

Program Excellence Award for Outstanding Partnerships: Intergovernmental Cooperation

POPULATIONS 50,000 AND UNDER



JOHN R. MOORE, JR.; RICHARD E. COTTON; JOEY PRESTON; AND WILLIAM "HERBERT" THOMPSON

ICMA's Program Excellence Award for Intergovernmental Cooperation recognizes outstanding programs developed out of cooperative actions or strategic partnerships between government organizations. This year's award in the 50,000-and-under category goes to the following Anderson County, South Carolina, jurisdictions and their CAOs: the City of Anderson and John R. Moore, Jr., City Manager; the City of Clemson and City Administrator Richard E. Cotton; and the city of Central and William H. Thompson, City Manager, for the Clemson Area Transit 4U System.

In 1996, Clemson University loaned the city of Clemson, South Carolina (pop. 12,000), four small buses that it had previously used to shuttle students between outlying parking lots and the inner campus. Out of this loan, the Clemson Area Transit System (CATS) was born. CATS added two additional used buses to the fleet

and began transporting riders free of charge between the community and campus. In 2000, the adjoining municipalities of Central (population 3,500), and its resident university, South Wesleyan, saw the benefits of bringing the service to its community. With a \$200,000 commitment from Clemson University, \$25,000 from the town of Central, and \$680,000 of Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and South Carolina Department of Transportation funds, the cooperative endeavor expanded.

Ridership grew and service again expanded. For example, through private sponsorship, Night Cat was offered to provide late night and weekend service between student housing and Clemson's downtown area. By 2002, there were 14 buses, and ridership stood at nearly 900,400 passengers.

Meanwhile, nearby Anderson County was exploring ways to expand educational opportunities for young adults. County officials believed that providing transportation to points beyond the county would benefit not just students but all residents, who would enjoy increased access to shopping, jobs, health care providers, and cultural opportunities. County officials also recognized that the availability of public transportation would encourage low- and moderate-income families to further their education, thereby strengthening the area's economic base. As a large percentage of the area's population worked in the shrinking textiles industry, the benefits of linking laid-off workers with the training and educational offerings at local educational facilities, particularly Tri-County Technical College, were apparent. Advocates also argued that the county could highlight the proposed transportation system as well as its strong technical school system as a recruitment tool for new industry. Finally, a new bus system would provide more mobility for the county's growing senior population.

Because none of the existing transportation systems had the resources (buses and equipment) to provide the service that was envisioned, Anderson County obtained FTA funding and the new 4-University (4U) transit system began operations in January 2002 with three new buses equipped with handicap accessibility, bicycle racks, and geographic positioning systems. Like the CATS system, the 30-mile 4U system is offered free of charge. Within six months, the 4U ridership exceeded 6,000.

The 4U system continues to evolve and grow. The town of Pendleton has voted to contract with CATS, and three other municipalities have expressed interest in becoming part of the system. Discussions are under way to determine the feasibility of expanding service on the 4U route to Friday nights and Saturdays; in addition to providing transportation to recreational and cultural venues, this would offer park-and-ride opportunities for Clemson football games and other sporting events. A feasibility analysis and preliminary engineering designs also have been completed for a light-rail component.

The success of the partnership of Clemson Area Transit, two counties, five municipalities, four institutions of higher education, and state and federal agencies is testimony to the power of partnership and regional cooperation. Today, CATS and the 4U system offer area residents educational opportunities, access to jobs, improved quality of life, and hope for a better tomorrow. ■



CATS system riders prepare to board