



# Mobility Vision Plan for Tompkins County 2024-2027

## Introduction

Tompkins County is committed to ensuring everyone has access to the transportation they need. Our key strategy? A customer-focused mobility management program that goes beyond simply connecting the general public with rides. It prioritizes meeting the specific needs of diverse populations, including older adults, people with disabilities, low-income workers, and youth. Recognizing their shared need for access to jobs, essential services, and opportunities to participate in community life is at the core of this Mobility Vision for Tompkins County. By identifying gaps and barriers in the current system, we can build on existing transportation programs to create new and improved ways for everyone to access the social determinants of health – factors like housing, education, and healthcare – ultimately promoting better well-being in our community.

Many factors beyond medical care influence our health. These “social determinants” encompass the conditions where we’re born, raised, work, and live. This mobility strategy directly addresses the social determinants of health by breaking down transportation barriers that prevent people from reaching essential destinations like jobs, grocery stores, schools, health care appointments, and recreation activities.



Tompkins County is dedicated to fair and equitable access to mobility services for all. Currently, low-income communities, both rural and urban, experience barriers and gaps in transportation service that negatively impact their ability to access these social determinants of health. We owe it to our residents to address these issues. By doing so, we can not only improve health outcomes but also foster economic growth and opportunity within the county.

For this mobility vision, we define underserved and low-income communities as stated in the Tompkins County Transportation Equity Needs Assessment (TENA) report. Underserved communities within Tompkins County include:

- People younger than 17 years old or older than 55
- People with physical or mental disabilities or impairments
- LGBTQI+ individuals
- Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC)
- Hispanic/Latino/Latina/Latinx individuals
- People with limited English proficiency
- People with fixed/low/no income
- People without a car or with a restricted license
- People living in rural areas

The survey focused on underserved communities because structural inequities in Tompkins County disproportionately affect BIPOC and other underserved communities, particularly at the intersection of household income.

However, people’s identities often overlap, resulting in even more transportation inequities. For example, a young person of color with a disability may face even greater challenges accessing reliable transportation. On the other hand, it’s important to acknowledge that identifying with one or more of these groups doesn’t automatically guarantee limited transportation options. While initial data suggested a correlation between these identities and transportation barriers, the inclusion of income levels revealed a strong association. This suggests that income may be the primary driver of transportation disparities, rather than identity alone.

This document takes a comprehensive look at the current system, outlines key transportation barriers, and proposes strategies to dismantle them. By improving access to social determinants of health, we can create a more equitable and healthy future for all Tompkins County residents.

### **Barriers and Gaps in the Mobility System**

This Mobility Vision seeks to identify and address transportation barriers affecting Tompkins County residents and visitors. To achieve this, we drew insights from the Transportation Equity Needs Assessment (TENA) survey, conducted from February 2022 to March 2024 and outreach by The Chief Transportation Officer and staff from March 2023-July 2024. The survey aimed to understand transportation connectivity, strengths, barriers, and solutions in Tompkins County, with a special emphasis on access to essential services, opportunities, and amenities for underserved communities.

The resulting barriers and gaps, presented below, are based on the analysis of the 2,197 responses received from residents across the County and outreach by The Chief Transportation Officer and staff from March 2023-July 2024.

- **Limited Rural Access:** Transportation options are scarce in outlying rural areas.
- **Information Gap:** Underserved and low-income communities, particularly in rural areas, lack information about available mobility options.
- **Out-of-County Travel:** Convenient travel options for out-of-county trips, especially to see medical specialists, are limited and often require a personal vehicle.
- **Public Transit and Job Opportunities:** Public transportation alone may restrict job prospects for some residents.
- **Language and Accessibility:** Information about available transportation modes is sometimes confusing and often only available in English, limiting non-English speakers' ability to navigate the system and access services.
- **Reduced Service:** Recent suspensions in public transit routes and trips have further limited transportation options in many parts of the county.
- **Medicaid Transportation:** The lack of dedicated transportation providers for Medicaid clients, coupled with the difficulty of navigating the Medical Answering Services (MAS) system, significantly limits access to essential services.

