Acknowledgements

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West Central Job Partnership serves the Workforce Development Area consisting of Lawrence and Mercer Counties in Western Pennsylvania and is one of 23 WDAs across the Commonwealth.

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Contents

Context
Purpose and Parameters 5

Existing Conditions
Key Destinations 6
Existing Transportation Network 8

Survey Input
Online 12
On the Ground 15
Overnight Guests 16

System Gaps
Overnight Guests without Vehicles 17
Airport Shuttle 17
Event Venues and Lodging 18
Disconnected Residents 18
Connecting Attractions 18

System Improvements
Expanding Access to Existing Services 19
Alternatives for New Service 20
Types
Routes
Providers
Funding

Recommendations 25
Context

Purpose and Parameters

This report represents an initial effort to understand:

- The array of transportation choices available to visitors to Lawrence County and Mercer County, Pennsylvania
- What gaps exist in the local transportation network, and
- What options are available to better connect visitors with desired destinations.

Lawrence and Mercer counties are located along the state’s western border, situated roughly one hour north of Pittsburgh, one hour south of Erie and 1.5 hours east of Cleveland. The counties host a wealth of shopping, outdoors, historic/cultural and other attractions and events that draw visitors from points near and far. Agencies and stakeholders involved in the local tourism industry have observed that the far-flung distribution of attractions and lodging, along with the area’s limited transportation services, present challenges to any visitors who do not have or would prefer not to use a private vehicle.

There are many advantages to improving connections for visitors. More transportation options would add value to the visitor experience, increasing its competitive appeal. This could translate to visitors returning more often or to attracting new visitors, both of which have the potential to make local entrepreneurs more prosperous and accelerate economic development across both counties. More transportation options would also reduce dependence on private vehicles, easing emissions and reducing parking demand.

This report is intended to start a conversation. It is limited in scope, representing a point-in-time analysis of conditions in June 2019 as framed by a set of stakeholder interviews, survey results and an inventory of services. It includes case studies that have lessons for this area and some generalized information about what expanding transportation options could entail. It also includes recommendations for next steps, but does not go so far as to endorse any particular option for investment, recognizing that moving forward will require a more detailed feasibility analysis and consultation with potential operating and funding partners.
Existing Conditions

Compiling a full inventory of all places a visitor might like to experience within Lawrence and Mercer counties is no small order. The area abounds with attractions of every type and scale, ranging from river paddling adventures to luxury wedding venues, from Amish country roadside produce stands to urban retail landmarks. Signature special events such as WaterFire and BalloonQuest represent even more reasons to visit.

Therefore, the attractions and lodging sites marked on the following map, while plentiful, do not reflect a comprehensive list. The map displays some known key locations for the purpose of generally envisioning how they are geographically laid out and what challenges exist in getting from place to place. Likewise, the map displays major features of transportation infrastructure, including highways and public transit routes, without showing all possible ways to navigate the counties.

While visitor attractions and lodging are indeed scattered across the map, many sites cluster around corridors. This makes transportation connections among them more feasible, as will be explored later in the report.

Key Destinations

The following map provides a general overview of more than 100 sites of interest around the counties, including:

- Unique event venues, such as Buhl Mansion, Buhl Farm Park, Irons Mill Farmstead and Tara - A Country Inn
- More than 40 places to stay, such as full-service hotels, bed-and-breakfast locations, motels and campgrounds
- Tourist attractions of all types, including Apple Castle, Keystone Safari, Living Treasures, Volant Main Street Shops, Wendell August Forge, Grove City Premium Outlets, McConnells Mill, Daffin’s Candies and more
- 15 wine and brew destinations, such as Fractured Grape, Crooked Tongue, Volant Winery, Webb Winery and others.

