DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Rural Community Transit Strategies: Building on, Expanding, and Enhancing Existing Assets and Programs

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This project involved the development of innovative sharing-economy strategies to address rural transit challenges in Greater Minnesota. Many transit services and transportation network companies (TNC's) like Uber and Lyft do not provide services to commuters outside metro areas, forcing most residents in Greater Minnesota to own automobiles. Meanwhile, many communities have school bus systems and substantial vehicle capacity that remain parked and unused much of the day. This project uses a human-centered design approach to engage a community in Greater Minnesota with a population of less than 10,000 people to develop a pilot for rural community transit that could be a model for similar communities across the state. The research seeks to answer the question of whether a shared, mobility services approach to rural transit transportation in Greater Minnesota could meet people's needs at a lower cost, with more convenience, and with greater positive impacts on the local economy than current transit practices and services. Our research developed a menu of strategies that uses existing community assets to promote walking, biking, car sharing, bus sharing, and car and van pooling.

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RURAL COMMUNITY TRANSIT STRATEGIES: BUILDING ON, EXPANDING, AND ENHANCING EXISTING ASSETS AND PROGRAMS

FINAL REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Although there are many transit needs in small, rural communities, the available transit services frequently do not meet those needs. Rural Community Transit Strategies sought to answer the following question: Can a shared, mobility services approach to rural transit transportation in Greater Minnesota meet the unmet needs of rural residents, with more efficiency, and with greater positive impacts on the local economy than current transit practices and services?

Our research created a flexible menu-based strategy that can be altered and changed over time to respond to changing conditions, needs, and opportunities. In partnership with the city of Wabasha and its region, the research team created a rural community transit system model (RCTS) that equitably serves the needs of rural community residents using 21st-century technology, leverages existing assets and resources in new ways, and identifies new strategies to integrate existing vehicles into a community transit system. We documented the existing transit options, studied rural transit models in other states, investigated sharing-economy transportation models, integrated existing disparate transportation resources into a community system model, and identified potential funding strategies. We also examined barriers to the adoption of RCTS.

Our research demonstrated how rural communities can leverage existing public assets, like school bus funding to serve as the 20% match needed to access the state's rural transit funding. Our research showed how these vehicles can qualify for that match if they are also used for transit purposes and how transit can benefit small, rural communities.

This research creates a menu of strategies that rural communities across the state — and nation — can adopt in its entirety or adapt parts of it to fit their circumstances, leveraging both physical and digital assets in new ways. The menu ranges from a strategy that self-organizes local mobility groups using websites to a strategy that reconfigures school transit service to serve the whole community.

The work redefines small community rural transit as a mobility system consisting of a mobility menu and names it Greater Minnesota Moves. It has the following characteristics:

Embraces

- Variety of movement modes
- Pedestrian and bicycle pathways
- Multimodal hubs
- Virtual communication hubs

Creates Hybrid Mobility System Menu

- Bicycles
- Pedestrian ways
- Buses

- Vans
- Cars

Responds to Small Rural Town's Character

- Builds on local assets
- Supports community's choices from menu
- Responds to changing circumstances, can be adjusted, changed and/or added to
- Recognizes limited staff capacity in small communities
- Engages county and regional partners
- Benefits from MnDOT's expertise

Strengthens Community Life

- Transforms two focused transit systems into one for all
- Increases service to facilitate participation in community life
- Includes all residents

Uses and Builds on Existing Assets

- 21st-century communication technology
- City website
- Current dial-a-ride service
- Current school bus service
- Existing volunteer driver program
- Regional dispatch center
- Underutilized privately owned cars in community
- Bicycle/walk groups
- Local businesses
- Internet capacity
- Existing sidewalks and trails
- Existing streets
- Community members

Expands Service

- Extends hours of operation
- Operates seven days a week
- Extends beyond city limits
- Crosses county boundaries

Responds to Driver Shortages

- Restructures a part-time, seasonal school bus driver job into a full-time community bus driver

- Transforms the volunteer driver program to attract more drivers

Engages and Empowers Community Residents

- Uses existing social-media connections
- Empowers community members to connect directly regarding transportation needs
- Requires little or no public-sector staff support

Impacts Community Form

- Creates multimodal nodes
- Designates pickup points and stops
- Relies on a pedestrian and bicycle network system
- Requires pedestrian and bicycle ways in new developments

Impacts Public Policy

- Redefines rural transit as a mobility system with a choice of menu items
- Recognizes rural transit as important civic infrastructure
- Recognizes existing public and public/private opportunities
- Supports public mandate for timely snow removal
- Requires pedestrian and bicycle ways in new developments
- Transforms lightly used streets into walk/bike/drive streets

Creates Partnerships with:

- City
- School district
- County
- Regional transportation management organization
- MnDOT
- Nonprofits
- Private businesses
- Citizens
- Community groups
- Neighborhoods

Meets Students' Mobility Needs

- Preschool programs
- Kindergarten through 12th grade
- After school activities
- Special needs students
- Post-secondary students

Finally, we recommend re-branding rural community transit with a name and logo such as Greater Minnesota Moves (see Appendix) to distinguish it from its urban and suburban counterparts. The branding needs to convey the sense of innovation possible and capture the creativity of rural community mobility systems. We also recommend a communication strategy that will provide a menu of options that rural communities might consider in a form that makes it easy for them to understand and use.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 ESTABLISHED ADVISORY GROUP

We created an advisory group that consists of members from MnDOT, Southeast Minnesota transit providers, the city of Wabasha, transit customers, diverse local residents, staff members from the city, county, state, school district, major employers, and private transit providers to help us understand the needs of the community.

1.2 DOCUMENTED EXISTING TRANSIT SERVICES

We documented the existing transit services available to Greater Minnesota residents, with a focus on four sectors: education, social service, employment, and community activities. We also documented the transit providers and the populations currently served; mapped the existing service areas, routes, and schedules; looked at how they are funded and how the pandemic has affected their business; and took the time to understand the policies, regulations, and restrictions within which they operate. We further identified those in need of transit services who do not have access to the existing system, what their specific experiences of transit have been, and what unmet needs they might have.

1.3 EVALUATED OTHER RURAL TRANSIT EFFORTS

We documented how communities in other states have addressed the need for rural transit and what new technologies and strategies they used to do so. We then evaluated their applicability to our rural communities and their usability among a diverse population, with the goal of narrowing in on a few of these efforts that have the most relevance to Greater Minnesota. We found several initiatives in other states, as well as in other parts of Minnesota, worth exploring.

1.4 IDENTIFIED DESIRED TRANSIT SYSTEM CHARACTERISTICS

The desired characteristics include the following:

- A system that is recognized as an important part of community infrastructure
- Expands community system funding by using current local school transportation funding as a 20% match to Minnesota's rural transit grant program
- Acknowledges informal networks outside of its system
- Strengthens community life by accommodating group trips to community events and community resources such as the swimming pool and library and promotes food access: grocery shopping after work, delivery of food, access to farmers' markets, etc.
- Provides service to all in the community and responds to the unique needs of minority populations, i.e., undocumented workers, etc.
- Runs at the regional level
- Builds on and expands current assets
- Uses digital platforms
- Makes on-demand requests accessible by cell phone, internet, and landlines

- Has a fare system that supports the system economically while providing free or reduced fares to those who need them in a manner that respects their privacy
- Uses the dispatch system located in Plainview and expands its role
- Operates longer hours, more days, ideally available 24/7
- Requires less than one-day advance notice, ideally on-demand within minutes not hours
- Crosses county boundaries and potentially state boundaries
- Creates attractive employment opportunities for drivers
- Replaces or supplements volunteer driver programs with programs that adequately compensate drivers for their time and distances traveled
- Addresses liability issues
- Addresses security concerns
- Protects client privacy
- Responds to changing conditions, i.e., post-pandemic situation
- Supplements fixed routes for kindergarten through 12th grade students with additional mobility services, i.e., service to technical colleges, return-to-home services from after-school activities
- Meets students' needs: Head Start, after-school activities, high school, post-secondary, special needs, etc.
- Permits other community members to ride on school buses
- Meets the needs of commuters who are not already served by transit including employees with irregular schedules and telecommuters
- Has "mobility node" transit stops, pick-up points, and stops
- Supports physical access to mobility nodes, i.e., neighborhood strategies for access: sidewalks, snow removal system, etc.
- Supports other services: food delivery, educational equipment, i.e., equipment for technical programs in high schools, medical services, etc.
- Uses the creation and acquisition of new electric school buses as an opportunity to create buses that accommodate adults, handicapped individuals, etc.

1.5 DEVELOPED A MENU OF STRATEGIES AND IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

We developed, as part of a human-centered design process, the best models, strategies, and techniques to meet the greatest number of unmet needs in Greater Minnesota. We also gathered feedback from community members, city officials, and the advisory group to identify barriers to overcome, the resources needed, and the partners needed to make it happen. From there, we outlined some potential implementation steps and possible external funding strategies.

CHAPTER 2: TRANSIT NEEDS OF RURAL MINORITY AND UNDER-SERVED POPULATIONS

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Our review of the literature shows that there are a key set of factors determining rural transit: customer service, safety, and reliability. However, the challenge is to connect these values to a system of measurement, a challenge amplified by the way in which administrators engage with rural transit policy. If an internal plan of action exists, administrators may not always pay attention to the plan, they may have difficulty creating metrics for the plan, and/or they may prioritize the metrics that state managers may want to see in order to claim success (Monast et al 2019). Given this condition, it would be helpful to consider the values and metrics that particularly address minority and under-served populations in rural Minnesota.

2.1.1 Opportunities:

Local administrators need to be considered when identifying the values that define rural transit and when developing clear and cogent rural transit policies. These policies need to be at a scope most beneficial for rural communities. This could be carried out through the transportation element of local comprehensive plans, providing incentives for transit and associating transit with other elements of the plan.

2.1.2 Challenges:

The availability of data that may center minority and under-represented communities in the development of rural transit is key. Access, ownership, and management of this data would require the public sector to maintain a vast resource, which would require staffing and funding to maintain. Additionally given the multi-layered characteristics of governance, coordination among transit systems at various scales would be necessary.

2.2 UNDERSTANDING RURAL TRANSIT DEMAND AND NEEDS

Another key factor affecting minority and under-represented groups is understanding how demand functions in rural areas. Rural areas are characterized by limited choices in transportation, despite the growth of travel demands. As the demand for public transit in a rural transit district ebbs and flows, a key question is: What are the likely factors that would influence individuals' decisions to use a particular mode of transportation? The likelihood of demand includes factors such as: travel cost savings, frequency of service, time savings, accessibility to jobs, a variety of payment types, and the opportunity to do other things while traveling (Majumdar 2012). These factors need to be considered when developing rural transit policy that may fit both local and regional demands.

2.2.1 Opportunities:

Based on preliminary interviews with local transportation and transit policy actors in rural Minnesota, the authors have found that cost is a major issue for transit access in rural areas. Members from minority and

under-represented groups face employment pressures and labor instability. They may need to hold multiple jobs and maintain extended family responsibilities, which translate into time savings as a dire need.

2.2.2 Challenges:

Access to rural transit for minorities and under-represented communities is an inter-related problem. The solution is based not just on enabling a robust rural transit system that meets the demand, but also on addressing structural challenges that exist outside the transit system. To address such disparities, coordination and policy making among different systems, such as transportation, workforce development, and education, are necessary. Many minority and under-represented groups struggle with accessing job opportunities that may require a transit budget and do not have the capacity to use digital or other virtual payment types. These conditions point to a need for innovative programs that may link employment opportunities with travel cost-savings programs.

2.3 DIAL-A-RIDE SERVICES

One option for transit in rural areas involves introducing flexible transportation for better service (Hough et al 2018). In this regard, solutions such as DAR (dial-a-ride) service may offer an alternative in rural areas where complex road network topographies exist and where fixed services are less available or not cost effective. A key aspect of this solution involves minimizing operating costs and the total travel times of all travelers.

2.3.1 Opportunities:

Dial-a-ride services may provide specific offerings for minority and under-represented groups who lack access to a car and/or require mobility assistance. Dial-a-ride services may include specific instructions to facilitate the transit experience and/or pre-planned in advance to ensure scheduling. This type of service is also attractive to people who may face cognitive barriers and physical limitations.

2.3.2 Challenges:

Dial-a-ride services have been used in urban areas for some time with varying degrees of success. This service includes providing transit options for individuals who live beyond a predetermined walking radius relative to existing transit stops. A main issue with dial-a-ride service includes the waiting time as well as the financial sustainability of such programs based on the number of riders. Given the long distances between major destinations that exist in rural areas, dial-a-ride services may also be a less preferable solution for riders who prefer not to – or do not have the time to – wait.

2.4 CAR-SHARING HUBS

Other studies (Frank et al 2021) involve establishing hubs to improve rural transit accessibility. In these cases, the input of models account for the existing public transit system, identified points-of-interest, and estimated commuting volumes to workplaces, based on official commuting data. While models have a

high potential to improve accessibility in rural areas, most of the improvement stems from unimodal car-sharing trips.

2.4.1 Opportunities:

Car sharing presents itself as a major opportunity for the enhancement of an existing transit system in rural MN. The piloting of car-sharing technologies/apps in the metro region offer lessons that may be transferrable to rural areas, where new systems may be piloted. Rural areas may already have informal car-sharing networks in place that provide mutual aid and support to get to and from destinations. The introduction of new technologies and the identification of existing networks offers a win-win situation.

2.4.2 Challenges:

Data access to model car-sharing opportunities represents a major challenge for this type of system. The management, safeguarding, and synthesis of data would require the designation of governance structures at different scales that may not be in place in rural Minnesota. Additionally, there is a cultural barrier: car culture in rural Minnesota is embedded with traditions and legacies that are difficult to transform. The dependency on the car as a pervasive sole-ownership mode of transportation would require further reflection to address.

2.5 INFRASTRUCTURE CHALLENGES

The challenges of transportation in rural areas represent a multiplicity of factors. One study (Henning-Smith et al. 2017) provides a picture of informant attitudes towards transit challenges across the U.S. The picture that emerges is complex: infrastructure (mentioned by 63%), geography (46%), funding (27%), accessibility (27%), political support and public awareness (19%), and socio-demographics (11%). According to this study, the main challenges to consider are the management, construction, and upkeep of infrastructure; the difficulty of implementation given geographic conditions; and funding.

2.5.1 Opportunities:

The focus on infrastructure, geography and funding provides an entry way for a discussion that prioritizes minority and under-represented populations. The planning of transit infrastructures lends itself to planning approaches in which community engagement strategies are created and used to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion in rural transit planning and use.

2.5.2 Challenges:

Very little is known about the preferences and priorities for rural transit in Minnesota. While there is a challenge accessing quantitative data that is privately owned and a lack of capacity from the State, knowledge about what people actually want and experience is also absent.

2.6 SPECIAL NEEDS

Much of the literature that was reviewed focused on the implementation of rural transit strategies without the consideration of particular populations. While access to transit on the part of minority and

under-represented groups appears to be an important value through the critique of policy regimes, metrics and values, less research focuses on the experiences of particular populations with special needs. Minority and under-represented groups are characterized by specific experiences that require recognition, opening the door to the refinement of policy implementation.

2.6.1 Opportunities:

The inclusion of particular populations that make up the minority and under-represented socio-economic spectrum could provide further specificity in addressing rural transit needs. These groups include youth, the elderly, as well as people with disabilities and different cognitive abilities. Each of these groups have a particular experience that could become the basis for rural-transit mobility, for the formation of values, and for the application of best practices. The focus on special needs also extends beyond a capabilities approach to include family structures. For example, certain groups may consider transit as a collective activity rather than an individual-based activity. This characteristic becomes more important in households where youth may take care of the elderly and vice-versa, as trips to carry out every day errands are necessary.

2.6.2 Challenges:

The inclusion of special needs in a rural transit plan must be intentional and carefully planned to prevent tokenism and inauthentic engagement with members from the designated groups. This approach may require the building of trust as well as the maintenance of relationships over time that may have their own timeline beyond the ordinary expectations of community engagement work.

2.7 FOOD ACCESS

The link between transit and food access remains a seldom considered topic in transportation accessibility studies. Nevertheless, planning transit around food access remains a dire need for minority and under-represented groups. To consider this topic, the research team carried out initial conversations and participant observations with the Wabasha County Food Access Network, which includes staff from different sectors in the food system - producers, consumers, and advocates. The staff identified mobility and access to healthy and culturally relevant food as major issues for their clientele.

The lack of transit options to food underlines a key paradox for transportation planners and policy makers in rural Minnesota: While agricultural production defines rural Minnesota's landscape, access to culturally relevant and healthy food remains a major challenge. Markets, restaurants, food shelves as well as access to food security programs and services tend to be concentrated in urbanized areas, while staffing, knowledge, and the demand able to sustain a food economy tend not to exist in small towns.

2.7.1 Opportunities:

The potential for partnerships is high in Wabasha through collaborations with the Wabasha Area Food Shelf. Collaborations may include the redistribution of spoilable food from large, big-box stores in urban communities to rural destinations. The Wabasha Area Food Shelf is accessible for car-owners, but it is not

easy to get to for those residents who are car-less or do not live within walking distance. The Hiawathaland Transit Service does provide dial-a-ride service to the food shelf, but the client is the one who needs to make the call. Similarly, food shelf staff have promoted the use of the Hiawathaland. They have tokens available for client use, but some of the food shelf clients are reluctant to use the service.

During the early pandemic, Hiawathaland made food deliveries to homebound food shelf clients when bus ridership and food shelf volunteers were down. This adaptation to home deliveries presented itself as a novel opportunity. However, Hiawathaland requires a one-day lead time for food delivery and will not deliver last-minute, even if the bus is driving by the destination. Initially, it required that the Wabasha Food Shelf provide a volunteer to ride the bus and deliver the food, but it then changed to providing deliveries without a food shelf volunteer. During the time of school closure due to the pandemic, school food was also delivered to homes in some urban areas while few meals were delivered in rural areas. While the SE Region food access information is very thin, a food access survey is being deployed in SE Minnesota. Data from the survey will provide information on the location for food deserts and the general condition of food access points related to food access. When the survey is completed, the information will be used to identify transportation needs related to food access.

2.7.2 Challenges:

The Food Access Network agreed that Hiawathaland is an important community asset, but its inflexible policies limit its use by food-shelf clients. The financial and operational sustainability of the new services that have sprouted after the pandemic remain a question mark. The challenge of institutionalizing such operations and ensuring their capacity over the long-term would require funding and expert knowledge. While the multi-use of transit service represents a novel approach, the reproduction of this approach in other locations in rural Minnesota also represents an unknown. It is difficult to assess whether similar food networks with robust participation and on-the-ground connections exist in other locations in rural Minnesota and whether they have any interest in such an approach.

CHAPTER 3: EXISTING SOFTWARE AND PLATFORMS

We identified and evaluated existing apps, websites, platforms, and services that are currently available to aid people living in rural areas access transportation. These broke down into several categories, which we have summarized below and in the attached spreadsheet.

3.1 EXISTING TRANSIT SERVICES

The provision of on-demand transit services is the dominant mode of transit services in many rural communities, which are often too small or spread out to justify a fixed-schedule, fixed-route bus service. The primary service available in Wabasha is Hiawathaland Transit, operated by Three Rivers Community Action. While Hiawathaland has been providing fixed-route service in larger communities in Southeast Minnesota: Faribault, Northfield, and Red Wing, currently the fixed-route service in Red Wing has been discontinued because of a driver shortage. In smaller communities like Wabasha, dial-a-ride service is the only one available. The service in Wabasha is only available from 7:30 am to 3:30 pm, Monday through Friday, and from 7:30 am to 4:30 pm on Saturday, with no service on Sunday or major holidays. A one-way fare is $1.75. Although this service provides low-cost transit in Wabasha, it has several limitations, operating within a limited timeframe, only six days per week, and requiring reservations in advance, making it impossible for riders to access transportation if needed on short notice.

There are efforts to make rural transit easier to access. The Georgia DOT has developed a rural transit website and phone app, called Let's Ride. The site makes it easier for people to see what transit options they have available and to contact providers. Let's Ride is a marketing and branding initiative created to promote greater awareness and ridership of rural transit services in local communities across Georgia and it is procuring Let's Ride branded buses to let riders easily identify Let's Ride vehicles. This is not a new transit system, but rather a way to increase access to existing transit providers.

3.2 TRANSIT NETWORK COMPANIES (TNC)

Wabasha is served by Uber and Lyft, which provide mobility on demand via their proprietary apps. While prices differ, depending on the distance and time traveled, a typical TNC one-way fare between Wabasha and Rochester, the largest city in Southeast Minnesota, is between $105 and $120. A one-way ride from Wabasha to closer employment centers like Winona or Red Wing, is between $50 and $55, which make the TNC option prohibitive for many lower-income residents or for anyone using the service on a regular basis, to go to and from work, for example.

There are other ride-sharing options for seniors and people with disabilities. Mobility4All bills itself as "an Uber for folks who need someone to walk them from their doorstep to a vehicle at pick-up, and from the vehicle to the lobby of their destination at drop-off." The ride-share service uses drivers' vehicles, and it allows caregivers to call up a ride and monitor the trip through its MO app. It also uses a cashless, points system to pay for rides. The drawback of this service is that it is available only to seniors and people with disabilities, which limits its role and makes it transit for a relatively few.

