

STATE OF AGING IN CENTRAL INDIANA



SECTION 6 TRANSPORTATION

November 2023





Persona

HAROLD

56 years old

Lives in close-in suburb

Part-time bus driver

Harold is a White, 56-year-old single man living in a close-in suburb west of Indianapolis. Since he lost his job as a driver for a delivery company three years ago, he has worked various part-time jobs. Currently, he's a bus driver for a local school, and he works part-time as a server at a sit-down chain restaurant near his home. His total income is a little under \$30,000. He owns a car but uses it as little as possible. Both of his part-time jobs are within easy walking distance of his home, and he carools with a friend who lives nearby for trips to the grocery store. Harold also has a bike and uses it for exercise and for short errands. The benefits on his mental and physical health from walking and biking—and a series of costly, unexpected car repair bills over the past year—have led Harold to consider selling off his car. One obstacle is the fact that he has a son, daughter-in-law, and two grandchildren in the city's northern suburbs. It takes 20 to 30 minutes to visit them by car. He could get there by public transit, but it would take about two hours.

Through another friend, Harold recently learned about and was offered a position as server at a restaurant in downtown Indianapolis. Working full time there, he estimates he would make up to \$6,000 more (depending on tips) annually than he currently earns with two part-time jobs. Although he's intrigued by the offer, transportation challenges make it a hard call. By car, the trip downtown from his home is about 20 minutes. But the extra expenses for gas, repairs, and parking would consume a significant share of the extra money he would

Personas are sketches of fictional people that represent real challenges and circumstances highlighted in this report. They are a useful way to imagine how these statistics impact the lives of individuals and families.

make at the new job. Alternatively, he could take public transit. But the walk to and from his home to the bus stops, plus the commute time, would add up to more than an hour each way. As a result, one of two things will happen if he takes the new position: car expenses will eat up much of his additional income, or he will spend much more of his free time riding a bus, especially if he sells off his car and uses public transit to visit family. Yet the status quo also has very real downsides. Most notably, Harold fears being stuck in a cycle of relatively low-paying, part-time jobs for the rest of his working life.

In this report, we refer to three subsets of older adults.

Younger-old: age 55-64

Middle-old: age 65-84

Oldest-old: age 85+

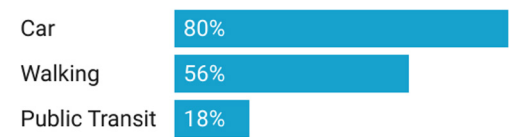
TRANSPORTATION

Access to transportation is important because it empowers older adults to maintain their independence. Transportation opportunities for older adults may take different forms, including driving, public transportation, ride-share service, or shuttle buses. This section of the report discusses public transportation access and perceived transportation barriers. Key findings include:

- In Indianapolis, approximately 76,000 people age 65 or older live too far away from an IndyGo stop to likely use transit. That represents nearly two thirds of people age 65 or older in Indianapolis.
- Less than one in five older adults in Central Indiana positively rate the ease with which they can use public transportation in their communities.
- In Indianapolis, one in three older adults live in a neighborhood with minimal or no public transportation service.
- The 2023-2027 IndyGo Plan aims to improve IndyGo transportation services. This is likely to help increase access for older adults who live along pre-existing routes.
- Forty-two percent of adults age 65 and over who ride IndyGo public transit in Marion County would not be able to make their trip without IndyGo services.

Older adults find car travel easy, but only one in four finds transit easy to use in their community..

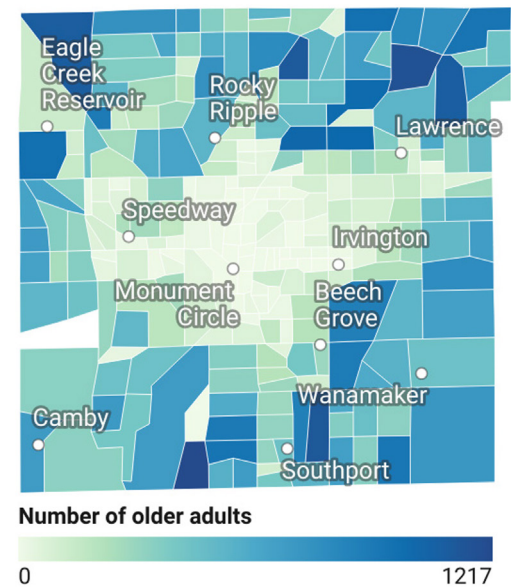
Percent of older adults in Central Indiana who say they have good or excellent ease of travel by...



Source: CASOA, 2021; Graphic by the Polis Center

The greatest number of adults 65+ who are likely too far from transit live in the more suburban or rural areas of Marion County.

