

A black and white photograph of a young woman with curly hair, smiling and wearing large headphones. She is standing on a transit vehicle, with her hands near the earcups. The background is slightly blurred, showing the interior of the vehicle with overhead handrails.

GET ON
O.U.T



**Oxford-University
Transit and RATP Dev**

Build One of America's
Fastest Growing
Transit Systems

WHO WE ARE

The Oxford-University Transit System (OUT), the public transportation service of the city of Oxford, Mississippi, started in October of 2008. Since then it has expanded its services to include the University of Mississippi (“Ole Miss”) and extended routes farther into Lafayette County, of which Oxford is the county seat. OUT currently has a fleet of 32 buses and carries around 11,300 riders a day, which is more than any other system in the state of Mississippi. Additionally, OUT has seen a consistent 30-35 percent ridership growth each year for the past nine years. This unordinary growth, which is the direct result of its exemplary response from the community and students, has presented many opportunities to expand as the popularity of the service has grown. This case study will detail the milestones and best practices OUT has recognized with transportation partner RATP Dev, a subsidiary of RATP Dev North America.

With a population of just over 20,000 permanent residents, Oxford, Mississippi, has routinely been ranked “One of the Best Places to Live” in the South. The city is the home of the University of Mississippi, which means for about 30 weeks out of the year the population doubles thanks to the addition of more than 21,000 university students. Combine this with the daily commuters from Lafayette County that work in Oxford, and you have a daily population of nearly 60,000 people in the city for most of the year.

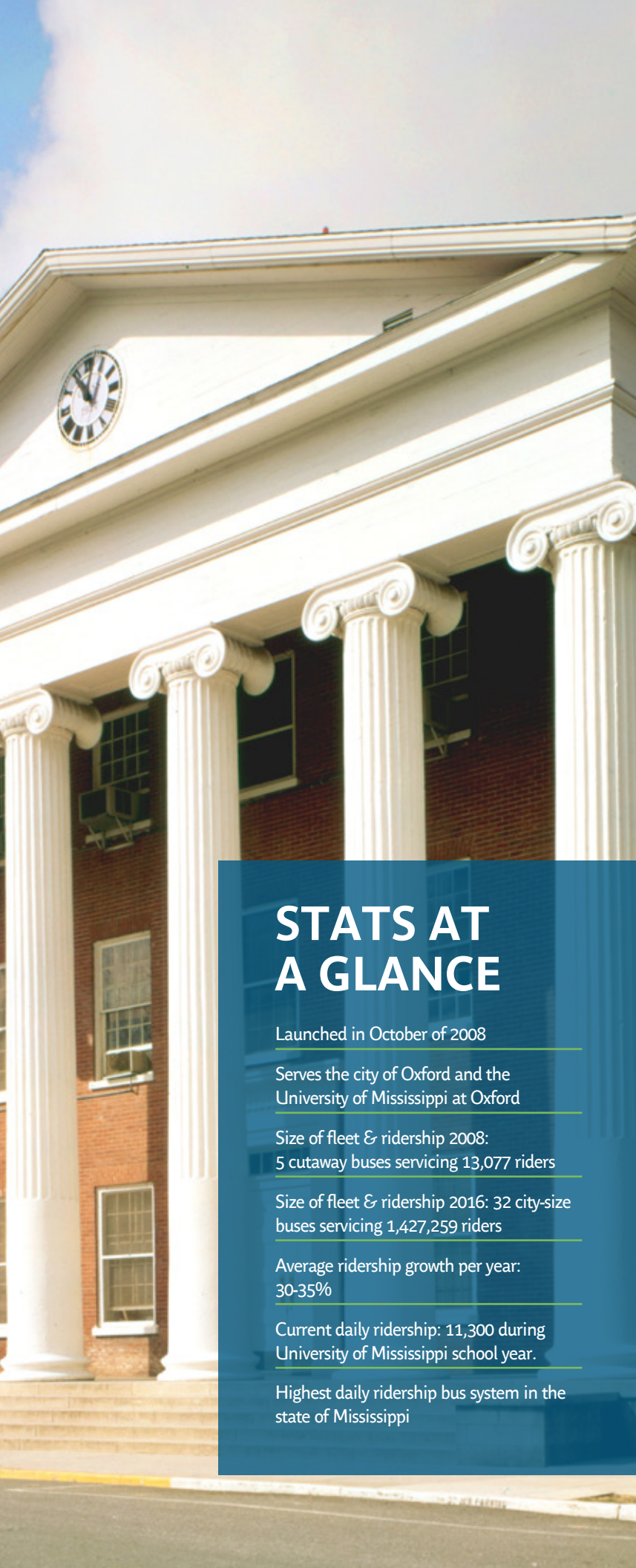
This type of growth can be very taxing on any community, especially ones with a road system that has struggled to support such dramatic traffic increases. And so

