

Testimony
House Bill 1106 – Department of Transportation
State Aid for Public Transit Budget
Senate Transportation Committee
March 20, 2025

Chairman Clemens 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 HB 1106 which would add \$2,000,000 to the State Aid for Public Transit fund for the next biennium.

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, McVile, 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."

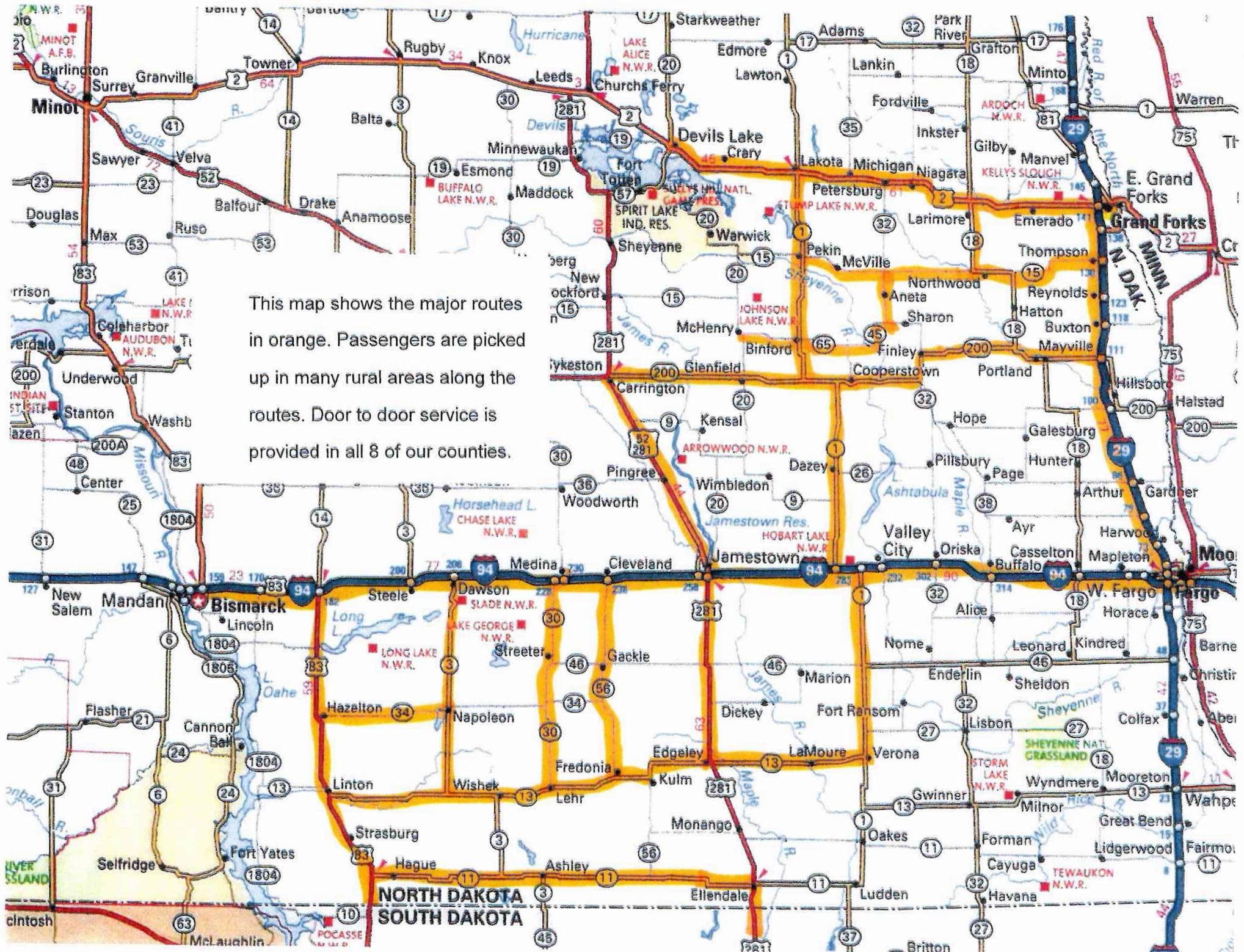
While many of North Dakota's rural public transit agencies provide much needed transportation to those already living here, our public transit services also play a role in drawing new people to our state. Many of those considering re-locating to North Dakota from other states, come from large cities 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 and fares 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.

Reviewed 12/11/24

Following are the service routes & schedules currently being provided by South Central Adult Services.

Barnes County Schedule

Valley City - Demand/Response: Monday - Friday - \$2.00/ride

8:00am - 5:00pm

Saturday & Sunday

8:00am - 2:00pm

Valley City to Jamestown: Monday, Wednesday and Friday - \$5.00 round trip

Oriska, Fingal, Nome, Kathryn, Litchville, Hastings: 1st & 3rd Friday each month - \$5.00 round trip

Sanborn, Rogers, Leal, Wimbledon, Dazey: 2nd & 4th Wednesday of each month - \$5.00 round trip

Valley City to Fargo: Monday - Friday as needed - \$10.00 round trip - will stop in Tower

City, Buffalo and Casselton as requested. Jamestown to Fargo \$25.00 round trip.

Taxi operates in Valley City 24 hours per day, 7 days per week - Metered - Second Taxi to run on weekends.

