



THE WHEEL

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FTA Administrators Visit OATS Transit



OATS Transit was pleased to host a visit by the Federal Transit Administration's newly appointed Region 7 Administrator, Carrie Butler, and Deputy Regional Administrator Mark Bechtel last month. It was an opportunity for Carrie to meet OATS Transit's Directors and learn more about our mission and the services we provide. FTA Region 7 consists of Missouri, Kansas, Iowa and Nebraska.

The time Carrie and Mark spent with OATS Transit staff was for sharing success stories and discussing challenges, including getting enough local funding to help with vehicle replacement, and expanding service where demand exceeds resources.

Funding from FTA is allocated to the State of Missouri, through the Missouri Department of Transportation, which then awards grants to eligible transit providers and monitors to assure the funds are being used efficiently and effectively. The FTA funds OATS Transit receives from MoDOT is for rural service and requires local funding to match those funds. When state and local governments, businesses, or residents contribute either financially or in-kind (such as volunteer labor or resources), they are signaling their commitment and support of local transportation services and underscores that the federal funds received have a meaningful impact.



Thank you Krissy Sinor!

Krissy Sinor announced her retirement from the OATS Transit Board of Directors at the January 28, 2025 meeting. She was acknowledged for her nine years of service to OATS Transit by Board President, Darleen Rapp.

Krissy joined the Board of Directors in January 2017 to fill a vacancy in our Southwest region. Krissy served as our Board President in 2021-2022. In addition to her role on the Board, she played an important part in several Southwest Missouri organizations. Thank you for all you have done for our company over the years, Krissy!



Governor Outlines Budget Requests in State of State Address; Cuts Transit Funding

Story and photo provided by the Missouri Public Transit Administration (MPTA), January 31, 2025

During his State of the State address on January 28, Governor Kehoe outlined his budget requests including a cut of \$5 million to state transit operating assistance. The SFY 2026 Missouri Highway and Transportation Commission request was \$11.7 million for Missouri transit. This request included \$10 million from General Revenue and \$1.7 million from the State Transportation Fund. This has been the funding level since 2023.

“It is a disappointment to see our wins for transit investment reduced in this year’s budget recommendations from the Governor. This investment in transit is a critical match to ensure our providers can draw down the historic federal funding levels available for public transit back to Missouri. The price of doing business continues to escalate and this \$5 million is critical to continue to be able to deliver in Missouri,” said Kimberly Cella, executive director of Missouri Public Transit Association. “This just means we will have to work even harder this year to educate the legislature on the importance of this investment to the state’s bottom line.”

As a recipient of state assistance funding, OATS Transit shares MPTA’s concerns. “We use this funding as match to federal grants which helps cover operating costs in rural areas” said Dorothy Yeager, Executive Director. “What makes this funding even more valuable has been its flexibility to use for operating or capital. The average local match required for a new vehicle is \$22,000. With new vehicles scheduled to come in next year, we hope to be able to utilize some of this funding to replace some of the older vehicles in our fleet that are long past their useful life. New vehicles actually helps reduce operating costs as they run more efficiently and don’t require expensive repairs.”



Lake Area Industries riders depend on OATS Transit to get to work daily.

Just Google It!

It took a couple of knocks on the front door before Phillip Emerson opened it for me. Once I stepped inside, I was greeted by the smell of vinegar and pickling spices. Laughingly, Phillip led me to the kitchen, where his wife of 56 years, Shirley, was busy making freezer pickles. After a quick greeting and washing my hands, we found ourselves seated at the kitchen table, preparing several pints of pickles together. "A dear neighbor gifted us these cucumbers," Shirley said with a smile. "I love canning, and these will be great treats during the winter." We reminisced about the 'Good ol' days' as we put up the pickles and talked about gardening and how to stretch grocery resources

Living on a strict budget and ensuring all the bills are paid each month can be a challenge, even for the most frugal. The Strafford Senior Center is just around the corner from the Emersons' home, but getting there was a challenge for them after Phillip took a bad fall in their driveway several years ago, making him unable to drive and affecting his mobility. With their medical appointments sometimes being quite a driving distance, Shirley did not feel safe driving. It is a dilemma that faces many who live rurally and do not wish to inconvenience family members. So, the enterprising couple decided to find a way to safely get to their appointments. "We Googled it!" Shirley exclaimed with a giggle, as she pointed to a computer set up in the corner of the dining room, "And OATS Transit popped up, so we called!"

After sharing some more laughs about the use of technology, Shirley continued, "It's such a fantastic



Shirley Emerson enjoys planting different varieties of flowers and knows all their scientific names.

service. Since we know when our appointments are, we can schedule a ride far out and the costs are affordable for us. Our driver, Don, always makes sure that we are safe. He helps me get to my appointments and takes extra time to make sure we get into the building safely."

Don Kiblinger has been a driver since 2010 and serves as a Team Leader for the Southwest Region. "We just love Don," Shirley said. "He teases us that the bus doesn't go anywhere until all the seatbelts are fastened. When we have someone on the bus who is in a wheelchair, he's always so careful that they are secure and safe. Don is always at the door to help us navigate the steps."



Driver Don Kiblinger helps Shirley off the bus at the Strafford Senior Center.

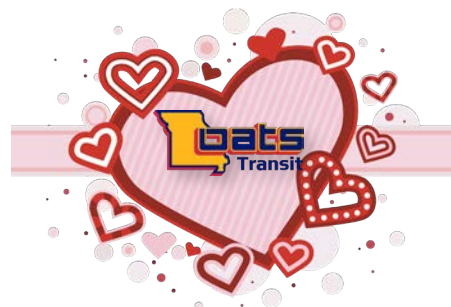
The Emersons mainly use OATS Transit's service for medical appointments and visits to the senior center but also understand that they can use it for grocery shopping. "It's easy to schedule a ride," Shirley says, adding, "I just call into the office and they help me get everything set up. Then comes Don just when we need him. OATS Transit has been a godsend to us. We feel independent and are able to get to our appointments without being a bother to the family. I'm so grateful for this service."

The pickles are finished, and I am entertained by the couple singing a few gospel songs. One of them was an original that Phillip had written. I asked him if he had ever recorded it, and he slyly grinned at me and said "Just Google it!"

written by Rhonda Proctor

Shortly after Rhonda's visit Mr. Emerson passed away. Mrs. Emerson continues to ride OATS Transit.

Employees Visit Home Office in Columbia.....



Top: Midwest Region staff Lee Bowers, Jamie Pyatt, Tommy Henderson, Denise Bell, Sandy Nolan and Keith Ray.

Center: Northeast Region drivers Rodney Baker and Jim Scott.

Bottom: Southwest Region staff Derrell Friend, Sandy Schultz, Naomi Garner, Tina Dillon, Denis Freidt, Lisa Bailey, Rick Painter, Bob Whitney and Scott Crosby.



Our Northwest Region staff had lots of fun cheering on the KC Chiefs during SuperBowl LIX. The Chiefs didn't win this year, but we still love our Missouri team!

Please contact the editor if you have news stories or photos you would like to share with us. We would love to hear from you.

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