



Sullivan County Public Transportation Status

Southwestern Community Services (SCS) provides local transportation services to the towns of Claremont, Newport and Charlestown. The organization took over after the closure of the Community Alliance. It is working with the Community Transportation Association of America under a USDA grant to look at the operations, marketing and branding and to make improvements in its overall operation. It will soon begin working with Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission on a short-range operations plan that will look at operations, routes, and services to determine if improvements can be made.

Volunteer Driver Program

The Sullivan County Volunteer Driver Program is a part of the public transit service provided by SCS. The program is funded by an FTA/NHDOT Grant program to provide services for seniors 60+ and individuals of any age with a permanent or temporary disability (FTA Section 5310). The program funding is a formula-based program that distributes funds throughout the state. The volunteer drivers are reimbursed for mileage at the current General Services Administration rate for the use of a private auto for business. The volunteer time is used as the match for the funding. The program provides hundreds of rides throughout Sullivan County. The rides may be for any purpose, but are primarily requested for medical appointments.

Two additional sources of funding provide rides in Sullivan County: The Bureau of Elderly and Adult Services funds rides specifically for senior residents who are unable to use the regular bus services or who live too far from the deviated route, which is within one quarter of a mile from a bus route/stop. The Medicaid program funds rides for beneficiaries of that program to all medically necessary covered services.

Regional Coordination of Public and Human Service Transportation

For the past eight years, Sullivan County Regional Coordination Council has met quarterly to discuss transportation services for the County. Representatives from social service agencies, the county, the Bureau of Elderly and Adult Services, senior nutrition services and private citizens are represented on the Council.

Regional Transportation Planning & Feasibility Studies

Route 120 Commuter Study -

http://www.uvlsrpc.org/project/Route_120_ClaremontLebanon_Hanover_Transit_Feasibility_15/

Interstate 89 Commuter Study -

http://www.uvlsrpc.org/project/Interstate_89_New_London_Hanover_Lebanon_Commuter_Feasibility_Study_145/

The Rt-120 and I-89 Commuter services require significant start-up funds for vehicle purchases and annual operating costs, which are funded 50/50 for operations and 80/20 for capital, administration and preventative maintenance. That means a substantial local sustaining match commitment from the private and public sectors is required if the federal funds were available. An added complication

with the I-89 commuter service is lack of parking spaces on the New London end. The exit 12 Park n' Ride is generally filled to capacity serving Dartmouth Coach and local ride-share commuters. The Park n' Ride would have to be expanded to accommodate parking for additional commuters. This may require a land swap to protect a wetland adjacent to it. At this time, there really is no suitable place in downtown New London for another Park n' Ride.

The state of NH dedicates almost none of its own revenue to transit operations (some funds are allocated to capital match for vehicles and facilities, but it's a fairly small appropriation) and the federal formula funds have been essentially level funded for almost a decade. Between 2009 and 2016, stimulus funds helped with some new capital investments, and some of the planning funds for various studies, but those were one-time opportunities.

Statewide Strategic Transit Assessment Study

The State of New Hampshire has never conducted a comprehensive Statewide Strategic Transit Assessment Study and has not conducted an official Intercity Bus & Intermodal Needs Assessment since 2003. With limited federal and state dollars and mounting federal consultation and certification requirements, having a third-party Statewide Transit Needs Assessment conducted will assist the Department with long-term planning by assisting with funding projections and would help provide a statewide context and understanding of potential transit expansion priorities and capital/facility needs. The study will help the Department meet the Federal requirement under Title 49 U.S.C. 5311(f) to consult with intercity bus providers and ensure their needs are adequately met, which must be demonstrated through an assessment of statewide intercity mobility needs no more than four years before the date of the certification. This research will assist the Bureau of Rail & Transit by prioritizing future expansion corridors and projects and helping to shape RFPs or CMAQ applications submitted on behalf of the Department. The study will also assist Department staff involved in constructing new intermodal facilities (bus terminals and/or park & ride lots) through a reliable transit-related needs assessment to substantiate or help with prioritization of projects.

This research is underway and quarterly reports can be reviewed here:

<https://www.nh.gov/dot/org/projectdevelopment/materials/research/projects/15680t.htm>

How Public Transportation is Funded in New Hampshire

The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 was created to promote mobility. Today, with 323 million people, the nation's population has more than doubled since its creation. By 2050, we will number 420 million. Growing transportation demand threatens to dwarf regulatory and legislative efforts to mitigate its health and environmental consequences. Increases in total vehicular mileage have all but wiped out the gains achieved through regulations on fuel efficiency and emissions control.

