

Votran Transit Development Plan (2022-2031 Major Update)

Phase I Public Workshops - Questions & Answers

December 2020

Question: What is being done to improve medical transport and long waits for patients after appointments? Also, some patients miss appointments as they cannot afford transportation. Is there any free transportation for those that need access to medical appointments?

Answer: *Votran's paratransit system is designed and operated according to the Transportation Disadvantaged Local Coordinating Board (TDLCB) user guide standards. When the user is not ready at their assigned return time, they are put on the will call status. The time allotted is two hours. This is due to the current budget and could be amended if there were more funding. Currently, Votran does not have a program that would allow users to ride Votran for free due to funding and budget constraints. There are some social service agencies that sponsor free trips, but this is independent of the transit agency.*

Question: There is a lot of development in Volusia County. There is not any transit access to some of these new developments. What is Votran going to do about that? When will Votran transition to electric buses?

Answer: *It is important to recognize that land development is a business, and, like most other businesses, developers ply their trade to make money. As a result, a major factor for where developers pick sites on which to build is the price of the land since lower land prices will help improve the profitability of their developments. Unfortunately, in most urbanized areas, the land available for development often is not near established areas or adjacent to existing services, like transit. Votran cannot always accommodate the developers' requests for transit access by extending an existing route or creating a new route to connect to new residential or commercial developments due to funding constraints. Votran makes sure that agency staff are aware of and a part of the review process for new developments in the county. Votran also makes sure to communicate to developers the nature of its existing services and what accommodations can be made to potentially serve new development.*

Votran is in the initial research stage of looking at electric buses and the associated infrastructure required to operate them. At this time, Votran does not have any plans to buy electric buses.

Question: What is the chance of Votran announcing many more stops for people who are visually impaired so we know where in the route we are/we know when to get off the bus? Additionally, Volusia County does a great job with ADA compliant lifts on the bus.

Answer: *Votran is currently coordinating with its technology vendor to add the announcement of each bus stop to its on-vehicle bus stop announcement system. Votran will need to compile a list of its stops and use its current AVL technology to do this. Additionally,*

during some of the discussion group workshops held as part of the TDP's public outreach process, some participants suggested that the announcements should go beyond just stops and announce each street intersection, as well.

Question: What peer systems is Votran being compared to? When will the results of this comparison be available?

Answer: The peer selection process is underway and once the peers have been selected and reviewed, the selection methodology and its findings will be included in the first technical memorandum of the TDP. Once this memorandum has been reviewed by the TDP Steering Committee, any comments on it will be addressed before incorporating into the Draft TDP. The Draft TDP is expected to be available for public review in Summer 2021.

The peer selection process utilizes a multi-variable statistical methodology and uses validated National Transit Database (NTD) data for transit agencies in Florida and the surrounding southeast region to select peer systems for Votran.

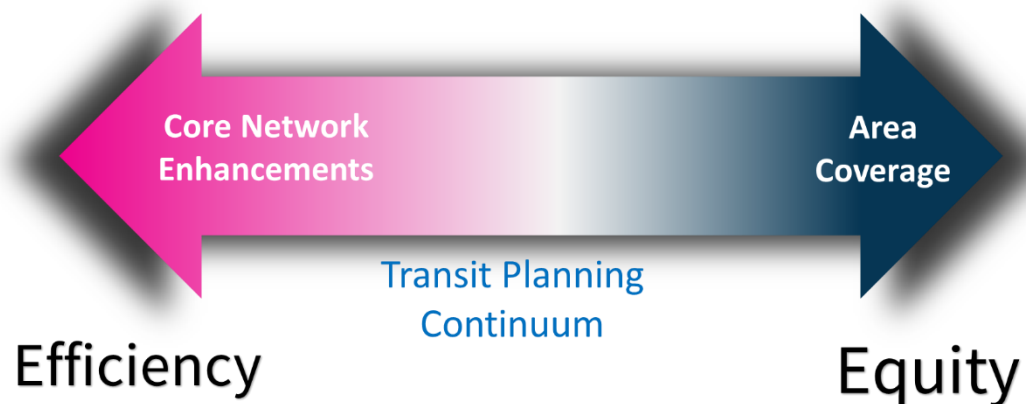
Question: I ride the bus at least five times a week and use paratransit on the weekends. I have recently moved to an area outside of the paratransit access area on Sunday and cannot get to church. Others cannot get to church or other lifeline trips on Sunday. What can we do about this?

Answer: A common complaint is that there is no service to those living outside of the ADA-defined service area on Sundays. The ADA boundary, a ¼-mile buffer around all of Votran's fixed routes, is derived from a federal definition issued by the Federal Transit Administration. It is a strict definition with which transit agencies receiving federal funds must comply; though it is feasible for agencies to consider expanding the service area to be less stringent—they just cannot make it more stringent. Ultimately, the application of the strict definition in the county is a funding issue as Votran does not have room in its budget to expand the boundary to accommodate everyone. Generally, paratransit services are more expensive than fixed-route services on a per-trip basis, so it is difficult to expand the boundaries as it will increase demand and, therefore, costs, significantly. If more funding revenues become available, this issue could be revisited.

Question: Where is Votran on the Efficiency - Equity continuum today?

