



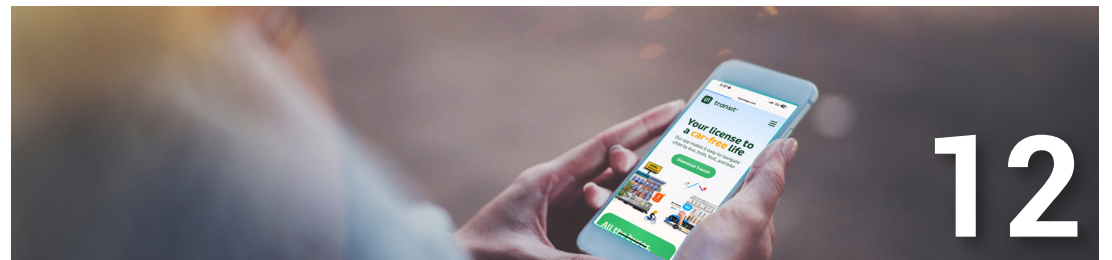
Second Quarter 2025

eNEWSLETTER

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The Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) was initiated in 1986 by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to provide resources, training and technical assistance to rural transit providers. The Missouri RTAP Center is located at Missouri University of Science and Technology (Missouri S&T) in Rolla. Since April 2012, Missouri S&T has been contracted by MoDOT to manage the RTAP program.

**National
RTAP**
Rural Transit Assistance Program



National RTAP is a program of the Federal Transit Administration dedicated to creating rural transit solutions through technical assistance, partner collaboration and FREE training.

LETTER FROM THE MANAGER



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Missouri RTAP Manager

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DEAR TRANSIT FRIENDS,

As you probably now know, Pat Diaku made the difficult decision to leave at the end of May. She recently finished her master's degree and moved to Columbus, OH where her husband had relocated for his job. We greatly appreciate Pat's two years with us and wish her the very best. Tina Monson, who has been with our program for nearly two years will be taking over scheduling RTAP training and processing scholarship reimbursement requests and payments. Tina has been very involved with the RTAP data repository development, so she has some background with the program. In addition, she was able to work alongside Pat for a few weeks and become familiar with the program. Tina has been able to pick up right where Pat left off.

The Midwest Transit Conference is scheduled for September 3-5 at the Kansas City Downtown Marriott. Registration for all Section 5311 providers will be paid directly by MoDOT as in the past. Register under the Attendee Registration tab using the promo code 5311MPTA2025. Please note that early bird registration ends July 15. The agenda includes time for a Missouri RTAP update on Thursday, September 4 from 2:50-3:50 p.m. during the Rural Transit Operations Update session. I will share information on the program and gather feedback from all of you. In addition, National RTAP will participate as an exhibitor. Plan to stop by and pick up the various materials they will have available. Please submit your Scholarship Reimbursement requests to Tina as soon as possible at tina.monson@mst.edu.

I plan to schedule meetings in each area of the state this summer to meet with the transit agencies. I had hoped to schedule the first meeting in the Southeast region during June, but wasn't able to find a date that worked for most of the agencies. I am now looking at some time in early July. I will be sending an email to each region in hopes of scheduling a time to host a lunch meeting. If you have any upcoming events you would like RTAP to participate, please let me know. Please feel free to contact me at pickerillh@mst.edu or by phone at 573-341-7637 with any questions, comments, or suggestion. The entire Missouri RTAP staff wish you a wonderful summer, and I look forward to seeing you all at the Midwest Transit Conference.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Heath Pickerill". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Heath Pickerill,
Missouri RTAP Manager

HUMAN TRAFFICKING TOPIC GUIDE



THE RESOURCES IN THIS TOPIC GUIDE WILL HELP RAISE AWARENESS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN THE TRANSPORTATION INDUSTRY AND ASSIST TRANSIT AGENCIES AND OTHER TRANSPORTATION STAKEHOLDERS TO IDENTIFY AND REPORT VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING.

