

Transit Development Plan

Tift County

Draft

Prepared by the South Georgia Regional Development Center

Tift County Transit Development Plan

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I. Executive Summary

Quality of life “refers to the level of comfort, enjoyment, and ability to pursue daily activitiesⁱ.” In assessing the quality of life for an individual, a group of individuals, or a community as a whole, the ability to pursue daily activities is of great importance. When this ability is hampered through lack of efficient and reliable transportation for an individual, that individual’s measure of quality of life is greatly reduced. When many people in the same community lack the ability to pursue daily activities, the quality of life for the entire community is decreased. In many rural communities across the country this is the case; the public simply cannot gain access to affordable and reliable means of transportation. Because of this, many rural residents are not able to live the highest quality of life they would wish to achieve.

In many rural communities there is a lack of access to reliable transportation. The United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) notes that “groups often considered transit dependents include the elderly, the young, low income individuals, and households without vehicles available.”ⁱⁱ According to the Community Transportation Association, “nearly 40 percent of the country’s transit dependent population...resides in rural communities.”ⁱⁱⁱ With only 20.8 percent of the country’s population living in rural areas^{iv}, and almost 40 percent of the transit dependent population living in the same regions, rural communities are abound with those in need of transportation.

Rural public transit services enable citizens to pursue their daily activities, affording them as high of quality of life as possible. Tift County is one of these rural communities and with the help of the Georgia Department of Transportation and federal funding through the Section 5311 grant program, the County is able to provide transit services to the entire community.

This plan provides a demographic and economic overview of Tift County and the surrounding region, an overview of the current public transportation system within the County, a set goals and objectives for Tift Lift over the next five years, and recommendations to help keep the system as efficient and effective as possible in the near future.

II. Overview of Section 5311

The Section 5311 Rural Transportation Program offers rural communities an opportunity to provide transit services which improve access to medical, commercial and activity centers. The program is administered by the Federal Transit Association (FTA) to provide assistance for rural public transportation by allocating funds to the states on a formula basis. These funds can be used for capital assistance, operating assistance planning, and program administration. The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) is the designated recipient of these funds for the State of Georgia and is responsible for administering the federal funding to local sub-recipients throughout the State. GDOT also provides a limited amount of state capital funding to rural transit systems that receive Section 5311 funds.

The State of Georgia has set several statewide goals for the Section 5311 program. These goals are the primary objectives produced by GDOT in order to guide rural transit systems and operators to running the most effective, efficient, safe, and accessible services possible. Each goal serves to cover a certain aspect of the transit system, from purpose to execution. The goals of the 5311 Program are as follows:

- **Basic mobility to serve all Georgians-** Public transportation services that serve all Georgians, especially those with the most critical needs for access and mobility while providing service to all populations without any trip purpose restrictions or eligibility requirements.
- **Program implementation-** Partnering with the FTA to administer Section 5311 funds while managing a program that provides timely management direction, guidance, and reimbursement to allow local entities to provide quality service.
- **Efficiency and effectiveness-** Maximizing ridership while recognizing significant differences in communities that will affect usage, including utilizing the appropriate type of service and the appropriate vehicles to best serve the population.
- **Safe, secure, and quality service-** Operating equipment that is safe and regularly inspected for quality and overall condition while running services operated by staff that meet the highest qualifications and that are trained proficiently in all necessary skills.
- **Accessible service-** Providing service that is accessible to all users, including those with disabilities, and using operators trained to proficiency in passenger assistance, lift use, restraints, and mobility devices.
- **Coordinated provision of transportation in rural areas-** Coordinated services at the State level through interagency coordination, and coordinated services at the local and regional levels where coordination will result in the most efficient, quality service that meets rider's needs.

Any rural transit system in Tift County should meet and/or exceed these goals in order to provide the best services possible. In addition to the goals GDOT has also established minimum

criteria that must be met by rural transit programs that are listed in the Rural Public Transit Service Policy. These include, but are not limited to:

- Services should not be duplicative of other transportation services available
- Vehicles should be utilized to reach a goal of 500 one-way passenger trips per vehicle per month **or** be operated 120 hours per month **or** should be operated at least 1000 vehicle miles per month
- Vehicles should be available for public transportation services on a daily basis
- Vehicle trips for charter, contract, or subscription service should fully recover allocated costs
- The system should aim to recover a minimum of 20 percent of its public transportation costs from fare box revenues generated through regular public transportation operations, with a minimum of 10 percent recovery required from fare boxes.

Section 5311 funds can be used for capital and operating costs, which are the two types of costs incurred for developing and continuing a rural transit system. Capital expenses under Section 5311 may include: vehicles, communication equipment, lifts, equipment installation costs, computer equipment and software, office equipment, and fare boxes. Local funding for capital acquisition must be at minimum 10 percent of the total costs.

Operational costs may include, but are not limited to, drive, mechanic, and dispatcher costs (including licenses, vehicle insurance, drug and alcohol testing, and uniforms), repair costs, and fuel. 10 percent of operating costs must be recovered from fare boxes and other local funds, while the remaining 90 percent is considered the net operating deficit. Federal funding may be provided for up to 50 percent of the net operating deficit, while the remaining 50 percent of the operating deficit must be covered by local funds.

According to the *Georgia Administrative Guide for Rural Public Transportation Programs* (January 2007- June 2008 funding cycle), the following types of service are appropriate for rural public transportation programs:

- **Demand-response or route deviation service-** Demand-response is a type of service where individual passengers can request door-to-door or curb-to-curb transportation from a specific location to another specific location at a certain time. Route deviation services operate along a public roadway on a fixed-route, but may deviate from the route occasionally to take a passenger to a destination or pick one up from an origin, after which they return to the regular route.
- **Contract and subscription service-** Subscription service is a type of demand-response service in which routes and schedules are pre-arranged to meet the travel needs of riders who sign up for the service in advance. Often these riders are clients of human service agencies, who contract with the transportation operator to provide the service

on behalf of the agency. This type of service may be provided by a Section 5311 program only to the extent that it does not violate FTA Charter Bus restrictions.

