Joplin Regional Transit Study

Joplin City Council Presentation | October 20, 2025

JOPLIN MISSOURI

TransPro
Driving Excellence

Agenda

- Project Background & Overview
- Existing Conditions
- Public Engagement
- Initial Recommendations
  - Governance
  - Revenue
  - Service
- Next Steps and Questions

Project Background

- In 2023, the City of Joplin was awarded the FTA's Areas of Persistent Poverty (AoPP) grant to study feasible options that will promote more ridership in areas considered historically disadvantaged communities or designated as areas of persistent poverty.
- The City released an RFP and the consulting team of TransPro, TranSystems (now GFT), and Lathrop GPM were selected in late 2024.
- The TransPro team leveraged the Joplin Transit System Analysis report from February 2020, which provided short recommendations for transit service in the City of Joplin and into neighboring communities.



Project Schedule

1. Define Project Success for Partners & Assess Current Conditions – *Complete*
2. Community Engagement and Information Gathering – *Ongoing*
3. Feasibility Assessment (Governance Structure, Service Delivery Model, Service Plan, and Funding Levels) – *Complete*
4. Revenue Sources and Recommendations – *Drafted*
5. Implementation Plan – *In Progress*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Task 1: Assess & Define												
Task 2: Public Engagement				★			★				★	
Task 3: Feasibility Assessment												
Task 4: Revenue Recommendations												
Task 5: Implementation Plan												

★ *Engagement Events*

Success Definition

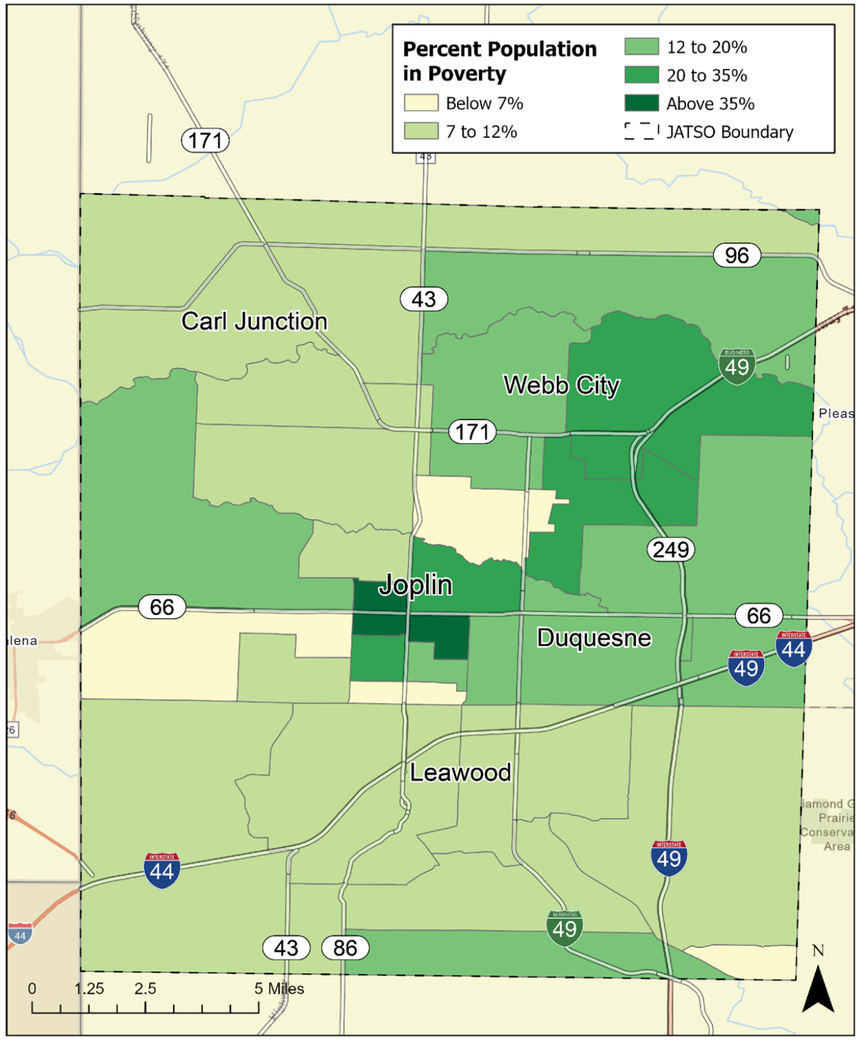


The Joplin area will have a regionally governed and operated transit system that is *operationally sustainable, connects people to destinations, and promotes economic development.*

Existing Conditions and Public Engagement

Existing Conditions

- **There is need for public transportation in the Joplin region.** The Joplin region has more low-income households and people with disabilities on average compared to Missouri as a whole.
- **An operator shortage caused by low driver pay contributed to the suspension of trolley service in 2022 and threatens operational sustainability.** Operators make less compared to other transportation programs in the region, such as school districts.
- **Limited service inhibits access to jobs and other destinations, especially outside of the city of Joplin.** The existing system consists of three fixed trolley routes that come every hour, with all services operating only on weekdays. MAPS trips outside Joplin are subsidized by the city and partner communities contribute per rider.



