



Section 3 – Key Issues and Current Conditions

Key Issues

Throughout the feasibility study process, the consultant team identified some of the key issues affecting the transportation system in the City of Easley and driving the need for public transit. Although some of the issues identified are specific to Easley, some of these issues are regional and national trends.

Existing Transportation Issues and Problems

Transportation and traffic issues in the City of Easley are primarily centered on the US Highway 123 corridor. This highway is the major corridor in the city and is home to just about all of the significant shopping destinations in the city. The distances between this corridor and most of the apartment complexes and denser residential areas are too great. This separation reduces the residents' options for commuting. The end result is the congestion and traffic problems experienced along this corridor on a daily basis. Future growth in the City of Easley will only exacerbate this problem.

Transportation and Economic Vitality

The City of Easley has enjoyed recent success with tourism initiatives, including the Big League World Series and downtown development. The city leaders hope to continue to capitalize on the success of these types of initiatives in the future. Several times during the study, residents and committee members discussed the need for transportation options during downtown and baseball events. Additionally, the rate-of-return experienced by communities that invest in transit could be a key factor in future success of the current economic initiatives.

Financial Support

Although public transit will not pay for itself, there are several options available for financing the public transit service. The South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) can provide some of the funding for the service, but some local funding will be required. The public opinion survey included a question about the type of financing option that the public may find acceptable. Although a large percentage of the respondents (27%) chose "None of the above," 24% supported additional sales tax as a viable option. The final survey results can be seen in **Appendix A**.

Need for Public Transit

The general consensus from the transportation committee, and the general public, is that there is a definite need for public transit in the City of Easley. The greatest amount of interest was expressed for the shopping corridor and for the downtown residents.



The closing of the BI-LO grocery store on SC Highway 8 accentuated the need for transportation options in the city. That grocery store was the only one on the west side of the city. Now, the residents north of SC Highway 8 do not have any other options for grocery stores. They will all need to travel to the US Highway 123 corridor to purchase their groceries, adding more traffic pressure to an already crowded highway.

Trends Impacting the Need for Public Transit

Like many cities and counties in South Carolina, the City of Easley has experienced significant population growth in the last 15 years and expects to continue that trend into the future. Between the 1990 and 2000 Census, the City of Easley's population increased nearly 17%, from 15,195 to 17,754. Over the same period, the number of households in the city increased by more than 21%. This trend has continued into the current decade as well. The city's population is estimated to have grown by an additional 8% since the last Census. This influx of population into the city will increase the need for transportation options. This need is further evidenced by the lack of highway funds available through the State and Federal governments.

The Benefit of Public Transit

The City of Easley residents would benefit from public transit. Currently, only limited transportation options are available to residents of the area and a public transit system would provide a means of transportation besides the private automobile. The elderly, disabled and low-income populations would probably benefit the most from public transit. Other beneficiaries include persons who may be environmentally conscious and minimum wage earners.

Current Conditions

The City of Easley, founded in 1873, was named for the Confederate General William King Easley. General Easley is given credit for bringing the railroad into Pickens County and the city of Easley. Although it has transformed itself with the changing times, the city in its current form is a center for entertainment and activity in Pickens County. This section of the study describes the current transportation and demographic conditions in the city.

Transportation System

Running from the City of Greenville to Clemson University, US 123 passes through Pickens County nearly bisecting the City of Easley. Traffic volumes on the stretch of highway in the City of Easley average over 35,000 vehicles per day, according to SCDOT. Other high volume highways in the Easley area include SC Highway 8 and SC Highway 93. Both of these routes have segments that hover at or above 20,000 vehicles per day. The high traffic volumes on these arterial highways further supports the need for additional transportation options in the City of Easley.



With the exception of Amtrak, which stops in Greenville and Clemson, passenger rail service does not exist in the Easley area. Since the rail lines in downtown Easley are mostly freight lines, the option of passenger rail service was not considered during this study. A brief overview of transit alternatives is described in Section 5 of this report. Connections to any local airports were not considered due to the distances to the various airports in the area. The City of Easley is 22 miles from the closest airport, Oconee County Regional Airport, and 25 miles from the Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport.

Major Transit Destinations

The identification of the current major destinations within the study area is very important in terms of trip generation rates and their ability to be served by public transit. The most popular destinations were identified through the public information meetings and the public opinion surveys, as discussed in Section 2 of this report. The following list of major transit destinations, listed in no particular order, is based on the information collected from the surveys, meetings, Transportation Committee and consultant team observations:

- Piedmont Baptist Hospital;
- Easley Dialysis Center;
- BI-LO/WalMart shopping complex;
- Captain Kimberly Hampton Memorial Library;
- Rock Springs Baptist Church;
- US Highway 123 Corridor;
- BILO/Kmart shopping complex;
- YMCA;
- U.S. Post Office;
- Pharmacies;
- City Hall/LEC;
- Downtown Easley
- J.B. “Red” Owens Recreational Complex;
- City of Pickens;
- City of Clemson and Clemson University; and
- City of Greenville.

