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President's Column



Getting back together for in-person meetings and events feels great! We're looking forward to more opportunities for transit professionals to see each other, talk with each other and learn from others

who are going through many of the same challenges.

The Spring Workshop hosted by the Office of Transit and Active Transportation (OTAT) provided a great space to share stories, get the latest information we need regarding transit funding and enjoy spending time with friends. MPTA members really appreciate the working relationship we have with OTAT staff and appreciate that our feedback is seriously considered. We were pleased to learn that contracts for 2023 will allow for up to a 10 percent increase in operating budgets with a 20 percent match for fixed route 5307 systems, a 15 percent match for ADA paratransit service and a 5 percent match for 5311 operating grants. A big Thank You to all the staff and participants for making this such a worthwhile event.

MPTA is planning a couple of other major events that are designed to bring people together, provide important information and training and allow all of us to enjoy the company of friends and colleagues. The first one is our **Statewide Bus Rodeo scheduled for July 15-16 in Austin**. This event is a great way to celebrate our bus operators while giving them new training and information along with a fun, family-friendly summer get away.

The more participants we have, the better the event, so please join us in Austin! You can get all the information on the MPTA web site: <https://www.mpta-transit.org/event/2022-mpta-bus-roadeo>

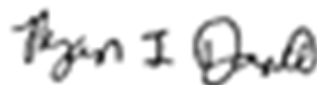
The other event we're planning is **State Public Transit Conference which will be held October 24-26th in beautiful St. Cloud**. This year's transit conference will focus on the challenges we're all facing: staffing shortages, ridership, fuel prices, new technology, planning for the future and leading organizations in difficult times. Mark your calendars and plan to join us in St. Cloud to get inspired, recharge your batteries and get the latest information you need.

While the 2022 Legislative Session left us all feeling frustrated and disappointed that opportunities were lost, MPTA continues to speak out for transit systems all across the state. The value of a state transit association is that we keep doing our work assisting our members, communicating with law makers and keeping transit in the forefront through good years and not so good years.

You can rest assured that MPTA will continue to work for you throughout the year – both in St. Paul and in Washington, D.C. Your membership allows us to speak out for transit needs. **Please be sure to renew your MPTA membership for 2022 so we can continue to work for you and all of the transit systems in Minnesota.**

Enjoy the warm weather and thank you for all the work you do every day for transit in Minnesota!

Sincerely,



Ryan Daniel
MPTA President

Legislative Report

State

The 2022 Legislative Session ended with a frustrating stalemate. While this year was not a budget year, there was great anticipation that legislators wanted to pass a major capital bonding bill as well as passing legislation that would benefit Minnesotans in light of the \$9.25 billion general fund surplus. Unfortunately, when the deadline of May 23rd came, there were many areas of disagreement that prevented most of the work of the session from getting done.

Throughout the legislative session, the transportation committees in the House and Senate had discussed increasing funding above the two-year budget passed during 2021 in order to ensure that matching funds needed to access federal transportation dollars would be available. For transit, the historic surplus offered an opportunity to provide matching funds and to pay for some important transit projects.

The Senate transportation budget bill included an ongoing funding increase of \$7 million per year for Greater Minnesota transit along with a \$10 million one-time increase for metropolitan area transit. The House provided \$10 million in one-time funds for Greater Minnesota transit along with \$20 million in one-time funds for metropolitan area transit. The House also appropriated \$51 million for the current biennium for the Northern Lights Express train from the Twin Cities to Duluth with additional ongoing funding in the next biennium. Both the House and Senate proposed more funding for Safe Routes to School while the House included \$12.5 million for Active Transportation with \$6.15 million in annual increases in the next biennium. The Senate bill also included funding for federal grant money for multimodal projects but restricted the use of those funds so they could not be used for major transit projects.

With one week left in the 2022 Session, the Governor, the Senate Majority Leader and the House Speaker announced that they had reached agreement on a broad outline for the use of the surplus. They agreed that \$4 billion should be used for tax cuts, \$4 billion should be used to increase spending on education, health care and other areas of the budget and that \$4 billion should remain unspent. They also agreed that a capital budget bill of \$1.4 billion should be passed. The House wanted to make sure that the budget increases would pass and so announced that the tax bill would not be passed and sent to the Senate prior to agreement on the budget. While much of the \$4 billion in increased spending was agreed upon, some major differences remained in the distribution of dollars for K-12 education, health and human services and public safety.

