



# The State of the System

August 2020

DRAFT

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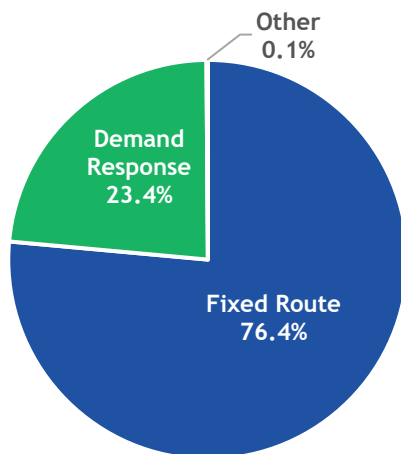
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# 1 Introduction

## Transit in Oklahoma Today

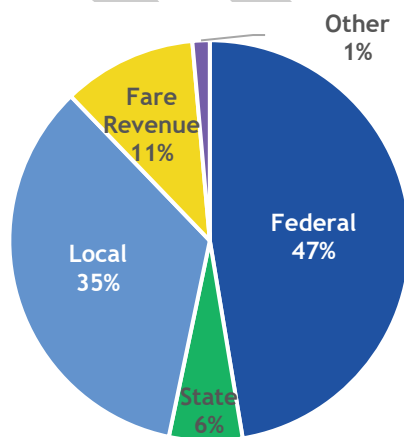
Oklahoma's transit network consists of 35 transit service operators carrying nearly 10.5 million passenger trips a year. Statewide, transit providers in Oklahoma spend roughly \$93.8 million annually to operate service. About 35% of this operating funding is from local sources, such as county and municipal funds, while 47% of funding is from the federal government. Another 6% of funding for transit comes from the state of Oklahoma. The remaining 12% comes from passenger fares and other sources.

Figure 1: Annual Passenger Trips in Oklahoma by Service Type (2018)



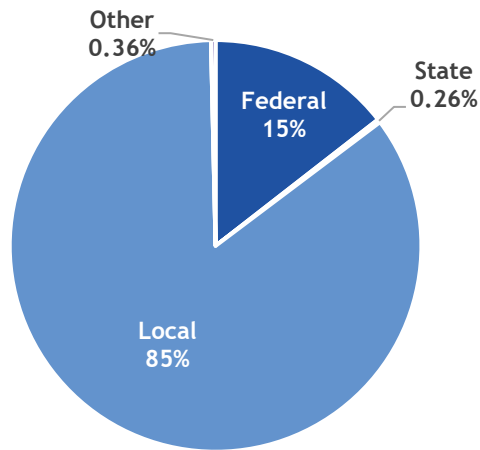
Source: US Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, National Transit Database

Figure 2: Sources of Operating Funds for All Transit Service Providers (2018)



Source: US Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, National Transit Database

Figure 3: Sources of Capital Funds for All Transit Service Providers (2018)



Source: US Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, National Transit Database

## What is Oklahoma Mobility?

In 2019, in accordance with HB 1365, the Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) created the Office of Mobility and Public Transit to help improve 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, titled *Oklahoma Mobility*, as mandated by HB 1365 is 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.
- Aid the development of a policy that addresses the transit challenges of today while providing a strong and enduring vision for the future of Oklahoma.

Oklahoma has a full range of public transit providers, from large, fixed-route urban systems to rural door-to-door services. While existing funding has allowed many community-level systems to provide basic transit services, state and federal funding levels have not kept pace with changes in transit demand. A rapidly growing aging population is often in need of health services outside of their immediate area. At the same time, all generations need better access to education and employment opportunities.

Across the country the expectations of transit riders have changed. New technologies and alternative options to traditional transit mean that customers expect reliable and accessible service. Anything short of convenient service, particularly in urban areas, encourages riders to seek alternative options that better meets their needs. And for some communities, a lack of transportation alternatives can mean costly trips to medical appointments and shopping, diminished opportunities for employment and education, and isolation for Oklahoma's most vulnerable residents.

*Oklahoma Mobility* is designed to identify the resources that transit systems and communities utilize and need to succeed. Input from stakeholders and the public will ensure that the plan meets the



expectations of transit riders and addresses the growing need to support transit dependent populations to get to critical appointments and improve their quality of life. Ultimately, this plan will provide a set of strategies and policy recommendations to support the new Office of Mobility and Public Transit in their mission to ensure that mobility needs across the state are addressed in a reliable, economical, consistent, and coordinated fashion.

## About the State of the System Report

This State of the System report provides:

- A review of Oklahoma's existing transit service and operating characteristics
- A description of challenges, opportunities, and next steps

The State of the System is one of the first steps in understanding the existing conditions of Oklahoma's transit services. While this report aims to understand transit in Oklahoma from a statewide perspective, transit operations and needs are inherently local. This study also includes a comprehensive effort to:

- Survey transit riders and non-riders throughout the state
- Visit transit agencies to discuss needs, challenges and opportunities with agency staff and leadership
- Interview representatives from key state agencies and stakeholders

The State of the System, together with stakeholder and community input as well as a statewide transit market analysis, will inform additional phases of the Plan, including development of a transit investment plan and policy proposals. The final report will include actionable implementation steps that reflect local priorities.

For additional information, visit [www.oktransitplan.org](http://www.oktransitplan.org).

### About the Data

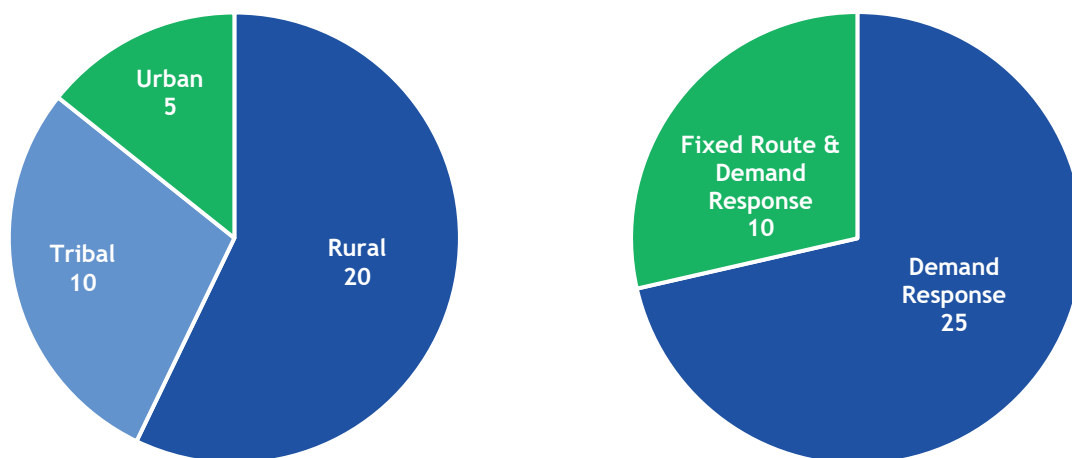
To conduct analysis for the State of the System, the study team used the most recent data available at the time of analysis. Data on transit service, including ridership and service performance, are based on 2018 data from the Federal Transit Administration's National Transit Database. Data on vehicle fleets are from state and agency Transit Asset Management (TAM) plans, with some data supplemented by the National Transit Database (2018) where agency data was not available. Population and demographic information is based on the US Census American Community Survey, using 2013-2017 five-year estimates. Data on employment is based on Longitudinal Employment-Household Dynamics (LEHD) program data, administered through the US Census Center for Economic Studies, from 2010 and 2017. Additional data sources were used for specific topics in the document as well, and analysis was based on the most recent data available from those sources.

## 2 Oklahoma's Transit Service

### Existing Transit Services

There are 37 recipients of federal transit funding. Two recipients, Cherokee Nation and Northeast Tribal Transit Consortium, receive federal transit funding but contract with transit providers who directly operate service. The remaining 35 recipients are transit systems that directly operate service. These 35 transit systems operate a range of services across the state, broadly categorized into fixed route or demand response. In addition, more than 100 entities receive federal transit funds through ODOT to support additional community-based transportation services for older adults and persons with disabilities.

Figure 4: Number of Transit Service Providers in Oklahoma by Federal Funding Category and Type of Service



Source: US Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, National Transit Database

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, and five of those also provide some limited fixed-route services, mostly oriented toward connecting people to employment sites. Twelve tribal entities receive federal transportation funds to support transit services. Ten of these entities operate transit services as listed in the table below; two additional entities are federal funding recipients (Cherokee Nation and the Northeast Oklahoma Tribal Transit Consortium) and contract with transit agencies to provide service.

