Putting Transit to Work in Main Street America

How Smaller Cities and Rural Places Are Using Transit and Mobility Investments to Strengthen Their Economies and Communities

Reconnecting America
People • Places • Possibility

Community Transportation Association

May 2012

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank The Rockefeller Foundation and the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) for supporting this research.

We also wish to thank the panel review members for their helpful comments and suggestions: Scott Bogren, CTAA; Kathy Nothstine, National Association of Development Organizations; Roger Millar, Smart Growth America; Dr. Fred Schmidt, University of Vermont and CTAA Board Member; Charles Fluharty, Rural Policy Research Institute; Rochelle Carpenter, Transportation for America; Bob Fogel, National Association of Counties; John Kennedy, US Department of Transportation; Matt Ward, Sustainable Strategies DC; and Leslie Wollack, National League of Cities.

Integral to this report were the reflections of Barb Cline, Prairie Hills Transit; Jim Moulton, Addison County Transit Resources; Connie Garber, York County Community Action Corporation; Johnny James, Choctaw Nation Tribal Transit; Jana Boykin, Choctaw Nation Tribal Transit; Carl Sedoryk, Monterey-Salinas Transit; Lee Hazelbaker, Human Resource Development Council; Jeff Rupp, Human Resource Development Council; Kirt Conrad, Stark Area Regional Transit Authority; Mohammed Khan, Montachusett Regional Transit Authority; Lynnda Bassham, Lower Savannah Council of Governments; and Delilah Garcia, Town of Taos. We thank them for highlighting the work in their communities.

This report was written by Sasha Forbes, Alia Anderson, Sarah Kline, and Vernon Brundage Jr. Layout design and editing of the report was performed by John Hughes.

Contents

Acknowledgements **1**

Introduction **4**

Definition of "Small Towns and Rural Areas" **6**

A Quick Snapshot of Rural America **7**

Demand Response and Other Services **8**

Findings **8**

Overview of the Case Studies **14**

Improved Local/Regional Bus Networks **15**

Connecting Workers to Jobs: Addison County, Vermont **15**

Increasing Mobility by Coordinating Services: Allendale County, South Carolina **18**

Providing Accessibility For Everyone: Choctaw Nation **19**

Circulator Systems **21**

Supporting Residents and a University Through Community Involvement: Bozeman, Montana **22**

Linking People to Opportunity: York County, Maine **24**

Serving Tourists While Maintaining Historic Character: Monterey, California **26**

Intermodal Transit Centers and Transit Hubs **28**

Using a Transit Center to Strengthen a Downtown: Kent, Ohio **29**

Turning a Transit Agency Building into a Community Hub: Spearfish, South Dakota **30**

Intercity Transit/Rail Improvements **32**

Bringing Economic Vitality with the Reverse Commute: Fitchburg, Massachusetts **32**

Spotlight: Taos, New Mexico **34**

Conclusion **35**

Appendix **36**

Methodology **36**

Rural Resources **36**

Figures and Tables

Map 1: Micropolitan statistical areas **6**

Figure 1: Rural Transit Riders **7**
Figure 2: Shoreline Explorer Funding **24**

Table 1: Rural Transit Systems Nationwide **7**
Table 2: Rural Transit Funding Sources **11**
Table 3: Selected Federal Funding Sources for Rural Transit **12**
Table 4: Case Study Transit Systems **14**
Table 5: National Percentage of Rural Vehicles that are ADA Accessible **20**
Table 6: HRDC Annual Funding (includes circulators, demand response) **23**

Introduction

Public transportation plays a critical and expanding role in rural America. Just as it does in urban environments, public transportation in small towns and rural areas provides mobility choices and promotes sustainable economies. Across the country, small towns and rural communities are developing partnerships to build intermodal transit centers, creating circulator buses to catalyze private investments in their downtowns, and improving connections between people and jobs. Small towns are using public transportation investments to help address the challenges of limited resources, populations both shrinking and growing older, industrial decline, and the loss of farmland. Through strong partnerships and creative funding mechanisms, rural America is creating stronger and healthier communities through transit[1] investments. Connie Garber, a passionate advocate of rural services and transportation director at York County Community Action Corporation in Maine, sums up the motivation of rural transportation leaders: "We all are headed for the same goal: a more robust economy that helps all of the people in the communities we serve."

In this report, the researchers have explored how smaller cities, towns, and rural places are integrating transit into their communities. This report seeks to elevate the emerging best practices in smaller cities and rural places where transit investments are helping to set the stage for a robust future. This report is intended to help local planners, elected leaders, and policymakers understand the strategies, partnerships, resources, and plans being enacted in comparable communities across the country.

1 The words "public transportation" and "transit" are used interchangeably throughout this report.

Key research questions include:

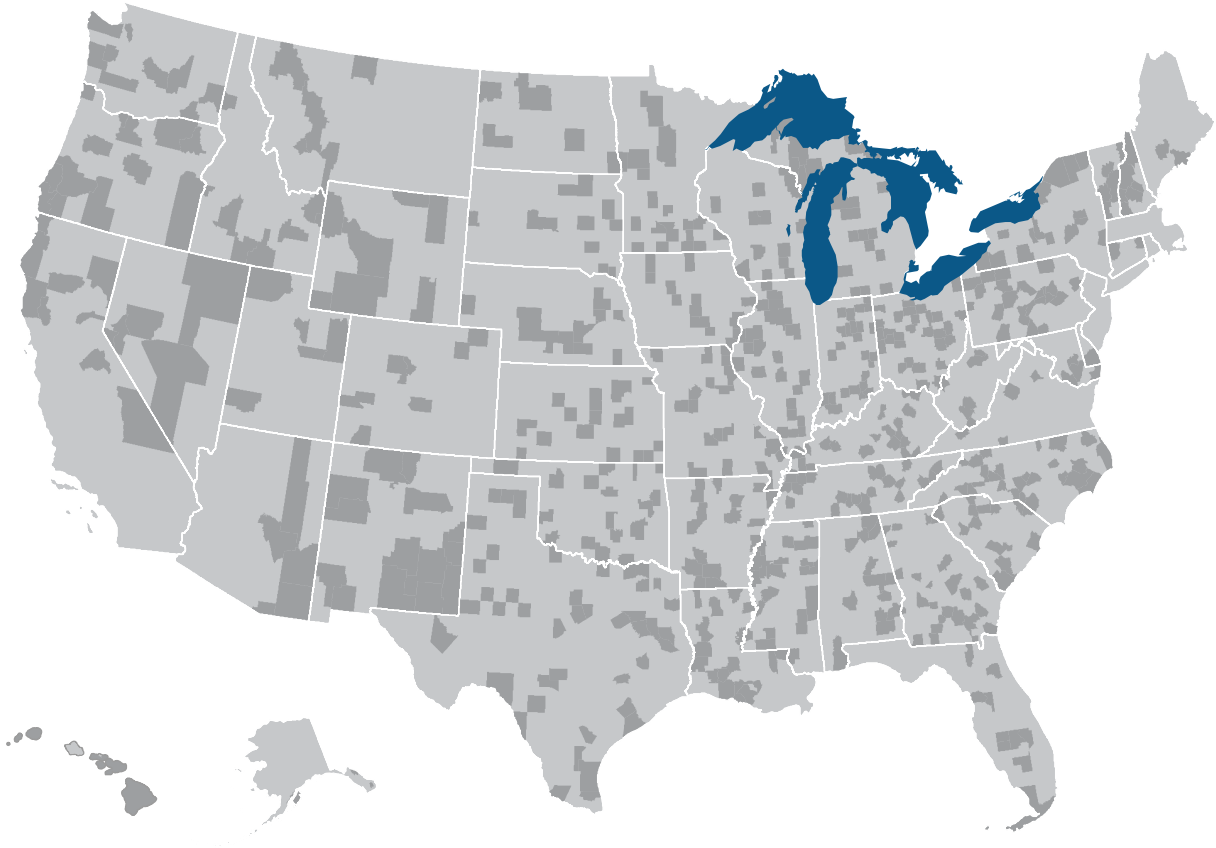
- What types of transit investments are smaller communities making?
- What impact has transit had on the economy and quality of life of those smaller communities?
- Has transit affected the historic character that exists in many of America's small towns, or has it been integrated seamlessly into the community?
- Can a modest or incremental approach to transit investment yield results, or do only large-scale, urban-style systems yield benefits?
- How do different players influence the process?
- What is the role of the federal government in small-town transit projects?

When examining transportation investments in small towns and rural places, it is important to keep in mind the unique mobility challenges such areas face. Many rural places have long distances between destinations, and small-town residents often must travel a long way to reach specialized services or venues in larger towns and cities. The rural population in America is older than in urban areas, and older Americans experience more mobility challenges as their ability to drive decreases. As intercity bus and rail access has declined over the last several decades, small towns and rural places have become increasingly isolated from larger population centers.[2] The cost of transportation for Americans living in such communities is high, and household budgets are tied to the cost of gasoline for the family car, the primary – and in many cases only – means of getting around.

These factors suggest that small towns and rural areas would benefit from transportation alternatives. But it is also clear that transit in these communities cannot look like the transit systems of larger cities. Historic low-density land-use patterns in rural areas make designing and operating transit service more challenging. Local resources to support transit planning and service are limited, and small-town residents may feel that while transit can be wonderful in a big city, it just isn't something that would fit in with their lifestyle.

