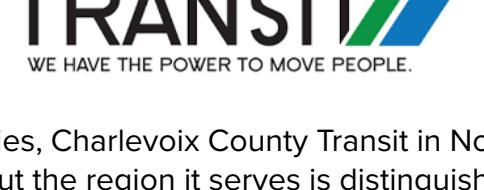


# CHARLEVOIX COUNTY TRANSIT

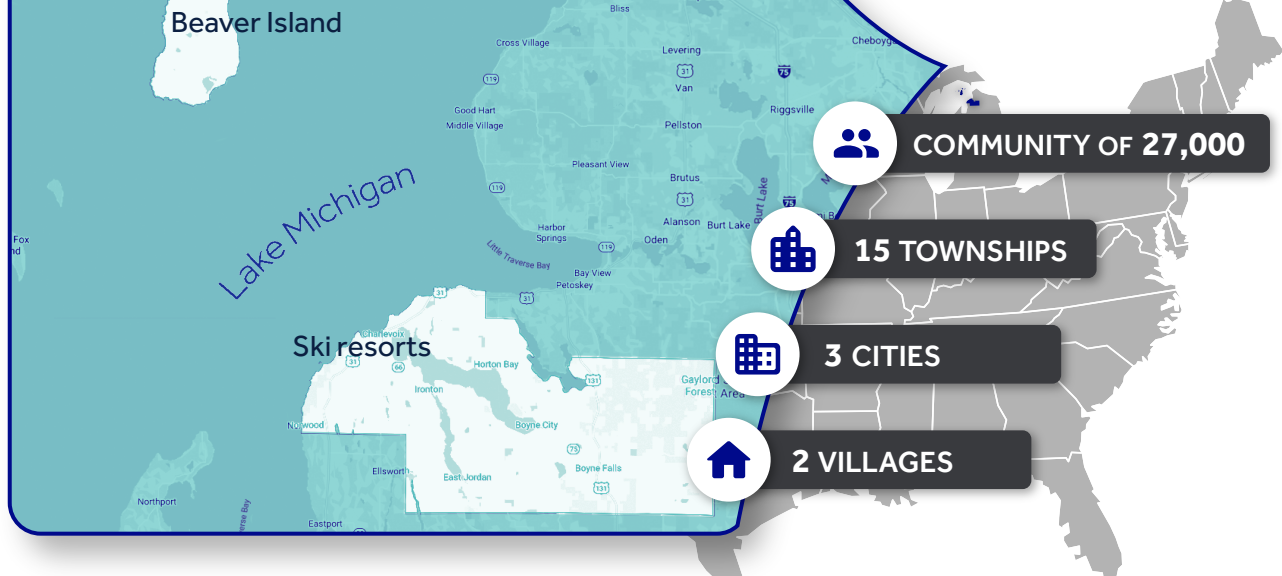
A rural agency thriving despite unusual challenges



Like many rural transit agencies, Charlevoix County Transit in Northern Michigan is a critical resource for its community, but the region it serves is distinguished by a few uncommon traits. The agency covers an expansive area of 15 townships, 3 cities and 2 villages on the shores of Lake Michigan, provides bus service on an island 2 hours away by ferry, and even encompasses a ski resort! In addition, as a year-round vacation community which includes many second homes owned by non-residents, the population of the Charlevoix region triples between its high and low seasons.

These factors, plus a geography of rural, winding roads, create numerous challenges, especially for consistency in employment and budgeting, as well as vehicle utilization and overall transit planning. But as for the residents of many rural areas, Charlevoix County Transit provides its community an indispensable lifeline to medical care, employment, food and other basic needs.

Today, CCT operates a fleet of 20 vehicles, has 8 full-time and 21 part-time drivers and provides demand response services for its community of 27,000. CCT uses a largely phone-based system for reservations, scheduling, and dispatching, and until 2016 relied on another scheduling program to manage operations. But at that point managers knew the software's limitations would prevent them from meeting the growing needs of the community.



**8 FULL-TIME DRIVERS**

**90% ON-TIME PERFORMANCE**

**21 PART-TIME DRIVERS**

**20 VEHICLES**

*"We are thinking about what do we do to be more efficient, and also more user friendly."*

*Jill Drury, Director  
Charlevoix County Transit*

"The system wasn't much more than a database that could see who had called for a ride," said Jill, director of Charlevoix County Transit. "It couldn't give us a true picture of what we were doing, and information often didn't reach drivers." The limitations meant that "tasks that should take 10-15 minutes could easily take 30-40 minutes. Although it was a good entry-level system, we knew it couldn't take us to the next level."

