

Public Transit State Funding from a Small Rural Transit System Perspective and their passengers

There is a reason why Mass Transportation in the United States moved from the private sector to the public sector decades ago.....COST. I could tell you that every dollar invested in public transit is returned 4 times in economic development as well as a lot of other financial investment statistics pertaining to funding public transit but you have heard all of this before.

Whether it is the Baby Boomers needing more specialized transportation service or the Generation Z's trying to find employment all the while having a millennial stance against pollution, congestion and fiscal responsibility of owning and maintaining an automobile, the public transportation need is greater now than ever and it is growing. The challenges to provide safe, reliable and convenient service are a constant struggle even if the service was properly funded. But to add injury to insult the great state of Ohio is ranked 45th in funding transit, sandwiched between South Dakota and Mississippi, at a dismal investment of 63 cents per capita, despite being rated 14th in the country for total trips provided. In the state of Ohio the small rural transit systems are no different than our Big Brothers in the urban centers of Ohio, except most rural transit systems do not have dedicated sources of local income like our Big Brother counterparts and the mode of service differs greatly. Most small rural transit systems are Demand Response (door to door) unlike our Big Brothers who have concentrated service districts in an urban environment where fixed line service can efficiently move several passengers on big buses along a designated corridor with bus stops. Service factors and expenses depend on the operating costs, travel demands, and passenger-carrying capacities of the different modes. These factors greatly affect the relative cost effectiveness of the different modes. The 2018 national average cost per passenger mile between urban fixed line was (\$1.31)₂ and demand response at (\$4.37)₂. In addition the cost of unlinked passenger trips between the two are, fixed line (\$4.09)₂ and demand response (\$39.51)₂. These are staggering cost differences associated between the two types of transportation modes. As a rural transit operator the service district has very few urban environments making it live out its namesake, "Rural".

To compare the two, we will consider Toledo, Ohio (TARTA) Toledo Area Regional Transit Authority and Ottawa County Ohio (OCTA) Ottawa County Transportation Agency, which both operate in northwest Ohio. TARTA has a service district of approximately 137 square miles₃ serving an approximate combined population of 370,864₃ persons. The density of population per square mile averages 2,015₃ persons in the district with Toledo proper maintaining 3,388₃ persons per square mile. The TARTA service district encompasses seven hospitals providing approximately 2,305 beds₃ with a large array of support services from physicians to Urgent Care facilities including 24 Dialysis facilities. In comparison, OCTA has a natural service district (geographic county) of 255 square miles₃ with the additional service areas that border Ottawa

County including most of Lucas County and some parts of Wood, Erie and Sandusky counties. The true service area equates to approximately 641 square miles serving a population of approximately 40,525₃ persons resulting in a density of population per square mile of 63 persons. There is one hospital in Ottawa County with 25 beds₃. Ottawa County has no Dialysis or Cancer Centers and only one Urgent Care facility. The comparisons are dramatic for the citizens of Ottawa County and put a tremendous burden on OCTA's ability to serve the citizens and their needs with a large amount of those needs being provided out of county. This comparison is not to contrast a difference that our Big Brother counterparts have it easier, just the opposite. They too have funding issues and tremendous financial obstacles but being small and rural we do not have the luxury of dedicated funding or establishing rainy day funds. We count on the State of Ohio and a good ability to stretch what monies we receive.

OCTA serves a community who has a senior population that exceeds 24% and is only growing. Eighteen percent of the trips in 2020 provided by OCTA were for medical purposes and 27% were for employment. Despite having one of the largest service districts in the state, operational hours of 5:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., seven day a week service, OCTA maintained some of the best performance metrics for our passengers. Any reduction in funding would most likely jeopardize the ability to provide the needed transportation, inside and outside the boundaries of Ottawa County. It would also be difficult to maintain quality service metrics and service hours that accommodate the needs of passengers. The people we transport rely heavily on the services provided and the drivers truly become friends and family to them.

It is, and always has been, our desire to be servants to those in our community and to the best of our ability. Without adequate funding, this task is impossible. Adequate funding is not just avoiding this recent proposed reduction but to permanently fix the funding source for public transit. We can never compete with Highways and Bridges for those with cars outnumber those without, but those without are some of the most vulnerable citizens of this great state, urban or rural.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
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¹ Ohio Statewide Transit Need Study and policymattersohio.org

² NTD 2018 Summaries and Trends Report

³ Wikipedia

⁴ The American Hospital Directory