Job Access
Extended Service Transportation Strategic Plan
for
Northwest Louisiana Council of Governments
Task 1 Report
7.27.04
Introduction

Background

The Northwest Louisiana Council of Governments (NLCOG) in June 2004, contracted with the consulting team of MHSM Architects and Burk-Kleinpeter, Inc. to prepare a Job Access – Extended Service Transportation Strategic Plan for the Shreveport-Bossier City region. The study was undertaken for the following reasons:

- The Shreveport-Bossier City regional economy has grown and changed, and today is based on a 24-7 work week. This trend is reflected by job gains in the gaming/tourism, medical and retail sales industries.

- The public transportation system’s services have not grown and changed to service this new dynamic in the economy.

As a result, transportation is frequently a barrier for many of the region’s citizens in accessing employment opportunities. Some of the transportation barriers faced by citizens include a mismatch between where people live and where job growth is taking place; limited transit service hours (no weekday service between 7:30pm and 5:00am with minimal service on Sundays); low automobile ownership among low-income residents; and work trips that often require several destinations such as job training, child care, and health care that are complex and time consuming.

Purpose

The purpose of the Job Access – Extended Service Transportation Strategic Plan is to define and quantify the job access-transportation needs of both residents and employers; to identify the gaps in existing transportation services; and to offer a range of transportation options, solutions, and strategies. The goal is to increase residents’ access to employment opportunities, to assist them in maintaining employment, and provide a more stable work force for area employers.

Scope of Work

The Scope of Work developed by NLCOG included seven tasks to be undertaken over a period of approximately 8 months. The work to be conducted under each of these tasks is attached at the end of this report. The seven tasks are:

Task 1: Establish Collaborative Planning Process

Task 2: Spatial Analysis of Target Populations, Employment Centers, & Related Services

Task 3: Assessment of Unmet Need for Additional Transportation Services

Task 4: Identify Job Access Goals, Policies & Strategies

Task 5: Performance Measures & Data Collection
**Task 6:** Monitoring & Reporting

**Task 7:** Prepare Regional Job Access-Extended Service Transportation Strategic Plan for the Shreveport-Bossier City Region

During the planning process, four reports will be issued: the Task 1 Report, the Task 2 and Task 3 Report, the Task 4 Report, and the Task 5 and Task 6 Report. These four reports will be incorporated into the final plan document (Task 7). What follows is the Task 1 Report.
Task 1 Report

I. Establish an Oversight Committee

The first step in undertaking Task 1 was to develop a representative and diverse group of stakeholders to oversee the planning process. An Oversight Committee of approximately 70 individuals was established representing transportation, planning, economic development and job training agencies; faith-based, community, neighborhood and social service organizations; and major employers. The Council of Governments determined that a large Oversight Committee would best serve the planning process due to the plan’s short duration and a desire to keep as many informed and involved as the plan progresses. It is hoped that leadership will evolve from this larger group—committed individuals that will take responsibility for the critical task of implementing the plan’s recommendations.

Oversight Committee Workshop

An Oversight Committee Workshop was held June 8, 2004, to introduce the committee to the purpose of the Job Access–Extended Service Transportation Strategic Plan, the work to be accomplished under the plan, and the role of the Oversight Committee. Thirty-three stakeholders attended the workshop. The bulk of the workshop was spent discussing and brainstorming on what committee members saw the transportation issues and barriers in the area to be. The group was then divided into four smaller groups to develop alternative solutions to four main issues that came out of the brainstorming session.

Leadership evolved from this group process. Joe Pierce with the United Way of Northwest Louisiana was named the chairperson for the Oversight Committee.

Oversight Committee Workshop Findings

Oversight Committee discussions revolved around four issues: (1) serving new growth and a 24-hour economy; (2) public transportation and economic development; (3) transportation alternatives and coordinating existing transportation services; and (4) advocacy and overcoming stigma. Oversight Committee comments on each of these issues are presented below.

Serving New Growth and a 24-Hour Economy

Spatial Mismatch: New job centers are moving farther away from that portion of our community that is in most need of employment opportunities. These new job growth areas are frequently located on the urban fringes of Shreveport and Bossier and as a result are not served by the existing transit system. Examples include the new U.S. Support Company call center at 5800 Bert Kouns Industrial Loop, retirement home centers on Flournoy-Lucas Road, the new Bossier Parish Community College campus, Harrah’s Louisiana Downs, General Motors and the new General Motors suppliers.

Routes and Hours of Operation: Even if businesses are located on a bus route,
there is frequently no service during their full hours of operation, and so many employees have no way of getting to and/or from work. Shreveport-Bossier has expanded to a 24-hour economy, yet the transit system stops running somewhere between 6:30pm and 7:30pm. This 24-hour economy is represented by the health care industry, gaming/tourism industry, and many retail shopping centers. It is not uncommon for manufacturers, such as Solo Cup (1214 Hawn Avenue), to also operate night shifts.

**Job Training Access:** There is no evening access to the area’s major job training institutions: Southern University-Shreveport, Bossier Parish Community College, Louisiana Technical College and LSUS.

**Suggestions:**

- Reevaluate growth policies to consider transit as an integral part of the cities’ infrastructure when siting or approving new projects.

- Encourage the building of new job centers and new housing developments in the inner city.

- Develop incentives for employers to participate in funding transportation alternatives.

- Look at transportation alternatives that are lower in cost and more flexible than public transit to meet the physical and economical changes in the community.

**Public Transportation & Economic Development**

**Business Impacts:** Employee turnover and absenteeism are real costs businesses incur because of a lack of transportation services. Businesses also lose clients and customers.

**Quality of Life Impacts:** There are direct and indirect benefits from people working. Public transportation plays a key role for working and low-income families, those with disabilities, and senior citizens in obtaining and maintaining employment. Lack of transportation also affects housing and healthcare issues. It is difficult for some to obtain better housing because to do so often results in loss of access to transit. On Roy Road, a developer is interested in constructing affordable housing, but won’t because of the lack of transit services. Shreveport’s Department of Community Development conducted a study that highlighted that many of the low-income missed health appointments due to the lack of transportation.

