
***PART II:
INITIATIVES AND
INNOVATIONS***

Part II of the Guidebook presents a selection of successful, creative initiatives and innovations implemented to solve a local, regional or state issue or to meet particular needs within a specific rural or small urban setting. These are initiatives/innovations identified through this TCRP project's research efforts and represent a sampling of the types of creative projects, services, programs, activities, and strategies that have been implemented in rural and small urban communities across the country. The very nature of public transit in rural and small urban environments—limited resources, large service area, dispersed low density population, special needs riders, multiple and diverse agencies to deal with—means that many smaller transit agencies and the organizations that support them are continuously developing new and often creative initiatives to compensate for limitations and to improve services. It is this process of *change* and improvement that is key for developing rural and small urban transit.

The sampling of initiatives and innovations presented in Part II will give you a sense of what other transit managers as well as state and regional governments

have done when faced with a particular issue or dilemma. And these examples show how other transit systems and support organizations have gone about change, what was involved in the process, the outcomes, and the transferability of their ideas. Given that some of the initiatives are local adaptations of a program or service that has been done elsewhere—new to the particular transit system but not necessarily something totally new or unique—the initiatives and innovations presented in Part II should provide ideas and strategies for transit systems that may face similar types of issues or problems.

To present the more than 40 initiatives/innovations that we have detailed through the research project, we have grouped them into six different categories according to their primary focus:

- Productivity—page II-3
- Efficiency—page II-23
- Quality—page II-53
- Funding—page II-79
- Training—page II-99
- Marketing—page II-109

This categorization is not exacting: some of the initiatives, with multiple objectives, defy a simple grouping and could be placed into several of the categories. Readers of this Guidebook interested in learning about new approaches to improving the *quality* of transit services, for example, should look not only in the category of quality but also in *training*, *funding*, and *efficiency*. Initiatives that augment driver *training* will result in better trained drivers, which in turn can lead to higher quality transit services for riders. Efforts to improve a transit system's *funding* base could improve service quality if such strategies also sharpen the focus on customer service. And initiatives that improve a transit system's *efficiency* can improve service quality when the efficiencies target those functions of a transit system that directly impact riders—improved efficiencies in maintenance, for example, may lead to improved reliability of service, which clearly improves the quality of transit service.

The rest of Part II presents the more than 40 initiatives and innovations identified through this TCRP research project within the six categories.

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INITIATIVES AND INNOVATIONS IN PRODUCTIVITY

Productivity for public transit service refers to the number of passenger trips carried typically measured on a service or revenue hour basis. For transit systems serving rural and small urban areas, productivity is often limited because of large and sparsely populated service areas and service designs that focus on riders with special needs such as seniors and persons with disabilities. Moving towards higher productivities, however, enables a transit system to serve more residents in the community and lower per passenger trip costs. For example, when the Santee Wateree Regional Transit Authority in Sumter, South Carolina, implemented flex-routes to replace traditional demand response service, productivity improved and service costs

per passenger trip decreased with the new ability to group riders along defined corridors and to serve, for the first time, general public riders at newly established bus stops. This was a successful new initiative undertaken by this smaller transit agency in response to local objectives to better coordinate resources and to try and serve general public riders in addition to its specialized clientele.

Presented in this section of the Guidebook's Part II are a number of successful strategies, including that of Santee Wateree Regional Transit Authority, to improve productivity.

PRESENTED IN THIS CATEGORY:

1. ***Postal Bus: Providing Mail Service and Passenger Transportation in the Same Vehicle***—Council on Aging & Human Services, Colfax, Washington
2. ***Central Transfer Service at The Hub: Improving Productivity and Coverage***—Baldwin Area Rural Transit System, Robertsdale, Alabama
3. ***Buying Bus Tickets With Section 5310 Funds Rather Than Capital Equipment***—Advocacy Outreach, Elgin, Texas, and Capital Area Rural Transit System, Austin, Texas
4. ***Renovating Rural Demand Response Service to “Flex Routes,” With Higher Productivity and Lower Per Trip Costs***—Santee Wateree Regional Transit Authority, Sumter, South Carolina
5. ***Vehicle Pool: Sharing Paratransit Vehicles in the Community***—Council on Aging & Human Services, Colfax, Washington
6. ***Improving Rural Transit Planning and Operations with State-Provided Geographic Information Systems***—New York State Department of Transportation, Passenger Transportation Division
7. ***Finding the “Winners and Dogs”: Countywide, Web-Based Performance Reporting System***—San Bernardino Associated Governments, San Bernardino, California

Postal Bus: Providing Mail Service and Passenger Transportation in the Same Vehicle

*Council on Aging & Human Services
Colfax, Washington*

Organization Highlights

Council on Aging & Human Services (CoA&HS) is a not-for-profit, multi-service agency based in Colfax, Washington, providing social service, nutrition, transportation, and home care programs in rural eastern Washington state along the Washington-Idaho border. CoA&HS's transportation program, known as COAST, provides specialized transportation to residents in four Washington counties as well as five Idaho counties along this border. The service area is very large - 23,000 square miles - and rural. In addition to direct transportation provision with a fleet of 21 vehicles, COAST provides a wide range of transportation services, including, among others, Medicaid transportation brokerage, vanpool services, and volunteer transportation.

Background/Objectives

COAST developed a working relationship with a local, private for-profit transportation company called Link Transportation Systems, Inc. The two signed a non-competition agreement in 1994. Link, a licensed intrastate carrier, provides transportation between the local airport and university campus, intercity services, and taxi services. COAST supports Link by providing a lift-equipped vehicle and, at times, a driver when this is necessary.

