

Rural Resilience: The Role For Innovative Public Transportation

Connor Evans-Ralston, Kathleen Spear, Jonathan Rubin, October 2024

Introduction

- Rural communities can be particularly vulnerable to climate change and face many transportation related obstacles
- Employment, education, healthcare, and shopping are often farther away in rural communities than their urban counterparts, making active transportation challenging
- Recent population trends have seen a modest increase in rural counties, signaling a growing need for reliable public transportation
- We highlight lessons learned from Maine, Vermont, and New Hampshire in increasing rural transportation resilience well as innovative solutions

Methods

- Selected Vermont and New Hampshire as peer states and used state reported transportation statistics to compare to each other and Maine
- Lessons learned constructed from ongoing state transportation efforts
- Conducted a review of active and inactive microtransit and on-demand transit programs across and outside the United States
- Used the NTD database to compare the standardized cost of trips across transit systems among peer states
- Conducted a literature review on the impact of electric vehicles on resilience

Results

- Public transit represents a small percentage of Maine commutes
- Decreased ridership levels during the pandemic resulted in higher operating expenses for rural transit providers in 2021
- Federal assistance provides significant funding for rural transit providers

Operating expense per unlinked trip of selected transit providers by funding source in 2021, (FTA Office of Budget and Policy 2022)

State	Fares	Local Funds	State Funds	Federal Assistance	Other Funds	Total
Vermont	\$7.30	\$1.28	\$2.07	\$15.34	\$0.52	\$26.51
New Hampshire	\$0.05	\$2.95	\$0.62	\$14.04	\$0.32	\$17.99
Maine	\$1.77	\$1.75	\$2.55	\$21.59	\$44.64	\$72.29

Conclusion

Innovative transit systems can increase rural resilience by addressing accessibility, reliability, and flexibility

- **Microtransit:** small-scale, on-demand public transit (ex. MyRide and Arlington On-Demand)
- **On-Demand Multimodal Transit Systems:** scales to meet demand and fills the first/last mile connection
- **Volunteer Driver Programs** (ex. ITNAmerica)
- **Rideshare Programs** (ex. Green Raiteros)
- **Paratransit & Non-Emergency Medical Transportation** (ex. Rides to Wellness, Recovery and Job Access Rides, Community Rides)



Contact Information:
rubinj@maine.edu;
connor.evansralston@maine.edu
kathleen.spear@maine.edu