

Mifflin County  
Planning and Development Department  
Pennsylvania Department of Transportation

Mifflin County Public Transportation Study

Executive Summary

Prepared by  
Abrams-Cherwony & Associates

December 2002

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Executive Summary documents the recommended service plan proposed as part of the Mifflin County Public Transportation Study. Estimates of the impacts of the proposed service plan in terms of several key operating statistics are also provided. An outline of the various service inputs and planning precepts utilized in the development of the service plan is also included.

### **Background**

A Quality of Life Survey was conducted in Mifflin County in 1998. Among the findings of that survey was a rating for Public Transportation of fair or poor by nearly three-quarters of the respondents. Respondents also were afforded the opportunity to provide additional write-in comments not covered in the survey. Fifteen respondents wrote in the following comment, "Creation of a public transportation system". The results from this survey and the findings from a more recent household survey focused on solid waste disposal where the issue of fixed route public transportation was also addressed contributed to the need for a more detailed review of public transportation. The fact that Pennsylvania has a very favorable funding program for rural public transportation where about 90% of the cost for the services are paid for through state and federal funding were also contributing factors.

Finally, public transportation was a high priority set by the United Way Transportation Committee. Overseeing the development of this study was this Committee which was composed of representatives from the following organizations: Hummel and Associates; Mifflin County School District; Penn DOT; Big Brothers Big Sisters; J&D Transportation Services; Mifflin County Mapping; Juniata Valley YMCA; Mifflin County Salvation Army; Juniata Valley Area Chamber of Commerce; Downtown Lewistown Inc.; Mifflin County Planning; SEDA-COG; Mifflin-Juniata Special Needs Center; Mifflin Juniata Area Agency on Aging; Tuscarora Intermediate Unit/Juniata County; and United Way of Mifflin Juniata.

### **Service Development Process**

The recommended service plan was prepared by giving consideration to a variety of service inputs. Also, items that lead to the conclusion that fixed route service in Mifflin County is feasible are noted.

**Service Inputs** - Six major inputs were considered while preparing the fixed route service plan. Each of these inputs is briefly described below.

- \$ Community Characteristics - An analysis was performed to identify residential areas and major activity centers that warrant transit service as well as Census tracts and municipalities in Mifflin County with the greatest potential need for transit. Results indicate that - with limited exceptions - the area of Mifflin County most suited to fixed route public transportation in terms of sufficient population density is the area in and around the Borough of Lewistown.
  
- \$ Stakeholder Interviews - Interviews were held with about one dozen policy makers, community leaders, representatives of community organizations, County Commissioners, members of the business community and various other decision makers throughout Mifflin County. It was learned that there is a general perception that a fixed route transit service would benefit specific segments of the population, but that the cost must be reasonably within the means of Mifflin County.
  
- \$ Public Meetings - A walk-in@public meetings were held at various locations in Mifflin County. At these meetings, citizens had an opportunity to provide verbal and written input regarding the existing demand responsive paratransit service, any concerns they might have and ideas for fixed route transit service alternatives. The results of the walk-in@public meetings indicated that there is great interest in providing a regularly scheduled fixed route public transportation service in Mifflin County. The majority of people feel that service in and around the Lewistown area would be most appropriate, and that service to major shopping locations would also benefit a large number of people. However, when asked about an increase in property taxes to help finance the system, the respondents seem somewhat less enthusiastic.
  
- \$ Survey - A survey of Mifflin County residents regarding various local issues (including public transportation) was previously conducted as part of a solid waste disposal survey. The results of this survey were contrasted with those asking similar questions related to fixed route public transportation service in other similarly sized cities. Overall, the survey indicated that Mifflin County residents were somewhat less enthusiastic about the possibility of operating a fixed route transportation system in their community as were residents in some of the other communities surveyed. However, Mifflin County residents do seem to be willing to give public transportation a chance depending upon its cost and availability for their specific trip needs.

- \$ Field Reconnaissance - Extensive observations were made throughout Mifflin County to gain a first-hand understanding of existing transit operating characteristics as well as the character of present and future development. During the course of these investigations, land use, key generators and other noteworthy land use characteristics were recorded.
- \$ Staff/Committee Input - Meetings were held with Mifflin County staff, the United Way's Transportation Committee and with Pennsylvania Department of Transportation staff where issues regarding the operation of a new fixed route public transportation service were reviewed. Based on input from these groups, a potential service plan has been developed.

**Feasibility Determination** - A key finding in this report is that a proposed fixed route public transportation system in Mifflin County is, in fact, technically feasible for the following reasons:

- \$ The community characteristics indicate that a sufficiently high population density exists within a corridor and around Lewistown that could support fixed route public transportation service (i.e., population densities are generally in excess of 2,500 persons per square mile).
- \$ The prior survey and discussions with County residents as part of this study indicate a need for fixed route service.
- \$ Discussions with both the general public as well as with several community leaders indicate that there is a general impression among residents of Mifflin County that the taxicab service in the area is not sufficient.
- \$ Other Pennsylvania counties with similar population densities have fixed route public transportation service. For example, Carbon County provides fixed route transit service and the local share of the service for which Carbon County is responsible is approximately \$15,000 per year.

