

Creating a Sustainable, Equitable, and Walkable City via Improving Public Transportation

Blake Gibbons

University of South Carolina - Graduation with Leadership Distinction in Professional and Civic Engagement

Beyond the Classroom Background

The COMET

I've served as a Transit Services Intern assigned in the Planning & Development department since December 2020 and was accepted into a permanent part-time position the following year. Working an average of 25 hrs. over three days a week, I have gained over 2,500 hours of direct, hands-on transit experience.

About The COMET

- Regional transportation authority (RTA) for Richland and Lexington counties
- Transit services on 47 fixed routes, paratransit, and rideshare services
- Transports approximately 2.2 million passenger trips a year on a fleet of more than 90 buses, vans and trolleys


Having a passion for urban planning, transportation, and diving into the internship, I have not only gained a breadth of transit experience at such an early point of my career but have also left a meaningful impact within the community via key contributions such as promotion and enhancement of USC Transit (Figure 2) and promotion of BlueBikeSC (Figure 3).

Public Policy & International Affairs (PPIA) Fellowship

Building upon experiences within the classroom and beyond, I applied for and was awarded the PPIA fellowship at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, MI.

- Intensive set of courses over seven weeks in policy creation
- Networking opportunities with top U.S. policy experts
- Deliverable: statistical analysis of Amtrak funding by political party



 Figure 1 – PPIA Cohort

Conclusion

Without interning or applying for fellowships I wouldn't have had the clear path forward that I have now and would be lost in the confusion of academic, economic, and personal goals. My vision now has a two-part approach:

- **Micro Level:** To be the best version of myself possible - goal to attend graduate school enriching my planning skills and organizational leadership.
- **Macro level:** Work towards a "car-light" model for communities across the United States in which there is increased integration and availability of a diverse offering of mobility modes.

Activity/Description

While being assigned in the Planning & Development Department, I've had the opportunity to be **cross-trained in Operations, Customer Service, Finance, and Marketing**, having the ability to work on various projects in all departments.

Notable accomplishments:

- Procurement of Remix Scheduling saving over \$20,000/yr. and speeding up the schedule creation process
- Implemented all features of Strategic Mapping ITS software to increase efficiency and decrease customer complaints via GTFS & GTFS-RT improvements
- Created the script and starred in the USC Transit promotional How-to-Ride video which was shared with all incoming freshman students to the University as well as being hosted both at The COMET and USC Vehicle Management & Parking Services



Figure 2 – Recording of USC Transit Video



Reflection (Analysis)



 Figure 3 – BlueBikeSC Promotional

Experiences at The COMET, BlueBikeSC, and the PPIA Fellowship have given me a set of skills and abilities which have allowed for a smooth transition post-graduation into the workforce with multiple offers.

Improved Skills:

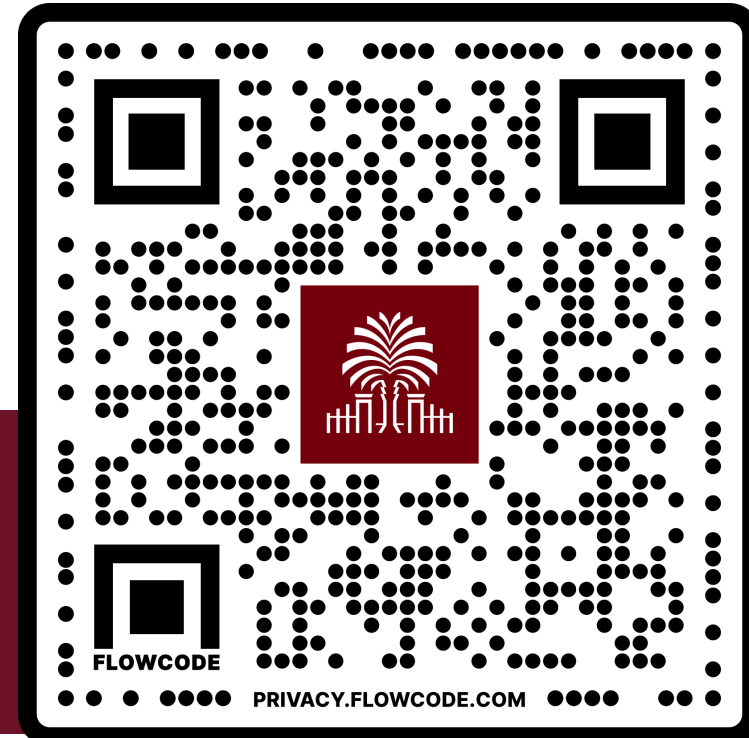
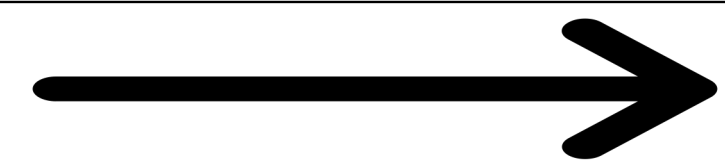
- Time management
- Critical thinking
- Oral/written communication
- Networking

The COMET & BlueBikeSC took **concepts discussed in geography and political science** and have allowed me to **apply them in a workplace environment**.

Next Steps:

I will be working as a Business Development Representative (BDR) at Via Transportation in New York, NY where I will help transit agencies across the U.S. modernize their systems.

Scan to view the ePortfolio



UNIVERSITY OF South Carolina

GRADUATION WITH LEADERSHIP DISTINCTION