III. Demographic and Geographic Analysis

Regional Demographic Overview

To give a brief overview of overall population trends in the vicinity of Tift County, it is appropriate to take a look at demographic information for the South Georgia region as a whole. The South Georgia region, or the region within the jurisdiction of the South Georgia Regional Development Center (SGRDC), is a nine county region located in South-Central Georgia which is comprised of Ben Hill, Brooks, Cook, Echols, Irwin, Lanier, Lowndes, Tift, and Turner Counties. While these Counties are geographically similar in location and topography, population characteristics vary greatly.

The estimated total population of the South Georgia Region as of 2005 was approximately 220,315 residents, according to the U.S. Census Bureau’s community fact sheets. With a total land area of 3,037.9 sq. mi., the population density for the region as a whole is roughly 79 people per sq. mi. However, Lowndes County and Tift County, with population densities of 182.7 and 144.9 people/sq. mi. respectively, are home to a much higher percentage of the region’s population than any other counties. Ben Hill County has the next highest density of 69.4 people/sq. mi., but every other county in the region has a density less than 40 people/sq. mi., with Echols County having the lowest density of 9.3 people living per square mile. Table 1 below shows the total population numbers by County.

County	1990	2000	2005	2007*	2010	2015	2020	2025
Ben Hill	16,245	17,484	17,855	N/A	18,226	18,597	18,968	19,339
Brooks	15,398	16,450	16,749	N/A	17,048	17,346	17,645	17,944
Cook	13,456	15,771	16,341	N/A	16,912	17,482	18,052	18,622
Echols	2,334	3,754	4,118	N/A	4,483	4,847	5,211	5,575
Irwin	8,649	9,931	10,167	N/A	10,403	10,638	10,874	11,110
Lanier	5,531	7,241	7,638	N/A	8,035	8,431	8,828	9,225
Lowndes	75,981	92,115	98,151	100,243	104,187	110,222	116,258	122,294
Tift	34,998	38,407	39,793	41,156	41,180	42,566	43,952	45,338
Turner	8,703	9,504	9,503	N/A	9,501	9,500	9,498	9,497

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. *2005-2007 American Community Survey, DCA DataViews for Georgia: Population Projections

In the region as a whole, population continues to increase consistently, and because the land area of a region remains static, population densities will only continue to increase. Looking into the future, the total population of the South Georgia region as a whole in the year 2025 is expected to have grown by 22.9% to a total population of 258,899. Currently, Lowndes County holds a significant percentage of the regional population at 43.7%. Lowndes County’s total

population is expected to increase 32.8% from 2000 to 2025. Given this rate of growth, Lowndes County will have been responsible for 14% of the total increase in total population expected to occur in the South Georgia region by 2025. Tift County will also continue to evolve as a major contributor in the region. The total population of Tift County is expected to increase 18% from 38,407 residents in the year 2000, to 45,338 in the year 2025. Together, these two counties will continue to comprise over 60% of the total population for the South Georgia region with their combined populations reaching approximately 65% of the total population in 2025.

Tift County Analysis

Tift County is located in South Central Georgia approximately 180 miles south of Atlanta and 60 miles north of the Florida State line. The County comprises of 265.05 square miles of land, which encompass the City of Omega, the City of Tifton, and the City of Ty-Ty. The County seat is Tifton, which is located centrally in the county and accounts for a high percentage of the population and a very high percentage of economic activity for Tift County. The 2007 population estimate for Tift County from the American Community Survey is listed as 41,156 people. According to other census estimates for 2007, the population for the City of Omega was 1,383; the City of Tifton was estimated at 16,650; and the City of Ty-Ty had a population of 775, while the remaining population of over 22,000 live in unincorporated areas of the County.

Tift County Location Map



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Population

Table 2 shows population numbers for Tift County, the South Georgia Regional Development Center's region, and the State of Georgia from 1960 to 2000. This table shows that the population in Tift County has increased historically by over 3,400 people each decade, with a slightly smaller population increase of 2,773 expected between the year 2000 and 2010. Table 3 puts the information into perspective by showing the percent change of population for four separate decades. From 1990 to 2000, Tift County gained a significant number of residents, helping the county increase in population by 8.87 percent.

Table 2: Population Change					
	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Tift Co.	23,487	27,288	32,862	34,998	38,407
RDC	150,165	157,500	186,200	195,717	227,421
State	3,943,116	4,611,479	5,484,527	6,522,645	8,229,820
Source: U.S. Census Bureau					

