Section 5311 / 5310 Service Expansion Analysis

Rural Transportation Needs Assessment

By

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Prepared by

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The University of Alabama, The University of Alabama in Birmingham, and The University of Alabama at Huntsville

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<td>This research performed a transit needs assessment for St. Clair County, Alabama, including a potential link to transit operations in the Greater Birmingham, AL area. Two potential transit system models were analyzed. The first model was a “traditional” 5311 transit system, where the transit system owns vehicles that provide demand-response services on a county-wide basis and are also contracted with social service organizations to provide transportation needs to their clients. An innovative 5311 transit model was also analyzed that allows social service agencies to retain control of their transportation services, which usually only operate in the early mornings and late afternoons. The 5311 coordinator schedules the excess capacity in the system for demand rides for the local communities and works with other local groups to add new public transit services.</td>
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A traditional 5311 rural transit system does not appear appropriate for St. Clair County, largely because the current transportation budgets for those agencies do not reflect their true costs. If a traditional 5311 provider were installed, service agencies would be unable to pay the true contract costs. However, an innovative 5311 system appears suitable. In the new approach, the annual 5311 budget is relatively small, and almost all expenses would be met by 5311 Federal Transit Administration funds routed through the Alabama Department of Transportation. |

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Executive Summary

St. Clair County is one of 17 Alabama counties without a rural transit program funded via the Federal Transit Administration’s Section 5311 program. The purpose of this research was to examine methods of establishing a 5311 program in St. Clair County similar to those serving Jefferson and Shelby counties, thereby extending the rural transit program in the Greater Birmingham area. The research also investigated linking proposed 5311 service in St. Clair County with existing 5311 providers in Jefferson and Shelby Counties.

This research determined that there is significant need for public transit within St. Clair County and that there are at least two ways by which a 5311 transit program could be deployed in the county:

- A traditional 5311 rural transit service, where the 5311 provider contracts its services to local social service agencies to transport their clients to scheduled programs and also serves the general population needs for shopping trips, medical trips, etc., via “demand-response” rides.
- An innovative 5311 transit model that allows social service agencies to retain control of their transportation services, which usually only operate in the early mornings and late afternoons. The new 5311 coordinator schedules the excess capacity in the system for demand-response rides for the local communities and works with other local groups to add new public transit services such as ridesharing to employment centers, scheduled shopping trips from subsidized housing locations, etc.

Several results led the researchers to advocate establishing an innovative 5311 rural transit system for St. Clair County:

- A transit connection from St. Clair County to the Greater Birmingham area public transit system does not appear feasible at this time due to the high costs of bringing transit vehicles from Birmingham to transfer points in or near St. Clair County.
- The traditional 5311 model appears unworkable for two reasons:
  - Required local government matching funds support is high: $57,334 to $86,674, depending on the number of social service agencies involved.
  - County service agency transportation contract costs would greatly exceed their current budgets. One service agency’s budget would increase from $58,200 to $123,425 and another agency’s budget would increase from $69,478 to $193,558. The budgets increase because the model adds replacement costs for vehicles, includes costs for drivers that are not currently charged to the transportation system by the agencies, and adds a layer of 5311 administrative costs.
- Costs for the innovative system are considerably lower than for the traditional configurations and are limited to an annual 5311 request of $35,000 plus monthly office and communications costs of $760 per month and a one-time request of
$10,000 for start-up equipment. Local government match is estimated at approximately $15,000 per year.

- Establishing a 5311 rural transit program in St. Clair Co. will demonstrate the county’s commitment to rural transportation. Thus, the county should make a follow-up request for congressionally-earmarked FTA 5310 funds (Elderly and Disabled Capital Program) to update the aging vehicles currently used by the local service agencies. The cost of ten lift-equipped vans obtained via an earmark is approximately $450,000. The 20 percent local match for those vans would be approximately $90,000.
Section 1
Introduction

Project Overview

Researchers at The University of Alabama initiated a project in January 2003 at the request of the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham to assess the resources required to expand the Jefferson/Shelby County 5310/5311 transportation program into a more regional program. The immediate expansion was a 5311 rural public transit service in St. Clair County including a potential transit connection to the Birmingham (Jefferson and Shelby Counties) urban area.

St. Clair County is one of 17 counties in Alabama that does not have a rural transit system funded through Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5311 funds. The county has limited transit service provided with vehicles funded through the FTA Section 5310 program (Elderly and Disabled Capital Program).

The project began by investigating the need for a traditional 5311 rural transit service, where the 5311 provider contracts its services to local social service agencies to transport their clients to scheduled programs and also serves the general population needs for shopping trips, medical trips, etc., via “demand-response” rides. Later, an innovative approach to system deployment and operation was considered that continues existing service for social service agency clients and adds initial service to the general public, anticipating that the demand-response service will grow over time. It also provides a coordinator to initiate a rideshare/vanpooling program for commuters from St. Clair Co. to Jefferson and Shelby Counties. With an estimated 14,000 commuters (2000 US Census Figures) per day driving to Jefferson and Shelby Counties from St. Clair, it was a logical starting point and a good trip reduction strategy for the air quality non-attainment area.

This second approach will establish a 5311 program which will not contract with social service agencies but will provide an umbrella organization for countywide transportation. By establishing a 5311 entity using either the traditional or innovative approach, the county will position itself to make a forceful proposal for a congressional earmark to replace large portions of the county’s aging transportation fleet.

This report discusses both the typical and new approaches to 5311 transit system deployment and operation and provides supplementary information to help establish a 5311 transit system in St. Clair County.
Report Organization

The report is organized as follows:

- **Section 1: Introduction**

- **Section 2: Existing Transit Resources in St. Clair County** - This section outlines the quantity and quality of transportation services currently available in St. Clair County.

- **Section 3: St. Clair County Transit – Profile and Perceived Need** - This section provides a demographic analysis of St. Clair County and gauges the perceived need for additional public transportation.

