

# 16 ITNAmerica®: Network Connectivity through Social Enterprise and Information Technology

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### Summary:

#### Background

ITNAmerica is the first national, non-profit transportation system for America's aging population. Founded in 1995 in Portland, Maine, as the model Independent Transportation Network® (ITN), ITNAmerica became a national organization in 2004. Research and development of the economically sustainable ITN model was funded by the Transit IDEA program, the FTA, AARP, and numerous private philanthropies. In 2005, The Atlantic Philanthropies funded the national rollout with a \$3.5 million grant. ITNAmerica now has 16 affiliates in 12 states, with a total of more than 1,500 dues-paying members.

#### Methodology

Most older Americans depend on the automobile for transportation. This dependence poses serious safety and mobility problems for diminished capacity older drivers, who rely on private automobiles for access to necessities of life. The problem is compounded by where older people choose to live. More than two thirds of seniors live in rural or suburban communities that lack the density for traditional mass transit. Older people who stop driving become dependent on favors from family and friends for as long as a decade. Women who stop driving outlive their decision by ten years; men by six. Those who continue to drive face limited mobility and the highest fatal crash rate per mile driven of any group except teenagers.

ITNAmerica's solution to this growing national problem was to create a consumer-oriented, economically sustainable model in a defined geographic area, replicate the model in other defined communities, and connect communities (affiliates) into one, efficient national system with shared brand and business rules, unified database and sophisticated information system, ITNRides™, that is now a Microsoft Success Story (<http://www.microsoft.com/business/success/?StoryID=290>). ITN maximizes individual choice and recreates the comfort and convenience of private vehicle ownership by using automobiles to provide service 24/7, for any purpose. People who use the service become dues-paying members of the organization and open Personal Transportation Accounts™ to pay for rides. ITN keeps fares reasonable by charging roughly half the true cost of rides and covering the balance through a diversified base of voluntary local community support. Through innovative payment plans automated in ITNRides™, ITN integrates previously inaccessible private resources to help fund rides, storing resources in Personal Transportation Accounts and sending members monthly account statements. No money changes hands in the vehicles; transfers and charges are processed automatically in the database. ITN's CarTrade™ program helps seniors trade their vehicles to pay for their rides; the Transportation Social Security Program™ gives volunteers transportation credits in the system when they drive others; and the Road Scholarship Program™ encourages volunteers to donate these credits for low-income riders who cannot afford their share of the fare. Sustainability is supported by very efficient dispatching of volunteer and paid drivers using the Geographic Information System in ITNRides.

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## Findings

Research findings from a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study demonstrate that ITN is used to transport older non-drivers and younger visually impaired adults for a wide variety of purposes that maximize quality of life. Among 1,557 ITN members who used the service between January 2004 and December 2008 (mean age 79.6 years; age range 22 to 104; 58,736 rides originating at home), 83% took at least one ride for healthcare purposes, accounting for 46% of total rides. Members also used ITN for a full range of ride purposes, including consumer activities, social and recreation travel, trips for worship, intermodal connections, education, employment, and professional services. One-third of rides during the five year study period were provided to members with visual impairment.

An Atlantic Philanthropies-funded evaluation, conducted May 2007 through June 2010, measured the impact of ITN on the quality of life for three distinct groups: 1) ITN customers, 2) family members of ITN customers, and 3) ITN volunteer drivers. The study included customers and family members from five ITN affiliate communities: Charleston, SC; Lexington, KY; Los Angeles, CA; Orlando, FL; and Portland, ME. The sample of volunteers provided rides in those communities as well as in three others: Middletown, CT; East Windsor, CT; and San Diego, CA. Results of the evaluation study provide empirical evidence of the positive impact of ITN on quality of life for these groups.

For ITN customers, transportation difficulty decreased from 64% prior to ITN membership to 49% six months later and 43% one year later. ITN customers who reduced or stopped driving reported an increase in confidence in arranging personal transportation. Moreover, non-drivers increased to the level of drivers in confidence in arranging personal transportation (mean scores were 50.1 vs. 60.3 prior to ITN membership, 68.0 vs. 67.9 six months later, and 70.2 vs. 69.4 one year later, respectively).

Family members of ITN customers worry much less about their relatives' transportation adequacy and safety after their relative joins ITN. Prior to ITN membership, 65% of family members worried whether their relative had adequate transportation; six months after their relative joined ITN, the proportion dropped to 19%. The percentage of family members who worried about their relative's safety when they traveled from home decreased from 70% to 39%. They experience less emotional stress (mean scores decreased from 2.8 to 2.3.) and are less likely to miss work. The percentage of family members who said they had to miss work because they had to arrange or provide transportation decreased from 64% to 27%.

ITN volunteer drivers derive personal and social benefits from this role. More than two thirds (66%) said that volunteering for ITN has affected their quality of life and 36% said that volunteering for ITN has enriched their social lives. Significant minorities are storing ride credits in an ITN account for their own future transportation needs (39%) and are donating their credits to the Road Scholarship Fund for low income riders (38%).

ITNAmerica's entrepreneurial approach has impacted public policy in several states, including Maine, Florida, New York, Connecticut and Kentucky. A 50-state analysis of policies that remove barriers or create incentives for the use of private resources for community mobility is underway by ITNAmerica. Other research and development projects include ITNEverywhere™: A Revolutionary Approach to Community Mobility, a suite of software programs that extend ITN's core business innovations—Personal Transportation Accounts and a flexible approach to private resources—to the general population, and a business plan for ITNCanada.