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# New CAT building carries transit hopes

## Ground breaks on new energy-efficient facility

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CLEMSON — Federal stimulus money was like a "get-out-of-jail-free card" that enabled Al Babinicz to move Clemson Area Transit from a former city jail suitable for a dozen employees 15 years ago but not for the 75 people working there today.

A new headquarters under construction for the college town transit system that now serves three counties will bring jobs and savings. It is a step toward the "greening" of the Upstate and a mile marker on the road to an interconnecting statewide mass transit system.

"We're putting people to work while we're helping the environment," said Butch Trent, a Clemson city councilman, as ground was symbolically broken for the facility, where grading is already started.

Sustainable features, including solar technology, advanced energy sensors and controls and outlets for plug-in hybrid electric vehicles, will save money while helping the environment.

It consolidates buses in one central location under cover, said John Connell CAT's maintenance coordinator. The "green" concept even extends to collecting rainwater for washing uses, he said.

"Because of this building we'll save money a lot of different ways," Trent said.

About 20-30 jobs will be created with "a dozen or so" subcontractors working on the 300-day project, said Herschel Morningstar, president and owner of Able Constructors Inc. of Greenville, the general contractor.

The $2.5 million federal stimulus funding "came around at the right time" for the long-needed project, said Glennith Johnson, deputy secretary for mass transportation for the state Department of Transportation, who sees a network of transit systems like Clemson's eventually connecting South Carolina's mountains with the sea.

The new CAT headquarters will be "the jewel" in the state transportation system, Johnson said.

The new headquarters is the result of creating and pulling together many believers — local, state and federal agencies — into a partnership "that has grown over the years" and "filled a need in our community," said state Sen. Thomas Alexander, a longtime CAT supporter who occasionally rides the bus.

He doesn't ride often, but said he'd like to be able to. "It's getting used to it and a change of habits," Alexander said.

For visionaries like Babinicz and Johnson, who want people like Alexander to be able to ride mass transit from homes like his in Oconee County to the state capitol, the new facility is a step in that direction.