

Upcoming Events

NARCOG Board Meeting
DATES: Dec. 1 at 10 a.m.
LOCATION: NARCOG Board Room - Decatur

Agency Contacts

RTA Office
256-580-2088

Falguni Patel
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Hours of Operation

Open Monday through Friday
from 7 a.m. -5 p.m.

Schedule a Ride

Schedule a ride by calling 256-580-2088. The NARCOG RTA provides transit services in Lawrence and Morgan counties and serves both rural and urban areas. This service is available by scheduling a ride at least 24 hours in advance and by no later than 2 p.m. the day before. Trips outside the Region are limited to a 50-mile radius of the NARCOG office, and cannot cross state lines.

Connect Cards are available for \$20 and can be purchased at the NARCOG Transit Office.

Information

ON THE WEB
www.narco.org
SOCIAL MEDIA

Working through a pandemic

Transit continued essential services during COVID-19

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic changed how most organizations conducted daily operations.

The same goes for the North Central Alabama Regional Council of Governments (NARCOG) Regional Transit Agency (RTA).

But while many businesses and organizations temporarily shut down during the early



months of the pandemic, as an essential service, the RTA continued to keep its transit vehicles on the road — with a few mod-

ifications to operational procedures.

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NARCOG RTA surpasses 5-year milestone

The North Central Regional Council of Governments (NARCOG) Regional Transit Agency (RTA) is celebrating a milestone.

The RTA recently concluded its fifth year under the NARCOG umbrella.

In 2016, NARCOG assumed responsibility for the Morgan County Area Transportation System (MCATS) and the Lawrence

County Transportation System, becoming the sole public transportation provider for the two counties.

“The NARCOG Regional Transit Agency has seen tremendous growth in service while assuming operations of two separate agencies,” RTA Director Falguni Patel said.

Now that the first five-year

milestone has been reached — a period that includes the challenges of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic — Patel is looking to help the agency grow.

One significant item the RTA has addressed is ensuring the agency’s fleet remains modern and operational.

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Regional Transit Agency ready for holiday season

The holiday season has arrived, which typically means the North Central Regional Council of Governments (NARCOG) Regional Transit Agency (RTA) is entering one of its busiest times of the year.

Even though the RTA had limited services during the previous year due to COVID-19 protocols,

the agency began to expand services to regular fares on Nov. 1, even though riders and drivers are still required to wear masks and follow social distancing guidelines, per Federal Transportation Association (FTA) regulations.

According to RTA officials, in the years prior to the pandemic,

the agency usually began to see a spike in trips beginning the week before Thanksgiving, and this usually continues through the holiday season.

Trips within the Decatur Urban Area (Decatur, Hartselle and Trinity) have a fare of \$2 each way. Each rural one-way trip is \$2 per five miles traveled and is capped at \$10.

Robby Cantrell | Executive Director

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NARCOG seeks volunteers to deliver meals

Senior citizens in Lawrence and Morgan counties need assistance.

The North Central Alabama Regional Council of Governments (NARCOG) is searching for volunteers to assist with the More than a Meal program, delivering nutritious meals to homebound seniors in the Region.

Through the NARCOG More than a Meal program, seniors who are 60 and older are provided a nutritious meal five days a week at their local senior centers. But for those seniors who are homebound, the meals are delivered to their homes.

Delivering these meals, however, requires help.



In Lawrence and Morgan counties, NARCOG relies on volunteers to deliver meals to homebound seniors. But during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, the number of volunteers decreased, prompting the

NARCOG Regional Transit Agency (RTA) to depend primarily on its drivers to ensure homebound seniors received daily meals.

Now that some of the pandemic restrictions have been loosened, the agency is now shifting back

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Volunteers are needed to help deliver meals to homebound seniors in Lawrence and Morgan counties.

To volunteer for this program, contact NARCOG Outreach Coordinator Justin Graves at 256-355-4515.

to its more traditional services of providing transportation to customers. The RTA resumed non-essential trips on Nov. 1, and the holiday season typically is a busy time for the agency.

FROM PAGE 1: MILESTONE

In December 2019, the RTA received four new buses, and the agency has ordered four more that will be used to replace aging vehicles. Also within the next year, the RTA will be replacing four minivans that are used primarily for rural routes.

To assist the RTA as it heads into the future, the agency will conduct a planning study that has been included in the budget for the 2022 Fiscal Year.

The goals for the study are:

- Providing access to key origins

and destinations in the community, including government services, employment centers, vocational training institutes, etc.

- Improving mobility of residents.

- Providing a cost effective, competitive, and reliable transportation options for the residents.

- Leveraging technology and innovation to maximize benefits of transit investments by identifying opportunities and private partnerships that will allow the agency to improve its services.

- Identifying operational deficiencies that can be addressed within the financial constraints.

- Identifying potential service models that can be implemented to improve service in the next five years.

In recent years, the NARCOG Area Agency on Aging (AAA) and the Community Action Partnership of North Alabama (CAPNA) have conducted community surveys that identified transportation near the top of the list of the Region's needs. Transportation is

also identified as a barrier in employment attainment by industry partners.

"The lack of transportation options is not just a challenge for the elderly and disabled," Patel said. "Public transportation is also an essential part of job creation, economic growth and improved quality of life in a community."

"This study will assist us in identifying options that have been successful in other communities around the country of similar demographics, land use and size."

FROM PAGE 1: PANDEMIC

Because of safety concerns due to the pandemic, the number of riders allowed on a vehicle was reduced, and Federal Transportation Administration (FTA) protocols required all drivers and riders to wear masks and use social distancing measures.

The safety protocols used by the RTA were effective.

"Our drivers did an outstanding job managing the challenges of the pandemic," RTA Director Falguni Patel said. "During this period, we have not had any COVID-19 cases

that originated or spread through the transit system."

Even though the RTA continued daily operations throughout the pandemic, the COVID-19 protocols significantly reduced the number of riders who were able to utilize its services.

That, however, was expected.

During the height of the pandemic, the RTA's daily trips reduced to about 60-percent of normal operations. Trips that were deemed essential during the shutdown

phase of the pandemic in 2020 and early 2021 were limited to riders who needed transportation for dialysis, medical appointments, prescription refills, and employment-related trips.

On average, the RTA provided 220 urban area trips each day during 2020.

The RTA also aided another important essential service: Delivering meals to homebound seniors.

Due to concerns related to the pandemic, the number of volun-

teers who assist in NARCOG's More than a Meal program decreased during the past two years. The RTA ensured that this program continued by assisting in the delivery of nutritious meals to homebound seniors in Lawrence and Morgan counties.

"I'm proud of how our drivers and employees responded to the challenges we faced," Patel said. "They overcame a lot of challenges to help keep us operational during this difficult time."