Figure 5: Transit Providers by Federal Funding Classification and Type of Service

Service Provider	Service Type	Service Provider	Service Type
<b>Urban</b>		<b>Rural</b>	
City of Norman	Fixed Route & Demand Response (Small)	Beaver City Transit	Demand Response (Small)
Citylink of Edmond	Fixed Route & Demand Response (Small)	Call A Ride Public Transit	Demand Response (Small)
EMBARK	Fixed Route & Demand Response (Large)	Central Oklahoma Community Transit System (COTS)	Demand Response (Small)
Lawton Area Transit System (LATS)	Fixed Route & Demand Response (Small)	Cherokee Strip	Demand Response (Large)
Tulsa Transit	Fixed Route & Demand Response (Large)	Cimarron Public Transit System	Demand Response (Large)
<b>Tribal</b>		Delta Public Transit	Demand Response (Small)
Cheyenne & Arapaho Transit Program	Fixed Route & Demand Response (Large)	Enid Public Transit	Demand Response (Large)
Chickasaw Nation Transportation Services	Demand Response (Large)	First Capital Trolley	Fixed Route & Demand Response (Large)
Choctaw Nation Tribal Transit	Demand Response (Large)	JAMM Transit	Demand Response (Large)
Citizen Potawatomi Nation Tribal Transit	Demand Response (Small)	KI BOIS Area Transit System (KATS)	Demand Response (Large)
Comanche Nation Transit	Demand Response (Large)	Little Dixie Transit	Demand Response (Large)
Kiowa Fastrans	Demand Response (Small)	MAGB Transportation	Demand Response (Large)
Muscogee (Creek) Nation Tribal Transit	Fixed Route & Demand Response (Large)	Muskogee County Public Transit Authority	Fixed Route & Demand Response (Small)
Seminole Nation Transit	Demand Response (Small)	OSU/Stillwater Community Transit System	Fixed Route & Demand Response (Large)



Service Provider	Service Type
<b>United Keetoowah Band Transit</b>	Demand Response (Small)
<b>White Eagle Transit</b>	Demand Response (Small)

Service Provider	Service Type
<b>Pelivan Transit</b>	Demand Response (Large)
<b>Red River Public Transportation Service</b>	Demand Response (Large)
<b>Southern Oklahoma Rural Transit System (SORTS)</b>	Demand Response (Large)
<b>Southwest Transit</b>	Demand Response (Small)
<b>The Ride (City of Guymon)</b>	Demand Response (Small)
<b>Washita Valley Transit</b>	Demand Response (Small)

Source: Federal Transit Administration and Oklahoma Department of Transportation

Transit service coverage areas, or the places where transit service travels, also vary; most service providers' coverage areas are defined by jurisdiction boundaries and serve an entire city or county, while many others serve only a portion of a county or cover multiple counties. Several transit providers have overlapping service areas, meaning that some places are within the coverage areas of more than one transit system, such as both fixed-route and demand-response services, and many areas are covered by both rural and tribal service provider areas. Maps of service coverage areas for urban, rural, and tribal transit providers are shown in the following maps.

Nearly all of Oklahoma's residents - 99% - live within the designated coverage area of at least one public transit provider (Figure 9). It is important to note, however, that while many areas appear to be covered by at least one transit service provider, the reality is that constrained resources limit the ability of transit operators to deliver service to everyone in these communities. As a result, many residents who live within a transit service coverage area may have only partial or no access to service compared to what is shown on the map. About 27% of Oklahomans live within reasonable access of fixed-route service in addition to demand-response services that operate in the same areas, while the remaining 73% are located in a service area for demand-response service only. In many areas where there is no public transit available, many community, health, and faith-based organizations provide transportation for older adults and people with disabilities, ensuring mobility for vulnerable populations and connecting them to medical and other services.

Figure 6: Urban Transit Service Designated Coverage Areas



This map displays the designated service coverage areas for various transit operators across Oklahoma's counties. The legend identifies 20 different transit systems, each represented by a unique color or pattern. The map shows how these services are distributed geographically, with some areas having multiple overlapping coverage zones. Notable features include the large yellow area in the west-central part of the state representing KATS, and the dense cluster of smaller, differently colored areas in the eastern half of the state.

Transit Operator	Coverage Area(s)
Beaver City Transit	Beaver
Call A Ride Transit	Pontotoc
Central Oklahoma Community Transit System (COTS)	Seminole, Pottawatomie
Cherokee Strip Transit (NODA)	Blaine, Kingfisher
Cimarron Public Transit	Cimarron
Delta Public Transit	Enid
Enid Transit	Enid
First Capital Trolley	Oklahoma
JAMM Transit	Atoka
KI BOIS Area Transit System (KATS)	Adair, Cherokee, Creek, Delaware, Dewey, Ellis, Garvin, Grady, Haskell, Latimer, LeFlore, Lincoln, Logan, McClain, McIntosh, Muskogee, Nowata, Okfuskee, Oklahoma, Osage, Pawnee, Payne, Rogers, Tulsa, Wagoner, Washington
Little Dixie Transit	McCurtain
MAGB Transportation	Harper, Major, Woodward
Muskogee County Public Transit Authority	Muskogee
OSU/Stillwater Community Transit System	Greene
Pelivan Transit	Nowata
Red River Public Transportation Services	Alfalfa, Grant, Noble
The Ride (City of Guymon)	Guymon
Southern Oklahoma Rural Transportation System (SORTS)	Bryan, Carter, Love, Murray, Stephens
Southwest Transit	Greene, Harmon, Jackson
Washita Valley Transit	Washita

Colorado

Kansas

Cimarron

Texas

Beaver

Harper

Woods

Alfalfa

Grant

Kay

Osage

Washington

Nowata

Craig

Ottawa

Delaware

Ellis

Woodward

Major

Garfield

Noble

Pawnee

Payne

Cherokee Nation (operated by KATS, Pelivan Transit, Muskogee County Public Transit, and Cimarron Public Transit), United Keetoowah Band (UKB) Transit

Cheyenne & Arapaho Tribal Transit

Chickasaw Nation Transportation Services

Choctaw Nation Tribal Transit

Citizen Potawatomi Nation Tribal Transit

Comanche Nation Transit

Kiowa Tribe Fastrans

Muskogee (Creek) Nation Transit (Okmulgee)

Northeast Oklahoma Tribal Transit Consortium (operated by Pelivan Transit)

