

# Schuyler County Transit NADTC Grant Action Plan

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Schuyler County Transit



**Cornell AAP**  
City and Regional Planning

Report prepared for the Arc of Chemung-Schuyler

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## Introduction

Schuyler County Transit provides public bus transportation to the aging and rural community of Schuyler County. The Arc of Chemung-Schuyler (the Arc), a non-profit organization that operates Schuyler County Transit, received a competitive grant from the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center to identify transportation barriers and develop solutions. The following action plan documents the Arc's comprehensive planning and community engagement process, as well as a number of implementable solutions developed to address the county's needs.

## Demographics

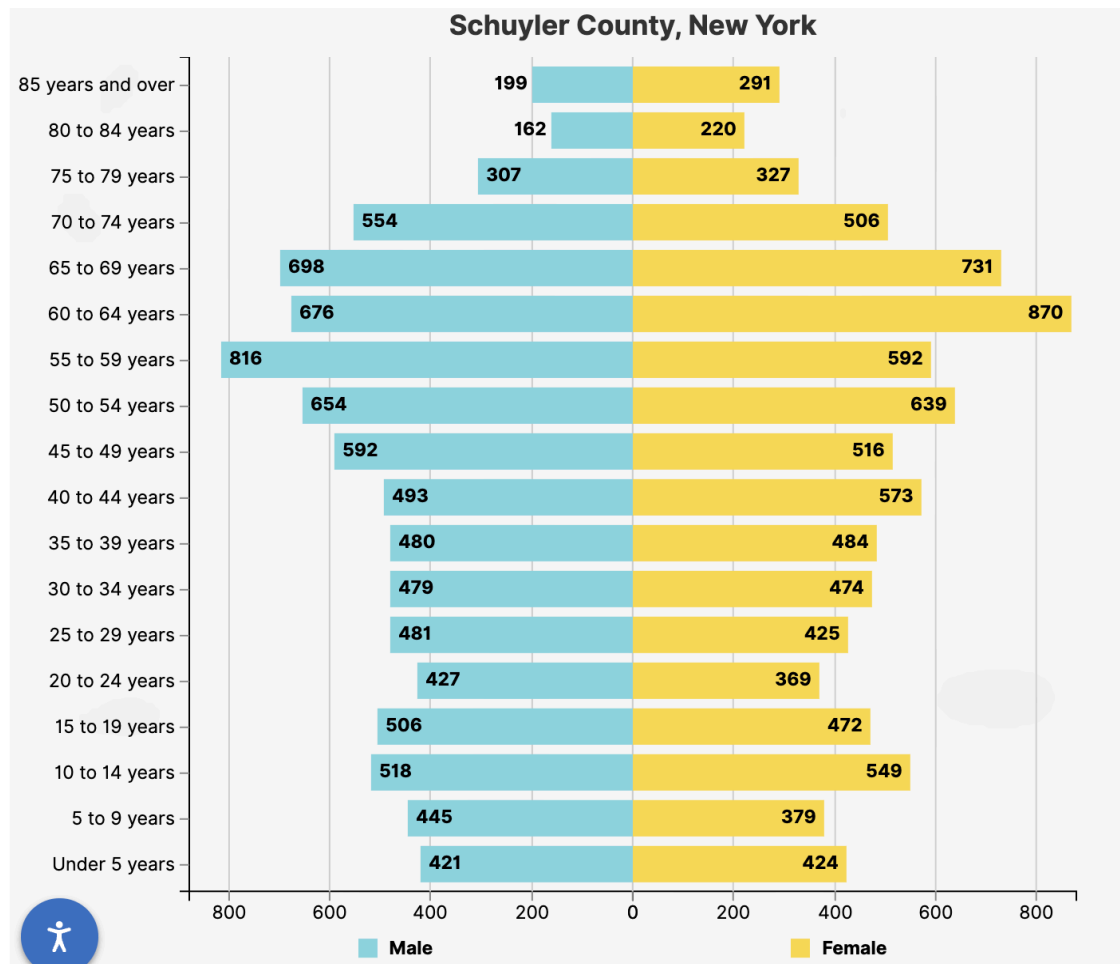
Before beginning to engage the community, the Arc conducted significant background research to develop a foundation for future work. This began with identifying the demographic realities that create and amplify transportation barriers.

### Age

Schuyler County is home to an older population, with a median age of 47.4, well above New York state's median of 40.2. The county is home to an estimated 3995 seniors ages 65 and older, accounting for 22.5% of the population, the eighth highest proportion of seniors among New York's 62 counties.

Population trends from recent years further show an aging population. While the overall population of Schuyler County fell 3.7% between 2013 and 2023, the population ages 65 and older increased by 22.5%. As the population ages, transportation systems will need to be adapted to ensure seniors can continue to

live independent and fulfilling lives even if they are no longer able to operate motor vehicles.



Population Pyramid of Schuyler County

The country's population pyramid can provide insight into the future direction of demographic changes. The bulge in the upper half of the pyramid shows that a relatively high percentage of Schuyler County residents are between the ages of 50 and 69. As this group ascends the age ladder, there is a risk of increasing strain on public services. Schuyler County must improve its transportation systems now to prepare for this future demographic wave.

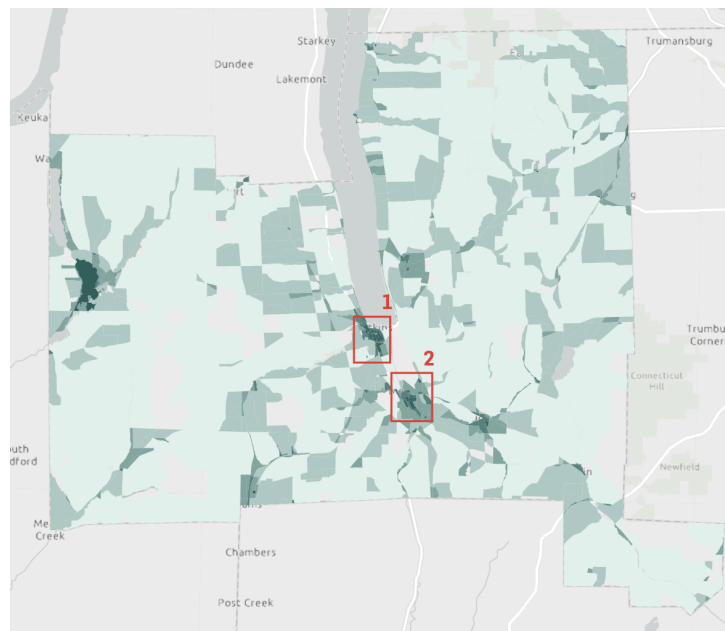


## Disability

Schuyler County Transit also has a large population of people with disabilities. 15.1% of the county's population has a disability, compared with just 13% statewide. Schuyler County must ensure that its transportation system addresses the unique barriers faced by its most vulnerable residents. These measures include maintaining a fleet of ADA accessible vehicles, training bus operators that can assist people with disabilities, and designing bus operations to accommodate limited mobility.

## Rural

Along with an aging population, the country is also rural and sparsely populated, with a population density of 54.5 residents per square mile. Out of 62 counties, Schuyler is the second least populous and eleventh least dense in New York State. This spread out population makes providing adequate transportation to all residents difficult. With seniors increasingly preferring to age in place, Schuyler County Transit must find creative solutions to serve all corners of the county.



Population Density of Schuyler County

## Geographic Distribution

One advantage of Schuyler County's population makeup is its geographic distribution. Much of the population lives in the county's three core villages, which are located close together in the center of the county. This population distribution is conducive to the establishment of viable transit service between areas of relative density. However, serving the remaining expanse of the county continues to be a challenge.

Together these statistics paint a difficult picture for transit. The increasing population of seniors creates a great need for quality transit, while the sparse population density makes serving all of those residents difficult.

