



**Mountain Empire Transit's
METLINK project
Big Stone Gap, Virginia**



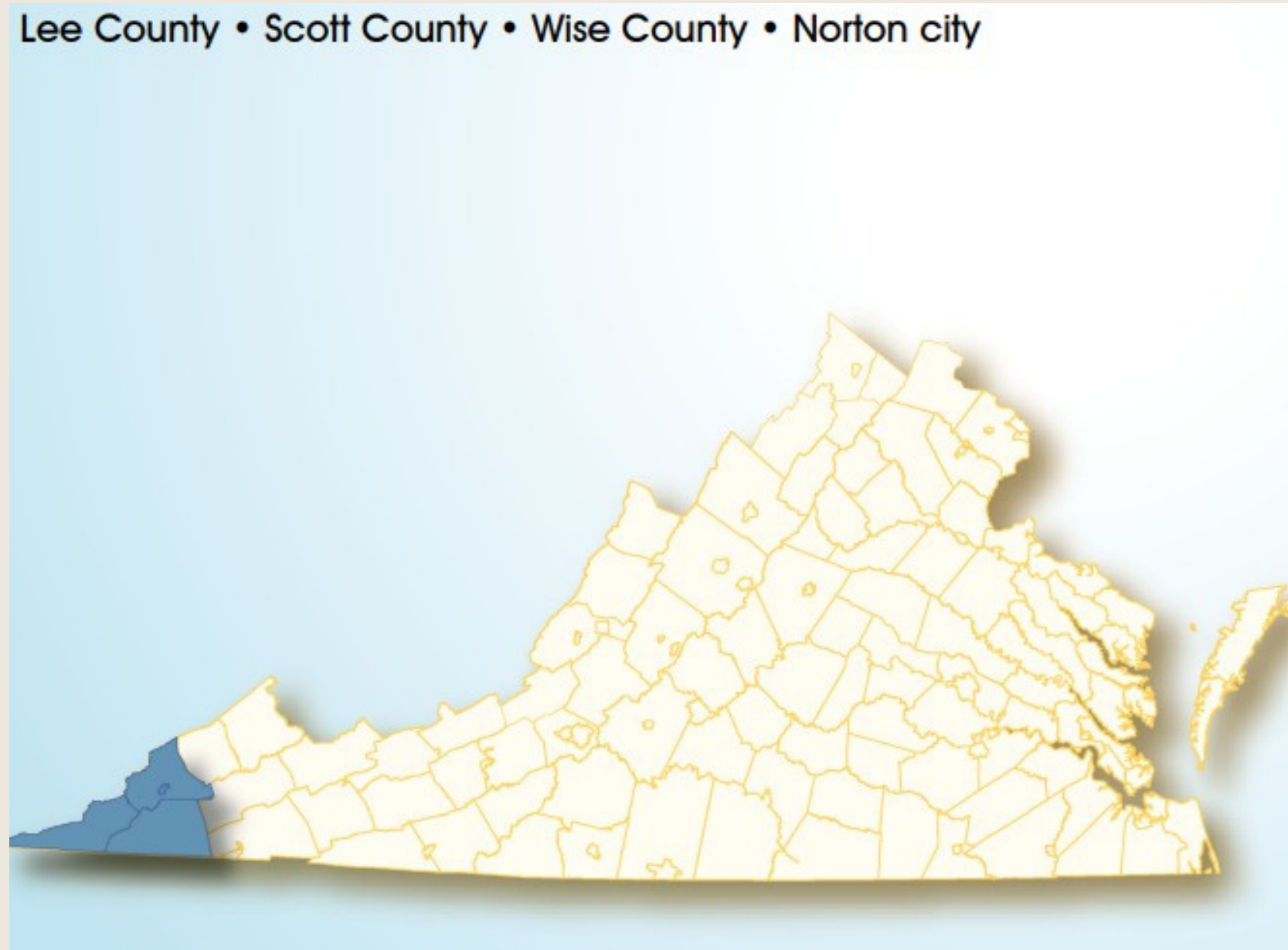
Get To Know Us

Over 4,000 citizens receive direct services annually. MEOC provides over 30 different programs, employs roughly 250 people and utilizes over 70 different funding sources.

Mountain Empire Older Citizens (MEOC) is the designated area agency on aging and public transit entity for Lee, Wise, and Scott Counties and the City of Norton in far Southwest Virginia.



