TRANSREPORT

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ILLINOIS RURAL TRANSIT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Summer 2025

The Rural Transit Assistance Center (RTAC) was created in 1990 and operates under an inter-agency agreement with the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT). The RTAC mission is to promote the safe and effective delivery of public transportation in rural areas and more efficiently use public and private resources. RTAC fulfills its mission through providing the Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) for the State of Illinois. Administered by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), an RTAP exists in each state to provide training, technical assistance and research, and to promote public and specialized transportation in rural areas.

In This Issue

Ed Heflin's Farewell

Mable's Health Update

CRIS RMTD Spotlight

Public Transit News

Carroll County Transit

Save The Dates

RTAC NOTES

Ed Heflin's Farewell.....

I am leaving RTAC on August 29. For those of you who are relatively new to this field, I was the RTAC Manager for seventeen years before retiring, then came back to work part time for nearly eight more years. The past quarter century has been eventful and rewarding.

Thanks to the collaborative efforts of many individuals, our rural transit environment is much different than it was in 2000. Today there are 38 additional counties with rural public transit services, and technology innovations have made us more efficient. Rural transit is an essential public service which plays an outsized role in improving the lives of disadvantaged rural residents.

I owe many thanks to the seasoned rural transit professionals who taught me so much over the years. Likewise, I want all of you to succeed, so I'd like to humbly offer a couple of suggestions:

1. Internal Collaborations - IDOT, Section 5311 grantees (all staff including PCOMs), Section 5310 recipients, RTAC, HSTP Coordinators, IPTA, and others are part of our rural transit environment. A greater amount of understanding and connectivity among all players might strengthen our delivery system. Maybe we need training or conference sessions which explain in detail the roles and expectations of each player, as well as a discussion on how to foster enhanced interactions.

2. External Collaborations – Coordinating rural transit services across geographic jurisdictions and federal and state funding sources creates efficiencies and fills in service gaps, but only truly occurs as the result of "top-down" and "bottom-up" victories. We've had some "bottom-up" success. "Top-down" is a different story. The state's former Interagency Coordinating Committee on Transportation (ICCT) was unable to achieve policy changes needed to foster collaboration among state agency silos to coordinate human service program delivery with public transportation service delivery. Maybe we need to try again via a rural Illinois version of the federal Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM). Passing legislation is not easy, but such a body could be created by executive order.

This is a bittersweet time for me. I have not lost my passion for rural transit, but there are many other things I want to do with the remainder of my life. In the words of the late Richard "Kinky" Friedman, "I aspire to inspire before I expire." It has been an honor and a pleasure to work alongside you. Best wishes to everyone and I'll keep you in my thoughts.

Mable's Health Update....

It's good to be back!!! I'm still recovering but am back to the office full time as of Friday, August 15. I am very appreciative of everyone's help, patience and assistance during my recovery. The RTAC office will be going through a transitional period during this time. As Ed mentioned above, he will be retiring on August 29 and his absence will be a huge loss to the public transit industry. I want to wish Ed and his wife well in his future endeavors and thank him for his years of service and expertise to public transit for the past twenty-five years. If you need are in need of any resources or technical assistance, please feel free to reach out to me at MR-Kreps@wiu.edu. The RTAC 5311 email listserv is also a great resource so if you're not currently on it, please send me your email so I can get you added. See you all in Champaign for the IPTA conference September 29!

RTAC Fall Maintenance Workshop - Wednesday, October 29 - Springfield Mass Transit District
Details to come.....

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CRIS Rural Mass Transit District: Advancing Accessible and Inclusive Transportation in Vermilion & Ford County

CRIS RMTD

CRIS RMTD

Service Hours

Monday–Friday: 6:00 AM – 6:00 PM

Saturday: 8:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Our Fleet and Team

4 vans
19 fifteen-passenger buses
7 full-time drivers
13 part-time drivers
8 full-time administrative staff

About CRIS RMTD

CRIS Rural Mass Transit District (CRIS RMTD) was founded in October 2012 following a separation from CRIS Healthy Aging. Since then, it has operated as a standalone agency, proudly serving Ford & Vermilion County with accessible and inclusive transportation services tailored to individuals with disabilities, seniors, and residents with mobility challenges.

