



# Newton County Transit Master Plan

Transit Investment Scenarios Technical Memorandum

Newton County Department of Transportation

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# 1 Introduction

This report documents potential funding opportunities for transit service in Newton County and includes scenarios outlining the requirements for accessing various state, federal, and local funds that may be available.

This report is organized as follows:

- **Section 1: Financial Plan Overview:** The financial plan has been developed following the service strategies and include high/low specs (minimal and optimum), to reflect these different service levels.
- **Section 2: Potential Funding Sources:** This section discusses federal sources of funding, flexible funding (STP funds), state sources of funding, and local sources of funding available to Newton County to initiate and sustain service.
- **Section 3: Funding Requirements and Strategies:** This section shows the operations and maintenance, capital, and timing assumptions for high/low levels based on the service strategies and forecasted federal funding and local share.

## 2 Potential Funding Sources

There are several potential sources of funding to initiate and maintain transit service in Newton County. The most common sources used to fund transit service are from federal, state, and local agencies, though in some cases agencies can leverage partnerships and pay-for-service contracts, such as service to a college or job site. These funding sources are explained below.

### 2.1 Federal Sources of Funding

This section evaluates the financial plan for the proposed transit system service. Transit expenditures, capital, operating costs, and funding sources are shown in this chapter. In addition, this chapter includes a discussion of the financial capacity and identifies the financial impact for Newton County of this proposed transit service plan.

In order to fund the transit recommendations, local revenues will be required to provide the necessary local match needed to acquire federal and state funding, which are administered by various state agencies.

Per the definitions of the US Census Bureau, Newton County is divided into rural and urban areas, with the urbanized area lying within the Atlanta Urbanized Area (UZA). Because of this, Newton County would be eligible for the use of both FTA Section 5307 Urbanized Area funding and Section 5311 Rural Area funding. These formula funds are used by almost all transit systems in the United States and represent the largest federal funding sources for their respective service areas. For large urban areas such as Atlanta, Section 5307 Urbanized Area funding is administered through a designated recipient, in this case it is the Atlanta Regional Transit Link Authority (the ATL). Section 5311 Rural funds are administered by the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) for all rural areas within the state.

FTA sets limits on how much federal funding can be used for transit projects, referred to as the “federal share”. The maximum federal share varies among funding programs and expense types. For Newton County, Sections 5307 and 5311 formula funding from the FTA could be used to fund up to 80% of capital investments and between 50% to 75% of operating expenses.

provides a summary of the Federal grants, some of which are administered by GDOT, which Newton County is eligible to receive for the financing of an expanded public transportation system. Most all transit systems in the United States receive substantial federal funding. This section provides a summary of the transit funding options available for this UZA. All funding programs include limiting factors related to the eligible recipients and eligible costs, either planning, capital and/or operating costs.

Federal funding is established through legislative program structures and programs maintained in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and the House Continuing Appropriations Act 2021. The IIJA builds on the previous transportation reauthorization bills, the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act and Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) Act. IIJA provides substantially more federal funding for formula appropriations but does not make major changes to the regulatory requirements such as eligibility.

