



2016 Technical Assistance Program Case Study:

Pullman Transit

Abstract:

In 2015-2016, National RTAP worked with five rural transit agencies as part of a new direct technical assistance (TA) program. Pullman Transit of the City of Pullman, WA, a system offering fixed route and demand response that receives 5311 and 5307 funds, was selected as part of this program.

The Pullman project was to identify service plan alternatives to provide cost effective mobility options to the City of Pullman and surrounding communities. National RTAP hired Main Street Connections to conduct the study, provide analysis, and make recommendations for next steps for Pullman, in collaboration with National RTAP staff.

The project was completed in February 2016, which produced a Recommendations Report and Executive Summary. Shortly after the implementation of the project, there was a shift in the priority of mobility needs identified by Pullman Transit Staff, and therefore the original purpose of the study changed. The mobility needs of the original Request for Proposal (RFP) and past coordinated plans are still valid, but preserving current levels of service due to recent funding constraints became the focused outcome of the study. As a result of this shift, the regional needs as prioritized by Pullman Transit, were identified from the highest to lowest.

The Executive Summary on the following pages provides a case study for other transit systems on the process of doing a feasibility study, the data needed, the factors and barriers to consider, and potential outcomes and recommendations.

For additional information about this project email info@nationalrtap.org.



Pullman Transit Coordination Feasibility Analysis - Executive Summary

Main Street Connections
February 2016

INTRODUCTION

As the transit provider for the City of Pullman in Washington State, Pullman Transit, in association with National RTAP (National RTAP) participated in an in-depth study of their transit services with the purpose of identifying service plan alternatives to provide cost effective mobility options to the City of Pullman and surrounding communities. The goal was to focus on methods that would enhance existing transit service to provide a more regionally interconnected transportation network through integrated partnering opportunities.

With the recommendations of the 2014 Coordinated Plan as one resource, National RTAP hired the transportation consulting firm of Main Street Connections, on behalf of Pullman Transit, to assist in the discovery process to identify mobility alternatives.

The objective is the creation of new or enhanced transportation service that can rely on the coordination of existing services, cost sharing arrangements, technological advancements, and unified collaboration between transportation service providers, and other stakeholders who have a vested interest in its success.

In early October 2015, Main Street Connections began the project by assessing the existing conditions of Pullman Transit's services, as well as investigating other transportation services performed by other provider's in and around the City of Pullman, the City of Moscow, and Whitman County. This assessment was performed to provide both a snapshot of all transportation services currently available within the region and available alternatives.

Shortly after the implementation of the project, there was a shift in the priority of mobility needs identified by Pullman Transit Staff, and therefore the original purpose of the study changed. The mobility needs of the original Request for Proposal (RFP) and past coordinated fare still valid, but preserving current levels of service due to recent funding constraints became the focused

outcome of the study. As a result of this shift, regional needs as prioritized by Pullman Transit from highest to lowest are:

- Maintain Existing Levels of Service
- Expand Service to Moscow
- Mobility Coordination

The consulting firm of Main Street Connections, in collaboration with the National RTAP and Pullman Transit elected to move the project forward with the understanding that the new goal will be to discover cost effective alternatives, to allow Pullman Transit to maintain current service levels, based on its current budget. Conversely, Main Street Connections would also develop one methodology with regional coordination in mind, comparable to the original RFP, and offers a blueprint for the region should resources and priorities change.

PULLMAN SITE VISIT

On November 16th, 2015 staff from the National RTAP and Main Street Connections (MSC) met with Pullman Transit to present existing conditions, current findings, and to discuss initial project recommendations.

The purpose of the site visit was to gain a better perspective of local concerns that changed the focus of the study, discuss potential opportunities discovered from initial research and review, identify additional barriers, and discuss recommended alternatives to present the best possible approach to meet Pullman Transit's goals. Those recommendations are contained in this report. During the visit Main Street Connections toured the Pullman transit facility, the City of Pullman, the Washington State University (WSU) Campus, and the City of Moscow.

BARRIERS

Transportation demand needs usually expand beyond set geographical borders, such as city or town limits. Operating within these set municipal boundaries represents a fundamental characteristic of most traditional public transit services, due to a variety of factors, with funding constraints as the driving force. The purpose of this coordination study was to increase mobility options for the City of Pullman, and Whitman County residents, employers, students, visitors, and commuters alike. A coordinated system can be achieved between public transit agencies and/or human service agencies, but a coordinated study also first needs to identify barriers that can impede coordination in the region. The four barriers identified during this project include:

Barrier 1: Mandatory Indoor Storage for Transit Vehicles

It was found that a state mandate exists for reducing storm water contamination from transit vehicles. The mandate requires that transit vehicles are sheltered indoors during non-revenue service hours. Pullman Transit currently struggles to comply with this mandate risking contributing to contaminated test samples and fines imposed upon them by the state.

