

2018-2019

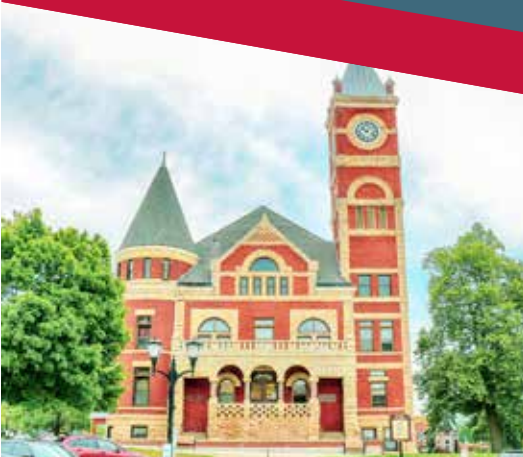
FINAL REPORT

UniverCity Year

Better • Places • Together

Improving rural transportation in Green County

POPULATION HEALTH SCIENCES 780: PUBLIC HEALTH: PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE



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Project Goals

This project was developed as part of the UniverCity Year, a partnership between the Green County Economic Development Corporation and the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

The Green County Healthy Community Coalition determined that transportation presents a significant challenge for many residents in Green County in accessing medical care, grocery stores, and other services. In consultation with RoAnn Warden, Director of the Green County Health Department, and based on the content of our initial literature review, we decided to present a menu of options focused on transportation for low-income families. After beginning with broad research on the topic, we narrowed our work down to three detailed options from which Green County can consider for implementation. Our intention was to present realistic, affordable options that can reduce inequities in transportation access. We additionally suggest possible funding sources for each of the options. We hope this report can assist Green County in selecting an evidence-based community intervention to improve rural transportation access.

Introduction to Green County

Green County, Wisconsin is a largely rural county of 37,050 people covering 584 square miles (Data USA, 2018; UW Extension, 2018). The largest increases in population have been in the towns of Exeter, York, and New Glarus and the county population is expected to increase by 25.5% to 46,219 by 2035. Presently, there are 14,772 households with an average family size of 2.48 persons per household (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

The median household income in Green County is \$57,416, which is higher than the state median of \$54,610 (Data USA, 2018). The percentage of people in poverty in Green County is 8.86% and the percentage of children living in poverty has grown faster than the state's rate (Data USA, 2018; UW Extension, 2018). Women aged 18-24 are the largest demographic living in poverty, followed by women aged 35-44 then women over the age of 75 (Data USA, 2018).

There is a wide variety of employment opportunities in Green County, with the following distribution:

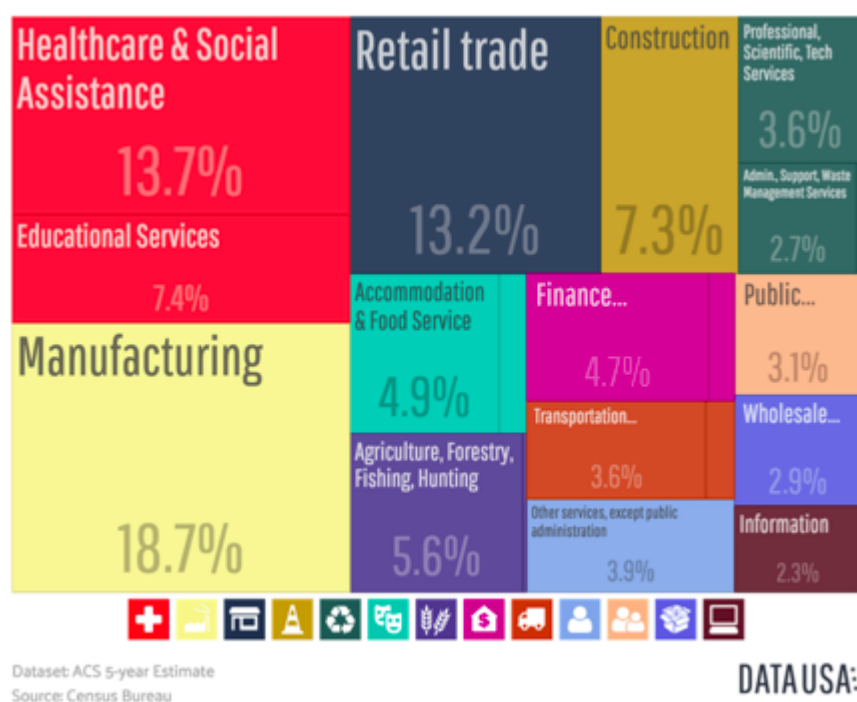


Figure 1: Green County Employment by Industry, 2016 (Data USA, 2018)

While there is an average of 2 cars per household in the county, low income families often face difficulties in accessing commonplace necessities such as grocery stores, banks, and medical care. Rural individuals' lack of reliable transportation may affect health care decisions. In families with more adults than cars, the working adult often takes the car to their place of employment, leaving the caregiver at home without reliable transportation. Transportation can therefore translate into health inequities as well as unnecessary hardships when families cannot access medical clinics or stores regularly. Studies have indicated that distance is a healthcare barrier and transportation can be a major factor affecting health care availability and decision-making (Arcury, Preisser, Gesler, & Powers, 2005). It is important to consider how transportation services, the local built environment, and land use patterns may fail to meet the mobility needs of lower-income populations in Green County.