For the transportation budget, the Senate strongly supported the full dedication of revenue from the sales tax on auto repair parts with all of the money directed to spending on roads. The House and Governor would only support dedication of this revenue if some of the money was dedicated to transit. This impasse was a major roadblock to reaching agreement.



Legislative Report

The session ended without passage of a tax bill, a supplemental budget for most areas of the government, or a capital bonding bill. The surplus dollars will wait until the new legislature convenes for the 2023 Session unless the governor calls the legislature back for a special session. Given all the work that was done during the session, it only makes sense for the legislature to compromise on the outstanding issues and finish their work.

We hope there will be a special session to pass the transportation bill, but there is no agreement at this time.

One area where there was agreement was on bonus pay for frontline workers. Legislation was passed and signed into law that provides one-time bonus checks for workers who needed to be on the front lines during the pandemic. The list of impacted industries includes public transit workers whose jobs could not be done remotely.

More information on this program is included in a separate article in this edition of In Transit.

Federal

MPTA continues to work with the Minnesota Congressional delegation to make changes to the law governing the reimbursement of volunteer drivers.

Congressman Pete Stauber has introduced H.R. 7432, the Volunteer Driver Appreciation Act of 2022, which substitutes the business mileage rate set by the IRS each year for the current 14 cents per mile reimbursement rate for volunteer drivers. The bill was introduced on April 6th and currently includes Rep. Angie Craig as a co-sponsor. MPTA is working to get support from additional members of Congress and to get a hearing on the bill.

We are keeping Rep. Stauber's office updated on the list of Minnesota supporters. **If we can list your transit system as a supporter please let us know.**

Additional information on grant programs available for transit systems as well as for local governments continues to be issued by US DOT and the White House. A big priority for the administration in administering the IIJA is expanding access to transit and other modes of transportation. MPTA will provide updates and information on new programs and funding opportunities as they become available.



Minnesota Frontline Worker Pay

To thank those Minnesotans who worked on the frontlines during the COVID-19 peacetime emergency, **Gov. Tim Walz signed a law April 29, 2022, enabling those workers to apply for Frontline Worker Pay.**

Details of the program, including the application process and timeline, are online at frontlinepay.mn.gov. Visit the website to sign up to receive emailed updates about Frontline Worker Pay.

Who is eligible

There are initially two parts to who is eligible to apply: the work requirements and the job sector.

Work requirements

To be eligible for Frontline Worker Pay, the applicant:

- Must have been employed at least 120 hours in Minnesota in one or more frontline sectors between March 15, 2020, and June 30, 2021; for the hours worked during this time period the applicant –
- **Was not able to telework due to the nature of the individual's work** and worked in close proximity to people outside of the individual's household;
- Must meet the income requirements for at least one of the 2020 or 2021 tax years – workers with direct COVID-19 patient care responsibilities must have had an adjusted gross income* less than \$350,000 for married taxpayers filing jointly, or less than \$175,000 for other filers and for workers in occupations without direct COVID-19 patient care responsibilities, the adjusted gross income* limit is \$185,000 for married taxpayers filing jointly, or \$85,000 for other filers; and
- Must not have received an unemployment insurance benefit payment for more than 20 weeks on a cumulative basis for weeks between March 15, 2020, and June 26, 2021.



After all the applications have been received and the appeals period has ended, money dedicated to Frontline Worker Pay will be evenly divided among all eligible frontline workers whose application was approved. The payments cannot exceed \$1,500. Payments are expected in early fall depending on the time necessary for processing applications, appeals and payments.

Minnesota Frontline Worker Pay

Job sectors

- 1) building services, including maintenance, janitorial and security;
- 2) child care;
- 3) courts and corrections;
- 4) emergency responders;
- 5) food service, including production, processing, preparation, sale and delivery;
- 6) ground and air transportation services;
- 7) health care;
- 8) long-term care and home care;
- 9) manufacturing;
- 10) public health, social service and regulatory service;
- **11. public transit;**
- 12) retail, including sales, fulfillment, distribution and delivery;
- 13) schools, including charter schools, state schools and higher education;
- 14) temporary shelters and hotels; and
- 15) vocational rehabilitation.



Applications will be open June 8 through July 22, 2022. Applications can be submitted at frontlinepay.mn.gov. The 45-day application period will be followed by a 15-day period to allow for appeals from those whose applications were denied. After verification and processing of the applications are completed, payments are anticipated in early fall. All applications will move through the process at the same time and payments will be forwarded for processing together.

