

worklink

Wood County Workforce Mobility Study



Executive Summary

September 2026



Department of
Transportation



Lake Erie West
REGIONAL COUNCIL
Empowering Connection • Amplifying Impact

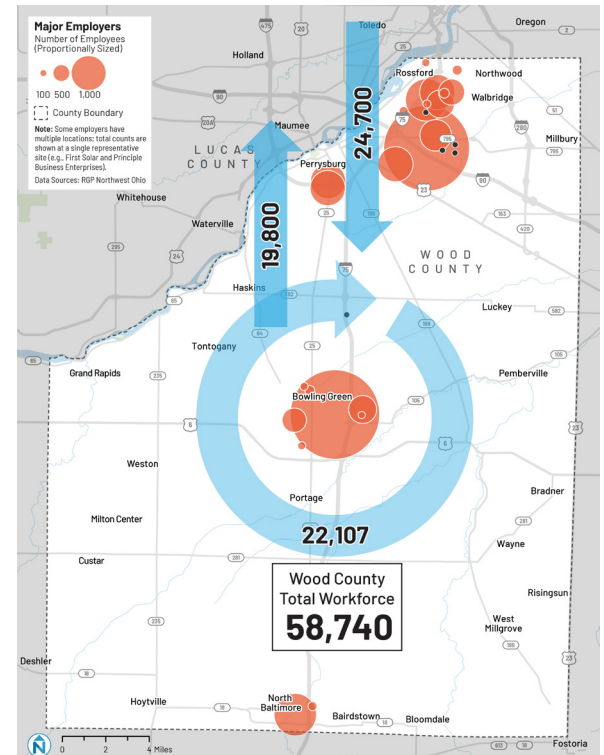


Great Lakes
COMMUNITY ACTION
PARTNERSHIP

The Need for Workforce Mobility



Wood County, Ohio, is a mix of rural and suburban settings with a diverse economic base and a strong sense of community. The northern part of the county is a regional industrial employment center for Northwest Ohio. Bowling Green, in the center of the county, is an important hub for jobs, education and medical facilities. Transportation remains a critical challenge both for employers trying to attract and retain talent and employees trying to get to jobs. In addition, roadway design, land use separation, industrial siting patterns and lack of sidewalk infrastructure directly affect workforce mobility costs and feasibility. The **Wood County Workforce Mobility Study** – also known as WorkLink – aims to address these challenges.



Daily workforce mobility patterns

Study Goals

01

Enhance
Workforce
Mobility

02

Establish
Multimodal
Connection
Points

03

Encourage
Regional
Collaboration

04

Support
Economic
Growth

Project Schedule and Key Tasks

The project began in May 2025 and concluded in May 2026.

2025

Spring

Kick Off and Needs
Assessment

Summer

Strategies and
Opportunities

Fall

Transit Workshop

2026

Winter

Draft
Recommendations

Spring

Workforce Mobility
Study Report

Funding for the project was provided through the Ohio Department of Transportation's (ODOT's) Workforce Mobility Partnership Program. TARTA, Lake Erie West Regional Council and the Great Lakes Community Action Partnership (GLCAP) jointly managed the project.



Employer & Stakeholder Engagement

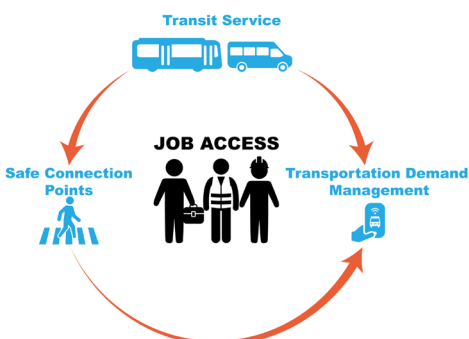
To understand the mobility needs of employers and employees in Wood County, WorkLink gathered insights through a series of engagement activities:

- Meetings with a steering committee formed specifically for this project
- Interviews with employers in small groups and one-on-one meetings
- Surveys of employers and employees
- Project progress updates at community events and conferences
- Updates on the project website, woodcountyworklink.com

WorkLink Outcomes

Successful mobility strategies depend on available public transportation services, safe access to transit stops and an awareness of available travel options. WorkLink's outcomes address these foundational needs through:

1. **Transit Service.** Five transit service strategies were developed, each meeting different workforce needs within travel markets A, B and C (right).
2. **Safe Connection Points.** More than a dozen potential sites were identified where passengers could transfer between transit providers.
3. **Transportation Demand Management (TDM).** TDM consists of a suite of strategies that increase awareness and reduce barriers to transit, carpooling, walking, and biking to work.



