Regional Planning Affiliation

Passenger Transportation Plan

2024-2028

Serving the northeast Iowa counties of:
Allamakee, Clayton, Fayette, Howard, and Winneshiek

upper explorerland
regional planning commission

Regional Planning Affiliation 1 (RPA-1)
2024-2028 Passenger Transportation Plan

Submitted to:

Iowa Department of Transportation
800 Lincoln Way
Ames, Iowa 50010

July 27th, 2023

By:

Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission
325 Washington Street
Decorah, Iowa 52101

RPA-1 prepared this report with funding from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration, and in part through local matching funds of the RPA member governments. These contents are the responsibility of RPA-1. The U.S. Government and its agencies assume no liability for the contents of this report or for the use of its contents. RPA-1 approved this document on July 12th, 2023.

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Adoption Resolution

UPPER EXPLORERLAND TRANSPORTATION POLICY BOARD
REGIONAL PLANNING AFFILIATION 1 (RPA-1)
RESOLUTION 2023 - 02

RESOLUTION TO APPROVE
THE RPA-1 PASSENGER TRANSPORTATION PLAN (PTP) for
STATE FISCAL YEARS 2024-2028

WHEREAS, Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission (UERPC) has been designated as the Regional Planning Affiliation (RPA-1) for the counties of Allamakee, Clayton, Fayette, Howard, and Winneshiek for the purposes of transportation planning and programming; and

WHEREAS, the Upper Explorerland Transportation Policy Board has been established by resolution to serve as the governing body for RPA-1; and

WHEREAS, the Iowa Department of Transportation requires the RPA to develop a Passenger Transportation Plan that identifies the goals and objectives that will serve as guidance for prioritizing regional projects; and

WHEREAS, RPA-1 has worked with regional agencies, NEICAC/EARL Transit, governmental partners and transportation stakeholders to write a Passenger Transportation Plan that adheres to Iowa DOT Passenger Transportation Plan guidance; and

WHEREAS, the Upper Explorerland Transportation Policy Board, its committees, and the public have had an opportunity to review and comment on the plan, in accordance with the RPA-1 Public Participation Plan;

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that the Upper Explorerland RPA-1 Transportation Policy Board hereby approves the RPA-1 PTP, SFY 2024-2028.

Passed and adopted this 12th day of July, 2023

Signed: Dean Eastman Vice-Chair
Mark Vick, Chair
Upper Explorerland RPA-1 Transportation Policy Board

Attest: Aaron Detter
Aaron Detter, Transportation Planning Administrator
Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission/RPA-1

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Section 1: Introduction and Planning Process Discussion

What is the Passenger Transportation Plan?

Passenger Transportation Plans (PTP) are unique to Iowa, providing needs-based justification for passenger transportation projects and as well as incorporating federal requirements for coordinated planning.

A region's PTP provides the basis for efficient and effective passenger transportation, and for future operations, maintenance, and service development. The PTP attempts to identify where there may be duplication of services resulting in scheduling and funding inefficiencies, as well as potential gaps in services and unmet transportation needs for our region's residents and visitors. The plan includes a description of the region's existing conditions, identifies current passenger transportation challenges and coordination issues, anticipates potential future needs, and explores various strategies for addressing those challenges and needs.

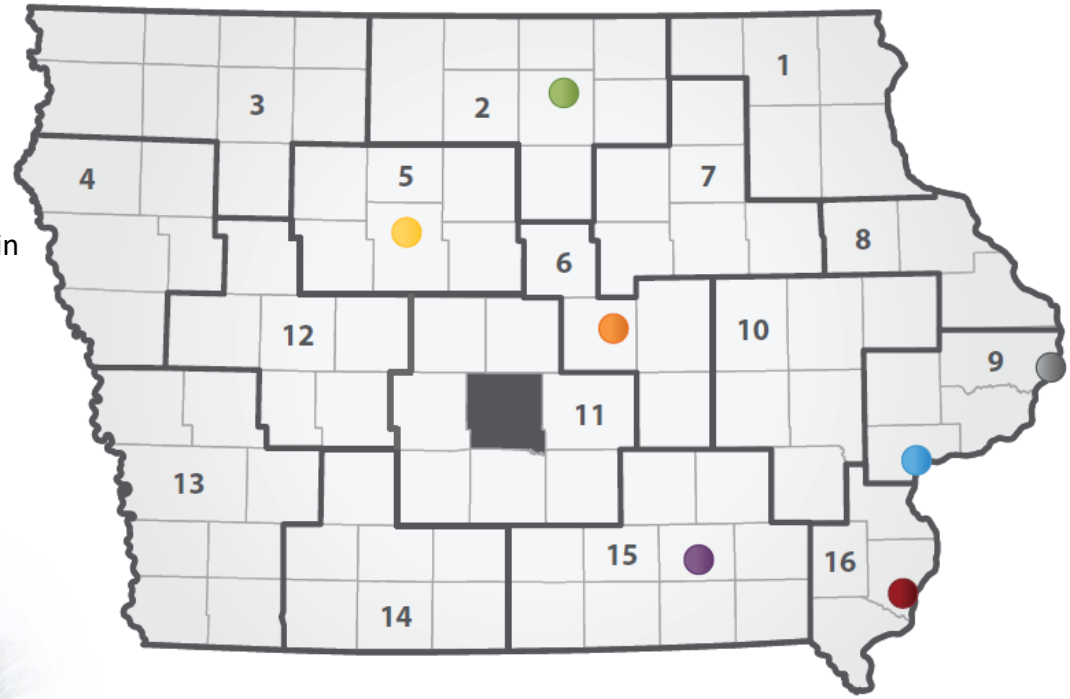
The RPA-1 PTP includes the five northeast Iowa counties of Allamakee, Clayton, Fayette, Howard, and Winneshiek, and includes passenger transportation projects that will appear in the Region's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and Transportation Planning Work Program (TPWP). The PTP covers the five-year period of state fiscal years (SFY) 2024-2028 and includes a brief overview of funding opportunities.

Iowa has nine Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and 18 Regional Planning Affiliations (RPAs), each of which is required by the Iowa Department of Transportation (IDOT) to develop a PTP to help promote joint, coordinated passenger transportation planning programs that further the development of the local and regional public transportation systems. There are 35 public transit systems in Iowa, plus a wide array of human service and private transportation providers.

As identified by IDOT, the goals of a PTP are to:

- Improve transportation services to Iowans.
- Increase passenger transportation coordination.
- Create awareness of unmet needs.
- Develop new working partnerships.
- Assist decision-makers, advocates, and consumers in understanding the range of transportation options available.
- Develop justification for future passenger transportation investments.
- Save dollars and eliminate overlapping of services.

Iowa's Rural Public Transit Systems



- Burlington Urban Service
- City of Fort Dodge
- Marshalltown Municipal Transit
- City of Mason City
- City of Muscatine
- Ottumwa Transit
- City of Clinton, Municipal Transit Administration

IOWA DOT
Public Transit Team

Region 1 - Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation
Region 2 - North Iowa Area Council of Governments
Region 3 - Regional Transit Authority
Region 4 - Siouxland Regional Transit System
Region 5 - MIDAS Council of Governments
Region 6 - Region Six Planning Commission
Region 7 - Iowa Northland Regional Council of Governments
Region 8 - Delaware, Dubuque, and Jackson County Regional Transit Authority
Region 9 - River Bend Transit
Region 10 - East Central Iowa Council of Governments
Region 11 - Heart of Iowa Regional Transit Agency
Region 12 - Region XII Council of Governments
Region 13 - Southwest Iowa Planning Council
Region 14 - Southern Iowa Trolley
Region 15 - 10-15 Regional Transit Agency
Region 16 - South East Iowa Regional Planning Commission

Region-Specific Priorities

The overarching purpose of RPA-1's PTP is to improve passenger transportation services in the northeast Iowa region.

Specific passenger transportation priorities in RPA-1 are:

- Hire, train, and retain adequate personnel—specifically drivers and mechanics.
- Make transit easier for all to use.
- Improve communication and coordination between all providers.
- Improve medical- and healthcare-related transportation options.
- Seek new and additional financing for public transit, to help both with retaining staff (higher pay) and with making rides more affordable by lowering rider fees.
- Continue to research and collaborate with regional stakeholders toward electrification of the transit fleet.

A detailed list of goals, priorities, and strategies for RPA-1 are included in Section 5, beginning on page 21.

Image credit: NEICAC

Transportation Advisory Group (TAG)

The Transportation Advisory Group (TAG) is made up of representatives from the following agencies. Other stakeholder groups are encouraged to provide input and will be invited to future TAG meetings when the opportunities arise.

NAME	TITLE	COUNTY/CITY/AGENCY
Spiff Slifka	Development Coordinator	Howard Co. Business and Tourism
Amy Chicos	Rehabilitation Counselor	Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services
Janna Diehl		Northeast Iowa Area Agency on Aging
Peggy Shea	Domestic Violence Advocate and Transitional Housing Coordinator	Helping Services for Youth and Families
Lori Egan	Transportation Director	NEICAC Public Transit
Jenna Mockler-Gjerde	Interim Director of Student Activities	Luther College
Lizzie Van Dyke	Coordinator of Student Life	Upper Iowa University
Aaron Detter	Senior Transportation Planner	UERPC

The purpose of the TAG is to provide the input and oversight from stakeholders and citizens in the five-county region for the development of the Passenger Transportation Plan. Many of the representatives on the TAG committee are from agencies that have transportation services or may need more information for their clients' transportation needs, whether they are colleges, employers, or service agencies.

