

## Chapter 13– Transit Service

SunTran provides transit service for the City of St. George and Ivins, currently operating fixed bus routes and paratransit (ADA) service between 6:00 AM and 8:00 PM Monday through Saturday. There is no service on Sundays or major holidays. The system consists of six fixed bus routes, four of which operate on 40 minute headways with two operating on 80 minute headways. SunTran has experienced significant ridership growth since its



inception in 2003 (See graph below). Areas being served by transit include: downtown St. George, Red Cliffs Mall, Dixie State College, the Dixie Center, the Dixie Downs area, Bloomington and Ivins City. Map 10 in Appendix A shows the six existing fixed SunTran routes, as well as potential routes for expansion.

SunTran continues to grow substantially in ridership and several studies and plans point to the need for expanded and improved transit service in the Dixie region to develop a more balanced transportation system and provide a greater range of transportation choices, particularly for those with limited mobility. In a recent onboard transit survey, 90% of respondents stated it was important to expand SunTran service to new places in the area. This survey also indicated that the majority of SunTran riders rely on the service to meet their daily transportation needs, with 76% of respondents stating that they did not have another option (besides riding SunTran) for making their trip.

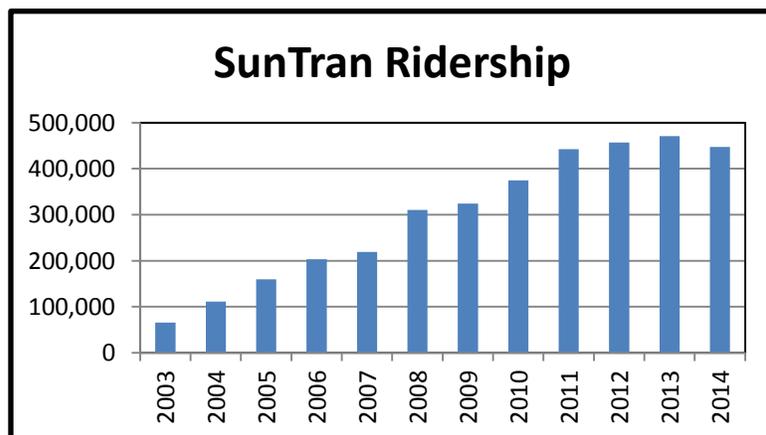
### Potential Transit Expansion Areas

In January 2015 transit service was expanded to Ivins and Bloomington. This expansion was accomplished through an inter-local agreement with Ivins and St George City, operator of SunTran. Studies have identified the following additional areas/corridors in the region to be in need of transit service.

#### Hurricane and Zion National Park Corridor

The *Dixie Bus Rapid Transit Feasibility Study* (BRT study) and the *Hurricane to Zion Canyon Transit Study* both point to the potential short term and long term viability of transit service in this corridor. The BRT study evaluated the potential for long-term feasibility of transit service between central St George City and Hurricane City and central St George City and the airport. The study suggests that when the service area reaches 252,000 people and 143,000 jobs, BRT service will be viable. However, conventional bus service should be implemented to serve existing demand. Map 9 (Appendix A) displays potential alignments for these routes.

The *Hurricane to Zion Canyon Transit Study* evaluates and recommends transit service between Hurricane and Zion National Park. After analyzing demand in the corridor, the study



recommends implementing fixed-route transit service with 60 minute headways. The study emphasizes that transit would only be viable in this corridor provided that a transit connection is also provided between St George and Hurricane.

The next step toward implementing transit in this corridor is to provide an implementation plan for transit service in the short term, which identifies service characteristics, fare structure, and funding, given resources that are available at the present time. This service is likely to be provided initially through an inter-local agreement with St George City, Hurricane, Springdale, and other communities in the corridor.

### Washington City

A concept route to Washington City was presented in the *Dixie MPO Regional Transit Study*. In 2014, Washington City began the process of formulating an agreement with SunTran to institute a fixed route that connects to the existing bus system with complementary para-transit service. SunTran management is currently working with Washington City to determine which route would best serve the community. A potential route is displayed on Map 9 (Appendix A). The Dixie MPO recently provided assistance to the stakeholders in the process by utilizing the Regional Travel Demand Model to estimate ridership of two route alternatives to inform the process. Similar to Ivins City, initial service to Washington City is likely to be provided through an inter-local agreement with St George City.

