Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

The Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority (WPRTA), doing business as Greenway Public Transportation, was formed in 2007 and operationally consolidated in 2008. WPRTA is a four-county, urban-rural transit authority with seven jurisdictional members, including the Counties of Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba, and the Cities of Hickory, Newton, and Conover. The WPRTA service area is depicted in Figure ES-1. WPRTA was formed after several years of discussion and consensus-building in the region, including a regional transportation feasibility study and a regional transportation implementation plan. Each of these previous planning studies focused primarily on organizational issues and consensus-building among elected officials, rather than service planning and public outreach.

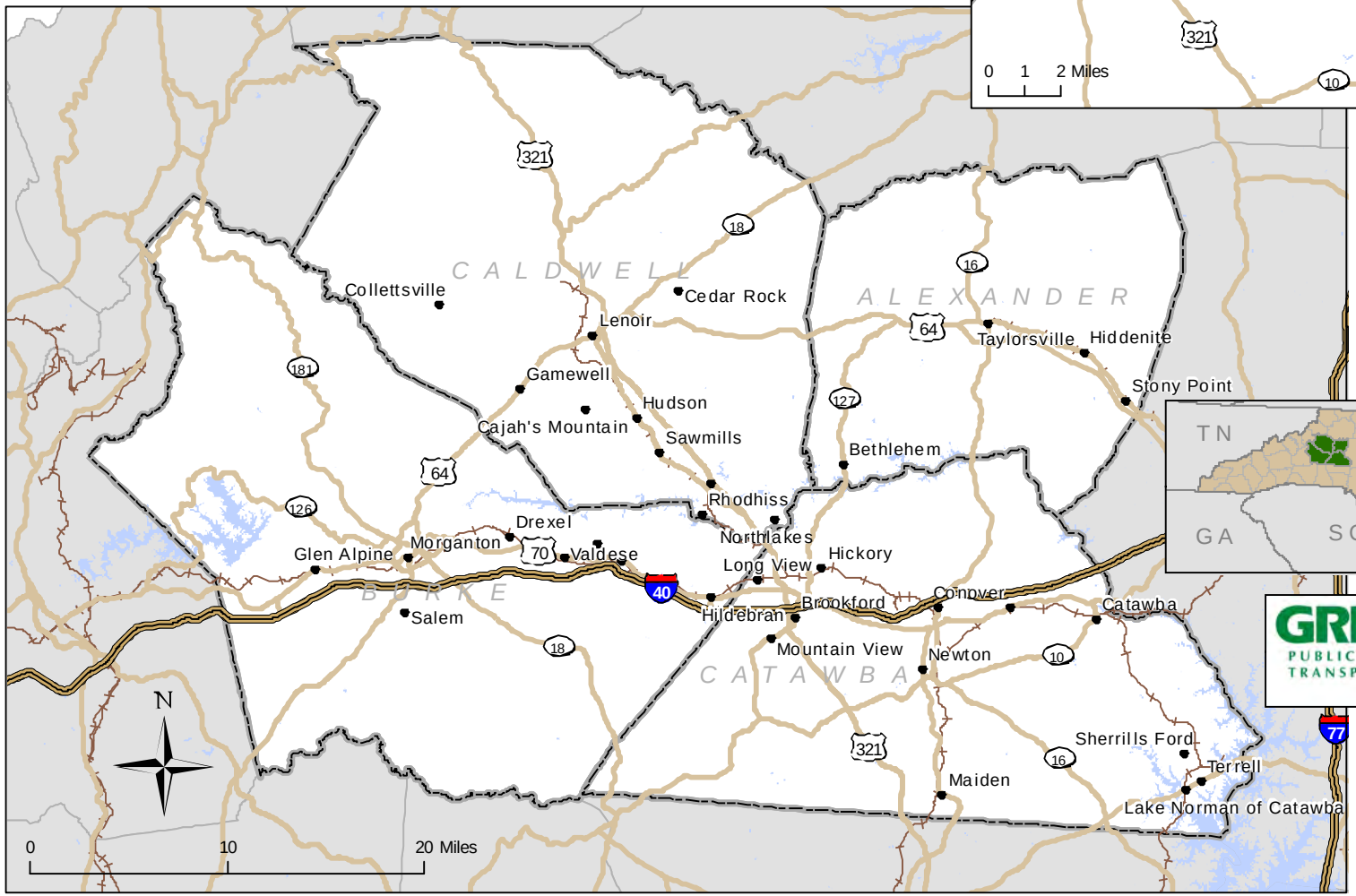
With the successful consolidation of service completed, WPRTA began looking at ways to improve public transportation service in the region and initiated the process of conducting a Community Transportation Service Plan (CTSP). A CTSP is a five-year plan that studies transit needs in the region, documents the current services, and develops detailed operations, financial, capital, and implementation plans for the five-year planning period. The North Carolina Department of Transportation, Public Transportation Division (NCDOT-PTD), requires that its grantees adopt CTSPs and provides technical and financial assistance for the plans.