Workforce Transportation Needs

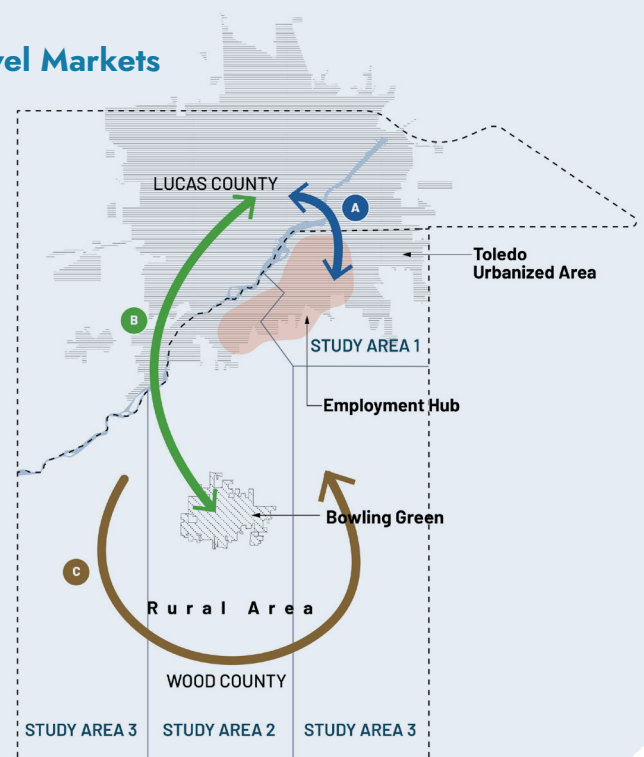
Understanding transportation needs and travel patterns directly informed solutions. Analysis and stakeholder input led to the identification of three Wood County study areas:

1. State Route (SR) 795 corridor in northern Wood County
2. I-75 corridor from Perrysburg to Bowling Green and North Baltimore
3. Rural areas outside of the SR 795 and I-75 corridors

Based on travel patterns, three primary markets were identified:

- A Urban to Suburban:** Between Lucas County and Wood County, primarily for work trips.
- B Intercity:** Toledo area to Bowling Green and beyond, serving a mix of work, education, and general-purpose trips.
- C Rural:** General purpose and workforce trips traveling to and from less frequently served areas.

Travel Markets



The Transit Landscape

Existing workforce transit providers in Wood County include:

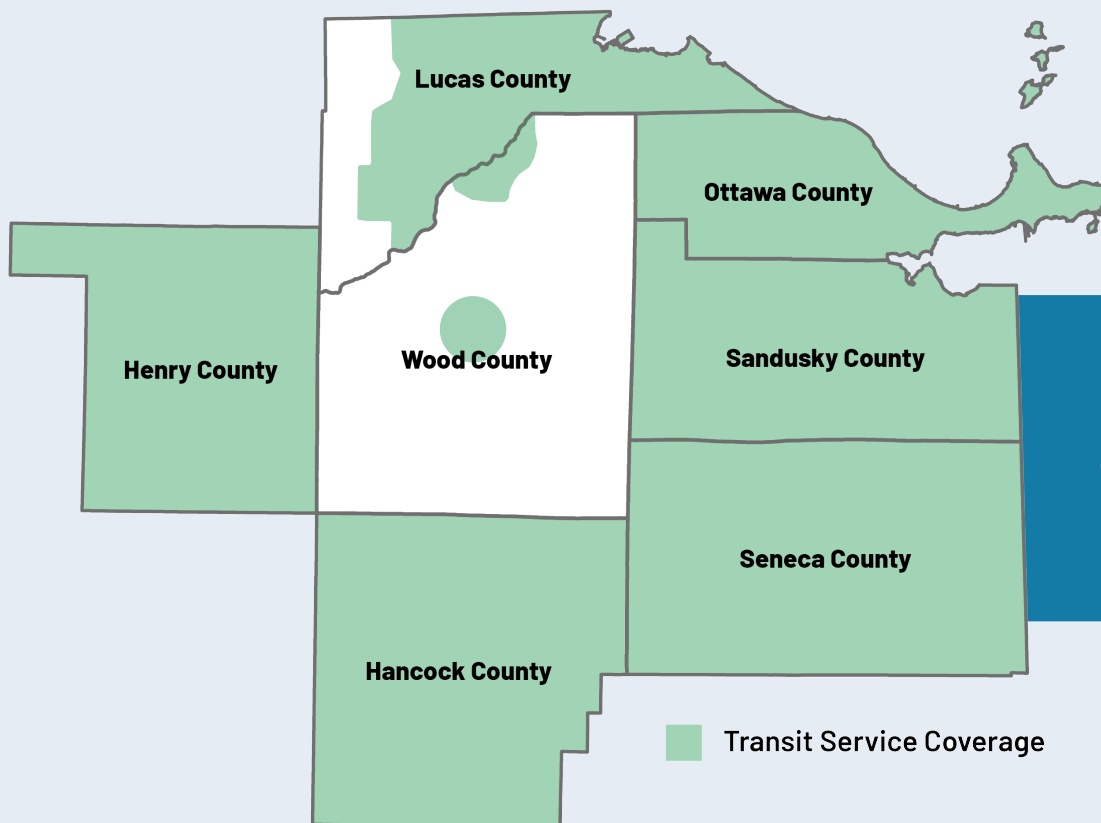
- **TARTA's Route 10** from Toledo to Rossford, a fixed route with scheduled stops.
- **TARTA Flex**, an on-demand service covering Rossford, passengers can request a pick-up and drop-off within this zone with as little as 30 minutes of advance notice.
- **TARTA Move**, a paratransit service that can make workforce pick-ups and drop-offs for pre-certified passengers with disabilities within $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from TARTA's fixed-route stops in Wood County.
- **Perrysburg Transit**, which serves the City of Perrysburg with demand-response service, meaning passengers schedule their pick-up and drop-off in advance.
- **BG Transit**, a demand-response service covering

