

**AS OF JUNE 2025**

NEBRASKA  
RURAL TRANSIT

# GAP ANALYSIS

*South Central Region*



UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA  
CENTER FOR PUBLIC  
AFFAIRS RESEARCH

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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The Center for Public Affairs Research (CPAR) at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) conducted a comprehensive analysis of rural transit in Nebraska’s South Central region at the request of the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT). This region includes 17 counties in south central Nebraska and is served by seven transit providers. By analyzing data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, NDOT records, and local transit providers, the study provides insights into ridership by agency, identifies common rider destinations, and examines service gaps and overlaps across the region. Based on this analysis, we propose opportunities for coordination and strategies to enhance the reach of rural transit services in Nebraska.

A key finding is the essential role of rural transit in supporting the region’s increasingly transit-dependent population. Over 18% of residents are aged 65 or older, 11% live with disabilities, and 13% live below the poverty line, indicating a growing need for accessible and reliable transit services. Fortunately, more than 97% of the region’s rural population lives in areas served by at least one rural transit provider.

Rural transit providers in the region serve a wide range of communities across south central Nebraska. Many of the reported trips traveled within the tri-city area connecting Grand Island, Hastings, and Kearney. Five of the region’s seven transit providers operate within that region, connecting riders to vital services, including health care, education, and grocery and discount stores.

Based on the data and analysis, the report offers several actionable recommendations. Coordination among the five providers operating in the tri-city area is vital to ensure efficient service without redundancy. Expanding intercity routes between Grand Island, Hastings, and Kearney may eliminate some overlapping rides. We also recommend exploring fixed or flex-routes along U.S. Highway 281 between St. Paul, Grand Island, and Hastings.

This study highlights the need for continued investment in rural transit. Enhancing intercity services, fostering regional coordination, and planning strategically will help ensure that all residents, especially those who depend on transit, can access the services and opportunities they need.

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# INTRODUCTION



This analysis examines the gaps and overlaps in Nebraska’s rural transit services to help ensure reliable access to transit across rural areas of the state. By identifying areas where service can be optimized, the study aims to improve the efficiency, reach, and effectiveness of rural transit. This work is supported by the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT), which administers funding from the Federal Transit Administration’s Formula Grants for Rural Area Programs (49 U.S.C. 5311) to public transit providers in areas with populations under 50,000. NDOT has contracted with the Center for Public Affairs Research (CPAR) at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) to conduct this gap analysis as part of its commitment to strengthen Nebraska’s rural transit system.

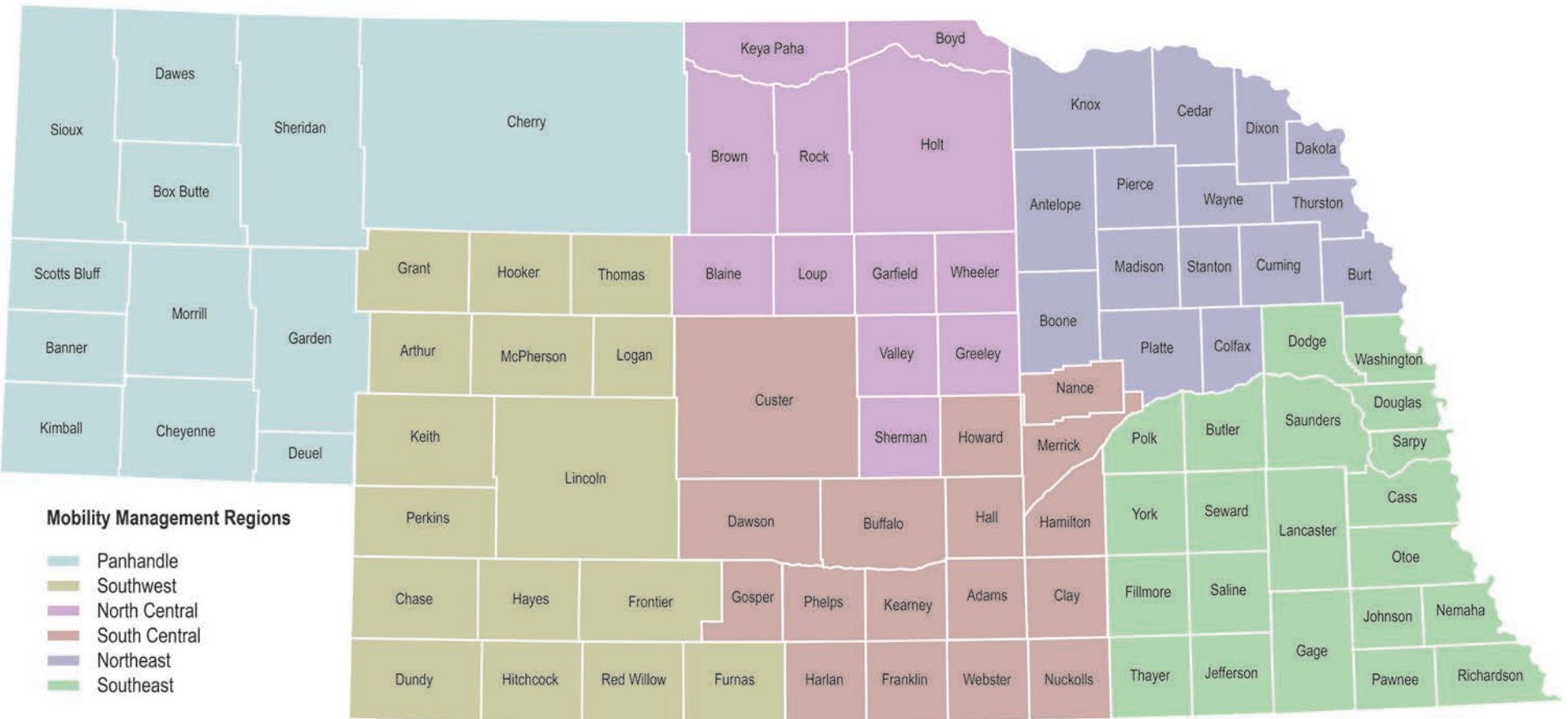
- This gap analysis has several key components:
- An overview of Section 5311 rural transit providers in the region, including their reported coverage area.
  - A summary of the most common drop-off destinations served by these providers.
  - An assessment of gaps and overlaps across providers in each region.
  - Evidence-based recommendations to support and expand efficient, effective rural transit across Nebraska.

The analysis is conducted using data from the U.S. Census Bureau and data about coverage areas, drop-off and pickup locations provided by service providers across Nebraska receiving Section 5311 funds as described in the About the Analysis section.

# NEBRASKA MOBILITY MANAGEMENT REGIONS

As part of the management of Federal Transit Administration funding, NDOT divides Nebraska into six Mobility Management regions. A distinct analysis for each region is provided.

**Figure 1. Nebraska Mobility Management regions, 2023**



Source: (1) Nebraska Public Transit website, retrieved 2024

## NORTH CENTRAL REGION

- Avera St. Anthony’s Hospital
- Community Memorial Health Center
- Loup City Public Transportation
- Valley County Transit System

## NORTHEAST REGION

- Avera Creighton Hospital
- Cedar County Transit
- City of Neligh Dial-A-Ride Public Transit
- City of Plainview Handivan
- Columbus Area Transit System
- Good Samaritan Society-Albion Public Transit
- JoyRide Public Transit
- North Fork Area Transit
- Oakland Public Transit
- Ponca Express
- Schuyler Public Transit
- Wayne Public Transit

## PANHANDLE REGION

- Alliance Public Transit
- Chadron City Transit
- City of Sidney Transportation System
- Crawford Public Transportation
- Garden County Public Transportation
- KCTS
- Open Plains Transit
- Tri-City Roadrunner

## SOUTH CENTRAL REGION

- Callaway District Hospital Public Transit Service
- Hall County Rural Transportation
- Harlan County Public Transportation
- Midland Public Transit
- Nance Trans, Inc.
- Phelps County Public Transit
- RYDE Transit

## SOUTHEAST REGION

- Blue Rivers Transportation System
- Butler County Rural Transit Service
- City of Tecumseh/Johnson County Public Transit
- Fillmore County Rural Transit Service
- Fremont Transit Program
- Lancaster County Public Rural Transit
- Saline County Area Transit
- Saunders County Public Transportation
- Seward County Public Transit
- Southeast Nebraska Community Action
  - Cass County Transit
  - Pawnee County Transit
  - Richardson County Transit
- York County Public Transportation

## SOUTHWEST REGION

- Chase County Transportation System
- City of Benkelman Handi Bus
- City of McCook Transit
- City of Ogallala Public Transit
- Grant Arthur Handi Bus
- Hitch & Hay Public Transit
- Hooker County Handi Bus
- North Platte Public Transit System
- Perkins County Public Transit
- Tri Valley Public Transportation

# ABOUT THE ANALYSIS



Our analysis uses a range of data and methods to examine rural transit services in each mobility region. We built this approach by drawing on existing rural transit analyses from other states (e.g., DRPT, 2023 [Source 2]; MCDOT, 2020 [Source 3]; MOOver, 2022 [Source 4]; SWRPC, 2022 [Source 5]; Wave Transit, 2023 [Source 6]) and leveraging our own expertise.

Data for this analysis comes from three primary sources.

- The first is the 2022 American Community Survey 5-year estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau. These estimates provide detailed information about population characteristics and help us estimate transit demand for each region.
- The second source is data from rural transit agencies, provided through the Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal. This data enabled us to analyze transit offerings, ridership, and geographic service coverage.
- Third, we requested samples of completed rides from transit providers. Not all agencies provided samples over the same time periods or same length of time. However, they are all illustrative of agency service. These samples included pick-up and drop-off locations in 2024. Using the U.S. Census Geocoder (Source 7), we geocoded these locations to generate latitude and longitude coordinates, which were key in creating visual representations like heatmaps and coverage maps.

The metrics we examine for each agency include: provider coverage area (e.g., city-specific, county-wide, regional), boardings per vehicle per fiscal year, miles per vehicle per fiscal year, miles per boarding per fiscal year, drop-offs at or near reported locations in the sample, observed coverage area in square miles, vehicles per square mile of the observed coverage area, and boardings per square mile of the observed coverage area.

The analysis begins with an exploration of the population characteristics and transit demand in each region. This step uses demographic and socioeconomic data to understand the needs of rural transit users. Next, we profile each transit agency’s services, detailing ridership statistics, geographic coverage, and operational metrics. These profiles offer insights into the capacity of existing transit systems.

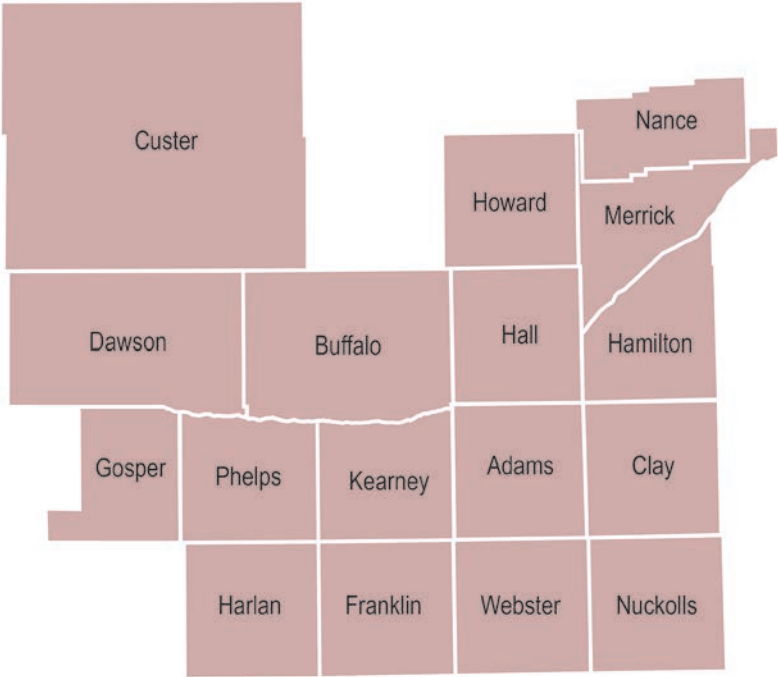
To illustrate the state of rural transit services, we present maps derived from the geocoded ride sample data. Heatmaps highlight the density of drop-off destinations, while polygon maps delineate the observed coverage areas. These visual tools help convey the extent and uses of transit services. In addition to visual analysis, we conduct a detailed review of trip destinations and service patterns to identify gaps in coverage and overlaps between agencies. This helps assess how well current transit services meet regional needs and highlights opportunities for improvements.

Finally, we synthesize these findings into a regional summary that evaluated transit availability, accessibility, and coverage gaps. The report concludes with a set of actionable recommendations aimed at enhancing rural transit services in the region.

# SOUTH CENTRAL REGION OVERVIEW

This document focuses on rural transit agencies in the South Central Mobility Management region, comprised of the 17 counties in the south central region of Nebraska bordering Kansas.