Transportation to health appointments is another area in which TNC's can provide on-demand transit. For example, Hitch Health has partnered with Lyft to provide door-to-door services for people needing transportation to a medical appointment. The system retrieves appointment information for eligible riders, sends them a ride offer, and if they accept, a Lyft ride is dispatched to pick up the patient and to take the patient back home. The advantage of this system is in its cost-effectiveness to the consumer, since the health system pays for the ride for eligible patients, but its disadvantage lies in the specific service it offers: transportation to and from medical appointments.

3.3 RIDE-SHARING SERVICES

There are three types of ride-sharing services: platforms, websites and apps. We evaluated these types as they relate to rural transit.

3.3.1 Platforms:

By far, the platform most frequently used for accessing rides is Facebook. There are several ridesharing groups on Facebook's platform, such as Arcade City, which focuses on Austin, Texas. In these Facebook groups, riders post their requests, which is typically a pickup and drop-off destination as well as desired time (most as ASAP). Then potential drivers will respond with an ETA, price, and phone number to call to confirm the pickup. Riders are then instructed to delete the post after confirming a ride, as not to clutter the page.

Another Facebook group is Driving Anyway, which has a free, downloadable app. People looking for a ride or seeking someone to share a ride with, use the app to find a match, request or offer a ride, or chat with the other person. Riders and drivers can check out the other person's photo, Facebook Profile, and other information that they have chosen to share. They can also review the calculated times and the map of the shared journey, with reward points to drivers accepting rides in the app.

Another service is Ride-Share, which is also accessed through Facebook and intended for British Columbia users. It provides a platform that enables anyone to request a ride or a passenger in its Facebook group, which provides a level of security for those wary of driving with a complete stranger. Accessed either through the website or a phone app, this site lets drivers and passengers set their own rates and the service is often used for long-distance rides.

3.3.2 App-based services:

A popular ride-sharing app is RideConnect. In it, a passenger or driver can post their destination, the desired time of the pickup, and arrange the type and amount of payment for the trip. Commercial drivers can also follow the posts on the app and offer more competitive rates if they so choose, and riders can see which drivers are available and ask them for a ride. This rideshare channel also lets riders and drivers group users together so that drivers can give better service to their riders, and riders can have safer rides with drivers they trust. This ride service is available everywhere, although for rural communities like Wabasha, the number of potential drivers or riders remains relatively small.

An app-based ride-sharing service with a specialized audience in mind is Carpool Kids. This app helps parents organize family carpooling with their friends, as a way to know who is driving and riding on any given day. Parents create a carpool, then invite their friends to join with their kids. Scheduled carpool events can be one-time or repeating and the app can sync with their iOS Calendar or Google Calendar on Android. Meanwhile, event updates by push notification or e-mail keep everyone up to date. This could be quite useful for the parents of young children in a small community like Wabasha, but it has obvious limits in how many people might choose to use it.

Another app-based service aimed at a particular audience is Hitch Hiker, intended for use by college students looking for rides home. Drivers can host passengers or passengers can seek drivers through the app, with everyone able to read about the people with whom they will be ride-sharing. The financial arrangement is left up to the parties involved, and its safety appeal lies in its offering private ride sharing with a closed group of users. For a small community like Wabasha, without a college in the community, the app has limited relevance.

A similar limitation exists for the ride-sharing app, Hitch. Hitch uses driver's cars and offers frequent service between select cities, none of them in Minnesota, and all of them, much larger that a city like Wabasha. For city-to-city service, a one-way ticket starts at $15, and for door-to-door service, it starts at $79, so again, it is intended for the occasional long-distance trip rather than as transit within a city.

Nextdoor is a social media app focused on communication among residents of a neighborhood and reinforcing the sense of community and its safety and resiliency. Nextdoor is a common platform for reporting lost and found possessions such as house pets, informing neighbors about local crimes, and asking for recommendations for local businesses. In our search, we encountered several instances of people in Minnesota asking for rides or carpooling opportunities. The communication, however, is completely manual through users' response to postings and there is no specific way to connect riders and drivers. However, local businesses can create their own business page to promote their businesses on Nextdoor.

Scoop is a proprietary platform based in the San Francisco Bay Area that uses technology to facilitate hybrid workspace, with one feature being carpooling. According to their website, they receive ride requests and offers in the form of origin/destination/time and use algorithms to match drivers to riders. A particular feature emphasized on their website is the morning and afternoon commute, which, although not being very clear, gives the impression that ride matches provide both outbound and inbound trips for a commuter. Another feature mentioned on Scoops website is the ride back up provided by Lyft that could potentially provide a more reliable service in case of voluntary driver shortage.

3.3.3 Website-based services:

Like other forms of transportation, ride sharing has struggled during the COVID-19 pandemic, with some services closed or curtailed. An example of the latter is Zimride (https://zimride.com/)/ Intended as a carpooling service for university students and corporations, Zimride announced that it will no longer be

serving university clients and will focus on its business and corporate users. It offers commuters a fully hosted, private network of people looking to share rides. While possibly useful to the employees of major employers in Southeast Minnesota, Zimride does not address the transit needs of communities more broadly.

Another web-based service is eRideShare. It is an open system, dependent on volunteers, and it does not vet users before having them post, although it does require users of the site to register. It operates more like a ride-share bulletin board in which drivers post offers, looking for passengers, and riders post their desired destination in search of a driver. The challenge is that the posts are all over the country and so finding a person in one's immediate vicinity, going to the desired destination, seems unlikely.

3.4 BRINGING SERVICE TO RESIDENTS

Opportunities may exist in using broader sharing economy technologies to bring goods and services to people instead of people making trips for goods and services. Some examples are such technologies are Instacart for grocery delivery and Doordash for food delivery. These could be particularly helpful in meeting the needs of people with limited mobility options such as the elderly, people with disabilities, or youth. In our search about these two platforms, we realized that none of them are available in Wabasha, although Uber is available in the area and could provide Uber Eats service. Other services such as mobile libraries and basic medical services, could have the potential to bring services to neighborhoods. Overall, these sharing economy services would meet some types of needs and prevent certain types of trips, but the more frequent commute trips would not be satisfied unless a transit or ride service becomes available.

3.5 SUMMARY

The world of ride-sharing and car-pooling apps, websites, and platforms is a rapidly changing and constantly evolving realm. As one Georgia Tech scholar notes, "9 out of 10 app-based start-ups fail," and we have seen that in the ride-sharing market. For example, an app called Carma Hop, which research showed held some promise for rural transit because of the flexibility it offered users to design their own platform to meet their own needs, no longer exists. Meanwhile, those apps that have survived have evolved to serve specialized groups, such as corporations in the case of Zimride, children in the case of Carpool Kids, or occasional users in the case of Uber and Lyft. Moreover, social media platforms have too broad of an audience and don't really specialize in transportation and therefore, driver-rider matchings are made manually through users' communications.

That said, we still believe that there is great potential to use digital technology as a means to increase the availability and access to transit in rural areas and small communities like Wabasha. Whether it be through an app or website, or through a Facebook group, the digital environment continues to offer opportunities to leverage existing vehicles and drivers in a community to provide on-demand transit service to the residents of that community. A barrier to note, however, is the residents' access to internet service, cell-phone service, smart phones, and other data services as well as their familiarity in working with digital platforms. A great example in overcoming this barrier is Hitch Health that uses SMS technology, and a similar consideration should be made when designing a transit service in rural areas like Wabasha.

CHAPTER 4: CURRENT RURAL TRANSIT INITIATIVES

We conducted a review of existing rural transit initiatives across the U.S. to identify the state of rural small town mobility services in the United States and to identify what the kinds of rural transit currently exist and what innovations could be adopted in Minnesota. The attached spreadsheet lists state initiatives, with links to the sources of information. We have summarized our findings below:

4.1 CURRENTLY AVAILABLE TRANSIT

4.1.1 School-related transportation

Bus service on a fixed route between student residences and schools is often the only fixed-route transit service in small, rural communities. Because this service remains tied to schools' calendars and academic schedules, it is not available year-round. And because of a lack of bus drivers in many communities, especially since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, this type of service has faced a crisis: a lack of bus drivers. Although the transport of students to schools remains a substantial part of the transit in rural communities, most states do not call it out in their description of rural transit programs. And, while many school districts delivered meals to the homes of students during the pandemic, states have not identified the potential use of an expanded community role of school-related transport in communities.

4.1.2 Human-service mobility programs

Many of the transit programs that do exist in small, rural communities are tied to and funded by Federal 5310 grants for enhanced mobility for seniors and individuals with disabilities and 5311 formula grants for rural areas and tribal communities. Although these service benefit many of the most transit-dependent populations in small communities across the country, their limited schedules and days of operation create service gaps for those who they serve. A Minnesota rural transit program's 20% local match requirement presents a challenge for small, rural communities that lack the public resources for the match other staff capacity to seek other sources of funds for the match.

4.1.3 Employer-sponsored services

Dominated by large employers, this type of transit has been affected by the changing nature of work enabled by automation and driven by the COVID-19 pandemic. While many processing jobs and those involving human contact in small, rural communities required that workers continue to travel to and from their places of employment, a substantial number of jobs went partly or entirely online during the pandemic. And many surveys suggest that a number of the employees – and employers – in those job categories plan to continue remote work for at least part of every week, altering the demand for transit or employer-sponsored mobility. Some employers, for example, who operated bus service for employees in small, rural communities have switched to a van-transit system for employees, provided by contracts with private operators or rental-car companies.

4.1.4 Technology-driven mobility

Technology-driven mobility strategies, utilizing the digital platforms and apps appear to be less prevalent in small, rural communities, perhaps because of bandwidth challenges preventing ready access to the Internet or because the adoption of new technology has often, historically, happened in cities more rapidly than in rural areas. However, some small, rural communities have embraced transportation-related digital communications, in part because such technology can help connect people regardless of the density of a community or the physical distance between households.

Ride-sharing networks and commercial car-sharing apps offer exciting possibilities for rural residents seeking more personalized, targeted mobility strategies, and social-media platforms such as Facebook have provided opportunities for informal sharing mobility options. However, these technologies also raise equity issues based on people's access to digital networks, their ability to own or use mobility technology, and the infrastructure needed to support and maintain it. New federal investments in infrastructure provided by the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* offer the opportunity to make technology-driven strategies more accessible in rural areas.

4.1.5 Bike-sharing mobility programs

Car- and ride-sharing opportunities are not yet being widely used in most small, rural communities, with the exception of those with colleges or major universities. However, shared bicycle programs do currently exist in several small towns, with the growing recognition of bicycling as an important part of a community's mobility system. Many towns have created bike trails along old rail rights-of-way, and restriped or retrofitted existing roadways to accommodate cycling. At the same time, bicycle-sharing programs have proliferated making cycling available to non-bike owners, and a number of small towns across the U.S. have created community-based, bike-sharing programs based on donated bikes and volunteer efforts.

Figure 1 Stockholm Wisconsin | Blue Bike Project

4.2 MOBILITY MENU FOR RURAL MINNESOTA COMMUNITIES

Based the summary of mobility services available in small, rural communities in various states, we looked at what it might mean for our partner community of Wabasha. The following analysis outlines some of the challenges and opportunities that a community like Wabasha faces when implementing programs and strategies such as those described above.

4.2.1 School bus services

In our review of state rural transit programs, we did not see any reference to school bus services for kindergarten through twelfth-grade students. Some descriptions of community fixed-route and on-demand services did refer to student transports, although the references were to post-secondary students. Although kindergarten through twelfth grade school transportation systems serve small towns, many factors limit their role in providing mobility services, and the school bus service in Wabasha typifies the challenges rural communities face with school-related mobility services.

4.2.1.1 Challenges:

- Wabasha has no defined community role for the school bus service beyond transporting students to and from school, an issue that we found in all of the state rural transit programs that we reviewed. This may be driven, in part, by school bus design, which constrains their use by some students, as well as the larger public, because most buses do not accommodate riders with mobility challenges. Steep entry steps and narrow aisles limit bus use to non-impaired users. While the modification of rear doors may provide some opportunities for retrofitting existing fleets, the need to maintain rear doors as egress in emergencies may reduce this potential.
- Wabasha, like other communities across Greater Minnesota, does not provide mobility services to students participating in school-related, after-school activities such as school sport-team practice, play practice, or other clubs and activities, even though research shows that participation in these extra circular activities benefits students by increasing their attendance and academic performance. Many Minnesota school districts provided transportation home from extra circular activities in the past, but because of costs and driver shortages, districts have curtailed such services.
- Like many school districts and transit companies, Wabasha has experienced challenges in finding, hiring, and keeping school bus drivers. The job's part-time nature, low pay, and daily and seasonal driving schedule, as well as the changing demographics in many small, rural communities have driven the shortage. In the past, many farmers who lived and worked on small farms adjacent to rural communities found school bus driving an attractive way to supplement their farm income, but the number and availability of these farmers have substantially decreased. Although this challenge preceded the pandemic, many older drivers more at risk from COVID-19 have stopped driving, making the school bus driver shortage even greater.
- The consolidation of school districts has created larger areas for school transit service, longer rides for students, and greater demand in an already challenged school bus system. The Wabasha/Kellogg School District, for example, now serves Wabasha, Kellogg, and their surrounding communities. School mobility services in small towns are often provided by a contract between a small, locally

owned private company and paid for by public funding. Many school bus companies are also family owned and may have more than one school district as clients. The company that serves the Wabasha/Kellogg district, Bluff Country School Bus Service, also serves Independent School District 813, Lake City's district, and the Plainview School District. A family-owned business for generations, it has also been active in the Minnesota School Bus Operators Association.

4.2.1.2 Opportunities:

The Greater Wabasha Area has the potential to create a larger community role for mobility services within the context of expanding and transforming school bus service, for the following reasons:

- Many small, rural communities, like Wabasha, highly value local control, and expanding and transforming school bus service responds to and supports that value.
- The school bus service in the Wabasha/Kellogg District is the only scheduled, fixed route transit service in Wabasha, which is too small and too dispersed to support the rider base required for a scheduled, fixed-route service as in other Southeast Minnesota communities like Northfield.
- School buses represent an underutilized community asset because when they are not transporting students, they sit idle for many hours of the day and days and weeks of the year.
- Expanding service to include transporting the public could create a more attractive, robust bus driver job that would be fulltime, while providing additional ways for people to access local jobs and services.
- Building on rural, small-town community culture in which everyone knows everyone else, including members of the general public on the buses, may strengthen community culture, reinforce connections among generations, and counter the perception of danger in a system that includes strangers on a bus with children.
- Expanded service could strengthen community by increasing access to community events and activities by people who do not drive or have cars and therefore do not have access to many aspects of community life such as attending community festivals, church services, school games, etc.

4.2.2 Volunteer riders

Nationwide, residents, especially in small, rural communities, have stepped up to volunteer for mobility programs that address community needs, and volunteer mobility efforts have become a part of community mobility strategies throughout the country.

Depending on community need and resident interest, volunteer efforts also vary from community to community, ranging from an enthusiastic individual's interest in a type of mobility, such as bicycling, to a person's support of a community organization, such as a non-profit agency, or a government program run by county health and human service departments. Because small towns like Wabasha have very little staff, small town officials and residents rely on volunteers committed to the community who do most of the heavy lifting in civic initiatives. They run the community festivals, serve on government committees, create civic initiatives, and support local public and private institutions such as libraries and non-profits.

4.2.2.1 Volunteer trends

- Volunteers enrich community life, providing work that could not otherwise be possible in the community. However, a non-paid workforce creates volatility in efforts that rely heavily on volunteers to function, so some activities may not be sustained over time.
- Many of the same people are engaged in multiple civic volunteer efforts, and many small towns have a dwindling number of people available for volunteer work. Many of these very talented and informed residents are retired senior citizens or women who are not currently in the workforce who often bring a variety of skills and experiences to volunteer work. Because women have entered the workforce in great numbers over the past decades, the volunteer base of at-home women has been greatly eroded, and as the population of small, rural communities has gotten older, retired seniors have run more volunteer activities.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has been very challenging to volunteer activities because public health mandates and voluntary restrictions have affected the supply of volunteers and the volunteer activities that small communities rely on. Because many of the volunteers are older and more at risk during the pandemic, some volunteer activity has been curtailed. Three Rivers, the social service non-profit that delivers volunteer mobility services in Wabasha County has had to cut back mobility services provided by volunteers, such as their volunteer driver program, because of the pandemic.
- Declining health and/or retirements from volunteer work have also had program impacts. For example, the resident in Wabasha who, for many years, gave drunken would-be drivers rides home from the bar has retired. No one has been found to replace him, so this valuable community service is no longer available in the Wabasha/Kellogg area.
- Volunteers sometimes start efforts and then hand them off to paid staff to run, with the volunteers remaining an important part of the work, but improving community mobility is often started by a staff member, who then recruits volunteers in the mobility effort. In Wabasha a county, the county public health worker staffed and promoted the local Safe Routes to School Program. By connecting with Wabasha's bike community and parents of school age children, the effort has grown into the Wabasha Area Walk/Bike Advocates, an active group of committed residents and city and county officials who initiated the bicycle share program in Wabasha.
- Volunteer drivers are often only reimbursed for mileage when transporting a rider, but not for the mileage to pick up the rider or to return home. As a result, a substantial portion of the cost of the volunteer's trip is often not subsidized, a practice that limits the volunteer pool to those willing to pick up a substantial portion of the trip's cost.
- Often the agency/group that initiates and oversees a volunteer mobility program sets the area to be covered by the program. This can limit the area served by volunteers, which can also limit its effectiveness of a volunteer effort in meeting local mobility needs.

4.2.3 Bike sharing programs

Even though financial support for bicycle mobility programs is thin and many states do not even mention bicycle programs as a part of their rural, small-town mobility strategies, the number of bicycle sharing programs has grown across the country. Because they are the mobility sector least supported by public

funding programs, bicycle sharing programs often rely on grants, volunteers, and the civic commitment that is often an important part of small-town culture. But when bicycle-sharing programs have only two-wheel bikes, their use for transporting children and packages like groceries is limited, and because of balance issues, some people are reluctant or unable to use two-wheel bicycles.

As a result, some bicycle programs have added three-wheel or tricycle bicycles to their fleets. Bicycle programs also typically start small and over time the number of bicycles and the number of bicycle stations around the community expand. Wabasha has had both some success and some challenges with its bike-sharing program. In addition to creating a bike-loan system, the Wabasha Area Walk/Bike Advocates have led efforts to improve existing trails, to identify opportunities for new trails and trail extensions, and to make maps of existing trails available to the general public. Challenges encountered by the current Wabasha/Kellogg bike effort has highlighted challenges in making bicycles an integral part of a small-town mobility system. These include:

- Procuring funding for the initial investment in the bicycles: Small, rural towns often have very limited financial resources, so public funding can be beyond the reach of many small towns. In some communities, the bicycle system relies on donated bikes, and in other communities, like Wabasha, individuals and local businesses, community foundations, or interest groups like the Chamber of Commerce are potential funding sources.
- Maintaining operation of the individual bicycles: the Wabasha program has encountered issues related to maintenance needs. Fortunately, volunteers have taken the leadership on addressing some very challenging maintenance problems. Some have repaired the bicycles, and the Wabasha Main Street is funding some bike share program maintenance in 2022.
- Mapping and updating information: Although the initial mapping of the Wabasha trail system and posting it on the Wabasha webpage was funded by an outside source, there is currently no funding to update the information.
- Sizing the system to reflect the community's size and character: The Wabasha/Kellogg Area is spread out, and Wabasha is bifurcated by State Highway 61. More than one bicycle station is needed for the system to provide access to bicycles and effectively address cycling as an effective part of the community's mobility system.

4.2.4 Human Service Providers

Many states rely on federal and state programs to provide on-demand mobility services to small, rural communities. Representing a substantial, important part of the mobility services in rural areas and the small communities within them, these programs are informed and shaped by federal guidelines and requirements that both define the services and place limitations on them. The services provided by Hiawathaland Transit in the Wabasha Area demonstrate some of the challenges faced by this of this kind of service:

- The limited hours and days of operation of these programs create substantial challenges for people who work non-regular hours and cannot use the service for weekend and after-hours trips.

- The service boundaries of these programs also pose obstacles and limitations for people who often need to cross county boundaries to receive medical services, go shopping for groceries and other necessities, etc.
- The limited-service schedule in these programs can be problematic for people who rely on transit to access food in a community like Wabasha, even though the Wabasha Food Shelf is staffed by a creative and energetic staff who facilitates use of the mobility services provided by Hiawathaland Transit.
- One day notice limits some service.
- The fare structure increases costs for some users. It requires that a worker who takes his/her child at daycare on the way to work pays twice for the trip to work and again twice on the trip home from work. The worker pays one fare upon getting on the bus initially and a second fare when getting on the bus again at the daycare site. On the way home from work the pattern is reversed.
- The identification of mobility users by some Wabasha Area residents as "those people" makes other resident potential transit riders reluctant to use the services because of their fear stigmatization by their fellow community members.

