

4. Public Outreach

The *StarTran Transit Development Plan* includes an extensive community participation program designed to elicit input from members of the general public, current users of the system, community leaders, key policy decision makers and other transportation stakeholders in Lincoln. The public outreach efforts include such activities as drop-in sessions, stakeholder interviews, open houses, and a section on the City of Lincoln’s website for members of the public to leave comments. A 13 member Advisory Committee consisting of all 7 members of the StarTran Advisory Board members and 6 other community representatives met 6 times throughout the TDP process to help guide the process and direct the findings. Their names and affiliations are presented below.

Beatty Brasch, StarTran Advisory Board

Jennifer Dam, UNL Institute for Research and Planning

Susan Epps, StarTran Advisory Board

Jill Flagel, StarTran Advisory Board

Rod Griess, StarTran Advisory Board

Randy Hoskins, Public Works & Utilities, Engineering Services

Kevin Johnson, Citizen

Dallas McGee, Urban Development Department

Patte Newman, City Council

Joy Patten, StarTran Advisory Board

Kim Phelps, StarTran Advisory Board

Jane Stricker, Citizen

Other outreach efforts included driver meetings and public meetings for the public to comment on recommended route changes.

Initial Public Outreach

In all, a total of 376 members of the public provided input into the early stages of the study, as follows:

Drop-ins	
UNL Student Union	65
State Office Building	120
Gold’s Transfer Center (Midday)	54
Gold’s Transfer Center (PM Peak)	60
Open Houses	
Energy Square	15
Bennett Martin Public Library	10
Internet Comments	2
Stakeholders	50
Total	376

Drop-In Sessions

A “drop-in” session is a session where the public talks directly to the consultant team on a one-on-one basis and offers suggestions for improvements or comments on the system. Four drop-in sessions were held; one on the University of Nebraska Campus on April 25, 2006, one at the State Office Building on May 9, 2006, and two at the Gold’s Building in downtown on May 10, 2006. Together, the four sessions produced comments from 300 individuals. Both users and non-users were targeted at the drop-in sessions.

Comments from the sessions are grouped into several categories for this summary, as follows:

- Service Area Expansion
- Service Frequency
- Extended Service Hours
- Extended Days of Service
- Quality of Service
- Amenities
- Public Information
- Other Comments

Service Area Expansion

There were many comments about the need to expand into new areas. A common comment which was both a compliment and a complaint is about service to downtown. People felt that the service is good for serving the downtown area. However, people complained that coming into downtown and then having to transfer to get to their destination is not a convenient way to get there.

They also mentioned that many generators outside of downtown are not served. People want to see service extended to the new Wal-Mart and the new cardiac hospital on South 84th Street near Highway 2, and medical offices on South 70th Street. Other people mentioned service to the airport and employers in that vicinity such as Kawasaki. An area that people want to see served better is the Haymarket area. This area is close to downtown and the StarTran storage facility, yet receives no bus service. Others mentioned that areas that have some service need more, such as Northern Lights and Rolling Hills.

People noted that the limited service area is an issue, and yet routes are spaced too close together. One person mentioned that Lincoln has been growing over the last 20 years while the service area of StarTran has been shrinking.

Besides serving new areas, there were comments on new services. Some people thought that grid services would be better than the current service pattern which has every route serving downtown. Other people felt the service is too slow, and think that express service is needed, which should be created along with park and ride. This would serve people coming from further away, or from areas outside of the current service area, and would provide a quicker and more attractive trip. An issue with the downtown loop is that it is too long.

Service Frequency

One of the more common comments was that service is not frequent enough. While users and non-users said this was an issue, some users mentioned it in context of their route only, or just for certain times of day. A lot of students mentioned that the bus schedule needs to coincide better with class schedules.

Extended Service Hours

Most comments regarding service hours stemmed from the need for service to operate beyond 7:00 PM, which is the time period that service terminates today. There were some recommendations as to how late service should run, which ranged from 9:00 PM to 1:00 AM, with some people requesting 24 hour service. The requests were for later service on all days, not just on weekdays. A small number of people did request that service start earlier in the morning in order to access jobs, especially when a transfer is needed.

Extended Service Days

The desire for Sunday service was mentioned by many people. They have noticed that the job market has changed in Lincoln, and people need access to jobs on all days of the week. Besides Sunday service, there was a general displeasure with the interlining of routes on Saturdays, which results in long and indirect trips for a lot of people who have to ride the entire route length in one direction to get to or from a location. This item is something both riders and non-riders found to be important.

Quality of Service

Comments on quality of service mentioned such issues as driver behavior and condition of the bus. Many people mentioned that most of the drivers are good, with the occasional “bad apple” driver. Others mentioned that they have issues with drivers such as speeding, rudeness, and drivers not announcing stops or routes, and drivers passing up passengers as they wait at stops. Some people said that drivers have been good about holding buses to facilitate transfers, while others have said that they have not done so and need to do more for transferring passengers.

Most people are happy with the buses, but have issues such as the smell of cigarette smoke, buses being dirty in general, loud brakes, or issues with the air conditioning. There were a few complaints about wheelchair lifts not working; however this may have been solved with the new low-floor buses. One person mentioned that it would be nice if there was a restroom provided on-board buses. One person said that they would like to see seatbelts on-board buses. Other people mentioned that buses need to be more distinguishable, both in terms of being more visible, and for passengers to be able to distinguish one route from another.

