

# The Wheel

**FEATURE STORY:**  
**The Northeast  
Intercity Express**

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The Wheel is published quarterly and mailed or emailed to riders, agencies, legislators and other interested parties.

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OATS, Inc. (dba OATS Transit) is a private, not-for-profit transportation provider serving 87 Missouri counties. Transportation is available to the general public in rural areas. In urban areas (Columbia, St. Louis, St. Joseph, Springfield, and Kansas City) service is limited to contract service and not available to the general public. Contact your local OATS Transit office for service available to you or to enter into an agreement to pay for services.

OATS Transit operates its programs and services without regard to race, color, and national origin in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. We are an equal opportunity employer M/F/H/V.

Relay Missouri is available to individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind, and/or speech impaired. Use the Relay Missouri service by calling 711 to talk with an OATS Transit representative or to schedule your trip.

#### **OATS Transit Board of Directors**

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Board Meetings are held six times a year and are open to the public.

**Bus schedules and fare information can be found at:**

[www.oatstransit.org/schedules](http://www.oatstransit.org/schedules)

Phone: 888-875-6287

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Cover photo: Northeast Intercity Express driver, Patty Robinson, helping rider, Philip DeMoss, off the bus.

## **Foundations and Businesses Provide Support to OATS Transit**

OATS Transit is pleased and grateful to be the recipient of these donations given by Missouri businesses and foundations over the past few months.

- **Allen P. and Josephine B. Green Foundation** - \$13,000 for Mid-Missouri Region bus match.
- **First Christian Church of Troy** - \$437 for Northeast Region bus match.
- **Marion and Henry Bloch Family Foundation** - \$100,000 for West Region new construction project.

To find out how you can support public transportation in your local community, call OATS Transit development staff at 888-875-6287, or email [jstedem@oatstransit.org](mailto:jstedem@oatstransit.org). We need your support now more than ever as gas prices are at an all-time high and maintenance costs are rising due to supply chain issues.

### **Bloch Family Foundation Donates \$100,000**



**O**ATS Transit is pleased to announce that it has received a grant from the Marion and Henry Bloch Family Foundation totaling \$100,000. These funds will be used to support the capital campaign for a transportation

hub in the Kansas City area.

In recognition of Marion and Henry Bloch's lifelong commitment to their community, the Bloch Family Foundation focuses its support on organizations that serve Greater Kansas City - Jackson, Clay, and Platte counties in Missouri, as well as Wyandotte and Johnson counties in Kansas.

OATS Transit has purchased property for a new operations facility in Lee's Summit just off I-470. Construction is expected to begin in 2023 and planned for completion in 2025.

"Thanks to the support from the Marion and Henry Bloch Family Foundation, this grant allows us to match our federal dollars with local funds," said Dorothy Yeager. "We are excited to be building and expanding in the Kansas City area market in the near future," added Yeager.

*Pictured: Jill Stedem, Administrative Director (L) and Dorothy Yeager, Executive Director (R)*



## Service or Emotional Support Animal - What's the Difference?

**T**he Governor's Council on Disability receives many call and questions from individuals relating to the rights and obligations concerning service and emotional support animals, and oftentimes, they are not sure about the difference.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines a service animal as a dog that has been trained to work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, while Emotional Support Animals (ESAs) are not considered service animals under the ADA. Emotional Support Animals have not been trained to perform specific tasks. ESAs may provide comfort, companionship or emotional support to relieve symptoms of a person's disability and can include other animals besides dogs.

The ADA requires state and local government agencies, businesses and non-profit organizations that provide goods or services to the public to make "reasonable modifications" in their policies, practices, or procedures when necessary to accommodate people with disabilities. The service animal rules fall under this general principle. Accordingly, entities that have a "no pets" policy generally must modify the policy to allow service animals into their facilities. Emotional Support Animals do not qualify as service animals under the ADA and therefore do not have to be allowed in public places.

