

Mobility in Greenville County, SC

A study of public transit and health and human services transportation with recommendations for improvement

Study Task Force

Chip Bentley, *Appalachian Council of Governments, Planning & Economic Development Services Director*

Keith Brockington, *Greenville County Department of Planning and Code Compliance, GPATS | Greenville-Pickens Area Transportation Study, Transportation Planning Manager*

David Burgess, *SCDOT, Office of Public Transit, Regional Planning Manager*

John Cocciolone, *Greenville County Disabilities and Special Needs Board, Executive Director*

John Concklin, *United Way of Greenville County, Impact Strategy and Investment Manager*

Lance Estep, *Appalachian Council of Governments, Transportation Planner*

Keith Frazier, *Greenville County Department of Social Services, County Director*

Donna Harrington, *Hispanic Alliance, Capacity Development/VISTA AmeriCorp*

Skip Limbaker, *Greenville County Schools, Planning and Demographics*

Frank Mansbach, *Bike Walk Greenville, Executive Director*

Addy Matney, *Piedmont Health Foundation, Board Chair*

Andrea Smith, *Senior Action, Executive Director*

Walker Smith, *Bon Secours St. Francis Health System, Director of Advocacy and Community Affairs*

Jennifer Snow, *Greenville Health System, Director of Accountable Communities*

Grant Sparks, *Greenlink, Transit Planner*

Gaye Sprague, *Piedmont Health Foundation, Board of Directors, Greenville City Council, Sprague and Sprague Consulting Engineers*

Mike Teachey, *Greenville CAN, Lead Facilitator*

Kathy Vass, *Greenlink, Marketing and Program Specialist*

Sandra Yudice, *County of Greenville, Greenville County Economic Development Corporation, Assistant to the County Administrator*

Background

The lack of a comprehensive transportation system in Greenville County, SC, has long been cited by health and human service agency directors, employers, and community leaders as a barrier to residents' access to health care, employment, education, recreation and more. In early 2015, the Piedmont Health Foundation launched a study of public transit and health and human services transportation to better understand mobility in the community and to identify ways to increase residents' ability to travel in Greenville County.

With the technical support of a consultant team from CDM Smith and Arnett Muldrow and Associates; the guidance of a task force of local planners, transportation providers, and stakeholders; and financial support from local sponsors, the Piedmont Health Foundation assessed the need and transit use among residents, inventoried existing transportation services, and considered underlying infrastructure and existing plans. Based on evidence, the task force then determined recommendations to improve mobility in the community.

Methodology

Researchers conducted the study using a mixed methodology, gathering qualitative data from residents and planners coupled with quantitative analysis using descriptive statistics.

Transportation provider survey. More than a dozen transportation providers — public transit, nonprofit health and human service agencies, for-profit transportation companies and taxi services — shared information through a transportation survey on their fleet, scheduling systems, ridership and day-to-day operational functions. CDM Smith made site visits to four key providers to observe their operations.

Focus groups. In May 2015, CDM Smith and Arnett Muldrow and Associates conducted 12 focus groups to solicit input from residents on their ability to travel in Greenville County without a car. More than 200 people participated. Focus groups took place in different areas of the county from Slater to West Greenville to Fountain Inn, and with various stakeholder groups, from older adults to people with mental illness to the unemployed.



December 2015

The Piedmont Health Foundation is a private, philanthropic foundation in Greenville, South Carolina. Our mission is to improve health in Greenville County by identifying critical issues, catalyzing community action, and supporting organizations' health related programs.

