



Kansas RTAP Fact Sheet

A Service of The University of Kansas Transportation Center for Rural Transit Providers

Assessing Transit Needs in Rural Areas

What are the needs now? What will they be in the future?

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According to the decennial census, 736,157 individuals lived in rural communities in Kansas in 2010. As Kansas rural transit agencies work to reconfigure service to more regional service, a new guide series developed by Easter Seal's Project Action and other partners may be useful to rural agencies in assessing the need for new transportation services. This article explains rural growth trends in the United States, identifies high priority transportation needs for rural groups, and provides examples of community assessments and gap analysis studies pertaining to rural transportation.

Project Action's Rural Transportation Topic Guide Series provides information to assess needs and also describes emerging trends with economic, social, and transportation-related data on rural America. The first installment of the series, "Assessing the Need for New Transportation Service in Rural Communities," identifies trends in rural America which include:

- A growing population of rural residents,
- Significant population of people with disabilities living in rural areas, and
- Significant retirees in locations with limited transit.

The guide states that: 27 percent of U.S. population are rural residents, 11 million people with disabilities live in

rural areas, and 38 percent of rural residents live in areas with no public transportation. Immigration is also listed as an emerging trend in the United States. How can this information benefit your transit agency?

What the Guide contains

The emerging trends identified in the Guide indicate that there will be a greater demand on transit agencies to provide services in rural locations. The Guide identifies examples of plans and programs that are addressing those trends, including the *Adirondacks Community Empowerment Plan*. That plan identifies the following characteristics of older adults and customers with disabilities:

Older adults need:

- Varied types of transportation options
- Public transportation to senior centers, adult day services, groceries, faith centers, and cultural events
- Enclosed bus stops with seating and timetables

Customers with disabilities have:

- Limited funding or restrictions on how funding is used
- Limited trip purposes
- Limited days and hours of service

Transit agencies that are aware of these trends can help mitigate gaps in service.

Steps for assessing rural transit needs in Kansas

The first step in assessing the need for more transportation service is identifying existing transportation services and providers. In Kansas, some of the preliminary work has already been done. SAFETEA-LU required each recipient of Section 5311 funds to develop a Coordinated Public-Transit Human-Service Plan. In Kansas, those plans were developed at the regional CTD level and needs were identified through community surveys and

Examples of Assessing Emerging Rural Trends

Rural New York. The Rural Transportation Topic Guide Series highlights the Adirondacks Tri-Lakes Regional Community Empowerment Action Plan (2010) as a prime example of assessing emerging trends in rural transportation. The region used community-based planning to address the transportation needs of their aging communities, and customers with disabilities.

The effort was strengthened by community involvement from the early stages. A task force reviewed guidelines from other communities related to infrastructure, accessibility, walkability, and pedestrian safety, plus results from interviews and public surveys to complete their action plan. According to the Guide, the Adirondack plan is a model for other communities on how to identify the relevant customers and get involvement early for a gaps and needs assessment.

The Adirondacks plan provides specific suggestions for rural communities to serve the needs of customers with disabilities, stating that communities can contribute by “coordinating transportation services, establishing a voucher program where eligible individuals purchase trips, and by offering volunteer driver programs where volunteers are reimbursed by a transportation provider or other agency.”

Rural Connecticut. Another example of transit gap assessment is the Locally Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan for the State of Connecticut (2007). This plan was highlighted in the Guide for using statewide surveys to obtain information on gaps and identifying services. The gaps were organized in five categories:

- Information and awareness,
- Geographical,
- Temporal,
- Passenger service, and
- Service quality.

The Connecticut plan reported on survey results showing access to transportation, “extends beyond the vehicle or the bus stop.” Using the five categories above in an assessment of new or expanded services may be useful to your agency or region.

public meetings. The existing service in each district was documented in an inventory along with the demographics of the district.

The next step completed by the CTDs was to identify gaps, or needs that were not being met, in transportation service in their region.

As Kansas transit regions continue in their evolution, it will be important to revisit and update transit service gaps for each region. The sidebar at right provides two examples from the Guide about how other agencies are approaching this task.

Olsson Associates is currently under contract with KDOT’s Office of Public Transportation to work with providers in rural communities to help implement regional service. Updating needs and gaps in service is an important element of reconfiguring the regions, along with the organizational and financial aspects of regionalization. As a transit manager, be sure to review past plans and identify trends in your own community. For more information on the continuing move toward regionalizing in Kansas, contact KDOT transit manager Joshua Powers at joshuap@ksdot.org.

In sum

As the organizational and operational structure of transit changes in Kansas to become more regional, it is important to understand the unique service needs of each of region. The recommendations provided in this Easter Seals guide series may be helpful in identifying existing and emerging needs.

For more information, visit Project Action’s Rural Transportation Topic Guide Series webpage at <http://www.projectaction.org/ResourcesPublications/RuralTransportation.aspx>. At present, two documents are posted: the Series’ introduction and “Assessing the Need for New Transportation Service in Rural Communities.” More guides are being developed. Easter Seals’ Ken Thompson said that new postings for the series are forthcoming and will be tied into the new funding changes in MAP-21 and updates of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements.

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Sources

- Easter Seals Project Action. (2012). Rural Transportation Topic Guide Series #1 and Introduction.
- Thompson, Ken. Phone Interview. May 23, 2013.
- U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census. 2010.