

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The primary purpose of the Cook County Transit Development Plan is to present viable, transit alternatives and recommendations on how best to achieve the transportation goals and objectives identified by the community.

According to the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), more than one-third of America's population lives outside of urbanized areas. Nearly 40 percent of the country's transit dependent population – primarily senior citizens, persons with disabilities and low-income individuals – reside in rural areas. Yet in many rural communities, public and community transportation are extremely limited or absent. The demographics, mobility needs and resources of rural areas are much different than those of urban areas.

This Transit Development Plan (TDP) is the strategic guide for public transportation in Lanier County over the next five years. The TDP includes an evaluation of existing services, a review of demographic and travel behavior characteristics of the service area, the development of transit-related goals and objectives, a demand estimation and needs assessment, proposed transit alternatives, enhancements and recommendations, and the preparation of a 5-year Capital and Operating Plan.

Public transportation is a vital component in most rural communities, with Lanier County being no different. The availability of public transportation provides options to senior citizens, those without vehicles, and those who are physically or economically disadvantaged. The ability to provide a transportation alternative for those who live in a rural area is as important as for those who live in a high density metropolitan setting.

The availability of reliable public transportation improves the quality of life in rural communities across the state by providing safe, efficient and economical service. It also serves as a vital component necessary for a healthy economy. The next five years in Lanier County are pivotal to shaping public mobility strategies to best help enhance the benefits of the county's unprecedented growth, economic opportunity, and historic heritage.

INTRODUCTION TO SECTION 5311 PROGRAMS

Since any rural public transportation system in Cook County will require funding from the Section 5311 Rural Public Transportation Program, an overview of the Section 5311 program is necessary. The Section 5311 Program offers local areas an opportunity to provide transit services improving access to business, commercial and activity centers. The program is administered by the FTA to provide assistance for rural public transportation. Federal funds are allocated to the states on a formula basis, and can be used for capital assistance, operating assistance planning, and program administration. The Georgia Department of Transportation is responsible for administering the program. GDOT is the recipient of these funds, and it in turn provides Federal funding (and a limited amount of state capital funding) to local sub-recipients in Georgia.

The State of Georgia has established the following statewide goals for the Section 5311 program:

- **Goal: Basic Mobility to Serve All Georgians:**
 - serving those persons with the most critical needs for access and mobility, especially those without alternatives.
 - providing service without any trip purpose restrictions or eligibility requirements including medical, social services, personal shopping, business, and employment trips.
 - serving all areas with appropriate levels of service, subject to the required local or regional participation.
 - addressing economic development—through employment trips, services to support local employment sites, new ones, etc.

- **Goal: Program Implementation:**
 - partnering with the FTA in the administration of the Section 5311 program, meeting all FTA program requirements.
 - managing a program of excellence that provides timely management direction, guidance, and reimbursement to allow local entities to provide quality service.
 - partnering with local or regional entities to plan services to meet locally identified needs.
 - partnering with local or regional entities to operate the services.
 - providing technical assistance to help local providers improve effectiveness, efficiency, safety, and quality of service.
 - providing technical information, policy analyses, and program management data to support transit program development.

- **Goal: Efficiency and Effectiveness:**
 - while maximizing ridership, recognizing that there are significant differences in population density, trip characteristics, and client needs (accessibility, assistance, etc.) which will affect usage.
 - subject to performance requirements appropriate to the area and type of service
 - with the appropriate type of service—demand-responsive, subscription route, route deviation, or fixed-route.
 - using the appropriate vehicle type—accessible if needed, sedan, van, small bus, large bus.

- **Goal: Safe, Secure Quality Service:**
 - operating equipment that is within its design life, inspected for safety and overall condition
 - operated by staff meeting the highest qualifications—appropriate license (Commercial Drivers License (CDL) if required), safe driving and criminal records checked, drug and alcohol tested, etc.
 - operated by a staff that is trained to proficiency in all necessary skills:
 - Defensive Driving
 - Passenger Assistance
 - First Aid and CPR
 - providing a safe and secure service to the riders.

