Introduction

Rural Nebraska is served by a variety of transportation services, including rural public transit, intercity bus service, Amtrak, and air service, as well as private vehicles. Despite this, many rural Nebraskans have no or limited access to transportation services. This report looks at some aspects of rural transit in Nebraska.

Sources and Types of Funding

Table 1 shows that funds are available from the state and federal government to support a variety of transportation-related activities.

Table 1. Sources and Types of Funding Available for Transportation-Related Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Entity</th>
<th>Type of Assistance Available</th>
<th>Fund Source</th>
<th>Direct Recipient of Federal and/or State Funds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural Demand Response</td>
<td>Operating &amp; Non-operating Expenses</td>
<td>Federal 5311 and State</td>
<td>Nebraska Dept. of Roads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Demand Response</td>
<td>Capital Vehicle Purchases &amp; Capital Construction</td>
<td>Federal 5311</td>
<td>Nebraska Dept. of Roads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercity Bus</td>
<td>Operating Expenses</td>
<td>Federal 5311 and State</td>
<td>Nebraska Dept. of Roads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit Agencies in Rural Areas and Lincoln MPO Area</td>
<td>Operating Expenses &amp; Capital Vehicle Purchases</td>
<td>Federal 5310</td>
<td>Nebraska Dept. of Roads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small &amp; Large Urbanized Areas (Omaha, Lincoln, Simpco-S. Sioux City, and Grand Island)</td>
<td>Planning Funds</td>
<td>Federal 5303 (Divided using a Population Formula)</td>
<td>Nebraska Dept. of Roads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Urban Cities</td>
<td>Operating Expenses</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Nebraska Dept. of Roads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Urban Transportation Providers (StarTran and Metro)</td>
<td>Operating Expenses</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Nebraska Dept. of Roads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Urban Transportation Providers (StarTran and Metro)</td>
<td>Operating Expenses &amp; Capital Vehicle Purchases</td>
<td>Federal 5307</td>
<td>Urbanized Areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit Agencies in Omaha MAPA Area</td>
<td>Operating Expenses &amp; Capital Vehicle Purchases</td>
<td>Federal 5310</td>
<td>Metropolitan Area Planning Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit Agencies in Small Urbanized Areas (Grand Island and Simpco)</td>
<td>Operating Expenses &amp; Capital Vehicle Purchases</td>
<td>Federal 5310</td>
<td>Nebraska Dept. of Roads</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Nebraska Department of Roads
Funding assistance for each type of activity varies based upon the type of entity and transit activity. For example, the operating expenses for rural demand response public transportation systems are eligible for 50% federal and 25% state reimbursement, which requires only 25% local match. Non-operating expenses or administrative costs for these rural systems are also eligible for an 80% federal and 10% state reimbursement, which only requires a 10% match at the local level. The federal funding is provided through the Federal Transit Administration 5311 allocation of funds for rural public transit to the state of Nebraska.

**Rural Public Transit**

In the State of Nebraska, there are currently 58 rural public transit systems that operate approximate 240 buses, passenger vans, or mini vans. In Fiscal Year 2014, these systems provided 691,868 demand response passenger trips and covered over 2.8 million miles. Nebraska residents rely on these systems for access to medical appointments, school or child care facilities, employment, and shopping for groceries or other daily necessities. Many of these systems are hosted by a city, county, Community Action Partnership Program, or Area Agency on Aging. While many of the users of the public transit system in Nebraska are senior citizens or disabled, transportation subsidized with Section 5311 funds is open to the general public.

**Figure 1. Rural Public Transit Service, Nebraska: 2014**

Source: Nebraska Department of Roads; prepared by UNO Center for Public Affairs Research, November 2014

**Current Intercity Bus Services Available in Nebraska**

There are seven intercity bus service providers currently providing service on various routes across the state of Nebraska. As described previously, four are subsidized by the State of Nebraska and three are not. In addition, one feeder service, subsidized directly through FTA, is included in this study.
The routes and stops of four of the providers are defined by a regular schedule with scheduled stops. Three providers have a regular schedule with scheduled stops but also accommodate additional stops on demand. Reservations must be made for additional stops and stops must be directly on the route between the scheduled stops. The additional stops may require an additional fee. There is usually a limited number of additional stops that can be made on each run in order to maintain the route schedule. The feeder service does not have a regular schedule or stops but provides services on demand.

**Table 2. Service Descriptions and Number of Counties Served by Intercity Bus Service Providers, Nebraska: 2014**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Provider</th>
<th>Service Description</th>
<th>Number of Counties Served</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subsidized</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Dashabout Shuttle Company                 | 1. Omaha - Colorado  
2. McCook - Omaha  
3. McCook - North Platte  
4. Grand Island - Columbus  
All routes accommodate additional stops on demand | 21                         |
| K & S Express                             | 1. Norfolk – Chadron  
Route accommodates additional stops on demand                                                        | 8                          |
2. Omaha – Fremont – North Bend – Schuyler – Humphrey – Madison – Norfolk | 10                         |
| Blue Rivers Area Agency on Aging         | 1. Hebron – Fairbury – Beatrice – Lincoln  
2. Auburn – Nebraska City – Syracuse – Lincoln – Omaha                                               | 6                          |
| **Not Subsidized**                        |                                                                                                         |                           |
| Omalink                                   | 1. Omaha – Lincoln  
Route accommodates additional stops on demand                                                          | 4                          |
| **Feeder Service**                        |                                                                                                         |                           |
| Ponca Express                             | On-demand service in Ponca Delivery Area                                                               | 11                         |

Source: College of Public Affairs and Community Service. (2014). *Assessment of Intercity Bus Services in Nebraska*.