**Barriers to Advancement:** For many to work or advance they must be able to access job training. A representative of Southern University-Shreveport stated that a significant number of students drop out because of no transportation. A representative of the BPCC Job Learning Center estimated 20% of their students drop out for the same reason.
Suggestions:

- Provide a stable base of public funding for transit. Secure a dedicated fund (ex: fuel tax, sales tax, property tax) by selling to the larger community the benefits to be derived from an improved economy, lower crime, and a more reliable workforce for area employers.

- Look at generating employer financial support (ex: passes, tokens) with the goal of offsetting the costs incurred from absenteeism and turnover.

- Experiment with new ideas and out-of-the-box thinking in providing alternative transportation services.

- Improve collaboration among existing transportation providers.

Coordinating Transportation Services & Transportation Alternatives

Unreliable Alternatives: Taxis, relatives and friends are filling the gaps in transportation services; however, they are not consistent, reliable and can be costly.

Cost of Service: Traditional transit services can be costly. SporTran management stated that adding service to the existing system is cheaper than starting new services. There is no dedicated funding source for SporTran. City government pays $4M out of SporTran's $9M budget. Federal assistance has significantly declined from years past and local government has had to increase its funding. SporTran estimates that to add 3 hours of service could cost as much as $2M annually, and to service the new call center could cost up to $100,000/year. Fare increases result in a loss of riders with only a small increase in revenue.

Obstacles for Alternatives: Van-type services and/or brokered rides are cheaper transportation services than SporTran. TANF funds supported this type of private sector service (Vision Transportation) but funding was cut and the service no longer exists. Fuel costs, driver requirements, and insurance are a barrier to these types of services.

Suggestions:

- Create a central, umbrella organization for coordinating and/or brokering existing transportation providers.

- Establish a regional transit authority to get the two cities working together to solve the area’s transportation problems. Build support for this initiative among politicians, employers and citizens.

- Initiate a “211” information line to increase access to information on schedules and routes and to better gauge the community’s transportation needs.

- Set up a mechanism for social service agencies to regularly meet and work together with SporTran to improve services.
Consider alternative transportation programs such as utilizing school buses during off hours; creating and promoting use of bike lanes; asking car dealerships to assist those who live outside transit served areas in purchasing their own vehicles; and asking the Louisiana Technical College if they could repair vehicles as a service to the low-income.

Advocacy & Overcoming Stigma

Perceptions: There is a stigma to riding the bus, i.e., you only ride the bus if you have to. In the South there is a preference for the auto. This stigma involves issues of class, race, the perception of inconvenience, and safety.

Political Support: Bus riders do not have a voice, or political weight, in getting their transportation needs addressed.

Suggestions:

- Enlist support groups such as the Chambers of Commerce, the Committee of 100, Society of Human Resource Managers, handicapped advocacy groups, Sierra Club and other environmental groups, and agency service providers. Agency service providers can give essential information on their clients needs and can collaborate to build an advocacy base. These support groups should be educated on the benefits of providing public transportation.

- Increase use and knowledge of the public bus system through marketing. Options include agency service providers promoting bus system use; advertising the low cost of using the bus, particularly for special events such as area festivals; introducing young riders and their parents to the transit system through student “bus” field trips; and educating people on how to ride the bus and read schedules because as an important life skill.

II. Major Employers

The next major step in Task 1 was to involve the major employers in our community. A meeting was held June 29, 2004. Invitations were mailed to approximately 30 area employers; unfortunately only five employers attended the meeting. However, those attending represented a diverse employment base—The Glen, Boomtown Casino, Caddo Parish Schools, Hibernia National Bank, and LSUHSC. The meeting was very productive and much was gained in understanding the impacts to employers when employees lack reliable and affordable transportation options. An additional effort was made to reach employers, by mailing a survey to all those that were not in attendance. Only three surveys were returned. A few employers attended the community meeting that is discussed in the next section, and other key employers will be contacted and interviewed as part of Task 2. Efforts are also underway to reach employers through the Society of Human Resource Managers.

Employer Meeting Findings

Employers at the meeting discussed the service needs of their businesses, the impacts they incur form the lack of available transportation services, the transportation
services they provide to their employees and the alternative transportation options their employees use when public transit is not available. The group also provided suggestions and support in many key areas.

**Evening Service Needs:** The casinos, LSUHSC, and the Glen operate 24-hours/day which requires around the clock transportation services. Typical work shifts for LSUHSC, The Glen and Boomtown are: 7:00am – 3:00pm; 3:00pm – 11:00pm; and 11:00pm – 7:00am; or for some nursing staff, 7:00am – 7:00pm; and 7:00pm – 7:00am. Hibernia needs evening transportation services for their call center and other specialized operations.

**Route Service Needs:** The Glen is not on a bus route and in need of service for its employees. Many public schools are not on bus routes as well as some of the Hibernia Bank branches.

**Negative Impacts from Lack of Transportation Services:** The lack of available transportation negatively impacts employers. There is employee turnover due to their inability to get to and from work. According to the group it costs approximately ±$5,000 to train a new employee. The group estimated that 3 – 4% of absenteeism and tardiness is due to transportation problems encountered by employees. Absenteeism also results in overtime for other employees which can lead to morale issues. However, since this happens more frequently on Mondays and Fridays, there is some belief that transportation is also used as an excuse for absenteeism. The School Board believes their absenteeism is more from illness and child care. The Glen believes approximately 1/3 of their employees have transportation difficulties. The Glen is expanding and has concern over finding reliable staff.

