



# OKLAHOMA PUBLIC TRANSIT POLICY PLAN

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DECEMBER 2020

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# Executive Summary

## INTRODUCTION

In 2019, in accordance with House Bill (HB) 1365, the Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) established the Office of Mobility and Public Transit (OMPT) to improve the delivery and coordination of public transit services, ensuring that resources are aligned to meet mobility needs across Oklahoma. To aid in this effort, the Oklahoma Public Transit Policy Plan (OPTPP) was developed as a joint effort by ODOT and the Oklahoma Transit Association (OTA) and aims to:

- Establish standards and protocols for agencies involved in the delivery and funding of public transit services.
- Set the foundation for policies guiding transit investments statewide as well as establishing programs and strategies to enhance transit services.
- Support the development of policies that address the transit challenges of today while providing a strong and enduring vision for the future of Oklahoma.

Oklahoma has a full range of transit agencies, from large urban systems, to tribal systems, to rural door-to-door services. While existing funding has allowed certain systems to provide basic services, state and federal funding levels have not kept pace with changes in transit demand. The Plan is designed to identify the resources needed over a 20-year period. The Plan provides a set of strategies and policy recommendations to support OMPT in their charge to ensure a network of public transit systems receive adequate funding to ensure the mobility needs of all Oklahomans are met in a safe, affordable, reliable, consistent, and coordinated fashion.

### Mission Statement

Ensure a coordinated statewide public transit network that meets the mobility needs of all Oklahomans in a safe, efficient, and economical manner.

### House Bill 1365

Approved by Governor Kevin Stitt on April 25, 2019, HB 1365 mandated the development of the OPTPP. It states that the Plan shall: (1) be all-inclusive of the public transit systems in the state, (2) reflect the results of the 2018 Oklahoma Transit Needs Assessment, (3) include all stakeholder input, (4) provide for future collaboration and coordination of an effective network of public transit systems across the state, and (5) provide for future collaboration and coordination among all state agencies with an interest in public transit.

The development of this Plan involved significant data collection and analysis using a combination of qualitative and quantitative input. This data enabled a detailed understanding and evaluation of existing conditions, transit service performance, service needs, and transit funding. Data was collected and analyzed over a 13-month period through several project tasks.

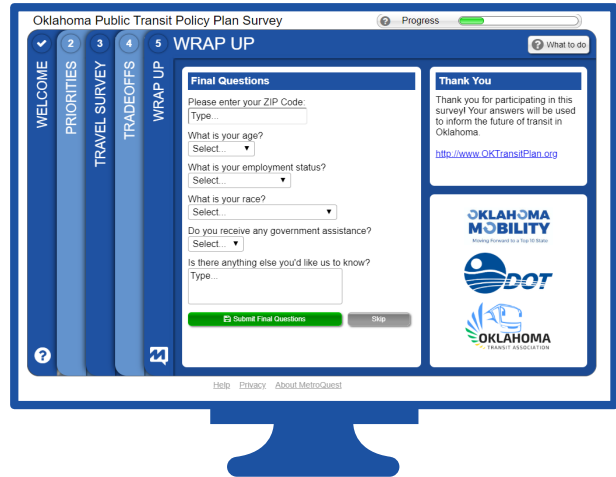
## PUBLIC AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

### Public Survey

A survey was administered from January 20 through March 4, 2020, to gather information on Oklahomans' transit needs and challenges. A total of 2,460 people took the survey, a much larger response than prior surveys conducted by ODOT. Respondents answered questions related to priorities for transit access, existing and desired transit use, preferred regional destinations, transit tradeoffs, and various socioeconomic characteristics.

Several themes emerged:

- Job access is a high priority for rural and urban respondents. Many respondents shared their experiences of using transit to travel to work and emphasized the importance of transit for those who are looking for work (e.g., using transit to travel to interviews).
- Access to medical services was the second highest priority for all respondents, particularly for those living in rural areas.
- Transit is the only transportation option available for many respondents in rural areas. Many more rural respondents would use transit if services were available near their homes.
- Urban respondents would use transit more often if services were expanded to their desired destinations.
- Thirty-eight percent of respondents in urban areas would use transit five to seven times a week if it were frequent and reliable.
- For some, personal vehicles are a financial burden.



### Stakeholder Engagement

Representatives from transit agencies, human service organizations, and state agencies participated in stakeholder interviews and attended regional meetings held across the state. The purpose of the stakeholder interviews and regional meetings was to:

- Identify transit needs, including needs related to transit services.
- Identify structural needs, such as organization, management, and resources.
- Collect different perspectives on interests, needs, and expectations for transit in Oklahoma.
- Ensure as many groups and organizations as possible had an opportunity to provide feedback to maintain a broad range of perspectives.





## KEY FINDINGS

Findings are organized by the following topics:



### Funding

#### FTA

#### FTA Section 5310 Program



#### Public Transit Coordination



#### Succession Planning and Professional Development



#### Driver Recruitment and Retention



#### Service Improvements



#### Technology



#### Feedback for ODOT



### Funding

Nearly every stakeholder noted that the lack of funding is a perennial problem. Almost all stakeholders agreed that public transit systems across the state need more funding to be successful. Stakeholders felt additional funding is necessary to maintain existing service levels and support existing investments in capital resources, such as vehicles.

#### FTA

#### FTA Section 5310 Program

The transition of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) section 5310 program from the Oklahoma Department of Human Services (DHS) to ODOT has been frustrating for some stakeholders who are not also 5307/5311 transit agencies. Some stakeholders expressed past frustrations with the 5310 program, stating that data tracking was too onerous and that they could not keep up with reporting requirements due to staff shortages.



## Public Transit Coordination

### ***Non-Emergency Medical Transportation***

The need for transit trips to serve non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) was a common theme among many stakeholders, especially in rural communities. Many medical facilities are located in urban areas, but many transit agencies lack resources to provide adequate services to these medical facilities. Providers who schedule trips into larger cities run the risk of using a vehicle that would otherwise be available for a full-day of local service. Many transit agencies contract service through LogistiCare. In most cases, contracts with LogistiCare are the only option rural transit agencies have for local match or increasing local match for federal funding. While this structure works well for private contractors like LogistiCare, it does not favor the transit agencies, service coordination, the passengers, or Oklahomans as a whole.

### ***Service Area Coordination***

Some stakeholders noted the existence of formal or informal partnerships that allow one provider to pick-up or drop-off passengers in another provider's service area. These partnerships seemed to be working well and they help transit agencies meet the needs of customers who may be traveling long distances. On the contrary, some transit agencies expressed that there are no incentives from ODOT to coordinate with other transit agencies across service areas.



## Succession Planning and Professional Development

Many stakeholders expressed interest in improving succession planning and professional development. Many directors of agencies are reaching retirement age, and some have been in the position since the beginning of the agency. Stakeholders also voiced the need for more grant writers or technical assistance with grant writing. Grant writing requires time and training, and many agencies only have a few non-driver staff. Agencies tend to rely on municipal staff or whomever has time at that moment to write grants.



## Driver Recruitment and Retention

Many stakeholders noted that driver recruitment and retention is a major issue. Due to lack of funding, many agencies cannot afford to pay wages that are competitive to other jobs in the area. Once drivers are hired, many leave for a better-paying job soon after they have been trained. At some agencies, administrative staff fill in as drivers on days when there are not enough available drivers.



## Service Improvements

All stakeholders expressed a desire for more service improvements to meet the needs of their clients or customers. Many stakeholders stated that transit services in Oklahoma do not currently align with residents' travel needs.



## Technology

Several stakeholders expressed a strong desire for more technology integrated into transit. Inconsistent use of technology for trip scheduling and dispatching was observed during agency site visits.



## Feedback for ODOT

Stakeholders were asked what ODOT could do to help the transit agencies improve their services and programs.

Some stakeholders offered specific feedback for ODOT:

- Continue advocating for more state and federal funding.
- More flexibility with funding and reporting requirements.
- More grant writing support.
- More assistance for transit agencies with the Office of Management and Enterprise Services (OMES) procurement process.
- Clearer communication about funding opportunities and deadlines.
- More trainings across different topic areas (e.g., drug and alcohol training, grant writing, and procurement training).
- More regionally-based, in-person trainings and webinars.
- Streamline processes across different state agencies, when possible. Stakeholders expressed that there is redundancy between rules and inspections from ODOT, health agencies, and others, and the regulations are often inconsistent.





## PLANNING TRENDS

### Overview

A diverse cross-section of more than 40 documents that guide transit service funding and transit development in the state of Oklahoma were reviewed, including statewide plans and policies, long-range transportation plans, and human service provider policies. The following summarizes the key findings gathered from those plans:

- Transit agencies in urban areas face challenges keeping pace with population growth.
- Public transit does not adequately serve rural populations.
- Funding remains a key barrier for transit improvements in many areas throughout the state.
- There is a desire to improve coordination of transportation services between transit and human service providers.

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

There are 37 recipients of federal transit funding in the state of Oklahoma, under either section 5307 or 5311 (tribal funding is provided through section 5311(c)). Thirty-five of these recipients are transit systems that operate a range of services across the state, broadly categorized into fixed-route or demand-response (Figure ES-1). In addition to the 35 transit systems, the Cherokee Nation and the Northeast Tribal Transit Consortium receive an apportionment of 5311(c) federal funds. These two recipients contract with transit agencies to operate service within their respective tribal boundaries.

