

SCHUYLER COUNTY TRANSIT

Community Rides Grant Project



February 2023

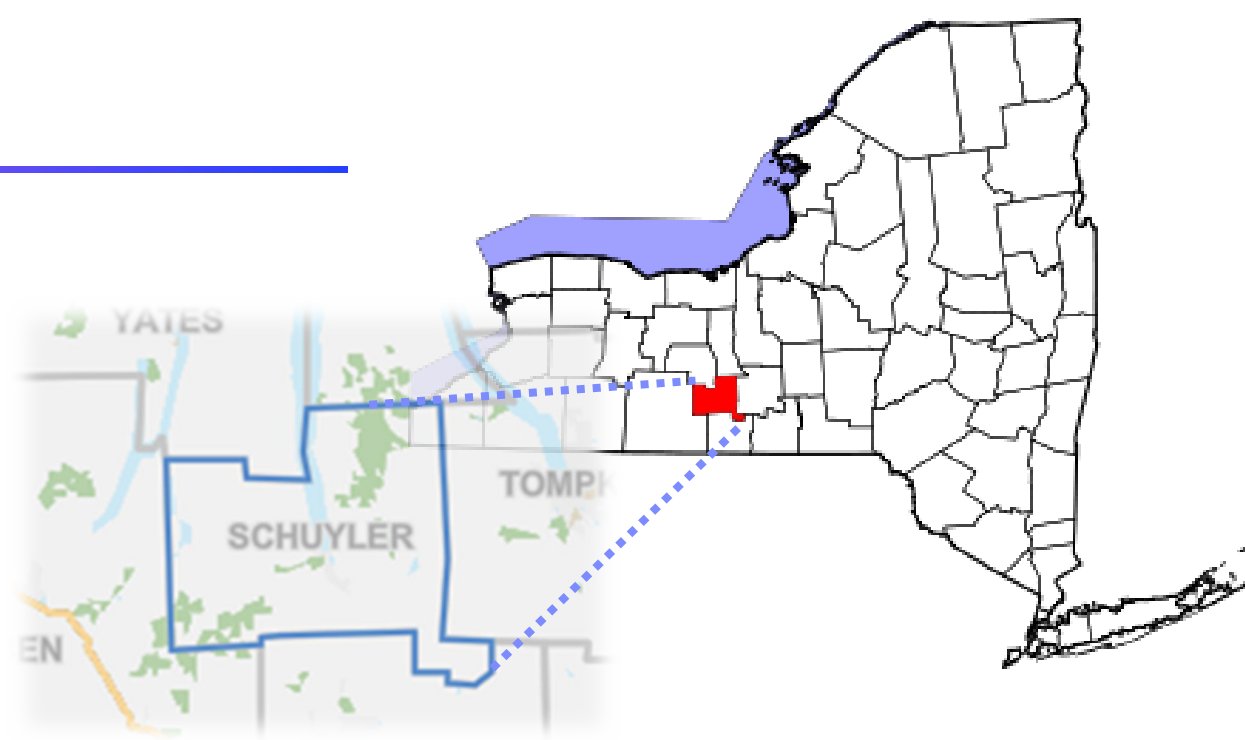
Photo courtesy of Charlie Berch.

Introduction

- The Arc Chemung-Schuyler was one of 19 recipients of the National Rural Transit Assistance Program (NRTAP) Community Rides Grant. The goal of our grant was to establish a commuter route between Chemung and Schuyler Counties; a.k.a. an Elmira Connections route.
- The route was launched on January 17, 2022. The route met all our expectations and continues successful operations.
- This is our story.

Schuyler County

- Located at the southern end of Seneca Lake, one of the 'Finger Lakes'
- Population of 17,898 (2020 census), average density 53.5 people per square mile
- Population density of surrounding counties is 5,000 – 10,000 people per square mile
- 46% of county is in agricultural districts
- Median household income is \$53,291



