

CHARTS: Comprehensive Healthcare Access with Rural Transit Solutions Traverse City, MI

Team and Budget

Key Partners: TransLoc On-Demand Software/Ford Mobility, Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) Technology (TBD), Northern Michigan Community Health Innovation Region (NMCHIR), Grand Traverse Region Community Foundation, Disability Network Northern Michigan, Area Agency on Aging Northern Michigan, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities

Budget Summary:

IMI Demonstration Federal Amount	IMI Local Cost Share	Total Cost
\$276,499	\$69,125	\$345,624

Innovation: Project Approach

Bay Area Transportation Authority (BATA) serves two scenic rural counties in northwest Michigan—Grand Traverse County (population 92,000) and Leelanau County (population 22,000), one of the oldest counties in the US with 38% of residents over age 60. BATA delivers more than 530,000 rides annually with fixed-route and demand-response services. The Bayline route, introduced one year ago, has been a game-changer for BATA and its local community. Supported by local municipal and private business sponsorships, Bayline is a fare-free, high-frequency service running the east/west corridor in Traverse City with “book-end” park-and-ride lots. It provided more than 140,000 rides in its first year, and ridership has grown on connecting routes as a direct result.

BATA will use IMI funding for the acquisition of an ITS technology suite for integration with newly-purchased TransLoc/Ford Mobility On Demand software. It will coordinate the CHARTS Coalition/Comprehensive Healthcare Access with Rural Transit Solutions, a collaborative of human-service agencies, to develop a best-practice non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) program. CHARTS will work alongside a public-private sector strategy group supporting BATA’s community-wide pilot of on-demand micro-transit service. BATA’s inclusive process with these stakeholders, coupled with technological advancements, will result in a successful launch of an enhanced mobility ecosystem. This endeavor will have a sustainable impact for BATA’s constituency accessing the regional healthcare system and enable efficient and effective public transit options for the overall rural population.

Challenges Project Is Designed To Address

BATA has pushed its current technology envelope as far as it can go, with four departments running on stand-alone software—Dispatch, Assets, Security, and Business Operations—none of which can transfer information to each other. As individualized technology with smartphones and apps become more sophisticated, ridership expectations of convenience and comfort have risen. If BATA is to grow in an effective and efficient manner and meet the needs of its constituency, it must get ahead of the curve and engage with systematic technology solutions.

Transit research shows that moving the needle for increased public transportation ridership is dependent on convenience, frequency, and amenities. On-demand technology and transit is clearly the most direct route to meet that challenge. Based on BATA's review of some critical issues in the healthcare field, it found that the lack of access to care has a primary impact on health and well-being. Medical clinics in the BATA region report an average rate of appointment no-shows at 28%. A regional health care initiative, NMCHIR, has completed more than 20,000 patient screenings in area Medicaid clinics to monitor primary social determinants of health (SDOH). Of those patients who requested referrals, 10% reported that lack of reliable transportation options impacted their ability to access healthcare on a regular basis. BATA is examining how Medicaid clinics can be proactive by using on-demand transit to transport patients in real time as needed.

Anticipated Outcomes, Benefits, and Impacts

With the acquisition of an ITS technology suite of software, BATA will have an integrated platform that allows all departmental systems and data banks to intersect and produce accurate and comprehensive reports and projections. ITS will also open the door to a high level of inter-departmental efficiency and the ability for BATA to undertake in-depth service and operational analyses.

BATA's upcoming on-demand service addresses the unmet need of NEMT transit for a rural demographic. Immediate access to healthcare will reduce incidences of untreated illness, and reliable transportation options are expected to reduce stress and increase health and well-being. Reduced costs for transit, medical clinics, and patients will be realized with reductions in no-show and cancellation incidents. Passengers will have added mobility options for origin to destination travel that offer both reserved and immediate transportation for NEMT appointments. All micro-transit vehicles will have wheelchair accessibility and drivers who are Commercial Driver License certified, background checked, and sensitivity-trained. Passengers may be pre-approved for agency-hosted NEMT without needing funds to pay for their travel, as the fare will be directly billed to the agency.