

CAT System Improvement Plan Update #2

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Project Objectives

Initial Objectives

- A. Analyze other bus systems
- B. Analyze proposed CAT changes
- C. Compare strengths of UTS and CAT

Feb 9 Meeting Objectives:

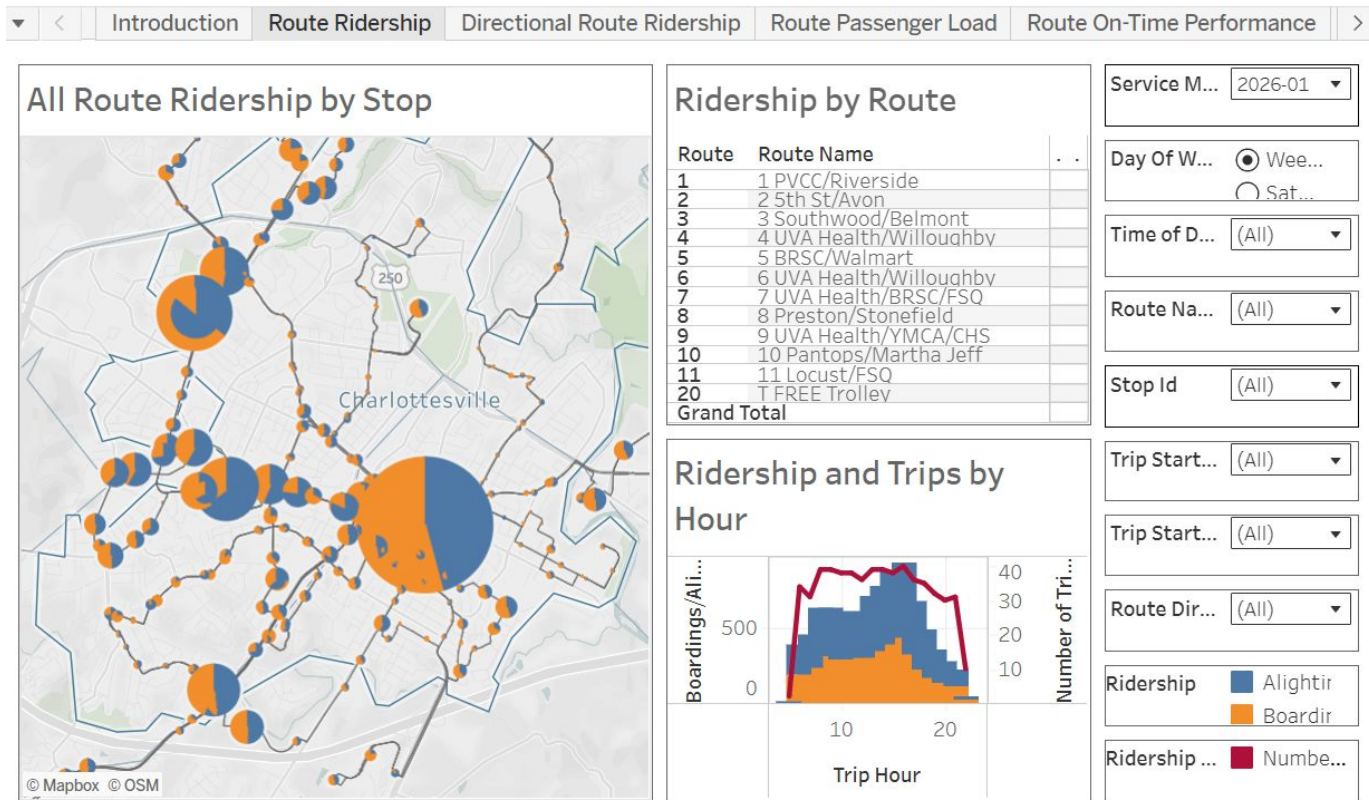
- D. Driver Hiring and Training
 - Are there innovations available for hiring, training, and retaining drivers?
 - What can be done to ensure the morale and overall satisfaction for the drivers?
- E. Analyze UTS and CAT
 - Can CAT operate an asymmetrical schedule to bring more frequency to higher traffic routes?
 - To stop buses from arriving early or off schedule, does CAT utilize software such as the anti-bunching software that UTS uses?



Progress Since Last Update

- Conducted 2 interviews:
 - Matthew Ray (CAT Union Representative)
 - Ben Chambers (Transportation Planning Manager) & Zoe Macomber (City Transit Planner)
- Reviewed resources:
 - CAT Service Performance Dashboard
 - Fixed Route Schedule Book

CAT Service Performance Dashboard



Interview Recap:

Matthew Ray
(CAT Union Representative)

- ~30% turnover among new hires (first year of service)
 - Currently a lot of retirement, so many openings in the near future in addition to the 2027 quota.
 - It can take roughly ~6 years to reach the top wage (around ~\$32/hr), and unattractive shifts can compound retention issues early on.
- Wage competitiveness is a factor for new driver retention.
 - Albemarle County Public Schools pays significantly higher, especially for people who already hold a CDL and have extensive experience - starting salaries \$30/hr or more.
- Starting pay is lower than competitive jobs (<\$24/hour).
 - Union is open to increasing starting pay, which would have cascading effects for all the other wage brackets.
 - Union is open to increasing pay for late routes.
 - Wage increases would take time to implement.

