

AL 181

Interviewee: Perry Maull

Interviewer: Alan Bliss

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B: I am Alan Bliss interviewing Perry Maull. Could you spell your name with your middle initial, please?

M: Perry J. Maull.

B: I would like to ask a little bit about your background, where you came from and where you grew up, where you were educated.

M: I am a Hoosier. I am from Indiana. I was born and raised and went to school there. Well, I was born in Hammond, Indiana, raised in Crown Point, Indiana, which, at that time, was a town of about 10,000 people up in the northwest corner of the state near Gary. I was educated at Indiana University, got both my bachelor's degree and my master's of business administration [degree] from Indiana, and then I worked for IU for five years after I graduated, doing transportation research. As I say, it took ten years to get me out of a university community because it was wonderful, five years in school and five years working for the university and living in Bloomington.

B: What part of the university were you working for doing transportation research?

M: It was the Institute for Urban Transportation, which is IUT. People like that acronym. It was part of the business school, and it is still there. George Smerk is still the director.

B: Do you still make use of their resources or have any dealings with them in your professional capacity?

M: Yes. I talk to people who I worked with and other people who I went to school with. A classmate of mine is the director in Lakeland. Actually, in those days, you could major in urban transportation management. You cannot anymore. All of the transportation program has been eliminated at Indiana. But, in the old days, you could sit in a class with public utilities and transportation, and you could actually major in things. People were going to work for airlines, trucking companies, railroads, and transit.

B: Was that your major?

M: My undergraduate was actually marketing. My MBA concentration was in urban transportation management. I did not start soon enough, I guess, to get full transportation [in] undergraduate, but I got marketing, which was close.

Marketing allowed me to take transportation courses.

B: Do you know of other universities that offer majors in urban transportation management?

M: I should not say it, but Tennessee is one of the bigger ones. Syracuse has a transportation program. Typically, transportation is related to civil engineering more than it is the business. Maryland is another one within the business area, or had it. A lot of that has changed now because the schools just do not have the same kind of programs that they had twenty-five years ago.

B: It would not be immediately obvious to me which department or college to put it in, but I would not have expected engineering. Business, it seems, or public administration.

M: Correct. Typically, most people think of transportation as highway engineers or something like that, people building the roads. But, if you think about managing the railroads or managing the airlines or managing a transit system, that is more business or public administration.

B: What stimulated your interest in public transportation?

M: George Smerk, a professor of transportation.

B: When you were at IU?

M: It is an amazing story. I still have to chuckle about it. I was in the honors program as an undergraduate, and we were required to take so many hours of honors courses. At that time, the university charged a flat fee for up to eighteen hours, so it was not per credit hour like we are used to now. If you did not take eighteen hours, you actually were paying more per hour by whatever hours less than eighteen. I had sixteen hours worth of classes that I already said I had to take for the second semester my sophomore year, spring semester. I was looking for a two-hour course that was honors. All I did was go down the catalogue. I was not looking for what the course was about. I was looking for a two-hour course so that I could get up to eighteen, because after eighteen, you would end up paying more. I came across one in the honors program. It was two hours. Then, I looked over there and it said, seminar in urban transportation problems. What is that? So, I went to see the professor, George Smerk, and I said, are there any prerequisites? He said, no, come on in. I said, okay, I will sign up for the spring semester, and I did. I took the course and it was like, wow, this is great. He was such an inspiration that I said by the end of that semester, I want to major in this. [So, it was] because of a two-hour course that I was looking for only for the two hours and being honors that I ended up with my career and I am sitting here

twenty-five years later in the business. Serendipity I guess is what they call it.

B: How old is George Smerk now?

M: I want to say he is just around sixty-five, maybe sixty-four.

B: Will there be a successor to him?

M: No. Unfortunately, they have eliminated the whole transportation department. When I was there, they had six faculty members who were professors of transportation, and one was a professor of public utilities. The whole transportation department, when the chair retired in the late 1970s, they then made all the transportation professors go into marketing and got rid of the department. Though he had always been a full tenured professor, he is now the director of transportation for the university and teaches occasionally and keeps an office at the business school, but basically they have kind of moved him over to the transportation department for the university.

B: When you say director of transportation for the university, are you referring to the university campus?

M: They have a campus bus system there and the parking operation. They have their own campus buses. Then there is a city, separate, bus system.

B: And the two do not overlap?

M: Well, after twenty-five years. When I was in school, I actually worked for the city bus system as a driver and a supervisor for a year or so. You had to be twenty-one at the time to drive a bus in Indiana, so I had to wait until I was twenty-one. So, it was actually my senior year that I ended up driving the bus. Now, although they are not consolidated, they are in the same facility, and they are sharing the same garage. The white buses with a red stripe are the Indiana campus buses, and then there are the city of Bloomington buses which are white with a green stripe. They are all parked in the same garage now, but that is as close as they have gotten, and it was university land that the city has a lease on for ninety-nine years and built the garage that they all share.

B: Outside of that, though, separate budgets, separate personnel?

M: Right.

B: What was your first job once you finished your education?

M: It was working there for George Smerk at the Institute for Urban Transportation.

We were just gearing up. He had gotten a few grants for research projects, and I was his second hire, actually. He had hired a doctoral student who, when he finished, left to go to the University of Louisville, and then I was able to move up into his position. So, I was actually the second person he hired as he was gearing up his Institute for Urban Transportation, and I worked there for five years at Indiana. Then I went to Dayton, Ohio, as the director of marketing, planning, and development for the Miami Valley Regional Transit Authority, which is the transit system in Dayton. At that time, it was expanding to encompass the entire Montgomery County in which Dayton sits. I was there three years, until 1983, and then I came down here to Melbourne, Florida, where I was the executive director of the Brevard Transportation Authority, which was an authority of several of the small cities. Well, Melbourne is not that small but Palm Bay, Melbourne Village, Melbourne Beach, Indiatlantic, West Melbourne. There were a number of cities that had formed a transit authority. In 1985, that transit authority was taken over by the county's transportation system, which was Brevard County, and we formed what was called Space Coast Area Transit. I continued in that position as the director for that consolidated system, countywide, until 1992.

B: What came next?

M: At that time, I took a job with the Center for Urban Transportation Research [CUTR], which is actually a unit of the University of South Florida over in Tampa. They were just starting up a major research project with Miami-Dade Transit down in Miami. So, I went down to Miami to be the project manager for them, even though I was on the payroll for the University of South Florida as their project manager for their research project that they were doing for the Miami-Dade Transit system. I was there from 1992 until 1994 doing that. That was really interesting because that got me into a big transit system that has rail and people mover and buses, a very large operation, and I was assigned right into the director's office, who was also an Indiana grad whom I knew back in Bloomington. In the early 1970s, Ed Colby was the director of transportation for the university. He had left there to go out to Phoenix and then had been in Denver and then had ended up coming down to Miami, so I knew where I was going to work in that sense. Then, in 1994, I was briefly with Tri-County Commuter Rail Authority, which is called Tri-Rail, which is the three-county commuter rail system down there.

B: Dade, Broward and Palm Beach [Counties]?

M: It serves the entire three counties.

B: You left CUTR at that point.

