

TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH BOARD

**Practices in Rural Regional Mobility:  
Case Studies and Lessons Learned**

**Thursday, September 27, 2018  
2:00-3:30 PM ET**

# Purpose

Discuss research from the [National Cooperative Highway Research Program](#) (NCHRP)'s [Research Report 861](#): Best Practices in Rural Regional Mobility.

# Learning Objectives

At the end of this webinar, you will be able to:

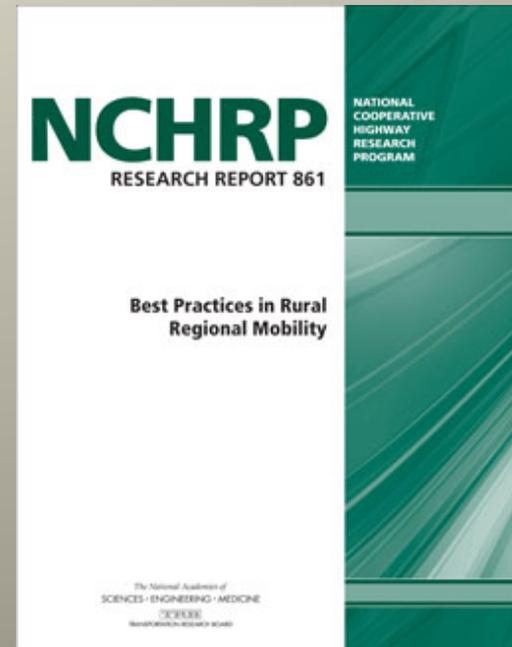
- Describe characteristics of rural regional services and recognize the presence of these characteristics in your own situations
- Apply the lessons learned in the case studies to your own environment and identify potential rural regional services that would meet needs in your service areas
- Utilize the checklist to develop a local process for assessing rural regional needs and potential service options



# TRB Webinar: *Best Practices in Rural Regional Mobility: Case Studies and Lessons Learned*

NCHRP Research Report 861

September 27, 2018  
2:00 PM to 3:30 PM





# *Rural Regional Defined*

Rural regional services are transportation services that fall in the middle ground between intercity bus service and rural public transportation. The concept was the topic of an NCHRP report [*NCHRP Research Report 861: Best Practices in Rural Regional Mobility*] that addressed the role of state transit program policies and regional planning agencies in the development of rural regional services. According to the report, these services improve mobility, employment, and education opportunities; provide access to healthcare and community services; and offer connectivity to the national transportation network.



# *Best Practices in Rural Regional Mobility: NCHRP Research Report 861*

- Definition of rural regional services
- Literature review and analysis of national data
- Survey of state DOT's
- Case studies
- Tool kit



# *The Need for Regional Services*

- Employment: Increasing demand for commuter transportation from rural areas to employment centers outside immediate service area
- Education: Regional community colleges or other training programs may be located in other counties
- Medical: In particular, more specialized providers, or those accepting Medicaid may be in other jurisdictions—typically in regional centers, or Veterans Administration medical facilities; closing of local rural hospitals
- Social and Recreational: Activities, family, sites (parks, theaters, etc.) may require non-local travel
- Necessary shopping: Closure of stores in rural areas



