

# The Update



**February/March 2026**

**Serving the Counties of Cass, Fremont, Harrison, Montgomery, Mills, Page, Pottawattamie, and Shelby**

## SWIPCO Awarded \$1.4 Million for Lead-Based Paint Hazard Reduction

ATLANTIC- SWIPCO has been awarded a \$1.4 Million grant for lead-based paint hazard reduction from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. This program assists property owners with removal of lead based paint hazards. The program applies to homes constructed before 1978 and have children under the age of 6 who reside or spend a significant amount of time in the home. Rental units may qualify as well if the owner gives preference to a family with children under age 6.



Before and After a Lead Abatement Project in Atlantic

Vacant rentals are also eligible. Rental unit owners must match 10% of the project cost. Work that is eligible includes exterior and/or interior improvements involving lead-based paint removal and other items necessary to make the home safe and healthy. Homeowners must meet income guidelines and live in Cass, Fremont, Harrison, Mills, Montgomery, Page, or Shelby counties. Grants have averaged approximately \$30,000.

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SWIPCO was awarded these same grant funds in 2021 and wrapped up that project in December of 2025. During implementation of the previous grant, SWIPCO was able to help remediate lead paint hazards from 12 units, which housed 22 adults, and 23 children. 33 total assessments and evaluations were completed during the grant process.

Continued..

## Lead Paint Hazard Reduction Grant Continued...

Lead is highly neuro toxic and lead poisoning is 100% preventable, but the effects of lead poisoning are irreversible. The Centers for Disease Control reports that there is no safe lead level and a level of 3.5 micrograms/deciliter is considered a high blood level of lead. Testing for elevated lead levels in children continues to be emphasized in Iowa. Children under 6 are more sensitive to lead and pregnant women exposed to lead can pass lead to their unborn baby. Lead gets into the body when it is inhaled or swallowed, and lead poisoning can lead to significant and long-term health effects. Lead poisoning affects 1 in 14 Iowa children and Iowa's rate of lead poisoning is four times the national average. Nearly 60% of the homes in Iowa, both in rural and urban areas, were built before 1960.

Lead Hazard Reduction Program Coordinator Nicole Rhodes said, "This is a wonderful opportunity to help us get some of those lead hazards removed to make southwest Iowa a safer and healthier place to live for everyone, especially kids who are particularly vulnerable. Through this grant program we have already been able to get 4 contractors in the southwest Iowa area certified as Lead Safe Contractors, which will ensure that lead poisoning awareness and abatement will outlast this program and will continue to benefit the community for future generations." Previously no such certified contractors were in the region

If you would like to see if you qualify for assistance then fill out the pre-screening questionnaire available at [www.swipco.org/housing-swihtf/lead-program/](http://www.swipco.org/housing-swihtf/lead-program/) To learn more about the grant program, please contact SWIPCO Lead Hazard Reduction Program Coordinator, Nicole Rhodes, at 712-243-4196 or 866-279-4720 ext. 240 or by emailing [nicole.rhodes@swipco.org](mailto:nicole.rhodes@swipco.org).



# LEAD REDUCTION GRANT



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- Do you own a home or rental property in Cass, Fremont, Harrison, Mills, Montgomery, Page, or Shelby County, or do you rent in these counties?
- Was the property constructed before 1978?
- Are there children under age 6 that reside or spend a significant amount of time in the property?

or

Are the rental units currently vacant?

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If yes, you could be eligible for improvements involving lead-based paint removal and other repairs! Projects have averaged \$30,000 to \$50,000 in repairs!

**SCAN THE APPROPRIATE QR CODE AND TAKE THE SURVEY TO SEE IF YOU MAY BE ELIGIBLE FOR THE PROGRAM OR CALL 712-243-4196**

**MORE PROGRAM INFO AVAILABLE ON [WWW.SWIPCO.ORG](http://WWW.SWIPCO.ORG)**

Homeowners



Rental Owners or Renters



## Legislative Advocacy for SWIPCO and SWITA in March

WASHINGTON D.C.- Representatives from SWIPCO and SWITA recently made trips to Washington D.C. to join state and national organizations to meet with federal legislators to advocate for common sense federal rules and funding for rural programs.