Bowling Green plus one mile outside city limits.

- **Bowling Green State University shuttles** that operate near campus in Bowling Green. This service is free and available to the public, but it's provided mostly for BGSU staff, faculty and students.
- GoBus regional service from **Toledo to Cincinnati or Columbus**. Six daily GoBus trips serve Bowling Green on the way to Toledo, Cincinnati or Columbus. Service times work well for daily southbound round trips for anyone living in Toledo and traveling to Bowling Green.

These individual services provide local circulation but do not meet workforce travel needs.

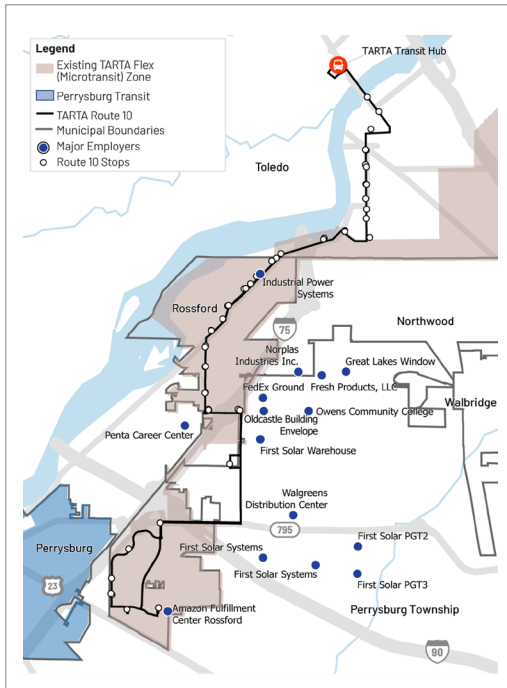
Existing Transit Service Coverage



All neighboring counties have countywide or nearly countywide transit service coverage.



Major Employers In Northern Wood County Lack Proximity To Existing Transit



Many employers are located along arterial routes (45 mph speed limits) with no sidewalks or bike lanes. This makes it difficult for workers to get safely to and from existing transit and job sites. It also creates safety challenges when designing transit service to serve these major employers.



Transit Strategies

Based on engagement with stakeholders and employers, five transit strategies were developed that addressed the three travel markets: Feeder Shuttle, Commuter Shuttle, Microtransit Shuttle, Regional Route, and Countywide Service.

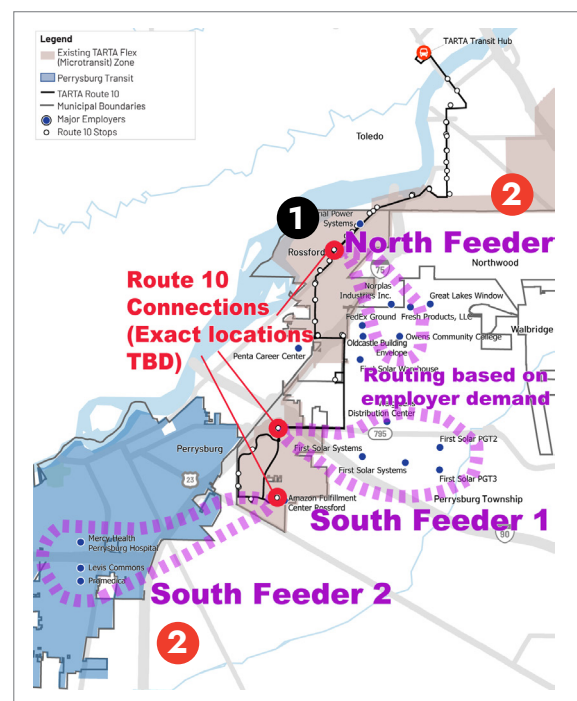
Study Area 1: Urban to Suburban Feeder Shuttle