4.2.5 Mobility Services

Across the country, program administrative structures that support the small, rural mobility services vary depending on their funding sources. The 5310 and 5311 federal programs have most robust administrative structures for services. Those serving the Wabasha Area are listed below:

- Project administration of the federally funded 5311 and 5310 programs that serve Wabasha is housed in a non-profit, Three Rivers Community Action headquartered in Northfield.
- The Mayo Clinic, headquartered in Rochester, contracts with Enterprise for van services for its employees.
- The Wabasha/Kellogg School District contracts with Bluff Country School Bus Service for its school bus service.
- The bicycle share program is volunteer-run, and some modest maintenance is currently being supported by Wabasha's Main Street Program.

Most existing small, rural town transit programs are funded by federal and state programs. These fixed route and on-demand programs primarily serve elderly, low-income, and mobility impaired people. Other rural transit programs often remain underutilized because local communities either lack the match required to leverage the funds or because they feel that the rural community transit programs do not meet their community's mobility needs. The recently passed federal infrastructure bill, with its billions of dollars for transit, offers the potential of expanding existing programs and creating new innovative small rural community mobility programs.

4.2.6 Workforce Mobility

Currently across the United States van-based transit services for employees provided by public, non-profit, for profit, and private individuals are growing. Van-based transit services have become popular in meeting

workforce needs by transporting employees to their places of employment as well to employment hubs, industrial parks, and other centers of economic opportunity. In the last few years car rental companies have entered the van-based service market by contracting with private employers

Van-based service in which the van riders share the cost, offer a potential opportunity to become an important, substantial part of rural community mobility systems by providing a cost-effective mobility service at a scale that is appropriate to small, dispersed populations. One type of van-based service is a private employee to employee service.

Many rural residents own vans, and communication technology facilitates communication between the van employee/owner/driver and the van employees/riders/customers. In Fresno, California, a van-based sharing system serves farm workers there, meeting the mobility needs of the many undocumented farm workers that the agriculture sector in the U.S. relies on.

In the Wabasha area, resident workers commute to the regional centers of Red Wing, Winona, and Rochester, while others commute within Wabasha. Meanwhile, about 40% of St Elizabeth Medical Center employees in Wabasha commute across the Mississippi River Bridge from Wisconsin. Many healthcare organizations operate 24/7 and need mobility systems that meet the schedules of employees as well as patients and their families. The Mayo Clinic's support of its employees was a crucial part of Rochester's transit funding base, which had two pick-up sites in Wabasha: one on the west side of State Highway 61 and another on the east side of the highway. Currently the Mayo Clinic is experimenting for six months with a family van-based system for its employees though a contract with Enterprise Rental Car company, an example of a private company creating services to meet flexible, low-density mobility needs that can extend beyond Monday through Friday 9 to 5 hours.

Although social service programs use vans in small, rural communities, the mobility potential of community van-based use remains underutilized. By using communication technology, private van-based service can potentially be expanded to provide mobility services that support and strengthen small-town community life by providing access to community events, such as sporting and cultural events, church services, volunteering opportunities, etc.

4.2.7 Rural transit and equity

The transit services funded through federal programs 5311 and 5310 cannot discriminate although the only reference to the needs of minority groups that we found in our survey of rural transit programs in other states was found in the description of van services for agricultural workers in California. Addressing the transit needs of racial minorities, developmentally disabled people, those with physical handicaps, people with low incomes, women, elderly individuals, and children are relevant to creating a mobility system that is safe and accessible to all in the Wabasha Area.

- Racial minorities: Services that addressed the needs of racial minority groups were found in the description of van services for agricultural workers in California. While there is no mention that the

need for those services is driven by the undocumented status of some of the workers, we presume that many of the agricultural workers are undocumented. In our conversations with leaders of the Latinx communities in Minnesota, all recognized that access to and use of transit was a big issue for those communities while acknowledging that their advocacy has focused on making driver's licenses available to undocumented residents rather than on rural transit.

- Developmentally disabled persons: People with developmental disabilities can face challenges texting on a cell phone to book a ride. During a pilot project in Georgia's Gwinnett County, however, young adults who had just aged out of the education system were able to use spoken commands on smartphones to order micro-transit rides. The ability of those young adults to use micro-transit provided them an important opportunity to continue participating in community life after finishing their education.
- Physically handicapped people: Those with physical conditions that limit their mobility are served by mobility services provided by federally funded programs that are popular in rural Minnesota. However, their service hours limit when these services are available.
- Elders: Elders are also served by these federally funded programs and experience the same limitations.
- Women: Transit use by women is often informed by the perceived and actual safety it provides because women can face vulnerability challenges while waiting for a ride and riding in the transit vehicles. Services and waiting sites need to be actually and perceived to be safe for full transit participation by women.
- Children: Although school buses meet the transit needs of children attending k-12 schools, other after-school or evening and weekend transit needs of school children are often not met or identified in most state rural transit programs even though some activity transportation was funded in the past. Safety is an important issue for children and their parents because while waiting for transit and riding in transit vehicles children face the same vulnerabilities as women.
- Low-Income Residents: In siting low-income housing, often communities do not take into consideration the mobility needs of low-income residents who may not have access to cars. Low-income housing should be conveniently located and have connections to the community's pedestrian and bike systems.

CHAPTER 5: LOCAL AND REGIONAL RURAL TRANSIT IN SE MN

5.1 INTRODUCTION: WABASHA AND SE MINNESOTA

Wabasha is both a city and a county in Southeast Minnesota, and this report will specify when it refers to the "city" or "county." Other cities in Wabasha County include Zumbro Falls and Lake City. MnDOT designates Wabasha as Economic Region 10, which includes ten other counties nested in the Southeast corner of the state. Wabasha County is bordered on the East by Wisconsin, on the Southeast by Winona County, on the Southwest by Olmsted County, and on the Northwest by Goodhue County. Wabasha, the city, is the county's seat and largest city (other than Lake City, which is split between Wabasha and Goodhue Counties), and the bordering counties each have their own large metropolitan areas, which extend close to or into Wabasha County (Winona, Rochester, and Red Wing respectively). Wabasha has no public transportation provider that only serves the county, nor are there any fixed-route public transportation routes with stops in the county. The next section will outline those providers (both public and private), ordered from those that serve the area most specifically to those that serve it the least.

5.2 LOCAL PROVIDERS

5.2.1 Three Rivers Community Action

Three Rivers Community Action is a nonprofit human-service organization, created by local citizens and incorporated in 1966. They fund transportation service to three counties in Region 10: Wabasha, Goodhue, and Rice. Their service falls under two categories: public transit service (HLT - Hiawathaland Transit), and a volunteer driver service program (Hiawatha Auxiliary Regional Transit).

5.2.1.1 Hiawathaland Transit (HLT)

Funded by Three Rivers Community Action, HLT provides public transportation in two formats: fixed-route and dial-a-ride (DAR). They *do not* provide any fixed route service in Wabasha County, although they do provide three fixed-route service areas in Red Wing, Faribault, and Northfield, as well as a connector between Faribault and Northfield and a demand-response connector between Plainview and Red Wing. Their non-fixed-route service is categorized as "Rural DAR". HLT has an extensive existing infrastructure (outlined below), and is considered a successful rural-transit system, as their fixed routes are one of the only rural systems in Minnesota with a headway under 60 minutes (Greater Minnesota Transit Investment Plan, 2017-2037). COVID has caused the reduction of those fixed route-services, which are still being reintroduced slowly. DAR service remains available at the discretion of operator availability, and is fulfilled using their bus infrastructure at the cost of $1.75 in cash at the time of boarding. Riders must request trips (and cancel, if necessary) in advance, and space is often limited. The hours of DAR operation are limited, which in Wabasha are:

- Monday - Friday 7:00 am - 3:30 pm
- Saturday 7:30 am - 4:30 pm
- No Sunday services

DAR service is also limited to within the service area where requested. In other words, all trips originating in Wabasha/Kellogg must terminate in Wabasha/Kellogg, all trips originating in Lake City must terminate in Lake City, etc. For rides that extend outside of the origin's service area or hours, the HART transportation program exists to fill the need (see next section: *HART Program*). HLT's DAR service demand in Wabasha County, as reported to MnDOT, is summarized in tables 1 and 2. These tables categorize service into all the service areas within Wabasha County, as well as the "River-Run", which is a demand-response route (requiring reservation) which originates in Plainview and takes community members from local group homes to ProAct, a disabilities services provider in Red Wing, MN. Note that HLT serves areas outside of Wabasha County.

Table 1. HLT DAR demand for Wabasha County service areas, in annual passenger trips and miles

		Wabasha/Kellogg (DAR)		**Lake City (DAR)**		**Elgin/Plainview (DAR)**	**River Run**	**Totals**
		Weekdays	**Saturday**	**Weekdays**	**Saturday**	**Weekdays**	**Weekdays**	
2018	Trips	12,734	529	11,556	294	15,575	14,527	55,215
	Miles	27,949	2,310	21,635	1,156	42,530	42,311	137,891
2019	Trips	11,935	554	11,339	113	13,045	13,089	50,075
	Miles	25,908	2,851	23,954	774	34,734	36,281	124,502
2020	Trips	5,275	410	6,546	313	5,845	4,081	22,470
	Miles	18,481	2,370	18,966	2,074	17,712	15,432	75,035
2021	Trips	9,691	291	6,922	260	7,004	4,463	28,631
	Miles	24,930	2,122	17,915	1,896	21,388	19,517	87,768
Totals	Trips	39,635	1,784	36,363	980	41,469	36,160	156,391
	Miles	97,268	9,653	82,470	5,900	116,364	113,541	425,196

Table 2 HLT DAR demand for Wabasha County service areas in annual passenger trips and miles, as a percentage of HLT DAR overall demand

		Wabasha/Kellogg (DAR)		Lake City (DAR)		Elgin/Plainview (DAR)	River Run	Totals
		Weekdays	Saturday	Weekdays	Saturday	Weekdays	Weekdays	(% of all DAR demand)
2018	Trips	9.51%	0.40%	8.63%	0.22%	11.63%	10.85%	41.24%
	Miles	8.13%	0.67%	6.29%	0.34%	12.37%	12.31%	40.10%
2019	Trips	10.87%	0.50%	10.33%	0.10%	11.88%	11.92%	45.60%
	Miles	8.95%	0.99%	8.28%	0.27%	12.00%	12.54%	43.03%
2020	Trips	8.91%	0.69%	11.06%	0.53%	9.88%	6.89%	37.96%
	Miles	8.94%	1.15%	9.17%	1.00%	8.57%	7.46%	36.30%
2021	Trips	14.49%	0.44%	10.35%	0.39%	10.47%	6.67%	42.82%
	Miles	10.54%	0.90%	7.57%	0.80%	9.04%	8.25%	37.10%
4-Year Average	Trips	10.72%	0.48%	9.83%	0.27%	11.21%	9.78%	42.29%
	Miles	9.04%	0.90%	7.66%	0.55%	10.81%	10.55%	39.50%

Tables 1 and 2 show that Wabasha County accounts for almost half of HLT's DAR demand. As a publicly funded system, HLT has received grant funding for infrastructure and service improvements, detailed in MnDOT's *2020 Transit Report: A Guide to Greater Minnesota's Public Transit Systems*. Information in tables 3 through 6 is obtained from this report.

Table 3 HLT, Summary of system characteristics

Vehicle Fleet	24 Class 400 Buses, 6 Class 500 Buses
Service Type	Dial-a-ride (DAR) and route deviation
Base Fare	$1.25 for Routes, $1.75 for DAR
Area Served	Wabasha, Goodhue, and Rice Counties
State/Federal District	20B, 21A, 21B, 24B, 58B/1,2

Table 4 HLT Span-of-Service, by service area. All service in Wabasha County is categorized under "Rural DAR"

Day-of-Week	**Redwing**	**Northfield**	**Faribault**	**Rural DAR**
Weekday	4:30am - 9:00pm	6:00am - 11:00pm	6:00am - 6:00pm	7:00am - 5:00pm
Saturday	7:00am - 5:00pm	7:00am - 5:00pm	12:00pm - 5:00pm	7:30am-4:30pm
Sunday	No Service	No Service	No Service	No Service

Table 5 HLT financial statistics 2019 and budget 2020

Financial Data	Total	Federal	Federal CARES	State GF	State GMTA (MVST)	Local	% Local
2019 Operating Expenditures	$3,328,363	$608,580	$0	$515,530	$1,860,790	$343,463	10.3%
2019 Capital Expenditures (Buses)	$324,000	$0	$0	$259,200	$0	$64,800	20.0%
2020 Operating Budget	$8,371,000	$1,178,415	$2,750,399	$0	$3,692,361	$627,825	7.5%

Table 6 HLT state funding, operating and Capital contracts SFY 2018 and 2019

Operating Projects	State Share (Fiscal Year 2018)	State Share (Fiscal Year 2019)
8 New Service Segment Projects (Operating Contracts)	$221,700	$260,000
Buses for Expansion - Two < 30 foot (Capital Contracts)	$166,000	$0

Contact with HLT Transit representatives has generated a list of points of interest (high demand) for DAR riders. These points are mapped later in the report in figure 3 along with local school bus route information.

5.2.1.2 Hiawatha Auxiliary Regional Transit (HART) Program

The HART program, provided by Three Rivers Community Action, serves people who cannot use shared transit due to age/disability, most often to get to and from medical appointments. Similar to HLT, there is often limited space because of driver availability, and riders must schedule a trip in advance. Unlike HLT, volunteer drivers' fulfill these rides with their own personal vehicles; the HART program has no fixed infrastructure. HART program also bills trips after providing the service, often covered as a medical expense. Because of this, and other funding structure limitations, if a trip *can* be fulfilled by public transit (HLT), it *must* be. That is to say, all HART Transportation trips are either medical transportation for people who can't access HLT vehicles, *or* they are trips that extend outside of a single service area. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, HART reported having a volunteer group of six drivers, although that number has dropped to two as the pandemic has forced many volunteers to stop providing service for many reasons. The table below describes the demand for HART service. Wabasha has the lowest among the three counties in Three Rivers' Community Action's service area:

Table 7 Annual Demand (Rides Requested) through the HART Program, by county of trip origin

	Goodhue	Rice	Wabasha	Total
2019	2,016	1,150	840	4,006
2020	1,972	703	463	3,138
2021	1,428	1,062	765	3,255

5.2.2 Vantastic

Vantastic is a private on-demand transportation service based in Lake City, providing medical transportation service to all of Wabasha County. Similar to the HART program, the Vantastic service, meant for medical and disability-related transportation, bills to insurance, and it provides vehicles accessible to wheelchair and other mobility needs. Vantastic reported no regular use within Wabasha city. Their service region is shown in figure 1.

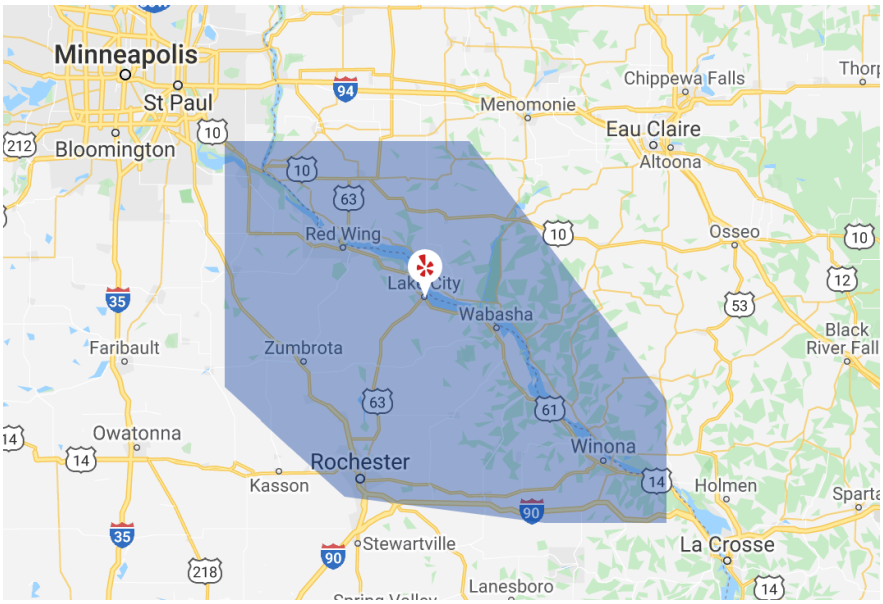


Figure 2 Vantastic's service region.

5.2.3 Bluff Country School Bus

Bluff Country School Bus is a private bus service provider in Wabasha County that partners with Wabasha-Kellogg, Lake City, and Plainview-Elgin-Millville School Districts. Although their service is currently limited to education transportation, they have a significant level of infrastructure and are the largest transportation provider specific to Wabasha County. The company has three terminals serving three service areas, shown in figure 2. Information on fleet sizes and service is shown in table 8.

Table 8 Fleet sizes and service information for Bluff County School Bus

District/Terminal	Employees	Fleet Size	District Size (sq. mi)	Annual VMT
Wabasha-Kellogg	14	11	140	132,000
Lake City (HQ - 960 N 10th St, Lake City, MN 55041)	30	25	195	284,000
Plainview-Elgin-Millville	19	20	295	315,000

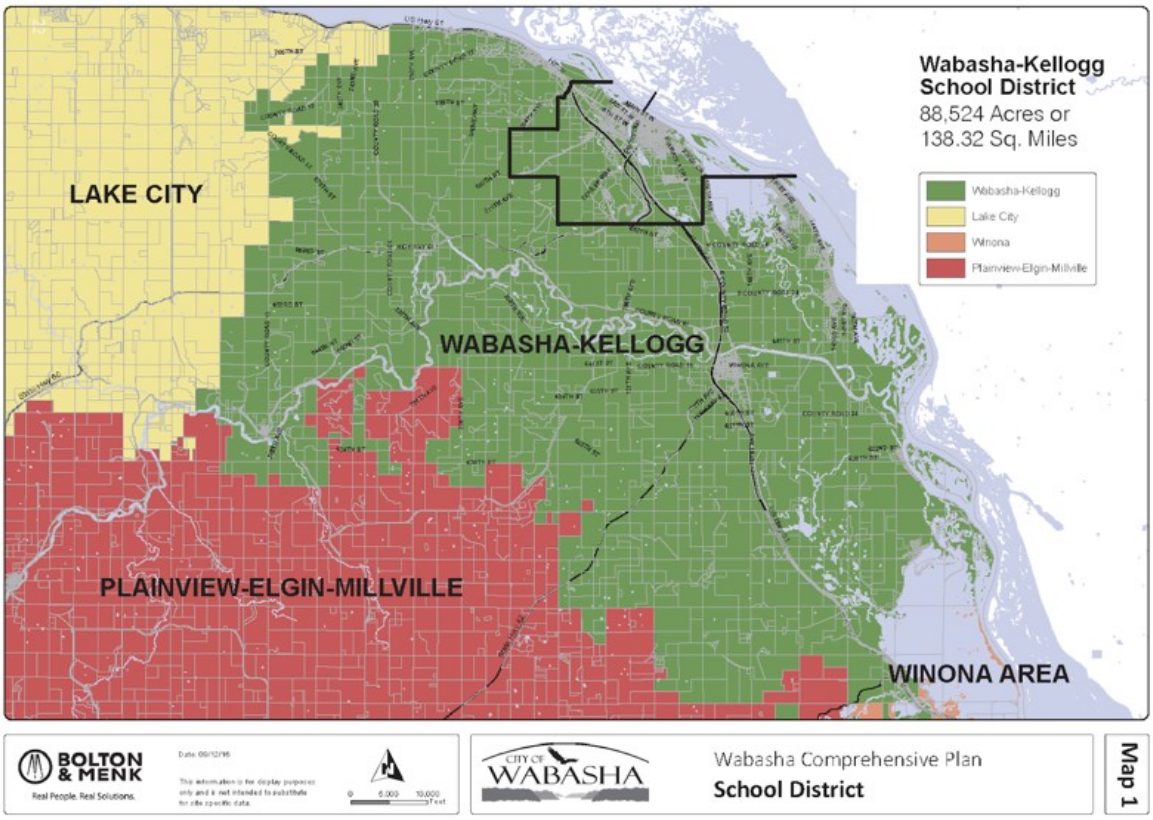


Figure 3 Wabasha County school districts map.