Community Survey Locations

A Child's Haven
Able SC
AccessHealth Greenville County
Allen Temple CDC
Alston Wilkes Society
Bike Walk Greenville
Bon Secours St. Francis Health System
Center for Developmental Services
Center for Community Services (Fountain Inn)
City of Greenville
Communities in Schools
County of Greenville
Covenant United Methodist Church
Freetown Neighborhood Association
Furman University
GAHN
God's Pantry (throughout Greenville County)
Greenville Free Medical Clinic
Greenlink
Greenville CAN
Greenville City Councilwoman Amy Ryberg Doyle
Greenville County Disabilities and Special Needs Board
Greenville County Health Department
Greenville County Library System
Greenville County Redevelopment Authority
Greenville County DSS
Greenville Health System
Greenville Literacy Association, Inc.
Greenville Mental Health Center
Greer Community Ministries
Harvest Hope Food Bank - Greenville
Hispanic Alliance
John Knox Presbyterian Church
Meals on Wheels
Meyer Center for Special Children
Miracle Hill Ministries
New Horizon Family Health Services
Nicholtown Neighborhood Association
North Greenville Crisis Ministry
Pendleton Place for Children & Families
Phillis Wheatley Association
Phoenix Center
Roger C Peace Rehabilitation Hospital
Safe Harbor
SC Works
Senior Action
SHARE
Sterling Neighborhood Association
Snails
Taylors Free Medical Clinic
The Salvation Army
Triune Mercy Center
United Ministries
Urban League of the Upstate

Community survey. From late June to mid-July 2015, the researchers explored transportation experiences and ideas for improvement among residents through a community survey. The survey — developed based on findings from the focus groups — was available online and on paper. Community partner organizations, the City of Greenville, the County of Greenville, and the Greenville County Library System assisted with the distribution of the online survey. In addition, the Piedmont Health Foundation distributed paper surveys to more than 50 community organizations for dissemination to their clients and patients. The Greenville News, WYFF News 4, and 107.3 JAMZ promoted the survey resulting in an impressive response: 3,527 surveys were completed.

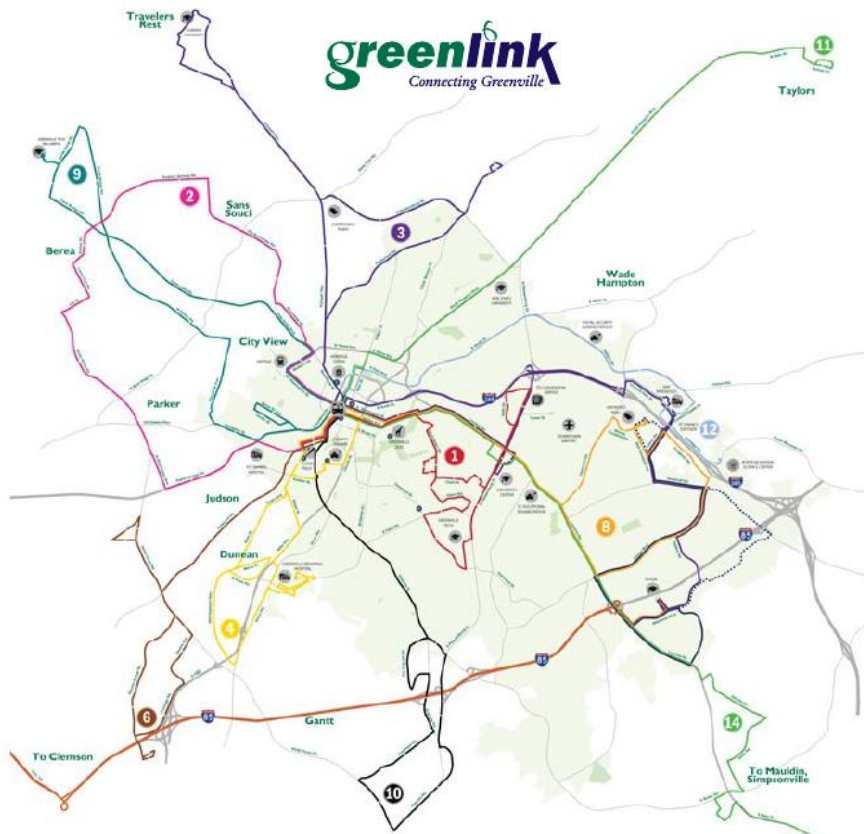
Review of existing plans, infrastructure and demographics. The consultant team reviewed recent plans from Greenville County, the six municipalities, and Greenlink (the public transit agency serving Greenville County) to determine their goals for public transit, infrastructure to support multimodal transportation, and future growth. The researchers also examined current sidewalks and trails, population density, and land use to highlight areas with potential for use of multimodal transportation and areas that would present challenges.

