



*First Quarter Edition*

# eNEWSLETTER

FIRST QUARTER 2021



## NEED TRAINING?

Call our office to schedule training for your agency at 573.341.6155.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS



- 5** [Missouri RTAP Visits OATS Southwest Region Office](#)
- 6** [Without a Ride, Many in Need Have No Shot at COVID-19 Vaccine](#)
- 8** [Celebrating Earth Day 2021 From Home](#)
- 9** [Small Towns and Rural Communities Need Transit, Too](#)
- 10** [Rural Rideshare: Sustainability Beyond the Pilot](#)
- 12** [We All Need Transit – Whether We Ride It Or Not](#)

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



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

# LETTER FROM THE MANAGER



Heath Pickerill  
Missouri RTAP Manager

## CONTACT INFORMATION

### MISSOURI RTAP

710 University Drive, Suite 121  
Rolla, MO 65401

Phone: 1.573.341.6155

Fax: 1.573.341.7245

Email: [mortap@mst.edu](mailto:mortap@mst.edu)

Web: [mortap.com](http://mortap.com)

### MISSOURI RTAP/LTAP STAFF

Heath Pickerill

*Director*

Kristi Barr

*Program Coordinator - LTAP*

*Grant Accountant - RTAP*

Doreen Harkins

*Administrative Assistant - LTAP*

*Program Specialist - RTAP*

Shelby O'Keefe

*Graphic Designer*

John Rice

*Contract Instructor*

### PUBLICATION INFORMATION

Missouri University of Science  
and Technology

### THE FINE PRINT

Missouri RTAP quarterly eNewsletter is published by the Missouri RTAP office located on the campus of Missouri University of Science and Technology. The opinions, findings, and recommendations expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of Missouri S&T, MoDOT or the Federal Transit Administration.

### DEAR TRANSIT FRIENDS,

I hope the first quarter of 2021 is off to a great start for each of you. The past year has certainly been full of changes. One year ago, we were quickly adapting to the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Missouri S&T was closing campus and transitioning to remote learning and working in an effort to safeguard students, faculty, and staff. All of us had to adjust in our day to day lives. Looking back on the past year proves how quickly our normal routine of operations can change but also highlights our ability to adapt quickly. But I prefer to also look ahead rather than simply reflect on what we have endured. Missouri S&T recently announced plans to return to mostly in-person classes on campus in the fall, which is a promising sign that things are beginning to return to normal or at least something more closely resembling it. Additionally, as I look ahead, I'm encouraged to see several organizations planning in-person or hybrid conferences later in the year. I remain optimistic that travel will begin to be approved by our campus as well as other agencies. MPTA just announced plans to hold the 2021 Multi-State Midwest Transit Conference in St. Louis on September 7-9. They will be offering a one-day virtual admission. The National Conference on Rural Public and Intercity Bus Transportation will be holding their event, originally scheduled for last fall, on October 24-27 in Charleston, South Carolina. I look forward to possibly attending as the conference always provides excellent sessions and networking opportunities. Finally, the CTAA Expo has been postponed from June until November 7-11 in Richmond, Virginia, which allows more time for travel and gatherings to become safer.

We continue to offer in-person training, following all CDC, MoDOT and campus guidelines. Please contact Doreen if you would like to schedule any drivers' training or have questions. We also have several online training options posted on the MO-RTAP website. In addition, Scholarship Reimbursement funds can be used for any virtual conferences or education opportunities in which you or your staff would like to participate. Please note that some of our transit agencies have used these funds for in house training materials. We are happy to answer any questions about eligible expenses. Please remember we welcome your input at any time. If you have any agency news you would like to share, let us know. We will include it in an upcoming issue. If you have any upcoming meetings in which you would like RTAP to participate, please let me know. I am happy to share the latest RTAP offerings or gather your ideas on how we can best serve transit agencies in the state. Please feel free to contact me at [pickerillh@mst.edu](mailto:pickerillh@mst.edu) or by phone at (573) 341-7637 with any questions, comments, or suggestions. If you know someone who would like to start receiving the newsletter, they can call our office or go to the Missouri RTAP website at [www.mortap.com](http://www.mortap.com) and sign up.

Best Wishes,

Heath Pickerill  
Missouri RTAP Manager





This FREE virtual four-day conference will provide attendees with a background on 49 CFR Part 655 (Prevention of Alcohol Misuse and Prohibited Drug Use in Transit Operators) and 49 CFR Part 40 (Procedures for Transportation Workplace Drug and Alcohol Testing Programs).

