

Northeast Indiana Regional Transportation Needs Assessment



Executive Summary

January 2024

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Acknowledgments

This project could not have been accomplished without the support of many local stakeholders who went beyond their normal call of duty to provide information and input into this assessment. CTN would like to express a sincere thank you to all of the organizations and agencies who contributed to the planning process and evaluation, including the following:

providers:

- Adams County Council on Aging
- Community Transportation Network (CTN)
- Fort Wayne Public Transportation Corporation (Citilink)
- DeKalb County Council on Aging
- Easterseals Arc
- Fellowship Missions
- Huntington County Council on Aging
- Kosciusko Area Bus Service (KABS)
- Kosciusko Senior Services
- LaGrange County Area Transit
- Living Well in Wabash County
- Noble County Council on Aging
- St. Vincent de Paul Society of Fort Wayne
- Steuben County Council on Aging
- Wells on Wheels
- Whitley County Council on Aging

supporting organizations:

- AARP
- AWS Foundation
- Community Foundation of DeKalb County
- Community Foundation of Greater Fort Wayne
- Community Foundation of Wabash County
- Community Foundation of Whitley County
- Community Research Institute, Purdue University Fort Wayne
- The Dekko Foundation
- Downard Development Strategies, LLC
- Fort Wayne Metals
- Fortify Life
- Healthier Moms & Babies
- Huntington County Community Foundation
- K21 Health Foundation
- Kosciusko County Community Foundation
- LaGrange County Council on Aging
- Michiana Area Council of Governments (MACOG)
- Northeastern Center
- Northeastern Indiana Regional Coordinating Council (NIRCC)
- Olive B. Cole Foundation
- Parkview Boys & Girls Club
- Parkview Noble Hospital
- Pathfinder Services
- Region 3-A
- St. Joseph Community Health Foundation
- The Arc Noble County Foundations
- The Arc of LaGrange County
- Turnstone

In 1998, an assessment was completed in Allen County, Indiana exploring the transportation gaps. The results were given to a group of nonprofit leaders who were tasked with changing the status quo. The result was Community Transportation Network.

Twenty-five years later, CTN's Board of Directors commissioned a similar assessment, but on a much larger scale. This report is the culmination of more than a year of study and evaluation of the eleven-county region we call northeast Indiana. It includes breakout data for each of the eleven counties and nine recommendations presented by RLS & Associates, the consultants hired to evaluate our region.

To be completely honest, for those of us working in transportation, the data isn't a surprise. We know the need for affordable and reliable transportation is critical. We know the need for inter-county transit continues to grow. And we know that transportation is one of the greatest barriers to healthy independent living for thousands of seniors and people with disabilities. But now you know as well.

The data presented, in many ways, mirrors national reports. But our response should be better.

For the most part, the recommendations presented by RLS & Associates are not targeted at any one community, county, or transportation provider. For more than twenty years, our region has worked together on economic development deals and advocacy efforts at the Indiana State House. This report indicates the transportation community is ripe for collaboration as well.

CTN is not a public transportation provider, we fill in the gaps when public transportation is overextended or unavailable. It is not our intention to replace or preclude any other provider from doing what they do best. It is our goal, however, to convene parties across the region to continue the discussion started in 2023 and ask the question "what's next?"

We've been incredibly grateful for the work of our partners and the support of our funders. This could not have been accomplished without them. And it will take all of us to solve these challenges.


Justin Clupper
Executive Director, CTN


Jared Helge
Board Chair, CTN

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Community Foundation of Dekalb County • Community Foundation of Greater Fort Wayne • Huntington County Community Foundation • Kosciusko County Community Foundation • St. Joseph Community Health Foundation • Community Foundation of Wabash County • Community Foundation of Whitley County

Transportation Needs Assessment Overview

Community Transportation Network (CTN) partnered with multiple organizations to initiate an in-depth transportation needs assessment in the eleven-county region that includes Allen, Adams, DeKalb, Huntington, Kosciusko, LaGrange, Noble, Steuben, Wabash, Wells, and Whitley Counties. The partnering organizations, through their daily work, understood the importance of access to transportation, and recognized that there are unmet transportation needs throughout Northeast Indiana. They initiated the assessment to clarify the gaps that exist between those who need transportation and the available services, and to design strategies to remove those gaps and barriers.