After evaluating multiple vendors, CCT chose Routematch to provide a more modern and complete toolset to manage its growing operations. "We knew we wanted to have access to tablets, notifications and other advanced capabilities, and we wanted to find someone who already had experience with next-level tech," Jill explained. As the innovator that brought low-cost tablet computers to the transit industry, Jill and CCT chose Routematch as their partner, and began implementation in 2016.

## BALANCING SUPPLY AND DEMAND

Serving the needs of seniors and people with disabilities has driven the bulk of CCT's demand response service. Under several contractual partnerships, the agency also provides transportation to multiple sheltered workshops and schools. A persistent challenge for this rural area is the availability of drivers. Due to its wide population fluctuations and a workforce that serves vacationers in both summer and winter, the number of drivers available to CCT is always constrained.

This challenge makes efficient scheduling especially important, and before its adoption of Routematch, CCT required a dedicated resource solely to optimize the agency's scheduling. At its height, CCT was completing over 700 rides per day, but its shortage of available drivers ultimately inhibited further growth. In addition to its scheduling challenges, it was difficult for CCT to pinpoint performance metrics to identify barriers to improvement. Improved scheduling and reporting, enabled by its Routematch software, meant CCT could use its scarce driver resources more efficiently. Today the agency knows that approximately 90% of rides are on-time, and this improvement has improved its driver utilization and overall productivity.

## TURNING CRITICS INTO FANS

These improvements have helped CCT deliver both more efficient service and reduce rider complaints. "Our old system gave us no way to track incidents or accidents, which ADA requires," Jill explained. "Our Routematch system makes it very easy for us to track any problems that may come up during a ride. It gives us the information we need to capture and report, and helps us stop problems from happening again."

In addition, CCT has begun implementing Routematch's web portal so riders can book trips online as well as a notification module which provides automated phone call reminders to riders. "People really appreciate these calls and rely on them. Since so many of our riders use their phones rather than a web app, we use notifications for same-day or on the day before. Communicating better with our riders and doing better with our on-time performance has started to turn some of our riders around. Some of our loudest critics before are now big fans."



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*Jill Drury, Director  
Charlevoix County Transit*

## OTHER BENEFITS

Similarly, CCT's system makes it easy to keep mandated driver information up-to-date. "We have to be able to show that our drivers have had their physicals, and that their licenses are in good standing, and our system makes it extremely easy to keep those records in each driver profile. It's one less thing to worry about." The agency also relies heavily on Routematch's expansive database of training materials, which helps it ensure employees are able to take advantage of the software's capabilities. "I've been hands-on with the software right from the beginning, so I'm able to help my staff with day-to-day questions that come up," Jill told us. "And it's great knowing other Routematch users here in Michigan when questions come up, in addition to Routematch's support team."



## WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

Recently Jill and her team at CCT have been hard at work envisioning the future of the agency, and are now completing a five-year master plan for the agency. "We've seen the community's requirements change over the years, and we know they will continue to," she says. "We are thinking about what do we do to be more efficient, and also more user friendly." This approach led to CCT's implementation of RMPay, which enables riders to use a stored account to pay for rides. CCT's pursuit of improvement through innovation has also led it to evaluate hybrid service models that would add the efficiency improvements of a fixed route, but with greater flexibility for riders.

*"It's the perfect time to retool – to be more productive, more user friendly"*

*Jill Drury, Director  
Charlevoix County Transit*

This would mean phone reservations would not always be necessary, and that riders could also count on timed routes. "Demand response is an expensive way to operate, so we're looking at situations where people don't always have to make phone calls, and we have a couple communities where we think it could work well,"

Jill said "Whether a hybrid service, mobility on demand or another model, she's confident that the Routematch team will facilitate whatever evolution the future holds for CCT. COVID-19 has of course recently raised new challenges for all agencies, and CCT is no exception. Food, essential jobs, prescriptions are all considered critical. Ridership has fallen dramatically since the start of the crisis, and Jill and her team are wondering what the 'new normal' will look like. "We're asking ourselves: 'Will people not want to move around the community quite as much? Will FTA change their requirements for what qualifies for funding?' We're starting to develop comparisons to help us see what our services should look like under different scenarios and budget constraints." In any case, Drury is confident that her team's resilience and resourcefulness will enable them to meet their community's challenges, and that CCT's Routematch software will continue to reliably support their needs. "It's the perfect time to retool – to be more productive, more user friendly," Jill told us. "And having a robust software system has made life a whole lot easier for us."

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*Jill Drury, Director  
Charlevoix County Transit*

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