**Table 1: Federal Sources of Funding**

<b>Administered Federal Aid Grant Programs</b>			
<b>Federal Aid Grant Program</b>	<b>Program Description</b>	<b>Eligible Recipients</b>	<b>Matching Ratios</b>
FTA Section 5303, 5304 and 5305 – Metropolitan and Statewide Planning formula funding	Supports transit planning expenses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs)</li> <li>State DOTs</li> </ul>	Up to 80% of eligible expenses
FTA Section 5307 – Urbanized Area formula funding	Supports operating and capital costs of transit operators. Used by the State DOT to fund small urban transit systems.	Funding is made available to designated recipients, which must be public bodies.	Between 50% to 75% of eligible operating expenses. Up to 80% of eligible capital expenses.
FTA Section 5311 – Rural Area Formula funding	Supports operating and capital costs of transit operators in non-urbanized areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State DOTs</li> <li>Federally recognized Indian Tribes</li> </ul> <p>Sub-recipients include state or local government authorities, nonprofit organizations, and operators of public transportation or intercity bus service.</p>	Between 50% to 75% of eligible operating expenses. Up to 80% of eligible capital expenses.
FTA Section 5339(a) – Bus and Bus Facilities <i>formula</i> grant	Provides capital funding to replace, rehabilitate and purchase buses and related equipment and to construct bus-related facilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Designated Recipients of urbanized areas.</li> <li>State DOTs that operate or allocate funding to fixed-route bus operators.</li> <li>Sub-recipients include public agencies or private non-profits engaged in public transit.</li> </ul>	Up to 80% of eligible capital expenses.
FTA Section 5339(b) – Bus and Bus Facilities <i>discretionary</i> grant	Provides capital funding to replace, rehabilitate and purchase buses and related equipment and to construct bus-related facilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Designated Recipients of urbanized areas.</li> <li>State DOTs that operate or allocate funding to fixed-route bus operators.</li> <li>Sub-recipients include public agencies or private non-profits engaged in public transit.</li> </ul>	Up to 80% of eligible capital expenses.
Flexible Funding Program – Surface Transportation Program (STP) Funds	Provides funding for a wide variety of projects that support operating and capital costs of transit operators. Used by the State DOT to fund small urban transit systems.	Funding is made available to designated recipients, which must be public bodies. Typically, the State DOT is the designated recipient for urbanized areas between 50,000 and 200,000.	Up to 88.5% of eligible capital expenses.

Federal funding categories that can be leveraged for transit improvement projects are detailed below.

### 2.1.1 Metropolitan and Statewide Planning – Sections 5303/5304 Programs

These funds are available for planning activities that:

- Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency;
- Increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
- Increase the accessibility and mobility of people and for freight;
- Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, improve the quality of life, and promote consistency between transportation improvements and State and local planned growth and economic development patterns;
- Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight;
- Promote efficient system management and operation; and
- Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.

This funding is allocated to GDOT and then distributed to the MPOs in the state of Georgia through a grant process with FTA. Each specific MPO receives an allocation through a GDOT-administered formula. This funding is generally available to do planning studies related to transit and sometimes to fund transit planning positions or other special projects that will benefit transit in the region.

### 2.1.2 Urbanized Area Formula Grant – Section 5307 Program

The Section 5307 formula grant provides transit capital, operating and planning assistance to urbanized areas with populations of more than 50,000. This program has the most encompassing eligibility of any federal program providing funding to transit systems. Grant funds are utilized to support the development, maintenance and improvement of public transportation in urbanized areas. Eligible projects fall into three primary categories: Planning Projects, Capital Projects, and Operating Projects.

Planning eligible activities include, but are not limited to:

- Studies relating to management, operations, capital requirements, and economic feasibility;
- Work elements and related activities preliminary to and in preparation for constructing, acquiring, or improving the operation of facilities and equipment;
- Plans and specifications;
- Evaluation of previously funded projects; and
- Other similar or related activities before and in preparation for the construction, acquisition, or improved operation of public transportation systems, facilities, and equipment.

Capital projects eligible under the Urbanized Area Formula Program include all projects contained under 49 U.S.C. 5302(3). In general, capital project expenses involve purchasing, leasing, constructing, maintaining, or repairing facilities, rolling stock (i.e., buses or other transit

vehicles), and equipment for use in a public transportation system. Capital project costs may include all direct costs and indirect costs associated with the project (provided that the grantee has an approved cost allocation plan or indirect cost proposal). It is noted that a listing of eligible projects is not shown here because of the breadth of projects.

Example eligible projects include engineering design and evaluation of transit projects, capital investments in bus and bus-related activities such as replacement and overhaul of buses, rebuilding of buses, crime prevention and security equipment, construction of maintenance and passenger facilities and capital investments in new and existing fixed guideway systems. All preventive maintenance and some Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) complementary paratransit service costs (10% of the yearly apportionment) are considered eligible.

FTA provides funding to eligible recipients for costs incurred in the operation of public transportation service. In general, operating expenses are those costs necessary to operate, maintain, and manage a public transportation system.

