

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The Capital Area Transit System (CATS) operates transit service across the Baton Rouge, Louisiana Region. In addition to their existing 25 fixed bus routes and CATS On Demand paratransit service for persons with disabilities, CATS recently implemented Lynx microtransit in the city of Baker. CATS is also implementing new Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) along the Plank-Nicholson corridor in scheduled to begin service in early 2025.

CATS served 2.5 million passengers in 2019 (pre-pandemic) and 1.2 million passengers in 2021.

To ensure effective delivery of new and existing services, CATS developed a Comprehensive Operational Assessment (COA) to serve as a roadmap over the next ten years. The 2022 COA, *SmartCATS – A Blueprint for Stronger Communities*, was completed in October 2022 and evaluated existing services and determined their effectiveness based on rider needs and destinations, identified bottlenecks in the network that could impact on-time performance, considered funding mechanisms, and provided a set of recommendations to improve transit service.

The COA process included three key components – public outreach, existing conditions assessment, and final recommendations. Additionally, a facilities assessment, operations assessment, technology assessment, a financial plan, and future service integration evaluation were developed as part of the COA. These documents are provided in detail in the COA Supplemental Report.

# 2. PUBLIC OUTREACH

The purpose of public outreach for the Capital Area Transit System (CATS) Comprehensive Operational Analysis (COA) was to gather feedback, document transit concerns and transportation needs, and to envision goals for the future of CATS.

## 2.1. Outreach Activity

The SmartCATS outreach effort engaged people from across the region to ensure participation from a wide cross section of the community. Outreach methods included website updates, email blasts, social media posts, and paper flyers on buses and in common spaces throughout the CATS network. Outreach efforts included local community events, organized engagement efforts at CATS bus route terminals, and



surveys. A public open house was also hosted by CATS at the Main Library to present COA findings and recommendations for public feedback.

## **2.2. Feedback**

CATS riders, both young and old, indicated that they would prefer a phone app for route information, ticketing, and other transit-related activities. People who do not currently ride but showed an interest in using CATS service included professionals who are interested in transforming long commutes into a more productive and environmentally sustainable experience through a bus service.

## **3. EXISTING CONDITIONS**

The project team evaluated demographic data and travel characteristic data across Baton Rouge to establish a foundation for recommendations based on the strengths and weaknesses of the CATS system. To achieve this, the project team analyzed transit propensity among different demographic measures (income level, race and ethnicity, housing type) across different geographic areas of Baton Rouge. This information, along with employment data, was used to understand ridership patterns, and where service could change or improve. The project team also compared CATS service and performance to other peer agencies to understand how well CATS performs compared to its peer agencies.

## **4. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The project team developed a set of recommendations that incorporate public input, reflect data-based analyses, and effectively utilize tax dollars. The recommendations provide a tool for CATS to use to improve service and implement system-wide enhancements. All recommendations, details, including scenario development and analysis can be found in the COA Final Recommendations. Recommendation highlights include:

- Reduce size of network to improve service on core routes.
- Reduce travel times among key areas by 13% to 15% with the recommended network.
- Add four new bus routes – Plank-Nicholson BRT, Routes 25, 56, and 61.
- Increase the number of 30-minute frequency routes from four to six routes.