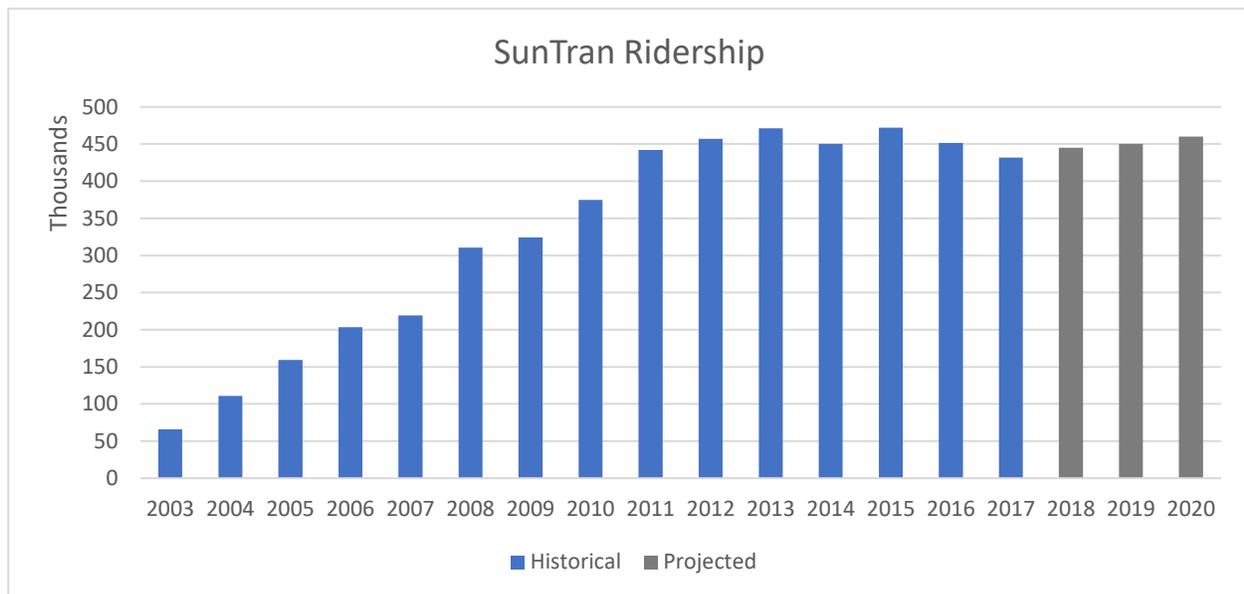


Chapter 13 – Transit Service

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 University, the Dixie Center, the Dixie Downs area, Bloomington and Ivins City. Map 10 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 past 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.

Subsequent studies have shown that additional transit lines to Washington City, Hurricane City and Zion National Park are feasible if public support, financing, and governance issues can be ironed out. In 2018 and 2019 Washington County and the Washington County Council of Governments have been actively working to resolved financing and governance issues in order to expand transit services from St. George to Springdale. Washington City elected officials have also sought funding to support local transit needs.



Potential Transit Expansion Areas

In 2015, the Utah State Legislature enacted laws to establish new funding options for transit services. Elected officials throughout Washington County are currently discussing how to respond to that opportunity and various ways to establish new transit routes. Planners and elected officials also

recognize the value of public transit services to low-wage earners and are observing increased public support for transit services.

St. George to Springdale

In 2016 *The St. George to Springdale Public Transit Feasibility Study* recommended that a route between Springdale and St. George is viable and could attract an annual ridership of 272,000 trips. Zion National Park sees over four million visitors annually who, once inside the park, are required to use a transit services to reach their final trailhead destinations. The 2016 study suggested that these visitors are already competent and accepting of transit use and would likely embrace transit lines prior to reaching the Park if they were established. Service sector employees would also benefit from transit services between the two areas.

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 10 displays the 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. While those efforts eventually faded, the Washington City Council reaffirmed its interest in establishing transit services on June 12, 2019. A potential route is displayed on Map 9 in Appendix B.

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 “doors closed” 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 efforts 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.

The *St George Urbanized Area Short Range and Long-Range Transit Plan* (2006) identifies an express route to the airport. To maximize efficiency, the route schedule should be coordinated with air service.

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

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