

PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES FOR A COORDINATED BUS AND RAIL NETWORK ON THE EAST END OF LONG ISLAND, NY

The U.S. Department of Transportation's (U.S. DOT) Volpe National Transportation Systems Center (the Volpe Center) will work with the five towns that comprise the East End of Long Island and its transportation agencies and citizens in planning for a coordinated bus and rail network to achieve improved mobility and access for residents and visitors. The Volpe Center is part of DOT's Research and Innovative Technology Administration and is an innovative, federal, fee-for service organization. Our mission is to improve the Nation's transportation system. Our work is performed primarily for DOT, as well as other federal agencies and state, local, and international entities.

Below is a description of the work that will be performed under an agreement between the Volpe Center and the Town of Southampton, and based on the requirements of a grant provided by the New York State Department of State. While the Town of Southampton is serving as the lead for grant administration, all five towns are considered working partners in the development of the final recommendations and vision for a coordinated transportation network for the East End of Long Island. Additionally, local transportation planning and operating agencies, local citizen and stakeholder groups, interested Federal and State agencies, and others will be invited to join in providing for a system that reflects local needs and values.

The work described in this synopsis will also add to a national understanding of:

- The planning and implementation of alternative systems for unique transportation environments—ones that are defined by both urban characteristics of high demand for system access but also rural characteristics of scenic by-ways and historic sites that drives intermittent tourist demand based on limited transportation resources. This is a problem increasingly faced by many other localities around the nation.
- New and innovative institutional arrangements that might be developed among public agencies and between the public and private sectors in order to improve mobility, access, and customer satisfaction.

SYNOPSIS OF WORK

In early 2004, citizens from the five towns that comprise the east end of Long Island — Southold, Riverhead, Shelter Island, Southampton, and East Hampton — joined together to form a coalition called Five Town Rural Transit, Inc. (5TRT) to address local transportation issues. 5TRT has identified how existing transportation services and infrastructure are not aligned with the local demand. This misalignment in transportation services has been an issue for over a decade; the results of one previous and two recent local projects have verified the problems:

- A report completed over ten years ago noted the state of congestion, lack of transit services to meet demand, uncoordinated schedules, and the impacts of population growth and the prevalence of “second home ownership.”
- The Sustainable East End Development Strategies (SEEDS) initiative more recently confirmed these older findings and provided more detailed documentation on the state of local transportation needs in the context of land use policies for the east end. The preliminary findings from SEEDS were the impetus for forming 5TRT, a not-for-profit citizen advocacy group that could take action.
- A recent market research survey of the local population looked at the residents’ understanding of transportation services, improvements that could result from implementing a more coordinated network of rail and bus services, and interest and/or commitment in utilizing public transportation as a means of alleviating congestion on the east end of Long Island. The survey found “overwhelming” support for a redesigned public transportation system that better meets local needs.

Using the preliminary results of the SEEDS initiative, 5TRT proposed an initial conceptual design for an East End Shuttle system (referred to as “The Shuttle”). The Shuttle concept provides a coordinated approach to a rail and bus network for the East End of Long Island. Importantly, under the requirements of the New York State grant, The Shuttle concept will have the opportunity to be validated against other potential alternatives to ensure that the concept is the most appropriate with regard to local needs, existing service provisions, institutional and technical issues, and a host of other considerations that spell long term viability and implementation success. As a result, the Town of Southampton, New York, in cooperation with the four other towns on the East End (East Hampton, Shelter Island, Southold, and Riverhead), have requested that the Volpe Center undertake a set of planning and assessment activities that would provide them with:

- An evaluation of the existing system and the proposed changes associated with The Shuttle.
- A review of alternatives.
- A set of facilitated discussions with stakeholders to identify institutional issues.
- A proposal for a coordinated bus and rail network and a set of recommendations for the next steps in implementation.

The Volpe Center team, comprised of transportation planners, systems analysts, and facilitators, have identified a set of critical tasks that are required to deliver a final report that proposes a coordinated bus and rail network, along with recommendations for implementation. These tasks are:

1. Evaluate and validate the existing data and concepts (including The Shuttle concept)
2. Develop a Concept of Operations
3. Analyze Institutional Issues and Constraints
4. Identify Access and Intermodal Opportunities
5. Propose a Coordinated Public Transportation Network and identify an Operations and Management Structure
6. Analyze Financial Sustainability

The end result of the planning and assessment activities is a report with supporting data that will enable the East End Towns to:

- Understand the viability of the existing system and proposed concepts developed to date, and understand the comparative viability of alternatives.
- Establish a vision for a coordinated bus and rail network for the East End.
- Understand the commitment (financial, institutional, technical) necessary to implement the end result.
- Participate more fully in the regional transportation planning process with regard to their resulting vision.
- Enact purposeful outreach strategies with local and regional stakeholders.

The role of the Volpe Center is to provide an operational concept and supporting data so that the East End Towns, having established consensus amongst themselves:

- May have future productive interactions with future stakeholders, including citizens, local governments, local transportation planning and operating agencies, and State and Federal agencies.
- Are prepared to present their concept to local citizens and engage in a local referendum after the study is complete.
- Can carve out next steps in establishing a local coordinated bus and rail transportation network..