Attendees can choose from a variety of sessions to customize their experience for the specific needs of their employer and knowledge level of the regulations. The conference will include separate training for both beginner and advanced Drug and Alcohol Program Managers (DAPMs) and various other sessions catered to running a compliant drug and alcohol program.

All participants must be registered to view the presentations. Some sessions are pre-recorded and will be made available to view according to the listed agenda. Each presentation, including those that have been pre-recorded, will have a brief live Q&A session with the speaker following the presentation. Space in all live sessions is limited to 275 participants per session and will be available on a first-come, first-served basis.

A recording of each session will be available to all conference participants on Whova shortly after the presentation through the end of May 2021. Participants viewing the recorded sessions can ask questions via Whova, or contact the FTA Drug and Alcohol Program and Project Office at [Iyon.Rosario@dot.gov](mailto:Iyon.Rosario@dot.gov), [FTA.DAMIS@dot.gov](mailto:FTA.DAMIS@dot.gov) or (617) 494-6336.



## PRAIRIE STATE PARK

More than 13 million acres of tallgrass prairie once covered more than one-third of Missouri's landscape. Today, less than 65,000 acres remain. Prairie State Park is Missouri's largest remaining tallgrass prairie landscape. Four examples of tallgrass prairie within the park, East Drywood Creek, Regal, Hunkah and Tzi-sho prairies, were originally designated as natural areas. These have all now been combined and are included in the nearly parkwide Regal Tallgrass Prairie Natural Area designation. Purchased with the help of The Nature Conservancy, Prairie State Park preserves a unique and rare diversity of life.

### PARK LINK





# Doreen Harkins, MO-RTAP Program Specialist, Visits OATS Transit Southwest

March 4, 2021 was a beautiful day in Springfield to visit the OATS Transit Southwest Region Office. I had never been to any of our Missouri RTAP agencies. After seeing the facility and meeting some of the staff, I am eager to visit more of our agencies.

The Southwest Region relocated in early 2014 to this new facility, a beautiful complex. I was told the seven other region facilities are identical. The Southwest Region is one of eight OATS Transit regions that operate in 87 of the 114 counties in Missouri. Annually, OATS Transit provides 1 million trips and travels over 11 million miles and is one of the largest and most unique systems of its kind in the country.

The Southwest Region Office Staff consists of 14 personnel with 137 years combined service to OATS Transit. The Region Director is Jeff Robinson, and the Operations Managers are Lisa Bailey, Leann Saulters, and Rene Frazier. The Operations Coordinators are Diane Floyd, Donna Short, Lori Thomas, Dawn Kelley, Tina Inmon, Dawn Bradley, Nicole Parent, Tina Akers, and Adana Fishback. Their roles are as schedulers, dispatchers, reservationists, and billing. The Maintenance Coordinator for the 135 Southwest Region transit buses is Paul Akers.

Jeff Robinson provided me with a mission brief of OATS Transit and the Southwest Region. Then the Operations Managers each delivered a PowerPoint presentation outlining the duties and responsibilities involved with each of their positions. I was in awe of what each of them do.

The backbone of the Southwest Region consists of 86 drivers who transport riders within the 17 counties of the region. The drivers' reputation, based on selfless service, are the reason for the steady growth of the region, including expanding service contracts with multiple Senior Citizens and Developmental Disability Tax Boards. The region is seeking new drivers in multiple Southwest Region counties and projecting growth to approximately 100 plus drivers through FY22.

After two hours at the Southwest Region Office, I left with a much better understanding of the sequence of events to pick-up riders and deliver them safely to their destinations.

I want to extend a huge THANK YOU to Jeff Robinson and his staff for a wonderful visit and their kindness and hospitality.



OATS Southwest Region Director, Jeff Robinson, presents Doreen Harkins, MO-RTAP Program Specialist, a diecast model OATS Transit bus in recognition of her years of service and support to OATS Transit.



OATS Southwest Region Operations Managers: Rene Frazier, Leann Saulters, and Lisa Bailey

[LINK TO SEE MORE PICTURES OF DOREEN'S VISIT](#)





# Without a Ride, Many in Need Have No Shot at COVID-19 Vaccine

Jane Campbell, the town commissioner in Davidson, North Carolina, worries that some of her constituents, especially older adults, don't have a way to get to COVID-19 vaccine sites.

