

Unification: Painless Consolidation of Special Services

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Efforts to bring together small, independent providers of specialized transportation services to increase efficiency have been made for more than 20 years. Consolidation and coordination are two methods that have been attempted. The results are mixed. Sometimes consolidation and coordination fail because of political reasons, sometimes they are implemented but fail to provide improvements. Politicians are attracted to consolidation in theory but resist it if their jobs are affected. A third method, unification, was studied recently in Central Contra Costa County, California. Specialized transportation providers were placed under a common management umbrella. Management was consolidated but service was not. Unification is attractive because it is less of a threat to stakeholders, yet it provides the management structure necessary for accomplishing the specific changes that are hoped for under consolidation and coordination. The unified system discussed here is a type of brokerage system providing flexibility for multiple providers and service competition. How the concept of unification was developed, presented, and implemented in Central Contra Costa County is discussed in this paper.

Central Contra Costa County is a rapidly growing area in the San Francisco Bay region. The area is primarily suburban and includes several new commercial office developments and some rural areas. The Bay Area Rapid Transit runs through an edge of the area, but the primary intraregion transit is the bus service offered by the Central Contra Costa Transit Authority, which is called "County Connection."

In 1988 when the study described here was undertaken, the 10 cities of Central Contra Costa County offered elderly and disabled residents door-to-door paratransit services through one of three arrangements. One city-run service provided rides to its residents as well as to residents of a smaller city. This service used city-owned vehicles, which were driven by city employees. Six cities took advantage of an existing Joint Powers Agreement to contract with a private operator for service to their residents. The remaining two cities contracted with a not-for-profit agency for services.

Although the three services provided door-to-door transportation to seniors and persons with disabilities, they differed in age eligibility requirements, fare levels, priorities of trip types, hours of service, advance reservation requirements, and the like. In addition, the cost of the three services differed, partially because of the differences in area population densities and partially because of the mode of operation.

Principal financing for all services came from state sales taxes made available to local agencies. In addition, some of the cities spent general funds and provided in-kind services.

No funding provisions had been made for replacement of vehicles, however, and this lack of replacement funding motivated the study described here.

BACKGROUND

In 1987 several of the cities approached County Connection and requested funding for fleet replacement. County Connection approved the funding contingent on a study of the performance of the special services. This condition recognized the obligation to ensure that tax funds were used effectively.

The study included an assessment of the existing services, estimates of demand, development of a financial plan, an analysis of alternative institutional arrangements, and an implementation plan. The institutional analysis is the topic of this paper.

Early in the study, the following two questions were posed as a means of giving direction to the institutional study:

- Should the three services be consolidated into fewer services?
- Who should operate the consolidated service or services?

Oversight for the study was provided by a Technical Advisory Committee consisting of staff representatives from each city, two regional organizations, and consultants.

During the study a significant event took place that changed prospects for special services—a ballot initiative passed that provided significant new funding for paratransit. More institutional arrangements were made possible by eliminating the barrier of inadequate funding, which would concern organizations that were candidates to assume responsibility for the service.

SYSTAN, Inc., Pat Piras Consulting Services, and Clayton Consulting conducted the study.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Factors thought to affect the efficiency and effectiveness of the services negatively were identified by means of an assessment. For each of the findings, methods to overcome the problems were recommended.

Institutional Structure

The key finding of the study was that the institutional structure consisting of three autonomous providers, managed by three

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managers, and under the direction of three policy boards was not adequate for the task of offering cost-effective service. However, an institutional change recommendation was considered to be one of last resort since it was thought that it would be difficult to gain political acceptance. Therefore, every effort was made to identify methods to resolve the issues and shortcomings with procedures that did not require organizational changes. It was only when the Technical Advisory Committee unanimously endorsed the concept that a new institutional structure was a necessity that the concept of unification was developed. Because this recommendation is the central thrust of this paper, it is discussed later. Other findings and recommendations are cited to make the case that only an institutional change could significantly improve the paratransit service offered.

