

Rural Communities

EXPANDING HORIZONS



The Benefits of Public Transportation

Public transportation offers mobility options for millions of Americans. However, for residents of small urban and rural areas, access to public transit still needs to be greatly expanded. Nearly two-thirds of all residents in these communities have few transportation options.

While residents of these areas travel to work, school, the doctor, the store, or out to dinner as much as people in larger urban areas do—they do so primarily in cars because they do not have the transportation infrastructure that larger areas do.

Although great strides have been made in the last decade to provide more transportation choices, much more support is needed for these communities. Continued innovation, significant increases in public transit investment, and broad political and community support are sorely needed if this nation is to provide freedom, independence, and access to all Americans.



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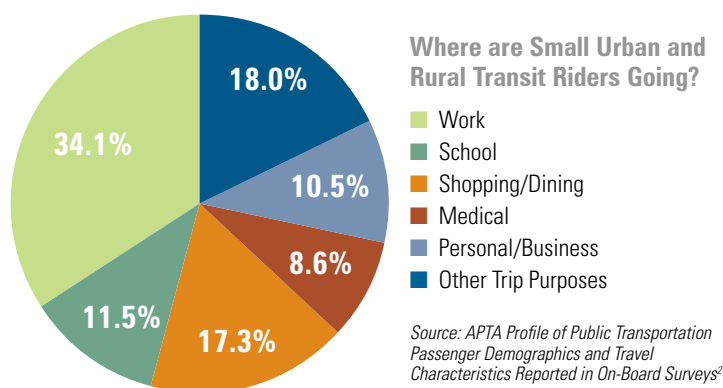
PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION
TAKES US THERE

economy > environment > energy > quality of life

“Nothing drives home the interconnectedness of our country’s rural and urban communities like the federal transportation bill. Connecting rural America with improved transportation systems is a top priority for our country today. With the federal transportation authorization pending, our goal is to strengthen, and integrate the transportation systems that connect rural populations to commercial centers.” — KATHLEEN MOXON, DIRECTOR, REDWOOD COAST RURAL ACTION, CALIFORNIA

Small Urban and Rural Transit Service Provides Access

The primary destination for public transit riders in small urban and rural areas is work, which accounts for 34 percent of all trips. Shopping and dining are the destinations for 17 percent of trips, with all levels of school representing 12 percent, personal business 10 percent, and medical services 9 percent. All other purposes, including social and recreational ones, represent 18 percent of trips.¹



Regional Employers in Small Urban and Rural Areas: Impact to States’ Economies

In addition to offering an alternative method of transportation, public transit plays a significant role in a state’s economy, including job access, time-saving benefits to travelers, transportation cost savings to employers, and access for all.

In the small urban area of Florence, SC, for example, the motto of Pee Dee Regional Transportation Authority is “Be Transported, Be Moved, Get Where You Have to Go.” This public transit system lives by this motto every day with its solid commitment to ensure that its riders can travel to distant work opportunities.³ Fixed route commuter bus service moves people from surrounding communities into Florence to get to work. The system covers longer distances with deviated service routes that carry large numbers of workers away from Florence directly to their jobs in the Myrtle Beach resort area. This type of service, frequently seen in smaller communities, combines the certainty of service associated with regularly scheduled and serviced bus stops with the ability to deviate from the route with an advance reservation, to drop riders directly at their destinations.

Small Urban and Rural State Capitals: Service to Major Government Areas

The 17 state capitals found in small urban and rural areas are large employers that draw visitors for both business and tourism from throughout their states. For example, Frankfort, capital of Kentucky and home of Kentucky State University, has a population of less than 200,000. In common with many small urban and rural public transit systems, the Frankfort Transit System (FTS) operates several types of service to meet the different needs of its community.⁴

A free Downtown Trolley takes riders to historic sites, shopping, and restaurants, which encourages tourists and workers alike to patronize local businesses. The system’s basic structure is defined by deviated fixed routes.

FTS also offers additional demand-response services that carry riders from

their origin location to their destinations. Job Access/Reverse Commute (JARC) service improves access for workers who otherwise would have difficulty reaching their jobs. New Freedom is a door-to-door reserved service for persons with disabilities who find travel on fixed route service difficult.