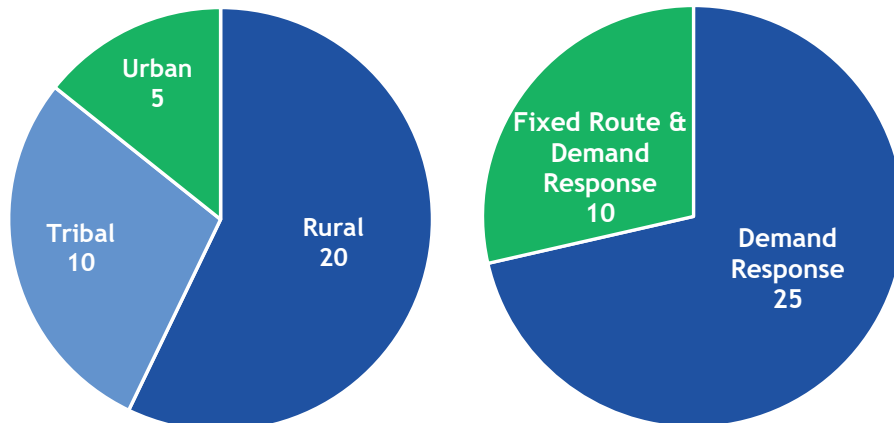
More than 100 entities receive federal 5310 transit funds through ODOT to support additional community-based transportation services for older adults and persons with disabilities.

In general, transit systems in urban areas operate scheduled, fixed-route services, while rural areas are more likely to be served by demand-response services. Five urban systems operate fixed-route service but also provide some level of demand-response services. Also, as part of receiving federal funds for fixed-route services, these systems are required to provide demand-response paratransit services within their fixed-route service areas. Twenty rural systems provide demand-response services. Two tribal systems and three rural systems also provide limited fixed-route services, mostly oriented toward connecting people to employment sites. Twelve tribal entities receive federal transportation funds to support transit services, 10 of which operate transit services of their own.

The analysis of existing services in Oklahoma shows several unmet needs for transit services statewide. While 99% of all Oklahomans reside within transit service areas (Figure ES-2 & ES-3), actual service is not provided to all of those areas. **Many residents who live within a transit service coverage area may have only partial or no access to service.** Figure ES-4 shows the actual rural transit trips as provided, speaking to the gap between the need for transit across the state and the limited capacity of transit agencies to meet that need given constrained resources.



**Figure ES-1 Number of Transit Service Providers in Oklahoma by Federal Funding Category and Type of Service**



Source: U.S. Department of Transportation, FTA, National Transit Database (NTD)

**Figure ES-2 Urban Transit Service Designated Coverage Areas**

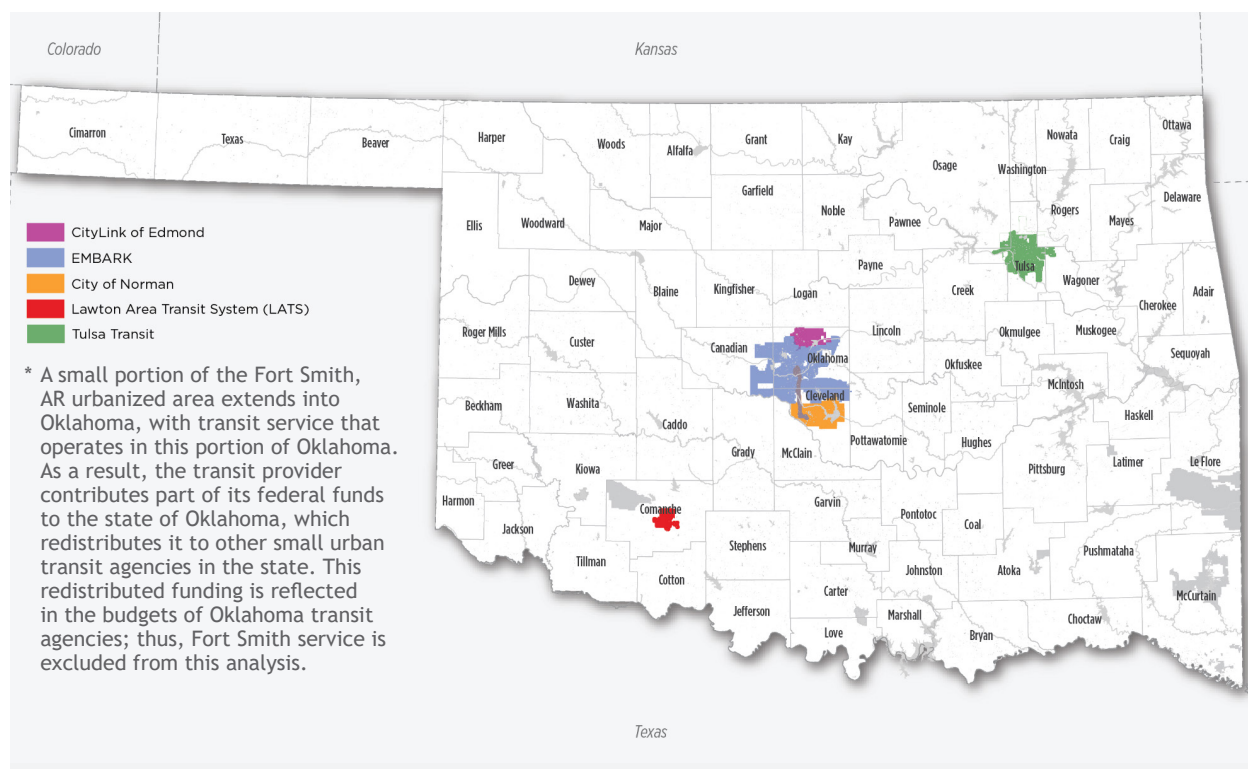


Figure ES-3 Transit Service Coverage Areas - All Programs

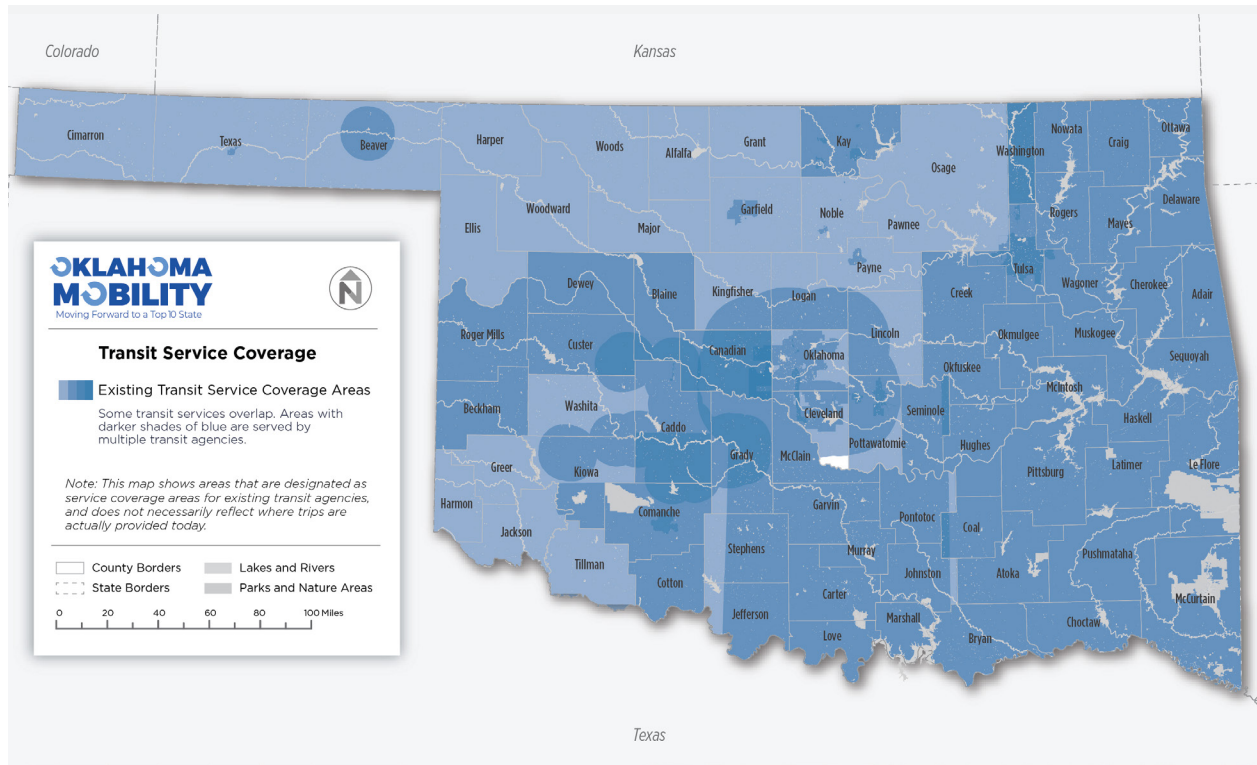
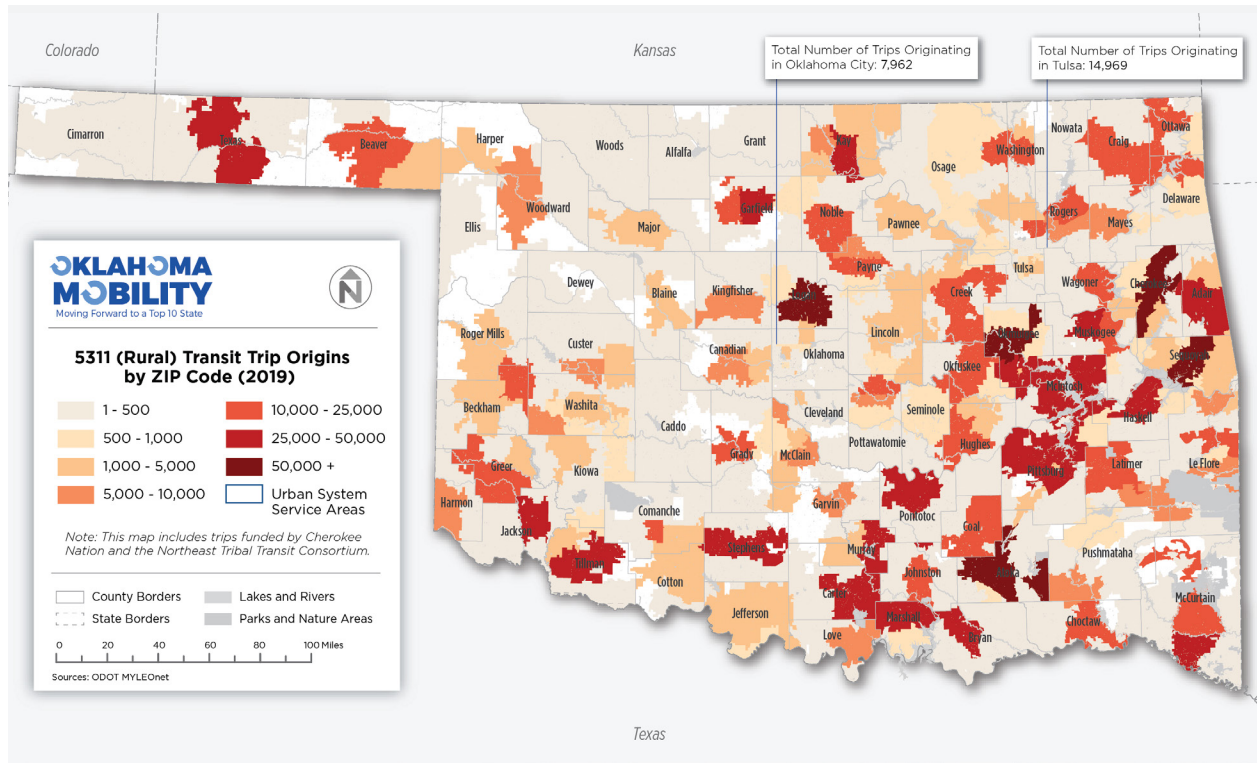


