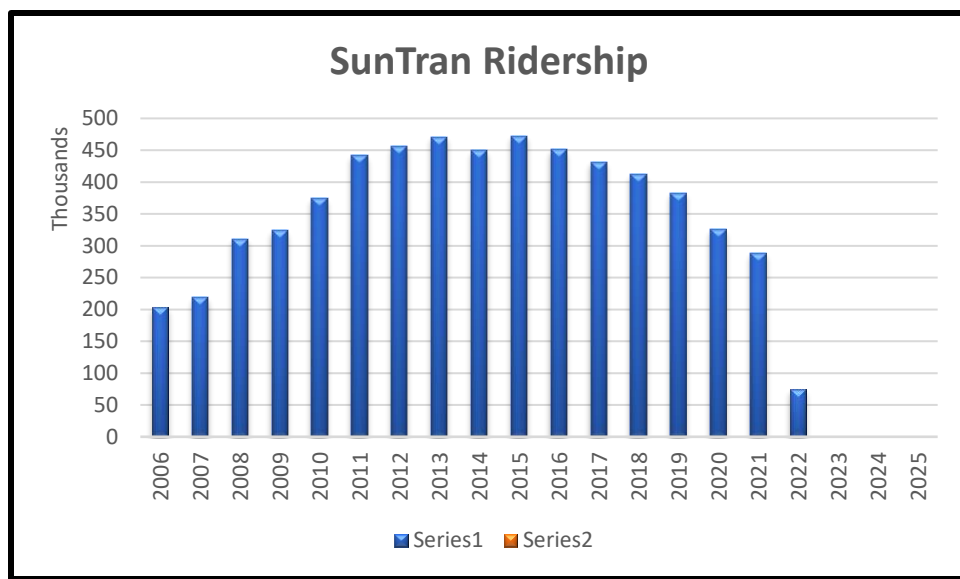


## Chapter 13 – Transit Service

SunTran provides transit service for the City of St. George, Washington 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 seven fixed bus routes, five 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, Washington City and Ivins City. Map 9 shows the seven 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 Santa Clara, La Verkin, 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.

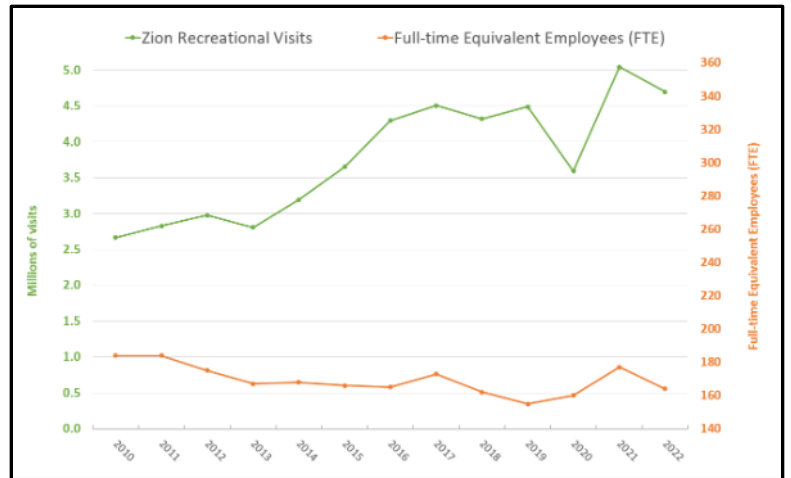
### Potential Transit Expansion Areas

Transit expansion areas have been identified within St. George City, Washington City, Hurricane City and Springdale. Planners and elected officials throughout the Dixie Area continue to value public transit services to low-wage earners and to tourists to the area. Public support for expanded transit services is also growing.

## St. George to Springdale

Under state legislation, elected officials within Washington County implement a one quarter of one percent sales tax in 2019 to fund transportation projects (including transit services) as requested by a contingency of cities within the County. The elected officials' intent was to create a new funding stream for roads and to establish a transit line between St. George City and Springdale. The Utah Department of Transportation granted \$16,000,000 toward the establishment of a Springdale transit line to enhance the economy, support tourism, and reduce congestion. The intent in establishing transit services to Springdale is to serve the local workforce who live outside the area, and to reduce visitor demand on the limited number of parking stalls within Springdale City

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 (see chart at right). Once inside the park visitors are required to use a transit service 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 9 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.

### **Hurricane City**

Transit expansion in Hurricane has been considered for implementation in phases between 2023-2053. Phase 1 will begin with transit stops as suggested by the 2016 *St. George to Springdale Public Transit Feasibility Study* along SR 9 for the purpose of servicing local use and use of transit to Springdale and Zion National Park. Phase 2 of the transit plan will implement a second line creating a transit loop system like those in neighboring cities. Phase 3 include multiple lines of transit servicing Hurricane's high traffic routes.

### **La Verkin City**

With addition of the Springdale Transit Service Line, a transit stop for the route to Springdale will be provided in La Verkin. As transit ridership is studied after the Springdale line is completed, additional local stops in La Verkin will be taken into consideration but ultimately deemed necessary by the level of demand as needed.

### **Touquerville City**

Due to budget constraints, service to Tourqueville was not feasible at the time of planning. With exception to a possible service stop for the Springdale Transit Line, the City of Touquerville does see the expansion of bus transit as a likely outcome within the next 20 to 30 years. However, at the current rate of change, expansion of roadway networks and possible housing development growth, transit services could be seen as beneficial for future connections to surrounding areas in La Verkin and Hurricane to meet accessibility needs.

### **Leeds City**

With anticipated rapid growth of new development in Leeds, likelihood of transit being implemented also grows. Allow the expected time of Leeds receiving transit will not be until more development and residential growth expands to the necessary standards for services needed to be met. Further study and growth in Leeds must be done to determine the feasibility of transit expansion before any decisions are made.

### **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. Washington City Council was successful in establishing transit services in 2019 and anticipates additional service in coming years.

### **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 of Transportation 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 wheelchair users on transit has also risen substantially in recent years. In addition, SunTran is partnering with the Five County Association of Governments to improve conditions for passengers at bus stops by installing bus shelters. 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, St George Express and Salt Lake Express currently offer services 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. In 2018 the Utah Department of Transportation granted \$15 million to expand transit services from St. George to Springdale contingent on local support to continue the service for at least 10 years. The Washington County Commission passed a one quarter of one percent sales tax increase in June 2019 to demonstrate that support. The Dixie MPO supports the region's elected officials as they plan for improved regional transit services.

## 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