

TRANSPORTATION ACCESS IN

RACINE

from **ARRIVE TOGETHER:** Transportation Access and Equity in Wisconsin

The report examined the effectiveness and equitability of transportation in nine cities and major metropolitan regions across Wisconsin. This examination is a culmination of 2010 U.S. Census data, figures provided by public transportation systems, the state of Wisconsin, and direct personal interviews with transit riders. The report concludes that, while each community faces unique challenges in providing transportation access to employment, medical services, major businesses, local attractions or other points of interest, the absence of consistent and sufficient funding for public transportation is a major hurdle across the board. Inadequate financial support from federal and state governments and an inability to raise additional resources through local funding mechanisms like Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs) are making it increasingly difficult for local public transportation systems statewide to provide mobility.

RACINE TRANSIT OVERVIEW

Public transportation has been a part of the City of Racine since the Belle City Street Railway began operation in 1883. The first bus routes were introduced in 1922, and operations continued as the Belle Urban System (BUS) since 1975. BUS was renamed RYDE in 2017. The RYDE service area covers all of the City, extending into the immediate surrounding area including to Caledonia in the north and to employment centers in Yorkville, Sturtevant and Mount Pleasant.

It reaches several industrial parks, shopping areas, schools, attractions, the Amtrak station and the hospital. There is also commuter bus service from Milwaukee through Racine and then south to UW Parkside and the Metra Station in Kenosha. RYDE provided more than 1,270,000 passenger trips in 2015 alone.



TRANSIT SYSTEM BARRIERS

While transportation coverage is good within the City of Racine, there are several areas where riders face barriers. In the 2016 Human Services Transportation Coordination Plan for Racine County, Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC) identifies several unmet transportation needs for Racine County. Current route and travel schedules have not adapted to address the needs of new employment locations, and there is a lack of weekend and late night hours that would better serve those who work second or third shift. Transit access in Western Racine County and between counties is limited, as well. As Southeast Wisconsin continues to develop as a hub of employment opportunities, it will become increasingly important to address these challenges. It is unclear what impact the Foxconn technology plant in Mount Pleasant will have on public transportation in the region, and whether the plant will, in fact, be served by public transit, by privately operated shuttles, or by both (or neither). Budget cuts have reduced hours of operation, and it would be beneficial to restore these, especially to help connect workers to expanding centers of employment in the region.

OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPAND SERVICE AND FUNDING

RYDE's funding is provided through federal, state, and local streams, as well as through fares and other sources. However, over the past several years a decrease in funding, especially from the state, has made it more difficult for the system to effectively serve the region.

As the Southeast Wisconsin Regional Plan Commission reports:

"Budget cuts have reduced hours of operation, and it would be beneficial to restore these, especially to help connect workers to expanding centers of employment in the region."

There are many areas of potential expansion for RYDE both within and outside of Racine County, if funding were available. Increasing hours and frequency of routes, expanding service to parts of the county that have been less served such as the Village of Sturtevant, and improving regional service to surrounding counties are all opportunities for RYDE. SEWRPC has also identified the need for improved communication and planning between transit agencies in the region, expanded public transit service that "connects workers to jobs between counties," and more accessible transit through lower fares and increased frequency. Current capital needs include funding for ten new buses to replace those that have been in use since 2004. RYDE also needs a new maintenance and storage facility, and new software. With increased funding, RYDE could better meet the growing needs in Racine County and in Southeastern Wisconsin.

For full report: sierraclub.org/wisconsin/ArriveTogetherReport

"My husband (83) and I (80) cannot drive after dark, and need transit as much or more than anybody! As the system now works, when the last driver in the family is gone, we are forced to move out of our homes of half a century because of lack of public transportation!"

-Barbara, Racine