



FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

In 2011, I completed my service as Chair of the Board of the regional transit authority and turned my attention to my roles on the Richland County Council, National Association of Counties (NACo), and the Women of the National Association of Counties Leadership Network. Five years later I was asked to come back to the authority and found myself in a whole new organization.

My return gave a refreshed perspective. The CMRTA is now The COMET. There is an entirely new Board of Directors with a different executive director and a robust professional staff. There is a Penny Sales Tax that has provided \$35.6 Million in funding through October 2016. The COMET has almost 1.5M additional transit trips per year and over 100,000 new hours of service. There is a new identity—a spirit of innovation and a view of changing not just transit in the Midlands, but the Midlands itself.

In 2015 the Board of Directors, staff and stakeholders embarked on a Strategic Planning Process, which is documented herein. This plan is the compass for the next five years of The COMET, providing direction for the journey without defining the exact path of travel. This becomes a leadership tool, a communication tool, and an accountability tool for the transit system and the community.

I cannot express in words how proud I am to return as Chair of the Board of Directors and spend the coming years bringing the vision, values and priorities to life on the streets of the Midlands.

Respectfully,



Joyce Dickerson



FROM THE BOARD TREASURER

The COMET's Strategic Planning process unfolded from a series of questions in Fall 2014 surrounding one main issue: "How do we grow a system for the future while keeping the services in place for our long-time riders?" A group that meets once a month really needed an in-depth discussion so the decision was made to hold an informational workshop and discussion opportunities for The COMET.

In May 2015, an all-day workshop was held at Earlewood Park better to understand transit in the Midlands, including the formation of the authority and what had guided the system to date. As we asked several big questions and thought about new issues, we realized that more than just one meeting would be needed. Instead we took the bolder step of a strategic planning process.

We gathered the original participants back at Earlewood Park in August 2015, with some new faces from Richland and Lexington Counties as well as the City of Columbia, Town of Blythewood, City of Cayce, and Town of Eastover. With key regional leadership in the room, the Council of Governments forecast growth rates for the community and staff identified a more long-term model of transit with fleet and cost needs. By the end of our second full day of labor, we realized this was way more than a transit issue—it was a regional growth issue that truly needed not just to engage but involve the community.

The COMET Strategic Planning Task Force divided the primary issues into four main categories and

assigned subject matter experts as champions, supported by key staff members, facilitators, and community stakeholders. As you'll see from our "thank you" page, there were many organizations that gave their time and energy to the process, which carved out key priorities for The COMET over the next five years and provided some much needed perspective on what The COMET did well but also where we go next.

I was overwhelmed by the support and response we received by so many of our local leaders, in public agencies and private firms, as well as many talented individual citizens who demonstrated just how important it is to be engaged in order to shape the future. These individuals made the difference.

Our Strategic Plan took longer than we'd have liked to complete, but with changes come challenges and we had to realign priorities, but without losing long-term focus on the final product. As my fellow Taskforce board members have rotated off of The COMET Board of Directors, I remain the last active member with the responsibility for delivering a final product. With this document, we met not only the challenge, but the obligation to set the course for The COMET's future and make this a better place for our riders, our employees, and our citizens.



Mac Bennett
Treasurer



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Vision:2020 Plan has been the guiding document for The COMET, first created in summer 2012 to help voters understand the future of The COMET and offer an idea of what transit could look like with dedicated funding. This plan is designed to help operationalize the Vision:2020 Plan and chart success over time. The Compass is both a management and accountability tool for the Board of Directors and the executive staff.

At the basic level, strategic planning is a tool for organizations to identify problems, issues, and solutions while developing a systematic plan for implementation. By simplifying the steps, eliminating jargon and embracing the nature of its flexibility, these plans are highly beneficial. At the same time, these plans can often be boring and difficult to read or the resources aren't provided to bring the plan to life. As such, the plan ends up sitting in on a shelf and the energy is lost.

This instrument is different because our attention is on the most critical issues and challenges The COMET will face over the next five years and places the need to solve them front and center for decision-makers. By clarifying problems, objectives, and goals, The COMET has become more aware of the needs of its internal and external customers. It has attached important action items that serve as guideposts for the organization, some of which are one-time but important achievements while others reflect an ongoing need to innovate and improve.