Funds from the surface transportation bill are distributed to states in two ways—through formula grant programs and through competitive grant programs. Formula funded programs are the largest portion of this funding. The Surface Transportation Program (STP)—the largest program authorized in the surface transportation bill, which many call the highway program—allocates funds directly to state Departments of Transportation using the following formula:

- 25 % based on total lane miles of federal-aid highways
- 40 % based on vehicle miles traveled on lanes of federal-aid highways
- 35 % based on estimated state contributions to the Highway Account

Therefore, the program rewards states and regions that drive more, build more highways, and use more gas—a combination that does little to promote health and environmental quality. The more we have expanded highways, the more traffic we have created. The United States needs multi-modal systems with public transportation that efficiently serves a large segment of the population, using existing streets and highways.¹

Beginning in 1991, the stated goal of federal transportation policy has been to expand access and improve efficiency through an interconnected multi-modal system that supports highways, public transportation, walking, and biking. This goal has yet to be achieved. Funding mechanisms and formulas have continued to favor highway construction and car travel. Among the policy options to ease this problem is expanding the funding pool for public transportation.

More than one in five Americans ages 65 and older do not drive because of poor health or eyesight, limited physical or mental abilities, concerns about safety, or because they have no car. Lack of transportation is cited as one of the most difficult problems for rural residents. Researchers attribute the historical inequity between urban and rural public transportation funding as the cause of this situation. In 2018, this continues. Urban residents represent 75% of the population and receive 89% of the public transit funding and the rural residents who are 25% of the population receive only 11% of the funding.²

In addition, rules for public transit funding require a 20% match for administrative and capital expenses, and a 50% match on operating expenses, while highway programs have a straight 20% (or less) match requirement. Congress has focused funding on capital investments and restricted the use of federal funds for transit operations on the principle that this is a local responsibility. But, with local tax resources strained by the economic conditions and the higher match requirements for public transportation operations, services cannot be expanded and federal funds can be left unused due to the lack of matching funds.

Federal Transportation FY 2017 Apportionments

Funding levels for public transportation programs are a small fraction of the entire USDOT budget; rural public transit funding within the Federal Transit Administration budget is an even smaller fraction of that.

¹ Healthy, Equitable Transportation Policy: Recommendations & Research, July 2009, Policy Link Institute. <http://www.policylink.org>

²Research and Training Center on Disability in Rural Communities (RTC: Rural) University of Montana Rural Institute. <http://rtc.ruralinstitute.umn.edu/Trn/Policy.htm>

Public Transit Appropriations	National	New Hampshire
FTA Total Budget All US Public Transit	9,197,106,043	16,070,869
5307 Operating & Capital Formula Urban	5,075,530,419	8,496,595
5311 Operating & Capital Formula Rural	672,793,885	4,173,885
FTA Section 5310 Elderly and Disabled	271,208,388	1,089,985

In New Hampshire as in other small states, the federal funds distributed by a population-based formula provide a very low level of support for rural public transportation operations, expansion, or improvement, even with the additional special-purpose funds. The limited funding restricts access to basic mobility and is particularly acute for those unable to drive or afford the cost of owning a private auto. For further research, NH DOT has excellent information resources on its web page.

<https://www.nh.gov/dot/org/aerorailtransit/railandtransit/transit.htm>

Notes on Solutions:

A step toward resolving this problem would be a change in the amount allocated and the distribution formula for federal funding to provide a floor or minimum for small states to assure that the infrastructure for basic mobility exists. Such a formula might also consider other state demographics and characteristics.

Beyond the low level of funding allocated to rural states, the tangle of funding rules and regulations for the FTA programs presents two other challenges: complex regulations and high local-match requirements.

FTA program regulations are so complex that they discourage many eligible recipients from applying for funds. The annual "Master Agreement" that both state and local grantees must sign is over 60 pages long. This is supplemented by more than 130 pages of guidance for each program, as well as the additional OMB guidelines for audit and fiscal compliance. Compared to highway programs that receive vastly more funding, the federal regulations for FTA programs are onerous and in need of an overhaul.

Both accounting and regulatory complexity and high federal match rates present an enormous obstacle to the expansion of rural transportation. The FTA rules require a 20% match on administrative and capital expenses, and a 50% match on operating expenses. The rules assume that municipalities, states, or charity will provide the required match, but as is well understood in New Hampshire, a local tax to fund these services is not realistic and availability of state funds are limited by both fiscal and statutory constraints. None of these is a sustainable source of funding.

In most of the country, public transportation is "mass transit." In rural America, it is essential mobility and a lifeline to community and medical services. Many policy initiatives focus on those human services, but all the best social and medical services are of little value to those who cannot get to them.

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