Transportation Service Demonstrations To Facilitate the Employment of Persons with Disabilities in Tennessee

THEODORE J. NEWSOM, DEBRA MARTIN PETTY, AND CAROLYN HENDERSON

A process to facilitate the development of alternative transportation services to help persons with disabilities overcome barriers that limit employment opportunities was implemented in two phases. Phase 1 activities concentrated on collecting information about transportation resources, work-trip problems, and potential solutions. The results of Phase 1 activities are contained in a previous report. These activities produced recommendations about transportation services for workers with disabilities and provided the basis for initiating Phase 2 transportation service demonstrations. During Phase 2, local project teams were formed in Memphis, Knoxville, and Sevierville, Tennessee, to pursue the development of demonstration projects. In Memphis, the local team developed a transportation revolving loan program and a coordinated commuter van service. In Knoxville, the team focused on increasing mobility options for workers with disabilities through private-sector service contracting and through the development of a community-based transportation business. In Sevierville, the team designed a dedicated commuter van service and expanded driver education opportunities for workers with disabilities interested in driving to and from the workplace. A statewide demonstration project involving the development and implementation of a vehicle purchase program for agency-provided transportation services was also conducted. In addition, the use of the Plans for Achieving Self-Support to finance transportation options for workers with disabilities is described.

When states such as Tennessee experience periods of economic development and growth, employment opportunities increase as existing businesses expand and new businesses open. Many persons take advantage of the opportunities to obtain new employment or experience career growth as a result of increased economic activity. However, certain segments of the population, such as persons with disabilities, cannot participate fully in the economic life of their communities. Problems such as lack of education and training, day care, and the inaccessibility of work sites are barriers that must be overcome to simplify job placement and retention. In many cases, employment opportunities are limited simply because the employees cannot drive or afford transportation. In addition, many potential work sites are in areas not served by existing transportation services, and work schedules often do not correspond to scheduled public transportation services.

Transportation is the problem most often cited by parents, staff, and persons with disabilities (1). This issue may be looked at from two perspectives: (a) the lack of available transportation and (b) the inability of the individual to access transportation because of either physical barriers or insuffi-

Institute for Human Mobility Systems, University of Tennessee Transportation Center, Knoxville, Tenn. 37996.

cient skills. The availability of public and private transportation is essential. Many people with severe disabilities cannot transport themselves; they must depend on a third party to get to and from employment. In areas where no public transportation exists, new services and support systems are required. Where transportation may be available, service schedules, architectural barriers, or confusing routing systems may inhibit the use of that transportation by persons with disabilities. In a national survey of staff in rehabilitation agencies, facilities, and organizations, transportation was ranked as the most significant barrier to accessing employment for persons with disabilities (2).

In a recent study of the National Association of Rehabilitation Facilities (3), the status, impediments, and best practices of supported employment were reported by 2,034 supported employment providers across the nation. The three most common methods of transporting supported employees to work were (a) transportation provided by an agency, (b) public transit without assistance, and (c) transportation provided by friends or relatives. Smaller organizations were more likely to provide transportation for their supported employees. Half of the smaller organizations provided transportation for an average of 65 percent of their supported employees. In a study on program status of supported employment in Tennessee (4), providers reported that transportation greatly impeded the consumer's ability to obtain and keep employment. The most frequent type of primary transportation to work was that provided by rehabilitation agencies and organizations. Other types included consumers driving their own cars, independently using public transportation, and walking or riding bikes or mopeds. Transportation was reported as the service most often provided while consumers were receiving extended support to help them maintain their jobs.

It is apparent that workers with disabilities are having substantial difficulties in using traditional transportation systems to the extent desirable for community integration. Transportation is a major barrier for persons with disabilities, especially when they are seeking work training and job placement. It remains a significant issue for public and private organizations whose mission is to design and implement strategies to facilitate employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND TASKS

The overall intent of the project was to initiate a process for developing transportation service options that would help persons with disabilities participate in the economic growth of Tennessee. The targeted client group was composed of Tennesseans with disabilities who are or will be employed in competitive job positions. Besides employees with disabilities, others involved in the project were transportation operators and community service agencies that transport employees with disabilities to work sites, employers who recruit and hire employees with disabilities, and support agencies that provide funds to facilitate the employment of persons with disabilities. Under the direction of the University of Tennessee Transportation Center's Institute for Human Mobility Systems, these groups provided input to the future development and design of transportation services to transport employees with disabilities to and from the workplace.