- M: I left CUTR to go there as the deputy executive director, and I was there six months. Let me put it briefly: the executive director and I did not see eye-to-eye on a lot of things, if not most things. So, I was gone at the end of six months, and I was really happy to be gone. Then, I did just straight consulting work. I did six months with Florida International University, at their Lehman Transportation Research Center. Then, I went to work for a local consulting firm called Carr-Smith, which is part of the Corrodino group out of Louisville. I did some projects out of the Louisville office, but the big project that I was involved with at Carr-Smith was the Broward County Transit Needs Assessment, which was a multi-hundreds of thousands of dollars, eighteen-month research project on what should Broward County be doing differently; what is its transit needs, and assessing that. We worked with the transit system, Broward County Transit, and all of the twenty-eight municipalities that are there and put together a multi-modal transit needs assessment for that.
- B: Multi-modal is a reference to the integration of bus, rail....
- M: To rail, bus, paratransit demand-responsive kind of services. That was wrapping up in the summer of 1996, and that sort of sets the stage for coming to Gainesville because at the time—of course, you never tell your future employer this—in a consulting firm, it is all based on billable days. August or so was coming along in 1996, and I had very few billable days left, maybe twenty-five, thirty billable days. You could see the end of the line was coming up shortly, and there was no new business coming in and, in consulting firms, it is all based on billable days. You either have them, or if you do not, you are not there. So, this job had been advertised in late June of 1996, and I had applied over the summer. I was interviewed in late August and then got the job in September and started on October 14, 1996. I think that kind of gets us to Gainesville. I had applied for the Gainesville job back in the 1980s, had been a finalist in 1987.
- B: Which is when you were in Melbourne?
- M: I was in Melbourne, in Brevard County, and Greg Cook got the job and was the director for about three years back in the late 1980s to about 1991 or so. So, I had been familiar with Gainesville from that and the fact I had been in the state since 1983. I had visited Gainesville, and I knew a little bit more than people coming from out-of-state would know about its reputation.
- B: When you visit a city for the first time that has a public transit system, do you pay attention? I am sure you at least observe what equipment they are using.
- M: I do more than that. Typically, when I go some place, I do not rent a car. If I go to Washington or Chicago, I never rent a car. My first thing to do is, especially if they have a rail system coming out to the airport, is hop on the rail and go for it.

Now, I just went to Seattle last summer, and it might result in getting on the bus and going in the wrong direction a few times and you will have a chuckle about, well, this is a learning experience. Sometimes, I will wear a hat with a transit system name or a bus name. I remember talking to this one Seattle bus driver last summer, and he kind of got the idea that I should have known where I was going, as I had gotten out to the end of the line and realized that I really wanted to go in the opposite direction. So, yes, I do try because I think it is good to see what other people are doing and bring back thoughts and ideas that other people are using.

B: So, no doubt when you had visited Gainesville earlier, you had done that with this system and so you had some familiarity with it.

M: Yes, because we had spent three or four days in that interview process. We were all brought in at the same time in 1987. There were five finalists put up at the University Centre Hotel. It was quite a nice few days.

B: How would you describe the Gainesville system when you actually arrived to take up your new position here in September of 1996?

M: I guess the best way to describe it was, it was on a downward spiral. It had been losing ridership all through the 1990s--5, 6, 7 percent a year. Fares had been going up. When I was here in the late 1980s, fares had been \$0.50 for adults, and then it had gone to \$0.75 and \$1.00. Transfers, which had been free, had gone from free to \$0.10 to \$0.25. At the same time the fares were doubling in six or seven years, the ridership was falling off 5 or 6 percent a year. The personnel here, I likened it to bunker mentality, which is that everybody is hunkered down, holding on, and hoping that that last charge of somebody coming over the trenches at them does not wipe them out. It was that kind of feeling when I got here. It was pretty amazing.

B: Would you say that the Gainesville system was extraordinarily distinct from other comparable-sized systems in Florida cities, or other cities in the United States?

M: It certainly is distinct from, say, Tallahassee, which we always try to use as comparison. They are very well-funded and [have] very stable management. In fact, their transit director has been there since 1969. So, there is a great deal of stability there. Here, the average tenure has been about thirty months. The longest-serving director was five years, and that was my direct predecessor. That was the longest serving, five years, so we have not had a lot of continuity of management here. With thirty months--I only made thirty-six months--it tends to be kind of a revolving-door type of operation, for the director level.

B: Were the conditions here significantly deteriorated from what you would expect to

find in a system, given that history of turnover, that sort of funding, [and] the size of community?

M: Florida is a hard sell for transit. It does not have the kind of stability in the community that, say, Champaign-Urbana [Illinois] had. Before I came here, before I took the job [but] after I had accepted, I flew up (I went on my own dime) to Champaign-Urbana, went to a lousy football game between Indiana and Illinois. We lost, but it is okay in that kind of crowd because Illinois does not treat you badly when you are going in there. Champaign-Urbana, in comparison, is a town the same size as Gainesville, 100,000 people, and their university is slightly smaller than ours. Their transit is an institution. That is the best way to describe it. We, in the past, I think, have not been an institution that has been esteemed in the community; it has sort of been kind of a necessary evil. That would be about the best way to describe it: we should have one, but we do not know why we should have one. Up there, Bill Volk has been the director from 1974 to right now. He graduated a few years before I did from Indiana, but he went over there in 1974 as the director. [Now] he is the second longest-serving transit director in the country. I think stability of management really tends to help. It is not a total thing, but I think it does tend to help keep things on a course. Otherwise, you tend to go in different directions, depending on who is sitting in that top job.

B: The kind of conditions you referred to about transit being an institution in the community, do you find that is universally true everywhere in Florida, or are there cities that are exceptions?

M: No, I think here, Florida particularly, transit is almost marginalized, invisible, statewide. It is for everybody else. We in our car need to have a bus system, but it needs to be for somebody else. So, it is not like a transit system in, say, Chicago or Washington, where people of all kinds of backgrounds and economic and socio-minority [status] uses public transportation. Here, in Florida, we seem to think that public transportation is for people who have some sort of disadvantage, whether they are disabled or lower-income, that it is somehow not for the broad cross-section of the community. As a result of that, I do not think it has gotten the kind of attention that, say, roads get. We build a new road, and everybody uses it, right? Transit, well, that is a social welfare function. We are trying to change that on a statewide basis, but I think we are way behind other states, other Sunbelt states even, like in California and Texas where they have aggressively expanded their transit systems. I think our best hope here has been what Orlando has done in the last few years. Just in the last six or seven years, they have gone from carrying 12,000 passengers a day and operating less than sixty buses in the Orlando metropolitan area--in 1990, that is what they were doing--to now doing 70,000 passengers a day and operating 240 buses.

B: Is that a multi-modal system?

- M: No, that is just buses. Now they are talking about a light rail program. But, just a few years ago, it was invisible. It was an unknown thing. They did a survey of their residents of the three-county area there, and most people did not know what Tri-County Transit was. It was like a 10 percent name recognition. Now, Lynx, which is their new name, has a 90+ percent name recognition in the Orlando metro area. That is the kind of monumental changes that we need in transit, and not just in Orlando but everywhere, so that we can become part of the mainstream of transportation and move into the transportation system, rather than this idea that, well, it is part of the social services program of a community, and that, well, we have transit for those who need it. That was something that was told to me a lot when I first got here: that is who the transit system is for, those who need it. Well, gee, doesn't everybody need a good public transportation system? But it really was not thought of in those terms in the past.
- B: So, affecting that change of perception was one of your goals, I gather, when you arrived here. What would you say your first priority was?
- M: My first priority in coming into any community is to find out, what is the priority of that community? Well, it did not take very many days to figure that one out, and it was pretty well told to me by elected officials, appointed officials, [and] planning people that making the bus system, the transit system, work for the University of Florida was the prime mission, because it had not been working in the past. My first week on the job, I went to a public hearing over at McCarty Hall. It was filled with students who, one after another, got up and said how bad the bus system was, that it did not meet their needs and that their solution was--I remember one student getting up and saying that the university should be required, for every new academic building, to build five to six stories of parking structure so that the students could drive from class to class. That had a few of the people who were the planning people, and there were elected officials there, kind of going [gasp], what kind of community, what kind of campus, would that be? It would be awful to have people driving from class to class and expecting a parking spot underneath every academic building. What would this look like? It would look like, you know, Butler Plaza or something. I do not know, but it would not look like a campus, like an Indiana University campus, which is pretty much [a] auto-free, pedestrian-only area, in the central core. So, it became really very obvious to me that what had to happen here was to make it work for the university, because that is really our major focus in this town, unlike Tallahassee. I would love to have 25,000 state employees working downtown so that we could run buses for them back and forth, but we do not have that here. We do have 43,000 students and another 20,000 faculty and staff between the university and Shands, all within a four-square-mile area. That is a pretty good concentration of trips. And, if you add all that up, that is 60,000 some people every day who want to go there. There are only 25,000 parking spots on campus, ergo there is your opportunity to make something happen, if you put together the package of services that will

be attractive. This is America. This is Florida. You really cannot force people to use the bus. They have to choose it.

