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Athens Transit System named 2016 Urban Community Transportation System of the Year



On Wednesday, May 25, 2016, Athens Transit/Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County was honored as the 2016 Urban Community Transportation System of the Year by the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) at their annual conference in Portland, Oregon. The CTAA is a national public transit association representing thousands of transit providers from across the country.

"Athens Transit focuses on partnerships throughout the community and outreach to our citizens, the University's staff, schools, businesses, citizen groups, and other Unified Government departments," says Transit Director Butch McDuffie. "We all care about this community, our riders, our partners, and each other. We take pride in knowing that all of our hard work has been recognized."

Some of Athens Transit's notable recent program highlights that factored into their selection as 2016 Urban Community Transportation System of the Year include:

- A bus riding education program overseen by Municipal Court Judge Leslie Spornberger Jones as a sentencing tool for people who are either losing their license or will experience the loss of certain driving privileges when they either enter a plea or have been convicted of certain offenses. The monthly program teaches participants how to ride The Bus and complete trip planning in both English and Spanish. This program has been in place for over five years and has trained over 1,200 individuals.
- A collaboration with the University of Georgia's Enterprise Information Technology Services to link the current bus real-time Automatic Vehicle Locator (AVL) information into UGA's mobile app. This enables riders to see real-time information on Athens Transit's vehicle locations, arrival predictions, routes, and schedules, as well as a 360 degree view of bus stop locations. All programming and ongoing maintenance of the app is handled UGA staff at no cost to Athens Transit.
- A community partnership with the LEAD Athens Team Transit that enabled all of Athens Transit's route and schedule information to be included as part of Google Transit. The program launched on March 15, 2016 and was also completed at no outside cost to the department.

- The launch of Sunday bus service on August 16, 2015 as a pilot FY16 project that is included as a continued project in the Mayor's Recommended Budget for FY17. The launch marked the first time that Athens Transit provided Sunday bus service in its 39-year history.
- A youth ridership program for the summer of 2016 that was approved by the Mayor and Commission. It allows youth 17 years old and younger to ride Athens Transit buses free all summer long to help provide at-risk youth with free transportation to work, educational, and recreational opportunities. The program also saves economically-challenged families significant amounts of money on day-to-day transportation cost for children.
- A Transit Options Feasibility Study that has been conducted over the last 12 months. The study has looked at various modes of transportation throughout the community including Athens Transit, UGA's Campus Transit, private apartment complex shuttles, non-emergency medical transportation, taxis, bicycle options, and pedestrian options.

"I have to thank each and every one of our Transit Department staff for this honor," says McDuffie. "Each of our staff members are dedicated to serving the citizens of Athens-Clarke County and providing the best possible experience on our public transportation system."

The Athens Transit System currently provides over 1.7 million trips per year on The Bus. In 1991, Athens Transit also received a national award as the Outstanding Public Transportation System Achievement award from the American Public Transportation Association.

Since that award, Athens Transit has moved into a Multimodal Transportation Center that serves as a hub for transportation options, transitioned the fleet of buses to 100% low-floor accessible buses for the mobility impaired, added bicycle racks to all buses, implemented real-time bus tracking for the public, and improved almost 500 bus stops and shelters, including 11 art shelters. Over the last 15 years alone, Athens Transit has received more than \$45 million in operating and capital grants that have served to reduce costs to the local community.

For more information about the award and Athens Transit, call 706-613-3430.