Figure 1 shows the scheduled routes and stops for the seven intercity bus service. Some routes are covered by more than one provider. For example, Black Hills Stage Lines, Burlington Trailways, and Dashabout Shuttle Company cover the entire Interstate 80 route from Omaha to the Colorado border. As illustrated in Table 2, additional stops on many of the routes are available on demand.
Figure 2. Routes of Intercity Bus Services, Nebraska: 2014

Note: There are 12 first class cities that do not have scheduled stops and which are not on the routes of those providers that make additional stops.


The current intercity bus service providers serve five of the nine metropolitan counties, 10 of the 20 micropolitan counties and 21 of the 64 rural counties. The one feeder service included in this study provides service to one additional micropolitan county and four additional rural counties. Metropolitan counties are those that are part of a metropolitan area. Micropolitan counties are those that include an urban area with a population of 10,000 to 49,999 plus surrounding counties that are linked through commuting ties.

A total of 41 of the 93 counties in Nebraska are served by the providers included in this study. These counties contain 84.0% of Nebraska’s total population.

The current intercity bus service providers offer scheduled stops in 24 municipalities, and 16 of these are in first class city or larger municipalities with 5,000 population or higher. Four of the providers allow additional stops on the routes. These routes are along Interstate 80; portions of highways 34 (McCook to North Platte), 83 (McCook to North Platte), 30 (Grand Island to Columbus), 275 (Norfolk to Holt County), and 20 (Holt County to Chadron), and throughout the Ponca Service Delivery Area. This provides service to an additional eight first class city or larger municipalities.

Areas lacking service

There are 12 first class cities that do not have scheduled stops and which are not on the routes of those providers that make additional stops.

There are four metropolitan counties not served: Dakota, Dixon, Washington, and Saunders. There are nine micropolitan counties not served: Scotts Bluff, Banner, McPherson, Logan, Gosper, Clay, Howard, Stanton, and Pierce.
Other Intercity Transportation Options

Other intercity transportation options for those who either do not drive or choose not to drive include being transported by relatives or neighbors, private for profit transportation services, Amtrak and airline service.

**Amtrak**

Amtrak operates one long-distance train through Nebraska, the California Zephyr, which runs one train in each direction daily. Amtrak has stations in Omaha, Lincoln, Hastings, Holdrege and McCook. Table 2 shows that since 2007, the number of passenger boardings and alightings has been increasing in the three stations in non-metropolitan Nebraska. Collectively, these three stations accounted for nearly 12,000 boardings or alightings in 2013. This is an increase 31% since 2007.

**Table 2. Amtrak Passenger Boardings and Alightings, Nebraska: FY 2007-FY 2013**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Omaha</td>
<td>25,480</td>
<td>25,627</td>
<td>25,496</td>
<td>25,855</td>
<td>20,668</td>
<td>22,794</td>
<td>24,410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lincoln</td>
<td>10,616</td>
<td>10,820</td>
<td>10,703</td>
<td>10,770</td>
<td>11,756</td>
<td>12,468</td>
<td>13,160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hastings</td>
<td>4,085</td>
<td>4,096</td>
<td>4,073</td>
<td>4,084</td>
<td>4,839</td>
<td>5,358</td>
<td>5,865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holdrege</td>
<td>1,715</td>
<td>1,678</td>
<td>1,671</td>
<td>1,695</td>
<td>1,623</td>
<td>2,296</td>
<td>2,335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCook</td>
<td>3,205</td>
<td>3,189</td>
<td>3,173</td>
<td>3,175</td>
<td>2,939</td>
<td>3,540</td>
<td>3,638</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Amtrak State Fact Sheets, www.amtrak.com

**Airline Service**

Nebraska has nine airports with scheduled airline service, seven of which are outside of Lincoln and Omaha. Table 3 shows that between 2008 and 2012 passenger enplanements declined in Lincoln and Omaha but generally increased or remained steady in the other airports. The Grand Island airport exhibited the largest increase, as passenger enplanements in 2012 were more than seven times what they were in 2008. Despite this increase, these seven airport only accounted for 4.2% of Nebraska’s passenger enplanements in 2012.