Figure 2. South Central Mobility Management region

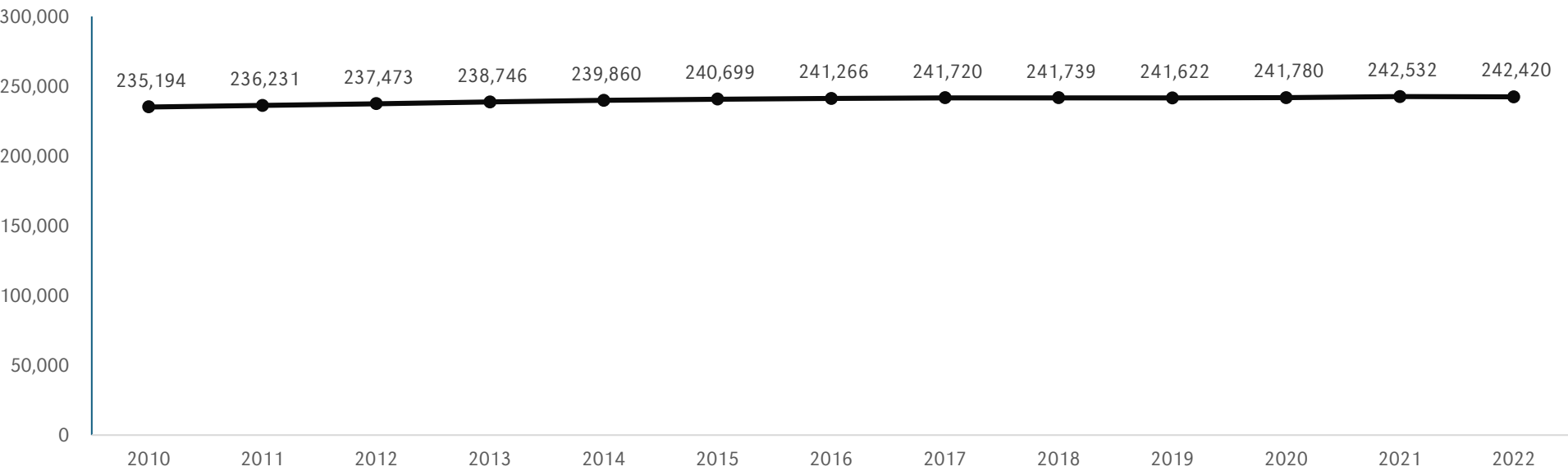


Source: (1) Nebraska Public Transit website, retrieved 2024

# POPULATION TRENDS

The population of the South Central region has consistently increased from 2010 to 2017, rising from 235,194 to 241,720. Since 2017, the total population has remained steady at approximately 242,000.

Figure 3. Total population in the South Central region, 2010-2022



Source: (8) U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 5-year Estimates 2010-2022

# TRANSIT DEPENDENT POPULATION

In addition to evaluating the overall population, we analyzed the transit-dependent population in the region. The transit-dependent population includes those who cannot drive due to age, lack financial resources to own a vehicle, or have physical disabilities (Jiao & Dillivan, 2013; Jiao & Wang, 2021). Reports from other state DOTs, such as those in Arkansas, Iowa, Vermont, and New Hampshire, as well as local reports from agencies like DuPage County in Chicago, Illinois, and the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission, consider the following groups as transit-dependent:

- a. Individuals aged 65 or older.
- b. Individuals below the poverty level.
- c. Individuals with hearing, vision, ambulatory, or other physical difficulties.
- d. Households without access to a private vehicle.

Table 1. Transit-dependent population in the South Central Region, 2022

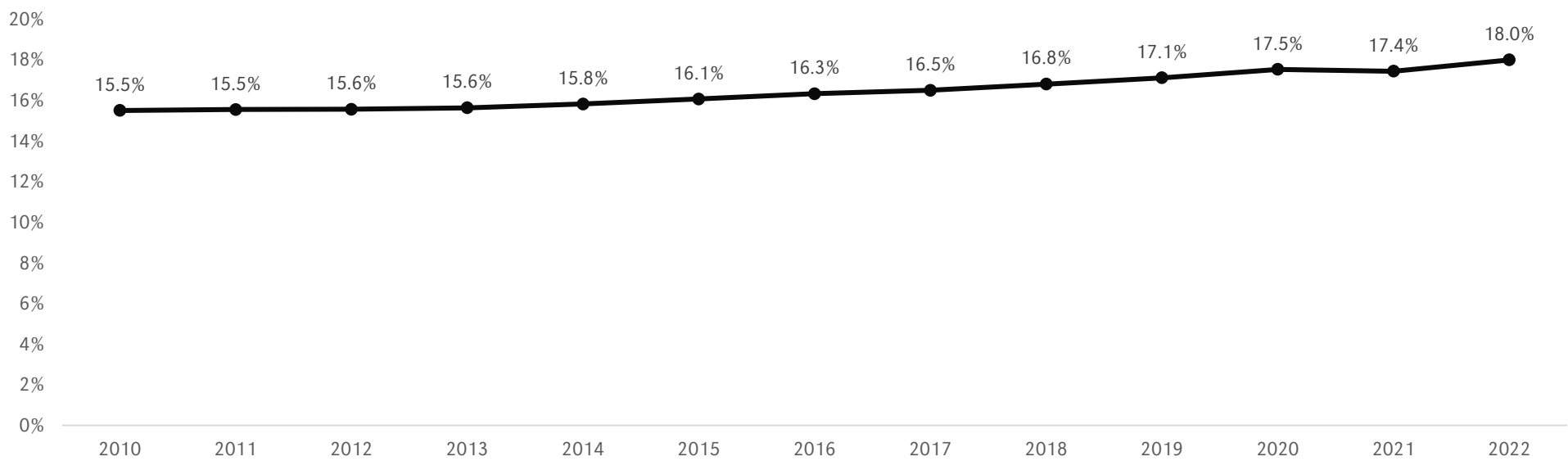
Region	Total Population	Percent of Population 65 Years or Older	Percent of Population Below Poverty	Percent of Population with a Disability	Occupied Housing Units	Percent of Occupied Housing Units with No Private Vehicle
Nebraska	1,958,939	16.2%	10.4%	12.0%	776,379	5.1%
South Central	242,420	18.0%	11.6%	13.4%	95,661	4.5%
Adams	31,143	18.1%	12.0%	14.4%	12,717	5.0%
Buffalo	50,103	15.6%	11.8%	13.2%	19,544	4.3%
Clay	6,088	20.3%	8.7%	13.3%	2,475	2.6%
Custer	10,566	22.1%	11.3%	14.9%	4,543	4.5%
Dawson	24,037	16.8%	14.2%	12.9%	8,810	5.3%
Franklin	2,901	27.6%	14.9%	17.9%	1,255	3.5%
Gosper	1,873	25.6%	6.5%	12.1%	751	0.7%
Hall	62,575	15.5%	12.8%	12.9%	24,026	5.3%
Hamilton	9,400	20.3%	5.5%	10.9%	3,577	1.9%
Harlan	3,094	26.6%	7.3%	17.6%	1,221	1.9%
Howard	6,476	21.7%	4.9%	14.0%	2,544	6.1%
Kearney	6,655	20.0%	9.5%	8.9%	2,683	3.3%
Merrick	7,675	21.5%	10.2%	17.8%	3,175	2.7%
Nance	3,366	21.0%	13.6%	16.6%	1,307	1.5%
Nuckolls	4,092	27.5%	6.3%	13.4%	1,748	2.4%
Phelps	8,966	20.7%	14.5%	13.5%	3,805	5.8%
Webster	3,410	22.6%	7.9%	12.3%	1,480	2.8%

Source: (8) U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 5-year Estimates 2022

In 2022, the South Central region overall has a higher estimated transit-dependent population than the Nebraska statewide average, as summarized in Table 1. Population aged 65 or older has consistently increased in the region during 2010-2022, accounting for 15.5% of total population in 2010 and 18% in 2022. Franklin and Nuckolls counties showed the highest older population percentage, recording 27.6% and 27.5%, respectively.



**Figure 4. Percent of population age 65 or older in the South Central region, 2010-2022**



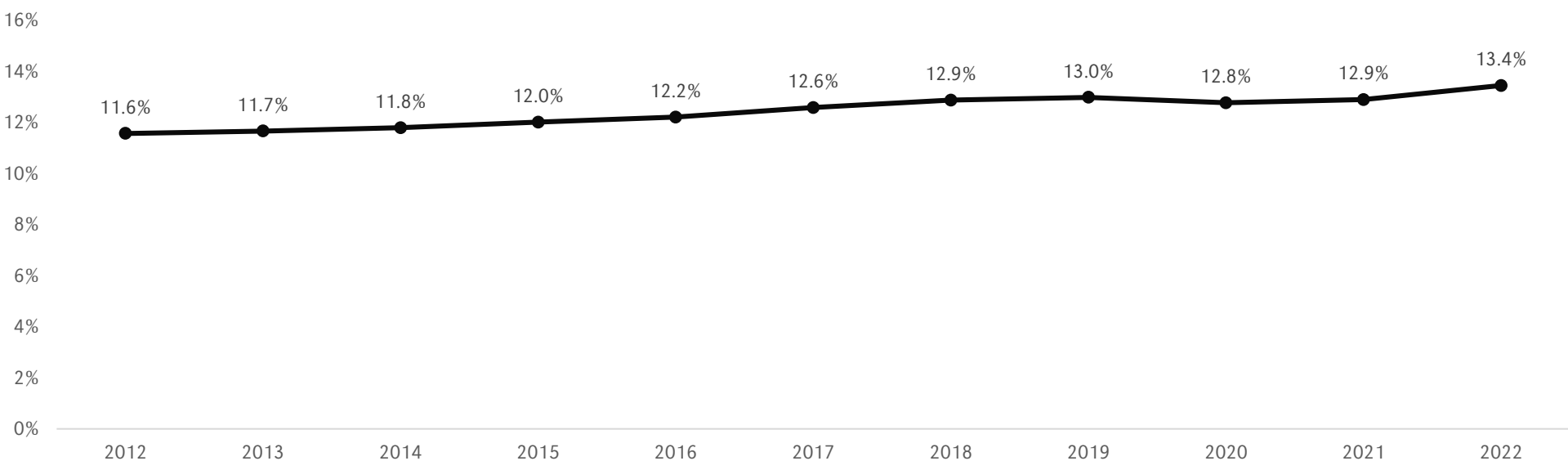
Source: (8) U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 5-year Estimates 2010-2022

The percentage of population living below the poverty level (11.6%) was slightly higher than the Nebraska average (10.4%). Dawson, Franklin, and Phelps counties showed poverty population over 14%, indicating that transit-dependent individuals may be concentrated in these areas.

The percentage of individuals with difficulties in the South Central region remained stable, showing a mild fluctuation around 12-14%. The overall estimate of the disability population was 1.4% higher than the Nebraska average in 2022. Among South Central counties, Howard and Merrick counties showed the highest percentage of population with difficulties at 17.6% and 17.8%, respectively.

The percentage of housing units with no private vehicles in the South Central region showed a lower estimate compared to the Nebraska average.

**Figure 5. Percent of population with difficulties in the South Central region, 2012-2022**



Source: (8) U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 5-year Estimates 2012-2022

Based on these estimates, **the population of the South Central region is more dependent on public transit than the population of Nebraska as a whole.** The relative percentage of transit dependent population is also growing in the South Central region, meaning the need for public transit will likely increase.



# SOUTH CENTRAL TRANSIT PROVIDERS

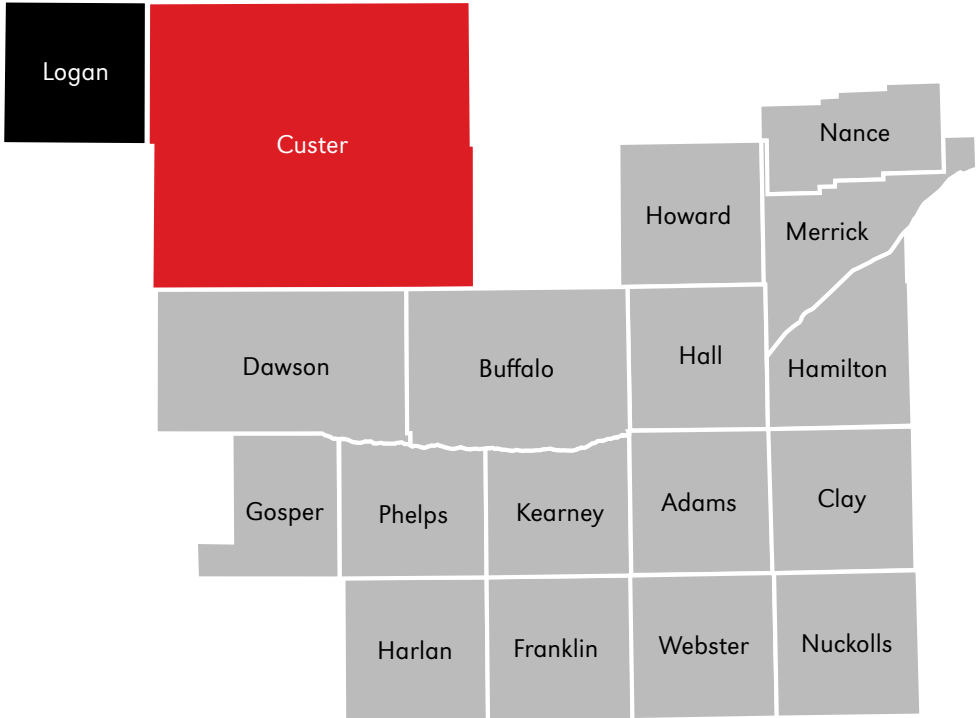
To respond to the growing transit needs of the region, the South Central region is currently served by seven rural transit providers. Two providers — Hall County Rural Transportation and Harlan County Public Transportation — started providing rural transit service in FY 2025. Each replaced providers previously operating in the same service area. This section includes an overview of the service provided by each of the providers in the region.



