



# Transportation Services

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Oklahoma Works: Building Oklahoma's future workforce  
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# About Oklahoma Works

Oklahoma Works is an initiative designed to increase the wealth of all Oklahomans through providing education and training for citizens to obtain quality employment. Our aspiration is to implement wealth-generating policies across the state, helping all Oklahomans to achieve the American Dream.

Since 2014, Oklahoma Works has been striving to create a better workforce development infrastructure in the state by aligning education and training with employer needs and coordinating private and public strategic priorities and plans across education, training and economic agencies. The initiative aims to facilitate quality employment for workers and improve the availability of highly skilled talent for business and industry. The initiative is a coalition of state agencies, educational institutions, businesses and other partners working together on four main objectives:

- Aligning and connecting the education and training pipeline with the needs of the state's regional economies;
- Integrating and using workforce and economic development data to inform policy, track progress and measure success;
- Building partnerships between local industry and education at the regional level; and
- Optimizing the use of resources and incentives.



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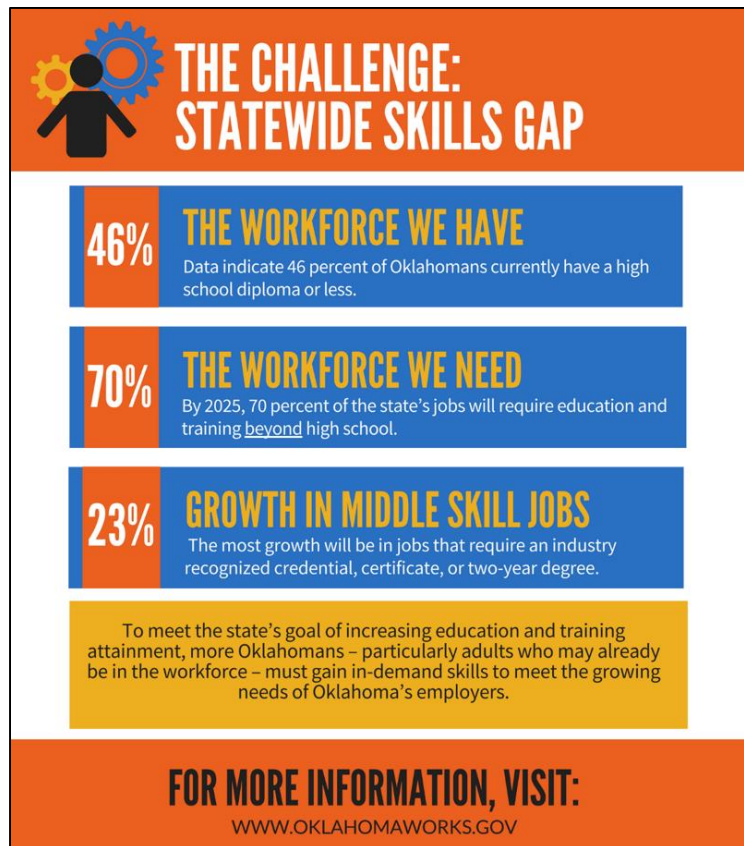
# Executive Summary

Public transportation services are critical to the well-being of Oklahomans and to the economic health of the state. Without dependable transportation, Oklahomans cannot get to work, school, job training, health care services, or other vital resources needed to achieve the American Dream. For many, the road to economic stability begins with obtaining the education and training needed to enter and succeed in the workforce. For some, the journey is derailed before completion simply because they do not have a vehicle to physically attend. Businesses also feel the effects, with thousands of good-paying, vacant positions going unfilled because qualified workers cannot be found.

When Oklahoma Works began, dozens of partners, including state agencies, workforce partners, business leaders, and others, convened to carry out a strategic planning process aimed at aligning efforts to strengthen the talent pipeline, reduce duplication, and fill gaps in the system. Repeatedly, transportation arose in these conversations as a significant barrier to Oklahomans entering and succeeding in education, training, and the workforce. Partners shared stories about students who became disconnected from education and training programs because they could not consistently get to class, and workers losing jobs because they lacked reliable transportation to ensure timely and consistent participation in work activities.

The resulting Oklahoma Works Strategic Delivery Plan established transportation services as a core strategy needing to be addressed across the state to better align and connect the workforce system. With the Strategic Delivery Plan serving as the blueprint for developing a stronger, more streamlined system, Oklahoma Works began the task of mapping out existing assets within the state, linking to other statewide transportation initiatives, and exploring innovative ideas to get more people who lack reliable transportation to work and school. These efforts were not without challenges.

