

# *Community Transportation Coordination Initiative*

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## *Executive Summary*

*Prepared For:*

*Princeton, New Jersey*

*Prepared By:*



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# Community Transportation Coordination Initiative

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## **Acknowledgement**

The Consultants would like to express their appreciation to members of the Project Working Group and Joint Advisory Committee for their assistance throughout the study process. Their input and suggestions proved invaluable in the development of alternatives and selection of a recommended plan.

## **Background**

A working group with representation from the Borough, Township and University held numerous meetings during the last year and a half soliciting comments and suggestions from stakeholders, residents and likely users of any expanded public transportation system. This process effectively formed what we have termed the Community Transportation Coordination Initiative - a cooperative effort of Princeton Borough and Princeton Township, in conjunction with Princeton University to analyze the current transit services in the Princeton area to:

- ❖ identify existing gaps in service;
- ❖ recommend any improved transit services that would increase transit coverage;
- ❖ improve mobility options of residents; and,
- ❖ increase connectivity between the area's existing transit services.

To address these issues and improve mobility, a technical analysis was conducted which evaluated the following:

- ❖ current service options;
- ❖ transit generators;
- ❖ potential new shuttle bus routes;
- ❖ administrative structures;
- ❖ marketing plans;
- ❖ operating costs and capital planning; and,
- ❖ identification of potential funding sources.

Each of these topics was discussed in several presentations and are summarized in a Final Report which describes in detail the findings and results of the analysis. This Executive Summary highlights the study process and summarizes those elements that would comprise a more integrated transit plan for the community.

## **Existing Transit Services**

Existing transit routes were reviewed to gauge the current level of service in Princeton Borough and Princeton Township. This assessment included an analysis of service provided in the Princeton Community by:

- ❖ NJ Transit;
- ❖ Suburban Transit;
- ❖ Princeton Borough's FreeB;
- ❖ Princeton Borough and Princeton Township's Crosstown 62 Service;
- ❖ Princeton University's TigerTransit; and,
- ❖ Other Shuttle Services - shuttles operated by Mercer County and private institutions (the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton Healthcare System, Rider University).

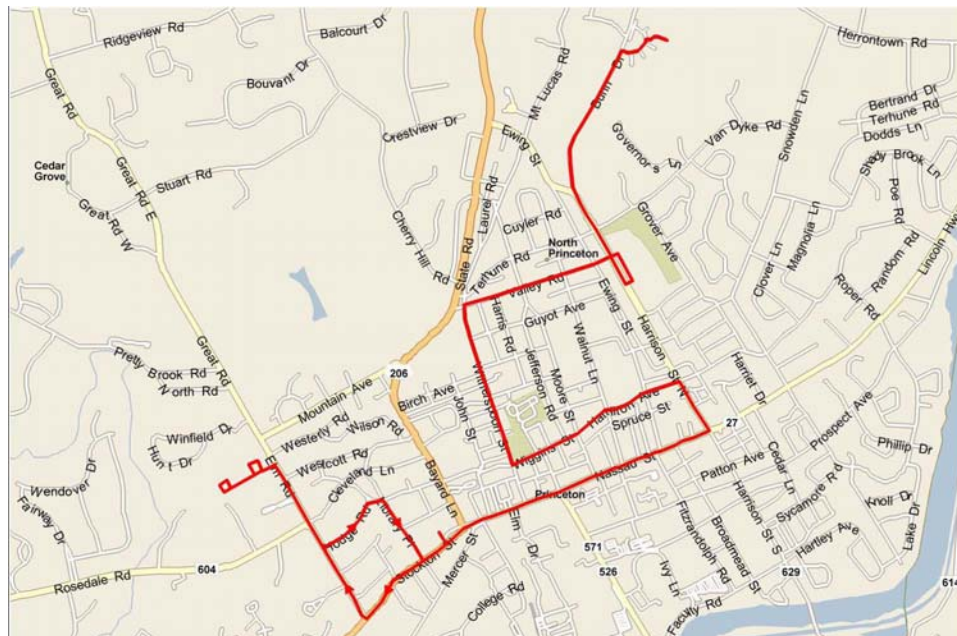
Of particular interest is the FreeB which is a local, one-way loop route offered by Princeton Borough. The route operates during peak commuter hours (early morning and late

afternoon/evening) through the Borough's downtown area via Nassau Street and Hamilton Avenue, and to the Princeton Rail Station where it provides connections with the Dinky train service to the Princeton Junction Rail Station.

The FreeB service is provided at no cost to riders. The cost of the service is underwritten entirely by financial support of NJ Transit (they provide a declining subsidy for three years) and Princeton Borough. Princeton Borough staff provides management oversight for the system, and day-to-day operations and vehicle maintenance is the responsibility of a contracted vendor. In addition to the regularly scheduled weekday commuter service, Princeton Borough and Princeton Township created a financial partnership to offer a successful Holiday Service during the 2009 Christmas shopping season using the FreeB vehicle.