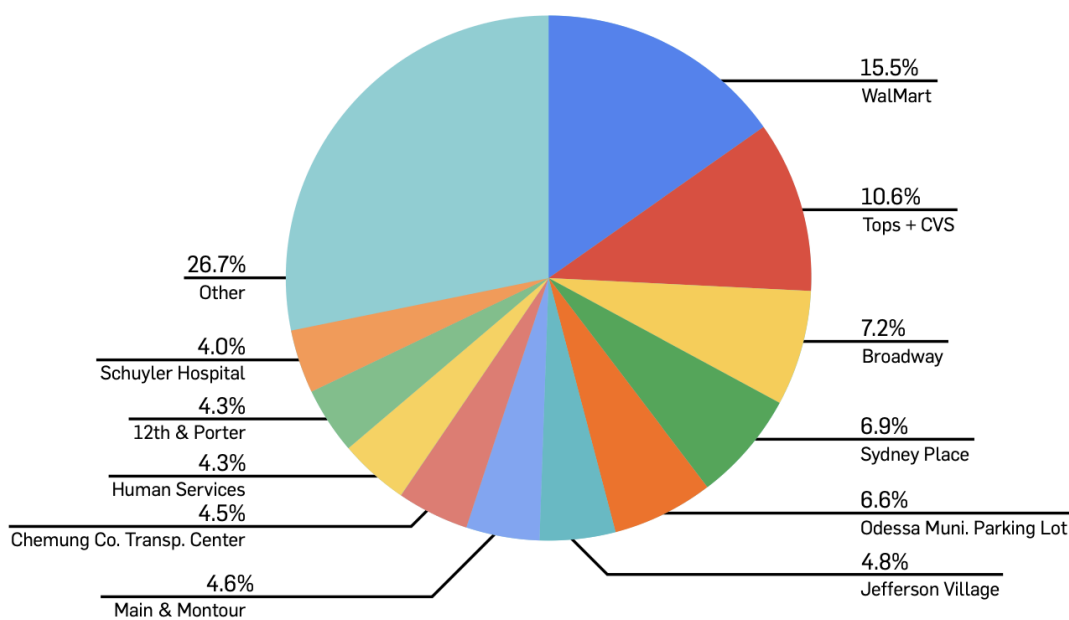
## Existing Conditions

Although the demographic analysis presents an unfavorable picture for transportation, an overview of the existing transportation service reveals a surprisingly resilient system and several promising opportunities.

Schuyler County Transit has four fixed-route bus services, one semi-fixed flexible service, and a dial-a-ride service. Its highest frequency route, the Village Connections (route 1), serves the county's three central villages with one hour headways. The other fixed routes branch out from the villages, connecting with destinations in neighboring counties, specifically the cities of Corning, Elmira, and Ithaca. Finally, the dial-a-ride service allows residents to schedule individualized bus trips beyond the typical fixed routes.

## Transit Ridership

Analyzing ridership data at individual bus stops can form the basis of a transportation barriers assessment. Ridership data reveals the destinations that community members value the most. Ensuring that all residents have access to these key needs will be a major objective of any solutions. Community engagement will build on this analysis by identifying gaps that the ridership data fails to detect.



Ridership by Stop - Schuyler County Transit

Schuyler County Transit ridership is heavily concentrated at a few key stops. Six of the 44 stops account for more than half of all ridership. The highest ridership bus stops are Walmart (15.5%) and Tops plaza (10.6%), home to the Tops grocery store and CVS pharmacy. After that are several stops that serve key residential areas, including apartment buildings that are subsidized for low-income or senior residents. In addition, many riders travel to medical and human services locations including Schuyler Hospital (4.3%), the medical offices on Porter St (4.3%), and the Human Service Complex (4.5%), which houses the Office of the Aging among other important services.

Taken together these ridership numbers present a clear picture of the system's existing role. It primarily connects low-income residents and seniors with groceries, medical appointments, and human services. When considering how best to serve transportation needs in the county, efforts must be made to improve Transit's ability to deliver on its core function: namely providing basic needs to the county's most vulnerable residents.

The ridership data also indicates potential uses of the bus that are not yet fully realized by large numbers of riders. A very small percentage of bus rides originate from areas outside the core villages, meaning very few of these rural residents are taking the bus. Moreover, only a small portion of ridership is generated by stops outside the county, indicating that very few people are using the bus to travel to and from neighboring cities. Limited ridership in these areas can be interpreted multiple ways. It can certainly indicate that intercity and rural transit are less important than groceries and medical visits. After all, most rural residents already own cars and may not need transit. However, it can also indicate that current bus service does not adequately serve these potential needs. It is not difficult to imagine large numbers of potential rural riders who would use transit if it were more convenient, cheaper, more flexible, etc. Community engagement will be necessary to determine which of these potential barriers exist and how they can be alleviated.

## Call Log Analysis

As part of an existing conditions analysis, the Arc also sought to analyze its call logs to fill some of the gaps in information presented by the ridership data. Analyzing calls made to Schuyler County Transit provides many useful insights, especially pertaining to requests for route deviations and dial-a-ride service, both of which are not included in the ridership data. In cases where calls reveal that Schuyler County Transit can not meet a person's needs, the call provides a data point of a potential transportation barrier. Moreover, dial-a-ride and route deviation requests are of particular interest since they represent needs that existing routes fail to meet.

In analyzing these phone calls several key themes emerged.

- 1) No Dial-a-Ride service on Monday
- 2) No evening or weekend service
- 3) Medical appointments fall outside the scope of transit's operating schedule
- 4) No drivers available for Dial a Ride at the requested time
- 5) Requested fixed route diversion is too far off the route (>1 mile)

These five themes indicate real unmet needs under the current system. They show demand for an expansion of dial-a-ride, specifically to include more days of the week and more hours of the day. Many callers hoped to use dial-a-ride to access medical appointments only to discover that their return trip falls outside the 10 AM to 1 PM window. In addition, since Schuyler County Transit can only make one bus available for dial-a-ride at any given time, potential passengers are often turned away simply because another ride has already been requested. Finally, the frequency of calls requesting a route deviation beyond the permitted three-fourths of a mile, provides yet further evidence that more dial-a-ride is necessary to provide transportation to the areas not covered by fixed bus routes or their deviations.

Overall, our existing conditions analysis reveals a transportation system designed to serve the basic needs of aging and disabled populations in Schuyler County. However, the system is limited by restricted operation hours and difficulties serving rural parts of the county.



## Literature and Precedent Studies

Along with quantitative and existing conditions analysis, the Arc's background research also included an exploration of best practices in rural transit. Studying the existing literature, along with precedent cases from across North America, the Arc hoped to gain inspiration for its own plans to address transportation barriers.

The Arc did not treat any case study as a blueprint but rather as a point of comparison, seeking not to copy another agency's example but rather to learn from them. The Arc sought to understand how specific resource constraints, geographic realities, and community circumstances informed the solutions developed by different transit providers, gauging the extent to which these case studies were applicable to Schuyler County.

### General Literature on Rural Transit

Rural areas face major structural challenges when trying to create effective transportation systems. While urban mass transit systems take advantage of density and economies of scale to efficiently transport large numbers of people, the long distance and spread out populations that characterize rural areas make successful transit incredibly difficult to implement.

While the blueprint for successful urban transit is well known — high frequency service along clearly-defined routes — this traditional view of transit often fails in rural areas for a number of reasons. First, key destinations such as medical facilities and grocery stores are spread out and do not cohere around clear linear paths. Second, rural communities face resource constraints including driver, funding, and vehicle shortages that make high frequency service almost impossible. Finally, and most fundamentally, rural counties do not have the ridership base to sustain efficient transit systems. Instead of a continuous flow of riders, transit needs emerge sporadically from different places across vast expanses of land. The ultimate challenge of rural transit is to effectively serve those who need transportation the most with a limited number of drivers and vehicles.

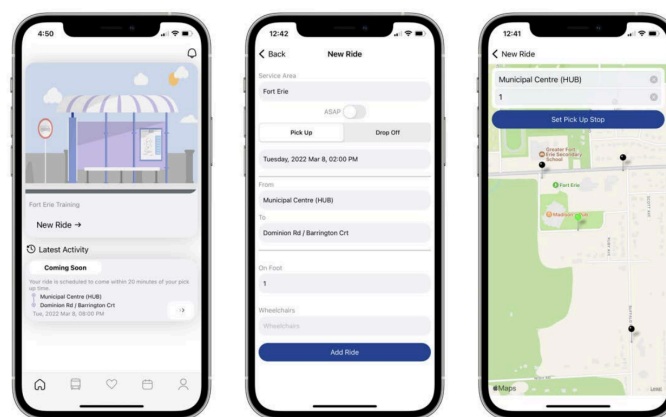
## Microtransit / Demand Response

In order to solve this issue, many localities and regions have attempted to implement demand responsive service. Instead of running buses along a fixed route, demand response vehicles vary their routes, responding to the specific requests of individual passengers. The goal is to create the flexibility necessary to effectively serve low density areas.