A feeder shuttle would meet employees at designated Route 10 stops and take them directly to their employers and back.



- 1 The feeder shuttles can be timed to meet Route 10 at connection points for a seamless transfer.

- 2 The feeder shuttle route would be pre-determined based on employer demand. Three on-demand routes serving northern, central and southern employers could provide time-efficient connections for employees.

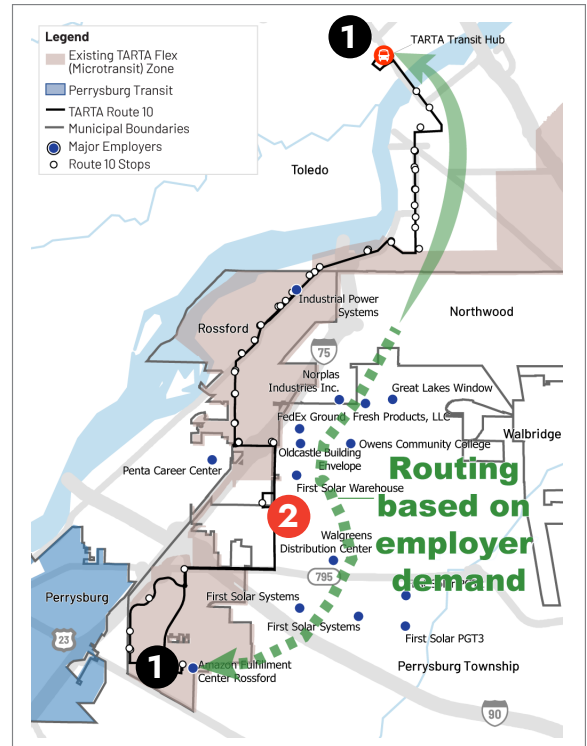


Commuter Shuttle

A commuter shuttle would start in Toledo and serve northern Wood County employers directly. To maintain efficiency and customer experience, it would likely serve a limited number of employers.



- 1** Shuttle starts at the TARTA Transit Hub where riders can transfer from other TARTA routes. It ends in Rossford where riders can transfer to Route 10.
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- 2** Shuttle directly serves employer front doors since roads are fast and there are little to no sidewalks. The exact routing would be based on employer demand and interest.



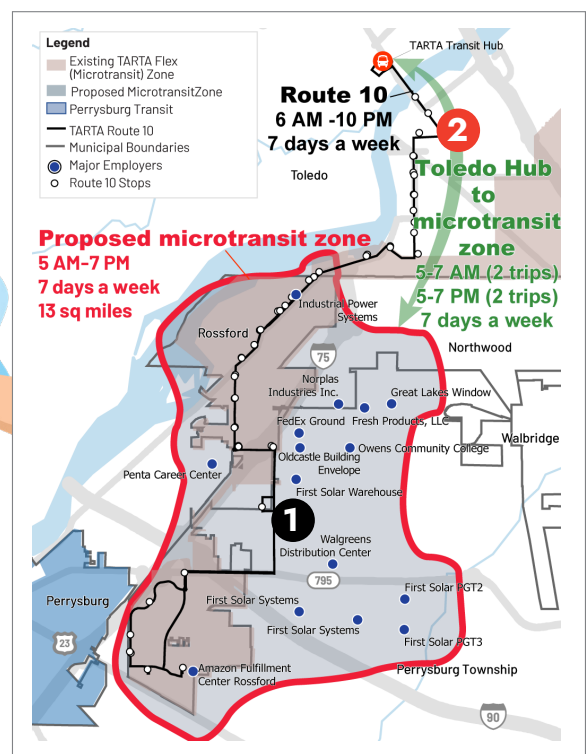
Microtransit Shuttle

Microtransit is an on-demand, same-day service that relies on technology to maximize efficiency. Service could be provided within northern Wood County connecting to Route 10 during non-peak hours and to the TARTA Transit Hub during peak hours.

