



KANSAS TRANSIT REPORTER

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DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

By Kara Cox, Kansas RTAP



Happy spring, everyone!

We have some exciting announcements. First, we would like to extend a happy congratulations to Bradley Schrock, our student worker, who has been a true asset in helping approved trainers set up their training sessions online, accessing completion certificates, and answering all your learning management system questions. Bradley graduates this spring, and we wish him the best in his next adventure!

We are in the process of updating the Transit Manager Handbook to the 2026 Edition. Updates will include information adjusted to be in accordance with KDOT's updates to their policy manual, updated links to resources, and more. With this, there will be some updates to the online Transit Manager training course. Be on the lookout for these to go live.

Additionally, we are working on a new resource called the Policy Guidance Compendium. This resource will house all of the articles we have written regarding policy guidance when it comes to developing policies for your agency. The goal of this resource is to serve as a quick one-stop shop for agencies to refer to when seeking advice on how to write and tailor policies to fit their agency.

Lastly, we have a busy conference season coming up this fall. KS RTAP will be assisting KPTA in developing and coordinating sessions for their annual meeting, which will take place in Hutchinson, KS, August 10-12. We are excited to share details of this soon! KS RTAP will also be helping to launch the first University of Kansas Transportation Center conference, the Midwest Innovation and Development in Transportation Symposium (MIDTRANS). The goal of this conference is to connect transportation researchers and practitioners and discuss transportation needs, research, applications, and best practices. This one-day conference will take place at the University of Kansas on September 2. You can learn more about MIDTRANS 2026 at <https://kutc.ku.edu/midtrans-2026>

As always, if there is anything Kansas RTAP can do for you, please let us know!

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES TO CARE: THE ROLE OF RURAL TRANSPORTATION IN KANSAS

By Nikhila Gunda, Kansas RTAP

In many rural and suburban communities across Kansas, public transportation serves as a critical bridge connecting residents to primary health care. However, transportation systems often face challenges such as limited and unreliable services, workforce shortages, funding constraints, and the compounded vulnerabilities of populations such as older adults, individuals with disabilities, and low-income households (Kansas Health Institute, 2022; County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, 2023). Together, these factors make accessing primary health care more difficult and contribute to poorer health outcomes in rural areas compared to urban communities (University of Kansas Institute for Health and Disability Policy Studies, 2020).

This newsletter highlights the opportunity for rural transportation agencies to better understand these healthcare access barriers and take a more strategic, mission-driven approach to service delivery—positioning themselves as essential partners in improving community health and access to care.

RURAL TRANSPORTATION ISSUES ACCESSING PRIMARY HEALTHCARE

Many places like rural Kansas face significant transportation-related barriers to accessing primary health care, contributing to health disparities and inequities (Kansas Health Institute, 2022). The following are key issues:

1. Long Distances and Geographical Isolation

- Fewer local services: Many rural Kansans live far from primary care and specialty services, often located in regional hubs (Kansas Health Institute, 2022).
- Travel outside county: Limited cross-county transportation makes access more difficult (Kansas Department of Health and Environment & Healthworks, 2022).



2. Lack of Transportation Infrastructure

- Limited public transit: Rural transit options are often sparse or nonexistent (County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, 2023).
- Driver shortages & funding gaps: Limited workforce and funding reduce service availability (Kansas Health Institute, 2022).
- Sustainability concerns: Many systems rely on volunteer or limited-capacity programs (Public Health Law Center, 2019).

3. Vulnerable Populations Disproportionately Affected

- Older adults & people with disabilities face mobility challenges (Kansas Department of Health and Environment & Healthworks, 2022).
- Low-income households often lack reliable transportation (County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, 2023).

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4. Appointment Barriers and Health Outcomes

- Missed appointments: Transportation is a major reason for missed healthcare visits (University of Kansas Institute for Health and Disability Policy Studies, 2020).
- Poorer outcomes: Limited access leads to delayed care and increased health risks (Rural Health Information Hub, 2023).

5. Broader Systemic Challenges

- Provider shortages: Many rural Kansas counties are designated shortage areas (Kansas Department of Health and Environment & Healthworks, 2022).
- Telehealth limitations: Broadband gaps restrict virtual care access (Rural Health Information Hub, 2023).

UNDERSTANDING HEALTHCARE ACCESS BARRIERS

Especially in places like Kansas, where rural transit agencies or transportation providers are often the only mobility provider in a community, it is not just helpful but strategic and mission-critical for the transit agencies to understand healthcare barriers. Understanding healthcare barriers allows providers to design smarter services, improve health equity, secure funding, build partnerships, and strengthen long-term sustainability. Each of these is explained in detail below.

- **Agencies are a Direct Link to Health Outcomes** - In many rural Kansas communities, transit agencies are the bridge between residents and primary care. If agencies understand:

- Where primary care deserts exist
- Which populations are missing appointments
- How far patients must travel
- What times are appointments scheduled

They can design routes, demand-response services, and scheduling systems that directly reduce missed care and emergency visits. Transportation becomes a health intervention, not just a ride (University of Kansas Institute for Health and Disability Policy Studies, 2020).

- **Strengthens Funding and Grant Competitiveness** - Federal and state programs (e.g., Section 5310, rural health grants, mobility innovation pilots) increasingly require agencies to demonstrate:

- Unmet need
 - Data-driven service design
 - Coordination with healthcare providers
- Agencies that understand healthcare access gaps can:
- Write stronger grant applications
 - Justify expanded service areas
 - Secure partnerships with hospitals or clinics
 - Align with state Coordinated Plans and TAM goals

This is more relevant to communities in Kansas where funding pools are limited and competition is high (County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, 2023).

