

Greenville Intermodal Transportation Center Feasibility Study

Executive Summary

The Greenville Intermodal Transportation Center Feasibility Study was established to determine the needs for, and feasibility of, a transportation center in Greenville. This would be a central point for transportation within the city, offering easy access to services and making connections under one roof. The center could potentially serve buses, taxis, limousines, package express, private car parking, bicycles and pedestrians, as well as possible future rail service. Such a center was a recommendation from the 2003 Regional Transit Feasibility Study.



A review of existing transportation centers confirmed that Greenville’s reasons for considering a center are in line with those of many other cities which have built them – particularly the desire to improve service quality for transit riders, to make it easier to transfer between services, and to contribute to downtown revitalization. These other centers have generally been successful, and specific lessons for Greenville are drawn out in the report.

Transportation operators were interviewed to establish whether they would be interested in using a center in Greenville, and their requirements for its specification. Citizens’ and civic stakeholders’ views and aspirations were also sought. There was strong support for a transportation center, particularly in view of the city’s continuing growth, and there was a broad consensus that it should be in downtown or the tobacco district.

Guidelines were therefore drawn up for what services would use the center, and what facilities the center would contain. The study also took into account the possibility of passenger rail service returning to Greenville in the future. Ideally the station would be located at the transportation center, although this may not be possible.

Which Transportation Services Would Use the Center?



Greenville Area Transit (GREAT) would definitely use the center as its downtown hub for transfers. GREAT wants to give its riders a higher level of amenities – including a comfortable waiting area and restrooms – and to provide better facilities for drivers. The center would also become the base for GREAT’s management.

Trailways (part of the Greyhound system) would definitely use the center as its Greenville depot, instead of the existing depot which is no longer attractive to riders. Trailways has been involved in transportation centers in other cities, and has found that they work well.



ECU Student Transit Authority (ECUSTA) would use the center, so that staff, students and visitors would be able to connect to campus from other services. It would be especially useful for people commuting to campus who are not served by ECUSTA, and for students using Trailways to travel between ECU and home.

Pitt Area Transit System (PATS), which provides transit in Pitt County, would be able to drop people at the center or collect them from there – for example, to connect with a GREAT or Trailways bus. This would not affect people who are going to other destinations as clients of human service agencies – their trips would still be direct. In the future, if enhanced Rural General Public (RGP) service is provided, the center could also become a hub for that service. Other van or shuttle services could also use the center (such as vans from other Counties, or a potential shuttle to the airport).



A taxi stand would also be provided, with space for one or more taxi company offices. Ideally a car rental firm would also be attracted to the center. Finally, if the chosen site is on a railroad, space would be reserved for it to become a station as well in future.

What Would the Center Contain?

The main building would include a waiting area for riders, with room to expand as demand grows; a ticket/information desk; a Trailways ticket/baggage desk, baggage room and office; restrooms; vending machines; a security office (which could be used by security staff or as a police substation); space for a taxi office, shuttle/limousine office and a car rental office; management offices for GREAT, and a break room and restroom for bus drivers.



The center would have two bays for Trailways buses and at least seven (ideally twelve) bays for GREAT and ECU buses. The extra bays would allow for future service expansion, and could be added later. There would also be parking spaces, and a drop-off zone, a taxi stand, and bike racks and lockers.

There would also be space in the building for other facilities aimed at riders. The amount would depend on the site layout, budget and likelihood of attracting tenants. For planning purposes, space has been assumed for a café, a news-stand, a ‘bike station’ (where people could leave their bikes to be serviced) and another useful shop, such as a florist or barber.

Ideally, there would be space to be leased out for other activities, such as offices or shops. Some existing transportation centers include a bank branch or a child-care center. Alternatively, there could be community facilities such as a meeting room. Again, this would depend on the location, site layout, budget and likelihood of attracting tenants, so this space has not been specified in detail at this stage. The goal is to have as much activity as possible in and around the center, to enhance security and the viability of any retail services.



There is a consensus among stakeholders that the center should be a high-quality public building. Architecturally, it should reflect the city’s aspirations and design standards. The Sheppard Memorial Library Extension and the new City Hall are examples of this level of quality. Inside, it should be comfortable and attractive. Security and upkeep will also be important.