Figure ES-4 Rural (5311) Transit Trip Origins by ZIP Code



## Service and Ridership Trends

According to NTD, Oklahoma's transit agencies carried 10,470,020 passenger trips in 2018. Most passenger trips in Oklahoma are carried by urban transit services, representing 73% of all passenger trips. Rural transit agencies carried 24% of all passenger trips in 2018, and tribal transit services carried about 3% of trips.

While nearly two million trips were provided in 2019, service is not necessarily provided in all of the areas that are designated as service coverage areas. Many transit agencies are unable to adequately serve all of the communities within their coverage areas, often due to limited capacity and constrained funding.

Transit agencies in Oklahoma operated nearly 1.7 million hours of service in 2018. The largest share of transit service hours is operated by rural systems, which operated 57% of all service hours in 2018. Urban systems operate 35% of all transit service hours in the state, while tribal systems operate 8% of the state's hours of transit service.

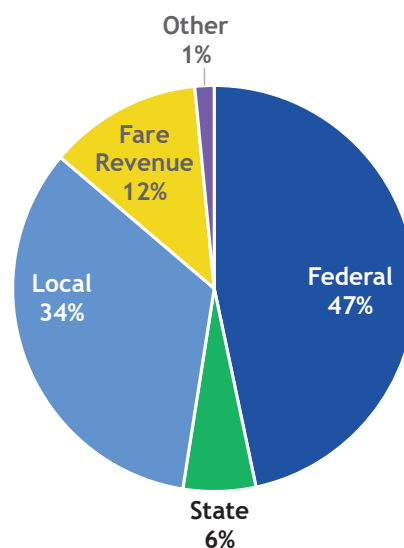
## Transit Funding in Oklahoma

Transit services in Oklahoma are funded through some combination of federal, local, and state funds, plus fares, contracts, and other resources, such as grants and other financial assistance. Within this general formula, however, there is a lot of variation in how individual transit agencies fund their systems.

Statewide, transit agencies in Oklahoma spend roughly \$94.6 million annually to operate service. This amount represents the total transit service operating costs as reported to NTD for FY 2018 (the most recent data available at the time of the study). About 34% of the \$94.6 million is from local sources, such as local county and municipal funds, while 47% of funding is from the federal government. Another 6% of funding for transit comes from the state of Oklahoma. The remaining 13% comes from passenger fares and other sources (Figure ES-5).

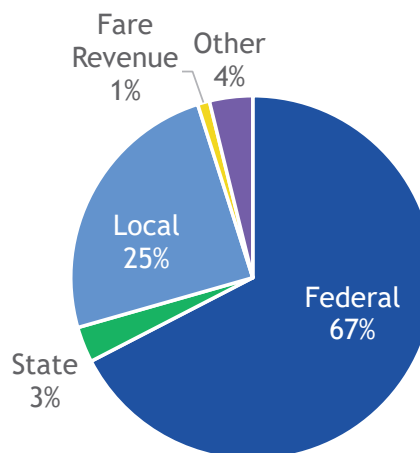
From 2014 to 2018, transit agencies spent on average \$12.4 million per year on capital expenses. About 67% of this capital funding is from the federal government, while 25% of capital funding is from local sources. Another 3% of funding comes from the state of Oklahoma. The remaining 5% comes from passenger fares and other sources (Figure ES-6).

**Figure ES-5 Sources of Operating Funds for All Transit Service Providers (2018)**



Source: US Department of Transportation, FTA, NTD

**Figure ES-6 Sources of Capital Funds for All Transit Service Providers (Annual Average 2014-2018)**



Source: NTD, ODOT

## Population and Job Growth

According to 2017 American Community Survey data, 3,896,251 people call Oklahoma home. About 62% of the state's population is focused in the major urban areas, particularly the Oklahoma City and Tulsa regions. The remaining 38% live in smaller communities or more rural areas across the state.

Between 2010 and 2017, areas with the highest increases in population were the greater Oklahoma City and Tulsa regions, as well as the Lawton area. The Oklahoma City metro area grew significantly, growing by 8.0% between 2010 and 2017, while the Tulsa area grew by 4.3% and the Lawton area increased 4.0% (Figure ES-7). Notably, smaller areas within Oklahoma City and Tulsa experienced a mix of population growth and loss, with some core areas of each city increasing in population density while others declined during the same period. At the same time, the suburbs and surrounding communities outside these cities experienced significant increases in population, speaking to the expansion and urbanization of these metropolitan areas.

In 2017, there were 1,550,990 jobs across Oklahoma. Employment is more geographically concentrated than population. Employment is most highly focused in the state's urban areas: Oklahoma City and Tulsa and their immediate metro areas.

Between 2010 and 2017, employment in Oklahoma increased by 6.2%, less than half of the national rate during this same period (14.1%). The Oklahoma City and Tulsa Metropolitan Statistical Areas both experienced significant increases, with jobs increasing by 8.8% and 8.1%, respectively (Figure ES-8). In these metropolitan areas, most places just outside the urban centers experienced increased job density, while changes within the core areas were more mixed. Among all of the state's metro areas, the largest increase occurred in the Stillwater region, where employment grew by 12.7%. The Lawton metro area experienced an overall employment increase of 3.9% but with a mix of increases and decreases across the area. Outside of the state's metropolitan areas, overall employment increased by just 0.3%.

**Figure ES-7 Population Growth in Major Metro Areas, 2010 to 2017**

	State of Oklahoma	Oklahoma City-Norman MSA	Tulsa MSA	Lawton MSA	Enid MSA	Stillwater MSA	Non-Urban/Rural
2010	351,351	1,252,987	937,478	124,098	60,580	77,350	1,487,493
2017	3,896,251	1,353,504	977,869	129,066	62,421	80,634	1,496,356
# Change	+144,900	+100,517	+40,391	+4,968	+1,841	+3,284	+8,863
% Change	3.9%	8.0%	4.3%	4.0%	3.0%	4.2%	0.6%

Source: 2010 Census Summary File, 2017 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Oklahoma City MSA, Tulsa MSA, Lawton MSA, and Enid MSA are all Metropolitan Statistical Areas as defined by the US Census. The City of Norman is considered part of the Oklahoma City MSA by the US Census. Stillwater MSA is a Micropolitan Statistical Area.



**Figure ES-8 Employment Growth in Major Metro Areas, 2010 to 2017**

	State of Oklahoma	Oklahoma City-Norman MSA	Tulsa MSA	Lawton MSA	Enid MSA	Stillwater MSA	Non-Urban/Rural
2010	1,460,741	546,958	408,647	38,348	24,642	30,486	502,063
2017	1,550,990	595,050	441,628	39,835	25,080	34,354	503,451
# Change	+90,249	+48,092	+32,981	+1,487	+438	+3,868	+1,388
% Change	6.2%	8.8%	8.1%	3.9%	1.8%	12.7%	0.3%

Source: Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) Survey (US Census Bureau, Center for Economic Studies)

Oklahoma City MSA, Tulsa MSA, Lawton MSA, and Enid MSA are all Metropolitan Statistical Areas as defined by the U.S. Census. The City of Norman is considered part of the Oklahoma City MSA by the U.S. Census. Stillwater MSA is a Micropolitan Statistical Area.

## Transit Propensity Index

To better understand transit needs across the state, a Transit Propensity Index was developed, which is a single measure that estimates the extent to which a specific area (such as a census tract) may have a sizeable proportion of the population with characteristics related to transit usage.