Operating expenses usually include such costs as driver salaries, fuel, and items having a useful life of less than one year. For transit systems in large urban areas such as Atlanta, the amount of federal operating assistance is determined by the number of buses in the transit fleet.

Transit agencies operating a large number of vehicles are not allowed to use FTA formula funds for operating assistance. However, agencies that operate 75 or fewer buses may use up to 75% of Section 5307 funds for operating assistance.

Local match is required for any Section 5307 project and can vary from 10% - 50% depending on the type of project. The federal share for planning and capital projects that receive funding under the Section 5307 Program may not exceed 80 percent of the project cost. There are several notable exceptions in which the federal share may exceed 80 percent for certain projects related to ADA, Clean Air Act, and certain bicycle projects as follows:

- **Vehicles:** The federal share is 85 percent for the acquisition of vehicles for purposes of complying with or maintaining compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA; *42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.*) or the Clean Air Act (CAA; *42 U.S.C. 7401 et seq.*).
- **Vehicle-Related Equipment and Facilities:** The federal share for project costs for acquiring vehicle-related equipment or facilities (including clean fuel or alternative fuel vehicle-related equipment or facilities) for purposes of complying or maintaining compliance with the CAA, or required by the ADA, is 90 percent.

### 2.1.3 Rural Area Formula Grant – Section 5311 Program

The Formula Grants for Rural Areas program provides capital, planning, and operating assistance to state departments of transportation (DOT) to support public transportation in rural areas with populations of less than 50,000, where many residents often rely on public transit.

The FTA Section 5311 program supports both the maintenance of existing public transportation services and the expansion of those services through the program goals of:

- Enhancing access in rural areas to health care, shopping, education, employment, public services, and recreation.

- Assisting in the maintenance, development, improvement, and use of public transportation systems in rural areas.
- Encouraging and facilitating the most efficient use of all transportation funds used to provide passenger transportation in rural areas through the coordination of programs and services.
- Providing financial assistance to help carry out national goals related to mobility for all, including seniors, individuals with disabilities, and low-income individuals.
- Increasing availability of transportation options through investments in intercity bus services.
- Assisting in the development and support of intercity bus transportation.
- Encouraging mobility management, employment-related transportation alternatives, joint development practices, and transit-oriented development.
- Providing for the participation of private transportation providers in rural public transportation.

Because Section 5311 funds are reserved for rural transportation, any transit trip funded through Section 5311 must either begin or end within an area designated as rural by the US Census Bureau. Jurisdictions that contain both rural and urbanized areas must take steps to ensure that Section 5311 funds are not used to provide “urban-to-urban” trips; this is usually accomplished by using separate vehicles for each trip type, or by operating parallel urban and rural transit systems.

The Section 5311 program also provides funding for state and national training and technical assistance through the Rural Transportation Assistance Program (RTAP). Funds may be used for capital, operating, and administrative assistance to state agencies, local public bodies, Indian tribes, and non-profit organizations, and operators of public transportation services. The maximum FTA share for operating assistance is 50 percent of the operating costs.

Funds in the FTA Section 5311 program have a very wide compass of eligibility. Eligible capital expenses include the acquisition, construction, and improvement of public transit facilities and equipment needed for a safe, efficient, and coordinated public transportation system, as well as certain other expenses classified as capital in Section 5302(3). Operating expenses are those costs directly related to system operations. At a minimum, states must consider the following items as operating expenses: fuel, oil, drivers’ salaries and fringe benefits, dispatcher salaries and fringe benefits, and licenses.

