



2026

“It’s Literally Limiting”

**How Transportation Barriers Affect Employment
and Quality of Life in Rapid City**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Transportation is a barrier for some residents in Rapid City. That's a statement the John T. Vucurevich Foundation (JTVF) has heard for years from the region's residents, leaders, and nonprofits.

Reliable transportation is essential in our community for individuals and families to maintain a healthy life and secure a stronger future. In April 2026, members of the JTVF staff and board of directors gathered with community stakeholders to learn how transportation barriers currently affect life for some Rapid City residents.

One mission of the Foundation is to learn about what stands in the way of helping our most vulnerable neighbors reach their fullest potential. This report will be one in a series designed to help inform the Foundation about where it might set its priorities in the future. As we learn more about these issues, we invite you to learn along with us.

This report shares what we're learning about the transportation barriers in Rapid City—using local data to reveal who experiences transportation barriers in the community and how that affects our ability to provide all residents with access to jobs, healthcare, school, and daily necessities like food.



SOME OF THOSE BARRIERS INCLUDE:

- Bus routes and operational hours are barriers to employment, according to many who work with the region's nonprofit organizations. Those who rely on public transit are finding jobs primarily in the food service or retail industry. Shifts in these industries do not normally align with Rapid Transit System (RTS) operating hours.
- Transportation insecurity is an indicator of other forms of material hardship. Those without access to reliable transportation may struggle to take advantage of food distribution sites or food shelf pantries. Some residents experience complications in getting to medical appointments.
- Rapid Valley and Box Elder residents lack public transit options to reach jobs and services in Rapid City.
- As medical services and affordable housing options move to the edges of the city, those who use public transportation assistance must travel farther to access existing RTS routes to get where they need to go.
- Federal transit funding formulas use total population, household income, and housing density to determine funding for transportation systems and projects. As Rapid City expands its borders and decreases in density, federal funding lags behind need in the service area.
- For those with poor credit, high interest auto loans can double the cost of car ownership.

As Rapid City continues to grow, community leaders should become more transportation minded—that includes the scale and frequency of public transit options, location of future affordable housing developments, and an awareness of bike and pedestrian traffic on city roadways.

This report can serve as a starting document—a first pass at defining Rapid City's current transportation barriers. It also includes suggestions and considerations for the conversations ahead.

JTVF supports community collaborations to remove barriers holding individuals back from finding economic stability. The Foundation partners with several nonprofits to focus on in the areas of economic mobility, affordable housing, early learning and basic needs. While those are JTVF's four core pillars of grantmaking priorities, JTVF and other local nonprofits work every day to help the region's residents find stability to thrive.

JTVF staff are committed to continuing the dialogue on transportation barriers in Rapid City. It is essential for the community to gauge how reducing these barriers can lead to better outcomes for individuals, and, as a result, lead to a better and healthier community.

TRANSPORTATION AS A BARRIER

Since moving to Rapid City in 2024, Susan has become a regular user of Rapid Transit System's RapidRide service and is familiar with many of the fixed routes through town.

She said when she talks with other riders, she's learned that many are unemployed and they say relying on Rapid Transit to get around can be an employment barrier.

"It just ends too early," Susan said, of RTS operation hours, during a recent interview. "It doesn't give, you know, people an opportunity to work. It's literally limiting and, I think, discouraging individuals to want to get out and have a job."

The RapidRide system has served the city's public transportation needs with six fixed routes since 1992. The fleet of 27 buses runs from 6:20 a.m. to 5:50 p.m. Monday through Friday, and from 9:50 a.m. to 4:40 p.m. on Saturdays. While RapidRide bus routes run on loops every 35 minutes, the system's Dial-A-Ride system is a curb-to-curb/door-to-door service within the city for residents who qualify under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Susan said extending operating hours to reflect the hours of service and retail jobs would benefit RTS ridership. She said many riders say they have to leave their shift 10 minutes early just to get to the bus stop.

Susan used to work for a business in Rushmore Crossing, but after having major surgery, she is no longer looking for work. She now uses RTS for her personal transportation needs and said more bus stops would make it easier to reach her destinations along the routes, especially during winter when the nights are longer and there's potential for snow accumulation.