Under the leadership of CEO Melissa Walters, CRIS RMTD has grown into a cornerstone of community mobility. Melissa, who holds a Master of Science degree with a major in Leadership and a minor in Finance, has served as CEO for the past two years. She oversees daily operations, ensures compliance, manages staff, and drives the strategic direction of the agency to expand services and better meet the needs of the community.

Our Services

CRIS RMTD provides both demand response and subscription-based transportation services, offering flexible, scheduled rides to connect passengers to essential destinations like medical appointments, employment, and community events.

Safety and Training

Safety is at the core of CRIS RMTD's mission. Over the past two years, our employees have completed comprehensive safety and operational training through TAPTCO, as well as certification in CPR and first aid. Additional training includes:

Defensive Driving/Passenger Assistance/Emergency Procedures

In the past two years, we have participated in training sponsored by RTAC. Our experience with RTAC training has been extremely positive. The hands-on, practical guidance from instructors has prepared our staff to apply best practices in real-world situations, enhancing passenger and driver safety across the board.

Vehicle Maintenance

We conduct daily pre-trip and post-trip inspections to ensure our fleet is safe, clean, and road-ready. Any maintenance issues are addressed immediately to minimize downtime and avoid service disruption. We partner with local maintenance centers to provide the support in creating safe and reliable vehicles.

Technology and Innovation

Recent upgrades include the installation of new cameras on buses, which serve as valuable tools for training, safety reviews, and service improvements. Future plans include:

- Expanding medical transportation services
- Continue to review the needs for NEMT to the city of Champaign, Bloomington, Peoria, St. Louis for specialized medical appointment.
- Acquiring a 24-passenger bus to increase ride availability
- Implementing an IVR (Interactive Voice Response) system for automated ride reminders
- Launching a self-serve scheduling platform for efficiency and rider experience

CEO, Melissa Walters

Funding

CRIS RMTD is supported through a combination of IDOT, HFS grant funding and local service contracts, which enable the agency to deliver reliable transportation services that meet the specific needs of Vermilion County.

Our governance is led by the CRIS Rural Mass Transit Board of Trustees and Board of Directors, who provide oversight and strategic guidance.

SCAN OUR QR CODE TO ACCESS OUR WEBSITE

In Fiscal Year 2025, CRIS RMTD provided a total of 58,488 trips and traveled 362,154 miles across Vermilion County. We plan to increase our ridership by 20% in Fiscal Year 2026. This will happen with the help of our marketing campaign and continued involvement with the communities at large. Special thanks to IDOT for hearing the needs of our community and making transportation a possibility across the State of Illinois.

CRIS RURAL MASS TRANSIT DISTRICT

Our Mission

At CRIS Rural Mass Transit District, we are committed to providing safe, accessible, and dependable transportation for individuals with disabilities, seniors, and others with mobility challenges. By connecting people to critical services, employment, and social activities, we promote independence, enhance quality of life, and foster community inclusion throughout Vermilion County and beyond.

