

Lewis County Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan

PREPARED BY:

LEWIS COUNTY PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
AND THE LEWIS COUNTY TRANSPORTATION TASK FORCE

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Executive Summary

The Lewis County Transportation Task Force has prepared the following plan to provide documentation of past and current efforts toward the creation of a public transit-human services transportation coordinated plan, and to provide the outline for future efforts to improve community mobility and quality of life for the residents of Lewis County. This Lewis County Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan, hereafter referred to as the Plan, is specifically prepared in accordance with the regulations of the Federal Transportation, Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act - Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) mandate.

SAFETEA-LU requires the establishment of a "locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan" for all FTA programs for underserved populations: the Elderly Individuals and Individuals with Disabilities program (Section 5310); the Job Access and Reverse Commute program (Section 5316); and the New Freedom program (Section 5317). Under MAP-21 and the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, Sections 5316 and 5317 are now combined under the Public Transportation in Nonurbanized Areas (Section 5311) program.

Introduction

Problem Statement

Lewis County is a rural county where low-income individuals without vehicles have difficulty accessing healthcare, human services programs, and retail stores to purchase essential goods and services. Additionally, low-income residents, without adequate transportation, are finding it difficult to obtain and maintain gainful employment and attend adult education programs.

Since the launch of Lewis County Public Transportation, the County has been able to solve many of the past transit issues faced by low-income residents with their affordable fixed route system and long-range connector route. Even with the addition of this rural public transit system, residents need easily accessible and efficient transportation to and from employment, healthcare and community events.

Purpose of the Lewis County Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan

In May 1999, the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) announced the Rural Transportation Initiative. The initiative was designed to ensure that rural areas and small communities share in the mobility, economic, and social benefits that many USDOT programs provide. It aims to increase the capacity of rural America to play a more integral role in the planning and decision-making that shape transportation systems. It also provides an array of technical assistance and grant programs to enable communities to plan, develop and improve air, surface, and water transportation infrastructure.

The objectives of the Rural Transportation Initiative are:

- To improve safety by reducing the human and material costs that are unintended consequences of the operation of the transportation systems in rural areas;
- Allow residents of rural areas and small communities access to the destinations and goods to attain their desired quality of life;
- Provide the transportation service that will afford rural areas and small communities the opportunity to reach their economic growth and trade potential;
- Enhance the social strength and cohesiveness of small communities and protect the natural environment of rural areas;
- Maintain the national security and border integrity necessary for the well-being of all Americans.

In February 2004, the Presidential Executive Order 13330 on the Coordination of Human Services Programs created an Interagency Transportation Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility to undertake departmental actions to minimize duplication among federally-funded human service transportation services, simplify customer access to transportation services, enhance cost effectiveness of service delivery and identify useful practices in coordinating human service transportation.

The Plan is a necessary requirement should the county seek funding through the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) programs, including Section 5310 – Elderly and Individuals with Disabilities, Section 5316 – Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC), Section 5317 – New Freedom, and Section 5311 – Public Transportation in Nonurbanized Areas.

The purpose of the Lewis County Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan is to identify methods to improve transportation services for persons with disabilities, senior citizens and low-income individuals. The plan will assist in the coordination between and among transit providers and human service agencies.

The plan recommends strategies and identifies implementation priorities to improve the coordination of public transit and human service transportation in Lewis County.

Federal Transit Administration Funding Sources

Section 5310 – Elderly and Individuals with Disabilities Program

The Elderly and Individuals with Disabilities Program provides funding to assist private nonprofit groups in meeting the transportation needs of the elderly and persons with disabilities when the transportation service provided is unavailable, insufficient, or inappropriate to meeting these needs. These funds are apportioned to the states annually by a formula that is based on the number of elderly persons and persons with disabilities in each state. The New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) administers this program in New York State and an interagency review committee selects grantees. Capital assistance in New York State under this program is provided on an 80% Federal / 20% local share basis for the purchase of vehicles. Private, nonprofit agencies are eligible to receive funding and must demonstrate that they coordinate services for elderly persons and persons with disabilities.

Section 5311 – Public Transportation in Nonurbanized Areas

Public Transportation in Nonurbanized Areas program was created to increase accessibility to health care, shopping, education, employment, public services, and recreation while also providing funding for the needed maintenance, route development and system improvements. This program provides formula funding to areas with populations of less than 50,000 people. Funds can be used for capital assistance, maximum Federal share of 80%, and operating assistance, maximum Federal share of 50%.

CARES Act Funding

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) Act of 2020 provides supplemental federal support for states to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the impacts of COVID-19 on community public transportation services. Funding provided pursuant to the CARES Act may be used by sponsors of public transportation services at a federal share of up to 100 percent; and is available to support capital, operating and other expenses eligible under 49 USC 5311.

Mission and Vision Statements

***Mission:** To identify the existing transportation services, duplications in service, gaps in existing services and future transportation needs in Lewis County. This study will aid in the development of a responsible, consumer-focused Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan for Lewis County.*

***Vision:** Through the development and implementation of the Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan, the transportation-disadvantaged of Lewis County will have greater access to health care, human services, employment, education, commerce, social and community services.*

Lewis County Transportation History

In 2004, representatives from five county human service agencies introduced a plan to consolidate human service transportation, in which the county would contract county transportation for the Department of Social Services (DSS), Lewis County Community Mental Health Clinic (CMHC), Lewis County Public Health Agency (PHA), Lewis County General Hospital Adult Day Health Care (ADHC), and the Office for the Aging (OFA) out to a transit vendor. Unfortunately, the necessary support was not available at the time and the planning to consolidate the administration of the transportation services provided by these agencies ceased.

In 2007, the Lewis County Transportation Task Force, a group of human service providers, began meeting to discuss the transportation needs within the county. The major concern at the time was the transportation of dialysis clients for treatment. As more people came to the table, transportation efficiency became a subject of interest.

The Lewis County Transportation Task Force invited the Lewis County Manager to a meeting in April 2008 to discuss transportation efficiency and needs. The County Manager, understanding the importance of transportation efficiency, asked the Lewis County Department of Economic Development and Planning to review the existing transportation programs in the county and identify the redundancies and gaps in service. The Lewis County Department of Economic Development and Planning established a seat at the Transportation Task Force table.

