

Introduction

The JUMPO 2050 MTP considers all modes of transportation and promotes an integrated approach to transportation system planning. Jacksonville Transit offers fixed-route bus service throughout the City of Jacksonville and parts of Onslow County, Express Route Service connecting the city to nearby military installations, and Complementary Paratransit Service. Onslow United Transit System, Inc. (OUTS) is contracted through Jacksonville Transit and coordinates demand-response for general public transportation, including Camp Lejeune and Americans with Disabilities

Act (ADA) Complementary Paratransit Service throughout Onslow County. OUTS also operates a regional Ride Line and one-call center for area citizens to inquire about transportation options within the region. This chapter aims to leverage previous planning efforts, explore readily available data, and evaluate options to create a more coordinated regional public transportation system. Additionally, this chapter explores the planning considerations, service guidelines, integrated technologies, and partnerships on which OUTS, JUMPO, and NCDOT should continue collaborating.

“Our mission at Jacksonville Transit is to provide safe, affordable, reliable and convenient public transportation services.”

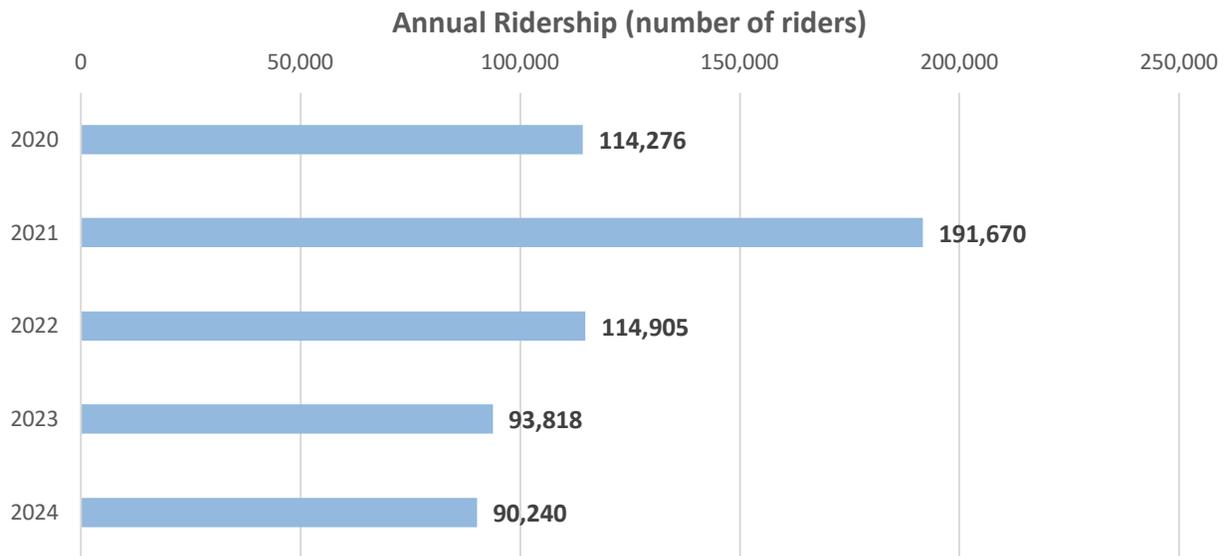


System Overview

As described in Chapter 2, Jacksonville Transit operates four fixed-route services. These fixed routes operate on weekdays between 5:55 AM and 7:55 PM, and weekends between 9:55 AM and 7:55 PM. All Jacksonville Transit buses are handicap accessible. For passengers with disabilities who cannot ride the daily routes, ADA Paratransit applications are available online or at Jacksonville Station, 1300 N. Marine Blvd. For all Jacksonville Transit-related information, passengers can call 910 938-RIDE (7433). Passengers who use OUTS transportation services must call (910) 346-2998 no later than 10:30 a.m. the day before the needed transportation or up to 14 days prior, while cancelations must occur at least 2 hours before the scheduled time.

As seen in Figure 39, ridership on Jacksonville Transit has declined since 2021. In that year, COVID-19 policies allowed transit fares to be free, resulting in a significant increase in ridership. However, with the relaxation of COVID-19 policies and the re-implementation of transit fares, ridership decreased. Additionally, a substantial decline in ridership occurred in the New River area, where many low-income homes were condemned in late 2021. The overall decline in ridership can be attributed to various factors, including shifting demographics, changes in services, and other external factors such as the impact of COVID-19. Jacksonville Transit and OUTS should continue to monitor ridership trends to determine the best ways to serve the region.