Lack of Staff Training and Management Continuity

In general, the supervisory and middle-management staff and front-line service staff had not been adequately trained. Two of the three services provided no formal training for drivers or dispatchers. The city administrators who oversaw paratransit did so as part of larger job responsibilities and none was trained in paratransit matters. Also, there was a lack of continuity among the management staff because of sharing of administrative responsibility among the cities and normal staff turnover. There was no back up management capability, either for ad hoc needs or for progression into the top management position.

No specific recommendation was suggested for management and training shortcomings because it is difficult to provide cost-effective training in small units. There are several ways, however, that institutional changes would provide trained staff. A combination of services would create a sufficiently large unit to allow training to be performed in-house or by contracting and would provide opportunities for on-the-job management development.

Low Productivity

Although service productivities (passengers carried per hour of vehicle service) were within the ranges commonly found in paratransit services, they were well below the productivities of top performers. Because of the clustering of high population densities, combining trips was considered as a possible means to substantially improve the productivity of the city-operated system and modestly improve the joint powers system. The third provider operated in an area of sparse population so only slight improvements were thought likely.

A number of actions were recommended. Better dispatching procedures, perhaps with computer assistance, were recommended so that more trips could be grouped. The increased use of prescheduled trips to popular destinations was recommended. To this end, cooperation should be sought from those scheduling physician appointments to concentrate appointments within certain hours. Procedures for coordinating trips among the three providers were recommended to reduce interjurisdictional movements of empty vehicles. Increased use of paratransit as a feeder to fixed-route services was recommended to eliminate long paratransit trips.

Inadequate Management Data and System

Each service prepared financial and performance reports, quarterly for the Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA) and annually for the state. These reports were designed to ensure accountability for funds so report contents and format were not adequate for management or policy formation. The shortcomings were twofold. Much of the data necessary for management was not included; sometimes data were not collected and sometimes data were collected but not processed. The RTPA also did not assemble or use certain management data. They did not compile and release data reported to them, which providers could have used for assessment and planning.

The second difficulty was accuracy of information. Although standard definitions of data elements are prescribed by state regulation, the providers did not follow the definitions. Particular indicators from one operator were based on different assumptions than those used by other operators. The RTPA did not monitor or provide technical assistance to ensure that data were correctly reported.

The consultants recommended the following. A thorough management reporting system installed by each operator could provide timely and accurate reports to all those who have responsibility for the conduct of the services—policy makers, managers, and others. Documentation of the precise means of processing each measure in the reporting system was recommended. Further, technical assistance on this function should be provided by the RTPA.

These reports should be part of a larger management system of goal setting and achievement monitoring. No such system had been installed at any of the existing services. The search for improvement was not part of the culture of the operators.

Minimal Policy Board Oversight

Ultimate responsibility for policy was vested with the city councils in each of the participating cities. For two of the services, the councils had delegated the policy function to management staff and required minimal reporting to the councils. The consultants believed that the existing services probably suffered from the lack of greater policy oversight.

It was recommended that the policy boards meet regularly and publicly with agendas and the other trappings of a publicly accountable organization. They should participate in annual goal setting, should receive regular service performance reports, and should report to their councils.

Little Coordination Among Services

There were no mechanisms for coordinating trips or for sharing facilities and information among the three providers. Trip coordination might help improve productivities. Other types of coordination, perhaps in purchasing and in sharing of technical and market information, could also achieve cost savings.

To initiate coordination, it was recommended that a voluntary and informal operator's group should be formed, consisting of administrators, drivers, and dispatchers. The group would discuss options for coordination and identify those ac-

tions that would be mutually beneficial. It was suggested that the group meet regularly (perhaps bimonthly) and form task forces to investigate issues such as operations reporting, coordinating trips, purchasing, driver and management training, equipment and facility needs, training, and the like.

Low Market Share and Declining Ridership

Ridership in all services had declined over the previous four years despite growing populations of eligible users. Staff reported that few new riders entered the program. Moreover, the number of actual users of the services was believed to be only about 10 percent of the eligible population. Although the people using the service may have been those needing it the most, the information necessary to verify this presumption and to determine the causes of declining ridership was not available.

