

Testimony
Senate Bill 2012 – Department of Transportation
State Aid for Public Transit Budget
Senate Appropriations - Government Operations Division
January 20, 2025

Chairman Wanzek and members of the committee, my name is Pat Hansen. I am the executive director of South Central Adult Services in Valley City. I am also a member of the North Dakota Senior Service Providers and Dakota Transit Association. I am testifying in support of State Aid for Public Transit funds in HB 2012.

The State Aid for Public Transit funding we receive is used to match federal dollars for operating transit services and as local match for purchasing vehicles for use in public transit. If we do not receive adequate state funding for match, we may be unable to access all of the federal dollars we are appropriated.

South Central Adult Services provides the same service in the very rural areas of North Dakota that are available in the larger cities. In the very rural counties we serve, which include LaMoure, Foster, Logan, McIntosh, Griggs, Emmons and Nelson South Central provided 53,125 rides this past fiscal year. Barnes County (which is our "urban" county) provided 59,804 rides. This is a 9% increase over our last fiscal year. Local service is provided to communities within the counties, and transit is available from the southwestern counties to Bismarck 5 days per week, to Jamestown 3 days per week, from our eastern counties to Fargo 5 days per week and to Grand Forks 5 days per week. We are transporting dialysis patients from Strasberg, Linton, Wishek, Ashley, McVillie, Lakota, Carrington and Valley City on a

regular basis. We have made many trips to Fargo and Bismarck with patients for radiation treatments and chemotherapy in the last few months.

That is only the tip of the iceberg. We provide rides for local medical appointments, rides to work, school, daycare, Head Start, and many rides for local grocery shopping, hair appointments, rides to senior centers and rides for nursing homes and assisted living facilities. We currently have 32 full-time and 46 part-time transit employees. The cost of personnel has increased dramatically over the past few years. We have had to increase wages in order to compete with other employers in our area and have increased hours to keep up with the demand for services. This problem has increased since the pandemic. Even taking the impact on the residents of our counties out of the picture, if we do not receive adequate funding, the staff reductions in these rural counties would be devastating to our employees and to the small rural communities where there are very few jobs available.

Last fiscal year, even with the increase in State Aid, we had to use \$462,808 (over 20% of our operating budget) in local dollars to meet expenses. That amount of local funding cannot be sustained long term. This concerns me on several levels as many of the people we serve do not have other options for transportation. Some of our rural riders would be forced to move to locations where medical services such as dialysis and cancer treatments are available. A large percentage of them would need long term care and are low-income. Many of the people we serve do not have vehicles. As one of our riders told me today, "I would be totally isolated without your service."

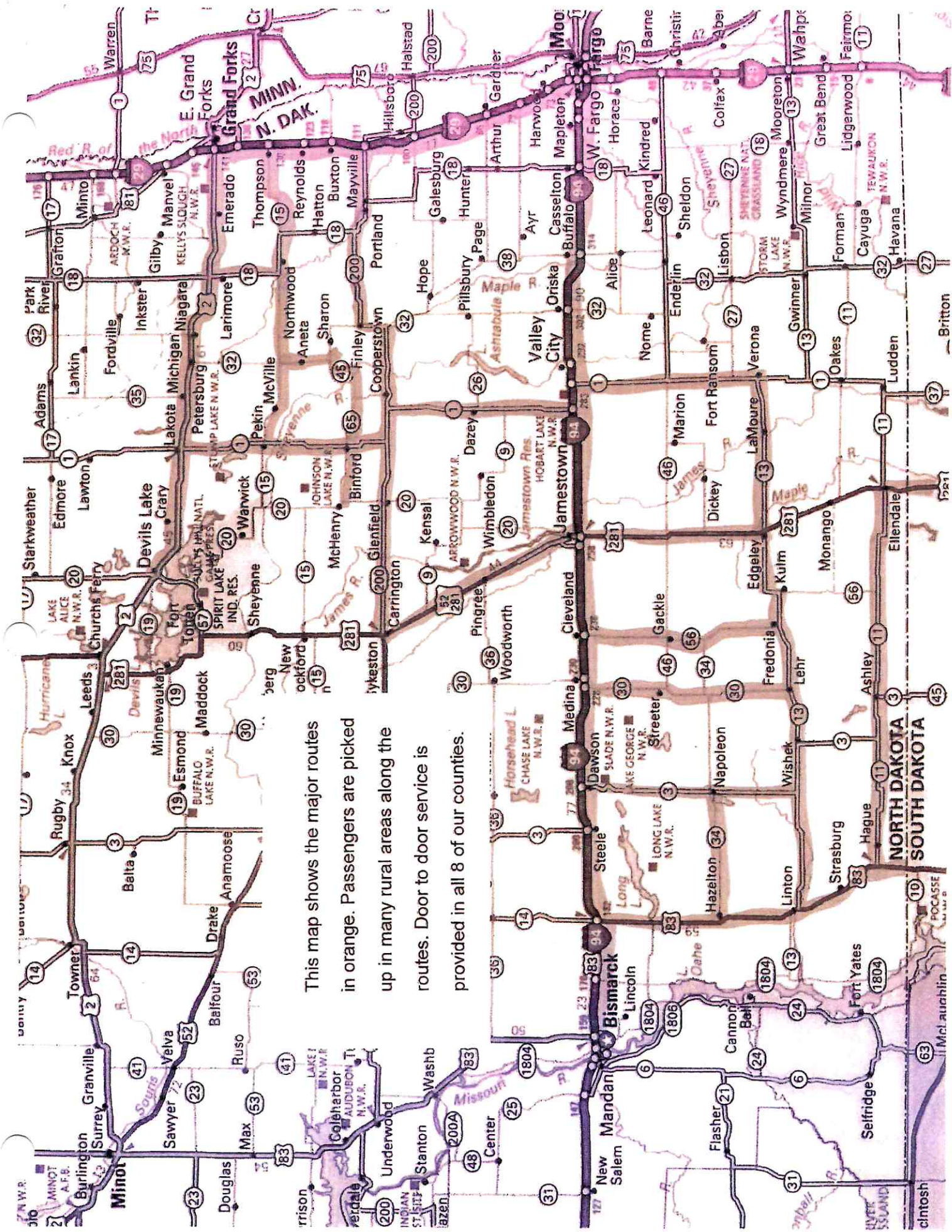
While many of North Dakota's rural public transit agencies provide much needed transportation to those already living here, our public transit services also play a role in drawing new people to our state. Many of those considering re-locating to North Dakota from other states, come from large cities and urban areas where public transit is their main mode of transportation. A large number do not even own a vehicle. Access to public transportation, especially in rural communities, can be a determining factor in their decision making process. We believe that safe, reliable and sustainable public transportation is an integral piece of the puzzle when it comes to continued growth in North Dakota.

On a positive note, we have received many new vehicles in the past year. Many had been on back order for two or more years. This is a benefit to us as it will help decrease the amount dollars spent on repairs. It also provides much safer transportation for passengers. I would like to thank the legislators for the increased funding this biennium, and the North Dakota Department of Transportation for their continued support of our agency. We are very fortunate to have the great staff we have in the Department.

Transit providers would like to see us get back to a minimum of \$12 million next biennium. This would ease some of the demand on local funding.

I have attached a map of our coverage area for your information.

Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



This map shows the major routes in orange. Passengers are picked up in many rural areas along the routes. Door to door service is provided in all 8 of our counties.

NORTH DAKOTA
SOUTH DAKOTA