- **Goal: Accessible Service—Usable by Persons with Disabilities:**
 - providing service that is accessible (adequate number of accessible lift- or ramp-equipped vehicles.
 - using operators trained to proficiency in passenger assistance, lift use, restraints, mobility devices (folding, stowage, etc.).
 - user information and outreach to ensure that persons needing the service are aware of it and can obtain information.

- **Goal: Coordinated Provision of Transportation in Rural Areas:**
 - coordinated policies at the state level through interagency coordination.
 - coordinated at regional/local level—shared vehicles, shared ride, coordinated management—where it will result in more cost-effective, quality service that meets client and general public transit rider needs.

A rural transit system in Cook County should promote these established goals by the State of Georgia. Likewise, GDOT has established minimum criteria for transit programs in GDOT’s Rural Public Transportation Service Policy. These include:

- Services should not be duplicative of other transportation services;
- Vehicles should be utilized to reach a goal of 500 one-way passenger trips per vehicle month **or** be operated 120 hours per month **or** 1,000 vehicle miles per month;
- Vehicles should be available for public transportation service on a daily basis;
- Vehicle trips for contract, charter or subscription service should recover fully allocated costs;
- The system should aim to recover a minimum of 20 percent of its public transportation costs as a goal from farebox revenues generated through regular public transportation operations, with a minimum of ten percent farebox recovery required. **The total of all purchase of service agreements should recover the fully allocated operating costs.**

Additionally, GDOT recommends that service should be funded to the maximum extent possible by the generation of revenues through farebox.

Section 5311 can be used for capital and operational costs. Operational and capital costs are two different types of costs incurred for developing and continuing a rural transit system.

Local funding for capital acquisition will at a minimum be ten percent of the costs. Capital expenses under Section 5311 can include:

1. Vehicles,
2. Communication equipment,
3. Wheelchair lifts,
4. Equipment installation costs,
5. Computer equipment and purchase of software (laptops are not an eligible expense and monthly software maintenance or lease fees are an operating expense), or
6. Office equipment,
7. Smart Card Reader,
8. Fareboxes.

Ten percent of the public transportation operating costs must be provided from fare or other local dollars. The remaining 90 percent of the operating cost is considered the net operating deficit. Federal funding may be provided for up to 50 percent of the net operating deficit; the remaining 50 percent (or more) must be provided from local funds. Operating costs include, but are not limited to, driver, mechanic, and dispatcher salaries, licenses, vehicle insurance, drug and alcohol testing, uniforms, maintenance and repairs (includes oil, tire and parts) and fuel. Monthly service fees for cell phones and/or two way radio services are eligible operating expenses.

In the South Georgia region, all counties that have a rural transit system contract with a third party operator. Third party operators are experienced transit providers that are able to provide transit service effectively and efficiently. These counties use the Section 5311 funds to purchase capital equipment and contract with the third party operator for operation of the system. According to Mids, Inc., the most utilized third party operator in the South Georgia region, local governments generally only pay for vehicle insurance and operational expenses. It should be noted that operational expenses do not include capital costs. All other operational expenses are handled by the third party operator. The third party operator goal is to provide service efficiently in order to profit from the farebox revenues.

According to Mids, Inc. farebox costs generally are \$3 for trips that are less than ten miles, \$5 for trips that are at least ten miles, and \$0.50 for every mile outside of the county of service.

According to the *Georgia Administrative Guide for Rural Public Transportation Programs* (January 2007- June 2008 funding cycle), the following types of service are appropriate for rural public transportation programs:

- Demand-response or route deviation service. Demand-response is a type of service where individual passengers can request door-to-door or curb-to-curb transportation from a specific location to another specific location at a certain time. Route deviation service operates along a public way on a fixed-route, but which may deviate from the route occasionally in response to take a passenger to a destination or pick one up from an origin, after which it returns to the regular route.
- Contract and subscription service. Subscription service is a type of demand response service in which routes and schedules are pre-arranged to meet the travel needs of riders who sign up for the service in advance. Often these riders are clients of human service agencies, who contract with the transportation operator to provide the service on behalf of the agency. This type of service may be provided by a Section 5311 program only to the extent that it does not violate FTA Charter Bus restrictions.

