October 2026

Quarterly Newsletter



PDRTA

CONNECTING PATIENTS TO CARE

How Healthcare Partnerships Are Expanding Transportation Access

For many patients, access to healthcare depends on having a reliable way to get there.

For three out of every four PDRTA passengers, there is no vehicle available within their household. That reality can make getting to a doctor, specialist, treatment center or pharmacy a significant challenge, particularly for patients who are unable to drive or need regular transportation for ongoing care. Regular appointments, specialty care and follow up after a hospital stay can make reliable transportation especially important to keeping care on track.

At PDRTA, transportation is part of the solution. Through partnerships with healthcare providers and community organizations, PDRTA works with local organizations to create transportation solutions that help patients get to appointments, access other essential services and stay connected to their care.

On July 23, PDRTA joined healthcare providers and community partners for IOP PHP: A Local Healthcare Transportation Solution, a webinar focused on the transportation challenges patients face and the partnerships helping address them.

The conversation brought together perspectives from PDRTA, CareSouth Carolina, McLeod Access Health, Carolina Pines Regional Medical Center and Genesis Healthcare, highlighting how transportation partnerships can develop into practical solutions for patients and providers.

Partnerships That Open the Door to Care



Addressing transportation barriers takes more than a bus. It takes partnerships between transit agencies, healthcare providers, community organizations and other local partners who understand the needs of the people they serve.

PDRTA serves six counties across more than 3,500 square miles, covering a largely rural region where communities can be spread out and transportation options can be limited.

Over the past year, PDRTA provided more than 500,000 passenger trips, with healthcare related travel accounting for 41 percent of passenger trips. Those trips include transportation to routine appointments, specialists, cancer centers, dialysis, dental care and other healthcare services.

For PDRTA, partnerships are also an important part of making those transportation services possible. As a public transit agency, PDRTA relies on federal, state and local funding. Because local funding is required to access federal and state transportation funding, local partnerships play an important role in helping PDRTA expand services and meet transportation needs throughout the region.

Partnerships can also give healthcare organizations another way to support transportation needs without having to operate their own vehicles, hire drivers or take on the full costs of insurance, fuel and vehicle maintenance. Instead, organizations can work with an established public transportation system to help connect the people they serve with the care and services they need.

When Transportation Is the Missing Link

For CareSouth Carolina, the connection between transportation and healthcare access has been clear for years. Joe Bittle, LBSW, MHA, Chief of Community Health at CareSouth Carolina, described how conversations with PDRTA began about a decade ago around access to care and transportation barriers. Those conversations grew into partnerships involving healthcare providers, local governments and community organizations.

The impact of transportation can be seen in whether patients are able to make it to their appointments. CareSouth Carolina's no show rate was approximately 47 percent in 2019. Within two years, that number had dropped to 18 percent and has remained around 16 to 17 percent in recent years. Bittle attributed the improvement in part to the availability of free PDRTA transportation.



Caregivers, navigators and community health workers help patients understand that transportation is available. The service can also extend beyond medical appointments, helping people reach pharmacies, grocery stores and other essential destinations.

Building Transportation Solutions Around Community Needs

Transportation needs do not always end when a patient leaves the doctor's office or hospital. Lorene S. Godbold, LMSW, Assistant Director of Access Health Pee Dee and the Healthy Outcomes Program at McLeod Health, discussed the organization's longstanding partnership with PDRTA, which began more than a decade ago with conversations about transportation needs and barriers to care. One early partnership led to a free downtown shuttle serving patients in the area around McLeod Regional Medical Center. Over time, the partnership has expanded to address other transportation needs throughout the community.

In the lower Florence and Lake City area, healthcare and community partners have come together around a shared transportation solution. Referrals can come from organizations including MUSC, Lydia's House, Hope Health, Mercy Medicine and Light House Ministries. PDRTA then provides transportation for participating patients at no cost.



Approximately 57 patients are consistently using PDRTA transportation through this particular initiative, with the program continuing to grow. The partnership demonstrates how transportation solutions can evolve as communities identify new needs and find ways to share responsibility for addressing them.

Transportation as Part of the Continuum of Care

At Carolina Pines Regional Medical Center, transportation has become part of the process of helping patients return to care after leaving the hospital.

Laurie Jones, BSN, RN-BC, Director of Quality and Population Health at Carolina Pines Medical Group, works in prevention, population health and hospital discharge planning, including helping patients return to their physician within seven days after a new diagnosis.

She shared that transportation was the number one issue identified among patients who wanted to attend appointments but did not have a vehicle, a family member or friend who could take them or another transportation option. For those patients, demand response transportation has become an important part of the care process.

Carolina Pines has also used PDRTA transportation to help patients reach pulmonology, hematology, oncology, imaging appointments and medication pickups. Laurie reported a 52 percent reduction in readmissions since partnering with PDRTA through demand response transportation.

