



MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

newsroom

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 2, 2024

MEDIA CONTACT

Michael Frezell

517-281-6519

FrezellM@Michigan.gov

New innovations for rural public transit agencies highlighted in video news release

Fast facts:

- **The Advancing Rural Mobility pilot project provides new online tools for both rural public transit agencies and their riders.**
- **Project is funded through a federal SMART grant.**
- **Participating public transit agencies, include Benzie Bus, Cadillac/Wexford Transit Authority, Charlevoix County Transit, and Roscommon County Transportation Authority.**

LANSING, Mich. – Officials from the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) and Charlevoix County Transit (CCT) recently announced a significant leap forward in improving rural mobility through the Advancing Rural Mobility pilot project. This innovative project provides new online tools for both rural public transit agencies and their riders to help plan their trips, find transit services more easily and provide for a better overall travel experience. [MDOT's video news release](#) highlights the project benefits, which were presented at a media event held in Boyne City.

“The potential of this project to revolutionize Michigan’s transit industry cannot be overstated,” said Jean Ruestman, MDOT Office of Passenger Transportation (OPT) administrator. “We are not just advancing technology, we are enhancing lives and connecting communities. By improving access to transportation options, we are improving access to health, education and economic opportunities for rural residents.”

Funded by a USDOT Strengthening Mobility and Revolutionizing Transportation (SMART) grant, the project is collaboration with four rural transit agencies: Benzie Bus, Cadillac/Wexford Transit Authority, Charlevoix County Transit, and Roscommon County Transportation Authority. The federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) established the SMART program with a significant annual appropriation of \$100 million for Fiscal Years 2022 through 2026. This visionary funding is dedicated to fostering innovation in transportation through advanced technologies and systems.

“The Advancing Rural Mobility project, spearheaded by the Michigan Department of Transportation and its partners, is a shining example of what the SMART program aims to support,” said Stanley Caldwell, USDOT SMART program director. “It embodies the spirit of

innovation and collaboration that we value, and it is projects like these that pave the way for a smarter, more connected future.”

SMART operates on a two-stage grant process. In stage 1, the USDOT offers grants of up to \$2 million over 18 months, open to any eligible entity with the vision to innovate. Those who prove their mettle in stage 1 will have the opportunity to escalate their projects through stage 2 grants, which can reach up to \$15 million over 36 months, allowing for a broader and deeper impact.

“This project is a testament to what we can achieve when we work together. Our collaboration with the Michigan Department of Transportation and fellow transit agencies has been nothing short of inspiring,” said Ryan Novotny, CCT executive director. “At Charlevoix County Transit, we are deeply committed to serving our community. The Advancing Rural Mobility project aligns with our mission to provide accessible, efficient, and innovative transportation solutions.”

MDOT [Office of Passenger Transportation](#) administers passenger transportation programs, including local transit, intercity bus and for-hire passenger regulation. The programs aim to provide a safe and balanced statewide network of passenger transportation services to meet the social, safety and economic well-being of the state. Building on OPT’s [2022 Statewide Technology Plan for Rural Public Transit Agencies](#) and the ongoing Statewide Mobility as a Service (MaaS) System Procurement and Implementation Project, OPT developed the Advancing Rural Mobility project to pilot the implementation of [General Transit Feed Specification \(GTFS\)-Flex](#) at partner public transit agencies. The project has the potential to advance the state of operational technology for Michigan’s transit industry.

###

MDOT: Working with our partners at airports, bus systems, marine and rail to find innovative solutions for Michigan's transportation systems.