TAG members meet at least twice a year to review the PTP and offer guidance and recommendations to the Transportation Policy Board as appropriate. The main responsibilities of the TAG are to determine the passenger transportation needs in RPA-1; determine how to meet and prioritize those needs; and to continually work towards implementation of the PTP.

PTP planning process

The PTP planning process took place during the winter of 2022 through the spring of 2023. RPA-1 staff began preliminary development, review, and research during late 2022. The TAG held its initial PTP development meeting, at which RPA-1 staff and TAG members discussed the current plan and any key goals or strategies that needed to be updated, in December of that year.

In early 2023, RPA-1 staff developed two targeted surveys—a needs assessment survey specifically for transportation service providers in the five-county region, and a community passenger transportation survey directed at all residents and visitors of the five-county region.

The needs assessment survey specifically for transportation service providers was directly distributed to groups including human services and care providers, schools, childcare providers, religious establishments, veterans service groups, and others. The survey results can be found in Appendix A, beginning on page 29.

The community passenger transportation survey was distributed and promoted through multiple means, including Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission (UERPC) newsletters; press releases and newspaper articles; and the UERPC website. In all cases, a direct link to the survey, as well as a scannable QR code to take people directly to the online survey were provided. An option to request a paper copy of the survey was included, and UERPC staff distributed, collected, and manually entered several paper surveys. The full results can be found in Appendix B, beginning on page 31.

Also during early 2023, Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation (NEICAC), led by its Transportation Director, reviewed and updated all sections of the PTP related directly to NEICAC Public Transit to ensure that information was accurate and up-to-date since the previous PTP was adopted.

The TAG met again in March of 2023 to review the draft PTP. A summary of the TAG meetings is available in Appendix C beginning on page 35. The draft PTP was also shared with RPA-1 Policy Board members for review, with feedback and

comments addressed before submission of the draft to the Iowa DOT for their initial review.

After the Iowa DOT returned its comments and recommendations, the feedback and comments were addressed and/or incorporated into a final public review draft.

The public review draft was posted on UERPC's website for public review on June 23rd, 2023, and a fifteen-day public comment period was held. The Policy Board conducted a public hearing for the PTP and adopted it unanimously via resolution at its July 12th, 2023 meeting. The final plan is available on UERPC's website and upon request.

Image credit: NEICAC

Section 2: Inventory and Area Profile

The purpose of public transportation in Regional Planning Affiliation 1 (RPA-1) is to provide an adequate level of mobility for the general public and transit-dependent residents of the region at the least possible cost. On April 1, 1979, Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation (NEICAC) assumed administrative oversight of the regional transit agency, located in Decorah, IA. The NEICAC transit program operates many programs that primarily serve low-income and elderly populations of the region, giving transit a unique operational setting.

In 2014 the NEICAC Public Transit program was re-branded as EARL Public Transit. EARL is an acronym that stands for **Easy**, **Affordable**, **Reliable**, and **Life-changing** — all benefits of using transit that the regional transit agency wishes to communicate to the public.

NEICAC is responsible for transit administration, operations, and coordinating the Region's transit services. They also qualify as the recipient of funds from the Iowa Department of Transportation (IDOT) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), to help support their capital and operating assistance needs. Since its inception, NEICAC Public Transit has provided transit services to the public, including persons who are elderly, disabled, refugee and childhood programs, and to human service providers and clientele.

NEICAC Public Transit runs demand-response service in all five counties of the region. These service routes transport people to a variety of destinations, including worksites, and return them to their residences. Transit rides are open to all persons, regardless of age, color, national origin, citizenship status, physical or mental disability, race, religion, creed, gender, sex, or sexual orientation. Individuals can access rides by simply contacting NEICAC Public Transit and informing them that they would like transportation.

NEICAC Public Transit Fleet Inventory and Utilization Analysis

NEICAC Public Transit has provided the following Fleet Utilization Analysis, including the name and assignments of its transit fleet:

Year/Body MFR/Model	Fleet ID#	Seats	Wheelchair Plus Seats	Assignment	Evening and/or Weekend Use
2009 /Ford/ElDorado	09185	18	18 Amb or 1+16 or 2+14	General Public	When Needed
2011/Ford/ElDorado	10187	18	18 Amb or 1+16 or 2+14	General Public	When Needed
2010/Dodge/Grand Caravan	11033	3	3 Amb or 1WC+2 Amb or 2WC+1 Amb	General Public	When Needed
2011/Ford/ElDorado	11184	18	18 Amb or 1+16 or 2+14	General Public	When Needed
2013/Dodge/Braun	12051	5	5 Amb or 1 WC+4 Amb or 1WC+2 amb	General Public	When Needed
2013/Dodge/Braun	12052	5	5 Amb or 1 WC+4 Amb or 1WC+2 amb	General Public	When Needed
2013/Dodge/Braun	12053	5	5 Amb or 1 WC+4 Amb or 1WC+2 amb	General Public	When Needed
2012/Ford/ElDorado	12186	18	18 Amb or 1+16 or 2+14	General Public	When Needed
2012/Ford/ElDorado	12187	18	18 Amb or 1+16 or 2+14	General Public	When Needed
2014/Ford/Amerivan	14054	5	5 Amb or 1 WC+4 Amb or 1WC+2 amb	General Public	When Needed
2014/Ford/Amerivan	14055	5	5 Amb or 1 WC+4 Amb or 1WC+2 amb	General Public	When Needed

Year/Body MFR/Model	Fleet ID#	Seats	Wheelchair Plus Seats	Assignment	Evening and/or Weekend Use
2014/Ford/Amerivan	14056	5	5 Amb or 1 WC+4 Amb or 1WC+2 amb	General Public	When Needed
2014/Ford/Amerivan	14057	5	5 Amb or 1 WC+4 Amb or 1WC+2 amb	General Public	When Needed
2014/Ford/Amerivan	14058	5	5 Amb or 1 WC+4 Amb or 1WC+2 amb	General Public	When Needed
2015/Ford/ElDorado	15181	18	18 Amb or 1+14 or 2+12 or 3+10	General Public	When Needed
2015/Ford/ElDorado	15182	18	18 Amb or 1+14 or 2+12 or 3+10	General Public	When Needed
2015/Ford/ElDorado	15183	18	18 Amb or 1+14 or 2+12 or 3+10	General Public	When Needed
2016/Ford/ElDorado	16181	18	18 Amb or 1+14 or 2+12 or 3+10	General Public	When Needed
2016/Ford/ElDorado	16182	18	18 Amb or 1+14 or 2+12 or 3+10	General Public	When Needed
2016/Ford/ElDorado	16183	18	18 Amb or 1+14 or 2+12 or 3+10	General Public	When Needed
2014/Dodge/ProMaster	17071	7	7 Amb or 1+3 or 2+1	General Public	When Needed
2017/Ford/Glaval	17182	18	18 Amb or 1+14 or 2+12 or 3+10-8	General Public	When Needed
2017/Ford/Glaval	17183	18	18 Amb or 1+14 or 2+12 or 3+10-8	General Public	When Needed
2017/Ford/Glaval	17184	18	18 Amb or 1+14 or 2+12 or 3+10-8	General Public	When Needed
2017/Ford/Glaval	17185	18	18 Amb or 1+14 or 2+12 or 3+10-8	General Public	When Needed
2017/Ford/Glaval	17186	18	18 Amb or 1+14 or 2+12 or 3+10-8	General Public	When Needed
2017/Ford/Glaval	17187	18	18 Amb or 1+14 or 2+12 or 3+10-8	General Public	When Needed

Year/Body MFR/Model	Fleet ID#	Seats	Wheelchair Plus Seats	Assignment	Evening and/or Weekend Use
2017/Ford/Glaval	17188	18	18 Amb or 1+14 or 2+12 or 3+10-8	General Public	When Needed
2017/Ford/Glaval	17189	18	18 Amb or 1+14 or 2+12 or 3+10-8	General Public	When Needed
2019/Ford/Glaval	18181	18	18 Amb or 1+14 or 2+12 or 3+10-8	General Public	When Needed
2019/Ford/Glaval	18182	18	18 Amb or 1+14 or 2+12 or 3+10-8	General Public	When Needed
2019/Ford/Glaval	18183	18	18 Amb or 1+14 or 2+12 or 3+10-8	General Public	When Needed
2019/Ford/Waldoch	19071	7	7 Amb or 1+5 or 2+3 or 3+1	General Public	When Needed
2019/Dodge/Caravan	19051	5	5 Amb or 1 WC+4 Amb or 1WC+2 amb	General Public	When Needed
2020/Ford/Glaval	20181	18	18 Amb or 1+14 or 2+ 12 or 3+10	General Public	When Needed
2020/Ford/Glaval	20182	18	18 Amb or 1+14 or 2+ 12 or 3+10	General Public	When Needed
2020/Ford/Glaval	20183	18	18 Amb or 1+14 or 2+ 12 or 3+10	General Public	When Needed
2020/Ford/Glaval	20184	18	18 Amb or 1+14 or 2+ 12 or 3+10	General Public	When Needed
2019/Dodge/Caravan	20055	5	5 Amb or 1 WC+4 Amb or 1WC+2 amb	General Public	When Needed
2020/Ford/Waldoch	20076	7	7 Amb or 1+5 or 2+3 or 3+1	General Public	When Needed
2020/Ford/Waldoch	20077	7	8 Amb or 1+5 or 2+3 or 3+1	General Public	When Needed
2021/Ford/Waldoch	21071	7	7 Amb or 1+5 or 2+3 or 3+1	General Public	When Needed
2021/Ford/Waldoch	21072	7	7 Amb or 1+5 or 2+3 or 3+1	General Public	When Needed
2021/Ford/Waldoch	21073	7	7 Amb or 1+5 or 2+3 or 3+1	General Public	When Needed