From Davidson, the nearest locations for anyone seeking a shot have been at mass vaccination events in the Charlotte area—more than a half hour away, Campbell said. For many older adults who needed transportation, that was too far.

*"I can get the volunteers to drive them, but I don't think it's prudent or safe to put a volunteer and a person needing the vaccine in the same car for a 35-minute drive each way," she said. "It needs to be COVID-safe transportation."*

While state and local governments have been busy planning for and distributing vaccines, many have left out an important piece: how to provide transportation to people who can't get to those sites.

Millions of older adults and low-income people of color who are at higher risk of contracting the virus don't have cars, don't drive or don't live near public transit. Some are homebound. Some live in rural areas far from vaccination sites.

"It's incredibly complicated how the vaccine planning played out across the country. Transportation was overlooked," said Denny Chan, a senior staff attorney at Justice in Aging, a national legal advocacy organization for low-income older adults.

Many older adults and poor people also may not have family or friends to drive them, said Chan, who is a member of the California Community Vaccine Advisory Committee, which recommends ways state officials can equitably distribute and allocate vaccines.

"We have, unfortunately, not spent as much time talking about how we are actually going to get the vaccine to people," Chan said. "You're creating a situation where you're building the plane while you're trying to fly it."

The vaccine rollout largely has been left to state and local governments, which are busy trying to keep up with heavy demand and short supply. While transportation hasn't been a priority, some areas, from New York City to Spokane, Washington, have come up with different ways to address the problem.

Aside from getting their own agencies and departments involved, state and local officials also should be partnering with charities and nonprofits that can help with transportation, said Caitlin Donovan, a spokesperson for the National Patient Advocate Foundation, a nonprofit group that promotes access to health care for people with debilitating illnesses.

"Transportation is often neglected, but it's often one of the biggest barriers to health care," Donovan said.

## THE HOMEBOUND

One of the biggest challenges for state and local officials is getting vaccines to homebound older adults, said Steven Albert, chair of University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health's department of behavioral and community health sciences.

An estimated 2 million people 65 and older are mostly or completely homebound and another 5 million have health conditions that make it hard to get out, according to the Commonwealth Fund, a foundation that funds health policy research.

"This is an invisible population. They're not like long-term care residents in nursing homes," Albert said. "They are very elderly and frail and they live at home and are an afterthought, in some cases."

One obstacle is that both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines have stringent cold-storage requirements, which creates logistical difficulties for transporting and administering vaccines in people's homes, he added.

"Someone like a nurse would have to travel with a cooler or refrigerator to keep the vaccine at the right temperature and then give the injection," Albert said.

Some organizations that offer services to older adults are helping to bring vaccines to those who are homebound or to find transportation to vaccine clinics.

"Transportation is just critical to this," said Sandy Markwood, CEO of the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, a Washington, D.C.-based membership group of local agencies that provide services directly or through contractors to older adults to help them age at home and in the community.

In central Indiana, for example, an area agency has been reaching out to older adults to help them receive vaccines in their homes or to locate transportation to take them to vaccine sites.

And the Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources is working with transportation providers and volunteer drivers, some of whom have been vaccinated, to bring older adults to vaccination appointments, according to Markwood.

"I know everyone is struggling to do their best," Markwood said, "but right now, there needs to be a realization that when you're looking to serve older adults and people with disabilities there needs to be a level of support there, and without planning, it won't happen."

## POOR NEIGHBORHOODS

Vaccine transportation is also a problem for low-income communities of color, which are disproportionately affected by the virus. Public transit operations also have been reduced in many cities during the pandemic.

The private ride-sharing sector is offering some assistance. Uber announced in December a partnership with the National Urban League and other groups in which it will offer 10 million free or discounted rides to communities of color.

Lyft joined with corporate partners and nonprofit groups in December to launch a program that would

provide 60 million rides to and from vaccination sites for members of low-income, uninsured and at-risk communities

But local officials say they, too, need to reach out to those communities. Some counties already are setting up mobile vaccine units that will travel to underserved areas where accessibility is a challenge, said Blaire Bryant, associate legislative director for health at the National Association of Counties.

Officials in some local communities are considering using churches, schools and grocery stores as places where residents can get vaccinated.