2 Rural Access to Intercity Transportation Has Declined. (2011). Research and Innovative Technology Administration, Bureau of Transportation Statistics. Retrieved December 2011 from http://bit.ly/wc9xxf

Map 1: Micropolitan statistical areas



Dark gray areas represent micropolitan statistical areas, which contain an urban core of at least 10,000 (but less than 50,000) population.

Definition of "Small Towns and Rural Areas"

This report focuses on smaller cities, towns, and rural places – loosely defined as places with populations of 50,000 or less. But rather than using strict population thresholds to select case studies, the researchers looked for places with small-town character, a rural environment, and relatively small transit systems. These areas are referred to as micropolitan areas.

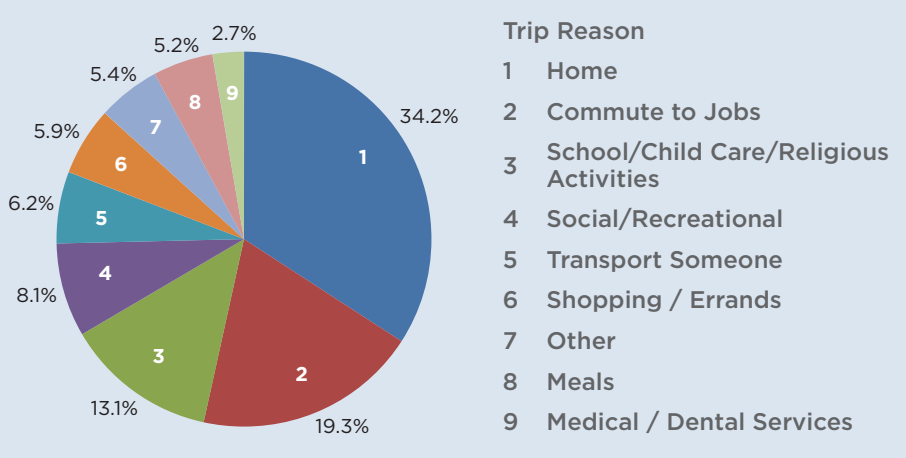
The "rural" moniker itself has several different definitions. For purposes of this report, the word "rural" includes basic rural, developed rural, and urban boundary rural.[3] The character and needs of smaller cities and towns will be defined in part by their proximity to the nearest major metropolitan area, historic and current economic drivers, and population characteristics. They might be transitioning single-industry communities, where the local economy hinges upon the strength of one industry. They might be agricultural communities that rely on their ability to produce and transport crops, or bedroom communities located on the exurbs of the nearest metropolitan area. In other words, these places are very diverse and each needs tailored solutions to its planning, mobility, and economic development challenges.

3 Our Rural Transportation System. US Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration Retrieved March 2012 http://bit.ly/HsQVsI

A Quick Snapshot of Rural America

Approximately 71 million Americans live in rural areas.[4] Compared to urban areas, rural areas are less ethnically diverse, older, and have higher rates of homeownership and vehicle ownership.[5]

Figure 1: Rural Transit Riders



Source: Small Urban & Rural Transit Center, 2011

Today's rural residents are more likely to engage in a wide variety of non-farming and manufacturing activities, requiring them to drive more than in previous generations, and to cover greater distances than their urban counterparts. Compared to urban areas, rural areas in general also lack transportation options, requiring rural residents to depend more on their cars.

Table 1: Rural Transit Systems Nationwide

	2007	2008	2009
Total	1,293	1,358	1,358
Type Service Offered			
Total Fixed Route	453	440	429
Traditional Fixed Route	206	225	243
Deviated Fixed Route	319	287	278
Both	72	72	92
Demand Response	1,085	1,149	1,169
Demand Response & Fixed Route	239	228	235
Van Pool	8	16	14
Other Or Not Specified	25	40	22

Source: Small Urban & Rural Transit Center, 2011

Still, more than 1.6 million rural households do not own cars (especially in the South, Appalachia, Southwest and Alaska).[6] Nearly 40 percent of the country's transit-dependent population – primarily senior citizens, persons with disabilities and low-income individuals – live in rural areas.[7] Approximately 14 percent of residents in rural areas are 65 or older, higher than in urban areas (12.5 percent). About 13 percent of rural residents have a disability (9.7 million residents), and 12.3 percent are living below the poverty line (9.1 million residents).[8] Public transportation is increasingly being used in small towns and rural areas to address the unique mobility challenges of the transit-dependent population in these areas.

4 Based on US Census, which defines rural as less than 50,000.
5 Rural Transit Factbook 2011. (2011). Small Urban & Rural Transit Center. Retrieved February 2012 from http://bit.ly/HpMoFm
6 Rural Transportation: Setting the Context. (2009). Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network: TANF Resources and Information. Retrieved January 2012 from http://bit.ly/HsLavg
7 Rural Transportation. (2010). Community Transportation Association of America. Retrieved January 2012 from http://bit.ly/HsLgD0
8 American Community Survey, 2010 U.S. Census. (2010). U.S. Census Bureau. Retrieved February 2012 from http://www.census.gov/acs/www/

As of 2000, 62 percent of rural transportation users were female, 31 percent were seniors, and 23 percent were disabled, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.[9]

Demand Response and Other Services

Rural areas often depend heavily on demand-response, vanpool, taxi, and paratransit services. Although this report does not focus extensively on those services, they are often the lifeline of rural transit systems, and complement the larger economic development projects discussed in the case studies.

Demand-response vehicles provide specialized services, especially to meet the needs in low- or no-transportation service areas. Demand-response vehicles generally do not operate on a fixed route or schedule, but respond to requests to transport passengers to specific destinations. Demand-response is a flexible routing service that can increase efficiency of providing transit services in rural areas. As of 2009, there were 1,358 transit systems in rural areas.[10] Eighty-six percent of these systems provide demand response service, and 31 percent provide fixed-route service, as shown in Table 1.

Findings

Despite the challenges associated with providing transit service in rural areas, many smaller communities view transit as an essential component in enhancing mobility. The research shows that transit solutions for smaller cities and rural places must take into consideration local and regional factors such as population density, distance to urban areas, the employment market, demographics, and other factors. Research also shows that rural transit providers must be extremely flexible in providing services.

The case studies helped to inform the following findings:

"When you can get people to work you are directly affecting the economy and reducing need for government services by having reliable transportation," Jim Moulton, Addison County Transit Resources, Vermont.

1. Smaller communities are making a wide variety of transit investments.

Investments by smaller communities in a variety of projects are improving connectivity and strengthening their economies. Small towns and rural areas are:

- Implementing and improving bus and circulator routes that link residents to services, tourists to local attractions, and workers to employment.

9 Rural Transportation: Setting the Context. (2009). Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network: TANF Resources and Information. Retrieved January 2012 from http://bit.ly/HsLavg
10 Rural Transit Factbook 2011. (2011). Small Urban & Rural Transit Center. Retrieved February 2012 from http://bit.ly/HpMoFm

- Creating transit hubs to bring together regional transit services, making them more convenient and easier to access.
- Using creative funding strategies to invest in projects that help to catalyze private investment in Main Street areas.
- Using intermodal facilities to reclaim their downtowns and attract businesses and diverse workforces.
- Engaging in partnerships with a range of stakeholders, such as universities, for-profit and nonprofit companies, chambers of commerce, ferry companies, private developers, human service agencies, councils of governments, and economic development offices.
- Piecing together funding such as Medicaid to connect residents to non-emergency medical care, which can reduce ambulance trips, allow for preventive care and save governments' money in the future.
- Collaborating on projects that reduce traffic congestion and increase ridership.
- Linking transit investments around local destinations that can generate revenue such as local vineyards.
- Building on traditional fixed-route, demand response, and paratransit services by making incremental changes that complement the larger transportation network.

Small towns are also coordinating transit investments with services for seniors, low-income families, workers, and people with disabilities. For example, in Choctaw Nation, the transit agency implemented improvements to their bus fleet specifically to provide better access to medical services.

2. Transit has had a positive impact on both the economy and the quality of life in smaller communities.

The case studies make clear that public transportation investments are making a difference by stimulating local economies and enhancing the quality of life for residents. Several small towns have seen increased ridership, revitalized downtowns, new businesses, additional employment opportunities, increased tourism, and improved access to community services.[11] In Kent, OH, for example, a multimodal center is generating 266 construction jobs and will add 700 full-time jobs upon completion. The Kent Central Gateway project and the connected private development project are expected to create $105 million in public and private development and $5.8 million in tax revenue annually.

The case studies also demonstrate that as much as there is an economic benefit from transit investments, there is a "human" benefit as well. The smaller population served in rural areas allows for a personal relationship between provider and transit rider. That relationship helps to improve the overall experience for transit users. In addition, the mobility that rural transit services provide contributes to an improved quality of life for transit

11 Within the case studies, figures have been included to note the economic and job creation impacts as a result of a specific project or investment, to the extent such information is available. However, many rural agencies and human services organizations have limited resources to track the overall economic impacts of their services. When specific data is unavailable, the researchers have relied on qualitative assessments to determine impact.

users. As Jim Moulton, Director of Addison County Transit Resources (ACTR) in Vermont put it: "Transportation is most often overlooked as having an effect, but when people have a feeling of self-worth from being able to get to their jobs, they are much happier."