Findings

Community Input. Several themes emerged from the focus groups and 3,500+ community surveys.

- Lack of transportation is a primary barrier to economic success.
- Quality of life — especially for older adults and people with disabilities — is significantly impacted by lack of mobility.
- Car ownership is not necessarily an indicator of mobility. Older adults reported no longer being able to use their cars because of changes in health. People with low incomes reported that they frequently cannot afford gas or repairs to their cars.
- Residents appreciate improvements to the transit system and to sidewalks and trails, but there is an urgency for additional mobility options. Greenlink users expressed the need for longer hours of operation and lamented the limited geographic service area and the one-hour wait times. The combination of all these issues makes it difficult or impossible to meet residents' mobility needs.
- Respondents desire a transportation system and mobility infrastructure that are as forward thinking and innovative as other developments in the area, such as our parks systems, downtowns, and business and industry.

Existing services. Fourteen service providers — including nonprofit organizations, for profit companies, public agencies, and a taxi company as well as Greenlink — responded to a transportation provider survey. Geography and demographics



Greenlink's fixed route and paratransit service operates Monday through Friday from 5:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. and Saturday from 8:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. with one hour headways (wait times between buses). Fares are \$1.50 for regular passengers, \$1.25 for youth, and 75 cents for seniors and passengers with disabilities. Paratransit is available for people with disabilities riding within 3/4-mile of a fixed route and costs \$3.

Legend

- 1 Greenville Zoo - Cleveland Park - Greenville Tech - University Center
- 2 Pendleton Street - Easley Bridge Road - Wal-Mart, White Horse Road - Old Buncombe Road
- 3 Heritage Green - Cherrydale Point - Furman University - Columbia Farms
- 4 West End - Falls Park - Greenville Memorial Hospital - K-mart, Mills Ave - Greenville County Square
- 5 West End - Falls Park - Anderson Road - Welcome Elementary - Grove Station Apartments
- 6 Haywood Mall - Embassy Suites - Verdae Market - Laurens Road - SC Voc Rehab
- 7 Amtrak Station - Charter Legacy - Greenville Tech NW Campus - SHARE - Birnie/Gower
- 8 Augusta Street - Augusta Road - Home Depot - S Pleasantburg
- 9 Wade Hampton Blvd - Bob Jones University - Wal-Mart, Taylors - Spring Grove Apartments
- 10 Overbrook - GHS Patewood - St. Francis Eastside - ITT-Tech
- 11 University Center - Mauldin Cultural Center - First Baptist, Mauldin - Bi-Lo, Mauldin, Wal-Mart, Grandview, Simpsonville - Hillcrest Hospital
- 12 Clemson Commuter
- 13 Clemson Connector
- 14 CU-CAR - St. Francis Shuttle

served were examined, as were hours of operation and eligibility requirements. This analysis showed that there is both overlap, suggesting multiple vehicles are traveling in the same areas of the county, as well as significant gaps for individuals in need of assistance but ineligible for a particular program and outside of Greenlink's service area. Furthermore, Greenlink currently lacks stop-level data that would describe numbers of riders who board and exit at each stop by day and time. This makes it extremely challenging for Greenlink to plan for service changes or expansions to effectively meet residents' needs.

Infrastructure and land use. An analysis of existing sidewalk and trail inventories, land use and population densities indicated that most of Greenville County is built in a way that makes use of fixed route transit service a challenge at best. Of course, many parts of Greenville County remain rural, but suburban developments are disconnected from one another and lack sidewalks, meaning it is difficult for a fixed route bus to efficiently serve the area or for a rider to access the bus. Furthermore, the vast majority of Greenlink stops are not compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, meaning people with mobility or other impairments cannot access the stops or board or disembark from buses, thus requiring users to ride a paratransit van, which is far more costly.