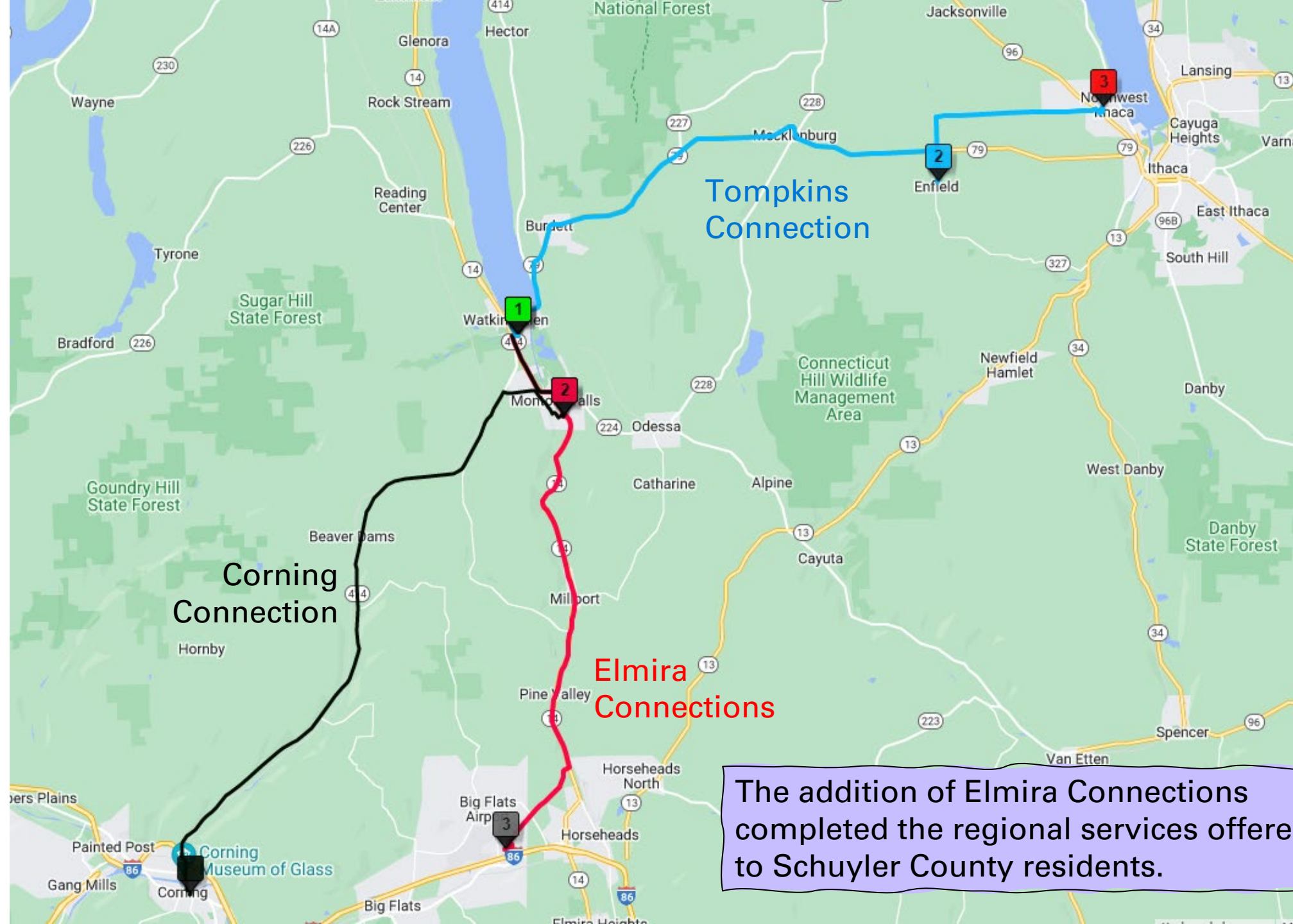


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Schuyler County Transit

- Founded in 2010 with Dial-A-Ride and two buses operating with the county (Village Connections)
- Over time added fixed and flexible routes in Schuyler, Steuben, and Tompkins counties (Rural Connections, Corning Connections, and Tompkins Connections).
- Routes are designed to go between low-income housing and major employers.
- Routes often integrate with The Arc Chemung-Schuyler program sites and participant residences.





The addition of Elmira Connections completed the regional services offered to Schuyler County residents.

Local Needs

- Low income, elderly and disabled with limited or no transportation options.
- Commuters traveling from Montour Falls and Watkins Glen to Elmira.
- Medical and human services access in both counties.
- Shoppers wanting access to plazas Big Flats – Arnot Mall, Consumer Square, Southern Tier Crossing.
- Elmira area residents wanting access to recreational sites – Watkins Glen State Park, Seneca Lake, Catherine Valley Trail.

