



RTCC Transit Partners Embrace AI at Regional Workshop

On March 12–13, 2026, four RTCC transit partners—Summit Stage, Winter Park Transit (The Lift), Steamboat Springs Transit, and Core Transit—came together for the AI Launchpad Workshop, a two-day intensive led by [Kuban Transit Solutions \(KTS\)](#). A big thank you to Ben Gerdes and Eagle County Government for the use of space, as well as funding through CDOT's 5310 Mobility Management grant. Each agency's leadership team received hands-on coaching in applying commercially available AI tools to a real planning challenge of their choosing.



The timing couldn't be better. A [March 2026 Gallup report](#) found that public-sector AI adoption has surged from 17% in mid-2023 to 43% by late 2025—now rivaling the private sector's 41%. The research also shows that managerial support is the decisive factor in whether AI use becomes routine: in high-support government settings, 65% of employees use AI frequently, compared to just 37% where support is low. The AI Launchpad is built on this principle—equip leaders with real skills first, and adoption follows.

About the AI Launchpad

Developed by KTS CEO Stephen Kuban, the AI Launchpad is designed for small and mid-sized transit agencies that need comprehensive planning but lack the budget for six-figure consulting contracts. The program coaches senior staff through using AI for research, peer benchmarking, demand analysis, and scenario planning—with the goal of completing up to 50% of planning work in-house before issuing RFPs, saving an estimated \$20,000–50,000 per project. The two-day workshop is followed by seven months of continued training and support.

What Each Agency Built

Rather than theoretical exercises, each agency tackled a project tied to a real operational need. Here's what was developed:

- **Winter Park Transit (The Lift) – NTD Data Aggregation Tool.** The Lift built a tool to streamline reporting to the National Transit Database (NTD), the federal data system administered by the Federal Transit Administration where transit agencies across the country report operational, financial, and safety data. NTD reporting is required for agencies receiving federal funding, and compiling the data—ridership counts, vehicle revenue miles, operating expenses, and more—is a time-intensive manual process, especially for small agencies with limited staff. The AI-powered aggregation tool automates the collection and formatting of this data, reducing hours of manual work. Remarkably, the core concept and working prototype for the NTD tool took roughly eight hours to develop during the workshop—a process that would typically require weeks or even months of staff time and multiple rounds of meetings using traditional approaches. Importantly, a tool like this has applications well beyond Winter Park; any small transit agency dealing with NTD reporting burdens could adapt it, making this one of the most broadly transferable projects from the workshop.
- **Summit Stage – Paddle Scheduling Tool.** Summit Stage started to develop an AI-assisted paddle scheduling tool for their drivers. In transit operations, a “paddle” is the detailed daily work assignment given to each driver—it specifies which routes they’ll drive, in what order, when their shifts start and end, and where their breaks fall. The name comes from the paddle-shaped boards historically used to display these assignments. Building paddles manually is a complex puzzle that must account for labor rules, route coverage, vehicle availability, and driver preferences. Summit Stage’s tool uses AI to help generate and optimize these assignments, saving dispatchers significant time while improving schedule quality. Like the NTD tool, the paddle scheduling concept took approximately eight hours of workshop time to develop—compressing what would normally be weeks or months of staff time and meetings into a single intensive session. Both projects exemplified the workshop’s team-to-individual-to-team approach: the group discussed the challenge together, individuals then worked one-on-one with Claude AI to explore solutions and iterate on designs, and the team reconvened to review, refine, and pressure-test each other’s work. *“My mind was blown away about how easy it is to interact with AI and get quick results,”* said Ann Findley, Summit Stage Planner.
- **Core Transit – Expanded Route Scenario and Timeline.** Core Transit used AI to develop route expansion scenarios and a phased implementation timeline for new service connecting Eagle to the Eagle/Vail airport and potentially extending to Gypsum. This kind of scenario planning—evaluating ridership projections, cost estimates, and operational logistics across multiple route options—would typically require a consulting engagement. AI allowed Core Transit’s team to model these alternatives in-house and arrive at the workshop’s end with a concrete, data-informed expansion plan.
- **Steamboat Springs Transit – Expanded Transit vs. Rail Cost/Benefit Analysis.** Steamboat Springs Transit tackled a comparison between commuter bus and rail for their region, an annual report for the system, how to persuade constituencies if different political persuasion on the same issue, and a design for the main bus terminal at the Steamboat Springs ski area base. This saved a lot of hours in development and provided new areas to explore.