Some rural transit systems have turned to a demand-response model of transit, also known as microtransit. The town of Fort Erie, Ontario serves as a representative example of this kind of rural transit reform:

### Fort Erie Demand Response Case Study

Fort Erie, Ontario is located just miles from New York state in the Niagara region of Ontario Canada. Facing similar challenges to Schuyler County Transit, the town replaced its fixed route bus system with a van-based demand response service. While regulatory and other differences make replicating the changes challenging, Fort Erie still serves as an example of one potential set of solutions to the challenges facing rural transit.



Fort Erie Transit App

Fort Erie replaced its four standard buses with a fleet of six minivans, two of which were wheelchair accessible. Instead of operating fixed routes, they created a demand-response system where riders can book individual trips through an app or on a website, similar to Uber and Lyft. For rural passengers, rides are curb-to-curb whereas in more urban areas, riders are asked to wait at designated “stops.”

Ultimately, the changes succeeded. Smaller vehicles reduced operating costs (specifically fuel costs). Curb-to-curb service provided greater access to rural populations, who previously lived too far from fixed bus stops. The implementation of an app for booking and dispatching succeeded in reducing wait times, with riders waiting an average of just under 11 minutes, compared to the full hour between buses under the old system. However, wait times were slightly longer (14 minutes) for passengers with disabilities, due to the limited number of accessible vehicles.

#### Strategies:

- 1) Right-sizing vehicles
- 2) Demand Response
- 3) Integration of smartphone app technology

#### Outcomes:

- 1) Higher ridership
- 2) Shorter wait times
- 3) Lower costs

The model of Fort Erie is enticing but may not be fully applicable to Schuyler County. It's true that right-sizing is warranted in Schuyler County. The county's highest ridership service, the Village Connections, will see an average of 51.12 passengers per day, spread across nine round-trips. This amounts to approximately 2.84 passengers per bus trip, far fewer than would justify 15 seat vehicles. However, unlike in Canada, regulations surrounding federal 5311 transit funding require vehicles that seat 15 passengers. While the county has applied for a waiver to this rule, it has not yet been able to obtain permission to operate smaller vehicles.

Moreover, while Fort Erie is a rural area, its density of 514 residents per square mile is still higher than that of Schuyler County (55 per square mile). As a result, the low wait times achieved by demand response in Fort Erie may be more difficult to achieve. In addition, Schuyler County's population centers and key points of interest are located in closer proximity to each other. Unlike in Fort Erie, the three core villages are well-located to sustain fixed route service. As a result, completely abandoning the advantages of fixed route service is ill-advised.

The Arc studied several other rural transit systems with similar changes to the Fort Erie example. While these changes were interesting, the Arc decided that community engagement feedback would ultimately decide which path they chose to pursue.

## Community Engagement

The Arc conducted extensive community engagement to better understand transportation barriers in the county and identify the best solutions. We discovered that residents have positive opinions about Schuyler County Transit overall, and would like to see greater hours of operation and more efficient service to key destinations.

### Key Findings - Barriers

Contrary to the findings of much of the existing literature, we found that many residents of Schuyler County are fond of the fixed route service and would like to see it expanded, rather than replaced. However, several major challenges emerged from the engagement work. The list below summarizes the key barriers we discovered:

- 1) **Coverage:** Buses do not reach the homes of the most residents, especially outside of the main villages.

- 2) **Hours of Operation:** There is no service on **evenings or weekends**, limiting flexibility.
- 3) **Inter-County Connections:** Access to neighboring cities/counties are too limited.
- 4) **Frequency:** Buses do not run very often, making transit an unreliable alternative to driving.
- 5) **Long and Circuitous Routes:** The Village Connections takes an hour to travel from Odessa to Walmart. The route's design currently focuses on covering the most ground rather than serving important destinations more efficiently.
- 6) **Marketing:** Community members often showed a **lack of knowledge** about the system. A greater focus on increasing awareness of Transit is warranted.
- 7) **Accessibility:** Buses are difficult to board and do not provide any "last mile" support to riders who may need assistance getting to and from bus stops.

## Methodology

The Arc employed a multifaceted community engagement approach, utilizing surveys, community meetings, and focus groups. This variety of methods ensured the Arc could gather a complete picture of transportation barriers, especially those facing specific groups like the aging, disabled, and those living in more rural parts of the county.

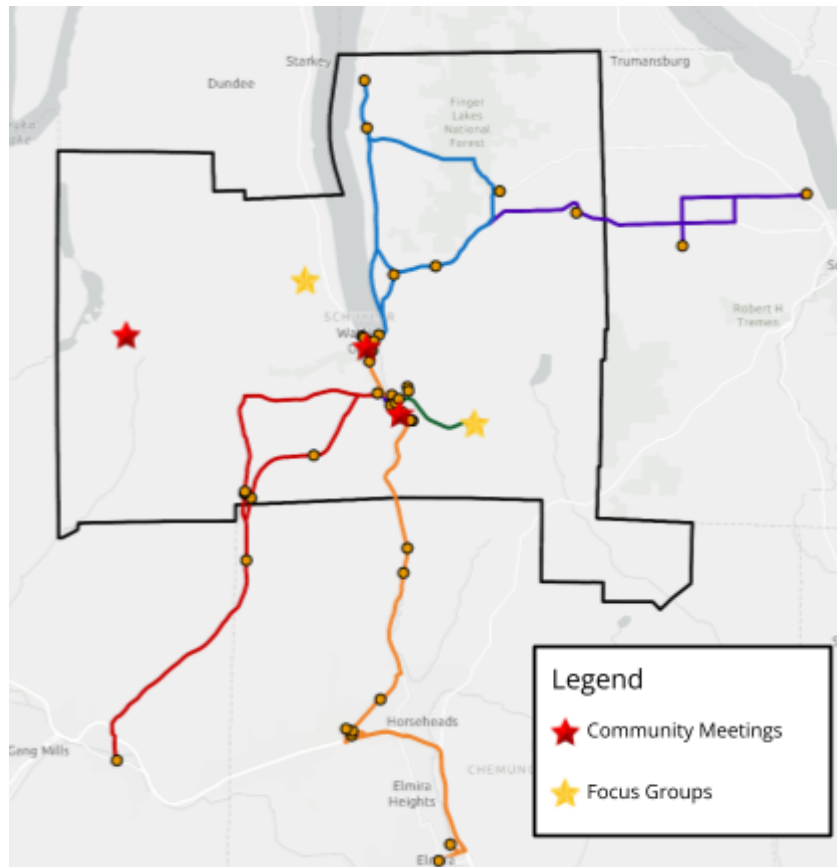
The primary purpose of the survey was to gather data from a large and diverse population. The team received 201 responses from people of all ages living in all parts of the county. Surveys were distributed at key locations in the community and were conducted over the phone, with Arc staff calling individuals from their extensive database of previous riders.

In addition to surveys, the Arc hosted community meetings and focus groups to hear longer-form stories from residents. By listening to individual community members, the Arc was able to begin building more personalized narratives surrounding transportation. In meetings, the Arc emphasized discussion, with the hope that community members and key stakeholders would prompt deeper



thinking from each other. These stakeholders included representatives from the Office of the Aging, Veterans Services, and the Chamber of Commerce, who brought their unique expertise and perspectives.

The Arc strategically located its meetings to engage different groups of residents. We sought to hear from transit's core users as well as residents who don't use transit at all. Several meetings were held in location's with the greatest reliance on transit including the County Human Services Complex and the Middle School Apartments on Decatur Street, home to many low income seniors. At these meetings, we sought to gain the input of those who rely on transit the most, especially pertaining to questions of accessibility and age-friendliness.



Locations of the community meetings and focus groups

In addition, we sought to discover barriers facing underserved residents. It's relatively easy for Schuyler County Transit to interface with regular users, but one of the big focuses of the community engagement project was to understand why the vast majority of residents, including those who could benefit from transit, don't use the service. To achieve this goal, the Arc sought to host community meetings not only in places with known transportation users, but also areas that have very little familiarity with Schuyler County Transit. One example of this were the meetings held in Tyrone and Reading. Because the western side of the county is the largest transit desert, the Arc specifically hoped to locate meetings there to hear from these residents and explore the possibility of expanding transit to them.

