



State of the State: Transportation Coordination Efforts in Mississippi

February 2023

The National Center for Mobility Management (NCMM; nc4mm.org) is a national technical assistance center created to facilitate communities in adopting mobility management strategies. NCMM is funded through a cooperative agreement with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and is operated through a consortium of three national organizations – the American Public Transportation Association, the Community Transportation Association of America, and Easterseals, Inc. NCMM is charged with supporting FTA and its partners in carrying out the recommendations suggested in the updated [Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility \(CCAM\) Strategic Plan](#).



About the National Center for Mobility Management (NCMM)

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About Easterseals

Since its founding in 1919, Easterseals has remained committed to ensuring that the needs of children and adults with disabilities, veterans and older adults are met with services and support to help them live, learn, work, and play in their communities. By combining on-the-ground presence, deep expertise, and diverse programs, 69 Easterseals affiliates nationwide are advancing change to assure that people with disabilities and other special needs can thrive in their communities.

About this Information Brief

Easterseals, through its work at the National Center for Mobility Management (NCMM), focuses on building connections across education, human services, and transportation sectors so that individuals with disabilities can access school, work, health care, and other inclusive community settings. In this work, NCMM has researched, and sourced national examples to identify programs using FTA and private funding that demonstrate mobility management activities performed by various agencies around an area defined as a state or region. This document will review the history, activities and projects conducted by the Mississippi mobility network across their region, state, or local communities.

For questions about this product or to start a conversation about mobility management in your area, please contact Enjoli Dixon at edixon@easterseals.com.

Acknowledgments

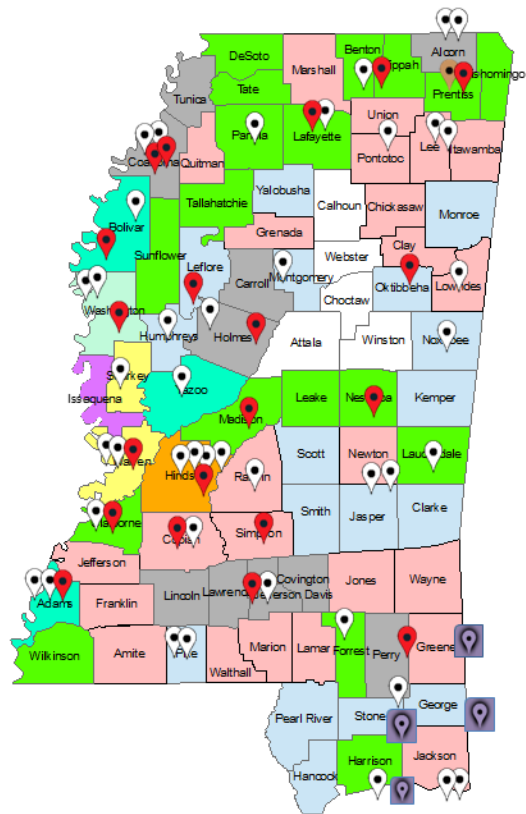
NCMM would like to thank the following organizations for their contributions to this product. They provided key insights, information, resources, and time to ensure this report accurately reflects the fundamental aspects of each example highlighted in this brief:

- Easterseals, Inc.
- National Rural Transportation Assistance Program (National RTAP)
- Easterseals Project Action
- Connect MS (State of Mississippi Mobility Managers)
- Mississippi Department of Transportation – Public Transit Division

Overview

Public transportation is provided within the state of Mississippi in both urban and rural settings by direct recipients and sub-contractors. In 2017, Mobility Management was defined in the Mississippi Public Transit Management Plan as, *"Mobility Management consists of short-range planning and management activities and projects for improving coordination among public transportation and other transportation-service providers carried out by a recipient or sub-recipient through an agreement entered with a person, including a government entity, under 49 U.S.C. Chapter 53. Mobility management does not include operating public transportation services."*

Mississippi Department of Transportation has developed a promotional video to advertise the importance of public transportation within their state, [watch the video here](#).



Transportation Service Examples

The **City of Meridian** established their transportation program to focus on a large aging population in their community. This service successfully expanded mobility options for older adults going to healthcare appointments, the senior center or local grocery stores. The city eventually expanded services to include all community members, which can greatly benefit the local economy.

