



# South Carolina

## Overview

South Carolina has a fairly extensive network of transit that serves rural areas in a variety of innovative ways. Relationships between the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT), regional Councils of Government (COGs), and rural transit agencies vary and often involve other entities. However, SCDOT has formalized the role of COGs, similar to that of metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), and overall has been successful in engaging regional and local entities in statewide planning and in innovative practices, such as the use of performance measures and a focus on commuting and economic development. Agencies at regional and local levels have shown their own initiative in pursuing Federal and State priorities and innovative practices, such as partnering with universities and companies and focusing on marketing to change the perception of transit.

## Context

### *Rural Transit*

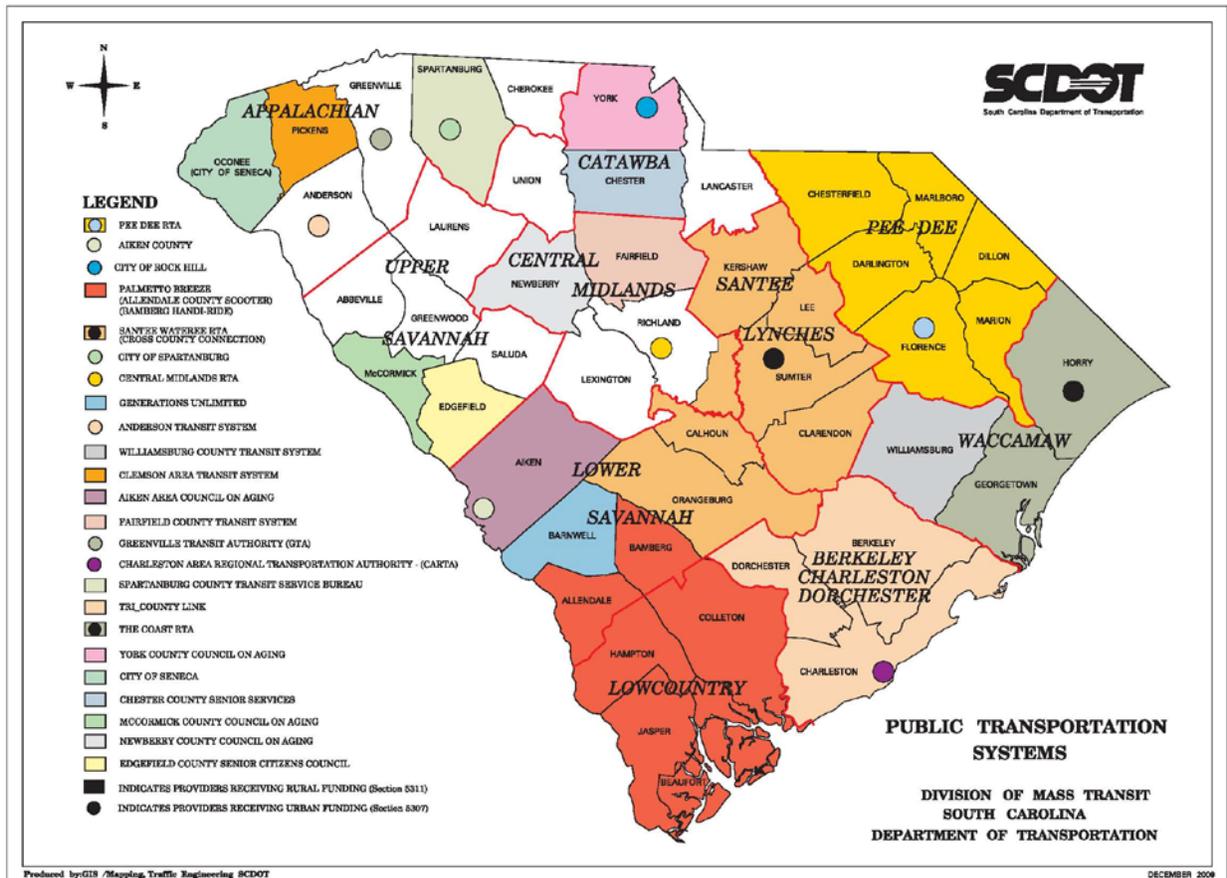
As of 2009, South Carolina had 26 transit service operations operated by 24 separate transit agencies, consisting of seven exclusively urbanized agencies, 14 exclusively rural or non-urbanized, and three with both urbanized and rural services (see Figure 1). Several of the agencies that serve urban and rural areas provide public transit in multiple counties and are primarily known as regional transit authorities (RTAs). Nearly all of the State's counties (39 out of a total of 46) have some type of general public transit.<sup>1</sup> South Carolina's Medicaid-funded transportation services are run through a brokerage operated by two private companies and managed by the State Department of Health and Human Services.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> South Carolina Department of Transportation. Transit Trends Report Fiscal Year 2008-2009. [http://www.scdot.org/inside/pdfs/transit\\_data\\_report-09.pdf](http://www.scdot.org/inside/pdfs/transit_data_report-09.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services: Transportation. <http://www.scdhhs.gov/openpublic/transportation.asp>

