

**ARTS/Aiken County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan
Focus Group: Transit and Alternative Transportation
Conducted at Augusta Public Transit
October 3, 2011**

Focus Group Participants:

- **Willy Jones;** (visually impaired)
- **Karen Bellamy;** kbellamy@waltonoptions.org; (706) 955-0665 (hearing impaired)
- **Shantee Reed;** sreed@waltonoptions.org; (706) 724-6363 (visually impaired)
- **Bob Munger;** mungerassociates@gmail.com; (706) 231-3037
- **Janet Zimmerman;** jzimmermann@lscog.org; (803) 649-7981 (works for LSCOG, also has a visually impaired daughter who lives in Denver)
- **Rhonda Mitchell;** rmitchell@lscog.org; (803) 649-7981 (works for LSCOG as the regional mobility manager, and Aiken manager for Best Friends Express System)
- **Mike Rossen;** Augusta Public Transit
- **Maurice McDowell;** mmcdeowell@augustaga.gov; (706) 796-5025; City of Augusta Parks & Recreation & Facilities

Staff Attending:

- **Marya Moultrie;** mmoultrie@augustaga.gov; 706-821-1796 (Study Project Manager)
- **Mary Huffstetler,** MPH and Associates, Inc.
- **Jean Crowther,** Alta Planning + Design

Let's talk about what we have in the region that is already good.

- A sidewalk has just been added in Aiken County by Aiken Regional that will connect to the shopping center near the new Wal-Mart and help connect to USCA (University of South Carolina – Aiken)
- A bus will leave the Augusta Mall and go over to the doctor's hospital and that is a positive addition

What needs to be connected?

- Mall on SR 56 Spur near Augusta Regional Airport and the transit would help people to get out there
- The last bus closes down at 8:30pm, at the K-mart transfer point.
- There is a problem that results in terms of individuals being able to take transit to get to locations, but then potentially, not being able to get home if it is too late.
- Augusta has the fixed route system, but also has paratransit (shuts down at 8:30)
- We (Augusta) have an inadequate sidewalk system and those that we have are hazardous.
- On 11th Street, going to Walton Options, there are cars parked on the sidewalk that you have to move around.
- Could easily fall because the sidewalks are uneven.
- Addressed to Parks & Recreation – trees growing across the sidewalks, and hanging limbs, that are hazardous.
- Two different things – sidewalk hazards and hanging limbs

ARTS/Aiken County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan
Focus Group: Transit and Alternative Transportation
Conducted at Augusta Public Transit
October 3, 2011

Where are the gaps in the system?

- Greater emphasis on alternative transportation to be able make those connections that are a mile or longer
- Imagine a transit station that has condensed parking spaces with a recharging station for use by low-speed electric vehicles
- We hear concerns about transit facilities themselves – in terms of having areas for people to wait on the bus to transfer, bathroom facilities, etc. it is a little difficult for some people. There is not a sidewalk that connects all the way down.
- Best Friends Express has 3 routes and operates an express route that goes to the south side of Aiken and operates a metro route that connects down to Aiken Tech to bring riders to Augusta Public Transit; 2 hour headway.
- A greenway would be a very good thing
- Bicyclists are getting killed in this area because they are coupled with high speed vehicles
- Would like to see 25 mph roads coupled with low speed electric vehicles and bicycle paths coupled with low speed electric vehicles

Key destinations that should be connected?

- Fort Gordon area is important. Transit riders would like to have service there.
- Some of the shopping centers in Columbia County are destinations that transit riders would like to get to as well.
- In the core part of Richmond-Augusta riders are relatively happy.
- Lack of connection to Fort Gordon is due to lack of funding – APT is looking at that and considering a temporary route to see what the ridership would be like. Used to have express routes to Fort Gordon in past.
- Many jobs are located at Fort Gordon and would be a very positive thing to reestablish that right now. Could possibly even charge a bit more for riding to that area.
- Transportation is a key element in any community. Without transportation there is no food, no water, no shelter.
- At a shelter halfway between Aiken and North Augusta (Mt. Salem Outreach Mission, 2121 Augusta Road, Gloverville, SC 29828; 803-593-2276) there is a bicycle rehabbing program and tennis shoe distribution program to enable the homeless to access destinations in the area.
- Medical District is a huge traffic generator. Create a connection from downtown to the medical district.
- There is a growing recognition across the country that the suburban lifestyle that we have developed across the country is not sustainable. The Augusta Sustainability Plan encourages more downtown residential development.
- New YMCA is being constructed on Trolley Line Road in Aiken and University of South Carolina Aiken is nearby and need to connect the two.