- **Helps Prioritize Vulnerable Populations** - Older adults, people with disabilities, and low-income residents are disproportionately impacted by both transportation and healthcare shortages (Kansas Department of Health and Environment & Healthworks, 2022).

When agencies understand:

- Who lacks a personal vehicle
- Who cannot drive due to age or disability
- Who must travel across county lines

They can tailor:

- ADA-compliant services
- Volunteer driver programs
- Cross-county coordination agreements
- Instead of offering generic service, they provide targeted mobility support

- **Encourages Cross-Sector Partnerships** - Healthcare providers often struggle with no-show rates due to transportation barriers.

When transit agencies understand the healthcare landscape, they can:

- Coordinate appointment blocks with clinics
- Develop mobility vouchers
- Partner with FQHCs and rural hospitals
- Create cost-sharing arrangements

This can improve both patient health outcomes and agency revenue stability (Public Health Law Center, 2019).

- **Supports Rural Sustainability** - In rural Kansas clinics are consolidating, hospitals are financially strained, and population is aging (Rural Health Information Hub, 2023).

Transportation agencies that understand healthcare access challenges become essential community infrastructure — supporting economic stability, workforce participation, and aging-in-place.

Without reliable transportation, rural communities risk:

- Increased ER use
- Delayed chronic care management
- Outmigration of older residents

PRACTICAL AND PROVEN STRATEGIES FOR KANSAS TRANSPORTATION PROVIDERS

Considering all the above issues and more, rural transportation agencies can move from just being reactive ride providers to becoming proactive mobility partners in healthcare access. Below are some of the practice strategies for the transportation providers that can help in reducing these barriers and provide better healthcare outcomes.

- **Coordinate directly with healthcare providers:** Rural agencies can:
 - Establish formal partnerships with local clinics, FQHCs, and hospitals
 - Align service hours with clinic hours (especially early morning specialty trips)
 - Schedule “appointment blocks” to group riders going to the same facility
 - Create direct referral systems where clinics schedule rides at time of booking

Impact: Fewer missed appointments, better chronic care management, stronger cost-sharing opportunities (Kansas Health Institute, 2022).

- **Address Cross-County & Long-Distance Travel:** In Kansas, many patients travel 30–100+ miles for specialty care. Agencies can:
 - Develop regional coordination agreements across counties
 - Create transfer hubs between neighboring transit providers
 - Implement mileage-based pricing models for long-distance medical trips
 - Coordinate with state DOT to support intercity connectors

Impact: Expands access beyond local primary care deserts (Kansas Department of Health and Environment & Healthworks, 2022).

- **Prioritize Vulnerable Populations:** Agencies can:
 - Expand Section 5310-funded services for older adults and individuals with disabilities
 - Offer door-through-door assistance when appropriate
 - Create mobility training for seniors who can transition to fixed route or deviated services
 - Develop volunteer driver programs in low-density areas

Impact: Supports aging-in-place and reduces isolation (County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, 2023).

- **Leverage Telehealth & Digital Access Support:** Transportation agencies can support telehealth indirectly by:
 - Providing trips to broadband hubs (libraries, community centers)
 - Partnering with clinics to transport patients needing diagnostic follow-ups
 - Supporting mobile clinic events in remote communities

Impact: Reduces travel burden while still enabling access to care (Rural Health Information Hub, 2023).

- **Use Data to Identify Healthcare Mobility Gaps:** Agencies should:
 - Map trip origins/destinations for medical rides
 - Track no-show data linked to transportation gaps
 - Conduct rider surveys on healthcare access barriers
 - Overlay service areas with Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs)

This is especially powerful in Kansas where many counties are designated shortage areas.

Impact: Stronger grant proposals and more targeted service design (Public Health Law Center, 2019).

- **Build Sustainable Funding Models:** Rural agencies can:
 - Partner with hospitals to offset ride costs (reducing ER use benefits them financially)
 - Apply for mobility innovation or health coordination grants
 - Explore Medicaid NEMT partnerships where feasible
 - Integrate state transit funds with local health initiatives

Impact: Diversifies revenue beyond traditional transit funding streams (Kansas Health Institute, 2022).

- **Conduct Community Outreach & Mobility Education:** Many rural residents don't know services exist. Agencies can:
 - Present at senior centers and health fairs
 - Distribute materials in clinics and pharmacies
 - Train healthcare front-desk staff on scheduling rides
 - Offer multilingual outreach where needed

Impact: Increases ridership and reduces unmet need (County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, 2023).

The path forward lies in collaboration, innovation, and a shared commitment to community well-being. When transportation systems are designed with healthcare access in mind, they do more than move people—they connect communities to care, strengthen rural systems, and create healthier futures for all Kansans.

CONCLUSION

Access to primary health care in rural Kansas is not solely a healthcare challenge—it is a transportation challenge. As this document highlights, barriers such as long travel distances, limited service availability, and the needs of vulnerable populations continue to impact how and when residents receive care.

Rural transportation providers are uniquely positioned to be part of the solution. By understanding these barriers and adopting more strategic, data-driven, and partnership-focused approaches, agencies can move beyond traditional service delivery and play a vital role in improving health outcomes and quality of life in their communities.

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RIDE THE BUS AND TALK TO RIDERS

By Anne Lowder, Kansas RTAP

Public transportation exists to serve people. While policies, schedules, and performance metrics help guide operations, the most valuable insights often come directly from the riders themselves. One of the most effective ways supervisors can stay connected to real-world conditions is by riding the bus and talking with the people who depend on it every day. This simple practice builds understanding, strengthens trust, and ultimately leads to better service.