in 2008 former Mayor Richard Howorth made public transportation a primary goal of his administration as part of the Vision 2020 Comprehensive Plan. The plan’s goal was to improve the movement of automobiles within the city by investing heavily in public transportation and pedestrian-friendly walkways and bike lanes to cut down on the need for vehicle use and help maintain the small-town character and charm of the Oxford community.

With the understanding that setting up a transportation system from scratch required experience and expertise, the city of Oxford knew they needed a partner. The city contracted RATP Dev based on their extensive experience at building and operating public bus systems in other prominent college towns, including Bloomington, Indiana, Athens, Georgia, and Lubbock, Texas. RATP Dev was tasked with building and managing the public transit system in Oxford by sourcing vehicles, securing a bus depot and management facility, creating routes, and hiring and training staff.

With an initial fleet of only five cutaway buses, OUT’s inaugural run came in October of 2008 when the university hosted the first Presidential Debates. With over 3000 members of the media swarming Oxford, along with the candidates’ entourages, the first run was a trial by fire, but gave the OUT the exposure it needed to firmly establish itself in the city.





GOVERNMENT FUNDING

The city of Oxford has always been enthusiastic and proud of its public transportation system, but to earn that hearts and minds of the people, it was imperative for OUT to first win the support of the local government. Luckily, the transportation initiative set forth by the former mayor’s administration and the desire for a more pedestrian-friendly city had created a solid base of support among the city officials and allowed for complete collaboration between RATP Dev and the city.

“The key component to OUT’s success is, and has been, the collaboration that developed between RATP Dev, the city, and the university.” said Blaine Rigler, President RATP Dev North America Bus. “Proper design demands collaboration among all the stakeholders to better meet the people’s needs, and proper design ensures success.”

Thanks to the support of the local transit commission and the Board of Alderman, as well as RATP Dev’s expertise in transit, the city of Oxford was able to secure 5311 funding from the Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) for capital and operational funding including, fleet expansion and construction of a state-of-the art 10,000-square-foot facility to accommodate and maintain the rapidly growing transit system in 2012.

STATS AT A GLANCE

Launched in October of 2008

Serves the city of Oxford and the University of Mississippi at Oxford

Size of fleet & ridership 2008:
5 cutaway buses servicing 13,077 riders

Size of fleet & ridership 2016: 32 city-size buses servicing 1,427,259 riders

Average ridership growth per year:
30-35%

Current daily ridership: 11,300 during University of Mississippi school year.