Another set of comments that fall within quality of service are comments regarding fares. Many people find that the current fare levels and passes provided, especially the “Ride for \$5” passes, are great. Some people find that the fare is quite expensive. Others like the free fare bracelets that are sold. A recommendation is that an annual pass should be provided. Many people think that the low fares and quality of service should be marketed in light of the current high gas prices.

Amenities

Users and non-users commented about the amenities at bus stops and onboard buses. We received a number of comments that there should be bike racks on buses to complement the trail system within Lincoln. Many people requested bus shelters at their bus stop and recognized that outlying areas are lacking this amenity. In the downtown area people complained about the condition of the major transfer stops.

Public Information

There were a number of comments regarding public information. Many people had issues with the information line, that it takes a very long time to get information from the line and many times it is not accurate. One person mentioned that major stops should have a kiosk that says when the last bus came and the next one is expected so people know if they missed their bus. Some people had issues with the current timetables, and recommend adding more timepoints to the schedules as well as provide a schedule booklet. On the timetables people would like to see more stops displayed. A system map should be more widely available to assist users. Another issue with public information is the lack of announcements when buses need to detour due to construction. A good feature for the website would be an online trip planner.

Other Comments

Some other comments pertained to reasons why people do or do not use the bus. People said they use the bus to avoid high gas prices, to meet interesting people, or to read while commuting, and

they like that they can get most places they need to go. People do not ride the bus because they have a car and enjoy driving, parking makes driving very convenient, some people fear losing parking privilege if they don't drive, parking space is already paid for, because they live on the UNL campus, or they are not educated about the system. Also, it is difficult to run errands using the bus. A few people who do not use the bus regularly did comment that they do like and use some of the special services, such as UNL game day services and the Holiday Light Tours service.

Other comments were that students are loud and rowdy on buses. The image of the typical bus rider is lower income, whether this is true or not, and this is a perception that also keeps some people from riding. Also, people thought that StarTran planners should listen to what bus drivers have to say, as bus drivers are on the front line and know the issues. People who use the system did say that StarTran is good at reacting to comments made by users and is the best way to travel when weather is bad.

Open Houses

Two open houses were held on May 11, 2006. The first one was an afternoon session at Southeast Community College/Energy Square. The second one was in the evening at Bennett Martin Public Library. About 15 people attended the afternoon open house and 10 people attended in the evening. Both users and non-users attended the open houses.

Comments from the meetings are grouped into several categories for this summary, as follows:

- Administrative
- Land use and zoning
- Service expansion
- Public information
- Vehicle and driver issues
- Amenities

Administrative

People at the sessions mentioned that funding is an issue for StarTran. They want to see a comparison to peer systems to see how well StarTran is doing compared to systems that are the same size. Several individuals expressed an opinion that bus riders are already being given too much in the form of subsidy. The U-Pass at UNL is a great program and should be expanded to other Lincoln colleges. People love the "Ride for \$5" program; however there should be a graduated system of increases for these passes, instead of just having to pay full price when you are above the poverty level.

Land Use and Zoning

In the open houses people mentioned that one impediment to usage of the system is land use and zoning ordinances that encourage driving. The land use in Lincoln is lower density and

businesses are required to provide parking spaces, which is not supportive of a transit system. As a matter of fact, a lot of development is going on outside of the StarTran service area. Newer development needs to be built at a higher density. Also, more sidewalks need to be built which would improve access to transit.

Service Expansion

Service expansion was discussed in terms of both location and time. Many people feel that the Saturday network is ineffective and time consuming as people have indirect trips in one direction due to interlining, and service is not frequent enough. Transfers are not conveniently timed, resulting in long waits at transfer points, and making relatively short trips that require a transfer rather lengthy. Some Sunday service would be beneficial. Also, later evening service is needed in Lincoln, even if a premium fare was charged. Other people mentioned that transfers should be good for two-way travel on the same route.

Other areas that need service are newer development areas that are primarily on the south side of town. Some specific destinations mentioned include the Wal-Mart on South 84th Street, the Lancaster County Events Center, the airport and employers close to there, the Landings retirement home on 40th Street, and additional service to SouthPointe Pavillions. Many people feel that more frequent service is needed on some or all routes. More concentrated services like the Star Shuttle would be good.

Some people mentioned additional bus hubs so connections can occur outside of downtown, the creation of a grid system, and the current grid routes are no longer grid routes due to modification to serve downtown. These bus hubs could also serve as park and rides.

Other people mentioned service needs to expand into neighboring counties, with connections to neighboring systems such as Omaha.

Not all services should be fixed route; there may be some services that should operate in a demand response manner. Some people mentioned that Lincoln should take advantage of the fact that light rail vehicles are manufactured in Lincoln to implement a light rail system on major corridors.

Most people agree that service should be concentrated into areas that need it more. Service has shrunk as the town has grown.

Public Information

More education about the transit system is needed. People at both open houses mentioned that people should be educated about the environmental benefits of transit and the low cost, especially with the high cost of gas and parking costs. Also, there is a misconception of what type of person is riding the bus, and this needs to be corrected. StarTran is implementing an AVL system, which can be used for real time bus information. The city should use its GIS system to show by address access to transit. The operators on the customer information line do not know very much about the system.