The activities described in this paper were a part of a larger study conducted in two phases during October 1989 through June 1992. Phase 1 activities concentrated on collecting information about transportation resources, work-trip problems, and potential solutions. The results of Phase 1 activities are contained in a previous paper (5). On the basis of these results, the project was continued into a second phase, which is described in this paper. The development of specific service demonstrations and selection of test sites and service financing options were begun as Phase 2 project tasks.

The intent of the second phase was to continue the development of alternative transportation service options. The work focused on developing transportation services at demonstration sites throughout the state. The major tasks accomplished during this project phase included the selection of demonstration sites, the formation of local project teams, the design of transportation services to be tested at each demonstration site, and the development of financial resources to fund the demonstration projects. A description of the demonstration projects and their developmental status is presented.

TRANSPORTATION SERVICE DEMONSTRATIONS

Local Service Demonstration Projects

Specific transportation service options recommended during Phase 1 were reviewed by the project staff for inclusion as potential service demonstration proposals developed during Phase 2. Potential project concepts were selected for development in the Knoxville, Memphis, and Sevierville areas. Local project teams were formed for each of these areas to work with the project staff during proposal development, solicitation of demonstration grant funds, and project implementation when financing was obtained. The local demonstration projects and their status as of this paper are described in the following.

Community-Based Transportation Business (Knoxville)

A local project team was formed in Knoxville to consider the development of a community-based transportation business. Team members included a representative from the Helen Ross McNabb Center, K-Trans, and the University of Tennessee. The objective of the community-based transportation business project is to develop a transportation business that trains,

employs, and transports low-income and disabled people. Although the transportation business would offer a variety of trips, its primary emphasis would be on work trips and work-related trips for persons with disabilities. The transportation business would provide reliable transportation to work sites, job training opportunities to low-income and disabled people, and jobs for persons with disabilities in the community-based business.

The Phase 1 results provided background information for an initial proposal developed by the staff of the Helen Ross McNabb Center and submitted to the Tennessee Department of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Levi Strauss Foundation for funding consideration. The initial proposal did not receive funding from these sources, so it was revised and a second project proposal was prepared and reviewed by the local team members. The revisions included an emphasis on training entrepreneurs interested in starting transportation businesses to serve persons with disabilities. The objective of the demonstration project is to provide business training along with technical support and financial incentives to encourage businesspeople to develop community-based transportation businesses. The proposal has been submitted for funding consideration to FTA as part of its Entrepreneurial Services Program (ESP). Follow-up contacts with FTA staff in Region 4 and in Washington, D.C., indicated that the project is eligible for funding with some revisions, but that no decisions can be made until ESP funding receives final approval from FTA.

Private-Sector Service Contracting Project (Knoxville)

A local project team in Knoxville composed of representatives from K-Trans, the Knox County Association for Retarded Citizens, and the University of Tennessee was formed to consider private-sector service contracting as an option for expanding services to persons with disabilities. The objective of the demonstration project is to contract for transportation services with private-sector providers. Such providers in the Knoxville area will be identified and recruited to participate in the program. Through a series of meetings, interested providers will be asked to propose alternative service models and financing strategies to accommodate the work-trip needs of persons with disabilities. The results will be used to prepare service designs using contracted private-sector providers. The contracted services will be procured through appropriate bid procedures and implemented as service demonstrations for set time periods.

When the local team was preparing a project concept, a planning team of city officials and public transportation providers began to develop Knoxville's Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Paratransit Compliance Plan. One plan element will be to explore and evaluate privatization and alternative modes such as the design of referral services, private-sector contracting, and user-side subsidy options. The funds to conduct this assessment are provided by Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) as part of the FTA Section 8 Planning process in Knoxville. To help evaluate these options, the project team worked with the Knoxville ADA Paratransit Advisory Committee to develop a Project ACTION proposal to use the Care Network computer technology to identify persons with disabilities and their transportation needs. This project was submitted to Project ACTION on May 29, 1992.

