



Advancing Rural Mobility Michigan

Project Overview

The Advancing Rural Mobility Program seeks to provide access to static and real-time public transit information and improve people's abilities to plan and book transit trips in rural communities. The program is funded by a Strengthening Mobility and Revolutionizing Transportation (SMART) program [grant](#). The SMART program was established to conduct demonstration projects focused on advanced smart community technologies and systems to improve transportation efficiency and safety.

MDOT's Office of Passenger Transportation (OPT) is partnering with four agencies: [Benzie Transportation Authority](#), [Cadillac/Wexford Transit Authority](#), [Charlevoix County Transit](#), and [Roscommon County Transportation Authority](#) for the pilot phase of the Advancing Rural Mobility Program. These four rural transit agencies are more advanced in terms of technology readiness than many of their peers, making them good candidates to pilot GTFS-flex to better understand how to expand this data to agencies across Michigan.

Advancing Rural Mobility Program Benefits

- Increase awareness of and access to mobility in rural communities, helping residents access opportunities and essential services.
- Create reliable information to bring rural transit agencies into the digital age and prepare them to adapt to future technologies.
- Enable the public to make more informed choices about how to reach their destinations with static and real-time information.
- Provide consistent data across all agency and passenger-facing tools.
- Train transit agency staff in modern technologies and provide them opportunities to shape the project through collaboration and engagement.
- Develop a replicable process that can be adopted by transit agencies throughout the country.

GTFS - What is it?

- People are often forced to use less-affordable private transportation options or avoid making trips altogether if public transit is unavailable or if they are not aware of it. Trip planning tools, such as Google Maps, Transit app, and agency-specific apps, consume publicly available open standard data specifications, such as the General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS), to display available fixed-routes, schedules, real-time vehicle information, and service updates to help people identify available services and plan their trips. This open standard

data is largely not available in rural communities, limiting awareness of travel options and creating a barrier to accessing public transit.

- Rural communities are primarily served by demand-response transit, which are custom trips taking a rider from their origin directly to their destination instead of operating on a fixed route. Demand-response services are not supported by GTFS feeds and, therefore, are not discoverable in trip-planning tools. This makes it challenging for people in rural areas to find and learn how to use the transit services that are available to them.

The Advancing Rural Mobility Program seeks to address this gap in mobility information by using existing and emerging open standard data specifications that work with demand-response services to deliver static and real-time transit information (such as GTFS-flex). The program will increase the availability of transit information to improve awareness of and access to transit services and, therefore, to jobs, education, and essential services in rural communities.

Upcoming Technology Events/Tech Talks

April 25, 2024, 1-2 p.m. - Artificial Intelligence (AI) is at the forefront of revolutionizing the transportation industry from bus operations to data analytics. This session will provide insights from groundbreaking research, making AI less intimidating and more approachable for transit professionals and policymakers. The presenter, Renee Autumn Ray, recently published *Understanding AI and Transportation* with the Eno Center and is the Senior Director of Strategic Growth at Hayden AI.

If you are not already receiving Tech Talk invitations and would like to, email Janet Geissler, MDOT mobility innovations specialist, at GeisslerJl@michigan.gov to get added to the notification list. Meeting links are typically sent about two weeks before each event.

Stay Connected

Please get in touch with MDOT Project Manager Sherry Vandevender at VandevenderS@michigan.gov with any questions or comments.