

Vision: **2020** / COMPASS

PROGRESS REPORT

FY2019-2020

A Letter from The Board

The COMET has come a long way since being fully funded with the Richland County Transportation Penny in 2012. This document details the progress that we have made as well as the fulfillment of our commitment to the people of the Midlands and our financial stewardship.

SOME HIGHLIGHTS ARE:

- Upgraded the fleet with new buses, cutaways and trolleys. These purchases have positioned us to ride into the future with environmentally responsible and technologically progressive vehicles to allow our riders a safe, pleasant experience with better amenities.
- Expanded service throughout Lexington and Richland Counties.
- Increased ridership to more than 2.7 million annual trips.
- Upgraded COMET Central (formerly known as the transit center at Laurel and Sumter) and installed new passenger amenities, including shelters, benches and bus stop seating throughout the service area.

- Established the Soda Cap Connector, a downtown circulator, connecting regional attractions, hotels, restaurants and downtown businesses.
- Created new partnerships with local institutional organizations like Prisma Health, local school districts, Midlands Technical College, Columbia College, Allen University and the University of South Carolina, which provide The COMET services to their faculty, staff and students.
- Partnered with Lyft and Uber to connect low-income residents in food desert areas and provide cost-effective transit for riders during hours when it isn't cost-effective to run bus service.
- Upgraded our call center to improve customer service.
- Added local policing to our buses to improve safety and security.
- Created door to door services to areas we could not efficiently serve with fixed route service.



Ron
Anderson

- Partnered with the City of Columbia and Blue Cross Blue Shield of South Carolina allowing The COMET users free access to bicycles through the Blue Bike program.
- Provided continuous essential travel service throughout the 2015 flood and the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Successfully completed two federal triennial reviews, eight annual reviews by the South Carolina Department of Transportation and eight annual reviews by an independent auditor.
- Received commendation on its financial audits and awarded a Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting from The Government Finance

Officers Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA) for its Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2018. This was the first year that The COMET has achieved this prestigious award.

It has been an honor for me to preside over The COMET's Board of Directors for the past two years. Along with the leadership of past Chairs, such as Joyce Dickerson, I have witnessed firsthand the determination to be fully accountable and fiscally responsible to the citizens we serve and the communities where we live.

The COMET Board of Directors, staff and key stakeholders have forged the path to ensure viable transportation services for the Midlands. We have accomplished much, but there is more work to be done. I am confident that The COMET will continue on the path to excellence in public transit and provide the best service possible for now and for the future.

Respectfully,
Ron Anderson
Chairman of The Board
2018-2020



A Letter from The CEO

Back in 2010, the Board of Directors adopted Vision: 2020, which was the guiding framework for how The COMET is to operate. In July of 2011, Lexington County and the Cities of West Columbia and Cayce as well as the Town of Springdale started contributing funding for public transit services. In November of 2012, the Richland County voters approved the transportation local options sales tax, known as The Penny, to provide 22 years of funding up to \$300,991,000 to support The COMET's operations in Richland County. In June of 2015, the Board of Directors adopted a five year Strategic Plan known as The COMPASS to guide how public transit is to be provided for the next five years.

Fast forward to 2020, this is the final year of Vision: 2020 and The COMPASS strategic plan and as your Executive Director hired in April 2018, I am proud to say that many of the actionable items in both these documents have been achieved. This report will provide the Board and the community an update on the progress made by The COMET in relation to these documents.

Over the course of 2021, a strategic review and planning process would need to be employed to update Vision: 2020 to Vision 2030 and The COMPASS through 2025. Key efforts that this process should look at includes strengthen the relationship with the members of The COMET, revisions to the intergovernmental agreement, determining a path forward for funding The COMET beyond 2029 when the Richland County Penny is expected to be fully expended and determining a reasonable mechanism to fund transit services in Lexington County where transit is needed, evaluating cleaner fuel technologies, determining a path forward for an intermodal facility where The COMET, Amtrak and Intercity Bus could meet and continuing to deliver a quality public transportation service with mobility options to the residents of Richland and Lexington Counties.

I extend my thanks and appreciation for the cooperation and assistance provided by the members of the Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority Board of Directors for their interest and



John
Andoh

support in the delivery of the tasks in the Vision: 2020 and The COMPASS in a responsible and progressive manner. Special recognition is also due to The COMET's administrative staff for the delivery of the Vision: 2020 and The COMPASS. It is their combined effort that enabled the timely issuance of this report and continued provision of a quality transportation service product for all the Central Midlands to enjoy.

Sincerely,
John Andoh | Executive Director/CEO

Vision: 2020

Connecting People & Building a Future

The COMET's early implementation will be focused service enhancement supported by an emphasis on capital projects in order to maximize federal funds and provide the infrastructure to support growth.