In summary, the results of the feasibility analysis indicate that a starter route be operated for a demonstration period to confirm feasibility.

### **Recommended Service Plan**

The recommended service plan consists of utilizing both a Base Route proposal and the Belleville Route proposal and would create a fixed route transit service with approximately

2,528 annual revenue hours and approximately 30,898 annual revenue miles. The routes comprising the recommended service plan are described below:

**Base Route** - The Base Route, which is illustrated in Figure E1, would operate between the Mifflin Commons shopping center (where K-Mart is located) and the Wal-Mart on U.S. Route 522 via downtown Lewistown. Other major generators served by this route would be J.C. Penney's, Weis Market, Lewistown Hospital, Indian Valley High School, Geisinger Clinic and the Lewistown Area High School. Service would only operate on Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays for ten hours between 8:00AM and 6:00PM. However, on Fridays during November and December, two additional round trips will be operated after 6:00PM (i.e., service will operate until 10:00PM). It is assumed that on Wednesdays and Thursdays transit service would be provided along an extended route alignment which would also serve the Valley View Retirement Community in Belleville. The round trip mileage for the Base Route would be about 20.70 miles. Therefore, assuming a reasonable operating speed, service along this bus route would operate every two hours (i.e., every 120 minutes). The accompanying tables illustrate the proposed schedule for the Base Route:

**Base Route To Wal-Mart**

| Mifflin Commons (K-Mart) | Weis Market | Lewistown Hospital | Downtown Lewistown (Old Courthouse) | Wal-Mart |
|--------------------------|-------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|----------|
| 8:00AM                   | 8:05AM      | 8:20AM             | 8:45AM                              | 8:56AM   |
| 10:00AM                  | 10:05AM     | 10:20AM            | 10:45AM                             | 10:56AM  |
| 12:00PM                  | 12:05PM     | 12:20PM            | 12:45PM                             | 12:56PM  |
| 2:00PM                   | 2:05PM      | 2:20PM             | 2:45PM                              | 2:56PM   |
| 4:00PM                   | 4:05PM      | 4:20PM             | 4:45PM                              | 4:56PM   |

**Base Route To Mifflin Commons/Weis Market**

| Wal-Mart | Downtown Lewistown (Old Courthouse) | Lewistown Hospital | Weis Market | Mifflin Commons (K-Mart) |
|----------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------|--------------------------|
| 9:00AM   | 9:11AM                              | 9:36AM             | 9:51AM      | 9:57AM                   |
| 11:00AM  | 11:11AM                             | 11:36AM            | 11:51AM     | 11:57AM                  |
| 1:00PM   | 1:11PM                              | 1:36PM             | 1:51PM      | 1:57PM                   |
| 3:00PM   | 3:11PM                              | 3:36PM             | 3:51PM      | 3:57PM                   |
| 5:00PM   | 5:11PM                              | 5:36PM             | 5:51PM      | 5:57PM                   |

The annual hours for Base Route would be 1,592 annual revenue hours, and the annual miles would be about 16,477 annual revenue miles.

**Belleville Route** - The Belleville Route, which is illustrated in Figure E2, would operate between Belleville and the Wal-Mart on U.S. Route 522 via the Valley View Retirement Center and downtown Lewistown. Other major generators served by this route would be the Mifflin Commons shopping center (where K-Mart is located), the YMCA on First Avenue in Burnham, J.C. Penney's, Weis Market, Lewistown Hospital, Indian Valley High School, the new Geisinger Clinic and the Lewistown Area High School. Service would only operate on Wednesdays and Thursdays for nine hours between 8:00AM and 5:00PM. Wednesdays were selected for this service since it is Belleville Sale day that could attract residents to use public transit to attend the event. Further, the YMCA and two high schools were served by this route to provide opportunities for students to participate in after school activities at the YMCA. As was seen in the prior route description, it is assumed that on Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays transit service would be provided along the shorter ABase Route@alignment. The round trip mileage for the Belleville Route would be about 46.22 miles. Therefore, assuming a reasonable operating speed, service along this bus route would operate every three hours (i.e., every 180 minutes). The accompanying tables illustrate the proposed schedule for the Belleville Route:

**Belleville Route To Wal-Mart**

| Belleville/Valley View Community | Mifflin Commons (K-Mart) | Lewistown Hospital | Downtown Lewistown (Old Courthouse) | Wal-Mart |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|----------|
| 8:00AM                           | 8:32AM                   | 8:47AM             | 9:12AM                              | 9:23AM   |
| 11:00AM                          | 11:32AM                  | 11:47AM            | 12:12PM                             | 12:23PM  |
| 2:00PM                           | 2:32PM                   | 2:47PM             | 3:12PM                              | 3:23PM   |

**Belleville Route To Belleville/Valley View**

| Wal-Mart | Downtown Lewistown (Old Courthouse) | Lewistown Hospital | Mifflin Commons (K-Mart) | Belleville/Valley View Community |
|----------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 9:30AM   | 9:41AM                              | 10:04AM            | 10:19AM                  | 10:51AM                          |
| 12:30PM  | 12:41PM                             | 1:04PM             | 1:19PM                   | 1:51PM                           |
| 3:30PM   | 3:41PM                              | 4:04PM             | 4:19PM                   | 4:51PM                           |

The annual hours for Belleville Route would be 936 annual revenue hours, and the annual miles would be about 14,421 annual revenue miles.

