



For immediate release

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**TCAT to pilot on-demand rides via “Tconnect” for Dryden area this spring
First three of a series of informational meetings slated in February**

Given the high cost of running buses to sparsely populated areas, many people in rural Tompkins County don’t enjoy the same level of transit as do their urban – and to some extent – their suburban counterparts.

These so-called “transit deserts” afflicting communities nationwide can make it difficult, if not impossible, for rural residents without cars to get to jobs, schools or wherever they need go.

Tompkins County transportation leaders and a cutting edge software company are hoping they found part of the solution through the creation of a low-cost, on-demand, app-based transit service called “Tconnect, ”a two-year pilot project starting in April in the Dryden area.

Bolstered with a nearly \$260,000 grant from New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), Tconnect will provide on-demand rides to TCAT’s Route 43 bus stops in downtown Dryden in both directions for residents who live outside of reasonable walking distance, enabling them to travel anywhere within TCAT’s service area.

Alicia Barton, President and CEO, NYSERDA said, “I applaud TCAT and Dryden for their commitment to launching a pilot program that moves the State toward Governor Cuomo’s clean energy and climate goals while providing a valuable service for rural residents seeking public transportation options. To combat climate change, we need to deliver equitable and meaningful results at an unparalleled pace and the success of this highly-replicable, low-cost pilot program will help reduce the number of cars on the road, lower harmful emissions within our communities, and safeguard our natural resources.”

Informational meetings

To engage and enlist potential riders, the first three of a series of informational meeting are scheduled Feb. 12, Feb. 17 and Feb. 22 in the Dryden area with more being planned, according to TCAT and its project partners that include Way2Go, Cornell Cooperative Extension's transportation education program; paratransit provider Gadabout Transportation Services, Inc.; and HyperCommute, a multimodal shared transportation software platform created by San Francisco-based Urban Mobility Inc.

Meeting specifics:

- 8 a.m. Wed., Feb. 12, at the Village of Dryden's offices, 16 South St., Dryden
- 2 p.m. Mon., Feb. 17, at Southworth Library, 24 W. Main St., Dryden
- 10 a.m. Sat., Feb. 22, Community Room at Poet's Landing, 4 T.S. Eliot Drive, Dryden

"Our hope is that Tconnect will provide a unique solution to what is known as the "first-mile, last-mile" connectivity problem many communities all across the country have been grappling with for a very long time," said TCAT General Manager Scot Vanderpool.

What it will cost?

Riders can take advantage of a one-month free trial period from the day of launch, which will be early April. Cost for the program is still under review, but project leaders said they will strive to make it as affordable as possible. Riders will pay regular fare when boarding a TCAT bus.

"Many low-income and transit-dependent populations currently do not have the ability to get to essential services, such as doctors' appointments, to the pharmacy or even to job interviews," Vanderpool said. "This is really an equity situation we are trying to address; our way to provide an essential service that is affordable –obviously a big factor for low-income people."

More details will follow later this year, but after the project rolls out, Tconnect will offer weekday service as follows:

- Gadabout bus operators will drive Tconnect-branded minibuses that will transport people to and from their homes (or nearby waiting locations) and a TCAT bus stop, which in this case is route 43 that provides 14 inbound and outbound weekday trips;
- TCAT route 43 will then transport passengers to and from other TCAT routes from TCAT's downtown hub in the Ithaca Commons to get them to where they need to go anywhere in TCAT's service area;
- Urban Mobility, Inc.'s innovative ridesharing technology groups riders based on their location and travel times at the first-mile/last-mile level in real-time with guaranteed connections to and from route 43 trips for a "smooth end-to-end travel experience for riders," said Urban Mobility Founder Hari Prasad. (It's important to note that for those who do not have or wish to use the technology, booking by phone will be an option.)

Depending on its success, the Tconnect model has the potential to expand to other rural areas in Tompkins County, but project leaders selected the Dryden area for trial due to its rural-town-village topography and demographics, as well as the level of TCAT service already provided there.

TCAT Assistant General Manager Matt Yarrow, who is project manager and who worked to the NYSERDA grant starting two years ago, said TCAT has been financially and operationally unable to increase fixed-route transit to many low-density areas of the County.

“This pilot is exciting because, if we can prove that we’ve found a convenient and cost-effect model to reach new riders, it has the potential of being replicated elsewhere in the county,” Yarrow said. “I encourage Dryden residents to look into this new offering and to ride the new service early and often.”

Theodora Weatherby, environmental educator from Way2Go, said the Tconnect program addresses a number of needs within the community by reducing transportation barriers rural residents face; by providing alternative options for commuters, and by reducing greenhouse gas emissions by supporting access to public transportation options.

At the informational meetings, Weatherby said that Tconnect’s partners not only hope to inform and attract riders, but to also garner feedback to help the program to improve and grow.

Future meetings will be announced at <https://www.tcatbus.com/tconnect> and through local media outlets. Those seeking more information about the meetings can call (607) 277-9388 ext. 560 or by email at tconnect737@gmail.com.

Tconnect will make every effort to assist those who need transportation to attend any of the meetings or to accommodate persons with disabilities, or those with limited English proficiency. Please call (607) 277-9388 ext. 560 at least five days in advance of the meeting date to enable time for Tconnect to make arrangements.

Funded with a grant by the New York State Energy and Research Development, Tconnect is a pilot project through a partnership of Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit, Inc. (TCAT); Way2Go, a program of Cornell Cooperative Extension; Gadabout Transportation Services, Inc.; and Urban Mobility Inc., with the aim of reducing transportation barriers and fostering transportation equity in Tompkins County.

TCAT, Inc. (Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit, Inc.) is a not-for-profit corporation that provides public transportation for Tompkins County. TCAT’s annual ridership is more than 4 million, covering a distance of about 1.6 million miles, with a fleet of 55 buses. TCAT also offers complementary ADA Paratransit through a contract with Gadabout Transportation Services, Inc. For more information about TCAT, please visit www.tcatbus.com or call (607) 277-RIDE. Twitter: TCATrides. Facebook: EverythingTCAT. TCAT is a Tompkins County Certified Living Wage and an Equal Employment Opportunity Employer. Passengers are advised to look for service information and updates at TCAT’s [Bus Tracker](#) or [find out how to download apps here](#).