

AppalCART is the transportation authority serving all of Watauga County with 10 fare free bus routes in the Boone area, and 10 van routes throughout the county. All 20 routes are open to the public. Trip tickets for rural routes cost \$16.00 for \$20.00 worth of rides and can be used on van routes. Passengers over 60 years old can register at the Project on Aging and then get picket up at their homes for transportation to senior centers, doctors offices and grocery shopping at least once per week. Call 264-CART (2278) for more information.

The name AppalCART goes back even further beginning at Appalachian State University where former public information officer John Simmons coined it as an acronym Appalachian Campus Area Rapid Transit. While it may never have been rapid in the sense of high speed rail, the bus system has always provided a transit option for students and non students alike since January 1980 when it began.

Watauga County established the Watauga County Transportation Authority (WCTA) in January 1980 by resolution to consolidate and coordinate the transportation being provided by different agencies in the county. The County adopted a Transportation Development Plan in August of 1980 which planned for the consolidation of existing public transportation services and made the county eligible to receive state and federal funding to match local funding of the authority.

In June of 1981 the county hired Patrick Simmons to be the first transportation director. He had an office in the stone building next to the courthouse. He hired operations staff which operated out of the basement of the downtown post office.

In October of 1981 the transportation authority began operating human service agency routes with a fleet of 10 vans and one bus appropriated from other agencies such as WAMY and Watauga Opportunities. Within a year the transit authority incorporated the campus bus service and began doing business as AppalCART. Roy Tugman, who was director of ASU security at the time, taught the authority staff how to drive the four 1969 GMC 30 foot transit buses the university had purchased from the town of Roanoke, Virginia. The buses had over 500,000 miles on them and featured no power steering or air conditioning.

When Pat Simmons was asked what his worst day was, he remembered a day when all four of the buses had quit running and several were at the NC105/US 321 intersection. 1982 also marked the beginning of Appal-A-Day service using new, lift-equipped vans to meet the medical transportation needs of disabled passengers. In 1983 Beech Mountain donated three buses that had been used as part of the Land of Oz resort, and AppalCART began providing transportation to Ski Beech Resort during the winter months. After serving for two years as transportation Director Simmons left to take a position with the Public Transportation Division of the North Carolina Department of Transportation.

J. Lynn Leidersdorff became the second director. He became actively involved in a plan to convert four vans to run on alcohol and helped write several grants to fund the development of an alcohol still at the new site the County had purchased for use by the

transportation authority, and the county building maintenance department on Winklers Creek Road. The new site was being renovated from a planned car dealership into the operations center which would house administrative offices and a maintenance shop to serve county and authority vehicles. On December 7, 1984 the authority moved to the new location and for once the fleet and all personnel were located at the same address. The authority took possession of an ethanol still from TVA , hired an engineering firm to upgrade it and actually produced fuel grade ethanol (190 proof). The problem was they could not get the vans to run reliably on it and the ethanol supply eventually had to be disposed of as hazardous waste.

AppalCART began contracting with Sugar Mountain Resort to provide parking shuttles in December 1984. Leidersdorff tried a new fixed route design in 1984/85 featuring four routes that ran the same schedules all year. While the new routes increased passengers, some of the areas served were not densely populated enough to generate the kind of ridership needed to sustain it. Likewise, ridership in the summer did not approach that of the regular school year.

The authority began work on its second transportation development plan in the Spring of 1984. Leidersdorff and his family moved to Florida in June of 1984. Jean Reece, the Operations Manager, was appointed as interim director and the authority began its third search for a Transportation Director.

On September 4, 1985 Christopher D. Turner became the third transportation director in four years to lead the authority.

The consultant doing the Transportation Development Plan recommended setting the transportation authority up as a more independent agency, noting that the board could only recommend actions which the county commissioners would then have to approve. This meant that the director had to present action items to two boards in order to do anything regarding policies or budget issues. It also made getting a quorum at authority meetings difficult since the board was not empowered to act independently.

As a result of the recommendations in the TDP, AppalCART became an independent authority in July of 1986 with its own personnel policy and benefits, and all employees became authority employees and no longer county employees. This change also overcame some reluctance with the Boone Town Council and it voted to join the authority and to begin financially supporting it. AppalCART became the official name of the authority.

While the four fixed routes began under Leidersdorff proved to be more service than was needed, the two routes that AppalCART began in August of 1985 proved to be not enough. In January of 1986 AppalCART began the Express Route to relieve the overcrowding of the Red Route. It provided service between College Place Apartments, the Boone Mall and Appalachian State University every 30 minutes. It proved to be very successful and most routes since that time have featured 30 minute headways or less.

Presently AppalCART has a fleet of 30 passenger vehicles with two hybrid 35 foot transit buses on order. There are sixteen rear engine transit buses, one van cutaway, seven lift equipped vans, four all wheel drive minivans, one front wheel drive minivan, and one 13 passenger conversion van.

AppalCART operates ten day time fixed routes in the Boone Area Monday-Friday, five of which also operate until 11:00 pm. On Saturday AppalCART operates the Red, Green POP105, and Orange Routes from about 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. Sunday evenings during Spring and Fall Semesters at ASU, AppalCART operates three evening routes; the Red, Gold and State Farm Shuttle. AppalCART fixed route bus routes are fare free.

AppalCART offers complimentary Paratransit service to individuals certified with disabilities that prevent them from using the fixed routes for certain trips. Paratransit service provides door to door service using lift equipped vans for people with disabilities during the same hours that fixed routes operate and along the same geographic corridors.

County routes include five under contract with the Project on Aging, Five under contract with Watauga Opportunities, and a growing number of trips for the Department of Social Services; many of which are out of county medical trips.

With the growth in miles of service and passenger trips over the years, **AppalCART** is now at a critical point with its facility. Space is at a premium, and a facility review done by a consultant hired by the N.C. Department of Transportation recommended looking for a larger site. Since then we have purchased an 8 acre site on the 105 Bypass and construction of a new office and vehicle maintenance facility is well underway.

With the town, county, and university all growing, the need for public transportation has never been greater. **AppalCART** plans to meet these growing needs by relying on the existing partnership of local entities combined with the federal and state funding matched through the Public Transportation Division of the North Carolina Department of Transportation.