FIGURE 39: RIDERSHIP FROM 2020 - 2024




With 10 Ride Punch Cards or the Passio Go App, riders can easily find and ride the bus.

- 10 Rides, One Card
- City and Express Routes
- Regular and Reduced Fare Rates

Purchase Your Card at 910 938-RIDE(7433) 

JacksonvilleTransit.com

Planning Considerations

Specific planning considerations are imperative to understand when analyzing public transportation services. The following sections explore these considerations and provide information on how they may impact transportation decision-making.

Types of Riders

There are various approaches to analyzing ridership and understanding who utilizes public transportation. To gain insight into ridership, it is essential to consider how specific socioeconomic factors may influence individuals' interactions with public transportation. The following categories outline the different ways in which people engage with public transportation.

- **Commuter riders** use public transportation to go to work. They may choose to do so for personal or financial reasons. Taking public transportation to work may be more convenient and safer than other modes of transportation.
- **Occasional riders** use public transportation despite having access to other modes of transportation. These riders may choose to ride public transportation depending on their trip purpose. Public transportation aims to connect residential areas with high-activity areas, so occasional riders may find it easier or more convenient to take public transportation.
- **All-purpose riders** use public transportation for all types of trips whether that be commuting, shopping, going to appointments, or running errands. They could be people who do not have access to another mode of transportation or choose to make trips exclusively by taking public transportation.

In a growing region, public transportation is an important feature in creating a more connected, safer community. Public transportation can be a transportation solution to empower a community to make alternative transportation choices. To make public transportation a competitive choice, the following features should be considered: fee, connectivity, frequency, accessibility, and reliability. To increase ridership, Jacksonville Transit and OUTS should continue to partner with NCDOT and JUMPO to further explore how people use public transportation.

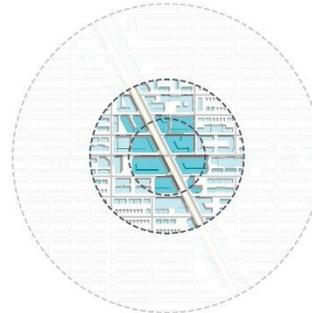


Transit and Land Use

Transportation and urban form are integral to building a connected community. People are more likely to use transit when the service is reliable, convenient, and easy to use. Where applicable, public transportation should leverage transit-supportive development and urban form. The interrelated nature of public transportation and transit-supported development can maximize ridership and promote mode-shift. The following types of development would complement the existing public transportation system.

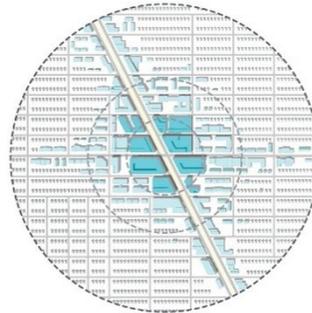
Transit-Oriented Development

Transit-oriented development (TOD) is a type of urban planning that strategically routes public transportation services within walking distance to mixed-use and high-density areas. TOD combines intentional placemaking design with thoughtful land use and transportation decision-making. The geographic scale of TOD is approximately ¼-mile. The radius establishes a boundary around transit-oriented services to connect to mixed-use, walkable areas. Areas within JUMPO have not been identified for TOD, however future analysis can help identify locations.



Transit-Ready Development

Transit-ready development is defined as an area that would be TOD-supportive but currently lacks connection to existing transit facilities or routes. These opportunity areas include a blend of land uses, foster pedestrian-friendly design, and allow space for future public transportation uses. Transit-ready development could also include areas with anticipated future growth. The MPO should continue evaluating opportunities to expand or streamline service with Jacksonville Transit and OUTS. Future studies can identify optimal locations for transit-ready development.



Single-Use Transit Destinations

Single-use transit destinations are more common in rural communities than TOD and transit-ready development areas. In Onslow County, these destinations could include Onslow Memorial Hospital, Jacksonville Mall, Coastal Carolina Community College, and Lejeune Memorial Gardens. The connectivity or increased service to these destinations by public transportation is crucial.



