

TCRP Project B-52: Intercity Bus: the State Role Updated—Progress Report



National RTAP Conference- December 8, 2025

KFH Group, Incorporated | *In Association with:*



Agenda

**Review of
Research
Objective and
Timeline**

**Overview of
Interim Report
Document**

**Task 1: Define the
Context**

Task 2: Surveys

**Next Steps:
Task 3: Planning
Tools and
Guidelines and
Task 4: Program
Examples**

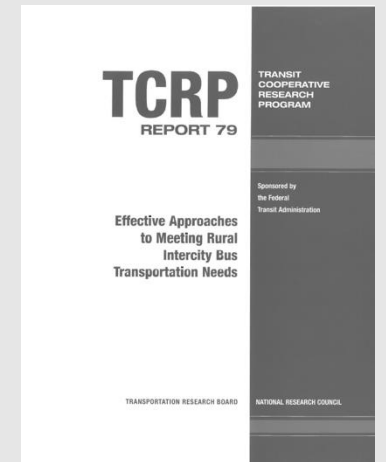
Research Objective and Questions

Overall Objective

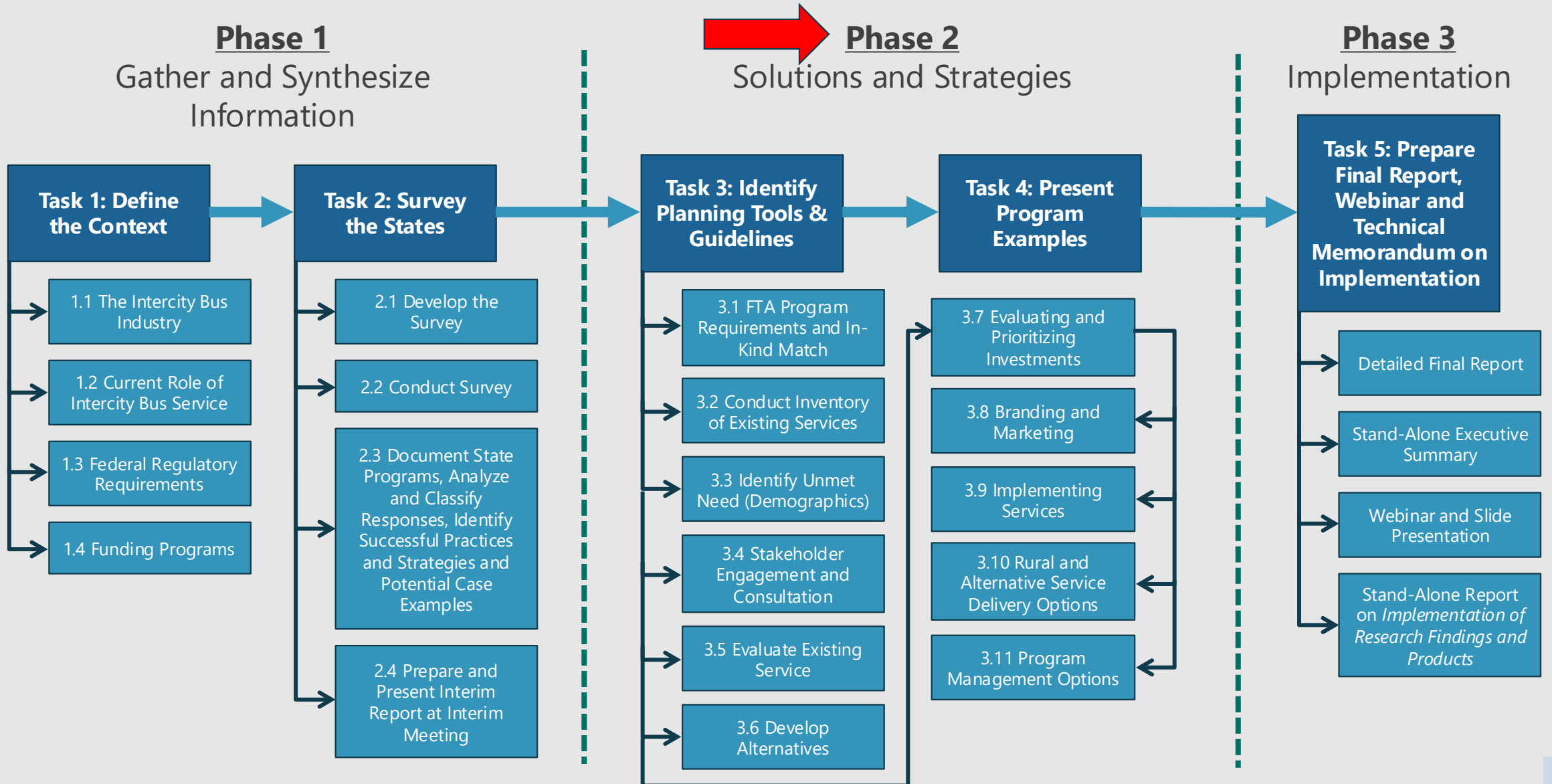
“Update TCRP Report 79 (Effective Approaches to Meeting Rural and Intercity Bus Transportation Needs) and provide strategies and tools necessary to plan, fund, build, deploy, operate and expand sustainable intercity bus services and facilities.”

