

AS OF JUNE 2025

NEBRASKA
RURAL TRANSIT

GAP ANALYSIS

Southwest Region



UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA
CENTER FOR PUBLIC
AFFAIRS RESEARCH

NEBRASKA

Good Life. Great Journey.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION



UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA
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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 Southwest region at the request of the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT). This region encompasses 16 counties in southwestern Nebraska and is served by 10 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 22% of residents are aged 65 or older, 15% live with disabilities, and 9% live below the poverty line, indicating a growing need for accessible and reliable transit services. Unfortunately, only 77.3% of the region's population lives in areas served by at least one provider.

This gap in service is most notable across the six counties in the northern part of the region — Arthur, Grant, Hooker, Logan, McPherson, and Thomas. No providers currently operate in these areas, leaving around 17,000 residents without rural public transportation.

To address these issues, the report offers several actionable recommendations. Extending service to the northern part of the region would close the largest current gap. This will likely mean finding additional regional providers. Currently only two providers, Hitch & Hay Public Transit and Tri Valley Public Transportation, provide regional service in the Southwest region. Both of those providers operate in the southern part of the region, however, leaving a gap in the northern counties of the area. We also recommend exploring fixed or flex-routes along Highway 6 and Highway 34 west of McCook to improve the efficiency of service in the Southwest region and service increasing regional demand.

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:

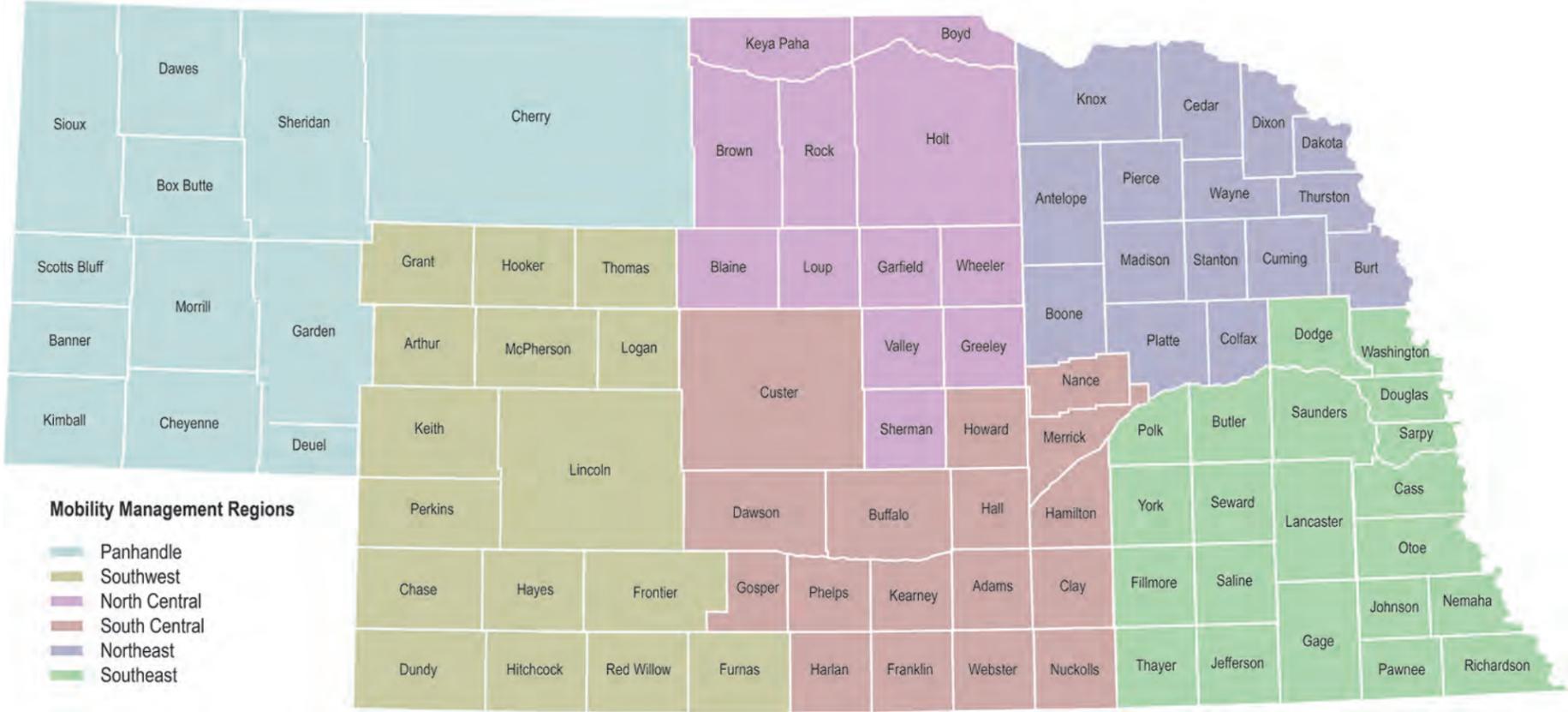
- An overview of Section 5311 rural transit providers in the region, including their reported coverage area.
- A summary of the most common drop-off destinations served by these providers.
- An assessment of gaps and overlaps across providers in each region.
- Evidence-based recommendations to support 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.

SOUTHWEST REGION OVERVIEW



This document focuses on rural transit agencies in the Southwest Mobility Management region, comprised of the 16 counties in southwestern Nebraska, including counties bordering Colorado and Kansas.

Figure 2. Southwest Mobility Management region

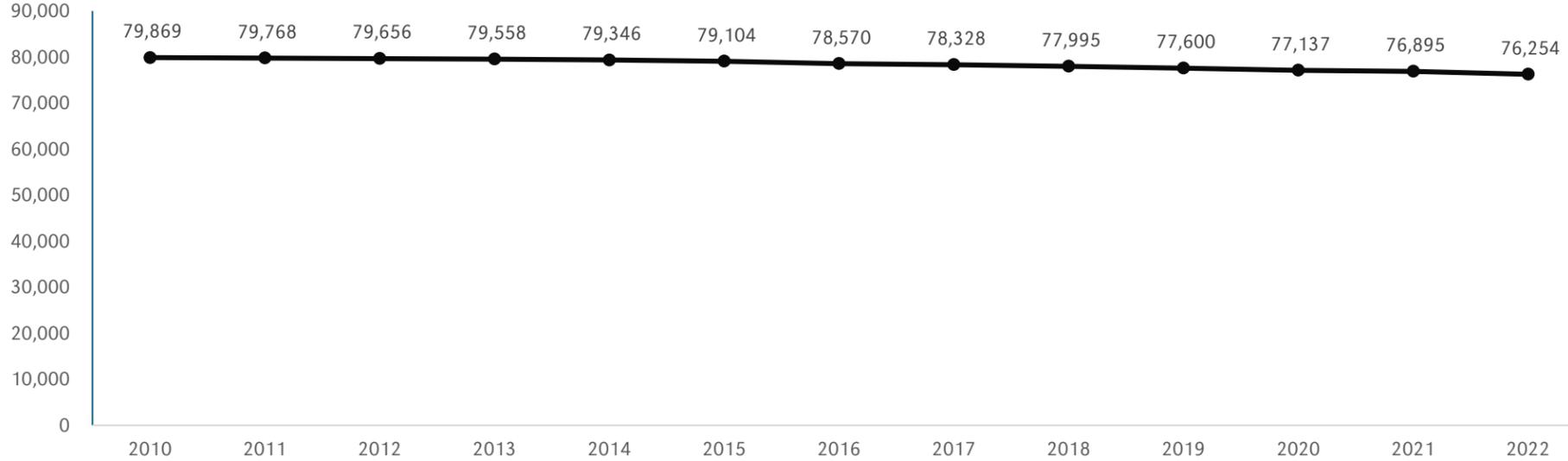


Source: (1) Nebraska Public Transit website, retrieved 2024

POPULATION TRENDS

The population of the Southwest region has steadily declined since 2010. In 2010, the region’s population was 79,869. By 2022, it had decreased to 76,254.

Figure 3. Total population in the Southwest 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.

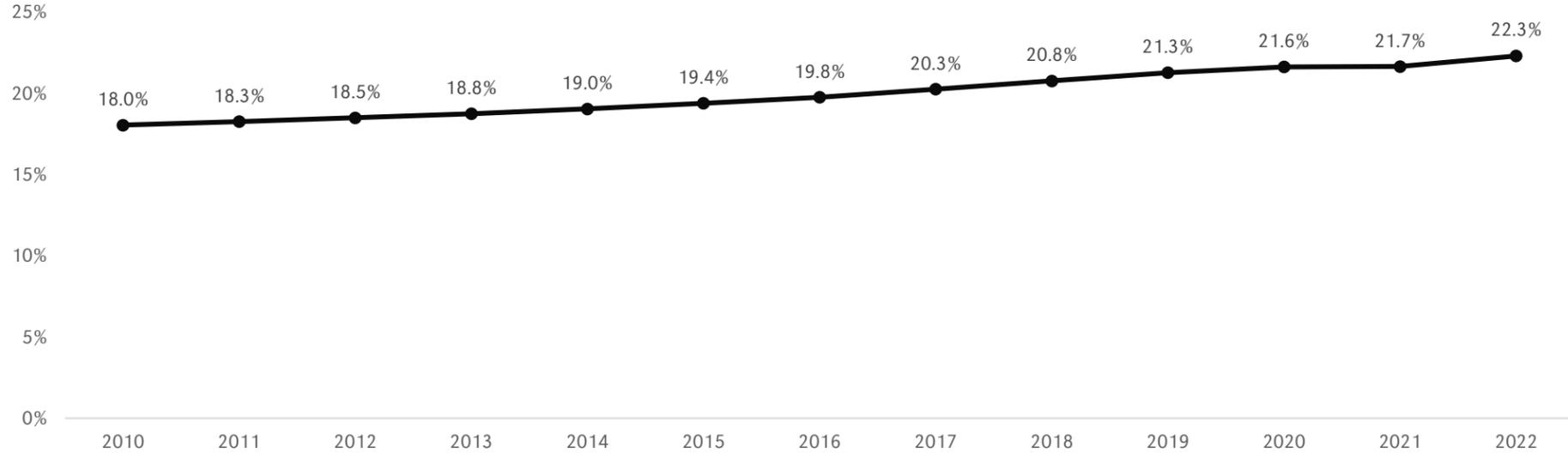
Table 1. Transit-dependent population in the Southwest Region, 2022

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%
Southwest	76,254	22.3%	9.0%	15.5%	32,077	4.7%
Arthur	485	23.5%	7.0%	16.5%	178	3.4%
Chase	3,704	24.9%	8.2%	12.9%	1,478	2.5%
Dundy	1,825	20.5%	12.5%	15.1%	788	2.9%
Frontier	2,491	25.2%	12.4%	19.7%	1,033	2.9%
Furnas	4,630	25.4%	11.2%	18.9%	2,003	4.5%
Grant	649	21.4%	10.8%	10.8%	281	3.6%
Hayes	919	23.8%	14.7%	14.5%	374	3.2%
Hitchcock	2,620	25.4%	12.4%	20.7%	1,109	4.0%
Hooker	659	19.0%	8.1%	12.8%	292	5.8%
Keith	8,303	27.2%	11.9%	14.8%	3,781	5.3%
Lincoln	34,532	20.2%	11.0%	15.3%	14,485	4.3%
Logan	839	18.1%	9.2%	11.2%	307	0.0%
McPherson	456	29.4%	7.7%	8.1%	193	1.0%
Perkins	2,860	23.8%	8.7%	12.2%	1,154	3.8%
Red Willow	10,690	21.0%	12.2%	16.3%	4,315	8.2%
Thomas	592	34.5%	6.6%	13.3%	306	2.6%

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

As shown in Table 1, the Southwest region has a higher percentage of some transit-dependent populations compared to Nebraska overall. The share of residents aged 65 or older — 22.3% in 2022 — is higher than the statewide average and has increased steadily since 2010 (up from 18.0%).