The plan has been named The Compass: A Five Year Guide to Transit in the Midlands because it is focused on providing the Board and Staff direction, just like a compass while on a journey. The Compass Plan becomes a tool for the organization to maintain focus, energy, and understanding for where transit in the Midlands is headed.

Special thanks is owed to The COMET's board members for caring deeply enough about the organization to invest their countless hours into the community and for providing the resources to ensure the opportunity to continue our record-breaking success.



Bob Schneider
Executive Director COMET



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Board of Directors would like to thank the following people for their extensive participation in The COMET's strategic planning process (all participants are listed according to their positions in 2015).

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This document was written and prepared by The COMET staff.



INTRODUCTION

Mass transportation began in Columbia in what was the typical way for 1892: with streetcar lines running to new suburban neighborhoods like Earlewood, Shandon, and Melrose Heights. By 2002, however, Columbia was unique, the last utility-owned transit system in the United States.

Those 110 years of utility ownership were marked by stability—the staff of the transit system knew where the funding would come from—but not enthusiasm. Already in 1928 the transit system was listed in the annual stock report only as a liability and from 1929 forward the United States Supreme Court compelled Broad River Power Company, and later South Carolina Electric and Gas, to operate transit, even after it was an all-bus system.

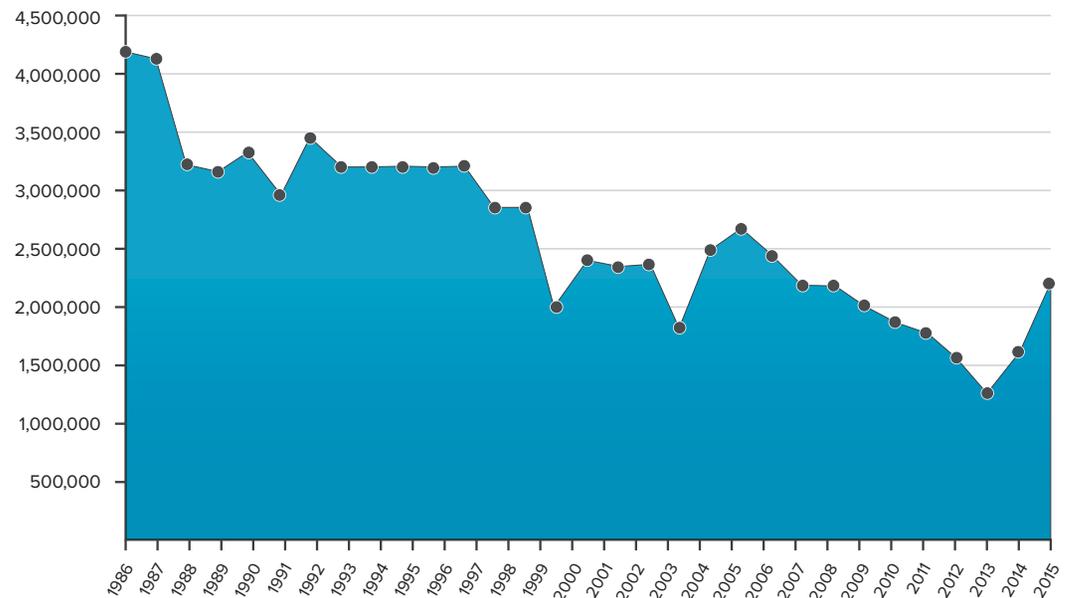
From 1986 (the first year the National Transportation Database—NTD—began collecting data) to 2002, annual ridership on the Columbia Bus System dropped from 4,209,089 boardings to 2,353,810, a 60% decline. As chart 1 shows (right), after SCE&G divested the transit system to a newly formed regional transit authority the decline continued through 2013 to 1,262,053 boardings (another 53% decrease) as funds from the newly-passed Penny were just coming into the Central Midlands Transit coffers. A rebound in use of this transit system has followed: the total reported to NTD for FY2015 was 2,260,607, an increase of 56% since 2013.