To employers: Notice requirement for employers

No later than 15 days after the Frontline Worker Pay application period is opened on June 8, 2022, employers in a frontline sector must provide notice, in a form approved by the commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry, advising all current workers who may be eligible for payments of the assistance potentially available to them and how to apply for benefits.

An employer must provide notice using the same means the employer uses to provide other work-related notices to employees. This notice must be at least as conspicuous as:

- Posting a copy of the notice at each worksite where workers work and where the notice may be readily observed and reviewed by all workers working at the site; or
- Providing a paper or electronic copy of the notice to all workers.

The approved employer notice and information about qualifying frontline sectors will be available at frontlinepay.mn.gov.

2022 MPTA Bus Rodeo

We're looking forward to seeing you all in Austin, July 15-16!

REGISTER TODAY!

<https://www.mpta-transit.org/event/2022-mpta-bus-rodeo>



RTAP Assistance Available

The RTAP program will pay for the **registration fee** (\$175) for up to 3 participants from a 5311 system (either operators or judges). Just sign up on the MPTA web site. Take advantage of this great offer and treat your staff to a summer weekend of fun!

We are excited to provide you with new trainings, a chance to see old friends and catch up, and a weekend of fun. Courses will be located at Riverland Community College.

The Minnesota Public Transit Association hosts the annual Bus Rodeo to bring together bus operators from

across the state to hone their driving skills and gain new skills through training opportunities. Our goal is to improve safety and celebrate the great work of bus operators who have been serving the public throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Friday, July 15

- 5:00-7:00 pm - Registration
- 6:00-8:00 pm - Bus Familiarization
- 5:30-7:00 pm - Welcome Reception and Pizza Party
- 7:00 pm - Judge's Check-In Meeting

Saturday, July 16

- 5:00-7:00 am - Breakfast
- 6:00-7:00 am - Registration/Bus Familiarization
- 7:00-7:20 am - Opening Ceremony
- 7:30-8:00 am - Large Bus Course Walk-Through
- 8:00-9:30 am - Large Bus Competition
- 9:35-10:00am - Small Bus Course Walk-Through
- 10:00-11:30am Small Bus Competition
- 11:30-12:30 - Lunch
- 12:30-1:30pm - Training - Safety Training by Minnesota State Patrol
- 1:30-3:00 pm - Small Bus Competition
- 6:00-7:00 pm - Social Hour
- 7:00-9:00 pm - Banquet and Awards



FTA Announcements

U.S. Department of Transportation Announces Initial \$13 Million Funding Opportunity from President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law for Transit Planning That Addresses Climate Change and Equity in Communities Nationwide

Thursday, May 26, 2022

Priority will be given to projects, such as mixed-use development near transit stations, that help reduce transportation costs, combat pollution and climate change, and promote housing affordability

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Transportation today announced the availability of approximately \$13 million in [competitive grant funds](#) through the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) [Pilot Program for Transit-Oriented Development \(TOD\) Planning](#). TOD looks at the relationship among transit, housing and land use and recognizes that better planning can help reduce costs for American families and reduce the impacts of transportation on climate and air quality.

Thanks to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, funding for the TOD Planning grant program was bolstered by 38% and will send nearly \$70 million to communities across the country over the next five years.

"We're making this funding available to help more cities and towns plan for the future their residents want and deserve. When communities are able to locate housing, jobs, and cultural centers alongside public transit, it helps people get where they need to go more quickly and affordably, and with less pollution," said **U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg**.

"The program encourages communities to think innovatively about the intersection between land use and mobility," said **FTA Administrator Nuria Fernandez**. "It also challenges communities to think about road safety, equity, climate change and affordable housing as intertwined with transit investments."

The existing Pilot Program for Transit-Oriented Development Planning supports comprehensive or site-specific planning projects that improve economic development and ridership, foster multimodal connectivity and accessibility, improve transit access for pedestrian and bicycle traffic, engage the private sector, identify infrastructure needs, and enable mixed-use development near transit stations. Information on previously funded projects can be found [here](#).

This year's program will support comprehensive or site-specific planning efforts that support President Biden's call to lower costs for American families, combat climate change, and promote equitable delivery of benefits to underserved communities. Special consideration will be given to applications that improve air quality, advance environmental justice and promote housing affordability.

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To apply for program funding, an applicant must be an existing FTA recipient – either a project sponsor of an eligible transit project or an entity with land use planning authority in the project corridor. To ensure that work meets the needs of the local community, transit project sponsors and land use planning authorities must partner to conduct the planning work. **The application period will close on Monday, July 25.**



**Federal Transit
Administration**

Federal Discretionary Grant Program Networking Workshop

REGISTER

Wednesday, June 22nd, 2022

10:00 am to 2:00 pm

Mystic Lake Casino, Prior Lake

New federal discretionary grant programs were authorized under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) in addition to existing grant programs. More funding is available and new guidance is being issued that will govern the distribution of these funds.

