

# TRANSPORTATION POLICY AND THE DELIVERY OF SOCIAL SERVICES IN A SMALL CITY

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The study examined the ways in which social service agencies in a small city cope with the transportation problems of immobile clients. The study documents unmet needs as well as underused capacity. Inefficiency stems from the tendency for many agencies to operate 1 or 2 vehicles only a brief time during the day. Low-vehicle utilization combines with high driver cost to produce per client trip costs as high as \$7.60. Demand for services appears to be poorly coordinated with the available supply of vehicles. Consolidation of transportation services would eliminate this inefficiency, but economic, institutional, and legal barriers stand in the way of effective merger of transportation programs. Interim solutions include exchanges among agencies of data on volunteers and vehicle availability and increased reliance on public transit modes. Longer range solutions involve application for federal funds through local governmental channels for service development and capital improvement programs.

•PREVIOUS studies of the transportation needs of residents in small cities and their hinterlands indicate that those who have low incomes and no automobiles are dependent for their mobility on other drivers and on public transportation. Where bus service is unavailable and where there is no one with whom to catch a ride, serious problems may arise. Studies of persons without access to cars reveal the difficulties they have in getting to medical facilities for routine appointments, getting to job-training programs located in adjacent towns, and in transporting children across town to recreation programs (1).

Social service agencies have identified the needs of low-income residents or other transportation disadvantaged, and each agency tends to develop its own program to solve the problem of immobility among its clients. Conversations with antipoverty agency directors, social service workers, and job-training staffs indicate a proliferation of ad hoc solutions: Volunteers driving their own cars may be asked to aid in emergencies or with the monthly schedule of client visits; vehicles such as cars or vans may be purchased or leased by the agencies and driven by the staff; or the agency may reimburse clients for the transportation expenses incurred. An agency director may even be called from his or her home at 6 o'clock in the morning to bring taxi fare to a trainee whose car broke down on the way to start a new job.

In large cities, social service agencies can extend the outreach of their services by opening new neighborhood centers in low-income areas (2) or in housing projects designed for the elderly (3). Other transportation disadvantaged may be reached through development of special vehicles for the physically handicapped or the disabled (4).

In smaller cities, however, the cost of multiple centers is prohibitive, and few agencies can with their own funds purchase the expensive, specially equipped vehicles for transporting the handicapped. To extend the delivery of social services, various programs have been devised.

1. Individual agencies have purchased one or more vehicles that are driven by professional or paraprofessional staff. For example, in Belvidere, New Jersey, Progress on Wheels, a nonprofit organization, uses volunteers and vehicles acquired through OEO auspices from the General Services Administration of the federal government.

2. New transportation operations are occasionally funded out of antipoverty funds to provide specialized transportation services for the disadvantaged (3):

In Inkster, a racially mixed, low-income suburb of Detroit with a population of about forty thousand, . . . five station wagons were leased inexpensively from the state highway department to provide on-call, door-to-door transportation to medical services, social services, cultural affairs and shopping. There is no public transportation in the area. The wagons are driven by volunteers who are paid only out-of-pocket expenses. In emergencies and in other than business hours, volunteers drive their own cars. In two of the less populated service areas, volunteers are unavailable. Therefore, part-time elderly drivers are employed by the project.

3. An agency acts as the coordinator to get rides for clients from a pool of volunteers. In Greensboro, North Carolina, the Voluntary Action Center of the United Community Service has a list of volunteers who are called on to provide rides to social service agencies for clients who request transportation.

The research reported on in this paper is an attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of agency transportation services in the context of a small city. Our data collection site is Greensboro, North Carolina, that has a population of 150,000. Greensboro enjoys a fairly widespread network of radially oriented bus service to the downtown area, but public transportation from low-income neighborhoods to outlying medical facilities, special clinics, and job-training sites is often lacking.

The study inventoried the transportation resources (both physical and financial) that were at the disposal of these agencies, and attempted to find answers to the following questions:

1. What is the total expenditure by social service agencies for transportation for clients?
2. What is the extent of utilization of the cars, vans, and buses owned by the agencies?
3. Do agencies find there are unmet calls for transportation from clients or other persons transportation disadvantaged by low income, age, physical handicap, or inability to drive?
4. Can the transportation resources of the community and of the social service agencies be drawn together into a consolidated system?
5. What budgetary or jurisdictional restrictions inhibit the development of a centralized transportation system to serve the transportation needs of all social service agencies?

#### METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The universe of social service agencies in Greensboro, both public and private, were included in the study. The functions of the agency may include any of the fields of health care, counseling, training, income transfer, employment placement, youth, recreation, and day care. Lists of agencies were supplied by the United Community Services, the Center for Manpower Research and Training of North Carolina A&T State University, and by the Guilford County Economic Opportunity Council. Interviews were conducted both with agency directors and with transportation specialists within the agencies where such positions existed.