"It's affordable when you absolutely have to have it, you know?" Susan added. "I just wish the bus system stayed out longer."

Rapid City is a car-dependent city, according to Walk Score, meaning that most errands require a car. City boundaries boast a larger footprint than San Francisco (KOTA-TV). Given the sprawl, without access to safe and reliable transportation, many regional nonprofit leaders say some of the region's residents and families struggle to make their way to jobs, school and other important destinations.

The transit system's operational hours are one of many barriers expressed to the Foundation in its recent meeting with nonprofit and community partners to talk about transportation in Rapid City.

"Public transit in South Dakota is a need to use, not a want to use," said a local transit leader. In fact, the complex funding formulas that support the Rapid Transit System can make it difficult to expand and extend the city's transit system.

Life in and around Rapid City is difficult without reliable transportation and for residents without personal vehicles, public transit is an essential service. RTS will become even more vital as the cost of owning a vehicle continues to rise.

Rapid City residents are driving less but paying more in transportation costs according to the Center for Neighborhood Technology's Housing and Transportation Affordability Index.

According to its data, in 2025 city residents drove an estimated 17,208 miles, and paid an average of \$14,167 in transportation costs. Compared to 2018, when Rapid City residents drove more, an average of 21,395 miles each year, while paying about \$12,000 in annual transportation costs.

The COVID-19 pandemic may skew the numbers slightly. The 2025 index relies on 2022 American Community Survey data, as well as Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics data from 2021 and many work from home policies may blunt the mileage estimates for those years.

However, the cost of transportation may continue to weigh more heavily on American household budgets going forward because transit costs are more sensitive to economic factors than other areas, according to officials with the Living Wage Institute (LWI). With recent shocks to global oil markets and 15% tariffs on vehicles from Europe, South Korea and Japan, LWI estimates transportation barriers will become a bigger challenge in the coming years.

"In most U.S. counties, transportation means driving a personal vehicle, and the components needed to drive and maintain a vehicle are more susceptible to market volatility than housing," said Misael Galdamez, data manager with LWI, in a recent interview.

LWI data includes the cost of used cars and trucks, gasoline and motor oil, maintenance, and public transportation. Fuel availability is directly tied to oil markets and geopolitical events and when supply chains are disrupted, costs spike.



Recent events in the Middle East have raised the average gas price in Rapid City in the middle of May 2026 from \$3.25 last year to \$4.48 this year, according to AAA. That represents a 38% increase in the cost of fuel.



Auto insurance operates in a similar fashion with premiums reflecting repair costs, claims, and replacement values. When vehicle costs rise, insurance premiums follow.

“That’s a different dynamic than housing, where costs adjust slowly: leases lock in rents, and adding new housing supply takes longer when compared to manufacturing a vehicle,” Galdamez added. “This is why we expect transportation costs to increase in 2027’s data.”

In fact, the cost of car ownership surged by 40% from January 2020 to August 2025, according to an index by Navy Federal Credit Union, a credit union serving active military, veterans and their families. Additionally, tariffs levied on new cars may push shoppers into the used car market, thereby flooding that marketplace with buyers and raising prices (Wall Street Journal).

There’s another factor that contributes to the high cost of owning a vehicle—auto debt. For people unable to pay for a car outright, the prospect of financing adds another costly hurdle into the transportation equation. Many with poor credit turn to loans through high interest auto financing, so called ‘buy now, pay later’ deals.

As financing charges boost the ultimate cost of vehicles, the total amount of auto debt has surged in America—reaching a total of \$1.68 trillion, according to The Century Foundation.



18.7%

According to the group, the average annual percentage rate for auto loans is nearly 10%. However, borrowers with limited access to credit carry an average APR of up to 18.7%. That rate on a six-year loan to finance a \$10,000 vehicle, if you can find one, nearly doubles the total price to \$19,407.

The Century Foundation finds that the lowest-income borrowers had the highest average auto loan balance. Those consumers can also see higher and faster credit card balance growth.