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THE
COMET
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The Focus

New, innovative services that matches service with passenger and community needs—increased peak service on major corridors, park-and-ride commuter routes, feeder shuttle/routes in neighborhoods and flexible services



Implementation of Compressed Natural Gas, to include on-site vehicle fueling station—reduce fuel costs, improve air quality and support American industry



Fleet replacement and expansion with more diverse vehicles (smaller, more cost effective buses and park-and-ride vehicles)



Aggressive technology expansion to build on existing automated vehicle location (AVL) to make transit information easier to access



Amenities for passengers—shelters, benches & satellite transit hubs



Analysis of real estate for park-and-ride property purchases for future services



Value-added engineering for roadway and pedestrian projects to include transit elements



The Priorities

Improved frequency along high-capacity transit corridors



Park-and-ride to improve traffic congestion, air quality and access to jobs



Flexible services in low-density areas to connect passengers to high-capacity corridors



Expanded fixed routes as density, demand and funding require



Additional resources and support may be provided through partnerships with employers, universities, non-profit organizations and local governments wishing to create specific services to meet their own organizational needs.



N Not Implemented | **IP** In Progress | Implemented

Evolution of Transit Development

Years 1-4

✓ | IMPLEMENTED

- Aggressive grant application to access federal funds.
- Grow technical capacity in critical areas of grants, finance, planning, technology.
- Prioritized rebuilding transit services discontinued during the CMRTA's Balanced Budget Service Implementation Plan, but restored by The COMET's service plan.
- Neighborhood-friendly buses and amenities (benches/shelters) with satellite transit hubs at connection centers and park-and-ride locations.

IP | IN PROGRESS

- Create a comprehensive Downtown Intermodal facility (bus, taxi, bike/pedestrian) with mixed-use (police substation or retail).

FUNDING ASSUMPTIONS

- \$12.5M operating budget with a separate \$2-4M in available match funds annually to apply for and receive between \$8-\$20M in annual federal funds.
- Service will trend with available revenues and availability of federal funds to purchase capital equipment.

Implemented

Years 4-8

✓ | IMPLEMENTED

- Continued infrastructure expansion in support of high capacity corridors, park-and-ride and flexible services, especially buses, amenities and technology.
- Critical emphasis on service expansion, especially park-and-ride, and increased frequencies during peak commuter hours.
- Expanded marketing and planning functions to customize programs for employers, colleges/education and tourism.

FUNDING ASSUMPTIONS

- \$19M annually: Supports all operational programs while allowing The COMET to apply for and receive up to \$10M in annual federal funds.
Implemented. Receives about \$6M.
- In eras of reduced federal funds, match funds are aside for discretionary items, single-purpose expenses or a reserve for large-scale infrastructure.
Implemented. Apply for funds annually.
- Service is expected to "peak" in years 7-9 and then plateau or grow based on revenues and ridership. This peak will include approximately 100 transit vehicles in peak service.

Not Implemented. Peak transit bus is 63. Operations based on available funding.

Years 8-12

PEAK SERVICE EXPECTED

- Twenty-five (25) buses along eight (8) high-capacity corridors with 20/30/40/60 minute service—based on ridership demand.

Partially Implemented. 15 Peak buses.

- Forty (45) vehicles in low-density zones (to connect high-capacity corridors)—including fixed route, flexible and DART services.

Implemented.

- Twenty (20) vehicles performing park-and-ride services.

Partially Implemented. 2 Park & Ride lot expresses in operation. 1 discontinued due to low ridership.

- Ten (10) vehicles for local circulators or similar programs.

Implemented due to partnership with University of South Carolina and Soda Cap Connector implemented.

✓ | IMPLEMENTED

- System innovation and developing new partnerships for service growth.
- Capital grant match and reserve funds for capital replacement in outlying years.
- Adjustment expenses to match revenue forecasts ensure services are performing adequately and sustainably with local, state, federal and customer revenues.

IP | IN PROGRESS

- Service refinement through continuous evaluation of performance and costs.

FUNDING ASSUMPTION

- A \$19M annual expense with a 3% increase per annum beyond year #8. Service expansion occurs when a pattern of revenues will fund an increase (i.e., passenger fares, tax revenues, outside funding partners).

Implemented.

Years 13-25

IP | IN PROGRESS

- Maintaining and expanding the most successful and viable services.
- Developing and building innovative services to compete against single-occupant vehicles while supporting regional “smart growth” initiatives and high-density, transit-based, residential/retail investment.

N | NOT IMPLEMENTED

- Maximize federal funds to maintain high federal investment in the region, to capture the attention and support of the Federal Transit Administration programs. This allows The COMET to seize unique opportunities such as: experimental fuel types and equipment; Bus Rapid Transit start-ups (pre-cursor to rail corridors); property acquisition for rail corridors; or expanded park-and-ride garage facilities.

Vision: 2020

Operations Roadmap

Overview

Vision: 2020 presented by the Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority—The COMET proposes a new direction and approach to public transportation in the Midlands that will create a more innovative, connected and accessible system to facilitate a better quality of life for all Richland County citizens.

The conversion of compressed natural gas (CNG) as a new fuel source for the The COMET's transit fleet will not only be a major investment in the infrastructure for The COMET, helping the system save up to 40% of fuel cost while mitigating its impact on the environment, but it will also create much-needed infrastructure for the entire region that allows local businesses and governments to use and develop cleaner, American homegrown energy while boosting the region's economic development potential.

The development of high-frequency service along high-capacity corridors will provide greater connectivity and added convenience for riders during peak hours so that they can get to work, school and retail in a more efficient manner.