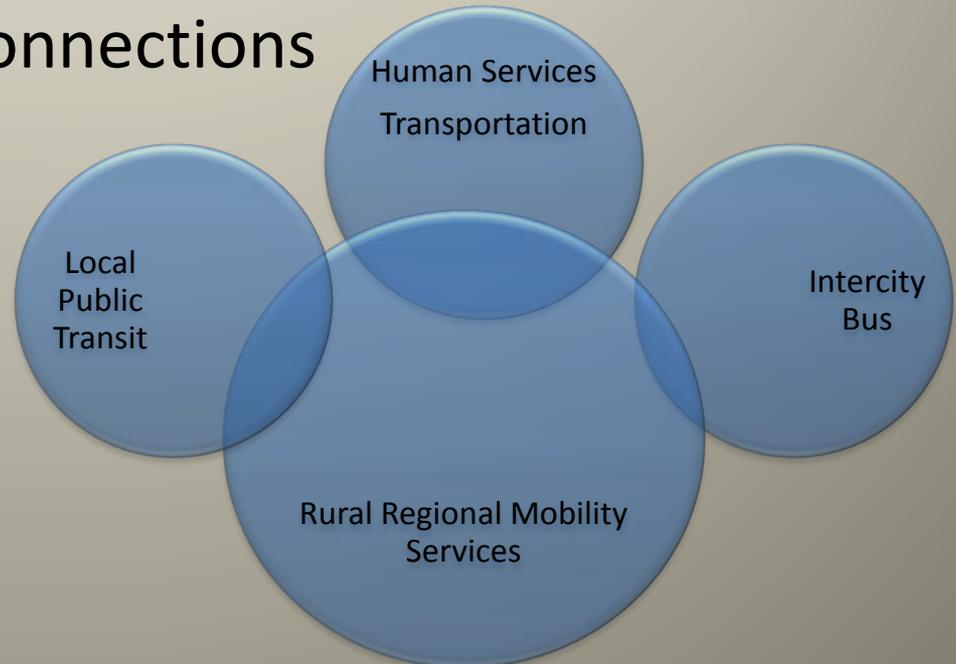
# *Not Local Services, and Not Intercity Services*

- BUT – Programs that are funding or providing local transit systems say they can't address this need.
- AND – Intercity bus services [provided by the market or funded by Section 5311(f)] don't really meet this need either.
- THEREFORE - There is a need to identify cases or examples where these needs have been addressed, and to develop tools to help fill this gap.



# *Typology of Transit Services to Include Rural Regional*

- Intercity services
- Regional commuter services
- Rural regional services
- Essential mobility connections
- Local transit



# *Characteristics of Rural Regional Services*



Transit services that are:

- Scheduled
- Open to the general public (though they may also carry agency clients)
- Operate on longer routes that cross county lines
- Connect Non-Urbanized Areas (under 50,000) to each other and to Urbanized Areas (over 50,000)
- Scheduled to permit a round-trip within a day, allowing for the user to spend several hours at a regional destination



# State Roles

- Top-down approach:
  - Legislation requiring regionalization
  - Direct state provision of regional services
  - Statewide planning
- Bottom-up approach:
  - Legislation allowing regionalization or removing barriers
  - Funding for regionalization feasibility studies
  - Technical assistance with implementation
  - Incentive funding (higher level of match, more state aid for buses, technology)
  - Mobility management funding for regions
- State focus is often on creating regional organizations

# *Rural Regional Case Studies*



- Variety of organizational structures
- Use of different funding sources
- In states with different approaches to regional services/organizations
- Serving multiple and varying needs

# Case Studies



- California

- Lake Transit Authority Routes 3, 4, and 7



- Colorado

- Colorado DOT Regional and Intercity Bus Plan/ Bustang
- South Central (Colorado)  
COG Service Walsenburg  
to Pueblo



Photo: Pueblo Chieftain

# Case Studies (2)



- Iowa
  - Iowa DOT Regional Structure
  - Region XII Council of Governments/Western Iowa Transit Dennison to Harlan Commuter Service
- Kansas
  - Kansas DOT T-Works and Regional Transit Business Model Implementation Plan
  - Flint Hills Area Transportation Agency, Inc. (Kansas) routes from Manhattan, Fort Riley, and Junction City and western Pottawatomie County

# Case Studies (3)



- Maine

- Maine Strategic Transit Plan
- ShuttleBus Zoom Intercity/Portland Service



- Michigan

- ALTRAN (Alger County Transit) Alger County to Marquette Route

# Case Studies (4)



- Minnesota
  - Minnesota DOT “Transit for our Future” Initiative
  - Central Community Transit (CCT) rural regional consolidation
- Oregon
  - Oregon DOT Transit Network Program
  - Northwest Oregon Connector Alliance five-system regional network

# Case Studies (5)



- Montana

- Utilize Section 5311(f) funding through Montana Department of Transportation
- Flathead Transit and North Central Montana Transit regional links