In New Orleans, City Councilwoman Cyndi Nguyen put together a task force that includes health and social services providers and community and faith-based leaders to map out a plan for her district, which includes the Lower Ninth Ward, a low-income Black neighborhood that was devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

"My concern is that in those areas, low-income and elderly people are not going to have access to the vaccine," Nguyen said. "If they don't have access, they may lean toward saying, 'I'm not going to take it.'"

In the Lower Ninth Ward, she said, there is only one clinic and no pharmacies, so officials need to come up with other solutions.

"You have to get the vaccine to where people are at. We've got to look at bringing in mobile vaccine buses and exploring other options like churches," she said. "We don't want people frustrated and overwhelmed because they don't have ways of getting to the vaccine."

## RURAL COMMUNITIES

In rural areas, some residents also are facing serious challenges getting to vaccine sites, which are often far away.

Big chain stores and pharmacies that have been signing up to provide vaccines across the country are nonexistent in many rural areas, so local pharmacies will be key, said Keith Mueller, director of the RUPRI Center for Rural Health Policy Analysis at the University of Iowa.

"You really want to reach as many people as possible," he said. "These smaller, independent pharmacies are able to put the shot in the arm."

Mueller pointed to West Virginia, one of the states that has given out the highest percentage of vaccine doses. Officials there decided to bypass the federal program in which large pharmacy chains were responsible for vaccinating long-term care residents and instead delivered vaccines to 250 pharmacies, mostly small, independent ones.

**READ MORE**





The "green things growing" whisper me of  
many an earth-old mystery.  
Eben Eugene Rexford



# EARTH DAY 2021

## CELEBRATING EARTH DAY FROM HOME

### THE 51<sup>ST</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF EARTH DAY

Earth Day 2021 will mark the 51st anniversary of this holiday. Typically, Earth Day is assigned a different theme or area of focus each year; this year's theme is "Restore Our Earth."

Most years, Earth Day events range from river cleanups to invasive removals. With social distancing still in place for many of us this April, Earth Day has gone digital. Virtual events, like environmental lectures and films, will take place on Earth Day (Thursday, April 22). To see a catalogue of official events, visit [earthday.org](http://earthday.org).

Of course, social distancing doesn't mean that you can't go outside and enjoy nature, as long as you do so responsibly! Nature is not cancelled!

### WHAT IS EARTH DAY?

Ever wonder how Earth Day began? The first Earth Day was held on April 22, 1970. Dealing with dangerously serious issues concerning toxic drinking water, air pollution, and the effects of pesticides, an impressive 20 million Americans—10% of the population—ventured outdoors and protested together.

President Richard Nixon led the nation in creating the Environmental Protection Agency which followed with successful laws including the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act. Read more from [EarthSky.org](http://EarthSky.org).

McConnell originally chose the spring equinox (March 21, 1970) and Nelson chose April 22, which ended up becoming the official celebration date. (Given that the date of the spring equinox changes over time, it could have made things more complicated to go with that date!)

Today, Earth Day is not only a day to increase awareness of environmental problems but it's also become a popular day for many communities to gather together and clean up litter, plant trees, or simply reflect on the beauty of nature. We've provided a list of activities and projects that you can do to improve your local environment further down the page!

### WHEN IS EARTH DAY?

Earth Day is always celebrated on April 22. It's followed closely by Arbor Day, which falls on the last Friday in April.

[READ MORE ON CELEBRATING EARTH DAY 2021 AT HOME](#)

## 10 EARTH DAY ACTIVITIES AND IDEAS

-  **SUPPORT OUR POLLINATORS!**
-  **CLEANUP PLASTIC ON YOUR FAVORITE WALK IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD OR LOCAL PARK**
-  **SWAP OUT YOUR KITCHEN AND HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS!**
-  **PLANT A TREE**
-  **PLANT NATIVE FLOWERS AND PLANTS. REMOVE INVASIVE PLANTS.**
-  **REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE IN THE GARDEN**
-  **STOP PESTICIDES AND CHEMICALS IN THE GARDEN**
-  **CONSERVE WATER**
-  **THINK ABOUT YOUR DIET**
-  **GET KIDS INVOLVED**





# Small Towns and Rural Communities Need Transit, Too

With the pandemic taking a devastating toll on local budgets, the U.S. public transit system is battling to survive. For much of the country, this funding crisis jeopardizes an already withering lifeline.