**Employer Transportation Services:** The employers in attendance offer no transportation benefits to their employees other than free parking. Boomtown runs shuttles on request for customers, but not employees. Boomtown offers SporTran information and route maps to its newly hired employees. Hibernia thought this would be a good idea and may now include it as part of their training program. LSUHSC runs a shuttle for employees from their remote parking lots. The shuttle is privately contracted and bid out every few years. Competition for jobs at the School Board doesn’t require them to offer transportation benefits. There are many more applicants than positions. Low pay is more of a problem for their employees than transportation. Apparently Harrah’s inquired about sponsoring SporTran service to Louisiana Downs for its customers, but not their employees. Since the service was not going to be available to the general public, SporTran declined to participate.

**Transportation Options:** Taxis are frequently used by employees for late night service to and from the casinos. Taxicabs are expensive for those in lower wage jobs. There are some informal carpools at LSUHSC.

**Suggestions/Support:**

- Boomtown, Hibernia, and LSUHSC would support extended evening bus hours. The Glen and the Caddo Parish School Board would support extended routes. The Glen stated they would support employer subsidized bus passes for their employees if service was extended.
• All employers indicated they were willing to survey employees to determine those in need of transportation services and where they live to assist in developing routing or service plans for alternative forms of transportation. Employers also indicated that they could survey applicants on an on-going basis to assist in quantifying the need for transportation services.

• More input is needed from major employers and additional efforts are needed to get the word out. It was recommended that the study team work through the human resource directors of area employers. The place to start would be a presentation to the Society of Human Resource Managers. The American Society of Training Directors would be another good organization to contact.

• Educating employers on how they will benefit from participating in program(s) that address alternative transportation options is needed (e.g., a reliable workforce, reduced absenteeism, reduced turnover). If possible, the cost to employers should be quantified (training, overtime, productivity). Employers could then be asked to transfer their “lost” investment into transportation options. For the education of employers and the general community it would be good to find “poster individuals” willing to be a symbol for the problem. Consideration should be given to placing the community survey in the newspaper.

III. Community Input

The third component of Task 1 was to hear from the larger community, particularly those in need of transportation services. Two public meetings were held July 13, 2004, at the Municipal Auditorium. There were approximately 80 people in attendance at the 4:00pm meeting and 20 in attendance at the 6:30pm meeting. (Of note is the fact that attendees reliant solely on transit bus service were not able to attend the 6:30pm meeting because of the lack of evening service.) The meetings were advertised by over 200 direct mailings to major employers, faith-based communities, neighborhood associations, and community, social service and job training organizations. An ad in The Times newspaper was placed, and a supportive editorial appeared on the editorial page (see attached). Notices were also posted at the SporTran terminal and on SporTran buses. A community survey was distributed at both meetings. Some attendees took extra copies to distribute to friends, employees and clients who were unable to attend. As of the date of this report, 83 surveys have been received. If more surveys are received following this report, the updated results will be included in the final plan document. The community suggested that surveys be distributed at the transit terminal. Perhaps resources could be allocated for this purpose when the Transit Development Program Update study is initiated in the near future by NLCOG. The TDP will review the needs of the transit system in its entirety.

Community Meeting Findings

Transportation Options: Many workers cannot afford a car and have no transportation to and from work because of the lack of SporTran service. In order to work they rely on friends and family, jitney type services and cabs to fill the gap. This can be expensive and unreliable. One person gets to his job on SporTran and then pays someone $10 to pick them up at night; another person pays $13 for a
Trip Length & Reliability: The time involved in taking the bus to work can be a hardship. Bus schedules do not always correlate with work schedules and can cause extensive waits (ex: State Building). Some drivers will run ahead of schedule and don’t wait for the scheduled stop time. There are instances where the walking distance between routes in order to transfer is long and poses a problem. Part of the problem is the lack of cross-town bus routes. For example, a Centenary student that works at LSUHSC and also attends LSUS must backtrack and ride downtown to get to each destination. One person stated that it takes 3 hours to get kids to day care and get to work by 8:00am. Another stated that it takes 2 hours to get from Shreveport to her work in Bossier (Boys & Girls Club After-School Program).

Hours of Service Needs: Many present at the meetings stated that the lack of evening transit service has resulted in a personal loss of employment or inability to find employment. Specific references included area hospitals, nursing homes, the casinos, and Red River Sanitors. A representative from Goodwill stated that their job placement retention is down because of lack of evening hours. It was also mentioned that there was no evening service to LSUS and BPCC. There is also a need for earlier morning service for those that need to arrive at work by 5:00am. Because of the amount of time to get to work, even those housekeepers and beverage people that need to be at work by 7:00am can have difficulties (Sam’s Town).

Saturday & Sunday Service Needs: Many work on both Saturday and Sunday. The limited hours and frequency of service is a problem, particularly Sunday service. Willis Knighton-Pierremont and LSUHSC need Saturday and Sunday service for longer periods of time. The Linwood Route has no service to Goodwill on Saturdays; the N. Bossier Route does not serve Willis Knighton-Bossier on Saturday or even Wal-Mart on Sunday; and the Russell Road Route needs better Sunday Service. There is no Sunday service on the Allendale Route and Pines Road Route.