Estimate based on population of adults age 65 and over from 2020 ACS 5-yr survey data and the estimated percent living farther than 1175 feet from the closest IndyGo bus stop, based on straight line distances from residential parcels.



Source: Polis Center analysis of 2020 ACS 5-yr survey data, IndyGo data, and the City of Indianapolis data; Graphic by the Polis Center

INADEQUATE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, “transportation is essential to many areas of life such as employment, staying connected with family and friends, and access to healthcare.”¹ However, many older adults do not have reliable transportation options beyond driving.

In Central Indiana, older adults find travel by car much more accessible than walking or public transportation. Four out of five older adults report that the ease of car travel is good or excellent in their communities, while only 56 percent say the same about walking, and 18 percent about public transportation.² Additionally, 42 percent of older adults said that safe and affordable transportation is not available in Central Indiana.³

This is particularly important for households without a vehicle, and the 2021 five-year American Community Survey estimates that one in 10 households with a household member older than age 65 has no vehicle. Furthermore, access to vehicles varies by housing tenure. One third of renter householders age 65 and older have no vehicle, compared to only 5 percent of homeowners.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION USE BY OLDER ADULTS

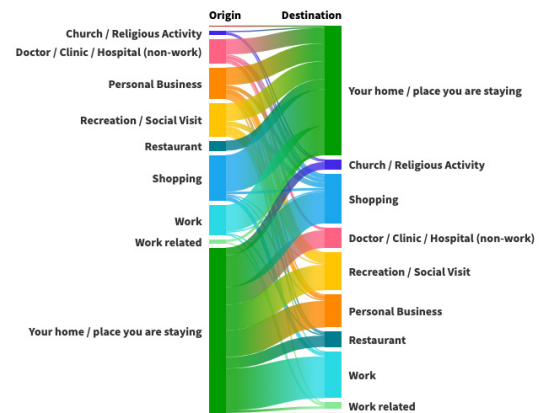
Indianapolis has a substantial public transportation system and in 2019, its fixed-route ridership was 9,244,855.⁴ Unfortunately, since then, largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ridership has starkly declined, outlined later in the chapter. Analysis of the 2022 IndyGo on-board survey data shows that close to 35 percent of bus riders are adults age 50 and older, and nearly 10 percent are age 65 and older.⁵ For adults age 65 and over, while their home was the most common origin or destination, social/religious/personal trips were next most common for origins or destinations at just over 20 percent of trips. However, for adults age 50-64, work was much more common as an origin and destination, with 27 percent beginning their weekday trips from work as opposed to 17 percent of those age 65 and over. IndyGo services were especially critical for adults age 65 and over to reach their destinations, with 42 percent of riders saying they would not be able to make their trip if IndyGo was not available as a service.

Public transportation is often only easily accessible to those who live near a public transportation service. Unfortunately, while some older adults live in neighborhoods with good public transportation service, most do not. Approximately 76,426 adults age 65 and over in Indianapolis live farther away from bus stops than many are likely willing to walk—about 1,200 feet, or just under a quarter mile. This threshold of walking distance is based on the 75th percentile of distance traveled to bus stops by IndyGo riders 65 and older from the 2016 IndyGo ridership survey and findings from the 2022 survey that 65 percent of adults age 65+ travel less than a quarter mile to the bus stop from their point of origin.

A transit service density score (shown in the map below) is another way of quantifying transit service available to a neighborhood. It is calculated as weekly revenue miles per square mile and ranges from zero (no transportation services) to over 1,000 (high transportation service).⁶ A greater number of older adults tend to live where transit density is the lowest.

In 2019, the City of Indianapolis invested in significant public transportation improvements, which led to increased service, including for older adults who live in Marion County. Twenty more census tracts had improved

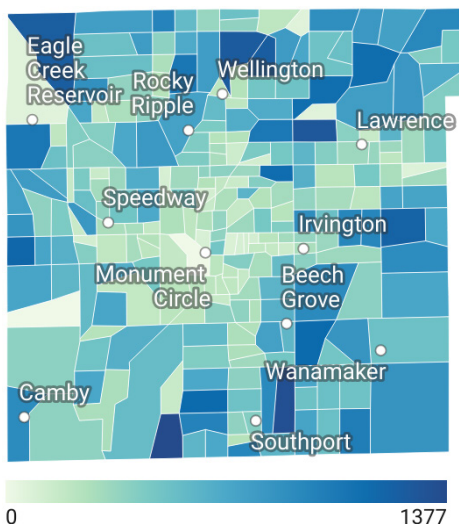
Adults age 65+, tend to use IndyGo public transit for social/religious/ personal trips the most.



