



# St. Lucie County Public Transit

# 2019

ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

ST. LUCIE WORKS



# St. Lucie County Public Transportation at a Glance

Directly Impacting the  
Local Economy

## TCC System by the NUMBERS:

**85** Workers Directly Employed -  
in St. Lucie County

**\$12.6M** Annual  
Total Budget

**\$7.6M** Annual  
Actual Expenditures

**2,600+** Daily Trips  
Provided

**793,210** Annual  
Trips Last Year -  
A 48% Year-over-Year Increase

**48** Service Buses  
and 8 Support Vehicles

**276%** Increase in Fixed Route  
Ridership from 2017-2019

**FREE** to Riders

# CONTENTS

**2** Infographic Summary

**4** Director and General Manager's Message

**5** Executive Summary

**6** Accomplishments

**7** Funds Leveraged

**8** Capital Investments and Operating Enhancements

**9** Map

**10** Performance Metrics - Ridership

**11** Performance Metrics - Demand Response, Direct Connect

**12** Improving Life Through Mobility

**13** Meeting Needs, Summer of Success

**14** Planning for the Future

# This is What Progress Looks Like!

## Dear Friend of the Treasure Coast Connector,



*Diana Wesloski*  
Community Services  
Director



*Murriah Dekle*  
Transit Manager



### ST. LUCIE WORKS

At TCC, our resolve was tested in the wake of an adverse start in 2019. In the midst of a Transit Contract Provider RFP rejection, creating and coordinating a new document and process, and the financial ramifications of funding decreases from the Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged (FCTD), we addressed unexpected challenges and, we're proud to say, the organization rose to the occasion.

It is our pleasure to present St. Lucie County's 2019 Transit Municipal Services Taxing Unit Annual Report, highlighting the implementation of creative financial solutions and the support from the Board of County Commissioners budget approval and general fund, two new competitive awards received from the FCTD for the Innovation and Service Development grants. Also, through the support of the County's general fund, the transit program was able to accept and fulfill the local match required for two new service development grants totaling \$1.2 million from the Florida Department of Transportation. These initiatives, paired with a disciplined financial approach, resulted in the ability to provide new and continue existing services:

- Micro transit pilot in Port St. Lucie – An innovative mobility-on-demand service.
- Direct Connect - An afterhours solution for employment and education related trips.
- Dialysis Pilot – Service improvements for dialysis patients.
- Upcoming 25th Street Express Bus Route – Connection of the Fort Pierce and Port St. Lucie Intermodal facilities.

As we move forward, we have additional tools for success through the adoption of the updated Transit Development Plan, which serves as our strategic plan. This plan was endorsed and adopted by the Transportation Planning Organization Policy Board and the Board of County Commissioners in the summer of 2019. The updated TDP helps identify areas for improvement, efficiency increases, enhanced services and serves as the foundation for our funding priorities.

Also, in collaboration with the transit contracted service provider, the Council on Aging of St. Lucie, Inc./ Community Transit and Cambridge Systemic, the FDOT has generously funded a comprehensive analysis of the current fare-free structure on the local economy, community and operational impacts. This study is slated for completion in late January 2020.

At the start of 2019, perspectives from 140 riders and over 400 non-riders were gathered at local community events, workshops and various public meetings via comment cards and an online survey. Our outreach provided for a demographic mix representative of St. Lucie County, with a focus on those who reside within TCC's immediate service area. The overall goal was to understand the true needs of the community, prioritize our initiatives and gain insight into ways to improve the public transportation experience for our customers.

The information contained in this report is inspired by the opinions of the community, our 2019 journey, and our vision for the future.

As we embark on a new year, we continue to strive to fulfill our core mission of providing safe, reliable, clean, and courteous public transportation. Our success will be measured by our customers, our partners, and our community. We hope you'll join us on the ride for a better tomorrow.

Sincerely,

*Diana Wesloski*  
Community Services Director

*Murriah Dekle*  
Transit Manager



*Howard Tipton*  
County Administrator



*Mark Satterlee*  
Deputy County Administrator



*Jeff Bremer*  
Deputy County Administrator



*Sean Mitchell, Cathy Townsend, Linda Bartz, Frannie Hutchinson, Chris Dzadovsky*  
St. Lucie County Commissioners

## Background of the Transit Municipal Services Taxing Unit

The St. Lucie County Transit Development Plan was adopted by the Board of County Commissioners on July 2, 2019 and endorsed by the St. Lucie Transportation Planning Organization on June 5, 2019. The Transit Development Plan (TDP) serves as a strategic guide to prioritizing funding and services to create a more accessible, attractive county to enhance economic development. The TDP is based on a ten-year planning horizon and contains public transportation goals and objectives for the county.

St. Lucie County's TDP is branded as Bus Plus – the "Plus" acknowledges that every bus ride begins or ends as a multimodal trip and these trips are influenced by surrounding land uses.