Route Service Needs: Numerous locations were given for areas and businesses that lack service. Specific needs mentioned were:

- Cross-town routes for Kings Highway and 70th Street
- Century Tel Arena (which regularly offers temporary employment jobs such as cleaning of parking lots after events)
- Flournoy Lucas Road, where there are major employers operating 24 hours/day
- General Motors and General Motors suppliers
- Louisiana Downs Race Track
- Large portions of Bert Kouns Industrial Loop
- American School of Business
- Wal-Mart on Mansfield which would also serve several apartment complexes
- The new BPCC campus
- Bossier Industrial Park
- Slack Industrial Park
- Ashley Ridge Business Park
- Bossier City as a whole is inaccessible; 2 routes are not enough and the frequency/headways are too long
- East end of Shed Road (housing project)
- NW State School on Shed Road
- No service to large portions of the MLK neighborhood, including the area known as the “Easy Living” neighborhood
- Housing project on Hamilton Road (½ mile to any stop)
- North Bossier above I-220
- Pines Road
- Swan Lake Road
- Queensboro & Airport need better service
- Allendale needs 2 buses

**Needs of the Disabled:** The disabled, because of the lack of handicap sidewalks, can’t get to many bus stops. LiftLine has limited hours too and is difficult to schedule regularly (generally requires scheduling 2 weeks in advance). Frost Industries and Goodwill, which employ the disabled, have limited bus service. The disabled also have more work opportunities in the evenings, but there is no evening bus service. Cabs are often not an option because they too are not handicap accessible. As a result the disabled often can’t work even if they wanted to. Early morning bus service is important to the disabled who may depend on personal care attendants to get to their home in time for them to make it to a job at 8:00am.

**Safety Concerns:** Safety and security is an issue for many riders, particularly women. There is fear of walking to stops, fear of waiting for the bus in dark winter hours, and the fear of being stranded if you miss the last bus. This fear is exacerbated by frequent poor lighting at bus stops. Sam’s Town provides shuttle for its employees to the terminal because many are scared to walk the distance.

**Quality of Life Issues:** Access to transportation is a quality of life issue. Transportation supports many daily living needs besides employment, such as daycare (with significant late fees incurred if one does not arrive on time), shopping, church activities and medical needs. Medical needs at night go unmet because there is no transportation or the person has to incur high prices for their medical attention through use of a cab or ambulance. The lack of evening bus service restricts entertainment or social options for evening activities particularly for the elderly and teenagers. The level of service on Sundays can make going to the movies a 7-hour ordeal.

**Customer Service Needs:** Many mentioned the need for services that would make riding the bus more comfortable. Specifically mentioned was the need for more bus shelters and benches. Waiting for long periods of time in the heat or inclement weather is a hardship. Shelters should be more inviting/safe and better designed. The terminal building should also be open on Sundays (apparently it opened recently, but several regular riders were not aware of that). Maintenance and cleanliness of the buses and stops was mentioned as a problem.

**The Economy:** If we want to improve our economy, we need to provide transportation so people can work. There are large numbers of people working
from 11:00pm to 7:00am that need transit services. Jobs have been offered to several of the participants and the lack of public transit was a barrier to accepting the jobs (ex: Louisiana Downs Racetrack). Several people are unable to drive and can’t apply for work unless it is on a bus route and fits with bus schedule. Many stated that the higher paying job areas in our community lack transportation service.

Good public transportation helps provide employers with a stable labor pool. Hidden employer costs due to the lack of transportation include absenteeism, overtime, and added training costs. Our growing population/economy requires a transportation system that grows with it. Better transportation could lead to a better economy. A small business owner stated that she looses business due to the lack of reliable transit or cabs for her clients.

Increasing Ridership: Two options mentioned to increase bus ridership were to offer free bus passes for a day and for employers to provide bus passes to their employees.

Community Survey Results

As mentioned above, 83 community surveys were completed and returned. There were some problems in survey execution. Seven respondents were given an incorrect survey by error. Their results are included in the first two questions only. 76 surveys were returned that pertain to questions 3-8. On questions where respondents were asked to “check only one”, some checked more than one. However, by including all responses, we found results to be appropriately weighted and relevant. In question 8, responses were to be ranked from 1 to 5. Many respondents simply checked a total of five items. Therefore, we counted the total number of responses for each item, and did not rank them. We believe the above deficiencies could only have been corrected if the survey was conducted one-on-one. The plan’s scope of work does not allow for such an exhaustive survey technique. In Task 2 survey results will be coupled with census data to provide a clearer picture of those in need of public transportation services.

Survey Questions

1. Where do you live?

Responses to this question will be mapped under Task 2. Of the 83 responses, only 6, or 7.2% lived in Bossier City.

2. Are you currently employed?

68, or 82.0% of respondents are currently employed.

How do you usually get to work? (Please check only one.)

How do you usually leave work? (Please check only one.)


SporTran is the predominant means of transportation for respondents to get to and from work followed by use of their own vehicle and then taxis.

Could you please tell us where you work?

Information from this response will also be mapped under Task 2. Responses were diverse with the largest concentration in the gaming industry (19) and medical industry (11).

3. Are you currently in a job training program?

Only 5 of 75 respondents were in a job training program (No response = 1). Only two job training sites were listed: Southern University on MLK Drive and Goodwill.

4. Do you have children you are responsible for under the age of 12 in your household?

Out of 74 respondents, exactly half, or 37, had young children in their household.

How do you get your children to day care or a sitter while working, at school, etc.? (Please check only one.)


Over 40% of families get their children to day care or a sitter on SporTran.

5. Do you feel that the lack of reliable transportation ever caused you to:
(Please check all that apply.)


The lack of reliable transportation has affected the employment opportunities of at least 80% of the respondents. The number could be higher in that some of the no responses were those who did not complete the backside of the survey. Of those that answered this question, 62% were unable to accept a job and 46% also lost jobs.

6. How often would you use transit (bus) services during evening hours (7:00 pm to 12:00 am) if available?

Of the 67 responding to this question, 80% indicated they would ride the bus more than 3 times per week, with 55% indicating they would ride the bus daily during evening hours.

7. How often would you use transit (bus) services after midnight (12:00 am) if available?


Fewer respondents indicated they would ride the bus after midnight. Of the 62 responding to this question, 56% would ride less than twice a week, with as much as 27% indicating they would never ride. 24% indicated they would ride 3 to 4 times per week and 205 indicated they would ride daily.

8. From the following list, please identify the top five items which may be preventing you from getting to and from work in the area. (Please rank these from 1 to 5, with 1 being your biggest barrier.)

