

Chapter 5. Stakeholder Meetings

Stakeholder Process

An initial step in this strategic analysis of Fort Collins' transit services included a series of interviews and meetings with a wide range of representatives of the Fort Collins community.

The intention of this chapter is to represent the array of concerns voiced by business leaders, political leaders, representatives of local agencies and organizations and community members representing a diversity of advocacy groups.

Individuals commented on a number of issues regarding transit services. This chapter provides a summary of the range of perspectives on issues related to transit. Comments are grouped according to general themes.

City of Fort Collins staff identified stakeholders to provide a diversity of insight that would reflect the concerns of the community at large. These individuals were relied upon to describe the "pulse of the community," but do not necessarily represent the full range of concerns among the citizens of Fort Collins. Thus, these stakeholder interviews serve as a "starting point" for the input process. The process includes presentations to advisory boards, the Fort Collins City Council, and the public through open houses, public meetings and the distribution of informational materials.

The list of stakeholders included in the interview process is included in Appendix A.

Stakeholder Issues

The interview format afforded stakeholders an opportunity to discuss their concerns about transit in Fort Collins. Comments are classified under the following headings:

- Strengths and Weaknesses of Transfort
- Mission and Policy Direction
- Transfort's Needs and Priorities/Funding
- Necessary Elements of the Plan for You to Support it
- Other Issues (CSU role in planning, service expansions, other service recommendations).

Strengths and Weaknesses of Transfort

According to stakeholders, Transfort's strongest points are:

- its staff,
- customer service,
- the quality of service the system provides for CSU students, and
- the transportation alternative that Transfort makes available to the Fort Collins community.

Weaknesses include issues related to:

- reliability,
- frequency of service,
- limited funding,
- public information resources (marketing information and maps),
- the focus of its services on CSU, and
- capacity limitations on dial-a-ride.

Figure 5-1 illustrates a sample of comments within general categories about Transfort's strengths and weaknesses.

Figure 5-1 Comments on Transfort Strengths and Weaknesses

	Strengths	Weaknesses
General Opinions	<p>User-friendly system.</p> <p>Transfort is good at promoting itself.</p> <p>Generally a good system given funding levels.</p> <p>It is a reasonable, University-oriented system.</p> <p>Fort Collins is supportive of Transfort.</p> <p>Is an alternative for transit-dependent people.</p> <p>It's good because it exists.</p>	<p>Transit service in Fort Collins is scant for the size of the community.</p> <p>From a senior's perspective, the DAR is not the most desirable form of transportation.</p> <p>Even with its limited funding the system could perform better.</p>
Marketing and Customer Service	<p>Good employees: friendly staff; courteous drivers; good customer service.</p> <p>There is a neighborly atmosphere on Transfort: It doesn't feel like a big city bus.</p> <p>Very reliable services.</p> <p>Bike racks: putting bikes on buses is good.</p>	<p>Low income seniors have difficulty paying their fare and they are not even aware of a discounted rate.</p> <p>The schedule brochure is horrible. Elderly people cannot read it or understand it.</p> <p>The system is poorly marketed.</p> <p>The maps are confusing.</p> <p>Limited night service is inadequately advertised to the general public.</p> <p>School system is not used as an ally in encouraging bus use.</p> <p>Lack of driver and dispatcher sensitivity with regard to seniors and persons with disabilities.</p> <p>Poor snow plowing means that people with disabilities, and elderly too, cannot get on the bus at bus stops</p>
Service Design	<p>Good coordination with school schedules.</p> <p>Routes are convenient to almost all schools and are well-planned to serve the university.</p> <p>Good route structure in place to accommodate Fort Collins' development patterns.</p> <p>For the size of the system and its focus, it does very well.</p>	<p>Transit does not respond to the behavior changes in the community: the frequency of trips that are taken and the location where trips are taken.</p> <p>Too many one-way loops: need bidirectional routing on many routes.</p> <p>Odd routes that do not run in a normal grid-like pattern.</p> <p>No interlining is a big problem.</p>

