SARASOTA
TRANSPORTATION ENHANCEMENT PLAN

Technical Memorandum IV:

Needs Assessment
&
Potential Alternatives

Draft Report

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TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM IV:
NEEDS ASSESMENT & POTENTIAL ALTERNATIVES

INTRODUCTION

We are a society that takes great pride in our independence and mobility. Whether speaking of upward mobility in a career, moving from state to state, or deciding to take in a broadway show, a person’s ability to move is a symbol of success, vitality and fulfillment. Most Americans are not consciously aware that even a minimal loss of that independence, either gradual or sudden, can easily cause us to become disafflicted from the simple choices we take for granted each day. While there is low general public awareness of the millions of people whose lives are governed by the simple act of getting from Point A to Point B, the fact is that individual mobility is a societal issue.

When the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed by Congress, one intent of the Act was to create full participation in American life for those individuals with disabilities. The ADA once again highlighted the critical role that mobility and access play in the vitality and health of overall social systems by providing access to economic, social, educational and cultural opportunities. The message of the ADA is one that includes and extends beyond people with disabilities in Sarasota County.

A traditional TDP or TDSP designs products and services to meet the demands of different market segments that have the greatest likelihood of utilizing those services. The STEP process, however, has a much broader goal in mind. This goal is to address mobility needs at the individual as well as the market and community levels. In this way, the STEP seeks to maximize individual mobility through community level investments.

At this point, the STEP process is one step away from the actual recommendations and implementation mechanisms that will constitute transportation enhancements in Sarasota County. This technical memorandum is divided into two parts: first, a discussion of transportation demand and unmet transportation needs; and second, a series of alternatives designed give form and function to the journey of meeting the mobility demands of residents of and visitors to Sarasota County.
ASSESSMENT OF UNMET MOBILITY NEEDS IN SARASOTA COUNTY

The public involvement process in the STEP has been extensive. Its purpose was to take a comprehensive approach to determining transportation needs in the county for the purpose of developing alternatives. The components of the process have included:

- The establishment of a STEP Advisory Committee composed of the following community leaders and transportation stakeholders throughout the county:

  Robert Miles  The Venice Foundation
  Phyllis Bohnenberger  WAGES
  Alex Boudreau  Sarasota County Transportation Department
  John Cross  South Biscayne Baptist Church
  Richard Dreyer  FDOT
  Ellery Girard  Sarasota County School Transportation
  Jay Goodwill  SCAT
  Phil Lieberman - SCAT
  Jerry Gray  Sarasota County Planning Department
  Barbara Grill  Citizen Advisory Committee
  Robert Herrington  Sarasota/Manatee MPO
  Beverly Kent  Senior Friendship Center
  Mark Gumula - FDOT
  J. P. Marchand  Sarasota County Transportation Department
  J. Mack Reid  Boys & Girls Clubs of Sarasota
  Dale Vollrath  Suncoast Workforce Development Board
  Ernest Gerlach  Citizen Representative
  Mike Bigner, The Venice Foundation
  Tim Dutton - Human Services Planning Association

- More than 20 community leader interviews with individuals representing government officials, THE business community, human service agencies, and citizens groups

- A written survey of more than 400 agencies, organizations, and groups providing services to Sarasota County residents and visitors
Sarasota Transportation Enhancement Plan

- Three facilitated discussion groups with over 30 representatives from faith-based organizations that provide transportation assistance, youth organization representatives, and the Transportation Disadvantaged Local Coordinating Board

- Two community forums with involvement of local chambers of commerce in two south county communities: Englewood and North Port

- Creation of an Internet web page dedicated to the STEP process for public review and comment on the process and/or documents related to the study.

In addition to the public involvement process, CUTR has used other analytic techniques to assess transportation demand in the county, including:

- Demographic analyses;

- Evaluation of existing public transportation services; and

- Fixed-route and paratransit demand estimation.

All of the above activities have created a rich and diverse body of information far more extensive than that typically collected for transportation plans developed for other communities. The level and depth of involvement also have achieved a primary objective of the STEP, which is to develop a true community-level plan for transportation. Below is a discussion of potential market segments and unmet transportation needs of various population segments in Sarasota County. Following this discussion, a wide array of alternatives will be presented to address these levels of demand.

Workers/employment trips

The economic boom of the late 1990s has created greater opportunity in the employment market than at any other time in the 20th century. Unemployment rates continue to fall as wages increase and inflation holds steady. In Florida, targets for reducing welfare recipients have been exceeded as more people have voluntarily given up public assistance benefits. It is assumed these individuals are choosing to give up their benefits due to the booming employment marketplace. In spite of the favorable marketplace for employment, there remain
large service sectors of the economy where unskilled or semi-skilled laborers work shifts around the clock for relatively low pay. In 1995, the service sector of the economy in Sarasota County accounted for 50 percent of the workforce, which includes professional services as well as semi-skilled jobs. In addition, current projections show that of the 36,000 new jobs forecast to be created in Sarasota County by 2010, more than 28,000 will be located in unincorporated areas currently not well served by public transit.

Below are unmet transportation needs among various market segments of workers that were identified throughout the STEP process. If steps are taken to meet these demands for transportation, the market for employment will be enhanced for employees to compete for higher paying jobs and for employers to gain the most competent employees.

In addition to unmet needs, there is the possibility of enticing commuters to utilize alternative means of transportation even if they currently have other transportation options. According to the 1990 Census, 1 percent of commuters in Sarasota indicated they used public transit for work purposes, and another 12 percent used car pools and van pools. Efforts undertaken to attract discretionary riders to the transit system could increase the percentage of commuters utilizing public transit for work trips.

Second and Third Shift Workers

With the current span of service provided by the SCAT fixed-route system, second shift workers can use transit to travel to work but not home at the end of their shift. Third shift workers cannot use transit to get to work but in many cases could use it to get home. Since many second and third shift employees occupy positions in the service, manufacturing and light industrial sectors of the economy, they also are likely to be prime transit and alternative transportation markets. Fixed-route systems with limited resources often gear their services toward the standard 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM work shift since the majority of workers fall within these hours.

Weekend Service on SCAT Fixed-route System

Current weekend service includes Saturday service that operates the same level of service as weekdays. This is rare in a fixed-route system. Traditionally, weekday revenue hours entail the highest number of revenue hours in the system because of frequencies, spans, and peak
periods of service. A standard rule of thumb is that when Saturday service is provided, the revenue hours represent approximately 50 percent of weekday revenue hours. When Sunday service is provided, even fewer revenue hours of service are operated at approximately 33 percent of weekday revenue hours. SCAT, however, operates no Sunday service. Again, as above, the service, manufacturing and light industrial sectors of the economy often operate on weekends. Therefore, those working Sunday shifts cannot use fixed-route services for their transportation needs.

Direct Access to Major Employment Sites (especially along the beaches and sites near I-75)

The I-75 corridor, which spans the entire length of Sarasota County, is designated by the Sarasota County Comprehensive Plan for development of light industrial, manufacturing, warehousing and office uses. Specific areas include the University Parkway, Fruitville Road, Laurel Road, and North Port interchanges. Although the corridor will experience a high degree of development, I-75 is at the eastern edge of the urban area and not as ripe for fixed-route expansion. In addition, fixed-route systems are based on networks of routes that often do not foster direct origin-destination travel. This is especially true along the beaches, which are all served from Downtown Sarasota and require transfers for many traveling to the beaches from mainland Sarasota County.

Single-auto households

In 1990, 47 percent of all households in Sarasota County had only one vehicle available. One vehicle households with one or two working adults are often prime targets for alternative transportation products and programs since employment sites are dispersed. When it is not feasible for both household adults to coordinate transportation efforts, then the second adult must secure other means of travel whether for work or shopping and other household needs. In many instances, the existing fixed-route system cannot meet the travel needs for these types of households.

Inter-county transportation between Sarasota and Manatee/Charlotte Counties

The Highway 41 and I-75 corridors, which run through the Sarasota, Manatee and Charlotte Counties, create a level of economic interdependence in the region. Unemployment in Sarasota
Children/Youth Market

The economic boom of the late 20th century discussed in the section above also has brought with it a cost to the millions of working moms and dads across the country. Employers are asking more of employees in order to keep the business of America growing and prospering. Whether single or dual parent households, the enormous pressures parents face regarding the welfare of their children is something we all feel, whether we have children or not. There is no greater stress for working parents in modern times than coordinating the daily lives of their children prior to, during and after school. It has to be a source of frustration for all community resources serving youth and youth-related activities, not to mention parents, that the investments in children’s programs yield many wonderful opportunities for participation until the challenge of transportation inevitably enters into the mix.

From intramural sports to church programs to music lessons to activities at public parks, the opportunities to enrich and develop young minds are vast. However, transportation takes center stage in determining the level of access to these opportunities. According to the on-board survey of SCAT’s system conducted in 1999, about one in five passengers is under the age of 18. The percentage of under 18 riders (19 percent) increased over a similar on-board survey conducted in 1997 when youth ridership accounted for 11 percent of total ridership. The youth market has traditionally been a challenging market for fixed-route transit to serve based on the location of homes, schools, and activity centers to which youth may want to travel. This challenge also can be seen as an opportunity to explore creative means of maximizing youth mobility in safe and secure environments.
Seniors and people with disabilities

For a vast majority, personal mobility is something taken for granted. Most never realize that it is a luxury, and a potentially fleeting luxury at that. For millions of Americans, daily lives are governed and structured by the simple act of getting from Point A to Point B. In a training class with fixed-route bus operators, the instructor asked the participants to list all of the things they might do after getting off work. Go to the bank, one said. Stop and get a video, said another. Buy groceries, said a third. The instructor then said, Now imagine that you are on a vehicle taking a demand response trip and you ask the driver if you can stop into Walgreens for a minute to buy toothpaste. The driver then responds that he/she cannot do that because he/she must drop you off in order to be on-time to make the next pick-up. The bus operators then stare with disbelief as the concepts begin to sink in.

Sarasota County is a popular retirement location and retirees in the county tend to age in place. In the 1990 Census, 40 percent of the county population was over the age of 60 compared to 24 percent for Florida, and by 1996 the median age for the county was 50.1. The highest concentrations of senior populations are in South County (Venice and North Port) and along the beaches. A recent White House Summit on Aging concentrated heavily on the issues facing seniors regarding aging and driving. As one local senior volunteer put it recently at a public workshop, seniors volunteer to take other seniors to doctors appointments because they realize the day is coming when they will no longer be able to drive and will require assistance themselves. This concept, the continuous replacement of generations of younger seniors assisting older seniors, is one that should be capitalized upon further in Sarasota County.

According to SCAT records, those paying half-fare (seniors and persons with disabilities) account for approximately 25 percent of overall ridership. In addition, of the 188,066 advance-reservation trips provided by Senior Friendship Centers in fiscal year 1998, 57 percent were classified as serving elderly clients (including elderly low-income and elderly-disabled). A total of 16 percent of trips served non-elderly persons with disabilities (the other 27 percent were low-income, non-disabled, non-elderly). However, mobility challenges for seniors and persons with disabilities remain a current and future issue. Services available for seniors and persons with disabilities, including accessible fixed-route service, paratransit, and ADA-mandated paratransit, help to provide for the mobility needs of these populations. However, there are still a number of operational and funding constraints that restrict access even when services are available. Funding constraints for the Transportation Disadvantaged non-sponsored program serve to limit the mobility of the populations who fit the definition of TD.
Fixed-route systems have limitations in terms of service area and frequency. Often, seniors and persons with disabilities experience difficulties in accessing, waiting for and navigating bus routes and stops. Although there may be many seniors and persons with disabilities who are physically able to use fixed-route transportation systems, many residential developments along bus routes still have many residences that are beyond the traditional catchment area for fixed-routes which is four blocks or one-quarter mile. Correspondingly, paratransit services often have quality, availability and flexibility issues. Customers have to wait for pick-ups, must have fairly precise appointment times, must call in advance for a trip, and cannot stop at multiple destinations. As a result, there are many opportunities to explore not only enhancing fixed-route and paratransit services but also to define other or new alternatives that can be tried to serve this market.

**South County Market Area**

There is currently a geographic and psychological division between urbanized Sarasota and the areas collectively referred to as South County (Venice, North Port, Englewood, and surrounding communities). During public meetings with residents of South County, participants repeatedly expressed that, as a constituency base, the area’s transportation and other civic issues do not command comparable attention than is paid to urbanized Sarasota to the north. Compounding the issues are demographic characteristics that vary somewhat from northern portions of the County. For instance, Venice has a greater proportion of senior populations than Sarasota, and Englewood has a seasonal population up to 40 percent, much higher than most communities. Finally, both North Port and Englewood, and to a lesser extent Venice, maintain social, cultural and economic interdependence with Charlotte County.

When examining transportation issues and jurisdictional boundaries, sometimes the manmade lines take precedent over the reality of interdependence between communities. In fact, there are many services in Charlotte County (e.g. Port Charlotte, Murdock) that are more convenient and accessible to South County residents than comparable services in Sarasota County. While residents with personally owned are afforded unrestricted travel over county lines, the result of jurisdictional boundaries is an artificial line in the provision of public transportation services unless formalized agreements between counties exist.

Historically, SCAT has improved services in the Venice area as development has occurred and also has initiated regional system connections in both North Port and Englewood. Although fixed-route bus service does operate in South County, it is limited in its scope and availability.
While a majority of SCAT routes operate at a frequency of one bus each hour, a majority of routes south and east of Venice only provide one bus every two hours. Bus routes, for the most part, are not easily accessed from residential areas. Correspondingly, the provision of Senior Friendship Center (SFC) operated paratransit service in South County can be expensive due to the costs of sending empty vehicles from Sarasota to make pick-ups in South County.

The issues that face South County residents with unmet transportation demand encompass all of the unmet needs discussed above with the addition of travel needs across county lines. In addition, there will continue to be transportation issues for the communities well into the future, including:

- North Port as a municipality is completely platted (designated for development) and there is little additional land available for new roads;
- North Port is designated by the Comprehensive Plan to experience the most future growth;
- There are several major developments in North Port that are in the planning and/or construction stage, including residential and multi-family residential uses;
- As development continues in North Port there will be a need to connect intra-city locations; and
- Englewood is now and will continue to be far removed from major employment centers in northern Sarasota County and new industrial centers along I-75.

Low-income persons

Low-income persons have long been a staple, as well as stable, transit market. In American society, social mobility is in many ways directly or intimately linked with physical mobility. When a person lacks physical mobility, they also can be socially, economically, and culturally disaffected from all the activities that comprise American life. This includes purchasing power. Everything that people purchase is influenced by the ratio of cost to personal income. For instance, a rule of thumb for homeowners is that their monthly mortgage payment should not exceed 25 percent of gross monthly income. However, for lower income persons, the rent or mortgage they pay for housing may exceed 50 percent of their income. Therefore, public
transportation is a logical transportation purchase for low-income persons given its fractional cost compared to owning and operating a vehicle and relatively low percentage of income. Low-income persons also constitute many of the market segments discussed in this section, including (but not in all instances) seniors, persons with disabilities, urban and rural residents, and youth.