Barrier 2: Vehicle staging at WSU not an option

Vehicle staging possibilities at locations on the WSU campus cannot be achieved because unused real estate on campus is hard to come by. The Campus will also be expanding in the near future and WSU real estate needs take precedence.

Barrier 3: Maintaining existing services a higher priority than service expansion at this time

The Pullman City Council has prioritized maintaining existing services over service expansion to Moscow, or other regional locations at this time.

Barrier 4: Technology compatibility

Pullman Transit’s mapping and AVL technologies are robust but also proprietary in design. This makes data mining difficult, and provides limited ability for partner integration between technology components.

SERVICE RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the full review and analysis of the Pullman Transit system, discussions with staff before and during the site visit, and the barriers identified, the team has developed the following recommendations to enhance Pullman Transit’s system from a regional perspective. This transportation network also takes into account sustaining Pullman’s Transit services as a top priority, with the current funding levels already in place.

The three recommendations are as follows:

Recommendation 1 – Establish a Partner Network to Enhance Existing Service

Because Pullman Transit identified their top priority as maintaining current levels of service with existing funding levels, the first recommendation is to develop a network of providers through partnerships, to establish an expanded network of services through an understanding of service area, potential transfer points, and a process of communication, that can offer regional mobility options at little to no cost.

The project team recommended that Pullman Transit continue and/or begin the process of contacting their current and potential partner agencies, and begin to understand the types of service provided. This is essentially the discovery phase of the partner network.

Recommendation 2 – Service Expansion to Moscow

The project team recommended that in order to achieve service expansion to Moscow, it first is necessary to accurately identify all transportation services that currently exist between the City of Pullman, and the City of Moscow.

There are several transportation options that currently exist between Pullman and Moscow. This includes Northwestern Trailways, an intercity provider, with service between the two cities four times daily. ZipCar and Zimride both located on the WSU campus. Zip cars must be reserved in advance, and Zimride is a ride share network for use of WSU students, faculty, and staff.

Expanding on the recommendation of utilizing Northwestern Trailways services, Main Street Connections also recommended Pullman Transit reach out to the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), Intercity Bus Program Section, to inquire about the potential availability of the “In-Kind Match for Intercity Bus” program that was established in 2006 as a pilot project under SAFETEA-LU, made permanent under MAP-21 and further enhanced under the FAST ACT.

Depending upon availability of resources, this program may offer further opportunity to establish connectivity between Pullman and Moscow.

Recommendation 3 – Mobility Coordination

The major focus of this study initially was to assist Pullman Transit with a regional transit coordinated plan. However, as referenced earlier in this summary, the shift in priority away from coordination and on maintaining existing levels of transit service should take precedence. With the 2014 coordinated plan recommendations still valid, the project team provided a coordinated plan for future reference, should coordination become a focus. The plan constitutes a multi-agency approach that would be in line with the recommendations of the 2014 Coordinated Plan.

The project team offers in this recommendation, a holistic approach to coordination that takes into account not only inclusion of providers and agencies who have clients with mobility needs, but also a cost sharing methodology that offers fair and equitable distribution of services.

RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY

The recommendations above vary in complexity and design, yet all can achieve regional connectivity. Because it is the top priority for Pullman Transit to maintain existing levels of service, the most favorable recommendation in the view of Main Street Connections is as follows:

Most Favorable Recommendation:

Service Expansion to Moscow, as referenced in recommendation 2 above, we consider most favorable with the ability to leverage the funding associated with the “In-Kind Match for Intercity Bus Program.” This funding is not a guarantee however, and the State of Washington may not have remaining resources or approve funding this project. If this funding is available however, the project could be very cost effective and offer regional connectivity at minimal cost.

Second Most Favorable Recommendation:

Establish a Partner Network to Enhance Service, as referenced in recommendation 1 above; we consider the second most favorable recommendation. At a minimum, this recommendation should be implemented if recommendation 2 above is not an option. This recommendation offers regional connectivity through collaboration, and should not have a cost component beyond staff time to implement.

Third Most Favorable Recommendation:

Mobility Coordination, as referenced in recommendation 3 above; is the least favorable, at this time, and was included to offer a window into the possibilities of mobility coordination, and the benefits a multi-agency, regional transportation network can provide, should the priorities of Pullman Transit change in the future.

Last Reviewed: February 16, 2022