Lewis County Public Transportation, LCPT, was launched in 2009 and was a direct outcome of the identified needs found in the 2009 Lewis County Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan. This public transportation agency is administrated by the Lewis County Planning Department and the operations are contracted through Birnie Bus Service, Inc. Since its infancy, LCPT has provided access to a fixed route system that gives residents and visitors the ability to access other parts of the County. Over time, LCPT has added connector routes that provide access to and from cities like Utica, NY and Watertown, NY.

Research

Regional Geography and Demographics

It is essential to define the geography and demographics of Lewis County to understand the relationship they have with the transportation needs of the county. The Lewis County Transportation Task Force must consider geography, population centers and trends, socio-economic status, educational status, employment, and vehicle ownership when planning, implementing and evaluating the Lewis County Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan.

Geography

Lewis County is centrally located in the northern section of New York State, north of Utica-Rome and east of Lake Ontario and Watertown. The county lies between the Tug Hill Plateau to the west, the Adirondack foothills to the east and the Black River Valley running north and south through the center. It is bordered by Jefferson County, St. Lawrence County, Herkimer County, Oneida County and Oswego County. The county seat, Lowville, is located 120 miles west/northwest of Albany, 90 miles northeast of Syracuse and 55 miles north of Utica-Rome.



Figure 1. Lewis County and Surrounding Counties

Population

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the estimated population of Lewis County in 2020 was 26,582. This is a slight decrease from the reported 2010 Census data of 27,087. Per the 2020 Census, the population density is 20.9 persons per square mile and Lewis County is the fourth least populated county in New York State. In fact, the County is one of only two in the state classified as "rural" by the federal government. Lewis County is comprised of 17 towns and 8 villages. Much of the County's population is located along the Black River Valley. The Village of Lowville is the population center, and in 2010, it had a population of 4,982. Table 1 shows that the population trend of Lewis County is beginning to decline.

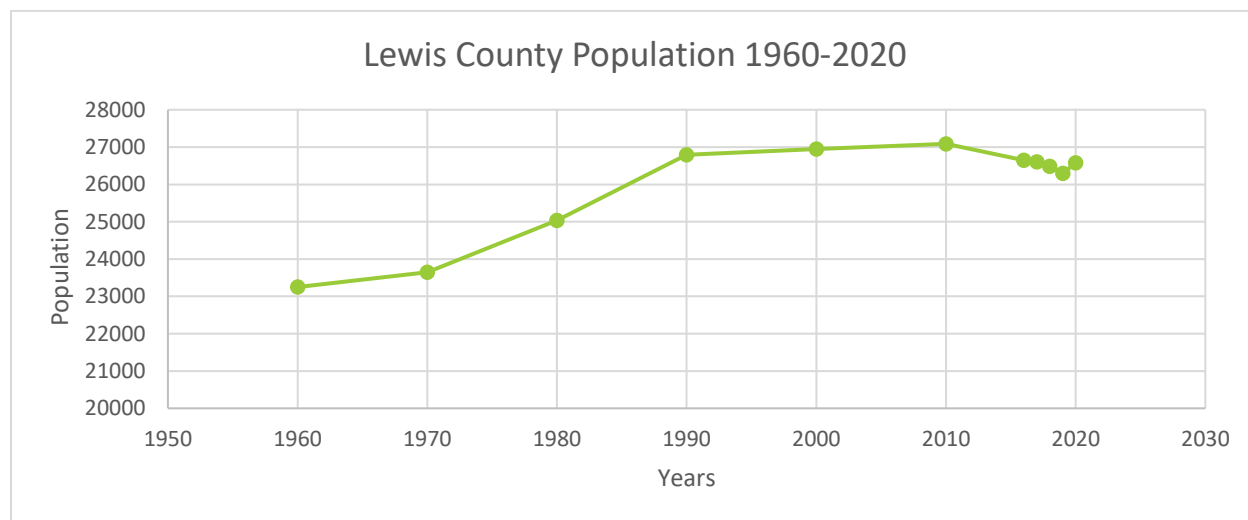


Table 1. Lewis County Total Population from 1960 to 2020

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The American Community Survey showed that in 2019 the median age of Lewis County to be 42.2 years. The trends show a significant increase in the median age from 1990 to the present, as well as a large increase in the population 65 or over during the same period. Table 2 details the percentage of the population by age group.

AGE GROUP	2000	% OF TOTAL	2010	% OF TOTAL	2015	% OF TOTAL	2019	% OF TOTAL
0-19	8,206	30.4	7,367	27.2	6,972	25.7	6,708	25.2
20-24	1,366	5.1	1,515	5.6	1,652	6.1	1,504	5.7
25-44	7,588	28.2	6,269	23.1	6,204	22.9	5,964	22.4
45-64	6,074	22.5	7,860	29.0	7,893	29.1	7,641	28.8
65 +	3,710	13.8	4,076	15.1	4,403	16.2	4,755	17.9
TOTAL	26,944	100.0	27,087	100.0	27,124	100.0	26,572	100.0

Table 2. Comparison of Lewis County population by age group over 19-year period

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Lewis County is sparsely populated in the Tug Hill and Adirondack Foothills regions of the County and more densely populated in the Black River Valley and northern reaches of the County.