What We Built as a Region

Beyond individual agency projects, the workshop also produced a collaborative regional strategy for the RTCC. This strategy came together during 2.5 hours on day one of the two-day workshop, using a team-to-individual-to-team approach that defined much of the AI Launchpad’s methodology. The process worked like this: first, the full group discussed their shared regional challenges and aspirations together as a team, identifying key themes such as cross-boundary commuting, workforce transit needs, and the lack of coordination among independent agencies. Those group conversations were recorded for Claude AI. Next, individuals worked independently with Claude to explore ideas, refine their thinking, and develop specific proposals. Then, the group reconvened as a team to synthesize their work. Claude was prompted to take the group’s ideas and existing pieces of the emerging strategy and integrate them into the research it had already conducted on similar coordination efforts—specifically, [Iowa’s successful statewide transit coordination model](#) and [Nashville’s less successful city-level effort](#). By studying what worked in Iowa and what failed in Nashville, and layering in the group’s own regional knowledge and priorities, Claude helped produce a strategy that was both grounded in real-world evidence and tailored to the NWCCOG’s unique context.

The resulting framework outlines a phased approach to improving cross-county transit coordination across the seven-county NWCCOG region, where multiple transit agencies currently operate independently despite significant cross-boundary commute and travel demand driven by ski areas, healthcare access, and workforce needs. Drawing on the Iowa case study in particular, the strategy outlines a practical path forward—starting with formalizing intergovernmental agreements and launching a pilot intercommunity route, then pursuing state and federal funding sources including Colorado’s Clean Transit Enterprise program, and eventually building a broader coalition of non-transit stakeholders such as hospitals, veterans organizations, ski resorts, and major employers. Critically, the group concluded that better coordination—not necessarily a single new agency—is the path forward, with a likely long-term model being a network of individual RTAs connected by inter-RTA agreements and the NWCCOG serving as the coordination backbone. The full strategy will be shared with RTCC stakeholders for input, with key decisions on pilot corridors, funding, and governance to be addressed in the coming months.

Why This Matters for Our Region

Our RTCC partners operate in one of the most challenging transit environments in the country—mountain terrain, seasonal population swings, long distances, and tight budgets. These agencies have long been innovators, but limited staff and funding make comprehensive planning studies hard to pursue. AI changes that equation. Today's generative AI tools are inexpensive, accessible, and require no specialized technical training—a transit planner can use them to draft analyses, summarize data, and benchmark peers without an engineering degree. Jonathan Flint with Steamboat Springs Transit agrees. *"The biggest thing that I learned is that it is a collaborative tool that results in a deep dialog and exchange that results in a more complete and well-rounded product. It is non-judgmental and free of the biases that come from peoples' preconceptions. It can also produce a new perspective and ask pointed questions that force more of a 360-degree evaluation."*

As the Gallup research shows, the public sector is rapidly closing the technology gap with the private sector, and rural agencies that build AI fluency now will be best positioned to serve their communities going forward.

Mark Your Calendar

All four agencies will present their AI Launchpad projects at the [May 5, 2026 RTCC meeting](#). This will be a great opportunity to see the tools in action and learn how AI might benefit your agency or organization.

