

# TRANSIT DEPARTMENT

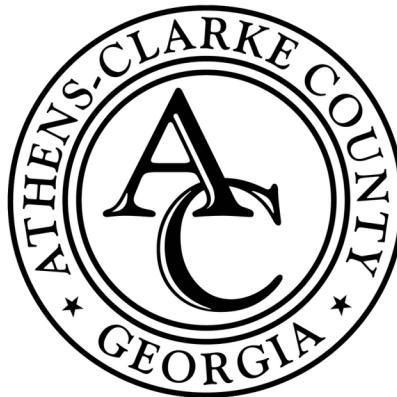
## FY25 PERIODIC AUDIT



# FY25 Periodic Departmental Mission, Operations, & Internal Controls Audit

## Transit Department

Report Number 2025P-74



The mission of the Operational Analysis Office is to provide quality internal audit services through independent and objective reviews and assessments of the activities, operations, financial systems, and internal accounting controls that support the Mayor and Commission's adopted goals and strategies; to make recommendations that will improve governance, risk management, control processes and value for money, all with the intent of enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of government operations for the benefit of Athens-Clarke County.

In accordance with Sec. 1-3-1 (b)(1) of the Athens-Clarke County Code of Ordinances, the Internal Auditor shall:

“Conduct reviews and analysis of operational and fiscal procedures and organizational structure and responsibilities as affects the efficiency and effectiveness of departments, offices, boards, activities, and agencies of the Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County.”

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The Operational Analysis Office (OA) conducted this audit with voluntary guidance and reference from the US Government Accountability Office publication Government Auditing Standards, also commonly referred to as “generally accepted government accounting standards” (GAGAS), or “Yellow Book.” Acknowledgement of these standards indicates our continued efforts to incorporate applicable, professional practices that are realistic and adaptive to the unique expectations of ACCGov and the community at large. The Periodic Audit process developed by the Operational Analysis Office is not a forensic audit; however, OA staff uses framework from the Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government, known as the “Green Book,” as guidance for internal control and financial review. Green Book compliance helps provide reasonable assurance that evidence discovered is sufficient and appropriate to support findings and recommendations.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Operational Analysis Office is pleased to present the Fiscal Year 2025 Periodic Departmental Mission, Operations, and Internal Controls Audit for the Transit Department. This report highlights the essential services provided countywide by the Transit Department and details its approach to fulfilling its responsibilities as an entity, with a focus on objectives and performance. The evaluation primarily concentrated on financial and operational processes to assess reliability, resource utilization, and compliance with regulations.

Since the Transit Department offers direct services to the public across all demographic groups and holds a prominent position within the community, the research conducted by Operational Analysis staff was appropriately comprehensive. As outlined in the background and comparative analysis sections of this report, and within other analyses, public transit is recognized as a multifaceted and consistently evolving subject. It is important for the reader to understand that a Periodic Audit carried out by the Operational Analysis Office is intentionally a snapshot of the department under review. Where deemed suitable by the professional judgment of the staff, additional context is provided.

This audit serves as a valuable resource for ACCGov and the community, emphasizing the role of Operational Analysis in promoting efficiency and effectiveness within a complex governmental structure. The specific purpose and scope of the audit are detailed in the document, along with the key findings identified during the assessment. Matters of lesser significance were addressed with the department and county management during the audit, as needed, and may not have warranted inclusion in the report. All findings and recommendations, irrespective of their importance, were shared with relevant staff and the Audit Committee prior to public disclosure. A comprehensive compilation of formal findings, recommendations, responses, and informal points of interest or concern can be found on the designated pages.

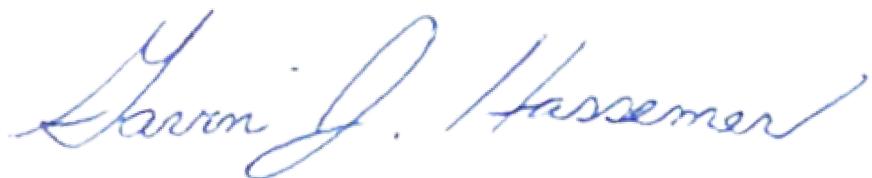
The professional assessment conducted by the Operational Analysis Office indicates that the Transit Department is operating at capability appropriate for the level of funding and internal resource support it has been given over recent years. Despite significant leadership changes in previous years, the recent permanent director appointment has provided necessary stability for the department going forward. Services are being delivered at the level that can be expected, given financial and other resource limitations. While certain issues were identified and discussed with management and leadership during the course of the audit, six formal findings were emphasized, accompanied by recommendations for mitigation. These findings are:

- 1. Publicly available information is unclear and in need of attention.**
- 2. Employee compensation does not align with job requirements.**
- 3. Specific operational inefficiencies, and a lack of accurate data and information, impact service delivery.**
- 4. The size, location, condition and security of current facilities has not been prioritized, particularly to meet future needs**
- 5. The Transit Department does not have sufficient clarity regarding its role within ACCGov and the community, or its financial future, to pursue focused strategies and achieve long-term goals.**
- 6. Optimize service delivery with existing partners.**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The recommendations put forth are intended for careful consideration and implementation to enhance ACCGov as a local government entity. Following this audit and thorough analysis, the Operational Analysis Office intends to monitor the progress toward implementation of the findings and recommendations within one year.

The Operational Analysis Office extends gratitude to the ACCGov Transit Department for their cooperation and assistance throughout the audit process. Additionally, we appreciate the Manager's Office for their responsiveness to information requests and clarifications. Lastly, we recognize and value the support and guidance provided by the Audit Committee in fulfilling their crucial role.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gavin J. Hassemer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Gavin" and "J." on the first line and "Hassemer" on the second line.

Gavin J. Hassemer, Internal Auditor

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

*For increased understanding, the Operational Analysis Office has compiled a list of commonly used words and phrases in relation to the Transit Department Periodic Audit that are used throughout this report.*

Buy American Act (BAA) – (41 U.S.C. §§ 8301–8305) is the primary law addressing domestic procurement preference for all Federal financial assistance obligated for infrastructure projects after May 14, 2022. It provides a preference for the purchase of domestic supplies (or domestic end products) and domestic construction materials.<sup>[i]</sup>

CDL – Commercial Driver’s License. To operate certain specialized types of vehicles such as buses, heavy oversized vehicles, or vehicles that carry multiple passengers, this type of license is required. There are three different classifications of CDL (A, B, C) with different requirements depending on the type of vehicle and cargo or passengers to be carried. There are also six additional endorsements available for CDLs including Passenger (P) and School Bus (S).<sup>[ii]</sup>

Demand Responsive System – Any system of transporting individuals...including, but not limited to, specified public transportation service, which is not a fixed route system.<sup>[iii]</sup>

Enterprise Fund – Used to account for operations which are similar to a private business enterprise, or the governing body has identified a need to account for an operation in this manner

Fixed-Route System – A system of transporting individuals...on which a vehicle is operated along a prescribed route according to a fixed schedule.<sup>[iv]</sup>

Microtransit – A technology-enabled service that uses multi-passenger vehicles to provide on-demand services with dynamically generated routing. Microtransit services are traditionally provided in designated service areas.<sup>[v]</sup>

Transit Trust Fund Program (“TTFP” or “TTF”) is administered by GDOT and uses a population-based formula, based on 2020 Census data, to distribute state funding to Georgia’s counties with existing transit service to further support public transportation across the state.<sup>[vi]</sup>

[i]<https://www.commerce.gov/oam/build-america-buy-america>

[ii]<https://dds.georgia.gov/how-do-i-cdl-license>

[iii]<https://www.transit.dot.gov/regulations-and-guidance/shared-mobility-definitions>

[iv]<https://www.transit.dot.gov/regulations-and-guidance/shared-mobility-definitions>

[v]<https://www.transit.dot.gov/regulations-and-guidance/shared-mobility-definitions>

[vi]<https://www.dot.ga.gov/GDOT/Pages/TTFP.aspx>

# OVERVIEW

## Purpose & Scope

On August 6, 2024, the Mayor & Commission approved the FY25 Audit Workplan for the Operational Analysis Office, which included a periodic audit of the Transit Department. The purpose of these audits is to review performance measures, compliance and financial management. The Internal Auditor aims to regularly audit all ACCGov departments. Factors considered for audit timing include time since the previous audit, community impact, scheduling and risk.

Transit was selected due to challenges in staffing, impact on public service and changes in leadership. The department's highly visible public presence, interrelated with the focus of ACCGov on the challenges of poverty and homelessness, impacted this decision.

## Department History

ACCGov Transit began developing in the late 1800s when organizers established the first railway system and used mules as the main mode of transportation. In 1890, the Athens Park and Improvement Company provided land to the Street Railway Company to create a new two-mile development called 'The Boulevard.' By 1910, with service using electric power and an agreement with the city to share profit and pay ad valorem taxes, the service expanded and covered four major streets in Athens. After changes in ownership, and structure, the company eventually became the Athens Railway and Electric Company and merged with five other companies to become the Georgia Power Company, which eventually ceased the railway operations in Athens in 1930.<sup>[i]</sup>

In 1976, to revive usage of the transportation system, 16 GMC coaches started providing service to the streets of Athens. In the first year, 'The Bus' averaged 900 passengers a day and reached its millionth passenger by 1980. Service was expanded to Sundays on eight routes through a pilot program in 2015.

Prior to unification, the public transportation system existed only as a part of the City of Athens government. By 2014, Athens Transit System had 25 active vehicles making over 1.7 million passenger trips. Athens was third (behind Macon-Bibb County Transit Authority and Hall Area Transit) in population served. It was also, among small, urbanized areas of the state, second in service area (44 square miles, versus 70 for Macon-Bibb and 38 for Hall.)

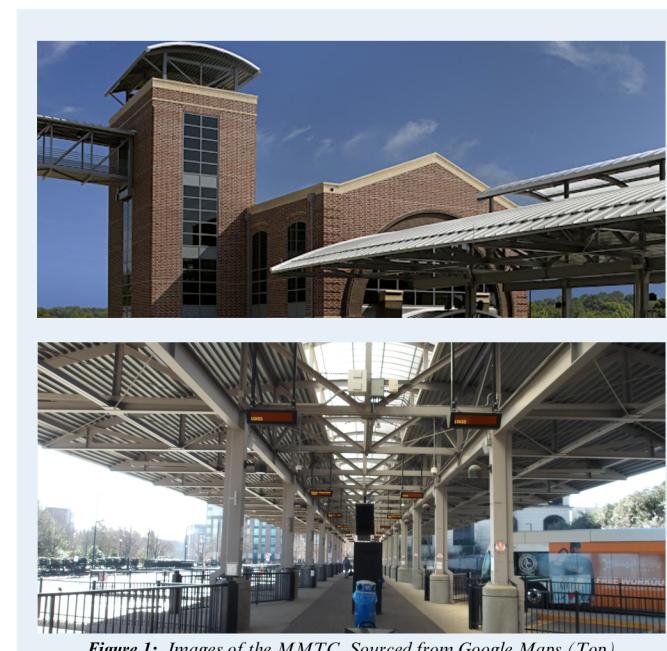


Figure 1: Images of the MMTC. Sourced from Google Maps (Top)

To provide sufficient historical context for this Periodic Audit report, we reference ACCGov Overview Commission reports. The Overview Commission makes written recommendations to the Mayor & Commission, and openly to the general public. After reviewing the four reports from 1996, 1999, 2010, and 2020, we found no significant findings or recommendations related to Transit operations.

[i] [https://railfanning.org/history/athens-streetcars/#google\\_vignette](https://railfanning.org/history/athens-streetcars/#google_vignette)

# OVERVIEW

## Current Environment

The Transit Department has three divisions: Administration, Maintenance and Operations. Administration operates out of the Multimodal Transit Center (MMTC), which is located at 775 E Broad St, Athens, GA 30601. The Maintenance and Operations divisions work out of a facility at 325 Pound St, Athens, GA 30601. Online mapping apps show the two facilities to be 2.7-3.9 miles apart by automobile routes, with travel time in normal traffic eight to nine minutes.



Figure 2: Aerial view image of ACCGov Transit's Pound Street facility

The Pound Street facility was built in 1977 and stands on property that is shared with the Leisure Services Department, which occupies a separate building on the same grounds. The property is accessible through the residential and historic Boulevard/Buena Vista neighborhoods. An unoccupied building formerly housing the jail also sits on these grounds. The Pound Street facility is where all buses are housed when not in service. Vehicles are serviced by the Maintenance Division in the six bays located at this facility.

At the time of this audit, five bays are being used for maintenance activities, and one is being used for storage. There are also five offices used by the Operations Division to plan, organize and implement transit services, as well as an employee breakroom, restrooms and a conference room which also serves as a training room for new employees. The entire Transit portion of the property is fenced. There is an automated vehicle gate, with camera and keypad, which can be opened remotely from within the facility. There is also a pedestrian gate which remains padlocked.

The MMTC is equipped with 17 sheltered bus bays in its outdoor area, which also features benches, digital displays, loudspeakers for announcements, and an emergency call box. The first-floor lobby has benches, restrooms and vending machines available to the public. A reception window is enclosed with plexiglass, above which a digital screen displays bus arrival and departure information. There is also an employee break room with a single toilet facility. Transit Department's Administration Division is housed on the second floor of MMTC. To accommodate the six staff members who share this space, an area formerly used as a lobby has been converted to office space.

ACCGov Transit is constructing a transfer center as part of a third-party concurrent construction mixed-use project within the Mall Redevelopment Plan.



Figure 3: Image sourced from Impact Development Management

# OVERVIEW



Figure 4: Five bus bays located at the Pound St. location

In order to prepare buses for departure, and clean, fuel and maintain after service is complete, Maintenance Division employees may work in shifts from approximately 5:00AM until midnight during the week, and approximately 6:30AM until 9:00PM on weekends. Administrative offices are generally open 8:00AM-5:00PM, Monday-Friday.

There are a total of 496 designated bus stops maintained by ACCGov Transit throughout the county. This number does not include the stops maintained by the University of Georgia. Bus stops are designated at different levels: landing pads, benches or shelters. These stops are classified by daily ridership and the rider frequency. Level one bus stops are designated by a landing pad and level two stops have the same landing pad with an attached bench. Level three bus stops have a landing pad, bench, shelter and nearby trashcan.

Of the shelters, during the last 15 years, 44 have been designated as “art shelters,” which were created using funds from the 2000, 2005,

According to published schedules, ACCGov Transit’s service hours for its 18 daytime routes and nine evening routes are Monday-Friday, 6:00AM-9:45PM and Saturday and Sunday 7:00AM-6:45PM, with bus schedules varying by route. Certain routes are adjusted around University of Georgia’s breaks, holidays and “reading days” (which are days that are counted as part of the semester, but students do not attend classes).

There are nine annual ACCGov holidays on which bus service does not run throughout the community. Additionally, service hours for The Lift, which is an on-demand, curb-to-curb transportation service that provides transportation for residents with mobility impairments, are 6:00AM-10:00PM, Monday-Friday and 7:00AM-7:00PM on Saturday and Sunday.



Figure 5: Three levels of bus stops. Top left is level one, top right is level two and bottom is level three.

# OVERVIEW

2011 and 2018 SPLOST programs. These structures were created to emphasize the local public transit system and also provide functional public art. The initial 11 art shelters were created during the first two phases in 2005 and 2011 as a part of the “You, Me and the Bus” program. The latest art shelters, funded from SPLOST 2018, include 13 art shelters and 20 laser-cut shelters that were designed by artists.

All bus stop designs are prescribed by the Transit Department. While designers of a new development can be required to build transit amenities for certain projects, they may be allowed to alter the prescribed design to fit the development concept. Once built, however, ACCGov Transit is required to maintain the infrastructure. As part of the zoning ordinance (ACCGov Code of Ordinance: Ch. 9-25-8):

*“Transit amenities, such as bus stops, benches, shelters, bus bays, and other transit-related improvements, and easements for future transit amenities, shall be required if deemed necessary by the Athens-Clarke County Transit Director or authorized designee.”*

The Oconee Street Park & Ride, which is accessible through routes 25 and 27, is located at the State Route 10 Loop and Oconee Street intersection. The lot was designed to give riders a location close to downtown with free parking in order to use public transit to get to their final destination. The grounds are maintained by ACCGov Central Services Department.

## Accolades & Accomplishments



Figure 6

As of March 2025, the department remains steadfast in its commitment to safety, currently demonstrating over 200 days without an accident. Additionally, the Transit department has 22 operators with over a year of experience who possess certificates in Safe Driving Years, ranging from one to 26 years; three operators specifically having “Five Years Safe Driving” plaques; and one operator who has a Ten Years ACCUG Service recognition.

## Process & Methodology

It is the intent of the Internal Auditor to perform constructive audits and present reports which are clear and concise. This report highlights factual information, both positive and negative, so that those with responsibility have the opportunity to respond and build off the suggestions provided. The findings of the Periodic Audit are presented so as to be easily understood by those outside ACCGov in a manner that is relatable, but sound in logic. The layout has been designed in a direct and deliberate style to facilitate usability for all interested parties.

# OVERVIEW

In order to assure and maintain objectivity, independence, integrity and professionalism, OA uses generally accepted government auditing standards to gather and analyze data. Information used for this report was attained directly from Transit Department and other ACCGov entities, along with publicly available documents and information. Sources used from outside of ACCGov are cited where applicable.

Quantitative analysis has included a review of ratios and trends among data in order to isolate unusual circumstances. Qualitative analysis has been judged to be valid when it is logically comprehensive, complete, professional, and significant to the reported findings.

Specific activities of research and analysis included:

- Research of federal, state and local laws and regulation governing the operation of the Transit Department
- Gathering of information specific to the Transit Department and its partnership entities through research of digital and printed sources
- Attendance at public meetings
- Sampling of data, including financial and performance metrics
- Analysis of documentation requested from the department and subsequently submitted by department director and staff
- Data and information gathered from anonymous surveys prepared by OA staff and voluntarily submitted by department employees, either digitally or on paper
- Oral interviews of staff members
- Scheduling trips and riding buses
- Test of internal controls against standards set by federal, state and county entities, as well as best professional practices
- Observation of all divisions' operations by shadowing staff during normal operations
- Research and analysis of comparisons between ACCGov Transit Department and other transportation entities

While methodology and scope are designed to be consistent among ACCGov departments, the diversity of operations across the organization calls for certain aspects of the audit work to be tailored to each department. For the Transit Department, a standardized Periodic Audit Document Request list was used, and 48% of requested documents were submitted by the department in a timely manner, or upon clarification and further communication. Remaining documents either were not submitted, or do not exist, which is not unusual in a periodic departmental audit. A questionnaire was provided to each staff member, with an online link, QR code, and paper copies provided for completion. A 55% response rate of active Transit Department employees was received by OA staff.

Fieldwork comprised 111 hours over 25 days. Email and phone calls were used to follow up regarding scheduling, office visits, and quick clarification questions. Confirmation of assets, records, statements and documents was made by cross-reference with other ACCGov departments.



# ANALYSIS

## Comparative Review

As part of the periodic audit, the Operational Analysis Office reviewed data from transit authorities and entities serving areas within or similar to Athens-Clarke County. Key factors of interest included staffing, compensation, hours of operation and ridership. To conduct this review, OA Staff utilized departmental staff and relevant websites to compare ACCGov Transit with similar jurisdictions. Specifically, we focused on the Clarke County School District, the University of Georgia, Hall and Gwinnett counties, and private contractors such as Groome shuttle service and McLane transport. By evaluating these metrics, we are able to take a more comprehensive approach to analyzing the ACCGov Transit Department, and in particular its staffing capabilities and challenges.

Comparisons among transit systems are not exact, due to the unique geography and ridership of each, among other factors. Additionally, within ACCGov itself, there are many similar or nearly identical job descriptions for which ACCGov Transit competes with its fellow departments in hiring and retaining staff. Several other ACCGov departments offer positions requiring a commercial driver's license and/or mechanic skills required for Transit Department positions.

The current advertised salary for ACCGov Transit vehicle operators is \$18.45 - \$28.60 hourly for fulltime, and \$18.45 for part-time. Current job postings also advertise a hiring bonus of \$1,500-3,000, depending on whether the applicant holds a Commercial Driver's license (CDL). Although the midpoint salary is \$48,932, ACCGov compensation guidelines generally require extensive experience to attain that level.

As of January 21, 2025, there were 10 jobs posted on the ACCGov website requiring or preferring a CDL in addition to four advertised by the Transit Department. The other departments listing a CDL in job descriptions were Airport, Central Services, Public Utilities, Public Works and Sheriff's Office. Pay grades for non-public-safety, non-supervisory positions ranged from pay grades 110-113 (midpoint salaries \$46,605-\$53,952), and for non-public-safety supervisory positions 113-117 (midpoint salaries \$53,952-\$65,579). Pay grades for public safety positions (Airport, Firefighter and Sheriff's Office) are \$51,220.00 - \$57,246.00 Annually and \$50,575-68,474 respectively with a potential \$10,000 hiring bonus for the latter.

The average yearly salary of a transit bus driver in Georgia is \$34,739 per year. For a school bus driver, the average salary is \$36,994, and for a motor coach bus driver \$43,847. According to the United States Census Bureau, Athens' median households income from 2019-23, in 2023 dollars, was \$51,655.

*Figure 8: Average Salaries in Georgia<sup>[i]</sup>*

Job Title	Annual Salary	Hourly Wage
Motor Coach Bus Driver	\$43,847	\$21.08
School Bus Driver	\$36,994	\$17.79
Transit Bus Driver	\$34,739	\$16.70
Remote Airport Shuttle Driver	\$31,821	\$15.30

[i] <https://www.ziprecruiter.com/Salaries/Transit-Bus-Driver-Salary--in-Georgia>

# ANALYSIS

The University of Georgia (UGA) and Clarke County School District (CCSD) both operate robust transportation systems with distinct differences in staffing, ridership and hours of operation. UGA Transit employs approximately 59 full-time and 60 part-time bus drivers. Pay starts at \$16.00 per hour, and paid training for a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) with a Class B Passenger Endorsement is provided, with regular wage increases beginning as soon as training is completed. Their maintenance team consists of nine technicians, including three supervisors, while the administrative team comprises various roles, including operations supervisors, managers, planners, schedulers, driver trainers, directors,<sup>[i]</sup> and training specialists.

