

Transit Coordination Plan
Powder River Public Transportation
Fiscal Year 2025

TAC Committee
approved on 7/10/24
Board approval 8/5/24

The Transit Coordination Plan was developed through a process involving users of the transportation system. The passengers include the general public, the elderly, low income, residents of our local nursing home and persons with disabilities. Members of the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC), County Commissioners, representatives of the Powder River Manor, the Council on Aging are actively involved in the development of this plan.

Powder River Transportation is the sole provider of general public transportation in the county and surrounding area. There are no fixed route or intercity bus systems, railway or private taxi services. The local school system is the only other agency that provides transportation and their busses are not ADA accessible, nor are they available to the general public as they are owned by private contractors.

According to the 2023 statistics from U. S. Census, Powder River County has a population of 1,694. 38.5% is over the age of 60. 485 of them that are over 65 have some form of disability. These aging population statistics demonstrate the need for public transportation to serve the general public and to accommodate the elderly and those persons with disabilities. Our county demographics remain fairly constant as do the needs of these citizens.

The transportation service is provided by Powder River County, with the Board of County Commissioners serving as the governing board for the transit program as mandated by state and federal guidelines. There is a full-time transportation coordinator to take care of the daily administrative duties, reports, grant writing and general office and business duties. We have three full time permanent driver's; the transportation coordinator is also a driver for trips as needed. The full-time driver's will average 32.5 hours a week. The TAC (Transportation Advisory Committee) provides oversight to ensure that the program is structured to meet the transportation needs of the community. Drivers are responsible for trip reports and vehicle inspection reports. Our one local vehicle repair shop is hired to do the preventive maintenance according to the Preventive Maintenance Plan. This garage has qualified mechanics to perform minor and major repairs.

The transportation system provides demand/response service. Attachment #1 shows a typical weekly schedule. When the dispatcher receives a call for an out-of-town appointment, it is then scheduled on the calendar and then advertised to the public so everyone is invited to participate. The upcoming schedule is advertised weekly in the local newspaper and on the county's website on the transportation page, posted at the Senior Center, the library, County Courthouse and the

local nursing home. We make trips to Belle Fourche, SD, Spearfish, SD, Ft. Mead, SD (VA Hospital and clinic) and Rapid City, SD; Gillette and Sheridan, WY; Billings, Forsyth, Colstrip and Miles City, MT. These trips range from 160 miles to 340 miles round trip.

PR Transportation is the only non-emergency transportation available to our local nursing home for medical and recreational purposes. This service transports many Powder River Manor residents to both local and out of town medical appointments and some community activities. For example; every Wednesday at noon there is a senior congregate meal at a local restaurant. We have passengers from both the nursing home and the community that can utilize our service so they can attend this meal. The Powder River Manor is a 41-bed facility, but averages 20 residents.

The transit vans also make out of town trips organized by the local Senior Center, Council on Aging and other community groups as long as they are during regular business hours. We advertise these trips the same as any other trip so everyone, including the general public, has a chance to participate. The transportation system can also be utilized by community organizations, churches and groups traveling to meetings and events, again, as long as they are during the regular hours of operation and open to the general public. This allows more people to attend as a group and allows those who may need the wheelchair lift to participate. The use of the vans by these groups is coordinated around regularly scheduled trips. Occasionally a request is made for a trip on a weekend. The coordinator will determine on a case-by-case basis if these trips will be made, considering hours, distance and driver availability.

The TAC determines the transportation needs of the community. Committee members are selected from in town and the various outlying areas of the county and include a representative of the groups who are the primary users of the existing transportation system, such as the elderly, low-income, individuals with disabilities, Council on Aging, our local nursing home and minority groups. The TAC is a valuable resource in assessing the current and changing needs of the transportation services, identifying the users of the system and assisting in determining how the transportation needs of the community can best be met. The TAC, as a county advisory committee is continuing to help set goals for the system and provide oversight in the overall operation of the system. The TAC has adopted this Coordination Plan at their meeting on January 10, 2024. The minutes are attached.

A full time Transportation Coordinator organizes and manages the transportation system and is responsible for the quarterly reporting, grant writing and all other office, building and vehicle tasks. This helps to utilize the service to its fullest potential. The Transit Coordinator also supervises and dispatches drivers, schedules and coordinates all trips, gets the schedule out to the public, makes sure all vehicles are maintained in compliance with the vehicle maintenance agreement, and also serves as a driver when needed. The Transit Coordinator is responsible to the County Commissioners as a department head.

We drove over 119,537 miles during the 2023 fiscal year. Our mileage is increasing as well as our ridership. Our ridership this year is starting to increase without pandemic restrictions and have added an additional driver for additional coverage. Many of our passengers have come to rely on this service for their personal out of town medical needs and due to fluctuation in fuel prices. We have reasonable fares and the county supports and contributes to the transportation system. Senior and disabled citizens are charged one half of the fare. If anyone cannot afford to pay the fare, we have donations from two local non-profit organizations who have contributed money for this very reason. This transportation system allows older residents and the disabled to stay in their own homes longer by getting to medical appointments in a timely and safe manner. Some younger residents have used the transportation system for not only medical trips, but employment and educational related trips, recreational reasons and personal trips for services not available in our small rural community.