Car Ownership in Green County

Please note that the buckets used in this visualization were not evenly distributed by ACS when publishing the data.

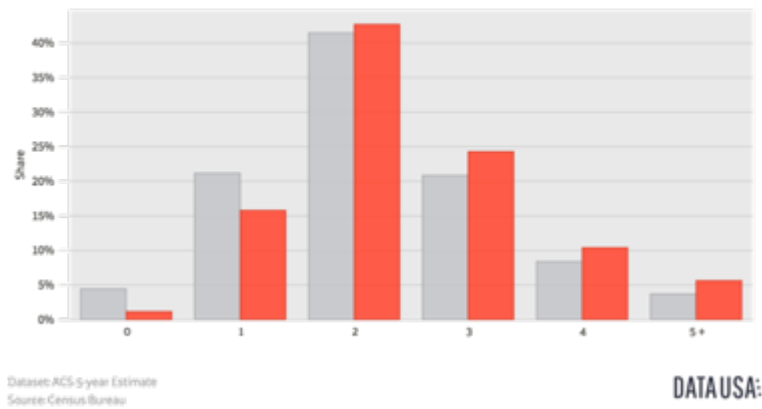


Figure 2: Car Ownership in Green County, 2016 (Data USA, 2018).

[Red is Green County, Gray is U.S.]

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Current Green County Transportation Options

We conducted a review of transportation services that are currently operating in Green County. This allowed us to evaluate current transportation models and identify gaps in transportation needs. Highlighted below are a few of the transportation options currently available in Green County. A comprehensive list of transportation options with additional information is included in a table at the end of this section.

1. The Green County Aging & Disability Resource Services Unit (ADRC) provides transportation for elderly and disabled residents. Their Driver Escort Service is run by volunteers who provide door-to-door service. Priority is given to medical and nutritional needs, but riders can use this service for shopping and recreation. To schedule a ride, riders must call the ADRC 48 hours in advance. Costs vary depending on the trip, but to give a sense of pricing a trip from Monroe to Broadhead costs \$9, and Broadhead to New Glarus costs \$17, and New Glarus to Madison costs \$15. The ADRC also operates a Shuttle Bus Service that runs fixed routes Tuesday through Friday. If space permits, this service is available to all residents of Green County. The cost of a ride is \$5 in county, \$10 to Janesville, and \$13 to Madison. (ADRC Green County, 2017).
2. Monroe Cab is a door-to-door service that is available to anyone. Rides anywhere in Monroe are \$3 (Green County Health Department, 2017).
3. LIFT Volunteer Driver Program provides transportation to Southwest Wisconsin. Anyone is able to use this service. Rides can be scheduled for the day, evening, and weekend hours by calling LIFT SWCP (SWCAP, 2018). Rides cost \$0.50/mile.
4. Medical Transportation Management, Access Medical Transit, and Country-view Transport provides door-to-door transportation to medical appointments. Medical Transportation Management and Country-view Transport are available to anyone and accept Medicaid as payment. Access Medical Transit services the elderly, disabled, and children (Southwestern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, 2013).
5. Work'n Wheels Program provides 0% interest auto loans on high quality used cars to low-income individuals. The goal of the program is to expand transportation to allow for people to access higher paying jobs (Southwestern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, 2013). To be eligible for the program, applicants must have a certain income and be employed for a minimum of thirty days. Applicants are required to take a financial education class through UW Extension. The average out of pocket cost for a \$4,500 loan is \$470 (SWCAP, 2018).

Service or Sponsor Name	Contact Information	Passenger Eligibility	Service Description	Hours of Service	Fleet Information	Funding Sources
Aging & Disability Resource Center- Green County	Katie Gilbertson N3152 State Road 81, Monroe 53566 328-9499	55+, disabled any age	Fixed routes & demand-response (door-to-door) by paid staff (bus & van) and volunteer driver escorts using their own vehicles	Driver Escort: Mon.-Sat. Bus & Minibus: Tue.-Fri. 8am-4pm; Van: 1st & 3rd Wednesday	12 passenger bus w/possible 2 wheelchair; 5-7 passenger mini-bus w/1 wheelchair, 4-6 passenger van w/1-2 wheelchair; approx. 12 private vehicles owned by volunteer drivers	85.21, Family Care, Co-pays
Department of Veterans Affairs	Respective County Veteran Service Officer	Veteran	Fixed route		30 vans	VA
Access Medical Transit	Craig Pitzer 214-5047	Elderly, disabled & children	Demand response (door-to-door) two-weeks notice	Mon-Sat. 6:30 am 8 pm	8 vans, 5 with extra wide lifts	Medical Assistance, Private Pay, Family Care
Monroe Cab-Brown Cab Co.	For ride: 325-6993 Manager-Carl Schulte	Anyone	Demand response (door-to-door)	Mon-Sat. 6 am-9:45 pm	Cars; mini-bus w/1 wheelchair	Private Pay, 5311, Family Care
Lamers Bus Lines	325-7788	Anyone	Bus charter & rental	open	Motor coaches, mini-buses, passenger vans, school buses, limousines	Private Pay
Country-view Transport	Mike Gilbertson 558-8547	Anyone	Demand response (door-to-door)	open	5 vans; 3 wheelchair accessible, non-emergency stretcher	Medical Assistance, Family Care, Private Pay
LIFT SWCAP	Ashley Nedeau-Owen 201 S. Iowa St. Dodgeville, WI 608-930-2191	Disabled and Lacking transportation as viewed by LIFT as a disability	Demand response (door-through-door)	8 am- 4:30 pm Monday-Thursday 8 am-12 pm noon Friday	2/3 Van- wheelchair accessible 7 passenger Mini van- not accessible	SWFC - Medicaid 53.17 TCSP Copay Private Pay