The Transit Municipal Services Taxing Unit (MSTU) was established in 2002 to provide a mechanism to leverage state and federal funding for public transportation. Since then, the County has gone from having only three vans serving one route, to providing close to 700,000 annual trips.

During county fiscal year 2019, the Board of County Commissioners approved a budget request for expenditures from the general fund to support the expansion of services including one new fixed route and the micro transit pilot program. These general fund dollars have since been encumbered to leverage an additional \$500,000 in state grant funding for the operational costs of service development. In years' past (2015 – 2017), the BOCC committed general fund dollars to support operational costs to extended service hours on six of the fixed routes.

St. Lucie County's public transportation system is organized as a full brokerage system, which means the operational component is contracted via open procurement. The Board of County Commissioners is the designated recipient by the U.S. Department of Transportation for all federal and state grant funding required to provide these services.

The Council on Aging of St. Lucie/Community Transit has served as the County's contracted service provider for the past 27 years and is responsible for delivering all public transport trips and the operational tasks such as reservations, maintenance and regulatory compliance. As the designated recipient, the County's Transit Division administers the program, which includes grant management, new service planning, oversight of the Transit MSTU, contractor oversight, infrastructure enhancements and public outreach within the community.

The Transit MSTU has not had an increase since 2011. Transit staff proposed a budget initiative during the summer of 2019 to bring the existing millage rate of 0.1269 to 0.2300, in order to generate an additional \$2 million annually to meet the match requirements. While the millage increase request was not approved, Administration recommended support from the general fund, which was approved by the BOCC for FY20/21.

As shown in the table below, two projections are presented, one showing the expected ad valorem revenue under the current MSTU millage rate, 0.1269 mills, and one showing the expected ad valorem revenue if the MSTU rate were increased to 0.2300. The maximum cap established for the Transit MSTU is 0.25 mills.

Year	Populati on (BEER- Med.)	Ad Valorem Increase Assumption	Source	Taxable Value per Capita	Total Taxable Value	Revenue per Mil	Millage	Ad Valorem Revenues (Current Millage)	Max Add'l Millage	Ad Valorem Revenues (Add'l Millage)	Total (@ 0.25 mils)
2015	299,400	2.77%	EDR – Ad Val Estimating Conference (August 2013)	\$54,798	\$16,406,521,200	\$16,406,521	0.1269	\$2,081,988	0.1231	\$2,019,643	\$4,101,630
2016	306,915	3.48%	EDR – Ad Val Estimating Conference (August 2013)	\$56,705	\$17,403,615,075	\$17,403,615	0.1269	\$2,208,519	0.1231	\$2,142,385	\$4,350,904
2017	314,619	5.58%	EDR – Ad Val Estimating Conference (August 2013)	\$59,871	\$18,836,554,149	\$18,836,554	0.1269	\$2,390,359	0.1231	\$2,318,780	\$4,709,139
2018	322,516	6.46%	EDR – Ad Val Estimating Conference (August 2013)	\$63,737	\$20,556,202,292	\$20,556,202	0.1269	\$2,608,582	0.1231	\$2,530,469	\$5,139,051
2019	330,611	3.60%	Avg Annual Growth Rate (1976 - 2013)	\$66,032	\$21,830,905,552	\$21,830,906	0.1269	\$2,770,342	0.1231	\$2,687,384	\$5,457,726
2020	338,900	3.60%	Avg Annual Growth Rate (1976 - 2013)	\$68,409	\$23,183,810,100	\$23,183,810	0.1269	\$2,942,026	0.1231	\$2,853,927	\$5,795,953
2021	346,017	3.60%	Avg Annual Growth Rate (1976 - 2013)	\$70,872	\$24,522,916,824	\$24,522,917	0.1269	\$3,111,958	0.1231	\$3,018,771	\$6,130,729
2022	353,283	3.60%	Avg Annual Growth Rate (1976 - 2013)	\$73,423	\$25,939,097,709	\$25,939,098	0.1269	\$3,291,672	0.1231	\$3,193,103	\$6,484,774
2023	360,702	3.60%	Avg Annual Growth Rate (1976 - 2013)	\$76,066	\$27,437,158,332	\$27,437,158	0.1269	\$3,481,775	0.1231	\$3,377,514	\$6,859,290
2024	368,277	3.60%	Avg Annual Growth Rate (1976 - 2013)	\$78,804	\$29,021,700,708	\$29,021,701	0.1269	\$3,682,854	0.1231	\$3,572,571	\$7,255,425
<b>Total</b>								<b>\$32,465,525</b>			<b>\$63,958,874</b>

\*Adopted by St. Lucie County Board of County Commissioners June 2014

# PAST YEAR'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## Ridership

The fixed route continues to maintain the highest ridership levels in county's history! The FDOT awarded a third year of grant funding to continue the fare-free pilot program until August 2020 to enable further analysis of the economic development and operating system impact.