REGIONAL DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

The South Georgia Region is comprised of 9 counties. These include the counties of Lanier, Lowndes, Irwin, Brooks, Turner, Tift, Cook, Ben Hill, and Echols. The estimated total population of the South Georgia Region as of 2005 is approximately 220,315 residents. Given a total land area of 3,037.9 square miles, the current population density of South Georgia equals 73 persons per square mile. The South Georgia region as a whole is currently experiencing a growth

rate of over 22%. Special planning considerations will be necessary to insure that the cities and counties of South Georgia will be able to continue to meet increasing infrastructure needs and demand for community services brought about by the ongoing expansion. Socio-economic conditions will also continue to change as the area experiences additional development. Thoughtful consideration is necessary to anticipate the parameters and impacts brought about by these changes.

The following table displays the compiled and predicted total population figures for the nine South Georgia counties.

Population Contributions by County								
County	1980	1990	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025
Ben Hill	16,000	16,245	17,484	17,855	18,226	18,597	18,968	19,339
Brooks	15,255	15,398	16,450	16,749	17,048	17,346	17,645	17,944
Cook	13,490	13,456	15,771	16,341	16,912	17,482	18,052	18,622
Echols	2,297	2,334	3,754	4,118	4,483	4,847	5,211	5,575
Irwin	8,988	8,649	9,931	10,167	10,403	10,638	10,874	11,110
Lanier	5,654	5,531	7,241	7,638	8,035	8,431	8,828	9,225
Lowndes	67,972	75,981	92,115	98,151	104,187	110,222	116,258	122,294
Tift	32,862	34,998	38,407	39,793	41,180	42,566	43,952	45,338
Turner	9,510	8,703	9,504	9,503	9,501	9,500	9,498	9,497
Source-U.S. Bureau of the Census								

Comparison of Population Density by County

The following table depicts the population density for each of the South Georgia counties for the time period between 1980 and the most recent 2000 census.

Population Density by County Over Time				
County	1980 Population Density (persons /sq. mi.)	1990 Population Density (persons /sq. mi.)	2000 Population Density (persons /sq. mi.)	Percent change since 1980
Ben Hill	63	64	68.8	9.2%
Brooks	30.6	30.9	33	7.8%
Cook	57.8	57.7	67.6	17%
Lanier	28.3	27.7	36.2	27.9%
Lowndes	133.1	148.8	180.4	35.5%
Tift	122.2	130.2	142.8	16.9%
Turner	32.8	30	32.8	0%
Irwin	24.8	23.8	27.4	10.5%
Echols	5.5	5.5	8.9	61.8%
Total	56.6	59.7	69.3	

Data Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

A significant trend, in terms of population density for South Georgia, is the foreseeable rise in total population density across the region. With an observed rise in total population over time, and a finite amount of land, it is only expected that density would increase. Changes in population density across the region mirror the changes in total population. Echols County has grown the most in terms of density, followed by Lowndes, Lanier, Cook, and Tift Counties. Turner County actually shows no population growth from 1980 to 2000. These trends are expected to continue throughout the planning period.

The total population of the South Georgia region as a whole in the year 2025 is expected to have grown by 22.9%. Currently, Lowndes County holds a significant percentage of the regional population at 43.7%. Lowndes County's total population is expected to increase 32.8% from 2000 to 2025 continuing its economic and social importance to the region. Given this rate of growth, Lowndes County will have been responsible for 14% of the total increase in total population expected to occur in the South Georgia region by 2025. Tift County will also continue to evolve as a major contributor in the region. The total population of Tift County is expected to increase 18% from 2000 to 2025. Together, these two counties will continue to comprise over 60% of the total population for the South Georgia region with their combined populations reaching approximately 65% in 2025.