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

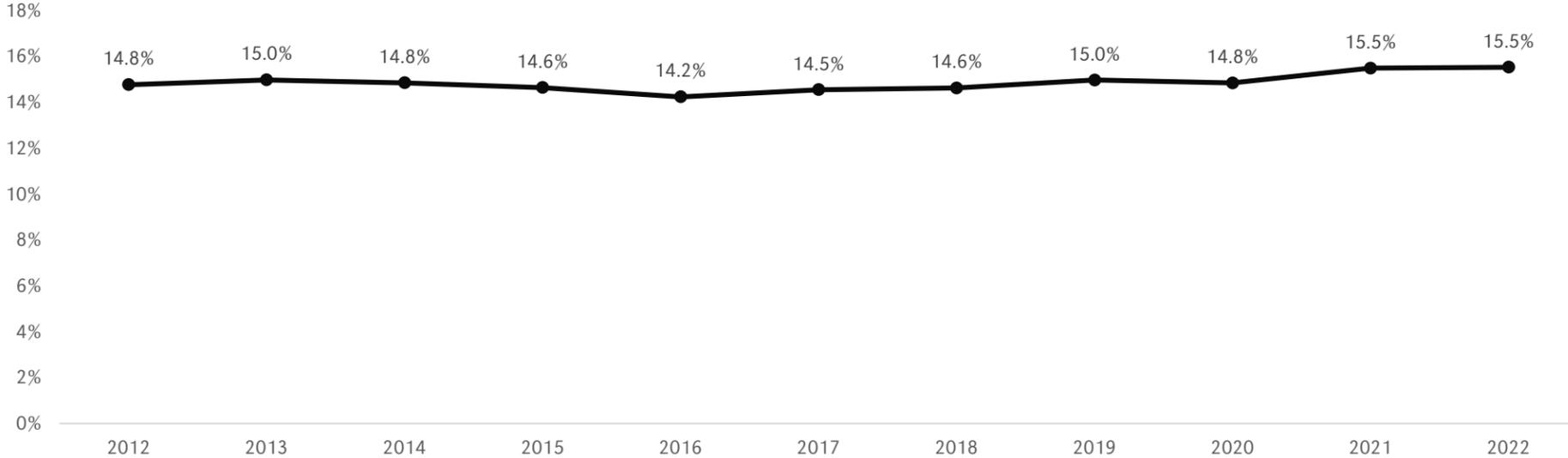


Source: (8) U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 5-year Estimates 2010-2022

The poverty rate in the Southwest region overall (9.0%) is slightly lower than the Nebraska average (10.4%), but many individual counties report a higher poverty rate.

Between 2012 and 2022, the proportion of residents with difficulties ranged between 14% and 16%, consistently higher than the statewide average. In 2022, this group represented 15.5% of the region’s population compared to 12.0% statewide. Meanwhile, 4.7% of occupied housing units in the region lacked access to a private vehicle in 2022, slightly lower than the statewide average of 5.1%.

Figure 5. Percent of population with difficulties in the Southwest 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 Southwest is more dependent on public transit than the population of Nebraska as a whole.** These trends suggest that the Southwest region has a greater and growing reliance on public transit than the rest of Nebraska, particularly due to its aging population.

SOUTHWEST TRANSIT PROVIDERS

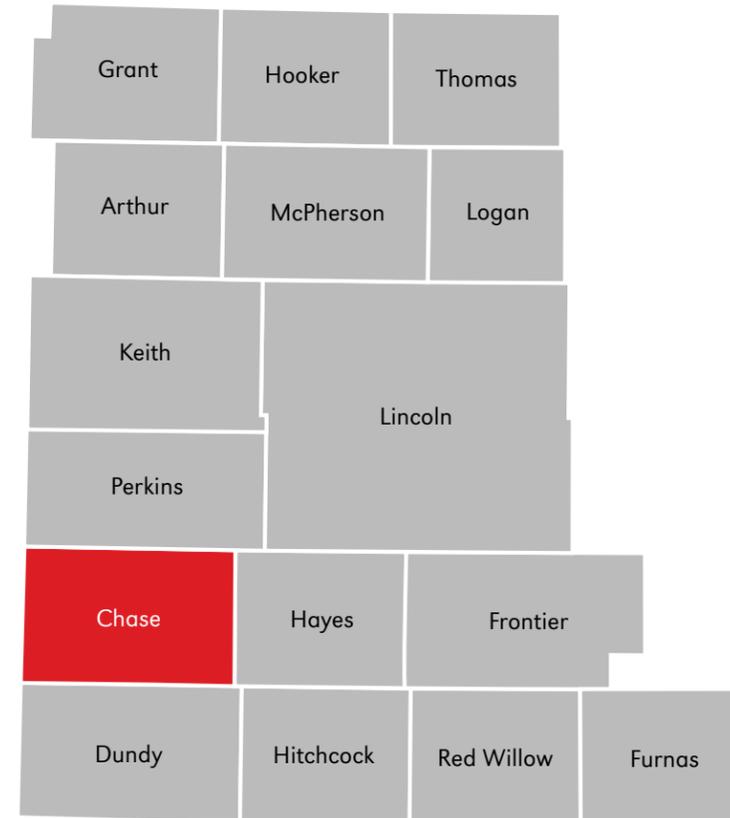
To respond to the growing transit needs of the region, the Southwest region, at the time of data collection, was served by 10 rural transit providers. This section provides an overview of the service provided by each of those providers.



CHASE COUNTY TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Chase County Transportation System offers a demand response transportation service within and around the cities of Imperial and Wauneta.

Figure 6. Map of Southwest region with Chase County Transportation System service area county shaded in red



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

Rides are provided
Monday through Friday
from 8 A.M. to 4 P.M.

Source: (13) Chase County Transportation System Facebook page, retrieved 2025

According to the Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal, the agency operated five vehicles in FY 2024 and provided around 9,600 rides. The number of boardings has decreased from more than 15,000 in FY 2022. Total miles traveled also decreased since FY 2022, showing an overall decrease in service over the three-year period. Chase County reduced the size of their fleet by one vehicle, likely in response to the large decrease in ridership in FY 2023.

Average miles per boarding has increased over the three-year period, suggesting that Chase County Transportation System has been receiving more requests for long-distance, intercity trips than short local travel.

Table 2. Ridership statistics for Chase County Transportation System, FY 2022 to FY 2024

	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	Percent Change FY 2022 to FY 2024
Vehicles	6	5	5	-16.7%
Boardings	15,107	8,440	9,603	-36.4%
Mileage	64,148	73,726	60,561	-5.6%
Boardings Per Vehicle	2,517.8	1,688.0	1,920.6	-23.7%
Miles Per Vehicle	10,691.3	14,745.2	12,112.2	13.3%
Miles Per Boarding	4.2	8.7	6.3	48.5%

Source: (9) Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal

Chase County Transportation System provided a sample of bus driver logs recording trips taken in August 2024. Some of the logs did not include pickup locations, only destinations. 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 Imperial, with a few trips recorded to North Platte, Sidney, and Kearney. Top destinations included the post office in Imperial, Chase County Community Hospital, Hill’s Family Foods, the senior center, and assisted living facilities. These destinations reflect a strong local focus on essential services, especially health and elder care.

Figure 7. Drop-off locations for Chase County Transportation System, August 2024

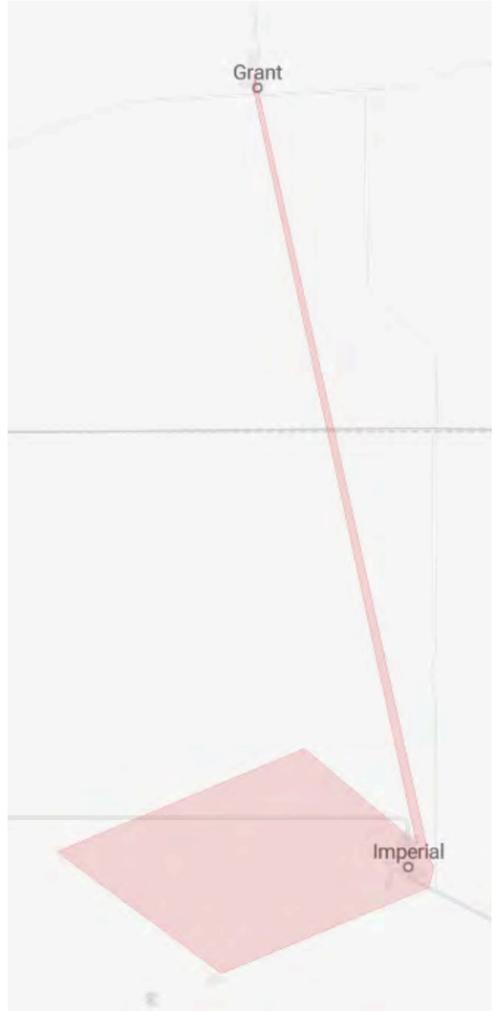


Top Five Drop-off Locations	City/Town	Number of Drop-offs
U.S. Post Office	Imperial	32
Chase County Community Hospital	Imperial	31
Hill’s Family Foods	Imperial	20
Imperial Community Center	Imperial	18
Imperial Manor/Parkview Heights	Imperial	16

Source: (10) Chase County Transportation System reported ride data, August 2024

The observed coverage area spans approximately 42.3 square miles, primarily comprising the city of Imperial and surrounding areas. A handful of pickups were reported in Grant, Nebraska as well.

Figure 8. Observed pick-up area for Chase County Transportation System, August 2024



Source: (10) Chase County Transportation System reported ride data, April 2024 to June 2024

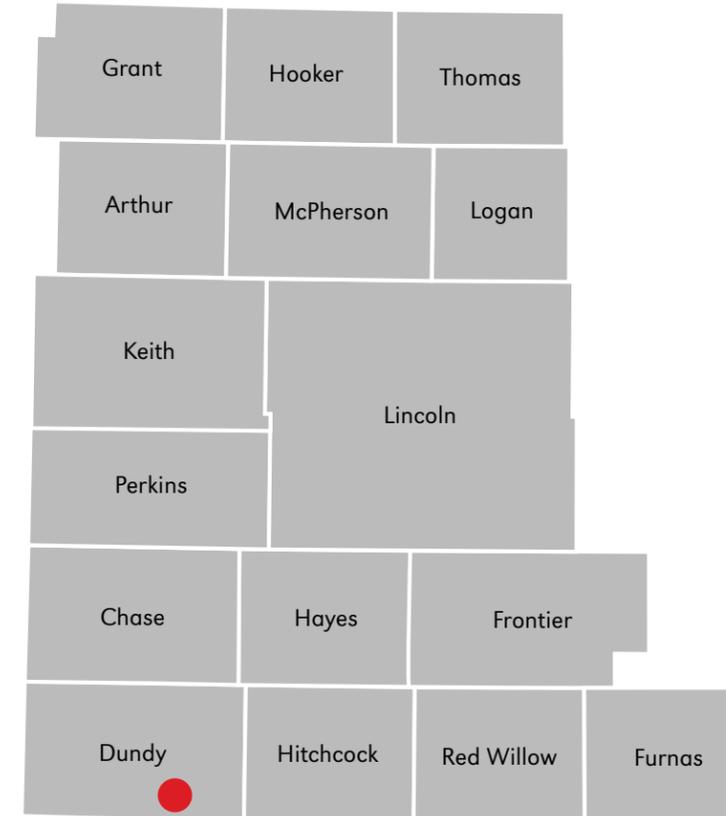


Chase County Transportation System has shown a decrease in annual boardings and mileage since FY 2022. In response, they have reduced the size of their fleet during the same period. **The average miles per boarding have increased, showing they may be providing fewer, longer-distance rides,** possibly prioritizing intercity trips over local demand response services.

CITY OF BENKELMAN HANDI BUS

The City of Benkelman Handi Bus provides a demand response transit service for residents of the City of Benkelman.

Figure 9. Map of Southwest region with the City of Benkelman Handi Bus service area shown as red dot



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



Rides are provided
Monday through Friday
8 A.M. to 3 P.M.

Source: (9) Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal, retrieved 2025

According to the Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal, the agency operated one vehicle in FY 2024 and provided around 1,500 rides. The service was not in operation in FY 2022. From FY 2023 to FY 2024, the number of boardings and miles traveled decreased slightly, by 10.1% and 5.1%, respectively.

The average trip length is comparatively short (around one mile), indicating that the service focuses mainly on short, in-town trips.

Table 3. Ridership statistics for City of Benkelman Handi Bus, FY 2022 to FY 2024

	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	Percent Change FY 2022 to FY 2024
Vehicles	N/A	1	1	0.0%
Boardings	N/A	1,756	1,578	-10.1%
Mileage	N/A	1,749	1,659	-5.1%
Boardings Per Vehicle	N/A	1,756.0	1,578.0	-10.1%
Miles Per Vehicle	N/A	1,749.0	1,659.0	-5.1%
Miles Per Boarding	N/A	1.0	1.1	5.6%

Source: (9) Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal

City of Benkelman Handi Bus does not currently use software or other measures to track rides and did not have any records to provide as a ride sample for use in our analysis.