Fort Wayne and each county, except for rural Allen County, have public transportation and many are also served by agencies that transport passengers that meet eligibility requirements. CTN, for example, is a specialized transportation provider that serves individuals with disabilities and older adults in Allen County and other subscription rides outside of the county. Specialized and public transportation services provide an important — and often life-sustaining — link for anyone who needs a ride to appointments, groceries, work, school, recreation, and medical care.

More than 12 organizations in the region provide transportation to individuals with disabilities, older adults, dialysis and cancer patients, and the general public.



Assessment results indicate that the organizations providing transportation are highly valued and frequently used, but residents, employers, agencies, and healthcare providers continue to face barriers to local and regional transportation.

Each of the public and specialized transportation providers has a service area that is restricted to local jurisdictional boundaries (e.g. county lines or municipal limits). Many of the providers cross over the jurisdictional boundaries only on a limited basis such as for medical appointments which restricts a rider's access to employment, medical, wellness, and socialization resources to what is available within their county of residence. Transportation options for the rider are further limited by eligibility and/or capacity constraints of the local transportation service provider such as no service on weekends or at hours that support shift work, no same-day ride options for last minute or unexpected needs.

The needs assessment process focused on achieving a deeper understanding of the transportation challenges that people face. The assessment provides the conclusions from extensive community input and suggests strategies to address the identified needs through strategic partnerships, better inter-agency communication, and development of new services that may or may not require additional funding.

Planning Process and Findings

The needs assessment conclusions and recommendations are based on a combination of demographic research and input from local transportation partners and the general public. Local input was collected through multiple community engagement activities including 11 public meetings, numerous one-on-one interviews with local transportation providers and community partners, eight focus groups, and 4,223 public survey responses.

Community input indicated that the following aspects of transportation in the region are working well:

- Rural county transportation is available in most of the region.
- Medicaid transportation is available for eligible people and purposes.
- The public and agency drivers are positive and respectful to passengers.
- Verida provides a valuable service.
- Seniors are receiving meals and gaining socialization because of the transportation services.
- There is a strong network/partnership among human service and non-profit agencies.

4,223 people participated in the public survey.

16% were ages 65 or older.

24% have a disability or live with someone with a disability or other physical or cognitive/intellectual limitation that affects their ability to drive.

21% were pregnant or had been pregnant within the last 18 months.

21% had a legal violation that was keeping them from driving.

The identified strengths of the transportation network are commendable, but community feedback also indicated that there is room for improvement in several key health and wellness-related areas. The following transportation challenges were widely noted:

- Transportation across county lines is restricted for the general public and some specialized providers which leads to limitations on employment and housing opportunities, access to food and healthcare for individuals living in rural areas. Many of the regions' resources are located within or immediately surrounding Fort Wayne. However, rural transportation providers are often limited to serving only their local county and, therefore, cannot transport passengers across county or municipal lines where many of the region's top destinations are located.
- Allen County has no rural public transportation; only specialized transportation for eligible individuals is available in Allen County outside of Fort Wayne. As a result, transportation alternatives for the general public are scarce and often the biggest limiting factor when seeking housing, employment, and healthcare.
- Limited days and hours of operation for transportation providers, including no weekend or early/late service throughout most of the region, create barriers for access to employment, medical or wellness treatment, access to food, and socialization, for anyone who is normally or periodically without a personal vehicle or someone to drive them.
- Same-day transportation service is either not available or extremely limited in rural areas, making it difficult for people to find options when last minute appointments or vehicle breakdowns happen.
- Transportation providers have capacity constraints created by vehicle or staff shortages that prevent them from increasing service levels to meet demand.
- Individuals with low incomes who do not qualify for transportation assistance from human service agencies or through Medicaid or insurance benefits have the most limited options for local or regional mobility. This group would include people who are too young to qualify for senior transportation and also do not have transportation benefits through an agency.
- Transportation and childcare are among the biggest barriers to employment, health and wellness. Childcare is limited or not available in many of the rural communities, which creates a barrier to employment that is particularly significant for zero- or single-vehicle households.
- Inconsistent accessibility of roads and sidewalks create barriers for individuals in a mobility device and those who would walk or bike if they could safely do so.