Preliminary contacts with private-sector contractors indicated that contractors were interested in providing transportation services but that they would need specific market and cost information to initiate specific service design options. The ADA paratransit planning process, along with the use of Care Network computer technology, would address this need. As a result, it was decided to incorporate this project demonstration concept and its development and implementation into the ADA paratransit planning process.

Coordinated Commuter Van Service (Memphis)

A local project team from Memphis, consisting of representatives from the Memphis Area Transit Authority, the Northeast Community Mental Health Center, and the University of Tennessee, explored the opportunities for demonstrating a coordinated commuter van service. The objective of the demonstration project is to design and operate a coordinated commuter van service to transport employees with disabilities to and from the workplace. Five area community mental health agencies that now provide job development and placement services for persons with disabilities will be asked to participate in an agency transportation consortium. Northeast Community Mental Health Center will be the lead agency for the consortium. With technical assistance from the Memphis Area Transit Authority and the University of Tennessee Transportation Center, the consortium will design and operate a coordinated commuter van service to provide dedicated work-trip transportation for individuals from all five agencies. The consortium will make decisions about organizational responsibilities of its members and the operations of the commuter van service. It is planned to operate the coordinated commuter van service for a limited demonstration period. Employees, employers, and the consortium members will evaluate the service to assess its costs and benefits. On the basis of the lessons learned from the demonstration, the consortium will recommend whether to modify, expand, or discontinue the service.

The local team is working closely with the Memphis Paratransit Coordinating Committee, which oversees the development of improved paratransit services in the Memphis area. The committee has several projects under way that have been given higher priority for development and implementation. These projects include the development of an ADA Paratransit Compliance Plan for Memphis as required by FTA and the implementation of a driver training program for personnel of agencies in Memphis that operate transportation services. The development of the coordinated commuter van service is ongoing. The specific focus now is the solicitation of operating funds to initiate the service.

Transportation Loan Guarantee Program (Memphis)

Another local project team in Memphis was formed to consider the development of a transportation loan guarantee program. Representatives from the Memphis Area Transit Authority, A&A Guard Service, and the University of Tennessee participated as team members. The objective of the demonstration project is to develop a transportation loan guarantee program for employees with disabilities who need financial

assistance to purchase transportation items essential for acquiring and retaining employment. The program would enable qualified workers with disabilities who can drive to buy vehicles for commuting to and from work. The program would also assist workers with disabilities to rehabilitate available vehicles in need of repair and to procure items to equip vehicles for driving or transporting persons with disabilities. The initial seed capital for the loan program will be solicited from public and private agencies. These agencies will provide representatives for the formation of a loan board that will develop eligibility criteria for loan program participants and make recommendations on program administration. An agency will also be selected to administer and manage the loan program and to develop procedures for soliciting, processing, and approving loan applications. Loan guarantees will be available until the initial seed funds are depleted, and additional loans will be made as funds become available. The program will be evaluated to assess program costs and benefits.

The local project team is searching for an administrative unit to conduct the program. Partners in Placement, Inc. and the Memphis Independent Living Center have been approached to consider the administrative unit role. Although supportive of the project concept, these organizations are unable to participate in the administrative role. The local team will continue to pursue opportunities for program funding and the identification of an organization to serve as the administrative unit for the loan program.

Sevier County Commuter Van (Sevierville)

A local project team with representatives from the East Tennessee Human Resource Agency, the Douglas Cooperative, and the University of Tennessee was formed to develop a Sevier County Commuter Van service. The objective of the demonstration project is to design and operate a commuter van route dedicated to transporting employees with disabilities to and from the workplace. The origin, destination, operating schedule, and fare rate of the commuter van will be based on an assessment of employee transportation needs and employer labor needs in selected areas of Sevier County. The commuter van route will be operated for a limited demonstration period. During the demonstration period, the route will be promoted to increase ridership among workers with disabilities. User evaluations will also be conducted periodically to assess employee and employer satisfaction with the service and to modify the route as needed. Continuation beyond the demonstration period will be contingent on the level of use and financial viability of operating the commuter van

A draft project proposal was prepared and submitted to TDOT for review and funding consideration. Follow-up contacts with TDOT staff to assess the proposal status indicated that the project was still under review and remains under consideration for funding as a demonstration project when funds are available.