The COMET will also restructure service to begin serving neighborhoods with lower-density routes with smaller buses to directly connect riders with the higher-capacity transit corridors. This change will enhance efficiency, provide opportunity for increased ridership and better connect neighborhoods to the downtown business corridors.

With new technologies and improved infrastructure The COMET will create a more intelligent transit system. Some of these measures include implementing the automated vehicle locator (AVL) and enhanced GPS- tracking to provide real-time arrival and departure information for riders so that they can more efficiently plan their trips using their smart phones or the redesigned COMET website. And the new smartcard fare payment technology will allow riders to quickly and easily recharge their transit passes at terminals to speed rider commutes.

All of these innovations and service enhancements will enable a more robust, accessible service for the citizens of Richland County to live, to work and to play. Increased frequency, more coverage and greater connection will contribute to a higher quality of life for all.

The COMET's Vision: 2020 reflects a new philosophy and approach to service. Vision: 2020 is simply about growing ridership by providing amazing service for our transit riders while constantly attracting new customers and building community-wide support. By focusing on job connectivity, job growth and livable communities, The COMET's services will become a transportation style. Vision: 2020's operational plan targets improving existing services, creating new services and bringing about innovative technologies/ infrastructure to support current and future riders.

ENHANCED SERVICE

HIGH-CAPACITY TRANSIT CORRIDORS AND LOCAL ROUTES

- Enhancements target frequency, expanded evenings and restored Sundays. **Implemented**
- Traditional transit but with high frequency to make riding transit easy and convenient.

Limited implementation

- Ridership rates are well-above other routes with high demand for more services. **Limited implementation**
- Local routes will build on existing successful services and connect people with jobs and shopping. These services will see high frequency peak hours, as supported by ridership.

Limited implementation

NEW SERVICE TYPES

LIMITED STOP EXPRESS (LSE) ROUTES

- Travels along major metro transit corridors, stopping only at major intersections, transfer points, large employment areas and retail centers. **Limited implementation**
- Limited Stop Express routes are designed to operate both directions to serve suburban and metro commuters. Initially, these routes will only operate during peak periods. Service will expand as supported by ridership. **Limited implementation**

NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICE & FLEX ROUTES

- Redesigns low-productivity transit routes and uses small buses in neighborhoods to directly connect people with high-capacity transit corridors. **Partially implemented**
- Flex routes allow buses to leave neighborhood service routes to pick-up or drop-off customers in low-density areas. Usually operate in peak service only but use dial-a-ride options in mid-day, evening and on weekends. **Implemented**
- Creates more independence and ridership options for persons with disabilities and the elderly. **In progress**
- High ridership and strong fare collection allows the small services to grow into full-service transit routes. **In progress**

PARK & RIDE EXPRESS ROUTES

- Dedicated service to parking areas with express service to major employment sites via the region's interstate highway network but will also circulate through downtown to minimize transfers. **Implemented**
- Connect people with jobs or events (downtown employers, events/concerts, USC, etc.) over a longer distance. **Implemented**
- Operates only during peak periods or dedicated event times. All routes will travel into downtown Columbia in the morning and from downtown Columbia in the afternoon with connections to other routes. **Limited Implementation**
- Allows metro workers to reach suburban retail areas for employment while suburban service increases access to metro job markets. **Implemented**

NEW TECHNOLOGY

COMPRESSED NATURAL GAS (CNG)

- As part of its environmental commitment and emphasis on supporting American industry, The COMET will actively pursue CNG as its fuel type for its transit fleet. The COMET's leadership in this area brings considerable federal funds and investment that can act as a catalyst for alternative fuel use in the Midlands.

Not Implemented

- By opening the first permanent natural gas fuel station to the Midlands, it opens the doors to other fleets from Richland County, City of Columbia, State of South Carolina, University of South Carolina and School Bus fleets.

Not Implemented

- The COMET will pursue a strong public-private partnership to bring CNG fuel to the retail market, allowing private citizens to purchase flex fuel, natural gas or hybrid-gas vehicles and fuel for local or regional travel. Emerging green technology—such as bio-gas production—will help establish new industries in the Midlands.

Not Implemented

- Natural gas has lower tailpipe emissions, is a US-based fuel product that creates US jobs, costs about 40% less than diesel fuel and permits The COMET to stretch its dollars even-farther. It is very expensive to build the on-site infrastructure and buy the new transit fleet. **Not Implemented**

CARBON FOOTPRINT

- Measure The COMET's carbon footprint in our region.
- Expand the use of clean fuels.
- Reduce single-occupant vehicle trips in our region.
- Make The COMET's facilities cleaner.
- Market our impact on air quality and carbon footprint.

