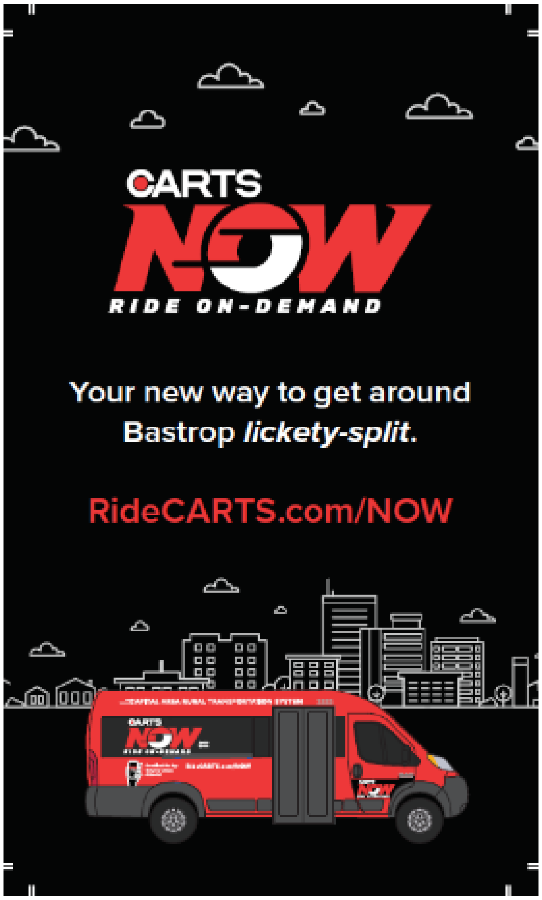
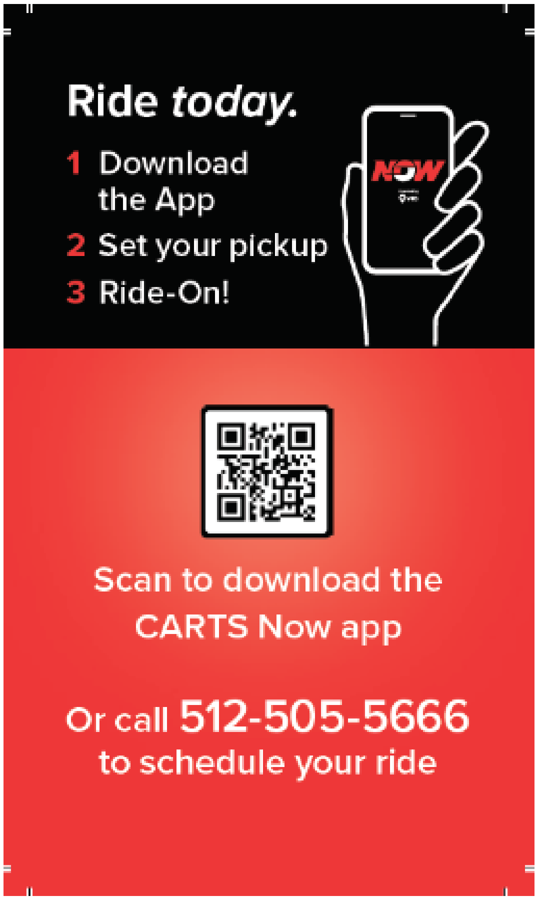
Texas Rural Microtransit Guidebook





A Step by Step Guide to Implementing Rural Microtransit in Texas

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Prepared for:
TxDOT and CARTS

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Section 1: Introduction

Purpose of the Rural Microtransit Guidebook

Since the inception of rural public transit, managers have been seeking new ways of providing service to their customers. Rural transit systems may serve customers that live on the outskirts of a metropolitan area. They may transport residents to and from small towns and low-density counties, as well as extremely isolated areas. Rural transit can include rural towns that are ten miles apart, 50 miles apart, or communities on the fringes of urbanized areas and some that are hours away. Along with this array of service areas comes an assortment of customer transportation needs – commuting to work in the city; access to key destinations such as local and specialty health care, shopping, school; connections to intercity bus and other transportation services; etc.

Currently, many rural transit systems provide day in advance paratransit as they have for 20 – 30 years. A 1990s model, with low productivity and low ridership. Others provide fixed route which also may be a poor fit for small cities of under 20,000 population. With a variety of service areas, customer demands, and operational burdens, choosing the right service design for each need is not an easy task. Clearly, **One Size Does Not Fit All**. What might be an effective and innovative approach in one area may not work in another.

In certain scenarios, microtransit can be the answer to the question of how to provide a high quality ride service to rural residents with a wide range of public transportation needs. For that reason, microtransit has found a successful place in rural transit, and systems across the country are investing in the technology needed to supply this enhanced level of service to their customers.

Bastrop NOW Vehicle (Dodge RAM 1500 Promaster)

Recognizing that microtransit is not a solution to all service needs and that it requires specific conditions, the intent of this Guidebook is to:

1. Focus, specifically, on cities of about 5,000 to 25,000 residents.
2. Help rural transit managers and planners **decide if microtransit is a good fit** for the rural communities that their transit agency serves.
3. **Serve as a practical guidebook** for helping managers and planners of rural transit to initiate microtransit service in a rural community, using Capital Area Rural Transportation System (CARTS) CARTS Now service model as an example and one of the very first rural microtransit systems across the country.

What is Rural On-Demand Microtransit?

An increasing number of public transit providers have begun operating services with an **on-demand**, e-hailing component. These services, called microtransit, use smaller vehicles and mobile technology to provide dynamic routing and curb-to-curb or corner-to-corner service. Customers use a smartphone application (app) to schedule and pay for a ride within a specific geofenced zone, or riders can use the telephone. Microtransit service can provide more flexibility to customers than traditional fixed route service. Riders can individualize service by selecting both their pick-up and drop-off locations, while dynamic routing capabilities allow drivers to quickly adjust pick-up locations to provide more efficient service.

Rural microtransit also uses app-based, real-time scheduling technology, to manage trip requests and provide constantly updated real-time arrival information. The service typology is like the commonly known services provided by Uber, Lyft, and other transportation network companies, except it is a shared ride service. By adopting this technology, rural public transportation providers can operate more efficient and customer focused service in small cities.

Key characteristics of rural microtransit service include:

- **On-demand and real-time service** – customers book trips when they are ready to go
- **Dynamic routing and scheduling** – routes may vary
- **Shared ride** – where possible trips are grouped together
- **Operation within a geofenced zone** – shorter trips within the defined area
- **App-based (riders can also use a telephone)** – leverages customers' smartphones for more direct and efficient service

Microtransit can provide more flexibility to customers than traditional fixed route and in advance demand response service. Riders can individualize service by selecting both their pick-up and drop-off locations, while dynamic routing capabilities allow drivers to quickly adjust pick-up locations to provide more efficient service. Most existing microtransit services have been implemented as a first mile/last mile mobility option that connect to an area's broader high-frequency transit network. As the user of this guide will see in Section 3 of this Guidebook, the CARTS Now service is the way for rural customers in rural Bastrop, Texas to make intercity transit connections. The CARTS Now service is one of the first on-demand applications in small rural cities.

Repurposing Service

As will be seen, the operating cost of microtransit service in an area already served by paratransit is virtually the same for the same number of service hours. It is simply a matter of repurposing into a new and more productive service. In many cases, existing vehicles can be used as discussed in Section 4.

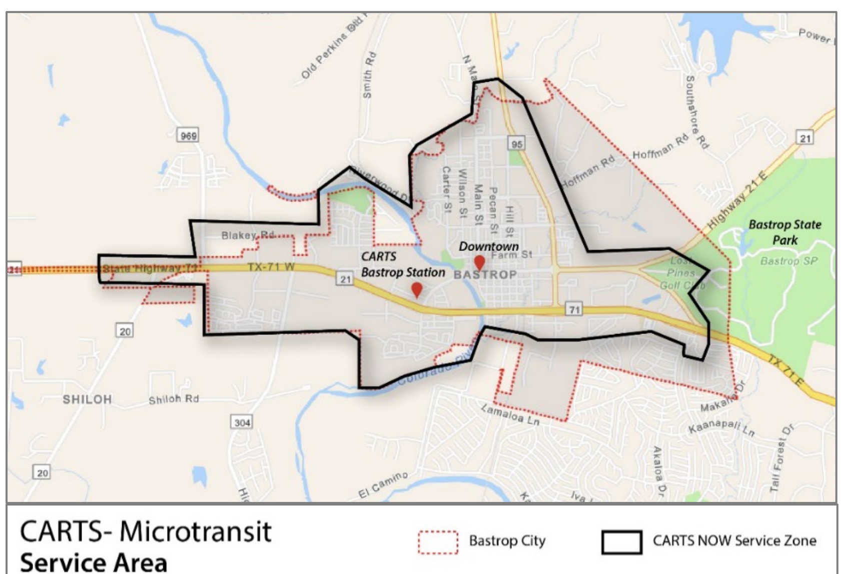
A Definition – Microtransit

The Shared-Use Mobility Center (SUMC) defines microtransit as a technological evolution of dial-a-ride and paratransit and refers to services with flexible routes and schedules and on-demand availability that use vehicles larger than personal autos but smaller than transit buses—generally vans or cutaways carrying up to 20 passengers. SUMC notes that microtransit services require professional drivers who are usually employed through a purchased-transportation arrangement with a vendor or employed directly by a transit agency.

Rural microtransit is best suited for short-range trips (1 to 7 miles) within cities of at least 3,000 to 5,000 population **with** significant destinations such as shopping (large grocery and/or big box stores), health care, employment needs and connections to other transit systems. It is particularly useful as an option where fixed route transit cannot operate in an efficient or productive manner. By its nature, microtransit rarely moves more than 3-6 passengers per vehicle revenue hour, but it may offer greater flexibility in well-defined corridors or zones of operation that cannot sustain a productive fixed route like in small cities, commercial subdivisions, or strings of office parks.

CARTS Now - Microtransit in Bastrop, Texas

This Guidebook is based on the highly successful implementation of a rural on-demand microtransit service in a city of under 10,000 population. When the Capital Area Rural Transportation System launched CARTS Now in Bastrop, Texas, it was one of the very first on-demand trip models to use a smart phone application in a rural community under 20,000 population. CARTS Now, operates in an extended service area that includes most of the Bastrop city limits, and began to provide rides between any two



A map of CARTS NOW Bastrop Service Area locations in the city within 15 minutes of booking in January 2021. As a result, ridership almost tripled during the pandemic. While the focus is on Bastrop, the Guidebook is also based on the successes in Lockhart, Taylor and Manor, TX.

The goals and objectives for the CARTS Now ride service were established early in the process:

- increase productivity,
- increase ridership,
- provide an enhanced service for existing customers,
- better serve more remote areas with freed-up resources, and
- expand the customer base.

The sections that follow include descriptions of all aspects of the CARTS Now planning and implementation process, including outreach and coalition building considerations. This will be followed by an analysis of the service itself, to show how CARTS adjusted certain aspects of the service to improve performance. A review of opportunities leveraged, and lessons learned is also provided later in the Guidebook.

The Guidebook Sections

While many of the steps in implementing rural microtransit on-demand ride services are interrelated, this guide has been separated into the following sections:

- **Section 1: Introduction –** This section contains the purpose of this Guidebook, generally defines microtransit and rural microtransit, and provides a brief overview of CARTS Now.
- **Section 2: How to Use the Guidebook –** The Guidebook can be used in a number of ways depending on how advanced the planning effort is, for planning, outreach, implementation and/or operations.
- **Section 3: Examining a Success –** Examines the success of CARTS Now through coalition building and ridership. Understanding the demographics and land uses related to Bastrop will allow a reader to make the appropriate comparisons to their communities and make adjustments specific to their unique circumstances. This section highlights the importance of coalition building and outreach efforts. Technology and vehicle selection considerations are also included here. To supply more insight, this section of the Guidebook also focuses on how CARTS leveraged opportunities, lessons learned, and adjustments that have been made since CARTS Now launched in 2021.

- **Section 4: Implementation –** Builds on the earlier examination of the successful CARTS Now service and similar implementations in other locations, this section walks the user through the process of choosing, planning, community coalition building and implementing a rural microtransit service. This section of the Guidebook includes information on how to assess the need for microtransit services as well as important items to consider when building a community coalition and developing marketing and outreach plans. Operational needs and issues will be detailed as well as performance measurement and evaluation. This section concludes by walking the user through the key features of preparing for a successful launch.

- **Section 5: Appendix**
    - ***Technical Memorandum No. 2:*** Review of CARTS Microtransit Pilot Project
    - ***Technical Memorandum No. 3:*** Review of Demographics, Land Uses, Travel Patterns and Existing Service
    - ***Technical Memorandum No. 4:*** Opportunities Leveraged and Lessons Learned
    - ***Review of Sponsorship Programs*** *– A detailed discussion on private sector funding*

Section 2: How to Use the Guidebook

Introduction

The Guidebook is designed to support rural transportation providers and their communities as they work together to support improved transportation access. Depending on one's interest, a reader can start at any section and focus on specific issues or needs. This Guidebook is designed to serve as a practical resource for rural transit managers and planners that are thinking about or are ready to make the switch from day in advance demand responsive transportation (DRT), rural flex route, or traditional fixed route systems to microtransit for some of the rural communities that they serve.

As stated in the introduction section to the Guidebook, choosing the right service design is not an easy task and "one size does not fit all." With that thought in mind it is recommended that the reader use this Guidebook to make informed decisions about changing to a rural, on-demand microtransit service by:

- First, reading the sections below to gain a general understanding of the *Types of Communities* that have typically had success with microtransit.
- Reviewing Section 3 of the Guidebook, *Examining a Success,* and comparing the history and development of the CARTS Now service to the goals and objectives of your organization to see if they align.
- Using the information in Section 3 of the Guidebook, *Examining a Success/CARTS Now Bastrop – Service Characteristics* and *Bastrop – Community Demographics and Land Use,* and in Section 4, *Step by Step: Developing and Implementing Rural Microtransit/Assess the Need for New Service*, to compare, analyze, and determine if microtransit services are merited based on data specific to your service area.
- Using the information in Section 3 of the Guidebook*, Examining a Success/Building a Coalition* and in Section 4, *Step by Step: Developing and Implementing Rural Microtransit/Getting Started – Coalition Building*, to compare, analyze, and determine if your rural community is or would be supportive of the change to an on-demand rural microtransit service.

- Using the information in Section 3 of the Guidebook, *Examining a Success/Funding the Service, Technology, and Vehicles* and in Section 4, *Step by Step: Developing and Implementing Rural Microtransit /Planning the Service, Determine Costs and Funding,* to compare, analyze, and determine if your operation is ready or what it would take to make the change to an on-demand rural microtransit service.

Types of Communities

The focus of the Guidebook is on the small city of Bastrop with about 10,000 population in the Capital Area Rural Transportation System (CARTS) service area; however, the intent is that the useful and timely information compiled here will also be of value to other rural transit systems operating in communities of approximately 5,000 to 25,000 residents.

Where is Service Most Appropriate?

Section 3 of the Guidebook provides details on exactly how the identifying land uses and major trip generators in the city of Bastrop complemented the demographic analysis by indicating where transit services were most needed.

Section 4 of the Guidebook will go into more detail on this subject; but, very briefly:

- **Trip Generators -** The first essential element of a service area is that residents of a community must have a need to travel locally. Trip generators attract transit demand, and include common destinations like major employers, medical facilities, educational facilities, human service agencies, and big box shopping. If residents typically travel out of town for shopping, work, or health care, that community would best be served by a fixed schedule service or shopper shuttle.
- **Population Density** is often an effective indicator of the types of public transit services that are most feasible within a service area. While exceptions always exist, an area with a density of below 1,500 but above 700 persons per square mile will generally be suited to microtransit services.

When?

When the service is provided is just as important as where. CARTS Now operates at least 12 hours a day to ensure that commuters can use the service. 7 AM to 7 PM is common and reasonable. Beyond that often there is a need for service when the retail closes, typically at 9 or 10 PM. Management should be prepared to operate at least 7 to 7.

Technology and the Service Provider

There are multiple strategies that can be employed to provide microtransit service in rural communities. Assuming the service area is appropriate, the first considerations include the following:

- **Technological Platform:** The technology company needs to provide both a customer app and an onboard software tablet/system for service operators. These platforms should allow for on-demand scheduling, dynamic routing, payment, and vehicle tracking. The technology product should be simple to use for customers and operators alike, and preferably collect trip data to store in a database to improve trip efficiency and analysis. There are a number of potential technology firms that have proven successful.

- **Existing Platforms** – Some paratransit software products used by rural systems in Texas state they have the capability to provide an app based microtransit platform. Clearly if a system has these platforms, using those apps with your existing technology vendor may have advantages (e.g., working with one vendor as opposed to two).

- **Service Provider:** There are three broad choices for operating a microtransit service:

    - maintaining the service in-house using agency vehicles and employees, usually replacing a less effective service – typically recommended for rural areas and is the CARTS model;
    - contracting the service out to a local established transit contractor; or
    - contracting with the technology company to both provide the mobile app and operate the service.

The companies that are currently promoting microtransit services typically break them into these categories:

- **Software-as-a-Service (SaaS)** that offers a localized version of the vendor's platform, allowing transit systems to use their vehicles, drivers, and support staff to operate an on-demand service. CARTS uses a localized version of the Via (no relation to VIA – the transit system) technology platform to support the CARTS Now model of service. Most rural transit systems will use this model as the most cost effective.

- **Transportation-as-a-Service (TaaS),** which offers a turnkey approach through which the vendor provides the on-demand technology -- plus the drivers, vehicles, and overall operations.

Each service delivery model has its unique advantages or disadvantages. In particular, with the small cities where the rural transit system operate, repurposing the vehicles and service design makes the existing in-house structure the best option. In most cases, unless the service is currently contracted out, the low level of service in most rural communities does not require contracting for service.

- **In House** - Providing the service in-house offers a transit agency with more control, more opportunities to grow public commitment and investment in the new service, and the best guarantee of Title VI and ADA compliance. The service can usually start with the existing vehicles and staff that were used for the previous service (repurposed). **Typically, the costs are simply shifted from the previous service model to the microtransit model.**

- **Contracted Turnkey** – Some technology companies offer, as an option to operate the service. Contracting service to a technology company for a turnkey operation of 2 – 3 vehicles may not be cost effective under most rural conditions, particularly if the transit system is already operating service in that community. Further the transit system would need a staff person to manage that contract. Each transit system will have to look closely at this option.