Market research was recommended to evaluate existing services in meeting the needs of the intended users. An evaluation of how well the existing eligibility requirements really defined the intended market was recommended. If and when greater capacity became available, resulting from productivity improvements and the new funding, promotion among the target population should be instituted.

Anticipating that this marketing function could not be cost-effectively performed by any one of the services, it was recommended that the RTPA be asked to take responsibility for the research aspects of this function.

Inequitable Burden-Sharing Among Cities

Three of the six cities in the joint powers' service provided in-kind support with the heaviest burden falling on two cities who shared the administrative responsibilities. This inequity of the sharing had become a major issue among these cities. Inequity was, of course, not an issue for the single city provider as they provided little service to the small neighboring city. In the third service area, the administrative duties had been passed around among the three cities in the service area and the equity issue had not risen. (The passing of the duties created its own problems, as cited above.)

It was recommended that the cities performing the administrative duties charge these costs to the service. Unfortunately, this charge would reduce the service available to the users. Furthermore, it was anticipated that even with remuneration, none of the cities would have taken the administrative job. This, then, was an unresolved problem short of an institutional change.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In general, it was concluded that the three services could be operated in a fashion that would increase their productivity and allow more trips to be offered within the existing budget. It was also concluded that service would benefit by more intensive management and the managers would benefit from paratransit training. It was observed that public accountability required a greater level of policy attention and oversight.

The consultants further concluded that many of the recommendations could not be implemented by individual actions of the providing agencies. Other suggestions, which might be implemented by collaborative action, would not be because there was neither the mechanism nor the incentive for that collaboration. In other words, coordination was not a viable option for achieving the needed reforms. A change in the organizational structure for offering the services, however, could create a structure in which the issues could be more easily addressed and would have a greater probability of success. For this reason, a change in structure was deemed to be desirable.

It was concluded that consolidation would permit the reforms, but it was believed that consolidation would not be seen as an acceptable political option. Therefore, the consultants searched for an arrangement that provided the benefits of consolidation without actual consolidation. The result was the concept described in the next section.

ORGANIZATIONAL ARRANGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

The institutional decision was presented to the decision makers as a three step decision. First was whether or not there was a need for an organizational change. The second was the decision concerning which of the various possible changes should be instituted. The third was the decision concerning which organization would take responsibility for the service in the new institutional structure.

Although the consultants at this point felt that a new structure was the best technical solution and one that was most workable in the long run, they did not adopt an advocacy role. The method of presenting consultant recommendations is a matter of philosophy about the role of consultants in public policy formation. Consultants have widely divergent views on the subject although it is almost never a topic investigated during the selection of consultants. The consultants in this study believed it was their obligation to lay out the arguments for and against each alternative as objectively as possible. Every attempt was made to identify the political implications of each alternative without letting the political factors affect the findings, although they might affect the recommendations. Having determined a preferred technical approach, the consultants explained it and recommended it, but they did not advocate for it. (Advocacy is proper when it is an explicit contractual task and all parties understand that is the role of the consultant.) The danger of advocacy by consultants is that it compromises their real and perceived objectivity. They abandon their role as an objective analyst upon whom all parties may rely. The loss of credibility may make it impossible for the consultants to help their clients find a successful course of action, which may have to be different from the consultant's recommendation in order to achieve political consensus. Much that goes wrong with consultant studies does so because consultants let their egos become involved with their recommendations, and are not able to help their clients find a successful course of action—one that works in the real world. Turning from consulting philosophy to the study at hand, it was first necessary to consider if change was necessary.

Was It Broken?

Consultants often face the question, "If it isn't broke, why fix it?" Study results led to the conclusion that the provision of service was broken, and, as the findings just cited demonstrate, the status quo was not efficient.