B: You have pull them onto the bus, instead of pushing.

M: You have to pull them. You have to welcome them. You have to make it attractive. You have to make it fun. You have to make it feel like it is for them, not for somebody else. You have to have it be welcoming. And, a lot of times, people's ideas of transit are formed like, New York City and it is the grim subway, and everybody is in a grim mood. Now do not get me wrong. There were people who used the bus system who had a choice, but it was more of a penance that they were using it: I am an environmentalist and, therefore, I am going to leave my car at home, but the bus only comes every hour or every forty-five minutes, and it is not reliable, and it wanders all over town before it gets to campus. Well, that is not attractive. So that was the objective.

B: You talked a little bit about the perception of transit as an institution for those who need it. That sort of speaks to what you were just describing, your goal of making people want to use the bus and want to use transit.

M: And there are certain things that come along with that. It is not an advertising thing. It is truly service design. As I used to tell the city commission, you can design transit service for ones, twos and threes, and you will get ones, twos, and threes to use the bus.

B: What do you mean by ones, twos and threes?

M: One, two, and three passengers at a time. That is what I call the empty bus syndrome, which was really a lot of people, like the business community, telling me, hey, the buses are empty; nobody is using them; why do we have this system? So, you can design a service for those ones, twos and threes. If you design for that, you are going to get that. But if you want to design for the thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, and now really millions more passengers, you can also do that. But they are not the same. If you design services for lots and lots of people, they have to be frequent [and] they have to be direct. You cannot expect people who want to go from A to B to go through X, Y, and Z to get there. We had a lot of that. I call them the wandering bus routes. When I first got here and was on a bus route, and it is wandering through all these single-family residential housing areas, and from the bus, you are looking over the roofs of the houses, practically, right? Even where we had concentrations of student apartment complexes, the bus route would wander everywhere before it got to campus, and it would only come every forty-five minutes or every hour. Well, if you are a student, and most students here on our campus, as I always tell people, drive better cars than the rest of us do. When

the university is on break, the population of Ford Explorers goes down, a lot, and Jeep Grand Cherokees. So, if the buses only come every forty-five minutes and they miss it, they end up packing it in and driving to campus, but if it comes every ten minutes, well, that is a lot more attractive. We have one bus route now every ten minutes, and we have six others every fifteen minutes. When I got here, the best bus route was at every half-hour, and most were forty-five minutes or an hour. That kind of service is not attractive to people who have a choice, and we want people who have a choice to choose to use public transportation. So, you have to make it attractive to them. That is the first thing that we can do from our side. And, you know, they have to be clean, and there have to be personable bus drivers, and they cannot be passing you up at the stop or snapping your head off because you asked a question. There has to be some customer orientation, some welcoming to using the bus.

B: Once you get them to the bus stop.

M: Right. Then, the second thing is--and I cannot emphasize this enough of the three concepts--parking: control the supply and price of parking. That is one thing the university does an extremely good job on, because they have 25,000 parking spots when 60,000 people want to go there every day. Really, that is probably not going to expand. I always try to put it in these terms. Do we want the university campus to look like Wal-mart's parking lot or Butler Plaza? I do not think so. Campuses are pedestrian-friendly environments. Cars detract from that. So, the more we can do to make the campus more pedestrian-friendly, more auto-free areas like next to the library there where they did that section of Newell and closed it off; that used to have sixty-six parking spots along those two sides. Now, it is a beautiful pedestrian [center] with brick planters. It is gorgeous. We need more of that. It will happen in the future, as more of the campus is less cars and more people. Let's face it. You can either put up, on a given square area, a parking garage in which you store cars, or you can put up an academic building or a laboratory or something in which you can educate people and do research. That is your choice. There is only so much land and so much money to build, and it is the same basically bonding authority that you get. Obviously, you use parking revenues, parking fees, to pay for it. That is the second thing. Then, the third thing that was done was, and the university students themselves did it in the spring of 1997, they voted to tax themselves in their activity and services fee. The question on the ballot in March of 1997 was, would you be willing to pay up to a \$1/credit hour for free unlimited access to the bus system? They said, by a 57 percent majority, those who voted, yes, and that was in the face of all the bad things, because we really, in March of 1997, had done nothing. You know, when you start a job--our fiscal year starts October 1, and I started October 14 of 1996--your budget is fixed for a year; your budget was done by your predecessor, so there is very little you can do to change anything at that point, without changing in funding. So, that unlimited access has really moved the

students from being fare-paying, dropping \$0.50 in or buying a \$35 semester pass, to a member of a club. I liken it to the same thing as a health-and-fitness membership. There are 10,000 members of Gainesville Health and Fitness. When you go, you hope the rest of them do not show up so you can have that great facility to work out in. Some nights, it does seem like all 10,000 are there, but typically they are not. Everybody benefits from the fact that there are 10,000 members. It is the same way for the students. The fees have gone up each year. This year, it is \$0.29, and we are proposing for it to go up for next year as well, up against that \$1 that was authorized.

B: When were you able to actually implement that free ridership for students program?

M: That actually did not begin until this past school year, 1998-1999, during my second fiscal year. The first fiscal year that I had anything to do with, which was 1997-1998, we were able to begin the improvements of service using DOT [Department of Transportation] funding, some funding made available by Alachua County, the city of Gainesville, and the University. We were able to do some demonstrations, in the southwest area with the student apartment complex areas, of improving services, improving frequencies from forty-five minutes or an hour to a half-hour. Just by doing that, we had tremendous ridership increases. They were still, at that time, buying \$35 a month passes and putting \$0.50 in the fare boxes. This was 1997-1998. They did not implement the fee until 1998-1999, so we have actually only had one year with the unlimited access. That just shocked the ridership up tremendously. It did go up the first year. Our ridership in fiscal 1997 was 2,147,000, compared to 2,110,000 in fiscal 1996. But then, in fiscal 1998, which was the first year that we were able to do service improvement, we went up some 40 percent, to 2,948,000. This past year, when we did more service improvement and had the unlimited access, we were up to 4,411,000.

B: 109 percent.

M: Right, but most of the improvements were in the city routes. We differentiate between campus, which are those routes that never leave the campus, and city routes, which most of them do go to campus but they are designated city routes. Although we have doubled the overall ridership, we have tripled the ridership on the city routes over the last three years. We have gone from 1.1 million to 3.1 million.

B: That is a phenomenal change in that short period of time.

M: Yes, it is great.

B: You talked about three different aspects of redesigning the system to accomplish change. Do you think that could be done in any community, or is Gainesville particularly unique?