## Community Meetings

During the community engagement period, the Arc hosted three community meetings in Watkins Glen, Tyrone, and Odessa. In addition, the Arc hosted three focus groups in Montour Falls and Reading Center. During these meetings several key barriers were identified and discussed.

- The existing bus routes are often very long and take more time than driving. This causes longer journey times for people who use the buses and discourages people from using the system. In addition, the current routes are not very frequent, as most routes have buses that run once every one or two hours.
- The current demand area response (DAR) services only operate from Tuesday through Friday from 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM. Many people expressed that the system does not serve them when trying to take trips during later hours or during longer trips such as medical appointments. People also expressed a desire to travel using DAR services on the days that the service does not operate.
- Many people use the bus system and DAR services to access medical appointments. However, current transportation is hard to take to medical appointments due to the unknown length of the appointment. This makes

scheduling transportation to appointments hard due to the unknown time commitment.

- The current high-floor buses that Schuyler County Transit operates are harder to use for people with accessibility needs than a low-floor vehicle. One person expressed concern with using the wheelchair ramp on the bus, as they did not believe that it was completely safe. A low-floor vehicle is also more fast and equitable, as everyone boards through the same door instead of wheelchair users boarding in the back using the slower lift.
- The existing fare acts as a barrier to lower income riders, especially in rural areas of the county. Route deviations, DAR services, and the Rural Flex Connection route all cost more than the fixed route services. One person expressed that they struggled to afford the round-trip cost of the bus.
- While there are other public transportation services in the county that are not operated by the Arc, many of these are unreliable. Several of these services can only be used by certain groups of people like seniors, such as GoGoGrandparent.
- People expressed interest in connecting with other transit agencies in different counties. However, the current buses are not scheduled to meet with other buses at transfer points. The Tompkins Connections route also does not end at the main TCAT (Tompkins County's bus network) hub, causing some passengers to have to make multiple transfers to reach their destination.
- Many people are unaware of public transportation in Schuyler County and do not even know that there is a bus system. In addition, many people in the meetings expressed unfamiliarity with the system. Several people did not know about intercounty routes, and people often did not know what times the buses ran.
- The elimination of volunteer programs has made it more difficult to learn how to use the bus system. Several people wanted the previous Bus Buddies program to return in order to assist passengers with using the bus. One person suggested recruiting high school volunteers under a new program
- Schuyler County has an increasing number of senior citizens. However, many seniors are continuing to drive or are relying on family and friends to take

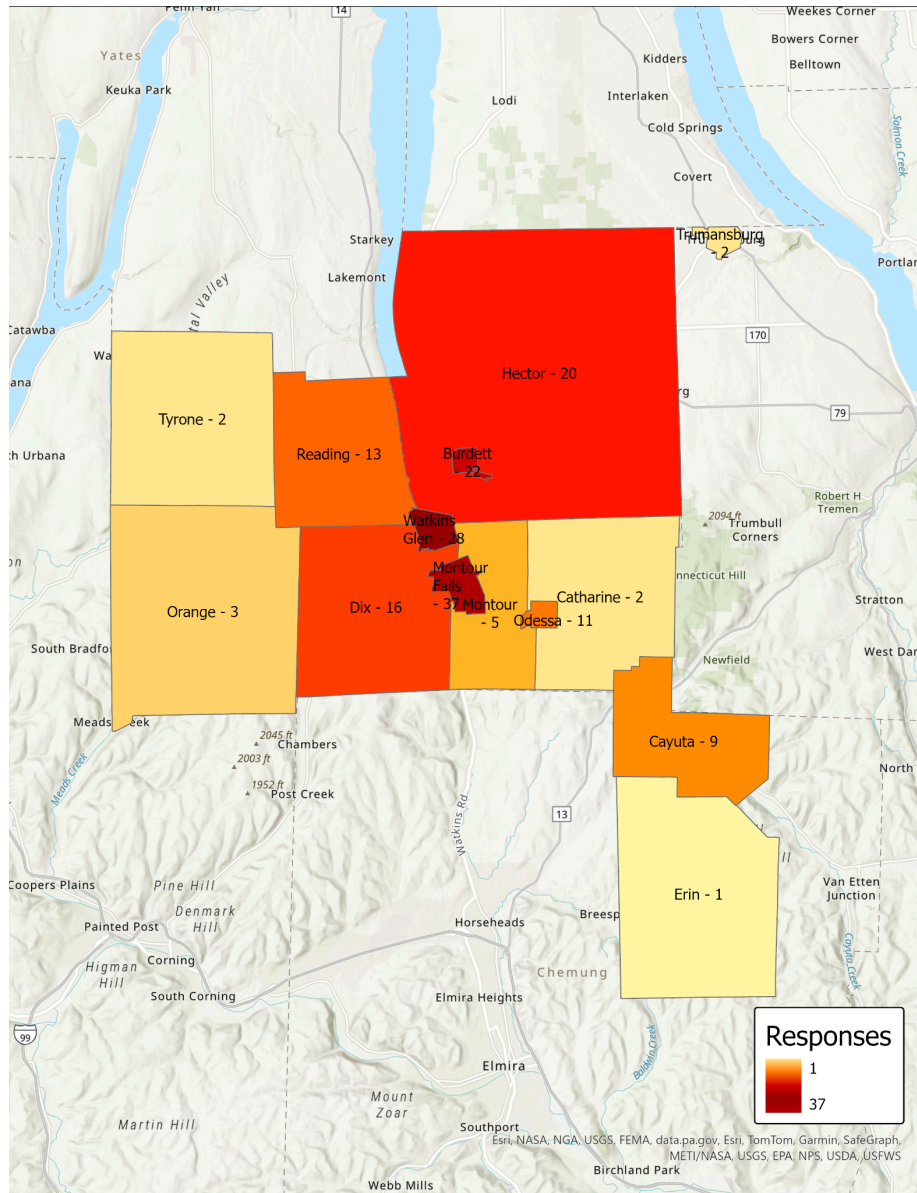
them on errands. This creates a burden on themselves and others as they either have to rely on others or continue to drive past the age where they should stop.

All of these comments contributed to the potential solutions that we proposed in the action plan.

## Survey

The survey was completed by 201 respondents, giving us a broad view into the concerns and needs of the county's population. The survey's questions were designed to prompt respondents to share their transportation barriers and tell us the changes that would help them the most. In addition, the survey collected demographic information including age, disability status, employment, and home location. This information allowed us to further analyze the needs of specific groups including rural populations, seniors, and people with disabilities. We chose to primarily analyze where people travelled to, how the bus system can help people reach these places, and how people felt about the current system.