FTA and U.S. DOT Resources

- [FTA's Human Trafficking Awareness and Public Safety Initiative](#)
- [FTA's Human Trafficking Prevention Webinar, 2024](#)
- [U.S. DOT's Compendium of Transport-Specific Human Trafficking State and Territory Laws, 2024, and Preventing and Addressing Human Trafficking in the Transportation Sector, 2024](#)

National RTAP Resources

- [On-Ramps, Intersections, and Exit Routes: A Roadmap for Transit Agencies to Prevent and Disrupt Human Trafficking, 2019](#)
- [States Combating Human Trafficking Best Practices, 2023](#)
- [Transit and Human Trafficking eLearning course, 2019](#)

Additional Resources

- American Public Transportation Association's (APTA) [Human Trafficking web page](#), 2025

- Blue Campaign's [Human Trafficking Response Guide for the Transportation Industry](#), 2023
- [Florida Transit Safety and Operations Network's \(FTSON\) Human Trafficking Response Procedure Template](#), 2023
- Metro Magazine's [Human Trafficking Awareness: What Public Transportation Can Do?](#) 2025
- [Truckers Against Trafficking/Busing on the Lookout's Transit Training Library, Transit and Motorcoach webpage, and Transit on the Lookout to Combat Human Trafficking: A Toolkit for Transit Agencies in the United States and Canada](#), 2020

DISCLAIMER: The resources provided in each topic guide are not an exhaustive survey of every available resource on each topic. If you would like to add a resource to a Topic Guide, please email info@nationalrtap.org. This document was prepared by National RTAP with the financial assistance of the U.S. Department of Transportation. The contents do not necessarily represent the opinions or policy of any agency of the U.S. Government, and the U.S. Government assumes no liability for the contents or use thereof. It does not have the force and effect of law and is not meant to bind the public in any way.

nationalrtap.org/Resource-Center/Topic-Guides/human-trafficking



2025 STATEWIDE TRANSIT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Ridership Down Compared to Pre-Pandemic Levels, Service Demand is Rising and Costs are Skyrocketing

The Missouri Public Transit Association (MPTA) released the findings of its [2025 Statewide Transit Needs Assessment Study](#) as part of a virtual forum held on May 15. The study examined public transit access across Missouri and was completed by the Lochmueller Group – a full service, survey, planning, engineering and environmental firm. It found that while ridership is still down compared to pre-pandemic levels, there is significant unmet demand for transit across all system types compared to 2022 and the cost to meet those demands has increased significantly. These and other findings will aid the state's 30 transit providers, along with the Missouri Department of Transportation and state policy makers, in understanding the critical need for federal, state and local transit funding prioritization in order to ensure future mobility enhancements and more effective delivery of public transit services to customers and communities.

A recording of the virtual forum is available below or by following this [link](#).

The 2025 report analyzed data from 2019 to 2023 and serves as a refresh of the original Statewide Transit Needs Assessment Study conducted in 2022 that looked at numbers from 2015 to 2019. The study concludes that transit ridership across the state increased in 2022 and 2023, but the five-year average ridership has decreased 33 percent since the previous study and is still well below 2015 levels (Note: numbers include 2020 and 2021 at the height of the pandemic). Yet, when comparing the 2022 and 2025 study results, demand for transit has increased, leading to an increase in unmet demand for all system types. Inflation has significantly increased the cost of service and, consequently, the cost to meet unmet demand. The total unmet demand is up 55 percent and the estimated cost of providing the additional service has increased by 119 percent.

“It is important to understand this is a rolling, five-year average as it relates to ridership levels,” said Kim Cella, Executive Director of the Missouri Public Transit Association.

“Trends show transit ridership was at a high in 2015, then started slowly declining before plunging during the COVID-19 pandemic because of lockdowns and people avoiding enclosed, crowded spaces due to health concerns. Workforce dynamics then shifted and remote and hybrid work became common place. This, coupled with a nationwide transit operator shortage, had a profound impact on ridership. The findings show ridership is rebounding – and we know it has continued to increase over the past two years. The critical area of focus for transit providers is the unmet transit trip needs that exist in nearly every corner of the state and the skyrocketing cost of meeting those demands.”

Demand is especially acute for rural transit providers, as they are only meeting 17 percent of the demand. This leaves an 83 percent unmet demand, which equates to more than 8.9 million trips per year that are needed yet go unfulfilled. To meet 100 percent of the unmet demand in rural parts of the state it is estimated to cost more than \$218 million.

“This report reinforces what we’ve always known – that reliable transportation infrastructure enhances quality of life and is not just an urban issue,” said Dorothy Yeager, Executive Director of OATS Transit, which is based in Columbia and provides service in 87 counties in Missouri, and At-Large MPTA Board Member. “OATS Transit was founded in 1971 as a way to allow people to remain independent and in their rural homes by improving connectivity, mobility, and access to jobs, shopping, and services like education and healthcare.”

Larger urban areas like St. Louis and Springfield are experiencing similar trends. In St. Louis there is an unmet demand of 52 percent or 27 million transit trips per year, and in Springfield the unmet demand is at 86 percent, or more than 6 million transit trips per year. The cost to meet those unmet demands is more than \$299 million and \$60 million respectively.

