

Mayor Madeline Rogero – WINNER 2019 APTA Distinguished Service Award

Introduction: Knoxville Mayor Madeline Rogero is wrapping up two successful terms in office this year, but her positive impact on transit in this small city will be felt for years to come. Mayor Rogero understands that transit is essential to a **fair and equitable** city, and she has tackled the issue of improving transit service in Knoxville through three key strategies: Supporting transit service improvements, setting a new tone for transit in Knoxville, and giving transit a seat at the decision-making table. Her **leadership** and focus on improving transit garnered Knoxville Area Transit (KAT) the 2017 Outstanding System of the Year Award for small systems.

Support for transit expansion and passenger improvements

Service Increases. During Rogero’s tenure, KAT’s fixed route services increased steadily, in both span of service and frequency of service, resulting in a 12% increase in overall annual miles, and a 24% increase in annual hours of service. This support has allowed KAT to steadily increase frequency of service on routes throughout the city, also instituting the first 15-minute peak service on three main corridor routes.

Other passenger improvements. During Rogero’s term, KAT has also been able to implement Wi-Fi on all buses, as well as real-time texting information at all stops, along with KAT’s first real-time mobile app. The hours of the Customer Service Office have been expanded to include later evenings and Saturdays, and additional supervisors help support both operator and passenger needs throughout the day. Support for capital match grants by the Rogero administration has resulted in a lowering of KAT’s average fleet age by 1.66 years, as well as the purchase of a new camera system for all buses.



Overall, the city’s financial support of KAT to provide all these improvements has increased 20% during Rogero’s terms in office.



Setting the Tone – and the example: Transit as an integral part of a successful city

Before Mayor Rogero won her first term as Mayor, she was riding the bus. In fact, she made a stated point of taking the bus to campaign events, in order to emphasize the key role transit plays in the City and in people’s lives. This was a first for a mayoral candidate, and people took notice. The increased attention to transit service highlighted the importance of this often-overlooked City service and also the need for additional support.

The Mayor’s On Board

Once elected to office, Mayor Rogero instituted the “Mayor on Board” program, wherein the Mayor rides the bus to various official events via transit. The bus PR Codes read “Mayor on Board” and passengers have the opportunity to chat with the Mayor on the bus ride.



Transit Driver Appreciation Day

The Mayor took an active role in a new annual Transit Driver Appreciation Day. Her suggestion for highlighting various drivers and their stories resulted in an event garnering media attention, and a renewed appreciation for the **professionalism** the bus operators display on a daily basis. The annual event has also resulted in both city and state proclamations highlighting the day, and further increased awareness of transit in the city.



Employee Pass Program

In addition to leading by example, the Mayor also began a program to encourage all City employees to ride the bus. The new program allowed any City employee to get a free 20-Ride bus pass each month. City employees have taken 1,714 trips on transit, logging 35,991 miles of transit commuting.

Giving Transit a New Seat at the Table

Prior to Mayor Rogero's first term, the transit system was not considered an official City department, even though transit operated under the same processes as other City departments (budgeting, purchasing, etc.). Mayor Rogero changed that by making the transit general manager an official City Director, reporting to the Deputy Mayor for Operations. This change allowed transit to be on a level playing field with other departments, helping shape overall city policy and

Celebrating Diversity with Transit



When downtown lunchtime favorite Yassin's Falafel House won the Readers Digest / Good Morning America title of Friendliest Place in America, it was an opportunity for the Mayor to show that Knoxville has worked hard to be an **inclusive** community, and what more fitting way than to hold an interview with Robin Roberts of Good Morning America on a downtown trolley. Yassin, a Syrian refugee who settled in Knoxville, has opened two successful restaurants in Knoxville. The Mayor's focus on diversity and inclusivity in Knoxville go hand-in-hand with her support of transit service, as shown in the GMA interview.



decision making, eliminating silos and allowing for new partnerships and **teamwork**.

Office of Redevelopment

Under Rogero's term, Knoxville's very active Office of Redevelopment has involved KAT in numerous redevelopment projects, resulting in transit considerations in street redesign, designing bus pull-offs and stops and accommodating buses into all

new redevelopment projects, and even partnering with transit as a solution during construction.