Come learn more about these funding opportunities and how and when to apply for discretionary grants. This event will bring local governments, tribes, transit systems and state agencies together with private sector partners to explore how we can help Minnesota maximize the amount of federal funding coming to our state.



Workshop Agenda:

10:00 AM Welcome and Opening Comments - Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux

Representative

10:10 AM Nancy Daubenberger, MnDOT Commissioner

10:30 AM **Overview and Updates on Federal Discretionary Grant Programs**

- Minnesota Office of Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) – Bill Lohr, Phil Barnes
- Minnesota Department of Transportation State Aid Office – Elisa Bottos
- MnDOT Office of Sustainability – Emily Houser
- MnDOT Office of Transit and Active Transportation – Mark Nelson
- Metropolitan Council – Charles Carlson, Executive Director, Metropolitan Transportation Services, Nick Thompson, Deputy General Manager, Metro Transit

12:00 **Meet Transportation Alliance Sponsors**

Lunch

1:30 PM **Congressionally Directed Spending**

•Congressional Staff

- Isaac Schultz, Office of Rep. Pete Stauber
- Office of Rep. Dean Phillips
- Office of Senator Amy Klobuchar

2:00 PM Conclusion

SouthWest Prime: Growing and Modernizing



SW Prime is a transit service for Eden Prairie, Chaska, Chanhassen, Carver, Victoria, and Normandale Community College.

As a modern local service, you may request a ride through our mobile app or by phone, indicate the location from which you want to be picked up and where you want to go. A shared ride will be sent to pick you up.

SW Prime is an on-demand ride service. Our vehicles are ADA compliant. Riders indicate whether they will be taking a wheelchair, walker, or bike when requesting a ride. Along with the regular Prime service, SouthWest offers a few more services under the Prime "Umbrella":

SW Prime 494/MSP Airport: A Premium ride serving the 494 corridor as well as MOA and the MSP International Airport.

SW Prime Shakopee Connector: connecting our service area with Shakopee and the Mystic Lake Casino.

SW Prime Essential: A premium ride for discounted groceries and pharmacy needs.

SW Prime MD: A Premium ride for all your non-emergency medical needs.

For our Green Initiative, SouthWest Transit is adding 2 new Electric Vehicles to their Micro Transit service – SouthWest Prime. We are aiming to have them on the road by mid-June.

SouthWest has a third cut-away vehicle that they are in the process of converting from gas to Electric that we plan to have ready by mid-July to also be included in our SouthWest Prime service.

Starting June 6th, SouthWest Prime will be expanding to Edina.

SouthWest Transit also provide SW Perks - a new rewards program. Our riders can earn points for riding, connecting on social media, and referring friends to SouthWest Transit.

Riders can connect their Go-To cards to earn points faster! Connect your Go-To Card, MetroPass, College Pass, or U-Pass to your account and receive points every time you use that card to pay for your ride.

SouthWest Transit continues to be the public transit agency for Chaska, Chanhassen and Eden Prairie, as well as Carver. The system currently offers service to and from Downtown Minneapolis, the University of Minnesota, Normandale Community College and Best Buy Headquarters.

Maple Grove Transit to launch new express route serving east end of downtown Minneapolis



Maple Grove Transit's new Route 784 will serve Downtown East and popular destinations such as U.S. Bank Stadium and the Wells Fargo campus in Minneapolis.

Maple Grove Transit riders who work in the east end of downtown Minneapolis will have a much shorter walk to their offices when a new express route debuts in August.

Route 784 will serve large employment hubs such as Wells Fargo, Thrivent Financial, Hennepin County Medical Center, U.S. Bank Stadium, and the Mill District starting Aug. 22.

"We are excited to serve a new part of downtown," said Transit Administrator Mike Opatz. "It will serve quite a few people."

Opatz said riders had been requesting service to the Downtown East area since Wells Fargo relocated its headquarters from the downtown core several years ago. The nearest express buses ran on Marquette Avenue, leaving riders with a six- to eight-block walk to get to their jobs.

The transit agency had wanted to extend service to that part of downtown, but it didn't have enough drivers, buses or budget to expand its footprint, Opatz said.

The COVID-19 downturn in ridership changed that.