Inventory of Private Transportation Assets

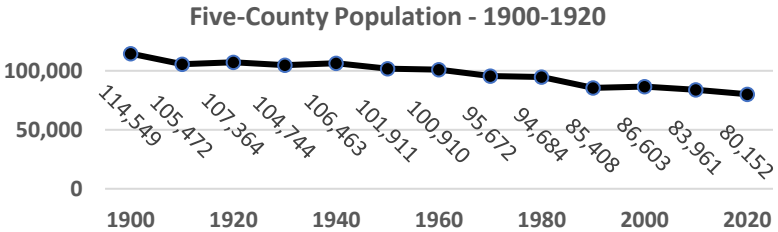
In addition to the transportation services provided by NEICAC Public Transit, there are seven known private transportation providers within the region. Only two of the seven—Hometown Taxi and Brü Hop microbrewery shuttle—have regular operating hours and are available on a demand-response basis to the general public. Brü Hop brewery shuttle has regular operating hours and is open to the general public but is a specialty provider of service to/from breweries in the Decorah area. Hometown Taxi of Decorah runs six days a week. If a person needs a ride in Decorah or the surrounding area, they simply contact the taxi service. The operators of Hometown Taxi have communication devices in their vehicles. There is one charter bus service in the RPA-1 region, Hawkeye Stages, based in Decorah.

- **Allamakee County Disabled Veterans Van** – Scheduled on an as-needed basis by Veterans Affairs Tues-Fri
    - Open to military veterans
- **Clayton County Disabled Veterans Van** – Scheduled on an as needed basis by Veterans Affairs
    - Open to military veterans
- **Hawkeye Stages** – Charter service; no regular hours of service
    - Based in Decorah
    - Open to the general public
- **Hometown Taxi** – 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mon-Fri, after hours by appointment
    - Open to the general public in Decorah and surrounding area
- **Grandview Care Center/Oelwein Health Care Center** – Scheduled on an as needed basis
    - Open to those age 65+ or disabled in Oelwein and surrounding area
    - Pick up within 15-mile radius; drop-off/destinations farther out as needed
- **Decorah Express** – Car service, scheduled on as-needed basis
    - Service within 200 miles of Decorah, including Minneapolis and Iowa City
    - Open to the general public (Not ADA accessible)
- **Brü Hop microbrewery shuttle** – 14-passenger van with wheelchair lift
    - Open to the general public on Friday and Saturday evenings/nights
    - Service to/from breweries in Decorah and surrounding area

Population

Not only has the population of the five-county region been slowly declining over the past several decades, as in many rural regions in the United States, but it is also an aging population. The table to the right illustrates some of the key demographic characteristics that help identify populations that would most benefit from affordable, accessible public transit and ride services: poverty status, elderly population, and disability status.

In all five counties, at least 20% of the population is age 65-plus; Howard County has the lowest percentage at 20.3%, while Clayton County has the highest percentage at 23.4%. There are also significant portions of the population living in poverty and living with disabilities. Clayton and Fayette Counties have notably high numbers of disabled residents, at 14.0% and 16.8%, respectively. Those two counties also have the highest poverty rates of the five counties at 12.2% each.



U.S. Census Bureau, decennial censuses, 1900-2020

	Population	Percent of Total
Allamakee County		
Total Population	14,068	
Below Poverty Level	1,449	10.5%
Age 65 and Older	3,160	22.5%
Disabled	1,664	12.0%
Clayton County		
Total Population	17,173	
Below Poverty Level	2,058	12.2%
Age 65 and Older	4,013	23.4%
Disabled	2,373	14.0%
Fayette County		
Total Population	19,582	
Below Poverty Level	2,318	12.2%
Age 65 and Older	4,107	21.0%
Disabled	3,234	16.8%
Howard County		
Total Population	9,456	
Below Poverty Level	763	8.2%
Age 65 and Older	1,922	20.3%
Disabled	908	9.8%
Winneshiek County		
Total Population	20,100	
Below Poverty Level	1,479	8.2%
Age 65 and Older	4,247	21.1%
Disabled	2,287	11.5%

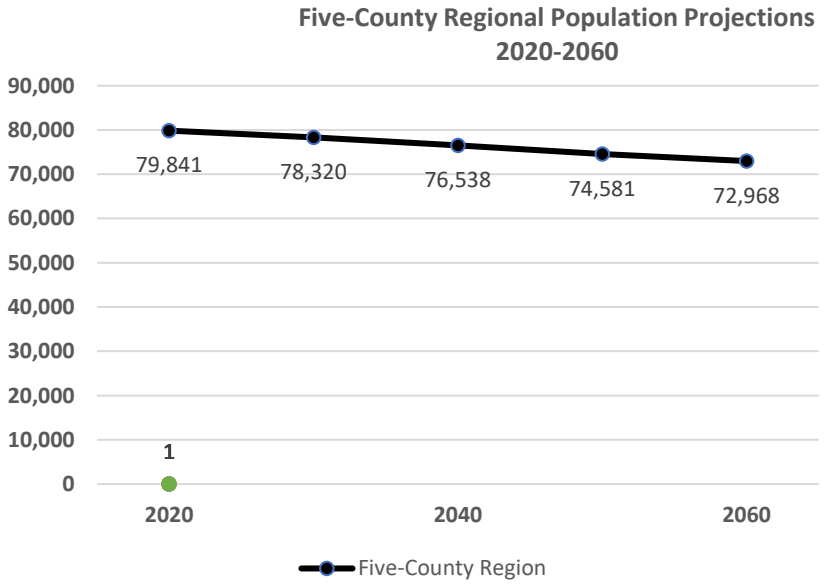
U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey 5-yr estimates

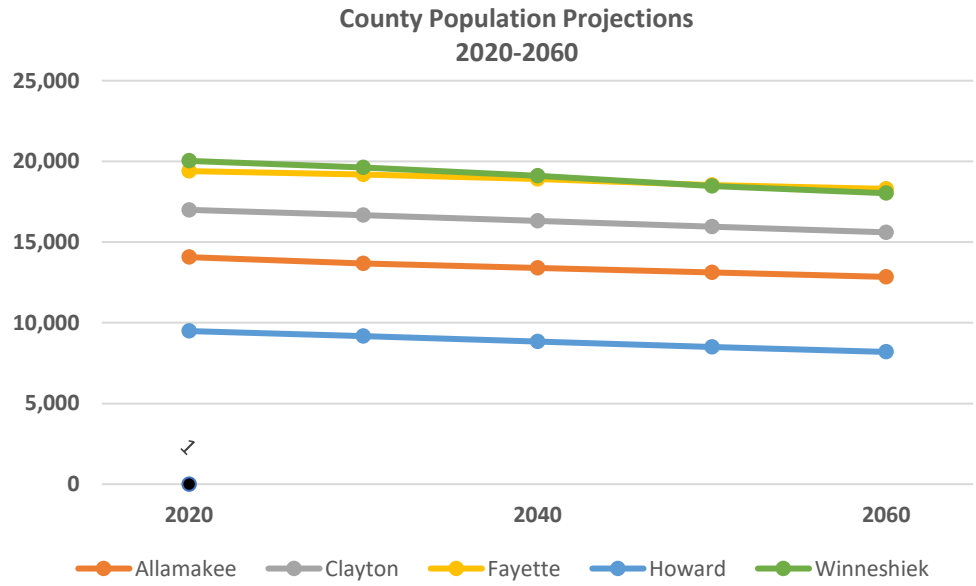
Services and Activity Centers

Like other rural regions of Iowa, services and activity centers are spread out across our area and generally concentrated in towns, particularly our larger towns of Decorah and Oelwein, but also in towns like Cresco, Elkader, Guttenberg, Waukon, and West Union. Major employers include healthcare centers, school districts, some light manufacturing, and our three institutions of higher education: Luther College, Upper Iowa University, and Northeast Iowa Community College.

Population Projections

The following demographic and economic projections are prepared by Woods & Poole Economics, Inc., an independent firm headquartered in Washington, DC, that specializes in long-term demographic data projections at the county level. The projection data are made available through the State Data Center at the State Library of Iowa.





Woods & Poole Economics, Inc.; State Data Center of Iowa, 2023

Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Population

NEICAC is committed to ensuring transportation services are available for Limited-English Populations. NEICAC Public Transit relies on technology applications allowing for the translation of information and speaking with customers requesting transportation services. If information is requested in a language other than English, NEICAC will provide the information in the requested language. NEICAC Public Transit also utilizes a telephone interpreter service which can assist with dozens of languages and can be accessed as needed. NEICAC Public Transit drivers all have access to an application on the mobile-data tablet to assist with interpretation/translation for LEP customers.