M: Ridership here is found in a mother lode. The goldmine always existed here in Gainesville, and it just took pick and shovel and wheelbarrow to haul it away. In other communities, I do not believe there will be such a mother lode. I think there will be veins, though, of ridership that can be found. For instance, Palm Beach County, where I am going, 30 percent of the population is over the age of sixty-five. I lived in Brevard County. Coastal counties are a lot different than interior counties, and we are a much younger county than is typical because of the university and the students. In Brevard County, if you do stuff for senior citizens, they vote.

B: Is that what you mean about coastal counties? You are not talking about geography; you are talking about population.

M: Population. You know, retirees pretty much have flocked to the coastal counties, and they are a lot different than this kind of county, although I think in the future, we will certainly have more senior citizens moving in here. We are already getting it, people retiring from South Florida and moving to Gainesville. I have it in my own neighborhood. I think college communities will end up attracting more senior citizens. But that is one group. There are going to be different groups and not the mother lode of ridership that university students are in a community like this.

B: You mentioned the funding that became available from DOT, and I think you mentioned the county commission also. How did that come to pass? Was that something that had been in the works when you arrived?

M: No. That is stuff that we immediately started to talk to the Florida Department of Transportation about. They have what is called service-development grants, quarter-development grants, just grants that they do not have to give you, that are discretionary. We also get block grants from them where the legislature says, you will give every county so much based on this formula. But the other grants are discretionary. They are grants to demonstrate service concepts. That is what we were able to do, to go to DOT and say, hey, we want to demonstrate how improved services would do here in Gainesville, to take some of these routes, that are forty-five minutes to an hour, to a half-hour. They were fairly modest proposals. They were not big-time things, but the results were standing loads on the buses, people waiting at bus stops. In the fall of 1997, we got quite a bit of publicity out of it and were able to then move forward with even more proposals to DOT, in the county and the city, to provide even more proposals.

B: Would you say you are more attuned to grantsmanship than your predecessors in this job?

M: I do not know what had happened in the past, but I do know from experience, and my experience in Brevard County was that the county likes it when you use other people's money first, either state or federal. There, we obtained about 90 percent of our money from sources other than the county, so I spent a lot of time going to Tallahassee and Washington making sure we got the money back. So, I have had a lot of experience with that. It is not that you cannot do it locally, and certainly we got funding, but it is a lot easier when you go to, say, the county, the city, and the university and say, hey, we have the commitment from the Department of Transportation to give us \$250,000; you have to come up with \$250,000 of your own. Now, they [say], well, let's see; if we each give a third... And it gets it down to where it is palatable. It is like, how do you eat that elephant? By one bite at a time. Getting challenge grants like that and convincing the Department of Transportation that, hey, this is some place that would be a good risk for them, that it may pay off. And it has. We have probably had one of the best increases in ridership than any of their demonstration projects have ever had. Now, it is at the point where they call us up and say, can you use some extra money; we found some. Oh sure, just send it down. Just at the end of their year, June 30, it was that way. They said, hey, we have an extra \$100,000; we have to get this all done (this was June 1); can you get us all the paperwork necessary to get this to you by June 30? It is amazing how fast you can move when somebody calls and says, we have \$100,000 we want to unload on you. You just move. Grantsmanship is an essential part of building any public transportation system. For instance, a new bus is \$250,000, and the fuel and the bus driver's salary. It just costs money. So, you have got to put together the package, and the more sources of revenues you get in, the easier it is to keep it all going. If you are dependent on a source, that is where it gets to be hard to do anything.

B: What proportion of the money that it takes to run this system in Alachua County and Gainesville comes from local sources, and what proportion comes from either grants or regularly recurring sources of outside revenue from state or federal government?

M: I guess I should put it this way because a lot of people like to talk about, is there a deficit in transit, and in the past, they talked about farebox recovery, which was how much was going in the farebox versus how much was coming from all the other sources. One of the things I have tried to do over the last three years in completely eliminate that whole discussion from the formula because it all has to be paid for. In any event, everything has to be paid for, and this idea that somehow the "users" have to pay for it. We look at the auto and say, well, the auto user is paying for the highway system. My response to that is, yes, they pay

for the construction and the maintenance of the roads, but go ask the police department or the fire department how much they get from their budget from the gas tax. The answer is zero. Then ask them how many runs of fire department personnel, either fire trucks and their ambulances, go to auto accidents. The majority will be the answer. Very few house fires. When you see a fire truck out there or an ambulance out there, they are going to an accident, because typically, especially if it is a severe accident, you are going to have gasoline on the ground and you are going to have debris everywhere. That is why the fire truck is out there. Then, go to the police department and ask them how much of their operation goes to traffic control? About half. Then ask them how much they get from the local option gas tax. Nothing. Both of those departments are paid for by the general taxpayers. Whether you own a car or not, you are paying property taxes.

B: Or local sales tax.

M: Some sales tax has come back. So, the idea that this part of the transportation system, the transit part, has to be paid only by the users, hey, you have to apply it across the board. The subsidies to the automobile are staggering. For instance, go and ask the Department of Defense how much of the gas taxes they got to do the Persian Gulf War. It costs this country billions of dollars. Now would we have gone to war in Kuwait if they did not have an oilfield there? Well, I think the obvious answer, because we have seen it elsewhere, is no. We would never have gone to war in the Persian Gulf if they had not a drop of oil. But how much does our Department of Defense get in gas taxes? Nothing. So throughout the federal, state, and local government, we are subsidizing the automobile to a staggering amount. So, I guess as far as transit is concerned, what we have to do is make sure that we cover the budget, and it is going to come from different sources. One of the things I think transit in general, not just here in Gainesville, has done is a miserable job with pricing. Back in the early 1990s, before 1996, the same time we were raising the fares from \$0.50 to \$0.75 to \$1.00 and transfers from \$0.00 to \$0.10 to \$0.25, we were cutting service. So, at the same time we were saying pay more, you were getting less. Is that really a great marketing strategy? Maybe that is because I was a marketing undergraduate, but I do not think so. That is not what a company or any service does to grow. That is a formula for death, and the way it was going with the 5 percent reduction of ridership, it was just 5 percent, 5 percent; when it is gone completely? I call it extracting from the people. Remember, by the time you cut service back and raise fares--I have seen a lot of research this way--a lot of people think, well, you are trying to get more money from the users. Yes, but who are your users at that point? The people are absolutely dependent on you. You are taking the lowest-income people, because these are the people who do not have a car, have no other choice, and you are sticking it to them with higher fares and less service. So, it is actually a way of extracting pennies, in essence, from the

lowest-income people in your community, rather than another strategy, a Wal-mart type of strategy, which would say, what do they like to do? You know, the little man flips down on the cart there with a smiley face as the prices go down. We do not do that in transit. We should be looking at a way to make pricing invisible, to remove that barrier that the fare and farebox has been to the people using the transit system. I liken it to, how often have you ever gone into a high-rise building, gotten on a elevator, and there was a little box there saying, please deposit a quarter? Have you ever done that? The elevator is that building's lifeline. A high-rise forty, fifty, sixty stories could not function without an elevator. Now, you might say in a five-story building, by God, if they are going to charge me a quarter, I will walk the stairs, right? In a fifty-story building, I do not think you could say that. Well, what is the difference in a community? A transit system is nothing more than a horizontal elevator. We should be able to have access to it. Now, obviously, it has to be paid for and I would never say, make it free, because the research shows that where they have tried free systems, they have all been failures because basically the perception becomes, well, if I am paying nothing for it, it is not worth anything. It is like air. We do not pay for air. Now, if it were gone, we would sure pay a lot because we would die. But the incremental cost, we do not care about; basically, unless it gets so bad that we are choking on it, we do not think about the costs for it. In transit's case, I am not saying that it should be free, but we need to come up with a way--which we have done, for instance, with the Gator One [identification] card with the students--where they are part of the riding transit club, and they all know they are paying for it. They show their ID to get on and provide that access. So, we have sort of changed the whole way the economics of transit work so that it is not by use, but it is prepaid. A lot of businesses have tried to go to that way. You up front prepay something, like the health clubs. If, for instance, there were no \$300 or \$400 a year memberships at a health club, would you go in and pay \$10 or \$15 a visit? Most people would never do that. Yet, really, if they thought about how often they went, that is what they are actually paying. The students this past year actually paid for all the trips they did on the city bus routes, not the campus ones which are separately funded, just the city routes, the 1.7 million rides that University of Florida students took, the amount of money they paid was \$0.11 a trip. That \$180,000 they paid to us to have that unlimited access amounted to \$0.11 a trip. But, what a hassle it would have been if they had to bring a dime and a penny for every time they wanted to board the bus. They would not have done that, but we removed that and all they had to do was show their ID.