MEOC's service area (Lee, Scott and Wise Counties and the City of Norton) lies in the heart of rural Appalachia, in the far southwestern corner of Virginia, bordering Kentucky and Tennessee. With a population of nearly 90,000, covering 1400 square miles of mountainous, forested terrain and a population density of 67.8 persons per square mile.



Did you know?
In Southwest Virginia, we are
closer to 6 other state capitals
than to our own?
NC, TN, KY, OH, WV, GA

MET,
formerly MEOC Transit,
is the largest transportation
provider in the region and
provides an array of
transportation services.



Mountain Empire Transit (MET)

Broad-based, multi-service coordinated transportation system in Southwest VA that provides human service, contract, public and specialized transportation.

METGO!

METGo!, one of two microtransit services piloted in Virginia, allows the rider a user-friendly approach to ride-hailing technology.

METLINK

Through National RTAP funding, MET created feeder/connector routes linking passengers to Northeast TN.

2021

Community Needs

MET was awarded a Community Rides grant through NRTAP to start a feeder/connector service linking riders to Northeast Tennessee.



The need for consistent transportation services among riders to Northeast Tennessee became evident in a survey distributed to MET riders from December 2019 to February 2020.

Survey results indicated the most popular concept among riders was service to Kingsport, TN (77%) and Johnson City, TN (47%).

Based on the Transit Development Plan's findings and vision of our Transit Advisory Council, MET sought a way to close an identified gap in service with the addition of a feeder/connector route to Kingsport, TN aptly named METLINK.

Initial Strategy.

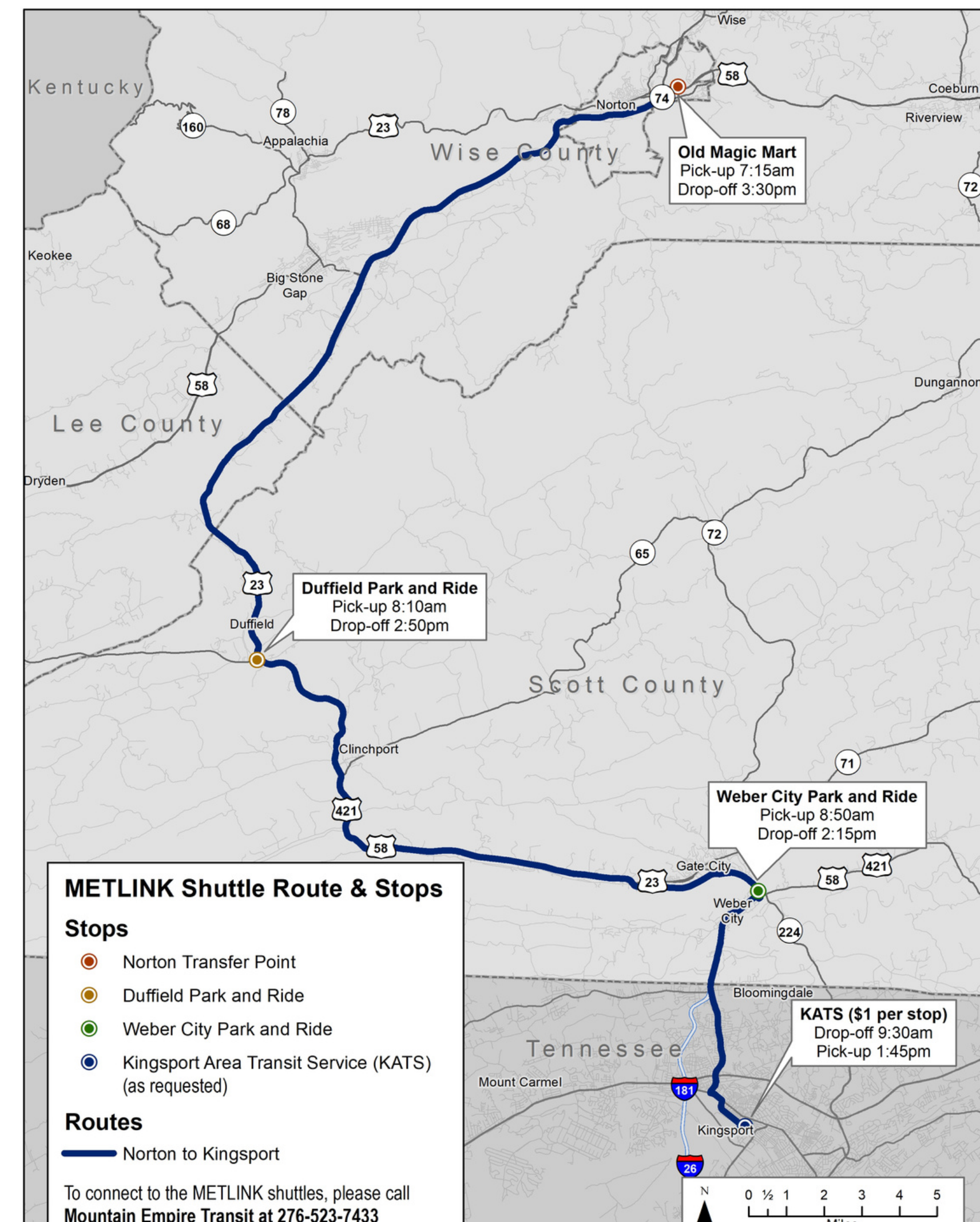
MET designed its METLINK service in such a way that passengers could utilize multiple modes of transportation and increase efficiency and minimize cost to its transit system.