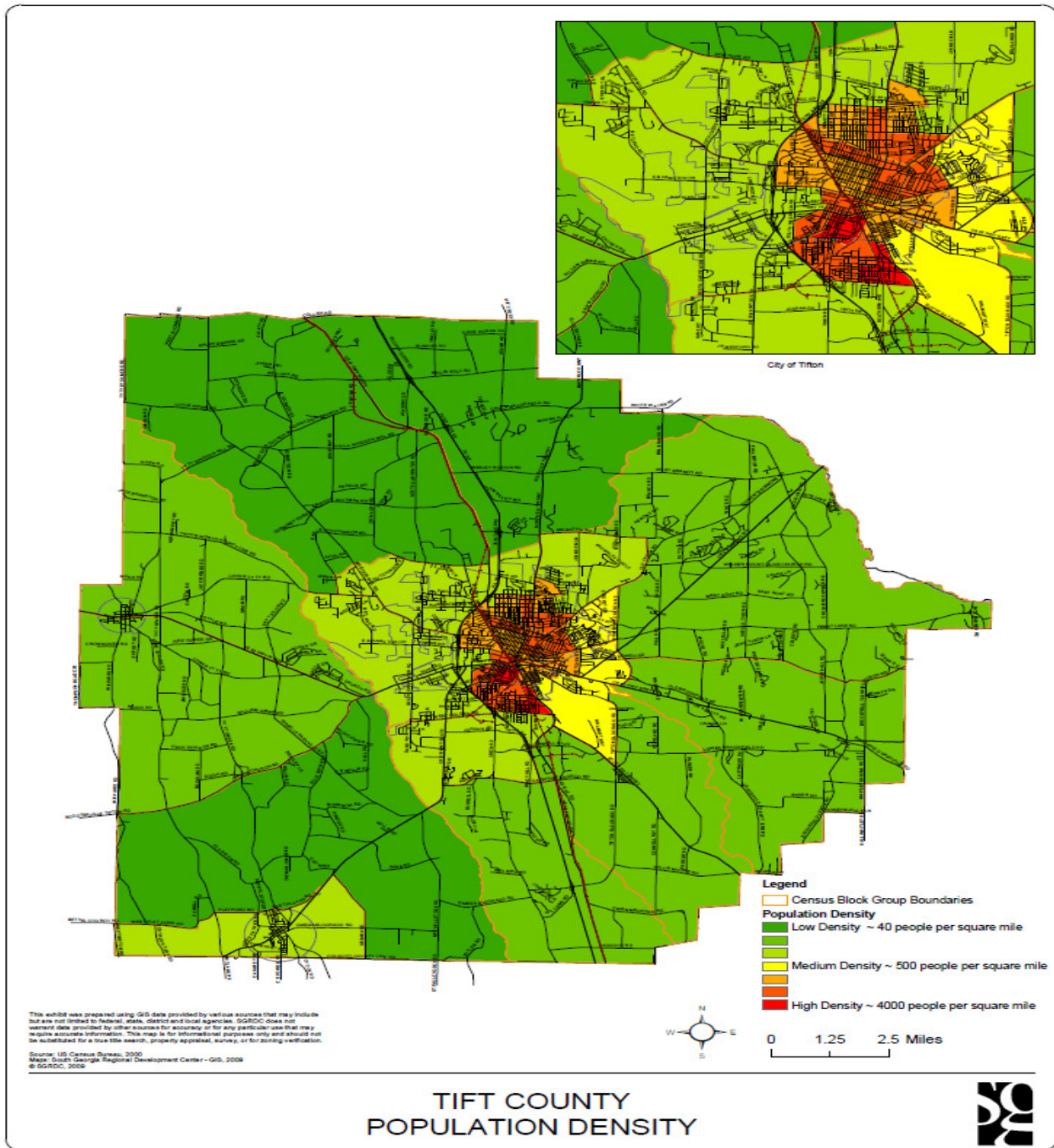
Table 3: Population Change Numbers and Percentages								
	1960 - 1970		1970 - 1980		1980 - 1990		1990 - 2000	
Tift Co.	3801	13.9%	5,574	16.96%	2136	6.1%	3,409	8.9%
RDC	7,335	4.9%	28,700	18.2%	9,248	5.0%	31,704	16.2%
State	668,363	17.0%	873,048	18.9%	1,038,118	18.9%	1,707,175	26.2%
Source: U.S. Census Bureau								

Table 4: Future Population Estimates						
	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030
Tift Co.	39,793	41,180	42,566	43,952	45,338	46,725
Source: GA DCA DataViews for Georgia						

Table 4 shows population projections for Tift County produced by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs^v. This projection suggests that the population in Tift County will continue to grow steadily through 2030, increasing by 14.8 percent between 2005 and 2030.

Because the land area of Tift County will remain the same, increased population numbers mean increased population density for the area. Population statistics show that Tift County already has a very high population density in relation to other counties in the region. With a population density of 144.9 people per sq. mi., Lowndes County is the only county in the region with a

higher population density. If the DCA's predictions for future population hold true, Tift County should have a density of 176.3 people per sq. mi. by 2030, an increase of 18%.



Demographics

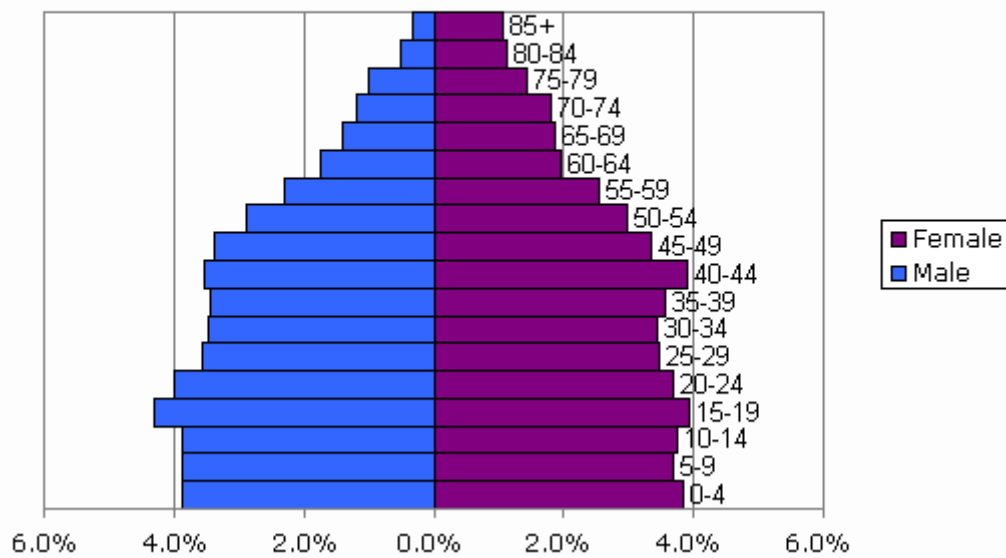
When discussing the necessity or functionality of a transit system in a rural community it is important to determine the needs of the community based on demographic characteristics such as age and economic background. These factors can predict need and usage characteristics based on known usage and ridership statistics from other rural areas. It is also important to determine these characteristics for each community within the county to determine target areas with the most need for public transit opportunities.