In addition, the recommendation for an organizational change was appropriate because the present situation was not stable. Something needed to be done about the inequity of administrative sharing among the cities. Moreover, the availability of new funding, which eventually doubled the resources available for paratransit, would cause sufficient changes to warrant reorganization. The existing practices could not have handled an increase in resources of that magnitude. The prospect of greater levels of service raised policy questions that could not be addressed by the existing policy formation structure. In other words, because changes were coming, it would be expedient to take advantage of the change to remodel the service delivery system.

Analysis of Options

Several criteria were used for evaluating options for the institutional arrangements. An overriding consideration was whether a proposed option (i.e., definitive reporting channels, span of control, and the like) would be workable according to the precepts of organizational theory. For arrangements that were workable, several other factors were used to assess their strength: the impacts of changes on the performance (efficiency and effectiveness), the amount (supply) of service, the quality of service, and funding levels for the services. Additional factors considered included the degree of city control, equity among cities, adequacy of policy board oversight, capability of management, stability of the organization, ability to handle the new financing, and the ability to respect existing commitments.

For this analysis, the organizational structure was viewed as consisting of three parts. At the top are the policy boards that make policy and are ultimately responsible to the taxpayers for the use of tax funds. The second level consists of management—paid staff responsible for all aspects of offering the service under policies set by the policy board. The third level consists of operators or providers responsible for the day-to-day implementation of services. While management and operations are commonly combined, they are separated in this discussion because they can be vested in different organizations as they were in both the existing and the recommended structure.

The options for institutional arrangements consist of combinations of one to three policy boards, management, and operators. However, eliminating those options not meeting the criteria from organizational theory left only three candidates. Figure 1 indicates how these options differ at the three organizational levels. The existing three-provider arrangement with the recommended improvements was considered as the "do nothing" option. The second option was consolidation of all services into one. The remaining option was a particular form of combining the three services, which was called "unified." The unified service has one policy board, one manager, and any number of operators. Unified differs

LEVELS OF ORGANIZATION	OPTIONS		
	STATUS QUO	CONSOLIDATED	UNIFIED
POLICY BOARDS	3	1	1
MANAGEMENT	3	1	1
PROVIDERS	3	1	1 or more

NOTE: Numbers in matrix indicate the numbers of organizational units of each type.

FIGURE 1 Institutional options.

from consolidated, which usually refers to a system that has one policy board, one manager, and one integrated operator. Consolidation is a subset of unification.

Arguments for Unification

The single policy board is an important characteristic of a unified system. With one policy board, decisions can receive more intensive policy analysis and review.

The single manager is the most important aspect of a unified system. Concentration of management could provide the resources necessary to obtain a well-trained and experienced manager and could allow that manager to be dedicated to paratransit. Dedicated management should pay many dividends in improved service and improved policy board involvement. Moreover, single management would ensure that the benefits of more effective packaging of trips would occur because responsibility for such coordination would not be divided among organizations, as was true for the old systems.

Another important benefit of single management is that it provides a home base and resources for a centralized passenger scheduling and vehicle dispatching system. Such a system was seen as an important means to increase rides per vehicle hour and to achieve better management control over on-the-road management. Also, computerization allows more precise eligibility requirements to be implemented and trips to be tailored to better suit the needs of users by maintaining quickly retrievable records.

Unification has the advantage of allowing for several providers, an important option that permits tailoring operators to services, using a competitive selection process for providers, and allowing users to choose from competing providers. Also, in the case of Central Contra Costa County, unification allowed the existing providers to be maintained, a fact that was believed to mitigate the resistance to change from both cities and users, while allowing the flexibility to subsequently replace providers that did not perform well.

In the unified system, the inequity of current city contributions would be eliminated. No individual city would be responsible for administration or for in-kind services and none would be required to contribute from their general fund to

fill paratransit budget deficits. The issue of inequity of current contributions was eliminated. On the other hand, if cities wished an extraordinarily high level of service, they could purchase those additional services from the unified organization with their own funds. Cities would also be free to provide special paratransit services for their own programs or facilities in addition to those provided by the unified organization. In this way existing volunteer services could be maintained.