Source: 2022 IndyGo Ridership Survey; Analysis by the Polis Center

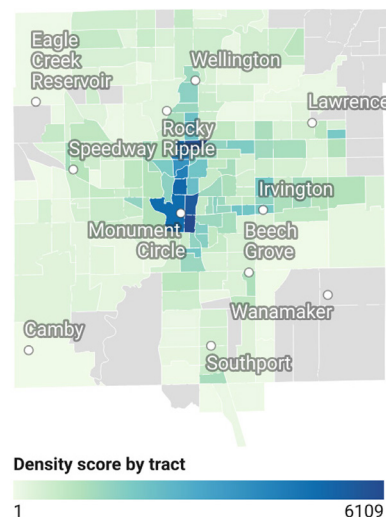
Most transit services are concentrated in the city center, but most people, including most older adults, live outside this area.

There are fewer adults age 65+ living in the urban center
Number of adults aged 65 and older living within each census tract.



Source: American Community Survey 2017-2021 five-year estimates; Graphic by the Polis Center

Transit density is the greatest in the urban center, where there are fewer adults age 65+
2019 data per census tract, calculated as weekly revenue miles per square mile. Ranging from zero (no transit service) to over 1,000 (high transit service). Grey tracts have no transit service.



Source: SAVI; Graphic by the Polis Center

Increased transit service benefited many Indianapolis neighborhoods, not just those with high transit service.

Average transit service score of home census tract for an older adult in Indianapolis.



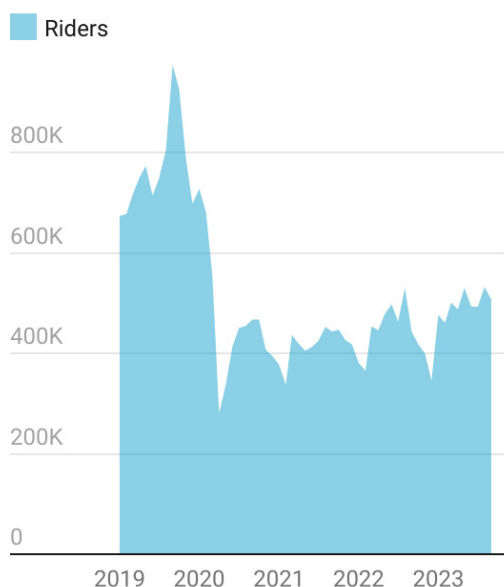
98,000 older adults have improved transit access.

Neighborhood transit service increased at least 10% for 98,000 older adults

Source: Polis Center analysis of 2020 ACS 5-yr survey data, IndyGo data, and the City of Indianapolis data; Graphic by the Polis Center

service in October 2019, compared to 2018. As a result, 15,000 additional older adults now live in high public transportation service neighborhoods. Increased public transportation service broadly affects adjoining neighborhoods, not just those with high levels of service. Nearly 98,000 older adults now reside in census tracts where service increased by 10 percent or more. In Marion County, the average older adult experienced a 26 percent improvement in service. This was accomplished by increasing the frequency and operating hours of local routes, as well as adding bus rapid transit via the Red Line. IndyGo plans to continue increasing local bus service with greater frequency and two additional rapid transportation lines through their proposed 2023-2027 future service plan.⁷ IndyGo will particularly target transit critical population zones with increased frequency, improving the reach of 15 minute or better service for minority communities, zero vehicle households, and low-income households. While this will likely improve access for older adults, this future service plan is focused along pre-existing routes and will not expand access to less urban areas in Marion County where older adults are more likely to reside.

IndyGo ridership has fallen sharply during the pandemic but is beginning to rise again in recent months in 2023.



Source: IndyGo; Graphic by the Polis Center

Like every transit agency in the country, IndyGo experienced a 32 percent decline in ridership between February 2020 and February 2023, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁸ This drop in ridership negatively impacted IndyGo's revenue, leading to a reduction in service frequency.

Additionally, the shortage of bus drivers has been a continual challenge, with IndyGo being around 100 drivers short of its operating goal for most of 2022.⁹ The reduction in service frequency impacts older adults reliant on public transportation, causing longer travel times and limiting accessibility to complete multiple tasks in a single trip.

COMMUNITY NEEDS

Central Indiana households having trouble acquiring transportation have the option of dialing 2-1-1 to connect with needed services. From September 2020 to September 2023, there were 1,783 calls to 2-1-1 from adults age 60+ requesting some form of transportation assistance.¹⁰ However, important to note is that most callers do not disclose their age. For example, 92 percent of callers during this period did not disclose their age, more so even than 2019.¹¹ In general, ride app services made up the bulk of calls, at 42 percent. Calls from older adults for ride app

services dropped drastically in 2023, to only three percent of all transportation related 2-1-1 calls.

COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE

According to focus group participants across Central Indiana, transportation is important for maintaining independence.¹² Those who can access transit enjoy the activities it allows them to do, while those who do not have access feel their independence was curtailed. Across the Central Indiana region, participants report utilizing various means of transport. Some drive themselves or are driven by others, some utilize rideshare or shuttle bus programs, some who live in Indianapolis ride public transportation, and others walk. The type of transportation used and the frequency with which it is used depends on affordability, accessibility, and a variety of other factors. One participant drives himself and other older adults out to eat, while another who owns her own vehicle found that paying for its ongoing maintenance problems was challenging and stressful. As a part of the aging process, driving at night is no longer safe for some and the lack of accessible parking is a deterrent for others when driving to locations they frequented in the past. The roundabouts in Carmel were mentioned as confusing and difficult to navigate by one participant. Other older adults relied on family or friends to drive them, which is helpful but does not always allow these older adults to be as independent as they wish.

While rideshare programs permit focus group participants to go anywhere they wish, these programs are expensive, rely on technology that some do not know how to use, and are viewed as potentially unsafe by others. Shuttle bus programs, such as those through medical providers, senior centers, CICOA Aging and In-Home Solutions (CICOA), and IndyGo's Open Door program, are options that are affordable to many participants and are useful for going to medical appointments and sometimes grocery shopping. A few participants indicated that the nominal fees charged for some of these services are not within financial reach for them, and hoped for more affordable, free options. Most of the services mentioned by older adults do not operate outside Marion County, making it difficult for older adults who must travel to the suburbs for medical, personal, or social reasons. Those transit options that cross county lines often require reservations in advance. Depending on where they lived, participants had different opinions on how accessible public transportation was. Some find it

Ride app services made up over 40 percent of 2-1-1 transportation calls from adults age 60 and older within Central Indiana.

Sept. 2020 - Sept. 2023 in Central Indiana.

Referral Taxonomy Name	Total Calls	Percent of Transportation Calls
General Paratransit/Community Ride Programs	23	1.1%
Transportation Passes	32	1.6%
Local Bus Services	40	1.9%
Transportation Expense Assistance	141	6.8%
Disability Related Transportation	145	7.0%
Non-Emergency Medical Transportation	357	17.3%
Senior Ride Programs	467	22.7%
Ride App Services	854	41.5%

Source: Indiana 211 Data Dashboard; Graphics by the Polis Center

Only for callers who identified their age. 92% of callers did not give their age

The number and percentage of 2-1-1 calls from older adults for ride app services dropped drastically in 2023 in Central Indiana.

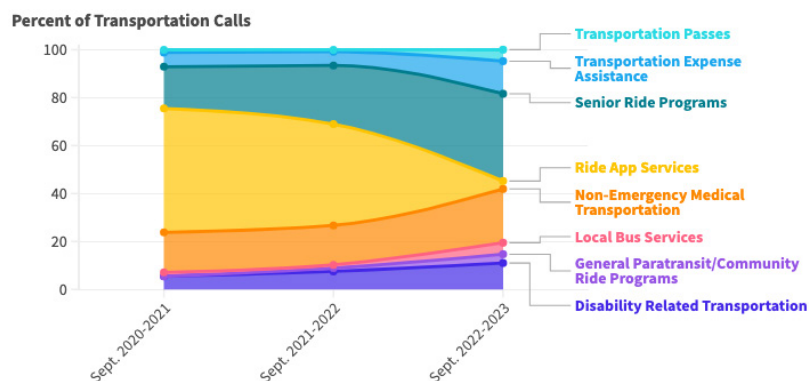
Number of calls from those age 60 and over.

convenient, while others had difficulty accessing it. One participant mentioned how much she enjoys the new transit center downtown, while another one noted that it is difficult to navigate the stairs on the bus. Walking is also enjoyed by some as exercise or transportation; however, poor weather can make this challenging, particularly as ice and lack of snow clearance make sidewalks, bus stops, and curbs dangerous to navigate.

2-1-1 Transportation Needs of Older Adults (Age 60+)



For online users, hover your mouse above the points on the graph to see the total number of transportation calls recorded for older adults who provided their age.