Vehicle and Driver Issues

A few issues with bus drivers and vehicles were mentioned. Some of the bus headsigns have bad lighting. The brakes on some of the buses are a bit squeaky. Bus drivers are not always doing a good job calling out stops and are sometimes not stopping for patrons at bus stops. Some drivers are not adhering to the published schedule.

Amenities

The discussion on amenities yielded many comments. People would like to see bike racks on buses. The downtown transfer facility is not a pleasant waiting environment with smoke, concrete, and car exhaust. Bus shelters should have floor heating as they are quite cold in the winter. All bus stops should have some form of seating. There needs to be more shelters and windscreens. Also, at the stops on Lincoln Mall and at 47th and R Street it is difficult to see the bus coming.

Internet Comments

On the City of Lincoln website, in the section pertaining to the TDP, there is a section that allows members of the public to e-mail comments to the study. Two internet e-mail comments were received. The e-mail comments did raise a lot of the same issues that were raised at other outreach sessions such as the need for service to the Haymarket area, night time service, and providing more grid route service versus having all routes go downtown. Another comment mentioned is that StarTran needs to start thinking big as Lincoln is starting to become a big town.

Stakeholder Interviews

Over the course of two site visits – April 24-25, 2006 and May 8-12, 2006 -- the project team had 27 sessions with stakeholders in the community representing a broad spectrum of interests, including elected officials; city, regional, and state department and agency staff; and members of the business community, human services sector, University of Nebraska Lincoln, and citizen's groups. A list of participants is provided in Table 4-1. In all 50 individuals participated in discussions ranging in length from about 30 minutes to an hour covering topics including the role of public transportation in the community, public policy and finance, StarTran operations, community transportation needs, and other perceptions related to bus service and the direction of this project.

Table 4-1: Stakeholder Meeting Participants

Name	Organization/Agency
June Pederson, Director	Lincoln Area Agency on Aging
Deborah Peck, Community Activities and Services Director	Lincoln Area Agency on Aging
Wayne McClaran, Director of Transportation	Lincoln Area Agency on Aging
Richard Blair, Director	Foundation
Erica Williams, Mall Manager	Westfield Mall Gateway
Bernice Westerholt, Property Accountant	Westfield Mall Gateway
Mike Schafer, CEO	League of Human Dignity
Matt Schaefer, President	Association of Students at UNL
Matt Connolly, External Vice President	Association of Students at UNL
David Solheim, Government Liaison Committee Member	Association of Students at UNL
Jeff Fierhan, Property Manager	SouthPointe Pavilions
Marian Malone	Citizens Transportation Coalition
Rick Krueger, President	Krueger Development
Don Herz, Financial Director	City Finance Department
Steve Hubka, Budget Officer	City Finance Department
Gordon Winters, Editor	Journal Star
Karl Fredrickson, Director	Lincoln Public Works and Utilities Dept.
Bruce Bohrer, Senior Vice President	Chamber of Commerce
Kit Boesch, Director	Lancaster County Human Services
Steve Richman, Employer Services Manager	Nebraska Workforce Development
Dan Cain, Program Manager	Lincoln One Stop Employment Solutions
Larry Williams, Executive Director	Human Rights Commission
Dennis Van Horn, Associate Superintendent for Business Affairs	Lincoln Public Schools
Bill McCoy, Director of Operations	Lincoln Public Schools
Robin Eschliman, Councilperson	Lincoln City Council
Jon Camp, Councilperson	Lincoln City Council
Patte Newman, Councilperson	Lincoln City Council
Terry Werner, NASW	Citizen, former City Council member
Beatty Brasch, Executive Director	Center for People in Need
Coby Mach, Executive Director	Lincoln Independent Business Association
A. Craig Mason Jr.	Attorney-at-Law
Peter W. Katt	Lawyer
Debby Brehm	Douglas Theater Company
Gene Carroll	Planning Commission
Jon Carlson	Planning Commission
Roger Larson	Planning Commission
Marc Wullschleger, Director	Lincoln Urban Development Dept.
Hallie Salem AICP, Community Development Program Specialist	Lincoln Urban Development Dept.
Kathy Northrup, Community Development Program Specialist	Lincoln Urban Development Dept.
Les Helms, President	ATU
Christine Jackson, Vice Chancellor for Business and Finance	University of Nebraska Lincoln
Dan Carpenter, Parking and Transit Director	University of Nebraska Lincoln
Polly McMullen, President	Downtown Lincoln Association
Pearl Van Zandt, Executive Director	Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Jeff Altman	Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Director Marvin Krout	City/County Planning Department
Assistant Director Kent Morgan	City/County Planning Department
Colleen Seng, Mayor	City of Lincoln
Ann Harrell, Aide to the Mayor	City of Lincoln
Rodney Griess, Chairman	StarTran Board (Via telephone)

As would be expected, the views among the fifty participants were widely varied, and yet there were a large number of commonalities found in the discussions, even between those perceived to be pro-transit and those perceived to be anti-transit. The discussion that follows defines a number of overarching topics that were prevalent during the discussions, along with the range of thoughts that ran through each and shaped them.

