



**For Immediate Release  
July 28, 2021**

**Tconnect: App-based, on-demand transportation service extends to Dryden  
Weekday-only service to start Mon, Aug. 9 (\*Test roll out will be Aug. 4, 5 & 6)**

More than a year after the pandemic disrupted the original launch plan, Tconnect app-based, on-demand service will start weekdays in the Village of Dryden and surrounding rural areas on Mon., Aug. 9.

Tconnect's aim is to reduce transportation barriers for those living too far, generally considered to be more than ¼-mile, from a bus stop, to connect riders with a fixed TCAT route for travel anywhere within the TCAT system.

Using the [HyperCommute](#) app, created by Urban Mobility Inc., riders can book a trip, view the Tconnect bus location in real time and expect to be picked up near their home usually within 30 minutes of the time they wish to board.

Already running weekend-only service in the [Lansing-Etna](#) area, Tconnect currently uses TCAT's smaller 30-foot buses, branded with the Tconnect logo, to transport people to and from TCAT's Route 30 main stop at the Shops at Ithaca Mall. The bus also stops at a few select locations within the service areas to include popular retailers and businesses.

In Dryden, Tconnect will use Gadabout Transportation Inc. buses, also branded with the Tconnect logo, to connect riders with TCAT's Route 43 village stop in front of the Sunoco Station, 30 W. Main St. The Dryden service will also stop at select destinations within the Dryden service area to include Clark's Surefine, Southworth Library, Agway and a host of others.

The cost of riding Tconnect follows TCAT's affordable fare structure and includes transfers to complete one-way trips throughout TCAT's service area. Fares are \$1.50 per single adult ride and 75 cents for those eligible for half fare to include seniors 60 and older; youth 17 and under; and persons with disabilities. Dryden's Tconnect will link with Route 43 at the Main St. bus stop with two morning and two afternoon trips each to and from Ithaca and Dryden between 7:45 a.m. to noon and 1:30 p.m. to 5:45 p.m. See web page at [Tconnect](#).

**Tconnect aims to provide relief to “transit deserts”**

The Tconnect model has been in the works for more than two years and was created from a partnership with TCAT, Urban Mobility, Gadabout, as well as Way2Go, a program under Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County. Also, support came in 2019 when the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) awarded the project a grant.

In launching Tconnect, project managers here have joined a growing number of transit planners and advocates all over the country who are experimenting with similar, on-demand type models, referred to as “first-mile, last-mile” transportation and/or microtransit services. (See American Public Transportation Association [story](#).)

These programs target geographic areas with so-called “transit deserts,” or low-density residential pockets that don't have enough demand to cover the high cost of fixed-route transit,

**\*Please note: A test roll-out is scheduled for mornings only on Wed., Aug. 4, Thurs., Aug. 5, and Fri., Aug. 6, to give project managers and drivers a chance to work out any issues before the official start date on Mon., Aug. 9. Riders are invited to participate during this three-day test run and offer their feedback by emailing TCAT at [tcat@tcatmail.com](mailto:tcat@tcatmail.com). (Please write Tconnect in the**

but yet enough population to merit a less costly on-demand service. These types of services can be life changing, especially for low-income households that struggle to find transportation to work and to obtain basic services.

Depending on the program's success and available resources, Tconnect could expand to similar designated rural areas in Tompkins County to help fulfill the community's goals of reducing economic and social barriers and cutting down on greenhouse gas emissions.

### **Pandemic prompts change of plans while maintaining project momentum**

Tconnect's original plan was to begin the weekday-only service in Dryden in April. Planners chose the Dryden area for the pilot based on census and local demographic data that identified a number of residential neighborhoods with little to no TCAT service. The Dryden service area covers a nearly 4-mile radius from the main bus stop on Main Street in the Village of Dryden. Based on previous research, the project team has determined that 2,200 people live within 2.2 miles and another 2,000 live within 3.8 miles from a Dryden bus stop. These include an untapped market of would-be riders to include seniors, persons with disabilities or those with limited incomes.

Unfortunately, when the pandemic hit in spring of 2020, project managers were forced to put the brakes on the Dryden launch. Business closings and stay-at-home-orders caused TCAT ridership to plummet and planners to cut service. Steep service reductions at the time rendered it unrealistic to launch a weekday, on-demand service whose market plan was dependent upon a robust Monday-Friday fixed route; Route 43 is one of TCAT's busiest rural routes with 11 trips per weekday.

Though the Dryden launch was delayed, Tconnect planners have some experience to lean on. Instead of postponing the plan altogether in spring of 2020, planners opted to launch the Lansing-Etna service in August 2020, which enabled them to maintain the project's momentum and to analyze and refine the service model. Nonetheless, there are differences. Unlike the Dryden service whose major aim is to pick up new riders outside the TCAT service area, Tconnect's Lansing-Etna route replaced TCAT's fixed route 77, which had previously offered minimal weekend service.

In both areas, Tconnect's flexibility relies on Urban Mobility's software, which tracks vehicle location, coordinates rider requests with the fixed route schedule, and maps out directions sent to drivers via an in-bus screen. Another important feature of Tconnect is the use of smaller buses, which are far less costly to operate than the typical 40-foot, large-capacity bus typically needed for fixed-route service. The Tconnect service in the Lansing-Etna area are being operated by TCAT drivers using TCAT's small cutaway 30-foot, 29-passenger buses. The Dryden service will use Gadabout drivers and Gadabout's 18-foot, 10-passenger buses. In addition to being less expensive to operate, smaller buses are easier for drivers to maneuver on rural roads.

### **Using the service**

Project managers strongly urge riders to use and/or seek training on how to use the HyperCommute app. New versions of the app will be updated July 28. Anyone already using the app will see an automatic update to the newer version on July 31. (For more information or to download the app, click [here](#) for iPhone or click [here](#) for Android.)

Recognizing that many would-be riders do not have smartphones, riders can book Tconnect Dryden area trips with Gadabout Dispatch at (607) 273-1878 before 4:30pm. Riders can also email Gadabout for same-day scheduling before 4:30 p.m. at: [gadaboutgroup@tcatmail.com](mailto:gadaboutgroup@tcatmail.com). Lansing-Etna weekend Tconnect service can be booked by calling TCAT dispatch at (607) 277-7433 ext. 620.

For those who need app training and additional information, Tconnect team members will be conducting outreach sessions and welcome would-be riders to contact them for app training or to answer any questions about the service. To request assistance or a meeting, email team members at [tcat@tcatmail.com](mailto:tcat@tcatmail.com) (write Tconnect in the subject line) or call (607) 277-(RIDE) and ask for a Tconnect team member.