

Transportation Service for the Elderly Run by Senior Citizens

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Two neighborhoods on the far east side of the city of Detroit, through their east area coalition, the Community Resource Assistance Center, organized an independent, privately financed, public corporation—Senior Citizen Area Transit (SCAT)—for the purpose of purchasing a van to serve the daily transportation needs of elderly residents. SCAT purchased the vehicle for the much needed service and laid the groundwork for a transit system that now serves the entire east side of the city of Detroit. The program is innovative because it is run by volunteer senior citizens. The service is free of charge to citizens who are 55 years of age and older. The process by which the organization was formed, funding sources, cooperative agreements, recruitment of staff, and organizational issues are described. The cost and service characteristics of the emerging program are summarized and evaluated. Most important, the program adheres to UMTA's directive on privatization.

In October 1979 the Community Resource and Assistance Center (CRAC), a coalition of east-side Detroit neighborhoods, started a much needed transit service for elderly residents. The Senior Citizen Area Transit (SCAT) system initiated by CRAC represents a successful, early example of what has recently emerged as the "privatization" phenomenon. The organizational and operational characteristics of SCAT provide model evidence of cooperation between the public and private sectors that is embodied in the recent UMTA directive mandating its grantees to encourage the maximum feasible participation of private enterprise in the plans and programs funded under the Urban Mass Transportation Assistance Act.

In fulfilling the privatization directive, SCAT has contracted with local medical facilities to absorb operational and transportation costs for door-to-door service. Given that ACTION/Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) and the Comprehensive Education and Training Act (CETA) were at one time major funding sources for SCAT, the directive toward privatization makes good sense.

The continuing development of the SCAT concept and other public-private venture initiatives is perceived as an important step in providing efficient door-to-door transportation service for the elderly—a need left unfilled by the traditional public, fixed-route transit system.

BACKGROUND

In 1978 the Crime Prevention Unit of the city of Detroit Police Department was attempting to find a way to purchase vehicles

to transport senior citizens on their daily travels. The plan of the police department was to get vans for each of their precincts and use these vans for the primary purpose of providing transportation for the elderly population of the city.

At the same time, two east-side Detroit neighborhood organizations needed to find some type of service to help fill the everyday transportation needs of their senior population. Many of the senior citizens in these two areas had been repeatedly robbed and assaulted while making necessary trips to local banks and groceries and monthly medical appointments.

The city program fell through because the police department was not able to secure funds for the purchase of the vehicles they needed to start the program. The disappointment within the communities of the two neighborhoods was high as was to be expected. The task of finding some type of safe transportation service for the elderly was taken on by a group of local activists who were part of a newly formed coalition of east-side Detroit neighborhoods.

The coalition was the Community Resource and Assistance Center (CRAC) and its purpose was to share problems that were prevalent in the respective areas and to exchange ideas and encourage support among member organizations. The original coalition had a membership of six neighborhood organizations. The projects that were already ongoing within the CRAC organization were youth employment, area beautification, housing, local oral histories, and re-treeing many of the neighborhoods that were plagued with Dutch elm disease. The senior transit problem was yet another challenge to this core group of activists.

The membership of CRAC knew that in order to satisfy the need to develop a transportation service, they would have to seek funding to purchase a start-up vehicle. They also knew that they would have to develop a viable, safe, and secure service in order to alleviate the problem of senior safety in these two neighborhoods. They were faced with the problem of convincing potential sources of funding that this need was critical.

The regional transit authority at that time was providing a waycart service for the perimeter of the affected areas. However, the needs of the senior citizens were such that door-to-door service was necessary and preferred to the waycart service. Many of the senior citizens were not capable of walking the necessary blocks to get to the waycart service stops. Also, the waycart service did not decrease the vulnerability of the senior citizens at all. The waycart service was not a deterrent to potential criminals. Funding from Section 16B-2 of the Urban Mass Transit Assistance Act of 1964 as amended would be difficult to obtain through the U.S. Department of Transportation because the waycart service initially received part of the specific funds that were to be used as part of a transit service for senior citizens. Therefore, as far as the federal government

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was concerned, the needs of the two specific neighborhoods were being met through the waycart service. In reality, the service did nothing to enhance transportation of senior citizens in that particular area of the city.