[6] I do not know how to use the transit (bus) system
[25] It costs too much to use buses or taxis
[29] There is no bus service to places where I can apply for a job
[22] I have a job, but there is no bus service to the place where I work
[28] I have a job, but there is no bus service during the times I go to work
[34] I cannot get my family or friends to take me or pick me up from work
[13] There is no bus service to places where I can go for job training
[43] I cannot afford a car
[13] I cannot get my children to daycare or sitter
[24] It takes too long to ride the bus to a job and/or job training
[6] I am disabled and don’t know what transit services are available
[20] It is unsafe to walk from the bus stop to my house, job and/or job training
[2] Other
[12] No response

The top five items respondents marked as the biggest transportation barriers for getting to and from work are: (1) I cannot afford a car; (2) I cannot get my family or friends to take me or pick me up from work; (3) There is no bus service to places where I can apply for a job; (4) I have a job, but there is no bus service during the times I go to work; and (5) It costs too much to use buses or taxis (most respondents underlined the word taxis when marketing this item). The top two items highlight the reasons why respondents are reliant on public transportation for accessing employment.

Other Comments Received

Approximately ten comments were received from the public via phone and email. Several of the comments were regarding the time of the 6:30pm meeting and the lack of public transportation to be able to get home. The majority of the comments expressed the need for evening services and better Saturday and Sunday services. Several work nights and the lack of service is a hardship. Cab fares ranged from $12 to $20 per ride for these individuals. One caller now uses a jitney service that costs $5 per ride.
Another citizen, not dependent on the transit system, stated that public transportation is an essential service and that he would be willing to pay more in sales or property taxes to improve the system.

IV. Future Input

Additional input will be received from the Oversight Committee, employers, social service and community based agencies, and the larger community throughout the development of the plan. The Oversight Committee will meet regularly to review task reports and to give guidance on the development of alternative job access transportation strategies. The larger community will have access to task reports on the NLCOG web site (www.nwlainfo.com; Job Access/Strategic Plan link). Stakeholder interviews will be conducted during Task 2, and other special efforts may be undertaken such as a presentation to the Society of Human Resource Managers. The final plan will be presented to both the Oversight Committee and the larger community for input and comment prior to presentation to the NLCOG Policy Committee.

V. Conclusions

The overall conclusion is that public transportation is serving fewer and fewer businesses as the city grows and hours of operation expand. This poses an economic hardship on Shreveport-Bossier citizens that are most in need of employment and on employers in need of a stable workforce.

There was significant similarity of themes between the Oversight Committee, employers, and the general community. The majority of people in the community we heard from are actively working. Yet, maintaining employment is a struggle for many of them. Their personal stories of the logistics, time and expense required to get to and from work were astounding. The lack of available transportation caused 46% to lose a job at one time or another and 62% to be unable to accept a job offer (see survey results).

Even though we heard from only a few employers, those who have participated so far indicated that transportation is a key factor in their estimated 3 to 4% absenteeism and turnover rates. The economic impact from this could be significant, especially given an estimated training cost of $5,000 for each new employee.

The challenge ahead will be to find those solutions and strategies which will cost-effectively increase employment opportunities for the Shreveport-Bossier community.
**Task 1: Collaborative Planning Process**

**Establish Organization Framework**
- Oversight Committee

**Conduct Oversight Committee Workshop: "Plan for the Plan"**
- Review Scope of Work & Plan Process
- Identify Agency & Community Stakeholders
- Define Issues & Problems
- Identify Existing Resources & Programs
- Identify Potential New Resources & Programs

**Conduct Community Meetings (2)**
- Employers
- General Community & Stakeholders
Task 2: Spatial Analysis

Identify & Conduct Stakeholder Interviews
- Transportation Providers
- Employers, Business & Industry Organizations
- Education & Job Training Agencies
- Public Housing & Social Service Agencies

Prepare Profile of Shreveport-Bossier Region
- Population, Income, & Economic Characteristics
- Transportation Characteristics
- Comparisons to Comparable Cities & State of LA

Collect Data, Locate, Map & Analyze Low Income Populations
- Number of Welfare Recipients/TANF Enrollment
- No., %, Geographic Location of Low Income Populations

Collect Data, Locate, Map & Analyze Job Access Attributes
- Employment & Activity Centers
- Potential Growth Industries & Activity Centers
- Education & Job Training Facilities
- Support Services (daycare & housing)

Task 3: Assessment of Unmet Need

Identify, Collect Data, & Map Existing Transportation Services
- Public, Non-Profit, Human Service Providers
- Service & Ridership Characteristics
- Equipment, Capital & Operating Costs
- Funding & Future Plans
- Analyze Applicable Strengths, Weaknesses & Opportunities

Identify, Describe & Map Gaps between Needs & Existing Services
- Geographic Distribution Gaps (people, employment centers, related activities)
- Estimate Size of Underserved Areas of Low Income Persons
- Transportation Job Access Barriers
- Hours of operation, accessibility (capacity, awareness, flexibility, multi-purpose trips

Prioritize Job Access Barriers

Present Findings to Oversight Committee
Task 4: Job Access Goals, Policies & Strategies

**Establish Job Access Goals & Policies**

- Overview of Successful Job Access Projects

**Develop Strategies to Address Gaps & Improve Job Access**

- Maximize Existing Transportation Services
- Modify/Expand Existing Transportation Services
- Identify New Services, Providers, & Projects
- Review Alternative Transportation Options
- Identify Potential Collaborations & Partnerships
- Awareness/Marketing Needs
- Needs of Persons with Disabilities/Requirements of ADA

**Oversight Committee Meeting: Present/Test Proposed Strategies & Determine Priorities**

- Finalize & Prioritize Strategies

  - Assess Employment Potential in Service Area
  - Project Potential Utilization & Ridership (general population, low income & welfare recipients)
  - Project Capital & Operating Costs
  - Identify Potential Financial Commitments
  - Propose Project Phasing
  - Identify Long Term Financing Strategies