Age

Table 5 below indicates age group characteristics for Tift County as a whole, while tables 6, 7, and 8 break down the same information for the individual municipalities within Tift County. According to a publication by the American Public Transit Association in 1992, in communities with populations of less than 50,000, 18 percent of riders are 65 or older^{vi}. If this number is still close to the same in 2009, since 12.5 percent of Americans are over the age of 65, this means that citizens over the age of 65 would account for a much larger share of public transportation ridership than they account for the total population. The paper goes on to state that “transit performs an indispensable service for their medical, shopping, recreational and other non-work travel needs; it is not uncommon to find that many seniors in rural areas rely exclusively on public transit for transportation.” The age group that will most likely benefit the most from a transit system will not only include citizens over age 65, but most likely all citizens over the age of 54.

Figure 1

Age Distribution, 2000



Source: CensusScope.org

Figure 1 shows a population pyramid for Tift County as of the year 2000. If the pyramid were heavy near the top, it would show a negative rate of growth, with the population steadily aging. A bottom heavy population pyramid would suggest very high birth rates and falling or stable death rates. This diagram shows a healthy population growth structure for Tift County, with steady and sustained growth of both the male and female populations.

Table 5: Tift County Population by Age							
Category	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030
0 – 4	2,961	3,006	3,051	3,096	3,141	3,186	3,231
5 – 13	5,828	6,009	6,190	6,370	6,551	6,732	6,913
14 – 17	1,670	1,463	1,257	1,050	843	636	430
18 – 20	2,254	2,161	2,067	1,974	1,880	1,787	1,693
21 – 24	2,187	2,143	2,099	2,055	2,011	1,967	1,923
25 – 34	5,346	5,430	5,515	5,599	5,683	5,767	5,852
35 – 44	5,546	6,046	6,546	7,046	7,546	8,046	8,546
45 – 54	4,840	5,319	5,799	6,278	6,757	7,236	7,716
55 – 64	3,277	3,417	3,557	3,696	3,836	3,976	4,116
65 +	4,498	4,800	5,101	5,403	5,704	6,006	6,307
Source: Georgia Dept. of Community Affairs							

In 2005, 8,217 residents of Tift County, or 20.6 percent of total residents, were 55 years or older. By 2010, this number is expected to increase by 5.36 percent to 8,658, and by the year 2030 the number of citizens in Tift County over the age of 55 will reach 10,423, an overall increase of over 21 percent. This shows that the number of residents in the age category most likely to benefit from a transit system in Tift County will only continue to increase steadily over the next 20 years.

Economic Characteristics

Age	Population	In Labor Force	Employed
16-19	2489	61.7%	43.5%
20-24	3384	79.8%	62%
25-44	10952	85%	80.1%
45-54	5326	72%	70.1%
55-64	4082	55.7%	55.7%
65+	4834	32.5%	27.8%
	31067	65.8%	59.7%
Source: 2005-2007 ACS, U.S. Census Bureau			

Table 7 shows the total labor force, or the total number of citizens that are employed or actively searching for employment and the percentage of those in the labor force that are employed by age group. This shows that the largest portion of the population in Tift County either working or searching for work is in the 25-44 year old range. Of the 31,607 residents of Tift County over the age of 16, 65.8%, or 20,444, were considered part of the labor force as of 2007. Of these residents, 18,562 were actually employed, leaving Tift County with a 6.1% unemployment rate. The most recent statistics for unemployment from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, however, show Tift County having an unemployment rate of 11.5% as of April, 2009.

Household Income		
	Total (\$)	%
Less than \$10,000	2038	15.2
\$10,000 to \$14,999	1158	8.7
\$15,000 to \$24,999	2126	15.9
\$25,000 to \$34,999	2054	15.3
\$35,000 to \$49,999	1570	11.7
\$50,000 to \$74,999	1841	13.8
\$75,000 to \$99,999	1578	11.8
\$100,000 to \$149,999	643	4.8
\$150,000 to \$199,999	127	0.9
Greater than \$200,000	256	1.9
Total	13391	100
Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2000		

As seen in Table 8, most of the households in Tift County brought in less than \$35,000/year as of the 2000 census. Less than 8 percent of families in Tift County brought home more than \$100,000, but over 15 percent brought home under \$10,000. This does show a large disparity in the extremes, but as would be expected, most households earned between \$25,000 and \$99,000 dollars.

	Per Capita		Median Household	
	1990	2000	1990	2000
Tift County	10,612	16,833	26,578	39,083
RDC Region	9,274	14,754	23,907	34,088
Georgia	13,631	21,154	29,021	49,280
Source: U.S. Census Bureau				

Table 9 above gives a good picture of how Tift County stands in regards to Median Household Income across the state. In 1990, Tift County had a high per capita income for the South Georgia Region, but was still almost \$3,000 under the state average per capita income. These numbers stayed very similar in the 2000 census survey, with Tift County showing a 58.6% increase in per capita income, compared with an increase of 59% increase in the region as a whole, and 55.2% increase throughout the State. So, in terms of per capita income, Tift County has grown at a greater rate than the State in general, and is right on par with the percentage increase in per capita income throughout the South Georgia region.