## Service Improvements

Beginning on March 4, the Treasure Coast Connector's Route 1 buses began offering service every 30 minutes, running from Avenue D in Fort Pierce to the Treasure Coast Mall in Jensen Beach. The Route 1 buses operate weekdays between 7 a.m. to noon and 2:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., plus Saturdays from 8 a.m. to noon and 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

## Additional Funding Secured

- TCC maximized the existing leverage of the Transit MSTU to provide higher levels of service via two new grants from the Florida Department of Transportation in FY19 – total project costs \$1.2 million. In FY20, the County was also awarded an additional \$300,000 in competitive discretionary awards from the Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged. Total for 'New' grant funding in the past 12 months = \$1.5 million.
- Staff also compiled three budget requests during the 2019 BOCC budget cycle. One request was successfully funded, totaling an additional \$1.2 million from the general fund to expand services and leverage additional state grant dollars.

## Cost Savings Rendered

Completed the new, major update to the ten-year Transit Development Program which was adopted and endorsed by the local policy Boards (BOCC, TPO) and acceptance by the Florida Department of Transportation. Realized a cost savings of over \$150,000 to the County by developing the plan in-house with TPO staff. The TDP is valued at over \$200,000 and with consulting costs of only \$48,000.

## Infrastructure Investments

Openly procured and awarded a new contract for the construction of two new bus shelters in the City of Fort Pierce and nine Simme-seats have been installed with an additional 16 slated for the City of Port St. Lucie.



## Community Outreach

Transit staff conducted a record-breaking amount of public outreach and travel training sessions throughout the community while collecting over 500 surveys! The County's Media Division created a social media campaign targeted for younger residents and produced specialized print collateral for the travel training sessions conducted by transit staff for the Summer of Success program. The data-sharing partnership with Google Transit remains active.

## Direct Connect - Innovative Partnership with local Taxi Services (Coming Soon...contract with Uber for Business)

Competitive funding was awarded for \$100,000 from the Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged to continue the after-hours program designed to 'bridge the gaps' in existing services.

## Positioning the County for Future Success

- Developed an innovative solution to serve suburban areas via a micro-transit pilot project. Launched services in Port St. Lucie on December 11, 2019.
- Continued the development of civil engineering plans and contracted for 30% design level for the St. Lucie County Transit Headquarters facility, as identified within the St. Lucie County Transit Development Plan. The FDOT has verbally committed \$3 million to the state work program in July 2020. Transit staff continues to apply for additional funding opportunities to fund the full project cost.

# FUNDS Leveraged

The current millage rate for the Transit Municipal Services Taxing Unit is .1269, or \$12.69 per year on a home valued at \$150,000 with a \$50,000 homestead exemption. The millage rate of the Transit MSTU has not been increased since 2011.

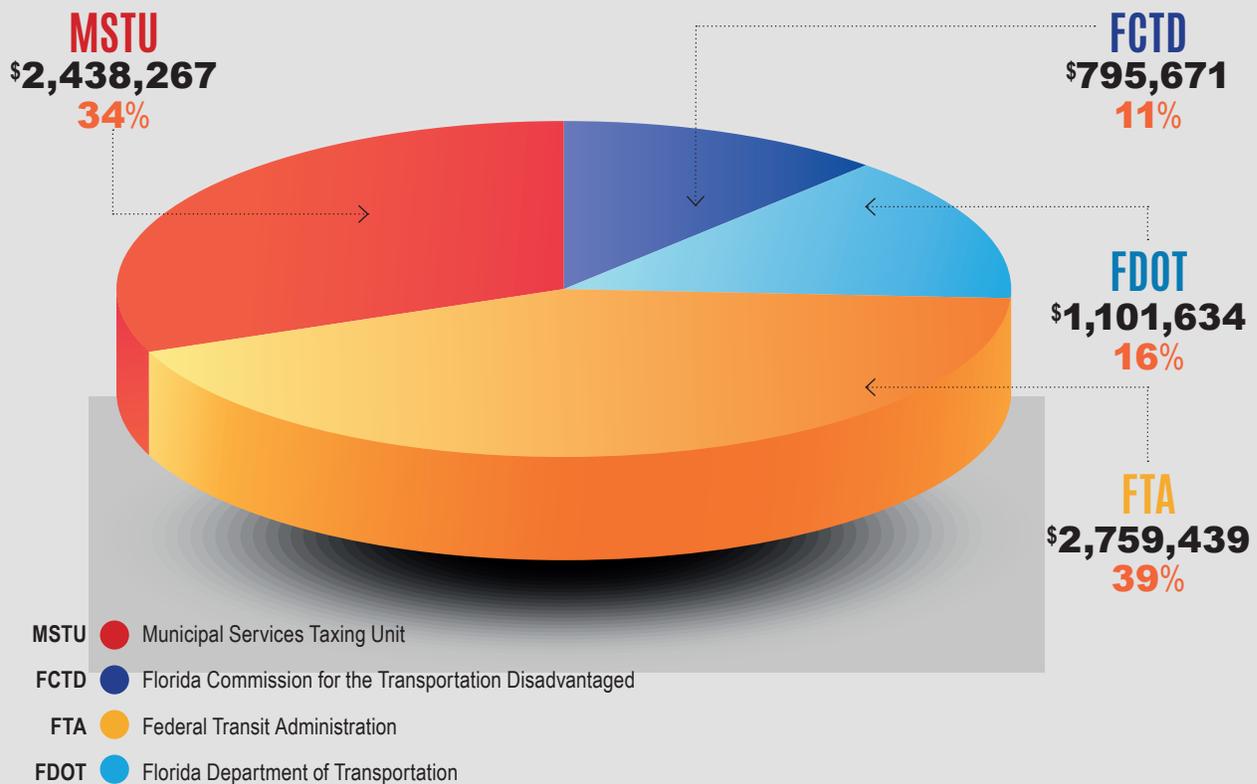
In County Fiscal Year 2019, the transit MSTU provided the sole source of local funding used to meet the required grant matches. The County leveraged 192% of every dollar generated from the MSTU in 2019 from other sources such as the Federal Transit Administration and the Florida Department of Transportation. Last year, the Transit Division administered a grant-funded budget totaling \$12.6 million, realizing \$7.6 million in actual expenditures. It's important to note that the life cycle of federal and state grants ranges from one to five years which explains the difference between the total budget and the actual expenditures.