In 1995, in addition to its established freight business (courier, medical, and small package), Link began providing bulk mail service as a contractor to the U.S. Postal Service (USPS). In

rural areas, the USPS commonly uses contractors for bulk mail delivery and pick-up. COAST saw an opportunity to use Link's vehicles to also provide passenger transportation to communities along the postal route and now contracts with Link to provide intercity service to these communities rather than provide the service directly.

Description

COAST provides intercity transportation service to remote communities in Idaho six days per week through its contract with Link. The intercity route begins in Moscow, a small city in Idaho with regional shopping and medical services, and traverses eight smaller communities outside Moscow. The Link vehicle begins its route in Moscow at 7 a.m., dropping bulk mail in each community served. After dropping the mail, the vehicle turns around and, on the trip back to Moscow, picks up passengers in the eight communities along the route who have made trip reservations on a 24-hour advance basis. The passengers are taken to destinations in Moscow.

In the afternoon, the service is reversed: the vehicle picks up the passengers from their Moscow destinations and returns

them to their homes in their respective communities. After dropping off all the passengers, the vehicle turns around and picks up mail in each of the towns, which is then delivered to the post office in Moscow. Riders are "guaranteed a ride home" when unavoidable delays in Moscow mean they cannot ride the Link vehicle back home, for example, if their medical appointment is delayed. In this case, the return trip would be provided by COAST or a local taxi company. Providers of these trips are fully reimbursed.

As long as Link maintains the USPS-required volume of cargo space, mail and passenger service can be mixed. Link uses a standard 12-passenger van with a separate section in the back for mail and other package delivery. As part of Link's agreement with COAST, all Link drivers are trained by COAST. Link takes all requests for passenger service. Ridership is reported monthly to COAST. In the event of a request from a passenger using a wheelchair, COAST loans Link a lift-equipped vehicle.

The passenger fare is \$15.00. COAST subsidizes half of this cost for general public passengers and pays the full fare for funded priority clients (for example, Medicaid). Passenger fares are retained by Link.

Resources

The service costs COAST \$400 per month, plus \$7.50 per one-way trip. The \$400 is a monthly retainer for Link's availability and providing the trip request and scheduling



function. COAST uses federal funding through the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5311(f) program for rural intercity bus service to fund part of this service along with Sections 5311 and 5310, and associated social services funds.

Results

This innovative postal route serves about 1,000 one-way trips annually, a small number of trips but essential service for residents in these very remote communities in Idaho who had no public transportation options prior to the COAST-Link contract.

At current ridership levels, the cost to COAST is approximately \$12,000 annually. This equates to about \$12 for a long distance, rural trip, with six days per week availability. COAST gets very inexpensive service, passengers have scheduled access from re-

remote areas to a larger community with shopping and medical services, and Link receives additional money for very few extra miles of service, which otherwise would have been deadhead mileage.

Barriers/Constraints

With a strong working relationship between COAST and Link, there were no significant barriers in developing and implementing this creative program. The USPS has made no special requirements related to the combined service, other than the requirement for cargo space. One constraint is the amount of time that riders can spend in the community of Moscow, given the schedule for the service.

Transferability

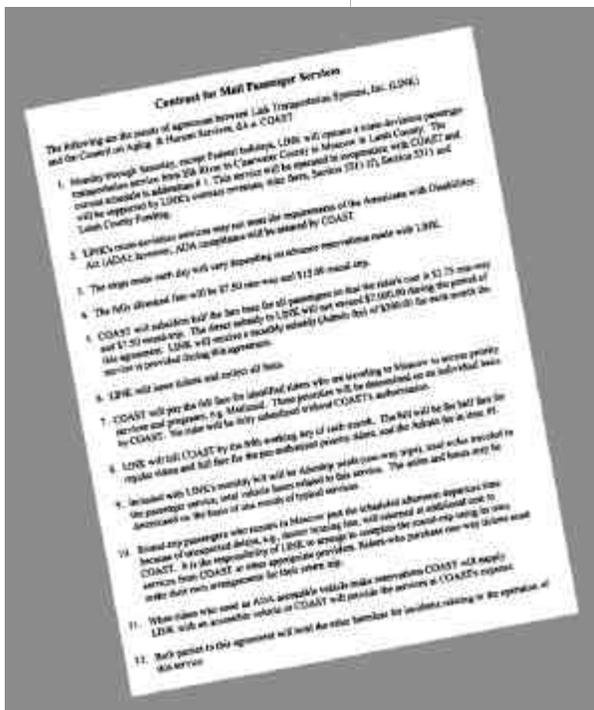
Transportation in very rural areas can be difficult and expensive. Public transit systems

servicing such areas may need to develop creative approaches to meeting the needs in their more remote communities and to recognize that other transportation services, such as local private providers of mail delivery, package delivery, rural taxi companies, and even railroad transportation contractors (if on a regular schedule) might be resources for service provision. Where such private providers already provide transportation within defined corridors, they may be willing to modify their service to add passenger service. Once an opportunity is identified, the parameters would need to be discussed with the provider and a contract negotiated, spelling out the particulars.

As a twist on the COAST model, a transit system might take on new services in addition to passenger transportation in very remote, rural areas with limited transportation providers. For example, the public transit system might try to secure a contract to provide bulk mail delivery or package delivery, if the agency already provides scheduled service along remote corridors.

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Central Transfer Service at *The Hub*: Improving Productivity and Coverage

Baldwin Rural Area Transit System Robertsdale, Alabama

Organization Highlights

Baldwin County is located in lower Alabama just east of Mobile across Mobile Bay. It is the largest county in Alabama at 1,600 square miles, with a population of about 150,000. The county is a unique combination of resort communities along the Gulf of Mexico, suburban Mobile on its western edge, and isolated, rural lower-income areas, particularly in the northern and eastern parts.

