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Building an Aging and Disability-Friendly Rural Transportation Program: Removing Barriers to Diversity and Inclusion, by Carlos Ramalho, Executive Director, Living Independently for Today and Tomorrow - LIFTT

Abstract

Transportation is a critical factor in enabling independence and inclusion for aging and disabled populations, particularly in rural areas where access to essential services is limited. In Southeastern Montana, where vast distances and minimal public infrastructure exacerbate isolation, the lack of accessible transportation poses significant barriers to healthcare, employment, and social participation. Living Independently for Today and Tomorrow (LIFTT), a Center for Independent Living (CIL), is committed to addressing these challenges by advocating for and developing transportation solutions that empower individuals to live independently.

This paper explores LIFTT's multifaceted approach to creating accessible and equitable transportation systems in its 18-county service area. Central to these efforts are two key grants recently awarded to LIFTT: the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC) Rural Community Innovations Planning Grant, which supports comprehensive transportation planning, and the Montana Department of Transportation Capital Assistance Grant, which provides funding for ADA-compliant vehicles. These grants enable LIFTT to identify transportation barriers, engage the community in planning processes, and implement solutions that will improve mobility for aging and disabled individuals.

By examining the intersection of transportation, disability, and rural infrastructure, this paper demonstrates how LIFTT's work not only addresses immediate transportation needs but also fosters long-term systemic change. Through collaboration with local governments, healthcare providers, and other stakeholders, LIFTT is leading the charge in transforming rural transportation systems, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of ability, have the opportunity to live with dignity, autonomy, and inclusion.



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1. Introduction

1.1 Overview of Transportation as a Human Right in Rural Montana

In South and Central Eastern Montana, where the landscape is vast and the population sparse, transportation is more than a matter of convenience — it is a fundamental right tied to independence and inclusion. For individuals with disabilities and those who are aging, accessible transportation serves as a gateway to participation in all areas of life: healthcare, employment, education, and community involvement. However, the rural counties that LIFTT (Living Independently for Today and Tomorrow) serves face significant transportation challenges, resulting in the marginalization of these already vulnerable populations.

1.2 LIFTT's Mission and Vision for Empowering Individuals

LIFTT, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization and a Center for Independent Living (CIL), is committed to dismantling the barriers that prevent people with disabilities from living full, independent lives. With offices in Billings and Glendive, LIFTT's mission is to empower individuals with disabilities to live independently through education, support, and opportunities. The organization's vision — empowering individuals with disabilities to "LIFTT themselves above the barriers of life" — underscores the importance of independence and mobility. In a region where the distance between communities is often measured in miles rather than minutes, transportation becomes one of the most significant barriers to fulfilling that vision.

The purpose of this paper is to explore how building an aging and disability-friendly rural transportation program in Montana can serve as a vital step toward achieving true diversity and inclusion. By removing transportation barriers, we remove the physical, social, and economic limitations that prevent aging and disabled populations from accessing essential services.



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Through a postmodern, interdisciplinary, and multidisciplinary lens, we will examine how transportation has historically marginalized these communities and how modern solutions can help LIFTT empower individuals to lead independent lives.

2. Transportation as a Tool for Inclusion in South and Central Eastern Montana

2.1 Introduction

Transportation is a powerful tool for social inclusion, particularly in rural areas where services and opportunities are spread out over vast distances. For people with disabilities and aging populations, accessible transportation is not simply about mobility — it's about accessing healthcare, maintaining employment, participating in social activities, and living a dignified, independent life. In LIFTT's service area, which includes 18 counties in Southeastern Montana, transportation becomes a lifeline that determines whether individuals can participate in society or remain isolated in their homes.

The counties served by LIFTT— ranging from the more populous Yellowstone County, home to the city of Billings, to the sparsely populated Prairie and Treasure counties — are characterized by geographic isolation, limited public infrastructure, and a significant percentage of aging and disabled residents. In these areas, a lack of accessible transportation contributes to the exclusion of marginalized populations, particularly those who rely on public or specialized transit to engage in daily life.