SWITA Transit Director Mark Lander, Communications Coordinator Chris Parks, and SWIPCO Policy Council Member Jenna Ramsey met up with other transit representatives for the Iowa Public Transit Association and Community Transportation Association of America's DC Fly-In event March 4th-7th. The event gave transit leaders an opportunity to hear from and meet with advocacy group leaders, Federal Transit Administration leadership, and legislators and their staff. IPTA hosted a luncheon with staff from all of the Iowa legislative delegation to discuss priorities for the year and advocate for funding during this critical time of reauthorization. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) expires on September 20, 2026 and congress is working toward a new surface transportation reauthorization bill. IPTA and CTAAs members were visiting with their federal representatives to advocate for funding levels in the next bill that will keep up with rising costs and aging fleets.



Representatives from transit agencies across the state gathered to advocate for transit funding and proper regulations.



SWITA Transit Director Mark Lander and other IPTA Members listen to insight from FTA Executive Director Matt Wilbes during his presentation to the CTAAs delegation.

## Legislative Advocacy Continued....



COG Directors from across the state visited with Iowa legislators on a wide range of community and economic development issues

SWIPCO Executive Director John McCurdy joined the Iowa Association of Councils of Government at the National Association of Development Organizations' Washington Conference March 8th-11th. Development organization leaders from across the country came together for a multitude of sessions focused on regional development, the federal landscape, and the programs and policies that matter most to Regional Development Organizations (RDOs) and their stakeholders. They also spent time on Capitol Hill meeting with legislators on program and funding priorities.

NADO attendees were able to attend sessions featuring Economic Development Directors from across the nation, Housing and Urban Development officials, U.S. Department of Labor officials, Department of Transportation leaders, and more.

These annual legislative fly-ins help keep issues and topics that are relevant to Iowans on the mind of our legislative leaders. The Iowa organizations we belong to at SWIPCO and SWITA do a great job of delivering our message and results have followed. For example Iowa public transit was awarded \$77 million dollars through the FTA's Bus and Bus Facilities Program, a transformational investment in the state's transportation network.



Iowa COG Directors meeting with Senator Charles Grassley

## Senator Grassley Legislative Assistant Sherry Kuntz Honored With SWIPCO Partnership Award

During the IPTA and CTAA DC Fly-In SWIPCO and SWITA representatives were able to deliver a SWIPCO Partnership Award to Senator Charles Grassley's Legislative Assistant Sherry Kuntz. Kuntz was recognized back in September during SWIPCO's 50th Anniversary Celebration for her long-standing service and assistance with legislative priorities and issues. Sherry was unable to be at the celebration to accept in the Fall but we were able to deliver her award in person during the Washington D.C. visit. Whether it's guidance on legislative events, shining a light on projects that are being held up, or advocating for our priorities, Sherry has always been quick to assist. It's not always easy to feel heard at the federal level, but Sherry is a shining example of good representation. We thank Sherry for her continued assistance and advocacy for Iowa..



Senator Charles Grassley Legislative Assistant Sherry Kuntz, SWITA Communications Coordinator Chris Parks, SWITA Transit Director Mark Lander

## IPTA Recognizes FTA Executive Director Matt Welbes



L to R: FTA Region 7 Administrator Carrie Butler, FTA Executive Director Matt Welbes, CyRide Director Barb Neal, DART CEO Amanda Wanke

Iowa Public Transit Association representatives on behalf of The Bus Coalition presented Federal Transit Administration Executive Director Matt Welbes with a Distinguished Service Award during IPTA's meeting with FTA on March 8th in Washington D.C. Matt is retiring in April and IPTA and The Bus Coalition wanted to recognize his many years of dedicated assistance and advocacy for public transit in Iowa and the nation.

# SWITA Fleet Updates



SWITA continues to work toward updating the vehicle fleet as funding and availability allows. The agency was happy to have four new buses delivered from Hoglund Bus Company in February. These buses will replace similar capacity vehicles that are past what the FTA deems as their useful life, a combined 770,789 miles on the odometers. Delivering quality service to riders takes a step forward when vehicles can be upgraded.