The governor designates a state agency that will have principal authority and responsibility for administering the FTA Section 5311 program. For Georgia, the agency given charge over the FTA Section 5311 program is GDOT’s Division of Intermodal. Specifically, the role of the state agency is to do the following:

- Document the state’s procedures in a state management plan;
- Notify eligible local entities of the availability of the program;
- Plan for future transportation needs and ensure integration and coordination among diverse transportation modes and providers;
- Solicit applications from transit providers;
- Develop project selection criteria;

- Review and select projects for approval;
- Forward an annual program of projects and grant application to FTA;
- Certify eligibility of applicants and project activities;
- Ensure compliance with federal requirements by all sub-recipients;
- Monitor local project activity;
- Oversee project audit and closeout;
- File a NTD report each year for itself and each sub-recipient;

#### 2.1.4 Bus and Bus Facilities Grant – Section 5339 Program

The Bus and Bus Facilities is a formula grant program created by MAP-21 legislation which replaced the previous Section 5309 discretionary Bus and Bus Facilities program. This capital-only program provides funding to replace, rehabilitate, and purchase buses and related equipment, and to construct bus-related facilities.

Distribution of this grant is formula based and requires a 20% local match. A portion of the total Section 5339 program has been also set aside as a discretionary pot of funding through the IIJA. These competitive grants also provide additional federal resources to state DOTs and designated and direct recipients to replace, rehabilitate and purchase buses and related equipment and to construct facilities including technological changes or innovations to modify low or no emission vehicles or facilities. Note that despite the Section 5339 supporting capital only expenditures, preventive maintenance is not an eligible activity. A sub-program, the Low- or No-Emission Vehicle Program, provides competitive grants for projects that support the purchase or rehab of those specified vehicles. These funds will flow directly from GDOT based on capital projects applications.

#### 2.1.5 Flexible Funding Program – Surface Transportation Program (STP) Funds

The STP program provides a national annual appropriation to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). This funding has a broad project eligibility and funding may be used for projects to preserve or improve conditions and performance on any Federal-aid highway, bridge project on any public road, facilities for non-motorized transportation, transit capital projects and public bus terminals and facilities. This program funding can also be “flexed” to FTA for use by transit agencies. Once flexed to FTA, the funds generally follow the regulations and eligibility of Section 5307 funding.

### 2.1.6 Flexible Funding – Congestion Mitigations and Air Quality (CMAQ) Funds

The FAST Act continued the CMAQ program to provide a flexible funding source to State and local governments for transportation projects and programs to help meet the requirements of the Clean Air Act. Funding is available to reduce congestion and improve air quality for areas that do not meet the National Ambient Air Quality Standards for ozone, carbon monoxide, or particulate matter (nonattainment areas) and for former nonattainment areas that are now in compliance (maintenance areas).

Funds may be used for a transportation project or program that is likely to contribute to the attainment or maintenance of a national ambient air quality standard, with a high level of effectiveness in reducing air pollution, and that is included in the metropolitan planning organization's (MPO's) current transportation plan and transportation improvement program (TIP) or the current state transportation improvement program (STIP) in areas without an MPO.

## 2.2 State Sources of Funding

Currently, the state of Georgia provides approximately \$1.7 million per year to fund transit activities through the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT)<sup>1</sup>. These funds come from the state's general fund and not a transit-specific funding source. These funds are used to provide a portion of the 20% local match needed to leverage federal capital funding programs and could be used to assist in the purchase of vehicles in a potential Newton County transit system.

The State of Georgia also provides between \$10 million and \$14 million in annual assistance for the operation of metro Atlanta's Xpress commuter bus system. These funds have traditionally been allocated from the State's General Fund.

In April of 2020, the state of Georgia began assessing a fee on for-hire ground transportation providers, such as taxis and Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) like Uber and Lyft. The revenues generated from these trips are to be appropriated for transit projects. Providers are to pay 50 cents per trip or 25 cents per shared or pooled ride; these rates may be adjusted annually for inflation and cost-of-living changes. Funds are held in the Georgia Transit Trust Fund.

Transit projects can also seek funding allocations from the Georgia Transportation Trust Fund, though transit allocations may only make up 10% of the fund's annual allocations. These funds are collected through Georgia's alternative fuels taxes and hotel fees.