Existing plans. The majority of our local Comprehensive Plans, Long Range Transportation Plans, and other planning and visioning documents envision a future in which pedestrian accessibility and connectivity between neighborhoods and

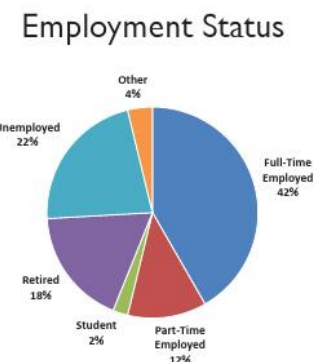
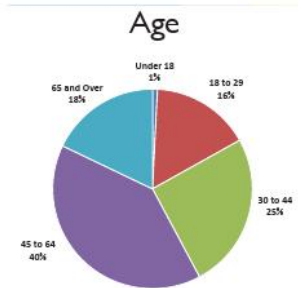
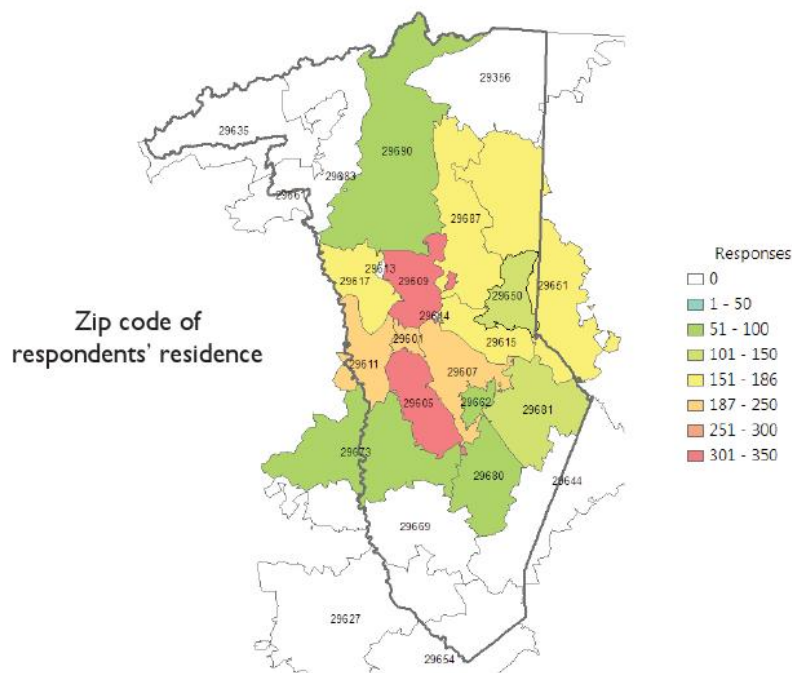


The majority of Greenlink stops are inaccessible to wheelchair users, lacking sidewalks or an adequate surface to board and disembark.

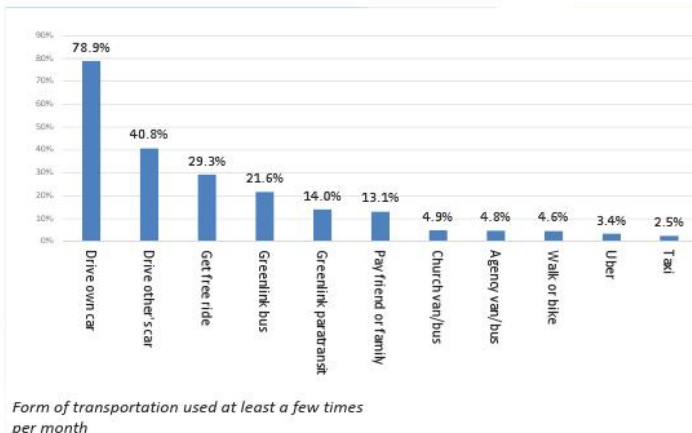
communities are made possible through infrastructure such as sidewalks, bike lanes, considerations for buses and more. In other words, communities should be built in ways that promote the use of multimodal transportation. Turning these visions into reality, however, depends upon opportunities being available, support for developers to pursue these opportunities (including incentives and requirements) and the decisions made by planning commissions and local elected bodies. As such, some recent developments in the area are good examples of multimodal design, such as changes in downtown Travelers Rest, while others represent missed opportunities.