Even though our local clinic is staffed by a full-time Physician Assistant, most of our population still has to travel to other medical facilities to meet their needs. We try to place a priority on medical trips and about 90% of our trips originate that way. Often, though, the trip will end up being combined with personal needs, business or shopping as our small community has limited resources. We have several passengers who are veterans who go to the VA Hospital/Clinic at Ft. Meade, Gillette, WY and the VA Clinic in Billings, MT. Several times during the year we coordinate with passengers to meet other types of transportation, such as other bus lines or airlines.

We currently have a 11-Passenger 2020 Ford Transit Ambulette with wheelchair lift with 5,567 miles on it; a 6-passenger 2020 Honda Odyssey with 124,004 miles on it; a 6-passenger 2020 Toyota Minivan with 70,271 miles on it; a 6-passenger 2018 Toyota Minivan with 159,206 miles on it; a 5-passenger 2017 Dodge ADA Conversion Van with 99,865 miles on it; a 12-passenger 2018 Ford Transit Passenger Wagon that has 14,203 miles on it. We are currently waiting on 2 addition vehicles that were awarded in FY2023 & 1 additional vehicle that was awarded in FY2024.

With housing these vehicles in our facility, we are required to seek a new additional outer shed for space to store tires and seats for the vans as we don't have a fire wall within our facility to house them in our building. We have chosen to include in our grant the request for a 10'x 12' shed and additional supplies to provide a place to store tires, seats and additional items needed for the vehicles. The quoted price at the time requested was \$4,455.00 for the shed which included a shingled roof, primed and painted, roll up door and delivered. The additional funds will be needed to provide for racks or shelving, supplies and placement of the shed.

The 2018 Ford Transit Passenger Wagon has been used for several trips and has proved to be much easier for passengers to get in and out of. It is very comfortable to ride in and is economical to drive. The 2017 ADA Van is used for disabled passengers on a demand/response basis. We have received a 11-passenger 2020 Ford Transit Ambulette that is wheel chair

accessible and has a lift that can transport more than one wheelchair bound passengers. The mini-vans are used daily during the week making trips to both in town and out of town medical facilities and other destinations when there are fewer than 6 passengers, servicing both the public and the local nursing home. These vans are invaluable given the miles that we drive each year. The 2018 Ford Transit Passenger Wagon is used when we have several passengers and for senior trips as it allows easier loading and unloading and roomier seating for our elderly and disabled passengers.

Our ADA conversion van has also been invaluable as it is used when fewer passengers are taken. We make many trips for the nursing home to out-of-town medical facilities and the ADA mini conversion van is more economical to run and more comfortable for the passengers. Most days we have several vehicles in use. We are looking forward to received our replacement ADA van soon.

We have piloted a software program in 2023-2024 and would like to apply for funding to continue into 2025 for Blaise Transit Software in the quoted amount of \$5,200.00. Transit agencies looking to improve access and mobility to essential community services for vulnerable populations such as rural areas, low-income groups, older adults, elderly, and persons with disabilities. Additional funding is needed to provide software for the transit providers to schedule and coordinate the service with the needs of the rural community. With the large distances this software could eventually dial into these key features: recurring and scheduling trips, transfers to existing transit routes. guide drivers through optimized routes generated in real time using turn-by-turn navigation instructs and a passenger manifest at each stop. Dispatch of drivers is entirely automated based on incoming trip requests, real-time traffic conditions, and operating parameters set by you. Provide mobile payment for tickets and monthly passes. Blaise's platform equips riders with flexible transit schedules built around their own needs. With improved reliability, directness, transparency, and a frequency that's there when they need it, riders are empowered to use your transit system more effectively – and often. Powder River County will be using the Blaise Drive and Blaise Engine software components to bring the power of AI to the scheduling, routing, and dispatching for their call-in demand-response service. With a service area stretching well beyond the County's 3,300 square miles, and with trip distances reaching as high as 150 miles per run, Blaise's patented routing algorithms promise to bring greater flexibility, efficiency, and ease of use to residents of southeastern Montana riding with Powder River County.

Powder River County Transportation will be applying for a new 6-7 passenger minivan to replace our 2020 Toyota Sienna Minivan this year to maintain rotation of vehicles. This 2020 Toyota Sienna has currently the following mileage of 73,021, the VIN is 5TDJZ3DCXLS251366 and the Project number of this vehicle is 1236. We are currently putting an average of 3,000 miles on it every quarter which will put it over 100,000 soon. Especially with our other two already over 100,000. We use this vehicle almost daily because most of our riders are elderly but are ambulatory.

We have implemented Dial-A-Ride, a local service for those who are not able to get to services on their own. The need for this service was recognized by the TAC as some seniors and disabled are not able to get out and get to their physical therapy, the grocery store, the post office, library and other personal appointments on their own. The need for continued funding is essential to keep this program actively growing to meet the needs of our community. We utilize our mini vans or the ADA Conversion Van for these local trips. We have made pamphlets and have distributed them to the public and are placed around town at different businesses. We also have this information available on the county website, in the local newspaper and posted at the Senior Center.

Revised 7/1/24