Section 3: Examining a Success

Introduction

This section of the guidebook will explore and examine the components related to the successful launch of an innovative, on-demand rural microtransit service. What follows is an analysis of the key components and process used by Capital Area Rural Transportation System (CARTS) to choose, plan, and implement CARTS Now in Bastrop, Texas through a discussion of the following areas:

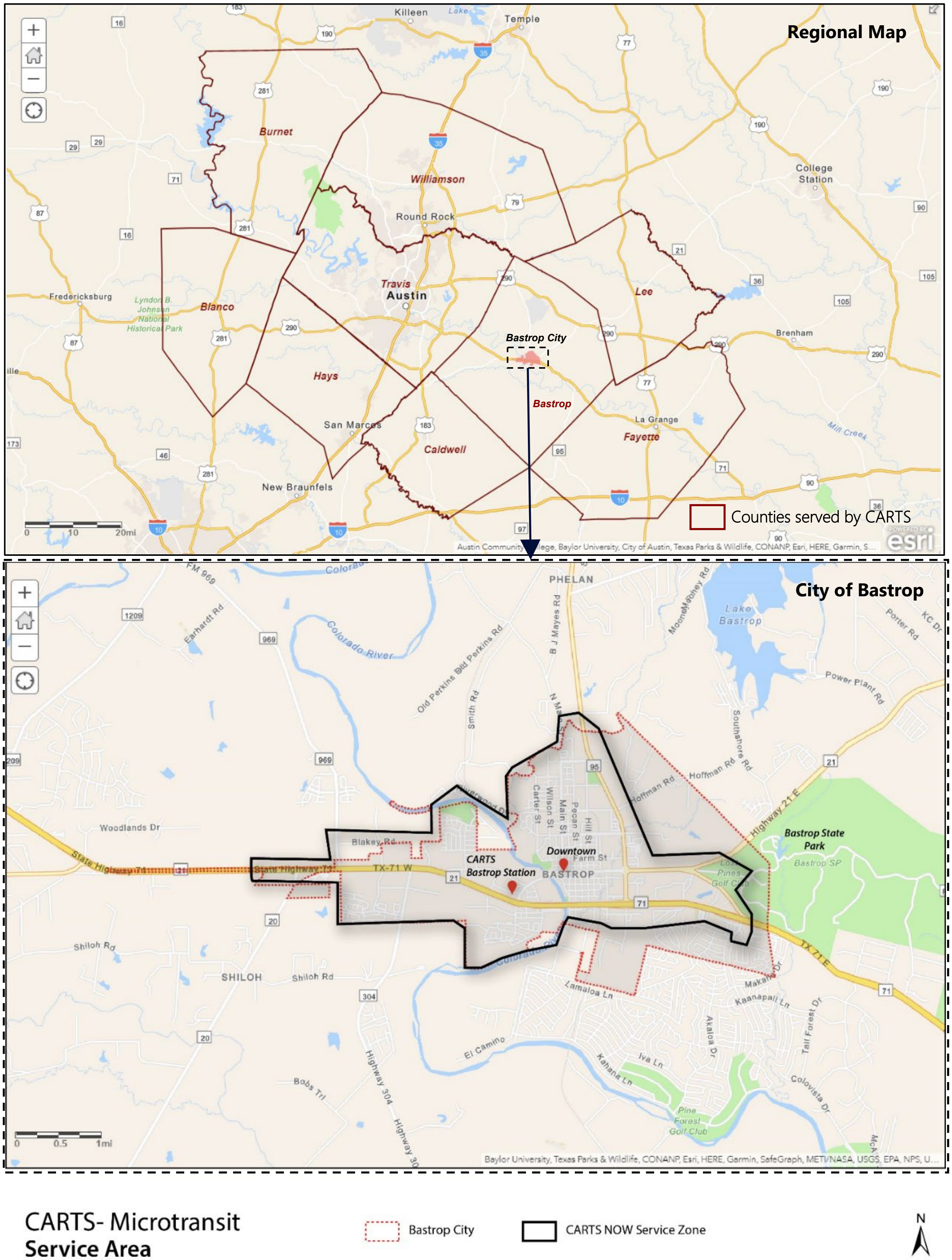
- **Overview of the Service –** An introduction to CARTS NOW service
- **Building a Coalition –** Coalition building is one of the first steps to success
- **Funding the Service –** Diversity of funding and a local commitment are essential ingredients
- **CARTS Now Service Characteristics –** Service details related to CARTS Now's performance
- **Demographics and Land Uses -** The importance of an analysis of population data and key destinations in the planning for a microtransit service
- **Summary of a Success –** Summarizing the key destinations and service characteristics that can make a difference

For those readers desiring greater detail into existing conditions and service please see Technical Memorandums Nos. 2, 3, and 4 in Section 5 – Appendix of this guidebook.

Overview of Bastrop Service

CARTS is a public transportation service offering low-cost rides in and around non-urbanized areas across nine counties in Central Texas. In 2020-2021, CARTS successfully built a rural microtransit on-demand (within 15 minutes of the request) service in Bastrop, Texas. Bastrop's population is 10,000 and is located about 30 miles southeast of Austin, Texas as shown in Figure 3-1.

Figure 3-1: Bastrop On-Demand Service Area with Regional Context



In the face of lagging ridership in Bastrop that was made worse by the Covid-19 Pandemic, CARTS sought out an innovative approach to the provision of service. In January 2021, CARTS Now began to provide rides between any two locations in the city of Bastrop **within 15 minutes of booking**. CARTS Now provides curb-to-curb transportation to the citizens of Bastrop on their schedule. The service operates in an extended area that includes most of the city limits. The service has no predetermined routes or schedules and is not limited to trips that bring riders to and from CARTS stations or transit stops. Instead, customers can use an app on their smart phone or call CARTS directly to request a ride from anywhere in Bastrop and meet their driver at a nearby curb or corner to be dropped off at a curb or corner at or near their destination.

> ***The implementation of CARTS Now brought a higher level of public transit service to the CARTS Bastrop service delivery area as ridership tripled during the COVID-19 Pandemic.***

According to rider surveys and interviews with riders and transit managers, virtually all believe Microtransit, in addition to boosting ridership, is a better, more comfortable, and usually faster ride. The new service better meets the needs of residents, human service clients and medical facilities. When compared to its fixed route predecessor, the Country Bus, CARTS Now also proved to be a more responsive transit option for the public. The attractive new ride has broadened the market for other CARTS services by bringing new customers and more community awareness to public transit.

Building a Coalition

> ***CARTS management stated that – "The emphasis and importance of building and maintaining strong community coalitions in the service area cannot be overstated."***

CARTS placed significant emphasis on building a broad based local coalition of governmental and community leaders and stakeholders from the public and private sectors. CARTS was already collaborating with the Bastrop city manager on a joint vision of mobility improvements in the city and associated improvements planned for the downtown streetscape as well as a new citywide tourism campaign. This served to enhance the spirit of community as the CARTS Now project moved forward to implementation. **Strong community coalitions with local leaders, businesses, medical and social service providers, and other community organizations helped raise awareness and support for the new service.**

The CARTS management team was careful to continue interaction with all stakeholders based on their relationship to the project, i.e., city officials on geo-fencing, human service representatives on client needs. The steady progression of collaboration in the development of the concept of microtransit to address local mobility led to the community embracing the new way of getting around the city.
A premier example of the importance of coalition building is evidenced in the City of Bastrop's ongoing contribution of between $40, 000 – $50,000 in match money through an interlocal agreement each year. The city also continues to provide a prime downtown half-block of restricted parking for a mobility hub and paid for the improvements, including installing the shelter.

A Screenshot of the Promotional Video

Having the City as a partner was particularly important as others will follow as they see the successes. One way to gain from the partnership was a Promotional video with the Mayor of Bastrop explaining the benefits of the service and how to ride.

Building the Partnerships

In 2018, CARTS management was invited to participate in a focus group organized by Bastrop County Cares (BCC). BCC is a local non-profit organization and county-wide partnership whose initiatives include improving health outcomes in Bastrop County. BCC lists as partners and sponsors a wide variety of nonprofit social support agencies and initiatives, including the St. David's Foundation and the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health. After the meeting, CARTS leadership began work on a plan that would improve access to health care in Bastrop and perhaps other rural areas in CARTS service area. BCC took on the task of establishing a county-wide consortium of health care providers who could assist in ensuring that the new service met the needs of their patients. As a result of their collaboration and participation in the BCC organization, CARTS produced a concept paper "Improving Health Outcomes in Bastrop County via Improved Transit Access." (Appendix 5-*Technical Memorandum 2: Service Planning and Implementation of Microtransit Pilot Project*

In November 2018, with the encouragement and support of BCC and the St. David's Foundation, along with local governments and affiliated healthcare facilities, CARTS filed a proposal for an FTA grant to implement microtransit service for Bastrop County. While that proposal did not result in an award, the concept and underlying needs for a new type of service were validated.

In September 2020, with the continued support of the community, CARTS again partnered with BCC to respond to a Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Call for Pilot Projects with a request for the funding of four microtransit projects to serve cities within the CARTS service area. TxDOT awarded funding and CARTS chose Bastrop for implementation as the first pilot.

Funding the Service

CARTS had been preparing for the launch of an on-demand microtransit pilot in the City of Bastrop since the launch of the Manor Pickup service in the summer of 2019. To ensure that the CARTS Now pilot in Bastrop would launch on the same timeline as other planned local commitments and initiatives that were complementary to the pilot project, CARTS committed assets early on to fund those activities necessary to launch the pilot: agreement with Via technology (no relationship to VIA the transit system), vehicles for the service, and arrangements for branding the new service, marketing, and public information.

State - As previously noted, in September 2020, CARTS responded to a Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Call for Pilot Projects with a request for the funding of four microtransit projects to serve cities within the CARTS service area. CARTS received funds for one pilot project and chose the City of Bastrop to be their first on-demand microtransit pilot.

Local - As anticipated, the City of Bastrop had a positive response to the idea of on-demand microtransit service. With support from Bastrop's City Manager and City Council, the city continues to contribute between $40,000–$50,000 in match money through an interlocal agreement each year.

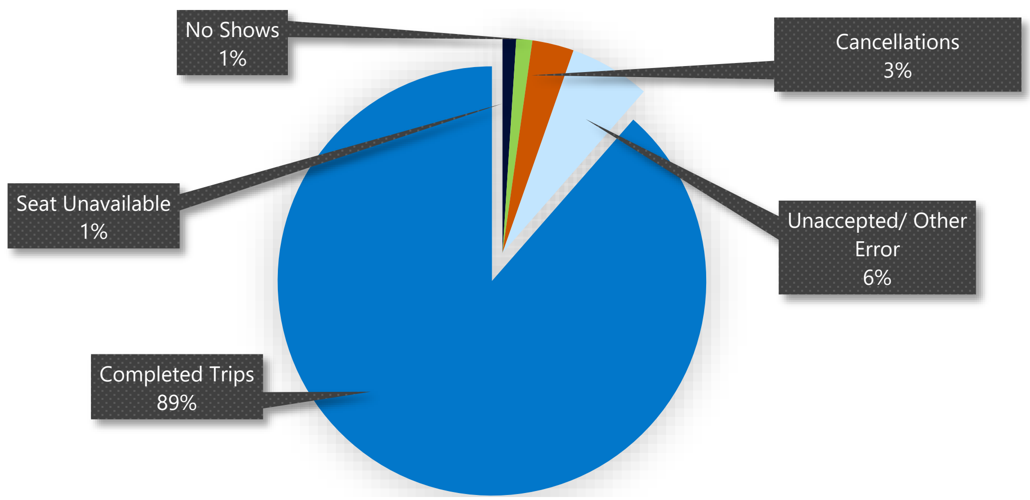
Federal - CARTS also had the opportunity to participate in a successful Department of Energy (DOE) grant to the Lone Star Clean Fuels Alliance (CFA) for low speed, electric vehicle cabs. The grant was meant to introduce electric taxis to Bastrop and the timing was perfect. CARTS was able to incorporate the addition of an Electric Cab of North America (eCab) service in downtown Bastrop with the launch of the new CARTS Now service. As part of a previously planned renovation, the CARTS Bastrop station was outfitted to function as a charging station and hub for the electric vehicles. While the eCabs are not currently a part of the CARTS fleet of vehicles, they were instrumental in the successful launch of the new CARTS Now service.

CARTS Now Bastrop - Service Characteristics

CARTS serves most of the City of Bastrop, about 7 square miles, using 2 in service vehicles during peak hours. CARTS management feels that for this community, two vehicles for seven square miles works effectively as can be seen by the one percent denial rate in Figure 3-2.

Service is available Monday through Friday from 7 AM to 7 PM. The service was fare free for the first year and is now $2 per one way trip.

Figure 3-2: Trip Request Status Overview



Vehicles

It was determined that the CARTS Now service needed vehicles that could travel on the highway (65 MPH) and frontage roads (45 MPH). CARTS turned to Dodge RAM 1500 and 3500 Promaster vans. These are low floor, ramp equipped vans with a capacity of 8 – 10 passengers with two wheelchair positions. These are small maneuverable vehicles that can manage the maximum number of riders at one time. Each vehicle is equipped with a tablet tied into Via's system. Throughout the day two vehicles are typically in use, covering about 7.4 square miles. These vehicles cost about $100,000 each. When funding becomes available, electric vehicles with a higher speed limit will be introduced.

The original eCabs no longer operate as a CARTS Now service but do continue to serve the downtown Bastrop area with evening and weekend service only. This complements the current CARTS Now service hours. The eCabs did not exceed 35 MPH and were limited in their capabilities. While CARTS would like to go electric, for now they are using Dodge Ram vans as depicted in Figure 3-3.

Vans are lower capacity vehicles that can be equipped with ADA accessible ramps. They are built on a smaller vehicle chassis, allowing for more maneuverability in tight areas. Drivers interviewed during other microtransit projects have mentioned that the technology platform's routing algorithm does not consider how large a cutaway bus is. Using smaller vehicles minimizes tight turnarounds and backing up, maneuvers often used in this service and that may increase the service's efficiency.

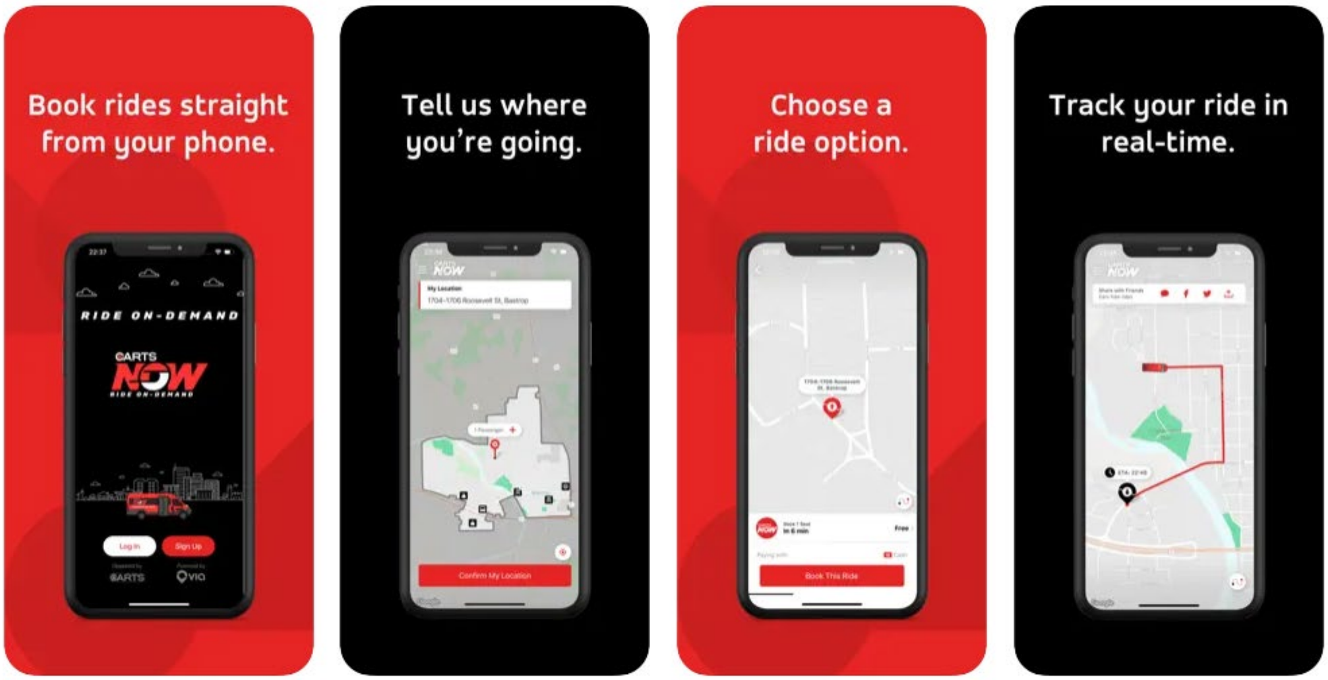
Figure 3-3: CARTS Now Vehicle- Dodge Ram

Technology

The initial idea to pilot an on-demand microtransit service for CARTS Bastrop service area was formed as a result of CARTS experience piloting (2017-2018) and then launching an on-demand ride microtransit service in Manor a similar sized city within Capital Metro's service area. This early contractual partnership with Capital Metro gave CARTS an opportunity to become familiar with operating an on-demand microtransit system and with the use of an app to schedule rides without the need for a call center. Customers were able to schedule rides from their smart phones by using an app or calling the service center. The app used for Manor Pickup service was developed in partnership with an on-demand public mobility developer, Via, which licenses its technology to transportation providers globally.

According to CARTS management, the agency had been preparing for the launch of the Bastrop pilot since their initial launch of the Manor Pickup service in June 2019. By 2020, CARTS had an ongoing relationship with Via Transportation, Inc., the software vendor, and had an agreement for the use of the VIA app for the project. The CARTS team worked with Via to set up the CARTS Now app that allows customers to request rides anywhere in the 7.4-square mile Bastrop service area. The app is shown in Figure 3-4. While CARTS Now customers have the option to call to schedule a ride, most use the app and there is very little need for dispatcher intervention. Customers are encouraged to use the app as it reduces the need for dispatching, ultimately reducing operating costs over day in advance service.

Figure 3-4: iPhone Screenshots of the CARTS Now app



Ridership

CARTS started this service in the middle of the COVID-19 Pandemic when transit services saw their lowest ridership numbers. Despite that timing, the service quickly gained ridership and in a very short period of time exceeded pre-pandemic ridership.

