Heart of Iowa Regional Transit Agency

PUBLIC AWARENESS AND ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN



Introduction

The Why

Public transit is more than a ride. It is access to healthcare, education, employment, and community. In Iowa, thousands of residents rely on transit every day to stay connected and independent, especially in rural areas where options are limited.

Heart of Iowa Regional Transit Agency (HIRTA) provides door-to-door service that helps people reach the places that support their wellbeing and quality of life.

Yet, this vital service depends on strong public awareness and support. When communities understand the value of transit, they become powerful advocates for the funding and policies that keep people moving.

This campaign will help Iowans learn who HIRTA is, why public transit matters, and how they can speak up to protect and strengthen access for their neighbors, families, and themselves.

Together, we can keep Iowa moving forward.

Public Transit at the Federal Level

Bus prices have increased by 70% since 2020

More than 430,000 people work for public transit agencies

87% of trips on public transit directly benefit the local economy

5-to-1 economic return produced by long-term investment in public transit

1.4 million jobs are created or sustained per year because of public transportation

$77 billion in transit spending flows to the private sector

Public Transit in Iowa

1 of every 16 households rely on public transit

Public transit provides over $100 million in economic benefit to the state

Iowa's 35 public transit systems provide service in all 99 counties of the state.

60% of transit rides are work-related

$1 invested by the state of Iowa equals $4 received from federal

For every $1 spent on transit provides a $3 economic return

PUBLIC TRANSIT POWERS IOWA

People depend on transit



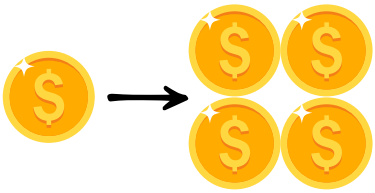
1 in 16 Iowa households rely on public transit



Transit boosts Iowa's economy

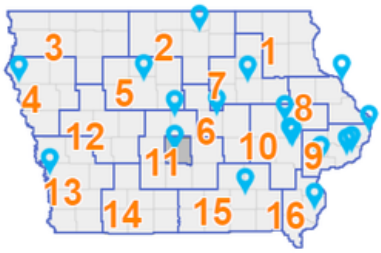
Every $1 spent on transit provides a $3 economic return

State investment leverages federal funding



$1 invested by the state of Iowa brings $4 in federal funding

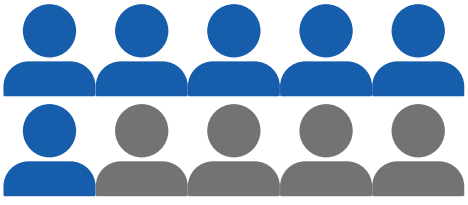
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Transit reaches every county

Iowa's 35 public transit systems serve all 99 counties

Transit gets people to work



60% of transit rides are work-related

What are the challenges?

Funding gaps are growing as cities and counties struggle to provide the match needed to sustain service. We work hard to find other funding, but stronger local support is still essential.

Local support is inconsistent with only nine of HIRTA's 87 cities providing funding. Without shared investment, service becomes harder to maintain.

Vehicles are hard to get and expensive to replace. With demand increasing, our fleet cannot keep up with what riders need.

Iowa's fleet is aging with one of the oldest transit fleets in the nation. 52% of Iowa's vehicles should have been replaced by now, putting service reliability at risk.

Costs keep rising for fuel, insurance, technology, and maintenance. Every dollar is stretched further than before.

Ridership is growing faster than the funding needed to support it, creating real challenges in maintaining reliable transportation for older adults, people with disabilities, and anyone who does not have a car.

Supporting the transit workforce is a growing challenge. Competitive wages and benefits are essential to ensure drivers and staff can continue providing reliable service.

Challenge 1: Funding Gaps

The Challenge

Many cities and counties do not provide the full funding match needed to keep transit running. Without reliable local support, HIRTA may have to reduce trips or delay services, leaving riders without access to work, school, or healthcare.

Actions

Contact your city council or county supervisors and tell them why funding HIRTA matters to your community.

Attend public budget workshops where local budgets are discussed and speak in support of transit funding.

Sign petitions or write letters advocating for consistent local investment in public transportation.

Challenge 2: Inconsistent Local Support

The Challenge

Only nine of HIRTA's 87 cities currently contribute funding. When local support is inconsistent, service becomes harder to sustain across the region, leaving some communities with reduced service.

Actions

Contact leaders in your city and neighboring cities to encourage funding for HIRTA.

Attend regional planning meetings to ask for fair distribution of local support.

Work with local media to highlight the benefits of transit funding for all communities.

Challenge 3: Vehicle Acquisition

The Challenge

Buses and vans are expensive and take time to acquire. With demand growing, HIRTA does not have enough vehicles to meet community needs, which can mean longer wait times and less reliable trips for riders.

Actions

Advocate for state and federal grants that fund vehicle replacement. Ask your representatives to prioritize transit fleet funding.

Support bond measures or local funding initiatives that provide money for new buses.

Promote public-private partnerships where local businesses contribute to fleet expansion in exchange for advertising or sponsorships.

Challenge 4: Aging Fleet

The Challenge

Iowa has one of the oldest transit fleets in the nation. Over half of the state's vehicles—52%—should already have been replaced. Older buses are more likely to break down, causing delays and reducing reliable service for riders who depend on HIRTA.

Actions

Call or email your state legislators asking them to fund fleet replacement programs.

Invite decision-makers to ride HIRTA buses so they can see firsthand the condition of older vehicles.