After careful examination of available funding sources and through the expertise of the CRAC administrative staff, monies were secured through the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. The initial amount of funding was enough to purchase a used vehicle with 50,000 mi on it. The program was under way.

IMPLEMENTATION

Now the coalition had to develop a program for the service. The biggest question was how to go about finding enough money to pay for running the program. CRAC also knew that, because the income of the area to be serviced was low, they would not be able to charge for the service. The following things needed to be done:

1. Develop a dispatch service and procedures for the program;
2. Find a place that would be used as a bay station to house the service;
3. Gather people (drivers and support personnel) to run the SCAT service; and, most important,
4. Seek funds for running the service on a daily basis, including maintenance, gasoline, insurance, and general upkeep.

HOUSING SCAT

The problem of rent was solved by setting up the service, called the Senior Citizen Area Transit (SCAT), in a Detroit Police Department ministration. Ministations are located throughout the city of Detroit and are a part of the Crime Prevention Unit. The facilities were used specifically to deal with neighborhood and community problems. Programs such as Neighborhood Watch are set up at these locations. Having the SCAT service run out of the ministration was ideal for the program. The ministration donated space for the setup and operation of SCAT.

It is important to note that the officer in charge of the ministration and his administrative assistant (a volunteer) were extremely instrumental in setting up this service. They had an established network of volunteers, many of them senior citizens, who helped run the facility during working hours. The officer and his assistant volunteered their time to find donated equipment for the initial office [i.e., typewriters, citizens band (CB) radio, units, desks, chairs, and supplies]. They even built walls around the area that SCAT would use for an office.

STAFFING

The ministration volunteer system solved a portion of the next problem, staffing the program. Many of the senior citizens who had volunteered to work at the ministration volunteered to work on the dispatch service and to do general logging and clerical

tasks. These people would divide their time in 2- to 4-hr shifts. The balance of the staff was funded through the then existing ACTION/VISTA, and CETA programs. The first drivers for SCAT were paid with CETA funds. Job descriptions are given in the following subsections.

Driver

Driving senior citizen riders in the SCAT area. Regular maintenance and servicing of the van; inside and outside cleaning of the van on a regular basis; collaboration with the volunteer working with the senior citizens; collaboration with the volunteers and workers in the program; collaboration with the dispatcher on scheduling and dispatching; daily installation and removal of the CB radio in the van; and use of that radio for emergencies or to receive information regarding rider pickups from the dispatcher. Helpful to seniors in cases of need (i.e., carrying bags, help in walking, waiting until they are safely inside, etc.). Careful driving.

Volunteer

Planning and coordination of activities for senior citizens and any follow-up that is necessary; outreach, research, and referral of senior citizens with special needs and problems; developing programs that are responsive to senior citizens and their needs; providing educational programs for the senior citizens; organizing and supervising volunteers who handle phone reception and code-a-phone setup and answering. Collaboration with drivers and volunteers in dispatching the van; coordination of the dispatching scheduling book. The volunteers should be of assistance to the senior citizens in their weekly meetings. Flexibility is of the utmost importance. Grant-writing ability would be most helpful. Monthly reports on ridership and expenses should be coordinated by the volunteer.

FUNDING

At this time, SCAT had a vehicle, a bay station, and people to drive the vehicle and run the program. The only remaining concern was finding money to get the program on the road, so to speak. This is where the affiliation with the Detroit Area Agency on Aging (DAAA) came into being. DAAA from that point on provided SCAT with a \$12,000 a year grant to run the program. This allocated funding would cover the cost of gasoline, maintenance, and insurance for the vehicle. SCAT was ready to roll.

