

Chapter 4. Outreach Efforts and Needs Assessment

A critical part of developing service recommendations is to understand the community's perspectives, priorities and needs regarding public transportation services in Ontario County. We relied on two main sources to help us understand transit needs: the community profile (discussed in Chapter 3) and comments, input and ideas provided by members of the riding and non-riding public. The community profile, as discussed, provides an overview of the spatial distribution of key population groups, land uses and demonstrates how closely aligned CATS' services are with these areas. The study team also collected input from Ontario County residents including both those who currently use the service as well as those who do not, to understand their perspectives on service effectiveness and needs. This chapter discusses the outreach efforts conducted as part of this study and key findings resulting from those efforts. The final section of the chapter provides a summary of public transportation system and service needs.

Public Outreach

As part of our analysis of the existing service, Nelson\Nygaard held a series of public outreach exercises that surveyed public transit riders, interviewing stakeholders and encouraging input from members of the public at job fairs and community meeting forums. We also administered an internet and paper survey to collect opinions from members of the non-riding public.

We examined this data to evaluate where transit services are succeeding and where and how they may be improved. This information was not constrained by the operational and financial realities of transit services, but rather represents needs, interests and priorities as voiced by individuals responding to our queries. It also provides insight into the perceptions of consumers currently using the fixed-route services and non-riders with limited experience with the service.

Transit Riders

As part of our analysis of CATS bus service, the Nelson\Nygaard team, working in conjunction with staff from the Ontario County Planning and Transportation Departments, conducted a survey among CAT riders. The objective of this exercise was to understand passenger travel patterns as well as to ascertain their perceptions of the existing service and priorities for new services. A complete analysis of the survey results is documented in the survey report (Appendix A). In terms of unmet needs and priorities for new services, the survey suggests that:

- Passengers primarily use CATS for travel to/from and within Canandaigua and Geneva, where they can walk to/from bus service and their trip origin or destination. Although some riders use CATS for inter-county travel, there are far fewer of these riders.
- Passengers are appreciative of the available CATS service with passengers giving the service high scores overall. Service scored lowest in terms of the bus running on the days and times when needed and the accuracy of the schedule. The reasonableness of fares, on the other hand, scored the highest among the attributes tested.
- In terms of improvement priorities, passengers requested more evening and weekend service and improved information systems, such as signed bus stops and more web-based information systems. Passengers also wrote in priorities for expanded service to Rochester and direct service between Geneva and the Eastview Mall.

Stakeholders and General Public

Early in the study, members of the Nelson\Nygaard conducted stakeholder interviews with major employers, representatives of educational institutions, medical and human service providers and civic leaders. These interviews were conducted in-person and by telephone. Stakeholders were asked to provide an overview of how their constituents use CATS service, their overall impression of the service, any issues or concerns, and suggestions for improvement. The following includes a summary of key findings. The stakeholder interview report, which provides a list of the stakeholders contacted as part of this research, is included in Appendix A.

Stakeholders had a slightly different perspective on CATS service as compared with the passengers. For the most part, stakeholders are not regular bus riders, but instead are representatives of destinations, e.g., institutions and organizations where employees, clients and members of the public travel to. Their sense of the needs and priorities for public transportation services include:

- Stakeholders expressed a need for more bus service overall. Stakeholders had a list of potential ideas for service improvements ranging from:
 - Improved scheduling to coincide with employer work shifts. Fixed-route services do not accommodate second and third shift employees. Even first shift employees have limited ability to use the bus if their start time is 7:00 am.
 - More bus stops located within walking distance of the employment sites.
 - Increased service coordination with neighboring transit systems.
 - More geographic coverage throughout the Ontario County. Significant sections of Ontario County have no fixed-route service. Towns in the southwest and western portions of Ontario County are the areas where transportation for employment purposes represents the greatest problem.
 - More service to/from Finger Lakes Community College (FLCC).
- Stakeholders also suggested that fixed-route services are not suitable for the most vulnerable members of the population, especially older adults and individuals receiving medical care. On the other hand, fixed-route services could do more to meet the needs of older adults and persons with disabilities, by providing door-to-door service to senior housing facilities and other public services and increasing driver training. Stakeholders specifically cited the Geneva Hospital as an example, noting some drivers miss passengers because they do not wait or look for passengers waiting inside the hospital.
- Use of the DAR service is challenged by the requirement to reserve travel 24 to 48 hours in advance and the 'shared-ride' aspect to the service which means travel times cannot always be accurately predicted. Others suggest that DAR service should be available on weekends and evenings.
- The administrative aspects of using the DAR service are challenging for both users and organizations that transport their clients via the service. Challenges persist throughout the entire process, commencing with reserving and booking the trip, to tracking riders, and recording the individual's travel.
- Service quality, especially for DAR, is an issue for some stakeholders. Some stakeholders reported problems with service delivery, especially the on-time performance

