



# National RTAP

## Community Rides Grants



Schuyler County Transit

# ELMIRA CONNECTIONS ROUTE

*Connecting Chemung and Schuyler Counties*



**IS NOW UP AND RUNNING!**

FOR ROUTES AND SCHEDULES

[SchuylerCountyTransit.org](http://SchuylerCountyTransit.org)

3/1/2023

The Arc Chemung-Schuyler Final Report

The following document is the final report for the NRTAP Community Rides Grant awarded to The Arc Chemung-Schuyler. The grant was used to establish a public transit route between rural Schuyler County and a local urban area (city of Elmira in Chemung County).

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# Community Rides Grant – Final Report

## THE ARC CHEMUNG-SCHUYLER

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Community Rides Grant was awarded to The Arc Chemung-Schuyler (The Arc) to establish a route originating from Schuyler County, passing through Watkins Glen and Montour Falls (the most populous areas within the county), then traveling south along New York State Route 14 to the City of Elmira located in Chemung County. Prior to this project there were no public transportation services connecting residents of Schuyler County with locations and services in Chemung County. The City of Elmira, and surrounding municipalities, contain employment, health care services, educational, and recreational opportunities. Additionally, Elmira operates the Chemung County Transit System, which provides regular service in the city, and surrounding villages, as well as connecting routes to Steuben County Transit System and Corning Erwin Area Transit System.

The project began with a coordinated team of stakeholders determining the best route and connection points. The team consisted of representatives from Schuyler County Development Planning, Schuyler County Government, Chemung-Steuben-Schuyler Workforce New York (CSSWFNY), Schuyler County's Mobility Manager, and The Arc's Transportation Manager, Public Relation Director, and Chief Financial Officer. In addition to establishing a desired route, the team developed a marketing plan, performance metrics, and timetable for route launch. We also worked with the Schuyler County Administrator to secure New York State Operating Assistance (STOA) funding for the route at its inception.

The new Elmira Connections route was launched on January 17, 2022. The route was met with immediate success, exceeding the metric for average passengers per day in its first few weeks. We initially operated the route as a free fare and were excited when the average ridership still exceeded expectations after fares were introduced. Though we have expended all our grant funding, the Elmira Connections continues to be a successful link between rural Schuyler County and the services, educational institution, and medical sites in Chemung County. Schuyler County has included the Elmira Connections route in the 2021 – 2023 operating contract with The Arc.

**NEW Transit Route!**

## Elmira Connections

THIS NEW ROUTE WILL PROVIDE TRANSPORTATION CONNECTIVITY  
BETWEEN CHEMUNG AND SCHUYLER COUNTIES!

### AVAILABLE STARTING JANUARY 17TH, 2022!

ROUTE FARE IS BEING WAIVED  
THROUGH JUNE 30, 2022!

 Schuyler County Transit

The full route brochure can be found at  
**SchuylerCountyTransit.org**

## OUR STORY

### Schuyler County

Schuyler County is a beautiful vacation destination in the heart of the Finger Lakes and the second-least populous county in New York State. The entire county is classified as rural with a population of less than 18,000 people and a workforce of approximately 8,000 people. The population centers in Schuyler County are primarily the villages of Watkins Glen and Montour Falls. Using the data available from the 2018 census, nearly 50% of commuters from the villages of Watkins Glen and Montour Falls travel south to Chemung County where the job density is higher. Though Schuyler County has a hospital located near Watkins Glen and Montour Falls, the hospital provides limited services. Advance or specialty services require patients to seek providers outside the county. There are no institutes of higher learning or post-secondary educational institutions. In addition, there is limited options for clothing, appliances, and other household items.

### Schuyler County Transit

In August 2010, Schuyler County initiated a pilot program to connect the villages of Burdett, Watkins Glen, Montour Falls and Odessa. The public transit routes are open to the public, and meet needs of low income, seniors and people with disabilities who live within  $\frac{3}{4}$  miles of fixed routes. The public transit service also includes a Dial-A-Ride component servicing outlying areas of the county on certain days during specified times. The system was immediately successful and expanded to meet additional needs. In January 2014, a route was established to Corning in Steuben County. In August 2017 a route between Schuyler County and Tompkins County was established that connected partner hospitals, Schuyler Hospital and Cayuga Medical Center, with Tompkins County Area Transit (TCAT) routes and continued service into Ithaca and Cornell University. Both the 2014 and 2017 routes remain in operation today. The final target, connecting Schuyler County with Chemung County to the south, had been a long-standing goal of the Schuyler County Coordinated Transportation Committee and was repeatedly listed as a goal in the Coordinated Transportation Plan. The NRTAP Community Rides grant provided the initial funding we needed to finally attempt this project.