“Transit is an essential function in St. Louis and for all of Missouri,” said Taulby Roach, President & CEO of Bi-State Development, which operates Metro Transit in St. Louis, and President of the MPTA Board of Directors. “This study qualifies the value of transit investments and tangibly demonstrates the sweeping influence on Missouri’s economic health.”

Matt Crawford, Transit Director for City Utilities of Springfield, which operates the public transit system for Springfield, and Vice-President of the MPTA Board of Directors, added, “We are proud of the service we provide our community and pleased that this study reflects not only the need and costs of delivering the service but also demonstrates the value of the service to our community. It is also important to note that the findings validate those of our recent transit optimization study Connect SGF.”

The 2025 Missouri Legislative session wrapped the budget process on Friday, May 9, by sustaining the amount of statewide transit investment for the third consecutive year. It includes \$10 million in General Revenue plus \$1.7 million from the State Transportation Fund for transit operations. The \$11.7 million is a retention of the funding levels from 2023 and 2024, a 580 percent increase since 2021. The total amount will be split between that state’s 30 transit providers. This will help provide the non-federal or local match required to enable transit providers to draw down some of the \$91 billion in federal funds earmarked for transit as part of the \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Federal funding support requires a 50:50 match for transit operations and an 80:20 match for capital programming. The budget now goes to the Governor to sign it into law.

“While we are grateful that the state is once again investing \$11.7 million to help fund transit – this amount is split between 30 transit providers – and as the 2025 Statewide Transit Needs Assessment Study underscores it is simply not enough given the rising costs of delivering transit service.”

The 2025 Statewide Transit Needs Assessment Study can be accessed [here](#).

mopublictransit.org/2025/05/15/missouri-public-transit-association-releases-findings-of-its-2025-statewide-transit-needs-assessment-study/



2025 RURAL TRANSIT DAY

The nation's first Rural Transit Day was celebrated on July 16, 2019. This special holiday focuses on what agencies are doing to recognize passengers and staff on Rural Transit Day and through the year.

On Rural Transit Day (July 16) and every day throughout the year, I/we pledge to:

1. Understand the unique needs of rural and tribal passengers and plan services to meet those needs.
2. Provide all passengers with helpful, courteous, and respectful customer service.
3. Coordinate with community organizations to provide transportation to as many destinations as possible.
4. Involve passengers, community stakeholders, and elected officials in service planning.
5. Assure that vehicles and facilities are safe, clean, well-maintained, and comfortable.
6. Invest in training and education that keep staff current, knowledgeable and skilled.
7. Contribute to an organizational culture where staff are motivated and successful.
8. Have a plan for potential emergencies and disasters and communicate that plan to all stakeholders.
9. Keep up with and invest in new technologies and funding opportunities to continually improve services.

Get Ready for Rural Transit Day!

- Take the Rural Transit Day Pledge to show your commitment to rural transit. It's on our Rural Transit Day [webpage](#).
- Participate in our #RuralTransitDay Prequel. It's on July 16 from 1:00-2:00 PM ET. If Rural Transit Day falls on a weekend, the prequel will be held on the Friday before.
- Participate in our Rural Transit Day Facebook Live Chat. It's on July 16 from 1:00-2:00 PM ET. If Rural Transit Day falls on a weekend, the prequel will be held on the Friday before. RSVP to info@nationalrtap.org.
- Honor your staff. Send them a Rural Transit Hero card (downloads available on our [webpage](#)), surprise them with a special meal or snack, or have staff nominate others to win a Rural Transit Day award (share their story on your social media - if you tag us socially, we will enter them in a contest).
- Honor your riders. Make Rural Transit Day fare-free, invite local celebrities, musical performers, or elected officials for a ride-along, or give riders a special small giveaway.

- Partner with a local school, library, or recreation department to host a Touch-a-Bus event, hold an art contest for young riders to draw the bus or driver (and showcase these proudly), or have a transit career info session where drivers, mechanics, dispatchers, etc., can talk about what the job entails.
- Schedule a special ride or route on Rural Transit Day to somewhere in your town people would like to go (a park, farmer's market, beach, concert, etc.).
- Write an article and take a photo about something wonderful that your agency has done recently and submit it to National RTAP. We'll post it in our social media and/or newsletter. We can also interview you and write an article. Contact us at info@nationalrtap.org.
- Use our social media infographics toolbox and countdown clock to post on your website and social media. They are available on our webpage.
- If you'd like to buy an official Rural Transit Day t-shirt, you can purchase it from our Rural Transit Day Storefront, which will reopen in the Spring of 2026.
- State DOTs or RTAPs can ask their subrecipients to all do something special to celebrate Rural Transit Day.
- Print and/or publish your Rural Transit Day Proclamation. Contact your elected official and ask them to proclaim Rural Transit Day. Invite the media and photograph or film the signing to share the proclamation. We have included a downloadable Rural Transit Day Proclamation Template that you can use.
- We continue to fill our Rural Transit Day time capsule. In 2024 we collected bus tokens. Thank you to all who sent them to us! This year we're collecting smart cards. If you'd like to donate one (please don't add value to it), mail it to Cara Marcus, National RTAP, 5 Wheeling Road, Woburn, MA 01801. When we fill the time capsule, we will announce when we will open it.

