

City of Savannah--Savannah Convention and Visitors Bureau
Transportation Task Force
Visitor Mobility Plan Summary

October 14, 2005

A good visitor mobility system is a vital part of Savannah's trademark hospitality, and crucial to the tourism industry, attracting conventions, ensuring the satisfaction of individual visitors, families and groups, and a necessary step to reducing traffic and parking congestion downtown. It must be consistent and reliable, and provide the rider with a sense of comfort in "getting around", not just transportation. It must provide meaningful service to residents. It should actively encourage walking. It must have firm, long-term funding support.

There is general agreement about what this part of the "Savannah Experience" should be: a mobility system that requires minimal effort to understand and use, creates a sense of confidence and ease in moving around downtown, and gets people out of their cars. Some elements are in place now but lack frequency, coordination and connectivity.

Plan Requirements:

- Define service needs and parameters for each type of service.
- Clarify and centralize system management and policy decisions wherever practical.
- Provide seamless services allowing easy transition among platforms and venues.
- Provide visitors and residents with reasonable options to private vehicles.
- Encourage visitors and residents to enjoy the "walk-ability" of the city.
- Make ease of mobility downtown a reinforcing part of the 'Savannah Experience'.

Plan Features:

- Fast, easy, useful, FREE downtown transportation for visitors and residents.
- Takes advantage of many existing assets and resources.
- Expands and improves water ferry frequency, coverage and hours.
- Expands CAT Downtown Shuttle to include a tighter downtown service loop.
- Initiates the River Street Trolley (streetcar) service along the riverfront.
- Integrates ferry, shuttle and streetcar elements into a single, flexible, coordinated system.
- Provides comfortable shelters at several mobility "touch points" around the system.
- Integrates system management, operating standards and branding.
- Provides an automated information system to tell riders where they are, how to get where they're going, when the next bus or ferry will arrive, and other relevant information.
- Creates a Walk Savannah program that encourages getting out of private vehicles to walk around downtown, optionally using the mobility system to get from one area to another.
- Provides one-stop mobility / transportation management and arrangements for visitors, group leaders and meeting planners.
- Exports a fair share of costs to visitors, who are the biggest users / beneficiaries.

Visitor Mobility Plan

Plan Detail: System Implementation, Timelines, Phasing

Basic Service Plan.

1. Expand Existing Water Ferry Service

Timeframe: 2d quarter, 2006 *Lead Agency:* GIMTCA / CAT

Recommendations:

- a. Expand base ferry service to two vessels, one each servicing City Hall Landing (20-minute headway, 17 hrs/day) and Waving Girl Landing (30-minute headway, 10 hrs/day).
- b. Outfit ferry vessels with a GPS-based information system for real-time schedule/connections information. Manages customer expectations, and allows service to be easily modified off-peak.
- c. Install call-boxes for water and ground taxi at the three ferry landings.
- d. Install appropriate shelters at the three ferry landings, along with an integrated information system to present system information and cultural-historical entertainment.
- e. Station trained *Visitor Specialist* staff at ferry landings during high-demand periods, to facilitate movement and to provide an additional encounter with Savannah hospitality.

2. Begin Expanded CAT Shuttle Circulator Service

Timeframe: 3d quarter 2006 *Lead Agency:* CAT

Recommendations:

- a. Increase CAT shuttle service to two routes and up to 4 vehicles in simultaneous circulation. Connect with River Street ferry landings and circulate in downtown, serving other fixed “touch points” with flexible routing on rest of system. Suggested locations:
 - Forsyth Park-Mansion
 - Hilton DeSoto Hotel
 - City Market
 - Main Visitor Center

Each of these locations and the River Street ferry landings would have information screens providing real-time system information and entertainment. Round-trip should be 30 minutes or less: with no more than 15 minutes between service on either route with 2 vehicles in service.

- b. Match shuttle service to ferry service hours during peak periods, adjusted to customer demand during off-peak. Routes and ‘touch points’ may be modified to meet visitor patterns as they emerge. Vehicle capacity should be about 25 passengers, and fully accessible as at present.

3. Initiate Streetcar (Trolley) Service on River Street

Timeframe: Initiate service by 3d quarter 2006 *Lead Agency:* City of Savannah

The City has programmed to refurbish an existing ‘Melbourne’ Streetcar as a dual-powered platform capable of running on existing legacy track along River Street. This asset should be placed in service between Waving Girl Landing and MLK Boulevard on a 15-minute schedule with one or two in-between stops including City Hall Landing.

The streetcar would operate 12 hours a day, 6 days a week; provide a pleasant visitor experience, and an option for movement along River Street and to connect to other shuttle and ferry stops.

4. Establish Common Branding

Timeframe: 2d Quarter, 2006 Lead Agency: CAT

A recognizable, uniform image for the system is highly desirable from a customer service view. Rather than create a new brand, system should extend the established *Savannah Belles* branding to the other platforms, taking advantage of the *Belles*' built-in historic and romantic story-lines.

