

Establishing A Public-Transportation Level-of-Service Policy

Referred to: The Public Works, Capital Projects and Transportation Committee (Chairwoman Petit and Legislators Erner, Fabiano, Litts, and Nolan), and The Ways and Means Committee (Chairman Gavaris and Legislators Cahill, Criswell, Roberts, and Ronk)

Legislator Phil Erner offers the following:

WHEREAS, Ulster County Area Transit (UCAT), operated by the Department of Public Transportation, has as its mission to provide quality public transportation to the residents of Ulster County in a safe, reliable, and cost-effective manner; and

WHEREAS, the public fund the construction, maintenance and repairs of such infrastructure as roads and bridges; and

WHEREAS, County residents who lack access to a personal motor vehicle may therefore lack meaningful access to transportation upon these roads and bridges which their taxes help pay for; and

WHEREAS, seven-and-one-half percent of Ulster County households having no car, as well as those having only one car including half of the city of Kingston, all may depend upon public transportation for work, school, shopping, appointments, leisure, visiting family and friends, and access to government services and meetings; and

WHEREAS, although one-third of the population of Ulster County lives within one-quarter mile of an existing fixed-route UCAT bus, at present many populated places including some entire municipalities lack public transportation altogether; and

WHEREAS, in our predominantly rural County many popular origins and destinations are located far from major roads where most regular fixed-route UCAT buses travel; and

WHEREAS, many County residents have been displaced outside the County in emergency, temporary housing, without access to public transportation; and

WHEREAS, slow, infrequent and geographically limited mass transit prevents some prospective passengers with no alternative, and discourages those who have alternatives, from using the service; and

WHEREAS, during 2020-2022 when in order to protect the public health the Legislature held most meetings either by videoconference alone or as hybrid in-person and videoconference, public attendance increased relative to previous in-person only meetings, demonstrating an increased interest in, or accessibility to, the meetings, or both; and

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WHEREAS, County residents regardless of their address, ability/disability and/or socioeconomic class ought to have equitable access to public meetings as well as other purposes described above; and

WHEREAS, public safety and security requires fulfilling transportation needs with minimal dependence upon other governments, corporations or other entities with different interests; and

WHEREAS, the public health requires minimizing pollution and despoiling of land, air and water while fulfilling transportation needs; and

WHEREAS, environmental and socioeconomic justice require sharing resources, ameliorating harms historically and presently done to communities bearing the brunt of exploitative economics, and preventing such harms in the future; and guaranteeing equitable transportation rights; and

WHEREAS, personal motor vehicles continue to become more expensive for County residents to own and operate, and consume many resources to manufacture, operate and maintain not generally available in the County, State or country; and

WHEREAS, the total cost to the people of Ulster County on the whole would decrease by further sharing of motor vehicles and trips in addition to already-shared transportation infrastructure; and

WHEREAS, for years many actual and would-be UCAT riders have petitioned the County concerning the need for major improvements to public transportation services; and

WHEREAS, the County has recently responded to such concerns by enacting policies such as advance communications for route changes, a no-cost-to-riders fare policy, an increase in driver & dispatcher pay grade, and a Traffic Demand Policy; and

WHEREAS, Executive Order 01-2023, item no. 12, requires UCAT to “develop a plan to expand routes and scheduling to enable wider, faster, and more convenient access to public transportation,” with an underway Route Optimization Study anticipated to help inform further UCAT service improvements; and

WHEREAS, the Legislature seeks to support further necessary and creative solutions for mobility justice in Ulster County; and

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WHEREAS, the Legislature may direct the Department of Public Transportation pursuant to County Charter Article XIII, section C-67, B. (4); County Administrative Code Article XIII, section A-13-1, section B, paragraphs (2) and (4); and County Code, Part I, Chapter 26, Article I, section 26-2, and Chapter 131, section 131-5, paragraph H; now, therefore be it

RESOLVED, that a Public-Transportation Level-of-Service Policy is hereby established as follows; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that Ulster County shall provide daily access to public transportation in every city, town, village and United States Census Designated Place in the County; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that Ulster County shall operate all fixed-route bus and paratransit services continuously throughout their daily service hours without planned service breaks, and in the case of fixed routes at periodic intervals no greater than one hour in between runs in each direction, and to all destinations within service areas; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that Ulster County shall provide regular fixed-route and paratransit service such that, for any County facility open to the public and accessible by public transportation, the last fixed-route bus runs, as well as the final return trip for any paratransit riders, shall depart no earlier than half-an-hour following the regularly scheduled nightly closure of such facility, including the location of Committee Meetings and Sessions of the Legislature; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that Ulster County shall provide express-bus routes, having a principal purpose to travel between municipalities, and shall provide local-bus routes, having a principal purpose to travel within and/or around a city, a village, a hamlet and/or adjacent areas, including residential, commercial, industrial and tourist sites of origin or destination serving at least the number of individuals who would fill UCAT's smallest bus; and in so doing shall coordinate with, and negotiate contributions of funds and/or further resources toward services within, such municipalities, areas and sites; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that in order to implement this policy the Department of Public Transportation shall coordinate with all pertinent Departments, citizens' committees, commissions and boards, and with the Ulster County Transportation Council, as well as collaborate with other government and non-government providers of public and/or mass transportation in Ulster County including school districts; and, be it further

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RESOLVED, that the Director of Public Transportation shall report monthly at the Legislative committee(s) of jurisdiction as to the progress in implementing this policy; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that this policy shall be fully implemented within one year, and move its adoption.

ADOPTED BY THE FOLLOWING VOTE:

AYES:

NOES:

Postponed in Committee: Public Works, Capital Projects and Transportation on August 7, 2023

Postponed in Committee: Public Works, Capital Projects and Transportation as amended on September 15, 2023

Passed Committee: Public Works, Capital Projects and Transportation on _____.

Passed Committee: Ways and Means on _____.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

TBD