Engagement Activities

- Third Thursday (Regional)
- Staff Interviews (City)
- Online Project Survey (Regional)
- Community Phone Survey (Regional)
- Steering Committee (Regional)

City News

Posted on: June 20, 2025

City launches Transit Study to explore future public transportation

The successful relaunch of the Trolley in February was a major step forward for public transportation in Joplin. Having been idled for two years due to staffing and resource challenges, the program is back up and running better than ever.



Now, the City wants your input. A short public survey is available to help shape the future of transit in the Joplin region. We encourage all citizens to take a few minutes to share their needs and ideas—your voice matters!



Findings of the Online Project Survey

- Non-statistically significant survey of community members distributed during Third Thursdays and via the city of Joplin's newsletter and social media channels
- 241 responses as of July 23

82% of respondents agree with the statement: **"Our metro needs a regional transit system that connects people with destinations in communities outside of Joplin."**

CHALLENGES IN MAKING TRANSIT BETTER



- *Frequency & reliability*
- *Too expensive to operate*
- *Serve the entire region*

KEY DESTINATIONS TO SERVE WITH TRANSIT



- *Education*
- *Recreation*
- *Industrial parks*
- *Nearby communities (Carl Junction, Webb City, Oronogo, Alba, Seneca, Neosho, Diamond, Duquesne, Carthage)*

