



City of
Wooster
TRANSPORTATION

City of Wooster
Transportation Subdivision
2024 Annual Report

Prepared by:
Kevin White, AICP – Public
Transportation Manager
January 2025

Transportation Executive Summary

The City of Wooster made significant strides in transportation throughout 2024, laying the groundwork for a more accessible and sustainable transit system. With key planning efforts completed and new initiatives on the horizon, the City is positioned to enhance mobility for residents in 2025 and beyond.

Major Accomplishments & Projects

- **Transportation Subdivision Established:** The City formally created a Transportation subdivision with the hiring of Kevin White as Public Transportation Manager to oversee transit initiatives.
- **Transit Development Plan (TDP) Completed:** Establishes a guide for public transit services for Wooster and, ultimately, Wayne County through the 5311 Rural Transit Program.
- **Initial Funding Request Submitted:** The City submitted its first-ever Wooster-Wayne Community Transit (WCT) project proposals for ODOT's SFY26 grant cycle. This represents a critical step toward securing the necessary funding **to launch public transit services by July 1st, 2025.**

Key 2024 Performance Metrics for City's Subsidized Program

- **Ridership:** The City-subsidized transportation program provided **51,294 trips**, reflecting a **25% decrease** from **64,196 trips** in 2023. Of these:
 - **40%** were fixed-route bus loop rides
 - **60%** were taxi pass program rides
- **Cost & Efficiency:**
 - The **total program cost to the City** was **\$678,832**, a **21% increase** from 2023, largely due to taxi pass price increase from \$10 to \$12.50 per trip.
 - Despite a decrease in performance compared to 2023, Wooster's **average total cost per trip** of **\$14.98**, would be among the most cost-effective rural transit programs in Ohio.

Major Goals for 2025

- **Transit Advisory Committee (TAC):** A new advisory group will be formed with countywide stakeholders to provide input and guidance on WCT operations.
- **Public Transit Service Launch:** The City will procure a transit provider and **officially commence public transit service** within Wooster and a **one-mile radius** around the city.

Anticipated Challenges in 2025

- **Service Transition & Public Adaptation:** The introduction of a new public transit system will require adjustments from residents, particularly in scheduling and service navigation.
- **Operational Refinement:** As the program evolves, the City will fine-tune processes, address rider needs, and strengthen partnerships to maximize efficiency and accessibility.

Wooster is at a pivotal moment in shaping the future of public transportation. While 2024 focused on planning and laying a strong foundation, 2025 will mark a transformative shift with the launch of an **official public transit system**. Through strategic partnerships, community engagement, and a commitment to service excellence, the City is poised to improve mobility options for residents while maintaining cost efficiency.

Wooster-Subsidized Transportation Program

In the late 1990s, Wooster’s City Council introduced a subsidized transportation program for qualified residents, contracting with a local taxi company to provide the service. While eligibility criteria have varied over time, the program continues to assist low-income individuals, seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities. Since 2017, the City has collaborated with Community Action Wayne Medina (CAWM) to verify residents’ eligibility and administer the taxi voucher system. In May of 2023, the City of Wooster partnered with Share Mobility, a transportation contractor, to provide continued fixed route transportation, a 1-hour bus loop in the City.

In 2024, there were 943 participants in the program. This is an increase from 732 participants in 2023, but still below prepandemic levels. The chart below provides a breakdown of eligibility categories.