Organize community letters or campaigns highlighting how aging vehicles affect vulnerable riders.

Challenge 5: Rising Costs

The Challenge

Fuel, insurance, maintenance, and technology costs are all going up. Limited funding forces every dollar to work harder, putting consistent, reliable service at risk.

Actions

Encourage organizations, such as hospitals or community agencies, to include a transit component in their own grant applications and support programs that lower operational costs.

Advocate for increased state and federal operational funding by sharing how rising costs impact service in your community.

Encourage efficiency measures like supporting flexible funding or shared mobility programs.

Challenge 6:
Funding Falling Behind Ridership

The Challenge

Ridership continues to grow because people rely on us, yet major state and federal funding sources are limited. This puts essential access at risk for older adults, people with disabilities, and anyone without a car.

Actions

Reach out to state and federal representatives asking them to maintain or increase transit funding.

Share personal stories of how HIRTA impacts your life to put a human face on funding needs.

Join advocacy campaigns like letters, petitions, or community forums that emphasize transit as a critical service.

Ask your local leaders to consider a transit levy so every community can contribute fairly and sustainably to public transit.

Challenge 7:
Supporting the Transit Workforce

The Challenge

HIRTA relies on dedicated drivers and staff who keep service running every day. Limited funding makes it difficult to offer wages and benefits that fully reflect the value of their work. Without continued investment, it becomes harder to maintain a stable workforce and ensure reliable service for riders.

Actions

Encourage your local leaders to support funding that allows for competitive wages and benefits.

Share stories on social media or community newsletters about how HIRTA drivers impact your life.

Recognize and thank the drivers and staff who keep your community connected.

Example Advocacy Letter
For Cities & Counties

Subject: Support Local Public Transit

Dear [Official's Name],

I am a resident of [City/County] and a rider of HIRTA, the Heart of Iowa Regional Transit Agency. I rely on HIRTA for [work, school, medical appointments, or daily needs], and I know many others in our community depend on this service as well.

Public transit keeps our community connected and helps older adults and people with disabilities maintain independence. HIRTA provides reliable door-to-door service, but the system faces challenges including growing ridership, rising costs, and limited local funding.

I am asking for your support by considering one or more of the following actions:

- Include HIRTA in your next city or county budget with a predictable annual contribution
- Support local funding mechanisms so communities of all sizes can share the cost of transit
- Participate in or expand regional funding agreements that help sustain transit service
- Schedule a ride-along or site visit to better understand the needs firsthand

Thank you for your attention to keeping transit reliable for [City/County] residents. I hope you will continue to prioritize HIRTA and the people who depend on it.

Sincerely,
[Your Name]
[Address]
[Email / Phone]

Example Advocacy Letter
For State Legislators

Subject: Protect and Strengthen Public Transit in Iowa

Dear [Representative/Senator Name],

I am a resident of [City/County] and a rider of HIRTA. HIRTA provides essential transportation so people can reach jobs, healthcare, and daily services.

State support is key to keeping rural transit strong. I am asking for your help to:

- Increase state transit funding to keep up with rising costs and growing demand
- Support capital funding to replace aging buses before they break down
- Expand or improve local funding options so communities can participate sustainably
- Introduce or support legislation that allows small cities or counties to establish a transit levy, giving local governments a clear legal and financial path to fund HIRTA and other rural transit services.

Reliable transportation allows people to stay healthy, independent, and involved in their communities. I hope you will continue to invest in rural public transit and the people who rely on it.

Sincerely,
[Your Name]
[Address]
[Email / Phone]

Example Advocacy Letter
For Federal Representatives

Subject: Protect Federal Investment in Rural Transit

Dear [Representative/Senator Name],

I am a resident of [City/County] and a rider of HIRTA. For many people, HIRTA is the only way to get to medical care, work, and essential services.

Federal programs are a major source of operating and capital funding for rural transit. Please:

- Protect and strengthen federal transit funding that supports rural communities
- Provide capital support to replace aging vehicles and maintain safe service
- Allow continued flexibility in how funds can be used so rural agencies can meet operating needs
- Prioritize rural mobility in future transportation legislation

Federal investment keeps people in small communities connected and ensures basic access to opportunity. Thank you for supporting public transit in Iowa and nationwide.

Sincerely,
[Your Name]
[Address]
[Email / Phone]

Rider Testimonials

Without HIRTA, I would struggle just to manage daily life. Because of this service, I can reach my doctor, get groceries, pick up medication, and stay independent in my community.

HIRTA has made life so much easier for my family. You help people stay connected to what matters. We truly could not do this without you.

I could not live without HIRTA. Everyone treats me with kindness, and this service helps me stay healthy and active.

HIRTA didn't just take me to appointments. They cared about how I was doing. That kind of support improves lives more than people realize.

Without HIRTA's support, I'm not sure how I would have been able to go to my cancer treatments. Thank you for your kind conversations and support.

Resources

Find your State Legislator:
www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/find

Find your Federal Legislator:
www.congress.gov/members/find-your-member

HIRTA:
Website: www.RideHIRTA.com
Facebook: @RideHIRTA
X: @RideHIRTA

Industry Resources:

Understanding Transit Levies and Local Funding:
www.iowadot.gov/modes-travel/transit/transit-funding-programs

American Public Transportation Association:
www.apta.com

Community Transportation Association of America:
www.ctaa.org



Contact Us

1 (877) 686-0029

www.RideHIRTA.com