As for the median household income, which is a good indicator of household economic conditions because it is a measure of current private incomes for households, Tift County experienced a 47% increase between 1990 and 2000. This number was fairly large in comparison with the 42% growth in the region, but much lower than the 70% increase experienced by the State as a whole. What this means is that, while Tift County remains well below the State average for both median household income and per capita income, it is growing at a greater rate than most of the South Georgia Region.

Commuting Characteristics

In terms of employment in the South Georgia region, Tift County can be considered an employment hub. Although most people working in Tift County are from Tift County, over 30% of workers in Tift County reside in neighboring counties. Only 15.5% of Tift County residents work outside of their home County, which is a very low number relative to the rest of the

region, which averages 42.5% of residents working in other counties. Lowndes County is the only county with a lower number, with only 8% of its resident working in another county, whereas 85% of Echols County residents work in other counties.

Table 10: Employed Residents of Tift Commuting Patterns		
County Where Employed	Number	% of Total
Tift	14,291	84.5
Dougherty	420	2.5
Turner	344	2
Cook	242	1.4
Irwin	229	1.4
Worth	191	1.1
Ben Hill	188	1.1
Berrien	171	1
Other	836	4.9
Total Residents	16,912	100
Source: GA Dept. of Labor		

As stated above, just over thirty percent of people working in Tift County commute from neighboring counties. Table 11 below shows that after Tift, Berrien County accounts for five percent of workers, followed by Worth, Colquitt, and Irwin Counties. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, average travel time to work for workers in Tift County is 17.9 minutes, well under the State average of 27.7 minutes and four minutes shorter than the region average.

Table 11: Persons Working in Tift County Commuting Patterns		
County of Residence	Number	% of Total
Tift	14,291	68
Berrien	1,120	5.3
Worth	1,011	4.8
Colquitt	935	4.4
Irwin	750	3.6
Cook	718	3.4
Turner	677	3.2
Lowndes	310	1.5
Other	1,207	5.7
Total	21,019	100
Source: GA Dept. of Labor		

IV. Evaluation of Existing Services

Tift County is currently using Section 5311 funds to operate the Tift Lift transit system. Tift Lift is operated by Tift County, making it unique in the South Georgia region in that it is the only rural transit service that is not operated by a third party operator. All other counties in the region contract with MIDS, INC., to operate their transit services. Another differentiation from other rural transit services in the region is that Tift Lift operates solely on Section 5311 public transportation funding and local funds, with no purchase of service contracts, such as DHR or Medicaid, used to fund or provide other sources of riders. In other words, 100% of rides provided by Tift Lift are public transportation rides. DHR and Medicaid transportation services, as well as meal deliveries to seniors, are handled by third-party operators; Harris Transportation runs Medicaid transportation while MIDS, Inc. runs DHR transportation and senior meal deliveries for the County.

Tift Lift currently operates a two van system which runs Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The service is demand-response with route deviation for the public and trips are scheduled by phone through a dispatcher working at the Neighborhood Service Center. Tift Lift currently operates within Tift County, and the fee for trips is \$2.00 if the trip is 0-3 miles, \$3.00 if the trip is 3-5 miles, and \$4.00 if the trip is over 5 miles. Of the two vans run by the county, one is lift-equipped. Vehicle maintenance and major repairs are conducted at a private garage.

Marketing for Tift Lift is currently conducted by a publicized telephone number displayed on every vehicle and through press releases, posters, handouts, and by word of mouth. In the past, magnets and pens have also been handed out as reminders of the service. The funds provided for marketing purposes have been adequate in the past to cover marketing expenses, and in the most recent funding application, \$400 was requested for marketing costs for FY 2010.

Many residents of Tift County have a long-standing belief that Tift Lift is only for a select population within the County, and not, as is the case, public transportation for all residents of Tift County.

Tift Lift Ridership Survey

A ridership survey conducted in April 2009 provided a perspective of services from users of the system. Riders were asked to fill out a short survey and answer questions regarding frequency of use, quality of service, satisfaction with Tift Lift, and some general demographic information. Also, riders were given the opportunity to voice any comments or concerns they may have/have had regarding Tift Lift. 51 riders filled out the survey, which was made available on Tift Lift vans for several weeks.

Of the 51 riders who filled out surveys, 47, or 92%, either agreed (51%) or strongly agreed (41%) with the statement that “Tift Lift is dependable.” Three gave undecided as an answer and one strongly disagreed. This shows that, on a broad level, riders are either satisfied or very satisfied with the services provided by Tift Lift.

Several questions were asked to further determine which aspects of the system are viewed favorably and unfavorably. In response to whether the cost to ride Tift Lift is reasonable, 59% strongly agreed and 37% agreed that the fares are reasonable, showing that overall, 96% of survey respondents believe that the price to ride Tift Lift is affordable and practical.

The question for which the highest percentage of respondents found an aspect of Tift Lift unfavorable was in regard to trip scheduling. Three respondents disagreed and no respondents strongly disagreed with the statement that “I can schedule my trips on Tift Lift at the time I want.” This is still a very low number, only 6%, who believe that they cannot schedule trips when they want every time they ride Tift Lift. Two respondents marked that they were undecided and the remaining 90% either agreed or strongly agreed that this statement is accurate. To go along with this, the declaration was also made that “I am picked up on time when I ride Tift Lift.” The same percentage of respondents (90%) agreed (59%) or strongly agreed (31%) with this statement. Four people remained undecided on this issue and only one respondent disagreed that they are picked up on time when they ride. 100% of Tift Lift riders who filled out a survey either agreed or strongly agreed with the sentiment that “I feel safe when riding Tift Lift.”