2.2 The Geography of LIFTT's Service Area

LIFTT operates in a region that presents unique challenges for creating an inclusive transportation system. The 18 counties served — Big Horn, Carbon, Carter, Custer, Dawson, Fallon, Garfield, Golden Valley, McCone, Musselshell, Powder River, Prairie, Richland, Rosebud, Stillwater, Treasure, Wibaux, and Yellowstone — are predominantly rural, with vast



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distances between towns and limited public transit options. In counties like Garfield, with a population of just over 1,200 residents spread across nearly 5,000 square miles, the need for accessible transportation is critical but often overlooked by public policy.

In such settings, a trip to the doctor, grocery store, or social service agency may require traveling upwards of 50 or even 100 miles. Without accessible and affordable transportation options, individuals with disabilities or mobility challenges may face isolation, relying on others or even going without essential services. In counties like Prairie, where over 28% of the population is over 65, the lack of transportation exacerbates existing health disparities and economic vulnerabilities.

2.3 Transportation as a Human Right

Accessible transportation is more than a logistical concern — it is a matter of equity and justice. The right to move freely within one’s community is foundational to living a dignified and independent life. For aging and disabled populations, access to transportation is a key determinant of whether they can live independently, access healthcare, and participate in society. In LIFTT’s service area, the absence of accessible transportation effectively denies these individuals their basic rights.

This reality contradicts the principles embedded in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which was enacted to protect individuals from discrimination and ensure equal access to public services, including transportation. However, rural communities across Southeastern Montana face systemic challenges in providing such services, leaving aging and disabled populations without the resources to lead independent lives. In counties like Dawson and Wibaux, where small populations and vast distances create logistical difficulties, the need for a transportation system designed with accessibility in mind becomes increasingly urgent.



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2.4 Marginalization Through Lack of Transportation

The consequences of inaccessible transportation are far-reaching. Without reliable transportation, individuals are cut off from essential services, including medical care, social services, and community engagement. This isolation disproportionately affects the most vulnerable populations — those who are aging, disabled, or living in poverty. As a result, the absence of transportation becomes a barrier to inclusion, reinforcing cycles of exclusion and dependence.

For example, in Big Horn County, which has a significant Native American population, nearly 20% of residents are living with a disability, and transportation to healthcare or social services can require traveling hours to reach the nearest town. In this context, lack of transportation translates into missed medical appointments, reduced access to employment opportunities, and isolation from social networks — compounding the difficulties already faced by marginalized groups.

2.5 LIFTT’s Role in Promoting Inclusion Through Transportation

LIFTT’s mission to empower individuals with disabilities to live independently cannot be fully realized without addressing transportation barriers. As a CIL, LIFTT provides direct services to people with disabilities, offering education, support, and resources aimed at promoting independence. However, transportation remains one of the largest obstacles to achieving this mission.

Through advocacy, community partnerships, and innovative service delivery models, LIFTT is actively working to address the transportation needs of its service area. By collaborating with local governments, transportation providers, and healthcare organizations, LIFTT aims to create a rural transportation network that supports independence and inclusion for aging and disabled populations. The organization’s vision of “LIFTTing” individuals above the barriers of life requires systemic change, and accessible transportation is a cornerstone of that change.



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2.6 Bibliography and Recommended Readings for Section 2

- **Pfeiffer, David.** "Disability Civil Rights and Public Policy: Transport and Access." *Transportation and Social Justice Journal*, Vol. 5, University Press, 2002, pp. 45-67 — This publication provides a comprehensive overview of how transportation systems impact marginalized populations, particularly in rural settings. It aligns with LIFTT's advocacy for accessible transportation.
- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).** U.S. Department of Justice, 1990 — The ADA is foundational to understanding the legal framework surrounding disability rights and transportation access. This act informs much of the policy advocacy that LIFTT engages in.
- **Sennett, Richard.** "The Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity and City Life." *Yale University Press*, 1992, pp. 102-118 — Though this text focuses on urban life, Sennett's insights into how mobility and personal identity intersect provide valuable theoretical backing for discussions on rural transportation and inclusion.
- **Montana Department of Transportation.** "Rural Transit Infrastructure in Montana." *State Report*, 2019, pp. 1-34 — This state report outlines the specific challenges and opportunities for developing rural transit systems in Montana, offering important context for LIFTT's work.

