

Miles City, Custer County Montana

# Custer County Transit Coordination Plan

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## Executive Summary

This plan is the Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan for Custer County Montana. This plan fulfills the requirements of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) under the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, signed into law as a reauthorization of surface transportation programs through Fiscal Year 2020.

According to requirements of the FAST Act, locally developed coordinated public transit-human services transportation plans must be updated to reflect the changes established by the FAST Act legislation. The FAST Act applies new programs and rules for all Fiscal Year 2016 funds and authorizes transit programs for five (5) years.

Formula Grants for Rural Areas (Section 5311 Program): This program enhances the access of people in non-urbanized areas by providing public transportation. Federal funds pay 86.58 percent of capital costs and 54.11 percent of deficit operating costs (corresponding to Montana's allowable sliding scale match rates), 80 percent of administrative costs, and 80 percent of maintenance costs. The remaining 13.42, 45.89, 20, and 20 percent, respectively, must come from the local recipient. Eligible recipients of these funds can be a state agency, a local public body, a nonprofit agency, or an operator of public transportation services. Ten percent of the state's Section 5311 apportionment is dedicated to carry out a program to develop and support intercity bus transportation. In some instances, MDT transfers excess 5311 funds to the three urban areas as Section 5307 funds

Transportation is a critical component of Miles City and the surrounding area of Custer County Montana. Transportation provides access to jobs, education, health care, human services and allows all community members, including older adults and people with disabilities, to live independently and engage in community life. It is the purpose of this plan for local stakeholders to work collaboratively to do the following activities:

1. Community Resources:

- Custer County Commissioners

- Custer County Transit Advisory Board

- Custer County Council on Aging

- Medical and Mental health agencies, education and social service agencies

- Senior volunteers and Senior Housing agencies

2. Community Transportation needs:

- Transportation to social service agencies, medical facilities, medical providers

- Transportation to grocery stores, pharmacies, and public utilities companies

- Transportation to out of town providers and companies as show above

### 3. Plan for achieving goals:

Provide affordable and safe public transportation to the citizens of Miles City by reaching out to the community to understand the public transportation needs. Assign an Advisory Board to oversee the adoption of policy and procedure to best serve the identified needs. Hire administrative personnel and drivers that understand the mission, are held accountable to the mission, and provide outstanding public service.

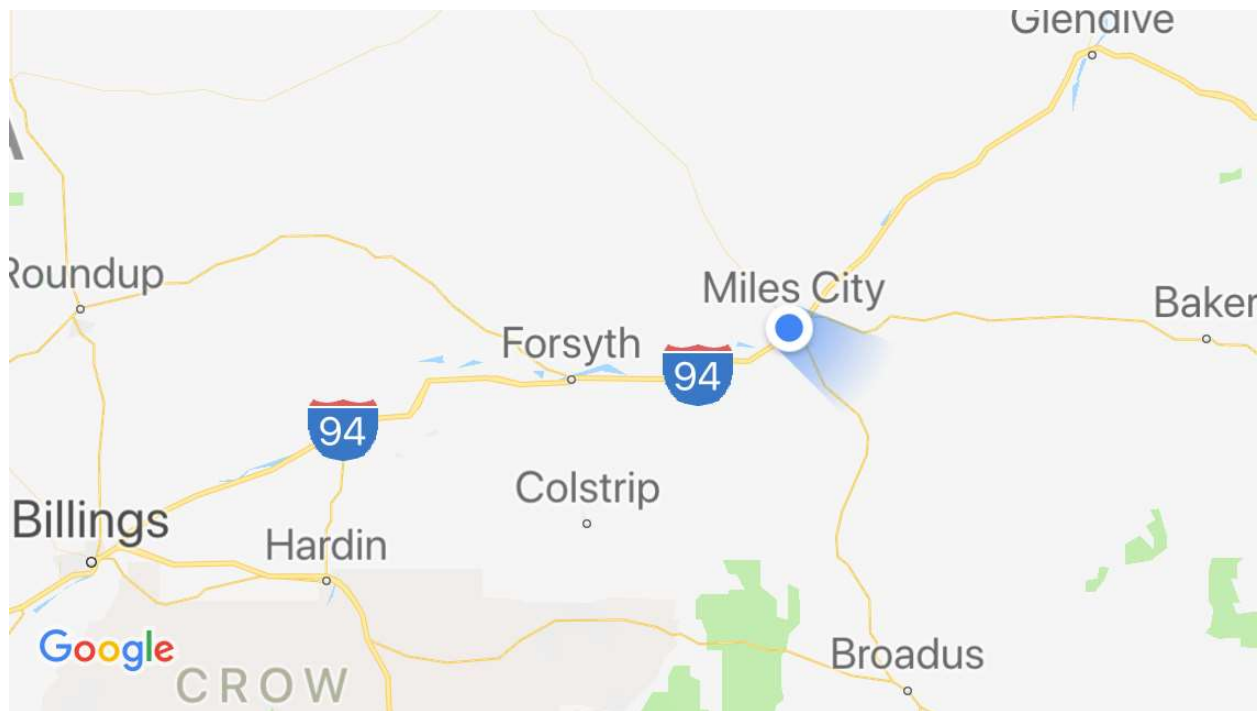
This plan was developed and adopted by the Custer County Transit Advisory Board. More information about the Advisory Board can be found in Appendix A.