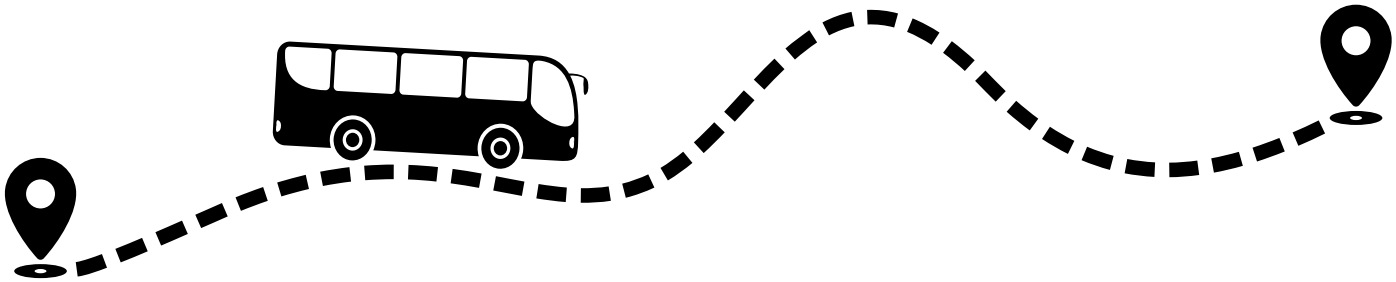
Public Transit News

Rural Winnebago County Public Transportation program hopes to reach more people

From looped routes to a bi-directional network: Transforming Galesburg's public transportation system

'It gives you that sense of independence back' | Public transportation now available in rural Mercer County

Shawnee Mass Transit had the highest number of provided rides for fiscal year 2024-25 with 160,188 rides. This beats their old record of 159,988 from 2017. Congrats on such a great milestone!!!



Carroll County Transit: Driving Community Connections Since 2012

Transportation services in Carroll County began in 2011 through the Carroll County Senior Center, operating under the 5310 program to serve seniors and individuals with disabilities.

In 2012, the service expanded into public transportation, officially launching Carroll County Transit under the operation of the Senior Center as a third-party operator. This shift into the 5311 program opened the door to countywide, demand-response service for all residents.

At the start, Carroll County Transit operated with just two vans, two buses, and four drivers, providing around 3,000–4,000 rides per year.

In 2014, Alicia Kness was hired as Director of Transportation. Since then, under her leadership, Carroll County Transit has grown steadily in both fleet size and ridership. Today, we proudly operate nine vans and eight buses, employ 16 drivers and four dispatchers, and transport over 30,000 rides each year, including 3,442 rides in June 2025 alone.

Our Mission & Commitment to Carroll County

At Carroll County Transit, we are committed to providing safe, reliable, and inclusive transportation for all. We value integrity in service, respect for every individual, and a dedication to connecting people with the resources, opportunities, and communities that matter most. Guided by the belief that mobility is essential to quality of life, we proudly uphold our mission:

Your journey is our mission.

With a county population of just 15,700, our impact is significant. Whether it's getting a senior to a life-saving treatment, taking a neighbor to work, or making sure someone can buy fresh groceries, every ride matters.

We thank you for placing your trust in us, day after day. We understand the valuable role we play in caring for you and your loved ones, and we are honored to be part of your daily journey.

We Don't Just Move People—We Support Lives

Our service is demand-response, door-to-door, and operates Monday–Friday, 5:00 AM – 4:00 PM. Every ride we provide is more than just transportation—it's a connection, a helping hand, and a promise that our community members are seen, heard, and cared for.

Meet the Team Behind the Wheel

Alicia Kness – Director of Transportation

Alicia Kness has brought in over 13 years of dedicated experience in transportation management, beginning her journey with Carroll County Transit as a dispatcher in 2011. Holding an associate's degree in criminal justice with a specialization in Psychology, Alicia combines her academic background with a passion for community service and continuous learning. Her leadership since 2014 has been instrumental in expanding Carroll County Transit's reach and enhancing its commitment to accessible, reliable transportation throughout Carroll County. Alicia's approach is deeply people-centered, emphasizing the importance of every individual served and the vital role transportation plays in improving quality of life. Outside of work, Alicia enjoys walking, spending quality time with her husband and three children, and is an avid dog lover, cherishing moments with her pets.

Carroll County Transit: Driving Community Connections Since 2012...cont.

Alicia is quick to point out that the heart of Carroll County Transit isn't the buses or the schedules, it's the people. "The heart of our operation is our staff. Our dispatchers, drivers, and administrative team go above and beyond to make every ride safe, friendly, and dependable. Their compassion and professionalism are what make Carroll County Transit more than just a transportation provider, it's a lifeline for many. We're not just providing transportation, we're making sure people feel seen, heard, and cared for."