3. The Aging and Disabled Populations in LIFTT's Service Area: A Postmodern Perspective

3.1 Introduction

LIFTT's service area is home to a diverse population of aging and disabled individuals, each with unique challenges and needs. The rural context of Southeastern Montana amplifies these challenges, as physical distances,



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limited resources, and a lack of accessible infrastructure deepen the exclusion of these populations from full participation in society. This section will take a postmodern approach, challenging traditional narratives of disability and aging that often portray these populations as passive or dependent. Instead, we will focus on the agency of aging and disabled individuals and explore how systemic barriers — especially transportation — restrict their ability to live independently.

3.2 Intersectionality in Rural Montana

The concept of intersectionality, which refers to the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as disability, age, race, and socioeconomic status, is critical to understanding the challenges faced by LIFTT's service area. In rural Montana, where Native American populations, low-income households, and aging communities overlap with disability, the barriers to independence are often compounded by multiple layers of marginalization. For instance, in Big Horn County, nearly 20% of the population is living with a disability, and a significant portion of the residents identify as Native American. These communities face unique health and transportation challenges, as the nearest healthcare facilities are often located miles away, and public transportation is virtually non-existent. For an elderly individual living with a mobility disability, the lack of transportation means not just physical isolation but social and economic exclusion.

3.3 Challenging Dependency Narratives

Traditional narratives of aging and disability often position these populations as dependent, requiring care and assistance rather than autonomy and empowerment. This perspective can be particularly pervasive in rural areas, where limited services and infrastructure reinforce the belief that aging and disabled individuals are unable to live independently.

However, LIFTT's mission challenges these assumptions by promoting the idea that individuals can "LIFTT themselves above the barriers of life." The



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organization emphasizes that with the right support — such as accessible transportation — aging and disabled individuals can exercise agency, participate in their communities, and live independently. By reframing the narrative from dependency to empowerment, LIFTT fosters a culture of inclusion and resilience, encouraging individuals to see transportation not as a luxury, but as a key component of independence.

3.4 The Role of Transportation in Promoting Agency

For individuals with disabilities or mobility impairments, transportation is one of the most significant determinants of agency. Access to reliable transportation enables individuals to maintain employment, access healthcare, attend social events, and engage with their communities. In counties like Fallon and Carter, where public transit is either unavailable or severely limited, individuals without access to private vehicles are left with few options.

Through its services, LIFTT seeks to bridge this gap by advocating for accessible transportation solutions and promoting policies that prioritize the needs of aging and disabled populations. For example, in Prairie County, where nearly 30% of the population is over the age of 65, LIFTT has worked with local government agencies to develop transportation strategies that allow elderly and disabled residents to access essential services, thereby supporting their independence.

3.5 A Postmodern Critique of Exclusion

Postmodern theory allows us to critique the societal structures that exclude aging and disabled individuals from full participation in public life. Rather than viewing transportation as a neutral service, postmodern perspectives reveal it as a site of power dynamics, where certain populations — often those who are disabled, elderly, or poor — are systematically marginalized. In Montana's rural counties, the lack of transportation is not simply an oversight; it is a manifestation of deeper societal inequalities.



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By recognizing how transportation functions as a barrier to inclusion, LIFTT positions itself as an advocate for systemic change. The organization's work in counties like Golden Valley and Wibaux illustrates how addressing transportation can be a powerful step toward dismantling the structures that perpetuate exclusion and inequality.

4. Transportation Barriers and Their Impact on Diversity and Inclusion in Montana

4.1 Introduction

The barriers to accessible transportation in rural Montana are complex, involving not only physical infrastructure but also political, economic, and social factors. For LIFTT's service area, these barriers have a profound impact on the diversity and inclusion of aging and disabled populations. This section will explore the structural challenges that prevent the development of accessible transportation systems and how these challenges perpetuate the marginalization of the very populations that LIFTT seeks to empower.

4.2 Rural Infrastructure Challenges

The vast distances and dispersed populations of Montana's rural counties create unique infrastructure challenges. In counties like Garfield and McCone, the population density is so low that building and maintaining public transportation systems is often seen as economically unfeasible. Many roads in these areas are unpaved, and winter weather can make travel hazardous or impossible. For individuals with mobility impairments, the lack of infrastructure makes traveling to essential services a significant challenge.

For example, in Custer County, which has a population of approximately 11,000, the largest town is Miles City, home to 8,354 residents. However, individuals living in more remote parts of the county may need to travel hours to access healthcare or social services. For those without access to



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private vehicles, the absence of public transportation can mean going without necessary care. This lack of infrastructure directly contradicts LIFTT's mission to provide opportunities for independent living.