Region 4 Mental Services provides care for 20,000 clients and soon determined the need for reliable transportation options to access essential services at their clinic. The clinic now contracts with local transportation providers to resolve that barrier. **MIDD Meridian** faced similar issues while serving adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities who are unable to drive. This partnership has transported 22 MIDD clients to work on a daily basis, easing the burden on families who have been challenged with providing rides on their own.

Mass Transit, operated by Mississippi Valley State University, provides a variety of transportation services for residents traveling to adult day care centers, the local university, childcare centers, employment centers and to mental health facilities.

Mobility managers often receive calls from students seeking transportation to campus and work activities. Many students live in rural areas, where there is often a lack of public

transportation options, which presents a barrier to furthering their education, unfortunately causing many students to drop out each semester due to a lack of reliable transportation. Many universities are small and often located in rural communities, one specific university system, **Oxford University Transit (OUT)**, provides 1.2 million riders annually, approximately 1 million of those riders are students attending Ole Miss and the University of Mississippi, including a few small-town destinations around campus.

An increase of international students attending these universities have prompted the expansion of services to the Golden Triangle Regional Airport, located centrally between Columbus, Starkville and West Point. This expanded transit option is not only for students but is open to anyone needing a ride to and from Starkville. Within its first month of operation, the new route provided approximately 400 rides, and has contributed to a growth in ridership, also providing a boost to the local economy by bringing more people to the area and staying in local hotels.

The success of expanded transportation programs has enabled residents to visit new places around the communities where they live. Student advocates are actively working alongside local mobility managers to address the need of a universal transportation system that is accessible to all residents in the community.

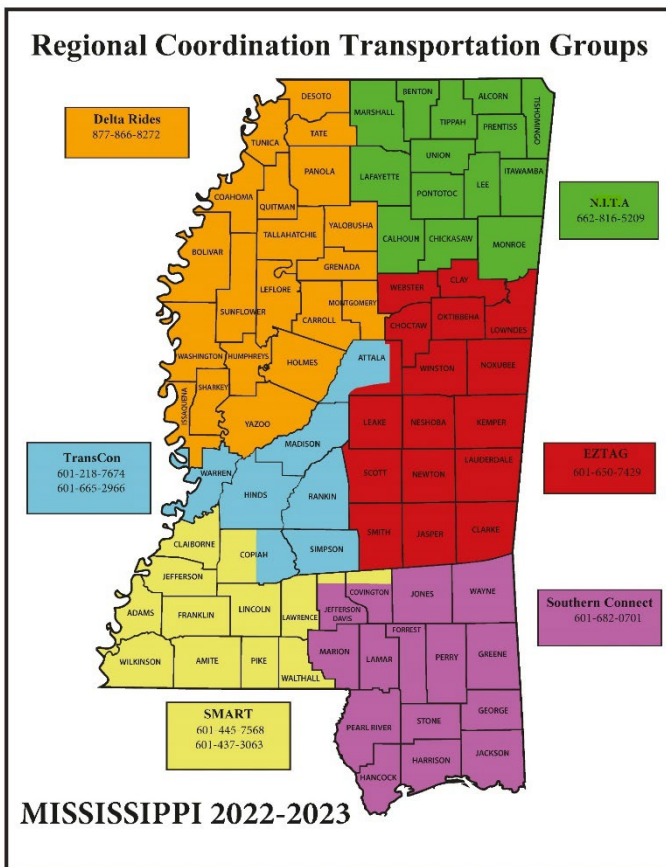


Connect MS ([Connect Mississippi](#)) is a network of Mobility Managers divided into six regional coordination transportation groups by the Mississippi Department of Transportation. Public transportation is necessary in rural places to connect people to their essential needs and daily activities. Each mobility management network is unique, and navigates through rural, tribal areas and urban challenges while providing the highest level of public transportation to meet the needs of their communities. There are currently ten mobility managers placed throughout the state to cultivate partnerships, seek funding opportunities, collaborate and deliver diverse mobility services to the southern region. Mobility Managers are funded through FTA 5310 and 5311 grant programs awarded to transit agencies or regional planning commissions. *(See map below).*

Connect MS has worked with many statewide agencies to keep moving their programs forward, below is an example of their collaborative partnerships:

MS Department of Education
 AARP OF Mississippi
 MS Division of Medicaid
 MS Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities
 MS Department of Health
 MS Department of Human Services
 MS Department of Mental Health
 MS Home Corporation
 MS Department of Rehabilitation Services
 Central MS Planning and Development