Frankfort is representative of many rural communities that meet the variety of small community travel needs with an equally wide variety of travel services.

Military Installations in Small Urban and Rural Areas: Innovative Service Means Easier Access

Kitsap Transit in Bremerton, WA, provides employee transportation to the Kitsap Naval Base by employing naval facility workers who are also part-time transit staff of the public transit system. This program began during World War II and now includes 30 commuter bus routes.⁵

Like so many small urban and rural public transit service providers, Kitsap Transit is more than a single service provider. It operates fixed route buses in the Bremerton area, with walk-on patrons riding ferries across Sinclair Inlet; provides origin-to-destination demand-response service for older Americans and persons with disabilities; coordinates commuter vanpools; and provides service from the Washington State Ferry docks for a trip to Seattle.

Service to Major State Universities: Integrating Services

Lawrence, KS, like many large university towns, is served by two public transit systems. The University of Kansas operates KU on Wheels and the city of Lawrence operates the Lawrence Transit System; but, instead of functioning as two separate systems, they operate as one coordinated service.⁶

Any University of Kansas student or employee can ride either bus by showing proper identification. Persons not affiliated with the university can ride and pay a standard base fare or show a transit pass.

KU on Wheels buses do not run on all routes when the school is not in session, while Lawrence Transit Buses operate year-round.

Access to Local Health Care:

Transportation Challenges for Small Urban/Rural Areas

Local health care centers, regional medical centers, and national hospitals are all major hubs for small urban and rural areas and their transportation centers—because reaching medical personnel can be a challenge for many of these residents. Nearly 6 percent of rural households and more than 6 percent of small urban households have no access to private vehicles.⁷ These are sobering statistics because the need for health care increases as people age, and 21 percent of Americans over the age of 65 do not drive.⁸ The health care trip, often a long one, can therefore be challenging for persons living in small urban and rural areas.

One solution to improving health care access is increasing awareness of existing services. Southern Illinois Rides, a project of the Rural Medical Transportation Network, provides computer access to five existing service providers in the 34-county southern Illinois area.⁹

Some of the Most Rural Places:

Public Transit for National Parks

In 2006, the federal government established the Alternative Transportation in Parks and Public Lands program to improve mobility and reduce congestion and

Urban communities like the transportation one of the biggest challenges facing our nation has an opportunity to modernize, people and places to each other and urban

NIA 18



pollution.¹⁰ Bryce Canyon National Park is an example of a busy place that uses bus service to minimize congestion and reduce air-polluting emissions in and around the park. Visitors are encouraged to leave their cars at staging areas and take shuttle buses for all of their transportation needs in the park.¹¹

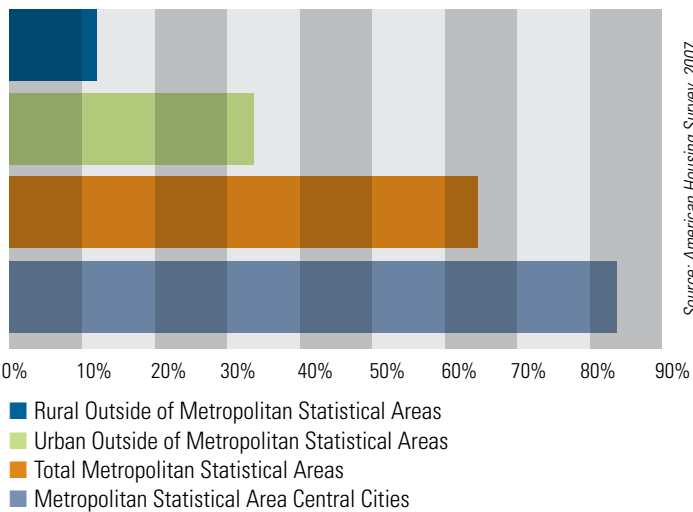
Small Urban and Rural Areas: Growing Needs; Limited Service Options

People living in small urban and rural areas have fewer public transportation options than those in larger urban areas.

The American Housing Survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau asks respondents whether they think they have public transportation service available near their home. The data reveals that available public transit service significantly declines as communities become smaller.