3. Improved transit service can be integrated into a community without adversely affecting its small-town or rural character.

Investments of the type described in this report complement and strengthen the existing highway and transit networks without undermining the lifestyle that residents want to preserve. For example, in Monterey, CA, transit planners created a trolley that fit with the local historic character of the city to improve connections to tourist destinations.

The fact that small-town residents believe transit improvements can fit within their lifestyle is demonstrated most clearly by the strong community support these projects receive. In many cases, the success or failure of the project depends upon the level of community support. In Bozeman, MT, the local bus system was spearheaded by two community groups that stepped forward to fill a gap in the existing transit system.

4. Incremental or small-scale improvements in transit service can yield significant benefits.

A transit project does not need to be of any particular size or cost in order to have a positive impact; it needs only to be "right-sized" for the community making the investment. For example, a package of small-scale improvements to sidewalks, transit stops, vehicles, or other low-cost interventions can significantly improve access to and usage of an existing transit system. Choctaw Nation Tribal Transit took an incremental approach to upgrading buses, and eventually phased out buses that were not compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

5. Successful projects require coordination among multiple partners.

As in larger cities, myriad actors are involved in implementing transit solutions in small cities and rural places. These may include:

- Cities and counties
- Transit agencies
- Regional planning bodies (MPOs, RPOs and tribal planning agencies)
- States (including state DOTs, which control federal transit funds in rural areas)
- Nonprofits and universities

Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) – Federally mandated transportation policy-making body responsible for long range transportation planning. Required in urbanized areas with a population over 50,000.

Rural Planning Organization (RPO) – Organizations in rural areas informally responsible for transportation and regional planning. They are not federally mandated, but some states require them, for example Tennessee.

Tribal Planning Agencies – Foster wide range strategic planning in tribal areas.

- Local employers or business groups
- Community stakeholders

In rural areas, with their smaller and more isolated population, transit planning, implementation, and advocacy takes on a personal focus, where the needs of individual residents may drive the process. As a result, a wide variety of advocates for public transit exist in rural America, such as the individual, tribal organizations, church groups, local officials, health personnel, schools, and social workers.

Human services organizations play a much larger role in connecting residents to transportation services than in urban areas. For example, Area Agencies on Aging advocate as well as provide elderly residents with transportation services. Many agencies, such as Prairie Hills Transit in South Dakota, were started in order to meet a human service need such as feeding the elderly or connecting people to medical services. In many cases, these services develop into a larger and more robust transit system that benefits all residents.

Volunteers are also major actors in implementing transit service in rural areas, which can provide fiscal benefits for local communities. In Maine, for example, volunteer drivers provided over $16 million worth of time in 2011.[12]

6. The federal government is an essential partner in small-town transit projects and can be the catalyst that leads to successful completion of a project.

The federal government has long provided critical funding for transit projects in smaller towns and rural places, and in recent years has offered a number of new grant programs that have significantly benefited these communities. In many of the case studies, the federal government provides the largest share of the total project costs, making federal funding a catalyst to project development. In 2009, the federal government appropriated more than $498 million to rural public transportation agencies in capital and operating expenses, as shown in Table 3. TIGER, American Reinvestment and Recovery

Table 2: Rural Transit Funding Sources

	2007	2008	2009	Change 08-09
Capital Funding				
Federal	107,251,562	128,118,103	159,346,173	24%
State	23,808,314	27,314,677	40,565,774	49%
Local	37,886,750	32,184,429	30,115,042	-6%
Operating				
Federal Assistance	257,175,509	293,033,494	339,038,870	16%
State Assistance	192,751,020	193,599,123	213,787,126	10%
Local Assistance	298,126,617	275,787,715	296,125,982	7%
Fare Revenues	76,323,783	85,652,440	97,376,190	14%
Contract Revenues	193,893,072	214,445,705	198,061,533	-8%
Total Expenses	**1,003,846,706**	**1,063,216,122**	**1,153,041,709**	**8%**

Source: Small Urban and Rural Transit Center, 2011

12 Connie Garber. Phone interview. February 2012.

Act (ARRA), CMAQ, and other federal formula and discretionary funds identified in this report total more than $87.9 million.

Federal funds also play a role in providing services for the elderly, low-income, and disabled population. Funds for elderly transportation services, for example, can come from the Federal Transit Administration's Section 5310, 5311, or New Freedom programs. Funds can also come from Medicaid non-emergency funds or the Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) program, which are essential in connecting low-income residents to jobs and services. Medicaid non-emergency transportation has become a key element in many rural transit systems' funding streams. Programs like Medicaid and Medicare benefit from rural transportation systems that connect their clients to such care as dialysis, chemother-

Table 3: Selected Federal Funding Sources for Rural Transit

PROGRAM TITLE	BRIEF DESCRIPTION
FORMULA GRANTS	
Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ)	Funds projects that reduce congestion and improve air quality. Projects can include bicycle, pedestrian and transit facilities.
Formula Grants for other than Urbanized Areas (49 U.S.C. § 5311)	Provides capital and operating assistance grants to States to support public transportation in rural areas with population of less than 50,000. Also includes funding for Tribal Transit.
Rural Transit Assistance Program (49 U.S.C. §5311 (b) (3))	Training, technical assistance, research, and related support services in rural areas.
Transportation for Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities (49 U.S.C. § 5310)	Formula funding to States to assist private nonprofit groups in meeting transportation needs of the elderly and persons with disabilities.
Job Access and Reverse Commute Program (49 U.S.C. § 5316)	Funding to address transportation challenges faced by welfare recipients and low-income persons seeking to obtain and maintain employment.
New Freedom Program (49 U.S.C. § 5317)	Formula grant that provides tools and resources to reduce barriers to transportation services and expand the transportation mobility options available to people with disabilities.
Medicaid Non-Emergency Transportation	Provides funds for Medicaid recipients to obtain transportation to and from medical providers for non-emergency services.
COMPETITIVE GRANTS	
Bus and Bus Facilities (49 U.S.C. § 5309)	Funds new and replacement buses and facilities. Includes bus livability and state of good repair funds.
Transportation Investments Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER)	Fosters innovative, multimodal and multi-jurisdictional transportation projects that promise significant economic and environmental benefits to an entire metropolitan area, a region, or the nation.
Major Capital Investments (New Starts and Small Starts)	Funds new or extensions to existing fixed guideway and bus rapid transit systems.
Veterans Transportation and Community Living Initiative Grant Program	Inter-departmental initiative to improve transportation options and mobility for America's veterans, service members, and their families.
Public Transportation on Indian Reservations (49 U.S.C. § 5311 (C))	Direct funding to federally recognized tribes for the purpose of supporting tribal public transportation in rural areas.
American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA)	Stimulus or recovery funds appropriated in 2009. Funding was geared toward job preservation and creation, infrastructure investment and other uses.

apy, and routine checkups. Federally funded transportation vouchers (from Section 5310) also subsidize portions of transit services from either public or private entities like taxi companies.[13] In Monterey, California, the local taxi system would not be affordable to many local senior citizens had it not been for the federal support.

Although the federal government plays a large role in jumpstarting the projects, partnerships are a key element in successful implementation of transit projects. Especially in this constrained fiscal climate, transit investments often require piecing together funding from many sources. None of the large-scale economic development projects discussed in this report would have been feasible without federal funding; however, they would also not have been possible without matching funds from state, regional, local, private, or philanthropic sources.

13 Transportation: The Silent Need, Results of a National Survey of Area Agencies on Aging. (2010) National Center on Senior Transportation. Retrieved March 2012 from http://bit.ly/HsMePH

Overview of the Case Studies

The communities chosen as case studies for this report represent only a sample of the types of communities and investment types underway in America today. The case studies are divided into sections based on the type of transit improvements being made:

1. Improved Local/Regional Bus Networks
2. Circulator Systems
3. Intermodal Transit Centers
4. Intercity Transit/Rail Improvements

Table 4: Case Study Transit Systems

LOCATION	AGENCY / TYPE	POP.*	PROJECT	FUNDING SOURCE
IMPROVED BUS NETWORK				
Addison County, VT	Addison County Transit Resources	37,000	Increased shuttle bus routes	Federal, State, Philanthropic
Allendale County, SC	Lower Savannah Council of Governments	11,200	Coordinated regional bus network	Federal, State, Regional, Philanthropic
Choctaw Nation (Oklahoma)	Choctaw Nation Tribal Transit	84,670	ADA-accessible bus upgrades	Federal (Bus Livability Grant and stimulus funds)
CIRCULATOR				
Bozeman, MT	Human Resource Development Council	40,000	Bus Circulator	Federal, University, County, Philanthropic
Sanford, ME	York County Community Action Corporation	20,800	Trolley Bus Circulator	Federal, Business, Local
Monterey, CA	Monterey-Salinas Transit	28,000	Trolley Bus Circulator	Federal, City, Transit Agency, Monterey Bay Aquarium, Regional
INTERMODAL TRANSIT CENTERS				
Kent, OH	Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority	30,000	Multimodal Transit Center	Federal (TIGER), Transit Agency, City, University
Spearfish, SD	Prairie Hills Transit	10,400	Transit Facility	Federal (ARRA), land contributed by the City
INTERCITY TRANSIT/RAIL IMPROVEMENTS				
Fitchburg, MA	Montachusett Regional Transit Authority	40,000	Commuter rail line extension	Federal (TIGER), Regional, Local

* Population rounded

Improved Local/Regional Bus Networks

The foundation for smaller communities' transit systems is local and regional bus networks. Within these networks, rural and small city transportation is often based on serving trip generators – colleges/universities, major employers (such as industrial plants), medical centers, retail centers, or tourist destinations. Buses provide key connections between major health care, commercial, and educational opportunities. As the cost of gasoline has risen and families' budgets have tightened, demand for more and better bus service is high all across the country, in both urban and rural areas. Smaller cities are looking for cost-effective solutions to meet this demand. Their funding constraints require creative solutions to enhance bus service in a way that will fit their community's character and meet residents' needs.