	Strengths	Weaknesses
Service Design (cont.)	<p>Good equipment: high capacity; abundance of buses. It's good for providing service between the major activity centers. Buses run on schedule. The system is cooperative: transfers are coordinated. Operated efficiently.</p>	<p>Don't have a comprehensive service - it's inefficient and service is infrequent, making it difficult for time-sensitive travel. Lack of service in evening and on Sundays, particularly in the non-school months. Not a seamless system: transfers can be arduous. Routes don't necessarily go where they should go. Bad hours of operation. Not user friendly for high schools: the bus stops by five minutes before high school ends. Transferring is very difficult for seniors - especially at CSU.</p>
Ridership Markets	<p>Youth ride free. Kids use it. It's a good service for young adults. Is becoming increasingly accessible for seniors and disabled. Serves CSU: They are ones who use the system and they will continue to use it. The 1991 plan to focus on the student rider and transit-dependents has been very successful. Strong downtown and CSU service.</p>	<p>It is only used by transit disabled or transit believers. Seniors were grandfathered into ADA service and remain the predominant users of it when they could be using the fixed route. The school bus is such a negative experience that kids want to get into a car immediately. On DAR service, capacity is constrained. Lot of empty seats on the fixed route system? CSU ridership is not what it should be. CSU is an ag. school, with lots of students from small towns, so they're not used to transit.</p>
Cost/Value	<p>Transfort is a great value for riders. The ballot measure showed a reasonable level of positive support for Transfort in the community.</p>	<p>Ballot measure was problematic, staff thought they could win by including signalization, but can't win such a big ticket measure. Not enough critical mass of riders (low densities, short hours) under current conditions: doesn't save enough VMTs to justify our expenses. Expensive to the city given the usage. Need a dedicated source of financial support. Transfort is one of many entities competing for the general fund.</p>

Individuals who were interviewed took sides regarding areas that receive too little or too much transit service. While most acknowledged that the system focuses service on the University community, few would admit that this was a poor planning decision because CSU students represent a large ridership group. Concerns related to this concentration of service around the University were voiced about downtown and other non-CSU activity centers not being supported by transit. The majority of stakeholders identified the south and east portions of Fort Collins as underserved by transit. Specifically, several stakeholders mentioned the Harmony, Horsetooth and Timberline corridors as needing more service.

Mission and Policy Direction

Most transit systems have a mission that focuses on the provision of public transit service. Stakeholders were asked to voice what they believe the mission of Transfort to be.

Few stakeholders offered far-reaching visionary missions: “To improve citizen productivity, safety and the quality of life by providing an affordable, accessible and effective transit system.” Most stakeholders offered missions that focused on one of three key areas: (1) congestion mitigation, (2) service to specific population groups and (3) providing good customer service. Examples of mission statements noted by stakeholders within each of these areas are noted in Figure 5-2.

Figure 5-2 What Should Transfort’s Mission Be?

Congestion Mitigation/ Environment/Planning	Ridership Groups	Customer Service
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To reduce single occupancy vehicles and VMT in Fort Collins and to serve as a model for other communities. 2. To provide an environmentally-friendly way of getting around town. 3. To shape future development in Fort Collins by establishing a placeholder for the future. 4. To provide a source of transportation that allows people to keep their cars at home. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To move people who have a transit-compatible lifestyle from place to place. 2. To serve the CSU population. 3. To provide local transportation for people who need it 4. To serve the <i>entire</i> Fort Collins community. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To provide safe, reliable, adequate public transportation. 2. To provide public transit and paratransit in a safe manner, assisting people with special needs. 3. To be the easiest mode of transport moving the greatest number of people. 4. To provide an alternative to driving by providing frequent service.

This range of thoughts on what should be Transfort’s mission makes it difficult to narrow the focus of the City of Fort Collins’ transit policy. With unlimited resources, all of these mission ideals could be addressed; with a limited budget and adopted transit performance criteria, it is necessary to determine where Fort Collins should focus its transit dollars.

Among the many stakeholders, some believe that transit is a social service which, like other social service agencies, goes wherever people need it, essentially supporting the need to establish a little bit of service everywhere. Other stakeholders believe that transit's purpose is to move as many people as possible in the most cost-effective manner possible. This tradeoff of coverage versus productivity was discussed with stakeholders and is described in more detail in Chapter 7.

Most described the existing service as a coverage-focused one, with Transfort trying to serve as much of Fort Collins' geography as possible and with frequencies sacrificed for this level of coverage. The great majority of stakeholders indicated that they were inclined towards a more productivity-focused system, using a corridor approach: "If Fort Collins wants to build for the future, it is important to start off with reliable frequent service in corridors, let people get used to it, and then expand beyond." Many suggested a revised mission that emphasizes innovation and efficiency. Interviewees who assigned percentages of service to be dedicated to productivity or coverage, typically indicated a system that focused 60 to 80% on productivity and 20 to 40% on coverage.

Comments from stakeholders regarding the tradeoffs of coverage-focused or productivity-focused services are noted in Figure 5-3.