Broadly, the topic areas include the following:

- **Public Policy:** What is the role of public transportation, or what should the role be, in Lincoln? How well does public policy support this role? What is the perception of StarTran as the provider of public transportation?
- **Finance:** How is StarTran service supported, and how does that support affect the StarTran program? Is the current method and level of finance reasonable?
- **Service Quality:** How well does StarTran meet its perceived mission? How can StarTran improve its service to the community? How is StarTran constrained in carrying out its mission?
- **Service Needs:** What are the needs of the community for bus service? Are these needs being met? Are there services being provided that are not needed?
- **Improvements:** What can StarTran or the community at large do to improve service? How should StarTran change to meet the changing needs of the community?

The following pages describe the findings from the stakeholder interviews with regard to these topics, with particular attention to the range of opinions in each area, but also to the commonalities within each that were found despite that range. Note that these topics are not mutually exclusive and therefore some ideas and issues may be repeated in more than one discussion.

Public Policy: The Role of Public Transportation in Lincoln

As noted at the outset, despite the feeling in the community that there are two distinct camps of transit supporters and transit detractors, after speaking with 50 individuals from all points of view, it appears that this simplistic viewpoint misses all the grey areas in-between, and that the discussion is far more nuanced.

Public transportation, which does not have to be defined simply as fixed route StarTran bus services, was universally supported by everyone with whom we spoke as a necessary part of the city's infrastructure. Everyone understands that there are a significant number of individuals in the community who are transit dependent due to age, income, disability and who rely upon public transportation for mobility. In the absence of public transportation, these individuals depend upon family and friends, human service agency services, or a poor but expensive taxi system. Too often, a lack of transportation services renders many transit dependents unable to travel at all, even for the most important trips for medical services, food shopping, etc. Furthermore, an extensive route network supports the city's mission to diversify housing throughout the community, supports job access programs, and generally contributes to the quality of life for these citizens, which in turn can be seen as a benefit to the entire community.

The public policy issue, therefore, is not whether to provide public transportation, but rather how to provide it effectively and efficiently, and to whom. This is where the diverse opinions can be seen among those who were interviewed.

Most of those interviewed believe that StarTran provides service only for the transit dependent and that there are only a few if any choice riders on the buses. While this viewpoint may prove to

be ultimately erroneous based on the drop-in interviews and on-board survey that was conducted, it has a powerful impact:

- Most individuals think that the system should be focused upon the transit dependent, and many in fact think that the system should not be attempting to attract the choice rider.
- Many among the “pro-transit” camp believe that StarTran is not doing enough for the transit dependent population, particularly the low income population, is spending too much time and effort and marketing activity to attract a choice market they feel is not ever going to use the system in large numbers, and does not really care about its low income riders.
- Those in the “anti-transit camp feel similarly. They believe that StarTran is wasting its resources trying to be all things to all people, trying to be everywhere, and trying to attract choice riders who will not ever use the system.

Both groups, therefore, believe that public policy is misguided with respect to its position regarding transit service. Both feel that by trying to do too much, the system is spreading itself too thinly and therefore is unable to deliver quality service to either group, the transit dependents or the choice riders. The underlying assumption from all parties is that:

- Transit should only be provided where it has a chance to succeed, and if that means restructuring service to concentrate it upon the higher probability areas of the community and reducing service to the other parts of the community, that would be a better use of resources.
- Transit does not have to always be provided by big buses on fixed routes. There are a wide range of opinions on this topic, including individuals who would do away with buses in favor of taxi vouchers, vans or other paratransit services, but ultimately everyone believes that a hard look is needed to identify the appropriate service design and mode of travel that matches the diverse markets in the community. More will be said later regarding system design features and recommendations from the stakeholders.
- Most people spoke of rethinking public policy to de-emphasize the need to have universal coverage in favor of a set of policies and standards which puts bus services in those areas that need service.

There are points of disagreement as well concerning public policy:

- Some in the community feel that the system should only be designed for the transit dependent, and that trying to provide services for choice riders is futile in a community that so values its cars, cheap and available parking, and immediate access and mobility.
- Others believe that the city should continue to strive to provide service for choice riders, should strive to integrate bus services into its “new urbanism” vision for higher densities and smart growth, and that well-designed and funded transit can do this.
- Some believe that it is pointless to think that transit can be a tool for economic development, and that transit ridership even at its best would be insignificant in comparison to automobile travel, and insignificant with regard to location choice for new and relocating businesses. Therefore any spending beyond that to provide service for the transit dependents is futile and a waste of tax dollars.

- On the other hand, pro-transit advocates point out that transit is in fact an economic development tool already. It provides access to jobs for those who otherwise might not be able to get to them. It provides access to services which in turn puts more dollars into the economy. It creates tax dollars in the form of income taxes and sales taxes on money earned and spent by its riders. And over the long term, it does impact, even modestly, development patterns, particularly with regard to residential choice location, housing diversity and public housing policies.
- Finally, some interviewed thought the city could do more in its policies to support the bus system, by looking at the interrelationship between bus service, bus fares, parking supply, and parking pricing; potentially developing strategies to encourage a shift from the car to the bus for downtown oriented travel. These same individuals felt strongly that the University of Nebraska Lincoln could do the same, shifting its policies from the car to transit use, and furthermore could integrate its policies with those of the city. But others felt that any policies restricting parking or increasing parking pricing would have a deleterious affect on the city's economy and long-term development. These individuals feel that such policies would only serve to shift employment growth from downtown to either fringe locations or to other cities entirely, and the University position seems generally similar, that such policies could depress enrollment.