Interview Recap:

Matthew Ray
(CAT Union Representative)

- CAT is financially limited for hiring new employees.
 - Supervisors are overwhelmed. Acting as dispatchers makes it difficult to manage their team of drivers.
 - Hiring dispatcher(s) would likely increase adherence to route schedule.
- There is a generational disconnect for technology to access route schedules.
 - ~55% passengers are older folks that don't utilize the electronic bus schedule software (SPOT).
 - Paper guides are coming back so that older folks don't have to rely on app.
- Currently drivers have to maintain two separate physicals to drive for CAT and the school system.
 - Dept. of Transportation and Dept. of Edu.
 - DOT physical covers everything DOE covers
 - Not just inconvenient, costs time and money.

Interview Recap:

Ben Chambers

(Transportation Planning Manager)

Zoe Macomber

(City Transit Planner)

- A common public customer complaint is that they don't know where the time stops are.
 - Need a better way of communicating this with the public.
 - To know where the time stops are riders need to either go through the scheduling book or dig through their website.
- Some barriers to hiring new drivers:
 - No training to support them.
 - Running out of buses after the first half of new hires.
 - Currently working on a plan for a new fuel type for their busses.
- Reliability is a known problem:
 - CAT reports roughly ~60% on-time performance, but staff flagged that how "on-time" is calculated and which system supplies the data may affect accuracy (arrival vs departure; GIS vs passenger-counting sources).

Short-Term Recommendations

- The bus tracking interface should be made more intuitive and accessible.
 - A large portion of riders that rely on the CAT system are older and less adept with technology.
 - One potential improvement would be to place unique QR codes at each bus stop that, when scanned, direct users to a simplified web page or app page displaying only the estimated time of arrival for buses serving that specific stop.
 - Alternatively, the city could install tablet-style digital displays at bus stops that provide real-time tracking and clearly show “minutes until arrival” for each approaching bus line.

Short-Term Recommendations

- Hire more than just drivers.
 - CAT must hire people to be supervisors and dispatchers to ensure that the bottleneck is not with the supervisors being overworked.
 - This could help solve the running-early problem (in addition to anti-bunching software).
- Run a van or another vehicle on low demand routes at their lowest ridership times.
 - Use the extra CDL driver on a high demand route - probably have to pay less for non CDL drivers, and easier to train.
- Figure out who the right person is to talk to to remove the double physical requirement for DOT/DOE drivers.

Long-Term Recommendations

- Regional Coordination
 - Assess benefits of a regional authority for staffing and resource sharing
- Operational
 - Need dedicated dispatchers (starts the shift towards being a transit authority)
 - Improve time-point communication
 - Expand training capacity
- Labor
 - Increase starting wages or compress wage progression
- Technology
 - Improve GPS accuracy and data systems
 - Explore anti-bunching or real-time management tools
- Service Planning
 - Prioritize high-ridership routes (e.g., Route 7)
 - Evaluate feasibility of 15-minute frequency expansion

Resources Used and Relevance to Recommendations

Ben Chambers & Zoe Macomber (City Transit)

- Primary source for hiring bottlenecks, bus fleet transition, and on-time data concerns. Directly supports hiring infrastructure and public communication.

Matthew Ray (CAT Union Representative)

- Primary source for wage competitiveness, turnover rates, supervisor overload, and dual physical requirement. Informs all short-term labor recommendations.

Next Steps

Acting on Short-Term Recommendations

- Create detailed proposal for scheduling access alternative to SPOT that is low-cost and low-maintenance. (Amith)
- Data analysis on CAT ridership - can they reduce some bus lines to 15 person vans (CDL starts at 16 people) or minivans? (Jacob)
- Figure out impact of hiring one supervisor/dispatcher versus hiring one extra bus driver. Is there an unseen bottleneck? (Fatima)
- Identify point of contact or process for getting DOE physical waiver for drivers who have an active DOT physical. (Isidore)
- Identify root cause of buses running early -- Would dispatchers totally solve this issue? Is there a place for a “software dispatcher” that tells buses when to wait at stops to stay on schedule? (Hannah)

Questions



- Drivers are currently asked to maintain two separate physicals to drive for both CAT and the school system (Dept of Transportation and Dept of Education. **Would it be possible to work with the school system to grant DOE capability if a DOT physical is submitted?** This would increase driver availability.
- **What is the city's position on forming a regional transit authority?**
- **How will CAT measure improvement in on-time performance?**
- **What is the timeline for hiring dispatchers or restructuring supervisor roles?**
- **How much budget flexibility exists for wage increases?**