### Our Partnership

Because the target of this route was opening employment opportunities, we partnered with CSSWFNY, a not-for profit organization that assists people with increasing their job skills and finding greater employment opportunities. Their access to and analysis of demographics data in our region has been one of the contributing factors for determining future growth goals and unmet needs for Schuyler County's public transit system. Using their access to job seekers, CSSWFNY routinely provides referrals and marketing for people to successfully use area transportation in their employment goals. These functions of their organization made them an obvious candidate for our partner on the Community Rides Grant. Through the initial development of the



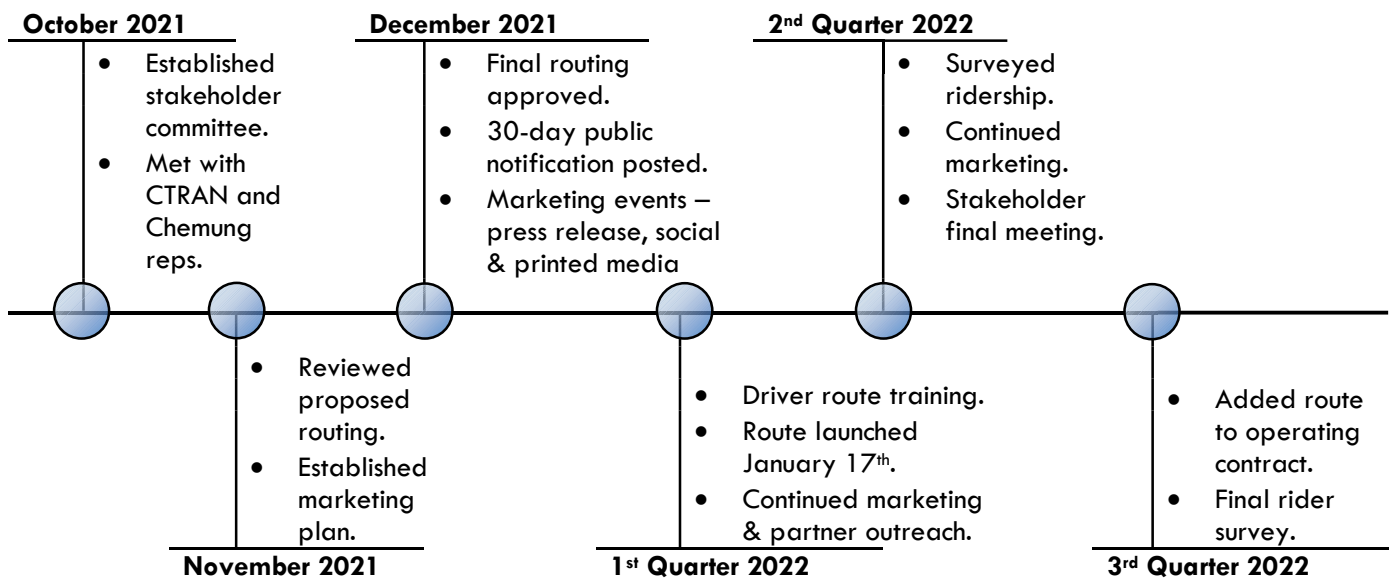
route and early stages of marketing, they were a very effective partner. They identified target areas for marketing and direct passenger referrals. While our primary target audience was the working population in Schuylers County, the stakeholders also identified the potential for low-income families to use the route to access recreational opportunities in Watkins Glen.

Additionally, we drew upon the vocational department of The Arc since the route would tie our Elmira and Watkins Glen campuses together, allowing people with intellectual/developmental disabilities to access vocational support, employment, and career exploration at both locations.

The Community Rides Grant funding received by The Arc was augmented with the resources already owned by The Arc and used for operation its other public transit routes. Therefore, for initiating this route, no new vehicles were needed. The Arc used spare vehicles in its fleet to begin the route. If successful, new buses would be included in the next Section 5311 grant cycle. In addition, The Arc already had a full staff of 19-A certified drivers with the correct endorsements and training to operate the route. The grant funds were primarily used to offset salary and fuel costs. The vehicle maintenance, GPS equipment, and route tracking software were provided by The Arc.

