

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-25-107455](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Public transportation can be critical to the millions of people living in rural and tribal areas. Accessible public transit is especially important for those with limited driving abilities due to age or disability. However, even with recent grant funding from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, stakeholders have raised questions about meeting the transit needs of an increasingly aging population.

GAO was asked to review issues related to accessible transit. This report examines (1) the primary federal funding sources for rural and tribal communities for accessible transit for older adults and people with disabilities; (2) the approaches these communities have used to provide this service, and the challenges they have faced; and (3) how the Department of Transportation (DOT) and FTA's efforts have helped communities use funds to improve accessible transit services.

GAO reviewed statutes, regulations, and DOT and FTA documentation. GAO conducted case studies of three Tribes and four states, including three site visits, and interviewed 44 federal and transportation agency officials and other stakeholders, such as groups representing older adults. GAO compared FTA's efforts to key practices and requirements for assessing the results of federal efforts.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that FTA establish a process to regularly assess the effectiveness of its efforts in assisting rural and tribal communities' access and use of funding programs in support of its objectives. DOT agreed with the recommendation.

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RURAL AND TRIBAL TRANSIT

The Federal Transit Administration Should Evaluate Its Efforts to Help Improve Accessibility and Service

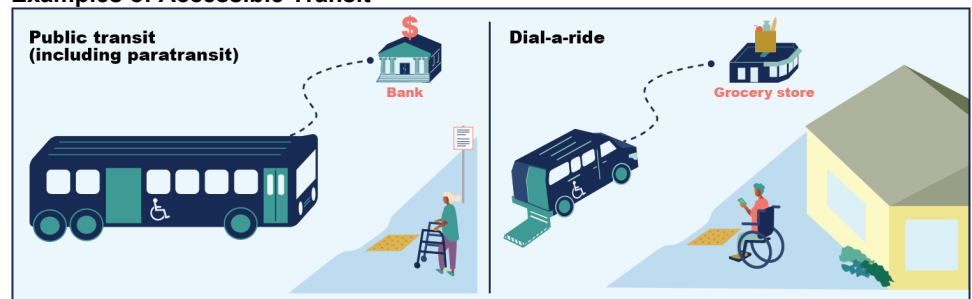
What GAO Found

Federal funding is key for many rural and tribal transit providers to meet their communities' needs, especially the accessible transit needs of older adults and people with disabilities. These needs include accessing jobs, education, and essential services, such as medical appointments and groceries. GAO identified three Federal Transit Administration (FTA) grant programs that rural and tribal communities primarily rely on:

- the Formula Grants for Rural Areas program,
- the Public Transportation on Indian Reservations and Tribal Transit Program, and
- the Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities program.

While Tribes and rural communities use federal funding and other approaches to provide and support accessible transit services, their transit providers face an array of challenges. Based on interviews GAO conducted with federal and transportation agency officials and other stakeholder group representatives, the most frequently cited challenges included funding constraints (25 of 44) and staffing shortages (24).

Examples of Accessible Transit



Source: GAO illustration and review of Federal Transit Administration documentation. | GAO-25-107455

Note: Paratransit, broadly defined, is accessible, origin-to-destination transportation service that operates in response to requests from eligible riders and supplements fixed route services.

FTA assists communities in accessing and using federal grant funds, and addressing the challenges they face in doing so, through a variety of efforts. FTA has identified related objectives to removing barriers and has conducted performance management reviews to assess its progress. However, FTA has not formally or more broadly assessed whether these efforts have helped communities better access and use funds and does not have plans to do so. Additionally, while FTA has conducted performance reviews, it has not formally assessed the effectiveness of its efforts in helping the agency achieve its strategic objectives, as called for by key practices based on legal requirements.

Without regular assessments, FTA may be missing opportunities to help address rural and tribal communities' needs and challenges as related to accessing and using funds, and to more effectively align its efforts to best support its objectives and prioritize resources. For example, FTA might not be fully leveraging the strategies that best assist communities and might be spending resources on strategies that are less effective.