



IOWA ASSOCIATION
OF COUNCILS OF GOVERNMENTS

In this quarterly newsletter edition:

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COG FOCUS AREA: TRANSIT INITIATIVES

Transit initiatives are underway across Iowa's Councils of Governments (COGs), aiming to improve regional mobility and connectivity. These efforts focus on enhancing public transportation options and fostering collaboration among local communities.

Annual Number of Transit Initiative Rides Supported by COGs*

2,117,773

**Statistics are based on 2023 ridership.*

Chariton Valley Planning & Development Council

The Chariton Valley Planning & Development Council of Governments (RPA 17), in collaboration with 10-15 Transit, has launched D.R.I.V.E. (Driving Regional Iowa Veterans Everyday)—a nonprofit initiative offering free rides to veterans throughout

the 10-15 Transit service area. Formed as a 501(c)(3), D.R.I.V.E. can now raise funds through donations and grants to help sustain the service. The need for reliable transportation, especially to medical appointments, was identified through public input. Since 2021, the 10-15 Transit Board has contributed \$25,000 annually to support D.R.I.V.E., which provided 767 rides in FY24. As demand grows continued community support is key to sustaining this vital service.

This initiative addresses a growing transportation need, offers critical mobility for veterans, and relies on both public support and new fundraising efforts to remain sustainable.

East Central Intergovernmental Association

The East Central Intergovernmental Association (ECIA)/Region 8 RTA has partnered with Commute with Enterprise to launch a new vanpool program serving Delaware, Dubuque, and Jackson Counties. Designed for areas with limited fixed-route transit, the program offers shared rides in SUVs or vans—ideal for daily commutes. Enterprise handles vehicle logistics, group coordination, and insurance, while the RTA offsets costs with a \$600/month subsidy per vanpool. This can save commuters up to \$6,000 annually. The service launched in Spring 2025 with the University of Dubuque, helping students and staff reach its flight center. With a first-year goal of 2,500 rides, the program aims to grow through employer partnerships across the region.

The vanpool program offers flexible, affordable commuting, fills transit gaps, and supports workforce access throughout Region 8.

East Central Iowa Council of Governments

The East Central Iowa Council of Governments (ECICOG), in partnership with Johnson County, launched Trip Connect in December 2024—a flexible, on-demand transit service designed for northern Johnson County. Operating Monday through Saturday from 5:00 PM to midnight, the service fills a critical gap for evening shift workers when traditional transit is unavailable. Riders can schedule same-day or advance trips using a dedicated app, offering convenient access to employment and other essential destinations. Trip Connect is operated by

Horizons NTS, which provides vehicles, drivers, and dispatch services. Funded through an Iowa DOT STA Special Projects Grant and local support, the program has quickly grown to more than 340 monthly rides.

Trip Connect demonstrates how ECICOG and local partners are using innovation, technology, and strategic funding to improve access to late-night transportation. This service strengthens workforce mobility and builds on the region's commitment to responsive, rider-focused transit solutions.

Iowa Northland Regional Council of Governments

The Iowa Northland Regional Council of Governments (INRCOG) has introduced TripMaster, a modern scheduling and dispatch software from CTS Software, to transform how public transit operates across the region. Serving as staff for the Iowa Northland Regional Transit Commission (INRTC), INRCOG manages the OnBoard Public Transit System in Black Hawk, Buchanan, Butler, Bremer, Chickasaw, and Grundy counties. The shift from manual paper scheduling to this automated system marks a major upgrade in transit operations. TripMaster enhances trip scheduling, dispatching, and route coordination while reducing wait times and improving service reliability. Features like real-time updates, automated call reminders, and advanced reporting tools are helping INRTC deliver more efficient and responsive transportation services.

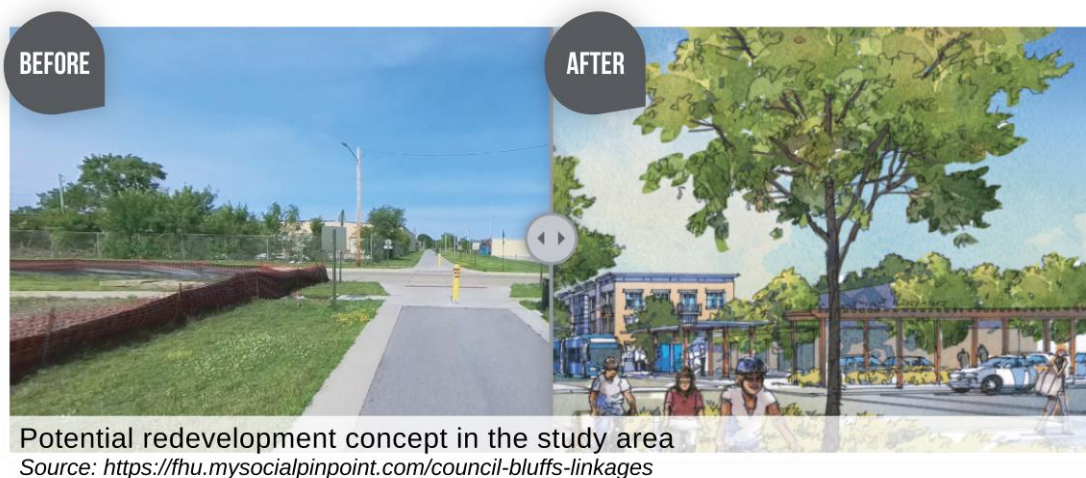
With this innovation, OnBoard passengers will benefit from a smoother, more dependable ride experience. INRCOG's adoption of TripMaster underscores its dedication to advancing safe, accessible, and rider-focused public transit across the Iowa Northland region.