Transportation Participants in 2024

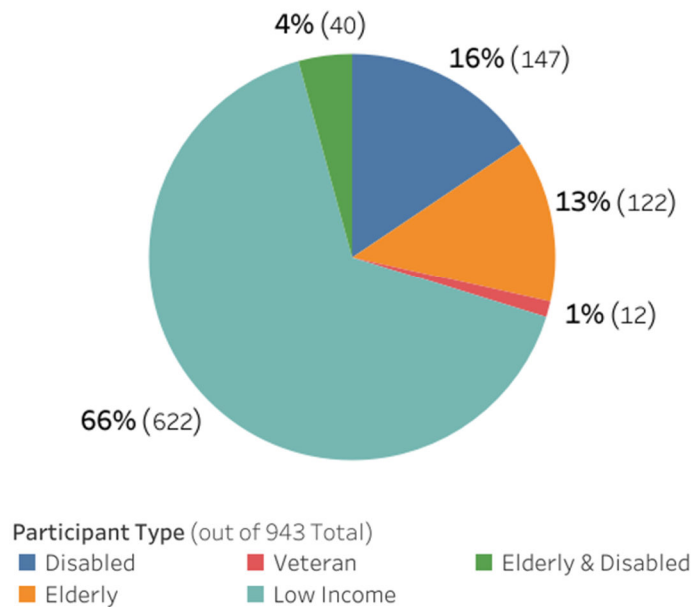


Chart 1 Source: City of Wooster

Total Trips Fall in 2024

In 2024, the City’s subsidized transportation program provided 51,294 trips, a 25% decline from the 64,196¹ trips in 2023. Of these, 30,269 trips (approximately 60%) were completed through the taxi pass program, while the fixed-route bus loop accounted for 21,025 trips (40%). This decrease is primarily attributed to budget constraints implemented in August, which limited taxi pass purchases to 10 per month and reduced fixed-route service by one morning hour. Additionally, the new fixed-route service, which follows a slightly different path with fewer stops, averaged 1,752 trips per month in 2024—significantly lower than the 3,046 average monthly trips recorded during the first five months of 2023 under the previous service.

¹ 2023 Annual Report double counted Share Mobility Fixed Route trips. Instead of 23,213 there were only 11,185.

Rising Transportation Costs

Since 2015, the cost of the City’s Transportation Program has steadily increased, as shown in Chart 2. Following a temporary decline during the COVID-19 years, expenses have risen for the second consecutive year. To help mitigate these rising costs, the City utilized \$250,000 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds between 2022 and 2023. In 2024, transportation costs increased primarily due to two factors. First, the fare paid to taxi companies rose from \$10 to \$12.50 per trip, with the City’s contribution increasing from \$8 to \$9.50, while riders paid an additional \$1 per trip. Second, costs increased with the transition to Share Mobility as the fixed-route provider. The previous provider, which ceased operations in May of 2023, billed based on the number of trips, costing the City approximately \$12,000 per month during the first five months of 2023. In contrast, the new provider operates under a fixed hourly rate, resulting in an average monthly cost of \$27,000 in 2024.



The total cost of the subsidized transportation program in 2024 was \$678,832². By the end of August, projections indicated the program would exceed \$711,000. Without corrective actions to limit spending, it was unlikely the program would have remained within the \$700,000 allocated by City Council. While the 21% cost increase from 2023 may seem significant, the City's cost per trip—factoring in contributions from all partners³—averaged just \$14.98. According to the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT), this cost per trip remains highly competitive compared to public rural transit systems across the state, particularly those offering curb-to-curb service like the taxi program.⁴ For example, in 2021 Chillicothe's curb-to-curb service cost \$52.91 per trip⁵.