The following five characteristics were combined into the Transit Propensity Index:

- Low-income residents (26% of statewide population)
- Persons with disabilities (16% of statewide population)
- Older adults (15% of statewide population)
- Minority residents (27% of statewide population)
- Households with zero or one vehicles (14% of statewide population)

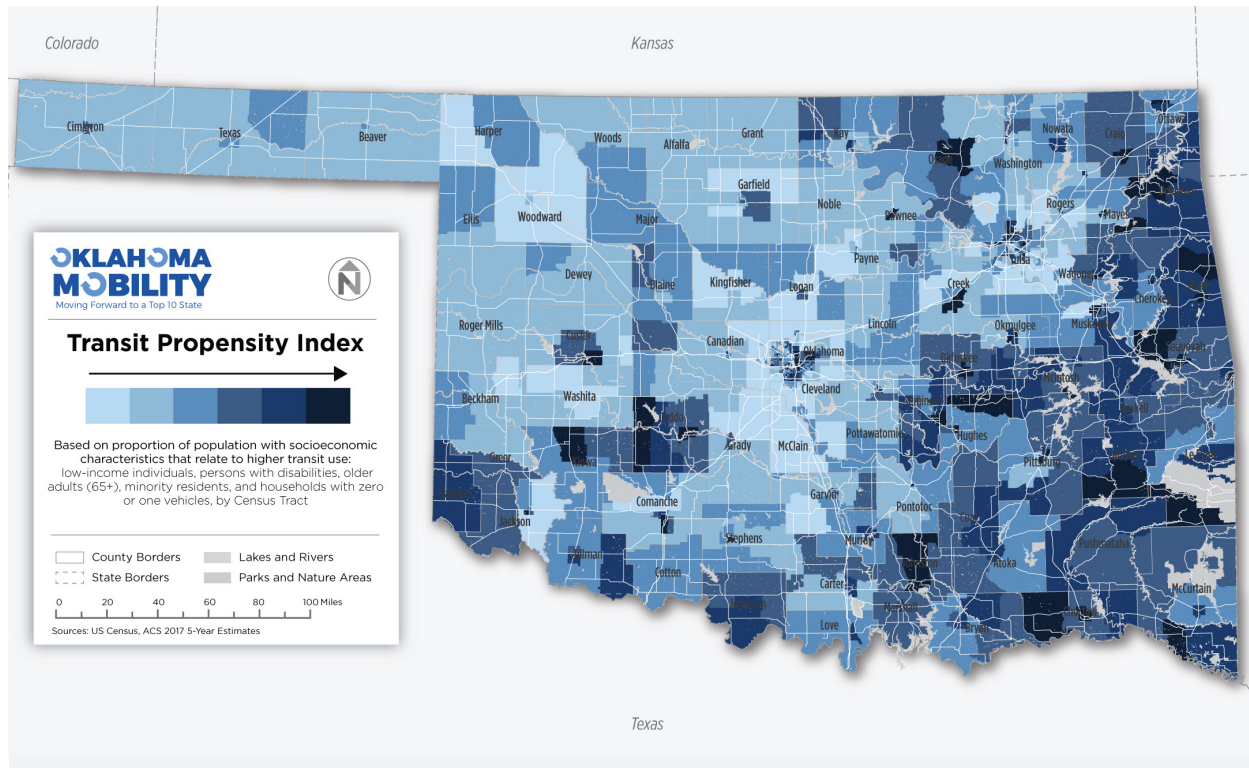
The Transit Propensity Index purposefully excludes population density as a factor and does not recommend the type or level

of transit service that should be provided. Rather, it highlights places where there are high proportions of people more likely to rely on transit service, regardless of what type of transit may be appropriate to meeting those needs and how many people live there.

The results of the transit propensity analysis are shown in Figure ES-9. Additional findings in the existing conditions analysis include:

- The regionalization, or concentration, of jobs and healthcare services outside of rural communities.
- Communities with very low food access, with supermarkets up to 20 miles away.
- A projected 24% increase in SoonerRide members once Medicaid expansion is complete.
- Veterans traveling long distances to access VA healthcare services.
- Over 10,000 daily commuter trips into Oklahoma and Tulsa Counties, including trips originating from several counties away.

Figure ES-9 Transit Propensity Index



## EXISTING CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

### Current Gaps and Potential Improvements

To improve public transit, agencies need support locally, regionally, and at a state level. In many instances, they must work together to meet existing needs and expand services in a way that targets the priorities of Oklahomans. Current gaps and potential improvements in transit service center around the following themes:

- Funding Needs
- Service Improvements and Expansion
- Education and Marketing of Transit Services
- Investment in Technology
- Statewide Coordination and Connectivity

### Opportunities Created by Improving Transit

- **Economic Development:** Transit agencies play a critical role in connecting people to their existing jobs as well as connecting them to new employment opportunities. This expands economic opportunity for Oklahoma's residents, and helps ensure that employers can fill positions from a large market of potential employees.
- **Quality of Life and Healthcare:** The availability and quality of public transit in Oklahoma directly impacts people's quality of life and access to health services, especially for vulnerable communities. For residents without a car (or with one vehicle), low-income residents, residents with disabilities, or older adults, access to transit is especially crucial for living independently.

- **Mobility for All:** Improving transit gives Oklahomans more transportation choices, offering a compelling alternative to driving that can attract riders with other options. Providing convenient, reliable, and safe public transit that is competitive with other travel modes can reduce car dependency, increase transit ridership, and ensure that all Oklahomans can travel where they need or want to go.

## PEER REVIEW

To assist in developing options for Oklahoma's public transit program, five states were selected for analysis of their transit programs: Arizona, Iowa, Kansas, Ohio, and Oregon. Surveys and interviews with state program staff identified several areas that could provide potential examples for consideration by Oklahoma with regard to regional approaches, coordination, mobility management, funding, planning, regional and intercity services, and tribal transportation.

**Coordination:** Several of the states have developed regional approaches. Iowa and Kansas both have legislatively created regional structures for implementing their transit program, and Oregon has a program staff resident in regions around the state. Arizona's program works closely with the MPOs and COGs to implement programs at the regional level.

Coordination of public transit with other transportation programs takes place at the state level in Oregon through its Public Transit Advisory Council, in Iowa through a Coordination Council, and at the regional level in Kansas through Coordinated District Councils.

**Mobility Management:** Mobility Management is a major initiative in several state programs. Arizona has ten regional mobility managers. Ohio has a state Mobility Management coordinator and uses section 5310 to support local and regional mobility management programs statewide.

**State Funding:** State funding programs vary, with a major expansion in Oregon using payroll taxes to support transit expansion. Kansas funded an Access Innovation Collaboration funding program to support innovative services. An expansion of transit funding in Ohio resulted in a two-tier program, with preservation and expansion components. Oregon's new funding program requires applicants to have a plan, and the state provides technical and funding support for local transit plans.

**Intercity Bus:** Regional and intercity bus service development is also part of the transit program in some states. Oregon contracts with an intercity bus service to fill gaps in the network, branding their service as POINT. Ohio provides its section 5311(f) intercity funding to a private non-profit that contracts numerous GoBus routes.

**5310 Program:** The surveyed states generally utilize their section 5310 program funding to take advantage of the federal flexibility to use funds to support mobility management and for contracted service, as well as vehicle capital.

**Tribal:** Regarding tribal transit, both Arizona and Oregon work closely with tribal transit providers as part of their overall transit programs.

## BEST PRACTICES

Beyond the five states that served as primary peers, best practices and examples from other states that could serve as appropriate resources were also identified.

### Program Management

- Washington state has a consolidated grant application that combines sections 5310, 5311 and 5333(b) in one program.
- Virginia has developed a model section 5310 compliance manual and review process.
- Maryland has model program manuals for subrecipients in each funding program.
- Virginia has developed its own programming system for capital funds statewide, the TransAM assessment system.
- South Carolina developed an on-line portal to manage interaction with subrecipients.

### Coordination

- Nebraska's statewide Mobility Management program supports local program development including technology procurement and planning.
- In Michigan, statewide coordination planning involves the state transit association and has led to the creation of the Michigan Transportation Connection, a transit-led private non-profit that delivers NEMT.
- In both Arkansas and Vermont, the state transit associations worked with their members to successfully bid on regional NEMT contracts.

### Training and Technical Assistance

- The Arkansas Transit Association (ATA) administers RTAP for the state through a grant agreement with the Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDOT).
- CALACT is under contract to the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to implement RTAP in California. Through RTAP, CALACT provides technical and training materials produced by the National RTAP and supplements their program with California specific technical assistance, management workshops, peer networking and scholarship assistance.
- The Public Transportation Division of the North Carolina DOT established a requirement for "Minimum Training Standards for Community and Human Service Transportation Vehicle Operators."

### Intercity Bus Service

- Colorado DOT's Bustang statewide network of services includes both commuter and intercity routes.
- Minnesota's Transit for Our Future Initiative supports the development of regional rural transit systems through technical assistance, planning, and funding support.



## GOALS

Goals are a critical component to any policy plan, providing an overall context for what the policies are trying to accomplish and how to develop performance metrics to demonstrate progress toward achieving the stated goals. The ten goals, combined with the mission statement, are designed to make Oklahoma a Top Ten state in public transit.

## Ten Goals

FOR MAKING OKLAHOMA A TOP TEN STATE



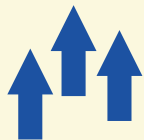
### 1. Mobility

Enhance public transit for all Oklahomans in every county



### 6. Communication, Collaboration, and Coordination

Meet statewide mobility needs through stakeholder involvement



### 2. Economic Development

Ensure public transit for employment, shopping, and tourism



### 7. Strategic Funding

Increase funding for public transit



### 3. Outreach and Education

Establish user training and provider education programs



### 8. Technology Advancement

Utilize technology to improve public transit



### 4. Livability

Improve quality of life through public transit



### 9. Safety and Security

Promote safe and secure transit services



### 5. Environmental Health

Encourage healthy living through public transit



### 10. Equity

Ensure equitable distribution of public transit services statewide

## STRATEGIES AND OBJECTIVES

Strategies provide the mechanisms to accomplish the Plan's goals and mission statement. Strategies are derived from multiple sources such as stakeholder input, previous plans, and the gaps and needs analysis, and address policies, services, infrastructure, and funding. Action-oriented objectives for each strategy were developed to implement the strategy to accomplish the Plan's goals.

The ten strategies are:



### Mobility Management

As a practice, mobility management involves the creation of partnerships with transportation and transit agencies, usually in a regional setting, to enhance travel options and increase mobility and access for all individuals.



### Sustainability and Environmental Stewardship

This strategy aims to increase physical activity levels, reduce air pollution, and provide education about the benefits of transit.



### Public Transit Service Enhancements

Public transit services can be enhanced through several objectives that increase the operating hours of transit, service frequencies, and service areas. Additional programs include improving access and outreach to key existing or potential transit markets.



### Transit Safety Needs

Ensuring transit works for everyone requires promoting safety and the transit rider experience. Maintaining the fleet's SGR, effectively managing emergency responses, and preventing crashes are important elements in meeting transit safety needs. Additional education programs and technology applications foster a culture of safety and cleanliness.



