



"I have no one to take me anywhere during the day during the week. I live with a family member who works and is only available on weekends when some of the services I need are not available."

– Survey Respondent from Maury County

Mobility and Accessible Transportation Annual Report

March 2021

Mission Statement

Provide resources and expertise for expanding and improving accessible transportation and mobility across the state.

Priorities

Mobility Management initiatives will provide opportunity to unite a broad collaborative of stakeholders through development of local, regional, and statewide solutions to fit community and user needs.

- The State will provide administrative support and oversight for the process of shrinking gaps in access to appropriate transportation options.
- The State will establish a pathway to integrated policies and cooperative activities that support a flexible and comprehensive transportation programs.
- Tennesseans will gain transportation independence and livability in their communities.

Project Partners include: Council on Developmental Disabilities, Commission on Aging and Disability, Commission on Children and Youth, Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Department of Health, Department of Economic and Community Development, Department of Human Services, Department of Transportation, TennCare, Area Agencies on Aging and Disability, Human Resource Agencies, Tennessee Association of Public Transportation, The Arc of Tennessee, Disability Rights Tennessee, Tennessee Disability Pathfinder, Amerigroup, Urban Public Transit Systems, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, local public transportation providers, human services providers, non-profit organizations, other advocates, users of accessible transportation, and the general public.

Strategic Goals

The Mobility and Accessible Transportation Strategic Plan identifies five strategic goals to support the long-term vision and on-going motivation to reduce barriers to transportation for older adults, individuals with disabilities, and the general public.

Goal #1: Expanded Access. Support local solutions for expanding and improving access to transportation services.

Goal #2: Service Solutions. Identify where barriers to transportation overlap and develop quality solutions that meet travelers' needs.

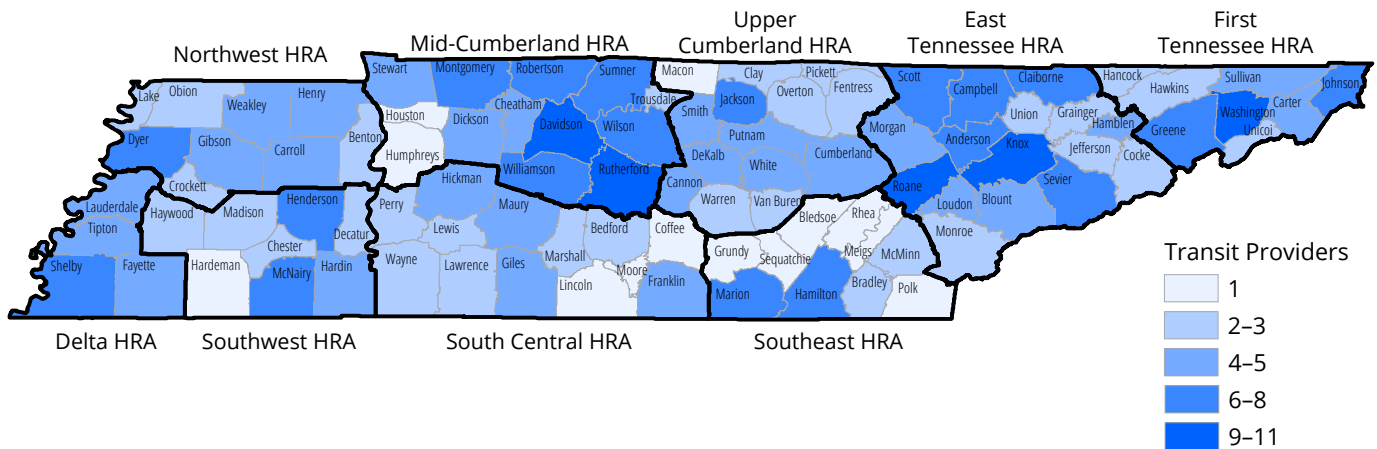
Goal #3: Collaboration. Establish a structure and collaborative culture that maximizes financial resources for transportation across multiple programs and departments.

Goal #4: Technology Solutions. Prioritize user-focused public information systems and transit technology tools to diversify access to services.

Goal #5: Communication. Facilitate communication and coordination between transportation providers and users for a more seamless mobility network.

36% of survey respondents who rely on public or agency transportation programs sometimes need a ride and no service is available.

Tennessee Transportation Providers by County



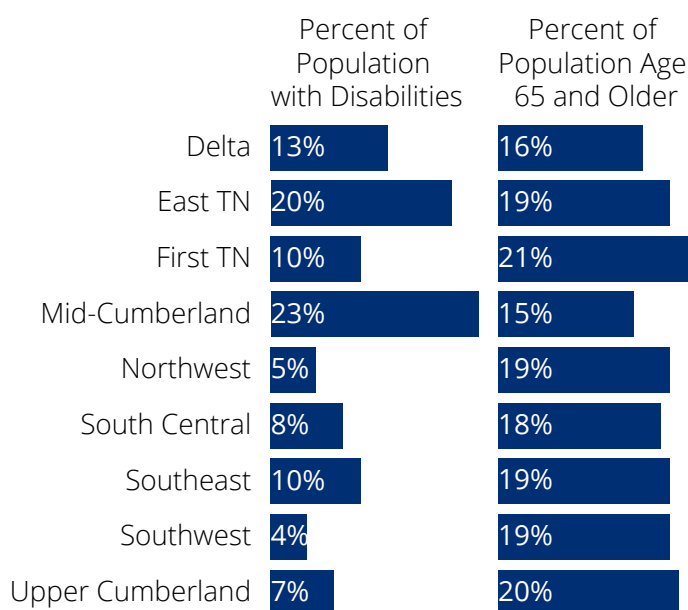
Existing Transportation Services

Public transportation, human service agencies, non-emergency medical transportation, veteran's transportation, public- or private-non-profits, and private transportation operators make up the network of transportation options. Public transportation is available in all 95 counties and

every urbanized area. Urban transit is operated within specific local boundaries. Rural public transportation is operated regionally through Human Resource Agencies (HRAs). The current availability and structure of services directly impacts the State's mobility management work, and how future investments and actions are taken also influences how these growing needs are met.