Echols County and Lanier County are also expected to continue to grow at a significant rate (48.5% and 27.4% respectively). However, given a lower total base population, the combined contribution of these two counties translates to approximately 5.7% of the total projected increase in population for the region.

Growth and development in the South Georgia region has historically centered in the vicinity of Moody Air Force Base, Valdosta State University, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College, and Interstate 75. Hence, Lowndes County and Tift County have received a majority of this development. Projected growth in the adjacent counties of Cook, Echols, and Lanier illustrates

an increasing willingness by residents to locate further from customary centers of development and indicate a willingness to make longer commutes.

Ben Hill, Brooks, and Irwin Counties are all projected to have moderate growth throughout the year 2025 (10.6%, 9.1%, and 11.9% respectively). Together, these counties will contribute approximately 1.7% of the expected total gain in population for the region.

Commuting Patterns

The majority of employed persons living in Lanier County and Echols work outside of the county, with most employed in Lowndes County. Also, Lowndes County receives 37% of Brooks County's employed population. Lanier, Brooks, Echols and Irwin Counties all have over half of their employed population leaving their respective counties to work. Potential reasons for the work force leaving Lanier, Brooks, and Echols Counties could be that the workforce may consider Lowndes County as having a better quality of life as a place to work. On the other hand, Lanier, Brooks, and Echols Counties may not have the necessary residential development to support additional workers living within their county and, therefore, these workers must commute.

Both Lowndes County and Tift County are the two major counties of employment within the region. This may signify either a desire to live in more rural communities by the residents, or a lack of employment possibilities within the county of residence.

According to the Georgia Department of Labor, sixty-nine percent of Cook County's workforce is made up of Cook County residents, and more residents of Lowndes County commute to Cook County to work than from any other county. According to the 2000 Census, the mean travel time to work in for Cook County citizens is 21.3 minutes.

COOK COUNTY DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

Cook County has four incorporated areas within its boundaries. These incorporated areas are the cities of Adel, Lenox, Sparks, and Cecil.

Population

Table 1 shows population numbers for Cook County, the South Georgia Regional Development Center's region, and the State of Georgia from 1960 to 2000. Table 2 puts the information into perspective by showing the percent change of population for four separate decades. From 1990 to 2000, Cook County gained a significant number of people migrating into the county, helping the county increase in population 17.2 percent that decade. It is speculated that Cook County, due to its proximity to the growing Valdosta metropolitan region, is actually growing faster than U.S. Census data indicates. With Cook County having physicians, a hospital, a nursing home and a bank, this influx is likely to continue seeking housing in Lanier County. It is assumed that Cook County will continue to grow in population.

Table 1 Population Change

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Cook County	11,822	12,129	13,490	13,456	15,771
RDC	150,165	157,500	186,200	195,717	227,421
State	3,943,116	4,611,479	5,484,527	6,522,645	8,229,820

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1960 - 2000.

Table 2 Population Change Numbers and Percentages

	1960 - 1970		1970 - 1980		1980 - 1990		1990 - 2000	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Cook County	307	2.5	1361	11.2	-34	-0.2	2315	17.2
RDC	7,335	4.9	28,700	18.2	9,248	5.0	31,704	16.2
State	668,363	17.0	873,048	18.9	1,038,118	18.9	1,707,175	26.2

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1960 - 2000.

Assuming that these trends will continue, the South Georgia Regional Development Center created a population projection based off of past data. Table 3 shows what this projection predicts for Cook County. This projection reveals that Cook County will continue to grow and will increase by 21.7 percent from 2000 to the year 2030.

The 2000 Census also revealed a county with a low population density in comparison to other counties in Georgia (68.9 people per square mile) and housing density (about 25 housing units per square mile). Any new transit system must pay special attention to this low population density.