While the ADA does not specifically address service animals in employment, employees with disabilities may request to bring their service dog or emotional support animal to work as a reasonable accommodation.

Rights and regulations are different in regards to housing. The Federal Fair Housing Act defines assistance animals as animals that work, assist, perform tasks, or provide emotional support for the benefit of a person with a disability. This means, that in addition to a service dog, a landlord or homeowners association must consider emotional support animals as a reasonable accommodation in housing.

For comprehensive information, educational videos, legislation, and publications regarding service animals and emotional support animals, please visit the Service Animals page on the Disability Portal at <https://disability.mo.gov/serviceanimals.htm>. You may also contact our office with questions or to request a presentation on this topic.

*Story provided by Claudia Browner, Missouri Governor's Council on Disability, as printed in June 2022 issue of the Governor's Council on Disability Newsletter, Volume 8, Number 3.*

**To see OATS Transit's Service Animal Policy, visit our website at [www.oatstransit.org](http://www.oatstransit.org) and click on "FAQ's" under our "About Us" tab.**

## The Northeast Missouri Intercity Express

**T**ransportation is limited for many residents in rural Missouri, especially when traveling to a bigger city. This affects how much individuals - specifically older adults and people who don't drive - can get around and travel for things like doctor visits, job opportunities, essential shopping, and more. Luckily, OATS Transit has a solution.

The Northeast Intercity Express is a regularly scheduled bus service for the general public that travels to bigger cities. There are several different routes including one that goes from counties in northeast Missouri to Columbia and St. Louis weekly. People typically use this service for medical appointments, business, getting to airports, or visiting friends and family.

Sheree Webb, the Northeast Regional Director, manages the Northeast Intercity Express. "These routes provide connectivity between rural and urban areas," she said. "A person from an outlying area can connect with other modes of transportation (air, rail, etc.) to travel further."

There are several reasons riders decide to use the Northeast Intercity Express. The fares are reasonable, they get to meet new people, and they don't have to worry about driving in big cities. "Many of our riders, while still comfortable driving in their familiar rural surroundings, do not want to deal with driving in more populated areas," Sheree added. "They would much rather sit back and leave the driving to OATS Transit's friendly, competent drivers."

Patty Robinson has been driving with OATS Transit for 23 years. Currently, she drives the Northeast Intercity Express from Hannibal to Columbia on Tuesdays and Thursdays. "The Intercity Express is a way of keeping connected with family, doctors, and friends," Patty said. She gets to know each rider on her bus. Some of them, now in their teens, she has known since they were babies. "We're together so much that the riders become like family," Patty added.

The Northeast Intercity Express provides several options for traveling to larger cities. Along with a bus that runs every Tuesday and Thursday from Hannibal to Columbia, there is also a route that runs from Kirksville to Columbia every day of the week. On Wednesday and Friday, a bus goes from Palmyra to St. Louis. These routes are open to the general public and can be used for any purpose. Fares are \$10.00 for a round trip and \$6.00 for a one-way trip. Due to its popularity, reservations must be made at least 24 hours in advance.

Carol Fulton is a frequent rider of the Northeast Intercity Express and typically uses it to go to doctors' appointments, shopping, and out to eat. She rides with her granddaughters and



*Pictured: Driver, Patty Robinson (L) and Rider, Carol Fulton (R)*

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**“Because of COVID, so many people are socially starved and they really need the connection that the Intercity Express can provide.”**

appreciates the convenient and low-cost option the service provides. “I love that OATS Transit is willing to help,” Carol said. She loves to talk to the other passengers on the bus. “It’s a friendly group of people that get together and help each other. We have a conversation going back and forth from town to town, and we enjoy the day,” Carol added.

Alta Speak fills in for regular Northeast Intercity Express drivers when they’re not available. She drives the Kirksville to Columbia route. “I think the Intercity Express is valuable on so many different levels,” Alta said. “Because of COVID, so many people are socially starved and they really need the connection that this service can provide.”