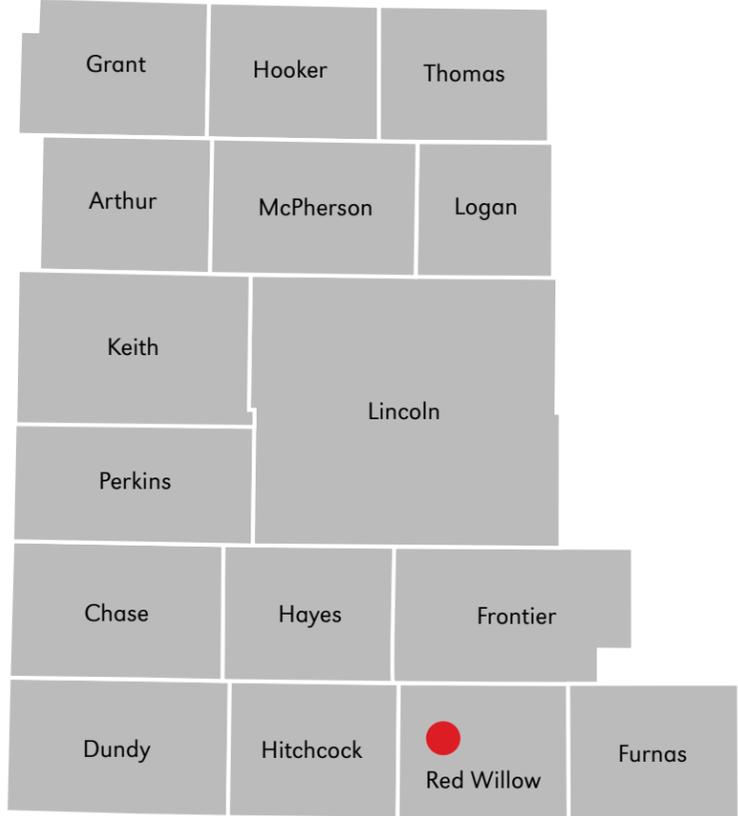


City of Benkelman Handi Bus has shown a slight decrease in annual boardings and mileage from FY 2023 to FY 2024. The short average trip length suggests most rides are local rather than longer, inter-city trips.

CITY OF MCCOOK TRANSIT

The City of McCook Transit operates a demand-response public transit service to residents of the City of McCook.

Figure 10. Map of Southwest region with the City of McCook Transit service area shown as red dot



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

Rides are provided Monday through Friday from 8:30 A.M. to 4:30 P.M.

Source: (14) City of McCook Transit website, retrieved 2025

According to the Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal, the City of McCook Transit operates one vehicle and provided 5,764 rides in FY 2024. Boardings increased by nearly 20% from FY 2022 to FY 2024. Total miles traveled also increased slightly, rising by 4.0%.

The average miles per boarding has remained steady, keeping close to three miles per boarding. This is in keeping with City of McCook Transit’s advertised service within the limits of the City of McCook.

Table 4. Ridership statistics for the City of McCook Transit, FY 2022 to FY 2024

	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	Percent Change FY 2022 to FY 2024
Vehicles	1	1	1	0.0%
Boardings	4,827	5,906	5,764	19.4%
Mileage	14,803	16,103	15,392	4.0%
Boardings Per Vehicle	4,827.0	5,906.0	5,764.0	19.4%
Miles Per Vehicle	14,803.0	16,103.0	15,392.0	4.0%
Miles Per Boarding	3.1	2.7	2.7	-12.9%

Source: (9) Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal

City of McCook Transit did not respond to requests to provide a ride sample for use in our analysis.

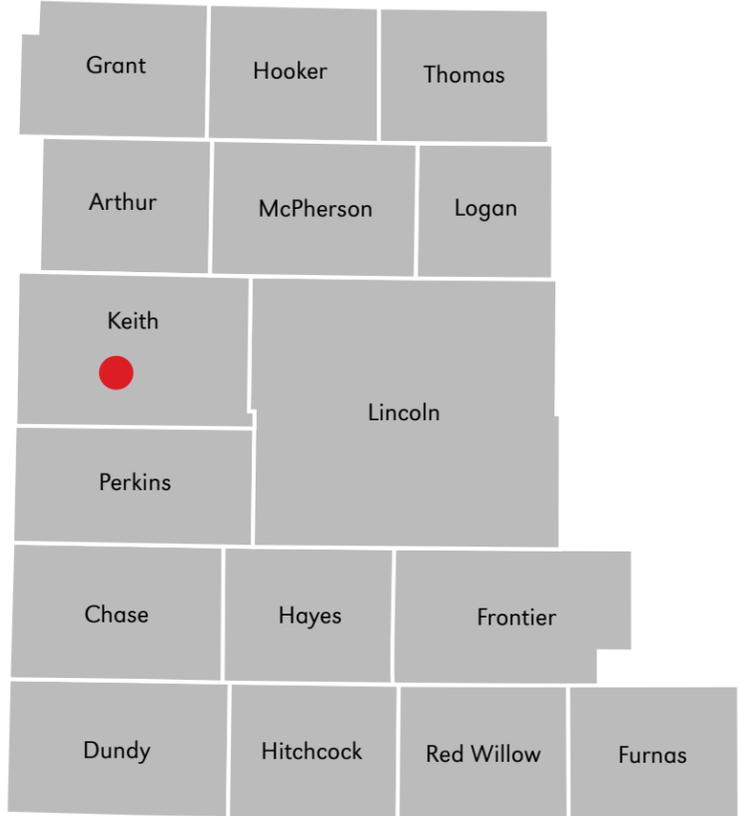


City of McCook Transit has shown a slight increase in annual boardings and mileage since FY 2022. Average trip length has remained around three miles per boarding, suggesting that most trips are in the City of McCook rather than intercity.

CITY OF OGALLALA PUBLIC TRANSIT

The City of Ogallala Public Transit provides a demand response service to residents within and around the city of Ogallala, with coverage up to one mile outside the city limits.

Figure 11. Map of Southwest region with the City of Ogallala Public Transit service area shown as red dot



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



Rides are provided Monday through Friday from 7 A.M. to 7 P.M. and Saturday from 8 A.M. to 4 P.M.

Source: (15) City of Ogallala Public Transit website, retrieved 2025

According to the Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal, the agency operated three vehicles in FY 2024 and provided more than 26,000 rides. Boardings increased by nearly 25% from FY 2022 to FY 2024. Total miles traveled also increased by 4.3% over the same period.

Average miles per boarding decreased slightly, with most trips remaining under 1.5 miles per boarding. This is consistent with the advertised service, which operates very near the city limits of Ogallala and excludes longer, intercity service.

Table 5. Ridership statistics for the City of Ogallala Public Transit, 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	21,320	23,959	26,507	24.3%
Mileage	32,878	32,938	34,299	4.3%
Boardings Per Vehicle	7,106.7	7,986.3	8,835.7	24.3%
Miles Per Vehicle	10,959.3	10,979.3	11,433.0	4.3%
Miles Per Boarding	1.5	1.4	1.3	-16.1%

Source: (9) Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal

City of Ogallala Public Transit did not respond to requests to provide a ride sample for use in our analysis.

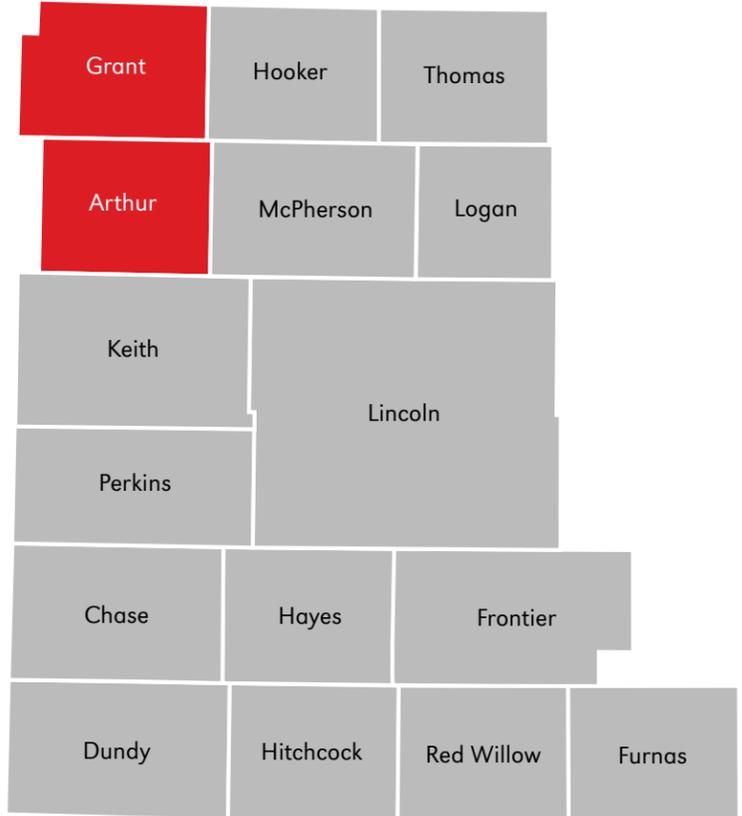


City of Ogallala Public Transit reported an increase in ridership from FY 2022 to FY 2024, but added no vehicles to their fleet. Average trips remained consistently short, preferencing local trips over longer, intercity rides.

GRANT ARTHUR HANDI BUS

The Grant Arthur Handi Bus was a demand-response service provided to residents in Arthur and Grant counties with service within those counties and to Ogallala, Alliance, North Platte, and Scottsbluff. The county suspended operations during FY 2024.

Figure 12. Map of Southwest region with Grant Arthur Handi Bus service area counties shaded in red



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



Grant Arthur Handi Bus is no longer in service as a rural public transit provider.

According to the Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal, the agency operated one vehicle from FY 2022 to FY 2024. The agency stopped providing services in FY 2024, with the last reported statistics in November 2023. Overall, the agency reported a decrease in ridership since FY 2022. Boardings decreased from 155 in FY 2022 to 100 in FY 2023. The 31 rides reported in FY 2024 only report part of the fiscal year prior to ending the service.

Average trip length was generally high compared to other providers in the region, indicating that Grant Arthur Handi Bus may have taken on many of the longer, intercity rides not covered by the city-specific providers.

Table 6. Ridership statistics for Grant Arthur Handi Bus, FY 2022 to FY 2024

	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	% Change
Vehicles	1	1	1	0.0%
Boardings	155	100	31	-80.0%
Mileage	7,460	5,745	2,454	-67.1%
Boardings Per Vehicle	155.0	100.0	31.0	-80.0%
Miles Per Vehicle	7,460.0	5,745.0	2,454.0	-67.1%
Miles Per Boarding	48.1	57.5	79.2	64.5%

Source: (9) Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal

Grant Arthur Handi Bus is no longer in service and did not provide a ride sample for use in our analysis.

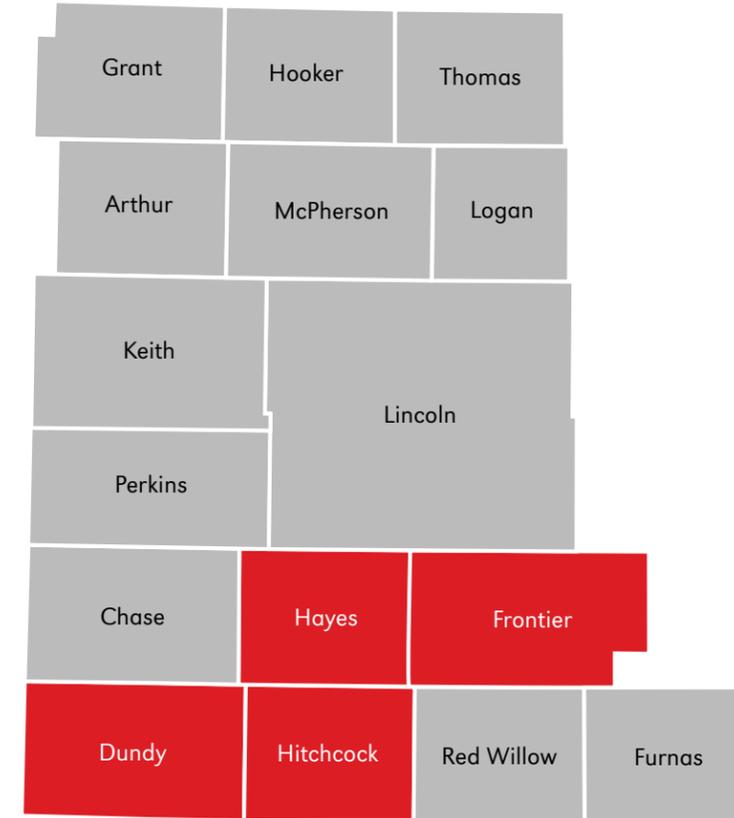


Grant Arthur Handi Bus stopped providing transit services in FY 2024. **Prior to ending service, ridership steadily declined from FY 2022 to FY 2023 and FY 2024.** Average trip length was notably longer than that of the region’s city-specific providers, suggesting Grant Arthur Handi Bus was a primary provider of longer, intercity rides within the region.

HITCH & HAY PUBLIC TRANSIT

At the time of data collection for this analysis, Hitch & Hay Public Transit provided regional, demand response service in Dundy, Frontier, Hayes, and Hitchcock counties. Throughout late 2024 and early 2025 they added Chase, Furnas, Lincoln, Perkins, and Red Willow counties in the Southwest region and Dawson County in the South Central region. According to their website, residents of Dundy, Frontier, Hayes, and Hitchcock counties pay reduced fares, but rides can be scheduled anywhere in Nebraska.