- **Section 4: Identification of Potential Transit Stakeholders** – This section identifies those agencies, organizations, and individuals that likely will play important roles in the development and operation of a St. Clair County rural public transportation system.

- **Section 5: Analysis of Potential St. Clair County Transit Deployments** – This section describes two potential public transportation system models and identifies the potential costs of these deployments.

- **Section 6: Conclusions and Recommendations** – This section summarizes the work conducted during the research and provides a listing of conclusions and recommendations derived from the work.
Section 2
Existing Transit Resources in St. Clair County

This section describes the existing transit resources in St. Clair County. While there is currently no public transit system operating in the county, there are several social service organizations that provide transportation services to eligible clients. The list of organizations discussed below is not all-inclusive, but represents those organizations in St. Clair County that provide major transportation services to clients. These organizations were surveyed by researchers from the University Transportation Center for Alabama (UTCA).

ARC of St. Clair County

The ARC (formerly named the Association of Retarded Citizens) is a social service organization with a mission stated below: (The Arc, 2003)

The ARC is the national organization of and for people with mental retardation and related developmental disabilities and their families. It is devoted to promoting and improving supports and services for people with mental retardation and their families. The association also fosters research and education regarding the prevention of mental retardation in infants and young children.

In St. Clair County, the ARC provides “adult day rehabilitation services to mentally disabled citizens.” The ARC of St. Clair County has approximately 70 clients:

- 45 clients enrolled in the day program (spend the day at the ARC facility)
- 17 clients receive “round-the-clock” care at the ARC facility
- 2 clients receive care in their homes
- 6 children are enrolled in summer programs

The ARC of St. Clair County operates a fleet of four vans. These vans operate throughout St. Clair County and pick-up clients from their homes, bring them to the ARC facility in Chula Vista, and return the clients home. The van fleet also provides clients critical transportation to medical appointments, grocery stores, etc. ARC transportation services are also extended to the families of clients. Additionally, the ARC van fleet allows clients to participate in recreational programs such as “field trips” to Gatlinburg, Gulf Shores, etc.

A summary of the ARC’s transportation services and fleet characteristics is given in Table 2-1 below. The ARC reported a cost of $58,200 per year to provide their transportation services, including $24,600 for driver salaries and $33,600 for vehicle fleet operations and maintenance. The ARC provides an estimated 5,000 hours of transportation per year to its clients.
### Organization

The ARC of St. Clair County

### Type

Social Service Organization

### Services

Adult day rehabilitation/transportation

### Clients Served

70

### Fleet Profile

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* Remaining life refers to amount of life remaining on a five year or 125,000 mile useful life schedule

For this report, the typical life of a transit vehicle is considered to be five years or 125,000 miles. Vehicles beyond either the age or accumulated mileage threshold are considered to be beyond the typical useful life. Three of the four vehicles described in Table 2-1 exceed either the age or mileage thresholds.

### St. Clair County Department of Senior Services

The St. Clair County Department of Senior Services (formerly named the St. Clair County Council on Aging) provides recreational activities, nutritional services, and fellowship opportunities for the senior citizens of St. Clair County. The Department of Senior Services maintains six facilities within St. Clair County. These facilities are located in Ragland, Pell City, Odenville, Moody, Ashville, and Steele and serve as fellowship and dining points. A map showing the location of these cities may be found in Appendix A.

The St. Clair County Department of Senior Services operates a fleet of seven vehicles. Six of these vehicles are assigned to each of the Department of Senior Service’s facilities in St. Clair County (one vehicle per center). The seventh vehicle is used as a “rover” to fill in as needed, e.g., when another vehicle is being serviced. These vehicles are used to transport clients to Senior Services centers and to return them home and are also used to transport clients on “personal need” trips to the grocery store, bank, etc.

A summary of the Department of Senior Service’s transportation services and fleet characteristics is given in Table 2-2. The Department of Senior Services reported a cost of $69,478 per year to provide their transportation services. This cost includes $50,029 for driver salaries (and a portion of the director’s salary) and $19,449 for vehicle operations and maintenance. The Department of Senior Services provides an estimated 8,750 hours of transportation per year to its clients.
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* Remaining life refers to amount of life remaining on a five year or 125,000 mile useful life schedule

**Boys and Girls Club of St. Clair County**

The Boys and Girls Club is a nationwide youth service organization that provides programs for children, focusing on enrichment and character enhancement programs. The Boys and Girls Club maintains one facility in St. Clair County, located in Pell City.

The Boys and Girls Club provides services for approximately 25 children during the school year and 60 children during the summer. These children are between the ages of 7 and 18 and come from two Pell City schools (Kennedy Elementary and Duran Middle School-North). The Boys and Girls Club in St. Clair County does not operate or maintain a vehicle fleet. By arrangement with the Pell City schools, a number of these children are brought to the Boys and Girls Club facility on school buses as they travel on their regular afternoon (after-school) routes to return children to their homes. The Boys and Girls Club is not charged for this transportation service. Several clients are brought to the facility by private vehicle (parents or relatives). Children are picked-up at the end of the day by parents.

Based upon interviews with officials at the Boys and Girls Club, the club has adequate resources to expand the services to children at other Pell City schools. However, there are no public transit resources available to bring additional children to the facility. The Boys and Girls Club estimates that if transportation services were made available to children at three other Pell City schools (Coosa Valley Elementary, Iola Roberts Elementary, and Eden Elementary) approximately 10-15 children per school would utilize those services to participate in Boys and Girls Club activities.

**Other Available Transit Resources**

There are very limited public transit resources available to the public in St. Clair County as described below:

- There are currently no private taxi services operational within St. Clair County.
• The City of Pell City operates a single van which may be used for senior citizen’s “on demand” trips within the
• Greyhound Lines (the predominant nationwide intercity passenger bus carrier) operates routes that pass through St. Clair County but currently does not have any stops within the county.
Section 3
St. Clair County Transit – Profile and Perceived Need

This section provides an overview of the demographics of St. Clair County and the availability of private transportation, i.e., personal vehicles within the county. The section concludes by providing an analysis of the perceived transit need in St. Clair County based upon questionnaires administered to clients of two St. Clair County social service organizations.