Riders were also asked whether they agree or disagree with two comments regarding drivers and dispatchers for the system. All but one respondent, who remained undecided, either agreed (53%) or strongly agreed (45%) that the dispatcher who answers the phone when they call to schedule a ride is friendly. In regard to drivers, every respondent either agreed (43%) or strongly agreed (57%) that the drivers who pick them up and transport them to their destination are friendly and courteous.

Overall, the qualitative view of Tift Lift by riders who took the time to fill out a survey is very good, showing that most of these riders agree that Tift Lift is dependable and that they can schedule rides when needed and expect the ride to be there on time. It is also a very strong note for the system that 100% of riders who responded to the survey do feel safe when riding Tift Lift.

Several questions were posed to determine general demographic information of Tift Lift riders. As would be expected, a large percentage of those who responded to the survey (84%) do not own a car. Also, a high percentage (86%) of respondents, or 44 of the 51 total, were female. 10% of riders who responded to the survey were under the age of 24, while 76% were between the ages of 25-61, and the remaining 7% were over the age of 62. When asked about annual household income, 31 of the 48 riders who responded to this question, or 65%, noted that they had an annual household income under \$10,000. Ten riders had annual household incomes

between \$10,000 and \$17,999, five listed the number between \$18,000 and \$24,999, and only two had annual household incomes over \$25,000. Only seven of the respondents noted that they use a mobility aid, with three of these using walkers and four using canes.

Survey takers were also asked to note which destinations they primarily utilize the Tift Lift system to access. Thirty respondents (60%) commonly use Tift Lift to get to work, 37 (74%) use the system to access medical facilities, 24 respondents (48%) frequently use Tift Lift for shopping purposes, twelve (24%) use Tift Lift to access food, two riders (4%) use the system to reach religious functions, and ten (20%) use the system to access social or recreational functions.

Finally, the survey asked whether the riders live in the City of Tifton, or outside of the City within the County. 64% live within the City limits of Tifton and the remaining 36% live in Tift County outside of the City of Tifton. Several respondents to the survey added additional comments which ranged from highly appreciative statements to recommendations. Additional comments included several (9) requests for additional buses and drivers, a comment requesting extended service to 6:00 p.m. for those who work late, and a suggestion to add Saturday services.

Overall, the survey showed that riders are content with the dependability and level of service of Tift Lift, but many believe that service would be improved with the addition of another van/bus. The only comments that respondents seem to not wholly agree with regarded issues stemming from limited service that comes with the two van system. It is also clear from the survey that a majority of trips originate within the City of Tifton. Furthermore, riders generally use Tift Lift most to have transportation to and from medical/doctor visits, to be able to get to and from work, and to have access to shopping, respectively.

V. Transit Demand Estimation and Needs Assessment

Transit demand analysis is the method for determining the overall demand for transit services within a community. Demand, as defined by the Transportation Research Board's National Research Council, is "the number of passenger trips that will be taken when a given level of passenger transportation service is available." Passenger trips do not account for travel arranged by riders with friends or relatives, but solely refers to trips where "the driver either is an entrepreneur or is affiliated with a public agency or private entity that provides transportation service."^{viii}

Methodology for determining transportation demand within a community is provided by the Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) Report 3: Workbook for Estimating Demand for Rural Passenger Transportation. The workbook produced by the TCRP is used for forecasting demand for passenger transportation in rural areas, or areas outside of an urbanized area and with population densities under 1,000 persons per square mile. The TCRP study documented over 185 different rural transit programs from across the county to derive formulas to calculate transportation demand in similarly sized areas. The study considers transportation demand in two categories: "program demand", where transit ridership is generated by trips to and from social service programs, and "non-program demand" where ridership is generated by transportation needs of elderly persons, persons with disabilities, low income families, and the general public. For this estimation, non-program demand will be assessed because the Tift Lift system does not provide any program-related transportation services.

When using the TCRP demand forecasting methodology, a high supply level measured by vehicle-miles per square mile per year is used to find the maximum demand. This high supply level is the top portion of densities as found in the rural communities studied across the country. Therefore, the demand numbers produced from the formulas are the maximum potential ridership with high levels of service in rural counties.

The three population groups used in the formula for non-program demand estimation are elderly persons (ages 60 and over), persons with mobility limitations (age 16-64), and persons under the age of 65 living in households below the poverty line. These populations are used because they are considered to be the populations with the greatest propensity to need transportation services.

Table 12 shows the information utilized in the demand forecasting process. The measure of service area shown is the total area of the County in square miles. This is used to determine the level of service provided per square mile for the entire county. Although a majority of services provided are within the City limits, total area of the county is taken into account because service is available throughout the entire county. Total available vehicle-miles (AVM) is a measure of the total miles driven with all non-program related transportation service vehicles taken into account, including public transportation and taxi services provided.

	Total	% of Total Pop.
Service Area (sq. mi.)	267.6	
Total AVM Available	188,244	
Total Population	38,407	100
Elderly	5,918	15.4
Disabled	5,280	13.7
Low-Income	1,444	3.8
Total demand (trips)	40,197	

Demand for a county is determined by a formula that derives a maximum total ridership estimate based on the total land area of a county, total number of elderly, disabled, and low-income population, and the current or proposed total vehicle-miles available to each needs group. For Tift County, the formula determined that with the current level of transportation provided by both Tift Lift and the taxi service taken into account, demand for one-way trips within Tift County should be 40,197 trips per year. With Tift Lift averaging 9,573 one-way passenger trips per year over the past 5 years, this number seems steep. However, this number is the maximum demand in Tift County with the current level of service provided, not the actual need within the community. Demand is not the same as need, because the need for transportation exists whether the services are provided or not; demand only exists when services are provided. The need for transportation services is also met in many other ways not reflected here including, friends and family, car pooling, walking, cycling, etc.