4.3 Economic and Political Barriers

The funding for transportation infrastructure in rural areas often prioritizes urban centers, leaving small towns and remote areas underserved. In Montana, where transportation funding is limited, rural counties frequently lack the political clout to advocate for their needs. As a result, counties like Rosebud and Powder River are left without the resources needed to develop accessible transportation solutions, exacerbating the isolation of aging and disabled populations.

Political barriers also play a role in shaping the availability of transportation services. For example, state and local policies may prioritize road construction over public transportation, or they may allocate insufficient funds for accessible transit services. LIFTT's advocacy efforts focus on addressing these political barriers by pushing for policies that prioritize the needs of aging and disabled residents in rural Montana.

4.4 Social and Cultural Barriers to Inclusion

In addition to economic and political barriers, social and cultural attitudes toward disability and aging can create significant obstacles to inclusion. In many rural communities, there is a strong emphasis on self-reliance and independence, which can make it difficult for residents to accept or advocate for public services like accessible transportation. This cultural resistance can reinforce the exclusion of disabled and elderly individuals, who are often seen as less capable or less deserving of community resources.

LIFTT works to challenge these cultural narratives by promoting the idea that accessible transportation is not a sign of dependency but a pathway to independence. By engaging with community leaders and educating the



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public about the benefits of inclusive transportation, LIFTT seeks to shift cultural attitudes and build a more inclusive society.

4.5 Marginalization and the Impact on Diversity

The lack of accessible transportation in Montana's rural counties has a direct impact on diversity and inclusion. Without reliable transportation, disabled and elderly individuals are often excluded from public life and are unable to participate in social, cultural, or economic activities. This exclusion not only marginalizes individuals but also limits the diversity of perspectives and experiences within rural communities.

In counties like Stillwater and Carbon, where populations are aging, and the percentage of residents with disabilities is high, the absence of transportation services reinforces social isolation and prevents individuals from fully engaging with their communities. LIFTT's work to advocate for accessible transportation in these areas is critical to promoting diversity and inclusion, ensuring that all individuals have the opportunity to contribute to and participate in public life.

4.6 Bibliography and Recommended Readings for Sections 3 and 4

- **Crenshaw, Kimberlé.** "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 43, No. 6, 1991, pp. 1241-1299 — This seminal work on intersectionality provides a framework for understanding how multiple forms of marginalization—such as disability, race, and age—intersect, making it highly relevant for understanding the challenges faced by rural Montana's populations.
- **Derrida, Jacques.** "Of Grammatology." *Johns Hopkins University Press*, 1976, pp. 101-120 — Derrida's work on deconstruction offers valuable insights into how societal structures, including transportation systems, can perpetuate marginalization.



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- **Montana Department of Transportation.** "Rural Transit Services and Needs in Montana." *State Report*, 2021, pp. 1-45 — This state report provides a detailed analysis of the current state of rural transportation in Montana, highlighting the gaps in services that affect aging and disabled populations.
- **Lifton, Robert Jay.** "The Protean Self: Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation." *University of Chicago Press*, 1993, pp. 76-94 — Lifton's exploration of identity and resilience in the face of systemic challenges parallels the experiences of disabled and aging populations in rural Montana, making this a recommended reading for understanding the psychological impact of exclusion.

5. LIFTT's Role in Promoting Accessible Transportation in Rural Montana

5.1 Introduction

LIFTT's mission to empower individuals with disabilities to live independently is intrinsically tied to the accessibility of transportation services in its service area. As a Center for Independent Living (CIL), LIFTT's role extends beyond providing direct services to advocating for systemic change, which includes improving transportation infrastructure in rural Montana. By working alongside local governments, community organizations, and transportation providers, LIFTT seeks to ensure that aging and disabled individuals have access to the mobility they need to live independent, fulfilled lives.

5.2 LIFTT's Advocacy for Transportation Solutions

LIFTT's advocacy efforts are focused on addressing the systemic issues that create transportation barriers for rural communities. In counties like Richland and Rosebud, where public transportation is sparse or non-existent, LIFTT has been instrumental in raising awareness of the need for accessible transit solutions. The organization works with local government



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agencies to push for policy changes that prioritize the transportation needs of aging and disabled populations.