Trip Characteristics

This section captures CARTS Now trip characteristics as well as other additional data-driven comparisons and analyses using trip request data provided by CARTS Now from the first day of service in December 2020 through July 31, 2022. Approximately 33,242 trip requests were made during this period or an average of 74 completed one way trips per service day. When the service was fare free, ridership was about 100 one way trips per day. Current numbers as of November 2022 are about 88 one way tips, as Bastrop ridership has stabilized since the fare increase.

An overall breakdown of trip requests by trip status from the first day of service in December to July 31, 2022, is shown in Table 3-1 and present a monthly breakdown of trip requests by trip status.

Once ridership was maximized, travel by day of week remained very close for each day of the week, varying by only 4 percent. Ridership between 9 am and 4 pm was stable, varying eight percent. Ridership grew to 122 one way trips daily before fares were instituted. Daily ridership dropped almost 30 percent after fares were instituted. Ridership has come back to about 90 percent of that loss in May 2022. Most trips are for retail shopping.

Table 3-1: Ridership By Month

Year	Month	Total Trip Requests	Service Days	Average Daily Requests	Average Daily Completed Trips	# Completed Trips	%No Shows	% Cancellations	% Completed Trips
2020	Dec.	45	9	5.0	4.0	36	0%	4.4%	80.0%
2021	Jan.	369	19	19.4	15.7	298	<1%	1.9%	80.8%
2021	Feb.	588	15	39.2	33.8	507	1.7%	2.2%	86.2%
2021	Mar.	1,227	23	53.3	49.8	1145	<1%	1.1%	93.3%
2021	Apr.	1,330	22	60.5	55.6	1223	<1%	2.3%	92.0%
2021	May	1,551	20	77.6	72.0	1439	<1%	2.1%	92.8%
2021	June	1,719	22	78.1	73.2	1611	<1%	2.1%	93.7%
2021	July	2,427	22	110.3	101.2	2227	1.2%	2.8%	91.8%
2021	Aug.	2,568	22	116.7	106.7	2348	<1%	2.9%	91.4%
2021	Sep.	2,562	21	122.0	106.0	2227	1.5%	3.9%	86.9%
2021	Oct.	2,440	21	116.2	99.7	2093	1.5%	3.7%	85.8%
2021	Nov.	2,197	21	104.6	91.5	1922	1.9%	3.7%	87.5%
2021	Dec.	1,931	22	87.8	76.9	1691	2.0%	3.8%	87.6%
2022	Jan.	1,407	20	70.4	61.6	1232	1.1%	2.3%	87.6%
2022	Feb.	1,275	18	70.8	63.9	1151	1.3%	2.1%	90.3%
2022	Mar.	2,136	23	92.9	80.6	1854	1.5%	3.9%	86.8%
2022	Apr.	1,927	21	91.8	78.3	1644	1.1%	4.0%	85.3%
2022	May	2,150	21	102.4	87.5	1838	1.2%	4.1%	85.5%
2022	June	2,195	22	99.8	85.9	1889	<1%	3.8%	86.1%
2022	July	1,198	13	92.2	81.3	1057	<1%	2.6%	88.2%
	Total	**33,242**	**397**	**83.7**	74.1	29,432	**1.2%**	**3.1%**	**88.5%**

Source: VIA Service Operations Report Dec 2020-July 2022

Bastrop- Community Demographics and Land Uses

The demographic makeup of the Bastrop service area played an important part in the decision to choose it as the location for the initial CARTS rural microtransit on-demand pilot. Readers should review this section to best understand how their community is similar and different from Bastrop.

> ***Most important is the need for a significant number of local destinations – reasons for local travel typically include shopping, health care, work, and school. For example, a community with a small hospital, and a big box store (most often Walmart or a local grocery chain such as United, Albertsons or HEB) will generate the needed local demand.***

What follows is a summary of the demographics and land uses. For the detailed report see: *Technical Memorandum No. 3: Review of Demographics, Land Uses, and Travel Patterns* that is included in Section 5 – Appendix of this guidebook.

Population Profile

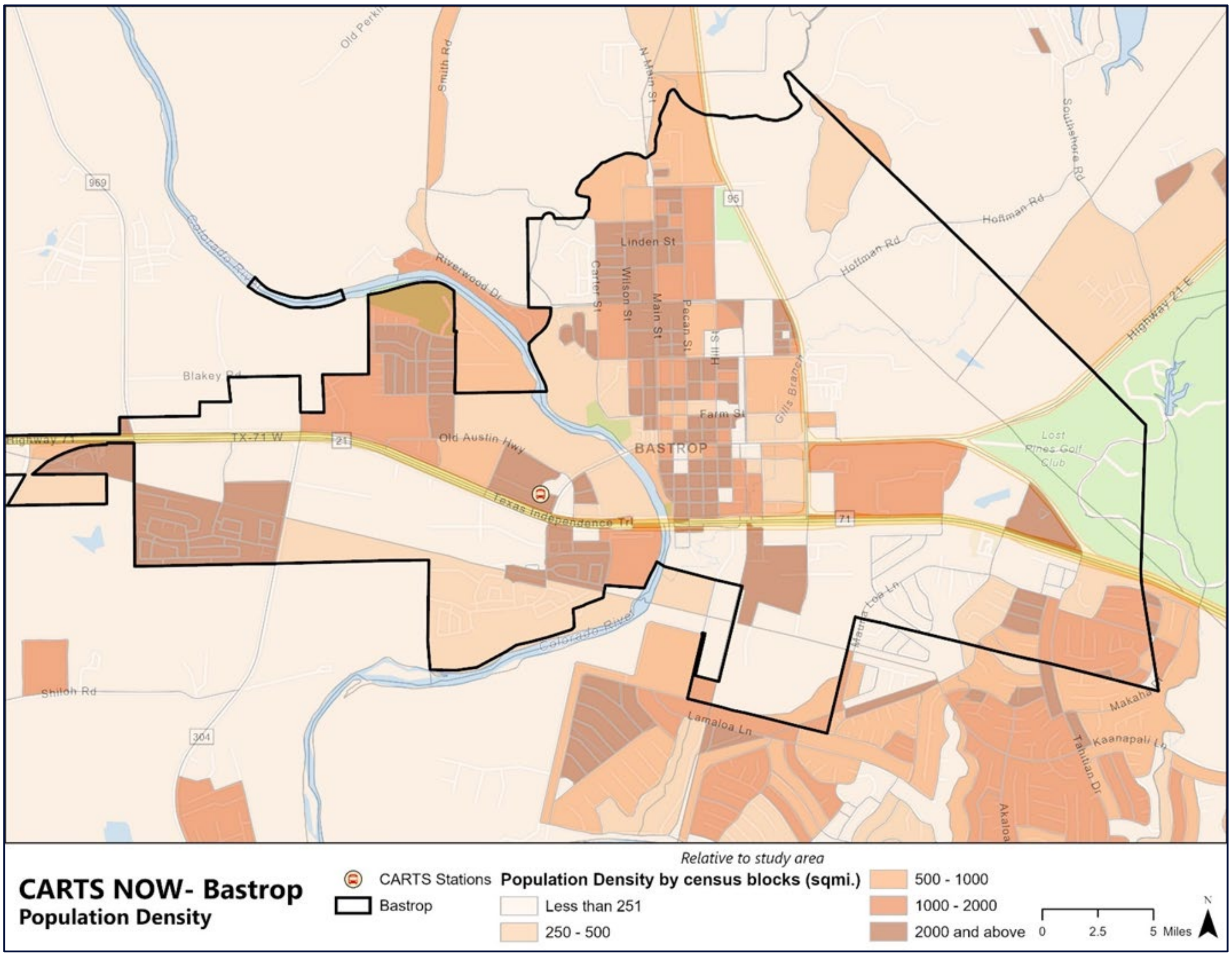
Summary Population Profile

- As of the 2020 Decennial Census, the total population in Bastrop was 9,688.
- Bastrop has grown rapidly over the last 20 years and is projected to more than double its population in the next twenty years.
- Bastrop has a total area of 9.34 sq mi. and a population density of 1,037 persons per square mile (Figure 3-4). Most of the city is currently in the service area.
- Census blocks with a population density of 2000 persons or more per square mile highlight the major residential areas in Bastrop.
- Transit dependent populations are slightly higher than the state average for elderly and disabled populations.

Population Density

Population density is often an effective indicator of the types of public transit services that are most feasible within a service area. While exceptions always exist, an area with a density of 2,000 persons per square mile will generally be able to sustain frequent, daily fixed-route transit service. Conversely, an area with a population density below this threshold but above 700 persons per square mile may be better suited for microtransit services. Figure 3-5 shows population density in Bastrop by census blocks sourced from 2020 Decennial Census Table P1. Please note that many of the low density areas are shopping or health care centers.

Figure 3-5: Population Density by Census Blocks (2020)- Bastrop, TX



Transit Dependent Populations

Public transportation needs are defined in part by identifying the relative size and location of those segments within the general population that are most likely to use transit services. These transit dependent populations include individuals who may not have access to a personal vehicle or are unable to drive themselves due to age or income status. Determining these populations assists in the evaluation of current transit services and the extent to which the services meet community needs.

The socio-economic characteristics that make up the transit dependent population include:

- **Autoless Households**: Households without at least one personal vehicle.
- **Senior Population**: Individuals 65 years and older.
- **Youth Populations**: Youths and teenagers, ages 10 to 17 years.
- **Below Poverty Populations**: Individuals who earn less than the federal poverty level.
- **Individuals with Disabilities**: Individuals who are 18 years and above and are members of households (non-institutionalized population).

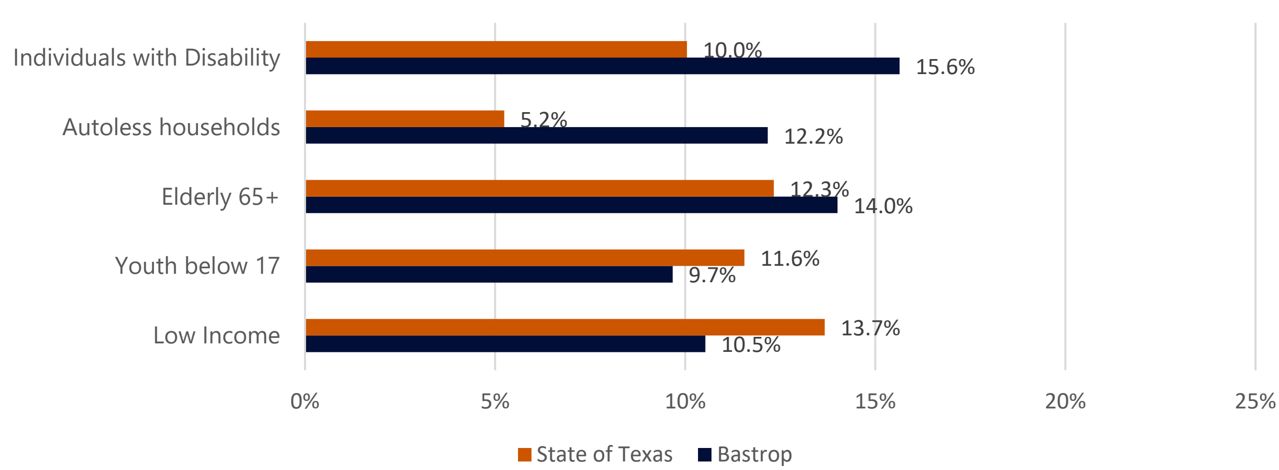
Table 3-3 and Figure 3-6 present the transit dependent populations in the city of Bastrop compared to the State of Texas. The section of population in each cohort is typically between 10 and 15 percent.

Table 3-3: Transit Dependent Populations in Bastrop, TX

Bastrop, TX	# Bastrop population	% Bastrop population	% Texas population
Total Population	9,688		
Total Households	3,188		
Low Income Population	1,020	10.5%	13.7%
Youth Population (10-17 years)	937	9.7%	11.6%
Senior Population (65 years and above)	1,357	14.0%	12.3%
Autoless households	388	12.2%	5.2%
Individuals with Disabilities (18 years and above)	1,515	15.6%	10.0%

Source: ACS 2020 Five-Year Estimates

Figure 3-6: Transit Dependent Population in Bastrop, TX



Trip Generators

Bastrop has a wide range of trip generators including big boxes, supermarkets, shopping areas, medical facilities, human service organizations, and major employers. The abundance of destinations is what makes Bastrop a logical choice for a rural microtransit service. Without these local destinations, the shopping, employment, and health care trips would be to other cities. This profile displays the location of major trip generators in the city of Bastrop, which are common origins and destinations.

Major trip activity centers were analyzed using trip request data from December 2020 through November 30, 2021. A heat map of total trip activity (sum of total drop offs and pickups at a location) is illustrated in Figure 3-7. WalMart Supercenter and HEB-Plus were the two most popular destinations that together accounted for over one-fourth of total trip activity. Interestingly, health care and human service agencies ranked low in destinations, while retail clearly dominated.

A map of major trip generators by various categories is illustrated in Figure 3-8. Key observations derived from the land use analysis by trip generator categories are as follows:

- **Medical**: Ascension Seton Bastrop Hospital is a major trip generator.
- **Shopping**: The most common big box stores include Walmart and HEB-Plus which are also major employers. Shopping malls include Burleson Crossing and Lost Pines Village as major trip generators.
- **Education**: There are no higher education facilities in Bastrop.
- **Human Service**: There are many human service agencies or organizations in Bastrop that include but are not limited to senior centers, civic buildings, nursing and assisted living facilities, and mental health and rehabilitation centers. Some of these agencies are also major employers that include Silver Pines Nursing & Rehabilitation Center and Lost Pines Nursing and Rehabilitation Center.
- **Major Employers**: Major employers include HEB and Walmart with over 300 employees.
- **Multifamily Apartments**: Bastrop has a moderate number of multi-family apartment buildings or low-income / senior housing apartments, most of which are scattered all over in Bastrop.

Figure 3-7: Heat Map of Total Trip Activity- Bastrop, TX

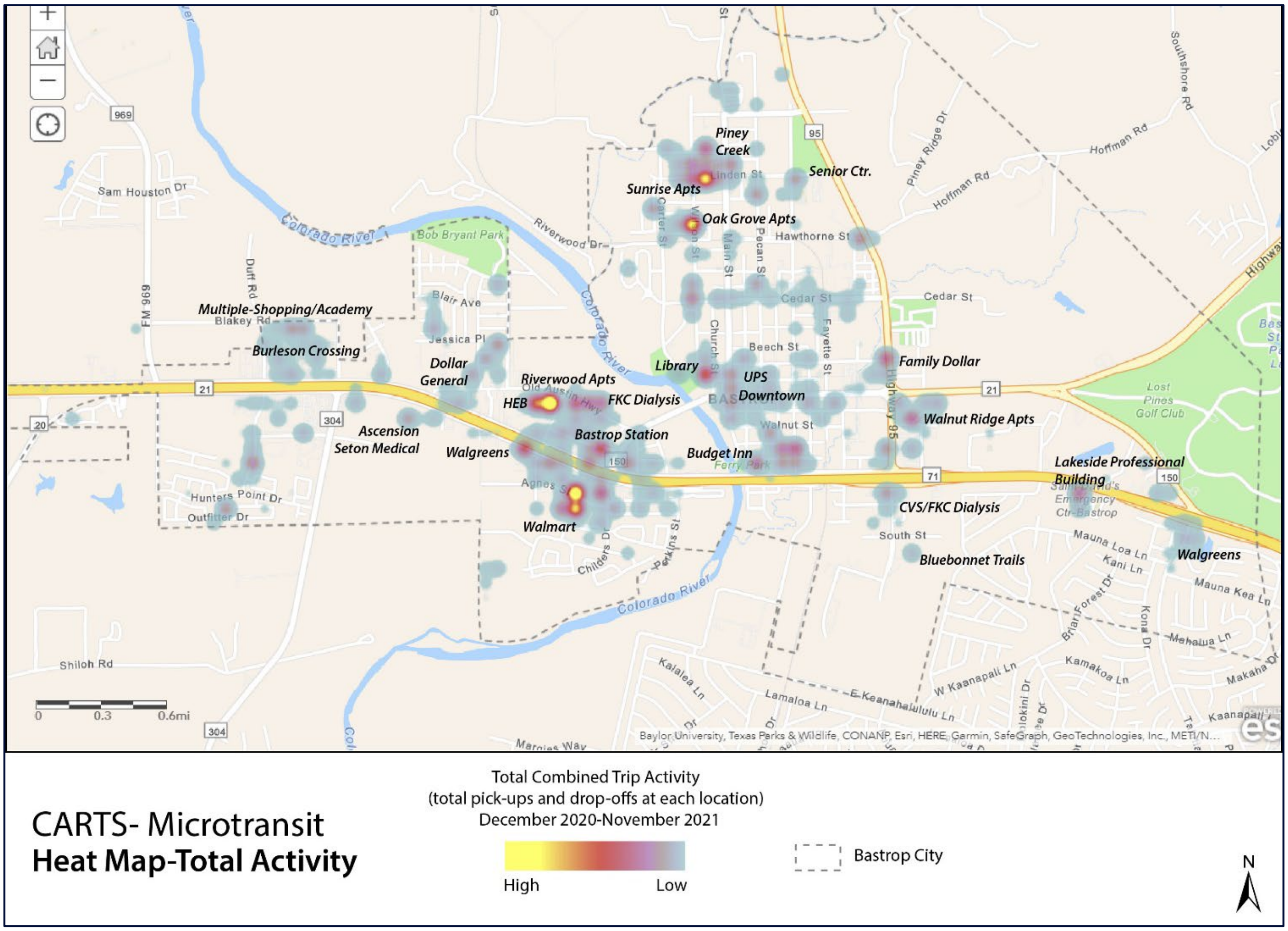
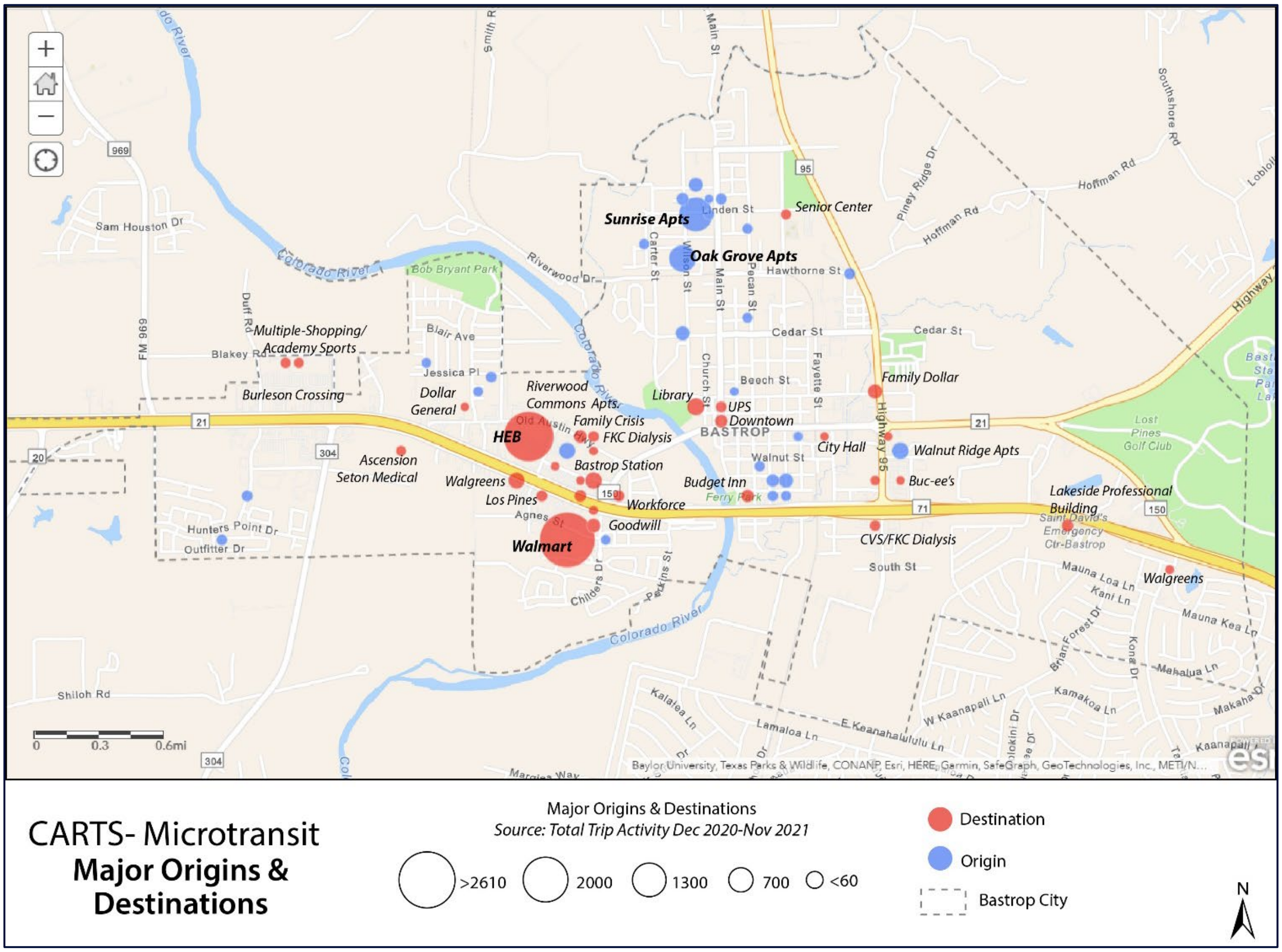