For many Americans, public transit is the only option to get to work, school, the grocery store, or doctor's appointments. But nearly half of us have no access to public transit. And those that do are now confronting limited routes, slashed service times, and limited disability accommodations.

This isn't just a worry for people who live in cities — over a million households in rural America don't have a vehicle. In rural communities like Wolfe County, Kentucky, Bullock County, Alabama, and Allendale County, South Carolina, fully 20 percent of households don't have a car.

Recently, dozens of transit riders and workers joined together for a two-day national community hearing to testify about their needs for public transit.

"My bus pass is the key to my independence," testified Kathi Zoern, a rider from Wausau, Wisconsin with a vision impairment. But limited routes prevent her from performing basic tasks. "I can't get to the Department of Motor Vehicles to get my voter ID," she said, "because it's outside the city limits."

Unfortunately, situations like this are typical. Over 80 percent of young adults with disabilities are prevented from doing daily activities due to a lack of transportation. And there aren't enough resources to properly train transit workers for accommodating people with disabilities.

Nancy Jackman, a transit mobility instructor from Duluth, Minnesota, helps people with visual or hearing impairments ride transit. But she feels exhausted from the uphill battle. "Transit workers seem very overworked and underappreciated for the types of problem solving that is demanded," she reflected.

Public transit is also crucial for essential workers during the pandemic.

Sister Barbara Pfarr, a Catholic nun in Elm Grove, Wisconsin, helps operate a Mother House where sick

and elderly sisters reside. But at least half of her food and health care workers don't have a driver's license, she said, and they're missing shifts due to a lack of transit. As a result, residents in facilities like hers "don't get their services because their workers can't get to work, through no fault of their own."

Barbara is also considering that as she ages, she may also become transit-dependent. "When I'm older and can't drive anymore, I want to be able to get around." Many smaller towns and rural areas tend to be older, and seniors are now outliving their ability to drive safely by an average of 7 to 10 years. Without transit options, many of these seniors will lose their independence.

The hearings also emphasized that survivors of domestic abuse disproportionately rely on transit.

Shivani Parikh, outreach coordinator at the New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, testified that a lack of public transit makes it harder for survivors to get help. Service cuts can "greatly influence their sense of isolation, their experience of abuse, and their perceived ability to leave," she warned.

Throughout America, millions are forced to depend on transit that doesn't fully meet their needs, while millions more have no access at all. This is unacceptable.

Congress can help. Public transit needs at least \$39 billion in emergency relief to avoid service cuts and layoffs through 2023. But more broadly, we need to revise the "80-20" split that's plagued federal transit funding since the Reagan era — with 80 percent going to highways and less than 20 percent to public transit.

Part of the justification for this disparity is that only people in dense, urban areas use transit. This is upside-down logic. The hearings reveal that when people don't use transit, it's because it is nonexistent, unreliable, or inaccessible.

The funding to meet everyone's transit needs exists — it's just not being allocated correctly. It's time we invest in public transit for all of America.

Resource: <https://www.counterpunch.org/2021/02/26/small-towns-and-rural-communities-need-transit-too/>



# RURAL RIDESHARE: SUSTAINABILITY BEYOND THE PILOT

## OVERCOMING THE RIDER DEMAND OBSTACLE

No doubt that rideshare is a sustainable, transportation option. All that's needed is an awesome technology platform that will match riders to an eager pool of drivers and magically, all will be right with the commuting universe. It's an oversimplification which depends on the assumptions that people desire environmentally friendly, congestion fighting, money saving solutions. Promoters of rural rideshare pilot programs have often held the assumption that "if we build it, they will come", but that is not necessarily the case.

"...there is a belief that when there is demand, the supply will be generated automatically. This assumption introduces a risk that a demanded ride cannot be supplied, a risk that can increase when population density is reduced.... For success in new mobility services, we stress the importance of (i) identifying the customer segment and (ii) securing the resources necessary to meet the demand."

The above summarized conclusion of a study of four Swedish rural pilot projects are spot on. It's not as simple as great ride matching technology. It's knowing who the audience is and identifying their needs. Who will benefit from the program? Why would each customer segment want to use the technology?

Simply introducing technology, when rural residents tend to rideshare through word-of-mouth, is not necessarily the best way to gain participation. Typically, rural rideshare has been an organic process of neighbors and friends helping each other. This form of ridesharing is virtually impossible to track and people may not be willing to divulge why they share or need shared rides.