PUT ANOTHER WAY, THE COMET HAS REVERSED A NEAR DECADE IN RIDERSHIP DECLINE IN ONLY TWO YEARS.



In 1936 the Columbia Electric Railway became the Columbia Bus System, but was still run by the electric utility until 2002.

COLUMBIA BUS SYSTEM AND CMRTA RIDERSHIP 1986-2015



THE PROCESS BEGINS

To begin attracting new riders, The COMET's board of directors began a strategic planning process in 2015 with The COMET senior staff and the management team from the contract operator Transdev. Then-board chair Brian DeQuincey Newman convened the first Strategic Planning Board retreat on Friday, May 1, 2015, at the Earlewood Park Community Center to establish a vision for the transit system and the board's responsibilities moving forward. A second retreat was held on August 21, 2015. The result of these meetings was to establish a vision statement, values, and a set of four priorities that community stakeholders would use to guide the strategic planning process: Service Design, Board Governance, Operational Excellence, and Finance.

In November, 2015 subcommittees of each priority met to establish a uniform strategic planning process that all groups would follow and to select champions and facilitators for each priority. These committees then recruited stakeholders with relevant interests in each area to participate in a series of stakeholder meetings to guide the formulation of an achievable strategic plan. The plan would include attendant goals and readily achievable action items to address needs over a five-year period. The Action Planning teams consisted of The COMET board members and senior staff, the Transdev management team, and a diverse group of governmental and community stakeholders including representatives from Richland County, City of Columbia, Lexington Chamber of Commerce, Town of Blythewood, the Columbia Urban League, the Community Relations Council, the Midlands Transit Riders Association, the Central Midlands Council of Governments (MPO), the Council of Neighborhoods, colleges and universities and many others in order to elicit input from the broader stakeholder community in the "action planning" process.



Facilitator Rania Jamison at a Service Design working group session.

WHO WE ARE

VISION

 A high-quality public transit service that contributes to economic development, environmental sustainability and mobility solutions throughout the Midlands.

MISSION

 The COMET provides safe, reliable, efficient, and customer-friendly mobility services throughout the Midland's region, and stimulates economic development and enhances quality of life.

CORE VALUES

 Safety

Reliability

Friendliness

Cleanliness & Comfort

Cost Effectiveness

The responsibility for these core values is demonstrated through:

- respect for each other, the environment, and ourselves;
- accountability for what we do and the results we achieve;
- continuous dedication to growth of our knowledge and skills;
- dedication to diversity and inclusivity in our work team;
- ethical decisions as individuals and as a business.

 We demonstrate our respect for each other in how we talk and listen, striving to understand and be understood. We demonstrate our respect for the environment by maintaining our buses and equipment, by repairing existing damage to our environment, and avoiding future environmental contamination. We respect ourselves when we work in a way of which we can be proud.

 By holding high ethical standards we demonstrate honesty and integrity in all aspects of our work. A transparent environment enables us to recognize our successes, as well as our shortcomings, and create a better personal and business environment.

We hold ourselves accountable by planning effectively, managing productively, measuring and reporting accurately and by internal and external audits, reviews, and evaluation. By correcting errors and adopting appropriate innovations, we identify and implement the best route to our success.

To fulfill our mission we must grow personally and professionally. We seek new ways to do our work, we learn new skills, and we take pride in what we know.

CORE VALUES

SAFETY

Safety truly comes first, as you cannot be reliable, friendly, etc. if you are unsafe. The COMET's most important obligation is a safe experience from the moment a passenger arrives at The COMET's transit stop until reaching the final transit destination. This includes safe driving from our employees, safe behavior for and from our many passengers, and safe infrastructure at our stops. Our community partners should know we are invested in their safety and security.

RELIABILITY

A community that moves on transit must have confidence in the service. Once a potential passenger decides to ride The COMET must fulfill its obligation to provide the right vehicle, at the right time and the right place. Technology helps to provide accurate and reliable information to support and evaluate service. Customers must be able to depend on The COMET.

FRIENDLINESS

Once a system is safe and reliable, a friendly experience is essential. Easy-to-understand information and a great personal experience becomes increasingly important. Friendly and informed bus drivers, with expert support from mechanics and supervisors, will retain customers and create loyalty to transit services.