## Timeline

We had originally anticipated the route launch would be in November 2021. The actual launch was in January 2022, coincidentally on the first day of a two-day snowstorm. The launch date delay was primarily due to extra time needed to establish a stakeholders group and design a proposed route. Besides stakeholders, the route was also vetted with key stakeholders (CSSWFNY board, Chemung County Coordinated Transit Committee, Chemung Transit (CTran) operator). After the route launch, there were a series of milestones that were all completed on time. The trifold brochure for the route can be found at Schuylers County Transit's website: <https://www.schuylerscountytransit.org>.





## OUTCOMES, IMPACT, & PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The primary metric we monitored was the average daily ridership for Elmira Connections. The measure of success was an average of more than ten passengers per day. The route started on January 17<sup>th</sup>. A mere 11 days after our launch, on Tuesday, February 1<sup>st</sup> we had our first day with more than 10 passengers (we had 11 that day). The week of February 7<sup>th</sup>, we averaged 14.6 passengers per day (with as little as 11 and as many as 19 daily passengers that week). Throughout the duration of this project, we maintained a daily average above 10 riders every week (calculated on a weekly basis) except for 1. We consider this route a success based on this metric alone.

### Local Impact Stories

This route created new opportunities for people who may not have otherwise had one, a few of those stories are included here:

- ☐ The Arc provides vocational services for a young man who lives along NY State 14. He routinely used Elmira Connections to access vocational supports and job exploration at The Arc's Seneca Shine auto-detailing business. He does so independently because of his access to Elmira Connections.
- ☐ The route passes through the hamlet of Millport, within the Town of Veteran in Chemung County. The hamlet has no other public transit services. When we presented route to the Town of Veteran, all present at the meeting were overwhelming excited at this service coming to their area. On average, we pick up at least 1 passenger per day in Millport.
- ☐ With the availability of the Elmira Connections route, we were able to offer veterans without transportation the ability to visit the Moving Wall when it toured Elmira in



#### Schuyler County Transit & Transportation Link-Line

Published by Caitlin Kelce Cheney · February 11, 2022 ·

We advocated and looked for funding for an Elmira-Watkins Glen connection because we knew it would make a difference in the lives of people in our community!

The positive feedback didn't take long! A person supported by [The Arc of Chemung-Schuyler](#) immediately adapted to using the bus to get to/from work. The staff that works with him reported that having the bus has made a huge impact, creating an enhanced level of independence.

Looking forward to more stories like this!



#### Schuyler County Transit & Transportation Link-Line

Published by Caitlin Kelce Cheney · June 27, 2022 ·

Veterans, let us help you get you to The Moving Wall - the traveling half-size replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial - at Eldridge Park, please contact us at 607.535.3555. 🇺🇸