**Table 3. Passenger Enplanements at Airports with Scheduled Service, Nebraska: 2008-2012**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Airport location</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Omaha</td>
<td>2,136,880</td>
<td>2,083,973</td>
<td>2,097,958</td>
<td>2,047,055</td>
<td>2,018,738</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lincoln</td>
<td>163,177</td>
<td>142,507</td>
<td>139,532</td>
<td>135,647</td>
<td>135,085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Island</td>
<td>7,961</td>
<td>20,136</td>
<td>37,101</td>
<td>47,167</td>
<td>56,138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottsbluff</td>
<td>10,680</td>
<td>9,221</td>
<td>9,864</td>
<td>9,912</td>
<td>10,356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kearney</td>
<td>11,956</td>
<td>10,113</td>
<td>9,530</td>
<td>11,079</td>
<td>12,480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Platte</td>
<td>10,288</td>
<td>7,924</td>
<td>8,391</td>
<td>10,962</td>
<td>10,962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCook</td>
<td>1,848</td>
<td>1,677</td>
<td>1,993</td>
<td>1,810</td>
<td>1,623</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chadron</td>
<td>2,152</td>
<td>1,875</td>
<td>1,769</td>
<td>1,980</td>
<td>2,037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance</td>
<td>1,786</td>
<td>1,395</td>
<td>1,416</td>
<td>1,730</td>
<td>1,594</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vehicle Access and Commuter Patterns

Vehicle Access

The 2008–2012 American Community Survey from the U.S. Census Bureau shows that statewide about 5.8% of the households have no vehicle available. Figure 3 illustrates that this varies considerably by age of people living in households. Until about age 80 years, the percentage of persons with no vehicle available in their household varies between 2% and 5%. After age 80, the percentage increases rapidly. For persons aged 90 years and over, the percentage with no vehicle available approaches 40%.

**Figure 3. Percentage of Persons Living in Households with No Vehicle Available by Age, Nebraska: 2008-2012**

![Bar chart showing percentage of persons living in households with no vehicle available by age](chart)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata File; prepared by UNO Center for Public Affairs Research, June 2014.

Figure 3 presents data for persons living in households. However, at the county level, data are available only for households. Figures 4 and 5 on the following page present data for all households and for households with a householder aged 65 years or older. Looking at Figure 4 shows, that in 29 counties, 5% or more households do not have access to a vehicle. Figure 5 shows, that in 29 counties, 9% or more of households with a householder aged 65 years or older do not have access to a vehicle. Comparing Figures 4 and 5 to Figure 1 shows that many of the counties with relatively high percentages of households with no vehicle available are also counties with no rural public transit.
**Figure 4. Percent of Households with No Vehicle Available, Nebraska: 2008-2012**

![Map showing percent of households with no vehicle available in Nebraska, 2008-2012](image)

No Vehicle Available
- Less than 3.0% (23)
- 3.0 - 3.3% (21)
- 4.0 - 4.4% (23)
- 5.0% or more (28)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community 2008-2012 Survey 5-Year Estimate; prepared by UNO Center for Public Affairs Research, June 2014

**Figure 5. Percent of households with Householder Aged 65 years or older with No Vehicle Available, Nebraska: 2008-2012**

![Map showing percent of households with householder aged 65 or older with no vehicle available in Nebraska, 2008-2012](image)

No Vehicle Available
- Less than 5.0% (26)
- 5.0 - 7.4% (21)
- 7.5 - 9.9% (26)
- 10.0% or more (20)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community 2008-2012 Survey 5-Year Estimate; prepared by UNO Center for Public Affairs Research, June 2014

**Commuter Patterns**

Figure 6 shows that many workers in Nebraska live considerable distances from where they work. In fact, 41.8% of the people who live in Red Cloud and are employed, work more than 50 miles from their residence. North Platte is interesting because about one-fourth of the people working in North Platte
live more than 50 miles from their work, and about one-fourth of the workers living in North Platte live more than 50 miles from their job.

Although the percentages may not be as large, Omaha and Lincoln have sizeable numbers of workers who live more than 50 miles from where they work. For Omaha, there are 17,345 workers, and for Lincoln, the number is 16,816 workers who live more than 50 miles from where they work.

**Figure 6. Workers with 50 Miles or More between Place of Work and Place of Residence as a Percentage of All Workers, Nebraska: 2011**

Definitions:
Work to Home--People who work in named city but live elsewhere.
Home to Work--People who live in named city but work elsewhere.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Center for Economic Studies, LEHD, June 2014; prepared by UNO Center for Public Affairs Research, July 2014

**Summary and Conclusions**

Census data indicate that individuals in Nebraska who are low income, elderly, or disabled are less likely to have access to a vehicle to reach critical services such as medical care. Currently, many Nebraska residents lack access to community public transportation in any form, while intercity bus transportation is severely limited across the majority of the state. To begin to address these concerns, enhanced communication, coordination, and connectivity between transit providers such as planning agencies, cities and counties, and public or private non-profit organizations is a crucial first step. In addition, promising mobility management strategies, such as the coordination of existing transportation services with Medicaid transportation, should also be explored and considered. Enhancements such as expanded on-demand transit service throughout the state, additional feeder routes to the state’s larger
metropolitan cities, and greater access through intercity bus routes are also critical steps to addressing the transportation needs of Nebraska’s underserved populations.

References
Amtrak Fact Sheets, www.amtrak.com
U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata File
U.S. Census Bureau, Center for Economic Studies, LEHD, June 2014