

Report to the Fremont County Association of Governments: Recommendations for Funding and Governance of Key Services in Fremont County

Executive Summary

Since its formation, the Joint Committee on Funding Key Services has convened weekly to thoroughly examine the operational, financial, and regional dynamics of ambulance, commercial air, and public transit services in Fremont County and the Wind River Indian Reservation. Through detailed presentations, stakeholder consultations, and data analysis, the Committee has developed a comprehensive recommendation grounded in two core principles: 1) building infrastructure for sustainable growth rather than perpetually chasing substandard service, and 2) ensuring every Fremont County resident receives equitable ambulance service funded by their collective tax dollars, regardless of their address. The Committee proposes that, upon concurrence of the Fremont County commissioners, the Fremont County Association of Governments (FCAG) oversee and administer all funding for ambulance, air service, and WRTA, with the appointment of a dedicated advisory board to provide operational expertise and distilled recommendations, thereby reducing the administrative burden on FCAG while maintaining accountability. Two funding options are presented: 1) a single 0.75-cent sales tax covering all services or 2) two separate 0.5-cent taxes—one dedicated to ambulance operations and the other to air service and transit. This report outlines the proposed funding mechanism, governing structure, implementation timeline, public communication strategy, and essential partnerships required for successful execution.

Summary of Existing Issues in Ambulance Services

The key challenges identified through committee discussions, data collection, and stakeholder input during meetings encompass operational, financial, structural, and regional aspects of ambulance services in Fremont County. The county spans approximately 10,000 square miles and serves nearly 40,000 residents, including those on tribal lands. The committee reviewed current operations under Frontier Ambulance's contract with the county commissioners, historical reports (e.g., 2015 SafeTech assessment), state-level insights, and local data to obtain an understanding of the current situation.

The background on the current ambulance service in Fremont County reveals a system that has undergone significant changes over the past decade, transitioning from a largely volunteer-based model to a more structured and subsidized operation under private management. In 2014/2015, the county issued a Request for Proposals (RFP), inviting private entities to bid to provide ambulance services, marking a shift away from traditional public oversight. This coincided with a fundamental change in the ambulance structure, shifting from a primarily volunteer-driven Basic Life Support (BLS) system to a hybrid of Advanced Life Support (ALS) and BLS capabilities. This change, combined with alterations in Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement policies, reduced payouts for certain services, dramatically escalated operational costs, and pushed the system to a point where County taxpayer subsidies became essential to its viability.

Today, Fremont County subsidizes the ambulance service with approximately \$1.8 million annually, drawn directly from the general fund, reflecting the ongoing financial burden on residents. In this arrangement, the County retains ownership of all key assets, including ambulances, buildings, and equipment, and maintains them to help ensure reliability. Additionally, the County extends a cost-saving measure by supplying fuel to the service, leveraging its tax-exempt status to reduce expenses that would otherwise further inflate the subsidy. Despite these supports, the current structure has led to annual increases in the County's subsidy, with no transparency into the private provider's profit margins, creating concerns about efficiency and accountability. The private ambulance service, meanwhile, manages critical day-to-day functions, such as billing and collections, as well as provider hiring and training, allowing it to focus on operational delivery. At the same time, the County bears a significant portion of the infrastructure burden.

Through rigorous analysis of publicly available data by this committee, the estimated annual total cost of running an effective ambulance service in the county is likely to be in the range of \$3.5 to \$3.8 million, underscoring the scale of investment required. A notable downside of the 2014/2015 transition from public to private management was the significant degradation in coverage and response times in some regions of Fremont County. For instance, volunteer-staffed ambulances in communities like Jeffrey City, Shoshoni, and Pavillion were discontinued, forcing these regions to depend on services dispatched from Riverton, Lander, or Dubois. In many scenarios, this has resulted in response times stretching to 30-45 minutes (or beyond), a stark increase that heightens risks during emergencies and erodes public confidence in the system.

