

## Chapter Five – Situation Appraisal

Changing demographic conditions in a community can have a significant impact on existing and potential transit services. Prior to estimating future demand and developing potential enhancements for transit in St. Johns County, it is first important to identify community policies and trends. This chapter provides a summary of local plans and recent planning efforts that might affect transit services.

### Review of Local Plans

As part of the Transit Development Plan Update, a review of local, regional, and state plans was undertaken to identify trends and policies that might affect transit services over the ten-year planning horizon. Policies from FDOT and the North Florida TPO are highlighted in Chapter Six, so this section focuses on local plans.

### Transportation Goals, Objectives, and Policies

The following goals, objectives, and policies related to transit can be found in the 2025 Comprehensive Plan for St. Johns County.

#### Goal B.1

The County shall provide countywide coordination and planning to achieve a balanced transportation system which consists of both public and private transportation networks and which provides for the safe and efficient movement of goods and people, including the transportation disadvantaged.

#### **Objective B.1.7: Coordination with Other Transportation Agencies**

The County shall continue to coordinate transportation activities with federal, state, regional, local agencies and local governments, having planning and implementation responsibilities for highway, mass transit, bicycle, multi-purpose greenways, multimodal transportation alternatives, railroad, air, and other transit facilities by implementing actions specified in the corresponding policies.

##### Policies

*B.1.7.1:* The County shall maintain its representation on the North Florida Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) to ensure transportation improvements and actions which are within the boundaries of the TPO are coordinated with the plans, programs and policies of the County. The County will work with the TPO in determining any extensions to the TPO boundaries as a result of the 2010 Census.

*B.1.7.2:* The County as a member of the North Florida TPO Technical Advisory Committee shall provide technical assistance in the development of the Long Range Transportation Plan. The County shall review all updates of the Long Range Transportation Plan and consider amendments to the County Comprehensive Plan, as necessary, to ensure consistency with the TPO Long Range Plan and inform the TPO of any inconsistencies and work with the TPO staff in resolving inconsistencies. The Northeast

Florida Regional Council conflict mediation process will be utilized for any inconsistencies which cannot be solved through negotiation.

*B.1.7.3:* The County shall continue to work with the North Florida TPO and FDOT as necessary in developing future population and employment projections by Traffic Analysis Zones (TAZs) for use in transportation modeling.

#### **Objective B.1.8: Transportation Disadvantaged Services**

Support continued operation of the County's transportation disadvantaged services by coordinating and supporting the planning activities of the Northeast Florida Regional Council and the operating activities of the St. Johns County Council on Aging as the designated Community Transportation Coordinator in St. Johns County.

##### Policies

*B.1.8.1:* As a member of the Local Coordinating Board, the County will participate in the Northeast Florida Regional Council's annual evaluation of the Community Transportation Coordinator as well as the annual update of the Transportation Disadvantaged Service Plan.

*B.1.8.2:* The County shall continue to support the St. Johns County Council on Aging, as the, local transportation disadvantaged Community Transportation Coordinator in obtaining state grant money by supporting the provision of local matching funds.

*B.1.8.3:* The County shall continue as the designated recipient of Federal Transit Administration funding to support the Community Transportation Coordinator in providing Transportation Disadvantaged services.

*B.1.8.4:* Minimum Level of Service Standards are established for transportation disadvantaged services provided within the County as follows: Disadvantaged Transit Service 95,000 one-way trips per year

#### **Objective B.1.9: Public Transit Service**

St. Johns County will develop public transportation services that address mobility needs of transit dependent customers and encourage the use of public transportation by all residents of St. Johns County and municipalities within.

##### Policies

*B.1.9.1:* The County shall work with the Jacksonville Transportation Authority on the results of the public transit study and its feasibility to St. Johns County and its municipalities and to determine the extent to which public transit, paratransit, and ridesharing is feasible for the County.

*B.1.9.2:* The County shall insure Future Land Use Maps support the development of public transit service.

*B.1.9.3:* The County shall continue to cooperate with the Jacksonville Transportation Authority in examining the potential for public transit service within the northern half of the County.

*B.1.9.4:* The County shall promote transit in new development by including provision of bus pullouts and paved areas for shelters, where applicable. These requirements shall be mandatory in

Developments of Regional Impact. The County shall develop standards for public transit facilities in non-DRI developments.

*B.1.9.5:* The County shall establish requirements for park and ride facilities in major developments that provide access to transit facilities.

*B.1.9.6:* The County shall develop policies and standards that will provide access to public transit through the use of bicycle and pedestrian systems and park and ride lots.

*B.1.9.7:* The County shall address the need to provide safe pedestrian and bicycle access to commercial generators and attractors from transit facilities located on public access roads.

*B.1.9.8:* St. Johns County shall continue to seek available funds authorized by Federal Transportation Acts as well as required matching funds to meet public transportation needs.

*B.1.9.9:* The County shall conduct yearly surveys to evaluate and accommodate public transit needs.

*B.1.9.10:* The County shall coordinate with FDOT and North Florida TPO to incorporate transit design and amenities when roadway improvements are made to state, county and local road segments.

*B.1.9.11:* The County shall strive to improve transit routes by minimizing headways.

*B.1.9.12:* The County shall develop a system and standards whereby the cost of providing transit service to large developments can be offset by developer's contributions.

#### **Objective B.1.10: Transit Services Coordination**

Coordinate transit plans and programs within St. Johns County.

##### Policies

*B.1.10.1:* The County shall work with the Northeast Florida Regional Planning Council, the St. Johns County Council on Aging as the Community Transportation Coordinator, jurisdictions within the County, and neighboring jurisdictions, including the Jacksonville Transportation Authority, in coordinating any transit plans and programs.