Proposed Route Features



Stop at easy park/ride locations (Tops Plaza, Human Resource Complex, Arnot Mall)



Run State Route 14 South – allow for flag stops in areas with no other transit services



Maximize stop locations serviced by multiple routes/providers – Arnot Mall, Elmira Transit Center, Tops Plaza, Human Services Complex.



Timed for commuters and personal use – 1 early AM loop, 2 midday loops, and 1 PM loop



Turn-by-turn routing in proximity of frequent use services – Social Security Administration, Guthrie Clinics

Partnerships

- The grant required establishing at least one key partnership to work collaboratively to build lasting improvements to public transit.
- We partnered with CSS Workforce NY to support the employment and education aspects of the route.
- Workforce participated in stakeholders meeting, subcommittees, marketing, and direct referrals.





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PROJECT OUTCOMES

Launch of Elmira Connections fixed route service.

Elmira Connections



The route began on January 17th, 2022, on the first day of a two-day snow event.



After only 11 days of operation, we had our first day where the ridership exceed 10 people.

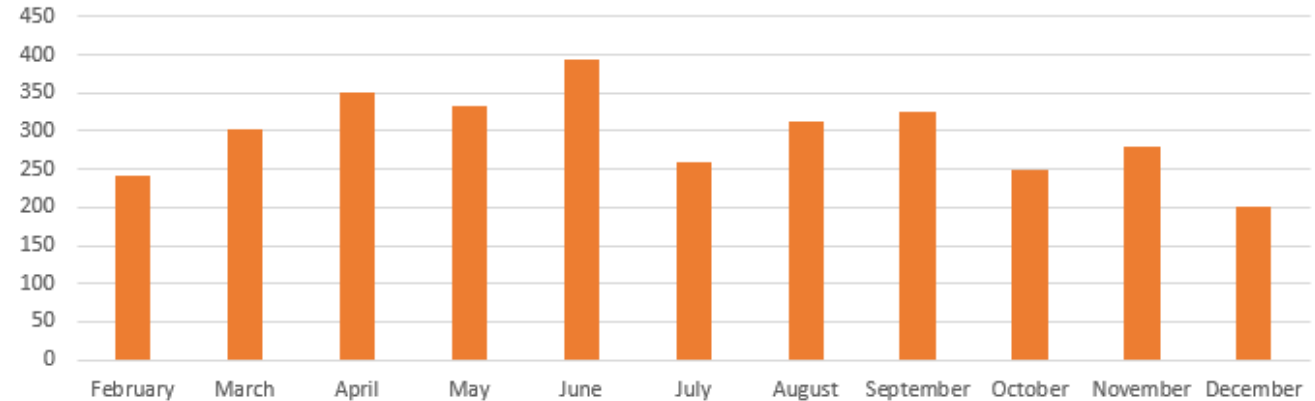


Since that day, we continued to average above 10 riders per day weekly, except for 1 week.

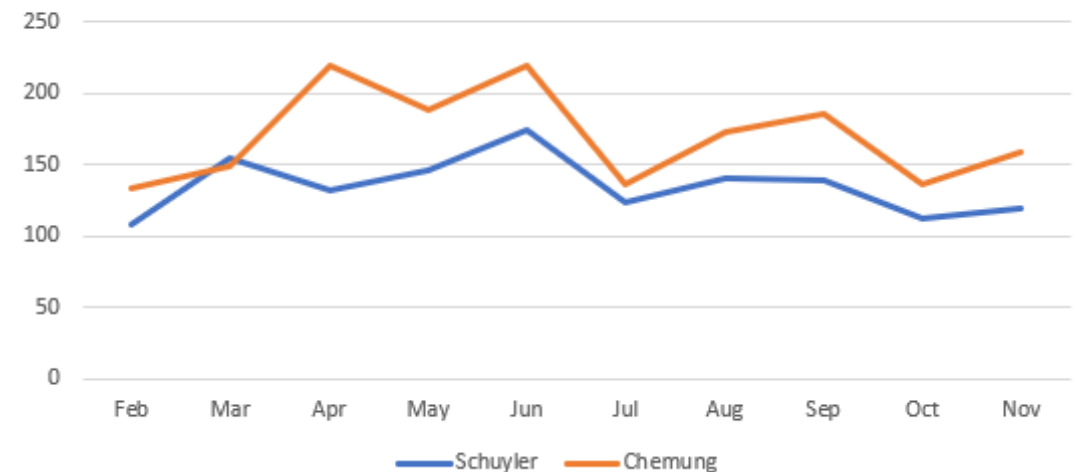
Ridership

- For the duration of the project, ridership remained above our metric for success.
- Ridership fell off at the end of June when free fares ended.
- Monthly most riders are originating in Chemung County.

