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A Pelivan Transit van serving northeast Oklahoma

## Demand-Response Transportation

**D**emand-Response Transportation (DRT), also called *dial-a-ride* or *paratransit*, provides service at the passenger's request. Typically, transit agencies dispatch vehicles in response to a patron's request while accommodating other patrons with similar geographical requests. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) complementary paratransit is a type of DRT service.

DRT helps enhance the mobility of people who either cannot drive, are unable to use or do not have access to a fixed-route system, or simply prefer to use the demand-response system. DRT service provides mobility to people who otherwise would be unable to travel at all.

A DRT vehicle could be a passenger car, van, or small bus, and it would typically operate a door-to-door or curb-to-curb service. Many vehicles are wheelchair accessible.

With DRT service, (a) vehicles do not continuously operate under a fixed route or fixed schedule and (b) the vehicle is typically "dispatched to pick up several passengers at

### Statistics & Research

- The number of rural transit providers operating demand-response service increased from 1,085 in 2007 to 1,180 in 2010, a 9% increase. (Rural National Transit Database, 2007–2010)
- The top two reasons that people in rural areas take transit are for work (27.4%) and school/church (20%); medical/dental trips constitute just 7.4% of transit trips. (2009 National Household Travel Survey). Most of these trips are provided by demand-response transportation.
- In the first quarter of 2013, DRT rides in the United States totaled 48,230,000. (APTA, 2013)

different pick-up points before taking them to their respective destinations” (Central Federal Lands Highway Division, n.d.).

The costs of DRT services vary based upon the hours of operations, the service area and the number of passengers. Additionally, cost can depend on the size and number of vehicles used. According to the Central Federal Lands Highway Division, the cost of DRT services varies between \$40 per hour and \$150 per hour, with potential additional costs for buses.

## Provider Examples

- **Champlain Islanders Developing Essential Resources**, or C.I.D.E.R., is located in the Lake Champlain Islands of Vermont, an area with numerous geographical barriers. C.I.D.E.R. runs its demand-response service Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Volunteers using their own autos are the key component of the program with about 40 volunteer drivers who use their own vehicles. C.I.D.E.R. also operates eight staff-driven vehicles: three 14-passenger buses with wheelchair lifts, three mini-vans with manual ramps, and two sedans. [www.cidervt.org/](http://www.cidervt.org/)
- **Prairie Hills Transit** in Spearfish, South Dakota offers a demand-response service that began with one van that ran four hours a day. The system now covers 14 communities in six counties. Founded 1989, this non-profit is dedicated to providing transportation to whomever needs it. [www.prairiehillstransit.com/](http://www.prairiehillstransit.com/)
- **Rides Mass Transit District** (formerly Rural Initiative Development of Effective Services program) in Harrisburg, Illinois is a federally assisted program to provide public transportation to any individual. Rides is partially funded by the Golden Circle Senior Citizens Council and provides a demand-response service Monday – Friday, 6 a.m. – 6 p.m. and Saturdays, 8:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. Rides’ six operating locations have dispatch centers along with maintenance facilities that supports the 16 county district RMTD serves. [www.ridesmtd.com/](http://www.ridesmtd.com/)
- **The Huntingdon-Bedford-Fulton Area Agency on Aging** is a public agency under the jurisdiction of the counties of Huntingdon, Bedford, and Fulton in Pennsylvania. The organization provides a demand-response program that transports older adults with a wide range of needs, such as medical appointments and shopping. Transportation to senior centers is provided for free. [www.nb.net/~hbfaaa/page7.html](http://www.nb.net/~hbfaaa/page7.html)

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**Pelivan Transit** in northeastern Oklahoma was established by Grand Gateway in 1985 to provide flexible, accessible transportation to a rural, seven-county area. The program serves an aging and geographically dispersed population, offering demand-response, deviated fixed-route and transportation to nutrition sites, work and activities. Debbie McGlasson, Pelivan Transit director, and Kay Carter, Grand Gateway Area Agency on Aging director, share information about their demand-response transportation program in the interview below. More information is available at [www.pelivantransit.org](http://www.pelivantransit.org).

**NCST: How is your demand-response program funded?**

**McGlasson:** We have actively pursued and secured a diverse range of federal funding, including [Section 5311](#) (Rural & Small Urban Areas), [Discretionary 5309](#) (Bus and Bus Facilities), [5310](#) (Transportation for Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities) [JARC](#) (Job Access and Reverse Commute), and [New Freedom Grants](#) as well as [5311\(c\)](#) Tribal Transit Funding. Some of these grants require local matching funds, which Pelivan meets through its service contracts with the State of Oklahoma, local municipalities, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Medicaid non-emergency transportation and Older Americans Act nutrition funding. We also supplement these funds with revenue from advertising, private for-profit businesses, non-profit foundations, and fares.

