Chapter 2: Outreach- Listening to the Community

INTRODUCTION

Ozark Regional Transit (ORT) wanted to hear from residents and stakeholders regarding the potential for BRT type service in Northwest Arkansas. The outreach effort for this BRT study was wide ranging and extensive. Critical elements of the outreach included the following approaches which will be summarized in this chapter:

- **Community public meetings** – Four public meetings were held in April 2017.

- **Stakeholder interviews** – Interviews were conducted with representatives of cities, large businesses, chambers of commerce, planning agencies, transit systems and other interested parties.

- **Public, commuter and business surveys** – Over 1,000 public surveys were completed and more than 40 business/human service agency surveys were completed.

- **Advisory Committee** – All planning documents will be reviewed by the advisory committee.

COMMUNITY MEETINGS AND STAKEHOLDER INPUT

As part of this feasibility study a series of community meetings were conducted in the region. These meetings provided the opportunity to introduce the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) concept, discuss the transportation needs in the area and obtain community input on how potential BRT services could help to improve mobility in the US 71B corridor.

Community meetings were scheduled and conducted as follows:

- Springdale: Tuesday, April 11, 5:30-7:00 p.m.
- Fayetteville: Wednesday, April 12, 4:00-7:00 p.m.
- Bentonville/Rogers: Thursday, April 13, 2:00-4:00 p.m.
- Lowell: Thursday, April 13, 4:30-7:00 p.m.

In conjunction with community meetings, individual interviews were conducted with key stakeholders to discuss the BRT concept and obtain their comments on what results they would like to see from this study. The study team reached out to each city. The following agencies and organizations were interviewed:
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- Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce
- Springdale Chamber of Commerce
- Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission
- Lowell City Staff
- Northwest Arkansas Council
- Fayetteville Mayor and City Staff
- Representatives from Georges, Walmart, JB Hunt and Tysons Food
- Walton Family Foundation
- Ozark Regional Transit and Razorback Transit

Northwest Arkansas is a diverse region with a strong international flavor as people from all around the world come to this area to work. With a major university and headquarters for one of the largest companies in the world, there were many voices interested in BRT, as it would fill the need to connecting the cities. Service needs, route design, station location, operational considerations were all discussed in detail with the community and local stakeholders. Following is a summary of community comments.

Service Needs

- Stakeholders noted that there are transportation needs between Bentonville and Fayetteville but most importantly just going from one city to the next can be difficult.

- BRT service would benefit the community as a whole and in particular workers and students at major regional employers, colleges, universities and medical facilities in the region.

- Improved transit services are often a major discussion among local planning agencies and businesses.

Route Design

- Residents stated that service should operate along the entire corridor and not just in sections.

- While the alignment of the route on US 71B was the focus of this study it was noted that meaningful connections to other areas in the region would be needed.

Station Placement

- It is important that the route service major destinations (employment, medical, shopping) as well as origins with park and ride stations, and stations near neighborhoods.
• Stations should be limited to keep the express nature of the route but be frequent enough to serve the areas needed.

Park and Ride Considerations

Park and ride locations should be placed strategically throughout the corridor to maximize accessibility for residents.

Need for Multi-Modal Connections

Many stakeholders expressed the need for BRT services to connect with other modes of transportation. Specifically they mentioned connections with bicycling, which is very popular in the area; they also noted that stations and buses must accommodate bikes.

Service Considerations

Many stakeholders expressed the desire to see a service that can compete with an automobile in travel times along the corridor.

Fare Structure

Fares should be competitively priced and the fare system should not infringe on the bus dwell time at each station. Fare free service was seen as a way to generate the most ridership and should be considered as a promotional/start-up event at a minimum.

Hours of Operation

There was agreement that minimum hours for BRT service needs to be from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Some stakeholders noted additional need for “night owl” service between Bentonville and Fayetteville.

Connecting to Other Transportation Options

• Essential to the success of a limited stop express service includes the ability of transit to feed the route. This could include accessible pathways, park and ride locations and connecting public transit, in this case both Razorback Transit (RT) and Ozark Regional Transit (ORT).

• Currently buses have bike racks and stakeholders reported they are used frequently. Building upon this, a more formal bike share program could be considered.
• The Northwest Arkansas Council expressed need for a Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH) program so that BRT customers have another option if they use the service for work trips.

**Expanded Outreach Efforts**

Stakeholders expressed the need for an effective marketing campaign to ensure success of BRT service. Outreach that targeted millennials was suggested and included a need to ensure information on services would be available through the ORT App.