Seminole Nation Transit

White Eagle Transit

Dewey

Blaine

Kingfisher

Logan

Lincoln

Canadian

Oklahoma

Creek

Tulsa

Wagoner

Cherokee

Adair

Roger Mills

Custer

Okmulgee

Muskogee

Sequoyah

Beckham

Washita

Caddo

Grady

McClain

Cleveland

Pottawatomie

Seminole

Okfuskee

McIntosh

Haskell

Greer

Kiowa

McClain

McClain

Pittsburg

Latimer

LeFlore

Harmon

Jackson

Comanche

Garvin

Pontotoc

Coal

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Jefferson

Carter

Murray

Johnston

Marshall

Love

Bryan

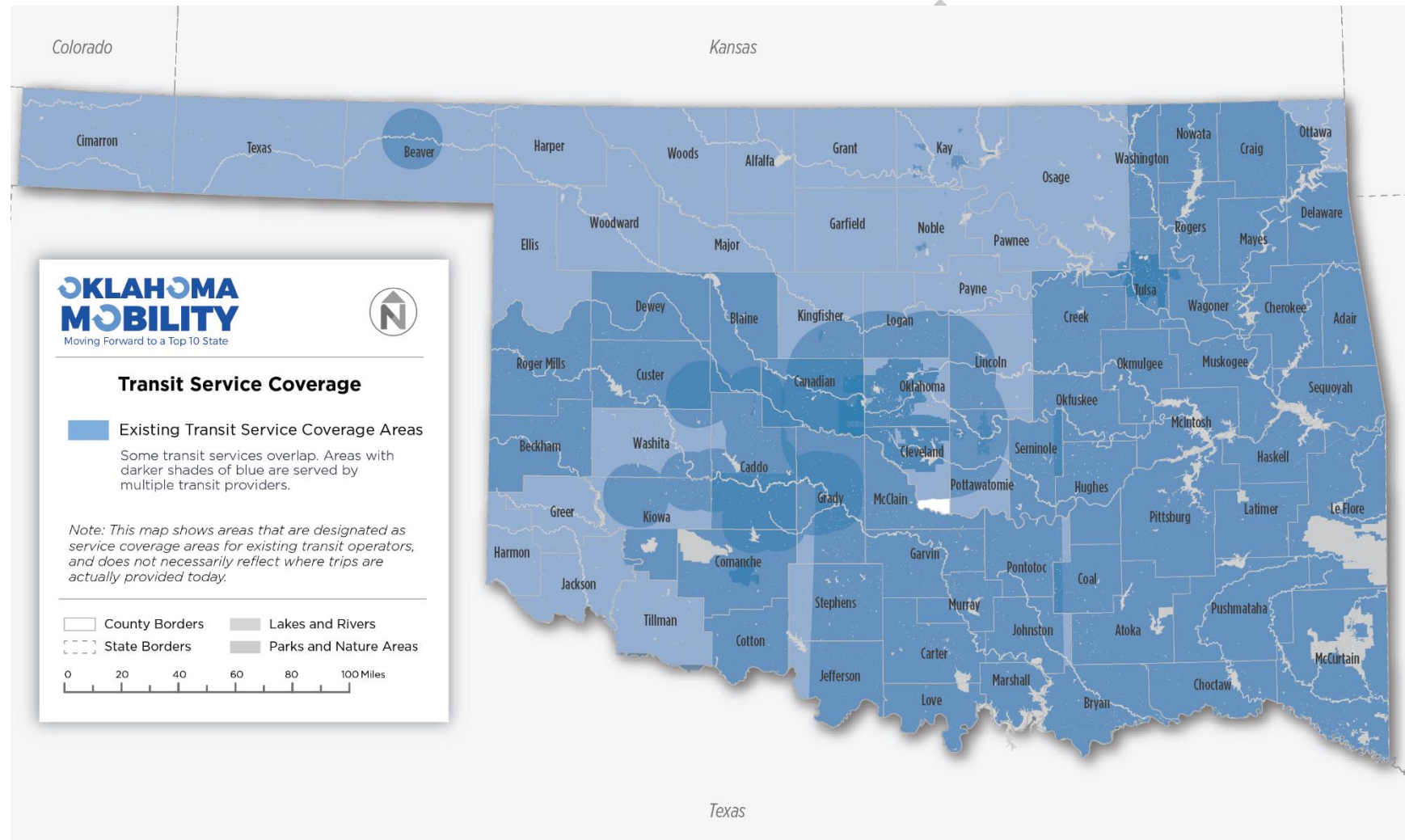
Choctaw

Texas

Note: This map shows areas that are designated as service coverage areas for existing transit operators, and does not necessarily reflect where trips are actually provided today.



Figure 9: Transit Service Designated Coverage Areas - All Programs





## A Closer Look at Rural Service

The State of Oklahoma provides rural transit operators with access to MYLEOnet, a proprietary software application designed for all elements of data collection for the state's 5311 transit services. Through MYLEOnet, Oklahoma's rural transit providers report data about their service, including ridership, individual trips, and operating performance. A map of all trip origins on rural transit services (by zip code) is shown in Figure 11. While nearly 2 million trips were provided in 2019, comparing Figure 11 to Figure 7 shows that service is not necessarily provided in all of the areas that are designated as service coverage areas; many providers are unable to adequately serve all of the communities within their coverage areas, often due to limited capacity and constrained funding. Areas with the most frequent number of trips are found in the following places:

- Across east-central Oklahoma, particularly in Cherokee, Sequoyah, Adair, and Muskogee Counties, as well as Okmulgee, McIntosh, Pittsburg, Muskogee, and Haskell counties.
- Logan County just north of the Greater Oklahoma City Metropolitan area
- Southern Oklahoma including Atoka, Carter, Marshall, northwest Bryan, and eastern Murray Counties
- Stephens County
- Southern McCurtain County
- Northern Pontotoc County
- Parts of Tillman, Jackson, and Greer Counties in the southwest
- Central Garfield County
- Central Kay County
- In the panhandle, focused in central Texas County as well as central Beaver County
- Craig, Ottawa, and northern Delaware Counties in the northeast, and central Washington County

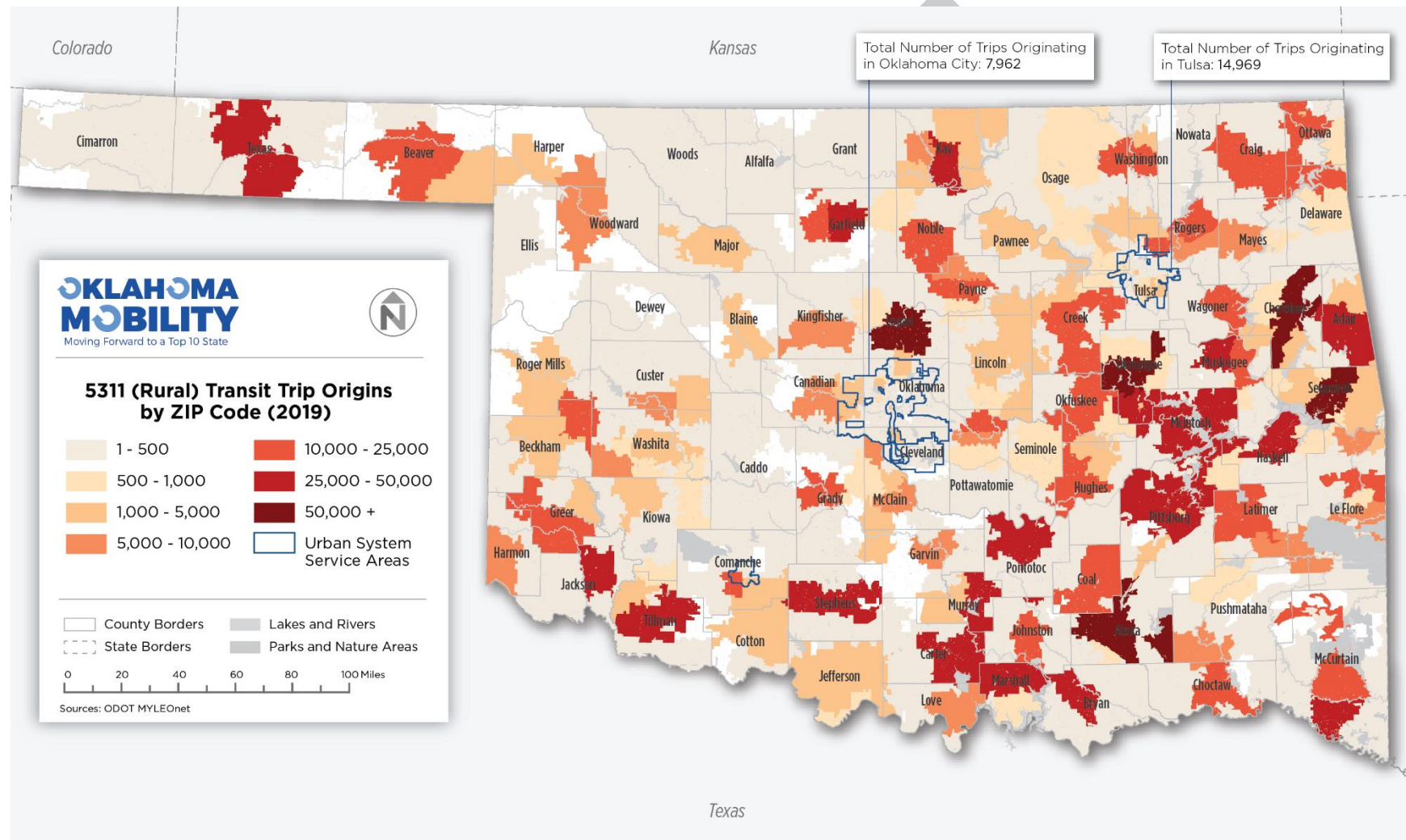
Riders utilize rural transit providers for a wide variety of trip purposes. The largest share of trips - 25% - are taken for medical purposes, while other trips are evenly distributed among getting to education, jobs, shopping, and recreation, as well as other opportunities.