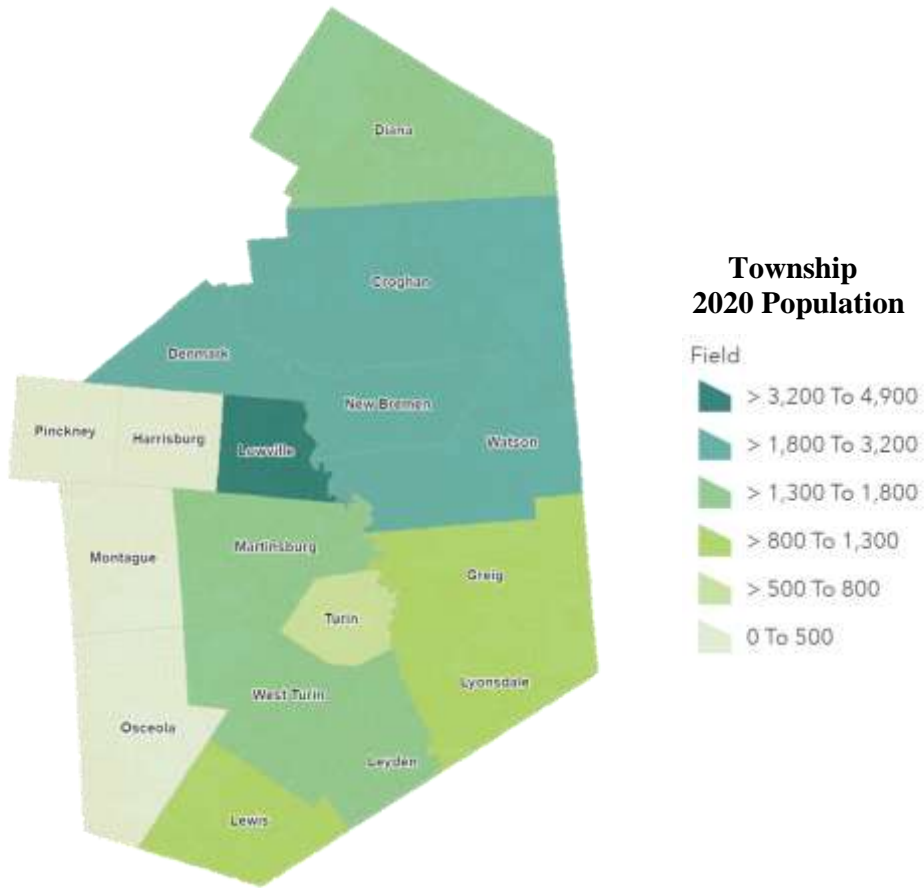


Figure 2. Population of Lewis County Townships
Source: 2020 Census

Socio-Economic Status

Lewis County Residential Income*		
	Population	Percent
Households	10,247	100
Less than \$10,000	441	4.3
\$10,000-\$14,999	543	5.3
\$15,000-\$24,999	830	8.1
\$25,000-\$34,999	1,127	11.0
\$35,000-\$49,999	1,670	16.3
\$50,000-\$74,999	2,183	21.3
\$75,000-\$99,999	1,486	14.5
\$100,000-\$149,999	1,281	12.5
\$150,000-\$199,999	461	4.5
\$200,000 or more	225	2.2
Median Household Income	\$54,524	

Table 3. Lewis County Household Income
Source: American Community Survey 2015-2019

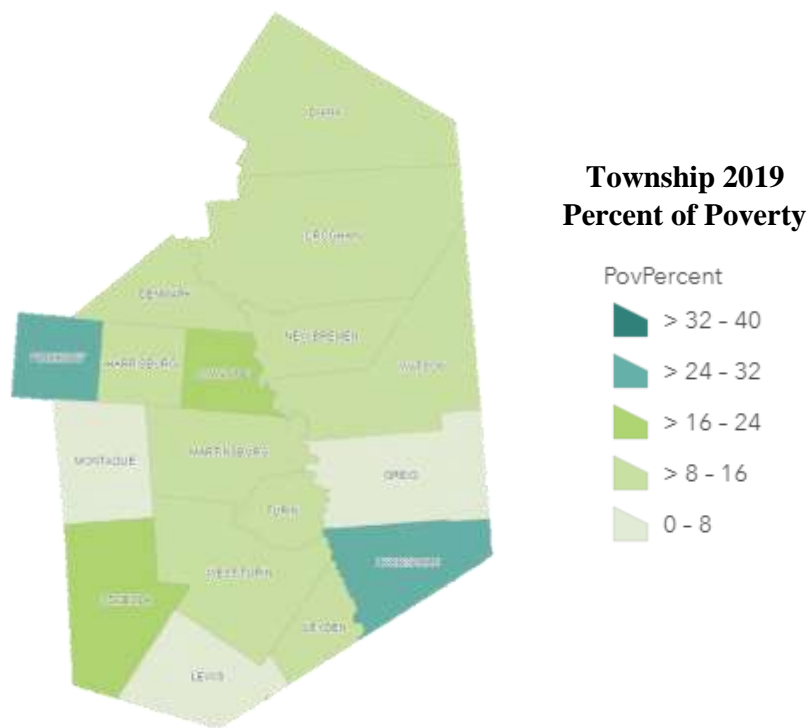


Figure 3. Geographic representation of poverty in Lewis County Townships

Lewis County Household Income								
	2000		2010		2015		2019	
	Households	% Total	Households	% Total	Households	% Total	Households	% Total
Under \$25,000	4,905	39%	2,707	25%	2,317	22%	1,803	17.6%
\$25,000 to \$49,999	3,820	31%	3,501	33%	2,971	28%	2,797	27.3%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	2,434	20%	2,283	21%	2,114	20%	2,183	21.3%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	839	7%	1,182	11%	1,369	13%	1,486	14.5%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	315	2%	780	7%	1,289	12%	1,281	12.5%
Over \$150,000	155	1%	308	3%	479	5%	687	6.7%
Total	12,468	100%	10,761	100%	10,539	100%	10,247	100%

*Table 4. Lewis County Household Income over 19-year period
Source: U.S. Census Bureau*

Education Status

Educational Institutions	
Public School Districts	Private Institutions
Beaver River Central School District	Crystal Light Mennonite School
Copenhagen Central School District	River Valley Mennonite School
Harrisville Central School District	Hope Mennonite School
Lowville Academy & Central School District	Millcreek Amish
South Lewis Central School District	

Table 5. Public and private educational institutions in Lewis County

Educational Attainment		
	Population	Percentage
Population 25 years and older	18,360	100
Less than 9 th grade	504	2.7
9 th grade to 12 th grade, no diploma	1,305	7.1
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	8,198	44.7
Some college, no degree	2,752	15.0
Associate degree	2,219	12.1
Bachelor's degree	1,924	10.5
Graduate or professional degree	1,458	7.9
Percent high school graduate or higher	16,551	90.1
Percent bachelor's degree or higher	3,382	18.4

*Table 6. Educational attainment statistics for Lewis County residents age 25 and older
Source: American Community Survey 2015-2019*

Employment

Per the 2010-2019 American Community Survey, approximately 35.4% of employed Lewis County residents, over the age of 16, traveled outside of the County for employment. The average travel time for residents commuting to work was 23.9 minutes. The primary destinations were Watertown, Utica and Rome.