Continuous Planning

Public transportation is an essential component of the region’s multimodal network. Other planning considerations—whether that be land use or transportation—can impact how public transportation operates. The consideration of public transportation in the decision-making process is vital for all types of riders. In coordination with NCDOT, Jacksonville Transit, and OUTS, JUMPO should consider the following when discussing impacts on public transportation planning:

Population

Changes in the population can affect public transportation in a variety of ways. Population growth can put more strains on the current system or create ancillary effects like causing more peak and non-peak congestion. Alternatively, population decline can create less demand. Although these relationships are linear, the greater context is important to consider. For example, although a population may be steadily declining, the number of aging adults could be increasing. Older adults typically need more assistance getting to the store or appointments, which could create more demand for on-demand transit. As the region changes, JUMPO should continue to coordinate with Jacksonville Transit, OUTS, and NCDOT about the population's needs.

Employment

Public transportation frequently serves as a vital link to employment opportunities. Changes in employment levels—whether growth, decline, or other shifts—can significantly influence the region and the connectivity and accessibility that public transportation provides. The arrival of a major employer could attract commuters from outside the area, potentially placing new demands on the existing transportation system. Conversely, the loss of a significant employer could also have a profound effect on the demand for public transit services.

Other Considerations

The changes in population and employment are considered and reflected in the recommendations of the JUMPO 2050 MTP. In addition to population and employment, other factors should also be considered when planning the future of public transportation. These impacts on public transportation include:

- Changes in retail and location of activity centers
- Residential development plans
- Changes in local zoning code

Service Guidelines

Public transportation is an important facet of the region’s transportation system. In alignment with current planning efforts, Jacksonville Transit and OUTS should continuously reevaluate and monitor design guidelines and performance metrics to understand ridership and performance. This analysis can help determine current deficiencies and system needs to better inform service changes.

Integrating Technology

The JUMPO 2050 MTP is a forward-looking document. The MPO understands that new and emerging technology impacts safety and efficiency. The region could benefit if the MPO adequately leverages and integrates new technologies. The following technologies are considerations for JUMPO, Jacksonville Transit, OUTS, and NCDOT to consider.

Micromobility

Micromobility is a lightweight, small vehicle that is electric- or human-powered, and operated by the user. Micromobility options include e-scooters, e-bikes, and bicycles. As a technology, micromobility is a relatively new, emerging technology that provides a mobility option for short-distance trips. A personal vehicle is convenient and can provide enhanced flexibility for the user. Shared micromobility refers to a fleet of vehicles that multiple users can share. As a service, shared micromobility provides an affordable, accessible solution to avoid the cost and maintenance of having a personal vehicle. The MPO should consider exploring technology options that might assist in the first- and last-mile connections to public transportation.

Transit Signal Priority

Transit signal priority (TSP) is a traffic management strategy that adjusts the normal operation of traffic signals to give an advantage to public transit vehicles. The goal of TSP is to reduce the travel time of transit vehicles to improve reliability and encourage the use of public transportation. As a concept, TSP can be achieved in several ways: extending green lights, shortening red lights, or providing an early green light for transit vehicles. These small adjustments can help transit vehicles move through intersections more safely and efficiently to improve the overall performance of the transit system.

The City of Jacksonville employs an Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) to provide citizens with real-time traffic information. The ITS system features:

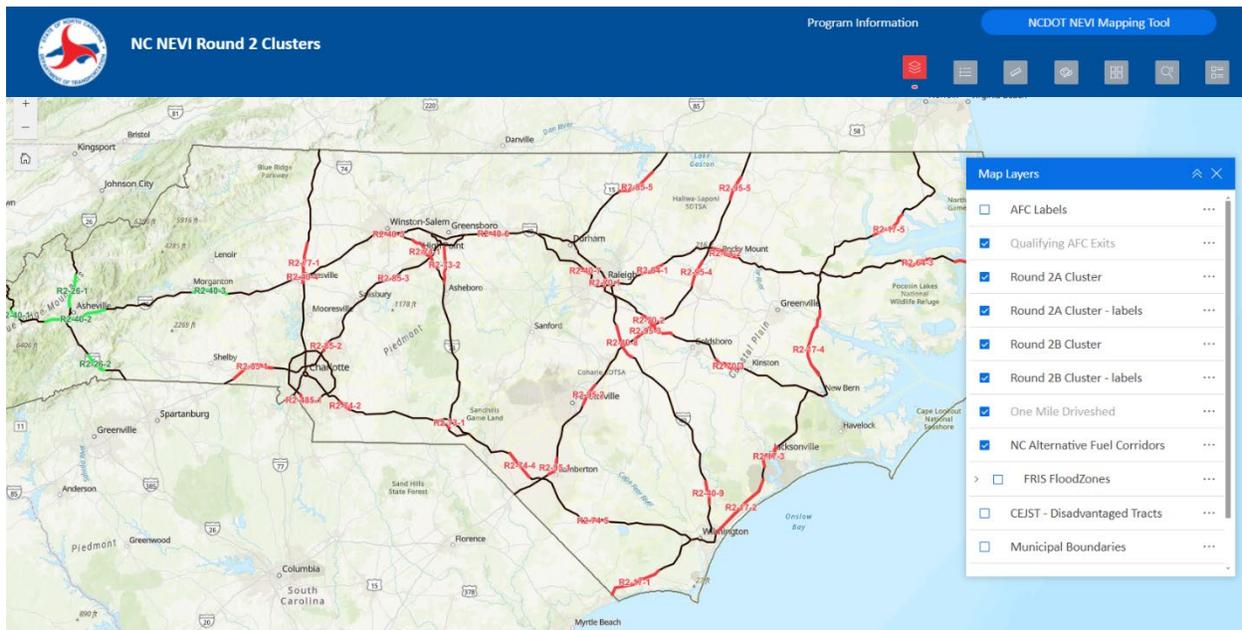
- **100** connected traffic signal controllers
- **68** monitoring cameras
- **10** digital message boards (DMS)

With over 40 miles of fiber optic cables, the Traffic Operations Center (TOC) actively monitors real-time traffic and provides information to drivers. The TOC is located in the Center for Public Safety and the system is maintained in partnership between the City of Jacksonville and NCDOT. The City should leverage technologies to provide traffic signal priority not only to public transportation vehicles, but to expand the current preemption in place for emergency responders as well.

Electric Vehicles

The IIJA introduced new focus areas for metropolitan transportation plans. One of those emphasis areas in transportation technology is electric vehicles or EVs. Through IIJA, the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) Program provided almost \$5 billion to help states create a network of electric vehicle charging stations on designated corridors. NCDOT's NEVI Program will be implemented in two phases over the next five years. The first phase focuses on building alternative fuel corridors (AFCs) and the second phase will focus on identifying community-centric electric vehicle charging opportunities and other supportive infrastructure. In Onslow County, US 17 is a designated alternative fuel corridor. The MPO should monitor the NEVI program and adapt as needed should changes to the program be implemented.

In addition to personal electric vehicles, many transit agencies are exploring fleet electrification. The first step to determine if fleet electrification is feasible is to analyze the current fleet and operational needs. Figure 40 displays NCDOT's NEVI alternative fuel corridors (AFC) implementation below.

FIGURE 40 - ALTERNATIVE FUEL CORRIDORS


Recommendations

The 2050 MTP's recommendations are listed below. These recommendations highlight the growing need for safer, more connected public transportation throughout the county.

Organization Recommendations

Organizational recommendations aim to improve the function and operation of Jacksonville Transit and OUTS.

Community Transportation Service Plan

Jacksonville Transit and OUTS should coordinate to update their Transit System Development Plan (2011) and Community Connectivity Plan (2018). The updated plan should analyze current service performance and productivity, revisit the service recommendations, and update the implementation plan.

Operating Recommendations

Operating recommendations seek to improve the current service and provide faster, more reliable service to passengers.

Airport Service

Albert J. Ellis Airport (OAJ) is the regional airport that serves nearly 330,000 passengers annually, with regular connections to major international airports such as Atlanta and Charlotte. During in-person public engagement, a key engagement theme that arose was having a connection to the airport via public transit from the City of Jacksonville. This recommendation originated from public engagement and its feasibility should be further addressed through a transit plan.

Microtransit Feasibility Study

Microtransit is a form of public transportation that offers flexible, accessible routing and scheduling. The fleet that typically operates the on-demand service is small to medium-sized vehicles. Microtransit can bridge the gap between private transportation and more traditional fixed-route service. The benefits of microtransit include convenience, cost-effectiveness, and efficiency especially in more rural areas.