The challenges noted above were frequently shared through community engagement activities which were conducted in each county. Participants

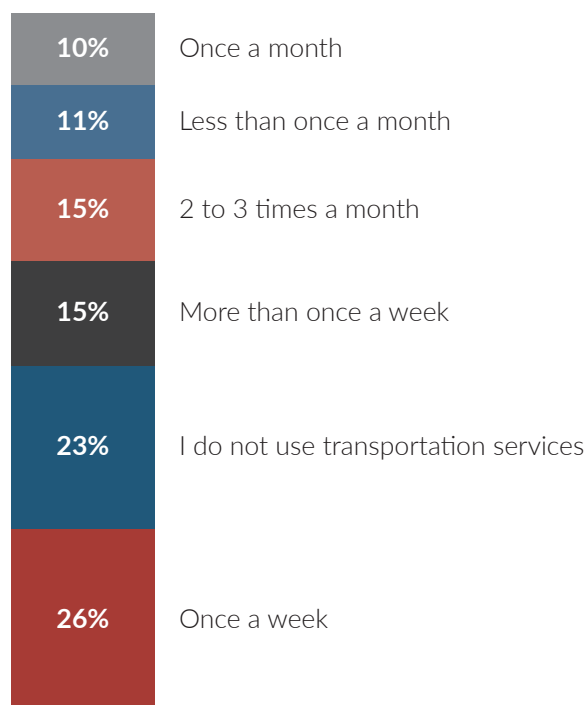


covered a full range of age groups and income levels as well as drivers and non-drivers. Seventy-four percent of survey respondents ride a transportation service and more than 25 percent of those people ride more than once a week. Conversely, about 26 percent of survey respondents do not use a transportation service.

Interestingly, the percentage of people who do not use public transit increased as the ages increased. For example, seven percent of respondents who were between ages 18 and 24 did not use transportation compared to 46 percent of people between ages 65 and 79. The trend begins to reverse for people age 80 and older. The trend of younger riders traveling more often than older riders is unusual in rural communities because older adults are more likely to consistently need alternatives to driving themselves due to age-related mobility limitations or a preference to not drive.

The higher rate of people of working age who use public transit could be an indication that people are riding public transit as a choice (over owning a vehicle) or that a significant number of local public transit riders rely on the service because they are unable to drive, do not have reliable access to a vehicle, or because transit is more affordable than owning a car. Also, the respondents who ride most frequently tend to be in the age group that is early in their professional career and may be working entry-level jobs. Approximately 51 percent of the respondents between ages 25 and 34 ride once a week. In all other age groups, 10 percent to 18 percent of respondents ride once a week. The following chart illustrates the responses by age group.

Figure 1. How often do you use public transit or community/Medicaid transportation services?
(n=3,824)



The primary reasons why many non-riders make other choices for their transportation are because they are not aware of how to use local transportation services, or the service is not available where they live or work, and therefore, is not an option. This finding is consistent with the input and data analysis results that transportation services that cross county lines would significantly improve access to work, medical appointments, or shopping.

Some people also choose not to ride because they have access to a vehicle or share a ride with a family member or friend. Public feedback indicates that people who are relying on a friend or family member may not have a ride when they need or want it because the family member/friend may not have enough flexibility in their schedule to fully meet the person's needs. This scenario is indicated as an obstacle by 20 percent of survey respondents.