SEEING THE SERVICE THROUGH THE RIDER'S EYES

Supervisors often experience transit from an operational or administrative perspective—reviewing reports, addressing complaints, or responding to incidents. Riding the bus changes that perspective. It allows supervisors to see firsthand what riders encounter: crowded vehicles, confusing signage, driver communication, comfort, cleanliness, and punctuality.

Experiencing the trip the same way riders do helps supervisors recognize challenges that may not be obvious from data alone. A route that looks efficient on paper may feel stressful during peak hours. A minor delay might have a major impact on someone trying to get to work or a medical appointment. This firsthand understanding leads to more informed decisions and realistic expectations for frontline staff.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNICATION AND TRUST

When supervisors talk directly with riders, it humanizes leadership and shows the organization values public input. Riders are often more willing to share honest feedback in casual conversations than through surveys or formal complaint channels.

Simple questions like “How is the route working for you?” or “Is there anything that makes your trip difficult?” can reveal recurring issues, unmet needs, or positive experiences worth reinforcing. Riders who feel heard are more likely to trust the

system, remain loyal to transit, and recommend it to others.

These interactions also help de-escalate frustration. When people know that supervisors care enough to ride the bus and listen, they are more patient and understanding when problems arise.

SUPPORTING AND UNDERSTANDING BUS OPERATORS

Riding the bus gives supervisors valuable insight into the working conditions of bus operators. They can observe how operators manage traffic, interact with passengers, follow schedules, and handle stressful situations. This perspective builds empathy and strengthens the supervisor-operator relationship.

Understanding the realities of the operator’s job helps supervisors coach more effectively, set realistic performance expectations, and advocate for improvements such as schedule adjustments, safety changes, or better tools. Operators are also more likely to respect leaders who understand their daily challenges instead of managing solely from behind a desk.

IMPROVING SAFETY AND SERVICE QUALITY

Many safety and service issues are easier to identify when experienced in real time. Riding the bus allows supervisors to observe:

- Rider behavior and crowding patterns
- Stop spacing and accessibility challenges
- Lighting, cleanliness, and comfort issues
- Confusing fare or boarding processes

These observations often lead to quick fixes or longer-term improvements that may not surface through reports alone. Regular field presence also reinforces a culture of accountability and continuous improvement throughout the organization.

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MAKING DATA MORE MEANINGFUL

Transit agencies rely heavily on metrics such as on-time performance, ridership numbers, and complaint counts. While data is essential, it doesn't always capture how the service feels to the rider. Riding the bus helps supervisors connect the numbers to real experiences.

For example, a route may meet on-time standards but still feel unreliable if small delays consistently affect transfers. Supervisor observations help interpret data accurately and ensure performance measures align with rider expectations.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

When supervisors ride the bus, they send a powerful message: leadership is engaged, visible, and willing to share the same experience as riders and frontline employees. This builds credibility and promotes a culture of service, respect, and learning.

Leadership presence in the field shows that improvement starts with listening and observation—not just policies and procedures. It encourages staff at all levels to stay connected to the mission of serving the community.

CONCLUSION

Riding the bus and talking with riders is one of the most effective tools a supervisor has. It bridges the gap between administration and everyday experience, fosters trust, strengthens relationships with operators, and leads to smarter decisions. Most importantly, it keeps the focus where it belongs—on the people who rely on public transportation to get where they need to go.

Supervisors who regularly ride the bus don't just manage a system; they understand it. And that understanding is the foundation of strong leadership and high-quality transit service.

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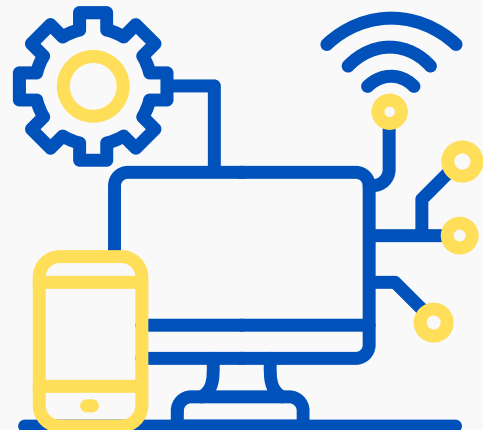
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ONE STEP AT A TIME: IMPLEMENTING TRANSIT TECHNOLOGIES

By Kara Cox, Kansas RTAP

Rural transit agencies operate in an environment defined by limited resources, wide service areas, and diverse community needs. When stressed to meet the day-to-day needs of transit in these areas, it can be tempting to rely on familiar systems and proven approaches to getting the job done. However, the transit industry is evolving rapidly, and staying open minded about emerging technologies is becoming less of a luxury and more of a necessity. For rural providers, this mindset can unlock new opportunities to improve service, increase efficiency, and better connect communities that depend on them.



WHY OPENNESS TO TECHNOLOGY MATTERS

At its core, public transit is about access—access to jobs, healthcare, education, and community life. Emerging technologies are reshaping how that access is delivered. Tools like on-demand scheduling software, real-time vehicle tracking, mobile payment systems, and data analytics platforms are no longer reserved for large urban systems. Many are scalable and increasingly adaptable to rural contexts.

Being open to these innovations allows agencies to rethink traditional service models. For example, fixed routes with low ridership may be supplemented, or even replaced, by demand-responsive systems that better match how rural residents actually travel. Similarly, real-time tracking can reduce uncertainty for riders, which is especially important in areas where missing a ride may mean missing a critical appointment.