## CALLAWAY DISTRICT HOSPITAL PUBLIC TRANSIT SERVICE

Callaway District Hospital Public Transit Service offers demand response service to residents within Custer and Logan counties. Logan County is in the Southwest Mobility Management region. Longer rides are also provided based on space and schedule availability.

**Figure 6. Map of South Central region with Callaway District Hospital Public Transit Service service area counties shaded in red and Southwest region service area county shaded in black**



Source: (1) Nebraska Public Transit website, retrieved 2024

Rides are provided  
Monday through Friday  
from 8 A.M. to 5 P.M.

Source: (14) Callaway District Hospital Public Transit Service website, retrieved 2025

According to the Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal, the agency operated three vehicles in FY 2024 and provided around 1,600 rides. The number of boardings has increased nearly 10% compared to FY 2022. Total miles traveled tripled over the same period, rising from 12,580 total annual miles in FY 2022 to 38,113 in FY 2024. Fleet size also increased with the addition of two new vehicles in FY 2023.

Average miles per boarding increased greatly, from 8.3 miles per boarding in FY 2022 to more than 22 miles in FY 2024. This suggests a shift in ridership from shorter, local trips to longer trips between neighboring cities in the region.

**Table 2. Ridership statistics for Callaway District Hospital Public Transit Service, FY 2022 to FY 2024**

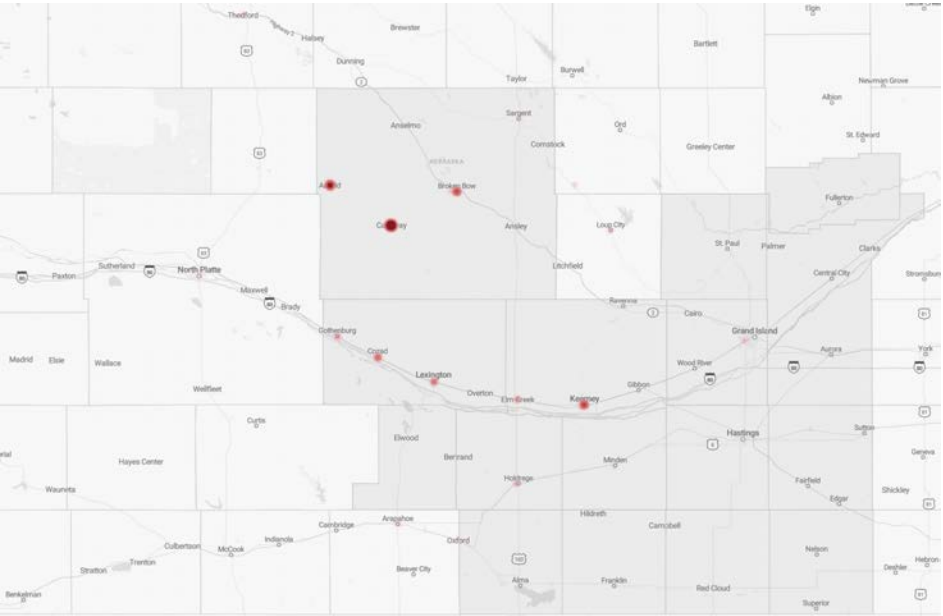
	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	Percent Change FY 2022 to FY 2024
Vehicles	1	3	3	200.0%
Boardings	1,520	1,900	1,669	9.8%
Mileage	12,580	29,061	38,113	203.0%
Boardings Per Vehicle	1,520.0	633.3	556.3	-63.4%
Miles Per Vehicle	12,580.0	9,687.0	12,704.3	1.0%
Miles Per Boarding	8.3	15.3	22.8	175.9%

Source: (9) Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal

Callaway District Hospital Public Transit Service provided a sample of bus driver logs from March 2024 to June 2024. In some cases, only a city or town name was included rather than a specific address. Figure 7 shows a heatmap of drop-offs, along with the five most common destinations.

The top destinations are within the City of Callaway with trips reported to Arnold, Kearney, and Broken Bow. The top destination by far was the Callaway District Hospital, including the attached medical clinic. Grand Generation Manor and Callaway Good Life Center, both elder care facilities, were also among the top five destinations.

**Figure 7. Drop-off locations for Callaway District Hospital Public Transit Service, March 2024 to June 2024**

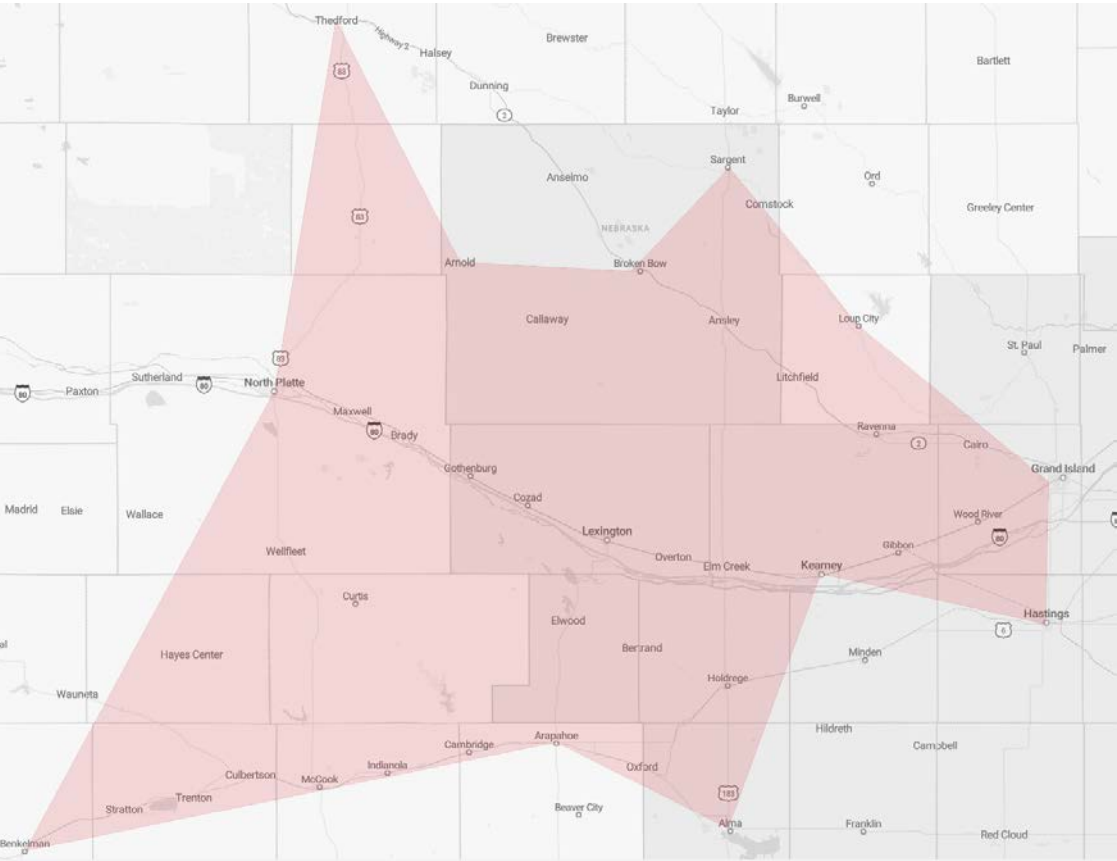


Source: (10) Callaway District Hospital Public Transit Service reported ride data, March 2024 to June 2024

Top Five Drop-off Locations	City/Town	Number of Drop-offs
Callaway District Hospital/Medical Center	Callaway	263
Grand Generation Manor	Callaway	89
Arnold	Arnold	75
Kearney	Kearney	40
Callaway Good Life Center	Callaway	35

The observed coverage area based on the reported pick-up locations spans approximately 10,305 square miles, extending from Benkelman in the southwest to Grand Island in the east. This includes most of Logan County, but only the southern portion of Custer County. Notably, no trips were reported near Anselmo and Merna in the north of Custer County.

**Figure 8. Observed pick-up area for Callaway District Hospital Public Transit Service, March 2024 to June 2024**



Source: (10) Callaway District Hospital Public Transit Service reported ride data, March 2024 to June 2024



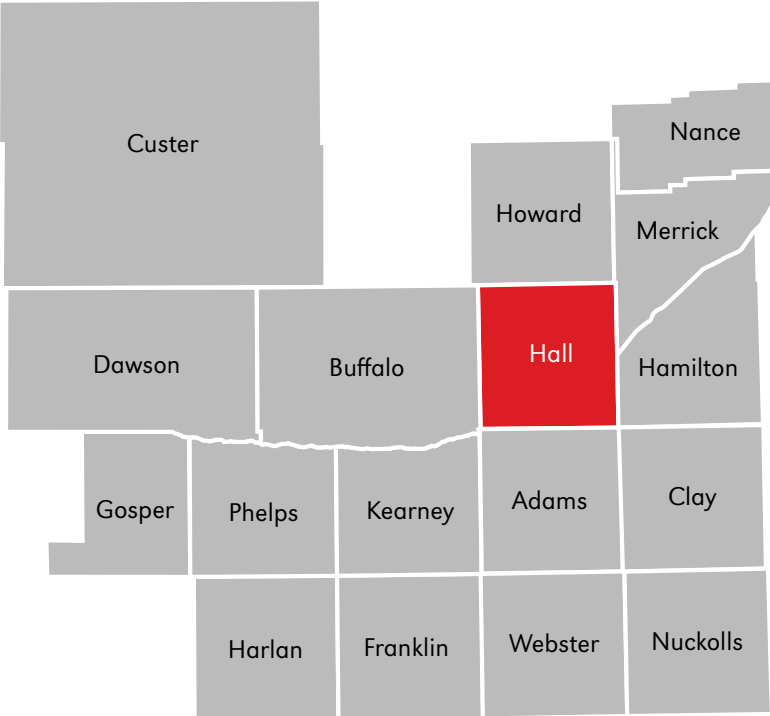
**Callaway District Hospital Public Transit Service has shown a sharp increase in annual mileage since FY 2022 despite a much smaller increase in boardings.** This suggests that the average trip length has increased significantly during the same period. **Callaway added two new vehicles to their fleet as well, likely to ensure continued availability despite the longer average trips length.** The observed coverage area is also much larger than Callaway’s advertised coverage area. Even so, coverage in northern Custer County may be limited.



## HALL COUNTY RURAL TRANSPORTATION

Hall County Rural Transportation provides demand response service to residents of rural Hall County outside the City of Grand Island, with limited service into the city. Service was previously provided by CRANE Public Transit, which stopped providing rural transit in March 2024.

**Figure 9. Map of South Central region with the Hall County Rural Transportation service area county shaded in red**



Source: (1) Nebraska Public Transit website, retrieved 2024

Hall County Rural Transportation transitioned service from CRANE Public Transit in March 2024. They reported no data to the Nebraska Transit Portal for FY 2022-FY 2024 and provided no ride sample for this analysis.

Rides are provided  
Monday through Friday  
7 A.M. to 5:30 P.M.

Source: (15) Hall County Rural Transportation website, retrieved 2025

# CRANE PUBLIC TRANSIT


Prior to March 2024, rural transit in Hall County was provided by CRANE Public Transit rather than Hall County Rural Transportation. According to the Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal, the agency operated 15 vehicles in FY 2024 and provided around 1,166 boardings for rural transportation. The number of boardings decreased from more than 5,000 in FY 2022. Total miles traveled also decreased sharply since FY 2022. These decreases are likely related to the cessation of service in the middle of FY 2024.

Table 3. Ridership statistics for CRANE Public Transit, FY 2022 to FY 2024

	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	Percent Change FY 2022 to FY 2024
Vehicles	13	14	15	15.4%
Boardings	5,466	3,980	1,166	-78.7%
Mileage	34,410	30,965	12,235	-64.4%
Boardings Per Vehicle	420.5	284.3	77.7	-81.5%
Miles Per Vehicle	2,646.9	2,211.8	815.7	-69.2%
Miles Per Boarding	6.3	7.8	10.5	66.7%

Source: (9) Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal

CRANE Public Transit stopped providing rural transit in March 2024. They did not provide a ride sample for this analysis.

