

# Regional Transit Engagement Series 2017



**Phase 1 Summary Report  
August 23, 2017**

◦ Phase I Summary Report ◦

**Introduction**

This Summary Report outlines the input gathered during the Regional Transit Engagement Series Phase I stakeholder engagement process that occurred between March and May 2017. The Report includes an Introduction, Project Background, Phase I Process Details, Response Summary by Question, What’s Next and an Appendix. The Appendix includes a sample Phase I meeting agenda, questions sheet, feedback form, PowerPoint presentation, attendees list, and group discussion notes from each meeting.

*Project Background*

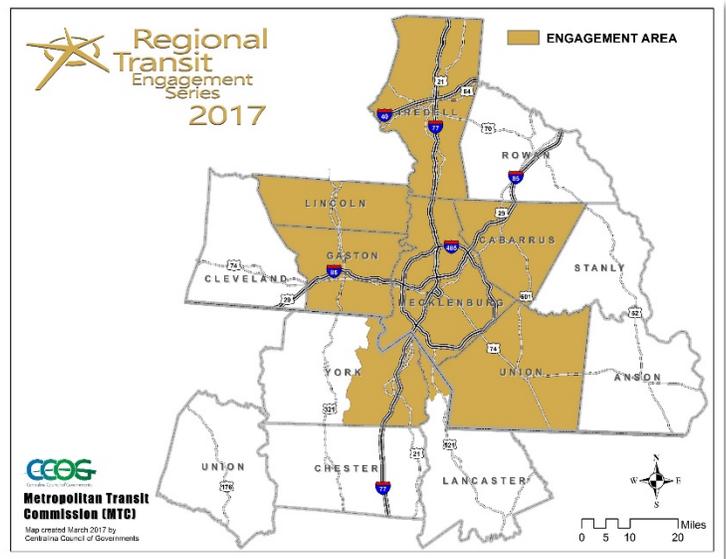
The Regional Transit Engagement Series (RTES) is a continuation of the CONNECT Our Future dialogue around transit. This series is designed to provide an opportunity to have focused conversations with local governments and stakeholders about regional transit, well before any planning takes place.

RTES is a collaboration between the [Metropolitan Transit Commission \(MTC\)](#) and [Centralina COG](#) intended to:

- more fully understand key stakeholder values and interests related to regional transit,
- develop and strengthen regional relationships,
- engage those in surrounding counties that may be most impacted by a growing region and transportation network, and
- develop consensus-based next steps.

The Regional Transit Engagement Series is an opportunity for communities to express their aspirations, concerns, values, and interests around long-term transit. The foundation for successful transit planning is public understanding and an early determination of community values and interests surrounding transit.

The engagement area for this project includes Cabarrus, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Mecklenburg, and Union counties and the urbanized areas of Lancaster and York counties in South Carolina. The first phase of engagement, designed for local government staff, included county-level meetings held in March and May 2017.



RTES Engagement Area

This work will inform the update of the CATS 2030 Transit System Corridor Plan, future transit planning in communities outside of Mecklenburg, and the identification of next best steps for long-term regional transit coordination.

# Regional Transit Engagement Series 2017



RTES Process Map

## RTES Phase I: Process Details

Phase I occurred during March – May 2017 and consisted of nine (9) county-level meetings in Cabarrus, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Mecklenburg (north and south) and Union counties, Rock Hill, South Carolina, and a make-up meeting held at the Centralina COG for anyone unable to make their county’s meeting. Invitees included county and municipal managers, planning directors, planners, transportation planners, transportation directors, Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and Rural Planning Organization (RPO) staff, Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) members from CRTPO, GCLMPO, CRMPO, and RRRPO, Catawba Regional COG staff, CATS staff and Centralina COG staff.

Each meeting consisted of a robust transit discussion that focused on the county where the meeting was being held (except for the make-up meeting). A total of 72 people attended the Phase I meetings, not including CCOG and CATS staff, who attended all meetings.



RTES Phase I By the Numbers

# Regional Transit Engagement Series 2017

The purpose of the Phase I meetings was to provide a baseline of information on the region's growth trends, the current state of transit planning, and to listen and gather input from local government staff and transit stakeholders from across the region. The meetings were designed to create dialogue and achieve clarity among regional stakeholders and to understand the transit related values, attitudes, concerns, and opportunities in each county. Other goals included:

- providing the audience with context for a broader regional transit discussion,
- understanding local benefits, concerns, and sensitive issues related to expanded transit,
- forecasting RTES Phase II engagement process and roles, and
- developing and strengthening relationships.