CLEANLINESS & COMFORT

A complete experience is achieved for the rider when the vehicle, the amenities, and the transit-oriented components are clean and comfortable. Convenient bus stops with benches and shelters are essential along with trash cans to mitigate waste and keep a neat and clean appearance on the street. Vehicles should be kept clean, smelling fresh, free of debris with working HVAC and an interior that is calm and restful allowing a relaxed passenger trip.

COST EFFECTIVENESS

When the first four values are achieved, true cost-effectiveness for the system can occur. Passengers are able to make an ongoing commitment to use the system as a supplement to or instead of personal vehicles. Passengers who cannot drive a car for economic, medical, or personal choice reasons can rely on services to meet their travel needs. Transit stops are accessible by walking, wheelchairs, or biking and racks are provided to allow bike use from transit stops to other destinations. The system begins to replace automobile trips and citizens become riders. Rider fares may increase, but are reasonable and sustainable. Deeper investment from business, governments and taxpayers occur because the benefits and results for the community can be seen.



ONGOING COMET RE-BRANDING BEGAN IN 2013,
INCREASING VISIBILITY FOR BUSES

THE COMET REBRANDING 2013 - ONGOING



PRIORITIES

OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE PRIORITIES

- 1 • *Establish key Performance Goals & Metrics*
 - 2 • *Focus on Safety and Customer Satisfaction*
 - 3 • *Leverage Technology to Enhance Customer Experience*
 - 4 • *Improve Transit Center and Facilities*
-

PRIORITY 1

ESTABLISH KEY PERFORMANCE GOALS & METRICS

The basic metric on which any transit system is graded is ridership. The number of boardings in a month or year, however, is a superficial measurement reflecting success or failure on the part of maintenance, operations, customer service and other actions of both the authority staff and the contract operators. Knowing our own scores is essential to improvement.

- Produce a reporting mechanism to measure system safety, reliability and efficiency.
- Monitor performance to meet the standards and metrics included in the contract for on-street service.
- Perform a passenger profile survey to capture the varying characteristics of riders, their feedback on service and their perspectives on needs for the future.
- Report prompt and accurate information to the Board routinely and whenever requested/required.
- Provide employee training to ensure accurate entry and reporting of transit system data.

PRIORITY 2

FOCUS ON SAFETY AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

The COMET's passengers are The COMET's customers. Their safety and satisfaction must be the first consideration in planning, operations, maintenance, and facilities management. As an organization, The COMET will:

- Provide training to improve safety and customer service.
- Conduct surveys to measure effective customer service and areas for improvement.
- Review current safety program to measure effectiveness.
- Install 100% of shelters and benches according to the adopted board policy.
- Adjust board policy as needed to expand locations for shelters and benches.

PRIORITY 3

LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY TO ENHANCE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

The Pew Research Center found in April 2015 that 10% of Americans have “leapfrogged” broadband computing (laptops/desktops) and gone straight to smartphones. Two-thirds of Americans own this technology (up from 35% in 2011) and young Americans, called “digital natives,” have not known a world without hand-held access to the internet. In order to harness to the power of technology The COMET will:

- Coordinate all three current smartphone technologies (Plan, Track, Pay) into a single Catch The COMET app.
- Continue to research industry best experience, information, and convenience and implement options that enhance and facilitate the transit experience.
- Ensure technologies on buses and at the transit center are in working order.



PRIORITY 4

IMPROVE TRANSIT CENTER AND FACILITIES

The transit center is The COMET’s living room to our customers and our front porch to the wider community. Much of what residents of and visitors to the Midlands believe about our transit system and our passengers is gleaned from the corner of Sumter and Laurel Streets. The COMET’s long-term needs may not be feasible to meet within 5 years but in the interim we will do the following:

- Identify and implement an immediate list of improvements to the interior and exterior of the transit center.
- Assess current location to determine if present location meets future growth/ expansion.
- Determine if neighboring property can be acquired for expansion at current location.
- Explore and identify additional sites for relocating transit center.
- Involve community stakeholders in identifying current and future decisions to improvement amenities and facilities.