We are pleased to report complete support from the designated agencies. All of the 24 agencies responded to the request for data. At the start of the project the agencies were invited to a conference held at the university where the special service agency representatives and the students and faculty of the university Transportation Institute developed the survey instrument and provided useful guidance and insights to the researchers.

#### Existing Transportation Resources of Social Service Agencies

The social service agencies of Greensboro report the availability in one agency or another of 26 vehicles with a total seating capacity of 481 seats. These transportation

resources are not evenly distributed among the agencies. Of the 24 agencies interviewed, 10 have no vehicle whatsoever and the remaining 14 have one or more vehicles. Table 1 gives the characteristics of the agencies interviewed. The vehicles inventoried were 2 sedans, 4 station wagons, 13 vans and minibuses, 6 buses, and 1 utility truck.

Table 2 gives the breakdown of total transportation costs by agency and by type of expenditure. In many cases, the agency directors did not know how much they were spending on transportation or how many client trips were made during the year. Thus, nonresponses (na) are given in many categories; if the cost category contains an na, it was not included in the budget totals for the agency. If it was possible to estimate expenses for any category, for example, on the basis of the mileage driven per year, the estimated figure is given and included in the total.

The social service agencies are implicitly spending \$50,468 yearly at an average cost per client trip varying between 69 cents and \$7.60. This extraordinarily large sum for transportation expenditure is possible because many separate budgets, from a host of funding sources, include line items for transportation. The duplication of expenditure is striking in view of the low level of utilization of most of the vehicles and drivers. Let us consider some of the inefficiencies of the system.

### Low Vehicle Utilization

The average vehicle is in use only 3.6 hours out of the 24-hour period of a weekday and almost not at all on weekends. Only 5 agencies out of the 10 with vehicles use the cars more than 1 hour per day.

Data are not available on the complete distribution of trips by time of day; however, the authors estimated these figures based on interview responses about the agency's program. These estimates are given in Table 3.

Capacity utilization appears to be quite low. Utilization of capacity should be measured along 2 dimensions: seat utilization at a given point in time and during the day that the vehicle is carrying passengers. For example, some of the agencies run large buses to schools for the handicapped. These vehicles used most of the seats when in operation, but the buses make only 2 runs a day and stand idle otherwise. Other vehicles may make frequent trips (such as vehicles operated by the social service division of the county), but carry only 1 passenger to a specific destination.

With respect to the agencies under study, we may conclude that at no time of the day is more than 65 per cent of seat capacity used, including peak traffic hours (Table 4). Use drops to 26 per cent of capacity during midmorning and may amount to no more than 5 per cent of capacity over time. Almost no use is made of the seats in the evenings, during the night, or on weekends.

### Labor Costs

Many agencies cannot afford to hire a paraprofessional driver and hence press into service the existing professional staff, including in selected cases the director of the agency. The agencies that have paid drivers had a total annual wage bill of \$29,000 for their time actually spent in driving (Table 2). Since some of the drivers' time is spent on other activities in the agency, the total costs of drivers' salaries may run considerably higher.

If data were not available from the agency, wages for drivers were estimated from the hourly wage rate supplied by the agency and the mileage divided by 20 mph, which we assumed to be an average speed. This approach understates wage costs, for it does not include waiting time, nor does it allow for the fact that some agencies pay for the entire salary of paraprofessional drivers, irrespective of whether they are driving all during the day. Since we did not know whether the paraprofessional drivers were gainfully employed in other pursuits within the agency when not driving, we decided to impute to the transportation costs not their total hours worked in the agency but only the hours they spent driving.

Table 1. Characteristics of agencies interviewed.

Characteristic	Number	Percent	Characteristic	Number	Percent
Clients served per year			Source of funds		
1 to 100	3	12.5	Federal government	7	29.1
101 to 1,000	11	45.8	State government	5	20.8
Over 1,000	10	41.7	Local government	2	8.3
Total	24	100.0	Charitable contributions	5	20.8
Function			Public and private	5	20.8
Counseling	3	12.5	Total	24	100.0
Health	5	20.8	Major source of transportation		
Manpower and employment	10	41.7	Own vehicles and drivers	10	41.7
Youth recreation and day care	4	16.7	Use volunteer drivers	10	41.7
Other	2	8.3	No program	4	16.6
Total	24	100.0	Total	24	100.0
Clientele in poverty bracket			Other transportation programs		
Less than 25 percent	7	29.2	Pay bus fare	6	25.0
25 to 50 percent	5	20.8	Do not pay bus fare	18	75.0
51 to 90 percent	8	33.3	Pay taxi fare	5	20.8
Over 90 percent	4	16.7	Do not pay taxi fare	19	79.2
Total	24	100.0	Reimburse staff	9	37.5
			Do not reimburse staff	15	62.5
			Reimbursed staff drivers	8	33.3
			Do not reimburse staff drivers	16	66.7
			Use volunteers	10	41.7

Table 2. Agency expenditures for client-related transportation.

