

Areas of Persistent Poverty Planning Grant

The Jule provides daytime/evening fixed-route and paratransit services, as well as a park-and-ride shuttle for downtown employees. The service area includes Dubuque, Iowa, with a population of 59,119 and East Dubuque, Illinois, just across the Mississippi River with a population 1,489. Dubuque's downtown population in Census Tracts 1, 3, 5, 6, and 7.01 (Areas of Persistent Poverty) is particularly dependent on bus rides to access work, school, shopping, health care, and other destinations.

While the Dubuque region has experienced significant change over the last several decades, the Jule's operations have largely remained the same. Key shifts over the last 20 years include:

- Downtown Dubuque has been revitalized. Once abandoned, areas like the Historic Millwork District are now fully activated with mixed-use development. New transit routes and services are necessary to connect these neighborhoods to the broader region.
- Dubuque's population is diversifying. The 2000 Census identified a minority population of 4.6% in the community. In 2020, the non-White population had grown to 16.2%. Dubuque is now home to a growing Hispanic population and roughly 800 Marshallese people. The city's changing demographics demand new approaches to meet the transit needs of all users.
- Manufacturing is reemerging in Dubuque. After the loss of several major employers, the community has witnessed new companies moving into industrial parks on the edge of town. These businesses are urging the Jule to expand transit services to help downtown workers access their sites.
- Dubuque's economy is expanding. Health care, education, tourism, publishing, and financial services are now important sectors of the city's business climate. These companies understand that alternative transportation is an important factor in their ability to attract young talent.
- COVID-19 has disrupted how Dubuque functions. New hybrid telework models have been developed that allow more residents to stay home. As such, the transit system needs to adapt to how, where, and when people are traveling.

With Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Areas of Persistent Poverty funding, Dubuque will conduct a planning study that will help the Jule to optimize bus routes, identify necessary service changes, and determine appropriate equipment/facility needs. An analysis of existing conditions will establish baseline transit services in the region. Robust community outreach will help Dubuque to gather user feedback. A market analysis will help ascertain transit gaps and opportunities for growth. Multiple strategies will be considered and shared with community stakeholders to develop a consensus on needed improvements. Finally, an action plan will be developed that presents specific changes that Dubuque can adopt to enhance transit opportunities for disadvantaged residents in Census Tracts 1, 3, 5, 6, and 7.01.

The proposed project will help Dubuque create a transit model that is reactive to today's demands. The Jule will be evaluated to account for changing demographics, growing business sectors, and new workplace models. Spatial data and feedback from equity-focused community outreach will help Dubuque to explore racial and economic disparities. FTA resources will provide the community with

a roadmap to improve public transportation efficiency and ensure the system meets the needs of individuals who lack access to employment, education, health care, and other destinations. The plan will improve transit by identifying where to provide more frequent and expanded service. The project will also support community connectivity, address generational poverty, and help promote environmental justice.