



975 Charles Road
Carbondale, Illinois 62901
Phone | 618.549.0304
Fax | 618.457.0171

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*Contact: Shawn Freeman, CEO
JAX Mass Transit District
Phone: 618.549.0304
Email: ceo@ridejax.com*

JAX Launches “SOAR” — A First-of-Its-Kind Recreational Bus Route Connecting Residents to Southern Illinois’ Natural Treasures

CARBONDALE, IL – JAX Mass Transit District is proud to announce the launch of the **Southern Outdoor Access Route (SOAR)**, a new and exciting initiative designed to connect residents and visitors to the breathtaking natural landscapes of Jackson County and Southern Illinois starting May 31st, 2025. This effort is a collaboration between JAX Mass Transit, the Jackson County Board, the City of Carbondale, SIU, and Giant City State Park (or IDNR).

SOAR isn’t just a bus route—it’s a mission. SOAR seeks to inspire everyone to explore the natural beauty and outdoor experiences available in Southern Illinois – particularly Jackson County – by highlighting four specific destinations. Furthermore, it’s about removing barriers so **everyone can enjoy the beauty of our region**, regardless of transportation barriers. With this new service, nature is no longer a luxury—it’s **accessible, affordable, and just a ride away**.

The route will operate seasonally and make pickups at **Evergreen Terrace**, the **new Southern Illinois Multimodal Station (SIMMS)**, and the **SIUC Student Recreation Center**, providing direct transportation to a lineup of stunning destinations:

- **Touch of Nature Trailhead**
- **Post Oak Trailhead** (ADA-accessible)
- **Devil’s Standtable Trailhead**
- **Trillium Trailhead**
- **Makanda Boardwalk**
- **Cedar Lake Beach**
- **Cedar Lake Boat Ramp**

Whether you're a seasoned hiker, nature lover, or just looking to cool off with a swim, the SOAR route is your ticket to adventure.

“We believe access to the outdoors is a right—not a privilege,” said JAX CEO Shawn Freeman. “There are incredible places to explore right in our community’s backyard. SOAR makes sure that transportation isn’t the reason someone misses out.”

Operated using a **14-passenger ADA-equipped Medium Duty bus**, SOAR ensures accessibility for all. Riders can track the bus using the **JAXGo app**, which offers real-time location updates—no strong cell signal required, and **we guarantee the bus will never leave a stop early**.

With a **morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up**, passengers can enjoy a full day of hiking, swimming, picnicking, and exploring.

Why It Matters

Located just minutes from Carbondale:

- **Cedar Lake** offers one of the area's most scenic spots for swimming, kayaking, and relaxing on the beach.
- **Giant City State Park**, a crown jewel of Southern Illinois, features ancient sandstone bluffs, lush forests, and miles of trails—drawing in nature enthusiasts from across the state.
- The **Makanda Boardwalk** offers a perfect blend of quirky local charm and serene natural escapes.
- Touch of Nature offers scenic hiking, mountain biking trails and educational programs.

JAX's SOAR route reflects a larger commitment to sustainability, health, and **reconnecting people to the land that surrounds them**.

Route Details & Schedule

- **Morning Departure:** Starting at Evergreen Terrace at 10:00 AM
- **Afternoon Return Trip:** Last drop off at Evergreen Terrace at 4:30 PM
- **Bus Type:** 14-passenger Medium Duty, ADA-equipped
- **Tracking App:** Available on JAXGo (Apple & Android)

For more information, route maps, or to plan your trip, visit www.ridejax.com/soar or follow JAX on Facebook.

Let's get outdoors—together.