Baldwin Rural Area Transit System (BRATS), a department of the Baldwin County government, is the rural public transportation provider for Baldwin County. The system is based in Robertsdale, a town that calls itself "the Hub" because of its central location in the county. With a total fleet of 52 vehicles, BRATS provided about 680,000 one way trips in FY 2000, operating 62,200 hours of service.

Background/Objectives

The BRATS service area is large and major trip generators are scattered across the county, with government facilities in the northern part, the major hospital and some shopping areas in the western end, and a large mall and the Gulf resorts in the southern end. For many years after its implementation in 1987, BRATS operated predominately county-wide paratransit service, with corresponding low productivity and high cost per passenger trip, inherent with paratransit in a large service area. Productivities for the paratransit service were in the range of two to three one-way trips per hour.

With increasing needs throughout the county, however, BRATS management became aware that the service design was inadequate and that the personalized pick-ups and ensuing long trips with one, two or maybe three passengers on board were not cost-effective - in effect, "draining the system of productivity," according to the director.

Recognizing that change was necessary, BRATS graduated from paratransit to flexible routes, with timed transfers at a central location to facilitate transferring and improve accessibility across the county. With BRATS's headquarters located in a town at the crossroads of the county and known as "the Hub," designating the central transfer location at the BRATS's facility was a natural choice. BRATS's facility includes its administrative offices as well as the operating/maintenance site. The offices, shared with one of the county commissioners, has a waiting room with vending machines and TV, suitable for passengers waiting for their transfer vehicle.

Description

The flexible route service was implemented in 1996. With the BRATS facility in the Hub serving as the central transfer point, buses meet in the morn-

ing and afternoon coming from the east, south, west, and north parts of the county. Passengers that need to transfer do so at the BRATS facility. After transfers are complete, each bus continues in the direction it was heading, to complete its run at the opposite end of the county.

Important to note is that these vehicles initially start the day as work routes, taking riders to various employment destinations often through BRATS's *selling bus seats* program, and most of these routes end where the flexible routes start. The flexible routes then operate their runs, ending after the morning service in the towns where the drivers started. At that point, the drivers, all working split shifts, go off duty until their afternoon flexible route begins. In the afternoons, drivers operate their flexible route, then the evening work route. Deadhead is virtually eliminated by tying these routes together.

BRATS still operates some personalized, door-to-door service, but much of this paratransit service operates as feeder service, meeting the flexible route at a scheduled time at one of the designated stops. Buses providing paratransit feeder service stay in specific designated areas. Fares for a round trip are \$3.50 for pick-up at designated stops and \$5 for door-to-door service.



A combination of elements makes BRATS's flexible route service effective and innovative:

- Tying routes together to eliminate deadhead - This reduces costs which helps make the service cost-efficient.
- Split shifts - The drivers end their morning and evening runs at their starting points and go off duty for three hours.
- Flexible routes - These are far more productive than traditional demand-response service.
- Variable fare pricing to try and encourage riders to use the flex-routes, boarding at bus stops.
- Central transfer facility - Designating a centralized transfer point allows increased coverage in the service area while meeting localized needs. The fact that the transit system's offices are located at the crossroads of the county is fortunate, providing an ideal site for the central transfer point.

Resources

To implement the flexible route service, BRATS diverted vehicles previously used for demand response service. Converting service to a scheduled, flexible route nature—with more grouping of passenger trips than possible with paratransit—freed up vehicles for other transit services. Staffing resources were actually reduced as fewer staff were needed than for the dispatch-intensive demand-response service.

Importantly, a central transfer point was needed, providing a safe, secure, weather-protected and accessible location for riders to wait. The BRATS's offices, located at a central juncture in the county, provided an ideal site, and a waiting area was developed for transferring riders.

Results

The re-designed flexible route service has been a success for BRATS and for riders. Where previously low productivity service was replaced, ridership increased significantly with the ability to group trips on the scheduled, flexible routes. Productivity—previously about two to three passenger trips per hour—has more than doubled, to approximately 7.4 trips per hour. Total ridership has also increased by six percent.

Barriers/Constraints

BRATS did not encounter any barriers in implementation of its flexible routes. From a system-wide perspective, existing resources including staff, vehicles and funding were redeployed to the new service mode. Staff training is needed for the new service mode, and, importantly, effort must be taken to address marketing and information materials, because the service change impacts riders.

Transferability

Such service redesign, with transition of some proportion of a rural transit system's traditional, personalized paratransit service to scheduled, flexible route service with timed trans-

fers can open up transit travel to many new riders. Key components are: effective routing design to maximize residential and destination areas served, careful scheduling with adequate "flex" allowing time to provide some curb-to-curb service and then to meet at coordinated times, location of the transfer point so routes can make their meets with minimal waiting time, and publicizing the routing and schedule to ensure that all potential riders are aware of the vehicle ride times. Such service is particularly applicable in areas where demand response service is not able to meet all its demand, though some paratransit service will likely remain needed to serve those that cannot travel to a designated stop.

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Buying Bus Tickets with Section 5310 Funds Rather Than Capital Equipment

Advocacy Outreach, Elgin, Texas
Capital Area Rural Transit System
Austin, Texas

Organization Highlights

Advocacy Outreach is a private, non-profit, community-based agency formed in 1992 to help low income families in central Texas gain self-sufficiency.

Capital Area Rural Transit System (CARTS) is a rural transit provider serving a large, nine-county area of over 7,500 square miles in central Texas. CARTS provides a variety of transportation services, including fixed-route, paratransit, and commuter services, with a fleet of 77 vehicles.