Rural Transit Day Toolbox

Use the images in this [Rural Transit Day Toolbox](#) to spread the word about Rural Transit Day and the benefits of rural transit through social media. Our designer, Lexy Santiago, has created free images for you to use for Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter. Note that the images may not be used for any commercial purposes. If you have any questions, or need assistance, please contact us at info@nationalrtap.org.

Examples of images included in the Rural Transit Day toolbox are included to the right.

nationalrtap.org/News/Rural-Transit-Day



#RuralTransitDay



States 'Up Their Game' with Enhanced Intercity Bus Offerings



Gone are the days when schedules, stop locations, and promotional practices were frozen mainly in place from year to year. Instead, state-run bus lines are mixing it up, testing new reservation options, improving apps and text alerts, strengthening links to Amtrak, and devising creative campaigns to boost traffic.

"The expanding bus systems of state governments deserve more attention than they are receiving for their innovation and adept marketing," notes Mark Szyperski, CEO of [On Your Mark Transportation LLC](#), a bus-travel consultancy. "So much is happening that it can be hard to keep track."

These stepped-up efforts pay off for large, branded bus systems like Colorado's Bustang, Oregon's POINT, and the Virginia Breeze.

Each has seen traffic rebound sharply since the pandemic and has cultivated public support to allow for ambitious expansions. State networks are also instrumental in

assuring that bus passengers have access to terminals with indoor waiting, off-street boarding and aligning, and other amenities.

"State-run bus systems are helping the entire intercity bus system gain more visibility among travelers who aren't accustomed to riding scheduled motorcoaches," according to Brian Antolin, an intercity bus expert and CEO of CoTo Travel, echoing a theme in our DePaul University 2025 Outlook for the Intercity Bus Industry report.

These regional networks rely on state and federal financial support and cooperation from private bus lines that often operate the service under contract.

Federal support comes primarily from the USDOT's 5311f program, which is designed to support linking cities with populations below 50,000 to the national bus network, which is widely known for such brands as Greyhound, Trailways, and Jefferson Lines. This long-overlooked program has generated much attention recently due to the federal policy's unpredictable ebb and flow.

Funding in fiscal year 2024 was just under \$141 million, according to Fred Fravel, VP at KFH Group. The firm is exploring the state role in intercity bus service in a project for the Transit Cooperative Research Program.

Branded State Systems “Up Their Game”

The Virginia Breeze, a four-route system centering on Washington Union Station, captured the spotlight last year for its ridership gains. However, the line’s success is due to far more than offering comfortable and reliable service.

Several needs assessments laid the groundwork for success with ridership projections, estimated costs per bus mile, and community surveys, helping evaluate potential routes. The state’s Department of Rail and Passenger Transportation (DRPT) continuously tracks traffic trends and operational challenges.

Such planning is paying dividends: Virginia Breeze is set to launch its fifth route, its first east-west offering, this summer. The new Tidewater Current will connect Harrisonburg and Virginia Beach with stops in Norfolk, Newport News, Williamsburg, Richmond, and Charlottesville.

Moreover, a new program with North Carolina’s Department of Integrated Mobility allows passengers to make interline connections for tickets purchased on megabus.com. Customers can travel between North Carolina, Virginia, and Washington, DC on a single ticket by connecting on a new, [twice-daily connecting route](#), the Triad-Danville Connector, supported by North Carolina.

The Connector, operated by Sunway Charters, links Winston-Salem, N.C., to Danville, Va., the southernmost point on Virginia’s system, and offers well-timed transfers at Danville, sometimes as short as 15 minutes.

The expansion of Colorado’s state-operated Bustang, which now crisscrosses the Centennial State at high frequency, is also the product of much technical analysis.

Comprehensive statewide studies have evaluated opportunities to improve travel in the congestion-ridden I-70 mountain corridor. These favorable critiques set into motion last year’s tripling of Bustang service on its West Line between Denver and Vail and Grand Junction.