Agency	Expenditures (dollars)							Annual Trips	Cost per Passenger (dollars)
	Vehicle Depreciation	Driver Wages	Gas and Oil	Repairs	Insurance	Other	Total*		
1									
2	315	2,800 <sup>b</sup>	560	150	220		4,045	5,200	0.78
3						2,150	2,150	na	na
4						100+	100+	20	5.00
5	na		na	na	na	na	na	na	na
6	na		na	na	na	na	500	na	na
7	380	1,500 <sup>b</sup>	300	100	na		2,280	300 <sup>c</sup>	7.60
	283	1,800 <sup>b</sup>	360	100	na		2,543	400 <sup>c</sup>	6.35
	233	1,800 <sup>b</sup>	360	100	na		2,493	400 <sup>c</sup>	6.23
8									
9	191	1,500 <sup>b</sup>	na	na	na	na	na	na	na
10	539	2,750	825	na	150 <sup>c</sup>	1,250	5,514	8,000	0.69
11	532	3,500	1,050	250	150 <sup>c</sup>	na	5,482	1,000+	5.48
12	858	na	na	na	na	na	na	1,250	na
13	463	1,800	1,080	1,668	750		5,761	na	na
14						100 <sup>c</sup>	100 <sup>c</sup>	na	na
15	na	5,000	na	na	na	na	16,000	2,550	6.27
16	400	3,400	663	na	na	na	na	na	na
17	400	3,368	663	na	na	na	na	na	na
18	na						3,500		
19									
20									
21									
22									
23									
24	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na
Total	4,594	29,218	5,861	2,218	na	na	50,468		

Note: na = not answered, i.e., no information was supplied by agency.

\*Does not reflect total expenditures for the items, rather total reported expenditures. The costs, therefore, represent a minimum estimate.

<sup>b</sup>Imputed expenditure.

<sup>c</sup>Estimated.

Table 3. Trips by time of day.

Agency	7:01 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.	9:31 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.	11:31 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.	1:01 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.	4:31 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.	6:31 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.	10:01 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	
2	20	0	0	20	0	0	
3	0	0	0	0	0	0	
4	0		0	0	0	0	
5	0		0	0	0	0	
6	0		0	0	0	0	
7	0		0	0	0	0	
8	0		0	0	0	0	
9	65		na	65	0	0	
10	12		0	0	12	0	
11	5	15	15	15	15	5	5
12	0	3	0	3	0	0	0
13	0	0	0	100	100	0	0
14	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
15	0	5	0	5	0	0	0
16	100	50	50	0	100	0	0
17	50	50	0	0	50	0	0
18	40	0	0	0	40	0	0
19	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
20							
21							
22							
23	5	2	0	5	0	0	0
24	<u>10</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>10</u>
Total	230	126	65	223	315	15	15

Table 4. Seat capacity used on weekdays.

Time	Client Trips	Seat Capacity	Trips as a Percentage of Capacity
7:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.	230	481	47.8
9:31 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.	126	481	26.2
11:31 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.	65	481	13.5
1:01 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.	223	481	46.3
4:31 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.	315	481	65.5
6:31 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.	15	481	3.1
10:01 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.	15	481	3.1

### Poor Coordination of Demand for Services With Available Supply of Vehicles

The agencies that are likely to receive calls from persons needing transportation are not the agencies that have vehicles at their disposal. The Voluntary Action Center maintains a list of volunteer drivers, but there is no guarantee that the volunteers will be available with a functioning car when calls come in from the elderly needing to get to clinics, from low-income families needing to collect food, from children going to special instructional programs, or from the physically handicapped needing help to get around in the city. The Crisis Control Center can be reached by phone 24 hours a day. Its staff report getting requests for transportation in the middle of the night for medical emergencies among low-income persons who feel they cannot afford the \$25 for an ambulance, but they have no way of dispatching vehicles to meet those needs. Closer cooperation between these agencies and the ones with vehicles and drivers could greatly improve the efficiency of the system.