Bluff Country School Bus is the only provider serving specifically, and primarily, education-related transportation needs. Through their contract with Wabasha-Kellogg School District, they offer six routes. Pickup locations for the six routes are shown in figures 3 and 4 at two scales (Wabasha City, and Wabasha Kellogg District):

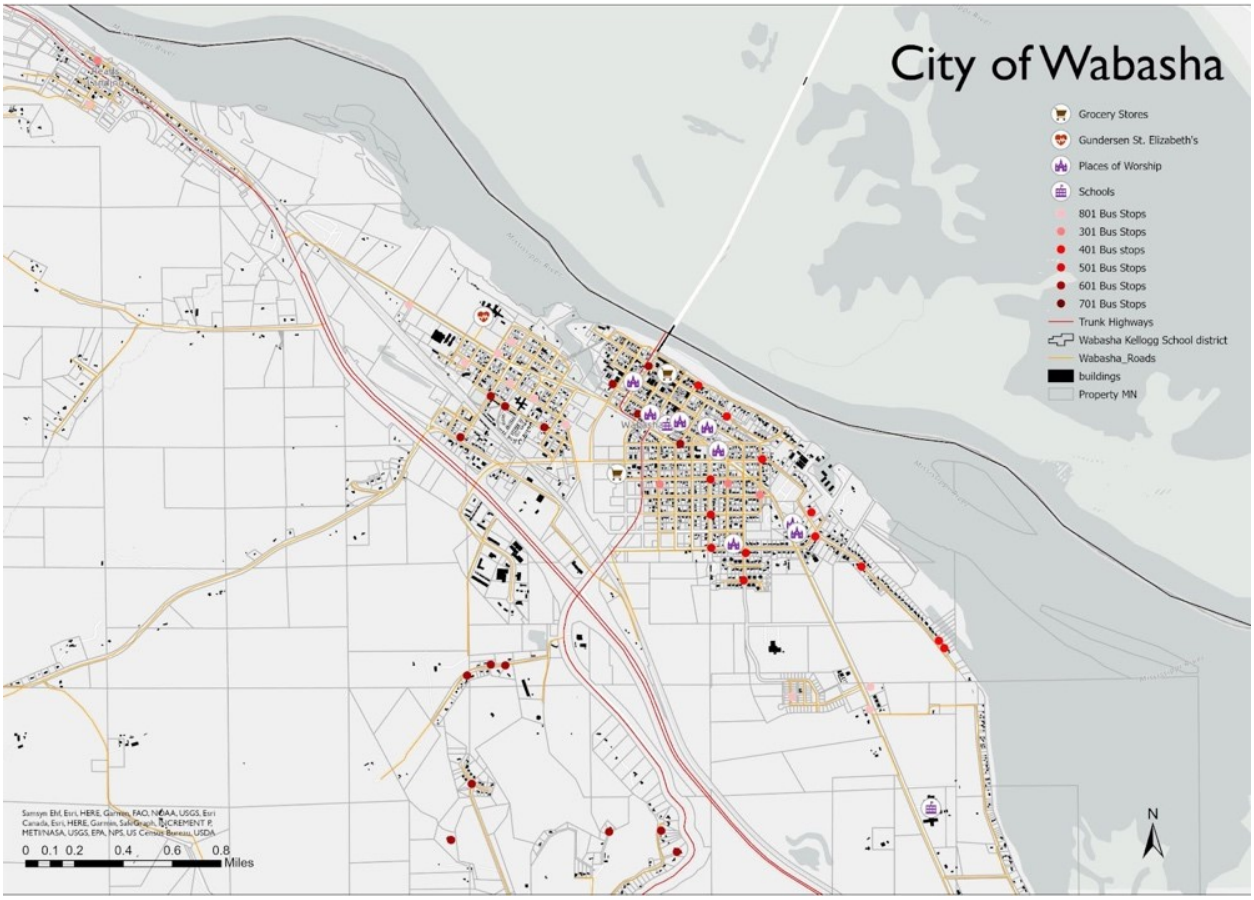


Figure 4 Bluff Country School Bus, Wabasha City pickup locations for the Wabasha/Kellogg school district. Public transit (HLT) points of interest are also mapped.

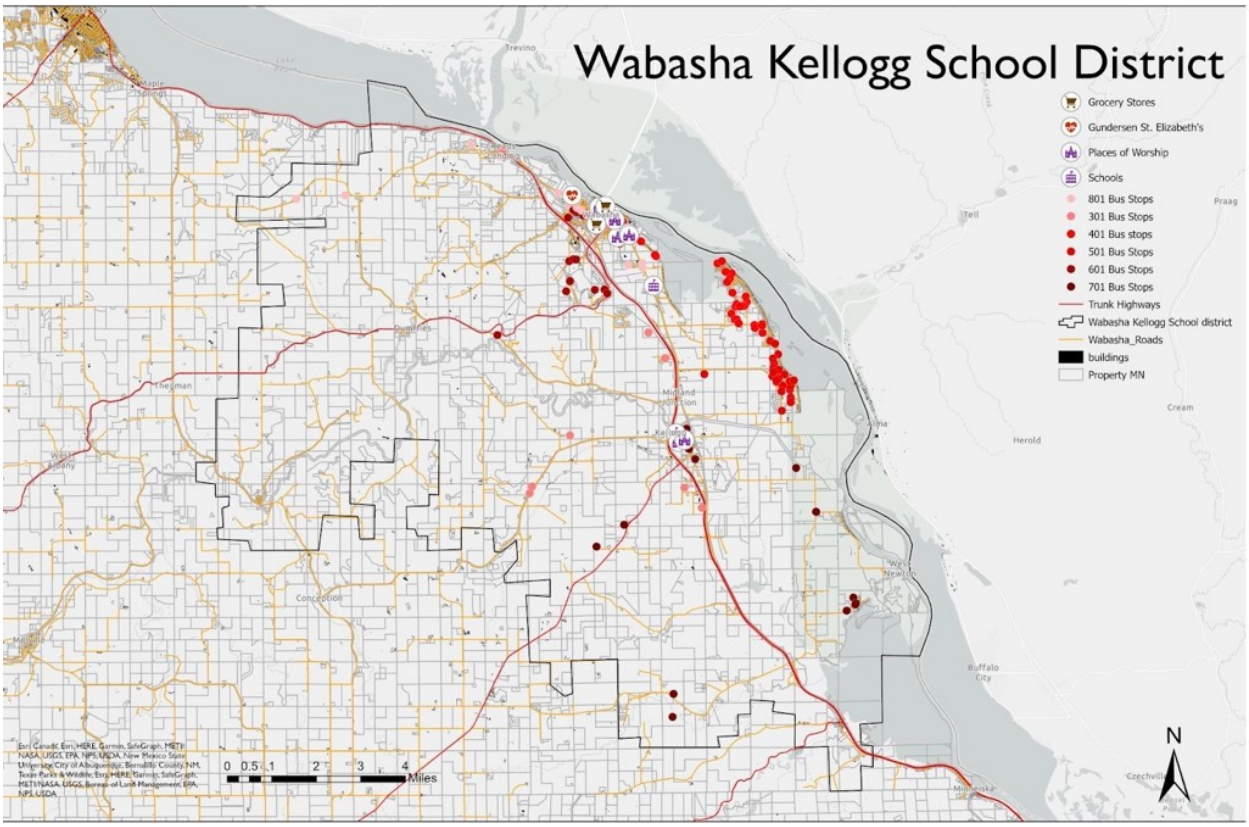
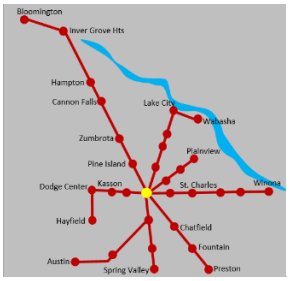


Figure 5 Bluff Country School Bus, pickup locations throughout the Wabasha-Kellogg School District

Survey data through the Wabasha community bike/walk survey showed that approximately half of Wabasha/Kellogg respondents elected to have their children use the school bus to get to school (rather than biking, walking, or private vehicle, Wabasha Area Bike/Walk Advocates). More specifically, 43% reported that their child(ren) arrived at school using the bus, and 66% returned using the bus.

5.2.4 Rochester City Lines (RCL)

Rochester City Lines is a private transportation provider with a fixed route service that has been discontinued. This service focused on getting commuters to and from Rochester, MN, in Olmsted County. They had one route with two trips per day in Wabasha County. The company has a large fleet, with over 30 total vehicles of varying sizes. They also act as a private charter service. Prices for fixed route commuter tickets varied by zone/distance from $11 to $25, with the option to buy annual, monthly or 10-ride passes. Riders purchased tickets on-line or by phone call and are available to anyone. Stops for Rochester City Lines included two stops in the city of Wabasha, with a primary stop in the center of the city at a Kwik Trip (#843), and an additional stop at the Wabasha Fairgrounds. Additional stops in Wabasha County were in Lake City. Currently Mayo Clinic employees are transported by transit vans through a contract with Enterprise.



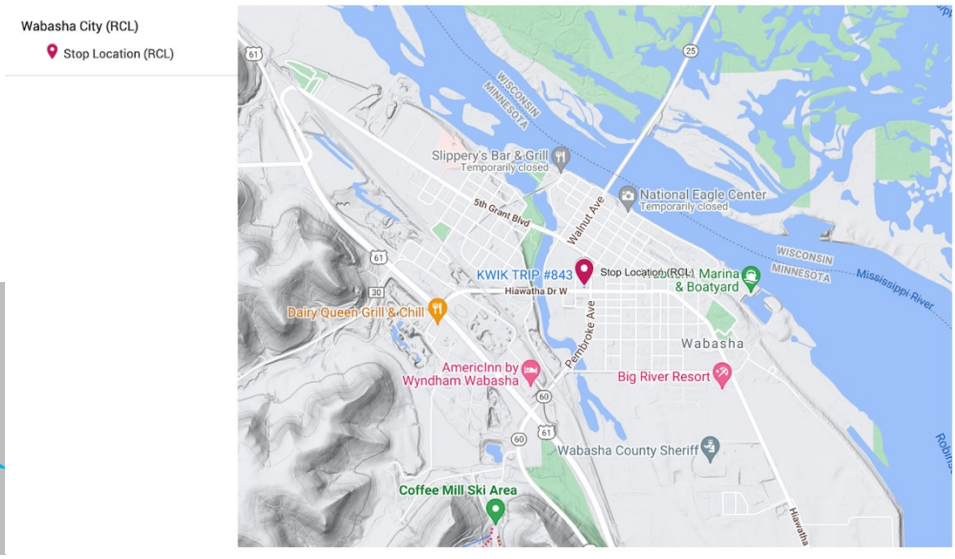


Figure 6 Rochester City Lines, route diagram (left) and image of stop location in Wabasha City (right)

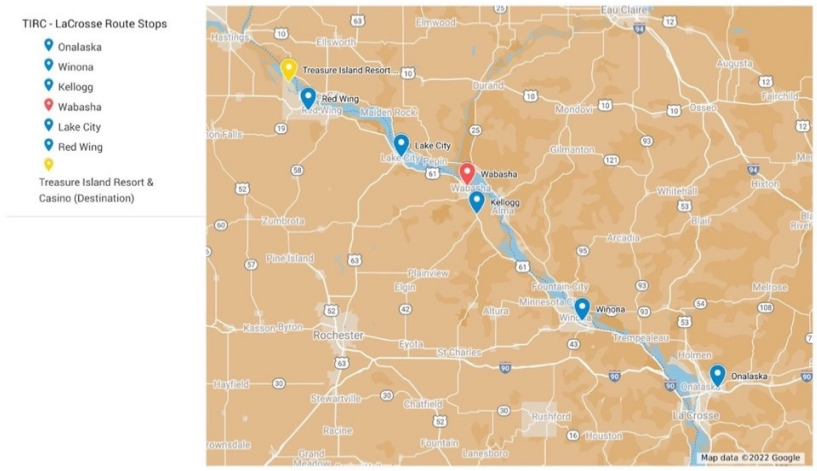
RCL reports that most of their transit ridership came from employees of the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, and the company partnered with the Clinic to offer employees subsidized (by Mayo Clinic) annual passes. Riders purchased and used these passes depending on which zone a commuter comes from, aligning with the serviced stops. In 2019, preceding the Covid-19 pandemic, they had 19 annual passes servicing riders in the City of Wabasha, 41 for Lake City customers, and 8 for Zumbro Falls and Oak Center combined. This leads to an estimated 68 near-daily users of the twice-daily Wabasha-Rochester round-trip route. These numbers approach double in the winter months or on stormy days when people elect not to drive and buy a day pass or utilize a 10-ride pass. RCL dispatched extra buses to serve the route on these days. RCL rented space in Wabasha to overnight their buses, and hired local drivers to operate the route; these drivers often worked part time at Mayo Clinic or nearby businesses to fill the working day before operating the return trip.

5.2.5 Treasure Island Resort and Casino Transportation Line

Located on the Prairie Island Reservation in Goodhue County, the Treasure Island Resort and Casino (TIRC) is operated by the Mdewakanton Sioux and provides a free bus service for patrons. They provide two fixed routes with two runs per day (riders must confirm their age as over 18 before boarding). The "Lacrosse Route" runs from Onalaska, WI, to TIRC twice a day, with a stop in Wabasha. Service to the Wabasha stop, and all stops southeast of it, must be requested at least 24 hours in advance (reservation by phone to the casino's tours line). The Wabasha stop receives about 2 service requests per week.

This service is not available to employees of the Casino; TIRC offered an employee transportation program before COVID-19, which was cancelled at the start of the pandemic and has not been reinstated. The patron transportation program was put on hold at the start of the pandemic and resumed in May 2021. This service is provided through a contract with Phillip's bus company, based in Winona, MN. Figure 6 shows the Lacrosse route stops in context at two scales (note the TIRC also runs an additional line coming from the Southwest, originating in the greater Rochester area).

Bus Routes



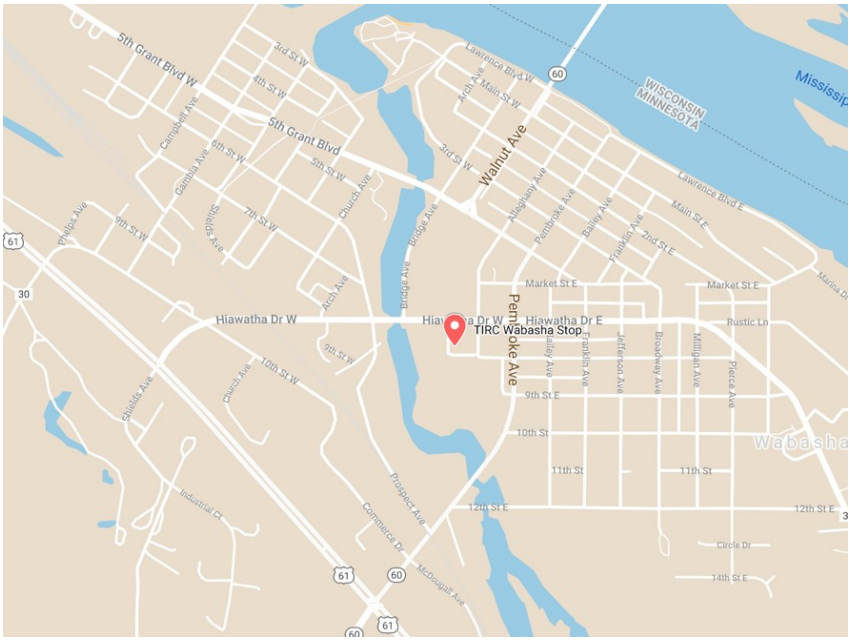


Figure 7 Treasure Island Resort and Casino's "Lacrosse Route". All stops (above) and cropped into Wabasha City (below)

5.3 FIXED-ROUTE, INTERSTATE TRANSPORTATION

Multiple private transportation providers pass through Southeast, MN. Jefferson Lines and Amtrak both offer long-distance routes which pass near but not through Wabasha County.

5.3.1 Jefferson Lines

Jefferson Lines is a bus service that stops in Winona and Rochester. They offer online and mobile booking, as well as ticket sale points at select stops. As a family-owned company with a fleet of over 50 buses, Jefferson Lines serves locations throughout the Midwest. Their proactive response to Covid-19 has included contactless booking and boarding, as well as equipping vehicles with air purifiers.

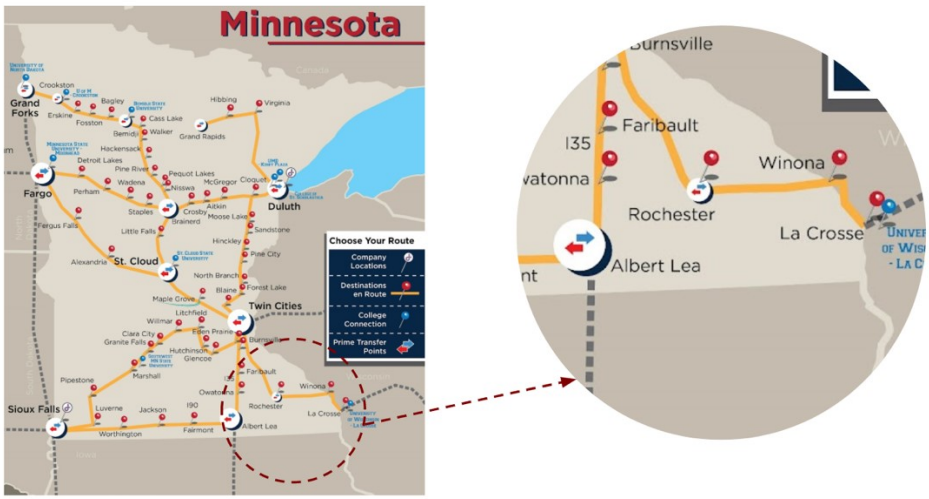


Figure 8 Jefferson Lines Route Map, SE MN Shown in Cropped Portion

5.3.2 Amtrak

Although Amtrak, a nationwide rail provider, goes though Wabasha, it has stops in Red Wing and Winona, MN, both of which are in Region 10 but not in Wabasha County.

5.4 RIDESHARE SYSTEMS

Multiple app-based rideshare systems have expanded their service areas to include Wabasha. These include Uber and Lyft, although access to these services is still limited and much less affordable than the alternatives provided by HLT. HLT does, however, require much more lead-time from customers making reservations in advance. Uber and Lyft both have similar service areas (or “coverage areas” as used by Lyft) centered around Rochester, covering Wabasha and up to the Minnesota border. Rides must be requested from within a coverage area, but they can extend out past it if under 100 miles total.

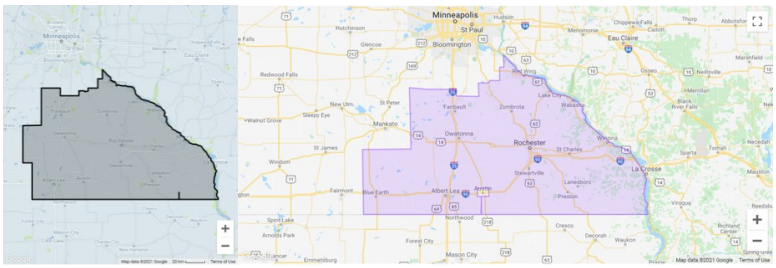


Figure 9 Service areas for Uber (left) and Lyft (right)

5.5 SUMMARY STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

5.5.1 City of Wabasha Comp. Plan, 2016-2035

Wabasha published a 20-year comprehensive plan in 2016. In terms of transportation, this plan pays little attention to transit, and does not formally cite transit as a major concern. The plan notes that "The number of nonfamily households over the age of 65 is expected to increase significantly in the future. These types of households will most likely rely heavily on transit, walkable neighborhoods, passive recreational facilities, and townhome or apartment style housing." This is one of the only mentions of transit in the plan, with little mention of current infrastructure or potential desired improvements. The plan also notes that sidewalk infrastructure needs to be improved and invested in, which would be a critical step in encouraging multi-modal use.

5.5.2 Multimodal Systems

In addition to the need for improved walking infrastructure mentioned in the 20-year plan, Wabasha conducted a bike-walk survey. Data from the bike/walk survey showed that many students/parents still choose private vehicles because of the city's non-walkability. Sidewalk improvements and a community commitment to timely snow removal could encourage walking as a part of the city's transit system.

5.5.3 Community Cited Needs: Transportation out of Wabasha County

Wabasha Social Services (RCTP SS MTG WABASHA) surveyed the community and found that the principal need not fully met by on-demand service is out-of-county commuting. Many workers need to leave Wabasha County for work due to limited work opportunities within the County. There is also a need for transportation for people living in the more rural areas of the County, outside of Wabasha and Lake City, both of which the RCL serves.

CHAPTER 6: SHARING ECONOMY & INTERNET OPPORTUNITIES

The sharing economy leverages under-utilized assets to generate income for the asset's owners and to provide lower-cost, on-demand services to customers. In the transportation sector, the sharing economy has prompted the rise of transportation network companies (TNC's), which take advantage of the excessive number of vehicles are parked and unused most of the time, the large amount of passenger capacity in the unused seats in cars while in use, and the significant number of car owners interested in making money by driving others around. TNC's like Uber and Lyft have become the largest providers of personal transit in the world without owning a single vehicle, although their cost, given the relatively few rural customers and greater distances among dispersed households, makes them not a good option in most small, rural communities.

Critics have pointed out how TNC can perpetuate inequalities. A ride in a TNC vehicle typically costs more than taking publicly subsidized transit, such as a bus or train. And the ability to become a driver in one or more of the TNC's requires the ownership of or access to a vehicle and the possession of a driver's license, which many transit-dependent people do not have. The availability of these on-demand services can also depend on the size and density of a community, with TNC drivers frequently unwilling to serve remote locations because they do not get paid for the distances they must travel to pick up or after dropping off a customer.

However, sharing economy approaches to transportation can offer other viable alternatives to Uber and Lyft and supplement public transit, by leveraging the existing vehicles and the available drivers in communities in other ways. The following describes ride-sharing platforms and ridesharing and car-sharing applications.

6.1 RIDE-SHARING PLATFORMS

6.1.1 Facebook Groups

The social-media platform, Facebook, hosts several ride-sharing Facebook Groups. Because of the number of people who use Facebook, the platform has become a major source of informal, ride sharing. Some transportation focused Facebook groups have a national focus, such as Share a ride, while others focus on a particular geography, like Sharing Rides in North Carolina or Carpool Acadia in Nova Scotia.