Community Survey Results

- 1 Responses to the community survey were demographically diverse.** During the three week survey period, 3,527 individuals throughout Greenville County responded online (47%) and on paper (53%). Ninety-five percent of surveys were completed in English and 5% in Spanish, and 61% were female. Ten percent of respondents reported having a disability or health condition that prevents them from driving a car.

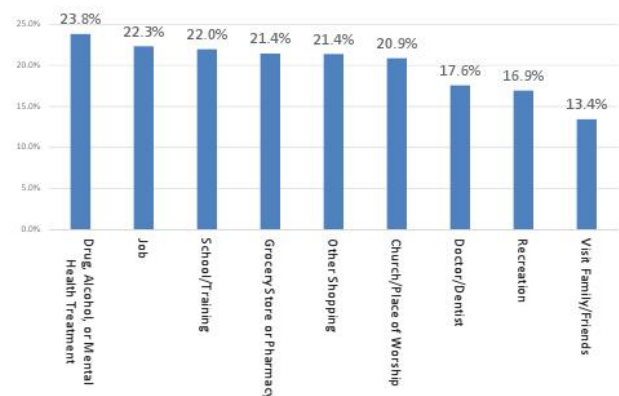


- 2 Respondents use a variety of modes of travel in Greenville County**



- 3 Yet mobility is still an issue for many residents**

Do you ever have trouble getting to any of these places?



Excluding "does not apply to me" responses

3 Car ownership does not equate mobility

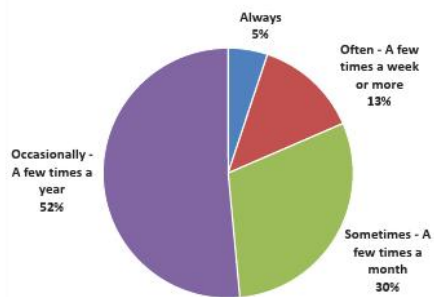
Do you own a car?

- Yes - 75.4% (2,380)
- No - 24.6% (776)

Are you ever unable to drive your car because you can't afford repairs or gasoline?

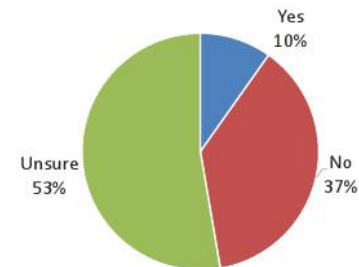
- Yes - 24% (569)
- No - 76% (1,802)

How often are you unable to drive because you can't afford it?

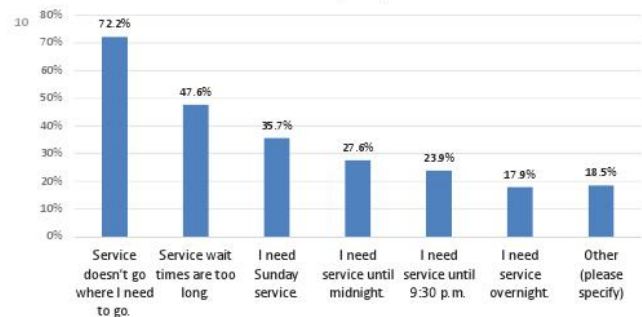


4 Greenlink does not meet most residents' mobility needs

Does the current bus schedule meet your needs?



If no, why not?

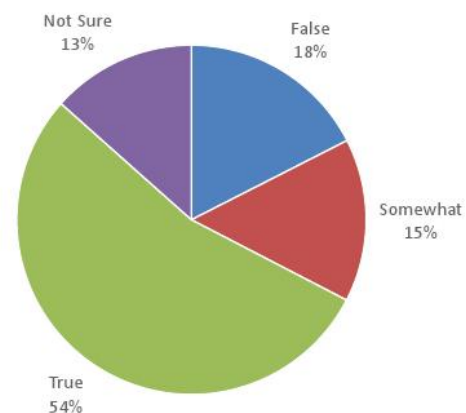


5 Transportation is fundamental to quality of life and success in Greenville County

Percentage of respondents affirming the statement:

- Lack of transportation impacts my day-to-day life - 23%
- I would be better off if transportation wasn't a problem for me - 31%
- Most people I know have trouble with transportation and going where they need - 24%
- People with disabilities have few options for transportation - 26% (34% not sure)
- People must have their own cars to get around effectively in Greenville County - 55%

Greenville County would be a better place if people could travel without their own cars





Mobility is not just about cars or transit. Underlying infrastructure to support connectivity is essential. Top: a bus shelter in Nicholtown in the City of Greenville is not connected to the sidewalk behind it, meaning a wheelchair user cannot use this stop. Middle: this bus stop in Mauldin is disconnected from the surrounding businesses and neighborhoods. Users must walk and wait in the grass. Right: Monarch Elementary School is located in Simpsonville on Five Forks Road in the middle of several subdivisions housing school-aged families. But a lack of sidewalks in the neighborhoods or on the main road as well as a lack of turn lanes lead to severe congestion as students are driven to school.



Conclusions

Improving mobility of those who do not drive their own cars — whether because of disability, income, or choice — is more complex than simply adding more buses or more hours of transit operation. To increase mobility in the community in a manner that is far-reaching, comprehensive, and sustainable takes a multipronged approach.

The task force, with the support of our study consultants, identified four areas that require attention in order to improve mobility in Greenville County.

Planning and Infrastructure. In order to have a transportation system that is effective, efficient, sustainable and accessible, the infrastructure on which it operates must support it. This includes the roads on which transit drives and how it connects with the residential and commercial areas and the people it serves. There are a variety of entities responsible for this infrastructure, such as municipal and county government, SCDOT, USDOT, and private developers. By strengthening lines of communication and coordination between these parties and Greenlink and by including forms of transportation other than cars in infrastructure improvements and development, Greenville County residents can experience increased mobility.

Public Transit. Greenlink already provides 1.3 million rides per year in Greenville County on its 15 fixed routes and paratransit vans. But this study found that many transportation needs are unmet, and “choice” riders are not opting to use public transit because of service limitations.

By first bolstering Greenlink’s planning capacity, the system can better design services to cost-effectively meet the public’s needs. Then, with service expansion based on

current and anticipated demand, innovations in service methods, and with adequate financial support, Greenlink can improve mobility.

Health and Human Services. Greenville County has dozens of transportation services provided by nonprofits, businesses, and volunteers, but because they all have different funding sources, scheduling systems, and eligibility requirements, they are both duplicative and unable to meet the vast need in the community. By better coordinating these disparate services, we can make the most of available assets to improve mobility.

Funding. Providing transportation – whether through fixed route bus service, on-demand human service programs, or even volunteer ride networks – is a costly endeavor. Certainly, by maximizing resources and developing services based on clear needs and opportunities, transportation can be provided in a more cost-effective manner. Nonetheless, it takes funding to support mobility throughout Greenville County. This investment reaps economic development through connections with jobs, education and retail, health care in physicians' offices rather than emergency departments, and improved access to destinations for tourists and consumers.

The findings of the study and the input of the task force members and community leaders shape a *vision for mobility that is:*

Accessible, allowing people throughout Greenville County to get where they need to go, regardless of their physical, mental, or cognitive limitations.

Cost-effective, for both the user and the taxpayer. The best and most appropriate tool that avoids duplication should be pursued. Can strong public transit reduce use of more costly paratransit or Medicaid rides? How can transit get people to work so they need less support from governmental programs?

Reliable, with reduced wait times for fixed route service and reduced call ahead time for demand-response services.

Coordinated and connected, making it easier for residents to find mobility options that best meet their needs, establishing connections between agencies, and serving major destinations and those who most need to access those destinations.

Systemic, with coordination between planning, public works, and transit in such a way that infrastructure supports mobility and land use promotes connectivity and improves air quality.

Recommendations

The Piedmont Health Foundation along with its partners serving on the study task force recommend the following tactics for improving mobility in Greenville County.