### Transit Agency Marketing, Education, and Information

Becoming a Top Ten state requires building a broad and deep coalition of partnerships, particularly around education and marketing campaigns. It is critical that information is accessible by all individuals.



### Transit Technology Infrastructure

Knowledge-sharing across transit agencies, investment in broadband infrastructure, and creating a coordinated platform interface will improve agencies' abilities to deliver enhanced transit services.



### Transit Planning Support

Integrated transportation and comprehensive plans, along with effective analysis tools, can be leveraged to enhance mobility to underserved areas and transportation disadvantaged populations. Support and guidance for local agencies will ensure that local transit system plans are consistent with the OPTPP.



## Sources of Funding

Achieving the Plan's ten goals relies on securing reliable funding sources.



## Regional Commuter Needs

Meeting Oklahoma's regional travel needs will require a connected network of transit operators to create regional plans and coordinated efforts.



## Human Service and Public Transportation Coordination

Coordination can ensure transit services are providing increased access to healthcare, food, and other daily needs, to improve the quality of life for Oklahomans.

## NEEDS AND FUTURE TRENDS

Existing levels of investment in Oklahoma's public transit system are insufficient to meet the current service needs. Studies and stakeholder input reveal that current public transit service in Oklahoma meets about 50% of the overall mobility needs of Oklahomans. The amount of unmet need is expected to increase significantly as demographics in the state change over the next 20 years, leading to even greater gaps in meeting mobility needs.

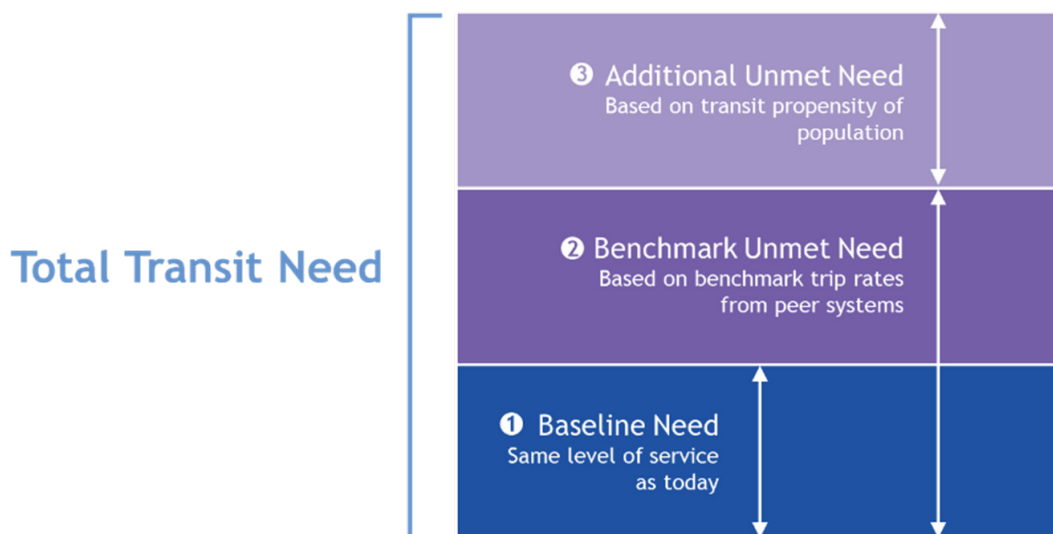
### Transit Service Needs Assessment

A transit needs assessment was conducted to identify gaps in Oklahoma's transit systems. Understanding current and future passenger needs, and the funding required to meet those needs, is a fundamental part of developing a public transit system that meets mobility for all.

The analysis consisted of three primary steps (Figure ES-10):

1. **Baseline Need:** Resources needed to provide service at the same level of investment as today.
2. **Unmet Need:** Resources needed to deliver service at the same level as peer systems.
3. **Additional Unmet Need:** Resources needed to provide additional service in communities that have a more transit-reliant population.

Figure ES-10 Total Transit Need



## Oklahoma and Peer Transit Systems

Oklahoma is a geographically large state with a variety of communities including large cities, university towns, small cities, rural communities, and tribal lands. Given the inherent differences between systems, transit agencies were categorized into seven groups. These groups are characterized by the type of service operated and the similarities of their service areas.

Figure ES-11 shows across all system groups, Oklahoma transit agencies are providing less trips per capita compared to their peer systems. It also illustrates that a higher level of investment is necessary to achieve service that meets mobility needs.

**Figure ES-11 Summary of Oklahoma Benchmark Group and Peer Systems Average**

Oklahoma Transit System Peer Groups	Trips Per Capita		Investment Per Capita	
	Oklahoma Group Average	Peer Benchmark Average	Oklahoma Group Average	Peer Benchmark Average
Large Metro	5.13	6.47	\$37.92	\$56.94
Small Metro	3.02	5.26	\$18.21	\$39.70
University-Based	13.04	19.03	\$75.10	\$66.64
Large/Multi-County Rural	0.93	2.24	\$14.51	\$25.05
Small/Single County Rural	1.71	2.99	\$13.54	\$39.38
Large/Multi-County Tribal	0.65	1.15	\$21.90	\$25.02
Small/Single County Tribal	3.20	3.40	\$51.81	\$91.04

Source: NTD 2018, City of Norman FY20

*Note: The higher investment level in the University category in Oklahoma is a result of a significant investment in CNG and building facilities by the University.*





## Estimating Service Need

This analysis shows that the investment in transit service operations in Oklahoma is lacking by \$126.7 million annually. Approximately 9.6 million transit trips were taken in 2018, but the analysis shows the actual trip demand was 17.7 million (Figure ES-12).

Meeting existing transit needs in Oklahoma would require more than doubling the existing investment in transit services. Given the size of this additional investment and the complexities of increasing service levels

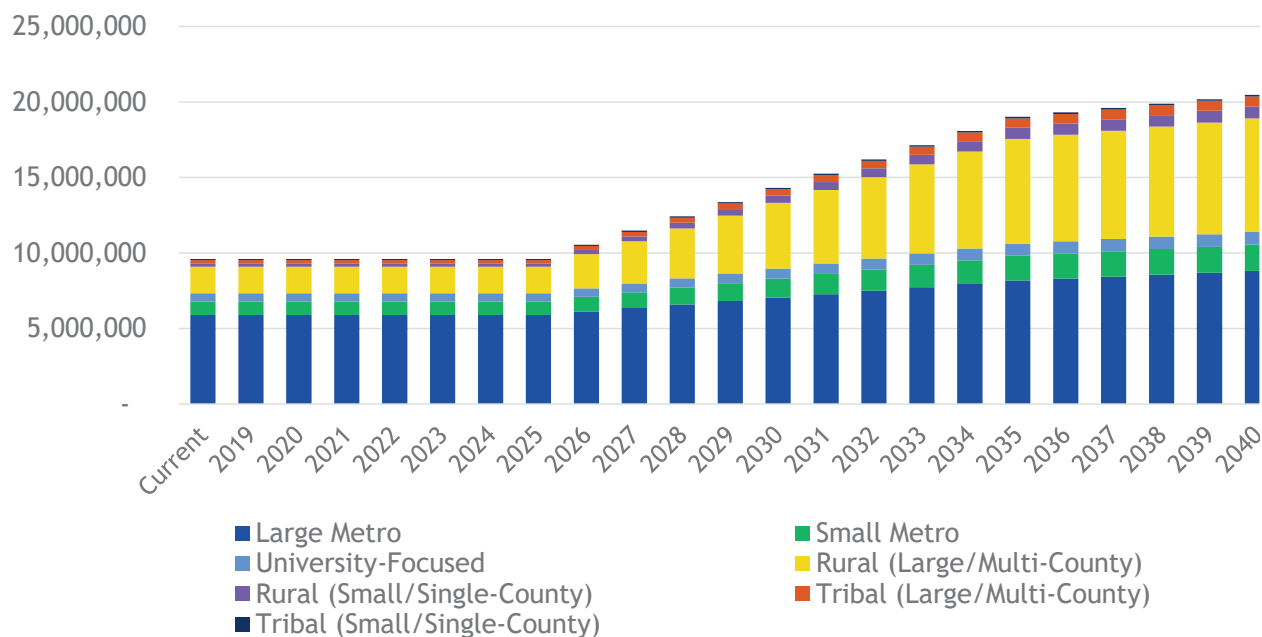
rapidly, the Plan sets milestones to increase services and investments over time.

This graduated approach to increasing transit investment will focus on meeting critical needs while building capacity to improve coordination and delivery of transit services (see Figure ES-13). Expanding local service as well as new regional connections will provide Oklahoma transit systems with the tools necessary to replicate the productivity of peer state systems. Meeting these milestones will increase transit trips to 20.5 million annually by 2040.