LaMoure County Schedule

LaMoure to Jamestown & Valley City: every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday - \$10.00 round trip

LaMoure to Fargo: Every Thursday - \$18.00 round trip

LaMoure to Bismarck: Monday - Friday on McIntosh County vehicles - \$18.00 round trip

LaMoure to Oakes upon request - \$8.00 round trip

LaMoure to Aberdeen, Ashley and Wishek upon request - \$10.00 round trip

LaMoure City: Monday - Friday - \$2.00 round trip

Logan County Schedule

Within Napoleon: Monday - Friday - \$1.00 round trip

To Bismarck: Monday - Friday - \$10.00 round trip western county/\$13 round trip eastern county

To Jamestown: every Thursday - \$10.00 round trip eastern county/\$13.00 round trip western county - stops in Streeter as requested

To Wishek and Linton: Monday - Friday upon request - \$8.00 round trip

To Aberdeen: 1st, 3rd and last Tuesday - \$13.00 round trip

McIntosh County Schedule

Within Ashley: Monday - Friday - \$1.00/ride

Within Wishek: every Monday - Friday - \$1.00/ride

Wishek/Ashley/Zeeland/Lehr to Bismarck: Monday - Friday - \$15.00 round trip

Wishek to Jamestown: every Thursday - \$13.00 round trip

Between Zeeland & Ashley: Upon request - \$5.00 round trip

Shuttle to Kulm for Jamestown & Fargo connections: every Thursday - 25.00

To Aberdeen: 1st, 3rd & last Tuesday each month - \$13.00 round trip

Griggs County Schedule

To Fargo: every Thursday - \$10.00 round trip

To Valley City: 2nd Tuesday of each month - \$8.00 round trip

To Grand Forks, Mayville, Hillsboro: 4th Tuesday - \$10.00 round trip

Within Cooperstown: Monday thru Friday - \$1.00/ride

Cooperstown/Binford/Sutton: upon request - \$3.00 round trip

Cooperstown/Hannaford: upon request - \$3.00 round trip

To Jamestown: 1st & 3rd Tuesday - \$8.00 round trip - stops in Glenfield as requested

Foster County Schedule

Within Carrington: Monday thru Friday - \$1.00/ride

To Fargo: 1st Wednesday & 3rd Tuesday of each month - \$15.00 round trip

To Bismarck: 3rd Wednesday of each month - \$15.00 round trip

Rural Foster County: 2nd Wednesday and 1st, 3rd & 4th Fridays of each month - \$5.00 round trip

To Jamestown: 1st, 2nd & 4th Tuesday, 4th Wednesday and every Thursday of each month - \$8.00 round trip

To New Rockford: Every Monday, upon request - \$5.00 round trip

Emmons County Schedule

Within Linton: Monday - Friday - \$1.00/ride

To Wishek - As requested - \$8.00 round trip

To Bismarck: Monday - Friday - \$10.00 round trip northern county/\$13.00 round trip southern county
Rural Emmons County to Linton: Monday – Friday as requested - \$5.00 round trip
To Fargo: Thursday - \$25.00 round trip
To Jamestown: every Thursday, \$15.00 round trip
Rural Emmons County to Linton: Monday – Friday as requested - \$5.00 round trip
Within Strasburg, Hague and Hazelton – Monday – Friday - \$1.00 per ride

Nelson County Schedule

Lakota to Grand Forks: Monday, Wednesday, Friday - \$10.00 round trip (stops in Michigan, Petersburg, Larimore and Emerado as requested)
Devils Lake to Grand Forks: As needed - \$10.00 round trip
Within Nelson County: \$1.00
Aneta/McVile to Grand Forks: As needed - \$10.00 round trip
Aneta/McVile to Devils Lake & Lakota: As needed - \$5.00 round trip

Shuttles are available from anywhere in Logan, McIntosh and Emmons counties Monday through Friday to meet the scheduled Bismarck vehicles so that service is available to Bismarck five days per week.

Free rides may be provided through referral from Social Services. They are to be negotiated as a need arises. South Central Adult Services does not have discounted fares.

I thank you for your consideration of HB 1106. I apologize for not being at the hearing last week. It is much easier to answer questions in person than through an email, but I will attempt to answer some of the questions asked by Representative Koppelman.

In response to questions from Representative Koppelman:

1. Reasons why those who are not elderly and disabled use transit:
The Federal Transit Administration requires that to receive funding for operations, rides must be available and open to the general public. Their preference is that at least 50% of the rides are for the general public. South Central has met this goal for several years. Riders under age 60 use the service for many things including rides to work, rides for children to school and daycare, shopping, personal errands, etc. Many of them do not have vehicles of their own or they are unable to take off work to transport their kids.
2. Do you see people using transit just because it's cheaper than using their own car?
We do not generally ask people why they are riding. We have had some state that it is cheaper than owning and operating their own vehicle. Some of them, for example traveling nurses, come from other parts of the country and do not want to drive here. They usually fly to Fargo or Bismarck and use our service to get to and from their work.
3. Reason for excess \$460,000 in local funds last year:
It has been difficult to project ridership since Covid. Last year we provided 10,000 additional rides from the prior year. We also did not apply for an adequate amount of federal dollars because we did not foresee this large increase. Federal funds will pay for 50% of operating and 80% of administrative costs after fare income is deducted. These funds must be matched with State or local funds. I am attaching a copy of our fares and services by county for your information. The amount we are charging is approximately 10-11% of the cost of service which is encouraged by the FTA. I believe this is one of the factors they consider when funding our program. We make every attempt to look at each county's demographics and distances per trip when determining fares.
4. Thoughts on increasing fares and using a voucher system for elderly and disabled:
We do not require a means test for passengers so in many cases we don't know what their financial situation is. For the very low-income, those who are on Medicaid or Expanded Medicaid, we bill their fare to Medicaid. Unless it is an unscheduled or special need request we are not allowed to bill Medicaid for more than the regular fare. In order to set up a voucher system and to do intakes on the hundreds of people receiving rides throughout the state it would almost require a whole new department to oversee it. It is also doubtful that FTA would approve it.