Image credit: NEICAC

Section 3: Passenger Transportation Coordination Issues

Transportation Service Provider Survey

During the winter of 2022-2023, Regional Planning Affiliation 1 (RPA-1) created and distributed a needs assessment survey specifically for transportation service providers in the five-county region. The survey was directly distributed to groups including human services and care providers, schools, childcare providers, religious establishments, veterans service groups, and others. The survey resulted in six responses—not a large number, but the responses provide insights into broader issues and consensus challenges. The survey results can be found in Appendix A, beginning on page 29.

Some of the key findings and takeaways include:

- 5 out of 6 respondents did not express any specific coordination challenges or said they did not experience any problems or difficulties coordinating transportation. The one challenge expressed was for residents of an assisted living facility being able to find transportation outside of a 30-minute radius.
- The largest common challenge that providers are facing is finding, training, and keeping employees—specifically drivers, but also mechanics. This has been expressed by multiple providers from sectors including charter buses, school transportation, and transit services.
- Transportation to critical-need community services, such as food pantries, is a challenge for some individuals.
- Goals expressed by respondents included continued good safety record, hiring and training more drivers, minimizing repair needs, and operating a profitable service.

Community Survey

During the winter of 2022-2023, RPA-1 created and distributed a community passenger transportation survey directed at all residents and visitors of the five-county region. The survey was distributed and promoted through multiple means, including Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission (UERPC) newsletters; press releases and newspaper articles; and the UERPC website. In all cases, a direct link to the survey, as well as a scannable QR code to take people directly to the online survey were provided. An option to request a paper copy of the survey was included, and UERPC staff distributed, collected, and manually entered several paper surveys. The survey generated some 75 responses. The full results can be found in Appendix B, beginning on page 31.

Some of the key findings and takeaways include:

- Two thirds of respondents live in or very near a town, while one third live in the country.
- Respondents frequently make trips farther than 50 miles from home, including 41% who do so about monthly, 32% who do so about weekly, and 6% who do so every day or nearly every day.
- Respondents travel outside of their immediate area or community even more frequently, with 41% doing so about weekly, and 27%—over one quarter—doing so every day or nearly every day.
- About 10% of respondents use transit in our region, with 3% using it about weekly and 1% using it every day or nearly every day.
- 42% of respondents have never used transit in our region but are interested in the service.
- About 48% of respondents have used various types of ride services in the RPA-1 region, including taxis, event

shuttles, rideshare services such as Uber and Lyft, as well as rides from family or friends.

- The top reasons respondents travel outside of their community or immediate area are recreational (85% of respondents), visiting family and friends (79%), medical appointments (70%), and shopping for necessities (70%). (Respondents could select multiple options.)
- The peak periods during which respondents travel are early morning through evening Monday through Friday and daytime on the weekends.
- 32% of respondents expressed a need for transit services (whether or not the need is met), with 77% wanting some form of call-ahead scheduled service and 50% wanting some form of fixed-route service. (Respondents could select multiple options.)
- 4% of respondents identified as experiencing a mental or physical condition that makes it difficult or impossible to get around on their own.
- Challenges frequently expressed by respondents in getting where they need to go safely and conveniently include: time-management challenges of families with young children; poor and unsafe walking conditions; difficulty finding medical-related transportation; lack of transportation options to nearby large cities such as Minneapolis, La Crosse, WI, Rochester, MN, Dubuque, Cedar Rapids, and Waterloo; and the challenges of travel that come with advancing age, including not driving at night, choosing not to drive, or not being able to drive.
- Many respondents cited affordability (too expensive) and reliability (pre-scheduled trips cancelled, service not available when needed, etc.) as challenges or barriers to using transit services.
- Multiple respondents identified as healthcare workers and spoke to the dire need for expanded transportation services for patients to access needed medical care.
- By and large, respondents appreciate and support the transit services that are available through NEICAC, even if they'd like to see improved availability and affordability.

NEICAC Public Transit services and engagement

Marketing for ridership

Although most residents of the region are aware of the public transit agency, many are unsure who can use the service, where it could take them, and how to arrange for a ride. Methods Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation (NEICAC) Public Transit has employed to communicate available services and programs include: updating brochures and distributing them to other community-based organizations, larger employers, tourism and economic development offices, and higher education schools in the region; yellow pages, newspaper, and magazine advertising; social media; website (www.neicac.org); and presentations at civic and community organizations.

Collaborations for support

Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation receives funding from counties and cities in the service area. These funds are distributed proportionately to the individuals/households served in each county. There are not

Image credit: NEICAC

any tax levies in any county or city to support public transportation services. The city of Decorah has maintained its commitment to support the intown services provided in Decorah, but this could change at any time and should not be considered part of the transit budget. The Depot, a Decorah faith-based organization, continues to financially support the public transportation services provided to disabled individuals in Decorah.

Outreach to elected officials and stakeholders

The education of elected officials and stakeholders is an ongoing process. UERPC continues to participate in the Six-County Meetings held five times a year. These meetings provide the opportunity to share issues and ideas for passenger transportation among RPA-1 county supervisors and engineers. In addition, UERPC continues to host regional legislative forums for the region. These forums allow for the education of state legislators regarding our area's transportation needs. In addition, an update from the NEICAC Public Transit director is a standing agenda item at RPA-1 Transportation Policy Board meetings.

Beyond local officials, service organizations often find that legislative decisions at the state or even federal level have unintended consequences for their clientele. The Transportation Advisory Group (TAG) serves the role of "ears to the ground" for Region 1 Public Transportation services to learn how legislative decisions impact people in our region. The input from this group is invaluable to the PTP in the determination of service needs and communicating this information to elected officials.

Transit improvements

NEICAC Public Transit continues to ensure the technology used to support its operations works to streamline processes and improve efficiency in the delivery of services.

NEICAC Public Transit will continue to evaluate the need to replace or upgrade the current maintenance facility as the push toward cleaner modes of transportation continues and resources are made available.

Previous and potential obstacles to priorities and strategies

An ongoing obstacle is to overcome the lack of understanding by the public concerning the "who, how, and what" of using public transit services. To address this issue, NEICAC Public Transit will develop and implement "Travel Training" information to share with stakeholders and users.

The establishment of employer commuter routes continues to be an ongoing challenge in northeast Iowa. There are several factors impacting this issue. Many employers have not placed

a high value on nor a willingness to subsidize the cost of commuter routes in this region of the state. Most employees are highly dependent on personal means of transportation. As a demand response transportation system, we have some limits to our flexibility in the provision of scheduled commuter routes.

To address this issue, NEICAC Public Transit will survey large employers in the service area to determine the interest or need for a commuter service. If there is a significant need for commuter services, conversations concerning the employer's ability to subsidize this service will be held.

In this new phase of national recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic, many employers continue to struggle to find employees. Public transit systems across the country are also struggling to employ transit drivers. There are several factors impacting this current struggle — the retirement of so many "Boomers," stagnant wages, fewer people looking for employment, just to name a few. These factors negatively impact the ability to consistently provide public transportation services and meet the needs of the public.

Future needs for transit

NEICAC Public Transit will need to revise/replace their maintenance shop to meet the needs of transitioning to low-no emission vehicles. Until this new build occurs there will likely be several improvements needed: a new HVAC system, paving the parking lot and addressing other TAM Facility Assessment items from 2022 facility audit.

NEICAC Public Transit is continually assessing the best composition of its fleet to serve northeast Iowa; there is currently an effort to right-size the fleet and consistently meet the required percentage of replacement vehicles available.

Section 4: Priorities and Strategies

The following priorities and strategies were identified based on review and feedback of the Transportation Advisory Group (TAG), public input from the community survey, input from various transportation service providers, and the RPA-1 Policy Board.

Priority 1: Hire, train, and retain adequate personnel—specifically drivers and mechanics.

Strategies:

- Utilize training resources through Iowa Workforce Development, Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Northeast Iowa Community College (NICC), and others.
- Explore opportunities to increased revenue for public transit to ensure competitive wages and benefits.
- Look for opportunities for outreach to specific groups, such as retired people, veterans, and younger prospective drivers.
- Explore creative marketing strategies to recruit drivers, including catchy messaging on the buses themselves.

Priority 2: Make transit easier for all to use.

Strategies:

- Explore opportunities to increase revenue for public transit to ensure low- or no-cost fares so that affordability is not a barrier for riders.
- Explore and research the possibility of a regional tax levy or other local public funding sources to support low- or no-cost public transit services.
- Look for opportunities, including aforementioned methods for raising revenue, to expand the hours of service for public transit to include more evening and weekend availability.
- Continue to promote public transit as being open to everyone, but look for creative or innovative ways to

increase awareness of the service and its being open to everyone.

- Explore potential for summer recreation, school-related, and activity-related rides geared towards youth.

Priority 3: Improve communication and coordination between all providers.

Strategies:

- Look for best practices for improving communication and coordination with Medicare transportation brokers.
- Plan to hold another transportation summit/networking event, or even an annual event, like what was held in northeast Iowa in 2017.
- Continue to look into technology that can improve communication and coordination efforts.
- Look for opportunities to bring back a "Mobility Manager" position, or similar, that is solely focused on outreach, promotion, education, engagement, social media, etc.

Priority 4: Improve medical- and healthcare-related transportation options.