UGA Transit operates from 6:00AM until the end of service, which can range from 1:00AM to 3:00 AM. General administrative hours are 8:00AM-5:00PM. Annually, UGA Transit facilitates over 3.5 million passenger trips, providing fare-free services to the public. However, UGA students pay a mandatory transportation fee to support the transit system. According to information available on the UGA Bursar's Office web page, this fee, reviewed annually by the Mandatory Student Fee Committee, funds bus and paratransit operations, training, salaries, fleet maintenance, and a reduced rate for ACCGov Transit to allow free off-campus travel for students with a valid UGA ID. The fee has ranged from \$103 per semester in 2010–2012 to \$121 per semester in recent years (with a temporary reduction to \$116 during Fall 2022/Spring 2023). The 2023–2024 transportation budget totals \$9 million.<sup>[ii]</sup>

In contrast, CCSD employs 139 salaried drivers with a pay range from \$22.69 to \$30+ per hour, 17 on-call drivers earning \$22.69 per hour, 52 bus monitors earning \$18.14 per hour, seven on-call bus monitors, and eight service technicians.<sup>[iii]</sup> Their administrative team includes various roles, such as the Director of Transportation, assistant directors, routers, supervisors, coordinators, training instructors, and dispatchers. CCSD's bus operations vary in hours, starting as early as 4:00AM and concluding at 5:30 PM, with additional services for athletic and after-school programs beyond these hours. While specific ridership data for CCSD is currently unavailable, they plan to implement RFID Cards to capture accurate data in the future.<sup>[iv]</sup>

Groome Transportation has provided 24-hour-a-day shuttle service from Athens' hotels to the Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson International airport since 2011. Groome employs both CDL and Non-CDL drivers, as well as mechanics and administrative personnel. For non-CDL shuttle drivers, Groome advertises a base pay of \$10.25 - \$15.25/hour based on the time and days worked, along with credit card tips that average \$5.75/hour and additional cash tips. McLane Transport is a nationwide wholesale distributor based in Texas with over 25,000 employees. The job listing for a CDL position (Yard Driver, 3:00PM-11:30PM) at the Athens location advertises a starting salary of up to \$22.50/hour.

## Regional Comparisons

OA staff selected transit systems in the vicinity for comparisons. Since workers can commute to nearby counties in order to work similar jobs, Hall and Gwinnett were chosen for comparison. However, in the

[i]<https://tps.uga.edu/transit/>

[ii][https://busfin.uga.edu/bursar/TransportationFeeFactSheet\\_24.pdf](https://busfin.uga.edu/bursar/TransportationFeeFactSheet_24.pdf)

[iii]<https://www.publicschoolreview.com/georgia/clarke-county-school-district/1301170-school-district>

[iv]<https://www.clarke.k12.ga.us/o/ccsd/page/transportation>

# ANALYSIS

process of analysis, significant differences in the types of services were discovered. Both Gwinnett Hall counties offer on-demand service using an app for scheduling and payment. As of 2021, Hall County no longer offers fixed-route bus service. It does offer a single-route seasonal trolley service in downtown Gainesville during the summer season and Christmas holiday. Gwinnett offers two types of fixed-route service: local routes and express commuter routes. Hall county's trolley service is free, but all other services in both counties are fare-based.

It should also be noted that Gwinnett County hires a global third-party provider, Transdev, to operate its transit services. Transdev operates 37 services across the US, including the Georgia Regional Transit Authority (GRTA) Xpress. At the time of this audit, Transdev advertised CDL Driver positions at \$22.50-\$24.00 per hour (Union Collective Bargaining Agreement PayScale), with a \$3,000 signing bonus.

## Service & Fare Comparisons

The 100% fare-free structure of ACCGov Transit makes it unique in the state. The Chatham Area Transit system offers two fare-free fixed routes in its historic district on its “dot” system, which is labeled as “Visitor Transportation” on its website. Rome Transit Department began offering fare-free transit in 2021 but will reinstate fares of \$0.75-\$1.50 beginning in March of 2025. All researched municipalities offer discounts to students and seniors, and all offer advance-purchase, multi-ride discounts.

## Comparative Analysis

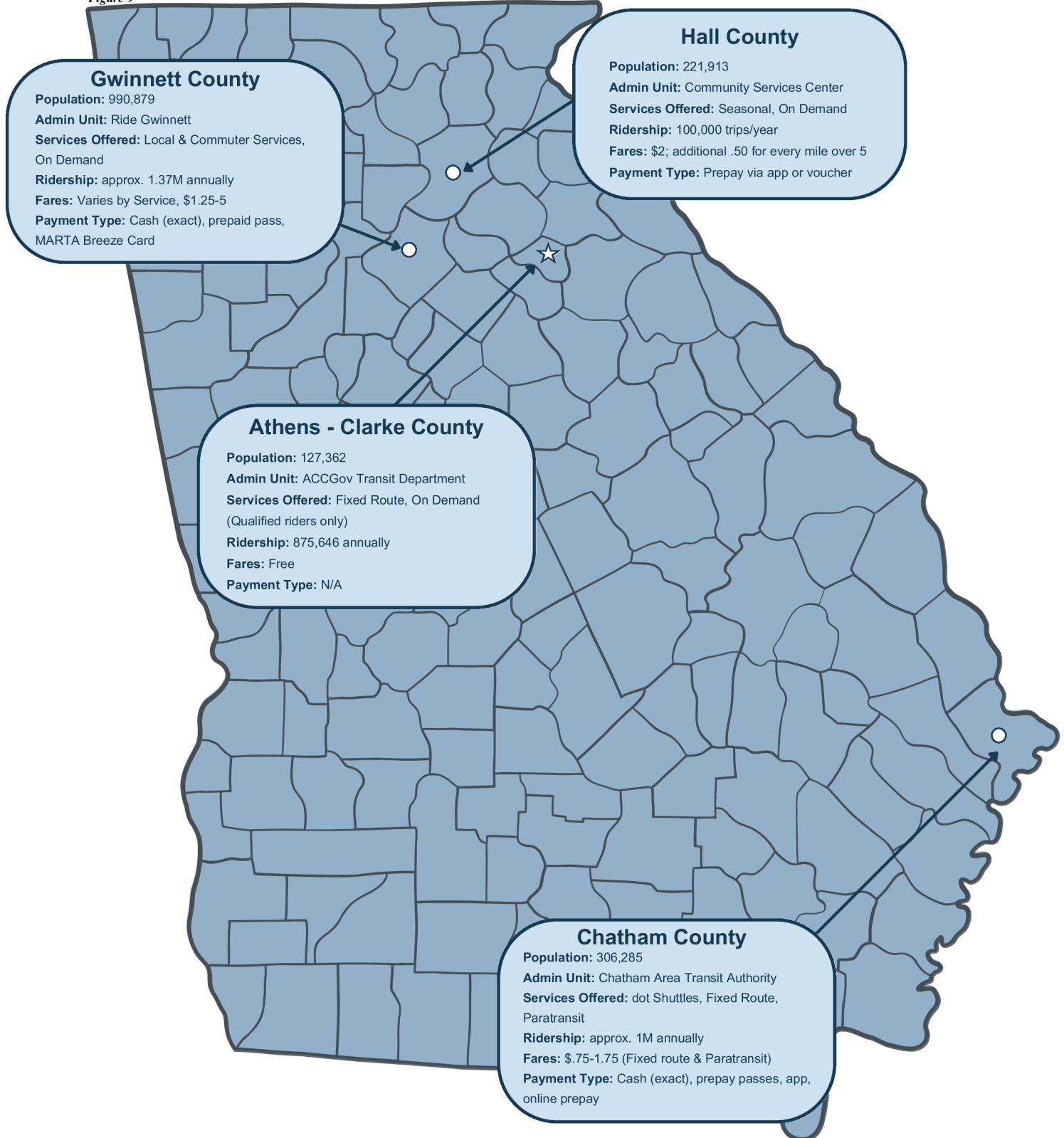
There are a limited number of small to medium urban areas in Georgia with public transit systems that have points of comparison with ACCGov Transit. Three factors in particular stand out as far as Athens Transit are: the fare-free structure; a seven-day-per-week operation schedule; and, its coexistence with the UGA Transit system. In Savannah, there is fare-free service on two fixed, circular routes in the historic downtown, and seven-day-per-week service. The system is not directly operated by the city or county government, but by the Chatham County Transit Authority (CAT). Gwinnett and Hall Counties were chosen for comparison due to proximity, but both have significantly different operating structures from ACCGov Transit, most notably being Hall County’s move to 100% on-demand service (with the exception of the seasonal trolley), and Gwinnett’s outsourcing of its operations to Transdev Corp.

The Operational Analysis Office has identified that ACCGov Transit faces significant challenges when competing with its largest local employee counterparts. Full-time operators at the University of Georgia (UGA) and the Clarke County School District (CCSD) earn minimum annual salaries of \$46,000 and \$47,195, respectively. In contrast, the starting minimum salary for a transit employee at ACCGov is approximately \$40,000—a considerable gap in compensation. Additionally, while all institutions require rigorous working hours spanning from 4:00AM to well after midnight, depending on operational needs, CCSD employees typically complete their shifts by 5:30 PM. This more favorable schedule, coupled with higher wages, places added pressure on ACCGov Transit to enhance its appeal to current and prospective employees. These differences highlight UGA Transit's focus on a wider user service and extended operating hours, supported by the student transportation fee, while CCSD prioritizes student transportation within a more structured timeframe, complemented by a substantial support system for both regular and special programs.

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At the time of this report, ACCGov Transit is the only completely fare-free municipal transit system in the state. While there is not a truly similar transit system within Georgia to compare operations, OA staff compared jurisdictions that potential employees may consider during their job search. It is also worth noting that Athens-Clarke County is the only unified government among those that were studied.

Figure 9

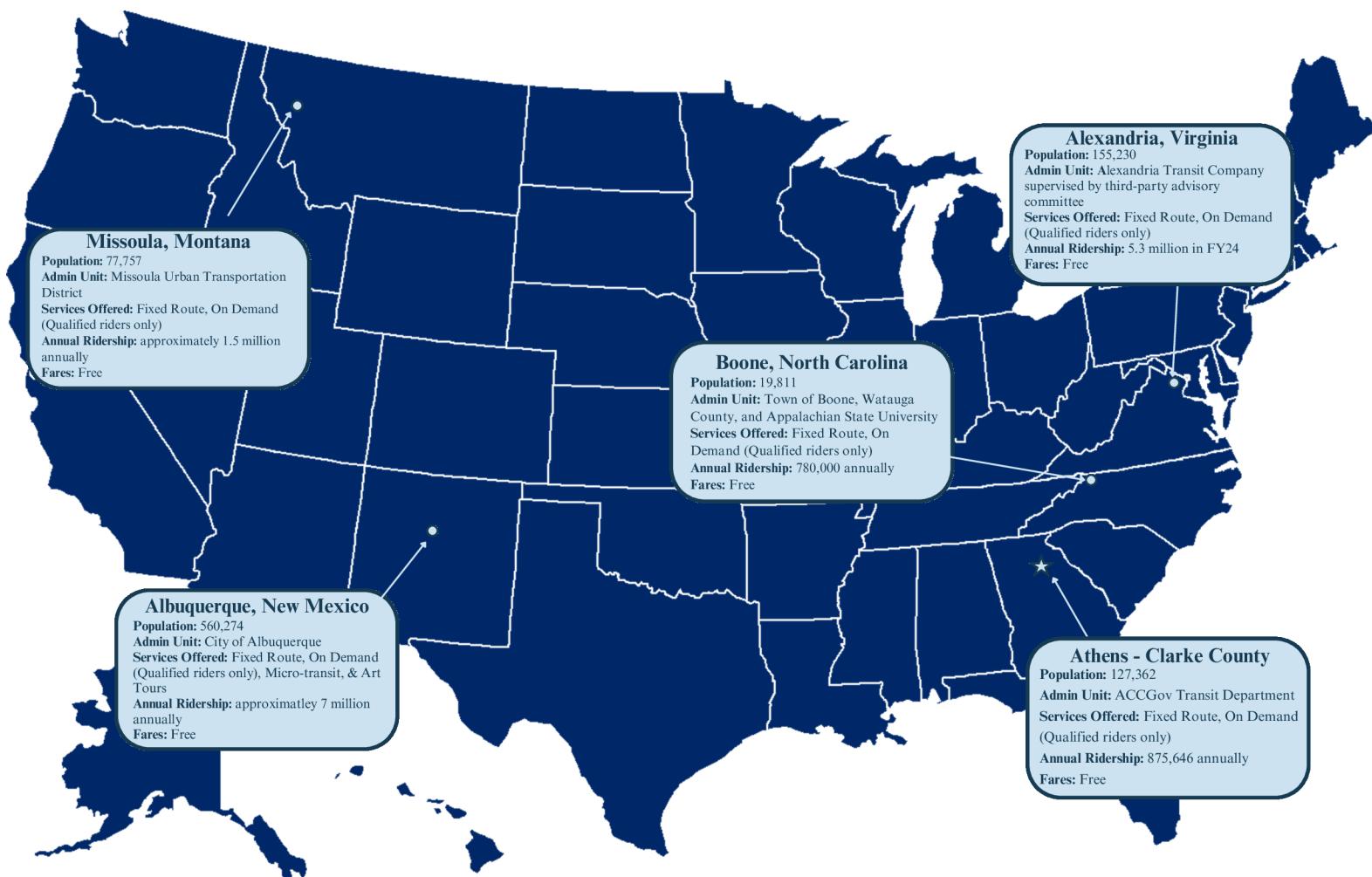


# ANALYSIS

Within the state of Georgia, transit services of comparable scale are not fare-free, unlike the operations of ACCGov's Transit Department. The Operational Analysis team conducted a review of fare-free transit services across the United States to assess their prevalence and sustainability. While many systems that implemented fare-free policies during the pandemic have reverted to fare-based operations to sustain their scale, some systems continue to operate without charging fares. Notable examples include Mountain Line in Missoula, Montana; AppalCART in Boone, North Carolina; DASH Bus in Alexandria, Virginia; and ABQ Ride in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Mountain Line, based in Missoula, Montana, serves approximately 80,000 residents and operates through a legacy partnership involving 26 companies. Governance is provided by a board appointed by the City of Missoula and Missoula County. In Alexandria, Virginia, DASH Bus is a non-profit public service corporation owned by the city, providing service to 160,000 residents across 10 routes. This is fewer than ACCGov's Transit Department, which operates 18 routes. AppalCART, located in Boone, North Carolina, serves a population of 20,000 through 16 weekday routes, funded by the Town of Boone, Watauga County, and Appalachian State University. Lastly, ABQ Ride in Albuquerque, New Mexico, serves a population of approximately 558,000 across six weekday routes but is currently scaling down its operations.

Figure 10



# ANALYSIS

## Compliance Review

All divisions of the ACCGov Transit department have to keep compliance in mind during their daily operations. Transit staff has to ensure they are in compliance with rules and regulations put forth by local, state and federal authorities at all times. As a recipient of state and federal grant funding, Transit staff has to guarantee everything from department purchases to the safety of passengers is in compliance with those regulatory bodies.

The Athens-Clarke County Transit system is a department of the Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County (ACCGov), which is responsible for overseeing public transportation within the county. This local government plays a central role in decision-making for transit operations and any potential expansions. Additionally, local government officials, including ACC commissioners, influence transit policies and project decisions. The transit system is also closely coordinated with other entities such as the University of Georgia (UGA), which operates its own transit system. UGA's collaboration with ACCGov dates back to 1977, and both institutions share resources, such as funding and bus routes, to provide efficient public transportation across Athens-Clarke County. Their joint efforts are outlined in service provisions, funding, and responsibilities between the two entities. This partnership is vital for ensuring that public transportation is both accessible and cost-effective for a diverse range of riders, including students, residents, and faculty.

A significant source of funding for the ACCGov Transit system comes from the local TSPLOST (Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax), which was approved by voters in 2022. This program allocates funds for 34 different transportation projects, some of which are allocated to ACCGov Transit efforts, such as the expansion of service in East Athens and the electrification of the bus fleet. The TSPLOST oversight is managed by a committee of residents who ensure that these funds are allocated appropriately across projects, with particular attention to public transit initiatives.

The TSPLOST 2023 program also affects transit investments, which will be part of the broader Transit Development Plan (TDP) update currently underway. This five-year strategic plan aims to enhance the ACCGov Transit system's operations through capital improvements, route expansions, and increased efficiency, all of which align with local and state transportation goals.

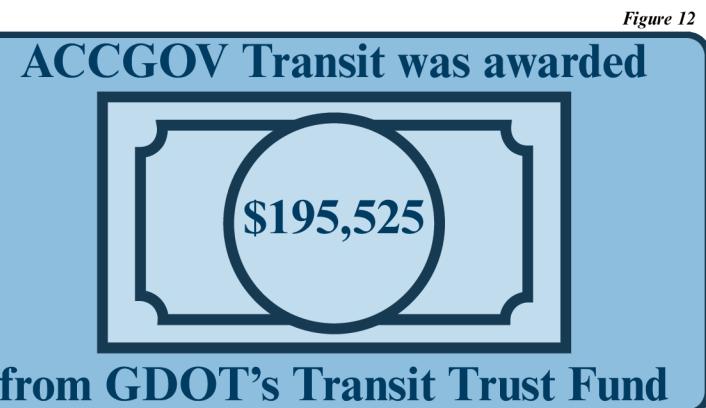
One of the more complex aspects of local governance in Athens-Clarke County Transit involves the agreements and funding arrangements with UGA. The FY24 agreement between ACCGov and UGA reflects a shared responsibility for funding, route coordination, and the efficient use of federal transportation resources. Through this partnership, both entities leverage federal funding



Figure II: Cover of the proposed 2025 - 2029 TDP

# ANALYSIS

under programs like the Section 5307 Urbanized Area Formula Program, which supports both capital and operational costs. The agreement specifies the apportionment of funds, the coordination of transit services, and the expansion of routes to meet increasing demand. The partnership is designed to ensure that both the University and the broader Athens-Clarke County urban area benefit from a well-integrated transit network that minimizes duplication and maximizes efficiency. Additionally, both entities are committed to increasing ridership, improving services, and using federal funds to sustain and enhance the transit system.



ACCGov Transit operates under a framework of state and federal authorities, with key oversight from the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) and the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). In 2021, Georgia secured its first-ever dedicated annual state funding for public transit, amounting to \$27 million. From this, ACCGov Transit received \$195,525 for FY25 through GDOT's Transit Trust Fund, allocated based on population.

The Madison Athens-Clarke Oconee Regional Transportation Study (MACORTS) is a federally mandated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) that is key to transportation planning in the urbanized area, ensuring the flow of federal funds to the region. The Policy Committee, which includes representatives from Madison, Clarke, and Oconee counties, the University of Georgia, and GDOT, oversees this process. The committee has eight voting members, with leadership rotating among the counties, and holds meetings on an as-needed basis.

Advising the Policy Committee is the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC), which includes staff from the involved counties, the University of Georgia, GDOT, and the Federal Highway Administration. The ACC Planning Department Director serves as the permanent chair of the TCC. Together, the ACC Planning Department and GDOT manage the transportation planning process, ensuring compliance with federal legislation and directing the allocation of federal and state funds, like the \$98,919 allocated to ACCGov Transit for Fiscal Year 2025, with a local match of up to \$24,730.

## Strategic Planning

When considering the FY23-25 Strategic Plan Goals, Strategies, and Initiatives of the M&C, two metrics are assigned to the Transit Department:

- Metric: Revitalizing Transit: Strategies for Recruitment and Service Restoration*
- Metric: Enhancing Accessibility: The Zone 3 Decentralized Transit Center Plan*

These metrics are connected to two corresponding goals/strategies within the Strategic Plan:

### Goal #3 Organizational Improvement

- Strategy A: Develop strategies to recruit, reward, and retain high performing employees, both internally and externally, including individuals coming out of the justice system.

# ANALYSIS

## Goal #5 Safely Move Around Athens

- Strategy B: Provide enhanced public transportation through inter-city travel options to connect Athens residents with the surrounding region.
- Strategy C: Expand multi-modal Transit access to reduce auto dependency and provide greater mobility for Athens residents.

Beyond the metrics assigned to departments within the Organizational Strategic Plan, each department is also charged with creating a Departmental Strategic Plan, which is included in the organization-wide tracking system, ClearPoint. The departmental plan available for viewing in ClearPoint lists six goals, encompassing seven strategies, 16 initiatives measured by 49 milestones. This departmental plan was updated in FY25 from the previous FY22 plan.

## Plans Review Process

Transit planning staff is involved in the weekly Plans Review process that includes reviewing all building and site submittals. Transit Planners are notified via the software program, Clarity, when plans are submitted for potential commercial or residential developments to the Planning Department for review. The Transit staff then determines whether it is the type and size of development which warrants investigation of bus stop infrastructure. Criteria include population density and demographics, use, and whether or not the property sits on an existing bus route, as well as proximity to other stops. If the decision is made that the development should include bus stop infrastructure, the developer may either grant easement to ACCGov to construct the stop, or alternately construct the stop themselves, particularly if they would like to design the stop according to their own architectural or artistic style. In either case, maintenance for the stop remains the responsibility of ACCGov.

Additionally, Transit staff has worked closely with the Planning Department when creating and updating the Development Services related standards, policies, checklists and documents that relate to the Transit Department when creating a Development Services webpage. At the time of the report the Transit review average has exceeded expectations; building only was only a 7-day review period, while site only and site & building review was 14 days.

## Contracts & Agreements

There were no contracts & agreements between Transit and any other ACCGov Departments submitted to Operational Analysis Staff. While the department does take part in cross-departmental partnerships, for example MACORTS and Plans Review, but there are no formal contracts or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) put in place.