### BARRIERS TO CONSOLIDATION OF SERVICES

Given the evidence of unmet needs in the face of underused capacity, one suspects the system as a whole could benefit from consolidation. Older, less reliable vehicles could be disposed of; telephone requests now coming in to the Voluntary Action Center

could be answered by vehicles in another agency; and a pooling of the various sets of volunteers used as drivers by the several agencies could provide a larger backup to the whole system.

Despite these advantages, many barriers stand in the way of effecting these changes. Economic barriers are immediate: There is a high initial outlay required by the agency that assumed responsibility for coordination of the program. These costs include managerial time, recruitment of volunteers to operate telephones, red tape involving inter-agency transactions, and increased liability.

Institutional barriers in some cases prevent transfer of assets from one agency to another. The various funding sources for the agencies include federal government grants, state grants, city or county budgets, foundation support for special programs, support by the United Campaign, other charitable contributions, or some combinations of these sources. Each funding source carries its own hierarchy of accountability and cannot easily permit transfer of vehicles to another agency. Furthermore, vehicles used by a social service agency may more frequently be used to send staff to nearby conferences; therefore, the agency wants to maintain dispatching authority.

### INTERIM SOLUTIONS

Using a single agency to collect the requests for service, the agencies can retain their own vehicles but at the same time offer the probable use of the vehicle where no conflicting demands made by that agency have arisen. The approach involves the pooling of lists of vehicles, lists of functioning volunteers, and information on alternative modes (such as taxi rates).

Volunteers appear to be the key ingredient. It is no longer any problem to insure volunteer drivers of agency vehicles. The National Center for Voluntary Action published a pamphlet that describes a blanket policy that covers all volunteers for an annual premium of \$2 per volunteer (\$40 minimum premium per policy).

It is difficult to recruit volunteer drivers who have the physical stamina to lift handicapped individuals into cars. From experience, most volunteers are either housewives or retired persons, for whom the lifting is difficult. None of the social service agencies interviewed had acquired the specially equipped vehicles to make access and egress easier for the physically handicapped.

Some of the social service agency personnel interviewed were unfamiliar with alternative transportation modes available to the carless. Another interim solution includes a compilation of information on existing public transportation routes, fare structure, and schedules; conventional taxi rates; contract rates offered by taxi companies; and information on rates charged by emergency squads for ambulance pickup in low-income areas. If a central dispatch office has this information, it can be passed on to clients and agency personnel to answer immediate problems.

### LONG-RANGE SOLUTIONS

Much transit planning is now occurring in city and regional governments. Transit planners typically depend on aggregate data sources such as origin-destination studies, census data, and traffic surveys. Perhaps new discussions should take place between planners and heads of social service agencies to identify specialized transportation needs, which may occur monthly, such as a need to distribute surplus food, or unpredictably, a need to get a client to a medical specialist in an adjacent town.

Such discussions may lead to exploration of demand-responsive, flexibly routed public transportation services. This approach to bus service is under experimentation in many cities (5) and could prove a great benefit to social service agencies. Low-income residents of Model Cities neighborhoods in Detroit, Michigan, and Columbus, Ohio, have increased access to local agencies as a result of demand-responsive systems that provide door-to-door pickup and delivery.

Cities that have evaluated their needs and have fulfilled the federal transportation planning requirements may apply for capital grants and service development grants from the Urban Mass Transit Administration, provided the local municipality contributes. However, few cities have a transit system that provides ubiquitous service to

social service agencies. In an era of increasing deficits for transit operators, most are reluctant to provide these services, which are unlikely to pay for themselves.

An issue worthy of further research is that of other federally funded approaches to the transportation problems of social service agencies. One suggestion broached by volunteer organizations is that the current rate of income tax credit for volunteers who drive for charitable organizations be raised. At present the rate is 8 cents per mile, 3 cents less than business corporations can deduct for business mileage. Equalization of the income tax advantage bringing the volunteers up to 11 cents per mile would be instrumental in promoting the expansion of volunteer programs.

Another suggestion involves federal support for capital acquisition as agencies band together to provide better transportation services. Several important questions should be explored with respect to this proposal: What would be the basis for local matching grants? Would the consortium of agencies include both public and privately funded organizations? In a consortium, would the agencies participating be charged on a per client basis or on a flat yearly fee? If the latter, how would assigning of transportation priorities take place?

There is only a modest amount of literature available describing how agency transportation programs are set up, and none analyzes in depth the costs and benefits of these experimental programs. These matters were discussed at length at the UMTA-sponsored Spring Meeting of the University Research and Training Grant Program in 1973. Therefore, it is premature to discuss solutions to a problem of client immobility that has not been completely documented. What does appear clear is that there is widespread recognition among social workers that carless clients, or otherwise handicapped individuals, are denied needed social services because of transportation difficulties.

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