SERVICE DESIGN PRIORITIES

- 1 • *Diversify Ridership*
 - 2 • *Redesign the Network*
 - 3 • *Optimize the Fleet*
 - 4 • *Strengthen Relations with Lexington County*
 - 5 • *Establish a Multi-modal System*
-

PRIORITY 1 DIVERSIFY RIDERSHIP GOALS

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;
- Engage employees such as bus drivers, supervisors, and transit center workers to get their feedback on what would improve customer experience
- Reach out through community contacts to potential new riders.
- Establish a multi-jurisdictional approach to growing ridership

- Promote First-Year Freedom passes to colleges and universities;

Improve Branding/Marketing to Enhance Use and Image of the System

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 The COMET vehicles to project one fleet;
- Participate in community events, festivals, fairs and expositions;
- Promote pass programs to businesses, hotels, tourism/convention industry;
- Increase advertising campaigns in local publications;
- Aggressively pursue messaging on social media;

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;
- 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.);
- Provide resources that offer assistance to first-time, non-English speaking, and low-literacy riders.



Unified design strengthens The COMET brand. Older buses should be wrapped like the rest of the fleet.

College students are fertile ground for transit as seen here at Florida State in Tallahassee.

PRIORITY 2 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;
- Adopt a clean slate/”no sacred cows” policy which is guided by population data, activity centers/destinations and other relevant factors;
- Maximize the use of technology in redesigning the network;
- Establish budget parameters for designing service;
- Utilize pilot routes to guide the introduction of new routes in order to get data that can only be collected on the street.

PRIORITY 3 OBTAIN OPTIMAL FLEET VEHICLE MIX

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;
- Adopt industry best practices for establishing the right fleet vehicle mix to meet planned growth in the area;
- Create a purchasing plan with benchmarks for vehicle replacement;
- Establish standards for ensuring the right size vehicle is used for the area being served;
- Establish standards for ensuring the right vehicle amenities are available to meet the riders’ needs.

PRIORITY 4

STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIP WITH LEXINGTON COUNTY TO ESTABLISH A COMMITMENT OF COOPERATION AND SUPPORT

The Columbia Metropolitan Airport is in Lexington County as is Lake Murray, one of the best-known and most popular attractions in the Midlands. The Midlands Technical College campus in Lexington County is an important contributor to workforce development. Lexington County's 216,000 residents make up 36% of the region's population and there are many jobs west of the Congaree River that residents of both counties could access with public transit, e.g., large employers like Amazon and Nephron Pharmaceuticals. A stronger relationship between The COMET and Lexington County is essential to regional success, therefore we will:

- Work with the existing Lexington County Transportation Working Group as a vehicle to strengthen the relationship, garner cooperation, and support by/from Lexington County;
- Identify and engage other stakeholders (large businesses like Amazon, Nephron, Midlands Technical College, Wal-Mart and key community leaders) who could serve as partners to grow ridership/contribute resources;
- Assess the current and future transit needs of Lexington County as well as the needs of current riders going to and from Lexington County;
- Survey the attitudes and beliefs of key stakeholders about the bus system;
- Offer bus rides and facility tours for stakeholders (business, political, and civic).

PRIORITY 5

ESTABLISH A REGIONAL 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. Multimodalism 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;
- Create a long-range, integrated, regional transportation plan that meets the needs of future riders;
- Ensure circulator services are established to provide a connection hub for various modes of transportation;
- 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;
- Coordinate road, bike, transit funding to maximize funding opportunities.

BOARD GOVERNANCE PRIORITY

PRIORITY 1 **IMPROVE THE COMET 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;
- Write a policy detailing communication between the board, the executive director and his staff, the contract operator, the union, passengers, and the broader community;
- Detail board member roles and responsibilities;
- Create a procedure for addressing matters before the board to facilitate a work flow;
- Institute a board member orientation process for current board members and new board members moving forward;
- Clarify how agendas and meeting minutes will be written, recorded, and distributed.

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.*

**POWERED BY
PROPANE**



Affordable, abundant
energy powering this
and other COMET buses!