In summary regarding public policy, it appears that almost everyone believes that there is a role for public transportation in the community:

- The city has a responsibility to provide service to at least the transit dependent population.
- The city has a responsibility to spend its resources wisely in carrying out this mission, which means potentially reconsidering its policies and standards regarding transit, or considering alternative operating paradigms.

Finance: Funding Public Transportation Services

Tied closely to public policy issues are public finance issues regarding transit, and a great deal was said on this topic as well. While the general feeling is that there has to be public transportation in the community, at least for the transit dependent population, the issue here is how much to spend, how to spend it, and if it is being spent wisely.

The general feeling across the board is that public transportation is a necessary part of the city's services, and therefore should receive local funding for its support. While it is recognized that unlike many other services, transit does bring in a variety of revenues – fares, state and federal subsidies – the large level of local financing taken from the General Fund on an annual basis is still very large. In 2005, StarTran financial reports stated that the system' total operating cost was about \$ 8.0 million, of which \$ 1.2 million came from locally generated revenues, \$ 1.6 million from state and federal sources, and \$ 5.2 million (65 percent) from city general revenues.

The focus for most of the stakeholders was not on the need to spend money, but on the large amount being spent versus the benefits accrued to the community by having a system. The

amount of money being spent on StarTran was a lightning rod for a wide range of comments and perspectives:

- Several of those who were most positive about the need for bus service feel that StarTran does well with the limited resources available to it. These limitations can be seen in the cuts that are proposed almost annually and the degree of discussion at City Council hearings regarding these cuts, the needs of the community, and their potential impact. It is tough at budget time to compete for general fund dollars with a community lukewarm to transit.
- Others believe that StarTran’s problem vis-à-vis its budget is that it is trying to do too much, to be all things to all people; and that the real solution lies in tailoring the service to the real needs of the community. These people believe that the resources should be better allocated, that not all areas need service, and that service should be concentrated where it will be most effective, linking finance to the policy discussion described earlier. This response came from all perspectives, e.g. from the staunchest supporters of bus service and from those looking for alternative solutions. These individuals are strong proponents of increasing core route service levels and finding alternative means of providing services in other areas.
- Following upon the above comments, several individuals believe it is the city itself that has standards and policies that force StarTran into spreading itself too thin, and that StarTran is simply reflecting public policy in its choices.
- Some individuals who were less supportive of bus transit in general focused on the potential of completely new service paradigms, like shared taxi or coordinated van services in lieu of large buses. Specifically, the statement made by one individual is that “transit is needed but not in this form.” These people generally believe that the level of funding for transit is way too high, that there are better uses for general fund money, and that StarTran itself uses the money inappropriately and inefficiently. These opinions are counter-balanced by those who stated that StarTran seems to do more with less every year, that they appear to be well-managed and efficient in their use of resources, etc. One person felt that we should not be subsidizing trips for city and state workers, thus not only paying their salaries from taxes, but also for their trip to and from work.
- How the budget is determined each year, and how priorities are determined for additions and deletions of service in finalizing the number was a subject of great discussion. Many from all sides believe that StarTran does a solid job of reviewing and analyzing their services and developing preliminary recommendations each year in line with city goals and objectives for each budget cycle. They also believe that when the transit budget is presented those most in need of service form an effective lobbying group and are very vocal at the council meetings in defending StarTran and supporting the status quo. There was a range of opinions, however, on whether this process is actually good for the city and for the system:

- Those who represent the transit dependent core riders feel that this represents democracy at work in its purest sense, and provides the proper forum for citizen input into the decision-making process.
- Others believe that this process allows the “squeaky wheels” to formulate and bend public policy from doing what might be best for the community in its entirety, and that this process prevents the City from making hard decisions that may in fact need to be made. Many people commented how difficult it is for StarTran to make changes in light of the lobbying efforts, and further how hard it is for elected officials to demonstrate the political will to do something in a constructive manner. Some stated that the politics of transit prohibit StarTran from cutting its poorest routes even if they are aware of the savings that could accrue from such changes.
- There was also a more general concern that StarTran has to go from year to year with its budgeting and that the annual uncertainty prohibits StarTran from taking a more programmatic approach to change. With a more stabilized funding base, better planning and allocation of resources could result in a better system. Those who spoke to this issue also spoke of the need to look at alternative institutional arrangements like an authority and wondered what the potential would be of a city/university joint system with regard to these issues.

Taken together, the city policy and funding issues seem to point to a general conclusion that transit is necessary, but that the city and StarTran need to determine what it is that should be provided based upon a combination of need and reasonable financial support. To do this, standards have to be set that realistically match services to needs, that allow for consideration of alternative service delivery methods in low density areas, and that ultimately produce trips more cost-effectively.

StarTran Service Issues

Given the mission described for StarTran and the amount of money made available to work with, this section discusses perceptions regarding StarTran service and service quality as perceived by the stakeholders.