Transportation is a complex, multi-faceted issue for every community. Factors such as funding, geography, population, and regulations all play a role in the availability, accessibility, and quality of public transportation available. In order to bring about system improvements in these areas, we must have access to more information to truly understand community needs. Barriers to improvement identified through our efforts include:



- A lack of data related to the overall need for public transportation by particular populations;
- Limited state and federal funding to expand routes; and
- Geographical challenges associated with the state's vast rural areas.

In order to ensure a skilled workforce for the state and continued economic development, we must find ways to make public transit, in urban and rural areas, more available to all Oklahomans. For more than a year, we have persisted in our efforts, attempting multiple strategies with limited success. We have collaborated with statewide teams focused on public transportation, partnered with education institutions to explore innovative pilot projects, implemented tools to collect needed data and information, and explored policy changes and financial models to improve the state's current public transit system. However, the fact remains that without additional resources, both research and financial, devoted to public transportation issues, progress will remain slow.

# Overview of Transportation in Oklahoma

Oklahoma has four urban transportation systems located in Lawton, Norman, Oklahoma City and Tulsa. Urban transit providers operate fixed route service, meaning vehicles make stops at regular, pre-scheduled intervals and locations. Additionally, these operators offer on-demand services typically reserved for people with disabilities. On-demand services must be scheduled by a rider hours or days in advance depending on the policies of the individual provider.

**OKLAHOMA TRANSPORTATION: AT-A-GLANCE**

- 4 URBAN TRANSIT OPERATORS**  
Provide fixed-route services at regular, pre-scheduled times. Also offer on-demand services, typically for people with disabilities.
- 20 RURAL TRANSIT OPERATORS**  
Typically offer on-demand services to all residents of a geographic area. Services must be scheduled 1-48 hours in advance.
- 11 TRIBAL TRANSIT OPERATORS**  
Often partner with state- and federally-funded transit systems to provide services to tribal and non-tribal members.

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There are an additional 20 rural transportation systems throughout the state, which primarily provide on-demand services. Rural on-demand services may be offered to any resident of a geographical region, or in some cases, be available only for certain purposes, such as pre-scheduled doctor’s appointments.

Tribal nations also receive funds to implement public transportation. Many times Tribes partner with local transit operators to blend funds and service both tribal and non-tribal members. Some tribes only provide on-demand transportation to tribal members to get to and from work and/or health care appointments.

Approximately half of transit providers in the state provide services Monday through Friday only, typically running between the hours of 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. The remainder of providers run services Monday through Saturday, beginning between 5-7 a.m. and running until 9 p.m. – 1 a.m. There is currently no public transportation available to riders on Sundays in the state of Oklahoma.

Public transportation is funded by a combination of federal, state and local dollars. Fares vary based on the distance of the ride, and many operators offer reduced fares to certain populations, such as students, seniors, and Medicare/Disability recipients.

A comprehensive asset map with details specific to each transit operator is available on the Oklahoma Works website.<sup>1</sup> Also available are route maps<sup>2</sup> identifying the location of fixed transit routes in relation to large employers and education and training institutions.

<sup>1</sup> [www.oklahomaworks.gov](http://www.oklahomaworks.gov)

<sup>2</sup> [www.oklahomaworks.gov/transportation-services](http://www.oklahomaworks.gov/transportation-services)

# State Efforts and Best Practices

Oklahoma has made recent strides in making public transportation more available, accessible, and of higher quality. Whether it be through cross-agency collaborations or regional alliances, partnerships have been key to this success. All of the below efforts have played a role in easing barriers to Oklahomans getting to work, school, and job training.

## MyRide—Statewide

MyRide—Statewide is the only one-call/one-click clearinghouse of public transportation resources in the state. Users can easily locate rides through MyRide’s extensive database, which is populated with all known public transportation resources throughout the state’s 77 counties. The database includes all forms of transportation, including private transit providers like taxis and ride-share services. MyRide is a free one-click web application accessible to anyone with a computer and internet access by visiting [www.myride.ok.gov](http://www.myride.ok.gov). Those without internet access may dial 844-OKMyRide (844-656-9743) to obtain the same information through the one-call toll-free hotline. The hotline is operated 24 hours a day, seven days a week by call center specialists at HeartLine 2-1-1. MyRide-Statewide was developed by Oklahoma Interactive (OI) at no-cost and is maintained by the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services (OKDRS).