### SURVEY EFFORTS

This planning effort consisted of three rounds of surveys focusing on:

- The general public
- Commuters, targeting major employers
- Businesses

Overall, the surveys indicated that there is significant interest in a robust transit service in the US 71B corridor. A BRT service can benefit commuters, students, transit dependent populations and choice riders. Community members stated the desire to use the service for both commuting and personal trips. There was stated desire to see frequent, low-fare, safe service that connects to major destinations and other modes. Rapid service was also a factor among participants. Many private sector employers expressed interest in sponsorships and partnerships to better serve their employees and support the service.

The results of the public and commuter surveys showed many similarities. Two thirds of over 1,000 respondents stated that they would use the service at some point. Most importantly, respondents overwhelmingly stated that they would like fast and frequent service that uses real time information with clean vehicles, safe stations and ideally a mobile application. There was also an unusually high number of affluent (over $100,000 in annual income) respondents. While this lends itself to the ability to charge higher fares it should be noted that many responses were completed online and major corporate employers were targeted. There are many lower income workers along the corridor that may not have responded to the surveys that would greatly benefit from a low fare service along the corridor.

### General Public Survey

General public surveys are an essential component in the development of public transit feasibility studies. A survey was conducted as part of this study regarding the practicability of BRT service along US Business 71. The purpose of the survey was three-fold:
1. Assess attitudes of the general public to determine if there is an interest in a “higher level of bus service” along US Business 71 between Fayetteville and Bentonville.

2. Identify major origins and destinations.

3. Identify potential services and amenities that would encourage the public to ride the bus.

**Survey Analysis Summary**

The major results from this survey is that the service will be used most heavily during the peak commuting hours, service needs to be fast and frequent, and connections to major employment destinations are needed.

**Who are the Respondents?**

- **Age.** Of the 515 respondents, 354 (68.7%) are between the ages of 25 and 54. Stratifying the age category further, persons between ages 25 and 34, persons between ages 35 and 44 and persons between ages 45 and 54 each account for roughly 22 percent of the respondents.

- **Income.** Of the 513 respondents, 132 (25.7%) indicated their income is above $100,000 annually. Not far behind, persons with an annual income between $45,001 and $65,000 ranked 2nd place – 124 (24.2%). These are unusually high numbers of middle income or higher respondents.

- **Employment status.** Of the 515 respondents, 392 (76.1%) indicated they are employed full-time.

**Travel Patterns**

In an effort to determine potential travel patterns, respondents submitted origin and destination zip codes. There were seventy respondents who indicated their travel pattern is within Springdale and 70 respondents who indicated their travel pattern is within Fayetteville. When combining the travel patterns of respondents between Springdale and Fayetteville, this becomes the third most evident travel pattern.

**Ideal Bus Stops**

In an effort to determine potential bus stops, respondents were asked to identify ideal bus stop locations along US Business 71 between Bentonville and Fayetteville. Based on the responses, 16 destinations were often mentioned (see Table 2-1).
Table 2-1: Desired Bus Stop Locations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bentonville</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Bentonville Square</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Walmart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Walmart Home Office</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Rogers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. Downtown Rogers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Frisco Station Mall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Pinnacle Hills Promenade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Springdale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. Springdale High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Northwest Arkansas Mall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Downtown Springdale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Walmart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Don Tyson Parkway</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fayetteville</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12. Fiesta Square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Evelyn Hills Shopping Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Fayetteville Square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Downtown Fayetteville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Northwest Medical Center</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Time Periods**

Respondents were asked to identify time periods they are most likely to ride the bus. As expected, the majority of respondents indicated they would ride the bus during peak periods, 34.5 percent, during the morning peak and 38.8 percent during the evening peak (see Figure 2-1).

**Services and Amenities**

Respondents were asked to identify what services and amenities would persuade them to utilize the bus service. Of the thirteen categories, 65.4 percent of respondents indicated that if real time bus arrival were available, they would most definitely use the service. Closely behind are clean vehicles (64.0%); a sense of safety on-board vehicles and at stations (64.0%); and a smartphone application to plan a trip (55.4%). About one-half of riders indicated rapid service as very important.