Occupation		
	Population	Percent
Employed Civilian Population	11,917	100
Management, professional, and related occupations	3,765	23.2
Service occupations	2,072	17.0
Sales and office occupations	2,053	17.2
Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations	466	3.9
Natural Resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	2,041	17.1
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	1,843	15.5

*Table 7. Occupational breakdown of Lewis County Civilian Workforce
Source: American Community Survey 2015-2019*

Major industries providing employment to Lewis County residents are educational, health and social services (26.5%), manufacturing (10.6%), retail trade (9.6%), agriculture, forestry and fishing/hunting (7.3%) and construction (10.9%). Private wage and salary workers make up approximately 64.0% of the workforce, while 23.6% is divided between government workers and self-employed workers. The remaining 0.3% are unpaid family workers.

Industry		
	Population	Percent
Employed Civilian Population 16 years and over	11,917	100
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	865	7.3
Construction	1,299	10.9
Manufacturing	1,259	10.6
Wholesale trade	197	1.7
Retail trade	1,144	9.6
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	502	4.2
Information	105	.88
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	288	2.4
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management service	901	7.6
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	3,161	26.5
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	773	6.5
Other services, except public administration	565	4.7
Public administration	858	7.2

*Table 8. Industry breakdown of Lewis County Civilian Workforce
Source: American Community Survey 2015-2019*

Vehicles

Approximately 4.5% of occupied housing units in Lewis County do not have access to a personal vehicle. Nearly 28% of those households have only 1 vehicle.

Vehicles Available		
	Population	Percent
Occupied Housing Units	10,247	100
None	459	4.5
1	2,847	27.8
2	4,563	44.5
3 or more	2,378	23.2

*Table 9. Vehicles available per Lewis County household
Source: American Community Survey 2015-2019*

Methodology

Lewis County, with the support of the Lewis County Transportation Task Force, researched the transportation needs in the County. This research was divided into two separate categories:

- (1) Existing transportation services
- (2) Long-range transportation vision

The existing transportation services portion of the research is defined as identifying the existing transportation programs in the County, redundancies of services, gaps in services and potential needs. The long-range transportation vision involved research into what other rural counties, similar in geography and demographics, are doing with planning and implementing transportation systems. Knowing that a "one-size fits all" model does not work with transportation, Lewis County wanted to learn about successful programs in New York State.

Outreach

In August 2021, the Lewis County Transportation Task Force sent transportation update requests to various human services providers in the County, requesting detailed information regarding the needs of their clients, customers and employees. The following organizations supplied the Transportation Task Force with updated information:

- Lewis County Office for the Aging
- Lewis County General Hospital Adult Day Health Care
- Lewis County Public Transportation
- Lewis County Public Health
- Lewis County Department of Social Services
- Transitional Living Services
- Credo Community Center
- The Work Place
- The ARC, Oneida Lewis Chapter

- Northern Regional Center for Independent Living
- Mountain View Prevention Services
- Literacy of Northern New York
- Lewis County Opportunities
- Central New York DSO
- Lewis County Head Start
- Brookside Senior Living
- Volunteer Transportation Center, Inc.

Results from Research

The Lewis County Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan identifies the existing transportation services, redundancies within those services and gaps of those services. This information is outlined in the following sections.

Existing Public Transportation

LEWIS COUNTY

Lewis County Public Transportation

Operated by Birnie Bus, Inc.

6591 State Route 12

Lowville, NY 13367

315-376-6508

<https://www.lewiscounty.org/publictransportation>

Birnie Bus, Inc. is contracted by Lewis County Public Transportation to manage and coordinate transit service. Lewis County Public Transportation (LCPT) offers transportation to all residents and visitors of Lewis County. There are currently 7 fixed routes that run Monday – Friday, a Utica Connector Route that runs Monday – Friday during the school year and Tuesday/Thursday during school breaks, a JCC Connector Route that runs Monday – Friday year-round, an Old Forge Seasonal Route that runs from mid-June – Labor Day Weekend, and a Fort Drum Circuit Route that runs Monday – Friday year-round. In addition to the set routes, LCPT also offers a Dial-A-Ride service that is open to the public and arrangements are made by the rider through Birnie Bus, Inc. Fares are double the rate for this service. Non-emergency medical transportation is provided Monday – Friday via the LCPT Demand Response/Medical Van and is available only to Medicaid clients by appointment only. LCPT expects to add an employment focused vanpool program to their list of services in September 2021.

JEFFERSON COUNTY

Watertown CitiBus

544 Newell Street

Watertown, NY 13601

(315) 785-7772

<https://www.watertown-ny.gov/departments/citibus>

CitiBus offers transportation with five daily routes throughout the City of Watertown. The service operates Monday through Saturday from 7:00 am to 6:15 pm. The base fare is \$1.50 per rider while children under 12 are \$0.50. Rider cards are available for 10, 20 or unlimited monthly rides at discounted rates. A para transit bus is available for those passengers who are not able to ride on regular buses.

Volunteer Transportation Center, Inc.

203 North Hamilton Street

Watertown, NY 13601

(315) 788-0422

<https://volunteertransportationcenter.org>

The Volunteer Transportation Center, Inc. (VTC) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Thanks to the work of our certified Volunteer Drivers, Staff, Board of Directors and the generosity of our donors, the VTC provides essential rides to health, social, and other destinations for residents of Northern New York who have no other transportation alternatives. We envision a community where transportation is available to everyone. The Mission of the VTC is to provide transportation to health, wellness and critical needs destinations utilizing volunteers and mobility management for anyone who has barriers to transportation. These charitable rides are provided at no cost to the rider. This program allows VTC clients to maintain their own residence thus providing them with a sense of independence fostering self-confidence and self-esteem. VTC provides comprehensive coordination of trips to maximize ride sharing. VTC does not duplicate public transportation, however, fills in the gaps when traditional fixed route or paratransit routes cannot meet the need. Door through door transportation is provided by 250+ volunteer drivers using their own vehicles who in turn receive \$0.445 per mile (for charitable programs) for transporting clients across Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence Counties. Mileage reimbursement is based on miles traveled, not the number of passengers. Volunteer proximity to clients makes it possible to keep non-passenger mileage to a minimum. The success of the program is attributed to the coordination of transportation activities with other human service and government agencies in the County. In 2019 & 2020 for charitable rides volunteer drivers provided 8,268 one-way trips, traveling 287,264 miles of transportation to clients in Lewis County. Part of the funding for this service is provided by utilizing Title III funds from OFA, \$10,500 annually in addition to fundraising of \$64,000 for volunteer driver trips assisting seniors, persons with disabilities, and anyone else needing a ride to medical appointments and grocery shopping. For all trips including human service contracts i.e. Medicaid transportation, in 2019 & 2020 volunteer drivers provided 23,871 one way trips traveling 873,351 miles for Lewis County residents. Coordination of all volunteer rides is handled by VTC – making sure that the most efficient use of resources is utilized.