Driver Education Program (Sevierville)

A local project team from the Sevierville area pursued the development of a driver education program for persons with

disabilities. Team members included representatives from the Tennessee Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation, and the University of Tennessee. The objective of the demonstration project is to increase the opportunities for workers with disabilities to drive to work by obtaining a driver's license through expanded driver education programs. Current driver education programs will be identified and program activities directed to meet the special requirements, and needs of workers with disabilities will be documented. Follow-up evaluations are planned to assess the project's effects on helping such workers obtain driver's licenses and the degree to which the ability to drive to work increases job placement and retention.

A vocational rehabilitation student at the University of Tennessee is identifying and documenting the activities of agencies that conduct driver education programs for their clients. The Tennessee Vocational Training Center, in Maryville, has volunteered to assist with the project. The center has provided case study information about the local driver education program for its clients. Its participation has encouraged the team to go beyond the local area to identify and document similar programs in other regions of Tennessee. This information will be summarized and disseminated to agencies in the state that are interested in initiating driver education programs for their clients.

Statewide Vehicle Purchase Demonstration Project

Many agencies throughout Tennessee are charged with developing community-based employment opportunities for their clients to facilitate community integration and independent living among persons with disabilities. As discussed earlier, these agencies must overcome transportation barriers that inhibit job training and job placement opportunities for persons with disabilities. To meet their employment program objectives and to ensure job placements, these agencies sometimes provide direct transportation services to accommodate the work-trip needs of their clients. In an effort to provide transportation resources to these agencies, the project staff participated in the development of a statewide vehicle purchase program.

A vehicle purchase program has been designed to assist agencies that provide supported employment opportunities for persons with disabilities and that desire to buy vehicles to transport individuals to work and work-related activities. The project is a statewide transportation demonstration project developed by the University of Tennessee Transportation Center as part of a research grant from the Developmental Disabilities Planning Council. The demonstration project is a cooperative effort of the university, the Tennessee Initiative on Employment, TDOT, and the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation.

The vehicle purchase program is a service option provided through Tennessee Vans, the statewide commuter vanpool service sponsored and operated by the University of Tennessee Transportation Center and TDOT. Tennessee Vans was initiated in 1990 with funds of approximately \$1 million in capital and operating grants from TDOT. The vehicle lease and purchase options are designed as revolving fund programs to recover program expenses and subsequently expand ser-

vices with program revenues collected from consumers and participating agencies. The vehicle purchase option enables public and private nonprofit organizations to buy vehicles for work-trip and work-trip—related purposes on a "pay as you go" financing plan. Major features of the program follow:

- Program participants include public and private nonprofit organizations that provide, or would like to provide, transportation services for commuters in Tennessee. Commuter transportation services include transporting employees to and from work or to and from job training sites or events and activities that facilitate the employment of persons served by the organization.
- Vehicles are purchased by the University of Tennessee Transportation Center and assigned to participating organizations through a simple purchase agreement. The vehicles are equipped especially for commuter transportation and include items such as cloth seats, carpeting, privacy glass, front and rear air conditioning and heat, side and rear swing-out doors, cruise control, tilt wheel, and AM/FM radio. Vehicles available during the 1991 model year are Ford 15-passenger vans and Ford 7-passenger minivans.
- Vehicle financing is provided on a "pay as you go" basis without requiring any cash down payment. The participating organization agrees to pay mileage fees to the University of Tennessee on a quarterly basis until the vehicle replacement cost is paid in full. The replacement cost must be paid in full within 60 months of the vehicle assignment date. Current fees for the 1991 vehicles are as follows:
 - -Ford 15-passenger van: Replacement cost is \$19,000; mileage fee is \$0.19/vehicle-mi.
 - -Ford 7-passenger minivan: Replacement cost is \$15,000; mileage fee is \$0.15/vehicle-mi.
 - -Administrative fee: Mileage fee of \$0.02/vehicle-mi is added to cover incurred administrative costs.
- Upon payment of the vehicle replacement cost, the title to the vehicle is fully transferred to the participating organization. The organization may then use the vehicle for any organization purpose for the rest of its useful life.
- Vehicle insurance and maintenance are provided by the participating organization throughout the duration of the purchase agreement period. Basic insurance coverage levels and routine vehicle maintenance procedures are outlined in the purchase agreement.
- Drivers that operate these vehicles are provided by the participating organization. Drivers are expected to possess appropriate, valid Tennessee operator's licenses and to operate the vehicles safely, in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations.