Figure 13. Map of Southwest region with Hitch & Hay Public Transit service area counties shaded in red



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



Source: (16) Hitch & Hay Public Transit website, retrieved 2025

According to the Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal, the agency operated six vehicles in FY 2024, up from five in FY 2022. Annual boardings more than doubled between FY 2022 and FY 2024, increasing from 4,164 to 9,188 (120.7%). Annual total miles traveled also increased dramatically, rising from 146,627 in FY 2022 to 340,225 in FY 2024. Because both boardings and mileage increased at nearly the same rate, the average trip length remained steady at around 36-37 miles per trip. These data suggest that Hitch & Hay Public Transit has seen an increase in overall demand over the last three fiscal years, with no change in the types of rides being requested.

Table 7. Ridership statistics for Hitch & Hay Public Transit, FY 2022 to FY 2024

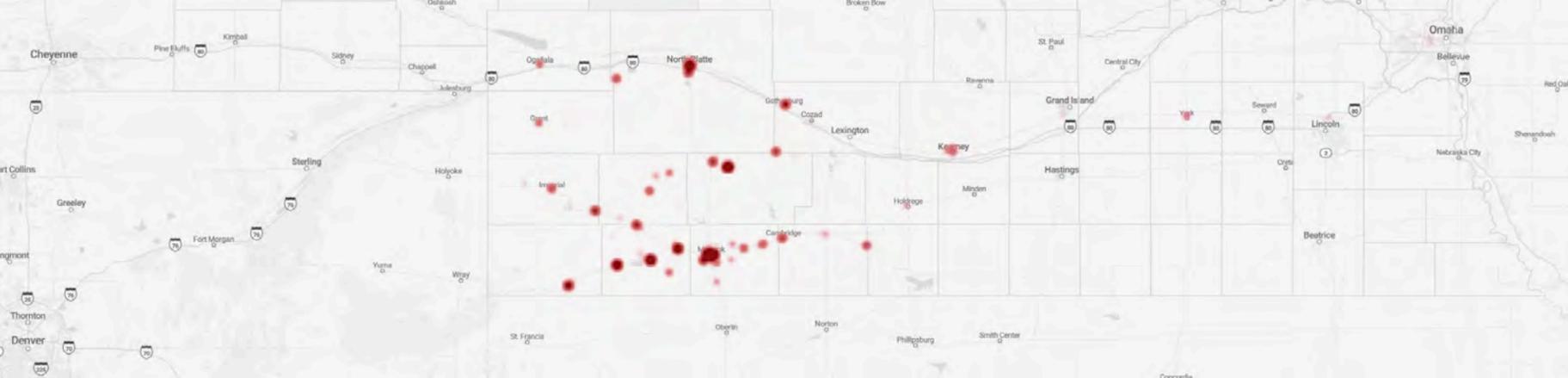
	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	Percent Change FY 2022 to FY 2024
Vehicles	5	6	6	20.0%
Boardings	4,164	6,001	9,188	120.7%
Mileage	146,627	225,746	340,225	132.0%
Boardings Per Vehicle	832.8	1,000.2	1,531.3	83.9%
Miles Per Vehicle	29,325.4	37,624.3	56,704.2	93.4%
Miles Per Boarding	35.2	37.6	37.0	5.2%

Source: (9) Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal

Hitch & Hay Public Transit provided a sample of trips taken from May 2024 through July 2024. The sample included 3,409 individual rides to 357 unique destinations. Figure 14 shows a heatmap of drop-offs, along with the five most common destinations.

Many of the trips (42.2%) ended in the City of McCook, which includes four of the top five most common destinations. The top destinations include McCook’s main downtown commercial intersection, medical and elder care facilities, and the Walmart Supercenter in McCook.

Figure 14. Drop-off locations for Hitch & Hay Public Transit, May 2024 to July 2024

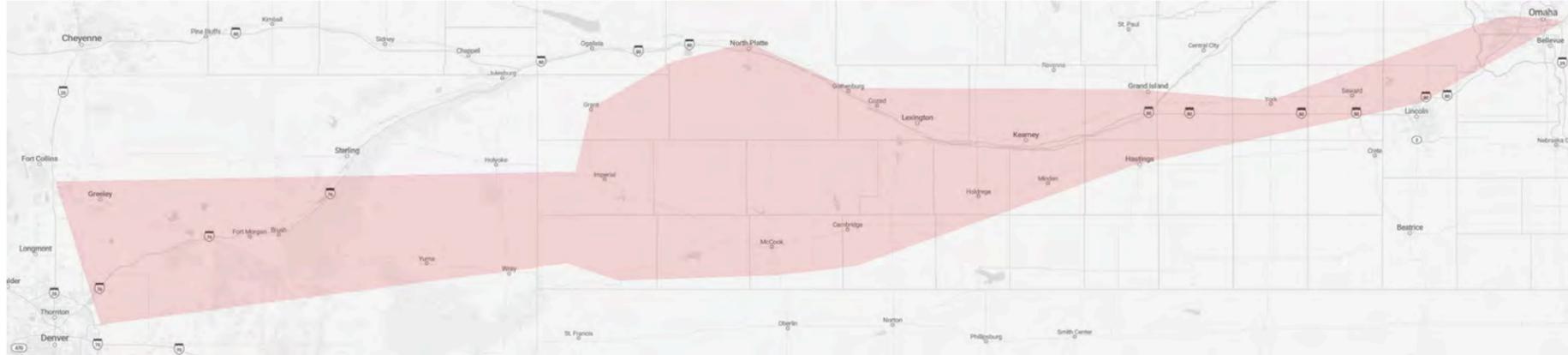


Top Five Drop-off Locations	City/Town	Number of Drop-offs
Downtown	McCook	176
Community Hospital	McCook	175
Walmart Supercenter	McCook	130
Senior Living Choices/Curtis City Housing	Curtis	120
DaVita Dialysis	McCook	118

Source: (11) Hitch & Hay Public Transit reported ride data, May 2024 to July 2024

The observed coverage area spans approximately 17,525.7 square miles and includes most of the southern part of the region. Some trips were also recorded to more distant destinations including a few trips to Omaha, and some trips to Colorado destinations including Denver and Fort Collins.

Figure 15. Observed pick-up area for Hitch & Hay Public Transit, May 2024 to July 2024



Source: (11) Hitch & Hay Public Transit reported ride data, May 2024 to July 2024

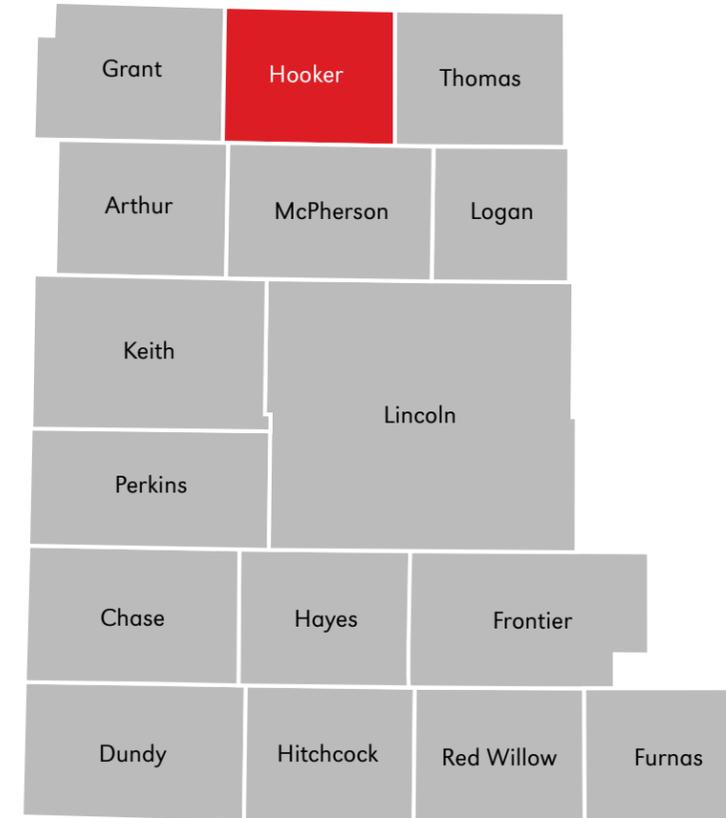


Hitch & Hay Public Transit has seen an increase in demand with annual boardings and mileage both doubling since FY 2022. Average trip length has remained steady, suggesting that most riders travel between neighboring cities within the region. **Overall, the agency appears to be keeping up with advertised service as one of two remaining regional providers in the Southwest region.**

HOOKER COUNTY HANDI BUS

Hooker County Handi Bus was a demand response transit service to residents in Hooker County. Rides were provided as needed within the region, with scheduled service to North Platte and Tryon throughout the week. Hooker County Handi Bus stopped operating transit services in December 2024.

Figure 16. Map of Southwest region with Hooker County Handi Bus service area county shaded in red



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



According to the Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal, the agency operated two vehicles in FY 2024 and provided 510 rides. Both boardings and miles traveled increased from FY 2022 to FY 2024, with boardings rising from 310 to 510 over the three-year period. While boardings and mileage increased from FY 2022 to FY 2023 and FY 2024, Hooker County Handi Bus reduced the size of their fleet from three to two.

The average miles per boarding decreased slightly over the same period, suggesting that Hooker County Handi Bus was providing more frequent shorter rides in FY 2024 than they had provided in FY 2022.

Table 8. Ridership statistics for Hooker County Handi Bus, FY 2022 to FY 2024

	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	% Change
Vehicles	3	2	2	-33.3%
Boardings	310	406	510	64.5%
Mileage	16,930	24,171	24,941	47.3%
Boardings Per Vehicle	103.3	203.0	255.0	146.8%
Miles Per Vehicle	5,643.3	12,085.5	12,470.5	121.0%
Miles Per Boarding	54.6	59.5	48.9	-10.5%

Source: (9) Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal

Hooker County Handi Bus is no longer in service and did not provide a ride sample for use in our analysis.



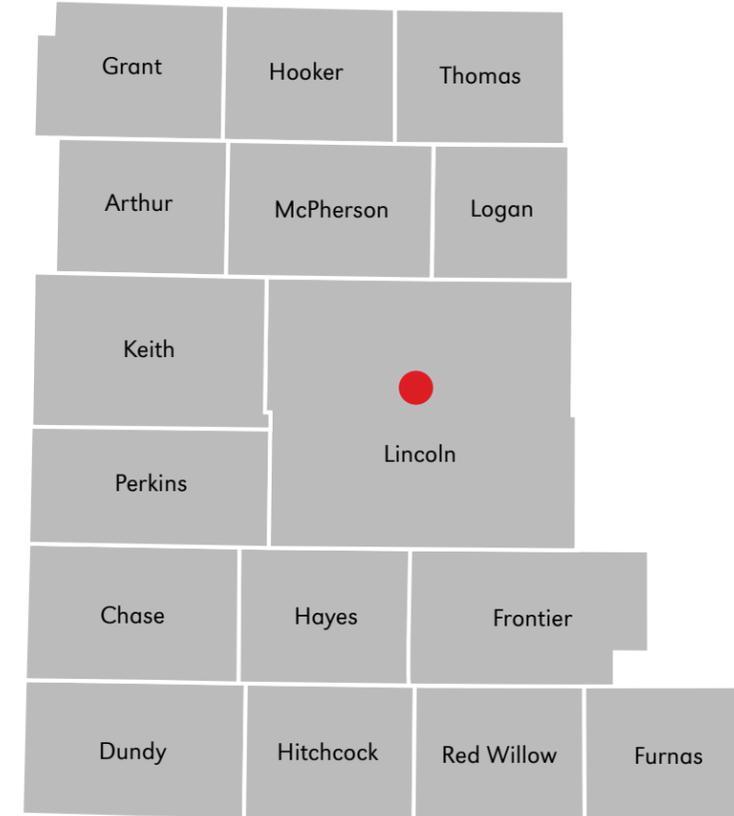
Hooker County Handi Bus stopped service as a rural transit provider in December 2024. **Prior to ending service, reported ridership data have shown an increase in both ridership and miles traveled since FY 2022 despite removing a vehicle to their fleet in FY 2023.**

Trips were trending toward being shorter and more frequent, but the nearly 50-mile average trip length still suggests trips were commonly taken between neighboring communities.

NORTH PLATTE PUBLIC TRANSIT SYSTEM

North Platte Public Transit System provides demand response service to residents of the City of North Platte and those within a 20-mile radius of the city limits.

Figure 17. Map of Southwest region with North Platte Public Transit System service area shown as red dot



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



Rides are provided Monday through Friday from 6 A.M. to 8 P.M. and Saturday from 7 A.M. to 5 P.M.