On-Street Amenities. With current and recently-completed Office of Redevelopment projects, KAT will have twenty-two additional shelters on the street – an increase of 44%.



Creative Partnership. During the construction of one redevelopment project, merchants along the corridor were concerned about the loss of business the construction might cause. The Office of Redevelopment partnered with KAT to offer a “Free Fare Zone” through the corridor, allowing patrons to easily access merchants via transit. This drew attention to the ease of using transit and increased ridership by 50% through the corridor while giving businesses a way to get customers to their doors.



Department of Engineering

- To continue to expand mobility options in Knoxville, a new Alternative Transportation Engineer was hired.
- Transit was integrated into City Engineering’s sidewalk request evaluation system, with sidewalks along transit routes receiving higher scores.

- A specific engineer was assigned to assist KAT in evaluating KAT’s own specific shelter priorities, determining right-of-way, feasibility and cost for various amenities projects prioritized by KAT.
- All engineers working on various projects within the Engineering Department now contact KAT to inquire if a shelter or other amenity should be incorporated into their project planning. This has resulted in at least six additional bus shelters throughout the city, and multiple bus stop improvements.
- The Department of City Engineering partnered with KAT to find grant funding for upgrading a main corridor with Advanced Traffic Management Systems to include bus signal prioritization, enhanced stops, and the creation of an Accelerated Bus Corridor program. This project is expected to begin in 2020 and should result in a decrease in transit travel time on a major corridor and improved access to the center city. This will be the first limited stop, signal-based priority transit service in Knoxville.

City Downtown Working Group

Mayor Rogero appointed a downtown coordinator to help deal with issues such as parking, construction, events, and other issues of the downtown Central Business District. KAT has been invited to join these meetings and can thus coordinate on issues such as the implementation of scooter and bike programs, detours for events and the impacts on the downtown trolley system. KAT is also made aware of construction and event detours, new developments coming online, and new businesses and residential projects as part of this group.

Communications and Public Relations

- News Releases that are created by the City Communications Office now feature appropriate KAT routes to events, in addition to the standard information about parking.
- KAT now partners with the City Office of 311, training their front line information staff on KAT transit routes and trip planning. In addition, a partnership with 311 encourages the use of KAT for medical appointments

The Office of Special Events

- Anyone organizing an event in the City has an opportunity to interact with various City departments as needed for the specific event, whether it is a race that closes streets or an

event using a park. KAT is now a part of that process, attending special events meetings and providing language to event organizers on how to reach their event on KAT. This information is then used on the event website, social media, etc. to encourage transit use.

- Coordinating more closely with the Office of Special Events has also resulted in adjusting event-based street closures to avoid impacting transit service whenever possible.
- One of the City Special Events' signature programs is the Christmas in the City event. KAT participates in opening night by having a booth making Origami Christmas Tree and Bus Ornaments out of recycled bus schedules. The event's popularity has increased every year, and draws positive attention to the transit system.



The City Office of Sustainability

- In 2015, the City of Knoxville hosted consultants from [Smart Growth America](#) and [Strategic Economics](#) for two days of workshops and discussions about Transit Oriented Development. It was the result of a federal grant through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency received by Knoxville Area Transit and the City's Office of Sustainability. The workshop focused on how investment in public transit could multiply the City's economic development successes.
- The office is working closely with KAT on electric vehicle opportunities, assisting in creating partnerships with the local utility board in developing a local solution for efficient charging infrastructure.