In the Wabasha area, a few Facebook groups offer ride sharing and carpooling. UWRF Carpooling is a group that formed out of the University of Wisconsin River Falls community. It is a public group that anyone can join, and from the evidence on its site, members have used it to travel through Wabasha. There are other ride-sharing groups on Facebook near Wabasha that are private. One such group is MANKATO rideshare, but because it is a private group, it is hard to know the extent of its network other than the fact that the group is relatively small, with currently only 177 members.

Colleges provide another frequent source of ridesharing on Facebook. Moorhead's Concordia College has a Concordia Ride Board, which is a public group including public members as well as students among its 1,000 members. The Rideshare Group at the University of Minnesota has over 2,000 members and, while focused on rides in the Twin Cities, it also includes members seeking transportation across Greater Minnesota.

Other special-interest groups have established ride-sharing Facebook groups with particular purposes in mind. One example in the Wabasha area is the MN / WI Vegan carpool to animal sanctuaries, a private group meant "to connect vegans with cars to vegans without cars in hopes to plan trips to visit Animal Sanctuaries."

6.1.2 Craigslist

Less group affiliated, but more geographically specific ridesharing exists on platforms such as Craigslist. The closest Craigslist city to Wabasha is Rochester, which has a number of transportation-related requests in its ride-sharing section. Most of those ride requests are for long-distance or one-off trips although some drivers use Craigslist to advertise their availability to give people rides to wherever they need to go.

6.2 RIDE SHARING APPLICATIONS

6.2.1 Uber and Lyft

Several companies have been developed downloadable apps that support ride sharing and carpooling. The two dominant apps in the U.S., both serving Wabasha, are San-Francisco-based Uber and Lyft. Despite some of the limitations of these TNC's, they do offer a flexible form of transportation and income generation for many people. Uber, for example, has 110 million users, offering a rating system to identify difficult drivers or riders, special accommodations for hearing-impaired drivers, the advance scheduling of rides, and the opportunity to pay in cash, to split fairs with other riders, and to have multiple drop-off points for groups of riders. Lyft, which some industry observers think may soon surpass Uber as the leading ride-sharing company, offers discounted shared-saver rides, a "one tap to ride" option for quick requests and pickups, and an illuminated Lyft windshield sign that helps riders find their drivers at night. In addition to their high fares, currently both Uber and Lyft are facing both business model and driver challenges. They need more drivers, and their current drivers are seeking higher pay. The development of local TNC-like services in rural regions remains a possibility using social media and cell phones as a communication channel and enabling riders and drivers to negotiate the fees and level of service.

6.2.2 Other Ride-Sharing Apps

Other smaller TNC's offer some unique benefits although they still have limited market penetration in smaller, rural communities like Wabasha. One ride-sharing app that claims to serve rural communities is New-York-based Via (https://ridewithvia.com/). Via has a "rent a car" system for drivers who don't own their own car, which addresses the inequities embedded in the Uber and Lyft models. Via also takes only a 10% commission from drivers, versus Uber's 25% fee for each ride, which can lower the cost of a ride as

a result. The app also allows customers to instantly see who is riding nearby and in the same direction, providing faster pickups and less driving overall.

A UK-based company, BlaBla Car (https://www.blablacar.co.uk/) differs from other apps in its focus on commuter ridesharing. Anyone with a car can list their vehicle on the app and identify their route, and if any passenger wants to join them, they can request a ride and share the expenses, with BlaBla receiving a 12% commission for every successful booking. The name comes from its rating system - "bla" for the quiet ones, "bla bla" for chatty occupants, and "bla bla bla" for the ones who won't shut up – and it allows for a quick posting and accepting of trips and empowers drivers and riders to choose who they want to ride with.

Another app that can meet the car-pooling needs of families, especially in low-density rural areas, is New-York-based GoKid (https://www.gokid.mobi/). Acting as a carpool schedule organizer, GoKid connects parents with families they know in order to reduce risk, while providing the optimal routes for pick-ups and drop-offs, a messaging feature that gives parents updates, and a real-time journey tracking feature that lets parents follow their children's trips. Based on mutual favors, the app does not require any payments among its users.

6.3 CAR-SHARING APPLICATIONS

Unlike ride-sharing platforms and apps, in which the owner of a vehicle is also its driver, car-sharing allows others to drive one's car when not in use. This, of course, requires that the other driver has a license, which can exclude those who, for whatever reason, do not have a license to drive. Allowing another person to drive one's car also raises liability and insurance issues, although the companies in this business have largely addressed that concern by offering their own insurance coverage. At the same time, car-sharing gives a person unable to own a vehicle access to personal transportation~~, which~~ representing a real benefit in rural areas with few other transit options. The following are among the most prevalent car-sharing apps:

6.3.1 Turo

The largest of the car-sharing apps is the San-Francisco-based Turo (https://turo.com/). Because of its size, it often has vehicles available in smaller, rural communities. In Wabasha, for example, there were nine cars available at the time of this writing, ranging from high-end electric vehicles to mini-vans, sub-compacts, and sports utility vehicles, at prices ranging from $36 to $249 per day. Drivers pay for gas and must replace what they used, and rentals are only on a per/day basis. To book a car, a driver reserves it on the Turo app or online, chooses one of three levels of in the company's protection plan, and arranges with the owner of the vehicle to have it delivered or picked up. According to the company, owners can make, on average, over $10,000 annually on renting out a vehicle that would otherwise be parked and unused.

6.3.2 Other Car-Sharing Apps

There are other variations of the car-sharing model that could benefit Greater Minnesota car owners and drivers. Hyrecar (https://www.hyrecar.com/), for example, is a car sharing service for Uber and Lyft drivers, allowing users to share cars in order to make a living on Uber or Lyft without having to own a vehicle. There is no charge to sign up to the service, and the sharing of a car costs between $35-$45 per day, depending on the vehicle and its location. Drivers pay for gas and replace what they used, and the vehicle owner and driver must negotiate the rental period.

Hourcar (https://hourcar.org/), nonprofit in Minnesota offers another version of a car-sharing service. Unlike the for-profit companies that leverage other's vehicles, Hourcar owns its own fleet of 47 cars and offers rentals for as short as 30 minutes or as long as three days, with gas, insurance, and roadside assistance included. It has also led in the use of electric vehicles and has helped efforts to establish a network of 70 electric vehicle charging stations. Although Hourcar has mainly served the Twin Cities, it recently expanded to Rochester, making it somewhat more accessible to communities like Wabasha. As part of the new federal infrastructure funding more charging stations will be established throughout Minnesota promoting more electric vehicle use in the State.

The car-rental company, Enterprise, offers another option in some Greater Minnesota communities. Enterprise Commute (https://www.enterprise.com/en/commute.html) works with companies and commuters to help employees share rides to work. The service connects coworkers who live near each other, and the company supplies a recent-model SUV, van or crossover vehicle of their choice. Riders share the expenses related to the ride, reducing their commuting costs, and employers can further subsidize the commute. The Mayo Clinic, for example, has recently entered into an agreement with Enterprise Commute to provide van service for Mayo employees going to and from Rochester as a six-month pilot project.

There are other car-sharing companies that have emerged in recent years. However, their services are either not available in Minnesota, such as Getaround (https://www.getaround.com/), ~~or~~ are available only in major cities, such as ZipCar (https://www.zipcar.com/), are available only on the West Coast, such as Gig Car Share (https://gigcarshare.com/), or are available only in select college towns in the U.S., such as Enterprise Car Share (https://www.enterprisecarshare.com/). If these car-sharing companies grow, they may also expand their services in Greater Minnesota, in competition with Turo, although some promising services, like General Motor's Maven car-sharing and long-term rental program, shut down in 2020 because of the drop in demand caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

6.4 BIKE SHARING

Several bike-sharing applications, such as Lime (https://www.li.me/en-us/home) and Mobike (https://mobike.com/us/), have emerged over the last decade, although most of them are mainly available only in major cities. Small, rural communities do not have the population numbers or density to make it worthwhile for bike-sharing companies to install and maintain their fleets or for communities to set up such systems themselves at an average cost of $4,000 to $5,000 per bike.

Small, rural communities with colleges or universities may be able to attract a bike-sharing company. Some, like Norman, Oklahoma, have a bike-share programs that serves the larger community as well as the students of Oklahoma State University. There are also non-profit organizations, like Cascadia Mobility (https://www.cascadiamobility.org/) that serve communities in the Pacific Northwest that are too small for bike-share companies to make a profit. Nice Ride (https://niceridemn.com/) and Twin Cities Adaptive Cycling (https://www.tcacycling.org/) are among the bike-sharing non-profits in Minnesota, but they serve the larger cities in the state. In response, communities like Lake City, Minnesota, has partnered with the Lake City Active Living Volunteers to implement a free bicycle program. Once residents complete the required forms, they are issued a numbered key that will unlock the bike with that number at one of the city's bike racks, although bikes must be returned by 7:30 pm on the day of rental (https://www.ci.lake-city.mn.us/index.asp?SEC=400CAFC8-02F9-43D8-8488-67E22AA23253)

Another trend has been the implementation of a "bike library" model, with bikes available to check-out, like a library book, for free. In Allen County, Kansas, the check-out times can vary from minutes to even months, with bikes sourced and maintained through local bike shops and with support from healthcare insurers like Blue Cross, Blue Shield. A variation of that in four rural counties in Ohio is the "book-a-bike" program as part of the library system, which maintains the bikes and manages the check-out process. Rochester, Minnesota, has a similar book-a-bike program (https://www.rochestermn.gov/government/departments/parks-and-recreation/activities-classes/bike-share).

Montevallo, Alabama has taken a more community wide approach with a membership model in which residents pay a $25 annual fee or complete 25 hours of community service in exchange for access to community owned bikes. And Cochrane, Ontario, has engaged local high-school students to fix up stolen or abandoned bikes, paint them bright colors for easy identification, and distribute them for free use in a variety of stations. Two staff mechanics, who work for the town, maintain and repair the bikes.

6.5 COMMUNITY RESPONSE

Because ride-, car-, and bike-sharing are still relatively new as transit options, especially in smaller, rural communities like Wabasha, the best way to gage people's views is through the online reviews on some of the sites.

The Facebook and Craigslist ride-sharing sites related to Wabasha either did not have any user reviews posted or were private sites, without comments that are publicly available. The one gage of their success is their longevity. Some, like the University of Wisconsin River Falls sites was founded in 2011, and the University of Minnesota site in 2014, while others, like the Mankato site, was founded in 2018. And relatively constant stream of ride-sharing requests on all of the sites listed above shows that these platforms meet a real need.

The car-sharing apps offer a different way to gage their success. On the Turo site, for example, the three vehicles with user reviews all received five-star ratings, with drivers all happy with the experience they had with the owners' cars. William wrote of the car he rented, "Fantastic Host. Fantastic Vehicle…Terrific all the way around. Highly recommended!" Mangesh wrote, "This was my first experience with Turo. I was pleasantly surprised how well it went." and Jon wrote, "Fantastic service. Vehicle was clean, well maintained, and ready when promised." As is the case with any online, on-demand service, the reviews of previous customers matter a lot and, as these reviews suggest, car sharing has satisfied those who have used it in Wabasha.

6.6 CONCLUSION

Ride-, car-, and bike-sharing services are not for everyone and are not available everywhere. But they do offer a form of transit service that supplements traditional services for people who do not own or cannot operate a vehicle or who want to reduce the costs of car ownership or commuting. And they use assets – existing vehicles – that Greater Minnesota communities like Wabasha have in abundance. While a sharing economy approach to transportation cannot meet the entirety of a community's transit needs, it should be a part of any comprehensive solution.

CHAPTER 7: POTENTIAL PROVIDER PARTNERSHIPS

This chapter identifies opportunities to create partnerships among existing transit and transportation providers across sectors by mapping and exploring barriers. The partnerships explored here are specific to our partner community, Wabasha, but much of what this report describes has relevance to the transit challenges of Greater Minnesota communities statewide.

7.1 BARRIERS

The following list describes some of the obstacles that exist to the creation of partnerships among existing transit and transportation providers across sectors.

7.1.1 Service boundary limitations

Some existing transit services are constrained by their service areas, which limit their ability to cross boundaries.

7.1.2 Lack of a regional coordinating entity

Unlike other regions in the state, Southeast Minnesota has no regional coordinating entity to facilitate partnerships among service providers, although an effort is currently underway to create such an entity, which will facilitate future coordination.

7.1.3 Lack of administrative support for partnered services

Southeast Minnesota also has no administrative entity that can support partnerships between and among transit and transportation providers, in part because, unlike all the other regions in the State, it does not have a regional planning entity.

7.1.4 Lack of pedestrian and bike systems

Although many small communities have some pedestrian and bike pathways, many lack sidewalk and bike path systems that facilitate access to transit services. However, Minnesota Safe Routes to School, a MnDOT program aimed at improving walking and bicycling conditions for youth and encourage healthy lifestyles, is an important state asset to increasing mobility options and creating safe pathways to transit services. A popular program throughout Minnesota, Safe Routes to School exists in almost every Minnesota County, with currently 739 participants.

7.1.5 Few transit providers serving Wabasha

The Rochester City Lines has served Wabasha with commuter round trips to Rochester during the work week. One Wabasha pickup area existed east of Highway 61 and another west of it. However, Rochester City Lines experienced greatly reduced ridership and revenues because of pandemic-driven changes in employment patterns, which drove the Mayo Clinic's decision to switch from subsidizing employee use of

Rochester City Lines to family vans contracted with Enterprise car Rental Company. The loss of that major ridership and revenue has forced Rochester City Lines to curtail its services in Wabasha.

Passenger rail service between the Twin Cities and Chicago passes through Wabasha, but trains stop in the larger cities of Red Wing to the north and Winona to the south. The north/south Jefferson Line goes through Rochester but does not serve Wabasha. The Treasure Island Resort and Casino Transportation Line, operated by the Prairie Island Community, provides transit to its casino north of Red Wing. Although it picks up riders in Rochester, it does not go to Wabasha. Finally, the Lake City based Vantastic provides insurance-reimbursed medical and disability related service, but it rarely goes to Wabasha.

7.1.6 The high cost of TNC services

The high cost of services from Transportation Network Companies (TNC) like Uber and Lyft presents an insurmountable barrier to their frequent use and as a result, very few people from the Wabasha area use these services. However, a locally based, low-cost, Uber-like service, supported by the Dispatch Center in Plainview, might increase its usage.

7.1.7 The expense of trips with short stops

The lack of a coordinated payment system for transit also increases costs and reduces its use. For example, if a passenger stops at a daycare center on the way to work to drop off her child, she must pay another fee to continue her ride to work. The same occurs when she returns to pick up her child and then continue the ride home, doubling the cost of transit to and from work. A coordinated, voucher-payment system that permits people to make stops along a trip without paying an additional fare could increase transit use and eliminate the double fares for trips to and from work.

7.1.8 The layout and low density of communities

Like most of Greater Minnesota, the Wabasha Area has a car-oriented culture. Although Wabasha's original street pattern followed a finely grained grid, the community has spread out since World War II, with a thinly populated web of roads that make car ownership necessary and transit service challenging. The lack of density and the relatively small population overall underscores the need for the current study to find transit solutions that are appropriate to rural communities and that have a different form than those that work in larger, denser cities.

7.1.9 Attitudes toward transit

Transit use tends to be stigmatized in small rural communities. Although a community like Wabasha is too small and spread out to support a fixed route transit service, it does have federally funded and state funded on-demand and volunteer services that serve veterans, and disabled, low income, and elderly people. Because these services do not serve the entire community, transit is often not seen for "those people," not as a community-wide asset.

7.1.10 Attitudes toward biking

Attitudes towards biking in many small rural communities has also limited access to transit stops. Many Greater Minnesota communities do not have bike lanes, which makes biking to the transit stop challenging. Although things are changing, some communities have increased access by making bike lanes on some existing neighborhood streets.

7.1.11 Attitudes toward walking

Attitudes towards walking has limited access to transit as well. Many Greater Minnesota communities have allowed housing to be built on streets that do not have sidewalks, forcing pedestrians to walk in the streets, especially during winter months, as the only option for reaching a transit stop. Some communities have also seen the repair and replacement of aging sidewalks as a financial hardship and homeowners have objected to assessments from for a portion of the cost.

7.1.12 Attitudes toward snow removal

Homeowners have resisted the responsibility for snow removal from sidewalks on their property. Sidewalk snow removal has also been seen as a problem for some older residents, leading some communities to remove older sidewalks, making streets that formerly had sidewalks challenging and dangerous places to walk. In some communities one solution to that problem has been the use social media to organize neighborhood snow-removal teams that remove snow from neighborhood sidewalks in a timely manner.

7.2 CURRENT AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

The following section describes the partnership and coordination opportunities that exist in Greater Minnesota communities. The opportunities include:

7.2.1 Creating compatibility among service platforms

MnDOT's Southern Minnesota Mobility as a Service (MaaS) project represents a much-needed pilot program. Even though the pilot does not include Wabasha in its coverage area, the digital platform currently being developed offers an opportunity to foster partnerships in the future within the Southeast Minnesota Region. It promises to connect existing transit and transportation service providers and to foster collaboration among them by mapping opportunities to connect, by identifying barriers to coordinated services, and by creating software that will facilitate that coordination. It may also provide a fare system that works across services.

7.2.2 Creating partnerships among existing providers

In Wabasha, for example, potential partnership opportunities exist between Hiawathaland Transit and Bluff Country School Bus Service. Three Rivers Community Action, the entity that runs Hiawathaland Transit, has expressed an interest in being a part of expanded mobility service in the Great Wabasha Area,

along the lines of a combined human service and student transportation service in a small community in Vermont. Students use Metro Transit in Minneapolis and Saint Paul, so there are no policy or rule barriers to adults riding school buses in Minnesota if seats are available. Vehicle licensing requirements can be met with mixed-use licenses for vehicles that serve both school and community riders.

7.2.3 Connecting existing transit systems

The strategically siting of community transit stops in a hub-and-spoke system, may provide opportunities to make connections among systems. People from the Wabasha/Kellogg Area, for example, might access rides at these community transit stops to jobs in the area's regional centers or to the Jefferson Lines, which connect north to the Twin Cities and south to Kansas City, or to Amtrack, which connects north to the Twin Cities and southeast to Chicago. Creating a fare system that works across these systems might also make access easier and more popular.

7.2.4 Creating more bike and pedestrian routes

Getting more community bikes and creating sidewalks and bike lanes that connect to community hubs could facilitate connections to other transit systems. In Wabasha opportunities exist to expand the existing bike trails and sidewalk systems. In small, rural communities many already walk in the streets. Because many streets in rural small towns have sparse traffic, lightly used streets could be designated as Walk/Bike/Drive Streets with a walk-bike lane created on the existing street using stripping and bollards. New developments could be required to provide walk/bike routes. Wabasha is working to improve walking and biking. The Wabasha Walk/Bike Advocates was formed in 2018 as a part of making Wabasha an Active Living City, a Greater Minnesota's Futures project funded by the State and led by the University of Minnesota's Design Center. Combining with Safe Routes to School efforts, the group has built on community enthusiasm for biking and bike trails to champion expanding bike and walking networks across the Wabasha/Kellogg Area and providing free bicycles for community use. Currently the group has placed bikes on a bike rack station below the Mississippi River Bridge on Main Street in downtown Wabasha and is working on getting funding to extend the trail system to Kellogg and procure more bikes and bike stations.

CHAPTER 8: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES TO RURAL TRANSIT

We have identified the opportunities and challenges to address in creating a rural community transit model. The following summary also reflects our observations and analysis of our community partner, Wabasha, and our conversations with members and leaders in that community. In general, we see more opportunities than challenges in establishing a rural community transit strategy in small, rural municipalities like Wabasha. Some of the following bullets identify issues that apply to most rural communities and others are specific to Wabasha and may not apply to many other, similar-sized municipalities.

8.1 OPPORTUNITIES

We have listed the opportunities from those that apply most broadly to the greatest number of other communities and those that apply most directly to Wabasha.

8.1.1 Federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)

The Federal government's five-year investment in both physical and broadband infrastructure presents an enormous opportunity for small, rural communities that often have unmet infrastructure needs and spotty Internet access. There is a sizable amount of IIJA funding that is discretionary and innovation focused, some of which might be available for innovative, community-based rural transit strategies such as those being explored in this project. It could also potentially provide funding from the Safe Streets and Roads for projects that improve access to mobility systems.

8.1.2 Underused vehicles already exist

The typical non-delivery vehicle stands parked over 90% of the time, and that pertains to vehicles in small, rural locations as much as large, urban ones. As car-sharing apps, like Turo, become more widely available and more frequently used, the potential of people renting those vehicles for hourly or daily use remains very high. Organizing that car-sharing into an on-demand transit system is an opportunity that awaits a public- or private-sector entity to take the lead.

8.1.3 Student transportation fleets already exist

Buses used to transport children to and from school also exist in almost every rural community and they, too, stand idle most of the time during the day, nights, weekends, and summer months. Minnesota law allows buses to transport adults as well as children, within certain limits as long as the vehicle has a mixed-use license and at least one student is on board, so a real opportunity exists to use those underused vehicles for transit purposes that extend beyond the transportation of school children.