These two trust funds, created by 2021's House Bill 511, are intended to replace contributions to transit that were typically made through allocations from the state's General Fund. By using these trust funds, state investment is expected to be more consistent in the coming years.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: *GDOT FY2021-2024 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program*

## 2.3 Local Sources of Funding

Newton County funds most transportation projects and programs through three SPLOST funds: 2005, 2011, and 2017. The 2017 SPLOST is currently being collected, whereas the 2005 and 2011 SPLOST funds are no longer in place. The transportation balances for the two older SPLOST funds were budgeted to be exhausted in FY 2021. For FY 2021, \$12,527 from the 2005 SPLOST and \$89,385 from the 2011 SPLOST were expended.

For the 2017 SPLOST, the FY 2021 budget projected a total of \$11,704,200 in collections, of which \$3,309,726 were budgeted for transportation purposes. \$1,250,000 was budgeted to be spent on transportation projects in FY 2021. **Table 2** below provides more detail on the transportation fund for the 2017 SPLOST.

**Table 2: Newton County SPLOST FY 2021 Transportation Budget Information**

Fiscal Year	Beginning Balance	Budgeted Collections	Proposed Expenditures	Proposed End-of-Year Balance
FY2019	\$3,055,132	\$3,055,132	\$0	\$6,110,264
FY2020	\$6,661,064	\$3,309,726	\$1,250,000	\$8,720,791
FY2021	\$10,095,018	\$3,309,726	\$1,250,000	\$12,154,744

*Source: Newton County FY 2021 Adopted Budget Book*

For FY 2022, Newton County has budgeted \$5.1 million for Public Works expenditures, which would include transportation expenditures. Newton County leadership is currently planning for a continuation of the 2017 SPLOST Program starting in FY2023, pending voter approval in a November 2022 referendum.

Newton County also collects impact fees, a portion of which may be used for road projects. The FY 2021 budget projected \$525,000 in annual impact fee revenues for the transportation fund. There are no budgeted FY 2021 expenditures for this fund.

## 3 Financial Plan Overview

The financial plan has been developed based on the scenarios discussed in the Service Strategies Technical Memorandum. There are two scenarios considered, the High Scenario, where total costs are calculated based on optimum level of service, and the Low Scenario, where costs were calculated based on minimal level of service.

Federal funding is considered to offset the costs of acquiring capital items and operating costs. Section 5307 Urban and Section 5311 Rural have been considered for the development of the scenarios. Capital items are paid with federal funds the first year, but additional funding sources will be required to cover the costs in subsequent years, in particular in the high scenario.

The scenarios considered the initial cost, or subsidy, and applies the funding available for operations using Section 5307, Section 5311, and local matches, including fare revenues. Inflation is considered year to year for all costs and funding. The high and low criteria are applied to all costs and funding sources and sources of revenue.

The financial plan provides budget projections using the transit projects recommended in the Service Strategies Technical Memorandum and considers service over the next 20 years. The projects and their respective timeframes are:

**Near-term (1-5 years):**

- Countywide Demand Response Service
- Covington to Conyers Shuttle Service
- Covington Park-and-Ride to East Conyers Park-and-Ride Shuttle
- Downtown Covington Circulator Service

**Mid-term (6 – 10 years):**

- Extension of ATL Xpress Regional Commuter Service
- Microtransit Service

**Long-term (10+ years):**

- Northeast Covington Fixed-Route Bus Service
- Porterdale Fixed Route Bus Service

Initial capital costs are considered in the plan, along with replacement costs that the agency will incur when capital assets reach the end of their useful life.

## 4 Funding Requirements and Strategies

Funding requirements have been made for capital and operational costs. The financial plan makes timing assumptions, such as when new services are occurring and when capital items need to be acquired. The financial plan also includes replacement costs for rolling stock, as vehicles make up the largest capital expenses a transit agency will need to cover.

### 4.1 Capital Costs

The capital costs have been developed for each one of the scenarios and include the cost of replacing the rolling stock as service continues and new service is implemented.

In the first year, the assumption is that Section 5307 and Section 5311 will be used to acquire rolling stock, software, shelters, and equipment. These funds will not be available for the following years for Section 5307, and some funds could be available from Section 5311 to offset some of the costs. However, it is common practice for GDOT to assist with acquisition of Section 5311 rolling stock, therefore the assumptions of using Section 5307 and Section 5311 funds are maintained.

