

# Carbon County Area Ride & Transit Coordination Plan



Photo courtesy of Karen Dietz, CART Dispatcher/Driver

Red Lodge Area Community Foundation  
Carbon County Area Ride & Transit  
122 South Hauser Ave., P.O. Box 1871  
Red Lodge, Montana

David Kallenbach, Transit Manager  
[david@rlacf.org](mailto:david@rlacf.org) (406) 425-2820

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### Adoption:

The Red Lodge Area Community Foundation Board of Directors officially approved the Carbon County Area Ride & Transit Coordination Plan for Fiscal Year 2025 at the Strategic Board Meeting on Wednesday, January 17, 2024.

The Transportation Advisory Committee officially approved the Carbon County Area Ride & Transit Coordination Plan for Fiscal Year 2025 at their regular committee meeting on Wednesday, February 21, 2024.

Updates to the Coordination Plan were officially approved at the Red Lodge Area Community Foundation Board of Directors meeting on

## Overview

Carbon County Area Ride & Transit (CART) is an essential need for the residents of Carbon County, Montana. CART provides access to health care, food, jobs, education, human services, and social interaction. The service, available to all county residents, identifies as a necessity for the low-income populations of seniors, mobility challenged, and people with disabilities to “age-in-place,” live independently and engage in community life.

### 1. Agencies & Partners Involved:

- **Red Lodge Area Community Foundation (RLACF)** – Operates CART as a project of the Resilient Communities Program Area. The RLACF maintains the role of providing direct oversight, fundraising, project management, data collections, fiduciary responsibilities, and human resources.
- **Carbon County Commissioners**—Provide support through advocacy both county and statewide and as a partner for state funding sources.
- **Municipal Governments**—Mayors and Councilors in the five established local town governments provide support through advocacy countywide and as partners for state funding sources.
- **Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC)**—Provides an advisory role for CART. Meets quarterly to review progress reports, discuss successes and how to improve the service, and participate in public outreach. The TAC is comprised of individuals from local healthcare facilities, highly engaged residents, community groups, business owners, and public officials (both county and city).
- **Senior Centers of Carbon County** (Belfry, Boyd, Bridger, Fromberg, Joliet, and Red Lodge). All serve meals and deliver social & civic opportunities for seniors in local facilities. Volunteers give rides in personal vehicles to those who need transportation. None of our county’s senior centers have a dedicated vehicle to provide transportation.
- **Medical Facilities/Clinics:** Beartooth Billings Clinic (hospital and clinic); Intermountain Health’s (formerly St. Vincent/SCL Health) Mountainview Clinic; Riverstone Health Clinics in Joliet and Bridger. CART has excellent relationships with all the clinics and hospitals in the county and deliver patients to their facilities on a daily basis.
- **Community Care** program. A part of Carbon County Fire/EMS/SAR service is based in Red Lodge. Community Care provides non-emergent rides with medical care from Paramedic drivers. Members of Community Care were instrumental in working with the Age-Friendly Steering Committee to get CART established.
- **Billings Clinic, Intermountain Health, and Riverstone Health** in Billings and Laurel. CART delivers patients to these medical facilities 3 days a week—Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

- **Carbon County Public Health** – Conducts the Community Health Assessment and Planning by working with county medical facilities and other stakeholders to identify barriers to the health and well-being of its residents and to implement a community health improvement plan.
- **Beartooth Industries**—Disability Services. They have their own transport vehicle and network of care workers.
- **Heartland Assisted Living**—Roberts/Joliet. This is currently the only assisted living facility in all of Carbon Co. (10 residents) as in past year Cedarwood Villa and St. John’s Willows in Red Lodge closed down. Heartland does not have a dedicated vehicle (nor one that is ADA compatible) to transport their residents. They rely on CART.
- **Age-Friendly Steering Committee** (Carbon County’s form of the Council on Aging) - Convened in 2017 to identify needs of the aging community. Reconvenes when other issues facing the elderly require consideration.

**Demand/Response:** CART maintains a Demand/Response model of ride delivery using two wheel-chair accessible 6-passenger Dodge Grand Caravans.

**Fleet inventory:**

2019 Dodge Grand Caravan, accessible – 103,290 mileage  
 2017 Dodge Grand Caravan, accessible - 91,111 mileage

**Details of Service:** CART operates within the county Monday through Friday between the hours of 8:00 am and 4:00 p.m. for all residents of Carbon County. Service for county residents to Billings/Laurel (Yellowstone County) operate Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday with healthcare access prioritized. The service is weather dependent in winter conditions and will pick up and drop off at residences within 3 miles of the three main highways within the county (78, 212, 308). CART is a fare-free service though recommends donations of \$3 per in-county trip and \$10 per out-of-county trip.

**Location:** Carbon County is a 2,062 sq. mile rural area of ~11,200 people at the base of the Beartooth Mountains in south central Montana. Red Lodge, the county seat, with an elevation of 5,555ft. provides seasonal access to Yellowstone National Park. The nearest metropolitan area, Billings, is 63 miles away. Local resources of healthcare, transportation, childcare, and affordable housing are limited and more expensive to access. The communities in Carbon County and necessary services status:

- Bearcreek: No services, seasonal limited hours restaurant, active post office.
- Belfry: No services, active senior center, active post office, K-12 school.
- Boyd: No services, active senior center, active post office
- Bridger: Rural health clinic (Riverstone), grocery store (limited), feed store/gas station, Family Dollar, active library, active senior center, bank, automotive service, K-12 school.
- Edgar: No services, active post office

- Fromberg: No services, active senior center, active post office, K-12 school.
- Joliet: Rural health clinic (Riverstone), bank, grocery store (limited), gas station, active library, active post office, active community/senior center, EMS, K-12 school
- Roberts: No services, active post office, K-12 school, EMS, Volunteer Fire Dept.
- Rockvale: Gas station.
- Red Lodge: Grocery store, Gas stations, Banks, Rural emergency care hospital (Beartooth Billings), Rural medical clinic (SCL-Intermountain Health), EMS & Rural Fire, Family Dollar, restaurants (\$\$-\$\$\$\$), thriving downtown, ski area, active senior center, optometrist (Wednesday only), dentist, pharmacy, veterinary clinics, K-12 school.

