



VIEWS & VISIONS

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Public Transit Impacts Everyone

Rocky Burke, General Manager
Lextran – The Transit Authority of Lexington, Kentucky

Rocky Burke has served as the general manager of the Lexington Transit Authority (LexTran) since March 2008. He has 15 years of experience managing public transit systems, including positions in Austin, Texas; Tucson, Arizona; Jackson, Mississippi; and now Lexington, Kentucky.

Mr. Burke retired from the United States Air Force as a Lieutenant Colonel after 28 years of dedicated service. He currently serves on the board of directors for the High Street YMCA and the Morehead State University Alumni Association. He also is a member of the Mayor's Commission on Homelessness and the Senior Services Commission. Mr. Burke holds a bachelor of arts degree from Morehead State University and a master of public administration degree from the University of Dayton.

Lextran is definitely on the move! This was a marketing/branding strategy developed in late 2004, shortly after the property tax levy passed that resurrected the transit system. Lextran, officially known as the Transit Authority of Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government, was very close to shuttering its doors prior to the tax levy passing. The system was funded primarily by the local government, a very small amount from the fare box and some federal assistance. This was nowhere near the amount needed to support a transit system to serve the people of Lexington. Fortunately, citizens saw the need for a vibrant and robust transit system if Lexington were to become a first class American city. The property tax referendum passed and now the transit system receives six cents for every 100 dollars of property value. This amounts to about \$15 million dollars annually.

Lextran has come a long way since 2004. The transit system now has nearly 200 employees, operates 75 buses on 23 routes and provides over six million trips annually. The "On the Move"

Lextran

catch phrase has been discarded and we are now simply focused on being a world class transit system for a world class city like Lexington.

I believe Lextran is essential to the continued economic growth and vibrancy of Lexington and Fayette County. When the World Equestrian Games (WEG) came to Lexington in 2010, the world was watching. It seemed like everyone chose to ride the bus to the Kentucky Horse Park for the Games. Over 19 days, we transported almost 50,000 patrons to the Games and received rave reviews for our service. People were saying things like "The buses were clean," "I never had a long wait," and "The drivers were so courteous." This is important because many of the people that rode the bus were local citizens who had never used Lextran. I believe many people that





rode during that 19-day span continue to ride today. Just this past year, ridership increased six percent over the previous year. Our citizens are seeing the value of public transit and their tax dollars at work.

Lextran is critical to the growth of Lexington. It contributes so much to the economy, with 40 percent of our passengers going to jobs, another 30 percent traveling to school, and the remainder using the bus to get around for a variety of reasons. It enhances the quality of life for many people, especially those without a car. Indirectly, public transit impacts everyone. I frequently tell people that the bus is not for everyone, but hopefully they understand the need for public transit and how it affects those that rely on us to get to jobs, to school and to the doctor. Can you imagine what our life would be like if the employees in our service industry couldn't get to their jobs in restaurants, in our health care facilities, and in the factories that produce the products

we use daily? These people depend on the bus for their livelihood!

Another segment of the population is known as the "choice rider" – someone who has a car, but might choose transit if they thought it were attractive and convenient.

Lextran is in the midst of a systems integration project that will add many technological enhancements, hopefully making our system more attractive and convenient for all. In the last 18 months, we have added electronic fare boxes and passenger counters so we can adequately assess our rider demographic. Global positioning satellite technology is now being utilized so we know the exact position of each bus at any given point in time. This provides Lextran staff and passengers with instant access to knowing where the bus is and when will it arrive at their stop. In addition, a new interactive website was launched last year where

you can find virtually anything you want to know about the transit system and even plan your trip using Google transit. Cameras have been added to every bus to provide an added sense of security for your riding pleasure. Smart phone apps are just around the corner and more enhancements are being looked at. We believe these technological advancements will go a long way toward attracting the "choice rider," while improving service for our everyday passengers.

As you can see, Lextran has made great strides in a very short period of time. More and more people are choosing transit as a way of life in Lexington. All over America, public transit is essential and becoming ever more critical for the growth of our cities in the future. ▽