

LCTA Report

Introduction

Mass transit in Luzerne County impacts lives on a daily basis; through its involvement in several roles. These roles include:

- Welfare: Mass transit gets people to jobs and off welfare.
- Seniors: Transports seniors to multiple destinations to meet daily needs
- Healthcare: Moves people to treatment centers to avoid home healthcare and/or hospitalization.
- Education: Transports kids to school.
- Overall: Brings people to their destination to reduce the impact of traffic congestion on all roads.

Mass transit is more than a convenience to local residents – it creates a tremendous return on investment. Studies show that there is a return on investment of \$3.00 for every \$1.00 spent on mass transit. With a successful mass transit system, you can transport people to jobs, school, health services, and personal business. This, in turn, increases employer productivity, healthcare, school attendance, and also reduces the use of fuel, traffic congestion, and parking issues.

Overview of LCTA and the Region

The LCTA, serving the city of Wilkes-Barre and the surrounding areas, provides a vital service to the county's 65 and older population, shopping centers, and industrial parks. Since 2004, the LCTA has experienced increases among the total passengers it serves, and the total revenue generated.

Luzerne County is a region saturated with an elderly population. According to the 2000 Census, Luzerne County held a median age of 40.8 – well above the statewide average of 38.0 and the national average of 35.3. Five years later, the 2005 American Community Survey estimates that the county has a median age of 42.3 – still significantly above the statewide average of 39.7 and national average of 36.4.

For 2000 and 2005, the population 65 years and over comprised of 15.6 percent and 14.6 percent of the total population for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania respectively. Both totals represent a higher percentage than the national averages of 12.4 percent in 2000 and 12.1 percent in 2005. In fact, according to a 2002 US Census Bureau report, Pennsylvania held the second highest percentage of population 65 years and older in the US. Still, Luzerne County holds a significantly higher percentage of 65 years and older population than the Commonwealth. In 2000, Luzerne County's 65 years and older represented an astonishing 19.7 percent of the total population. For 2005, the County's mark of 17.6 percent still ranks higher than both the statewide and national averages.

To put it in perspective, Luzerne County has one of the largest elderly populations, in the state, which boasts the second highest percentage of elderly population in the country. In fact, researchers predict that by 2025, an estimated 20 percent of the US population will be over the age of 65 – a percentage in which Luzerne County has held since 1990.

Understanding the demographic background for Luzerne County is important as you take a closer look at the mass transit system. Since 2003, the LCTA has provided transportation to over five million persons. During that same time, senior citizens represented forty percent, or over two million of those passengers. That produces a senior citizen ratio of two out of every five passengers boarding a LCTA bus. Statistics show that the public transportation system is vital to the elderly population – particularly a region that is saturated with that demographic.

One reason mass transit is used by the elderly population is to get to and from healthcare facilities. Recently, the LCTA drivers were surveyed and asked to identify the three busiest drop spots, during their routes. Results showed that five healthcare centers were mentioned in the top three, on five different routes. The routes included:

- Run #1: General Hospital
- Run #5: Geisinger Hospital
- Run #11: Nesbitt Hospital
- Run #12: Saxton Medical Pavilion
- Run #14: Mercy Hospital

In addition to benefiting the elderly population, the LCTA continues to provide passengers with non-stop transportation to the newly constructed shopping centers throughout Luzerne County. In analyzing the LCTA ridership and revenue statistics, you will find that Run #10 – the Wyoming Valley Mall, and Run #18 – the Shopper's Delight, are two of the more popular routes. In fact, Run #10 and Run #18 have accounted for over 18 percent of the total transfers collected since 2003.

Run #18, in particular, has experienced tremendous increases in total revenue and passengers since 2003. Run #18-or Shopper's Delight, provides passengers access to the following shopping centers:

- Public Square
- Sam's Club
- Wegman's
- Super Wal-Mart
- Wyoming Valley Mall
- Target
- Barnes & Noble
- Bed Bath & Beyond
- Best Buy
- Lowe's

Comparing 2003 totals to 2007 projected totals, Run #18 has more than doubled its passenger totals [32,636 to 66,597] and tripled its revenue totals [\$8,347.09 to \$33,340.22].

