

## 7 Public Transportation

### INTRODUCTION

An inventory was completed of existing and planned transit programs, services, and facilities within the Tyler MPO boundaries, using existing data and transportation plans. The purpose of this inventory is to provide an understanding of the programs and services currently provided in the Tyler metropolitan planning area.

### EXISTING PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Today, Tyler Transit fleet consists of nine fixed route buses and nine paratransit buses. Its services are available between the hours of 6:00 AM and 8:15 PM during the weekday, with Saturday service between 9:00 AM and 6:00 PM. No Sunday service is currently available.

The basic fare is currently \$0.75 for adults; \$0.35 for elderly or disabled; and \$0.25 for children under 12. Monthly passes are \$30 (or \$15 for students) and permit the passholder to ride an unlimited number of times during the month in which the pass was purchased.

To maintain its operation, Tyler Transit employs approximately 17 full-time and one part-time driver. The drivers are assigned to one of two shifts – the morning or afternoon shift. The morning shift starts at 6:00 AM and works until 1:30 PM. The afternoon shift then begins at 1:00 PM and runs until 8:15 PM.

Tyler Transit is funded through a variety of sources including:

- ❑ Operating revenue from transit fares;
- ❑ Federal funding;
- ❑ State funding for operating assistance; and
- ❑ Local funding provided by the City of Tyler

In 2005, Tyler Transit traveled close to 464,632 miles with a total of 158,836 passenger trips according to the 2007 Texas Transit Statistics report prepared by TxDOT Public Transportation Division.

### History of the System

The City of Tyler established bus services on March 6, 1936. It offered six fixed routes with a six cent fare. In 1959, the City terminated its operations and a privately-owned transit company, Tyler City Lines, began to offer the service. The change reduced the number of fixed transit routes from six to four. After a number of years Tyler City Lines was purchased by another firm and the number of transit routes was again reduced from four to one — the reduction due to the declining ridership over the years. In 1977, the City of Tyler began providing an operating subsidy to the transit operator. The subsidy continued until 1981 when the City of Tyler resumed operations of the transit service. At first the system operated with a

fleet of two twelve-passenger vans on one fixed route. In 1989, a review of the transit system showed many unmet transit needs in the community and recommended expansion of the system.

The City contracted with Ryder/ATE to manage the city bus system. Transit Management of Tyler (TMT) was formed in July of 1993. TMT started operation under the trade name "Tyler Transit." In 1994, a second route was added to cover the East-West Tyler area. Paratransit services were along added to meet the needs of the disabled community in accordance with the requirements of the American with Disabilities Act.

The expansion continued in February 1999 when a third route was added and the existing routes were reconfigured. To better distinguish the routes, color coded names were given to each — the Red Line, Blue Line, and Green Line. Several transfer points were also added along the routes to allow riders to transfer between lines without having to arrive at the Bergfield Center transfer point. However, Bergfield Center remained in place as the main transfer point between all three routes. In October 2001, a fourth fixed route (the Yellow Line) was added and the lines were again reconfigured slightly.

### Present Operational Characteristics

Currently, Tyler Transit offers five fixed routes as shown in **Figure 7-1**. The Yellow Line serves the southern area of the City while the Blue and Green Lines primarily serve the west and east sides of Tyler, respectively. The change to five fixed bus routes occurred when the Red Line was split into two routes. Red Line North serves the north part of Tyler and Red Line South makes stops along South Broadway Avenue. The main reason for dividing the Red Line into two separate routes was the time delay it experienced as one route. Broadway Avenue is one of Tyler's busiest corridors. As one route, the Red Line bus could not complete its route without occurring excess delay due to traffic signals and congestion.

Service frequency is best described by bus headway, or the time interval between transit revenue vehicles at a specific location. The Tyler Transit system has grown to a system that operates nine fixed route buses throughout the City of Tyler. These buses operate on a timed point system, where the bus stops and departs from the timed stop as scheduled. The transit system was designed with headways ranging from 30 minutes to 1 hour and 20 minutes. The system also features four transfer points so passengers could schedule their trips with minimum wait time. Transfer points are destinations where various routes meet at the same time to allow passengers to transfer to another bus route. Tyler Transit's main transfer point is located in Bergfeld Center. Here passengers can transfer to any of the five fixed routes offered. The remaining three transfer points are located along Red Line North route and allow riders to transfer from the Red Line North bus to either the Blue or Green lines.