Comparison of Transportation Needs and Existing Services

Despite the State's comprehensive supply of transportation services, unmet transportation needs remain. Many people choose to use transportation services above their other options. Others ride because it is their only option. Those who need transportation services tend to be older adults or individuals with disabilities.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau ACS 2015-2019 5-Year Estimates

Assessment of Unmet Transportation Needs and Gaps in Services

The gaps and unmet needs in access to transportation are temporal (hours of the day/days of the week), spatial (from Point A to Point B), funding, and/or policy related. The solutions must also be flexible enough to appropriately respond to the nature of the problem. For example, adding more vehicles is not a solution to a policy-related challenge. Likewise, changing a policy about the allowable use of State or Federal funding may not address the need for more service on weekends if the transit provider is struggling to hire drivers.

"I often think about the people with more needs than I have. If I see this as a problem, what about them? I often consider moving, and the primary reason why is lack of transportation options."

– Survey Respondent from Davidson County

The State is strategically analyzing transportation-related unmet needs and gaps in service so that it can make collaborative decisions about the most effective use of existing resources across multiple

departments while meeting transportation needs for Tennesseans. The nature and degree of unmet transportation needs varies throughout Tennessee with no single or consistent underlying root cause but several common themes.

The most significant themes identified through the initial phases of the strategic planning process are outlined below.

- **Personal Assistance.** Even in urban areas, where fixed route public transit is available, passenger assistance is limited to specific forms of assistance mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act. This level of assistance sometimes is inadequate for individuals who require a certain level of flexibility and customization in order to use transit service. As a result, an otherwise independent person may not be able to access medical care, get to work, or manage daily errands, even when a vehicle is available.
- **Misperceptions.** There is a widespread perception that transportation is not available to take people to work or other necessary errands. In some cases, this perception is reality. In many cases, however, it is a misperception. The real challenge here is making sure that information is consistent and easily available because not knowing how to schedule a ride is the same as having no service at all.
- **Independence.** Users are forced to accommodate the system at the expense of independence. In urban and rural areas alike, passengers are scheduling trips for curb-to-curb transportation weeks or, at minimum, days in advance so that they can accommodate the transporter's availability to provide the trip. The options are even more limited for individuals who need a vehicle that can accommodate them and their mobility device. Planning transportation weeks in advance limits inclusion and responsiveness and is not customer-friendly.
- **Limited Weekend or Nighttime Options.** Transportation options are extremely limited on weekends and evenings even in areas with fixed route bus service. Wheelchair accessible options are especially limited on weekends and

at night. Limited access to reliable and affordable transportation during weekends and nights also limits access to employment and/or education/ job training options.

- **Limited Funding.** Limited funding balanced with the expense of on-demand transportation restricts the amount of service that can be offered. The cost of long-distance trips is too great and is typically not available for users in programs that involve destinations far from home.
- **Affordable Fares.** On-demand transportation options such as taxis and other private transportation operators are cost-prohibitive for people living within a limited budget and there are no affordable alternatives for short-notice or point-to-point services.
- **Infrastructure.** Crumbling sidewalks or no sidewalks can be a barrier to accessing bus stops or walking to community resources. In rural areas there are even fewer sidewalks and often not even roadside shoulders. These conditions prevent people from walking or using a wheelchair to their destination or even getting to a bus stop.
- **Options for Specialized Services.** Transportation options are not multi-faceted enough to include services for individuals with a variety of needs ranging from wheelchair accessible vehicles to safe transportation for individuals with cognitive or behavioral disabilities.
- **First/Last Mile Options.** First/Last mile transportation options are needed in areas surrounding fixed route bus service so that people can get from their origin or destination to the fixed route transportation option.
- **Volunteer Transportation.** The waiver protecting volunteer drivers of older adults does not extend to volunteer drivers of individuals with disabilities. Therefore, volunteer transportation services for individuals with disabilities are not as widely available. With a waiver, volunteer services could be expanded.

Half of survey respondents sometimes do not have a ride to medical appointments or essential errands.

Solutions to Accessible Transportation

The State is moving closer to having a clearinghouse for Federal and State programs that fund transportation. Even opening the doors for more connectivity at a district level or in two- or three-county groups at a time could be effective; every solution doesn't have to have a statewide impact. Performance measures will be established to accompany every objective created in the coming months.

A larger investment in transportation options that include more drivers and operating dollars and more personalized and/or assisted transportation would enable more people who need accessible features to get in and out of their homes independently. The investment could come from 'braiding' or combining existing funds from multiple Federal programs so that transportation providers can operate more efficient service, and/or identification of new funding sources.

Clarification of eligibility rules tied to Federal grant programs that support transportation may lead to more multi-agency partnerships. Beyond clarification, the State will be in a stronger position to advise Federal-level policymakers of the policies and rules that limit the effectiveness of specific programs.

Finally, enabling technology that improves access to information and scheduling of transportation will improve the lives of all Tennesseans who need or

choose to use available resources. The Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities is actively working on improvements in enabling technology and access to employment for individuals with disabilities. TDOT is working on improvements to scheduling technology for public transit providers. These and other such

solutions will enable communication about important transportation options everywhere and help reduce misperceptions about gaps in service.

The State, together with its partner organizations, transit providers, and users of the services will grow these successful strategies and cultivate new opportunities to make transportation more accessible for all Tennesseans.