Figure 1: Transit in South Carolina



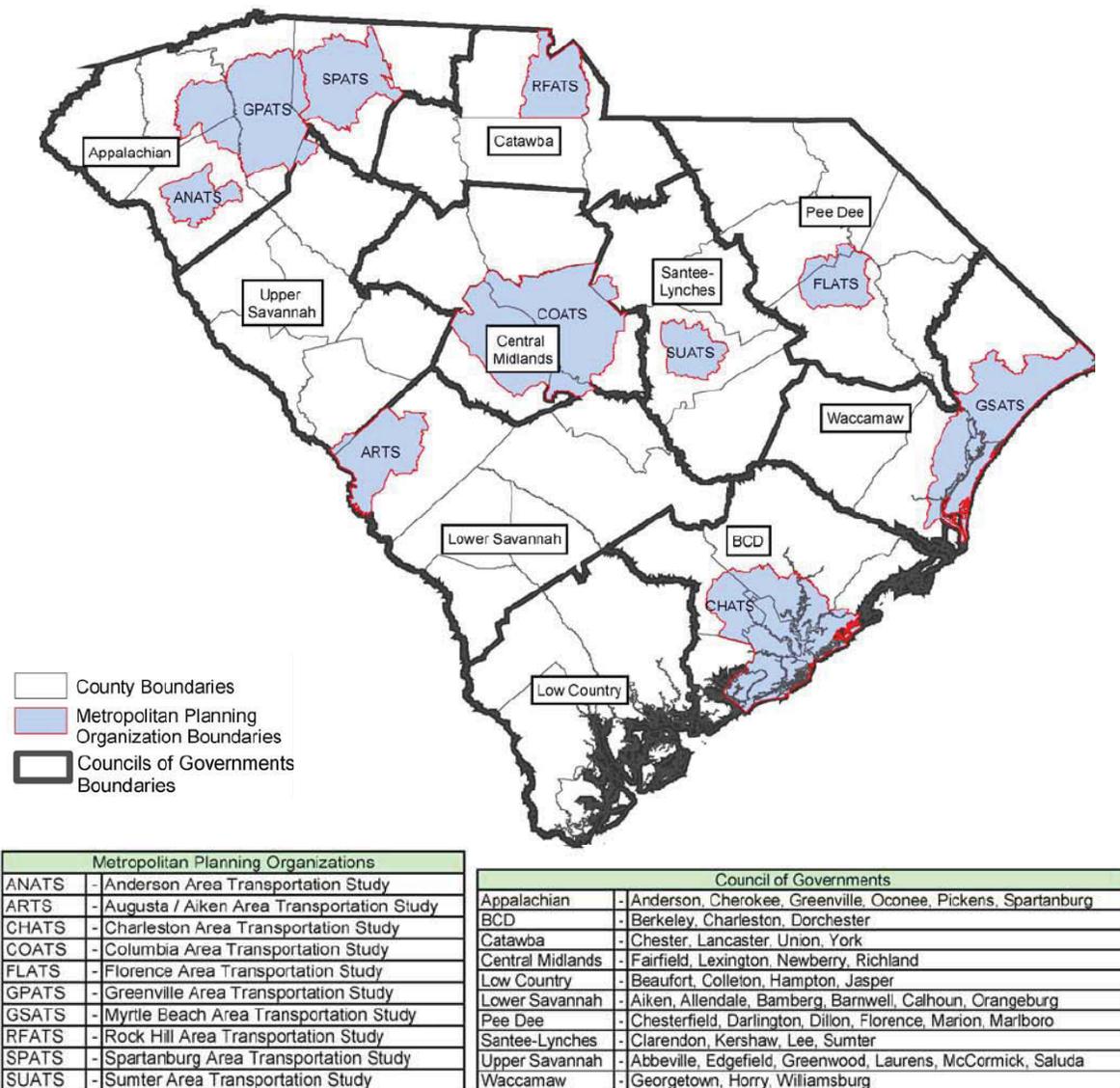
Source: SCDOT

### Institutional Structure

SCDOT is governed by a [Transportation Commission](#) comprised of representatives elected by the legislative delegations of each of the State’s six transportation districts and an appointed at-large member. SCDOT has three divisions: finance/administration, engineering, and intermodal and freight programs. The Division of Intermodal and Freight Programs is a result of a restructuring that occurred in the summer of 2010 and consists of an Office of Railroads and an Office of Public Transit (OPT). The Division replaces the former Division of Mass Transit (DMT) and incorporates the former [Transit Planning Section](#) (TPS) of the Office of Planning within the Division of Engineering. TPS consisted of three staff and handled transit components of the statewide transit improvement plan (STIP), statewide long-range transportation plan (LRTP), the statewide transit plan, regional transit plans, and the coordinated human services plan (CHSP). The [Division of Mass Transit](#) consisted of 15 staff and administered the Federal and State transit funding programs. The new Division combines these functions in the OPT. Bicycle and pedestrian coordination is handled by traffic engineering. This case study will refer to TPS and DMT because of the timing of the research but all described activities can now be assumed to fall under the new OPT.

There are 10 defined planning regions in the State, each of which has a COG (see Figure 2). SCDOT has memoranda of agreement/understanding with each COG that describe what transportation-related activities are expected in exchange for State planning and research (SPR) funding. COGs complete Rural Planning Work Plans (RPWPs),<sup>3</sup> similar to the Unified Planning Work Plans (UPWPs) that are Federally required of MPOs. RPWPs identify the transportation planning activities that are to be undertaken in the specified time period by the COG in support of the region’s LRTP. COGs also have responsibility for human service related functions, such as community and workforce development, in each of the regions.

Figure 2: South Carolina MPOs and COGs



Source: SCDOT

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.centralmidlands.org/pdf/FINAL%20COPY%20RPWP%202009-2010.pdf> and <http://www.bcdkog.com/files/RPWP20092010FINAL.pdf> for example RPWPs.