Lodging tends to be more clustered than attractions, by necessity of convenient connection to major transportation routes through the counties, though some smaller accommodations are tucked into more rural settings.
Overview of Destinations

- Attractions
- Brew/Wine
- Lodging
- Local Parks
- County Boundaries

Map showing various destinations such as:
- Shenango River Lake
- Park Inn by Radisson Sharon
- Nova Cellars Winery / Brew 32
- New Castle Harley-Davidson
- The Happy Eggplant
- The Jacqueline House of Wilmington
- Comfort Inn Grove City
- Comfort Inn Mercer
- Daffin's Candies

Additional places include:
- Ellwood City Community Plaza
- Ellwood City Area Historical Museum
- The Jacqueline House of Wilmington
- Comfort Inn Grove City
- Comfort Inn Mercer
- Daffin's Candies

Map credit: © OpenStreetMap (and) contributors, CC-BY-SA
The counties’ attractions have an additional feature that should factor into transportation considerations: The trails. This refers not to the growing network of outdoor recreational trails (for instance, the Hell’s Hollow Wildlife Adventure Trail!), but specifically to attractions that link together for a themed multi-destination experience, such as:

- Wine and Brew Trail: This includes stops for handcrafted wines, craft beers, cider and mead.
- Burger Trail: Eight restaurants participate in this trail, along which burger enthusiasts can collect stickers on a passport to win prizes.

Private tour providers also connect destinations via their own transportation solutions. An example of this is Simple Life Tours, which carries visitors along scenic back roads to explore the Amish countryside.

### Existing Transportation Network

This section considers current alternatives to traveling via private vehicle within Lawrence and Mercer counties. Walking and cycling are also options, though the safety and viability of either will vary depending on the distance and route selected. Both counties are working to make streets more safe and accessible for all users.

### App-Based Ride-Hailing

Stakeholders reported that it is not reliably possible to hail an Uber or Lyft ride via a mobile app, an option that has democratized ride service in more densely populated areas.

Ride-hailing app companies offer service according to population as well as the reliability and affordability of existing transportation options. Uber considers, according to one executive, “the number of riders that have opened the app in that city looking for a ride,” as well as the number of people who attempt to sign up to drive in a city where the service is not currently offered.\(^1\)

According to Uber’s website, most of Lawrence and Mercer counties fall within the Erie or Pittsburgh service area, meaning that it is technically possible to hail a ride. However, stakeholders reported that pulling up the app consistently results in no available rides, suggesting that the area lacks enrolled drivers.

Even if such rides were available at present, they may be unaffordable. Uber’s website currently estimates the cost of a ride from Grove City to Hermitage at $41, largely due to a variable “long pickup fee.” The affordability of this service cannot improve until its local availability does.

Multiple stakeholders mentioned that it is possible to take an Uber or Lyft from elsewhere (more dense areas of the Pittsburgh or Erie regions) to destinations within the counties, then become relatively stranded by a lack of return service.

App-based ride-hailing represents an ideal solution to many of the network gaps identified in the following section (for instance, corporate visitors who need a ride on demand to a worksite), and its growth in future years could follow the continued development of driverless vehicles.

---

Uber Coverage

South from Erie

North from Pittsburgh

uber.com/cities
Taxi Service

A handful of private companies offer taxi service within Lawrence and Mercer counties. Tina’s Taxi and Delivery and Phil’s Dependable Taxi were the most commonly cited among stakeholders. Tina’s, for instance, offers services 24 hours per day from Mercer, Lawrence, Butler, Crawford and Venango counties, though service is demand/response or via advance order, as there are not enough cabs to idle at any given time or location waiting for fares.

Public Transit

The area’s two principal providers of fixed-route bus service are Mercer County Regional Council of Governments, which operates the Shenango Valley Shuttle Service, and the New Castle Area Transit Authority, which operates a variety of routes extending out of New Castle to destinations in nearby communities and for commuters to Downtown Pittsburgh.

While it would be possible to use public transit service to move between certain destinations (particularly within the vicinity of New Castle or Sharon), this is not a common choice for visitors. Figuring out schedules and stop locations can be cumbersome for those unfamiliar with the systems, and the routes tend to run on long headways and limited hours. New Castle Area Transit Authority ends service prior to 7 p.m., for example, which would preclude depending on its buses for a ride back from dinner or evening entertainment.

These providers have helped to provide transportation for special events on a contract basis. Their fleets, insurance and trained drivers represent assets that could factor into future investments in new or expanded service.