Table 3: Future Population

	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030
Cook County	16,341	16,341	17,482	18,052	18,622	19,193

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1960 - 2000. Analysis: South Georgia Regional Development Center 2006

Table 4 shows population projections for ten different age groups. The demographic category that would benefit from a rural transit system the most would more than likely be the category that includes people age 55-64 years old. In 2000, thirteen percent of all residents of Cook County were 65 and over with a population of 2,046. By 2030, this demographic category is expected to increase by 639 people.

Table 4: Population Projections by Age

	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030
0 – 4 Years Old	1,090	1,075	1,059	1,059	1,221	1,254	1,287	1,319	1,352	1,385	1,418
5 – 13 Years Old	2,352	2,231	2,110	2,320	2,530	2,575	2,619	2,664	2,708	2,753	2,797
14 – 17 Years Old	1,071	882	692	697	702	610	518	425	333	241	149
18 – 20 Years Old	669	658	646	642	638	630	623	615	607	599	592
21 – 24 Years Old	752	768	783	789	794	805	815	826	836	847	857
25 – 34 Years Old	1,922	1,921	1,919	2,032	2,144	2,200	2,255	2,311	2,366	2,422	2,477
35 – 44 Years Old	1,440	1,589	1,738	1,998	2,258	2,463	2,667	2,872	3,076	3,281	3,485
45 – 54 Years Old	1,284	1,367	1,449	1,682	1,915	2,073	2,231	2,388	2,546	2,704	2,862
55 – 64 Years Old	1,290	1,244	1,198	1,361	1,523	1,581	1,640	1,698	1,756	1,814	1,873
65 and over	1,620	1,741	1,862	1,954	2,046	2,153	2,259	2,366	2,472	2,579	2,685

Source: Georgia Department of Community Affairs Data Views (<http://www.georgiaplanning.com/dataviews/census2/>) 2006

Workplace Destinations

Table 5 shows commuting statistics for Cook County in comparison to other counties in the region and the State of Georgia. Cook County is in the middle as far as percentage of commuters compared to the rest of region.

Table 5: Commuting Comparisons State and Region

	1970	1980	1990	2000	% Increase Since 1970
State	25.3	29.7	37.9	41.5	16.2
Ben Hill	9.4	9.2	14.2	21.4	12.0
Brooks	18.8	31.6	40.8	51.5	32.7
Cook	17.0	22.7	32.4	40.2	23.2
Echols	45.7	57.4	83.5	85.0	39.3
Irwin	21.9	34.6	47.6	56.6	34.7
Lanier	43.1	45.2	50.7	65.3	22.2
Lowndes	4.4	7.1	9.1	8.6	4.2
Tift	5.5	6.3	10.6	15.5	10.0
Turner	11.4	12.2	32.0	38.3	26.9

Source: US Bureau of the Census 1960-2000. Analysis: South Georgia Regional Development Center 2006

Table 6: 2000 Cook County Place of Work Destinations

County of Work	Number
Cook, GA	3,955
Lowndes, GA	1,004
Tift, GA	718
Berrien, GA	467
Colquitt, GA	98
Dougherty, GA	72
Brooks, GA	38
Morgan, AL	30
Other	234

Source: US Bureau of the Census 2000

Table 6 shows where the residents of Cook traveled to for work. The most popular workplace for residents of Cook County other than their home county is Lowndes County. According to the Georgia Department of Labor Area Labor Profile the five largest employers within Cook County as of 2006 were Hardees, Healthmont of Georgia Inc., Jimmy Bullard and Sons, J-M Manufacturing Company Inc., and Micro-Flo Company.

Economic Characteristics

Many counties in South Georgia often overestimate the importance of agriculture to their community. Like many Georgia counties, the percentage of people living in Cook County working in agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting and mining has declined significantly since 1980. Manufacturing, along with educational, health, and social services are the two largest industries in Cook County. This economic sector employs the highest percentage of residents in Cook County (26.5% in manufacturing and 17.7% in educational, health, and social services) as seen in Table 7.