Maple Grove Transit suspended five of its downtown express routes in 2020. That allowed the agency serving the northwestern Hennepin County suburb to beef up service on its primary express Route 781, originating at the Maple Grove Transit Center, and free up resources to start the new Route 784, Opatz said.

The new route will operate about every 30 minutes during peak periods, according to the proposed schedule.

Ridership across the system still is down 50% from pre-pandemic levels when the agency provided about 3,100 rides a day on its five express routes. But numbers are "slowly increasing" as full- or part-time workers return to the office, Opatz said.

Starting June 13, Maple Grove Transit will reinstate express service from the Parkway Station on Maple Grove Parkway, one of the routes cut because of the pandemic. Service to the University of Minnesota also will continue during the school year, Opatz said.

Opatz said working out the new service plan has been a bit of a chess game. Maple Grove Transit contracts with Metro Transit for its drivers, but Metro Transit is facing a driver shortage and cannot provide any additional drivers. To accommodate the new Route 784 and resume Parkway service without adding drivers, there will be three fewer trips on the 781 daily, Opatz said. But there still will be enough 781 service to meet demand.

"Mobility patterns are changing," Opatz said. "We have to roll with them."

Metro Bus Again Offering Free Bus Rides to Kids This Summer

ST. CLOUD -- A program that offers free bus rides to kids returns to the St. Cloud area this summer.

The U-Go Free Summer Youth program allows kids ages 17 and under to ride Metro Bus Fixed Routes and ConneX in Sartell for free.

The program runs June 1st through August 31st and is designed to get kids comfortable using mass transit while taking pressure off parents to get kids to their summer activities.

The U-Go Free program does not require registration or a pass, but training on how to use the bus system is available at the Mobility Training Center in downtown St. Cloud.

The [Metro Bus website](#) also has how-to-ride videos available.

Read More: [Metro Bus Again Offering Free Bus Rides to Kids This Summer](#)



Metro Transit brings back Adopt-A-Stop program

With more than 12,000 bus stops, shelters and light-rail platforms in the Twin Cities area, Metro Transit has a tall task when it comes to keeping them clean.

"Facility staff can't be everywhere all the time," said Pam Steffen, Metro Transit's customer relations manager. So the agency has brought back its [Adopt-A-Stop](#) program after it had been on hiatus for a several years and is leaning on members of the community to keep the stops looking good.

One participant is Jason Stephens, who looks after five bus stops near the massage therapy business he runs on Hennepin Avenue near the Uptown Transit Station. Twice a week, or so, he sweeps up cigarette butts and picks up fast-food wrappers and pop cans that people have left behind.

"It makes my business look better, and I help keep the neighborhood clean," Stephens said. Metro Transit supplies safety vests, cleaning supplies and trash bags. Program participants are asked to remove litter a minimum of once a week and report more serious issues such as graffiti and broken glass.

In return, Adopt-A-Stop participants receive 10 free rides on trains and buses a month for each stop they clean. For Stephens, a Metro Transit user, that's 50 free rides a month. Additionally, signs at bus stops acknowledge them for their efforts. That's extra advertising for Time for You Massage Therapy, another benefit for a few minutes of work, he said.

Adopt-A-Stop was active from about 2010 to 2013 before it went dark. Metro Transit brought it back late last year and devised a marketing campaign to spread the word. "We see it as a way to improve the customer experience," Steffen said.

Lane Renner and other members of the Theta Chi fraternity at Hamline University adopted the A Line stop at Hewitt and Snelling avenues in St. Paul. Renner, a sophomore studying civics, saw the plea in January and said it fit with the fraternity's mission of philanthropy.

To date, individuals and groups have adopted about 25 shelters and traditional bus stops, with a majority of them in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Steffen said the agency is seeking volunteers to adopt stops at high-traffic locations.

"We'd love it if a group would adopt a light-rail station," Steffen said. "This is fun to do with family members. It shows that somebody is watching out."

Columbia Heights City Council member Kt Jacobs adopted two stops near 40th and Monroe Street. Though not required, Jacobs has gone beyond trash pickup by shoveling snow and chipping away ice last winter.

"It's miserable trying to get on and off a bus with ice and snow," she said. "I'm no hero, but it's an easy way to volunteer. It helps sustainability."



RTAP Web Site Provides Great Information



The Rural Transit Assistance Program (49 U.S.C. 5311(b)(3)) provides funding to State Departments of Transportation through the Federal Transit Administration's 49 U.S.C Section 5311 Formula Grants for Other than Urbanized Areas (CFDA 20).