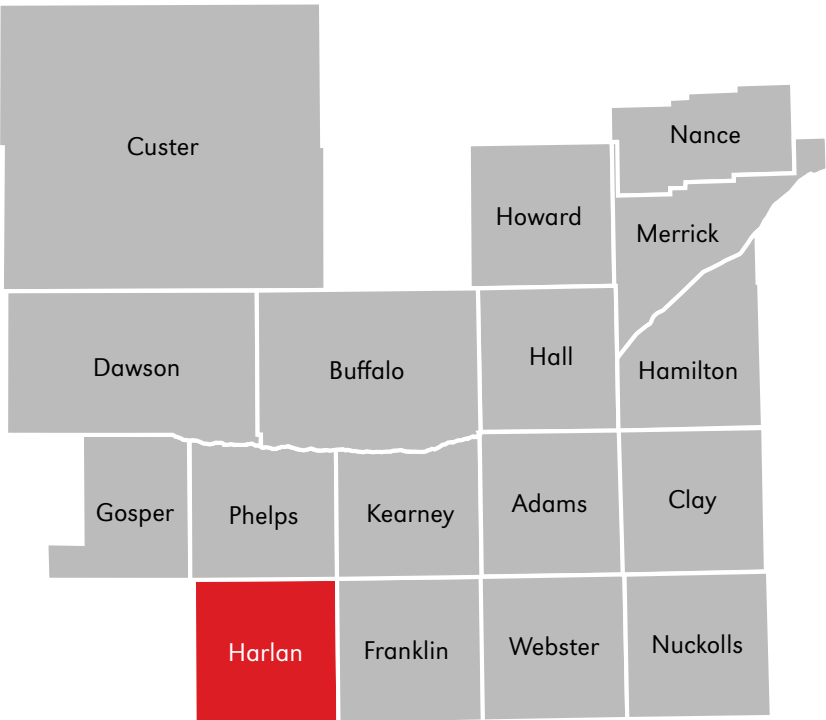


**Rural transit in Hall County transitioned from CRANE Public Transit to Hall County Rural Transportation in FY 2024.** Ridership for CRANE Public Transit’s service decreased both in terms of ridership and mileage from FY 2022 to FY 2024. **Hall County Rural Transportation reported no data to the Nebraska Transit Portal for FY 2024, but will provide a comparable service.**

# HARLAN COUNTY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Harlan County Public Transportation operated by Harlan County Health System started providing demand-response rural transit in FY 2025 for all residents of Harlan County. Riders can travel within the county or to Grand Island, Hastings, Kearney, or nearby locations in Kansas.

Figure 10. Map of South Central region with the Harlan County Public Transportation service area county shaded in red



Source: (1) Nebraska Public Transit website, retrieved 2024

Harlan County Public Transportation started providing rural transit service in FY 2025. They reported no data to the Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal from FY 2022-2024, as the Harlan County Transportation System, operated by the Harlan County Senior Center, provided service during that period. They also provided no ride sample for this analysis.



Rides are provided  
Monday through Friday  
from 7 A.M. to 6 P.M.

Source: (16) Harlan County Public Transportation website, retrieved 2025

# HARLAN COUNTY TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Prior to FY 2025, rural transit in Harlan County was provided by Harlan County Transportation System. According to the Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal, the agency operated one vehicle in FY 2024 and provided around 2,200 rides. The number of boardings decreased slightly compared to FY 2022. Total miles traveled also decreased since FY 2022, showing an overall decrease in service over the three-year period. In response, Harlan County Transportation System reduced the size of their fleet by one vehicle in FY 2023.

Average miles per boarding decreased over the three-year period, suggesting that Harlan County Transportation System was providing shorter rides rather than long, intercity trips.

Table 4. Ridership statistics for Harlan County Transportation System, FY 2022 to FY 2024

	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	Percent Change FY 2022 to FY 2024
Vehicles	2	1	1	-50.0%
Boardings	2,725	2,937	2,192	-19.6%
Mileage	22,930	18,626	17,094	-25.5%
Boardings Per Vehicle	1,362.5	2,937.0	2,192.0	60.9%
Miles Per Vehicle	11,465.0	18,626.0	17,094.0	49.1%
Miles Per Boarding	8.4	6.3	7.8	-7.3%

Source: (9) Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal

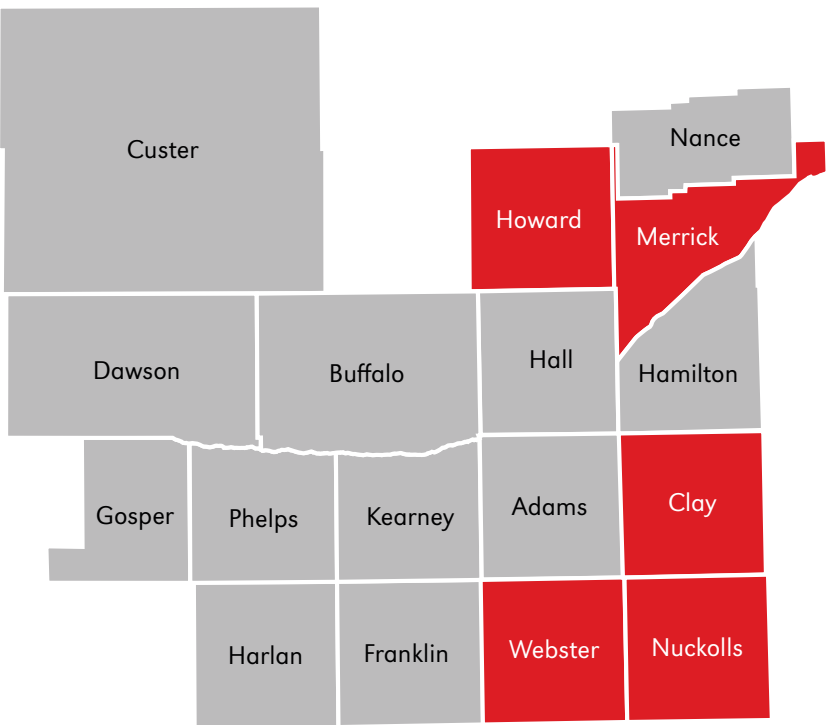
The Harlan County Transportation System stopped providing service in FY 2024 and did not provide a ride sample for this analysis.

Rural transit in Harlan County transitioned from the Harlan County Senior Center to Harlan County Health System in FY 2025. **Ridership for the area decreased slightly both in terms of ridership and mileage from FY 2022 to FY 2024.** Harlan County Health System reported no data to the Nebraska Transit Portal for FY 2024, but will provide similar service.

# MIDLAND PUBLIC TRANSIT

Midland Public Transit provides demand response and non-emergency medical transit services to residents of Clay, Howard, Merrick, Nuckolls, and Webster counties.

Figure 11. Map of South Central region with Midland Public Transit service area counties shaded in red



Source: (1) Nebraska Public Transit website, retrieved 2024

Rides are provided  
Monday through Friday  
from 8 A.M. to 5 P.M.

Source: (17) Midland Public Transit website, retrieved 2025



According to the Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal, the agency operated 15 vehicles in FY 2024 and provided around 12,000 rides. The number of boardings has increased from 11,154 in FY 2022. Total miles traveled also increased since FY 2022. Midland Public Transit increased the size of their fleet by two vehicles, likely in response to increasing ridership.

Average miles per boarding increased over the three-year period, suggesting that Midland Public Transit has been receiving more requests for trips between neighboring towns rather than shorter, in-town rides.

Table 5. Ridership statistics for the Midland Public Transit, FY 2022 to FY 2024

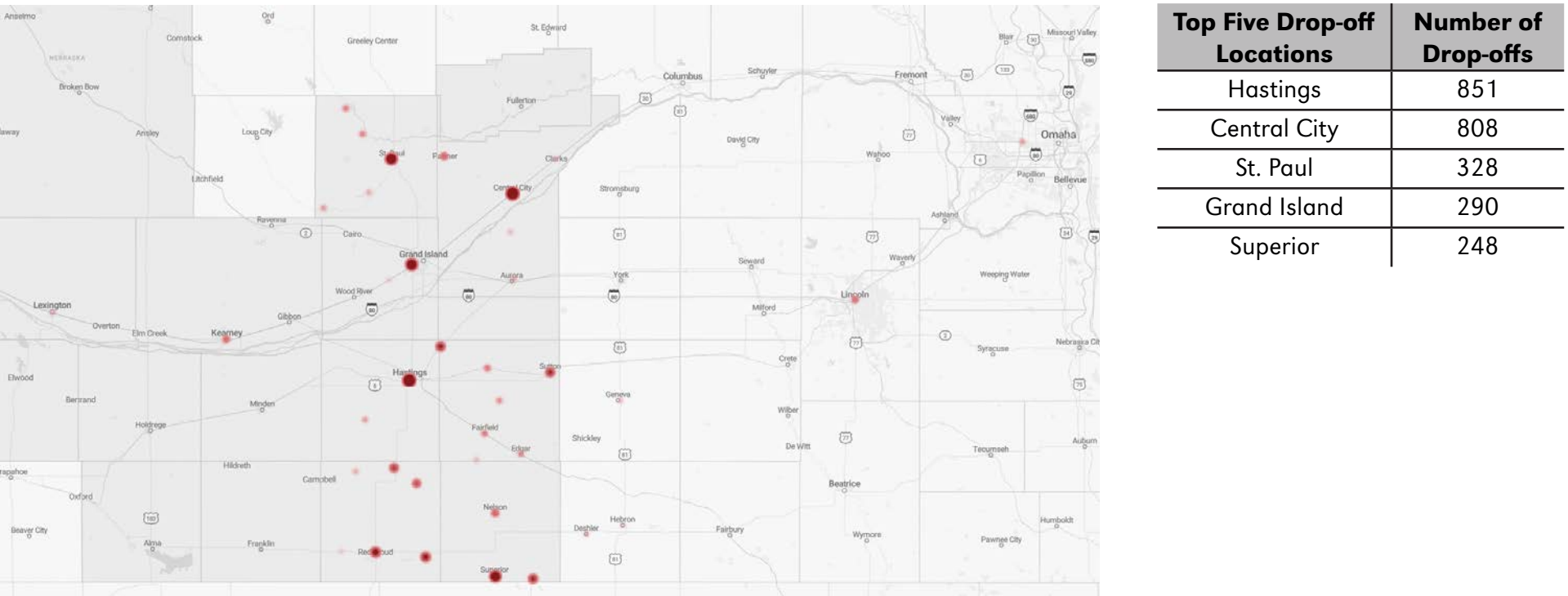
	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	Percent Change FY 2022 to FY 2024
Vehicles	13	14	15	15.4%
Boardings	11,154	10,250	12,052	8.1%
Mileage	145,262	124,147	164,902	13.5%
Boardings Per Vehicle	858.0	732.1	803.5	-6.4%
Miles Per Vehicle	11,174.0	8,867.6	10,993.5	-1.6%
Miles Per Boarding	13.0	12.1	13.7	5.1%

Source: (9) Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal

Midland Public Transit provided a sample of rides taken between July 2024 through August 2024. The rides provided include only a city or town name rather than a specific address. Figure 12 shows a heatmap of drop-offs, along with the five most common destinations.

The top destinations are the cities of Hastings, Central City, Saint Paul, Grand Island, and Superior. Each of these cities provides necessary services to nearby residents, including medical and elder care facilities, educational institutions, and discount or grocery stores.

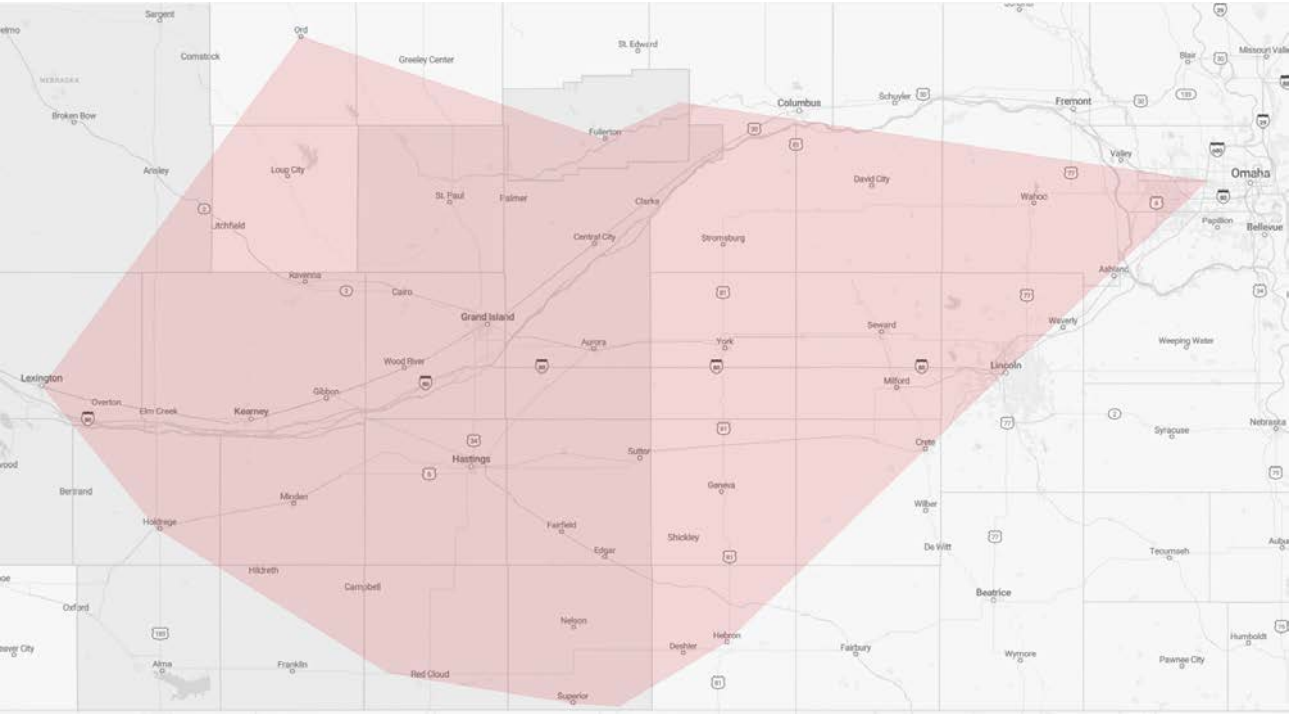
Figure 12. Drop-off locations for the Midland Public Transit, July 2024 to August 2024



Source: (11) Midland Public Transit reported ride data, July 2024 to August 2024

The observed coverage area spans approximately 12,304.4 square miles, covering a large part of the South Central region. Some rides began in Omaha and Ord, extending the coverage area outside the South Central region.