Riders schedule a pick-up and drop-off in advance (usually via an app). Workforce trips could be prioritized.



- 1** Passengers get dropped off or picked up anywhere in the microtransit zone. The bus operator runs on the most direct route between destinations.
-
- 2** In the morning and afternoon peak, service starts or ends at the TARTA Transit Hub.





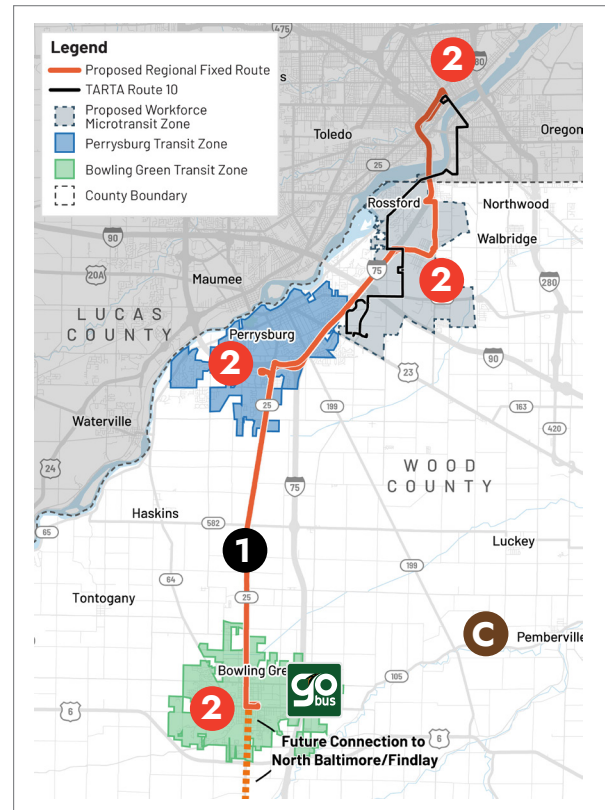
Transit Strategies

Study Area 2: Intercity

Regional Route

The regional route would connect Toledo, Rossford, Perrysburg and Bowling Green.

- 1** Service would operate on a fixed route with limited stops and is focused on serving key work shifts.
- 2** The first phase would connect Bowling Green to northern Wood County and Lucas County. Later phases could be extended to North Baltimore and Findlay.
-  The route could complement new GoBus intercity service that stops in Toledo, Bowling Green and Findlay.
- C** This route could serve as an efficient central corridor with connections for countywide service (see rural strategy).



TDM Toolkit

Transportation Demand Management (TDM) complements transit service by providing policies, programs, services and infrastructure that expand and improve non-drive-alone options. TDM increases awareness of transportation options and reduces barriers to using them.

The WorkLink Workplace Access Toolkit developed for this project provides a blueprint for implementing more TDM programming. Specific actions include:

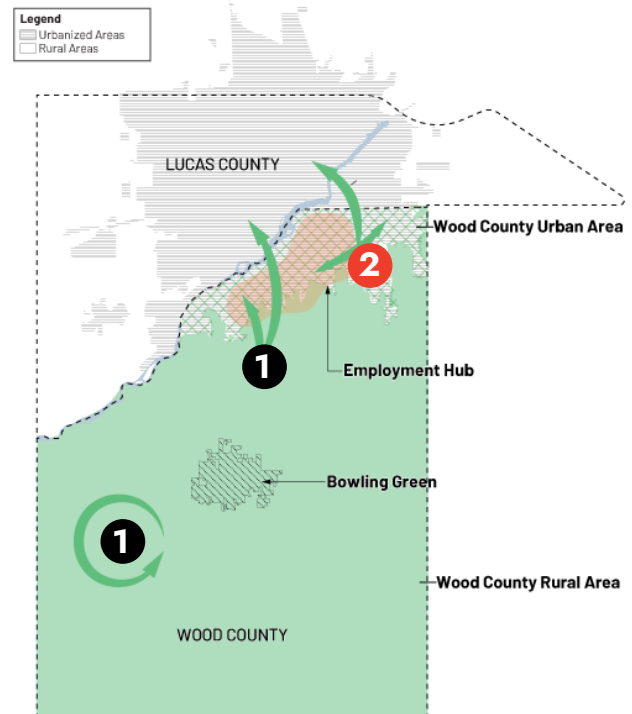
- **Pre-tax transit fare purchases:** TARTA is working on this program, which allows employees to buy transit passes pre-tax.
- **Carpool promotion:** The Gohio platform already provides comprehensive carpool matching, but employees may not be aware of it.

