1 DATA: GATHERING THE FACTS

The study's first major step was fact-gathering. Four different target-group surveys were completed, and additional data gathered. Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping data from Allegheny County was used to relate locations of employers and routes of existing transportation services.

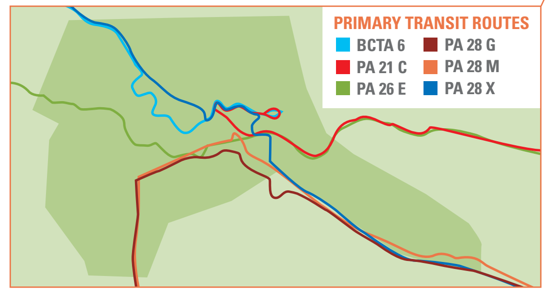
Businesses in the area say transportation is the number one barrier to hiring and retaining qualified workers.

COMPANIES AND JOBS BY INDUSTRY

BUSINESS TYPE	COUNT	JOBS
Higher Education	2	3,944
Hotels	12	347
Manufacturing	18	3,371
Offices	142	11,311
Retail Trade	235	7,657
Services	21	562
Wholesale Trade	48	873
Other	4	154
Total	483	28,219

Workers who don't use public transportation say there aren't bus stops near home or work, and bus schedules don't mesh with their work schedules.

Recent Port Authority schedule cuts make commuting to the study area more difficult than ever.



Wait times to transfer between buses at the IKEA stop are up to 28 minutes.

EMPLOYERS

The study looked at a total of 483 businesses in the area, finding that many require job schedules starting before 7 a.m., ending after 10 p.m., and involving weekends—important considerations for public transportation.

Most notable from the employer survey was that—in this busy and successful area just a few miles from Downtown Pittsburgh —30% of the surveyed businesses cited transportation as the most significant barrier to hiring and retaining qualified workers.

EMPLOYEES

394 employees of businesses in the study area were surveyed. 91% drive alone to work, 4.2% ride-share, and 4% use transit. Asked why they don't use transit more, employees cited the lack of a bus stop near home or work (53.1%), and bus and work schedules that don't mesh (21.4%).

BUS SERVICE (including on-board rider surveys)

There is considerable service to the area. It is provided by the Port Authority of Allegheny County and the Beaver County Transit Authority, with agreements allowing passengers to use both during a commute for the cost of a transfer. Eight routes—seven PAAC and one BCTA—were studied. In almost every case, service was significantly curtailed outside of traditional business hours.

Because the ability to transfer conveniently between buses is important for commuters, the study analyzed the level of coordination between a representative pair of routes: a principal trunk route (the PAAC's 28X "Airport Flyer") and one of its feeders (the 25A, which serves employment centers not directly accessible from stops on the 28X route). Wait times between trunk and feeder buses at the central IKEA stop were found to be up to 28 minutes—inconvenient for transferring.

Other problematic factors for commuters include a lack of sidewalks in the heavily-trafficked area, significant grade differences (for instance, steep hillsides) that make it difficult to walk between bus stops and workplaces, and bus shelters that provide little protection from the elements. Problematic for buses is the area's suburban development style, with many businesses located in cul-de-sacs at the end of long roads—for bus routes, that adds time and subtracts efficiency.

Toward the end of the study, a funding crisis forced a reduction in Port Authority service, with schedule cuts affecting several routes serving the study area. More cuts may be necessary if the crisis is not resolved. The cuts only worsen the current situation: now it's even more difficult for commuters to use traditional bus service.

SHUTTLES

Eleven shuttle services operate in the study area, most providing rides only to customers of their sponsors (a hospital, a technical school, several hotels, and several airport- and parking-related businesses), with no coordination between or among them.

Two ACTA- sponsored shuttles also serve commuters within the area. The shuttles are supported through the federal Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) program and contracted through the Port Authority-sponsored ACCESS Transportation Systems.

ACTA's Penn Center West Shuttle is a scheduled service carrying riders from the Parkway Center West complex to the West Busway Monday-Friday from 4:30-8 p.m. During morning and afternoon prime commuting times, the On-Demand Shuttle carries riders between the IKEA bus stop and requested destinations up to 1.5 miles away—for example, Bayer, FedEx Ground, and GlaxoSmithKline.