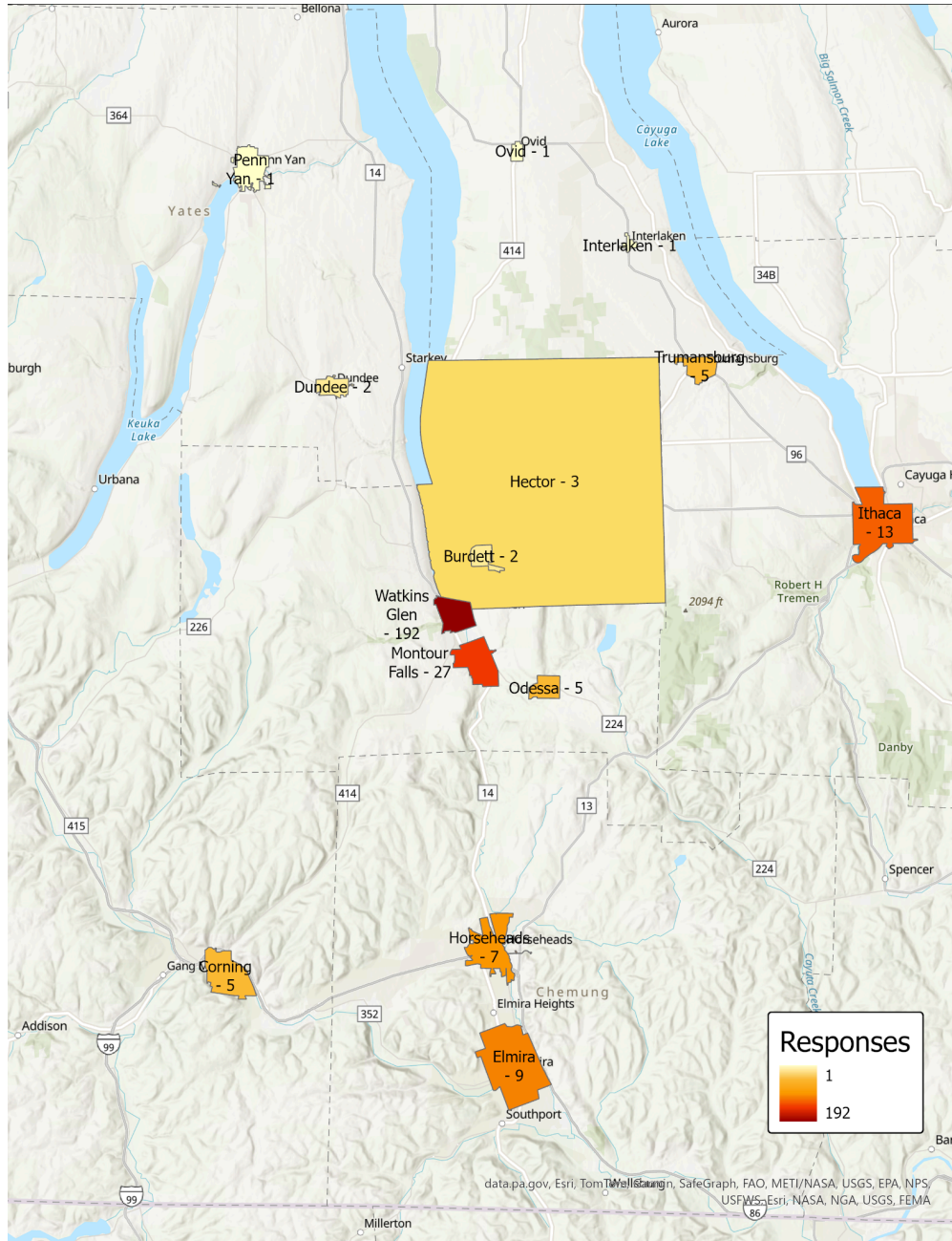
We first decided to analyze residents' travel patterns by comparing where they lived and where they wanted to travel to. We did this by creating four maps using the data gathered from the "What town or village do you live in?" and the "What are the top 3 places you go to most frequently?" questions. Each map is shown on the next four pages of the report.



Survey Responses: “What town or village do you live in?”

The first map shows the town or village that each respondent lives in. Around half of respondents live in the four villages of Schuyler County. The village of Montour Falls had the highest number of responses with 37. The other half of respondents live in either the rural areas of the county or in adjacent counties. Overall, the responses were spread out across the county with no town or village having more than 20 percent of all responses. The map demonstrates the geographic diversity represented in the survey.





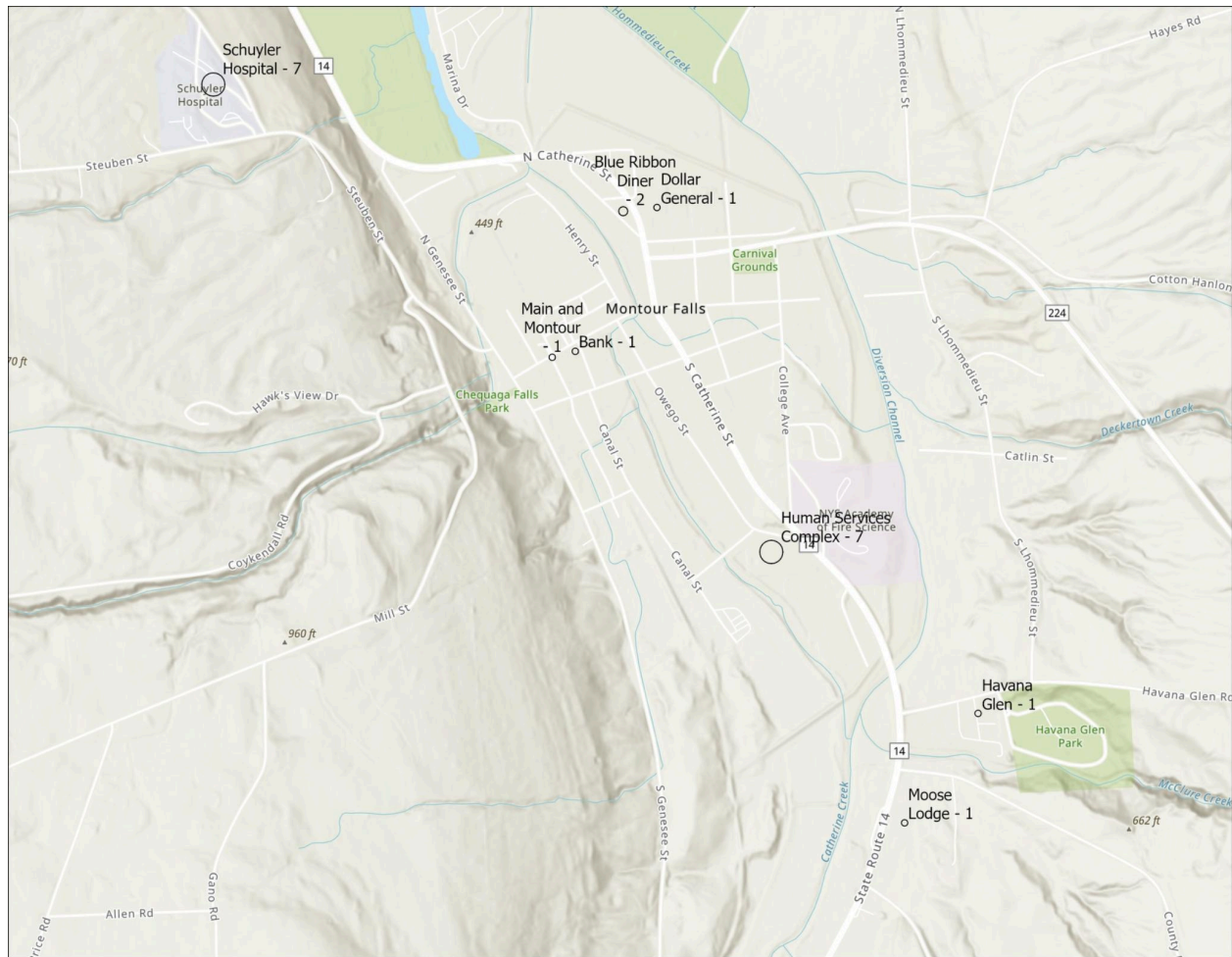
Survey Responses: "What are the top 3 places you go to most frequently?"

The second map shows the places that respondents go to most frequently, organized by municipality. The vast majority of locations that people responded with were in Watkins Glen, accounting for 70 percent of the results. Any solutions should prioritize removing barriers to accessing Watkins Glen.



Survey Responses: "What are the top 3 places you go to most frequently?"  
Watkins Glen Inset

The third map shows the locations that people travel to within Watkins Glen, the most popular municipality. The majority of people indicated Walmart or Tops, the two major grocery stores, as one of their top three destinations. Out of 273 total responses, 143 were for Walmart or Tops. Our engagement work reveals that ensuring access to grocery shopping must be the primary goal of transportation-related solutions.



Survey Responses: "What are the top 3 places you go to most frequently?"  
Montour Falls Inset

Finally, the fourth map shows the locations that people travel to within Montour Falls. There is substantially lower demand for destinations in Montour Falls, despite the village having a slightly higher population. People seemed to want to visit the services more in Montour Falls, such as the Human Services Complex and Schuyler Hospital, rather than the shops and restaurants.

Additionally, we analyzed people's opinions about how to improve the current system by using data gathered from the "How can Schuyler County Transit help you get to your most frequent destination?" question. In total, we received 39 relevant responses to the question. Two respondents reported that the system

already does a good job at serving their needs. We sorted the remaining responses into 7 different categories: coverage, frequency, scheduling, hours of operation, costs, marketing, and other miscellaneous ideas.

The first and largest category is coverage, which received 19 responses. The majority of these responses are from people who live in rural areas of the county that the fixed routes do not currently operate to. Other responses were about the lack of service to other counties such as Yates County. Two respondents discussed a lack of frequency, specifically on the intercounty routes. Two responses were related to scheduling, specifically on the Tompkins Connections route. One was about how the Tompkins Connections and Rural Connections bus times should be spread apart more to provide a more even frequency, and the other discussed the difficulty in connecting with TCAT under the current schedule. Six respondents discussed improving the hours of operation of the system. Of these, half wanted more hours on the weekdays and half wanted a weekend service. One respondent expressed concern about cost as their medical insurance would not cover the cost of transport to and from appointments. Two respondents suggested distributing physical brochures of routes as part of marketing. Four responses detailed adding things that already exist such as bus passes and intercounty routes, which suggests a lack of marketing. Finally, four responses did not fall under any category and detailed ideas such as putting up bus signs and the bus stopping at every stop regardless of if the driver sees a passenger or not. We have incorporated these needs into the potential solutions that we propose in the action plan.