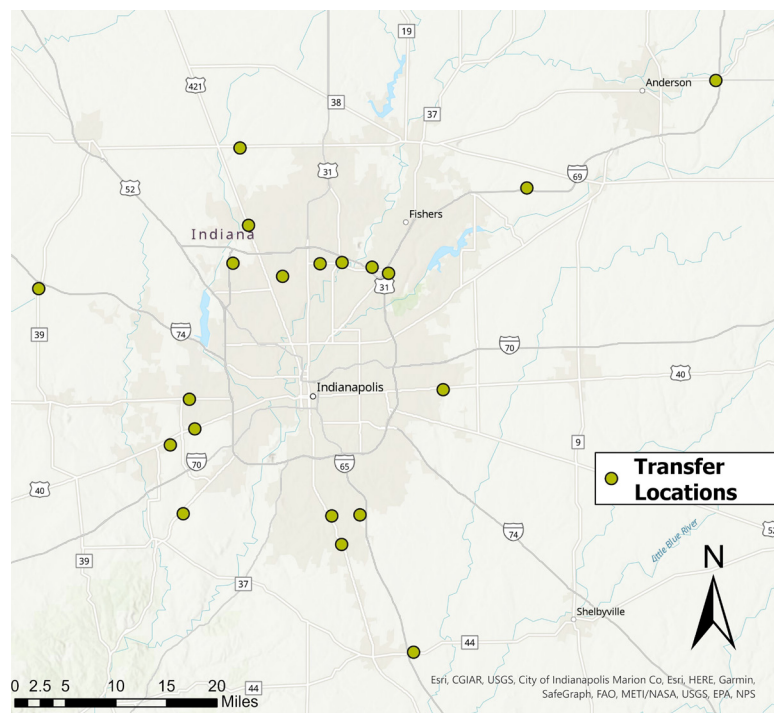


Source: Indiana 211 Data Dashboard; Graphics by the Polis Center

Only for callers who identified their age. 92% of callers did not give their age

Transfer points between door-to-door services are located near the borders between counties.

Locations where riders can transfer from one door-to-door service to another.

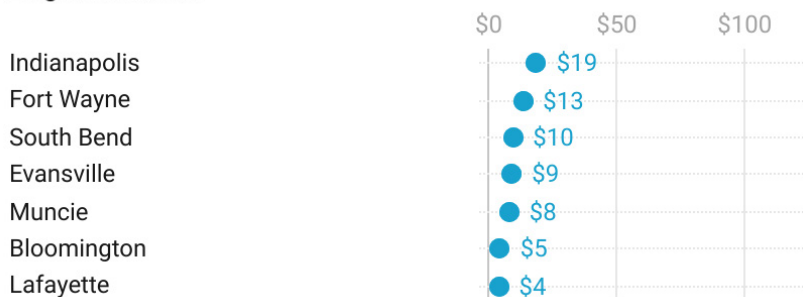


Source: Central Indiana Regional Transit Authority; Graphic by the Polis Center

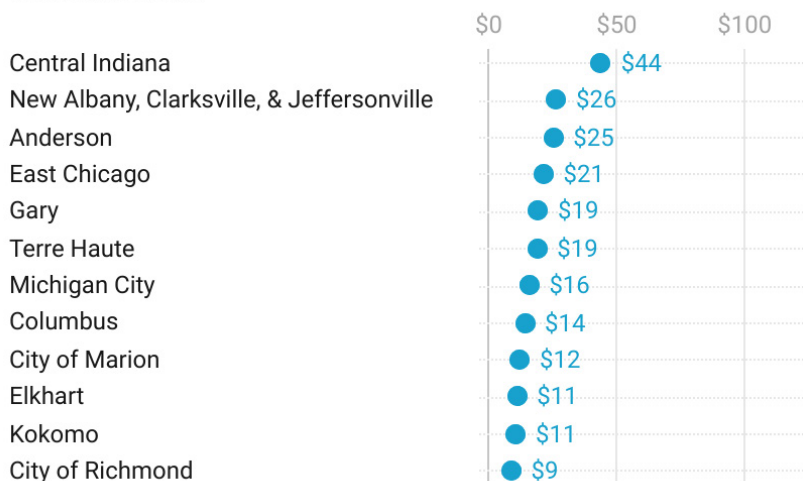
Expenditures per rider are greater for demand services in general relative to fixed route services, although demand services are especially critical for older adults. (Page 1/2)

2022 Indiana Transit Data, total expenditures per rider (U.S. dollars), Based on ridership data and total expenditures data from 2022.

