

Rural Transit: Where It's Been, Where It's Going

**Presentation for the CSG East
Summit**

Jill Hough, Ph.D.,
Senior Transportation Planner



Photo credit: Jeremy Mattson, NDSU

Introduction & Purpose

Public transit exists in rural areas but operates differently than in cities.



It is essential for economic development, workforce mobility, healthcare, and community sustainability.

What Does Public Transit Look Like in Rural Areas?



Photo Credit: Amy Biggs, Snoqualmie Valley Transportation



It varies:

- Demand-response (Dial-a-Ride, Microtransit)
- Fixed and deviated routes
- Intercity bus services
- Vanpools and employer-based transit
- Volunteer driver programs

Number of Rural Transit Providers Nationwide

Source: Rural Transit Fact Book 2024,
National Transit Database, 2018-2022

| | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Type of Service Provided | | | | | |
| Fixed-Route | 468 | 469 | 464 | 455 | 446 |
| Demand-Response | 1,136 | 1,114 | 1,136 | 1,141 | 1,121 |
| Ferryboat | 9 | 12 | 11 | 13 | 11 |
| Commuter Bus | 72 | 59 | 58 | 56 | 56 |
| Vanpool | 22 | 17 | 18 | 16 | 16 |
| Other | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Total Rural General Public Transit | 1,324 | 1,301 | 1,263 | 1,292 | 1,259 |

CSG East U.S. States' Counties with Rural Transit Service in 2022

| State | Number of Rural Transit Agencies | Number of Counties in State | Number of Counties with service | % of Counties served |
|---------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| Connecticut | 3 | 8 | 5 | 63% |
| Delaware | 0 | 3 | 2 | 67% |
| Maine | 12 | 16 | 16 | 100% |
| Maryland | 5 | 24 | 17 | 71% |
| Massachusetts | 4 | 14 | 6 | 43% |
| New Hampshire | 5 | 10 | 7 | 70% |
| New Jersey | 4 | 21 | 15 | 71% |
| New York | 39 | 62 | 45 | 73% |
| Pennsylvania | 23 | 67 | 51 | 76% |
| Rhode Island | 0 | 5 | 2 | 40% |
| Vermont | 8 | 14 | 14 | 100% |
| Total | 103 | 244 | 180 | 74% |
| Total US | 1259 | 3091 | 2607 | 84% |

Why Does Rural Transit Matter?

- Workforce mobility (connects workers to jobs)
- Business support (brings customers, expands workforce reach)
- Healthcare access (reduces missed appointments)
- Reduces transportation costs for rural residents
- Increases quality of life and community livability.

