

## **DRAFT – For Internal Use**

### **New Connections in Warren and Washington Counties**

#### **Overview**

The Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA) is the region's mobility manager with a menu of services that connect people to economic opportunities. CDTA has been asked to consider an expansion of its transportation district to include the Greater Glens Falls Transit (GGFT), with appropriate service agreements with communities in Warren and Washington Counties. This expansion would bring the GGFT and its resources under CDTA's administrative umbrella. Services currently provided would be maintained with new connections provided by CDTA throughout the expanded area. This paper provides information about the two organizations and outlines how this process can be advanced.

#### **Background on GGFT**

GGFT is an established, well managed municipal system. It operates as a department within the City of Glens Falls; GGFT's Transportation Director is a city employee who reports directly to the Mayor of Glens Falls. The GGFT system was established in 1984, and includes fixed route, seasonal trolley, and paratransit services. The system connects Glens Falls, Queensbury, South Glens Falls, Lake George, Hudson Falls, Kingsbury, Fort Edward, and Moreau. Service is available Monday through Saturday. GGFT owns one facility, 18 vehicles and employs 18 people (this number grows to 40 during summer season), most of whom work in operations.

Total annual ridership (pre-COVID) was 330,000. Of the total, 110,000 rides (34%) are taken on the seasonal trolley service that connects Glens Falls and Lake George. The pandemic has had a significant impact on ridership, which is currently about 60% of what it was before the pandemic began.

The GGFT system is in a good financial situation. The total operating budget in 2021 was \$2.1 million. Federal Transit Administration funds (5307) total \$858,000 (41%), state operating assistance totals \$758,000 (37%) and customer fares total \$250,000 (12%). The City of Glens Falls, the Town of Queensbury and several other municipalities contribute a local share towards the operation of the system, totaling \$173,000 (8%). Advertising and special programs account for the remainder of system revenue.

Like most transit systems, salaries, wages and benefits make up the majority of GGFT's operating costs. Of the \$2.1 million spending plan, approximately 77% is allocated to wages and benefits. The three major cost drivers are wages, health care and retirement. The only other significant costs are for fuel, which totals \$250,000, and insurance, which totals \$50,000. The remaining costs are normal business expenses, ranging from parts, printing and advertising.

#### **Background on CDTA**

The CDTA service area includes Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga and Schenectady counties. Montgomery County is expected to join CDTA's service area in mid-late 2022. CDTA is a public authority, created in 1970 to develop transportation solutions throughout the service area. CDTA is governed by a Board of Directors who are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the State Senate. CDTA provides a full menu of mobility options, including, fixed route service, Bus Rapid Transit and paratransit service (STAR). The menu also includes a bike share program, an electric scooter program, and an on-demand service (FLEX). The menu is tied together by an integrated fare payment system.

CDTA owns 250 vehicles and five facilities (including Rensselaer Rail Station and the Saratoga Springs Train Station). Total ridership on all modes is about 16 million (pre-pandemic). Emerging from the pandemic, ridership is 70% of what it was in early 2020. Service is available seven days per week with trunk routes operating from early in the morning until midnight. Trunk routes serve most customers, with neighborhood/connector services supporting the trunks routes. Seasonal services are offered to local attractions, parks, and recreation centers. A fleet of trolley vehicles are used for most seasonal services. Over the past few years, new services (bikes, scooters and FLEX on demand) have become options for people to move more seamlessly.

A critical component of CDTA's success is its Universal Access program (UA). The UA program allows colleges and major employers to provide students and employees with free access to the CDTA system. This program accounts for 30% of all ridership. CDTA has developed an array of technology tools to make using the system easier; these tools provide customers with advanced fare payment systems and vehicle location information. A mobility as a service initiative will integrate these choices into a single convenient, common platform for payment and customer information across all modes.

The CDTA operating plan for FY 2022-23 is \$115 million. About 70% of all spending is allocated to wages and benefits. Close to 750 people work at CDTA with the majority in operations (bus operators and maintenance personnel). About 90 people are employed in management positions, providing accounting, human resources, planning, safety, facilities, IT, communications, and business development expertise. A Chief Executive Officer is responsible for day-to-day operations and is charged with implementing a strategic direction. The Board of Directors develop plans and a vision to guide the long-term development of the organization.

### **The Concept**

Combining the resources of CDTA and GGFT will result in a dynamic mobility company that stretches from Albany and Saratoga to Warren and Washington Counties. It will bridge the gap between the two systems, specifically from the areas of South Glens Falls/Fort Edward/Saratoga Springs, providing connections throughout the expanded region. Services will be stronger and customer support features will be improved. New mobility options will spread, and alternative fuel vehicles will be encouraged.

New connections will be developed – an example is the Route 9 corridor between Glens Falls, South Glens Falls, Moreau and Saratoga Springs. Bikes, scooters and trolley services will be expanded, and connections to employment locations and to new housing and commercial developments will be improved. Innovative opportunities will be developed as the combined organization moves people throughout the region.

The new organization will be equipped with resources to work on an innovative agenda of activities. The combined strength of GGFT and CDTA will provide for economies of scale in operations, finance, human resources, technology, planning and infrastructure. Improvements will be evident in recruitment and training, grants management and advocacy. Business development and community outreach will be more vibrant as the new organization deepens its footprint, its effectiveness, and its ability to connect people to economic opportunity.

### **The Process**

Bringing the two organizations makes good business sense and it will result in more service for communities throughout the expanded area. Over the long term, the GGFT would cease to exist. Their resources and employees would become part of CDTA. To ensure a seamless transition,

there will be a period where GGFT services operate exactly as they do now, under the administration of CDTA. The current GGFT management team would stay in place and a smooth transition will be a top priority. Labor issues will need to be resolved (CSEA and ATU), and service standards and expectations will need to be considered (hours of operation, frequency of services). It is expected that the expanded CDTA mobility menu will be introduced throughout Warren and Washington County to supplement existing service (bikes, scooters, trolley services, FLEX on Demand).

Warren County would become a member of CDTA (joining Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga, and Schenectady counties; and soon Montgomery County). Washington County communities will be served and supported with operating agreements. This will require a resolution of the Warren County Legislature along with the provision of  $\frac{1}{4}$  of one percent (0.0025) of all mortgage transactions over \$10,000 (Mortgage Recording Tax). The MRT could become revenue or a revenue match for the local operating agreements (Glens Falls, Queensbury and other communities).