Highest daily ridership bus system in the state of Mississippi

EFFICIENCY

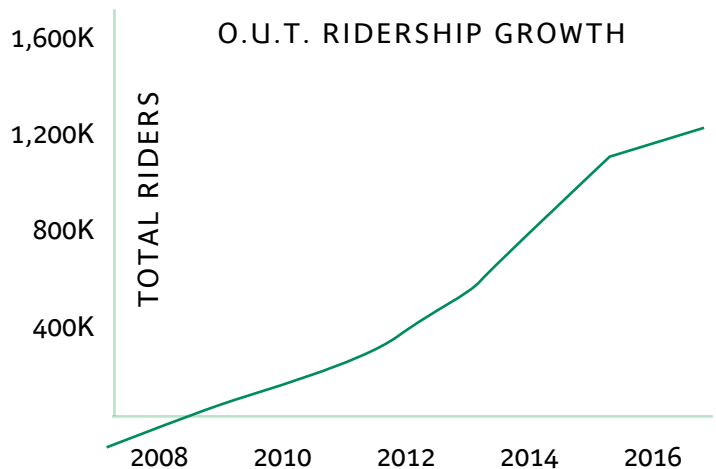
While support for the system was firm from the beginning, maintaining support requires continued exemplary performance and meeting the needs of the people. When RATP Dev first began with OUT, the commissioners wanted routes to run every 30 minutes. To accommodate for this, RATP Dev strategically re-drafted and re-arranged routes, making them linear in design to ensure the community that the buses would be on time and as close to automobile travel time as possible. Once the university was added to the system, the needs of the community changed. With students needing to traverse the campus and be on time for class, 30-minute routes were just not going to cut it, and routes had to be added and re-designed to accommodate for the new demands of the riders. Thanks to an increase in the number and size of buses, as well as the redesigned routes, services were rescheduled to run every 15 minutes.

“It’s very simple,” said Blaine Rigler. “To make a system more efficient you need to understand the community and their needs. Travel the routes, learn the city, meet the riders, and talk to them about their experiences and what they would like to see from their public transportation. RATP Dev has succeeded in transit operation for so long because it always seeks to understand the community and listen to its needs. An efficient system is a desirable system, and a desirable system is a growing and successful system.”

GROWTH

Growth has been a both a blessing and a challenge for OUT since its creation in 2008. Due to the bus system’s popularity among the citizens of Oxford and the students, ridership growth has remained at a constant 30-35 percent increase per year; a remarkable growth rate for any public transit operation. From a system of only five buses that serviced 13,076 people in 2008, OUT now services over 1.4 million riders a year with a fleet more than 32 standard city-size (35-40 ft.) buses.

While increased growth means more funding from the state, it also requires more local capital and resources to maintain quality service. To accommodate this growth, RATP Dev had to scale OUT dramatically, purchasing quality, used buses at an average rate of eight vehicles per year between 2009 and 2013. This meant that OUT needed to hire more and train more drivers and maintenance personnel, and invest significantly more in basic maintenance and utilities. Due to the continued demand, RATP Dev has stepped in to assist more with maintenance and provide OUT staff with their exemplary and training methods to extend the life of the city’s vehicles and keep customer service levels high.



Source: Oxford-University Transit & RATP Dev

THE UNIVERSITY

Oxford, Mississippi, was named after the famed British university with the hopes of having a state university chartered there. Needless to say, Ole Miss is one of the key establishments of Oxford, and the same goes for OUT. The university was officially added to the OUT system in 2009, and has since become a key stakeholder in the transit system, providing subsidies and maintaining a voice in its governance.

When OUT first started running routes for the University, the system was faced with a slight issue: many of the incoming students had little idea how to use public transportation. Determined to get students to adopt the transit system and limit the number of cars on campus, OUT and the university set up programs to show students how to navigate the routes as part of their orientation. Now in its eighth year, the program recruits upperclassman, who have used OUT their entire college career, to assist the university by showing freshman and transfer students how to use the transit system. Students are able to ride OUT for free as part of the university's contract with OUT, which provides even more incentive for students to utilize the bus system.

The student body has sustained serious growth over the past few years, which has put more pressure on the university and city officials to ensure the safety of their students. With the goal to limit car accidents on the university, and to promote a more green and pedestrian-friendly atmosphere, the campus has drastically limited the number of cars allowed on campus and is moving for OUT to be the only major source of transportation allowed in the next few years.

Additionally, city and university officials worked with RATP Dev to set up a late night bus route on the weekend, called Safe Rides, to ensure the students' safety and eliminate the need for driving. The Safe Rides, which run every 10 minutes from 10 p.m. until 2 a.m. on Thursdays and Fridays, and 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. on Saturdays, have helped drastically reduce DUI incidents in the city and are used by over 3000 students monthly.