## SWITA by the Numbers

	January 2026	YTD (Since July 1)	February 2026	YTD (Since July 1)
Total Miles	161,308	1,161,037	152,027	1,313,064
Total Hours	9,183	63,894	8,571	72,465
Total Rides	44,087	303,719	41,494	345,213

January Rides by Service

Workforce Rides	8,750
Taxi Rides	5,258
Student Rides	7,455
Other	22,624

January Rides by Demographic

Disabled	20,732
Elderly	2,578
Other General Public	20,777

February Rides by Service

Workforce Rides	7,704
Taxi Rides	4,970
Student Rides	7,081
Other	21,739

February Rides by Demographic

Disabled	19,701
Elderly	2,414
Other General Public	19,379

# Birthdays & Anniversaries



**Phil Richter**  
Building Inspector I  
6 Years of Service



**Ashley Hayes**  
Community Development Specialist II  
February Birthday Month



**Daurine Petersen**  
Administrative Services  
Director  
15 Years of Service



**Brandie McFarland**  
Human Resource Specialist  
March Birthday Month

## SWIPCO Outing at the Des Moines Buccaneers

SWIPCO and SWITA Staff gathered for a fun night of hockey and camaraderie on Saturday, February 28th as the Des Moines Buccaneers took on the Sioux Falls Stampede.



### Upcoming Grant Information:

- Community Attraction and Tourism Program (CAT) Spring - until funds exhausted.
- Iowa DOT State Recreational Trails Program July 1, 2026
- Iowa DNR Solid Waste Alternative Program July 1, 2026
- Iowa DNR Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) Program August 15, 2026
- Small Business Energy Audit Program May 1, 2029 (Ongoing, first-come basis until funds exhausted)

## From the Desk of the Executive Director...

### John McCurdy

I'm not a big fan of politics, but I do have great respect for those who put themselves out there for public office. Likewise, when our elected officials get a little higher up, such as in Congress, they rely heavily on their staff and we are fortunate here in Iowa that our elected officials have surrounded themselves with some excellent staff and advisors. Recently, as you have read through this newsletter, we have spent some time with our elected officials and their staffs, both in Des Moines and Washington DC, and I do not envy them for what must be a constantly changing parade of various constituents all wanting something. My hat goes off to them for being able to handle that all day, and we are lucky to live in a place where we have access to our lawmakers—more people need to take advantage of that right.

I do believe that an important piece of our advocacy, particularly in Washington, is that we are not just asking for more money—although we do that to help rural Iowa—but we are bringing with us concrete examples of how government rules make helping rural Iowans more difficult. Typically, these rules were not made by the legislators, but by well-meaning but sometimes disconnected agencies after a law or spending package was passed. A prime example of a program so cumbersome is the HUD lead grant program, which is our cover story. Yes, we appreciate the \$1.4 million and it will go to good use. However, a huge amount of those funds will get eaten up by requirements that have very little to do with actually protecting children from lead-based paint hazards. One example of this that jumps to mind is if a home is older and has its original wood siding, we must scrape and paint the wood siding rather than cover it with vinyl siding in order to comply with US Department of Interior regulations for “historic” structures. Even though that paint job may last only 5 years whereas the siding would last 20 years at least and is typically much cheaper to do. Hopefully, as we continue to advocate for these changes, we can not only see greater investments in our rural areas, but we can put more of our tax dollars to work actually fixing problems.

## SWIPCO STAFF

**John McCurdy, AICP**  
Executive Director

**Mark Lander**  
Transit Director

**Daurine Petersen**  
Administrative Services Director

**Rhonda Brown**  
Finance Manager

**Brandie McFarland**  
Human Resources Specialist

**Kersten Abild**  
Transit Scheduler II

**Ann Anstey**  
Housing Programs Coordinator

**Mary Auten**  
Grants Specialist I

**Michael Ballinger**  
Safety Coordinator

**Barb Boggs**  
Grants Specialist I

**Dani Briggs**  
Lead Planner

**Tracy Clark**  
Transit Scheduler III

**Tammy DeBord**  
Grants Specialist III

**Mark Hansen**  
Fleet Mechanic

**Ashley Hayes**  
Disaster Recovery Coordinator

**Julie Hays**  
Transit Scheduler I

**Dee Holtz**  
Administrative Assistant

**Matthew Lee**  
Building Inspector II

**Chris Parks**  
Communications Coordinator

**Nicole Rhodes**  
Grants Specialist II

**Phil Richter**  
Building Inspector I

**Kyle Rock**  
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**Kristen Templeton**  
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