This Executive Summary provides an overview of the CTSP process that has been completed for WPRTA. The CTSP was directed by WPRTA's Transportation Advisory Board (TAB), with input from WPRTA's Governing Board, NCDOT-PTD, and staff. The study tasks were undertaken by KFH Group, Inc., in close consultation with the TAB, Governing Board, NCDOT-PTD, and staff. Task work for the CTSP began in October 2009 and was completed in June 2010. The WPRTA Board of Directors approved the CTSP in August, 2010.

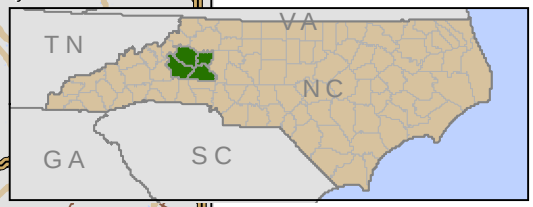
Figure ES-1: Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority Service Area

Legend

- WPRTA Service Area
- Rivers/Lakes
- NC Counties
- Cities/Towns
- Interstate Highways
- Major Highways
- Railroads



Enlarged Area:
Hickory Metro Area



GREENway PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

KFH GROUP

Sources: Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG), ESRI Data CD.

The goals for the CTSP were to:

1. Develop a vision for public transportation in the Western Piedmont region.

2. Develop an accurate assessment of WPRTA's operating and capital costs with the ability to allocate among jurisdictions and between urban, rural, fixed-route, and demand-response services.

3. Identify and cultivate a stable, dedicated source of local funding.

4. Examine ways in which WPRTA's services can reach a broader market, including regional and long distance commuters.

5. Study existing routes and services to see if there are opportunities to make changes that would better serve the riders, increase ridership, and/or improve system efficiency.

6. Examine the feasibility of providing intercity bus service on a few potential corridors: Boone/Hickory/Charlotte; and Salisbury/Asheville.

The CTSP was developed with a thorough community outreach effort, including public surveys, rider surveys, stakeholder interviews, and a series of public meetings. The outreach efforts resulted in a plan that highlights transit service improvements that are desired by the community.

EXISTING SERVICES

The first major task for the CTSP was to document and analyze the existing community transportation resources in the region. WPRTA's services were the focus of this analysis. WPRTA provides demand-response, flex routes, and subscription services in Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba Counties. WPRTA also operates fixed-route transit services in the Cities of Hickory, Newton, and Conover. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) complementary paratransit is provided in conjunction with the fixed routes.

In FY 2009, the WPRTA's demand-response/flex/subscription network (van-based) provided 129,602 passenger trips, recording 66,790 service hours, and 333,124 vehicle service miles. The total annual operating expenses (FY 2009) for the van-based services were just over $2.9 million. A fleet of 46 vans were in operation in the four counties.

WPRTA's fixed routes provided 157,999 passenger trips in FY 2009, recording 14,706 passenger trips and 218,976 vehicle service miles. The fixed-route annual operating expenses were just under $725,000 for the year. Five heavy-duty transit vehicles support the fixed routes, with four in operation at any given time.

The total system budget for FY 2011 (the first year of the CTSP) is $4,786,438. This budget was increased from FY 2010 to provide a contingency fund and to reflect higher operating expenses. As a multi-jurisdictional urban-rural public transportation/human service transportation operator, the funding sources for WPRTA are varied and include federal, state, local, and contractual revenues.

Several taxi and private transportation providers also operate in the region, and the five-year plan includes a recommendation to further engage the private transportation network, to help with capacity, and to provide one-on-one trips that are too costly for WPRTA to operate.

Intercity bus service is scheduled to come to the region in October, 2010, providing north-south service along the US321 Corridor, serving two cities in the four-county region (Hickory and Lenoir).