Vehicle Rental

A handful of car rental locations are available to assist overnight out-of-towners in securing temporary use of private vehicles. Hertz and Enterprise have offices in Grove City, Mercer and New Castle. Stakeholders reported that options are generally limited.

Jitneys

In Western Pennsylvania, the term “jitney” refers to an unlicensed cab for hire. In Lawrence and Mercer counties, they most commonly serve Amish families, as Amish religious beliefs do not permit driving motor vehicles. This is a particularly appealing option for destinations too far for horse-drawn buggies.

In general, a visitor to area attractions would not have the opportunity to hail or use a jitney. However, the presence of jitney drivers suggests that there is a supply of labor that could potentially support other transportation options, such as an expansion in app-based ride-hailing service.

Shuttles

Limited shuttle service is available to some visitors, such as Pittsburgh Airport service (pre-arranged), charter shuttles for special events, or on-call shuttle service for guests of select Grove City hotels.

The latter service, limited to guests for insurance purposes, is somewhat underused, especially on weekdays. Guests tend to request travel to the nearby Grove City Premium Outlets, to Volant or to Downtown Grove City bars and restaurants. The shuttle is more popular in winter due to guest reluctance to drive in icy or snowy conditions.
**Getting Around**

This table compares some of the area’s existing transportation options.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provider</th>
<th>Hours of Operation</th>
<th>Routes</th>
<th>Fare</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Castle Area Transit Authority</strong></td>
<td>M-Sa 6:15am-6:15pm</td>
<td>Seventeen routes throughout New Castle and surrounding environs and to Downtown Pittsburgh. See <a href="http://newcastletransit.org/schedules-maps/">http://newcastletransit.org/schedules-maps/</a></td>
<td>One way- $1.00-$2.50 6-12 years old - $0.50 5 and under - Free Senior Citizens- Free Pittsburgh- $4.00 (Seniors-Free)</td>
<td>Fixed-route public transit operator and paratransit provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shenango Valley Shuttle Service</strong></td>
<td>Various times M-F 7am-6pm and Sat 7:45am-4:30pm</td>
<td>Northern Route Southern Route Central Route Express Route Courthouse Route</td>
<td>Full- $1.25 Half-$0.60 Medicare Card- $0.60 K-12- $0.25 Transfers- $0.25 Senior Citizens-Free Big 40 Pass- $30.00 ($10 for k-12) Disabled- $0.60 Under 5- Free</td>
<td>Fixed-route bus service that services Farrell, Hermitage, Sharon, Sharpsville, and Wheatland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mercer County Community Transit</strong></td>
<td>M-F 6am-5pm (Shenango Valley) 8am-4:30pm (Outside Shenango Valley)</td>
<td>Door to door, advance registration required</td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Fare depends on length and type. Reduced fare for seniors and people with disabilities. Trips must be scheduled by 2pm the working day before.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grove City Hotel Shuttle Services</strong></td>
<td>On call</td>
<td>5-mile radius (10-mile for corporate)</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>Guests only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anderson Coach &amp; Travel</strong></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Charter bus company provides transportation for tours, vacations, schools. Vehicles of various sizes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Premier Tour and Travel</strong></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Tourism and charter travel company based in Hermitage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tina’s Taxi and Delivery</strong></td>
<td>On call 24/7</td>
<td>Mercer, Lawrence, Butler, Crawford and Venango Counties</td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Local on-call taxi and delivery company</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition to interviews with attraction and lodging owners and operators, transportation providers and others with perspective on the local tourism industry, the study involved three surveys in June 2019:

- An online survey
- In-person information collection from visitors at various event locations on a select Saturday
- A postcard survey of area hotel guests

Participation was encouraged across all three surveys by prize offerings — all completed entries were eligible to win a $100 gas card or one-night hotel stay.

### Online

The online survey was designed to be fairly quick, with nine questions in total. The first three were demographic, revealing that of 205 respondents:

- There was a variety of geography represented. 26% were from Mercer County and 20% were from Lawrence County, while an additional 22% lived within a one-hour drive and the remaining 32% lived farther away.

- Most (50%) were age 60 and older. Only 10% of all survey respondents were younger than 40.

- The vast majority of respondents (84%) represented households without children under age 18.