Table 1. A comprehensive list of transportation options in Green County.⁴

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Volunteer Driver Programs

I. Background

Volunteer driver programs provide door-to-door service to riders. These programs have been implemented across the country in both urban and rural settings, serving a variety of persons. Historically, volunteer driver programs served older adults needing transportation to medical appointments, grocery stores, and social gatherings. Recently, these programs have expanded to include low-income populations, veterans, children, people with disabilities, and those in the workforce (RHI, 2018).

Most volunteer driver programs are supported by a sponsoring agency such as a non-profit or community organization. This agency is responsible for recruiting drivers, training, and scheduling rides (NVTC, 2018). When an individual wishes to schedule a ride, they call the sponsoring agency. Depending on demand, a one to two day notice may be required. The agency coordinates the ride with the driver. The driver then picks up the individual and transports them to their chosen destination. Volunteer driver programs have been shown to provide low cost transportation compared to other options such as taxis. Riders are charged per mile. Volunteers either receive no reimbursement or are reimbursed using the government's mileage reimbursement rate. Our objective was to research more about volunteer driver programs and how they may be applied to serve low-income residents of rural Green County.

Figure 1 displays the density of volunteer driver programs across the country according to the National Volunteer Transportation Center.

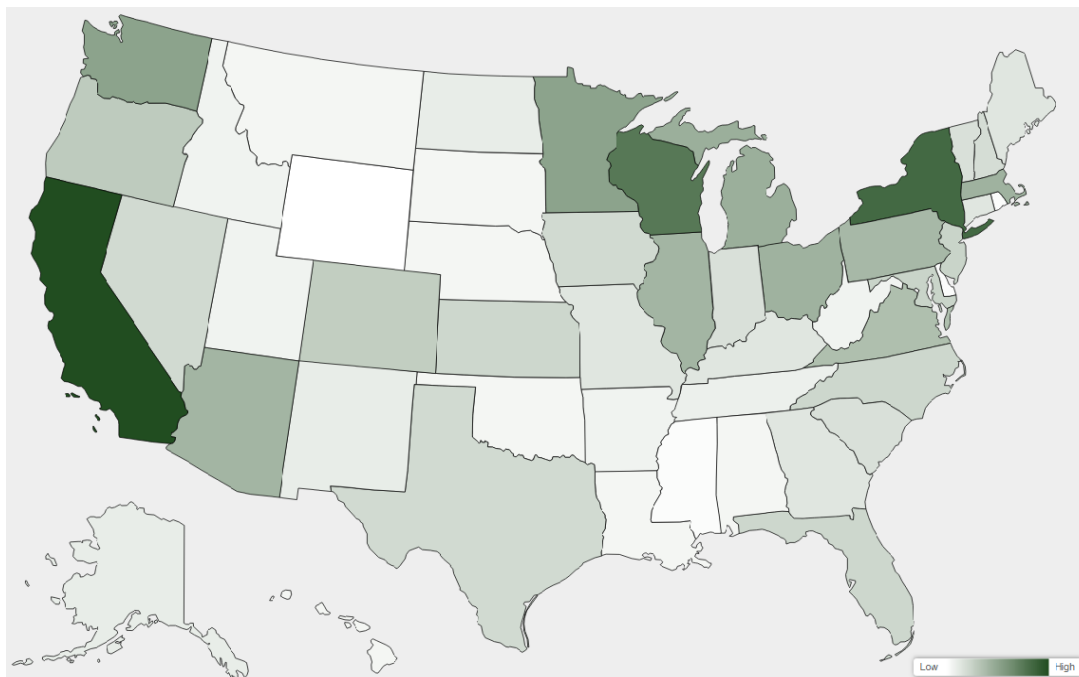


Figure 1. Map of Volunteer Driver Programs

II. Research Findings and Examples

Rural Transit Service Volunteer Driver Program

Rural Transit Service is a non-profit transportation organization in Erie County, New York. They provide safe, reliable, and affordable door-to-door transportation to older adults, low-income populations, and persons with disabilities. While a majority of the population utilizing these services are the elderly, about 5% are low-income. In 2017, they provided over 9,847 trips, over 105,000 miles. Most of the rides provided were to medical appointments or grocery stores. They also provide transportation to work, volunteering, social activities, banks, shopping, and education. Rural Transit Service relies on volunteers to serve as drivers, dispatchers, and driver aids. In its twenty-eight years of service, Rural Transit has expanded significantly. It started off serving two towns with twelve volunteers. It now serves twenty-five municipalities in Erie County with over one hundred and twenty volunteers (UCAP, 2018).

