



Who We Are

*any computer chip
starts with
Spruce Pine
quartz.*



1 hour to Johnson City Tn
1 hour to Asheville
1 hour to Boone
1 hour to Hickory



Mitchell County is located in the upper most part of western North Carolina.

We are a tier 1 impoverished county, with high unemployment and a large population of elderly and disabled individuals. Strip mining is our largest employer.

Mitchell Transit



Mitchell County Public Transportation was started in 1976 as a non-profit. We became a county department in 1985.



No Sidewalks



Why did we apply for the RTAP Grant?

We have NO pedestrian friendly highways with few sidewalks and no bike paths.

From the center of town to Walmart
is a 4.3 mile walk, taking 1 ½ hours one-way.

The image shows a Google Maps interface with a blue sidebar on the left and a map on the right. The sidebar contains a menu with icons for different transport modes (car, train, person, bicycle, airplane) and a search bar. Below the search bar, there are three location entries: 'Spruce Pine, North Carolina 28777', 'Walmart Supercenter, 2514 Halltown', and 'Add destination'. Below these is an 'OPTIONS' section with a button 'Send directions to your phone'. At the bottom of the sidebar, there are three walking route options, each with a person icon, a description, and a time/distance summary.

Route Description	Time	Distance
via NC-226 N	1 hr 28 min	4.3 miles
via NC-226 S	1 hr 28 min	4.3 miles
via Altapass Hwy and Halltown Rd	1 hr 46 min	5.2 miles

The map on the right shows the area around Spruce Pine, North Carolina. A blue line indicates the walking route from the center of town to the Walmart Supercenter. The route is marked with a blue line and a person icon. The map also shows various landmarks, including Ingles Markets, Brian Center Health & Rehabilitation, Gem Mountain Gemstone Mine, and Walmart Supercenter. The map data is from 2021.

Preparing for the Route

Even before we knew we received the RTAP Community Rides grant we were preparing. July 20, 2021 we had our TAB retreat. Our main topic for discussion was a d/fixed route for the town of Spruce Pine. We had asked NCDOT for an extension to our fleet. We received this 22' LTV, 2 months before we were awarded the RTAP grant.



Front Page News (twice)....

MITCHELL NEWS-JOURNAL

The area's leading hometown newspaper

Established in 1927

www.mitchellnews.com

Wednesday, September 15, 2021

Vol. 94, No. 37

\$1

MCTA gets \$100,000 grant to add Spruce Pine fixed route

BY CORY SPIERS
Mitchell News-Journal
cspiers@mitchellnews.com

SPRUCE PINE — Mitchell County Transportation Authority will soon add a fixed route in Spruce Pine thanks to a \$100,000 grant from the National Rural Transit Assistance Community Rides Program.

MCTA Director Sheila Blalock said a start date for the Spruce Pine route will be announced later.

The fixed Spruce Pine route is one of 19 projects approved for grant funding this past month. The National RTAP review committee sifted through 76 applications requesting a total of \$6,714,287 to reach its final list.

MCTA gets the maximum possible grant award from National RTAP's first grant program. Community Rides Grants

are for transportation partnerships that improve social detriments of health in rural and tribal communities.

Selected projects will improve access to critical needs and build the capacity of transit programs. Project results will be shared nationally as promising practices.

The award selections press release touts the Spruce Pine route as "a new fixed route in an area with only demand response during limited weekday hours."

The release says the route will "increase mobility and access and help prevent people from having to walk long distances on a dangerous highway."

National RTAP will share additional information about each selected project and publicize outcomes and lessons learned to benefit the rural and tribal transit industry nationally.