St. Clair County Demographic Profile

Table 3-1 uses U.S. Census 2000 data to compare and contrast the demographic profile of St. Clair County with that of the entire state of Alabama.

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Note: Percentages given reflect percentage relative to entire state (for Land Area and Population) and relative to either St. Clair County or Alabama (all other percentages)

Table 3-1 suggests that St. Clair County possesses demographic characteristics that are largely similar to those of the entire state of Alabama. Notable differences are the percentage of “Persons under 18 Below Poverty Level” and “Unemployment.” St. Clair County possesses (as a percentage of population) a higher proportion of children (persons under the age of 18) who live in environments below the poverty level. These children are likely candidates for participation in programs such as the Boys and Girls Club and would benefit greatly from enhanced transportation services.

The unemployment rate suggests that 97% of St. Clair County’s working age population is employed and that unemployment is relatively low compared to the unemployment rate in the entire state. As stated earlier, 14,000 St. Clair County residents commute to jobs in Jefferson and Shelby Counties.

To determine the location of potential public transit riders, various Census 2000 demographic data was mapped. Figures 3-1 and 3-2 illustrate the geographic distributions of persons by age and by income within St. Clair County, respectively. Note that a basic map of St. Clair County is included in Appendix A.
Figure 3-1: St. Clair County median age by census block (natural breaks)
For reasons of low income and poor health or sight, elderly individuals often lack the means of transportation necessary for routine travel. Areas with a concentration of elderly persons may be targeted for service by a St. Clair County transit system. Figure 3-1 suggests a widespread...
geographic distribution of persons by age within St. Clair County. There are several identifiable areas of the county (particularly the northeast and central-eastern) where there appear to be a significant concentration of elderly individuals.

Similarly, Figure 3-2 identifies an area near Ragland with low income persons. Such areas may be targeted for service by a transit system, as low income riders often lack the means to provide for their transportation.

**St. Clair County Transportation Profile**

There are currently 70,847 private vehicles registered in St. Clair County, corresponding to 1.094 registered private vehicles per person within the county. A value above 1.0 suggests an adequate amount of available private transportation. However, given the relatively high number of senior citizens and persons of limited income living in St. Clair County, public transit is likely needed.

**Perceived Transit Need for St. Clair County**

To gauge the public’s need for transit in St. Clair County, the research team constructed the questionnaire included in Appendix B. This questionnaire was administered to 30 clients of the Department of Senior Services and the Boys and Girls Club of St. Clair County. Other organizations were provided questionnaires and asked to participate in the process, but they did not submit responses. Answers given by Senior Services and Boys and Girls Club clients reflect a public need for additional transportation options and are described in the following paragraphs. Most respondents from both organizations indicated that they would be willing to pay a small fee per trip (one to five dollars) in order to have more transportation options available to them.

**Senior Services Clients Questionnaire Results**

Twenty-one clients from the Department of Senior Services responded to the questionnaire. Their responses are summarized below.

- Department of Senior Services clients make use of its transportation services frequently. Most respondents (14 of 21) used the service five times a week.
- The most frequent destination of clients that make use of Senior Services transportation is the Senior Services center. However, several clients indicated that they also used Senior Services transportation for visits to the grocery, pharmacy, and dentist.
- Eighteen respondents noted that “family, friends, or church members” provide them transportation when Senior Services transportation is not being used.
- When asked what types of locations they visit, the most typical answers were doctor, dental, and eye visits, the pharmacy, and shopping.
- A majority of the respondents noted that they most need transportation in the morning, with five respondents indicating that they need transportation all throughout the day.
- The respondents listed trips to the Senior Center (nine respondents), the grocery store or doctor (nine respondents), church (two respondents), and the drug store (one respondent) as their most important trip made each week.
• Nineteen respondents indicated that they needed transportation to locations outside of St. Clair County. Transportation to Birmingham and Gadsden were specifically mentioned.
• Twenty of the 21 respondents indicated that they would pay a small fee ($1 to $5 per ride) to have more transportation options available to them.
• Twenty of the 21 respondents indicated that they are not Medicaid recipients.
• When asked to suggest improvements to the Department of Senior Services transportation service, respondents listed the following:
  o Generally, more transportation options available
  o More opportunities for transportation to the doctor and for shopping
  o Drivers with improved customer service skills
  o A larger fleet and more reliable vehicles

**Boys and Girls Club of St. Clair County Clients Questionnaire Results**

Nine clients (or parents of young clients) from the Boys and Girls Club of St. Clair County responded to the questionnaire. Their responses are summarized below.

• A number (eight of nine respondents) indicated that they did not make use of the Boys and Girls Club’s transportation options. However, when they did, the usual activity was a “field trip”.
• Boys and Girls Club clients noted that parents, coaches, and their school often provide transportation in addition to the transportation offered by the Boys and Girls Club.
• Respondents noted that they need transportation in the afternoon (two respondents) and in both the morning and the afternoon (three respondents).
• The respondents listed trips to school, work, and church as their most important trips made each week.
• Five of nine respondents indicated that they would pay a small fee to have more transportation options available to them.
**Section 4**

**Identification of Potential Transit Stakeholders**

If a public transit system is to be established in St. Clair County, potential stakeholders must be identified and involved in the system planning and deployment process. This project identified several groups of potential stakeholders:

**St. Clair County Social Service Agencies/Organizations**
- The ARC of St. Clair County
- St. Clair County Department of Senior Services
- The Boys and Girls Club of St. Clair County
- St. Clair County Department of Public Health
- Alabama Department of Human Resources
- Alacare (a home-healthcare organization)
- St. Clair County Regional Hospital

**St. Clair County Political Entities**
- Mayors of the cities and towns in St. Clair County including Argo, Ashville, Branchville, Leeds, Margaret, Moody, Odenville, Pell City, Ragland, Riverside, Springville, and Steele
- St. Clair County Commission

The identified social service agencies/organizations will provide a significant portion of a public transit system’s passenger base. Clients of these agencies/organizations will require both routine transportation (ARC, Senior Services, Boys and Girls Clubs) and demand-response transportation services (the remainder of the organizations on the list). There are other organizations and public agencies that operate in St. Clair County (churches, etc.) that will potentially provide a significant passenger ridership to a public transit system and might also provide volunteer drivers.
Section 5  
Analysis of Potential St. Clair County Transit Deployments

This section discusses the potential for the deployment of a public transit system in St. Clair County. Several possible system configurations are examined along with the possibility of providing a transit link between St. Clair County and Birmingham.