Again, despite the presumption that there are two camps in the community who are either for or against transit, there are a large number of commonalities with regard to their views on the services and quality of service being provided, which are summarized herein:

Image: A great deal of this discussion stemmed from StarTran’s image as perceived by the stakeholders. Even among supporters, in the end StarTran is perceived to be provided largely to the transit dependent population and is basically a social service program in the community. It is for the elderly who do not drive, it steps in where other options are expensive, of poor quality, or non-existent. This image is reinforced by the Ride for \$ 5.00 program, which has been very successful in increasing mobility for low income individuals, but has also contributed to an image of the bus as a system largely built for that population, along with the elderly.

It was also surprising how few people believe that the system is used by choice riders, despite the fact that the drop-ins and customer survey indicate otherwise. This lack of understanding of the ridership contributes to the image of the bus as a mode for only those who have no other choices available. StarTran clearly has to remedy this aspect of its image with more information, marketing, and outreach demonstrating that everyone uses the bus.

One of the issues to be considered during this project is how to ensure quality service to the core ridership population, while at the same time increasing opportunities to use the bus among choice riders. It was noted by stakeholders that the image of the bus as only for transit dependents is harmful in several ways – it keeps choice riders from considering the bus due to a lack of information and fear and uncertainty about riding, it limits its level of support in the community during budget hearings, and in the long run it will make it more difficult to maintain its funding and support for even its core riders.

Service Quality: What StarTran provides, it provides well according to most of the stakeholders. Very few people commented negatively about the management of the system, quality of the drivers, or conditions of the bus. Again, the general comment throughout was that StarTran does well with its limited resources in terms of what it does provide, but what it provides could be done better.

Service Design Issues – Design Issues, Community Needs and Improvement Concepts: Other than the discussion generated about funding levels and cost-effectiveness, these three interrelated topics produced the most comments and critiques of StarTran, and also began a process that will lead to many productive avenues of research as the project continues.

Regarding the design of the present fixed route network, there was substantial agreement on many points:

- First and foremost, the hub and spoke network oriented to Downtown Lincoln was heavily critiqued by most stakeholders. Having all but one route oriented to the downtown transfer point does not match with the changing community development and travel patterns, which have de-emphasized downtown as a destination and which have created far more non-CBD trips that do not match the bus service. Too many trips involve a transfer downtown, and therefore are too indirect, take too long and are non-competitive with automobile travel times.
- In the same vein, people questioned the need for the large downtown loop, which they thought added a lot of travel time to each bus route, again resulting in longer than needed travel times.
- People feel they see too many buses traveling around town empty or with just a few passengers.
- Many people said that the schedules were too short. Even if evening service is not being considered, several thought that the last buses should leave about an hour later, which

might make the service attractive for downtown workers in the private sector. But many thought a city of this size needs to have evening service.

- The Saturday route network was heavily criticized, as was the lack of Sunday service. Saturday routes were seen as particularly circuitous, with long headways, travel times, and a short span of service offered.
- People felt the current downtown shuttle is too large and does not do what it should, which is to provide frequent and direct connections around the core area and to and from the Haymarket.
- People liked the Husker shuttles and thought it is those types of services that could begin to attract choice riders.
- The Ride for \$ 5.00 was generally well-liked, although some of the less supportive individuals questioned whether that fare actually increased ridership among new riders or simply benefited existing users.
- Most people thought service went to most places in the community, although they cited some areas that need to be considered for service, including better service to the industrial areas around the airport, service to Wal-Mart and the new Cardiac Hospital at Highway 2 and 84th Street. At the same time others were concerned that service was spread too thin and that the system needed to cover less territory, not more.

Given that the critical design issue concerned the hub and spoke arrangement and the resulting routing issues, people in turn had many ideas regarding community needs and improvements, beginning with a de-emphasis on the downtown transfer center for all trips and more emphasis upon directness for non-CBD oriented travel, better designed routes allowing people to get around the community more easily, and longer hours. In essence, the service has to conform to the new Lincoln, but in doing so may have to change how it provides those services, particularly in less dense areas of the community. Some of the areas of most concern follow:

- The system needs to consider having multiple transit centers where people can make transfers outside the CBD between routes that are oriented to a range of locations, including downtown. These locations should be at key trip destinations in the city such as the Westfield Gateway Mall or SouthPointe Pavillions, and the routes serving them could be a combination of arterials and neighborhood circulators. One or two people were interested in developing a grid system for the city, although they recognized that could result in too many trips requiring transfers.
- The system should look into concentrating its services along core routes that have the most potential for ridership, and should reduce service in areas of low potential. Better levels of service should include more frequent and later services on these core routes. Feeders from the lower potential areas should consider alternative modes to large, fixed route buses. This concept was endorsed by people on all sides of the issues – those who

want to spend less money more effectively, as well as those who want to make sure that the system improves services to the core ridership.