PROGRAM EXPANSION

For the first year SCAT provided rides for senior citizens 55 years of age or older to and from local groceries, banks, and medical appointments Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. Riders were encouraged to use the service no more than twice weekly. This transportation service was free to riders although there was always a donation box in the vehicle

in which as much as \$100 per week was collected from the passengers. This money was used along with DAAA funds to run the program.

During the first year of operation SCAT established itself as a safe and effective service for elderly persons in these two high-crime areas. The service was so successful that two areas that were part of CRAC and adjacent to the neighborhoods served by SCAT were interested in forming a similar service.

SCAT provided 500 rides per month with the first vehicle and was generally not able to meet all of the requests for rides. Getting a second vehicle would help absorb the additional requests for service. It would also let the program extend its boundaries.

The Board of Directors of CRAC now had to seek funding for a second vehicle. This time they were not able to use high crime as a justification for the extension of the service. The two new areas requesting the service were considered affluent in comparison with the areas already served. The premise on which a grant was proposed was twofold. First, the local transit authority waycart service was not providing door-to-door service and, second and most important, transit for senior citizens was an issue of concern no matter what the demographics of a neighborhood might be.

Working through the CRAC office, funding was sought. After spending a great amount of time and effort in the state capital, SCAT, through CRAC, was able to convince the Michigan Department of Labor that funding should be allocated for the much needed service. Enough funding was provided to purchase a second vehicle for the program to serve the needs of the two adjacent neighborhoods.

Again, a used vehicle was purchased. The purchase was made by the administrator of CRAC and the chairperson. Both of these individuals were instrumental in the early stages of development of the program. They often worked in concert to promote and demonstrate the program to potential funding sources, the media, and other neighborhoods in Detroit and suburban areas. (Note that CRAC submitted grant applications yearly for Section 16B-2 funding through the U.S. Department of Transportation. Every year they were denied money.)

For the next year SCAT ran as a senior transit service for four east-side neighborhood organizations and provided 500 rides per month per vehicle. Insurance for each vehicle ran \$1,000 per year and the cost of maintenance was about \$1,000 per month. During this time staff secured a local mechanic to service the vehicles, installed CB radio units in each vehicle, and continued to run on a volunteer basis with CETA drivers and two ACTION/VISTA workers. As the service struggled through its initial growing pains (i.e., learning the most effective routes, setting up specific shopping days, determining schedules, and all other nuisances associated with the start-up of a transit service) something unexpected was happening.

SENIOR ADVOCACY

The SCAT bay station became a gathering place for area seniors. They came here to volunteer their time and to band together as a support group. Their avid interest in the program allowed them to become members of the SCAT board of

directors, with a representative from each neighborhood association involved in the service. They used the facility to gather seniors for weekly meetings at which they often had speakers address them on social security, banking, doctoring, and other concerns relative to their senior status.

SCAT was no longer just a transportation service. It provided a good place for senior citizens to advocate their needs. Many individuals who had not left their homes for a long time would gather at the SCAT office to meet new friends, discuss their problems, plan trips, and share the pains of aging. They even delighted in fund raising for the SCAT service. Their main sources of funding dollars were proceeds from selling household products, conducting bake sales, and preparing goods to sell at local fairs. They even went door to door on the local business strip where the office was located (the East Warren Business Association, which houses 425 businesses) to sell premiums to store owners and encourage them to promote the SCAT service. Thus the SCAT program was a success in more than one respect. Not only did it get the senior citizens out of their homes to conduct their daily business, it gave them a new purpose in life. They took a new pride in themselves.