Similarly, ACCGov Transit does not have any formal contracts or agreements with any quasi-governmental, non-profit organizations or internal government agencies. While Transit staff does frequently communicate with these groups and value the wants/needs of these stakeholders, they currently do not have any official arrangements with these groups. Examples of these agencies they work with include MACORTS, which is run through the ACCGov Planning Department, or Clarke County School District.

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The only external government agency that ACCGov Transit has a contract with is the University of Georgia (UGA). ACCGov Transit and UGA are in an intergovernmental agreement on how to split the FTA's Urbanized Area Formula Program, or 5307, funds between the two entities. Previously ACCGov Transit was the only sub-recipient of these funds, but ACCGov provided UGA with funds proportional to the metrics they were reporting.

Starting in FY25 the university also became eligible for the 5307 funds, so the two organizations entered an agreement regarding the transit services that are being offered to the community as well as the allocation of these 5307 funds. This agreement has resulted in a 51%/49% divide of these funds in FY25, with UGA getting the majority. OA staff observed that the divide between these two organizations was calculated using the Allocation Calculation Method to the current Key Performance Metric Data submitted to the National Transit Database (NTD). The divide of the funds is able to be changed annually between ACCGov Transit and UGA using the previously mentioned calculation.

At the time of the report, Transit has contracted with over fifteen private sector businesses to ensure the continuation of daily operations. ACCGov Transit primarily contracts with private sector businesses for items such as tires, uniforms, bus wrapping and oil. Contracts with private sector businesses can be found within every division of the ACCGov Transit Department and those contracts are procured using federal, state and local procurement standards.

It is worth note that one major system that is also used across all divisions of the department is AVAIL technologies, but Transit uses a subscription-based model with that company rather than having a contract or formal agreement. Due to that technology being included in all of the hybrid buses, the rest of the fleet had to move over to this subscription-based technology. Additionally, when using a subscription-based platform, that software is not subjected to some of the procurement standards that are used for contracts. Currently, the AVAIL software is renewed annually by department leadership.

## Professional Standards & Accreditations

The department provides supervisors with a robust program that emphasizes critical leadership skills. This program includes 15 comprehensive training manuals, such as Gaining Commitment: Setting Performance Objectives That Work and Delivering Feedback: Fixing Performance Problems. These resources focus on areas such as setting measurable objectives, fostering accountability, and enhancing team performance through effective coaching.

Maintenance staff undergo extensive training and certification programs to ensure top-tier expertise in maintaining and repairing the department's vehicle fleet. These programs encompass both foundational and advanced topics to meet evolving technical and safety standards.

Figure 13



# ANALYSIS



#### Key Certifications Include:

- Lift Truck Operation
- Wheelchair Restraints and Securements through Q'Straint
- Modine E-Fan Diagnostics
- Luminator System Training
- Vehicle Detailing
- Shop Equipment
- Gillig Bus Operations

Additionally, every maintenance team member completes 35 online courses with passing scores on Allison electric bus systems, preparing them for all-encompassing vehicle servicing. The team also benefits from specialized training in areas like diesel tank switching, multiplex systems, quick-serve operations, and fleet history (fleet mileage, fuel usage, parts usage and cost). The department prioritizes safety and ongoing learning through obtaining and continuing certification in over 40 courses.

Operations staff benefit from a rigorous training program that covers federal regulations, passenger assistance, and defensive driving. Specific modules also address safety and sensitivity when working with passengers, ensuring employees are well-prepared to handle diverse situations. As of December 2024, the ACCGov Transit Operations department employs 61 staff members, all of whom undergo an extensive onboarding process. The department's vehicle operator training encompasses 24.25 hours of classroom instruction in areas such as federal regulations, safety best practices, hazard mitigation, adverse driving conditions, defensive driving techniques, and conflict and aggression management. Operators receive 4 to 6 weeks of comprehensive training, tailored to their experience and familiarity with the transit system, covering a wide range of topics like de-escalation techniques, emergency response procedures, and ADA compliance.

Daily Driving Standards Checklist			
Use this two part form to track each student's progress during BTW training. If your operation has other standards it must test for, you can write them in the blank spaces.			
Student: _____	Hours Driving _____		
Instructor: _____	Bus Model: _____ Bus # _____		
Location: _____	Date: _____		
circle one			
1. Pre-Trip Inspection	P	F	N/A
2. Seat Adjustment	P	F	N/A
3. Mirror Adjustment	P	F	N/A
4. Hand Signals	P	F	N/A
5. Use of Signals and Horn	P	F	N/A
6. Use of Brakes and Anticipated Stops	P	F	N/A
7. Defensive Driving - LLC	P	F	N/A
8. Following Distances	P	F	N/A
9. Straight Ahead Driving	P	F	N/A
10. Straight Backing	P	F	N/A
11. Right Turns	P	F	N/A
12. Left Turns	P	F	N/A
13. Crossing Intersections	P	F	N/A
14. Driving Railroad Tracks	P	F	N/A
15. Narrow Bridges/Underpasses/Restricted Hts	P	F	N/A
16. Service Stops	P	F	N/A
17. Entering Traffic/Merging	P	F	N/A
circle one			
18. Overtaking and Passing	P	F	N/A
19. Lane Changing	P	F	N/A
20. Pedestrian/Bicyclist Awareness	P	F	N/A
21. Night Driving - Special Conditions	P	F	N/A
22. Limited Visibility	P	F	N/A
23. Post-Trip Inspection	P	F	N/A
24. Commentary Driving	P	F	N/A
25. Bus Announcements	P	F	N/A
26. Life Situations	P	F	N/A
27. Wheelchair Seizement /Passenger Restraint	P	F	N/A
28. Air Brakes	P	F	N/A
Operation Specific/Local Requirement - Write Out			
1. _____	2. _____	3. _____	4. _____
5. _____	6. _____	7. _____	8. _____
9. _____	10. _____	11. _____	12. _____
13. _____	14. _____	15. _____	16. _____
17. _____	18. _____	19. _____	20. _____

Training is further structured into thematic groups, such as defensive driving, passenger service, and emergency response, ensuring operators are proficient in handling diverse situations. De-escalation training and Passenger Assistance, Safety, and Sensitivity (PASS) modules account for 240 minutes of specialized training. Operators are also required to pass a TAPTCO final exam, complete refresher courses, and maintain certifications to uphold high standards across all operational facets.

By incorporating tools like daily driving checklists, de-escalation training receipt forms, and vehicle loss notices, the program reinforces a culture of safety and continuous improvement. Supplemental training—like maneuvering standards (closed course) and specialized workshops from organizations such as the Community Transportation Association of America—ensures that staff are equipped with advanced skills for passenger assistance and vehicle operation.

**Figure 14:** Daily driving checklist used during TVO training

# ANALYSIS

Customer service is another focal point for the Athens-Clarke County Transit Department, with resources such as the 20 Telephone Doctor Customer Service training modules, which include programs like Influencing the Interaction and Curt to Courteous: Mastering the 7 Touch Points of Communication. These resources aim to improve communication skills and ensure employees can effectively address customer needs while maintaining a proactive approach.

Additionally, the ACCGOV Transit barring process, customer service reports, and structured procedures—such as the Complaint Handling Procedure Flowchart—demonstrate a commitment to resolving customer concerns efficiently. For example, complaints may be submitted in person, by phone, email, or in writing, and are categorized for resolution at either Stage 1 (Frontline Resolution) or Stage 2 (Complaint Investigation). This comprehensive approach reflects the department's dedication to professional standards and a safe, supportive workplace, further underscored by its substance abuse policy and incident reporting protocols.

## Third-Party Reviews

### *Georgia Department of Transportation 2024 Risk Assessment*

The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) conducted a risk assessment of the FTA 5311 Rural Program. In this review, GDOT evaluated major program areas for overall compliance with Federal Transit Administration requirements. These reviews are conducted periodically to identify areas of deficiency. When deficiencies are identified, GDOT/FTA requires a corrective action plan (CAP), written policy modifications, and potentially requests for additional documentation.

The 2024 review of ACCGov Transit identified the department as medium risk, highlighting deficiencies in three key areas: financial management oversight, procurement, and the drug and alcohol program.

### Financial Management Oversight

- This review revealed several issues:
  - Absence of written financial policies and procedures, including protocols for cash or credit card handling.
  - Delays in submitting monthly reimbursements and documentation—only September's submission is currently under review.
  - Subrecipients' insufficient review of allowable costs, resulting in ineligible expenses.
  - Submission of overly detailed, disorganized General Ledger data, including numerous ineligible costs.

### Procurement

- Despite the FY24 contract year ending on June 30, 2024, the subrecipient had not yet fully utilized the allocated funds.

### Drug and Alcohol Program

- The program lacked an adoption page in its policy, necessary to confirm its validity and active status.

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Addressing FY 2025 Risk Areas Athens-Clarke County Transit Department (ACCGov Transit) *has effectively resolved* these deficiencies in their Risk Assessment Corrective Action Plan.

## **Financial Management Oversight Improvements**

- No longer accepting cash, checks, or credit cards, ensuring compliance with the ACCGov Finance and Procurement Manual.
- Restricting grant expenditure until agreements are fully executed, with authorization being sought to expedite processing.
- Implementing a new expense submission system for greater accuracy and faster processing of grant-related costs.
- Collaborating with GDOT to streamline reimbursement processes, eliminating extraneous or confusing data.

## **Procurement Enhancements**

- Working to expedite the use of FY24 5037 grant funds, received on April 9, 2024, and reimbursements before the June 30, 2025, deadline.
- Using the Georgia Transit Trust Fund to request a dedicated position focusing on finance and compliance activities.

## **Drug and Alcohol Plan Update**

- Securing the mayor's signature on the adoption page of the 2024 Drug and Alcohol Plan, formalizing its June 4th adoption as per the FTA mandate.

## *GDOT – Office of Audits | Agreed-Upon Procedures – Athens-Clarke County*

At the request of the Georgia Department of Transportation's Office of Intermodal, the Office of Audits conducted an agreed-upon procedures audit for ACCGov Transit to assist in overseeing the 5307 Transit Program and assessing the effectiveness of GDOT's review of compliance with transit program requirements, including those under FTA's 5311 program. The audit was not intended to provide an opinion on overall program compliance, and as such, no opinion is expressed. The procedures undertaken included verifying reimbursements for subawards, reconciling program revenues, and reviewing compliance with drug and alcohol testing requirements. For reimbursements, 100% of sampled operating expenditures and capital purchases were checked for adequate support, accuracy, allowability, proper documentation, and compliance with procurement and grant regulations, including CARES Act provisions. General ledgers were reconciled with reimbursement forms to ensure accuracy of program revenue reporting. Regarding drug and alcohol testing, policies were reviewed, and documentation for pre-employment testing, random testing, and post-accident or reasonable suspicion testing was examined.

Key findings included \$8,865.87 in questioned costs for project T006111, with \$6,466.76 lacking documentation and expenditures such as meals, hotels, donations, and other costs found to be insufficiently supported or unallowable under federal regulations. Additionally, supporting documentation for pre-employment and random drug testing was not provided. These findings highlight

# ANALYSIS

the need for improved documentation and adherence to program requirements. GDOT Transit Program Manager, responded September 2023, stating that she and her staff will follow up with Athens Transit on the findings that require corrective action and that she has no further questions or comments.

## *FTA Triennial Review*

The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) conducted a comprehensive compliance review of ACCGov Transit in order to assess adherence to state and federal regulations as a Section 5307 subrecipient, while also providing technical assistance to strengthen its management practices. The review aimed to identify areas of noncompliance, suggest improvements, and ensure that ACCGov Transit is effectively meeting the requirements of its federal funding. The first stage of this review was conducted by the contracted consultant, RLS & Associates, Inc. This phase focused on evaluating documentation and data submitted by ACCGov Transit in response to specific requests. The second stage comprised a site visit.

Compliance observations noted in the review outlined specific deficiencies requiring remedial action. Examples included the need for ACCGov Transit to revise its procurement policies, improve preventive maintenance performance, and submit compliant Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and Drug and Alcohol Testing policies. Advisory recommendations were non-mandatory suggestions aimed at improving operational efficiency. These included best practices, such as revising public information for consistency and ensuring accessible formats are advertised effectively.

The review process is not a full audit but rather a limited-scope compliance assessment. Its primary purpose is to provide technical assistance to ACCGov Transit, identifying areas for improvement without necessarily uncovering every potential instance of noncompliance.

## **Consultant Reports**

### *Transit Feasibility Plan*

**ACC Transit  
went fare-free on  
July 6, 2020**



*Figure 15*

The Athens Transit Feasibility Study, created in June 2016, evaluates the potential for a unified transit system in Athens-Clarke County and the University of Georgia (UGA). While some aspects of the study no longer apply—due to ACC Transit going fare-free in 2020 and UGA receiving federal funding—its relevant recommendations have been utilized to develop the Transit Development Plan. The study focuses on assessing current transit operations, identifying needs for service expansion, and exploring opportunities for consolidating services.

Short-term goals include enhancing multimodal transportation, improving accessibility projects, and utilizing SPLOST funding for upgrades. Long-term objectives focus on eliminating redundant infrastructure, merging services, and securing sustainable funding. The study is grounded in an analysis of existing conditions, service performance, and prior plans to create a framework for efficient, accessible transit development.

# ANALYSIS

## *Transit Safety Plan*

The ACCGov Transit Department Transit Safety Plan, adopted in March 2024, complies with the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) 49 CFR Part 673 requirements and emphasizes Safety Management Systems (SMS) principles. This 20-page detailed Safety Plan incorporates various leadership roles, including the maintenance and operations administrators, alongside the assistant director who serves as the Chief Safety Officer (CSO) and the director serving as the Accountable Executive.

ACCGov Transit emphasizes the importance of hazard management through a three-step process: hazard identification, assessment, and resolution. Hazards are identified via employee reporting, performance data, safety investigations, inspections, public feedback, and other methods. Resolutions are devised to mitigate risks effectively, with some cases requiring changes in policies, additional training, or system redesigns. Complex hazards may involve tracking logs to ensure corrective actions are implemented and monitored. A multi-disciplinary Safety Committee, led by the CSO, oversees this hazard management program.

The Safety Plan requires management, staff, contractors, and suppliers to adopt high standards of safety in design, construction, testing, and operational phases. Employees are encouraged to report safety concerns through a structured reporting process that protects them from retribution. The CSO, supported by departmental managers and the Safety Committee, maintains regular hazard assessments and ensures any mitigations do not create additional safety concerns. Every employee must practice workplace safety, use equipment, tools, and materials properly, and be trained in the agency's work rules and procedures for their respective areas of responsibility, including contingency plans for abnormal and emergency conditions.

## *Transit Development Plan*

A Transit Development Plan (TDP) is a Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) required plan with a 10-year horizon intended to support the development of an effective multimodal transportation system for Athens-Clarke County. The Athens-Clarke County Transit Development Plan (TDP) underwent an extensive third-party evaluation to assess its feasibility, sustainability, and responsiveness to community needs. Independent reviewers analyzed the plan's alignment with transit best practices, financial sustainability, and stakeholder expectations.

TDPs serve as a strategic planning document and define public transportation needs, coordinate with other transportation plans, involve substantial public participation, and explore community goals with decision-makers and other stakeholders. The TDP process is mandated by both federal and state statutes and is repeated every five years. As part of this endeavor, the operational environment is going to be evaluated alongside considerations for the future of the system.

A key observation was the variance in priorities among different groups. Community feedback, gathered through surveys and public meetings, emphasized the need for increased frequency, expanded service

# ANALYSIS

hours—particularly on weekends and evenings—and maintaining a fare-free system or limited increase to a one-dollar fee per ride. Many residents expressed a strong preference for regional service expansion to surrounding areas.

Public participation strategies for the 2025 Athens Transit TDP engaged with a variety of groups in order to identify ways to better serve transit customers and opportunities to expand ridership through fun and engaging communication and outreach. The mayor's office emphasized the need for a balanced approach that prioritizes economic development while ensuring sustainable transit operations. Stakeholders, such as business leaders and institutional representatives, largely supported transit enhancements but focused on transit's role in workforce mobility and economic growth. Employers favored direct, high-frequency routes to job centers, while university representatives highlighted the importance of seamless integration with UGA's transit system.

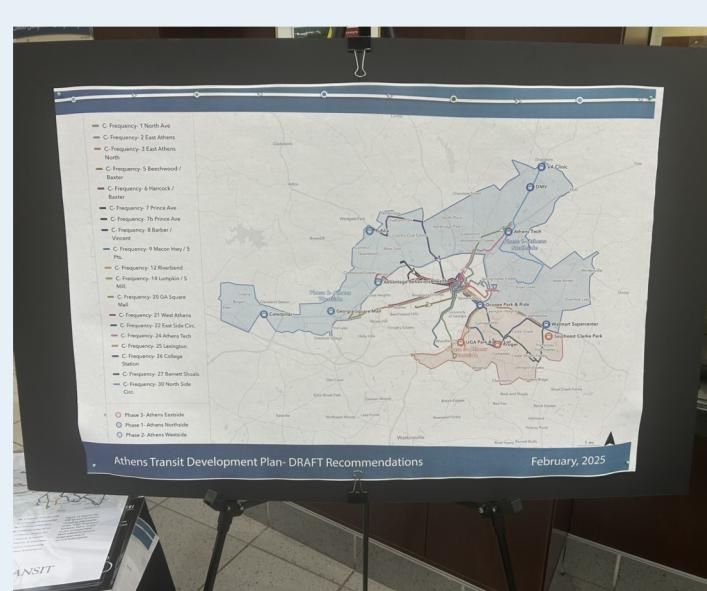


Figure 16 Potential route map shown at February 2025 TDP public input event

ACCGov Transit's goal is to reach all citizens in ACC, especially targeting current riders, community leaders who play a role in executing Athens Transit or represent the distinct voices of the community, and potential riders who do not actively use transit but would if able. The third-party assessment endorsed the TDP's strategic direction, acknowledging its commitment to balancing community needs with financial and operational constraints. The review recommended continued stakeholder collaboration to refine service priorities and secure funding for sustainable growth.

## *Title VI*

ACCGov Transit is dedicated to ensuring that no individual is excluded from participation, denied benefits, or subjected to discrimination under any program or activity it undertakes, in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This commitment extends to compliance with federal regulations and guidance, including the Federal Transit Laws (49 CFR Part 21) and FTA Circular 4702.1B.

The department's responsibilities encompass leadership and commitment, contractual compliance, complaint resolution, training and corrective measures, data collection, and documentation and reporting. Additionally, the department has established clear procedures for filing and investigating complaints. Upon receipt, complaints are reviewed, acknowledged, and investigated within a specific timeframe to ensure fairness and adherence to Title VI requirements.

Outcomes are communicated through closure letters or letters of finding, with opportunities for appeals. Furthermore, the Athens-Clarke County Transit Department oversees compliance among subcontractors and ensures nondiscrimination practices in employment and program delivery.

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## Compliance Analysis

Upon review, the Office of Operational Analysis found that ACCGov Transit is performing satisfactorily in maintaining, improving, and mitigating compliance risks within its strategic plan, plans review process, professional standards and accreditations, contracts and agreements, and third-party reviews, while consistently maintaining good standing with all governing authorities.

## Financial Review

A review of the FY25 Operating Budget, Capital Budget and previous three fiscal years, was performed to gain a general sense of revenues/expenditure trends, and provide detail of major account spending. This was accomplished through an understanding of financial documents, interviews, observations and data analysis.

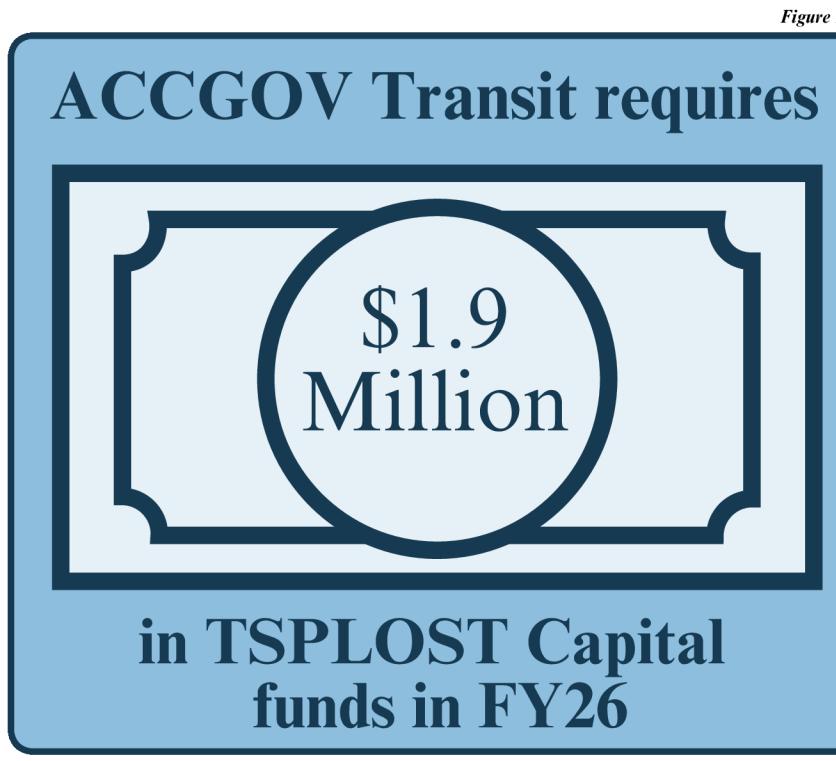
Unique to Transit as compared to other ACCGov departments is that it is primarily grant funded through both the state and federal government. While ACCGov does have to match some portions put forth by the state, traditionally 10%, that is the only amount of funding the ACCGov has to contribute to the departments annual budget.

The federal fiscal year begins Oct. 1, while ACCGov's begins July 1, so it can be necessary for grant award amounts to be estimated during the budget preparation process. Year-over-year approved budget totals are compared against end-of-year results in the summary tables found on pages 30-31, with funding accounts broken down by the revenue source to include ACCGov's general fund, general capital fund Transit Enterprise Fund, Grants Fund (SRF) and TSPLOST.