## Solutions

The Arc's community engagement brought residents together to develop solutions to the most pressing transportation barriers. The following section outlines the Arc's proposed solutions, developed with guidance from our community engagement. The Arc would hope to secure implementation funding from the NADTC. However, the team also identified several grants that can serve as independent sources of funding.

### Pilot Program - Weekend Shopper Express

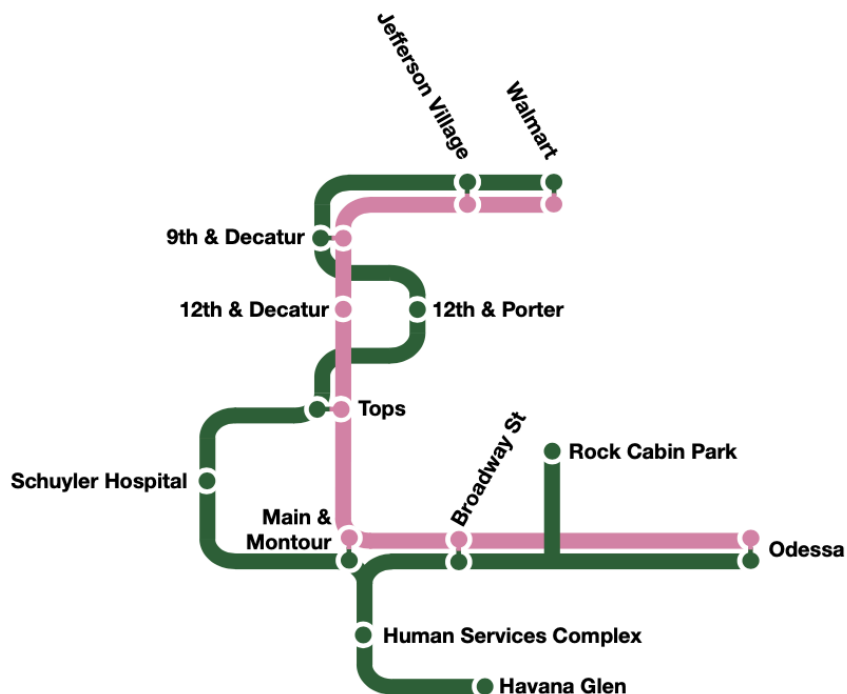
The Arc decided to choose one solution to elevate as its first priority. This solution must address multiple barriers in a way that would be easy to pilot and implement. Informed by its community engagement process, the Arc decided a weekend shopper express would be the preferred solution. The route would be a shortened version of the Village Connections, focused on weekend grocery shopping.

A weekend shopper express would deliver on two of the community's most pressing barriers, the length / circuitry of bus trips and the lack of weekend service. When asked for the top 3 places they travel, survey respondents overwhelmingly listed Walmart and the Tops grocery store. Unfortunately, riders also detailed several transportation-related barriers to accessing grocery shopping. First, bus trips to Walmart are long, owing to the circuitous nature of the Village Connections bus route. The trip to Walmart from Odessa takes an hour by bus but only twelve minutes by car. Removing this time barrier requires shortening the route and creating an "express" service to Walmart and Tops. Of course, this service must only be run at select times to avoid eliminating critical service to other destinations like Schuyler Hospital.

Running this shopper express on weekends would allow the Arc to deliver shorter grocery trips without compromising regular service to other locations.



Moreover, the lack of weekend service was consistently identified as a barrier in its own right. By piloting a shopper shuttle on weekends, the Arc could address both barriers with one action.



Proposed Shopping Express (pink) vs. Village Connections (green)

The aim of the route's design will be to shorten trips to Walmart and Tops. This will be achieved by skipping the lowest ridership stops, as well as those which require the longest deviations. These include Schuyler Hospital, the Human Services Complex, Havana Glen, and Rock Cabin Park which each add several minutes to the trip time. Instead, the bus will focus on serving the county's senior housing apartments including Jefferson Village, the Middle School Apartments, The Falls Home, and Sydney Place Apartments. Linking these locations to Walmart and Tops will create a streamlined linear path, removing barriers to the county's most vulnerable. With these changes, trip times from Sydney Place in Odessa to Walmart would fall from one hour to 35 minutes.

The bus would begin the express route in Odessa at the Sydney Place Apartments. It would run directly into Montour Falls, without the long detour out to

Rock Cabin Park. It would stop outside the Broadway Flats Apartments on Broadway. The route would skip the long southward detour to Havana Glen Park and the Human Services Complex. Instead, it would cut directly across Montour Falls and stop on Main Street, near the Falls Home assisted living facility. Next, the bus would drive straight to Watkins Glen, avoiding the uphill climb to Schuyler Hospital. It would then reach its first major destination, the Tops and CVS strip mall. After that, the route would continue directly up Decatur Street, stopping at the Middle School Apartments and the Jefferson Village subsidized housing complex. Instead of serving the current 12th and Porter stop which requires the bus to turn off Decatur Street, the bus would serve a new stop at 12th and Decatur Streets which would better serve residential areas, local businesses, and recreation attractions as well as streamlining the route. Finally, buses would no longer stop at Seneca Harbor Park, one of the system's lowest ridership stops, and instead proceed directly to Walmart. Collectively these changes would cut 25 minutes from the run time and allow people to reach their overwhelming preferred destination of Walmart in a reasonable timeframe.

#### Proposed Southbound Schedule:

Walmart Depart	Jefferson Village	9th & Decatur	12th & Decatur (Depot)	Tops	Main & Montour	Broadway	Odessa Arrive
-	-	-	8:15	-	-	-	8:30
9:15	9:19	9:22	9:25	9:29	9:36	9:41	9:50
10:45	10:49	10:52	10:55	10:59	11:06	11:11	11:20
12:05	-	-	12:10	-	-	-	-
13:15	13:19	13:22	13:25	13:29	13:36	13:41	13:50
14:45	14:49	14:52	14:55	14:59	15:06	15:11	15:20
16:15	16:19	16:22	16:25	16:29	16:36	16:41	16:50

#### Proposed Northbound Schedule:

Odessa Depart	Broadway	Main & Montour	Tops	12th & Decatur (Depot)	9th & Decatur	Jefferson Village	Walmart Arrive
8:30	8:38	8:43	8:50	8:53	8:56	9:00	9:05
10:00	10:08	10:13	10:20	10:23	10:26	10:30	10:35
11:30	11:38	11:43	11:50	11:53	11:56	12:00	12:05
-	-	-	-	13:10	-	-	13:15
14:00	14:08	14:13	14:20	14:23	14:26	14:30	14:35
15:30	15:38	15:43	15:50	15:53	15:56	16:00	16:05
16:50	-	-	-	17:05	-	-	-

Weekend buses would run every 90 minutes from Odessa, taking 35 minutes to reach Walmart and then laying over for 10 minutes before returning to Odessa and making another brief layover. Beginning at 8:30 in the morning, the bus would make five round trips to Walmart, interrupted by a one hour lunch break for the driver. Riders who want to use the new service to or from one of the Village Connections stops the bus does not serve would be able to request a deviation by calling ahead the previous day, similar to how route deviations currently operate on fixed route buses. To account for this, flex time has been built into the schedule that would allow for deviations in the route so that individual riders could request more personalized service. This will maintain the flexibility of Schuyler County Transit without taking needless detours on every run.

This new service would be branded as Route 8: Shopping Express on buses, maps, and schedules. The bus would be branded with the color pink on the system map, as it contrasts with the colors used for branding on other routes. This would make the bus stand out more from Village Connections and highlight its different service pattern.