# Regional Transit Engagement Series 2017

A sample agenda from the Phase I meetings is included in the Appendix.

The table below outlines the meeting schedule for the Phase I meetings.

Phase I Meeting Schedule					
#	County Meeting	Date	Time	Location	Venue/Address
1	Lincoln	Monday, March 13	10 am - 12 pm	Lincolnton	Lincoln Economic Development Assoc. 502 E. Main Street, Lincolnton, NC
2	Gaston	Monday, March 13	2 pm - 4 pm	Gastonia	Gastonia Police Department – Community Room, 200 E. Long Avenue, Gastonia, NC
3	Cabarrus	Wednesday, March 22	10 am - 12 pm	Concord	Cabarrus County Government Center 65 Church Street South, Concord, NC
4	Union	Wednesday, April 19	10 am - 12 pm	Monroe	Old Armory Community Center 500 S. Johnson Street, Monroe, NC
5	South Mecklenburg	Wednesday, April 19	2 pm - 4 pm	Matthews	Matthews Town Hall – Council Chambers 232 Matthews Station Street, Matthews, NC
6	Iredell	Friday, April 21	10 am - 12 pm	Troutman	Troutman Town Hall – Council Chambers 400 North Eastway Drive, Troutman, NC
7	North Mecklenburg	Friday, April 21	2 pm - 4 pm	Cornelius	Cornelius Town Hall – Community Room 21445 Catawba Avenue, Cornelius, NC
8	South Carolina	Wednesday, April 26	10 am - 12 pm	Rock Hill	Manchester Meadows Conference Room 337 E. Mt. Gallant Road, Rock Hill, SC
9	Make-Up Meeting	Thursday, May 11	10 am - 12 pm	Charlotte	Centralina Council of Governments 9815 David Taylor Drive, Charlotte, NC



## RTES Phase I: Summary of Meeting Responses by Question

The following is a summary of responses to each question posed during the RTES Phase I meetings. A sample question sheet from the Phase I meetings is included in the Appendix.

### *Question 1: What’s going on now/future in your community that transit would support?*

Communities generally responded to this question by outlining **how transit could assist their community** (broadly) in the future. The most frequent responses included:

- Acknowledgement that our economy is regional and that existing cross-county commuting is a key driving factor in pursuing additional transportation options in the form of region-wide transit.
- A desire to mitigate current and future congestion on highways and local roads.
- Recognition that upward mobility and access to jobs, services, education, and cultural attractions can be improved through regional transit.
- The potential to diversify the local economic base and attract employers by offering more transportation options.
- Recognition that positive, existing relationships with CATS make discussion of these issues possible.

Communities also mentioned **current trends, initiatives, projects, and programs that would benefit from future transit** improvements, and in some cases, were paving the way for future transit. Examples included:

- New residents from other parts of the nation have increased expectations for transportation choices, particularly transit.
- Explosive growth requires additional options and regional thinking.
- Local land use policy changes are occurring to support density at locally designated activity centers and/or allow mixed-use, walkable developments.
- Communities are focusing on seniors, mobility, and aging in place.
- Current transportation and transit initiatives could render near-term opportunities (weekend transit circulator, expanded express bus services, I-77 managed lanes/BRT).

A sample of the unique responses for Question 1 are noted below.