## Capital Budget

For the FY25 capital budget, the Transit Department carried a \$222,500 balance, with a proposed budget of \$160,000 for FY26-29 and \$400,000 for FY30-34. to be used as matching funds for federal grant dollars. This reflects the anticipated 20% match, although it is a possibility that the state of GA Department of Transportation could fund 10%, making ACCGov Transit responsible for 10%. Allocations for this fund include vehicles, benches and shelters and other supported transit capital projects.

In FY26, the ACCGov Transit department will require approximately \$1.9 million in TSPLOST funds to meet the Department's capital needs.



# ANALYSIS

## Future Allocations

The total proposed general capital funds budgeting for the Transit Department through Fiscal Year 2034 is \$740,000. This reflects allocation of \$80,000 proposed annually, primarily to be used as matching funds for varies state and local grants. Typically grant funding is 80% Federal and 20% local match, although some projects receive a 10% state match, reducing the local portion by half. For the three years prior to FY22, no general funds were required for grant matching funds, as the department funded its portion of the grants through the sale of surplus buses and equipment. The FY22 approved amount was a total of \$80,000, \$30,000 of which was designated for funding of updates to the Transit Development Plan (TDP).

Figure 18



Additionally, there was a carry-forward balance in this fund of \$94,700. There were no general capital funds approved in the FY25 budget, reflecting and \$80,000 reduction in the four-year future proposed budget (FY25-FY28) which was again reduced by the same amount for FY26-FY29. The proposed FY30-FY34 budget reflects the prior proposal of \$400,000, or \$80,000/yr., with an additional \$150,000, or \$30,000/yr. for updates to transit plans and studies.

For its five-year Capital Improvements/Investment plan, Transit projects expenses of approximately \$143M, \$65M of which would be dedicated to Operations (Maintenance Facility) scheduled in 2028. An additional \$50M is scheduled at approximately \$10M/yr. over five years (2025-2029) for Transit Operating, dependent upon the TDP deployment strategy.

Projections assuming the funding sources in figure 19 and a continued fare-free structure through 2029 result in expenses in excess of \$17.1M of matching funds required.

Figure 19

Funding Source	Amount
Federal & State Grants	~\$86.1M
TSPLOST 2023 Projects 19 & 20	~\$29.5M
ACCGov Capital General Fund	~\$0.3M
ACCGov General Fund	~\$9.7M
ACCGov Transit Advertising Agreement	~\$0.3M
<b>Total</b>	<b>~\$125.7 M</b>

# ANALYSIS

## Operating Budget

Previous Three Fiscal Years

Figure 20

Fiscal Year	Fund	Original Budget	Revised Budget	% +/- Previous Year	Year End/YTD Expenditures	Encumbrances	% of Yearly Expenditures	Notes
FY22	Transit Enterprise Fund	6,009,000	5,986,006	N/A	4,887,530	0	81.65%	Transit Funds does not include depreciation expenses
	Grants Fund (SRF)	100,800	-	N/A	N/A	-	See Notes	Overall Grants SRF (Transit) Available End-of Year Budget FY22: \$1,466,807
	TSPLOST	-	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	General	-	N/A	N/A	No Change	0	100%	There was a \$699,843 transfer to the general fund. There was no General Fund contributions in FY22 due to the increase in federal funding through ARPA
	General Capital	80,000	N/A	N/A	13,128	0	-	N/A
FY23	Transit Enterprise Fund	6,296,000	6,464,758	4.78%	5,733,964	0	88.70%	Transit Funds does not include depreciation expenses
	Grants Fund (SRF)	100,841	70,200	0.04%	N/A	--	See Notes	Overall Grants SRF (Transit) Available End-of Year Budget FY23: \$1,466,807
	TSPLOST	1,300,000	N/A	N/A	--	N/A	N/A	N/A
	General	150,000*	N/A	No Change	--	N/A	N/A	*Transferred to the Transit Enterprise Fund, used as a local match for grants.
	General Capital	80,000	N/A	No Change	--	N/A	N/A	**Split between two projects, often used as a local match for grant requests
FY24	Transit Enterprise Fund	7,224,300	7,289,710	14.74%	6,145,627	(8,260)	84.19%	Transit Funds does not include depreciation expenses
	Grants Fund (SRF)	100,841	N/A	No change	N/A	-	See Notes	Overall Grants SRF (Transit) Available End-of Year Budget FY24: \$3,173,269
	TSPLOST	5,500,000	N/A	323.08%	N/A	N/A	N/A	
	General	500,000*	N/A	233.33%	N/A	N/A	N/A	One time General Fund contribution
	General Capital	80,000	N/A	No change	N/A	N/A	N/A	

# ANALYSIS

Current Fiscal Year

Figure 21

Fiscal Year	Fund	Original Budget	Revised Budget	% +/- Previous Year	Year End/YTD Expenditures	Encumbrances	% of Yearly Expenditures	Notes
FY25*	Transit Enterprise Fund	7,396,347	7,386,347	2.38%	N/A	524,301.73	74.67%	Transit Fund does NOT include the depreciation expenses
	Grants Fund (SRF)	100,841	--	No Change	N/A	732,257	-	Overall Grants SRF (Transit) Available YTD Budget (3 <sup>rd</sup> QTR.) FY25 \$3,525,905
	TSPLOST	5,000,000	N/A	No Change	N/A	N/A	N/A	
	General	0	N/A	-100%	No change	N/A	N/A	
	General Capital	0	N/A	-100%	No Change	N/A	N/A	

\*YTD as of March 2025

At the time of the report, Transit is on track with their current year budget. Within their Compensation line items, overtime is a major expense that the department takes on, similar to other comparable departments within ACCGov. While the majority of expenditures within the Transit Department come from compensation and benefits, but there are some other line items worth mention.

## Major Allocations

FY25 Transit Enterprise Fund:

Diesel Fuel - \$850,000

- This account is used for refueling the part of the Transit buses that still run off of diesel in any capacity. The Transit Department has a contract with Acree Oil Stto provide fuel at their fueling station located at Pound Street. Please note that this is not an internal transfer to the Fleet Management Division of the Central Services Department – Transit purchases their own fuel for all of their vehicles.

Electricity - \$60,000

- This line item covers the electricity used to charge the EV vehicles (both revenue and non-revenue), as well as the electricity used for the MMTC and Pound Street locations. This figure is prior to the addition of the new electric vehicle infrastructure and needs of electric vehicles.

Contract Labor - \$350,000 (\$287,500 revised\*\*)

- This account is used for any maintenance needed on vehicles that is completed on-site. This amount has increased over the previous years due to the vacancies found across the department and the use of contract labor to bring them back to full service capacity.

# ANALYSIS

## Advertising, General - \$95,000

- This account is used for the general advertising and marketing done for the Transit Department. The advertising and marketing include purchases such as signs, merchandise and event sponsorship.

## Overtime: \$217,000

- For a minimum of the past two fiscal years, the Compensation - Overtime line item within the Operations Division has run into the negatives. If the Transit Department was not allowed this over Budget Limit Request, there would be an issue with them meeting Strategic Goal 5: Safely Move Around Athens. Overtime funding has increased over the years due to the number of vacancies in the Operations Division, specifically with Bus Operators.

Figure 22

Transit Overtime, Operations Division			
	Approved	Used	% +/- Used
FY23	69,300	193,902.69	280%
FY24	71,300	292,127.80	410%
FY25*	217,000*	207,483.51*	96%*

## Recent Budget Trends:

\*YTD as of March 2025

As seen above, the overtime budget has increased at a steady rate for the past three fiscal years, with the biggest jump happening between FY24 and FY25. Additionally, there has been a significant decrease in General Fund contributions to Transit (both General and General-Capital), with both funds no longer contributing to Transit at the time of the audit.

## Funding Sources

### General Fund:

The FY25 budget does not include a General Fund contribution to the Transit Enterprise Fund. In FY24, a one-time allocation of \$500,000 was provided. In FY23, no contribution was recommended due to anticipated federal funding from the FTA through the American Rescue Plan Act, consistent with FY22, when transit operations, including fare-free services and service expansions, were supported by federal relief funds instead of the General Fund.

### Special Revenue:

In reference to the Athens-Clarke County budget, the creation of tax allocation districts (TADs) was authorized in Georgia under the Redevelopment Powers Law, designating the Mayor and Commission as the Redevelopment Agency. The six TADs in the county broadly include the 'creation or improvement of mass transit facilities' within their range of allowable uses for TAD funding to support redevelopment. As of March 2025, no allocations have been made to ACCGov Transit.

# ANALYSIS

## Grants

Figure 23

Title	Amount Awarded	Description
FTA 5303 - FY25 Metropolitan Planning Assistance	<p>\$79,714.00 (Federal)  \$9,967.00 (State)  \$9,968.00 (Local)  = \$99,676.00</p>	<p>This encompasses: Program Support Administration, Long-term Transportation Plan - System Level, Short - Range Transportation Planning, and Transportation Improvement Program.</p>
FTA 5307 - FY25	<p>\$4,707,632.00 (Federal)  \$132,780.00 (State)  \$3,778,172.00 (Local)  = \$8,618,584.00</p>	<p>5307 - Urbanized Area Formula Program  This can include operating assistance, capital - vehicles, small capital, and mobility management/planning.</p>
Georgia Transit Trust Fund - FY24	<p>\$172,844.00</p>	<p>In 2021, the Georgia General Assembly enacted HB 511 (codified as O.C.G.A. § 48-13-141), creating the Georgia Transit Trust Fund (“TTF”) as a separate fund in the State Treasury, with annual appropriations from these fees. The GDOT Commissioner serves as the trustee of the Georgia Transit Trust Fund, and funds allocated to the TTFP are distributed to counties with transit services using a formula. This distribution is detailed in the TTFP SFY2024 Annual County Allocations. ACCGov submitted its TTFP Application for FY24, which GDOT subsequently accepted.</p>
FTA 5307 - FY24 Operating/Capital/Planning/ Mobility Management	<p>\$4,917,312.00 (Federal)  \$158,990.00 (State)  \$3,200,903.00 (Local)  = \$8,277,295.00</p>	<p>Operating, capital, and planning costs are funded through a combination of federal funding and state/local matching contributions.</p>
FTA 5307 - FY23 Operating and Capital	<p>\$10,391,143.00 (Federal)  \$247,524.00 (State)  \$1,488,526.00 (Local)  = \$12,126,955.00</p>	<p>Operating and capital costs assistance</p>
FTA 5307 - FY22 Operating	<p>\$366,722.00</p>	<p>100% federal operating funds in an electronic contract for FY2022 funding to assist with the operation of the Athens public transit system.</p>
FTA 5307 - FY22 Operating/Capital/Planning	<p>\$200,000.00 (Federal)  \$25,000.00 (State)  \$25,000.00 (Local)  = \$250,000.00</p>	<p>TDP Development</p>

# ANALYSIS

## Bus Advertising:

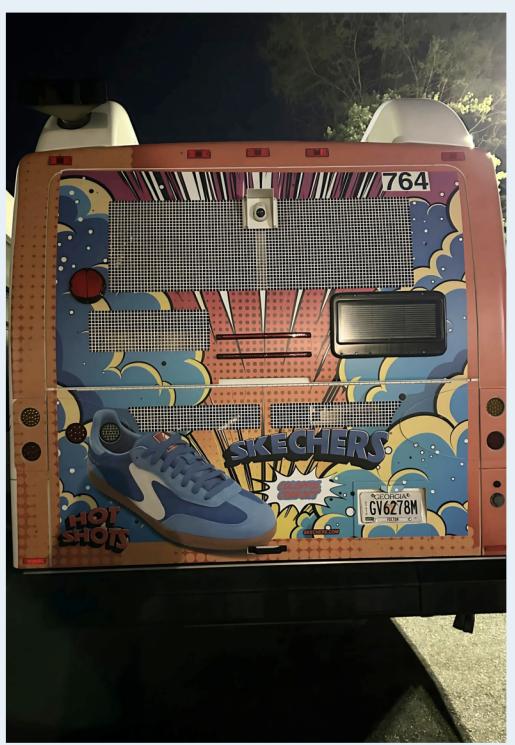


Figure 24: Back of a Transit Bus wrapped in an advertisement

ACCGov Transit contracts with Houck Transit Advertising for the advertisements that are displayed on the outside of the vehicles. Within the contract, Houck promises a minimum of \$55,000 in revenue to the Transit department. If the total amount of advertising sales surpasses that \$55,000, then there is a 50/50 split between the Houck and ACCGov Transit of the net advertising sales.

The 2018 Athens Clarke County Transit Department Advertising Policy and Regulations outlines the administration, standards and objectives of advertising on Transit vehicles. The policy emphasizes the use of advertising as a revenue opportunity for the department and establishes an apolitical, neutral standard that is to apply to all advertising on the fleet. Additionally, it states that a maximum of 30% of the fleet can have a “half wrap” or “full wrap” at any given time. Priority is given to commercial advertisers; however, once that space is taken by said group, any remaining advertising space can be used by either the Transit Department or other ACCGov Departments, which are given a 25% discount off the commercial rate.

## Enterprise Funds

At the time of the report, due to ACCGov Transit being fare-free, advertising is currently the sole source of revenue generated by the department. The contract with Houck ensures there is a minimum of \$55,000 in advertising revenue returned to ACCGov Transit.

As of March 2025, ACCGov Transit operates as a fare-free service and is, therefore, reliant on third-party sources of revenue. A review of the current expenditure trends within the Transit Enterprise Fund, the primary source of federal grants reimbursed as the department incurs expenses, reveals that the available, including (operating reserve for 3 months) unrestricted net position has been running a deficit of \$1.7 million in FY25.

Figure 25

Fiscal Year	Actual Net Position (as of July 1, FY)	(+/-) Actual Change	Actual Percentage Change	Available Net Position (operating reserve for 3 months as of July 1, FY)	(+/-) Available Change	Available Percentage Change
FY22	(\$1,579,340)	-	-	(\$3,398,340)	-	-
FY23	\$286,850	Increase	118%	(\$1,678,967)	Decrease	50.6%
FY24	(\$628,114)	Decrease	319%	(\$1,324,704)	Decrease	21%
FY25	\$464,662*	Increase	174%	(\$1,795,338)*	Increase	35%

\*estimate

# ANALYSIS

## *Fare Structure:*

Over the past two decades, Athens Transit bus fares had risen at least four times, before the system became completely fare-free in April of 2020. The prior increases were from \$1 to \$1.25 in 2009, to \$1.50 in 2012, to \$1.60 in 2013, and \$1.75 in 2014. Beginning in 2016, fare-free service was being provided for children under 18. In July of 2019 “The Bus,” as it was then known, became fare-free for seniors 65 and over as well as disabled people and ACCGov employees. With concerns over the spread of the Covid-19 virus in 2021, all rides became fare free, to eliminate payment-handling, and to allow riders to enter the bus through the rear doors, maintaining distance from the driver.

## **Detailed Accounting of Assets**

ACCGov Transit department assets include vehicles of two types. While the department does not currently charge fares for rides, federal and state regulations classify busses and on-demand vehicles which are used to transport customers as “revenue” vehicles. The other classification of vehicles includes maintenance service vehicles and units used to transport route supervisors as support for the “revenue” vehicles. At the time of this audit, the vehicle counts were as displayed in the table below.

*Figure 26*

<b>Vehicle Type</b>	<b>No. in fleet</b>	<b>Age range</b>
Heavy-Duty Buses, Diesel	11	12-16 years
Heavy-Duty Buses, Hybrid	21	4-7 years
Light Duty Vans (Cutaway Bus)	5	6-10 years
Light Duty Vans	3	5 years
Service Vehicles	16	5-19 years

Additional assets carried by the Transit department are primarily vehicle maintenance equipment, as well as two generators to power the Pound Street facility in case of an outage. The replacement cost on this equipment is estimated to be \$3.1M. All assets were verified visually by OA staff, with the exception of two revenue vehicles which were under repair at an off-site location. One light-duty van and a street-sweeper were inoperable and in the process of disposal, per ACCGov guidelines.

## **Financial Responsibility**

Similar to other ACCGov Departments, there are no authorized users within the Transit Department that are able to enter any journal entries within Munis. At the time of the report, nine staff members have the ability to view Purchase Orders and Requisitions. Budget transfers within the Transit Department can be requested by seven users, with those users primarily comprising the department administrators and leadership. Additionally, budget transfers can be approved by three staff members within the department.

# ANALYSIS

At the time of the report, the department does not handle any cash. When the department went fare-free, all of the cash handling within the department went away. While the buses are still equipped with their original fare boxes, they are no longer in the condition to be used for collecting fares.

Fifteen people within the Transit Department currently hold Purchasing Cards (P-Cards.) Transit Staff noted that they have reduced the number of P-Cards within the department in the past few years to streamline the purchasing process. Upon review by OA staff of records from the Purchasing Division of the ACCGov Finance Department, no discrepancies regarding records of who holds these cards were found. Transit staff has recently implemented a process to ensure the prompt and proper submission of P-Card Receipts within 72 hours of receiving the purchase card statement, using a form created by administrative staff and tailored to the needs of the department.

ACCGov Transit processes all grant funds expenditures as reimbursements. That is, federal or state funds awarded are not paid to the department up front, but instead the funds are transferred to ACCGov once spent, and appropriate documentation is submitted to the funding agency. Throughout the fiscal year, their goal is to fully utilize the allocated funding and recover it through reimbursements from the FTA/GDOT under the terms of their specific grant.

## Financial Analysis

At the time of the report, Transit has used approximately 75% of their annual budget out of the Transit Enterprise Fund, which is on pace to use their funds by the end of the fiscal year. Historically, the Transit Department has relied heavily on grant-funding, with additional revenue generated through farebox revenues and bus advertising. Additionally, general funds have been allotted for capital projects and grant matching funds. During the annual budgeting process, the bulk of revenue estimates are made based on previous years' grant awards. That revenue can fluctuate depending on many factors, so the department complying with both state and federal guidelines is crucial for the continuation of their funding.



Figure 27

As previously mentioned, ACCGov Transit needs approximately \$1.9 million in TSPLOST funds to meet the department's capital needs, this is the first time the department needs additional funds to cover their capital expenses. Although federal funding will cover their operating costs, there will not be sufficient funds to finance their capital projects. These projects include additional electric vehicles for their fleet, benches for bus stops, bus shelters and other infrastructure needs of the department.

This deficit in funding happened as a result of the FY25 ACCGov/UGA Transportation Agreement, a new contract between the two entities to divide the FTA's 5307 funding. Due to this agreement ensuring an annual recalculation of the federal funding, there is no way for the department to estimate over a long period of time the amount of 5307 funding they will be receiving. The contract allows for ACCGov

# ANALYSIS

Transit and UGA to expect a minimum of 40% of the 5307 funds annually or else the two parties have to negotiate an amount that will allow for operations to continue, but the exact amount could be unpredictable and unable to cover capital needs. Additionally, it is important to note that this contract, which is up for renegotiation in October of 2026, stipulates that ACCGov Transit stays fare free through June 30, 2026.

Given the uncertainties surrounding federal funding, the Transit department is increasingly reliant on TSPLOST funds. TSPLOST funding has grown by approximately 285% since FY23, with a consistent upward trend in annual funding requests. Although department leadership intends to pursue additional grants to bridge funding gaps, this effort is constrained by current staffing shortages.

Following the department's recruiting efforts to be become a competitive employers in the area, they have started to hire people without a CDL. The department has taken on the costs of the training and testing of those pursuing a CDL, including the final licensing test that costs approximately \$50 per attempt. That is an additional cost the department has had to absorb in an effort to not only recruit, but also to retain staff and reduce the number over overtime hours being done by staff.

The only revenue generated by the Transit department itself is through advertising. ACCGov Transit should look to formalize the 25% reduced rate given to other departments when advertising on the revenue vehicles in the next contract renewal process. While it is a part of the 2018 Transit Department Advertising Policy and Regulations, it is not formally part of the vendor contract. Additionally, with the future of federal funding becoming increasingly uncertain, the Transit Department should also explore the possibility of advertising at bus stops to help raise additional revenue to cover operating costs.

## Internal Controls

Assets for the Transit department consist of the vehicle fleet and associated maintenance equipment and supplies. The check-in/out of vehicles is monitored by the dispatcher on duty. Daily use of buses and vans is accounted for by the maintenance shop supervisor. The maintenance administrator is responsible for procurement, off-site repair, and disposal of vehicles. The vehicle inventory is kept on record as a spreadsheet in the department shared drive.

Parts and equipment are tracked through the fleet maintenance software system (RTA) system, which is also used by the fleet resources coordinator to track, order, inventory and issue parts and supplies to the mechanics and maintenance workers. Parts and supplies are tagged with individual bar code labels which are scanned and used for tracking and inventory control.

The internal controls review with ACCGov Transit staff focuses on the protection of sensitive information, including access controls, organizational processes, the physical location of archives, and retention periods for records.



Figure 28: Image of inventory with individual bar code labels

# ANALYSIS

Figure 29



Sensitive information is stored in inventory archives at the Pound Street facility. These records, covering three years of maintenance and operational data, are not classified as highly sensitive and do not require HIPAA-level controls. Records are categorized into work orders with defects and those without defects, with each stored in separate areas. Access is restricted to authorized personnel, including drivers and inventory control clerks. Due to space constraints at the multimodal facility, the decision was made to store records at the Pound St. facility, as other storage areas are either unavailable or repurposed for other functions. Records are retained for up to three years and may be requested for purposes such as the FTA triennial review or Department of Transportation digital audits. These reviews help ensure proper fund allocation, identify discrepancies, and support grant applications.

In addition to standard ACCGov computer equipment issued by the IT Department, the Transit Department issues cell phones, iPads and android tablets to certain employees in order to facilitate mobile communication. At the time of this audit, the assistant director, marketing coordinator, division administrators, maintenance crew leader, and five route supervisors are issued ACCGov cell phones. Android tablets are used by route supervisors, and iPads are mounted in the dispatch area to be used by vehicle operators for clocking in and out. ACCGov requires each employee to complete online cybersecurity training as part of the orientation process. At the time of this audit, 62% of Transit staff were shown to have completed the training.

In accordance with the ACCGov Finance Department policy, department leadership determines access levels/permissions in the Munis financial system. A review of software permissions shows that the director, assistant director, administrative assistant III, fleet resources coordinator and maintenance administrator have approver permissions in the Munis software system. The operations administrator, marketing coordinator, administrative assistant II, inventory control technician and the on-demand dispatcher have entry user permissions.