**Table 3: Project Capital Costs (High Scenario)**

Year	Program Elements	Capital Cost	Federal Source (5307)	Federal Source (5311)	Total Local Share
2023	Capital Purchases	\$710,000	\$251,750	\$251,750	\$186,500
	Administration	\$40,000	\$16,000	\$16,000	\$8,000
	Total	\$750,000	\$277,750	\$277,750	\$194,500
2028	Mid-Term	\$490,025	\$208,261	\$208,261	\$74,504
2029	Replacement Vehicles	\$656,729	\$279,110	\$279,110	\$98,509
2032	Long-Term	\$424,051	\$180,222	\$180,222	\$63,608
2035	Replacement Vehicles for Near and Mid Terms	\$698,669	\$296,930	\$296,930	\$104,799
	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,269,464</b>	<b>\$964,522</b>	<b>\$964,522</b>	<b>\$340,420</b>

## 4.2 Operations and Maintenance

Operations and maintenance costs are shown in **Table 4**. With new services added as the transit system matures, costs also increase over the years. Since ridership is also increasing, as more service is offered, fares increase, and this helps with offsetting the total operational costs and reducing the subsidy.

**Table 4: Operating Cost Scenarios**

Phases	Operating Cost (High)	Operating Cost (Low)	Fare Revenue (High)	Fare Revenue (Low)	Total Subsidy (High)	Total Subsidy (Low)
Near-Term	\$8,023,833	\$5,009,451	\$805,987	\$643,899	\$7,222,846	\$4,365,552
Mid-Term	\$12,806,894	\$8,198,055	\$1,270,399	\$1,063,529	\$11,536,495	\$7,134,526
Long-Term	\$23,401,499	\$15,690,295	\$3,029,008	\$2,639,968	\$20,372,491	\$13,050,326

## 4.3 Forecasted Federal Funding

Under this plan, federal funding will increase just based on inflation, which results in a higher share of local funding as the agency adds service from year to year, as shown in **Table 5**.

**Table 5: Federal Sources of Funding**

Phases	Section 5307 (High)	Section 5307 (Low)	Section 5311 (High)	Section 5311 (Low)	Total Local Share (High)	Total Local Share (Low)
Near-Term	\$1,809,830	\$953,176	\$1,533,401	\$1,371,372	\$3,879,615	\$2,041,004
Mid-Term	\$2,217,683	\$1,592,646	\$2,312,735	\$1,665,903	\$7,006,078	\$3,857,977
Long-Term	\$3,276,498	\$2,746,470	\$3,333,313	\$2,934,718	\$13,762,680	\$7,369,138

## 4.4 Potential Funding from Other Sources

The preceding investment scenarios assume a single-county transit operator run or managed by Newton County, and solely utilizing county-sourced funds to pay local matches for capital and operating expenses. However, Newton County should seek partnerships to help provide local funding for the proposed services, as well as to accommodate trips to and from beyond the county's boundaries.

As Northeast Georgia proceeds with a Regional Transit Development Plan (TDP), the regional TDP should consider the needs identified in this plan. Cross-county trips between Newton and surrounding counties warrant consideration of regional transit. The growing employment sector off Interstate 20 in Newton County, but also into Walton and Morgan Counties highlights the need for serving trips that do not remain in a single county. Regional service would allow pooling of funds and resources shared between multiple counties, while also alleviating complications of single-county operators trying to accommodate trips to and from neighboring jurisdictions.

The proposed Covington to Conyers shuttle can provide benefits to both Newton and Rockdale County residents; therefore, pursuing a partnership with Rockdale County could help provide local funding for the service.

The proposed Downtown Covington Circulator was the most popular proposed transit service, based on the results of the third public survey. As this service would help promote tourism in the downtown area, and help provide services to business, medical trips, and government center, there may be an opportunity to seek funding from other willing Newton County agencies and downtown businesses to help fund the circulator.