ONEIDA COUNTY & HERKIMER COUNTY

Oneida County Rural Transit

Utica Terminal

2245 Dwyer Ave

Utica, NY 13501

(315) 797-4933

<http://www.birniebus.com/routes.php>

In 2019-2020, Oneida County partnered with the Herkimer-Oneida Counties Transportation Council (HOCTC) to evaluate existing conditions and address transit issues resulting in the determination that a technically advanced study for transit planning was needed. The System-Wide Analysis for Transit Based Transportation Connections (SWA for TBTC) study was started and focused on the re-organization of the Oneida County Rural Transit (OCRT) System for the purposes of building system efficiency, providing a higher level of service, increasing ridership, and obtaining a greater return on investment of public transit dollars in Oneida County. The intent of the SWA for TBTC was to encourage economic development and enhance the quality of life by:

- Identifying user needs
- Planning service to meet needs
- Developing comprehensive transit service in rural and urban areas
- Identifying opportunities for transit to support economic development
- Increasing multi-modal connectivity, and
- Developing transit resources in Oneida County

Currently, Oneida County contracts with Central New York Regional Transit Authority (CNYRTA) for urban transit (FTA Section 5307) service in Oneida County. The rural service is striving to implement the recommendations of the SWA for TBTC to better serve the rural Oneida County. The Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan for Herkimer and Oneida Counties 2022-2025 will be used to better serve vulnerable and underserved populations. The analysis presented in this document will provide insight and guide future plans and programs that respond to transit needs in the two-county Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA).

Although there is no designated public transit system in Herkimer County, the HOCTC MPO staff is in continual conversations with Herkimer County staff regarding transit needs. Herkimer County Office of the Aging is a lead agency providing limited transportation to areas of greatest need. Several Herkimer County human service agencies and County department staff are current members on the HOCTC’ Transportation Coordination Committee. Herkimer County has a documented need for rural transit services. The small population, significant geography, and wide-spread population distribution provide challenges for implementing rural transit beyond agency or program specific options. Responding to transit needs through partnerships between government, human-service agencies, and HOCTC will continue to evaluate potential transit options.

OSWEGO COUNTY

Oswego County Opportunities

239 Oneida Street

Fulton, NY 13069

(315) 598-4717

<https://www.oco.org/>

Oswego County Public Transit (OPT) offers fixed routes, non-emergency medical transportation, Call-N-Ride and Medicaid transportation. There are currently 5 fixed routes throughout the County. The fare for public transit is \$1.50 per one-way trip. Seniors have a reduced rate of \$0.75 per one-way trip, but must show their Medicare card and photo identification. Children ages 6-9 are charged \$0.75 per one-way trip and children ages 5 and under rider for free when accompanied by an adult. OPT does offer riders monthly passes for \$45 and route deviations are twice the normal fare.

Oswego County Opportunities Call-N-Ride service provides curb-side pick-up to seniors ages 60+ and persons with special needs fast and free transportation. This service is funded in part by the Oswego County Office for the Aging and Exelon.

ST. LAWRENCE COUNTY

The Arc Jefferson St. Lawrence

6 Commerce Lane

Canton, NY 13617

(315) 386-2600

<http://www.slcnypublictransit.com/>

St. Lawrence County Public Transit is operated by The Arc Jefferson St. Lawrence. The system consists of 16 bus routes that extend between the county's five population centers. With the exception of three routes that operate daily in and around Clarkson University, SUNY Canton and SUNY Potsdam, a majority of St. Lawrence County's Public Transit buses operate Mondays to Fridays with extended business hours. To complement its bus operations, St. Lawrence County offers First Mile Last Mile to transports riders who are $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile or more from a designated bus stop. This service relies on a fleet of private vehicles that are owned by volunteer drivers. This corps of volunteer drivers is coordinated by Volunteer Transportation Center, Inc., a third-party organization that serves as the County's program dispatcher and schedules these on-demand rides in 48 hours in advance of a trip. Public Transit passengers pay a \$2 bus fare for a one-way trip; but do not pay any additional cost to use First Mile Last Mile.

Existing Human Service Transportation

Lewis County Office for the Aging

5274 Outer Stowe St, PO Box 193

Lowville, NY 13367

315-376-5313

The Office for the Aging (OFA) offers transportation services to anyone over the age of 60. Services covered under this transportation program include medical/dental appointments and grocery shopping. Once OFA approves the registrant's application, it is forwarded to the Volunteer Transportation Center (VTC) in Watertown. VTC will then contact the participant to explain the program and schedule a driver for any upcoming appointments. The participant deals directly with VTC for any future appointments.

Currently, there are more than 400 registered participants within the program. During the calendar year 2020, for OFA eligible trips, VTC logged 146,376 volunteer miles for OFA clients. OFA receives funding through the Older Americans Act Title IIIB and New York State Office for the Aging.

Lewis County Public Health Agency

7785 North. State Street, Suite 2

Lowville, NY 13367

315-376-5453

Public Health contracts with Birnie Bus Service to provide pick-up/drop-off service to Lewis County children who are in the Pre-school program. To qualify for the Pre-school program, children must be between the ages of 3 and 5 and have a disability. The Pre-school children are bused to United Cerebral

Palsy in Rome, NY, Kelberman Center in Utica, NY, Gouverneur Central School in Gouverneur, NY, and Bright Beginnings in Watertown, NY.

Public Health funds the transportation program through funds received from the New York State Department of Education. The 2021/2022 contract with Birnie Bus states that the cost of the first child on the bus is \$495.00 per day and every additional child on that bus is \$30.00 per day.

Lewis County Health System

7785 N. State Street

Lowville, NY 13367

315-376-5200

Pre-pandemic, the Adult Day Health Care (ADHC) program at Lewis County Health Systems (LCHS) offered door-to-door transportation to and from the ADHC facility at LCHS. The transportation occurred in the morning and afternoon. The service was provided to approximately 20 people ages 18 and over with disabilities or other specific medical needs. There were two drivers, one full-time and one part-time, along with two vans that carried three wheelchair riders and 10 seated riders. The vans are owned by LCGH.