- **Financial Burden:** Low-income residents face financial barriers to using available transportation. These barriers include affording transportation itself, maintaining a personal vehicle, obtaining a driver's license, and potentially covering related fees. The TENA survey results further highlighted these issues, with underserved and low-income respondents reporting:
  - Less frequent bus service availability.
  - Difficulty finding or understanding information about existing services.
  - Limited transportation options for people with disabilities.
  - Challenges using shared transportation for non-English speakers or those with limited literacy.
  - Spending a larger portion of their income (11-20%) on transportation.
  - Limited transportation options for late-night or weekend shifts.
- **First Mile/Last Mile Challenges:** Residents in rural communities often live more than a mile from the nearest bus stop, making access to public transportation difficult. This “first mile/last mile” gap limits mobility, especially for those without a personal vehicle.
- **Limited Travel Training:** Programs that provide training on navigating different transportation options are scarce, particularly in rural areas of Tompkins County. This lack of knowledge can be a significant barrier for residents unfamiliar with the system.

In spring and summer 2024, staff of the County Department of Planning and Sustainability engaged in a series of public outreach meetings and conversations with a variety of stakeholders, including residents, riders, drivers, nonprofits, and transportation providers to discuss these barriers. This multi-faceted approach gave us a comprehensive understanding of the transportation barriers limiting access to social determinants of health for Tompkins County residents.

Through this outreach, additional barriers and gaps identified during these conversations were incorporated into this Mobility Vision.

### Solutions to Address Identified Barriers and Gaps

This section outlines a comprehensive strategy to address the transportation challenges identified in the TENA survey for Tompkins County and in a series of public outreach meetings and conversations with a variety of stakeholders. The proposed actions aim to reduce barriers and expand access by strengthening the existing mobility infrastructure and providing more transportation options.

- **Pilot Program Support:** Provide support to transportation partners to implement pilot programs identified in Mobility Vision.
- **One Call-One Click Transportation Information Center:** Establish a comprehensive transportation resource center for county residents.

- **Affordable Transportation Options:** Collaborate with Ithaca Bikeshare and Carshare to ensure these services are accessible to low-income and underserved residents.
- **Employer Partnerships:** Work with employers and carpool/vanpool services to implement programs that address transportation barriers faced by potential employees.
- **Interagency Collaboration:** Facilitate conversations among agencies and transportation service providers to explore opportunities for collaboration and service expansion.
- **Mobility Management Program:** Develop and implement a program to provide transportation information, particularly in rural low-income and underserved communities. This program would also assist with creating and implementing solutions that break down transportation barriers and improve access to employment, food sources, medical services, education, and recreation (all considered social determinants of health).
- **Intercounty Collaboration:** Partner with neighboring counties to facilitate seamless transfers between transportation systems, enabling easier intercounty travel for customers.
- **Funding Exploration:** Collaborate with key stakeholders (including nonprofits, for profits, foundations, and government agencies) to research shared funding opportunities and areas of possible collaboration. This includes but is not limited to funding for bus passes, bikeshare/carshare, and demand-response transportation services.
- **Increased TCAT Ridership:** Work with TCAT to implement initiatives that boost ridership, such as expanding the First Mile/Last Mile program and restoring pre-pandemic service levels.
- **Enhanced Services for Seniors and People with Disabilities:** Partner with Gadabout to enhance transportation access for these populations. This collaboration would involve community education, travel training programs, and scheduling assistance tailored to their specific needs.
- **Improved Medicaid Transportation:** Collaborate with MAS (New York State's call center for Medicaid rides) to provide community agencies serving Medicaid clients with clear and accessible information on scheduling transportation services, completing authorization forms, handling missed trips and no-shows, and other essential procedures.
- **Rides to Recovery Program:** Implement this program to provide crucial transportation for individuals in active recovery, connecting them to vital services and opportunities that support their overall well-being, including employment, grocery stores, healthcare, education, and recreation.
- **First Mile/Last Mile Program:** Develop and implement this program, using all available transportation modes to connect residents in outlying areas to the nearest bus stop or transportation hub, ensuring they can connect to their desired destinations.