- New Mexico

- State enabling legislation, the Regional Transit District Act provides for regional public transit
- North Central Regional Transit District developed a regional network



# Case Studies (6)



- Vermont

- Vermont Agency of Transportation/CCTA and transit provider support for regional links
- Rt. 2 Commuter and Southeast Vermont Transportation Association/Green Mountain Community Network joint service Wilmington-Bennington



- Wisconsin

- Scenic Mississippi Regional Transit :  
three county regional system





# *Lessons Learned*

- State policies make a difference
- Organizational approaches vary
- Local champions required
- Multiple markets served
- Appropriate service design
- Connectivity and information
- Creative funding



# *State Policies Supporting Regional Services*

- Direct state operation or contracting
- State programs providing incentive or demonstration funding for regional services specifically
- State legislation allowing funding for regional districts
- Section 5311(f) program—identifying regional needs, use of funds for intercity also meeting regional needs



# *Organizational Approaches*

- Public transit authorities
- Joint powers agreements between public agencies
- Private non-profits
- Regional advisory committees with lead agency applicant
- Joint services by separate systems
- Tribal transit
- Direct state operation
- Regional planning agencies



# *Local Champions Required*

- Local champions required—both individuals and organizations
- Case studies included champions from:
  - Local coordination committees (developed for coordination plan process)
  - Regional planning agencies—rural or MPO
  - Mobility managers
  - State DOTs
  - Tribal transit
  - Economic development organizations
  - Transit providers who recognize regional needs



# *Combine Markets*

Most case study services were designed to serve multiple markets:

- Employment trips
- Medical trips
  - Medicaid
  - Dialysis
- Educational facilities
  - Community college/high schools
- Intercity/commuter bus connections
- Airports, rail stations
- Regional shopping



# *Appropriate Service Design*

- Design services to meet needs of intended market
  - Weekday daily service for employment
  - Schedules to allow workday, school trips
  - Mid-day services for human service, shopping, early return home
  - Timely intercity connections
- May require special schedules for shift employment, educational trips
- Include desirable amenities
  - Wi-Fi
  - Bicycle racks
  - Comfortable seating



# Connectivity

- Ensure connections with local transit at trip origins or destinations
  - Shared stops
  - Joint fares
  - Linked schedule information
- May need deviations at trip origin and destinations for last-mile/first-mile
- May need park and ride access
- Interline ticket agreements with intercity carrier
  - Makes service information available to national market for inbound trips
  - May add revenue for intercity connections



# *Information and Marketing*

- Importance of all types of service information
- GTFS allows for Google Transit and similar systems to show connectivity
- Web information
- Social media - Twitter feed with schedule/service updates
- Branding - unique route name or brand, for example “Bustang Outrider” or “Shuttle Bus Zoom”
- Interline ticketing with Greyhound and other members of National Bus Traffic Association (NBTA) puts information in their systems
- Include other transit connections in regional transit service information systems



# *Creative Funding*

- Section 5311 and Section 5311(f) intercity funding
  - In-kind match from unsubsidized carriers for local share
  - Potential use of toll credits by state for local share
- CMAQ funding
- State transit funds
  - Feasibility studies/technical assistance
  - Operating assistance
  - Capital
  - Technology
- Department of Energy funding (Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant)
- Economic Development Block Grant
- Medicaid
- Sponsorships—Business support



# *12 Steps in Developing Rural Regional Services: The Toolkit*

- Step 1: Identify Needs
- Step 2: Establish Planning Leadership
- Step 3: Goals/Vision - Public and Stakeholder Input
- Step 4: Identify Resources
- Step 5: Develop Alternatives
- Step 6: Assess Feasibility
- Step 7: Prioritize - Recommended Plan
- Step 8: Detailed Service Plan
- Step 9: Detailed Organizational Plan
- Step 10: Implementation Plan/Action Items
- Step 11: Initiate service
- Step 12: Evaluate and Fine Tune



# *Comments or Questions?*

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# Panelists Presentations

<http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/webinars/180927.pdf>

*After the webinar, you will receive a follow-up email containing a link to the recording*

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  - Create your account
  - Update your profile

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