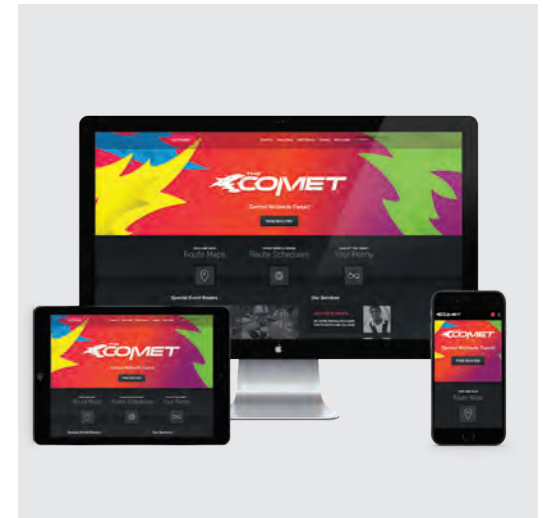
Transit Technologies

- Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) buses.

Not Implemented

- Real time arrival and departure information for transfer points and smart phones **Implemented**
- Web-based transit trip planning and trip matching services for ride-share and vanpool programs. **Implemented**
- New shelters and benches to match the service types. **In Progress**
- A new downtown transit center to support downtown revitalization.

In Progress



High-Capacity Transit Corridors and Enhanced Local Routes

Corridor #1

N. MAIN/COLUMBIA COLLEGE

Enhanced to 30-minute all-day service, later evenings, enhanced weekend and restored Sunday service. Key residential and retail corridor with service to Columbia College and Eau Claire Community Center.

The 101 – Implemented.

Corridor #2

PALMETTO HEALTH

RICHLAND/FARROW RD

Enhanced to 30-minute peak service, later evenings, enhanced weekend and restored Sunday service. Will use neighborhood and flex services on weekends to connect to other routes. Key access to Palmetto Health, SC Health Department and large state employment sites.

The 301 – Implemented.

Corridor #3

TWO NOTCH RD

30 minute all-day service with new Limited Stop Express route during peak periods to provide near 15-minute service during peak travel times; restore evenings, enhance weekends and restore Sundays. Will enhance a major retail, residential and employment corridor that will reduce auto traffic and connect with new services to the Village at Sandhill.

The 501 – Implemented with Route 53X Express and Route 55 to Village of Sandhill.

Corridor #4

FOREST DR

Enhanced to 30-minute peak service, later evenings, enhanced weekend and restored Sundays. Possible Limited Stop Express to Ft. Jackson for support workers and families attending Army graduation ceremonies/ events. Route supports a growing retail and residential corridor.

The 701 – Implemented. Limited service to Fort Jackson not implemented. In discussions with Fort Jackson staff for partnership.



Corridor #5

ASSEMBLY/BLUFF RD

Enhanced to 30-minute peak service and 60-minute midday service. Will use neighborhood and flex services on weekends to connect to other routes. Enhances transportation for University of South Carolina students and workers to campus with increased access to special events at Williams-Brice Stadium and State Fairgrounds. High use by students from the University of South Carolina/ Midlands Technical College will allow for 20-minute frequency all day.

The 601 was every 40 minutes, decreased to 60 minutes due to low ridership and became Route 61. Flex bus service implemented on Route 62, weekdays only. Partially Implemented.

Corridor #6

DEVINE/GARNER'S FERRY

Enhanced service for the entire area, expanding to Greenlawn Ave. with 30-minute all-day service. A new Hopkins Limited Stop Express route during peak periods will provide near 15-minute service during peak travel times. Restores evenings and Saturdays with Sunday neighborhood service and flex services. Enhanced service to Midlands Technical College, Benedict College housing, Veterans' Administration Hospital and Shandon community.

The 401 – Implemented with Route 44X Express to Hopkins and connections to Routes 62, 46 and 47 flex services. Does not directly serve Midlands Tech or Benedict College housing.

Corridor #7

BROAD RIVER/HARBISON

Enhanced with 30-minute peak frequencies; enhanced evening and weekend service, including Sundays. Expanded frequency to Dutch Square Mall, state employment centers and Harbison Rd. retail/employment sites. High ridership builds toward a downtown-to-shopping weekend express service. **The 801 – Implemented. Route 82X discontinued due to low ridership.**

DOWNTOWN CIRCULATOR

This high-frequency service into downtown Columbia creates the opportunity for a downtown circulator at a much lower cost. As buses arrive downtown, they will depart the new transit center and “orbit” downtown to connect the north and south ends to include Bull and Assembly streets. Quick access to downtown high-rises, University of South Carolina campus and The Vista without having to transfer routes to get there. **Soda Cap Connector implemented with 4 routes, including The Orbit.**

Neighborhood Service & Flex Routes

EAU CLAIRE

Connects Earlewood, Sunset Rd. and Eau Claire neighborhoods with Broad River and N. Main corridors. Fixed route services give customers quick access to shopping or connections into downtown and Palmetto Health Richland.

Route 6, implemented.

COLONIAL DR/W BELTLINE

Connects the neighborhoods between N. Main St. and Two-Notch Rd. to downtown with connections at Farrow Rd. providing increased opportunity to reach job centers.

Route 88, implemented.

MONTICELLO RD./DENNY TERRACE

Flex Route with possible dial-a-ride service to connect Denny Terrace, Eau Claire and N. Main St. communities with evening/weekend service.

Route 31, implemented.

FAIRFIELD RD/ WILSON RD

Flex Route with possible dial-a-ride service to connect the Wilson Rd. and Northeast Richland County with the N. Main St and Farrow Rd. corridors. Allows for evening and weekend transit services.