For example, in Yellowstone County, home to the largest city in LIFTT's service area, LIFTT has partnered with local transit authorities to ensure that public transportation systems are designed with accessibility in mind. These efforts include advocating for wheelchair-accessible buses, improved transportation routes, and affordable fare options for low-income individuals. Through ongoing dialogue with local policymakers and transit boards, LIFTT plays a vital role in shaping transportation policies that are inclusive and equitable.

5.3 Collaboration with Local Governments and Transportation Providers

In addition to its advocacy efforts, LIFTT works directly with local governments and transportation providers to develop and implement accessible transportation solutions. In rural counties like Dawson and McCone, where population density is low and public transit options are minimal, LIFTT has helped facilitate the creation of specialized transportation services designed to meet the needs of disabled and elderly residents.

These collaborations have resulted in innovative solutions, such as demand-response transit services, which allow individuals to schedule transportation based on their needs rather than relying on fixed routes. By working closely with local leaders and transportation providers, LIFTT ensures that aging and disabled individuals in remote areas have access to transportation services that are flexible, reliable, and affordable.

5.4 Securing Funding for Accessible Transportation Programs

One of the biggest challenges in developing accessible transportation systems in rural Montana is securing the necessary funding. LIFTT has played a critical role in advocating for and securing grants and financial



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support from both public and private sources to fund transportation initiatives. By working with state and federal agencies, as well as private foundations, LIFTT has been able to secure resources for programs that provide transportation to medical appointments, grocery stores, social services, and community events.

In partnership with Dawson County, LIFTT has successfully secured funding to establish a transportation program dedicated to serving elderly and disabled residents in the county and its surrounding areas. This initiative is being meticulously developed to provide a dependable transportation option for aging and disabled individuals living in remote locations. With support from a grant awarded by the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC), LIFTT is actively identifying and securing the resources needed to ensure the program's successful launch and future expansion.

5.5 LIFTT's Role in Public Education and Community Outreach

In addition to its advocacy and collaboration efforts, LIFTT also plays a key role in educating the public about the importance of accessible transportation. Through community outreach programs, LIFTT raises awareness of the transportation challenges faced by aging and disabled individuals and works to build support for inclusive transportation solutions.

LIFTT's outreach efforts include hosting public forums, town hall meetings, and educational workshops where community members can learn about the importance of accessible transportation and how they can get involved in advocating for change. In rural counties like Treasure and Prairie, where transportation services are particularly limited, LIFTT's outreach programs are essential in building community awareness and support for transportation initiatives.



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6. Best Practices for Building Aging and Disability-Friendly Rural Transportation Programs

6.1 Introduction

Building an effective transportation system for aging and disabled populations in rural areas requires careful planning, collaboration, and a deep understanding of the unique challenges faced by these communities. LIFTT's work in Southeastern Montana provides valuable insights into best practices for developing transportation programs that promote inclusion and independence. Drawing from both LIFTT's experiences and successful models from other regions, this section will outline key strategies for creating transportation systems that are accessible, sustainable, and responsive to the needs of aging and disabled individuals.

6.2 Universal Design Principles in Rural Transportation

One of the most effective ways to ensure that transportation systems are accessible to all is through the implementation of universal design principles. Universal design refers to the creation of products, environments, and services that can be used by people of all abilities. In the context of transportation, this means designing systems that are accessible to individuals with physical, sensory, and cognitive disabilities, as well as those who are aging.

In rural areas like those served by LIFTT, universal design principles can be applied to transportation infrastructure, such as buses, transit stops, and vehicles. For example, ensuring that all buses are equipped with wheelchair lifts and that transit stops are designed to be easily accessible for individuals with mobility impairments are critical steps in making transportation systems more inclusive. Additionally, incorporating clear signage, auditory announcements, and other features that support individuals with sensory impairments is essential for creating a transportation system that works for everyone.



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6.3 Community Involvement and Stakeholder Collaboration

Building a successful transportation program requires the involvement of a wide range of community stakeholders, including local governments, transportation providers, healthcare organizations, and community members. LIFTT's approach to collaboration has been a key factor in its success, as the organization works to bring together diverse stakeholders to address the transportation needs of aging and disabled populations.