TRANSIT NEEDS ANALYSIS

The transit needs analysis, which is fully documented in Chapter 3 of the Final Report, included a significant data collection effort that considered demographics and land use, previous planning efforts, public opinion, rider opinion, and stakeholder opinion. Demographic data indicate that the region is growing slowly, with this trend likely to continue over the next several years. It is unclear whether or not the population of the Census-designated urbanized area will go over 200,000 in the 2010 Census, or whether its shape may change due to changing commuter patterns or by recently proposed changes to the method of defining urbanized areas.

The surveys conducted for the transit needs analysis indicated that users of the current system are generally pleased with the service, particularly with the driver courtesy and the safety and security. There were some specific criticisms offered and a general desire for more service, but the overall results were favorable.

In reviewing and analyzing the various data concerning transit needs, a number of unmet transit needs and potential services were echoed by several of the data sources. These key unmet needs and potential services are highlighted below and formed the basis of the recommendations included in the five-year plan:

- Additional public transportation services are needed in Lenoir, Long View, and Morganton. These three areas are the only three in the region that exhibited relatively high transit needs in all of the needs categories and have sufficient population density to consider fixed-route services, but are not currently served by fixed-route transit. Lenoir and Morganton were also frequently mentioned by survey respondents as needing additional transit services.

- Corridor service is needed for key regional corridors. Corridors cited by survey respondents and in previous studies include the 321 Corridor between Lenoir and Hickory; the US70 Corridor between Morganton and Hickory; the NC16 Corridor between Newton and Taylorsville; and the NC127 Corridor.

- Public transportation service is needed to connect the region's community colleges.

- Intercity and/or commuter bus/van services are needed to areas outside the immediate region, such as service to Statesville, Gastonia, Charlotte, Asheville, Boone, Winston-Salem, and Greensboro.

- Park and ride opportunities are needed to support either intra-regional service or intercity bus and/or commuter services.

- Additional demand-response capacity is needed to provide greater mobility for residents of the rural portions of the region.

- There is a need for improvements to the current services:
  - Later hours, more frequent service, more shelters and benches, and more access to transit information for the fixed routes;
  - Improved communication, easier trip scheduling, and additional capacity on the demand response services;
  - Generally more routes.

FIVE-YEAR PLAN

The draft five-year plan for WPRTA was developed from a series of potential service and organizational alternatives that were presented in May and June, 2010. The plan incorporated most of the alternatives, with improvements phased over time. The alternatives were presented to the public at a series of forums that were held in June, 2010.

The plan is expansionary in nature and assumes that new revenue will be available, either through the development of vehicle registration fees, or through new federal funds, pending the re-authorization of SAFETEA-LU. If new revenue is not available, then many of the projects included in the plan will not be able to be implemented. An important initiative for this CTSP period is the development of a maintenance and operating facility to support system growth.

Detailed five-year service, capital, and financial plans are included in the full report. Table ES-1 and ES-2 provide summaries of the recommended projects for the five-year plan, including project descriptions, purposes, service areas, estimated revenue service hours, proposed implementation years, estimated expenses, and recommended funding sources. The financial plans for operations, vehicles, and other capital are provided as Tables ES-3, ES-4, and ES-5. The full report and the financial and capital plans also incorporate ongoing initiatives by WPRTA that were developed independent of the CTSP and included for budgetary and planning purposes.

Table ES-1: Recommended Urbanized Area Fixed-Route Transit Projects

Priority	Project	Purpose	Service Area	Rev. Service Hours	Prop. Year	Annual Operating Cost	Capital Cost	Proposed Funding Sources
1	Adjust the Tate Blvd./ Conover Route	To improve productivity	Hickory, Conover	Minor reduction	FY 2011	$ -	$ -	n.a.
2	Improve Service Frequency	To provide more travel options for riders, offering greater flexibility and convenience.	Hickory, Conover, Newton	7,140	FY 2013	$ 396,270	$ 640,000	Fares, S.5307; Vehicle Reg. Fee.
3	Split the NC127/Springs Road Route	To provide north-south linear service along NC127 and to allow service to be extended to several currently un-served apartment complexes.	Hickory	3,604	FY 2013		$ 160,000	Fares, S.5307; Vehicle Reg. Fee.
4	Split the Hickory-Conover-Newton Route	To allow for improved interlining and schedule reliability and creat a mini-transit hub in the Catawba Valley Medical Center area.	Hickory, Conover, Newton	-	FY 2012	$ -	$ -	n.a.
5	Adjust the Interlining of the Routes	To reduce travel time between residential areas and commercial areas.	Hickory, Conover, Newton	-	FY 2012	$ -	$ -	n.a.
6	Extend the Service Day	To provide riders with more flexibility to access jobs, evening classes, and typical errands.	Hickory, Conover, Newton	5,620	FY 2014	$ 310,224	$ -	Fares, S.5307; JARC, Vehicle Reg. Fee.
7	Provide Sunday Service	To provide mobility for transit riders on Sundays.	Hickory, Conover, Newton	2,080	FY 2015	$ 115,440	$ -	Fares, S.5307; JARC, Vehicle Reg. Fee.
New	Newton-Conover Circulator	To improve mobility for people whose origins and destinations are both in the Newton-Conover areas and potentially shorten the HCN route.	Newton, Conover	3,604	FY 2014	$ 200,022	$ 160,000	Fares, S.5307, Vehicle. Reg. Fee
			Totals	22,048		$ 1,021,956	$ 960,000	