RAPID CITY'S PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION-RTS

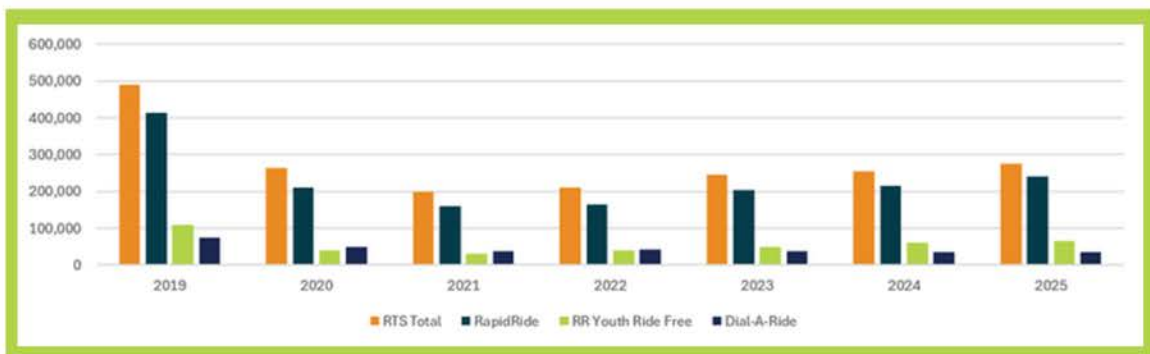
As Rapid City continues to grow, with Air Force personnel and retirees moving to the area, addressing transportation barriers will remain crucial for all residents. Rapid Transit System (RTS) plays a vital role in addressing those barriers. As a vehicle dependent town, most Rapid City transit customers are there out of necessity according to a local transportation official.

"The people that are utilizing our services absolutely need it. And a lot of them are there every single day—day in, day out."

Megan Gould, manager for Rapid Transit System



Ridership has steadily increased since the COVID-19 pandemic led to a dramatic drop in utilization. In 2019, RTS reported a total of 493,541 rides across its routes and services. In 2021, the pandemic pushed usage down to 203,433. In 2025, however, the number of total rides was up to 276,167.



BARRIERS

While transportation and transit systems will struggle to meet every resident's needs, it is helpful to understand common issues faced by those who use public transit regularly.

According to stakeholders, nonprofit leaders, and community members there are several ways transportation shows up as a barrier in Rapid City. Below is a deeper dive into how different pressures exacerbate transportation barriers in Rapid City and how that ultimately affects residents without access to reliable transportation.

THE HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION RELATIONSHIP

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, housing and transportation are the first and second largest expenses for American households. The COVID-19 pandemic radically increased the housing cost burden in Rapid City—especially for those with limited income who rely on affordable housing. While housing costs have soared, wages have not kept up.

That trend has created a tension between affordable housing and access to public transit. Since 2019, asking rent in Rapid City has risen by 32%. In the last five years, average wages have risen by only 18%. As housing pressures increase, more people are finding affordable places to live at the edges of the city, and in neighboring Rapid Valley and Box Elder, where rents are typically cheaper.



While Dial-A-Ride has a unique ridership, utilization of the service for disabled customers has remained steady since 2020. However, while the number of rides is consistent, Dial-A-Ride's bus mileage has increased by as much as 205% during that time. This shows that service to newer neighborhoods on the edges of Rapid City increases trip mileage.



RTS's Dial-A-Ride statistics provide a unique window into how the city has changed in the last five years.

This may also be affected by newer healthcare facilities also located on the outskirts of the city. The outpatient VA clinic in Rapid City, as well as a proposed Sanford Hospital, are located on the southern edge of city limits and up the hill on Highway 16, making access difficult on foot and bike¹.

Monument Health recently broke ground on an emergency department on Mall Drive on the northern edge of town.



To remove transportation barriers in the Rapid City area, many nonprofit leaders say the city of Box Elder, home to Ellsworth Air Force Base and the Pennington County Commission, should consider adding to the region's public transit service.