Analysis of Potential Transit Connection to Birmingham

One portion of the project investigated the possibility of providing public transit between St. Clair County and Jefferson County/Birmingham. There is a perceived need for transportation between St. Clair County and Birmingham, as noted in questionnaire responses which primarily indicated a need for transit to the doctor or a medical facility. There are also approximately 14,000 daily commuters between St. Clair County and jobs and Jefferson and Shelby Counties who may be candidates for ridesharing/vanpooling.

UTCA research team members interviewed a representative from ClasTran, a public transit provider that operates in Jefferson and Shelby Counties. This discussion, coupled with input from the director of the Department of Senior Services, resulted in the conclusion that a transit connection between St. Clair County and ClasTran is not feasible at this time:

- Transfer of St. Clair passengers to ClasTran is not logistically feasible at this time
- The fare structure to bring ClasTran buses to St. Clair County was prohibitively high. ClasTran provided an estimated allocated cost of $61.29 per hour and an average cost of $18.05 per trip.

Despite these findings, future transit studies should further investigate the possibility of developing a transit link between St. Clair County and Birmingham.

Review of U.S. Department of Transportation 5311 Transit Grant Program

What is currently known as the “5311” program began in 1979 as a block grant to the states in the Federal Transit Act. Section 18 of this act (now codified in 49 U.S.C. 5311) provided funding for transit programs in rural areas.

5311 Funding Eligibility

The following groups are eligible for 5311 funding (Lindly and Tubbs, 2001):

- State agencies
- Local public agencies
- Private nonprofit organizations
- Operators of public transportation services
These groups may use 5311 funds for “public transportation and intercity bus service in areas that are classified as nonurbanized.” A nonurbanized area is defined as being outside an urbanized area. An urbanized area is “an area that consists of a core area and the surrounding densely populated area with a total population of 50,000 or more, with boundaries fixed by the Bureau of Census or extended by state and local officials.” There are no urbanized areas in St. Clair County; thus, the entire county may be serviced by a 5311 transit entity. (Lindly and Tubbs, 2001).

Both administrative and operating costs of rural transit systems are eligible for 5311 funding. Administrative costs are eligible for an 80% federal share, with the remaining 20% of the funding coming from local/state sources and/or generated program revenue. Administrative costs include “non-operating” expenses such as salaries, advertising, office supplies, insurance payments, and building/equipment rental (Lindly and Tubbs, 2001).

Operating expenses (such as fuel costs and driver salaries) are shared, with the federal share being 50% of eligible costs and the remainder coming from local sources. Eligible costs are those costs that remain after subtracting 20% from the overall operating costs. That 20% must be provided from farebox revenue or contract service revenue. The 5311 funds can then pay 50% of the remaining operating cost (Lindly and Tubbs, 2001).

5311 in Alabama

There are currently twenty-seven 5311 systems in operation in Alabama, serving a total of 50 counties. These providers operate services of varying sizes, with some services covering multiple counties and operating 40 or more vehicles and some services operating within only one county with fleets of less than ten vehicles. The amount of 5311 funds received by the systems in Alabama (in 1999) ranged from $51,700 to $436,000 depending on the size and scope of the system being funded (Lindly and Tubbs, 2001).

Based upon discussion with officials at the Alabama Department of Transportation, it is estimated that as a new service provider St. Clair would receive approximately $35,000 -$45,000 per year via the 5311 grant program. This estimated cost has been used in the construction of potential system costs in the following sections of this report.

Development of a Transit System Potential Cost Analysis Tool

The research team developed the Transit System Potential Cost Analysis spreadsheet tool that can accurately gauge the potential costs of deploying a public transit system within St. Clair County. Screenshots of the tool are presented in Appendix C. Use of the spreadsheet allows the user to perform the following actions:

- Itemize potential system cost components and determine total system cost (e.g., costs of drivers, costs of fuel, etc.)
- Adjust administrative and operating costs separately
- Select and investigate various combinations of potential system contracting agencies/organizations
- Adapt to various transit system configurations
Researchers estimated administrative and operating costs based upon the budgets of other 5311 systems in Alabama (these systems are not listed by name due to the sensitive nature of some of their cost figures).

**Administrative Costs**

**Administrator** – The 5311 system administrator oversees the day-to-day operation of the transit system. A salary of $34,000/year was estimated for the system administrator.

**Administrator Fringes** – Fringe benefits for the system administrator were estimated at 25% of the base annual salary. Fringes include health insurance and other typical employer-provided benefits.

**Legal/Accounting** – Start-up of a 5311 system likely will require the services of legal and accounting professionals. There likely will be an ongoing cost to adhere to legal and accounting guidelines. Based upon the experiences of other Alabama 5311 systems, this cost is estimated to be $1,500 per year.

**Drug Testing** – Drug testing is required for a 5311 system (but not a 5310 system) and drivers must be tested periodically. Drug testing may be performed through a contractor that will administer the drug tests and report the results. Based upon the experiences of other Alabama 5311 systems, this cost is estimated to be $1,500 per year.

**Travel** – 5311 system employees (administrator, dispatchers, and drivers) may attend relevant transit industry meetings (e.g., 5311 transit rodeos). This expense is included in the budget and is estimated to be $2,000 per year.

**Printing, Supplies, and Postage** – The estimated annual cost for printing, standard office supplies, and postage is $2,250.