Source: (18) North Platte Public Transit System website, retrieved 2025

According to the Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal, the agency operated eight vehicles in FY 2024 and provided nearly 63,000 rides. Both annual boardings and mileage increased slightly from FY 2022 to FY 2024. Average trip length also rose slightly but remained close to four miles per boarding, indicating that the agency largely provides short, in-town trips rather than longer, intercity rides.

Table 9. Ridership statistics for North Platte Public Transit System, FY 2022 to FY 2024

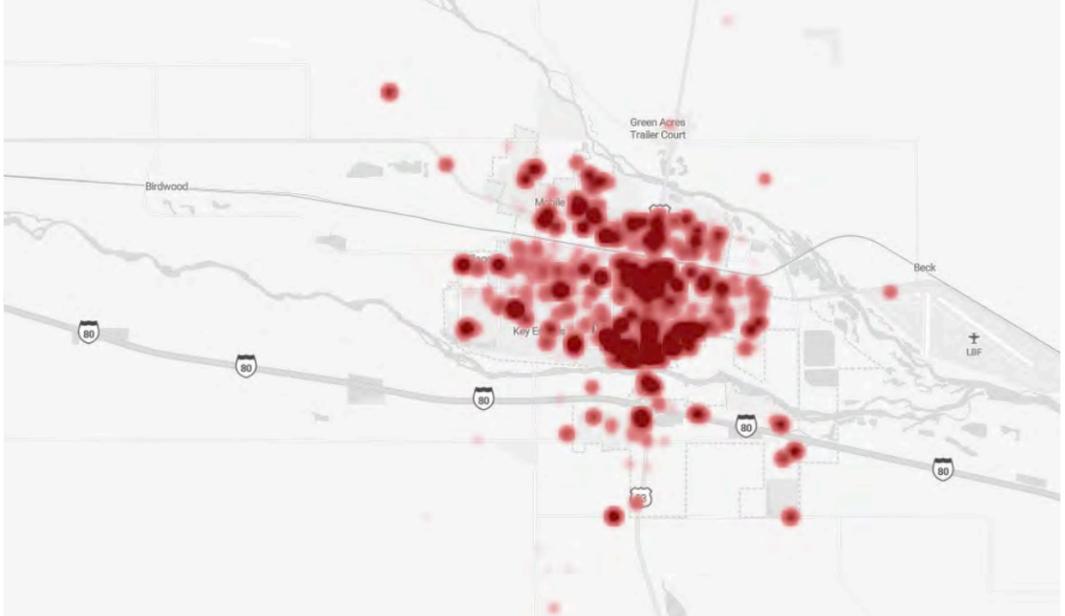
	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	Percent Change FY 2022 to FY 2024
Vehicles	8	8	8	0.0%
Boardings	47,331	59,881	62,839	32.8%
Mileage	173,395	227,305	267,796	54.4%
Boardings Per Vehicle	5,916.4	7,485.1	7,854.9	32.8%
Miles Per Vehicle	21,674.4	28,413.1	33,474.5	54.4%
Miles Per Boarding	3.7	3.8	4.3	16.3%

Source: (9) Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal

North Platte Public Transit System provided a sample of 14,920 trips taken from April 2024 through June 2024. Figure 18 shows a heatmap of drop-offs, along with the five most common destinations.

All 702 unique destinations in the sample were within or very near the City of North Platte. Top destinations included Walmart Supercenter, Great Plains Health (the hospital), and various apartment communities catering to elderly and disabled residents.

Figure 18. Drop-off locations for North Platte Public Transit System, April 2024 to June 2024

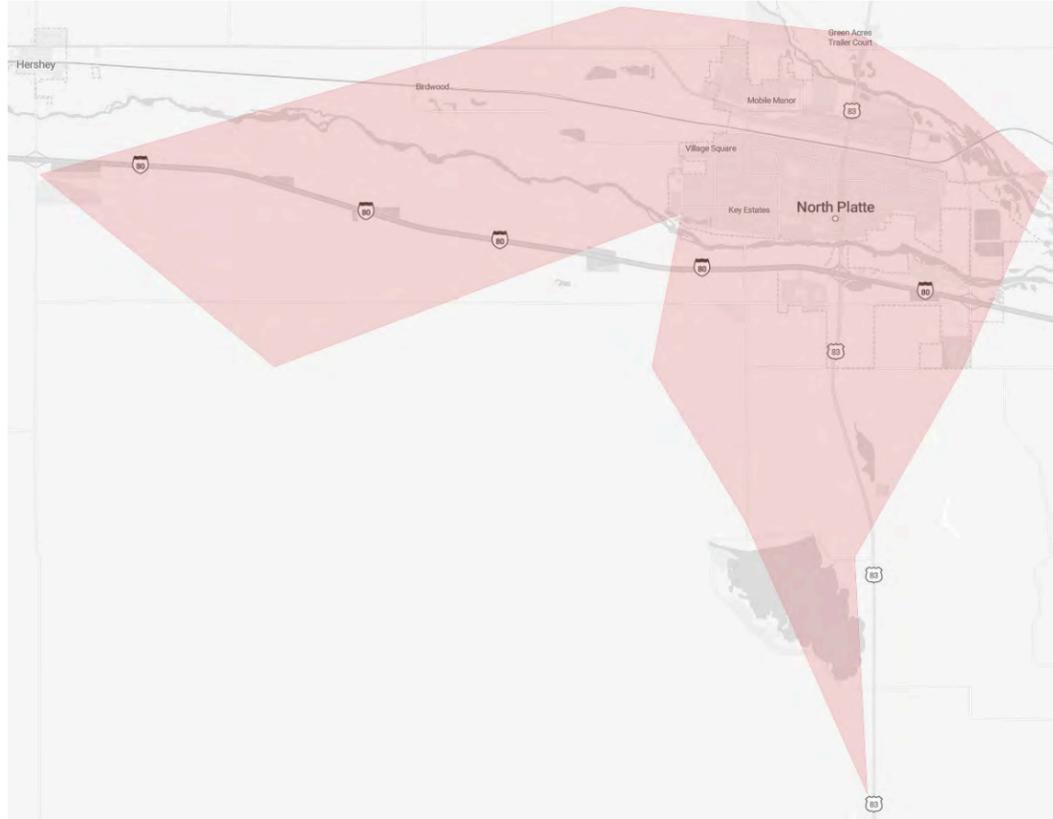


Top Five Drop-off Locations	City/Town	Number of Drop-offs
Walmart Supercenter	North Platte	1,128
Great Plains Health	North Platte	1,102
Buffalo Bill Manor	North Platte	400
Stonebridge Suites	North Platte	367
Liberty House	North Platte	237

Source: (12) North Platte Public Transit System reported ride data, April 2024 to June 2024

The observed coverage area spans approximately 68.3 square miles covering the City of North Platte and nearby employers and attractions. This is consistent with their advertised range of 20 miles around the City of North Platte.

Figure 19. Observed pick-up area for North Platte Public Transit System, April 2024 to June 2024



Source: (12) North Platte Public Transit System reported ride data, April 2024 to June 2024

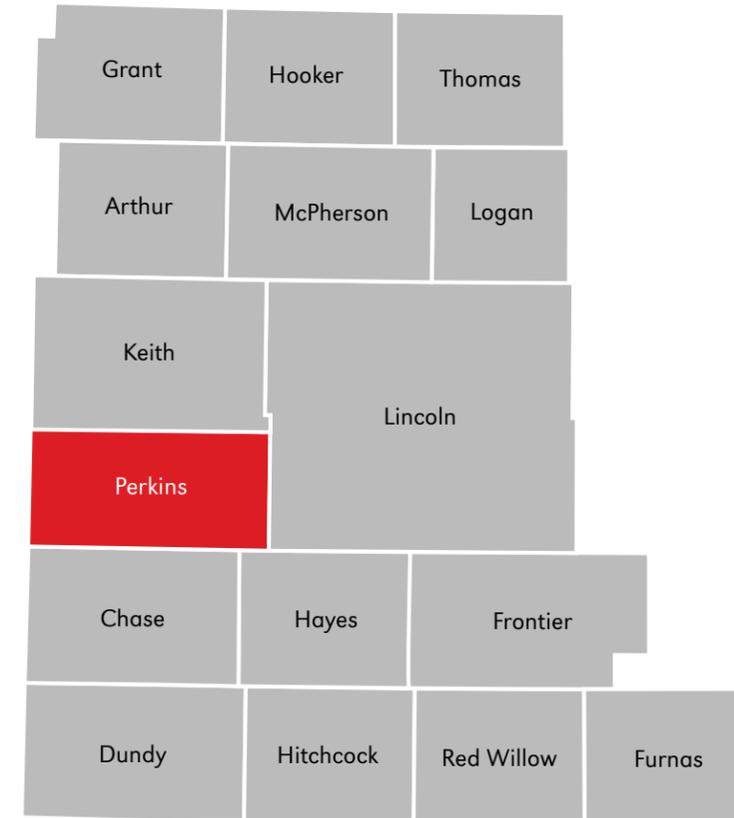


North Platte Public Transit System has seen an increase in ridership since FY 2022. Trips remain relatively short, indicating that **most rides are short, in-town trips rather than intercity rides.** This is consistent with the advertised service, which provides rides within a 20-mile radius of North Platte.

PERKINS COUNTY PUBLIC TRANSIT

Perkins County Public Transit provides demand response service to residents of Perkins County.

Figure 20. Map of Southwest region with Perkins County Public Transit service area county shaded in red



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



Rides are provided Monday through Friday from 9 A.M. to 4 P.M.

Source: (19) Perkins County Public Transit Facebook page, retrieved 2025

According to the Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal, the agency operated two vehicles in FY 2024 and provided over 5,000 rides. Boardings decreased slightly from FY 2022 to FY 2024 but were slightly higher in FY 2023. Annual miles traveled has also remained generally steady, increasing overall by 1.2% from FY 2022 to FY 2024.

The average miles per boarding is notably low for a county-wide provider, consistently remaining around three miles per boarding. This suggests the agency is most frequently providing rides within the City of Grant rather than covering all of Perkins County.

Table 10. Ridership statistics for Perkins 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	5,876	6,542	5,291	-10.0%
Mileage	17,314	23,211	17,520	1.2%
Boardings Per Vehicle	2,938.0	3,271.0	2,645.5	-10.0%
Miles Per Vehicle	8,657.0	11,605.5	8,760.0	1.2%
Miles Per Boarding	2.9	3.5	3.3	12.4%

Source: (9) Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal

Perkins County Public Transit does not currently use software or other measures to track rides and did not provide a ride sample for use in our analysis.

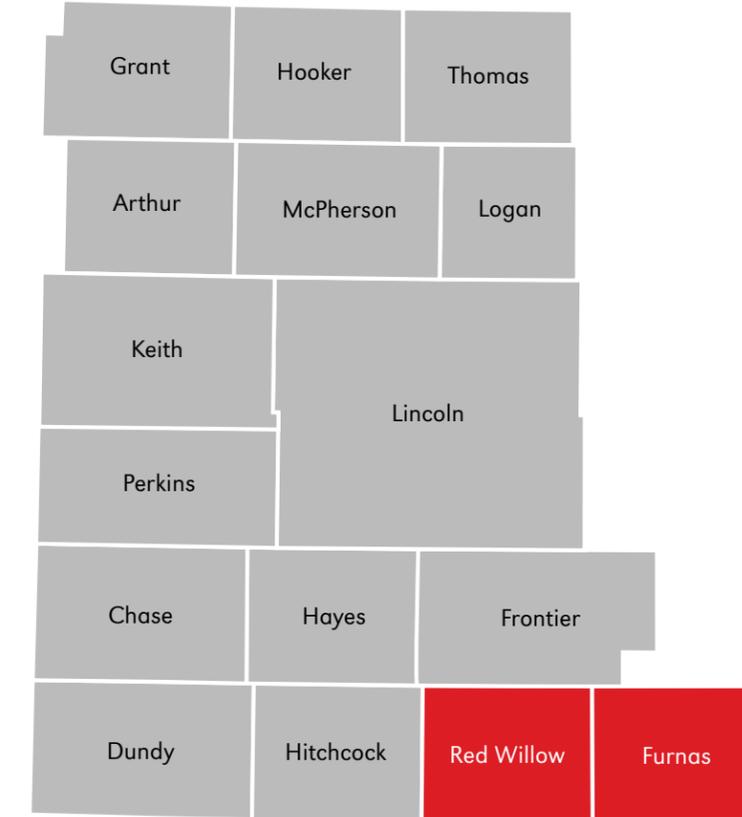


Perkins County Public Transit has reported a consistent level of service from FY 2022 to FY 2024, with only slight variation in annual boardings and miles traveled. **Average trip length is shorter than has been reported by other county-wide providers** and suggests that Perkins County Public Transit is operating primarily within the City of Grant rather than providing rides across Perkins County.