B: So, funding the student transportation did not actually replace the farebox revenues that would have occurred with the same ridership over the same period of time.

M: What we had done to arrive at that figure of \$180,000, we had looked at the previous years' student fares that had been paid, the \$0.50 fares and the \$35

semester passes, and we made an estimate of how much of that was paid by the University of Florida, and we came up with \$180,000. That is what was paid to us last year to have that unlimited access. Now, we took that \$180,000 and just put it in our regular budget. To give you an idea how well that worked, our farebox did not go down by \$180,000; it is only down about \$90,000 last year. The reason is, there is a lot more service out on the street, and other people who are not students are riding more. In fact, the figure of non-UF student ridership is now, for the fiscal year that just ended, 1.5 million. That is 36 percent higher than the total city route ridership of 1.1 million just four years ago. That 1.1 [million] included students, but we cannot take that out because before last year, we did not have a separate count just for University of Florida students. With the start of this new program, we had its own key, and that is the key that is hit on the farebox every time a student gets on board showing their ID. Back to 1996, they just paid a fare, but so did secondary, middle-school, and Santa Fe [Community College students]. So, really, if you took out the University of Florida students, it would even be higher. The point is, we are up substantially in other people riding the bus system than were riding just four years ago. It is not just students. There is a synergy there, and it can be measured by both the ridership and the farebox that did not go down by as much as we estimated it would go down. That kind of warmed the heart, but that is how economics work if you think about it. Sometimes, the idea of spending money to get money is not real intuitive, but that happens all the time in our economy, right? I mean, the federal government wants to spend money to create more jobs to do this or that, and it is not intuitive that that would be how it works. Indeed, I think, in transit, it is the same way. You know, charging more and more for less and less is not a good formula for success; in fact, I think it is a formula to fail.

- B: Do you think that public transit in the community outside of the student population, in Gainesville we will say for this discussion, would work better across the board if anybody with, say, an ID card or a pass issued by the city or the county were able to board a bus and ride without paying anything into a farebox?
- M: The removal of a farebox, that barrier that it represents, has got to be a prime objective of any transit system. Now, some transit systems that really led the way in this--Denver and Portland are the two that come to mind the most--the concept that they have taken is, most employers (now, the university is not one of those employers) provide free parking for their employees. Most employers do not provide a free bus pass. So, Denver and Portland have pushed, and these are tremendous numbers--in Denver, it is something like 285,000--employees who have bus passes provided free by their employers. Portland is about 225,000, but it is a much smaller city than Denver, and I think its percentage of employees being provided bus passes by their employer is one of the highest in the country. I think that is coming here. We were very close this past summer with the university. The thing was on the table. DOT was actually going to match the

university's money. The proposal was \$29,000 from the university, \$29,000 from the Department of Transportation, and all faculty and staff would have been able to have free unlimited use of the bus system. It was turned down because it was not a good enough deal. Well, we will be back in there. In fact, they pitched it yesterday, the group from Tigert Hall. They said, well, you know, we need to think about that again. Yes, you do need to think about that. That was the best deal. DOT was right in there and was going to match their money. Well, now, it would have been good for two years, that match. Then, in two years, they would have had to come up with the full [amount], but I think it would have done tremendous positives for the faculty and staff. Even if we could not have accommodated all the demand in the short run, in the long run, it would have put them on the same side of the equation that the students are on, giving us 60,000 people in this community with bus passes for free unlimited use. Well, free is not the greatest word, but unlimited use, because they are being paid for by their employer. Anyhow, I think that will come. I know the county and the city are also interested in providing their employees with bus passes.

B: In the downtown core.

M: Hm-mm [yes]. In fact, the Doubletree Hotel, the new [University of Florida] conference center, they are interested in it [and so is] their new general manager for their employees because they have limited parking out there. So, I think that concept will come to Gainesville, and in a few years, it will be expected. You know, you are getting a free parking spot; you get a free bus pass. [It will] level that playing field between transit and taking your car. See, there are so many incentives for using your car. Most people do not think of that, oh, that is right; most employers give a free parking spot; they do not charge. The university does because it is mandated by state law. It has to charge. Parking has to support itself. It is an enterprise function. They cannot use general funds to support parking, that is [a] state statute. But, the city in the past, our zoning ordinances required a minimum number of parking spots per employee. Now, we have changed that around. In other words, you do not have to provide one parking spot for every employee like you used to.

B: You can opt to accommodate less.

M: What was the minimum is now the max.

B: Are other cities following that?

M: Yes, a lot of people are, because it is all part of this new urbanism idea of going back to what our communities were before we were auto-dominated, the 1930s, the 1920s, when people walked to the corner store. They did not have to get into their car to do every basic function of life. We had actual communities where you

had a corner grocery store, and you could all go down there and chat about what was going on in the community, and people were out of these 4,000-pound chunks of steel that they have to haul around all the time. I think we are going to have more and more of that in the future and less and less of [the mentality that] we have to have all these huge roads and move in cars.

B: Can that be done in Florida cities that have spread so horizontally, do you think?

M: I think the best example here is Haile Plantation and the Haile Village Center. The other one is the Town of Tioga. Greenways of Gainesville will be like that as well. I think people are coming around to seeing that more Archer Roads...I mean, that is the whole thing on Tower Road. The residents there said, geez, all you want to do is make us another Archer Road, and is that what we want for the future or do we want more two-lanes and pedestrian-friendly and transit-intensive corridors instead of just building more roads?

B: What other innovations have satisfied you the most about your tenure at Gainesville Regional Transit System? You have been resourceful about acquiring buses from other systems. You have put bike racks on all the buses on this system.

M: Yes. The bike racks have been great. When I got here, they were on a handful of them. They were not on enough to really matter, so we decided really rapidly, let's get them on all of them. That has been great. Now, there are only two on each bus, and they are overloaded. They will put two, and they will put a third one in between the other two. Actually, we need to probably look at having a rack that will hold four. A company in Seattle is apparently going to come out on the market with the rack that holds four. I think that has extended our bus system because people who are willing to walk, maybe, a couple of blocks will bike a few more. Or people coming into campus but the bus does not get them quite where they need to go on campus will have their bikes. So, it really is an extender, and the more of that we can have available, the better. One disappointment in new things was getting alternative-fuel busses and getting new busses in general. It is one thing to say, yes, we did go out and get everybody else's used busses, it seems. You can do that. You know, we bought ten busses from Orlando for \$30,000. Well, just one new brand new bus costs \$250,000. An alternative fuel, like a CNG [Compressed Natural Gas] bus, would be close to \$300,000, not to mention the fueling facilities that you need and things like that. That is what takes the years to put together the packages. For instance, we have worked with the Department of Transportation, and in the year of 2003-2004, they will begin giving, from highway money that would typically be allocated to the Gainesville area, \$1,250,000 a year [for] the transit system to buy busses. So, I have a gift for my successor that will start in a few years that is going to be wonderful, that is going to take highway money and make it into transit money to buy busses with.

