

OVERVIEW

Purpose and Need

The question that prompted this study, the Regional Core Circulator Study, was “What is the most appropriate form of transportation to connect key downtown-area attractions?” During interviews to identify broader issues and concerns, a major recurrent comment offered by those working, living and visiting downtown Toledo was that, above all, the area should be more pedestrian-friendly, easier to navigate on foot and by car. Other major themes repeated in the interview process included:

Improvements should enhance the river and historic buildings that give the downtown a sense of character;

Improvements should support *Downtown Toledo Master Plan* proposals and encourage continued economic revitalization efforts;

One-way streets, as well as the bus loop, make it confusing and difficult to navigate downtown;

A park-once system with parking and transit complementing each other should be promoted;

The current regional transit system is confusing and not easy to use for downtown travel;

The current lunchtime trolley (rubber-tired replica trolley) does not run often enough or to enough places and does not provide a unique travel experience; and

There is no reliable way to cross the river other than by automobile.

Alternatives Considered

The variety in the types of issues identified in the purpose and need analysis prompted a customized study process, tailored specifically to Toledo conditions. The resulting process evolves around five key decisions that must be made. For each decision, the two or more most feasible alternative improvements were studied. The five decisions relate to:

Overall Mode. Different transit modes for the downtown area, including rubber-tired circulator, streetcar, and personal rapid transit (PRT);

Connection to Museum of Art and Zoo. Alternatives for improved connections to these attractions, including improved TARTA connections and dedicated service;

Connection Across River. Different modes for improving accessibility across the river, including rubber-tired circulator, water taxi and aerial gondola;

Bus Loop Operations. Alternative bus loop operations as well as station treatments to make bus operations less confusing and more development-friendly; and

Downtown Street Operations. Various traffic network changes for providing more two-way streets and improved traffic operations.

A package of key supporting elements (referred to as Fundamentals) was also developed. This package includes pedestrian and bicycle, streetscape, wayfinding and parking proposals.

Initial Findings

Overall Mode. The reintroduction of streetcars to downtown Toledo would provide a unique, interesting mode that would connect major attractions and promote downtown economic development efforts. Supplementing this service with rubber-tired trolley routes (a restructuring and expansion of the existing lunchtime service, but with a new type of vehicle) provides a comprehensive downtown circulator system;

Connection to Museum of Art and Zoo. Anticipated low usage from downtown makes any dedicated service cost-prohibitive, but branded TARTA vehicles (i.e., decorated to indicate they go "A to Z" (Museum of Art to Zoo) would make existing TARTA service easier to use;

Connection Across River. The rubber-tired circulator needs to connect across the Maumee River and operate not only during lunch but also in the evenings; publicly funded, scheduled water taxi service would not be considered for now, but when additional development occurs; in the even longer term if even more development occurs, there could be an aerial gondola from the base of Madison Avenue to The Docks and/or Marina district;

Bus Loop Operations. The bus loop is the most-efficient means of circulating fixed-route TARTA vehicles through downtown, but modifications are justified--extend the loop one block to Monroe Street and relocate stations at Erie/Madison and Summit/Madison to improve redevelopment potential and sight lines down Madison Avenue to the river; in support of the *Downtown Master Plan* and;

Downtown Street Operations. Downtown streets should be two-way except for the two pairs serving freeway ramps for I-75 (Erie-Michigan and 14th-11th).

LPA Selection Process and Schedule

The alternatives under consideration are a product of an extensive public involvement process, including over 40 stakeholder interviews as well as in October, 2002, a stakeholder conference and public meeting to identify issues and potential concepts. Now it is necessary for the community to identify a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA). That alternative will be the composite package of the preferred elements of the above-mentioned groups. This menu-approach has allowed for the development and analysis of a host of different improvements, rather than the investigation of just one or two major alternatives. This decision-based process will yield a preferred alternative custom-made to downtown Toledo's opportunities and challenges.

Initial findings will be reviewed by the general public in September, 2003. Based on input received from these groups, the Steering Committee and Task Force will propose a Locally Preferred Alternative that will be presented to Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments (TMACOG) for formal adoption into the area's regional transportation plan.

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