Figure 13. Observed pick-up area for the Midland Public Transit, July 2024 to August 2024



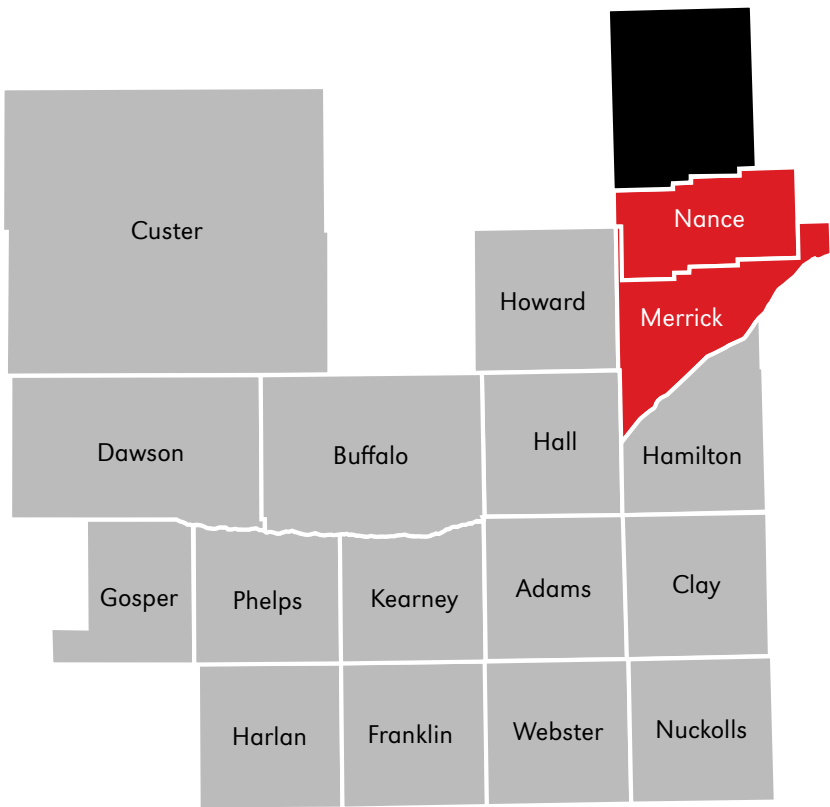
Source: (11) Midland Public Transit reported ride data, July 2024 to August 2024

**Midland Public Transit has shown an increase in annual boardings and mileage since FY 2022.** In response, they have increased the size of their fleet during the same period. **The average miles per boarding have decreased, showing they may be providing longer-distance rides between neighboring communities.**

NANCE TRANS, INC.

Nance Transit, Inc., provides demand response transit service to residents of Boone, Merrick, and Nance counties. Boone County is in the Northeast Mobility Management region.

Figure 14. Map of South Central region with Nance Trans, Inc. service area counties shaded in red and Northeast region service area county shaded in black



Source: (1) Nebraska Public Transit website, retrieved 2024



Rides are provided by appointment Monday through Friday.

Source: (9) Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal



According to the Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal, the agency operated three vehicles in FY 2024 and provided around 2,400 rides. The number of boardings has increased from around 1,700 in FY 2022. Total miles traveled also increased since FY 2022, showing an overall increase in service over the three-year period. Nance Trans, Inc., has maintained the same fleet over the three-year period.

Average miles per boarding decreased slightly over the three-year period but still suggests that Nance Trans, Inc., largely provides transit from outlying parts of their service area to neighboring communities rather than providing short, in-town trips.

**Table 6. Ridership statistics for the Nance Trans, Inc., FY 2022 to FY 2024**

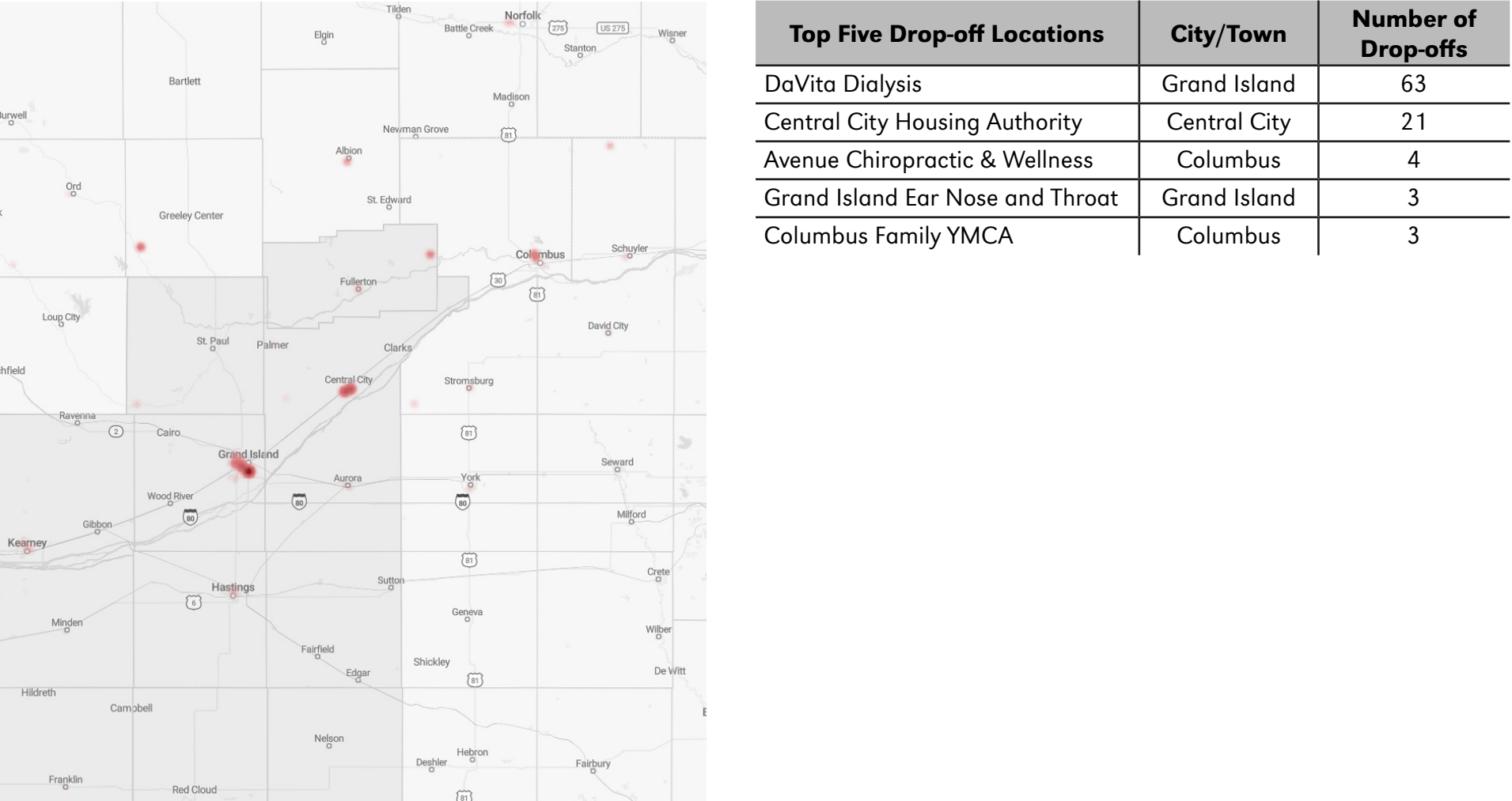
	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	Percent Change FY 2022 to FY 2024
Vehicles	3	3	3	0.0%
Boardings	1,728	1,993	2,392	38.4%
Mileage	45,523	54,716	59,605	30.9%
Boardings Per Vehicle	576.0	664.3	797.3	38.4%
Miles Per Vehicle	15,174.3	18,238.7	19,868.3	30.9%
Miles Per Boarding	26.3	27.5	24.9	-5.4%

Source: (9) Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal

Nance Trans, Inc., provided a sample of 228 rides taken between June 2024 and August 2024. Figure 15 shows a heatmap of drop-offs, along with the five most common destinations.

The top destinations are in Grand Island, Columbus, and Central City, the three largest cities in the area bordering Nance Trans, Inc.’s, coverage area. The top five destinations include a variety of medical providers — DaVita Dialysis, Avenue Chiropractic, and Grand Island Ear Nose and Throat — as well as the Central City Housing Authority and the YMCA in Columbus.

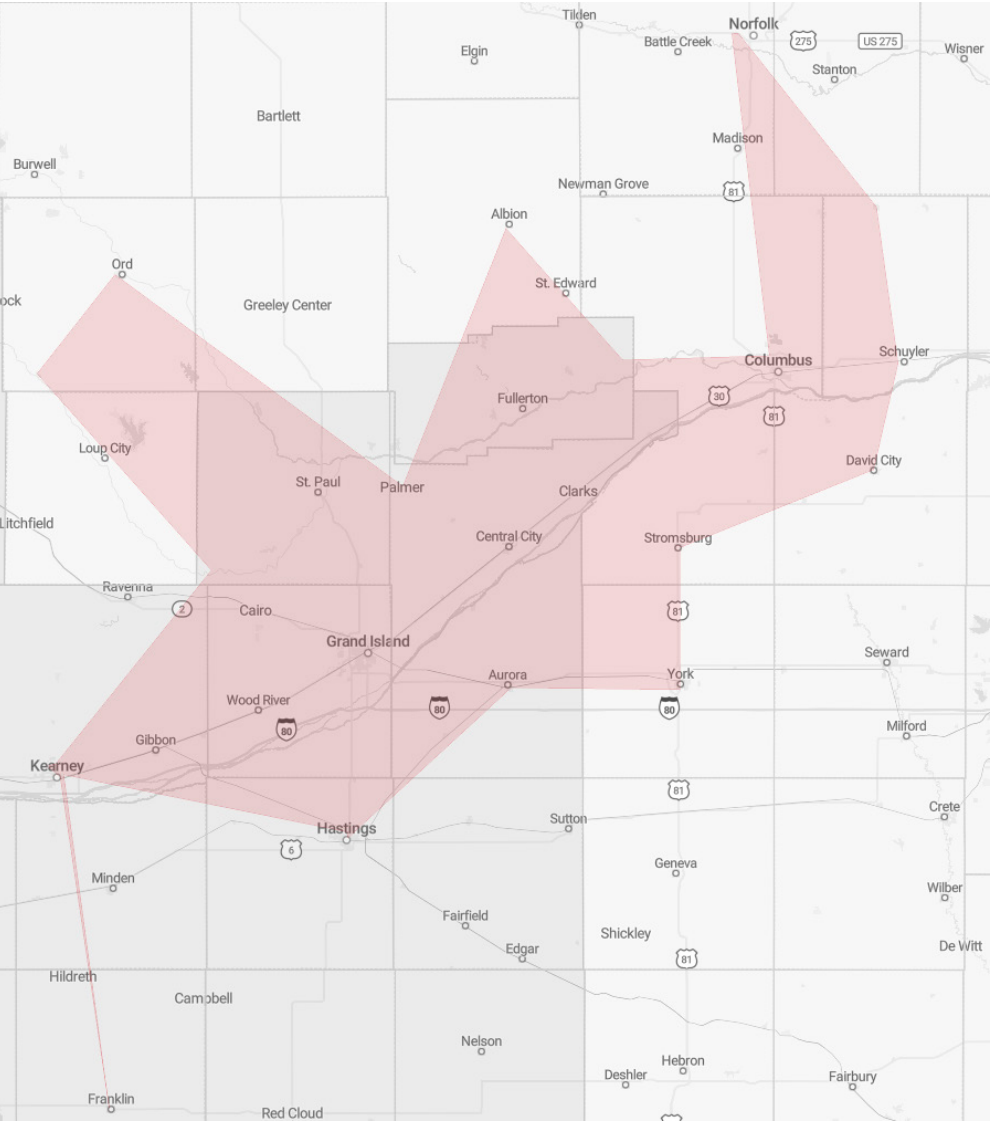
**Figure 15. Drop-off locations for the Nance Trans, Inc., June 2024 to August 2024**



Source: (12) Nance Trans, Inc. reported ride data, June 2024 to August 2024

The observed coverage area spans approximately 4,461.8 square miles, connecting the advertised coverage area with neighboring cities. The tri-city area of Grand Island, Kearney, and Hastings falls within the observed coverage area, as does the area around Columbus to the east.