The March workshop was only the beginning. The KTS program includes seven months of follow-up support, and participating agencies will continue refining their tools and sharing lessons learned with RTCC partners across the region. The NWCCOG and the RTCC will continue to support these efforts as part of our mission to coordinate transportation services and foster innovation across Eagle, Garfield, Grand, Jackson, Routt, Pitkin, and Summit Counties.

For more information about the RTCC and regional mobility programs, visit nwccog.org/programs/mobility/rtcc.

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Colorado Legislature Deliberates Data Centers



Hello! I am thrilled to introduce myself to NWCCOG members and highlight one of the policy issues at the forefront of the Water Quality/Quantity Committee's (QQ) legislative work this session: data centers. I joined the QQ team at the end of last year, after working with QQ during my tenure at Conservation Colorado and interviewing QQ consultants as part of my master's research. My role includes representing headwater interests at the Colorado legislature.

Data centers have emerged as a hot topic during the 2026 session in part because of their potentially significant water and energy usage, and two bills regarding data center development and operation have been introduced. One bill seeks to incentivize data center development as a valuable industry and economic driver, while another seeks to regulate data centers based on community impacts. Noise pollution from generators and urban heat island effects are some of the concerns for prospective neighbors to these behemoth structures. Questions remain around impacts on energy and water infrastructure when a large consumer is added to the system and the implications for other ratepayers. The NWCCOG/QQ Region is particularly concerned about using transmountain diversion water from the west slope to fuel a data center boom on the Front Range.

Legislative Overview

The two data center bills that have been introduced are HB26-1030, which offers tax incentives to attract data centers to Colorado, and SB26-102, which aims to regulate environmental impacts and protect ratepayers against increasing costs. To see news coverage on these bills, click [here](#). Given the significant concerns surrounding data center development, QQ consultants currently recommend opposing HB26-1030 because it is premature to incentivize an industry before local governments have an opportunity to ensure protective measures are in place. QQ does not have a position yet on SB26-102. By requiring certain thresholds of energy and water efficiency, SB26-102 could mitigate against impacts to source communities for energy and water. However, the bill places mitigation onus on local governments and dictates processes they must adopt, and QQ members have expressed concern over such provisions. QQ will take formal positions on legislation at its March 13th meeting.

Proactive Action is Needed

Colorado needs to be proactive in responding to looming data center development. Any potential benefits need to be carefully weighed against negative impacts, and the water use of any growing industry must be scrutinized. Finally, it is important that communities are not left to shoulder burdens so that others may benefit. Feel free to reach out with questions or concerns—or just to say hello: kgreen@nwccog.org.

NWCCOG Welcomes Becky Baugh as HR Generalist

The Northwest Colorado Council of Governments (NWCCOG) is pleased to welcome Becky Baugh as the organization's new Human Resources Generalist. Becky brings more than 20 years of experience in human resources and a deep passion for supporting strong, effective teams.

Originally from Wyoming, Becky has spent more than half of her life in Colorado and is proud to call the state home. She currently lives in Gypsum with her three busy children, ages 10, 14, and 16. Outside of work, much of her time is spent keeping up with family activities and enjoying the full and lively pace of life that comes with raising teenagers.



In her role at NWCCOG, Becky will support staff across the organization and help ensure that employees have the resources they need to succeed. She will primarily be based in the Silverthorne office on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, and will also spend time visiting the Gypsum and Rifle warehouse locations to stay connected with teams across the region.

Becky is excited to get to know NWCCOG staff and contribute to the organization's mission-driven work. *"If you see me around, please feel free to stop by and say hello,"* Becky shared. *"The programs you all support are incredible, and I'm excited to be even a small part of the important work happening here."*

Please join us in welcoming Becky to the NWCCOG team!

Upcoming Board Meetings

Thursday, June 4, 2026 – NWCCOG Energy Warehouse in Gypsum
Full Council & EDD Board Meeting Primary Agenda Items: Approve March meeting minutes, approve Q1 Financials; EDD Board meeting

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