## United We Ride Council

The Governor’s United We Ride Council assesses the availability, efficiency and quality of the state’s public transit system. The Council collaborates with partner agencies within the state, public transportation providers, the Alliance for Public Transportation, Oklahoma Transit Association, the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments, and regional Councils of Government (COGs) to advise in the development of transportation planning and support the implementation of solutions to Oklahoma’s transportation problems. In December 2017, the Council put forth recommendations to improve the coordination of passenger transportation providers. Among the recommendations were:

- Equitable agency cost-sharing;
- Fostering of innovative partnerships (public, private, faith-based, non-profit)
- Expansion of MyRide into a true mobility manager that allows for purchasing transportation services; and
- Increasing transparency and accountability through policy development such as requiring the establishment of system goals, operator performance metrics, professional development, and publicly-available annual reporting.

## Regional Transit Planning

In 2014, the Governor signed House Bill 2480, which allowed for the formation of a Regional Transit Authority (RTA). A RTA gives local cities the option to ask voters for additional property or sales taxes for a light rail or other public transit projects. As state and federal funding for public transportation fluctuates, the RTA can serve as model for developing new, creative funding streams, increasing efficiency and coordination of community transportation across Oklahoma, and strengthening regional economic development. In the Oklahoma City Metro Area, the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments (ACOG) is leading the charge to create a RTA. To date, the mayors of Del City, Edmond, Midwest City, Moore and Norman, have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with ACOG on the commitment of staff and financial resources needed to create a Regional Transit Authority Task Force for the purpose of developing a RTA.

## **Rides to Wellness**

Started in April 2015, the Rides to Wellness Initiative is a coalition of partners working to increase collaboration between health and transportation providers in order to improve the coordination of non-emergency medical transportation services. The initiative's goals are to: increase access to care, improve health outcomes, and reduce health care costs. Oklahoma's 90 members span 40 rural counties and represent hospitals, clinics, state agencies, health departments, social service organizations and transportation users. The initiative hopes to receive grant funding through the Federal Transit Administration to further its goals.

## **Veterans' Ride Connect**

The Indian Nations Council of Governments (INCOG) began implementing the Oklahoma Veterans Access (OKVA) Transit Project in 2011 through grant funding from the Veterans Transportation and Community Living Initiative (VTCLI). The OKVA Transit Project has evolved into Veterans' Ride Connect, which is the first-ever mobility management center in Oklahoma. Veterans' Ride Connect is a cooperative agency of six founding transit providers working together to provide transportation services to veterans in more than 25 counties. This regional model is the type of successful regional planning needed in the state.

## **Business Bus Pass**

Enid Public Transit has launched the Business Program Pass, which allows organizations to purchase a bus pass with a dedicated destination. The program is designed to help low-income riders by permitting organizations to pre-pay for rider fares to particular destinations. The organization can then distribute the pass to riders and be confident the rider will use it for the intended purpose only, as drivers do not accept them for other travel destinations. Permitted destinations currently include travel to and from work and medical appointments. The pass is laminated with a bus pass and a business card. The business card shows the acceptable pick up and destination locations. Trip passes may be for single day use or may include up to ten rides on a multi-ride pass. The program allows transit costs to be distributed more equitably and offers low-income, low-skilled workers a means to enter and persist in the workforce.

## **Muskogee Re-Entry Pilot Project**

Muskogee is currently implementing a pilot program for inmates re-entering communities designed to decrease recidivism. Failure to pay fines, fees and other expenses frequently contribute to a cycle of incarceration. This pilot allows judges to sentence people to the program as an alternative to jail, and existing inmates may be eligible for early release into the program. As a part of the pilot, offenders are connected with supportive services, including behavior health, mental health, substance abuse, workforce training, and housing. Offenders are provided transportation vouchers to and from work, meetings, and other necessary appointments. By providing all of the essential services necessary for a successful transition, Muskogee aims to prevent future incarcerations and increase workforce participation among this population.

## **University of Central Oklahoma Safe Ride Program**

During the 2016-2017 school year, the University of Central Oklahoma (UCO) launched a partnership with Uber to provide free ride sharing services to students on weekend evenings. The program allows enrolled students to use a promo code to request up to six rides per semester on Thursday through Saturday nights between 9:00 p.m. and 3:00 a.m. within a defined geographical region. The program offers free rides to students up to \$15 and is geared toward reducing drunk driving. Such a collaboration between an



education institution and ride sharing service offers a unique opportunity to adapt this model for daytime services that assist riders in getting to education, training and workplaces.