This uncertainty and perceived inequity have prompted communities like Shoshoni to explore or pursue establishing independent volunteer ambulance operations outside the County-controlled, subsidized framework. However, such fragmentation is far from ideal, as these

outlying areas already contribute to the County funds that underwrite the existing service, potentially leading to duplicative efforts and inefficiencies. Moreover, integrating these independent units into the County's dispatch system would be crucial to avoid confusion, delayed responses, or overlapping interventions that could compromise overall emergency care. This historical and ongoing context underscores the need to reassess the ambulance service model, striking a balance between costs, coverage, and community equity across Fremont County's vast rural landscape.

The ALS/BLS ambulance system in Fremont County provides a critical level of advanced medical care, significantly enhancing patient outcomes during emergencies. ALS providers possess skills nearly equivalent to those of nurses, with only a few exceptions, enabling them to immediately administer life-saving interventions, such as advanced airway management, cardiac medications, and IV therapies, upon arrival at the scene. In contrast, BLS providers are limited by state regulations to basic stabilization measures, such as administering oxygen and providing basic wound care, before transporting patients to the hospital. The combination of highly trained personnel on a single ambulance enhances efficiency, enabling seamless initiation of care and rapid transport for definitive treatment. Retaining this ALS/BLS model ensures sustained high-quality emergency response, as converting back to a volunteer service would reduce care capabilities and face mounting challenges amid declining volunteerism across society.

The recurring RFP process for Fremont County's ambulance service creates profound instability for providers and employees, who face persistent uncertainty about job retention with each contract cycle. Transitions between providers often result in shifts in wages, leadership, and benefits—leaving many longtime EMS professionals managing multiple 401(k) accounts from past employers, navigating inconsistent health plans, and adapting to new operational priorities. With Frontier Ambulance, employees were compelled to organize a union to negotiate fair wages and working conditions, underscoring the challenges of securing equitable treatment under private management.

This cycle of disruption erodes morale, complicates recruitment and retention of skilled personnel, and ultimately jeopardizes the consistency and quality of emergency medical response across the County.

Summary of Wind River Transit Authority - WRTA

The Wind River Transportation Authority (WRTA) serves as the primary public transit provider in Fremont County, Wyoming, operating a fleet of fixed-route buses, demand-response paratransit services, and intercity connections across rural communities like Lander, Riverton, and surrounding areas to enhance mobility for residents, including seniors, low-income individuals, and those without personal vehicles.

This program is funded through a series of federal and state grants, which dictate how the bus system must operate and require a local match. The federal/state grants that help fund the bus are the FTA 5311 and FTA 5339, which, for fiscal year 2026, are anticipated to provide \$977,794 towards the overall budget. The total proposed budget for FY2026 is \$1,416,818, leaving a local match of \$439,024 to be generated by the local communities served. The federal grants allow the local match to come from a dedicated capital set-aside, as well as industry-standard revenue generation, such as advertising on vehicles, bus shelters, or other transit assets, route service guarantees, qualified human service organization contracts, and local government subsidization.

The Wind River Transportation Authority (WRTA) delivers essential benefits by providing reliable transportation to isolated communities, enabling residents to access employment, grocery stores, and educational opportunities that would otherwise be out of reach. This connectivity reduces social isolation, spurs economic development in communities by bringing people to town to access jobs and spend money locally, boosts local economies by facilitating workforce participation, and consumer spending. For the local community, investing in WRTA and providing a stable local funding source yields significant returns, including predictable budgets that enable strategic long-term planning for service expansion and efficiency. This commitment unlocks increased service capacity with more routes, higher frequency, and extended hours; supports critical infrastructure maintenance and upgrades for safer, modern fleets; and enhances competitiveness for additional federal and state grants, such as FTA 5311 and 5339, which require matching funds to maximize public investment in rural transit.