Figure 10: Rural (5311) Transit Trips by Purpose

Trip Purpose	Number of Trips	Percentage of Trips
Medical	458,830	25%
Education	281,235	15%
Employment	269,393	15%
Shopping	264,521	14%
Recreation	231,082	13%
Other	325,660	18%

Source: MYLEOnet, Oklahoma Department of Transportation

Figure 11: Rural (5311) Transit Trip Origins by Zip Code



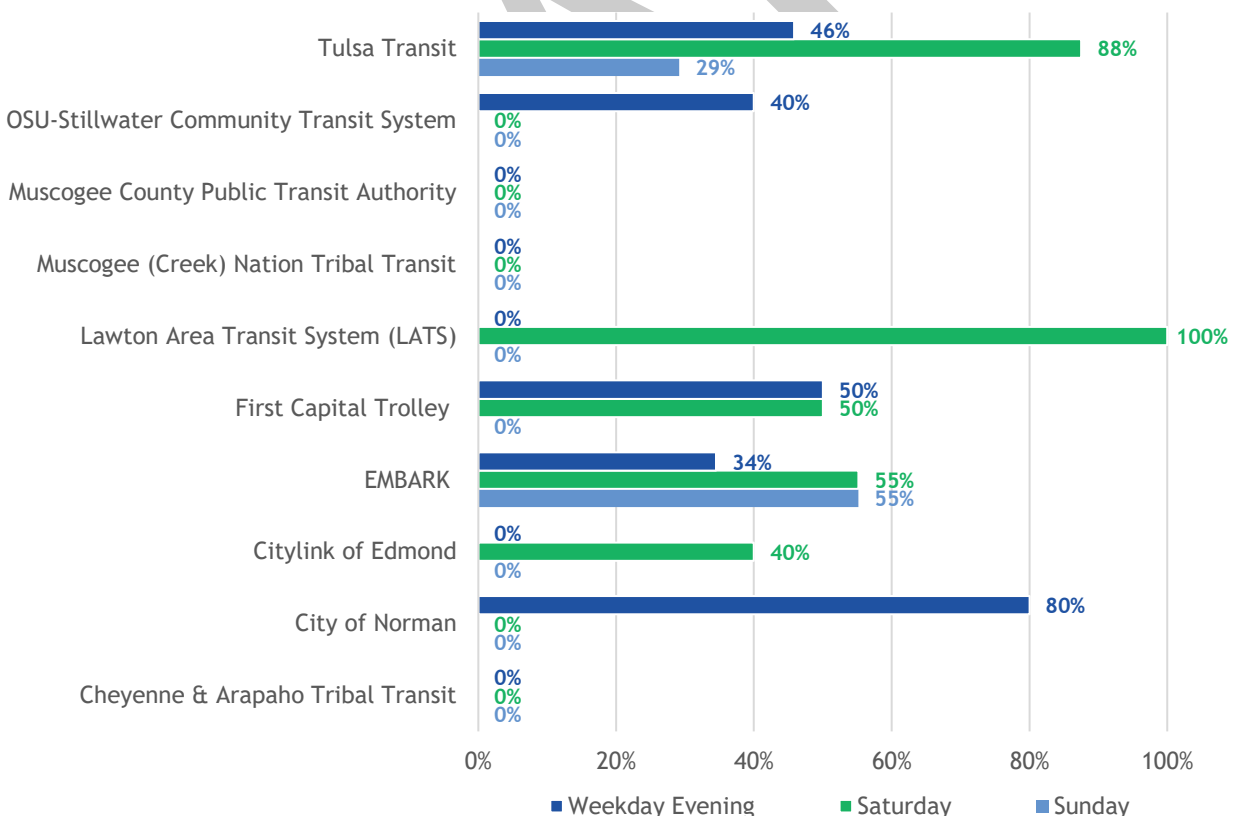
## Types of Services

### Fixed-Route Services

About 27% percent of Oklahoma's population lives within one-half mile of fixed-route transit service. However, it is important to note that living in a county or city that offers public transit service does not necessarily mean it is accessible to all residents, in terms of how many days of the week it operates, how many hours a day it operates or how frequently the service runs. This study considered the portion of existing services available on weekday evenings (defined as after 7:00 PM) and weekend days (Saturdays and Sundays). The measure was calculated by counting the routes that offer service on weekday evenings and weekend days and expressing this as a percentage of the total number of routes.

In general, much less service is available on weekday evenings, Saturdays, and Sundays as compared with weekday daytime hours. Beyond traditional weekday periods, there is generally more service available on weekday evenings than on Saturdays, and more on Saturdays than on Sundays. Within these general findings, there are variations. Lawton Area Transit Service (LATS) provides full coverage on Saturday and EMBARK only offers slightly more than half their service (55% of all routes). Only Tulsa Transit and EMBARK offer Sunday service. There is significant opportunity to expand the hours and days when service is available, which would make transit a more convenient and reliable transportation option and better serve a variety of trip purposes outside of traditional work hours.

**Figure 12: Percentage of Routes Operating During Evenings, Saturdays, and Sundays (Fixed-Route Services Only)**



Source: Nelson\Nygaard, information from individual transit providers

## Demand-Response Services

Unlike fixed-route service that typically operates on a regular schedule, users of demand-response services must contact the service provider to reserve a trip in advance. Many of these services are only available on weekdays, and generally operate during typical business hours only (i.e. 8:00 am to 5:00 pm).

Figure 13: Demand-Response Only Public Transit Services: Rural

Agency	Service Area	Service Availability
Beaver City Transit	Town of Beaver and 10 miles from the town	Open to General Public
Call A Ride Public Transit	Pontotoc County	Open to General Public
Central Oklahoma Transit System (COTS)	Seminole County, Pottawatomie County	Open to General Public
Cherokee Strip	Alfalfa County, Blaine County, Garfield County, Grant County, Kay County, Kingfisher County, Noble County	Open to General Public
Cimarron Public Transit	Creek County, Kay County, Osage County, Pawnee County, Washington County. Includes the following cities: Newkirk, Ponca City, McCord, Pawhuska, Fairfax, Hominy, Skiatook, Dewey, Bartlesville, Pawnee, Cleveland, Mannford, Oilton, Sapulpa, Drumright, Kellyville, Bristow	Open to General Public <i>Saturday Service</i>
Delta Public Transit	Garvin County, McClain County	Open to General Public
Enid Transit	City of Enid	Open to General Public <i>Weekday Evening Service</i> <i>Saturday Service</i>
JAMM Transit	Atoka County, Johnston County, Marshall County, Murray County	Open to General Public <i>Weekday Evening Service</i> <i>Saturday Service</i>
KI BOIS Area Transit System (KATS)	Adair County, Cherokee County, Haskell County, Hughes County, Latimer County, Le Flore County, McIntosh County, Okfuskee County, Okmulgee County, Pittsburgh County, Sequoyah County, Wagoner County	Open to General Public
Little Dixie Transit	Choctaw, Pushmataha, and McCurtain Counties	Open to General Public
MAGB Transportation	5311 Funds: Major, Woods, Texas, and Harper Counties. 5310 Funds: Northwest Oklahoma, area north of I-40 and West of I-35	Open to General Public <i>Saturday Service</i>

Agency	Service Area	Service Availability
Pelivan Transit	Washington, Tulsa, Nowata, Rogers, Craig, Mayes, Ottawa, and Delaware Counties	Open to General Public <i>Weekday Evening Service</i> <i>Saturday Service</i> <i>Sunday Service</i>
Red River Transportation Service	Carter, Beckham, Comanche, Stephens, Cotton, Caddo, Dewey, Tillman, Washita, Roger Mills, Kiowa, Jefferson, Custer, Ellis, Canadian, and Woodward Counties	Open to General Public
Southern Oklahoma Rural Transit System (SORTS)	Bryan, Carter, Coal, and Love Counties	Open to General Public
Southwest Transit	Harmon, Greer, and Jackson Counties	Open to General Public
The Ride (City of Guymon)	Guymon City	Open to General Public <i>Weekday Evening Service</i> <i>Saturday Service</i>
Washita Valley Transit	Grady County	Open to General Public

Figure 14: Demand-Response Only Public Transit Services: Tribal

Agency	Service Area	Service Availability
Chickasaw Nation Transportation Services	Chickasaw Nation, 20 miles radius around OKC city limits	Open to residents of Chickasaw Nation Area
Choctaw Nation Tribal Transit	Choctaw Nation	Open to residents of Choctaw Nation
Citizen Potawatomi Nation Tribal Transit	Shawnee City, Tecumseh City	Open to General Public
Comanche Nation Transit	Caddo County (partial), Comanche County, Cotton County, Kiowa County (partial)	Open to General Public <i>Saturday Service</i>
Kiowa Fastrans	Anadarko City, Apache Town, Binger Town, Carnegie Town, Fort Cobb Town, Hinton Town, Grechemont Town, Weatherford City, Hobart City, Mountain View Town, Cyril Town, Chickasha City, Verden Town	Open to General Public
Seminole Nation Transit	Seminole County	<i>unknown</i>
United Keetoowah Band Transit	United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma	Open to General Public