- **Expanding Transportation Network:** Build partnerships with a broad group of stakeholders, including nonprofits serving the elderly and people with disabilities, medical facilities, educational institutions, existing transportation providers, school districts transportation departments and volunteer driver programs, to create a more robust and inclusive transportation system.

Some of the insights gathered are incorporated into this Mobility Vision, ensuring a comprehensive and effective transportation plan that will be achievable in the next three years.

### **Possible Solutions to Address Identified Barriers and Gaps**

#### **One Call-One Click Transportation Information Center**

The One Call-One Click Transportation Information Center would aim to simplify access to transportation for Tompkins County residents. By making a single phone call or using a website or app, residents would obtain information about all the transportation services available in the community. The system would allow users to schedule rides, receive confirmations, and pay for their trips. A key component of this proposal is the inclusion of a volunteer driving program.

The center would also be responsible for developing and implementing the volunteer driver program, if approved. This program would connect volunteer drivers and passengers to get them access to employment, food sources, medical services, education, recreation facilities, and support programs.

Tompkins County currently has a small volunteer driver program called Friends in Service Helping (FISH) that transports residents to medical appointments. This new system, if implemented, would expand these services to encompass a wider range of needs.

#### **Mobility Management Program**

Develop and implement a program to provide transportation information, particularly in rural low-income and underserved communities. This program would also assist with creating and implementing solutions that break down transportation barriers and improve access to employment, food sources, medical services, education, and recreation (all considered social determinants of health).

- Providing training for seniors, people with disabilities, and residents in underserved and low-income areas of Tompkins County to help them navigate public transportation more effectively.
- Scheduling and coordinating outreach events to inform the community about available transportation options and resources.
- Coordinating with area agencies, businesses, and other stakeholders to identify barriers that existing public transportation programs don't readily address.

- Partnering with the One Call-One Click Transportation Information Center to find solutions for transportation barriers in the county.

### ***First Mile/ Last Mile***

This initiative would provide connections to and from bus stops, as well as car- share and bike- share locations, for trips that start or end more than a mile away. The service would be aiming to increase ridership, especially in rural areas with limited public transportation options.

### ***Rides to Recovery***

This program would connect individuals in active recovery with essential services like employment, food sources, medical care, education, and recreation, addressing key social determinants of health.

This access would enable individuals to meet their basic needs, engage in meaningful social interactions, and maintain overall health and well-being. The primary focus of the program would be employment-based transportation, including access to educational resources for long-term career advancement. Additionally, the program would provide transportation for healthy food access and medical needs, such as prescription pickup and social services appointments.

By offering consistent access to these essential services, Rides to Recovery would aim to promote equal opportunities for good health, professional growth, and social engagement throughout our community.

### **Feedback via email, survey, and public outreach meetings**

Through a series of public outreach meetings, survey and emails received here are some of the feedback:

- School buses should be used to provide transportation to more than just students. They serve every portion of the county, and the districts have their own transportation operations. The buses can be used to serve the general public and use the schools as transportation hubs for connections to other transportation systems.
- Using the school bus system to transport youth might be a way to
- Need to address congestion in Ithaca. Providing better transit options would reduce the use of personal vehicles in the City of Ithaca and reduce the demand for parking.
- Create a bus hub for hourly service and should be located at the farmers market or other location where there are activities/facilities that people waiting for the bus can use.
- A fare free system
- The VA provides transportation to veterans who have medical appointments out of town (e.g., Syracuse). A driver provides a ride, waits for the appointment to be complete, and then drives them back to Tompkins County. There ought to be a way to coordinate so that multiple people could be on the same trip.
- "Access to Cell Phone minutes & Internet" should be included as a social determinant of health, since so many transportation options heavily depend on access to this

technology. I asked about the possibility of adding a budget line to include funding for cell phone minutes so people could participate in the programs being offered.

