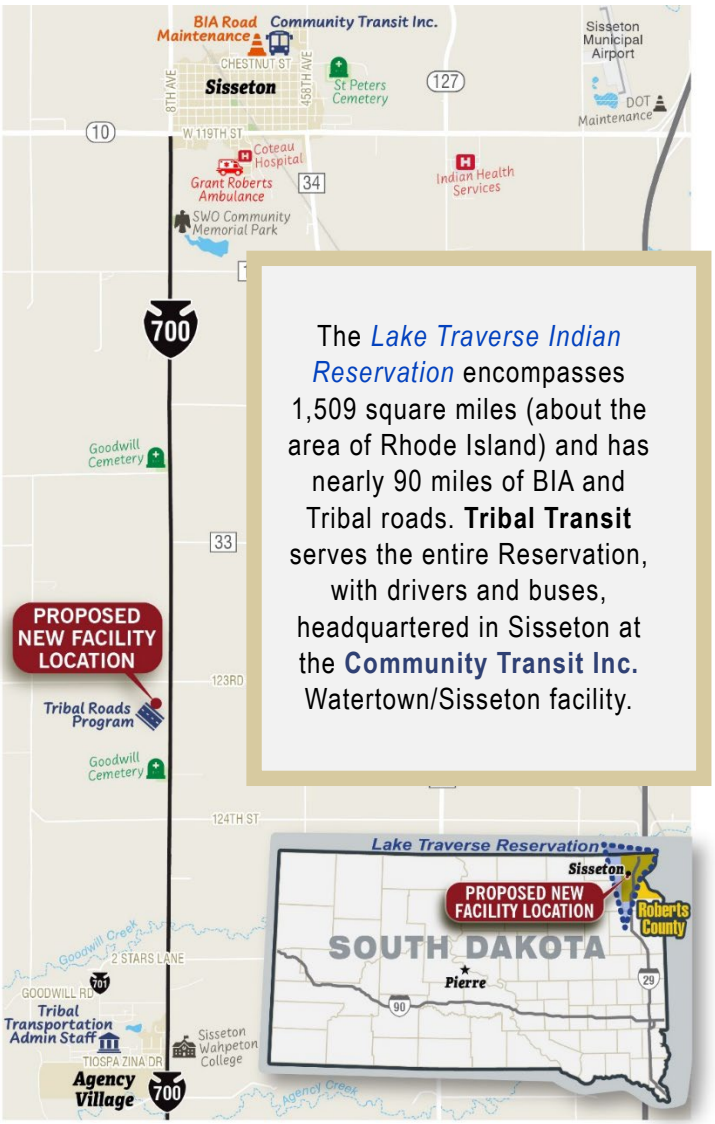
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION FACILITY PROJECT

2025 Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) Grant

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate (SWO) is requesting $9,338,314 to support completion of final design and construction costs for the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate Department of Transportation Facility Project (the Project). Upon completion, the new facility will serve as a single consolidated location for administrative functions for the SWO Department of Transportation (DOT), Tribal Transit, and Road Maintenance staff, transit and maintenance vehicle storage, in-house vehicle maintenance and washing bays, and provide a covered sand/salt storage area. The Project will provide regional impact to the Lake Traverse Indian Reservation in northeastern South Dakota, with lands that stretch into North Dakota. The combined services facility will help the Tribal community develop and implement long-term resilience and growth of their transportation programs and infrastructure. This facility will not only assist the Tribe in streamlining current transportation programs but provide opportunities for economic benefit and workforce growth.

Currently, Tribal Transit, DOT administration, and Road Maintenance all work out of different facilities. Tribal Transit is working out of the Community Transit, Inc. (Community Transit) office in Sisseton. DOT administration staff, consisting of the director, finance manager and transit administrator, are located at the Tribal Administration building in Agency Village. Road Maintenance is working out of a pole shed on a parcel of land owned by the Tribe approximately halfway between Sisseton and Agency Village. This is the location proposed for the new DOT facility. The existing Road Maintenance facility is building is in desperate need of repair. Upgrades to the existing facility are too extensive and costly, and would not only be less economical, but would also not provide the space needed for the Tribe's long-term goals of hiring additional staff and expanding transit services. Having staff located at separate facilities brings many challenges with communication, coordination, and service efficiency. Additionally, transit and



The *Lake Traverse Indian Reservation* encompasses 1,509 square miles (about the area of Rhode Island) and has nearly 90 miles of BIA and Tribal roads. **Tribal Transit** serves the entire Reservation, with drivers and buses, headquartered in Sisseton at the **Community Transit Inc.** Watertown/Sisseton facility.

maintenance vehicles, as well as the salt/sand piles, are all outside and subject to extreme weather which causes increased deterioration, an increased maintenance, preparation, and warmup time. Tribal Transit is also seeking funding to purchase its first electric transit van as a step towards reducing transportation-related air pollution and providing cost-savings to the Tribe for local routes.

