

Community and Economic Development Impacts of Rural Public Transportation in Ohio

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INTRODUCTION:

Building Partnerships Helps Communities Offer Transportation Systems that Impact Rural Quality of Life

- Communities with no or limited access to public transportation still exist across rural Ohio. Only 11 percent of rural residents report having access to transportation near their home, compared to 83 percent of central cities in metropolitan areas.
- There are 28 urban and 33 rural transportation systems in Ohio.
- Many rural residents depend on public transportation for such amenities as jobs, schools, medical facilities visits, retail shopping and recreation.

Seeing the success of other regional transportation partnerships, The Ohio State University Extension Fayette and Noble County Offices researched and shared the need for more structured access to public transportation in their counties.

Types of Rural Transportation in Ohio

Rural public transportation can be operated in a few different modes.

- Fixed-route service - bus follows a schedule at designated passenger stops.
- Point deviated fixed-route service - bus follows a schedule and defined stops.
- Demand-response service - passengers pre-schedule trips in advance.

Goals:

- To enhance the access of people in rural areas to shopping, health care, employment, public services, education and recreation.
- To assist in the development, maintenance, improvement, and use of public transportation.
- To encourage and facilitate better use of all federal and state funds used to provide public transportation in rural areas through the coordination services.

Barriers to Rural Transportation:

- Funding,
- Low population numbers,
- Longer travel distances and
- Cultural challenges to adoption in rural areas include stoicism – personal pride or independence.

Funding for Transportation Services:

Funding for rural transportation programs includes:

- Federal, state, local, government funding,
- Private foundations,
- Faith-based organizations or
- Non-profit organizations.

Partnership Research Methods:

- Noble was identified by The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) as one of only 27 counties in the state without public transportation services.
- Online and interview research conducted by The Ohio State University Extension Community Development program in Noble County identified several successful rural regional transportation models. Anecdotally, providers indicated that adoption rates in rural areas may take longer.
- ODOT Regional Transportation Planning Organization's needs analysis and transportation opinion survey reports as lacking a coordinated transit plan or services.
- Southeast Area Transit offered a six-month pilot general ridership program and contracted for Medicaid non-emergency medical riders.
- Focused group meetings to determine employer's workforce needs.



Fayette County is located in Southwest Ohio with a population of 28,752



SEAT Transit Operations in Noble County



Noble County is located in Southeast Ohio (a designated Appalachian county) with a population of 14,500

PARTNERSHIP ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

NOBLE COUNTY:
Southeast Ohio Transit – Zanesville, Ohio
Ohio Mid-East Governments Association – Cambridge, Ohio
Noble County Board of Commissioners

FAYETTE COUNTY:
Community Action Commission of Fayette County
The Fayette County Transportation Program
Local employers

Potential Impacts in Community & Economic Development:

Transportation plays a critical role in shaping economies growth through:

- Job creation
- Trade facilitation and
- Economies of scale creation.

Transportation supports clusters by:

- Allowing more people to come closer together in higher density developments,
- Makes a larger pool of available employees, and
- Improves business and industry productivity and clusters of activities.

Transportation enhances supply chain efficiency.

- Makes it more timely for businesses to reach their suppliers and their customers.
- Lowers transportation and inventory carrying costs while increasing productivity and profitability.

Role of OSU Extension in Improving Rural Transportation:

- **Conveners** – Can identifies public issue (Need for Rural transportation), key stakeholders, gain support and cooperation in the educational process, and work to design and carry out a process for improvement.
- **Diplomats** – Make tactical moves between stakeholders and encourage them to work together through an educational process to resolve the public issue - Need for Rural transportation.
- **Networkers** – Identify and link people and resources to increase knowledge of rural transit issues and encourage them to participate in public decision making.

Results:

Noble County:

The OSU Extension, Community Development facilitated the partnership with Noble County Commissioners and Southeast Area Transit.

- The Southeast Area Transit (SEAT), agreed to launch a six-month Demand-response service pilot and to help determine service needs.
- The pilot program served residents of rural communities.
- Determined needs and opportunities for additional contract services for non-emergency transportation to Medicaid recipients.
- After six-month pilot, SEAT continues services in Noble County, at no cost to the county.

Fayette County:

The OSU Extension, Community Development assisted with:

- Partnership with Community Action Commission to transport workers to and from work to home.
- Expanded services to employers in Highland and Ross Counties and Franklin County for on-shift work.

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