Background/Objectives

With a grant from the State Commission of Health and Human Services (HHSC) in 1996, Advocacy Outreach spearheaded the formation of the Rural Coordinated Transportation Council in its home county - Bastrop - to improve transportation. Representatives from a wide range of organizations joined the Council, including local social service agencies, transportation providers (including CARTS), local governments, HHSC, and the Texas State Department of Transportation (TXDOT) District Office.

During its first year, the Council focused on identifying transportation needs in the community and inventorying available transportation resources, including public providers as well as not-for-profit agencies operating transportation services. Among its findings, the Council discovered that a number of organization owned vehicles but many such vehicles were underutilized.

During its second year, the Council focused on developing solutions to meet identified transportation needs, including some of the more standard responses to inadequate transportation such as new services to meet specified needs. However, the Council also developed a creative approach to obtain new funds for transportation and meet other needs: it applied to TXDOT for federal funding through the Section 5310 program to *purchase transportation service* from existing transportation providers in the area. This was a novel approach, as Section 5310 funds had been traditionally used in Texas, as well as in other states, by human service agencies and in some cases public transit systems to purchase vehicles for their own use to provide transportation service to their own elderly and disabled clientele.

The Council's application was successful, with funding initially awarded for FY 1998. Advocacy Outreach served as the lead agency for the Council's Section 5310 application and continues in this role, submitting the annual 5310 appli-

cations and completing reporting required by TXDOT.

Description

One of the first steps in the Council's *purchase of service* program was determining the types of transportation and fare structure offered by the transportation providers in the area, including CARTS, Greyhound, local taxi companies, and others. CARTS became one of the primary providers used under the program, with its various transportation services, large fleet, and reasonable rate structure. To use its services, CARTS issues bus tickets "punch" style - in two denominations: a \$5 ticket made up of 25 cent punches, and a \$10 tickets, with 50 cent punches.

Advocacy Outreach, as the lead agency, purchases the transportation, primarily bus tickets from CARTS, and then processes requests for transportation from its own clients as well as from other agencies in the Rural Coordinated Transportation Council. With a request for transportation from another agency in the Council, Advocacy Outreach sends bus tickets



and a reporting log to the requesting agency, which then completes the log once the transportation has been provided, returning the log to Advocacy Outreach for reporting purposes. For its own clients, Advocacy Outreach provides the bus tickets for the specified transportation, documenting use on its reporting log.

On a quarterly basis, Advocacy Outreach compiles and completes the required reporting, including a Purchase of Service Reporting Form developed by TXDOT, and bills TXDOT for reimbursement.

Reportedly, most of the transportation purchased through the program is through CARTS, with users taking local trips within their communities for a 50 cent fare. There are also occasional charter trips purchased and some intercity trips purchased through Greyhound.

Resources

Advocacy Outreach's first 5310 grant, on behalf of the Council, was in FY 1998 for a total of \$4,800. The agency matches the federal funds with the required 20 percent local match, some of which is provided by the other agencies participating in the Council. Advocacy Outreach has received 5310 grants in subsequent fiscal years, with its largest grant award of \$10,000 in FY 1999. Because the *purchase of service* program was new, requiring significant time and effort to develop guidelines and protocols, Advocacy Outreach and the Council did not spend all the allocated funds the first two years, impacting both

use levels and subsequent funding awards after FY 1999.

CARTS reports that Advocacy Outreach purchases approximately \$3,000 worth of bus tickets from CARTS on an annual basis through the *purchase of service* program.

Results

Through this program in Bastrop County, Advocacy Outreach has purchased transportation for many of its own clients as well as for clients of other agencies in the Council. During FY 1999 - the year of the largest 5310 grant award - Advocacy Outreach reports that it purchased, on behalf of the Council, \$7,425 worth of transportation, which provided 3,887 trips totaling 50,845 miles. This computes to a very cost-effective per trip cost of less than \$2.00.

With the success of the program in Bastrop County, the Texas Health and Human Services Commission asked Advocacy Outreach to replicate the program in another central Texas county.

In addition to the actual transportation purchased for the individual riders, the program has a number of results:

- Improved coordination in the county, with the lead human service agency, operating on behalf of the dozen or so additional agencies participating in the Council, obtaining transportation through *purchase of service* from existing transit providers.

There was little coordination before the program started, because the State's federal 5310 funding was provided for capital purchases, typically with agencies acquiring their own vehicles for their own transportation programs, leading to a proliferation of human service vehicles operating in the community.

- New ridership for the public transit system, with the sale of bus tickets to clients of the various human service agencies participating in the Council.
- Higher quality transportation for clients of the participating human service agencies, with service provided by an organization dedicated to transit service provision; when human service agencies provide transportation as a support to their main purpose, it is often difficult for such entities to spend the time and resources to ensure a high quality transportation program.

Barriers/Constraints

The major barrier with the *purchase of service* program is that there are very limited Section 5310 funds, with far greater demand for funds than availability. This makes it difficult to provide adequate resources to the many agencies that could benefit from the ability to purchase transportation service from existing transit systems.

Other barriers include the required administrative effort and

“paperwork” with the state-administered FTA funding program. “Paperwork” was substantial in the beginning when Advocacy Outreach was setting up the program in the first county (Bastrop County) and continues to be an issue, though less so than initially. Such administrative requirements also serve to discourage other small agencies in rural areas from participating in similar programs.

In a related vein, another identified constraint is changing state rules and requirements for the program, particularly when Advocacy Outreach began to replicate the original program in another rural county. While this may have resulted from the fact that the program is still relatively new, with federal funds being used in a new manner, such administrative changes and “red tape” frustrated the small staff at the implementing agency.