Detailed Statement of Work

The Project proposes a new facility that will house Tribal Transit, DOT administration, and Road Maintenance staff all in one location. This will improve efficiency and coordination efforts between the three transportation divisions, provide adequate space for SWO Transit to grow their capacity and move the Tribe toward operating their own community transit service. Additionally, the facility will provide adequate space for vehicles and maintenance equipment to be stored and maintained and provide for more efficient access and response during emergencies in inclement weather that may require a snowplow to clear roads for emergency services to access a location. The new combined services facility would include and ADA accessible public waiting area and restrooms, staff offices, conference room, parts storage, four drive-through 80-foot by 25-foot bays, a wash bay, a vehicle maintenance bay with vehicle lift, diesel fueling station, two Type-2 electric charging station, a geothermal heating system, public parking spaces, security cameras and fencing, lighting, and a covered salt/sand storage area that will serve all of the Lake Traverse Reservation. SWO is requesting funding for the purchase of one electric transit vehicle, funding to upgrade the current electrical infrastructure at the proposed location for the electric charging station, and funds to partner with Electric Nation to provide training and outreach to staff and the public on the transition to electric vehicles for local transit routes. Providing safe and efficient transit service is a priority for the Tribe. As seen by the increase in ridership numbers provided below, the transit program is utilized by a significant number of people including elderly and disabled adults and children, ensuring not just access to services and goods, but also increased safety for vulnerable and disadvantaged populations.

Current Design Status

This project is a high priority for SWO. The Tribe has initiated planning, preliminary design, and survey for the project. This preliminary work is being paid using the Tribe's own funding. Project planning is approximately 30% complete and will be at 90% by the end of 2025. A preliminary building footprint has been created. Legal survey, wetland survey, cultural records searches, public engagement, and a preliminary site design have also been completed. The final design activities in the grant request include architectural design and detailing for code compliance, electrical and mechanical design, and finalization of the site design.

Existing Transportation Challenges

- Barriers to expand transit service
- Deteriorating facilities
- Lack of efficiency
- Construction and Maintenance burdens
- Transportation and emergency service vulnerabilities

Transportation Challenges and Solutions

There is a current agreement between Tribal Transit and Community Transit, a 501(c)3 non-profit agency, that has recently been extended. The continued agreement is necessary due to SWO's limited capacity, staff, and no space to park their buses. Community Transit provides transit services to eight counties in South Dakota and currently assists

Tribal Transit with service between Agency Village, where Tribal Headquarters is located, and Sisseton. They transport members of the community to and from employment, healthcare, educational institutions, and essential services, giving Tribal Transit the ability to provide on-demand response services to all seven districts on the Reservation as well as off-peak transportation services to locations such as pow wows, tribal elder days, and school sporting events.

According to the National Equity Analysis, 20 percent of Native American households in the state of South Dakota do not have access to a car[1], limiting access to essential services and goods, and isolating them from educational and workforce opportunities. The transit system is heavily used by a large number of Reservation residents, increasing transportation efficiency, safety, and improving mobility. According to FY24 ridership data, most riders were in the general public category, with elderly citizens as the next highest category, followed by school age youth making up the 3rd highest number of riders. Ridership data indicates in FY24 there were 16,634 rides given to residents of the Lake Traverse Reservation, up fifty-eight percent (58%) from FY23 (10,500 rides) and ninety-two percent (92%) from FY21 (8,656 rides). The most frequently occurring trip purposes were for shopping, employment, and medical appointments. According to the American Public Transportation Association, in areas where public transit is made available and attractive, pedestrian fatalities decrease by as much as fifty percent (50%). There were five (5) pedestrian fatalities on the Lake Traverse Reservation from 2009-2023. Based off the current statistics, expanding SWO transit service theoretically prevents 2 or 3 fatalities on the Lake Traverse Reservation in the next 15 years.

