

TRANSPORTATION

What is needed to grow a local and regional Green Economy (GE) that brings good jobs with good wages, benefits, and secure careers?

- Transportation should keep pace with other economic development. This is necessary for transportation of both goods and workers. Public transportation should be integral to City and County development projects and be widely accessible (e.g., by walking, biking, and carpooling).
- An increase in access and availability of public transportation is necessary in order to address a variety of social, environmental, and economic concerns. Among these are: reducing reliance on fossil fuels, improving air quality, de-isolating pockets of poverty, reconnecting racial divides, and improving mobility for populations who do not have access to private vehicles (e.g., the youth, low-income, and elderly).
- Alternate fuels should be utilized more for public transportation needs. Municipal service providers have the opportunity to demonstrate strong leadership by adopting progressive attitudes and strategies. Fleets of public, alternative-fuel vehicles would symbolize the area's commitment to sustainability. UT, ORNL, and TVA, in particular, could build alternative-fuel fleets.

What current strategies address these needs?

- There is a growing commitment to integrate public transportation into the GE. For example, the City recently hired an alternate transportation engineer to spearhead new efforts, as well as converted the transportation director position from a contractor to a permanent city-funded role. Also, the Knoxville Regional Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) has several GE-related initiatives, including car-pooling incentives, "placemaking" efforts, and an "open streets" initiative, which converts streets into places for a variety of activities like socializing, bicycling, walking, and more.
- The City recently applied to Smart Growth America and was granted technical assistance in implementing transit-oriented development (TOD). TOD is a type of community development that encourages the integration of amenities into neighborhoods through mixed-use zoning. Through a site visit and numerous formal and informal conversations, several suggestions were given: coordinate future development with transit expansion; work with the public and private sector to implement work; and, work towards incremental improvements while considering possible leaps forward.
- Public transportation providers are actively seeking to increase access and quality of services: Knoxville Area Transit (KAT) is adding Sunday services and additional routes; KAT is currently seeking public input on reconfiguring trolley routes; and, the Knoxville-Knox County CAC Transit is actively working with KAT to provide transportation services to underserved populations.

Assets- what other current activity can be leveraged to support specific strategies in place?

- The City is supportive of innovative transportation strategies. There is a willingness to experiment with new ideas, such as in the “Open Streets” event and that took place earlier this month, and the Smart Growth America study on TOD.
- Political cooperation across city, county, and regional roles is increasing, forming a hospitable climate for sustainable planning alignments in the region. For example, the Tennessee Region Roundtable is spearheading planning efforts and partnerships, such as the one between the TPO and the Knox County Health Department, and is bringing a holistic approach to planning efforts. The Regional Mayors Caucus also recently expanded from 5 to 16 counties and began tracking key indicators using the shared resource of the ETindex database.

Obstacles- what keeps these assets from being more successfully pursued at this time?

- Local culture is often resistant to planning initiatives and public transportation. Although this seems to be changing, it is a slow shift. This makes it hard, especially for City and County efforts, to push and justify projects that lack public support.
- Public transportation lacks consistent funding. Compared to other publicly funded services, public transportation has a history of being cut first. Once transportation is lagging behind other economic development components, it’s hard to catch up.
- Although various experts are actively working to improve public transportation, they tend to operate in silos, with limited connections to each other and other departments who could add input. This results in duplication of work, misaligned efforts, and missed opportunities for cooperation.
- There is a lack of best practices that can be applied to Knoxville. Few case studies have been done on cities this size, resulting in few examples Knoxville can model itself after.

What are some suggested strategies?

- If public transportation were user-friendlier, demand might increase. Suggestions include: more consistent bus times, a smart-pass system, tax benefits for riders, employee incentive programs, structural improvements to bus stops, and Wi-Fi connections. Some also suggesting using public instead of school buses to socialize youth to public transit.
- Greater regional cooperation could result in a long-term and cohesive transportation plan that may include airport service and routes between regional cities. Public transportation could be considered as a driver of intra-regional economic growth.
- Improvements should continue for pedestrian/bike friendly/bus accessible zones and routes. As TOD suggests, such access boosts ridership, revenue, and development.

Action priorities- what to do and in what order? Stay tuned for the breakout session.