Among residents of central cities in Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), 83 percent of respondents said they had public transportation available to their homes. For entire MSAs, central cities, and suburbs, 64 percent of householders reported the availability of public transportation. For small urban areas outside MSAs, only 33 percent of households said they had public transportation service, and only 11 percent of respondents in rural areas reported the same thing.¹²

Percent of Households Reporting Public Transportation Service



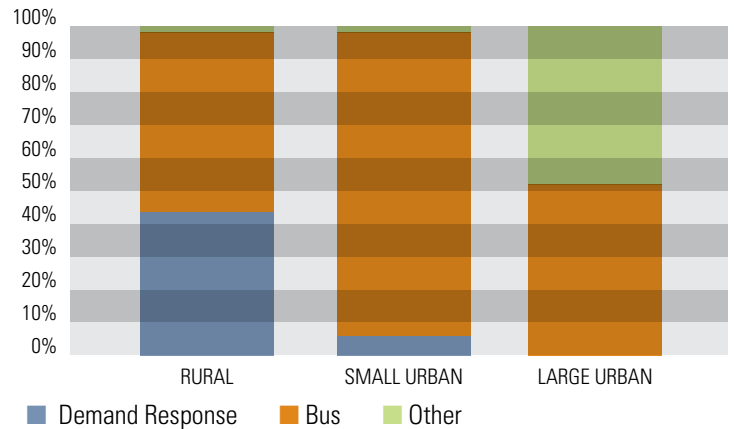
Small Urban and Rural Transit Service is Provided by Different Modes Compared to Larger Areas

Small urban and rural public transit service is provided primarily by demand-response and bus operations. This type of service is the most economical for the lower-density population areas, a few of which are also served by ferry boats, vanpools, and commuter railroads that connect them with larger cities.

In rural areas, demand-response service accounts for 43 percent of passenger trips and buses for 56 percent, with only 1 percent on other modes. In small urban areas, demand-response service provides only 6 percent of trips, with 92 percent on buses and 2 percent on other modes. This contrasts sharply with larger areas, where only 1 percent of trips are on demand-response vehicles, 50 percent are on buses, and 49 percent are on other modes, primarily rail.¹³

Rural public transit services use different bus modes to meet the travel needs of their dispersed populations. Intercity bus service, provided by 11 percent of rural bus operators, connects customers to towns with essential services and to terminals for longer distance travel by railroad or airplane. Fixed route bus service is provided by 32 percent of rural bus systems. A different type of bus service—deviated fixed route where buses leave their regular routes on request to reach passengers' origins and destinations directly—is provided by 43 percent of bus operators. The remaining 14 percent of rural bus operators provide both fixed route and deviated fixed route services to meet different levels of demand within their areas.¹⁴

The Transit Mode That Riders Take Varies by Size of Area



RURAL AREAS	
Demand-Response Service Providers	1,180
Bus Service Providers	530
Demand-Response Passenger Trips (Millions)	61
Bus Passenger Trips (Millions)	78

SMALL URBAN AREAS	
Demand-Response Service Providers	251
Bus Service Providers	229
Demand-Response Passenger Trips (Millions)	16
Bus Passenger Trips (Millions)	259

Source: National Transit Database 2010

“Rural residents, especially those with disabilities, need and deserve affordable and accessible transportation. This includes public transit, regional, and inter-modal systems that are in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.”

– BILLY ALTOM, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ASSOCIATION OF PROGRAMS FOR RURAL INDEPENDENT LIVING¹⁹



Federal Funding for Small Urban/Rural Operators

Small urban and rural transit systems are a specific group defined by federal law and eligible for funding from federal programs designed especially for them.

Currently, two federal programs provide funds for any allowed use to specific areas. One is for urbanized areas (central cities) and their connected suburbs. Urbanized areas with populations below 200,000 are considered small urban areas; they receive a specified percentage of federal urbanized area formula funds from 49 USC 5307 “Urbanized Area Formula Grants” and are allowed to use those funds for capital and operating expenditures.¹⁵

The 2000 Census lists 310 small urban areas with an average population of 95,000. Every state except Rhode Island houses at least a portion of a small urban area.