The fate of Rapid City, Rapid Valley and Box Elder are intricately tied to one another. Residents in Box Elder and Rapid Valley do not have direct access to the Rapid Transit System, and yet, these communities are home to several affordable and Section 8 housing developments, like Heartland Heights and Whisper Rock. Additional transportation options could support residents who work in Rapid City or access services there. However, since Rapid Valley is unincorporated, support for any transit program would likely need to flow through Pennington County.

Currently, RTS only operates within city limits, however the location of affordable housing units across the region will play a crucial role in the demands of future regional transit needs. Transportation options and limitations must be considered when new apartment complexes and neighborhoods are permitted and built.

A PATHWAY TO ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Rapid City residents who live on the economic margins often find work in service, hospitality, sales, health care or other job sectors that often function outside normal business hours. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, this represents over 1/3 of local jobs. These workers are the least likely to have a reliable vehicle and the most likely to rely on public transit.

Shifts for those entry level jobs, which may end late at night or early in the morning, do not match those of the existing RTS service. While a person working a second or third shift job can use RapidRide to get to work, it would not get them home.

The existing transportation barrier for such residents is illustrated by statistics from two Rapid City-area nonprofits.

¹ While the VA clinic is close in proximity to Highway 16 and its service road, buses would have to reach the facility via Promise Road. Renderings of the Sanford Hospital appear to place access just off Highway 16.

Workforce Connections is a program through Black Hills Special Services Cooperative that provides intensive mentorship, support, and advocacy for those pursuing adult education. The programs lead individuals to jobs with wages that can help families become more self-sufficient.

Since 2020, Workforce Connections has actively mentored and supported 147 people and about 60% of those individuals either had an unreliable vehicle or relied solely on public transit.

Lori Larson, program manager for Workforce Connections, said one way to remove transportation barriers would be to expand bus route hours to serve people working weekend, afternoon, evening and overnight shifts.

“Clients have had to turn down job opportunities due to limited hours of operation for busing,” said Larson. “Entry level jobs are typically not available in shifts that are within the bus route hours.”

The numbers are similar for Elevate Rapid City’s Career Lift Program. That service, with stipends, strengthens the local talent pipeline by removing short-term financial barriers that prevent job seekers from starting employment.

Participants receive an average stipend of \$300 to reimburse essential expenses such as interview clothing, uniforms, tools or mobile phones needed for job placement. Of the program’s 113 applicants, 77% rely on public transit.

Most Workforce Stipend Program clients work in the food service, healthcare, construction and retail industries. Many of those job shifts are likely to fall outside of RTS operating hours.



“When someone has a job offer but cannot reliably get to an interview, a first shift, or a workplace outside regular bus hours, both the individual and the employer lose out.”

Taylor Davis, Senior Workforce Development & Partnerships Director at Elevate Rapid City



AN ESSENTIAL CONNECTION TO CHILDCARE

Parents need top quality programming for their kids. Multiple studies point to the benefits of early education for young children which can lead to better overall outcomes including a 25% reduction in interactions with the criminal justice system.

However, parents without reliable transportation often can't get their children to those pre-school and early learning programs.

Rural America Initiatives (RAI) serves low-income Native American families in Rapid City and started operations in 1986. RAI offers early Head Start programs as well as childcare and provides transportation for families based on need which is informed by a questionnaire filled out by parents.

However, since most parents do not live near RAI's location, many drive from North Rapid City.

In addition to busing for children, RAI can provide basic equipment for quick auto fixes including things like jump starter kits, spare tires, and a mechanism that helps open doors when keys are locked in a vehicle.



"It's expensive to be poor," said RAI Head Start Director Anne Reddy.

Car problems can compound on new parents, who are already exhausted.

"I remember driving a car like that when I was first a single mom and didn't have any money and it was like, you're just praying the car holds together to get you where you need to go next," Reddy said. "It's difficult. It really is difficult."

RELIABLE ACCESS TO DAILY NECESSITIES

Many nonprofit employees say clients face difficulty navigating RTS routes to reach their destination. However, in recent months, RTS has uploaded its routes to Google Maps, as well as [launched an interactive map](#). Both improvements will aid riders as they plan their routes around town.