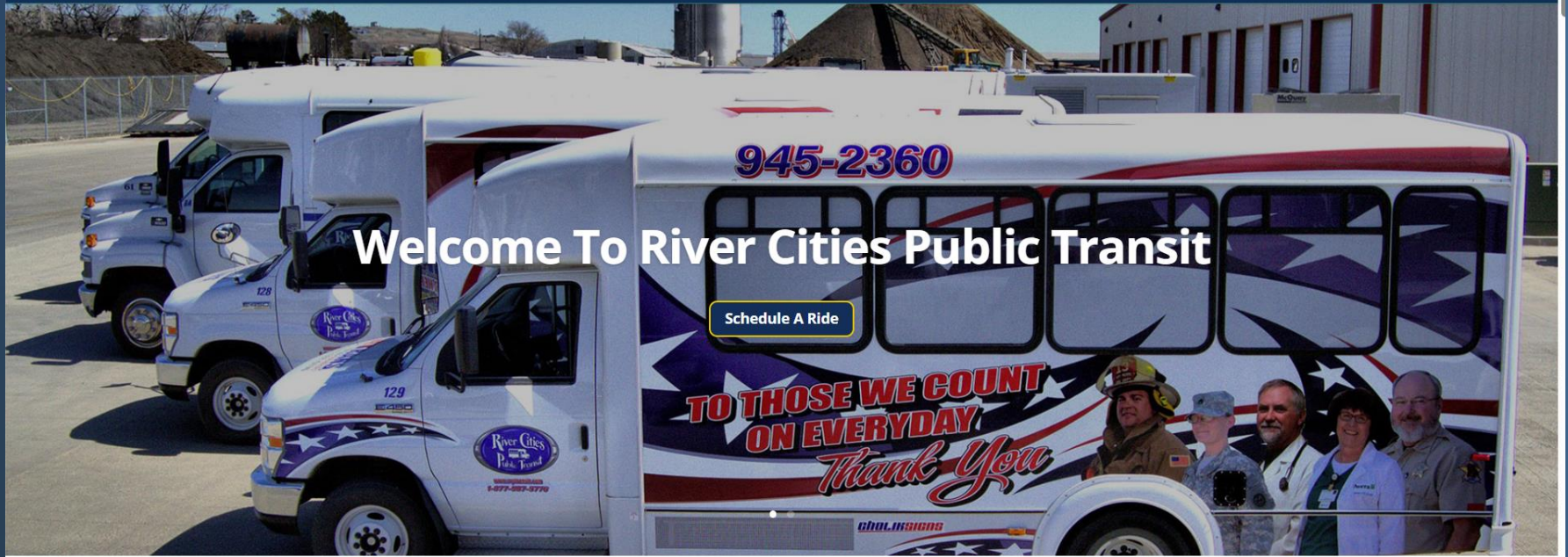


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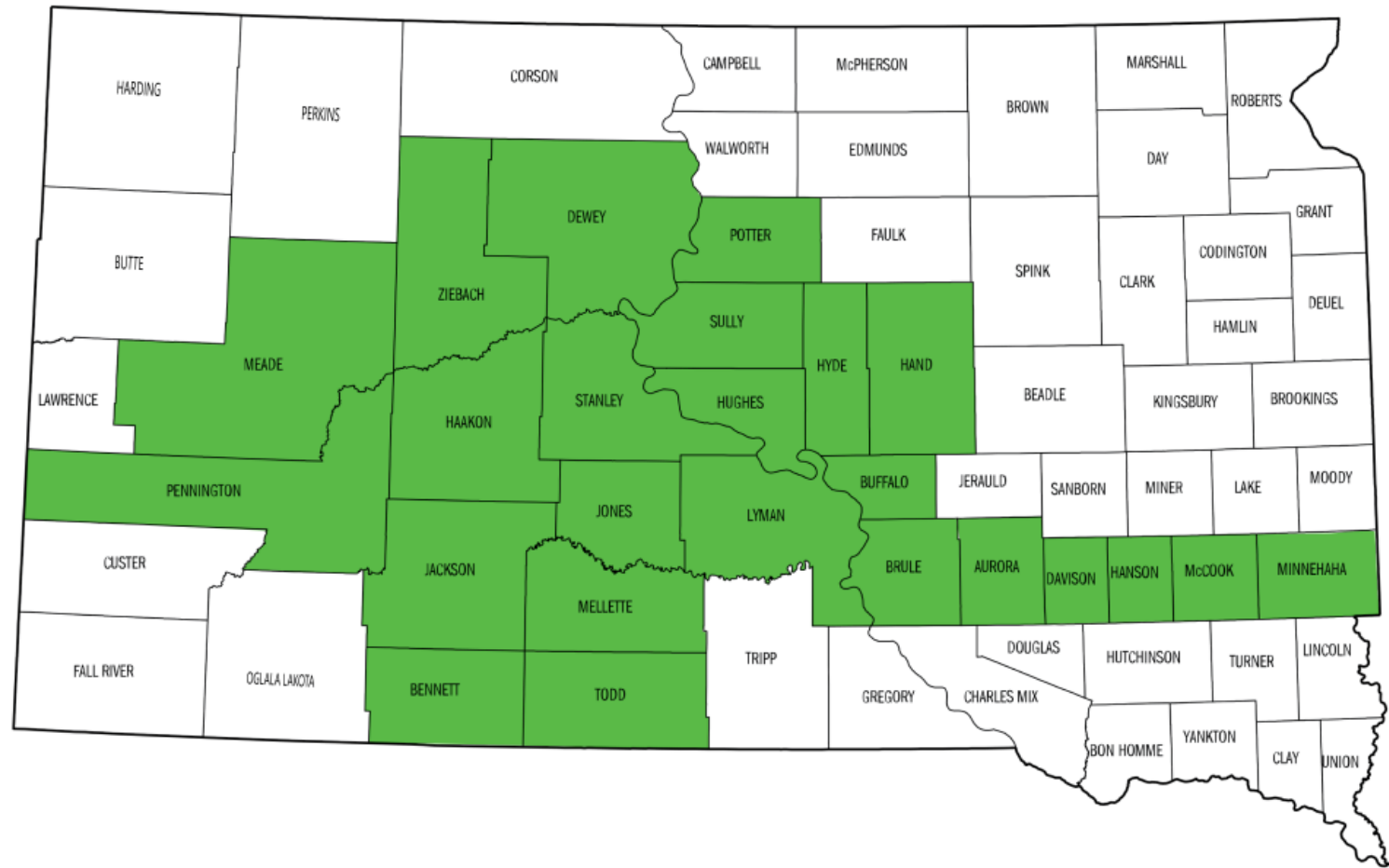
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River Cities Public Transit Service Area



Healthcare Access (reduces missed appointments)

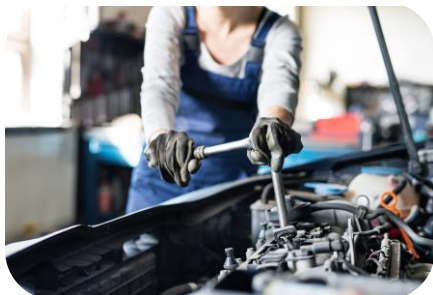
Demonstration Project in Pierre, SD

Total Hospital Savings – Project between RCPT and Avera St. Mary's

| | |
|-------------------------|-----------|
| Routine doctor visits | \$33,900 |
| Readmissions | \$91,200 |
| Inappropriate ER visits | \$748,296 |
| Total combined savings: | \$873,396 |