8.1.4 A demonstrable need for transit already exists

While the demand for transit in small, rural communities varies, depending on their demographics and socio-economics differences, every community has a number of transit-dependent people who do not or cannot drive a car for diverse reasons. By some estimates, roughly 25% of the American population fits that category either because of their age – people who are too young or too old to drive – or the ability – people with a physical or cognitive constraint that prevents them from doing so. In the case of Wabasha, there are many employees – and patients of its hospital – who live in Wisconsin, across the Mississippi River, and they also have a need for a more flexible form of transit that crosses state borders.

8.1.5 A changing transportation environment

The global COVID-19 pandemic and recent geo-political events will likely continue to affect transportation cost and demand. The pandemic has led to a rise in the number of people moving to smaller communities because they can now work remotely for much of the time and because they are looking for more space, lower living costs, and a different quality of life. This trend may affect the demand for transit, especially among home-workers. At the same time, global conflicts – along with post-pandemic supply issues – have led to increases in everything from the price of gasoline to the cost of new and used cars. What impact this has on transportation decisions and transit use, especially among commuters, remains to be seen.

8.1.6 A growing use of technology

Although rural areas have been somewhat slower in the embrace of mobile, digital technology, the penetration of smart phones and other Internet-connected devices has become pervasive, which makes app- and web-based transit options more viable in small, rural communities. Ride-, bike-, and car-sharing has become more widespread in such communities as has the use of on-demand transit services more generally, expanding the opportunities to create more responsive transit strategies, able to address the needs of those not already served by transit.

8.1.7 A volunteer system for transportation already exists

The number of volunteer drivers able to pick up and drop off people who cannot otherwise operate a vehicle is significant in Wabasha, even though the ranks of such volunteers has diminished since the pandemic (see challenges section). Not all communities have a strong volunteer culture, however, and so the reliance on volunteers to provide rides may differ greatly from one place to another.

8.1.8 Political support exists at the top for transit

Another factor that may set Wabasha apart from some other small, rural communities is the support for alternative transit strategies among those in positions of power – the mayor, council members, and civic leaders. While municipal staff in Wabasha, like many similar communities, is stretched thin and cannot take on transit duties, the opportunity of establishing sharing-economy approaches to transit and self-organized modes of operation exist in communities where most residents know each other.

8.1.9 On-demand, dial-a-ride transit already exists

Again, this applies to Wabasha and may not exist in other, similarly sized cities, but Hiawathaland Transit does operate a dial-a-ride system during the day through mid-afternoon Monday through Saturday in Wabasha. Although this service, like those across the country, have encountered difficulties finding enough drivers to maintain their pre-pandemic level of service, the on-demand nature of transit in small, rural communities like Wabasha has prepared people for a greater range of on-demand transportation options likely in the future.

8.1.10 Wabasha has institutional, educational, and recreational assets

Wabasha may be better situated than many small, rural communities in its proximity to three regional employment centers, several higher education institutions, and recreational assets related to its location on the Mississippi River. It also has an historic commercial core and surrounding residential area, with short walking distances and many sidewalks. Those features may make it better suited than other, more remote municipalities in supporting a variety of transit options for residents and visitors alike.

8.1.11 Wabasha has a strong interest in multi mobility modes.

The Wabasha Walk/Bike Group is pursuing opportunities to strengthen pedestrian and bicycle routes.

8.2 CHALLENGES

Despite the many opportunities that exist in municipalities like Wabasha to develop rural community transit, challenges remain. The challenges involve both physical and political considerations, listed below:

8.2.1 Small rural communities lack the capacity to pursue and administrate funding

While the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) presents an historic opportunity to invest in physical and digital infrastructure, many small communities do not have staff available or knowledgeable about how to access and administrate IIJA funds. Because a lot of those funds are discretionary, it requires an ability on the part of a city's staff to put together competitive proposals, which can be difficult for staff already stretched very thin. Because small, rural communities have small and very busy staffs, funding to provide for an organization with staff capacity to administrate successful proposals needs to be included in grant proposals.

8.2.2 Cars continue to be the dominant mode of transportation

Although the cost of owning and operating automobiles continues to strain household budgets, the association of driving a vehicle with personal freedom remains strong, especially in rural America. With this has come a stigma around taking transit, which is a social challenge for those who, for various reasons cannot or will not drive. As rural communities age and seek to attract more families with young children, the role of transit becomes more important. A cultural change that is needed to embrace transit as a mobility mode for everyone and overcome that stigma will take a long time, even if transit options become more available and the cost of operating a car becomes more expensive for most people. One rural

community strategy that offers some promise is to reposition transit as a community development strategy within its current and future plans.

8.2.3 Public policies continue to favor cars over transit

Reflecting the car culture in America, public policies continue to invest far more money into maintaining the automobile infrastructure than into investing in transit of any sort. The recent passage of major Federal legislation in support of infrastructure does include a significant investment in transit ~~services~~, some of which is designated for rural areas which represents an opportunity to rethink and reconfigure transit that serves those that live in rural areas. However, it remains to be seen what how much of the resources flow to innovative transit strategies that serve small, rural communities versus existing urban-centric systems.

8.2.4 Public investments favor cars over other transportation modes

The amount of public investment devoted to automobile infrastructure far exceeds the funding for transit, bicycle, and pedestrian infrastructure. Wabasha, for example, is bifurcated by busy Highway 61. While a considerable investment in the redesign of the Highway 61/Highway 60 intersection has occurred to make it safer for cars, other mobility modes such as walking were not effectively accommodated in the design. Although a more balanced investment in transportation strategies is needed, a large change seems unlikely in the short term; however IIJA represents an important step in toward a balance.

8.2.5 Cost and benefits of transit not yet clear

While urban transit systems have a relatively good sense of what it costs to provide transit to residents and workers, and what benefits accrue from those investments, a cost/benefit analysis of rural transit rarely occurs beyond the services already available. Because of the limited data available, it becomes a challenge to make the case for investing in rural transit.

8.2.6 Old ways of thinking about vehicle use remain

We have policies that largely assume that vehicles will be driven by their owners and used for the purpose they were originally intended to have, resulting in the paradox of rural communities having few transit options while also having a lot of underused vehicles. An example of policies that make it difficult to use vehicles more flexibly pertain to school buses. Minnesota state statues, for example, “limit use of traditional yellow school buses to only pupil transportation, although there are exceptions for some situations…when (1) the vehicle is owned by or under contract to a school district and operated as a charter or leased bus; (2) the bus is used under contract with a tax-exempt entity for a special event and in conformance with motor carrier regulations; (3) the bus is operated by a day activity center and a specified set of conditions are met; or (4) the bus is operated by a licensed childcare provider and some additional conditions are met.”

8.2.7 Service boundaries that do not reflect transit needs

Many transit service districts reflect political boundaries, such as counties and municipalities, which do not always align with the travel needs of people. In the Wabasha Area, for example, people commuting to Rochester, the major employment center in S.E. Minnesota, do not have a reliable transit options if they do not work for the Mayo Clinic. A similar misalignment occurs with people who live across the Mississippi River in Wisconsin and who work in Minnesota, but who do not have transit service available to them. Boundaries can change, school consolidation has reconfigured school bus service and has driven partnerships among communities in the newly configured districts.

8.2.8 Poor land-use decisions work against transit

Although sprawl is often associated with big-city suburbs, it also exists in small, rural communities like Wabasha. Wabasha has over time relocated its public schools, municipal and county buildings, and its affordable housing away from the historic core of the city in areas with poor pedestrian, bike, and transit access. The physical sprawl and slow growth of many small, rural communities represents a challenge in terms of land use in support of transit. While the less restrictive or near absence of or enforcement of zoning in many small communities presents an opportunity to create more transit-oriented development. Other measures sure as requiring walk/bike access pathways in new developments that connect to the existing bike and pedestrian systems in the community's core could also help to address access challenges and make the community more livable.

8.2.9 Lack of sidewalks and bicycle trails makes access to transit challenging

Sidewalks in some small, rural communities have been removed making their often-fragmented sidewalk system discontinuous where they have sidewalks at all. This fragmentation makes accessing transit stops difficult for some. For example, in Wabasha the original pattern of sidewalks in the commercial core and surrounding streets was not continued as the municipality expanded. Some existing sidewalks were removed making walking and biking on the street the only option in many parts of the city. The location of key buildings at a distance outside the city center on streets without sidewalks also makes access to them difficult.

8.2.10 Modest civic infrastructure makes mobility difficult

Rural small towns like Wabasha have small staffs with big responsibilities, and a small, dedicated group of volunteers who play many important civic roles. Identifying and creating a model for the effective administrative support that is needed for a community mobility system is challenging.

8.2.11 Ability, liability and/or safety remain a challenge for some

Some community members do not have a driver's licenses and/or liability insurance, or they cannot drive for various reasons, which limits their access to some car-sharing strategies. Personal safety issues also exist for vulnerable people such as children, females, older adults, and those with handicaps, which might limit their use of some ride-sharing strategies.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Historically traditional transit models developed in and for urban communities have not been successfully adapted to smaller, dispersed rural communities. Yet small, rural communities have the potential to become leaders in transit innovation to address their unmet mobility needs. They have a lot of human and physical assets to leverage and engaged residents and committed civic leaders who can use 21st-century technology to create a new kind of rural transit system. The Rural Community Transit Project offers a menu of mobility options that address the varied needs of all community members. Although it has been developed in partnership with the community of Wabasha, Minnesota, the menu of strategies offers a relevant tool for meeting the mobility needs of small, rural communities across the state and nation.

These recommendations represent a redefinition of what people traditionally think of as "transit." Transit is often framed in terms of urban mobility systems with dedicated transit vehicles that provide scheduled, subsidized service to large numbers of transit users in dense urban areas. That model neither translates well to small, rural communities, nor is it often economically feasible to do.

These recommendations reframe transit as mobility. The project's menu of strategies redefines rural community transit as a mobility system consisting of several interrelated and mutually supportive parts. The mobility system builds on the assets that small, rural communities already have and the capacities of the people who live, work, manage, and lead in them. The menu of strategies connects existing transportation programs and 21st-century technology with a flexible system that lets each community select strategies that meet its particular needs.

Some of the mobility strategies explored include:

- promoting car, ride, and bike sharing;
- ensuring pedestrian access;
- transforming volunteer driver programs;
- repurposing school bus systems; and
- embracing the delivery of goods and services as well as the transport of people.

These strategies can run up against policy barriers, funding challenges, administrative obstacles, and planning constraints, all of which we address in the following recommendations.

Each section of this chapter focuses on a particular aspect of rural mobility, providing an overview of the challenges, needs, opportunities, and existing assets particularly relevant to meeting the mobility needs of small, rural communities, and then offering recommendations in terms of mobility options, planning actions, public processes, policy changes, administrative requirements, funding possibilities, and use of existing assets.

We also recommend branding a rural community transit using the "Greater Minnesota Moves" moniker to distinguish it from its urban and suburban counterparts. The branding conveys the sense of innovation possible and captures the creativity of rural community mobility systems. Each mobility strategy has a

name that reinforces the brand and identifies it as an important part of the local community's infrastructure: "Greater Minnesota Buses," "Greater Minnesota Bikes," "Greater Minnesota Rides," etc. In these recommendations, the branding becomes community specific: "Greater Minnesota Rides" becomes "Wabasha Rides."

9.1 WABASHA WALKS: IMPROVING COMMUNITY WALKABILITY

Although the importance of people's access to destinations and multiple transportation modes is often recognized as important to community mobility, integrating sidewalks, bike trails, and other pedestrian ways into a community mobility system is not often considered a necessary, integral part of the transit system.

9.1.1 Challenges

- Walking to destinations and access to other mobility modes is impeded by the lack of a continuous pedestrian system.
- Although historically most small Minnesota rural communities had a sidewalk system that connected the downtown, employment centers, schools, community facilities, and institutions like libraries, churches, and service clubs, some sidewalks have been removed and others are in disrepair.
- Residential neighborhoods developed in many rural communities in the late 20th and early 22nd centuries often have discontinuous sidewalks or no sidewalks and pedestrian ways at all.
- Sidewalk snow removal in residential neighborhoods provides a challenge for many community residents with disabilities and older people.

9.1.2 Needs

- A recognition that sidewalks, bike trails, and other pedestrian ways are important community infrastructures that contribute to community livability.
- Pedestrian and bike pathways should be identified as important to the community's development efforts to attract new businesses and new families with young children and to accommodate its aging population.
- A recognition that because a connected, maintained pedestrian system facilitates walking to many community destinations and creates access to other mobility modes, a community pedestrian system is an integral, essential part of a rural community's mobility system infrastructure and should qualify for some funding from federal, state, and regional transit grant programs.

9.1.3 Opportunities

- The street grid system found in many of Minnesota's rural communities is a community form that accommodates efficient and effective movement within, between, and among different parts of the community.
- The commercial area and civic buildings in many small towns are located on the street grid in its historic center.

- Sidewalks and community trails connect some destinations in many small communities.
- Pairing a pedestrian and a bicycle system could create an efficient and cost-effective network that connects destinations across the community.
- The wide streets in many small towns can be retrofitted to enhance connectivity.
- Streets with light traffic often are used by pedestrians when sidewalks are not available.
- Some rural communities have Safe Routes to School initiatives that promote community-wide walking and cycling funded by Minnesota's Safe Routes to School Program and staffed by county staff.
- Use of MnDOT's Planning Assistance Grant Program for "Safe Routes to School."
- Pursue existing funding programs for walkability, such as America Walks' Community Change Grants, the Greater Minnesota Transportation Alternatives program and the State Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP).

9.1.4 Planning and Actions

- Plan the community-wide network by the city engaging the entire range of community stakeholders with a process that includes in-person and online public meetings, a website, and presentations to community groups.
- Create a pedestrian mobility system by:
  - Inventorying and assessing the condition of the existing sidewalks, trails, and lightly traveled streets.
  - Identifying gaps in sidewalks and trails.
  - Building on the robust Safe Routes to School Program found in some communities and developing Safe Routes to School in communities without them.
  - Engaging with community residents to identify destinations, sidewalk gaps, and areas where pedestrian ways are needed.
- Create a snow removal system that integrates public sector snow removal and private responsibilities for snow removal by using a digital neighborhood-based snow removal initiative to:
  - Identify specific areas of public and public responsibility for snow removal.
  - Organize neighborhood-based, digitally connected residential snow removal groups.

9.1.5 Public Policy Needs

- Define the pedestrian system infrastructure as part of the mobility system that qualifies for transit-related funding.
- Require sidewalks, trails, or pedestrian ways in new developments.
- Require timely sidewalk, trail, and pedestrian way snow removal.

9.1.6 Administrative Responsibilities

- Administer funding for pedestrian system: city, regional transportation agency, and MnDOT.
- Enforce snow removable requirements: city
- Manage neighborhood snow removal networks: neighborhood resident groups.

9.1.7 Funding

- Build out the pedestrian system since pedestrian projects are eligible for funding from almost all federal transportation programs, from transit enhancement to highway safety to congestion mitigation to recreational trails programs.
- Support sidewalk maintenance with city funding and a line item in the federal transportation/transit grant funded mobility budget.
- Pursue funding for sidewalk planning and construction from sources such as the Active Transportation Program and Greater Minnesota Transportation Alternatives.

9.1.8 Existing Assets

- Use and supplement existing pedestrian and cycling systems.
- Strengthen existing city snow removal programs.
- Build on small town friendly neighborhood culture to create new neighborhood snow removal systems using neighborhood-based social media.
- Link Safe Routes to School programs to the mobility initiative.
- Supplement the community's planning capacity with MnDOT's Planning Assistance Program.
- Partner with MnDOT's grant and administration capacities.
- Connect with regional transportation entities' planning and coordination capacities.

9.2 WABASHA BIKES: INCREASING BICYCLE USE AND ACCESSIBILITY

Although many people in small communities own and use bikes, often community residents have unused bicycles stored in garages. Bicycling is often seen as a mode of transportation mainly for young people prior to their getting a driver's license or for recreation, even though most trips by adults and children in communities are within an easy bike ride away. Bike (and scooter) sharing have become increasingly popular in large communities, where well-funded providers clearly meet both residents' and visitors' needs. This strategy looks at various ways in which communities can better utilize the bikes they already have.

9.2.1 Challenges

- The ability of small, rural communities to attract bike-sharing companies is low because the company costs of administering and maintaining such a system is high.
- Although some small, rural communities have a bike shop, many lack a bike shop and ~~l~~ack the city staff capacity to maintain and repair bikes.
- Minnesota winters can be especially hard on bikes and finding places to store them during the winter can also be a challenge, especially if a community wants to run such as system itself, without an outside vendor.
- Not everyone can ride a bike, either because of age or ability, and not everyone can afford to rent a bike, all of which currently gives biking a relatively minor role in the provision of rural community transit.

9.2.2 Needs

- A need for access to rental bikes exists in small, rural communities, although the extent and nature of their use is often dependent on the extent to which local streets and trails accommodate cycling.
- Because bikes also provide mobility to undocumented members of communities, where their immigration status prohibits them from owning or driving a vehicle, providing some level of bike sharing in small, rural communities recognizes the diversity of their populations.

9.2.3 Opportunities

- Currently Wabasha has some bikes available at a bike rake on Main Street that targets visitor use. The experience with this effort can help to inform a bike-sharing program.
- There are many under-used bikes in even the smallest rural community and leveraging those existing assets in a free bike-sharing system can utilize them more fully while also offering a low-cost way of providing bike access to those who need or want it.
- There are also bike enthusiasts in many communities who might be interested in making bikes more available to those who do not have a bike or cannot afford one.
- Often city residents are willing to donate their unused bikes, and communities often have a number of abandoned bikes that city staff have taken off the streets. These bikes can be repaired and returned to use as part of a local bike-sharing effort that requires little ongoing maintenance.
- Local groups like Wabasha Walk/Bike Advocates can help promote biking.
- Libraries have found that offering bikes that residents or visitors can check out can become one of the most frequently circulated items in their collections.
- In smaller communities with few civic institutions, a community gathering place or the local gas station may be interested in playing a role in bike-sharing.
- Local schools have also found that some students have considerable interest in learning bike repair skills. In a bike club or shop class, students can fix-up and keep bikes repaired as part of the bike-sharing network.

9.2.4 Planning and Action

- Convene city, library, and school staff as well as bike owners and those interested in bike sharing to discuss what a community bike-sharing system might look like.
- Critique the lessons learned from the bikes currently available on Main Street.
- Visit other communities that have a successful bike-sharing program.
- Assess the demand for bike sharing and get input from the community on how such a system might be structured, improved, or expanded.
- Implement partnerships with the local school, library, or public-works staff to repair, circulate, and maintain a low-cost bike-sharing system.
- Look at locations in the community that are well suited for bike stands. Bike stand locations should be easily accessible to those most in need and have adequate safety and security features.

- Survey the most common routes for bikes in the community and address ways to make those routes safer for bike users to increase bike sharing.
- Start with the simplest steps, such as gathering existing unused bikes and making them available for free or for a modest fee.
- Repaint the bikes a color that identifies them as part of the bike-sharing system. For example, Stockholm, Wisconsin, has painted its bike sharing bikes a bright blue.

9.2.5 Public Policy

- Develop policies that encourage the use of bikes, such as the provision of bike stands near commercial or other frequently used community destinations.
- Incentivize existing bike owners to donate used and under-used bikes to provide a supply that can replenish the system as older bikes wear out or disappear.

9.2.6 Administrative Responsibilities

- Appoint someone in the city or community with an interest in bike sharing to lead the effort and give them the time and resources needed to create the system.
- Ensure that the system is financially sustainable and humanly doable over the long term by recruiting enough people involved to ensure its continuation after its initial deployment. If a local bike group exists, solicit its members' participation in the bike-sharing effort.

9.2.7 Funding

- Look at the costs of starting and maintaining a bike-sharing system by consulting communities that have a bike-sharing program.
- Identify sustainable local funding sources: user fees, public works budget, library budget, and possible non-transportation-related funding such as wellness incentives, carbon credits, etc.
- Reframe bike sharing as part of a mobility system and seek support from transit funding sources.
- Seek philanthropic support from individuals, non-profits, business organizations, and foundations to handle one-time costs and find ways to measure the impact of those investments.
- Reframe bike sharing in ways that the donor community often cares most about, such as equity, opportunity, and sustainability to increase the chances of receiving financial support.
- Federal funding for protected bikeways includes the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Improvement Program, Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP), Surface Transportation Program (STP), Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) Discretionary Grant program, and the Transportation Alternatives Program.
- The federal bike commuter benefit is a program that encourages bike use by reimbursing individuals that use bicycles as a mode of transport.

9.2.8 Existing Assets

- Bikes already in the community: an estimated 100 million bikes are in America, a country of 330 million people, and many families own several bikes that are unused much of the time.
- Community individuals or groups interested in cycling
- Existing bike trails

9.3 WABASHA DELIVERS: TRANSFORMING THE VOLUNTEER DRIVER PROGRAM

Although the volunteer driver program has worked well in many small communities, its limitations have limited its effectiveness in meeting the mobility needs of community residents. Transforming this successful program offers the potential for greatly expanding its ability to meet community mobility needs.

