



Mobility Vision for Tompkins County 2024-2027

Draft June 21, 2024

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. 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.

- **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 will be engaging in a series of meetings and conversations with a variety of stakeholders, including residents, riders, drivers, nonprofits, and transportation providers to discuss these barriers. This multi-faceted approach will allow us to gain a comprehensive understanding of the transportation barriers limiting access to social determinants of health for Tompkins County residents.

After this outreach, any additional barriers and gaps identified during these conversations will be 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. 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 the 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, and volunteer driver programs, to create a more robust and inclusive transportation system.

Again, in spring and summer 2024, staff of the County Department of Planning and Sustainability will engage in a series of meetings and conversations with stakeholders to solicit ideas and solutions to current transportation barriers. The insights gathered will be incorporated into this Mobility Vision, ensuring a comprehensive and effective transportation plan.

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.

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.¹

¹ **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