## I. Geographic Area

Miles City is the County seat of Custer County in Eastern Montana. It is located at 46°24'30"N 105°50'24"W (46.408460, -105.840093),<sup>[6]</sup> at an altitude of 2369 feet (722 m).

According to the United States Census Bureau, the city has a total area of 3.34 square miles (8.65 km<sup>2</sup>), all land.

Miles City experiences a semi-arid climate with long, cold, dry winters and hot, wetter summers.



## II. Population Demographics

As of the 2022 United States Census estimate, within the geographical area of Custer County there were 12,032 people, 2479 over the age of 65, 4996 households with 2.3 persons per household. The population density was 3.1 inhabitants per square mile. There were 5,780 housing units. The racial makeup of the county was 93.2% white, 2.7% American Indian, 0.8% black or African American, 0.6% Asian, and 2.6% from two or more races. Those of Hispanic or Latino origin made up 3.8% of the population.

Of the population 4.7% is under 5 years of age, 19.3% is under 18 years of age, 20.6 % is over 65 years of age. 14.5 % of the population has a disability and is under 65 years of age.

The median income for a household in the county was \$61,114 and the per capita income was \$34,830. Of the population 10.8% were in poverty status.

## III. Assessment of Available Services

Except for Custer County Transit there is no other operating transit support systems in the area. There are no ADA accessible vehicles or services aside from the local hospital, but this service only caters to hospital patients. All other ADA accessible vehicles are operated by private parties or businesses and are not available to the general public.

## IV. Assessment of Transportation Needs and Gaps

Most current needs and gaps assessed for Custer County Transit include, vehicle maintenance and subsequent downtime, and the challenge of maintaining the “on demand” ride feature.

Custer County Transit had a major increase in rides between the first half of FY23 and FY24. Through the first 2 quarters of FY23 we had 7891 total rides 1678 of those being paratransit rides. Through the same 2 quarters of FY2024 we have had an almost 18% increase in total rides for a total of 9,284 as well as increasing our Paratransit rides of 43% for a total of 2405.

The increase in Paratransit rides as well as the Billings trips being utilized more by individuals in need of an ADA vehicle has taxed our current ADA fleet and made scheduling routine maintenance for these vehicles challenging.

The list of “regular riders” or passengers that book multiple and repetitive days during the week. Custer County transit currently services over 30 of these individuals who absorb various time slots throughout the month. These Transit riders’ needs are for getting to and returning from work, and routine medical appointments such as physical therapy. These “regular” passengers schedule around the same time; normally from

8AM to 12PM. This severely bogs the transit down to the point where getting additional rides booked during this timeframe is highly difficult unless there is a rider cancelation. Currently the regular rider schedule accounts for about 50% capacity on most of the week and about 80% capacity most days between 8-10 am.

The major increase of rider requests during the first half FY24 has occurred even with a historically mild winter season this far. Typically, the harsh conditions of the winter drive a spike in utilization of transit services. We are expecting this surge to come when the weather eventually turns and this will lead to increased declines and wait times for rides as we are currently running at or near our capacity most days.

## V. Goals and Strategies

### Developing Strategies to Address Gaps and Needs

In conjunction with its Transit Board advisors and guidance from the County Commissioners, the Custer County Transit will continually assess local transit needs and any transit needs beyond Miles City in the attempt to increase weekly ride support ratios and lower the “declined rides” rate and maintain the “on demand” feature.

Custer County Transit will meet the increasing demand for local Transit support by working directly with local medical agencies and social services to help identify and provide Transit assistance and coordination for any community members in need of support.