Figure 5-3 Coverage Versus Productivity: Comments about Transfort's Provision of Service Policies

Coverage	Productivity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a role for compassion in government and you don't want to turn your backs on the people who really have needs. • Use a shuttle type of service — or something new and innovative — in areas where fixed route service cannot be applied effectively. • There are going to be some people everywhere riding transit. Even kids and senior citizens live in wealthy areas in Fort Collins and you need to take the bus close to them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequency should be uppermost concern; Transfort should eliminate unproductive routes. • Need to have more transit centers and focus service on moving people between the transit centers rather than traveling through the neighborhoods. • Fewer routes; focus on CSU. • Most ambulatory seniors will be willing to walk a little bit for frequent service.

Transfort's Needs and Priorities

Stakeholders identified a range of short-term and long-term priorities. Many indicated that the focus should be on a range of transportation and planning issues and that transit is just one piece of the overall puzzle. Other priorities include the reduction of traffic congestion, the need to add new traffic lanes in Fort Collins, and signalization improvements. Some suggested that Fort Collins should focus on incremental improvements that provide justification for overall transportation policy development that the current focus on transit may be appropriate. Underlying most responses was an interest in efficiency. As one stakeholder put it, "Let's get the most bang for our buck out of our transportation system."

Short-term transit priorities are:

1. Improved overall service frequency.
2. More direct routing.
3. Longer service hours and more service days.
4. Better marketing and public information.

Long-term priorities are:

1. Regional transit planning; interconnectivity with other cities.
2. Collaboration and coordination in transit, transportation, land use and social service planning.
3. Alternatives to transit through new modes and new technologies.
4. Build support for funding transit and other alternative modes.

A wide range of comments from stakeholders regarding Transfort service priorities are noted in Figure 5-4.

Figure 5-4 Short and Long Term Transit Priorities

Short Term	Long Term
C Increase fixed route service frequency; sacrifice low productivity areas.	C Provide regional transit/better regional planning/develop partnerships with RTD, Loveland and Greeley/develop a better relationship with the MPO.
C Educate the public about what's available/better marketing and information.	C Put a park and ride at I-25. Need to connect the P&R with Front Range College.
C Increase the number of routes/serve southeast Fort Collins better.	C Develop an auto-transit connection with parking lots for transit users.
C Longer service hours/increased night service/Sunday service	C Needs to be better cooperation between development guidelines and transit.
C Get fully staffed with drivers	C Put rail trolleys back in where they once were/ light rail traffic corridors.
C Acquire scheduling software for DAR.	C Land changes are also needed to encourage alternative mode use.
C More cooperation with the schools and employers.	C Consider alternatives such as car-sharing, personal rapid transit, ITS, GIS, etc.
C Decide whether fixed-route makes sense, be willing to consider other alternatives/look at alternatives that employ taxi service and vans in the 'coverage' areas.	C Need to prepare and invest in a right of way for long term transit needs.
C Develop special programs like a buddy system whereby college students or high school students would volunteer to ride the bus with seniors.	C Reduce transit operating expenses and create a paradigm shift for the 21 Century.
C Secure more funding to increase routes, provide Sunday, evening service.	C Look at transit privatization. Let an entrepreneur make a buck and run it more effectively.
C Make transit more affordable.	C Get the trains out of the streets – sometimes the trains go as long as 8 or nine minutes – and results in bottlenecks. Trains are also a detriment to north side businesses and residential expansion.
C Use smaller vehicles to maximize the efficiency of the service. Put DAR vehicles to better use.	
C Serve more people who cannot afford automobile	
C Serve non-commute travel better.	
C If transit is provided as a true transportation option, then paratransit can focus on being more of an ADA service.	
C Better service to the north side of town.	

Some of these needs and priorities suggest an expansion of current Transfort services, something that would likely require additional resources. While one focus of this strategic plan is to develop a Transfort system based on existing budgeted resources, system enhancements and expansions can also be considered. The majority of stakeholders noted that a level of service expansion may be necessary. Most indicated they understood that expanded services would require additional funding.

To gauge potential funding alternatives for possible service expansions, stakeholders were asked to describe other sources that might be tapped to pay for transit services. The majority of stakeholders suggested increased funding is needed to pay for even modest service improvements and that Fort Collins should evaluate a dedicated tax source for transit. Nonetheless, with the recent public vote against a proposed tax measure for transit and transportation improvements in Fort Collins, stakeholders took a range of positions. A sample of comments is shown in Figure 5-5.