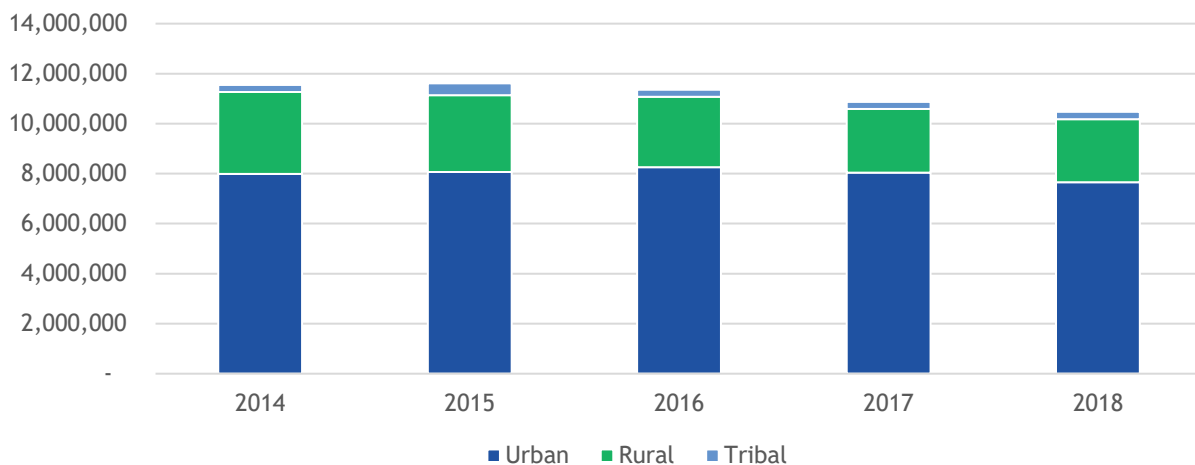
Agency	Service Area	Service Availability
White Eagle Transit	Marland, Red Rock, Blackwell, Kaw City, Newkirk, Tonkawa, Ponca City (White Eagle), Perry	Open to General Public

Source: Nelson\Nygaard, information from individual transit providers

## Service & Ridership Trends

Oklahoma public transit agencies carried 10,470,020 passenger trips in 2018.<sup>1</sup> This represents a 9% decrease from 2014, when the state's transit providers served just more than 11.5 million trips (Figure 15). This decline is similar to the national trend of declining transit ridership, which fell just under 8% between 2014 and 2018.<sup>2</sup> About 25 of the state's 35 transit providers experienced a decrease in ridership during this time, while 10 providers saw the ridership increase. Total ridership among urban systems declined slightly during this time, while ridership on rural systems experienced a more significant decline. Ridership on tribal services increased slightly during this period. As of 2018, most passenger trips in Oklahoma are carried by urban transit services, representing 7,655,793 passenger trips in 2018, or 73% of all passenger trips. Rural service providers carried 24% of all passenger trips in 2018, and tribal transit services carried about 3% of trips. While many of the state's transit providers experienced ridership declines, about 90% of the state's net loss in riders occurred among just six providers: Tulsa Transit, OSU-Stillwater Community Transit System, KI BOIS Area Transit System (KATS), Southern Oklahoma Rural Transit System (SORTS), Lawton Area Transit System (LATS), and Red River Public Transportation Service.

Figure 15: Annual Passenger Trips in Oklahoma, 2014 - 2018



Source: National Transit Database

Oklahoma transit providers operated nearly 1.7 million hours of service in 2018 (Figure 16). 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

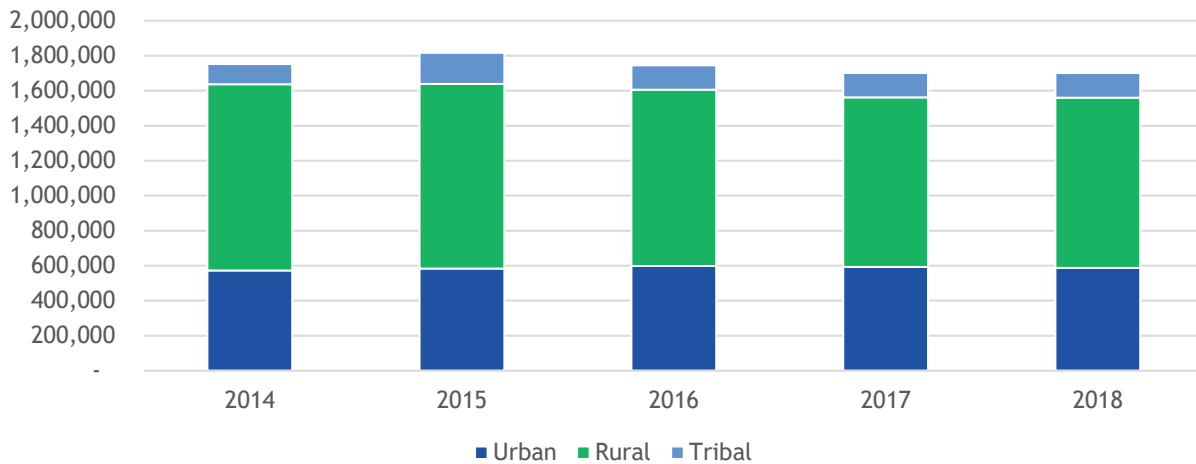
<sup>1</sup> US Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, National Transit Database

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



8% of the state's hours of transit service. Since 2014, total hours of service decreased by about 3%. However, this decline is attributable to decreased hours of service among rural systems, which experienced an 8.7% decrease in service hours. Urban systems increased service hours by 2.5%, and tribal systems increased service hours by 24%.

**Figure 16: Annual Hours of Transit Service in Oklahoma, 2014 - 2018**



Source: National Transit Database

Changes in service and performance are also notable between different types of services. Small and large service providers operating both fixed-route and demand-response service increased service hours and experienced increased ridership between 2014 and 2018, while agencies operating only demand-response service experienced declines in both service hours and ridership. The decline was particularly stark among smaller demand-response service providers, for whom overall service hours and ridership declined by more than 20%.

**Figure 17: Service and Performance Trends: Averages by Type of Transit Service**

	Agencies Operating Demand Response Services ONLY		Agencies Operating Fixed Route Services & Demand Response	
	Small	Large	Small	Large
Annual Revenue Vehicle Hours per Capita (2018)	0.46	0.29	0.45	0.41
Change in Revenue Vehicle Hours (2014-2018)	-23.2%	-5.9%	10.8%	3.4%
Change in Ridership (2014-2018)	-29.9%	-3.0%	2.8%	4.4%
Passengers per Revenue Vehicle Hour	3.0	2.2	7.4	12.7
Operating Cost per Revenue Vehicle Hour	\$38.10	\$47.20	\$49.80	\$95.30

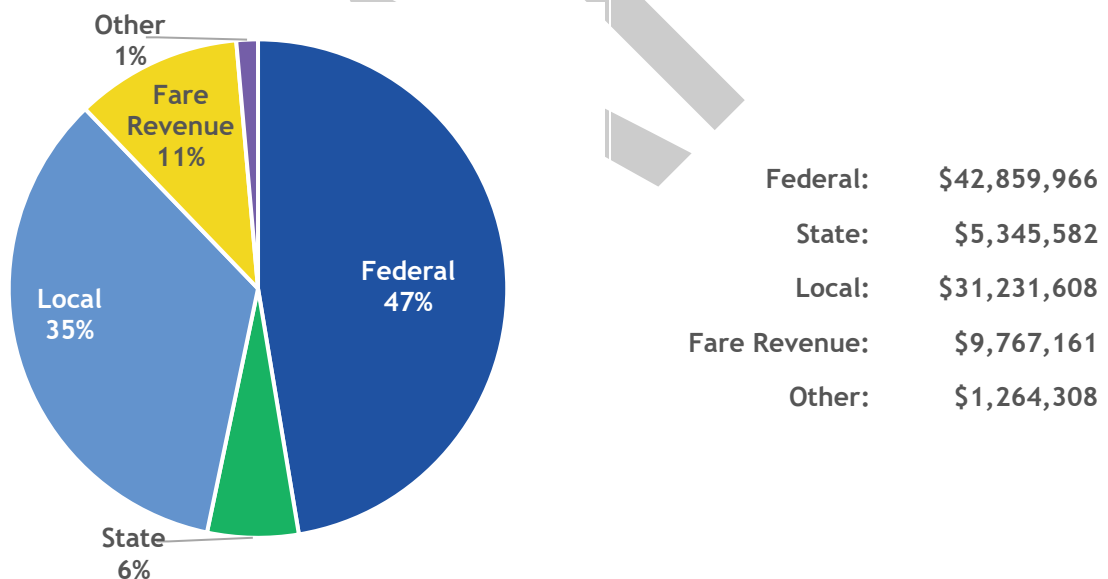
	Agencies Operating Demand Response Services ONLY		Agencies Operating Fixed Route Services & Demand Response	
	Small	Large	Small	Large
<b>Operating Cost per Passenger</b>	\$13.00	\$25.10	\$10.70	\$7.40