OVERCOMING COMMON BARRIERS

Despite the benefits, many rural transit agencies face legitimate barriers to adopting new technologies. Budget constraints, limited staff capacity, and concerns about training or maintenance can all slow progress. Additionally, there may be hesitation rooted in uncertainty; what if the investment doesn't pay off, or the technology becomes obsolete quickly? These concerns are valid, but they don't have to prevent progress. Instead, they highlight the need for thoughtful approaches to innovation.

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS FOR RESOURCE-LIMITED AGENCIES

- **Start Small and Scale Strategically**
Agencies don't need to adopt a full suite of technologies at once. Pilot projects allow for testing on a smaller scale, reducing risk while building internal knowledge. For example, implementing basic scheduling software for a subset of routes can demonstrate value before expanding system-wide.

- **Leverage Partnerships**
Collaboration can significantly reduce costs and increase capacity. Partnering with neighboring transit agencies, regional planning organizations, or universities can provide access to shared tools, technical expertise, and even grant opportunities. Vendors may also offer pilot programs or reduced pricing for smaller agencies willing to test new solutions.
- **Pursue Grant Funding and Technical Assistance**
Federal and state programs often prioritize innovation, especially in underserved areas. Agencies should actively seek grants that support technology adoption, as well as technical assistance programs that help with implementation and training. These resources can offset upfront costs and provide guidance throughout the process. The Kansas Infrastructure Hub is designed to help develop partnerships and seek grant funds for free. The Hub has designated a technical assistance provider to each region around Kansas to help find and coach you through grant applications where you have the best opportunities. You can learn more at <https://www.kshub.gov/about-the-hub/about-us>.
- **Invest in Staff Training**
Technology is only as effective as the people using it. Ensuring staff understand the benefits and feeling confident using new tools is critical. Training doesn't have to be complex. Peer learning, webinars, and vendor support can all play a role.
- **Focus on High-Impact, Low-Cost Solutions**
Not all technology investments require significant funding. Simple tools like cloud-based scheduling platforms, GPS-enabled tablets, or communication apps can deliver meaningful improvements without major capital expense and some tools are offered for free by some organizations such as National RTAP. Prioritizing solutions that address specific pain points can yield immediate returns.
- **Embrace Flexibility and Continuous Learning**
Technology adoption is not a one-time event. Agencies should view it as an ongoing process, remaining open to feedback and willing to adapt. What works today may evolve tomorrow, and maintaining flexibility ensures long-term success.

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CONCLUSION

For rural transit agencies, being open-minded about emerging technology is not about chasing trends. It's about meeting the evolving needs of the communities they serve. While challenges exist, they are not insurmountable. With a strategic approach, even small agencies can harness innovation to deliver more responsive, efficient, and impactful service.

Ultimately, the goal remains the same: ensuring that people, regardless of where they live, have reliable access to the opportunities and services that support their quality of life.

FRAUD AND WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

By Megan Tester, Kansas RTAP

Fraudulent emails, calls, texts, and even physical mail are more common than ever. It is important to know the warning signs to watch for to make sure you or your agency isn't scammed.

When it comes to fraudulent emails, there are a few things to look out for:

- Do you know the sender? If it's an unknown name or email address, pause and double-check before opening any links or responding to the email.
- Does the email address seem fishy? If the email address has a lot of seemingly random numbers or letters or ends in an uncommon mail service, make sure the email is legitimate before opening any links or responding. Oftentimes, scam emails are sent by bots, so the email address will look very strange.
- What is the email requesting? Most businesses will never request your username, password, or other personal information over email. If the email is asking for these things, call the business to confirm they sent the request.

You can find more information regarding email scams on the Federal Trade Commission's website here:

<https://consumer.ftc.gov/articles/how-recognize-avoid-phishing-scams>

Fraudulent calls and texts have similar warning signs:

- Do you know the caller/texter? Again, if it's an unknown number, pause and double-check before answering any questions or opening any text links.

- Is the caller/texter asking for personal information? Often a scam caller or texter will claim to be from a government agency, a bank, or even a family member and will be asking for personal information. Never share personal information, such as your social security number, during an unexpected call or over text. Hang up, and call the agency or bank's confirmed number to check if it was them requesting the information. If someone is claiming to be a family member, hang up and try to contact the family member or another family member to confirm.

More information on call and text scams can be found on the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's website here:

<https://www.consumerfinance.gov/ask-cfpb/what-are-some-classic-warning-signs-of-possible-fraud-and-scams-en-2094/>

Fraudulent physical mail can be more complicated to identify. There are different types of mail fraud:

- Imposter Scams: scammers pretending to be a government agency, bank, or other financial institution
- Sweepstakes, Lotteries, and Prize Scams: scammers claim you're a winner and use your responding information to steal your money or identity
- Unsolicited Mail Scams: scammers send offers for low priced products and services; if you respond, these scams often lead to call or text scam tactics
- Mail Theft Scams: scammers steal your mail and then demand payment or information in order to get it back

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To avoid fraudulent mail and mail scams, don't respond to any unexpected mail without double-checking its legitimacy. If you suspect mail is fraudulent, do not hesitate to report it to the United States Postal Inspection Service (USPIS). You can report fraudulent mail, mail theft, and even scam emails and texts on their website here:

<https://www.uspis.gov/report>. If you've been a victim of a mail scam, the USPIS has resources and information located on their website here: <https://www.uspis.gov/victim-help-resources>.

Fraud, unfortunately, seems to be more and more common as the years pass and more ways of implementing scams become possible. However, it is possible to protect yourself by being careful and thoughtful about your emails, calls, texts, and mail. If you do fall victim to a fraudulent scam, do not be embarrassed. These scams are designed to trick you. Please don't hesitate to report any suspected fraud or any instance of fraud that happens to you. By doing so, you will be preventing the same scam from happening to other people.