Overall, the functions listed above could require an ultimate building size of up to about 14,000 square feet, or 16,000 square feet if space is provided for future rail service. This includes allowances for ridership growth and for the other facilities aimed at riders, but these need not all be built initially. Any space to be leased out for other activities would be in addition to this (perhaps on a second level).

The entire site might need to be between two and five acres, depending on whether provision is made for rail and whether parking is satisfied on-site or in other parking facilities nearby. The precise layout of the center will depend on the size and shape of the chosen site, and on whether space is reserved for a future rail station.

How the Center's Feasibility was Assessed

The study evaluated the feasibility of a center for Greenville, based on four important questions:

- Would the center support the city and regional travel needs?
- Would the center be useful to stakeholders?
- Would the center have public support?
- Would the center be cost-effective?

Would the Center Support the City and Regional Travel Needs?

A Transportation Center located in or near downtown would fit in well with Greenville's travel needs, both now and in the future. The main reasons are:

- Downtown is the hub of not only the city, but the whole region, and there are plans to revitalize and strengthen the downtown area.
- Having the ECU campus nearby makes downtown particularly important.
- The center would improve connections with long-distance services.
- The center would improve access to ECU, which is a major destination for citizens and visitors.
- Many GREAT riders would pass through downtown anyway – for example, traveling from one side of the Tar River to another.
- The center would directly benefit the estimated 300 daily GREAT transfers downtown, plus other riders who may need to use the facilities before continuing their trip, and also 40 Trailways riders to/from Greenville each day.
- The center could be a springboard for other transit improvements.
- Finally, the center could improve the viability of any future passenger rail proposal.

However, the center would not solve all of the transportation needs:

- It would not directly serve the medical district, which is an important destination. As GREAT expands in the future, it is intended to provide suburban routes that run directly to/from the medical district without going through downtown. A future possibility is to have an express shuttle between the center and the Medical District.

- The center does not specifically address the need for more bus routes, running more often. However, it could provide greater impetus for these improvements.

Overall, the study concluded that the center does fit with people’s travel needs, although it will be most effective as part of a wider package of improvements.

Would the Center be Useful to Stakeholders?

The transportation operators were positive about the center. GREAT and Trailways would definitely make it their downtown base. ECUSTA and PATS would also connect to the center, and taxi firms were interested in using the facility.

The other civic stakeholders were also generally positive. Representatives of Pitt County, the Public Transportation and Parking Commission, the Redevelopment Commission, Pitt County Memorial Hospital, and ECU staff and students all thought the center was a good idea. Their reasons included the benefits to riders, the potential boost to revitalization efforts, and the need to provide Greenville’s community with better options for getting around. Many stakeholders felt that it was the sort of facility that a city like Greenville needed, particularly as it grows and needs to tackle congestion and mobility issues.

Some of the County’s social service agencies said that their main problem was the limited public transportation available to the general public outside the City, and that the center would not directly address this issue. But other stakeholders suggested that the center would give impetus to improving county-wide service levels, and that when this happens the center will become a useful hub for the whole County as well as for the City. In addition, the center would facilitate transfers for people traveling to medical and other services.

Would the Center have Public Support?

Two public meetings were held as part of this study. At the first meeting, citizens were told about the study, were shown some examples of centers in other cities, and were asked for feedback on whether a center would be useful. The second, toward the end of the process, reported back to citizens and sought further feedback on the emerging concept.



Most citizens supported the idea of a transportation center. They felt it would help people get around Greenville, particularly as the city grows. Some citizens supported the center on condition that it did not divert funds from other improvements to transportation services. Very few people at the meetings were against the idea.

Would the Center be Cost-Effective and Fundable?

Many factors will affect the construction cost – whether the City needs to buy land, the cost of site clearance and clean-up, and the amount of space that is built for other functions as part of the center. These will not be known until a specific site is chosen and the design is finalized. The total cost is estimated to be between \$6 million and \$8 million, depending on these factors. This is broadly in line with similar centers elsewhere. The estimate includes the space for future transit growth and ancillary functions; these could be omitted to reduce the cost, but land should be reserved to add them later as necessary. The cost of any space to be leased out for other activities would be in addition to this.