TRI VALLEY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Tri Valley Public Transportation provides demand response service to residents of Furnas and Red Willow counties. They serve many communities across the Southwest region including Arapahoe, Cambridge, Indianola, and McCook.

Figure 21. Map of Southwest region with Tri Valley Public Transportation service area counties shaded in red



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



Source: (20) Tri Valley Public Transportation website, retrieved 2025

According to the Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal, the agency operates six vehicles and provided 8,300 rides in FY 2024, up 10.5% from FY 2022. Annual mileage increased notably from FY 2022 to FY 2024, rising from nearly 145,000 miles to more than 190,000.

Average trip length also increased by around 20%, rising from 19.2 miles per boarding to 23.1 miles per boarding. This is similar to other regional providers in the Southwest, indicating that many of the trips are to or from nearby communities rather than short, in-town trips.

Table 11. Ridership statistics for Tri Valley Public Transportation, FY 2022 to FY 2024

	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	Percent Change FY 2022 to FY 2024
Vehicles	6	6	6	0.0%
Boardings	7,509	7,375	8,300	10.5%
Mileage	144,308	181,400	191,792	32.9%
Boardings Per Vehicle	1,251.5	1,229.2	1,383.3	10.5%
Miles Per Vehicle	24,051.3	30,233.3	31,965.3	32.9%
Miles Per Boarding	19.2	24.6	23.1	20.2%

Source: (9) Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal

Tri Valley Public Transportation is not currently using any ride tracking software and did not provide a ride sample for use in our analysis.



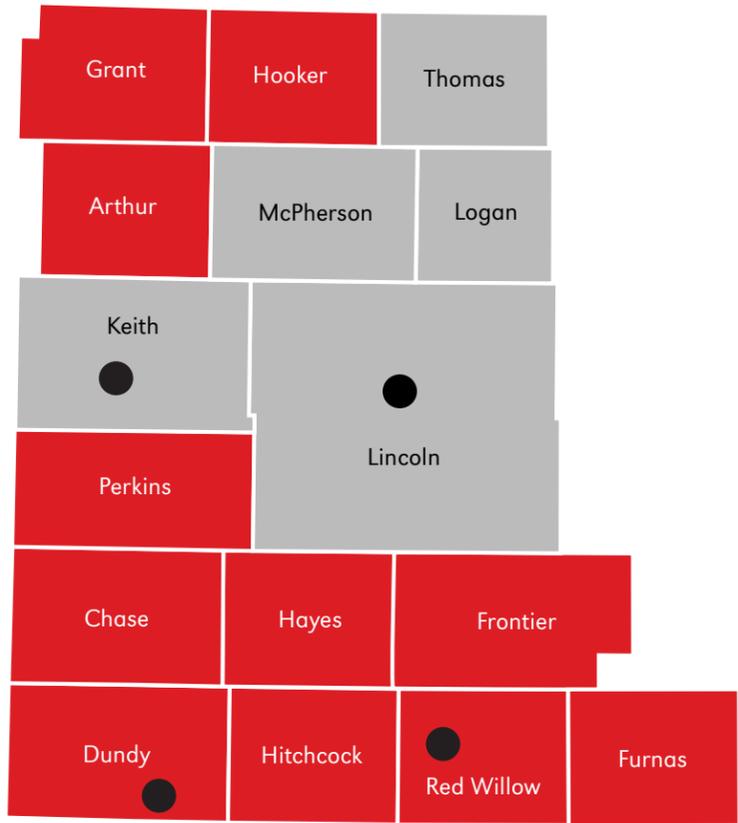
Tri Valley Public Transportation reported an increase in ridership from FY 2022 to FY 2024, particularly in annual miles traveled. **Average trip length is consistent with other regional providers in the area** and suggest Tri Valley Public Transportation typically provides rides between neighboring communities.

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 the 10 providers and offers insights into regional trends.

The eight currently operating transit providers in the region serve 11 of the 16 counties, as shown in Figure 22. The four city-specific providers operate in the cities marked with a black dot.

Figure 22. Service area of Southwest 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 12 summarizes the mileage and estimated coverage area for each provider in FY 2024, based on sample ride data.

Table 12. Summary of total miles traveled and observed coverage area

Provider	Service Category	Total Miles (FY 2024)	Percent Total Miles	Observed Coverage Area (Square Mile)
Chase County Transportation System	County-wide	60,561	6.3%	42.3
City of Benkelman Handi Bus*	City-specific	1,659	0.2%	1.2
City of McCook Transit*	City-specific	15,392	1.6%	5.5
City of Ogallala Public Transit*	City-specific	34,299	3.6%	5.0
Grant Arthur Handi Bus**	County-wide	2,454	0.3%	783.2
Hitch & Hay Public Transit	County-wide	340,225	35.6%	17,525.7
Hooker County Handi Bus**	County-wide	24,941	2.6%	721.5
North Platte Public Transit System	City-specific	267,796	28.0%	68.3
Perkins County Public Transit*	County-wide	17,520	1.8%	884.4
Tri Valley Public Transportation*	County-wide	191,792	20.0%	1,438.6
Totals		956,639		

*Note: Provider did not provide any sample ride data for this analysis.

+Note: Provider no longer in service

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

In FY 2024, Hitch & Hay Public Transit and North Platte Public Transit System recorded the highest annual mileage among the 10 providers in the region, accounting for 44.5% and 35.0% of all reported miles in the region, respectively (79.5% collectively). The coverage areas for these two providers are very different, however, with Hitch & Hay Public Transit covering more than 17,500 square miles compared to North Platte Public Transit System’s 68.3 square miles.

Along with the North Platte Public Transit System, the City of Ogallala Public Transit and City of McCook Public Transit also reported higher annual mileage than did the region’s county-specific providers. Even though these city-specific providers service a smaller coverage area, they are reporting more rides and more miles, suggesting that in-town rides are more frequent than longer trips across the region.

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

- There is no clear relationship between total mileage and the size of a provider’s observed coverage area.
- Shorter, in-town trips are more frequent than intercity trips across much of the region.

Nebraska’s transit providers also report annual boarding figures. Table 13 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 13. 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
Chase County Transportation System	County-wide	9,603	7.4%	6.3	227.2
City of Benkelman Handi Bus*	City-specific	1,578	1.2%	1.1	1,315.8
City of McCook Transit*	City-specific	5,764	4.4%	2.7	1,055.9
City of Ogallala Public Transit*	City-specific	26,507	20.5%	1.3	5,282.9
Grant Arthur Handi Bus**	County-wide	31	0.0%	79.2	0.0
Hitch & Hay Public Transit	County-wide	9,188	7.1%	37.0	0.5
Hooker County Handi Bus**	County-wide	510	0.4%	48.9	0.7
North Platte Public Transit System	City-specific	62,839	48.5%	4.3	920.1
Perkins County Public Transit*	County-wide	5,291	4.1%	3.3	6.0
Tri Valley Public Transportation*	County-wide	8,300	6.4%	23.1	5.8
Totals		129,611		7.4	

*Note: Provider did not provide any sample ride data for this analysis.

+Note: Provider no longer in service

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

North Platte Public Transit System accounted for more than half the reported boardings in the region in FY 2024. City of Ogallala Public Transit reported the second highest number of boardings, reinforcing the conclusion that in-town trips are more frequent across the region. In contrast, Grant Arthur Handi Bus reported the fewest boardings but the longest average trip length (79.2 miles), highlighting its focus on long-distance travel prior to ending service in FY 2024.

Across the region, the providers with the largest coverage areas — Hitch & Hay Public Transit, Grant Arthur Handi Bus, Hooker County Handi Bus, and Tri Valley Public Transportation — reported longer average trip lengths than the other providers. The only exception is Perkins County Public Transit. Their reported trip length is more like the city-specific providers, suggesting that Perkins County Public Transit provides most of its service within the City of Grant rather than the rest of Perkins County.

These data reveal two patterns:

- Providers in the Southwest region typically provide short, in-town rides.
- Providers with larger coverage areas tended to report a longer average trip length.

In addition to tracking miles traveled and boardings, NDOT monitors the vehicles each transit provider uses in their services. Table 14 lists the number of vehicles in service for each provider in FY 2024.

Table 14. 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
Chase County Transportation System	County-wide	5	14.3%	1,920.6	12,112.2	8.5
City of Benkelman Handi Bus*	City-specific	1	2.9%	1,578.0	1,659.0	1.2
City of McCook Transit*	City-specific	1	2.9%	5,764.0	15,392.0	5.5
City of Ogallala Public Transit*	City-specific	3	8.6%	8,835.7	11,433.0	1.7
Grant Arthur Handi Bus**	County-wide	1	2.9%	31.0	2,454.0	783.2
Hitch & Hay Public Transit	County-wide	6	17.1%	1,531.3	56,704.2	2,921.0
Hooker County Handi Bus**	County-wide	2	5.7%	255.0	12,470.5	360.7
North Platte Public Transit System	City-specific	8	22.9%	7,854.9	33,474.5	8.5
Perkins County Public Transit*	County-wide	2	5.7%	2,645.5	8,760.0	442.2
Tri Valley Public Transportation*	County-wide	6	17.1%	1,383.3	31,965.3	239.8
Totals		35		3,703.2	27,332.5	

*Note: Provider did not provide any sample ride data for this analysis.

+Note: Provider no longer in service

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

In FY 2024, the 10 providers operated a combined total of 35 vehicles. North Platte Public Transit, with the largest fleet, also reported the most boardings overall. City of Ogallala Public Transit reported the highest number of boardings per vehicle (8,835.7) and Hitch & Hay Public Transit reported the greatest number of miles traveled per vehicle (56,704.2).

Average boardings per vehicle varied across the region. The two providers reporting the lowest boardings per vehicle — Grant Arthur Handi Bus and Hooker County Handi Bus — are no longer in service. In general, city-specific providers (which tend to provide more frequent, shorter trips) reported more boardings per vehicle than county-wide and regional providers.

Hitch & Hay Public Transit and Tri Valley Public Transportation — the remaining regional providers in the Southwest — reported the lowest number of boardings per vehicle among the still-operating providers along with high miles per vehicle. This suggests their vehicles are routinely traveling long distances with few riders, which may limit ride availability.

In summary:

- City-specific providers reported more boardings per vehicle, supporting more frequent and shorter trips.
- Regional providers report high mileage with few riders per vehicle which may limit ride availability.



TRIP DESTINATIONS

Table 15 summarizes ridership changes across the region from FY 2022 to FY 2024. Boardings were up by 21.6% across the region. Miles traveled also increased by 54.8%. These increases were primarily driven by large increases in ridership for Hitch & Hay Public Transit. North Platte Public Transit System also reported a notable increase in service, but other city-specific providers reported varied in terms of boardings from FY 2022 to FY 2024. Other than Hitch & Hay Public Transit, North Platte Public Transit System, and Tri Valley Public Transportation, miles traveled remained largely flat among the still-operating providers in the region.

Table 15. 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
Chase County Transportation System	-16.7%	-36.4%	-5.6%	-23.7%	13.3%	48.5%
City of Benkelman Handi Bus	0.0%	-10.1%	-5.1%	-10.1%	-5.1%	5.6%
City of McCook Transit	0.0%	19.4%	4.0%	19.4%	4.0%	-12.9%
City of Ogallala Public Transit	0.0%	24.3%	4.3%	24.3%	4.3%	-16.1%
Grant Arthur Handi Bus ⁺	0.0%	-80.0%	-67.1%	-80.0%	-67.1%	64.5%
Hitch & Hay Public Transit	20.0%	120.7%	132.0%	83.9%	93.4%	5.2%
Hooker County Handi Bus ⁺	-33.3%	64.5%	47.3%	146.8%	121.0%	-10.5%
North Platte Public Transit System	0.0%	32.8%	54.4%	32.8%	54.4%	16.3%
Perkins County Public Transit	0.0%	-10.0%	1.2%	-10.0%	1.2%	12.4%
Tri Valley Public Transportation	0.0%	10.5%	32.9%	10.5%	32.9%	20.2%
Overall	0.0%	21.6%	54.8%	21.6%	54.8%	27.3%

⁺Note: Provider no longer in service
Source: (9) Nebraska Transit Invoice Portal

Vehicle utilization also increased across the region overall, with boardings per vehicle and miles per vehicle both increasing. The largest increases in vehicle utilization were reported by Hooker County Handi Bus, which is no longer providing transit services. Along with the increase in boardings and miles traveled, this suggests that the regions providers may need to increase the sizes of their fleets to respond to increasing demand.

In summary:

- Demand for rural transit appears to be growing slightly across the region.
- Providers may need to increase their fleets to respond to demand changes and increases in vehicle utilization.

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 10 regional providers submitted sample ride data, representing a total of 18,608 individual trips between April 2024 and August 2024. These trips corresponded to 1,067 unique destinations. Table 16 summarizes the number of sampled rides, unique destinations, and total boardings for FY 2024 by provider.