Bus network enhancements can incorporate a variety of different kinds of investment. For example, investments that will increase service and headways[14] along a corridor can improve mobility and also enhance economic viability in struggling areas. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) upgrades, special signage or vehicle branding, landscaping, intersection improvements or other low-cost changes to a bus system can also increase ridership. By focusing these improvements on just one or a few routes, communities can lay the foundation for a more walkable, economically viable corridor along a main street or connect an underutilized section of town, focusing growth in those areas and creating better access to jobs and opportunity. These types of improvements can be implemented incrementally as funding becomes available.

Even for relatively small-scale investments, partnerships can be key to getting a project off the ground. Cities in smaller regions are becoming increasingly creative in how they fund bus network expansions or improvements, often by piecing together many funding sources or by forging public-private or cross-agency partnerships.

Connecting Workers to Jobs: Addison County, Vermont

Addison County Transit Resources (ACTR) in Vermont became an emergency commuter lifeline when the bridge over Lake Champlain closed, cutting off a major connection between New York and Vermont. ACTR partnered with local businesses to develop a ferry and shuttle service to bring New York residents to their jobs in Vermont.

Middlebury, VT, is a city of less than 9,000 people 2½ hours north of Albany, NY. Addison County Transit Resources is a non-profit organization that serves the county's 37,000 residents, who are spread over 77,000 square miles. Approximately 73 percent of ACTR's riders are transit dependent.[15] The

14 "Headway" refers to the frequency of service on a particular route.

15 Jim Moulton. Phone interview. February 2012.

county population is also growing older. In 2000, 15 percent of Addison County's population was aged 60 or older; by 2010 that number was 20 percent.[16]

ACTR runs both fixed route bus service and also demand-response service with a fleet of 16 buses. The bulk of ACTR's funding comes from federal and state resources, but it also relies on support and investments from the business community, philanthropic organizations, towns, and individuals. ACTR operates six bus routes with 17 professional drivers, seven days a week, although weekend service is limited. ACTR's demand-response service relies on a bank of 40 volunteer drivers, using their own cars, who provide critical transportation services for elderly and disabled residents who need assistance getting to medical appointments or buying food. The service is also integral to responding to needs of the vulnerable population in Addison County. "Public transit has an amazing impact in rural communities. Whenever we put new or expanded service on the road, people ride. They ride because it's useful to them...they need it," said Jim Moulton, Director of ACTR.

ACTR has also secured federal and local funds to create a Green Transit Center. They hope to use cost savings from creating a green and energy efficient building to reduce operating costs. ACTR estimates a cost saving of $50,000 annually through the new transit facility.

In 2009, ACTR took on a new challenge: emergency commuter service. In late October, the Champlain bridge between New York and Vermont was declared unusable. The abrupt closure of the bridge affected roughly 4,000 daily commuters who lived in New York and worked in Vermont. With the nearest crossing almost 60 miles north or south of the bridge, workers who were accustomed to commuting 30 minutes each way suddenly had a 2½-hour one-way commute. Workers were faced with potentially being cut off from their families or cut off from their jobs since a five-hour round-trip commute was unsustainable. Employers shared those concerns, as they needed their employees in order to stay in business.

Through the initial organization of the Addison County Chamber of Commerce, the community called upon ACTR for assistance. ACTR partnered with the Basin Harbor Club and Marina to create a shuttle bus and pedestrian ferry system to transport passengers across Lake Champlain. When passengers reached the docks in Vermont, free ACTR shuttle buses transported commuters to nearby towns for work. If necessary, workers could also connect to regular ACTR buses.[17] The emergency commuter service was available on a scheduled basis during the morning and afternoon rush hours.

ACTR also partnered with two established car-ferry services that were now overloaded with demand. Dozens of displaced workers began riding these ferries as pedestrians

16 Ibid.
17 Bridge Update: Pedestrian ferry to take commuters between Basin Harbor and New York. (2009). Addison County Independent. Retrieved February 2012 from http://bit.ly/HsO3vO

and ACTR met them with dial-a-ride services to get them to their jobs. Adam Wright, parts manager at G. Stone Motors in Middlebury said at the time: "This is working really well for us. I come over from Mineville (NY), the other two guys are from Moriah and Ticonderoga (NY) … I am glad this got going. It has saved a lot of hassle and I get home in time to see my kids."[18]

Photo by Caleb Kenna

BF Goodrich employees boarding an ACTR bus for the commute home to New York via the ferry.

Funding for the emergency ferry, bus, and demand-response services was provided by the federal and state agencies. While these emergency commuter services were extremely successful, they were also designed to be temporary. After about five months, the New York and Vermont departments of transportation collaborated to provide funding to build docks and provide 24-hour car-ferry service. "People don't often think about public transit as part of the emergency response system; but we were a part of the response team … that was involved in getting people to work," Moulton said.

Besides being there when emergencies arise, ACTR provides a growing service throughout the Addison County region. Over the past decade, ACTR launched a series of fixed-route shuttles emanating from the center of Middlebury and traveling to neighboring cities, including Vermont's two largest communities – Burlington to the north and Rutland to the south. As a result of these bus shuttles and other service improvements, ACTR experienced a record-breaking 22 percent gain in ridership in 2011, bringing the total system ridership to 156,000 annual trips. The shuttle bus system alone experienced a 34.5 percent ridership boost and is on track for another 20 percent increase in 2012, demonstrating its continuing importance in the economic development of this rural area.

18 As told to Jim Moulton. Email Correspondence with Moulton. April 2012.

Increasing Mobility by Coordinating Services: Allendale County, South Carolina

Allendale County, South Carolina is home to a population of 11,211, and struggles with a substandard school system, little industry, high unemployment, and a high poverty rate. Per capita income in Allendale County was the lowest in South Carolina at the time of the 2000 Census and the rate of poverty for families in Allendale County, 28.4 percent, was the highest in the state. Community leaders in Allendale County and members of the Lower Savannah Council of Governments (LSCOG) determined that a lack of transportation was a major contributor to the issues facing Allendale residents.

County leaders met with LSCOG over a 9 month-period in 2003 to create solutions for the lack of transportation options. While there were a wide variety of human service transportation providers in the six-county region that includes Allendale, those services were targeted to specific types of individuals (e.g., disabled), did not serve the public at large, and did not generally coordinate with each other. As a result, Allendale County and LSCOG decided to conduct a demonstration project to better coordinate existing service provided by these agencies. According to Lynnda Bassham, LSCOG Human Services Director, Allendale's Regional Transit Authority agreed to station a "mobility manager" in Allendale to implement this project. The mobility manager would match residents with available seats on existing vehicles operated by agencies in the region, depending on the destination of the resident. For passengers who needed to reach destinations that were not along a scheduled route, participating agencies would transport them on their demand-response vehicles, agreeing on a common per passenger mile rate for transporting the general public on these seats.[19] The mobility manager would also handle billing and ticketing operations for passengers and participating agencies in the project.

Lower Savannah Council of Governments (LSCOG) photo

After conducting test runs in May 2004 to ensure the system would be effective, state and community leaders launched an official kick-off event in July 2004 for a new public transit system called the Allendale County Scooter. Although the Scooter was billed as a new system, it used existing transit vehicles and routes already es-

19 Lynnda Bassham. Phone interview. April 2012

tablished in the county; the "new" aspect of the project was its more efficient use of those vehicles to transport more people. This facet made the project unique, as no new vehicles needed to be purchased to provide improved transit services. Funding for the project came from sources such as South Carolina University Transportation Center, Sisters of Charity, Allendale County, Allendale Alive, a non-profit rural development organization, the South Carolina Department of Transportation, and the LSCOG. LSCOG also coordinated FTA Section 5310 Elderly and Disabled program funds with providers including aging services, the disability board, the rural health center, and the Medicaid transit providers. Whereas previously all of those providers operated their services separately, often with excess capacity on their vehicles, under the new system those seats would be in use by residents who otherwise might have no means of accessing employment, educational opportunities, or medical services.

In August 2004, the service provided 113 passenger trips with a total of 3,569 miles traveled, and by April 2005 there were 871 passenger trips with 12,728 miles traveled.[20] About 44 percent of passengers used the system to get to work daily in Allendale, Barnwell, Hampton, Williston, and Aiken, SC with 27 perfect utilizing the Scooter for access to medical facilities. The Scooter proved to be such a success that the LSCOG was requested by Bamberg County, South Carolina to help them establish a similar system, known today as the Bamberg Handy Ride. Ultimately, a regional network of coordinating transportation providers is being built in order to create capacity to meet current and future needs that will support South Carolina's Lower Savannah. However, even with the success of the system, various challenges exist, such as how to meet higher demand for later night and weekend transportation, how to secure additional funding, and how to find more public transit or human service agencies with which to coordinate additional trips.