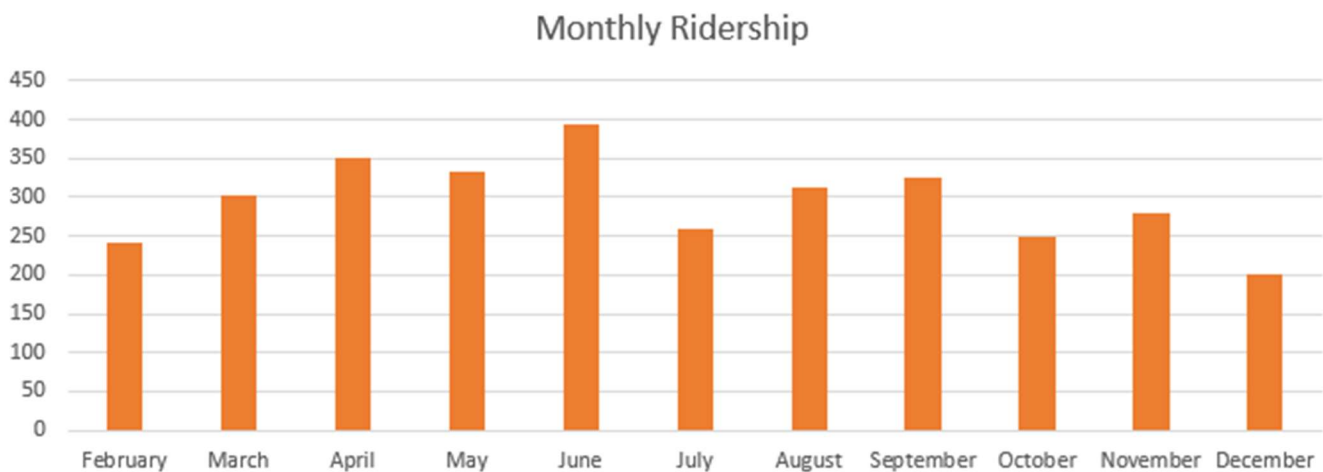


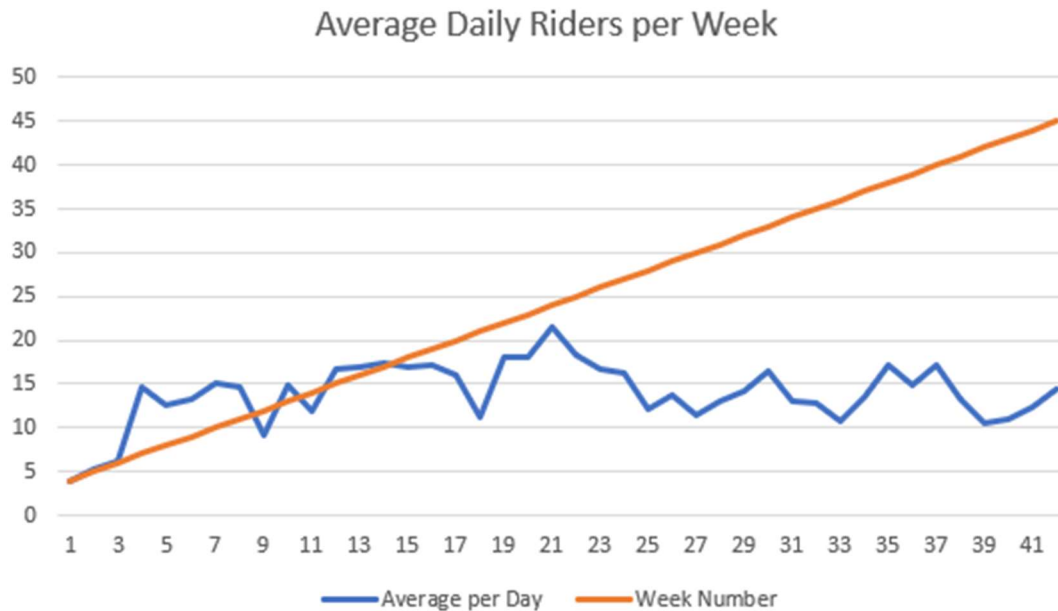
the summer of 2022. We paired Elmira Connections with our Transportation Link-Line service to help veterans make the transfers to CTRAN to visit the wall.

- After Elmira Connections was operational, we were contacted by the client service worker at OAR (Opportunities, Alternatives, & Resources) of Schuyler County. The OAR organization is a non-profit that assists people facing or returning from incarceration with supports. Our contact was able to successfully use Elmira Connections to transport people she supports in Chemung County to court appearances and parole meetings. The people she supports were able to maintain their freedoms and civil liberties. During our survey, one such rider wrote, *“Thank you so much. I’m repairing my life from past criminal convictions and my license is suspended. This helped me so much from court to mental health, and substance abuse counseling. Thank you!!!”*

