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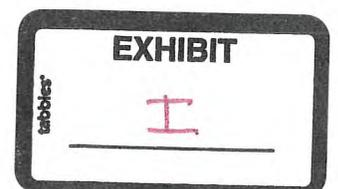
## Business: Making connections with public transit system

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By Russ Henderson, Press-Register



Creating an extensive transportation system is a daunting task in Baldwin County -- Alabama's largest county at 1,596 square miles, says Taylor Rider, director of the Baldwin Rural Area Transportation System.



But a bus system connecting the three Eastern Shore cities, Mobile and central Baldwin County is now partially in place. And with the help of federal stimulus money and a congressional appropriation last year, BRATS expects to build seven new transit hubs by early 2011 that will extend the system north to Bay Minette and south to the Gulf, says Rider.

Baldwin County stands to receive \$725,000 in federal stimulus money to start the hub project. Money has also been appropriated in Congress to provide nearly \$1.2 million to complete the work, Rider says.



When the project is completed, residents and visitors will be able to park at transportation hubs in eight cities and catch BRATS buses to work, shop or take care of business around the county.



**(BILL STARLING, Press-**

**Register)**

The Bayline bus travels to downtown Mobile along the U.S. 90 Causeway across Mobile Bay in November 2007, when the commuter service was launched.

The project will start by expanding and renovating the BRATS central office in Robertsdale. The \$725,000 would also be used to build the first hub station in Fairhope, Rider says.

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The \$1.2 million grant would be used for the other stations, in Fairhope, Foley, Gulf Shores, Orange Beach, Daphne, Spanish Fort and Bay Minette, Rider says.

Several cities have already specified sites, Rider says, either owned or leased by the municipalities where the stations will be placed.

The Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce has played a large role in creating an alternative transportation system linking the Eastern Shore, Mobile and central Baldwin County, says Tim Rosson, chairman of the chamber's Blueprint for Tomorrow campaign and former chairman of the chamber's board of directors.

Funds from the Blueprint for Tomorrow campaign paid for a transportation study conducted in 2007 by Gresham Smith and Partners of Birmingham.

That study, and the chamber's help in communicating with city and county leaders, were invaluable in starting the process of building the transportation system, Rider says.

The first route, Baylinc, connecting the Eastern Shore to downtown Mobile, began in November 2007. That route is a joint project of BRATS and The Wave Transit System of Mobile. The second route, Shorelinc, was launched by BRATS in February. It travels between Bay Minette and Thomas Hospital in Fairhope.

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