5. Continue Underwriting Transportation Costs for Selected Groups

Timeframe: Ongoing Lead Agency: CTFC

There is demonstrated benefit in continuing to support the current system of subsidizing transportation costs for selected city-wide groups requiring extra ground and/or ferry service.

6. Establish a Walk Savannah Program

Timeframe: Complete actions in 2007 Lead Agency: City of Savannah

Encouraging visitors to park-and-walk, as well as to use visitor mobility services, tour buses and carriages, and other private-sector modes is essential to reduce the volume of short-distance auto trips. A walking experience is enhanced when visitors perceive their environs as clean, safe and friendly. Walking-route signage and maps encourage visitors to seek out cultural and historic sites on their own, while feeling comfortable knowing where they are and how to get around.

So a 'Walk Savannah' campaign supports several strategies: managing downtown traffic, providing more encounters between visitors and downtown businesses, affording richer visitor appreciation of historic and cultural Savannah; and dovetails with City programs to improve downtown cleanliness and accessibility (sidewalk cuts, automated crossings etc).

Recommendations:

- a. Create and promote a system of north-south walking corridors, oriented to-from-between River Street and initially including MLK Blvd and Bull, Abercorn and Jefferson Streets.
- b. Make walking and circulator maps available to people using structured parking.
- c. Support ongoing City efforts to connect clean streets with local pride and visitor satisfaction.

7. Establish a Convention-Mobility Management Function

Timeframe: 2d Quarter, 2006 Lead Agency: City of Savannah

There is a need for a centralized mobility coordination function--a 'mobility manager'--to anticipate, plan for and respond to mobility challenges; match mobility resources to customer demands, and effectively service city-wide convention and special event demands.

This manager (or management function) would perform the following primary duties:

- a. Plan and coordinate mobility services for groups, especially multi-hotel groups associated with Convention and Civic Center events; and other downtown special events and festivals.
- b. Advise city on matters affecting downtown mobility, including parking and roadways.
- c. Provide interface with and direct support to a future Ambassador program.
- d. Respond to policy guidance/direction from a policy committee governing its function, comprising City, CAT, CVB, SITCC / Trade Center Authority, SCAD, downtown hotels, museum/attractions and businesses and residents. A model for this committee is the existing 501(c)(6) Convention Transportation Funding Committee.

The Extended Service Plan. In addition to the basic mobility service structure, four key elements are necessary to a comprehensive, dynamic and responsive network:

An Informed Customer. Visitors need ample, current information about their mobility choices when visiting Savannah. The more informed choices, the more likely a visitor is to make choices which both meet his needs and support the objectives of this plan.

An Informed Service Industry. Whether driving a taxi, greeting hotel guests or serving meals, professional and cordial service workers who know the city and how to get around, with the confidence to use that to assist a visitor, add measurable value to the Savannah Experience.

A Mobility Services Network. Rather than trying to meet evolving needs with traditional public and private transportation services, it is feasible and preferable to create a network of mobility services that respond effectively to customer needs while retaining their own identity.

Mobility Services Pricing. The most significant factor affecting a visitor's mobility choices is the pricing of services relative to their perceived value. Parking pricing is a key element.

1. Front-Line Staff Development Program

Timeframe: Implement by 3d quarter, 2006 Lead Agencies: CVB and TLC
Staff directly serving and interacting with visitors have a major impact on their perception of the city, and considerable influence over choices a visitor will make while here. Provides mobility-related training for front-line staff, and an interface and support for future Ambassador program.

Recommendation. CVB collaborate with TLC to institute a training/development program, including mobility choices, for front-line staff that when completed, accredits them as "Ambassadors." This program might additionally provide credits for skill development or CEU through local institution(s) such as GSU, SSU or Savannah Tech.

2. Visitor Specialist Program. *Timeframe: Summer 2007 Lead Agency: TBD*

This program trains a volunteer visitor mobility specialists based at transportation hubs during large conventions and special events to provide directions and mobility assistance to visitors moving through the system. Provides interface with a future Ambassador program.

3. Expand-Extend Convention-Mobility Management Functions. 2007

- a. Manage taxi and tour vehicle certification and approve issuance of necessary permits.
- b. Integrate taxi, other ground and tour operators into Ambassador initiative.
- c. Develop and maintain a comprehensive interactive mobility website for Savannah.
- d. Develop an integrated reservation and dispatching system for all mobility services.
- e. Devise and implement a system to communicate mobility options to travelers en route.
- f. Implement a system providing single-card access to mobility/parking services.
- g. Provide/broker communication services that enhance visitor experience (e.g., GPS guides).

4. Implement "Certified" Taxi / Ground Operator Service

Timeframe: Summer, 2007 Lead Agency: City of Savannah

Recommendation. City should develop a certification or designation for ground operators who demonstrate knowledge about the city and who provide a defined level of customer service. City and Savannah-Hilton Head International Airport managers might choose to select airport ground and other routes from among certified-qualified operators.