

The Arc Chemung-Schuyler

A nonprofit, [The Arc Chemung-Schuyler](#) is a disability service organization that supports nearly 2,000 individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families, as well as older adults. It also operates Schuyler County Transit, a public transit agency, on behalf of Schuyler County in Watkins Glen, New York.

Project Goal:

This project will complete a comprehensive transportation and mobility research, analysis, feasibility and sustainability plan for the Schuyler County region, addressing coordination for cross county/regional trips; identifying target populations such as older adults, people with disabilities and people with low incomes; and identifying complete transportation options from walkability to carshare and transit options. The solution would enable people with limited mobility options to travel more freely, access essential services and enjoy greater social inclusion.

Population Served:

- Older adults, people with disabilities and people with low incomes.
- County population less than 18,000, with 51 people per square mile.
- 22% are 65 years or older; of those, 10% live with dementia, 13% have disabilities and 15% experience hearing difficulties.
- Low income: 100% of the Federal Poverty Level.

Transportation Barriers:

- This hilly rural area is less than 350 square miles, with villages spread through farms and forests.
- Volunteer driver shortages limit transportation to medical appointments.
- Dial-a-Ride is the only transit option outside the villages, yet it only accounts for 2 percent of Schuyler County Transit Trips, possibly due to limited service hours.

Community Needs:

- Expanded service hours for transit, support for volunteer-based transportation programs, stronger coordination between transportation providers and human services providers, plus improved services in rural areas where transportation options are limited.

Community Engagement Efforts:

- Two surveys (for target populations and community organizations) distributed to 8,000 people via a postcard with QR code and via paper surveys taken to post offices, libraries, banks, etc.
- Three community meetings were held in neighborhoods with limited transportation options during times when transit was available; meetings included door prizes and an engagement activity with a map to visually represent travel paths with color coded stickers.
- Three smaller focus groups were held.
- An awareness and education campaign publicized the project extensively: newspaper and radio advertising, tabling at community events, billboards, ads in the free shopper, social media, on local café menus, at libraries and banks, at events like the fall harvest festival,

- In-person engagement included visits to rural area congregate meal sites, a rotary luncheon and book swap event, veterans' monthly coffee talk and more, including a ride-along on multiple transit routes asking riders to fill out surveys.
- The Arc hired two interns from Cornell University familiar with the project from their work on the AP Design Connect Challenge instead of consultants to assist with community engagement and compiling an action plan.

Multi-sector Collaborative Partnerships:

- The Arc built an Advisory Committee of 14 members who work in transit and mobility management, community planning and economic development, as well as people representing older adults, people with disabilities, people facing poverty and veterans. The committee also includes nine community members who are older or have disabilities and use transit.
- In a creative use of resources, The Arc partnered with Schuyler County Transit to open dead head legs on private routes to the public. This helped maximize accessibility by expanding transit to areas where The Arc was already serving a private population. Now, rather than an empty bus tracing the route, the public can ride.
- The Arc surveyed partner agencies to inventory vehicle fleets and identify ways to share technology or assets. While the survey only received a 50% response rate, many agencies already are exploring how to incorporate transportation in their budgets going forward. For example, one local agency is not allowed to pay for bus fares, but it can pay for bus wraps or ads that could free up Arc funding for fares.
- In a first step toward creating a sustainable partnership with the sheriff's office, The Arc assisted with budget estimates and strategies for a new volunteer program around safer driving.

Funding and Sustainability:

- The Arc has secured Section 5310 funds for years to purchase busses and operate a private bus system to transport older adults and people with disabilities to programs daily.
- For years, the Arc and Schuyler County have acquired Section 5311 funds to operate Schuyler County Transit and Mobility Management services, including a one click/one call center. Cost sharing drivers, vehicles and maintenance staff has leveraged 5310 and 5311 dollars.
- The Arc is applying for an NRTAP Community Rides grant application to further test and implement the identified transit needs, plus partnering with local human services agencies to budget a transportation line item for fare-free transit and expanded Dial-a-Ride.
- Coordination with NY Connects secured budget funding for Schuyler County Transit to advertise programs, upgrade equipment and potentially sponsor fares.

Outcomes:

- The primary need identified was expanded Dial-a-Ride hours in rural areas, plus weekend service, shorter routes and no fares. In response, The Arc is testing weekend service, a shorter route and fare free. When funding allows, expanded Dial-a-Ride services will be tested.
- To address identified needs for transit education, The Arc distributed in-person community engagement packets with a shopping bag, riders' guide for Schuyler County Transit, information on the Americans with Disabilities Act and paratransit, plus a schedule for the Saturday Shopper Shuttle pilot every Saturday in August, a "Fare Free in August" announcement and a celebration flyer for Schuyler County Transit's 15th Anniversary.
- Next steps include a bus shelter study with AAP Design Connect at Cornell University and a partnership with the county around route changes.

Learnings:

- Engagement can be challenging, even when holding community meetings and focus groups in communities, with free transportation. Instead, go to places community members already visit—a congregate meal site for older people, local food banks, church dinners and Veterans Coffee Talk meetings—to conduct impromptu focus groups and gather survey responses.
- Partner with agencies like Office for the Aging, Veterans Services, Workforce NY, and other human services agencies to spread the word almost one on one.
- Consider cold calling and knocking on doors, hand delivering engagement packets that include a pilot implementation project based on feedback received to date.