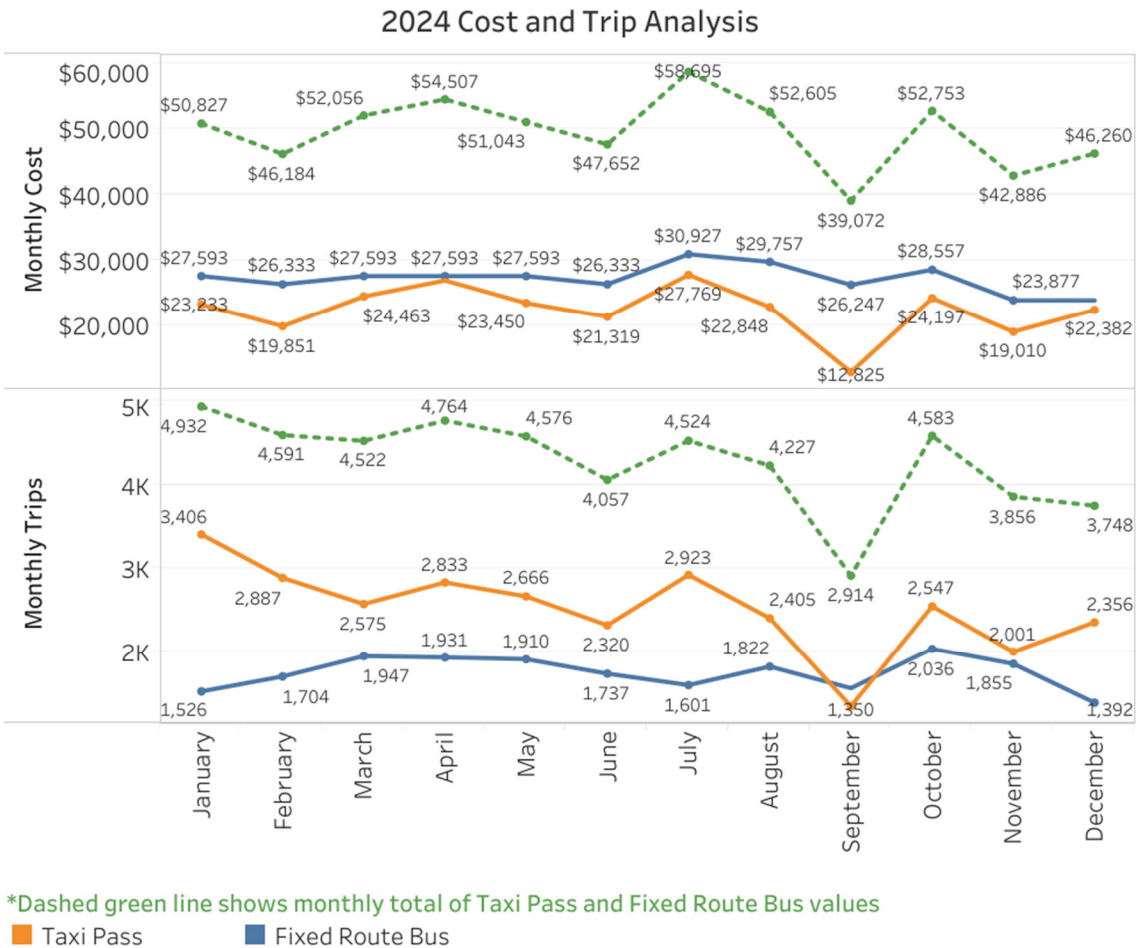


Chart 3 Source: City of Wooster *Taxi Pass purchases were limited in August leading to a drop in trips in September.

² Figure above in Chart 2 includes \$1,475 in revenue from Taxi licensing fees.

³ In 2024, OSU contributed \$20,000 for the first 6 months and the College of Wooster contributed 40,000 for participation in the whole year.

⁴ Rural public transit systems incur additional costs associated with training, accessibility requirements, and regulatory compliance, which are not part of Wooster's current transportation model.

⁵ Source: ODOT Status of Public Transit in Ohio March 2023.

Development of a New Public Transit through the 5311 Rural Transit Program

The loss of SARTA’s countywide service, coupled with dwindling funding sources such as 5310 and ARPA, signaled it was time to reimagine transportation in Wooster and Wayne County. Through discussions led by ODOT, the Wayne County Commissioners, and the City of Wooster, stakeholders identified the 5311 Rural Transit Program as the best path forward. This federally supported program offers a promising opportunity—not only by unlocking federal and state funding but also by simplifying ride scheduling and creating a framework for expanding transit services countywide.