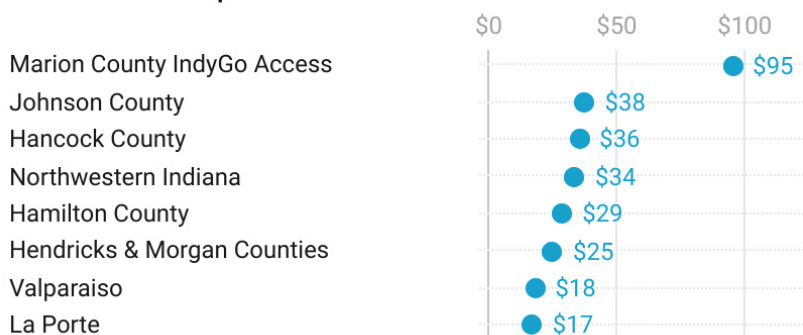
Large Fixed Route



Small Fixed Route



Urban Demand Response



Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District

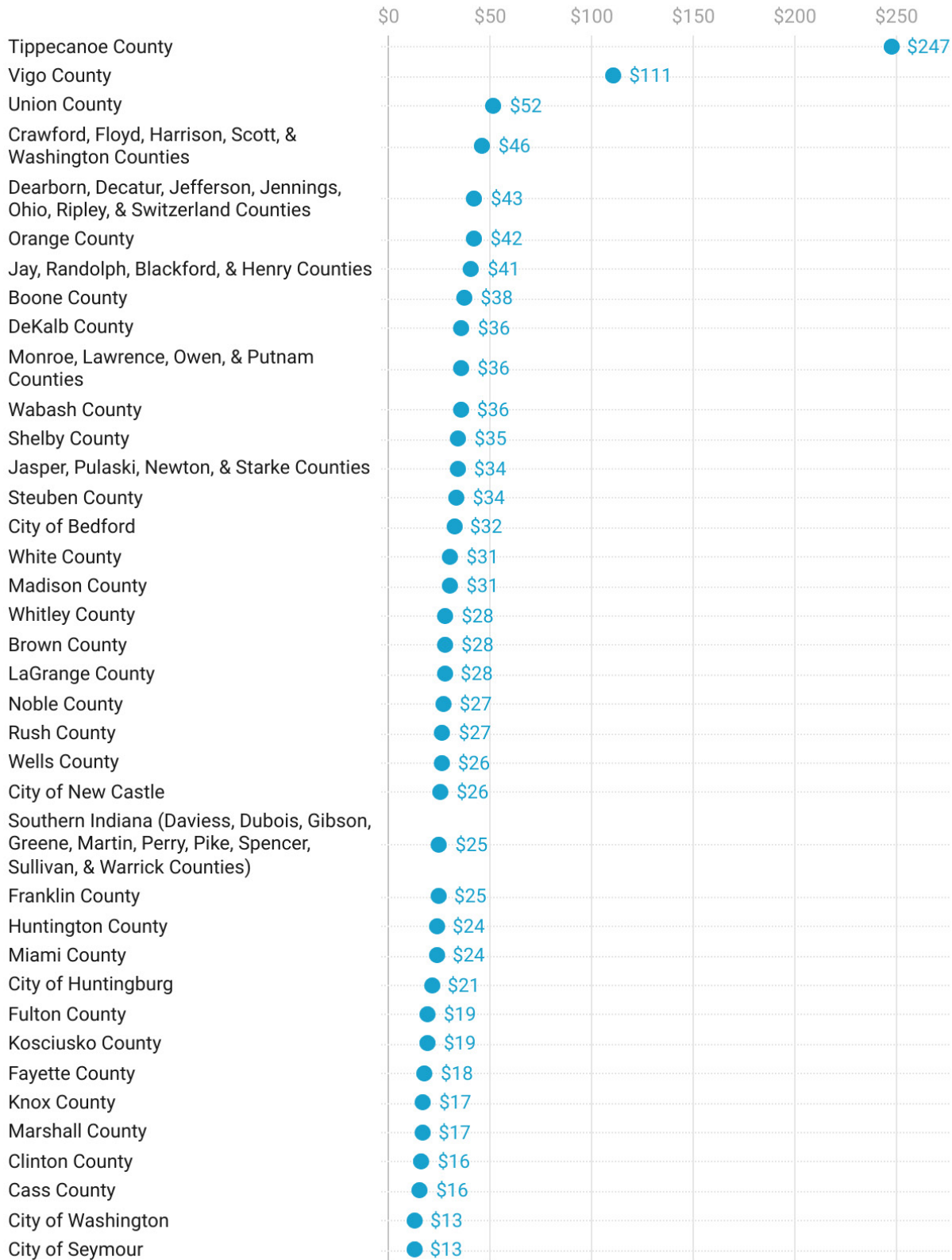


Source: INDOT and IndyGo; Graphic by the Polis Center

Expenditures per rider are greater for demand services in general relative to fixed route services, although demand services are especially critical for older adults. (Page 2/2)

2022 Indiana Transit Data, total expenditures per rider (U.S. dollars), Based on ridership data and total expenditures data from 2022.

Rural Demand Response



Source: INDOT and IndyGo; Graphic by the Polis Center

FILLING THE GAP

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires public transportation providers to provide paratransit to eligible individuals.¹³ Paratransit is a publicly funded, low-cost ridesharing service available by request. IndyGo's paratransit service, now called IndyGo Access, operates seven days a week throughout Marion County. According to IndyGo, eligibility is based, "...on the effect the disability has on the applicant's functional ability to board, ride and disembark independently from a fully accessible local transit vehicle. The accessibility of the regular local transit service and the environmental and architectural barriers within the service area are also considered."¹⁴ All eight Central Indiana counties have paratransit/door-to-door service, operated by either a public transportation authority or a senior services agency. Each of these programs provides transportation within the boundaries of their respective counties. Older adults who are dependent on these services but require inter-county transportation must transfer from one county service to another at one of 21 possible transfer points across Central Indiana.

