



Graduates of the COMET Transit Leadership Academy- Transit 101, with the COMET Board Chair and Chair of the Richland County Council Honorable Joyce Dickerson and Sam Scheib, Program Manager

Its Transit 101 at The COMET Academy

The Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority dba/The COMET decided it was going to do something different and launched its first Transit 101 Program on July 18th; which takes a look behind-the-scenes at The COMET. The program is called ***The COMET Transit***



Leadership Academy. The COMET Academy for short, was inspired by the Richland County South Carolina Sheriff's Department's Citizens Police Academy, which also takes a look behind-the-scenes at county law enforcement and its daily activities.

It was initially stated "No one will attend that," Meaghan (*not her real name*) told Samuel Scheib, director of planning and development for the COMET. "You won't find three people." However, Meaghan was the first person Scheib called to recruit for the inaugural class of The COMET Transit Leadership Academy, a once-a-week for six-weeks program that would meet a few months later in the summer. The idea was to educate community leaders to become advocates for transit. These leaders would receive first-hand information on the transit system and be armed to go out as strong advocates. The

learned the history of the system from 1892, up until now, when The COMET is being funded locally by the Richland County Penny Sales Tax. It was interesting to most to learn that the COMET was the last of the Transit Systems in South Carolina to be operated by a utility company.

"We were operating transit services with 15-year old buses because we didn't have the money to replace them until now," interim executive director Ann August says. "However, we are fortunate, that they will all be gone by October of this year. We are doing things right now; however, no one will know unless we tell them."

The COMET recruited ten citizens to attend, they included two elected board members from two of the county's school districts, an artist, a bike/trails advocate, ABLE South Carolina, a member of the bus riders association, representatives from universities and even the public library system. *"The COMET Academy ignited a deep appreciation in me for the history of transit in Columbia and the South in general," says Amy Ely Johnson of the Palmetto Cycling Coalition. "I'm already a huge fan of transit, coming from the world of bike and walk advocacy, but I appreciate the knowledge and relationships I gained from this experience."*

The Inaugural Class was completed and we are already getting requests to join the next one." It was originally planned as an annual event; The COMET will now start another class by Mid-October.