9.3.1 Challenges

- Limited hours, limited mileage reimbursement, and the limited numbers of drivers available are constraints to the only mobility services available to many low-income and disabled community residents living in communities too small or unable to provide the required 20% local match for fixed bus route service supported by state and federal program grants.
- Volunteer driver shortages characterize many of these local programs because small towns run on volunteers and the number of available volunteers is limited.
- Mileage reimbursements are limited to those miles driven with the client in the vehicle, not those miles driven to pick up the client or the miles driven to return to the driver's home. This reimbursement structure limits the number who can afford to volunteer as drivers because currently volunteer drivers subsidize the program.

9.3.2 Needs

- Changing a funding mind-set is needed to address small communities' mobility needs. Although transit systems in urban and regional centers are heavily publicly subsidized, volunteers are often expected to provide services in small communities.
- Access to local goods and services is a recognized need that is partially served by the volunteer driver system.
- An expanded schedule with longer hours and seven-day service would permit clients to have their basic mobility needs met and participate more fully in community life.
- Because they receive unexpected perishable food donations from food businesses, food shelves need a flexible system that brings their clients to the food shelf and a delivery system that delivers perishable foods to their clients.
- Small, local businesses could benefit from a program that delivers their goods to their local clients.

9.3.3 Opportunities

- The effective volunteer driver program run by Three Rivers Community Action could be expanded and enhanced.
  - Hiawathaland's call-in dial-a-ride service has call hours on Monday-Friday 5:00 am -7:00 pm and on Saturday, 7:30 am to 4:00 pm.
  - The mileage reimbursement system already in place could be modified.
  - Liability issues are addressed.
  - A driver recruitment and supervision system is already in place
- Delivery of goods could be an additional service provided by the same driver.
  - A local program using the DoorDash technology and delivery platform could support deliveries because DoorDash currently serves nonprofits and government entities for free across the country.
  - The driver who picks up and delivers people could also serve as a DoorDash driver.
  - Currently DoorDash limitations include requiring trips to locations 10 miles or under, a 25-pound bag weight limit, and a minimum of 50 parcels a week to be delivered; however, there is a possibility of modifying some of these requirements if the drivers drive both goods and people.

9.3.4 Planning And Actions

- Recruit the operator of the volunteer driver program to lead the effort.
- Transform the existing program into one that expands its operating hours, pays its drivers, and delivers products from local businesses to residential customers.
- Convene a meeting led by the operator of the current volunteer program that is attended by current clients, would-be users, current drivers, those interested in becoming drivers, city, county, medical, and non-profit staff, local business owners, community leaders, and interested community members to discuss the needs of a driver system that pays drivers a modest fee, reimburses for all miles driven, operates longer hours, and delivers both people and local business goods.
- Recruit members for a planning committee.
- Recruit local businesses that wish to use the delivery service.
- Solicit assistance from DoorDash and MnDOT.
- Assess the potential use of the service based on potential increased demand and input from the community members.
- Asses the need to enhance the service that the current call-in center offers.
- Create an expanded, enhanced driver program based on an expansion of the dial-a-ride service currently serving the community.

9.3.5 Public Policy

- Recognize that a driver-driven delivery program is an important part of the mobility system.
- Identify and establish provisions for funding drivers and increasing existing administrative operations and support.

9.3.6 Administrative Responsibilities

- Expand the capacity of the current provider of the volunteer driver program, which is usually a non-profit agency such as Three River Community Service that serves the community along with other communities in a large area of Southeast Minnesota.
- Continue and expand the supportive role that MnDOT currently plays in dial-a-ride services.

9.3.7 Funding

- Expand the grant funding that already exists for the current dial-a-ride program

9.3.8 Existing Assets

- Current dial-a-ride program
- Current drivers
- Community members who would like to be drivers if the program compensation provided a financial incentive.

9.4 WABASHA SHARES: UTILIZE UNDER-USED CARS FOR TRANSIT

Automobiles sit parked and unused for more than 90% of the time, even though cars represent one of the most expensive possessions that adults own and operate. At the same time, about 8.5% of the U.S. population in 2020 did not own or have access to a car, and 16% of the population does not have a driver's license. Leveraging existing vehicles for car and ride sharing offers one promising way of closing that transportation gap.

9.4.1 Challenges

- The existing car-sharing platforms, such as Uber and Lyft, rarely serve small, rural communities because the costs for rides are high and the driver payment system does not pay drivers before picking up or after dropping off riders, making it uneconomical for drivers to go long distances for a customer.
- The reservation-based and age and disability focused mobility options currently available in many small, rural communities have a limited schedule and days of service.
- Many car owners are reluctant to share or lease their vehicle, especially with strangers.
- There are potential liability issues in having others drive one's car, which can raise insurance rates.
- Not everyone has access to the Internet or to car-sharing apps or social-media platforms, which can prevent those most in need of on-demand transit from accessing it.

9.4.2 Needs

- Many people need access to automobiles only episodically and cannot afford or justify owning a car for such occasional use.
- There is a growing need for an alternative to car ownership because the continuing rising costs of cars are putting car ownership out of reach of many.

- As the sharing economy has become more dominant, the idea of owning a depreciating asset like a car becomes less appealing so many people would prefer to pay for the use of a car only when they need it.
- Car companies are moving to a mobility-services model in which they will own the vehicles they make and offer people mobility when needed, a model that has begun to happen in large cities but that also has value in small, rural communities where the need for cars to commute may be lower.

9.4.3 Opportunities

- Small, rural communities cannot afford or justify a scheduled transit system, while at the same time they have many vehicles parked and unused for much of each day. These communities have, absent any regular transit service, the opportunity to reimagine public transportation to better utilize the vehicles they already have.
- The use of these underutilized cars by community members depends on creating networks of trusted users of vehicles, something for which rural communities already have an advantage, given the familiarity that people have with each other in small towns.
- There are already car owners in small communities like Wabasha using car-sharing apps like Turo.com to lease their cars when not in use. While the numbers of people doing so remain relatively small, the fact that it is happening shows the potential of car sharing in such communities.

9.4.4 Planning and Action

- Engage people involved or interested in car sharing in your community in a co-design process that would ensure that whatever system gets established meets the greatest number of needs.
- Assess the number of vehicles parked in the city for any length of time and identify the places where long-term or all-day parking occurs in the community.
- Evaluate the car sharing currently going on in the community, whether through car-sharing apps like Turo, or through informal social-media groups that have agreed to share vehicles.

9.4.5 Public Policy

- Look at policies that might unintentionally work against car sharing, including rules related to parking and policing.
- Designate places in the community for mobility hubs, where people can drop off, pick up, or park shared vehicles for others to use.
- Organize a community mobility site on social media that makes it easy and safe for people to share rides or vehicles.
- Create a fleet of used cars that are available for residents to use on an as-needed basis, preparing for a future in which small, rural communities may need to provide mobility options if the mobility service companies will not serve places that are too remote or that have too few people.

9.4.6 Administrative Responsibilities

- Charge someone in the community to be the "mobility czar," overseeing the diverse mobility needs of the municipality and surrounding area.
- Empower civic groups to help in creating and maintaining mobility options in the community, focusing on self-reliant and self-funded strategies.

9.4.7 Funding

- Seek start-up funding from public or non-profit sources to put the above infrastructure in place, making the case for it in terms of equity and sustainability.
- Leverage the capacity of residents and businesses in the community to support a car-sharing system through their volunteer labor and/or their financial contributions.

9.4.8 Existing Assets

- While more than 90% of rural households have access to a car, there are still over 1 million rural households without a car.
- Rural counties have more than double the rate of "carelessness" than people in urban counties.
- Cars sit parked 95% of the time, remaining one of the most expensive underused asset people own.

9.5 WABASHA BUSES: USING EXISTING ASSETS TO CREATE A COMMUNITY BUS SERVICE

Many small rural communities have some bus service, but most are without a bus service that meets their mobility needs. School bus service is tied to the school calendar. Limited hours and limited routes constrain both the available dial-a-ride and the fixed route services. Because they are too small to have fixed route service, many communities like Wabasha have only school bus and dial-a-ride services. Larger rural communities like Red Wing that had fixed-route bus service in the past have curtailed those services. A community bus service for all could be created by combining the school bus service with the current services that primarily serve low-income, elderly, or disabled people.

9.5.1 Challenges

- The limited hours and days of operation of both social service and school bus service limit their ability to provide access to community activities and to work by residents.
- A bus driver shortage that is currently impacting school bus, social-service-bus, and public-bus services funded with federal grants promises to continue into the foreseeable future.
- Some federal language for defining rural transportation as public transportation excludes school transportation yet other language includes transportation for education.
- Although community members can ride the school bus if there is room on the bus for them, there is a public perception that school bus service is only for students.

- The two services have two different structures and cultures: often one is run by a non-profit or public agency, the other either directly by the school district or by a contract between the school district and the private service provider.
- School consolidation and the location of educational services for special needs students have created large school districts requiring long-distance travel in some districts, which is costly and time consuming.
- Although Minnesota has regional transportation management organizations across the state that could lead to the creation of community bus service, currently there is not one in Southeast Minnesota.
- Small communities have small staffs and are run by volunteers, so they have limited capacities to develop and run programs.
- Effective bus service needs to serve those both outside and inside city limits and cross county lines.

9.5.2 Needs

- Service schedules need to be expanded and tied more closely to employment and participation in community life.
- Bus driver jobs need to be made more attractive, to address the driver scarcity.
- The physical needs of elderly users and those with physical disabilities require vehicles that can accommodate those needs.
- The accommodation of mandated mobility services for some students traveling long distances to receive special education need to be addressed.
- Bus services need to be rebranded as a community-wide service that serves all.
- Southeast Minnesota needs to have a regional development organization, like all the other regions in the state, to help with transportation planning. Currently an effort to create one is moving forward.

9.5.3 Opportunities

- Available rural transit federal funding has recently been increased by the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), which includes substantial funding for services to seniors and people with disabilities, for public transportation service in non-urbanized areas, for technical assistance for rural transportation providers, and for transportation research, technical assistance, and training
- By using the current local funding for school bus service as the local 20% match the grant money available to create a transit service, communities and school bus providers could expand services using the vehicles they already have, recognizing federal regulations require that buses used for "tripper service" must be clearly marked as open to the public, may not carry designations such as "school bus" or "school special," and may stop only at a grantee or operator's regular service stop.
- Rules are in place to facilitate creating a community bus service, although there are state regulations regarding the use of school buses for general transportation involving signage, paint color, and equipment. Under the current rules, school bus service can be used by members of the general population if there is extra room in the bus to accommodate them, subject to local and state restrictions.

- Combining service could increase efficiency by eliminating service duplication. The combined fleets of two existing service providers would have a wide range of vehicle types that could facilitate efficient assignment of vehicles.
- By integrating both types of service into a system, the existing services service hours and days could be expanded. The per-pupil state funding for school bus service also simplifies integrating the services.
- Community bus service could create full-time bus driving jobs that are more attractive than current part-time, seasonal jobs.
- Bus access to healthcare, special education services, shopping, post-secondary education employment, public services and recreation and jobs in regional centers could help meet the 15% required for intercity travel by the federal grant requirements
- Regional transportation management organizations have the potential to play a leadership role in establishing and running community bus programs.
- The transportation management organization currently being pursed in Southeast Minnesota could play an important and creative role in establishing an innovative pilot rural community transit project in the region.

9.5.4 Planning AND Action

- Create a community bus system by assembling and convening a working group of local city, county, and school local officials and staff, school bus business owners, MnDOT staff, business owners, non-profit service providers, and other interested parties.
- Staff the effort with MnDOT staff and, or region transportation management staff in partnership with MnDOT.

9.5.5 Public Process

- Create and implement an inclusive public planning progress that facilitates participation from all community members including children.
- Create an inclusive process for informing the public during the implementation phase.
- Create a process for communicating with the public after the plan is implemented.

9.5.6 Public Policy

- Review existing public policy to identify supportive polices.
- Identify polices that need to be created and those that need to be addressed and create strategies to address them.

9.5.7 Administrative Responsibilities

- Development of the plan: appoint an administrative team of local, regional, and state officials and staff to support the development of the plan.
- Leadership: the regional transportation management organization will lead the administration in partnership with local and state officials.

9.5.8 Funding

- Identify and seek funding from the Formula Grants for Rural Areas Program, which provides capital, planning, and operating assistance to support public transportation in rural areas with populations of less than 50,000.
- Look into the possibility of using existing per pupil busing budget to leverage federal grant funding.
- The federal 5311 program can be used to provide financing capital, operating, planning, and job access and reverse commute projects, associated with providing public transportation in rural areas. Funds may be used for capital expenses including but not limited to buses, vans and paratransit vehicles, passenger shelters, bus-stop signs, park-and-ride lots, and similar passenger amenities. For details see the 5311 item in the appendix, administered by MnDOT.

9.5.9 Existing Assets

- Student transportation budget
- School bus service
- Social service bus service
- Federal funding for transit programs
- Local, regional, and state school officials, elected officials and staff, non-profit leaders, school bus company owners and operators,
- Interested community members
- Regional transportation management organizations
- MnDOT's planning assistance
- MnDOT's administration assistance

9.6 WABASHA COMMUTES: CREATING CAR AND VAN POOLS

In rural Minnesota, many workers who live in small towns or in the countryside commute to jobs in nearby regional centers. However, rural Minnesota communities do not have the concentration of riders and concentration of destinations that make fixed route commuter bus service in urban centers effective. Rural commuters are physically dispersed and frequently their destinations are also dispersed making the economics of fixed route commuter service difficult to sustain. This situation offers the possibility of forming carpools or van pools among commuters with similar work locations and schedules.

9.6.1 Challenges

- Traditional rural commuter bus services have typically not served those employees who work the second or third shift or those employed in the medical sector that operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- Recently the economic challenges facing traditional fixed-route rural commuter bus service serving employees who work 9-to-5 hours Monday through Friday have been negatively impacted by the

changing employment patterns as more and more employees telecommute daily or several days a week, making the economic challenges of fixed route bus service in rural Minnesota even worse.

- In communities like Wabasha, where many people work in the healthcare or education sectors, work schedules do not always fit a 9-to-5 pattern, making it hard to coordinate car or van pools.

9.6.2 Needs

- Transportation is needed for 9-to-5 and non-9-to-5 employees and those who work outside the traditional Monday through Friday work week.
- Economically viable, efficient transportation is needed for employees and those employers that help to underwrite the commuting costs.

9.6.3 Opportunities

- There are many informal connections – both face-to-face and via social media – among the residents of rural communities, which can facilitate the formation of informal car or van pools among commuters.
- Major employers, like the Mayo Clinic, have begun to create van pools for its staff, in partnership with companies like Commute with Enterprise (https://www.commutewithenterprise.com/).
- As is the case with car sharing, car and van pools can reduce the cost of commuting and reduce pollution and parking needs, while also increasing a sense of community among commuters.
- Shared commuting also uses both the underused fleet of vehicles that sit parked most of the day and the extensive fleet of cars and vans that rental car companies own.
- Coordinate with employers who might be interested in helping organize car or van pools for their employees in a particular area.
- Encourage residents to set up their own informal car or van pools and help them identify others in their community who might be interested in joining such efforts.

9.6.4 Public Process

- Hold informational meetings about commuting options in the community and invite those who want to set up car or van pools to post their interests in public venues.
- Invite car and van pool companies to come speak at public meeting and present to local employers.

9.6.5 Administrative Responsibilities

- Offer to help people set up social media sites for locating others interested in sharing commuting costs.
- Consider setting up a website or a place for residents to post inquiries about commuting.

9.6.6 Funding

- No public funding is required to make car and van pools work.
- Car and van pools are mostly funded by participants, who share the cost of driving, parking, and fueling vehicles or who pay monthly fees to those providing the rides.

9.6.7 Existing Assets

- Many underused vehicles that could be used for car and van pool commuting
- Existing social connections among residents in small rural communities
- Demand for workers among rural employers who might help organize car and van pools for employees

9.7 SUMMARY OF RURAL COMMUNITY MOBILITY SYSTEM'S NEEDED RESOURCES

Given small rural communities limited staff and financial resources, the infrastructure support needed for small towns to select, create, and implement mobility strategies includes the following items:

9.7.1 Funding

Currently most rural transit funding is dependent on grants. Because many small rural communities do not have the staff to support the development and implementation of an effective and successful community-based mobility menu strategy, the support needed includes staffing to support finding and selecting appropriate funding sources; knowledge of community history, context, existing assets, and needs; developing the grant application; and administering and implementing the grant.

9.7.2 Public Engagement

A community mobility engagement strategy process is needed to shape the form of the community's mobility system. Community member feedback includes the selection of mobility system menu items, the setting of priorities, and receiving feedback on use when implemented.

9.7.3 Asset Identification

Identifying *existing* federal, state, regional and local assets is key to building on them to create a community mobility strategy. These include mobility services; citizen, business, and civic individuals and groups; websites and social networks; pedestrian and bicycle pathways; community destinations; and potential places to site mobility mode pickups and transfers between mobility modes.

9.7.4 Partner Identification and Engagement

Depending on the area to be served, partners may include other communities, counties, school districts, tribes, regional planning organizations, the state, and federal partners.

9.7.5 Plan Development

The development of the mobility plan's menu items includes the identification, selection of mobility menu items, and prioritization of the items for implementation.

9.7.6 Mobility System Menu Implementation Strategy

Communities can select whatever piece of the mobility menu that applies to their situation and that builds on community's need, history and context. Criteria for selecting items might include ease of implementation, available funding opportunities, and ability to build community use and support.

9.7.7 Mobility System's Community Communication Strategy and Materials

Communities can do an assessment of the formal and informal communication strategies currently being used, from dedicated Facebook groups used to arrange rides to neighbors and friends calling each other to share rides or do errands. The menu of items selected should build on those existing communication channels and encourage others to form.

9.7.8 Ongoing maintenance of mobility pieces

The goal should be to minimize the amount of maintenance required to keep mobility services operational by distributing the responsibility for it among participants and private parties as much or more than the public-sector staff, who may not have the capacity to do so. The more resilient and shared the system can be, the more likely it will be maintained over time.

9.7.9 COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

A communications strategy should be pursued. It should enable rural communities to understand and use the menu of strategies in this report. This could include an easily used website that community members and their leadership can access as well as a visually appealing print brochure that can be circulated among rural communities as needed.

