



OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

January 5, 2011

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: David B. Vebaun, City Manager

SUBJECT: **Authorization to Submit FY 2011-12 SMTF & FTA 5307 Applications**

TRANSIT SERVICE FUNDING FOR FY 2011-2012

As you know, the City submits an annual application for funding under the State Mass Transit and FTA Section 5307 (Small Urbanized Area) Programs. These funding sources provide the primary financial support for administrative and operating expenses for all of our transit programs: CATS Commuter Bus Route(s) as well as York County Access (our Demand Response Program). In addition to an application, we are required to include a resolution from City Council supporting the SMTF funding request and designating the City as a direct recipient of Section 5307 funds. A spreadsheet reflecting the funding needs for FY 11-12 is attached. It is important to note that although we are recommending continuation of all of our existing transit services, we are not recommending any additional City cost sharing for FY 12.

From an operational and budgetary standpoint, here are the key factors affecting each service in FY 2011-2012:

CATS 82X: ROCK HILL EXPRESS (COMMUTER BUS SERVICE)

- Continuation of this route with the funding share split between federal and state transit sources and CATS.
- Operates Monday through Friday during the morning and evening peak periods from Rock Hill to the Charlotte Transportation Center.

CATS 78X: CELANESE CORRIDOR EXPRESS (COMMUTER BUS SERVICE)

As you will recall, this route began operating along the Celanese Road Corridor in October 2009, and it is intended to connect commuters in northern Rock Hill with the LYNX Blue Line at the I-485 station. Ridership results, however, have been much lower than expected. After closely tracking operating results during the past year, interviewing riders, and analyzing origination data of current users of the LYNX Blue Line Station, we came to the conclusion that the 78X should be discontinued or be revamped.

Over the summer, we started working with our partners at York County, Fort Mill and CATS to evaluate the express service and consider alternatives. Based on our evaluation and the results of a broad-based survey of potential riders, we are proposing the following modifications to the 78X that would extend its service territory from Celanese Road to points along US 21 terminating at the I-485 light rail station.

- **Stop Locations** – It is being recommended that this route maintain three park-n-ride locations, beginning at the current Home Depot Shopping Center stop and continuing north along US 21 with boarding points at SC 160 and at Regent Parkway. This recommendation is based on a combination of rider interviews, an evaluation of origination data of current users of the LYNX Blue Line Station (i.e., the final destination point for this route), as well as a recently completed survey of potential transit users along US 21.

Implementing this recommendation will continue to allow current riders of this route (approx 250 – 300 a month) to board on Celanese Road at the Home Depot Shopping Center, while at the same time incorporating pick-up points at two of the highest volume areas between Rock Hill and the LYNX Station: (1) Bi-Lo Shopping Center at US 21/SC 160; and (2) Bloom Shopping Center at Regent Parkway.

From a conservative evaluation of the origination data and survey results, these two locations are expected to generate an additional 1,200 to 1,600 riders a month. Taking the current monthly ridership level of 250 to 300 and adding an additional 1,200 to 1,600 transit users would bring this route to 1,500 to 1,900 riders per month. In terms of comparison, the CATS 82X route, which has been operating successfully for approximately 8 years, is currently averaging 2,900 to 3,400 per month.

- **Route Timing** – It is being recommended that the last outbound trip from the LYNX Station to Rock Hill depart at 6:00pm to better meet the needs of potential riders who frequently don't leave work until 5:30pm or slightly thereafter. The present schedule begins returning workers from the LYNX Station around 4:30 to about 5:30. By implementing this adjustment, we should be able to remove one of the limiting factors cited by some riders who presently use this route on an "as needed basis," rather than as their regular approach to getting to and from work.

- **Travel Time Duration** – By restructuring the route to operate along US 21, one of the primary incentives for utilizing transit (i.e., reduction in travel time) will be achieved. As outlined earlier, by shifting the position of the existing park-n-ride locations east along Celanese Road towards I-77, the length of each morning and evening run will be shorter for the rider, and more efficient to operate.

- **Broader Funding Participation** – Given that a restructured route along US 21 would now be serving the needs of Rock Hill, Fort Mill and County residents, each jurisdiction would be responsible for an equal share of the local costs – which is expected to be approximately \$27,131 in FY 2011-12; therefore, Rock Hill's share would be roughly \$9,044.00 or \$4,084.00 lower than our present funding level. It should be noted that staff from the County and Fort Mill have been actively involved in the evaluation of the 78X and the recommendations proposed above. In addition, staff have expressed their strong support for this effort and the joint funding participation it entails.

In addition to the items listed above, it is important to recall that restructuring this route to operate along US 21 will accomplish another important secondary goal that the City continues to actively work on and support – planning for the initiation of a rapid transit alternative from Rock Hill to Charlotte. As you will recall, a major investment study was completed in during 2007 identifying the US 21 Corridor as the preferred alignment for this purpose. Therefore, restructuring the 78X to operate along US 21 will support this broader planning effort.

YORK COUNTY ACCESS: ESSENTIAL SERVICES

- Recommendation to maintain 75,000 annual passenger miles; therefore, there would be no change in the local funding level in FY 2011-12.
- Ridership demand continues to be very strong. Although the initiation of the Peak Period service on July 1, 2010, drew some of the employment related demand from this route, additional ridership interest among seniors and the transit dependent population has grown, and maintaining a budget of 75,000 passenger miles will meet the need for this targeted route.

YORK COUNTY ACCESS: PEAK PERIOD SERVICE (RIDE-TO-WORK PROGRAM)

- As you will recall, this route was initiated on July 1, 2010 as an ARRA funded activity at 100% federal funding participation through June 30, 2010.
- Ridership is strong and is expected to continue to be so in FY 2011-12. Indeed, although this route was originally budgeted at 25,000 passenger miles for FY 2010-11, it is recommended that the budget be raised to 45,000 passenger miles through the remainder of this year and continue at that level in FY 2011-12. Local costs for continuation of this service in FY 11-12 is \$18,950.00
- Although this proposed passenger miles increase is notable, it is important to keep in mind that of all our existing transit services, the Peak Period Service is best positioned to function as the core component to our transit program (i.e., origin and destination points that remain within the City of Rock Hill); and as such, is the appropriate service to expand to meet increasing ridership interest and demand.

Taking all of these factors into account, the City's local share costs for FY 11-12 for all four transit programs is projected to be **\$61,118.67** This is approximately **\$703.83** lower than last year. The essentially flat year-over-year cost projection is primarily a result of broadening the funding participation on the Celanese Corridor Express (CATS 78X), and the stable farebox revenue generated from the Demand Response Routes (Essential Services and the Ride-to-Work Program). City staff is recommending the submittal of annual applications to continue to support our current transit services, including the restructuring of the 78X.

Your agenda packet includes the following action items for consideration:

1. Contract amendment with YCCOA to increase passenger miles for the Peak Period Service from 25,000 to 45,000 through June 30, 2011. All associated costs will be paid from the ARRA grant.
2. Resolution of support to submit the State Mass Transit Funding (SMTF) application for FY 11-12 in the amount of \$157,315.00.
3. Resolution designating the City of Rock Hill as a direct recipient of FTA 5307 funds.