### **Chickasaw Nation Road to Work Program**

The Road to Work program provides a low-cost alternative for rural commuters traveling to and from work. The program aims to reduce transportation costs for Chickasaw Nation employees and enable more Chickasaws to find jobs. Buses pick up riders at central locations in each community served and stops at the place of work of each rider. Routes vary and participants must schedule rides a day in advance. The Road to Work program is available to all riders, however discounted fares are offered to American Indians (Chickasaw or CDIB).

# Oklahoma Works Efforts

In late 2016, Oklahoma Works began its efforts to identify transportation barriers for the state’s workforce and find solutions to implement. The following strategies have been carried out to date:

## Resources, Assets and Route Mapping

A statewide asset map and layered route maps of existing public transit routes were developed to understand the current resources available to Oklahomans traveling to work, school and training. Fixed routes were mapped in relation to the location of large employers and regional education and training institutions to identify service gaps. As a result, 15 gaps were identified related to large employers, and 11 gaps were identified in relation to education and training institutions. From this list of businesses and institutions, one was selected to explore a potential pilot program based on the feasibility of a number of factors, including need and existing resources.

## Pilot Program Exploration

Oklahoma Works began by researching state and national promising practices to identify potential pilot programs for implementation or expansion. Two promising models that seemed ripe for adaptation were the Business Bus Pass Program and the UCO/Uber Safe Ride Program. Based on data gathered from the transportation asset map, Oklahoma Works explored opportunities for collaborations to expand public transportation to students seeking technical education or a two-year degree. Ideas discussed included:

### Public-Private Partnership

Public-Private Partnerships have long been recognized as mutually beneficial collaborations between government and private sector entities to build and strengthen the infrastructure necessary to help economies grow. These partnerships may take many different forms. For instance, a private non-profit serving similar populations, may partner with an education institution to split the cost of a vehicle and driver to transport clients/students to job training and education. Education institutions may also leverage their foundation branches to raise private funds toward the purchase of a vehicle, offer grant or emergency funds to assist students in need of transportation vouchers, or partner with a local business to sponsor the cost of transporting employees and/or students to postsecondary education and training. Businesses looking to build their workforce may even purchase transportation vouchers for their employees to get the additional training needed to advance in their company or industry.

### Shared Use Agreements

Shared Use Agreements, sometimes known as Joint Use or Community Use Agreements, are arrangements between government entities that agree to sharing equipment, facilities, or property in order to maximize

**OKLAHOMA TRANSPORTATION: FIXED ROUTE GAPS**

**11 GAPS TO EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

- Francis Tuttle - Rockwell Campus
- Brown Mackie College
- Southern Nazarene University
- Southwestern Christian University
- MetroTech Aviation Center
- Langston University
- University of Phoenix
- Oklahoma Christian University
- Mid-Del Technology Center - Del City Campus
- Moore-Norman Technology Center - South Penn & Franklin Road Campuses

**15 GAPS TO LARGE EMPLOYERS**

- American Fidelity (OKC)
- Hobby Lobby Distribution Center (OKC)
- FAA/Mike Monroney Aeronautical Center (OKC)
- Boeing (OKC)
- Goodyear Tire & Rubber (Lawton)
- Lawton Correctional Facility (Lawton)
- Johnson Controls (Norman)
- SYSCO Food Services (Norman)
- Moore-Norman Technology Center
- OK Veterans Center (Norman)
- Hitachi Computer Products (Norman)
- US Postal Service Employee Development Center (Norman)
- NORDAM (Tulsa)
- Melton Truck Lines (Tulsa)
- Whirlpool (Tulsa)

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the benefits available to the community. In this case, Shared Use Agreements entail the sharing of institution owned vehicles (i.e. buses) to transport community members to education institutions regardless of district, grade, or age. Such agreements frequently require legal consultation to identify and discuss any issues that may arise concerning liability.

### Contracted Services

Contracted services can also support innovative practices. With the rise of ride-sharing services, such as Uber and Lyft, it has become easier to transport students and employees to pre-determined destinations at low costs. Such transportation services can be conveniently scheduled through a mobile app and offer more flexibility than fixed route transit options. These types of contracted services can be amenable to those individuals who typically have occasional access to a personal vehicle, but may not have consistent access to reliable transportation.