Tift County has a relatively high population density for similar areas around the state, at 144.9 people per sq. mile. Also, Tift County has a significant low-income population with relatively low per capita income overall and a fairly high number of commuters. As shown in Table 13 below, steady increases in ridership have been noted over the past few years, with increases in total miles driven and total service days increasing at a high rate between 2004 and 2008 also. Tift County has a high need for a public transportation service as is provided with Tift Lift.

Year	One-Way Trips Total	Vehicle Monthly Avg.	Total Miles Driven	Avg. Total Miles/Veh.	Service Days Avg.
2004	8332	333	53439	2138	206
2005	8346	348	56310	2346	217
2006	10589	442	68497	2845	242
2007	9741	406	62163	2590	240
2008	9891	380	67141	2582	236
AVG.	9379.8	381.8	61510	2500.2	228

Table 13 shows ridership characteristics of the Tift Lift system between 2004 and 2008. One-way trip totals increased at a steady pace over the five year period as did Vehicle monthly average and total vehicle-miles. The increase in these numbers shows that the need for transportation in Tift County is prevalent and increasing from year-to-year. Although increased advertisement and spreading the knowledge that Tift Lift is open to all citizens has and will continue to have an impact on ridership numbers, other factors may be influencing the increased trips. As gas prices continue to rise and residents face tough economic times the need for alternative forms of transportation will also continue to increase.

VI. Goals and Objectives

Goal

1. To ensure safe, efficient, and reliable transit services for all residents of Tift County which will allow for participation in medical, educational, economic, and social activities, especially for those who have no alternative mode of transportation.

Objectives

1. Provide the most efficient service possible for both riders and for the County by exploring any alternative revenue sources such as outside contracts with the DHR, Medicaid, or any other need-based transportation services.
2. Maximize ridership through community outreach efforts including increased advertisement and increased efforts to reach the population of highest need, or those without any alternative form of transportation.
 - a. Increase funding for advertising and marketing to explore new options for increasing community awareness of the Tift Lift system.
 - b. Develop public education and marketing strategies to promote the use of existing transportation options and encourage the development of new options.
 - c. Explore new image options to revitalize the Tift Lift system.
3. Coordinate public transportation planning between Tift County, the City of Tifton, the South Georgia Regional Development Center, and the Georgia Department of Transportation.
 - a. Maximize service while meeting the needs of the community and developing a sustainable system that meets comprehensive planning goals.
 - b. Keep transit plans up to date and develop a new Transit Development Plan every five years.
4. Conduct semi-annual internal reviews to correct problem areas such as rider complaints and travel inefficiencies.
5. Coordinate the transit program with alternative forms of transportation.
 - a. Connect Tift Lift services to existing and proposed bicycle and pedestrian networks that can merge safe and effective non-motorized transportation methods with the public transit system.
 - b. Develop the ride-share and park-and-ride programs within Tift County to allow for connectivity between personal transportation and public transportation.

VII. Alternatives and Recommendations

Expand Existing Programs

Tift Lift can and should provide an efficient and effective form of demand-response transportation to any resident of Tift County in need of services. Expanding the usage of the Section 5311 program within Tift County and exploring other forms of external revenue while at the same time increasing connectivity with the bicycle and pedestrian network should be explored.

Hours of Service

In order to better serve the potential ridership of Tift Lift, Tift County should consider changing the hours of service from 8 AM to 5 PM to 7 AM to 6 PM. This change in hours of service would make it more feasible for riders to get to work and other appointments throughout the business day. This may require some additional staff, but likely can be done with changing the work schedules of existing staff.

Park-and-Ride & Rideshare

Increased and expanded usage of Park-and-Ride should be explored and developed. Currently there is limited usage of the park-and-ride system within Tift County; however, with increased support from the local community and promotion of Park-and-Ride as a viable and efficient form of transportation, this could be a well used and effective transportation method within the county. With high numbers of commuters and other factors such as expected increases in gas prices, Park-and-Ride or Rideshare programs, if promoted and provided effectively, could experience increased interest from the public in the near future.

Develop Existing Bicycle and Pedestrian Network

Tift County has a fairly well developed system of bicycle routes and pedestrian walkways, especially in downtown Tifton. This system should continue to be developed in order to provide a high level of pedestrian access throughout the community. With increased bicycle and pedestrian mobility residents of Tift County will have a higher level of access to commercial centers, educational centers, medical facilities, or any destination in general. Increased connectivity between the public transportation system and the local bicycle and pedestrian network will provide for greater access to the entire community.

Explore Image Options

Many residents of Tift County do not know that Tift Lift is a public transportation service. Some residents believe that Tift Lift is a service that only serves the mobility disabled or certain other populations. This belief has been shown through Tift Lift regularly receiving calls and questions regarding public use of the system. Several courses of action, in addition to increased advertising and marketing efforts, could be taken to inform the community that Tift Lift is a transportation service for all citizens. One suggestion has been to revitalize image of Tift Lift by either enhancing the look of vehicles or creating a slogan or catch-phrase for the system. By re-developing the look or feel of Tift Lift, potential riders who had overlooked the vehicles as being service-oriented in the past may not overlook a new and revitalized transit van like they have

VIII. Implementation Plan

Short-Term (1st Year)

New marketing and outreach opportunities should be undertaken to inform the community that Tift Lift is a viable alternative form of transportation for all people within Tift County. Many calls are still received and people still ask if Tift Lift is open to all residents or just those with disabilities. Increased efforts to inform the community that Tift Lift is open to all public should be continued. Also, information should be gathered from community surveys, public meetings, etc., to determine the standing of Tift Lift within the community and to find out what the people of Tift County believe could be done to make Tift Lift a more appealing option for transportation.