Economics also have an impact on the choices people make regarding residence. In the 1990 census, the highest concentrations of low income persons were found in downtown Sarasota, which is served by 15 of the 20 SCAT routes; however, affordable housing is not as abundant in downtown as other areas of the county. In fact, there are many affordable housing units, among them mobile home parks, that currently are either not served or not as well served by SCAT. For these individuals, the only other transportation options available to them are friends, families, and in some instances, taxi services. Senior Friendship Centers, in its role as CTC, is also charged with serving low-income persons under the Florida Transportation Disadvantaged Program. Usually, low-income persons served by the CTC are either elderly, disabled, or a child at-risk. Under the parameters of the TD non-sponsored program, only individuals who are not able to use the public transit system are eligible to received trips subsidized with TD Trust Fund monies. However, because the availability of trips provided through this program is limited and regulated through the implementation of trip purpose priorities, the trips desired by able-bodied low-income persons who do not live in the vicinity of a fixed-route receive low priority under the this program.

**Agencies and organizations**

In the Sarasota County Transportation Resources and Needs Survey of agencies, groups, and organizations conducted as part of the STEP, transportation to and from the agency was the most commonly cited issue making it difficult for clients and potential clients to access services. In fact, a full 55 percent of responding agencies and organizations reported unmet transportation needs, including medical, recreation, education, and shopping. While many agencies are providing transportation assistance through volunteers or agency vehicles, those resources are limited or stretched thin and often there are not designated drivers. Therefore, even agencies with resources often cannot accommodate all of the transportation needs they would like to provide, including group trips to special events and/or field trips and weekend service.
Finally, the discussion of unmet transportation needs has been addressing the subject of travel. This is what transportation enhancement in Sarasota really means—the concept of individuals traveling wherever and whenever they choose. In the alternatives discussed below, there is a concentration on achieving the ideal of addressing transportation needs at the individual level. Just as it is true that it takes a village to raise a child, full realization of the STEP will require a community effort that brings together formerly disparate pieces of the mobility puzzle to form a cohesive, collaborative village that nurtures opportunity for its children of all ages. The following alternatives provide a blueprint vision of what this village could look like.
MOBILITY ALTERNATIVES

Introduction to Mobility Alternatives

I shall be telling this with a sigh
   Somewhere ages and ages hence
       Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
           I took the one less traveled by,
               And that has made all the difference.

- The Road Not Taken
  Robert Frost

In the United States, we are faced with a reality that the complexity of our transportation systems is reflective of the complex society we live in. A variety of modes accommodate daily travel on connected (streets and highways) and sometimes not so connected (walking, bicycling and transit) systems. Correspondingly, a comprehensive mobility network for Sarasota County must take as its guiding principle that the same complexities apply. The development of mobility alternatives for the STEP plan involves bringing together a host of transportation modes, resources and strategies, including:

- Existing Transportation System Enhancements
- New Transportation Products and Services
- Customer Enhancements/Market Development
- Coordination
- Integration

This section of Technical Memorandum IV attempts to identify disparate alternatives that, as the final section Integration implies, can be brought together with schemes that create the type of network that the STEP process envisioned from inception.

Existing Transportation System Enhancements

This section addresses opportunities for the crown jewels of public transportation assets in Sarasota County: Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) and Senior Friendship Centers
Transportation (SFC). An examination of those actions that would implement the STEP by enhancing the services provided by these two agencies will be included in this section. A summary table of the fixed-route enhancements is included at the end of this section.

Increase Frequencies on the Fixed-route System

Historically, SCAT routes have operated with one-hour frequencies (with the exception of Route 16 which is every two hours), which means that there is one bus per hour at any given stop along a route. As a result of the comprehensive operations analysis (COA), the service levels on a portion of Route 15 and the entire length of Route 17 are recommended to increase to one bus every thirty minutes. This STEP alternative proposes that the entire SCAT system would operate at 30-minute frequencies, which is considered to be a much more convenient level of service. Implementing greater frequency on system routes entails adding more buses to meet the required running times. To achieve this alternative would require approximately 78,500 additional annual revenue hours of service on weekdays and Saturdays, which is a 56 percent increase over the current annual revenue hours recommended under the COA. Also, an additional 30 buses would be needed to provide 30-minute frequencies system-wide. Currently only five of the 21 Florida transit systems provide 30-minute frequencies which include Jacksonville, Orlando, Hillsborough, Brevard and Dade counties.

Increase Frequencies on Best Performing Routes in the Fixed-route System

This alternative, similar to the alternative described above, increases the frequencies of service but only on those routes that are the highest performers relative to passengers per hour, as well as routes that aid in system integration through geographic coverage. Under this alternative, eleven SCAT routes would increase frequencies to 30-minutes. The routes included in this alternative are 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 14, 15, 17, and 18. The additional annual revenue hours associated with this alternative are approximately 36,500, which is a 26 percent increase above the total annual revenue hours associated with the COA recommendations. Also, approximately 23 additional buses would be needed for this alternative.

Provide 24-hour Service on Fixed-route System

Another alternative could be for the SCAT system to operate 24 hours a day. Twenty-four hour service is extremely rare and often not provided except in the Nation’s and the world’s largest...
cities wherein ridership levels are maintained throughout the night. No Florida transit system currently provides 24-hour service. However, in examining this alternative for SCAT, two alternatives were analyzed: first, providing 60-minute frequency of service for a 24 hour period; and second, providing 30-minute frequency of service for 12 hours and 60-minute frequency of service for 12 hours. To achieve 60-minute frequency for 24 hours, approximately 127,000 additional annual revenue hours would be required, which is a 91 percent increase over the total annual revenue hours recommended under the COA, and would require an additional eight buses. To achieve 30-minute frequency for 12 hours a day and 60-minute frequency for 12 hours a day would require approximately 240,000 additional annual revenue hours, which is a 170 percent increase over the total annual revenue hours under the COA. This option also would require an additional 30 buses for the system.

Provide 24-hour Service on Fixed-route System/30-minute Frequencies Service during Peak Periods and 60-minute Frequencies during Off-peak Periods

Under this alternative, two options were analyzed. The first alternative involves providing 24-hour service with 30-minute frequencies during peak travel times (6:00 a.m. until 9:00 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. until 6:30 p.m.) and 60-minute frequencies during the rest of the day. This alternative assumes all routes in the system would operate in this manner. The additional annual revenue hours associated with this alternative are approximately 188,000 which is a 134 percent increase above the total annual revenue hours associated with the COA recommendations. Thirty additional buses would be needed under this alternative.

The second alternative involves providing 24-hour service with 30-minute frequencies during peak travel times (6:00 a.m. until 9:00 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. until 6:30 p.m.) and 60-minute frequencies during the rest of the day. However, those routes that are the highest performers relative to passengers per hour, as well as routes that aid in system integration through geographic coverage would provide this service. The additional annual revenue hours associated with this alternative are approximately 160,000 which is a 114 percent increase above the total annual revenue hours associated with the COA recommendations. Twenty-three buses would be needed under this alternative.
Evening Service – Entire system until midnight

This alternative provides evening service until midnight for the entire system. Under the COA, eleven routes (1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 14, 15, 17, 18) were recommended to operate until 10:30 p.m. Therefore, to operate the remaining routes until midnight, approximately 44,000 additional annual revenue hours, which is a 31 percent increase over the annual revenue hours under the COA.

Evening Service- Best Performing Routes until midnight

Similar to the alternative described above, this alternative would provide service until midnight. The distinction is that only the highest performers relative to passengers per hour, as well as routes that aid in system integration through geographic coverage would provide service until midnight. The additional annual revenue hours associated with this alternative are approximately 20,000 which is a 14 percent increase above the annual revenue hours associated with the COA recommendations.

Increase Span of Service on Entire System until 10:30 p.m.

The COA recommends increasing evening service until 10:30 p.m. on the highest performing routes in the system, as well as routes that aid in system integration through geographic coverage. This alternative goes a step further by increasing the span of service on the entire system until 10:30 p.m. The additional annual revenue hours associated with this alternative are approximately 21,000, which is a 15 percent increase above the total annual revenue hours associated with the COA recommendations.

Increase Span of Service until 10:30 p.m. and Frequencies to 30-minutes on Entire System

The COA recommendations include increasing frequencies on the entire Route 17 and the segment on Route 15 from downtown Sarasota to the airport. The COA also includes the recommendation of increasing the span of service on eleven routes in the SCAT system. This alternative would require increasing frequencies on the remaining routes in the system to 30-minutes as well as increasing the span of service to 10:30 p.m. on these routes. The additional annual revenue hours associated with this alternative are approximately 46,000, which is a 33
percent increase above the total annual revenue hours associated with the COA recommendations. Thirty buses would be needed under this alternative.

Add Sunday Service to the Fixed-route System

As mentioned earlier, as a rule of thumb Sunday service operates at between 25 and 33 percent of system weekday hours. Sunday service is usually limited to core routes that have the most ridership on weekdays and Saturdays, such as those serving Downtown. By operating routes that serve Downtown on Sunday, there is a network that ensures connectivity for those routes that are in service. Adding Sunday service would require approximately 7,000 annual revenue hours, which would operate on approximately eight of the heaviest traveled routes in the SCAT system.

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<td>Provide 24-hour (60 minute-off peak, 30 minute-peak) Service on Fixed-route System</td>
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<td>Provide 24-hour (30 minute-peak on best routes, 60 minute all other routes) Service on Fixed-route System</td>
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<td>Sunday Service-Best Routes</td>
<td>Sunday</td>
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\(^1\) Based on 1998 NTD information.
Geographic Expansion of Service Area

Another alternative is for fixed-route services to continue to serve new areas of the County as growth and expansion of development occur. Currently, fixed-route bus services in the northern portion of the county do not serve any areas east of I-75. This area has experienced both residential and commercial development, especially with the development of the Lakewood Ranch community. Also, the area along I-75, especially at the University Parkway interchange, and between Fruitville Road and Bee Ridge Road interchanges, are slated for industrial development. Expansions of service area should always be in response to new opportunities that enable the transit system to expand service area coverage while simultaneously maximizing ridership.

Establish South County Operations and Maintenance Base

For both fixed-route and paratransit systems, there can be and often is an operational expense to deadheading vehicles to begin their points of service. Deadheading in industry terms is that period of time when a vehicle is in operation but not in revenue service. The existing cost of providing county-wide paratransit service, both in terms of coordinated transportation and ADA-mandated transportation, is exacerbated by the inefficiencies of deadheading vehicles. One alternative is for the transit system and the CTC to establish a presence in South County by constructing an operating and maintenance base in the South County area. Not only could a new operating base bring about operational and cost efficiencies, it also could make a profound statement to the residents of the South County area regarding the commitment of transportation services in the region. Additional products, services and strategies for serving South County residents that may be enhanced by the presence of an operating base in the area will be examined in later sections of the Technical Memorandum.

Transfer Centers

The ability to transfer between buses in the SCAT system is an important feature of fixed-route bus service. According to the recently completed on-board survey of SCAT riders, over 20 percent of patrons require a transfer to complete their trip. There will always be a need for transfers in Sarasota County as long as one or both of the following conditions exist:
• Single point-to-point transit service is not available to all locations required by ridership;

• Different modes of transit are required to go from the point of origin to the destination.

Currently, both of these conditions exist in the SCAT system. In order to facilitate transfers, it is necessary to provide safe and convenient locations for patrons to transfer between vehicles both on-street (at intersections) or off-street on private property adjacent to the intersection, or at major transfer facilities constructed for that sole purpose.

• Develop Downtown Transit Center: Currently, SCAT operates a transfer point in Downtown Sarasota accommodating transfers between 14 of the 18 routes. The existing facility does not allow for the current needs, planned expansion of the system or the placement of adequate passenger amenities. SCAT could relocate this facility to a larger site in order to develop a Transit Center to accommodate the growing number of route connections, as well as a need for improved passenger amenities and information. This facility also would allow for operator reliefs, ticket sales and passenger safety, as well as protection from the elements. Location of this facility in proximity to the core of Downtown Sarasota will provide easy access to patron destinations.

• Establish a permanent transfer center at the Venice Train Depot: Five routes currently transfer at an on-street site in the City of Venice. A permanent site could be located at the existing Venice Train Depot. This site could accommodate the current and planned needs of the SCAT system. Multi-modal providers including SCAT, the CTC, as well as intracity bus service could use this site.

• Explore the use of fast food restaurants as fixed-route transfer sites: While major transfer points in the SCAT system are necessary to serve locations where multiple routes connect, key to the overall system are the sites located at major intersections throughout the county where only two or three routes intersect. Most of these transfers currently occur on-street where patrons must walk across major streets to reach their connecting bus. SCAT could explore the potential for locating transfer sites at fast food restaurants adjacent to intersecting routes. The benefits of such an arrangement include patron safety, access to restrooms and air-conditioned facilities, as well as the availability of food.
SCAT Facility Expansion

Over the last few years the SCAT has constructed a new Administration and Operations/Maintenance facility which includes the addition of office space, maintenance bays, and administrative and Operations and Management space for the operation of the CTC paratransit services. The final phase of this activity will be to demolish an existing structure north of the facility to allow for parking expansion.

Miscellaneous Equipment

In order to operate and maintain the existing fleet of vehicles, it is necessary to have adequate supplies of spare parts, and proper shop tools and physical plant equipment. This is a standardized annual appropriation for the transit system.

Bus Replacement

Federal guidelines call for the replacement of buses (depending on size) between 10 and 12 years of service, or between 350,000 to 500,000 miles of service. Smaller vehicles in use by the CTC are replaced at intervals between 5 and 7 years, or 150,000 to 200,000 vehicle miles of service.

Paratransit Service Enhancements

It is easy to suggest that as an alternative, paratransit service could be expanded and improved by adding vehicles and drivers to provide more trips. As a rule, coordinated transportation systems operate in a different manner than fixed-route systems. Paratransit systems generally expand and contract the number of vehicles and drivers based on revenues from agencies that execute contracts to purchase service from the Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC). For instance, Medicaid is a sponsor of large numbers of trips in most coordinated systems. If for some reason Medicaid were to discontinue purchasing trips from the CTC, then the number of vehicles and operators which had been providing service would be eliminated because the revenues from Medicaid would no longer be there.
Local governments can, and often do, contribute cash and in-kind services to community transportation coordinators. In those cases, vehicles and drivers can be expanded without additional agency contracts. This is a potential alternative under the STEP.

Further, in the event that new revenues do not materialize, there are operational actions that could be undertaken by the CTC to improve the efficiencies of scheduling and on-time performance that could reduce costs and maximize the capacity currently operating on the street. This could be achieved through upgrading computerized scheduling to maximize vehicle time on the street.

New Transportation Products and Services

In this section, alternatives designed to address many of the identified unmet mobility needs and issues described above will be addressed. The mobility alternatives presented in the following sections primarily represent new ways of doing business. The products and services considered focus on providing a higher level of mobility in the village. While most of the options discussed could become the responsibility of SCAT or SFC, implementation of the STEP could find that some or all of the products and services introduced herein are implemented and managed by other partners in the comprehensive mobility network being conceptualized in these pages.

Commuter Express Bus Services

Commuter express bus service is characterized by service predominantly in one direction during peak travel periods, a limited number of stops, and routes of extended lengths. Express bus routes typically serve to connect residents in outlying suburbs or rural areas with central business districts or other major employment centers. Commuter express bus service provides much quicker transit service by only serving a limited number of stops. It is often particularly successful when used in conjunction with park-and-ride lots (see below).