Figure 16. Observed pick-up area for the Nance Trans, Inc., June 2024 to August 2024



Source: (12) Nance Trans, Inc. reported ride data, June 2024 to August 2024



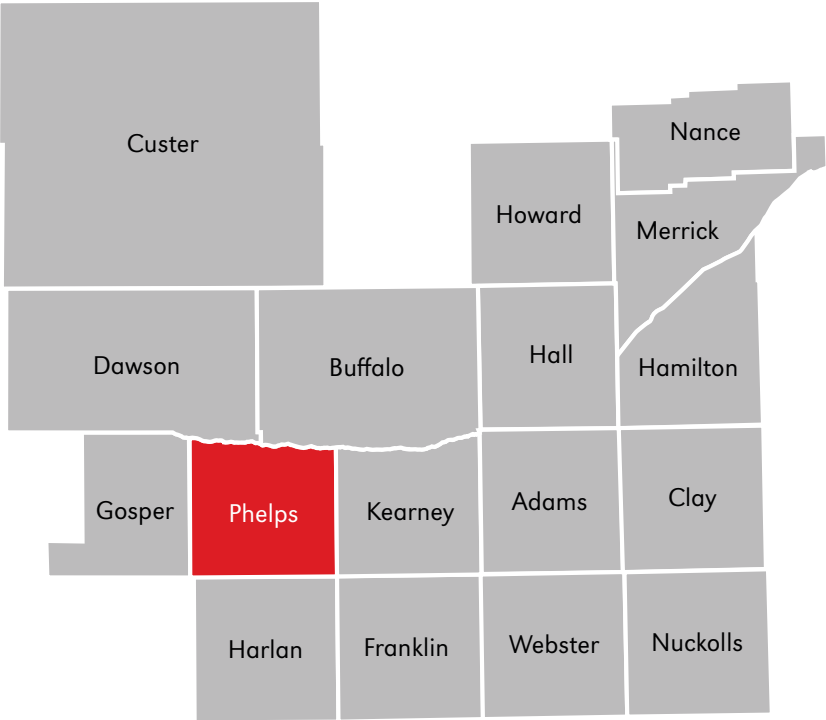
Nance Trans, Inc., has shown an increase in annual boardings and mileage since FY 2022. The average miles per boarding have decreased slightly during the same period. **Most of the top destinations are in the largest cities neighboring the advertised coverage area, with pickups ranging beyond the advertised area, from Kearney and Hastings in the southwest to Norfolk in the northeast.**



## PHELPS COUNTY PUBLIC TRANSIT

Phelps County Public Transit provides demand response and non-emergency medical transit services to residents of Phelps County.

Figure 17. Map of South Central region with Phelps County Public Transit service area county shaded in red



Source: (1) Nebraska Public Transit website, retrieved 2024



Source: (9) Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal

According to the Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal, the agency operated two vehicles in FY 2024 and provided around 10,600 rides. The number of boardings has decreased from more than 13,000 in FY 2023. Conversely, total miles traveled increased since FY 2022. The agency maintained the same fleet over the three-year period.

Average miles per boarding increased slightly over the three-year period but remained less than 3 miles per boarding. This suggests that most of the trips are short, in-town trips within the City of Holdrege.

Table 7. Ridership statistics for the Phelps County Public Transit, FY 2022 to FY 2024

	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	Percent Change FY 2022 to FY 2024
Vehicles	2	2	2	0.0%
Boardings	11,780	13,713	10,619	-9.9%
Mileage	25,715	25,481	30,125	17.1%
Boardings Per Vehicle	5,890.0	6,856.5	5,309.5	-9.9%
Miles Per Vehicle	12,857.5	12,740.5	15,062.5	17.1%
Miles Per Boarding	2.2	1.9	2.8	30.0%

Source: (9) Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal



**Phelps County Public Transit has shown a decrease in annual boardings and an increase in total annual mileage since FY 2022.** The average trip length has remained relatively short, indicating that most trips are likely short, in-town trips within the city of Holdrege. **Phelps County may be better classified as a city-specific provider based on the reported trips.**

Phelps County Public Transit did not provide a sample of rides for this analysis, but did provide a list of the top drop-off destinations. All destinations are within the City of Holdrege, as summarized in Figure 18 below.

The data provided did not include the number of drop-offs per destination or any ranking among them. However, the top destinations can generally be grouped into discount or grocery stores (four locations), medical facilities (four locations), and educational facilities (three locations).

Figure 18. Drop-off locations for the Phelps County Public Transit, April 2024 to July 2024



Source: (13) Phelps County Public Transit reported top destinations

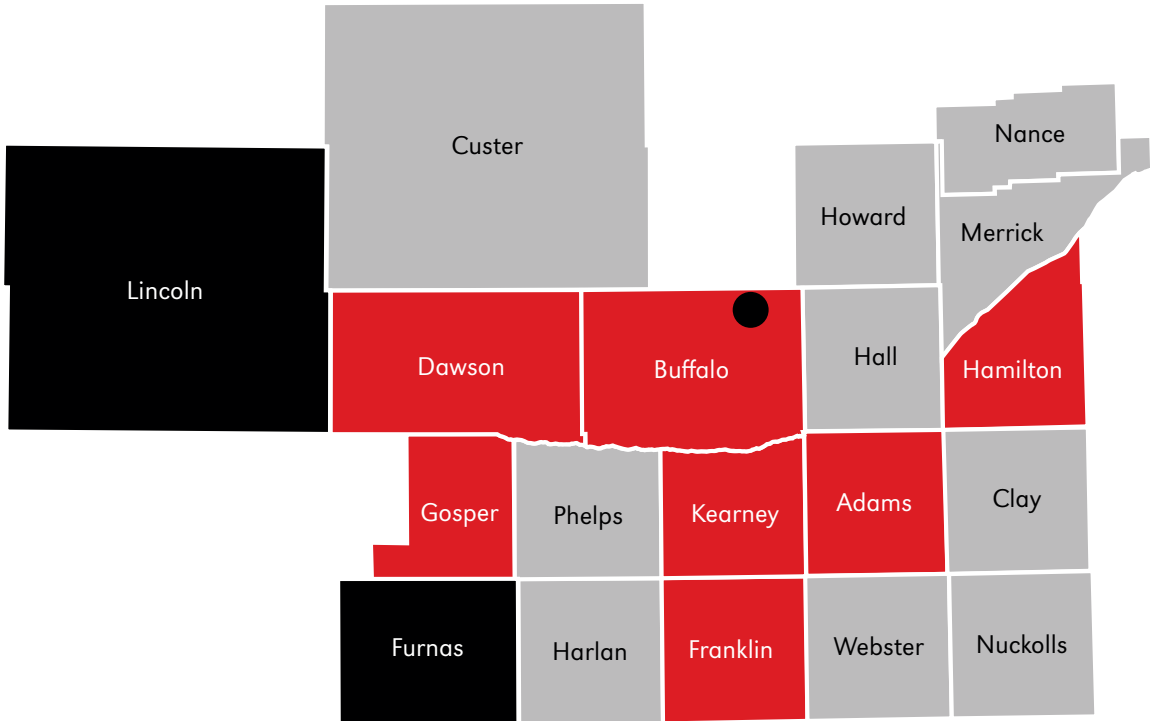
Drop-off Locations	City/Town
Family Fare	Holdrege
HyVee	Holdrege
Family Medical Specialties	Holdrege
Phelps Medical Group	Holdrege
Phelps Memorial Medical Center	Holdrege
Family Dollar	Holdrege
Dollar General	Holdrege
Ultimate Hair	Holdrege
Holdrege Area Recycling	Holdrege
Head Start	Holdrege
Mosiac (Stepping Stones)	Holdrege
Legacy School	Holdrege
Holdrege Middle School	Holdrege

Phelps County Public Transit did not provide any pickup data for use in computing their observed coverage area.


RYDE TRANSIT

RYDE (Reach Your Destination Easily) Transit provides demand response and non-emergency medical transit services to residents of Adams, Buffalo, Dawson, Franklin, Furnas, Gosper, Hamilton, Kearney, and Lincoln counties as well as the city of Ravenna. Furnas and Lincoln counties are in the Southwest Mobility Management region.

Figure 19. Map of South Central region with RYDE Transit service area counties shaded in red and a black dot and Southwest region service area counties shaded in black



Source: (1) Nebraska Public Transit website, retrieved 2024



Rides are provided Monday through Friday from 6 A.M. to 6 P.M. (Kearney and Hastings) and 8 A.M. to 5 P.M. (Lexington, Aurora, Franklin, Minden, Elwood, and Ravenna).

Source: (18) RYDE Transit website, retrieved 2025

According to the Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal, the agency operated 63 vehicles in FY 2024 and provided around 86,000 rides. The number of boardings has remained relatively steady since FY 2022. Total miles traveled also remained largely the same, suggesting a relatively consistent level of demand.


Average miles per boarding remained consistent over the three-year period as well. The relatively low trip length — less than six miles per boarding — suggests most rides are in-town trips within one of the municipalities served by RYDE Transit, with fewer long trips between cities.

Table 8. Ridership statistics for the RYDE Transit, FY 2022 to FY 2024

	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	Percent Change FY 2022 to FY 2024
Vehicles	62	63	63	1.6%
Boardings	83,914	87,848	85,918	2.4%
Mileage	480,198	493,519	497,709	3.6%
Boardings Per Vehicle	1,353.5	1,394.4	1,363.8	0.8%
Miles Per Vehicle	7,745.1	7,833.6	7,900.1	2.0%
Miles Per Boarding	5.7	5.6	5.8	1.2%

Source: (9) Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal

RYDE Transit did not provide a sample of rides for this analysis.



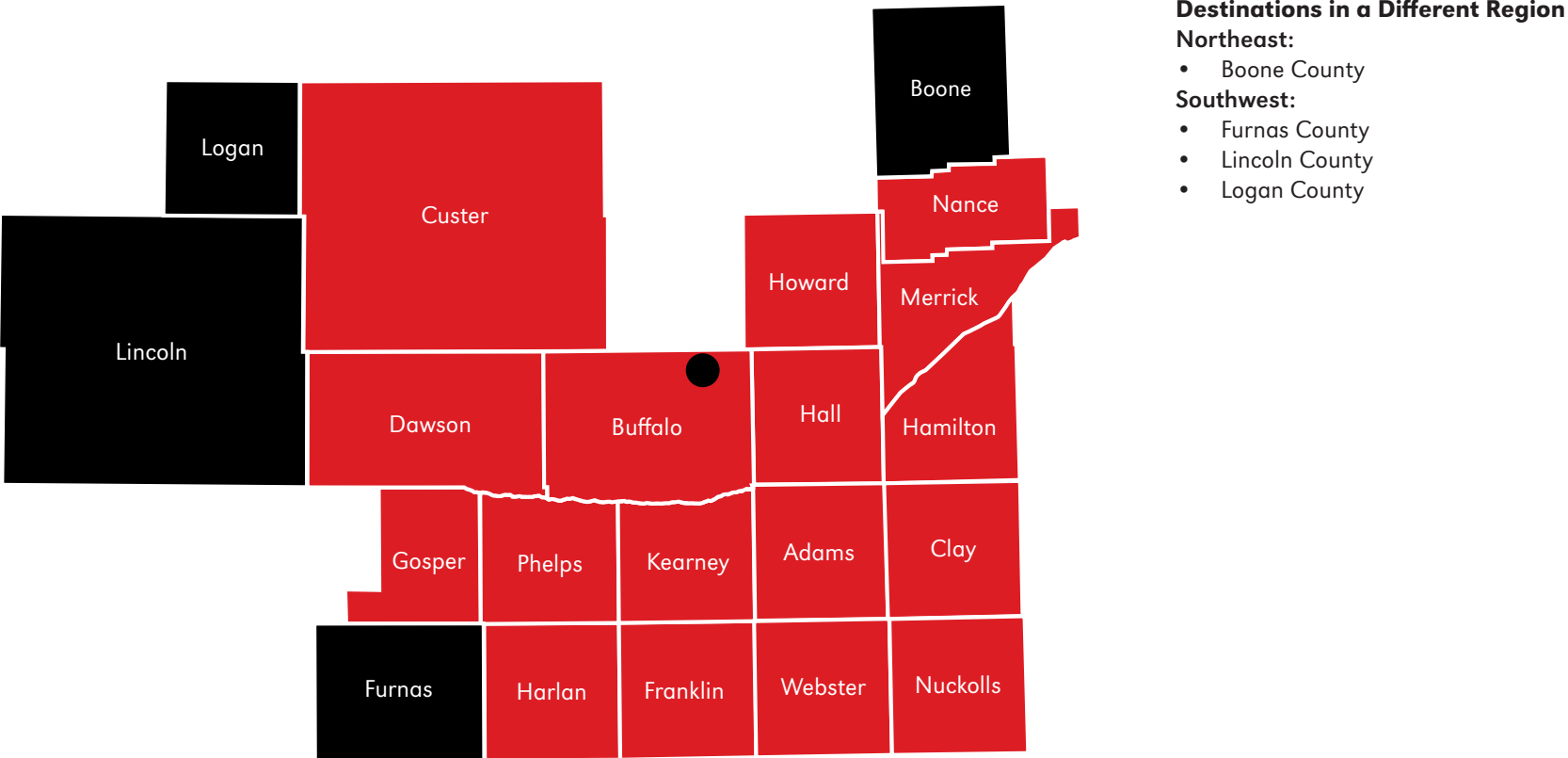
**RYDE Transit reported a consistent level of service from FY 2022 to FY 2024, with boardings, mileage, and average trip length remaining largely flat over the three-year period.** The average trip length suggests that most trips are short, in-town trips rather than longer inter-city rides.

# REGIONAL OVERVIEW

This section summarizes the overall services these providers offer, including miles traveled, passenger boardings, and vehicle usage. Additionally, it analyzes service changes across all seven providers and offers insights into regional trends.