Economic Impact of Rural Transit



Creates jobs in transit sector



Enables local businesses to thrive



Supports tourism in rural regions



Reduces strain on emergency services (improves non-emergency medical transport)



For every \$1 invested in public transit, rural communities see a \$3-5 return

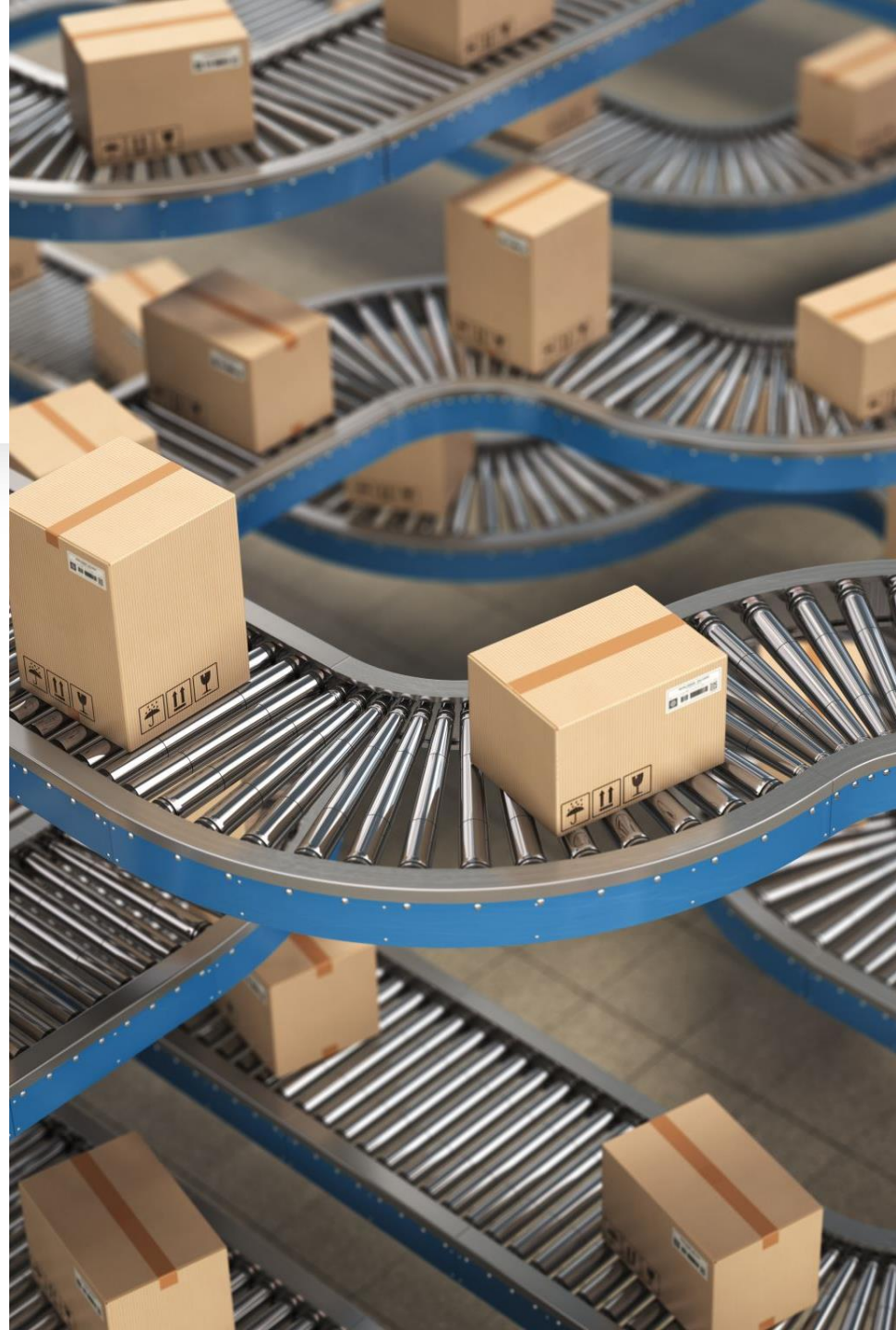


Challenges in Rural Transit Today

- Low population density
- Long distances to services
- High auto-dependence
- Limited funding/flexibility
- **Workforce shortages**
- **Gaps in service**

Where is Transit Going? Technology Plays a Role

- Improved Service Efficiency through Automation and Data (use of AI)
- Use of Apps (reserve rides online)
- Enhanced Access through Mobility-as-a-Service (MaaS)
- Expanded Service Coverage (with Autonomous Vehicles)
- Funding and Implementation Barriers



Contact Information

Jill Hough, Ph.D.,
Senior Transportation Planner

Email: jhough@kfgroup.com

Phone: 701-367-3248