IndyGo conducted an evaluation of its paratransit services in 2020 and found that one in five trips are made by individuals whose start or finish location has the following characteristics:

- is in the outlying parts of the county,
- is outside the ADA-required zone, and
- has an average trip distance of 12.5 miles.

This average trip distance is three miles longer than the average distance of peer paratransit agencies.¹⁵ This was evident when looking at expenditures per rider data from 2022 for each transit agency, where IndyGo Access had the greatest cost per rider compared to other urban demand transit services in Indiana and most other transit services throughout Indiana in general. This expenditure per rider also nearly doubled from 2021. These demand response services are often the costliest on a per-rider basis because of the greater number of miles traveled per rider but are essential for many older adults in Central Indiana.

There are several transit services within Central Indiana targeted toward older adults and those with limited mobility. CICOA's Way2Go service provides scheduled rides within Marion County for a fee of \$5.00 per ride. Medicaid may cover the cost of this ride service when the

trip is to a medical appointment. CICOA also provides shuttle services from certain apartment complexes within Marion County to major destinations such as banks, grocery stores, and shopping centers. My Freedom is

a voucher program available across the whole region that allows persons with disabilities to purchase up to 15 vouchers per month for \$6.00 each and use them as payment in any of the door-to-door providers in

Central Indiana. These services were typically described as affordable by focus group participants, but because service is usually restricted to within county boundaries, these services are rarely used for regional trips. Key informants mentioned the main downturn of these services not going outside of county boundaries was the

restriction of participants being able to attend medical appointments.¹⁶ Similarly, IndyGo has minimal service outside Marion County. The public and nonprofit transportation services available to older adults in Central Indiana still leave a gap in navigating the region at large. However, efforts are currently underway throughout Indiana, such as through Health by Design,¹⁷ to improve connectivity and accessibility to transit services between different agencies. To learn more about some of the factors that lead to gaps in transportation service for rural older adults, please read “Highlighting Equity” below.

HIGHLIGHTING EQUITY

RURAL OLDER ADULTS HAVE LESS ACCESS TO TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

Across the U.S., public transportation is generally less available for rural residents than urban residents. One third of rural areas have access to public transportation, compared to nearly three-quarters of metro areas.¹⁸ Because one in five (21 percent) older adults in Central Indiana live in rural areas, this can cause disparities in access to transportation for these older adults, which can affect their overall health and well-being. Below are factors that can influence the lack of access to transportation for rural older adults.

ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS: LACK OF VEHICLES AND RESOURCES FOR RURAL TRANSPORTATION SERVICES



One study that interviewed key informants in all 50 states about rural transportation challenges found that the lack of vehicles and personnel was the most cited barrier to providing sufficient services.¹⁹ One senior center in Hamilton County states in their senior transportation guide that the Hamilton County Express, which is the only public transportation service to serve the general public in the county, is unable to serve roughly 800 ride requests per month due to a shortage of available vehicles.²⁰

COMMUNITY FACTORS: CHANGING DEMOGRAPHY IN RURAL AREAS IMPACTS SERVICES



Due to migration of younger people to urban areas for more educational or career opportunities, older adults are beginning to make up a larger proportion of the population in rural areas. Because of decreased economic opportunities and fewer working-age residents, rural communities tend to have smaller tax bases. Reduced tax revenue means that the local government has fewer financial resources available to support or expand public transportation programs.²¹

POLICY FACTORS: MEDICAID REIMBURSEMENT DOESN'T FULLY REIMBURSE THE EXPENSES OF TRANSPORTATION PROVIDERS



Medicaid is an important source of transportation for qualified older adults in need of medical transportation. However, Medicaid only reimburses travel that occurs when the patient is in the vehicle. This policy can hurt the overall operating costs of rural transportation providers, as they often must drive more unreimbursed miles to pick up a passenger due to larger distances between businesses and residences in rural areas.²²