Additionally, the nursing home located at the hospital used the vans for transportation of the nursing home residents to and from activities in the region. There are approximately 160 residents in the nursing home.

Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, transportation services provided by LCHS were suspended in 2020 and, as of September 2021, have not resumed.

The budget for these programs in 2018 was \$65,800 for salaries and approximately \$25,500 for operating expenses.

Department of Social Services (DSS)

5274 Outer Stowe Street

Lowville, NY 13367

315-376-5703

The Lewis County Department of Social Services provides an array of services and supports for county residents including but not limited to; Temporary Assistance, Emergency Housing, SNAP, Child Support, Health Insurance, and services related to Child and Adult Protection. Co-located with Social Services is the One Stop for Employment.

Approximately 30% of Lewis County residents have Medicaid for insurance. Transportation for non-emergent medical care for Medicaid recipients is managed by Medical Answering Service (MAS), a contracted vendor with the NYS Department of Health. MAS authorizes all trips and determines the appropriate mode of transportation.

The Department provides direct transportation of certain clients that are receiving Child and/ or Adult Protection, Foster Care, PINS and homelessness. DSS has 12 vehicles with approximately 22 staff

that can perform this function. This Department also contracts with Volunteer Transportation Services and may provide bus passes to transport clients in this service array.

The One Stop for Employment may also be able to supply reimbursement or bus passes for transportation depending on certain eligibility requirements.

Transitional Living Services of Northern New York
7550 South State Street
Lowville, NY 13367
315-376-5450

Transitional Living Services (TLS) assists clients with arranging transportation through Lewis County Public Transportation, Medicaid Transportation (MAS), and Volunteer Transportation (VTC); however, clients can schedule the rides on their own. Programs and/or services include, but are not limited to, Health Home Care Management, Non-Medicaid Case Management, Clinic Services, Supportive Housing, Gateway, Rapid Rehousing, and Permanent Supportive Housing. If time and circumstance allow, Case Managers have the ability to transport clients in agency vehicles.

Currently, TLS has three agency vehicles, and their 2021 transportation budget is \$41,845.

The Arc, Oneida Lewis Chapter
7550 S. State Street
Lowville, NY 13367
315-272-1500

The Arc, Oneida-Lewis operates its own vehicles, contracts with transportation providers, and reimburses staff who use their personal vehicles for transport to provide adequate transportation for the people they support.

Transportation is provided to places of employment in Lewis County and neighboring counties where a small fare is charged.

The Arc also ensures that door-to-door transportation is available to people who attend its day programs at no cost. The Arc has a fleet of vehicles that includes minivans and wheelchair-accessible vans and buses that are leased to transportation providers.

Lewis County Head Start
P.O. Box 206
Lowville, NY 13367
315-346-7531

Lewis County Head Start (LCHS) provides transportation services to LCHS families to doctor and family service appointments when other transportation is unavailable. Transportation services are also coordinated through arrangements with Beaver River Central School, Lowville Academy & Central School, Copenhagen Central School, and South Lewis Central School Districts. Approximately 70 four-year-old children living on regular bus routes ride school buses with other students, often

including their own brothers and sisters. LCHS reimburses staff for the use of their personal vehicles and reimburses parents for mileage to attend Head Start activities.

Head Start receives funding through the Department of Health and Human Services to operate the program.

Central New York Development Services Offices
7020 State Route. 12
Lowville, NY 13367
315-376-1700

The Central New York Development Services Offices (CNYDSO) offers assistance to their disabled clients for the purposes of medical appointments and community outings (movies, shopping, visits to the zoo) throughout Lewis County and extends to surrounding counties and metropolitan areas. Transportation is provided through the operation of 14 DSO-owned vehicles (a combination of wheelchair vans and Town & Country vans).

CNYDSO is a state funded government agency and their vehicles are provided by the Central New York Transportation Department.

The Work Place
5274 Outer Stowe Street
Lowville, NY 13367
315-376-5800

Work Place does not provide any supportive services specific to transportation but their office does try to provide clients and visitors with the Lewis County Public Transportation schedule. They work with community partners to assist Work Place visitors in need of transportation assistance, such as referral to Lewis County Opportunity's transportation program or leveraging Salvation Army funds so that available money can be targeted towards transportation.

Credo Community Center
7714 Number Three Road
Lowville, NY 13367
315-376-5958

Credo Community Center, Inc. is a non-profit, Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services, OASAS, approved entity, dedicated in the provision of treatment services for the addiction of alcohol and substance abuse. They do not provide transportation; however, assist clients in securing appropriate transportation through VTC, as needed.

Lewis County Opportunities
8265 State Route 812
Lowville, NY 13367
315-376-8202

Lewis County Opportunities is dedicated to working with people in need to promote a higher quality of life within the community by providing various programs for low-income individuals and families as well as comprehensive services to victims of crime. To achieve this mission, Lewis County Opportunities owns a small fleet of vehicles that transports construction tools and materials to weatherize homes, provide mobile services such as food delivery and car seat stations, and respond to off-site locations to meet consumers.

Direct transportation of consumers is most often limited to the Victim Services program and provided by advocates who provide this service to bring consumers to destinations that include the Lewis County Courthouse, medical institutions, law enforcement offices, and area shelters. Transporting consumers outside of the Victim Services program is not common but could be authorized depending on circumstances applicable to various grant work scopes.

Lewis County Opportunities also provides limited transportation assistance to consumers, which can assist with vehicle repair, insurance, tires, fuel cards, and other transportation-related expenses.

Brookside Senior Living Community

5701 Brookside Circle

Lowville, NY 13367

315-376-4333

Brookside Senior Living Community is a resident community for seniors. Brookside provides transportation to the residents for the purpose of medical and dental appointments, grocery shopping and to the pharmacy.

Literacy of Northern New York

7640 North State Street

Lowville, NY 13367

315-376-8188

The Literacy of Northern New York provides tutoring and training to Lewis and Jefferson County residents. While they do not receive any funding for transportation, they do reimburse staff for the use of their personal vehicles when a client is unable to get transportation to the tutoring site. Transportation to the Literacy of Northern New York office and to area libraries is the most common transportation destination. Because there is no funding for the transportation of clients, Literacy of Northern New York has relied on non-reimbursed volunteer drivers and on occasion, utilized the services of the Volunteer Transportation Center (VTC).