Transferability

Purchase of transportation service with federal Section 5310 funds is a transferable strategy to encourage coordination and maximize use of existing transportation resources. In 1992 with passage of the federal transportation legislation, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), several changes were made to the Section 5310 program, one of which allowed the funding to be used for a broader range of eligible expenses. Initially, this federal program was designed to assist private, non-profit agencies with capital purchases, typically vehicles. However, with ISTEA, among other changes to the 5310

program, the definition of eligible capital expenses was broadened to include “acquisition of transportation services under a contract, lease, or other arrangement.” This is the provision that supports the purchase of service practice in Bastrop County, Texas. TXDOT believes the concept supports coordination of transportation services, a key objective of both the Federal Transit Administration and the State of Texas, and has initiated similar programs in six additional counties.

It might be noted that the 5310 purchase of service in the Bastrop County, Texas, example—with purchase of the riders’ bus tickets—pays just the farebox portion of the trip. The remaining cost is borne by the provider and its other grant funds; in CARTS’ example this includes Section 5311. Where the service is fixed-route (as is the case in this example), the additional or marginal cost for another rider is small. But where the service is paratransit, the marginal cost of another trip may be significant. Use of 5310 funds for purchasing service might then encompass the full costs of the trip, rather than just the farebox cost.

While the broadened definition of eligible expenses for the federal Section 5310 program was introduced in 1992, few states have taken advantage of the change. Purchase of service from existing transportation providers can be an effective strategy to maximize use of funding and available capital equipment. Where there are multiple organizations in an area providing transportation with available capacity and

appropriate services, it can be cost effective to encourage agencies that need transportation for their clients to obtain such transportation from providers already in operation.

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Additional Resources

TXDOT, Office of Community Transportation website:
www.gettingthere.net/info/section5310.html

Section 5310 Information:
www.fta.dot.gov/library/policy/9070_1E/toc.htm

Renovating Rural Demand-Response Service to “Flex Routes,” with Higher Productivity and Lower Per Trip Costs

*Santee Wateree Regional
Transit Authority
Sumter, South Carolina*

Organization Highlights

Santee Wateree Regional Transit Authority (SWRTA) is a public agency, created by state law in 1978 to serve rural counties in central South Carolina. SWRTA provides both public transit and Medicaid transportation with a fleet of about 125 vehicles. The agency is headed by a director, with an administrative staff of 11 and an eight-member Board of Directors.

Background/Objectives

Traditional Demand-Response Transportation For Specialized Clientele

Among its various transit services, the SWRTA provided traditional demand response, curb-to-curb transportation for Medicaid recipients and clients of human service agencies, with limited productivity and dispersed travel for the many “one-to-one” trips. By 1998, several local trends and events led to the agency’s planning and implementation of “flex routes” - route deviation services targeted to the special needs clients but also open to the general public to replace some of the traditional, specialized paratransit service.

Interest in Transportation Coordination

First, there had been growing interest and support in the region for coordination among human service agencies, particularly in Kershaw County, one of the counties served by the SWRTA. There was recognition that improvement to social services first needed improvements in trans-

portation, and coordination could be a first step in this direction. Second, the state Department of Transportation was also interested in coordination, providing support to localities pursuing coordination, including efforts in Kershaw County. Third, the SWRTA had a new director who was interested in improving services through coordination and more progressive programs, creating a new position of planning director. The individual hired for the position learned through RTAP training about a new service concept operating in Putnam County, Florida - *flexible routing*, where demand response, human service transportation services had been coordinated together to form deviated fixed-routes. This Florida operation provided scheduled service for some agency riders at bus stops, personalized pick-ups for other agency clients, and also opened up service to the general public who could access service at the bus stops. This operation provided an impetus to SWRTA to try a similar service model in South Carolina.

Planning and Implementation

Planning for coordination through flex routes began in earnest in Kershaw County in early 1998, which had expressed the strongest interest among SWRTA’s counties for the new service concept. An interagency transportation group was formed to work with the SWRTA on planning and implementation of the flex route concept. Membership on this group represented the key human service agencies serving Kershaw County, including the Department of Social Services, the Board of Disabilities and Special Needs, and Vocational Rehabilitation, among others.

The new SWRTA planning director, knowledgeable of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) through his degree in geography, used GIS technology to locate the residences of the Medicaid and other human service agency clients using SWRTA’s demand response services in Kershaw County. This analysis found that most of the clients—about 60 percent—lived within a defined corridor



along the main highway in the county - Route 1, which serves the county's largest town, Camden. With these data, SWRTA and the interagency transportation group worked together to develop a route and schedule with designated bus stops. The objective was that some of the clients of human service agencies could use the bus stops, that general public riders could also use the bus stops to access the transit service, and that flexibility in the schedule would allow the bus to provide curb-side pick-ups for those agency clients who could not get to a bus stop.

The interagency transportation group then focused on getting information out to riders and the community, medical facilities, and other local agencies to inform them of the coming changes. This group was also reportedly able to get some of the human service agencies to coordinate client appointments with the bus schedule - giving clients appointments 15 minutes after the bus arrival time at the stop closest to the agency.

Description

By 1999, SWRTA implemented three flex routes. While operation of those routes was interrupted in late 2000 when SWRTA lost its bid to operate Medicaid transportation in two of the counties it served, the flex routes had proved their success in increasing productivity and reducing per trip costs. The three routes are described below.

SWRTA's first flex route began in Kershaw County in July 1998. The service, known as the Kershaw Connection, was designed with four round trips each week-

day, traveling within the Route 1 corridor, with curb-side pick-ups at residences for most agency riders and pick-ups at the bus stops for remaining agency riders who could get to the stops. General public riders were also served at the bus stops. Riders receiving the personalized pick-ups had to conform to the schedule of the route, a change from the previous service model where trips were available at riders' requested times.

