Topic: Transportation in Phelps County

Blue Ribbons:

• Phelps County is a **transportation hub** with Interstate 44 cutting across the mid-section of the county east to west and Highway 63 traversing the county north and south. Its transportation network positions it well for economic activity.

• City of Rolla and key stakeholders were **innovative** with the passage of a Transportation District that taxed itself to make local transportation improvements in Rolla. Several projects have been accomplished, including the extension of Highway 72 to Interstate 44 and a new entrance to the MST campus with a round-about to calm traffic on Highway 63 near the Missouri S&T, a new street that provides a more direct connection to Interstate 44 and pedestrian improvements to improve walkability and safety around the campus in proximity to Highway.

• SMTS has developed **a deviated, fixed route transit** to better serve citizens in Rolla who lack transportation and/ or wish to use public transit. The service is dependable yet provides some flexibility, is affordable and provides easy access to the hospital and shopping areas.

• Phelps County has **engaged leadership and stakeholders** who are willing to share ideas and expertise in the area of transportation.

• Both the cities of St. James and Rolla have an **extensive sidewalk and trail network** that provides safe walking and biking opportunities and encourages health living choices. The City of Rolla continues to improve sidewalks to provide greater accessibility.

• The City of Rolla **owns an airport** that offers private pilots and area industry another transportation option.

Red Flags:

One of the Red Flags in Phelps County is the need for **more consistent transportation funding** at a local and state level, as well as identifying non-traditional sources to support taking care of the system and expansion. Funding continues to be inadequate to address all of the identified transportation needs within the county. With the increase of electric vehicles, monies accrued from the gas tax will continue to decline, even with the recent gas tax increase. MoDOT and the county need to be innovative and look for consistent local (city/county/state) funding sources dedicated to transportation.

Phelps County Bridges (per MoDOT)	
55 State Bridges (1 BNSF, 1 Pedestrian)	24 State Culverts
63 Local Bridges	16 Local Culverts
118 Total Bridges	**40 Total Culverts**

4 Poor Condition Bridges	3 Weight Restricted Bridges

Phelps County has added one more poor condition bridge since 2023. Fixing poor-condition bridges is critical to protecting public safety, ensuring that residents, school buses, emergency services, and commerce can travel without risk or detours. Securing funding for these repairs also supports economic stability by preventing costly closures and preserving essential infrastructure before deterioration becomes more expensive to address.

Benchmarks identified to track improvements on funding include increases to transportation funding annually for cities, county, and MoDOT. Since 2023, the state fuel tax has continued to increase by 2.5 cents per year to a total of 29.5 cents per gallon in 2025. In 2024, statewide user fees and other revenue accounted for just over $2 billion in funding. This is an increase from 2022, when the state received just under $1.7 billion in user fees and other revenue. However, with no other proposal for an increase in fuel tax, long-term funding increases will be dependent on other resources.

Greater investment in public transit services and the need for expanded services (per public survey and SMTS) is another Red Flag in the county. Public transit services improve the quality of life by providing mobility to those who need or choose to use them. For public transit to appeal to residents and become a staple in their lifestyle choices, the service must be well-designed, overcome physical and socioeconomic barriers and meet the needs of the transit dependent residents who may rely on public transportation due to age, disability, income, or other related circumstances. Between 2011 and 2023, public transit use remained extremely low, while travel by taxi or motorcycle also dropped significantly.

In Phelps County, commuting patterns show gradual but meaningful shifts in how residents travel to work. Driving alone continued to be the predominant mode, holding steady over the decade before declining slightly to 73.6% in 2023. Carpooling saw modest fluctuation, increasing to 14% in 2023 despite an overall decline since 2011. Active transportation remains limited, with walking decreasing slightly and biking—though still less than 1%—showing the largest relative growth. The share of residents working from home rose to 7%, reflecting broader remote-work trends. Average travel time increased from 17.9 to 20.4 minutes, indicating longer commutes or growing congestion across the county. The following table provides a summary of transportation modes for those residents traveling to work utilizing US Census ACS 5-Year Estimates with updates through the most recent set of data (2023).

Transportation Modes to Work	2011 (%)	2021 (%)	2023 (%)
Drove Alone	77.7	79.6	73.6
Carpool	11.8	11.2	14.0

Public Transit	0.3	0.1	0.1
Walk	4.2	3.6	3.8
Bike	0.1	0.2	0.7
Taxi, Motorcycle	1.9	0.5	0.9
Work from Home	4.0	4.9	7.0
Mean Travel Time to Work	17.9 minutes	20.1 minutes	20.4 minutes

While SMTS's deviated-fix route is relatively new, operating similar to a bus service within the city of Rolla, it still needs to build awareness and increase ridership in the community. Public transit is also subject to the availability of drivers and new vehicles. New vehicles continue to be delayed by over two years due to a lack of supply and transit agencies have difficulties hiring drivers. Without workforce and bus improvements, public transit struggles to meet all of the needs of the public, including after-hours and weekend services.

