

Coordination and Integration of

RURAL PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

in Pennsylvania

THE CENTER FOR



Rural Pennsylvania

A Legislative Agency of the Pennsylvania General Assembly

Coordination and Integration of Rural Public Transportation Services in Pennsylvania

a report by
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The Center for Rural Pennsylvania is a bipartisan, bicameral legislative agency that serves as a resource for rural policy within the Pennsylvania General Assembly. It was created in 1987 under Act 16, the Rural Revitalization Act, to promote and sustain the vitality of Pennsylvania's rural and small communities.

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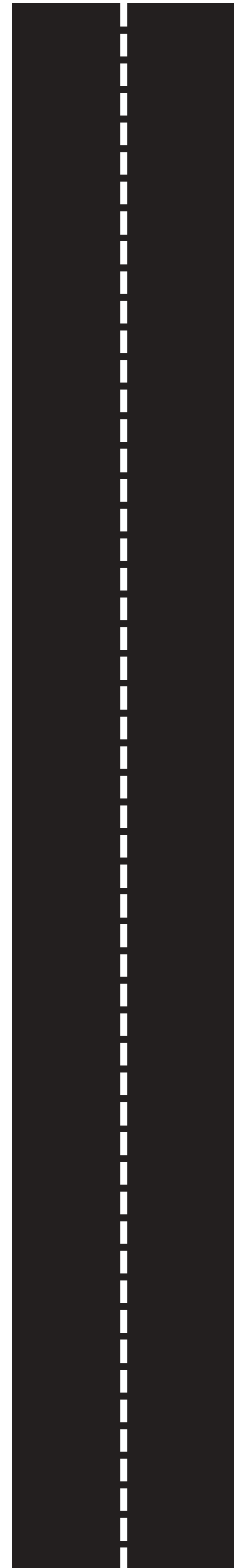




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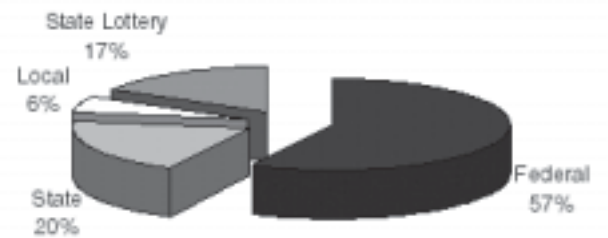
Introduction

In the mid 1970s, the Pennsylvania legislature enacted the Rural Public Transportation Operating Assistance Program in response to a need for affordable public transportation for the Commonwealth's rural citizens. Although the enactment of this legislation should have served as a catalyst for the integration and coordination of all public sector transportation, rural¹ public transportation services face many of the same challenges today as they did 25 years ago. These include overlapping services, limited availability of public transportation options, and lack of integration.

Public transportation systems provide a valuable service to the rural communities in which they operate. Most of the Commonwealth's rural counties do not operate integrated public transportation systems today, and those that do require public support to maintain these valuable services because they cannot be supported through farebox revenues alone.

Rural public transportation systems are funded in part by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) and their routes cover at least parts of 27 counties. In fiscal year 2002-2003, rural public bus systems transported 3.7 million passengers traveling 6.3 million vehicle miles, with 165

Figure 1. Sources of Funding for Rural Transportation Systems, 2002-2003



Total Funding: \$12.7 million

Source: PennDOT

vehicles in use at peak hours. (See Table 1)

Transportation providers in rural communities are a hodgepodge of governmental organizations, special interest groups and private firms. The problems facing the 27 counties that receive these services are just as diverse.

Table 1. Rural Transportation Systems in Pennsylvania 2002-2003

Total Passengers	Revenue-Earning Vehicle Miles*	Peak Hour Vehicles	Fare Paying Passengers	Average Fare	Operating Revenue** Per Passenger	Operating Expense per Passenger
3,655,826	6,291,432	165	2,070,772	\$ 1.96	\$ 1.78	\$ 6.68

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT)

* Revenue-earning vehicle miles only include those miles in which transportation is available for public use.

** The PennDOT definition of "revenue" includes both farebox revenue and lottery funds.

¹ The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation definition of rural was used. Rural areas are those that are not defined as "urbanized" by the United States Bureau of the Census.

