

City of Savannah--Savannah Convention and Visitors Bureau  
Transportation Task Force  
Visitor Mobility Plan Summary

October 14, 2005

A good visitor mobility system is a vital part of Savannah's trademark hospitality, and crucial to the tourism industry, attracting conventions, ensuring the satisfaction of individual visitors, families and groups, and a necessary step to reducing traffic and parking congestion downtown. It must be consistent and reliable, and provide the rider with a sense of comfort in "getting around", not just transportation. It must provide meaningful service to residents. It should actively encourage walking. It must have firm, long-term funding support.

There is general agreement about what this part of the "Savannah Experience" should be: a mobility system that requires minimal effort to understand and use, creates a sense of confidence and ease in moving around downtown, and gets people out of their cars. Some elements are in place now but lack frequency, coordination and connectivity.

**Plan Requirements:**

- Define service needs and parameters for each type of service.
- Clarify and centralize system management and policy decisions wherever practical.
- Provide seamless services allowing easy transition among platforms and venues.
- Provide visitors and residents with reasonable options to private vehicles.
- Encourage visitors and residents to enjoy the "walk-ability" of the city.
- Make ease of mobility downtown a reinforcing part of the 'Savannah Experience'.

**Plan Features:**

- Fast, easy, useful, FREE downtown transportation for visitors and residents.
- Takes advantage of many existing assets and resources.
- Expands and improves water ferry frequency, coverage and hours.
- Expands CAT Downtown Shuttle to include a tighter downtown service loop.
- Initiates the River Street Trolley (streetcar) service along the riverfront.
- Integrates ferry, shuttle and streetcar elements into a single, flexible, coordinated system.
- Provides comfortable shelters at several mobility "touch points" around the system.
- Integrates system management, operating standards and branding.
- Provides an automated information system to tell riders where they are, how to get where they're going, when the next bus or ferry will arrive, and other relevant information.
- Creates a Walk Savannah program that encourages getting out of private vehicles to walk around downtown, optionally using the mobility system to get from one area to another.
- Provides one-stop mobility / transportation management and arrangements for visitors, group leaders and meeting planners.
- Exports a fair share of costs to visitors, who are the biggest users / beneficiaries.

# Visitor Mobility Plan

## Plan Detail: System Implementation, Timelines, Phasing

### Basic Service Plan.

#### 1. Expand Existing Water Ferry Service

*Timeframe: 2d quarter, 2006      Lead Agency: GIMTCA / CAT*

##### Recommendations:

- a. Expand base ferry service to two vessels, one each servicing City Hall Landing (20-minute headway, 17 hrs/day) and Waving Girl Landing (30-minute headway, 10 hrs/day).
- b. Outfit ferry vessels with a GPS-based information system for real-time schedule/connections information. Manages customer expectations, and allows service to be easily modified off-peak.
- c. Install call-boxes for water and ground taxi at the three ferry landings.
- d. Install appropriate shelters at the three ferry landings, along with an integrated information system to present system information and cultural-historical entertainment.
- e. Station trained *Visitor Specialist* staff at ferry landings during high-demand periods, to facilitate movement and to provide an additional encounter with Savannah hospitality.

#### 2. Begin Expanded CAT Shuttle Circulator Service

*Timeframe: 3d quarter 2006      Lead Agency: CAT*

##### Recommendations:

- a. Increase CAT shuttle service to two routes and up to 4 vehicles in simultaneous circulation. Connect with River Street ferry landings and circulate in downtown, serving other fixed “touch points” with flexible routing on rest of system. Suggested locations:
  - Forsyth Park-Mansion
  - Hilton DeSoto Hotel
  - City Market
  - Main Visitor Center

Each of these locations and the River Street ferry landings would have information screens providing real-time system information and entertainment. Round-trip should be 30 minutes or less: with no more than 15 minutes between service on either route with 2 vehicles in service.

- b. Match shuttle service to ferry service hours during peak periods, adjusted to customer demand during off-peak. Routes and ‘touch points’ may be modified to meet visitor patterns as they emerge. Vehicle capacity should be about 25 passengers, and fully accessible as at present.

#### 3. Initiate Streetcar (Trolley) Service on River Street

*Timeframe: Initiate service by 3d quarter 2006      Lead Agency: City of Savannah*

The City has programmed to refurbish an existing ‘Melbourne’ Streetcar as a dual-powered platform capable of running on existing legacy track along River Street. This asset should be placed in service between Waving Girl Landing and MLK Boulevard on a 15-minute schedule with one or two in-between stops including City Hall Landing.

The streetcar would operate 12 hours a day, 6 days a week; provide a pleasant visitor experience, and an option for movement along River Street and to connect to other shuttle and ferry stops.

#### **4. Establish Common Branding**

*Timeframe: 2d Quarter, 2006      Lead Agency: CAT*

A recognizable, uniform image for the system is highly desirable from a customer service view. Rather than create a new brand, system should extend the established *Savannah Belles* branding to the other platforms, taking advantage of the *Belles*' built-in historic and romantic story-lines.