In 2024, OUTS developed a microtransit feasibility study through NCDOT's Integrated Mobility Division (IMD) pilot program. The study recommended six microtransit pilot zones, including Swansboro, Richlands, Piney Green West, Piney Green East, Sneads Ferry, North Topsail Beach, and West Jacksonville. It also suggested utilizing a Software as a Service (SaaS) delivery model to improve operational efficiency. Additionally, a marketing plan focusing on public education and engagement, particularly aimed at reaching underserved populations, was recommended. The study's goal is to enhance accessibility and efficiency by integrating a delivery model, pilot programs, and a marketing plan

Capital Recommendations

The following section outlines the capital recommendations. The capital recommendations provide details to highlight the additional capital needs that would be required to fulfill the operating recommendations.

Fleet Expansion and Bus Replacement Cycle

Currently, OUTS has a fleet of 20 buses, and Jacksonville Transit has a fleet of 17 buses, with half of these buses being purchased in the previous year. Jacksonville Transit plans to add 6 more buses to its fleet in 2025. Jacksonville Transit and OUTS will need to regularly assess if expanding their fleets is necessary to meet the needs of the community over the life of the plan.

Depending on the types of services, a variety of vehicles might be necessary. While a significant portion of the cost to purchase additional vehicles can be covered by federal or state funding, a local match is required. Maintenance is a key consideration in the vehicle replacement analysis. In some cases, the cost of maintenance and/or repair might be greater than the cost of replacing the vehicle. Both agencies should continue to actively monitor their fleet composition and purchase vehicles accordingly.

Partnerships

Partnerships are crucial for public transportation agencies for several key reasons:

- **Improved Funding and Resources Allocation.** Partnerships can provide additional or pooled funding sources, helping agencies secure financial resources for capital, operating and maintenance, and technology projects. Collaborations with private sector partners, government agencies, or non-profit organizations can unlock subsidies, grants, and investments that might otherwise be difficult to secure.
- **Enhanced Service Quality.** Public transportation agencies can benefit from shared expertise and innovation by working with other organizations. Partners can bring specialized knowledge and best practices that can identify current needs and service gaps. This can lead to more efficient routing, enhanced customer service, and new service types.
- **Community Engagement and Support.** Meeting with community organizations and stakeholders can help transportation agencies better understand and meet the needs of their populations. These partnerships can foster community buy-in and support to ensure that services are needed and utilized effectively. Collaborative efforts can also help reduce engagement fatigue and create a shared understanding of all the different agencies that work together to deliver a service.

- **Environmental and Sustainability Goals.** Partnerships with environmental organizations or other stakeholders can help public transportation agencies implement sustainable practices. Through these collaborations, agencies can work together to reduce the agency’s carbon footprint by promoting public transportation as an eco-friendly alternative to driving a private vehicle.
- **Operating and Efficiency.** Public transportation providers can streamline operations and reduce costs by sharing resources and information. Coordinated schedules and ticketing can provide a seamless transition between providers and enhance the user’s experience. Similarly, joint procurement can reduce expenses and inform better scheduling practices.
- **Public Safety and Security.** Collaborations with emergency services, law enforcement agencies, and other relevant partners are essential to creating a safe and secure experience for passengers. These partnerships can provide quick responses to incidents, enable better planning, and develop comprehensive safety protocols.
- **Economic Development.** Strong public transportation systems are vital to local and regional economic growth. Partnerships with developers and businesses can lead to transit-oriented development. Transit hubs can become economic activity centers, attract investment, create local jobs, and stimulate the local economy.

Partnerships are instrumental for public transportation agencies to enhance service quality, ensure financial viability, improve operations and safety, and contribute to economic growth. Transportation agencies can build resilient, robust, and sustainable transportation systems through these collaborations. Building on the following partnerships can help streamline resources and create a more comprehensive public transportation service:

- City of Jacksonville
- Onslow County
- Onslow County Human Services
- Onslow Memorial Hospital
- Onslow County Public Schools
- Albert J. Ellis Airport (OAJ)
- Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune (MCB Camp Lejeune)
- Marine Corps Air Station New River (MCAS New River)
- Greyhound
- Amtrak
- NCDOT

The MPO should continue to partnering with public transportation agencies, county services, and private partners to enhance the public transportation system.