Summary of Airport

Commercial air service at Central Wyoming Regional Airport (CWRA) in Riverton, Wyoming, operates under a state-led Capacity Purchase Agreement with SkyWest Airlines, providing reliable United Express flights through a 10-year contract structure that requires a local 40% revenue guarantee match (with the state covering 60%). In 2024, the service achieved record performance with 21,000 enplaned passengers, supporting key local employers in healthcare, outdoor recreation, and manufacturing, while contributing to broader economic certainty for the region. However, high operational costs—driven by the airport's elevation, air density restrictions, and a limited passenger base—necessitate an annual subsidy of approximately \$1.8–1.9 million for the local share. With existing reserve funds projected to be exhausted by

fall 2026, and the city’s general funds unlikely to fill the gap, sustained commercial service depends on identifying new funding mechanisms from Fremont County residents to prevent reversion to a general aviation-only airport.

Commercial air service at CWRA benefits every resident of Fremont County by promoting economic stability and accessibility across both urban and rural communities. Reliable flights attract and retain businesses—such as Brunton, Kifaru, NOLS, and healthcare providers—that rely on efficient travel for employees, clients, and supply chains, creating jobs and tax revenue that support schools, roads, and public services countywide. Sales tax generated from airport-related spending is distributed based on population and further shared through interlocal agreements, meaning even residents in Lander, Dubois, or the Wind River Reservation indirectly benefit from increased commerce in Riverton. Additionally, the service ensures timely access to specialized medical care, family visits, and professional opportunities outside the region, thereby reducing travel burdens for all Fremont County families, regardless of their proximity to the airport.

Chapter 1: The “Do Nothing” Option

Before advancing new funding mechanisms, FCAG and the Fremont County Commissioners (FCC) may elect to maintain the status quo. For ambulance services, this would involve continuing the current practice of issuing periodic Requests for Proposals (RFPs) to private providers, supported by county subsidies—currently approximately \$1.8 million annually from the general fund—and utilizing county-owned assets, including vehicles, stations, and equipment. The county would retain ownership and maintenance responsibilities, including fuel provision through its tax-exempt status, to control costs. However, this model carries persistent challenges, particularly in response times for outlying communities. Since the 2014/2015 transition from a volunteer-based system to private management, coverage in areas such as Shoshoni, Jeffrey City, and Pavillion has deteriorated significantly. Volunteer-staffed units in these locations were discontinued, requiring dispatches from Riverton, Lander, or Dubois, often resulting in response times of 30–45 minutes or longer. This inequity has eroded public trust and prompted communities like Shoshoni to consider independent volunteer operations. If the RFP process continues, governance must be strengthened through active contributions from FCAG and tribal representatives to ensure that future contracts mandate a sustained service presence in communities beyond Lander and Riverton—explicitly including Shoshoni, Dubois, Pavillion, and the Wind River Indian Reservation — and alleviate concerns in Dubois about the potential loss of their local ambulance service.

Should the RFP route be pursued, the Committee strongly recommends that the current Ambulance Director, Diane Lane, be formally consulted throughout the RFP drafting and proposal evaluation process. Her institutional knowledge of day-to-day operations, staffing

realities, and employee dynamics is crucial to crafting a contract that ensures workforce continuity, minimizes disruptions to service delivery, and guarantees that any selected provider can demonstrate a clear plan for retaining and supporting existing EMS personnel.

In contrast, commercial air service and public transit cannot sustain operations absent dedicated funding. Reserve balances supporting the local revenue guarantee for Central Wyoming Regional Airport are projected to be exhausted by fall 2026, and WRTA operations face similar constraints. Without a voter-approved sales tax or equivalent mechanism, these services would cease. Individual municipalities, the county, and potentially tribal governments would then need to decide whether to allocate discretionary general funds—competing with roads, public safety, and other core priorities—to maintain air connectivity and bus service. Such ad-hoc financing introduces fiscal uncertainty, potential service interruptions, and disproportionate budgetary pressure on local governments.

The committee does not recommend the “do nothing” option.