With a length of about 15 miles one-way and scheduled running time of two hours round-trip, the route attracted about three to four general public riders per day, in addition to the agency ridership. About four deviations were made each one-way trip.

Human service agency clients living beyond the corridor of the route were still provided demand response transportation, as had been the case for all riders prior to implementation of the flex route. In addition, SWRTA provided demand response transportation for human service agency riders within the flex route area in case of emergency. This concession served to allay some fears about the change to the new service delivery concept.

The second route was implemented in neighboring Lee County. With the early success of the Kershaw Connection in Kershaw County, staff from SWRTA and a representative of the Kershaw County Department of Social Services approached Lee County and elicited that county's interest in a similar service. After a similar

planning process as had been used in Kershaw County, the Lee County Connection began operating in June 1999, with flex route service along the corridor between Lynchburg and the county seat of Bishopville. Four round trips were provided each weekday. The Lee County Connection route was about 15 miles long, with a scheduled running time of one hour each way.

The third route, called the Columbia Connection, provided inter-county flex route service from the Lee County Connection transfer point in Bishopville, to the Kershaw Connection transfer point in Camden, to Columbia and back, a distance of about 60 miles one way. This route was designed predominately to serve medical trips, with the region's larger and specialized medical facilities, as well as the Veterans Administration, located in Columbia. The route was coordinated with SWRTA's other two flex routes, with transfers available in Camden and Bishopville. Service on the Columbia Connection operated three weekdays per week, with three round trips each service day.

Resources

To implement flex routes, SWRTA was able to obtain certain grant funds beyond its usual funding base. These included a demonstration coordination grant from the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) of \$310,000 over fiscal years 1998, 1999 and 2000. These funds were used for planning and start-up, including the purchase of GIS software and new scheduling/

dispatch software. For operations, however, SWRTA used no additional funding beyond that used for its previous demand response services. This was one of the key factors in the success of the Santee Wateree flex routes: the new flex routes and the remaining demand response services were operated with the same vehicles, drivers, and scheduling/dispatch as before.

Results

The flex route services resulted in increased productivity, decreased trip costs, and new service to the general public. From the fiscal year before flex routes (FY 1998) to the first year of flex route service (FY 1999), SWRTA data show that passenger miles per vehicle hour increased by 23 percent with a decrease of 12 percent in the cost per passenger mile. Total operating costs decreased ten percent. Additionally, the Kershaw Connection flex route ridership included an average of six percent general public riders; these were new riders who before could not use the transit service because it served only Medicaid and agency clients, and these general public riders were served with the same transit operating resources as before.

Barriers/Constraints

Several issues affected implementation and operation of the SWRTA flex routes:

- Establishing a different fare for human service agency riders and general public riders for the flex route service was a major problem. SWRTA had determined

that general public fares would be less than those for Medicaid riders who received curb-side pickups, as the general public would receive a lower level of service (boarding at bus stops, no advance reservations, etc.). But Medicaid officials said that SWRTA must charge the same fare for the general public as Medicaid riders, as the contract stipulated an equal or greater fare for anyone on the same vehicle as a Medicaid rider for similar service. SWRTA eventually was able to persuade Medicaid officials that the lower fare for the general public was appropriate because the service was not comparable.

- Billing for agency clients was an issue, with the cost per client ride based on actual passenger miles traveled. SWRTA staff had to convince human service agencies that its billing procedures were accurate and fair for the flex route operation. Agency staff also had to understand that the actual miles per client might increase in some cases with a change to flex routes, as the route would sometimes deviate to pick up other riders. But the flex routes, with their improved coordination, also held the promise for reduction in overall costs that would benefit all involved.
- Some of the human service agencies were reluctant to give up their own transportation program and allow SWRTA to provide the ser-

vice with its new flex routes. Such protectionism is not uncommon with attempts to coordinate human service transportation. SWRTA spent considerable effort working with the local human service agencies to address their concerns.

- Perhaps the most significant issue was SWRTA's loss of its Medicaid transportation contracts in late 2000 in two of its counties - Kershaw and Lee - which had been the sites of the transit agency's flex routes. With the loss of the Medicaid riders as well as the contracts' income, the original flex routes did not make sense. Loss of the contracts has been attributed, in part, to state procurement procedures for Medicaid transportation that did not adequately recognize the major coordination gains that had been achieved in the two counties with implementation of the flex routes.

Transferability

The concept of developing flexible routes and schedules to replace specialized paratransit services has merit in many areas. Traditional paratransit services are limited in their productivity by service design and are therefore more expensive on a per trip basis - riders are given curb-to-curb transportation on a demand basis - resulting in many *one-to-one* trips (pick up one passenger at a location, then drop off that passenger at one destination, etc.) across the service area. Using ridership

data for an established paratransit program that serves predominantly human service agency trips, trip origins and destinations can be plotted on a map. With that data, a route “corridor” can be determined, and from there, bus stops established. With information on trip times and the needs of the human service agencies, a schedule can be established, with enough “flex” in the schedule so that the vehicle can provide curb-side pick-ups for the special needs riders. General public riders can be served at the bus stops, as well as certain agency clients who are ambulatory and can travel independently.

The early success of the SWRTA’s flex routes built upon a number of factors:

- True collaboration between the transit agency and human service agencies is essential. Human service agencies must believe in the objective of coordination through flexible routing and must be involved in the initial planning to ensure “buy in” to the concept. Such agencies should also be involved in the detailed planning and implementation to ensure the needs of their clients are met and that a “comfort level” is established.
- Retain some of the “old model” with operation of flex routes - that is, retain curb-to-curb transportation on an emergency basis for the riders channeled to using bus stops. This can help allay the concerns of families and human service agencies with change to the new service concept.