There would also be an ongoing operational cost. This is mostly staffing – a building manager, ticket/information staff and security staff. There would also be maintenance and utility costs. Again, it depends on the final design, but it could be up to \$450,000 per year. This is relatively expensive, but it reflects stakeholders’ preference for a well-kept, well-staffed center.

Construction of a transportation center is typically funded 80% from Federal grants, 10% from State funds and 10% locally. The City has already been allocated enough Federal funds to cover design work, and there is a good likelihood of receiving Federal funds for construction as well. The State works to secure Federal funds and would be able to provide its own share. The local share could come from city reserves, from the bonds recently authorized by voters, or by contributing land or other resources instead of cash.

Each service provider could pay a share of the ongoing operational cost, although this would need to be negotiated. Leasing income (from a cafe or other facilities) could cover some of the costs, although experience suggests this should not be relied upon to make the financial case.

Transportation centers are not usually expected to be ‘profitable’ or even to break even. The benefits are mostly non-financial – to riders, government, citizens and other stakeholders – as listed in Table ES-2, on the next page. The study concluded that the benefits do justify the costs.

Conclusion: the Center is Feasible

The study concluded that a transportation center is indeed feasible for Greenville, and recommends that the City moves forward with the idea. Table ES-1 summarizes the reasons for building the center.

Table ES-1: Summary of Reasons to Build a Transportation Center

Why build a transportation center?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GREAT, Trailways and ECUSTA would all use the center and all see benefits for their riders • Trailways needs a new depot anyway • Existing GREAT and Trailways riders need better transfer conditions and will benefit directly • Improves access to/from ECU • Improves trips to downtown for transit riders • Could improve access to/from the medical district, in conjunction with shuttle and Tenth Street Connector • Could provide more options for PATS riders, while potentially reducing PATS costs • Improves image and visibility of transit • Springboard for service enhancements as city and region grow • Potential options to locate alongside rail line • Potential to assist downtown revitalization • Represents forward-planning to meet the challenges of City growth • Consistent with City and County planning policies and objectives
Why not?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity cost of site • Opportunity cost of money

Stakeholder	GREAT	Trailways	PATS	Hospital	ECU Community	Taxi operators	NCDOT Rail	Community and Government	Riders
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved passenger service and amenities – especially as a comfortable transfer facility Convenient Information / ticketing point for public Much-needed amenities for drivers Easy transfers between modes for riders Operational synergies (e.g., shared ticket sales) Opportunity to work more closely with ECU Springboard for increasing service levels & ridership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved passenger environment Potential increase in ridership Avoids major maintenance costs on existing building Supports policy of downtown locations Supports preference for leasing space in intermodal centers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good place to drop/collect riders downtown Easy, safe transfers to/from other modes for riders Potential for safe layover area Potential for van-to-van/bus transfers, for efficiency Safe transfers to/from GREAT for any future RGP service Springboard for any future fixed-routes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved service for patients and staff who use transit Springboard for possible future Hospital-Downtown shuttle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved student access to Trailways (for start and end of semester, weekend trips) Improved access to campus for students on GREAT routes – particularly remote apartments Potential synergies with ECU downtown facilities Potential synergies with Main Campus – Medical School axis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved visibility and image of taxis Stand is convenient for visitors arriving Office space if required Stand serves as layover area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves Trailways connection to Amtrak (even without rail at the center) Springboard for future Greenville rail service (if location supports rail) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved visibility and image of transit Improved quality of service Springboard for improving transit service levels Springboard for managing city growth more sustainably Assisting downtown revitalization Potential for synergies with other developments Improves case for rail service (if location supports rail) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Directly benefits ~300 existing GREAT trips daily Directly benefits ~40 Trailways riders daily Improved links to long-distance travel High-quality, safe place to wait/transfer Information point Convenience of kiosks while waiting or on arrival
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial cost Operating cost 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential share of operating costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential share of operating costs if shuttle is hospital-run 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential operating fee for bus slip(s) used by ECUSTA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost of office space Potential fee for using stand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Location choice at this stage may restrict rail options (but options are limited anyway) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial cost Operating cost 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must accommodate growth in system and ridership Center must be seen as part of overall step-change in service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operational cost will depend on negotiations, but will likely be similar to existing cost 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some agency customers see severe RGP needs as critical issue Potential depends on agencies' and PATS' future service strategy 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing student use of GREAT also involves other issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possible loss of business (due to easier transit) is balanced by improved visibility and image of taxis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needs care not to compromise city transit function to serve rail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Downtown revitalization effects must be seen as part of wider efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some see improving service levels as a higher priority

