



The Wheel

News Publication - February 2026

Driving Growth: A Chamber - Transit Partnership

Since 2001 the Macon MO Chamber of Commerce has partnered with OATS Transit to provide reliable bus service to the community, demonstrating the lasting impact of a strong local collaboration. Designed to better connect residents and workers to local businesses and essential services, the partnership reflects a shared commitment to economic vitality and quality of life in the small community.



“We partner with OATS Transit to help fund the local service that runs within the City of Macon” said Sharon Scott, Executive Director of the Macon Area Chamber of Commerce. “It is vital for our citizens to have transportation to get to work, doctor appointments, and shopping” added Scott.

Through this partnership, residents have gained dependable access to jobs, medical appointments, shopping and community events — services that are especially vital for seniors, individuals with disabilities, and those without personal transportation. Local employers also benefit from a broader, more reliable workforce, while small businesses see increased customer access to their goods and services. By working together, the Chamber and OATS Transit continue to strengthen community connections, support economic growth, and ensure that Macon remains a place where opportunity and accessibility go hand in hand. “This shows what can happen when the local community supports public transit services” said Sheree Webb, Northeast Regional Director. “When people come together to invest in transit, it creates stronger connections and benefits everyone in the area” added Webb.

With a population of only 5,400 people living in Macon, this partnership is unique for a town of its size. The Macon Chamber of Commerce uses grant funds available through the Missouri Department of Transportation. Local residents (inside the city limits) call the Chamber of Commerce to schedule their transportation, which is available Monday - Friday 9 am to 3pm. There are 210 city riders who regularly use the bus to get around town, whether it be medical appointment, work, essential shopping, recreation or other business needs. “I thank director, Sharon Scott, for recognizing the need and working with OATS Transit to keep this service going” added Webb.

Sharon collaborates with city leaders to ensure the community’s needs are met and that everyone plays a role in the services success. Her commitment helps build trust and encourages long-term support for the transit system. “We want to see our community thrive and grow and transportation is a big part of that. If you want your community to grow and

for your businesses to succeed, you must have transportation for your citizens,” added Scott. By investing in accessible transportation, community leaders have taken a practical step toward supporting workforce mobility, strengthening downtown commerce and ensuring that a small town can think big when it comes to meeting the local needs.

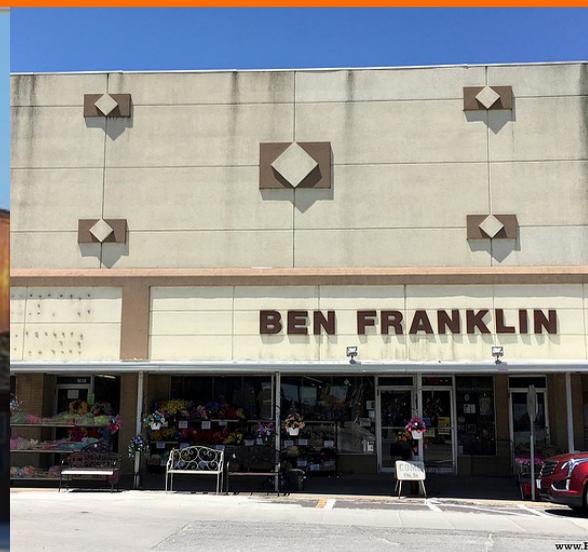
As Macon looks to the future, this ongoing commitment to transportation reflects more than a service — it represents a promise to keep the community connected, resilient, and forward-focused. By continuing to prioritize partnerships that remove barriers and expand opportunity, local leaders are helping ensure that residents, businesses and visitors alike can move forward together. In doing so, Macon sets an example of how thoughtful collaboration can drive lasting impact in communities of any size.



Rider Joyce Nichols with her driver Donnie Cox downtown Macon.

Interesting tidbits about Macon.....

- A fun fact from the history books about Macon dates back to 1872..... John Beaumont was a local real estate man who owed \$116 in back taxes to the town during the 19th century. He settled his debt by planting 10,000 maple saplings, leading to its nickname The City of Maples. There are now an estimated 275,000 maple trees growing in Macon.
- The city is known for its outdoor activities, with Long Branch Lake and Macon City Lake being popular tourist destinations during the summer months. Long Branch State Park provides nearly 25,000 acres of water and land for boating, fishing and camping.
- Both the City and County were actually named after a Revolutionary War Veteran, Nathaniel Macon.
- Lolli Brothers Auction Market in Macon attracts people globally for its exotic animal auctions. Everything from giraffes, camels, zebras, sloths and more can be seen coming through their auctions.
- Ben Franklin was a chain of five and dime stores that started back in 1927. They grew to more than 2,500 stores nationwide. Today there are only a handful of stores remaining, which are independently owned and operated. Macon is home of one of those unique stores downtown on Rollins Street.
- Macon developed rapidly due to the intersection of two major 19th century railroad lines and sat atop one of the state’s richest coal-bearing regions, earning the county a reputation for coal mining.



The Issue

Last year, Governor Kehoe reduced the state funding for transit by \$5 million which resulted in a loss of \$933,500 in funding for OATS.

Now, in his budget recommendation for this year, the Governor is proposing eliminating *another* \$5 million which will result in an additional \$900,000 loss for OATS.

Why it Matters

OATS receives a federal grant to provide rural public transportation in 86 counties. This federal grant requires 50:50 match for transit operations and an 80:20 match for vehicles.