of Dial-A-Ride service, including adherence to both pick-up and drop-off times. Other stakeholders suggested that while many drivers are very nice, others are less customer oriented.

Stakeholders offered the following ideas to improve service:

- Offer bulk fare discounts to the large employers. These employers could pass the savings on to employees as a means to encourage employees to commute by bus.
- Offer express commuter service between the Victor area and the City of Geneva.
- Offer express service between Canandaigua and Eastview Mall.
- Increase service marketing and promotional efforts, such as a “ride free” day. Some stakeholders were surprised to learn that CATS provides public transportation.
- Create a package of marketing materials to distribute to Hobart and William Smith students at the start of each semester. The College can distribute this information as part of an email blast to students and/or orientation packages.
- Initiate discussions with Hobart and William Smith and Desales High School to explore the possibility of CATS helping to meet certain transportation needs not met by existing providers. Opportunities include evening bus service for college students and transportation for Desales students residing in and west of Canandaigua.
- Standardize the process to schedule Dial-A-Ride and confirm reservations. Reduce the need to continually call to confirm rides.
- Use the Canandaigua Veteran’s Administration (VA) Hospital, Happiness House and Eastview Dialysis more formally as hubs to coordinate inter-county transfers.
- Consider a scheduled shuttle from the Rochester Outpatient Clinic to the VA Hospital.
- Add time at the Geneva Hospital stop to incorporate wait time in the schedule so riders have enough time to get out to the bus from the inside waiting area.
- Extend service to Hartman’s Sausage on Brickyard Road in the Town of Canandaigua.
- Develop a transit hub off Main Street to get buses off the street. Consider sites near the Courthouse, where traffic is not congested, such as County-owned space at the Depot building or the outhouse property.
- Capitalize on the community’s increasing “green” consciousness to encourage bus ridership. Try to acquire buses that run on clean fuels.
- Consider establishing park and ride lots and serving them with fast service to key employment destinations.

Finger Lakes Community College

One of the stakeholders recommended that the Nelson\Nygaard study team consider the results of a survey conducted by FLCC. This survey, prepared as an independent effort, consisted of an on-line transportation survey with their students and employees. In total, some 248 individuals responded to the survey, of which 39% were full-time employees, 10% were part-time employees and 50% were students. This survey found:

- The largest concentration of students lived in Canandaigua, followed by Geneva and Farmington.
- Most students (82%) had regular access to a vehicle.
- Most respondents (83%) arrived on campus between 7:00 am and 9:00 am while departures were spread between 3:00 pm and 6:00 pm.
- The survey shows that only 10% (25 individuals) used transit to commute to/from campus, but 47% indicated a willingness to consider public transit.
- The most commonly cited reasons for not using transit were preference for personal transportation (46%), not aware of the bus (36%), did not live near a bus route (29%).

Non-Riders (Ontario County Residents)

To understand the perspective, priorities and opinions non-riders hold about CATS' services, the Nelson\Nygaard team worked with the Ontario County Planning and Transportation Departments to administer a survey. The survey was made posted on-line. The study team also distributed a survey link to existing email mailing lists. In addition a paper copy was made available to key markets. The purpose of this survey was to understand non-riders' knowledge and perception of CATS services and ask them to tell us their ideas for changes that would make the service more useful. As we evaluate and consider recommendations to the services, therefore, we will be able to include non-riders awareness levels, perceptions and needs into our analysis. A technical memo documenting the survey process and findings is included in Appendix A. Key findings gleaned from the results include:

- The internet survey reached the intended audience. Responses include individuals living throughout Ontario County, with 75% saying they had never ridden CATS and the vast majority (90%) having access to a private automobile.
- There were a lot of positive comments about the CATS service, including several comments underscoring the importance of the service to the community and tales about how the bus service has helped specific individuals.
- 14% of the respondents said they would like to use CATS more often. This finding was also supported for an appreciation of the service, recognizing it is challenging to provide public transportation services in rural areas.
- At least 38% of the respondents live within a 10 minute walk of a bus stop. This suggests excellent service coverage, especially considering 28% of respondents did not know if they lived near a bus stop or not.
- Improving awareness of and information about the CATS system is important for increased development of the system. As mentioned, just over a quarter of the

respondents were not sure if a bus stop was located near their home. Open ended questions also demonstrated a desire for more and better information about the service.

- Ideas to improve the service included extending the service longer into the evening, operating more service on weekend days, and more frequent service.
- There may be opportunities to improve the public's perception about the CATS service, especially with regards to drivers' driving behavior, idling buses in front of the County Courthouse and customer service generally.

Assessment of Public Transit Needs

Taking into consideration the results of the demographic analysis, survey results and input from stakeholders, the Nelson\Nygaard team has compiled the following suggestions for potential improvements to the existing public transportation network.

- Ontario County's demographic characteristics and development patterns are shifting. Growth has steadily moved into the northwest corner of the County, increasing the importance of the towns of Victor, Farmington and Manchester. Consequently, some services may need to be re-aligned to incorporate these growing travel markets – both in terms of trip origins and trip destinations as well as service types.
- Consistent with the population shift, there is a call for direct service between Geneva and the Eastview Mall in Victor. This reflects new development in Victor, increasing employment opportunities and the historical population center in Geneva. This potential new route may or may not include a stop in Canandaigua and should be designed as a fast, direct connection.
- There is a need for express commuter services that provide fast, direct connections between Canandaigua and Victor, and Geneva and Victor. These services would support employment and ideally will be timed to meet RGRTA commuter routes.
- FLCC is a major generator of ridership for CATS. Service and connections to the college as well as service amenities, such as shelters and information systems should be examined to ensure they are meeting the needs of students and staff as efficiently and effectively as possible. A future potential need will be to connect the FLCC main campus in Canandaigua with the Science and Technology Campus planned in the Town of Victor. The FLCC campus may also benefit from a targeted marketing campaign.
- Regional services are increasing in importance. There may be potential to operate direct service between Canandaigua and Rochester to connect Ontario County residents with major employment centers or service centers, such as medical facilities. Regional services may also be developed in conjunction with a park and ride system.
- There is potential to improve connections between CATS and other regional transit providers, especially in Victor and Geneva.
- There is a need to develop a transfer location off of Main Street in Canandaigua. While the current site has a lot of visibility, it requires buses to pull in and out of traffic and the location is a difficult place for passengers to cross the street. Waiting facilities are also limited. There are several County owned buildings near the Courthouse that might be developed as a transfer center, including the Depot building or the outhouse property.
- CATS needs more marketing and outreach efforts. Comments and data from riders, stakeholders and non-riders demonstrate a lack of information and awareness about the

service in general. Opportunities to improve awareness include improved schedules and information materials, increased use of signage and shelters and more web-based information systems.

- CATS may also conduct targeted marketing efforts to specific employers or institutions, including by not limited to FLCC. Several of the stakeholders, including educational institutions and large employers, suggested that some sort of universal pass program that offered discounts for bulk purchases would encourage awareness and ridership.
- Data shows the importance of walk access to the fixed-route service, especially for transit dependent riders. Changes to existing route alignments and plans for new services should bear in mind the importance of walk access and egress from bus service.
- There may be potential to incorporate senior van service into mid-day fixed-route services by offering a higher level of service during those times with door-to-door service between key facilities.
- Administration of the DAR service may examine its core ridership and determine if the service is effectively prioritizing the needs of this group. Improvements may include better information management systems to ensure passenger trips can be accurately tracked, recorded and billed to other county departments.