Figure 3-8: Major Trip Generators- Bastrop, TX



Employment Travel Patterns

In addition to considering the locations of major employers, it is also important to account for the commuting patterns of residents working inside and outside of Bastrop County. According to 2020 ACS five-year estimates, over 38 percent of workers that live in Bastrop City work at locations outside their county of residence. 16 percent of the residents work in Bastrop. Also, a majority of residents (66.6%) drive alone to work which is less than the state average of 78.7 percent.

Table 3-5: Journey to Work Pattern, Bastrop, TX

Destination	County	Percent
Total 16 years or older	3,986	
Worked in state of residence	3,923	98.4%
In county of residence	2,434	62.0%
Outside county of residence	1,489	38.0%
Worked outside state of residence	63	1.6%
Car, truck, or van - drove alone	2,655	66.6%
Car, truck, or van – carpooled	362	9.1%
Public transportation (excluding taxicab)	-	0.0%
Walked	285	7.2%
Taxicab, motorcycle, bicycle, or other means	372	9.3%
Worked from home	312	7.8%

Source: ACS Five-Year Estimates (2020), Table B08130

Opportunities Leveraged and Lessons Learned

CARTS operation of the Manor Pickup service for Capital Metro was ongoing during the development of the Bastrop pilot, CARTS Now. Their continued experience running the Manor Pickup system, made CARTS uniquely positioned to pilot an on-demand microtransit ride service in the CARTS service area, including the City of Bastrop.

In June 2019, in partnership with Austin's Capital Metro and the Travis County Transportation and Natural Resources (TNR) department, CARTS launched a Capital Metro on-demand microtransit (Manor Pickup) project in Manor, Texas (population 14,708). This early contractual partnership with Capital Metro gave CARTS an opportunity to become familiar with operating an on-demand microtransit system and with the use of an app to schedule rides without the need for a call center. Customers were able to schedule rides from their smart phones by using an app or calling the service center. Manor Pickup was such a success, with ridership increasing over 300 percent, that CARTS management began to develop a plan to provide a similar service for other cities in the CARTS service area, including the City of Bastrop.

CARTS Now Bastrop had a very long planning and development phase according to CARTS management, the agency had been preparing for the launch of a Bastrop microtransit pilot since the startup of the Manor Pickup service in June 2019. In fact, CARTS had been involved with the development of the Manor Pickup service since its inception as a pilot in 2017-2018.

Measuring Success

Measuring the success of a system change as dramatic as the CARTS shift from an under-utilized fixed route and demand response bus service to a rural, on-demand microtransit ride service requires an understanding of the original goals and objectives. The goals and objectives for the CARTS Now ride service were well established:

- increase productivity,
- increase ridership,
- provide an enhanced service for existing customers,
- better serve more remote areas with freed-up resources, and
- expand the customer base.

In response to CARTS goals related to productivity, the reporting and tracking capabilities of the Via app and the availability of other data have been and will continue to be essential to monitoring and measuring ridership, trips per mile or per hour, operating cost per passenger trip (or trip subsidy), and operating cost per mile or per hour. Ridership and trip reports for CARTS Now Bastrop from its launch in December 2020 through July 31, 2022, show that the new service:

- received approximately 33,242 trip requests or an average of 83.7 requests per service day,

- completed 29,432 one-way trips or an average of 74 trips per day, currently about 88 trips per day, and

- productivity of 3.2 trips per hour.

CARTS Now began providing service during the Covid-19 pandemic with expectations of low ridership. To help generate ridership, service was initiated with free fares. While CARTS Now ridership has seen a continuous upswing in ridership (over sixty percent), ridership did drop off briefly during the period between December 2021 and February 2022 due to the institution of a fare in January 2022. However, according to CARTS management and existing data, the customers are coming back.

CARTS rural service – Country Bus continues to serve surrounding areas as CARTS coordinates CARTS Now and Country Bus services to eliminate duplication. Trips that are a challenge for CARTS Now are carried out by the Country Bus service.

However, some of CARTS goals for the CARTS Now Bastrop pilot were not so easily measured by the metrics discussed above. A better measure of the success of the CARTS Now on-demand, rural microtransit service and its value to the city of Bastrop may be found in CARTS continued coalition building, outreach, and marketing efforts in the community, after the launch of the new service. This attention to both the metrics and their customers (or key stakeholders) allowed CARTS management to better understand the impacts of the new service and to adjust service parameters when appropriate.

Replicability

The most important piece of information to come from measuring the success of any pilot project is the knowledge of whether the model is replicable or not. The key components and processes used to choose, plan, and implement **the CARTS Now on-demand, rural microtransit service in Bastrop, Texas, has been successfully deployed in additional CARTS** service areas.

- **Taylor, Texas (2020 pop. 16,267) –** From startup in June 2021 to July 2022, CARTS Now Taylor had completed 12,611 one-way trips or an average of 47 trips per day with an average productivity of around 2.4 trips per hour. The last few months of 2022 have seen a significant increase in ridership to over 80 daily trips.

- **Lockhart, Texas (2020 pop. 14,379) –** In the first three months of service, May 2, 2022 - July 2022, CARTS Now Lockhart had completed 4,371 one-way trips or an average of 77 trips per day with an average productivity of over 4 trips per hour. Currently it is serving around 1400 riders per month.

- **Marble Falls, Texas (2020 pop. 7,037) –** CARTS Now Marble Falls launched on November 7, 2022.

Having reasons to travel locally is at the heart of success for microtransit. Bastrop has a concentration of a variety of trip generators such as a regional hospital, dialysis clinics, major employers, WalMart, HEB, shopping malls, human service agencies, and multi-unit housing. Most of them are located along State Highway 71, particularly at the intersection of Hasler Boulevard and State Highway 71 W.

Section 4: Step by Step: Developing and Implementing Rural Microtransit

Introduction

> ***Rural Microtransit is an old dial a ride concept adapted to new technology that is now seeing successes in rural areas. The concept is simple: Request a trip and the vehicle will arrive at or near your location in 15 minutes and take you where you want to go. After all, it only takes seconds to schedule the trip, so why make people call a day in advance?***

CARTS started this new service approach in 2021. Bastrop was the first Rural Microtransit implementation in Texas and probably the nation. Since that time, CARTS has implemented in three additional Rural Microtransit communities: Lockhart, Marble Falls and Taylor.

A Step by Step Implementation Guide

This section of the Guidebook details the step by step approach that a transit system and its coalition should take to successfully implement service. This part of the Guidebook highlights key components in the process of choosing, planning, and implementing a rural microtransit service. What follows are units that will highlight and walk the user through the key steps and issues to be considered prior to the implementation of a rural microtransit service. Each unit closes with a set of **Decision Point** questions and statements that are designed to prompt and assist rural transit managers and planners in reflecting on the purpose of each key step as it is presented. In addition, **Need More Information?** segments are included to direct and remind the reader that more detailed information about specific subjects related to the CARTS Now microtransit service model are available in the appendices of this Guidebook.

1. Assess the Need for new service. Take a short and simple assessment.

- Potential Community Sizes and Characteristics - Is microtransit suited to the proposed service area?
- Review the Power of Productivity – Productivity is the key to understanding if a service change is needed.
- Listen to the Community – Regular communication with riders and the community is a must!

2. Getting Started – Build a Strong Community Coalition.

- Crafting the Message – "On demand microtransit is a low cost way to provide a higher level of service."
- Identifying the Stakeholders – Identify the leaders and key stakeholders in the community.
- Building the Partnerships – Build a coalition that can make a difference.
- The Starting Point – Move forward with getting out the Message, providing Leadership, building a broad-based Community Coalition, and developing Sponsorships.

3. Planning the Service – Develop a plan for the new service model and determine costs for technology and service.

- Determine Service Area Boundaries – Depends on population density, locations of destinations and support from local communities.
- Response Times – short response time is a key concept for microtransit.
- Service Hours and Days – minimum schedules and other options.
- Fare Structure – Finding the proper fare structure.
- Determine vehicle needs – If existing vehicles are available, they can be re-branded for the service.
- Potential Ridership – Use of productivity models.

4. Determine Costs and Funding – In most cases, the cost will be very similar to the service it is replacing.

- Operating costs and repurposing service – Repurposing existing service.
- Capital costs – Funding for technology is the major issue.
- Potential new funding sources – Diversity of funding is very important.

5. Develop a Branding, Marketing, and Outreach Plan – As will be seen, branding and marketing are keys to **CARTS Now**'s success.

- Branding of microtransit services – The development of the brand as an essential element.
- Marketing and outreach- Using presentations, focus groups, and outreach materials to educate about the new service.
- Marketing new microtransit services –A variety of education and outreach efforts are often the most effective way to publicize a new service.

6. Technology Selection – Select and procure **application technology** (if applicable).

- The technology - Technologies currently used by some rural systems have microtransit apps and can support microtransit service. Procuring new technology may be necessary.
- The essentials – The mobile application is the essential interface between the public and the transit system.

7. Performance Measures and Service Evaluation – Develop **performance measures** and **service goals**.

- It is important to recognized both traditional and emerging microtransit performance metrics.
- Key measures and other important measures must be monitored closely.

8. The Kick-Off – Initiate plans for a Kick-Off Event.

- Partner with local leaders to host the events.
- Media Coordination and Coverage is important to promote the new service.

9. Implementation and Operations – Be prepared for any contingency.

- A checklist to assist with Operations Planning, Outreach and Implementation Tasks.

Please note: The appendices to this Guidebook provide great detail into how CARTS developed and implemented rural microtransit in their service area. Rural transit mangers and planners interested in implementing microtransit should review these technical memoranda to better understand the process and how it may be adapted to their own service area needs.

Opportunities Leveraged and Implementation Lessons Learned

Opportunity Leveraged:

CARTS operation of the Manor Pickup service for Capital Metro was ongoing during the development of the Bastrop pilot. Their continued experience running the Manor Pickup system, made CARTS uniquely positioned to pilot an on-demand microtransit ride service in the CARTS service area, including the City of Bastrop.

CARTS Bastrop Bus Depot

In June 2019, in partnership with Austin's Capital Metro and the Travis County Transportation and Natural Resources (TNR) department, CARTS launched a Capital Metro on-demand microtransit (Manor Pickup) project in Manor, Texas (population 14,708). This early contractual partnership with Capital Metro gave CARTS an opportunity to become familiar with operating an on-demand microtransit system and with the use of an app to schedule rides without the need for a call center. Manor Pickup was such a success, with ridership increasing over 300 percent, that CARTS management began to develop a plan to provide a similar service for other cities in the CARTS service area, including the City of Bastrop.

CARTS Now Bastrop had a very long planning and development phase. According to CARTS management, the agency had been preparing for the launch of a Bastrop microtransit pilot since the startup of the Manor Pickup service in June 2019. In fact, CARTS had been involved with the development of the Manor Pickup service since its inception as a pilot in 2017-2018.

1. Assess the Need for New Service

All transit systems should regularly assess their service. First, by reviewing performance measures on a very regular basis, ridership and productivity, in particular. Then, listen to the riders: conduct a survey and hold meetings.

Why have day in advance service for rural cities? After all, how long does it take to schedule a ride when there are only 2 – 3 vehicles available? The answer is seconds, even in a manual mode.

A Simple Assessment

A transit manager typically knows if there is a problem with the existing service or one component of the service. *Is ridership lagging? If so, maybe it is time for a change in service design. Maybe rural microtransit can help.*

Take the Assessment

This short assessment will give the reader a starting point for determining if rural microtransit can help improve ridership.

KEY INDICATORS:

1. **Community Characteristics:**

   - ☐ Size of the community-Are there over 5,000 residents of the potential service area? What is the population density, is it over 700 persons per square mile?
   - ☐ Major destinations – Are there reasons to travel locally, or do residents typically go out of town for health care, work and shopping? Are there big box stores and large grocery stores? Are there a significant number of health care facilities and/or major employers (often large retail).

   If the answer to these questions is yes, then continue.

2. **Current Ridership And Productivity:**

   - ☐ Is productivity lower than 6 one way trips per hour?
   - ☐ Are you turning away riders?

   If the answer to at least one of these questions is yes, then continue.

3. **Listen To Riders And Stakeholders: Are you meeting the riders needs by going where people want to go, when they want to go?**

   - ☐ Meetings to hear needs expressed – Meet on a bus or take the meeting to the people by going to farmers' markets, festivals, and gatherings.
   - ☐ Surveys, and/or interviews with stakeholders to determine need.

If the results of your outreach efforts indicate need, productivity is low and/or the system is turning down trips, then there is clearly a need for a more effective service. In many cases management and staff know that a change is needed due to trip denials, complaints, and other issues.

Potential Community Sizes – Community Characteristics

The outcomes from Bastrop and other rural communities show that the number and size of trip generators, most notably major destinations, are the key indicator of the potential for rural microtransit service success. Simply put, if there are few places to go in town, then there will be little demand. As noted in Section 3, *Examining a Success*, 25 percent of Bastrop destinations were to Walmart and HEB – destinations which also serve as employers of riders, as well.

- **Trip Generators –** To be successful, the community must have a significant number of trip generators such as grocers, big box stores (Walmart), shopping areas, medical facilities, human service organizations, and/or major employers of lower wage personnel. College towns may also sustain microtransit.

- **Population –** Communities with a population over 5,000 and a population density above 700 per square mile are best suited for microtransit services. Exceptions may include smaller communities with major trip generators. Communities over 25,000 population may also be included, if fixed route is not effective (even when properly routed).

- **Connections to other Transit Services and Intercity Services –** Where available, connections to other transit services and intercity services can sometimes help with trip generation.

- **Known in the Community –** Having a good reputation in the community can help build trust and support coalition building.

Review the Power of Productivity

Productivity is the key -if productivity on existing service (fixed route) is over 6 one way trips per vehicle hour, you may want to keep what you have. Microtransit may not be able to match that productivity and lower cost per trip.

> To understand the rational for a particular service design, it is important to first understand the concept of system **productivity** and how it relates to cost.

More than anything else in the transportation world, productivity drives the cost per trip. Productivity is measured as one way trips per vehicle service hour. Productivity, which must be balanced with providing a safe, timely and comfortable service, is critical to cost control.

Why is Productivity Important?

One of the best ways to lower transportation costs is through productivity improvements. The end result: That will depend on different modes or types of service which will yield different productivities (and costs per trip); see Table 4-1. Simply, the lower the cost per trip, yields more service availability and more service can be provided.

Productivity: One-way passenger trips per vehicle hour

- In this example, it costs a transit system $50 per hour to provide service:
    - Productivity of 1.5 trips per hour will yield a cost of **$33.33** per trip.
    - 3 one-way trips per hour bring the cost to **$16.67** per trip.
    - 10 trips per hour **- $5**
    - 25 trips per hour **- $2**

Table 4-1: Typical Productivity for Rural Service Types

Service Type	Productivity
Countywide Paratransit	1-2 trips per hour
On-Demand: Towns and Small Cities	2-6 trips per hour
Fixed Route: Small Cities	4-10 trips per hour

Source: Rural Transit Service Design - Matching Service to Meet Needs: An Introduction, Rural, and Intercity Bus Conference, October 2018, KFH Group

On-Demand Providing Greater Ridership – It Takes Seconds to Schedule a Trip, not 24 Hours

- **On-demand** is appropriate in towns and cities with significant destinations. In the progression of services, Rural on-demand service can replace day-in-advance paratransit and in some cases fixed-route with little or no additional operating expenses.