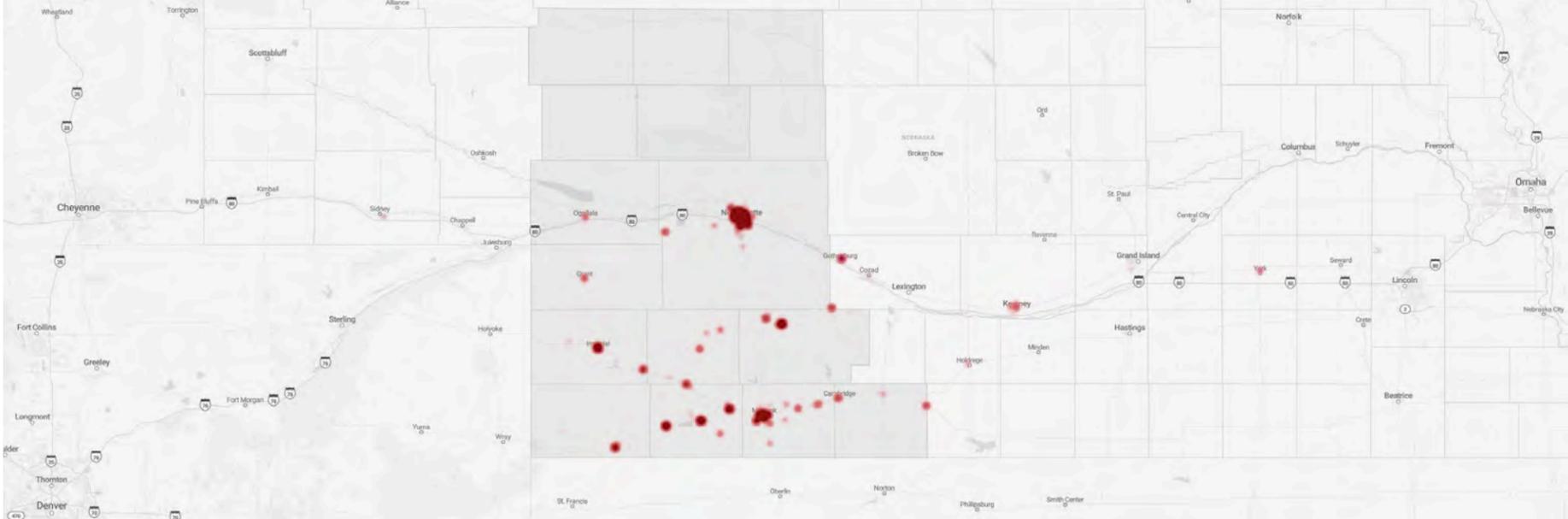
Table 16. Number of rides, unique destinations, and boardings reported by each provider, April 2024 to August 2024

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
Chase County Transportation System	279	1.5%	62	5.8%	9,603	7.4%
City of Benkelman Handi Bus	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1,578	1.2%
City of McCook Transit	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	5,764	4.4%
City of Ogallala Public Transit	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	26,507	20.5%
Grant Arthur Handi Bus	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	31	0.0%
Hitch & Hay Public Transit	3,409	18.3%	357	33.5%	9,188	7.1%
Hooker County Handi Bus	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	510	0.4%
North Platte Public Transit System	14,920	80.2%	702	65.8%	62,839	48.5%
Perkins County Public Transit	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	5,291	4.1%
Tri Valley Public Transportation	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	8,300	6.4%
Totals	18,608		1,067		129,611	

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

North Platte Public Transit System and Hitch & Hay Public Transit are over-represented in the ride sample relative to their share of total boardings, in part because Chase County Transportation System provided only one month of ridership data.

Figure 23. Drop-off locations within and around the Southwest region (shaded light gray) for reported rides by three out of 10 Southwest region transit providers



Source: (10-12) provider reported ride data, various dates

Table 17 lists the 10 most frequently reported drop-off locations. The top destinations are all in North Platte, the region’s largest city, and primarily include medical facilities, elder care homes, subsidized housing, and grocery stores. Most of the trips that ended in North Platte also started in North Platte, suggesting that public transit within the city is widely available and effective.

Table 17. Top 10 drop-off locations for three out of 10 Southwest region transit providers, April 2024 to August 2024

Drop-off Location	City/Town	Number of Combined Drop-offs
Great Plains Health	North Platte	1,204
Walmart Supercenter	North Platte	1,151
Buffalo Bill Manor	North Platte	400
Stonebridge Suites	North Platte	367
Liberty House	North Platte	237
Fresenius Kidney Care	North Platte	217
Holiday Inn Express	North Platte	206
South Oak Manor	North Platte	189
North Platte High School	North Platte	187
CP West Place Apartments	North Platte	184

Source: (10-12) provider reported ride data, various dates

SHARED DESTINATIONS

Among the 1,067 unique destinations, three were shared among all three of the providers who shared data for this analysis. Another 46 destinations were shared by two of the three providers. The top five shared destinations are listed in Table 18.

Table 18. Top 5 shared drop-off locations for three out of 10 Southwest region transit providers by number of drop-offs, April 2024 to August 2024

Drop-off Location	City/Town	Number of Combined Drop-offs	Number of Providers
Great Plains Health	North Platte	3	1,204
Walmart Supercenter	North Platte	2	1,151
Fresenius Kidney Care	North Platte	2	217
South Oak Manor	North Platte	2	189
The Connection (homeless shelter)	North Platte	2	156

Source: (10-12) provider reported ride data, various dates

In summary, we make three main observations from our analysis of the drop-off data:

- The most common destinations are medical facilities, public or affordable housing developments for low-income or elderly residents, and grocery or discount department stores.
- Public transit within the City of North Platte is widely available and effectively supports residents and visitors.
- Many of the trips across the southern part of the region travel along Highway 34 and Highway 6 near McCook. Fixed or flex-route services from McCook to Imperial and Benkelman may be beneficial to the region.

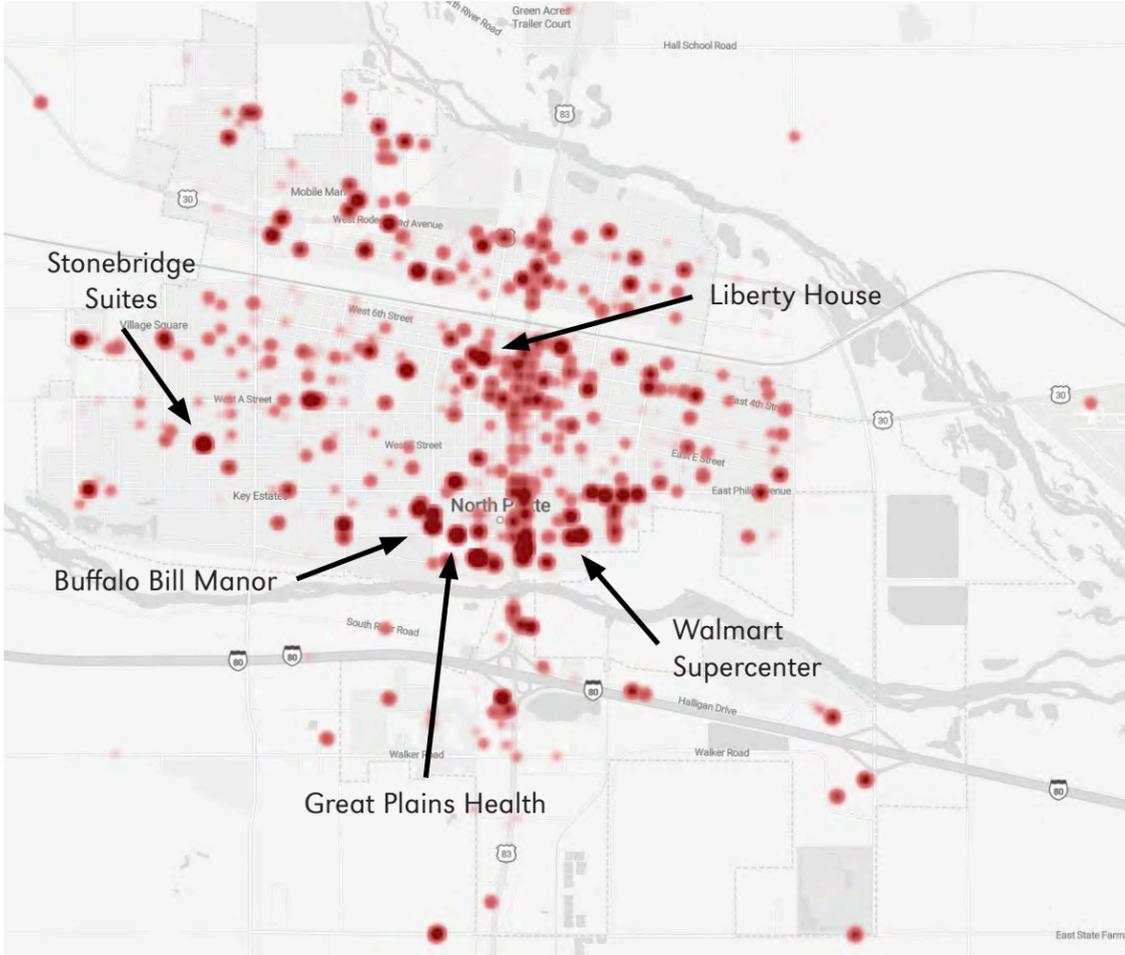
HIGH-FREQUENCY DESTINATION AREAS

To complete our analysis of the trip destinations in the region, we also examined the geographical distribution of the reported drop-offs and identified geographical areas where many drop-offs took place. These frequent destination areas may require additional resources or further analysis, as the riders taken to these areas may need other local services within the area.

DROP-OFFS WITHIN CITY OF NORTH PLATTE

Most destinations reported in the sample fall within or near the city limits of the City of North Platte. Figure 24 shows the geographical distribution of those drop-offs within the city limits via a heatmap. The top five most frequent destinations are labeled and listed in the table. These mirror the top destinations overall, including the Walmart Supercenter, the regional hospital, and apartments catering to elderly and disabled residents.

Figure 24. Drop-off locations within the City of North Platte (shaded light gray) for reported rides by three out of 10 Southwest region transit providers



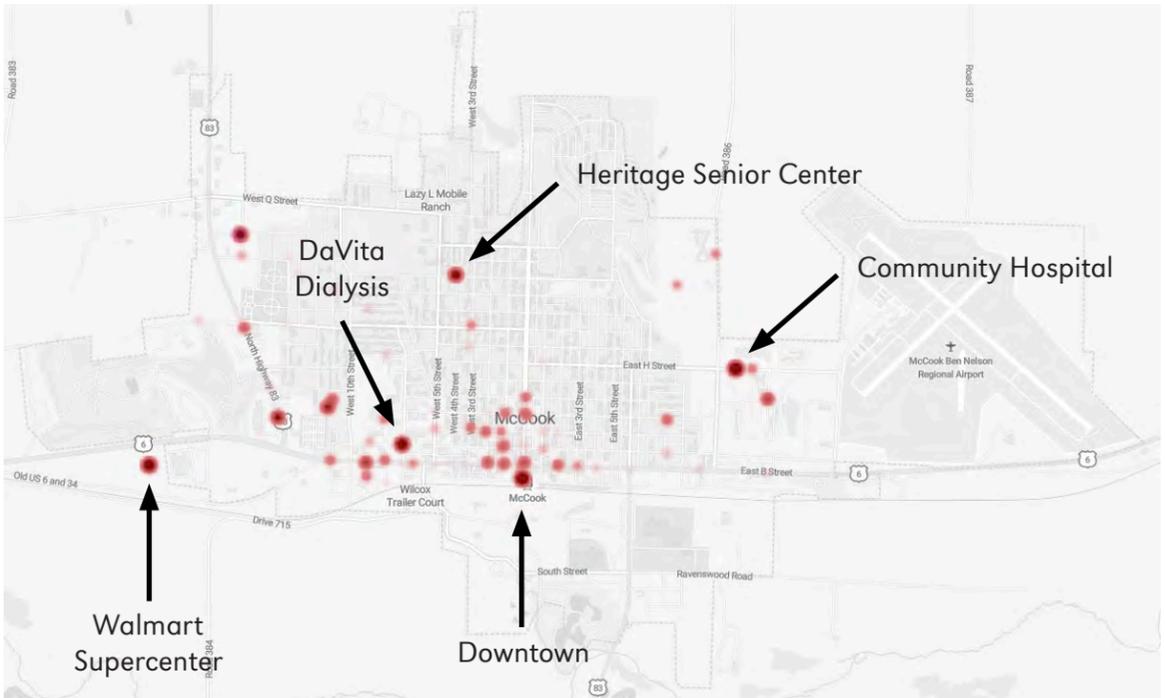
Source: (10-12) provider reported ride data, various dates

Top Five Drop-off Locations	Number of Drop-offs
Great Plains Health	1,204
Walmart Supercenter	1,151
Buffalo Bill Manor	400
Stonebridge Suites	367
Liberty House	237

DROP-OFFS WITHIN CITY OF McCOOK

The next most frequent area is the City of McCook, accounting for close to 10% of the reported drop-offs overall. Figure 25 shows the drop-offs in the City of McCook. The most frequent destinations were the main downtown commercial area, the Community Hospital, the Walmart Supercenter in McCook, DaVita Dialysis, and the Heritage Senior Center.