## Funding

Table 1 summarizes Federal and State funding for transit in the State. The State provides \$6 million for transit capital and operating expenses from the motor fuel user fee (1/4 of one cent per gallon). This funding amount is sufficient to provide for the local match for some, but not all, Federal funding.

SCDOT does allow flexing of its Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) funds to Federal Transit Administration (FTA) uses in both urban and rural areas, but has not flexed funds at significant levels relative to other states. TPS has been working to educate COGs about this option, which has gained traction recently.

**Table 1: Federal and State Transit Funding in Fiscal Year 2009 (in millions)**

Funding Program	Operating	Capital	Planning & Tech Assistance
Section 5311 (Formula Grants for Other than Urbanized Areas)			
Rural	\$7.6	\$1.6	\$1.2
(b)(3) (RTAP)	\$0	\$0	\$0.2
(c) Tribal			\$0.2
(f) (Intercity)		\$0.7	
Section 5310 (Transportation for Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities)	\$0	\$2.1	\$0
Section 5309 (Bus and Bus Facilities)	\$0	\$2.7	\$0
Section 5316 (Job Access and Reverse Commute)			\$1.6
Section 5317 (New Freedom)			\$1.0
Section 5303 (Metropolitan Planning)			\$0.7
Section 5304 (Statewide Planning)			\$0.2
Section 5307 (Urban Area Formula)	\$19.1		\$0
<b>Total Federal</b>			<b>\$38.9</b>
<b>State Transit Funding</b>			<b>\$6.1</b>

SCDOT allocates Section 5311 (Formula Grants for Other than Urbanized Areas) funds using a formula based on documentation of performance and demonstration of need. Previously, Section 5311 had been administered in South Carolina as a discretionary application process. The statewide performance measures are:

- Cost per passenger trip
- Cost per vehicle mile
- Cost per vehicle revenue mile
- Cost per vehicle hour
- Cost per vehicle revenue hour
- Passenger trips per vehicle revenue mile
- Passenger trips per vehicle revenue hour
- Fare box recovery ratio

Beginning with Fiscal Year 2007, the TPS developed and implemented a new transit data acquisition and analysis program called OPSTATS (Operating Statistics). The purpose of the program is to identify how each provider is doing individually and compared to each other and how the State overall is doing year to year. Providers submit information to the system at the end of each year. From this data, OTP develops an annual [Transit Trends report](#), which summarizes the initial analysis of OPSTATS data. OTP has used this report to inform the General Assembly of the status of transit in the State, the gaps in service, and

why funding requests are justified. This information has been well received by all parties. According to TPS, transit providers have expressed appreciation that SCDOT is using the data as they said they would, such as utilizing it for such things as local funding decisions. TPS also develops the annual rural National Transit Database submission to FTA for rural transit providers in the State based on OPSTATS.

## **Participation of Rural Transit in Statewide Planning Process**

### *State DOT*

DMT primarily interfaces with transit providers, urban and rural, through four DMT staff known as economic development managers (EDMs). EDMs are each assigned a region of the State and “are the face of SCDOT.” EDMs work with COGs on allocation of Section 5311 and other Federal transit funds; COGs receive and screen the applications and make recommendations to DMT on which agencies should be recipients. Now that Section 5311 is distributed using a performance-based formula, COGs still play a role in reviewing Section 5310 applications and administering Sections 5316 and 5317 programs. EDMs, with involvement from other staff at DMT, assist transit providers directly in vehicle acquisition, fiscal oversight, and access to the rural training assistance program (RTAP) funding and programs.

All three TPS staff interact directly with MPOs, COGs, and transit providers; the Chief Transit Planner oversees the whole State while the two staff each oversee half the State. TPS generally fields service and routing questions and becomes involved in the process for planning a new service. Both COGs and transit providers recognized the leadership of the new Director of OPT, who was the former chief transit planner in TPS, and how his background as a former FTA employee has been very valuable.

An example of specific outreach to rural transit providers is that SCDOT has targeted the seven counties (as of 2009) that do not offer any general public transit to provide funding for three-year pilot projects, after which the services will be reviewed to determine how they perform, and whether they will become permanent and be included in the normal funding process.

### *Rural Transit Agencies*

Transit agencies reported positive relationships with SCDOT, especially in regard to the EDMs and to TPS. One transit agency reported that it uses the State transit plan and CHSP as models and that it finds the Transit Trends report very helpful. Transit agencies indicated that they thought DMT’s resources are primarily directed toward work with large urban transit agencies.

Transit agencies also reported good relationships with COGs but that the level of involvement varies. COGs with RTAs usually work together quite closely. For example, the Lowcountry COG (LowCOG) oversees four counties in southern South Carolina and works closely with the region’s one regional transit provider, Lowcountry Regional Transit Authority (LRTA). LowCOG’s planning director is on LRTA’s board, and a member of the LRTA’s Board of Directors is on the Transportation Committee of LowCOG’s board. Some of the COGs have regional transit councils or similar entities that meet monthly and include a variety of stakeholders, from human services to educational institutions, and offer an opportunity for transit providers to become involved. On the other end of the spectrum, two transit agencies reported that although their relationship with their respective COGs was good, there was

limited interaction, as the COG was focused on roads. One agency instead reported working primarily with their nearby MPO on the LRTP and other efforts and with their counties on issues such as subdivision code changes to require private development to consider and integrate transit; the agency thought that a change in leadership at the COG may result in a different relationship in the future. Another transit agency also reported working with their nearby MPO through a memorandum of agreement. A third transit agency works closely with its COG, which is also an MPO.