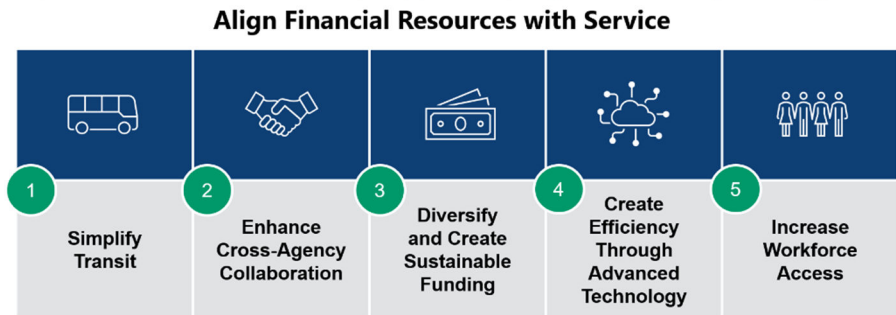


Figure 1 Source: Toole Design

The first step in this transformation was developing a Transit Development Plan (TDP) to establish the governance structure and model future services. With support from ODOT, the City of Wooster partnered with Toole Design to guide this process. Using previous City and County transit data and insights from three stakeholder workshops, the following system structure was developed.

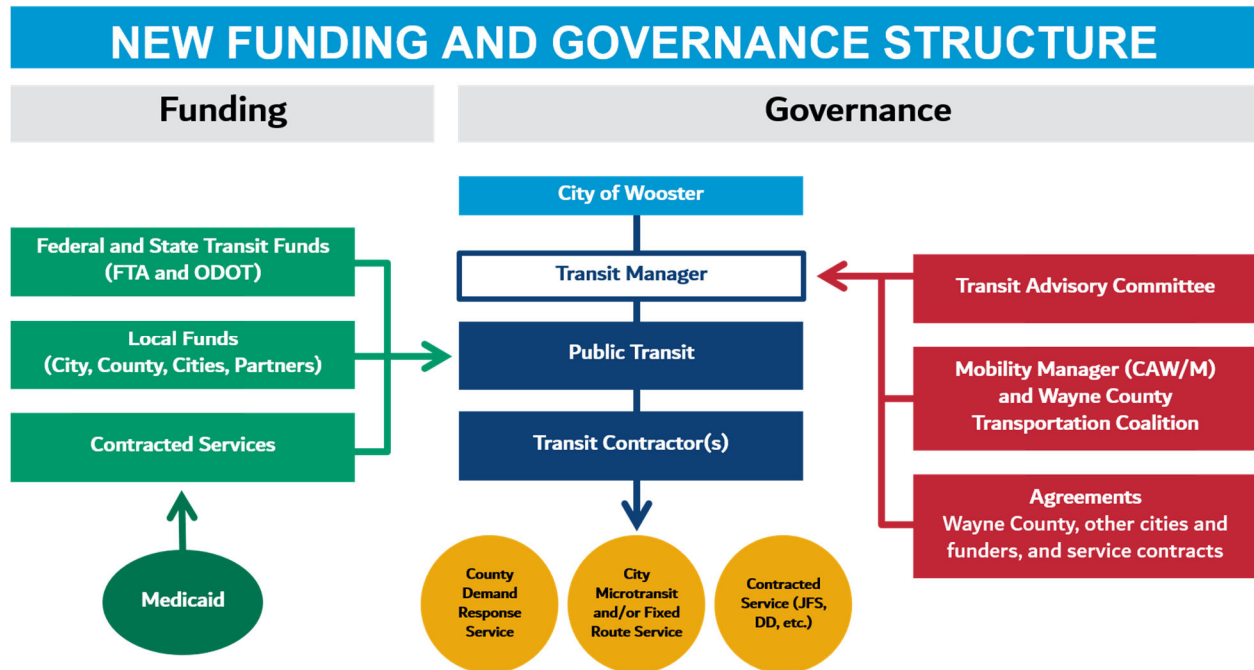


Figure 2 Source: Toole Design

Below is the proposed workflow for the new Wooster-Wayne Community Transit (WCT). This outlines the path toward full countywide public service, a process expected to take several years. The goal for 2025 is to establish a public transit system serving Wooster and a one-mile radius beyond the corporate limits.