SWO currently employees a Transit Program Coordinator and four bus drivers. SWO would like to establish an independent community transit service, however, this is hindered by lack of office space, parking capacity, and staff to solely take over public transit service on the Reservation.



The Road Maintenance department is working out of a pole shed on a parcel of land owned by the Tribe south of the city of Sisseton, where the new DOT facility would be located, *as shown in the picture*. This facility is not ADA compliant nor environmentally sustainable. It is a pole frame building with metal siding, dirt floor, and single-family-residence-grade electricity and water service. Upgrades to the facility would be more expensive than is warranted and would not provide the space needed for the Tribe's long-term plans to add additional staff to provide surveying and construction monitoring services. Transit and maintenance vehicles, as well as salt/sand piles, are all kept outside subjected to extreme weather which causes increased deterioration to equipment and materials. Road Maintenance staff are also early responders assisting in clearing roads during storms for emergency services to safely pass or enacting detours as necessary. Having equipment stored outside increases warm up and

[1] https://nationalequityatlas.org/indicators/Car_access?geo=02000000000046000&breakdown=by-race-ethnicity

idle time, and sand stored outside often freezes into clumps, increasing maintenance time needed to manually break up material prior to dispatching for emergency purposes, which delays response times.

BIA roads are historically maintained by the federal agency. The local BIA office on the Lake Traverse Reservation only has one staff member. Due to this, BIA has a program agreement with the Tribal Road Maintenance program to assist BIA in clearing 120 miles of routes. The Tribe uses TTP maintenance funds to assist with BIA road clearing in the winter. Additionally, the Tribal Road Construction program maintains certain non-federal roads. These routes, which serve elderly, dialysis, and terminal patients, are identified through collaboration with SWO Emergency Management Services and Indian Health Services. This adds approximately 200 miles of non-federal access roads across the Lake Traverse Reservation. This off-system work is funded with gaming funds from the Tribe's casinos. It is the Tribe's goal to take over the BIA Road Maintenance Program through PL93-638 contracting. Many other tribes have done the same to streamline and provide better DOT services, road maintenance, and snow removal services throughout the Reservation. At that time, BIA staff, their equipment, and their funding package would be incorporated into the space and operation of the proposed new DOT facility.

The Project will provide the funding needed to construct a new energy efficient Tribal Transportation facility that will improve coordination and efficiency efforts of the SWO DOT staff, reduce financial and maintenance burdens, expand transit service to this historically disadvantage community, and purchase SWO's first electric transit van for their local route vehicles to help reduce transportation-related air pollution on the Lake Traverse Reservation.

Project history and related infrastructure investments

FY2015	$300,000	FTA Tribal Transit Competitive Program	2 buses and operating expenses
FY2019	$481,761	FTA Tribal Transit Competitive Program	2 buses and operating expenses
FY2020	$328,761	FTA Tribal Transit Competitive Program	operating expenses
FY2021	$342,981	FTA Tribal Transit Competitive Program	operating expenses and cameras
FY2021	$100,700	FTA Tribal Transit Formula Grant	operating expenses
FY2022	$121,387	FTA Tribal Transit Formula Grant	operating expenses
FY2024	$690,327	FTA Tribal Transit Competitive Program	2 buses and operating expense