Core Questions for Research

- Current status of the intercity bus industry—its evolution to this point, current issues
- The current role of the intercity bus industry—users, coverage, connectivity
- Federal and state regulatory policy and funding programs—changes since 2002 and recent updates
- How states have implemented intercity bus programs, focusing on the Section 5311(f) program at the state level—analysis
- How bus operators have participated in state intercity bus programs—industry perspective
- Planning tools and guidelines for the states and for bus operators and rural transit systems—needed background information, suggested methodologies, examples for each area
- Case studies presenting alternative implementation models—how others have done it

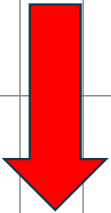


Research Approach



Timeline

Task	Year One												Year Two												
	2024					2025							2026												
	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Virtual Panel Meetings					QPR			QPR			QPR			QPR			QPR			QPR			QPR		
Task 1: Define the Context	A			SI	MP																				
Task 2: Survey the States											IR	IM													
Task 3: Identify Planning Tools and Guidelines																									
Task 4: Present Program Examples																									
Task 5: Final Report, Webinar and TM on Implementation																									
																							DF		FD



Project Begins - August 15, 2024
Project Ends - August 14, 2026

A=Amplified Work Plan
MP= Kick Off Meeting with Panel –
December 13, 2024

SI=Draft Survey Instrument
IR=Interim Report
IM=Interim Meeting

DF=Draft Final Deliverables
FD=Final Deliverables

Task 1 – Define the Context

1.1 The Intercity Bus Industry

1.2 Current Role of Intercity Bus Service

1.3 Federal Regulatory Requirements

1.4 Funding Programs

- Historical documentation of the growth, development, and regulation of the intercity bus industry.
- Description of the current intercity bus network.
- Identify ridership (to the extent possible) and access to intercity bus stops.
- Document current federal regulatory requirements affecting intercity bus services (FMCSA, ADA, etc.).
- Funding support for intercity bus:
 - Section 5311(f) 15% set-aside (minimum)
 - Other FTA programs--facilities and "reasonable accommodation"
 - State funding programs

Task 1.2: The Intercity Bus Industry - Current Context

- **The National Network**

- Coverage-Developed National Network Map
- Ticketing and Information
- Frequency
- Terminals and Stops

- **Passenger and Trip Characteristics**

- How Many Riders?
- Who Uses Intercity Buses?
- Trip Characteristics

- **Modal Comparisons**

- Fare Levels
- Energy Efficiency



Task 1.3: The Intercity Bus Industry – Federal Regulation

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA)

- For carriers in interstate commerce—registration required-DOT number
 - Intrastate services with passengers on interline tickets are considered interstate
 - Services using vehicles 8 passengers and under not required to have operating authority
- Insurance requirements
- Safety inspections—reporting
- Driver hour restrictions—reporting
- ADA requirements for Over-the-Road bus operators (large and small), private operators