The program for supported employment agencies was initiated with the assistance of the Douglas Cooperative in Sevierville. Douglas Cooperative agreed to participate as the first agency to develop a vehicle purchase contract and to field test the program with two vehicles. The program was subsequently field tested in Knoxville in cooperation with the Knox County Association for Retarded Citizens. The association agreed to contract for one vehicle. After successful efforts to execute contracts with these two agencies, program information was sent to similar organizations throughout the state by a mailing conducted by the Tennessee Initiative on Employment (TIE) and Department of Mental Health and

Mental Retardation. Many requests for further information about the program have been received; in response to these requests, general program information and sample purchase contracts were sent to these agencies.

Participation in the statewide vehicle purchase program has been substantial. Agencies that have procured vans to transport clients in their supported employment programs include the Douglas Cooperative; Knox County Association for Retarded Citizens; Comcare, Inc.; Greene County Skills; Emory Valley Center; Regional Education and Community Health Services, Inc.; Rhea of Sunshine; Franklin County Adult Activity Center; Lakeway Center; Gateway House, Inc.; Progress, Inc.; and Volunteer Blind Industries. Interest in the program continues, and a waiting list is being kept to assign vehicles to agencies when more vans become available. The substantial growth in the number of vans already procured and the demand for additional vehicles by agencies under the Tennessee Vans Vehicle Purchase Program was unexpected. However, this occurrence is a solid indicator that the program is a tangible benefit that is filling a mobility gap for agencyprovided transportation services.

Application of PASS Program To Finance Transportation Costs

Plans for Achieving Self-Support (PASS) is a concept that enables individuals who receive Social Security disability benefits to develop a written plan for their future. Employees with disabilities who qualify for supplemental security income (SSI) may develop a PASS to set aside income or other resources to be used to achieve a specific, individualized vocational goal. A PASS can be established for education, vocational training, business startup, or job coach and job support services that enable a person to work. The purpose of a PASS is to increase an individual's capacity to produce income, thus reducing the reliance on government support in the long run. PASS makes it financially feasible for employees with disabilities to set aside or save income or resources to be used in achieving their goal by enabling them to become eligible for SSI, to continue to be eligible, or to receive higher SSI payments as they work toward self-support.

Anyone who is currently receiving or applying for SSI or Social Security disability insurance, has a disability, and does not have the capability for self-support may develop a PASS. Given these criteria, people who could develop a PASS include public school students participating in transition programs, persons receiving rehabilitation services from state or private rehabilitation agencies, and persons with disabilities who are participating in vocational or educational training programs. Persons with disabilities who otherwise would not have access to training or vocational programs can also develop their own PASSs to fund their own programs. Individuals must decide what occupational goal is going to be pursued and how. Then, the individual may choose anyone to help develop a PASS (i.e., parents, vocational counselors, job coaches, social workers, teachers, and employers), or the individual can write it alone.

The income or resources used to pay for goods and services under a PASS are counted in determining a person's eligibility for SSI or in calculating the amount of the SSI benefit that a person will receive. As stated earlier, for individuals to qualify for SSI, they must have limited income and resources enabling them to pass the SSI income and resource test. If their income and resources are too high, they will not qualify for SSI benefits. However, by excluding this income or resources in a PASS, the individual would then meet the income and resources test, thus qualifying for SSI. Likewise, an individual who already receives SSI can maintain that SSI in the same amount or even receive a larger SSI benefit by setting aside income or resources in a PASS.