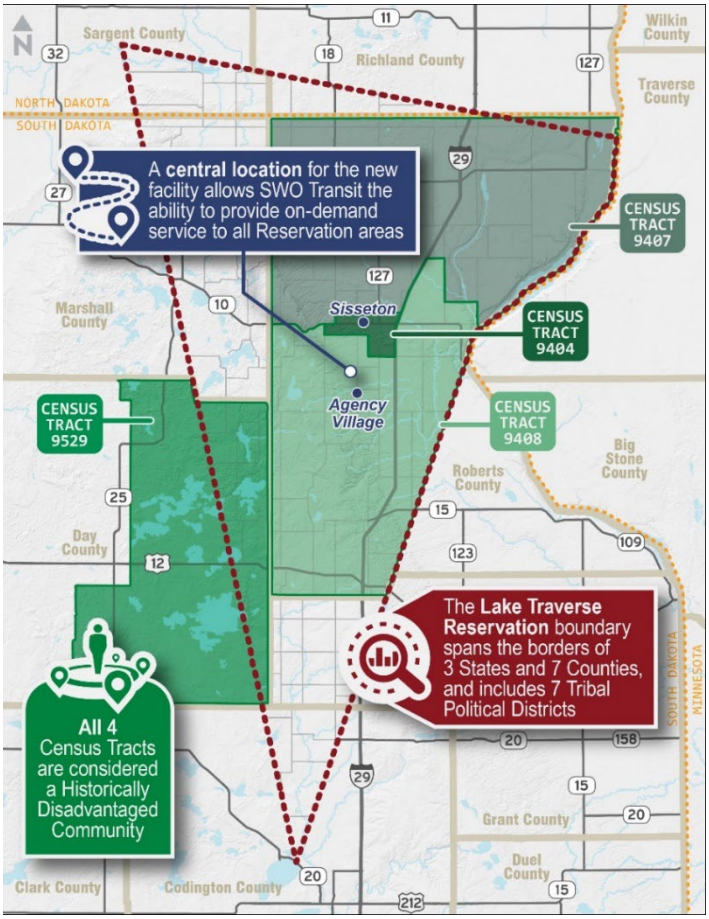
In recent years, the SWO has invested all its available Tribal Transportation Program funds to maintain Reservation roadways and operate the Tribal Transit Program. SWO was first awarded an FTA Tribal Transit Competitive Program grant in 2015 to initiate a public shuttle service between Sisseton and Agency Village. With this funding the Tribe began their ongoing partnership with Community Transit and purchased the original 2 buses. The Tribe used TTP funding to pay for all operating expenses until they received an additional FTA grant in 2019. That grant off set operating expenses and allowed for the purchase of 2 additional buses, expanding transit service and connections across the Reservation. Competitive grants were awarded in 2020, 2021 and 2024 to fund operational expenses for the transit program. The 2021 funding also included a capital request to equip the current fleet of buses with a camera system, improving safety for drivers and passengers, and the 2024 funding included a capital request to purchase two new buses that have reached their end of useful life. SWO

received their first FTA annual formula allocation in FY21 for $100,700. This funding was used toward operating expenses paid to Community Transit for FY22 ridership. SWO FTA annual formula allocation for FY22 was $121,387[2] and again used towards the operating expenses paid to Community Transit. Formula allocation for FY23 has not been released but again is anticipated to be used to off-set operating expenses paid to Community Transit. All prior grant awards have been used to ensure people on the Lake Traverse Reservation are able to access public transit for essential services.

Project Location

The Lake Traverse Reservation is in the northeastern corner of South Dakota, with lands that stretch into North Dakota. The Reservation is home to many individuals and families in financially sensitive situations, with 40.8 percent of people living in poverty and a 50 percent unemployment rate[3], compared to the State of South Dakota's unemployment rate currently averaging about 2 percent. Access to reliable, safe multimodal transportation is critical to living sustainably in this impoverished rural area. The Reservation has a population of 11,391 people with Sisseton being its largest community with a population of 2,479 people. Sisseton is the regional hub providing access to goods and services, health care, education, employment, childcare, and recreation. Agency Village (population 970) is the headquarters for tribal services within the Lake Traverse Indian Reservation.

The Project will be located in between the city of Sisseton and Agency Village, in rural northeast South Dakota, and will serve the whole of the Lake Traverse Indian Reservation. The Reservation encompasses parts of five counties in South Dakota, with the majority of land area, 60 percent, in Roberts County (Census Tracts 9404, 9407 & 9408), and lesser amounts in Grant County (Census Tract 9533), Codington County (Census Tract 9546), Day County (Census Tract 9529), and Marshall County (Census Tract 9508), and reaching into two counties in southeastern North Dakota, Sargent County (Census Tract 9742) and Richland County (Census Tract 9714). Census tracts 9529 and 9408 are in **Areas of Persistent Poverty** and Census Tracts 9407, 9404, 9408, and 9529 are all in a **Historically Disadvantaged Community**, *as shown in the adjacent map.*



[2] https://www.transit.dot.gov/funding/grants/tribal-transit-formula-grants-5311c1b
[3] Economic Conditions of the Lake Traverse Reservation — santicola & company