Thanks to a \$100,000 National RTAP grant, Mitchell County Transportation will soon add a fixed route serving Spruce Pine. Mitchell's project is one of 19 to be selected as a grant recipient. (Submitted photo)

MITCHELL NEWS-JOURNAL

The area's leading hometown newspaper

Established in 1927

www.mitchellnews.com

Wednesday, October 27, 2021

Vol. 94, No. 43

\$1

Mitchell Transit adds Pine Line Shuttle

Rachel Hoskins

rhoskins@thefranklinpress.com

There's a new transportation route coming to Mitchell County. Beginning Nov. 1, Mitchell County Public Transit will operate a fixed route in Spruce Pine. The first pick up is slated for 6 a.m.

"We see people walking on Hwy 226 to Walmart on a regular basis," said MCPT Director Sheila Blalock. "It's not safe. It's a dangerous highway with no sidewalks."

The new route, funded by a grant from the National Rural Transit Assistance Community Rides Program, will provide free

transportation to riders for the first year to areas including popular shopping centers.

The route, known as the Pine Line Shuttle, will cover the Wag-on-master, Deer Park Apartments, Walnut Avenue Apartments, Canipes (in town), Ingles, Grassy Creek (US Cellular), Walmart, Mineral City Heights, and Mayland Community College.

The shuttle will run from 6 a.m. to 6:45 p.m.

Pre-COVID, the MCTA was transporting about 1,019 passengers weekly.

"We now average about 216 riders on our current county routes," said Blalock.

For many Mitchell County residents, the transportation vans are lifelines to grocery stores, physician offices, and pharmacies. Before COVID-19 forced the shutdown or reduction of in-person services at the Senior Center, the transit system provided transportation for seniors who depended on the Senior Center for socialization.

"Currently our senior center is open only for drive up activities, serving drive through meals along with home delivered meals," said Blalock.

"Human services centers being

See shuttle schedule on page 4

closed for inside activities has impacted us greatly, as the numbers show. Doctors offices are now doing telemed visits. People are not traveling, and shopping like they were two years ago. We may never transport the number of passengers that we did two years ago. Our world has changed. But we also realize the importance of transportation. Many people, especially the elderly, depend on us for their transportation needs."

With 19 drivers, 4 full-time, Blalock said they are currently hiring additional part-time drivers.

"We have excellent drivers that are caring people with good driver skills and excellent customer skills," said Blalock. "We practice all COVID safety procedures. Drivers and passengers must wear a mask. Masks are available if you do not have your own. We have barriers between the driver and passengers. We try to keep air circulating. We sanitize at the end of every shift. We ask passengers not to ride the van if they have any of the COVID-19 symptoms."

The new route will provide regular stops and help people in high-demand areas. Residents interested in riding the van can call MCPT at 828-688-4715.

First of September

- Committee worked on design of route and advertising.
- Committee members distributed flyers, surveys, & talked with potential passengers.
- We advertised in our weekly newspaper, the local radio stations and social media, showing our route map and logo.
- Shared on social media to the Chamber of Commerce, Town of Spruce Pine & EDC Facebook pages
- We advertised for drivers.

Last week of October

- Signs erected at our 10 bus stops
- Put up yard signs with the stops & times
- Ran schedule in news paper & on social media
- Trained the drivers on the route & software

Did we have any idea of what we were doing? NO!!!

Best advice - we received was not to do the route in a circular pattern. Systems had better success with a straight line.