Working with the MPO Commuter Assistance Program, SCAT can seek to identify additional express bus routes. These may be used to serve existing employment centers or to respond to second and third shift needs. If existing demand does not warrant the use of a bus, these services may be provided through carpools or vanpools. As demand increases, especially in new growth areas, express bus services may be developed. This strategy was used by Tri-met
in Portland, Oregon in response to the reverse commute needs of second and third shift employees.

Park-and-ride lots

Again, working with the MPO Commuter Assistance Program, park-and-ride lots within Sarasota County may be a near term response for South County residents or multi-county transportation needs. Working with the MPO, SCAT and/or SFC may identify employees who do not live along existing routes or within the county. The MPO and transit providers could establish pick-up points from park-and-ride lots within Sarasota County. Commuters could access these points in a number of ways including the use of their personal vehicles. Transportation providers from outside the county could provide commuters without access to a personal vehicle transportation to these points or transportation may be provided through neighborhood-based services, many of which are described below. Participants at the Englewood public meeting were particularly interested in establishing a park-and-ride lot for users of SCAT’s Route 16.

Bus Service to Charlotte County

Sarasota County has two major communities, Englewood and North Port, that border and/or extend into Charlotte County to the south. For the residents of these communities, the break between Sarasota and Charlotte County is an artificial one. The geographic boundary between counties is particularly problematic for Englewood residents because the community is literally split by the invisible county line. In many cases, services offered in Charlotte County are closer to North Port and Englewood residents than comparable services in Sarasota County. Senior Friendship Centers, in its role as CTC for Sarasota County, will transport eligible South County residents to facilities and services in Charlotte County when it is determined that the trip will be more efficient. However, currently the only forms of transportation available to the general public in Sarasota County to transport individuals over county lines are personal vehicles and private taxi service. This alternative seeks to dissolve the invisible county line when it comes to providing seamless mobility for Sarasota County residents and visitors. Three options could be considered to accomplish this alternative:

- Fixed-route bus service is currently provided to the community of Englewood within the Sarasota County limits. SCAT could consider extending bus service into the Charlotte County portion of the Englewood community. This could not only provide
greater mobility to Sarasota County residents, but also provide a mechanism for Charlotte County residents to access services in Sarasota County, and enjoy the social and cultural opportunities available.

- Charlotte County is in the planning stage of the development of a general public dial-a-ride (DAR) service operating in the urban service areas of the county. This area includes the Charlotte County portion of Englewood; however, again geographic county boundaries will act to limit resident mobility options. Sarasota County could consider contracting with Charlotte County to provide DAR trips to the entire Englewood community. It is possible that an arrangement could be made between SCAT and Charlotte County wherein fixed-route bus service is extended into Charlotte County in exchange for Charlotte County DAR serving Englewood residents residing in Sarasota County.

- Finally, it may be possible for SCAT to establish an arrangement with Charlotte County, similar to the one negotiated with MCAT in Manatee County. This arrangement could include the establishment of connecting points between extended SCAT fixed-route bus service and the Charlotte County DAR system. Sarasota residents could transfer from the SCAT bus to the Charlotte County DAR system to accommodate their inter-county travel needs, and vice versa. Connections could be made on a pre-arranged schedule to provide short wait times on the part of passengers and allow for greater efficiencies.

Multi-modal Voucher Program

The concept here is to establish a fare system wherein customers can purchase vouchers with a specific dollar value. These vouchers could be used to purchase transportation on a variety of modes, including the purchase of bus passes and paratransit trips, as well as for any of the other modes that are added to the mobility network in Sarasota County. Individuals could purchase a quantity of vouchers, in much the same way that bus passengers purchase bus passes. Use of vouchers may reduce passenger and operator concerns associated with cash fares. Consideration could be given to providing subsidized vouchers for specific population groups, such as seniors and persons with disabilities. A multi-modal subsidized voucher system has been very successfully implemented in the Los Angeles Cityride program (see User-side Subsidized Taxi Service for full description of this program).
Summer Recreation Tripper Service

Sarasota County boasts more than 50 parks and 14 beaches available to residents and visitors. While some of these sites can be reached by using SCAT fixed-route bus service, many of these activity centers lie outside of the SCAT service area. Access to recreation sites is most limited in South County where a majority of the existing bus routes do not directly serve these trip attractors. The STEP public involvement process revealed that agency representatives and residents have great concern that young people are not able to take advantage of the many opportunities for social, cultural, and physical enrichment available in Sarasota because there are few mobility options customized to meet the demand for recreation trips. The problem is exacerbated during the summer months when young people have an abundance of free time.

One option available to assist in accommodating the recreation travel needs of young people in South County is the development of Summer Recreation Tripper Service. This service could be available during the summer months to provide trips from collection points throughout South County to major parks and recreation centers that cannot be accessed by the existing fixed-route system. Service such as this provides semi-direct access to major activity centers by limiting the number of pick-up stops and destination points. Service is typically limited to two trips in the morning and two trips in the evening. Central collection stops could be provided at well-know locations with comfortable waiting areas. Consideration also could be given to Summer Beach Tripper Service that could transport passengers from South County collection points to public beaches in the Venice area. Space Coast Area Transit in Brevard County has had success with summer routes designed to specifically provide access to area beaches. This service is primarily used by youth that reside in the communities furthest from area beaches.

Community Bicycles

Many pedestrian-oriented communities have had some success with community bicycle programs designed to increase community mobility. In these programs, beach cruiser (no gears) bicycles have been acquired through a variety of means such as used bike shops, found bicycles, and police department unclaimed bicycles. The bicycles are repaired to be in workable condition, painted fluorescent orange, and then placed in bike racks throughout the community for common use. The concept of the community bicycle program is that anyone who needs to travel around the community can hop on an orange bike, ride to their destination, and leave the bicycle for the next person who needs it. The bikes are painted fluorescent orange to
discourage theft and to provide police officers with an indication that the bicycle is part of the program.

In the long-term, communities within the village of Sarasota must take advantage of all mobility options available. Among the mobility options currently underutilized in most communities are non-motorized and pedestrian alternatives. These options are in-line with the philosophy of environmental preservation that is prevalent in Sarasota County. This alternative is to implement a bicycle program similar to the program described above, along the beaches in Sarasota County. The objective of this program is to increase mobility along the beaches without increasing motorized traffic congestion and diminishing air quality. In order for this alternative to be successful, the addition of bike lanes or shoulders and a thorough examination of related safety concerns (e.g. lack of access management, heavy volume traffic, and driveway turning movements) may be required. If this program is successful, consideration also could be given to expanding it to include Downtown Venice and Downtown Sarasota.

The following are strongly associated with the Transportation Resource Center (TRC) and the Coordinated Transportation Pool discussed below. While many of the products may exist as standalone services, they also may be considered as operating elements of the TRC. In some instances, this could be an expansion of an existing service, such as the ridesharing program administered by the MPO. In others, the creation of a new product, such as feeder or subscription services.

**Neighborhood Feeder Service**

One of the limitations of the existing fixed-route bus system consistently cited throughout the STEP process is the difficult time that potential riders have in accessing bus stops. Accessibility in this case may refer to the distance to or from a bus stop, the lack of necessary infrastructure (sidewalks, curb-cuts, etc.), barriers created by environmental factors (heat, rain, lightening), and safety concerns such as the need to cross busy intersections. In the Transportation Resources and Needs Survey of groups, agencies, and organizations in Sarasota County, half of the respondents indicated that the distance from SCAT bus stops to their organization or services acts as a barrier to accessing agency services for clients and potential clients.

Similar issues were identified in the on-board survey of SFC paratransit passengers. Approximately 44 percent of respondents indicated that they have used SCAT bus services sometime in the past. However, more than 40 percent of respondents indicated that they do
not currently use SCAT services because either the buses do not operate in their neighborhood or the buses do not travel to the places they need to travel. Approximately 64 percent of respondents indicated that they would consider using SCAT if they could get to a SCAT bus stop. Finally, another 16 percent would consider using SCAT if SFC delivered them to a safe SCAT bus stop. As discussed previously, similar concerns and issues were raised during the STEP discussion groups and public meetings.

Although SCAT currently provides bus service that can be considered county-wide, only the Downtown Sarasota area receives comprehensive coverage. In other areas of the county, bus stops are a considerable distance from residential areas and activity centers not located on the U.S. 41 corridor. To provide greater accessibility to the fixed-route system available in South County (Venice, Englewood, North Port), neighborhood feeder service could be considered for each of the routes south of Downtown Sarasota.

Feeder service is transportation service that picks passengers up at their origin point (usually home) and transports them for the first leg of their journey to a bus stop. Vans or small buses are typically used for feeder services. One segment of the trip – either the portion from home to stop or the fixed-route portion – is generally fare free. That is, passengers are either charged a fare for the demand response portion of their trip and use a free transfer to the fixed-route system or vice versa. Upon arrival at the stop or station, the passenger disembarks and, after a short wait or immediately upon leaving the feeder vehicle, boards the fixed-route vehicle. The passenger then travels on the bus or train to a stop closest to the final destination. A third leg also may be included wherein feeder service is provided from a stop or station to the final destination. Because point-to-point service is provided, careful scheduling is required to minimize wait times at transfer points.

When feeder service is used to move paratransit users to the less expensive fixed-route system, it is important to understand that feeder service is really not very cost-effective for short trips. The longer the trip, the greater the cost-savings that may result from substituting a portion of the paratransit trip with fixed-route service. Therefore, suburban to urban or rural to urban trips are typically better candidates for feeder service than intra-urban trips.

Mandatory use of feeder service can be a part of an agency’s ADA program. Individuals who are conditionally eligible for ADA complementary paratransit service may be required to use the fixed-route system when feeder service is provided as long as excessive trip lengths are not required to complete the trip.
Neighborhood feeder service in Sarasota County could take many forms using a variety of operational configurations. The most promising approaches for providing this service are paratransit feeder service, general public dial-a-ride service, and volunteer feeder programs. Each is discussed briefly below.

- Paratransit feeder service: This service could target current paratransit users who may be able to use fixed-route services if they could get to an accessible bus stop. The results of the paratransit on-board survey indicate that many current paratransit users either have or could use fixed-route services. An important objective associated with the provision of paratransit feeder service is to increase capacity on the paratransit system for individuals who cannot use fixed-route services under any circumstances. Under this scenario, the CTC becomes responsible for scheduling, dispatching, and providing feeder services in conjunction with the transit agency. Implementation could be relatively seamless due to the existing high level of CTC and transit agency integration and the use of computerized scheduling software at the CTC. However, successful implementation and operation would require that both departments continue to work closely together to ensure that transfer points are coordinated in such a way as to reduce wait and travel times.

- General public dial-a-ride feeder service: This alternative is similar to the paratransit feeder service option presented above with the important distinction that the feeder services are available to the general public rather than to paratransit users only. This type of service could extend fixed-route accessibility to members of the general public who do not qualify for paratransit services but have trouble traveling to and from stations or stops. (General public dial-a-ride is discussed in more extensive detail in a later section of this report.) While this type of service would be open to members of the general public, the CTC could still be the implementing and management organization. This arrangement could capitalize on the existing resources in the county. However, general public dial-a-ride services also could easily be contracted out to private providers, such as taxi service, on a per-trip basis. Additionally, under-utilized transportation resources in the county, such as vehicles owned by faith-based organizations and/or human service agencies could be contracted to provide feeder services within a specified service area. This arrangement could be accomplished through the development of a coordinated community transportation pool, which is described in detail in a later section. Regardless of the operational characteristics, as with paratransit feeder service, a close relationship with the fixed-route provider is needed to ensure effective scheduling of feeder trips.
• Volunteer transportation program: Feeder services also may be offered through a volunteer transportation program. In this scenario, volunteers provide trips to and/or from a station or stop in their own vehicles or in vehicles owned by the transit agency, CTC, or any other implementing agency. If this alternative is pursued, serious consideration should be given to the provision of volunteer feeder services to targeted population groups, such as seniors or residents within specific geographic areas. Volunteer transportation programs will be discussed in more detail below.

Ridesharing

Ridesharing is the shared use of a vehicle by two or more persons for the purpose of traveling to work, school or other trip locations. Vehicles used for ridesharing include privately owned automobiles or vans or publicly owned vans or buses (carpools, vanpools or buspools). Trip origins and destinations of riders may vary. Passengers may share fuel, toll, and parking expenses and driving may be a rotated duty. Although ridesharers most commonly are persons from the same household or neighbors sharing a ride, a ridematching service operated by employers, a regional commuter assistance program or transit agency can facilitate ridesharing arrangements.

Ridesharing success is increased when:

- Travelers find others with similar schedules and points of origin and destination
- Parking is unavailable
- Parking is expensive and commuters can reduce their individual parking costs by ridesharing
- A guaranteed ride home program is offered
- Preferential parking and flexible work schedules for ride sharers are offered by employers
- Employers choose to subsidize the cost of ridesharing

State and local governments can support ridesharing in a number of ways, including:

- planning for high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes as part of highway expansion projects;
- reducing the availability of parking;
• raising the price of public parking;
• strict enforcement of parking regulations; and
• providing funding for van or bus purchases, program planning and regional commuter assistance programs.

Vanpools are particularly attractive for longer commutes. Transit agencies that administer vanpool programs benefit by the vehicle miles traveled that are accrued by the vanpools actually generating revenue. This is because vanpool programs can earn federal and state formula funding attributed to the number of vanpool vehicle miles traveled. By reporting the vanpool mileage as part of the National Transit Database (formerly Section 15), a transit system should expect to increase the amount of state and federal revenue apportioned to it as a result of increases in passenger miles, trips and vehicle revenue miles due to the vanpool program. This revenue can be greater than the transit agency's investment in the vanpool program, making the program a revenue generator.

The Florida State Block Grant program funds are distributed based on a proportional basis among the Florida transit agencies based on a formula using their population, passenger trips, and revenue miles. Florida transit agencies that currently provide vanpool services include Space Coast Area Transit, LYNX, HART, PSTA, and Miami-Dade Transit Agency. Most transit agencies that administer vanpooling operate their own programs, although some agencies, like HART, purchase vanpool services.

Two types of ridesharing programs may have particular applicability in the Sarasota County mobility network: carpools and vanpools.

Carpools

As discussed in Technical Memorandum III, carpooling may be defined as two or more persons sharing rides in a private vehicle. Census data show that it is the most prevalent commute alternative to driving alone in the United States. Carpooling was first encouraged in this country during World War II due to petroleum and rubber conservation measures. It has been promoted since the 1970s in response to energy "crises" and as an air quality transportation control measure. As an important travel demand management (TDM) measure, carpooling can be considered as a strategy for reducing auto pollution and traffic congestion.

The matching processes for carpoolers range from very sophisticated computerized systems to informal arrangements. More effective matching systems usually include information on specific
origins and destinations, schedules, travel routes, and passenger preferences (such as smoking). A sufficiently large pool of potential commuters is important for securing good matches. Overall, it has been found that organized carpools targeting commuters at the work site seem to be more effective than those focusing on residential areas.

A major advantage of carpooling is that it allows the convenience of the private automobile. In addition, responsibilities for driving are shared among the carpoolers. However, there are some disadvantages when compared to driving alone. These include the necessary set schedules, the constrained ability for individuals to run errands, and increased commute time (due to picking up additional passengers). In addition, some commuters feel that carpooling deprives them of their private time.