Southern MS Planning & Development District
 MS Economic Development Authority
 North Delta Planning & Development District
 East Central Planning & Development District
 Southwest Planning & Development District
 South Delta Planning & Development District
 Northeast Planning & Development District
 Golden Triangle Planning & Development District



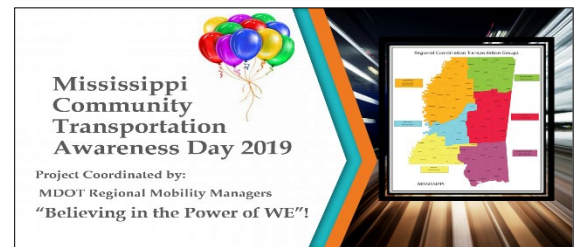
Mobility Managers develop programming for residents and riders to access healthcare, education, workforce, and general transportation services for older adults and people with disabilities. Tourism also plays a huge role in Mississippi and assists to boost the local economy of many cities, especially in rural or tribal areas throughout the state. The inherent benefit of mobility coordination is to connect residents and visitors to these communities, combined with a well-coordinated public transit system, providing visitors to stay in local hotels, dine at restaurants, shop in downtown commercial districts, or participate in annual festivals. As a result, increased access to many of these smaller communities brings in enhanced visibility through tourism with the benefit of a boost in the local economy.

Mississippi's mobility managers have been designated as essential workers within their communities, as they connect residents to

their most vital needs. Without established transportation programs, residents would not have reliable access to medical care, healthy food options, emergency care, education, workforce and more. Some communities would be isolated in many outlying communities, requiring residents to travel 30 miles or more to receive medical care, particularly specialty clinics.

Mobility Management Activities

An initiative led by Connect MS Co-Chairs Machelles Kyles, Regional Mobility Manager at Trans-Con and Donna Bailey, Regional Mobility Manager at Southern Connect; developed the first Mississippi Community Transportation Awareness Day Toolkit that can be used by mobility managers, local agencies, non-profits, cities, and other organizations across the state of Mississippi to organize their own Community Transportation Awareness Day. They also worked with Mobility Managers throughout the state to secure Proclamations from their local municipalities or councils, as well as the Mississippi Public Transit Association (MPTA) to adopt their toolkit for implementing an awareness day in all regions statewide.



Mobility Management Program Examples



Delta Rides provides transportation services in a 20-county region and is operated by a network of non-profit organizations in the northwest Mississippi Delta. The mobility managers at Delta Rides coordinate reliable and affordable mobility

options for riders going to jobs, training programs, colleges, medical facilities, shopping, and recreation. Below are a few examples of the services offered by partners in the Delta Rides region.

Healthy Destination Access Transportation is a micro-transit program operated by Bolivar County Council on Aging, Inc. (BCCOA Transit) designed to provide access to healthy food options to citizens in the rural communities of Arcola and Hollandale, Mississippi and to other goods and services. This program's success is due to partnerships with MDOT, National RTAP, Feonix Mobility Rising, Hearty Helpings and Mississippi State Extension Service- Aim for Change.



Delta Area Rural Transit System (DARTS) has established three round-trip employment routes, seven days a week and provides riders with access to healthcare, jobs and recreational activities in Tunica, Clarksdale and Robinsonville (including all shifts on the Casino strip). Routes are provided in partnership by DARTS and BCCOA Transit.

N.I.T.A. (formally *Ride the Smile*), operates a coordinated public transportation system in a 14-county region located in northeast Mississippi. Primarily offering rides to education and employment, they also provide services to medical appointments and recreational activities for riders with disabilities and older adults. Mobility Managers in the NITA Region have been working with the City of Aberdeen and NCMM to develop the “*MOVE Aberdeen! Freedom Through Mobility*” Plan.



City/County Transit, operated by the City of Oxford, offers transportation services for older adults and people with disabilities throughout Lafayette County. Individuals 55 years and older with no valid driver’s license or someone with a disability that presents them from driving, are eligible for this free service. This demand-responsive service offers rides to medical appointments, grocery shopping, nutritional services, and other essential services.

The City of Oxford has had ongoing dialogue with Ole Miss Student Affairs to expand more transit options, further implementing enhanced paratransit services on the campuses of Ole Miss and Oxford University. Additional late-night services were added, SafeRide, for students traveling around campus or downtown Oxford.