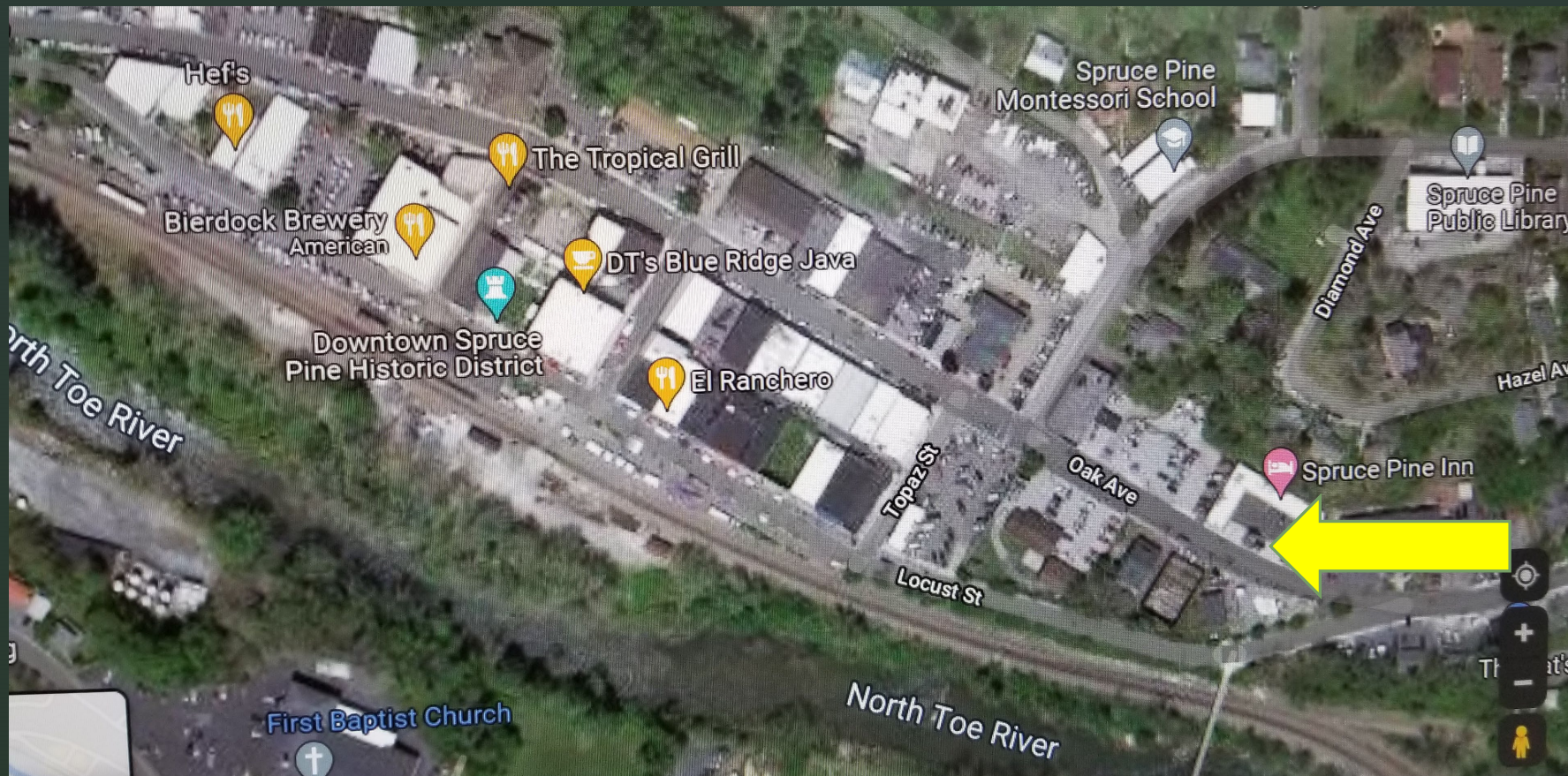
Time Consuming - was working with attorneys on our agreements for signage and shelters erected on private and commercial property.

Essential- We had to work with the state and our state division 13 on encroachment agreements. They had to approve our signs, shelter design and even the vendor that was to make our shelter.



Biggest Struggle with Route

Was finding property in town for a bus stop. We initially wanted two. One on the east end and one on the west end. We finally settled on one in the center of town.