- Work with staff at medical facilities and other service organizations that are frequented by the transit riders to inform them of service changes to a more fixed scheduled operation that flex routes provide. Medical and other agency staff can contribute to the success of the service by understanding the new transit schedule and even working to set up individual appointments around the transit schedule.

SWRTA also learned other “lessons” with the operation of their flex routes:

- Determining the “right” amount of time to build into the route schedule - the “flex” - to allow for deviations for pick-ups is difficult and requires on-going attention to ridership patterns.
- Provide on-going monitoring and attention to flex routes. This is not fixed-route service that can “run itself,” but rather a service with constant variation. It is critical for the transit agency to monitor and refine the service to ensure smooth operations responsive to riders’ needs. SWRTA found ridership on its flex route decreased in the third year and believed this was a direct result of inadequate staff time targeted to monitoring and managing the flex route service.

- Ensure on-going marketing of the flex route services. Flex routes are not well-known to the riding public or community at large and require on-going information and marketing.

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Additional Resources

Project ACTION report, titled [Handbook For Rural Flexroute Implementation](#) (document no. 20-0200)
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Vehicle Pool: Sharing Paratransit Vehicles in the Community

Council on Aging &
Human Services
Colfax, Washington

Organization Highlights

Council on Aging and Human Services (CoA&HS) is a not-for-profit, multi-service agency based in Colfax, Washington, providing social service, nutrition, transportation and home care programs in rural eastern Washington state along the Washington-Idaho border. CoA&HS's transportation program, known as COAST, provides specialized transportation to residents in four Washington counties as well as five Idaho counties along this border. The service area is very large - 23,000 square miles - and rural. In addition to direct transportation provision with a fleet of 21 vehicles, COAST provides a wide range of transportation services, including, among others, Medicaid transportation brokerage, vanpool services, and volunteer transportation.

Background/Objectives

Part of the mission of the transportation program sponsored by the Council on Aging and Human Services is to build community transportation resources, in keeping with the agency's motto, *Enhancing lives and building communities*. There are a number of programs provided by CoA&HS's transportation program - COAST - that serve this mission, including COAST's innovative "vehicle pool."

The objective of the vehicle pool is to get as many vehicles as possible for the region's transportation and human service agencies. Through the annual grant process, COAST applies and competes for FTA Section

5310 vehicles. As in most states, competition in the State of Washington for capital equipment is strong. Small human service agencies are disadvantaged in this competition because they cannot generate the numbers of one-way trips and miles necessary to compete effectively. Further, these agencies do not typically need a new \$60,000 vehicle given their light use patterns for transportation. But what these smaller human service agencies do need are reliable, accessible vehicles to provide transportation service that COAST is not funded to provide, such as group social trips on the weekends. COAST devised a plan to give human service agencies dependable used vehicles if they supply local match funds for the Section 5310 grant. This enables the region to maximize the number of vehicles received.

Description

COAST serves as the lead agency for vehicle acquisition through the Section 5310 program in its Washington service area, working closely with local human service agencies to ensure a cooperative and mutually beneficial approach. Essentially, COAST applies for vehicles on behalf of the small

human service agencies. When an agency needs a vehicle, it makes its need known to COAST, which applies for the vehicle on behalf of the agency through the annual grant process. When the vehicle is delivered, the agency provides the 20 percent match of funds to COAST. COAST then gives to the agency a well-maintained used COAST vehicle, rather than the newly delivered vehicle. The used vehicle is well-suited for the light use that the small agency typically has. COAST then uses the new vehicle for its region-wide transportation program, and once that vehicle has reached the end of its grant life, COAST signs the title over to the agency that supplied the original match funds four to five years earlier. The net result for the small human service agency is that it receives one well-maintained used vehicle and, several years later, a second used vehicle in exchange for its initial 20 percent match funds.

A key to success of this *vehicle pooling* approach is that the vehicles are well maintained so that the used vehicles provided to the human service agencies still have many years of light duty service. In addition, COAST provides other support for the agencies, including an



insurance pool that allows the small human service agencies to share in low cost insurance and *driver training*, provided without charge. The driver training program assists those smaller agencies that are too small to have in-house training capabilities and provides a 16-hour nationally-certified training program, helping ensure that these small human service agencies provide safe transportation. Together, these programs work towards building the transportation resources in the community, enhancing mobility in COAST's region.

Another aspect of the vehicle pool, beyond maximizing the acquisition of paratransit vehicles, is to ensure wheelchair accessible transportation in the region. To do this, COAST makes lift-equipped vehicles available to other agencies, including private for-profit providers, throughout the region when other agencies have such needs.

Resources

To develop its vehicle pool, COAST relied on its experience with the federal Section 5310 program and history of success in obtaining vehicles. This has required strong grantsmanship as well as the transportation program that justifies the need for replacement and expansion capital. The program has also been a success because of the available funding in the State of Washington. In the other state served by COAST (Idaho), a vehicle pool has not been tried because there are significantly less federal resources available through the 5310 program.

Results

COAST has used its vehicle pool approach with four human service agencies, acquiring five new vehicles. Each agency received a used vehicle upon delivery of the new one to COAST, and once the new vehicle had reached the end of its grant life, it was turned over to the agency that originally supplied the match funds.

COAST has built upon a long history of success with its Section 5310 applications, having received vehicles with each Section 5310 application submitted over the past 18 years.

Barriers/Constraints

While COAST did not face any significant constraints in developing its vehicle pool, the director was quick to point out that there is a strong level of trust among agencies throughout the region, cultivated through the director's almost 20-year tenure at CoA&HS. Clearly, in some areas, trust among the agencies would be a major issue to developing such a program to share funding and vehicles.