## Procurement

The Transit Department follows rules for procurement ensure it acquires goods and services in a manner that fosters full and open competition while maintaining efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and regulatory compliance. Because they split funds from various sources to cover expenses, all procurement must follow federal (which takes precedence), state and local guidelines. Different rules apply based on purchase amounts, ranging from written quotes for small purchases to formal bids for larger ones. Figure 28 outlines selected details.

The Transit Department manages contracts through two primary avenues. Contracts with the private sector are overseen by department leadership or division administrators, who ensure compliance and act as the primary points of contact for resolving any issues. Conversely, contracts with the federal government involve collaboration among department leadership, division administrators, and an administrative assistant.

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The administrative assistant serves as the liaison with state and federal representatives, working closely with the department director to uphold compliance standards that are crucial for maintaining and continuing funding.

ACCGov	US Federal Government
<i>Finance Dept./Purchasing Division Guide</i>	<i>FTA Circular 4220.1F and 2 CFR §§ 200.317 – 200.326</i>
Purchases under \$1,000 require a written quotation from one vendor approved by the Purchasing Administrator	Micro-purchases (less than \$10,000) do not require competitive quotations but must be equitably distributed among qualified vendors, with the price's reasonableness documented
Purchases ranging from \$1,000 to \$49,999 need written quotations from at least three vendors, also overseen by the Purchasing Administrator	Small purchases (\$10,000–\$250,000) necessitate price or rate quotations from adequate sources and approval by the Procurement Manager or Chairman of the Board
Purchases between \$50,000 and \$99,999 require a formal competitive sealed bid or proposal approved by the Purchasing Administrator	Formal purchases (above \$250,000) require competitive sealed bids or RFPs that are publicly advertised with accurate descriptions, and awards are determined based on the lowest responsive and responsible bid or best value criteria
Purchases from \$100,000 to \$199,999 are subject to the Manager's approval through a formal competitive sealed bid or proposal	Non-competitive procurement is only allowed with a single-source justification, backed by thorough documentation of necessity and cost analysis.
Purchases of \$200,000 or more must be awarded by the Mayor & Commission through the same formal process	All purchases: ensure full and open competition; avoid conflicts of interest in contractor selection; maintaining accurate procurement records for at least five years; conduct cost and price analyses for procurements exceeding the micro-purchase threshold; and include required third-party contract provisions while adhering to Buy America regulations

Figure 30

Compliance plays a critical role in ensuring that third-party contracts incorporate all required federal provisions and that contractors adhere to FTA and GDOT regulations. Robust record-keeping is essential, with procurement records documenting procurement methods, contractor selection rationale, cost analyses, and contract performance. For construction contracts exceeding the federal simplified acquisition threshold, bid, performance, and payment bonds are mandatory. Additionally, all procurements must comply with ADA accessibility standards and Buy America provisions, where applicable.

Employees and officials involved in procurement must avoid conflicts of interest, disclose financial interests in potential contracts, refrain from accepting gifts or favors from contractors or vendors, and base procurement decisions on objective criteria and public interest. To maintain alignment with federal and state regulations, the Transit Department regularly reviews procurement policies and procedures, with GDOT and FTA auditing procurement records for compliance.

# ANALYSIS

## Receipt of Goods

The Transit P-Card Receipt Submission form, developed by the Transit staff, is designed to provide a centralized location for all purchase card statements. It gathers the following information:

- Purchase card statement ID
- Receipt submission formatting
- Missing receipts form
- Travel expense reconciliation form
- Inquiries regarding statement details

This form serves as a tool for collecting information from a diverse group of employees responsible for procuring goods related to maintenance, cleaning, travel, inventory, and all other parts of Transit upkeep.

## Timesheets

ACCGov Transit uses a comprehensive system for tracking operator assignments and schedules. Each block includes details such as the operator assigned, schedule or replacement status, and whether the vehicle is on or off the platform. This system also records report times, travel and relief times, and check-in times. It applies to both regular transit and paratransit services, and operators are expected to initial their designated area every shift.

Operators clock in and out using the Munis system, while administration, supervisors, and dispatchers use a physical time clock. The times when the vans come and go are input into Munis, ensuring accurate tracking of all movements. Additionally, there are sign-ups for overtime on weekends. Throughout the day, checks are performed to maintain accuracy, and the Operations Administrator verifies all entries at the end of each day. The Transit Department is currently adding facial recognition technologies to improve the tracking processes, but as of today, those are not yet in use.

## Inventory

ACCGov Transit runs operations at two facilities: the Multimodal Transportation Center and the Operations and Maintenance Facility. This latter location is equipped with an array of tools and machinery essential for vehicle maintenance, cleaning, and upkeep. This includes two generators, two tire balancers, two tire machines, a trailer, a bus washer, a water reclamation system, a parts washer, a fuel tank, and a street sweeper. The maintenance and mechanic teams are trained and certified to operate and manage all equipment.

## Internal Controls Analysis

The Transit Department, due to its extensive hours of operation and use of two separate facilities, has established internal controls which are primarily based upon separation of duties. For example, the maintenance and mechanic teams' parts and supplies are tracked by the fleet resources coordinator, who in turn enters data into the RTA system, which is monitored by the maintenance shop foreman. The maintenance administrator ultimately assures budget oversight regarding both operating supplies and equipment as well as capital assets. OA staff observed all inventory to be well-organized, properly labeled, and appropriately tracked for usage.

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The Transit Department has had to make a long, slow and often challenging adjustment to organization-wide digital platform changes, including Munis enterprise software and the PerPro digital employee evaluation platform. Like similar large ACCGov departments, Transit staff has a variety of skillsets regarding use of digital platforms and devices. Concerns regarding internal controls for digital access include employees' diligence in logging off shared devices after use, and incomplete training by staff on cybersecurity. At the time of this report, ACCGov Human Resources Department is revamping the employee orientation process, which accounts in part for the lack of completion of the cybersecurity training by some Transit employees.

In analyzing permissions for Munis software, there are instances where those permissions deviate from the typical user profiles, particularly within the Administration and Operations divisions. This is likely a result of the particularly numerous personnel changes over the past four years in these key roles, which happened to coincide with both the coronavirus disruptions as well as the migration to the new Munis software system. Transit leadership should review these permissions with the Finance Department to assure they are properly assigned. This is particularly important because federal procurement guidelines are different from local purchasing rules and procedures, so it is imperative that approval permissions are assigned in a manner that assures approval processes are maintained accurately and efficiently to adhere to all local, state and federal standards.

The payroll process is a combination of employee self-entry in Munis software (used by the Administration and Operations divisions) and a timeclock system used by the Maintenance division. In both cases, accuracy is monitored by supervisors. Upon review no discrepancies in timesheet recording and submittals was noted.

## Performance Review

The Athens - Clarke County Transit Department is best described through their self-stated mission:

*“The mission of the Transit Department  
is to provide safe, courteous, and  
efficient public transportation services  
to Athens-Clarke County.”*

During the annual budgeting process as seen in Appendix A, each department curates performance measures that best describe the role, objectives and performance outcomes for the department. These metrics are updated by the departments during budget season to give a measurable threshold for what the department was able to accomplish in the past year.

A more detailed look into the Transit Department's self-stated performance metrics can be found in

# ANALYSIS

Appendix B, but it was observed that the department aims to increase all areas of their operation between 1-10% annually.

Similar to all of the departments that fall under the Manager's Office, Transit has a departmental strategic plan. At the time of the report, the Transit Department has marked one of the milestones for its departmental strategic plan within ClearPoint as completed. The milestone, which was "Compile all public and stakeholder feedback and finish the [Transit Development Plan] final draft," was marked as complete on July 16, 2023.

When analyzing the FY23-25 Strategic Plan Goals, Strategies and Initiatives of the Mayor and Commission, OA staff found many areas that Transit's operations impact - some of the significant ones are listed below.

- *Goal Area 2: Identify and Close Gaps in Partnership with the Community*
  - 2A: Partner to develop tools and relationships to increase awareness of and access to Athens workforce development opportunities.
  - 2C: Identify ways to address unaddressed community needs and develop programs, policies, and processes to facilitate community transformation
- *Goal Area 5: Move Safely Around Athens*
  - All of the subpoints of this goal fall within the scope of Transit's services.
- *Goal Area 6: Built and Natural Infrastructure*
  - 6B: Ensure Equitable Access to Infrastructure
  - 6C: Adequate funding for maintenance of existing and newly constructed infrastructure
  - 6D: Follow through on commitment to 100% Clean and Renewable Energy resolution
  - 6E: Address ecosystem health, infrastructure sustainability and resilience.

## Career Ladder

The Operations Division is currently in the process of developing and budgeting for a career ladder program for vehicle operators (drivers). The current pay grade for all drivers is 111, with an entry salary of \$38,383/yr., or \$18.45/hr. The proposed career ladder would introduce a three-level system. New hires could be hired at one of the first two levels. Recruits with a class C license would be hired as a Transit Vehicle Operator (TVO) Recruit at the current 111 pay grade. Vehicle operators already holding the required Class B Commercial Driver's License (CDL) with Airbrakes and Passenger Endorsement could be hired as a TVO I at pay grade 112 (\$40,302/yr or \$19.38/hr.) provided they complete:

- Defensive Driving Training
- Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) ELDT Training
- Two TAPTCO Vehicle Operator Training Courses -- Preventing Intersection Accidents and Conflict and Aggression Management

A TVO Recruit is eligible to move up to TVO I, provided they meet the above requirements, as well as certain performance evaluation standards and disciplinary standards. The TVO II career step at pay grade 113 (\$42,318/yr. or \$20.35/hr.) is only open to drivers who have two years' experience as an ACCGov TVO I.

# ANALYSIS

Furthermore, they must complete two additional TAPTCO courses “LLLC Defensive Driving” and “ADA Compliance & Sensitivity”; Peer Specialist and Addictive Disease Training; a leadership program course through ACCGov’s Organizational Development Department; and maintain the same evaluation and disciplinary standards as TVO I. Promotion through the career ladder is not automatically granted. It is made at the director’s recommendation with approval from the Human Resources Department.

The career ladder has not yet been implemented, with one of the concerns being salary compression with regard to the Transit Dispatcher position, which is currently at pay grade 112, meaning the TVO II position would “leapfrog” above Dispatcher.

## Staffing Levels

For FY25, the Transit Department was approved for 83 fulltime and additional 29 parttime positions, divided among divisions as follows: 61 fulltime and parttime vehicle operators; 22 fulltime and parttime maintenance workers; six fulltime and parttime administrative staff. As of February 2025, 25 positions were vacant, primarily including vehicle operators, maintenance workers, and route supervisors. Additionally, the department was approved for five internship positions and one high school work (Great Promise Program) position, none of which were filled at the time of the audit.

The organizational structure of the Transit Department comprises the Administrative, Maintenance and Operations Divisions. The director, administrative assistant III, marketing coordinator, and two transit planner II are the fulltime positions making up the Administration Division. The assistant director is part of the operations division. Reporting to the director are the administrative assistant III and the assistant director.

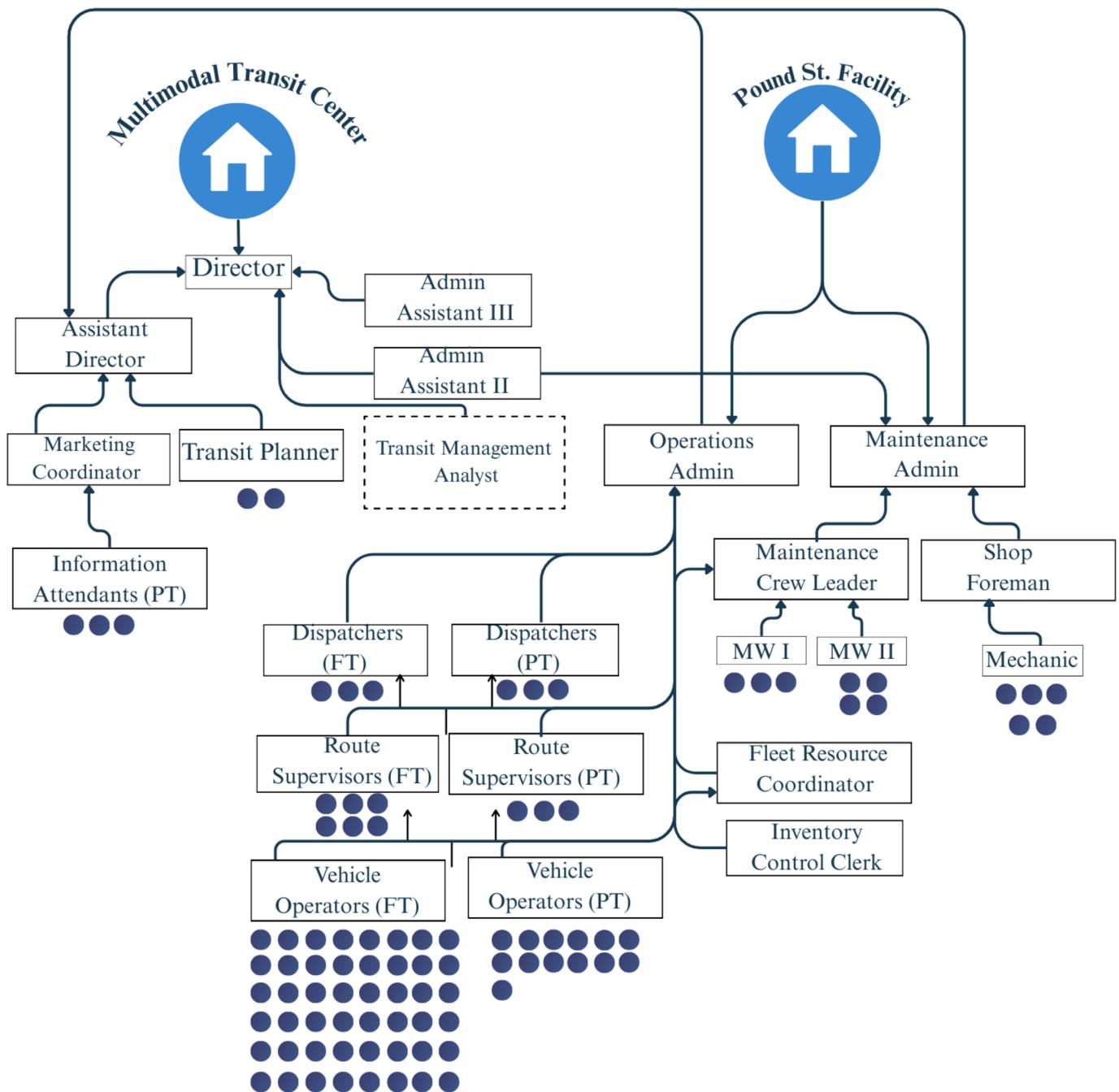
All other fulltime Administration Division employees report to the assistant director, along with the maintenance and operations administrators. All Administration Division staff, along with the assistant director and the administrative assistant II for the Maintenance Division are housed at the MMTC. All other employees are based out of the Pound Street facility.

In addition to the organizational breakdown standard to ACCGov departments, the Operations and Maintenance Divisions have certain job title designations necessary to apply for and comply with grant funding guidelines. Therefore, there is a separate vehicle operator group designated for on-demand paratransit, and a separate maintenance group designated as non-line maintenance workers, which includes facilities maintenance workers and the administrative assistant II.

Both the Operations and Maintenance Divisions provide services outside of normal business hours, including weekend hours, which are slightly shorter, and require fewer staff. Due to a high number of vacancies over the past year, significant overtime has been required to meet scheduled service. Through March of FY25, the department has used 96% of its approved overtime budget of \$207,000. This approved budgetary amount was more than three times the previous year’s budget of \$71,300, which was exceeded by more than 300% that year.

# ANALYSIS

# Organizational Chart



### Legend:

● = one person

MW = Maintenance Worker

FY25 approved TTF  
position, “Management  
Analyst”

Figure 31

# ANALYSIS

## Website

The Transit Department's website can be accessed by going to accgov.com/transit. The department's website is a central place for all of the information the department deems important. The marketing coordinator is in charge of the website and its maintenance. This includes updates when there route expansions or other service changes. This information is usually provided through the NewsFlash feature on the website.

Figure 32



Upon entering the main Transit webpage, any potential riders are directed to find routes and bus fares (see figure 30). The department's homepage does not have any information on the fare-free transit; any riders or potential riders have to navigate through multiple webpages to find that information. For example after finding the initial "Routes & Fares" button, it takes an additional two clicks to see that ACCGov Transit is currently fare free.

Potential riders are able to track the buses through the myStop application. There is an informational video put together by Transit staff on how to use the application for live bus tracking and trip planning on the homepage for anyone who needs help figuring out the application. There is also a web version of this application to increase the overall accessibility of the platform. If any riders want to plan their trip, either through the website or application, they are brought to a third-party map service to figure out their routes.

The department's website has route maps and information that does not appear to completely up-to-date, at times presenting information to the public from prior to the elimination of fares, or still having information from programs that are no longer running.

## Branding



Figure 33: All logos used by ACCGov Transit since unification

The Transit Department has a branding effort that is unified with the government, but still distinct enough to separate itself and its services. ACCGov Transit uses a variation of colors, names and messaging when promoting services.

While the official title of the department for branding purposes is "ACCGov Transit," OA staff observed the terms "The Bus," "ATS" and "Athens Transit" still being used.

# ANALYSIS

All three of those phrases have formally been used as the name of the department, and some of these are still used on signage (see figure 32) in ACCGov Transit facilities.

One goal of the department's strategic plan is: "Community Outreach: Promote public engagement that informs, involves, and invokes a diverse population while raising the profile and relevance of ACC Transit" Strategies listed to reach this goal are "Recoup ridership data that was lost with transitioned [sic] to a fare-free system" and "Tailor messaging and outreach to target defined user groups and stakeholders." Through approximately 37 engagement and outreach events, ACCGov Transit was able to reach 8,554 people in 2024.

Transit Maintenance division is responsible for the everyday upkeep of the stops, including cleanliness and minor repairs, along with installation of signs and other information displays. Central Services keeps grass areas cut, and Transportation & Public works (TPW) maintains the sidewalks and local roadways. Depending on the nature and location of the stop, third-party contractors and/or developers may handle the infrastructure installation, although ACCGov is responsible for maintenance once constructed. When the Art Shelters are damaged, the Maintenance Division does not attempt to perform repairs due to the artistic nature of the work.

Figure 35

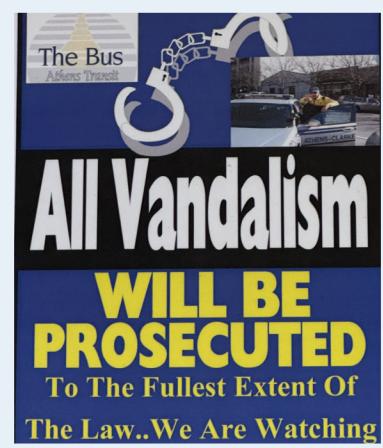
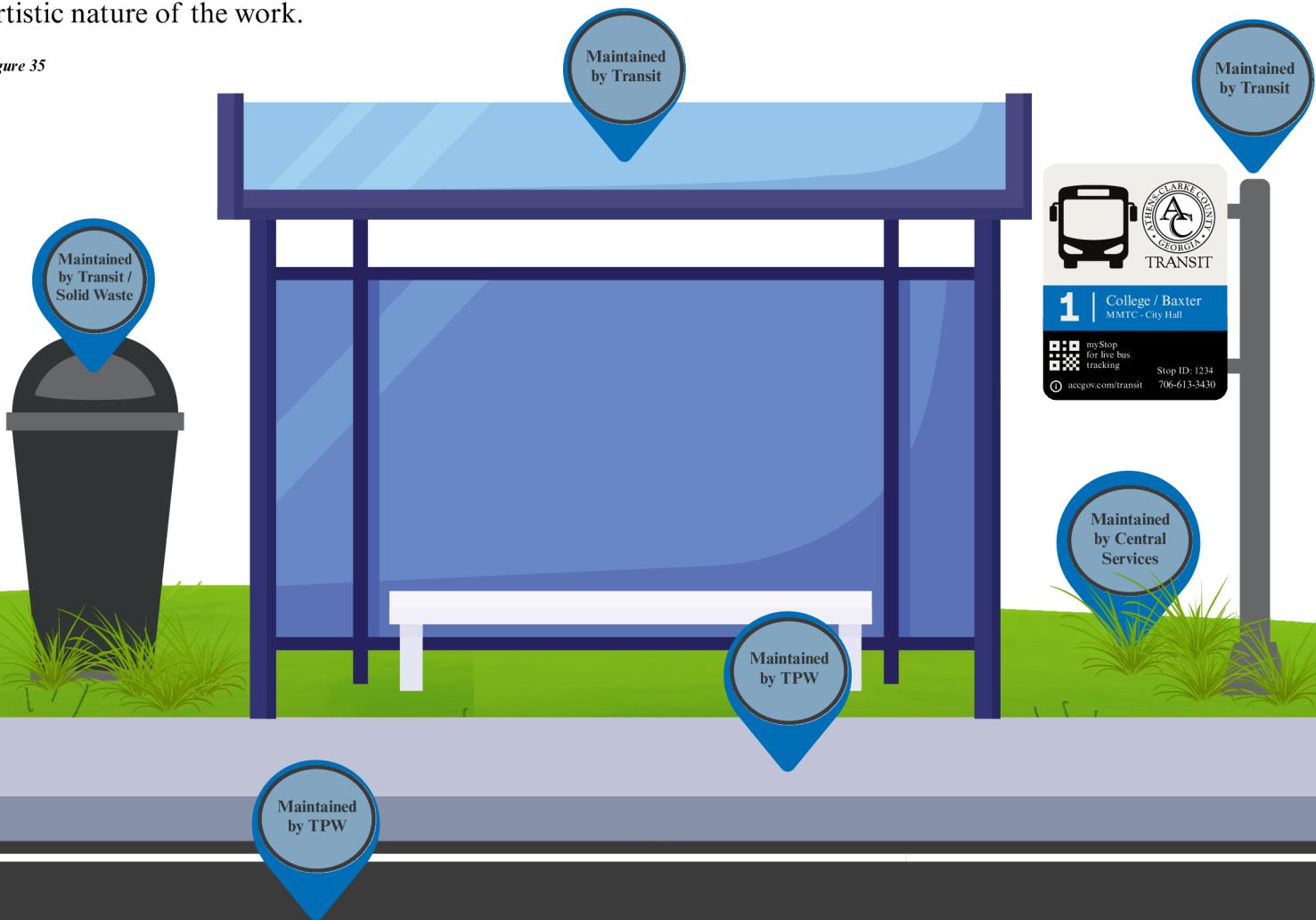


Figure 34: Sign in MMTC with old Transit logo

# ANALYSIS

## Telework Policy

As part of each Periodic Audit, the Operational Analysis Office examines the telework policy and practices of the subject department. According to the director, the Transit Department does not have a formal telework policy at the time of this audit. During fieldwork it was observed that some employees in administrative capacities occasionally telework.