County staff also applied for over \$16 million in additional discretionary grant applications in 2019 to the Federal Transit Administration for capital projects and Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged for operational funding. Competitive grant funding was awarded to St. Lucie County totaling \$300,000 from the Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged.

*\*For County Fiscal Year 2020, the Board of County Commissioners allocated over \$1 million from the General Fund to expand transit services!*



## 2019 | Annual Expenditures by Funding Source



# CAPITAL INVESTMENTS and Operating Enhancements

## Improving the Bus Experience Infrastructure Investments

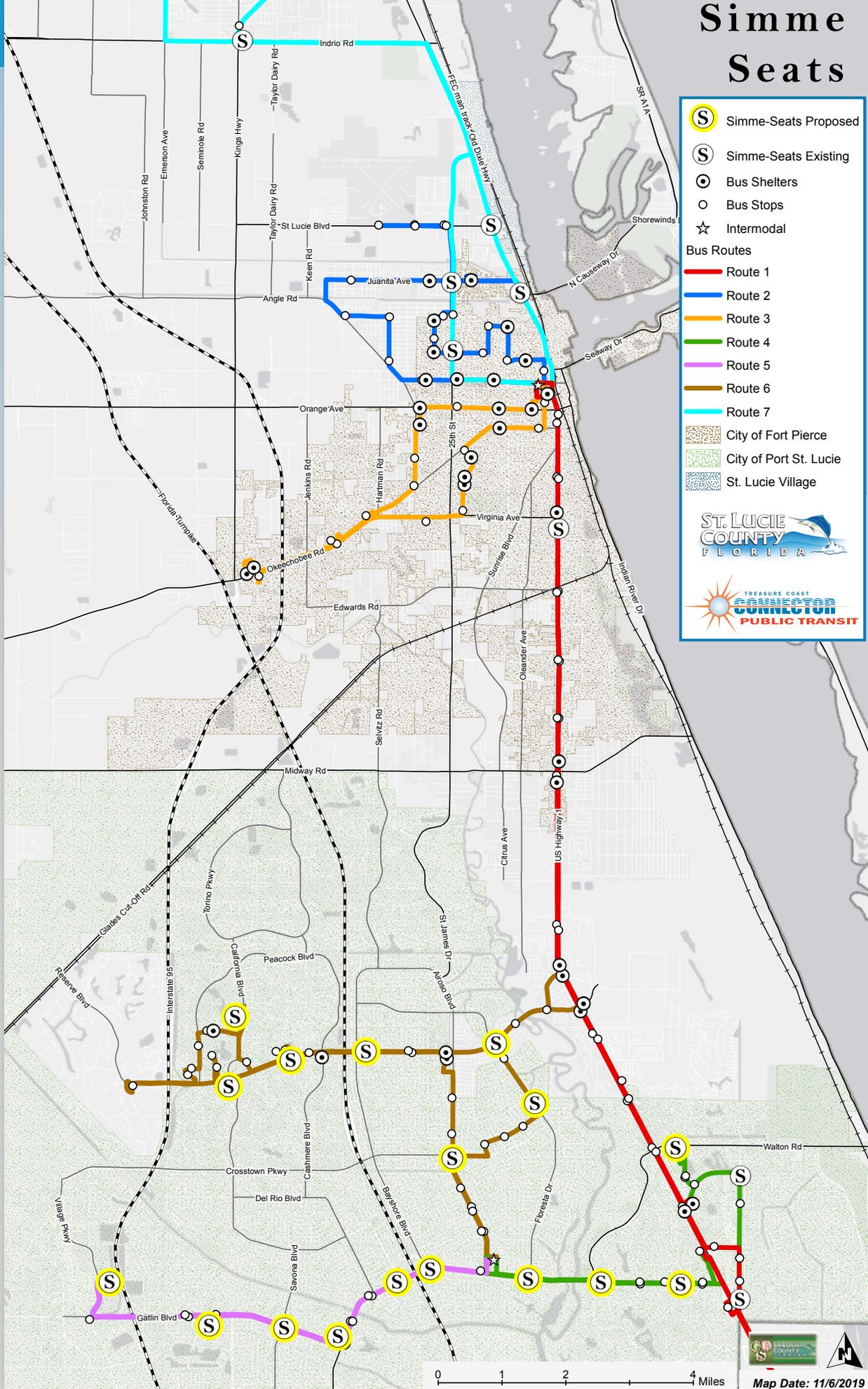
The Treasure Coast Connector strives to boost ridership and customer satisfaction by creating a balance of service reliability and creature comforts. Bus stops are important portals through which people move about the community and gain access to opportunity. Factors such as the location, design, maintenance and the general appearance of bus stops greatly affect the public's perception, and often the reality of a stops' safety and security. As an effective means of increasing awareness of the system and improving the image of the Treasure Coast Connector, the overall brand of the buses and bus stops must be acknowledged as part of the overall environment.