### *Councils of Government*

SCDOT reported that COGs make important contributions to the dialogue around statewide planning efforts – such as the CHSP and State transit plan – at the regional and local level. In addition, as mentioned above, COGs play an active role in the Federal transit funding process. COGs serve as the first line of screening, provide a local and regional view, and ensure that services and projects meet regional goals. Increasingly, COGs are submitting a single application for Section 5310 funds for their regions and, upon receipt of the funding, allocate funding to the providers.

The COGs reported good relationships with SCDOT, with overall limited interaction but more direct contact with TPS than DMT. According to the COGs, both offices recognize that the COGs know the local situation best but are still figuring out how best to work with the COGs as partners to fully take advantage of their perspective. Other than specific funding-related requests, COGs do not get much direction or guidance from SCDOT. However, this is not perceived as a problem, other than the perception that there is a lack of transit advocacy within SCDOT that is viewed as part of a larger State government leadership problem in South Carolina. However, SCDOT does require COGs to meet some requirements similar to MPOs, such as the RPWP, and has supported the expanded involvement of the COGs in coordinating regional transit.

SCDOT began supporting the involvement of COGs in transit in 2000, when the Lower Savannah COG (LSCOG) was asked by two transit providers to help improve coordination of services in the six-county region. As a result of this request and SCDOT financial support, LSCOG formed the Lower Savannah Regional Transit Management Association (LSRTMA), which has successfully coordinated and provided human services and public transportation since then.

Although LSCOG has been successful in its approach and LowCOG has also been working to provide all human services transportation through LRTA, other regions are at different points in the development of transit and have taken different approaches and still been successful. For example, in 2005, SCDOT funded a planning position to pursue transit opportunities at the Catawba Regional COG (CRCOG), which is in northern South Carolina close to Charlotte, North Carolina. The region had no transit when the position was created; but since then, CRCOG has been responsible for helping start demand-response transit in two of the region's four counties and the city of Rock Hills and for promoting and exploring connections to Charlotte. However, CRCOG does not provide transit services directly, either for public transportation or human services transportation.

*One COG official commented that “Different regions will evolve differently based on counties, rural and urban mix, and providers. SCDOT has not said this is what you need to do but instead has provided the COGs with a menu of approaches, which I really appreciate.”*

## *Others*

There are a number of other entities and associations involved in statewide transportation planning and rural transit. At the State level, Governor Mark Sanford established the South Carolina Interagency Transportation Coordination Council in September 2009 to promote interagency and statewide cooperation in the provision and management of transportation programs.<sup>4</sup> The Council has been charged with identifying needs and constraints in coordination between State agencies in terms of funding, operations, and other considerations. In terms of other State agencies, COGs also interact with the State Department of Health and Human Services for Medicaid funding and the Lieutenant Governor's Office on Aging for Older American Act funding for transportation services.

At the COG level, the COG directors meet informally each month but transit is not a priority topic for discussion. There is also a statewide COG association, the [South Carolina Association of Regional Councils](#), but it also is not very active in transit. Nearly every year there has been a COGs/MPOs transportation conference, but it depends on a COG or MPO official to take the lead in organizing it; LowCOG has hosted most of the recent conferences. TPS is usually involved but not financially. There used to be other conferences, but too many people became involved to accommodate efficiently.

COGs and transit agencies all report working with MPOs. Some COGs function as MPOs. For example, the Central Midlands COG (CMCOG) is the MPO for Columbia. CMCOG is working on establishing better coordination and communication between public transportation and human services transportation outside the MPO area, including educating providers to understand that they can fill empty seats with other users, and in developing more commuter services. Other COGs work with MPOs in other states; for example, CRCOG works with the Charlotte-Mecklenberg MPO in North Carolina, and LSCOG works with the Augusta MPO in Georgia.

The Catawba Indian Nation is the only resident, Federally recognized Tribe in South Carolina. SCDOT and CRCOG both work with the Catawba Tribe on transportation but not with regard to transit.

The [Transportation Association of South Carolina](#) (TASC) is a volunteer association with a mix of rural and urban, private and public transportation members, and board. TASC holds annual training conferences and offers other training opportunities as well, but funding has become a problem recently due to changes at the State. SCDOT relies on TASC for input on programs and policies. COGs reported that TASC used to be regarded as mainly representative of operators vs. planners and did not play an active role in statewide initiatives, but that as membership has doubled and other changes have been made recently, this may be changing. Transit providers reported that TASC is very helpful for information exchange and raising awareness of transit in the State.

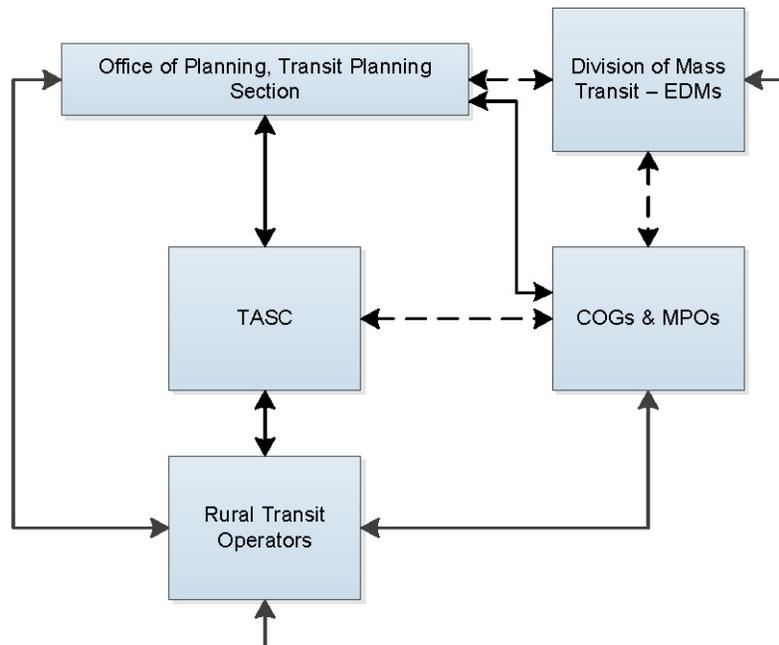
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<sup>4</sup> SCDOT Press Release: South Carolina Interagency Transportation Coordination Council. December 4, 2009. [http://www.scdot.org/artman/publish/article\\_935.shtml](http://www.scdot.org/artman/publish/article_935.shtml)