**Utilities** – The 5311 system may be required to pay for utilities at its dispatch office location (although some counties have their 5311 dispatch in an existing county-owned facility). This cost is estimated to be $500 per year.

**Advertising** – Initial advertising expenses may be significant for a developing 5311 system and may decrease after start-up. Estimated advertising costs are $1,500 per year.

**Office Equipment** – A developing 5311 system may be required to purchase office equipment (e.g., computers, printers, furniture, etc.). This cost may not recur beyond the first year of service, when it is estimated to cost the system $2,000.

**Telephone** – Telephone service likely will play a vital role in the operation of a 5311 transit provider, as it is necessary allow transit passengers to call in and request transportation. The estimated annual cost of telephone service for the 5311 transit system is $4,000, including a toll-free telephone number.

**Operations Costs**
Dispatcher Salary – As determined by a survey of several Alabama 5311 transit operations, the estimated annual salary for a system dispatcher is $15,000.

Driver Salaries – Driver salaries were estimated at $7.50 per hour.

Dispatcher/Driver Fringes - Fringe benefits for the system dispatcher and for the drivers were estimated at 25% of their yearly salaries. Fringes include health insurance and other typical employer-provided benefits.

Fuel, Oil, and Tires – Fuel costs have been estimated using data provided by other 5311 agencies in Alabama:

- Average miles per gallon – 9.8 miles/gallon
- Cost of gasoline per gallon – $1.50/gallon

Using these estimates, fuel cost can be predicted by the following equation:

\[
\text{Estimated Fuel Cost} = \left( \frac{\text{Total estimated number of miles to be traveled}}{9.8 \, \text{miles/gallon}} \right) \times \left( \frac{\$1.50}{\text{gallon}} \right) \quad (5-1)
\]

A similar procedure is used to predict the cost of oil and tires. The estimated cost for oil is $3.02 per 1,000 miles traveled, and the estimated cost for tires is $17.31 per 1,000 miles traveled. Predicted costs for oil and tires can be calculated by the following equation (substituting $3.02 for oil or $17.31 for tires in place of \(x\)):

\[
\text{Estimated Oil/tires cost} = \$x \times \frac{\text{Total estimated number of miles to be traveled}}{1000} \quad (5-2)
\]

Vehicle Maintenance – Vehicle maintenance costs are estimated in much the same manner as the costs for oil and tires. The estimated maintenance cost is $45.76 per 1,000 miles traveled. Thus, equation 5-2 can be used with $45.76 substituted for \(x\) to estimate maintenance costs.

Vehicle Insurance – Vehicle insurance costs are projected to be $3,500 per vehicle per year.

Training – A total of $1,000 is allocated for driver and dispatcher training.

Radio Communications – Radio communications may play a pivotal role in the dispatching process. An annual cost of $1,500 has been estimated to provide radio communications between the dispatcher and drivers.

Fees/Registration – Drivers may attend transit conferences and other relevant professional development opportunities. $1,000 has been included in the budget for that purpose.

License, Tags, and Taxes – A St. Clair County 5311 system can expect to pay vehicle registration costs (for license plates) of approximately $11 per vehicle.

Allocated Costs
The spreadsheet tool allows users to adjust the allocated cost for the transit system. Allocated cost is given in terms of dollars/mile and dollars/hour charged to agencies that contract transportation services through the 5311 system. These costs are charged to cover the day-to-day operation and administrative costs of the transit system.

**Potential Costs of a 5311 System Deployment in St. Clair County**

This section calculates the potential costs to establish 5311 rural transit in St. Clair County. Two potential models are discussed.

*Traditional 5311 Rural Transit Program*

This configuration entails the deployment of a “traditional” 5311 transit system which contracts with St. Clair County social service organizations and operates demand-response services on a county-wide basis. The State of Alabama, via the federal 5311 grant program, would likely provide $30,000 to assist with the administration and operation of the program. Seven system configurations are considered by varying the number of service agencies that may contract with the 5311 provider. Researchers used the spreadsheet tool to analyze the seven potential system configurations, and Table 5-1 presents the results of the budget analyses. Appendix C gives screenshots of the potential cost analysis spreadsheet tool for each of the configurations. The spreadsheet tool is available for further use by St. Clair Co. officials or officials of other counties wishing to perform similar analyses.

Table 5-1 indicates that the estimated local government cost of the system ranges from $57,334 to $86,674. Note that this cost does not reflect the likely possibility that agencies/organizations (such as ARC, Boys and Girls Club, etc.) would petition the St. Clair County Commission and other local governments to assist in defraying their increased transportation costs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System Configuration (incl. Demand-Response)</th>
<th>Admin. Cost</th>
<th>Ops Cost</th>
<th>Fares/Contracts</th>
<th>5311 Grant</th>
<th>Local Cost*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ARC</td>
<td>$ 61,000.00</td>
<td>$ 165,164.14</td>
<td>$ 147,425.00</td>
<td>$ 50,000.00</td>
<td>$ 74,489.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Services</td>
<td>$ 61,000.00</td>
<td>$ 214,628.27</td>
<td>$ 217,557.50</td>
<td>$ 50,000.00</td>
<td>$ 69,070.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARC, Senior Services</td>
<td>$ 61,000.00</td>
<td>$ 295,816.96</td>
<td>$ 340,982.50</td>
<td>$ 50,000.00</td>
<td>$ 57,334.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARC, Boys and Girls</td>
<td>$ 61,000.00</td>
<td>$ 186,745.28</td>
<td>$ 187,321.00</td>
<td>$ 50,000.00</td>
<td>$ 86,674.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Services, Boys and Girls</td>
<td>$ 61,000.00</td>
<td>$ 236,209.41</td>
<td>$ 257,453.50</td>
<td>$ 50,000.00</td>
<td>$ 81,255.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARC, Senior Services, Boys and Girls</td>
<td>$ 61,000.00</td>
<td>$ 317,398.10</td>
<td>$ 380,878.50</td>
<td>$ 50,000.00</td>
<td>$ 69,519.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Contracts</td>
<td>$ 61,000.00</td>
<td>$ 83,975.45</td>
<td>$ 24,000.00</td>
<td>$ 50,000.00</td>
<td>$ 86,225.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Local sources may be asked to supply agencies with extra funds to pay agency transportation contract costs

