

Englewood Florida Chamber of Commerce Task Force
Public Outreach Report

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History

Englewood Florida is an unincorporated area which spans two counties. While having its own fire department and water district, other jurisdictional agencies split the community into two distinct parts. In consideration of public transportation via bus service, serious challenges for residents and workers who don't or can't drive result from inadequate, inefficient or non-existent routing, especially when needing to go from one county to the other, albeit it may be literally blocks away.

As we are continuing to realize record "seasons" and increased residential development, heavy traffic and insufficient parking for key destinations will exponentially compound. This not only effects tourism, it marginalizes reasonable accommodations for the populace, whether their needs are for recreation, work, or essential services.

Bus transportation is provided in the mostly northern Sarasota County portion of Englewood. While dependable, clean and affordable, being the "end of the line" creates a non-circular routing, so while traveling from point A to point B may quick, returning from B to A is impracticably long. Service to any of the four beaches on Manasota Key is non-existent, as is nearly any destination across into Charlotte County.

Bus transportation in Charlotte County is a reservation based system, and while they have approximately 34 busses they are challenged by currently having only 22 drivers. The busses are stored more than 30 minutes away, so that any pickup in Englewood requires at least an hour travel time in addition to the passenger route. They describe their service on their website page

<https://www.charlottecountyfl.gov/services/transportation/Pages/Curb-to-Curb.aspx>

"The Curb-to-Curb program a point-to-point bus system available to the general public for a small fee. It provides the freedom of curbside transportation to and from your destination on an advance reservation basis. Please call at least 24 hours in advance, by 1 p.m., for next day service and by 5 p.m. for any day after that. Same day appointments can be made after 8:30 a.m. Monday thru Friday and after 10:00 a.m. on Saturdays and will be based on availability. Additionally, please allow one hour for travel time and one hour at your designation.

Monday – Friday 6:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Saturday 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and is restricted to a limited service area. Please call 941.575.4000 option #1 for details.

Charlotte County Transit is closed on all county and nationally recognized holidays, including but not limited to, the following: Sundays, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Day, Memorial Day, July 4th or Labor Day."

There are two overlapping/connecting stops for both transit systems, one near the Chamber of Commerce building and one near the Englewood Hospital. Anyone questioning this practicality would be encouraged to coordinate this integration of services; while technically doable, advanced planning and significant allowance of waiting time as noted above is required. Older folks waiting in the heat, working people needing to get to work on time, families with young and generally anyone wanting to get around without a personal vehicle have limited and cumbersome choices if they have them at all.

Objectives

The Englewood Florida Chamber of Commerce Task Force is dedicated to provide input from the community that can form the basis to initiate improvements and additions to service which better integrates the two counties. As a collective with a common goal, we are united in this quest, working cooperatively with Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT), Charlotte County Transit Service, and the Englewood CRA Advisory Board. As the first summary findings of our outreach, we look to engage the attention and support of the Board of County Commissioners in both Sarasota and Charlotte counties to realize reasonable, efficient and cost effective bus transportation in Englewood.

Outreach

CRA Advisory Board Meeting on December 14, 201 (and following monthly meetings)

During the inaugural SCAT service to Englewood Beach in Charlotte County for the November 2015 Englewood Beach Waterfest, the concern about the bus turning radius at the Beach/Gulf Road turn-about was successfully navigated. During the CRA meeting, input was sought from the audience for route priorities, including limited crossover into Charlotte County. The interactive presentation by Sarah Blanchard, SCAT Senior Transit Planner and Christopher DeAnuntis, SCAT Transit Planning Manager was the impetus for envisioning and then later realizing a Task Force to provide additional platforms to disseminate information and provide input from residents of Englewood. (See Exhibit A)

The CRA Advisory Board continued to prioritize the expansion and enhancement of public transit in the community, as denoted in their Project List as P1-7 Priority, and described as Item 6 in the CRA Annual Report (See Exhibits B and C respectively).

Englewood Florida Chamber of Commerce Town Hall Meeting on April 13, 2016

Advertised via WENG radio, the Sun Herald newspaper, CRA Advisory Board meetings, and the Englewood Chamber online newsletter, website and email blast to members, the Task Force organized a town hall meeting. Representatives from the transit services from both counties presented, the agenda was formatted to be first informational to then seek input from the attendees. (See Exhibit D). Reference the Sun Herald Article for a good accounting of the meeting (See Exhibit E) and follow-up Op Ed in the Sun Herald for their perspective (See Exhibit F).

Englewood Chamber of Commerce On-line Survey, finalized on April 27, 2016

To reach those who could not attend the prior meetings, an online survey was conducted to the 500 plus membership and local homeowners associations. There were 134 respondents, the results of which were tallied (See Exhibit G).

Findings

While quantitative data is provided per Exhibits, some common threads of responses are clear.

- There is a low percentage ridership in Sarasota County, and a nearly non-existent ridership in Charlotte County (many are not knowledgeable about it)
- The majority of residents would consider using bus service and know others who would, with the most sought destination to be the beaches on Manasota Key. Many cite the lack of adequate parking in both Counties as being the main reason.
- Other key destinations are to and from restaurants/shopping, healthcare and workplaces
- There is need for overlapping service to and from Charlotte and Sarasota County, and a continuous loop within the service area on a half hour or hourly basis is requested.
- Respondents have indicated a willingness to take bus transportation outside of Englewood, most prominently Punta Gorda, Charlotte Sports Park, Murdoch/Mall in Charlotte County and Venice, Walmart and RL Anderson County Building in Sarasota.

Summary Statement

We believe it is a reasonable conclusion that as the majority of respondents say they would use bus transportation but very few do, what currently exists is not adequate or is inefficient. Parking spaces are too few at all of the beaches and many local restaurants, increasing parking and automobile volume is not a desirable solution. It would be more cost effective to implement a cross-County coordinated bus service, which would serve both the growing community and accommodate the expanding swells of tourists.

The Task Force applauds the effort and interest by SCAT and Charlotte County Transit for their commitments to listen, to then implement enhanced routing, increased frequency and expanded hours for local bus transportation within a unified Englewood service area.

-End of Report-