In addition to the list of existing major transit destinations, the consultant team is aware of some of the potential future destinations being considered in the Easley area. The development at the former Saco Lowell plant site and the Tri-County Tech campus are 2 examples of potential destinations that could affect future transit route development. The recommendations in Section 5 of this report outline the consultant team’s long-range plans for these and other destinations.

Figure 1 shows the location of some of the major destinations in the Easley study area.



Placeholder for figure 1 (map of major destinations)



Study Area Demographics

As discussed earlier in the section, the population of the City of Easley is increasing at a steady rate. The trend for the next 20 years, according to the US Census Bureau is for that trend to continue for the entire Upstate of South Carolina. **Table 3.1** shows the most current estimate and projections for population growth in the region, as compared to the state.

Table 3.1 Upstate Population Projections

County	2006*	2010	2015	2020	2025	% Change 2006-2025
Anderson	177,963	180,280	188,440	196,590	204,750	15.1%
Cherokee	53,886	57,860	60,960	64,050	67,140	24.6%
Greenville	417,166	421,210	444,840	468,470	492,100	18.0%
Oconee	70,567	75,470	80,040	84,600	89,160	26.3%
Pickens	114,446	127,110	135,190	143,260	151,330	32.2%
Spartanburg	271,087	280,590	293,790	306,990	320,190	18.1%
Upstate Region	1,083,815	1,144,530	1,205,275	1,265,980	1,326,695	22.4%
South Carolina	4,218,460	4,446,240	4,674,050	4,901,810	5,129,630	21.6%

*Note: 2006 County populations based on most current estimate
Source: US Census Bureau

Figure 2, on the following page, shows the population densities for the study area. Although pockets of higher density populations exist in the city, the majority of the study area is considered as a low to medium population density. The highest population densities are typically in areas with clusters of apartment complexes.

Transit-Dependent Population Characteristics

Transit-dependent population groups are described as those segments of the population that are precluded from driving private vehicles and are highly dependent upon friends and relatives for transportation. The types of limitations that are the reason for their dependence include physical, financial, legal and self-imposed limitations. Physical limitations may include everything from permanent disability, such as frailty due to age; blindness; paralysis or developmental disabilities. They may also include temporary disabilities which would preclude an individual from driving.

Financial limitations also may be short or long term. Short term financial limitations may be the result of layoffs, high gas prices, unexpected medical bills, etc. Long term financial limitations may include fixed income level, single head of household, high insurance rates or other barriers to purchasing or owning a private vehicle. Legal limitations are typically related to persons too young to drive or persons that have had their driving privileges revoked (DUI, etc.).



The final category of limitations includes those persons who choose not to own or drive a vehicle for reasons other than those listed in the other categories. Persons in this category may include environmentalists, persons new to the area or any others that consciously make the choice not to drive. Data for this final category is not readily available and this group typically represents a small portion of the transit population. The census information related to transit dependent populations is shown in the following table.

Table 3.2 Transit Dependent Population

Geographic Area	Population				Households		
	Age 5 to 17	Age 65+	Minority	Below Poverty Level	Owner Occupied	No Vehicle	Median Income
Clemson	11.0%	12.7%	19.0%	33.1%	45.9%	8.7%	\$26,892
Easley	16.8%	14.7%	14.7%	10.9%	68.3%	6.0%	\$38,204
Greenville	14.3%	14.4%	37.9%	16.1%	47.0%	6.4%	\$33,144
Pickens County	16.2%	11.4%	9.7%	13.7%	73.5%	6.4%	\$36,214
South Carolina	18.6%	12.1%	33.9%	14.1%	72.2%	9.0%	\$37,082

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

As one of the screening processes for making recommendations for transit service, a review of the study area’s population and household characteristics revealed several interesting facts. Compared to the closest cities with existing transit service, Easley has higher percentages of both younger and older residents. Both of these groups are typically frequent transit users. Due to the growth of retirement populations across South Carolina, Easley should expect their elderly population to increase as well.

Also of interest is the fact that Easley has the lowest percentage of both minority population and persons living below the poverty level, as compared to Greenville and Clemson. While Easley is significantly lower in both of these categories, 6% of the city’s households are currently without access to a vehicle. For the study area, this factor equates to approximately 1,000 persons without access to a vehicle.

To identify concentrations of the target transit markets identified in **Table 3.2**, study area maps were generated for the feasibility study. The maps related to the age and race categories show Census data at the block level. To protect individual identities, some of the data is distributed at the block group level. The maps related to poverty and households show less detail, but the information is useful in identifying areas in need of public transportation. **Figures 2 through 6** illustrate the study area characteristics.



Placeholder for figures 2-6



Summary of Findings

Following a technical analysis of the study area data and a thorough public outreach program, we can conclude that there is definitely a need for more public transportation in the region. A quantitative analysis of the projected transit ridership is discussed in Section 4 of this report. The target transit markets (low income, minority, elderly) are located throughout the study area and they have very few options for commuting to work, shopping, medical appointments and recreational activities.