ELEVATING THE QUALITY OF LIFE THROUGH RURAL TRANSPORTATION

By Anne Lowder, Kansas RTAP

Rural communities across the country face unique transportation challenges. Unlike urban areas with dense transit networks, sparse populations and vast distances often mean limited options for residents, particularly seniors, individuals with disabilities, and lower-income individuals. This disparity underscores the vital role of rural transit programs, not just as a means to an end, but as a critical lifeline that profoundly impacts riders' quality of life.

A recent thesis study by Tate Coleman, Microtransit Program Director for the TriTown Connector in Southern Berkshire County, MA, delves into this crucial topic. The study champions the use of rider travel diaries and surveys as powerful tools to evaluate how demand-response transit (DRT) programs genuinely enhance the lives of their riders, moving beyond traditional metrics like "riders per mile" to capture the more nuanced, yet deeply impactful, human experience.

BEYOND THE NUMBERS: DEFINING QUALITY OF LIFE IN RURAL TRANSIT

Coleman's research, using the TriTown Connector (TTC) as a case study, breaks down quality-of-life (QOL) into several key dimensions that rural transit directly influences:

- **Mobility & Independence:** For many rural residents, especially older adults, losing the ability to drive can lead to isolation and a decline in well-being. DRT services restore this independence, allowing seniors to maintain active social lives and access critical services.

- **Access to Essential Services:** Public transportation in rural areas provides vital connections to healthcare, education, employment, and shopping—services often taken for granted in more populated regions.
- **Social Networks & Community Involvement:** The ability to attend social events, community gatherings, or simply meet friends for lunch is fundamental to mental and emotional well-being. Rural transit fosters these connections, combating social exclusion.
- **Social Exclusion:** A lack of transportation can profoundly limit participation in society. By providing accessible rides, DRT programs help individuals access goods, services, and opportunities available to others, thereby integrating them more fully into their communities.
- **Unmet Travel Demand:** Without personal vehicles or reliable alternatives, many essential or desirable trips simply don't happen. Rural transit directly addresses this unmet demand, enabling preventative medical care, shopping, and recreational activities that would otherwise be foregone.

PUTTING IT TO THE TEST: TRAVEL DIARIES VS. SURVEYS

Coleman's study rigorously compared two primary data collection methods: in-depth travel diaries and broader rider surveys.

Travel Diaries: A Deeper Dive While time and resource-intensive, travel diaries provided a rich, granular view of individual travel patterns. Participants logged their trips over

a week, detailing purpose, mode, distance, and crucially, what they would have done if the TTC weren't available.

The TTC travel diary case study, though small with 12 participants (representing about 7% of monthly riders), yielded profound insights:

- **High Reliance:** Many participants, particularly seniors who didn't drive, used the TTC as their sole mode of transportation.
- **Filling a Void:** The TTC was frequently used for essential trips like work, medical appointments, and shopping. Strikingly, it was the only mode reported for social/recreational and senior lunch program trips, with 80% of recreational trips explicitly noted as "Wouldn't Happen without the TTC." This highlights the program's crucial role in fostering social connections and reducing isolation.
- **Similar Trip Characteristics:** Microtransit trips mirrored those taken with friends or family in terms of distance and duration, suggesting the TTC effectively substitutes for informal support networks.

Rider Surveys: Broader Perspectives The rider survey, with 59 responses from TTC riders (roughly one-third of monthly riders), offered a wider snapshot of perceptions and usage patterns. While less detailed than diaries, it provided valuable insights into mode shifts and program impact:

- **Significant Mode Shift:** Nearly half of survey respondents switched to the TTC as their primary transportation in 2023, largely migrating from reliance on rides from neighbors, friends, and family. This underscores a strong desire for independent transportation options.
- **Consistent Usage:** Over 50% of respondents reported riding the TTC at least weekly, consistent with the program's overall ridership data.
- **Positive Feedback:** Riders overwhelmingly viewed the TTC as a "vital resource" and "amazing service," echoing the travel diary's findings about critical unmet travel demand. Reliability (on-time performance) emerged as a top priority for improvement, directly linking to rider quality of life through punctual access to appointments and activities.

THE POWER OF A HYBRID APPROACH

Coleman's research concludes that travel diaries and surveys are highly complementary. While travel diaries offer unparalleled detail into individual experiences and the nuances of QOL impacts, surveys provide broader program-level insights and identify common priorities. For rural transit agencies with limited resources, a hybrid approach—combining a smaller, focused travel diary study with a more extensive rider survey and one-on-one interviews—can be a cost-effective way to robustly evaluate program impact.

This study not only provides a valuable template for assessing rural transit's impact on quality of life but also lays the groundwork for future research into quantifying the economic benefits of these programs. By demonstrating how investments in rural transit translate into tangible improvements in mobility, access to essential services, and community well-being, agencies can more effectively advocate for critical funding, ensuring these lifelines continue to connect and uplift their communities.

As transit agencies increasingly recognize that a truly effective service is one that enriches the lives of its riders, tools like detailed travel diaries and QOL-focused surveys become indispensable. They transform abstract ridership numbers into compelling narratives of independence, connection, and a higher quality of life for those who depend on transit the most.

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Risk Management for Rural Transit Systems



Risk management is the process of controlling the chance or possibility of financial loss. This National RTAP technical brief provides rural transit managers with the tools and strategies they need to understand and effectively manage risk to improve system safety and minimize potential loss.