Figure 5-5 Taxes for Transit Services?

Area of Emphasis	Comments
The Tax “Climate” in Fort Collins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 30% of the population who voted for the sales tax was high enough to indicate that we can start the discussion about increased transit funding: this is far more than would have supported it 15 years ago. • Eliminate the transit fare and use a transportation tax package to subsidize it. CSU would have to continue to fund as they currently do. • People will support a special tax if it works for them. Will Transfort really work for them? • The tax measure was a bad campaign: it was premature. Now Fort Collins can’t go back for a sales tax for 4-6 years after such a defeat.
Prefer Sales Tax	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property tax increase is very difficult, even though it’s so low compared to other cities. A sales tax should be easier to sell, since 30-40% is paid by visitors. • Continue funding as currently being done: general fund plus fares. • Need to extend the sales tax tied to streets and street development.
Prefer Property Tax	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am opposed to sales tax. I’d rather see property taxes, because they are county-wide. Then we could focus on region transit services. • If we have a dedicated property tax, maybe we could make it a free system. I’d support that.
Other Taxes or Mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The time has come for higher gasoline tax so that drivers are paying a fair share. • Fund Transfort through new parking revenues and permits.
Opposed to New Taxes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A sales tax is unfair. Transfort should get a greater share of the general fund in this very strong economy. • Fort Collins is very far behind regarding Transfort’s service. We need to reassess budget needs. Ours is a sales tax-driven budget. We simply need to allocate more to transportation and less to other areas.

Necessary Elements of the Plan for You to Support it

The goal of the Strategic Operating Plan for Transfort is to develop a program that will get the support of community leaders and the citizens of Fort Collins. Thus, stakeholders were asked to comment about what would be the necessary elements of the plan in order to obtain their support. Top priorities for the plan include the following:

- Focus on current transit needs first, but must have long-term policy objectives and incremental steps to get there.
- Must be realistic and provide alternative levels of service for different levels of funding.
- Emphasis of plan must be on those who need and use transit.
- Service planning must include recommendations that address Mason Street.
- CSU must be involved in the process and agree with the recommendations.
- Must emphasize collaboration and cooperation with schools, government agencies, city and county departments.

As noted by stakeholders, overall transit and transportation planning in Fort Collins should address infrastructure improvements to make both auto and transit function better. The interplay of land use and transportation is also important, with a need for city and other public facilities to be developed around transit facilities.

Many stakeholders noted that they are more likely to be swayed in favor of recommended transit plans when health, congestion and environment are left out of the overall planning picture. Some view these as very partisan issues.

Other Issues

Other key issues discussed include the role of CSU in planning for transit services in Fort Collins and a list of service expansions to be considered.

CSU Role in Planning

Perspectives on CSU's role in planning for – or providing its own transit services – highlight a number of tensions that are at the crux of Transfort's current operations. When the system realigned its services in the early 1990's to better serve CSU, it showcased two emphases in planning: (1) concentrating Transfort service where it is utilized and (2) providing a higher level of service to the University community in comparison with other areas in Fort Collins. Stakeholders discussed the role the CSU should play in planning for Transfort. The range of stakeholder comments is presented in Figure 5-6.

Figure 5-6 CSU Role in Planning for Transfort

Area of Emphasis	Comments
Participation in Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration should communicate more to students how important Transfort is. • CSU should have a role in planning. It is a high-use area and we are serving it well. • Show people that transit can work around CSU and then you will be able to expand it around the rest of Ft. Collins. • CSU should be paying more; I don't know about planning more. • There really aren't any policies to discourage driving. • Discourage car use for freshmen and sophomores. Students are the most likely and able-bodies to use the bus and walk. • CSU has been cooperative but it should be providing a leadership role. • When the city has tried to lead the transit planning and multimodal planning efforts, there have been mixed results. CSU has never led the process... they do most of their lobbying and planning in Denver and avoid controversy in Fort Collins. They avoid the local press and avoid making tough decisions. • Need to change Transfort's goals and provide a local shuttle service on the campus.
CSU Transit Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CSU transit center negatively impacts the system from the perspective of non-CSU riders. • The system would be more useful if all of the routes didn't go through the University. • There should be a major University Transfer location on the College Avenue side of the Campus (near the Old Fort Collins High School).
CSU Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The University needs its own internal shuttle. • CSU's ultimate goal is a pedestrian campus, but they continue to provide parking and they make it cheap. • Bike planning on campus is poor: there are too many cars and no bicycle laws. Goal of CSU plan is to increase pedestrian and bikes within campus and move auto traffic and parking to periphery. Do a corridor really well and see that it works. Many of Ft. Collins' bike trails are dangerous. If we really got serious about biking we could make biking safer. People should be encouraged to bike but not forced. • CSU needs to promote ridership among its students and faculty. Also should provide later service to the college. • Staff and faculty are the worst group for utilizing alternative modes, but CSU does little to encourage them. Need an incentive program to encourage people to carpool or vanpool. Very few faculty/staff transit passes are purchased each year.
Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students help in funding transit, CSU should play an important part in the land use and transportation planning process, particularly since many students are dispersed throughout the Ft. Collins community. • If CSU starts banning cars on campus, that means there will be a lot of spillover onto the city streets. • At least the City and CSU are finally cooperating better than they did in the past. • The State will be able to increase the size of CSU. There isn't much opportunity to do that in Boulder. The main campus will densify. Concern is that the university will increase the number of classrooms and labs and the surrounding communities will be forced to absorb the additional needed housing. The University is not focused on housing its own. • Need more downtown housing and need to organize CSU's housing situation better.