Surface Transportation Board—Remaining economic regulation

Task 1.4: The Intercity Bus Industry – Federal Funding

Federal Transit Administration

- Section 5311(f) in new Circular “Rural Areas Formula Grant Programs Guidance” C 9040.1H
 - Includes improved description of in-kind match
 - Defines commuter service as more than 50% of passengers return the same day over a year—commuter service is not eligible for Section 5311(f)

Federal Highway Administration

- Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ)
- Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG)
- Other Flex funding

FTA Joint Development Projects

Department of Homeland Security-- FEMA Intercity Bus Security Grant Program

Internal Revenue Service—Fuel Tax Rebate

Task 2 – Survey of the States and Bus Industry

2.1 Develop Survey

2.2 Conduct Survey

2.3 Document State Programs, Analyze and Classify Responses, Identify Successful Practices and Strategies and Potential Case Examples

2.4 Prepare and Present Interim Report at Interim Meeting

- Comprehensive survey of the states to inventory their intercity bus programs and funded projects.
 - How is the program operated?
 - What is the consultation and certification process?
 - How are routes planned?
- Survey of the intercity bus industry to obtain their perspective on programs: awareness, consultation, participation, etc.
- Prepare the surveys and review with panel.
- **Distribute surveys: state transit program directors and intercity program managers, intercity bus firm executives.**
- **Publicly available materials (state management plans, RFPs, etc.) also reviewed for each state, follow-up interviews.**
- The results of Task 1 and 2 are included in the **Interim Report.**

Task 2.1: Develop Survey of the States

Final Surveys

- Initial survey was short and open-ended
- Planned for follow up interviews tailored around initial responses

Mailing lists:

- Developed from previous research projects
- AASHTO distributed to state transit programs—would not provide e-mail lists
- Sent to identified state transit program director and to known/likely intercity bus program staff—with directions to forward to relevant staff
- Staff turnover/new staff in many states

Task 2.2: Conduct Survey of the States

- **Process:**

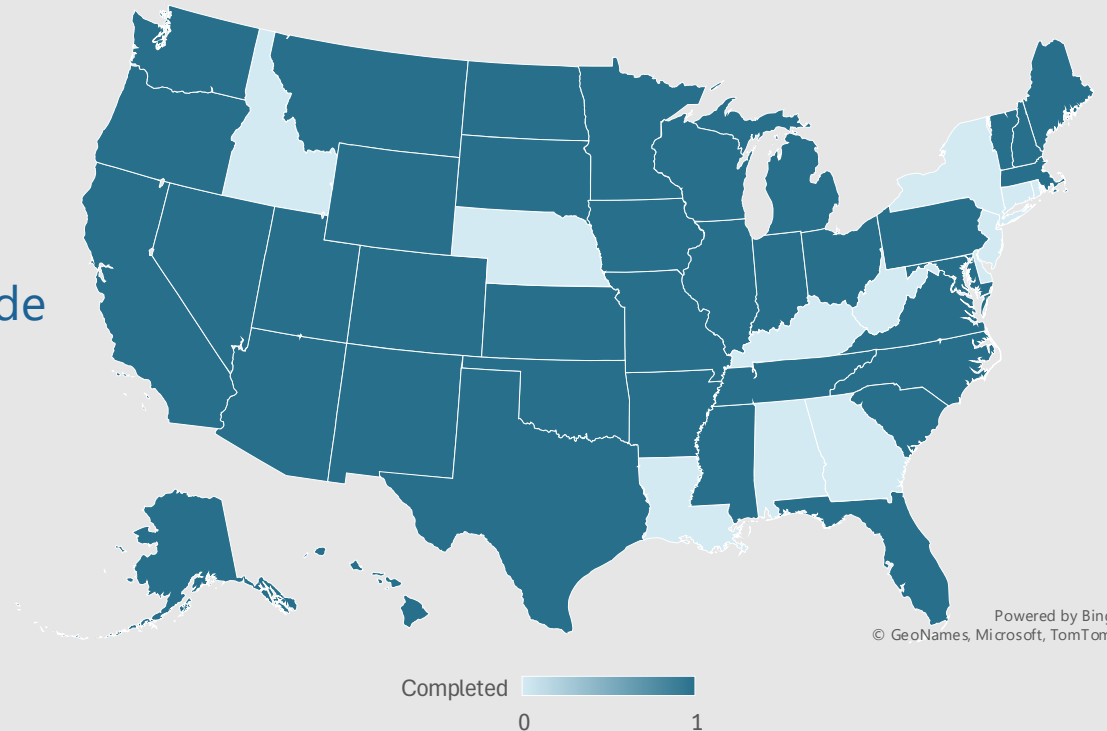
- E-mailed short survey to all identified state contacts
- Immediate follow up where not deliverable, etc.
- Follow up requests for response (sometimes multiple)
- Phone calls to request response
- Additional follow up to obtain data on funded routes
- Some interviews remain to be done—also full interview guide requested too much information—more appropriate for Program Example interviews.

