

The Places We'll Go: Equity in Transportation

Lieutenant Governor Kate Marshall of Nevada

Las Vegas, NV – One of Lieutenant Governor Kate Marshall's top priorities after taking office in January of 2019 was to address existing public transportation inequities in southern Nevada. Specifically, Marshall sought out solutions to make transportation more accessible and affordable to higher education students in the region.

After meeting with prospective, current, and former students, Marshall identified several transportation barriers to student success. First, while affordable transportation options were attractive – students also valued reliability. Second, students expressed a need for increased security measures such as real-time transit information as well as a service exclusive to students. Finally, students also valued their time by requesting a service that would operate on an express route with limited stops.

Students were reluctant to rely on or participate in a transit system that didn't meet their needs. Information collected through focus groups found that a bus ride to get to college in southern Nevada could take up to two hours one-way, require at least two transfers, and a mile walk to a bus stop.

Some additional takeaways include:

- Students would opt for ride share services over public transit. While such services generally reduced travel times, they also significantly increased costs. One student reported paying \$7,000 over a nine-month period to ensure he got to class on time.
- Students would regularly share their vehicle with family, juggling multiple family schedules adding to delays in getting to class.
- Students cited unreliable transportation options as a primary reason for their lack of participation in college programs geared towards academic success. The inability to participate in activities outside of the classroom denied students a full college experience, lowering their sense of accountability and increasing the likelihood of student drop out.
- Access to transportation was a key factor in student progress and success over time.

A 2019 survey exploring the ways transportation presents barriers to current higher education students in southern Nevada found:

- 75% of the students surveyed identified transportation as a critical barrier to higher education.
- 87% of prospective students perceived transportation as a barrier to starting college.
- 94% of students enrolled in more than one institution viewed transportation as a barrier.
- 79% of students perceived transportation as a barrier to consistent attendance.

Enter the Campus Commuter.

The Campus Commuter was created to provide a micro-transit option solely for college student use. The Lieutenant Governor secured partnerships with the local libraries in Las Vegas, Nevada, to facilitate a "community hub" model for the Commuter. The East Las Vegas Library was first to allow their facility to be used as a "bus stop". Instead of students waiting on the

street, they could use the library and all of its resources while waiting for the Campus Commuter to arrive, while a software application allowed students to track the location of the Commuter in real time.

A journey that used to take up to two hours one-way became a 30-minute ride. Additionally, the Commuter is equipped with Wi-Fi permitting students to work while they ride in a safe, reliable environment.

Collaboration was critical for the success of the Campus Commuter. While spearheaded by the Lieutenant Governor, crucial members of the team included Nevada State College, the College of Southern Nevada, the Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada, and Clark County Libraries. Through collaboration and persistence, Marshall and her staff moved the project from start to finish in 11 months.

By providing an affordable and reliable transportation option, the Campus Commuter aimed to increase participation in post-secondary education as well as close the achievement gap for the diverse populations in southern Nevada.

In order for education to be the great equalizer, the journey must be just as equitable.

A word from Lieutenant Governor Marshall:

While providing niche and boutique transit options may seem innovative and progressive, we must not neglect one of the very pillars of a thriving community: public transportation. As public servants we must ensure that mobility is available to all. This requires addressing the disparity in access to transportation that has developed over time. Public transportation is the mobility backbone of our communities. As such, it must be safe, reliable, and ever evolving to meet the needs of the people. A well-built public transit system means a well-built future. The further one can travel, the more one can see, and then create.

Some of our greatest cities have become what they are simply because people were able to believe in the idea of going somewhere.