The remainder of the survey focused on means of getting around. As figures to the right show, most respondents rely on their own vehicles to navigate the area’s attractions. However, many saw potential use for some kind of shuttle service. Respondents saw equal value in the following types of service, with between 40-45% indicating that they would be “highly valuable” and another 34-37% “somewhat valuable.”

- A shuttle connecting lodging and winery/brewery destinations
- A shuttle connecting lodging and tourism destinations in general
- A shuttle running between select tourism destinations.

Comments pointed out that the service would be of higher benefit to out-of-towners than locals, who “would already have cars,” but also noted that a shuttle would especially benefit seniors.
**Online Survey Results**

Responses to: How often do you visit the following types of attractions within Lawrence and/or Mercer County?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>At least once per week</th>
<th>About once every couple weeks</th>
<th>About once per month</th>
<th>Maybe a few times per year</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Restaurants</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wineries/Microbreweries</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agritourism (ex. farms with activities, Amish farm stores, etc.)</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts/Historical Destinations</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity Attractions (ex. zoos, mini golf, go-karts)</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

> Respondents reported visiting restaurants with the most frequency.

87% have only ever used a private vehicle to travel around the counties.

The most-mentioned ways around for the remaining 13% were walking, cycling, rental car, Uber and public transit.

Given the relatively limited availability of cab and ride-share service in the area, do you feel there is a need or market among visitors for some kind of shuttle service?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Maybe/ Don’t know</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>45%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As asked what a reasonable price might be to ride a seasonal (say, August to October) shuttle running on weekends, the most popular response was "all day pass for $10," selected by 51%. Ten percent of respondents found $20 to be fair for an all-day pass. For single-ride passes, 40% thought up to $5 would be fair, while 7% thought up to $10 would be fair and 20% felt that the shuttle must be free of charge.

The online survey’s final question was open-ended, asking what other improvements would make it easier for visitors to Lawrence and Mercer counties to travel between recreation destinations. The following is a generally representative partial selection of responses:

- Clear signage. Maps available across the counties and on the Web that highlight the destinations and what they have to offer.
- Road signage with arrows.
- Lots of signage.
- Put maps in your guides that include a little more of the surrounding counties.
- Recommend a good smart phone travel destination app.
- Easier access to resources and information on what is available to visit.
- Groupings of tours based on location, e.g., Outlets and surrounding activities; Amish farms; wineries; nature based — Lake Arthur & McConnell’s Mill.
- Maps with destinations/attractions, sample itineraries for a day trip or 1/2 day trip for example. This may be a good alternative to taking a bus trip, etc.
- The big thing is a shuttle from hotel, BB to wineries, restaurants, nearby places. Test on a weekend.
- Try to get restaurant owners, tourist attractions and hotels to offer special discounted package deals, including a free shuttle service.
- More taxis or Ubers.
- More ride share is the answer.
- All day shuttle service.
- I think a shuttle service is an excellent idea.
- Maybe a scheduled shuttle instead of a constant run? A discount if scheduled online with an itinerary?
- Just the transportation between lodging and attractions in areas that are close by.
- Promote that it is easy and fast. Create a website that shows all the attractions you can get to with the shuttle pass.
- Well posted, highly visible, well distributed shuttle routes and timelines or schedules.
- Buses and/or rides must have a set schedule and be on time. It will not work if customers have to wait for rides.
- Expansion and marketing of NCATA routes.
- Affordable airport transportation Tina’s taxi at $140 one way is ludicrous.
- Reliable shuttle to/from airport. We used to have Airport Orbits, but they no longer exist.
- Awareness of what there is to travel to. Some attractions/destinations are often overlooked.
- Bike paths and bike rentals.
- Bike racks on shuttle buses.
- Widen the roads for bikes/peDESTrians.
- Parking stations in Cranberry (for those living in Pgh.) and in Erie to obtain transportation to the two counties. Kind of a “Park n’ Ride.” Need to provide recreation packages, ex. Easter ride to Kraynak’s, Daffin’s, and the original Quaker Steak & Lube.
On the Ground

Project staff interviewed visitors at various sites in both counties on a select Saturday in June 2019, with a goal of collecting perspectives from those patronizing popular events and attractions. Some participants filled out survey cards, while others chatted informally.