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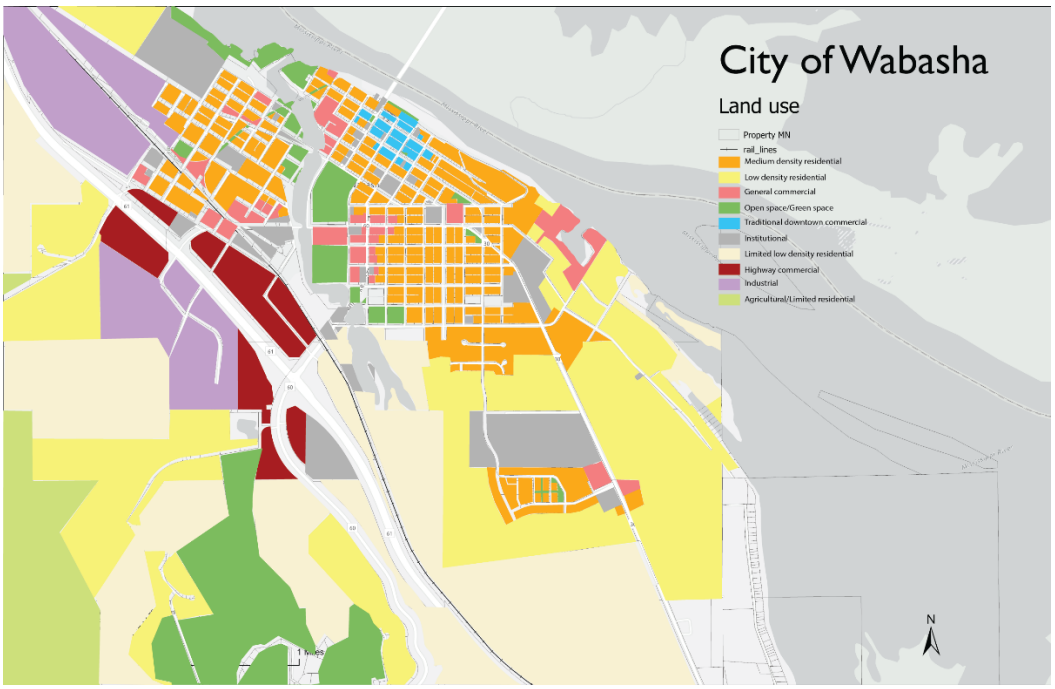
APPENDIX A:
MAPS OF WABASHA, LOGO FOR GREATER MINNESOTA MOVES


City of Wabasha
Land use
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Low density residential
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Open space/Green space
Traditional downtown commercial
Institutional
Limited low density residential
Highway commercial
Industrial
Agricultural/Limited residential
1 Miles
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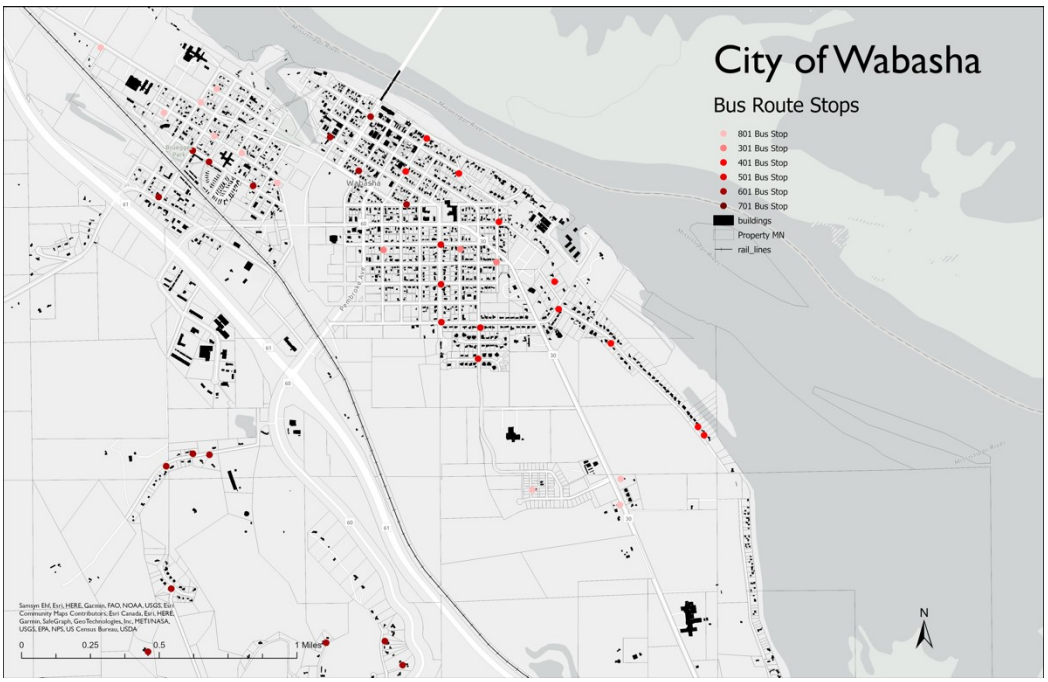
City of Wabasha
Bus Route Stops
801 Bus Stop
301 Bus Stop
401 Bus Stop
501 Bus Stop
601 Bus Stop
701 Bus Stop
buildings
Property MN
rail_lines
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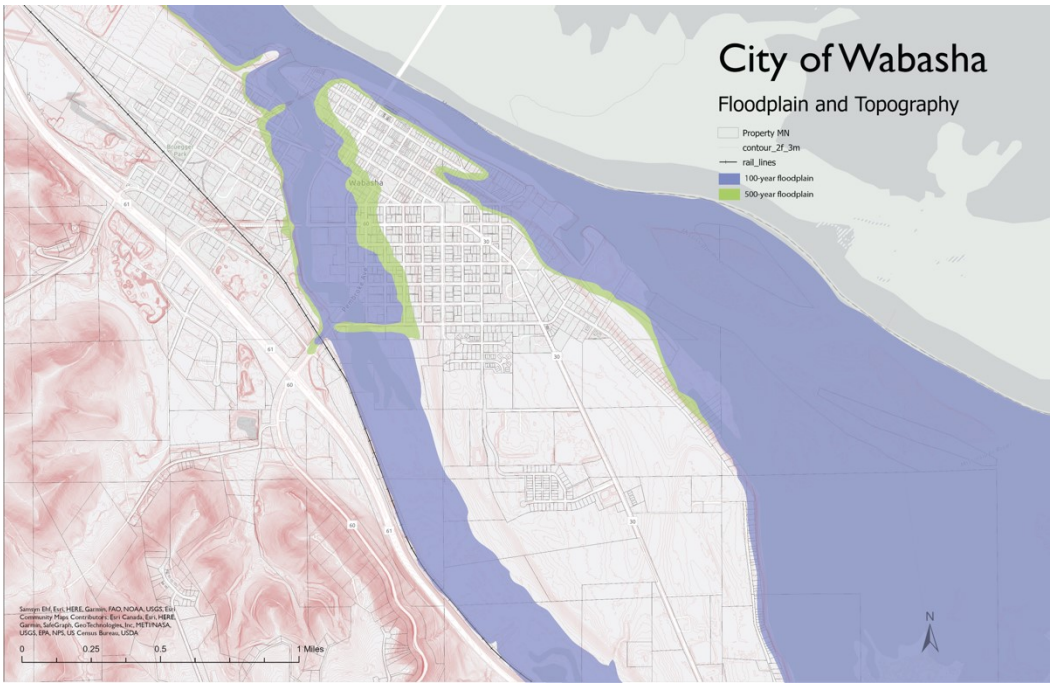
0.5
1 Miles
N


City of Wabasha
Floodplain and Topography
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rail_lines
100-year floodplain
500-year floodplain
Wabasha
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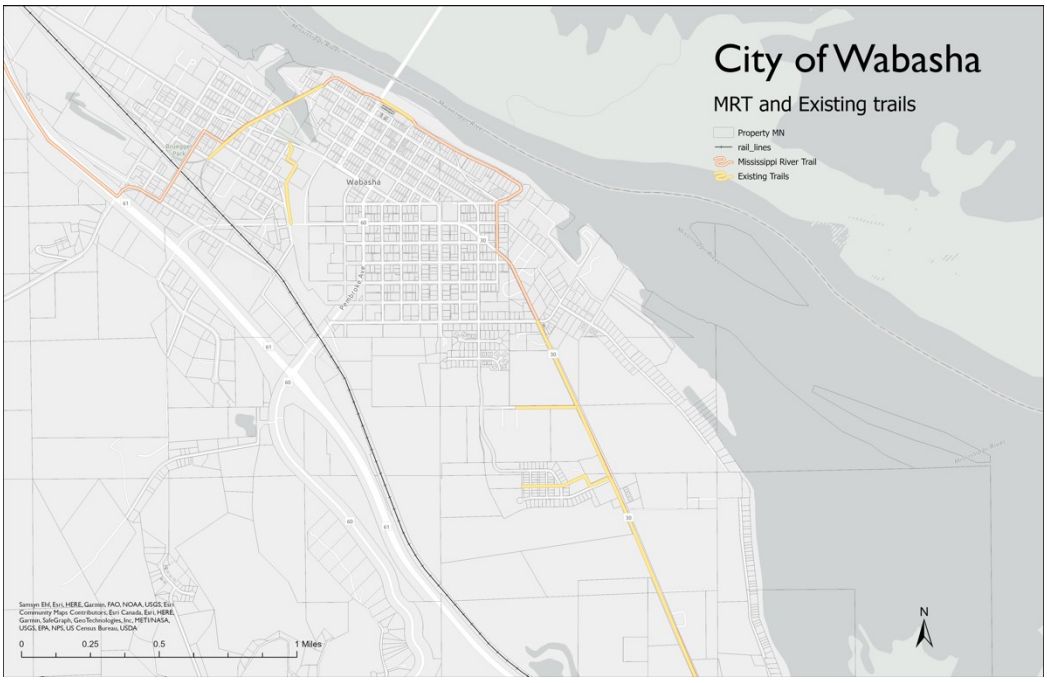
0.5
1 Miles
N


City of Wabasha
MRT and Existing trails
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rail_lines
Mississippi River Trail
Existing Trails
Wabasha
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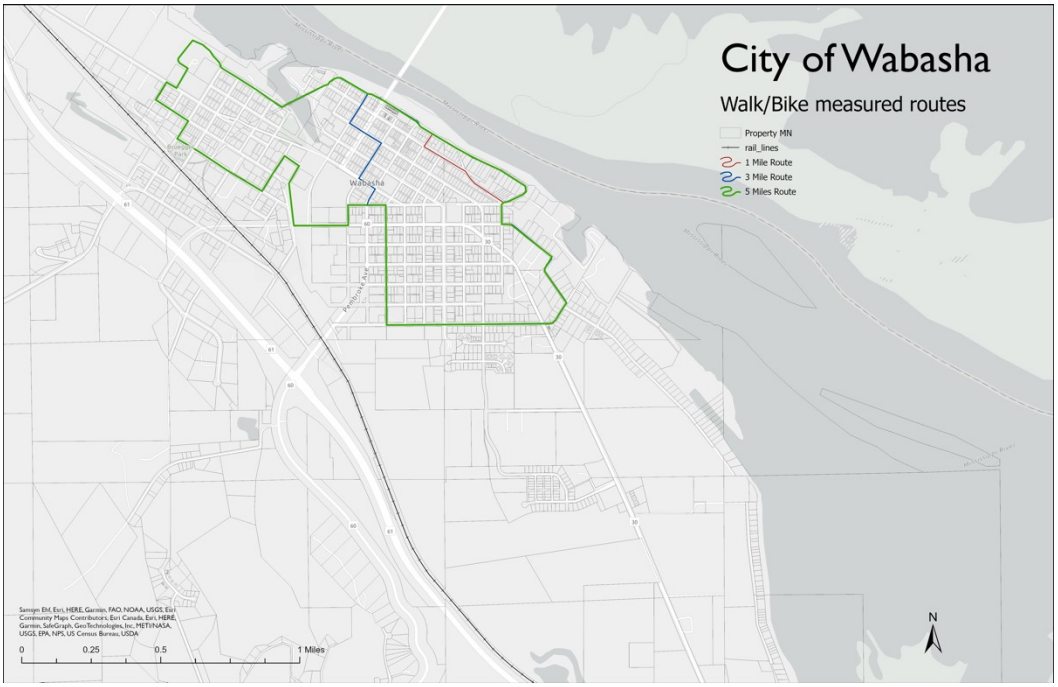
0.5
1 Miles
N


City of Wabasha
Walk/Bike measured routes
Property MN
rail_lines
1 Mile Route
3 Mile Route
5 Miles Route
Wabasha
Pembroke Ave
Sansyn Eld, Esri, HERE, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, Esri Community Maps Contributors, Esri Canada, Esri, HERE, Garmin, SafeGraph, GeoTechnologies, Inc, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS, US Census Bureau, USDA
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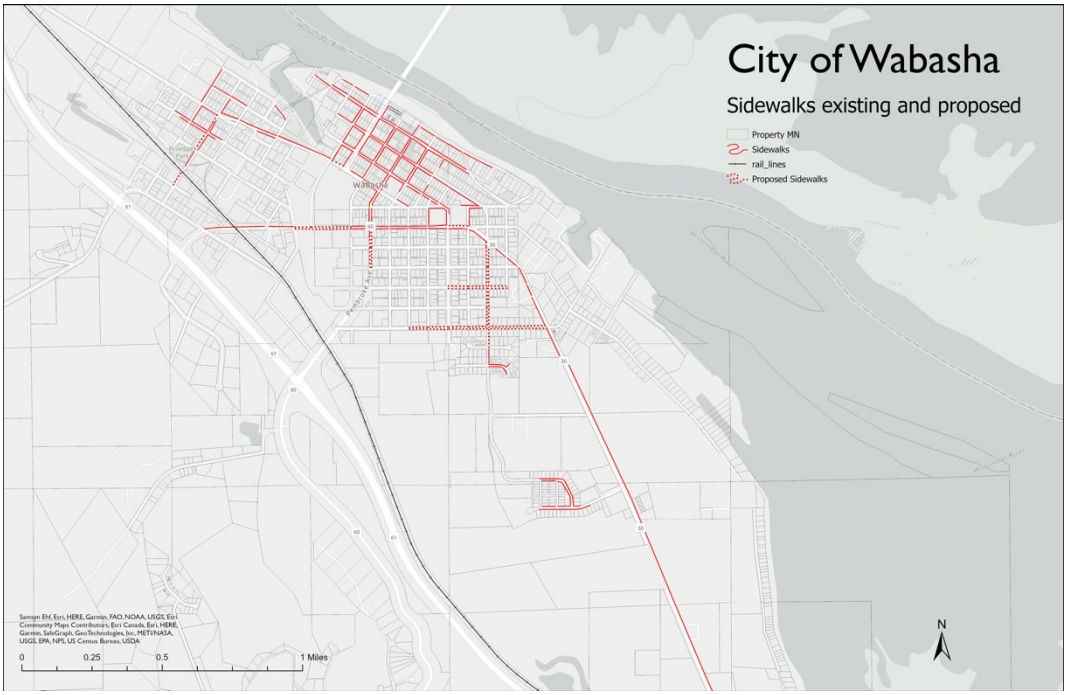
0.5
1 Miles
N


City of Wabasha
Sidewalks existing and proposed
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Sidewalks
rail_lines
Proposed Sidewalks
Wabasha
Pembroke Ave
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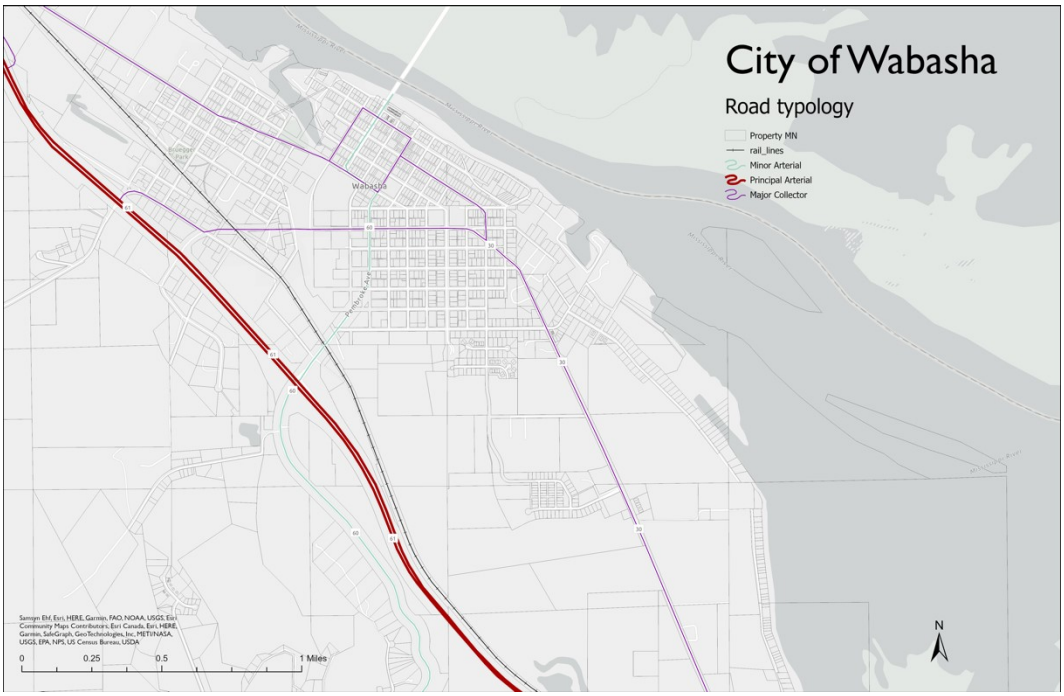
City of Wabasha
Road typology
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Principal Arterial
Major Collector
Wabasha
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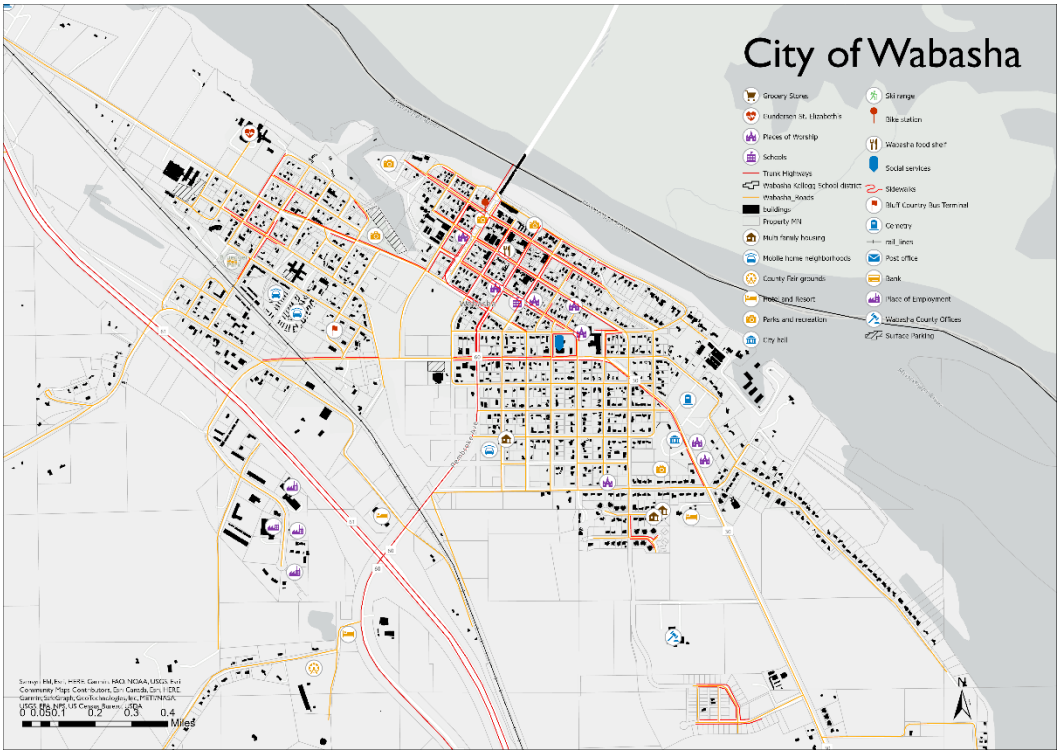
0.5
1 Miles
N


City of Wabasha
Grocery Stores
Pieces of Worship
Schools
Trunk Highways
Wabasha_Roads
buildings
Property MN
Multi family housing
Mobile home neighborhoods
County Fair grounds
Parks and recreation
City hall
Ski range
Bike station
Wabasha food shelf
Social services
Sidewalks
Bluff Country Bus Terminal
Cemetery
rail_lines
Post office
Bank
Place of Employment
Wabasha County Offices
Surface Parking
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0.1
0.2
0.3
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Miles
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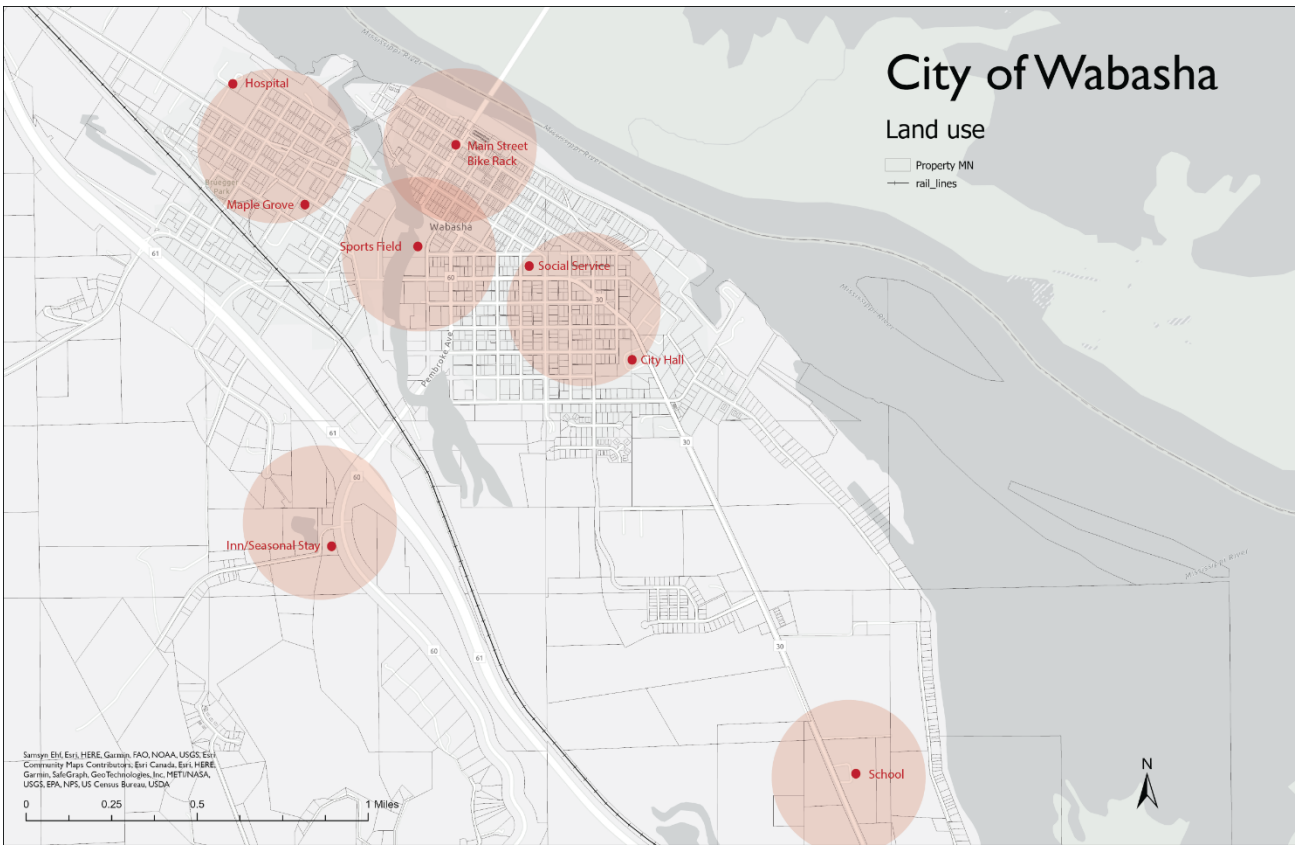

Wabasha Moves

Greater Minnesota Moves