

ITNCountry™ Development Plan

People who live in rural and small communities depend on the private automobile for transportation. This dependence poses serious problems for older people who stop driving, for people with special needs and for those who cannot afford a car. Now, the same kind of technology that is creating a new kind of urban mobility through services like Uber and Lyft can also serve the needs of people in small towns and rural communities across America.

Need and Opportunity

Rural transportation is one of the most intractable of transit problems. That is because longer distances and lower population densities reduce the opportunity for efficiency through shared rides; at the same time, logistical problems increase and resources diminish. The problem is not small. By population, 28.8 percent of the US population lives in a micropolitan or rural community, and although some smaller communities surround larger urban areas, others are county seats or similar population centers, surrounded by farmland and countryside.ⁱ By county, 42.2 million people live in a county that is either entirely or mostly rural. And by incorporated place (city, town or village), 18,751 places out of a total 19,505 in the US in 2015 had a population of less than 50,000 and 16,470 places had a population of less than 10,000.ⁱⁱ According to the American Public Transit Association, “nearly two-thirds of all residents in these communities have few if any transportation options:

- 41 percent have no access to transit
- Another 25 percent live in areas with below average transit services.”ⁱⁱⁱ

While traditional mass transportation endeavors to meet mobility needs with publicly owned high occupancy vehicles, advances in communication through the internet, smart phones and cloud computing have now made it possible to improve community mobility using private transportation capacity. In higher density urbanized areas, profit driven transportation network companies (TNC) like Uber and Lyft offer innovative solutions that capitalize on private capacity, creating jobs and reducing public expenditures. But in lower density rural areas longer distances erode profitability and diminish or preclude the viability of private for-profit solutions.

ITNCountry: Nonprofit, Do-It-Yourself Uber

ITNCountry is a non-profit transportation network solution that uses technology to match volunteer or paid drivers with people who need rides. People can connect by phone to a live operator, or use the newest smart phone technology to connect, to pay for rides, or just to communicate. Similar to the services offered by other modern ride sharing companies, ITNCountry includes integrated payment systems, advanced traveler information systems, GPS mapping, ride optimization and numerous other features to maximize efficiency and heighten customer satisfaction. ITNCountry also includes features developed by the Independent Transportation Network® (ITN), a non-profit TNC created to meet the needs of older and visually impaired people. ITN® is the model program for ITNAmerica®, the largest national non-profit transportation network for the aging population. The recipient of numerous national awards for business innovation, ITN features such programs as:

- *Personal Transportation Accounts™*—a mobility portfolio that holds transportation assets
- *CarTrade™*—a program that helps people trade their cars to pay for their rides
- *Transportation Social Security™*—volunteers earn credits driving others and store them for their own future needs

- *Ride & Shop™ and Healthy Miles™*—merchants and healthcare providers help to pay for rides
- *Road Scholarship Program*—rides for low-income people funded by donated volunteer credits

There are several proposed differences between the original ITN and the rural model, all designed to reduce costs and to use technology to create an efficient, connected system. The original ITN is an entirely separate non-profit organization, but ITNCountry can be a program within another organization. The original ITN guarantees a ride 24/7 for any purpose, while ITNCountry service parameters will be established by the local communities. Because small, rural community programs often run with little or no paid staff, ITNCountry will be designed to run with only volunteers, if that is what the community chooses to do. Another proposed difference will be how ITNCountry communities learn how to run the service. ITN is building a large on-line learning community where all of ITN's innovative programs are taught and supported.

With ITN's technology and support system, even small and rural communities can achieve the efficiency and economic benefits of services such as Uber and Lyft while incorporating the volunteerism and social capital that are often the strengths of small and rural communities.

Development Phases

- *Phase One: On-line Learning System*—teaches communities how to create ITN's innovative business programs (funded by the Tennessee Community Foundation, the Maine Community Foundation and AARP Maine State Office). The business components will be complete by June 2017.
- *Phase Two: Software Upgrade*—integrates ITN's innovative programs into a smart phone enabled platform for ride scheduling, billing, shared rides, volunteer and paid driver participation; 15 months from initiation, overlapping with Phase Three
- *Phase Three: Pilot Test and Evaluation*—deploys ITNCountry in multiple states and evaluates effectiveness (grant application to the Transit IDEA program, National Academies of Science; evaluation partner Susan Shaheen, UC Berkeley, Transportation Sustainability Research Center); 24 months, overlapping with Phase Two
- *Phase Four: Rollout*—national marketing and deployment campaign; overlapping with Phase Three

Leadership

Katherine Freund is the founder and President of Independent Transportation Network of America. Katherine served on the Advisory Committee for the 2005 White House Conference on Aging and is a 2012 Askoka Fellow. She was featured in the *Wall Street Journal* as one of the "12 People Who Are Changing Your Retirement," and on CNN's "Breakthrough Women" series. She has received AARP's Inspire Award, the Maxwell Pollack Award from the Gerontological Society of America, and the Social Enterprise Alliance award for Leadership in Innovative Enterprise Ideas. Katherine is also the recipient of the Access Award from the American Foundation for the Blind, the Archstone Award for Excellence in Program Innovation from the American Public Health Association, and the Giraffe Award for sticking her neck out for the common good.

ⁱ <https://storymaps.geo.census.gov/arcgis/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=9e459da9327b4c7e9a1248cb65ad942a>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/241695/number-of-us-cities-towns-villages-by-population-size/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.apta.com/gap/policyresearch/Documents/rural.pdf>