TRANS-CON operates coordinated transportation services in the seven-county region of Central Mississippi. They offer vanpool and commuter employment options, non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) and student transportation to area colleges or universities. Trans-Con consists of over 30 diverse community partners servicing over 34,000 constituents. Quarterly meetings are held to improve access to transportation and assist with wrap-around services aiding in life enrichment.



December 2022, Trans-Con partners were able to present over 100 bags of donations to men and women seeking services at Hinds Behavioral Health Services, as part of The Bridge: Drop-In Center. Donations included personal hygiene products, such as toiletries, hats, gloves, socks and blankets.



Photos: 2022 Trans-Con Homeless Initiative

SMART (Southwest Mississippi Accessible Regional Transportation) provides coordinated transportation services in a 13-county region located in southwest Mississippi. SMART ensures that all transportation is safe, available, affordable, and utilized throughout the region. Services are offered to local colleges or universities, workforce, medical appointments, and non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT).



Natchez Transit offers the first regional rural transportation center in the State of Mississippi, this multi-use building was completed in April 2013, and serves as:

- A regional public transportation passenger transfer hub.
- A park and ride lot.
- A regional transportation call center and in times of emergency, a disaster call center and public and private transportation provider disaster hub.
- A modern transit vehicle maintenance facility.
- Space for overnight secure transit vehicle parking, and
- A MDOT/Public Transit Division Regional Training classroom.

Currently, Delta Bus Lines, Inc. is leasing an office at the Natchez Regional Facility. In order to provide service for the entire service area, Delta Bus Lines partners with Natchez Transit System to link passengers to places throughout the entire region.



Southern Connect provides coordinated transportation to 15 counties in southern Mississippi, they consist of a diverse and active group of partners, including elected officials, who are dedicated to increased access to transportation services throughout the region.



Mobility Managers produce a quarterly newsletter to keep everyone informed of the successes and accomplishments of their group. They also organize and conduct a bi-monthly partnership meeting to network and provide updates on their services.

Southern Connect remains active in the communities they serve, attending job fairs or by participating in various town celebrations and parades. They have also been successful in implementing "Try Transit Day" as part of the Community Transportation Day, allowing users to ride for free and explore their local transit options. This event is similar to those conducted throughout the state with support of Connect MS.



In June 2022, the NCMM conducted an [Issue Focus Meeting](#) to bring mobility managers, state partners, Mississippi DOT and other regional transit agencies together to develop a strategy to use technology offering more coordinated mobility for transportation. Efforts from the Issue Focused Meeting led to an additional grant from NCMM to enhance mobility in their community. This [Design Challenge Project](#) focused on developing a tool that will specifically assist residents and enhance mobility options.

Photo: Mississippi Design Challenge Team co-leads Deshella Butler (DJ Transit), Thania Coyne, (South Mississippi Planning Development) & Amy Conrick and Bill Wagner (NCMM)

EZTAG is comprised of 5 transportation agencies, who coordinate rides in 16 counties in east central Mississippi. They provide residents with access to healthcare, employment, and rehab providers. The EZTAG region also partners Choctaw Transit, which is the largest of the eight Choctaw communities in East Central Mississippi and is the site of the Tribal government headquarters, where many tribal members are employed.



Pearl River is the site of numerous Tribal-owned and operated business enterprises, like Pearl River Resort, Dancing Rabbit Golf Club, daycare centers, schools, Choctaw health center, residential facilities whose employees benefit from public transit service.

Choctaw Transit Authority provides non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) for approximately 23,350 people annually, also providing rides to older adults to the Nutrition Center for meals, activities, medical care and shopping. Choctaw Transit provides daily trips for riders going to the Boys and Girls Club, school or educational opportunities, as well as riders going to work related activities.

In January 2015, Chief Phyliss J. Anderson, on behalf of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Mayor Percy Bland of the City of Meridian to provide limited services to residents within the city limits. The city had been without a public transportation system for five years and saw a need for transportation services to local businesses, educational institutions and medical appointments.

Summary

Despite the tremendous success of the mobility management program, Mississippi recognizes that there is still much work to be done. Currently the regions within Connect Mississippi, MDOT, and other stakeholders like the Mississippi Public Transportation Association, are working to find ways of meeting those unserved needs, through policy, rulemaking, pilot projects, and other coordinated efforts.

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