planning could help improve BCT’s service overall in the future by incorporating visionary transit plans into land use and development in the county and region. In order for BCT to meet its future goals of improving service at all levels, it is also important that a dedicated source of revenue is secured. A dedicated revenue stream will ensure that BCT will be able to meet future goals for increased levels of service and provide a higher level of certainty in terms of future funding.

8.2.3 Bus Operator Comments

BCT operators shared a variety of concerns over BCT’s internal operations, as well as their jobs on the street and their relations with customers. Overall, operators felt that many of their issues and comments are not being fully addressed by administrative staff as well as the BoCC.

Safety aboard buses was an important issue that operators felt needed to be addressed further. Currently there is a need to make operators feel safer while on duty, especially with regards to fare collection. While BCT has a policy of avoiding confrontation with customers, bus drivers should feel comfortable clearly articulating to customers the need to pay their fares. Some felt uncomfortable enforcing fare policy, fearing

repercussion on the bus. There is also a lack of consistency between operators on the importance of collecting the correct fare from each passenger.

Operators addressed communication issues with their customers. Some of the problems noted include:

- Language barriers.
- Lack of various types of information such as schedules at bus stops, bus stop signs lacking important route information, and a customer “How to Ride” guide. Operators would like to see improved passenger education.
- Need for customer service to be part of monthly safety meetings.

The most common comment reiterated by operators was the need for open communication with the various administrative departments of BCT. Many felt that their needs, suggestions, and concerns are not being properly evaluated and addressed (for example, they noted that decisions on new farebox technology were made without adequate operator input). This may have a negative effect on operator morale and, in turn, overall service quality. As part of the overall recommendations in Section 9, the COA recommends improved operator safety and customer service training, which can also provide a venue to address concerns.

8.3 Broward County Board of County Commissioner Meetings

BCT organized meetings with the Broward County Board of County Commissioners (BoCC), the Governing Body for the agency, during August of 2009. The goal of these meetings was to review initial results of the study (summarized in the Early Action Plan, Appendix A), and to seek input for future policies for BCT service. A number of central themes emerged from the Commissioner meetings regarding how transit service relates to their constituents.

Perception of BCT by Customers

Many Commissioners referred to the stigma of using transit as one of the greatest deterrents to BCT ridership. Transit is perceived as something that the less wealthy and those without a vehicle use because they have no other choice. Part of the stigma related to transit has to do with conditions on the bus such as:

- Loud and boisterous customers
- Lack of cleanliness
- Safety
- Crowding during peak periods

For BCT to attract a larger market share, it will need to ensure that riders feel safe and comfortable in an appealing transit environment. Ensuring that buses are clean, safe, and reliable is imperative to BCT’s future success. If the agency were to be successful in improving on-board conditions as well as adding such amenities as bus shelters, it will help increase its ability to attract choice riders along with the implementation of new transit services.

Importance of Transit for Economic Development

All of the Commissioners agreed that a strong transit system is important for building and maintaining a robust economy in the region. Investment in transit with permanence, e.g. light rail, rapid bus, dedicated bus corridors, provides a base for employers as they make location decisions. In the current environment, economic incentives to businesses play a stronger role than transit in location decisions. While BCT is not

necessarily ready to support an immediate “leap” to light rail, the system requires a gradual increase in frequencies and better identification of corridors using existing bus routes.

Dependence on Cars

The highway patterns in and around Broward County make getting around by car the fastest and most convenient mode of transportation. The 2008 hike in gas prices to nearly \$5.00 per gallon attracted new riders to transit, however when gas prices dropped, BCT still managed to retain a large portion of those riders.

Frequency of Service

The BoCC brought up the issue of service frequency and the impact of transfers. A number of examples were provided about trips that take 10 to 15 minutes by car requiring 1 ½ to 2 hours by transit. Suggested improvements included:

- Real-time information that will alert waiting passengers when the next bus is arriving
- Extended service spans to accommodate customers who work late shifts and odd hours
- Increased frequency to reduce long wait times on certain routes

Coordination with Other Agencies

The BoCC mentioned the importance of BCT’s interaction with the Broward MPO and that the relationship should be strengthened. Many Commissioners stated that it was important for BCT staff to continue to present planning documents to the Broward MPO so that all agencies are on the same page. Many Commissioners stated that there is a need for a South Florida regional transit service plan which would coordinate visions from all agencies (BCT, MDT, Palm Tran, and SFRTA). This plan would integrate goals and projects across the South Florida region.