Mountain View Prevention Services

7714 Number Three Road

Lowville, NY 13367

315-376-2321

Mountain View Prevention Services is non-profit, private agency dedicated to the prevention of alcohol and substance abuse. They do not provide transportation, but sometimes drive to client's

homes for consultations because the client is unable to secure transportation. They have also assisted clients in securing transportation, as needed.

Northern Regional Center for Independent Living (NRCIL)
5520 Jackson Street
Lowville, NY 13367
315-836-3735

Northern Regional Center for Independent Living (NRCIL) is a professional peer-run organization providing disability rights and resources in the tri-county area with offices in Jefferson, Lewis, and St. Lawrence counties. Their vision is a society free from discrimination where people of all abilities are empowered to live their best life. NRCIL promotes efforts to end discrimination against people with disabilities by working with community partners to create an accessible, inclusive society. Through NRCIL, people discover choices to live more independently, with enhanced dignity.

NRCIL is proud to provide peer services and eagerly meet the changing needs of the community identified by individuals they assist. Services are confidential and free in their office by appointment, by phone, or via Zoom. NRCIL cares very much about the health and wellness of individuals they support as well as their staff and community.

NRCIL does not provide transportation but does make home visits to consumers that are unable to secure transportation. It also assists individuals to find transportation and access all community supports.

Redundancies in Services

With the mitigation of previously identified transit redundancies, there are now few surpluses in the existing human services transportation system in Lewis County. Currently, the Medicaid transportation is handled by Medical Answering Services, LLC, also known as MAS, which alleviates most of the redundancies that were identified in the 2009 Lewis County Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan. Since Medicaid transportation services are now under one roof, there is no overlap, in regard to Medicaid patients, between agencies such as the Office for the Aging, the Department of Social Services or Transitional Living Services. Lewis County General Hospital's Adult Day Health Care program does provide transportation to Medicaid clients that could otherwise be covered by MAS, if needed.

With the establishment of the Lewis County Public Transportation system, there are little to no redundancies regarding public transit. Prior to the pandemic, agencies such as The Arc, Oneida-Lewis Chapter, Upstate Cerebral Palsy, Birnie Bus, Inc and Lewis County Public Transportation have joined efforts to share services, equipment and costs of transit to and from areas throughout the County, such as Lowville to Boonville, and outside of the County, such as Lowville to Utica. Post-pandemic, agencies are working collaboratively to utilize public transportation as a means for programing and client employment opportunities. While public transportation is used as a rule by agencies and organizations within the County, many

of them continue to depend on internal transportation budgets to fill in the transit gaps that leave many residents astray.

Unmet Needs

Through discussions with human service providers, the Lewis County Transportation Task Force has identified gaps in the current services: employment transit, healthcare/treatment transit, critical need access and on-demand transportation services.

With current unemployment rates exceeding 5.2%, many Lewis County households without a vehicle struggle to have a reliable mode of transportation for work. This lack of transportation directly impacts our residents' ability to pursue, land, and maintain a job. Prospective employees are not the only entities suffering from the lack of transportation. Expanding manufacturing companies, such as Kraft Heinz, and healthcare facilities, such as Lewis County Health System, are in constant need of a workforce but they recognize the transportation barrier that is in their way. While Lewis County Public Transportation plans to launch a van pool program through Commute with Enterprise in the fall of 2021, there still may be unmet needs.

Since the establishment of the universal Medical Transportation system, managed by the MAS, it has been hard for our human service agencies to find a voice for their clients. Though we have mitigated the redundancy of Medicaid transportation by centralizing the service, there needs to be increased diligent communication and program education between our agencies and MAS representatives to alleviate client frustrations and Non-Emergency Transportation service providers.

Aside from pre-scheduled medical visits, other than an ambulance, Lewis County lacks the ability to provide critical need transportation options. For instance, when Lewis County Health Services needs to discharge a patient without transportation, they may have to wait an entire day to release them because there are no transportation options to accommodate them.

Additionally, residents in Lewis County are interested in transportation to shopping centers, medical clinics, banks and post offices, hair salons, farmer's markets, and community centers, which are difficult to access outside of typical public transportation schedules. It would be beneficial for Lewis County residents and the local economy to continue coordinating established transportation services and identifying new points of interest to accommodate our clientele further; however, the Transportation Task Force has also identified the need for more on-demand transportation options. With no existing taxi service operating out of Lewis County, options like Lyft and Uber could provide residents with transit options and, in some situations, could assist LCHS with discharging patients who lack transportation in a timely manner.

Lewis County Transportation Goals

To provide affordable and easily accessible transportation to all Lewis County residents so that they can thrive financially, recreationally, and healthily.

In support of the overall desired mission, the Lewis County Transportation Task Force has identified five supporting goals in which they plan to focus their primary efforts:

1. Increase the availability of dependable and efficient transportation for those employed or seeking employment inside and outside the County.
2. Increase the awareness of services and procedures provided by the Medical Answering Service.
3. Eliminate affordability barriers to public transportation through a fare-free pilot program.
4. Increase the presence of public transportation bus stop shelters and signage throughout the County.
5. Create partnerships with app-based transportation services to provide critical need and on-demand transit options.

Action Plan

Recommended Actions

The Lewis County Transportation Task Force, LCTTF, has focused their discussions on the transportation needs for all County residents, especially for those in need of transportation to employment, healthcare/treatment, and community events throughout the County and beyond. Though there are other transit needs that the LCTTF identified, these five areas of need seem to resonate the most with agencies and residents.

By providing those who lack the transportation necessary to pursue employment with a reliable means of efficient transportation for their work schedules, Lewis County could reduce the July 2021 5.2% unemployment rate and provide employers with the workforce that they need. In order to appropriately assess the prospective employee transit needs, the LCTTF suggests the following:

1. Integrate existing transportation services and equipment that have the ability to serve resident needs for shifts that have greater attendance or truancy problems.
2. Work with organizations to promote and educate their current and prospective employees on vanpool transit services available through the LCPT pilot program and Lewis County Opportunities various vehicle repair programs.
3. Continue to expand the public transportation system, both locally and regionally, to provide more transit options from rural communities to employment opportunity areas that accommodate regular workday and shift schedules.
4. Advocate for the employment and retention of valuable transportation employees that serve as a life-line to many Lewis County residents.

