

## Why GAO Did This Study

Public transportation in rural areas is critical to connecting people to medical services, jobs, education, and shopping. FTA allocated about \$2.1 billion in formula grants over the last 3 years to support rural and tribal transit. In 2014, GAO reported that providing transit services in rural areas can be challenging and that coordination of transportation services among federal programs is limited.

GAO was asked to examine ongoing efforts and challenges of coordinating rural transit systems. This report addresses (1) factors affecting rural transit coordination and selected rural and tribal transit providers' coordination efforts and (2) the extent to which FTA facilitates coordination of rural transit services. GAO reviewed program documentation and literature on rural transit coordination. GAO also interviewed federal officials from FTA and the Department of Health and Human Services, which also funds transportation services, and rural transit stakeholders, including state transportation agencies, rural and tribal transit providers, and public transit industry groups. GAO selected states and rural and tribal transit providers based on federal-funding levels and geographic representation, among other factors.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that FTA develop a communication plan that will effectively share information with state and local stakeholders on coordination opportunities in an accessible and informative way. FTA partially concurred with the recommendation. As discussed in the report, GAO continues to believe the recommendation is warranted and should be fully implemented.

View [GAO-20-205](#). For more information, contact Susan Fleming at (202) 512-2834 or [flemings@gao.gov](mailto:flemings@gao.gov).

# PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

## Enhanced Federal Information Sharing on Coordination Could Improve Rural Transit Services

### What GAO Found

Coordination of rural transportation services across geographic jurisdictions and federal- and state-funding sources has the potential to reduce costs and improve services. Such coordination by transit agencies in rural areas can lead to efficiencies. A variety of factors, however, adversely affect rural transit coordination, including the availability of resources, according to GAO's literature review and stakeholder interviews. About 70 percent of the selected stakeholders GAO interviewed, including rural and tribal transit providers, explained that it is difficult to coordinate transit services in rural communities with limited resources, such as funding, staff, and technology. For example, three rural transit providers said that program managers sometimes assume multiple duties, such as a driver and dispatcher, a practice that affects their time and ability to coordinate. Other cited factors included the extent to which different requirements of federal programs that fund rural transit are aligned to allow transit providers to coordinate trips for riders with specific needs (e.g., people with disabilities) and the availability of coordinating mechanisms, among other factors (see figure). Nonetheless, selected rural and tribal transit providers said they were engaged in various coordination efforts to improve rural transit services. The most commonly cited efforts under way included coordinating trips—for example, by establishing convenient drop-off points—and sharing resources.

### Factors Affecting the Coordination of Rural Transit



Source: GAO analysis of interviews with rural transit stakeholders, discussion groups, and literature review. | GAO-20-205

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has several efforts under way to facilitate coordination, but results are mixed. At the federal level, FTA and the federal interagency Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility issued a strategic plan in October 2019, outlining their strategic goals. However, they have yet to submit to Congress a final report containing recommendations for enhancing interagency coordination. FTA officials told us they plan to submit the report by September 2020. At the state and local level, FTA has provided technical support to stakeholders to facilitate coordination. GAO, however, found limitations with FTA's current information-sharing approach. These limitations make information on coordination-related issues difficult to identify and access. Stakeholders want additional information from FTA on leading coordination practices, such as ways to coordinate with other providers. Improving communication and sharing additional coordination-related information could help rural and tribal transit providers identify additional coordination practices they could pursue to improve rural transportation services.