## Bus Protocol

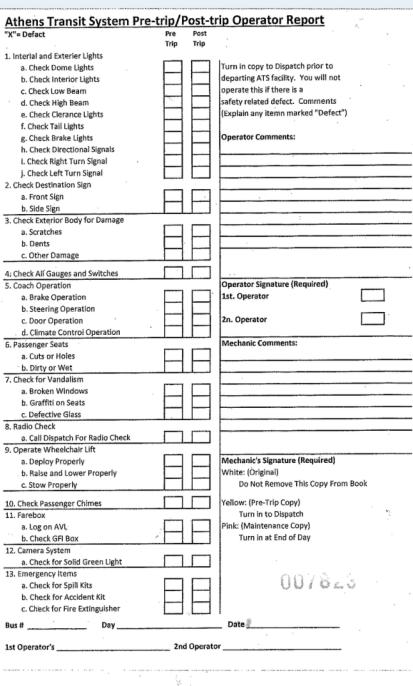
Pending approval from Mayor and Commission, the Operations Division of ACCGov Transit is implementing an updated code of conduct and safety measures, with the goal of ensuring every ride in Athens is safe, comfortable, reliable, and enjoyable. To achieve this goal, five management methods are being used: pre-boarding protocols; on-board procedures; bus exit practices; adherence to Georgia Code (OCGA) 16-12-120(a) regarding prohibited activities; and audio/visual surveillance systems all of the buses. The Preboarding section focuses on preparing riders with principles of safety and overall etiquette. Riders are taught to never assume they are visible to bus operators, despite their training, and to always make themselves visible. All persons should maintain reasonable cleanliness, free from any odor, infestations, illnesses, or anything that could negatively affect another rider.

In terms of audio and visual surveillance, these systems remain active at all times. Access is limited to supervisory staff for purposes such as incident or accident investigations, maintenance, and random compliance checks. These recordings may also be disclosed to law enforcement agencies as needed for investigations.

## Accidents/Incidents

In case of an accident or incident, either on a vehicle, at the MMTC, or at a bus stop, dispatchers serve as the initial point of contact for the Transit Vehicle Operator. The dispatcher, in turn, is responsible for notifying the route supervisor, emergency services and law enforcement as necessary. In general Georgia State Patrol is notified for accidents in to avoid an appearance of conflict-of-interest regarding ACC Police.

Vehicle operators are reliant upon their own judgment in enforcing ridership guidelines. Due to changes implemented



The form is titled 'Athens Transit System Pre-trip/Post-trip Operator Report'. It contains a grid for 'Pre Trip' and 'Post Trip' with columns for 'X' (Defect) and 'Comments'. A note at the top right says: 'Turn in copy to Dispatch prior to departing ATS facility. You will not operate this if there is a safety related defect. Comments (Explain any item marked "Defect")'. There are sections for 'Operator Comments' and 'Mechanic Comments'. At the bottom, there are signatures for '1st Operator' and '2nd Operator', and a section for 'Mechanic's Signature (Required)'. The form is dated '007823'.

Figure 36: Transit's "Pre-trip/Post-trip Operator Report"

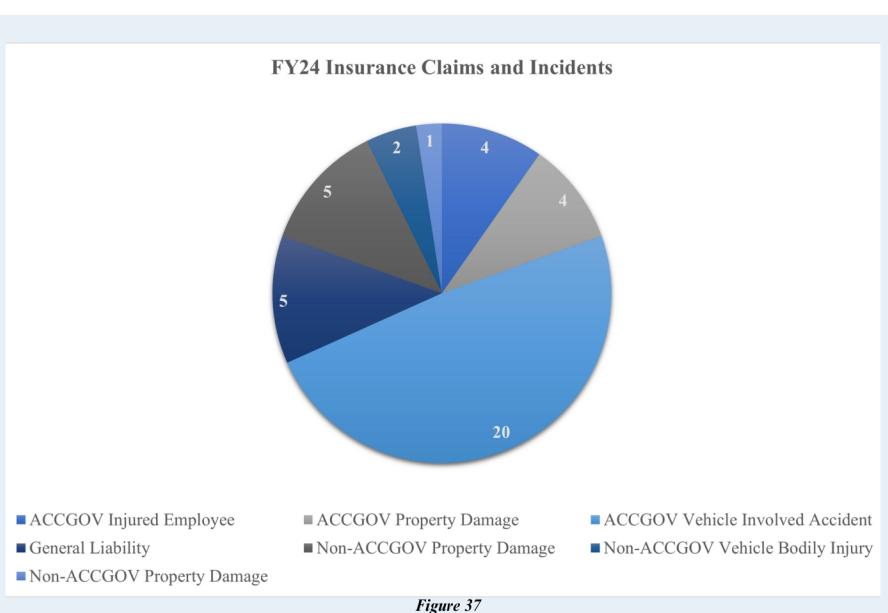


Figure 37

# ANALYSIS

during the coronavirus pandemic, passengers are now allowed to board buses through both front and back doors, meaning drivers must monitor both entrances. Figures 35 illustrates all insurance claims and incidents associated with the Transit Department, such as vehicular issues, personnel matters, general liability, property damage, and accidents. Another change due to the pandemic was the installation of clear plastic barriers around the drivers' seats, which partially shield drivers from riders, although passengers can still reach around these barriers, for example to show the driver a destination on a mobile device. If an incident occurs and the driver cannot de-escalate, the driver will notify the dispatcher to send a route supervisor to intervene. Such incidents revealed to OA staff during fieldwork include barred riders attempting to board a bus, passengers using aggressive and vulgar language, and an individual disrobing during a ride on the bus. Vehicle operators attempt to be proactive in preventing incidents by sharing information among each other regarding experiences along different routes and/or with specific riders.

Over the course of fieldwork, the Operational Analysis team observed frequent police department (PD) presence at the Multimodal Transfer Center. This presence was often in response to various incidents reported by transit staff, on-site private security, or the public. Prior to ACCGov Transit's transition to fare-free service on July 6, 2020 due to the pandemic, there were 97 instances where PD presence was requested. The top five reasons included:

- Theft (S-27)
- Burglar Alarm (S-17)
- House Check (S-31)
- Trespass Person (S-36)
- Domestic (10-16)

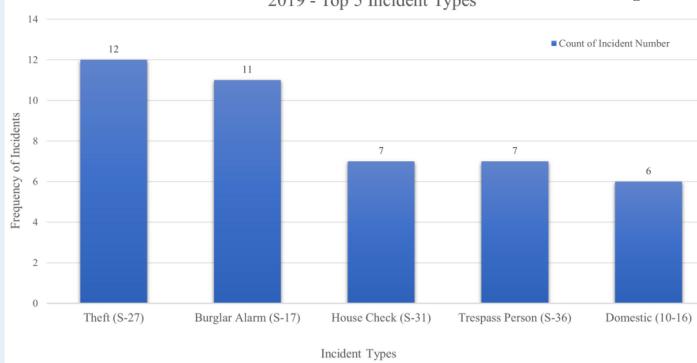
By the end of 2024, this number increased to 271 incidents, with police being called for issues such as:

- Trespass Person (S-36)
- Trespass Warning (S-36)
- 911 Open Line (S-89)
- House Check (S-31)
- Disorderly Person (S-35)

Statistically, represents an increase of approximately 179.3% over the course of five years, averaging about 22.5% growth each year. Additionally, according to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), between 2008 and 2022, the injury rate per 100 million total boardings on individual vehicle passenger trips increased by 294%.

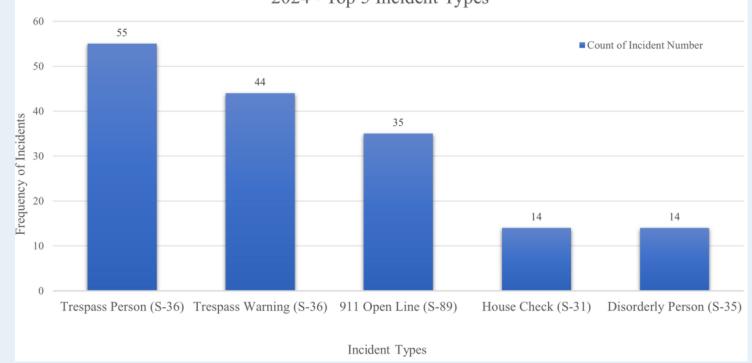
2019 - Top 5 Incident Types

Figure 38



2024 - Top 5 Incident Types

Figure 39



# ANALYSIS

## Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

The Operations Division leadership has created well-documented procedures, including guidelines for all positions from customer service representatives to the bus operators. OA staff observed well-documented SOPs and training manuals that Operations staff members are given during their on-boarding processes. Additionally, this division has frequent safety meetings to ensure all staff members know the most up-to-date procedures on how to handle any possible situations. When a new procedure from the director comes out in the form of a memorandum, it is posted in a public area for all operators to see and be able to ask questions. The Maintenance Division has a well-organized cabinet that holds all applicable SOPs for the division. It was noted by OA staff that some of these SOPs seem to be up to five years old. All maintenance staff are able to access these SOPs, and/or gain clarification at any time from a supervisor.

OA staff observed a lack of SOPs within that particular the Administrative Division, although the division does follow the rules and procedures put forth by all necessary governing authorities. There are some procedures in place that have been successfully implemented across the entire department; for example, the “Transit P-Card Receipt Submission Form,” but no SOPs were identified as specific to the Administrative Division.

## Performance Analysis

ACCGov Transit is one of the two non-public-safety departments in ACCGov which provides direct services to the public seven days a week and outside of normal business hours, the other being Leisure Services. Naturally public safety departments and offices require 24/7 staffing, as do certain government functions such as public utilities to assure infrastructure functions properly. Transit, however, is unique in the expectation that similar levels of service be provided seven days per week, as well as many holidays observed by ACCGov.

When evaluating the performance of ACCGov Transit Department, Operational Analysis Staff found it necessary to provide analysis in the context of the unique service ACCGov Transit provides the community, and the corresponding hours of operation which exceed those of most departments. Staffing is a challenge for the Transit Department, in part due to the need for weekend and nighttime schedules, to which new employees are generally assigned.

During the course of this audit, OA staff observed a strong sense of camaraderie and loyalty among Transit staff. In formal questionnaires as well as face-to-face interviews, maintenance and operations staff were quick to mention how much they enjoyed their jobs and felt a sense of duty to help out their customers, but were often equally as quick to mention that the salary is well below what they felt they should earn, given the level of responsibility expected.

A staff used various methods of accessing ACCGov Transit information and services to mimic the ways ordinary customers might. In general, if a user did not have prior knowledge of ACCGov Transit tools such as the website and the MyStop app, these sources are not particularly user-friendly. Staff compared this user interface to others around the country (Greenville, SC; Austin, TX; Atlanta GA) and found the

# ANALYSIS

ACCGov Transit interface to be comparable with Atlanta (MARTA), while other services provided more straightforward and user-friendly navigation.

Due to ACCGov's Transit Department's unique position as a public-facing, non-public safety department, they are in a position of needing to ensure their website is accessible for both mobile and desktop users, while also catering to the needs of both current and potential riders.

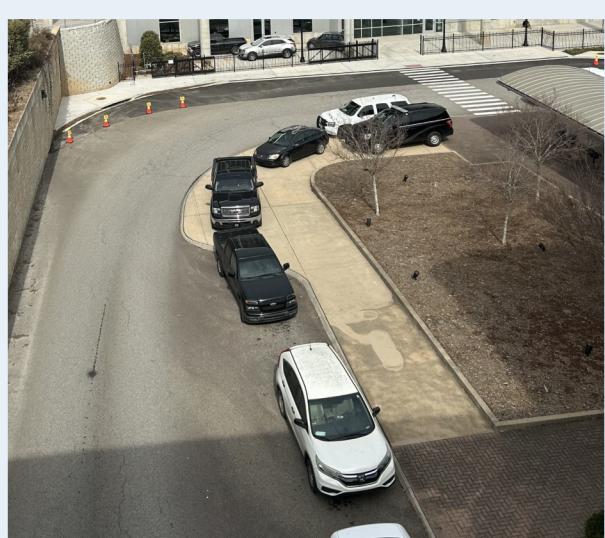


Figure 40: Cars parked on the curb at the Multimodal Transit Center

Noteworthy in attempting to replicate customer experience is the lack of convenient access to the MMTC. There is no parking available at the facility itself, and no direct sidewalk from downtown, except by way of the Classic Center parking deck/pedestrian bridge, which lacks any significant signage or identifiable characteristics regarding public transportation. When one does reach the MMTC, there are few print and digital materials in place for navigating bus routes. Announcements via loudspeaker are sporadic and difficult to comprehend, and digital displays were found operating at some times but not always. Bus drivers, other passengers, and information attendants were often the best source of information.

Setting aside the user experience, performance of the department was otherwise observed to be at or above standards expected for ACCGov departments of comparable size and complexity. Staffing, both recruitment and retention, across all divisions proves to be challenging. Despite having 10.8% vacancies at the time of this audit, policies and SOPs were mostly well-documented and observed to be followed, ensuring adherence to internal controls. One notable exception regarding SOPs is a lack of observed documentation within certain areas, which might be attributed to the significant turnover and structural changes the department has undergone in the past five years. Additionally, while there are well-documented SOPs in the other divisions, OA staff observed some of them to be out-of-date and possibly not in line with the current operations of the department, although it is also possible that these are simply procedures that have remained the same since originally developed.



# FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

After careful research and analysis of the objectives, as through consideration of the defined scope, the Operational Analysis Office believes there are six findings of significant note that should be addressed in reasonable time. The issues observed are described, and accompanied by potential recommendations. Responses to the findings and recommendation are listed, as provided by the department head and/or county management.

**FINDING ONE:** Publicly available information is unclear and in need of attention

**OBSERVATION:**

Clear and readily available information is essential to users of public transportation. Riders must know the location of bus stops, which buses service which routes, the time of arrival and departure, and how to use the service in general. During the course of the audit, OA staff found the user experience to be lacking essential points of information. While most information is available if one knows how to locate it, the entire exercise of locating and using digital and hard-copy sources for information was not found to be user-friendly.

**RECOMENDATIONS:**

- 1) The Administrative Division should prioritize the user experience by identifying the audience for its services, and accommodate those customers' digital knowledge, resources and capabilities (or lack thereof). Detailed written instructions for using the My Stop app should be available on the website, in a printable form, and in hard-copy flyers available for distribution at strategic locations in Athens for local users and visitors.
- 2) The Administrative Division should oversee the Transit page of the ACCGov website is kept up to date at least weekly, and also assuring new content is available to keep marketing materials and campaigns fresh and attention-grabbing. Rules and protocols for riders should also be posted and easily accessible on the website.
- 3) The Maintenance/Operations Divisions should post rules and protocols on every bus, at bus stops, and throughout the MMTC so that customers and drivers are fully aware of all expectations.
- 4) The Administration Division should have timetables and routes posted, both inside the MMTC and at each bus bay. When using public transit, time is of the essence. While most riders likely have access to a digital device, some may not. Furthermore, when trying to find information quickly, it may be more efficient for some riders to glance at a posted timetable than to navigate an app.
- 5) The Administrative Division should see that all digital displays at the MMTC and on all buses are properly working and are used to updated bus information in real time. Administration should see that any non-functioning displays are repaired or removed. The loudspeaker system on buses and at the MMTC should assure and reflect accurate information, or be discontinued.



# FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

## DEPARTMENT/MANAGEMENT RESPONSE: (Agree, Partially Agree, or Disagree)

- 1) **Agree** - Administrative Division (AD) will ensure diversity in information distribution by providing service information in both printed and digital formats. AD will develop and distribute flyers detailing the operation of the myStop Application (or real-time service dashboard), and high-level functions needed to obtain route status and vehicle location.
- 2) **Agree** - AD will work to embed the myStop Application (or real-time service dashboard) into the homepage of the website to ensure it is easily accessible. The website will also be updated to include a service dashboard to share Transit Department KPIs, including on-time service performance and ridership metrics.
- 3) **Agree** – Industry standards indicate rider protocols are posted at locations with a high rate of Rider Conduct violations. Strategic deployment of the ridership protocol will ensure use of equipment and staff resources is optimized. Posting the Rider Conduct will serve as a reinforcement tool at problematic bus stops. A majority of ACCGov bus stops do not have conduct issues.
- 4) **Partially Agree** – Printed material used to disseminate service and schedule information will be displayed at strategic central locations at the MMTC facility. This approach requires reduced resources while making information readily available to our customers.
- 5) **Agree** – Transit is currently working with the computer-aided dispatch/automated vehicle location (CAD/AVL) vendor to repair non-functioning digital signage at MMTC and onboard Transit revenue service vehicles. Transit will review the current location of existing digital signage throughout Athens-Clarke County and evaluate if the location is effective for information dissemination

## IMPLEMENTATION TIMEFRAME:

- 1) Development and distribution of print and digital materials is estimated to be completed in FY 2026.
  - a. Development of myStop utilization information will be completed *within 90 days*.
- 2) MyStop Integration and Service Dashboard integration – FY 2026
  - Coordination to embed myStop application within the ACCGov website is estimated to be completed *within FY 2026*. This effort will require close coordination with Civic Plus and the Communications Department to determine the feasibility of the effort and ensure pertinent information is not obscured.
  - Development and deployment of a Transit Department KPI dashboard – *FY 2026*
- 3) Strategic deployment of Rider Conduct information – *180 days*
- 4) Deployment of centralized Transit Department service information at MMTC – *FY 2026*
- 5) Repair of digital information signage. The Transit Department will work with current vendor to repair signage but will also issue an RFP for Transit Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) services. - *FY 2026*

## DESCRIPTION OF ACTION(S) TO BE TAKEN:

- 1) Develop and distribute materials tailored to the Athens-Clarke County community and accommodates the level of technological proficiency the user may have.
- 2) Collaborate with Communications Department and the CAD/AVL vendor to integrate and embed myStop interface within the Transit Department homepage to facilitate easy access to live Transit



# FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

operational information.

- 3) Identify stops with high incidence of rider misconduct utilizing inhouse reports as well as information available from ACCPD. Deploy placards with Rider Conduct information to identified bus stops.
- 4) Design a system-wide service map with route schedule tables and identify the appropriate display methods to effectively convey and portray system navigation information. This will require the procurement/acquisition of static display signage.
- 5) Coordinate with CAD/AVL vendor to diagnose and troubleshoot non-functioning digital signage. Collaborate with CAD/AVL vendor to requisition repair of damaged or non-functioning signage. The rate of repair will be based upon the available budget to acquire parts/equipment needed to restore function to the digital signage.

# FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

**FINDING TWO:** Employee compensation does not align with job requirements

## **OBSERVATION:**

During the course of the audit, OA staff discovered several aspects of the jobs within ACCGov Transit that are either less appealing than other jobs with competing employers, or the compensation is significantly less, or both. Examples of unappealing work conditions include weekend, late-evening and early-morning hours; short or non-existent break times; stress related to safety responsibilities and concerns; and consistently working under short-staffed conditions. Compensation differences can be noted in comparison to Clarke County School District, where CDL holders at the minimum earn approximately \$4/hour more than ACCGov entry-level vehicle operator positions, with little or no evening and weekend work. Additionally, in comparison with select ACCGov positions, part-time or seasonal positions start out at approximately \$2/hour more than a part-time vehicle operator. (The Comparative Review and Analysis on pages 13-17 of this report provides greater detail regarding this observation.)

## **RECOMENDATIONS:**

- 1) In conjunction with the organization-wide pay study taking place during the time of this audit, ACCGov Management, Transit leadership and the Compensation & Payroll Division of the Human Resources Department should re-assess the job descriptions and pay grade classifications of Transit staff to assure they are competitive in the job marketplace. Moreover, in order to prevent a large number of vacancies from hindering performance in the future, pay studies should take place more often than the five- to six-year cycles as is currently the trend for ACCGov, or allow for some other method of market-based adjustment.
- 2) Transit leadership should gather cost/benefit data and analysis regarding its service schedule, as well as how its current scheduling practices may impact employee turnover and morale. Such analysis could inform decisions as to whether the current scheduling structure, as well as operating hours are justifiable, or whether shorter operating hours with increased schedule frequency during peak demand times would provide better service to the community, as well as aid in employee retention.

## **DEPARTMENT/MANAGEMENT RESPONSE:**

- 1) ***Partially Agree – Manager’s Office Input:*** The current pay study will assess the job descriptions and pay grades of Transit staff. The implementation of a comprehensive pay study is a complex and expensive process, so the organization will continue implement them on a five-year cycle. However, the Manager’s Office notes that the last pay study was implemented in 2018. Since 2018, the labor market for some positions—such as 911 operators, specialty trades workers, treatment plant operators, and positions requiring CDL drivers—has shifted aggressively contributing to chronic vacancies in these roles. In lieu of committing to implementing comprehensive pay studies more frequently, the Manager’s Office recommends the new County Manager consult with Human Resources to establish if market assessments of chronically vacant positions should be completed in the 2-3 year window between pay studies. Under this concept, approximately two years after pay study implementation, the Human Resources Department would use position vacancy data to identify roles where market-based

# FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

may be contributing to challenges in filling these roles. After identifying these roles, a review will be implemented to determine if these roles are still appropriately graded within ACCGov's compensation structures to remain competitive in our region.