- **Results: 33 states fully responded, partial program information developed for another 6.**

- **Of States Not Responding:**

- Rhode Island, Delaware, Connecticut—Not known to have ICB programs, would still like to validate certification status
- New Jersey non-response due to imminent completion of study/plan-profile completed
- Idaho, Nebraska, New York, Kentucky, West Virginia, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia — No Responses to multiple contacts—**IT'S NOT TOO LATE, PLEASE ADD YOUR STATE TO THE STUDY**

TCRP B-52 - Completed State Surveys



Task 2.3: Analysis of Survey Responses

- **Use of Section 5311(f)**

- Most responding states say they fully utilize their Section 5311(f) 15% set-aside. Some certify or do partial certifications for grants management purposes even as they fund projects.
- All responding states use their Section 5311(f) funding for operating assistance, some states also allow capital and/or marketing
- Most states provide funds to private for-profit subrecipients/contractors, some also fund public or private non-profit transit operators, or tribal transit providers.
- Just over half the states provide Section 5311(f) funding as grants, nearly as many issue RFPs for services to be provided by firms operating as third-party contractors.
- Nearly **two-thirds of states (61%) utilize in-kind** for the required local match.

Task 2.3: Analysis of Survey Responses (cont.)

- **Consultation and Planning**

- Just over half of the states do formal intercity bus studies or plans to identify needs, another 12 include intercity bus in broader statewide transportation studies, a few address intercity needs in coordination studies.
- 25 states said they perform consultation as part of studies, 19 through other outreach.
- 22 states identified elements of their programs as best practices or models.

Task 2.3: Analysis of Survey Responses-Best Practices

Interstate Cooperation or Regional Coordination

- MOU for services connecting multiple states
- Planning for cross-boundary connectivity
- Intercity bus inclusion in regional planning efforts