FINANCE AND FUNDING PRIORITIES

- 1 • Define Short- And Long-Term Needs
 - 2 • Maximize Productivity, Efficiency, And Use Of Existing Assets
 - 3 • Evaluate Existing Funding Mechanisms
 - 4 • Bring In New And Expanded Revenue
-

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.

PRIORITY 1

DEFINE SHORT- AND LONG-TERM NEEDS

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

PRIORITY 2

MAXIMIZE PRODUCTIVITY, EFFICIENCY, AND USE OF EXISTING ASSETS

- Conduct a budgeting and spending workshop for The COMET board, staff and contractor operator staff;
- Develop a budget that is consistent with the approved “Strategic Plan Priorities” and recommend for consideration to the Budget Committee and Board of Directors;
- Identify the financial metrics necessary to monitor ongoing productivity and efficiency;
- Develop and then implement a financial management plan that includes the collection of the necessary information to monitor continually the efficiency and productivity;
- Develop and implement an ongoing fleet replacement plan;
- Provide orientation and annual training to the COMET staff and contract operator staff on the implementation and utilization of the information;
- Evaluate the data output on an ongoing and frequent basis and provide quarterly reports to the Board of Directors;
- 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 November 2012, Columbia started the penny revenue. It's been about three years since the 'transportation penny' took effect, and it's allowed us to make a positive difference.

PRIORITY 3

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;
- 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.

PRIORITY 4

MAXIMIZE PRODUCTIVITY, EFFICIENCY, AND USE OF EXISTING ASSETS

- Review transit system case studies or best practices to identify new funding opportunities and make recommendations to the Board for adoption;
- Coordinate and implement the logistics for at least two site visits for the Board and Senior 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;
- 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);
- Identify best use and apply for available federal funds;
- 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;
- 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;
- Make a decision on the feasibility of CNG use as a cost savings mechanism as well as potential revenue generator.





ONGOING COMET RE-BRANDING ALSO INCLUDES TRANSIT SHELTERS.





ACTION CHECKLISTS

COMPASS CHECKLIST | STAFF

- Create a reporting mechanism to measure system safety, reliability, and efficiency.
- Produce monitoring instrument to ensure contract operator meets standards in the contract.
- 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.
- Complete the branding of all The COMET vehicles to project one fleet.
- Develop “How to ride the bus” promotional material and videos to instruct new users.
- Provide resources that offer assistance to first-time, non-English speaking, and low-literacy riders.
- Conduct a fleet vehicle needs assessment based on service needs and ridership usage.
- Create a purchasing plan with benchmarks for vehicle replacement.
- Assess the current and future transit needs of Lexington County as well as the needs of current riders going to Lexington County.
- 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.
- 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.
- Institute a board member orientation process for current board members and new board members moving forward.
- Create a procedure for addressing matters before the board to facilitate a work flow (with Board).

Examine the proposed strategic priorities and provide projected costs to implement each of the recommended action outcomes.

Conduct a budgeting and spending workshop for The COMET board, staff and contractor operator staff.

Develop a budget that is consistent with the approved “Strategic Plan Priorities” and recommend for consideration to the Budget Committee and Board of Directors.

Identify the financial metrics necessary to monitor ongoing productivity and efficiency.

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.

Review transit system case studies or best practices to identify new funding opportunities and make recommendations to the Board for adoption.

Coordinate and implement the logistics for at least two site visits for the Board and Senior The COMET staff to observe and research at least two other identified benchmark transit systems to ascertain best practices and successes relative to new and expanded revenue options , pilot programming, etc.

Conduct a profile of a typical rider to identify specific ops and planning needs.

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

Conduct focus groups with current riders to understand how transit can be improved and non-riders to understand why they do not use transit.

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 land.