Many customers also use transit to reach nonprofit or government service offices—some of which are in parts of the city not served by current routes.

Transportation is crucial for low-income families and individuals seeking to meet their basic needs. Take, for example, households that need help with access to food and groceries.

The Rapid City community supports several food distribution and food pantry programs including the mobile food distribution operation by Feeding South Dakota. It stages scheduled food pick-up events in the AMC parking lot and Central States Fairgrounds. Often vehicles are lining up for food boxes two hours before disbursement begins, but households and individuals need a vehicle to pick up those food boxes.

Easy access to the region's food pantry options that offer access to nutritious food are often limited to people with vehicles which exclude those who navigate Rapid City with public transit, by foot, or by bicycle.

A recent statewide needs assessment conducted for South Dakota's SNAP-Ed program found transportation as a major barrier to obtaining healthy foods.



"The logistics of getting food can be overwhelming" for residents without a vehicle or people living paycheck to paycheck," the study explains. "Trips often consume half a day, depend on inconsistent or unavailable transit routes, and require navigating long distances on foot while carrying groceries."

While the phrase 'food insecurity' has become more common to define households that can't predict their food sources, a recent study from the University of Michigan explores links between 'transportation insecurity' and other material hardships. Demographic groups "most likely to experience transportation insecurity are disproportionately affected by other hardships, especially food insecurity."

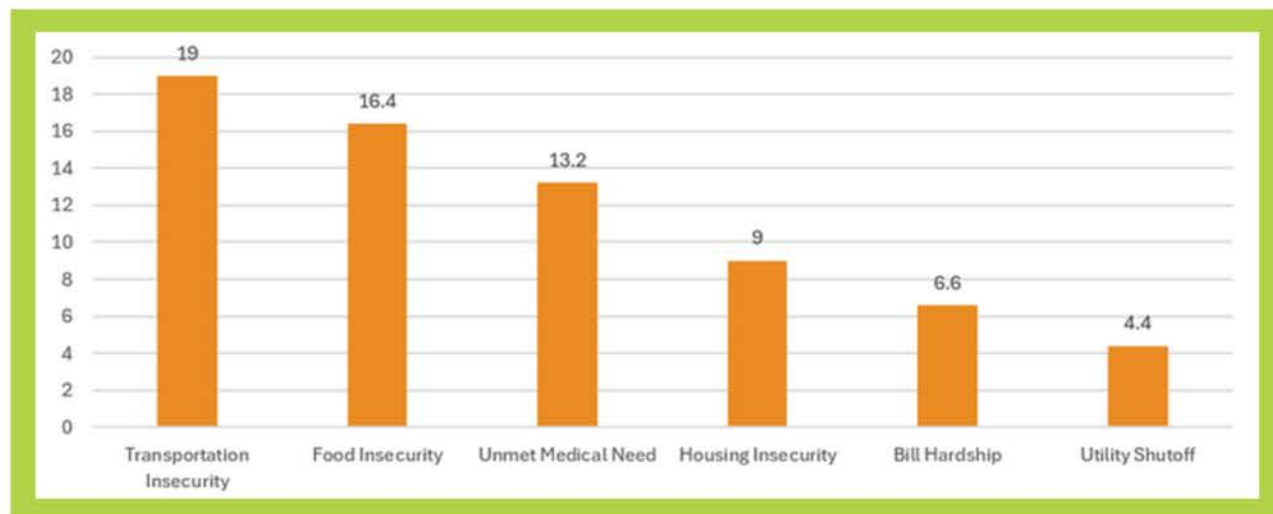


1 in 5

"In the area between Anamosa Street and I-90 (Census tract 103)—one of the city's most food-insecure areas—approximately one in five households lack access to a vehicle," says a report commissioned by the Black Hills Area Community Foundation.

The study points to hardships that can also result in poorer outcomes. Children who are exposed to material hardship are at greater risk of behavioral problems. It's also associated with poorer individual mental and physical health.