In addition to its fixed routes, Tyler Transit offers paratransit services to persons with disabilities. Paratransit is an alternative mode of flexible passenger transportation that does not follow fixed routes or schedules. To use this service a rider must live within or no more than 0.75 mile outside of the Tyler's city limits. Riders simply call in a request and the paratransit buses are dispatch to their locations. This service allows persons with disabilities the freedom to access shopping centers, medical facilities, or other locations within the City.

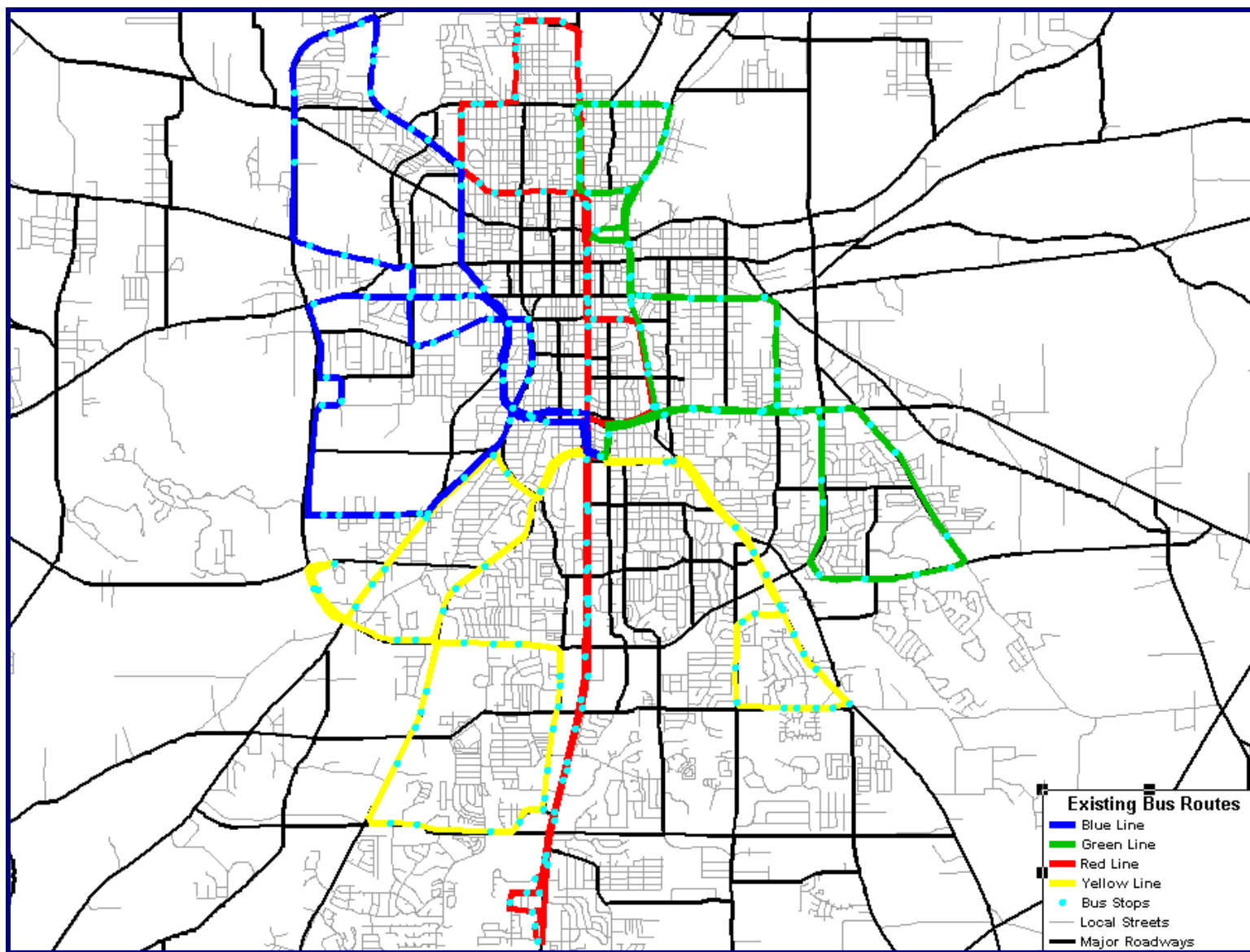


FIGURE 7-1 EXISTING BUS ROUTES

## REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION NEEDS AND ISSUES

Greyhound Lines, Inc. has provided regional bus services to the Tyler area since 1957. Located in downtown Tyler, Greyhound offers connections to Dallas, Houston, Texarkana and Shreveport, Louisiana. In a 24-hour window the downtown station has 13 buses arriving and departing from its location. With five direct connections throughout the day, the Dallas Line has the most scheduled departures from Tyler — followed by Shreveport with three direct connections, and both Texarkana and Houston with one direct connection. Other departures to Houston, Texarkana, and Shreveport are available but require transfer(s) to reach the final destination. The station's hours of operation are from 7:00 AM to 10:00 PM seven days a week.

Together, Greyhound Lines and Tyler Transit provide the means to travel regionally and locally within Tyler's city limits. However, there is a large portion of the MPO that does not have access to a public transportation system. Cities such as Lindale, Whitehouse, and Bullard have large portions of their population traveling to and from the City of Tyler for work, school, and recreational activities. The potential for this group of commuters to use a form of public transportation is currently not being captured.

The East Texas Council of Governments (ETCOG) was designated the Rural Transit District for the 14 county region, including the Tyler MPO area, in September 1995. In accordance with Texas Transportation Code (Chapter 458), the Rural Transit District is empowered to carry out the purpose of district planning, constructing, or operating a facility or performing a service that the rural transit district is authorized to operate or perform. Before the designation, the ETCOG Area Agency on Aging (AAA) began providing Rural Public Transportation in 1990. Initially it utilized the AAA's fleet of vehicles purchased with Elderly Funds and contracting with the AAA's Elderly Transportation Contractors. ETCOG assumed direct responsibility for the delivery of Transportation Services on September 1, 2007. Today, ETCOG provide demand-response rural transportation.