I participated in a rural rideshare pilot where program success was impacted by assumptions. A correct assumption was people who did not have vehicles would benefit from the empty seats of those commuting alone and an incorrect assumption was there would be enough people willing to provide rides. During multiple outreach events, it became clear that while those without vehicles saw the benefit of rideshare, those with vehicles didn't believe they needed the service, and there was no immediate benefit for them.

Understanding the intended customer is crucial, since assuming that vehicle owners will add time and/or inconvenience to rideshare, may not be a reasonable expectation. The primary interest in the pilot program was from people who did not own vehicles and needed a ride.

Data from this rural NY pilot was collected from 2014-2018. Most of the funding was spent on outreach and education since the platform was state sponsored. From 2014 through 2017, 362 people registered from three counties. In 2018, a small urban area was added and registration jumped to 813<sup>2</sup>.

## SUCCESSFUL RURAL RIDESHARE

So how can rural rideshare programs succeed? First, substantial effort must be made to engage drivers. Rural drivers are not naturally inclined to consider rideshare platforms, they feel they simply don't need the product. There must be a deeper understanding of all the potential customers for supply to meet demand.

A method to provide a deeper dive into customer understanding is the Design Thinking Process or Human-Centered Design. This method provides



a deeper understanding of the potential users by engaging all stakeholders, ultimately unveiling incentives and understanding for success. The National Center for Mobility Management has a number of resources related to Design Thinking and transportation. Additionally, they provide frequent grant opportunities to work with communities on transportation-related issues through the Design Thinking process. You can also find out more about Design Thinking through the company, Ideo. Arguably, the primary benefactor of rural rideshare platforms are those who lack transportation. Rural drivers generally need incentives beyond environmental benefits to consider rideshare programs.

Secondly, the Swedish model mentions the risk that the database lacks critical masses needed to be useful. Once users don't make a match, they may not return. If it happens twice, it's likely they won't use the platform again and will probably tell others,

essentially dooming the project beyond the pilot phase. Addressing the realities of sparsely populated areas where critical mass isn't adequate for the demand, will take some creative thought.

Therefore, when developing rural rideshare programs, spend time to ensure that both riders and drivers want and need the program. De-risk the solution by utilizing the Design Thinking process. Rural rideshare has potential for success by offering additional options where transit is not practical, but knowing who all of your customers are, and matching supply with demand is critical to that success.

Resource: <https://nationalcenterformobilitymanagement.org/rural-rideshare-sustainability-beyond-the-pilot/>



## OATS Transit celebrates 50 years in business

2021 marks the 50th anniversary for OATS Transit, a nationwide leader in rural public transportation systems. The company is headquartered in Columbia, MO and serves 87 counties in the state of Missouri.

What started in 1971 with three vehicles and five drivers serving eight counties, quickly grew to encompass much of the state of Missouri. Today, OATS Transit has more than 650 employees and a large fleet of vehicles providing more than a million trips each year.

The last 50 years have brought many successes and even a few challenges. OATS Transit survived lean times in the 1970's, economic fluctuations, gas shortages and price hikes, government shutdowns, and even a global pandemic brought on in 2020 that forever changed the way the company does business.

With the help of several funding agencies and businesses, OATS Transit continues to ensure thousands of Missourians have a ride. Over the

last 50 years, the company has seen a shift in trip purpose. In 1971, service was largely seniors going to the grocery store and other places that allowed them to remain independent in their own homes. Fast-forward 50 years, the focus has changed to employment transportation, which makes up nearly 50% of the trips provided. Senior transportation is still very much an important part of the service provided, but as seniors are driving longer, priorities have shifted.

The company is planning an official celebration in late September 2021. OATS Transit is governed by a 16-member Board of Directors; it is the largest rural transportation provider in the entire United States. If you would like to find out about riding OATS Transit, please visit their website at [www.oatstransit.org](http://www.oatstransit.org) and click on Bus Schedules for service in your county. You can also follow them on [facebook.com/oatstransit](https://facebook.com/oatstransit).

# WE ALL NEED TRANSIT – WHETHER WE RIDE IT OR NOT

I owe my college education to a lot of things, but two come especially to mind. One was a scholarship. The other was public transit.

I can still remember my commute on those early winter days. Not five minutes since I'd walked from my car to the train station, I could feel strands of hair, still wet from the shower, turning into icicles.