**Figure ES-12 Current Estimated Unmet Service Operating Need**

	Current	Current Total Unmet Need
Total Passenger Demand ( <i>millions of trips</i> )	9.6	17.7
Annual Operating Cost ( <i>millions</i> )	\$90.5	\$217.2

**Figure ES-13 Estimated Annual Transit Trips in Oklahoma (2021-2040)**

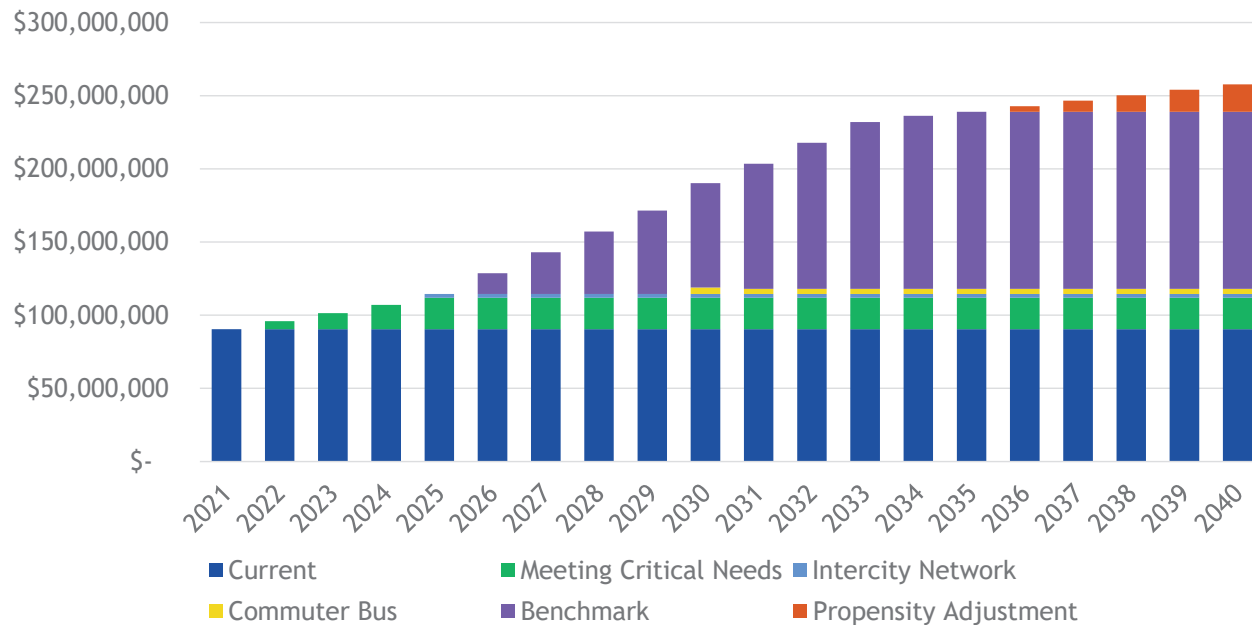


Source: Expansion needs based on needs identified by NDSU study and Service Needs Model, using NTD 2018 data. Norman trips are adjusted based on 2019 reported ridership. \*Does not include ferry or vanpool trips. Streetcar trips are also not included as service began December 2018.

## Executive Summary

Increasing passenger trips through 2040 requires an operating investment of \$257.5 million, an increase of \$167.3 million from 2021 (see Figure ES-14). This investment would come from a variety of sources at the federal, state, and local level.

**Figure ES-14 Estimated Annual Operating Costs in Oklahoma (2021-2040)**



All costs in 2020 dollars. Source: Expansion costs based on average cost per passenger trip for each Oklahoma Transit System Benchmark Group and estimated costs for intercity and commuter bus services.

\*Does not include ferry, vanpool, or streetcar costs



## Estimating Capital Need

In addition to insufficient funding for operations, there is also inadequate funding for capital causing the fleet to be in a state of disrepair. More than one-third of the vehicles statewide are in service past their useful life, putting the safety of the state's transit fleet at risk. Associated maintenance facilities and passenger amenities are also deficient and underfunded to meet current and future demand.

Capital needs are categorized by three types of investments:

1. **State of Good Repair** - Updates and replacements required to ensure the statewide fleet is able to operate at a full level of performance.
2. **Vehicle Expansion** - Additional vehicles needed to meet future operating milestones.

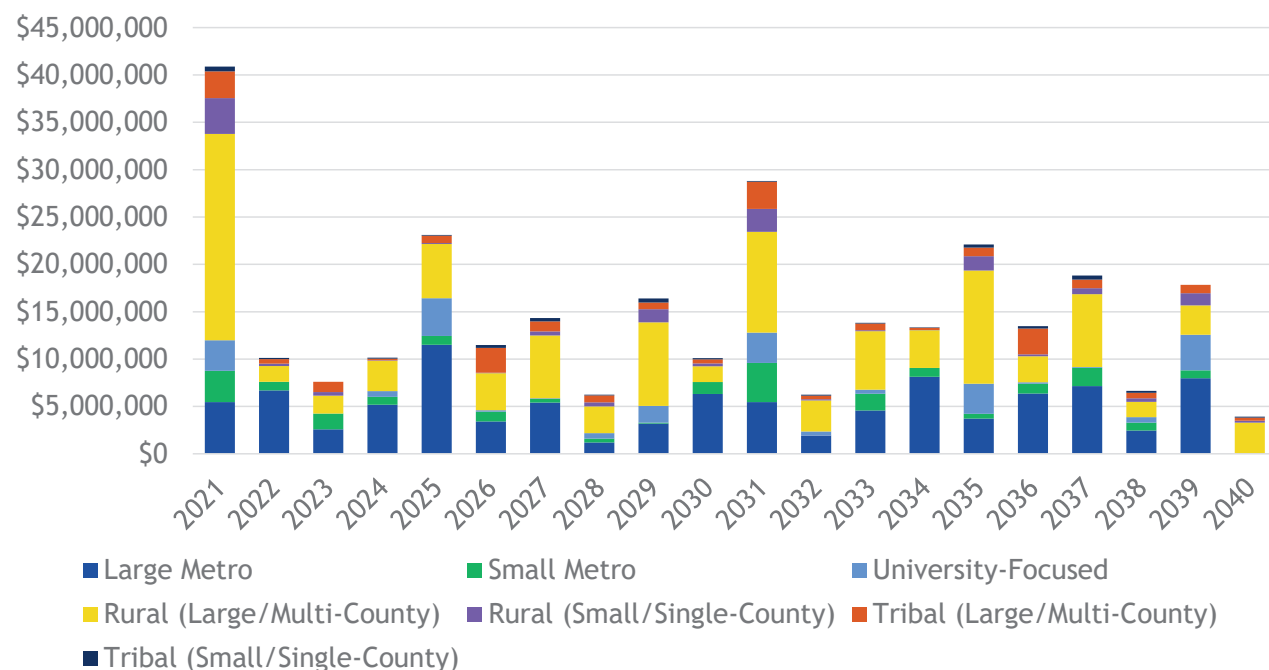
3. **Facilities Expansion** - Additional maintenance and passenger facilities and capacity needed to meet future operating milestones.

### State of Good Repair

There is currently a significant backlog in vehicle replacement needs. Approximately 34% of Oklahoma's transit vehicles are currently at or past their useful life. Because of the backlog created by underfunding capital investment, Oklahoma needs to invest \$40.9 million in 2021 to replace old and aging vehicles in order to maintain safety of the state's transit fleet. (Figure ES-15).

In addition to 2021 needs, between 2022 and 2040 transit agencies will need to replace 2,831 vehicles to maintain SGR. During the entire 20-year period, Oklahoma's transit agencies will need to spend \$295 million replacing vehicles to maintain SGR.

Figure ES-15 Estimated Annual Capital Costs for Fleet State of Good Repair (2021-2040)

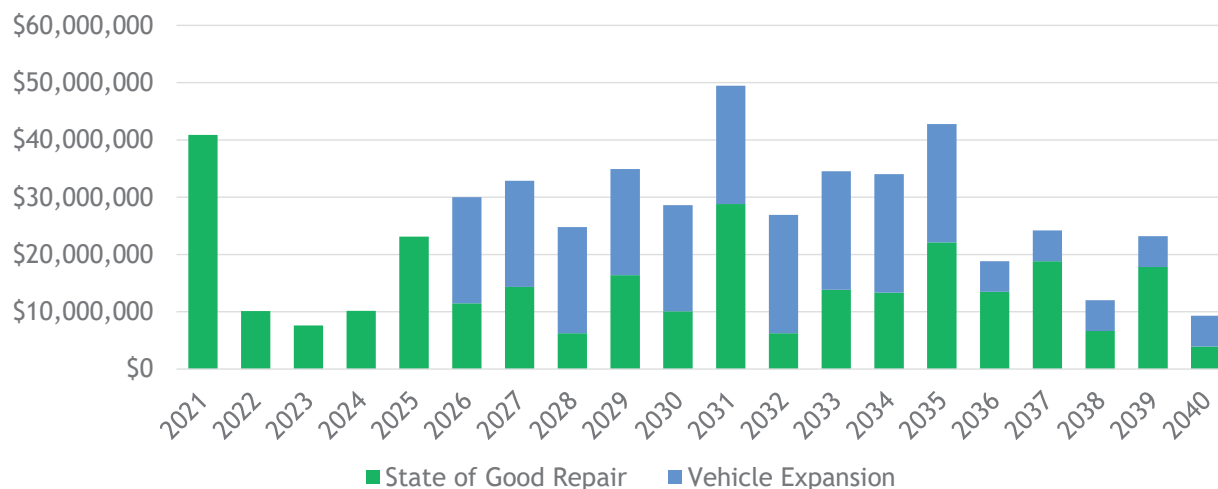


All costs in 2020 dollars. Source: TAM Plans (2018-2019), supplemented with Agency data and NTD 2018 Revenue Vehicle Inventory.  
 \*Does not include rail vehicles. EMBARK has 7 streetcar vehicles, which are not expected to be replaced before 2040.

## Vehicle Expansion

To meet the goal of mobility for all, Oklahoma transit agencies will need to provide an additional 11 million passenger trips per year by 2040, which will require 3,271 more vehicles. The cost of the vehicle expansion is \$222.9 million over the 20-year period (Figure ES-16).

Figure ES-16 Estimated Annual Total Fleet Capital Costs (2021-2040)



All costs in 2020 dollars. Source: TAM Plans (2018-2019), supplemented with Agency data and NTD 2018 Revenue Vehicle Inventory. \*Does not include rail vehicles. EMBARK has 7 streetcar vehicles, which are not expected to be replaced before 2040. Expansion needs based on Service Needs Model.

## Facilities Expansion

As the statewide fleet increases, expansion of current, as well as additional facilities, will be required in the out-years for larger non-urban systems.