**Bus Frequency Arrival**

Respondents were asked, “How frequently should the bus operate?” Of the 324 respondents, almost half (46.0%) indicated the ideal bus frequency is fifteen minutes (see Figure 2-2).
Figure 2-1: Time Period’s Respondents Most Likely to Ride the Bus

- Weekday evening peak: 38.8%
- Weekday morning peak: 34.5%
- Weekday midday: 21.2%
- Weekend afternoons: 21.2%
- Weekend evenings: 20.1%
- Weekday late evenings: 19.7%
- Weekend mornings: 18.8%
- Friday and Saturday nights: 16.8%
- Weekdays early mornings: 10.2%

Figure 2-2: Bus Frequency by Respondent

Commuter Surveys

The commuter survey effort was set with a more narrowed focus on origins and destinations and commuting service preferences and parameters. The Project Team targeted employees of major employers in the region to gain a better understanding of their commute patterns and attitudes toward potential BRT service.
Like the public survey, there was an expressed need to serve the cities along the corridor such as Springdale and Rogers. Additional similarities were the desire to see fast, frequent and safe service that is comfortable and affordable.

**Commuter Survey Summary**

A total of 696 surveys were completed on Survey Monkey. The average completion rate was 98.4 percent for the valid responses. Overall, the completion rate was high with no question getting lower that 95 percent of valid responses.

**Who are the respondents?**

- **Age.** Of the 696 respondents, 256 (36.7 percent) are between the age of 35 and 44 years old. Not surprisingly for an employee and commuter survey ages 25 to 54 account for 80 percent of the total responses. For the previous general public survey, 68.7 percent of the respondents were between the age of 25 and 54.

- **Income.** Of the 696 respondents, 246 (35.3 percent) indicated their annual income is above $100,000. Persons with an annual income between $65,001 and $85,000 ranked 2nd place – 108 (15.5 percent). In the previous general public survey 25.7 percent indicated their income is above $100,000 annually. Not far behind, persons with an annual income between $45,001 and $65,000 ranked 2nd place with 24.2 percent.

**Origin and Destination**

Respondents were asked to give the relative location of their homes and places of employments. Table 2-2 displays the commute travel matrix of the survey respondents. As shown the most common commutes are intra city with resident living and working in the City of Bentonville and Fayetteville.

Employees commuting from one end of the corridor to the other (Fayetteville to Bentonville 4.5 percent, Bentonville to Fayetteville 3.5 percent) account for only 8 percent of the survey responses. Many residents live and travel to adjacent cities with Springdale to Fayetteville having the highest response rate (8.3 percent).

**Commute Factors**

In an effort to determine peak travel times, respondents were asked their arrival and departure times at their place of employment. The largest responses were between 7:31 a.m. and 8:00 a.m. in the morning and between 5:01 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. in the afternoon.
Table 2-2: Commuter Travel Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Bentonville</th>
<th>Rogers</th>
<th>Lowell</th>
<th>Springdale</th>
<th>Fayetteville</th>
<th>Total Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bentonville</td>
<td>91 (13.3%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17 (2.4%)</td>
<td>6 (0.8%)</td>
<td>24 (3.5%)</td>
<td>138 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rogers</td>
<td>45 (6.6%)</td>
<td>7 (1%)</td>
<td>5 (0.7%)</td>
<td>9 (1.3%)</td>
<td>10 (1.4%)</td>
<td>76 (14.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowell</td>
<td>10 (1.4%)</td>
<td>6 (0.8%)</td>
<td>4 (0.5%)</td>
<td>6 (0.8%)</td>
<td>4 (0.5%)</td>
<td>30 (5.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springdale</td>
<td>22 (3.2%)</td>
<td>6 (0.8%)</td>
<td>11 (2%)</td>
<td>32 (4.6%)</td>
<td>57 (8.3%)</td>
<td>128 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fayetteville</td>
<td>31 (4.5%)</td>
<td>6 (0.8%)</td>
<td>15 (2%)</td>
<td>5 (0.7%)</td>
<td>81 (11.8%)</td>
<td>138 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Destination</td>
<td>199 (39%)</td>
<td>25 (4.9%)</td>
<td>52 (10.1%)</td>
<td>61 (11.9%)</td>
<td>176 (34.5%)</td>
<td>510 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Trips made outside of the US 71B corridor are excluded from this analysis

**Commute Duration**

To understand how long residents spend commuting, respondents were asked to give their average morning and evening commute durations. This data can be used to determine a range of trip duration that will make BRT competitive with the personal vehicle. Figures 2-3 and 2-4 display the average commute durations by number of respondents.

**Figure 2-3: Average Morning Commute Duration**

![Bar chart showing commute durations](chart.png)
BRT Attitudes and Amenities

To help assess the feasibility of BRT service on the US 71B corridor respondents were asked several questions about the aspects of service that may help them ride.

- Two thirds of the respondents stated that they would use BRT service to access employment if frequency and travel times were convenient.
- On average respondents stated that $2 per one-way trip was the desired fare.
- Headways (frequency) of 10 to 15 minutes were the most desired.
- There was a relative equal distribution of desired amenities with frequent service, rapid service, real-time bus information, smartphone app, shelters at stations, and well-lit stations being the most desired amenities.