My scholarship required me to transfer to the University of New Mexico, in Albuquerque, from community college in Santa Fe. But Santa Fe and Albuquerque are an hour apart.

So each day I took the New Mexico Rail Runner — one of the few rail ridership options in New Mexico — into Albuquerque. I rode alongside many students, workers, and daily commuters. The Rail Runner connects many cities and counties in the state, making stops in metro areas as well as rural areas like the Pueblo lands.

As soon as I'd arrive at my train stop, I'd run to catch the Rapid Ride, Albuquerque's public, fixed-route bus service. I'd board the red line, and in less than 10 minutes I was in front of the university.

Had it not been for the Rail Runner and Rapid Ride systems, I don't know how I would've gotten my degree. As a first generation college student, transit made a huge difference in my life.

I'm hardly alone. In communities big and small, public transportation makes lives work. There are close to 930 urban public transit systems in place across the country — and 1,300 rural services, too.

More and more Americans are opting for public transportation. Since the mid-1990s, the number of public transit passengers has gone up by over a quarter — and the number of rail passengers has increased by 57 percent. In 2019, before the pandemic, people in this country took nearly 10 billion trips on public transportation.

That's good news for the climate. The greatest and fastest growing greenhouse gas source in the U.S.

is transportation. But Americans who take transit instead of driving save over 4 billion gallons of gasoline a year — and subway ridership alone lowers carbon emissions by a stunning 73 percent compared to driving.

Finally, transit makes our country more equal. Around 60 percent of riders are people of color, who — like me — might not otherwise have a way to get to school, work, or the grocery store.

That's why Rosa Parks, who helped launch the Montgomery bus boycott when she refused to give up her seat to a white passenger, is remembered as a major figure in the transit equity movement. And it's why, on Parks' birthday this February, Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg promised his department would be "honoring her legacy by ensuring equity is central to everything we do."

Still, nearly half of Americans don't have access to public transit, and the pandemic has badly exacerbated this imbalance. Many systems have cut jobs, service, or routes. The New Mexico Rail Runner shut down altogether for nearly a year, only reopening this March.

Fortunately, the American Rescue Plan recently signed by President Biden included over \$30 billion in emergency relief funds for America's hard-hit transit agencies.

Coming next is a major infrastructure and "green jobs" package, which Congress hopes to pass this spring or summer. We will have to fight for this package to include funds to keep today's transit agencies working, as well as for the investments they'll need to make for the future.

Millions of Americans rely on transit — to meet their daily needs as well as their long-term goals. Hundreds of thousands more rely on it for good union jobs. And all of us need it to keep our planet livable.

Resource: <https://otherwords.org/we-all-need-transit-whether-we-ride-it-or-not/>





# AVAILABLE TRAINING PROGRAMS

The following is a list of the training programs and course length of each that are currently available to rural transit providers through Missouri RTAP. Requests for training can be made by contacting Doreen Harkins, MO-RTAP Program Specialist, at [harkinsd@mst.edu](mailto:harkinsd@mst.edu) or 573-341-6155.

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

For more information on classes and to register please visit: [mltrc.mst.edu/mortaphome/mortaptraining/](http://mltrc.mst.edu/mortaphome/mortaptraining/)

## RESOURCES

**National RTAP – Rural Transit Assistance Program**

[www.nationalrtap.org/](http://www.nationalrtap.org/)

**Transportation Safety Institute –  
Transit Safety & Security Training Division**

[www.tsi.dot.gov/Transit.aspx](http://www.tsi.dot.gov/Transit.aspx)

**Federal Transit Administration –  
Rural Transit Assistance Program Page**

[www.fta.dot.gov/funding/grants/  
grants\\_financing\\_3554.html](http://www.fta.dot.gov/funding/grants/grants_financing_3554.html)

**Missouri Public Transit**

[www.mopublictransit.org/](http://www.mopublictransit.org/)

**National Transit Institute**

[www.ntionline.com/](http://www.ntionline.com/)

**Kansas RTAP – Kansas University  
Transportation Center**

[www.kutc.ku.edu/cgiwrap/kutc/rtap/  
index.php/index.html](http://www.kutc.ku.edu/cgiwrap/kutc/rtap/index.php/index.html)

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

[www.tcrponline.org/](http://www.tcrponline.org/)