Table 7: Employment by Industry

Category	1980	1990	2000
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, hunting & mining	10.4%	8.2%	4.7%
Construction	5.3%	5.4%	7.4%
Manufacturing	34.5%	30.6%	26.5%
Wholesale Trade	3.9%	3.6%	3.1%
Retail Trade	14.5%	15.2%	13.1%
Transportation, warehousing, and utilities	2.7%	3.2%	5%
Information	NA	NA	1.2%
Finance, Insurance, & Real Estate	3.7%	3.15	3%
Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services	0.7%	3.9%	3.4%
Educational, health and social services	12.1%	15.2%	17.7%
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services	5.6%	0.7%	6.8%
Other Services	1.7%	7.5%	3.9%
Public Administration	4.9%	3.4%	4.3%

Table 8 shows the per capita and average household income for Cook County and the State of Georgia. The State of Georgia's numbers include people's and household's incomes in urbanized areas such as Atlanta, so it is not surprise that Cook County's per capita and average household incomes are much lower than the State of Georgia as a whole. This indicates that there may be a higher need for transportation services as lower income residents would benefit most from a transportation system.

Table 9 shows the household income distributions. Just over half of all Cook County households make less than \$30,000 a year in income. This combined with the Census Bureau's 2004 estimate that 18.3% of Cook County's population was below the poverty level. For the 2006/2007 school year 60.23 percent of the students enrolled in the county public school system were eligible for the Free Lunch Program or the Reduced Lunch Program.

Table 8: Per Capita and Average Household Income

	1980	1990	2000
Cook County Per Capita Income	\$4,772	\$8,870	\$13,465
State Per Capita Income	NA	\$13,631	\$21,154
Lanier County Average Household Income	NA	\$23,383.50	\$36,562
State Average Household Income	NA	\$36,810	\$80,077

Source: Georgia Department of Community Affairs Data Views (<http://www.georgiaplanning.com/dataviews/census2/>) 2006

Table 9: Household Income Distribution

Category	1990	2000
Income less than \$9,999	25.2%	16.8%
Income \$10000 - \$14,999	13%	8.5%
Income \$15000 - \$19,999	12.1%	10.2%
Income \$20000 - \$29,999	18.1%	18.8%
Income \$30000 - \$34,999	9%	6.9%
Income \$35000 - \$39,999	6.5%	6.5%
Income \$40000 - \$49,999	5.8%	9.5%
Income \$50000 - \$59,999	4.5%	7.9%
Income \$60000 - \$74,999	3.7%	6.2%
Income \$75000 - \$99,999	1.3%	5.3%
Income \$100000 - \$124,999	0.2%	2.2%
Income \$125000 - \$149,999	0.1%	0.5%
Income \$150,000 and above	0.5%	0.8%

Source: Georgia Department of Community Affairs Data Views (<http://www.georgiaplanning.com/dataviews/census2/>) 2006

Special Populations

Lowndes County, a border county of Cook County, is home to Valdosta State University. VSU is one of the states fastest growing universities growing a rate of about six percent per year. Valdosta State has a student population of about 11,000 that is expected to reach 16,200 by the year 2014. The university also employs more than 500 faculty and staff. The student body, as well as the employees of VSU make up a unique population within the community and present the community with additional transportation-related challenges.

Moody Air Force Base, primarily in Lowndes County, but spilling over into Lanier County presents Cook with another special population to consider when compiling a transportation plan. Moody alone has approximately 4,278 military and 375 civilian employees contributing to the surrounding population. When you include the military and their families this is 8,283 people. An additional 3,000 people must be taken into consideration when the families of the civilian employees are added to the population. Also, the population of retirees and families in the area of Moody Air Force Base is approximately 15,000. These military and civilian populations including their families total 26,283 people in the Lowndes County-Lanier County area. Moody Air Force Base, as well as Valdosta State University could present the surrounding communities with additional transportation related challenges.