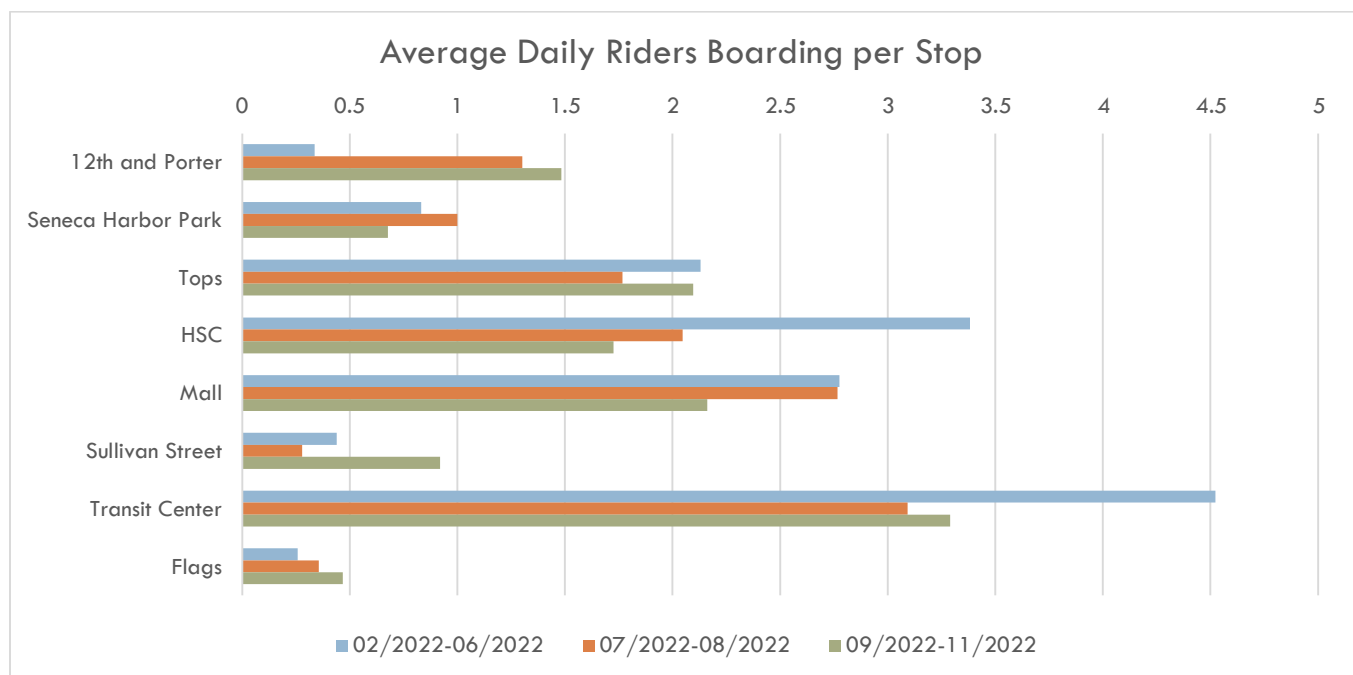
### Statistical Performance Data

During the grant period, we collected ridership and per stop data daily. The data was presented at the Community Development and Natural Resources (CDNR) committee of the Schuyler County legislature as well as the grant’s stakeholder committee. The graphs below illustrates the total ridership on Elmira Connections per month and the average daily ridership each week. The drop from June to July signified the end of free fares. In addition, the increased ridership from April through June coincided with the very large spike in gas prices during which our staff who live in Chemung County, found themselves using the Elmira Connections route instead of driving. Even after those noted increases, the average daily ridership continued to remain above 10 people per day for the remainder of the calendar year.





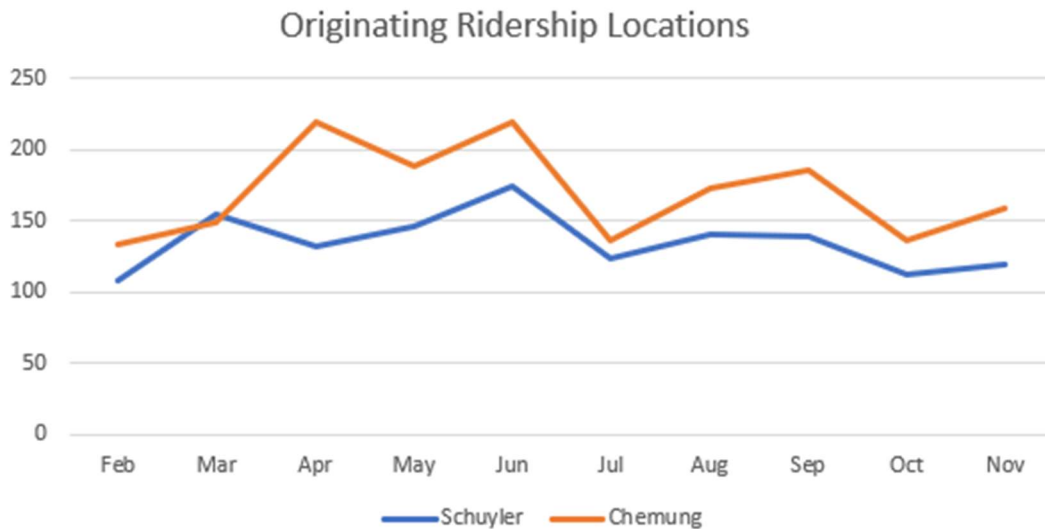
The following illustrates shows the average number of riders boarding per stop over the following time increments – February through June (free fare), July through August (summer), and September through November (Fall).



