



MEMORANDUM

To: Kevin Wallace, Maricopa Association of Governments
From: Scott Miller
Date: May 1, 2008
Subject: Regional Transit Framework Study - Focus Groups Summary

Four regional focus groups were conducted to learn about community members' perceptions of the existing regional transit system and their ideas about future transit needs. The focus groups consisted of 40 people in total (10 each group). Two of the focus groups consisted of regular transit users, while the other two focus groups were populated with participants who do not regularly use transit. Demographic characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, geographic location (west valley, central and east valley), income and travel habits were considered when selecting participants for the focus groups.

Observations – Regular Transit Users

- **General description of transit in the region** is that service is slow, crowded and limited (need to extend routes to growing areas and have late night\24 hour service). The region's transit system is significantly lacking compared to other major cities.
- **Perception that most people use transit because they have to** due to financial cost of auto ownership, don't have a driver's license or have a disability.
- **Factors limiting additional transit use today** include travel time\speed, route coverage, hours of operation, overcrowded buses and lack of shade and water at bus stops. Travel time or speed was the most important issue to current transit users. In general, the focus group members felt that travel time or speed on short to medium distance trips that can be accomplished on a single bus route is acceptable; however, long distance trips or most trips that require a transfer take too much time and aren't acceptable.
- **Future transit needs include** more direct\faster routes, separate transit routes from auto traffic (ideas include busways, subway and elevated trains), extend light rail to serve more areas, provide neighborhood connections to arterial\express routes, provide more shade and benches and operate service seven days a week and provide late night or 24 hour service.

Observations – Non-Transit Users

- **General description of transit in the region** is that service is slow and the vehicles and support infrastructure are old. The region's transit system is significantly lacking compared to other major cities.
- **Do not currently use the region's transit system regularly** because buses are too slow, don't always feel safe around other passengers, information is not readily available or easy to understand, shade\water is not always available and the system lacks key direct routes.

- **Use transit in other cities** because it's less expensive than renting a car or using cab service, it's convenient, transit information is easy to find and understand, locations of transit stops\nodes are conveniently located in major activity and employment centers and service is accessible late at night or even 24 hours a day.
- **The ideal transit system would include** faster and more direct service to major activity centers and cross town locations, some services should be separated from auto traffic, existing freeway corridors should be used for light rail expansion, greater service area coverage, cost less than operating a car, and provide a comprehensive range of services to meet different trip demands including neighborhood connectors to local and express buses, light rail and commuter rail for people traveling from longer distances.

Willingness to Support Future Transit Improvements

At the end of each focus group, the members were asked to choose a future transit scenario that they believed the region should follow in the future. The scenarios included:

Scenario 1: A basic plan that builds on the current transit levels. This is a low-cost expansion plan that includes a limited number of new routes. There are also a limited number of extensions to existing routes to serve growing areas within the region. This plan keeps costs to the public down and expands service to new areas.

Scenario 2: An intermediate plan that includes the basic improvements from Scenario1. In addition, it gives options including faster bus service or additional rail service in the most heavily used areas. Travel within the most heavily used corridors will be improved. This plan would have moderate costs to the public and would better serve a small number of congested corridors with new transit choices.

Scenario 3: This plan includes improvements from Scenarios 1 and 2. In addition, more areas with busy and congested roadways would receive new options. This would include options such as faster bus service or additional rail service in more areas providing a more comprehensive transit system. Because there are more options in more areas, travel on transit throughout the region would be easier. This plan has the highest cost to the public and would serve nearly all congested corridors with new transit choices.

Table 1 identifies the scenario preference of each focus group.

Table 1: Scenario Preference

Group	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3
Transit User Group #1	0	0	10*
Transit User Group #2	0	5	5
Non-Transit User Group #1	0	3	7
Non-Transit User Group #2	0	5	5
Total	0	13	23

** Voting for Transit User Group #1 occurred in an open manner. The members of the other focus groups voted individually before seeing what scenario others selected.*

A brief discussion was facilitated after the voting exercise to better understand what motivated individuals to select a scenario. All focus group members, regardless of transit use status, felt that the region's transit system needs to be enhanced. Many of the individuals chose Scenario 3 because they felt an aggressive plan was necessary and is where the region should already be at today considering the region's size relative to other cities. Likewise, the individuals that selected Scenario 2 felt that the region was behind other major cities, but felt that the region should either take a more gradual approach to developing additional transit infrastructure or didn't have complete confidence in the use of a large sum of money that would likely be required to implement scenario 3. Furthermore, during the scenario discussion, focus group members frequently justified their selection by the economic benefits that additional transit service would generate for the region. These benefits included access to new or better jobs, ability to work overtime and generate additional family income and decreased individual/family transportation costs which could be used to generate additional local sales of goods and service.

The results of the focus groups will be used for several elements of the RTFS planning process including the development of the regional telephone survey and the identification of consumer based transit performance standards and indicators to be used for reviewing and prioritizing potential transit operating and capital elements.