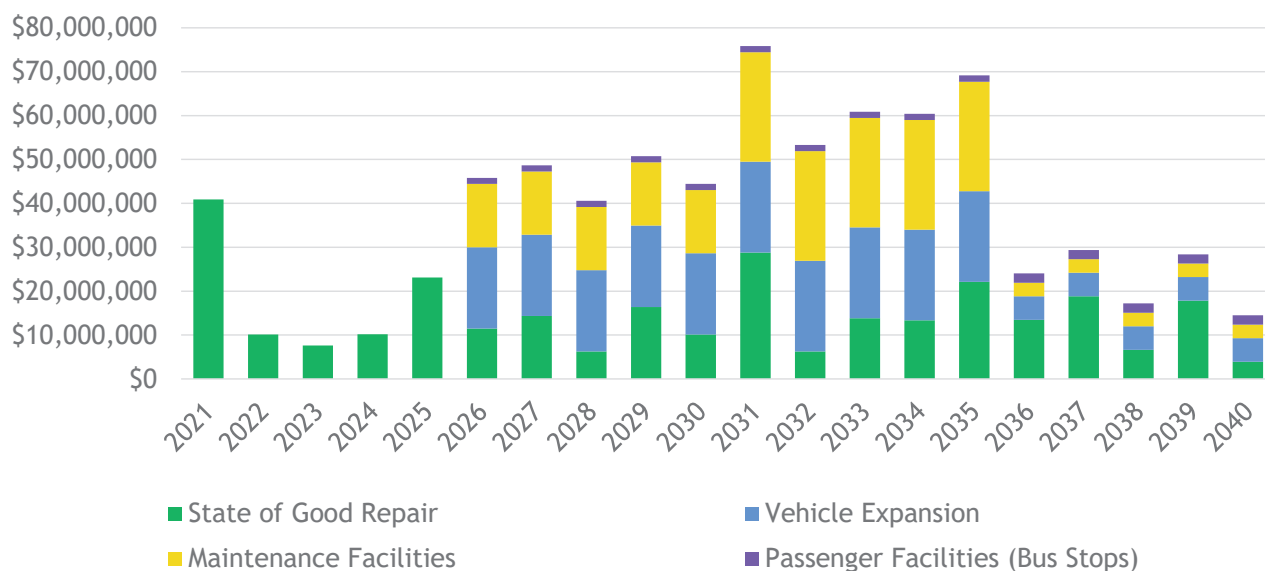
In addition, passenger facilities are assumed to include additional investment to upgrade 25% of bus stops statewide by 2030 and 50% of bus stops statewide by 2040.

Combining both the capital needs to maintain Oklahoma's existing transit fleet

and the capital investment required to grow the system in line with identified transit service needs requires a \$755.1 million investment over the 20-year period. This investment includes \$295.5 million to maintain the existing fleet, plus \$222.9 million for vehicle expansion and \$236.8 million for maintenance and passenger facilities (Figure ES-17).





**Figure ES-17 Estimated Total Annual Capital Investment (2021-2040)**

All costs in 2020 dollars. Source: ODOT, transit agencies, TAM Plans (2018-2019), supplemented with NTD 2018 Revenue Vehicle Inventory. Expansion needs based on Service Needs Model.\*Does not include rail vehicles. EMBARK has 7 streetcar vehicles, which are not expected to be replaced before 2040.

## Transit Resource Management

In order for transit systems to be able to implement the increased service to meet mobility for all Oklahomans, there is a corresponding need for new service types, local planning, new technology, staff

development and public education. Without an investment in the management elements shown in Figure ES-18, milestones for service expansion cannot be met.

**Figure ES-18 Transit Resource Management Costs (2021-2040)**

Management Elements	Costs for 2021	Annual Costs for 2022-2040
Single Source Program	\$3,000,000	\$500,000
Mobility Management Program	\$560,000	\$560,000
Training & Education	\$550,000	\$550,000
Public Education	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000
Transit Planning Support	\$3,500,000	\$350,000
Technology for Transit Providers	\$5,000,000	\$600,000
Total	\$13,610,000	\$3,560,000

All costs in 2020 dollars. Source: Estimated based on input from Project Team review of best practices.

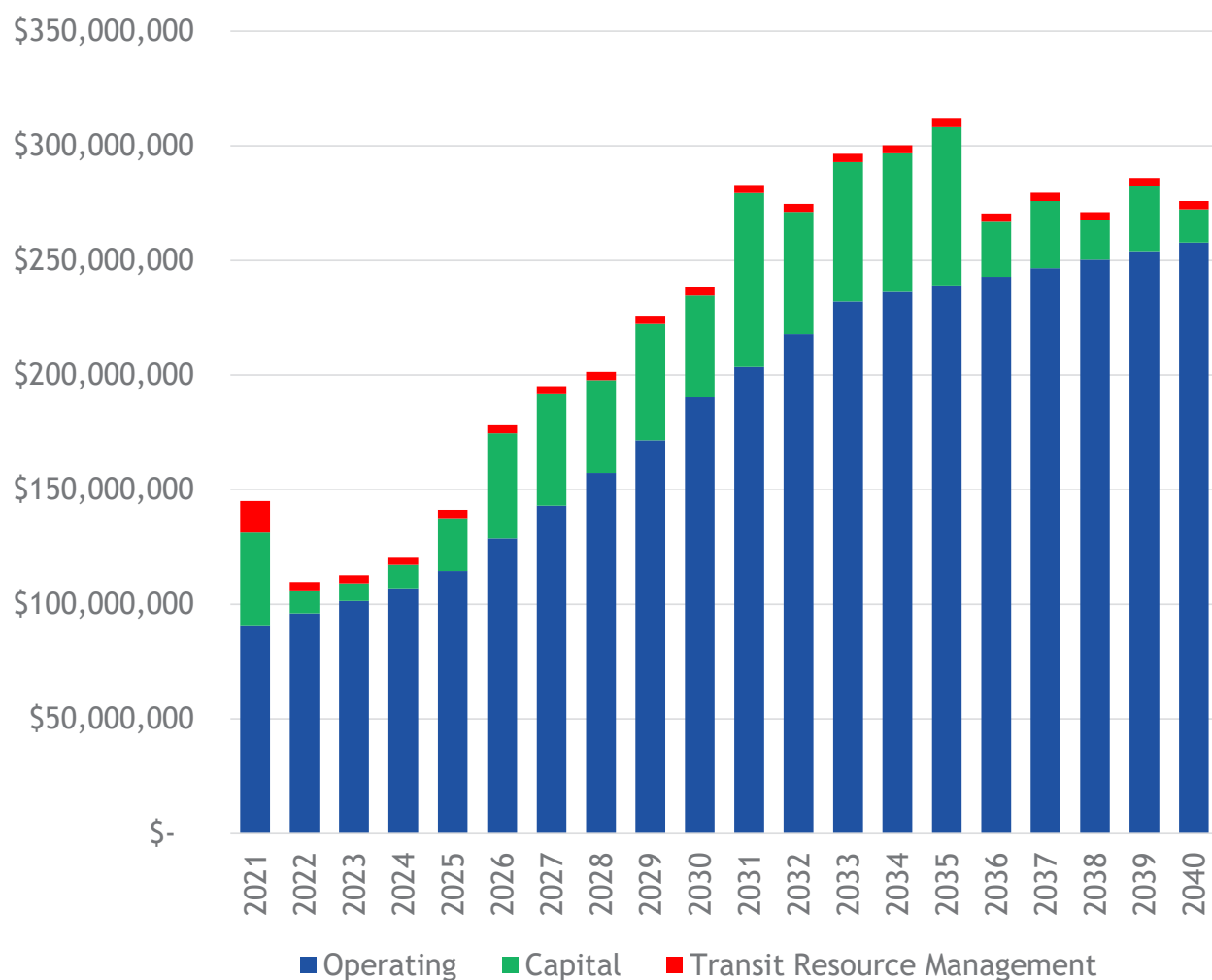
## STRATEGIC INVESTMENT

The Strategic Investment Schedule provides for enhanced transit services, capital investments, and resources needed to achieve the Plan's vision, goals and strategies. Figure ES-19 reflects the scheduled investments through 2040. It assumes a continued mix of funding from the federal, state and local levels, and will require an incremental increase in funding over time.

As a result of this Strategic Investment Schedule, transit systems in Oklahoma will meet the mobility needs of all Oklahomans in a coordinated, economical and safe manner.

Figure ES-20 summarizes the expected outcomes based on the investment schedule through 2040.

**Figure ES-19 Strategic Investment Schedule**



Source: TAM Plans (2018-2019), supplemented with NTD 2018 Revenue Vehicle Inventory. Expansion needs based on Service Needs Model and Identified Additional Needed Resources.

\*Does not include rail vehicles. EMBARK has seven streetcar vehicles, which are not expected to be replaced before 2040. All values in 2020 dollars.

## Investment Schedule

Under the investment schedule, incremental improvements will be made to public transit in Oklahoma over a 20-year period, with milestones to be accomplished every five years. The investment schedule of each five-year timeframe is designed to build upon one another and meet the strategies of the plan.

**Figure ES-20 Strategic Investment Outcomes**

	<b>2025 Meeting Critical Needs</b>	<b>2030 Expanding Service</b>	<b>2035 Meeting the Benchmark</b>	<b>2040 Reaching Mobility for All</b>
Expected Incremental Outcome	Meet critical service needs Bring fleet to SGR	Increase service to begin addressing service gaps	Increase service to meet benchmark	Increase service to meet all needs based on transit propensity and population growth
Operating	Fill crucial service gaps	Expand coverage and levels of service	Provide service consistent with peer states	Meet all service needs
Capital	Fleet replacement to ensure SGR Technology procurement to improve service	Maintain SGR Fleet expansion Maintenance facility expansion Passenger facility enhancement	Maintain SGR Fleet expansion Maintenance facility expansion Passenger facility enhancement	Maintain SGR Fleet expansion Maintenance facility expansion Passenger facility enhancement
Resource Management	Public education Transit system training & education Mobility Management Single-source platform Local transit planning support	Public education Transit system training & education Mobility Management Local transit planning support	Public education Transit system training & education Mobility Management Local transit planning support	Public education Transit system training & education Mobility Management Local transit planning support

### ***2025: Meeting Critical Needs***

Investment during the five-year period 2021-2025 is focused on meeting the critical needs of Oklahoma's transit systems. These include filling crucial service gaps, bringing the fleet into State of Good Repair, and developing a resource management toolbox to assist in the future development of transit in Oklahoma.