The final graph, shown below, shows the Originating Ridership Locations by county of origin. One would assume that these would be relatively equivalent. That is, a rider getting on in Chemung County would go to Schuyler County. At the end of their day, they would get on Schuyler County and get off in Chemung County. What we discovered is ridership originates more in Chemung than Schuyler counties. We assume this may be because people are then staying in Schuyler County or finding an alternate ride home. This data may also indicate that riders are using the bus to get on and off in Chemung County

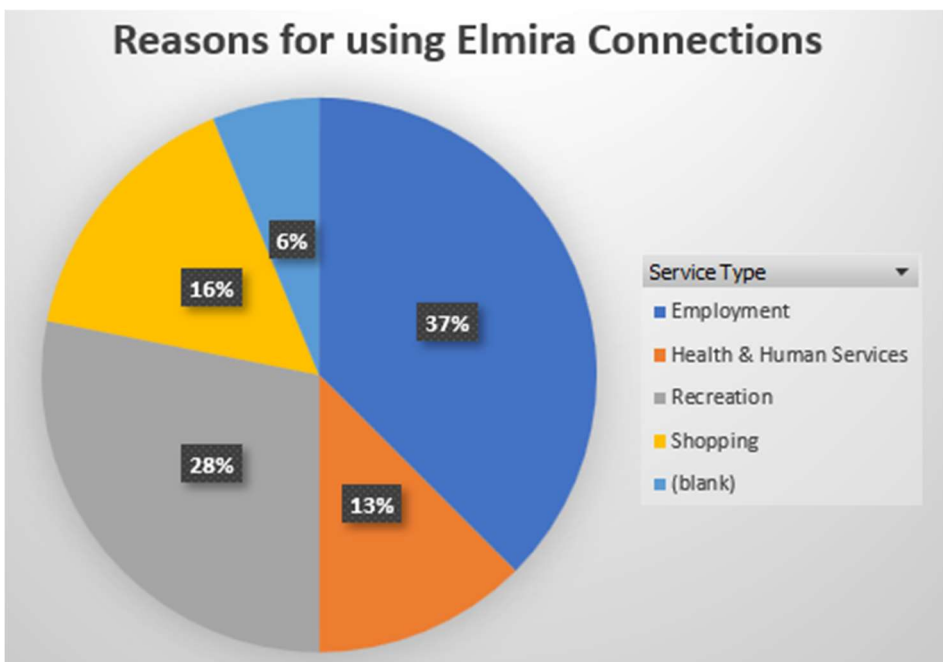


locations. For example, a rider getting off in Millport (in Chemung County) is then also getting off in Chemung County (for example, the Elmira Transportation Center).



## ACCOMPLISHMENTS, CHALLENGES, & LESSONS LEARNED

We are most proud of the fact this project accomplished everything we had hoped for and more. The results of the final ridership survey showed a mix of reasons for using the route. As anticipated, there were multiple reasons people wanted the ability to get between Schuyler and Chemung Counties. The graph below shows the combined survey results of 32 responses. The May 2022 survey had 22 responses and the September 2022 survey had 10 responses.



An added unanticipated effect was increased usage of our online portal for purchasing bus passes. We had established this system in December 2021 and had not sold any tickets since its launch. We have recently seen an increase in ticket sales using our online Square platform. We have not analyzed the data, but assume it is from increased ridership.

As a result of introducing this route, we increased our marketing in general for all our routes which increased awareness of transit and our

call center, Transportation Link-Line. Though all of our routes are still recovering from the decline in ridership due to the pandemic, Elmira Connections contributed to a significant ridership increase in 2022.

While working on this project it was difficult to find our target audience and determine the most cost-effective method for reaching them. Public transit riders are predominantly low-income, elderly, and/or disabled, and this same population is not typically heavy users of social media. As a result, we often included print media and press releases to reach people. We also developed a poster for displaying in area Office of the Aging, Department of Social Services, and Workforce NY offices.

## PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY

The Elmira Connections route was created knowing, if successful, we would want to make the route a permanent addition to Schuyler County Transit's offerings. Before launch, we followed the required guidelines for creating a new public transit route:

- ☐ We verified that The Arc had operating authority to offer a public transit route in Chemung County.
- ☐ The Schuyler County administrator notified NYSDOT of our intention to add this route and seek Section 5311 STOA funding.
  - The request was approved by the New York State Public Transportation Bureau.
- ☐ We followed the DOT guidelines for adding or modifying a public transit route by posting an official 30-day notice in newspapers and other mediums in the areas the route would cover.