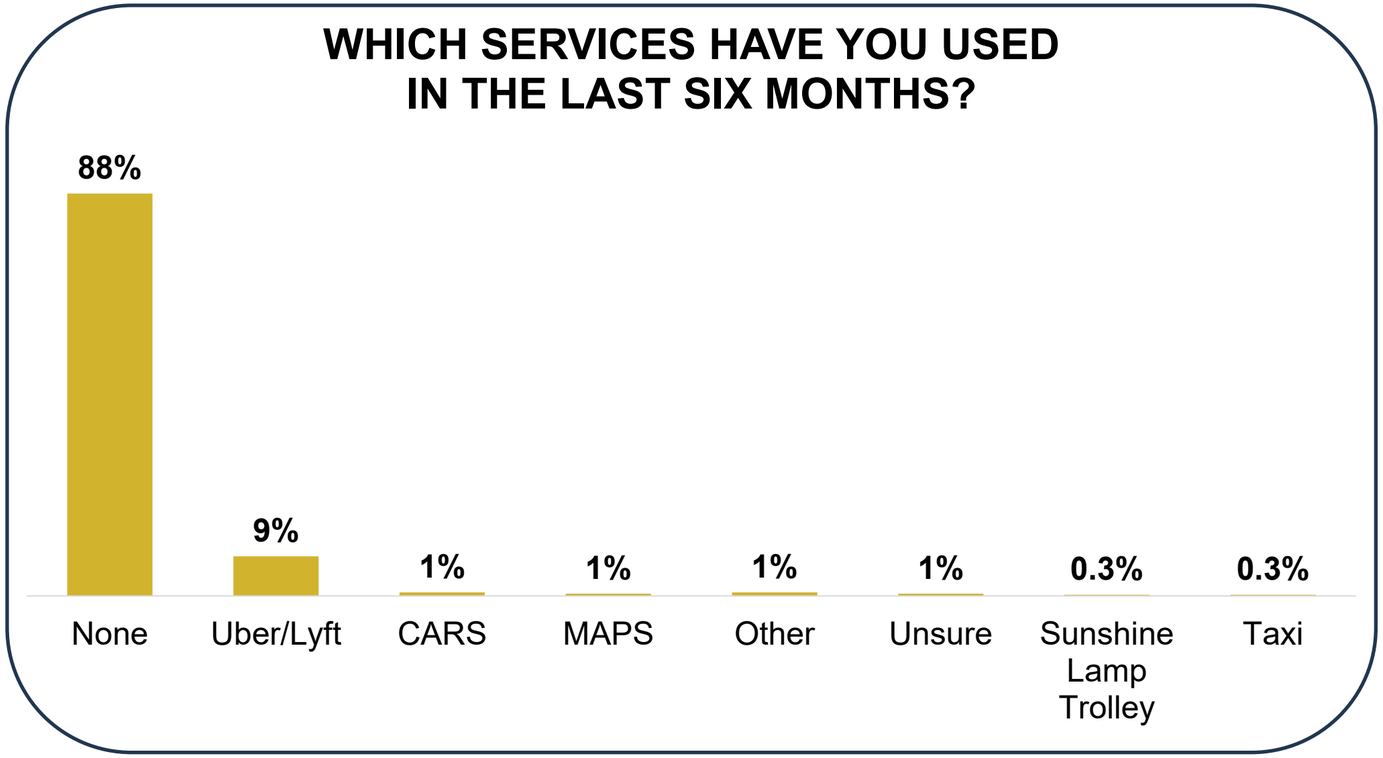
PRIORITIES FOR A NEW TRANSIT SYSTEM

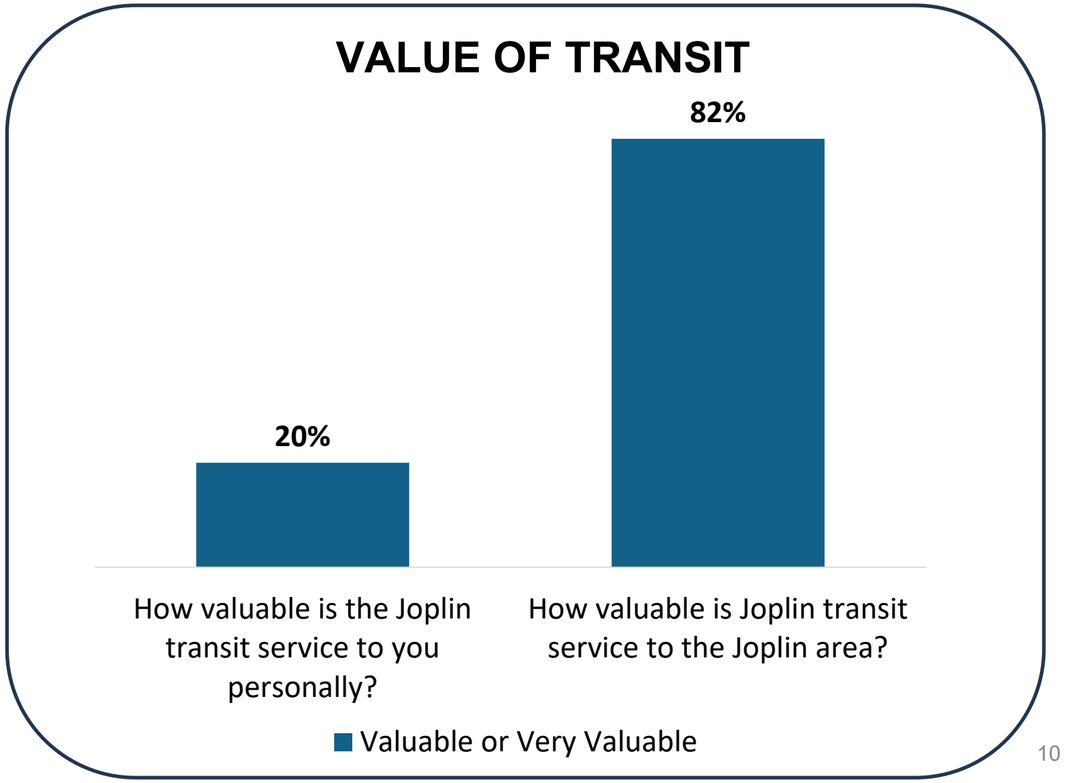


1. *Operationally sustainable*
2. *Access to destinations throughout the metro*
3. *Promotes economic development*

Findings of the Community Phone Survey

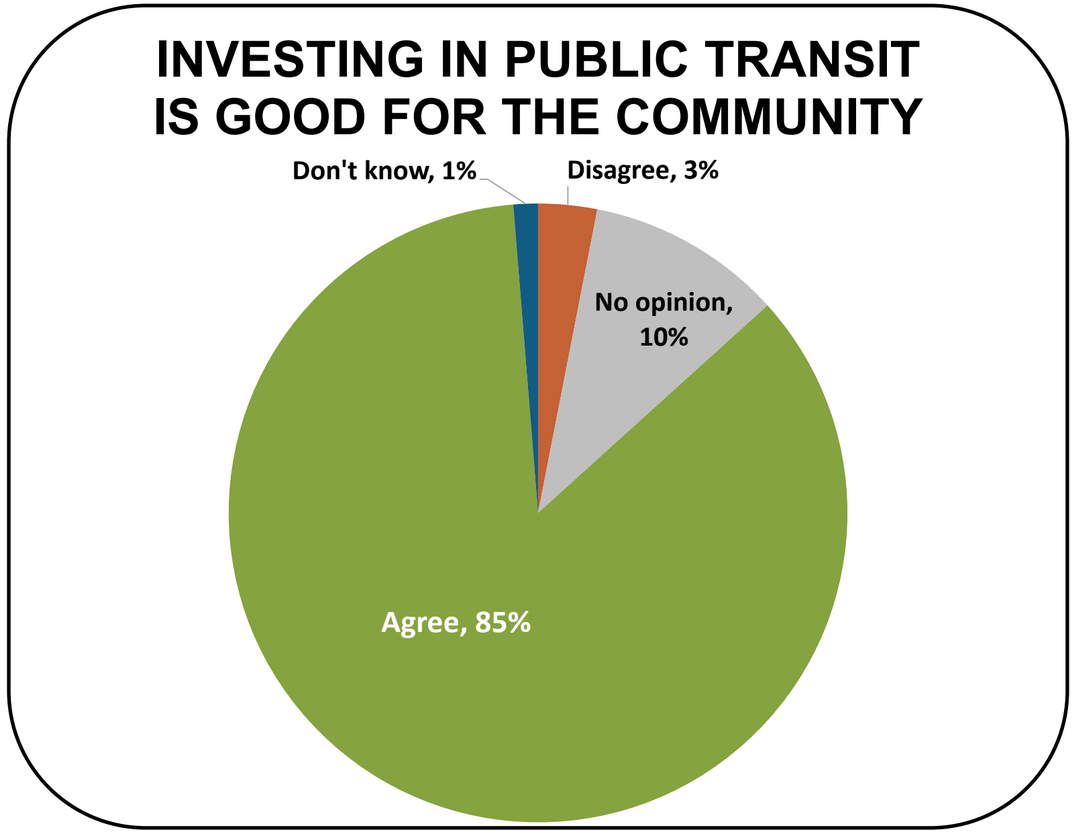
- Survey represents a statistically significant sample of Jasper and Newton County residents.
- A total of 391 responded to the survey, with 265 in Jasper County and 126 in Newton County.
- Survey was conducted by phone from May 27 – June 2, 2025.
- Only 12% have used shared or public transit services in the past 6 months.
- However… **82% believe transit service is valuable to the Joplin area.**





Findings of Community Phone Survey

- **85% agree that investing in public transit is good for the community.**
- Access and providing transportation for people with special mobility needs and low incomes are most important to the community.



