



Hills & Highways

“Transportation News in Southeast Ohio”

Winter/Spring Edition

Celebrating Excellence In Regional Transit



Two outstanding transit leaders from southeastern Ohio were recognized at the 2024 Ohio Needs Transit conference in Columbus, hosted by the Ohio Public Transit Association.

Julia Hinzman, Mobility Manager for Washington and Noble Counties, was honored as Mobility Manager of the Year. With three years of service, Julia is recognized for her advocacy, innovative collaborations, and dedication to public service. Described by her peers as “instrumental” and the “energizer bunny” of mobility managers, she has been vital in securing funding and developing creative solutions to ensure vulnerable populations in her counties have access to reliable transit. Julia’s passion for transit has made her an essential resource for her community and colleagues alike.

Mason Dickerson, Transit Manager with Perry County Transit, received the Community Impact Award for his leadership in a spring pet food drive for the Perry County Dog Shelter. Partnering with local organizations, Mason and his team collected an outpouring of donations, including food, toys, blankets, and cleaning supplies, filling a transit vehicle “to the woof.” The event demonstrated Mason’s commitment to his community, supporting both human riders and their furry friends in need.

Over the past six months, we've focused on regional conversations about mobility and transportation through our Transportation Advisory Committees (TAC), Transit Development Plans (TDP), and SWOT analyses. These discussions have helped us identify common barriers and trends, paving the way for a more coordinated Regional Transportation Plan.

One encouraging takeaway from Washington County’s Way2Go TAC meeting was the growing sense of teamwork within the transportation community. As one participant noted, “An increasing sense of team seems to have taken root around improvement goals.”

The strength of our partnerships is evident. Working together as a team, we’re building momentum to address regional challenges and improve transportation for everyone. We look forward to sustaining this progress and tackling the challenges ahead, united in our mission to better serve our communities.

Christa Myers
Transportation
Planning
Manager



CarFit Expands in the Buckeye Hills Region

The Buckeye Hills region made significant progress in 2024 by expanding the CarFit program, a national initiative sponsored by AOTA and AARP. CarFit empowers mature drivers by offering personalized adjustments to their vehicles—like mirrors, seatbelts, and seating—to enhance safety and comfort.

This year, mobility managers introduced the program to new counties, reaching diverse audiences, including high school students. Statewide coordinator Angie Wise praised the effort, noting Region 8 achieved Ohio's highest participation to date. Local partnerships with law enforcement and occupational therapists were key to this success, ensuring thorough vehicle check-ups and tailored advice for participants. With every mobility manager in Region 8 now technician-level trained, the program is well-equipped to continue improving road safety throughout the region.



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Boosting Workforce Mobility in Southeast Ohio

Morgan and Perry County Public Transits recently received funding from ODOT's Ohio Workforce Mobility Partnership Program. This program, established under House Bill 23, allocates \$15 million for 2024-2025 to support transportation projects that connect workers to key employment centers. Morgan County Public Transit received \$117,004 to fund two vehicles, enhancing access and reliability for workforce trips across Morgan and Noble counties, where 25% of transit trips are job-related.

Perry County Public Transit secured \$335,930 to purchase three new electric vehicles for the Zero Loop, a low-emissions service connecting employment centers in Perry, Licking, and Fairfield counties. These projects exemplify regional collaboration to improve workforce transportation in rural Ohio.

SWOT Assessment for Regional Transportation Systems

The Regional Transportation Steering Committee is using a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) assessment to evaluate the transportation system across the eight counties encompassed by Buckeye Hills Regional Council, including public transit and human services transportation. Information will be gathered from local county Transportation Advisory Committees (TACs) to identify trends. At Monroe County's recent Way2Go TAC meeting, participants shared insights into their local transportation systems. This input, combined with transportation survey data, stakeholder interviews, and public meetings, will help identify barriers and unmet needs. The Steering Committee will use this information to craft strategies and action steps aimed at improving transportation access in the region.