SCAT: A VIABLE TRANSIT SERVICE

The next year of the program was a real test in survival for SCAT. ACTION/VISTA and CETA funding was cut, which meant that SCAT lost its drivers and two staff personnel. However, because of the senior volunteer network that had been established during the previous 2 years, the program was able to carry on. SCAT now had additional volunteers working at the office as well as volunteer drivers. Ridership dropped; yet the need for the service was ongoing in other areas adjacent to SCAT's boundaries. CRAC's coalition grew to 23 east-side neighborhoods in Detroit and included block clubs and business associations. All of these members were requesting that the service be put in place in their areas. Once again, the question of where CRAC would get the monies to expand the program had to be addressed. Furthermore, if the number of vehicles could be expanded, additional office space for new bay stations would be needed.

Requests for Section 16B-2 funding were still overlooked because the regional transit authority was still receiving funds for the waycart service. So there was no chance of getting funding for the expansion of the service through the U.S. Department of Transportation. However, one alternative did come to mind. Perhaps the regional transit authority had unused vehicles that could be donated to the SCAT service. After much documentation and presentation of the program to the regional transit authority, SCAT received two vehicles from the authority to expand the program. A local parochial high school donated space for one new bay station and the second bay station was run out of the CRAC office. SCAT was now a four-vehicle operation, run out of three bay stations, covering the entire east side of the city of Detroit. The additional drivers and staff workers were senior volunteers. The service published a monthly newsletter that listed routes, area coverage, and shopping days. It also had a Senior Volunteer Board of

Directors that was represented at CRAC. SCAT became an example of privatization in the purest sense.

CONCLUSION

SCAT covers 23 east-side neighborhood and business district associations as a program operating under CRAC. The area it serves is almost the entire east side of Detroit. It has been recognized by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), the Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT), and Southeastern Michigan Transit Authority (SEMTA) as a viable alternate transportation service. SEMTA, DDOT, and the Detroit Police Department (DPD) have offered the following assistance:

- SEMTA—Donation of two vehicles from their own fleet of minibuses. Use of their mechanics and garages for repair of vehicles.
- DDOT—Retired drivers to operate vehicles.
- DPD—Reservists to operate vehicles.

SCAT AS A MODEL

What is the next step for SCAT? Two important events have occurred that will carry the program in new directions.

The MDOT has accepted the program as a model and has given SCAT a 2-year demonstration grant for an administrator and an assistant to institute the program in the southwest and northwest sectors in the city of Detroit. The task of the administrator and the assistant will be to replicate the program in these areas. After 2 years the new program will be expected to be as self-sufficient as is SCAT. Privatization will realize this goal.

The second kudo for the program is that other communities have asked for assistance in setting up SCAT programs for their elderly citizens.

The city of Southfield, Michigan, has asked SCAT to help them set up a comparable service for a portion of their senior population.

The model has been established. The private sector has created a viable and necessary transportation system in the wake of the trend toward privatization.

Barriers and Safety Risks for Elderly and Handicapped Travelers at Airports

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Current federal legislation prohibits discrimination in transportation opportunities on the basis of age or handicap. The elderly and the handicapped are an increasing proportion of the air travel market. Many air terminals are not designed to accommodate the special needs of these people. This severely limits their transportation opportunities. Airport terminals provide a service to a dynamic activity that flows from trip origin to the airplane. Most airports are designed and built according to local building codes that are for structures that house activities rather than accommodate movement. Consequently, most air terminals are not completely accessible, and many have significant hazards and barriers for elderly or handicapped passengers. The factors that influence airport accessibility for elderly and handicapped persons require a systematic study approach. The characteristics, barriers, and

hazards of air terminal components are individually evaluated. The joint interactions and compounding effects of characteristics, policies, barriers, and hazards are also studied. Architectural features and available terminal services limit accessibility for various subgroups of the elderly and the handicapped depending on their disability. The study concludes that when viewed in total there are many inconsistencies among the policies, services, and facilities that various air carriers and airports provide the elderly and the handicapped. The design features and architectural barriers built into many airport terminals present major hazards that affect the safety and health of these passengers.

Transportation accommodates the movement of people, materials, and ideas. Transportation interacts with all aspects of life and the environment and, if not accessible, can restrict the availability of societal activities and opportunities, including