Passengers began on a demand response service and transfer to one of three park and ride locations in Lee, Scott and Wise Counties.

Upon arrival, passengers would transfer to the METLINK route which would shuttle passengers directly to their destination or be connected to Kingsport Area Transit (KATS) in Kingsport, TN.

Once connected with KATS, passengers could utilize other modes of transportation to include: Uber, Lyft, Tri-City Airport, Virginia Breeze and rail transportation.

The process is reversed for the return home.



Changing our Strategy.

Passengers were resistant to our initial plan.

MET quickly pivoted to allow METLINK to pick passengers up at home and modified the 3 transfer points to 1 transfer point.

Travel training was key to alleviating anxiety and apprehension for seniors and individuals with disabilities.

MET would not do anything differently in its implementation of the project. The initial plan, although quickly modified, gave MET an opportunity to listen to passengers' input and execute what was needed.

Community Partner

MET's most effective partner was the Junction Center for Independent Living (JCIL).

JCIL staff accommodated requests for trips when METLINK was overbooked or during times of unavailability.



Riders Targeted

Individuals of all ages
and abilities from all
walks of life

College students
Middle aged
Seniors
Individuals with Disabilities
Veterans



Performance Measures

	Projected	Achieved
# of passenger trips provided	15 one-way trips per day	7-10 one-way trips per day
# of travel trainings provided	126	96
# of surveys distributed capture rate	100-150 surveys; 50% capture rate	102 3rd qtr surveys; 55% capture rate 145 5th qtr surveys; 50% capture rate
# of bus buddies recruited and trained	3-5	4 recruited/3 trained
# of community forums held	4	5

Project Impact

Access to transportation impacts the community in many ways, but for passengers in rural SW Virginia, it's a lifeline to long forgotten needs and services. Why follow up on a long-distance medical appointment if there is no way to get there? Why look for employment in another town if you can't find a ride? METLINK affords passengers' consistent long-distance transportation options and helps to restore their autonomy and independence while allowing them to travel with peace of mind.



Testimonial

MET
would like to
highlight just
one impactful
story involving
METLINK
transportation.

An older woman in the hospital called in mid-May, requesting transportation for her husband to visit her in the hospital. METLINK transported him several times, as she very much wanted to visit with him. She was very sick, and her health continued to decline. One day during a call she advised me she had just been diagnosed as terminal. Her cousin called in for a trip directly after her diagnosis and METLINK gladly set up the ride.

In late June, her husband was in a terrible car accident and was admitted to the same hospital as her, but they were unable to visit one another. A few days later, he was discharged home. A few days after that, she passed away.

METLINK is so much more than a transit route. It has a substantial impact on the lives of its passengers. The impact for this family was immeasurable.

Quotes from Rider Surveys

"I am so glad we have this service available to our area."

"They are good people, and they treat you good; have been good to me."

"If it wasn't for this transit, I wouldn't have the chances I have to make it to my extra doctor appointments and be able to shop and eat."



Quotes from Rider Surveys

"This program has been such a blessing to me."

"Work is accessible using this service."

"I don't own a car, so I've had to depend on my friend and now she has so many miles (on her car)."



Contact Details

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