Lisa Disher – Driver Supervisor
Lisa has been with Carroll County Transit for seven years. She loves working with clients, scheduling rides, and collaborating with her coworkers. Married for 10 years, she has two sons, three stepsons, and seven grandchildren. Lisa enjoys spending time with her family and friends.

Tawny Loper – Driver & Dispatcher
Tawny has been with the company for nearly five years. She enjoys putting faces to the voices she hears on the phone and loves serving all of Carroll County Transit's clients, especially veterans and older adults, who hold a special place in her heart. "It feels like home," Tawny says of her workplace. She has three children and enjoys spending time with her kids, family, and friends.

Bebe Irons – Dispatcher & Medicaid Consultant
Bebe has been part of Carroll County Transit for four years. "It's a great feeling knowing I'm part of a team that helps so many people with their transportation needs," she says. She will always remember being told by a client's family member that she made their loved one feel at ease. Outside of work, she enjoys spending time with her three daughters and their families.

Maggie Grissinger – Dispatcher
Maggie joined CCT three months ago and already loves the role. "There's something incredibly fulfilling about being calm in the chaos, coordinating routes, solving problems, and keeping things on track," she says. She takes pride in connecting people, supporting drivers, and keeping the system running smoothly. In her spare time, she enjoys camping, exploring, and walking her dog.

Meet a Few of Our Drivers

Leo Gelwicks
Leo started with Carroll County Transit in 2012 and has been here from the very beginning of public transportation in Carroll County. Born and raised in Mt. Carroll, Leo raised his family here and farmed land passed down through generations. "I love driving for Transit, it gives me purpose," says Leo, who is 87 years young. "We have each other's backs here."

Wayne Becker
Wayne has been with CCT for seven years and serves as the Supervisor of Training for all new drivers. "When I interviewed, I said I was more of a leader than a follower," Wayne recalls. "Seven years later, with the dedication of management, dispatch, drivers, and our amazing clients, we've reached 30,000 annual rides. What a great team effort!"

Larry Swanson
Larry joined CCT in May 2020 after retiring from a lifelong career as a machinist. "Retirement wasn't for me," he says. "I wanted to do something productive and give back to the community." Larry especially enjoys meeting veterans and hearing their stories, as well as helping people get to appointments, shopping, and community activities.

Carroll County Transit: Driving Community Connections Since 2012...cont.

Fast Facts:
- Service Type: Demand-response, door-to-door
- Operating Hours: Monday–Friday, 6:00 AM – 6:00 PM
- Rides Provided in 2024: Over 30,000
- Rides Provided in June 2025: 3,442
- Population Served: Approximately 15,700
- Base of Operations: Mt. Carroll, IL
- Contact: transportationdirector@ccsso.net | 815-244-0011

CARROLL COUNTY TRANSIT

"Your Journey Our Mission"

Carroll County Transit's Full Staff

Left Photo: Bebe Irons-Lisa Disher-Alicia Kness (Transportation Director)-Tawny Loper-Maggie Grissinger; Right Photo: The Dispatch Team

Drivers: Leo Gelwicks, Larry Swanson, and Wayne Becker

SAVE THE DATES

2026 RTAC Spring Conference
March 3-5, 2026
Northfield Conference Center
Springfield, IL

RTAC Roadeo
April 25, 2026
Sangamon County Fairgrounds

IL RTAP Advisory Council
Adam Lach, Rides MTD, Chair
Morgan Lewis, Warren County PCOM, Vice Chair
Kate Downing, Sangamon/Menard Co. Area Regional Transit
Stefanie Eisele, Dept. on Aging
Sarah Nollman-Hodge, South Central IL MTD
Sherry Hicks, FAYCO, Inc.
Kim Zimmerman, North Central Area Transit
Ron Gorst, Shawnee Mass Transit District
Kaycie Sanders, Dial-A-Ride

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