United Community Action Partnership Volunteer Driver Program

The United Community Action Partnership is a public transit service that provides transportation to eight counties in Southwest Minnesota. This program is available to all community members. The volunteer driver program complements their Community Transit program and public transportation that is available (RTS, 2018). This program has been essential for people living in rural areas to access medical and other necessary services (Zhao, 2017). The cost for a single rider is \$0.60-0.75/mile or coordinated with other person is \$0.35/mile (RTS, 2018). The program boasts 85 volunteers and serves 1,500 passengers each month. New volunteers are often recruited from current volunteers. All volunteers undergo an initial orientation and a diversity training once a year. Volunteers are reimbursed using the federal IRS rate of 53.5 cents per mile. They are also provided with \$7 for a meal if they are 30 miles outside of their service area. This program has minimal support from state and federal funds. It is estimated that the operating cost of the program is \$560,000 a year. This includes reimbursing volunteers and supporting the staff who coordinate rides. In comparison with a Special Transportation Service such as People's Express, the volunteer driver program saves about \$73/round trip and a total of \$584,000/year. In comparison to taxis, the volunteer drive program saves \$185/round trip and a total of \$1,480,000 a year (Zhao, 2017).

Vernon County Volunteer Driver Program

The Vernon County Volunteer Driver Program is run by the ADRC of Vernon County, Wisconsin. The volunteer program is complemented by the ADRC Minibus program as well as local taxis. This program provides a door-to-door service that is available to people of all ages. This program runs Monday through Friday. To schedule a ride, riders must call the ADRC 48 hours in advance (WisDot, 2017). Riders can request a pickup and drop off destination anywhere within a 100 mile radius of Viroqua. The cost of rides depends on mileage (Vernon County ADRC, 2018).

Trailblazer Transit Volunteer Driver Program

Trailblazer Transit Volunteer Driver Program is a public transit service that provides transportation to three rural counties in Southwest Minnesota. This program is available to all community members. The volunteer driver program is complemented by a dial-a-ride bus service. The program is operated Monday through Friday from 6:30 AM to 5:30 PM. To schedule a ride, it is recommended to call one of two dispatch centers 24 hours in advance. The cost of a ride is \$0.53 cents/mile. Rides can be coordinated and with these rides the total cost is divided by the number of riders. Volunteers are reimbursed \$0.53/mile and receive a \$10 meal reimbursement in the ride is longer than 4 hours (Trailblazer Transit, 2018).

III. Implementation, Costs, and Challenges

Volunteer Driver Program in Green County

The Green County ADRC currently operates a volunteer driver program that transports older adults and people with disabilities. Riders call the ADRC office in advance to schedule a ride. The ADRC relies on volunteers to provide their own vehicles and reimburse volunteers based on mileage (ADRC Green County, 2017). As stated in the SWRPC Locally Developed Coordinated Public Transit Plan 2014-2018, a goal was to improve and expand the volunteer driver program in Green County (Southwestern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, 2013). This goal could be met in one of two ways. The volunteer driver program that is currently running could expand its eligibility criteria to include low-income individuals or a separate program could be created. The former may be the most feasible, cost-effective approach.

To expand the volunteer driver program to include low-income individuals, certain considerations must be taken into account. First, it is important that low-income individuals know about this service. Targeted media and advertising should be created to educate residents of this resource. Programs that work with low-income individuals such as the Head Start program should be informed of this resource as well. Second, by expanding the eligibility criteria, more riders are able to use these services and that is likely to increase demand. It is important to consider strategies on how to recruit and retain volunteers. The National Transportation Volunteer Transportation Center created a handbook on Driver Recruitment and Retention that can be found on their website. It discusses that challenges to recruiting and retaining drivers such as the reluctance to use a personal vehicle and the time commitment. They found that some of the most successful ways to recruit volunteers was via word of mouth, media communication and one-on-one outreach. In order to retain volunteers, it is important to support volunteers, recognize their contribution, and ensure volunteers are having a positive experience (NVTTC, 2016). Lastly, expanding the program will increase costs. More volunteers will need to be reimbursed. It may also require more staff to train volunteers and coordinate rides.

IV. Funding

Volunteer driver programs require fiscal support to fund staffing, train volunteers, and provide reimbursement. Volunteer driver programs can be funded through municipal budgets, private foundation grants, and fundraising efforts by non-profit organizations. In addition to local budgets, state and federal governance can also provide grants (MA Mobility Management Center, 2016). The Wisconsin 85.21 County Elderly and Disabled Transportation Program allocated \$94,432 with a local match of \$18,886 to Green County in 2018. These funds can be used to support the volunteer driver program as it also services the elderly and disabled (WisDOT, 2018). The Federal Transit Administration supports federal transit programs with grants through 2020. One such grant through the FTA is the Formula Grants for Rural Areas. This grant provides capital, planning, and operating assistance to support public transportation in rural areas with populations less than 50,000 (FTA, 2018). The Rural Transportation Assistance Program (RTAP) is another federally funded program. This program provides funds to support transit in rural and small urban areas (WisDOT, 2018).