MOST IMPORTANT THINGS FOR TRANSIT TO ACHIEVE

1. *Connecting people to the places they need or want to go*
2. *Providing transportation for people with special mobility needs*
3. *Enhancing mobility for low-income individuals*
4. *Offering an affordable transportation alternative*
5. *Creating job opportunities*

Steering Committee

The study team convened a Steering Committee made up of elected officials and administrators from the region chosen by the City of Joplin. Jasper and Newton County representatives were added to the 2nd meeting.

Defining Success (Meeting 1 – March 24, 2025)

- Introduced the study scope and schedule
- Described existing transit service
- Collaboratively on the study's success definition
- Previewed governance options

Testing Recommendations (Meeting 2 – August 4, 2025)

- Presented public engagement results
- Discussed governance and funding options in more detail
- The Committee agreed with two initial recommendations: Using the TDD governance model with a sales tax. A 1% sales tax (the maximum allowed for a TDD) was deemed to be a difficult sell, so the group agreed to advance ½-cent and ¼-cent options for further analysis.

Final Recommendations (Meeting 3 – October 2025)

- A final steering committee meeting is tentatively planned for October 2025 to review the final study recommendations contained

Invitees
Carl Francis, Webb City Administrator
Mike Landis, Jasper County Commissioner
Billy Bowers, Leawood Chairman
Bill Sherman, Duquesne Mayor
Traci Cox, Carthage City Administrator
Steve Lawver, Carl Junction City Administrator
Sue Hirshey, Airport Drive Clerk
Claren Holmes, Airport Drive Trustee
Nick Edwards, Joplin City Manager
Keenan Cortez, Joplin Mayor
Jonathon Cook, Carterville Administrator
Charles Wilkins, Oronogo Mayor
Russel Olds, Duenweg Mayor
Jed Schlegel, Saginaw Village Chairman
Daniel Swem, Newton County Commissioner

Participants
Workshop 1: Nick Edwards, Carl Francis, Claren Holmes
Workshop 2: Ned Edwards, Carl Francis, Bill Sherman, Traci Cox, Billy Bowers

Phone Conversations
Bill Sherman, Steve Lawver, Denis Desmond

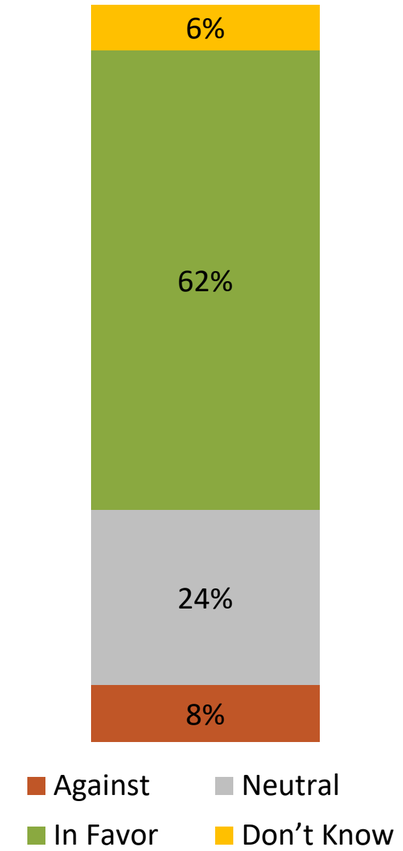
Initial Recommendations

Governance

62% of community survey respondents are supportive of a new public transit organization.

1. **Transportation Development District (TDD) – *most flexible, most control***
   a. Key decisions include any contiguous boundary (can span cities, counties), revenue mix, project scope, and owning entity–these all inform other decisions we make on the project.
   b. Revenue options include a sales tax (1/8th - 1%), property tax at a maximum rate of ten cents on the hundred dollars assessed valuation, special assessments, and fees associated with the use of the project.
2. **County Transportation Authority (CTA) – *less flexible, control split between counties***
   a. Newton County is ineligible to form a CTA, so service to Newton County would require separate agreements and taxing authority.
   b. Sales tax (up to 1%) is the only funding source option.
3. **Transportation Corporation (TC) – *least flexible, most restrictive***
   a. TCs are subject to approval and control of the MHTC.
   b. No dedicated sales or property tax options, which would require separate authorization.

How supportive would you be of a new public transit organization that could provide transit service to more communities in Jasper and Newton counties?