<b>Cabarrus County</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Increasing growth (i.e., population, residential development, airport, retail)</li> <li>○ Need for connection between different destinations (i.e., between RCCC campuses, to UNC Charlotte, within Cabarrus County, between Concord and Kannapolis, to Charlotte, to specific sites or facilities, etc.)</li> </ul>
<b>Gaston County</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Existing local transit system, paratransit, highway network, and relationship with CATS.</li> <li>○ Desire to reduce congestion and provide transit for economic development.</li> </ul>
<b>Iredell County</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Want to access Charlotte jobs, amenities, and events.</li> <li>○ Potential for reverse commuting.</li> </ul>
<b>Lincoln County</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Need for additional transportation options for seniors, veterans, disabled individuals.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Lots of cross-county transportation occurring for jobs.</li> <li>○ East Lincoln County has different challenges than the remainder of the county.</li> </ul>
<b>North Mecklenburg County</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Lots of transit-oriented development going on, especially focusing on downtown areas, and walkable activity centers.</li> <li>○ Current efforts on I-77 could lead to BRT and other transit enhancements.</li> <li>○ Davidson has initiated a weekend circulator as way to expand transportation options.</li> </ul>
<b>South Mecklenburg County</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Rapid growth and congestion means changes needed in how the public gets from one place to another.</li> <li>○ Newcomers have expectations for transit, especially for youth, seniors, and those displaced through gentrification.</li> <li>○ Silver line to Matthews received support/consensus.</li> </ul>
<b>South Carolina</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Rapid growth occurring and newcomers expect efficient, reliable transit.</li> <li>○ Growth is necessitating a better way to move people for economic access. Companies asking for options.</li> <li>○ Rock Hill has a transit system and SC seeks options for connecting to light rail.</li> </ul>
<b>Union County</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Transit and land use connection and concerns (i.e., density)</li> </ul>

**Question 2: What elements of regional transit would be most important for your county?**

● = at least half of meeting participants voted

	Business & comm growth	Broad-band access	Vibrant down-towns	Increased Housing choices	Control cost of gov't	Walk-able dev't	Transit access & reg'l mobility	Work-force training facilities	Farm-land pres.	Other
Cabarrus				●		●	●	●		
Gaston	●		●			●	●			
Iredell	●		●				●		●	
Lincoln	●						●			
Make Up	●		●	●		●	●		●	
N. Meck	●		●	●	●	●	●			
S. Meck				●	●	●	●			
South Carolina	●					●	●			
Union	●	●		●		●	●			

**Question 3: What do you see as the most challenging aspects to transit?**

● = at least half of meeting participants voted

	Gaining consensus on the corridor location	Developing tools to hold right-of-way long-term	Identifying community-specific strategies for how this concept will help business development	Leveraging tools to encourage mixed-use, walkable development around activity nodes	Identifying long-term funding mechanism to plan, design, and construct transit	Cultivating political support for transit projects	Other
Cabarrus				●	●	●	
Gaston	●	●			●	●	
Iredell		●			●	●	
Lincoln					●	●	
Make-Up					●	●	
N. Meck	●				●	●	
S. Meck		●			●	●	
South Carolina		●		●	●	●	
Union			●			●	

**Question 4: Locally, what concerns must be considered before transit can expand?**

Generally, the concerns fell into one of four categories, including: resources, partnerships and coordination, planning, and messaging.

The primary concern included understanding the options for **how to fund transit and the ability to fund projects**. Second, there was an expressed need for **education/messaging** around transit including:

- the benefit/value of transit to a community’s transportation system, even for non-riders, and the value proposition from multiple points of view (e.g., seniors, chamber of commerce, millennials, families with aging parents, farmers, etc.),
- the link between economic development and transit,
- the connection between local land use, density, and transit success,
- exploring stigmas around riding transit and having transit in a community, and
- understanding how transit impacts economic mobility.

Third, input highlighted the **need for a plan or regional transit vision** that extended outside Mecklenburg County. Supporting comments included the need to understand potential destinations, potential routes, and transit mode choices.

The fourth category of concerns centered around **partnerships and coordination** and how the “administrative” functions of transit would occur. Comments reference relationships with the state and federal government, coordination with mobility partners, cross-jurisdiction coordination, and coordination of transit modes.

A sample of the unique responses from Question 4 are noted below.

<b>Cabarrus County</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The land use and transportation connection – need to know key transit lines and destinations and it needs to be integrated into planning.</li> </ul>
<b>Gaston County</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Transit messaging and improved rider experience with regard to convenience, frequency, access, etc.</li> <li>○ Funding options needed.</li> </ul>
<b>Iredell County</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Integration with existing transit modes and partnerships within county and county-to-county.</li> <li>○ Education for riders, potential riders and elected officials to show value of transit.</li> </ul>
<b>Lincoln County</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Transit costs and value to residents.</li> </ul>
<b>North Mecklenburg County</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Overcome challenge of making transit an attractive, viable alternative to cars.</li> </ul>
<b>South Mecklenburg County</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Funding and support are needed before anything else can be done.</li> </ul>
<b>South Carolina</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Communication with residents about transit and their understanding of it so that way they understand why it is more efficient than single-occupancy vehicles.</li> </ul>
<b>Union County</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Cost and value to the community and residents.</li> </ul>