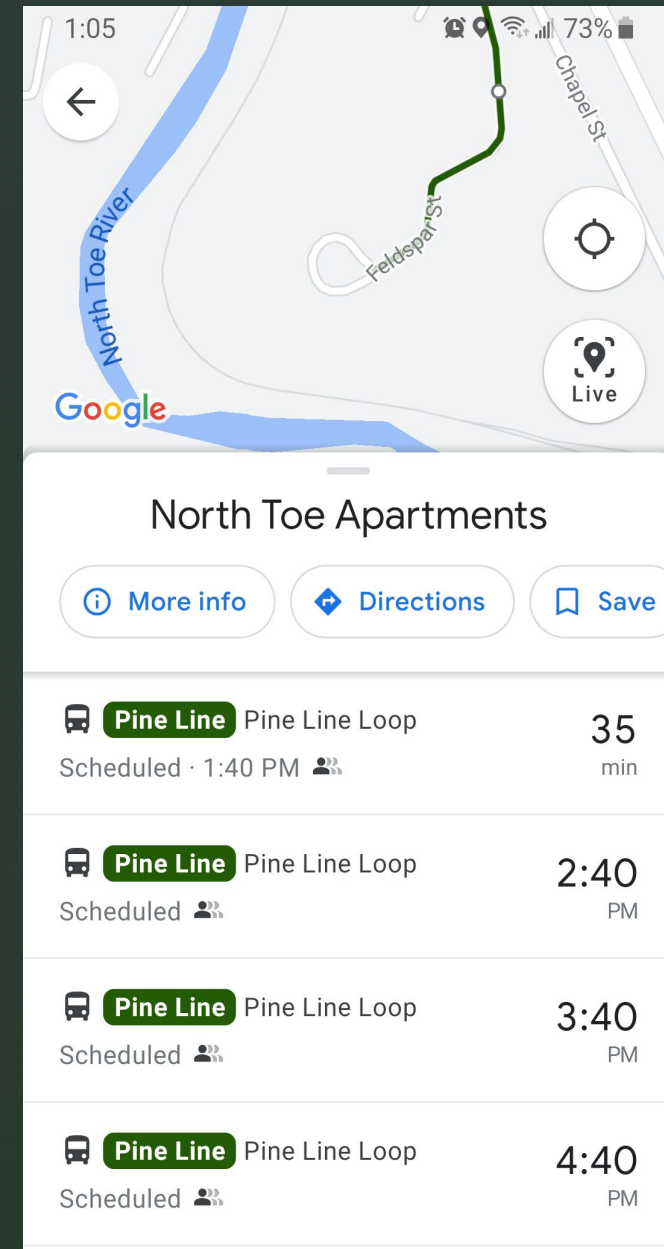


Due to Covid-19 it took almost one year to receive our shelter and bench. Before our shelter arrived someone placed homemade benches at the bus stop for our passengers.



We even have a QR code for Google Maps link.