*B.1.10.2:* The County will continue to participate as a member of the Northeast Florida Mobility Coalition and participate in the development of the goals and objectives of the Northeast Florida Mobility Plan developed by the Coalition.

*B.1.10.3:* St. Johns County will continue to participate as a member of the First Coast Intelligent Transportation System coalition and support the goals and objectives of the First Coast Regional Intelligent Systems master Plan.

#### **Transit-Supportive Land Use Policies**

In addition to the transportation goals, objectives, and policies detailed above, there are other areas of the Comprehensive Plan that encourage development that is supportive of transit. Three policies found in the Land Use Element are detailed below.

## Policies

A.1.2.2: The County shall promote infill residential development, within the Development Areas as depicted on the Future Land Use Map, near existing facilities by offering a Variable Density Factor for residential developments that are served by central water and central sewer consistent with the Variable Density Factors established through Policy A1.11.1.

A.1.2.5: All Comprehensive Plan amendments, including Small-Scale Plan Amendments, if determined by the County the Small Scale amendment warrants such review, amendments as defined by Chapter 163, F.S., shall provide justification for the need for the proposed amendment and demonstrate how the proposed amendment discourages urban sprawl and not adversely impact natural resources. In evaluating proposed amendments, the County shall consider each of the following:

(f) the extent to which the amendment will result in a sustainable development pattern through a balance of land uses that is internally interrelated; demonstrates an efficient use of land; ensures compatible development adjacent to agriculture lands; protects environmental qualities and characteristics; provides interconnectivity of roadways; supports the use of non-automobile modes of transportation; and appropriately addresses the infrastructure needs of the community.

A.1.2.8: The County shall encourage infill development. Infill development is development on a vacant parcel or parcels of land within Development Areas that are surrounded by an existing built area. Compatibility of the infill development shall be considered with the development review process. Infill development shall not be considered in R/S or A-I areas.

## **Land Use Trends**

As was noted in Chapter Two, St. Johns County continues to grow, albeit at a slower pace than in the 1990s and early 2000s. The area experiencing most of the growth is in the northern portion of the County, where several large-scale communities are being built. Many of these communities, also called Developments of Regional Impact (DRI), have had land use entitlements for years and may take 20 or more years to build out.

That said, the design of these communities is rarely set in stone. Market fluctuations affect the size and style of residential neighborhoods, the amount of mixed-use that is developed, the type of commercial that is built, etc. Many believe that ever-increasing gas prices and consumer desires to “live green” will have a profound effect on how communities will develop in the future. This may yield higher densities, true mixed-use, and a demand for mobility options beyond the automobile.

Finally, it is important to note that St. Johns County has a dedicated transit planner in their Growth Development Review division. This individual reviews comprehensive plan amendments, rezoning, site plans, etc. to ensure that the County considers transit as development and redevelopment occurs. As a result, it is expected that County land use and urban form patterns will be more transit-friendly and transit-supportive in the future.

## Regional Planning

Recently, the Northeast Florida Regional Council (NEFRC), in conjunction with the Urban Land Institute, undertook a regional visioning effort. Reality Check First Coast was an 18+ month process to envision what northeast Florida could look like in fifty years. Land use patterns following recent trends were developed and then the public was given opportunities to weigh in on whether this met their desires. Nearly 300 individuals convened in May 2009 to draw up alternatives to the trend. While the 30 tables each developed different concepts, the patterns centered around four themes: Corridors, Multiple Growth Centers, Dispersed, and Urban Compact. Polling revealed the two most popular patterns to be the Multiple Growth Centers (favored by 28%) and the Corridors (32%). Only 7% favored the Dispersed pattern. Another key theme was providing more employment in the suburban communities to create more balanced jobs-to-housing ratios.

Following the May 2009 event, additional roundtables were held throughout the region. More than 500 people attended these events, called County Checks, where urban form and policy changes were discussed. A key outcome of the regional visioning process was the realization that the community strongly desired sustainable growth through infill and mixed-use development, as well as multi-modal transportation and transit-oriented development (TOD). The NEFRC has converted Reality Check First Coast into a new process, called Region First 2060. This process will carry the discussion forward, ultimately resulting in a new Strategic Regional Policy Plan (SRPP) in 2013.

## Commuter and Intercity Rail

Through recent planning efforts undertaken by the NEFRC (Reality Check First Coast), the North Florida TPO (Envision 2035), the JTA (Regional Transportation Study Commission), and the City of Jacksonville (2030 Mobility Plan), the development of a regional commuter rail system has been identified as a priority. Several years ago, JTA commissioned a pre-feasibility study, and now the agency is set to embark on an Alternatives Analysis (AA) study.

One of the potential commuter rail lines extends from downtown Jacksonville along US 1 down to St. Augustine. This line would parallel much of the existing Sunshine Bus Purple route. The pre-feasibility study identified five potential stations in St. Johns County. These are:

- Palencia
- St. Augustine/St. Johns County Airport
- St. Johns County Complex
- St. Augustine
- West Augustine

In addition, there are 3 stations proposed for southeast Duval County, including the Avenues, Old St. Augustine Road, and Racetrack Road, which are along the Purple route.

Since the pre-feasibility report was produced, there has been much discussion about providing intercity rail service along this same corridor, extending from Jacksonville to Miami. The City of St. Augustine and FDOT have identified a potential station location adjacent to US 1 just north of San Marco Avenue. As such, it is possible one of the commuter rail stops listed above could be moved/deleted or another station added.

Initiation of passenger rail along this corridor would likely have a profound impact on the region, St. Johns County, and the local transit system. The possibility of rail service has been included in the TDP implementation plan and the St. Augustine station has been identified as a potential transit hub. However, if this were to come to fruition, a review and potential redesign of some Sunshine Bus routes would be necessary.