*Summary*

Figure 3 is a summary diagram of the relationships described in this section.

**Figure 3: Relationships between Agencies Involved in Rural Transportation Planning**



**Major Planning and Project Initiatives**

*Statewide Plans*

Until recently, SCDOT was not part of the Governor’s Cabinet and lacked the ability to mandate or enforce many activities. As a result, SCDOT has relied on “working from the bottom up” or from the local level in developing its regional and State plans. For example, the statewide CHSP, which was integrated into the State Transit Plan of the State transportation plan, drew upon 10 regional CHSPs. SCDOT provided an outline for the regions, obtained the support of a consultant for each region, and participated in outreach for the plans. This type of approach has created ownership and buy-in and allowed SCDOT to better understand how needs differed significantly across the 10 planning regions.

Some of these planning efforts have resulted in tangible benefits for rural transit. For example, as a result of the CHSP planning efforts, some COGs have hired mobility managers that now do human services and public transportation coordination.

In terms of the STIP, transit throughout the State has benefited from being counted as a consideration for the ranking of highway and bridge projects. According to the [South Carolina Code of Laws](#),<sup>5</sup> the Transportation Commission's prioritization of transportation projects in the STIP, which mainly consist of highway and bridge projects, must take into account several criteria, including economic development, alternative transportation solutions, and consistency with local land use plans. According to SCDOT, alternative transportation solutions are defined as those that consider whether transit could be an alternative instead of the project or whether alternative transportations accommodation should be integrated into the project in terms of technologies and infrastructure, such as pull-outs or bicycle lanes.

Along with transit planning, SCDOT is involved in passenger rail and is about to start a comprehensive statewide rail plan. South Carolina is a member of the [Southeast High-Speed Rail Coalition](#) and the TPS and Rail Program Manager at DMT are working with Georgia and North Carolina on one leg of the Southeast Rail Corridor. DMT has provided funding and assistance for alternative analyses of commuter rail from rural to urban areas, such as from Newbury and Camden to the Columbia area and into Charleston along the I-26 corridor, which currently includes census-defined rural areas that are growing quickly. Currently, OPT is working with the new Office of Railroads on an intercity rail planning study from Florence, in the northeast, Myrtle Beach, and Charleston.

### *State initiatives*

SCDOT has focused on workforce development in terms of commuter services that move employees from rural areas to urban areas. The [SmartRide Commuter-Focused Transit Program](#) is a partnership between SCDOT, the Newberry County Council on Aging, and the Santee Wateree Regional Transit Authority (SWRTA) with support from local communities, businesses, and commuters. The program provides commuter service to Columbia from Camden/Lugoff and Newberry, all small towns with populations under 50,000. SWRTA has also collaborated with a private vanpool provider and an on-line ride-planning provider to start a regional rural ridershare program (see Figure 4), which was awarded an [Excellence in Regional Transportation Award](#) by the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) in 2009. In Charleston, the Tri-County Link transit agency provides a similar commuter service; there are also commuter services available for Buford, Hilton Head, and Myrtle Beach.

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<sup>5</sup> 57-1-370(B)(8)

Figure 4: Screenshot of SWRTA Rideshare website

The screenshot shows a website interface for SWRTA Rideshare. At the top left, there are logos for 'AlterNetWays a Certified Green Business' and 'Santee Waterree RTA Regional Transportation Authority'. The main heading is 'List of Rideshare Destinations Santee Waterree RTA'. Below the heading is a prompt: 'Select Destination, become a member and be ridesharing tomorrow!'. A table lists various destinations and their addresses. At the bottom right of the table is a 'Close' button.

Destination	Address
<a href="#">Becton, Dickinson and Co</a>	1575 Airport Rd Sumter SC ...
<a href="#">CCTC - F. E. DuBose Campus</a>	3351 Sumter Highway Mannin...
<a href="#">CCTC - Kershaw County Campus</a>	1125 Little Street Camden ...
<a href="#">CCTC - Lee County Campus</a>	200 N. Main Street Bishopv...
<a href="#">CCTC - Sumter Campus</a>	506 N. Guignard Dr Sumter ...
<a href="#">Columbia</a>	Downtown / USC Columbia SC...
<a href="#">Shaw AFB</a>	Shaw Air Force Base Shaw A...
<a href="#">Square D - Schneider Electric</a>	Columbia SC 29202
<a href="#">Sumter</a>	Downtown Sumter SC 29150
<a href="#">University of South Carolina</a>	1501 Pendleton St. Columbi...
<a href="#">WJB Dorn VA Medical Center</a>	6439 Garners Ferry Road C...