**Projected Impacts of the Recommended Service Plan** - It is possible to assume a certain range of values for the projected costs of the recommended service plan based on experiences in other rural systems in Pennsylvania. Although it was assumed that passenger revenue would be approximately \$1.00 per passenger in all cases, the projected range in terms of ridership creates a possible range in terms of passenger revenue. Therefore, given the possible range in terms of cost and revenue impacts, the projected annual subsidy is also presented as a range of possible values. The projected subsidy range of the recommended service plan is therefore approximately \$55,616 to \$103,648 per year. The projected cost, revenue, ridership and subsidy values of the recommended service plan are summarized in the accompanying table:

**Projected Impacts of the Recommended Service Plan**

| <b>Statistic</b>                                    | <b>Projected Value</b>   |
|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Hours                                               | 2,528                    |
| Low Cost Estimate (at \$30.00 per hour)             | \$75,840                 |
| High Cost Estimate (at \$45.00 per hour)            | \$113,760                |
| Low Ridership Estimate (at 4 passengers per hour)   | 10,112                   |
| High Ridership Estimate (at 8 passengers per hour)  | 20,224                   |
| Low Revenue Estimate (assumes \$1.00 fare charged)  | \$10,112                 |
| High Revenue Estimate (assumes \$1.00 fare charged) | \$20,224                 |
| Projected Annual Subsidy Range                      | \$55,616<br>to \$103,648 |

**Implementation Plan** - In order to implement the recommended service plan for the new Mifflin County fixed route transit service, several requirements need to be considered. It should be noted that approximately \$20,000 in additional funding should be budgeted for the actual implementation of the recommended service plan. The implementation plan's requirements can be categorized into three groups: capital requirements, management/administration considerations and operating requirements. These are as follows:

**\$ Capital Requirements**

- < Prime vehicle with back-up vehicle
  - Lease
  - Unique Paint Scheme
- < Bus Stop Signs/Passenger Information Panels
  - About 50 signs throughout the route
  - Information displays at major stops

**\$ Management/Administration Considerations**

- < County must sign-off on all grants and is ultimately responsible for system
- < County must commit to local share for service
- < ACARS@ is in ideal position to manage and administer the fixed route system for the County; it does this now for the shared ride service
- < Duties would include:
  - Preparation of grant applications
  - Preparation of quarterly system performance reports
  - Compliance with the reporting requirements
  - Ensuring compliance with the vehicle maintenance requirements

**\$ Operating Requirements**

- < Two primary alternatives for day-to-day operation of fixed route system
  - CARS
  - J & D Transportation (or another private operator)
  - Final determination should be based on willingness, capability and cost
- < Completely define route alignments and stop locations
- < System logo and Identity@
- < Public timetable with route map
- < Distribution of timetable
  - Wide distribution with other County mailing
  - Door-to-door distribution along the route
- < Vehicle Maintenance Program
- < Fare Policy and Revenue Handling Procedure
  - Initial start-up at \$1.00 fare per trip
  - Seniors ride free during non-peak periods
  - Eventually offer passes and multi-ride tickets
- < Marketing/Outreach Program

- Advertise start of new service
- Make it a major media event with a Ribbon cutting@
- Offer fare incentives (e.g., reduced fare rides during the first week as an incentive)

**Local Funding** - The projected cost and revenue impacts of the recommended service plan indicate that the annual subsidy required to operate the new transit service may range between about \$56,000 and \$104,000. The start-up@or implementation costs would add about \$20,000 during the first year of operation. Therefore, during the first year, the subsidy required would range from \$76,000 to about \$124,000. Based upon PennDOT's practice of funding about 90 percent of the system deficit for a two year period, a ten percent local share of the subsidy would be required. This local subsidy would amount to approximately \$7,600 to \$12,400 during the first year.

**Next Steps** - In order for the service to be implemented, there must be a commitment made by the County for funding the service, at least for the two year demonstration period. Without this commitment, there would be no matching funds from the federal and state governments. While there is no timetable for when such a commitment must be made, the plan defined in this study will only be applicable for about up to three to five years. Thereafter, the feasibility of fixed route public transit service in Mifflin County may have to be revisited.

In the meantime, if the financial commitment is delayed, the shared ride operator (CARS) may wish to explore making any type service improvements it can to its services based on the results developed in this study.