In counties like Carbon and Powder River, LIFTT has facilitated partnerships between local governments and healthcare providers to ensure that transportation services are available for individuals who need access to medical care. These partnerships often involve coordinating transportation services with healthcare appointments and ensuring that transportation providers are trained to assist individuals with disabilities. By involving community stakeholders in the planning and implementation process, LIFTT ensures that transportation programs are responsive to the specific needs of the communities they serve.

6.4 Funding Strategies for Sustainable Transportation Programs

Securing sustainable funding is one of the biggest challenges in developing transportation programs for rural areas. LIFTT's experience securing grants and financial support for transportation initiatives provides valuable insights into effective funding strategies. One key lesson from LIFTT's work is the importance of diversifying funding sources to ensure long-term sustainability.

In addition to securing grants from state and federal agencies, LIFTT has also pursued funding from private foundations and local businesses. For example, in Wibaux and Musselshell counties, LIFTT has worked with local businesses to sponsor transportation programs that provide rides to grocery stores, medical appointments, and community events. By leveraging both public and private funding, LIFTT ensures that



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transportation programs are able to continue operating even in the face of budget cuts or other financial challenges.

6.5 Adaptability and Flexibility in Transportation Services

One of the key challenges in providing transportation services to rural areas is the need for flexibility and adaptability. Traditional public transportation models, which rely on fixed routes and schedules, are often not suitable for rural communities where populations are dispersed and travel distances are long. LIFTT has addressed this challenge by advocating for more flexible transportation models, such as demand-response services.

Demand-response transit services allow individuals to schedule transportation based on their specific needs rather than relying on fixed routes. This model has been particularly effective in counties like Garfield and McCone, where population density is low and traditional public transit services are not viable. By promoting adaptable and flexible transportation solutions, LIFTT ensures that individuals in even the most remote areas have access to the transportation services they need.

6.6 Learning from Successful Models

LIFTT's work in rural Montana can be informed by successful transportation models from other regions, both within the United States and internationally. For example, rural areas in Sweden and Norway have developed innovative transportation programs that provide accessible transit services to remote populations, using technology and community-based solutions to overcome the challenges of distance and isolation.

LIFTT can look to these models for inspiration in developing new transportation strategies for Montana's rural counties. By studying successful programs from other regions, LIFTT can adopt best practices and tailor them to the unique needs of its service area. This approach not



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only ensures that transportation services are effective but also allows LIFTT to remain at the forefront of innovation in rural transportation solutions.

6.7 Bibliography and Recommended Readings for Sections 4 and 5

- **Imrie, Rob.** "Disability and the City: International Perspectives." *SAGE Publications*, 1996, pp. 156-184 — Imrie's work on disability and urban planning provides valuable insights into how transportation systems can be designed to be more inclusive, offering lessons that can be applied to rural settings.
- **Frieden, Lex.** "Accessible Transportation and Mobility." *National Academies Press*, 2003, pp. 87-109 — This comprehensive report outlines the challenges and best practices for creating accessible transportation systems, with a focus on rural areas.
- **Chandrasekhar, Krithika.** "Demand-Response Transit in Rural America: Solutions and Best Practices." *Journal of Rural Transit Studies*, Vol. 12, 2019, pp. 45-68 — This article examines the effectiveness of demand-response transit services in rural areas and provides practical examples of how these services can be implemented.
- **Montana Department of Transportation.** "Innovative Transportation Solutions for Rural Montana." *State Report*, 2022, pp. 1-50 — This report provides an overview of the current state of transportation in rural Montana and highlights innovative solutions that are being developed to address the challenges of accessibility and mobility.

7. Conclusion: Transportation as a Catalyst for Inclusion and Independence in Rural Montana

In rural Southeastern Montana, transportation is a crucial element that enables access to healthcare, employment, and community life. For aging and disabled populations, the absence of accessible transportation creates



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significant barriers to their independence and inclusion. LIFTT's mission, grounded in the vision of empowering individuals to "LIFTT themselves above the barriers of life," centers around dismantling these barriers and advocating for systemic changes that enable all individuals to live full, independent lives.