Source: National Transit Database

## Transit Funding in Oklahoma

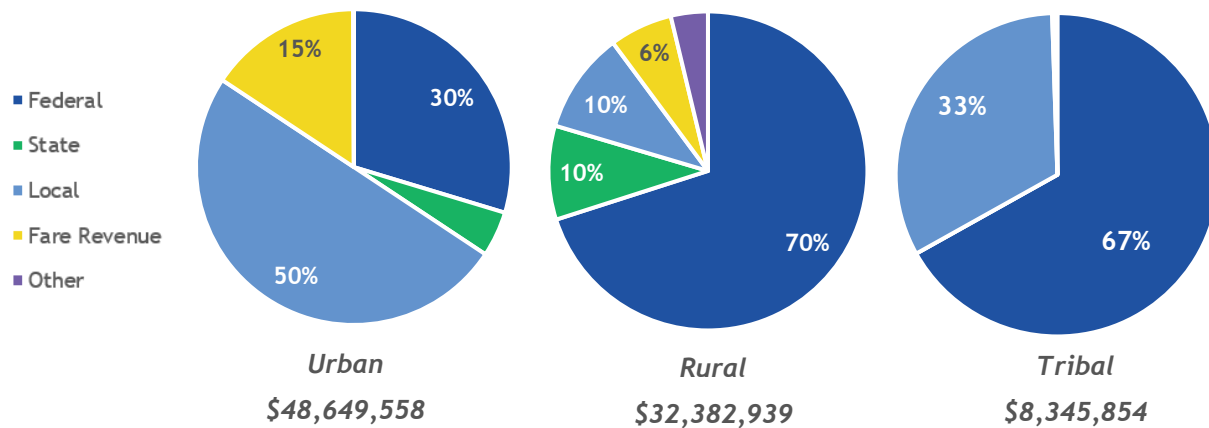
Many transit services in Oklahoma are funded through some combination of federal, local, and state funds, plus fares, contracts, and other resources, such as grants and other financial assistance. Within this general formula, however, there is a lot of variation in how individual transit agencies fund their systems. Transit service requires two types of investments. The first is for operations, which includes driver wages and fuel (among other inputs) and reflects the actual service delivery. The sources of operating funds for all public transit services in Oklahoma are shown in Figure 18, and are broken out by urban, rural, and tribal transit providers in Figure 19. Rural agencies are required to provide a 50-50 match for federal operating dollars.

**Figure 18: Sources of Operating Funds for All Transit Service Providers (2018)**



Source: National Transit Database

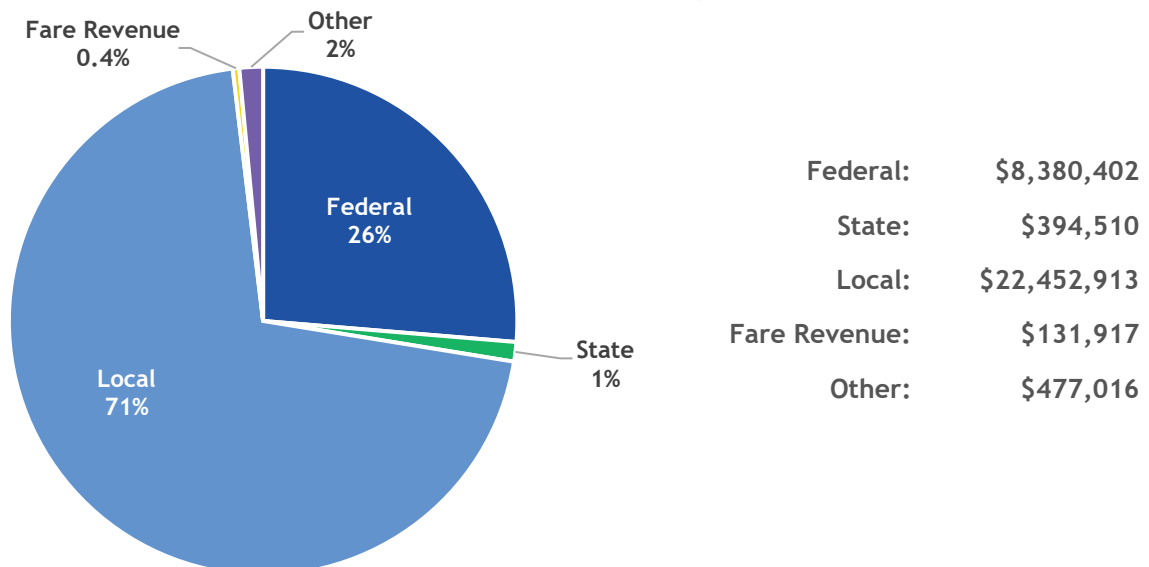
Figure 19: Sources of Operating Funds for Urban, Rural, and Tribal Transit Service Providers (2018)



Source: National Transit Database

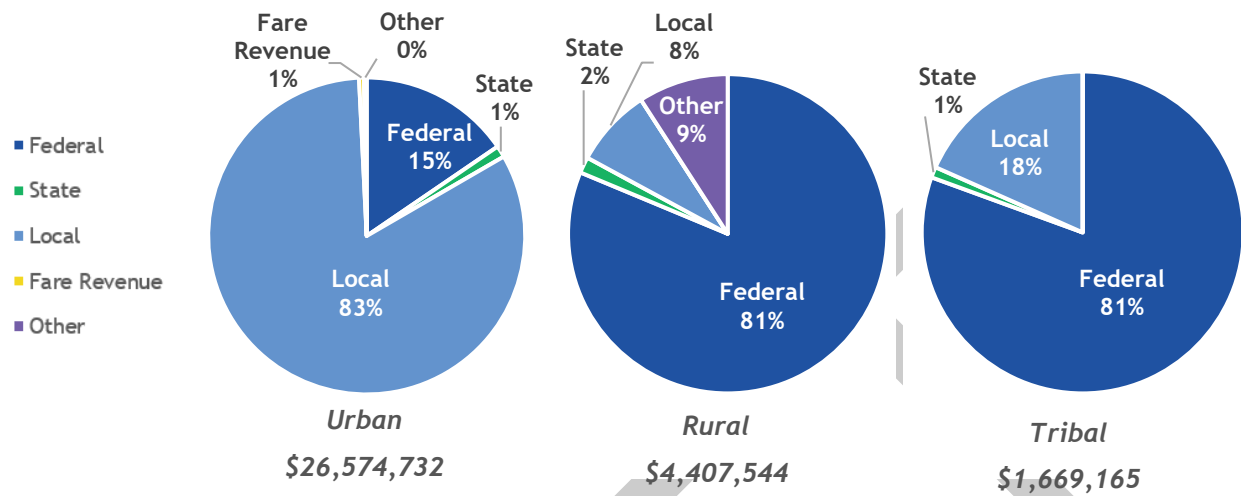
The other major investment in transit is capital, which is mostly made up of vehicles, but can also include facilities such as passenger infrastructure and investments in technology. Federal Transit Administration funds can be used to cover up to 80% fleet and other infrastructure but are more limited in their use for operating dollars. Some agencies use the revenue from contracted services, such as trips provided through LogistiCare, to meet federal match requirements for operations and fleet purchases. For some transit agencies, these contracts often serve as the only source of local match funds.

Figure 20: Sources of Capital Funds for All Transit Service Providers (Annual Average 2014-2018)



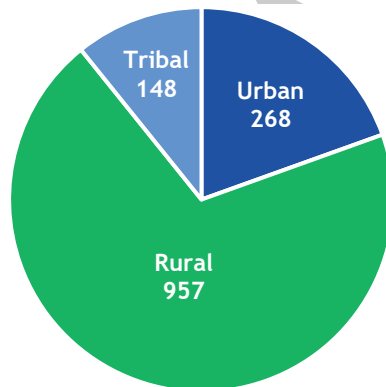
Source: National Transit Database

**Figure 21: Sources of Capital Funds for Urban, Rural, and Tribal Transit Service Providers (Annual Average 2014-2018)**



Source: National Transit Database

**Figure 22: Statewide Vehicle Fleet for All Urban, Rural, and Tribal Transit Services**



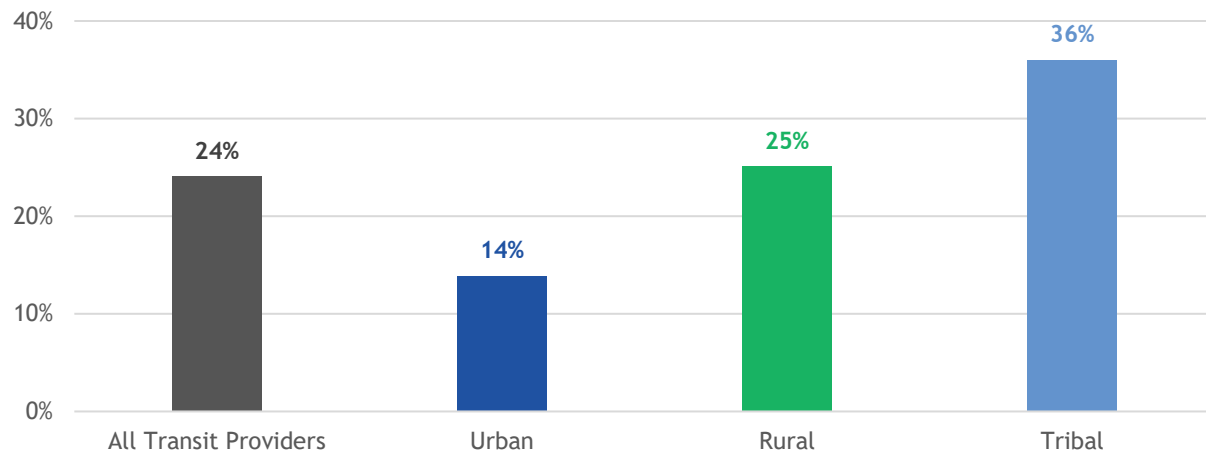
Source: Transit Asset Management (TAM) Plans for Oklahoma Transit Providers. Data for some providers supplemented from the National Transit Database (2018).