Arguments against Unification

It was foreseen that withdrawing the service from the cities' control would have caused the cities to withdraw their cash and in-kind contributions. This became a nonissue when the new tax monies became available and more than covered the withdrawn funds and also supported expansion of the services.

Cities feared that unification would mean loss of control of services and the loss of personalization of service. The city, especially, took pride in the highly personalized service it offered. On the other hand, it was believed that this was a perceived but not a real issue and that a unified service could be well tailored to individual needs. Full-time management oversight of the service, better training of drivers and order takers, and a computer-assisted reservation system would all support a high level of quality and attention to the users. If any of the cities felt very strongly that they wished to maintain contact with their constituents to ensure personalized treatment, they could establish their own order takers who would coordinate with the central reservation system.

Cities also may have feared that the loss of control over the service might mean a decline in the amount of service available in their city. To the extent that the political process distorts these decisions because of the personalities and seniority of policy board representatives, this could be a legitimate fear. However, all the cities would be in the same boat and it is incumbent upon them to develop resource allocation plans that are "boundary blind." Oversight by the RTPA should also minimize inequitable treatment.

UNIFYING ORGANIZATION

The decision to unify was separated from the question of which organization could best serve as the unifier. This approach was adopted to ensure that the strengths or shortcomings of existing organizations would not dominate the analysis of whether unification was an idea with merit. Clearly, the lack of an appropriate organization would affect the decision to unify or not.

The criteria applied to analyze the existing organizations included: consistency with the organization's mission, appropriate representation on the policy board, skills of current staff, existence of appropriate support functions, eligibility for state specialized transportation funds, and appropriate geographic scope.

The candidate organizations included the following:

- A newly formed organization for this purpose;
- The Paratransit Coordinating Council—an advisory organization to the RTPA on funding and coordination;

- A transportation authority created to impose the new transportation sales tax—an organizational means of imposing new taxes in spite of California's tough anti-tax initiatives;

- Any one of the participating cities;
- Any of several existing social service agencies; and
- The Central Contra Costa Transit Authority (County Connection).

Only County Connection met nearly all the organizational criteria. Its only shortcoming, shared with all the other candidates, was that it would have to hire or train staff to manage the paratransit operation.

At the outset of the study the consultants were told by County Connection management that they were not candidates to operate the service. However, when the analysis was completed, those management persons indicated they were convinced of the logic for its involvement and they would support the recommendation.

The consultants recommended that County Connection express to the cities its willingness to assume full responsibility for special service transportation using the state and newly passed local taxes. The pros and cons for this recommendation are cited in the following and were presented to the board with the recommendation.

Arguments from Public Policy Viewpoint

From a public policy point of view, the argument that County Connection should take responsibility for paratransit in Central Contra Costa County was threefold. First, there is precedent in the region for this arrangement existing in two neighboring transit agencies. County Connection was also planning feeder-paratransit services. Second, County Connection could be a cost-effective provider because it already had many of the support functions in place common to transit and paratransit. Finally, it was appropriate for County Connection to assume paratransit operations. It had an appropriate policy board consisting of representatives from each city and from the county, it had an appropriate charter, and it was the only candidate organization that could make these claims.

Arguments from County Connection Viewpoint

One benefit to County Connection of offering paratransit was that it would enhance its public role by expanding service to an additional set of constituents thereby increasing support for transit. Economic advantages to County Connection existed as well. The special-service paratransit was to be fully funded and would provide an expanded economic base, over which a number of overhead functions could be spread. Finally, paratransit offered opportunities for contracting that would contribute to their privatization goals.

On the other hand, paratransit would be an added burden to the board and top management. Moreover, although paratransit would come to County Connection fully funded, the new funding would expire after 20 years and could thereafter become a financial burden. However, the consultants found that by placing some of the new tax funds in a trust fund, paratransit could be funded at the existing level into perpe-

tuity, even after allowing for inflation. It was recommended that such a trust fund be established.

Arguments from Cities' Viewpoint

The cities would benefit in several ways from County Connection offering special services. Their constituents would be the principal benefactors from the unified service. In addition, service would be offered by a known and stable organization in which each city had a policy voice.