Providing Accessibility For Everyone: Choctaw Nation

In rural Oklahoma, the Choctaw Nation used federal funds to replace its small bus fleet with ADA-accessible vehicles, a move that allowed the agency to significantly improve its service and increase residents' access to health care.

Choctaw Nation is a non-reservation tribe that provides transportation services for residents of a 10½-county area of southeast Oklahoma, where many members of the tribe live. The central goal of the transit system is to provide tribal members with trips to and from non-emergency medical appointments. These trips ensure that individuals with medical conditions can be treated without having to wait until their condition requires more costly emergency transportation and hospitalization.

Choctaw Transit began service in 2007, after the tribe realized that many citizens who

20 What is the Allendale County Scooter? Lowcountry Regional Transportation Authority. Retrieved April 2012 from http://bit.ly/KE4EbI

Choctaw Nation Tribal Transit photo

Keith Lindly, driver with Choctaw Nation, welcomes riders.

lacked transportation were not fully benefiting from health care, food assistance, and job development programs available to them. The Tribal Council used funding support from FTA's Tribal Transit program to develop transit operations. Choctaw Transit now has 14 drivers, half of whom answer demand-response calls and half of whom run the fixed-routes that operate across the Nation to a central location daily. Choctaw Transit carries more than 500 riders each month. Transit services are not limited to those going to medical appointments; the service is also available to the general public for trips that correspond with scheduled medical transportation routes.[21]

The initial bus network increased access to services, but not all of the buses were wheelchair-accessible. As a result, buses had to be swapped or trips delayed for riders in wheelchairs. With a 2010 contribution of $480,374 from the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) and a $132,000 grant from the FTA Bus Livability program in 2011, the tribe made critical system improvements and bus upgrades. "These new buses are absolutely allowing us to increase our efficiency and our ridership, and to serve people who have no other way to get around," said Johnny James, Director of Choctaw Nation Transit. "The vision is for this to allow us to provide more fixed-route service and become a more established presence in the community."[22]

Table 5: National Percentage of Rural Vehicles that are ADA Accessible

	2007	2008	2009
TOTAL (Percentage)	73	77	77
Bus	88	92	92
Van	59	59	63
Minivan	50	57	56
Automobiles	3	3	4
School Bus	62	36	22
Over-the-road bus	77	64	79
Sports utility vehicle	50	59	12

Source: Small Urban & Rural Transit Center, 2011.

21 Sampson, Rich. (2009). Growing with Pride, Hope and Success. Community Transportation. Retrieved February 2012 from http://bit.ly/HsOlmy

22 Johnny James. Phone interview. November 2011.

According to Jana Boykin, a former dispatcher and now Assistant Director of Choctaw Nation Transit, the federal funding to buy more ADA-accessible vehicles has certainly helped, but finding additional funding to hire more drivers has also posed a problem. This is a common dilemma. It can be a challenge to find sufficient funding for both transit equipment and operating expenses.

Despite this challenge, the availability of more ADA-accessible vehicles and increases in bus routes has had a profound impact on Choctaw Nation. Once constrained to utilizing smaller clinics in the 10½ counties of the Choctaw Nation, residents can now be transported to specialty clinics located hours away in Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and Fort Smith, AR, if special care is needed.

Overall, the improved bus system and vehicle upgrades have benefited the Choctaw Nation in both personal and economic terms, as more residents have access to medical facilities, promoting a healthier population and reducing the high travel costs associated with receiving specialized medical care.

Circulator Systems

A circulator system is a transit line that connects downtown destinations and helps foster reinvestment and vitality in the city center. Circulators can be buses, streetcars or rubber-tire trolley lines that operate in a closed loop. Depending on local needs, a circulator may operate over a variety of distances, although the recommended distance is 3 miles or less.[23] A circulator line often runs on a more frequent schedule than other transit lines and may have a distinct branding – such as a special name or unique vehicles – to set it apart and to ensure that it is memorable and recognizable to users.

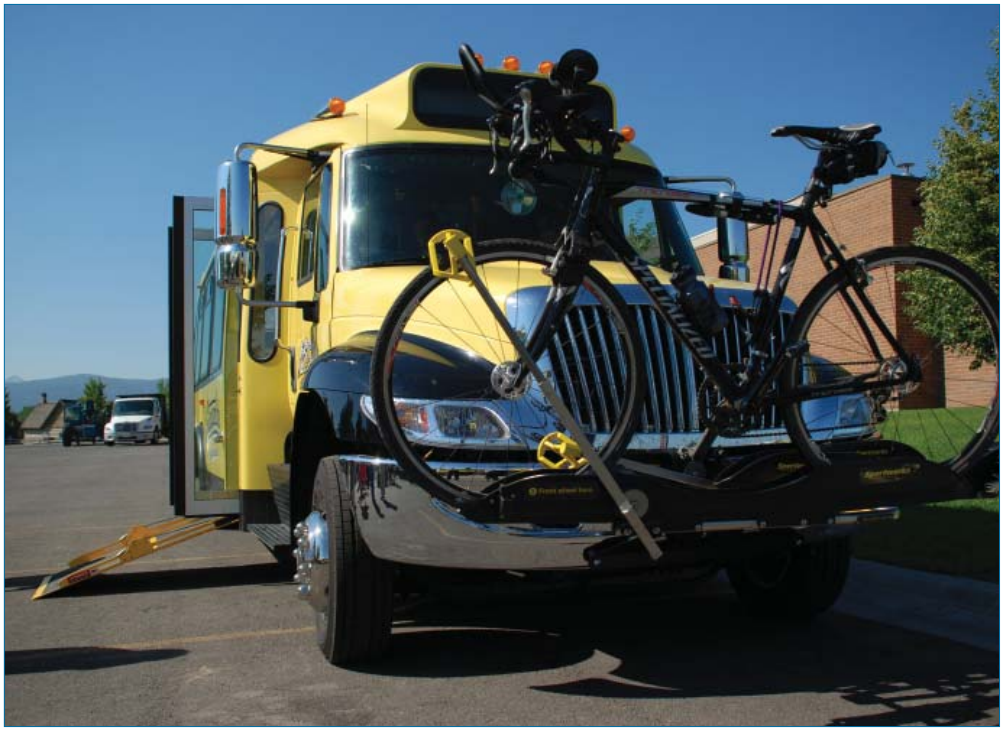
Circulators are becoming common in large and midsized cities such as Washington, DC, and Charlottesville, VA, and are increasing in smaller communities as well. Circulators can be a critical element in strengthening a historic downtown. Circulators are most often found in towns where there are concentrated trip generators located just a few miles apart such as a university or a large tourism market. Reliable circulator systems linked to transit-supportive land uses can create a positive loop of ridership for the transit agency and economic benefits for the community.

23 What is an Urban Circulator System? Federal Transit Administration. Retrieved January 2012 from www.fta.dot.gov

Supporting Residents and a University Through Community Involvement: Bozeman, Montana

Bozeman, Montana, the county seat of Gallatin County, is home to just about 40,000 residents and is also the location of Montana State University – Bozeman. The town is a national and international recreation destination for skiers to three major ski areas and visitors to Yellowstone National Park, located immediately to the south. Although home to a university, Bozeman had a very limited transit system to serve the University students, but not other members of the community. A local transit task force was appointed but they were unable to reach agreement on a solution that would serve various community members. As a result, the local nonprofit Human Resource Development Council (HRDC) and the Associated Students of Montana State University (ASMSU) stepped forward and spearheaded an initiative utilizing existing resources to develop a transit system to support the community.

Utilizing work from the College of Engineering at MSU, which developed the concept for a circulator, and the existing HRDC/Galavan "door to door" transportation service for seniors and people with disabilities, work began to implement a public fixed route system to support the city's residents, students and tourists. Active planning of the lines began in 2001 that laid the foundation for the new public bus system and supplied the ridership projections and route information needed to request Federal support for the system[24]



Human Resource Development Council photo

In 2006, the ASMSU and HRDC introduced the Streamline, a bus service with four distinctively branded circulator routes that originate downtown and serve key city destinations. When Streamline was first introduced, Streamline predicted only about 200 rides per day. Lee Hazelbaker, Program Director of

24 Kack, David. Planning and Implementing a Public Transport System in Bozeman, presentation at the Headwaters Recycle conference in 2008. Retrieved November 2011 from http://bit.ly/HsPM4w

Streamline, said initially, the company had to overcome the "nobody-will-ride" syndrome from pessimistic residents and city leaders. However, Streamline averages about 800 rides per day and has even recorded 1,300 rides in a single day.[25] Streamline has proven to be "very successful and the system itself has far exceeded its expectations," according to Hazelbaker. All four lines operate within an area that is roughly 4 square miles. One of the routes brings commuters into the Montana State University (MSU) Campus, where students make up approximately 45 percent of the riders, and faculty and staff make up approximately 10 percent.[26] The remaining 45 percent of riders can be attributed to residents and tourists in the area.

The year service was launched, Streamline ridership was 90,000, 22 percent higher than projections.[27] By 2011, ridership had more than doubled to 242,700 trips and Streamline transit has plans for five more potential circulator routes in the future.[28] The future route will continue to focus on attracting more riders and making it more convenient for people to use. Streamline service is also coordinated closely with Gallatin County, which operates a paratransit service in the broader county area.

