

Rural Transportation Advocacy

5 Talking Points to Influence Decision-Makers

1. The Rural-Urban Mobility Gap

Rural communities consistently face structural transportation disadvantages that leave non-drivers and those with mobility impairments with limited options.

- Transit agencies also often prioritize dense urban areas for service, leaving rural populations underserved.
- Even when transit is available in rural areas, residents may live miles from the nearest transit stop, creating significant barriers for older adults and those with mobility issues.
- Research shows that non-driving disabled adults in rural areas often rely on informal networks, limited paratransit services, or demand-response systems to get where they need to go (Meyers and Standley, 2024). While necessary and valuable, these services often require more advanced planning and longer wait times.
- The rural-urban mobility gap does not only mean fewer options for rural residents, it also means less independence, less opportunity, and more barriers that disproportionately impact non-drivers.

2. Reliable Transportation Opens Doors

Reliable transportation is a critical gateway to economic stability, health, and community participation.

- When people lack dependable transportation, they are more likely to struggle with everyday activities related to health and wellness (Wu and Decker, 2021).
- Expanded transit options increase residents' ability to pursue employment, job training, and health services (Del Rio, Hangrove and Tomaka, 2017).
- Community-based and volunteer transportation programs in particular can reduce isolation and improve access to medical and social services (Krasniuk, Lawson, and Crizzle, 2025).

3. Non-drivers in rural communities face particular challenges.

There are non-drivers in every community, but those living in rural areas face distinct and often more severe challenges.

- While car ownership is generally higher in rural areas, non-drivers in these communities face greater challenges due to limited public transit, longer travel distances, and fewer nearby destinations.
- Adults with travel-limiting disabilities in rural areas take fewer trips overall and rely heavily on informal support networks, resulting in constrained mobility and reduced independence (Meyers, Ipsen, & Standley, 2022).
- Without robust transit alternatives, non-drivers in rural communities face heightened risks of social isolation, missed medical care, and limited employment opportunities.

4. Active Commuters Thrive

A growing body of research suggests that people who walk, bike, or use public transit to get around are generally happier and healthier than those who drive.

- A study from the British Household Panel Survey found that individuals who shifted from car travel to active commuting reported improvements in psychological wellbeing over time (Martin, Goryakin, & Suhrcke, 2014).
- Public transportation can also contribute positively to wellbeing, as research indicates that transit users experience less commuting-related strain and may benefit from time spent reading, relaxing, or socializing while on transit (Cloutier et al., 2017).
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention further emphasizes that creating walkable, transit-accessible communities encourages daily physical activity, reduces air pollution, and lowers the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes.

5. Transit Protects Our Environment

Expanding access to public transit and active transportation can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve community health.

- According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, transportation is one of the largest sources of carbon dioxide emissions in the U.S., and shifting trips from single-occupancy vehicles to public transit can substantially lower per-person emissions.
- By decreasing the number of cars on the road, expanding access to public transit can reduce carbon emissions, improving global climate outcomes and local environmental health.

Sources:

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