Current transportation costs for the agencies/organizations analyzed in this report have been reported earlier:

- ARC - $58,200
- Department of Senior Services - $69,478
- Boys and Girls Club - $0

Screenshots of the spreadsheet tool presented in Appendix C show (using typical allocated cost figures from other 5311 systems in Alabama) that to contract with a potential 5311 system in St.
Clair County and maintain current levels of service, the agencies/organizations analyzed in this report can expect to be charged the following:

- **ARC** - $123,425 (an increase of $65,225 over current costs)
- **Department of Senior Services** $193,558 (an increase of $124,080 over current costs)
- **Boys and Girls Club** $39,896 (an increase of $39,896 over current costs)

These values represent a significant increase in the transportation budgets currently reported by the agencies. The following items explain why 5311 contracts would be much higher than current reported costs to transport the same clients:

- The 5311 figures reflect an allocated cost (charged to the agency/organization on a per-mile and per-hour basis) large enough to provide for vehicle replacement on a regular basis. Current agency budgets do not reflect vehicle replacement costs.
- The 5311 figures include an increased overhead associated with the day-to-day operation of the 5311 system. This overhead includes items such as salaries and benefits for a 5311 coordinator and dispatcher, computer equipment, office space rental/lease, telephone charges, etc.
- Van drivers perform more than one function for the social service organizations. At present, their salaries may not be charged against the transportation budgets of those organizations. However, driver salaries are included in the contract costs associated with the 5311 service.

The researchers believe that two factors made the use of a traditional 5311 program in St. Clair County unworkable at this time:

- The potentially high cost that local government would be asked to carry
- The large increase in cost that social service providers would be asked to pay to transport their clients.

Thus, an innovative approach to 5311 transit system deployment and operation was developed and is presented in the following paragraphs.

**Innovative 5311 Rural Transit Program**

A traditional 5311 system was judged infeasible for St. Clair County, so researchers investigated an innovative system. In most counties, the 5311 system owns the vans/buses and provides contract services to social service agencies and provides demand/response service to other citizens. In the new system envisioned for St. Clair County, the 5311 system would not own any vehicles. The 5311 program would function as a coordinator for a countywide carpool program and as a broker for the excess capacity available from existing social service operations. The social service agencies would continue to operate vans/buses as usual (including scheduled field trips) but will make them available for demand/response when not in use taking clients to and from services.

The 5311 coordinator in the innovative system will have less to do with the service agency transportation operations, but establishing a 5311 service will provide a framework for a major request for an earmark through the 5309 or 5310 programs for new vans. As the new coordinator’s schedule permits, the coordinator will start and coordinate new programs such as ridesharing, vanpooling, transit services to dialysis treatments, etc.
The characteristics of this new plan are detailed below:

- New transit vehicles will be requested via a congressional earmark or from the annual pool of funds allocated to the ALDOT for 5310 service. These vehicles will replace most of the vehicles currently operated by ARC and the Department of Senior Services that are beyond their useful life.
- Control of system vehicles will remain with the organization that utilizes the vehicles for their day-to-day operations. For example, ARC will continue to use vehicles allocated to it to perform standard transportation services. If ARC also wishes to use the vehicles for infrequent, special purposes such as field trips, those special trips are easily accommodates by informing the 5311 coordinator of the times the vehicles are required.
- Excess transit capacity (when available) will be used to provide demand-response rides for the general population of St. Clair County. For example, if the transit vehicles operated by the Department of Senior Services are not in use during the 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM hours, these vehicles will be made available for demand-response trips to grocery stores, pharmacies, doctor’s offices, etc. Demand-response services will likely be provided for areas of the county within five to seven miles of the six Senior Centers and the ARC facility. If the St. Clair County 5311 service were to provide demand-response service within a five mile radius of those seven locations, 45,912 persons (70.9% of the total population of the county) would be within the demand-response service area. If this service area was expanded to a seven mile radius of the seven locations, 57,251 persons (88.4% of the total population of the county) would be within the demand-response service area. Figure 5-1 illustrates the five and seven mile radius demand-response service areas.
- Additional scheduled transportation services could also be provided, such as transportation of students from elementary schools in Pell City to the Boys and Girls Club. Although that particular service would fall outside of the likely 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM transit resource availability window, this service may be provided by the City of Pell City’s bus, the “rover” bus from the Department of Senior Services, or an additional bus obtained via the congressional earmark. If a congressional earmark can only supply a small number of new buses that would all be used by existing services, then some of the buses replaced by the new vehicles could be used to provide this service. Another example of new scheduled transportation service could be regular service from subsidized housing areas to grocery stores, pharmacies, etc.
- Rather than purchasing additional vehicles to create a vanpool or rideshare program, the St. Clair County 5311 transit system coordinator will work to match riders to existing rides. 14,000 commuters travel daily from St. Clair County to places of employment in Jefferson and Shelby Counties. In an effort to reduce the congestion and environmental impacts of these trips, the 5311 coordinator will match commuters to create rideshare opportunities. As the number of riders increases, riders will be grouped into vanpools. Vans in vanpools are leased and paid for by the riders; thus, no public sector subsidization is necessary.
- Vehicle operation and maintenance expenses for social service transportation will remain the responsibility of the organization that utilizes the vehicles for their day-to-day operations. Thus, the costs related to maintaining and operating a transit vehicle fleet will remain in the hands of agencies most experienced with the management of such fleets.
• The cost of operating the demand-response transportation may be offset by rider fares and assistance from county and city governments. 5311 funds may also be used to offset some of these costs, but fares cannot be used as match for 5311 funds. Much of these costs can be avoided if the 5311 coordinator can recruit suitable volunteer drivers. Social service agencies have agreed that volunteer drivers may be used for demand-response use of their vehicles if such drivers are available.
By maintaining social service agency control of system vehicles, the complexity of 5311 system deployment and operation is reduced. In the deployment/operation of a “standard” 5311 system, the county (or other 5311 system administrative oversight body) must directly oversee vehicle maintenance, transportation arranged by contractual agreement between the county and various agencies/organizations, demand-response transportation, and driver salaries, benefits, and drug
testing. Under the recommended 5311 system, the burden on the county is reduced as they must hire only one employee (a 5311 transit system coordinator).