Released 1999, Updated March 2026

The responsibilities of operating a rural transit system demand constant vigilance in managing dispatchers, schedules, vehicles, and drivers, and coordinating the entire operation. Boards of directors, budgets, and passengers also require attention. Seldom will the system function as smoothly as desired, and just when it looks like it might, a driver calls in sick. Or a vehicle breaks down. Or there are new regulations that impact the transit system.

As a result, concepts like risk management may be forgotten due to a lack of time. But it is important that transit managers find the time to consider this topic because learning about risk management can help the manager to run a safer and more efficient operation and can help make the transit system more fiscally sound.

Risk Management in Today's Operating Environment

Today's rural transit systems operate in an environment of increasing complexity, visibility, and exposure. Agencies face rising insurance costs, more detailed regulatory requirements, increased public scrutiny, workforce shortages, cybersecurity threats, and new risks associated with advanced technology and alternative-fuel vehicles.

In addition, expectations for safety management systems, data reporting, and accountability continue to grow. Even small systems now manage risks that were once associated only with much larger organizations. Incidents that were once local news can quickly become regional or statewide news.

In this environment, risk management must be proactive, systematic, and integrated into daily operations. It is no longer sufficient to respond to problems after they occur. Effective transit leaders work continuously to identify risks early, reduce the likelihood of loss, and limit the consequences when incidents do occur.

What is risk management?

Risk management is the process of controlling the chance or possibility of financial loss. It is a proactive course of action protecting the system's assets and income by identifying all the possible causes of accidents or losses, then taking deliberate, planned steps to either prevent or absorb the losses.

Transit systems, like other service providers, face risk every day, whether from employee injury, vehicle damage, cybersecurity incidents, or passenger liability. Sensible risk management starts by accepting that a system may eventually suffer an accidental loss, even if no one has slipped on that banana peel—yet.

Risk management means thinking strategically about the system, so that everything - from driver training to disposing of toxic materials to purchasing insurance - is done from the point of view of improving the system's safety and reducing its liability. It's a way of looking at the system from a new perspective—one that shows the big picture of how the system operates today, so one can reduce the risk of things going wrong tomorrow. Some people call it “structured common sense.” The goal is to exercise more control over the likelihood of losses and reduce the impact on the system.

What does a risk management program look like?

There is no one risk management program or approach that is right for every transit system. Each system needs to assess its own operations and then design a program that takes into account its own particular needs. Every system needs to protect its people, equipment, and facilities. Sometimes that means trying new approaches: new policies, programs, and/or procedures that promote safety. It also means finding the right and best insurance coverage to protect your transit system if accidents or losses do occur (and they will).

Some risk management activities that have proven effective for a variety of transit systems include:

- Developing system safety programs and policies
- Using new approaches for hiring and screening employees
- Providing onboarding and refresher driver training
- Conducting job performance reviews for employees
- Offering employee incentives for safe job performance
- Creating passenger safety messages
- Developing and implementing procedures for:
 - vehicle maintenance
 - reporting accidents
 - disposing of toxic waste
 - Using security systems to protect property
- Obtaining liability insurance for the board of directors
- Forming insurance pools
- Having a solid correction and action plan for policy violations
- Including a Safety Officer position in your organization, if possible, or consider contracting this function out

Each transit system needs to determine what will work for their system and what practices are most important and feasible for their system to implement.

How can risk management help rural transit systems?

Risk management can benefit transit systems in several ways:

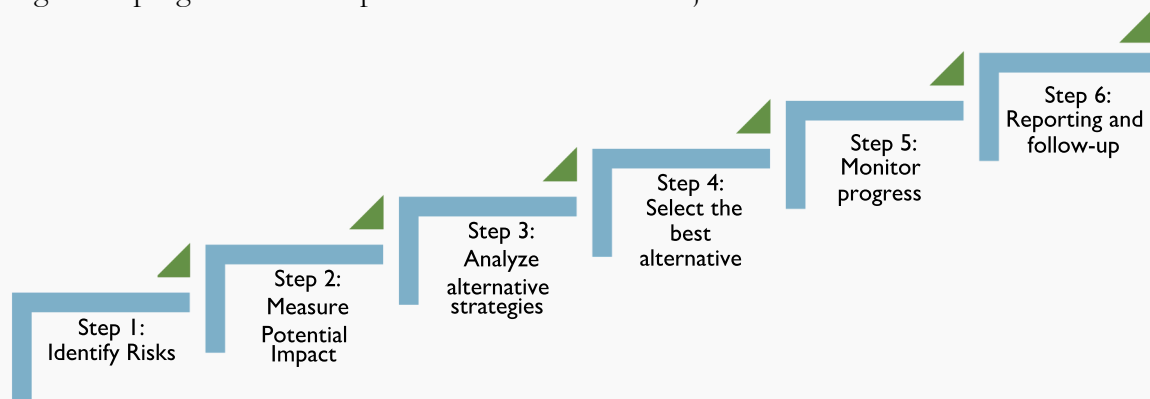
- **Prevent injuries and losses before they occur.** Imagine what it would mean for a transit system if an untrained driver with a previous history of traffic violations contributed to a fatal

accident. The effects would be devastating. But if a system includes background checks in the hiring process and trains drivers in safe practices, it can minimize or prevent needless losses.

- **Educate employees, board members, and passengers about safety and increase public confidence in the transit system.** A system that implements safety programs, screens its staff, and actively undertakes measures to avoid loss undoubtedly will gain public confidence.
- **Lower the cost of risk the system faces.** Identifying which risks to avoid or reduce, and which the system should finance, will lower overall costs. Uncertainty about risk or haphazard ways of dealing with risk can be extremely expensive and can prevent a system from performing its mission effectively. Systems with limited budgets will find that any process that ensures intelligent allocation of scarce funds is well worthwhile.
- **Qualify for insurance on more favorable terms.** Although even the best risk management program cannot guarantee that insurance coverage will be offered, its presence may enable a system to negotiate better policy terms when coverage is available. In addition, risk management can help a transit system reduce its losses and improve its claims history - always a plus when negotiating terms of insurance. Full awareness of the need to reduce losses can be a valuable tool in negotiations with an insurer.
- **Train staff.** Many companies offer risk management tools and include on-site or virtual training, as well as training supplies.