As long as our ridership exceeds an average of 10 riders per day, we believe there is sufficient funding via fares and STOA grant to maintain this route. We also believe, that if that funding were to be limited in the future, the popularity of the route would allow us to find other organizations or grants to assist with funding.

The Schuyler County Coordinated Transportation Committee, almost since its inception, has had an Elmira route on its list of goals. The NRTAP Community Rides Grant enabled us to prove the necessity and sustainability of this route. We would not have been able to create this route without NRTAP's support.

## APPENDICES

### Marketing Plan

Priority: Increase Awareness About Route Expansion		[Projected Launch Date: Jan. 17, 2022]		
Intent: Communication broadly that this route expansion will provide transportation connectivity between Chemung and Schuyler Counties, so people of all abilities have reliable transportation to increase access to employment, recreation, and health care.				
Task / Action Item	Notes / Measurable Criteria	Person(s) Responsible	Cost Associated	When / Status
Public Notice/ Press Release	Post to SCT website and share to social media.	Missy	n/a	Complete

	Send to media partners			
Social Media Teaser	"Exciting Announcement – Watch for a New Route Coming January 2022!"	Missy	n/a	Complete
Develop Outreach Materials	Fliers (v.1 Basic Info; v.2 More Detailed) Posters	Missy		Complete
	Route Brochure	Dave & Missy		Complete
Distribute Outreach Materials		All	n/a	Complete
Website	Add New Route to SCT - Once route is determined and brochure has been developed, include new route on website. Ticket Sales - Option to purchase tickets online		n/a	Complete
Outreach to Community/ Businesses Partners		Wendy & Phyllis		Complete
Direct Mail Postcards	Targeted mailing to identified zips	Missy	\$\$	Not Done

Locations/Sites

Digital: Social Media – Facebook (\$122.16+\$69.75+\$8.09), Google, LinkedIn Website  Printed: Press Releases Outreach Materials – Posters, Fliers	Media: (\$\$) Local Print Publications Odessa File Watkins Review (\$55) Star Gazette Hi-Lites (\$215) Television – News Coverage Chamber Newsletters – Chemung County & Watkins Glen Area
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**Priority: Training – Drivers, People Supported, Community Members**

Intent: Increase understanding of how to utilize new route. Travel training.

Task / Action Item	Notes / Measurable Criteria	Person(s) Responsible	Cost Associated	When / Status
Create Training Material	Mobility Manager Messages(?) "How to use this route" handout/flier	Wendy/Dave Missy	n/a	Complete
Travel Training for people we support	Completed with 4 individuals. Those people are now independently riding transit.	Job Coaches	n/a	Complete
Travel Training for Community Members			n/a	Not Done

**Priority: Survey Riders and Stakeholders**

Intent: Measure effectiveness and modify where needed.

Task / Action Item	Notes / Measurable Criteria	Person(s) Responsible	Cost Associated	When / Status
Create survey mechanism	Ask: How did you learn about this route? <i>Referral source.</i> Are you traveling for employment, training, pleasure, other?	Wendy/Dave	n/a	Complete

## Recognitions

Our Facebook posting about the new route was shared by our New York State Senator, Tom O'Mara.

The screenshot shows a Facebook profile for New York State Senator Tom O'Mara. The profile includes an 'Intro' section with contact information and a 'Photos' section. The main post is a graphic for 'THE ELMIRA CONNECTIONS ROUTE' by Schuyler County Transit, featuring a green bus icon and a 'NEW ROUTE!' banner. The graphic lists destinations: SENECA LAKE & WATKINS GLEN, ARNOT MALL & HORSEHEADS, and CLEMENS CENTER & ELMIRA. Below the graphic is a text post from 'The Arc of Chemung-Schuyler' dated April 5 at 1:03 PM, announcing the new route. The post has received 2 likes and 2 comments.