The most promising market for carpoolers is clearly the commuters traveling to and from work during the peak periods of the day. The size of this market can determine the feasibility of a carpooling program in a given area. For work trips, carpooling is best suited to suburban employment markets. For the suburban-suburban commute, carpooling seems to be the most likely alternative to driving alone due to the higher densities necessary for transit (and even vanpooling, discussed in the next section). Length of work trip also can determine carpool success. Commutes ranging from 15 to 25 miles seem to attract the largest proportion of carpools. An additional market is educational and recreational trips. Students typically carpool because of lower private vehicle availability and increased parking constraints. Many colleges and universities have commute alternatives that are marketed toward students.

Given the characteristics of carpooling described above and the unmet transportation needs of workers identified through the STEP process, carpooling is a relatively low-cost service alternative that may assist workers who need to travel to work sites not currently served by transit. The most promising markets for carpooling in Sarasota County include second and third shift jobs in the service, industrial, and manufacturing sectors, as well as major employment centers located on or near the I-75 corridor. In order for carpooling opportunities to be maximized, the ridematching services offered through the MPO’s commuter assistance program need to be more fully developed.

Commuter Vanpools

The vanpool concept was introduced in Technical Memorandum III. As described in that document, vanpools are an additional alternative to driving alone. The levels of carrying capacity, flexibility, costs, and convenience are in between those of transit and carpools. A vanpool typically consists of 7 to 15 people traveling together in a passenger van. The
commuter vanpool concept typically works best for long-distance commuters (at least 20 miles). Vanpools are particularly effective in situations that include outlying work destinations with little to no public transit service. Therefore, commuter vanpools can be an effective alternative for workers with similar trip patterns and schedules who are not able to access a work site on existing fixed-route bus service. This service scenario directly relates to the need for South County residents to access remote work sites. Vanpools also may be effective for employment sites that are serviced by existing public transit but have a need for workers on shifts that fall outside of the fixed-route’s service parameters.

The three major types of vanpool organization are owner-operator vans, employer-sponsored vanpools, and third-party vanpools. Third-party vanpools are likely the most applicable form of vanpooling for this study, although the other two types could still be encouraged. In this type of arrangement, a third-party organization such as a non-profit corporation, a private vendor, or a transit agency acquires the vans and makes them available to employers or individual users. The vans are generally leased to the users at a rate based on the cost of the vehicle, maintenance, fuel, and insurance. Sometimes, the administration costs incurred by the third party are included in the fares. A vanpool arrangement wherein a third-party acquires the vans and contracts with a private service vendor that provides maintenance and insurance reduces the participant costs of vanpooling. This type of arrangement has been successfully applied in Brevard County, Florida where the transit agency contracts with VPSI for administrative, maintenance, and insurance services.

Although the vanpool arrangement described above does serve to reduce participant costs, these costs are often still too high for members of the transit dependent population. Because many of the worker transportation needs identified are those of the transit dependent population, the possibility of providing vanpool subsidies could be explored. Possible sources of subsidy funding include the local WAGES coalition to develop vanpools for WAGES participants, County subsidies for a County-operated vanpool program, and/or subsidies provided by private donations and/or foundations for lower income commuters.

**Agency Vanpools**

Many agencies, groups, and organizations in Sarasota County would like to provide transportation to their clients and/or members. For many of these agencies, even if fixed-route transportation were available, clients or members would not be able to use that transportation due to physical or cognitive limitations. In the past, these agencies have attempted to acquire their own vehicles (usually vans) to meet their own transportation needs. When successful in attempts to acquire vehicles, these groups must then contend with the challenge of finding
qualified drivers, covering operating costs, ensuring the safety of vehicles through regular maintenance services, etc. A more effective and cost-efficient method of meeting the needs of these agencies may be the formation of a County-sponsored agency vanpool program open to non-profit agencies in Sarasota County. If the County is able to provide the capital (vehicles) for the program and contracts with a private company for the administration, maintenance, and insurance needs, the agency cost of providing transportation services can be reduced. In addition, the agency is relieved of many of the administrative problems associated with the acquisition and upkeep of vehicles.

Guaranteed Ride Home Programs

A guaranteed/emergency ride home program (GRH) is generally considered crucial to the success of ridesharing. Many people are reluctant to rideshare for fear of being stranded at work without transportation during an emergency. GRH reduces anxiety over ridesharing by guaranteeing participants a convenient and reliable mode of transportation to their home in the event of a personal emergency or in the event an employee must work overtime. The guaranteed ride can be provided by taxi, short-term auto rental, company-owned car, shuttle service or public transit. Such a program can either be administered by an employer, a regional commuter assistance program, TMO or transit agency.

The Sarasota-Manatee MPO is about to establish a GRH program for ridesharing participants in their Commuter Assistance Program (CAP). This program is scheduled to begin during FY 2000 and will be administered by the CAP program. This program could be heavily marketed to potential rideshare participants, as well major employers in the county. The GRH program may be an effective incentive for commuters to join publicly or privately sponsored ridesharing programs, such as carpools and vanpools.

Promote Employer-Provided Subsidies

The Transportation Commute Benefit Program is a provision of the Internal Revenue Code, Section 132(f), which permits employers to subsidize their employees' cost of commuting to work, by transit and vanpools, up to $65 per month. (In 2002, the maximum for transit and vanpools will be increased to $100 per month.) Up to $175 per month can presently be provided by employers to employees for parking at or near an employer's work site, or at a facility from which an employee commutes via transit, vanpool, or carpool. These expenses are tax deductible to the employer and cost the employer less than providing the same amount in
Employers also can take advantage of the new provision in the tax code that allows employees to use pre-tax dollars income to pay for qualified fringe benefits such as transit passes, vanpool fares, and qualified parking. As a result, employees take home more of their paycheck and employers benefit from this by saving on payroll taxes (at least 7.65% savings) and other salary-based benefits such as pension contributions defined as a percent of salary. Employers can offer both the commute benefit and the pre-tax option up to statutory limits. The Sarasota-Manatee MPO CAP program could ensure that information about the tax deductible commute subsidies available to employers are aggressively disseminated to all major employers in Sarasota County.

User-side Subsidized Taxi Service

The user-side subsidy service concept was introduced in Technical Memorandum III. This service alternative has been identified as a potential method of serving primarily low-income citizens or seniors with a need for personal mobility. In a user-side subsidy program, patrons are charged a portion of the fare associated with a demand response trip and the remainder of the cost for the trip is subsidized by the program’s implementing agency. Taxicab companies typically provide the trips delivered through user-side subsidy programs. These programs have a high potential for effectiveness in areas with low demand or low density, or at specific times of the day (late evening service), or specific days of the week (Sunday service). Taxi-based user-side subsidy programs are currently operating in many large cities in the United States, such as Houston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Oklahoma City, and Seattle.

Although each program is designed according to each area’s unique mobility needs, some general parameters can be applied to taxi-based user-side subsidy programs. Customers are typically sold taxi vouchers worth a certain dollar amount toward a cab ride (e.g., $10.00) at a reduced cost. The amount of the subsidy passed on to consumers varies from 40 percent to 90 percent. For example, in a program with a 50 percent subsidy, the consumer would be charged $5.00 for a $10.00 taxi voucher. The customer then makes a trip with a designated taxi company and is responsible for any portion of the total fare that exceeds the total value of the voucher.

The user-side subsidy program in Los Angeles (Cityride) is structured to allow for shorter trips made through designated taxi companies, as well as for trips on other modes. In this program, eligible customers purchase booklets of vouchers at a fraction of their cost (between 75 and 90 percent subsidy). Each individual voucher is valued at $1.00. The vouchers may be used toward the purchase of taxi service, paratransit service, or bus passes. Eligibility for the
Cityride program is limited to persons over the age of 65 or individuals with a disability that impairs their mobility. When purchasing taxi service or bus passes, each voucher has a value of $1.00. When purchasing taxi service, customers may pay the fare using a combination of vouchers and cash, but cannot use more than eight vouchers (maximum $8.00 voucher value) for any one trip. In FY 1997 the average trip length in this program was just under two miles.

A user-side subsidized taxi program may have many applications in the future mobility network now being conceptualized for Sarasota County. A subsidized program that offers vouchers that can be used to purchase transportation services on a variety of modes is a particularly attractive alternative for a comprehensive mobility network in Sarasota County. Elements of the user-side subsidy alternative also may be incorporated into many other forms of service delivery, such as fixed-route feeder service. This particular approach to mobility enhancement may be best applied in South County where population density is relatively low and the availability of transit service is limited. Several potential applications of user-side subsidy taxi service in Sarasota County are provided below. The applications should not be considered mutually exclusive of one another or in relation to many of the other alternatives described throughout this section.

- **Englewood General Public Service:** Englewood currently is served by one SCAT fixed-route which has two-hour headways. Several major activity centers, such as the new Englewood Sports Complex on South River Road, are not served by the existing bus service. The community also boasts a large seasonal population of retired residents. In addition, although many services located in Charlotte County are closer than comparable services in Sarasota County, there is no intercounty public transit available currently. A taxi-based user-side subsidy program for residents in Englewood could be explored to increase access to the fixed-route system, provide greater mobility to seniors and youth, and allow for travel between Charlotte and Sarasota Counties.

- **Seniors and people with disabilities:** Taxi-based user-side subsidy programs have been very successful when targeting seniors and people with disabilities. This type of service is especially effective for the provision of short trips. Passenger satisfaction is increased because travel time and wait time are generally shorter than making the same trip on the paratransit system. In addition, capacity on the paratransit system is available for longer and/or more specialized transportation needs. Eligibility for a user-side subsidy program limited to seniors and people with disabilities could be established through the formal eligibility process already in place at SFC.
South County feeder to SCAT fixed-route system:  Subsidized taxi service also may be designed to provide greater access to the SCAT fixed-route system.  Passengers can be encouraged to use taxi vouchers in conjunction with SCAT fixed-route services by limiting the number of vouchers used in a single trip and providing for free transfer to the fixed-route system.

Jitney Service

Jitney service refers to the private operation of vans or station wagons that carry up to 15 passengers and operate on semi-fixed-routes on a fairly regular basis.  Jitneys typically operate on major thoroughfares, picking passengers up anywhere along routes and sometimes deviating from the route slightly to drop passengers off at their homes.  As described in Technical Memorandum III, because jitney services are market driven (i.e., service is provided in circumstances where the operator is able to make a profit), the services are configured to best meet the needs of that market.  Jitneys have been most successful in high density urban areas with high concentrations of immigrants, such as San Francisco, Miami, San Diego, and Atlantic City, as well as within many Central and South American urban centers.

Jitneys may contribute to a community transportation network in a variety of ways.  A jitney system may act as a capacity enhancer by relieving overcrowding and passenger overflow on the fixed-route system.  Another potential role for jitneys is to extend service by providing transportation services in low-density areas where existing bus operations fall below accepted minimum standards.  When used to enhance or extend fixed-route services, jitneys are typically competitively bid by the public transit operator.  Jitneys may function to serve as transit feeders to provide greater access from residential areas to the fixed-route system.  Finally, jitneys have been employed to provide community-based transit in low-income neighborhoods.

Because jitney services are generally market driven, it is likely that any such service in Sarasota County would need to be structured as a subsidized, contracted program due to the current absence of self-sustaining markets. One exception may be jitney service designed as community-based transit within residential portions of Downtown Sarasota.  The following applications of subsidized jitney service could be explored further:

- Community-based transit in Downtown Sarasota residential areas (non-subsidized)
- Deviated circulator service in North Port (subsidized)
- Fixed-route transit feeder service county-wide (subsidized)
Englewood general public circulator service covering Sarasota County and Charlotte County portion of the community (subsidized)

School Pool

The travel needs of youth and young people in Sarasota County have been identified as an issue of major concern throughout the STEP process. Youth and young people have many opportunities for social, physical, and cultural enrichment through formal and informal extracurricular activities available throughout the county. However, although these opportunities exist, many are unable to take advantage of them due to limited mobility options. It has long been known that the demands of life today require adults to manage transportation to and from school and extracurricular events for their children. This often requires them to have a vehicle available at all times. Once again the transportation system is stretched to meet the demands of our lifestyles as a tremendous amount of traffic is poured onto area roadways during peak travel hours when school trips also demand road capacity.

One way to address the travel needs of youth and young people is through the establishment and coordination of a School Pool. A School Pool is a ride matching program much like a carpool matching program. However, rather than linking commuters with similar origins and destinations, a School Pool ride matching program seeks to connect parents who have children attending common schools in order to pool transportation efforts. A School Pool program in Sarasota County could be operated through the MPO’s Commuter Assistance Program in addition to the commuter ride matching program. This type of program has been successfully implemented and coordinated by LYNX in the Orlando area and is scheduled for continued expansion.

Subscription Routes

Subscription transportation routes generally take the form of prearranged service that is designed to meet specific group or individual needs. This type of service could be provided using accessible fixed-route buses (small or large), vans, or any other type of vehicle with available capacity. Subscription routes work best when there are specific needs for group trips to a few destinations during off-peak hours. The service operates through pre-arranged agreements to serve groups or individuals for specific trips or destinations. The establishment of subscription routes in Sarasota County has the following potential applications:
• Subscription route(s) to serve 2nd and 3rd shift workers at major employment centers: Many service, manufacturing, and industrial sector jobs include late night and early morning shifts that are not served by public transit. One approach to meeting the needs of these workers is the establishment of subscription routes specifically designed around employer and employee travel needs. A vehicle(s) can be dedicated to transport 2nd and/or 3rd shift employees. This arrangement could be coordinated between the lead transportation agency and employers. Employers and employees could be responsible for covering the operating costs associated with this service. Outreach efforts that include SCAT, the Sarasota Chamber of Commerce, the Suncoast Workforce Development Board, and representatives from major employment centers throughout the county could be dedicated to identifying specific transportation needs of employees and the potential for subscription routes to meet those needs. This process could consider the use of vanpools to meet the travel needs of employees.

• Subscription routes to serve youth programs: Many agencies, groups, and faith-based organizations in Sarasota County offer after-school youth programs. A common challenge faced by each of these programs is how to get participants from school to the after-school program facilities. Currently, most of the programs are fending for themselves when it comes to transportation. Many have purchased vehicles and regularly struggle with issues related to ensuring that a driver is available, operating costs are covered, and vehicles are maintained. A single breakdown anywhere in the complex transportation system can have seriously adverse effects on the function and mission of the youth program.

One alternative available to these agencies and groups is to coordinate and consolidate their resources by funding subscription routes that pick up children at schools and deliver them to the various program facilities. This alternative could remove some of the worries associated with the organization and operation of individual transportation programs. Many of these programs are currently transporting children in 15-passenger vans and controversy has arisen regarding whether the use of these vehicles to transport children from school is in violation of federal regulations. Subscription routes using full-size or mini-buses could provide compliance with federal and state regulations and ensure that vehicles are maintained in safe condition.
Deviated Fixed-route Services

Route and point deviation services are actually hybrid configurations with features of both fixed-route, fixed schedule transit service and demand responsive, curb-to-curb service. This type of service is generally a more cost-effective way of providing transit services in smaller urban, suburban, and rural areas. Route and point deviation systems work very well in areas where most destinations are near fixed-routes, but residential (origin) areas are farther from fixed-routes. Both route and point deviation service typically use smaller vehicles to allow for easier navigation through residential areas. Both route and point deviation systems require reservation and scheduling systems to accommodate deviation requests.