Table ES-2: Summary of Costs and Benefits for Stakeholders and the Community

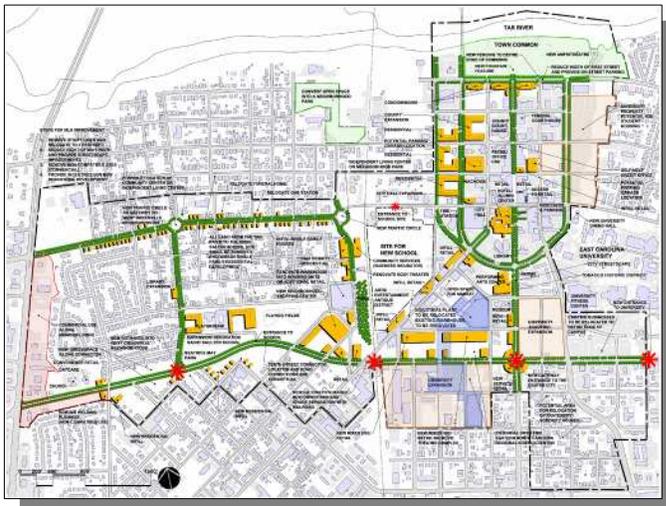
Site Selection Criteria

Because the next step would be to select a site, the study also developed some criteria to be used in a future site selection study. These are listed in Table ES-3, on the next page.

It will probably not be possible to find a site that is ideal on each of the criteria. Stakeholders will need to decide which of the possible sites will be the best overall. In particular, the best site for bus riders (which will likely mean being as close as possible to downtown and ECU) may not be alongside a railroad line. Allowing for a future rail station on site is less important than finding the best site for existing bus services and riders. This is because the bus services are definite and will be the center's core role. Any future train service would probably only run once or twice a day. If necessary, a dedicated shuttle could run between the Center and the station to connect with train arrivals and departures.



The ideal site would be close to Downtown, ECU and the Tobacco District. It would also be good to have a site on a railroad line, to allow for future passenger trains, but this may conflict with the other requirements.



The ideal site would support the City's revitalization efforts, as seen in this diagram from the Center City - West Greenville Revitalization Plan.

Another issue is how much the center could do to help revitalize downtown and the tobacco district. The Center alone, on an isolated site, would not be a strong magnet for revitalization. Instead, the Center is seen as part of a range of projects that will collectively lead the revitalization efforts. The ideal site would therefore be close to existing and near-term centers of activity (for example, the proposed ECU alumni center), helping to gradually extend the areas of vitality. Other aspects include the potential for adaptive re-use of historic buildings and for streetscape improvements.

Table ES-3: Summary of Site Selection Criteria

<p>Layout and site impacts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Big enough to accommodate the required functions, including an allowance for future expansion• Will have a safe, convenient site layout• Buses can get to the site easily• Acceptable impacts on traffic flow and safety in the surrounding streets (including for pedestrians and cyclists)
<p>Impacts on transportation operators and users</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Convenient for GREAT, Trailways and ECUSTA routes• Convenient for riders, taxi users, etc.• Convenient access on foot and by bicycle• Allows for future rail service (see text)• Assists travel to/from the Medical District• People will feel safe there• Improves the overall visibility and image of public transportation
<p>Location and city planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Close to downtown• Close to ECU main campus and future ECU expansion• Helps downtown / tobacco district revitalization efforts• Compatible with neighboring land uses• Maintains or improves the streetscape and urban design
<p>Finance and implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low purchase, clearance and remediation costs• Acceptable impact on environmental, community or historical resources• Potential for revenue from leased space, or for joint development• No 'roadblock' issues that would hold up the project

The study was carried out by transportation planners from Martin/Alexiou/Bryson, PLLC, on behalf of the City of Greenville and other local partners.



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