Methods

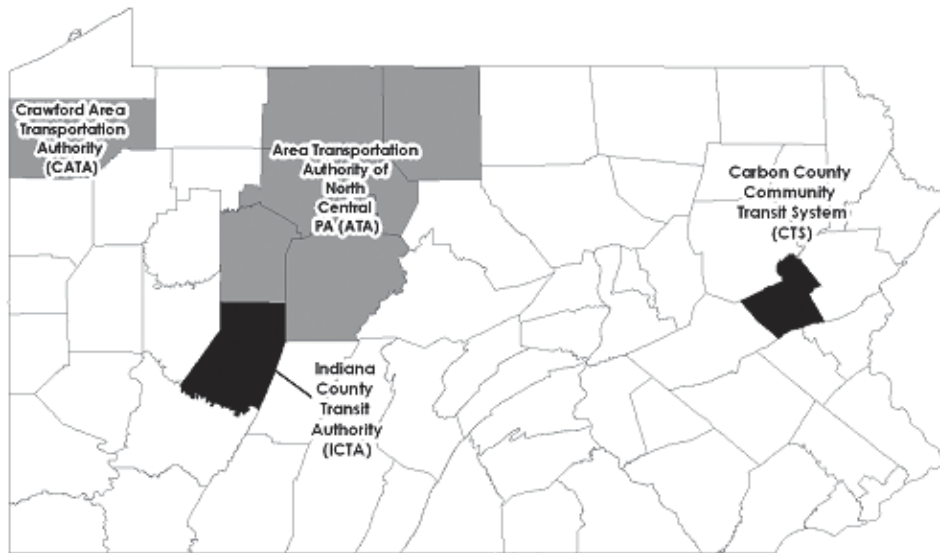
To identify barriers and opportunities for integration of rural transportation systems, the researcher interviewed administrators and employees from eight of the 21 providers of public transportation that operated in rural areas in 2002 and 2003. The eight providers were selected because of their attempts at rural transportation integration and because of their location across various regions of the state.

From the interviews, the researcher was able to produce a snapshot of several public transit organizations operating in rural Pennsylvania, their approach

to the common challenges unique to rural areas, and improvements that may help to provide better service to these underserved areas in the future.

Four of the eight transportation providers interviewed are described below to show the problems and successes of public transportation serving rural areas. The providers are the Area Transportation Authority of North Central Pennsylvania, the Carbon County Community Transit System, the Crawford Area Transportation Authority, and the Indiana County Transit Authority.

Figure 2. Case Study Transportation Agencies and Service Areas



The Area Transportation Authority of North Central Pennsylvania

The Area Transportation Authority (ATA) provides public transportation services in and between many communities in Cameron, Clearfield, Elk, Jefferson, McKean, and Potter counties. ATA was incorporated in 1976 as the first rural transportation authority within Pennsylvania. County commissioners from each county coordinated transportation services for social service clients and attempted to make transportation services available to as many residents as possible.

During 2002-2003, ATA served more than 300,000

passengers, with 55 vehicles operating during peak hours, and over 1 million revenue vehicle miles. (See Table 2 on page 7.) ATA provides public services using fixed routes, routes with deviation², and call-a-bus (CAB) service routes. Additionally, ATA has modified and expanded service through two new services: the County-Wide Service (CWS) and Continued-Managed Service (CMS). CWS operates similar to demand-response CAB service but is offered county-wide. CMS service provides organiza-

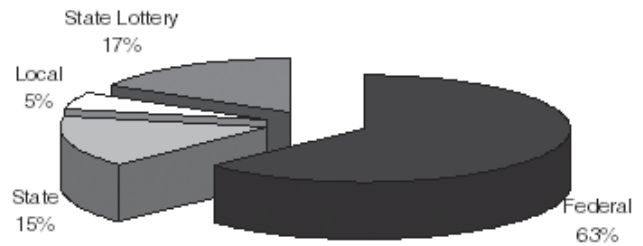
²The route can vary up to one quarter of a mile off the fixed route, depending on customer need. Fares for this service are increased if deviation from the fixed route has occurred.

tions with a non-public option when transporting passengers for a particular group or agency.

In an effort to coordinate and integrate all transportation service within its six-county service area, ATA operates the Medical Assistance Transportation Program (MATP) for Elk, McKean, and Cameron counties. Efforts are currently underway to integrate the remaining ATA counties into ATA's MATP program, where such transportation is generally provided at the county level by agencies or organizations.

As part of the integration effort, ATA contracts with about 40 human service agencies and organizations, including Goodwill Industries, the Area Agency on Aging, and Head Start, to meet the transportation needs of their respective clients. Although combining client groups is not usually a barrier to providing integrated transportation, special needs clients whose behavior has been deemed incompatible with other

Figure 3. Funding Sources for the Area Transit Authority, 2002-2003



Total Funding: \$2 million

Source: PennDOT

rider groups have not been included in the service integration.