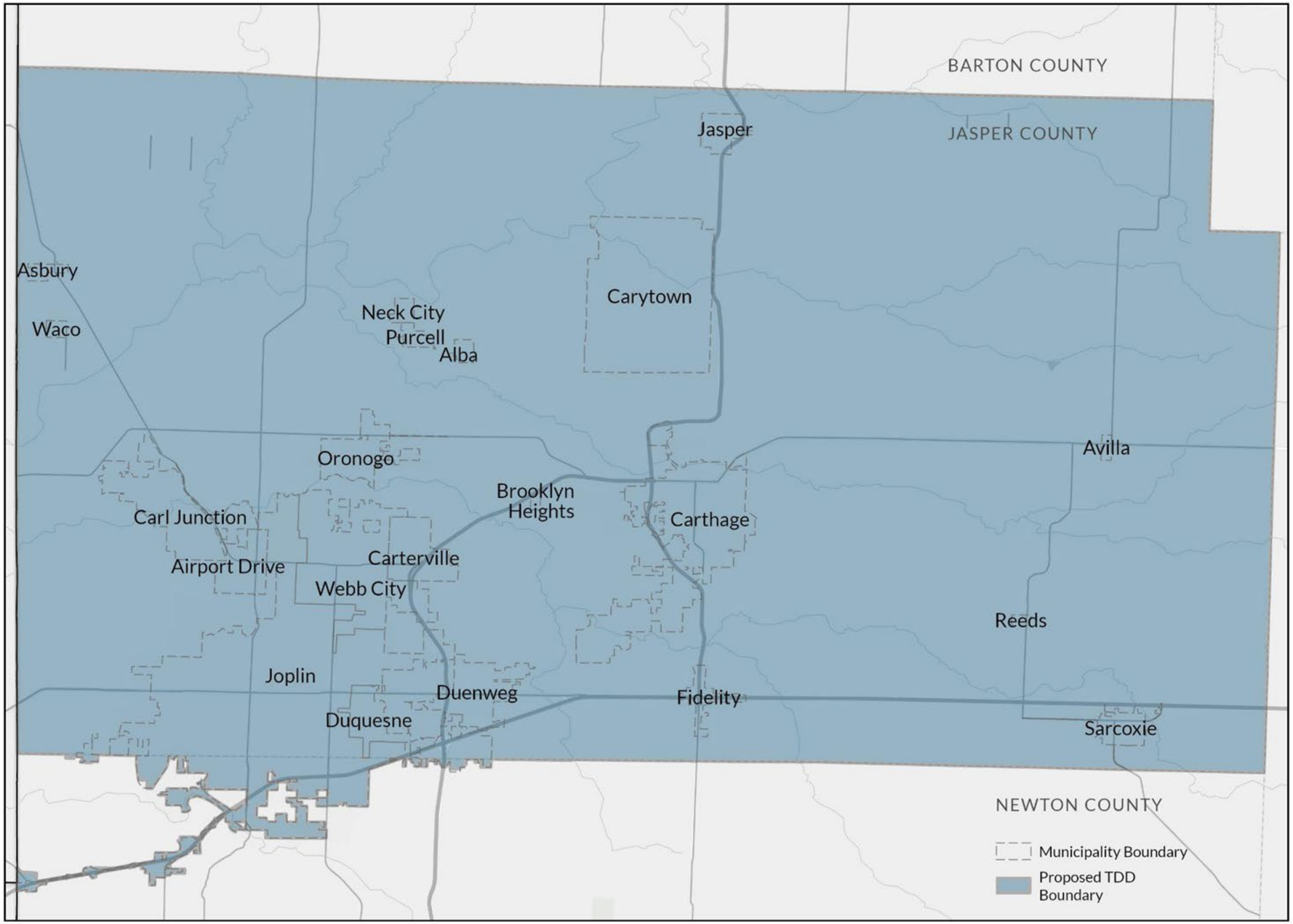


Governance

Recommendation: Transportation Development District (TDD) + Nonprofit Owner/Operator

- Owner, Operator, & Sponsor: Nonprofit
- Revenue: TDD Sales Tax
- Boundary: City of Joplin + Jasper County

Legislative Steps	Council Action Recommended
Create Nonprofit	Authorize staff to create a nonprofit to accept the existing transit program's assets and staff and to populate the nonprofit Board of Directors.
Shared Services Agreement	Authorize a shared services agreement with the new nonprofit to provide City support for human resources, benefits, facilities, budgeting, and legal support ("Joplin Library Model").
Form TDD	Enter into agreement with Jasper County to form the Southwest Missouri Transportation Development District, authorize legal representation for the process, appoint TDD Directors, and subsequent formation election date.
Transfer FTA Status	Authorize staff to transfer "designated recipient" status to the new nonprofit so the new organization can receive and sub-allocate federal transit formula funds for the region.
Determine TST Contributions	Determine the amount and timing of contributions from the existing Transportation Sales Tax until TDD sales tax revenue is received.