Delegation of Program Management to a Third Party

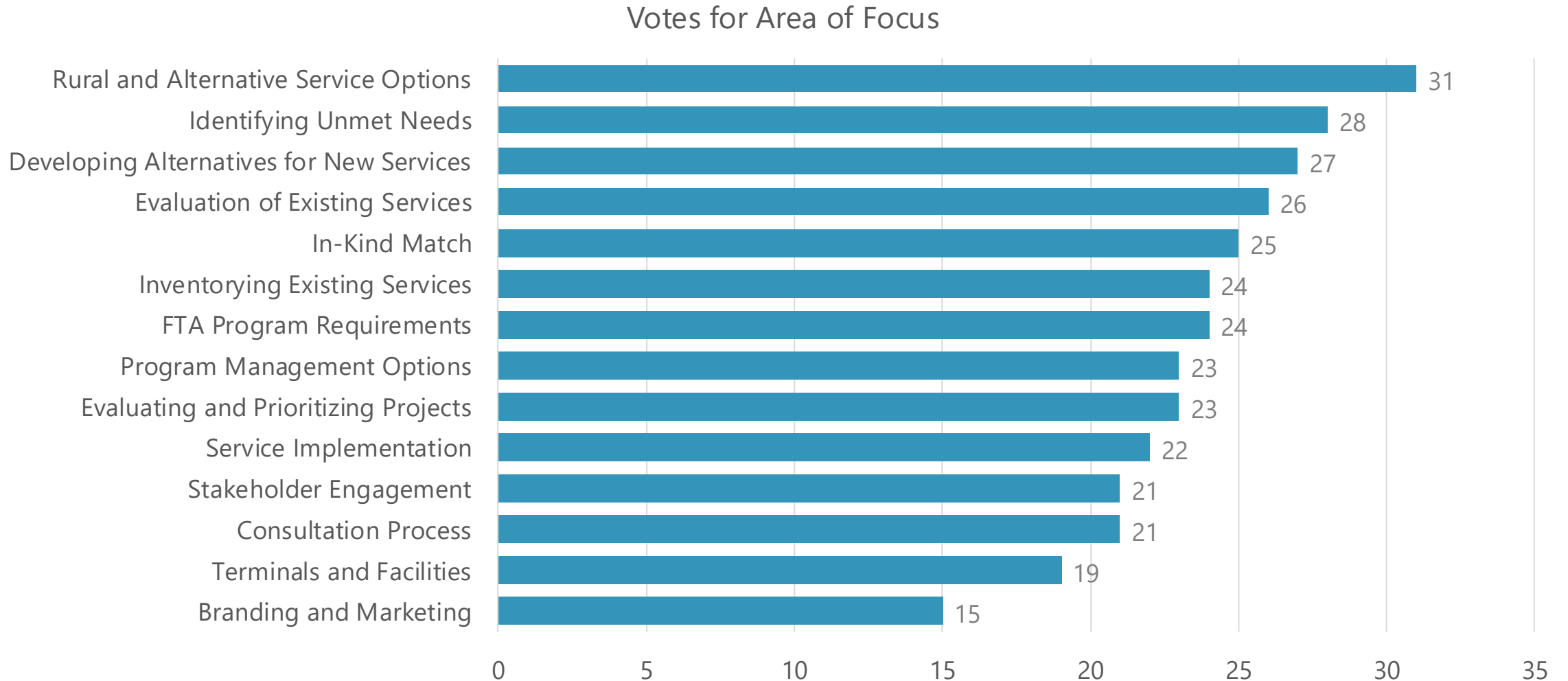
- Grant to sub-recipient to manage program, contract for services
- Grant to urban transit agency to manage program

Unique or Innovative Funding Mechanisms

- Use of value of state-funded shared-ride rural transit as in-kind match
- Per-mile subsidy for all services