- **Vanpool program:** TARTA offers a vanpool program, providing a 50 percent subsidy. This program is currently available for any Wood County trips that start or end in TARTA's service area.



Study Area 3: Rural Countywide Service

- 1 A coordinated funding effort could advance on-demand rural countywide service by leveraging federal transit funding (see callout below). Federal transit funding could subsidize trips within the rural portion of Wood County and transport the workforce from the rural areas into the urbanized area.
- 2 A countywide provider could seamlessly transport workforce within the more urbanized areas of northern Wood County or Lucas County. These trips would not be eligible for rural federal transit funding. In situations where urban and rural trips intersect, the provider tracks the trip costs separately and appropriates different funding sources to pay for them.

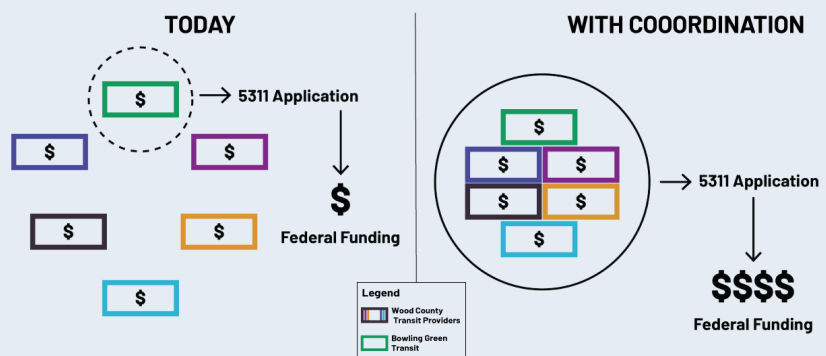


“I have to walk an hour to get to my bus stop.”

Walgreens Distribution Center Employee

Potential for Countywide Coordination

Several Wood County public service organizations pay to operate transportation today, but only one provider (the City of Bowling Green) applies for federal transit funding. Through coordination, Wood County could leverage more federal funding than it receives today without requiring significant new local funding. This approach was documented in Great Lakes Community Action Partnership's (GLCAP's) recent study, *Connecting Rural Wood County*, 2025.





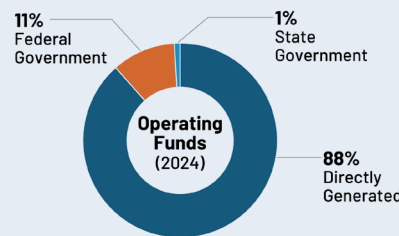
Transit Strategy Funding

Funding Sources Today

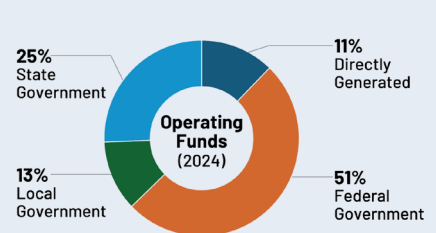
Today, transit providers receive funds from a mix of federal, state and local sources. Federal transit funding programs are specific to urban and rural areas. Northern Wood County is part of the Toledo urbanized area, while the rest of Wood County is rural. Urban transit providers are expected to generate most operating funds locally, while the federal government will subsidize around half of operating costs for rural communities. Local, directly-generated funding sources often include sales tax, general funds, fares and service contracts.

Sources of Operating Funds for an Urban Provider (TARTA) and a Rural Provider (B.G. Transit)

Toledo Area Regional Transit Authority (TARTA)



B.G. Transit



Transit Strategy Summary & Funding Options

The table to the right summarizes each strategy's operating characteristics and operating cost range. Costs were based on per-hour rates for similar services, with a conservative contingency added. The feeder shuttle costs are low because the service is not considered a public transit service under federal guidelines.

New transit services in Wood County will require new funding. The three main categories of funding for transit are:

- 1. Local funds**, including general funds, taxes, fares and contracts
- 2. Private funds**, including employer contributions and workforce grants
- 3. Federal funds** applicable to Study Areas 2 and 3. Federal Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) funds could potentially support Study Area 1 strategies as well

Funding Source Applicable to Each Strategy

Study Area	Strategy	Annual Operating Cost Range and Service Characteristics	Funding Source: Local Funds	Funding Source: Private	Funding Source: Federal
1: Urban to Suburban	Feeder Shuttle	\$110K-610K • Commuters only • AM/PM peak only • 7 days/week • 1-3 routes	Yes	Yes	CMAQ up to 5 years
1: Urban to Suburban	Commuter Shuttle	\$350K-410K • Commuters only • AM/PM peak only • 7 days/week • 2 vehicles	Yes	Yes	CMAQ up to 5 years
1: Urban to Suburban	Microtransit Shuttle	\$350K-920K • AM/PM peak only or All day • 7 days/week • 2 vehicles	Yes	Yes	CMAQ up to 5 years
2: Intercity	Regional Route	\$770K • 5 AM-7 PM; every 2 hours • 7 days/week • 1 vehicle	Yes		5311
3: Rural	Countywide	\$3.8 M • 5 AM-7 PM • 7 days/week • 10 vehicles	Yes		5311