The service skyrocketed from four to 15 trips daily. ([Our review](#) found that this is the greatest frequency by any bus line on any long-distance route outside the U.S.’s coastal regions) — Doubling from six to 12 weekday trips on the North Line between Denver and Fort Collins and the South

Line between Denver and Colorado Springs. Similarly, weekend service on both these routes grew from two to six.

The expansion necessitated large-scale investment and fleet expansion.

Bustang’s operator, ACE Express Coaches, part of [All Aboard America Holdings](#), reportedly hired 50 employees while the state procured 25 new motorcoaches to facilitate this expansion. Bustang’s app was improved, and multi-ride tickets (for up to 40 riders) were offered to encourage traveler loyalty.

The state also built a new “Mobility Hub” on I-25 near Longmont and Loveland. The center-loading hub allows buses to make stops without time-consuming diversions from the expressway and is designed to reduce traffic congestion and pollution. It was installed as part of the I-25 North Express Lanes Project.

These services are in addition to Bustang Outrider, Pegasus, and Snowstang services, which generally run with vans and other smaller vehicles. Bustang handled 290,700 passengers during the 12 months ending in June 2024 and is projected to hit 325,600 this year — the 10th anniversary of its operations.

Buses, Trains, and Planes

“Opportunities to connect to trains and planes are growing but still underdeveloped in many parts of the country,” notes Szyperski.

Oregon and Washington State, however, point the way to better bus-rail integration. In late 2023, Amtrak Thruway bus service on the Seattle—Vancouver route grew from two to four, supplementing the two daily trains.

“The hallmark of this schedule is attractively spaced options throughout the day, something lacking on many major routes,” notes Zaria Bonds, co-author of our 2025 Outlook for Intercity Bus Industry report.

Oregon uses a similar strategy on the Cascade corridor’s southern end. Public funding for the Oregon POINT bus service has allowed for strategically filling gaps in Portland – Eugene, Ore., train schedules, creating eight daily options. This route accounts for about 70% of POINT ridership and has seen dramatic increases in bus ridership, now approaching record levels.

Similarly, bus lines in the Northeast, including Adirondack Trailways and Vermont Translines, which connect with

Amtrak at various Upstate New York stations, are seeing strong ridership on buses that provide timely train connections.

Antolin notes that efforts to use state-supported bus lines to expand airport access haven't gained as much traction, despite the absence of scheduled intercity bus service at many airports. Recently, however, the tide appears to have turned.

Bustang launched the Denver International Airport service last year. GoBus recently stepped up service to Columbus, Ohio's international airport, and Virginia Breeze buses stop at either Washington Reagan or Dulles International airports.

"These states are running with the precedent established by Massachusetts with their BusPlus program in prioritizing multimodal connections at airports," Antolin adds.

Another notable airport example is Michigan's publicly supported motorcoach shuttle pilot, Detroit Air XPress, between downtown Detroit and the Detroit Metro International Airport. Operated 16 times daily by Indian Trails, the service pilot complements the state-funded Michigan Flyer service linking the airport to Ann Arbor, East Lansing, and other points.

"DAX is a game changer for travel to Metro Detroit," notes Claude Molinari, president of Visit Detroit.

Solutions for Stations

Like their commercial counterparts, state-supported bus lines continue to grapple with the closing of traditional intercity bus stations. Traffic can suffer after shifting operations to curbside stops.

[FlixBus](#), Greyhound, Trailways, and other commercial providers are searching for solutions to festering terminal issues, hoping to find attractive and affordable alternatives when stations can't be saved.

Bus lines have successfully moved to downtown transit centers in some cities, including Austin, Texas; Richmond, Va.; and Tampa, Fla. Critical questions remain, such as the future of Chicago's intercity bus (Greyhound) station, used for commercial services and publicly supported routes serving Illinois, Indiana, and Iowa.

Fortunately, more state and local governments are assisting in solving the problem. Some notable examples:

- In Ohio, Barons Bus and Greyhound plan to relocate from the historic Cleveland Greyhound Station to the Brookpark Transit Station on the city's Red Line transit route near its international airport. A high-quality Cleveland facility is critical to Ohio's GoBus system, which Barons operates.
- Georgia's state government facilitated the construction of a new Atlanta Greyhound Station, which opened in phases in 2023 and boasts natural light from its large windows, a food stand with a grill, spacious restrooms, and a digital departure board. Airport-style seating with power outlets, USB chargers, armrests with cupholders, and cushioning add to passenger comfort.
- In Massachusetts, state agencies support major improvements to the Boston South Station Bus Terminal, a project linked to a new office building built over railroad platforms. This will expand the terminal's footprint by 50% and allow for improved transit connections at South Station. After some delays, completion is expected this year.
- Michigan's state government stands out for investing in stations jointly used by buses and trains. Attractive multimodal facilities in Battle Creek, Grand Rapids, and Kalamazoo benefit bus and train riders, and planning continues for a new multimodal station in Detroit.