One of the biggest needs of rural America is reliable transportation, and public transportation services aren’t always available outside of urban areas. Transportation options like the Northeast Intercity Express promote connectivity between communities. Those who live in rural areas have greater access to essential services and resources. Whether you want to travel to Columbia or St. Louis to visit family or friends, go shopping, or get to a medical appointment, you can travel on with the Northeast Intercity Express.



*Pictured: Driver, Alta Speak*

If you live in northeast Missouri and would like to ride the Northeast Intercity Express, visit OATS Transit’s website at [www.oatstransit.org/schedules](http://www.oatstransit.org/schedules) to find a pickup route in your county. You can also call the Northeast Region Office at **660-415-0901** to schedule a ride.



## **New Mid-Missouri Regional Director**

**W**e are pleased to announce the appointment of Gary Anspach (pictured left) to our management team. Gary has been hired as the Mid-Missouri Regional Director in Columbia, MO, where he will oversee day-to-day transportation operations in 15 counties.

“We’re excited to have Gary on our team. His background in community development, fiscal management and state/federal grants will be a tremendous asset to OATS Transit,” said Dorothy Yeager.

Gary was with the City of Columbia and State of Missouri before joining OATS Transit. “I’m looking forward to continuing the important mission of OATS Transit in the Mid-Missouri Region,” said Gary.

Gary replaces Dion Knipp, who was promoted to Operations Director at the OATS Transit Home Office in Columbia.



## High Gas Prices Impact OATS Transit

**P**rices at the pump are breaking records nearly everywhere in the world. Everyone is feeling the pinch when they pump gas, including nonprofits like OATS Transit whose work requires them to get behind the wheel.

“Because our drivers are going over the entire state to provide more than 4,000 trips each day, gas costs mean a lot to our business,” said Dorothy Yeager,

Executive Director of OATS Transit. “Just a 10 cents jump in gas prices is a \$10,000 hit to our company,”

Yeager said.

Thousands of people rely on OATS Transit to get to work, lifesaving medical appointments, and grocery shopping, which would not be possible without our bus services. Currently, the staff is reviewing many options to save funds during these critical times and brainstorming different ways to operate more efficiently. “Whatever happens, we are committed to making sure that the people we serve can access their community,” added Yeager.

You can help OATS Transit weather this storm in several ways:

- **Donate to our nonprofit** - Higher gas prices mean that each of our drivers pays more at the pump, leaving us less money to spend on providing service. Just a small donation has a big impact; your donation will be used toward operations to cover fuel costs.
- **Possible service reductions** - Be patient with us if we have to reduce routes or hours of service in your area. We are working to keep the reductions minor where we can. We can keep rolling if we reduce miles on our vehicles. If you are used to going to another city for services, consider looking closer to home to help us lower miles on our buses.
- **Be ready** - When your bus arrives, be ready to go. This helps reduce idling time, which saves on fuel. When you schedule your ride, our staff will give you a “negotiated pick-up time.” This means your pick-up and drop-off time can vary from 20-30 minutes before or after the “negotiated” time, so it’s important that you are prepared for that. We do our best to arrive at the desired time, but it depends on the number of riders we have on that given day before and after you.
- **Group your trips** - We operate in-town service in many Missouri towns. We ask that you please group your trips rather than going out two or three times each day. This helps us greatly reduce our fuel cost if the bus isn’t making multiple trips for you.

If you would like to donate to OATS Transit, we have several options listed on our website at [www.oatstransit.org/donate](http://www.oatstransit.org/donate), or you can call our development office at **888- 875-6287** for more information. As a nonprofit agency, OATS Transit depends on donations to continue its operations and expand its service.

## Production Delays Create Vehicle Shortages

**N**early every sector of the economy has been impacted by product shortages that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. The supply chain continues to be a struggle for manufacturers worldwide, including those that produce the vehicles used by OATS Transit.



OATS Transit buses are procured with federal grants, which are passed down through the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT). We have not received any new buses since the beginning of the pandemic, and sources tell us it could be more like 2-5 years before we do receive new vehicles. This greatly impacts our fleet.