On-demand service can typically use existing cutaway buses, simply **repurposed** from day-in-advance service with **no additional operating expenses**. On-demand service is capable of doubling or tripling ridership and productivity and reducing per trip costs by the same margins.

Listen to the Community

Regular communication with riders, potential riders and stakeholders is always an important element of a manager's job. Often the manager and staff know when problems are occurring. Perhaps riders or vehicle operators complained, the rate of late trips went up, a drop in ridership, or any number of warning signs.

Regular contact with the community, especially when assessing service is critical. Meetings on a bus can help to bring management and the community together. Surveys, both on board and on line, can be helpful, as well.

Meeting on a Bus

Need More Information?

For additional information about the CARTS project, the reader is directed to Section 5: Appendix 3 -*Technical Memorandum No. 3: Review of Demographics, Land Uses, Travel Patterns and Existing Service* and *Technical Memorandum No. 4: Opportunities Leveraged and Lessons Learned*. These memoranda provide details on how existing services were assessed and how CARTS determined that rural microtransit was their best option to improve service.

Decision Points:

- ☐ Does the community have at least 5,000 population and 700 persons per square mile?
- ☐ Is ridership going up, down or stable? Are trips denied due to capacity/availability issues?
- ☐ Is productivity under 6 one way trips per hour on the current service?
- ☐ What does the community say: Complaints? Active participation?
- ☐ Consideration: Will the offer of a real time trip, like a taxi, Uber or Lyft be attractive to potential customers: Youths, seniors, persons with disabilities, shoppers, and others?
- ☐ **Decision**: Can Microtransit be implemented in the community in question? If Yes, continue.

2. Getting Started – Coalition Building

"Repurposing to microtransit may be a low cost way to dramatically improve service for the community." That is a key message. The emphasis and importance of building and maintaining strong community coalitions in your transit service area cannot be overstated. CARTS was already collaborating with Bastrop's city manager on a joint vision of mobility improvements. This served to enhance the spirit of community as the CARTS Now project moved forward to implementation.

> **Strong community coalitions with local business, community and elected leaders, health care and social service providers, and other community organizations helped raise awareness and support for the new service.**

Identifying the Stakeholders

The first step in building a coalition is to identify the key stakeholders in the community. The entities included in the list below are meant to be used as a starting place. Local organizations may also be helpful in locating and educating other stakeholders and members of the public. The regional coordinated transportation plan may also list additional stakeholders.

Without getting into local politics, the local management and planners should determine the best approach to building a coalition, consideration should be given to the following with the local government at the top of the list.

- Mayor, City Council
- City Manager
- County Judge and Commissioners
- Community Based Organizations
- Local Public Health Department/Social Services
- Local Chamber of Commerce or Business Associations
- Other local elected officials
- Local planning organizations
- Healthcare Providers
- Major employers
- Major retailers and other potential private sector sponsors

Building the Partnerships

One of the most important tasks for the transit management team is to build the right coalition. A coalition that can make a difference. As a starting point, some of the most important points to consider when building a coalition for implementing rural microtransit service are summarized here.

- **The Vision and the Message -** For Rural Microtransit.
  - Better service and greater ridership.
  - An excellent way to change and grow without significant additional cost. For the most part it is repurposing existing service. Any additional operating costs would be the result of expanded service hours.
- **Providing Leadership and Recruiting Potential Champions** – The transit system should provide leadership, but the "Champions" should be community leaders and the private sector as described above.
- **A Broad Based Coalition** – Diversity is a transit manager's friend. A broad based coalition can also help win grants.
- **Private Sector Sponsors –** The private sector may be a significant beneficiary of the service as both customers and employees can use the service.

The Starting Point: When the Door Opens, Walk Through It

In 2018, CARTS management was invited to participate in a focus group organized by Bastrop County Cares (BCC). BCC is a local non-profit organization and county-wide partnership whose initiatives include improving health outcomes in Bastrop County. BCC lists as partners and sponsors a wide variety of nonprofit social support agencies and initiatives, including the St. David's Foundation and the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health.

Trnasit systems should identify thiewr starting point. Getting involved throughout the region is a good way to start and learn. Is there a need or new local initiative that transit can fill or be part of the solution? Is the private sector interested in being part of the solution? The starting point can be finding the common ground and gaining significant public and private partners, foundations, and potential champions. **When requesting or applying for grant funding, it always helps to have an a broad based coalition fully supporting the application.**

A. Crafting a Message

As a manager or planner, consider crafting a message to get the program started. It should focus on the following elements:

- Help us take transit to the next level of convenience and rapid service.
  - Microtransit is a better ride – we come to you and take you anywhere in town – Fast and direct.
  - It's easy, just go to the app or call – we will be there in 30 minutes or less.
  - Anybody can ride, its easy.
- Low Cost Repurposing - The cost per hour is virtually the same, the cost per trip will go **down.**
- Microtransit broadens the market for services by attracting new customers.
- Opportunities to better serve the outlying areas with freed up resources.
- Reporting/Tracking available through the app.

Managers should consider their initial messaging to build the coalition and then ongoing messaging to keep momentum.

B. Providing Leadership: The Champions

Identify the champions. They should be recognized community leaders, such as the mayor, city council members, representatives of local advocacy groups, hospital and health care facilities, or large retailers and employers. Use them in promotions and marketing. Video promotions can be quite effective. The link below is to a CARTS Now promotional video with the Mayor of Bastrop, Texas – a true champion and partner to CARTS (as shown in Exhibit 4-1).

Exhibit 4-1: A Screenshot of the Promotional Video

https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1226733597742363

C. Building a Broad Based Coalition

Using the stakeholders listed above, attempt to build a diverse coalition of representatives from public sector, private sector, nonprofit, and health care organizations. In particular, having the big box retailer and the health care community (and foundation if there is one) on the team along with community and governmental leaders will go a long way toward winning grants to support the new service.

D. Sponsorships

Transit has a long history of providing advertising on and in buses for additional revenue. Many systems have engaged in advertising over the years, but a sponsorship program is more than simply advertising. Instead of the usual selling of just one form of advertising, a transit system should sell sponsorship packages. Sponsorship and advertising funds are an important source of local funding; a sponsorship program can help expand the service.

Large corporations have been known to participate in sponsorship programs and typically these companies (such as Walmart) have far more money than all the cities and counties in the service area combined. Healthcare facilities and their foundations are also good sources of sponsorship interest.

This activity should be implemented at the end of the rebranding with vehicles in the new paint scheme and the new name. Potential sponsors want to be associated with a first-class service that the community can take pride in.

Managers are encouraged to consider a sponsorship program. See the reference to a potential sponsorship program that a system can emulate to generate revenue and support in the **Need More Information?** segment below.

Need More Information?

For additional information about the CARTS project, the reader is directed to Section 5: Appendix 2.- Specifically, *Technical Memorandum No. 2: Review of CARTS Microtransit Pilot Project* details the coalition building and outreach efforts, including their partnership with BCC. *Technical Memorandum No. 4: Opportunities Leveraged and Lessons Learned* also contains details related to CARTS' partnership with BCC and their combined work to support and promote an improved service.

Managers and planners are also encouraged to review *Building a Sponsorship Program; a* discussion about a potential sponsorship program that a system can emulate in order to generate revenue and support that is included in Section 5: Appendix 2.

Decision Points:

- ☐ Generating interest – Is there support among key stakeholders?
    - ☐ Is there support among the public?
    - ☐ Is there a Champion/Leader of the effort?
- ☐ Can you form a strong coalition?
- ☐ Is the system ready to accept a new service and new customers?
- ☐ Is there a willingness to develop sponsors?

If the answer to these questions is yes, you are on the right track.

3. Planning the Service

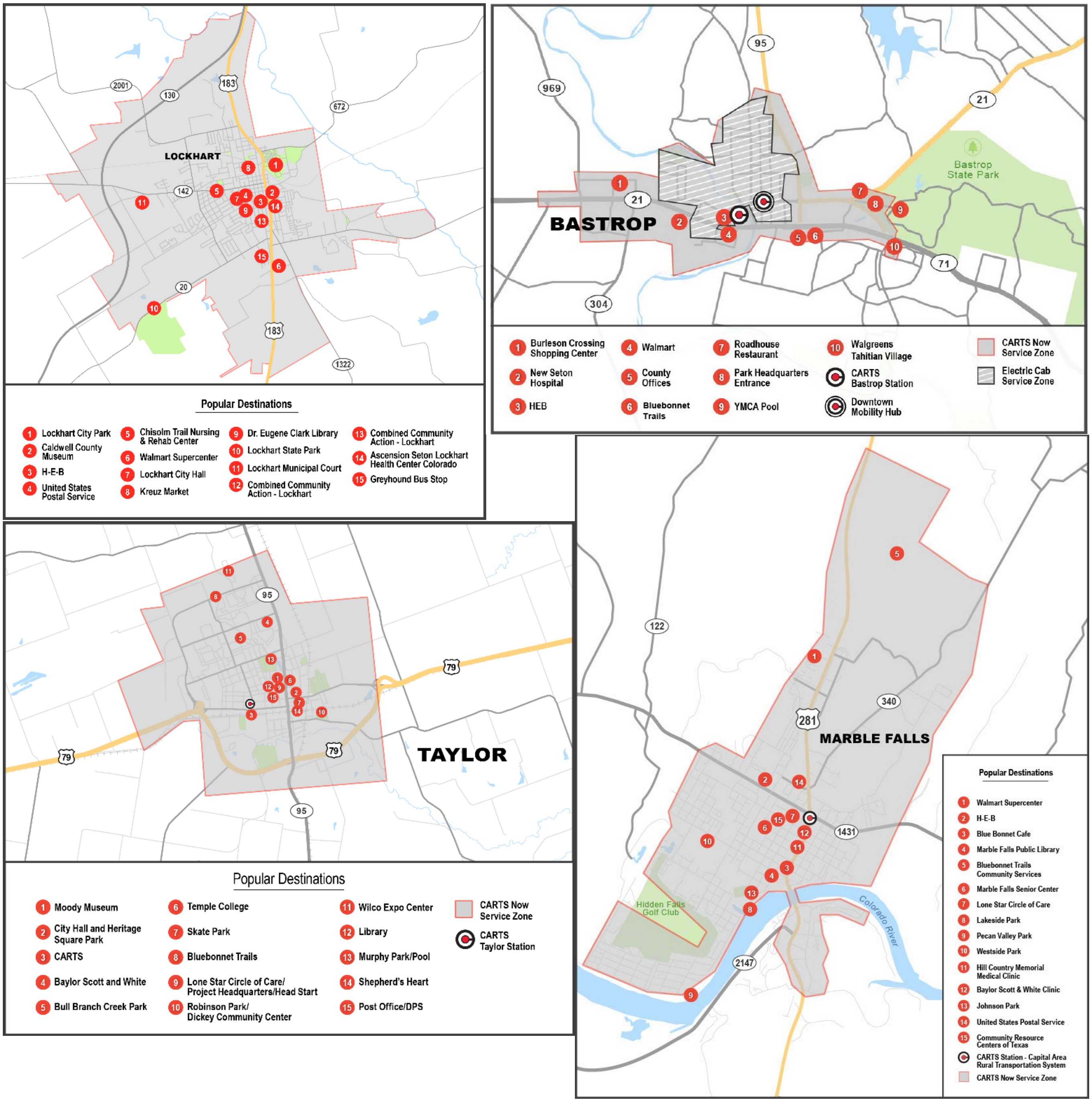
Once the coalition is built and microtransit is selected, it is time to plan the service. This includes all of the major components and parameters of the operation:

- Determining the service area
- Response time
- Service hours and days
- Fare structure and payment methods
- Vehicle needs
- Ridership estimates

Determine The Service Area

The size, layout and the location of major trip generators will help determine the service area as depicted in Exhibit 4-2 illustrating the service areas of Lockhart, Marble Falls, Taylor, and Bastrop.

Exhibit 4-2: CARTS NOW Service Areas of Lockhart, Bastrop, Taylor, and Marble Falls



Considerations

There are more considerations than simple geography in the determination and development of the service area.

- **Which local entities are paying for the service?** A basic rule of transit service is that if a local jurisdiction is paying for service, the transit system should not serve other jurisdictions for free. There may be exceptions.
- **Ensure all significant trip generators and residences are served.** – This includes housing clusters and, most importantly, major shopping and health care destinations.
- **Are there historical commitments or political issues.** – These are local policy issues that need to be considered with the funding questions.
- **Servicing Schools: A consideration.** – As a rule, CARTS Now does not serve schools during peak school hours. Management has stated that they would be inundated with students and that would negatively impact the other customers. This is a policy decision. Managers and planners need to consider if there are other exceptions that are best served in another manner.
- **The Coalition must be onboard** – The coalition should be directly involved in the decision making process.

Response Time

As noted earlier, one of the key concepts of microtransit is a short response time. Therefore, a designated goal for response time should be a guiding element when designing and implementing these services. Previous research conducted by the project team on a variety of microtransit services indicated that the average response time is usually between 12-15 minutes. That closely parallels the experience of CARTS, and it assumes the appropriate level of service is being provided. 30 minutes is typically the default (public facing) response time.

The response time is highly dependent on:

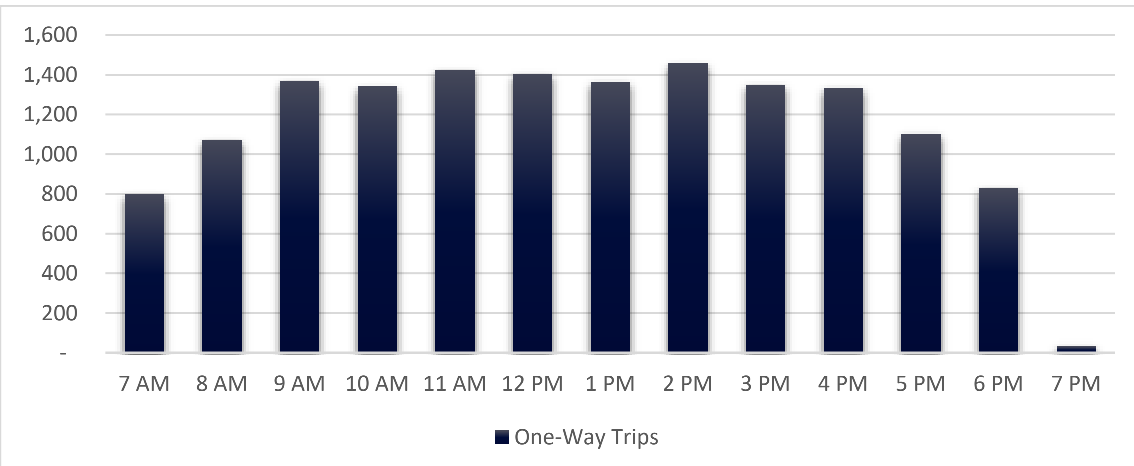
- The number of vehicles in service
- Configuring the correct size and layout of the service area (as discussed in the previous implementation step)
- The size and layout of the local street network and major trip generators
- The location of vehicle staging areas
- Anticipated demand

For example, CARTS Now in Bastrop averages about a 15 minute response time using two vehicles. If CARTS was using one vehicle, the response time would be considerably longer than that and there would be a loss of ridership.

Service Hours and Days

Service hours and days are clearly a cost driver. CARTS operates 7 AM to 7 PM Monday through Friday. Ridership data clearly shows that the peak hours are between 8 AM and 5 PM, with excellent ridership leading up to the peak at 7 AM and winding down at 6 PM (Figure 4-1). Ridership between 6 PM and 7 PM is negligible at this time. There is no Saturday service.

Figure 4-1: Ridership Patterns by Time of Day



Based on the experience to date, the minimum service hours should be 7 AM to 6 PM, Monday through Friday. Anything less would be a lost opportunity. Keep in mind that there are exceptions for unique situations. While there is no direct hard data on Saturday service for rural microtransit, the ridership numbers from suburban and urban microtransit tell us that ridership is about 50 percent of weekday ridership. In general, as a transit "rule of thumb," Saturday service is about one-half of weekday service.

Who Benefits from Late Hours and Saturday Service?

Post rush hour transit needs center on retail: businesses, customers, and employees. The greatest potential for ridership is when the retail stores close and employees commute home. Low ridership after 6 PM, as seen in Figure 4-1, gives transit little justification to provide night time service. One option to provide evening service would be for retailers to support night time service until the stores close and employees can access transit. These "sponsors" would pay for the nighttime and/or Saturday service.

Fare Structure

It is a simple calculation, the higher the fare, the lower the ridership and the lower the fare, the higher the ridership. Finding the proper fare structure for the microtransit service is important. There are several options available to make sure that riders will not be discouraged by high prices while at the same time ensuring that farebox recovery is adequate (10 percent at full service maturity) .

After a year of free fare service, the CARTS Now fare for a one-way trip is $2 for the general public. Senior riders who are 65 years and older, persons with disabilities and children under 12 years of age are charged half of the regular prices while veterans can ride to medical appointments free of cost. Both cash and credit cards are accepted as payment methods. Medical providers also have the option to purchase ride vouchers for their patients in advance directly from CARTS.

Incentivizing Riders

The first step is to use fare policy to incentivize potential riders to use the service. Free fare encourages ridership and is a great way to kick off an exciting new service. CARTS Now operated fare free for the first year during the COVID-19 Pandemic and ridership rose rapidly to about 100 trips per day.

As stated above, fares have a direct influence on ridership, and this was proven true when CARTS Now instituted a fare. The institution of a $2/1 fare, after one year of service, led to a 30 - 40 percent drop in ridership. However, ridership started coming back, almost immediately. After one year CARTS Now is almost back to the ridership experienced during the peak of the fare free service.

And It's Free!

A six month to one year free fare period will help build ridership and ultimately create the atmosphere where a $1 – $2 fare would seem reasonable. Additionally, there could be special fares offered to the public, including first ride free, discounted ride vouchers, and other expenses. However, to meet federal funding compliance requirements, it is important to note that any fare discounts offered on a mobile app or with a credit card must be made available to those who do not have access to the app and/or pay with cash. Sponsors could offer free fare days where the sponsor would pay all of the fares, for example – Free Fare Tuesdays, sponsored by the Big Box Store – for example.

Fare Collection

Many microtransit services, even those with app-based fare payment, have opted to install standard fareboxes onboard their vehicles. The app and fareboxes allow passengers the option of paying cash and incorporating other fare payment methods. Many of the most successful microtransit programs can incorporate a mobile payment option into the microtransit service's mobile application as CARTS does. This can add to the convenience and accessibility of the service.