The seven transit providers in the region serve all of the 17 counties, as well as one county in the Northeast Mobility Management region (Boone) and three counties in the Southwest Mobility Management region (Furnas, Lincoln, and Logan) as shown in Figure 20.

Figure 20. Service area of South Central region transit providers



Source: (1) Nebraska Public Transit website, retrieved 2024

Each fiscal year, Nebraska’s rural transit providers report the total number of passenger miles traveled. This metric is critical for evaluating rural transit services, as the area served by each provider may be very large. Table 9 summarizes the mileage and estimated coverage area for each provider in FY 2024, based on sample ride data.

Table 9. Summary of total miles traveled and observed coverage area

Provider	Service Category	Total Miles (FY 2024)	Percent Total Miles	Observed Coverage Area (Square Mile)
Callaway District Hospital Public Transit Service	Regional	38,113	4.6%	10,305.4
CRANE Public Transit <sup>++</sup>	County-wide	12,235	1.5%	552.1
Harlan County Transportation System <sup>++</sup>	County-wide	17,094	2.1%	574.1
Midland Public Transit	Regional	164,902	20.1%	12,304.4
Nance Trans, Inc.	Regional	59,605	7.3%	4,461.8
Phelps County Public Transit <sup>*</sup>	County-wide	30,125	3.7%	540.4
RYDE Transit <sup>*</sup>	Regional	497,709	60.7%	7,954.6
Totals		819,783		

<sup>\*</sup>Note: Provider did not provide any sample ride data for this analysis. Coverage area based on reported coverage area.

<sup>+</sup>Note: Provider no longer providing rural transit.

Source: (9) Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal, (10-12) provider reported ride data

In FY 2024, RYDE Transit and Midland Public Transit recorded the highest annual mileage among the seven providers in the region, accounting for 60.7% and 20.1% of all reported miles in the region, respectively (80.8% collectively). Together, these two providers alone cover the majority of the South Central region.

CRANE Public Transit and Harlan County Transportation System reported the fewest total miles traveled in FY 2024. Both providers stopped providing rural transit during FY 2024, however, and reported mileage for only a part of the year. Of the providers reporting a full year, Phelps County Public Transit reported the lowest mileage at 30,125. Along with their average trip length, this suggests that Phelps County Public Transit may be operating more in line with a city-specific provider, focusing mainly on the City of Holdrege.

In summary, the data reveals two key findings regarding annual mileage and coverage area:

- RYDE Transit and Midland Public Transit provide service to most of the region.
- Phelps County Public Transit appears to focus mostly on in-town service in the City of Holdrege.



Nebraska’s transit providers also report annual boarding figures. Table 10 summarizes the number of boardings reported in FY 2024, the percentage of the region’s total boardings, the miles traveled per boarding (calculated using the total miles reported earlier), and the boardings per square mile of observed coverage area.

Table 10. Summary of passenger boardings and trip length

Provider	Service Category	Number of Boardings (FY 2024)	Percent Total Boardings	Miles Per Boarding	Boardings Per Covered Square Mile
Callaway District Hospital Public Transit Service	Regional	1,669	1.4%	22.8	0.2
CRANE Public Transit**	County-wide	1,166	1.0%	10.5	2.1
Harlan County Transportation System**	County-wide	2,192	1.9%	7.8	3.8
Midland Public Transit	Regional	12,052	10.4%	13.7	1.0
Nance Trans, Inc.	Regional	2,392	2.1%	24.9	0.5
Phelps County Public Transit*	County-wide	10,619	9.2%	2.8	19.6
RYDE Transit*	Regional	85,918	74.1%	5.8	10.8
Totals		116,008		7.1	

\*Note: Provider did not provide any sample ride data for this analysis. Coverage area based on reported coverage area.

+Note: Provider no longer providing rural transit.

Source: (9) Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal, (10-12) provider reported ride data

RYDE Transit accounted for nearly three-quarters of the reported boardings in the region in FY 2024. Midland Public Transit reported another 10% of the boardings in FY 2024, with only 15% spread across the remaining five providers.

Despite their large service area, RYDE Transit generally provided shorter trips than other providers, with an average of only 5.8 miles per boarding. Nance Trans, Inc., and Callaway District Hospital Public Transit Service provided the longest average trips at 24.9 and 22.8 miles per boarding, respectively.

These data reveal two findings:

- Larger coverage areas do not imply longer average trips in the South Central region.
- RYDE Transit provided many short rides (74.1% of total rides) despite their large service area.

In addition to tracking miles traveled and boardings, NDOT monitors the vehicles each transit provider uses in their services. Table 11 lists the number of vehicles in service for each provider in FY 2024.

Table 11. Summary of provider vehicles and vehicle usage

Provider	Service Category	Number of Vehicles (FY 2024)	Percent Total Vehicles	Boardings Per Vehicle	Miles Per Vehicle	Covered Square Mile Per Vehicle
Callaway District Hospital Public Transit Service	Regional	3	2.9%	556.3	12,704.3	3,435.1
CRANE Public Transit**	County-wide	15	14.7%	77.7	815.7	36.8
Harlan County Transportation System**	County-wide	1	1.0%	2,192.0	17,094.0	574.1
Midland Public Transit	Regional	15	14.7%	803.5	10,993.5	820.3
Nance Trans, Inc.	Regional	3	2.9%	797.3	19,868.3	1,487.3
Phelps County Public Transit*	County-wide	2	2.0%	5,309.5	15,062.5	270.2
RYDE Transit*	Regional	63	61.8%	1,363.8	7,900.1	126.3
Totals		102		1,137.3	8,037.1	

\*Note: Provider did not provide any sample ride data for this analysis. Coverage area based on reported coverage area.

+Note: Provider no longer providing rural transit.

Source: (9) Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal, (10-12) provider reported ride data

In FY 2024, the seven providers operated a combined total of 102 vehicles, 63 of which were operated by RYDE Transit. RYDE Transit also reported the highest number of boardings and annual mileage. However, they also reported the second lowest mileage per vehicle and near average boardings per vehicle, suggesting that their overall vehicle utilization is not as high as other providers in the region.

Phelps County Public Transit reported the highest mileage per vehicle as well as high boardings per vehicle, suggesting they may need to increase their fleet size to reduce the load on their current pair of vehicles. CRANE Public Transit — which is no longer providing rural transit service — reported the lowest vehicle utilization. This may not provide a good picture of their actual utilization, as those vehicles were also used for transit within the urbanized area of the City of Grand Island.

In summary:

- Providers in the region reported similar levels of vehicle usage.
- Size of coverage area is not related to the annual mileage per vehicle.

Table 12 summarizes ridership changes across the region from FY 2022 to FY 2024. Boardings were down slightly, by 1.9%, across the region. Miles traveled increased by 6.9%. Sharp decreases in reported service by CRANE Public Transit and Harlan County Transportation System, both of which stopped providing service during FY 2024. As those services stopped providing transit partly through the year, the reported decreases in service may not reflect demand in the region.

Table 12. Summary of changes in service from FY 2022 to FY 2024

Provider	Vehicles	Boardings	Miles Traveled	Boardings Per Vehicle	Miles Per Vehicle	Miles Per Boarding
Callaway District Hospital Public Transit Service	200.0%	9.8%	203.0%	-63.4%	1.0%	175.9%
CRANE Public Transit*+	15.4%	-78.7%	-64.4%	-81.5%	-69.2%	66.7%
Harlan County Transportation System*+	-50.0%	-19.6%	-25.5%	60.9%	49.1%	-7.3%
Midland Public Transit	15.4%	8.1%	13.5%	-6.4%	-1.6%	5.1%
Nance Trans, Inc.	0.0%	38.4%	30.9%	38.4%	30.9%	-5.4%
Phelps County Public Transit*	0.0%	-9.9%	17.1%	-9.9%	17.1%	30.0%
RYDE Transit*	1.6%	2.4%	3.6%	0.8%	2.0%	1.2%
Overall	6.3%	-1.9%	6.9%	-7.7%	0.6%	9.0%

\*Note: Provider did not provide any sample ride data for this analysis. Coverage area based on reported coverage area.  
+Note: Provider no longer providing rural transit.  
Source: (9) Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal

Vehicle utilization also decreased slightly across the region overall, with boardings per vehicle decreasing and miles per vehicle remaining largely steady. The largest increases in vehicle utilization were reported by Harlan County Senior Center and Nance Trans. Those two providers operated one and three vehicles, respectively, and may need more vehicles to limit the load on their current fleet.

- Key Findings:
- Demand for rural transit appears to be remaining steady across the region.
  - Smaller providers may need to increase their fleets to respond to demand changes and increases in vehicle utilization.

# TRIP DESTINATIONS



To better understand the state of rural transit across the region, we examined the most frequent drop-off destinations for all the regional providers who shared a sample of their rides. We first geocoded each reported drop-off using the U.S. Census Geocoder to determine a latitude and longitude for each destination and counted the number of drop-offs that occurred at or very near that location. We then determined the “point of interest” nearest each location to report a name for each destination, excluding locations that we determined to be single-family homes.

Three of the seven providers in the South Central region provided us with sample ride data, for a total of 3,904 individual rides taken between March 2024 and August 2024. One other provider presented a list of top destinations, but no individual rides. Together, the four providers listed a total of 142 unique destinations. The number of rides and unique destinations reported by each provider are summarized in Table 13, including the number of boardings reported for FY 2024.

Table 13. Number of rides, unique destinations, and boardings reported by each provider, March 2024 to August 2024

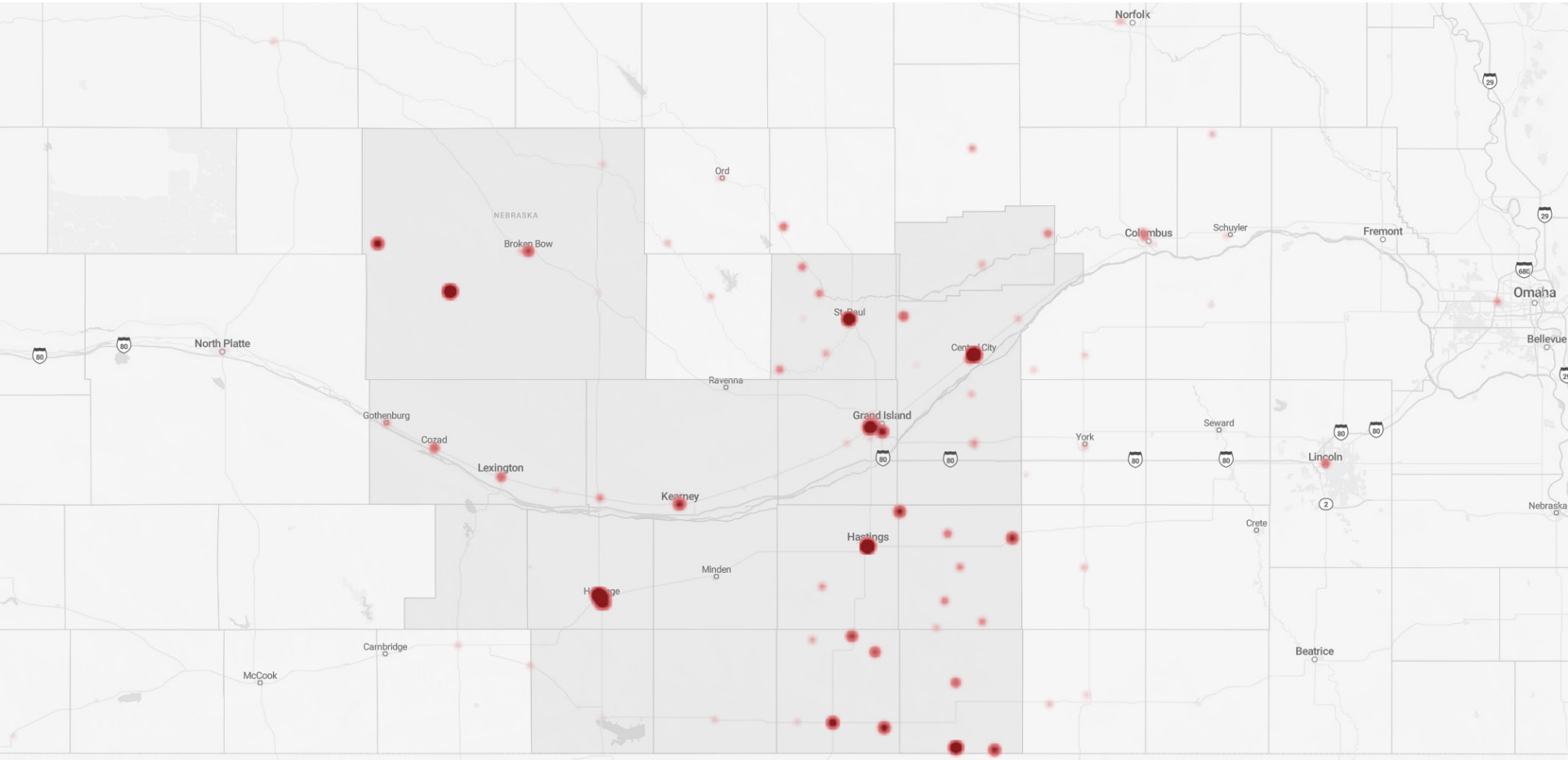
Provider	Number of Rides in Sample	Percent Total Rides	Number of Unique Destinations	Percent Total Unique Destinations	Number of Boardings (FY 2024)	Percent Total Boardings
Callaway District Hospital Public Transit Service	615	15.8%	28	19.7%	1,669	1.4%
CRANE Public Transit	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1,166	1.0%
Harlan County Transportation System	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2,192	1.9%
Midland Public Transit	3,061	78.4%	45	31.7%	12,052	10.4%
Nance Trans, Inc.	228	5.8%	61	43.0%	2,392	2.1%
Phelps County Public Transit	N/A	N/A	13	9.2%	10,619	9.2%
RYDE Transit	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	85,918	74.1%
Totals	3,904		142		116,008	

Source: (9) Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal, (10-12) provider reported ride data



Two of the three providers, Midland Public Transit and Nance Trans, Inc., only provided city-level data in response to our request for rides. All rides ending in a specific city or town are thus reported as the same location. Exact location data provided by Callaway District Hospital Public Transit Service and Phelps County Public Transit are reported as provided. The top 10 most frequent drop-off destinations are listed in Table 14.