**Figure 23: Statewide Vehicle Fleet for All Urban, Rural, and Tribal Transit Services**

Program	Fleet Count	Maintenance Facilities	Passenger/Parking Facilities	Operations/Admin Facilities
Rural	957	16	20	55
Tribal	148	2	11	2
Urban	268	16	6	36

Source: Transit Asset Management (TAM) Plans for Oklahoma Transit Providers. Vehicle data for some providers supplemented from the National Transit Database (2018).

**Figure 24: Percentage of Transit Fleet Vehicles At or Past Useful Life**



Source: Transit Asset Management (TAM) Plans for Oklahoma Transit Providers.

## Availability of Technology

The availability of transit technologies was also considered. Technology plays an increasingly important role in helping transit agencies to run efficiently, as well as making information about transit service more widely available and convenient for current and potential riders. In general, Oklahoma's largest fixed-route systems are for the most part technology capable. In some cases, transit agencies without certain technologies are in the process of acquiring them.

The Oklahoma Department of Transportation makes propriety software available to transit providers in the state. MYLEOnet is an application designed for all elements of data collection for the state's 5311 transit services. TransitAssistant Desktop is an application for scheduling, dispatching, and data collection by transit providers, while TransitAssistant Mobile is an Android application that can be used by operators to collect ridership data, as well as dispatchers to schedule riders and monitor rider trip activity. At least five service providers taken advantage of TransitAssistant and use it in their operations, while other service providers have invested in other technologies for a variety of purposes, including scheduling software, automatic vehicle location (AVL) and GPS systems, real-time arrival information for customers. Some agencies cited the cost of software as a barrier to acquiring technologies to enhance their operations.

## Human Services Transportation

Public transit agencies across Oklahoma play a vital role in providing trips for older adults, disabled persons and/or people with lower incomes. In recognition of the transportation needs of these individuals, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) provides additional resources through the FTA 5310 program to states to support private, non-profit entities to expand resources where public transit options may be unavailable or unable to meet these needs.

The Oklahoma Department of Transportation distributes these funds for the purchase of vehicles for both non-profit and public transit agencies to provide trips for older adults and individuals with disabilities. These funds were previously managed and distributed through the Department of Human Services. Since July 2019, the program is overseen by the new Office of Mobility and Public Transit to

better coordinate and align services across the state. There are approximately 100 program recipients, including 12 transit agencies who use these funds to supplement their fleet in order to provide additional services within their communities for these targeted populations. As of March 2020, 396 vehicles are in service through this program.

Additionally, the Oklahoma Health Care Authority (OHCA) administers the Medicaid program for the state and has oversight of NEMT services through the SoonerRide program. Since 1999 Oklahoma has used a statewide broker to operate its non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) program, currently contracting with LogistiCare Solutions, LLC. To operate the statewide brokerage, LogistiCare contracts with a variety of local transportation providers including public transit providers. In 2019, 932,264 trips were taken through this program, or 3,570 trips daily. The average trip length was 23 miles one way. Less than one percent of these trips were taken by fixed route bus, but about 26%, or 240,483 trips were provided by a combination of nine rural transit providers and three organizations with vehicles purchased through the 5310 program.



**OKLAHOMA MOBILITY**  
Moving Forward to a Top 10 State

### 5310 Recipients

Entities providing trips for seniors and individuals with disabilities

- 20 or more vehicles
- 10 to 19 vehicles
- 5 to 9 vehicles
- 2 to 4 vehicles
- 1 vehicle

Each dot represents an entity HQ with number of vehicles in 5310 service

County Borders, State Borders, Lakes and Rivers, Parks and Nature Areas

0 20 40 60 80 100 Miles

Sources: ODOT, Verified 5310 Recipients, 2020

# 3 Challenges and Opportunities

## Overview

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, 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 compared to what is shown on the map. This speaks to a gap between the need for transit across the state and the limited capacity of transit providers to meet that need given constrained resources.

Interviews with transit providers and other stakeholders along with a market analysis of underlying demand and need for transit in Oklahoma, highlight opportunities where transit can boost overall quality of life for all Oklahomans. The type of transit service needed varies across the state. In Oklahoma City and Tulsa, the two largest urban areas, frequent fixed route services are in high demand. Demand also extends to communities within the Oklahoma City metropolitan area such as Norman, Edmond, Shawnee, and Yukon, as well the urban areas of Lawton, Enid, Stillwater, and Tahlequah. These communities have areas of continuous job and population density that can support the hourly or better service of traditional fixed-route transit service. Most of Oklahoma is rural and may be served best with demand response transit so that service can be door-to-door. Regional commuter services can also connect rural residents with economic opportunity.

In order to improve both urban and rural public transit, transit providers need support locally 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. The following sections will outline the current gaps and potential improvements in transit service and highlight the opportunities created by improved connectivity statewide.

## Current Gaps and Potential Improvements

### Funding Needs

All transit providers in Oklahoma have significant unmet operational and capital funding needs, preventing them from improving and expanding service for their riders. Further, funding sources do not necessarily guarantee adequate funds for the future.

One major issue is the instability of local funding to match federal grants, in which providers miss out on fully receiving grants that are readily available due to the inability to come up with adequate local match. Many providers, especially ones that operate across a larger region, do not receive funding from municipalities or county governments. This situation has only intensified as a result of COVID-19, which has significantly impacted local economies while presenting Oklahoma's transit riders and operators with unprecedented challenges. To meet the local match, they often must piece together funds from other grants and contracts, such as money received from rides contracted by LogistiCare, a Medicaid transportation provider. These contracted rides are likely to decrease in the next few years as well, due to LogistiCare shifting to private companies to provide rides. In addition, private contractors in

Oklahoma have struggled to meet federal requirements related to NEMT services. For transit agencies that do receive funding from local governments, the amount of funding can depend on how much city officials support transit. A change in city councils or town financial management can drastically change how much funding the transit provider gets, which impacts the amount of local match funds available. Finding a stable mechanism for dedicated local and state funding with a clear structure can help transit providers across the state better leverage federal dollars.

Transit providers identified the following capital and operation gaps due to lack of funding:

- Inability to find or retain drivers due to low wages and part-time status without benefits
- Inability to meet all rides requested due to lack of overall capacity
- Vehicles that are too old and/or have too many miles on them
- Vehicles that need repair and cannot fully deliver services (e.g. broken wheelchair lift)
- Difficulty of providing long distance trips, since deadhead miles (the travel required to begin or end a passenger trip) do not receive funding but still use driver time and wear down vehicles

In addition to increasing funding at both the local and state levels to address these gaps, state and federal agencies can reduce the large volumes of state and federal regulations on public transit providers and their funding that prevent them from fully offering their services and programs. For example, some grants are restricted to only vehicle purchases, while a transit provider may need those funds more for buying parts or investing in technology. Lastly, there is potential to increase the overall pool of funding through better coordination with other agencies, such as ones that oversee economic development and health. Public-private partnerships can also get more private entities to invest in transit, such as employers looking to increase access to their facilities for potential workers.

## **Service Improvements and Expansion**

Transit in various areas of Oklahoma is limited. Given additional funding and resources, transit agencies can expand service and make it more reliable, affordable, and convenient. This funding can be used to increase capacity, by hiring and retaining more drivers, purchasing and maintaining vehicles, and other operational changes.

Currently, many transit providers operate only on weekdays, some on Saturdays, and very few on Sundays. Service hours are generally from the early morning to late afternoon. By operating only during the day on weekdays, people who work shifts outside of the typical workday cannot use transit to get to or from their jobs. On the flip side, people who rely on transit who are searching for a job cannot seek one outside of the typical workday. In both rural and urban areas, expanding service hours and days could connect more people to economic opportunities. It can also make accessing grocery stores, schools, medical facilities, and social activities more convenient and reliable.

Some demand response providers require advanced reservations of 24 hours or more for a ride, while others also operate on-demand. Agencies also noted that they sometimes turn away riders due to lack of capacity. For people to fully be able to rely on transit, services should be simple to schedule and use, and people should not have to worry about being turned away. Implementing policies to allow for on-demand trips and to guarantee all request trips can make transit more attractive, especially for those who depend on these services.