In 2019, the County contracted the installation of ten new bus stop locations to receive enhancements known as semi-seats; with an additional fifteen scheduled for installation in the City of Port St. Lucie in early 2020. Also, through an open procurement process, the County awarded a contract for the installation of two new bus shelters and the installation of bus shelter branding coming soon.

In partnership with the County's contracted service provider, the County purchased two new 40-foot buses to meet the county's growing demand for fixed route services and one new paratransit bus.



# Simme Seats



**Simme-Seats Proposed**

**Simme-Seats Existing**

**Bus Shelters**

**Bus Stops**

**Intermodal**

**Bus Routes**

- Route 1
- Route 2
- Route 3
- Route 4
- Route 5
- Route 6
- Route 7

**City of Fort Pierce**

**City of Port St. Lucie**

**St. Lucie Village**

**ST. LUCIE COUNTY FLORIDA**

**TREASURE COAST CONNECTOR PUBLIC TRANSIT**

**Map Date: 11/6/2019**

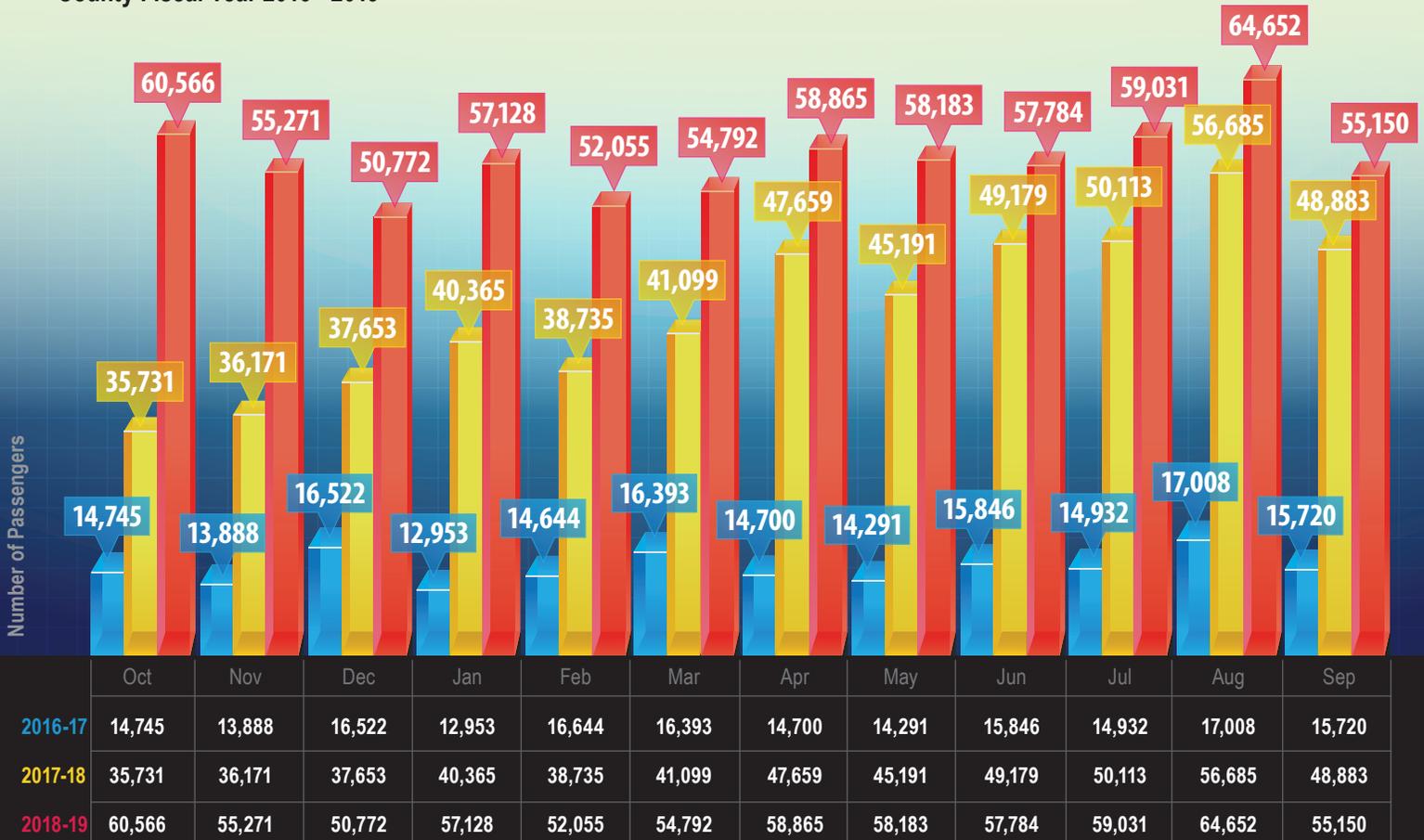
# PERFORMANCE METRICS

Our Transit System continues to operate at the **highest ridership levels** in County history, thanks to the continued support of the Florida Department of Transportation grant funding and the Board of County Commissioners.

## Fixed Route

The fixed route system has experienced an increase of **277%** since the implementation of the fare-free pilot!

**FIXED ROUTE** Monthly Ridership Comparison  
County Fiscal Year 2016 - 2019



Total Fixed Route Ridership for 2017 ▶ **181,642**  
 Total Fixed Route Ridership for 2018 ▶ **527,464**  
 Total Fixed Route Ridership for 2019 ▶ **684,249**

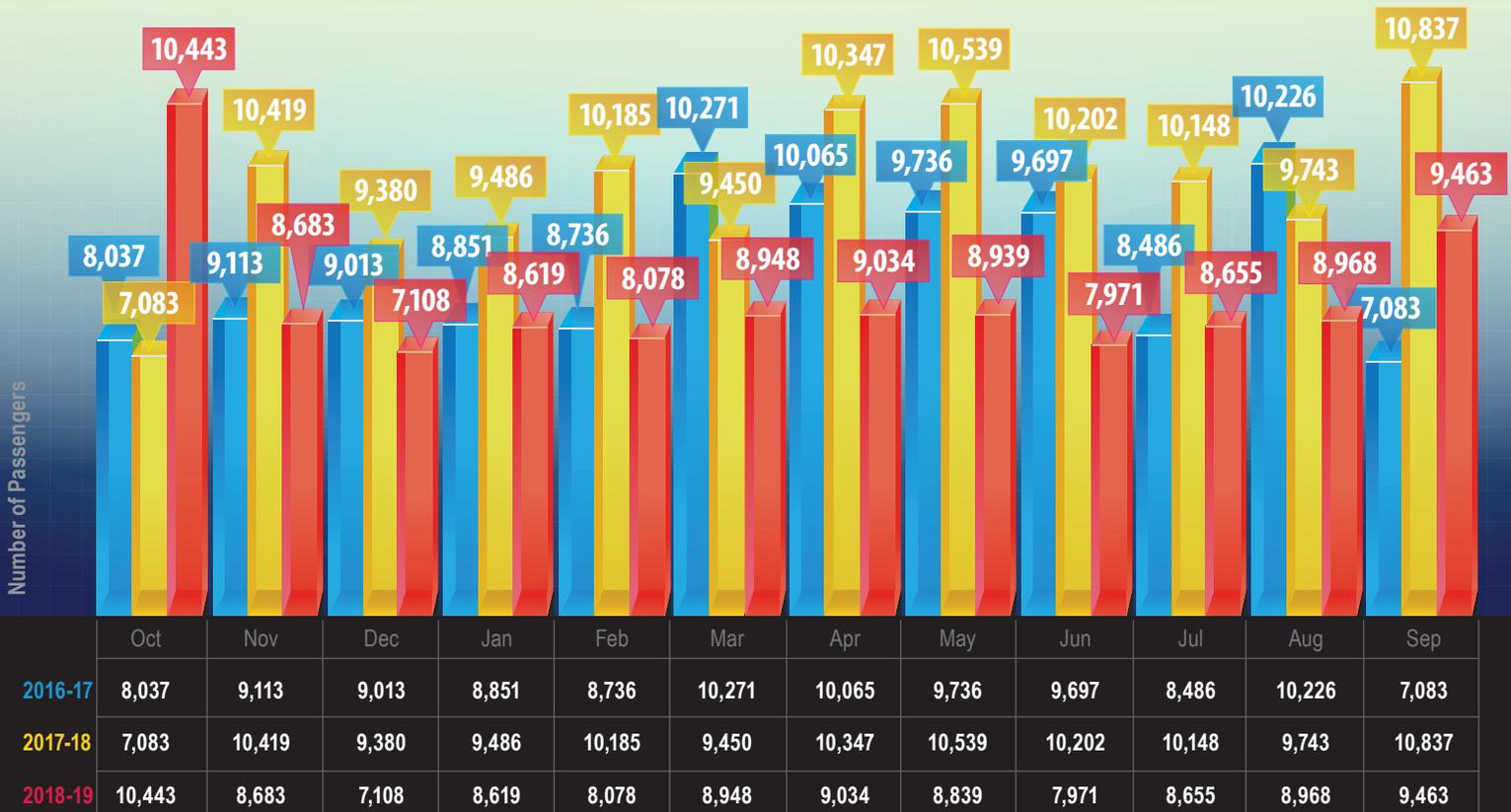
## Year-over-year increase of **30%** in unlinked passenger trips.

