



# Integrated Mobility Innovation (IMI)

Whatcom Transportation Authority | Whatcom County, Washington State

## Serving a Small City with Vans on Demand

### TEAM AND BUDGET

**Key Partners:** Whatcom Transportation Authority, City of Lynden

**Other Partners:** Lynden Public Library, Family Care Network

**Budget Summary:**

| IMI Demonstration Federal Amount | IMI Cost Share | Total Cost |
|----------------------------------|----------------|------------|
| \$719,388                        | \$179,847      | \$899,235  |

### INNOVATION: PROJECT APPROACH

Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA) provides fixed route, paratransit, rural dial-a-ride, and vanpool service in Whatcom County, Washington. Whatcom County, located in the northwest corner of Washington State, is home to the city of Bellingham, several smaller towns and rural communities, the Lummi Indian Reservation, and the Nooksack Trust Lands.

The scope of this project is to test whether an on-demand service could increase the effectiveness and usage of public transportation in a small city. This project will provide on-demand service to residents in the small city of Lynden, Washington. Using a mobile app, residents will be able to hail a ride to any destination within the City of Lynden.

WTA staff will purchase software and operate the mobile scheduling app. Service will be provided by WTA drivers in WTA-owned wheelchair-accessible vans. Though on-demand service will be open to everyone, marketing will focus on seniors, parents of school-aged children, people with disabilities, and people with limited income.

### CHALLENGES PROJECT IS DESIGNED TO ADDRESS

Like many agencies that serve both urban areas and small cities, WTA finds the standard offerings of fixed route and paratransit service—which meet people’s needs extremely well in our densely-populated areas—do not meet the needs of residents of small cities. The City of Lynden has a population of nearly 15,000 people. It covers 5.4 square miles. Approximately 23 percent of the population is over the age of 65. Of those, 13 percent are below the poverty level. Lynden has a small, vibrant downtown, numerous medical facilities, and two grocery stores. While the fixed route bus does serve a need of connecting people to the nearest larger town, the fixed route bus service does not connect all points within the city.

WTA currently serves the City of Lynden with one fixed route bus. It runs on a 90-minute headway. While WTA recognizes this level of frequency reduces convenience, the demographics and population density of Lynden do not warrant greater frequency. Even for those who can access WTA’s fixed route, service is limited. For those who live outside the fixed route service area, mobility options are extremely limited. Another challenge is the fact that Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) have limited or no service in many small towns. This project will assess the successfulness of an on-demand service run entirely in house.

### ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES, BENEFITS AND IMPACTS

The goal of this project is to improve access to--and the convenience of--public transportation within a small town. WTA will be target seniors, school-aged children, people with disabilities, and people with limited income. The project will expand public transportation options within the City of Lynden as well as enhance travelers’ ability to connect with public transit outside of Lynden. This project will advance FTA’s vision of a Complete Trip for All. By increasing the number of people able to begin a “chain of steps, beginning with an often-spontaneous decision to make a trip,” this project could turn “lost opportunities” into expanded mobility, especially for people who don’t drive, don’t live near fixed route service, or who are not eligible for paratransit.

This project will improve individual travelers’ ability to access medical appointments, shopping, faith-based activities, recreation and social opportunities. This improved access, especially for seniors, school-aged children, people with disabilities, and people with limited income, can improve the quality of life for individuals as well as the community. This project could also benefit the community by reducing problems associated with the lack of access to reliable transportation, for example missed medical appointments and limited participation in social services.