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TOP STORY

## Workshop about strategic public transportation plan held at Aiken Tech

By Dede Biles [dbiles@aikenstandard.com](mailto:dbiles@aikenstandard.com) Mar 28, 2017



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Dr. William Molnar, left, executive director of the Lower Savannah Council of Governments, or LSCOG, and Laura Everitt of Tindale Oliver look at a map of the routes of Best Friend Express before a workshop at Aiken Technical College on Tuesday. Tindale Oliver is helping LSCOG develop a 10-year strategic public transportation plan for Aiken County.

GRANITEVILLE — During a presentation at Aiken Technical College on Tuesday, a representative of a Florida-based consulting firm reported that users of Best Friend Express generally are happy with the service provided.

But those riders also made several suggestions for improvements, said Laura Everitt, associate director of transit services for Tindale Oliver.

The recommendations included the addition of Saturday service, earlier and later service on the existing routes and more opportunities to travel to Aiken's Southside.

Everitt was the main speaker during the first in a series of three workshops for area residents that the Lower Savannah Council of Governments, or LSCOG, is conducting this week.

With the help of Tindale Oliver, LSCOG is developing a 10-year strategic public transportation plan for Aiken County, and the meetings are part of the process.

The second workshop will be held from 4:30-6:30 p.m. today in the City Council Chambers in the North Augusta Municipal Building.

The Municipal Building's address is 100 Georgia Ave.

The third workshop is scheduled for 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Thursday in the Conference Center of the Aiken Municipal Building at 214 Park Ave. S.W.

LSCOG is the administrator of Best Friend Express and the Dial-A-Ride service for people with disabilities that make it difficult for them to ride Best Friend Express buses.

"We inherited these transit systems back in 2004 and since then, they've been tweaked a little bit, but there hasn't been a comprehensive review," said the LSCOG's Executive Director Dr. William Molnar. "We want to find out what is going with the systems now and how effective they are. We also want to figure out how to make them better."

The hours of operation for Best Friend Express buses are 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday. There is a Green Route that serves the Aiken metro area, a Red Route that serves Aiken's Southside and a Blue Route that connects to Augusta and North Augusta.

Earlier this month, Everitt said, Tindale Oliver employees rode the Best Friend Express buses for three days and talked to riders about their experiences.

Those employees turned in 106 completed surveys.

In addition, there is an online survey that Best Friend Express users can take at [www.bestfriendexpress.com](http://www.bestfriendexpress.com).

So far, most riders have rated the service as "very good" and are "very grateful for the service," Everitt said.

The workshops are designed to get even more input from Best Friend Express users, and an Aiken Tech workshop attendee told Molnar, Everitt and LSCOG Transit Manager Rhonda Mitchell that riders had to climb too many steps to get on the buses.

The process involved in developing the strategic public transportation plan, Everitt said, also has included five meetings with representatives of community stakeholders such as major businesses, USC Aiken, Aiken Tech and the Greater Aiken Chamber of Commerce.

Tindale Oliver is scheduled to have a draft of the strategic plan ready in May, when another workshop for the public will be held, Molnar said.

Then, in August, Tindale Oliver will present the completed plan to the LSCOG board. Molnar wants to invite members of the Aiken County Council and the Aiken City Council to that meeting.

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**Dede Biles** is a general assignment reporter for the *Aiken Standard* and has been with the newspaper since January 2013. A native of Concord, N.C, she graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

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**Dede Biles**