



11 VISION FOR TRANSIT

INTRODUCTION

The Preferred Alternative developed as part of the Iowa City Area Transit Study (ICATS) will improve public transit service in the Iowa City area but is fiscally constrained and does not propose many of the service improvements that the community voiced support for during the ICATS outreach process. The outreach process uncovered significant public support for expansions of and improvements to service that would require additional resources, both in terms of operating funds and one-time or ongoing capital expenditures.

This chapter summarizes the unfunded transit improvements that the community expressed support for and makes planning-level estimates of required operating and capital costs. These improvements are collectively referred to as the Iowa City area “Vision for Transit”.

THE VISION FOR TRANSIT

The ICATS Vision for Transit is based on public feedback and is not cost-constrained. The Vision for Transit imagines a transit system that connects most parts of the Iowa City area, operates frequently, and serves riders early in the morning and late at night. The Vision for Transit imagines a transit system that is free to Iowa City Transit riders and includes on-demand service for people living in lower-ridership neighborhoods.

Figure 11-1 summarizes these improvements. Annual operating costs and capital costs are estimated using 2020 dollars and should be considered planning estimates. None of the estimated capital or operating costs assume matching federal or local grants. Cost estimates for heavy-duty transit vehicles are assumed for battery-electric vehicles.

A more detailed description of the Vision for Transit improvements follows Figure 11-1.

IOWA CITY AREA TRANSIT STUDY | FINAL REPORT



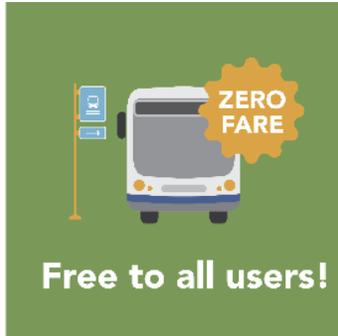
Figure 11-1 Vision for Transit Summary Table

Improvement	Description	Coralville Transit		Iowa City Transit		Total	
		Annual Operating Costs	One-Time Capital Costs	Annual Operating Costs	One-Time Capital Costs	Annual Operating Costs	One-Time Capital Costs
Zero-Fare Iowa City Transit Service	Zero-fare service on Iowa City Transit fixed-route and demand-responder services.	-	-	\$2,300,000	\$4,900,000	\$2,300,000	\$4,900,000
15-Minute Service on Multiple Corridors	Bus routes with 15-minute frequency on two major corridors in Coralville and nine major corridors in Iowa City and University Heights.	\$1,700,000	\$4,000,000	\$3,800,000	\$11,000,000	\$5,500,000	\$15,000,000
Sunday Service	Hourly Sunday service from 6:00 a.m. to midnight on Coralville Transit and Iowa City Transit routes in the Preferred Alternative.	\$320,000	-	\$1,170,000	-	\$1,490,000	-
Improved Saturday Service	All-day Saturday service on Coralville Transit routes in the Preferred Alternative. Saturday service from 7:00 p.m. to midnight on Iowa City Transit routes in the Preferred Alternative.	\$200,000	-	\$260,000	-	\$460,000	-
Late-Night Weekday Service	Service until midnight on Coralville Transit and Iowa City Transit routes in the Preferred Alternative.	\$300,000	-	\$540,000	-	\$840,000	-
On-Demand Night Owl Service	Subsidized ride-hail trips during late night periods near Coralville Transit and Iowa City Transit fixed routes.	-	-	\$130,000	-	\$130,000	-
On-Demand Service in Low-Density Neighborhoods	Subsidized ride-hail trips to places outside the fixed-route service area but within Coralville, Iowa City, and University Heights city limits.	-	-	\$560,000	-	\$560,000	-
A New Crosstown Route	A new crosstown Iowa City Transit fixed route operating with 30-minute headways on weekdays from 6:00 a.m. to midnight and weekends from 7:00 a.m. to midnight.	-	-	\$1,300,000	\$2,000,000	\$1,300,000	\$2,000,000
A New South Iowa City Route	A new route to south Iowa City that serves growing neighborhoods off Sycamore Street and helps provide more frequent service on the S Gilbert Street corridor. This route would have 30-minute peak hour headways and operate from 6:30 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. on weekdays and 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. on weekends.	-	-	\$600,000	\$1,000,000	\$600,000	\$1,000,000
Total		\$2,520,000	\$4,000,000	\$10,660,000	\$18,900,000	\$13,180,000	\$22,900,000

Note: Heavy-duty transit bus costs assume battery-electric buses are purchased.