Strategies:

- Look for opportunities to partner with or engage community groups and organizations who may be able to take a role in helping people get to their medical appointments.
- Look for opportunities to increase hours of operations, to extend further into the evenings during the week, as well as on the weekends—potentially starting with a focus on in-town routes.
- Explore methods for increasing funding/revenue, as has been discussed in other strategies, specifically for lowering rider fees—potentially starting with a focus on older riders, riders with disabilities, etc. This could involve partnering with cities, counties, or community organizations who would be willing to subsidize those trips.

Priority 5: Seek new and additional financing for public transit, to help both with retaining staff (higher pay) and with making rides more affordable by lowering rider fees.

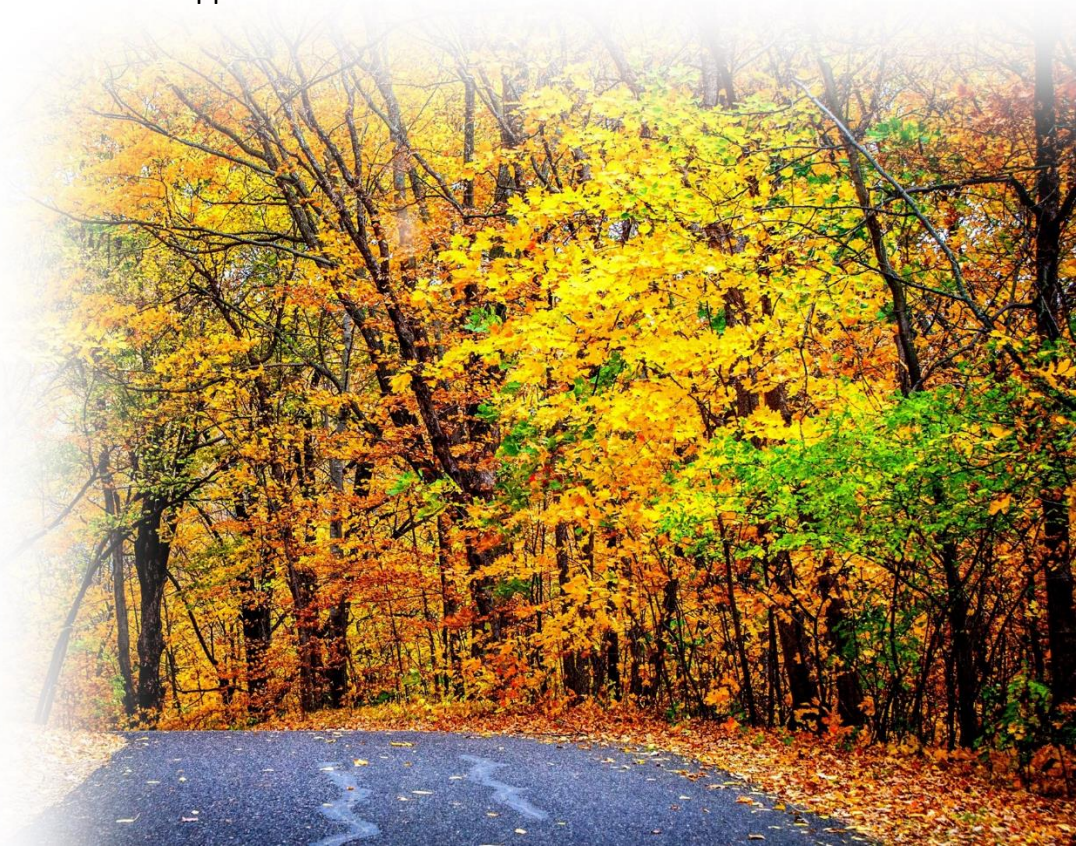
Strategies:

- Always be looking for grant opportunities, whether federal or state funds, or private funding opportunities.
- Continue to explore employee work routes and/or specific employers willing to support transit or other ride services for employees.
- Look for partnerships with cities and counties that may be willing to dedicate funding to fulfill a specific transportation need in their community.

Priority 6: Continue to research and collaborate with regional stakeholders toward electrification of the transit fleet.

Strategies:

- Transit and UERPC continue to focus on preparing for, studying, and exploring funding for a transition to an all-electric transit vehicle fleet.
- Research grants and opportunities to take advantage of federal funding that is specifically available for this purpose.
- Continue to collaborate with partners such as Alliant Energy, Northeast Iowa Community College, etc.
- Utilize and promote data related to climate benefits of transit and reducing GHGs, especially data that supports an electrified transit vehicle fleet.



Section 5: Funding

State Funding Programs

State Transit Assistance (STA): Funding for public transit systems that can be used for operating, capital or planning expenses. Approximately 97 percent of funding is distributed among eligible transit systems using a performance-based distribution formula calculated on prior year statistics for rides, miles, operating cost, and local support. There is no local match requirement for formula funds.

State Transit Assistance (STA) Special Project: Iowa DOT has $175,000 in reserve funding for STA each year specifically for special projects to help better transit in Iowa. These can include individual special projects for new services needed to support human services coordination, statewide transit training needs (including transit training fellowships), and emergency projects. Coordination projects will normally have an 80/20 match ratio for the first year and a 50/50 match ratio for the second year. By the third year the project should be self-sustaining. Fellowships require a local match of 20 percent.

AMOCO Loan: AMOCO is a capital match revolving loan fund that was created by the Legislature in Iowa. The funds come from the settlement Iowa received from the American Oil Company (AMOCO). The loan program must be agreed upon by the Iowa DOT and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). All transit systems in Iowa are eligible for loans under this program. This program is no interest loans to transit systems within the state. This loan can also be used as part of the local match for federal programs and paying it back over an allotted amount of time.

Public Transit Infrastructure Grants: The Public Transit Infrastructure Grant came about in 2006 after the Iowa Legislature wanted to fund vertical infrastructure needs of Iowa's transit systems. Projects can include new construction, reconstruction, or remodeling, but must include a vertical component to qualify. Projects are evaluated based on anticipated benefits to transit, as well as the ability to have projects completed quickly (generally within 18 months). A

minimum 20 percent local match is required, even when state and federal funds are combined to fund the project.

Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality (CMAQ) Program: This program funds vehicle replacement projects. Urban and regional transit systems are eligible. Non-federal matching funds of 20% required other than those that are compliant with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and the Clean Air Act Amendment (CAAA).

Iowa Clean Air Attainment Program (ICAAP): This program funds highway/street, transit, bicycle/pedestrian, or freight projects or programs which help maintain Iowa's clean air quality by reducing transportation-related emissions. Eligible highway/street projects must be on the federal-aid system. Transit systems may apply directly for funds. Net operating costs of new transit services are eligible for up to three years (at 80 percent federal/20 percent local participation); however, an application must be submitted for each year funding is requested.

Local Transit Funding: Local funding support for transit includes fares or contributions received from riders, revenues from contracts with social service agencies, student fees, and taxes levied by local cities and counties. Cities are allowed to under the Iowa Code to levy a dedicated property tax for transit of 95 cents per $1,000 assessed valuation. Other local tax funding comes from general fund levies, and from "trust and agency" levies.

Image credit: NEICAC

Federal Funding Programs

Capital Only Program (Bus and Bus Facilities Formula Grants) (Section 5339): Provides funding to states and transit agencies through a statutory formula to replace, rehabilitate, and purchase buses and related equipment and to construct bus-related facilities. In addition to the formula allocation, this program includes two discretionary components: The Bus and Bus Facilities Discretionary Program and the Low or No Emissions Bus Discretionary Program. Provides funding through a competitive allocation process to states and transit agencies to replace, rehabilitate and purchase buses and related equipment and to construct bus-related facilities. The competitive allocation provides funding for major improvements to bus transit systems that would not be achievable through formula allocations.

Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program (Section 5310): This program was established to provide federal funding for support of transit activities in rural areas and in urban areas, to serve the special needs of transit-dependent populations beyond traditional public transit services and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) complementary paratransit services.

Formula Grants for Rural Areas (Section 5311): Provides capital, planning, and operating assistance to states to support public transportation in rural areas with populations less than 50,000, where many residents often rely on public transit to reach their destinations.

Intercity Bus Assistance (Section 5311(f)): This program provides funds for: existing intercity bus routes that tie Iowa to the rest of the country; new feeder routes which will give smaller communities access to existing intercity routes; marketing for new or existing routes; and providers efforts to upgrade equipment and facilities to become compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). States must expend at least 15 percent of Section 5311 funds each fiscal year to develop and support intercity bus transportation. Private intercity bus companies, public transit agencies, and local communities are eligible. Joint private/public applications are encouraged.

Areas of Persistent Poverty Program: This program provides competitive funding for planning studies or financial plans to improve transit services in areas experiencing long-term economic distress.

American Rescue Plan Act of 2021: The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP), which President Biden signed on March 11, 2021, includes $30.5 billion in federal funding to support the nation's public transportation systems as they continue to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and support the President's call to vaccinate the U.S. population.

Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP): Provides funding to states for developing training, technical assistance, research, and related support services in rural areas. The program also includes a national program that provides information and materials for use by local operators and state administering agencies and supports research and technical assistance projects of national interest.

Other Non-State and Federal Funding Programs

Community Development Transportation Lending Services: Community Development Transportation Lending Services (CDTLS) helps create sustainable and profitable business enterprises in the transportation field. The efforts of CDTLS include supporting the development of businesses that move people and products in a cost-effective way. This program has a specific focus on environmentally sound technology.