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Task 5: Performance Measures & Data Collection

**Review Existing Performance Indicators**

**Develop Standardized Performance Measures**

- Operational Measures for New and/or Expanded Service
- Utilization & Productivity of Service
- Increases in Job Access to Target Market
- Local Collaboration Efforts
- Requirements of ADA

**Identify Data Collection Processes**
Task 6: Monitoring & Reporting

Develop Procedure for Monitoring & Reporting

- Performance Measures (Task 5)
- FTA Program Evaluation
- Reporting Form(s), Process & Timetable
- FTA Section 2307 Urbanized Area Formula Grants
  - Annual Certifications & Assurances
  - Civil Rights Submissions
  - Labor Union Descriptions (DOL Certifications)
  - Environmental Review
  - Air Quality Conformity

Task 7: Prepare Job Access-Extended Service Transportation Strategic Plan

Prepare Draft Regional Strategic Plan

- Technical Memorandums 1 through 6
- Incorporate Prior Comments and Revisions
- Develop Organizational Structure for Implementation

Present Draft Plan

- Oversight Committee Meeting
- Conduct Community Meeting

Finalize Regional Strategic Plan (incorporate comments received)

Present Final Plan

- Oversight Committee
- MPO Policy Committee
'Lives don’t end at 5 p.m.'
Group studies late-hour bus service for SporTran

By Don Walker
donwalker@gannett.com

Sometimes the end of a long night at work means the start of a long journey home for 32-year-old Johnathan Kennedy.

After Shreveport's public transportation system gets him by bus to his job at CiCi's Pizza on Airline Drive, Kennedy must rely on co-workers or friends to get him back home to downtown Shreveport. And sometimes he has to make the trek home on foot — the whole five miles.

Kennedy goes to school during the day and works at night as part of a welfare-to-work program through Shreveport's Providence House. He also relies on the bus service to get his two sons, Jerrod, 10, and Johnathan, 8, to day care after school. And again, it's friends who get them home.

"Bus service at night would be a big help," Kennedy said.

That service may be just around the corner.

The Northwest Louisiana Council of Governments will kick off a study within the next two weeks on establishing night service for the city's public transportation system, SporTran.

Kent Rogers, executive director of the group, said the study should be finished by year's end.

See SPORTRAN 2A

What's next

A study on implementing night service for SporTran buses should be completed by the end of the year, at which time a proposal on how to provide the service and pay for it would be brought to the Shreveport City Council for consideration.
By then, the goal is to have a plan on how to provide night service, the cost and how to pay for it.

"We know there's a need out there," Rogers said. "We've heard from industries such as the casinos, the hospitals, the 24-hour retail establishments, and even some of the smaller manufacturers that have evening shifts. In a lot of cases, those with lower income can get to work or get home, but they can't do both because of the time frame. SporTran cuts off service."

Service hours run from 5 a.m. to 8:10 p.m., however the last bus out is at 8:30 p.m.

The goal is to make the connection between jobs and employees in a feasible way by either expanding existing routes, creating new ones or through partnerships with other agencies to provide the service needed, Rogers said.

The $50,000 survey is being funded through federal transportation and transit grants. Ultimately, the findings will be brought to the Shreveport City Council before any service is implemented.

Gene Eddy, director of SporTran, said passengers have voiced the need for night service through its own surveys.

"Most of the three big needs we hear are that passengers want more frequent service, night service and 'please don't raise fares,'" Eddy said.

"The federal welfare-to-work program put in place several years ago established new jobs for people entering the job market and many of those are service sector jobs in nontraditional hours — restaurants, hotels, hospitals, casinos. We know that night service will not get the level of ridership we provide during the day but it's important to those who need it."

Eddy said he talked to one passenger recently who was job-bound. Knowing her hours did not coincide with SporTran's service, he asked how she'd get home. "She told me her cousin picks her up," he said.

Seventy-five percent of those who use SporTran don't have access to a car, Eddy said. "We cater to transit-dependent people — those who don't have access to cars or for whom a car is a major expense."

They may have several workers in the family unit with only one car.

Currently, typical SporTran service on weekdays consists of about 10,000 trips, plus 5,000 on Saturday and 1,000 on Sunday. SporTran's budget of $8.4 million is funded 25 percent through fares and $3.1 million through the city of Shreveport. The remainder of the budget is $2 million from Uncle Sam and about $1 million through state subsidies. There are 45 city buses.

Fees vary depending on usage, all-day and extended passes, or even student and senior fares, but the standard fare is $1.

"If we had more resources the first thing would be to put service on at night to help people get to jobs," Eddy said. "The secondary thing is, nowadays, people's lives don't end at 5 p.m. Even if you have a nine-to-five job, people have to get out and shop and do stuff. If you want to go out to Best Buy to pick up a DVD or CD, the last bus leaves at 6:30. This study is not just directed at people getting to jobs, but the quality of life of transit-dependent customers that we currently carry."

John Kirk, 35, uses SporTran service to get from his home in Bossier City to his job at Wal-Mart on Pines Road.

"The way gas prices are it's more economical to ride the bus now," he said. Yet, economically, night bus service would enable Kirk to potentially work a full-time schedule, where now he's lucky to get 30 to 35 hours a week.

"A lot of folks around here would have better jobs if they could get to their jobs at night," he said.

Lynn Brown, job developer for the job boost program at Bossier Parish Community College, said there's a definite need for night bus service.

"I'd say it's an urgent need," she said. "Employers have plenty of people who can fill 8-to-5 jobs, but too many jobs require odd hours, evening hours, times when the buses don't run. I've worked with many clients referred to us by Louisiana Rehabilitation Services as well as clients referred by social services, welfare clients, and they are locked out of too many jobs because they can't get there."

The program also provides job placement and job training skills to youths and even works with retirees hoping to re-enter the work force.