**Figure 21. Drop-off locations within and around the South Central region (shaded light gray) for reported rides by four out of seven South Central region transit providers**



Source: (10-13) provider reported ride data, various dates

**Table 14. Top 10 drop-off locations for four out of seven South Central region transit providers, March 2024 to August 2024**

Drop-off Location	City/Town	Number of Combined Drop-offs
Hastings	Hastings	852
Central City	Central City	808
St. Paul	St. Paul	328
Grand Island	Grand Island	293
Callaway Medical Center	Callaway	263
Superior	Superior	248
Grand Generation Manor	Callaway	89
Red Cloud	Red Cloud	83
Arnold	Arnold	75
Family Fare	Holdrege	70

Source: (10-13) provider reported ride data, various dates

- In summary, we offer two main observations from our analysis of the drop-off data:
- Drop-offs in the South Central region are spread across many cities and towns.
  - Many of the reported drop-offs (more than 30%) were reported along U.S. Highway 281 between St. Paul and Hastings. A regular fixed or flex route service along that route may be more efficient for some riders.

# SHARED DESTINATIONS

To explore the intersections among the agencies, we identified destinations served by multiple transit providers. Among the 142 unique destinations, one was shared by three of the providers and another five were held in common by two distinct providers. As the data from Midland Public Transit and Nance Trans, Inc., only included city-level destinations, we consider only cities and towns for this analysis rather than exact locations.

The top five shared destinations are listed in Table 15. Callaway District Hospital Public Transit Service, Midland Public Transit, and Phelps County Public Transit all reported trips to or within the City of Holdrege. Callaway District Hospital Public Transit Service and Midland Public Transit also shared stops in Hastings, Grand Island, Kearney, and Lexington. Nance Trans, Inc., and Midland Public Transit also reported drop-offs in the City of Genoa.

**Table 15. Top five shared drop-off locations for four out of seven South Central region transit providers by number of drop-offs, March 2024 to August 2024**

Drop-off Location	City/Town	Number of Combined Drop-offs	Number of Providers
Holdrege	Holdrege	3	915
Hastings	Hastings	2	852
Grand Island	Grand Island	2	293
Kearney	Kearney	2	53
Lexington	Lexington	2	14

Source: (10-13) provider reported ride data, various dates

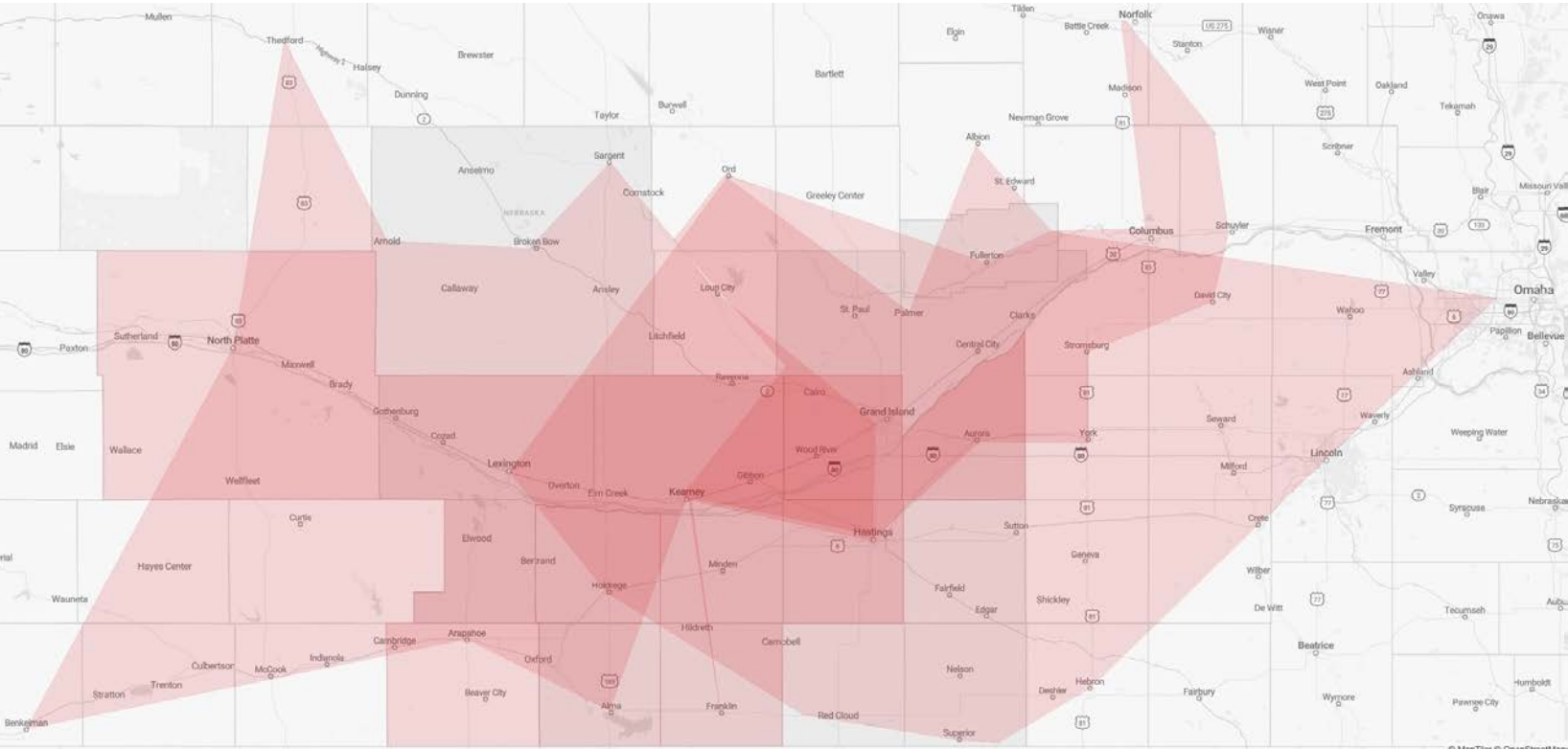
# AVAILABILITY OF TRANSIT



Along with frequent destinations, we also analyzed the areas in which riders were picked up by each transit provider as reported by the samples of ride data obtained from the providers. We analyzed the pickup data by first determining the observed area served by each provider and computing the estimated total and transit dependent populations that fall within each area. We then used that information to identify gaps and overlaps in service areas and any populations that may be underserved.

Nearly all the South Central region’s rural population (an estimated 97.7%) live in an area with reported pickups by at least one provider, as shown in the map of the observed coverage areas shown in Figure 22. Note that this figure excludes the population of the City of Grand Island. With more than 50,000 residents, Grand Island is not classified as a rural area for the purposes of 49 U.S.C 5311.

**Figure 22. Overlaid pick-up areas within the South Central region for all reported rides by South Central region transit providers; darker areas indicate overlap among pick-up areas**



Source: (10-13) provider reported ride data, various dates

Our dataset shows only areas in the South Central region without reported coverage: the northwestern extremes of Custer County, including the Villages of Anselmo, Comstock, and Merna. These areas are located close to Callaway District Hospital, however, and would likely be served by Callaway District Hospital Public Transit Service upon request. Most of the population (84.1%) has access to more than one provider.

The tri-city area between Grand Island, Kearney, and Hastings has the most coverage overall. Five of the seven providers in the region — Callaway District Hospital Public Transit Service, Hall County Rural Transportation, Midland Public Transit, Nance Trans, Inc., and RYDE Transit — all either claim coverage or reported pickups in that area. The urbanized area of Grand Island is also served by CRANE Public Transit, although CRANE Public Transit no longer provides rural transit service.

Among the transit dependent population, more than 97% of the transit dependent rural populations in the South Central region have access to at least one rural transit provider. More than 80% of those populations have access to more than one provider, allowing for more options when booking transit.

**Table 16. Population of reported pick-up regions, by number of providers, 2022**

	Total Population^	Percent of Total Population	65 years or older	Percent 65 years or older	With a Disability	Percent With a Disability
South Central	189,183	100%	35,846	100%	25,486	100%
Covered by...						
4 Transit Providers	26,595	14.1%	4,528	12.6%	3,505	13.8%
3 Transit Providers	82,918	43.8%	14,223	39.7%	10,814	42.4%
2 Transit Providers	159,080	84.1%	28,821	80.4%	21,070	82.7%
1 Transit Providers	184,748	97.7%	34,808	97.1%	24,899	97.7%
0 Transit Providers	4,435	2.3%	1,038	2.9%	587	2.3%
Callaway District Hospital Public Transit Service	100,506	53.1%	17,763	49.6%	13,448	52.8%
Hall County Rural Transportation *+	9,901	5.2%	1,907	5.3%	1,307	5.1%
Harlan County Public Transportation *+	2,155	1.1%	750	2.1%	466	1.8%
Midland Public Transit	145,270	76.8%	26,712	74.5%	19,204	75.4%
Nance Trans, Inc.	60,800	32.1%	11,379	31.7%	8,361	32.8%
Phelps County Public Transit*	8,966	4.7%	1,859	5.2%	1,182	4.6%
RYDE Transit*	125,743	66.5%	22,011	61.4%	16,320	64.0%

\*Note: Provider did not provide any sample ride data for this analysis. Coverage area based on reported coverage area.

+Note: Provider started service in FY 2025.

^Excludes the City of Grand Island, total population 52,761.

Source: (8) U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 5-year Estimates 2022

Overall, we do not find there is a large gap in rural transit services available to the population of the region. Nearly all the South Central’s population, more than 97%, live in an area with reported pickups or claimed coverage by at least one provider, with nearly 44% living in an area served by three or more providers.

# KEY FINDINGS



Our analysis shows that the population of the South Central region is more dependent on public transit than the population of Nebraska as a whole. The transit dependent population of the South Central region as a percentage of its overall population is larger than that of Nebraska at large. This holds true for the population aged 65 years or older (18.0% for the South Central vs. 16.2% for Nebraska); the population living in poverty (11.6% vs 10.4%); and the population with a hearing, vision, cognitive, ambulatory, or independent living disability (13.4% vs 12.0%). The relative percentage of transit dependent population is growing in the South Central region, meaning the need for public transit will likely increase.

Fortunately, rural transit is widely available across the South Central region. Nearly all the South Central’s population (more than 97%) live in an area with reported pickups by at least one provider. The areas in which no pickups were reported (northern Custer County) are also very likely to have coverage by at least one provider, but may have been missed in our sample ride data simply because no rides were requested during the sample period.

Most riders have multiple options available for rural transit. Many residents of the South Central region (43.8%) live in a region with reported pickups by three or more providers. This area includes the tri-city area of Grand Island, Hastings, and Kearney. This overlap indicates that while riders have options, some providers may be traveling the same routes. Thus, there may be opportunities to improve the efficiency of rural transit, particularly along U.S. Highway 281.

# RECOMMENDATIONS



Based on our analysis, we offer the following recommendations:

- 1. Expand coverage in northern Custer County**  
Based on our sample rides, no rides were reported in the northern part of Custer County, including the communities of Anselmo and Merna. Service should be extended to cover those regions.
- 2. Increase coordination in the tri-city area between Grand Island, Hastings, and Kearney**  
Based on our sample data, five of the seven South Central transit providers overlap to serve the area between Grand Island, Hastings, and Kearney. There may be an opportunity for more coordination to consolidate or reduce duplicate trips that are traveling the same highway during the same time frame.
- 3. Explore Fixed Routes Along Highway 281**  
Many of the drop-offs reported by providers in the region fell along U.S. Highway 281 between Saint Paul, Grand Island, and Hastings. Limited fixed or flex routes along this route may increase the efficiency of transit services in the region.
- 4. Prioritize Access to Essential Destinations**  
Medical facilities, public or affordable housing, and grocery or discount stores are the most common destinations for transit riders. Maintaining reliable service to these critical locations is essential, especially for low-income, elderly, and transit-dependent populations. Moreover, given that the Southwest region has a growing proportion of elderly residents and individuals with disabilities than the state average, transit agencies may need to develop programs specifically tailored to these populations and destinations.
- 5. Improve Data Collection and Performance Metrics**  
Standardizing how transit providers collect and report ride data would provide clearer insights into service usage and unmet demand. Incorporating performance metrics such as on-time performance, rider satisfaction, and trip frequency would help providers refine operations and identify gaps more effectively.



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