Source: [SWRTA website](#)

### State and National Priorities

SCDOT reported that some Federal priorities are being adopted by the State. For example, SCDOT is currently focusing on economic development, livability, and air quality. In 2010, SCDOT in conjunction with FHWA and FTA held a livability meeting that was open to people from the State and local levels. SCDOT has also been involved in air quality issues although currently there is only one non-attainment area eligible for the joint FTA-FHWA Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Improvement Program funds. SCDOT expects that most of the State will become non-attainment if new Federal air quality standards are implemented so has been working to provide educational sessions in preparation. Currently, CMAQ funds are used for incident response and for incident response vehicle procurement so that broken down vehicles can be removed quickly and reduce congestion.

Finally, SDOT is currently conducting a [statewide return on investment study on transit](#), which is trying to quantify what the economic impact of transit investment is. The intent is for the study to also be done at the regional level. COGs are also working on linking transit with economic development. CRCOG has been able to use U.S. Department of Labor [Workforce Investment Act](#) (WIA) funding as the local match for their Section 5316 Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) program in Rock Hill. Transit agencies noted the significant attention to economic development in their communities and the way in which transit has been able to play a role (see text box below).

COGs reported that they were encouraged to see the progress and direction coming from the Federal government, in particular the emphasis on, and encouragement of, rural transit; sustainable

*“We need to keep transit at the table, but that must include rural transit.” – Transit provider*

communities; and linking land use, housing, and multimodal transportation. They welcome further guidance and support for progress, especially in making transit more competitive with roads. Transit providers echoed the excitement heard from COGs about the positive attention to rural transit by the

*“Anything that says we have to do something more than road widening or restricts road widening or provides an alternative is positive. Federal restrictions and funding are good in this regard. Everyone will widen roads unless there are restrictions to guide the use of the funding. Roads will always win if given the option.” – COG official*

Federal government as well as by research through the Transportation Research Board. However, some emphasized that it was important for the Federal Government to make a distinction between urban and rural transit and expressed the desire that, in the future, the Federal government provide increased guidance for the administration of Federal programs for rural areas such as Section 5311.

In line with Federal and State priorities, economic development and jobs are key considerations for rural communities and rural transit providers in South Carolina. Transit providers reported successful initiatives tied to economic development that involves working with developers, universities, and businesses. For example, one transit agency reported that it struck a deal with a developer of condominiums to serve the site with transit in return for integrating transit infrastructure such as turnarounds and bus shelters into the development. Two other examples are provided in the text boxes below.

*One transit provider stated that, “Economic development is on the table in the three counties we serve” and another commented, “Getting people to work is very important.”*

#### **Public-Private Partnership: TriCounty Link and Santee Cooper**

TriCounty Link works collaboratively with State-owned electric utility company, Santee Cooper, which has a facility in the Town of Moncks Corner in Berkeley County. After conducting research into providing commuter benefits to its employees to be competitive with other employers, Santee Cooper decided to launch an iRide program. iRide includes carpool matching assistance and a public urban-to-rural commuter service by TriCounty Link to several park-and-ride facilities. Santee Cooper has also been able to use the transit service to advertise on the vehicles and promote its environmental message. TriCounty Link provided the service to Santee Cooper employees and the public for free for the first three months and maintained ridership once fares were reinstated. As a result of the partnership, TriCounty Link was able to develop its presence in Moncks Corner, including an innovative, high-frequency “Link to Lunch” weekday service (see Figure 5).

Two other transit agencies reported providing services to companies and described the Santee Cooper-TriCounty Link model as useful; however, the economic downturn resulted in cancellations of several such services as companies had to cut benefits and make significant layoffs. There is hope that this will change as the economy picks up again and companies begin to rehire.

Figure 5 Link to Lunch brochure

**Commuter Solutions**  
**LINK TO LUNCH!**

Link to Lunch picks up *every 8 minutes*  
from 10:45 a.m. until 1:15 p.m.  
Monday through Friday

**RIDE FREE**  
**August 10 - September 4, 2009**  
and register to win free  
meals from your favorite  
Moncks Corner restaurants

**Try it - you'll LINK it - a lot!**

For more information call 899-4096  
or visit us at  
[www.ridetricountylink.com](http://www.ridetricountylink.com)

Source: [TriCounty Link to Lunch Flyer](#)

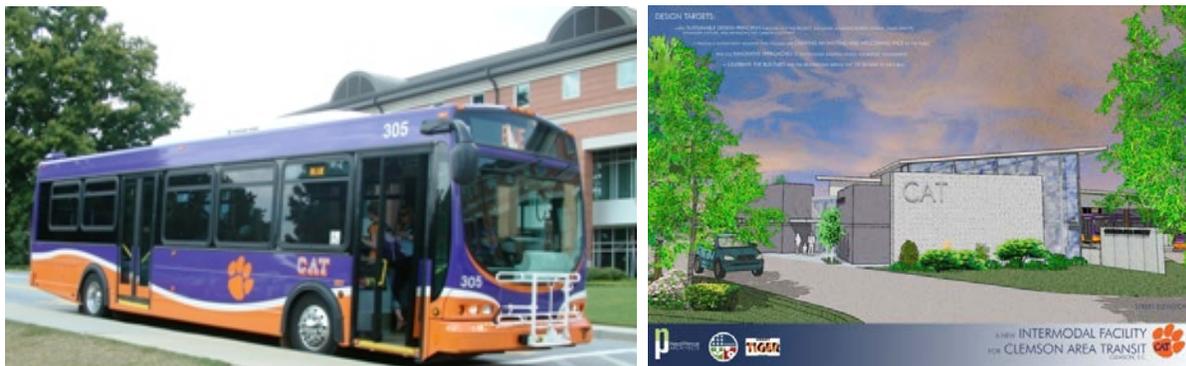
**Public-Private Partnership: Transit Agencies and Universities**

Some transit agencies have had success in partnering with local universities to obtain student ridership, expand services and establish a secure funding base.