Vehicles Needs

The number and types of vehicles are important considerations. Having the correct number of vehicles allows for the proper balance of **customer convenience and cost.** The types of vehicles are focused on ensuring that the vehicle is properly sized. Will additional vehicles be needed immediately or can the transit service repurpose existing vehicles?

Number of Vehicles

The number of vehicles needed is a critical element that is based on each of the above elements: service area, response time, and fare structure. These vary in CARTS NOW cities between 7,000 and 16,000 population. In each case, the operating parameters are identical and response time is typically 15 minutes or less. (Table 4-2 details the population per vehicle in the CARTS Now service).

Table 4-2: Population Per Vehicle CARTS NOW

Community	Bastrop	Lockhart	Marble Falls*	Taylor
Population	9,688	14,379	7,037	16,267
Square Miles	9.22	15.61	14.51	20.5
Population Density	1,051	921	485	794
Number of Peak Vehicles	2	2	2	2
Population per vehicle	4,844	7,190	3,519	8,134
Square Miles Per Vehicle	4.61	7.805	7.255	10.25
Average Response Time (minutes)	13	12	8	8

**Start up numbers*
Source: US 2020 Census

Vehicle Size and Type

While it is optimal to have smaller vehicles it is not a prerequisite to starting service. Many systems use smaller cutaway vehicles. There are many small cities in Texas with narrow streets that sometimes requires backing up (make sure the technology you use eliminates or minimizes backing up). To accommodate narrow streets CARTS procured a narrower vehicle as depicted in Figure 4-2. This vehicle has a narrower profile (80 inches) than a typical "cutaway" bus (94 inches) and can maneuver better in these environments. These vehicles are also ramp equipped for faster and easier boarding for people using wheelchairs or who have trouble walking up steps.

Figure 4-2: CARTS NOW Vehicle

CARTS' vehicles are built on a smaller vehicle chassis, allowing for more maneuverability in tight areas. These are low floor, ramp equipped vans with a capacity of 8 – 10 passengers with two wheelchair positions. These are small maneuverable vehicles that can manage the maximum number of riders at one time. Each vehicle is equipped with a tablet tied into Via's system. Throughout the day two vehicles are typically in use, covering about 7 square miles. These vehicles cost about $100,000 each.

Drivers interviewed during other microtransit projects have mentioned that the technology platform's routing algorithm does not always consider how large a cutaway bus is and using passenger vans minimizes the risk of damaging parked cars and could increase the service's efficiency.

While having narrower buses is of value, systems just starting may use cutaway buses. Many systems find that these vehicles work well in their communities. Cutaway buses of about 20 feet or less have minor limitations, but they can be functional for the short term in most of the rural communities to be served. Figure 4-3 is an example of a small cutaway bus. Maneuverability can be checked by field tests down streets in question.

Figure 4-3: Cutaway Microtransit Vehicle

Fuel Type

If a community commits to this type of service, the new electric vehicles coming out in the near future are well suited to low mileage rural microtransit service. At this time, hybrid vehicles are also advantageous, with less of a challenge. Rural transit managers and planners will want to work with city or county government officials to see if it is feasible to work together on future plans to convert to electric.

Potential Ridership

As stated above, rural microtransit is a new field, however we have CARTS' proven examples of small Texas cities that have implemented full scale on demand microtransit. Based on these examples, a rural transit manager can make estimates for their own service. Keeping in mind that the numbers presented are all start up, with Bastrop closest to stable. Taylor on the other hand had a very slow start but after a year, the service is growing.

The first point is that fares being equal or less, demand for the service will increase. How a change to microtransit will translate into ridership is discussed here:

- Ridership will be higher than the existing advance reservation service because of the real time, on-demand function. It is a higher quality service and its easy.
- Additional hours of service will expand ridership.
- Ridership estimates are based on productivity: The CARTS examples indicate a productivity of between 3 and 4.7 one way trips per hour. (Table 4-3)

For Texas cities of a size similar to Bastrop (see Table 4.2), the reader may wish to use a productivity comparative estimate method to forecast ridership. For example, a system that operates two vehicles 12 hours a day and those vehicles currently produce 21 revenue hours of service daily (12 and nine hours for each vehicle) may be expected to yield over time:

- two to four one way trips per hour, and
- 42 to 82 one-way trips daily at the low and high ends, respectively.

Table 4-3 indicates that the CARTS pilot projects are doing very well, and that ridership is still evolving. Of course, it is also a higher quality service.

Please note: When planning service based on potential ridership, always use daily ridership numbers as those numbers indicate capacity.

Table 4-3: Ridership and Productivity Estimates

Community	Bastrop	Lockhart	Taylor*
Daily Ridership	81	108	71
Productivity (one way trips/Hr.)	3.4	4.7	3

**Taylor ridership has been growing and currently higher than this average*

Need More Information?

The reader is directed to Section 5 Appendices for additional information about the CARTS project.-Specifically, *Technical Memorandum No. 2: Review of CARTS Microtransit Pilot Project*, *Technical Memorandum No. 3: Review of Demographics, Land Uses, Travel Patterns and Existing Service*, and *Technical Memorandum No. 4: Opportunities Leveraged and Lessons Learned*. These memoranda all contain details related to CARTS' planning for the new rural microtransit service. Technical Memorandum No. 3 also includes details on ridership by the hour.

Managers and planners should also take the time to review any microtransit vendor websites to better understand the nuances of their individual technologies.

Decision Points:

- ☐ Service Area
    - ☐ Serving schools?
    - ☐ Other exceptions?
- ☐ Service hours and days – 7 AM – 6 PM as a minimum.
- ☐ Response time – 30 minutes is standard.
- ☐ Number of peak vehicles
- ☐ Type of vehicles
    - ☐ Existing vehicles can be used in many cases.
    - ☐ Ordering new vehicles may be more appropriate for microtransit.
- ☐ Technology
    - ☐ Using existing software with an app or a new vendor?
    - ☐ Some software vendors can do both traditional paratransit and microtransit.
- ☐ Fare structure – Fare free for an extended period has advantages.

4. Determine Costs and Funding

In most cases, the cost of microtransit will be very similar to the service it is replacing. Repurposing takes the existing costs and applies it to the microtransit service. In most cases it is a one for one repurpose, however it is possible with productivity improvements to replace three day in advance demand response vehicles with two microtransit vehicles – **providing greater ridership and service quality at a lower cost.**

This Guidebook will focus on different and innovative approaches to funding and is not a primer on traditional funding sources. Strategies to generate local and state government funding have been discussed in coalition building. It is more important is to develop a diverse funding base, including Federal operating and planning funds as well as state funding. These funding sources are well known, and managers can determine their funding. This section will focus on non-traditional government and private sector funding to give managers an idea of the diversity of funding sources.

A Word About Operating Costs and Repurposing Service

Costs for a microtransit service are determined by multiple factors, such as the preferred service model, service zone size, response time and the operating hours and days. In the case of CARTS and most of the other transit systems is that much, if not all of the cost of microtransit is already being expended. There are little additional operating costs in many cases, and it is possible to reduce per trip costs.

Repurposing Existing Service

Very often microtransit repurposes existing service with existing vehicle hours and operating costs. For example, CARTS operated a fixed route in Bastrop using one vehicle. Their Country Bus service operated the equivalent of one full time vehicle in paratransit mode in the city. The vehicle hours from those two buses were repurposed to account for most of the CARTS Now service. Service hours were increased and that is the bulk of the additional costs. Ridership more than doubled.

Do Not Compete with Yourself

If there is existing service in the community you propose to serve with microtransit, that service should be repurposed. It is NEVER a good idea to compete with yourself. Microtransit or a slight modification should be able to provide service for virtually ALL TRIPS in the service area. There should not be any other service in that area with the possible exception of dialysis trips.

Capital Costs

Capital costs consist of technology, vehicles and possibly bus shelters (often paid for in part, by the city or retailer). As the funding and procurement of vehicles is standard practice, it will not be addressed here.

Funding for technology is the major issue. There are a number of firms that specialize in this technology. While the initial costs can be considered a capital expense, there are annual fees associated with the number of vehicles. The technology costs are broken down into three components:

1. Initial cost, licensing, and installation
2. Annual fees and support/warranty costs
3. Hardware costs: tablets and possibly a server

There are numerous vendors with all different approaches to payment. At this point there is no way to tell what the potential costs would be in the future.

Potential New Future Funding Sources

Diversity of funding is very important. Rural transit systems should always look to a variety of either ongoing or one time grants for planning, operations, and capital expenses.

Non-Traditional Government Funding Sources

Federal funding is often the primary source for both the capital and operations components of a shared mobility project like microtransit. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has previously issued specific programs such as the Integrated Mobility Innovation (IMI) Program that funded projects demonstrating innovative and effective practices, partnerships, and technologies to enhance public transportation effectiveness, increase efficiency, expand quality, promote safety, and improve the traveler experience. However, these programs are highly competitive and are not ongoing like other federal programs that support public transit services.

The FTA regularly puts out new grant opportunities often focused on capital funds such as the Grants for Buses and Bus Facilities program (49 U.S.C. 5339) which includes two discretionary components: the Bus and Bus Facilities Discretionary Program and the Low or No Emissions Bus Discretionary Program. TxDOT also has a regular call for innovative projects.

Sponsorship Programs

Sponsorship programs were discussed above in *Section 2: Getting Started - Coalition Building*. This is an expansion from the older form of advertising on buses. Sponsorship programs require a lot of work to succeed and a sales approach is needed to work with the private sector. Once acquired, these funds can be used a variety of ways as unrestricted cash, or as match. Managers are encouraged to consider a sponsorship program. See the reference to a potential sponsorship program that a system can emulate to generate revenue and support in the **Need More Information?** segment below.

Need More Information?

The reader is directed to Section 5: Appendix 2 for additional information about the CARTS project.- Specifically, *Technical Memorandum No. 2: Review of CARTS Microtransit Pilot Project* and *Technical Memorandum No. 3: Review of Demographics, Land Uses, Travel Patterns and Existing Service*. These memoranda contain details related to CARTS' decision making processes for determining costs and funding for the new CARTS Now service. Technical Memorandum No. 2 also discusses generating local and state government funding in more detail.

Managers and planners are also encouraged to review *Building a Sponsorship Program; a* discussion about a potential sponsorship program that a system can emulate in order to generate revenue and support that is included in Section 5: Appendix 2.

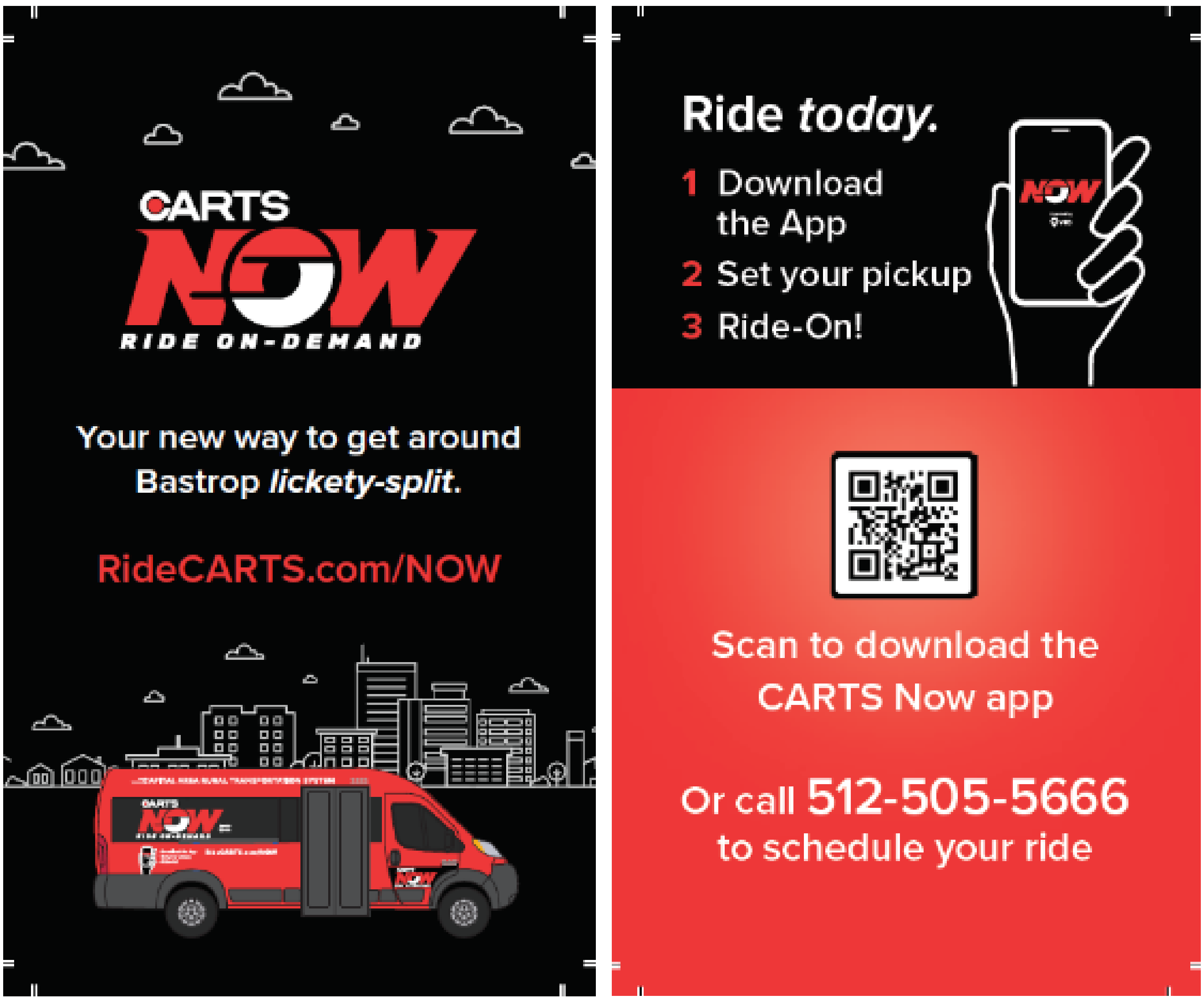
Decision Points:

- ☐ Secure capital funding for technology and vehicles (as needed)
- ☐ Determine repurposing ratio
- ☐ Determine any additional costs – expansion of hours
- ☐ Secure sponsorships from the private sector

5. Develop a Branding, Marketing and Outreach Plan

Just like any other service-related business, branding, marketing, and outreach are essential to success. This is particularly true for rural microtransit; a new concept for many who saw their community's public transit system as the "senior bus" and nothing more.

Exhibit 4-3: CARTS NOW Flyer



CARTS Now Bastrop – A Study in Branding, Marketing and Outreach Legwork – Lots of It

The **CARTS Now** outreach team, led by the General Manager and Community Outreach Director, with their consultant, began to implement their community outreach strategy in November 2020.

- To promote ridership and delivery of a successful pilot program, emphasis was placed on building coalitions with local leaders, businesses, medical and social service providers, and other community organizations to raise awareness and support for the new service.
- CARTS provided regular updates and overview of the new service.
- In addition to working with their partner, BCC, to enlist medical and social service providers as partners in promoting the program, the **CARTS Now** team met with city officials and local business leaders to ensure support and active engagement at start-up.
- The **CARTS Now** outreach team conducted two days of in-person visits to more than sixty local businesses and service providers. In addition to providing information and answering questions about the new, on-demand service, the outreach team shared general information about CARTS services and provided printed material and contact information to encourage future interaction.

Branding of Microtransit Services

An essential element in any service-related business is appropriate branding and marketing of the service. CARTS approach was to hire professional firms to conduct the marketing and branding, with an in-house Community Outreach Director to deliver the message with the General Manager. CARTS contracted with a local design firm to assist with branding the new on-demand microtransit service. **"CARTS Now" was chosen as the name for the new service and a bold, red color scheme was chosen for the vehicles, the app, and other marketing materials.** An example of a **CARTS Now - Bastrop** van is provided in Figure 4-4.

Figure 4-4: CARTS Now Bastrop Van

The Brand

A key aspect of the coalition effort is the branding of microtransit services to help differentiate the new service typology from other transit models. Transit systems are using a variety of branding efforts to publicize new on-demand services that include:

- Dallas Area Regional Transit (DART) dubbed their microtransit services *GoLink*. Other systems, such as the one that serves San Antonio (VIA) area and Nashville (WeGo), have branded their microtransit services *Link* to reinforce the connection it provides to existing transit.

- Some communities, such as Arlington (TX), have simply branded their microtransit services as *On-Demand*.

GoLink – DART On-Demand

Arlington On-Demand
Image Source: "City of Arlington Awarded for Leadership in Equity-Focused, Innovative Transportation with Via On-Demand Service," Accessed via https://www.arlingtontx.gov/news/my_arlington_t_x/news_stories/via_rideshare_impact_award_2021

VIA Link Service
Image Source: "VIA Link - VIA Metropolitan Transit," Accessed via https://www.viainfo.net/link/#via-services

Developing the Brand

Development and determination of a brand for the new service should begin in parallel with the development of the new service, itself. The development work can be done professionally or in-house, but the final result must look and sound professional, in every way. It may be possible to take advantage of local resources such as colleges and high schools for naming or branding ideas. The following are considerations to keep in mind when branding a new service.

- **Service name or nickname** – This is the name most people will use for the new service. Perhaps a contest among students, combined with a full rebrand celebration. The new name:
    - Be Easily Recognizable or Catchy – CARTS Now captures the type of service and is easily recognized, especially combined with the bold red.
    - Identify with the service – Such as Pick-Up or Connect
- **Avoid acronyms** – Names like SCAT (the absolute worst), have little or no meaning and should not be self-applied.
- **Vehicle colors and paint scheme** – This requires eye-catching vehicles that will be noticed and can instill pride in the new service. Is there a bright local color that symbolizes the area? This scheme should be developed. In general, avoid institutional white.
- **Bring in system sponsors** – Having sponsor names on the sides of the vehicles, perhaps in a corner, can lend credibility to the system.

- **Establish a website and Facebook/social media presence** – Each transit system should establish a social media presence with a website that stands alone.

Marketing and Outreach

This section of the Guidebook reviews marketing and outreach efforts suited to rural microtransit. It is not intended to be a guidebook on marketing and outreach. The **CARTS Now** approach is used as a model from which a manager or planner can tailor for their specific needs. After the branding effort has been completed, the marketing and outreach efforts should begin.