"In many cases it's not people's lack of desire or training, it's their lack of transportation that keeps them from getting jobs and succeeding in jobs," she said. "Employers don't want to hire you don't have transportation. This sounds like a good project that's long overdue."
Officials should back changes to bus system

Shreveport Mayor Keith Hightower has made the monumental, yet impractical decision to build a $150 million convention center without the assured funding of an accompanying hotel. Hightower is not alone in his impracticality. He is joined by the illustrious members of the Shreveport City Council who support him.

This fall, the vision of the mayor and the council again will be tested by their decision of whether or not to revamp the SporTran public bus system. A study hopes to explore the system and establish, among other things, a need for and ways to fund expanding the hours in which the buses run.

The May 30 Times article concerning the hardships experienced by bus rider Johnathan Kennedy, is not a unique tale of Shreveport’s working poor. Women and men — black, white, brown and yellow — who rely on public transportation continue to work odd hours convenient to employers but inconsistent with those of SporTran. The poor must walk to or from work before or after SporTran hours, procuring rides only when they can afford a token offering for the inconvenience of others. Although many people are kind and refuse those offerings, the Samaritans are often working poor themselves who cannot afford to give free rides on a consistent basis, particularly with the current mushrooming gas prices.

Why would the working poor like Kennedy continue to trek the sapping miles to ill-sustaining jobs, perhaps more than once a week, week in and week out? They do it because this is America where they have been led to believe that hard work and dedication reap rewards and where their elected officials are supposed to help them in their pursuit of happiness.

These working poor who subsist and eke out a living, and to whom a third- or fourth-hand car is a long-term dream of luxury, deserve to be met halfway by the people they entrust to represent them in their pursuit of the American dream. Even if Hightower succeeds in obtaining funding for the hotel he wants to build, who will clean it at night when SporTran buses cease to run? The working poor will.

We need practical leadership from the mayor and the council. If they can spend $150 million for the convenience of those who are not Shreveport citizens, they should be able to make life a little more tolerable for those who live here.

Pamela A. Hamilton lives in Shreveport.
**Centenary Muses plan book donation day**

The Centenary Muses, sponsor of the Centenary Book Bazaar, will hold an assisted book donation day today at the Centenary Book House, 108 East Kings Highway. Donors may bring books between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. when Muses will be available to help unload books. The Book House is in Centenary Square, across from George's Grill.

The Muses accept donations of paperback and hardcover books, video and audio tapes, and CDs in good condition. Not accepted are Readers Digest Condensed Books, National Geographic Magazines, textbooks more than five years old (history and English excepted) or books that are missing covers or are damaged.

Anyone who wishes to donate at another time can leave books in the blue weatherproof bins in front of the Book House.

The books will be sorted, priced and sold at the Centenary Book Bazaar, which will be held Sept. 10-11 at the Gold Dome. Funds raised at the bazaar are used to support student activities, functions and needs that are not part of the college's regular budget.

**Bossier group to hold meeting on election**

The South Bossier Citizens Assembly will meet at 6:30 p.m. today at the Shady Grove Recreational Center, 3949 Wayne Drive.

Ken Kruthof, superintendent of Bossier schools, and Bobby Edmiston, Bossier Parish tax assessor, are expected to speak about the upcoming bond and sales tax election.

Scott Irwin, who represents south Bossier City on the City Council, is also expected to talk about new development in the area.

The event is free and open to the public.

Participants can become members of the organization for $15 per individual or $25 per family or $12 for individual senior citizens or $20 for families with senior citizens.

For more information, call president Bob Wynn at (318) 746-7491.

**Group to consider transportation issues**

The Northwest Louisiana Council of Governments will hold a meeting to come up with ways to offer more Shreveport-Bossier City residents transportation to their jobs.

The council will meet from 4 to 5 p.m. for the first session and from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. for the second session Tuesday at Municipal Auditorium, 705 Elvis Presley Ave., in Shreveport, to discuss the Job Access—Extended Service Transportation Strategic Plan.

The council is seeking input from residents on the difficulties they have experienced in finding transportation or finding a job.

For more information, contact J. Kent Rogers, NLCOG executive director, at (318) 441-5950 or jobaccess@nlcog.org, or Sharon S. Swanson, project planner with MHSM Architects at 221-1623 or sswanson@mhsmarchitects.com.

**DDA parking meeting rescheduled this week**

A specially called meeting of the Downtown Development Authority has been rescheduled for 10 a.m. Wednesday in the DDA conference room, 401 Edwards St., Suite 205.

The meeting originally called for Friday was canceled because of other commitments of some of its seven-member board of directors, said DDA Executive Director Frank Williams.

The group was expected to go over its list of funding priorities for the year and to discuss construction of a parking garage on the downtown riverfront.

--- From Staff Reports

*Shreveport Times July 12, 2004*
More input is needed on public transportation

Ask any large local employer to name a major headache in recruiting and retaining employees. Ask any social service provider to identify a major obstacle to counseling or employment for clients. Ask any medical professional what the biggest cause of missed appointments is. The answers likely will have one thing in common: transportation.

The team of consultants and local officials drafting proposals for improving public transportation in Shreveport-Bossier City has already begun eliciting input from transportation stakeholders, employers and other organizations whose clients do not have their own transportation. The Northwest Louisiana Council of Governments is holding two community meetings Tuesday to let the public weigh in on the transportation issues affecting the lives of many Shreveport-Bossier City residents.

One of the first responses received by NLCOG about the event came from someone who had seen a flier advertising the meeting but said the location, the Municipal Auditorium, was too far to walk from the nearest bus stop and would likely discourage participation by people who might otherwise have been willing to attend. That's exactly the kind of problem organizers hope to address.

Efforts to devise a plan for extended service require public input, particularly from those who need it most.

The question isn't whether access to transportation is a barrier to economic growth. That is well established. The question is how to address these transportation barriers. Without comments from the very public that deals with transportation problems day in and day out, planners might never hear an idea that could play a major role in addressing the long-standing transportation problem in Shreveport-Bossier City.
The Northwest Louisiana Council of Governments (NLCOG) invites you to a community meeting on the Job Access – Extended Service Transportation Strategic Plan.