Just as importantly, she described a change in how patients approach their care. When patients know transportation is available, they can identify transportation concerns earlier rather than waiting until an appointment becomes difficult or impossible to attend.



"How am I going to get there?" is a question patients should not have to face alone when transportation is the barrier.

Making Transportation Part of the Patient Conversation

For Genesis Healthcare, the partnership with PDRTA has grown significantly over time.

PDRTA transported approximately 145 Genesis patients in 2020. In recent years, that number has grown to approximately 400 to 550 patients. Many of those passengers are repeat passengers who depend on transportation because they do not have another way to get where they need to go.

Howard Nettles, Director of Development at Genesis Healthcare, emphasized that reliability is an important part of that relationship. When transportation is dependable, healthcare providers can have greater confidence that patients have a way to reach their appointments.



He also highlighted the importance of awareness. Genesis has added PDRTA transportation information to new patient packets, signage inside Genesis locations and on its website. Staff have also been educated about PDRTA services and the bus live tracking app and website, SPOT ETA, so they can help answer patient questions.

Making transportation part of the conversation early can help patients understand their options before transportation becomes an immediate problem.

Building Solutions Together

The partnerships highlighted throughout the July 23 discussion demonstrate what is possible when transportation and healthcare providers work together to address barriers to care. From helping patients reach routine appointments and specialized treatment to supporting transportation after a hospital stay, these partnerships have created practical solutions around the needs of the communities they serve.

The discussion also made clear that there is no single solution to healthcare transportation. Effective partnerships depend on communication, shared responsibility and a willingness to find new approaches as needs change. The experiences shared by PDRTA, McLeod Access Health, CareSouth Carolina, Carolina Pines Regional Medical Center and Genesis Healthcare showed how those relationships can translate into meaningful support for patients.

For PDRTA, the work continues. By working alongside healthcare providers, community organizations and local partners, PDRTA can help identify transportation barriers, connect people with available services and develop new solutions where gaps exist.

careSOUTH carolina

McLeod AccessHealth Pee Dee

Carolina Pines Regional Medical Center
Empowered by ScionHealth
PARTIALLY OWNED BY PHYSICIANS

Genesis Healthcare, Inc.

Thank you to all of our partners for your continued support and commitment to improving transportation access throughout the Pee Dee!

CONNECTING THE PEOPLE OF THE PEE DEE



EXPANDING ACCESS THROUGH REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION

PDRTA's new Tri County Connector is creating new transportation connections between Marion, Dillon and Florence counties. The service launched September 8 and operates Monday through Friday, providing connections across county lines for employment, healthcare, education and other essential destinations.

The service combines two transportation models to meet different regional needs. An early morning scheduled connection travels from Marion and Mullins to Harbor Freight in Dillon, providing a direct connection for employees traveling to work.

Beginning at 8am, the service transitions to reservation based Demand Response, providing scheduled connections between Marion, Dillon and Florence. Passengers can reserve trips through PDRTA Dispatch at (843) 665-2227, option 2.

Community input helped shape the service before it launched. PDRTA held outreach meetings in Marion and Dillon counties where passengers, community members, employers and local partners shared information about transportation needs, travel patterns, times and important destinations. That feedback helped guide both the service model and the connections the Tri County Connector provides.



The Tri County Connector is made possible through funding from the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission State Economic Infrastructure Development Grant Program. More than a new route, the service represents an investment in regional mobility and creates additional opportunities for people to connect with jobs, healthcare, education and essential services across the Pee Dee. For community organizations and local partners, it also provides another transportation resource to share with the people and communities they serve.



WHAT'S YOUR STORY? PASSENGER OUTREACH CAMPAIGN



What is it like to be a PDRTA passenger? Behind every trip is a person, a reason and a story.

PDRTA is launching What's Your Story?, a new passenger outreach campaign designed to hear directly from the people who use public transportation across the Pee Dee. While data helps us understand how our services are being used, personal experiences help tell the story behind those numbers.

We want to hear what transportation makes possible for the people we serve. Maybe it is getting to work each day, making it to a medical appointment, attending school, taking care of family responsibilities or maintaining independence. It may be a particular trip that stands out, a challenge that transportation helped overcome or an experience that shaped how someone views public transportation. This campaign is about listening to the full experience of our passengers.

Passengers across all six counties can share their experience by emailing info@pdrta.org or by connecting with PDRTA directly. We will also be working with our drivers and dispatchers to help identify passengers who may be interested in sharing their stories.

Selected stories may be featured in PDRTA's newsletter, website, social media, photos, video and other communications. Sharing these experiences gives our passengers an opportunity to help others understand the important role public transportation plays in their lives, their communities and across the Pee Dee.





PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE OF THE FLORENCE TRANSIT SYSTEM

As use of public transportation continues to grow in Florence, PDRTA is evaluating how the Florence Transit System can better meet the community's changing transportation needs.

Building on recommendations from PDRTA's recent comprehensive transit study and the continued growth of Fare Free Florence, the agency is evaluating opportunities to better align routes and schedules with current travel patterns, improve on-time performance, strengthen connections and make service more responsive to how people travel throughout the community. PDRTA is also evaluating improvements to passenger information, bus stop infrastructure, routes and service frequencies.

Proposed improvements could include expanded weekday service hours and closing the current Saturday service gap. These changes could be particularly important for people working second-shift jobs who may have transportation to work but limited options for getting home after their shift.

Community input is an important part of this process. PDRTA will hold two public hearings on Tuesday, October 13, at 10:45am and 2:45pm at the PDRTA Main Office, 313 S. Stadium Road, Florence, SC 29506, to share information about the proposed improvements and hear from passengers, residents, businesses and other members of the community.

Both hearings will cover the same information, so community members may attend whichever time is most convenient. Both hearings are open to the public, and transportation to and from the hearings will be available through Florence Transit System Route 3. Public input received during the hearings will help guide the final direction of the proposed changes, which could take effect as early as November 16.



Your Message on the Move in Our Community

Every day, PDRTA buses travel throughout the Pee Dee, connecting people to work, appointments, school, shopping and destinations throughout our communities. Along the way, our buses are moving billboards, carrying your message through the communities we serve. When you advertise with PDRTA, your message becomes part of the community.

Traditional billboard advertising in the Pee Dee can cost thousands of dollars per month, depending on the size, location and level of exposure. PDRTA offers advertising options that move through multiple communities each day, giving organizations the opportunity to reach audiences across the region. Advertising with PDRTA is more than gaining visibility. It is an investment in regional growth, workforce access, healthcare access and connected communities.

We are proud to partner with organizations that choose PDRTA to help carry their message throughout the region. Interested in putting your message on the move? Contact Lauren Leonard at lleonard@pdrta.org to learn more about advertising opportunities.

Stay Connected with Us!

Want the latest updates, behind the scenes looks and community highlights from PDRTA? Follow us on social media! From service updates and special events to employee shoutouts and community news, our social channels are a great way to stay connected and see what's happening at PDRTA.

Follow us today and stay in the loop!



FOR NEWS AND UPDATES

NEXT STOP?

Upcoming Dates!

Oct 13 - Florence Public Hearings at PDRTA Admin 10:45am and 2:45pm - Transportation provided route 3
Oct 20-22 - 2026 SC Rural Health Conference
Oct 22 - SC Rural Transit Day in Sumter hosted by Santee Wateree
Oct 23 - 6-8:30pm - PDRTA Boo Bus at Florence County Emergency Management's Trunk or Treat
Oct 24 - 10am-1pm -Neighborhood Block Party - Genesis and Healthy Blue Blue Choice Health Plan of SC

Nov 7 - TASC Roadeo in Myrtle Beach, SC
Nov 7 - 2026 Pecan Festival
Nov 11 - Veterans Day - NORMAL Service Hours on all PDRTA routes
Nov 14 - 6-10 - PDRTA's Employee End Of Year Celebration
Nov 25 - Thanksgiving Eve - Normal service on all PDRTA routes.
Nov 26 - Thanksgiving Day - NO service on all PDRTA routes. Normal schedules will resume Friday, November 27.

Dec 24 - Christmas Eve - Normal service on all PDRTA routes.
Dec 25 - Christmas Day - NO service on all PDRTA routes. Normal schedules will resume Friday, December 26.
Dec 31 - New Year's Eve - NORMAL Service Hours on all PDRTA routes.

Jan 1 - New Year's Day - ONLY routes serving Myrtle Beach and Workforce locations will be operational.

Feb 1-5 - Passenger Survey Week

For more updates and information, follow us on social or view our website at www.pdrta.org



We're Hiring at PDRTA!

We are looking for talented individuals to join our team!

PDRTA offers competitive benefits, including SC State Retirement and Health coverage, 100% of the employee health insurance premium, $30,000 in life insurance and access to a free Employee Assistance Program. Full-time employees also receive holiday pay, annual leave, sick leave, personal days, floating holidays and community service leave.

If you or someone you know is interested in joining a team that keeps our community moving, apply today:

https://jobs.appone.com/PDRTA

Feedback? We value your input!

Share your thoughts, suggest improvements.

Email info@pdrta.org or
call 843.665.2227

Subscribe or unsubscribe
Email Lauren Leonard at
lleonard@pdrta.org

PDRTA is an Equal Opportunity Employer. PDRTA operates all its programs and services without regard to race, color, and national origin in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.