- Transit systems that have successfully implemented microtransit into their service areas employed marketing campaigns to educate potential customers on the availability and use of the new services. In many cases, it is important to explain exactly what the service entails and how to make the service work for the individual customer. Marketing and outreach efforts have included website pages specific to the service that include information on booking a trip (use of the app should be strongly encouraged), a map of the service area, hours of operation, and fares. Others have used promotional videos, including ones that feature prominent local residents or elected officials using the service. See Exhibit 4-1.

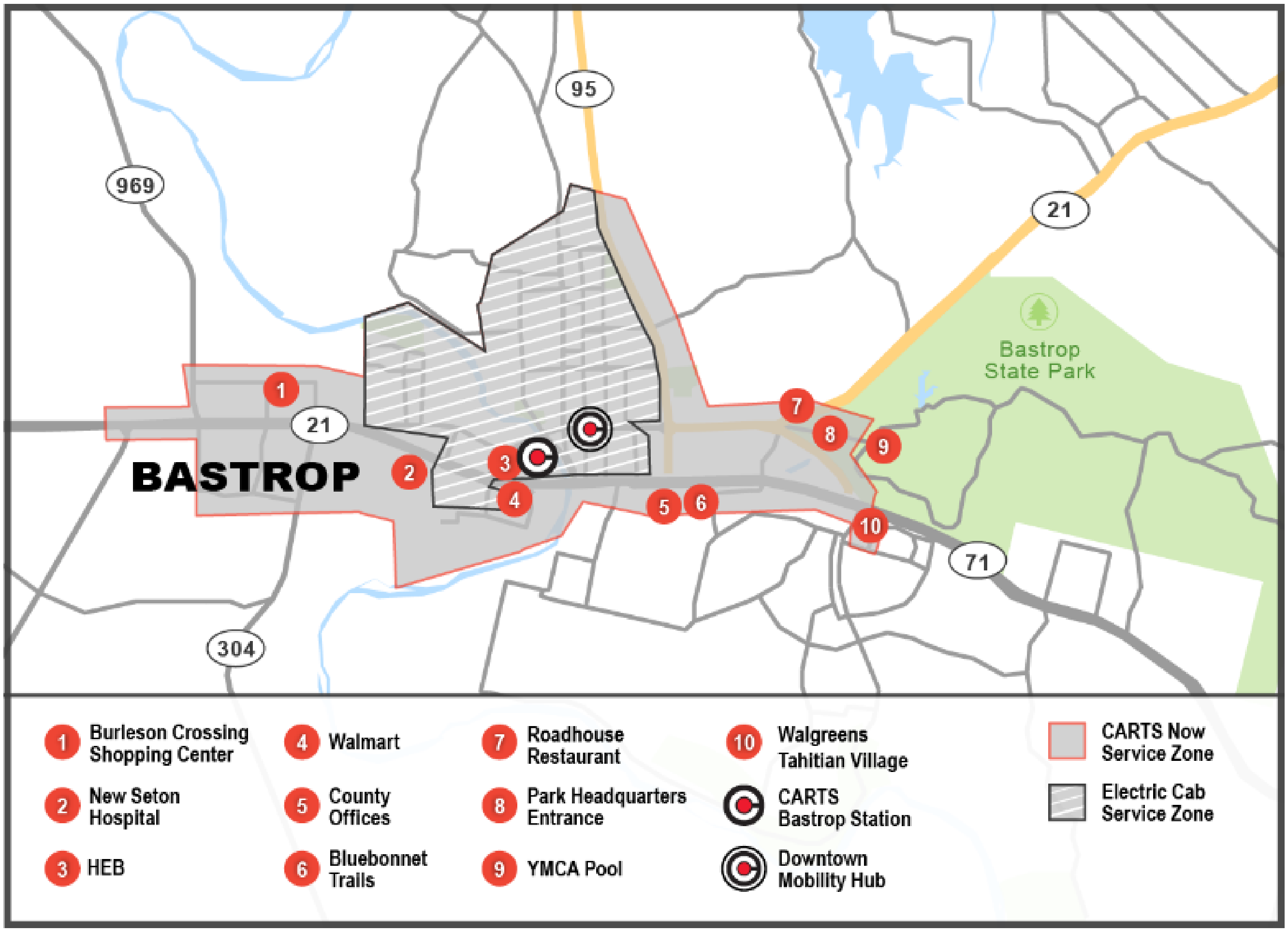
Additionally, as discussed previously, outreach processes should focus on local officials to help introduce the concept and receive feedback. Attempts should also be made to gather political support by engaging with elected officials. These efforts, which have been a hallmark of CARTS and other successful transit systems as they work to build necessary momentum for microtransit services, are presented in this section of the guide.

Presentations and Focus Groups

On, November 10, 2020, the CARTS Now team began their outreach campaign with a presentation to the Bastrop City Council. The presentation included an overview of the new service and the proposed outreach plan to distribute information to the greater Bastrop Community. This is where the Coalition can do the most good – serving as representatives of the service and getting their constituents on board.

A user-friendly map of the service area (Exhibit 4-4) was developed in English and Spanish to share with community members.

Exhibit 4-4: User-Friendly Map of Service Area



Building the Health Care Team

Prior to launching the new services and as a part of the overall coalition building effort, the CARTS Now team joined forces with Bastrop County Cares (BCC) to help ensure that local health care providers were on board with the new service. BCC helped identify medical service providers to participate in an online focus group session to provide input on proposed outreach strategies and materials. Highlights from the meeting were published in *CARTS Now Bastrop Community Outreach Report (See Section 5: Appendix 2)* and are listed below for added insight:

Health Care insights – the health care community can help build the service:

- Lack of reliable transportation contributes to many missed appointments.
- Materials need to be simple and easy to understand.
- Signs, posters, and fact sheets are preferred materials.

- Can be placed around town and given to medical care facilities to put up in their offices and waiting rooms.
- Many medical offices are using no-touch materials like laminated posters with QR codes.
- Clinics often have televisions in waiting rooms where they can show videos or presentations.

- Expressed interest in potential contracts or voucher systems for patients using the service.
- Patients are increasingly receiving information through text message alerts. Texts with links would be convenient.
- Identified the need to reach demographics without smart phones through grassroots outreach and printed materials.

In addition to providing insight into the transit related needs of their patients, members of the health care focus group and BCC agreed to assist CARTS by providing a "navigator" or liaison at each clinic who would work with patients to help explain the new CARTS Now transit service. CARTS returned to BCC in 2021 to provide an update and overview of the new service. This ongoing partnership with BCC reinforced transit relationships with health care providers by giving them a direct voice.

Outreach Materials

The CARTS Now team developed a variety of informative and easy-to-use materials to help users navigate the service and assist medical and service providers with coordinating rides for clients. Transit managers can use much of this information while developing their own program. Wherever possible, materials were provided in English and Spanish. QR codes were also used to assist users in downloading the CARTS Now app. Materials were distributed electronically and in person through business visits. These include:

- A CARTS Now webpage on the CARTS website with additional resources for riders
- CARTS Now flyers and posters to explain the service and provide links to the website and app.
- FAQs to help explain how to request a ride, pricing, and discount availability, and how to use the CARTS Now app.
- Grab-and-go business cards with the CARTS Now phone line and QR code for easy access to the app.
- eCab informational flyer describing how eCabs work, environmental benefits, and how to request an eCab ride.

These efforts are discussed in greater detail below. Further the outreach materials listed above can be found in Section 5: Appendix 2 - *Technical Memorandum No. 2: Review of CARTS Microtransit Pilot Project*. See Section 1 for an example of a promotional video.

Promotional videos are discussed in the Marketing section below.

Marketing Consultants

CARTS contracted with CD&P, a local public engagement firm based in Austin, Texas, to help with securing much needed public support and understanding of the new system. CD&P staff worked with the CARTS team to develop a list of businesses and medical providers in the Bastrop area who could be enlisted to share news of the service within their own social networks.

Marketing New Microtransit Services

As with any new transit service or business, for that matter, marketing is a critical element to rural microtransit success.

In addition to word-of-mouth marketing, other communities have used a variety of education and outreach efforts to publicize new microtransit and flexible transportation services. These efforts can include:

- **Press releases/Newspaper articles:** Press releases and public service announcements (PSAs) targeted to media outlets that transit users are likely to consume are an effective way to get the word out. Newspaper and local television news outlets can be an effective way to reach people, but don't forget local community radio.
- **Flyers/Pamphlets:** As soon as the ride hailing platform is secured, printed promotional material should be developed and distributed. The printed material should be high quality, pleasing to the eye, and informative. Information on how to download the app, use the app to hail the ride and locations served should be included. Additional information can include websites and phone numbers for additional information and questions. Marble Falls CARTS Now Grand Opening online message.

CARTS Marble Falls Launch Event Flyer

- **Websites:** Website pages specific to the microtransit service should be developed. An example from the DART GoLink service in the Dallas, Texas area that includes specifics on booking a trip, a map of the service area, hours of operation, and fares, is available at https://dart.org/guide/transit-and-use/golink. CARTS also has an excellent example at www.ridecart.com/now.

- **Promotional videos and messages:** Like CARTS, some communities have promoted new services through on-line videos, including some that that feature elected officials supporting the service.

  - A promotional video with the Mayor of Bastrop explaining the benefits of the new CARTS Now service and how to Ride.

  - Hey City of Lockhart – City Government, there's a new van in town! Video with clear instructions on how to ride and use the app.

- **Travel Training:** Working with human service organizations and employers to show how to download the app and use it to schedule a trip will be important. These individuals can assist in helping individuals understand how this new service works and ensure that the people that need transit service the most are ready to use the new system when it comes online.

- **Coordination:** Working and coordinating with local community partners is a great way to market service to residents. It is important to engage these organizations to ensure staff know about the new microtransit service and have promotional/educational materials on hand to share with the community.

- **Meetings and Presentations:** Brief promotional presentations detailing the new service and how to use it can be a good way to get information out to the public and answer any questions they may have.

Need More Information?

For additional information about the CARTS project, the reader is directed to Section 5: Appendix 2- Specifically, *Technical Memorandum No. 2: Review of CARTS Microtransit Pilot* for details about CARTS' decision making processes for developing a branding, marketing, and outreach plan for CARTS Now. The section above on Coalition Building also contains valuable information related to using members of the coalition to promote and support the new service.

Decision Points:

- ☐ Branding – determining a name and theme.
  - ☐ Have a contest to name the service – with the final selection to be determined by the coalition or name the service internally.
  - ☐ Design logo and paint scheme – recommended that this be done professionally.
- ☐ Determine a marketing and outreach approach using the tools discussed above.
- ☐ Selecting coalition members to support this effort.
- ☐ Hiring a professional marketing firm

6. Technology Selection

Technology is a key ingredient to the success of microtransit. Some rural systems already have the necessary technology but haven't had the opportunity to deploy it, yet. This part of the Guidebook reviews the needed technology; technology that can reduce demands on dispatch staff.

The Technology

Microtransit apps have come of age over the past five years and there are now at least four to five products on the market that are successfully running at transit systems. The technology consists of the app (which allows the customer to interact with transit), the software, and the on board tablets (the vehicle operator's connection to the microtransit service). Some of these technology vendors are incorporating other components of paratransit technology into their packages.

There are a number of rural transit systems in Texas that are using paratransit software that already has the capability to deploy a microtransit app. If this is the case, and the technology is proven to work, using the existing software would, in all probability, be the best approach.

For those systems wishing or needing to procure new technology, the question to be determined is: Do you want an entire paratransit/microtransit technology package or just the microtransit technology with the app? The disadvantage of just procuring an app for microtransit is that the transit system would still need technology for its other paratransit services. This would result in managing and supporting two different products with different vendors. Not the best option.

Procuring Technology

While a technology procurement guide is beyond the scope of this Guidebook, there are a few basic rules to procuring technology:

1. Demos do not count - Don't purchase a technology that you have not personally seen successfully operating in a real world application. See it in action at a transit system.

2. Better yet, also sample the service – for example go to Bastrop, download the app and then go for a few rides.

3. Ensure you are purchasing the products, support, and training.

4. Put actual copies of reports you want, in the RFP.

CARTS first use of an app was while under contract to Capital Metro in Manor, TX. The app used for Manor Pickup service was developed in partnership with an on-demand public mobility developer, Via (no relation to VIA Transit in San Antonio), which licenses its technology to transportation providers globally. CARTS has continued to use Via.

Transit systems will work their vendor to set up their app that allows customers to request rides anywhere in the service area. This can include: a setting up rules and policies, geo-fencing, tracking, and reporting information and ridership data.

The following sections provide an overview of the essential app processes used when requesting a trip, utilizing real time arrival information and onboard mobile equipment.

The Essentials

The key elements of the app are the mobile application – the interface with the public and the tablet that informs the vehicle operator of each trip, directions and any other information needed.

Mobile Application

The public's interface for microtransit services will be primarily through the service's mobile application (app). Regardless of the design and platform, the app must be publicly available for customers to download through common app outlets, to include the Apple's App Store and the Google Play Store.

Registration Process

Like other online services, customers will need to create an account to utilize the service. First time users of the app will likely be greeted with a home screen that allows them to log in to an existing account or to sign up with a new account. The account registration process must be simple and straightforward. Typically, providers require personal information that includes the user's first and last name, email address, and cell phone number.

Requesting a Trip

Once the customer is a registered user, the app then navigates them to a map that highlights their current location. Figure 4-5 (on the following page) shows a series of screenshots of the CARTS NOW app that shows real time information received by the customer while booking a ride. This map will also show the user the location and boundary of the zones. If the customer attempts to request a trip pickup or drop-off that is outside of the zone, the app will not allow for that request and will generate an out-of-zone message.

Alternative Interfaces

In addition to the microtransit app, transit systems must also ensure that individuals without a smartphone or internet connection can still access the service (a requirement of Title VI). Microtransit services should provide a phone number for a call center or local dispatcher to schedule real time trips. Some services have set up websites for trip requests, but this should be done in addition to a call-in option.

Real Time Arrival Information

One of the most exciting elements of a microtransit app is the real time arrival information. After a customer has booked their trip, the app then allows them to track their vehicle and receive real-time updates on the vehicle's estimated time of arrival. The app can be configured to send pop-up notifications to the customer's smartphone once the vehicle is a certain distance away, once it has arrived, or if it experiences delays. An example of the real-time arrival process for a microtransit service is illustrated in Figure 4-6.

Figure 4-5: iPhone Screenshots of the CARTS NOW App Showing Real Time Information

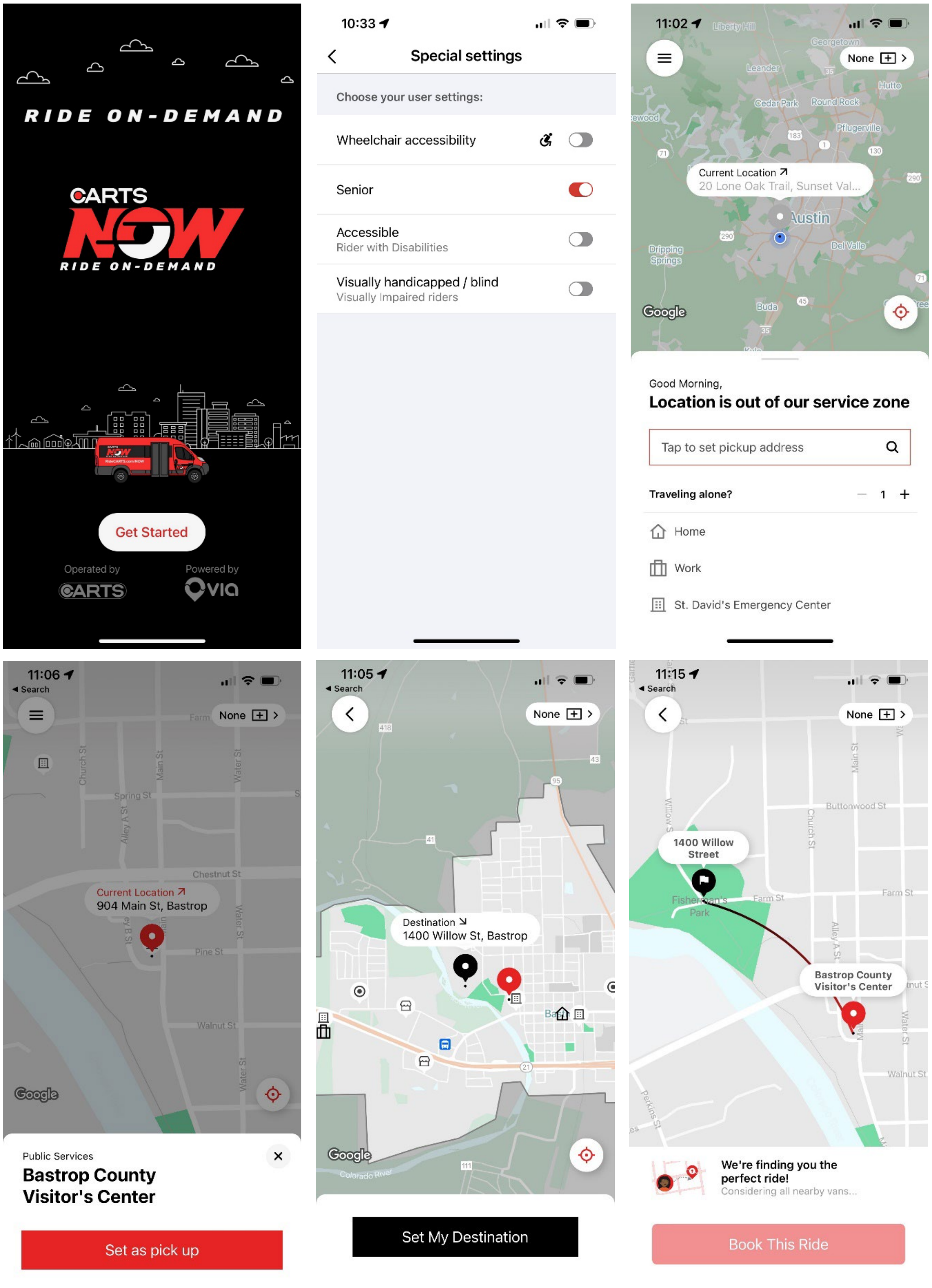
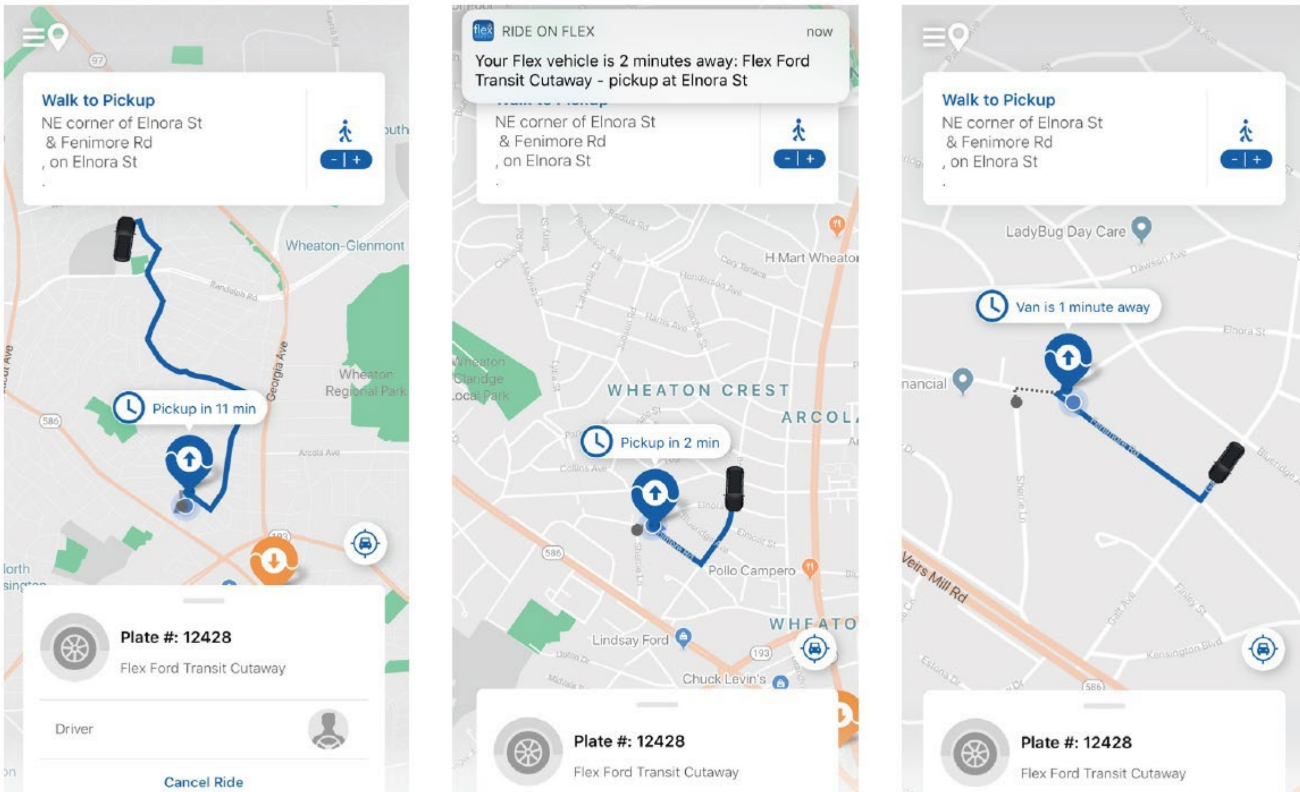
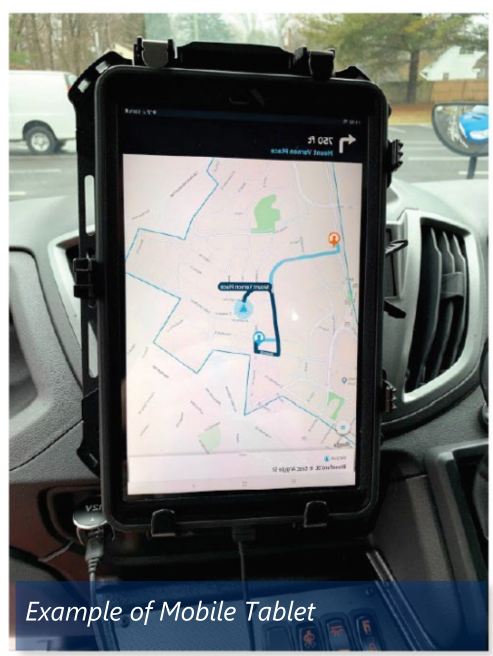