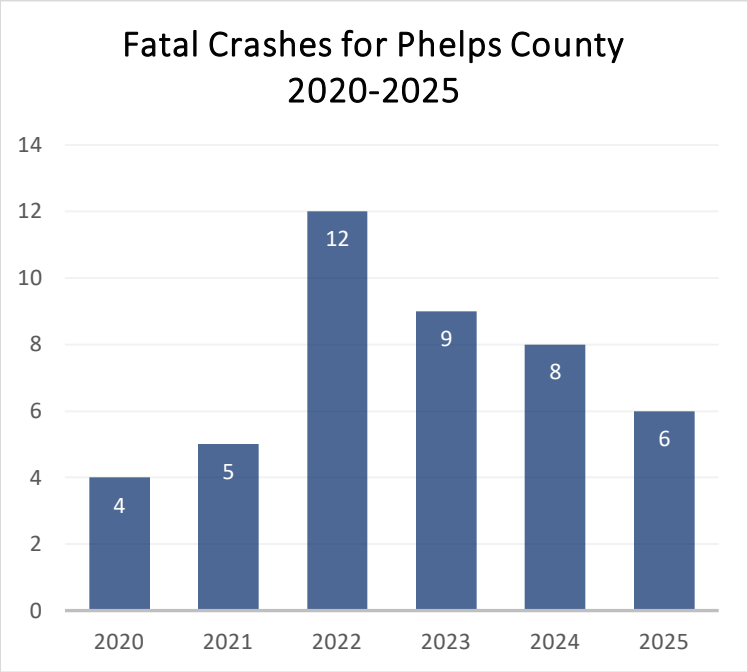
Benchmarks for transit needs include increases in state transit spending in the Central District, increases in SMTS ridership in Phelps County/census numbers, and an increase in the number of routes. While SMTS has not established additional transit routes since 2023 due to a rise in bus costs, driver shortages and federal funding cuts, other agencies have worked to provide transit services in the county. MOCA Transit offers free rides through volunteer drivers. Current funding covers low-income residents (up to 200% of poverty level), seniors, people with disabilities, and those seeking treatment for Opioid Use Disorder. The agency continues to pursue funding to cover rides for all users in the county.

While state funding for transit increased for a few years due to federal ARPA dollars, those funds have now been spent, and state budget figures show a significant decline in transit funding, compared to previous years.

The need for **more private transit services**, such as Uber and Lyft, as well as **access to cross-country bus service** continues to be a Red Flag for the county. Currently Lyft and Greyhound do not serve Phelps County and taxi services are limited. Benchmarks include the establishment of Lyft service, the expansion of Uber service, and the establishment of a Greyhound stop in Phelps County. Currently, the closest bus stops are in St. Louis, Jefferson City, and Springfield, MO.

While the county does a great job at bringing people together to discuss transportation needs, stakeholders need to **improve on consensus building and advocacy for priority needs and projects** in more areas than just state-maintained roadways. In order to present a unified front to state and federal elected officials, as well as MoDOT, to advocate for funding, Phelps County needs to establish a broader list of needs that include off-system projects for all areas (cities, county, multimodal needs, etc.). Benchmarks capable of tracking improved consensus building

may include improve attendance/participation in annual county transportation needs discussion (based on attendance sign-in sheet), and creation of a county-wide priority list of off-system needs. To date, attendance has remained steady over the past few years at county needs discussion meetings—with a slight increase in participation at the November 2025 meeting; however, a complete list of off-system transportation needs has not been completed. This continues to be a need for Phelps County.



Traffic safety, especially for pedestrians and motorcyclists, continues to be a Red Flag for Phelps County and the surrounding region. The Central Region Coalition for Roadway Safety tracks accidents and fatalities by cities and counties. While fatalities began to trend down by 2020 (4 total), the number of casualties increased three times that by 2022. Fortunately, fatalities have been in decline since 2022 with six fatalities in 2025 and one and a half months remaining in the year. Individuals in the transportation industry believe that increased speeds and distracted driving contribute heavily to fatalities in Phelps County. Aggressive drivers (speeding) played a part in 31 of the 44 fatal crashes between 2020-2025.

Regarding pedestrians and motorcyclists, the county has experienced nine total fatalities between 2020 and 2024. Though Missouri's helmet law was repealed in mid-2020, three motorcycle fatalities occurred prior to the change in law. The following table depicts the significant changes in fatalities for the last fully reported year compared to the previous report. Unfortunately, injury crashes have increased significantly.

Pedestrian and Motorcycle Accidents in Phelps County (State Hwy Patrol Crash Map)			
	2022	**2024**	**% Change**
Injury Crashes	20	25	25%
Fatalities	2	4	100%
Total Crashes	35	33	-0.06%

Seatbelt usage has also declined between 2022 and 2024 in Phelps County. Of the 10 fatal crashes involving motor vehicles in 2022, four were not wearing seatbelts (40%). In 2024, there were four total fatalities involving drivers or occupants of motor vehicles. Of the four fatalities, three were unbelted and one was listed as unknown (75-100%).

Benchmarks used to measure improvements in traffic safety should continue to be reviewed annually from MODOT statewide fatality reports, focusing on location, number of pedestrian and motorcycle-involved crashes, and increase in use of seatbelts/safety devices(helmets).

To summarize Phelps County's Red Flags in Transportation:

• More consistent transportation funding is needed at all levels of government to address the ever-growing list of needs within Phelps County.

• Greater investment in public transit services is needed with an expansion of services.

• More private transit services, such as Uber and Lyft along with access to bus service, are needed in the county.

• Consensus building and advocacy efforts should be expanded and more focused to include off-system needs in the county and cities.

• While the number of serious and fatality injury accidents in Phelps County have been on the decline, one death is too many. Additional work in traffic safety is needed.Updated Dec. 2, 2025