The Smith County Transportation Advisory Committee (STAC) has taken an active role in looking for solutions to meet the needs of commuters within the county. The hope of STAC is to establish a regional public transportation service that promotes connectivity between the County's major communities. The committee believes through a private/public partnership this goal can be met. Currently, leaders of STAC are exploring federal and state grants that can be used to grow such partnership and develop a multi-modal hub in Tyler.

Through the process of public participation the community has shared their thoughts on where they believe the regional public transportation needs are located. Their views are summarized below in no particular order.

- ❑ The current fixed route transit system is confined to the City of Tyler limits. This restriction impacts regional transportation. By extending the fixed transit system to cover the entire MPO boundary, a greater percent of the public would benefit from the service. Consider a 24-hour, 7-day week operation.
- ❑ The current demand-response rural transportation service is limited. The hours of operation restrict the movement of people to normal business hours during the weekday and do not provide any service on the weekends. The public would benefit if this service extended its hours of operation. Consider a 24-hour, 7-day week operation.
- ❑ A high volume of Tyler's workforce commutes in from surrounding communities. A fixed route bus service between Tyler and several of these suburbs (ie. Lindale, Whitehouse) would be beneficial and help reduce roadway congestion.
- ❑ Transfer points should be added to Tyler Transit's existing fixed route system to better serve the aging community. Suggested locations include at area hospitals, doctor offices, and retirement communities.

## CURRENTLY PROGRAMMED IMPROVEMENTS

For FY 2009, Tyler Transit has secured an ARRA grant with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). The total grant amount is \$1,744,631. The grant is a part of the recently stimulus package and consists of two parts. The grant's first part is approved and allows Tyler Transit to purchase five low-floor fixed route buses and four paratransit buses, as well as install 24 bus shelters with trash receptacles and sidewalk improvements. The second half of the grant funds is awaiting approval. These funds will go towards capital improvements at Tyler Transit's headquarters. Currently located at the historical train depot in downtown Tyler, the facilities features subpar sidewalks, crumbling surface water drainage system and parking area. The planned improvements involve upgrading the surrounding sidewalks to meet current ADA requirements, replacing portions of the curb and gutter and inlets to improve drainage, and reconstruction of the facility's parking lot.

A Strategic Plan for the Tyler Transit System is currently underway. Sponsored by the Tyler MPO, the study's goal is to develop a practical public transportation service expansion plan that is financially feasible and sustainable through a five year operating horizon. Results from the study are expected in early 2010. Anticipated recommendations include adjustments to the system's fixed routes, headways, and transfer points.