Tift Lift may want to consider forming an advisory Board, or a broad group of advisors to include members of the local governments, representatives from GDOT and members of the local community. This advisory board could help to lead planning efforts and promote Tift Lift within Tift County.

Changes to hours of service should be addressed. By extending hours of service by one hour at the beginning and end of the day, those who have to be at work before 8 am could ride the service and those who may have earlier appointments or appointments that run late may also be able to utilize Tift Lift. The benefits of providing extended service hours should be evaluated.

Mid-Term (2-3 Years)

Continued efforts should be made to promote Tift Lift throughout the County. Information gained from public outreach efforts should be compiled by this point and should begin to influence advertising and further outreach efforts. If an advisory board has been formed, the board should be leading the planning and outreach efforts and should work closely with the Director of Tift Lift to explore park-and-ride options and develop the bike and pedestrian linkages with Tift Lift.

Long-Term (4-5 Years)

Evaluation of service delivery and ridership reviews should be continued. Ongoing evaluation and possible growth of the Tift Lift fleet may be required. Ongoing collaboration with GDOT and other local and regional planning agencies should occur regularly. Consider the development of contracted services with DHR, Medicaid, or other programs, including private entities like retirement communities.

VIX. Capital Improvement Program & Financial Plan

Tift Lift is funded by federal Grant funds from the Federal Transit Administration’s Section 5311 grant program, resources from the Tift County general fund, and fare revenues. 10 percent of total operating costs must be recovered from fare revenues according to federal guidelines regarding the Section 5311 grant program. The remaining 90 percent, or the net operating deficit, is shared between federal funds, which may cover up to 50% of the net operating deficit, and local funds. Section 5311 funds may be used for both capital and operating costs; however the federal share may not exceed 50% of the net operating deficit, or 80% of capital expenses.

The Department of Transportation requires that vehicles or facilities are not purchased by local sponsors of Section 5311 programs. Instead, the Department takes on this responsibility. Local sponsors are allowed to procure other equipment through the purchasing division of the State’s department of Administration. GDOT is using an 18 month capital improvement plan for replacing vehicles purchased for the Section 5311 program. Vehicles are replaced after they are reviewed for age and condition and the decision is rendered that a replacement is necessary. If a new vehicle is required, Federal funds cover 80% of the costs, while GDOT provides 15% and the local government is required to provide the final 5%.

Table 14: Tift County Transit Operating Budget			
	2008	2009	2010
Total Operating Expense	161,531	155,874	217,276
Fare Box Revenue	16,153	15,587	21,728
Net Operating Deficit	145,378	140,287	195,548
Section 5311	72,689	70,143	97,774
Local Funds	72,689	70,143	97,774
Source: Tift Lift Budget Ledger Reports			

In 2010, Tift Lift’s requests for funding increased by a substantial margin. This was not an actual increase in funding amount, but a separation of funding sources and line-items to reflect actual costs incurred by the County that had not previously been listed on funding applications. This amount should remain steady over the next five years with increases stemming from natural rates of increase in transit operation and staff costs. Table 15 below shows a forecasted budget for the next five years, including costs incurred by the County and the Section 5311 program.

Table 15: Five-Year Transit Operating Budget					
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total Operating Expense	217,276	228,140	239,547	251,524	264,100
Fare Box Revenue	21,728	22,814	23,954	25,152	26,410
Net Operating Deficit	195,548	205,326	215,593	226,372	237,690
Section 5311 Grant Funds	97,774	102,663	107,797	113,186	118,845
Local Matching Funds	97,774	102,663	107,797	113,186	118,845
Source: SGRDC					

Tift Lift Rider Survey

Please take the opportunity to tell us how you feel about the Tift Lift Transit service. Circle one answer on the scale to show your level of satisfaction.

1. Tift Lift is dependable

Strongly Disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Strongly Agree

2. The money I pay for a trip on Tift Lift is reasonable

Strongly Disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Strongly Agree

3. I can schedule my trips on Tift Lift at the time I want

Strongly Disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Strongly Agree

4. I feel safe when riding Tift Lift

Strongly Disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Strongly Agree

5. I am picked up on time when I ride Tift Lift

Strongly Disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Strongly Agree

6. When I call to schedule a ride, the person who answers the phone is friendly

Strongly Disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Strongly Agree

7. Tift Lift drivers are friendly and courteous

Strongly Disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Strongly Agree

(OVER)

The remaining questions will help us describe who rides Tift Lift. This information will be kept confidential and will not identify you personally in any way. Please mark the appropriate response for each question.

8. Do you own a car? Yes No

9. Do you take Tift Lift to: (Circle all that apply)

Work Medical/Doctor Shop Eat Church
Social/Recreation
Other (Please List) _____

10. How many days a week do you ride Tift Lift?

- 5 or more
- 3-4
- 1-2
- Less than 1
- First time

11. I am: Male Female

12. My age is: Younger than 18____ 18-24____ 25-44____ 45-61____ 62+____

13. I use the following mobility aids (mark all that apply)

Wheelchair____ Walker____ Cane____ Crutches____ None____

14. My annual household income is (mark one)

Under \$10,000____ \$18,000 to \$24,999____
\$10,000 to \$17,999____ \$25,000 or more____

15. Do you live in the City of Tifton or in Tift County? City of Tifton____ Tift
County____

16. If you have any suggestions or comments to help improve Tift Lift, please list here.
Thank you.



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