Easter Seals Project Action – Accessible Transportation Technical Support Project: The Accessible Transportation Technical Support Project assists communities in achieving transportation goals. This may be used to increase Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance or to maximize current transportation options. This funding may be available if there was veteran ridership shown.

United Way: United Way organizations across the State of Iowa provide funding for a variety of community organizations and services. In Region 1 there are two United Way agencies. These organizations can assist in providing funding for transportation services. Funds may be used in certain situations but overall, this is not a long-term funding source.

Local Foundations: Many areas and businesses have local foundations in Region 1 that provide additional opportunities for funding in Northeast Iowa. Funding amounts are typically smaller.

Funding the Goals and Strategies of this PTP

NEICAC Public Transit uses the FTA 5311 funds and Iowa STA funds for operating expenses. Other revenue streams include contracts, general fare box, and donations.

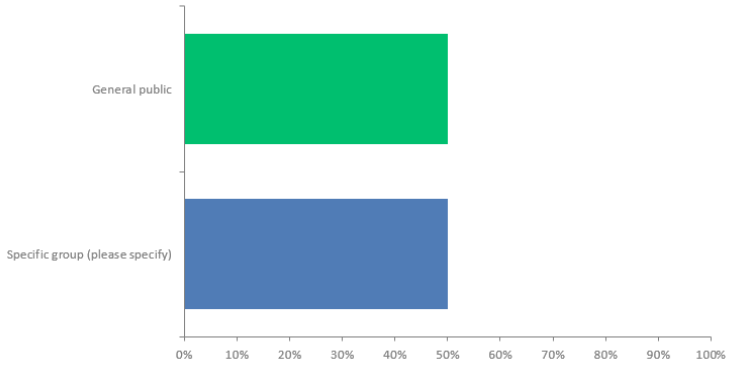
NEICAC Public Transit utilizes surplus funds carried forward in the event of an annual shortfall. Contract rates and general public fares are reviewed annually for relevance compared to actual expenses. NEICAC Public Transit does not currently have any planned special projects.

Appendices

Appendix A: Transportation service provider survey results

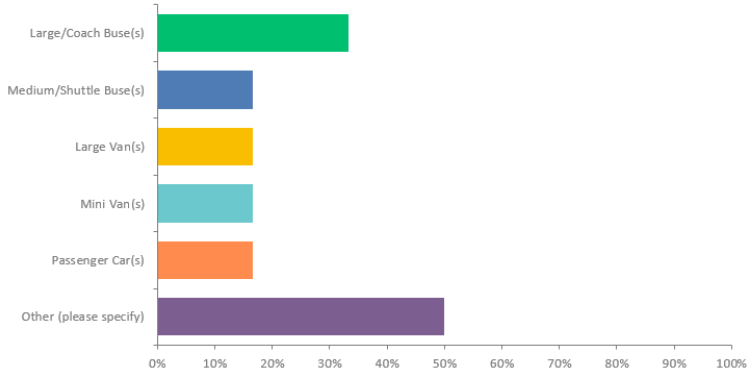
Q2: Are your transportation services available to the general public, or do you serve a specific group?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0



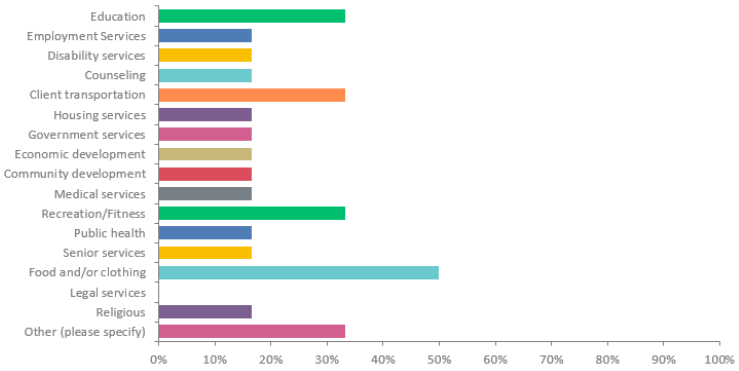
Q6: What types of vehicles do you operate? (Select all that apply.)

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0



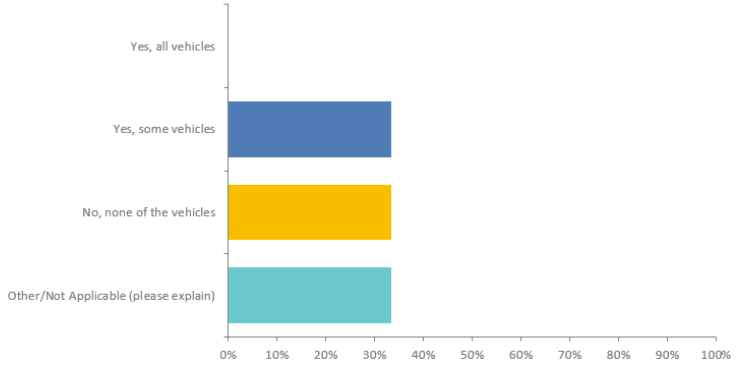
Q5: What types of services does your organization provide? (Select all that apply.)

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0



Q7: Are your vehicles ADA accessible?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0



Q8: What is the total number of vehicles in your fleet? (Please enter a number for each option; if none of that type, enter "0".)

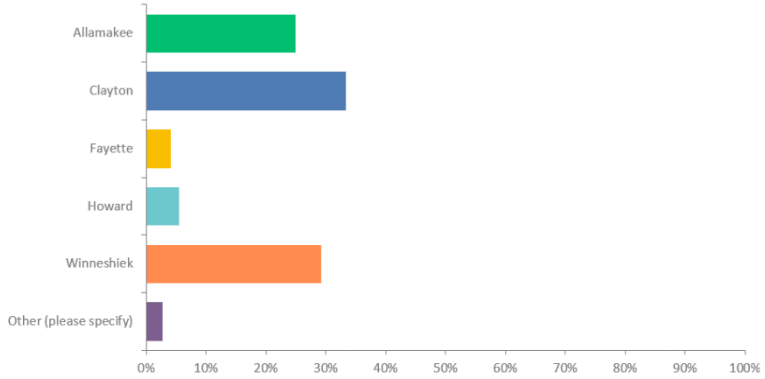
Answered: 6 Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	TOTAL NUMBER
Large/Coach Buse(s)	29
Medium/Shuttle Buse(s)	2
Large Van(s)	1
Mini Van(s)	2
Passenger Car(s)	1
Other	3
Total Respondents: 6	

Appendix B: Community survey results

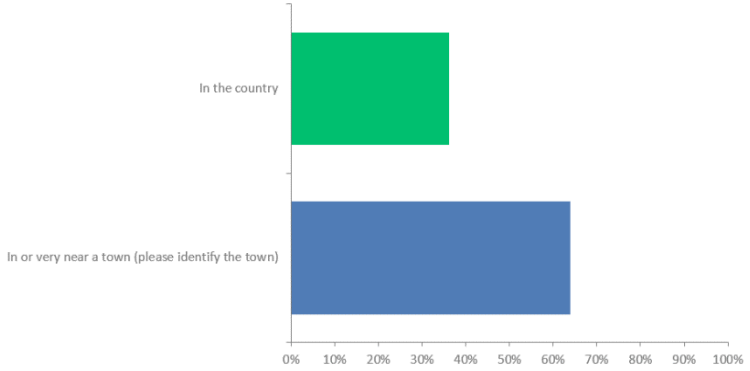
Q1: What county do you live in?

Answered: 72 Skipped: 0



Q2: Do you live in town, or in the country?

Answered: 72 Skipped: 0



Q3: What is your race? (Select all that apply.)

Answered: 72 Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Prefer not to say	2.78%	2
American Indian & Alaska Native	0%	0
Asian	1.39%	1
Black or African American	0%	0
Native Hawaiian and/or other Pacific Islander	0%	0
White	95.83%	69
Other (please specify)	0%	0
TOTAL		72

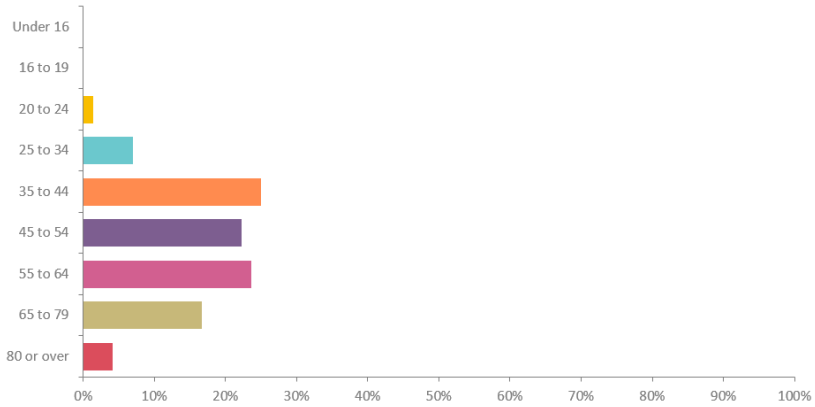
Q4: Are you Hispanic or Latina/o/x?