Top Reasons for Not Riding Community Transportation Services

- 1. I prefer to drive my own vehicle.*
 - 2. Bus service is not available where I live or work.*
 - 3. I am not familiar with the local bus/transportation service.*
 - 4. My friends/family drive me where I need to go.*
-

Obstacles to Driving Yourself

1. Cost of gas for my car (25%)
2. I don't like driving at night (25%)
3. I have a disability or other physical/cognitive limitation that restricts driving (23%)
4. I don't have a driver's license/insurance (21%)
5. I do not own a car/truck (21%)
6. I don't like driving at any time (21%)
7. Unreliable car/truck; needs repairs (20%)
8. Friends/family members are not always available to drive me (20%)
9. Difficulty getting children to school, childcare, and other locations (18%)



While a significant number of survey participants state that they drive a vehicle, many of the drivers are not always able to use their vehicle. This survey result is consistent with the fact that a significant portion of the respondents with a vehicle were older adults who may be more likely to have mobility limitations that affect their ability to drive safely. During situations when the person with a vehicle cannot or should not drive, public transportation is an option when it is available to them.

Obstacles to Using Transportation Services

When asked why not use transportation services, participants indicated the following top for reasons:

1. No community/public transportation service available to me (29%)
2. Inconvenient bus schedules/routes (26%)
3. Cost of bus fare/transportation service (24%)
4. No available wheelchair accessible vehicle (24%)





Impact of Not Having Access to Transportation

Access to Food

Approximately 30 percent of the people who said that lack of access to transportation limits their ability to shop for food indicated that having friends or family more available to drive them or having lower-cost transportation services would help them get to where they need to go.



The number of respondents who indicated that their transportation options limit their ability to shop for food ranged from a low of 51 people in Adams County to a high of 119 in Allen County. Kosciusko County was a close second-highest with 119, and LaGrange County ranked third-highest with 107 people having limited access to food.

Access to Work

Allen and Kosciusko Counties had the highest number of respondents who indicated that lack of transportation limits their ability to work outside the home. LaGrange County ranked third highest. It is important to note that survey respondents of working age use

Individuals may be able to meet their top priority transportation needs for work, school, and employment with their current transportation resources, but they are not always able to shop for food at a grocery store, food bank, or farmer's market. Poor nutrition contributes to health and wellness challenges that affect other aspects of life.

transportation more frequently than older survey respondents which corresponds to the higher need for reliable daily transportation to support employment.

Access to Medical

Although access is an issue in all counties, Allen and Kosciusko Counties had the most respondents who indicated that they skip or do not schedule medical appointments or treatments due to lack of transportation.



Top Priorities for Drivers and Non-Drivers

People with a Car

While cheaper gas was the most common reason for not riding transit for respondents with their own car, only 36 percent of those with a car selected cheaper gas as a priority. The top priorities (in order) for people who said that they have their own car were:

1. Cheaper gas
2. Cheaper transportation services, including free or low-cost bus fare
3. Having a more reliable car/truck



All Other Respondents

Analysis of the results without respondents who indicated that they drive a car reveals the priorities in a slightly different order, and indicates that cost is a major decision factor/barrier in their transportation choices.

1. Cheaper transportation services, free or lower-cost bus fare
2. Cheaper gas
3. Friends or family more available to drive me
4. Having a more reliable car/truck

Other high-ranking priorities selected by more than 20 percent of respondents in this group were as follows (in order of importance):

5. More bus/public transportation routes
6. Community/public transportation services where I live
7. Same-day or 24-hour notice transportation options

The priority for cheaper transportation services indicates the potential for car drivers and non-drivers to use public transit when it is affordable.

The need for a more reliable car/truck indicates the potential need for affordable vehicle maintenance and parts options.

Top Priorities for Older Adults

There were also notable differences when analyzing the top priorities by the age of the respondent.