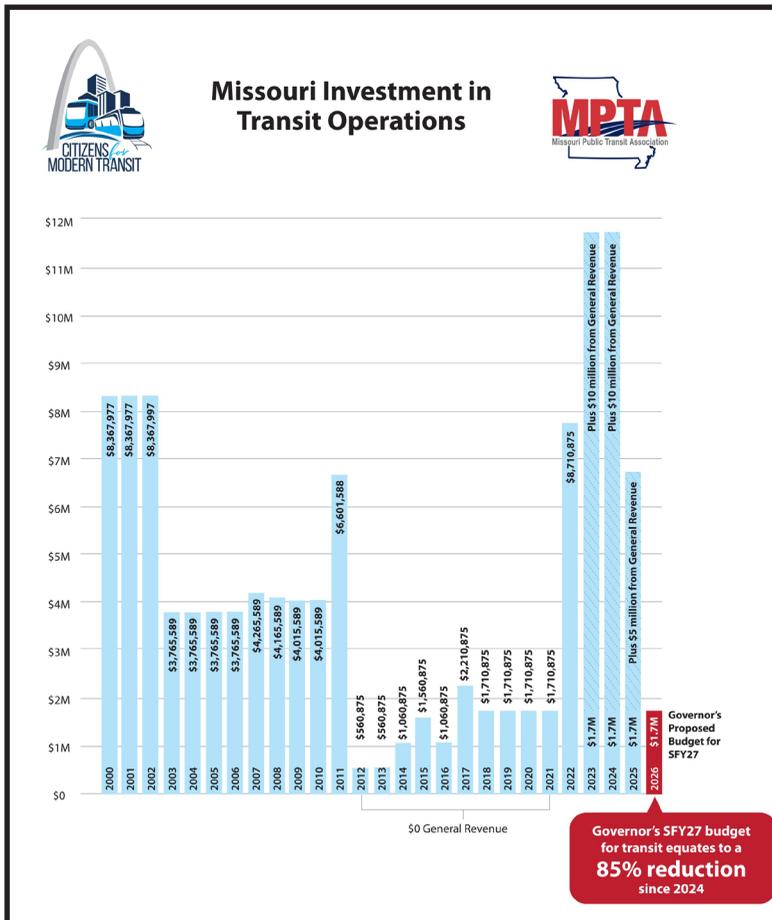
In FY25, state assistance OATS received provided 18% of the match needed for this grant. Last year it dropped to 10%. If this funding is not restored, our state assistance allocation will only provide 3% of the needed match.

This means that more of a burden will be placed on our community partners to provide the funds needed to keep service at the same levels.

What You Can Do

Call or write your State Legislator to let them know how important OATS Transit is to you.

- Tell them why you use OATS and what you would do if there is a reduction in service.
- Ask them to, at a minimum, restore the \$5 million in general revenue that was in the FY26 budget back to the FY27 budget. Loss of this funding results in OATS losing \$900,000 in funding that is used to match federal grants for rural public transit.
- Explain that the ultimate goal should be to work our way back to restoration of Transit Operating Assistance to the FY2024 and FY2025 transit funding levels of \$11.4 million and expand from there.



Use this link to find your Legislator(s): www.house.mo.gov

Find Your Representative



Tell us something good on Facebook.....

Macy G

i want to make a shout out to marsha .she drives here in moutain grove.she is ontime and she is very coutious and helpfull..thank you marsha for everythign you do



Our offices will be closed, and regular routes not running, on **February 16, 2026** for the Presidents Day holiday.

DID YOU KNOW.....



In the Spring of 1971 a small group of Mid-Missouri volunteers formed a committee to start a transportation program in rural Missouri. By November 1, 1971 the first three vans pulled off the lot in Fulton MO to start this program. The company began as Cooperative Transportation Services, and is now known as **OATS Transit**. With a fleet of over 600 buses, we are the largest and most unique rural transportation program in the nation. If you're going to dream -- dream big!

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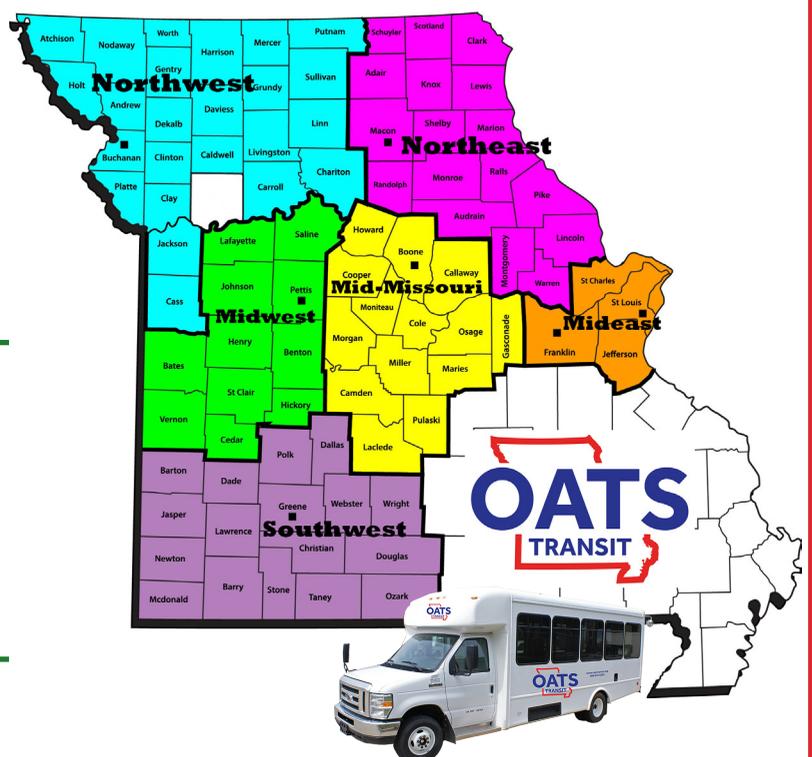
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