8.3.1 Other Broward County Outreach

Transit Advisory Committee (TAC)

The COA Public Involvement Team provided the BoCC’s appointed Transit Advisory Committee (TAC) with the full public meeting presentation of the project (see Section 8.4) at the November 2009 and January 2010 TAC meetings. TAC Members were provided with full updates of the project and a chance to participate in the same activities given in the Fall of 2009 and winter 2010 COA public meetings held in each BCC District during both rounds of the public meetings held for the project.

County Administrator - Meeting Date: 10/09/09

The County Administrator was informed about COA progress and the meeting included a discussion about how the COA process dovetails with County processes and priorities. The County Administrator raised the following issues which she saw as important in moving BCT forward:

- Conversations with the transit operators’ union regarding the labor agreement and contracting out portions of BCT service.
- Communicating information effectively to the BoCC about prioritizing resources, and reallocating investment from unproductive to productive areas of the system.

- Determine where people want to go. It is important to present key origin and destination information to assist in decision-making process.

8.4 Public Meetings

The general public meetings offered a chance for BCT to interact with customers to find out their concerns and opinions of BCT services. Two series of meetings were held in each BoCC district. In order to provide information about the meetings, BCT distributed fliers locally and at key transit hubs, and posted information inside buses.

The first round of public meetings was held during early November 2009, while the second round was held in January 2009. All meetings were held in public libraries and city centers. At each meeting, a presentation was delivered which reviewed the COA process and the format for each meeting.

At the first set of meetings, those in attendance were provided with study goals and objectives of the COA, a progress update, and discussion of the BCT market assessment and service framework. Following these items, key questions were presented to assess whether BCT is currently meeting the diverse market needs for mobility in Broward County. Attendees also participated in an interactive transit selection process called the *Transit Game*, which provided BCT with public insight into where service types and related amenities should be placed.

The second set of meetings provided a recap of the COA process and a look at the service tiers and network-based approach described in the Service Framework (Section 6). Participants were asked to comment on a series of general recommendations for service restructuring, including introducing Rapid Bus service, reallocating resources from unproductive areas of the system, improving reliability, and upgrading the transit operating environment.

Every public meeting held question and answer sessions in which attendees were given the opportunity to voice their opinions and receive feedback. Accompanying the question and answer (Q & A) period, attendees were also provided with comment cards that allowed them to express their issues or concerns on paper. An overview of the public comments is provided below; the results of the *Transit Game* are included as Appendix D.

Public Meeting Comments

Attendees provided a range of comments about BCT services regarding common issues such as frequency and service span as well as opinions on service changes such as Rapid Bus implementation. They also expressed a general wish for increased publicity, both about the meetings themselves and also about BCT information such as service changes and fare increases. The most common general issues discussed included:

- Bus “bunching” (when two or more buses arrive at the same time rather than evenly spaced)
- Lack of service coverage in certain areas
- Poor regional coordination
- Limited connectivity between BCT and Tri-Rail

Many meeting attendees stated that more focus should be placed on customer needs and identifying market opportunities. Key markets play a major role in transit success and they felt that attention must be paid to tourists within Broward County as they play a significant role in the economy and offer a new source of potential ridership, especially during peak tourism periods. Destination-based markets were also recommended with a focus on major employment locations, light rail, and high speed rail. Attendees felt that connectivity of different transit modes and uniformity through branding would ultimately improve BCT transit.

Rapid Bus plans received considerable interest as both BCT and meeting attendees agreed that Rapid services running at 10-minute frequencies would encourage choice customers to ride and utilize Park- and-Ride lots more regularly. Rapid Bus along with improved east-west connections would be worthwhile for BCT to pursue in order to create a more cohesive transit network.

Improvement and installation of additional bus shelters also received a large amount of discussion. Many attendees felt there is an overall a lack of bus shelters and that new bus stop and shelter designs would be beneficial given the climate of South Florida. BCT staff discussed using American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds to design and manufacture attractive shelters. Currently over 800 shelters are planned to be installed over the next four years, beginning with the most productive corridors and would require a minimum of 25 daily boardings per stop.

8.5 Web-Based Comments

BCT provided riders and the general public two venues to submit comments on-line throughout the COA process; the project website and the BCT Stakeholder Survey on the Broward County Transit website. The specific comments and the results of the stakeholder survey are included in Appendix E.

Insight gathered via the on-line outreach include the wish for increased BCT service frequency and coverage and more express/commuter services. Within the stakeholder survey, most respondents who were not BCT customers stated they did not ride BCT because they owned a car.

BCT also distributed the stakeholder survey at Community Transit Forums which were being held at the same time of the COA process. These results are included in the totals in Appendix E.