- Install EV charging stations at TCAT bus stops and park/ride parking areas to allow for charging while people bus or carpool the remainder of their commute.
- I also do not think that with all the hills and valleys in Tompkins County EVs are economical or even green at this time.
- The road conditions in Ithaca have become SO BAD that I have had to have my suspension replaced and alignments done on my car. This is a HUGE EXPENDITURE for me that I really cannot afford and have gone into debt because of it. I'm not sure what the thinking is for not fixing potholes in a timely fashion or repaving when desperately needed years ago. I was born in Ithaca and have lived here all my life. I cannot ever remember a time when it was THIS BAD.
- I am kind of thinking about the majority of transportation users will have a lot of barriers and may have a hard time with communication due to lack of phone service, couch surfing etc... and could lead to missed appointments and rides, late arrival, and such. I am wondering if there could be a built-in "care management" provided by the county similar to those who walk the streets for assistance in areas like the commons and the jungle. And perhaps a mix to include responsibilities like the health navigators.
- There is a challenge parking. I have not been able to attend work-related events because of this coming into the city from outside of the city. And working outside of the city means I need to add extra time to find parking. I have combined car and parking farther away with using bike share which I love but riding a bike is not safe. Walking is an option but not all areas are walking accessible.
- I live on South Hill, Whitetail Dr. There are 71 townhomes and 40 plus single-family homes. Many in my neighborhood would use TCAT if it was available.
- I am concerned about bicycles, bikes, scooters, and motorized scooters claiming public sidewalks, bullying pedestrians out of their way. Allowing bikes and all motorized vehicles to claim first priority in pedestrian areas like sidewalks and the commons, is robbing Peter to pay Paul. Yes, you encourage more non-car trips, but at the cost of making pedestrians unsafe. It is a false mobility vision that may sound good - more bike trips! - but you don't count negative impact on pedestrians. If your mobility vision is for more non-car trips, then plan for infrastructure to support it!
- Bikes and scooters need dedicated bike lanes, not paint on car lanes that say bike boulevard. It is manifestly unsafe to ride bikes on city streets with trucks, tractor trailers, subs and along rows of parked cars. I suggest you designate a north-south and an east-west bike route. Make the east-west route state street making a dedicated pedestrian and bike corridor from the commons to meadow street, connecting to the now laughable truncated and endlessly violated by cars bike lanes on state to floral avenue. For the north south, logically it would be linn street, with residents only allowed access by car. And then enforce current laws banning bikes from city sidewalks except kids 10 and under. My cherry on top wish would be a real trolley running from the commons to Stewart Park along the e-w state street corridor. If you build it, they will come.



## Future Evaluation of the Mobility System

The success of the County's Mobility Vision hinges on continued outreach and engagement with stakeholders at all levels. By working together and implementing the plan's recommendations, transportation providers and stakeholders can anticipate a reduction in the identified barriers and challenges. To lead this initiative, a collaborative effort will be sustained, continuing the dialogue initiated during the planning process. Proactive and cooperative work among stakeholders is crucial to address the identified needs and challenges.

## Conclusion

By implementing the actions identified in this strategy, Tompkins County will be well-positioned to significantly improve the mobility needs of our community. This plan directly addresses the challenges faced by many residents who rely on public transportation, ultimately enhancing their quality of life. The strategy incorporates key recommendations from the TENA survey, such as improved bus service frequency, convenient stop locations, and extended operating hours. Notably, it prioritizes solutions for underserved and low-income residents, focusing on affordability, financial assistance for bikes and cars, and increased accessibility near housing. Additionally, the plan emphasizes inclusivity by promoting safe and welcoming shared transportation options for all residents in Tompkins County.<sup>1</sup>

### <sup>1</sup> **Appendices available upon request:**

Appendix A: Current Transportation and Mobility Partners in Tompkins County

Appendix B: Current Funding Streams for Mobility in Tompkins County

Appendix C: Spring and Summer 2024 Outreach on the Draft Mobility Vision

Appendix D: Timeline for Implementation and Performance Measures

Appendix E: Survey Results