Answer: The transit planning continuum is shown below and represents the range of focus that transit agencies may take in planning out the base nature of their transit services within a community. At one end, an agency can focus all of its services to provide equitable coverage throughout the community without concern for how poor the service may be in terms of span or frequency. At the opposite end, the agency focuses its services in the core of the community where density and potential demand is the greatest. Not everyone will have access, but those who do will have a very efficient and effective service.

Votran staff considers the agency to be somewhere closer to the middle of this continuum at this time, but would like to be a little more to the left (more core network enhancements/efficiency). That is, Votran would like to focus more on its core network, but be cognizant of the area coverage. In essence, the service would provide more enhanced services in the core while still serving the areas with the greatest need for coverage. Previously, Votran focused more on equitable area coverage. Today, in some parts, there is more focus on the core network. On the west side of Volusia County, for example, there is more equitable area coverage while the east side leans more towards more frequent service in more dense areas. The Comprehensive Operations Analysis (COA) that is being completed concurrently with the TDP will be doing more in-depth analysis to assess any potential inefficient service resources that could be reallocated to other routes with higher demand.



Question: *The County does a great job with making sure the bus stops are ADA compliant. Is there any way to get the cities, through grants or other means, involved to ensure bus stops are ADA compliant?*

Answer: *Votran staff is always looking to improve and ensure that all of its bus stops are compliant with ADA accessibility guidelines. The process to transition all of the agency's bus stops to ADA requirements is very involved and can be costly, thus, it is difficult to maintain the inventory in a completely compliant manner as changes in the system occur over time. Votran has an infrastructure guidelines manual to transition its bus stops and ensure that ADA standards are being met. Votran also keeps in close contact with local municipalities to make sure that all bus stops are continuing to be improved. It is necessary to make sure that all municipalities are on board and actively support this process. For example, Deltona, Ponce Inlet, and Daytona Beach Shores have researched their funding and continue to improve their bus stops. In unincorporated Volusia County, there are two stops that are not ADA compliant and they will be brought up to standard after December 2020.*

Question: Which stakeholders will participate in the Situation Appraisal?

Answer: *The Situation Appraisal is an analytical tool. The public outreach conducted for the TDP is just one component of it, but there is no stakeholder outreach directly associated with the Situation Appraisal process. Instead, each analytical component of the appraisal is examined holistically. An example of this is the assessment of the Votran operating environment, where all components are examined to see what the study area needs, how the current and projected circumstances will dictate the improvements, or any changes that need to be made to the service. Additionally, the evaluation of existing services will be examined, and due to the COA, it will be expanded. Questions that are derived from the COA process include,*

- *What does the COA suggest we need to do to improve the system?*
- *What is needed to make the system more effective and more efficient? Are there parts of the system that need tweaks?*
- *Are there services that have underutilized resources that can be reallocated?*

When the Situation Appraisal is conducted, all of the information and analysis is reviewed, but it is focused on the next steps. It is not just a summary pertaining to what was learned from the operating area analysis or existing services, but also what actions are necessary to make the system better or to make the suggested improvements a reality. Staff also will be involved in this process. Once it is documented, the review committee established for the TDP will be provided the corresponding technical memorandum and can provide feedback on it. As part of the TDP Rule, the River to Sea TPO will be coordinated with and the document will be reviewed by them, as well. Additionally, Career Source Volusia-Flagler and FDOT District 5 will be a part of the review team, too.

Question: Transit would help environmental concerns and efforts in Volusia County. The trolley was a fun experience from Daytona Beach to Ormond Beach. It would be fun to see something like that on local roads while also helping the traffic congestion. Rail is also a nice way of transport that most people feel safe and secure on. Are there any thoughts on these modes?

Answer: *Beyond SunRail, the introduction of additional rail modes in the county will not be likely within the timeframe of the current TDP Major Update. While the SunRail extension from DeBary to DeLand has been on hold for some time, it seems that the planned extension still may be coming. In part because of the possibility of this extension, there has been at least one study conducted to evaluate connecting the east and west parts of Volusia County with some sort of premium transit mode. The study found there will not be high enough demand to warrant rail for the next few decades, but Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) was recommended as the next evolutionary modal step in cross-county connectivity along the US 92 corridor.*

In addition, Volusia County is very forward thinking and is invested in bettering the community. The trolleys were a popular tourist attraction and assisted many visitors in

going out to local restaurants and seeing the sights along the beach. Unfortunately, this service no longer operates since it is expensive for an agency to have multiple modes covering the same service area. Due to budget constraints, transit agencies often will typically keep one type of service functioning within a corridor to provide all services.

Traveling to bigger cities such as Washington, D.C., and New York is great since there are transit services available, but Florida is a state that was developed later, after the advent of the automobile, so it is more auto-centric in its development patterns. Developers should continue to help this situation by creating higher density developments and developing in the core of Volusia County so that services can be more efficient. For example, when looking for a place to put an outlet mall, if you are thinking about transit use it would be placed in the core areas where services are present. Unfortunately, as noted before, developers often choose less expensive land that is not in the core and may not have any existing services reaching it. Core areas, such as downtown Port Orange, downtown Daytona Beach, and South Daytona, which are places that are already developed, already have existing infrastructure and services. So, new development in these locations often can be accommodated with transit and other services reasonably well. If developers pick a location without existing services, it potentially can create a connectivity issue and put more stress on the existing services.