**2. Agencies Not Involved:**

There are no agencies that declined participation in the Carbon County Transportation Coordination Plan.

**3. Needs Assessment:**

In 2017-18, concerned citizens formed an Age-Friendly Committee through the Red Lodge Area Community Foundation (RLACF) to address issues facing seniors across Carbon County. CART was developed in response to three Community Health Assessment Reports for 2013, 2016, and 2019 that establish aging population and isolation as health risk factors for Carbon County. Survey respondents listed “transportation services” in the top three ways to improve the community’s access to health care. RLACF engaged LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc. to produce a Carbon County Transit Development Plan (2019) that addresses the need and outlines directions to provide services to county residents. This report is the result of a Service Option Workshop (SOW) attended by approximately 30 community members.

The [Carbon County Transit Development Plan](#) can be found in its entirety on the RLACF’s Transportation webpage or use link above.

<u>Metrics assessed:</u>	
-Population Density	-Youth Population
-Population of Older Adults	-Income by Community
-Population of Persons with an ambulatory disability	-Employment by Sector
-Low-Income Population	-Means of Transportation to get to work
-Zero Vehicle Households	-Travel Time to Work
	-Employment Location of Carbon County Residents

Outcomes of the Carbon County Transit Development Plan identified the needs for a small public Transportation Service to provide:

- Transportation to medical facilities, medical providers social service agencies
- Transportation to pharmacies, dentists, optometrists, hearing aid services, phys. therapy
- Transportation to grocery stores, food banks, public utilities companies
- Transportation to banks, post offices, libraries, DMV, civic meeting
- Transportation to senior centers and other social functions/events that help people deal with the health detriments of loneliness, isolation, and depression.
- Transportation to Billings and Laurel to out-of-town health care providers and companies as shown above.
- The program would primarily serve but would not be limited to seniors, people with disabilities, veterans, those lacking in transportation, and those without the financial means to afford transportation.

#### **4. Public Involvement:**

CART implemented a county-wide marketing campaign to raise awareness of the services. Public information in quarterly Foundation newsletters, through social media, radio, television, and news articles highlight CART's use and future needs. Engaging volunteers to serve on the TAC and related committees established the parameters and defined the destinations for riders. Public engagement through comment cards and surveys ensures continuous assessment and project changes relating to ridership demand and community output.

#### **5. Private Sector Transportation:**

Red Lodge Tour and Taxi service was invited to participate in the initial coordination planning efforts with their business consisting primarily of shuttles to and from the airport, recreational destinations, and late pickups in the downtown area. As of fiscal year 2024, they ceased operations.

Community Care, operated by members of Red Lodge Fire/EMS, is a service transporting people to clinics or hospitals who need a lesser degree of medical attention than provided by an ambulance. With an abundance of requests for basic transportation needs like food sources and basic necessities, Community Care was an integral partner in developing CART. A member of Community Care sits on the TAC.

## **6. Plan for Growth and/or increase ridership:**

Growth and increasing ridership will be accomplished through four goals:

### **A. Prioritize securing funds for long-term sustainability.**

Funding for CART is dependent on Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) grant, local business sponsors, and individual donors. Costs to operate CART are approximately \$230,000 annually. To fully fund CART the Foundation will conduct a county-wide fundraising campaign, identify and apply for federal, state, and foundation grants, and work with local government officials to identify funding opportunities. Outreach through regional media sources (television and radio) will bring awareness of the service to a larger audience thereby connecting with new donors. Utilizing volunteer drivers will help keep costs lower and allow staff to focus on marketing and outreach to ensure CART's future is secure.

CART remains a free service, however; mid fiscal year 2024 implemented the suggested donation of \$3.00 per in-county ride and \$10.00 per out-of-county ride.

### **B. Increase capacity to increase ridership.**

A county-wide marking campaign will expand CART's exposure to the most rural areas within the county thereby reaching more potential riders. Recruiting volunteer drivers will increase capacity by completing trips for staff, thereby allowing staff to complete required tasks for the project. By purchasing a third vehicle CART will provide an additional 2400 rides per year and adding 4WD features will ensure better service on inclement weather days. With multiple vehicles, CART will have the potential to base one in each area of the county for a faster response time.

CART is also exploring offering occasional rides in the evening or on the weekend for special events or church services.

### **C. Establish fleet rotation and maintenance plan.**

CART will need to establish a rotation of the fleet as the vans reach the end of their reliability. To improve efficiency, purchase of a third vehicle with AWD will allow for the older vans to be replaced without interrupting or reducing rides. Utilizing the established CART maintenance plan and incorporating service life extensions for the two vehicles in operation will ensure the fleet remains safe and reliable.

### **D. Obtain covered storage area for vehicles.**

CART coordinates with the local school district and local governments (both county & city) to identify an existing facility to store and maintain CART vehicles.