"Intrastate bus systems are having success building the political support needed to avoid the pitfalls of unpredictable budget cycles," concludes Antolin.

Although funding is never certain, these systems have the advantage of being less affected by the impending "fiscal cliff" that seems destined to create significant hardship for urban transit networks due to the end of pandemic-era federal funds.

"As more customers gain familiarity with all the new services, the possibility of more traffic growth will make the next several years an exciting time," Szyperski adds.

Joseph P. Schwieterman, Ph.D., is the director of the Chaddick Institute for Metropolitan Development at DePaul University and author of the 2025 Outlook for the Intercity Bus Industry. Readers can sign up for his free Intercity Bus E-News newsletter at chaddick@depaul.edu

metro-magazine.com/10241150/states-up-their-game-with-enhanced-intercity-bus-offerings?fbclid=IwY2xjawLGgV9leHRuA2FlbQlzMABicmlkETFYVXVlV3ljMEhzbE1IMzZEAR6eIeGDdqjVgUSyPCJL_LBHI-5R06z3JSqPTOyjtOD_Q2C7NQ9Nf3Jg3ynHg_aem_pH3S1ovAT8D7OXyIOPwK-g



Popular in Cities, Transit Trip **PLANNING AND PAYMENT APPS ARE SLOWLY COMING TO RURAL COMMUNITIES**

Rural public transportation is often underfunded and underappreciated. Two projects, one in Vermont and one in Minnesota, are working to bring some of the conveniences urbanites have long-enjoyed to rural transit.

Transportation planners in Vermont and Minnesota are working to bring rural transit riders the same app features that urbanites have been enjoying for almost a decade.

The initiatives, which Vermont began in 2018 and Minnesota began in 2023, are both part of federally-funded pilots, and will allow rural users to plan and pay for call-ahead public transit rides via web and mobile apps.

Public Transit Looks Different in Rural Communities

For years, city dwellers have had access to an array of apps, such as Apple Maps and Google Maps, to plan their public transportation trips. These options are more readily available in urban areas because of how public transit in urban areas works: transit agencies run fixed routes, and their schedules change infrequently. Some transit agencies also run these schedules into a feed, which developers

incorporate into trip planning apps. These feeds give users the ability to track the exact location of transit vehicles within the app.

In most rural areas, public transit looks a little different. Rural transit agencies generally do not have consistent schedules. In fact, most schedules — and consequently, the routes buses operate — change daily based on whoever calls-in for a ride. Rural transit agencies also often lack the resources to build a feed that developers could integrate into their trip planning apps.

The variable and underappreciated nature of rural public transit systems is why both Minnesota and Vermont decided to develop their own trip planning websites for rural areas.

“The trip planner really started with the idea that we can connect better to our rural communities if people could know what type of ... [transit] existed outside of fixed routes,” said Vermont Agency of Transportation planner Dan Currier.

Using Apps to Plan Rural Trips

In building trip planners, both Vermont and Minnesota worked with Trillium Transit to compile the start, end, travel

times, and paths of every trip their dial-a-ride systems have completed. These trips were, and continue to be, analyzed by web and mobile apps like Transit to calculate itineraries. Rural riders in Vermont and Minnesota can use either the web-based trip planner their state has developed, or the Transit mobile app to plan their trips.

Uptake of Vermont's trip planner has been strong. Users generated over 76,000 itineraries between November 2022 and mid-November 2023, with 14,463 of those itineraries involving planning a transit trip. Other trips users planned involved walking and biking itineraries, as well as matches with vanpools and carpools.

Vermont planners saw the most rural usage of their transit planner in Washington County, which encompasses Montpelier, the state's capital.

Data on how many itineraries Minnesota's trip planner has generated since it launched in March is currently unavailable. However the University of Minnesota, which is partnering with MnDOT to research whether rural trip planner travel tools affect rural residents' use of public transit, is pursuing this information.

Meanwhile, Minnesota transportation planners are seeing the most rural usage of the Transit app among those who use the Otter Express, one of the participating dial-a-ride providers which operates in Fergus Falls, Breckenridge, and Perham, communities in western Minnesota.