Monthly Ridership

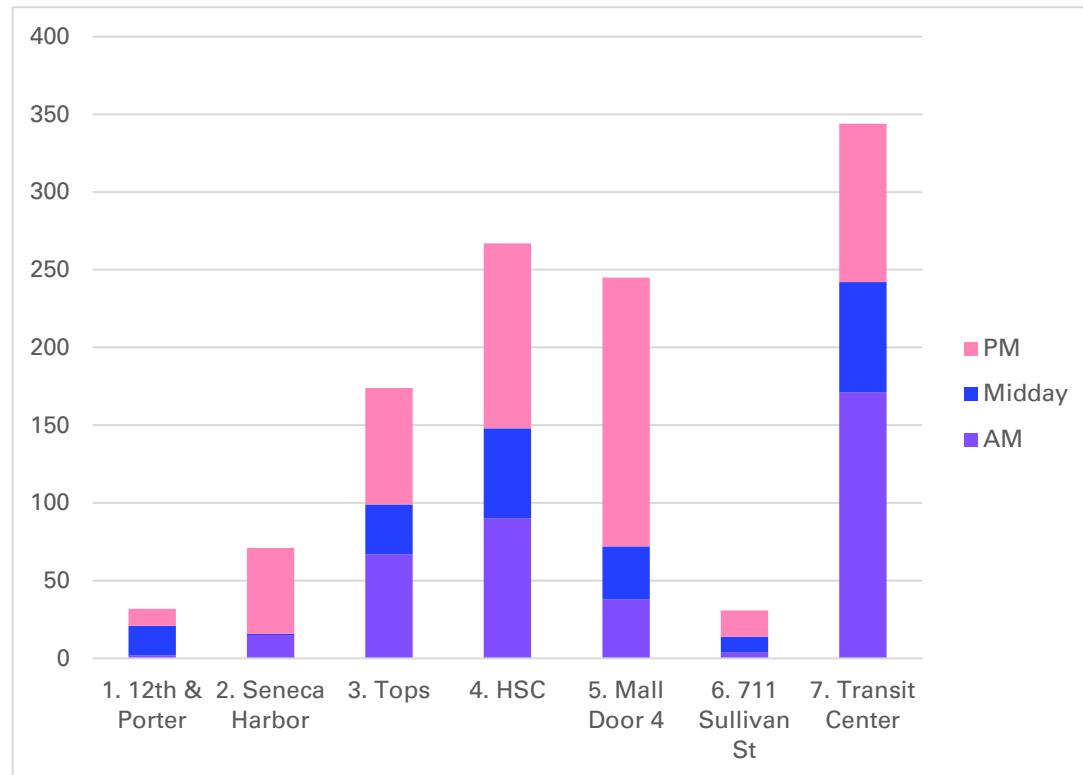


Originating Ridership Locations



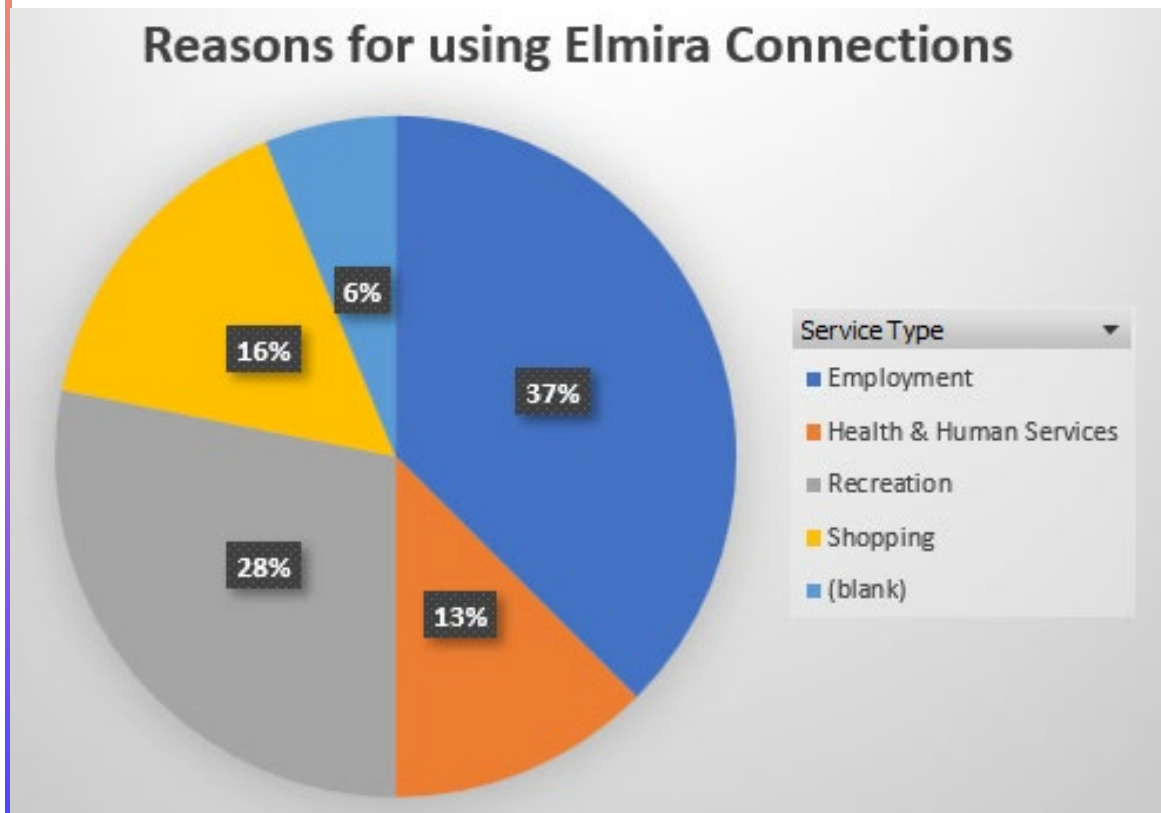
Boarding Riders by Time of Day/Loop

**Does not include flag stops, total riders February – May*



- During the midpoint of the project, we analyzed per stop data.
- Most pickups were on the early AM or late PM loops; indicating commuter usage.
- The hub locations, Elmira Transit Center, Human Services Complex (HS), and Arnot Mall, were popular; indicating people were likely transferring to other buses.

Passenger Survey



- A passenger survey supported the ridership data; 37% of riders were using the route for employment.
- Equally important, is riders were also using the route for its other original purposes: recreation and health & human services access.