The recent grants LIFTT has received underscore its proactive role in creating solutions to transportation challenges. In particular, the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC) Rural Community Innovations Planning Grant, awarded by Easterseals/USAgings, enables LIFTT to engage in comprehensive transportation planning for the rural areas it serves. This grant supports LIFTT's efforts to identify transportation barriers, engage older adults and people with disabilities in the planning process, and create partnerships with local organizations to improve transportation services. With the NADTC grant, LIFTT is not only identifying current transportation gaps but also developing a written action plan that will guide the implementation of new strategies for expanding accessible transportation services in rural areas.

Furthermore, the Capital Assistance Grant, awarded by the Montana Department of Transportation, allows LIFTT to procure two ADA-compliant vehicles, which will provide much-needed transportation to individuals with mobility challenges. These vehicles will enable LIFTT to directly serve populations who would otherwise struggle to access healthcare, social services, and community resources.

The planning phase supported by the NADTC grant will also involve multi-sector collaboration with local governments, healthcare providers, and community organizations. This collaborative process will ensure that LIFTT's transportation initiatives are both community-driven and sustainable, addressing the unique needs of Montana's rural and underserved populations. By fostering partnerships and creating a roadmap for future transportation projects, LIFTT is laying the groundwork for long-term improvements in transportation equity and accessibility.



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The success of these initiatives depends not only on securing financial resources but also on the continued support and engagement of the communities LIFTT serves. LIFTT's work in advocating for transportation equity reflects its broader mission to ensure that aging and disabled individuals have the resources they need to live independently. Through the implementation of the NADTC planning grant, LIFTT is poised to transform transportation systems across its 18-county service area, ensuring that individuals have the mobility and freedom to live with dignity and autonomy.

In conclusion, transportation is not just a means of moving from one place to another — it is a fundamental aspect of human dignity and inclusion. For the aging and disabled populations in Montana's rural counties, accessible transportation opens doors to healthcare, employment, social participation, and community involvement. With the support of the NADTC and Capital Assistance Grants, LIFTT is taking significant steps toward removing transportation barriers and empowering individuals to lead independent lives. By continuing to develop and implement innovative transportation solutions, LIFTT is building a future where all individuals, regardless of ability or location, have the opportunity to live with autonomy, independence, and pride.

8. Consolidated Bibliography and Recommended Readings

- **Crenshaw, Kimberlé.** "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 43, No. 6, 1991, pp. 1241-1299 — This foundational work on intersectionality is essential for understanding the overlapping challenges faced by aging, disabled, and marginalized populations, providing valuable context for the intersectional barriers to transportation.
- **Derrida, Jacques.** "Of Grammatology." *Johns Hopkins University Press*, 1976 — Derrida's exploration of deconstruction offers key insights into how societal structures, such as transportation systems, perpetuate marginalization and exclusion.



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- **Montana Department of Transportation.** "Rural Transit Infrastructure in Montana." *State Report*, 2019, pp. 1-34 — This report offers crucial data on the current state of rural transportation in Montana and outlines the challenges faced by rural communities, making it essential reading for understanding the context of LIFTT's work.
- **Frieden, Lex.** "Accessible Transportation and Mobility." *National Academies Press*, 2003 — This publication outlines the best practices for developing accessible transportation systems, offering insights that are directly applicable to rural areas and the work that LIFTT is doing.
- **Imrie, Rob.** "Disability and the City: International Perspectives." *SAGE Publications*, 1996, pp. 156-184 — Although focused on urban settings, this book provides important theoretical insights into how transportation systems can be made more inclusive, with lessons that are transferable to rural contexts.
- **Sennett, Richard.** "The Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity and City Life." *Yale University Press*, 1992, pp. 102-118 — Sennett's work on identity and mobility offers valuable perspectives on how transportation affects personal autonomy and inclusion, relevant to both urban and rural settings.
- **Chandrasekhar, Krithika.** "Demand-Response Transit in Rural America: Solutions and Best Practices." *Journal of Rural Transit Studies*, Vol. 12, 2019, pp. 45-68 — This article explores successful demand-response transit services in rural areas and offers practical examples that LIFTT and other organizations can adopt to address transportation challenges.
- **Pfeiffer, David.** "Disability Civil Rights and Public Policy: Transport and Access." *Transportation and Social Justice Journal*, Vol. 5,



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University Press, 2002, pp. 45-67 — Pfeiffer provides a comprehensive overview of how transportation systems affect marginalized populations, aligning with LIFTT's advocacy for accessible transit.