The majority were in town on a day trip, many of whom had come in for the annual Tour de Donut or to visit Volant. Regardless of the primary purpose of their visit, most also planned to tie in dining, shopping, a winery/brewery visit or some kind of attraction.

Asked how they were getting around that day, all participants were relying on a private vehicle or walking (with the exception of Tour riders, who were also cycling).

Many visitors said they would be “somewhat likely” to use a shuttle running between the current location and other area attractions and hotels. A few were “very likely,” and most who were “not likely” indicated that they were locals who would prefer to use their own vehicles.

The price visitors said they would be willing to pay for shuttle service varied widely. A handful said they would be willing to pay nothing, while some others thought a $10 or $20 all-day pass would be fair. Finally, others thought a single-ride fare between $2 and $5 would be fair.

The study’s on-the-ground results skew toward cyclists and donut enthusiasts, as polling day coincided with the annual Tour de Donut event at many popular visitor attractions. Image: nwtourdedonut.com.
Overnight Guests

Postcard surveys were distributed to six area hotels for distribution among guests, with the expectation that visitors staying at least one night, for business, leisure or other reason, have specific transportation needs and preferences.

The 76 total responses collected during the study period indicated the following:

- 39% of guests were staying just one night, followed by 34% staying two or three nights and 26% staying four nights or more.
- Leisure was the most popular primary reason for guest visits (36%), while 29% were in town on business, 28% were visiting friends or relatives and 8% were visiting for other reasons.
- The vast majority of guests (80%) depended on a private vehicle to travel during their stay, many of whom were using their own cars. 17% were using rental vehicles.
- As shown below, 64% of guests said they would be “somewhat likely” or “very likely” to use a shuttle connecting the hotel to attractions. The most popular price point among the “somewhat likely” or “very likely” group was up to $5 per ride, though those who were “very likely” to use a shuttle were generally willing to pay more. A few comments on the surveys supported this finding: “Please!! Desperately need a shuttle service here,” and “Other transportation would be great!”

Guest Survey Results

Cross-tabulated responses to: If there were a shuttle running between this hotel and area recreational attractions (shopping, dining, activities, wineries/brewpubs), how likely would you be to use it? AND How much would you be willing to pay to ride a shuttle connecting this hotel with area recreational attractions? (Please check all that apply.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nothing</th>
<th>Up to $5/ride</th>
<th>Up to $10/ride</th>
<th>$10 All-day pass</th>
<th>$20 All-day pass</th>
<th>Share of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not likely</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat likely</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very likely</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

80% were using a private vehicle during their stay (mostly their own car or a company car)

The next most common choice was a rental car (17%), followed by taxi/charter (3%). One guest reported using Uber.
This section identifies gaps in the existing transportation network with specific regard to visitors to Lawrence and Mercer counties, based on preliminary analysis of the system and the input of stakeholders and survey participants.

It is also important to note that there are some aspects of visitor transportation where gaps were not found to exist. For instance, multiple retail stakeholders indicated that private vehicle is currently a sufficient and preferred means for their customers to access their locations: “They want their cars” and the ease of loading and storing their purchases.

**Overnight Guests without Vehicles**

Lodging owners and operators must regularly devise ways to connect out-of-town visitors with ways to get around (and beyond) the counties. This includes:

- Corporate visitors who arrive from Pittsburgh International Airport for business travel and do not have a rental vehicle and/or are not licensed to drive in the U.S. Public transit routes typically do not meet guest needs, ride-hailing has scarce availability, and taxi service is highly limited, so guests in need of travel to work sites must sometimes depend on whatever transportation options a hotel itself is able to provide. This can take the form of a guest shuttle to certain locations, as in the case of some Grove City hotels, or the form of employees personally shuttling guests where they need to go.

- Repeat business travelers who are looking for things to do and ways to get there.

- Wedding guests or would-be winery/brewery patrons who prefer not to risk driving under the influence.