The goals for the Minnesota RTAP is to provide positive customer focused service to the transit agencies by engaging with them to know their training needs, offering the right opportunities for knowledge transfer and advancing the skills and competencies to the individuals providing transit in Greater Minnesota.

THE PROGRAM FOCUSES ON

- Enhancing the quality of training and technical assistance
- Encouraging and assisting with peer networking and engagement
- Advancing the skills, competencies, and knowledge for all

Providing proactive communication supporting RTAP trainings, workshops, effective practices and opportunities

STRATEGIC PLAN

[Here is the link to read and download](#) the Minnesota RTAP strategic plan, drafted in April 2020, and updated in December 2021.

SUGGESTED TRAINING

Our office anticipates a huge growth of transit use throughout our entire state. Aligning to this anticipated growth, RTAP supports the transit agencies by investing in our transit team members with training, workshops, seminars, and on-the-job skill based training. RTAP's catalog of courses identify courses for your new hires, refresher courses for your experienced team members and courses that can enhance a specific skill or competency for a specific job within a transit agency.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Scholarships are available to the Section 5310 and Tribal Transit service agencies. Scholarship dollars are available for training, seminar, workshop and conference registration costs, including air fare, per diem costs, and other identified costs associated to the request. Training can be offered within the agency's facilities, within the state of Minnesota, or out-of-state.

Visit the [RTAP Web Site](https://www.mnrtap.us/): <https://www.mnrtap.us/>

White House Releases Technical Assistance Guide to Help Communities Unlock Resources From Bipartisan Infrastructure Law

WH.GOV



MAY 18, 2022 • [STATEMENTS AND RE-LEASES](#)

Administration Highlights New Capacity from Philanthropic, Nonprofit & Labor Organizations to Help States and Cities Respond to Once-in-a-Generation Opportunity

Today, the White House released a Bipartisan Infrastructure Law [technical assistance guide](#) to help state, local, Tribal and territorial governments navigate, access, and deploy infrastructure resources that will build a better America. The Biden Administration has identified over \$700 million in dedicated funding across more than 65 technical assistance programs.

In addition to highlighting federal government technical assistance, the White House Infrastructure Implementation Team has engaged with a range of external stakeholders including, philanthropic, labor and nonprofit organizations, to highlight available nongovernmental resources and create a pipeline to assist communities in quickly and equitably accessing and deploying federal infrastructure funding

Over 90% of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's historic funding will be deployed by non-federal partners. In the past, too many communities have lacked the resources to apply for and deploy transformative infrastructure opportunities. This [guide](#), building on the [Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Guidebook](#) and [Rural Playbook](#), highlights programs that help communities navigate programs and resources that can help them deliver infrastructure projects.

While some of these programs offer hands-on and intensive planning and delivery support for communities, others are more self-directed resources and tools such as webinars and websites, or funding that can support project planning.

“This technical assistance guide is just one more way we’re working to ensure state, local, Tribal and territorial governments have the tools and resources they need to take advantage of investments in President Biden’s Bipartisan Infrastructure Law,” said **Mitch Landrieu, Senior Advisor & Infrastructure Implementation Coordinator**.

“Building a better America requires that we leave no community behind. This guide aims to pull together the many different technical assistance resources available across the federal government that can help communities deliver transformative infrastructure projects. We are also grateful to the many philanthropic organizations who have stepped up to support states and local communities in ensuring we do not leave any community behind in this once-in-a-generation investment.”

Bloomberg Philanthropies, Emerson Collective, Ford Foundation, and the Kresge Foundation, are launching the Local Infrastructure Hub, a national program to ensure that all U.S. cities and towns can access federal infrastructure funding to drive local recovery, improve communities, and deliver results for residents.

The \$50 million commitment of support for local communities in collaboration with the U.S. Conference of Mayors, National League of Cities, and Results for America, will bring together leading experts and resources to help city leaders access and ambitiously leverage funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to advance groundbreaking solutions to major challenges, especially narrowing racial wealth disparities and cutting the emissions that cause climate change. assistance, in-kind support for strategic planning and grant writing, communications strategy, policy research, and guides to help local government and development leaders navigate the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and complementary funding opportunities.

White House Releases Technical Assistance Guide to Help Communities Unlock Resources From Bipartisan Infrastructure Law

WH.GOV



BRIEFING ROOM

and complementary funding opportunities. Accelerator for America is working directly with 20 cities on infrastructure projects and expanding scope and reach regularly as cities prioritize local infrastructure projects, including workforce development initiatives and project delivery support.