Table ES-2: Recommended New Projects

Project	Purpose	Service Area	Rev. Service Hours	Prop. Year	Annual Operating Cost	Capital Cost	Proposed Funding Sources
Targeted Transporatation Program	To provide additional mobility options for elderly people, people with disabilities, and low-income people.	Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties	5,233	FY 2011	$ 282,600	$ -	S. 5310, S. 5316, S. 5317
Travel Demand Management Program	To promote alternative transportation options to the single occupant vehicle.	Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties	-	FY 2012	$ 80,000	$ -	State TDM Program
US 70 Corridor Service between Morganton and Hickory	To connect Morganton to Hickory, serving a number of communities along the way and meeting one of the most frequently requested needs from the public survey, including service to the Western Piedmont Community College.	Hickory, Long View, Hildebran, Icard, Rutherford College, Valdese, Drexel, Morganton. Burke and Catawba Counties.	2,040	FY 2012	$ 104,040	$ 160,000	Fares, S.5307, Vehicle. Reg. Fee
US 321A Corridor Service between Lenoir and Hickory	To connect Lenoir and Hickory, serving a number of communities along the way and the Caldwell Community College and Technical Center.	Northwest Hickory, Granite Falls, Sawmills, Hudson, and Lenoir. Catawba, Burke, and Caldwell Counties.	2,040	FY 2013	$ 104,040	$ 160,000	Fares, S.5307, Vehicle. Reg. Fee

Table ES-2 (continued)

Project	Purpose	Service Area	Rev. Service Hours	Prop. Year	Annual Operating Cost	Capital Cost	Proposed Funding Sources
Circulator Service in Morganton	To connect residential, retail, governmental and employment locations within the City of Morganton.	Morganton. Burke County.	3,536	FY 2014	$ 171,156	$ 160,000	Fares, S.5307; Vehicle Reg. Fee., City of Morganton
NC 16 Corridor Service between Taylorsville and the Catawba Valley Medical Center	To connect Taylorsville and Hickory, serving the Catawba Valley Community College along the way.	Taylorsville, Millersville, Oxford, Cline Village, Conover. Alexander and Catawba Counties.	2,040	FY 2015	$ 104,010	$ 160,000	Fares, S.5307, Vehicle. Reg. Fee
Circulator Service in Lenoir	To connect residential, retail, governmental and employment locations within the City of Lenoir.	Lenoir. Caldwell County.	3,536	FY 2015	$ 171,156	$ 160,000	Fares, S.5307; Vehicle Reg. Fee., City of Lenoir
			18,425		$ 1,017,002	$ 800,000	

Table ES-3: WPRTA Financial Plan for Operations

Projects	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015
Annual Service Hours					
Urbanized Area Fixed Route Services					
Current WPRTA Urban Fixed Routes	14,700	14,700	14,700	14,700	14,700
Improve Service Frequency			7,140	7,140	7,140
Split the NC 127/Springs Road Route			3,604	3,604	3,604
Extend the Service Day				5,620	5,620
Provide Sunday Service					2,080
Newton-Conover Circulator				3,604	3,604
Subtotal, Urbanized Area Fixed Route Service Hours	14,700	14,700	25,444	34,668	36,748
Demand Response/Flex Route/New Services					
Current WPRTA Demand Response Van/LTV Services	66,800	66,300	65,800	65,300	64,800
New Services Provided using S.5310, S. 5316, and S. 5317	5,233	5,233	5,233	5,233	5,233
US 70 Corridor Service between Morganton and Hickory		2,040	2,040	2,040	2,040
US 321A Corridor Service between Lenoir and Hickory			2,040	2,040	2,040
Circulator Service in Morganton				3,536	3,536
NC 16 Corridor Service between Taylorsville and the Catawba Valley Medical Center					2,040
Circulator Service in Lenoir					3,536
Subtotal, Demand Response/Flex Route/New Services	72,033	73,573	75,113	78,149	83,225
Total Transit Service Hours	**86,733**	**88,273**	**100,557**	**112,817**	**119,973**

