

Livable Delaware Activity

Activity/Policy/Program Name: Transit Planning Process

Purpose of this Activity: To define and develop bus and train service that meets community needs in an environmentally friendly way.

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Enabling Laws: 2 Del. C. § 1309 28 (The powers of the Delaware Transit Corporation) delegates to the Delaware Transit Corporation (DTC), the right and responsibility to develop plans and programs that: foster efficient and economic public transportation, and serve citizens with special transportation needs.

Policies: Delaware Transit Corporation's Five Year Business Plan and Long Range Transit Plan highlight the need to integrate development with transportation. Delaware's transportation plans include the Statewide Long-Range Plan, the Transportation Plan of the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (Dover Kent County MPO and WILMAPCO), the individual county long-range transportation plans, and the TEA-21 federal funding requirements (which require the inclusion of multi-modal transportation approaches in all state planning efforts).

History: Transit planning has a direct relationship with the land use. As cities and towns developed and grew, the need for transit service emerged as well. With the advent of suburban sprawl in Delaware, the direction and focus of transit planning has shifted to suburbia. Characterized by lower population densities, campus styled business parks, and sprawling light industrial developments; these suburban areas have been difficult to serve efficiently with transit. In Delaware's rural areas, most notably in Kent and Sussex Counties, the DTC is challenged to provide efficient and effective transit services to geographically dispersed residents.

Current Situation: Transit provides mobility and alleviates traffic congestion by creating an acceptable alternative to the automobile. By improving mobility, transit provides accessibility to areas of growth, both residential and commercial/retail. The viability and long-term success of transit is becoming more and more contingent upon supportive land use development. Suburban development presents a formidable challenge to the transit operator in providing and maintaining an adequate quality of service that makes transit an attractive alternative to the automobile (i.e. frequency of trips, coverage area, accessible bus stops within walking distances, comfortable passenger waiting areas, and applicable vehicle types).

The following goals of the Livable Delaware Initiative are addressed through the Transit Planning Process: #1, Direct investment and future development to existing communities, urban concentrations, and growth areas; #9, Promote mobility for people and goods through a balanced system of transportation options; and #10, Improve access to educational opportunities, health care and human services for all Delawareans.

Revisions/Actions Needed: There is a strong need for Delaware to be more proactive in creating a transit friendly environment. A transit friendly environment is one that synchronizes land use development patterns with transportation infrastructure planning. Both of these components must work in tandem to create long-term transportation solutions for the growing transportation needs of Delaware. To better plan for transit more coordination among local, county and state agencies is needed. All development codes should include language that specifically addresses and facilitates transit use. Developers and public agencies should be required to incorporate transit planning in projects from the initial phase of a project to the actual build phase, (within defined transit overlay zones). County government and DTC would define transit districts/overlay zones suitable to support existing or future transit in rural, suburban and urban areas. It is impossible to successfully plan and design transit service that will meet the needs of the public without involvement in the Land Use Planning (LUPA) process. Typically, transit planners only review major subdivision plans or plans that involve a traffic impact study (TIS). DTC will work to require counties to consider transit with all new developments. Additionally, it is important for transit planners to review sketch plans or preliminary plans before the developer has invested too much in the plan's design, so that provisions can be made for transit during the design of the project.

Resources Needed to Create/Revise: In order to implement the proposed changes the county must monitor and enforce the tenets of the Traffic Mitigation Agreements. The process would require proper language in all development codes to define the relationship between transit planning and land use. Ideally, the inclusion of a "Transit Overlay District" in development codes would be beneficial in creating a formula for mixed land uses with higher population densities, which would support transit.

Process for Creation/Revision: The Office of State Planning Coordination (OSPC) should coordinate with Transit Officials to develop land use planning in New Castle County. Note that specific suggested changes have been provided to Kent and New Castle Counties as part of the comprehensive planning process and the same changes are expected to be suggested to Sussex County.

Schedule: Generally, coordinate with each agency involved through scheduled sessions and/or public meetings, and encourage transit-focused dialogue. The regular scheduling of transit-focused dialogue would allow transit planning to become an ongoing, high priority agenda item. The Traffic Mitigation Agreement responsibilities concerning transit will be transitioned from DelDOT Planning to DTC Planning by spring of 2002.

Measures to Guide Progress: Measures to track the success of sustainable transit service would include: bus stop accessibility (please refer to the DTC's Bus Stop Improvement Program template for Livable Delaware), riders per platform hour (goal of a minimum of 10 riders per hour), farebox recovery ratio (decided on a case by case basis, depending on type of service as defined in DTC's Five Year Business Plan), and overall, on-time performance (goal of 95% or higher). Ultimately, success will be reflected in higher transit ridership for each trip and higher utilization rates (reflected in better performance ratios of Trips/hour and Trips/mile).

Outcome based performance measures, as they apply to the original goals of the Livable Delaware Initiative, would be the following: Service in new, planned communities that meet the travel demand requirements of the community. One overriding measure would be to ensure customer satisfaction in transit's ability to provide adequate mobility to educational opportunities, healthcare facilities, and human/cultural/social resources.

Interactions or Inter-relationships with Other Agencies or Units of Government: This process requires interaction among all local land use agencies, the Department of Transportation, and the Office of State Planning Coordination. There is a strong tie between the activities of the State in its efforts to develop affordable housing and an improved transit system. Social programs such as Welfare to Work subsidize transit as part of their program in recognition of the important connection between transportation and economic well-being. The Delaware transit Corporation also regularly coordinates with the Federal Railroad Transit Assistance Program, and the Federal Transit Authority.