- Overall, everyone wanted more directness, shorter travel times, and easier transfers on whatever routes are proposed. These are also seen as the key to attracting more work trips and choice users.
- To increase the ridership base, many were interested in pursuing additional options such as park and ride express buses, with the Southeast area considered the prime market; and amenities including WiFi, cushioned seating, etc. Shopper specials were also mentioned as a method to offer circulation in areas that may not need regular route service but rather specialized services largely oriented to the elderly.
- In planning new services, the study must not lose track of some critical markets according to many. This includes providing services in support of the city's housing program; and supporting foster parents and job access programs. Over time there are going to be increasing numbers of elderly as well as more subsidized housing in some of the less dense and more affluent areas of the city that will need services.
- The transit plan should work in concert with parking policies according to some, meaning that the city should think about residential permit programs around the university campuses, restricting the building of more supply in and around the CBD, and pricing parking to work with transit pricing. Others were adamantly opposed to such actions, feeling it would only encourage developers to go elsewhere. City and University officials both commented that the car is still king and any of these policies will be a hard sell until real congestion comes to Lincoln.
- The Ride for \$ 5.00 program should continue, and possibly be expanded to 150 percent of the poverty level according to some. A number of individuals feel that the cost of this pass cannot increase. Others questioned the program, whether it is achieving its desired outcome, and if in fact it is priced too low.
- Some people suggested more education and training to shift trips from HandiVan to the bus as a means of providing more cost-effective services overall.
- Marketing the system appropriately to broaden its image was seen as beneficial to most, although some thought that StarTran already is trying too hard to market to the middle class and is not paying enough attention to the low income riders.
- Several individuals want bike racks on the buses. They feel this would be a low cost way to attract more users, would tie the system into the extensive trail system, and would improve the system's image and build its support in the community.
- Those involved with the downtown and its economic development support a concept for a high frequency, short distance shuttle linking parking, downtown businesses, the south end of the UNL campus, and the Haymarket area. They feel a hop on, hop off service

would attract riders, minimize car use in the CBD, and enhance the system's image. The belief is that downtown is vibrant and will be a focal point if not the only focal point even as the city grows outward.

- In thinking about alternative services, the question was raised about integrating van services into the program, possibly for neighborhood services.
- People wanted to investigate the integration of the City and UNL services to determine what benefits, if any, might accrue from such an arrangement. They also wanted to examine an authority and how that might help stabilize funding.

In summary, most people believe that people in Lincoln will not give up their car easily, and therefore all changes that are considered need to be measured, e.g. not overbuilt, with services concentrated where the market can demonstrate a need. The feeling that the City and StarTran sometimes go too far in providing service makes it important that the service be properly redesigned around these points, and that city policy be changed to move away from having to serve everyone and everywhere rather than serving those areas where transit can be most effective. In doing so, however, the challenge for the project will be to do this while showing how the system can serve both the core rider as well as the choice rider, thus building a larger constituency and support for the program.

Summary

Whether talking to riders at the drop-ins and open houses, non-riders at these events, or the stakeholders, there were a number of common threads that ran through all of the sessions:

- StarTran service needs to be redesigned to match the changes in the community relative to trip origins and destinations. Downtown should not be the sole focal point of the system, as it creates trips that are too long and too indirect unless one is traveling downtown. Satellite transfer centers should be considered in the plan.
- StarTran has to change its image from that of a service only for the transit dependents to one that serves everyone in the community. This can be accomplished first by recognizing that there are a number of choice riders who use the bus now, and by redesigning the service to make it more convenient for people to choose over their cars.
- StarTran should expand its hours into the evening, and should investigate adjusting its services to provide higher quality schedules in the most densely used corridors.
- StarTran needs to make any or all of its changes within the context of limited resources, and with an eye to maximizing the use of those resources by concentrating services where they are most necessary.

Public Transportation is clearly considered an important part of the community's infrastructure which can be significantly improved in the minds of those who participated, be they supporters of the program or the "loyal opposition." Many concerns, ideas, and issues were raised in these

discussions which provide a great deal of direction for this project, and which will be used in developing concepts and recommendations in subsequent phases.

StarTran Driver Comments

Interviews with drivers which were held on Thursday June 29th, 2006 in the driver ready room at StarTran's main facility. The comments made by drivers cover a small number of categories, which are summarized below.

The first category of comments regards areas of concern. These concerns reflect the smooth operation of routes from the driver's perspective. One concern is that neighborhood streets that parked cars on neighborhood streets do not allow buses to pass. Some drivers feel that full sized buses may not be appropriate for neighborhood services. Service on neighborhoods streets is a function of the service standard that people should be within 4 blocks of a route, drivers think that this standard may be excessive. Currently bus service is oriented towards bringing people into downtown, which is only conducive for those people who work downtown. Drivers feel that a better alternative would be a multi-hub system that allows for transfers at alternate locations without going into downtown, or a grid system. Drivers do feel that routes do have enough running time, however timepoints do need to be retimed. Drivers feel that passengers, as well as drivers, are not given information about detours that occur due to accidents or construction. Drivers feel that service is not well advertised. Also, drivers feel that too much emphasis is put on cutting services.

Another set of concerns regard amenities. There are not enough signs marking bus stops, especially in the outer parts of the study area. Also, passengers would like to see bike racks on buses. Drivers would like to see a talking bus feature which automatically announces route and stop information. There are issues with a number of bus stops including the 11th and O transfer facility which is run down and the scene of a lot of loitering by school kids, the bus shelter at the State Office Building is used by state employees for smoke breaks, and Wal-Mart does not do a good job cleaning their bus stop. There is an overall issue with cars parking or waiting in bus stops, and police apathy to those cars. Drivers would like to have prior knowledge for when a wheelchair passenger will board in order to plan the trip accordingly. The last issue that drivers mentioned about amenities is that the front ends of the vehicles are not well cleaned.