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The Airport Corridor Transportation Association (ACTA) is a non-profit Transportation Management Association located in the Robinson commercial area in Pittsburgh's western suburbs. ACTA works to optimize use of the transportation system in the Airport Corridor by supporting and implementing programs that increase travel options and foster responsible economic growth. ACTA members include area businesses, developers, building owners, stores, schools, hotels, local governments, and public entities that do business in the Corridor.

Commuting in the Corridor

A New Study Identifies Transportation Gaps in Pittsburgh's Airport Corridor and Proposes Sensible Solutions

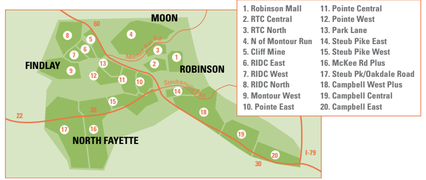
acta

INTRODUCTION

HOW CAN YOU HOLD A JOB IF YOU CAN'T GET TO WORK?

HOW CAN YOU RUN A BUSINESS IF YOUR EMPLOYEES CAN'T GET TO IT?

Jobs in Pittsburgh's "Airport Corridor" aren't just expanding; they're exploding. As more businesses move to the sprawling area—particularly (but not only) the Robinson/North Fayette commercial center—more employees are needed, and they need to get to work. Although most commute by car, many either choose to—or must—depend on public transportation.



1. Robinson Mall	11. Pointe Central
2. RTC Central	12. Pointe West
3. RTC North	13. Park Lane
4. N of Montour Run	14. Steub Pike East
5. Cliff Mine	15. Steub Pike West
6. RIDC East	16. McKee Rd Plus
7. RIDC West	17. Steub Pk/Oakdale Road
8. RIDC North	18. Campbell West Plus
9. Montour West	19. Campbell Central
10. Pointe East	20. Campbell East

For those people, the major resources for getting to the area are bus routes operated by the Port Authority of Allegheny County and the Beaver County Transit Authority. But once in the area, workers have limited options for traveling between bus stops and jobsites that can still be significant distances away—often a mile or more.

For some time, the Airport Corridor Transportation Association (ACTA) has heard anecdotal reports about employees having difficulty getting to work—and employers therefore having problems hiring and retaining people, particularly entry-level workers who don't own cars.

So, with funding from the federal Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) program, ACTA commissioned the *Study of Improved Shared Ride Transportation Services to the Robinson/North Fayette Employment Center*. The purpose: investigate the commute situation within the Corridor's busiest area, see if in fact there are gaps in the system—and, if so, recommend ways to fill the gaps.

To perform the study, ACTA engaged two experienced, well regarded firms, both based in Pittsburgh. Tripp Umbach implemented survey work for the study, and Linare Consulting was responsible for additional data-gathering plus analysis and recommendations.

This document is a summary of the study. For the full report, please visit **www.acta-pgh.org.**

CAREFUL ANALYSIS OF THE DATA LEADS TO SOME INESCAPABLE CONCLUSIONS

- *There is a substantial amount of bus service in the study area, mostly in the form of fixed-route service. Yet it's clear that current service doesn't fully meet the transportation needs of employees (or shoppers).*
- *There are some places within the study area where the remote locations of jobsites —typical of much suburban development—mean that bus service for employees is very poor.*
- *Some businesses with early shift starting times and late shift ending times are well served by early and late bus service, while others are not.*
- *Among gaps identified are a lack of schedule coordination among major bus routes and feeder routes, making it difficult to transfer.*
- *The area has few commuter amenities—including sidewalks and prescribed footpaths. Even the busiest bus shelters often have no sidewalk access, and they offer little protection from the weather.*

2 ANALYSIS: WHAT DO THE FACTS MEAN?

All these factors, the study finds, greatly compromise the ability of current transportation in the study area to meet the needs of workers —and also other users, such as shoppers and customers.

REVIEW: WHAT WORKS ELSEWHERE?

The study finds that other parts of the country, including suburban areas with issues similar to those in the study area, have successfully used flexible shared-ride service to help meet rider needs.

Most of the services cited are "demand-responsive transit"—DRT. DRT is by now a well-established and successful operating concept that can be implemented in several ways, most of which involve a reservation-scheduling-dispatch function so the service can respond to rider requests. Perhaps the most common example is "route deviation" DRT, in which the vehicle travels a well-defined path on a regular schedule, but deviates to accommodate rider requests within a zone around the path.

ACCESS, one Beaver County Transit Authority route, and the ACTA On-Demand Shuttle are the only services in the study area that incorporate aspects of demand-responsive transit.