### Recommended Transit Plan

An iterative process was followed in selecting a single recommended shuttle bus route. Initially, ten proposals were developed for consideration which attempted to link various neighborhoods and generators in the Princeton community. Based on a discussion by the working group, stakeholders and the advisory committee, the ten initial proposals were reduced to the four most promising and practical alternatives. In turn, these alternatives were discussed further by the working group in terms of their strengths and weaknesses. At the end of this process, a single alternative was selected as a recommended alternative. Based on the comments of the working group and a subsequent field test with the FreeB bus, the recommended alternative was refined and is presented below



The route would be operated using the FreeB bus and afford hourly service. Several alternatives were considered with respect to the hours and days of operation. The working group chose a six hour span (10:00 AM to 4:00 PM, or 9:30 AM to 3:30 PM) of service on weekdays. In this way, the vehicle used for peak period commuter service for the FreeB could also be used for midday operations of the proposed shuttle route.

## Operating Forecasts and Expenses

Forecasts of key operating statistics, ridership and costs were prepared for the first full year of operation of an expanded service as outlined. It was estimated that the shuttle bus would operate a total of 1,518 hours. Projections suggest that the shuttle bus would initially attract 30 riders daily or 7,590 trips on an annual basis. Furthermore, it was assumed that responsibility for the midday shuttle bus would be through a contract where day-to-day operations would be provided by a private firm similar to current arrangements for the FreeB and the Holiday Service. Based on these assumptions, it is estimated that the cost would be approximately \$91,000 to operate this service on an annual basis.

It is anticipated that the administration of the shuttle bus service would be handled by in-house staff at Princeton Borough, as it currently does for the FreeB. This cost would increase as the cost of the service increases, but the first year administration expense would be \$7,300, equal to eight percent of the total day-to-day costs.

An effective public outreach and marketing program is critical to raise awareness of an expanded community shuttle service. This marketing program would include, at a minimum, promotional materials such as a service brochure that would contain a timetable and a map of the route. This cost is estimated at \$15,000 for the first year and \$5,000 in each subsequent year. This would bring the total annual cost to \$113,300. The FreeB and Holiday Service are provided at no cost to all passengers. Under this scenario, the entire cost of operations, administration and marketing would need to be recovered through funding from financial streams other than passenger fares.

The new service would require various physical elements (i.e. bus stop signs, information kiosks, and shelters). Use of the current FreeB vehicle and existing transit amenities would decrease capital expenditures to about \$35,000.

<b>Operating Expenses For First Year</b>		
<b>Item</b>	<b>Cost</b>	
Day - to - Day	\$91,000	*
Administration	\$7,300	
Marketing	\$15,000	
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$113,300</b>	
<b>Capital Improvements</b>	<b>\$35,000</b>	<b>**</b>
<p>* Note: First year marketing expenses anticipated at higher rate. On-going annual marketing expense estimated at \$5,000.</p> <p>** Note: Capital Improvements could be phased in over time with more costly items held until service levels merit expense.</p>		

## **Funding**

Funding to underwrite the operating costs and capital outlays of the Recommended Transit Plan could consist of grants from local, state and federal governments, as well as from local non-profit and private organizations. It is most likely that a combination of outside sponsorships coupled with municipal support would be needed to launch this service. In addition, based on the expanded service areas that the shuttle service would reach, there may be savings to the municipalities by reduced usage of the community's Crosstown 62 program.

## **Administrative Plan**

As noted previously, the most likely approach to implement the service would be to follow the model of the FreeB where the day-to-day operations are left to a private contractor with the overall administration the responsibility of Princeton Borough. Both Princeton Borough and Princeton Township would enter into a local service agreement to share the costs of the service remaining after all outside sources of funding are explored.

There are two other issues related to the management of the service, which are institutional. The first is entry into the market which was an issue that arose when the FreeB was implemented. NJ Transit has operating rights for transit service, and they permitted, as well partially paid for, the FreeB service. NJ Transit must be consulted before implementing an expanded service.

The other institutional consideration is compliance with the American's with Disabilities Act (ADA). Typically, these include wheelchair accessible vehicles and the operation of a complementary demand responsive service for persons with disabilities who are unable to use the regular bus service. The current FreeB vehicle is lift equipped.

## **Marketing Program**

An aggressive marketing program is essential for the success of the Recommended Alternative. As previously mentioned, an initial outlay of \$15,000 has been suggested for the marketing of the new service for the first year. Each subsequent year, a third of that amount is suggested, which might increase moderately each successive year to reflect inflation. The branding of the recommended service is a key aspect of the marketing program, as it will create an impression with potential passengers and area residents alike.

Since we anticipate that the same vehicle will be used for this new service and the existing FreeB commuter service, a joint approach towards marketing and branding would be necessary, which would also spread the cost of a marketing program across both services. The implementation of the new service can also be employed to re-launch the current FreeB service.