Governance Models

Governance refers to the organization responsible for planning, funding and overseeing transit service. The governing agency can be separate from the operating agency. For Wood County, there are four potential governance models:

- 1. Local Government (cities, villages, townships, county).** This model provides the greatest local oversight. Local governments can use tax levies to fund transit.
- 2. Regional Transit Authority (RTA).** RTAs are public agencies providing transit across multiple jurisdictions. RTAs have the authority to levy taxes. TARTA is an example of an RTA.

- 3. Transportation Management Association (TMA).** TMAs manage the transportation needs of a particular district, focused on reducing drive-alone trips. Many TMAs are nonprofit, member-controlled organizations funded through a mix of member dues, assessments and grants. TMAs can complement existing providers by building coordination and filling service gaps.
- 4. Nonprofit agencies.** Many nonprofit agencies operate workforce transportation in neighboring communities.

Transit Strategy Governance Feasibility

The table below summarizes which governance models would work best for each transit strategy. Service models relying on local funding are less feasible in Wood County. Therefore, the most feasible model in Study Area 1 is a Transportation Management Association (TMA) or nonprofit. A local government model is more feasible for consideration of the intercity and rural strategies.

	Study Area 1			Study Area 2	Study Area 3
	Feeder Shuttle	Commuter Shuttle	Microtransit Shuttle	Intercity	Countywide
Transportation Management Assn. (TMA)	●	●	●	●	●
Non-Profit	●	●	●	●	●
Regional Transit Authority (RTA)	●	●	●	●	●
Local Government	●	●	●	●	●

Governance model feasibility per transit strategy



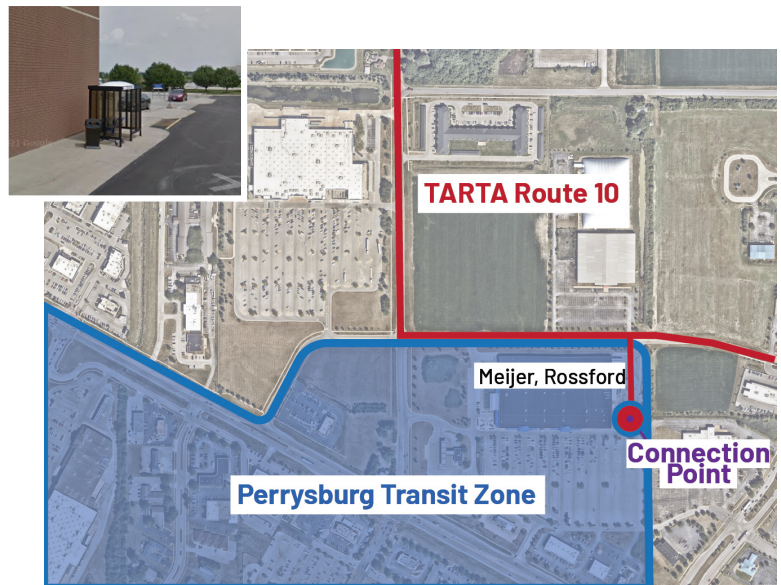
Connection Points

Connection points are designated places linking transportation options. They could be:

- From one public transit provider to another
- From public transit to a shuttle
- From public transit to a sidewalk or bike lane/bike share

Connection points should be seamless, safe and easy to understand.

Today, Perrysburg transit and TARTA route 10 connect at the Meijer in Rossford. An employee traveling from central Toledo, for example, could take TARTA to the Rossford Meijer, transfer to Perrysburg Transit, and arrive directly at an employer site in the city of Perrysburg.