Answered: 72 Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Prefer not to say	2.78%	2
Yes	0%	0
No	97.22%	70
TOTAL		72

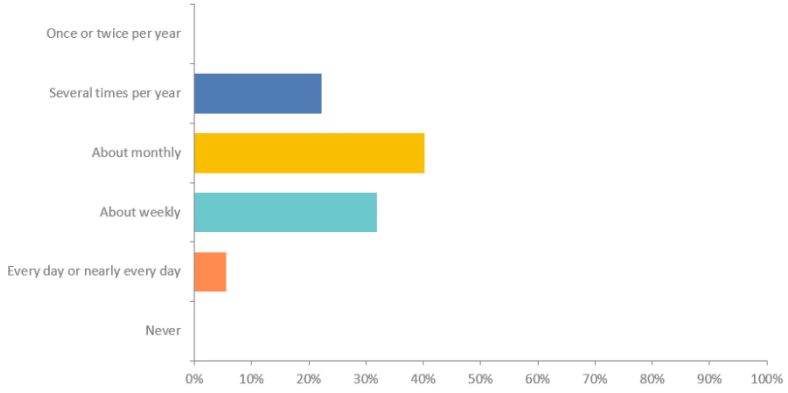
Q5: What is your age group?

Answered: 72 Skipped: 0



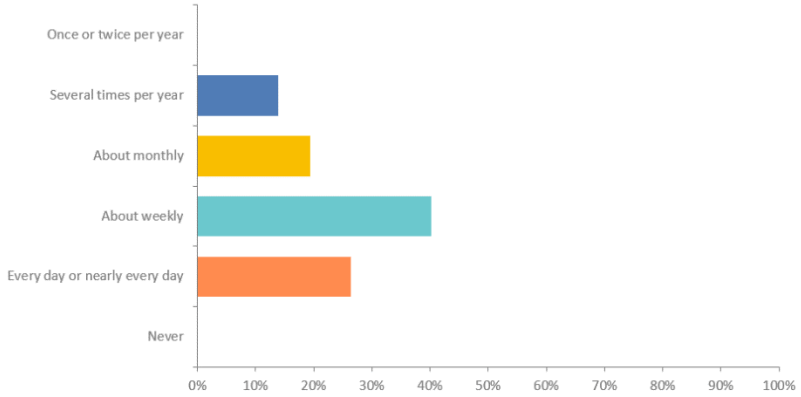
Q6: How often do you travel more than 50 miles from home?

Answered: 72 Skipped: 0



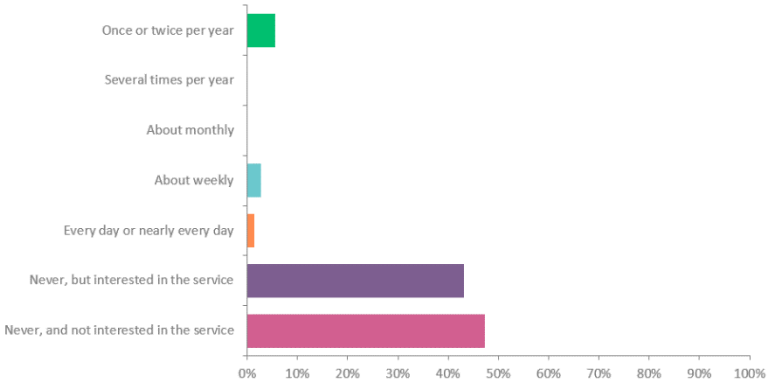
Q7: How often do you travel outside of your community or immediate area?

Answered: 72 Skipped: 0



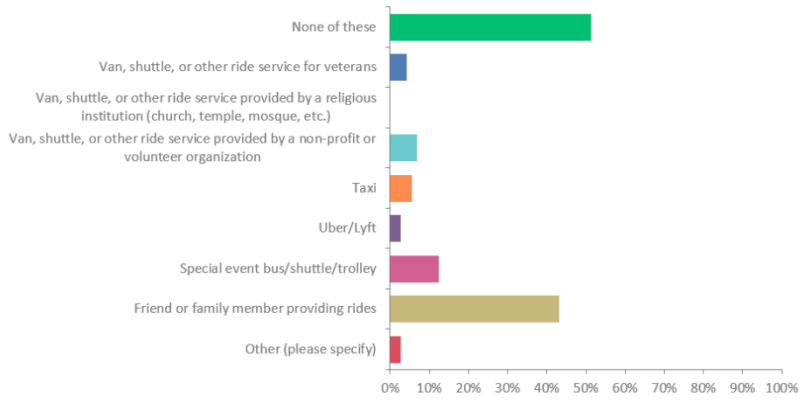
Q8: How often do you use our region's Transit services (EARL Transit/N Community Action)?

Answered: 72 Skipped: 0



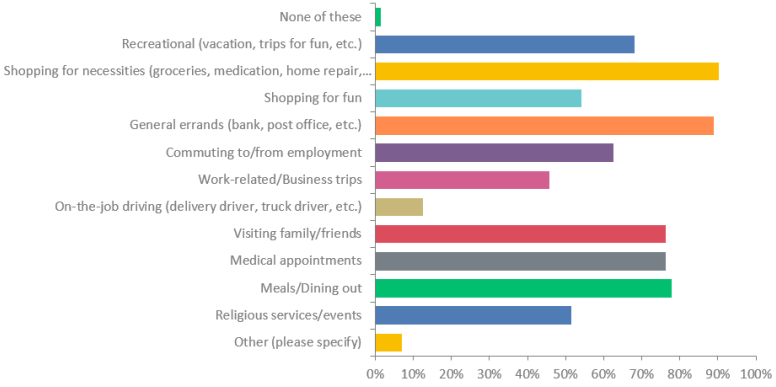
Q9: Have you ever used any of these other ride options in our five-county region of northeast Iowa? (Select all that apply.)

Answered: 72 Skipped: 0



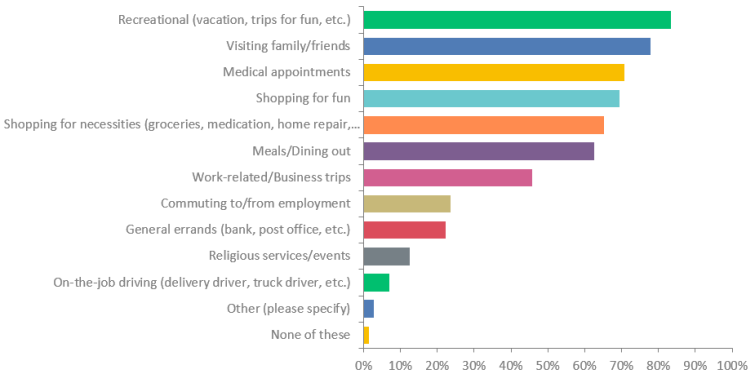
Q10: What types of trips do you make in your community or immediate area? (Select all that apply.)

Answered: 72 Skipped: 0



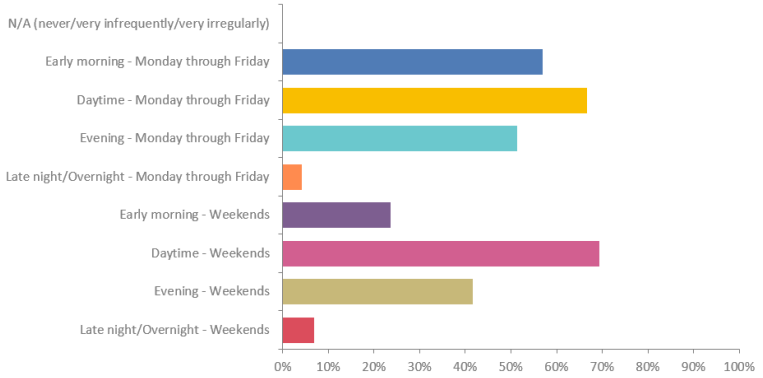
Q11: For what types of trips do you travel outside of your community or immediate area? (Select all that apply.)

Answered: 72 Skipped: 0



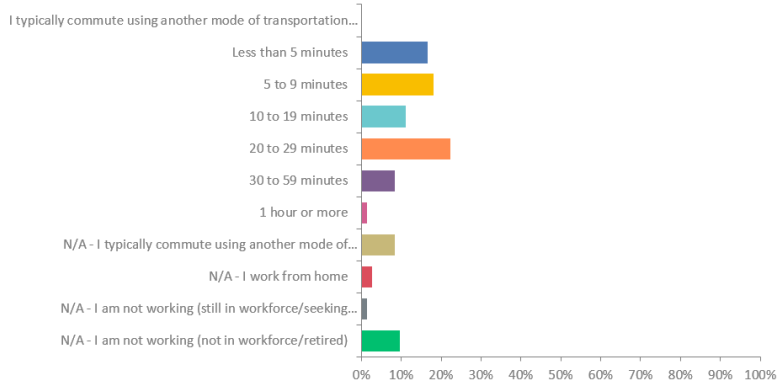
Q12: When do you typically travel? (Select all that apply.)

Answered: 72 Skipped: 0



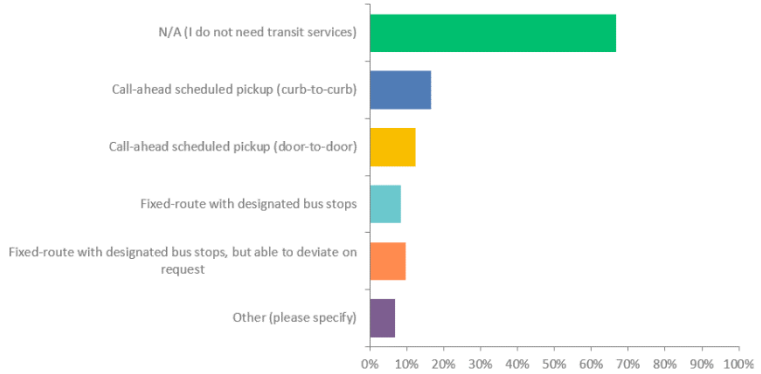
Q13: If you drive to work, what is your average commute time one-way?