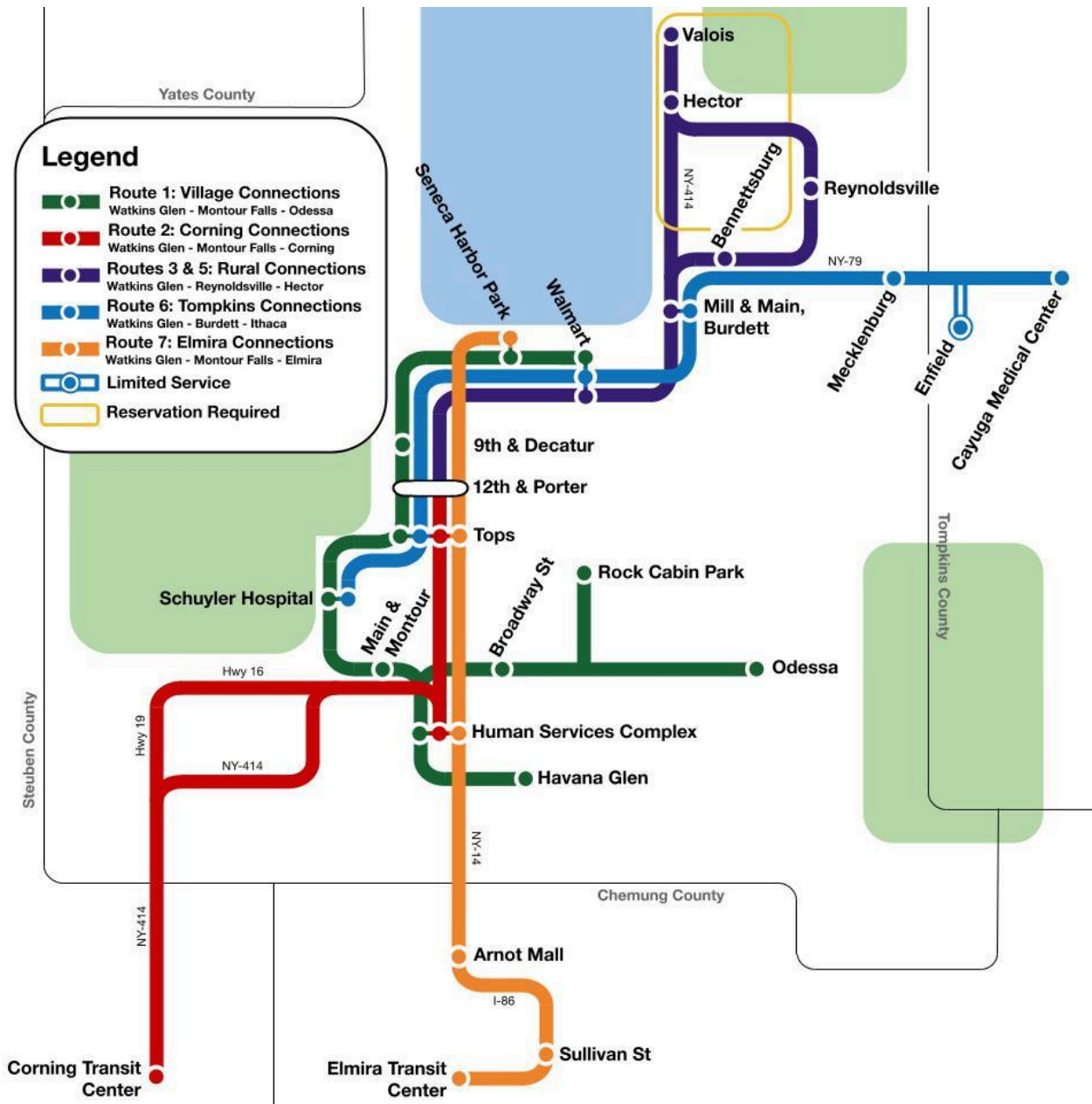
## Other Solutions

In addition to the primary pilot program, the Arc explored a variety of other proposals to combat the multifaceted nature of transportation barriers in the county. These include efforts to increase awareness of the system, create better connectivity across the county, and secure creative sources of funding.

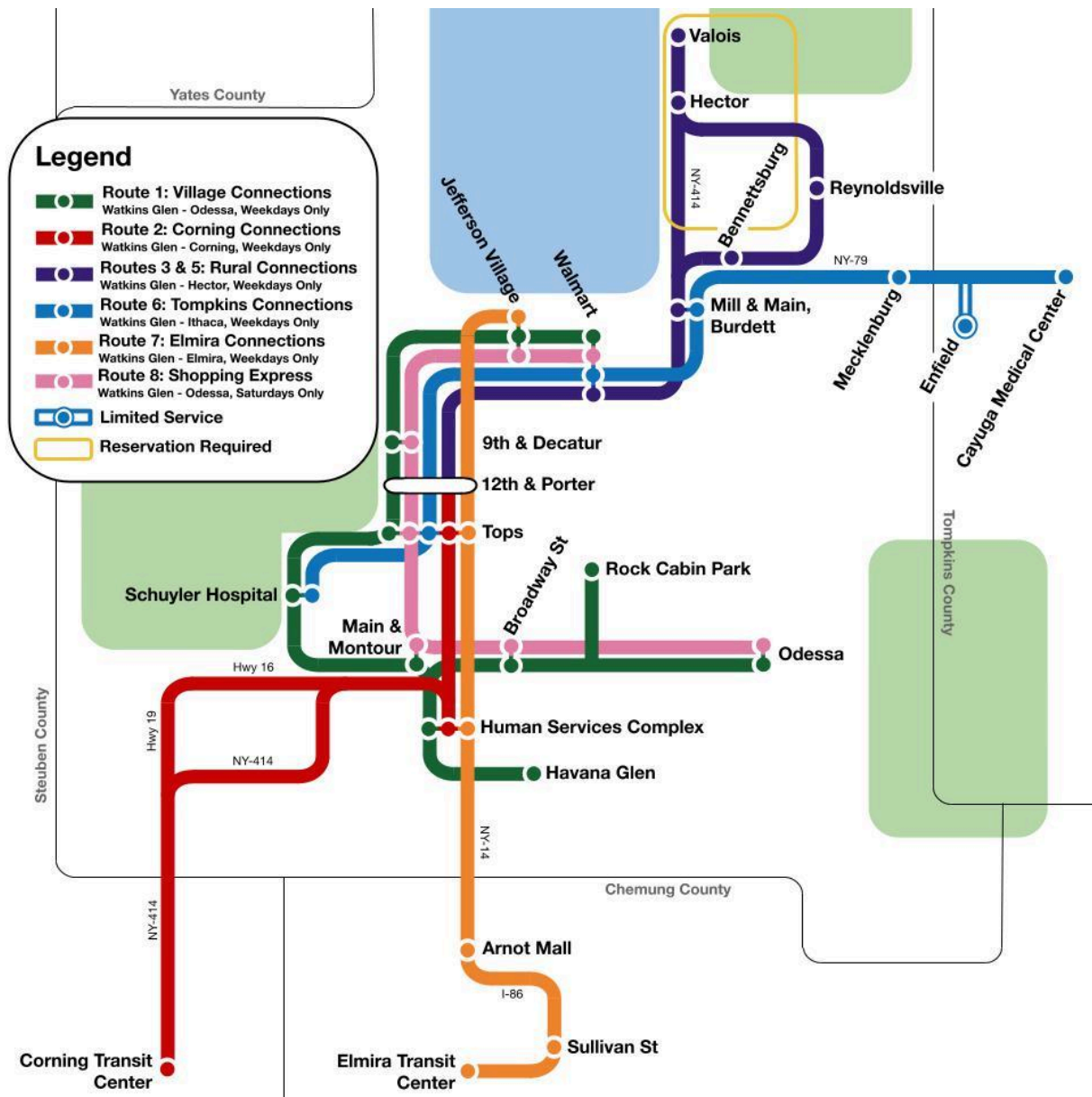
## Maps and Schedules

A major barrier to transit use is unfamiliarity with the system. The current bus maps and schedules can be difficult to understand and interpret, making it difficult for new users to become acquainted with the system, especially those with little to no transit experience.

The current map provides very specific detail about the exact path of every single route, including each turn and cross-street. However, the specificity makes it unapproachable. The Arc is considering deploying a simpler, diagrammatic map to supplement its existing maps.



