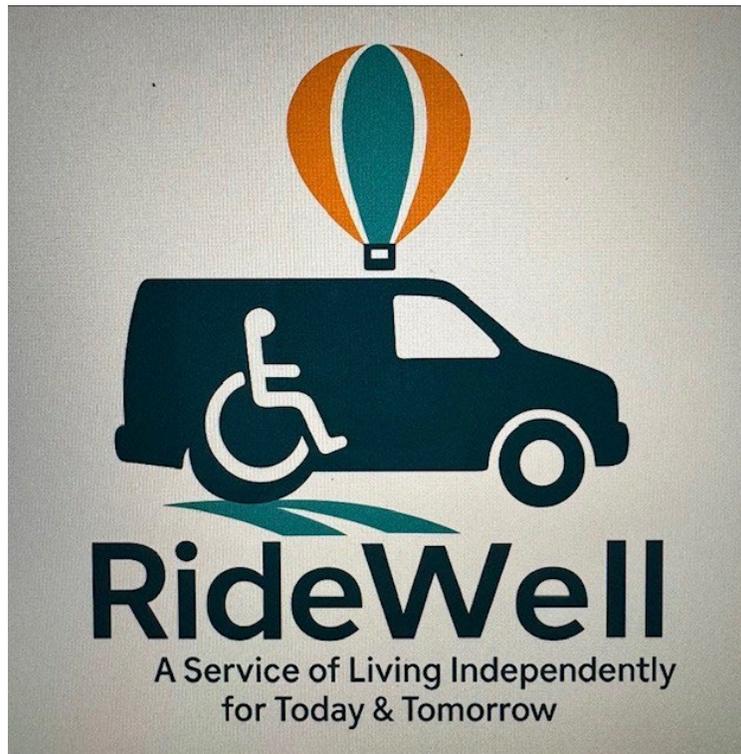


RideWell: Building the Future of Accessible Transportation in Rural Montana



In Montana, distance is a fact of life. For many of us, the nearest doctor, college, or even grocery store is not just down the street: it can be 50, 100, or even 200 miles away. In rural communities across Eastern Montana, this distance can mean isolation, especially for older adults and people with disabilities who don't drive. At LIFTT - Living Independently for Today and Tomorrow, we believe that no one should be cut off from healthcare, education, work, or community life simply because they lack reliable transportation.

That is why we are diligently working to offer to LIFTT's service area a new ADA-accessible rural transportation program: RideWell.

From Planning to Action

Over the past year, with support from the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC), LIFTT has worked closely with community members, local

organizations, and state partners to create a “Comprehensive Transportation Plan.” The first draft of this plan, currently under review by the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), outlines a clear vision for bridging the transportation gap across our service region.

The work has been guided by a strong Advisory Committee comprising local leaders, disability advocates, and residents. Together, we listened to the community, studied the barriers, and imagined what an inclusive transportation system could look like. Out of this effort has come more than a plan: it has produced a vision, a commitment, and now, a program with a name chosen by the community itself.

Why “RideWell”?

When we asked Montanans to help name this new service, they gave us options that were creative, funny, and inspiring. The winning name, RideWell, stood out because it captured what people want most from transportation: reliability, dignity, and health. To “ride well” is to travel safely, to live fully, and to be connected to the places and people that matter.

RideWell is more than a title. It’s a promise.

First Wheels on the Ground

That promise has already begun to take shape. This fall, the first ADA-accessible van, for the program, a 2025 Chrysler Voyager outfitted by BraunAbility arrived in Billings. This vehicle, designed with features that ensure accessibility for all riders, represents the first step in turning a dream into reality. Another van will follow soon, expanding our ability to serve communities across the region.



The excitement around this milestone was palpable at our most recent Advisory Committee meeting, where committee members and staff celebrated the arrival of the

van and reflected on how long rural Montanans have been waiting for a program like this.

Why Transportation Matters in Rural Montana

For many, transportation is not just a convenience but a necessity for survival. Without it, a person with diabetes cannot get to regular appointments; a young adult with a disability cannot reach college classes; a grandmother cannot travel to see her grandchildren; a neighbor cannot attend a community event or even shop for groceries. In cities, these problems are often met with buses, trains, or ride-sharing services. But in rural Montana, the options are few, and for those who use wheelchairs or need extra assistance, the options are almost nonexistent.

RideWell is designed to change that reality. By providing ADA-compliant vans and trained drivers, LIFTT will ensure that older adults and people with disabilities can move across our wide-open state with the same dignity and opportunity as anyone else.

Investing in the Future: RideWell and LIFTT's New Home

As part of this effort, LIFTT is making a bold investment in the future. We are in the process of purchasing two adjacent plots of land in downtown Glendive, where we will build a facility to house RideWell's vehicles and operations. This shop and garage will ensure the vans are well-maintained and ready to serve. Furthermore, the site will also serve as the location of LIFTT's new main offices, reflecting our long-term commitment to serving the region from a central, accessible hub.

This is more than bricks and mortar. It is about creating a home for independence, a place where transportation and advocacy meet under one roof, ensuring sustainability for years to come.

Gratitude and Community Power

None of this would have been possible without the support of the NADTC, whose grant gave us the opportunity to plan carefully and dream big. Their support provided not only funding but also knowledge, training, and a national network of peers who share our mission.

We also thank our Advisory Committee and community partners across Eastern Montana. Your voices, ideas, and persistence have shaped every decision. RideWell belongs to all of us, and together we will ensure that it continues to reflect the needs and hopes of the people it serves.

Looking Ahead

With the first vehicle in hand, a Comprehensive Transportation Plan under review, and land secured for our future operations, LIFTT's RideWell program is no longer just an idea, but it is a reality in motion. The road ahead will involve continued fundraising, expansion of services, and the building of our new facility, but the destination is clear: a Montana where aging and disabled residents can travel with independence, dignity, and confidence.

RideWell is coming. And with it, a new era of mobility for rural Montana. For more information, visit www.liftt.org or contact our Billings office at (406) 259-5181 or Glendive office at (406) 948-8500.

Because in Montana, distance may define the landscape, but it should never define our independence.