Answered: 72 Skipped: 0



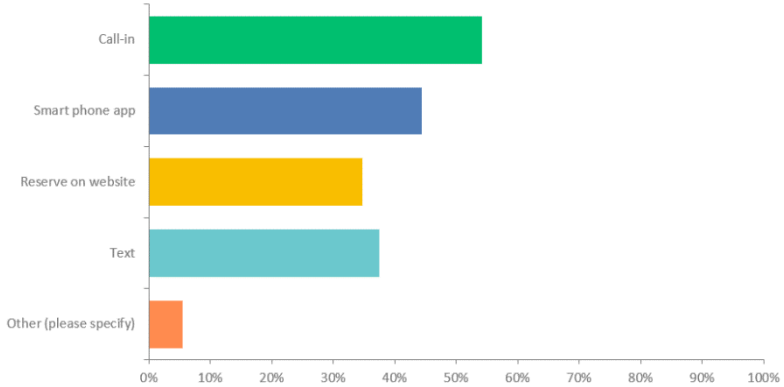
Q14: What type of transit service do you need? (Select all that apply.)

Answered: 72 Skipped: 0



Q15: How would you prefer to request transit services? (Select all that apply.)

Answered: 72 Skipped: 0



Q16: Do you experience any mental or physical condition that makes it difficult or impossible to get around on your own?

Answered: 72 Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
No	94.44%	68
Yes	5.56%	4
TOTAL		72

Appendix C: TAG meeting summaries

upper explorerland regional planning commission

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Meeting Minutes

Regional Planning Affiliation 1 (RPA-1)
Transportation Advisory Group (TAG) meeting
Monday, December 5th, 2022 at 10:00 a.m.

Members in attendance: Lori Egan, NEICAC EARL Transit; Spiff Slifka, Howard County Business and Tourism; Lizzie Van Dyke, Upper Iowa University.

Members absent: Janna Diehl, NE Iowa Area Agency on Aging; Amy Chicos, Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services; Jenna Mockler-Gjerde, Luther College.

Others in attendance: Aaron Detter, UERPC Transportation Planner

1. Welcome

   Detter started the meeting off with a welcome at 10:00 a.m. Members did introductions as the group welcomed a new representative from Upper Iowa University, Lizzie Van Dyke.

2. Passenger Transportation Plan (PTP) Discussion

   Detter thanked members for their involvement in the TAG over the years and for all of their input into the previous PTP. Detter gave an overview of RPA-1 activities and noted that planning processes for the PTP and the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) updates for the RPA-1 region would both be taking place in 2023, with the LRTP process extending longer, into 2024, with adoption anticipated for September of that year. He noted that the PTP was anticipated to be finalized later in the summer of 2024, with anticipated adoption in July/August.

   Detter discussed some things that have changed in transportation planning and public transit since the PTP's last update in 2018. One of the most notable changes in that time is that NEICAC lost the funding for its dedicated Mobility Manager position, and thus lost that staff person. This

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was a big hit because the Mobility Manager was really dedicated to many of the priorities and strategies of the PTP as far as coordination, communication, and promotion for NEICAC's public transit services.

Detter noted that, as with the previous update, this update would involve both a community transportation survey and a survey specifically for any transportation service providers in the region.

TAG members had reviewed the PTP prior to this meeting specifically to come with feedback, thoughts, and comments on anything that has changed or updates to the plan that should be made.

Detter walked through the stated goals of the current plan: make transit easier for all to use, improve communication between all providers, and continue enhancement of public transportation. He then opened up for discussion from TAG members on the current state of passenger transportation in the region.

Egan discussed the EARL Transit service numbers and trips per day, that it has leveled off since the initial decline during the pandemic. She noted that hiring and retaining drivers continues to be the biggest challenge for providing transit services. She noted that before the pandemic, there were some 45 drivers on staff and that now they're down to about 28. With that decline in drivers, it's just not possible to provide the same level of service as before the pandemic. Detter noted that even the current PTP, adopted before the pandemic, was talking about shortages in drivers, to which Egan replied that she has been with NEICAC since 2003, and that the difficulty hiring and keeping drivers has been a conversation within the agency for that entire 20-year period.

Slifka noted that all the categories of issues that we deal with as a region—housing, daycare, economic development, workforce—transportation is always central to all of thes, and it maybe

* Economic Development * Comprehensive Planning * Transportation * Workforce * Housing * Revolving Loan Fund *
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doesn't get the respect and attention that it should. She agreed that our focus here in northeast Iowa needs to be on recruiting drivers.

Egan noted the need to have access to transportation be part of the conversation with planning for housing development.

Van Dyke shared that Upper Iowa University shares the same challenges with hiring and keeping drivers. She said that they often look of drivers from within the university community, especially for peak times like winter break when many students are traveling home, and that there don't tend to be too many people stepping forward to be drivers. UIU has had to cut down on their shuttle dates and times because they don't have the resources. She noted that when students need transportation outside of the shuttles provided by UIU, they do point them to third-party options such as EARL Transit.

Egan noted that there is another MCO that is coming into the state, Molina Health, to join the various Medicaid transportation brokers. IME pay-for-service is getting back into transportation and are doing a contract with MTM to be their broker. She noted that, with the driver shortage, the main area where transit falls short is being able to meet all the medical trip needs, turning away up to 20 trips in a week. She said it's really frustrating because we know that there's that need in the community but that transit is struggling to meet it.

Slifka brought up the idea of potentiall marketing to the veterans groups in the different counties and members discussed the idea of NEICAC or partner organizations specifically going to veterans meetings to talk about the opportunity for being a driver.

Egan discussed NEICAC's effort to right-size their fleet, but also the issue of dealing with the difficulty of getting new vehicles and getting parts for the vehicles that do break down.

Detter asked for members thoughts about the role of transporation and transit in climate and environmental issues, and if that's something they felt needed to be addressed in the plan.

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Slifka noted that the environmental benefits of using transit could be a marketing piece for reaching younger people. Van Dyke noted that UIU students would probably be very intrigued by the environmental benefits of helping the environment and the community at the same time. Egan agreed that climate change and climate awareness are important pieces of the PTP. Slifka and Van Dyke discussed the possibility of this also being useful in marketing to the UIU community in terms of getting people to want to be drivers.

Detter and members discussed the use of the buses themselves as marketing tools, as they are traveling around the region all the time—specifically with promoting the environmental and climate benefits as well as attracting drivers, etc.

3. PTP next steps

   Detter noted that he would next be developing the community and transportation provider surveys and launching those after the beginning of the year. In the meantime, Detter will be working on other updates to the plan document itself. Once the draft is ready, he will share with the TAG again and schedule another meeting to discuss and get additional feedback.

4. Discuss next meeting date

   Detter noted that the next meeting to discuss the draft PTP would likely be in late winter/early spring, but reminded members that the group can always convene for a meeting if anyone wants to discuss or work on anything in the meantime.

5. Adjournment

   The meeting adjourned at 10:55 a.m.

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Meeting Minutes

Regional Planning Affiliation 1 (RPA-1)
Transportation Advisory Group (TAG) meeting
Tuesday, March 28th, 2023 at 1:00 p.m.

Members in attendance: Lori Egan, NEICAC EARL Transit; Janna Diehl, NE Iowa Area Agency on Aging; Spiff Slifka, Howard County Business and Tourism; Amy Chicos, Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

Members absent: Lizzie Van Dyke, Upper Iowa University; Jenna Mockler-Gjerde, Luther College.

Others in attendance: Aaron Detter, UERPC Transportation Planner

1. Welcome

   Detter started the meeting off with a welcome at 1:00 p.m.

2. Passenger Transportation Plan (PTP) Discussion

   Detter started with an overview of the community transportation survey and transportation provider survey in the draft PTP. He noted that multiple survey respondents specifically talked about being employed in the healthcare field and had first-hand experience of their clients' and patients' challenges in getting transportation to healthcare providers. Detter noted that, although the feedback naturally focuses on challenges and areas for improvement, survey respondents by and large really appreciate our regional transit services

   Chicos noted that the survey feedback information is fabulous, and especially the specific note that there was a large segment of respondents that said they had not used transit services but that they are interested in it.

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Detter then began a discussion of the draft priorities and strategies. Members discussed potential strategies that support the individual priorities.

3. PTP next steps

   Detter noted that he would synthesize information from this TAG discussion to include in the priorities and strategies, and that he would be submitting the draft PTP to the Iowa DOT by April 1st. The Iowa DOT will have the opportunity to review and provide its feedback. He explained that the draft would still go through the RPA-1 Transportation Policy Board's public process for approval and adoption and that there would still be additional opportunities for public review and comment before it is adopted.

4. Discuss next meeting date

   Detter noted that he may convene the TAG again after he receives and incorporates the Iowa DOT feedback, or he may just communicate and soliciti additional review and comment from TAG members via email. He noted that the final PTP is due to Iowa DOT by August 1st at this time.

5. Adjournment

   The meeting adjourned at 2:05 p.m.

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