Route 11, implemented.

FOREST ACRES

Flex Route with possible dial-a-ride service to connect Forest Acres with Two Notch, Forest Dr. and possibly Devine/Garner's Ferry. Allows for evening and weekend transit services.

Route 74, partially implemented. No weekend or evening service. Possible Route 78 via Trenholm Road to fully implement recommendation.

MILLWOOD/SHANDON

Flex Route with possible dial-a-ride service to connect The Millwood and Shandon areas with the Forest Dr. as well as Devine/Garner's Ferry Corridors. Also provides connections into Five

Points and the University of South Carolina campus. Allows for evening and weekend transit services.

Route 42, implemented as fixed route.

ROSEWOOD DR

Connects Hollywood/Rose Hill/Rosewood neighborhoods with the Devine/Garner's Ferry and the Assembly/Bluff Rd. high frequency corridors with access at Midlands Technical College and Assembly St. Allows for evening and weekend transit services.

Route 21, implemented.

BUSH RIVER RD/ST ANDREWS

Connects the Bush River Rd. St. Andrews area with the shopping and employment areas of Bower Parkway, Harbison Rd. and Lake Murray Blvd. and the new Palmetto Health Parkridge. Allows for evening and weekend transit services.

Route 83L, Route 84, implemented.

New & Enhanced Local Routes & Neighborhood Service/Flex Routes

TWO NOTCH RD LOCAL

Creates a new local service along Two Notch Rd. that operates between Columbia Place Mall and the Village at Sandhill. This route will operate bi-directionally to take commuters to job centers in both the city and suburbs.

Route 55, implemented.

TWO NOTCH RD LIMITED STOP EXP.

Creates a Limited Stop Express that operates from downtown Columbia along Two Notch Road to Columbia Place Mall (or beyond). This route will make limited stops only at major points of interest to our customers. This route will operate bi-directionally bringing commuters to job centers in the city and out to the suburbs. Service will operate during peak periods.

Route 53X partially implemented via I-77 and not Two Notch.

COLLEGE SPECIAL

Connects various off-campus apartments for the University of South Carolina, Allen University and Benedict

College students, to the entertainment district of Five Points. This route will operate from Bluff Road to Two Notch Road via Blossom/Harden Streets.

Route 63, partially implemented, discontinued due to low ridership & competition with free private shuttles.

HOPKINS LIMITED STOP EXPRESS

Limited Stop Express between Hopkins and downtown Columbia via Garners Ferry Road. Service during peak periods will operate bi-directionally bringing commuters to job centers into the city and out to the suburbs.

Route 44X, implemented.

EXPANDED DART SERVICE

For persons with disabilities as service areas grow, as well as access to all fixed routes, and all dial-a-ride/flex services.

Implemented.

GAMECOCK/EVENT SHUTTLES

Shuttles to connect downtown Columbia restaurants, hotels and parking garages and The Vista to Williams-Brice Stadium. This enhanced-

fare service will provide circulator-style transit in the downtown Columbia/ University of South Carolina areas, based on demand.

Route 2001, implemented.

RURAL TRANSPORTATION

Key to a successful transportation plan is a service as diverse as its communities. Rural communities have distinct needs, focused mainly on access to employment centers and medical care. Solutions—developed in conjunction with communities—will include dedicated van pool programs, volunteer rideshare programs and The COMET providing technical support for private transportation providers. These services will plug outlying communities into the metro transportation network for access to higher education, medical care and employment. As demand builds, new fixed routes and park and rides will follow.

Vanpool, Routes 46, 47, 97, volunteer driver program, health care shuttle and microtransit in Northeast implemented or in progress of implementation.



Park & Ride Express Routes

NORTHWEST (I-26) EXPRESS

New service from I-26 Exit 97 (Peak) through Columbiana Mall (Harbison) and then back to I-26 into downtown Columbia. Service will operate during peak periods will take commuters to job centers into the city and out to the suburbs.

Route 82X implemented May 2018, discontinued August 2019 due to low ridership. Route 93X fills in its place as of May 2019.

NORTHEAST (I-77) EXPRESS

New service from Blythewood through Killian Road, Palmetto Health Richland to downtown Columbia. Service will operate during peak periods. This route will operate toward Columbia in the mornings and toward Blythewood in the afternoons.

Route 52X implemented, September 2017 to May 2019, discontinued due to low ridership.

SOUTHEAST EXPRESS

New service from James E. Clyburn Intermodal Transportation Center in Sumter through Shaw AFB, Eastover and parts of Lower Richland to downtown Columbia. Service is operated Monday – Friday during peak periods to take commuters to the city of Columbia and to the southeast corridor of the Midlands.

EAST (I-20) RICHLAND EXPRESS

Creates a service that operates from the Village at Sandhill via Clemson Road, I-20, Columbia Place Mall, Palmetto Health/ Richland Hospital to downtown Columbia. Service will operate during peak periods. This route will operate bi-directionally bringing commuters to job centers into the city and out to the suburbs.

Route 53X, implemented, uses I-77 instead to Killian Road. Interlines with Route 57L via Clemson Road to Village at Sandhill. Route 44x, implemented.