Business Surveys

Business surveys are an essential component in the development of public transit feasibility studies. A survey was conducted as part of this study regarding the practicability of BRT service along US Business 71. The purpose of the business survey was two-fold:

1. Identify employee transportation issues and needs.
2. Determine if businesses are interested in financially supporting a higher level of service along US Business 71 corridor.

**Survey Response Summary**

A total of 40 companies completed the survey on Survey Monkey. Please note that the largest companies: Wal-Mart, JB Hunt, Tysons Foods and Georges were all interviewed individually and their responses are in the stakeholder section.

**Shifts**

Employers were asked to identify their typical employee shift times and approximate how many employees work during the shift. Based on the responses, there were three common shift times identified:

- Shift No. 1. The majority of the respondents indicated their employees work between the hours of 7 a.m. and 6 p.m.
- Shift No. 2 and Shift No. 3. These shift periods vary among the companies. No two companies have identified the same Shift 2 and Shift 3 time periods.

**Employee Modal Choice**

Employers were asked to identify how their employees currently travel work (respondents were able to select more than one mode). Of the 23 respondents that answered this question with 22 (95.7%) indicating their employees travel alone, by car. Notably, there are nine who utilize a bicycle for work-related trips. The remaining modal choices are less than five (Carpool 3, Walk 3, Other 2, ORT 1, Razorback Transit 1, Uber 1, Unknown 1).

**Employee Transportation Issues**

Employers were asked, “Have your employees indicated that transportation is a problem traveling to/from work?” Of the 21 responses, sixteen employers indicated that their employee’s specified transportation is a problem.

**Employee Hiring and Retention**

Employers were asked, “Has your company/agency identified transportation as an issue in hiring and retaining employees?” Of the 20 companies/agencies that responded to this question, 7 (35.0%) indicated – yes.
Programs, Services and Incentives

Employers were asked, “In the past, or currently, does your company/agency offer any type of the following programs, services, or incentives?” Employers currently offer flexible work schedules (12) and telecommuting options (10).

Comments

- “A transit system should enable riders to work--strong Wi-Fi, adequate seating room and schedules that allow early and late travel.”
- “Reasonable fees but self-sustaining.”
- “We’re really small, so many of these options would not work for us. Personally, I live near 71 in Springdale and would take the bus to work in Fayetteville if it were an option. It would make it possible for our family to need only one car.”
- “The planning should consider adjusting the current working hours to ease the transportation issues.”
- “Probably should ask in this survey who these business and agencies serve. The people we serve have the transportation issues, not our employees.” It should be noted that these questions were asked in the general public surveys and public meetings.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH SUMMARY

This study has included a robust community and stakeholder outreach effort. The activities of this effort have consisted of:

- Four community public meetings.
- Over ten stakeholder interviews with cities, large businesses, chambers of commerce, planning agencies, transit systems and other interested parties.
- Public and business surveys with over 1,000 total responses.

The focus of community and stakeholder outreach activities was to assist in ascertaining the level of support, demand and feasibility of a BRT service on the US 71B corridor. Major findings include:

- Approximately 35% of survey respondents stated that they would use the service during morning and evening peak travel times. Peak travel times are also the major shift times for employers on the corridor.
• The top five desired service amenities desired by survey respondents are real time bus arrival information, clean vehicles, a sense of safety on vehicles and at stations, a smartphone application to plan a trip and rapid service.

• The vast majority of survey respondents desire at least 15 minute headways during peak travel times.

• Desired station locations are concentrated at major employment locations along the corridor.

• The Northwest Arkansas Council stated that they talk to between 400-500 employers each year and improved transit services comes up often in these discussions. The businesses in the area, especially Walmart and George’s, attract employees from parts of the country where transit services are readily available. These employees expect to have transit options when moving to Northwest Arkansas and lament that the region has limited options beyond a single occupant car.

• Stakeholders suggested park and ride locations be placed at each end of the route as well as at a number of locations with easy and rapid access for people choosing to park and ride.

• Many stakeholders expressed the need for BRT services to connect with other modes of transportation. Specifically they mentioned connections with bicycle pathways, which is very popular in the area and noted that stations and buses must accommodate bikes.

• There was agreement amongst community members and stakeholders that BRT services should have a competitive fare, to attract customers. Fare technology should be employed to improve ease of boarding and dwell times along the route.

• 38 percent of employers surveyed stated that at least some of their employees have indicated transportation issues.

• 12 employers indicated interest in a sponsorship opportunity with the BRT service.