Chapter 2: Funding Mechanism Recommendations

The Committee recommends returning ambulance services to a publicly run entity under FCAG governance, delivering full transparency into operations and finances, direct local control over service standards and coverage, authority to hire and manage providers, and the ability to prioritize equitable response across all communities. Despite the county’s substantial support—including asset ownership, maintenance, and tax-exempt fuel provision—the required subsidy continues to rise annually without corresponding reduction, making the transition to a public entity the most logical and accountable path forward. To ensure long-term financial stability for these essential services, the Committee considered two sales tax options for voter approval in November 2026.

The **unified 0.75-cent countywide sales tax** would generate dedicated revenue for EMS/ambulance operations, provide a local revenue guarantee for commercial air service at Central Wyoming Regional Airport, and offer operational support for the Wind River Transportation Authority (WRTA) bus system. This consolidated approach is likely to have a stronger chance of passage because it presents voters with a single, straightforward ballot question rather than multiple measures. By requiring only one affirmative vote, it simplifies the decision-making process, reduces voter fatigue associated with approving multiple tax increases, and minimizes the cumulative burden on taxpayers of navigating successive funding requests. Moreover, both air service and public transit align directly with the established criteria for economic development sales tax initiatives, requiring minimal additional justification to qualify under existing statutory frameworks. **This option would generate approximately \$6,525,000 annually to support all efforts.**

Alternatively, the Committee considered **two distinct 0.5-cent sales taxes**: one exclusively for ambulance services, including personnel, equipment, and facilities, and the second to underwrite both the local match for SkyWest/United Express flights and WRTA transit operations. This bifurcated structure offers the advantage of allowing county residents to evaluate and vote on each service independently—a critical consideration given the fundamental nature of ambulance service as an emergency response function, distinct from the “key” infrastructure roles of commercial air service and public transit. While air and bus services readily qualify as economic development investments, the ambulance component may require more precise articulation of its economic nexus. Robust emergency medical infrastructure is a foundational prerequisite for sustainable growth; without reliable EMS capacity to support population increases, workforce expansion, and business attraction, economic development initiatives cannot succeed. Prospective residents and employers consistently rank the availability of emergency services as one of the highest priorities when evaluating relocation or investment decisions. **This option would generate approximately \$4,350,000 annually for each option, or \$8,700,000 in total.**

Both models distribute the funding responsibility broadly, across residents, renters, businesses, and visitors, while avoiding increased reliance on property taxes or depletion of municipal and county general funds.

Chapter 3: Recommended Governing Structures

The Fremont County Association of Governments (FCAG) Joint Powers Board is recommended to oversee and administer all funding for ambulance services, commercial air service, and WRTA operations. To enhance efficiency and operational effectiveness, FCAG shall establish a dedicated advisory board comprising subject-matter experts, community representatives, and service providers. This advisory board will alleviate the administrative burden on FCAG by conducting in-depth analyses of operational nuances, performance metrics, and service delivery challenges and then presenting clear, distilled recommendations to FCAG for final decision-making. This structure ensures FCAG retains full fiscal and strategic authority while leveraging specialized input to maintain high-quality, responsive services across all three domains. Commercial air service will continue under its existing operational framework, with the City of Riverton serving as fiscal agent and FCAG providing funding support as approved by voters.

Chapter 4: Implementation Timeline and Next Steps

The Committee recommends the following implementation timeframe, regardless of FCAG’s decision between the unified 0.75-cent option and **two separate 0.5-cent sales tax options**. This expedited schedule is driven by **uncertainty surrounding property tax revenue in Wyoming and the urgent need to eliminate ongoing service shortfalls**, particularly in outlying communities, as quickly and responsibly as possible.

- **December 2025:**
 - FCAG **appoints the Key Services Advisory Board** to provide operational expertise and begin drafting recommendations for governance, staffing, and service standards.
 - County **immediately negotiates and executes a one-year extension of the Frontier Ambulance contract (through June 30, 2027)** to avoid disruption from the January 2026 RFP cycle.