**Airport Shuttle**

Stakeholders and participants expressed a desire for more accessible, affordable travel to Pittsburgh International Airport, such as a group shuttle or bus leaving at a prescribed time each day. The key logistical problem is that travelers have drastically varying departure times, thus it would be difficult to assemble a large enough volume of travelers leaving at the same time to make such a route economically feasible.
Event Venues and Lodging

Hosts of weddings and other special events must generally charter their own shuttles or depend on guests to drive themselves between destinations. Private bus service is available for this type of booking, and occasionally a private-party bus will carry a group of celebrants around multiple destinations (breweries/wineries, for example). Multiple stakeholders mentioned the desire for some type of alternative.

Disconnected Residents

The outreach process revealed two types of people living within the counties who would like to visit its attractions more often but often face barriers due to limited vehicle access: Senior citizens and college students. The subsets of these populations without access to a private vehicle depend largely on fixed-route transit to travel beyond walking distance. Both students and seniors represent customer bases that are to some extent now being missed out on by area attractions.

Connecting Attractions

The most commonly mentioned gap, and the one facing the fewest obvious barriers to address, is connections among the area’s tourist attractions. Nearly all recreational travelers use private vehicles to visit the various types of destinations across both counties (restaurants, wineries/breweries/distilleries, shopping, agritourism, arts/historical, adventure/activity). This presents an opportunity to add options that would increase convenience for visitors, as well as increasing the probability that they will visit more destinations and spend more time enjoying themselves. Adding connections increases access for those who do not have or would prefer not to use a private vehicle, and it opens options for visitors to the winery and brewery scene who would otherwise need to appoint a designated driver. Additionally, having a transportation connection among select attractions could reinforce their status as stops on a recognized “trail,” raising the profile of individual locations as well as the trail as a whole.

Nova Cellars, shown here, is one of a variety of winery and microbrewery destinations along Route 208.
Image: Visit Lawrence County.
System Improvements

There are virtually innumerable approaches to reinforcing and/or adding links within a visitor transportation network. The type, scale of and approach to intervention will depend on local needs and resources. In particular, what should happen next depends on the presence of:

- A champion. An agency or partnership would need to identify a very specifically defined need and take ownership of addressing it, and
- Resources. Implementing service involves capital and operating costs that must be fully and sustainably accounted for.

Expanding Access to Existing Services

This report identifies public and private transportation providers operating in the area that each meet some component of visitor demand. Public transit providers, such as New Castle Area Transit Authority and Shenango Valley Shuttle Service, offer fixed-route service to certain locations on limited schedules. Private providers in the counties generally provided scheduled or on-call service. A low-hanging-fruit option to improve the transportation network is for tourism agencies and the owners/operators of lodging and attractions to coordinate with these providers in search of ways to better promote existing services and connect visitors with their use. This might include exploring with the providers whether there are ways in which their services could better meet visitor needs, as well as ensuring that attractions along bus routes provide schedule and route information to visitors.

Additionally, as suggested in some of the open-ended survey responses, this could include a collaboration to make existing transportation options more understandable and easy to plan, such as through a mobile app or local signage.
Alternatives for New Service

Given that fixed-route service does not match all of the locations or hours of typical visitor travel, options for new service are also worth considering. This report floats an array of possibilities and case studies that may have some application in Lawrence and Mercer counties, though it is worth mention that any option would require a more rigorous analysis of demand and operational/fiscal feasibility.

For the purpose of this analysis, possibilities are intended to address the need to create connections among tourism destinations within the counties.

Types

Shuttles carrying visitors between tourism attractions commonly take the form of fixed-route circulators, but they can also provide service on demand, which is particularly appropriate if the volume of riders does not substantiate service at a fixed regular interval. A hybrid option is the “shared taxi,” which is typically smaller than a bus and carries passengers on a fixed or semi-fixed route without timetables, leaving when most or all seats are filled. Another option is shared booking services, in which passengers use an app or SMS text to send booking details to a central server that communicates requests to drivers. (This could involve multiple private providers.)