Although the move to a universal Medicaid transportation system has reduced redundancies, agencies and organizations within Lewis County have expressed frustration with the inefficient and confusing service provided to their clients. Recently, healthcare and treatment patients, physicians and clinicians have voiced concerns about the waiting periods for transportation pick-ups, after hour transportation availability and overall understanding of the Medicaid Transportation system as a whole. After pulling together representatives from such agencies and from the Medical Answering Service, the LCTTF was able to identify the following ways to improve Medicaid transportation:

1. Agencies and organizations, with the help of MAS representatives, will educate employees and clinicians on the program and how it works.

2. An increase in communication between such human service agencies and the MAS representatives will reduce the frustrations that all three parties are currently experiencing.
3. Provide adequate shelters for riders to safety and comfortably wait for their assigned transportation at high volume treatment, healthcare and human service offices.
4. Seek out volunteer-based services to provide additional coverage through first-mile last mile programs.

With the local aging population on the rise, many residents are finding it more and more difficult to access fresh groceries, wellness centers and community events on their own. Sadly, many of our Lewis County residents cannot depend on family members and friends to provide transportation to their essential medical appointments and services, let alone these life perks. Through the collaboration of human services agencies such as Lewis County Public Health, The Arc, Oneida Lewis-Chapter and Lewis County Public Transportation, the LCTTF recommends the following transit ideas:

1. Publicize existing Lewis County Public Transportation routes as options for quick access to nearby farmer's markets.
2. Add wellness and fitness centers to the Lewis County Public Transportation's Village Loop route.
3. Educate both the public and human service agencies on the benefits and services that Lewis County Public Transportation already offers while also building routes that meet the needs of those who cannot rely on others for transportation.
4. Continue to work with local agencies to offer access to one-day extension routes to regional locations.

In recent years, technological and social forces have pushed smartphone applications (apps) from the fringe to the mainstream. The fast progress of smart devices and applications in the mobility sector opens a vast potential for mobility services that will provide easily accessible route information, time schedules, and fares and provide the possibility to gather the individualization of mobility patterns. These apps have several applications beyond simply giving consumers travel information. For example, multimodal aggregators may collect information on modal selection, travel time, transfer points, and journey lengths (time and distance). Thus, providing a window into travel behavior that can provide us with the information required to best suit our county's needs. Furthermore, on-demand transit apps for service providers like Uber and Lyft, could provide our residents with access to basic life needs and recreational opportunities that are currently difficult to access with existing transportation options. LCTTF recommends the following to provide critical need and on-demand transit options:

1. Develop an "all-in-one" transit app for Lewis County.
2. Explore a partnership between Lewis County Public Transportation, Lewis County Health Systems and various on-demand transit service providers to meet critical care and on-demand transit needs.
3. Continue to collect and analyze data to better accommodate rider needs.

Implementation

Lewis County human service agencies and organizations have been actively involved as members of the LCTTF and are willing participants of coordinated human service transportation. They are ready

and willing to join efforts to provide residents with access to employment, healthcare/treatment facilities as well critical care access and community events.

The LCTTF has identified implementation needs. Some of these needs are currently being met while others will need to be focused on as the County moves forward with the action items identified above. The needs identified are:

Identified Needs	Status
Public Involvement	In Progress
Coordination among individuals and agencies committed to transportation coordination	Met
Ensure that participating agencies are fully vested in the success of the program	Met
Generate support from local officials	Met
Open communication between human services providers and MAS	In Progress
Educate customers/clients/clinicians on Medicaid transportation	In Progress
Install public transportation bus stop markers and bus stop shelters to identify established pick-up points	In Progress
Educate customers/clients on Vanpool services	In Progress
Create and implement an app-based service	In Progress
Participation from employers throughout the County	In Progress
Connect rural riders with existing services through first mile last mile service	In Progress

Table 10. Transportation needs of Lewis County and status of progress

Future development and/or expansion of transit service will consider regional relationships. Lewis County will work with neighboring counties and their existing public transit services when planning transportation efforts. The adjoining transit services are:

Conclusions

Expanding and coordinating established transportation programs will provide the following benefits:

- Outreach to all members of the public, especially those who are looking for dependable transportation to employment and community events.
- Unification of all members of the public, including disabled, senior, children, and low-income individuals.
- Support the self-sufficiency and independence of all residents of the County.
- Utilize existing transportation funds for the most effective and efficient human services transportation.

The County human service providers and other agencies have recognized the need for expanding and coordinating transportation efforts. This plan outlines the redundancies that have been alleviated since the previous Plan and the unmet needs of transportation in the County and details an action plan to coordinate the existing efforts with the inclusion of those individuals who have gone underserved. Coordinated public transit and human service transportation will make the existing programs more effective and will foster additional mobility within the County and region by providing service to individuals who have not benefited from transportation service in the past.

Lewis County Transportation Task Force Members

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Angie Lazio	The Arc – Oneida. Lewis
Brittany Davis	Lewis County Industrial Development Agency
Casandra Buell	Lewis County Public Transportation & Lewis County Planning Department
Cathie Woledge	Transitional Living Services (TLS)
Debra Wurz	Lewis County General Hospital Residential Care Facility
Erin Largett	LIFEPlan CCO NY
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Jaylyn Yuhas-Heames	Snow Belt Housing, Inc.
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Jennifer Jones	Lewis County Department of Social Services (DSS)
John Exford	Volunteer Transportation Center, Inc. (VTC)
Karen Boliver	Northern Regional Center for Independent Living (NRCIL)
Laura Hacker	NYSDOT
Leah Schneider	Credo Community Center, Inc.
Lisa Hetzner	The Work Place
Margaret Grant	Lewis County General Hospital Residential Care Facility
Mel Bush	South Lewis Central Schools – Home School Community Coordinator
Melissa Kenealy	Birnie Bus, Inc.
Patricia Fralick	Lewis County Community Services
Robert Bucci	Lewis County Public Transportation
Roberta Zehr	Lewis County Department of Social Services (DSS)
Robin Wendell-Zabielowicz	Cornell Cooperative Extension Lewis
Sarah Bush	Lewis County Probation Department
Scott Mathys	Lewis County Opportunities
Sharyn Brandt-Ruzza	Medical Answering Service (MAS)
Steve Virkler	Lewis County Office for the Aging (OFA)