This shows the next time the shuttle will be at your stop





Wagonmaster trailer park
Private Property



Ingles
Supermarket



Strip Mall



Public Housing



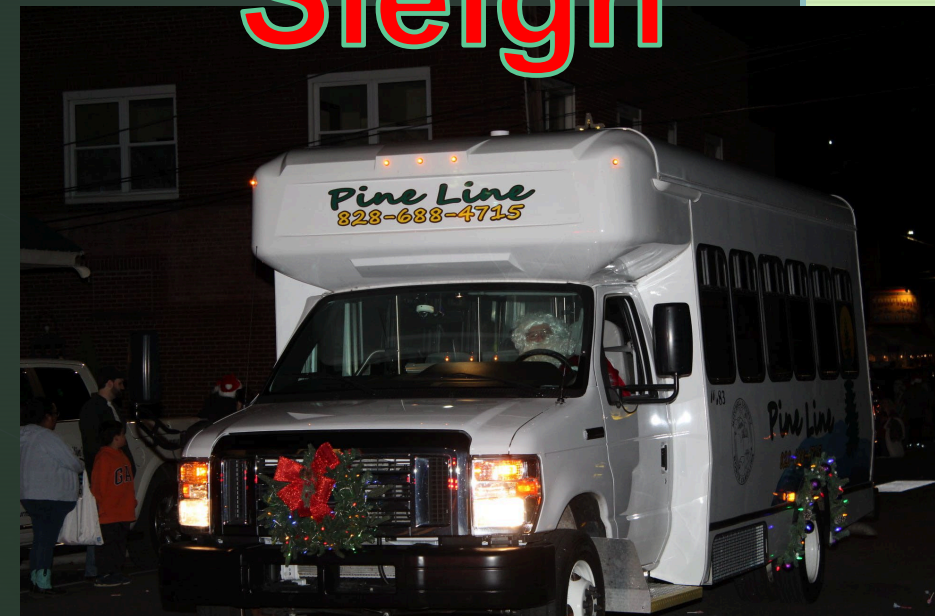
Christmas Parade



More ways than one to promote the new shuttle service.



Santa's Sleight



Ribbon Cutting 12/2/21



Spruce Pine Main Street

More free press

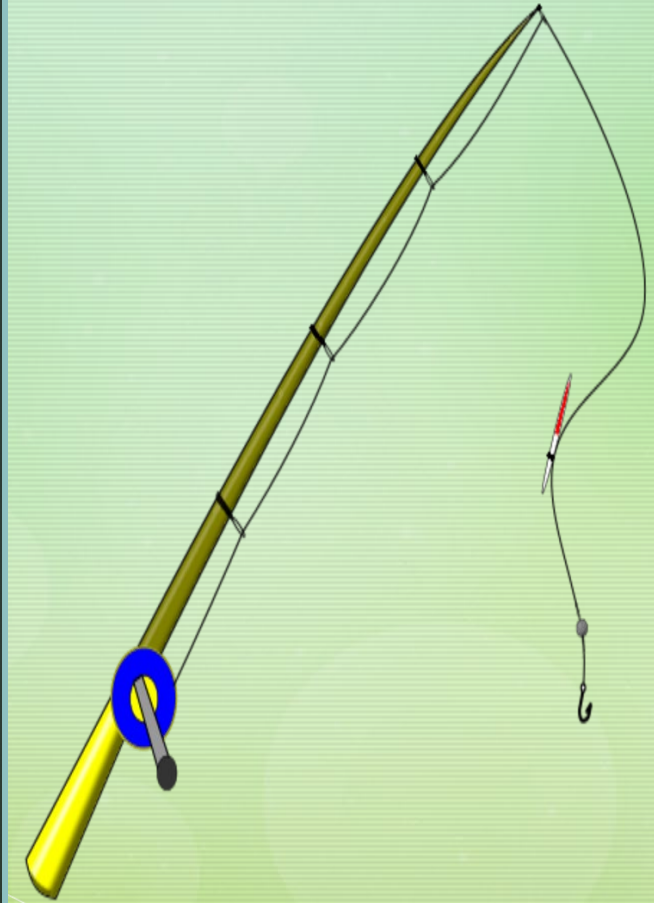


The Pine Line is a

- Safe place
- Addresses the social determinates of health
- Security/dependability
- Getting rid of my car to save money

Ride to

- Grocery store & produce stand
- Food pantry, free hot lunch
- Socialization
- Recreation, gym
- Eat out, shop, nail & beauty salon
- Medical appointments & pharmacy
- A good fishing hole!

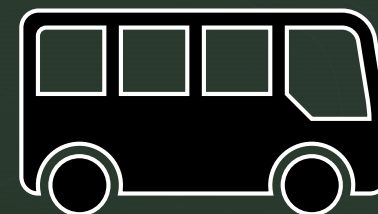




High Country Council of Governments recently worked with the town of Spruce Pine on their long range plan. In the survey two of the questions pertained to the Pine Line. 1- Did they use it? 2- Did they think Spruce Pine should help fund it?

And the results are----

The Town citizens are heavily in favor of keeping the Pine Line. The land use plan committee has also indicated that they want to see it continue.