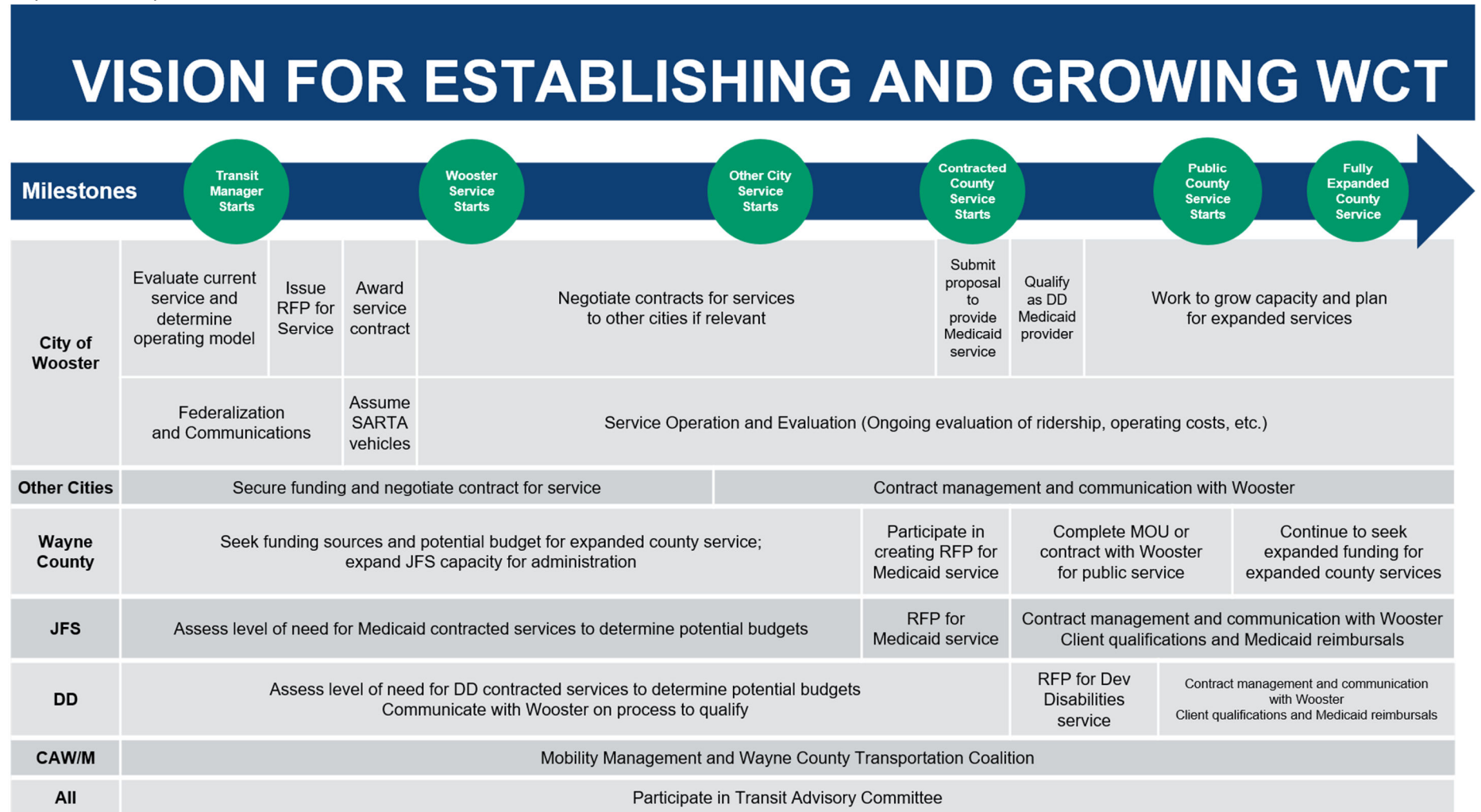


Figure 3 Workflow for new transit and local stakeholders. Source: Toole Design

Overview of Proposed Transit Services

Based on the recommendations of the Transit Development Plan, the City of Wooster submitted a proposal to ODOT in December of 2024. The details outlined below reflect the proposed service model but are subject to adjustments based on the level of funding awarded and any modifications required by ODOT.