#### **5. Continue Underwriting Transportation Costs for Selected Groups**

*Timeframe: Ongoing      Lead Agency: CTFC*

There is demonstrated benefit in continuing to support the current system of subsidizing transportation costs for selected city-wide groups requiring extra ground and/or ferry service.

#### **6. Establish a Walk Savannah Program**

*Timeframe: Complete actions in 2007      Lead Agency: City of Savannah*

Encouraging visitors to park-and-walk, as well as to use visitor mobility services, tour buses and carriages, and other private-sector modes is essential to reduce the volume of short-distance auto trips. A walking experience is enhanced when visitors perceive their environs as clean, safe and friendly. Walking-route signage and maps encourage visitors to seek out cultural and historic sites on their own, while feeling comfortable knowing where they are and how to get around.

So a 'Walk Savannah' campaign supports several strategies: managing downtown traffic, providing more encounters between visitors and downtown businesses, affording richer visitor appreciation of historic and cultural Savannah; and dovetails with City programs to improve downtown cleanliness and accessibility (sidewalk cuts, automated crossings etc).

##### Recommendations:

- a. Create and promote a system of north-south walking corridors, oriented to-from-between River Street and initially including MLK Blvd and Bull, Abercorn and Jefferson Streets.
- b. Make walking and circulator maps available to people using structured parking.
- c. Support ongoing City efforts to connect clean streets with local pride and visitor satisfaction.

#### **7. Establish a Convention-Mobility Management Function**

*Timeframe: 2d Quarter, 2006      Lead Agency: City of Savannah*

There is a need for a centralized mobility coordination function--a 'mobility manager'--to anticipate, plan for and respond to mobility challenges; match mobility resources to customer demands, and effectively service city-wide convention and special event demands.

This manager (or management function) would perform the following primary duties:

- a. Plan and coordinate mobility services for groups, especially multi-hotel groups associated with Convention and Civic Center events; and other downtown special events and festivals.
- b. Advise city on matters affecting downtown mobility, including parking and roadways.
- c. Provide interface with and direct support to a future Ambassador program.
- d. Respond to policy guidance/direction from a policy committee governing its function, comprising City, CAT, CVB, SITCC / Trade Center Authority, SCAD, downtown hotels, museum/attractions and businesses and residents. A model for this committee is the existing 501(c)(6) Convention Transportation Funding Committee.

**The Extended Service Plan.** In addition to the basic mobility service structure, four key elements are necessary to a comprehensive, dynamic and responsive network:

**An Informed Customer.** Visitors need ample, current information about their mobility choices when visiting Savannah. The more informed choices, the more likely a visitor is to make choices which both meet his needs and support the objectives of this plan.

**An Informed Service Industry.** Whether driving a taxi, greeting hotel guests or serving meals, professional and cordial service workers who know the city and how to get around, with the confidence to use that to assist a visitor, add measurable value to the Savannah Experience.

**A Mobility Services Network.** Rather than trying to meet evolving needs with traditional public and private transportation services, it is feasible and preferable to create a network of mobility services that respond effectively to customer needs while retaining their own identity.

**Mobility Services Pricing.** The most significant factor affecting a visitor's mobility choices is the pricing of services relative to their perceived value. Parking pricing is a key element.

## **1. Front-Line Staff Development Program**

*Timeframe: Implement by 3d quarter, 2006      Lead Agencies: CVB and TLC*  
Staff directly serving and interacting with visitors have a major impact on their perception of the city, and considerable influence over choices a visitor will make while here. Provides mobility-related training for front-line staff, and an interface and support for future Ambassador program.

Recommendation. CVB collaborate with TLC to institute a training/development program, including mobility choices, for front-line staff that when completed, accredits them as "Ambassadors." This program might additionally provide credits for skill development or CEU through local institution(s) such as GSU, SSU or Savannah Tech.

## **2. Visitor Specialist Program.**      *Timeframe: Summer 2007      Lead Agency: TBD*

This program trains a volunteer visitor mobility specialists based at transportation hubs during large conventions and special events to provide directions and mobility assistance to visitors moving through the system. Provides interface with a future Ambassador program.

## **3. Expand-Extend Convention-Mobility Management Functions. 2007**

- a. Manage taxi and tour vehicle certification and approve issuance of necessary permits.
- b. Integrate taxi, other ground and tour operators into Ambassador initiative.
- c. Develop and maintain a comprehensive interactive mobility website for Savannah.
- d. Develop an integrated reservation and dispatching system for all mobility services.
- e. Devise and implement a system to communicate mobility options to travelers en route.
- f. Implement a system providing single-card access to mobility/parking services.
- g. Provide/broker communication services that enhance visitor experience (e.g., GPS guides).

## **4. Implement "Certified" Taxi / Ground Operator Service**

*Timeframe: Summer, 2007      Lead Agency: City of Savannah*

Recommendation. City should develop a certification or designation for ground operators who demonstrate knowledge about the city and who provide a defined level of customer service. City and Savannah-Hilton Head International Airport managers might choose to select airport ground and other routes from among certified-qualified operators.