

FLINT, MICHIGAN, USA: RIDES TO GROCERIES

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THE ACTION AND ITS AIMS: The Rides to Groceries bus line in Flint, Michigan, transports residents of underserved neighbourhoods to grocery stores. Alternatively, for those with a lot of groceries to carry, the Your Ride service collects and returns residents to their homes. The aim is to ensure access to food for people who do not have a car and have no grocery store within walking distance.

WHEN IT WAS INTRODUCED: Rides to Groceries was launched in 2015. Your Ride, a fleet of 9 propane-powered minibuses covering Genesee County, was added after drivers realised some people were using the bus service every day as they could not carry all their groceries to and from the bus stop.

WHY IT WAS NEEDED: The services were needed because the closure of three major supermarkets in the city of Flint within an eight-month period left the community without easy access to healthy food and full-service grocery.

WHO INITIATED IT, WHO IS INVOLVED: Rides to Groceries was the idea of the General Manager of Flint Mass Transportation Authority (MTA). The MTA received a start-up grant from non-profit United Way of Genesee County, and graphics for Your Ride vehicles were provided by insurer Health Alliance Plan of Michigan. The service is funded by passenger fares. The regular bus fare is USD1.75 each way, Your Ride costs USD3.50 each way (reduced fares are available for both).



Flint, Michigan (USA), Shutterstock/Atomazul

IMPACTS TO DATE: No impact data were found in the public domain.

MORE INFORMATION:

- Website: Ride to Groceries, Mass Transportation Authority
<https://www.mtaflint.org/ride-to-groceries/>
- Publication: The Wheels on the Bus Go to the Grocery Store, Safe Routes to School National Partnership, 2017
https://www.saferoutespartnership.org/sites/default/files/resource_files/wheels_on_the_bus_0.pdf

A similar programme has been introduced in Philadelphia (USA), where the public transport agency aims for 75% of residents to have food access within 10 minutes. More information: Press Release: Improving Access to Local Food Via Transit (Goal 6), April 2011: <https://www.septa.org/sustain/blog/2011/04-15.html>.

In Austin, Texas (USA) the Texas Capital Metro and Austin/Travis County Food Policy Council have cooperated since 1996 to offer a 'grocery line' bus for residents of the low-income Latino Eastside neighbourhood. More information: Report: Roadmap for Encouraging Grocery Development in Houston and Texas: A Report of the Houston Grocery Access Task Force, The Food Trust, December 2012: http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media_items/houston-supermarket-report.original.pdf.

Other initiatives target specific groups, such as a bus service between six senior homes and supermarkets in Ann Arbor, Michigan (USA), and an initiative from Chelsea Area Transportation System to bring residents of senior centres to Chelsea Farmers Market on Saturday mornings. More information: Briefing: Transportation and Food: The Importance of Access, the Center for Food and Justice, September 2002: http://foodsecurity.org/policy_trans03_brief.

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