Transportation insecurity tops the list, with 19% of adults nationally reporting a lack of reliable transport as their number one challenge. That's closely followed by food insecurity, unmet medical needs and housing insecurity.



“When we relate transportation insecurity to other types of hardship, we find that those who experience transportation insecurity are more likely to also experience each of the other forms of hardship, a finding that likely reflects transportation insecurity’s high prevalence,” the study’s authors wrote.

In addition to food insecurity, many low-income people face unmet medical needs. Lack of reliable transportation also affects the lives of those who require regular visits to health care professionals. For instance, transportation insecurity remains a barrier for pregnant people accessing regular appointments according to a recent study by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. According to a recent Monument Health community needs assessment, 11.7% of the regional population cite a lack of transportation as a barrier to health care access.

While food, healthcare, and housing might seem more crucial than transportation, it’s easy to discount how important a vehicle is in a car-dependent city to meet basic needs and maintain a quality of life.



11.7%

cite a lack of transportation as a barrier to health care access.

NONPROFITS FILLING TRANSPORTATION GAPS

Nonprofit organizations in Rapid City are finding ways to lessen the transportation barrier. Here are a few examples in the community:

OYATE HEALTH CENTER

A few years ago, a community needs assessment told Oyate Health Center that transportation was a high need for its clients and patients. In August of 2023, it established a transportation division, and now the health system offers anywhere from 1,200 to 1,250 rides per month without even advertising the program. Prior to the ride service, the health system experienced a lot of no-shows, and patients would arrive late for appointments. The health system funds the transit program through Medicaid billing and cuts to federal Medicaid spending could challenge the future of the service (KFF).

ONEHEART

In 2024, 80% of OneHeart guests reported having either unreliable or no transportation. The nonprofit's mission to create a path out of poverty for clients and into permanent housing, finds that transportation is an essential element for success. The program's own transportation system provides participants with rides to and from work, school and off campus services. In 2024, OneHeart's transportation program made 4,511 trips.

In 2025, the transportation program delivered 5,895 rides, surpassing the prior year's total by an increase of 30%. Providing consistent transport to and from work or school fosters upward mobility to help a person escape the crisis of poverty.

LOVE INC

Seasonal transportation in the region can include two-wheeled transit options. Love INC refurbishes donated bicycles and makes them available to low-income individuals through a program called Thrive Bike Ministries. As the cost of owning a vehicle increases, bicycles can provide an important transportation solution, with some notable limitations when colder weather rolls around.

Recent numbers from Thrive Bike Ministries report the number of clients served in the past few years as 529 in 2024 and 545 in 2025.

JOURNEY ON

Journey On is a co-response, street outreach team that operates primarily in Rapid City. Like other regional nonprofits, Journey On reports that transportation is critical for those without a permanent residence. It also provides transportation for those who have just secured housing but still need transportation assistance. Its focus is on getting people to the resources they need—whether it's rides for elderly clients or folks struggling to pay bills. Journey On also offers three youth outreach programs, offering case management and support for vulnerable and unhoused youth—as well as safe passage to four participating schools in the Rapid City Area School District.

"Transportation is often one of the biggest barriers people face in accessing opportunity. Without reliable transportation, people can struggle to attend school consistently, maintain employment, participate in extracurricular activities, or access essential services," said Eltina Three Stars, program director at Journey On. "By providing safe and dependable transportation, Journey On removes a critical barrier and expands access to education, employment, mentorship, and community engagement. Transportation is not just about getting from point A to point B. It is about creating pathways to stability, confidence, and long-term success."

In 2025, with a total fleet of seven vehicles, the organization provided 3,674 rides to people for a variety of reasons—including access to food distributions, medical appointments, welfare rides, or transport to a detox center.

About 600 of those rides were for medical transport. Rides for behavioral and mental health appointments are crucial and without access to appointments or medication, lack of transportation can be a barrier to mental wellbeing.

Last year, Journey On logged around 500 calls as "welfare." Those calls include reliable transportation to remove a person from an environment that doesn't support their domestic safety.



