Mobility Manager Peer Roundtable: Rural Mobility Hub Design Guide Summary

April 1, 2026

This peer roundtable convened to review and discuss the Rural Mobility Hub Design Guide, with a focus on identifying practical needs, implementation strategies, and opportunities to strengthen coordinated transportation systems in rural and Tribal communities.

Facilitated as an open dialogue, the session emphasized peer exchange, allowing participants to share real-world experiences, challenges, and strategies. Roundtables are typically designed as informal knowledge-sharing forums where professionals exchange insights and best practices rather than formal presentations.

Discussion centered on how a stop-level and scalable mobility hub framework can improve access to healthcare, employment, education, and essential services while aligning with federal coordination priorities.

Facilitators: Enjoli Dixon, National RTAP Tribal Transit Program

The roundtable brought together over thirty rural and Tribal transportation stakeholders, including:

- Transit managers and operators
- Mobility managers
- Tribal transportation representatives
- Regional planners and state DOT staff
- Health and human service providers
- National technical assistance providers

Participants represented systems operating under FTA Section 5311 and 5310 programs, along with Tribal transit programs and community-based mobility initiatives.

Framing the Conversation: Why Rural Mobility Hubs

The discussion opened with a shared recognition that rural transit systems face:

- Long travel distances and low-density service areas
- Limited infrastructure at stops
- High reliance on demand-response and volunteer drivers
- Increasing demand for access to healthcare and employment

Participants noted that the guide introduces a new way of thinking about transit infrastructure—shifting from system-level investments to user-centered, stop-level design.

Topic 1: Understanding the Mobility Hub Typologies

Participants discussed the Level 0–3 hub framework and how it reflects real-world rural conditions.

Level 0 & Level 1 (Foundational Stops)

- Viewed as the most immediately implementable
- Critical for safety: pullouts, lighting, signage
- Importance of seating and shelter due to long wait times

Tribal Perspective:

- Flexibility is essential (e.g., turnout slabs, informal stops)
- Some locations intentionally limit connections to protect community priorities

Level 2 (Community Mobility Nodes)

- Strong alignment with existing community anchors:
    - Clinics
    - Libraries
    - Senior centers
    - Tribal facilities

Participants emphasized that co-location improves:

- Visibility
- Efficiency
- Service coordination

Level 3 (Full Mobility Hubs)

- Seen as long-term, regional assets
- Key features discussed:
    - Intercity connections
    - Multimodal integration
    - Co-located services (telehealth, food access, workforce support)

Challenge Identified:

- High capital and operational costs

Opportunity:

- Phased, modular development approach

Topic 2: Mobility Management & Coordination

Mobility management emerged as a central theme across all discussions.

Participants highlighted:

- The importance of one-call/one-click systems
- Coordination across:
    - Transit providers
    - Health services
    - Workforce agencies
- The role of mobility managers as connectors and problem-solvers

Examples shared included:

- Coordinated rides for employment and medical trips
- Volunteer driver programs filling service gaps
- Partnerships with community organizations to expand reach

These approaches reflect broader rural transit practices where collaboration and resource-sharing are essential to meeting community needs.

Topic 3: Designing for Rural & Tribal Contexts

Participants emphasized that rural and Tribal environments require context-specific design approaches.

Key Considerations

- Highway safety and pullout design
- Weather protection (heat, cold, storms)
- Limited utilities and broadband access
- Cultural appropriateness in Tribal communities

Resilience and Sustainability

- Solar lighting and off-grid solutions
- Flooding and extreme weather planning
- Backup power systems

Tribal Insight:

- Design must reflect community identity and priorities
- Engagement must go beyond consultation to co-design

Topic 4: Multimodal Integration in Rural Areas

Participants explored how hubs can function as multimodal connection points, even in low-density regions.

Modes discussed:

- Demand-response and dial-a-ride
- Volunteer driver networks
- Intercity bus connections
- Rideshare services (where available)
- Walking and biking connections

Key Challenge:

- Limited-service frequency requires careful coordination

Key Opportunity:

- Hubs as designated transfer and coordination points

Topic 5: Technology & Access

Technology was viewed as both an opportunity and a barrier.

High-Value Tools

- Real-time information displays
- Mobile trip planning
- Digital kiosks
- Public Wi-Fi

Challenges

- Broadband limitations
- Maintenance and lifecycle costs
- Digital literacy gaps

Consensus:
Technology should support, not replace:

- Printed materials
- Phone-based assistance

Topic 6: Accessibility and Tribal Consultation

Accessibility considerations were embedded throughout the discussion.

Priorities Identified

- ADA-compliant infrastructure
- Serving transportation-disadvantaged populations
- Tribal consultation and sovereignty
- Multilingual communication

Participants emphasized the need for:

- Early and ongoing community engagement
- Accessible site selection
- Accessible design practices

Topic 7: Implementation & Phasing

Participants responded positively to the guide's phased implementation roadmap:

1. Planning
2. Design
3. Pilot

4. Expansion
5. Evaluation

Pilot Projects

Seen as critical for:

- Testing concepts
- Building partnerships
- Demonstrating value

Performance Metrics

Participants highlighted:

- Ridership
- Trip purpose (healthcare, employment)
- Missed trip reductions
- Community outcomes

Topic 8: Funding and Sustainability

Funding discussions focused on braided and flexible strategies.

Key Sources

- Federal (5311, 5310)
- USDA and rural health programs
- State and local funding
- Philanthropic partnerships

Innovative Approaches

- Co-location cost sharing
- Public-private partnerships
- Revenue from advertising or leases

Participants emphasized that sustaining operations is often more challenging than securing capital funding.

Key Takeaways & Emerging Consensus

Across all discussions, several themes emerged:

- Start with what exists—formalize and improve it
- Design at the stop level to impact the rider experience
- Leverage partnerships as core infrastructure
- Use phased, scalable approaches
- Integrate transportation with community services

Next Steps & Participant Recommendations

Participants suggested the following actions to advance the guide:

- Develop visual templates and design standards by hub level
- Provide cost estimates and funding examples
- Expand Tribal-specific guidance and case studies
- Create implementation toolkits for small agencies
- Share real-world pilot examples and lessons learned

The roundtable affirmed that the Rural Mobility Hub Design Guide offers a practical and adaptable framework for improving rural and Tribal transportation systems.

By focusing on stop-level infrastructure, coordinated services, and community partnerships, mobility hubs can serve as:

- Access points to essential services
- Anchors for community development
- Catalysts for coordinated mobility systems

Participants emphasized that success would depend on local adaptation, strong partnerships, and sustained investment, but expressed strong support for advancing the framework through pilot projects and continued peer exchange.

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