People Age 65 to 79

The top three options for people ages 65 to 79 were (in order):

1. Same-day or 24-hour notice for scheduled transportation services
2. Transportation services that cross county or state lines
3. Longer bus/public transportation hours on weekdays

People Ages 80 and Older

The top three options for people ages 80 or older were (in order):

1. Friends or family more available to drive me
2. Better walking or biking paths, including curb cuts and sidewalks
3. More vehicles to accommodate a wheelchair or mobility device
4. Longer bus/public transportation hours on weekdays



According to the survey results, older adults are more likely to need convenient transportation options and options that cross county or state lines than the overall group. And, after the age of 80, respondents were even more likely to emphasize the importance of having personalized service by a provider they recognize and a driver they know, similar to what can be provided by friends and family. They also recognized the importance of accessible walking paths and vehicles to accommodate mobility limitations and devices.



Recommended Solutions

The recommended solutions are designed to address the identified needs through a combination of enhancements and expansions to the existing transportation options. Recommendations identify incremental strategies that would address priority needs and improve a person's ability to access valuable community resources.

Some of the following recommendations will take more time, funding, and/or effort to fully implement than others and the recommendations are not necessarily interdependent upon one another. Any recommendation can be implemented as a stand-alone effort or in combination with other efforts.

Recommendation 1: Implement Rural Public Transportation in the Rural Areas of Allen County

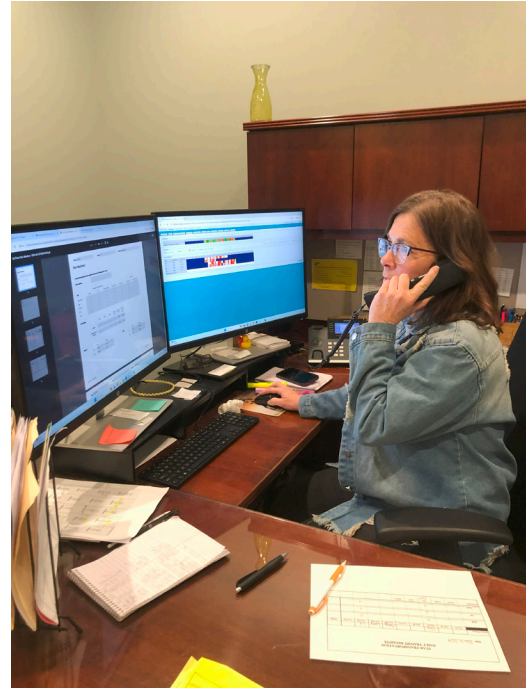
The expansion of general public, demand response transportation service into unserved neighborhoods and rural areas of Allen County that are beyond the Citilink service area will substantially increase transportation options for all residents, especially people with low incomes and individuals with disabilities. Currently, individuals who do not qualify for transportation by CTN and live outside of the Citilink fixed route or paratransit service area must rely on family and friends or drive themselves. Limited private rideshare transportation services like Uber/Lyft and taxis also may be available for some people. However, the price to ride may not be feasible on a day-to-day basis for many of the zero-vehicle and low-income households in the area. Private rideshare and taxi services either have no wheelchair-accessible vehicles or very few, which further limits the transportation options for individuals with disabilities who use a mobility device.

Recommendation 2. Kosciusko Area Bus Service (KABS) Fixed Route

Needs assessment activities indicated that the KABS service is valuable to the community and that it should continue. In addition to the existing demand response services, the demographic assessment, as well as qualitative data provided through the public engagement activities of this study, indicated a strong potential for a successful fixed route or deviated fixed route service in Warsaw. The route would operate on a fixed schedule and path so that passengers could ride without making a reservation for convenient and reliable service to work, grocery shopping, wellness programs, and social activities.