**Date:** Tuesday, July 13, 2004  
**Time:** 4:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. Session 1  
**or**  
6:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. Session 2  
**Place:** Municipal Auditorium  
705 Elvis Presley Avenue  
Shreveport, Louisiana

The NLCOG is undertaking a Job Access – Extended Service Transportation Strategic Plan for the Shreveport-Bossier City region. The Shreveport-Bossier City region has experienced strong economic growth over the past few years, with significant job gains in the gaming/tourism, medical and 24-hour retail sales industries. **Transportation is a barrier for many of the region’s citizens in accessing these employment opportunities.** Some of the transportation barriers faced by our citizens include:

- A mismatch between where people live and where job growth is taking place.
- Limited transit service hours (no service between 7:30 p.m. and 5:00 a.m. and minimal service on Sundays).
- Low automobile ownership among many individuals and working families.
- Long work trips that often include require several destinations for child care, job training and health care.

To develop the transportation options, solutions, and strategies which address the gaps in existing transportation services, we need your input. **We need to know the transportation difficulties you have experienced or currently experience:**

- In finding a job;  
- Getting to or from a job;  
- Combining other needs with your work trip such as child care, job training, medical appointments, and grocery shopping.

Please attend this important community meeting. If you have any questions or comments regarding the plan, please call:

J. Kent Rogers, Executive Director, NLCOG  
318-841-5950 or jobaccess@nlcog.org

Sharon S. Swanson, Project Planner, MHSM Architects  
318-221-1623 or sswanson@mhsmarchitects.com

Please Attend! We Need Your Input!  
Please Post & Distribute This Notice To Others!
Residents seek ways to get to and from work

By Raechel Leone
raechelleone@gannett.com

Shreveport and Bossier City have more employers offering jobs in 24-hour businesses such as casinos and hospitals.

The trouble is, the people willing to work those jobs often lack the transportation to get there.

The Northwest Louisiana Council of Governments is seeking to better connect the two through public transportation.

The council is developing a plan using federal grant funds to pitch to policy-making bodies early next year.

About 100 people took two public forums Tuesday, as they opportunity to weigh in on the difficulties they have experienced.

"A lot of people are hesitant to get jobs because they don't have transportation," Isha Gay of Shreveport said.

She was among many who said they want to see SporTran offer extended hours and routes. Gay takes a city bus to work but must take a cab home because the bus stops running before dark and hours before her shift at a local casino ends.

Some residents voiced special concerns about transportation for the disabled and elderly.

Sharon S. Swanson, who oversees the council's project for consulting firm MHSMS Architects, listed several other common transportation barriers, including: a mismatch in where job growth happens and where people live; low automobile ownership rates among low-income residents; and residents' need to stop at day-care, health or job-training facilities before and after work.

Romney Donnelly, vice president of work force development for Goodwill Industries, said a lack of transportation is a big reason many of her clients remain out of work or can't keep a job long. "It's not a question of whether they want to work. It's that they can't get to it."

About 90 percent of the 1,300 people in Goodwill's database seeking jobs don't have transportation, Donnelly said.

Compounding the problem, affordable public transportation often doesn't go to areas with higher-paying jobs, which results in low-income residents remaining in low-income jobs they can reach, she said.

Representatives of SporTran, businesses and community agencies are working with the council to improve transportation.

Ralph Tuttle, assistant resident manager for SporTran, said he and his co-workers have heard many of the same complaints. However, the company spends all the money it receives to provide the best service possible, he said.

"They're real problems," Tuttle said. "Unfortunately, they take real money."

Swanson hopes to form an advocacy group to find money to implement at least some of the ideas that come out of the council's work.

The cost could be high for the local economy if nothing is done, Donnelly said. "You're not going to attract businesses if you don't have a labor pool to fill what they need."

Woes: ‘They take real money’

Continued from 1B
Transit system affects economy, employment

The more informed citizens we have in this country, the stronger our democracy. This is a truism that is unquestioned and it is strengthened by a system of public schools and libraries to ensure a literate population capable of understanding information. The principles governing this truism also apply to our economy.

The more employed people we have adding to our economic base, the stronger our economy will be; yet there is no system to ensure employment. In fact, in Shreveport, there is a system in place that almost ensures continued impoverishment and underemployment among a broad base of its citizens. I am speaking of the ineffectual SporTran transit system.

SporTran buses leave the garage empty of passengers at about 5 a.m. At the end of the day, most buses return to the garage empty at about 7 p.m. This means that within a 24-hour period, only one work shift is open for workers in which they are guaranteed a way to work and a way back home — the day shift. This time block is saturated, but the other two shifts, evening and night, are not. During these times, employers need workers and workers need jobs. This lack of adequate public transportation has created a vast economic chasm through which have seeped the poisonous gases of poverty and stagnation.

Virtually, Shreveport's working poor are promised a life of poverty. Without adequate transportation how can they go to night school or facilitate a second job with which to pull themselves up by their bootstraps? The answer is that most cannot. They are caught in a vacuum that excludes them from the American dream.

If public schools and public libraries were diminished to a capacity that only serviced one-third of our needs, we would cry out that our democracy — our basic right to be informed participants within it — was jeopardized. What about our basic right to the pursuit of happiness? To pursue, to chase, to follow implies the very need for basic transportation.

Just as an informed electorate is needed to sustain our democracy, transportation is needed to sustain our economy. Regardless of our socioeconomic status, we must inform our elected officials that we want a strong economy for this city and that to ensure a strong economy we need the broadest base of our citizens gainfully employed or pursuing employment. We must inform our elected officials that we need, for the survival and growth of this city, an adequate system of public transportation.

Pamela A. Hamilton lives in Shreveport.