Staff attributes this increase to three primary factors: the demographic of transit-dependent residents within the county and the correlation with the fare-free pilot program, the continuation of expanded service hours and the significant public outreach efforts of staff.

# Demand Response

The two most important determinants of rider satisfaction with transit are service frequency and travel time. This is a challenge as the county's demand response services require a qualification process, a reservation, and, oftentimes, extended travel wait windows, whereas the fixed route offers a steady service of one-hour frequency. As such, the county demand response service has experienced a **4%** decrease in ridership since 2018.

## ON-DEMAND Monthly Ridership Comparison County Fiscal Year 2016 - 2019



Total Demand Response Ridership for 2017 ▶ **109,314**  
 Total Demand Response Ridership for 2018 ▶ **117,819**  
 Total Demand Response Ridership for 2019 ▶ **104,909**

# Direct Connect

In 2019, St. Lucie County reinstated the pilot program **Direct Connect**, an after-hours transportation program which provides trips for employment, education, and non-emergency healthcare during evenings and weekends when the county's fixed route and paratransit services are not in service or a client would otherwise not be served.

The second version of the pilot provided over **4,000 trips for 50 participants** who were able to obtain and/or retain employment due to the evenings and weekend services made available by the program. Service providers are contracted through the county with third-party registered taxi and car services.

# IMPROVING LIFE Through Mobility

Transit staff conducted a record-breaking amount of public outreach and travel training sessions throughout the community while collecting over 500 surveys! The County's Media Division created a social media campaign targeted for younger residents and produced specialized print collateral for the travel training sessions conducted by transit staff for the Summer of Success program.

## Student-Focused Routes

The Treasure Coast Connector and St. Lucie County Transit staff helped parents and students save time and money with student-focused routes. Parents were encouraged to skip crowded drop-off/pick-up lines and avoid inconvenient trips to school by having their student take advantage of the Treasure Coast Connector's free service. Local high school students enjoyed the freedom of more rider choices and destinations. College students have the ability to save money on gas and take advantage of extra study time by taking a fixed bus route to and from Indian River State College and Keiser University.



## Port St. Lucie Micro-Transit

A new, **FREE**, on-demand micro-transit service for residents in the southwestern portion of Port St. Lucie, called Treasure Coast Connector–ON DEMAND, launched on December 9, 2019. Similar to ride-hailing services, ON DEMAND uses a smartphone app for riders to schedule customized curb-to-curb trips in the Gatlin Road area of Port St. Lucie. A small, neighborhood-friendly van picks up riders and drops them off wherever they wish to travel within the defined pilot program area, including businesses and offices in Tradition and near Interstate 95 on Gatlin Boulevard. Areas being served include Becker Ridge, Paar Estates, Sawgrass Lakes, Crane Landing, Woodland Trails, Tulip Park, Rosser Reserve, Gatlin Pines, Whispering Pines, Newport Isles, and Tradition. Along the way, the shuttle may pick-up other passengers who also request a ride. The service conveniently accommodates people with disabilities.

This **FREE**, pilot program will operate for up to one year. If the program goes well, the service will expand and become a part of St. Lucie County Transit and the Treasure Coast Connector's transit options.