ELEMENTS OF THE VISION FOR TRANSIT



Fare-Free Iowa City Transit Service

Fare-free service is an increasingly common fare model in the United States. Small- to medium-sized cities such as Chapel Hill, NC; Corvallis, OR; Missoula, MT; and Olympia, WA now operate with zero fares paid by riders. Communities that have switched to fare-free service have seen ridership increase by between 40% and 60%. Operating fare-free is one of the most cost-effective ways Iowa City Transit could contribute to achieving its goal of doubling ridership in the next 10 years.

The cost estimates for fare-free service on Iowa City Transit’s demand-response and fixed-route services are from the ICATS Fare Study Report, which is included as Appendix D in this report. The additional annual operating cost is estimated to be approximately \$1,402,000 for fixed-route service and \$872,000 for demand-response service. The one-time capital costs for new vehicles to support zero-fare service is estimated to be \$4,000,000 for battery-electric fixed-route vehicles and \$900,000 for demand-response vehicles.



15-Minute Service on Multiple Corridors

Improving frequency means providing transit that comes more often. More frequent service is more convenient, thereby attracting and retaining more riders. Currently, most bus routes in the Iowa City area operate with headways greater than 15 minutes, reducing the attractiveness of the service. Many routes in the Iowa City area operate hourly at off-peak periods, which does not attract many discretionary riders. Frequent service corridors in the Iowa City area would provide service every 15 minutes on weekdays at peak hours and 30 minutes at off-peak hours.

If these corridors operated every 15-minutes, approximately 65% of all Coralville and Iowa City residents would be within a 1/2-mile walk of 15-minute service. This service is estimated to cost Coralville Transit and Iowa City Transit \$5,500,000 per year in operating costs and \$15,000,000 in one-time capital costs, which would be used to pay for new battery-electric vehicles that would be needed to provide frequent service.

Figure 11-2 Cost Estimates by Agency for 15-Minute Service on Multiple Corridors

Agency	Annual Operating Costs	One-Time Capital Costs
Coralville Transit	\$1,700,000	\$4,000,000
Iowa City Transit	\$3,800,000	\$11,000,000
Total	\$5,500,000	\$15,000,000



The cost estimates in the Vision for Transit assume the following corridors operate with 15-minute headways for two three-hour peak periods each weekday, and every 30 minutes for seven weekday off-peak hours.

Coralville Corridors:

- Downtown Iowa City/Iowa River Landing
- Downtown Iowa City/5th Street/Coral Ridge Mall

Iowa City Corridors:

- N Dubuque Street
- Westwinds Drive/Melrose Avenue/downtown Iowa City
- Westside Drive/Highway 6/downtown Iowa City
- E Court Street
- E Jefferson Street/E Market Street between downtown Iowa City and N Dodge Street
- Oakcrest route
- South Iowa City/downtown Iowa City
- Lower Muscatine/Kirkwood route
- Towncrest route

Note: "f" in the above bullet points indicates separate portions of the same corridor. E.g., "Downtown Iowa City/Iowa River Landing" indicates the corridor extends from downtown Iowa City to Iowa River Landing.

Sunday Service



Adding Sunday service is a popular desired service improvement in Iowa City and Coralville. Although CAMBUS already operates Sunday service, its routes are primarily limited to the University of Iowa campus. Adding Sunday service to Coralville Transit and Iowa City Transit would provide mobility for people without other travel options and would allow more people to shop, work, recreate, and attend some religious services without using personal vehicles.