The Communities First Infrastructure Alliance is working with technical assistance providers, front-line communities and government leaders to build just, equitable, and more resilient communities. The Alliance is led by national equity-centered leadership groups and includes a national ecosystem of valued aligned partners committed to communities first. The Infrastructure Alliance members will work collectively to support communities with the resources, capacity and technical assistance required to actualize community-centered plans, projects, and visions to meet this moment for the movement.

The recently launched What Works Plus (WW+) funding collaborative coordinates efforts across philanthropy, government, and nonprofit organizations to advance racial and economic equity through more just and climate resilient infrastructure investments. The collaborative is focused on partnerships that result in better outcomes for communities, workers, and entrepreneurs.

[The Climate Jobs National Resource Center](#) is assisting communities and states with workforce training, including building an equitable, inclusive renewable energy economy by investing in union apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs.

CJNRC will be working with labor-led climate jobs coalitions and unions in states to support a successful implementation effort by expanding and strengthening initiatives to increase access to union climate jobs for infrastructure workers in under-resourced communities on the frontlines of climate change.

The Administration welcomes additional commitments from nongovernmental stakeholders to support states and local communities access this once-in-a-generation investment.

Transportation gaps may persist for rural older adults despite infrastructure dollars

Some \$2 billion in federal money will soon be unlocked for rural transit projects, but it may not be enough to resolve long-standing accessibility issues older Americans face.



Janice McCoy, 65, gets assistance from Brian Huber, a driver for SMART, a transportation service available to rural residents, for a trip to get her second dose of the Covid-19 vaccine in Divernon, Ill., on April 9, 2021.

Judith Fisher doesn't want to be that small-town parent nagging her children for rides for everywhere she goes.

The 81-year-old, who resides in rural East Aurora, near Buffalo, New York, hasn't asked her two children for a ride to the doctor's office for physical therapy in three months.

She instead relies on the Rural Transit Service, a nonprofit transportation organization focused on driving older adults to dialysis clinics, adult day cares, the dentist and other health-related appointments.

Fisher, who has given up winter driving, said the transportation service has been a lifeline for her and other local transit-reliant residents.

"It's allowing people to live their lives without asking help from children or neighbors," Fisher said.

Millions of older adults living in rural America no longer drive and don't have adequate access to alternative transportation that can assist them with rides to banks, pharmacies and other important places, said Baruch Feigenbaum, senior managing director for transportation policy at the Reason Foundation.

Rural Transit Service, which employs three people but largely relies on its 65 volunteers, is an example of how nonprofit organizations can help address a lingering transit problem among older adults in rural populations, Feigenbaum said.

That idea may soon get a shot in the arm. President Joe Biden's infrastructure law is set to unlock \$2 billion in federal money for various rural transit projects. But it still may not be enough to solve the seemingly intractable problem of inadequate transportation for rural older adults.

"Having additional funding to expand services is always a good thing," said David Kack, executive director of the Western Transportation Institute at Montana State University. But, Kack said, the "distances involved in rural areas" make it difficult to transform rural transportation.

Monday was the application deadline for the Rural Surface Transportation Grant Program, which will help fund several infrastructure projects nationwide.

The Transportation Department will award up to \$300 million in grants this year and \$2 billion over the next five years as part of the program.



Transportation gaps may persist for rural older adults despite infrastructure dollars



Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg speaks at the White House on May 16.

The percentage of people over age 65 and living in rural areas increased nationally from around 16 percent to about 20 percent between 2012 and 2019, according to the [Rural Transit Fact Book](#) published earlier this year by the Small Urban and Rural Center on Mobility in the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute at North Dakota State University.

It was funded by the Western Transportation Institute at Montana State University. Feigenbaum estimated that 3 million to 9 million people are transit-dependent and living in rural places.

Rural populations tend to be older with residents taking fewer but longer trips, the fact book reported. Higher concentrations of older adult populations are found in Florida, the rural Midwest and Great Plains region, and parts of the western U.S., the fact book said.

Many of those older adults can't physically drive anymore, don't want to drive or simply can't afford a private vehicle, meaning they rely on friends or loved ones to get around, according to rural transit experts.

What's more, unlike in large or midsize metropolitan cities where trains, buses and even cabs and Uber run nonstop and have the ability to drop older adults off at or near their preferred destinations, rural America is far less equipped and connected.

"They're stuck," Feigenbaum said. "Without rural transit, the only thing they can do is ask someone for a ride or basically walk, which, for many folks who are elderly or disabled, isn't a viable option." One way to make rural transit more accessible for older adults nationwide — including those who are disabled or have low incomes — is to use various forms of federal funding to dole out more grant money for nonprofit organizations like the Rural Transit Service in New York, transportation experts say.