Routes

A general rule of transit is that service should be as direct and frequent as possible at the lowest possible cost: A route cannot be everything to everyone. In planning the most useful possible route between destinations in Lawrence and Mercer counties, it will be important to balance costs, service coverage and frequency. Routes will need to:

• Serve the highest-priority destinations. This requires deciding what qualifies as high-priority: The most popular destinations? Those with the greatest growth potential? Those which are the most geographically clustered? Those which are willing to offer financial or in-kind support to the route?
• Routes will need to make sense. A loop or out-and-back route is clear and understandable, whereas a meandering route may frustrate or confuse passengers.
• Routes will need to keep each passenger’s trip as short as possible while serving as many destinations as possible.

Initially, it would appear that a strong candidate route would connect the winery/brewery trail along Route 208 (Volant, New Wilmington, Pulaski) and nearby hotel clusters.

Providers

New transporation service could start with a public or private provider under contract. This would allow for the service to be provided by an entity with considerable experience and expertise, as well as capital assets (vehicles and maintenance facilities) and insurance. Starting the service on a contract basis also allows for flexibility in testing the route: Service could be expanded or reduced as staffing allows.

Anderson Coach & Travel represents a potential service partner. Though it does not currently provide much local or regular-schedule service, its vehicle fleet and staff of trained drivers could be well suited to meet initial shuttle service demand. Exploring the possibility further would require coordinating with Anderson’s route planner to determine the feasibility of desired service.
Funding

Any conversation about improving the transportation options available to visitors must factor in costs, which could include:

- Capital costs of fixed assets, such as vehicles and, if necessary, any facility required to store and service vehicles. Capital costs are less of an issue if a provider with an existing fleet and facilities extends or introduces service using existing capacity.

- Operating costs, such as vehicle maintenance, driver compensation, permits and fees and insurance.

- Promotional costs, such as branding, marketing, vehicle wraps, etc.

On the income side, considerations include:

- Fares. Survey results indicated that many would-be riders think fees per ride or all-day passes would be reasonable.

- Advertising and sponsorship. Some local shuttles receive promotional support from area businesses or organizations, selling ad space in or on vehicles or related materials.

Paying for a shuttle service often involves blending various sources: grants, loans, local tax revenue and cost-sharing among agencies or businesses. As the recommendations of this report suggest, a preliminary step in establishing or expanding service should involve reaching out to county and regional planning agencies (both county offices and the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission) to determine how this connection is positioned within the larger transportation network and what approaches to securing long-term funding would be the most advantageous.
Case Study
Atlantic City Jitney Association

Atlantic City, NJ, a resort city famous for its beaches, boardwalk and concentration of casinos, is served by a fleet of 190 wheelchair-accessible, 13-passenger minibus shuttles that run without any public operating subsidy. The fixed-route shuttles of Atlantic City Jitney Association (AJCA) are driven by owner-operators, who buy in at $180,000 for the price of a bus and share of the franchise. The association carries a fleet insurance policy and has its own repair shop to save on parts and labor costs. The service runs 24 hours per day, 365 days per year, and extends to surrounding areas (Avalon and Stone Harbor) on a seasonal weekend basis.

“It gets people off the streets,” AJCA President Thomas Woodruff has said, “especially the bar crowd. They won’t be walking up and down the street, there’s no drunk driving and it eases parking.”

— https://whyy.org/articles/jitney-avalon-stone-harbor/
Case Study

Coronado Summer Shuttle

The City of Coronado, CA, provides a free fixed-route shuttle every summer to “keep residents and visitors out of their cars during Coronado’s busiest season.” The service runs four buses along the city’s commercial corridor between Memorial Day and Labor Day, with service at 15-minute intervals between roughly 9 a.m. and 10 p.m. on weekdays and extending to 11 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays. The service has about 1,000 riders per day. In 2015, the route served 116,499 riders, an increase of 48% over ridership in 2014 and 100% over ridership in 2013.

The city contracts with its public transit provider, Metropolitan Transit System, to provide the service at a cost to the city of $30,000. Discover Coronado, the local tourism promotion agency, also sponsors the service. The city helps to offset the cost by selling interior ad space to local businesses and groups for $125/month ($75/month for nonprofit groups).