The Vision for Transit estimates that Sunday service would cost \$1,490,000 per year in operating costs. These costs would fund all-day hourly Coralville Transit service from 6:00 a.m. to midnight, and all-day Sunday hourly Iowa City Transit service from 8:00 a.m. to midnight. These costs are estimated for the Preferred Alternative alignments and include ADA paratransit.

Figure 11-3 Cost Estimates by Agency for Sunday Service

Agency	Annual Operating Costs	One-Time Capital Costs
Coralville Transit	\$320,000	-
Iowa City Transit	\$1,170,000	-
Total	\$1,490,000	-



Improved Saturday Service

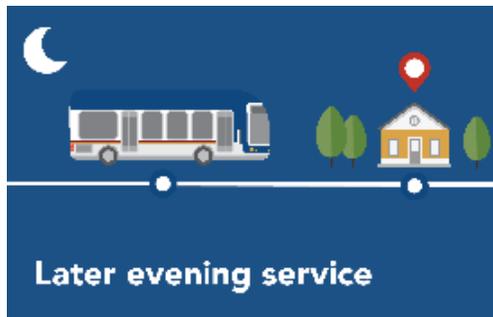
Current Saturday service on Coralville Transit and Iowa City Transit routes ends in the early evening, meaning later-night trips are not possible by public transit. Expanding Saturday service hours later in the evening will help serve workers with late shifts, people eating out, and other people that need to make late-night trips. Expanding Saturday service was a common theme uncovered in ICATS public outreach.



The Vision for Transit estimates operating Coralville Transit with hourly headways from 7:00 a.m. to midnight on Saturdays would cost approximately \$200,000 per year and operating Iowa City Transit routes with hourly headways until midnight would cost \$200,000 per year. Complementary ADA paratransit is estimated to cost \$60,000 a year and is included in Iowa City Transit operating costs in Figure 11-4.

Figure 11-4 Cost Estimates by Agency for Improved Saturday Service

Agency	Annual Operating Costs	One-Time Capital Costs
Coralville Transit	\$200,000	-
Iowa City Transit	\$260,000	-
Total	\$460,000	-



Late-Night Weekday Service

Extending public transit’s span of service later into the evening was a common theme in feedback received during ICATS outreach. Late-night service will help Coralville Transit and Iowa City Transit serve people working different types of jobs, tap into new markets, and provide mobility for non-commute trips. It will also give customers the ability to utilize transit for non-work evening purposes.

The current span of service provided by Coralville Transit and Iowa City Transit is oriented to serve peak-hour commute trips and does not support all employment types and potential trip markets. There is public support for improving span of service. During the ICATS community outreach process, adding weekday evening service was among the top community priorities.



The ICATS Vision for Transit estimates that late-night weekday service would cost approximately \$840,000 in annual operating costs. This estimate assumes all Coralville Transit and Iowa City Transit routes operate until midnight each weeknight (except Route 3 Eastside Loop and Route 22 North Liberty, which would remain peak-only routes). This estimate is based on the ICATS Preferred Alternative and includes complementary ADA paratransit costs.

Figure 11-5 Cost Estimates by Agency for Late-Night Weekday Service

Agency	Annual Operating Costs	One-Time Capital Costs
Coralville Transit	\$300,000	-
Iowa City Transit	\$540,000	-
Total	\$840,000	-

On-Demand Night Owl Service

Providing late-night on-demand service was a common theme in the feedback received during ICATS public outreach. Iowa City area residents understood that providing fixed-route transit after midnight would be expensive and likely see few riders but still desired a way to travel at this time without using personal vehicles. For many shift workers without access to a vehicle, on-demand night owl service would allow them to commute either to or from work when fixed-route public transit does not operate.

The Vision for Transit estimates an on-demand night owl service would cost approximately \$130,000 per year and would be available only in Iowa City and University Heights, and financially supported by Iowa City Transit. This assumes trips are provided by a private ride-hail service such as a taxi, Uber, or Lyft vehicle, and the chosen provider would have an ADA-accessible vehicle. The estimate assumes a transit agency subsidy of \$7.00 per trip and an average of 50 trips per day.