Figure 25. Drop-off locations in and around the City of McCook (shaded light gray) for reported rides by three out of 10 Southwest region transit providers



Source: (10-12) provider reported ride data, various dates

Top Five Drop-off Locations	Number of Drop-offs
Downtown	176
Community Hospital	175
Walmart Supercenter	130
DaVita Dialysis	118
Heritage Senior Center	82

AVAILABILITY OF TRANSIT

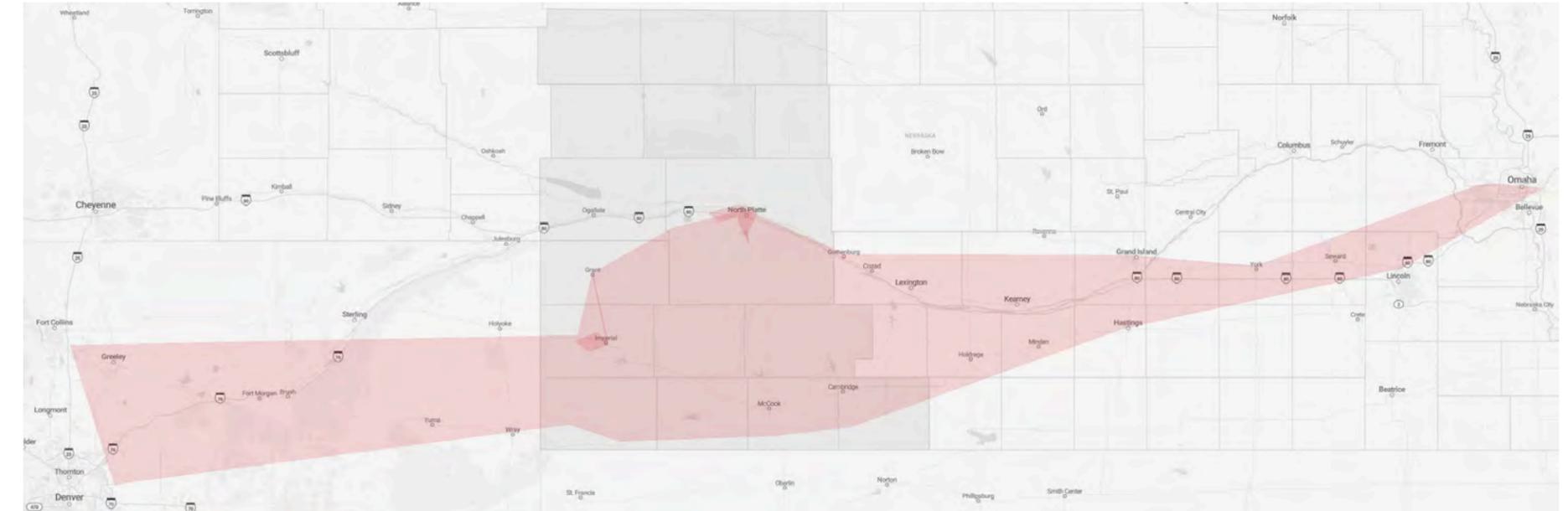


Along with frequent destinations, we also analyzed the areas in which riders were picked up by each transit provider as reported by the samples of ride data obtained from the providers. We analyzed the pickup data by first determining the observed area served by each provider and computing the estimated 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.

Figure 26 shows the observed coverage map based on reported pickup locations. The analysis reveals a major coverage gap in the northern portion of the region. Specifically, Arthur, Grant, Hooker, Logan, McPherson, and Thomas counties lack any observed service. Keith County also falls outside the observed coverage area for any of the three providers who provided data for this analysis but may be covered in part by City of Ogallala Public Transit. The northern part of Lincoln County is also not covered, but there may be some rides provided in that area by North Platte Public Transit. In total, an estimated 17,331 people, or 22.7% of the Southwest region's population, live in an area with no observed rural transit coverage.

We also observe that there is very little overlap in the coverage areas for the region's providers. Only 43.4% of the region's population (33,109 people) live in an area covered by more than one provider. The remaining 57.6% of the region's population may have limited transit availability, as they only have one transit provider to choose.

Figure 26. Overlaid pick-up areas within the Southwest region for all reported rides by Southwest region transit providers; darker areas indicate overlap among pick-up areas



Source: (10-12) provider reported ride data, various dates



KEY FINDINGS

Table 19 summarizes coverage by provider and population type including total population, seniors (65+), and individuals with disabilities. The overall gap in coverage also extends to the transit dependent population – 24.0% of the region’s population aged 65 years or older and 17.3% of the region’s disabled population have no options for rural public transit.

Table 19. 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
Southwest	76,254	100%	17,019	100%	11,691	100%
Covered by...						
3 Transit Providers	7,518	9.9%	1,629	9.6%	1,290	11.0%
2 Transit Providers	33,109	43.4%	6,875	40.4%	5,938	50.8%
1 Transit Providers	58,923	77.3%	12,942	76.0%	9,667	82.7%
0 Transit Providers	17,331	22.7%	4,077	24.0%	2,024	17.3%
Chase County Transportation System	1,416	1.9%	259	1.5%	122	1.0%
City of Benkelman Handi Bus	947	1.2%	256	1.5%	182	1.6%
City of McCook Transit	7,378	9.7%	1,600	9.4%	1,268	10.8%
City of Ogallala Public Transit	4,810	6.3%	1,203	7.1%	778	6.7%
Grant Arthur Handi Bus ⁺	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Hitch & Hay Public Transit	47,642	62.5%	10,303	60.5%	7,755	66.3%
Hooker County Handi Bus ⁺	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
North Platte Public Transit System	19,439	25.5%	3,765	22.1%	3,920	33.5%
Perkins County Public Transit	2,860	3.8%	681	4.0%	346	3.0%
Tri Valley Public Transportation	14,892	19.5%	3,351	19.7%	2,498	21.4%

⁺Note: Provider no longer in service and are not included in the analysis of rural transit coverage
 Source: (8) U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 5-year Estimates 2022

In summary:

- Nearly 23% of the Southwest region’s population have no observed access to rural transit.
- The eight northernmost counties in the region have the least coverage by the region’s rural transit providers.
- Among the population that does have rural transit coverage, most only have access to one rural transit provider.

Our analysis shows that the population of the Southwest region is more dependent on transit than the population of Nebraska as a whole. This includes 22.3% of residents aged 65 or older and 15.0% with a disability. These percentages are growing, highlighting an increasing need for public transit in the region.

Ridership has increased since FY 2022 across the region. Despite the increase in demand, two providers have stopped providing service since FY 2022 and fleet sizes have remained the same across the other providers. The remaining providers in the region may need to consider increasing the sizes of their fleets to meet increasing demand.

Together, the eight remaining transit providers connect residents to essential destinations such as healthcare, housing, and grocery stores, underscoring the crucial role of rural transit in supporting quality of life.

Currently, there is a notable gap in rural transit coverage in the Southwest region. Transit coverage reaches only 77.3% of the region’s population, primarily in the southern part of the region. This leaves around 17,000 residents – including around 4,000 elderly and 2,000 disabled residents – with no access to rural public transit. The gap is most clear across Arthur, Grant, Hooker, Logan, McPherson, and Thomas counties.

RECOMMENDATIONS



SOURCES



Based on our analysis, we offer the following recommendations:

1. Expand Coverage in the Northern Part of the Region.

As of this report, none of the region's eight remaining transit providers serve Arthur, Grant, Hooker, Logan, McPherson, or Thomas counties. This creates a significant service gap, leaving nearly 25% of the region's population and a similar share of its transit-dependent residents without public transit access to critical destinations such as medical facilities, grocery stores, and housing.

2. Encourage Additional Regional Providers

With the closure of Grant Arthur Handi Bus, only two regional providers serve the Southwest region. Hitch & Hay Public Transit and Tri Valley Public Transportation provide an impressive level of service across the southern part of the region, but their service is largely clustered around McCook and Cambridge. Additional regional providers may be necessary to service the northern counties in the region as well as connecting north-to-south rather than east-to-west.

3. Explore Fixed Routes Along Highway 34 and Highway 6

In the southern part of the region, many of the drop-offs occurred along Highway 34 and Highway 6 west of McCook. Some limited fixed or flex routes serving McCook, Imperial, and Benkelman 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

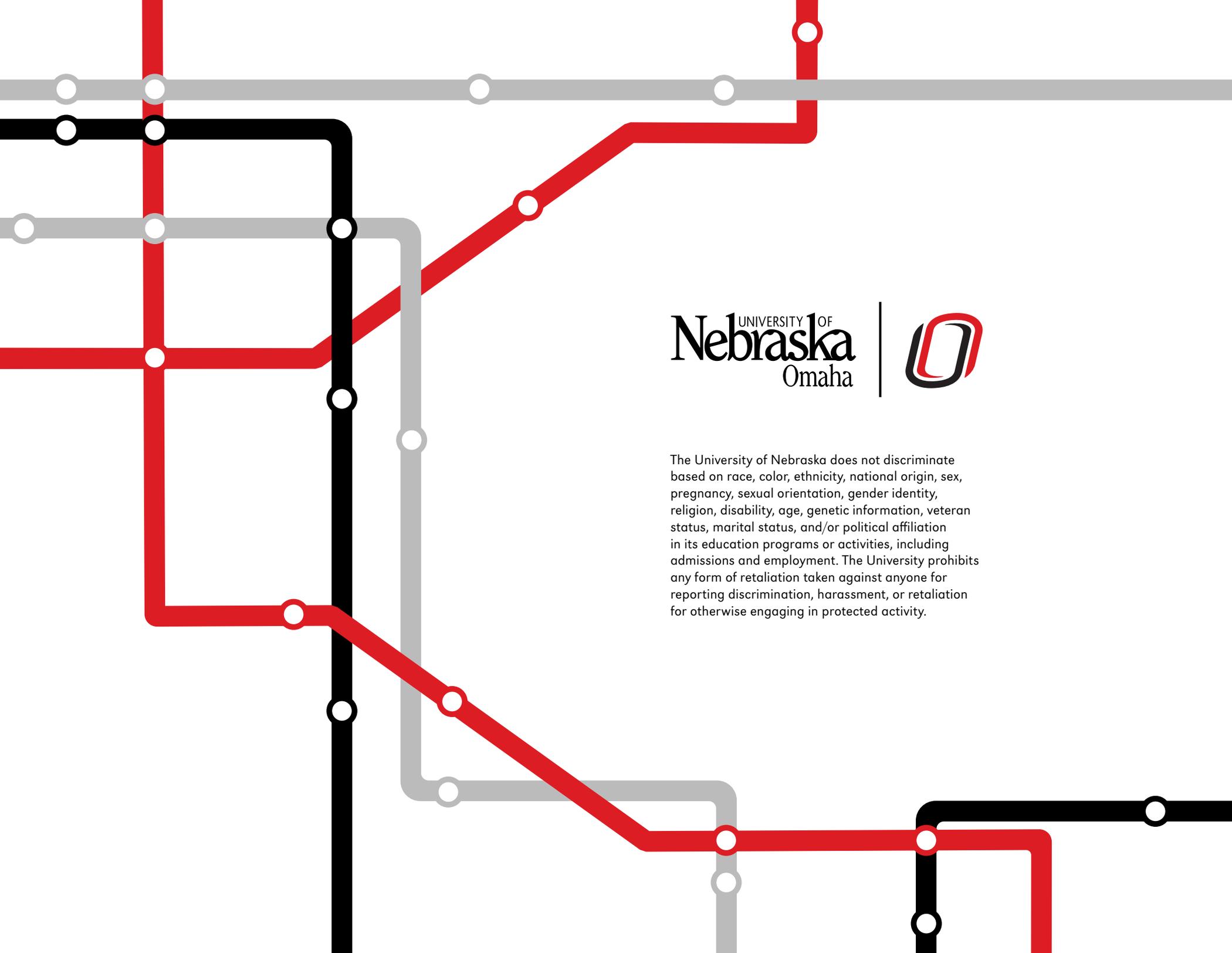
Standardizing how transit providers collect and report ride data would provide clearer insights into service usage and unmet demand. Incorporating performance metrics such as on-time performance, rider satisfaction, and trip frequency would help providers refine operations and identify gaps more effectively.

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