In a route deviation system, a vehicle operates along a fixed-route, making scheduled stops along the way. However, vehicles may deviate one to two blocks from the route to pick up and drop off passengers upon request. The vehicle then immediately returns to the fixed-route at the same point from which it departed to accommodate the request for deviation.

Point deviation is very similar to route deviation in that vehicles serve designated stops, or time points, on a fixed schedule. However, vehicles will deviate two or more blocks between time points to pick up and drop off passengers upon request. In point deviation systems, the vehicle operator and the deviation schedule determine the route that the vehicle travels between time points.

Point deviation service may address mobility needs identified in the Venice area and the City of North Port. These alternatives are described below.

- Implement point deviation on SCAT Route 13 in Venice area: As part of the STEP process, paratransit origin and destination data was collected from SFC representing two typical days of service. This data was plotted, along with the SCAT fixed-route network, on a map of the county and analyzed to determine if adjustments could be made to the fixed-route system to better serve paratransit users. This analysis revealed that many paratransit origins and destinations are either on or very near to Route 13. This route is relatively short and serves West Venice attractors such as Venice Hospital, Venice Community Center, and the public library. The paratransit on-board passenger survey revealed that many passengers feel that they could use the SCAT fixed-routes if they were able to get to and from bus stops. Redesigning Route 13 to provide point deviation service to pick passengers up at their homes and deliver them to final destinations within a couple of blocks from the fixed-route will provide more
opportunities for the TD population and other residents and visitors to use the fixed-route system.

- Replace North Port (Route 19) loop: Currently, SCAT’s Route 19 includes a loop that travels from U.S. 41 north on Biscayne Drive, east on Price Boulevard, south on Sumter Boulevard and back west on U.S. 41. This loop portion of Route 19 has two-hour headways and does not deviate from the roads just described. In order to provide better intra-city transportation, as well as connections with Routes 9 and 19, this loop could be eliminated from Route 19 and replaced with point deviation circulator service. Point deviation service, utilizing mini-buses, could allow for greater penetration into residential areas, as well as direct access to major activity centers such as the new George Mullin Activity Center. Future development is forecast to occur east of the existing loop and north to I-75. Therefore, an additional deviated circulator could be considered in the near-term future. These services could be developed as a partnership between Sarasota County (SCAT) and the City of North Port wherein capital and operating costs are shared. In order to facilitate the immediate implementation of deviated circulator service in place of the Route 19 loop, SCAT could contribute the portion of Route 19 operating costs associated with providing loop service and dedicate a SFC mini-bus to North Port circulator service. The City of North Port could cover the remaining operating costs. Any additional circulator services established in North Port could be designed as a partnership between SCAT and the City of Sarasota.

General Public Dial-A-Ride Service

General public dial-a-ride (DAR) is demand-responsive, door-to-door or curb-to-curb service that is provided to members of the general public without regard to the functional abilities of passengers. Customers make trip requests in advance and are picked up at their origin and dropped off at their destination. Thus, DAR systems require that the implementing agency or organization have some ability and willingness to receive and schedule trip requests. DAR generally takes one of three forms: many origins to one destination, many origins to a few destinations, or many origins to many destinations. While general public DAR is the most personal alternative to traditional fixed-route service, it is the most expensive alternative. General public DAR services may work well in low density areas where internal community service is desired or as feeder service to fixed-routes providing connection to higher density urban areas. This type of general public service tends to work best when services are concentrated within smaller neighborhoods or communities.
• Provide General Public Dial-a-Ride County-wide: General public dial-a-ride could be applied county-wide to provide late night transportation needs. Under this alternative, general public dial-a-ride service could be available county-wide from the time when the fixed-route service ends in the evening until the service begins the next morning. The same days of service could be applied to general public dial-a-ride as are in place for fixed-route public transit. This alternative could be a particularly effective option for meeting the needs of 2nd and 3rd shift workers in the county.

• Provide General Public Dial-a-Ride Service in Englewood: The mobility issues related to the general public in Englewood have been discussed in detail in previous sections. Additionally, the concept of providing dial-a-ride service in this community has been presented in relation to intercounty service between Charlotte and Sarasota Counties, feeder services, and user-side subsidized taxi services. In order to address the community’s need for enhanced mobility, existing transportation resources could be maximized. Therefore, this alternative is to explore an agreement with Charlotte County to provide general public dial-a-ride services in the Sarasota portion of Englewood, as well as within the Charlotte County portion of the community. Both counties could share the costs of this service. The primary functions of the dial-a-ride service would be to provide greater access to the fixed-route system, more convenient intra-community travel, and intercounty mobility for both Charlotte and Sarasota residents.

• General public dial-a-ride service in Englewood may be provided through a subsidized taxi program (as described earlier). While this service could be available to all residents, the amount of the subsidy provided could vary according to population group characteristics (e.g., low-income residents receive a higher subsidy). The primary functions of this service could be to provide more direct access to community resources and services, as well as feeder services to SCAT Route 16.
Customer Enhancements and Market Development

Part I: The Business of Transit

Publix Corporation possesses a multitude of strategic thinkers who continuously refine the experience of shopping at Publix, from the time customers pull in to a parking space to the time they pull out. From store layout and design to shelf height, from aisle width to product presentation, from technological improvements at cashier stations to the courtesy of employees who assist you to the car, the entire shopping experience has been experimented with, modified, tinkered with, changed, changed back and expanded. It is evident that Publix has a passionate commitment to creating the pleasurable shopping experience that has so long been the company’s slogan, a commitment that is based on pleasing environments, fast and courteous service, the personal touch and product quality.

Transit and transportation services have a lot to learn from Publix Corporation. Whether we like it or not, the marketplace of the late 20th century becomes more sophisticated and competitive every day in the pursuit of market share and customer loyalty. Private sector companies have realized that advertising and delivering products to the marketplace is only a small part of expanding market share. Customer loyalty is based on service after the sale and the company’s commitments to standing by its products. A wise transit marketing director once said, in our business, we have only two kinds of customers: those who use our services and those who do not. This means that in addition to customers and potential customers, public transit has the expanded customer base of its entire community. It also means that people who are customers of transit are customers of companies who must compete in this sophisticated and competitive environment. As a result, transit must position itself in the marketplace in such a way as to integrate its products and services into the life and economy of its community.

There are a number of opportunities for SCAT to take a more strategic approach not only to expand services but also to improve overall image, meaning to the community, customer bases, and community values. Setting a course for capitalizing on these opportunities starts with taking a look at what gives Sarasota its life and sense of community. What are the significant issues? Community values in Sarasota County consist of a number of social and economic interests, among them including:

♦ Businesses;
♦ Tourism and economic development;
♦ Downtown Sarasota;
The challenge for SCAT is to understand the needs and interests of each of these entities for the purpose of developing partnerships and joint opportunities to promote the interests of transit in Sarasota County. The challenge begins with relationships. Means by which SCAT could cultivate these interests are outlined below.

**Bus Advertising Program**

One means of cultivating the business community while at the same time generating additional revenues for transit services is a bus advertising program. Through the miracle of art, paint, and sometimes vinyl wrap, entire buses can be transformed into moving art forms that convey a message or advertisement for a product, service or business. Strict artistic standards are usually applied and advertisements are limited to any product or service that can be purchased by a minor. This type of policy rules out advertising for tobacco, alcohol, the lottery, adult entertainment, and/or other services or products deemed objectionable to the community.

In return for advertising, SCAT can accept a monthly payment for advertisements or use their relationship to promote some other aspect of transit service. For instance, media outlets such as newspapers, television and radio stations may provide time slots or space to SCAT in return for bus advertising. Businesses may provide bus access to their property, construct transit amenities, or implement employer transportation packages to encourage their employees to use alternative forms of transportation.

The current plan underway at SCAT is to contract with a private sector firm that would act as a third-party to go out and sell the full-wrap advertising to potential advertisers. The rationale behind this concept is that third-party firms can go out to national advertisers through advertising agencies and land accounts from firms that sell products nationally (Coca Cola,
McDonalds, etc.). Although this strategy is sound and used by other transit communities, an alternative could be for SCAT to maintain an option to negotiate contracts with local businesses with bases in Sarasota County. This could include local media outlets and other companies that have the potential of promoting transit interests in return for painted bus advertising.

In addition to the business community, SCAT can use the bus advertising program to promote other agencies that are of importance to the community. Actually, this has been the focus of the advertising program to-date with the Keep Sarasota Beautiful campaign. This is another aspect of forming relationship with other community jewels. For instance, SCAT could paint a bus to highlight the importance of parks, the environment, neighborhoods, and social and community groups. By setting aside a percentage of the fleet dedicated to community-oriented values, SCAT can build good will and support for transit as well as establish itself as a full partner in the life of Sarasota County.

Special Event Transportation

Transit systems should always be trying to add value to their community beyond their core mission. One way to do this is to give members of the general public, who might never otherwise experience the inside of a bus, an opportunity to sample the transit product. This can be achieved through a number of means, not the least of which is event transportation. Every community has its public events that create traffic congestion throughout the year. Events such as boat shows, arts festivals, the Hamfest, and theater festivals bring large numbers of people together wherein parking is always an issue. Special event transportation creates park-and-ride settings where people park and then ride a bus to access the event. Since these events often occur on weekends, buses that are not in revenue service can be used to provide this type of transportation. Fostering community good will, product sampling, and managing congestion are among the benefits of special event transportation.

Community Service

Community service is another means by which transit can add value to the community while at the same time providing a means for product sampling. Community service enables the transit system to provide one-time special transportation services for a community group as a complimentary service. An organization requests that a bus take a group of people from one place to another for an event, such as a luncheon, an outing, a museum or other cultural visit,
or field trip. The transit system can target those market segments it is most attempting to cultivate, such as youth, seniors, elected officials, chambers of commerce, clubs with influential community leaders, etc. Generally, there are limits on the number of hours per month and the number of buses that can be devoted to community service.

Community Outreach

Community outreach is another important step in getting to know the community that is getting to know transit. SCAT should seize and proactively seek any and all opportunities to give presentations out in the community. Examples include the Chambers of Commerce, the Homebuilders Association, Rotary and other club gatherings. Speaking engagements could focus on the importance of the STEP process in furthering community goals, and the role of transit in community life. Speaking engagements are a great time to receive input from the public on issues of importance related to transportation and to establish contacts for potential partnerships.

Communications

Transit’s image is a major factor in fostering public support for public transportation investments. A communications program is different from a marketing program because it does not attempt to actually stimulate usage of the transportation products. Rather, it provides the transit system with several methods by which to convey messages to the public as a whole about the role of transit and mobility, importance to the community in terms of quality of life and economic development, impact on transportation systems, future visions and improvements. However, if done well, a communications program can actually become a part of the marketing efforts of a transit system by enhancing transit’s attractiveness to those members of the community who had previously never given it a thought.

A communications program, developed for both SCAT and the STEP process as a whole, could be designed to improve image and build public support for continued expansion of mobility services. In building this support, the STEP process could implement programs and then communicate the progress of those programs over time. A communications program for SCAT and STEP could be tasked as an initiative with the Sarasota County Openly Planning for Excellence (SCOPE) committee.
Marketing

In a recent focus group session for a Florida transit system, one of the participants made a compelling remark, [the transit system] has to understand that I don’t need them. They have to make me want them. Thus, the case is made for transit marketing. In the transit industry, marketing has two fundamental roles: the first is to position the transit system and its products in the marketplace and the second is to sell those products and services. Since transit straddles the fence of being a tax-supported municipal service and a business that needs to develop customers, local governments are often reluctant to make investments in marketing out of fear that constituents will criticize the use of tax dollars. In addition, there is the inevitable argument that investments in marketing take away funds that could be placed into service.

In spite of the hurdles, the opportunities for marketing are to build image, community support, ridership gains, potential customer bases, and increased customer satisfaction with existing customers. To that degree, it is the compelling power of marketing that must be stressed over and above its hurdles. In fiscal year 1997, the marketing budget at SCAT was approximately $80,000. With a total operating budget of $3.9 million, the marketing budget represented about 2 percent of overall operating expenses. This section outlines opportunities for expanding investments for marketing and the associated benefits.

A solid marketing program targets multiple audiences with different messages utilizing a variety of media. Audiences include non-riding taxpayers (community-at-large), potential business partners, customers, potential customers, and public officials (opinion-leaders). Each of these audiences requires that the transit system utilize different techniques to reach them including business to business relationships, promotions, sponsorships, and school education.

Business to Business Relationships

Often, transit agencies attempt to make sales calls on major employers to sell such products as employee pass programs and commuter assistance programs, or to establish relationships for bus circulation on property and construction of amenities. The problem with these techniques is that often there is little incentive for employers to participate and/or cooperate because the transit agency has nothing to offer in return. In developing these relationships, SCAT has assets that could create relationships that are mutually beneficial. Advertising on buses, bus schedules, joint promotions (such as with restaurant chains), and sponsorship opportunities are among the arsenal of opportunities for SCAT to explore with business partners.
Promotions

SCAT and MCAT recently conducted a joint promotion with a character, Thornton B. Frugal, who was portrayed as a retired individual who promoted the value of transit service for the price. Frugal was featured in a radio broadcast and made personal appearances on board buses for the two systems. Another promotion SCAT does for passengers is the My favorite bus operator promotion. In this promotion, customers tell in 25 words or less about their favorite operator and why he or she should be recognized. For those entries that are picked as winners, the customers are awarded a free monthly pass. Promotions include rider promotions and community-level promotions. Opportunities to expand such promotions include a frequent rider program such as those offered by airlines wherein customers could be rewarded with free travel or other gifts if they travel often on transit. Another promotion could be a Thanks for riding promotion that could actually stimulate sales of passes. Customers could turn in a pass at the end of a month and receive a free gift such as an umbrella, hat, t-shirt, etc.

Opportunities exist for promotions at the community level. LYNX in Orlando sponsored a season of the Broadway series at the Bob Carr Auditorium. Community-level promotions were run for each show in the series. For Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, there was a coloring contest in the newspaper for children. For Hello Dolly, there was a promotion for seniors. One idea currently under consideration at SCAT is to develop a personal connection between non-riders and transit with a direct-mail piece targeted at residences within proximity to SCAT routes. The direct mail piece could give information on the nearest route to a resident’s home and all the places the resident could reach by riding that route. Community level promotions seek to gain exposure for the transit system as a corporate entity and build good will and recognition with the public as a whole.

Sponsorships

Currently, SCAT and MCAT co-sponsor an event called, Try Transit Week. This is an event sponsored nationally by APTA and implemented in local communities. There is a week long celebration with events that culminate with a free day on both systems. In addition, there is a color insert in the newspaper, sponsored by the transit systems, the MPO and the FDOT featuring information about transit and the MPO’s commuter assistance program.

Other opportunities exist for SCAT to sponsor events such as arts festivals, theater, and other cultural events. Transit systems often co-sponsor events that heavy corporate sponsorship.
SCAT also could gain significant exposure by sponsoring a community event, such as a music festival, wherein SCAT could seek corporate sponsors as co-sponsors. SCAT could gain top billing and the other sponsors could get minor exposure.

School Education Program

Currently, SCAT has a school education program in place called, “Bus it and Book it.” Staff members make a presentation to 5th graders about the history of SCAT, how to ride the bus, and how to read a map. The following week, the students are taken on a bus to the library. Students are given a family pass where the whole family can ride the bus every Saturday of a particular month. This technique is designed to gain parent participation with their children.