**Partially Agree - Transit Department:** The Transit Department along with other ACCGov Departments which provide vital services to the Athens-Clarke County community should undergo a market assessment of salary on a more frequent basis. The employees in the external services department provide vital services to the community which are impacted when staff vacancies occur. In some instances, the services may be suspended indefinitely until the vacancies are filled. This effort should be led by the ACCGov Human Resources department.

2) *Manager's Office Input:* Shift timing and selection impacts a number of Unified Pay Plan roles, including transit drivers, recreation assistants, treatment plant operators, and Solid Waste collection staff. The new County Manager will consult with Human Resources to determine if a shift-differential compensation incentive should be implemented for Unified Pay Plan positions. If supported and appropriate, this policy and any resulting ordinance changes will be presented to the Mayor and Commission for consideration.

**Disagree as Written** – ACCGov Transit currently designs employee scheduling to incentivize employees to work shifts which are typically difficult to provide coverage. Transit is working to implement work assignment structures which will allow employees to take regular breaks during their shift. Work assignments which require working early morning or late evening hours must be incentivized by offering paid shift differentials. The implementation of employee shift differentials should be led by the ACCGov Human Resources department.

The Transit Department operates hours for which the community has both expressed and demonstrated demand for public transportation services. During the recent public input sessions for the 2025-2029 Transit Development Plan (TDP), 88% of community survey respondents expressed the need for expanded hours of service to cover both early morning and late-night periods.

## IMPLEMENTATION TIMEFRAME:

1. Market Assessments of High Vacancy Positions – Beginning two years after Pay Study implementation (with approval of the new County Manager). – FY 2027
2. Shift Differential Assessment, Policy, and Ordinance Changes – Starting in FY27 (with approval of the new County Manager).

## DESCRIPTION OF ACTION(S) TO BE TAKEN:

1. Market assessments of chronically vacant positions (with approval of the new County Manager).
2. Development of a Shift Differential Policy (with approval of the new County Manager).



# FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

**FINDING THREE:** Specific administration inefficiencies, and a lack of accurate data and information, impact service delivery

**OBSERVATION:**

During the course of the audit, it became clear through interviews and observation that the Transit department endeavors to provide its services to any and all members of the public who are current or potential riders. Furthermore, the fact that the department derives revenue from ACCGov taxpayers, and the federal government by way of the State of Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) means that it must provide prescribed services to comply with funding guidelines. Finally, as a department of ACCGov, the Transit Department must conform to the M&C Strategic Plan. In order to balance these sometimes-conflicting priorities, it is necessary to gather, analyze and make available to various stakeholders accurate and complete data.

Further complicating the ability for ACCGov Transit to capture data is the fare-free structure implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since that time (March 2020), ridership data is no longer collected via farebox, which not only collected data for paying passengers, but also for UGA student/faculty/staff ID “swipes,” as well as users of passes issued by non-profit agencies. With the cessation of farebox use, the Transit system relies on a laser system attached to the Avail software used by the route tracking system which also powers the MyStop app. During five trips on four different routes which OA staff compared the actual number of riders to the MyStop app, 6.9% accuracy was noted using the system. Data was compared at each stop when riders entered or exited the bus at 29 stops, and in 97% of the errors, the system under-counted the actual number of riders. Vehicle operators attempt to keep manual counts, the accuracy of which could not be verified.

**RECOMENDATIONS:**

- 1) Transit Administration should focus on collecting, analyzing, and presenting accurate data. Key data points, ideally accessible through a real-time dashboard, include: current and historic rider volume (5–10 years), rider volume by route, bus stop usage, service breakdowns (weekday/evening/weekend), paratransit rider volume, cost per rider, cost per mile, and net financial position.
- 2) Transit leadership should divide and clarify the roles of the two transit planners. During the course of the audit, a duplication of roles was noted between the two transit planners, which is understandable given that both the positions and the staff members occupying them are relatively new. However, it is vital that each of these positions have distinct duties for which each staff member is responsible, such as maintaining certain data sets.

**DEPARTMENT/MANAGEMENT RESPONSE:**

- 1) *Agree* – Transit Administration is implementing measures to gain a higher level of control over both department service and fiscal performance. Transit Administrative Division will work in coordination with Budget and Strategic Analysis Department (BSAD) to develop and implement both internal and public facing dashboards to illustrate the Transit Department’s performance. The Transit Department is



# FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

requesting to add a Management Analyst position to assist with monitoring of service and fiscal performance goals, as well as compliance with applicable federal, state, and local policies and regulations.

2) **Partially Agree** – The Transit Planner roles comprise of both short-range operational planning and long-range planning that seeks to ensure consistency with other area plans. Route optimization, scheduling and operational analysis is typically managed by the Short-Range Planner, while tasks associated with long-range public transportation planning (such as first/last mile planning, updates to the MACORTS Metropolitan Transportation Plan—MTP—etc.) are typically managed by that staff person. These activities must be split amongst two planning positions as both require dedicated focus, and a considerable amount of time. As staff develop, the division of role responsibilities will become more apparent as separate projects will be assigned to the positions based on specific areas of focus. There will be periods of overlap when large projects such as system service change activities are being developed and implemented.

#### IMPLEMENTATION TIMEFRAME:

- 1) Development of Transit Performance Dashboard – Start FY 2026/Completion FY 2027
- 2) Refinement of Transit Planner roles – FY 2026

#### DESCRIPTION OF ACTION(S) TO BE TAKEN:

- 1) Task Transit Management Analyst and Transit Planner II – Operational Planning to collaborate with BSAD to develop and deploy a performance dashboard to track Transit Department KPIs and financial status.
- 2) Revise Transit Planners job description with task assignments specific to each Planner position to differentiate between Operational Planning and Long-Range Planning. Revise task assignments to correspond with the Planners' annual work plan.



# FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS



**FINDING FOUR:** The size, location, condition and security of current facilities has not been prioritized by ACCGov, particularly to meet future needs

**OBSERVATION:**

OA staff attempted to review all aspects of the Transit Department work, from daily bus maintenance and inspection for the entire fleet at 5:30am and 9:00pm, to visiting bus stops throughout the county, to conversing with other transit providers such as UGA Transit and CCSD bus service. From this review and analysis, it was made clear that far greater intentionality of mission and goals is needed by ACCGov as whole if ACCGov Transit is to perform at its best. This is nowhere demonstrated more fully than in the physical facilities with which Transit is provided.

Within the limits of the scope of this periodic audit, it is the professional opinion of the OA staff that conditions have significantly changed since the MMTC was planned, designed and built in 2006, including the fact that, while the center was envisioned to be “multi-modal,” there has been no evidence in this audit to find significant use of the facility beyond bus transfer service. Furthermore, development of parcels around the facility have reduced its accessibility for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists. Finally, the design of the facility is not in line with best practices, with vehicles having to back out of bus bays upon departure, creating unnecessary safety hazards. The same holds true for the maintenance facility, which also is configured with back-in/out parking in order to accommodate all vehicles. Additionally, the maintenance facility currently operates at capacity for the current fleet, with no provision for additional vehicles or enhancements that would be needed to accommodate power stations for an extensive all-electric fleet, or additional space necessary for maintenance of such vehicles.

Office and storage space at both facilities is at or beyond capacity. Hard-copy files primarily used by the Administration Division are stored at the Pound Street facility due to space constraints. The MMTC conference room has been converted so as to accommodate staff work stations. Similarly, the Pound Street conference room doubles as a training room for new vehicle operators, and neither facility has a gathering room large enough to accommodate the entire staff for departmental meetings.

**RECOMENDATIONS:**

1) The Administrative Division should provide an assessment of the MMTC and Pound Street facilities to all stakeholders, including the Manager’s Office, the M&C, and all boards and authorities associated with land use planning in the areas in or around the MMTC and the Pound Street maintenance facility. Such assessment should also explore the possibility of a joint fleet facility, one that could be shared with other departments who require similar vehicle parts and maintenance. Arrangements such as an on-site parts vendor have been noted to be successful for other transit providers researched for this audit.

2) The Administrative Division should, through information collected by the maintenance administrator, provide the Manager’s Office and the M&C with cost analyses of storing/servicing different types of vehicles (e.g., electric, hybrid, diesel, hydrogen, etc.).



# FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

In the professional opinion of OA staff, there is a possible disconnect between ACCGov's desire to purchase fully electric and/or hybrid vehicles, and its financial resources, as well as physical facility needs, to sustain such vehicles.

3) The Manager's Office should clarify the future of space allocation for the Transit Department. Throughout this periodic audit, OA staff was given reference to an 80-acre parcel of land acquired by the Public Utilities Department for approximately \$2.9M in 2022 with its enterprise fund surplus, as well as the separately approved Southeast Clarke Park transfer station, for which the funding remains unclear. It was generally understood among Transit staff that a new facility was eventually to be built there as a replacement for the Pound Street facility. The lack of clarity regarding future facilities causes inefficiencies in the Transit Department's ability to allocate fund and appropriately plan for the future. For example, the M&C has expressed interest in moving to a fully electric fleet. However, the Pound Street facility is not currently equipped, nor might it likely be able to be fully equipped, to power and maintain such a fleet. It is imperative that the Transit department have clarity regarding the future of its physical facilities in order to plan appropriately.

#### DEPARTMENT/MANAGEMENT RESPONSE:

1) *Agree* – The Hickory Street location of the ACCGov Multi-Modal Transit Center (MMTC) is optimal for the provision of efficient and cost-effective public transportation services for Athens-Clarke County and surrounding region. The MMTC is a relatively new facility and represents a significant investment by Athens-Clarke County taxpayers. ACCGov Transit has employed space optimization techniques to maximize the available space for the Transit Administration Division housed on the second floor of the MMTC. However, as the ACCGov Transit staff grows to accommodate the needs of a growing agency tasked with additional regulatory needs, and needs associated with the development of department services, space is at a premium. The layout and traffic flow within the MMTC are suboptimal and lead to operational and life-safety concerns associated with Transit vehicles being required to perform backing movements. Specifically, unauthorized traffic within the MMTC facility boundaries along the bus access driveways present additional risk to Transit Department operations. Industry best practices urge public transportation operators to limit backing (reversing) movements as often as possible as the activity poses a serious threat to the safety of staff and equipment.

The growth of the Transit Department's staff and revenue service fleet has rendered Pound Street inefficient in the maintenance, service, and storage of Transit Department vehicles. Due to design limitations, employees are faced with increased safety risks as large commercial vehicles are forced to operate in sub-optimal conditions such as backing into parking spaces and in/out of maintenance service bays. These activities substantially increase the risk of accident, injury or fatality. Again, industry best practices urge public transportation operators to limit backing (reversing) movements as often as possible as the activity poses a serious threat to the safety of staff and equipment. Pound Street is in the heart of the vibrant historic Boulevard neighborhood, but unfortunately activities associated with the operation of the maintenance facility detract from the amenities of the Boulevard community. As the Pound Street facility is 50-years in age concerns about the integrity of in-ground fuel storage and the potential impact on the environment arise.



# FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

2) *Agree* - Transit Administration will utilize data collected by the Transit Maintenance division to provide the Manager's Office and the Athens-Clarke County Mayor and Commission with cost analyses of storing and servicing vehicles with different propulsion technology types and its financial resources, as well as physical facility needs, to sustain such vehicles.

3) *Agree* – Initial insights on the space needs for Transit Department staff will must be addressed in a Transit Facility Master Plan. As noted in the audit, the Transit Department has unique facility and operational needs—including items such as fueling infrastructure, vehicle storage space, and transfer stations—so the department will develop a Facilities Master Plan that addresses the long-term needs, costs, and timing of the facilities and infrastructure needed to support transit service in our community

#### IMPLEMENTATION TIMEFRAME:

- 1) Reconfiguration of MMTC Transit revenue vehicle parking – FY 2027
- 2) Analysis of renewable fuel propulsion system implementation – FY 2026
- 3) Space Allocation Study – FY 2026

Transit Facilities Master Plan – FY 2028

#### DESCRIPTION OF ACTION(S) TO BE TAKEN:

- 1) Redesign MMTC to utilize a sawtooth bus-bay design reminiscent to the legacy design at the Athens-Clarke County City Hall facility and the UGA North Oconee Park and Ride facility
- 2) Collaborate with Transit Maintenance and ACCGov Sustainability to develop an analysis of vehicle propulsion types and the required support infrastructure necessary for maintenance and operation.
- 3) Development and acceptance of the Space Allocation Study and Transit Facilities Master Plan



# FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS



**FINDING FIVE:** The Transit Department does not have sufficient clarity regarding its role within ACCGov and the community, or its financial future, to pursue focused strategies and achieve long-term goals

**OBSERVATION:**

One of the questions posed by Operational Analysis staff during the course of this audit was, “Who is the target audience for ACCGov Transit?” There was no prevailing answer to this query through research of mission and goals of the department, or within the ACCGov’s M&C Strategic Plan. Interviews with staff regarding whom the department should prioritize with service generally met with the sentiment that ACCGov Transit should serve anyone who wishes to use the service. However, upon further questioning regarding specifics, it was acknowledged that resources are finite and therefore choices have to be made regarding bus routes, type and frequency of service, and the consideration of charging fares and, if so, how much.

**RECOMENDATION:**

- 1) The Administration Division should create budget scenarios which create specific contingencies for funding. The current structure, whereby future funding is heavily reliant upon federal grants and the passage of a TSPLOST referendum in 2026, is highly questionable insofar as assurance that funds will be provided to maintain current service levels. Contingencies would include plans for request of general funds use, or a proactive strategy for adjustments in service if funds are not available.
- 2) The Administration Division should prepare a basic cost/benefit analysis of reinstating a fare structure, so that the M&C can make an informed decision regarding whether or not to re-implement fares. The outcome of this decision is secondary to knowing whether or not fares will be implemented, because the unknown significantly impacts planning, and in turn all aspects of the department. Fares generate revenue and allow for significantly more robust ridership data, but the collection of fares incurs certain expenses, such as investing in fare boxes. In presenting a cost benefit analysis, the administration should explore models which allow for the best return on capital and operating investment, such as the most current digital payment methods.
- 3) Transit administration should outline specific situations regularly encountered by its staff regarding the challenges of some of its riders, and advocate for a greater support from other departments and community resources in addressing those challenges as they affect transit operations. By virtue of the valuable service the Transit Department provides, it necessarily becomes a frontline provider for members of the community with needs beyond just transportation, including mental health issues, substance abuse problems, food insecurity, lack of permanent shelter, domestic violence situations--just to name a few. In many cases vehicle operators are required to be frontline resources to these people in need. Meeting such needs can, and often is, in direct conflict with the simple and straightforward mission of any transit service--to provide reliable and timely transportation. Although transit staff is to be commended for the aid and assistance it provides for those in need, there are limits to how much transit professionals can, and should, be expected to provide such support.

# FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

4) The Administration Division should prepare a cost/benefit analysis regarding hybrid and fully electric vehicles to present to the M&C so that they can take action to proceed with the most cost-effective and sustainable fleet for future needs. The current fleet of 32 buses comprises 15 diesel and 17 hybrid buses. Nine of the diesel buses are at or past their anticipated useful lifetime. The remainder of the fleet will reach that mark between 2030 and 2033. Hybrid and fully electric vehicles have infrastructure needs that the current maintenance facility cannot meet if the entire fleet is made up of such vehicles. In order to assure the Transit department is able to appropriately maintain its fleet, a decision should be made within the next fiscal year regarding the type(s) of vehicles to be purchased.

## DEPARTMENT/MANAGEMENT RESPONSE: (Agree, Partially Agree, or Disagree)

1) *Agree* - Transit Administration will create budget scenarios in conjunction with BSAD which create specific contingencies for funding. The current structure, whereby future funding is heavily reliant upon federal grants and the passage of a TSPLOST referendum in 2026, is highly volatile and offers no assurance that funds will be provided to maintain current service levels into the future. An annual investment of Athens-Clarke County General Fund dollars will assist in stabilizing the Transit Department's financial future as well as offer a buffer for potential budgetary shortfalls in the future.

2) *Agree* - Transit Administration recommends conducting a cost/benefit analysis of reinstituting a fare structure as part of a financial feasibility study to allow Athens-Clarke County Mayor and Commission to make an informed decision regarding fare collection and overall Transit Department funding. Transit Department decisions regarding fare collection and the financial funding unknowns significantly impact planning, and in turn all aspects of the department. Fares may generate revenue and allow for significantly more robust ridership data, but the collection of fares incurs certain expenses, such as investing in fare boxes, staff time associated with transit ticket sales/maintenance, and impacts fare elasticity (fare can cause a reduction in ridership). Transit Administration will explore models which allow for the best return on capital and operating investment, including the most current digital payment methods.

3) *Partially Agree* - Transit Administration will outline specific challenges encountered by its staff regarding the conduct of its riders and advocate for greater support from other departments and community resources. The Transit Department provides a frontline provider for members of the community with needs beyond just transportation, including mental health issues, substance abuse problems, food insecurity, lack of permanent shelter, and domestic violence situations. In many cases, Transit Vehicle Operators are required to be frontline resources to community members in need. Meeting such community needs falls outside the mission of the Transit Department--to provide reliable and timely transportation.

4) *Agree* -Transit Administration will prepare a cost/benefit analysis regarding hybrid and fully electric vehicles to present to the Athens-Clarke County Mayor and Commission to inform the body of the most cost-effective and sustainable fleet for future Transit service needs and financial sustainability. The current fleet of 32 buses comprises 15 diesel and 17 hybrid buses. Nine of the diesel buses are past their FTA-defined useful life. The remainder of the fleet will reach that mark between 2030 and 2033. The current diesel-electric hybrid and potentially battery-electric buses (BEB) have infrastructure needs the current maintenance facility cannot accommodate beyond two BEB vehicles.



# FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

## IMPLEMENTATION TIMEFRAME:

- 1) Collaboration with BSAD to develop budget funding contingencies – FY 2026
- 2) Fare and Financial Analysis – FY 2026-2027 (pending availability of funds)
- 3) Transit Department Social Services and Advocacy – FY 2026 and on-going
- 4) Fleet Transition Analysis – FY 2026

## DESCRIPTION OF ACTION(S) TO BE TAKEN:

- 1) Transit Administration will collaborate with BSAD to develop funding scenarios for the ACCGov Transit Department and determine the impact to both Department services as well as the Athens-Clarke County General Fund
- 2) Transit Administration will work in conjunction with a consultant team to perform a financial feasibility study which will encompass fare collection, potential effects of fare elasticity on ACCGov Transit utilization, equipment upgrades, and staff requirements.
- 3) Transit Administration will network with agency providers to determine ways in-which social services can meld with the mission of the Transit Department.
- 4) Transit Administration will collaborate with Transit Maintenance Division to provide an analysis of existing conditions at the Pound Street facility and equipment necessary to support renewable fuel vehicles. Analysis of renewable fuel propulsion technology to include:
  - Cost/Benefit analysis
  - Environmental Impact
  - Long-term vehicle lifecycle plan



# FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

## FINDING SIX: Optimize service delivery with existing partners.

### OBSERVATION:

Although outside of the scope of this periodic audit, it is unwise to analyze the performance of the Transit Department without noting route selection and its significant impact on operational efficiency. The ACCGov transit system has evolved over a half century, always being influenced by the presence of the University of Georgia, with its own bus system. Up until 2024, there was an agreement between the University and ACCGov whereby the former issued payment to the latter per individual ride. This agreement ended last year, with a new structure in which UGA and ACCGov share federal funds. With this new arrangement in its infancy, there is little data to explore how the current arrangement affects both transit systems.

### RECOMENDATION:

1) Transit leadership should provide clear guidance to the staff in order to avoid operational inefficiencies, such as duplication of UGA-specific routes. Because UGA and ACCGov Transit now divide federal funds, it is of the utmost importance that these two entities work to provide the greatest geographic coverage and route frequency, without duplication of effort. Additionally, volume of bus stop usage should be analyzed and a strategy to eliminate underutilized “legacy stops” should be developed.

### DEPARTMENT/MANAGEMENT RESPONSE: (Agree, Partially Agree, or Disagree)

1) *Agree* – Transit Leadership supports eliminating duplicate service and streamlining routes to improve services offered to the Athens-Clarke County community and surrounding area. This effort requires examining both ACCGov Transit and UGA Campus Transit networks for service integration optimization and collaboration, as well as reviewing existing ACCGov Transit services (routes) for operational efficiency and realignment opportunities to provide more direct paths of travel and improved frequency as per terms of the ACCGov – University of Georgia 2025-2026 Transportation Memorandum of Understanding.

### IMPLEMENTATION TIMEFRAME:

1) Service Analysis and optimization: FY 2026 - FY2027

### DESCRIPTION OF ACTION(S) TO BE TAKEN:

1) Implement service changes on a regular interval (approximately twice per year) consistent with the 2025-2029 Transit Development Plan recommendations. The Transit Department has retained the services of Jarrett Walker & Associates, widely regarded as a nationwide leader in public transportation services planning.

# CONCLUSION

The Operational Analysis Office provides the following observations made during the Periodic Audit of the Transit Department. While these points don't require immediate action, they merit consideration for updates or future review. These remarks are in addition to the formal findings and recommendations already presented.

The Transit Department performs a service to the community that likely cannot be fully appreciated unless it were to discontinue. While that eventuality seems remote, it is worth considering as an exercise in creating priorities for the department going forward. There are worthy initiatives Transit might undertake in the coming and future budget cycles—for example, increasing route coverage and frequency, reducing emissions, providing low- or no-cost service—but such initiatives can conflict with each other. For example, more frequent headways increase operational expenses, which may have to be offset with fare increases. For that reason, it is imperative that the Transit Department have a clearer understanding of the support, both financial and in establishing its priorities, from the ACCGov leadership. Once issues of funding and the department's priorities are made clear, other action can be taken to improve its operational effectiveness and efficiency, which will allow the community to take full advantage of the best public transit system that ACCGov will be able to offer.