Table 2. Area Transportation Authority, 2002-2003

Total Passengers	Revenue-Earning Vehicle Miles	Peak Hour Vehicles	Fare Paying Passengers	Average Fare	Operating Revenue Per Passenger	Operating Expense per Passenger
302,134	1,065,746	55	189,374	\$ 1.85	\$ 2.27	\$ 10.22

Source: PennDOT

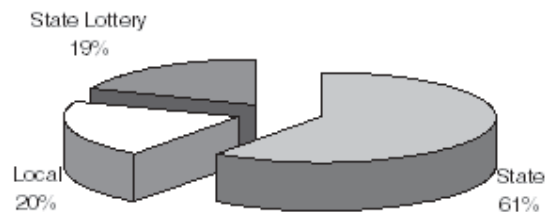


The Carbon County Community Transit System

The Carbon County Community Transit System (CTS) serves rural portions of Carbon County that border the more populous Lehigh and Northampton counties. CTS is managed by the Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority (LANTA). LANTA contracts with a private transportation firm to oversee the daily operations of CTS. Within this framework, CTS offers door-to-door and fixed route bus service in its boroughs and to several points outside the county. Table 3 on page 8 provides an overview of transit operations at CTS.

CTS has faced significant challenges to transportation integration since efforts began almost a decade ago. Some organizations like the Carbon County Training Center and the American Red Cross continue to provide transportation services to their clients individually. Competing rider needs and rigid client

Figure 4. Funding Sources for the Carbon County Community Transit System 2002-2003



Total Funding \$71,000

Source: PennDOT

appointment schedules also create stumbling blocks to full integration of transportation services in the

county. In spite of these challenges, many human service agencies in the county have chosen to use CTS's services to meet the needs of their MATP, mental health, mental retardation and other clients

requiring transportation services. In addition, the Area Agency on Aging contracts with CTS to deliver Meals on Wheels to senior citizens throughout the service area at midday.

Table 3. Carbon County Community Transit System, 2002-2003

Total Passengers	Revenue-Earning Vehicle Miles	Peak Hour Vehicles	Fare Paying Passengers	Average Fare	Operating Revenue Per Passenger	Operating Expense per Passenger
9,669	33,152	1	578	\$ 3.51	\$ 1.65	\$ 7.28

Source: PennDOT

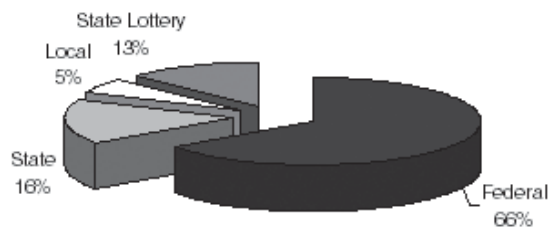
The Crawford Area Transportation Authority

The Crawford Area Transportation Authority (CATA) provides public transportation for the residents of Crawford County through fixed route and shared ride services. Fixed-route bus services operate in the city of Meadville, and in Vernon and West Mead townships. The shared ride program operates county-wide and offers door-to-door service that is demand responsive to senior citizens and persons with disabilities. Although CATA provides coordinated transportation services for some rider groups, full integration of transportation services has not been achieved within the county. CATA's basic operational information is provided in Table 4 on page 9.

In 1996, PennDOT chose Crawford County to participate in a Transportation Coordination Demonstration Project. One project program provides bus transportation for Allegheny College student volunteers from their campus to a local, low-income housing community so that the students can participate in a tutoring program for neighborhood children. In another project program, CATA buses transport public school students, who attend after-school programs, to a central point to be picked up by their parents.

CATA faces many barriers to full integration of services within their area, including: reliance on overlapping transportation providers like Veterans Service; the need to deliver different groups of individuals to their destinations at different times; rising numbers of riders who qualify for subsidized public transportation services; the large and rural nature of Crawford County, which limits accessibility of county residents who live in less populous areas; and the choices of some organizational transportation providers to use their own vehicles instead of CATA vehicles.

Figure 5. Funding Sources for the Crawford Area Transit Authority, 2002-2003



Total Funding: \$249,000

Source: PennDOT

Table 4. Crawford Area Transportation Authority, 2002-2003

Total Passengers	Revenue-Earning Vehicle Miles	Peak Hour Vehicles	Fare Paying Passengers	Average Fare	Operating Revenue Per Passenger	Operating Expense per Passenger
144,710	138,746	3	101,765	\$ 0.73	\$ 0.73	\$ 2.63

Source: PennDOT



The Indiana County Transit Authority

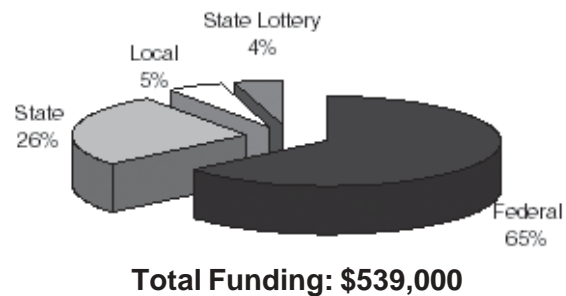
ICTA, whose public transportation service is known as IndiGO, provides transportation to Indiana County’s rural population as well as Indiana Borough, which includes Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP). Similar to other systems, IndiGO provides fixed-route, demand-responsive and shared-ride transportation services to Indiana County residents. In addition, IndiGO buses serve IUP students and staff on campus loop and parking shuttles. Basic information regarding ICTA’s operations is provided in Table 5.