Site Identification and Evaluation

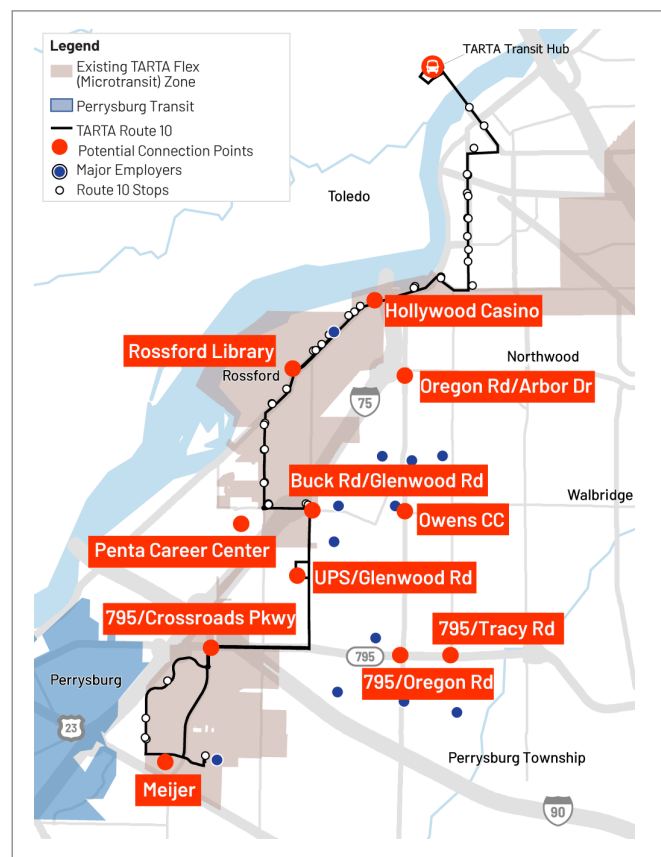
More than a dozen potential connection point locations were identified based on activity centers such as retail, health care, community centers, mixed-use destinations or education facilities. Once the sites were identified, they were assessed using an evaluation framework of 16 criteria.

Criteria included the ability for a bus to use the site, the cost to make the site safe/accessible and the value within the land use/street network. The results allowed the sites to be grouped into a list of priority and secondary connection points.

Ultimately, the implementation of connection point sites will depend on which transit strategy moves forward and where the routes go.

“We have a lot of employee turnover because of transportation challenges.”

Wood County Human Resources Professional



Selection of potential connection points in northern Wood County

Next Steps

To maintain the momentum of the WorkLink study, a series of next steps are recommended. Likely study partners to lead each next step are identified in parentheses.

Near-Term 2026-2028

- Maintain study momentum by continuing to update the Wood County Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) on WorkLink progress. (GLCAP, TARTA, Lake Erie West Regional Council, Wood County Commissioners, municipalities, county service agencies)
- Advance the “Building Access” study, which examines housing, workforce and transportation choices regionally. This study builds on WorkLink’s analysis and further defines transportation needs in Wood County. (Lake Erie West Regional Council)
- Apply for CMAQ funding. This funding can be used as seed money to fund the first 12-18 months of service to commuters in northern Wood County and create a member-driven TMA in the longer term. This organization can also manage and implement TDM programs. (TARTA, GLCAP and NOIC)
- Establish a standing committee that includes agencies and organizations that could complement employee membership in a TMA such as NOIC, Wood County Port Authority, Chambers of Commerce, Regional Growth Partnership, Wood County Transportation Advisory Committee, Wood County Economic Development. (TARTA, Lake Erie West Regional Council, GLCAP)
- Convene an information share between neighboring county transportation providers and Wood County staff to understand how other counties have structured their transit programs. (GLCAP)
- Apply for capital funding for safety and access projects at high-priority connection points. (TARTA, ODOT)

Longer-Term 2028 and Beyond

- Form a TMA as a nonprofit or other stand-alone organization. The TMA would recruit members, operate TDM programs, and set up a workforce shuttle pilot. The TMA would need to identify the operator for the shuttle pilot, what vehicles are appropriate, and what technology would be used for accessing information about the service. (TARTA, GLCAP and Lake Erie West Regional Council)
- Submit an application for the next round of CMAQ funding in 2030 that advances TMA, shuttle and other workforce mobility strategies. (Future TMA)
- Analyze GoBus data serving Bowling Green and Toledo. Survey riders to understand trip purposes. Determine how a regional fixed route could complement GoBus service. (GLCAP)
- Advance service coordination discussions among Wood County’s existing transportation providers. Meet with ODOT to better understand how to become a countywide operator. Interview peers to gather ways other systems track trips in rural and urban areas. (Lake Erie West Regional Council and GLCAP)
- Cross-reference the connection points with capital projects list and elevate connection points needed in local plans. This includes Lake Erie West’s Long-Range Plan as well as county and municipal capital projects lists and maintenance schedules. (Lake Erie West Regional Council, municipalities)
- Promote the pre-tax transit benefit and update the Gohio platform. Increase awareness among employees about these programs. (Lake Erie West Regional Council)