### ***2030: Expanding Service***

Investment during the five-year period 2026-2030 is focused on beginning to fill the transit service gaps that exist in Oklahoma when compared to peer states.

### ***2035: Meeting the Benchmark***

Investment during the five-year period 2030-2035 is focused on filling all of the transit service gaps that exist across the state. Increasing access to transit will allow Oklahoma transit agencies to provide a level of service comparable to peer states.

### ***2040: Reaching Mobility for All***

Investment during the five-year period 2035-2040 is focused on meeting the mobility needs of all Oklahomans by enhancing service to address propensity need and population growth, making Oklahoma a Top Ten state in transit.

## INVESTMENT OPTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

The Plan identifies the funding gaps and the costs of providing additional service, program resources and capital required to allow transit systems to meet the mobility needs of all Oklahomans and to make Oklahoma a Top Ten state in transit. This new level of investment will require a combination of federal, state, and local funding.

### The Funding Gap

Nearly \$103 million is spent annually in Oklahoma on transit. This total includes all operating and capital expenditures for urban, rural, and tribal systems in the state. Figure ES-21 shows the required total funding needed to meet the strategic investment through 2040. The year-by-year difference between the current expenditure and the total funding need represents the funding gap.

### Sources of Transit Funding

Public transit in Oklahoma is currently funded with a combination of federal, state, and local funds, along with revenue from fares, contracts, and other sources.

Federal funds cover 70% of the operating costs for rural services, compared to 30% for urban services, while state funds contribute less than 6% of overall operating costs.

### Federal Funds

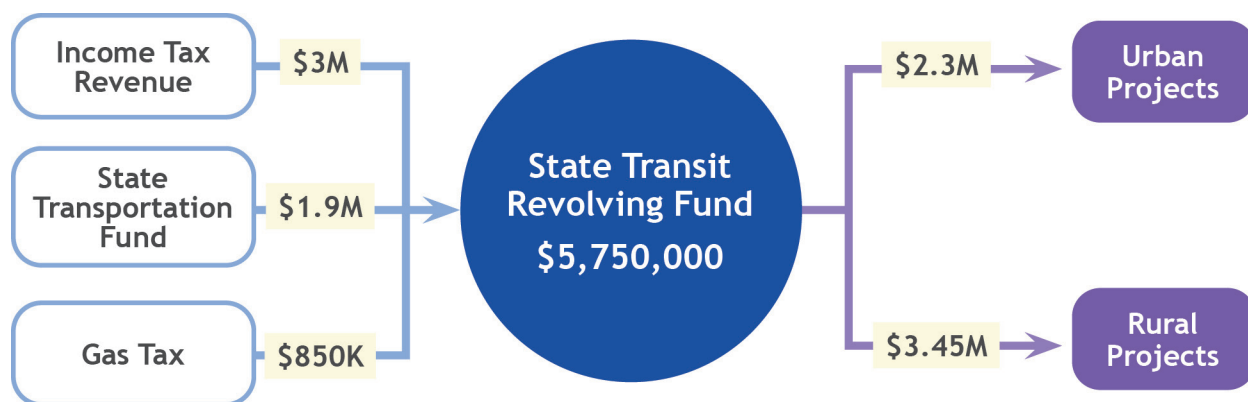
Federal funding is the largest source of funding for public transit in Oklahoma. There are seven different FTA programs that provide funding. Six of the programs provide funding on a formula basis, and the seventh program, which provides capital for buses and bus facilities, is competitive. For FY 2018, the total of FTA funding was \$57,494,811, of which \$5,600,396 was discretionary capital funds, and \$51,894,415 was in formula funding.

Figure ES-21 The Funding Gap: Public Transit Funding 2021-2040

Strategic Investment Funding Needs 2021-2040	\$4,516,972,563
Investment at Current Level of Annual Expenditures	\$2,058,370,148
<b>FUNDING GAP</b>	<b>\$2,458,602,414</b>



Figure ES-22 Sources and Uses of the Revolving Fund



### State Funds

State funding for public transit was established under Section 4031 of Title 69 of the Oklahoma Statutes. This funding source provides \$5.75 million per year for transit. The funding is allocated into urban projects and rural projects (Figure ES-22). The amount has remained flat since 2007, representing a per capita reduction in transit spending of 2.1% since FY 2013. Compared to other states, a national survey from the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) shows that Oklahoma's per capital state transit funding of \$1.49 ranks 32nd among states.

### Local Funding

Local funding is the second largest source of funding for public transit and is imperative to supplement state dollars to secure federal funding to carry out transit services for both urban and rural providers. It includes general revenue support from local governments, sales tax revenue, and voter-backed

general obligation bonds. In rural areas, where transit providers have limited to no access to local funding sources, Medicaid transportation revenues are a significant portion of local funding.

### Funding Options

Revenue sources to fill the annual funding gap presented in the Strategic Investment Schedule can come from a variety of sources, but mostly from the federal, state or local level. There are a number of options used by other states to provide funding for public transit.

### State Funding

Many states invest significant dollars into public transit. According to the FY 2018 Survey of State Funding for Public Transportation produced by AASHTO, states provided \$19.2 billion for public transit compared to total federal funding of \$12.9 billion.

States use a wide variety of sources for public transit funding, including:

- |                               |  |                                     |
|-------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| • General sales taxes         | • General fund allocations                       | • Rental car taxes                  |
| • Payroll taxes               | • Vehicle registration, license, or titling fees | • Hotel occupancy taxes             |
| • Bond proceeds               | • Vehicle code fines                             | • Recording fees/document stamps    |
| • Vehicle sales tax           | • Custom license plate revenue                   | • Corporate franchise tax           |
| • Trust funds                 | • Combined state transportation fund             | • Other specialized funding sources |
| • Gas taxes                   | • Cigarette and other "sin" taxes                |                                     |
| • Diesel sales tax            |  |                                     |
| • Interest income             |  |                                     |
| • Lottery or casino tax funds |  |                                     |

### ***Flexibility in Federal Funding***

Certain federal transportation funds, including Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) and Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) programs provide flexible funding that may be used by states and localities for transit improvements.

### ***State Assistance for Financing Transit Projects***

- **State Bonding:** With legislative changes ODOT could issue bonds to provide for public transit capital such as buses and facilities.
- **State Infrastructure Banks (SIBs):** SIBs are revolving infrastructure investment funds that are established and administered by states. In 1996, Oklahoma authorized the creation of an SIB. The statute would need to be amended to allow its use for public transit.

- **Toll Credits:** Toll credits can be used as in-kind match for federal transportation projects. The credits do not represent increased funding but instead are options for financing transit that may make capital investment more feasible. A number of states take advantage of this option, such as Texas.

### ***Local Funding Options***

Local jurisdictions in Oklahoma already take advantage of several funding options, including fares and other transit revenues, general fund revenues, sales tax increments, and GO bond funding to support local transit investments. Additional funding options that are being used in other states would take either state enabling legislation or changes in local policy.





## IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES

Public policies and administrative code must align with statewide transit priorities, in order to begin addressing the project goals and strategies set forth in this plan and to ultimately become a Top Ten state in transit.

Support for the statewide plan can take shape in many forms. Federal dollars can be maximized if the flexibility on the requirements of local match are continued past FFY 2021. A state dedicated funding source for public transit would take the pressure off of local systems from relying heavily on federal programs with strict requirements. Local systems should develop strategic transit plans that outline future investments to be consistent with the goals of this Plan.

### Plan and Policy Alignment

For the goals and strategies of this Plan to be met, all state agencies with an interest in public transit need to ensure their programs are in alignment with this statewide plan. Alignment of state transit policies allows

for coordination and efficient use of human resources, capital investment, and operating dollars. In addition to state policy alignment, strategic transit planning at the local level is critical to ensuring success at a statewide level.

### Training and Staff Support

Training is an essential component for local agencies to administer transit services. Both ODOT and OTA should offer training through statewide and regional in-person sessions as well as virtual webinars. Administrative staff should receive training to ensure core competencies are met in the implementation of transit programs statewide. Training opportunities should provide guidance on grant and program opportunities, drug and alcohol training, civil rights and equity, transit-oriented development, succession planning, and various other topics as needed. Driver safety training is critical to the delivery of service, be it in the form of passenger assistance training, cleaning protocols (both during and post-COVID), or safety operations.



## Funding Program Alignment

Multiple options to fund the Strategic Investment Schedule over the course of the next 20 years are outlined in this Plan. Public policies, administrative codes, and funding programs should be in alignment with the focus of this Plan. Allowing for flexibility among funding programs is needed to ensure state and local agencies can maximize how funding is used for transit. In addition, federal and state requirements need to allow for more flexible funding options for public transit providers to provide mobility for all.

## Performance Measures

Performance measurement is a means by which state agencies and local transit systems can track progress toward the achievement of goals and strategies. Program managers and state agencies should measure performance to assess the benefits and outcomes of investment in public programs, managerial efficiency, and administrative accountability to determine the effectiveness of the transit services provided throughout the state.

## CONCLUSION

*Successful transit planning starts with making transit a priority.*

Public transit can impact Oklahoma's statewide economy at a much greater scale than it is currently and can serve as a strong component of an economic recovery post-COVID-19. According to Oklahoma State University, public transit currently impacts the state's economy at \$815 million annually. With this Plan's projected doubling of transit service by 2040, the economic impact would grow to more than \$1.6 billion per year.

To achieve these outcomes, it is critical for Oklahoma to develop policies and programs that work to implement the strategies laid out in this Plan, along with strategic investments to implement those strategies. Mobility needs in Oklahoma continue to grow. Time is of the essence for implementation of this Plan in order to achieve the goal of mobility for all Oklahomans.