BARTON COUNTY
JASPER COUNTY
Jasper
Asbury
Waco
Neck City
Purcell
Alba
Carytown
Oronogo
Avilla
Brooklyn
Heights
Carl Junction
Carthage
Airport Drive
Carterville
Webb City
Reeds
Joplin
Duenweg
Fidelity
Duquesne
Sarcoxie
NEWTON COUNTY
Municipality Boundary
Proposed TDD
Boundary
N
0
2.5
5
10 Miles

Revenue

JOPLIN TRANSIT REVENUE TODAY

2024 transit budget* was $2,581,000. Service is funded through a combination of:

- Federal and state grants
- Customer fares
- A portion of the city's .5% transportation sales tax (which also funds street maintenance, street cleaning, traffic control, and signal maintenance)

**Existing revenue model limits the program's ability to improve service, increase staff salaries, apply for additional grants, and address infrastructure needs.*

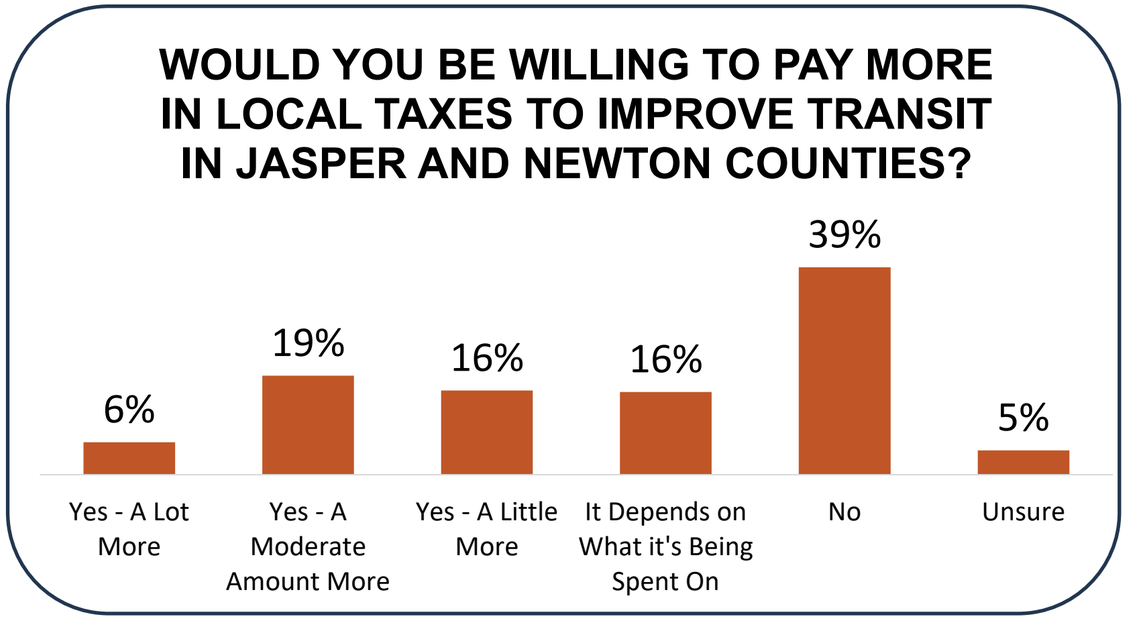
GOVERNANCE REVENUE OPTIONS

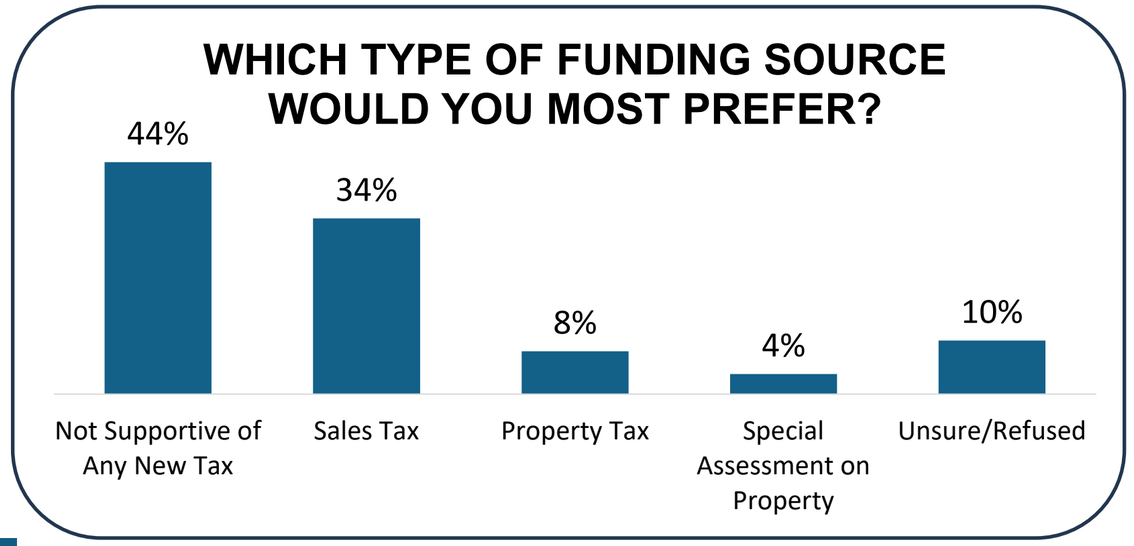
- Sales tax (1/8th - 1%)
- Property tax (up to ten cents on each $100 of assessed valuation)
- Special assessments (flexible, but should be tied to the amenity)
- Customer fares
- Federal and state grants**

***As the amount of local funding grows, Joplin can tap into additional federal funds for operations. State grants should be expected to remain flat or decline.*

Revenue

- 57% of community survey respondents would be willing to ***pay more in local taxes*** to support transit.
- Community survey results indicate ***very limited support for property tax or special assessments.***
- Respondents indicate some measures would be needed to ensure money is spent properly, including:
  - Performance measures and public reporting of spending (34%),
  - Sunset or expiration date (15%),
  - List or map of specific projects to be funded (8%), and
  - Directly electing a board of directors (8%).