Custer County Transit will also continue to hold active lines of communication and work in conjunction with its regional transit partners to bridge any transit gaps for Eastern Montana and support its outlying community’s needs.

### **Goal #1:**

Maintain an active Transit Advisory Board

Need(s) Being Addressed: Assimilate data, write and approve policy and procedures, oversee planning for future transit needs.

Timeline for Implementation: Scheduled quarterly meetings

Parties Responsible for Leading Implementation: County Commissioners

Parties Responsible for Supporting Implementation: Transit Supervisor

Performance Measures/Targets:

Incorporate appropriate members to address transportation requirements for local passengers.

Continue to identify individuals with disabilities, seniors, and individuals with low income in need of transit support.

Prioritize transportation services and funding for future growth.

### **Goal #2:**

Meet increasing demand for transit needs by expanding fleet support

Need(s) Being Addressed: Continue ADA fleet growth to be able to continue to meet the demand for paratransit services in the community.

Timeline for Implementation: Vehicles will be requested on the FY25 grant cycle.

Parties Responsible for Leading Implementation: County Commissioners

Parties Responsible for Supporting Implementation: Transit Supervisor

Performance Measures/Targets:

Increase ADA fleet from 2 to 4 vehicles to better meet the needs of Paratransit in the community and allow for easier scheduling of maintenance of the vehicles by having a spare ADA vehicle in the fleet.

### **Goal #3:**

Replace aging Transit vehicle fleet.

Need(s) Being Addressed: Augment and replace current Custer County Transit high-mileage vehicles

Timeline for Implementation: ongoing waiting for delivery of vehicles from FY24 grant.

Parties Responsible for Leading Implementation: County Commissioners

Parties Responsible for Supporting Implementation: Transit Supervisor

Performance Measures/Targets:

Increase Transit fleet from 5 to 7 vehicles and augment new vehicles with additional Transit drivers as demand requires. Move high mileage vehicles out of regular rotation and use as spare vehicles to better facilitate maintenance schedule and increase fleet reliability.

### **Goal #4:**

Increase cooperation with other regional agencies

Need(s) Being Addressed: Increase access to the region.

Parties Responsible for Leading Implementation: County Commissioners

Parties Responsible for Supporting Implementation: Transit Supervisor

Performance Measures/Targets:

Work with other Regional transportation providers to coordinate efforts in hopes to offer better access to the citizens of Custer county to other areas of the region.



## VI. Plan Adoption

Consistent support from both the Custer County Commissioners and the Transit Advisory Board has allowed Custer County Transit to provide over 9,000 rides locally and over 100 rides to Billings since the beginning of FY24. Since its inception, Custer County Transit currently has assisted with over 18K Paratransit rides for disabled individuals within the community, and over 58,000 total rides. So far in FY24 we are seeing a 17% increase in rides over FY23. Currently we are able to accommodate these trips while keeping our decline rate low averaging 13 declines per week (Most of which are same day or last-minute calls) while averaging 356 rides per week.

In July 2019 Custer County Transit began offering scheduled trips to Billings. These trips initially occurred once a week, in 2023 due to demand the trips were increased to 2 times a week on consecutive days. Schedules for 2024 were produced in Oct of 2023 and were posted to the transit Facebook and Website as well as distributed to the community. This allowed for citizens to make appointments on the dates the trips to Billings were scheduled. The popularity of these trips continues to grow as we see a number of first-time riders as well as frequent riders on these trips. Through the first 2 quarters of 2024 we are averaging 75% capacity for Billings trips.

Currently all citizens to include, the elderly, the disabled, and members of the general public are able to request and secure rides on this service. Custer County Transit is a next day call in, curb-to-curb service, providing service Monday thru Friday, 8am to 6pm, Saturday 9am to 3pm. Holidays observed are New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas. Fare rates are as follows: \$1 per stop locally, and \$25 (round trip on the same day, one-way rides are the same fare) to Billings or Glendive.

## Appendix A: Transit Advisory Board

The Transit Advisory Board consists of representation from local agencies as well as participation of individuals with disabilities, older adults, and members of the general public. More information about the Transit Advisory Board is available upon request by contacting the Transit Supervisor

Name	Agency
Kevin Krausz- Ex-Officio	Custer County Commissioner
Charlie DeSpain - Secretary-Ex-Officio	Transit Supervisor
Keli Anderson-Ex-Officio	Custer County Council on Aging
Kent Williams- Chairperson	
Esther Helmila	
Kim Blunt	
Deb Schmeling	