B: Is that something that is unique to the system here?

M: No. Daytona was the first one to do it. They are doing 20 percent of their funding. Actually, the \$1,200,000 ends up being about equivalent to 10 percent of our highway funds.

B: So, local communities or counties can call that as they choose to with DOT?

M: In our case, because we are under 200,000 in population, DOT has to agree. But we can request that, and they were cooperative with it. In Palm Beach, that is the first thing I am going to be working on. In fact, I have already talked with DOT down there, and they want to do more than what they are doing now for transit. That has got to be one of the things, to get a secure source of capital funding coming in to buy new busses. Unfortunately for Gainesville, that is not going to happen until the year 2003-2004, but once it starts, it is in there.

B: Was that change controversial with this community?

M: No, because it had been the number-one priority for our city and county commissioners, but what had not been gotten was taking the priority and making it into reality. That is what staff is here to do. We found out about this stuff in Daytona, took it to the city and county commissioners and said, hey, this is what they have done, talked about it in all the various committees, got everybody to agree. Well, we are not going to quite do that, [but] how many busses do you need? I said, well, I would like to buy five a year forever, because it is better than buying twenty-five at one time. Buy five a year, and you just put that in, [and] how much is that? Well, that is a \$250,000 bus; okay, \$1,250,000. The way DOT works, you have to be five or six years out because that is when you have the opportunity [and] there is a hole in their allocation of funds. In other words, projects end and then we have a stream of money, and we get about \$10,000,000 in federal highway money coming into the Gainesville area. It does things like the Newberry Road expansion, Archer Road. Federal aid highway money funds the big highway projects in the community, and it amounts to, on the average, about \$10,000,000, not including interstate money; that is a separate pot. This is the surface transportation program. Those funds can be used for transit capital, since the 1980s. They have just never been tapped.

B: At whose option?

M: At the local option. In our case, we work much more closely with DOT. Over 200,000 [population], you control your own federal money and you tell DOT what to do the projects on. Under 200,000, which is our case, it is a collaborative thing. Actually, the final call is DOT's, but they usually do what the locals want because, you know, it is our community. But it is a little bit more of a dance than it is in a,

say, Daytona Beach, which is over 200,000. So, we have the same mechanism now set up, but it is going to take a few years to get to it. In the meantime, we have been very active in getting earmarks, which are special allocations of federal transit money. We got \$1,500,000 for fiscal year 1999. Unfortunately, it was only going to be \$500,000 for fiscal 2000. But that is where you go to Washington, go in front of the committee, sit there like the commercials. You know, they are up there and you are asking for your money for busses. I do remember when I was there back in 1998, and Frank Wolf was the chair of the House appropriations, the transportation appropriations subcommittee, and everybody was droning on and on. But, when I said the students of the University of Florida had voted to tax themselves, he raised up and said, really? So, I mean, you make a connection because very often, people cannot say that, that people have actually voted to tax themselves to provide anything, let alone public transportation. It does not happen that often.

B: So, this was a fairly unique occurrence in public transportation?

M: I would not say unique. Rare. Unique means it does not happen at all. But rare.

B: Can you cite any other examples?

M: Probably the last one done here was back in the early 1980s when they passed a \$0.01 gas tax by referendum in Alachua County and split the proceeds 50 percent between roads and 50 percent to transit.

B: Was that part of the referendum question, the division between transit and roads?

M: Yes, that was part of it, and it passed as a result of that split. That is what Alachua County gives us and CTS their money from. About \$500,000 a year comes from that source, and it is split between us and them. Other areas...Lakeland has a Lakeland area mass transit district, and theirs is funded by a property tax, and every time they annex an area, it has to be done by referendum and, with it, goes the property tax. So, they are actually voting when they are annexed into the transit district to vote a tax on themselves. Other than that in Florida, well, Jacksonville did pass a sales tax a number of years ago, about ten years ago, to get rid of the tolls on the bridges. Also, as part of that, they funded the transit system. So, although the big visible thing was getting rid of the tolls, they also funded part of the transit system. So it is rare but not unique.

B: Do you think a voter initiative, such as what you are describing in Jacksonville, does that need to be somehow packaged to sell it to the voters?

M: Absolutely.

B: So, you think the removing of the tolls on the bridges was the \_\_\_\_ that helped the rest of through?

M: That was a big hook. And if you look here [at] the gas tax proposal that we had over the last year that went down here a month ago, it may come back as a referendum item, too. Packaged differently in what it will be used for.

B: Discuss issues that affect funding for transit and the possibility of any other alternatives that we had not talked about yet.

M: I think the transportation funding advisory committee that was active over the last couple of years, and that I was a member of, had a good proposal for increasing transportation funding. Where I think it fell apart was, how was that funding going to be allocated? When I think of balanced transportation, I think there needs to be an effective, efficient public transportation system. There needs to be bike paths, sidewalks, you know, more than just roads. But, to a lot of people, balanced transportation means half your highways are going to be made of concrete and half your highways are going to be made of asphalt. To them, that means balanced transportation. That is not what I think this community's vision is. The long-range transportation plan, the 2020 plan, that is going to be going on over the next eighteen months. I think that is going to give us a different vision than we have had in the past. With that, I think the new funding proposal, this \$0.05 gas tax, there were transportation impact fees [and] there was allocation of county general revenue to transportation. I think a lot of people are going to be looking for a real allocation of funds to balance transportation, not just token amounts like, okay, transit will get \$100,000 a year or something and, meanwhile, we are going to spend \$5,000,000 a year on new roads. I guess I would look at it as we really need something closer to 50 percent for roads and maintenance of roads and stuff and 50 percent for other alternatives, and not just transit, just busses, but also sidewalks. If you think about [it], one of the biggest barriers to walking or even riding the bus is getting there. I mean, how many subdivisions do we have that have [no] sidewalk[s] anywhere and you are out there on the curb, or they do not even have a curb or gutter; they have a [drainage] swale, and you are walking in among the fire ants to get out anywhere, to walk.

B: What about bus stops?

M: And bus stops with pads for wheelchair users and sidewalks that go to places. So, to make our community more pedestrian-friendly, we have a big backlog on pedestrian facilities. Bike paths, off-street, on-street. I love the Rail Trail [Gainesville bike path]. We need to have more of that. There are more

abandoned railroad right-of-ways. Archer Road, few people realize, could be another Rail Trail. The right of way is that. The power lines run over the top of it. We could put a bike path down that. That would be neat to pedal out to Archer. We could have a whole network around this county, but we are not going to have it unless there is some funding that goes to it, and not just once-in-a-blue-moon type of thing like we did the Rail Trail out to Hawthorne and that has been done for three or four years and, now, nothing has happened. I am talking about where we have a regular program of allocating substantial money to saying, hey, we have \$300,000 or \$500,000 a year to build bike paths. I bet we could build a lot of bike paths in the next five to ten years, knowing we have \$500,000 a year coming in just to do that. So, it is just not for transit purposes but to give us a more balanced transportation system. We need to look at that. For instance, if we are going to do an impact fee...if we are putting up a new apartment complex out there that is obviously oriented to the university, should their impact fee pay for a new traffic signal or should it pay for a new bus? Well, traffic intersections now are costing \$200,000 for all the elaborate signals, and the bus is \$250,000. Maybe that apartment complex, if it has 1,100 bedrooms like some of these have, should be paying for a couple of busses as part of their impact fee. It is those kinds of things. We need to be looking at some other alternatives. I would not want the students, especially, to feel that their fee should pay for everything, as far as transit is concerned in this community, because there are other interests involved and they should be paying their fair share, even if they do not use it. I mean, the owners of those apartment complexes are not going to use the bus, but certainly a lot of their residents are. We need to have that as part of that impact fee.

