



## Transportation Urgency In The Greater Rocky Mount And Eastern North Carolina Region With Proposed Solutions



**SOUTHERN EXPRESS**

June 20, 2024

### Executive Summary

The City of Rocky Mount, North Carolina, along with the entire region of Upper Coastal Plain Council of Governments have long recognized there is a need for intercity transportation options from the City of Raleigh, North Carolina, and Rocky Mount and extending throughout the entire region. The North Carolina Department of Transportation Transit Plan published in January 2024, also recognized the need for increased transportation options, especially in intercounty and intercity solutions.

Based on the needs found within that study, detailed below, and after conducting numerous meetings with local officials, Southern Express Inc. proposes that we come alongside the existing transit options to provide an additional route that will service the Raleigh and Rocky Mount communities. We propose providing a service that will run daily from Raleigh to Rocky Mount at 6 AM during peak travel times and return from Rocky Mount to Raleigh leaving at 5 PM each evening. By providing this transit option, commuters traveling for work, to and from the airport, and for medical appointments will now have a safe and affordable means to travel between these two cities. As needed, this service can expand to assist in other transit option times, to supply 24/7 transportation options for the cities served in Eastern NC.

From there, we recommend extending our additional service routes in year 2 and beyond utilizing a hub-and-spoke system. This will provide key transit options between primary cities in the areas that are currently underserved.

In order to secure funding for this service, our team is recommending that the City of Rocky Mount apply for the ConCPG Grants for this project along with other state and federal funding options as detailed below including CMAQ and S311(f) with others. We believe that our team is equipped to come alongside the City of Rocky Mount to help provide safe, reliable transportation for community members.



SOUTHERN EXPRESS Rocky Mount Transit White Paper Proposal 2

### History of Transit Options In and Around Rocky Mount, North Carolina



Rocky Mount Area Chamber of Commerce

Over the past several years, many entities, including the Rocky Mount Chamber of Commerce have acknowledged the need for additional transportation options in the area. This includes additional inter-county routes to provide safe and reliable transportation for community members to utilize during their daily work commute, medical appointments, travel to and from the airport in Raleigh, and more.

According to the 2023 NCDOT Study, it stated that "Population characteristics are an important factor in assessing a community's current and future public transportation needs. Growing communities need to evaluate and assess the range of mobility options provided, including transit, to determine whether future needs can continue to be met with current service levels. The ten-county study area and its 82 municipalities have a total population of 575,356 residents. Rocky Mount has a population of 54,309."

Specifically, there is a need to provide transportation options between Raleigh and Rocky Mount. Employers

in the area have been growing, including but not limited to Cummins, Pfizer, Honeywell, and more. The Rocky Mount Chamber of Commerce recognized, amongst other governmental agencies, a real need for transportation options when the North Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles announced their move from Raleigh to Rocky Mount in 2019. These employers all maintain large groups of employees who commute to work from Raleigh, NC, to Rocky Mount and would benefit from the availability of additional transit options and air quality would increase by taking all these single-driver vehicles off the road.

SOUTHERN EXPRESS Rocky Mount Transit White Paper Proposal 3

In addition to the need to provide transit options for daily commuters to and from work, Rocky Mount is also the home of North Carolina Wesleyan University.



With hundreds of students, including those here with foreign student visas, without a car or in some cases a valid United States Driver License, there is considerable need to provide daily commute from Raleigh to the University as well.

Southern Express Inc. became a member of the Rocky Mount Chamber of Commerce, and immediately found out about the need for transportation options for this entire area, and expanding out from there. Since becoming a member, Southern Express, Inc. has been on a fact-finding mission to see what the needs could be, and where and how they could assist.

Over the past several months, meetings have been held with the City of Rocky Mount, the Department of Motor Vehicles, North Carolina Wesleyan University, Honeywell and Cummins Engine, to name a few. In addition, Southern Express Inc. has held meetings with the Haliwa-Sapponi Indian Tribe to learn more about the needs within their community. It came to light that tribal members would benefit from reliable transit options to get to work in Rocky Mount, along with transportation options to Raleigh to connect with the airport, or for medical or other meetings in Raleigh.



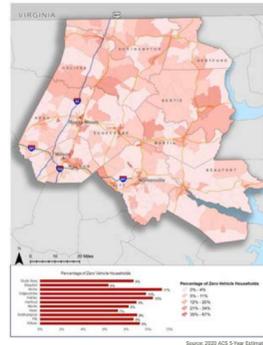
SOUTHERN EXPRESS Rocky Mount Transit White Paper Proposal 4

### North Carolina Department of Transportation Transit Study of Rocky Mount, Wilson and Greenville



An extensive study was conducted by the North Carolina Department of Transit in 2023. Here we have highlighted a several key facts from the 2023 NCDOT Study that make it clear there is a need for additional transit between cities in the area studied.

In the map to the right, pulled from page 32 and 33 of the 2023 NCDOT Study, you can see the distribution of households that have no vehicle. "The highest concentrations are in the outskirts of the larger urbanized areas, such as Greenville and Rocky Mount." In addition, the study found that within the area studied 32.3% of households only had 1 vehicle available. This area would benefit directly from the availability of additional reliable transit opportunities given this barrier to mobility.



SOUTHERN EXPRESS Rocky Mount Transit White Paper Proposal 5



When COVID-19 hit, transit agencies had to reduce their services due to capacity restrictions, and in a lot of cases, a lack of drivers. Now that more people are traveling, agencies have seen an increase in ridership. For example, at least one agency was looking to add grocery store trips in July 2023. Grocery store trips used to take place on Saturdays, but they were discontinued during COVID-19. Transit agencies have primarily been providing medical and employment trips, but some participants mentioned that they would like to provide more leisure trips during evenings and on weekends. Evening trips during evenings and on weekends. Evening trips also serve second-shift employment trips." [page 105]

In summary, as the 2023 NCDOT study was conducted it was found that "requests for improved transit services have been voiced. While service seems satisfactory across the study area, many noted that expanding service cover is essential. There are destinations of regional significance that transit users may have a hard time accessing when located across county lines. Some transit agencies are experimenting or would like to experiment with micro transit in providing more efficient service than demand response or fixed route. Moreover, service hours have also been a hindrance to providing service to customers with specific trip purposes such as employment trips, in particular, evenings and weekends." [page 163]

SOUTHERN EXPRESS Rocky Mount Transit White Paper Proposal 11

Our entire team is excited about the opportunity to expand our services into these key areas, meeting a need that has been present within the community for years.



We believe that community members and employees who commute daily to these areas, will benefit directly from these offerings. We will work with community leaders and other stakeholders to continually review the needs of the community and plan to expand to meet those in the coming years.



SOUTHERN EXPRESS Rocky Mount Transit White Paper Proposal 15



Let us get you to the finish line.