**Question 5: What must transit accomplish to be successful for your community?**

Participants noted that a broad **educational and messaging campaign** would be needed first, to assist in community understanding and acceptability of transit as a transportation choice. In addition, transit would have to be seen as:

- a viable alternative to the single occupancy vehicle in terms of convenience (does it go where I want it to go),
- affordable (does it make sense to drop a car from my household or will I save in the long-run on fuel and car maintenance),
- reliable (is there enough frequency that I can depend on the transit to accommodate changes in schedule),
- clean (are the stations and vehicles well kempt), and
- accessible (is there a stop close by, can I walk/bike to the transit, is there a park and ride at the station, etc.).

Participants also noted the importance of keeping a “future focus” and thinking about the community and transportation choices for children and grandchildren.

A sample of the unique responses for Question 5 are noted below.

<b>Cabarrus County</b>	○ Transit must meet the needs of different generations of residents (i.e., walkability, ability to age in place)
<b>Gaston County</b>	○ Remember messaging around transit history in Gaston County (we had passenger rail to Charlotte in the past). Improve the perception of transit.
<b>Iredell County</b>	○ Transit must enhance quality of life and economic mobility.
<b>Lincoln County</b>	○ Improve the quality of life for residents.
<b>North Mecklenburg County</b>	○ Transit must have logical destinations and could potentially be a job creator for the surrounding communities. This would make it more attractive to residents/potential users.
<b>South Mecklenburg County</b>	○ Communication between the public and private sectors, and regionally, is key to making transit successful.
<b>South Carolina</b>	○ Establish and keep ridership by making reliable, efficient, low-cost, and utilize coordination between providers.
<b>Union County</b>	○ Transit needs to demonstrate economic development growth but be convenient enough to build familiarity and support.

<b>Question 6: What mobility priorities exist locally?</b>					
● = at least half of meeting participants voted					
	Cross-county and cross-system connections	Access to hospitals and health-care	Access to employment and service centers	Access to entertainment and activity centers	Other
Cabarrus	●	●	●	●	
Gaston	●		●	●	
Iredell	●	●	●	●	
Lincoln	●	●	●		
Make Up	●	●	●	●	
N. Meck			●	●	
S. Meck	●		●	●	
South Carolina	●		●	●	
Union		●		●	

**Question 7: What do you need to know from residents about transit? (to inform the public survey questions)**

Participants in all meetings agreed that there are key questions that should be asked of the public to determine attitudes and values around transit.

**Factors Needed to Change Behavior**

- What would make you use transit?
- If it were available near you, would you use it?
- Would you ride if you did not have to pay?
- Accessibility? (easy on/off)
- Tolerance for change/would get you out of your car?
- Motivation for using transit: Why is it important/worthwhile?
- Even if you do not use it, what is the perceived benefit to the community?
- What would you use transit for?

**Land Use/Destinations**

- Is there support for density in urban form that would be needed to support transit?
- Is there interest in stops outside of Mecklenburg County?
- What would be an acceptable wait/time/distance to walk/where you want to go?
- Convenience/location of stops/frequency?
- What routes?

**Frequency**

- What hours of operation?
- What's the threshold commute time for folks coming from home into Mecklenburg County?

**Mode**

- What type/mode of transit would you support?
- What types of transit are people interested in?

**Willingness to pay**

- What is the willingness to pay in terms of fares?
- Would they approve an increase in taxes to pay for transit?
- Funding? Would you support funding for transit?
- How would you prioritize money – transit vs. other transportation funding (roads, etc.)

**Other**

- Interest in transit and level of understanding about it: Who needs or would use public transit?
- What do you think "transit mobility" means? (start broad)
- What percentage of Mecklenburg County residents support light rail expansion?
- There was interest in having a statistically (controlled) significant survey about transit.

**Question 8: What do you need to better understand and communicate transit?**

Communities across the region support the need for a **unified vision for future transit**. That is not to say that each county will have the same vision, but that there is a need for clarity in terms of **future extensions of the existing light rail system**, opportunities for **bus rapid transit and regional express routes**, and **cross-county system connections** and coordination.