Six steps to risk management

All transit systems, regardless of size, can follow the same six-step process in developing a risk management program. Each step involves two or three major tasks.



Step 1 - Identify the risks.

Be aware of the different types of risk exposures the transit system may face. Maintain an inventory of actual system risks. Look for exposures affecting the system as a result of new contracts and agreements, new regulations and legislation, and any changes in operations.

Step 2 - Measure the potential impact of the system's risks.

Estimate the possible frequency and severity of losses resulting from the risks and hazards identified in Step 1. For each risk, ask how much the transit system could lose and how often it could happen. Do the same with each potential new risk.

Step 3 - Analyze alternative strategies for managing the risks.

Look carefully at the costs and benefits of different options for managing risk, including risk control, risk transfer, and risk retention. Take into account the system's financial and administrative capacity for handling risk.

Step 4 – Select the best alternative.

Select and implement the combination of techniques that best serve the system's needs and goals. Develop a plan for phasing in risk management practices that are not already in place.

Step 5 - Monitor your progress in reducing risks and losses.

Keep track of any losses the system incurs. Look carefully at insurance costs. Review how well the system safety program is working. If it is not effective, look at the reasons for any shortfalls and make changes where needed.

Step 6 - Reporting and follow-up.

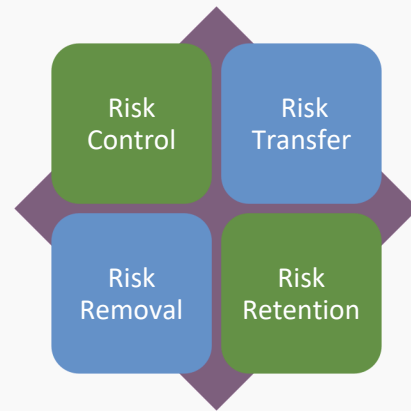
Whenever there is an accident, a complete and accurate report should be prepared to identify the causes and any corrections that were subsequently implemented.

It is important to note that the six steps are part of an ongoing process.

Strategies to manage risk

There are four basic risk management strategies. Most rural transit managers will use a combination of all four techniques in their risk management programs.

- **Risk control** involves avoiding particularly hazardous conditions or situations or taking special measures such as driver screening and training, preventive maintenance, and safety programs to reduce the frequency and severity of potential losses.
- **Risk transfer** means shifting the burden of financial responsibility for potential losses to a third party, such as an insurer. Contractual phrases such as hold-harmless clauses, which specify responsibility for liability, are another form of risk transfer.
- **Risk removal** eliminates those situations that involve a higher than acceptable level of potential risk.
- **Risk retention** refers to a transit system's decision to take financial responsibility for all or some portion of a potential loss. For instance, the deductible level set on vehicle collision insurance represents a conscious decision to retain a certain level of risk. A system also retains risks by failing to know its risks, or by failing to have adequate insurance. A good risk management program should help the system avoid these types of situations.



The Role of Leadership, Boards, and Organizational Culture

The transit manager's role in risk management is central, but responsibility does not rest with management alone. The board sets policy and risk tolerance, management implements programs and procedures, and employees carry out safe practices every day.

A strong safety and risk culture is one in which:

- Employees feel responsible for reporting hazards and near-misses
- Policies are applied consistently and fairly
- Training is continuous, not occasional
- Incidents are treated as learning opportunities, not just disciplinary events

Leaders set the tone through their priorities, their decisions, and what they choose to measure and reinforce.

Financial, Insurance, and Claims Stewardship

Insurance is only one component of risk management. Transit leaders must also focus on claims management, documentation quality, trend analysis, and long-term cost control.

Good stewardship includes:

- Working closely with insurers, pools, and brokers
- Reviewing claims regularly for patterns and root causes
- Ensuring accurate and timely incident reporting
- Understanding how deductibles, self-insured retentions, and coverage limits affect the agency's true risk exposure

Over time, disciplined claims and safety management can have a meaningful impact on insurability and cost stability.

Conclusion

The transit manager's role in risk management is central. Work closely with the board to identify goals and develop policies for managing risk in your system. It is also the manager's responsibility to see that the risk management program is implemented and to make sure that everyone understands and follows the risk control and safety procedures that have been established. Everybody in the system, from board members to passengers, must become involved in risk management to make it work.

Remember, risk management is a continual process that helps to build on past experience to ensure a safe and successful future for a rural transit system.

Acknowledgments

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Authority. The 2026 update was reviewed by Review Board member Mallory Meier, River Cities Public Transit.