*“Pelivan Transit is such a blessing because without it I would be a shut-in.”*  
- Pelivan passenger, Owasso, Oklahoma

**NCST: What are the travel options for those who utilize your demand-response service?**

**Carter:** We have an accessible network of rural transportation that helps link seniors to medical treatment, human services and social activities. Seniors are able to ride within a city zone, which includes up to two miles beyond city limits. City zone fares vary from a free (subsidized) fare to about \$2.50. In addition, riders can pay a variable distance fare based on mileage, with different rates for tribal citizens, to go from

any point of origin to a destination within the Pelivan Transit service territory.

We also provide a daily health-clinic route connecting two cities and numerous health clinics within a four-county area. This route is subsidized by an area hospital, area municipalities and a 5311 federal grant. Health-clinic routes now bring riders to multiple clinics across a seven-county area.

**NCST: Can you tell us about your vehicles?**

**McGlasson:** The Grand Gateway Economic Development Association (a council of governments) supervises and administers tribal transit in its seven-county service area. Tribal transit vehicles are marked by the Pelivan Transit logo and a unity symbol representing all tribes participating in Grand Gateway’s Northeast Oklahoma Tribal Transit Consortium. These

coexistent markings are a visible reminder of the cooperation between Pelivan and its tribal partner groups.

Some vehicles used by Pelivan are purchased specifically for tribal transit purposes through grants, primarily 5311(c). Tribal transit vehicle funding was also provided by the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) grant. Qualifying senior riders are also able to reach meal sites and doctor’s appointments for free. Each tribe takes a turn in vehicle purchases and then leases the vehicles for operation to

Pelivan Transit. Pelivan Transit makes all vehicles in its fleet available for tribal transit services. A total of 66 vehicles cover the seven-county area, integrating tribal and non-tribal transit in to a cohesive system.

***NCST: What plans does Pelivan Transit have for the future?***

Carter: Pelivan will continue to form multiple partnerships with agencies, medical providers and businesses to enhance the existing rural public and tribal transit system for the betterment of all of the communities we serve. For instance, through a partnership with Grand Lake Mental Health Center, we have added 100 vehicles to our fleet to help mental health patients get to

health appointments and socialization workshops. When the vehicles are not in use, the Center can use those vehicles to serve other people.

Pelivan Transit has also formed a consortium with ten Native American tribes in our service territory to enhance existing rural public transit services by adding tribal transit services alongside our other services. We complete grant writing and program start-up support for all of these tribes, which has infused about \$1 million more dollars into our budget. Because the tribes have tribal transit programs, we were able to work with them to create van pools, and work commuter routes, form partnerships and collaborate.

## Enhancing Local Practices

If you're interested in enhancing DRT services in your local community, consider the following:

- Use face-to-face communication for publicizing your service and encouraging older adults to use it. In the planning phase, public outreach to potential customers can help you identify the best options for your community. Going to places with concentrations of people such as community meetings, health fairs, and senior centers can put you in touch with potential consumers.
- Consider the cost that may be incurred due to the technology (software and hardware) typically used for dispatching and routing vehicles.
- Coordinating with others in your community, such as agencies or peer transit systems, could help you run a more efficient DRT service.
- Consider holding an orientation for new consumers in order to teach them how to use your service.

## References

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## NCST Resources

Download the following resources free of charge from [www.seniortransportation.net](http://www.seniortransportation.net).

**[Marketing Your Transportation Services to Older Adults](#)** – This 15-page document is the transcription of an AARP session with Leslie Gonder of AARP and Steve Blacksher and Jon Swanson of Special Transit in Boulder, Colorado. Leslie Gonder is Sr. Manager, Brand and Integrated Channels for the Integrated Marketing Services team and explains marketing strategies for reaching older adults. Steve Blacksher and Jon Swanson share the comprehensive marketing plan used at Special Transit that provides demand-response, door-through-door, and driver-assisted transit services.

**[Rides Change Lives: Innovations in Senior Transportation](#)** – This 12-page booklet describes the innovative approaches of the NCST's premier group of eight Senior Transportation Demonstration Grantees. Projects address topics including: technology, new volunteer options, alternative funding mechanisms, expanding services, increasing options, and improving quality. These are all vital components to creating or enhancing a demand-response service.