New Diagrammatic Map with Existing Services

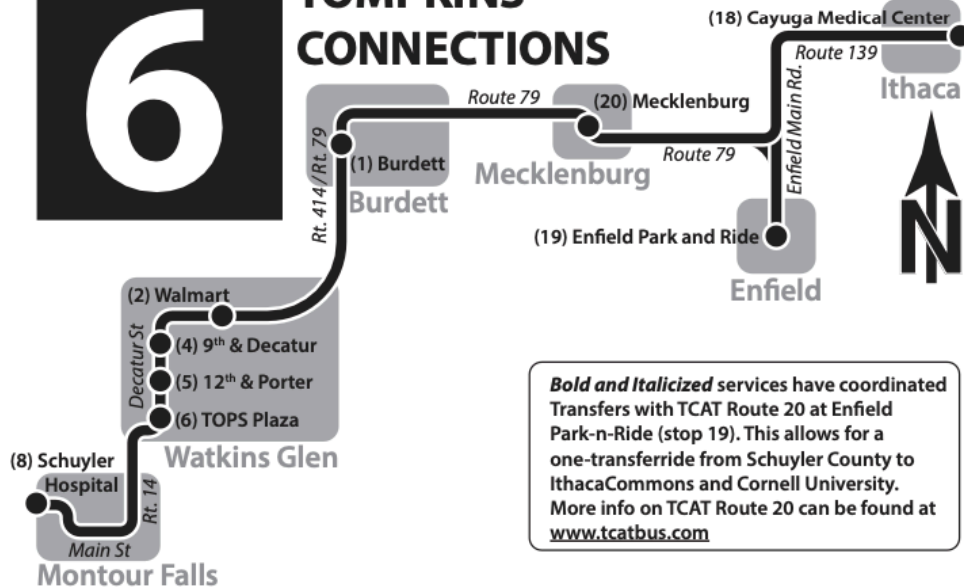


New Diagrammatic Map with Shopping Express

The Arc is also considering redesigning the schedules to make them more legible. The new designs are guided by a few simple strategies, including increasing the font size, making the important elements larger, and using consistent geometries.



## TOMPKINS CONNECTIONS



(5) 12th and Porter	(8) Schuyler Hospital	(2) Walmart	(1) Burdett	(20) Mecklenburg Park-and-Ride	(19) Enfield Park-and-Ride	(5) Cayuga Medical Center
5:55 AM	6:04 AM	6:19 AM	6:27 AM	6:37 AM	<b>6:47 AM</b>	6:58 AM
8:00 AM	8:10 AM	8:25 AM	8:33 AM	8:43 AM	-----	8:58 AM
11:30 AM	11:39 AM	11:54 AM	12:02 PM	12:12 PM	12:22 PM	12:37 PM
2:00 PM	2:10 PM	2:25 PM	2:32 PM	2:42 PM	-----	3:00 PM
3:52 PM	4:02 PM	4:25 PM	4:32 PM	4:43 PM	<b>4:53 PM</b>	5:08 PM

### EASTBOUND SERVICE

*Towards Cayuga Medical Center, Ithaca*

*Towards Schuyler Hospital*

### WESTBOUND SERVICE

8:20 AM	8:10 AM	7:55 AM	7:47 AM	7:37 AM	<b>7:27 AM</b>	7:10 AM
10:08 AM	9:58 AM	9:43 AM	9:35 AM	9:25 AM	-----	9:10 AM
1:45 PM	1:35 PM	1:20 PM	1:12 PM	1:02 PM	-----	12:47 PM
4:20 PM	4:02 PM	3:47 PM	3:40 PM	3:30 PM	-----	3:15 PM
6:06 PM	5:35 PM	6:01 PM	5:55 PM	5:45 PM	<b>5:35 PM</b>	5:20 PM

### Fundraising / Marketing Event

One of the primary issues that consistently emerged throughout the community meetings was that very few residents knew about Schuyler County

Transit, especially the Dial-a-Ride service. Many seniors, especially those living outside the main villages assumed transit wasn't for them and were surprised to learn that the ARC could provide individualized trips to any part of the county. In many cases, Schuyler County Transit already has the ability to break down transportation barriers. Residents just have to learn to utilize the service. Lack of awareness has become a barrier in itself.

A key strategy for increasing awareness is hosting events that spread Schuyler County transit's name to the county at large. These events can bring potential riders into contact with Transit while also serving as a supplemental revenue stream. All Points Transit in Montrose Colorado hosts an annual Oktoberfest event which brings in \$40,000 a year, almost as much as the \$56,000 it receives in Section 5311 funding. Schuyler County is ripe with opportunities for such events, which can be done in conjunction with local dairy, wine, and tourism industries, as well as other community partners such as Cornell University Cooperative Extension.

### Improved Transfers

In our community engagement, many riders expressed their desire for easier access to nearby cities like Elmira, Corning, and Ithaca, especially their medical facilities. The current bus routes are not scheduled to promote seamless transfers, adding unnecessary time and uncertainty to potential trips. The Arc has begun developing schedules that attempt to align the three inter-county routes with the Village Connections to create these connections.

### Tyrone Connections

The western part of the county currently sees no fixed route bus service. Community members in places like Reading and Tyrone expressed interest in bus service linking them with the rest of the county. This bus route would not only address the county's largest population desert, but serve the lower income and more rural half of the county.

## Expanded Dial-A-Ride

Schuyler County Transit's Dial-a-Ride service provides critical access to the most rural parts of the county. However, our community engagement revealed that its utilization is severely limited by inflexible hours of operation. Expanding Dial-a-Ride to five days a week and eight hours a day will make transit a viable option for the county's rural residents.

## Accessible Buses

Many of Schuyler County's aging residents have difficulty climbing the steps when boarding the bus. While it's true that wheelchairs can be boarded using the lift in the back of the bus, most riders prefer to board through the front door. Low-floor buses would make transit more accessible to aging residents. When making future vehicle purchases, the Arc will be sure to purchase more accessible low-floor vehicles.

## Zero-Emission Buses

Per New York state, all transit agencies are required to have zero-emission fleets by 2040, including Schuyler County Transit. In order to fulfill this requirement, the Arc is considering buying electric buses to use on its services. An electric minibus such as the Karsan e-Jest would be optimal as these are smaller than typical electric buses and would be better suited for the smaller ridership of the system. In addition, an electric charging station should be considered before purchasing electric buses.

## Volunteer Program

Schuyler County Transit previously had a volunteer "Bus Buddy" program, in which volunteers would assist elderly residents using public transit, helping them board the bus, find their way home, carry their groceries, etc. However, this



program had to be eliminated due to the lack of volunteers. The Arc is considering reviving the program and searching for volunteers in new places, including among high school students who are often eager for volunteer hours.

## School Bus Drivers

While the previously mentioned solutions would significantly reduce transportation barriers in Schuyler County, the Arc lacks the personnel to expand service and achieve these objectives. As a result, the operator shortage represents a barrier in its own right. Schuyler County Transit must consider creative proposals to overcome this hurdle.

School bus drivers can be an important untapped source of potential manpower. In most rural communities, the largest fleet of buses is not owned by the local transit provider but rather the local school district. Similarly the largest pool of trained bus drivers work for the school districts. These school bus drivers could be used to fill the gap in transit service during the lunch break. The driver lunch break on the Village Connections creates a long window with no bus service during a critical part of the day. Since school bus drivers typically sit idle during the middle of the school day, they could be brought on to close the gap in service.

## Grants

In addition to the operator shortage, the Arc is also limited by a lack of funding sources. The Arc has also identified several grants that could provide avenues for new funding.

- 1) AARP Community Challenge Grant: One of the organizations most committed to improving local communities is AARP, which provides grants to towns across America through its livable communities challenge. Many transit organizations and transit-related projects have been awarded the grant. All Points Transit in Montrose, Colorado installed transit shelters and benches, providing comfort for riders of all ages. Robertson County Schools in

Tennessee, created a “Reading Across Robertson” bus, connecting older adults with library books and intergenerational activities.

- 2) Zero Emission Transit Transition Program: Tapping into electric vehicle funding sources can provide a much needed second source of funding. New York state provides money for the purchase of zero emission vehicles as well as related equipment and facilities through the ZEET grant. If the Arc seeks to expand service or eventually replace its aging fleet, electric vehicle subsidies could reduce the cost significantly and make these investments possible.
- 3) Grants for Buses and Bus Facilities Program (Section 5339): This program is offered by the Federal Transportation Administration (FTA) and provides funding to replace, rehabilitate, and purchase buses, as well as constructing bus facilities. This program is offered every year until 2026. There is a formula grant and competitive grant available, as well as a grant specifically for low or no-emission transit vehicles.