An expanded school education program is one that attempts to reach children and youth to educate them about the benefits of transit to society and to them individually. This program provides opportunities for transit systems to form relationships with teachers, students, parents and school administrators. A curriculum is developed for different grade levels that stresses the historical significance, modern significance, benefits, travel possibilities, the transit experience, independence, and economics of public transit. Art contests can be held for younger students to draw a picture of what they learned during the session. Older students can win bus passes and other transit trinkets. This type of program attempts to cultivate the youth market to use transit services as well as make them future riders into adulthood.

Part II: Creating the Transit Experience

Consider for a minute a person (in this case, a man) sitting in his house and thinking about alternative means of transportation. First of all, does he know the name of the transit system? If he does, what does he know or what has he heard about that system? Would he know how to look up the transit system in the phone book? Would he know what to say if he made the call? If he obtained information about trip-making, would he know where to go to catch the bus? Would he know what a bus stop sign looks like? Would he know what side of the street to stand to catch a bus going to his destination? Would there be a safe and comfortable place for him to wait? Would he know how much to pay for his ride and would he have exact change? Would the inside of a bus be a pleasing environment to him? Would he have confidence that the bus operator would provide assistance if he needed it? The questions continue on and on until the answers to all of them together become the overall transit experience.
Passenger Amenities

An amenity is defined as, any feature that provides comfort, convenience, or pleasure. A major piece of the transit experience is safe, accessible, attractive and comfortable waiting areas for customers. This applies to bus stops, transfer centers, and at major points of origin/destination such as shopping malls. Passenger amenities include passenger shelters, information kiosks, street furniture, trash cans, telephones, water fountains, and in some cases, restrooms. In addition, amenities such as planted trees, bike racks and bike lockers can be placed at bus stops. An amenities program has the objective of being flexible enough to incorporate different design features based on compatibility with surrounding land uses, customer demand, artistic and creative elements, and community values. Many transit systems actually design shelters and street furniture that are reflective of the community. In some cases, those designs can be revised to reflect the values of a neighborhood. The most important elements of any program are to:

- Create a more pleasing and comfortable environment for customers;
- Enhance the attractiveness of transit service to potential customers;
- Foster community ownership of not only amenities but the transit system as a whole;
- Promote pleasing aesthetic urban design for all members of the community.

An integrated passenger amenities program provides for not only the aesthetics of various amenities (the look, feel and function), but also the identity of those amenities as being associated with public transit. It is the establishment of this kind of presence that fosters permanence for transit in the community.

Vehicle interiors are places where customer amenities can be placed. In the six hats sessions with the STEP Advisory Committee, there was discussion regarding placing sound systems and television sets on buses to provide information and advertising. Another idea was to place coolers on the bus for groceries. Other ideas for vehicle interiors included satellite feeds for television shows, coffee, newspapers, seating upgrades, happy hour, and giving people a limo experience.

In addition to passenger amenities, infrastructure is needed to ensure that passengers are able to get to bus stops. Infrastructure needs related to transit include sidewalks, curb cuts, and
light timing that allows for street crossings. In order to determine the level of accessibility that currently exists at SCAT bus stops and the types of amenities provided, SCAT should conduct a thorough bus stop inventory. The information collected in the inventory could be input and plotted using Geographic Information Systems (GIS). This information would be invaluable to efforts designed to fully integrate fixed route transit and paratransit services. This information may facilitate implementation of many of the other alternatives suggested throughout this report.

Other aspects of a passenger amenities program include incorporating transit-friendly design into new developments and road improvements. A transit system is much more likely to garner support and cooperation from developers and engineers if design standards, transit circulation patterns, engineering and construction drawings, and a site consideration checklist can be provided before roads and developments are constructed. In many cases, the transit-friendly design standards must be addressed in local land use, zoning and development regulations in order to inspire developers to be more transit-oriented.

Bus Operator Training

In this alternative, bus operators could be given additional training to provide superior customer service as part of the overall transit experience. Customer service entails greeting passengers, providing helpful information, announcing bus stops over a sound system, courtesy, assistance with bags, strollers and other items, assisting people with disabilities in boarding a bus, and deploying wheelchair lifts and kneeling features. Since bus operators have a great deal of stress in operating buses under hazardous traffic conditions, special training for customer service can actually enhance the experience of transit for operators and customers. The Canadian Urban Transit Association developed a training program for customer service that is called, Transit Ambassador. The program contains 10 modules that teach communications skills, dealing with difficult situations, complaints, passengers with special needs and other customer-oriented behaviors.

Bikes on Buses

In the past, Bikes on Buses was a marketing term that became prevalent in standard usage to describe a rack that is mounted on the front of a bus to accommodate passengers who wish to bike for a portion of their trip and ride the bus for a portion. The popularity of these racks
nationwide has not only refined their design among manufacturers but has greatly reduced costs because of mass production. Bike racks on the front of a bus benefit just about everybody because they reach out to a potential customer base, foster balanced transportation modes, don’t create hazards in bus interiors, and are environmentally friendly.

Transit Information

Outside of mass media such as newspaper, radio and television, traditional transit marketing efforts have typically employed the functions of telephone information, printed schedules, printed system maps, and on-board information placards to reach transit customers with information about the system. However, these methods have had a limited means of distribution to existing customers and virtually no distribution to potential customers. As a result, transit systems have attempted to utilize more sophisticated technologies and methods to reach wider audiences and to make transit information more readily accessible.

Accessibility of transit information can be achieved through computerized kiosks offering real time schedule information, automated telephone information advertised in the phone book (another very good alternative for the STEP as a whole), trip-planning software capabilities, Internet sites for customers to gain scheduling and marketing information. Similarly, implementation of stored value passes, read/write magnetic cards, and smart cards are changing the manner in which people can purchase transportation. Quite possibly the largest scale project ever attempted was for the Atlanta Olympics wherein several banks, credit card issuers and other major corporate sponsors combined forces to manage transportation during the Olympic Games held in 1996. Truly, the democratization of information that has resulted from the computer age is sometimes a blessing and sometimes a curse as people become overwhelmed with information. If we really bust through the mold, we can realize that there are ideas that haven’t even been thought of yet to create greater personal connection between people and transportation.

Under this alternative, SCAT could investigate means to make transit information more available to the general public in areas such as downtown, at major malls, in business center atriums, and on the Internet. Also, the process of refining route schedules and system maps to make them easier to use and comprehend could continuously be refined.
Travel Training

Travel training is a support service offered by transit and paratransit systems to teach people how to navigate a system, from leaving their homes to accessing a bus stop to reading schedules to planning trips to trip-making. Either paid employees or volunteers are utilized to provide the service to those who would consider changing to transit from other modes of travel. Typically, seniors and people with disabilities are good candidates for travel training.

Coordination

The Florida coordinated transportation system, guided by state legislation in Chapter 427, F.S., establishes a community transportation coordinator (CTC) in each county to either provide or coordinate services for all people who are transportation disadvantaged. As noted earlier in this process, the definition of transportation disadvantaged includes those individuals who because of age, income or disability cannot provide or arrange for their own transportation. Theoretically, the CTC has the authority to bring all agencies/entities that receive public funding for transportation into the coordinated system. In terms of the STEP process and its desire to bring together all forms of community transportation, the current legislation imposes some limitations on the powers of the CTC, including:

- Not all agencies/entities providing transportation serve clients who would meet the definition of TD;
- Many agencies/entities operate vehicles and services that are privately funded, which is not covered under Chapter 427; and
- Gentle admonitions notwithstanding, Chapter 427 does not include any sanctions for agencies/entities that do receive public funding for transportation but choose not to participate in the coordinated system.

Insurance, maintenance, safety, drug/alcohol testing and reporting requirements also are often cited as barriers to coordination. Despite these sometimes cumbersome requirements and the fact that those requirements must be monitored, people likely would not want to entrust their loved ones to any person or entity delivering transportation wherein there is a possibility that the vehicle has not been properly maintained to ensure safety and reliability. Given the goals of the STEP process, there appears to be one over-riding issue related to coordination that draws the line between success and failure: agencies/entities typically do not have the resources to
incurs costs without compensation simply because it is the right thing to do. Correspondingly, there is one factor that can overcome all barriers, and it is simply this: true coordination entails relationships that must be based on mutually beneficial interests among parties. When one airline partners with another airline, a rental car company, or a long distance carrier to provide bonus frequent flyer miles, you can bet that there is a mutual interest among parties and it is not to give people free flights. The mutual interests are to capture the same customer bases and foster loyalty to those companies among customers.

In this section, alternatives will be examined for coordinating agencies and entities that provide community transportation to bring about the vision of a comprehensive mobility network. The focus of the alternatives will be to create a mechanism, namely a community transportation pool, to foster relationships based on mutual interests among parties.

The Role of the CTC

In one Florida community, the transit agency became the CTC after a year when the previous CTC experienced severe financial and operating crises in the coordinated system. At the point that the transit agency became the CTC, the transportation community was fearful, distrustful, disillusioned, and desirous of dissociating from the coordinated system. Under these circumstances, the new CTC had the nearly insurmountable challenge of restoring credibility, faith and confidence among purchasing and coordinating agencies in the region. When negotiating coordination contracts, the CTC explained that the reporting data from agencies would be pooled as part of the Annual Operating Report to the Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged, and that the ridership data could increase the funding levels of the TD non-sponsored program coming into the county. Further, those funds could be used to assist clients of the agencies for trip needs other than those covered by their funding. As time progressed, the transportation community made up of the CTC, system sponsors, coordinated agencies, and customers was restored as the community members helped each other in times of need.

The scenario of agencies declining to enter into coordination contracts is one that often is a reality in Florida. However, CTCs do have some resources at their disposal to entice those agencies receiving public funding for transportation, including (but not necessarily limited to):

- Approval of grants for vehicles under Federal funding;
- Assistance with grant preparation as opportunities become available;
- Pledge to assist providing client trips with TD funds when possible;
Technical assistance in developing and maintaining a System Safety Program Plan required by the FDOT for grant recipients;

• Technical assistance in establishing cost centers and accounting procedures for transportation function vs. other agency functions;

• Compensation for trips provided under certain circumstances;

• Pooled maintenance and fuel; and

• Simplified reporting forms for quarterly reporting of operational and ridership data.

The more aggressive a CTC is in gaining coordination contracts, the more likely agencies are to participate. The old adage of, ‘Well if so-and-so isn’t doing it then I don’t have to either’ comes into play here. Once agencies realize that their counterparts are participating and there is benefit to participation, they are more likely to participate. However, in negotiating contracts with agencies the CTC should stress the concept of a transportation community where all agencies are equal participants in helping each other, including the CTC.

In addition to gaining additional coordination contractors, the CTC could review the Annual Budget Estimates submitted by State agencies annually (required by the Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged) to determine those agencies that are purchasing transportation through sources other than the CTC. If it is determined that this is occurring, the CTC should take whatever measures necessary to work with those agencies to bring them under the coordinated system. Finally, the CTC could foster private sponsorship of transportation through the coordinated system, such as transportation for medical facilities, hospitals, and nursing homes.

School Buses

The Sarasota County School Board Transportation Department operates nearly 300 vehicles in the provision of public school student transportation. The Department operates with an annual budget of over 10 million dollars. Much discussion throughout the STEP process has focused on the possibility of using school buses during idle time to provide community transportation service. Presently, school buses are made available to the CTC with at least ten-day advance notice and a per hour charge. According to the CTC’s most recent Transportation Disadvantaged Service Plan, it was determined that it is not cost effective to use school buses
Utilizing school buses for community transportation has a number of positive aspects. First and foremost, the use of school buses in this capacity takes advantage of existing transportation resources in the community, rather than relying solely on the introduction of new services. Secondly, bringing the School Board Transportation Department more fully into the community transportation system in Sarasota County could serve to improve School Board exposure and relations with the community at large. In turn, this could lead to greater support of the school system among all citizens. Finally, use of school buses for community transportation eases the requirements for driver training and testing, as school bus operator training and testing are mandatory through the School Board Transportation Department.

While there are many positive aspects associated with using school buses for community transportation, many challenges are evident. School buses do not have air conditioning and many are not ADA accessible. For these reasons, this form of transportation may not be appropriate for some population groups, such as persons with disabilities and/or seniors. High steps, limited leg room, and a somewhat bumpy ride may limit the use of school buses for senior transportation. Additionally, school buses are not equipped with fareboxes and, therefore, probably would not be appropriate for transportation services requiring passenger cash fares. The cost of liability insurance is also a concern. According to Chapter 234.211 (2)(a)(b), F.S., agencies or groups using school buses are required to release a school district from all liabilities and agencies not covered by Chapter 768.28, F.S. (non-governmental agencies) must provide liability insurance coverage with the same limits defined for government agencies. This requirement may pose a financial burden for groups or organizations that may like to use school buses to provide transportation services. Perhaps the most oft cited barriers to using school buses for community transportation are the relatively high cost of contracting with the School Board and the limited hours of vehicle availability.

According to the Sarasota County Transportation Resources and Needs Survey completed by the School Board Transportation Department, at least 70 percent of the school bus capacity is in use between the hours of 6:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. The implication is that up to 30 percent of the total fleet is available during these peak periods although it is unknown the degree to which labor force (drivers) is available during peak periods. Significant capacity appears to be available between the hours of 9:30 a.m. and noon, as well as after 4:30 p.m.
Despite the challenges related to coordinating school buses for community transportation service, there may be opportunities for SCAT and/or the CTC to use available school buses specifically for youth trips. This population is already familiar and somewhat comfortable with the school bus environment. Group trips for youth-oriented recreation activities could be a prime target for the use of school buses. In addition, these vehicles could be utilized for group shopping trips serving able-bodied seniors in retirement complexes.

Agency/Entity Transportation

In the Sarasota County Transportation Resources and Needs Survey, there were 57 agencies (42 percent of those responding) that reported providing public or privately funded transportation. Types of agencies included:

- Faith-based organizations
- Social Service organizations
- Senior service agencies
- Health-related service agencies
- Service agencies for people with disabilities
- Non-profit agencies

Results of the survey only hint at the extent and degree to which there are agencies/entities in Sarasota County providing transportation. In the terms of the STEP, the concept here is that agencies/entities that provide transportation for their own programs and services maintain peak periods of use for their vehicles. Often, those peaks are distributed throughout the day. Correspondingly, the vehicles owned and operated by agencies/entities experience hours of a day wherein they are not in active use. Often, agencies absorb the cost of transportation for their own programs as a cost of doing business or have a revenue source specifically set aside for transportation. Providing transportation for other community purposes would inevitably increase the cost of doing business without necessarily furthering the goals or mission of the agency/entity. As discussed in the introduction to the Coordination section, **coordination is successful when there are relationships based on mutual interests among parties.** As a result, vehicle capacity could be utilized for other community-based purposes identified by the STEP if mechanisms were in place to facilitate participation.

For many of the initiatives listed in the New Transportation Products and Services section of this report, private and public agencies could be the providers of those types of service. For
example, neighborhood-based feeders, subscription services, dial-a-ride, deviated circulator service, and summer recreation tripper service could all potentially be provided by agencies/entities during their off-peak hours of operation. Following Volunteers below, there is a discussion of such a mechanism to complete the full coordination puzzle.