B: You mentioned the figure of 50 percent a few minutes back. 50 percent of what pot?

M: Whatever pot it is.

B: Including all the outside revenues that come from federal and state?

M: There are different categories, but we are nowhere near...for instance, if we get \$10,000,000 in highway funds, we get about \$1,000,000 in transit funds. Just as I was talking earlier, now DOT is going allocate about \$1,000,000 a year of those highway funds to supplement our transit, but we are still going to have \$8,000,000 to \$2,000,000, a four-to-one ratio between highways and transit. So I do not think you are ever going to get out of this. But I think money that we control, like local money, we can set how it is allocated. Every six years, you have a new federal transportation act. It seems like we are moving up in the transit program versus the highway program, but locally, we can set that. We set how much we use our gas tax on. Palm Beach County, when they did their \$0.05, they took half of it to transit, Tri-Rail and Palm Tran, and half of it to roads.

So, they split it \$0.025 each. They did that four or five years ago down there. So, it is our call. It is the community's decision.

B: Any comments about the kind of support that local government, elected officials, or other agency heads have given to transit since you have been in Gainesville? What do you think it takes to stimulate that kind of support and enthusiasm and interest?

M: There is an old saying that roughly goes, failure is an orphan; success has a lot of mothers and fathers. I think the old saying was just fathers, but I think it is now, success has many mothers and fathers. I think in the past, and this has been expressed to me by some elected officials, they knew they needed to have a transit system, but they did not really know what they needed to do about it. It was sort of like, okay, we know we need this, but now what do we do with it, or what do we do about it? They have been great, really, the elected officials. I cannot say enough about the city commission and their support. I wish there were more on the county commission, but that is coming around.

B: Is there anyone you would single out as having been particularly influential or pivotal in helping?

M: In the city commission, it is all of them. They have all stood behind the changes. I will always remember what the mayor used to say. It was, well, we are asking him to change the system, but we are telling him not to make any changes. That is impossible; to change, we are going to have to change. They have taken a lot of heat in the early goings when we were trying to change from designing for the ones, twos, and three passengers to the thousands, tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands. We have been part of the social service network for twenty some years, and the change to be part of the transportation system, it is not intuitive that it is going to help the previous users. Well, in fact, it has proven to have helped them as well. Politicians, elected officials, it is frustrating when they have a three-year term and they have term limits to see things through. A lot of what we are beginning is going to pay off years from now, but it has been good to be able to pay off pretty immediately. I have only been here three years, but I do not think there is probably any other city department that has tripled or doubled their service level in the same period of time. If you look around at how many people are participating in parks programs, how many people are going to cultural affairs programs, I do not think the police are arresting twice as many people as they did three years ago. So I think the opportunity that we have had build on this success has really changed people's minds. I like to think of it as, it should not be me talking about transit; it should be everybody talking about it. Then, that is much better.

B: Comment on technology that is ahead for transit. There are several different

technologies for busses, and I guess there are alternative modes out there.

M: First of all, I think we are going to have low floors. Steps will be eliminated. Wheelchair lifts will be eliminated because there will not need to be any. A wheelchair will be able to come up right on a ramp that will just shoot out on the side of the bus. There will not be these big mechanical lifts. It will be an improvement for everybody. We will be able to board and de-board a bus much more quickly without stairs, and for the mass kinds of loadings that we have, that is going to be very important to us. The interiors of these low-floor busses look like railcars. A staff person [who is] six foot five can barely touch the ceiling of a low-floor bus. That is the look that they have. They have those European- style huge windows, and they have the look of a light railcar but it is a bus. It is because of the low floor. You do not go up three or four steps, and that helps everybody, [like] the elderly person who is not in a wheelchair but has difficulty climbing steps. It is just a smooth entrance, no steps. Then, I think there will be alternative fuels. I think the first step is going to be clean diesel, which is a particulate trap that they put on. In California, the technology has been deemed equivalent to an alternative-fueled vehicle. In other words, the clean diesel technology, because they have very strict California regulations, has been deemed equivalent to CNG operation. I think that will be the first step in the conversion of our busses in the future to alternative fuels.

B: Is that something that can be retrofitted on existing fleets?

M: That is with new engines. It is not going to be something retrofitted. You have to buy that new engine with it. Now, if you are completely re-powering a bus, you can put that into the old bus, but it is going to cost \$50,000, \$60,000 to do that because the whole engine, the whole cradle if you will, has to be taken out and put in. We do not do that very often. A bus will last 600,000 to 800,000 miles. At 200,000 or 300,000, we are rebuilding it, but we rarely pull a whole engine out and put a new engine in. The staggering amount of time that the busses use, I mean, a typical bus will last twelve to fifteen years. Think about how many cars you have in a fifteen-year period. Well, for most people, four to five is fairly typical these days, and that is up from what it used to be. The lives of cars, because they are so expensive, people are keeping them longer. Not that many years ago, it was only three to four years. Now, it is like five to six. It has been going up. People are holding on to their cars much longer than they used to. But, we hold on to a bus really long, twelve to fifteen years. Twelve years is the minimum life cycle that the feds allow you on a bus. Typically, by the time you get the money to buy a new one, it is fifteen years old. So whether it ends up being CNG or hydrogen or battery electric, I think we are going to go through all kinds of different versions of alternative fuels.

B: So, there is no distinct path that is very evident at this point?

M: Not at this point.

B: When you say hydrogen, you are referring to...?

M: To the fuel cells. Although you can now do hydrogen with not a fuel cell but where you just burn it in a turbine and make electricity that way. So, I think there are going to be lots of different alternatives, but the outcome will be that it will be an electric-powered bus, and that has a lot of advantages. One is, it is quiet, because it is not going to be an internal combustion, diesel-engine type of thing. An electric bus is wonderful because no matter what kind of auxiliary power you have to actually recharge the battery on board, you can set that...say, it is any kind of engine; it is set as a generator. The main motive power does not come from the engine. It comes from the batteries, and that is what batteries do best, to discharge deeply and give you that acceleration. There is nothing like the acceleration on an electric vehicle. Have you ever been on an electric train? Those things! Or an electric bus, I mean, they get up and go. You put in that electric motor, and it goes immediately. It is not like internal combustion which has to build up the speed. So that is coming. There will be a lot of different variants, but the ultimate outcome will be an electric-based vehicle. I would say over the next ten years, we are going to have lots of different things like that. I think we are going to have some of those in the near term, which will be a battery bus, battery-electric, with an auxiliary range extender on it. It will probably be a little diesel engine that we can keep very, very clean because you are not using it to accelerate, because most of the smoke you see on a diesel bus is unburned fuel during the acceleration. Once you can get that engine going and keep it steady, you burn all the fuel, or most of it. So, it is going to be interesting on that side of new technology.

B: Do you see electric busses going back to what used to be the system where they would derive power from either a rail or an overhead cable system?

M: No. I do not really see that because of the infrastructure costs. [Regarding] rail technology in general: our community is 140,000 people in the metropolitan area, and we are now carrying 26,000 or 27,000 passengers a day. For a rail line, just one route, for the federal government to start considering that you are in any kind of acceptable planning boundaries, you need to have ridership projections exceeding 20,000 boardings a day on one route, and if you cannot show that in your planning, you are not going to get federal participation in any kind of rail service. That is their new standard.