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Rural Ride-Hailing

I. Background

Use of ride-hailing apps, such as Uber and Lyft, have become increasingly popular across the country, with 30% of Americans using these services (Reinhart, 2018). People are able to use their smartphone to call a car to any address where Uber or Lyft operates and track the arrival of their driver in real-time. Customers may call a ride for any purpose, whether it be to go to work, school, a medical appointment, or a grocery store.

Urban citizens in 2018 utilize these services the most, with use at 37%, compared to 34% in suburban and 16% in rural areas (Reinhart, 2018). There was a marked increase in rural use from 2015, when 3% of rural residents stated they had ever used the service in their local communities (Smith, 2016). There is an age discrepancy as well, with 45% of those aged 18-29 versus 13% of those 65 years of age and older use ride-hailing (Reinhart, 2018). An income difference exists, with 41% of those making \$90,000 or more using services as compared to 23-28% for incomes under \$90,000. There is no difference in use by race or sex.

Traditionally, ride-hailing services have not operated in rural areas as the low population density may mean fewer rides. However, companies have increasingly been expanding into rural areas. Our objective was to research more about rural ride-sharing opportunities and how they may be applied to Green County.

II. Research Findings and Examples

Lyft and Uber in Green County

In 2017, Lyft announced that it will start offering full coverage in 40 states, including Wisconsin (Pierson, 2017). Lyft claimed the move would expand availability from 79% of the US population to 94%. The company acknowledged that response time and fare estimates may vary in rural areas but that as people learn about the service, they will utilize it more and then more drivers will follow. Uber also operates in Green County, although without similar statewide fanfare.

Uber-Town Subsidized Ride Partnerships

Uber has been partnering with small, rural towns to provide government-subsidized rides. Innisfil, a small, rural town of 36,000 spread over 101 square miles outside of Ontario, Canada, hired Uber in 2017 to provide transportation to its citizens (Lindeman, 2018). The town had been considering launching a bus service but determined they could save hundreds of thousands of dollars by working with Uber instead (Pentikainen, 2017). All prices have been converted to US dollars based on October 2018 rates. Town costs to Uber for subsidized rides was \$54,130 for 4 ½ months' worth of 24/7, door to door

transportation. UberPool is utilized to match 2 or more passengers on trips if they are going to similar destinations. The company charges riders a flat rate to popular town destinations (e.g. \$2.30 to the recreation center or town hall, \$3.80 to the train station) and other trips within town limits receive a \$3.80 discount. Users can estimate their fare online before taking a ride to a non-flat rate destination. People without a smartphone can book on a computer or utilize a call-in service.

During the initial 4 ½ month period, 12,400 trips were taken by 2,366 unique people, for an average gross subsidy by the town of \$4.40 per passenger, as compared to \$25.20 if the town had instead implemented 1 bus route (Pentikainen, 2017). Average wait time for a car was under 10 minutes. Peak hours of use were 3-5 PM on weekdays, 4-10 PM on Fridays, and 7-9 AM on weekdays. Satisfaction ratings were very high by respondents. Future initiatives of the town include increasing driver availability and reducing wait time. Residents suggested expanding the number of destinations covered with a flat fare, including a park, library, mall, grocery store, school, and hospital. Figure 1 displays the town's research, which including non-users, on ride destinations.

“The town’s partnership with Uber has made a world of difference to me and my family...It has markedly increased our income and contributed to the overall well-being of our family.” -Innisfil resident (Pentikainen, 2017)

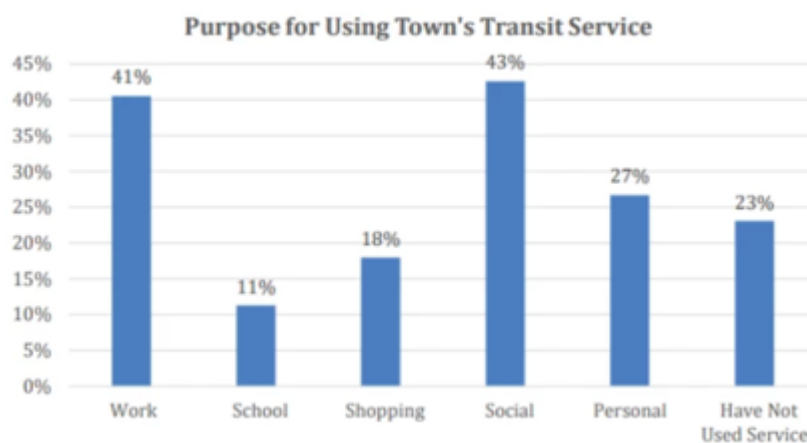


Figure 1. Innisfil- Uber Partnership Ride Destinations (Pentikainen, 2017)

As the 4 ½ month experience was successful, the town has continued to partner with Uber and will pay \$95,299 for services in 2018 (Lindeman, 2018). A senior associate at Uber stated that as of January 2018, there were 35 similar partnerships where the town subsidizes Uber use within its boundaries. Note that the town also partnered with a taxi company to provide wheelchair-accessible rides.