So what does that mean for OATS Transit? Our fleet is made up of a combination of mini-buses, minivans, and a handful of sedans. Since we use federal grant funds, the vehicles must meet the “Buy America” requirements. MoDOT is going through the process of renewing bids with vendors in hopes of placing orders for new vehicles and getting them into production. Due to various factors, including chip shortages and reduced fleet chassis production, the process has been slow to recover.

While we wait - like most transit agencies nationwide - we are doing our best to keep our vehicles maintained and in road-worthy condition. Due to supply issues in getting parts, repairs are also taking longer than in past years. That means vehicles that go in for repairs are off the road longer. Our number one priority is keeping our riders and drivers safe. OATS Transit drivers are diligent about daily inspections on their vehicles and ensuring preventative maintenance like oil changes and the like are kept up to date.

We hope in the next year and a half to two years it will start to smooth out, but we’re going to feel some of these effects for a long time. OATS Transit continues to deal with several factors including high gas prices, delays in getting new vehicles, driver shortages, keeping up with wage increases, and higher expenses on all goods. Although times are challenging, we continue to do our best to provide safe, caring, and reliable transportation in Missouri as we have for the last 50 years.

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## Employee Anniversaries (April-June 2022)

### 25 Years



Jackie Gant  
Mideast Driver

Debbie Cather  
MidMO Operations  
Coordinator



### 15 Years

- Wendy Schick - West Driver
- Tony Schenk - Northeast Driver
- Charlotte Nitz - Southwest Driver

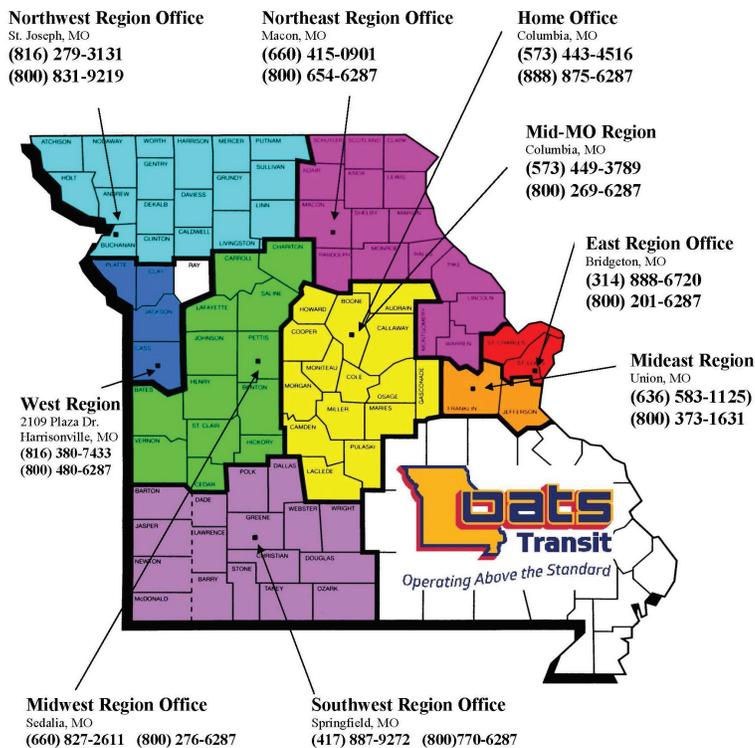
### 10 Years

- Denise Bell - Mideast Operations Coordinator
- Robin Ballhagen - MidMO Driver
- Darwin George - MidMO Driver
- Jason McFalls - MidMO Driver
- John Snethen - Midwest Driver
- Jill Stedem - Home Office Administrative & Development Director

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## OATS TRANSIT Service Area:



## Upcoming HOLIDAYS:

OATS Transit offices will be closed and regular routes will not be running on Monday, July 4th due to Independence Day or on Monday, September 5th for Labor Day.