Table ES-3 (continued)

Projects	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015
Projected Operating Expenses					
Urbanized Area Fixed Route Services					
Current WPRTA Urban Fixed Routes	$ 815,850	$ 832,167	$ 848,810	$ 865,787	$ 883,102
Improve Service Frequency			$ 396,270	$ 404,195	$ 412,279
Split the NC 127/Springs Road Route			$ 200,022	$ 204,022	$ 208,103
Extend the Service Day				$ 310,224	$ 316,428
Provide Sunday Service					$ 115,440
Newton-Conover Circulator				$ 200,022	$ 204,022
Subtotal, Urbanized Area Fixed Route Service Expenses	**$ 815,850**	**$ 832,167**	**$ 1,445,102**	**$ 1,984,250**	**$ 2,139,375**
Demand Response/Flex Route/New Services					
Current WPRTA Demand Response Van/LTV Services	$ 3,407,830	$ 3,475,987	$ 3,545,506	$ 3,616,416	$ 3,688,745
New Services Provided using S.5310, S. 5316, and S. 5317	$ 282,600	$ 282,600	$ 288,252	$ 288,252	$ 294,017
US 70 Corridor Service between Morganton and Hickory		$ 104,040	$ 106,121	$ 108,243	$ 110,408
US 321A Corridor Service between Lenoir and Hickory			$ 104,040	$ 106,121	$ 108,243
Circulator Service in Morganton				$ 171,156	$ 174,579
NC 16 Corridor Service between Taylorsville and the Catawba Valley Medical Center					$ 104,040
Circulator Service in Lenoir					$ 171,156
Subtotal, Demand Response/Flex Route/New Services	**$ 3,690,430**	**$ 3,862,627**	**$ 4,043,919**	**$ 4,290,188**	**$ 4,651,188**
Other					
Travel Demand Management Program	**$ -**	$ 80,000	$ 82,400	$ 84,872	$ 87,418
TOTAL	**$ 4,506,280**	**$ 4,774,794**	**$ 5,571,421**	**$ 6,359,311**	**$ 6,877,982**

Table ES-3 (continued)

Anticipated Funding Sources for Operating	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015
Federal					
FTA S. 5307	$ 1,476,507	$ 1,506,037	$ 1,536,158	$ 1,566,881	$ 1,598,219
FTA S. 5307 (Roll Forward and ARRA)	$ 250,000	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
FTA S. 5311	$ 567,182	$ 578,526	$ 590,096	$ 601,898	$ 613,936
FTA S.5310, S.5316, S.5317	$ 141,300	$ 141,300	$ 144,126	$ 147,009	$ 149,949
Subtotal, Federal	**$ 2,434,989**	**$ 2,225,863**	**$ 2,270,380**	**$ 2,315,788**	**$ 2,362,103**
State					
State Maintenance Assistance Program (SMAP)	$ 204,435	$ 208,524	$ 212,694	$ 216,948	$ 221,287
Elderly and Disabled Transportation Assistance Program	$ 400,994	$ 409,014	$ 417,194	$ 425,538	$ 434,049
Rural General Public	$ 433,490	$ 442,160	$ 451,003	$ 460,023	$ 469,224
Employment	$ 20,464	$ 20,873	$ 21,291	$ 21,717	$ 22,151
Subtotal, State	**$ 1,059,383**	**$ 1,080,571**	**$ 1,102,182**	**$ 1,124,226**	**$ 1,146,710**
Local					
Contract Revenue	$ 630,000	$ 661,500	$ 694,575	$ 729,304	$ 765,769
Member Matching Funds	$ 397,108	$ 397,108	$ 397,108	$ 397,108	$ 397,108
Passenger Fares	$ 235,000	$ 252,450	$ 270,424	$ 295,652	$ 322,021
Vehicle Registration Fee (80% toward operating, FY12, 13)		$ 369,848	$ 1,007,878	$ 1,752,790	$ 1,963,920
Subtotal, Local	**$ 1,262,108**	**$ 1,680,906**	**$ 2,369,985**	**$ 3,174,854**	**$ 3,448,818**
Total Projected/Proposed Operating Revenues	**$ 4,756,480**	**$ 4,987,339**	**$ 5,742,547**	**$ 6,614,867**	**$ 6,957,632**
Surplus to build reserves	$ 250,200	$ 212,546	$ 171,126	$ 255,556	$ 79,650