Uber Health

In 2018, Uber launched Uber Health, a service focused on transporting customers to and from medical appointments, clinics, hospitals, senior care homes, and other facilities (Weber, 2018). Medical staff can schedule transportation for patients up to 30 days in advance for patients or can request on-demand rides. Uber states providers can save money by having fewer missed appointments due to lack of transportation. There is no additional cost to a provider to utilize this service other than paying for the cost of rides. Uber Health is available everywhere Uber operates.

How Does Uber Health Work?

1. Clinic coordinator books a ride on demand or for a future appointment using the Uber Health Dashboard
2. Patient is contacted via text or call with trip details when ride is booked and immediately prior to ride
3. Patient is picked up/dropped off on schedule

Lyft Concierge

Through Lyft Concierge, any type of organization can schedule rides for people even if those people do not have a smartphone or the Lyft app. Below are examples of partnerships that organizations in Green County can consider.

***Medical appointments:** With a goal of reducing the number of people missing or rescheduling medical appointments due to lack of transportation, Lyft has partnered with electronic health records systems and healthcare systems to allow providers to request rides for patients.

Hennepin Healthcare in Minneapolis piloted a program that led to a 27% reduction in no-shows and a return on investment of 297% (Sanborn, 2018). While many of the publicized partnerships are with large organizations in urban areas, any organization can partner with Lyft Concierge.

***Senior mobility:** Assisted living facilities allow residents to have rides be billed to the their room, and similar arrangements exist with skilled nursing facilities and nursing homes (Lovelace Jr., 2018; Miliard, 2018).

***Other:** A wide variety of companies have partnered with Lyft Concierge, from airlines to car dealerships to insurance companies.

“Thanks to our partnership with Lyft, our hospital and clinics can now provide rides to patients who face challenges in obtaining transportation. Today, we’re positively impacting the lives of patients across our community” -Concierge partner (Lyft, 2018).

III. Implementation, Costs, and Challenges


Lyft and Uber in Green County

Given the company's expansion and subsequent declaration that "all" of Wisconsin is covered, residents of Green County are able to request rides on Lyft, although driver availability and response times vary. We calculated the estimated cost and ride times for various locations in both Lyft and Uber at 5:30 pm on Friday night for a regularly sized Lyft and UberX. Prices should be cheaper than those listed in Table 1 if a ride is called during the middle of the day.

Pick-up Location	Drop-off Location	Ride Time Per Lyft	Estimated Lyft Cost	Estimated UberX Cost
Town Bank, Main St, Albany	Monroe Clinic, Albany	4 min	\$6-8	\$6.55
Monroe City Hall	Wisconsin Cheese Group, 3 rd Street	7 min	\$8-10	\$6.55
Stearns	Monroe	12 min	\$12-15	\$11.73
Clarno	Monroe Hospital & Clinic	17 min	\$18-21	\$15.70
Monticello Village Hall	Jack Link's Jerky	18 min	\$25-30	\$13.12
Juda	Monroe Walmart	16 min	\$20-25	\$17.73
Monroe City Hall	New Glaurus Brewery	30 min	\$32-36	\$25.74
Albany	Monroe	30 min	\$30-35	\$25.66

Table 1. Sample of Lyft and Uber Fares and Ride Times Across Green County

The fares above indicate traditional ride-hailing may be too expensive to utilize on a regular basis when going from one town in Green County to another. However, families may be able to more readily afford a trip to a grocery store once a week, particularly if they go with a neighbor or friend. Green County could work with Lyft or Uber to recruit drivers in order to reduce wait times and to expand awareness of services to residents. Recruiting drivers would also lead to employment opportunities for residents. A challenge in solely relying on Lyft or Uber is that it requires a smartphone with reliable service, which



rural residents may lack or be unable to afford. As noted in the Introduction, young people are more likely to utilize ride-hailing services than older individuals, which may require targeted outreach and education. There are no significant costs to Green County in advertising ride-hailing as a tool, but it may be too expensive for residents to regularly use without subsidization.

Uber-Town Subsidized Ride Partnerships

Green County can coordinate with Uber to implement a partnership in which the town subsidizes rides for residents. The county has a similar population (36,000) as the Canadian town that has had successful utilization of Uber rides for much less money than implementing their own fixed-route bus service. Notably, Green County covers 585 square miles as compared to Innisfil's 101 square miles, which may pose a challenge. However, given the similar population size, we can roughly estimate that the cost for county subsidization of Uber rides may be similar, at around \$100,000 for a year of 24/7 services. Different towns within Green County can set their own flat-rate prices to town destinations like the store or pharmacy. Utilizing Uber Pool to group multiple passengers together could help reduce the cost of traveling from one town to another within Green County. Of note is that while town partnerships with Uber have received more news, Green County could communicate with Lyft to learn about potential subsidized collaborations as well.