On-Demand Service in Low-Density Neighborhoods

Many parts of Iowa City are low density and will not support efficient fixed-route transit service. Residents of these communities still desire public transit service and feedback during the outreach ICATS process revealed there is community support for an on-demand transit service in these areas.

The Vision for Transit estimates on-demand service in low-density neighborhoods within the City of Iowa City borders would cost approximately \$560,000 per year and be supported by Iowa City Transit. This assumes trips are provided by a private ride-hail service such as a taxi, Uber, or Lyft vehicle, and the chosen provider would have an ADA-accessible vehicle. The estimate assumes a transit agency subsidy of \$7.00 per trip and an average of 200 trips per day, as well as \$50,000 in annual administrative costs.



A New Crosstown Route

Many comments received during the ICATS public outreach process described riders' frustration with needing to transfer to make cross-town trips, particularly between west and east Iowa City. A crosstown bus route that does not stop at the Pentacrest Downtown Interchange would allow these riders to make trips without traveling through the congested Pentacrest area and without transferring from one bus route to another.

The Vision for Transit does not propose a specific alignment for a new crosstown bus route. Options could include service along Highway 1, Scott Boulevard, 1st Avenue in Iowa City, and Mormon Trek Boulevard/1st Avenue. The vision includes the estimated required operating and one-time capital costs for Iowa City Transit to operate one such route. These estimates assume this route would operate at 30-minute headways on every day of the week, with service from 6:00 a.m. to midnight on weekdays and 7:00 a.m. to midnight on weekends. This service would cost approximately \$1,300,000 in annual operating costs and would require two new battery-electric transit vehicles, which are estimated to cost \$2,000,000 in total.

A New South Iowa City Route

The ICATS outreach process uncovered public support for a new Iowa City Transit fixed route serving the furthest south areas of Iowa City that have seen greenfield development in recent years. Such a route would provide residents of this neighborhood access to shopping at the Hy-Vee and other businesses on Highway 6, the S Gilbert Street corridor, and downtown Iowa City, where they could transfer to other Iowa City Transit, CAMBUS, and Coralville Transit routes.

This route would travel bi-directionally on the Sycamore Street corridor south of Burns Avenue and could be called 'Route 14 Sycamore'.

Specific streets served by Route 14 include Washington Street, Gilbert Street, Highway 6, Boyrum Street, Southgate Avenue, Keokuk Street, Sandusky Drive, Taylor Drive, Burns Avenue, Sycamore Street, Langenberg Avenue (or McCollister Boulevard, when the extension is open), S Riverside Drive, and Old Highway 218. The new South Iowa City Route would operate in conjunction with Route 2 South Iowa City to provide a bus every 15 minutes on weekdays between the Sycamore Street area and downtown Iowa City. This would support high-need neighborhoods and provide capacity for projected residential growth.

The Vision for Transit Route 14 Sycamore route is estimated to cost \$600,000 in operating costs and would require one additional battery-electric vehicle at a total one-time cost of \$1,000,000. It is assumed this route would replace the Preferred Alternative Route 13 South Gilbert and would also serve Terry Trueblood Park and Cole's mobile home community. It is assumed this route would operate every 30 minutes during peak periods and the mid-day period, and every 60 minutes during late evening and Saturday service.



COSTS ESTIMATES BY AGENCY

Vision for Transit projects are imagined as primarily built and operated by Coralville Transit and Iowa City Transit. The financial resources needed for these projects, however, are not shared equally between the agencies, as significantly more future transit service is planned for the larger, more populous Iowa City. Figure 11-6 is based on the element-level agency splits included above and shows the total estimated one-time capital and annual operating costs for the Vision for Transit by agency.

Figure 11-6 Vision for Transit One-Time Capital and Annual Operating Cost Estimates by Agency

Agency	Estimated Annual Operating Costs	Estimated One-Time Capital Costs
Coralville Transit	\$2,520,000	\$4,000,000
Iowa City Transit	\$10,660,000	\$18,900,000
Total	\$13,180,000	\$22,900,000