The use of the PASS appears to be a viable option for some to finance transportation services. In June 1992, TIE project staff conducted a telephone survey to determine how PASSs were being used in Tennessee. The respondents for the survey were identified via the TIE Supported Employment Consumer Tracking System. The system enabled staff to select consumers for whom PASSs had been developed.

Local Social Security Administration offices were asked for information on PASS approvals; it was found that Social Security approved 19 PASSs for transportation services. PASSs were written to set aside money for various items that would allow the consumer to go to work. These items included payments for cars, car insurance, drivers, agency-provided transportation, taxis, mopeds, carpooling, car mileage, driver education, and bus passes. One PASS was approved to pay for carpooling expenses for transportation to work while the consumer participated in driver education and set aside savings to buy a car. Once the car was obtained, the consumer would use the PASS for car payments, insurance, mileage, and shoes to wear to work. Four PASSs were under review and had not received approval at the time of the survey.

The transportation services provided through the PASS have had a positive impact on the quality of life of consumers. Overall, the respondents indicated that the consumers acquired more independence and work opportunities. The PASS program enabled consumers to go to work and depend less on the family or a public agency for transportation. It provided the capability to replace and repair unreliable cars. For some, the PASS allowed individuals to go out on weekends by using the bus pass system and purchasing taxi services when no other transportation was available. Without the PASS program, long-term job security for some of the individuals would have been in jeopardy.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE ACTIVITIES

The overall intent of the project described in this paper was to initiate a process for developing alternative transportation service options that would assist persons with disabilities to overcome barriers that limit access to employment opportunities and inhibit participation in the economic growth of Tennessee. Specific transportation service options were selected, and service demonstration and financing plans for implementing and field testing selected transportation services were developed. This objective is still being pursued; several projects have been selected for development. The projects are a mixture of group transportation options (e.g., Sevier County Commuter Van) and personal mobility options (e.g., driver education). This mixture was developed in response to study findings that indicated that workers with disabilities

preferred options that promoted independence rather than dependence on public transportation. The major impediment to this goal has been the difficulty in locating funding for the projects. TDOT has been most responsive to the development of group transportation options, such as the Tennessee Vans Vehicle Purchase Program and the Sevier County Commuter Van. Funding "streams" for the personal mobility options, such as the Transportation Loan Guarantee Program, are not readily identifiable. In addition, the general economic environment has made it difficult to secure resources. However, the project staff will continue to submit proposals to selected funding agencies that express interest in the projects.

The overall project has actually developed beyond its original intent. The project staff envisioned the design of an optimal service that would meet the needs of all workers with disabilities. The primary goal was to develop a model centralized system that could be tailored to fit all mobility needs. As the result of project activities that created a dialogue with the consumers and agencies responsible for job training and placement, it was discovered that a centralized service concept would not meet all needs. There was a desire for diversified group and personal mobility options. Therefore, the project staff pursued a variety of decentralized services and developed a mixture of group and personal mobility options. It is hoped that these options can be financed, implemented, and evaluated to assess the benefits of this approach.

The project staff will continue to focus on developing transportation services at selected demonstration sites in local areas. The growth in the number of vans procured by agencies under the Tennessee Vans Vehicle Purchase Program is encouraging and indicates that the program is filling a mobility gap for agency-provided transportation services. The development of specific project proposals by the project staff and local teams is also encouraging. The project staff will continue to prepare and follow up requests for financial assistance to implement the projects.

The project staff will also continue to pursue the development of mobility options for workers with disabilities. Several proposals have been submitted for funding and will be

conducted when funds are allocated. The Tennessee Vans Vehicle Purchase Program will continue, and vans will be made available as capital recovery funds are collected and additional capital grants are received. Although group transportation options will be developed, attention will be directed toward personal mobility options—which are what workers with disabilities desire. The results of implementing various projects will be documented and disseminated to interested individuals, groups, and communities actively pursuing the development of mobility options for workers with disabilities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Funding was provided by the Developmental Disabilities Planning Council by means of a contract between the University of Tennessee and the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation.

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