The study also reviews transportation-supportive technologies in use across the country. A few of the technologies are used by transit operators serving the study area—for example, pre-trip traveler information systems providing route/fare information and trip planning (available through both the Port Authority and the BCTA). Others, if implemented in the study area, might help improve service. For example, computer-aided schedule and dispatch could allow a system like ACCESS, which now requires day-in-advance reservations, to respond to rider requests with far less advance notice—perhaps as little as 15 minutes.

***Demand-responsive transit**—flexible service that accommodates varying rider needs and requests—is successful elsewhere.*

3 RECOMMENDATIONS: BETTER WAYS TO GET TO WORK

The study's recommendations are straightforward and practical—and they have the potential to bring considerable benefit to employers and employees in the study area.

Converting a single traditional but route to demand-responsive mode could save $360,000 per year.

Incorporate demand-responsive transit (DRT) into the area's transportation mix.

Local businesses have varying work schedules that are not optimally served by traditional transit, so converting some routes to demand-responsive transit would be both efficient and effective. Routes and times could flex in response to specific needs in different parts of the study area.

The study suggests that ACCESS, which already has in place the central reservation/scheduling/dispatch system necessary for demand-responsive operation, might be used for the new demand-responsive routes—beginning with a pilot route.

For the pilot, the study nominated the Port Authority's 25D route, which was cut just as the study was being completed. However, other current routes are logical candidates, and the economics would be similar to those of the 25D. That route, the study says, cost the Port Authority approximately $98.95 per vehicle hour to operate. ACCESS, in contrast, has costs of approximately $41.03 per vehicle hour. Assuming the same number of service hours after a route conversion to demand-responsive mode, the Port Authority—which manages ACCESS—would see a savings of more than $360,000 per year (and riders would see improved service).

The study recommends that some of the savings be spent on customer communications, and on monitoring the progress of the new demand-responsive service.

If a pilot is successful, multiple other routes could be converted to demand-responsive mode.

Coordinate bus schedules to allow "timed transfers" in a place convenient for riders.

Timed transfers—predictable wait times between coordinated bus rides within a commute—can smooth commutes and encourage the use of public transportation. The Beaver County Transit Authority already uses timed transfers at its Transportation Center in Rochester, and the study recommends that they be implemented within the study area. A main transfer facility—including rider amenities like seating and shelter from the elements—should be located in the commercial area.

THE "BOTTOM LINE": it is currently difficult for many people to get to work in the study area, a situation with major implications for area businesses. However, there are potential solutions that are both practical and affordable. If those solutions are implemented thoughtfully and evaluated carefully, they could position Pittsburgh's Airport Corridor as a national model in helping people get to work.

GETTING AROUND IN THE AREA

The "mall sprawl" evident in the Robinson/North Fayette retail/entertainment/office area can make it difficult (and sometimes even dangerous) for pedestrians, cyclists, and even drivers to get around, and another report will soon propose practical solutions. ACTA's *Commercial Center Mobility Study*—funded by the Federal Highway Administration and PennDOT through the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission—has received extensive input from organizational and individual stakeholders, and is now formulating recommendations. Because many malls across the country have similar situations, the study's recommended solutions will be replicable elsewhere.

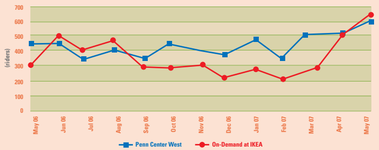
Improve pedestrian facilities.

The study recommends that ACTA work with land owners, developers, and other partners to improve pedestrian facilities such as sidewalks and walkways in the area. The lack of such facilities is more than an inconvenience; in some cases, it's also a safety issue.

The improvement effort is already underway; see the GETTING AROUND IN THE AREA box.

Expand ACTA's shuttle service.

The area's two ACTA-sponsored shuttles are growing steadily—a sign of need and of effectiveness. The study says the shuttles provide multiple opportunities for showing how non-traditional service can meet needs, and for accumulating data on the degree and types of rider needs in the area. The study recommends that ACTA work to obtain funding to expand its shuttle services.



ACTA should assume a lead role in implementing the study's recommendations.

Because, the study says, ACTA has a strong record in responding to worker transportation issues, and because ACTA regularly works with all stakeholders in the study area, ACTA is the logical organization to take on essential roles—including promotion, coordination, and facilitation —involved in implementing the study's recommendations.