"Keeping the students and the citizens safe is our chief priority," said Oxford Mayor George Patterson. "We understand the importance of providing a safe means

of transportation on the weekends, and are happy to work with the university and OUT to provide Safe Ride services for the community. It is widely understood that

any issues of safety

on these rides would be catastrophic for the integrity of our public transportation system, and we are thankful to have the dedicated professionals at OUT and RATP Dev working to ensure that never happens."

Football games also present a particular challenge for the city of Oxford, as 65,000 sports fans fill up Vaught-Hemingway Stadium, with an additional 30,000 tailgating in "The Grove" and surrounding areas. To protect the high number of pedestrians, the campus is closed down to non-permitted vehicles. What would be a crippling nightmare for both the campus and the city is mitigated by OUT's preparedness for game days, where additional buses and routes are used to safely transport fans to and from the stadium, reducing drunk driving risks and easing traffic congestion throughout the city.

Thanks to all these combined efforts, OUT has become an integral part of the university and beloved by the student body.

"It's not every day you hear this, but in Oxford, Mississippi, it is actually a welcomed relief to take the bus," says Ron Biggs, Superintendent of OUT. "Many of the college kids even consider it cool, and love that they are able to safely get around town until the early hours of the morning at no cost to them."

OUT is currently working on expanding more routes for the university students, which will include two new hubs that connect the north campus to the south. Called the "Internal Loops," there will be an additional eight stops between hubs connecting key campus points, including parking lots. The Internal Loops are another step in the process to make the campus car-free.

“Keeping the students and the citizens safe is our chief priority.”

TECHNOLOGY

Part of the OUT success has been the adaptation of technology into their transit service. OUT uses real-time tracking information that is available to both operators and riders, and allows them to maintain an accurate schedule and idea of when the bus will be arriving at its destination. This is important for OUT because it inspires confidence knowing that the buses are on time.

“Technology is not an extravagance, but a necessity to the modern transit user and operator,” says Blaine Rilger. “Knowing bus information in real-time is essential to an efficient and convenient bus system for all parties involved.”



CONCLUSION

While the success of OUT is certainly an outlier when it comes to the physical growth of the system, it is by no means a case of luck or circumstance. It is the result of superior expertise and a strong bond of collaboration between the city, OUT, and RATP Dev.

The government's enthusiasm and initial support of the system provided OUT with a solid footing when first creating the transit network. The continuous municipal support, along with their partnership with university, allows for OUT to continue to innovate and expand. RATP Dev's expertise and experience at setting up effective transit systems allowed for OUT to become the system it is today, enjoying exponential growth each year.

The final piece of the puzzle is the professionalism and happiness of the OUT staff. True to the traditions of Southern hospitality, the OUT staff ensures a clean, friendly, and safe atmosphere for riders. Their hard work does not go unnoticed by the citizens, and many have been with the company since the very beginning.

"In general, I have never heard anything but positive reviews of our staff and the bus system," said Ron Biggs. "There are drivers and staff working for OUT that have been here for over nine years; you just don't hear about things like that in the transportation field. Our drivers are our direct connection to the community, our ambassadors, and they are what give OUT its personality and professionalism in the community."

Through their role as managing operator, RATP Dev was able to use their expertise to deliver a finely-tuned transportation network to the city of Oxford, and did so through the strategic planning of routes, extensive training of staff, and their ability to scale for rapid growth. Because of this, OUT has become a staple in the city and has shattered the notion of how a public transportation system can grow and become a significant part of the community as a key driver in promoting public safety, smart growth, and innovation.



“ I had my initial reservations about public transit use in Oxford, but after seeing just how much OUT and RATP Dev aid this community, I could not imagine Oxford without the OUT. ”

Mayor George Patterson



THE CITY OF
OXFORD

107 Courthouse Square
Oxford, Mississippi 38655
662-236-1310 • oxfordms.net



3800 Sandshell Drive
Fort Worth, TX 76137
817-232-9551 • ratpdev.com