Potential Revenue Estimates

TDD Sales Tax Revenue Estimates

Sales Tax Rate	Operating Revenue	Capital Revenue (10%)	Total (City of Joplin + Jasper County)
0.125%	$2,949,000	$328,000	$3,277,000
0.25%	$5,898,000	$655,000	$6,553,000
0.50%	$11,797,000	$1,311,000	$13,108,000
0.75%	$17,695,000	$1,966,000	$19,661,000

Disclaimer: Revenue estimates are for high-level planning purposes only. Additional analysis will be conducted when the governance model is confirmed.

In addition to sales tax revenue, we estimate some level of continued federal operating assistance beyond what the City of Joplin uses today.

Assumptions:

- 2024 is the base year
- 2027 is first year of revenue generation
- 0% annual increase in total taxable sales
- Annual increase assumptions based on historical data

Source: Missouri Department of Revenue

Potential Revenue Estimates

Recommendation: 0.5% Sales Tax

- Property tax and special assessment are unpopular and not politically viable, per the project's Steering Committee.
- Steering Committee feedback indicates that 1% sales tax is also not politically viable.
- 0.5% sales tax would allow for expansion beyond the City of Joplin and significantly improve service through increased frequency and Saturday service.
- 10% capital set aside is recommended to expand fleet and ensure reliability and "state of good repair."

