

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, UCAT depends on funds from state and federal governments in order to deliver such services; and

WHEREAS, Ulster County contains many roads, bridges and other public transportation infrastructure owned, maintained or otherwise pertaining to the state and federal governments, including such marked and unmarked touring routes and truck routes within the city of Kingston, and which connect Ulster County with other locations; and

WHEREAS, at present most of UCAT's fixed-route bus service operates upon such state and federal roads; and

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WHEREAS, if the state and federal governments also operated public transportation services, then UCAT could expand its services; and

WHEREAS, at present the public funds most roads, bridges and related infrastructure in the United States of America for both passenger transportation and freight; and

WHEREAS, in New York State the people have a right of access to navigable waterways, yet ferry and other public boat services have declined now existing mainly for pleasure not transportation; and

WHEREAS, freight railroad remains widespread despite the nationwide decline of passenger rail, and it passes through Ulster County with little if any local benefit yet bringing air and noise pollution and dangerous crossings in many communities; and

WHEREAS, it has become mostly an individual responsibility to maintain one's own vehicle or other conveyance in order to make use of such infrastructure where public transportation is impractical or unavailable; and

WHEREAS, the seven-and-one-half percent of Ulster County households who lack access to a private automobile thereby lack meaningful access to public roads and bridges that their taxes pay to maintain just the same as households that have cars; and

WHEREAS, for those households lacking cars, it is generally not a choice but a socioeconomic hardship; and

WHEREAS, personal motoring is not an option for many Ulster County individuals with disabilities, youth and elders; and

WHEREAS, more Ulster County households would choose public transportation if available; and

WHEREAS, even for those households which can and do possess and operate private vehicles, transportation represents one of their greatest and skyrocketing expenses for insurance, repairs and fuel, and thus may be a burden more than a privilege; and

WHEREAS, New York State mandates that public transportation be provided to all students attending primary and secondary schools; and

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WHEREAS, state and federal public transportation systems could help to reduce material and energy extraction and consumption for transportation, the exploitation of socioeconomically disadvantaged peoples, emissions and motor-vehicle traffic density, and furthermore to improve roadway safety with a greater proportion of professional, trained drivers; all of which would contribute to healthier and safer human bodies, neighborhoods and communities and more sustainable ecosystems; and

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

WHEREAS, unhoused or temporarily housed persons must have access to necessary and desired public and community services; 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

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

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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 and 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, various Ulster County departments are tasked with arranging and delivering transportation services for the people; and

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

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 the Ulster County Legislature hereby adopts the Ulster County Public-Transportation Level-of-Service Policy in the form as attached and entitled “Exhibit A”; and, be it further

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RESOLVED, that Ulster County calls upon the governments of the State of New York and the United States of America to establish and maintain comprehensive public transportation systems, upon all state and federal roads, bridges and related infrastructure, including such marked and unmarked touring routes and truck routes within cities and villages, that shall prioritize access by the public who are low-income, low-wealth, lack personal transportation and/or are mobility-impaired, to conveyances comparable to the infrastructure's usual usage, and for purposes of socioeconomic equity, environmental justice, national security and public health and safety; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that Ulster County calls upon state and federal governments to negotiate and legislate a public right of access to presently private transportation infrastructure, including but not limited to freight-railroads and cargo-shipping corridors; 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

RESOLVED, that UCAT shall consult the various municipalities and school districts, BOCES, and SUNY Ulster and New Paltz, about public-transportation needs for the populations they serve; and shall include in its annual report to the Legislature about the findings and implementation of any recommendations resulting from such consultations; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that UCAT shall consult with neighboring Counties, New York State and other pertinent authorities as to the feasibility of expanded inter-county transit operations; and shall include in its annual report to the Legislature about the findings and implementation of any recommendations resulting from such consultations; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that the Department of Tourism shall urge community partners and tourist attractions to contribute toward the provision of transportation services for the public to visit and/or work at their sites, with the goal of establishing such services where none exist or improving them where they do; and, be it further

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

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RESOLVED, that no section of this resolution shall be interpreted as augmenting or abrogating the existing legislative process for expenditures; 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

Postponed in Committee: Public Works, Capital Projects and Transportation as amended on November 1, 2023

Defeated in Committee: Public Works, Capital Projects and Transportation on December 11, 2023

Passed Committee: Ways and Means on _____.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

TBD