Table 6: HRDC Annual Funding (includes circulators, demand response)

FTA Section 5311	$ 548,000
Local Match	$380,000
Montana State University	$ 90,000
City of Bozeman	$ 60,000
Gallatin County	$ 40,000
United Way	$ 28,000
Belgrade County	$ 8,000
Other (Contracts for Service)	$ 154,000

Source: Kack, Headwaters Recycle Conference

Similar to other bus systems, various funding sources are pieced together to create the circulator. Streamline has received federal funds through the state of Montana, Montana State University, the Associated Students of Montana State University and the local nonprofit Human Resources Development Council, which administers the service in partnership with the Associated Students of Montana State University, the United Way, Gallatin County and the city of Belgrade. According to Jeff Rupp, CEO of HRDC, "the success of Streamline can be attributed to community participation; the work of the community was the key instrument in establishing transit service in Bozeman."

25 Lee Hazelbaker. Phone Interview. March 2012
26 Streamline makes pitch for funding from City of Bozeman. (August 2012). Bozeman Daily Chronicle. Retrieved January 2012 from http://bit.ly/HsPXwy
27 Streamline Bus. Retrieved November 2011 from www.streamlinebus.com
28 Ballard, Lisa. "Southwest Montana Transit Status," presentation at the Headwaters Recycle conference in 2008.

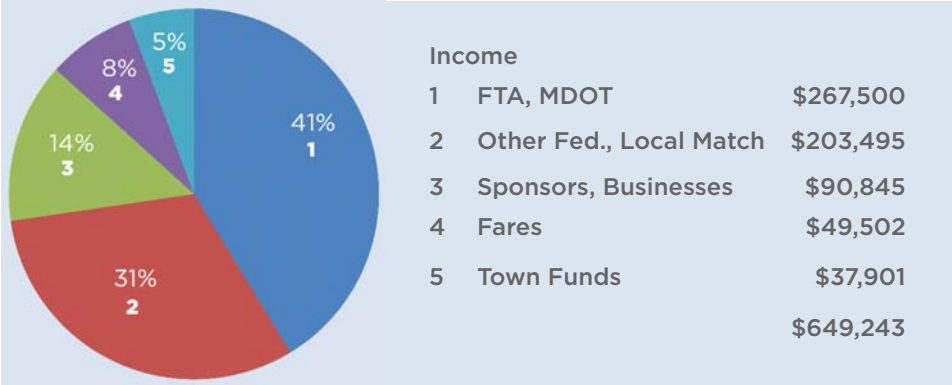
Linking People to Opportunity: York County, Maine

Along the scenic coast of Maine, the classic geographical disconnect between workers and jobs prompted York County to create a trolley service not only to provide access for workers, but also to connect residents and tourists to recreational facilities.

York County Community Action Corporation (YCCAC) is a non-profit human services agency. The county, one of the oldest in the United States, is on the southern end of Maine and is home to approximately 197,000 residents. The county is dotted with small towns, widely separated from each other, many of which do not have a grocery store, bank, or other basic services. YCCAC delivers a range of social services and assistance. Using federal funding, it provides the region's transportation services and operates a fleet of vehicles – trolley, demand-response, and fixed-route deviation.[29] YCCAC also relies on a large volunteer driver system to fill gaps in service. In 2011, more than 100 people provided $4.2 million worth of time for 115,000 one-way trips.[30]

Tourism is a major driver for the local economy. During summer months, tourists flock to York County coastal communities. Businesses need seasonal workers for low- and mid-skill-level jobs, such as chamber maids, fast food servers, and outdoor recreation and amusement park workers. However, it was difficult to attract the number of workers needed.

Figure 2: Shoreline Explorer Funding



Source: Shoreline Explorer Annual Report http://bit.ly/HsQAGq

Seventeen miles inland is the town of Sanford. Over the last few decades the loss of manufacturing jobs and other layoffs has led to a high percentage of unemployment and underemployment.

The YCCAC, in collaboration with the chambers of commerce and other stakeholders, set out to create a transportation option that would help residents get to work and connect the various communities together. Their goal was not only to increase access to jobs for local employees, but also to contribute to the economic viability of local businesses.

29 Transit service that operates along a fixed path at generally fixed times, but may deviate from the route to collect or drop off passengers who have requested deviation.

30 Connie Garber. Phone interview. February 2012

York County Community Action Corp. photos

They focused on creating mobility for three target groups: tourists, workers, and local residents with children, who needed a way to go shopping, visit the beach, or go to the museum. YCCAC partnered with three for-profit trolley companies to create a shuttle that would connect people from inland to the coastal areas, and connect the coastal communities to each other. Using federal CMAQ and 5311 funds, and state, local, and private funds, they created the Shoreline Explorer trolley service. The Shoreline Explorer received the FTA Administrator's Award for creating this unique collaboration among public and private trolley and bus service.

"Rural transportation is about giving people greater independence to access a better life," says Connie Garber, YCCAC Transportation Director. The Shoreline Explorer trolley is allowing people to do just that. Business owners Jason and Lee Talevi said, "From our perspective as seasonal business owners, the trolley is a fabulous amenity, a much needed resource and really an icon for the 'friendliest town in Maine'.[31]"

31 York County Community Action Corporation. Retrieved from http://bit.ly/HsQAGq

Serving Tourists While Maintaining Historic Character: Monterey, California

Monterey, CA, is a town of 28,000 people on the Pacific Coast of Central California, approximately 115 miles south of San Francisco and 350 miles north of Los Angeles. Monterey is home to the world-renowned Monterey Bay Aquarium and prides itself on its small-town, historic character, which is integral to Monterey's local economy and helps to attract thousands of tourists each year.

The local transit agency, Monterey-Salinas Transit (MST), serves about one-fifth of the coast of California, roughly equaling the size of two New England states. The system primarily serves individuals in the agricultural sector (farmers and ranchers), families of military personnel, tourists going to the Monterey Bay Aquarium and the Pebble Beach Resorts, as well as senior citizens and California State University, Monterey Bay, students.

In 2003, MST decided that in order to grow its service while maintaining the historic character of the region it served, it should switch from buses to a trolley service for the main tourist destinations. Four trolleys were purchased. Monterey covered 20 percent of the costs ($325,000), while federal grants covered the remaining 80 percent.

The new "MST Trolley" runs a short route originating from the transit plaza downtown and connecting destinations along the popular lighthouse district to the aquarium. The trolley is free to ride and runs on 10-minute headways. MST runs similar trolley circulators in the nearby cities of Pacific Grove, Salinas, and Carmel. After switching from a regular bus system to the specially branded, historic trolleys, ridership rose from 100,000 in 2003 to

MST-Military Bus Program: MST has made improvements to better serve Fort Hunter Liggett, an Army training center, by offering 15 bus routes to the communities close to the base. These transportation routes help to improve access to housing choices for military families beyond the space-constrained base. Since its inception in 2009, ridership in the MST–Military bus partnership has increased from 5,000 to 42,000 riders per month.[1] The bus routes serve Fort Hunter Liggett and the nearby Presidio Army Garrison and Naval Postgraduate School, all funded entirely by the Department of the Army Mass Transit Benefit Program and the Department of the Navy Transportation Incentive Program. According to the Army Garrison newsletter, the program has helped to remove 700 cars daily from the local road, thus resulting in less congestion and vehicle emissions and added approximately $6 million in revenues to the local economy.[2]

1 Community Newsletter, Volume 1, Issue 1. (January 2012). US Army Garrison, Presidio of Monterey. Retrieved April 2012 from http://bit.ly/IvMw7u
2 Ibid.

185,000 in 2005, an 85 percent increase.[32] In 2011, MST provided 4.5 million passenger trips throughout the Monterey Bay region, an increase of 120,000 from 2010.

MST focuses on integrating creative partnerships in its transit model. For example, MST and two Monterey County educational institutions devised a creative partnership to cut traffic congestion and increase public transportation access throughout the region. The Otter ID free ride program, launched by the CSU campus, allows students, faculty, and staff to access all MST buses at no cost.

MST has also created several programs geared towards senior citizens and persons with disabilities, using support from federal New Freedom grants. MST has implemented new Senior Shuttle routes as the demand for shopping and medical facility access without transfers has increased. A volunteer corps known as the MST Navigators, lead travel training sessions and ride Senior Shuttle routes, available to help carry packages and provide training for passengers using wheelchairs and scooters.

Later in 2012, MST will debut its new Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line, which will cut commute times along the Lighthouse-Fremont corridor while serving as a moving museum honoring the world's longest-running jazz festival. The new BRT line, named JAZZ, is expected to cut travel times between the Monterey Bay Aquarium and Sand City Station (about 1.6 miles outside of Monterey) by 25 percent.

"We are making transit fun and attractive, and including an impressive educational component at the same time," says MST General Manager Carl Sedoryk.

Fred Hsu / Wikimedia Commons

Through a partnership with the Monterey Jazz Festival, stops along the JAZZ route will highlight history, performers and cultural contributions and will even include downloadable music for smart phones. FTA provided $2.7 million in Small Starts program funds for the JAZZ line and another $1.9 million in state transportation bonds also supports the project.