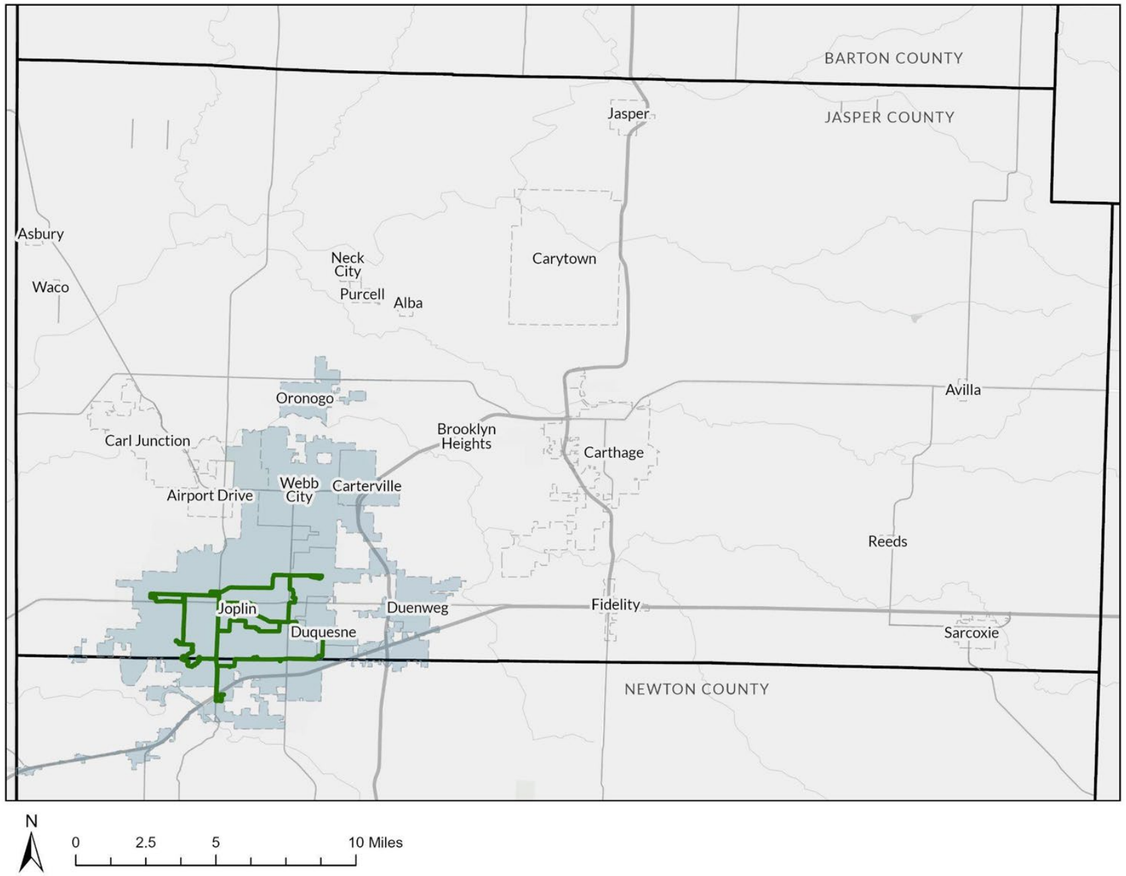

BLUE ROW
SUNSHINE LAMP TROLLEY

Service Recommendations

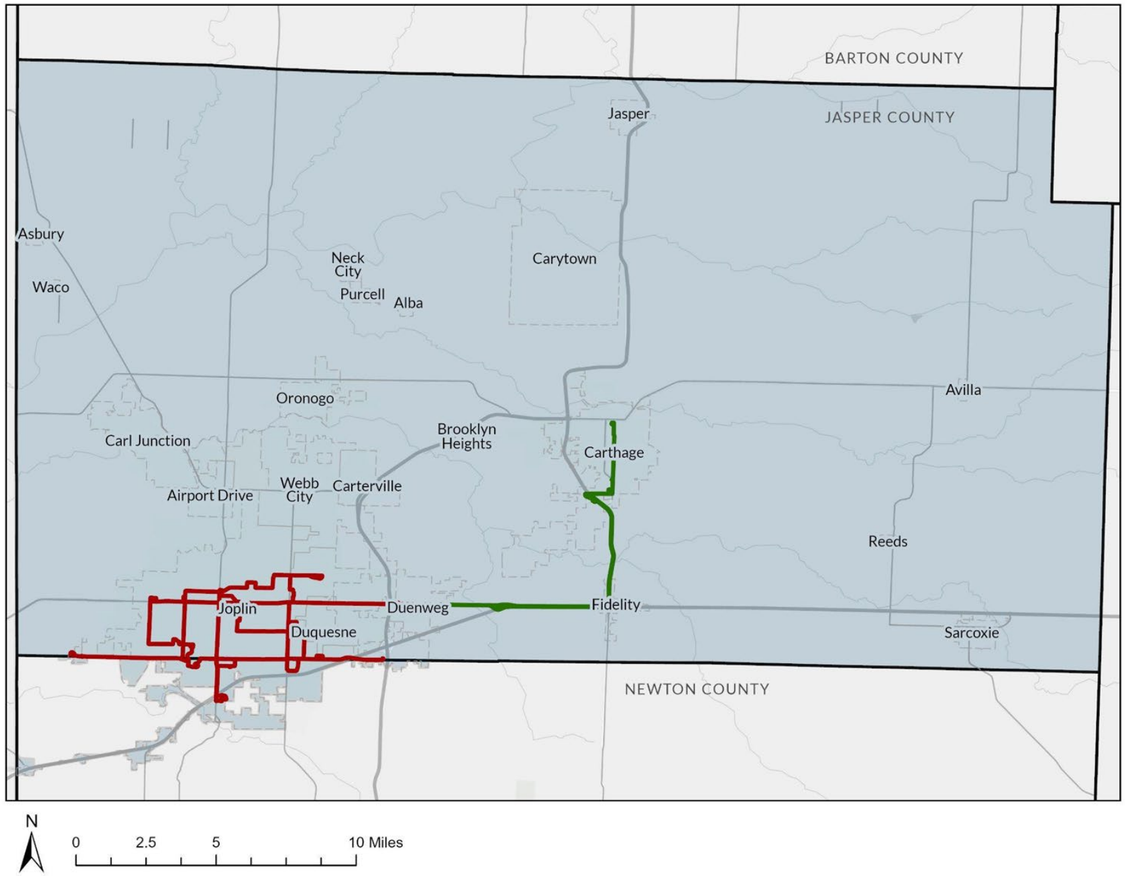
Service Type	Existing Service	Recommended Future Service (.50% Sales Tax Rate)
Fixed Route (Trolley)	• Three one-directional loops within Joplin city limits • 60-minute frequency • Weekdays only, 6AM to 6PM • $2 fare per trip ($1 for seniors, disabled, military, Medicare)	• Seven bi-directional routes on key corridors to serve the most population and jobs, including communities outside of Joplin (Duenweg, Duquesne, Carthage) • 30 to 60-minute frequency, 6AM to 6PM • Weekdays + Saturdays, 6AM to 6PM • $2 fare per trip ($1 for seniors, disabled, military, Medicare)
Demand Response (MAPS, Paratransit)	• Serves Joplin, Webb City, Oronogo, Carterville, Duquesne, and Duenweg only by request • Weekdays only, 6:30AM to 5PM • $4 fare per trip ($2 for seniors, disabled, military, Medicare; $1 for teens)	• County-wide MAPS service • $4 fare per trip ($2 for seniors, disabled, military, Medicare; $1 for teens) • ADA paratransit that would serve ADA trips within ¾-mile from the revised trolley routes above ($1 per trip for those who qualify) • Weekdays + Saturdays, 6AM to 6PM

Service

Current



Recommended



Service Considerations

Fixed Route (Trolley):

- Tradeoffs between **coverage** and **frequency** within a fixed operating budget
- Serving more locations in the region with a trolley route will require cutting frequency in the core where people are more likely to use transit
- Increasing the sales tax rate is also an option to add trolley coverage, but could run into political challenges based on Steering Committee feedback

Proposed Next Steps

Activity	Target Date	Engagement Level
Steering Committee #3	October 2025	Steering Committee confirm final recommendations
Joplin City Council Presentation	October 20	Looking for guidance and next steps confirmation
Elected Official Outreach	October – November 2025	Regional elected officials confirm final recommendations • Lynn Ragsdale, Webb City Mayor • Bren Flanigan, Carthage Mayor • Alan Griffin, Carterville Mayor • Mike Moss, Carl Junction Mayor • Daniel Swem, Carl Junction City Administrator • Charles Wilkins, Oronogo Mayor • Terry Myers, Airport Drive Chairman • Russel Olds, Duenweg Mayor
Implementation Plan	December 2025	City staff confirm implementation recommendations based on final recommendations
Study Completion	December 2025	Project team submits final plans and staff begins implementation



Questions?