Volunteers

One option available to enhance community mobility is the use of volunteers in assisting with or providing transportation. Many volunteer programs concerned with providing transportation assistance to residents and visitors in Sarasota County are currently in operation. Among these programs are FISH of Sarasota and FISH of North Port, Our Lady of Lourdes Hope Ministry, Plantation Neighborhood Care and Share, Retired Seniors Volunteer Program (RSVP), as well as countless faith-based organizations. Each of these groups is applying the spirit of volunteerism toward the solution of mobility problems encountered throughout the village of Sarasota.

In order to gain the maximum benefits associated with meaningful volunteer experiences, agencies should be willing to invest the same amount of energy and resources that are dedicated to acquiring and keeping quality paid employees. This is particularly important in specialized areas such as paratransit. Specialized transportation programs often serve passengers with special needs and, therefore, it is extremely important that all volunteers, whether they work in the office, answer the telephone, or interact directly with clients, are sensitive to these needs. It is critical that all volunteers have been provided the tools they need to successfully complete their jobs. The safety of passengers, as well as drivers and escorts, should be the number one priority of transportation providers. An aggressive risk management program, which is essential for minimizing the potential for liability, entails comprehensive volunteer screening and training. In order to accomplish this, it is important for agencies to screen and train volunteers in a similar manner as that of paid staff.

The alternative being presented for maximizing volunteer efforts in the area of transportation enhancement is for the CTC (SFC) and/or fixed-route transit provider (SCAT) in Sarasota County to coordinate volunteer transportation efforts to the maximum extent possible. Coordination under a single umbrella could facilitate training and testing of volunteers that may be used to provide specialized transportation services. At least one program, the Coalition of Volunteer Drivers (formerly Plantation Neighborhood Care and Share), has expressed interest in participating in a coordinated volunteer transportation program. Future efforts could focus on adding to the coordinated pool of volunteers and developing programs within which to apply
volunteer efforts. Because volunteer transportation programs tend to have the most success when designed to serve specific population groups and/or geographic areas, attempts could be made to identify the programs or areas most appropriate for volunteer efforts, such as South County mobility needs. These programs may include the following:

- Volunteer drivers in County vehicles serving seniors
- Volunteer drivers in personal vehicles serving seniors
- Volunteers acting as Bus Buddies to help seniors, youth, and people with disabilities feel comfortable using transit
- Volunteers on vehicles to assist passengers
- Volunteers as greeters at transfer centers to assist passengers in making connections
- Volunteers conducting outreach with the community about community transportation issues and needs

Community Transportation Pool

Come on in, the water’s fine. The concept of a community transportation pool is to expand the existing transportation network available to residents and visitors of Sarasota County to include existing transportation resources currently not providing general purpose, general public transportation. The objective of the transportation pool is to bring together, under one coordinated umbrella, the variety of transportation resources that exist in Sarasota County. Because coordination is contingent upon the establishment of mutually beneficial relationships, the pool includes mechanisms for community transportation providers to join the pool without incurring excessive financial burdens while concurrently ensuring reliable and safe services to the public. Therefore, the community transportation pool includes incentives for participation in return for commitments to provide services under the pool, which is administered by a single implementing agency or group. The implementing agency could be the CTC or other entities created as a result of the STEP process.

Eligible providers to participate in the pool would include those agencies/entities that:

- Are privately funded, non-profit and provide transportation to a market segment identified by the STEP;
- Are privately funded, non-profit and provide transportation to persons meeting the definition of transportation disadvantaged;
- Have available vehicles to provide transportation services beyond those needed by the agency; and
• Are service providers that do not provide transportation as a primary mission of the agency.

Specifically prohibited from participating in the pool could be any public transportation providers with transportation as a primary mission and all for-profit operators.

The implementing agency of the Community Transportation Pool would have funds at its disposal to offer services to participating providers to bring them into compliance with all state, federal, and local transportation requirements, that could include:

• Subsidized insurance premiums to attain liability limits;
• Drug and alcohol testing for vehicle operators;
• Contracted maintenance of vehicles;
• Vehicle operator training;
• Development of individual system safety program plans;
• Procurement of vehicles and related equipment; and
• Vehicle and operator licensing fees.

Funding for pool expenses could come from a consortium of sources including but not limited to Sarasota County, the Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged, the Florida Department of Transportation, municipal governments, private foundations, and private donations or endowments. To CUTR’s knowledge, no program of this nature, scope or concept has ever been attempted or accomplished wherein efforts to coordinate providers has actually entailed financial resources to make coordination more feasible, palatable, and desirable. As a result, the nature of this concept is likely to be very desirable to the Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged and the Florida Department of Transportation to invest in a pilot program and test the feasibility for wider application. Accordingly, the program could be set up modestly at first and be positioned to build providers and services over time.

The implementing agency responsibilities could include contracting, oversight and monitoring of providers, arrangement of transportation services, identification of pool participants, and marketing of services. In return for participation in the pool, providers would be expected to sign a contract with the implementing agency which would detail level of service standards such as service area, hours of service, days of availability, minimum safety requirements, and minimum quality of service standards. Providers would commit to covering their own operating expenses, including fuel and a dedicated vehicle operator (either paid or volunteer).
Although it is a possibility that the Community Transportation Pool could be administered by the CTC, flexibility is desirable under this alternative to enable the implementing agency to be stand-alone and not affiliated with government. Benefits of this could be that a stand-alone agency could take a more business-like approach and have greater flexibility in attracting providers to the pool.

Integration

The final point of discussion in our journey is the piece that ties all of the alternatives together into a cohesive, seamless mobility network. Integration refers to the actions, policies, and equipment that will be required to make the mobility network operate at the highest degree of effectiveness and efficiency.

Pursue the Establishment of a Long-term Dedicated Funding Source for Community Transportation

Implementation of many of the alternatives developed for enhancing transportation in Sarasota County will require significant funding for capital investments and operations. Therefore, efforts could be applied toward securing a dedicated funding source for transportation enhancements in Sarasota County. One option available for funding future transportation enhancements is to seek the dedication of a percentage of the local option five-cent gas tax toward community transportation efforts. Other options for a dedicated funding source may be additional revenues generated from county sales taxes and/or property taxes. The advocacy and lobbying efforts required to identify and secure a dedicated source of funding for transportation enhancements could be carried by the STEP Advisory Committee or the newly formed community planning group, Sarasota County Openly Planning for Excellence (SCOPE).

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy Improvements

In addition to requiring transit agencies to provide accessible fixed-route bus service, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) requires that complementary paratransit services be provided to individuals who cannot access the fixed-route bus system. The paratransit service must shadow the fixed-route service area and a comparable level of service must be
provided for persons who cannot use the fixed-route system. Unconstrained paratransit services must be provided to ADA-eligible customers. The per-trip cost of providing unconstrained ADA paratransit services are much higher than providing trips on the fixed-route system. Therefore, it is important that agencies ensure that only the individuals who truly need paratransit services are certified as ADA-eligible and use of the fixed-route system is maximized.

The demand for ADA complementary paratransit services has had and will continue to have a profound effect on both SCAT and the Sarasota County TD program. Fixed-route service improvements, such as route extensions and the lengthening of the span of service, will have significant implications with regard to the demand for ADA complementary paratransit. Requirements spelled out in the legislation preclude the possibility of prioritizing ADA paratransit trips in terms of trip purposes or due to capacity constraints. Therefore, SCAT and the CTC could attempt to manage the demand for ADA complementary paratransit services by strictly following the ADA paratransit eligibility standards outlined in the ADA regulations and by enforcing the ¾-mile ADA paratransit service area corridor.

• Implement stricter ADA paratransit eligibility process: Until recently, SCAT’s somewhat lenient ADA paratransit eligibility process consisted of a short and written application that was evaluated by SCAT personnel for eligibility classification. However, since demand for these services have grown at a very rapid rate in the last few years, SCAT recently reevaluated their existing ADA paratransit eligibility process and, together with SFC, developed a much more thorough application process for this program. The process includes not only a comprehensive written application with medical verification, but also would require applicants, on an as-needed basis, to undergo a functional assessment of their ability to use fixed-route services. SCAT has contracted with the Easter Seals organization to conduct the functional assessment of ADA applicants.

Implementation of the new ADA paratransit eligibility process could begin immediately. In order to achieve the maximum benefit from the new process, all ADA-eligible paratransit users should be required to undergo recertification of ADA eligibility. SCAT and SFC could work together to develop and carry out an aggressive recertification process in order to ensure that capacity on the paratransit system is available for individuals who are not able use the fixed-route system.

• Enforce ¾-mile ADA paratransit corridor requirement: The ADA transportation regulations require that ADA complementary paratransit is provided to eligible
individuals for trips that originate and end at points within three-fourths of a mile on either side of a fixed-route. This is to ensure that individuals who are not able to use the fixed-route system due to the nature or extent of a disability are provided a comparable level of mobility as users of the fixed-route system. Currently, SCAT is providing ADA complementary paratransit service to destinations anywhere in Sarasota County, rather than limiting service to the ¾-mile corridor. In order to manage the demand for unconstrained ADA paratransit service and stretch already scarce funds, SCAT could immediately begin the process required to limit the ADA service area to the ¾-mile ADA corridor.

Fully Integrate Fixed-route and Paratransit Programs by Establishing Sarasota County as the Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC)

Currently, the fixed-route system operator (SCAT) and the CTC in Sarasota County (SFC) have a very close working relationship. The two entities have consistently worked to achieve a higher level of integration of fixed-route transit and paratransit services. Toward this end, the County has contracted with the CTC to provide ADA complementary paratransit trips. The two entities work together to reach eligibility determinations for individuals interested in this program. Further, SCAT and SFC operations have been housed in the same facility since 1997 and the County (through SCAT) has been performing maintenance services on SFC vehicles since March 1998. Additionally, SFC’s vehicle operators now belong to the same union as SCAT drivers.

While much progress has been made toward integration of fixed-route transit and paratransit services in Sarasota County, full integration will not be possible as long as the two programs remain separate entities. Maintaining an independent identity has been both beneficial and detrimental for SFC. The role of CTC has had a very positive impact on Senior Friendship Center’s exposure and identity in the Sarasota Community. Further, SFC has done an excellent job building and expanding the TD program in Sarasota County. However, SFC and SFC Transportation have experienced some difficulties in administering the program and providing transportation for all TD clients.

SFC’s mission as a senior program is to provide a high level of service to seniors in the county. However, as CTC, SFC Transportation is charged with providing transportation to all TD clients according to the trip priorities established by the local coordinating board (LCB). The missions of each arm of SFC have found themselves to be in conflict at times. For example, when SFC Transportation received a rate increase from the FCTD, SFC had to reduce the number of trips that it was able to purchase from the CTC (SFC Transportation) for its own clients.
In addition, SFC Transportation has few opportunities available for capital acquisition, such as vehicle replacement. The CTC must compete with all other agencies that provide transportation services for seniors and people with disabilities when seeking capital funding through the FDOT Section 5310 grant program. Also, unlike SCAT, SFC does not have staff dedicated to specialized services such as training and marketing.

The alternative presented here is to establish Sarasota County (dba SCAT) as the CTC for the Sarasota County TD Program when SFC’s current memorandum of agreement (MOA) expires on June 30, 2000. At that time, if the County chooses not to become the CTC, Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged (FCTD) regulations require that an RFP for a new CTC must be issued. If an RFP is issued, SFC would have to compete with all other interested parties in order to continue as CTC for Sarasota County. Under this alternative, SFC could retain a portion of the vehicle fleet to provide only client trips, under a coordination agreement with the CTC. The County could assume the role of CTC and primary provider of trips. However, the CTC could retain contract operators to provide more specialized TD trips, such as stretcher service.

Establishing the County as CTC could potentially benefit the TD population in Sarasota County in a variety of ways. First, if the CTC responsibilities are taken over by the County, the CTC could have many more opportunities for capital replacements and vehicle expansion. As part of the SCAT system, the paratransit program could acquire vehicles through the same grant programs available to SCAT, including FDOT Section 5307, 5310, and 5311 and federal program section 5309. In addition, full integration of the two transportation programs could make many more specialized administrative services available to the TD program including planning, marketing, and training. Finally, the blending of the CTC and fixed-route transit programs in Sarasota County could facilitate the implementation of several of the mobility alternatives described as components of the Sarasota County comprehensive mobility network.

Low Floor Bus Technology

A low-floor bus has been defined as a bus which has a vehicle floor sufficiently low and level enough to remove the need for steps for passenger boarding and alighting. Transit agencies choose low-floor buses to provide more user friendly and easier access for all customers, including, adults, children, people with disabilities, seniors, people carrying infants and/or with strollers, and people carrying packages. Therefore, the introduction of low-floor bus technology
in the mobility network may have a significant impact on full integration of multiple modes serving a variety of population groups throughout Sarasota County.

Customer satisfaction surveys and reports from transit agencies indicate that customers riding low-floor buses experience a high degree of satisfaction with many of the characteristics of these vehicles. These characteristics include ease of boarding and alighting (seniors and persons with disabilities expressed stronger preference for low-floor buses); improved visibility provided by larger windows; and the feeling of spacious environment due to higher ceilings and places to put packages.

All of the current low-floor buses have fewer seats than comparable high floor buses, with 31 to 40 seats in the low-floor buses compared to 43-45 seats in high-floor counterparts. The loss of usable floor area to install seats results from the intrusion of wheel wells and the engine compartment into the passenger cabin. However, shorter boarding and alighting times (e.g. an approximate 20 second reduction for wheelchair passengers) experienced with low-floor buses results in less overall travel time, which means the bus can complete more vehicle trips in revenue service in a days time, requiring fewer buses in service.

In addition to the beneficial design characteristics of low-floor buses described above, there are many advancements in bus technology and fuel options that make low-floor buses an attractive vehicle for community transit. Manufacturers have reported that the current technologies of fuel cells, hybrid-electric, compressed and liquid natural gas are available for low-floor buses. LYNX, the transit system in Orlando, Florida, owns and operates ten low-floor compressed natural gas buses for its downtown circulator service. In Europe, technology has focused on providing a protected position for wheelchair securement wherein a passenger can position themselves in a rear-facing position with a load bearing backrest. Also, the Europeans are stressing level boarding and improvements in bus stop facilities to provide level access between bus and boarding platforms.

Prior to the development of low-floor bus technology, the transit industry had attempted to make buses accessible by using two mechanical systems: 1) a hydraulic "kneeling" capability for people who had difficulty climbing stairs and 2) wheelchair lifts, which deployed from platform to ground in order to lift a wheelchair into the bus. When the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed, it was mandated that standees would be allowed to use a wheelchair lift, which caused greater safety concerns. Since accessibility of transit services has become a major issue in the 1990's, low-floor buses have not only addressed the inadequacies of previous technologies, they have created a more pleasing and friendly environment for the
transit experience. Therefore, in spite of the reduced seating capacity and other noted concerns, transit systems have embraced the many benefits.

Low-floor bus technology will have an important role in the future mobility network in Sarasota County. These vehicles increase accessibility for persons with physical impairments and result in a reduction in loading dwell time associated with wheelchairs. The smaller size of these vehicles makes them particularly attractive for community transportation. Finally, the use of alternative fuels provides an environmentally friendly alternative that fits well with the community's goals related to the preservation of the natural environment.

Advanced Public Transportation Systems (APTS)

Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) refers to the integration of several information and control technologies, and is a tool to enhance mobility, energy efficiency, and environmental protection. Advanced Public Transportation Systems (APTS) is one portion of the ITS program. The objective of APTS implementation is to apply advanced technologies toward the improvement of public transportation and ridesharing.