**New York State Senator Tom O'Mara**

**Intro**  
Senator Tom O'Mara represents New York's 58th Senate District.

**Page** · Government Official

**Friends of Tom O'Mara**  
is responsible for this Page

Schuyler County, NY · Steuben County, NY · Tompkins County, NY · Yates County, NY · Chemung County, NY

(607) 735-9671

omara@nysenate.gov

omara.nysenate.gov

Always open

**Photos** See all photos

**MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD**  
climate.ny.gov

**Vietnam War**  
Vietnam War

**THE ELMIRA CONNECTIONS ROUTE**  
Schuyler County Transit  
Connecting you between Watkins Glen and Elmira.

**NEW ROUTE!**

**ONE ROUTE CAN TAKE YOU TO:**

**SENECA LAKE & WATKINS GLEN**

**ARNOT MALL & HORSEHEADS**

**CLEMENS CENTER & ELMIRA**

**The Arc of Chemung-Schuyler**  
April 5 at 1:03 PM · 🌐

Schuyler County Transit, part of The Arc of Chemung-Schuyler's Business Services Division, has a new route – the Elmira Connections Route – which provides conne... See more

You and 2 others

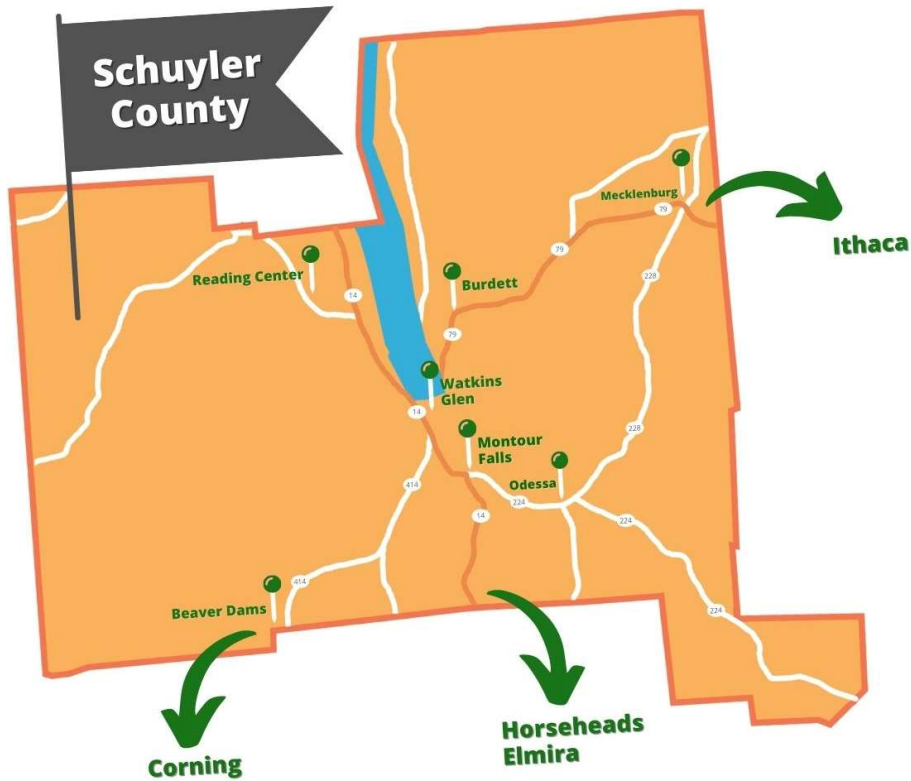
Like Comment Share



## Schuyler County Transit Poster



# Taking You Where You Want to Go!



### Shopping

Watkins Glen Walmart Supercenter  
Watkins Glen Tops Friendly Market  
Watkins Glen CVS  
Big Flats Arnot Mall  
Corning Market Street



### Medical

Schuyler Hospital  
Cayuga Medical Center  
Schuyler County Health Services  
Watkins Glen Arnot Health Location  
Big Flats Guthrie Location  
Guthrie Southern Tier Pediatrics



### Services

Schuyler County Human Services Complex  
Schuyler County Head Start  
My Place: A Play and Learning Center  
US Social Services Administration



### Housing

Watkins Glen School Apartments  
Jefferson Village Apartments  
Glen Lakes Apartments  
Rock Cabin Park  
Havana Glen Park



### Fun

Watkins Glen State Park  
Havana Glen Park  
Seneca Harbor  
Catherine Valley Trail  
Clemens Center  
Rockwell Museum  
Corning Museum of Glass  
International Motor Racing Research Center  
Montour Falls Glorious "T"

and many more locations...



**Schuyler County Transit**  
323 Owego St, Montour Falls, NY 14865  
[SchuylerCountyTransit.org](http://SchuylerCountyTransit.org) | 607.535.3555  
\*Schuyler County Transit's customer service calls are managed by Transportation Link Line.