EVALUATION OF EXISTING SERVICES

Currently Cook County is utilizing the 5311 grant to fund a rural transportation service. Their third party contractor is MIDs, Inc. Cook County also uses MIDs Inc. for DHR contracts with the local hospital and the Department of Family and Children Services. This covers all families with TANF benefits as well as Medicare.

The Medicaid and DHR transportation operations are considered adequate for the needs of the clients. Also, the rural transit service that is being provided by Cook County is providing adequate service to the citizens of the county.

The commuters from Cook County generally use their own vehicles or obtain rides from other people.

In summary, current services meet the public's needs for all purposes. There is a formal service that provides transportation services for the citizens of Cook County for general needs.

DEMAND ESTIMATION AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The Data and Analysis section describes a county with a growing population, a high percentage of commuters, and a low per capita income and relatively low household income in comparison to the state and national levels. Cook County has a significant low-income population. These traits suggest a county that could potentially benefit from a rural transit system.

For low-income families, it can be a tough challenge for them to meet their transportation needs even if they have one or even two vehicles. These families face the challenge of long trips to

work and to businesses that put many miles on vehicles that may or may not be pre-owned and already worn down. Likewise, a family that only has one mode of transportation faces just the challenge of meeting the transportation needs for the whole family. Due to the fact that Cook County is already participating in a rural transit system, they are not in need of another system to provide an alternative.

COST ESTIMATES

A rural transit system includes capital expenses and operating expenses. Table 10 shows the estimated expenses for several vehicles that would be included in capital expenses. Given Cook County’s population, two vehicles may be enough for their transit system. However, if demand warranted it, more vehicles may be needed to be considered for purchase to boost efficiency. Cook County would also need to consider purchasing a mobile radio and a computer, printer and necessary software as well.

Such capital equipment is eligible for funding under the Section 5311 grant program. The minimum required local funding for eligible capital equipment is 10 percent. However, this amount may be higher depending on the availability of state and federal funds.

Table 10: Capital Equipment Cost Estimates

Capital Equipment	2006	2007	2008
Standard Van	\$25,000	\$25,500	\$26,000
Conversion Van	\$38,500	\$39,000	\$39,000
Conversion Van w/ Lift	\$42,000	\$42,500	\$43,000
Shuttle Van	\$33,000	\$33,500	\$34,000
Shuttle Van w/ Lift	\$37,000	\$37,500	\$38,000
Shuttle Bus	\$37,000	\$38,000	\$38,000
Shuttle Bus w/ Lift	\$42,000	\$42,500	\$43,000
Mobile Radio	\$1,500	\$1,700	\$1,800
Computer, Printer and Software	\$3,000	\$3,200	\$3,300

Counties that have developed a rural transportation program in the South Georgia region contract a third party operator. Many third party operators, such as Mids Inc., provide services to the counties at no cost to the local governments. Operational expenses are paid for by fares received, and if necessary, the federal funds that are offered from up to 50 percent of the net operating deficit. Any other losses are paid for by the company, and any profits are gained by the third party operator.

Mids Inc., the most frequently utilized third party operator in the South Georgia region, explains that the average operating cost per month per vehicle is \$4,000. Therefore, if Cook County contracted with a third party operator, it can expect capital costs to be \$48,000 for one vehicle. The five percent match that Cook County would be expected to provide would be \$2,400.

In order to offset these costs, third party operators attempt to provide a large amount of transportation services as efficiently as possible. Third party operators try to at least break even on operational costs, and try to profit if possible. Cook County could attempt to provide the service on its own, but the operational costs could become higher.

Mids, Inc. explains that the cost for customers depends upon the distance traveled and whether or not a trip is within the county of operation. Cook County residents could expect a fare of \$3 for trips that are less than ten miles and a fare of \$5 for trips that are over ten miles. Mids, Inc. charges an extra \$0.50 a mile for every mile that is past the county border for out-of-county trips. However, it may be possible for Cook County to enter into a contract with a third party operator that will allow residents to travel to and from Lowndes County for an affordable rate.