Some of the most innovative and comprehensive APTS implementations that may benefit the mobility network in Sarasota County are described in the following sections. These technologies are categorized broadly under four sets of services/technologies: Fleet Management, Traveler Information, Electronic Fare Payment, and Transportation Demand Management. Many of the alternatives described previously can benefit from these APTS applications. However, very few of the alternatives included in this report are dependent on the application of APTS technologies.

- Implementation of ITS/APTS technologies can be a complex venture. In most cases, implementation should be preceded by the development of an ITS/APTS Plan that identifies the goals and objectives of the technologies sought and includes full examination of technologies available to meet stated goals and objectives.

Fleet Management

Fleet Management focuses directly on vehicles and operations, improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the services provided, and passenger safety. The concept behind fleet

\[\text{Much of this information is adapted from “Advanced Public Transportation Systems: The State of the Art – Update “96” published by the Federal Transit Administration.}\]
management applications is that transit systems that are more efficient and reliable are more attractive to prospective riders, transit operators, and the communities they serve. While almost all of the technologies described below can be purchased and implemented as stand-alone products, it is critical that purchasing entities ensure that all components are compatible and capable of integration.

1. Communications Systems - Currently, transit mainly relies on conventional land mobile communication services. The application of APTS technologies, such as automatic vehicle location (AVL), can place great strain on existing telecommunications systems. In fact, it is unlikely that these services alone will meet the needs of full-fledged APTS technologies. Innovative strategies, such as trunked radio, overlaying on transmissions by conventional commercial FM radio stations, low earth orbit satellite services, or cellular phone, are being explored and introduced as potential solutions. The main benefit of these communication innovations is an easing of the strain on the communications network and better utilization of frequency spectrum.

• The issue of communications is particularly problematic for SFC. Future development of general public dial-a-ride, feeder services, or real-time scheduling and dispatching will be dependent on having adequate infrastructure to support such innovation. Communication technologies will play a central role in these services. SFC operators have indicated that the existing radio communications system is not adequate to meet existing communications needs. Therefore, investigation of new communications technologies for SFC will be especially critical in the event that this agency is charged with implementation of many of the heretofore-described new services. The CTC could explore opportunities to upgrade the radio system to match the technology currently employed by SCAT and all other County-maintained vehicles.

2. Geographic Information Systems - A geographic information system (GIS) combines an electronic map and a relational database and allows users to visualize and analyze relationships between non-related data whose only common feature is that they are in the same basic location. There are many uses for GIS in community transportation and many of the alternatives presented in this report will be vastly improved by the application of GIS. Examples of GIS applications include the display and analysis of bus routes, facilities, shelters, emergency call locations, trip planning route choices, on-time performance data, and origin and destination analysis of ridesharing and paratransit clients. Some of the alternatives that can be facilitated and/or improved with GIS include:
• Bus stop inventory
• ADA complementary paratransit trip-by-trip eligibility
• Feeder services
• Dial-a-ride service
• Deviated fixed-route service
• Ridematching services
• Transportation Resource Center Information and Referral
• Coordinated Transportation Pool

3. Automatic Vehicle Location Systems  In Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) systems, the (real-time) location of each vehicle is determined and tracked through satellite technologies and this information is transmitted to dispatch. The information may be used for a number of purposes, including taking corrective action to deviations in service, real-time scheduling and dispatching, input to passenger information systems, and emergency location of vehicles in times of crises (e.g., crimes in progress, medical emergencies). Additionally, data generated over a period of time can be used for planning and management activities. AVL information also provides very useful inputs to passenger information and traffic signal preferential treatment systems.

4. Automatic Passenger Counters - Automatic Passenger Counters (APCs) are an automated means for collecting data on passenger boardings and alightings by time and location. These data may be used as additions to location data for passenger information or decisions on corrective action, future planning and scheduling, or National Transit Database reporting. Most agencies currently planning to acquire APCs are including them in their AVL systems, in order to take advantage of the location information. Though, in some cases, APCs can be used for real-time application, they are used almost exclusively for planning, scheduling, and reporting purposes. APCs provide much more complete data at a much lower cost than is possible using manual checkers.

5. Transit and Paratransit Operations Software - In conjunction with other APTS components, especially AVL, transportation operations software (TOS) for fixed-route transit and paratransit now perform many advanced functions. This software can be used for real-time scheduling and dispatching, run-cutting, quicker response to disruptions in service, and coordination between modes (e.g., fixed-route bus with paratransit). Additionally, TOS, combined with the appropriate hardware, allows a smaller number of operator interfaces for many functions, making the operator’s job easier to perform. TOS is especially useful in paratransit operations and management in the area of scheduling and dispatching. Vehicles
may now be dispatched much more quickly after a request. Further, with TOS, agencies may now dynamically reschedule and re-route paratransit vehicles in real time, based on changes in schedules such as cancellations. As a result, customer satisfaction and system efficiencies are increased.

- Currently, SFC is equipped with Trapeze scheduling and dispatching software. However, the CTC has not been able to acquire the most recent software upgrade available which includes many functions designed to assist in alternative methods of service delivery. In addition, the latest version includes components that store and display ADA paratransit eligibility information for reservationists and schedulers. Components are included to assist with ADA compliance monitoring. Future efforts could focus on acquiring the computer hardware that will make installation of the latest version of Trapeze paratransit software possible.

- SCAT has expressed interest in the fixed-route operations software offered by Trapeze. This software can be integrated with the paratransit software described above. In the event that organizational integration is accomplished between SCAT and SFC, this technological integration will further facilitate the service integration suggested through the description of alternatives.

Traveler Information

New technologies are emerging to provide information to travelers on multiple transportation modes to assist in their travel planning decisions. Travelers can now access this information through a variety of media, including telephones, monitors, cable television, variable message signs, kiosks, voice synthesizers, and personal computers (PCs). In addition, traveler information systems in transit are now being linked to AVL to provide real-time information related to arrivals, departures and delays.

1. Pre-Trip Information This includes information about routes, schedules, fares, and other pertinent information. In addition to the use of touch-tone telephones and human operators, this information may be distributed through the Internet, kiosks, and voice synthesizers, which do not require human intervention.

2. In-Terminal and Wayside Information Systems Travel information systems for passengers in the midst of travel are now widely available. Passengers can now obtain information about schedule updates and transfer information through the use of electronic signs, kiosks,
and television monitors. AVL systems can provide data that is used to update information in real-time. Automated in-terminal and wayside information systems are in their infancy in North America, primarily because supporting APTS technologies are only now being implemented.

3. In-Vehicle Information Systems  Passengers often would like to obtain travel information while they are on vehicles. This information can now be provided to riders through displays and communication devices on-board vehicles that provide information on stops, routes, schedules, and connections. The displays make transit easier for the novice to use. These systems are especially effective in assisting transportation operations in complying with ADA requirements. Again, data generated through AVL systems are being used in bus systems to provide automated information.

4. Multimodal Traveler Information Systems - These systems provide information (typically pre-trip) on several modes, including transit and traffic, via various technologies including, phones, personal computers, and the Internet. The Transportation Resource Center (TRC) being proposed as part of the STEP has as an objective, the provision of multi-modal travel information to the community at large.

Electronic Fare Payment

Electronic and automated fare payment systems employ electronic communication, data processing, and data storage techniques. Electronic fare media are capable of storing information in readable, writeable form. In addition to increasing security related to fare collection, this technology is particularly useful for tracking, planning, and billing purposes and can be applied to multiple transportation modes.

1. Multi-Carrier Fare Integration Systems  Multi-modal automated payment systems are fare media that can be used for more than one transportation mode, such as magnetic stripe cards usable for subway, bus, and paratransit. The development of multi-modal automated payment systems has been made possible by advancements in recent decades in electronic data processing and storage, magnetic recording technology, microcomputers, and in data communication. These systems will have particular importance in the Sarasota County transportation network as the many and varied transportation resources are more fully integrated into a cohesive mobility system.
Transportation Resource Center (TRC)

Concept

One fact of life in American society today is that people, services, and especially information are widely dispersed. Even when transportation resources exist, it is likely that the knowledge of those services and how to access them are unevenly distributed in the community. Infrastructure is needed to connect consumers to providers. In most communities this infrastructure is often insufficiently developed.

The objective of the Transportation Resource Center is to provide a one-stop shopping, centralized, coordinated information distribution center wherein all transportation sources are gathered and disseminated. In taking the concept further, the agency could be granted levels of authority to contract with, oversee, and arrange trips with transportation providers on behalf of customers. In addition, the TRC could provide traveler information for residents and tourists in the area of traveler information—how to travel from point A to point B regardless of mode, including automobile.

The TRC seeks to achieve the integration and coordination of transportation products and services offered by multiple providers (public and private), with multiple modes, and utilizing multiple sources of funding. In its maturity, the TRC could be structured like a travel agency with the authority to arrange travel based on price, availability and service characteristics. The customer base for the TRC will be all residents and visitors in Sarasota County. Information about the TRC and services provided could be disseminated through information pages in the telephone book, a toll-free access telephone number, the Internet, billboards, print and radio advertising, and possibly even signs throughout the county.

In Winston Salem, an urban area with a population the size of Sarasota County, a project called the Winston Salem Mobility Manager sought to use technology improvements to first improve paratransit services and then expand to other modes. Other modes include fixed-route services, multi-modal congestion management system, and traffic management. Among the objectives of the project were:

- Demonstrate mobility management in a mid-sized transit system;
- Improve the quality, timeliness and availability of customer information;
- Increase convenience of fare payments within and between modes; and
- Increase service reliability.
The objectives of the Winston Salem project are not as extensive as for the TRC in Sarasota County because the emphasis in Winston Salem was on improving operational concerns as opposed to maximizing mobility options.

As conceptualized, the Transportation Resource Center in Sarasota County has the potential to be a pioneer that will be chronicled and studied by other communities in Florida and throughout the Nation. None of the known attempts at mobility management in communities around the country have sought to address mobility needs or bring together previously uncoordinated resources such as church vehicles, vehicles utilized by organizations or agencies, volunteers, private transportation providers and public transportation.

Levels of the Transportation Resource Center

Given the potential of the TRC in scope and magnitude, it is important to break the concept down into various levels. It is these levels that will give a starting point and then joints for expansion and growth. Levels also will provide for a rational means by which alternatives of the STEP could be implemented. Table 4-2 summarizes the discussion below. Levels include:

- 1-800-GO-SARASOTA – Information and Referral
- Contracting, Management and Oversight of agency/entity Transportation
- Travel Arrangement
- Community Outreach

1-800-GO-SARASOTA

In this phase, the TRC could be an information and referral source and could provide commuter assistance services. The center could provide information on travel in Sarasota County, provide directions to residents and tourists, referrals to SCAT, Senior Friendship Centers Transportation and private transportation providers. In addition, information could be provided for service-specific inquiries, such as parents who are seeking information about agencies that provide both after school programs and transportation. Agencies/entities included in the initial phase of the TRC would participate on a voluntary basis as a transportation resource.

In addition, this phase of the TRC also could implement commuter assistance programs including ridematching (carpools), van pools, School Pool, guaranteed ride home programs, and community bicycles.

Contracting, Management, Oversight of Agency/Entity Transportation
At the second level, the TRC could have expanded responsibilities to bring transportation providers under the umbrella of the center for the provision of transportation services, including for-profit taxi operators. The TRC would administer the Community Transportation Pool and begin contracting with agencies/entities to join the center. The TRC would be authorized to use school buses, coordinate volunteer agencies, and promote employer subsidies and agency vanpools. At this level, the TRC also would work with the CTC to maximize available resources of coordinated contractors under contract to the CTC. Pilot programs for transportation services to be provided by the TRC would commence.

**Travel Arrangement**

At the third level, the TRC could begin actually arrange services as discussed in the STEP alternatives, including vouchers (multi-modal and user-side taxi), neighborhood feeders, general public dial-a-rides, inter-county, summer recreation, jitneys, subscription, deviated fixed-routes, and electronic fare payment mechanisms. At this level, the TRC could have a centralized scheduling and dispatching function, as well as an integrated GIS software that could be capable of origin/destination travel arrangement. Centralized referral and scheduling/dispatching would require some level of technology infrastructure; however, the capital and operating investment necessary to support centralized scheduling/dispatching will be significantly higher than that required for centralized information and referral services.

**Relationship to Unmet Needs**

Clearly, if all levels of the TRC were to be implemented, pilot projects could be implemented to address all of the unmet needs discussed earlier in the technical memorandum. The key to success is that investments in the TRC would yield results in terms of people served and efficiencies gained that are greater than those possible by simply improving fixed-route services or expanding paratransit services.
Table 4-2
Levels of a Transportation Resource Center

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Services Provided</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-800-GO-SARASOTA</td>
<td>-Information and Referral</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Travel Information/directions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Referrals to SCAT, CTC, and private operators</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Commuter Assistance</td>
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<td>-Ridematching</td>
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<td>-Van Pools</td>
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<td>-School Pool</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Community Bicycles</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Guaranteed Ride Home program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contracting, Management, and Oversight of</td>
<td>-Community Transportation Pool</td>
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<tr>
<td>agency/entity transportation</td>
<td>-Private agency/entity contracting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-School buses</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Volunteers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Agency Van Pools</td>
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<td>-Employer Subsidies</td>
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<td>-Taxi providers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Pilot projects</td>
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<tr>
<td>Travel Arrangement</td>
<td>-Vouchers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Neighborhood Feeders</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-General Public Dial-a-Ride</td>
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<td>-Inter-county transportation</td>
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<td>-Summer recreation</td>
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<td>-Jitneys</td>
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<td>-Subscription Services</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Deviated Fixed-route</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Centralized scheduling and dispatching</td>
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</table>
Ideas Worthy of Further Exploration

In addition to the alternatives described in the preceding sections of this report, a number of additional ideas were generated during two Creative Thinking workshops held with CUTR project staff and members of the STEP Advisory Committee. These ideas may require additional information and development before implementation will be possible. Therefore, the ideas have been retained for future discussion and exploration of their applications in the mobility network. These ideas include:

- The implementation of a Mystery Bus program
- Celebrity guests on vehicles
- Celebrity endorsements
- Virtual bus training programs
- Changes to zoning codes to require businesses to locate closer to streets
- Travel Nannie program
- Bike racks on school buses
- Mobile grocery services
- The assignment of transferable transportation credits to agencies and organizations

CONCLUSION

This Technical Memorandum has presented a discussion of unmet transportation needs and a series of potential alternatives outlining the mechanisms and products that, taken together, could meet the travel needs of individuals and communities in Sarasota County. Although the primary focus of the STEP is on the near-term, five to ten year horizon, many of the alternatives presented herein also could provide the infrastructure needed to respond to future growth and changes in the county and region. A central theme of the STEP process has been, and will continue to be, that flexibility and adaptability are required to meet the complex transportation needs and demands of individuals and communities. In fact, the true potential of these alternatives is that they lend flexibility and creativity to the process of creating integration schemes to further the STEP goals.

Important to the future of STEP is the acknowledgement that the alternatives eventually implemented must remain flexible enough to respond to technological and social changes that cannot be predicted. With that in mind, alternatives have been developed that provide practical
applications for the near term, while also positioning the community to take advantage of long term opportunities as they emerge.