Figure 4-6: Sample Real Time Arrival Information



Onboard Mobile Tablet

The onboard mobile tablet is the vehicle operator's connection to the microtransit service. Many microtransit providers acquire tablets and mounting kits through the software technology partner. Some trip planning software is specific to certain platforms (e.g., Android or iOS), but there are a range of options for procurement. Some systems procure their own tablets but must ensure that the tablet will be accepted by the vendor's technology.



Example of Mobile Tablet

The tablet provides a constantly updated itinerary with turn-by-turn directions for the vehicle operator. The tablet also provides an interface for vehicle operators to accept trips, mark no-shows, and view cancellations. In between trip requests, the tablet will even instruct the vehicle operator to return to a predetermined staging area to await a future request.

The tablets are relatively inexpensive capital equipment and will require rules to ensure the tablets are not lost. Many microtransit services require their vehicle operators to check out and return the tablets to a supervisor. The tablets will need charging capabilities onboard the vehicles and a charging station in the dispatch office/transit facility. The tablets should be kept in a locker or safe; there are many options for secure tablet storage with charging capabilities.

Need More Information?

Technology is discussed in detail in the technical memoranda included in *Section 5: Appendix* of this Guidebook. However, this Guidebook does not list out vendors that have either fully integrated paratransit/microtransit apps (as some Texas operators have chosen to use) or separate microtransit apps. Because these lists change regularly, it is recommended that transit managers and planners go to the Community Transit Association of America (CTAA) or American Public Transportation of America (APTA) website, or simply do an internet search to compile a list of vendors.

Decision Points:

- ☐ Does your transit system currently have or can you secure from your technology vendor, the necessary technology?
- ☐ If no, are you able of writing an RFP?
- ☐ Selecting a vendor and short term support (as necessary).
- ☐ Work with the vendor in selecting the operating parameters and reporting requirements

7. Performance Measures and Service Evaluation

Microtransit is a form of paratransit and many of the same performance measurements apply. First, transit must adhere to TxDOT reporting requirements. This discussion is centered on the performance measures needed to properly manage the day to day operation. The emphasis is on keeping it simple, measuring performance, cost, and communication. This includes traditional paratransit performance measures related to TxDOT and FTA National Transit Database (NTD) needs as well as measures unique to microtransit.

This effort will focus on those numbers and measures critical to microtransit operating performance. Further, this does not preclude the monitoring of any other activities – this list of measures and indicators should be considered a minimum.

Performance Measures

Performance measures are critical to monitoring performance. Some are tracked on a daily basis, while most of the others can be tracked on a monthly basis. Following are the recommended key measures for management to use for guidance in operations. In all cases these numbers and measures should be disaggregated by county. All should be collected monthly with the exception of those indicated that should be collected daily.

The key is to rapidly identify an issue before it becomes a problem; and then find solutions.

As pilot microtransit programs begin operation, there must be an effort to collect, analyze, and evaluate data to gauge service performance in productivity, on-time performance, and customer satisfaction. A thorough microtransit evaluation should analyze both traditional performance metrics outlined in the FTA National Transit Database (NTD) and emerging performance measures that evaluate the nuances of microtransit' s unique service model. This section provides a context for the performance assessment of the future rural microtransit services by exploring both traditional and emerging microtransit performance metrics.

Data Collection

1. One-way trips
2. Vehicle hours
3. Vehicle miles
4. Cost data
5. Accidents, incidents
6. Microtransit specific information
7. On-time performance
8. No-shows
9. Missed trips
10. Road calls/breakdowns
11. Complaints/compliments

Key Measures

1. **Passenger Trips per Vehicle-Hour – Daily** - This is productivity and is the most critical performance measure (excluding safety). It drives operating cost per trip and ultimately overall system cost.

2. **Operating Cost per Vehicle-Hour** – This is an important unit of cost and easily measurable. It reflects the cost to operate one vehicle for one hour. It should not fluctuate significantly from month to month unless a large one-time payment is made. It should not fluctuate significantly from year to year, unless costs such as fuel, insurance or other costs increase.

3. **Operating Cost per Vehicle-Mile** – Similar to operating cost per hour.

4. **Operating Cost per Passenger Trip** – This is partially a reflection of operating cost per hour but is most affected by system productivity.

5. **Safety Incidents per 100,000 Vehicle-Miles – Daily** - Can be tracked separately for incidents, accidents, and other problems.

6. **On-Time Performance – Daily** – Percentage of trips that are on time compared to all completed trips.

Other Important Measures

All measures should be reported and reviewed monthly, with most reported daily.

1. **No-Shows, Missed Trips - Daily** – Either actual number or percentage of total trips.

2. **Road Calls/Breakdowns** - Per 100,000 miles- Daily

3. **Complaints/Complements** - Daily

4. **Miles per Hour and Average Trip Length** – These should be used monthly to test accuracy of other measures. Monthly fluctuations of more than a few percentage points should be investigated, verified, and explained. If fluctuations occur, this should be tracked daily until the problem is resolved.

Measures Unique to Microtransit

1. **Response Time** – A key element to microtransit is the time between the trip acceptance and vehicle arrival.
2. **App Use Percentage** – Transit should stress the use of the app wherever possible. While it is required to allow telephone access equal to the app, the latter should be encouraged.
3. **Refusal Rate** – At times, requests are refused, and riders are requested to call back later (often just 5 minutes). If this number increases inform riders what the best times are and what times to avoid. Often called "Flattening the peaks."
4. **Mobile App Downloads** – Indicates potential growth.
5. **Percentage of shared rides** – an indicator of capacity.

When procuring technology, transit should require the vendor to meet these reporting requirements for each community separately. One flaw in CARTS NOW reporting capabilities is that it doesn't break out performance data for each city separately.

Need More Information?

More information about the FTA's National Transit Database (NTD) may be found at this site: https://www.transit.dot.gov/ntd
TxDOT PTN 128
The Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) Report No. 136: *Guidebook for Rural Demand-Response Transportation: Measuring, Assessing, and Improving Performance* is a resource to assist Demand-Response Transit (DRT) systems to measure, assess, and improve their performance, focusing on DRT systems in rural areas. https://nap.nationalacademies.org/download/14330

Decision Points:

- ☐ Establish current benchmarks for the existing service using most of the measures above.
- ☐ Set initial microtransit goals for all of the performance measures.
- ☐ Track performance daily, weekly, monthly.

8. The Kick-Off

Project Kick-Off

CARTS has mastered the art of ribbon-cutting, grand opening, and project kick-off. The following approach was used by CARTS in each of their recent kick-offs. This is an excellent model to follow. In step with their early coalition building efforts, CARTS partnered with local leaders, the Bastrop Chamber of Commerce, and Visit Bastrop to host the promotion events described below:

- **Kick-Off** - CARTS hosted a CARTS Now Kick-Off event. Local leaders, including Bastrop's Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem, were invited to take an inaugural ride from City Hall to downtown Bastrop in the new vehicles. The new CARTS Now vans also visited local health clinics to record healthcare providers using the service and sharing their experience.

- **Bastrop Station Ribbon Cutting and Full-Service Launch** - On January 21, 2021, CARTS hosted a ribbon-cutting event to celebrate the grand opening of the new CARTS Bastrop station and announce the full launch of the new CARTS Now on-demand microtransit service. The Mayor and other partners from the Chamber of Commerce were asked to share their thoughts about the new ride service.

- **Media Coordination** - The CARTS Now team used a series of Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter campaigns to help promote the service. Posts were consistently shared throughout the initiative on CARTS accounts, as well as through community partners, including community leaders, who shared messages about the service.

- **Social Media Contests** - The CARTS Now team developed two promotional contests during the program asking community members to share photos of their CARTS Now ride for a chance to win a gift card to a local business. Some transit systems have also had naming contests for residents to help select the name.

- **Media Coverage** - CARTS developed a media release to share with local news outlets in November 2020 announcing the service, along with additional CARTS initiatives and potential future expansions to other rural areas. The story was picked up by several outlets, some of which published multiple articles throughout the program to report on progress and additional CARTS news.

Need More Information?

For additional information about the CARTS project, the reader is directed to Section 5: Appendix 2 of this Guidebook.-Specifically, *Technical Memorandum No. 2: Review of CARTS Microtransit Pilot* for details about CARTS' project kick-off for CARTS Now Bastrop. The section above on Marketing and Outreach also contains valuable information related to using members of the coalition to promote and support the new service.

Decision Points:

- ☐ Plan the event:
    - ☐ Social media fun contests
    - ☐ Establish featured speakers.
    - ☐ Secure media coverage – In Lockhart, Austin's long time TV reporter covered the ribbon-cutting. Often local radio stations will interview management.
    - ☐ Music and festivities – a fun event.
    - ☐ A vehicle

9. Implementation and Operations

First impressions are very important.
Perfect first day – don't start if you are not ready!

Operations Planning and Implementation Tasks

The following tasks are required prior to the start and during the start-up of the service.

1. **Ensure Compliance with Regulations** – Requirements to comply with the same regulations and rules currently guiding the transit system

2. **Setting Basic Operating Rules** - Basic operating rules to work out internally and with the technology vendor:

    - Response time
    - Serving schools?
    - Distance the customer could walk

- Refusal rate – customers are asked to call back
- No-show rate
- Always encourage the use of the app

3. **Training for Staff** - Vehicle operators, dispatchers, and management
    - Rules
    - Follow the app

4. **Installing and Testing Technology** – Test, then test, again.
    - Testing technology in a real world environment
    - Use staff and select volunteers.

5. **First Day/Week** – First impressions – don't screw it up.
    - All hands on deck – all staff should be available to provide assistance in the office or in the field
    - Review performance measures daily
    - Interview drivers after their shift
    - Managers and planners – use the app during the first few days and ride the service

6. **On-Going** – Keep an eye on the service and encourage use of the app rather than a phone call.
    - Monitor performance daily using the daily performance measures discussed in Section 7 – Performance Measures
    - Periodically sample the service and meet with vehicle operators

Need More Information?

For additional information about the CARTS project, the reader is directed to Section 5 Appendices of this Guidebook.- CARTS provided detailed information on the implementation of CARTS Now and that can be found in Technical Memoranda Nos. 2, 3, and 4.

A Checklist: Planning, Outreach, and Implementation

In summary, this is a checklist a transit manager or planner can use when developing a rural microtransit program. No two transit systems are alike. Please review each of the steps and add or subtract as needed to fit your system.

1. **Assessing the Need** – is microtransit suited for the area in question?

    a. Does the community in question have the necessary major trip generators?

    b. Does the community have at least 5,000 population and 700 persons per square mile?

    c. Is ridership going up, down or stable?

    d. Are trips denied due to capacity/availability issues?

    e. Is productivity under 6 one way trips per hour on the current service?

    f. What does the community say: Complaints? Active participation?

    g. Consideration: Will the offer of a real time trip, like a taxi, Uber or Lyft be attractive to potential customers: Youths, seniors, persons with disabilities, shoppers, and others?

    h. **Decision Point**: Should Microtransit be implemented in the community in question?

2. **Coalition Building** – Emphasis on building coalitions with local leaders, businesses, health care and social service providers, and other community organizations to raise awareness and support for the new service

    a. The Mayor and local political leaders should support this project

    b. Steady progression of collaboration in the development of the concept of microtransit to address local mobility

    c. Ongoing partnership with health care and human service providers to reinforce transit relationships.

    d. Continued interaction with all stakeholders based on their relationship to the project, i.e., city officials on geo-fencing, human service representatives on client needs

    e. Is there support among the public?

    f. Is there a Champion/Leader of the effort?

    g. Is the transit system ready and able to accept a new service and new customers?

3. **Planning** – Working closely with the coalition

    a. Openness to alignment with other community initiatives that complemented and enhanced the pilot project – For example: mobility improvements

    b. Service Area

        i. Serving schools?

        ii. Other exceptions?

    c. Service hours and days

    d. Response time – 30 minutes is standard

    e. Number of peak vehicles

    f. Type of vehicles

        i. Existing vehicles can be used in many cases

        ii. Ordering new vehicles may be more appropriate for microtransit

    g. Using existing software with an app or a new vendor

        i. Some software vendors can do both traditional paratransit and microtransit

    h. Fare structure – Fare free for an extended period has advantages

4. **Funding** – Diversity and local support are the keys.

    a. Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Coordinated Call for Projects

    b. Committed assets early to activities necessary to launch the pilot: i.e., software, vehicles, and marketing.

    c. Matching funds from City of Bastrop

    d. Secure capital funding for technology and vehicles (as needed)

    e. Determine repurposing ratio

    f. Determine any additional costs – expansion of hours

    g. Secure sponsorships from the private sector

5. **Branding, Marketing and Outreach** – These are key details to success.
   - **a.** Branding – determining a name and theme
     - i. Have a contest to name the service – with the final selection to be determined by the coalition or name the service internally
     - ii. Design logo and paint scheme – recommended that this be done professionally
   - **b.** Determine a marketing and outreach approach using the tools discussed above
   - **c.** Selecting coalition members to support this effort
   - **d.** Hiring Materials distributed electronically and in person through business visits
   - **e.** Materials designed to help users and those coordinating rides for others
   - **f.** Social Media and Media Coordination
     - i. Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter campaigns to help promote the service
     - ii. Promotional contests
     - iii. Media releases to share with local news outlets.
     - iv. Participation of Community Leaders in promotions
   - **g.** A professional marketing firm
6. **Technology** – This will require some research.
   - **a.** Does your transit system currently have or secure from your technology vendor, the necessary technology?
   - **b.** If no, are you capable of writing an RFP?
   - **c.** Selecting a vendor and short term support (as necessary).
   - **d.** With the vendor, transit should select the operating parameters and reporting requirements.
7. **Performance Measures** – Monitor service closely.
   - **a.** Establish current benchmarks for the existing service using most of the measures above
   - **b.** Set initial microtransit goals for all of the performance measures
   - **c.** Work with technology vendor to establish needed reports
   - **d.** Track performance daily, weekly, monthly

8. **Plan for Kick-Off** – Credit and recognition to the local stakeholders and the coalition.

    a. Collaboration with local leaders and partners at kick-off and grand opening public events

    b. Plan the event:

    i. Social media fun contests
    ii. Establish featured speakers
    iii. Secure media coverage – In Lockhart, Austin's long time TV reporter covered the ribbon-cutting. Often local radio stations will interview management.
    iv. Music and festivities – a fun event
    v. A vehicle should be available and open to the public

9. **Implementation** – Be prepared for any contingency.