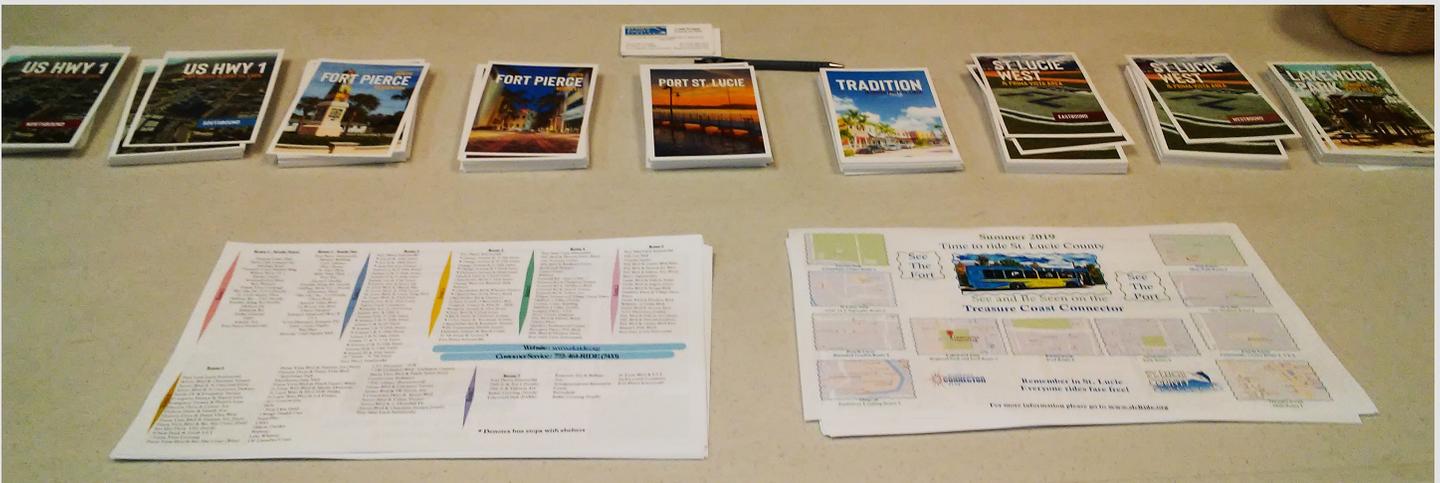
## Meeting Employer and Employee Needs

In preparation for a major business expansion, Convey Health Solutions moved from the Orange Blossom Business Center into the former Liberty Medical building on U.S. 1 in Port St. Lucie. Between the move and the expansion, Convey executives wanted to ensure that the 30+ employees who use the Treasure Coast Connector continued to have convenient access to the system. Convey enlisted the support of the Economic Development Council of St. Lucie County which worked with the Transit Division and the Council on Aging. Within a very short time, a stop on Route 1 was relocated to accommodate Convey's employee's needs.



## Summer of Success

During the Summer of Success, eligible youth attended Youth Employment Success Solutions (YESS) training where they learned skills to help them succeed in the workplace, including travel training from Transit staff. The County's Media Division created customized print collateral for the various bus routes in the county to provide travel options and connect participants to their internships.





## Fare-Free Analysis

During 2019, the Florida Department of Transportation funded a service analysis conducted by Cambridge Systematics, in close collaboration with Treasure Coast Connector (TCC) staff to summarize the potential benefits and concerns of continuing to operate a fare-free transit system after termination of the existing three-year pilot program. The current grant from the FDOT that funds the fare-free system expires August 31, 2020.

## Transit Development Plan

The Major Update to the Transit Development Plan (TDP) was adopted by the Board of County Commissioners on July 2, 2019 and endorsed by the St. Lucie Transportation Planning Organization on June 5, 2019 and serves as the guiding document for the County's transit system. This process facilitates a shared vision and ongoing collaboration for better services. The TDP is based on a 10-year planning horizon and was branded as "Bus Plus" to signify the new mobility paradigm of thinking outside of the bus and incorporating all aspects of mobility.

## Advocates for Additional Funding

The County continues to serve as the designated Community Transportation Coordinator by the Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged (FCTD). This designation enables funding allocations to St. Lucie to serve the needs of transportation disadvantaged (TD) residents. Annually, TCC staff attends TD Day on Capitol Hill to meet with legislative representatives to discuss challenges and opportunities for the program, provides updates at business meetings and participates in discretionary funding opportunities to develop innovative solutions.

# Upcoming Service Expansions and Capital Improvements

## 25<sup>th</sup> Street

In 2019, funding was allocated from the County's general fund and the Florida Department of Transportation to implement Route #8. Currently, St. Lucie County has only one north-south corridor bus route. The TDP recommends additional north-south routing along South 25<sup>th</sup> Street and NW Saint James Drive to provide continuous connectivity between the cities of Fort Pierce and Port St. Lucie. Lastly, the proposed new corridor route will relieve the existing U.S. 1 route which is reaching capacity.

## Transit Headquarters

The Transit Division completed Facility Needs Assessment as part of a feasibility study for the construction of a St. Lucie County based and operated Maintenance and Operations Facility. The assessment kicked off with a multi-agency meeting and included individual user group interviews. The report was completed in January 2019.

In the past six months, the Transit Division has applied for three separate competitive funding opportunities for the headquarters project, totaling approximately \$30 million. The total project cost is \$10-\$12 million. While we have not been awarded construction funds yet, we continue to pursue the various funding opportunities that the project could qualify for. Opportunities include Federal FTA-5339 grants, state appropriations, BOCC general fund budget requests, among others.





## St. Lucie County TRANSIT DIVISION



[SLCRide.org](http://SLCRide.org)



[TreasureCoastConnector.com](http://TreasureCoastConnector.com)



772-464-1777