Knoxville Police Department – the Change Center program

As part of Knoxville's Save our Sons Initiative, the city identified a new youth center as a priority. The city's lead on the project, the Chief of Police, worked with

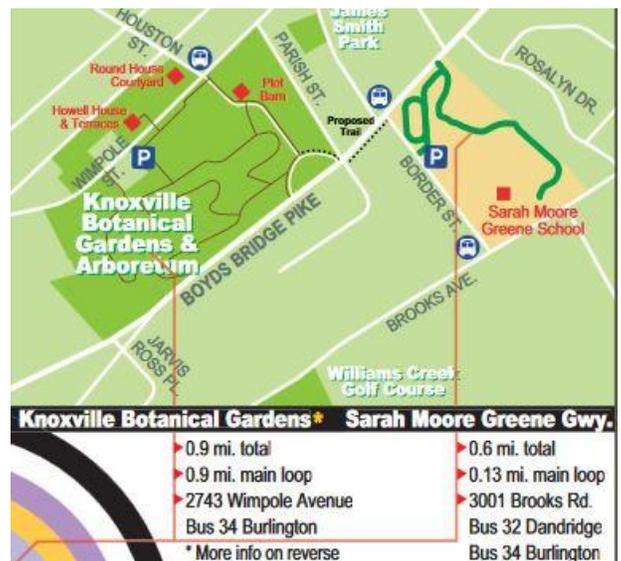
KAT to ensure that youth from Knoxville's identified priority neighborhoods were able to reach the Change Center during its open hours. KAT worked with KPD to identify key bus stops, and re-routed some buses to more directly serve The Change Center. Now, the five priority neighborhoods all have frequent, 7-day-a-week direct service to The Change Center.

Employee Benefits/HR

- **Employee Pass Program.** As mentioned previously the Benefits Department administers the program for city workers to receive free bus passes, as part of a project with KAT and the Office of Sustainability. So far, over 900 passes have been given to city employees, who have saved 1,683 gallons of fuel and 33,151 pounds of greenhouse gas emissions.
- **On-Boarding about taking transit to work.** KAT is now a part of regular city On Boarding for new employees. Each employee learns about commuting opportunities via KAT, as well as the City Employee Pass Program. KAT has attended 78 onboarding sessions, directly speaking with 276 new city employees about commuting via KAT.

Parks & Recreation

- The map of the city's parks and greenway system now shows nearest bus stops to each facility, and also which route gets you there.
- The Greenways arm of the Parks & Recreation Department is working with KAT to enhance a major KAT stop location in conjunction with a greenway expansion.



A sample of Knoxville's Greenways map shows bus stop locations, and lists the bus route in the greenway detail.

Office of Neighborhoods

- At the annual Knoxville Neighborhoods Conference, the Office of Neighborhoods pays for free bus rides home to anyone attending the conference, while giving KAT a booth at the event as well.
- The Office of Neighborhoods partners with KAT to act as the liaison with neighborhood groups who request transit amenities, helping them understand the processes involved, including right-of-way, engineering issues, KAT amenities resources, etc.

Public Service

KAT's Snow Routes system received a major boost after partnering with the City's Public Service Department. KAT and Public Service reviewed the routing that KAT uses during snow events, as well as their regular routes, and re-prioritized some salting and clearing of roads in order to keep the transit system moving. This process has allowed more routes to remain operating regularly, and also created a more reliable way of getting around during snow events for Knoxville residents.

Awards:

APTA System of the Year, 2017



APTA Safety Award, 2018



Other Mayoral Honors and Awards with connections to transit

- In 2013, President Obama selected Mayor Rogero to be one of 26 governmental leaders to serve on a task force that advised the President on climate preparedness and resilience-building efforts. The State, Local and Tribal Leaders Task Force on Climate Preparedness and Resilience was formed to develop key actions the Federal government can take to better support state, local and tribal preparedness and make recommendations on removing barriers to resilient investments, modernizing grant and loan programs, and developing information and tools to better serve communities.
- Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam appointed Mayor Rogero to serve on the Governor's Task Force on Aging in 2013.
- 2013 Public Official of the Year Award for Tennessee (presented by the National Association of Social Workers)
- 2012 Green Leader Award by the East Tennessee Chapter of the United States Green Building Council (KAT's Knoxville Station Transit Center was the city's first LEED-certified government building).
- She serves as co-chair of the Advisory Board of Smart Growth America's Local Leaders Council. The nonpartisan group is dedicated to using smart growth strategies to generate economic returns, save taxpayer money and provide housing and transportation options near jobs, shops and schools.