B: Is that mandate driven by what they understand the costs to be for a rail system?

M: Yes, because of the huge capital costs in a rail program, the infrastructure, the rail itself, the electric distribution system, the station. Even if it is light rail, you are

going to have some kind of station, even if it is not an elaborate station like you would have with a commuter rail or a heavy rail, a subway system or an elevated system; even a light rail is going to have periodic stations. But, with 20,000 passenger boardings on a route being your threshold for consideration for federal funding, we have a long way to go. I think we will easily pass 30,000, 40,000 passenger boardings a day in the near term of five years, and our goal should be Champaign-Urbana's 9,000,000 passenger boardings a year. That translates into 35,000 to 40,000 on an average weekday. We are not that far away from that.

- B: If I get on a bus and ride to the University of Florida in the morning and then board again and ride home at night, that is two boardings?
- M: Two boardings. Now, if you take two busses to do that trip in, say you transfer from one bus to another, that is four trips. That is one boarding, a second boarding, a third boarding, and a fourth boarding. That is passenger boarding. The only true way to evaluate transit ridership is, how many times does a person board. Now, obviously, you want to have as few transfers as possible. In a lot of systems, most systems in Florida, 30 to 40 percent of their boardings are transfers from another bus. Ours is much lower. Ours is like 20 percent. It is almost half the typical. That is because our route structure is pretty well-oriented to the university, and you can get on one bus and go to the university and get off, and you do not need to take a second bus. But, in a lot of communities, to get anywhere, you need to take a second bus. So, when I am saying 20,000 boardings on a route, I mean if you had a bus route from downtown to the Oaks Mall on University Avenue, which we do, which carries, maybe, 800 passengers a day, you would have to put 20,000 passengers a day on the busses on that route before the feds would begin to entertain any plan coming from Gainesville to put a rail line down University Avenue.
- B: Someone has been trying to advance a proposal to build some sort of light rail system just within the confines of the University of Florida campus. I do not remember the details of the proposal, but it sounds like from what you are saying that really does not meet the federal government's reality measure, I guess.
- M: And their funding availability.
- B: So, even with that concentration of population on the campus, it probably would not...
- M: See, the thing there would be, if you look at all of our routes coming in, they are coming from all [directions], southwest along Archer, west out 20<sup>th</sup> Avenue and S. W. 62<sup>nd</sup> Blvd, east 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue, south 13<sup>th</sup> St. south, up 13<sup>th</sup> St. north. It is a radial system of routes going into the campus. None of those routes will ever get 20,000 passenger boardings a day. I think what people like about rail is, the

vehicles are quiet [and] they are big. I think the low-floor electric bus will get a lot of that perception and move it over to the bus. They like the stations in a rail system. I think improvements that we need to do on putting passenger shelters, we are doing that on campus and we need to do more of them. We need to make them look the best they can look. People like the vehicles [and] they like the stations in a rail system, and I think we can give them that in a bus system that has low-floor vehicles with very high ceilings that are quiet, that are electric, that have the big windows. We can give them that with shelters at the bus stops. Maybe on the campus, they need to be red brick pillars with red tile roofs. I do not know what the new president is going to have for his style or her style, but we can accommodate that. We have been working with commercial developments [and] apartment complexes. Both the city and the county now require if you are building those kinds of things that you put an architecturally-compatible passenger shelter out in front of your place of business. So, I think there is a lot we can do. And also frequency. You know, people think of New York or Washington. Do you ever look at a schedule? No, because you can just go down in the subway station and the train comes by. We can do the same thing with a bus. We can have a bus coming by every ten minutes on a route. Then you get to the point where people do not need schedules. They know it is there. It can run all evenings, run seven days a week, and it will cost a fraction of what it would cost to build a rail system, to lay track, to put up electric distribution, to build stations. There is only so much money, and we can take advantages of all these roads we built to run the busses on them. So, I think, realistically for this size of community—now, I may not say this in a Tampa or Orlando, but I do think in Gainesville—we need to be realistic and concentrate on where we can make things happen, and that is with a really super improved bus system, much beyond what we have now.

- B: If you were to come back to Gainesville ten or twenty years from now, what would you look for that would make you call it a success in public transportation?
- M: First, it would have to be based on ridership. Ridership is like location is in real estate. It is ridership, ridership, ridership. So, what I would first want to see is that the ridership is millions and millions more. I could set the goal as 9,000,000, and we are halfway there with 4.4 [million] this past year, and we should hit over 6,000,000 this coming year. But, I would see millions beyond that, every year, riding the bus. Be able to go down University Avenue or Archer Road or 13th street and a bus comes by every ten minutes and operates all evening and operates seven days a week. Very frequent service, a big span of service. For a university community, it should be midnight; 3:00 a.m. on the weekends, should be just a matter of course, just like a big city. And, to the point where you really do not need a schedule because the busses are just coming and going. And, each bus stop, or if not each at least of the majority of them, would be wonderful places to wait, architectural statements that transit is something very important in

this community. And, the busses would be state-of-the-art, electric, quiet. You would not even know they were coming up until they opened the door. I think if that happened, that would mean that what we have started the last three years was carried on to its ultimate benefit for the community.

B: Do you have any advice for those who will succeed you in Gainesville?

M: Work. Lots and lots of work, by a lot of people, not just me but the entire staff, the elected officials, university administrators, student government. It just takes a lot of people to pull that off. It is going to be a lot of work.

B: What are your hopes in your new position, as you leave Gainesville and go to Palm Beach?

M: I look at this three years of my post-graduate work here in Gainesville, although I did not acquire a degree, I think I have acquired a lot more education about what the possibilities are out there. I have been down to Palm Beach a number of times in the past, but in the last month or so, I have been down there a couple of times, and I go, wow, there is a lot of challenge, but on the other hand, there is a lot of opportunity. That is an area that is now over 1,000,000 people. It also has a lot of money. It is growing by leaps and bounds. There are people now there who are thinking, just painting over everything is not the solution. They have some six-, eight-lane streets that are just awful. I am not talking about I-95 but like Okeechobee Blvd. that runs east and west from West Palm to the west. People are now rethinking, and this whole new urbanist movement is coming back in West Palm Beach and Boca Raton and others of the older communities on the eastern side of the county. Even in the western part of the county, where the ads are talking about "communities with walkways." In fact, Riverwalk is one of the new communities out there. I think it is going to be exciting because, let's face it, Palm Beach is much more typical of Florida than Gainesville. Gainesville is unique. I mean, there is no other place like Gainesville. I think it is going to be a challenge and an opportunity to work in a very diverse community like that, a huge community, and see how transit can help that community be a better community. And that is what it is all about. It is not about running busses. It is about, how do we make our community better, for everybody? Whether it is because of air pollution or traffic congestion or just access to jobs for people who do not have cars. There are a lot of different reasons. It is not just the busses themselves or the trains themselves. That is not important. It is that community, and how do we work in that community? That is what I have learned here. How can transit meet, or try to meet, or be a part of, that community? That is what is important. In the last three years, that really was pounded into my mind. How do we work within the community and make it a better place? So, that is what I am looking forward to doing down there on a much bigger scale. It is not going to be the slam dunk, as I call it, that it was here, but there will be opportunities and

there will be challenges.

B: Well, I do not think anyone thinks that what you have done here is easy, but it has been dramatic and it certainly has made a difference.

M: Thank you very much.

B: This concludes the interview.

[End of interview.]