32 Carl Sedoryk, Phone interview. February 2012.

Since federal grants require a local match that is often difficult to find in local agency budgets, MST has used public-private partnerships to fund routes to key destinations. For example, the Carmel Valley Grapevine Express transports people from downtown Monterey to Carmel Valley Village, a popular destination for wine tasting.[33] It is funded in part by the Monterey County Business Council and the County Office of Economic Development. The fact that businesses are willing to put their own dollars into the transit service demonstrates the value that they expect to receive from improved access to their facilities.

Intermodal Transit Centers and Transit Hubs

Rural areas primarily depend on intercity bus services such as Greyhound or local or regional intercity bus providers to connect them with major cities and other regional destinations. In recent years intercity bus service has declined due to lack of funding, competition from low-cost commercial airfares, and restructuring of bus transportation networks.[34] Amtrak is generally the only rail service in communities with populations less than 50,000. As a result, rural residents are increasingly seeking alternatives to automobile travel.

Intermodal transit centers and transit hubs are increasingly being pursued by small cities and towns because they can serve three key purposes:

- Promote regionalization by improving connectivity of the transportation network to make transfers easier and more convenient for riders.
- Serve as a central public investment that can support revitalization of a downtown, in some cases helping to kick-start private investment in these areas.
- Provide needed amenities, including child care centers and retail in a central location.

The fact that intermodal centers are shared facilities can help to lower costs while contributing to higher quality.

Unique partnerships are sometimes required to link public transit, intercity buses, passenger rail, high-speed rail, commercial air, and bike/pedestrian facilities. For example, Trinidad, CO, a town of 9,077 people, is developing a transportation center that will have space for passengers to comfortably transfer between Amtrak, intercity buses, and local transit services. The project is being advanced through a unique inter-governmental partnership, where the center will be owned by the city and operated by the South Central Council of Governments.

Transit hubs also provide a central focal point for economic activities and can be an anchor for various types of development – notably transit-oriented development (TOD).

33 Harvath, Hunter. Innovative Partnerships that Work, presentation, Monterey-Salinas Transit, 2008. California Transit Association.
34 Our Rural Transportation System. US Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration Retrieved March 2012 http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/rural/planningfortrans/2ourrts.html

Transit hubs, such as the one in Meridian, MS, a community of 40,000, can help spur economic development in declining downtowns. Reconnecting America President and CEO John Robert Smith, the former Mayor of Meridian, says the development of the South's first multimodal station was at the heart of the effort to create a downtown for which the community could be proud. Meridian's Union Station, a revitalized historic building, now serves more than 300,000 people each year and was the catalyst for $135 million in private investment in the downtown area. The Union Station project serves as a model for the use of small intermodal stations as redevelopment drivers.

Both the U.S. Department of Transportation's TIGER grant program and the FTA's Bus Livability program have supported a number of transit hub and intermodal facility projects in recent years. However, as illustrated in the case studies, these projects cannot rely solely on federal contributions. Significant effort and financial equity must exist on the local and regional level in order to bring these projects to completion.

Using a Transit Center to Strengthen a Downtown: Kent, Ohio

Kent is a city of just under 30,000 in Northeastern Ohio. Like many small towns and rural areas, Kent has struggled to retain young people, who prefer to move to major metro areas after graduation from the local university. As a result, Kent's workforce became less diverse and resilient. In an attempt to proactively address this issue, the city sent a survey to Kent State University students in 2008, asking them what it would take to persuade them to stay after graduation and work in Portage County. Many said that they wanted to live near a thriving downtown with cultural attractions, gathering places, walkable streets, and interesting neighborhoods.

This survey helped move along a proposed transit center concept, led by the Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority (PARTA). The city hoped that a new transit center would enhance multimodal transportation use and catalyze economic development in the downtown, creating an attractive area for businesses and residents. The project was intended to create a "vital civic space that will contribute to the health, safety, and sustainability of the Kent community."[35] The city and transit agency are working proactively with private developers to realize this vision.

PARTA received a $20 million grant from USDOT's TIGER program to build the Kent Central Gateway multimodal transit center, with an additional $4 million from the city of Kent. The proposed transit center will be a 325,000 square-foot mixed-use, intermodal transfer station. It will include a bus transfer area, parking, 18,000 square feet of retail and commercial space, plazas, and secure bicycle parking. The transit center is expected to create

35 PARTA breaks ground on transit center: Kent facility cited as an example of the region roaring back. Kent Central Gateway. (2011). Retrieved February 2012 from http://www.kentcentralgateway.com/

266 construction jobs and 700 full-time jobs upon completion.[36]

The public investment in the transit center and a nearby relocated county courthouse are expected to stimulate activity in the area and encourage more life on the streets, making the area more attractive for private investment. The city of Kent, PARTA, and Kent State University have partnered with private developers to revitalize the area surrounding the Kent Central Gateway multimodal facility. The development plan includes more than 250,000 square-feet of mixed-use space, a hotel, and a conference center. The Kent Central Gateway is considered a significant amenity to the private development and will help reduce the traffic impact of the new project. The Gateway and the connected private development project are projected to generate $105 million in public and private development and $5.8 million in annual tax revenue.[37]

Turning a Transit Agency Building into a Community Hub: Spearfish, South Dakota

Prairie Hills Transit (PHT) began with a 1979 green cargo van, a handful of passionate community activists, and a need to serve elderly residents through a Senior Meals program. The agency has steadily grown to more 36 vehicles, 50 employees, and a new transit facility that accommodates a community child care center.

Prairie Hills Transit is based in Spearfish, a rural city in western South Dakota with a population of 10,400, and serves 15 communities spread over 12,000 square miles, an area seven times larger than Rhode Island.[38] The transit agency is among the top 10 employers in Spearfish, where most residents either work in the health care or forestry industry. The city has safe communities, affordable housing, and is in close proximity to a major medical facility, shopping areas, and grocery stores. Still, many students, low-income workers, older residents, and people with disabilities depend on the reliability of PHT, and the system has come to be well-trusted in the community.

By 2002, PHT began plans for a multimodal facility that would provide for more efficient operation and maintenance of its vehicles, and allow for better connection between PHT and the local Jefferson Intercity Bus Lines.

At the same time, the agency needed to hire additional staff. But PHT faced a challenge in recruiting qualified candidates: the lack of child care in the community. As a result, the agency included a child care center in the plans for the new transit facility. The child care center not only helped attract a more diverse set of job applicants, but also filled a need

36 PARTA breaks ground on transit center: Kent facility cited as an example of the region roaring back. Kent Central Gateway. (2011). Retrieved February 2012 from http://www.kentcentralgateway.com/
37 Ibid.
38 Prairie Hills Transit. Retrieved February 2012 from www.prairiehillstransit.com

in the community at large.

Prairie Hills Transit began with a 1979 green cargo van and today has grown to more than 36 modern vehicles.

Prairie Hills Transit photos

Using $1.5 million from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, approximately $500,000 from FTA's Bus and Bus Facilities program, a technical assistance grant from Community Transportation Association of America, and land contributed by the city of Spearfish, the city was able to complete the project.[39] The facility provides offices and garage space for PHT, a ticketing site for Jefferson Intercity Bus Lines, and a child care facility that can be used by PHT employees and the general public. There is enough room to generate revenue by storing and repairing vehicles for other local organizations.[40] PHT was also able to provide jobs at the new facility: a part-time mechanic, a full time child care manager, four part-time child care providers, two part-time dispatchers and a full time mobility manager. The facility was built in an emerging area within the city, and is anticipated to catalyze other redevelopment projects.

PHT is a vital part of life in Spearfish, not only because of the mobility it provides, but because it recognized that it could help meet other community needs as well. Barb Cline, the executive director of PHT, explained the transit agency's rationale: "We are not a social service organization, but everyone has that thought [in the back of their heads] of 'what do we do for our residents and how can we help them?' "

39 Barb Cline. Phone Interview. February 2012.
40 Coming Soon: Regional Intermodal Facility. Prairie Hills Transit. Retrieved February 2012 from www.prairiehillstransit.com

Intercity Transit/Rail Improvements

Intercity transit connections support both small towns and the major urban areas they connect. The smaller city gains by connecting people to jobs and by making work trips to the city practical. From the urban center's perspective, the improved connection to the smaller town opens opportunities to take advantage of the lower cost of living. A smaller city within a two-hour drive of a large metropolitan area also is attractive to people who prefer a smaller-town environment, but still want occasional access to the primary city.

Providing an alternative to the long automobile commute is one way a small town can enhance the benefits that accrue from proximity to larger urban centers. For this reason, cities across the country are working to make intercity bus and rail a viable and attractive alternative for commuters and visitors.