Recommendation 3. Regional Scheduling/ Dispatching Software Initiative

Improvements in regional transportation must be made, especially with access to Fort Wayne from the surrounding counties. It is recommended that the rural public transit systems implement software that will enable them to see each other's trips. The participating agencies will have access to the out-of-county trip requests received by each agency as well as the out-of-county trips that are scheduled. Systems other than the one that receives the request may accept the trip request when it fits within their schedule.



Recommendation 4. Assistance for Personal Vehicle Maintenance and Parts

Survey results indicated that drivers and transit riders prioritized reducing the cost of repairing and operating a personal vehicle. In a rural area, with limited transportation during evenings and weekends, a personal vehicle expands a person's ability to obtain and maintain employment, access medical appointments, shop, and attend social events. It is recommended that the key stakeholders initiate a program to assist working individuals with purchasing necessary parts to repair vehicles. The program would work in coordination with mechanics who volunteer time or offer reduced-price maintenance for the program participants. Before being accepted into the program, the lead agency should explore the options for using public transit. If the applicant has transportation needs that exceed the service provided by any local public transit service, the application will be evaluated.

As an additional aspect of the program, the lead agency will work with local businesses to purchase parts to modify vehicles for wheelchair accessibility and incorporate vehicle modification parts into the program.

Recommendation 5. Regional Carpool/Vanpool Program

Transportation partners work to expand the carpool/vanpool program to address transportation demand for employment trips during second and third-shift hours. The program must be developed in coordination with local employers and advertised to employees. Employers may choose to offer incentives to employees using the vanpool program.

Recommendation 6. Design a Regional Transportation Network

In May 2023, the Indiana Department of Transportation, Office of Transit (INDOT) announced their intention to begin the process of establishing a regional rural transportation model throughout Indiana. The purpose of the INDOT initiative is to remove intercounty boundaries and encourage sharing of trips to increase service capacity and performance. While this initiative is in its beginning stages, INDOT is offering voluntary participation now. Northeast Indiana has the opportunity to build on the relationships established in the Northeast Indiana Regional Transportation Assessment to develop a regional network. The partners should work to design a regional transportation network that will be beneficial and effective for the eleven-county region. The design of one or more regional networks in the eleven counties will allow the region to consider local conditions and, therefore, the most appropriate rural public transportation regional model(s) and structure(s) to present to the Indiana Department of Transportation.



Recommendation 7. Vehicle Sharing Program

Some areas within the eleven-county region do not have an adequate number of vehicles to be used for individual or group trips. The assessment revealed that there are vehicles available throughout the region that are used infrequently only on specific days, for special events, or only during certain times of day. These vehicles and others that are available throughout the region should be made available for lease or rental to other providers and human service agencies when not in use by the owner. This program would be established modeling vehicle lease and rental programs, whereby the lessee/renter is responsible for liability insurance and vehicle fuel. Costs

associated with the program administration and vehicle maintenance would be allocated in the lease or rental agreement rate.

This lease/rental concept could also be expanded to incorporate business-owned vehicles such as businesses that provide client or customer transportation services.

Recommendation 8. Increased Non-Emergency Medical Transportation Providers

Using a collaborative and coordinated regional effort, review and evaluate current Indiana Medicaid brokerage requirements. Convene meetings with interested transportation providers and brokers, including Verida, to negotiate contractual requirements including, but not limited to, insurance coverage levels, customer complaint driver suspensions, unit rate reimbursement, no-show reimbursement, and other requirements.

Recommendation 9. Increase Participation in Medicaid Family Member and Associate Transportation Provider Program

A family member or another person can drive Medicaid-eligible clients to medical appointments and receive gas mileage reimbursement for their service. This option is available in Indiana for traditional Medicaid members as well as members of the Healthy Indiana Plan (HIP), Hoosier Care Connect, and Hoosier Healthwise. In order to receive gas mileage reimbursement for their service, they must enroll in Indiana Medicaid by completing the Medicaid Family Member or Associate Transportation Services Form. This opportunity should be promoted throughout the region.





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