The coordinator can be one person, or it can be an organization. For example, the ClasTran system in Birmingham is coordinated by the United Way of Central Alabama. Three United Way staff members share coordination responsibilities, each devoting part time to the effort and each supplying supportive and connected skill sets. Coordination by organization is recommended by the researchers because that option offers a diversity of skills as well as the ability to apply more than one person to the job during periods of high activity.

The 5311 transit system coordinator will coordinate existing transit resources (e.g., vehicles assigned to ARC and Senior Services) and arrange for demand-response riders to be transported on these vehicles (when available). Another proposed duty for the transit coordinator will be to obtain volunteer or paid drivers for the demand-response service hours. The coordinator will also work with civic groups, churches, and other organizations within St. Clair County to identify potential transportation resources (church vans, etc.) that are unused for portions of the day and can be incorporated into the demand-response and rideshare transit programs.

In addition to other responsibilities, the coordinator will assist ARC, Senior Services, and any other participating organizations with the calculation of their incremental and fully allocated transportation costs. Incremental costs are those costs incurred by providing demand-response transportation on an existing agency/organization inbound or outbound route. For example, if the Department of Senior Services brings clients from areas around Pell City to its center in Pell City and there is excess capacity (available seats on the van) then demand-response riders can fill those seats and be taken to locations along (or close to) the existing Senior Service’s van travel route. Fully allocated costs are the costs associated with transportation where the driver and vehicle are made available for “new” trips (demand-response or scheduled trips such as Boys and Girls Club student pick-up).

Figure 5-2 illustrates the 5311 transit system coordinator’s potential relationships and responsibilities related to social service organizations, rideshare programs in Jefferson and Shelby Counties, and the general population.

Incremental costs are anticipated to be relatively low. They will be a function of additional time and mileage that may be incurred during the pick-up or drop-off of demand-response riders along existing agency/organization transportation routes. The estimated costs for this “innovative” St. Clair County transit system are expected to be relatively low compared to the estimated costs developed for a traditional 5311 transit system.
Section 5311 program grant support must be obtained from ALDOT before the St. Clair County 5311 system is deployed. This is expected be a 5311 program grant from the FTA. St. Clair County should request $35,000 to $45,000 in federal funds as an annual 5311 grant from the ALDOT. The grant must be matched with local non-federal (county and city) funds on an 80/20 formula (80% of funds are federal, matched by 20% local). For example, if St. Clair County receives $35,000 via the 5311 program from ALDOT, the local match will be $8,750. The 5311 grant funds for St. Clair County will be used to pay the salary (including benefits, as appropriate) for the county’s 5311 transit system coordinator.

In addition to the 20% local match required to procure the 5311 grant funds, St. Clair County should also make a one-time capital assistance request to ALDOT for $8,000 (matched on an 80/20 formula by $2,000 in local funds). This capital assistance funding will be used to purchase ride-matching software (approximately $7,500) and a computer (approximately $2,500) for the 5311 coordinator.

The St. Clair County Commission will have direct oversight of the St. Clair County 5311 system. Thus, the Commission will request the congressional earmark to pay for new transit vehicles to replace Department of Senior Services and ARC vehicles that are beyond their useful lives. Any earmarked funds will be granted on an 80/20 federal-local match formula. It is anticipated that the St. Clair County Commission, cities and municipalities in the county, and the social service organizations who will benefit from the new transit vehicles will be approached to provide the local match funds for the congressional earmark. There are nine vehicles in need of replacement, and current replacement costs for handicap accessible vehicle available from ALDOT are estimated to be $45,000 each. This would require a match of $81,000 in non-federal funds to replace all nine vehicles. If the Commission requests additional vehicles for use with the Boys and Girls Club or other organizations, additional local match would be required.
Local government will also be asked to provide office space for the transit system coordinator. This request will be a cost-savings measure to avoid renting or leasing additional office space solely for the coordinator. The estimated monthly cost of transit system office space, utilities, and telephone service is $760. It is itemized in Table 5-2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>150 ft² Office Space</td>
<td>$300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone Service</td>
<td>$335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>$125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sum</strong></td>
<td><strong>$760</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section 6
Conclusions and Recommendations

This section provides a summary of the work completed during the course of this research, plus a list of conclusions and recommendations created as a result of this work.

Summary of Work

The purpose of this research was to perform a transit needs assessment for St. Clair County, including a potential link to transit in the Greater Birmingham area. To accomplish the research, the following tasks were completed:

- Collected, analyzed, and mapped demographic characteristics of St. Clair County.
- Met individually with representatives from potential 5311 contracting agencies in St. Clair County. Their need for additional transportation options was discussed, and the current condition and scope of their transportation services was collected.
- Conducted surveys of Department of Senior Services and Boys and Girls Club clients to gauge their need for public transportation (surveys were supplied to other agencies/organizations within St. Clair County, but these agencies did not respond).
- Conducted discussions with the ALDOT Multimodal Bureau regarding 5311 support and budgets figures for current 5311 providers.
- Created Excel worksheet and produced estimated costs for seven traditional and one innovative 5311 configuration.
- Visited the Blount County 5311 system to survey their equipment and facilities.
- Conducted four meetings with Pell City officials and St. Clair County Commissioners. At two of the meetings, representatives from the St. Clair County Regional Hospital, Alacare, ClasTran, and other local government representatives attended and provided feedback.