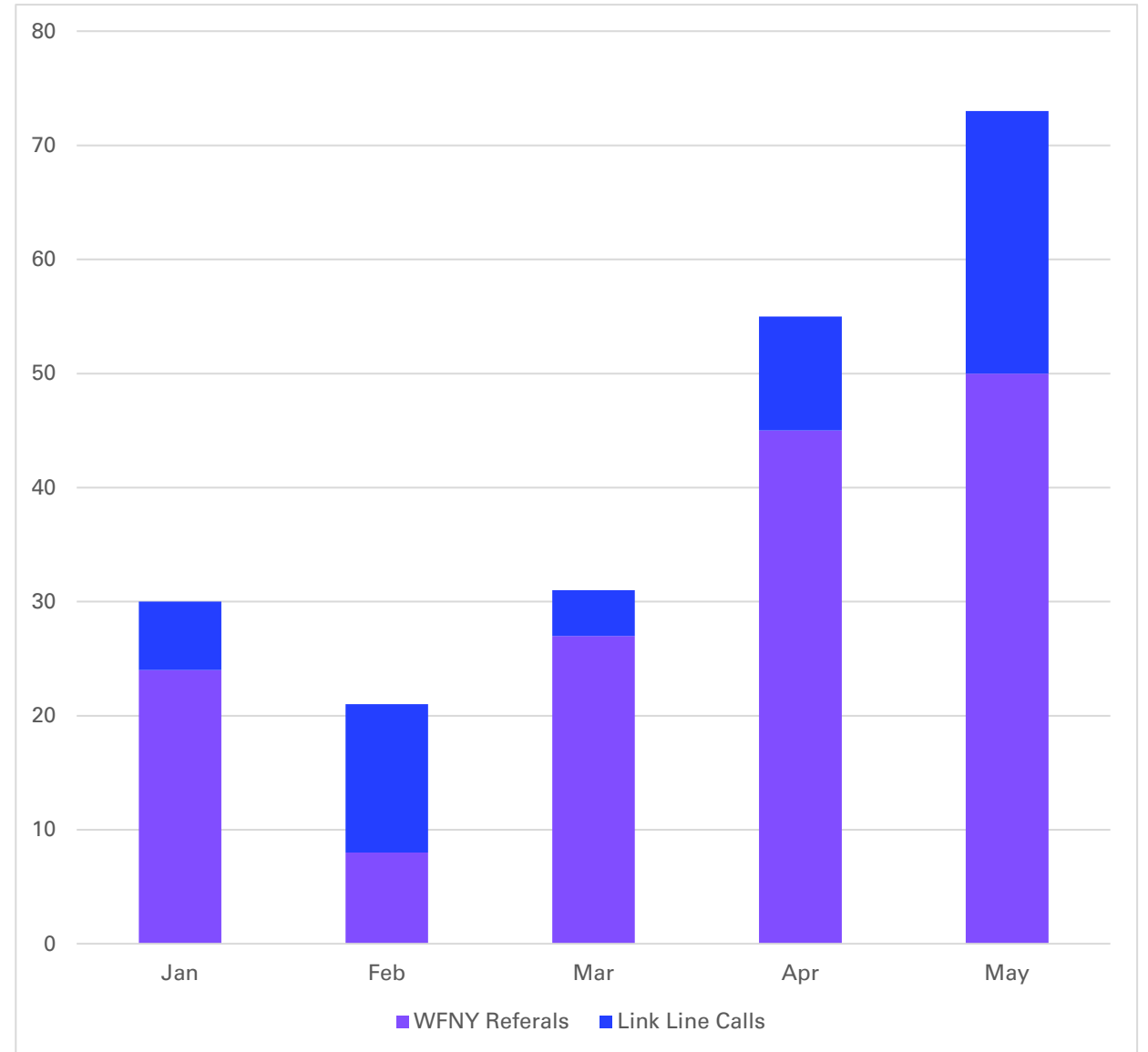
Data shown here represents combined responses from surveys in May 2022 and 10 responses in September 2022.

Calls & Referrals

Our partner (CSS WFNY) and the Schuyler call center monitored calls related to the route.

* CSS WFNY referred an average of 11.5 rider to use the route per month.

* Transportation Link-Line averaged 30.8 inquiries about the route per month.