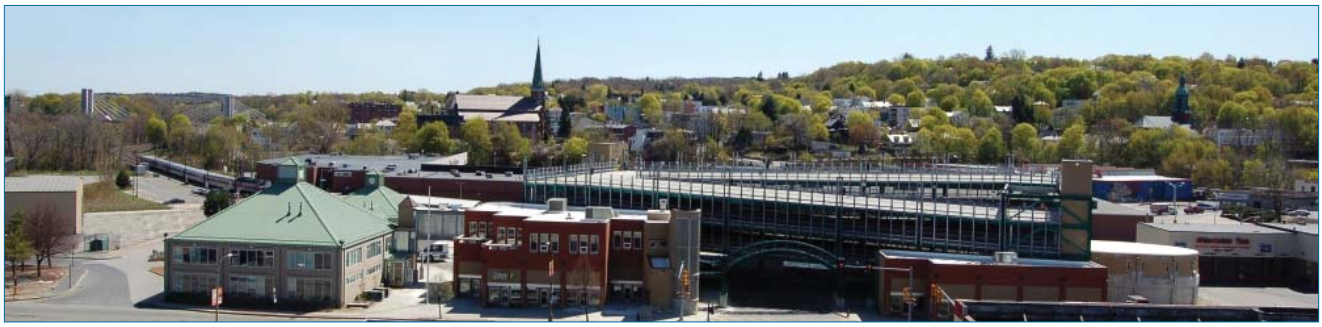
Bringing Economic Vitality with the Reverse Commute: Fitchburg, Massachusetts

Fitchburg, MA, is a city of about 40,000 residents approximately 50 miles west of Boston. Fitchburg was once a paper mill town, but new industries are expanding in and around Fitchburg, particularly in the health care, chemical, and technology sectors. The town is a bedroom community with many families commuting to Boston and Nashua, NH, for work. Fitchburg is home to Fitchburg State University, which enrolls 7,000 students, and is also a recreational and historical destination with ski resorts and apple orchards that attract tourists from the Boston metropolitan region.

The area is served by the Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART), which is responsible for fixed-route bus services and an extensive regional van service. The commuter rail, operated by the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), connects with the MART bus and van services at several stations within the MART service area. The commuter line serves as an alternative to automobile travel to Boston, not only for work, but also for various commercial and recreational purposes.

The commuter line has had a direct impact on local industries, which are now beginning to flourish in the Fitchburg/Leominster urbanized area. The commuter rail service brings in an expert labor force that is not readily available in Fitchburg, tapping into the intellectual pool from the Boston area. Residents along the commuter rail corridor can easily work with or attend Fitchburg State University or work at various health care and high-tech industries such as Bristol Myers and IBM.[41] The commuter line allows employees who prefer to live in Metro Boston to commute rather than relocate. For others, the availability of low-cost housing and a better living environment in Fitchburg attracts those whose job opportunities lie along the Boston commuter rail corridor.

41 Mohammed Khan. Email Correspondence. April 2012.



Montachusett Regional Transit Authority photos

Fitchburg commuter rail station today and in 1900.

As a result of the commuter rail, Fitchburg is also now more accessible as a recreational destination. "Attracting tourists was not the intention of the rail; it became a byproduct of creating the commuter service to Boston," said Mohammed Khan, Administrator of MART. The majority of recreational commuters use the MBTA promotion of Ski Massachusetts Program, where an individual from Metro Boston can bring their ski gear on the train to Fitchburg and a local bus service connects them to Mount Wachusett Ski Area (approximately 5 miles from the Fitchburg Station).[42]

Within the last few years, MART and MBTA have led an effort to improve the line in order to relieve traffic congestion on the main highway connecting Fitchburg to Boston, improve air quality and to reduce the costs and associated fees of bringing a car to Boston.

In 2010, MART received a $59 million TIGER grant to extend and make improvements to the commuter rail line. The project extends service west of Fitchburg an additional 4.5 miles to Wachusett station. Federal funds will support the construction of a new station there. The Wachusett station will be in close proximity of the main highway, Routes 2 and 31 interchange, which will make it easier for motorists to switch to transit.[43] Wachusett Station, when completed by the end of 2013, will be the sixth station within the MART area. This region provides approximately 25 percent to 35 percent of the commuter rail riders along the line, which has 17 stations including the five currently located in the MART area. (The remaining stations are in the MBTA district.)[44] The reverse commute demand is growing and with the improvement of the extension to Waschusett station, MBTA will likely increase service to meet the demand. The project is expected to create 306 construction jobs in the short term and 855 new permanent jobs.[45]

Approximately 10,000 people commute each day on the Fitchburg line. With the improve-

42 Mohammed Khan. Personal Interview. April 2012
43 The Wachusett Station Extension. (2012). Montachusett Regional Authority. Retrieved April 2012 http://www.mrta.us/CapitalProjects.html
44 Mohammed Khan. Personal Interview. April 2012
45 Fed Stimulus Boosts New Bedford, Rever, Fitchburg Line. (February 17, 2010). Massachusetts Department of Transportation. Retrieved April 2012 from www.transportation.blog.state.ma.us

ments, ridership is expected to increase by 5 percent to 7 percent on an annual basis. Khan said, "The commuter rail offers a lifeline of opportunity for the area and is a welcome substitution for driving to Boston." The rail line has helped to strengthen the local Fitchburg economy, bringing back life to an area that was once cut off from the metropolitan area. And though some may think commuter rail promotes sprawl, Khan said: "It's not sprawl; I call it rejuvenating communities."

Spotlight: Taos, New Mexico

Joseph C. Yaroch / Wikimedia Commons

In many instances, intercity rail offers the opportunity for people to connect to small towns, once only accessible by long distance drives. When the Rail Runner Express in New Mexico implemented the extension of the commuter rail line to Santa Fe, it impacted many towns. The Town of Taos seized the opportunity presented to them with the new Santa Fe stops to better connect with regional opportunities. Taos has a population of nearly 6,000 residents, yet more than 100,000 people visit each year.[1] It relies on year-round tourism, which makes up 75 percent of their local economy.[2] From the Santa Fe station, the Taos Express (a weekend shuttle) takes people , mostly tourists, from the station directly into Taos. Visitors can then get to Taos Ski Valley or visit Taos Pueblo, the only living Native American community listed as a World Heritage site.

The Taos Express serves both visitors as well as local residents. Shortly after creating the service, Taos officials realized that local residents were also using the shuttle to connect to other areas, including Albuquerque for leisure. Taos heavily relies on Section 5311 funding and when opportunities arise, they also apply for Section 5309 funds. They receive funding for their local match through a local tax. Delilah Garcia, Transportation Superintendent for the Town of Taos stated, "We have definitely benefited from the Rail Runner coming to Santa Fe; it gives people additional transportation options and gives us the opportunity to bring visitors and tourists into our town."

1 Delilah Garcia. Phone Interview. May 2012.
2 Ibid.

Conclusion

Increasingly, small communities are investing in transit as a way to address the unique mobility challenges that stem from large geographic distances, an aging population, and limited financial resources. Bus system improvements, downtown circulators, intermodal transit centers, and increased intercity travel options are all solutions being employed by communities that want to remain attractive places to live and work.

As the examples cited in this report demonstrate, transit investment can make a big difference in smaller communities. Made incrementally as funding becomes available, actions as simple as branding and signage changes or improved bus shelters can be the first step toward providing a desirable, reliable alternative to car travel. These transit investments provide numerous benefits for local communities and residents by stimulating activity along central transit corridors; helping connect people, jobs, and essential services; and by reducing long-term health care costs by improving access to medical centers. In the current tough economic climate, however, these projects must rely on a variety of funding sources. It is particularly important for those with responsibility for transportation and those with responsibility for land use to be coordinating their efforts to ensure that the transit investment can be integrated into the future vision for the community.

The federal government is an essential partner in the efforts of local officials to improve their economies, their citizens' mobility, and their overall quality of life. For this reason, it is important that federal policymakers as well as local officials understand the role that transit investments play in rural areas. While more research is needed to better quantify the impacts of transit on rural economies and residents, the cross-section of examples included in this study should help to inform the ongoing federal transportation discussion as well as provide guidance for other communities dealing with the same challenges.

Appendix

Methodology

The researchers reviewed online sources and conducted phone interviews to answer the research questions identified above. Research was conducted between October 2011 and May 2012. An expert panel reviewed an early draft of the report. The information presented in the case studies may have changed after the agencies were interviewed.

List of agencies interviewed

- Addison County Transit Resources
- Choctaw Nation Tribal Transit
- Human Resource Development Council
- Lower Savannah Council of Governments
- Montachusett Regional Transit Authority
- Monterey-Salinas Transit
- Prairie Hills Transit
- Stark Area Regional Transit Authority
- Streamline Bus
- Town of Taos
- York County Community Action Corporation

Rural Resources

A link shortener (bit.ly) has been used where needed to make URLs manageable

- Center for Rural Strategies – http://www.ruralstrategies.org/
- Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) – http://www.ctaa.org
- EPA, Putting Smart Growth to Work in Rural Communities – http://bit.ly/HrSly7
- Exploring the Role of Regional Transportation Projects as Rural Economy Drivers – http://bit.ly/HjfRDQ
- National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) – http://ruraltransportation.org
- Reconnecting America, Featured Topic web page on Livability in Smaller Cities – http://bit.ly/HSvRex
- Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI) – http://www.rupri.org
- Reauthorization of Surface Transportation Act – http://bit.ly/Hh2sGs
- Transportation for America: Livability Case Studies in Small Cities and Rural places – http://bit.ly/I8JmW5
- Transportation for America: Principles for Improving Transportation Options in Rural and Small Town Communities – http://bit.ly/Hj5629
- Small Urban & Rural Transit Center, Rural Transit Fact Book 2011 – http://bit.ly/HpMoFm
- Rural Transportation.org – http://bit.ly/HgSEB0
- Intermodal Surface Public Transportation Hubs – http://bit.ly/Hh39j3
- USDA Economic Research Service – http://www.ers.usda.gov/
- Western Transportation Institute – http://www.westerntransportationinstitute.org