Communities across the region expressed a desire to better understand:

- major cross-county transit **destinations**,
- **funding models**, opportunities and options,
- **administrative options**, and
- the **existing transit resources within the region** (e.g., transit systems, number of busses, routes, ridership, future plans, etc.).

There was an overwhelming need expressed for **transit-supportive messaging, value statements, and return on investment examples** from across the nation. Communities also need additional data about the **tipping point for riding transit** – “what does it take in terms of mode, destinations, frequency to get people out of cars?” – and the desire to pay for transit. Participants also wondered how the existing Amtrak passenger rail line could be used for regional commuter rail.

A sample of the unique responses for Question 8 are noted below.

<b>Cabarrus County</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How can we connect to the Charlotte Motor Speedway?</li> <li>○ A unified approach based on vision, a solid plan (including funding strategies) and systems.</li> </ul>
<b>Gaston County</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Messaging considerations – need a consistent, unified messaging for a broad audience focused on making the abstract – planning years out into the future – more concrete to today’s values and goals.</li> </ul>
<b>Iredell County</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Focus on residents – their concerns about transit, what value it would bring to them.</li> </ul>
<b>Lincoln County</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The facts – information on stop locations and frequency, available services, costs.</li> </ul>
<b>North Mecklenburg County</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Concise education and a reasonable funding model is needed to better communicate about transit.</li> </ul>
<b>South Mecklenburg County</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Is there interest in transit going elsewhere besides Mecklenburg County?</li> <li>○ Need facts regarding the process of physically making transit happen.</li> </ul>
<b>South Carolina</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Knowing what is available and the benefits of transit to sell to the community.</li> <li>○ Needs regional coordination.</li> </ul>
<b>Union County</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Existing transit infrastructure and information on the process of making long-term transit happen.</li> </ul>

### **Question 9: Who should be included in Phase II?**

During each meeting, additional stakeholders were identified as needed for Phase II. The following is a sample of the stakeholders mentioned during the Phase I meetings.

- Elected officials including local, county; state; federal; legislators; and chambers of commerce
- North Carolina and South Carolina Departments of Transportation (NCDOT and SCDOT)
- Small municipalities in addition to the larger ones
- MPOs/RPOs, including planning, development, and zoning boards
- Stakeholder groups
- Rail providers
- Airports
- Councils on Aging
- Uber, Lyft, and Taxi companies
- (Major) Employers such as education institutions, school districts, and healthcare providers
  - Industry and commercial sectors including EMS, fire, and hospital staff
  - Private sector
  - Nonprofit sector, including volunteer transportation services
- Developers
- Church and civic leaders
- HOA representatives
- The general public, including transit users and transit non-users, seniors, millennials/the next generation, veterans, the disabled, community leaders and underserved groups
- SC Workforce
- Tech-savvy people to educate on how to use the CATS phone app

### **What's Next**

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Phase II of the Regional Transit Engagement Series will consist of a follow-up round of county level meetings scheduled for August and September 2017, a public opinion survey, and a regional transit summit in early 2018. The difference between Phase I and Phase II engagement is the target audiences. While Phase I focused on staff-level stakeholders, Phase II will expand to include local, state, and federal elected officials, economic development and private sector stakeholders, leaders of institutions, and other stakeholders. Phase II will also build off the results of Phase I and go deeper into the topics that were consistently heard across the region.

The second phase of engagement will also help to establish clarity on background, context, and next steps for regional transit discussion and planning, including both challenges and opportunities. This stakeholder engagement will be supplemented by a public survey that will gauge public attitudes and values related to regional transit. Finally, this transit series will create an engagement summary document that includes county-specific feedback regarding the level of interest in transit, concerns, opportunities, and new partners, preferred transit destinations, and the regional appetite for financially supporting a regional transit plan. All this work will lay the groundwork for a regional transit planning effort.

## Appendix

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- Sample meeting agenda
- Sample questions sheet
- Sample feedback form
- Phase I PowerPoint presentation
- Phase I meetings attendee list
- Group discussion notes from each meeting  
(in the order that the meetings occurred)
  - Lincoln County
  - Gaston County
  - Cabarrus County
  - Union County
  - South Mecklenburg County
  - Iredell County
  - North Mecklenburg County
  - South Carolina
  - Make-up Meeting

Click here <http://bit.ly/RegionalTransit> to access the RTES webpage, Report Appendix, and learn more about this project.