Uber Health and Lyft Concierge

For health-care related rides specifically, Green County can communicate with various clinics, hospitals, rehabs, and senior care facilities about a potential partnership with Uber to ensure transportation for patients. Although the health facility covers the cost of rides, as noted above, Uber and Lyft claim the facility should be able to save money by having fewer missed appointments due to lack of transportation. There is no cost associated to Green County with this option other than informing its healthcare providers about this opportunity.

Lyft Concierge goes beyond Uber Health in that non-medical organizations can partner with them, such as employers and schools. For instance, cheese factories in Green County whose employees may have difficulty finding a ride to work could partner with Lyft to schedule transportation.

IV. Potential Funding Sources

We recommend you contact Lyft and/or Uber if you wish to pursue some type of subsidized county-private partnership. If you develop a partnership involving matching riders going to similar destinations (such as UberPool), perhaps you can apply to the Federal Formula Grant Program for Rural Areas ("Section 5311"), which supports public transportation services, including shared-ride taxi systems. The Statewide Transit Planning ("Section 5304") program is another option for funding. You may also

consider the Rural Transportation Assistance Program (RTAP), which provides a scholarship to develop the skills/abilities of those involved in providing transportation to rural and small urban areas.

If you wish to promote the use of Uber Health or Lyft Concierge, you can partner with the company to inform health providers about potential partnerships, ranging from Monroe Clinic Hospital to Pleasant View Nursing Home, about this opportunity. Providers will be more likely to want to incur the cost for rides if they have a high no-show rate. Additionally, Wisconsin state Medicaid covers non-emergency medical transportation, which is generally administered by specialized brokers who coordinate rides. There are several successful examples of brokers partnering with Lyft and Uber as well as ride-hailing companies directly contracting with health plans and organizations to provide services (Powers et al, 2018). This is another funding option for Green County Medicaid beneficiaries.

Additional Resources:

Wisconsin Department of Transportation Funding opportunities: <https://wisconsindot.gov/Pages/doing-bus/local-gov/astnce-pgms/transit/default.aspx>

Uber Health step by step guideline to utilizing their scheduling dashboard:
https://businesses.uber.com/Uber_Health_Resources.html.

Lyft Concierge information about partnerships: <https://www.lyftbusiness.com/>.

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[hailing-apps/](http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/05/19/on-demand-ride-hailing-apps/)

Rural Vanpool Programs

I. Background

A vanpool uses a vehicle which carries a group of passengers to a common destination. These vehicles are typically larger than a personal car, but smaller than a bus (Rural Health Information Hub). Vanpools are often used by rural residents who have long commutes to their worksite (Community Transportation Center of America). Vanpools can be organized by a variety of groups including employers, groups of employees, etc.

According to the University of Kansas Transportation Center for Rural Transit Providers there are four common types of vanpools: Third party vanpools, employer sponsored vanpools, owner operated vanpools and public transit vanpools (Papas, 2009). Third party vanpools are organized by private organizations, employer sponsored vanpools are operated and financed by the employer, rider operated vanpools are organized by groups of individuals and public transit vanpools are organized by a public transit agency within a unit of government.

In many rural locations, traditional public transit services cannot address the transportation needs of residents. Issues include many miles in the service area, lack of density to support fixed routes, and the fiscal challenges associated with public transit. Vanpools may provide a solution to these problems (Weaver, 2013)

The Southwestern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SWRPC) developed a coordinated public transit plan which outlined the specific needs and goals of Green County. The plan identified needs and gaps, as well as local and regional goals. Some of the identified goals/gaps could be addressed by the intervention option of vanpooling.

The report identified gaps that included the high cost of transportation, fragmentation in regional services, and stigma associated with public transit. The two regional goals that could be addressed by this intervention are implementing strategies to reduce stigma and increase awareness about transportation services and creating rideshare opportunities regionally and locally (SWRPC, 2013). As vanpools can serve people from a variety of backgrounds and can fill local and regional transit needs, this type of programming could help address goals identified by the SWRPC.

The County Health Rankings and Roadmaps “What Works for Health” tool rates policies and programs expected benefits and outcomes. The rated benefits for carpool and rideshare programs include reduced traffic congestion, reduced emissions and reduced vehicle miles traveled. Beyond these rated outcomes, some other potential benefits include increased mobility and increased quality of life (CHRR, 2017). It is important to note that these particular benefits are not unique to vanpools, but could be achieved through other rideshare programs.

Vanpools can reduce travel stress, increase employees’ access to the job market and reduced commuting costs. Employers can benefit as well, since their access to the labor market will be broadened to those who previously did not have access to transportation to a personal vehicle. The

community at large can also benefit, because of reduced traffic congestion, improved air quality, and reduced dependence on fossil fuels (Papas, 2009).

A profile of vanpool programs noted that the economic downturn in the United States resulted in disproportionate job loss in rural communities, increased commute times, and an uptick in the number of families that have become one-car or no car households. Vanpools can offer a solution that offers flexibility for commuters and reduces time spent on the road (CTAA, 2012). The issue of one-car households noted as being of particular interest in low income or single-headed household families was brought up in conversations with the community liaison for this proposal, so this benefit may be of particular interest to key stakeholders.