Over the past five years, Indiana County has been slowly implementing transportation coordination with the support of the county commissioners. The commissioners appointed a seven-person board of directors to supervise IndiGO’s operations. Although transportation services within the county are partially coordinated, a few human service agencies do not participate in county-wide transportation coordination. For example, the Handicapped Veterans of America uses volunteer drivers to transport veterans to hospitals even though the organization has no wheelchair-accessible vehicles. Additionally, IndiGO’s coordination efforts are hindered by a lack of tracking information. Collecting this information would provide ICTA with the date and time an individual agency is

sending a vehicle to a particular location.

Agency specific funding for vehicle purchases and transportation services provide other barriers to IndiGO’s coordination efforts. Agencies must apply separately for funding to purchase vehicles and some agencies’ vehicle insurance prohibits them from opening their vehicles to other public transit uses. Furthermore, although human services agencies receive large amounts of funding for transportation services, there is no way to track the specific amounts of money that each agency spends for transportation for its clients.

Figure 6. Funding Sources for the Indiana County Transit Authority, 2002-2003



Source: PennDOT

Table 5. Indiana County Transportation Authority, 2002-2003

Total Passengers	Revenue-Earning Vehicle Miles	Peak Hour Vehicles	Fare Paying Passengers	Average Fare	Operating Revenue Per Passenger	Operating Expense per Passenger
280,698	315,895	7	251,170	\$ 1.03	\$ 1.01	\$ 3.59

Source: PennDOT

Summary

From the interviews conducted with administrators and staff of all eight service providers, and from a review of federal and state laws on local public transportation funding, the researcher compiled a summary of conditions that affect the operation and coordination of public transportation as follows:

No Legal Limitations to Integration: Federal, state, and local legislation and regulations do not prevent local governments from working together to integrate transportation services in rural Pennsylvania. However, tradition and agency preference continue to limit current integration and may limit coordination in the future.

Funding Sources: At the present time, the real estate tax is the primary source of local revenues for the county and local governments supporting public transportation, and the Pennsylvania Constitution prohibits the use of gas tax revenues to fund public transportation. As a result, tax sources are severely constrained, and without new state enabling legislation, counties lack the revenue resources to better support public transportation functions.

Lack of Uniform Decision Making Processes: Different policy, budget, and funding choices among neighboring counties may present barriers to the formation of transportation alliances and inter-county coordination.

Complicated Funding Sources: Transportation agencies lack information about the availability and amounts of transportation funding available from various sources, including those available to human services agencies. In addition, government agencies must apply separately for federal, state, and local government funding for purchasing vehicles.

Increases in Demand for Public Transit: Increasing numbers of riders are qualifying for subsidized transportation at the same time that states are facing budget shortfalls.

Lack of Integration: Transportation and human services agencies do not regularly discuss transportation needs and services. Most private and

public interest organizations, primary and secondary schools, and some human services agencies have traditionally provided transportation for their clients separately. After failed integration attempts in the past, transportation providers may be reluctant to attend coordination meetings if they perceive that their efforts are not leading to progress.

Technical Infrastructure: Currently, most rural areas lack a tracking system for county agency vehicles. Transportation and human services administrators may not know specific times when agencies send vehicles to particular locations. The difficulties of driving clients to their scheduled appointments on time and of clients having to wait long periods of time for their return rides continue to complicate transportation coordination efforts.

Conflicting Rider Needs: Behavioral problems among some rider groups prevent some special needs clients from riding in vehicles with some other rider groups.

To improve the service delivery of rural public transportation systems, the researcher made several suggestions. Specifically, to promote the integration of rural public transportation systems, state and county human service agencies and rural school districts should be encouraged to integrate their transportation services with the local public transportation provider. In addition, local public transportation providers may be given more authority and financial resources to fulfill the transportation coordination and integration function in their communities.

To streamline and expand funding sources, the Pennsylvania General Assembly may consider designating public transportation systems as “regional assets,” owned by their member counties and operationally funded, in part, through a county-wide sales tax with a “regional asset” funding mechanism.

Furthermore, the General Assembly may consider using a portion of the motor fuels revenues for public transportation and encouraging the federal government to supplement or match state and local transportation funding.

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