GAMECOCK/EVENT SHUTTLES

New Park & Ride routes from the Northwest, Northeast and East Richland locations for University of South Carolina football games and special events. This premium-fare service will provide round trip express services from key locations to downtown for game day activities based on demand.

Not implemented. Need to discuss with UofSC. Plan has been prepared on how service can operate.

Innovations

Routes

DOWNTOWN CIRCULATOR

In addition to the emphasis on connecting workers, students and visitors throughout downtown, new partnerships within the Richland/Columbia area will permit the creation of a circulator to connect hotels, convention centers and restaurants. **Implemented**

UNIVERSITY & COMMUTER CONNECTIONS

The COMET's 2013 programs to begin connecting students to transit will begin with new lower-cost fare options for students to encourage more use by high school & college students. Partnerships with universities, school districts and major employer locations will allow us to connect a whole new passenger base with a whole new set of commute options.

Implemented partnerships with Allen, Richland 1, Richland 2, Lexington-Richland 5, Columbia College, Midlands Technical College and UofSC for Route 91. Employer partnerships include Nephron, McEntire Produce, Prisma Health and Lexington Medical Center. Implemented

DEDICATED JOB-CENTER ROUTES

As new industry arrives and existing businesses expand, shift work at major employment sites can become more challenging and can create increased burden on the local infrastructure (traffic, lack of surface parking). New partnerships with large employers allows for specialized transit routes (open to the public) from downtown to industrial parks, warehouses or manufacturing centers.

Implemented

LEXINGTON COUNTY TRANSPORTATION

While focused on Richland County as the primary funding source, Lexington County and its many towns and communities will have access to similar programs and services on a pay-as-you-go basis. Several high-capacity transit and Park & Ride corridors exist in Lexington County the opportunity to add neighborhood service and flex/dial-a-ride programs services in outlying communities.

- Work with the existing Lexington County Transportation Working Group as a vehicle to strengthen the relationship, garner cooperation, and support by/ from Lexington County. **In Progress**
- Identify and engage other stakeholders (large businesses like Amazon, Nephron, Midlands Technical College, Walmart and key community leaders) who could serve as partners to grow ridership/contribute resources.

Implemented

- Assess the current and future transit needs of Lexington County as well as the needs of current riders going to and from Lexington County. **In Progress**
- Survey the attitudes and beliefs of key stakeholders about the bus system. **In Progress**
- Offer bus rides and facility tours for stakeholders (business, political, and civic).

Implemented through Community Leaders Program

Technology

INTELLIGENT TRANSIT SYSTEMS

- The COMET will take the next step in technology by adding automated vehicle location (AVL) to allow real-time arrival and departure information for customers at stops or on smart phones.

Implemented

- GPS-tracking on buses can help trigger lights to turn green on major corridors helping push the buses through clogged city traffic and speed up commute times. **Not Implemented**

- New technology will text passengers when their buses will arrive (with user-defined settings) and even let them track the closest bus while waiting on the street corner and use web-based trip planning on The COMET's new web-site.

Implemented

- Smartphone apps for visitors can link them to transit and QRT/bar-code technology around town can tell tourists about routes and services on-the-go. **Implemented**

- Smartcard fare payment technology will allow customers to ride with the tap of their card and can recharge their transit passes at terminals (similar to an ATM). This also provides real-time bus arrival information, general passenger information and advertising revenue for the system. **Implemented**

Rider Amenities

- An improved downtown Transit Center with off-street bus access and off-street waiting areas. The new downtown transit center will give customers a more secure, convenient and cleaner way to ride transit services. Buses will no longer line up downtown for route transfers therefore downtown sidewalks will be easier to navigate for pedestrians. Customers will be able to catch their buses at the same gate every day to improve reliability and get them home on time.

In Progress at Lucius Road

- New buses for major corridors will be state-of-the-art, low-floor buses. New, on-board technologies will announce major stops, digitally display the cross-streets and include on-board security cameras. New ergonomic seating with stainless steel interiors (and on-board Wi-Fi for Park & Ride routes) will create the look and feel of a light-rail train car.

Implemented

- New neighborhood service and flex route buses will be smaller, less expensive to operate and more neighborhood friendly. In addition to being quieter, they have a lower profile, take up less of the road and support the feeling of community. They are less expensive to purchase and permit service in new areas until ridership grows. **Implemented**

- Brand new benches, shelters and signs with enhanced services at Super Stops and neighborhood connection points will feature solar lighting; reflective decals and real time arrival information at enhanced stops will make for safer and more convenient transfers. Trash and recycling bins will make it easier to keep the areas clean and neat. All bus stop signs will be replaced with high visibility signage to include the route and travel information. **Implemented**

Multi-modal System

The problem of first mile/last mile (how a passenger gets to and from routes at a distance) has long dogged the transit industry. With the advent of GPS and smartphone technologies we are realizing others can contribute to solving this problem. Uber and Lyft (app-based auto transport) and biking and bike sharing are shrinking the spaces between routes and destinations, or allowing transit to do the daytime part of a trip, the rideshare app the late night part. Of course, every transit trip begins and ends with a pedestrian trip. We no longer think of transit as a stand-alone mode. Multitmodalism includes ADA accessibility, great pedestrian and cycling amenities, connections to Amtrak, Greyhound, and Megabus. Development of passenger service on existing rails is feasible for longer commutes:

- Establish a workgroup to analyze regional transportation needs and provide recommendations for a regional multi-modal plan including municipalities, elected officials, SCDOT, USC and other appropriate stakeholders.
Implemented
- Create a long-range, integrated, regional transportation plan that meets the needs of future riders.
In Progress
- Ensure circulator services are established to provide a connection hub for various modes of transportation.
In Progress
- Formalize relationship with the City of Columbia and other stakeholders to implement the Walk Bike Columbia Plan and work with other municipalities to create a bike-ped-transit plan.
Implemented Member of BAPC Committee
- Coordinate road, bike, transit funding to maximize funding opportunities. **In Progress**
- Larger-capacity bicycle racks to support growing use of transit for bicyclists—in partnership with business and employers—will encourage riders to bike to the route and ride transit to their destination. **Implemented**

The COMPASS

Goal Progress

Diversify Ridership

EXPLORE THE NEEDS OF CURRENT AND FUTURE RIDERS

There is an old adage in business that the best customer one can get is the customer one already has. The COMET is essential transportation for thousands of people in the Midlands and this agency does not, and will not, take them for granted. At the same time, the transportation goals of this community cannot be achieved without reaching new customers. The following action items will help us continue to meet our existing customers' demands while filling seats with residents new to transit:

- Conduct focus groups with current riders to understand how transit can be improved and non-riders to understand why they do not use transit. **Implemented**
- Engage employees such as bus drivers, supervisors, and transit center workers to get their feedback on what would improve customer experience. **In Progress**
- Establish a multi-jurisdictional approach to growing ridership. **In Progress**

IMPROVE BRANDING/MARKETING

When the bright colors of the first rebranded COMET buses hit the streets people asked if there were two transit systems in the Midlands. Having a consistent, unified brand across all platforms is basic to the success of this organization. Promoting that brand to the broader community is the essential next step. The COMET will do the following to advance the system's branding and marketing:

- Complete the branding of all vehicles to project one fleet. **Implemented**
- Participate in community events, festivals, fairs and expos. **Implemented**
- Promote pass programs to businesses, hotels and tourism industry. **In Progress**
- Increase advertising campaigns in local publications. **Implemented**
- Aggressively pursue messaging on social media. **Implemented**
- Promote First Year Freedom passes to colleges and universities. **Implemented and discontinued in FY19-20**

MAKE CATCHING THE COMET EASIER

In the United States we train young people to drive in high schools and most adults grew up in suburban neighborhoods where owning and operating automobiles was preferred if not essential to daily living. As a result most Americans have little experience with transit. The COMET has to make transit easy to use to attract new riders.

- Develop "How to ride the bus" promotional material and videos to instruct new users. **Implemented**
- Make sure all customer information (schedules, fare structure, etc.) is current and easily accessible (i.e. at libraries, utility services centers, churches, voter registration offices, tax offices, etc.). **Implemented**
- Provide resources that offer assistance to first-time, non-English speaking and low-literacy riders. **Implemented with Language Line**

Redesign the Network

The route network The COMET runs today is largely the same as the one in operation more than forty years ago. Areas that boomed in the 1970s and 80s are awaiting redevelopment while areas “out in the country” back then now have significant percentages of the region’s population. The Penny provides a consistent source of income and resources should be developed and deployed to the maximum effect. To redesign the network, The COMET will:

- Establish targeted benchmarks for various service types, service areas, in vehicle time, with checks and criteria to guide the adjustment of service. **Implemented**
- Adopt a clean slate/”no sacred cows” policy which is guided by population data, activity centers/destinations and other relevant factors. **Implemented**
- Maximize the use of technology in redesigning the network. **Implemented**
- Establish budget parameters for designing service. **Implemented**
- Utilize pilot routes to guide the introduction of new routes in order to get data that can only be collected on the street. **In Progress**

Obtain Optimal Fleet

The COMET can realize significant savings from the right mix of vehicles and fuel types that can be put toward additional service. Vehicles can range in size from Dodge Mini-vans to 60-foot articulated buses and use diverse fuels like diesel, propane, compressed natural gas, and electricity. To obtain the optimal fleet the COMET will:

- Conduct a fleet vehicle needs assessment based on service needs and ridership usage. **Implemented**
- Adopt industry best practices for establishing the right fleet vehicle mix to meet planned growth in the area. **Implemented**
- Create a purchasing plan with benchmarks for vehicle replacement. **Implemented**
- Establish standards for ensuring the right size vehicle is used for the area being served. **Implemented**
- Establish standards for ensuring the right vehicle amenities are available to meet the riders’ needs. **Implemented**

Board Governance

The single, clearest need identified in the strategic planning process was to improve communication between the

three parts of transit system: the board, the executive director and staff, and the contract operator. The board of directors was reconstituted in 2011 and there has been recent change over of board membership. The bylaws, created in 2002 and amended in 2004 and 2011, need updating and The COMET as a whole has been lacking in policies delineating responsibilities, work and communication flows, and board member responsibilities.