II. Research Findings and Examples


In *Vanpooling: Is it Right for You?*: University of Kansas Transportation Center for Rural Transit Providers (Weaver, 2013) experts suggest transit agencies make sure to be “flexible, creative and responsive to customers” and to make sure not to use the standard response of “it can’t be done” and instead make sure to learn from other agencies who have successfully implemented programs. Additionally, it is important to know what role the agency in charge of the program will play. Options include managing the programming, providing the fleet and managing the program or a public private program which involves contracting with a vanpool provider.

In a report prepared for the Colorado Department of Transportation, the authors noted several key ingredients for success. To begin, there should be a clearly identified need for a vanpool program. There also needs to be connection with riders and routes need to be pinpointed. The next step is to secure a van. Funding the van is the “number one challenge for vanpools” and a common strategy to overcome this challenge is to partner with other agencies. Other key strategies for success include taking time to make sure there is adequate recruitment of ridership and ensuring stable and ongoing vanpool program administration (Urban Trans Consultants, n.d.).

The Community Transportation Association of America in their report “Profiles of Innovative Rural Vanpool Programs” laid out many examples of successful vanpool programs and also presented a list of common elements of successful programs including: developing partnerships, involving area employers, understanding the needs of individual communities, getting political support for local leaders, emphasizing ease of use for commuters and ensuring access to a guaranteed ride home (CTAA, 2012).

Nebraska: The Nebraska Department of Roads (NDOR) contracted with Enterprise Rideshare to create a statewide vanpool program. This is an example of a public-private vanpool model, since NDOR is working with Enterprise. The program also includes an example of a successful program technique mentioned above since Enterprise Rideshare guarantees a ride home. Nebraska received federal funding for this program, and some employers may also offer a pre-tax payroll deduction for mass transit allowable under IRS Tax Code (Nebraska Department of Roads, 2017).

Oklahoma: Road to Work-Oklahoma is a cooperative effort of transit operators from across the state to develop new job access routes. The program makes meetings needs of participants and employers and



provides transit in Oklahoma, Arkansas and Texas. This particular program is aimed at residents no longer receiving public assistance, but need help getting a job (National Association for State Community Services Programs, 2008).

Carroll, Iowa: JobJet is a regional program service six counties in rural Iowa. The program is organized and managed by a regional council of governments. While modeled after other programs in Iowa, JobJet was the first program in Iowa to serve a rural community. Drivers are responsible for collective fares and ensuring the program runs smoothly, however they also ride free of charge and are able to keep the vans at home (CTAA, 2012).

III. Implementation, Costs and Challenges

The programs profiled above are only a fraction of the successful vanpool programs operating in rural America. Vanpools have worked as a single state program, multi-state program, government operated program, and public private partnerships. The diversity of program types harkens back to the advice that successful vanpools are responsive to the needs of the community they serve.

Making sure people are able to access the jobs where they are can potentially solve employment transit problems, but allow for other members of the household to use a vehicle for other purposes (i.e. leisure trips). As mentioned previously, vanpools also have the potential to achieve some of the goals laid out in the SWRPC regional report.

Making sure that programs are tailored to the community and assuring adequate funding sources will be the main hurdles to implementing an effective vanpool program. For programs working with employers, it will be important to make sure that there is both employer and employee buy-in will also be important to laying the groundwork to a successful program. While not without challenges, vanpools can meet a variety of community transportation needs tailored to a rural setting.

IV. Potential Funding Sources

Monthly passenger fees usually cover the cost of the vehicle, maintenance, fuel, and insurance expenses. Riders and employers may also benefit financially by taking advantage of certain tax benefits like the Qualified Transportation Fringe Benefit program (IRS Section 132(f) (CTAA, 2010). As mentioned previously, this can be done in concert with public private models like the one being used in Nebraska. In the section of the report looking at profiles of successful vanpool programs, the consultants also recommended the Vanpool Pricing and Financing Guide as a starting point for reviewing potential funding sources (Winters and Cleland, 2000).

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Conclusions and Acknowledgements

In this project, we offered a menu of options that would allow for one or multiple interventions to be chosen that would best suit the needs and resources of Green County, both now and in the future. The three options can be used to target multiple populations, such as workers going to work, people making leisure visits, and families attending medical appointments, and need not be implemented simultaneously. In our conversations with the community liaison, it became clear that the transportation needs of Green County are varied and diverse, and that options that could serve a variety of populations are needed in order to create a usable and meaningful intervention.

This project was completed as part of UW-Madison's UniverCity program. This program helps local government leaders find practical solutions for issues facing their communities in partnership with undergraduate and graduate courses. We are grateful to have had the opportunity to work with a community partner this early in our graduate education and are thankful for the support of the UW-Madison UniverCity staff and community partners.

About UniverCity Year



UniverCity Year is a three-phase partnership between UW-Madison and one community in Wisconsin. The concept is simple. The community partner identifies projects that would benefit from UW-Madison expertise. Faculty from across the university incorporate these projects into their courses, and UniverCity Year staff provide administrative support to ensure the collaboration's success. The results are powerful. Partners receive big ideas and feasible recommendations that spark momentum towards a more sustainable, livable, and resilient future. Join us as we create **better places together**.



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