SHIFT GARAGE

When people rely on older model vehicles, there are times when reliability can be compromised and that's where a local organization called Shift Garage can play an important role providing free labor through volunteer technicians and at-cost vehicle parts. They also provide free or lower interest loans for vehicle purchases to participants through other social service programs. Shift Garage also helps coordinate lower interest loans for vehicle purchases through the UpSHIFT Program, which helps a family that can afford a basic vehicle payment. That can help them avoid using 'Buy Now, Pay Later' financing which typically comes at higher interest rates.



In 2024, Shift Garage completed repairs on 162 vehicles. Fifty vehicles were placed with families either through UpSHIFT or providing donated vehicles. Just over 2,100 hours of car repairs were done by their volunteers.

Anecdotally, most Shift Garage clients are single parents working at least one job. Applicants who completed the income section, 143 out of 298, had an average net income of \$498 per week, for an annual salary of \$25,876. The average household had two children living at home.

"These moms need their car to get their kids to school and to get to work," said Joe Smith, executive director of Shift Garage.

Smith said inflation and labor are driving up the cost of vehicle repairs significantly. Skilled mechanical labor is in high demand.



"In 2020 the average labor repair rate was \$100 while today we're seeing \$150 plus as standard. Everyone knows that the price of almost everything has gone up due to inflation. However, few things have increased by 50% in just 5 years."

Joe Smith, Executive Director of Shift Garage

Recognizing Funding Challenges

RAPID TRANSIT SYSTEM

Rapid Transit System (RTS) operations are supported by local and federal funding. Local funding comes from the city's general fund, fares, and ad revenue on the side of buses. For a decade, Rapid City school students have been able to use RapidRide for free through a program called Youth Ride Free. In 2024 and 2025, RTS provided more than 60,000 rides to Rapid City school-aged kids.

In addition to its fixed routes, the door-to-door transportation service, Dial-A-Ride, operates within city limits and provides rides to residents who qualify for service under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The amount of federal money RTS receives is based on a Federal Transit Administration funding formula called Section 5307. According to FTA definitions in this formula, Rapid City is considered a "small-urbanized area." That's a designation for a municipality with a population between 50,000 and 199,999.

Funding for Small-Urbanized Areas is based on a formula determined by total population, low-income population and population density. As exemplified by Dial-A-Ride data, Rapid City continues to grow away from its core and as the city spreads its density lessens, affecting the transit formula from the federal government.



60,000

free rides to school-aged kids through the Youth Ride Free program in 2024 and 2025.

Federal and city fiscal years are offset, but for the federal Fiscal Year 2025, RTS received \$1,695,536 in Federal 5307-S funding. RTS's total budget this year is \$4,104,969.

Twelve percent of RTS's budget comes from the \$1.50 fares and advertising. Those dollars are part of a local match for federal funds.

Setting operation funding aside, RTS also faces a barrier in hiring qualified drivers with a commercial driver's license (CDL). Wages make it hard to find and keep drivers, which is also an issue for the Rapid City Area Schools. The cost of CDL certification, with passenger endorsement, can cost upwards of \$6,000.

HOW SIMILAR TRANSIT SYSTEMS ARE FUNDED

A comparison of Rapid City and other similarly sized U.S. cities shows some key differences in funding streams for public transit systems. Since 1976, the Missoula Urban Transportation District (MUTD) in Montana has operated Mountain Line, which provides a zero-fare, fixed-route bus and Paratransit service in and around Missoula seven days a week.



MISSOULA, MT

In the last two decades, voters in Missoula have approved levies to increase transit service hours. In 2015, it began a zero-fare initiative and by 2017 ridership grew to over 1.5 million annually². In 2020, MUTD expanded its services to 7 days a week. Approximately 70% of its revenue comes from local property taxes. Federal dollars make up the rest.

Mountain Line's total operating budget in 2023 was \$12,039,157. That was nearly three times the size of RTS's budget. Mountain Line serves a population size 1.07 times the size of Rapid City.