Figure 4 Source: RTC, Bellefontaine. Transit Vehicles

The new transit system will be open to all members of the public, marking a significant shift from the previous City transportation program, which served only qualified individuals. To ensure accessibility for all residents, every transit vehicle will be equipped with ramps or lifts to accommodate wheelchair users and individuals with mobility challenges.

The service will operate using a hybrid model, similar to the existing program. Riders will have the option to board a regularly scheduled bus loop or schedule a demand-response trip, allowing for flexible, point-to-point transportation. In its first year, demand-response trips will be limited to a one-mile radius around the City of Wooster. The system will operate Monday through Friday with standard hours, while Saturday service will run with slightly reduced hours.

A fare structure will be implemented for transit use, though the City has included a discounted fare program in its proposal for qualified individuals, such as seniors and persons with disabilities. This initiative aims to keep transportation costs affordable for these populations, aligning with the pricing structure of the current subsidized program.

Many communities in Ohio and across the country participate in the FTA 5311 Rural Transit Program due to its financial advantages. This federal matching grant program significantly reduces a community's share of transit costs, making public transportation more sustainable and accessible. Every local dollar contributed—whether from government funds, partnerships, service contracts, or state allocations—can be matched by a federal dollar, effectively doubling the resources available for transit operations. Established in 1982, the 5311 program has long supported rural transit systems, and Ohio remains one of the few states where the legislature provides additional funding to bolster local transit initiatives.

By transitioning to this program, the City of Wooster aims to enhance public mobility, expand access to essential services, and strengthen the overall transit network while maximizing available funding opportunities.

2025 Goals and Objectives

Goal 1 – Monitor and Prepare to Transition Subsidized Transportation Program

Objective 1A – Continue to monitor monthly ridership and costs of the program.

Objective 1B – Analyze fixed route data and work with riders and drivers to modify and improve the route.

Objective 1C – Transition taxi licensing process from CAWM to the City of Wooster.

Objective 1D – Communicate with the public and partners any changes in service and status of the new public transit system.

Goal 2 – Establish a Public Transit System in Wooster

Objective 2A – Complete federalization process with ODOT.

Objective 2B – Acquire Federal Transit Authority vehicles for local use.

Objective 2C – Develop an RFP for transit services and solicit a vendor.

Objective 2D – Begin Transit services by July 1st.

Goal 3 – Establish Transit Advisory Council (TAC)

Objective 3A – Lead a regularly scheduled meeting of Transit stakeholders.

Objective 3B – During off months from TAC meetings provide a monthly update.

Objective 3C – Participate in Mobility Manager’s Transportation Coalition meetings.

Goal 4 – Plan Expansion of Transit Services

Objective 4A – Collaborate with Wayne County Commissioners and Jobs and Family Services (JFS) to provide contracted Medicaid rides through the transit system.

Objective 4B – Work with Wayne County Board of Developmental Disabilities and develop a plan for contracted trips.

Objective 4C – Explore a transit partnership with Wooster Community Hospital to provide the most efficient transportation services to the patients in the Community.

Appendix

**(See attached PDF. Will edit together into one PDF once final is approved).*

Exhibit 1 - 2024 Program Report

Exhibit 2 - City Program Since 2011

Exhibit 3 - Current Wooster Fixed Route and Ridership Map

Exhibit 4 - Wooster Taxi Trips and Frequent Destinations Sample

Exhibit 5 - Proposed Hybrid Wooster Transit Model

Exhibit 6 - County Travel Pattern Data

Exhibit 7 - County Travel Pattern Map