### **Barriers**

While exploring different structures under which to pilot a new project to close transportation gaps, two recurring barriers were identified: lack of data and lack of funding. Without the data to quantify the true need for transportation services, it is difficult to raise funds or seek partners to share costs associated with public transit. Expanding existing services can also require large financial investments. Extending existing fixed route services to new locations, even just a couple of miles, creates large expenses on transit providers, including such things as additional wear and tear to vehicles, service costs, staffing expenses, fuel, and more. Another barrier to creating innovative programming is that anecdotal evidence suggests there is not a large need for daily transportation services. Frequently partners hear from students and employees who may only need access to public transit options for a couple of days or weeks while a personal vehicle is under repair or while their regular ride sharing arrangement is unavailable (such as a family member or friend). Without a consistent ridership, investment in new public transit routes, vehicles, and partnerships becomes difficult.

Liability was another concern that arose when exploring Shared Use Agreements. Several barriers were identified with this model. First, Oklahoma has strong local control, which means such agreements are subject to each individual secondary school district. This is problematic for postsecondary institutions (CareerTech, Colleges and Universities) whose student population lives in multiple K-12 districts. If only some of those districts entered into agreements, certain segments of the population could remain unserved. Second, having adults on the same bus as young children creates institutional liability. Background checks may be required for adult riders, which may create a financial burden on the individual, employer, institution, or other entity sponsoring the transportation service. Third, in times of limited resources, shared cost agreements may be difficult to negotiate.

Identifying the need for data regarding need, Oklahoma Works attempted to survey Oklahoma adults who are not currently attending postsecondary education to determine to what extent transportation has played a role in non-completion. The survey was executed through a social media campaign targeted to key adult demographics, including:

- Low-wage workers;
- Young adults with some college or training but no degree;
- Adults without a high school diploma; and
- Oklahoma City metro area residents.

Unfortunately, the response rate to this survey was low, yielding ungeneralizable results.

In addition to surveying these adult populations, who are generally not touched by the state system, workforce development program data was collected from the state’s case management system. These data indicate nearly 500 people enrolled in Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth workforce programs had transportation needs at intake or assessment between July 2017 and April 2018. However, at the local and regional levels, there is not a consistent question that is asked of clients seeking workforce services or a consistent time frame during program participation at which such questions are asked. That makes understanding the needs of clients across the workforce system difficult.

Workforce Area	Locations	Participants with Transportation Needs	Percent of Total Participants Served*
Central	Clinton, El Reno, Guthrie, Holdenville, Norman, Oklahoma City, Seminole, Shawnee	127	3.57%
Eastern	Muskogee, Okmulgee, Stilwell, Tahlequah, Woodward	75	7.90%
Northeast	Bartlesville, Miami, Pryor	50	1.80%
South Central	Duncan, Lawton	22	6.73%
Southern	Ada, Atoka, Hugo, Idabel, McAlester, Poteau	65	4.88%
Tulsa	Sapulpa, Tulsa	91	5.40%
Western	Altus, Enid, Ponca City, Stillwater	62	8.32%
<b>Statewide Total</b>		<b>492</b>	<b>4.74%</b>

*\*NOTE: Numbers may include duplicated counts if participants are enrolled in more than one program.*

# Next Steps and Considerations

The first step required to continue forward movement of this work must be the collection of data to identify the true needs associated with transportation services. This can be done in several ways, however embedding questions into existing data collection practices and processes would be most efficient. This includes having state agencies and education institutions add consistent or similar questions to existing surveys, enrollment forms, etc., inquiring about transportation access and needs of clients. In addition to existing data collection tools, surveying through promoted and targeted social media posts can yield additional data about the needs of individuals who may not be touched through existing state programming.

Another necessary strategy to take is beginning a dialogue with businesses who may have large populations of lower-wage workers to determine their interest in helping those employees gain additional training and education in the industry in order to move into higher-skilled jobs. Part of that conversation will need to include employer-sponsored educational benefits, including transportation vouchers.

Finally, additional resources will be required to see any large-scale change. However, financial investments are contingent upon the collection of data indicating where funding should be targeted to make the largest impact. Such funding may include additional federal or state dollars, as well as private funds from non-profit entities and/or business and industry partnerships.

# Resources

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