



Department Source: Public Health and Human Services

To: City Council

From: City Manager & Staff

Council Meeting Date: June 16, 2025

Re: Ride Home Program Summary

Executive Summary

At the March 17, 2025, City Council meeting, Council Member Foster requested a report exploring the implementation of a “ride home program” for unhoused individuals requesting transportation to familiar supportive services such as family, spiritual, or clinical specialties. Below is a summary of information gathered by Public Health, Fire, and Police during stakeholder interviews, research, and agency inquiries.

Discussion

BACKGROUND:

Individuals from outside of Boone County are traveling to Columbia for a variety of reasons, including medical visits, mental health care, and/or legal matters. When the original crisis has been resolved, they are unable to return to their originating city for various reasons and therefore miss the support they need to permanently stabilize. Unfortunately, oftentimes, the resulting situation exacerbates the original source of traveling to Columbia.

Resources in Columbia are often limited in duration and accessibility for this cohort due to logistical complications, including ongoing costs, access to temporary housing, insurance limitations, and Medicaid/Medicare rules. The need for housing assistance, including emergency shelters, has already outpaced available community resources. The influx of non-Columbia residents into the unhoused population increases those needing assistance and further limits already overwhelmed community resources.

EXISTING RESOURCES:

Agencies providing support to persons experiencing homelessness (Room at the Inn, Turning Point, Love Columbia) estimate assisting approximately fifty (50) individuals annually in returning to a community where they have a support network. The purchase of bus tickets ranges from \$30-\$300 per ticket. These organizations do not have dedicated funds for this service; rather, they rely on donations and assistance from other agencies. Similar agencies, such as in2ACTION, True North, and the Voluntary Action Center, also have limited resources, including gas vouchers (\$20), Uber/Lyft rides, and assistance from other agencies. Similarly, the Boone County Jail also contacts non-profits for help addressing the need, albeit most requests do not get filled.

Medical providers in Columbia, such as CenterPoint, MU Healthcare, and Burrell, work with individuals to assist them with their transportation needs. Burrell has a van and can transport consumers. Other entities use donated funds and/or social service agencies when possible. This is not a reimbursable service for medical providers.



City of Columbia

701 East Broadway, Columbia, Missouri 65201

Individuals often travel to Columbia for emergency mental health care. Missouri State [statute](#) (RSMO 632.310, 3.) lists requirements for facilities and law enforcement as it relates to the transport of individuals who are not accepted for admission by a facility providing ninety-six-hour evaluation and treatment.

EXAMPLE FROM ANOTHER COMMUNITY

The [City of Lawrence](#) has a contract with [the Lawrence Community Shelter](#) to provide shelter beds. As part of the contract, the shelter notifies Lawrence’s Homeless Solutions Division when a non-resident (an individual who has resided within the city/county for less than one year) is requesting a bed. Individuals are allowed a three (3) day respite bed if they are working on a plan, or willing to work on a plan to return to their community of origin. The City will work with the individual to identify their home support system, develop a return plan, and assist with the cost of a return bus ticket. City staff estimated that 110 bus tickets were purchased in the prior year with costs ranging from \$30-\$240 per ticket. Those not seeking a return to their community of origin are not allowed to stay at the shelter.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Transportation is a critical need for the community. Governmental agencies, such as the City of Columbia and Boone County, do not provide transportation funds as part of their social service funding process. Entities currently aiding those who need to return to their home community are doing so largely with voluntary donations. The organizations mentioned above could utilize any funding committed to addressing this service gap. The initiative will improve the lives of the people in need and help to focus Columbia resources on the local need.

Fiscal Impact

Short-Term Impact: This is a report for informational purposes. No funds have been allocated.
Long-Term Impact: This is a report for information purposes. No funds have been allocated.

Strategic & Comprehensive Plan Impact

Strategic Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Safe Community, Secondary Impact: Secondary, Tertiary Impact: Tertiary

Comprehensive Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Not Applicable, Secondary Impact: Secondary, Tertiary Impact: Tertiary

Legislative History

Date	Action
3/17/2025	Request for report submitted by Council Member Foster

Suggested Council Action

Report has been prepared for informational purposes.