

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Introduction

BACKGROUND

In 2014, Berks County Regional Transit Authority (BARTA) and Red Rose Transit Authority (RRTA) consolidated their administrative, management, and planning functions into a single entity called South Central Transit Authority (SCTA). SCTA oversees the operations of BARTA and RRRTA, which still operate as separate transit systems serving Berks County and Lancaster County, PA, respectively.

Together as SCTA, the two systems cover a service area of 1,848 square miles with a population of 949,401 residents. This population is concentrated in each county's largest city — Lancaster, in Lancaster County, and Reading, in Berks County. BARTA and RRRTA are organized as radial hub-and-spoke networks connecting Lancaster and Reading with less populous outlying areas and neighboring towns. BARTA and RRRTA each also operate demand-response paratransit services that provide shared rides to populations who can't access fixed-route service.

SCTA completed its last Transit Development Plan (TDP) in 2018, its first TDP conducted since BARTA and RRRTA merged. The 2018 TDP sought to identify service enhancements, improve the overall efficiency of the system, and attract more riders. The COVID-19 pandemic forced SCTA to refocus its priorities; since the end of the pandemic SCTA faces new dynamics, such as a tight labor market and changing commuting patterns.

PLAN OVERVIEW

This TDP Update provides an opportunity to take a fresh look at the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities facing BARTA and RRRTA. Recommendations emerged from a process that included detailed analyses of each BARTA and RRRTA route, as well as a comprehensive assessment of the overall market for transit service in the region. In addition, the TDP Update included several opportunities for public and stakeholder involvement at key points throughout the study.

The recommended networks for both systems aim to simplify service by designing each route to be bi-directional to the greatest extent possible. Bi-directional service allows passengers to travel more directly from their homes to key activity centers, and then back again along the same alignment (or a similar alignment, in the case of one-way street pairs), as opposed to riding out-of-direction along one-way loops.

The recommended networks also concentrate fixed-route services where they can be most effective (i.e., areas with higher density and transit-supportive land use). This means the elimination of a few lower performing route segments in both systems. On-demand microtransit services are recommended in the long-term, pending available funding, to supplement BARTA and RRRTA's fixed-route networks. These microtransit services can more effectively serve lower-density, automobile-oriented areas than fixed-route transit.

The recommendations presented in this document are divided into three phases: a cost-neutral short-range phase, a mid-range phase that is not cost-constrained, and a long-range phase that is also not cost-constrained. However, this document will ultimately serve as a guide for SCTA as it looks to improve service in the future, the actual composition and timing of implementation may differ based on available resources, community outreach, and political considerations.

ORGANIZATION

This document consists of 10 chapters that follow this introduction. Each corresponds to the major phases of the study:

- **Chapter 2 – Strategic Vision:** An overview of the TDP’s vision, goals, and objectives as well as guiding principles for service planning.
- **Chapter 3 – Inventory of Existing Services:** An overview of existing transit services in the study area, including current operating characteristics.
- **Chapter 4 – Budget and Funding:** A description of current fare policies and funding sources.
- **Chapter 5 – Fleet and Facilities:** A description of SCTA assets related to the provision of service including vehicles, bus waiting areas, and customer information.
- **Chapter 6 – Market Analysis:** An assessment of both the need and potential for transit service in the region based on density and demographic characteristics, as well as regional travel patterns.
- **Chapter 7 – Initial Public and Stakeholder Input:** A summary of public and stakeholder input, collected in meetings and surveys at the start of the study and used to inform the development of preliminary service scenarios.
- **Chapter 8 – Service Assessment:** A diagnostic assessment of the existing systems’ strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities, as identified through the combination of technical analyses and industry best practices.
- **Chapter 9 – Preliminary Service Scenarios and Stakeholder Reactions:** A review of the two preliminary service redesign scenarios and the feedback received from stakeholders in response to each scenario.
- **Chapter 10 – Final Recommendations:** A detailed set of recommendations presented route-by-route, including an assessment of the impacts of the recommendations.
- **Appendices:** A set of appendices providing details on Title VI, planning documents in the region, public outreach, and the market analysis.