MIDs Inc. BREAK-EVEN ESTIMATE PER VAN

Based on GDOT provided information:

- Use 2008 figures
- Buy one shuttle van with lift \$38,000
- Mobile Radio 1,800
- Computer, printer, software 3,300
- Total \$43,100
- Minimum local required match of 10% \$ 4,310
- Annual operating expenses \$48,000
- GDOT will reimburse ½ of operating expenses **\$24,000**

Assume:

- Each trip is a two way trip. If the trip is going to Valdosta, it will be over 10 miles = **\$5**
- Each trip that is over the border of the county an additional **\$.50** per mile is charged
- The I-75 exit in Adel to the Cook County border is 8 miles. From the border to Valdosta’s mall, movies, and other shopping in the area is 14 miles. Therefore, 14 x 2 = **28** miles at \$.50 per mile for each trip
 - Using the above numbers, this means each trip would cost the patron a minimum of **\$24**.
- The transit van would operate **250** days per year. Monday – Friday, except for 10 holidays.

Farebox break-even of ridership, for the first year of operation:

1. person at \$24 x 250 days a year = \$ 6,000
2. people 12,000
3. people 18,000
4. people 24,000
5. people **30,000**

GDOT reimbursement	- 28,000
Initial investment	- <u>4,310</u>
	\$ 2,310 to Mids Inc.

Conclusion: It would take 5 people riding one van on this one route to Valdosta everyday of operation for MIDS Inc. to break even on the van. Without using only one route for this equation, there would have to be \$112 worth of business done every day of operation for MIDS Inc to break exactly even. Using the GDOT figures, it would cost patrons \$24 a trip to the mall area of Valdosta. Antidotal reports suggest that there are many people who could benefit from the service. Cook County is already providing this service to its citizens with a rural transit system.

MIDS, Inc. has informed the SGRDC that they are already providing the service to Cook County. Table 3-2 looks over their data.

Table 3-2
Cook County
MIDS, Inc., Third Party Operator
Operational Information for 2006

Description	Quantity or Cost to Cook Co.
Public Trips (one way)	2,594
Purchase of Service Trips (DHR, Medicaid, DEFACS, Seniors, Mental Health Services, etc.)	21,387
TOTAL TRIPS	23,981
Miles Driven	167,749
Hours	11,356
Income	\$141,188
Expenses	\$256,931
Average Cost per Trip	\$10.71
Average Cost per Hour	\$22.63
Average Miles Per Trip	7

Source: MIDS, Inc., Danny Saturday, Regional Supervisor, (229) 219-7666, June 2007

If one were only to look at Table 3-2, it would appear that MIDS, Inc. is losing money. Fortunately for all, that is not the case. They are able to receive 50 percent reimburse of loss from GDOT, some additional payments from the Federal Government, they have no lease payments, and they receive lower gas prices. Cook County only had to pay 5 percent of the upfront capital expenditure. This arrangement seems like a win/win/win situation. A win for MIDS, Inc., a win for Cook County, and most importantly a win for the citizens that need this form of transportation. Mr. Saturday's phone number is included if there are any specific questions about the current MIDS, Inc. operation.

The demand estimates are expected to correlate with population growth. According to Census information in Table 2-10b, the aggregate public assistance income for all households in Cook

County was only 1.6 percent and down from the previous decade. Therefore, the needs are projected to be relatively low. It seems that the current MIDS, Inc. system and the informal network of providing for transportation needs are working well and it is anticipated that these arrangements will continue to be sufficient for the next five years. However, there might be another 5 percent capital outlay to the MIDS third party operator, in about a year and a half. Finally, the entire Rural Transportation Plan and 5311 programs should be re-evaluated five years after its conception.