Region 8 Counties Benefit from Transit Development Plans

Jessie Schmitzer, Public Transit Manager, provided updates on transit funding received in 2024 by six Region 8 counties. The Ohio Department of Transportation's (ODOT) Office of Transit is supporting multiple Transportation Development Plans (TDPs) to optimize rural transit systems as COVID-era funding wanes and public transit demand grows. Jessie highlighted that these plans aim to enhance efficiency, marketing, and technology to better serve communities, ensuring limited funding benefits as many Ohioans as possible.

County Updates

Athens County: Athens Public Transit (APT), with Nelson/Nygaard consultants, developed a "Preferred Service Scenario" based on extensive surveys and an "Existing Conditions Report." The TDP outlines improvements for APT's future and associated costs. APT also secured an SFY25 marketing grant from ODOT.

Meigs County: Meigs County Public Transit collaborated with Toole Design on its first TDP. This plan identifies successes and areas for growth, with strategies to expand access, boost awareness, and promote efficiency. MCPT also received an SFY25 marketing grant for outreach efforts.

Morgan County: Morgan County Public Transit partnered with HDR, Inc. to create a TDP that spans Morgan, Noble, and Monroe Counties. The plan includes 10 actionable recommendations and governance strategies. Completed in June 2024, it also secured an SFY24 marketing grant for cohesive branding and outreach.

Washington County: ODOT led a TDP, with support from Nelson/Nygaard and MurphyEpson and community stakeholders, to improve governance and operations in Washington County, recommending changes to transit governance, forming a Transit Advisory Group, and transitioning Marietta's transit to a demand-response model. The changes will be marketed to the community with support from an SFY25 marketing grant.

Logan Public Transit (Hocking County): Received an SFY24 ODOT marketing grant to update flyers and its website with help from Rasor consulting group.

Spotlight

Congratulations to the Creating Healthy Community teams in Athens, Perry, and Washington counties for being re-awarded the Creating Healthy Communities grant by the Ohio Department of Health! This achievement reflects their dedication to fostering healthier, more vibrant communities through initiatives focused on healthy eating and active living.



IMPACT STORY



"My family recently went down to one car, partly because of the public transit options available in Athens County and because we can walk to area bus stops. This saves us money and time in the long run (and space in our driveway!) As a family, we also want to look for ways we can stop contributing to issues like long-term pollution and other not-so-great things that car traffic brings, so this helps us do that. We can take public transit to the local towns where we work, to the grocery store, museums, etc, and even on longer trips to see family in other parts of the state (by using GoBus). I took Athens On Demand Transit for the first time last month, and it was a great experience-- I can't believe I just started using it!"

Becca Lachman, Athens County Public Library

Active Transportation in Athens County Focused on Accessibility

Athens County CHC (Creating Healthy Communities) is thrilled to announce that they – along with partner Ohio State Parks Foundation – have raised all the funds needed to create an accessible beach entrance and kayak launch at Strouds Run State Park. Pictured here are Salem Miller and her daughter Jovia, who are members of the CHC steering committee that developed this project after Miller raised awareness about the need for inclusive beach access in the region. Currently, beach users must be able to navigate stairs or a steep grassy hill. The new ramp will run directly from the parking lot to the beach.



Groundbreaking Ceremony for New Transportation Hub in Meigs County

In May, Meigs County JFS and Meigs County Commissioners, with other community partners, celebrated the Meigs County Transportation Hub with a groundbreaking ceremony. Speakers included Meigs County Commissioner Shannon Miller and Meigs County JFS Director Theresa Lavendar. Ohio Representative Jay Edwards shared a proclamation to honor the progress. Lavendar



shared that Meigs County Public Transit, operated under the county JFS program and supported by county commissioners along with funding from ODOT, has seen tremendous growth since becoming an official transit agency in January of 2022. The Hub will be co-located with other government offices near Holzer Clinic and the county Health Department.



Mark Your Calendar

Ohio Loves Transit Week
February 9-15, 2025

Legislative Day
February 11, 2025
Columbus, OH

**National Transit Employee
Appreciation Day**
March 18, 2025

This newsletter was created by

BUCKEYE HILLS
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