The cities might have feared that paratransit would become a stepchild of transit and receive less attention than it did currently. This possibility was unlikely if the recommended full-time dedicated management was installed. It is true that some cities would have less control over paratransit and this is the chief price they would have to pay. Other cities would have more control than they did under the old structure. The corollary of loss of control is alleviation of responsibility and the savings in general funds and in-kind services.

The cities had to face the issue of possible displaced paratransit staff or contract providers to whom they felt an obligation. To achieve a smooth and fair transition, the consultants recommended that the existing providers be kept initially and that if providers changed, employees would be given consideration for employment.

Arguments from Users' Viewpoint

The users' fears were similar to those of the city. They were comfortable with the familiar and feared that change would result in less service. These fears were picked up by the press. In fact, the users would receive a higher level of service in all respects because better service to the user was the prime reason for recommending unification. More trips would be available for more purposes. The system should be better able to accommodate special needs, particularly short-notice trips. It would be management's responsibility to make change as easy to understand and nonthreatening as possible.

Users would have a policy board, meeting regularly, to which they could express their suggestions and complaints. Management would be better able to address their suggestions and complaints. They may have been concerned that a more remote policy board would be less responsive than their city council. Actually, they could make their concerns and wishes known either through their city councils or directly to the County Connection Board.

Alternative to County Connection

The consultants provided a backup recommendation if County Connection did not accept the role as paratransit provider or if it was not acceptable to the cities. In this case, it was recommended that a new organization be formed by the cities under state law, called Consolidated Transportation Service Agencies, which are eligible to claim state funds.

IMPLEMENTATION

Designation of the Service Responsibility

The consultants' report was submitted to the Board of Directors of County Connection in February 1989. The Board

soon approved a resolution stating that they would be willing to operate unified special services in Central Contra Costa County if the cities requested such an arrangement. In May 1989 all ten cities and the county had agreed to let County Connection assume responsibility for the service with varying conditions on the transfer. None of the cities required a contractual maintenance of level-of-service agreement to ensure their service would not decline. This was a significant omission, since such an agreement was required by the cities when the transit district, County Connection, was created.

The Accessible Service Committee of the board recommended that the services should be offered by contract, as recommended by the consultants, rather than directly by County Connection.

The consultants had interviewed the principal council members and city staff at the beginning of their work to ascertain the acceptable options concerning organizational arrangement. Most of the cities were willing to give up the service. Others were not, because of either concern for the users or for the providers of the service. At that time it appeared that unanimous consent of the cities would not be obtained easily.

Ultimately, the cities that resisted the concept of unification accepted it. The acceptance was aided by gestation of the unification idea over a fairly long period. Although the study was originally scheduled for six months, it was delayed to await the outcome of the sales tax for transit election so that a specific financial plan could be included in the study. The result was that the study took a year. This allowed time for everyone to understand and reflect on the recommendations.

Management of the Service

The consultants recommended that a manager of the implementation process be designated. They also recommended that the same person be the manager of the unified service and that the manager be free of other unrelated responsibilities that would dilute his or her effectiveness. In May 1989, after accepting responsibility for the service, County Connection promoted the staff person who was most active in this study to the position of Manager of Accessible Service, which included responsibility for both accessible fixed-route service and the newly acquired demand-responsive services. The creation of one manager for all accessible service was logical, and in view of the recent federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1989, a portentous decision.

The manager of the service was, then, the person with the best knowledge of the existing services and the consultants' work. She was in a position to plan the implementation and to prepare the bid documents. She was aided in this process by a transition team consisting of the existing providers and one representative of each city. In January 1990 when the three services became unified, she became the manager of the unified service with the three current providers reporting to her.

The existing Accessibility Advisory Committee of users was expanded to include special service users. The manager created an informal advisory group consisting of people from the human service program agencies to ensure their input into service considerations. This group will also be used to investigate offering contract transport service for human service programs.