Planning and Infrastructure

- Develop a process for coordination and communication between planning, public works, and transit agencies
- Conduct an inventory of existing sidewalks, trails, bike lanes, and bus stops to determine their conditions with the goal of improving their accessibility and connectivity
- Support development in a manner that is consistent with local comprehensive plans, including future land use plans

Public Transit

- Make Greenlink as efficient as possible by completing an operational analysis in order to document which routes and stops are well-used and which are not, and develop a Transit Master Plan to retool service to better serve the community
- Reduce wait times and expand service hours and geography, potentially using innovations in service such as call-a-ride, checkpoint, or flexible routes
- Engage new riders through cross-marketing in parks and by offering shuttle services to events
- Explore feasibility of alternative transportation services, such as Uber or taxi services for after hours or automated transit networks

Health and Human Services

- Implement mobility management for health and human services transportation to best leverage existing assets and inform riders of available services
- Establish alternative transportation service(s), such as a volunteer program and/or rideshare service

Funding

- Identify costs of system that most effectively and appropriately meets Greenville County needs and identify sources of revenue for these services

Over the course of the study, there was interest shown by community leaders and key staff members to improving mobility in our community. These recommendations must be implemented in a way that promotes collaboration, innovation and a will to look beyond organizational and political boundaries to make improvements in transportation services and infrastructure.

**Piedmont Health Foundation
Board of Directors**

Addy Matney, *Chair*, TMPR

Peggy Baxter, *Vice Chair*, Community Volunteer

Bob Coleman, *Secretary*, Enwright Associates, Inc.

Frances Patterson, CPA, *Treasurer*, Elliott Davis Decosimo

Sally Purnell, *Grants Chair*, Haynsworth Sinkler Boyd

Caitlin Baker, CPA, Cherry Bekaert

Hesha Gamble, PE, County of Greenville

Bob Knight, Public Strategies LLC

Alan Mitchell, Greenville Health System

Sara Montero-Buria, Hispanic Alliance

Glenda Morrison-Fair, Trustee, Greenville County Schools

Dana Ray, MD, Cypress Internal Medicine

Kerry Sease, MD, Greenville Health System

Meghan Slining, PhD, Furman University

Gaye Sprague, Sprague and Sprague Consulting Engineers, Greenville City Council

Greg Taylor, CPA, Dixon Hughes Goodman

Katy Pugh Smith, MSW, *Executive Director*

*For more information, contact the
Piedmont Health Foundation at:*

katysmith@piedmonthealthfoundation.org

864.370.0212

PO Box 9303, Greenville, SC 29604

www.piedmonthealthfoundation.org

Study Consultant Team

**CDM
Smith**®

**arnett muldrow
& ASSOCIATES**

Next Steps

The Piedmont Health Foundation is committed to continuing its work with the organizations represented on the task force and other stakeholders to improve mobility in Greenville County. The Piedmont Health Foundation will take the following steps in the next year to begin implementation:

Planning and Infrastructure

- Convene representatives from planning and public works from Greenville County, the municipalities, and Greenville County Schools along with Greenlink to develop a process for improved communication aimed at increasing mobility
- Work with Greenlink, the County and municipalities to conduct an inventory of existing bus stops and their ADA compliance
- Participate in roll out of recommended land use regulations in Greenville County, which are currently under revision, to publicize and help secure public input

Public Transit

- Provide financial support for Greenlink to complete an operational analysis and Transit Master Plan and help identify additional funding partners
- Work with Greenlink to identify peer communities and innovative practices that have potential for implementation in Greenville County

Health and Human Services

- Facilitate work group of health and human services transportation providers to identify opportunities for mobility management

Funding

- Work with Greenlink and health and human service agency providers to identify all current sources of revenue, possible improvements to existing systems, and potential new sources of revenue

With thanks to our study sponsors:



Hollingsworth Funds

The Graham Foundation



BON SECOURS
ST. FRANCIS HEALTH SYSTEM



GREENVILLE
HEALTH SYSTEM



United Way
of Greenville County



COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
OF GREENVILLE

DSS
Serving Children and Families