Case Study
Winery/Brewery/Distillery Tour Shuttles

- **Reston Limousine: Reston, VA**
  
  Among this company’s local tour offerings are private and public tour outings to DC-area wineries, breweries and distilleries. Public brewery and winery tours are available every Saturday 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Tourists can depart from multiple designated pick-up spots. From there, shuttles travel to two different locations for tastings and tours. Public tours usually cost $60-$80 and include tasting fees. Private tours allow choice of vehicle from a fleet of more than 200, ranging from small luxury sedans to limo and coach buses.

- **R&R Limousine: Louisville, KY**
  
  This company’s Copper Still experience accommodates visitors who want to responsibly tour Kentucky’s many distilleries, via either public or private tour. The public group tours are offered in the form of various “experiences,” each of which offers a different trio of locations to tour. Tours are $179 each and typically run from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Tours begin and end at the Brown Hotel in Louisville. Private experiences can be ordered by ticket packages. There are four levels that vary based on the accommodations throughout the 10-hour day. The costs range between $70-$250 per person. Customers can choose from six planned itineraries or create their own custom experience.

- **Flagship Trolley: Erie, PA Wine Country**
  
  The Flagship Trolley offers public wine tours every month between May and October. The tour leaves the Millcreek Mall between noon and 1 p.m. and typically lasts about six hours. Visitors on this tour can expect to visit four or five wineries. Tickets are $40, in addition to tasting fees and driver gratuity. The trolleys limit seating to 26 people and require reservations.
Recommendations

This report is exploratory in nature, taking preliminary stock of existing conditions and a snapshot of visitor transportation needs in June 2019 based on a set of stakeholder interviews and public input received in various forms. It reveals gaps within the system, some of which may or may not be feasible for anyone to address given the sparse rural settlement pattern (and distribution of destinations) across Lawrence and Mercer counties.

However, the low-hanging fruit with regard to addressing system gaps appears to be providing connections among hotels and tourism destinations, particularly winery/brewery/distillery locations where visitors are likely to consider an alternative to driving their own vehicles. The following recommendations have to do with this option, should it develop further:

- A single agency or partnership would need to champion this project. This could involve convening a committee to help plan and develop a potential new or expanded service, but the project is more likely to be successful if someone who has ownership of it is responsible for seeing it implemented.

- The project champion should consult and involve public agencies, local interest groups and private interests, many of which assisted the development of this report. Involving a wide variety of stakeholders will help ensure the viability of the end result. The stakeholders can also assist funding, implementing and promoting the service.

- Prior to developing any potential service plan, confirm a full inventory of possible providers and partners, including any additional shuttle services now operated by public or private agencies not covered in this report.
• Introduce any new or expanded service incrementally. For example, a shuttle among select hotels and destinations could run on a limited *pilot program* basis: Only on weekends, only during peak season (such as August to October, depending on the destinations selected).

• The map shown at right shows a recommended focus area for shuttle service, capturing a variety of shopping, winery, restaurant and other destinations as well as lodging choices. This area has a density of attractions that would make service relatively feasible.

• Introduce any new or expanded service on a contract basis with an existing local public or private transportation provider.

• An important next step should be collaborating with potential service providers on route specifics to determine the ideal route length, number of needed vehicles, optimal number and distance between stops, etc.

• While service should at first be on a pilot basis, marketing and promotion of the service should be a full-court-press effort from the start. Brand the shuttle service. (The Coronado Summer Shuttle’s eye-catching vehicle wraps are a good example of this.) Advertise the shuttle as a new and exciting way to experience the selected destinations. Engage the owners of hotels and destinations in promoting the shuttle service and helping visitors understand how to use it.

• At the conclusion of the pilot program, conduct a full evaluation to determine whether service should be continued, and on what terms. Did the shuttle provide a solution to identified visitor transportation problems? Did it provide sufficient value to justify the investments made? How could service be adjusted to provide maximum value? What future considerations should factor into longer-term decisions about service?
Potential Route Focus Area

The Route 208 corridor’s rich density of attractions in proximity of lodging makes it a natural choice for a pilot shuttle route. This map is intended to communicate a preliminary focus area with suggested general stops, with the understanding that specific route length, direction and stop decisions would be made as a later step in feasibility determination.