- **January – March 2026:**
 - FCAG and FCC formalize funding administration agreement under the Wyoming Joint Powers Act, including a legal framework for asset transfer.
 - Advisory Board holds initial meetings to develop transition roadmap, performance metrics, and staffing models.
 - FCAG initiates the pursuit of federal, state, and private grants for any start-up and capital costs.

- **April – June 2026:**
 - Complete asset inventory, condition assessments, and valuation.
 - Advisory Board finalizes recommendations for FCAG approval on operational structure, hiring plan, and equipment upgrades.
 - Ballot language certified for **August 2026 Primary Election:**
 - **Unified Option:** 0.75¢ sales tax measure.
 - **Separate Option:** 0.5¢ “Key Services” (air + WRTA) measure only.

- **August 2026 Primary Election:**
 - Voters decide on proposed sales tax(es).

- **September 2026 – June 2027:**
 - **If passed:** Sales tax collection begins **January 1, 2027** (earliest allowable under Wyoming statute), providing immediate relief for air and WRTA and funding ambulance transition.
 - **If failed (Unified):** FCAG and FCC explore an interim general fund bridge or a scaled-back service model through June 2027.

- **If failed (Separate – Key Services):** Air/WRTA funding gap addressed via discretionary funds; ambulance transition proceeds using existing subsidy.
- Advisory Board oversees:
 - Recruitment of EMS Director and leadership team (Q4 2026 – Q1 2027).
 - Development of training programs, dispatch integration, and stationing plan.
 - Final asset transfer from FCC to FCAG (target: May 2027).
- **July 1, 2027:**
 - **Public ambulance service launches under FCAG administration**, fully staffed, equipped, and operational countywide.
 - Advisory Board transitions to ongoing oversight role, delivering quarterly performance reports to FCAG.
 - Air service and WRTA continue with stable, dedicated funding (if approved).

This accelerated timeline ensures **no service interruption**, leverages the advisory board’s expertise from day one, and positions FCAG to assume full responsibility on schedule—delivering equitable, accountable EMS to every corner of Fremont County by **July 1, 2027**.

Chapter 5: Recommended Public Communication Strategy

Public engagement must be grounded in transparency, optimism, and factual accuracy. Messaging will frame the initiative as a proactive investment in community resilience, economic vitality, and access to critical services—not as a response to crisis. **Government messaging should not threaten the loss of ambulance service as a consequence of voter rejection.** While service would persist under existing arrangements in the short term, continued reliance on escalating general fund subsidies—amid Wyoming’s evolving property tax landscape—carries real fiscal risk. Without dedicated revenue, the county faces growing uncertainty, potential budget constraints, and the prospect of further service reductions in outlying areas. This initiative replaces that instability with sustainable funding and public accountability.

Unified 0.75¢ Option Messaging

Why public EMS? Fremont County taxpayers already own the ambulances, buildings, and equipment—yet subsidies rise yearly with no transparency into private profits or control over coverage decisions. Bringing EMS under FCAG governance restores local accountability, ensures equitable response times throughout the county, and allows for direct management of hiring, training, and service standards.

Why subsidize air and bus? Commercial flights and WRTA routes face structural deficits due to the size of our rural market, high elevation, and low passenger density—issues that no amount of efficiency can overcome. Dedicated sales tax funding replaces depleting reserves and prevents sudden service cuts.

Why vote yes countywide? A single modest tax invests in all three interconnected services simultaneously, simplifying the ballot and sharing costs fairly among residents, visitors, and businesses. Even those who never board a plane or bus benefit from the jobs, healthcare access, and economic activity they sustain—activity that funds schools, roads, and emergency response for every community.

Separate 0.5¢ Taxes Messaging

Ambulance as economic development: Reliable EMS is the bedrock of growth. Businesses won't expand, families won't relocate, and tourism won't thrive without confidence that help arrives quickly in emergencies. Public governance guarantees consistent coverage from east of Shoshoni to north of Dubois, protecting the workforce and visitor base that drives sales tax revenue, benefiting the entire county.