Service Expansions

Many stakeholders had specific comments about areas of transit expansion that are appropriate in Fort Collins. These included ideas about techniques for building ridership, providing enhanced service to the Fort Collins community and specific areas for regional transit services. Figure 5-7 presents a sample of comments received about service expansion.

Figure 5-7 Expanded Transit Services in Fort Collins

Area of Emphasis	Comments
New Techniques for Expanding Transit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The system must have some romance element to make it attractive. For example, shopping area shuttles would encourage social interaction. There should be a real benefit on top of efficiencies. • Use an advertising/marketing agency rather than doing everything in-house, because the City of Fort Collins is incapable of effectively marketing its services in-house. • The amenities program needs to be expanded: Fort Collins needs more shelters and benches.
Specific Areas of Expansion within Fort Collins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The southeast is neglected by Transfort. There is a transit need on the Harmony Corridor and Timberline south of Horsetooth. • Horsetooth Road is underserved. • With the expansion of Old Town to the Poudre River, we need to expand coverage in the downtown area. • Expand service in transit-dependent areas. Provide better evening service around CSU and expand the service hours. There should be later weekend service from the downtown bars to CSU. • Need to expand service on Lemay south of Vine, north of Mulberry. Here there are large low income neighborhoods that are not served. There are also many seniors in this part of town. • All current major routing areas are underserved except the Elizabeth corridor and Prospect. • Some routes that provide service through residential areas should operate only morning and evening so that other services can be expanded. • There is no commitment from Transfort with regard to providing transit service to and from Hewlett Packard in Fort Collins. You need to expand the South Side Shuttle to a regular route. • Need to expand the service to the new hospital.
Regional Expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There should be regional service to Denver and beyond. • A rural transportation authority was approved by the legislature two years ago (Rural Transportation Authority Act), and is able to charge a sales tax or \$10 registration fee. Any two local governments can join together and define boundaries the way they choose for funding for transportation-related activities. • Policy makers should decide if its going to be city-operated or be more of a regional entity. Currently the suburban areas get no service, so it is difficult to adopt a regional approach. • Transfort should be expanded regionally only if it service is provided differently than it is now: there are ways to provide service other than running fixed routes.

Conclusion

Fort Collins has an active groups of citizens, politicians, business and community leaders with an interest in the overall effectiveness of city services, including Transfort. Many of the stakeholders interviewed had given little thought to transit issues prior to their stakeholder meeting. The vast majority indicated that transit is one of many issues important to them.

Several key themes arose in the discussions. General issues that were referenced as part of the service planning process include the following:

- The overriding issue: a better transit delivery system. The focus should be on ease of use, frequency, user-friendliness, and meeting the needs of people most likely to use it.
- The need for clear justifications for transit investments. The city cannot support a transit system that does not perform as it should. Make transit more accountable and focus on making service more productive.
- Overall need for better public information. The question is not just how to use transit services, but why transit is important for the community and the future of Fort Collins. Improve the transit system map to include all streets and major destinations, and indicate service frequency, season and span.
- Changes to fleet. Explore fleet and facility changes to improve community acceptability, including vehicle size and fuel types. Explore hybrid demand-responsive services to low-density areas.
- Changes to bus stops. Examine bus stop locations and maintenance procedures for accessibility, especially safe street crossings. Improve bus stop facilities, including shelters.
- Multimodal integration. Further explore how the many different modes can work better with one another. Mason Street may help in many ways. Expand bike rack capacity on buses.