Once priorities are established and funding sources are identified, the Transit Department should pursue marketing and branding strategies which will, hand-in-hand, increase revenue and visibility of the service within the community. One such initiative would be expanding and emphasizing bus advertising. The bus advertising contract expires at the end of calendar year 2025. The contract should be reviewed and a new request for proposals created which will maximize revenue and perhaps expand advertising to bus stops and shelters.

Moving to a cash-free payment system should be explored. A 2022 MIT Technology Review article asserts that FTA regulations can act as a safeguard to assure that cash-free systems maintain (and might actually expand) accessibility for all riders.[i] Furthermore, “open-loop” systems, which require only a credit/debit card and not a smartphone app, can still provide robust data and allow the system to cap an individual rider’s payments within a time period (day, week, month) which can promote equity for frequent riders who are economically disadvantaged.[ii]

The relationship between UGA transportation and ACCGov Transit must be examined and leveraged to the greatest advantage of all stakeholders. The recent change in the relationship of UGA Transit and ACCGov Transit—whereby the two providers share in federal funding—warrants a fresh look at how resources can be maximized, and the entire community can best be served without duplication of effort. The Transit Department itself has established a positive working relationship with its UGA counterpart, which appears equally willing to collaborate. However, truly impactful improvements will need to be made at higher levels of authority.

ACCGov Transit, like the Leisure Services Department, provides services which are unique in that they are available to the entirety of the community. It is imperative, therefore, that the Transit Department

# CONCLUSION

have clarity regarding the other ACCGov Departments with which it shares infrastructure and other service responsibilities. There should be clear and complete written procedures to assure good understanding, and efficient operations take place between Transit and several other ACCGov departments including Solid Waste, Central Services, Transportation & Public Works and the Planning Department.

In some cases, the observations in this conclusionary statement overlap with or may be dependent upon the formal recommendations in the preceding section. It is the intent of the Operational Analysis team to share all observations which may be valuable to the department itself and management in optimizing performance of the department.

## Follow-Up

In an effort to gauge the effectiveness and emphasize the purpose of conducting a periodic audit, the Office of Operational Analysis intends to follow-up with the Transit Department within a year's time and report on the status of any resolution to the findings and recommendations made. The exact schedule will also be considerate of the implementation timelines put forth by the department and/or county management as indicated in this report.

A summary response will be requested at the appropriate time from the subject department, and if necessary, staff from OA will conduct inspections to confirm appropriate actions taken. Any unresolved issues will be brought to the attention of the department and/or county management for further discussion.

It is expected that brief memorandum describing the degree of compliance will be forwarded to the M&C for informational purposes.

[i] <https://www.technologyreview.com/2022/06/29/1055154/public-transportation-cashless-explainer/>  
[ii] <https://www.govtech.com/transportation/tap-to-pay-transit-tech-is-cash-poor-but-rich-in-data>

# APPENDIX

## Appendix A

### Transit Self-stated Performance Goals and Objectives FY25

#### Transit

##### Mission

The mission of the Transit Department is to provide safe, courteous, and efficient public transportation services to Athens-Clarke County.

##### Goals & Objectives

- Transit is to provide transportation to employment, educational, medical, shopping, cultural, and other resource centers for community members, with special attention to those who do not have access to other modes of transportation.
  - a) To identify areas with transit dependent block groups that have an above average propensity to use transit by assessing census data.
  - b) Recommend change on a system wide basis to better address the needs of Athens Clarke County.
  - c) Explore transportation opportunities for regional connections.
  - d) Position ACCGov Transit as a strong alternative to automobiles by providing more frequent service, expanded hours of operation, multiple transfer options, and shorter duration trips.
- Identify transit service areas that will benefit the most ACC residents.
  - a) Identify neighborhoods that are underserved and develop service plans.
  - b) Promote transit benefits such as reduced traffic congestion and long-term improved air quality.
- Responsibly and efficiently use all resources, including financial resources.
  - a) Continue to pursue dedicated funding sources for ACCGov Transit.
  - b) Develop alternative revenue sources that have the least impact on local tax payers.
  - c) Create a fare structure that is economically feasible for people with low incomes.
  - d) Utilize SPLOST and TSPLOST funding to supplement capital expenses.
  - e) Thoroughly research, acquire and implement new technology to achieve operating cost savings.
- Enhance service by fostering collaboration between ACCGov Transit and UGA Transit.
  - a) Continue to coordinate with Campus Transit to avoid duplication of transit services.
  - b) Develop specific services in conjunction with Campus Transit, tailored to meet the needs of UGA affiliated passengers.

##### SERVICE GOALS

###### Fixed Route Service – “The Bus”

- Provide safe, timely transit services to our community.
- Ensure that safe, clean, well-maintained vehicles are available to operate all trips as scheduled.
- Improve service reliability by measuring and responding to ACCGov Transit’s an on-time performance rate.
- Implement innovative route and scheduling methods to reduce cost and promote increased ridership.

###### Paratransit Demand Response – “The Lift”

- Improve service reliability by measuring and responding to ACCGov Transit’s an on-time performance rate.
- Optimize transit route schedules so resource use is efficient.
- Implement innovative route and scheduling methods to reduce cost and promote increased ridership.

# APPENDIX

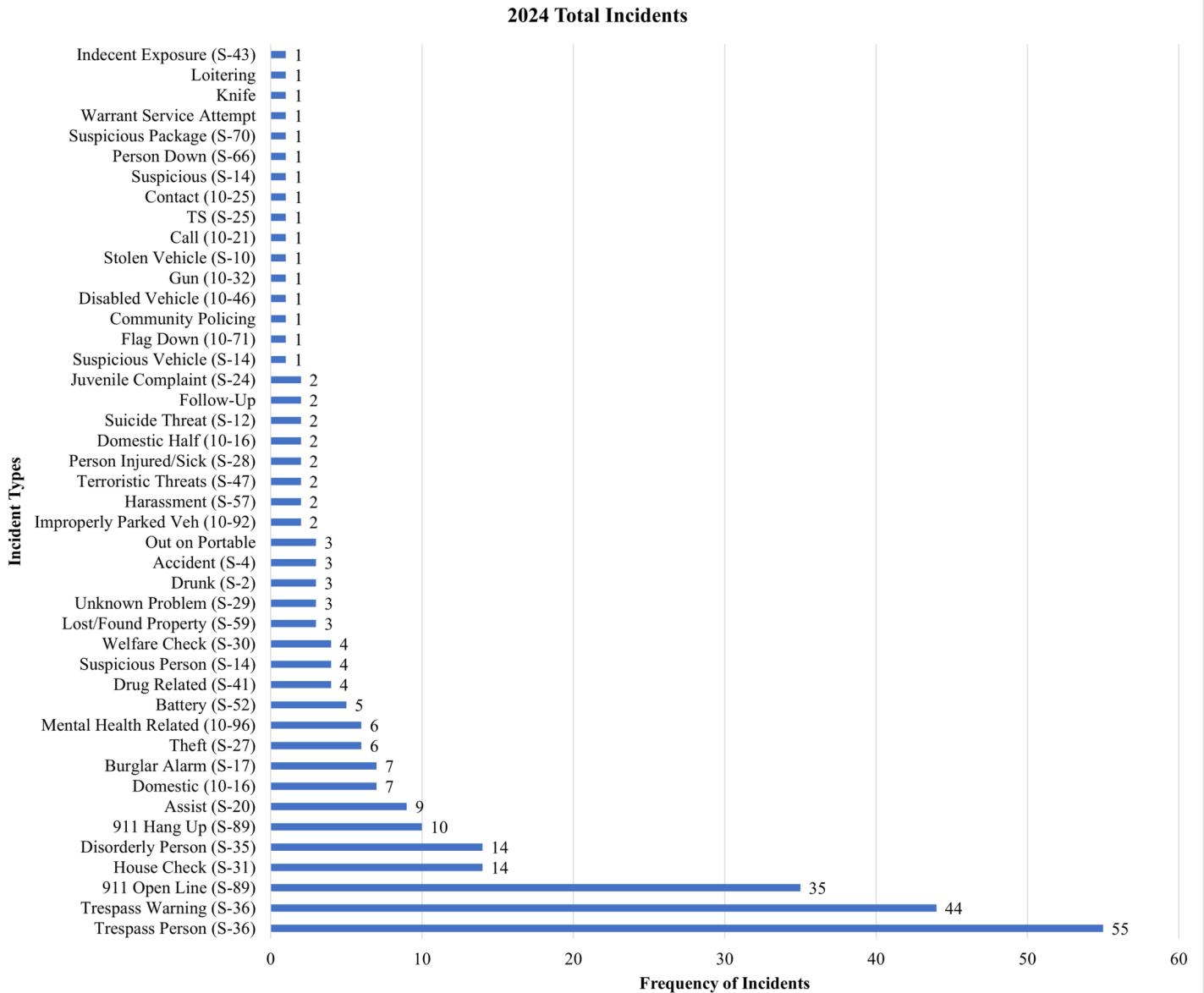
## Appendix B

### Performance Metrics

Transit Performance Measure	Goal	FY 20	FY 21	FY 22	FY 23	FY24	FY25 Projected	FY26 Projected
Total Passengers Fixed-Route	increase by 10%	1,548,324	654,293	673,922	1,183,153	694,139	1,064,534	1,362,603
Passenger Revenue*	increase by 1%	\$1,763,252	\$-	\$-	\$-	-	-	-
Revenue Miles	increase by 1%	1,061,448	774,304	782,047	794,439	826,791	773,243	989,750
Revenue Hours	increase by 1%	69,808	64,320	64,963	62,690	63,314	59,480	76,135
Passengers/Mile	increase by 1%	1.46	0.85	0.85	0.86	1	1	1
Passengers/Hour	increase by 3%	22.18	10.17	10.48	18.87	11	18	18
Revenue/Mile	increase by 3%	\$2.20	\$-	\$-	\$-	-	-	-
Revenue/Hour	increase by 3%	\$25.26	\$-	\$-	\$-	-	-	-
						-	-	-
Total Passengers Demand Response	increase by 3%	7,553	3,297	3,396	3,447	3,335	3,550	3,435
Passenger Revenue*	increase by 3%	\$25,090	\$-	\$-	\$-	-	-	-
Revenue Miles	increase by 3%	62,241	33,151	34,146	30,262	28,130	28,974	29,843
Revenue Hours	increase by 3%	6,093	3297	3396	3541	2,956	3,045	3,136
Passengers/Mile	increase by 3%	0.12	0.10	0.10	0.11	0	0	0
Passengers/Hour	increase by 3%	1.24	1.00	1.03	0.97	1	1.166	1.095
Revenue/Mile	increase by 3%	\$0.40	\$-	\$-	\$-	-	-	-
Revenue/Hour	increase by 3%	\$4.12	\$-	\$-	\$-	-	-	-
Miles/Trip	increase by 3%	8.24	10.05	10.36	10.67	11	8.161	8.688
Overall Ridership		1,555,877	657,590	677,318	697,637	697,474	1,068,084	1,366,038

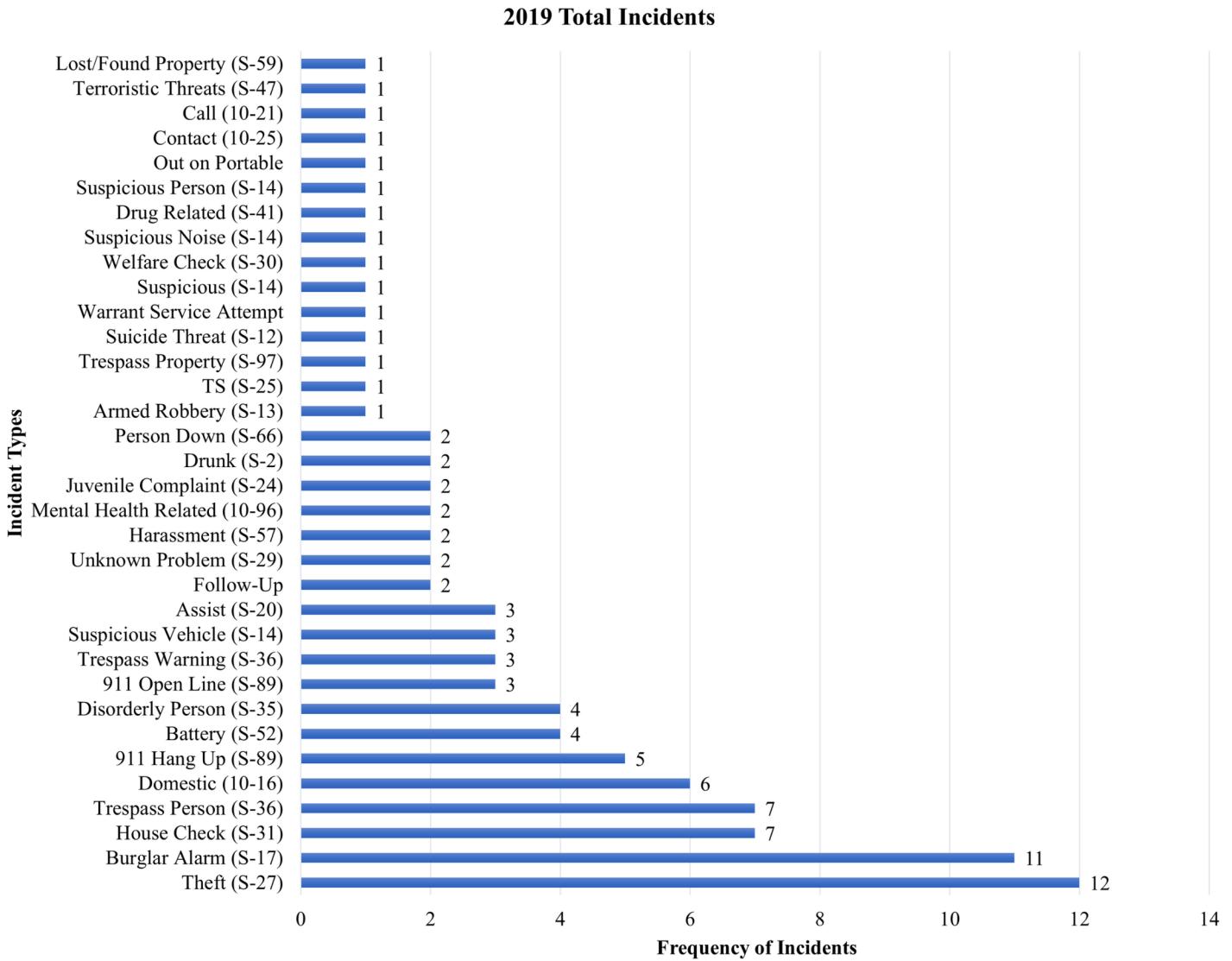
# APPENDIX

## Appendix C.1 2024 Incident Breakdown



# APPENDIX

## Appendix C.2 2019 Incident Breakdown

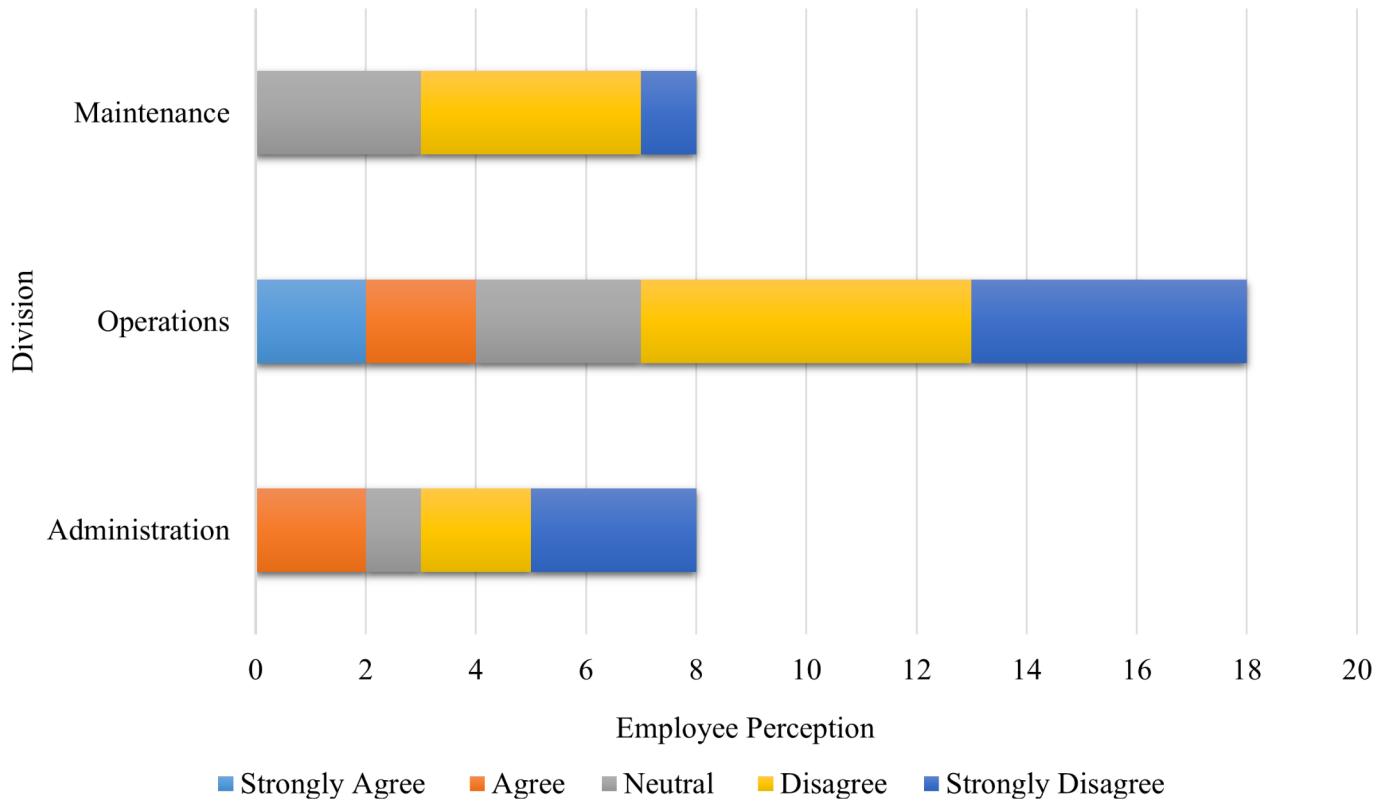


# APPENDIX

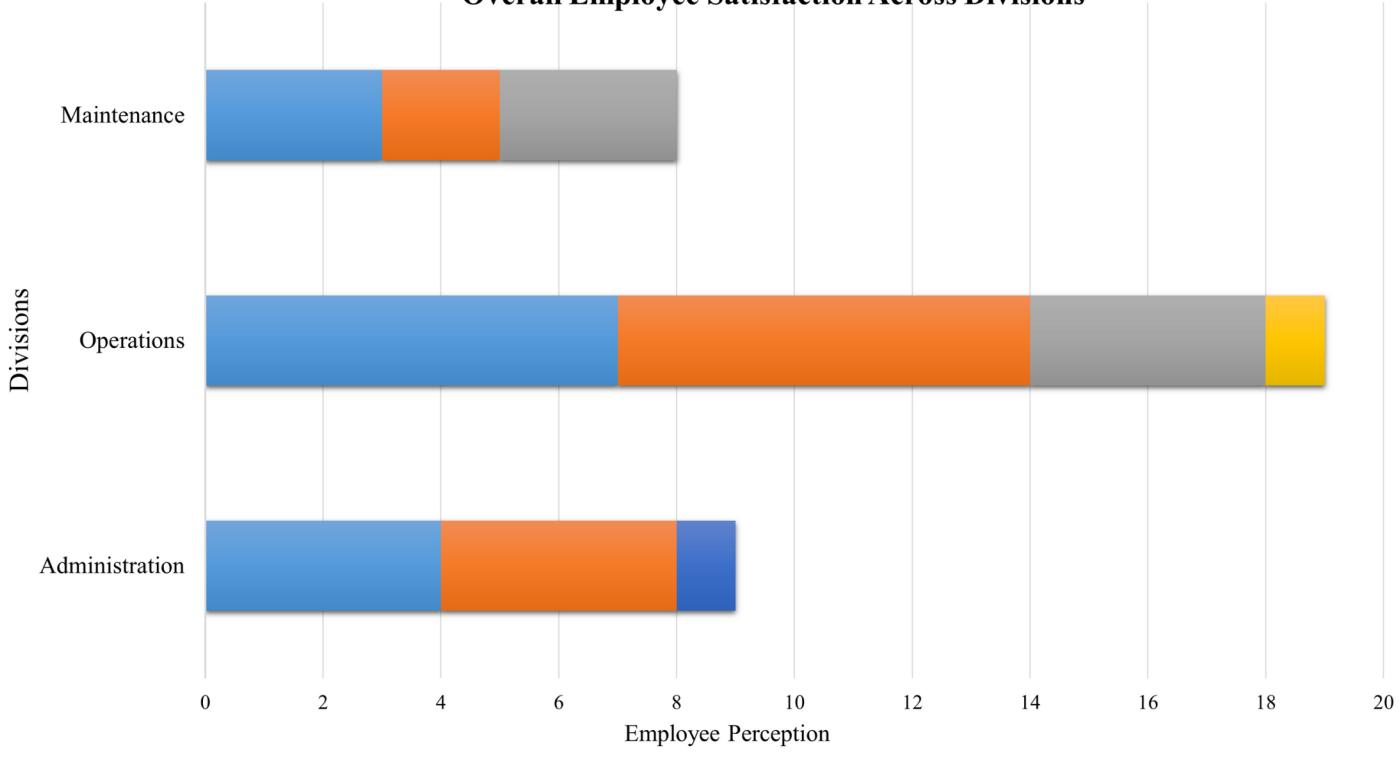
## Appendix D

### Transit Employee Survey Results

#### Employee Sentiment on Fair Pay Distribution Across Divisions



#### Overall Employee Satisfaction Across Divisions



■ Extremely Satisfied ■ Somewhat Satisfied ■ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied ■ Somewhat Dissatisfied ■ Extremely Dissatisfied