Paying In-App in Minnesota

Minnesota's pilot program includes a mobile fare payment component, another feature long afforded to urban transit riders. In addition to user convenience – particularly the fact that anyone can buy a ticket using the app without an internet connection – contactless fare payment may also save money for transit agencies. MnDOT believes transit agencies nationwide spend 10-15% of the fares they collect processing them, which includes counting the cash and taking it to a bank. Token Transit, the vendor that MnDOT and participating rural agencies are using as part of their pilot program, collects just 8% from fare sales.

However, Kayla Sullivan, director of rural Minnesota's Otter Express transit system, doesn't agree that in-app payment will truly save money for her agency. "It is a cost when we count cash as employees have to physically count the currency and that takes time, and it is also a cost for an employee to gather the data on any app purchases. To give you one answer, I would say it is cheaper for us to take cash payments," she said.

Wendy Clark, a resident of Fergus Falls in northwestern Minnesota, doesn't see the benefit of using an app for transit fare either.

"I have no problem paying \$2.00 [in dollar bills] one way. I also have dollar bills with me," said Clark, who rides the Otter Express. "Most elderly people that ride the bus do not have cell phones and only carry cash. The money boxes are always full of dollar bills!"

Additionally, cell phones don't do well during extremely cold winter weather. They can be hard to use when people are wearing gloves, and can die prematurely as their battery lives are reduced by the cold.

Even as cell phone manufacturers are constantly releasing new models with longer battery life, having to hold a phone out just before getting on a bus doesn't sit well with Clark. "It is too cold to have your hands out in the cold," she said.

Challenges Remain

Vermont's pilot, which was deployed with a \$480,000 grant from the Federal Transit Administration's Mobility on Demand Sandbox grant, ended in 2020. But they continue to pay \$150,000 annually to maintain the feeds and the trip planner website. "We ... continued to provide the trip planning service because of the value we saw in it," said Currier, the Vermont Agency of Transportation planner. He wants the tool to help the state's transit agencies restore all of their pre-pandemic public transit ridership by next year.

Minnesota also received support from the federal government to deploy their project. The project, which launched in March 2024 and ended in late April 2024, was funded in part by a \$628,000 federal grant. The total cost of the project, \$1.9 million, also included the pilot project for riders to pay their fares via a mobile device. MnDOT is not sure if, or how, they will continue the program when the pilot ends.

Due to limited funding, not every rural Minnesota transit agency is participating in the trip planner and fare payment pilot. "The agencies available on the Transit app are those that committed to work with MnDOT on this project," said MnDOT spokesperson Joseph Palmersheim. "Transit agencies ... [that] were both interested in participating and had the capacity to work on the project."

These initiatives face other challenges, too. The Transit app, for example, isn't able to calculate trip plans longer than

186.4 miles. A representative from the Transit app says it is designed to facilitate “local” travel. And for all Vermont and most participating Minnesota agencies, riders looking to get a ride through the trip planner website or the Transit app still need to make a call because they cannot book online, though Transit app users can press a button in the app that will automatically dial a number to connect them with a dispatcher to schedule a ride.

“There was some integration between the vendors that was too difficult to overcome,” said Currier. “And so we came up with an easier solution than trying to do a direct booking through the trip planner. [It’s] not ideal, [but] it was the best we could do.”

Minnesota’s online trip planner allows users to book rides from two rural agencies: Otter Express, and Rolling Hills Transit, which serves southeastern Minnesota. However, unreliable internet access and cell phone service, seemingly perennial challenges for rural communities, do affect how one can pay a fare.

Token Transit requires an internet connection for users to purchase tickets. However, it does not require an internet

connection for a rider to be able to show their purchased ticket to the driver.

Lack of internet access also seems to affect how one can plan a trip on public transit. Though the Transit app allows users to plan fixed-route trips offline using schedules the app saves to their phone, it does not allow users to plan dial-a-ride trips without an internet connection. The University of Minnesota and the Federal Transit Administration are researching how big a role the lack of internet and cell phone access plays in whether or not rural residents use the trip planning and fare payment apps.

dailyonder.com/popular-in-cities-transit-trip-planning-and-payment-apps-are-slowly-coming-to-rural-communities/2024/03/12/



Montpelier’s MyRide is integrated with Vermont’s rural transit trip planner. (Photo by Vermont Natural Resources Council)

Upcoming EVENTS

MULTI-STATE MIDWEST TRANSIT CONFERENCE

Sept. 3 @ 2:30 pm - Sept. 5 @ 11:00 am

KC Marriott Downtown
200 W 12th Street, Kansas City, MO

Registration is open for the 2025 Multi-State Midwest Transit Conference.