Several cities in rural areas already have some version of on-demand transit service.

Earlier this month, the Capital Area Rural Transportation System, a van transit service, launched in Lockhart, Texas, a city of 14,000 people about 35 miles from Austin. Van rides anywhere within city limits cost up to \$2.

In Valdosta, Georgia, a similar transit service became the city's first transportation system last year after using a \$1 million grant from the Federal Transit Administration to lease seven vans.

Meanwhile, Gainesville, Georgia, used a \$1 million FTA grant to jumpstart its WeGo transit van system, which takes passengers on rides throughout rural Hall County.

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The mayors of Gainesville and Valdosta say the transit systems have far exceeded expectations, with both systems operating at max capacity.

Valdosta On-Demand vehicles make 300 trips per day on average. WeGo's fleet of 17 vehicles conducted 80,000 trips during its inaugural year.

But the services aren't perfect. They operate for only about 12 hours per day Monday through Friday. And even the most spacious van can occupy only 15 passengers.

"Our biggest issue is labor. We need more drivers," said Gainesville Mayor Sam Couvillon. "We don't have enough drivers to operate all the vans."

Some transit experts reiterated that rural America is just too vast to completely lean on those types of alternative transit systems for the majority of older adults in remote places.

"There is quite a bit of demand-response transit service in rural America, as it is more efficient as opposed to fixed-route service," Kack said. "Hopefully the additional funds can be used to address some of the challenges that exist in rural America."

He added that other options such as car pools and van pools could use investment.

For now, people like RoseMarie Montreuil, 83, who gave up driving after she said she caused a car accident, will continue relying on alternative transit options such as the Rural Transit Service, where every two weeks she can stock up on groceries.

"I don't have anybody to take me shopping because I don't have anybody living close to me, and I don't like to involve anybody else by asking them to take me shopping," she said.



Volunteer Mileage Reimbursement Fact Sheet

Volunteer drivers may exclude mileage reimbursement payments from their income only to the extent they would be able to deduct the expense as a charitable contribution.

They may exclude one of these amounts for each mile driven, including unreimbursed miles:

- Optional, standard mileage rate for charitable activities of 14 cents per mile.
- Actual vehicle expenses, such as gas and oil, directly related to the charitable purpose

Note: Beginning with tax year 2021, you may be able to subtract reimbursements exceeding 14 cents per mile on your Minnesota income tax return.

Who Is a Volunteer Driver?

A volunteer driver transports persons or goods on behalf of a nonprofit entity or governmental unit in a private passenger vehicle and receives no compensation for services provided other than reimbursement of actual expenses.

Employees receiving wage compensation are not considered volunteer drivers if providing the same type of services they are employed to provide.

If I'm a Volunteer Driver

If you receive mileage reimbursement for charitable activities, you may need to include the payments on your income tax return.

- Report mileage reimbursements above the exclusion amount as income
- Report any other taxable payments as income

You may not need to include reimbursements under certain volunteer programs. For details, see [IRS Publication 525](#) and consult your tax professional.

If I Reimburse a Volunteer Driver

How much can I pay them for mileage?

You can reimburse for mileage at any amount. The volunteer may owe tax if the reimbursement rate is more than 14 cents per mile.

Do I need to issue them a federal Form 1099-MISC?

You must issue a Form 1099-MISC to a volunteer if both of these apply:

1. You reimbursed the volunteer more than 14 cents per mile
2. You paid the volunteer \$600 or more during the calendar year

State of Minnesota Volunteer Mileage Reimbursement Subtraction

If you received mileage reimbursement in volunteer service for an organization eligible for a charitable contribution under Internal Revenue Code, section 170(c), you may subtract the amount you received. For details about qualified organizations for deductible contributions, see [IRS Publication 526](#).

You may subtract any amount exceeding the 14-cent-per-mile volunteer mileage rate on your Minnesota return, up to the 2021 cap of 56 cents per mile.

Complete [Schedule M1M, Income Additions and Subtractions](#), to claim this subtraction from Minnesota income.

For More Information:

For more information, visit the [Minnesota Department of Revenue Volunteer Mileage Reimbursement website](#) or contact:

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Upcoming Events:

2022 Bus Rodeo
July 15-16, 2022
Austin, MN

**2022 MPTA
Transportation
Conference**
October 23-25, 2022
St. Cloud, MN

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