- Update the bylaws to reflect new realities after passage of the Penny. **Implemented**
- Write a policy detailing communication between the board, the executive director and his staff, the contract operator, the union, passengers, and the broader community. **Implemented Board Policy #6**
- Detail board member roles and responsibilities. **Implemented Board Policy #2**
- Create a procedure for addressing matters before the board to facilitate a work flow. **Implemented Board Policies #3 & #4**
- Institute a board member orientation process for current board members and new board members moving forward. **Implemented Board Policy #1**
- Clarify how agendas and meeting minutes will be written, recorded, and distributed. **Implemented Board Policies #3, #4 and proposed Board Policy #8**

Financials

Over a 22-year period The COMET will collect \$300,991,000 or \$13,681,409 annually. These funds will be used to operate fixed-route and DART transit, to purchase buses, shelters, and benches, and to build facilities, leveraging capital dollars from the federal government, and pay for staff and auxiliary services. While the Penny is a dependable revenue source, in order to use these funds responsibly The COMET requires a funding plan that considers all actual and potential funding sources, accounts for capital needs, and budgets for inflation.

Define Needs

- Examine the proposed strategic priorities and provide projected costs to implement each of the recommended action outcomes. **In Progress**
- Recommend priorities for annual expenditures based on the approved Strategic Plan. **Implemented**
- Identify the necessary funds to support the approved priorities. **In Progress**

Evaluate Existing Funding Mechanisms

- Evaluate the adequacy of the existing funding mechanisms to meet the long-term strategic vision of the Board and/or those of a changing environmental landscape through the year 2035 and provide a report to the Board. **Implemented through long term financial model**
- Establish a Public Transportation Consortium consisting of key stakeholders (Richland County, City of Columbia, SCDOT, Lexington County, Chambers of Commerce, COG and others) to engage discussions about existing and future funding and transit service needs. **Not Implemented**

Maximize Productivity and Existing Assets

- Conduct a budgeting and spending workshop for The COMET board, staff and contractor operator staff. **Implemented**
- Develop a budget that is consistent with the approved “Strategic Plan Priorities” and recommend for consideration to the Budget Committee and Board of Directors. **Implemented**
- Identify the financial metrics necessary to monitor ongoing productivity and efficiency. **Implemented**
- Develop and then implement a financial management plan that includes the collection of the necessary information to monitor continually the efficiency and productivity. **Implemented**
- Develop and implement an ongoing fleet replacement plan. **Implemented**
- Provide orientation and annual training to the COMET staff and contract operator staff on the implementation and utilization of the information. **Implemented**
- Evaluate the data output on an ongoing and frequent basis and provide quarterly reports to the Board of Directors. **Implemented**
- Provide regular feedback to other stakeholders (funding sources, customers and potential customers) regarding the outcome of the efficiency and productivity metrics in an annual report as well as through an ongoing comprehensive marketing effort. **In Progress**

Maximize Productivity and Existing Assets

- Review transit system case studies or best practices to identify new funding opportunities and make recommendations to the Board for adoption. **In Progress**
- Coordinate and implement the logistics for at least two site visits for the Board and senior The COMET staff to observe and research other identified benchmark transit systems to ascertain best practices and successes relative to new and expanded revenue options, pilot programming, etc. **Not Implemented**
- Continually engage the public through a comprehensive marketing campaign to inform them that the existing funds are being efficiently maximized and to ensure that services are meeting the needs of the community (sharing the successes of the system). **Implemented**
- Identify best use and apply for available federal funds. **Implemented**
- Explore all available additional funding sources and revenue generators (grants, incentive programs, farebox opportunities, etc) and implement appropriate programming on an ongoing basis and provide a report with recommendations to the Board. **Implemented**
- Engage in conversation and networking with other transit providers around the state and actively advocate for public transit funding needs in the SC General Assembly and US Congress. Legislative Updates should be provided to the Board on a quarterly basis or as frequently as necessary. **Not Implemented**
- Make a decision on the feasibility of CNG use as a cost savings mechanism as well as potential revenue generator. **Not Implemented**



COMPASS Checklist

N Not Implemented | IP In Progress | ✓ Implemented

Staff

✓ Create a reporting mechanism to measure system safety, reliability, and efficiency.

✓ Produce monitoring instrument to ensure contract operator meets standards in the contract.

IP Install 100% of benches and shelters according to the adopted stop policy.

✓ Coordinate all three current smartphone technologies (Plan, Track, Pay) into a single Catch The COMET app.

✓ Identify and implement an immediate list of improvements to the interior and exterior of the transit center.

IP Conduct a survey to measure effective customer service and areas for improvement.

IP Involve community stakeholders in identifying current and future decisions to improve amenities and facilities.

COG

✓ Assess current location to determine if present location meets future growth/expansion.

✓ Determine if neighboring property to the transit center can be acquired for expansion at the current location.

IP Explore and identify additional sites for relocating transit center.

✓ Create a long-range, integrated, regional transportation plan that meets the needs of future riders.

Operator

✓ Review current safety program to measure effectiveness.

Board

✓ Adjust board stop policy as needed to expand locations for shelters and benches.

THE
COMET