There were a number of comments regarding service issues. Drivers hear from passengers that they would like to see service on Sundays and all evenings, as well as less combining of services on Saturdays. A smaller number of people mentioned that they would like to see service earlier in the day, especially to meet factory shift times. Some drivers mentioned that schedules do not do a good job at allowing recovery time on Saturdays. Also routes that serve neighborhoods during peak period only may not have enough running time. Drivers mentioned areas that need bus service that currently are not served which include the South Wal-Mart, the Kawasaki plant, the airport, and various office parks throughout Lincoln. Many drivers mentioned that more frequent service is needed at all times of the day and week.

The drivers did make more specific comments about service issues and presented ideas for new routes. One such new route is a cross-town route along 84th Street at the edge of town. They also

mentioned that cross-town routes, such as the 48th Street route need to be timed to meet intersecting bus routes. The Star Shuttle should be expanded to serve some of the neighborhoods adjacent to downtown where more transit dependant people live. An issue was presented about the downtown loop, that the left turn nature of the loop forces drivers to have to cross all lanes of traffic to make turns, and that the downtown loop should have an exclusive bus lane. Drivers also feel that the route 24 should run a limited schedule during summers.

Drivers also feel that routes should not serve areas that are not generating ridership. They also presented a list of intersections that need traffic signals or turn arrows which are as follows:

- 27th and Van Dorn NB – reactivate turn arrow
- O Street and 27th light needs to be reevaluated
- 48th Street and L Street needs a traffic light, crossing is difficult
- 58th and 59th at Old Cheney and Hwy 2 needs turn arrows (both directions)
- Need light at 40th and Pine Lake
- 70th and Van Dorn turn light should be reactivated

Drivers also presented a list of locations that are issues with individual routes and what some of the solutions could be:

- 27th Street South between Calvert and Van Dorn
- Bus stop at 47th and Randolph is at a dangerous location, should be moved
- Havelock buses should not have to stop at 32nd and O Street due to turn
- Terminal timepoint for route 5 should be at 77th and A due to generators and space to layover
- More service to the north Wal-Mart store, have Belmont buses stop there

The drivers did make a few comments about Handi-van. They mentioned that there are some abuses going on with the system, that people who have no need for the Handi-van are being allowed to ride, and that people are using it for normal transportation because of gas prices. Also, people who can use the regular fixed route bus are using Handi-van because of the direct trip. They believe there should be incentives to move Hand-van passengers over to fixed route services.

A number of issues regarding fares were presented by drivers. A major issue is that drivers have been noticing that the Ride for 5 passes are being abused. They have witnessed the passes being resold. Also drivers feel tat a family pass would attract people to the system.

Passenger Survey

To gauge the needs and opinions of current riders, a survey was distributed onboard StarTran buses. Surveys were distributed by drivers on May 23rd and 24th, 2006. Approximately 1,200 survey forms were filled out by Star Tran riders. A key finding from the survey is that 35% of StarTran riders are “choice riders,” who have a vehicle available but choose to use the bus. A summary of the survey findings is presented in Appendix A. The survey responses were key pieces of information for developing the final plan.

Final Plan

Two open houses were held on March 21st, 2007 to present the planned route recommendations to the public. A total of 291 people attended the open houses to learn about the new services and comment. There were two parts to each of the open houses. The first part was a presentation on the development of the route proposals. During the second part of the open houses members of the public viewed the route proposals and asked questions to the consultant, planning, and StarTran staff who were present at the open house. Sixty people provided written comments. People also provided comments to the final plan via e-mail.

A very large percentage of attendees were not familiar with the route recommendations and were curious on how the routes would affect them. Other people made comments about the route network to staff at the meeting in support or against the plan.

Some of the concepts that people liked include:

- Consistent clock-face headways
- Extended service hours downtown
- Extended evening service
- Increased efficiency of service

A number of people mentioned that they felt that the route network should not be changed at all. People mentioned specific locations where they would like service not to change. Other people commented that they wish that there were more service changes. There was some concern about how the services will impact ADA passengers. Some people commented that service should operate earlier in the morning, later in the evening, and on Sundays. Many people urged StarTran to implement the new changes when the weather is warm, so people are not cold while adjusting to new routes. Below is a list of places where people said should be served or service should be maintained:

- Would like airport service
- Bus should go from Westfield to Pine Lake shopping center on weekends
- Serve medical offices @86th and Pioneers/70th & Pioneers
- Serve medical offices at 7441 O
- Need bus to Star Tran offices: I
- 27 North should run from 11&O to Wal-Mart to Northstar School
- College View route should serve Edgewood
- Please do not eliminate the stop at 44th & L
- Serve jobs at UNL Tech Park
- Extend service further South to Campbell's Nursury
- Likes bus looping back to Old Cheney & 40th
- Orange line should go into Edgewood Shopping Center
- Brown line should continue N on 27th back to downtown

A public hearing was held on Saturday June 16th to allow the public to give testimony about the service changes proposed in the TDP. A total of 34 people provided testimony regarding the service changes. A number of small route modifications were considered based on the

comments from the public hearing. The minutes from this public hearing are presented in the appendix.