Summary of Potential Costs

Two potential transit system models were analyzed. The first model was a “traditional” 5311 transit system. Under this model, the transit system contracts with St. Clair County social service organizations and operates demand-response services on a county-wide basis. This model appears unworkable for two reasons:

- The required local government matching funds support is high: $57,334 to $86,674, depending on the number of social service agencies involved.
- County service agency transportation contract costs would greatly exceed their current budgets. The ARC budget would increase from $58,200 to $123,425 and the Senior Services budget would increase from $69,478 to $193,558. The budgets increase because the model adds replacement costs for vehicles, includes costs for drivers that are not currently charged to the transportation system by the agencies, and adds a layer of 5311 administrative costs.
A second “innovative” 5311 transit model was also analyzed that allows social service agencies to retain control of their transportation services, which usually only operate in the early mornings and late afternoons. In this model, the 5311 coordinator schedules the excess capacity in the system for demand rides for the local communities and works with other local groups to add new public transit services.

Costs for the innovative system are considerably lower than for the traditional configurations and are limited to an annual 5311 request of $35,000 plus monthly office and communications costs of $760 per month and a one-time request of $10,000 to obtain start-up equipment. Local match is estimated at approximately $15,000 per year.

A request for congressionally-earmarked 5310 funds is anticipated for either the traditional or the innovative system. The cost of 10, lift-equipped vans obtained via the earmark is approximately $450,000. The 20% local match for those vans would cost approximately $90,000.

Conclusions

There appears to be a significant need for public transportation in St. Clair County, based upon the following observations:

- High (relative to state of Alabama) population of persons under the age of 18 living in poverty. This suggests that there are a number of children likely to require transportation to access services provided by organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club.
- Low (compared to the state of Alabama) unemployment rate indicates that there are a large number of employees in the county. Some of these employees likely require assistance to travel to work. Implementation of a St. Clair County transit system could allow these employees easy and cost-effective transportation.
- Perceived need as gauged by surveying clients of the Department of Senior Services and the Boys and Girls Club (other organizations/agencies were provided survey forms but did not return them). The clients indicated that they have a high personal need for additional transportation, notably transportation to medical facilities and for routine errands (grocery shopping, trips to the pharmacy, etc.). They indicated a willingness to pay $1 to $5 per trip for this service.
- There are currently very limited public transportation resources available within St. Clair County: there are no private taxi services, and Greyhound (an intercity bus carrier) does not operate any bus stops within the county. The City of Pell City does operate and maintain a single van to provide limited demand-response services to senior citizens within Pell City.

A transit connection from St. Clair County to the ClasTran public transit system in Shelby and Jefferson Counties does not appear feasible at this time due to the high cost of bringing ClasTran vehicles to transfer points.

A traditional 5311 rural transit system does not appear to be appropriate for St. Clair County, but an innovative 5311 system seems suitable. In the new approach, the annual 5311 budget is relatively small (approximately $35,000 plus $760 per month in office expenses) and all but
approximately $15,000 per year will be paid by 5311 FTA funds routed through ALDOT. In the new 5311 approach, vehicles continue to be owned and operated by local agencies. Excess vehicle capacity is often available from 10 AM to 2 PM, and the coordinator will schedule those vehicles for demand-response service or new, scheduled service around seven towns in St. Clair County. Service in a 5-mile radius of those cities will cover 70.9% of St. Clair’s population. The coordinator will have several other duties:

- Advertising the system
- Hiring part-time drivers or recruiting volunteer, part-time drivers
- Organizing carpools to employment centers in the Greater Birmingham area. Later, such carpools may evolve into vanpools.
- Working with local government to coordinate with 5311 and 5310 programs.
- Initiating new transit services such as shopping trips from subsidized housing or dialysis trips for county residents.
- Working with existing social service agency transportation providers to identify the “full” cost of transportation services they are providing.

**Recommendations**

Based upon the conclusions drawn from this work, the research team recommends the following:

- St. Clair County should continue to engage potential stakeholders in discussions about the possibility of a 5311 public transit program. The stakeholders must be committed to any prospective program and should fully understand the potential advantages and disadvantages of participation.
- St. Clair County should consider implementing the innovative 5311 system approach presented by the researchers. It will be critical to the long term success of the county transit program to develop a public transportation alternative to the single occupancy vehicle.
- St. Clair County should examine the possibility of creating a public transit program outside of the bounds of a federally funded program. If funds were made available for such a program, there would likely be more flexibility in its deployment (e.g., no requirement to adhere to federal guidelines with regard to 5311 programs).
- St. Clair County may wish to deploy a traditional 5311 program on a countywide basis with multiple contracting partners (agencies/organizations) and a wide-scale demand-response system or may opt to initiate a “pilot” 5311 program focused on the Pell City area (with countywide demand-response available upon request). Such a pilot program would likely have only one or two initial contracting partners (possibly ARC and Boys and Girls Club) and would serve as a test bed for a future countywide deployment.
Section 7
References


Appendix B

St. Clair County Transit Needs Assessment
Potential 5311 Client Interview Questions

How often do you use transportation services provided by the Boys/Girls Club?
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

What types of places does the Boys/Girls Club take you to?
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

Do you have any suggestions to improve transportation by the Boys/Girls Club?
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

Who, besides the Boys/Girls Club, takes you places?
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

What types of places (doctor’s office, grocery store, etc.) do you need transportation to?
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

What time of day do you most often need transportation?
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

What is the most important trip you make each week?
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

Do you need transportation to locations outside of St. Clair County? (e.g., hospitals/medical facilities in Birmingham/Gadsden) If so, how are these transportation needs being met now?

Continued on Next Page
Would you pay a small fee ($1 to $5 per ride) to have more transportation options available to you?

Are you a Medicaid recipient?

Thank you for your time.
Appendix C

Transit System Potential Cost Analysis Tool Sample Output
Figure C-1. Sample spreadsheet tool screenshot 1
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>J</th>
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<td>Life cycle = 4 years</td>
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<td>Per vehicle per year (over 4 years) = $7,625</td>
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Figure C-2. Sample spreadsheet tool screenshot 2