Metropolitan Area Planning Agency

The Omaha-Council Bluffs Metropolitan Area Planning Agency (MAPA), in collaboration with the City of Council Bluffs, is leading an important transit initiative: the Council Bluffs Multimodal Connection & Expansion Planning and Environmental Linkages Study. This study aims to improve connections between downtown Council Bluffs and downtown Omaha by exploring transit and multimodal solutions. Alternatives under review include integration with the

Omaha Streetcar, the ORBT (Omaha Rapid Bus Transit), enhanced bike and pedestrian routes, and the possibility of a new multimodal bridge spanning the Missouri River. The effort is supported by key partners, including the City of Omaha and Metro Transit.

This project represents a forward-thinking approach to regional mobility, emphasizing seamless, sustainable transportation options. By improving cross-river connectivity and expanding multimodal access, MAPA and its partners are laying the foundation for a more connected and accessible metro area for all travelers.



North Iowa Area Council of Governments

The North Iowa Area Council of Governments (NIACOG)/Region 2 Transit has partnered with Senior Life Solutions (SLS) to improve mental health access for older adults in rural communities. SLS, a hospital-based outpatient program, serves individuals in towns such as Algona, Cresco, and Osage, with additional offices in Mason City and Clear Lake. Many patients face transportation barriers, limiting their ability to receive consistent care. To address this, Region 2 Transit now provides non-emergency rides to and from SLS programs, helping ensure participants can access the treatment they need. While annual ridership is still being tracked, early indicators suggest growing demand.

This initiative highlights the critical role of transit in supporting healthcare and quality of life. By connecting older adults to essential mental health services, the partnership between NIACOG and SLS is reducing barriers, promoting wellness, and strengthening the social infrastructure of North Iowa's rural communities.



Region 6 Resource Partners

Peoplerides, the transit service operated by Region 6 Planning Commission, has partnered with Grinnell College to support LINK Mentoring, a local program connecting college students with K–8 youth for weekly, in-person mentoring sessions. Formerly known as Big Brothers Big Sisters, LINK Mentoring focuses on building strong relationships through regular lunch-hour visits to area schools. To make these connections possible, Peoplerides provides safe, reliable transportation for about two dozen student mentors. With weekly service throughout the school year, the program supports an estimated 1,000 annual rides. The collaboration is backed by Grinnell's Center for Careers, Life, and Service, offering mentors meaningful community engagement and real-world experience.

This partnership demonstrates how accessible transit plays a vital role in supporting education, youth development, and community connection. By ensuring students can reliably reach their mentees, Peoplerides helps strengthen local relationships and foster long-term positive outcomes for young people.

Region XII Council of Governments

Since June 2024, Western Iowa Transit (WIT), a department of Region XII COG, has been transporting inmates from North Central Correctional Facility in Rockwell City to communities in its six-county region. Partnering with Iowa Prison Industries, WIT facilitates inmate work crews in Carroll, Glidden, Breda, Denison, and Manilla.

Inmates perform tasks like tree and brush removal, concrete work, mowing, landscaping, painting, and maintaining parks, pools, and landfills.

This program improves community spaces while offering inmates valuable job training and work experience earned through good behavior. Some inmates have even gained future job opportunities in these towns after release. Since the program's start, WIT has provided 1,216 inmate rides. This initiative benefits both communities and inmates, and Region XII COG looks forward to expanding the partnership with Iowa Prison Industries and local governments.

WIT's inmate transportation program enhances local communities and supports inmate rehabilitation through meaningful work and training opportunities.