Pine Line averages

1180 miles per week

65 Hours per week

46 boards per day. (Nov. 2022)

By the end of our Community
Rides grant

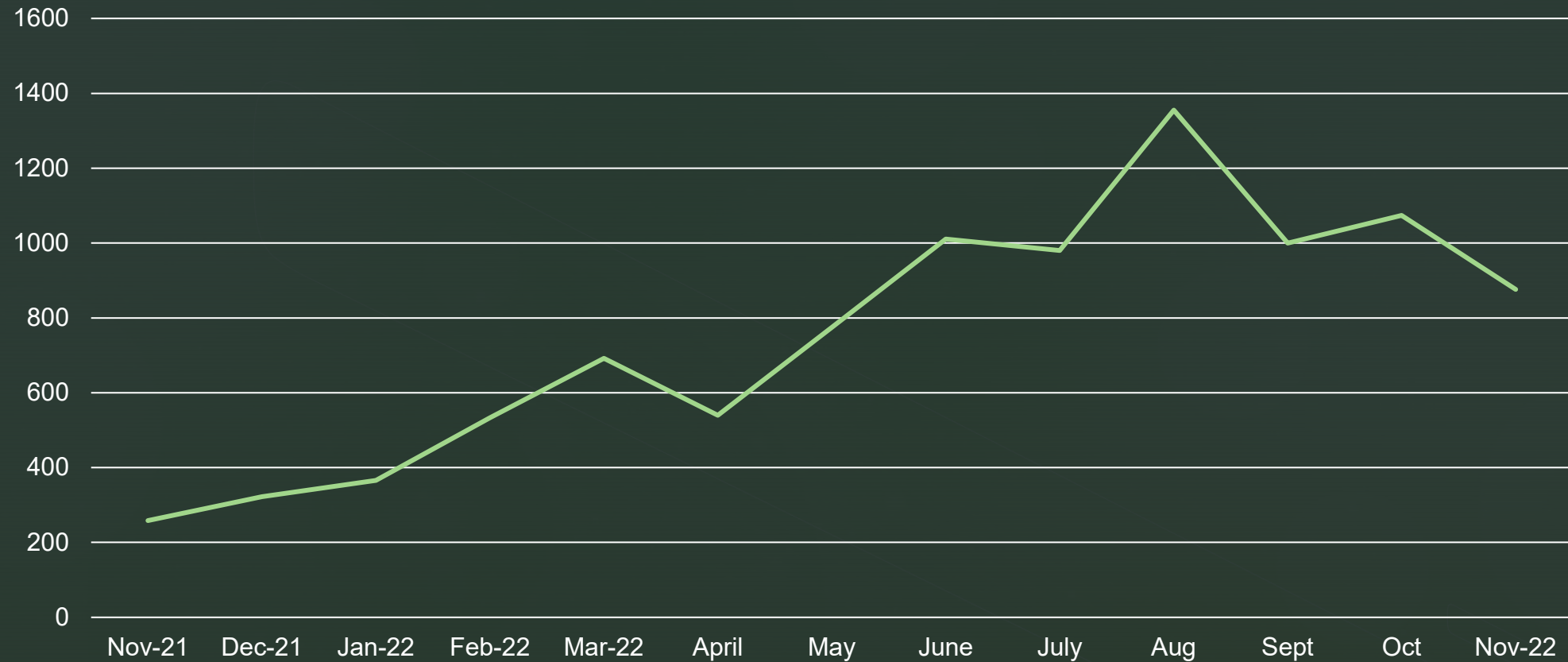
11,180 times someone

Had stepped onto the Pine
Line for a
Destination along the route.



Our First Year of Service

Riders BOARDING



You Ask

Was the Pine Line needed? Yes!

Was our project a success? Yes!

Did we learn along the way? Yes!

Would we do it again? Yes!

Would we like to expand upon it?
Yes!

Will the Pine Line remain? Yes

Has the Pine Line supplemented our
demand response? Yes





**NRTAP for believing
in us!!!!!!!!!!!!**

Mitchell County
Transportation
Phone 828-688-4715
73 Crimson Laurel Circle
Suite 7
Bakersville, NC 28705

Director, Sheila Blalock
Cell 828-766-9712