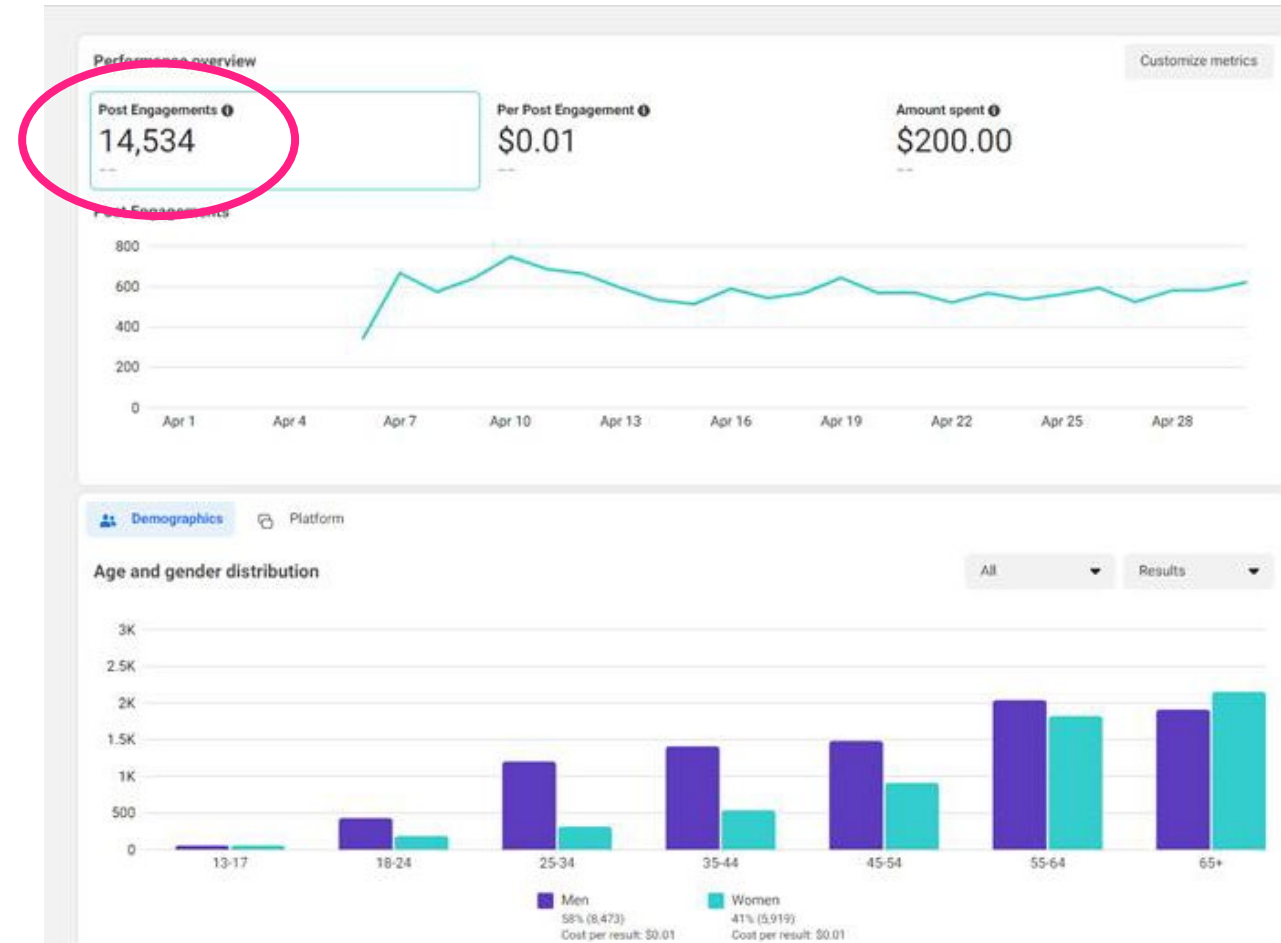


FACEBOOK

Typical engagement on Facebook transit site was less than 1000 per month. We were thrilled at the response the Elmira Connection post received.

Social Media Strategy

- Two months prior to launch we posted teaser “coming soon” ads.
- A month prior, we posted the schedules and route graphics.
- Two weeks prior we posted start dates.
- First week of operation we posted “Now up and running” pictures.
- We continued posting, reminders and Thank You to our riders over the next four months.