Siouxland Interstate Metropolitan Planning Council

The Siouxland Interstate Metropolitan Planning Council (SIMPCO), in partnership with Siouxland Regional Transit System (SRTS), has completed a new \$10 million joint-use transit facility in Sioux City, Iowa. Located at the Highway 75/20 interchange, the state-of-the-art center includes maintenance bays, indoor vehicle storage, a bus wash system, driver training areas, and administrative offices—greatly enhancing transit operations and efficiency. Funded in part by a \$7 million U.S. Department of Transportation BUILD grant, this project was selected from over 850 nationwide applicants, highlighting its importance. Supporting more than 82,000 annual rides, the facility strengthens transit access throughout the Siouxland region. Key partners include the U.S. DOT, Federal Transit Administration, Iowa DOT, and local municipalities. Building on this achievement, SRTS is seeking an additional \$12 million in BUILD funds to expand services and infrastructure further.

Overall, this new facility represents a major investment in Siouxland's transit infrastructure, improving operational capacity, increasing regional mobility, and supporting continued growth of vital transit services.



Southwest Iowa Planning Council

The Southwest Iowa Transit Agency (SWITA) played a key role in supporting the 2024 RAGBRAI event by providing shuttle transportation for overnight stops in Glenwood, Red Oak, and Atlantic. Over three days, SWITA delivered more than 17,500 rides, ensuring smooth, reliable transit for thousands of riders navigating the event. Supporting large events like RAGBRAI involves complex logistics, but SWITA's drivers and team members rose to the challenge, offering seamless service and making transportation a valuable resource for participants and communities alike. This effort highlights SWITA's commitment to community partnerships and enhancing local events beyond traditional transit service.

SWITA's involvement in RAGBRAI 2024 demonstrates how transit agencies can support major regional events by providing critical transportation solutions, helping communities thrive, and creating positive experiences for thousands of visitors and residents.



IMPACT MAP

Check out our impressive impact map!

This map illustrates the significant influence of COGs across Iowa, showcasing the diverse range of projects in which we actively participate.



These initiatives not only enhance the well-being of residents but also contribute to economic growth.

Our efforts hold particular importance for Iowa's rural regions, where the shortage of personnel for economic and community development is a prevalent challenge.

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AWARD RECOGNITION

ICOG Innovative Project Award



Metropolitan Area Planning Agency

The Metropolitan Area Planning Agency (MAPA) has received the Innovative Project Award for its Impact Map, presented at the Iowa Councils of Governments (ICOG) Staff Retreat on May 1, 2025.

The Impact Map highlights the extensive work of Iowa's Councils of Governments (COGs), showcasing a wide range of projects that support community well-being and economic growth—particularly in rural areas facing development staffing shortages.

MAPA's efforts played a key role in helping ICOG demonstrate the scale and impact of COG-led initiatives that benefit Iowans statewide.

ICOG Prometheus Award

Tracey Achenbach

Tracey Achenbach of the East Central Iowa Council of Governments (ECICOG) has been honored with this year's Prometheus Award in recognition of her outstanding leadership on the Housing Recovery project. The award was presented during the ICOG Staff Retreat held on May 1, 2025.

The Prometheus Award celebrates individuals or COGs who demonstrate visionary leadership and turn bold

ideas into impactful community outcomes.



Tracey's work exemplifies this spirit, bringing transformative change to housing recovery efforts in the region.

Friend of COGs Award



Allamakee County Economic Development & Tourism

Allamakee County Economic Development & Tourism has been awarded this year's Friend of COGs Award for its instrumental role in the Waukon Apartment Project. The award was presented during the ICQG Staff Retreat on May 1, 2025.

The Friend of COGs Award honors individuals, organizations, or entities that have shown exceptional support, advocacy, and collaboration with Iowa's Councils of Governments.

Allamakee County Economic Development & Tourism exemplified these values through its commitment to regional development and its partnership in advancing housing opportunities in Waukon.

Dee Fischer

Dee Fischer with USDA has received this year's Friend of COGs Award. The award was presented during the ICOG Staff Retreat on May 1, 2025.

The Friend of COGs Award recognizes individuals, organizations, or entities that have demonstrated exemplary support, advocacy, or collaboration with Councils of Governments, contributing to their success and the advancement of regional cooperation and development.



Dee Fischer has long been a steadfast advocate for rural initiatives and a dedicated public servant. Her unwavering commitment to ensuring equitable access to resources for rural communities has made a lasting impact. Through her actions, Dee has exemplified what it means to be a true partner in regional progress—her voice, leadership, and dedication speak volumes.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

COGs are hiring! Check out the new open positions!

- Project Manager/Inspector
- Family Support Specialist
- Communications & Development Assistant



EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM MEMBERS

We are incredibly grateful for the invaluable contributions of our Partnership Program members!

Thanks to their support, we've been able to strengthen our collaborations with a diverse range of agencies, creating a dynamic network that drives innovation and growth.

Together, we're making an impact in Iowa communities!



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