Additionally, to best serve the people who rely the most on transit and to make transit competitive with driving, services must be affordable. Long distance trips, which usually charge per mile, can be prohibitively expensive. While Medicaid or Veterans Affairs provide reimbursement for some long-

distance trips by their clients, some trips may not be covered. Lowering fares can allow more people to access transit. Providers can also put in place monthly passes or other frequent rider discounts to encourage people to take more trips on transit for a smaller fare.

Lastly, improving the infrastructure adjacent to transit can also help increase the safety and comfort of transit itself. For fixed route services, first mile/last mile considerations—such as building infrastructure for accessible sidewalks, safe biking, and well-lit bus stops—are crucial to getting more riders onto buses. Even for demand-response services, better walking conditions encourages people to make more short trips without a car.

## **Education and Marketing of Transit Services**

There is currently a stigma around public transit, which is often seen as a last-resort mode of transportation rather than competitive with other modes such as driving. In addition to improving transit service itself so that it becomes a viable first-choice mode, ODOT, OTA, and transit providers can improve the education and marketing of public transit in order to change its image and demonstrate how transit benefits everyone.

Education and marketing efforts can focus on the following:

- Increasing awareness of the types of services available
- Educating people on how to use transit
- Communicating the social and economic benefits of transit
- Providing professional development and training to support transit agency staff

A coordinated and funded statewide public outreach effort can help spread this messaging across the whole state. Tactics in the marketing plan can be creative too, such as creating videos geared toward attracting current non-riders onto transit. These tactics should be paired with making sure that transit information is easy to access as well.

In addition to marketing efforts to reduce public stigma and gain riders, educating key partners of public transit, such as other state agencies and elected officials, can help spread beneficial information. It can also help these partners consider incorporating transit services into their own strategies to improve public health, economic development, and quality of life in general.

## **Investment in Technology**

Over the last decade, there have been great advances in transportation-related technology that promise to make public transit more convenient and reliable. Investing in some of this technology statewide can help transit providers better provide service and help Oklahomans better access this service.

Technology can help improve trip batching and dispatching for transit providers, which is currently done manually by many demand-response agencies. Trip information can be sent directly to drivers, making on-demand rides easier to provide. In order for rural agencies to be able access this technology however, wireless internet and broadband infrastructure must also be made more robust to avoid lost connections. For potential riders, technology can help make fare payment easier and allow for the convenience of online trip requests, as well as make information about how to ride transit and service alerts more widely accessible and easy to find.

One potential goal of investing in technology is the creation of a coordinated statewide platform between all providers accessed through a user-friendly app. Through an app, riders will be able to plan, book, and pay for any trip on any transit agency statewide, and providers will be able to receive this information and immediately provide the service.

## Statewide Coordination and Connectivity

To fill gaps in transit service and ensure high-quality transportation across the state, it would be beneficial for ODOT and OTA to play a role in coordinating between transit providers and other public and private entities. Statewide coordination can help boost the impact of other transit improvements discussed in this report.

Based on the way funding and resource allocation are structured, transit providers often must compete for rides where service areas overlap. For people who want to travel regionally between different service areas, transit services are lacking, and transit providers do not often coordinate with each other to pass off rides. The state can create a structure to better facilitate coordination and encourage collaboration among providers to fulfill regional trips. ODOT and OTA can also work toward creating a centralized statewide mobility management system. These types of systems can provide for regional mobility managers and a statewide call center, as well as a single trip information and scheduling portal (1 call/1 click) that people can access to use any transit service in the state. This portal can be made more robust with a universal fare payment system so that riders can transfer between agencies in a more convenient manner.

In addition to coordinating between agencies, the state can coordinate with private transportation entities like Amtrak and Greyhound and enter public private partnerships to expand the reach of transit around the state. While several public transit agencies offer longer-distance regional trips, none are part of the national intercity bus network and there is no statewide intercity bus information or plan that would allow users to travel from one region or city to another, or to points outside the state. There is little marketing and no branding of intercity feeders by ODOT or transit agencies. One operator, Delta Transit, is a Greyhound agent and advertises that it provides feeder service to its Greyhound stop.

Lastly, the state can play a major role in providing trainings for transit providers. ODOT's Office of Mobility and Public Transit is responsible for the administration of both local and federal transit funding programs. Their responsibility to the network of transit providers, and their funding includes training around program requirements such as Drug & Alcohol programs, Civil Rights, Maintenance and Transit Asset Management Plans. Beyond compliance, there are many common issues agencies face, from local funding challenges and use of technology. The Oklahoma Transit Association offers a forum for agencies to gather and discuss ideas. Agencies would additionally benefit from more focused ODOT funded opportunities to share best practices and exchange ideas. For agencies in areas far from Oklahoma City, supplementing in-person trainings with webinars and other virtual learning can make them more accessible to both management staff and drivers across the state. Providing training on professional development and succession planning can also help ensure staff retention and the longevity of these transit providers.

# Opportunities Created by Improving Transit

## Economic Development

Access to jobs is one of the most important reasons why people travel. Transit providers 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.

Between 2010 and 2017, Oklahoma experienced a 6.2% increase in jobs, which is less than half of the national growth rate of 14.1%.<sup>3</sup> Jobs are growing the fastest in Oklahoma City and Tulsa, and much slower in smaller cities and rural areas. There are efforts at the state and local levels to make Oklahoma competitive with other states, which includes attracting new jobs to the state. When a major employer picks a location to open an office or facility, transportation for workers is an important consideration, since employers want to ensure that they can hire workers who can get to their site. Large companies are giving increased consideration to the presence of public transportation when they evaluate cities to relocate or expand, such as Amazon's requirement that transit must serve the site of their future "HQ2" secondary headquarters. Making transit more robust presents an opportunity to make areas all over the state more attractive to prospective employers.

In conversations with transit providers, there is also increasing interest in partnering with existing major employers to provide transit for workers. Some providers already run routes to the main employers in their towns, while others noted that many casinos and factories sit right outside the town boundary, and thus outside of their service area. Given additional funding and capacity to expand service, they expressed interest in extending the service area to cover these major employers. Transit providers are also interested in adding or expanding partnerships with local schools to expand potential ridership and help students and staff get around.

Since the job growth rate is low, people often must travel farther than the town boundaries to access economic opportunities. Transit services that connect people to jobs regionally are currently lacking, since many providers that span the county or multiple counties are stretched thin with other trip purposes, such as medical appointments. Fare structures that charge per mile also make these long-distance trips expensive, especially for fares that are not subsidized. Better coordination between agencies and more funding all around can help providers expand their regional job access.

## Quality of Life and Healthcare

The availability and quality of public transportation 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), residents with disabilities, or older adults, access to transit is especially crucial for living independently.

Oklahoma has an aging population: between 2010 and 2017, the population 65 years of age or older increased by 13%, more than triple the growth rate of the general population (3.9%).<sup>4</sup> Many stakeholders have identified the ability of older adults (65+) to age in place as a high priority, so there are opportunities to expand collaborative efforts between transit providers and health agencies for

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<sup>3</sup> Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) program, US Census Bureau

<sup>4</sup> 2010 US Census Summary File, 2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates



initiatives that improve livable communities. Some providers currently partner with nursing homes and assisted living centers to provide group trips to other local facilities.

In addition, many providers require advanced reservations of 24 hours or more for transit rides, which is a barrier to spontaneous travel that improves the quality of life while aging in place, such as a trip to visit friends, a last-minute medical appointment, or a trip to the grocery store or restaurant. Updating policies to allow on-demand transit trips, and potentially adding capacity to the transit system, would enhance overall wellbeing.

A major proportion of transit trips in Oklahoma, especially in rural areas, is to medical services, and there is a need for reliable and affordable access to medical appointments. Though many transit providers do connect people to local hospitals and clinics, most medical specialists are in Oklahoma City and Tulsa. Veterans' health facilities are also often farther than the typical health clinic, which introduces another gap in transit services. Increased transit services that serve longer-distance regional trips, plus better coordination between transit, health, and veteran agencies, can help better connect people to these crucial services.

## **Mobility for All**

When communities fully invest in transit, it can meet the needs of those who rely on it most while also attracting riders who want to use convenient and compelling transit service. Both urban and rural communities have populations who rely on transit, such as older adults, veterans, people with disabilities, people without cars, and students. Improving transit allows these populations to access quality healthcare and specialists, employment opportunities, veteran services, supermarkets, and other centers of activity. Connecting Oklahomans to their destinations in a safe, accessible, and affordable way also allows elderly residents to age in place and sustains communities of all ages and abilities in both urban and rural areas.

At the same time, improving transit also 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 to go.