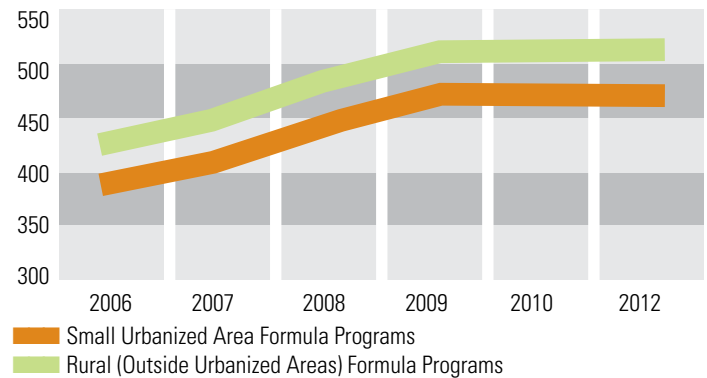
Rural areas receive funds from 49 USC 5311, “Formula Grants for Other than Urbanized Areas,” normally referred to as rural funding. Rural formula funds can be used for either capital or operating expenditures. Every state contains a rural area.

Small urban and rural agencies are also eligible for capital grant programs that are open to all public transit systems, regardless of size. Small urban and rural agencies are eligible for several capital grant programs. Capital funding from federal, state and local sources has stagnated since 2009, however, despite growing needs brought on by increased demand and ridership. Urbanized Area Formula Grant apportionments for small areas, the amount of funds actually distributed to public transit systems, have held steady at approximately \$470 million; apportionments of funds from the Formula Grants for Other than Urbanized Areas program have held steady at approximately \$512 million.¹⁶

Tribal or Native American Lands

Tribal areas, as many other regions of North America, are especially vulnerable to rising gas prices. Tribal households spend up to 30 percent of their income on fuel, compared to a metropolitan area average of 6 percent. Public transit options are critical; they provide life-saving aid in many communities.¹⁷

Federal Funding Apportionments for Small Urban and Rural Area Programs Have Stagnated



Public Transit is a Lifeline in Smaller Communities

The National Rural Assembly, which comprises more than 500 local, regional, and national organizations based in 47 states and the District of Columbia, is devoted to making the country stronger by improving the outlook for rural communities. It believes that improving rural transportation requires more than “digging ditches and laying pavement.” It sees the lack of rural transportation alternatives as a barrier to access to higher education and career opportunities for young people. Among its principles for a sound federal rural transportation policy are:

- increasing availability as well as access to transportation options for all rural residents;
- reducing barriers to employment, healthcare, and other services; and
- align[ing] transportation investments with ‘livable communities’—principles that support the economic, environmental, and social well-being of rural communities and landscapes.¹⁸

1 Profile of Public Transportation Passenger Demographics and Travel Characteristics Reported in On-Board Surveys. American Public Transportation Association, 2007.
 2 Ibid.
 3 PDRTA “Be Transported.”
 4 “Frankfort Transit: Bridging Our Past and Future.”
 5 “Kitsap Transit Worker/Driver Program” web page.
 6 “Lawrence Transit.org, City of Lawrence/University of Kansas.”
 7 2009 National Household Travel Survey: Summary of Travel Trends. U.S.

Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, June 2011.
 8 Lynott, Jana and Carlos Figueiredo. “How the Travel Patterns of Older Adults Are Changing: Highlights from the 2009 National Household Travel Survey.” AARP Public Policy Institute, April 2011.
 9 “S. I. Rides” home page.
 10 49 USC 5320. See page 29 of “APTA Primer on Transit Funding.” American Public Transportation Association, November 2011.
 11 “Bryce Canyon Park Shuttle.” National Park Service.

12 American Housing Survey for the United States: 2007. U.S. Census Bureau, September 2008.
 13 “NTD Data Tables.” Federal Transit Administration, National Transit Database.
 14 “Rural Area Data.” Federal Transit Administration, National Transit Database.
 15 CHAPTER 53 OF TITLE 49, as amended by the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). American Public Transportation Association.

16 “Annual Apportionments” web page. Federal Transit Administration. For an explanation of transit funding provisions of federal law see “APTA Primer on Transit Funding.” American Public Transportation Association, November 2011.
 17 “Assessing Impacts of Rising Fuel Prices on Rural Native Americans.” North Dakota State University, September 2008.
 18 “Principles for Sound Rural Transportation Policy,” National Rural Assembly, Rural Transportation Policy Group. September 13, 2010.