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Further Information

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A program of the Federal Transit Administration administered by the
Neponset Valley Transportation Management Association



KANSAS RTAP TRAINING, TRAINING RESOURCES AND CONFERENCES

By Anne Lowder, Kansas RTAP

Below are training courses available from Kansas RTAP and other sources through October of this year. If you are interested in hosting a training class, I am still scheduling for 2026. Please contact Anne Lowder at alowder@ku.edu if you would like to host a training course at your agency. 2026 Kansas RTAP Trainings can be found at [KUTC - RTAP](#)

DEFENSIVE DRIVING AND EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

06/18 – Salina
06/25 – Hutchinson
07/16 – Salina
07/29 – Emporia
07/30 – Emporia
08/05 – Ellsworth
08/20 – Dodge City
08/27 – Hutchinson
10/15 – Salina
10/22 – Hutchinson
11/19 – Salina
12/17 - Hutchinson

DEFENSIVE DRIVING AND PASSENGER ASSISTANCE/ WHEELCHAIR SECUREMENT

05/15 – Parsons
05/20 – Manhattan
05/20 – Garden City
05/21 – Dodge City
05/21 – Salina
05/27 – Great Bend
05/28 – Hutchinson
05/28 – Ellsworth
06/03 – Wichita
06/11 – Wilson
06/25 – Emporia
07/01 – Lawrence
07/02 – Girard
07/09 – Wichita
07/15 – Hiawatha
07/24 – Hutchinson
08/20 – Salina
09/10 – Emporia
09/16 – Arkansas City
09/17 – Salina
09/17 – Wellington
09/24 – Hutchinson
10/07 – Emporia
10/14 – Garden City
10/15 – Dodge City
11/19 – Hutchinson
12/17 - Salina

RESOURCES FOR TRANSPORTATION AGENCIES

EasterSeals Project Action Consulting

<https://www.projectaction.com/>

Easterseals Project Action Consulting provides instruction in a variety of formats to meet your community's needs and budgets.

National RTAP eLearning Transit Resources

<https://www.nationalrtap.org/>

- Training Modules
- eLearning Courses
- Technology Tolls
- Webinars
- Toolkits
- Topic Guides
- Technical Briefs
- Spotlight Articles

National Center for Mobility Management (NCMM)

<https://nationalcenterformobilitymanagement.org/>

Promoting Customer-Centered Mobility strategies that advance good health, economic vitality, self-sufficiency, and community.

Federal Transit Association

[De-Escalation Training Resource Directory | FTA \(dot.gov\)](#)

De-Escalation Training Resource Directory

De-escalation training is one component of a multi-faceted Safety Management System (SMS) that can also include other measures such as mirrors, signage, security cameras, and working with law enforcement.

APTA (American Public Transportation Association) Workforce Summit

[Home - American Public Transportation Association](#)

APTA is the only association in North America that represents all modes of public transportation, including bus, paratransit, light rail, commuter rail, subways, waterborne services, and intercity and high-speed passenger rail. More than 90 percent of the people using public transportation in the United States and Canada ride APTA member systems.

Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) Resources

- Legislative and Federal Policy priorities
- Crime and Human Trafficking Prevention
- Census Issues 2020 Urban Area Determinations
- CT Reader Regular Updates
- Training Calendar

National Center for Applied Technology

<https://n-catt.org/>

Providing small-urban, rural, and tribal transit agencies with practical resources for replicable technological solutions and innovations. The site shares case studies, research, technologies, and provides information on technologies that enable solutions that solve problems and enable goals to be reached.

U.S Department of Transportation

['Back to Basics' for Service Agents | US Department of Transportation](#)

The Office of Drug and Alcohol Policy and Compliance (ODAPC) is introducing a short series of reminders called "Back to Basics" for service agents (e.g., collectors, Medical Review Officers, etc).

National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (nadtc)

[National Aging and Disability Transportation Center \(nadtc.org\)](#)

Resources that include Driver Training Videos and Transportation Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA initiative).

WEBINARS AND CONFERENCES

Spring Into New National RTAP Resources Webinar

June 2, 2026

[Webinar Registration - Zoom](#)

National RTAP Tribal and Rural Transit Mini-Conference

June 29 – July 1, 2026

Window Rock, AZ

[Window Rock Tribal Transit Mini-Conference | National RTAP | Window Rock, AZ](#)

USAgging 51st Annual Conference and Tradeshow

July 18 – 21, 2026

San Diego, CA

[USAgging Conference](#)

NADO 2026 National Regional Transportation Conference

July 20-22, 2026

Atlanta, GA

[2026 National Regional Transportation Conference - NADO](#)

National RTAP State RTAP Manager Peer Roundtable
Webinar
July 21, 2026
[Meeting Registration - Zoom](#)

APTA Sustainability/Operations Planning and Scheduling
Workshop
August 9 -12, 2026
St. Louis, MO
[Sustainability/Operations Planning and Scheduling
Workshop - APTA](#)

Kansas Public Transit Association Annual Meeting and
Expo
Sustaining Rural Transit in Kansas
August 10 -12, 2026
Hutchinson, Kansas

NEMTAC Transform Annual Industry Conference
August 16-19, 2026
Orlando, FL
[Events - NEMTAC](#)

APTA 2026 TRANSform and Expo
October 4-7, 2026
Chicago, IL
[APTA 2026 TRANSform & Expo - APTA](#)

South West Transit Association LPTA and LADOTD Public
Transit Conference
November 4 6, 2026
Shreveport, LA
[LPTA & LADOTD Public Transit Conference - Your
Regional Transit Association](#)

APTA Safety and Risk Management Seminar
December 6-9, 2026
Miami, FL
[Safety and Risk Management Seminar - APTA](#)

SHARE!

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KANSAS TRANSIT REPORTER

The Kansas Transit Reporter is an educational and technology transfer newsletter published quarterly by the University of Kansas Transportation Center (KUTC). The newsletter is free to rural and specialized transit providers and others with an interest in rural and specialized service.

The Kansas Transit Reporter is co-sponsored by the Federal Transit Administration under its Rural Transportation Assistance Program (rtap) and the Kansas Department of Transportation. The purposes of the RTAP program are to:

1) educate transit operators about the latest technologies in rural and specialized transit; 2) encourage their translation into practical application; and 3) to share information among operators.

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