

Library Spotlight

Driving Access With Chattanooga's Library-Transit Collaboration

The Chattanooga Public Library (CPL) has long been a hub for community innovation, from launching a recording studio and mobile kitchen cart to building one of the largest maker spaces in the country. With the Read and Ride program, CPL is again leading with creativity and purpose. In partnership with CARTA (the city's public transit system), the library has developed an initiative that provides free bus passes to young people, with a little help from Beanstack.

Lyn Hunter, CPL's supervising youth librarian, is the driving force behind the initiative. With a passion for public service and a flair for joyful chaos, Lyn brings the energy and heart that help turn big ideas into impactful programs.



“Chattanoogans really believe that they can do stuff. And that’s really great. It’s how this library is, too—we’re just like, ‘Why not? Why don’t we just ask that question and make that happen?’”

Lyn Hunter

Supervising Youth Librarian
Chattanooga Public Library

The Vision: Free Rides, Fewer Barriers

A 2018 Public Library Association presentation from Denver Public Library inspired the Read and Ride program. After hearing about their work, Lyn began envisioning a similar collaboration between CPL and CARTA that would reduce access barriers and strengthen community ties. The goal: provide free transportation for kids to increase access to community resources.

Turning a Dream Into a Citywide Movement

In 2023, new leadership at both CPL and CARTA opened the door for Lyn to turn her vision into action. What began as a modest idea—five free rides for kids over the summer—quickly grew into something bigger:

- CARTA's new transit director ran with the idea and expanded it to offer unlimited free rides for youth all summer.
- With Beanstack as the foundation for tracking participation and permissions, CPL streamlined the process of distributing CARTA passes while collecting data to support sustainability and future grant funding.
- Hamilton County Schools quickly got on board, seeing the potential to boost student engagement and reduce transportation barriers for families.

Behind the Scenes: How Beanstack Powers the Program

- CPL created a custom Beanstack challenge, using registration forms to collect participant info, permissions, and data needed to issue transit passes.
- While logging reading is encouraged, it's not required—the core function is to facilitate access and collect meaningful data.
- Hamilton County Schools helped communicate with parents and facilitate additional registration.
- CPL staff visited PTA nights, school carnivals, open houses, and other events to register students for both library cards and transit passes on the spot.

Outcomes That Matter

The impact of Read and Ride has been both measurable and meaningful:

- Lyn's initial goal was 300 rides—by the summer, they had reached 3,300. Now, CARTA has reported 20,000+ rides with the youth transit cards.
- The program's impact was clear to community stakeholders, and the CARTA board voted to make the partnership permanent.
- Staff report hearing from teens who were able to secure jobs thanks to having reliable transportation through Read and Ride.

Getting a transit pass for a young person was once complicated and time-consuming, but it is now as simple as visiting a library event.

A NEW CHAPTER FOR COMMUNITY ACCESS

The Read and Ride program is a shining example of what's possible when libraries, schools, and public agencies work together with a shared mission. Thanks to Lyn's vision, Beanstack's flexibility, and Chattanooga's collaborative spirit, the program has eliminated barriers to access for countless young people.