In addition to Run's #10 and #18, are Run's #14 and #11. Both runs are also among the more popular routes, and feature stops at local shopping centers. Run #14 features stops at Penn Plaza, Hanover Plaza Shopping Center, and the Colonial Shopping Center, while Run #11 features a stop at the Midway Shopping Center, located in Wyoming. And according to the recent survey of LCTA drivers, these shopping centers are mentioned among the three busiest stops on those particular routes. What is significant is that these two routes, which again feature shopping centers as their busiest stops, comprised of over 25 percent of the total revenue generated from 2003 to 2006.

With the significant increases, and sizable amount of passenger increases and revenue generated, the routes featuring destinations of shopping centers, continue to drive the county's transit system. Coupled with the current and future economic development in the county, these routes will continue to increase in passengers and revenue.

Another beneficiary of the LCTA is the local industrial parks – in particular the Hanover Industrial Park. According to the recent LCTA driver survey, the Hanover Industrial Park is the busiest stop among Run #13 (Ashley). Not only is the park a busy stop for that route, but for the entire transit system. From 2003 to 2007, Run #13 has reported a total of 407,989 passengers – fourth highest among all routes during that time. And during that same time period, Run #13 has experienced the second highest increase in total passengers, ranking only behind the increases found in Run #18. With more industrial parks planned throughout the county, including the large development along I-81 in Pittston, the LCTA will continue to see increases as it provides transportation to and from work for county residents.

The increased traffic to and from shopping centers and industrial parks is found when analyzing the transfer statistics. From the FY 2003-2004 to FY 2006-2007, the number of transfers sold has increased over 25 percent.

In addition to transfers sold, passenger and total revenue figures continue to experience increases. From 2003 to 2007 (projected), the LCTA will experience a 48.2 percent increase in revenue, with the projected revenue to be at \$531,736.71. And while the LCTA experienced a decrease in total passengers from FY 2003-2004 to FY 2004-2005, they have experienced growth every year since. In fact, the LCTA is projected to provide transportation to over 1.4 million persons in the FY 2006-2007.

LCTA's Future

Future goals of the LCTA include:

- Rerouting: providing service when and where riders want it.
- Partnering: working with other organizations to pool resources.
- Marketing: ensuring people know about the service.
- Efficiency: form a buying group with the Lackawanna County Transit Authority.

Short-term goals include:

- Rerouting: review trip origin and destination to plot ridership and assess needs.
- Partnering: develop partnerships with colleges, universities, high schools, and employers.
- Marketing: creating awareness to capture a larger market segment.

To increase ridership from all demographic segments, mass transit authorities must create a system that is superior to the automobile, based upon the standards of the automobile users. These standards include:

- Actual travel time has to be comparable
- Schedule has to be frequent so that waiting and transfer time is negligible
- System has to be dense
- System has to be dependable
- System has to have enough capacity at peak hours to carry people comfortably
- Routes have to be simple and fixed
- All stops must have schedule and fare information
- System has to be predictable
- System has to be available at all times

Conclusion

In closing, the LCTA is a transit authority that is growing, in conjunction with the county. As more and more shopping centers are created, and industrial parks open, the LCTA will be a greater force in the region, providing residents easy access to experience the amenities, healthcare, employment, and education opportunities easily. As has been the case, the LCTA will continue to benefit the elderly population throughout the county. In addition, to being a mass transit tool to decrease congestion and parking, the LCTA serves a social service. With the added benefit of a \$3 to \$1 return on investment, the LCTA needs to be given the funding and tools to assist it in reaching the next level of service. With continued support, and the accomplishment of the short and long-term goals laid out, the LCTA can grow and become a major player in the redevelopment of the county.