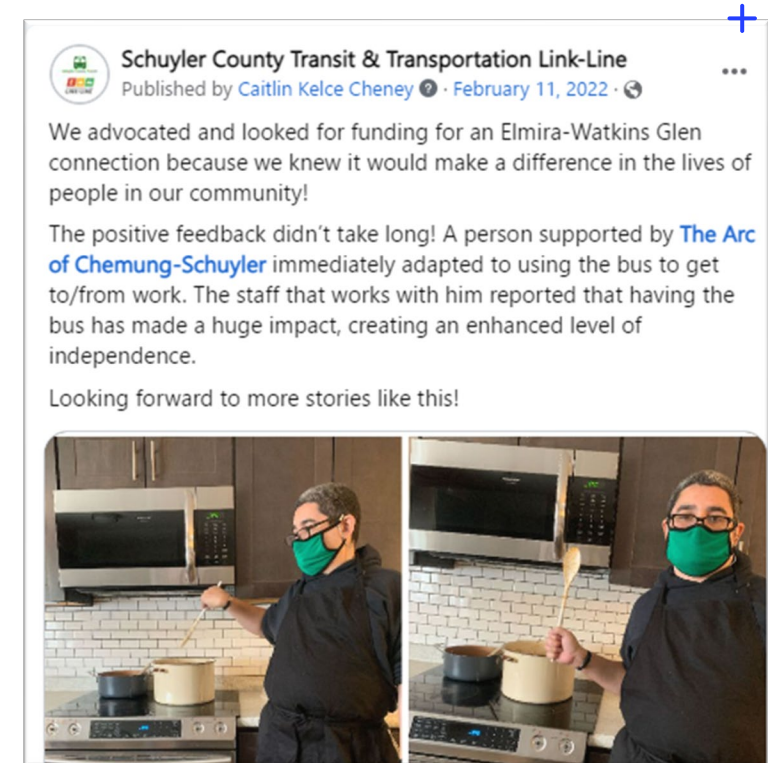
Unexpected Outcomes

- The route became valuable to a target audience we had not considered.
- Clients for OAR (Opportunities, Alternatives, & Resources) of Schuyler County (people facing or returning from incarceration) actively used the route.
- Elmira Connections transports people without transportation from Chemung County to Schuyler County court appearances and parole meetings.
- One such rider wrote on a survey card, *“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!!!”*



Disability Support

- The Arc Chemung-Schuyler's vocational department provides supports for people with intellectual/developmental disabilities.
- The route provided employment and vocational exploration for several people.
- Shown here is a person we support who gained a new level of independence by using the new route.



Other Testimonials

- Schuyler County's Mobility Manager was able to work with our local Veterans Services office to offer rides to see The Moving Wall.
- We helped riders find the appropriate CTRAN route to transfer to.
- We also helped with advertising this service.
- Veterans without transportation choices were directly impacted.



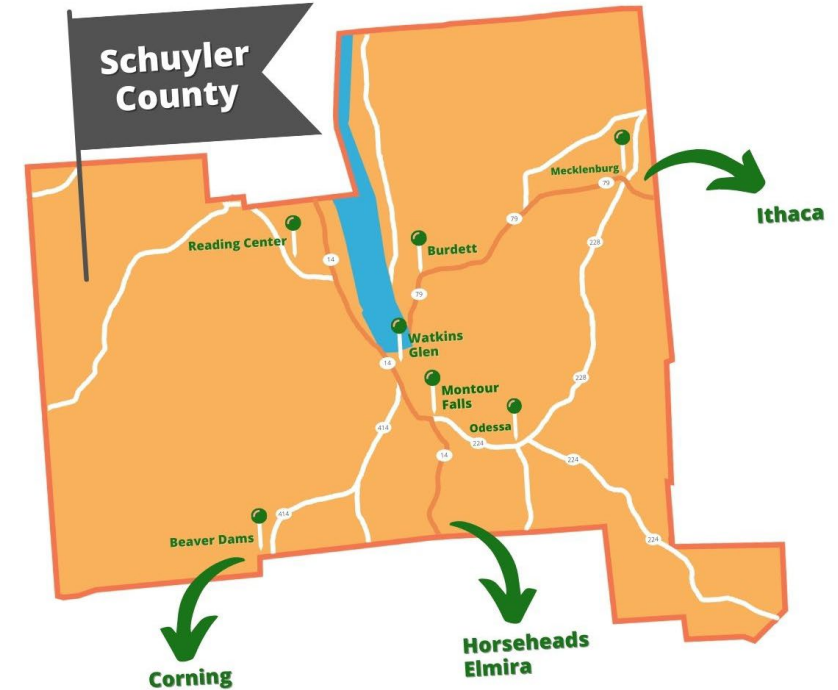


Other Outcomes

- Online ticket sales for bus passes went from none to a couple a month after the end of Free Fares. Note the online system was launched 1 month prior to the route launch.
- Increased awareness of the Transportation Link-Line call center. Passengers asking about connecting routes, bus schedules, and fares.
- Increased awareness and utilization of other Schuyler County Transit routes in general.
- Effective marketing must include more than social media – e.g., community outreach, mailings, educating staff in support service offices (OFA, DSS, WFNy).
- Outreach materials need to be specifically tailored to audience – e.g., just show locations of interest to that group, large font for some populations, color coordinating routes and messages

Choices!

- The addition of Elmira Connections completed the route choices for Schuyler County Transit.
- Residents now have transportation choices to all three urban areas that border our county.
- The image shown here was used to create a poster that is displayed in targeted areas around the county.



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



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



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



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



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 Oswego St. Montour Falls, NY 14805
SchuylerCountyTransit.org | 607.535.3555
Schuyler County Transit's customer service calls are managed by Transportation Life Lines.

+ • ○ THANK YOU

- This grant helped start a new rural transit route that connects residents to much needed services and opportunities.
- Without this grant, we would not have been able to prove the effectiveness of this route.

Find us @ www.schuylercountytransit.org