### Santa Clara City

Due to budget constraints, service to Ivins City was initially instituted without service to Santa Clara City, which the bus passes through on the route. However service to this community would benefit a large population of residents, not currently being served. The Dixie MPO will support coordination between Ivins, St George City, and Santa Clara City to provide public transit service to Santa Clara City, given adequate funding and public support.

### St George Airport

As noted above, a bus rapid transit line, servicing St George Airport is a viable service in the long term. However, in the short term interim bus service should be provided to begin phasing toward a BRT line.

### Other Transit Improvements

The *St George Urbanized Area Short Range and Long Range Transit Plan*, completed in 2006 identifies a service plan, which includes providing service to Middleton and Bloomington Hills, while modifying other routes. St. George City and the Dixie MPO will partner in 2015 to update the 2006 plan to reflect current needs for the system and recommend improvements that would improve transit level of service, while offering a plan to sustain the service. In addition to servicing new areas, consideration should be given to provide more frequent and direct service to reduce travel time. In addition to a service plan that recommends specific routes, the plan should include a capital, institutional and financial plan. Some of these elements can draw upon the findings of the *Dixie MPO Regional Transit Study*. The plan should take into account the financial assumptions of the Dixie MPO for additional transit funding, including ¼% sales tax by 2020.

### Coordination with other modes

As regional transit service is improved and expanded, coordination with other modes of transportation is essential to offering alternative transportation options. Every trip on fixed-route public transportation begins and ends with another mode, whether it be cycling, walking or driving. Due to additional

demand, SunTran has recently purchased additional capacity on its bicycle racks. SunTran Management indicates that demand for wheel chair users on transit has also risen substantially in recent years. In addition, SunTran is working with a Bus Shelter work group to improve conditions for passengers at bus stops. The *Southwest Utah Coordinated Human Service Public Transportation Plan* identifies the need for a last mile study to identify needed improvements for transit users on roadways near transit. Furthermore, as transit expands to Hurricane, Zion National Park and the Airport, consideration for Park-and-ride locations should be given.

Improved connections to inter-city bus and shuttle services are necessary to connect residents with the greater region. Greyhound, St George Shuttle, Aztec Shuttle, and St George Express currently offer service to Salt Lake City, Las Vegas and other nearby cities. However, these services are not well-connected to SunTran. Coordination with each entity is needed to improve the experience of transit users.

Coordination among providers to match users to the appropriate transit service or services is the focus of the Five County AOG Mobility Management Program. The Five County Regional Mobility Council guides this program, while coordinating human service and public transportation services throughout the region. The Dixie MPO will continue to support mobility management efforts to coordinate and expand services to meet the needs of seniors, persons with disabilities, and low income individuals, as well as the greater community. The *Southwest Utah Coordinated Human Service Public Transportation Plan* includes mobility management and other strategies to meet these needs.

## **Funding and Governance for expanded transit service**

Public Transportation cannot be provided without adequate financing. Additional funding is necessary to implement any expansion of the current transit system, including those listed above. In 2012, a *Dixie MPO Regional Transit Study* was completed to evaluate the governance and funding options available to the Dixie region for expansion and diversification of transit service. The study includes a case study of six transit organizations of similar size to illustrate the variety of governance and funding options for public transportation.

The study recommends a phased approach toward developing a regional transit service, beginning with improved service in St George and initial service to adjacent cities through inter-local agreements, followed by the establishment of a Regional Transit District, which is supported with a dedicated multi-jurisdictional funding for transit. This is only possible through public support, which should be gauged throughout the process.

As noted above, the first phase is currently being implemented through inter-local agreements in Ivins, with the initial phases of such agreements occurring in Washington City and the Hurricane/Zion Corridor. The Dixie MPO Transportation Executive Committee (DTEC) has officially endorsed the financial assumption that ¼% sales tax will be implemented by 2020. This assumption is contingent upon public support. The Dixie MPO will support the region's communities as they plan for improved regional transit service.

## **Objectives and Goals**

### *Objective*

Enhance and expand public transportation to build a more balanced transportation system

## *Goals*

1. Provide technical assistance to SunTran and cities in the region to plan for and implement expanded transit service
2. Support efforts to develop a regional transit district or authority
3. Identify sustainable funding sources for public transportation and assist with procuring funds
4. Support the mobility management program to coordinate transportation services and meet the needs of residents with limited mobility