Branding and Marketing

Task 2.3: Areas for Focus of Planning Tools and Guidelines - Survey Responses

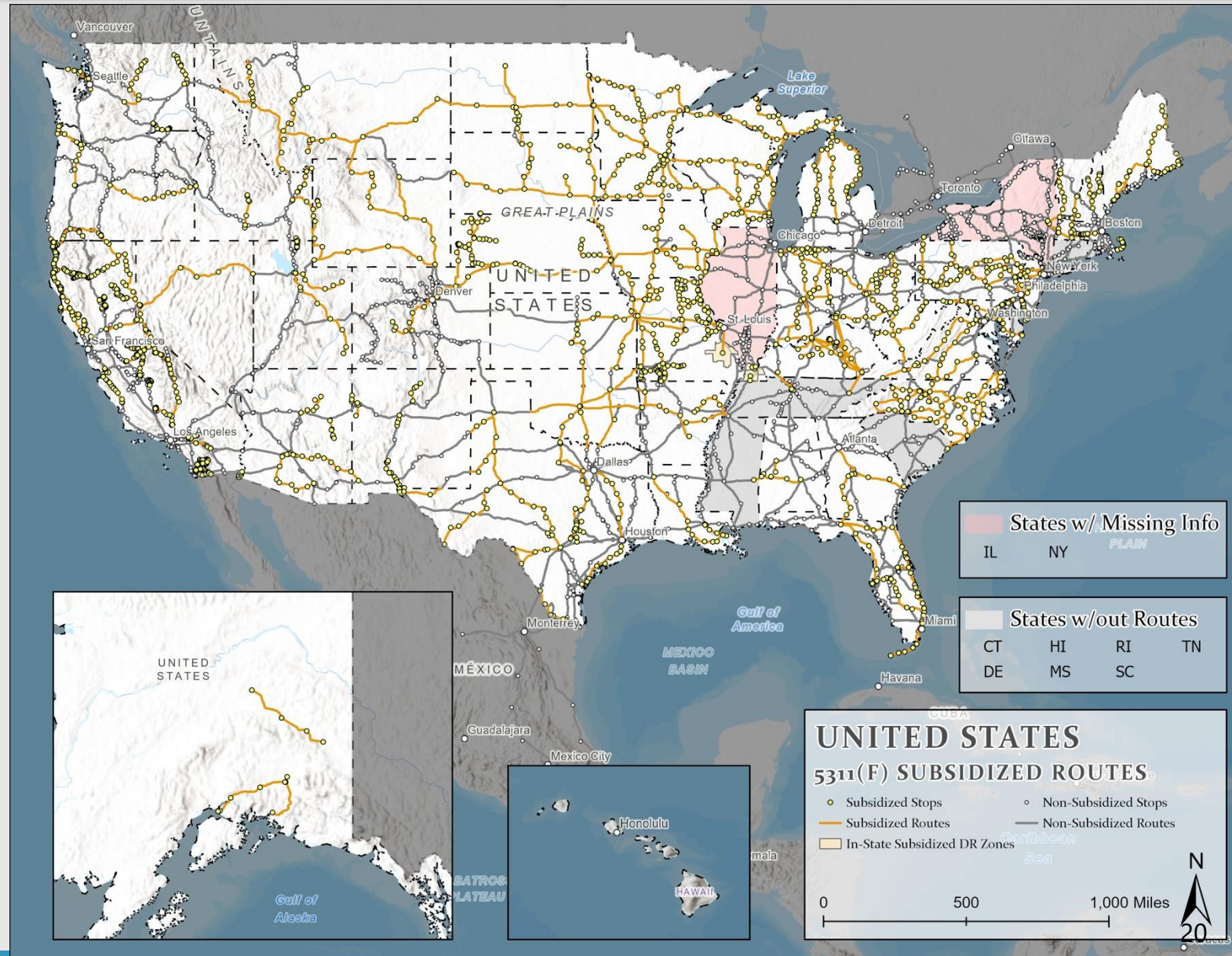


Other Findings and Conclusions

- State programs vary greatly in size, scope and technical ability.
- Limited funding prevents addressing all known unmet needs, dependence on the use of in-kind further limits projects to federal funds.
- This program model (use of in-kind match to fund operations) may be facing its limits:
 - *There is little remaining unsubsidized service in some parts of the country to serve as match.*
 - *Increasing replacement of carrier-provided services with service operated by broker partners who may not be able to provide in-kind match.*
- Rural connections and alternative service options are a concern of the states—there is tension between addressing rural regional intrastate needs and supporting the interstate network.
- Terminals and access to multimodal connections is a critical issue for the network and the industry—states are to some extent unaware or do not see their role in addressing this issue.
- Branding is perceived as working well in states that have implemented it, others are considering it.

Findings and Conclusions

- Section 5311(f) is now an Operating Program Providing Much of the Overall Network Coverage:
 - 309 Subsidized Routes
 - 2,119 Stops on the Subsidized Routes
 - Not including routes in non-responding states!



Next Steps



Task 3: Planning Tools and Guidelines

Task 4: Program Examples

Task 3: Planning Tools and Guidelines Products-- Begin Work

Rural and Alternative Service Delivery Options

Evaluating Existing Service/Calculating Performance Measures/Developing Performance Standards (combined)

In-Kind Match

Branding and Marketing

Terminals and Terminal Access

How to Inventory Existing Intercity Bus Services

Task 4: Program Examples-Potential Ideas

Virginia

- Branding and Marketing, Collaboration on Interstate Connections

North Carolina

- Integration of State Services with Unsubsidized Network, Interstate Connections

Colorado

- Branding, State Funding

South Dakota

- Coordination of Rural Providers with Intercity

New Hampshire

- State Role in Funding Terminals and Park and Ride Lots

Washington

- Addressing needs as in-kind is limited—new state funding

Pennsylvania

- Third-party management, unique in-kind source, marketing, ICB access to multimodal terminals

Oregon

- Evolution of POINT system and coordination with rural operators

Michigan

State Support for Passenger Facilities, coordination with Wisconsin for connections across state line.

Questions? Comments?



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