ENDNOTES

- 1 U.S. Department of Transportation, "Accessibility," 2020, accessed February 5, 2021, <https://www.transportation.gov/accessibility>.
- 2 National Research Center, "CICOA Aging and In-Home Solutions Full Report," Community Assessment Survey for Older Adults (TM) (Boulder, CO: National Research Center, 2021).
- 3 National Research Center, "CICOA Aging and In-Home Solutions Full Report," Community Assessment Survey for Older Adults (TM) (Boulder, CO: National Research Center, 2021).
- 4 IndyGo, "About Us," IndyGo, accessed February 5, 2021, <https://www.indygo.net/about-indygo/>.
- 5 Lochmueller Group, ETC Institute. IndyGo On-Board Transit Survey Final Report. IndyGo; 2023:107. Accessed November 7, 2023. https://www.indygo.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/IndyGo_combined_FINAL_03162023.pdf
- 6 Transit service density scores are calculated for each census tract by finding the total mileage of bus service available (including multiple trips on the same route) and dividing that by the area of the census tract. This score rises if trips are more frequent, if operating hours are extended or if more routes are added.
- 7 IndyGo, "IndyGo Future Service Plan" IndyGo, Accessed October 28, 2022 <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/4176f43c5ea54394821e2b58c46b9e2f>
- 8 IndyGo, "Transit Planning, Policy, and Performance" IndyGo, Accessed October 28, 2022 <https://www.indygo.net/about-indygo/transit-planning/>
- 9 Dwyer, Kayla, "IndyGo is proposing a new local bus route map. What to know and how to give input" IndyStar, Accessed October 28, 2022 <https://www.indystar.com/story/news/local/transportation/2022/10/11/new-indygo-bus-map-which-routes-could-be-cut-or-changed/69551856007/>
- 10 Polis Center analysis of data provided by Indiana 2-1-1, provided by the 2-1-1 dashboard, Accessed October 9, 2023, <https://in211.communityos.org/datadashboard>
- 11 Indiana 2-1-1 data analysis is provided by the SAVI Community Information System. 2-1-1 is a free and confidential service that helps Hoosiers across Indiana find the local resources they need. When a client calls 2-1-1 for help, this is referred to as an interaction. During each interaction, a client may communicate one or more needs, related to a single problem or multiple problems. When a call is received by 2-1-1, it is placed in one or more categories, depending on the nature of the need(s) expressed by the caller. For example, if a caller requests a referral for a food pantry, a referral for transportation to help get to that pantry, a referral for donated clothing, and a referral for a soup kitchen, the call is identified as a single, unique call related to food needs, transportation needs, and material assistance needs. Even though there are two different food-related needs expressed, the call is only counted as a single call for food-related help. In the 2019 dataset, 75% of caller data specified client age, while the remainder did not. In this report, only data with the age of the client (between 60 and 105 years old) was used.
- 12 Nine focus groups with older adults were conducted during 2019 and 2020 to collect input on issues facing the older adult population in Central Indiana. The focus groups composed of older adults were assembled with the identification and recruitment assistance of community service providers. These focus groups were conducted by researchers, in person prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and by Zoom after the pandemic began. The questions asked of the focus group participants were discussed and agreed upon by research faculty and staff.
- 13 IndyGo, "Access," IndyGo, accessed November 1, 2022, <https://www.indygo.net/access/>
- 14 IndyGo, "Access," IndyGo, accessed November 1, 2022, <https://www.indygo.net/access/>

- 15 KFH Group Inc., Palo Consulting Group, and The McCormick Group, "IndyGo Paratransit Operational Analysis Study Final Report," June 2020, <http://www.indygo.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/IndyGo-Final-Report-June-2020.pdf>
- 16 Public and nonprofit sector leaders and service providers who are knowledgeable about service systems and issues pertaining to older adults in Central Indiana were identified and interviewed during report preparation.
- 17 Core Programs – Transit – healthbydesignonline.org. Accessed November 9, 2023. <https://healthbydesignonline.org/core-programs-transit/>
- 18 Thirty-five key informant interviews with caregivers and service providers were conducted during 2019 and 2020 to collect input on issues facing the older adult population in Central Indiana. Public and not-for-profit sector leaders and service providers who are knowledgeable about service systems and issues pertaining to older adults in Central Indiana were identified and interviewed as key informants during report preparation
- 19 Henning-Smith, C. et al., "Rural Transportation: Challenges and Opportunities" (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Rural Health Research Center, November 2017), http://rhrc.umn.edu/wp-content/files_mf/1518734252UMRHRCTransportationChallenges.pdf
- 20 Gafford, M., "Transportation for Seniors in Hamilton County: The Definitive Guide," Shepherd's Center of Hamilton County (blog), January 14, 2019, <http://shepherdscenterofhamilton-county.org/transportation-for-seniors-in-hamilton-county-the-definitive-guide/>
- 21 Wood, J. et al., "Older Adult Transportation in Rural Communities: Results of an Agency Survey," *Journal of Public Transportation* 19, no. 2 (June 1, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.5038/23750901.19.2.9>.
- 22 Henning-Smith, C. et al., "Rural Transportation: Challenges and Opportunities."

Download the data used in this chapter.

Download spreadsheets containing our source data
by [clicking here](#) or scanning the QR code below.