Clemson Area Transit (CAT), highlighted as a best practice case study in the [Transit Cooperative Research Program Synthesis 39: Transportation on College and University Campuses](#) (2001), began as a joint venture between Clemson University and the City of Clemson as an expansion of a university parking shuttle; the service is fare free for all riders, students and residents. In 2011, CAT is scheduled to complete construction on South Carolina’s first green intermodal transit facility with administrative space, bus storage, and a bus wash. The facility will feature solar panels on the roof; efficient lighting, heating, and cooling systems; and recycling of storm water among other aspects and is funded completely by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).<sup>6</sup> (See Figure 6).

The Santee Wateree RTA works with a local college and university in Orangeburg, South Carolina. The college has its main campus outside of town but is building downtown and wants service between the two campuses. The university has an agreement with the RTA to offer a commuter service fare free for students and employees. The university is conducting a survey to explore the idea of a student fee for transit and the expansion of transit services to reduce the number of vehicles on campus.

**Figure 6: CAT bus and new CAT facility**



Source: CAT

<sup>6</sup> FTA Press Release. U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood Announces \$2.5 Million in Economic Recovery Act Dollars for ‘Green’ Transit Facility in Clemson. January 20, 2010. [http://www.fta.dot.gov/newsroom/12288\\_11113.html](http://www.fta.dot.gov/newsroom/12288_11113.html)

## Observations and Challenges

SCDOT identified three main challenges in involving transit in statewide planning: 1) lack of formal requirements or incentives; 2) lack of funding; and 3) negative perception of what coordination of transit provision entails. SCDOT noted that the lack of funding can be both a challenge and benefit, since it can foster opportunities to leverage each other's efforts. In terms of coordination, for many the term implies reducing clients and jobs rather than effectively sharing activities and services such as training and maintenance. The latter can be positive for agencies' bottom line, allowing them to serve more clients and/or improve existing service, but requires agencies to adopt policies they may perceive as potentially negative. Thus there is a need to communicate and market how such activities can help without reducing clients or jobs.

*An SCDOT official reported that since they didn't have any way to require participation, they "had to be creative and build relationships to bring everyone to the table."*

COGs and transit providers also reported funding as a challenge, in particular due to the local match requirement, state of good repair burden, fragmented nature of human service transportation funding, and the recent loss of training funding. However, the CHSP process has had success in incorporating funding from various non-DOT Federal sources, such as the Department of Labor and Department of Health and Human Services; in addition, several transit agencies have succeeded in seeking out support from employers and universities, obtaining local support, or receiving Federal grants. Such examples include:

*"You really do need an official facilitator/advocate [for transit], otherwise things don't happen." – COG official. Another COG official agreed, "[Name] really hit the nail on the head. If you don't have a designated facilitator, things won't happen."*

- In 2010, LowCOG, LRTA, Beaufort County, and other local partners received an FTA Bus Livability grant to support new fixed-route circulator services, the first phase of a multiuse trail, and sidewalk improvements and construction.<sup>7</sup> The grant was a result of planning and survey work done by LowCOG, Beaufort County, and the University of South Carolina at Beaufort that was supported by Section 5304 (Statewide Planning) funding. The service has local support from nearby military facilities, which plan to offer their employees a monthly stipend for public transit use, and the tourism industry, which is looking into pre-purchasing tickets for hotel and restaurant guests. Although the grant is for less than originally requested, the partners have developed a revised plan that still will accomplish many of the project's goals.
- TriCounty Link, which is the rural bus system for the counties of Berkeley, Charleston, and Dorchester, was founded in 1996 with \$30,000 in annual funding commitments from each county for three years. After that period, the service was expected to become self-sufficient, which it did through providing Medicaid and contract services. The service now receives a half

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<sup>7</sup> Urban Circulator/Bus and Bus Livability Project Descriptions.  
[http://www.fta.dot.gov/news/news\\_events\\_11820.html](http://www.fta.dot.gov/news/news_events_11820.html)

cent sales tax revenue commitment from Charleston County as a result of a referendum. The commitment is for 20 years, and it has allowed TriCounty Link to provide additional services.

- Lancaster County applied for and received a \$240,000 grant to develop demand-response services for non-Medicaid medical patients from the J. Marion Sims Foundation, a local foundation set up by trustees of the nearby Elliott White Springs Memorial Hospital for health and wellness projects.
- LSCOG was able to combine USDOT and US Department of Health and Human Services grants to fund an Aging, Disability, and Transportation Resource Center and equip transit vehicles throughout the region with intelligent transportation systems technology. The project began in 2003, when LSCOG was selected to become South Carolina's first Aging and Disability Resource Center, which was intended to streamline access to information and assistance for older adults, family caregivers, and people with disabilities. At the same time, through the regional coordinated plan process, the LSRTMA became interested in adopting new transit technology to improve the provision of information and services. As a result, LSCOG and its partners were able to pursue and achieve an integrated approach to providing information and assistance on human services, benefits, and mobility options.