Air & bus services as economic development: Commercial air links in Fremont County enable employers to access national markets, facilitate same-day medical travel, and attract clients and qualified employees. WRTA connects workers to jobs, students to college, and seniors to services—reducing isolation and supporting local commerce. Residents in remote areas gain indirectly through a stronger regional economy, higher property values, and shared sales tax proceeds redistributed countywide.

Independent votes, shared benefits: Voters decide each service on its merits, but the passage of both maximizes stability—ensuring that no community is asked to fund one without the other, while safeguarding ambulance continuity regardless of the outcome of the key services.

Core messaging will emphasize: *“A modest sales tax commitment ensures reliable ambulance response, regional air connectivity, and public transit—strengthening healthcare access, supporting local jobs, and building economic certainty for all of Fremont County.”* Outreach will include a countywide town hall series in Riverton, Lander, Dubois, Arapahoe, and Ethete, as well as targeted social media campaigns featuring resident testimonials and partnerships with local civic organizations.

Chapter 6: Recommended Partners

Successful implementation requires collaboration among institutional, governmental, and community stakeholders. The Fremont County Commissioners will lead the ballot initiative, manage the RFP and contract award (Option 2), and formally transfer ambulance assets to

FCAG. The FCAG Joint Powers Board will serve as the governing and fiscal authority for ambulance and transit services. The Northern Arapaho and Eastern Shoshone Tribes will participate in governance and co-shape regional benefit narratives.

The City of Riverton will remain the fiscal agent for air service and operational partner in WRTA. Community anchors—including the Riverton and Lander Rotary Clubs, the Riverton and Lander Kiwanis Clubs, and the Fremont County League of Women Voters—will amplify outreach efforts. Healthcare providers such as Wind River Cares, SageWest Health Care, and the River Peak Health, along with educational partners Central Wyoming College and Wind River Job Corps, will lend credibility and demonstrate real-world impact.

Conclusion

The Joint Committee on Funding Key Services presents a forward-looking vision that rejects the cycle of reactive, substandard service delivery in favor of proactively building infrastructure for Fremont County's future growth. For too long, the county has chased minimal standards—extending ambulance contracts to avoid gaps, patching air service with dwindling reserves, and sustaining transit through temporary fixes. This plan ends that pattern by placing FCAG in charge of funding and administration, supported by a specialized advisory board that distills complex operational realities into actionable recommendations. This structure enables FCAG to focus on strategy and accountability, ensuring informed, expert-driven decisions that support expansion, innovation, and resilience.


Equally vital is the principle that every resident of Fremont County deserves the full benefit of the ambulance service they fund through their taxes. Under the current model, residents in Shoshoni, Pavillion, Jeffrey City, and beyond contribute to a system that often results in response times exceeding 45 minutes—unacceptable for life-threatening emergencies. By centralizing funding under FCAG with input from the advisory board, this initiative ensures equitable, high-quality EMS coverage for all residents and visitors to Fremont County. Whether through the unified 0.75-cent tax or the two 0.5-cent measures, taxpayer dollars will deliver the reliable, inclusive service every community has earned—not fragmented, privatized responses that leave rural residents behind.

With disciplined timelines, strong partnerships, and transparent communication, Fremont County can secure essential services for generations to come—transforming from a region that merely survives to one that thrives.

COMMITTEE APPROVAL


We, the undersigned members of the Joint Committee for Funding Key Services, respectfully submit this report for review and further action.

Sincerely,


[Mick Pryor \(Nov 22, 2025 13:47:33 MST\)](#) 11/14/25
Mick Pryor, Chairman


11/14/25
Kyle Butterfield, Vice Chairman


11/14/25
Lisa Mallon, Secretary


[Sarah Reilley \(Nov 14, 2025 12:15:36 MST\)](#) 11/14/25
Sarah Reilley


[Jennifer Blaylock \(Nov 14, 2025 12:48:10 MST\)](#) 11/14/25
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Patrick Edwards


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