Table ES-4: WPRTA CTSP Financial Plan for Vehicle Replacement and Expansion

Number of Vehicles	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015
Replacement	13	10	4	12	5
Expansion	2	2	6	2	2
Total Vehicles	15	12	10	14	7
Vehicle Costs					
Replacement	$ 1,894,600	$ 925,000	$ 204,000	$ 1,136,000	$ 255,000
Expansion	$ 76,800	$ 320,000	$ 960,000	$ 320,000	$ 320,000
Total Projected Vehicle Costs	$ 1,971,400	$ 1,245,000	$ 1,164,000	$ 1,456,000	$ 575,000
Anticipated Funding Sources					
Federal S.5307	$ -	$ 849,600	$ 849,600	$ 1,018,400	$ 250,400
Federal S. 5311	$ 184,000	$ 146,400	$ 81,600	$ 146,400	$ 209,600
ARRA	$ 1,741,400	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
State	$ 23,000	$ 124,500	$ 116,400	$ 145,600	$ 57,500
Local	$ 23,000	$ 124,500	$ 116,400	$ 145,600	$ 57,500
Total Vehicle Revenues	$ 1,971,400	$ 1,245,000	$ 1,164,000	$ 1,456,000	$ 575,000

Table ES-5: WPRTA CTSP Financial Plan for Facilities, Equipment, and Other Capital

Projects	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015
Facilities and Maintenance					
Land Purchase for New Facility	$ 380,000	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
Warlong Building Upfit	$ 400,000	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
Architectural and Engineering- New Facility	$ 500,000	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
Maintenance Tools	$ 25,000	$ 10,000	$ 100,000	$ 10,000	$ 10,000
Construction, New Facility		$ 3,050,000	$ 3,050,000	$ -	$ -
Technology					
On-Board Computers (vans)	$ 322,224	$ 12,000	$ 36,000	$ 12,000	$ 12,000
Video Cameras	$ 192,000	$ 12,000	$ 36,000	$ 12,000	$ 12,000
Computer Upgrades	$ 41,172	$ 10,000	$ 10,000	$ 10,000	$ 10,000
Computer Software	$ 11,644	$ 3,500	$ 3,500	$ 3,500	$ 3,500
Fare Collection					
Fareboxes (vans)	$ 30,800	$ 2,000	$ 6,000	$ 2,000	$ 2,000
Ticket Machine	$ 65,006	$ -	$ 65,000	$ -	$ -
Passenger Amenities					
Bus Stop Signs	$ 106,500	$ 25,000	$ 25,000	$ 25,000	$ 25,000
Shelters	$ 300,000	$ 60,000	$ 60,000	$ 60,000	$ 60,000
Other					
Office Furniture and Equipment	$ 16,172	$ 2,500	$ 50,000	$ 2,500	$ 2,500
Phone System	$ 30,000	$ 3,000	$ 3,000	$ 3,000	$ 3,000
Total Projected Non-Vehicle Capital Expenses	**$ 2,420,518**	**$ 3,190,000**	**$ 3,444,500**	**$ 140,000**	**$ 140,000**

Table ES-5 (continued)

Anticipated Funding Sources	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015
Federal S. 5307	$ 1,094,800	$ 1,633,280	$ 1,763,584	$ 71,680	$ 71,680
ARRA	$ 1,040,846	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
City of Hickory Incentive	$ 150,000	$ -		$ -	$ -
Federal S. 5311	$ 8,938	$ 918,720	$ 992,016	$ 40,320	$ 40,320
State	$ 137,967	$ 319,000	$ 344,450	$ 14,000	$ 14,000
Local	$ 137,967	$ 319,000	$ 344,450	$ 14,000	$ 14,000
Total Projected Non-Vehicle Capital Revenue	$ 2,570,518	$ 3,190,000	$ 3,444,500	$ 140,000	$ 140,000

Notes (1) For the projected expenses, beginning in FY2012, the urban/rural split of 64/36 was used to divide the federal share of the capital expenses between S.5307 and S.5311.