SHREVEPORT, LA

SporTran in Shreveport, Louisiana is another transit service that operates fare-free. The region is home to the Barksdale Air Force Base. In 2022, the transit service received a federal grant to cover fares through the end of 2023. The goal was to increase ridership, which fell during the pandemic. During that grant period, ridership increased by 353%. SporTran said that demonstrates how great the need for public transit is in the Shreveport-Bossier area. In 2025, the City of Shreveport answered with a 9% funding increase for SporTran.

After federal funding ran out, the City of Shreveport stepped in. The city now provides SporTran about 60% of the transit system's operating dollars. Federal grants make up another 34%. Nearby cities contribute the rest. SporTran's budget for 2025 was \$19,037,987.

That's over 4.5 times higher than the RTS budget and serves a population only 2.7 times larger.

² Compare that to a recent peak in RTS ridership in 2019 of 493,541.

WHAT WE ARE EXPLORING

- 1. Flexible Funding to Meet Transportation Needs:** Rapid City's nonprofit leaders are creative in using flexible funding to help meet their clients' transportation needs. They come in the form of RTS RapidRide bus tickets and monthly passes, gas cards, and resources for vehicle purchases, repairs, and quick fixes. Workforce Connections, for example, assist clients in obtaining driver's licenses and vehicle insurance. Flexible funding from JTVF to Workforce Connections also supports vehicle repairs and gas cards.
- 2. Leveraging Public Funding to Expand Service Capacity:** When local, regional and federal government dollars fund transportation services and infrastructure, that allows nonprofits to pour more of their budgets into the work of serving people, to devote a greater share of resources to directly serving people.
- 3. Capacity Constraints of Existing Nonprofit Models:** While Shift Garage helps low-income individuals and families secure and maintain reliable transportation, its services face limitations. The program works with an average of 4 to 5 families a week, but repairs are often three weeks out. The program is constrained by the number of skilled volunteer mechanics and its physical infrastructure, including service bays. Nonprofits in Rapid City would love to see more capacity in this type of model.
- 4. Expanding Public Transit with Complementary Services:** There are other structural questions to consider regarding Rapid City's transit system. Right now, the reach? Scale of public transit is constrained by federal funding formulas and local and state dollars. Could private philanthropy develop complementary resources to supplement the capacity of the existing system, like microtransit?
- 5. Advocating for Greater Public Investment:** There is a question of how strongly local leadership should push for more investment in the public transit system.

6. **Supporting CDL Training and Workforce Development:** If Rapid Transit is looking to provide CDL training in-house, to cut down on costs, could charitable dollars support the costs of or incentives for obtaining these certifications for individuals and organizations?
7. **Scaling Successful Nonprofit Transportation Models:** Other questions include the role of philanthropy in helping to scale successful nonprofit programs focused on transportation challenges. Can we help to increase the scale and impact of these solutions? For example, is there an option to take models like Shift Garage to scale?
8. **Aligning Affordable Housing with Transportation Access:** As the community seeks to address affordable housing challenges, should access to the public transit system play a role in the siting of dense, affordable housing? Can philanthropic resources be used to address these issues in cooperation with local governments and developers?
9. **Advancing Long-Term Collaboration and Community Dialogue:** In the long term, the John T. Vucurevich Foundation is committed to moving the regional conversation around transportation barriers forward. We will create space in the community to address transportation challenges and build coalitions to determine the best approaches. Additionally, the foundation will encourage and remind city and county leadership to consider transportation barriers in their decision making.

The Foundation is actively engaging with leaders in communities that have already invested in transportation solutions to better understand promising practices, lessons learned, and approaches that could inform local efforts.

If you have ideas about how to reduce transportation barriers in Rapid City and want to share them, please email Lee Strubinger at lstrubinger@jtvf.org to talk further.

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About

The John T. Vucurevich Foundation is a locally rooted community investor in the Rapid City area. We serve as a connector, bringing together people and ideas to transform shared interest into shared outcomes, helping our most vulnerable neighbors reach their fullest potential. Through intentional funding across interconnected issue areas, strategic convening and responsive listening, we're contributing to a better future for the region and everyone within it



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