ARTS/Aiken County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan
Focus Group: Transit and Alternative Transportation
Conducted at Augusta Public Transit
October 3, 2011

- Bike Share would be a good initiative - would help pollution as well.

What programs would be most helpful?

- There is a lot of negative perception about bicyclists on the road. And there are also bicyclists who are not following the rules. There needs to be a big education push for both sides – both drivers and bicyclists. Help motorists accept the fact that they need to be sharing the road.
- Something in the school systems would help to teach young persons from the start.
- It is a double perspective – Janet’s husband cycles now. He came from the side of the motorist and being angered by bicyclists and now he is a cyclist and he understands what it means when the shoulders of the road are crumbling. Bicyclists should not take up the whole road.
- Kids need to get out of the house and they need to be biking and it needs to be safe to do so.
- Need to target the senior population also. Making it safe and educate seniors how to do it safely.
- Educating people as to where the safe areas are.
- On legislative side – making bike lanes, etc. a part of development, adding bike parking spaces, etc.
- Need parking spaces downtown for bicyclists
- Part of the problem is in law enforcement. Bicyclist behavior needs to be enforced.
- Public safety could get involved. Need to see cops on bicycles.
- Need some incentives as well. Abatement with car insurance, etc. give them a reason to want to go to alternative transportation.
- Medical College of Georgia has a green team and recently held a bike to work day that involved an incentive.
- City of Augusta has a wellness program that could (in the future) include bicycling and walking to work. The City of Aiken has a wellness program and so does LSCOG.
- It is vital for employers to get on board.
- People travel from Aiken to get to the VA Hospital using the Best Friend Express.
- Get off of the Best Friend Express at the transit center and walk .5 mile to 1 mile to get to the Augusta Public Transit.
- More commuters go from Augusta to North Augusta than vice versa. APT does not provide service to North Augusta.
- Connect to North Augusta from Augusta for shopping activity. Currently APT does not do that because of federal regulations (took many many years to get the Best Friend Express to cross state lines).
- Old trolley line would potentially allow service to cross the river (arrange it as a rural service – receives different federal funding than transit)
- Augusta Canal Path and North Augusta Greenway – need to connect the two.
- What is the plan for the 5th Street bridge? Considerations to update/upgrade or close it, but no consensus on that yet.

ARTS/Aiken County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan
Focus Group: Transit and Alternative Transportation
Conducted at Augusta Public Transit
October 3, 2011

Who would be the best partners for programs and initiatives?

- Wheel Movement
- Aiken Bicycle Club
- Annual event of national scale that was held in Augusta
- Mountain biking system in the area is strong – that group could be a partner
- DNR state funds but much of that is for motorized trails

Where are the challenging intersections or corridors?

- Deans Bridge Road at Gordon Highway
- Gordon Highway can be crossed at Wheeler
- At the Red Lobster, Willy (sight impaired) will cross
- 15th Street is tough around the medical district
- 15th and Walton Way across the Walton Way from the Rite Aid (rather goes across Fifteenth first and then make a left, bank on the corner) – otherwise there are cars coming from the east and turning on fifteenth street and that is a very difficult place to go across.
- 15th Street and Broad Street; Going toward North Augusta, traffic is going up onto the bridge; Coming from Broad and taking a right and getting on
- There is not a good way to get from Columbia County to downtown
- One more mile to the Evans town center – from the north end of the Augusta Canal – path continues west to Evans to Locks Road (if it continued you could get to major shopping district); People are taking their children to Stephens Creek Elementary in golf carts on that trail.
- One visually impaired participant said she uses a telescope to see the ped heads but otherwise she wouldn't know what they were saying. She also said that some intersections do not have tactile curb ramps to indicate crosswalk entry. Need to have those at every intersection.
- The bus stops have signs for people who can see, but it can be difficult to find the bus stop or figure out if you are at the proper bus stop. Something with audio voice would solve that problem. San Francisco has tactile maps as well as audio.
- How does the rider let the driver know when they need to get off of transit? Visually impaired persons need more confidence to know when to get off for their destination. ADA requires that drivers call out every intersection, but some drivers do not do that.
- Best Friend Express does not have funding for audio stop announcements on all buses. Any time a passenger gets on the bus they can tell them when they need to stop and then give personalized announcement.
- A number of people would like to see the Canal Trail paved but Canal authority thinks that it attracts from the historical use of it.
- Painted stripe on a high speed road is not a good idea.