Transit technology in the project includes: reservations, scheduling and dispatch software system with on-line access; automatic vehicle location/mobile data computers installed in approximately 100 vehicles; voice communications, including an interactive voice response system and support for a call center; and a website with an on-line reservation system. Such technology assists in providing real-time information to customers but also coordinating available seats on vehicles. Federal funding sources for the project include a 2005 transformation grant from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid, facilitated by the Lieutenant Governor's Office of Aging; a USDOT [Mobility Services for All Americans Initiative](#) planning grant and then implementation grant; and ARRA funding for the building. For this project, LSCOG won one of five United We Ride Leadership Awards in 2009 and was awarded Project of the Year for 2010 by the South Carolina Association of Regional Councils.

- As mentioned above, LSCOG also received ARRA funding. One ARRA grant is to add space to its building to house the coordination one-call center, and another grant is to build a \$3.5 million transit center in Orangeburg. Clemson Transit was also successful in obtaining ARRA funding for a \$4 million green transit facility. In addition to grants, transit providers have also pursued sponsorship and wrapping buses to bring in revenue and attract riders as well as pursue partnerships with businesses and universities to ensure ridership.

The FY2008-2009 Transit Trends report identified two main challenges for transit in South Carolina: its rural nature and the perception or public image of transit. One transit provider commented on the rural nature by stating, "The challenge with rural transportation is that you have small rural towns and roads for miles and miles and miles. Towns may have a nurse practitioner, but if you need a specialist, you have to travel for 30-60 miles." Thus distances and access to services is seen as a key issue in rural transit.

The COGs and transit providers also identified perception of transit as a key challenge. To many residents of South Carolina, transit is for the poor, elderly, and handicapped. However, there is an impression that the perception is changing and that more people are choosing to ride transit. COGs have worked with transit providers to change perception through marketing and education. Marketing is difficult because there is a balance between communicating the need for financial support and providing professional, desirable services. Education related to the benefits of rural transit investments has primarily focused on the role of transit in enabling communities to grow and the benefits of reduced air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. TriCounty Link’s success in changing perception and ridership is highlighted in the text box below.

*“It’s heartwarming to see that transit in rural areas is no longer just for people who don’t have cars.” – Transit provider, regarding the change in perception and use of rural transit.*

Transit providers seemed in agreement that regional transit systems across multiple counties would be more cost efficient, help reduce competition for the limited funding, and improve coordination. They also had significant commentary on the Medicaid transportation brokerage system (see text box below).

**Success in Changing Perception of Transit: TriCounty Link**

The executive director identifies four ways in which TriCounty Link has been able to make itself more attractive to potential passengers. First, the agency hired a community outreach person who travels throughout the region to educate people on the difference transit can make. Second, the agency changed its name from the Berkeley, Charleston, Dorchester Rural Transportation Management Authority (BCD-RTMA) to TriCounty Link and adopted a new logo and mascot, Linky (see Figure 7). Third, TriCounty Link developed a reciprocal commuter agreement with Charleston Area Rapid Transit Authority (CARTA), which means TriCounty Link passengers are now able to transfer at no-cost between TriCounty Link services and CARTA and vice versa. Finally, the agency continues to add innovative transit services, such as the Link to Lunch service and free wireless on its commuter buses. Another transit agency, Clemson Area Transit, also reported success with innovation; it just became the first transit agency in South Carolina to offer a Google transit trip planner on its website.

Figure 7: TriCounty Link vehicle and mascot, Linky



Source: [TriCounty Link press release](#)

#### Medicaid Transportation Brokerage Transition

South Carolina recently transitioned to a brokerage system for Medicaid transportation and, as such, is identifying how best to improve results moving forward. Prior to the brokerage, the State bid the Medicaid service by county and most were awarded to public transit agencies. This provided transit agencies with a stable income and the ability to coordinate human service and public transportation trips by multi-loading, or placing different types of passengers on the same vehicle. Under the brokerage, two large private companies broker services in six regions, which do not match the 10 regional planning districts. The broker decides with which agency it will contract at the local level, from local transit providers to small private businesses. Coordination with public transportation providers, which is required for several Federal funding programs, is not required as part of the broker contract.

The brokerage system provides for administrative cost efficiencies and coordination across larger areas. However, the system needs to work to improve standardized training and reporting for all participating transit operators, facilitation of multi-loading, and predictability of service type for customers. Multi-loading vehicles are critical in rural transportation to meet the demand and critical for good coordination.

## Conclusions

- SCDOT makes important contributions to the success of rural transit by holding COGs to many of the same standards as MPOs, including review and selection of projects for funding, performance management, and LRTPs and RPWPs.
- SCDOT uses a balanced set of performance measures to allocate funding for Section 5311 funds to encourage efficiency and effectiveness.
- SCDOT uses a transit data system and report (Transit Trends) to track transit performance throughout the State, including rural areas, to provide transparency and accountability, inform the State legislature, guide State priorities and initiatives, and identify needs and challenges. The Transit Trends report has recognized that due to the rural nature of the State, there is a significant need to direct resources to the particular challenges of rural transit.
- The involvement of COGs in rural transit varies significantly throughout the State although there appears to be a trend in developing regional transportation systems in rural areas and increasing COG involvement to support this regionalization.
- SCDOT has not had the ability to mandate or enforce many activities so it has instead relied on “working from the bottom up,” or from the local level, in developing its regional and State plans. This approach creates ownership and buy-in by local agencies and stakeholders and allows SCDOT to better understand how needs differ significantly across the 10 planning regions.
- SCDOT, the COGs, and local transit agencies are working to adapt and integrate Federal priorities, such as economic development, livability, and air quality.
- The negative perception of transit in rural areas may be changing in non-urban areas as rural transit providers increasingly partner with employers, provide innovative services, and focus on marketing and education on the positive role transit can play in a community.