COMPASS CHECKLIST | BOARD

- Develop and then implement a financial management plan that includes the collection of the necessary information to monitor continually the efficiency and productivity scope through the year 2035 and provide a report to the Board.
- Make a decision on the feasibility of CNG use as a cost savings mechanism as well as potential revenue generator.
- Establish targeted benchmarks for various service types, service areas, in vehicle time, with checks and triggers to guide the adjustment of service.
- Adopt a clean slate/no sacred cows policy which is guided by population data, activity centers/destinations and other factors.
- Establish budget parameters for designing service.
- Establish standards for ensuring the right size vehicle is used for the area being served.
- Establish standards for ensuring the right vehicle amenities are available to meet the riders' needs.
- Write a policy detailing communication between the board, the executive director and his staff, the contract operator, the union, passengers, and the broader community.
- Detail board member roles and responsibilities.
- Update the bylaws to reflect new realities after passage of the Penny (with Legal).
- Develop and implement plan for ongoing monitoring of operator performance.

COMPASS CHECKLIST | 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.
- Explore and identify additional sites for relocating transit center.
- Create a long-range, integrated, regional transportation plan that meets the needs of future riders.

COMPASS CHECKLIST | LEGAL

- Update the bylaws to reflect new realities after passage of the Penny (with Board).
- Clarify how agendas and meeting minutes will be written, recorded, and distributed.

COMPASS CHECKLIST | OPERATOR

- Review current safety program to measure effectiveness.
- Develop monthly report to Service Committee and Board covering all contract performance measures.



THE COMET SUPPORTS, RECOGNIZES AND HONORS
VETERANS AND SERVICE MEMBER FAMILIES.

THE COMET PURPLE HEART TRANSIT LAUNCHED FEBRUARY 25, 2015



UPDATE TASK LISTS

COMPASS UPDATE TASKS | STAFF

Report prompt and accurate information to the Board when requested/required.

Provide employee training to ensure accurate entry and reporting of transit system data.

Provide training to improve safety and customer service.

Continue to research industry best experience, information, and convenience.

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

Participate in community events, festivals, fairs and expositions.

Promote pass programs to businesses, hotels, tourism/convention industry.

Increase advertising campaigns in local publications.

Aggressively pursue messaging on social media.

Promote First-Year Freedom passes to colleges and universities.

Maximize the use of technology in redesigning the network.

Work with the existing Lexington County Transportation Working Group as a vehicle to strengthen the relationship, garner cooperation, and support by/from Lexington County.

Offer bus rides and facility tours for stakeholders (business, political, and civic).

Combine road, bike, transit funding into a single corridor to maximize funding opportunities.

Recommend priorities for annual expenditures based on the approved Strategic Plan.

Identify the necessary funds to support the approved priorities.

Provide orientation and annual training to The COMET staff and Contractor staff on the implementation and utilization of the information.

Evaluate the data output on an ongoing and frequent basis and provide quarterly reports to the Board of Directors.

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.

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).

Identify best use of and apply for available federal funds.

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.

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.

Adopt industry best practices for establishing the right fleet vehicle mix to meet planned growth in the area.

Identify and engage other stakeholders (large businesses like Amazon, Nephron, Midlands Technical College, Wal-Mart and key community leaders) who could serve as a partner to grow ridership/ contribute resources.

Measure the attitudes and beliefs of key stakeholders about the bus system.

Engage employees such as bus drivers, supervisors, and transit center workers to get their feedback on what would improve customer experience.

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.).

Utilize pilot routes to guide the introduction of new routes in order to get data that can only be collected on the street.

COMPASS UPDATE TASKS | OPERATOR

Engage employees such as bus drivers, supervisors, and transit center workers to get their feedback on what would improve customer experience.

Ensure technologies on buses and at the transit center are in working order.

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.).

Utilize pilot routes to guide the introduction of new routes in order to get data that can only be collected on the street.

COMPASS UPDATE TASKS | BOARD

Identify and engage other stakeholders (large businesses like Amazon, Nephron, Midlands Technical College, Wal-Mart and key community leaders) who could serve as a partner to grow ridership/ contribute resources.

Measure the attitudes and beliefs of key stakeholders about the bus system.

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.).

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

Identify and engage other stakeholders (large businesses like Amazon, Nephron, Midlands Technical College, Wal-Mart and key community leaders) who could serve as a partner to grow ridership/ contribute resources.

Measure the attitudes and beliefs of key stakeholders about the bus system.

Establish a multi-jurisdictional approach to growing ridership.

Utilize pilot routes to guide the introduction of new routes in order to get data that can only be collected on the street.