The conference will offer a variety of opportunities to attend presentations and panel discussions, participate in workshops, engage in peer-to-peer learning, and network with peers and vendors in the industry. We hope to see you there!

Visit the conference website for more details and to register for this year's event. Reach out to twood@mopublictransit.org with any questions.

Register today!

<https://mopublictransit.org/event/multi-state-midwest-transit-conference/>



**Wrangling Access and Mobility
in Rural and Tribal Transit**

December 7-10, 2025 in Austin Texas

**National
RTAP**
Rural Transit Assistance Program



6TH NATIONAL RTAP CONFERENCE

Dec. 7-10, 2025

Austin, TX | Hyatt Regency Austin

The National Rural Transit Assistance Program (National RTAP) invites you to participate in the 6th National RTAP Conference, Wrangling Access and Mobility in Rural and Tribal Transit. Five Topical Conference Tracks, plus preconference/conference workshops

Lillian Karabaic will deliver the keynote presentation at the conference. She is the host of Oregon Public Broadcasting's Weekend Edition and also hosted Stop Requested, a series about traveling around Oregon on Public Transit.

Register today!

<https://www.nationalrtap.org/News/Conference/2025-Austin>

AVAILABLE TRAINING PROGRAMS

The following is a list of the training programs and course length of each that are currently available to rural transit providers through Missouri RTAP. Requests for training can be made by contacting Tina Monson Education Program Coordinator, at tina.monson@mst.edu or 573-341-6155.

1. ACTIVE SHOOTER PREVENTION AND RESPONSE – 2 HOURS.
2. AGGRESSIVE DRIVING – 1 HOUR.
3. ASSAULT AWARENESS AND PREVENTION FOR TRANSIT OPERATORS – 1.5 HOURS
4. BACKING SAFETY – 1 HOUR.
5. BASIC FIRST AID – 1 HOUR.
6. BLOOD BORNE PATHOGENS – 1 HOUR.
7. CPR & BASIC FIRST AID – 4 HOURS.
8. DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PASSENGERS – 2 HOURS.
9. DEFENSIVE DRIVING – 3 HOURS.
10. DISTRACTIVE DRIVING – 1 HOUR.
11. DIVERSITY & AWARENESS TRAINING - PROVIDING QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE FOR TRANSPORTATION PASSENGERS WHO HAVE DISABILITIES – 2 HOURS.
12. DRIVEN TO EXTREMES – 1 HOUR.
13. DRUG & ALCOHOL AWARENESS – 1 HOUR.
14. EMERGENCY & EVACUATION PROCEDURES – 1 1/2 TO 2 HOURS.
15. FATIGUE AWARENESS FOR DRIVERS – 2 HOURS.
16. HIPAA – 1 HOUR.
17. NIGHT DRIVING – 1 HOUR.
18. OPERATION LIFESAVER – HIGHWAY-RAIL CROSSING SAFETY – 1 HOUR.
19. PASSENGER ASSISTANCE/MOBILITY AID SECUREMENT – 2 HOURS.
20. REASONABLE SUSPICION TRAINING FOR SUPERVISORS – 2 HOURS.
21. SAFE & SECURE PROPER INFANT AND CHILD SEAT INSTALLATION – 2 HOURS.
22. SENSITIVITY AWARENESS – 1 HOUR.
23. SEXUAL HARRASSMENT – 1 HOUR.
24. SLIPS, TRIPS AND FALLS – 1 HOUR.
25. VIOLENCE IN THE TRANSIT WORKFORCE – PREVENTION, RESPONSE AND RECOVERY – 1.5 HOURS
26. WHEELCHAIR SECUREMENT – 2 TO 3 HOURS DEPENDING ON NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS.
27. WINTER DRIVING SAFETY – 1 HOUR.

For more information on classes and to register please visit: mltrc.mst.edu/mortaphome/mortaptraining/

RESOURCES

National RTAP – Rural Transit Assistance Program

www.nationalrtap.org/

Transportation Safety Institute – Transit Safety & Security Training Division

www.tsi.dot.gov/Transit.aspx

Federal Transit Administration – Rural Transit Assistance Program Page

www.fta.dot.gov/funding/grants/grants_financing_3554.html

Missouri Public Transit

www.mopublictransit.org/

National Transit Institute

www.ntionline.com/

Kansas RTAP – Kansas University Transportation Center

www.kutc.ku.edu/cgiwrap/kutc/rtap/index.php/index.html

Transportation Research Board's (TRB) Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP)

www.tcrponline.org/