Bidding Process and the Results

During the latter half of 1989, a request for proposal to offer the service was prepared by the County Connection manager. Providers could bid to provide service in any number of or all of the three existing service areas. The proposal was issued on January 10, 1990.

A prequalifying procedure was established on the advice of County Connection legal counsel to ensure that those bidding were financially responsible and capable of providing service.

Thirteen bidders attended the bidders' conference. Five bidders qualified. Both the city that provided service and the existing social service agency provider were deemed not to be qualified. The third existing private provider qualified.

Three proposals were received. All bid to provide service to any and to all of the three areas. The contract was awarded to a new provider for service to the entire region.

The failure of two existing providers to qualify was the significant outcome in the move to the unified system. There were no protests to the qualification process. The use of the competitive process to judge the qualifications of existing providers probably avoided acrimony that would have accompanied such a decision if it were made in the political realm.

The winning bid offered \$9.79 per vehicle hour in operating costs plus \$37,000 a month in fixed administrative and maintenance fees. The total vehicle hour cost came to \$24.42 for 30,480 hours. The vehicles, owned by County Connection, were those from the old providers, with new vehicles expected to arrive in late 1990. The contract is for a one-year term with three one-year renewal options.

The contracted service, inaugurated on May 30, 1990, started in July 1990.

Description of the New Service

The unified service consists of a single zone with a zonal fare system. Because a single provider won the competition, the service appears to be consolidated but in fact the structure exists so that the different subareas can be bid on separately and providers could also be allowed to compete in the same area. The service is a type of brokered system with County Connection as the broker. Under the single-provider contract, services were changed to make them consistent with one another. Standard operating hours were established, which were longer than any that the previous three systems offered. The city-operated service had provided some evening service for senior recreation and they kept vehicles to continue that service on their own.

System capacity was deficient and demand exceeded supply. This resulted in many service denials but would change as new vehicles arrived. While capacity was deficient, preference was given to medical, adult day care, and nutrition services by allowing reservations to be made 48 hours in advance, whereas all other trips are not scheduled until 24 hours in advance. Ultimately, the goal is to achieve same-day reservation.

The age of eligibility was changed from 60 years in two of the previous systems to age 65 for all trip purposes, except for nutrition services, which are available at age 60. All persons with disabilities continued to be eligible.

Marketing in the old systems was minimal so that demand for the new service was higher because of the high visibility resulting from the transfer of services. Because of the single-zone operation, trip lengths are estimated to be longer than in the previous systems (trip lengths were not calculated for the old services).

The new contract provider uses a computer-aided scheduling and dispatching system, as recommended by the consultants.

At the time of preparing this paper, there is less than one year's operating data available from the single-contract, unified service and at a time when vehicles were in short supply. Because of the short history, a comparison would not reveal any useful findings. At some time in the future, operating statistics will be studied. The new management information system generates data that will enable better control and adjustment of services.

SUMMARY

When the study started, there was no precondition favoring a recommendation of consolidating services. In fact, the one admonition from the transit agency sponsor was that they did not want to take over the system. However, as the findings were made, it was clear that the systems were too small and of too little importance to the city sponsors to be operated efficiently. Although improvements could be made to each service, there did not appear to be the will to do so. The consultants together with the Technical Advisory Committee, representing the cities and the transit district, concluded that only a change in organization that brought the services together would be successful in improving them.

Nevertheless, there was resistance to changing the organizational structure for service delivery from some city council persons, from provider staff, and from users. To resolve the conflicts, the consultants proposed a concept of unification, which brought the individual services under a common management umbrella. All the cities and County Connection approved the unified concept and approved placing the service under County Connection.

It was recommended that the unified service be started with the existing providers, but that a competition to select providers be conducted at some later time. This would allow retaining good providers and replacing the weak ones. A competitive bid was held less than a year after the study had been completed. A provider who was not previously involved in the service was selected to provide service in all three areas. The service started in July 1990.

Although the unified service appears to have been consolidated because there is a single provider, it is not. The structure is in place for multiple providers who may operate in different zones or may compete in the same service areas.