Transferability

The degree to which a vehicle pool program is transferable will depend to a great extent on several factors: the state's specific methodology for distributing Section 5310 funding and vehicles, as each state has developed its own process; the availability of Section 5310 funding in the state; and the nature of the relationships between entities vying for the

funds. Where there is cooperation and an understanding of the region-wide benefits that might accrue with a *pooling* approach, where the state's Section 5310 program gives weight to coordinated efforts and dominant established transportation programs, and with strong grant writing, a vehicle pooling program can be an effective approach to maximizing accessible paratransit vehicles within a region.

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Organization Highlights

New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) administers an annual \$1.4 billion State Transit Operating Assistance program and a Transit Capital Program. Of the state's total 130 transit operators, 50 are rural and small urban.

Background/Objectives

NYSDOT began using geographic information systems (GIS) applications for monitoring accident locations on its roadway network in the 1980s. With the passage of ISTEA and its multi-modal focus, the state began to use its GIS experience and technology developed on the highway side for transit planning and applications. New York developed two initiatives to make GIS an effective resource for its operators: first, NYSDOT established the New York State Transit GIS Users Group, and second, it established a Rural Transit GIS Initiative program for rural and smaller operators.

The stated objectives of these initiatives are to:

- Facilitate information exchange among transit agency GIS staff and provide a forum for operators to learn from New York State and national experts on transit GIS,
- Open communications between technical GIS staff at transit agencies and technical GIS staff at NYSDOT,
- Seek economics of scale in GIS application development and data acquisition

and sharing among state transit operators,

- Use GIS as a technical bridge to tie transit planning into the state's own project development, planning and programming activities, and
- Minimize the learning curve for smaller transit agencies so that GIS could be appropriately integrated into business practices without unnecessarily draining scarce resources.

NYSDOT also realized that promotion of GIS among the smaller, rural operators held promise for improved planning and operations.

Description

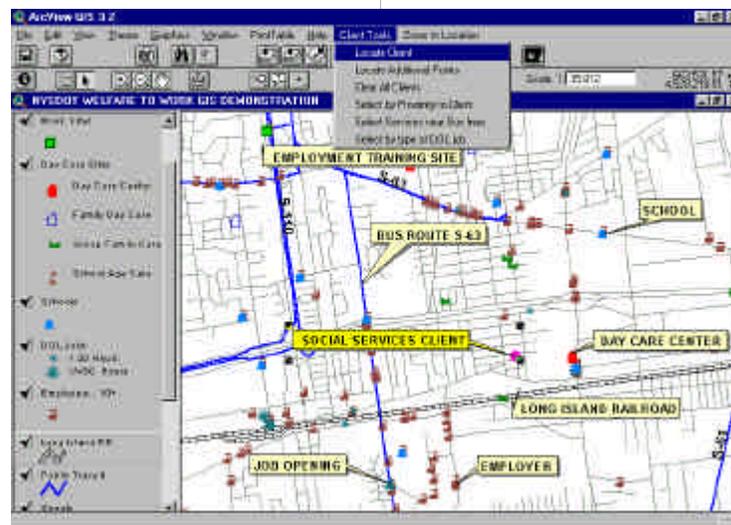
New York State Transit GIS Users Group

The New York State Transit GIS Users Group was established in 1996 as a network of transit operators, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), and NYSDOT regional offices

to facilitate a wide and efficient use of transit GIS to improve transit service and solve transportation problems. One of the key assignments for this group was to define data needs for GIS and potential data standards to develop common applications and ability to share across the state.

Rural Transit GIS Initiative

The Rural Transit GIS Initiative was pursued through the State's RTAP resources. As a first step, the state selected three rural counties with three operators as demonstration sites to assess needs for data and GIS applications. In each of the three counties, a working group was formed with the transit operator and representatives from the many local agencies whose clients used public transit to share data on trip-making and needs. A GIS database was then developed for each county by the NYSDOT, incorporating bus routes and stops and local agency data on locations of users and sites to be served. The demonstrations showed that rural systems could achieve improved route efficiencies, coord-



dination, and other benefits (such as providing planning tools and powerful data for public meetings) by using GIS analysis tools. But the demonstrations also showed that the systems did not typically have the staff or resources to commit to GIS.

Based on the demonstrations, NYSDOT realized that it would have to be a “GIS service shop” for many of the smaller agencies, though the long-term objective is that local agency staff are able to use GIS themselves. To implement the Rural Transit GIS program, NYSDOT did the following:

- Surveyed all rural fixed-route systems to gain a broader understanding of GIS needs and whether the systems could use GIS independently or would need the “GIS service shop” approach,
- Bought GIS software (ArcView) for some of the agencies and provided training to local staff, and
- Undertook the geocoding of transit route networks and timepoints for the fixed-route systems across the state (rural as well as urban) with assistance of college students from a local university.

Through the surveys, the rural systems needing the “service shop” approach indicated their GIS data requests and priorities, many of which involved database development and analysis. NYSDOT took these requests and initiated the work, with help from the college interns. However, the volume of work was

very large, and it has not yet been completed.

NYSDOT is continuing to complete the work requested by the smaller operators, and is also able to complete certain one-time special requests from the smaller operators. The State is also handling database maintenance for many of the smaller systems.

Resources

The demonstrations in the three rural counties, which comprised the initial step in the Rural Transit GIS Initiative, cost about \$25,000, including staff time. Roughly \$6,000 of this was software purchase.

After the demonstrations, the state procured GIS software for fixed-route operators statewide (about one-half are rural) by amending its existing software agreement, and, given the size of the purchase, was able to negotiate a very cost-effective price of less than \$50,000. This included updates and support for five years.

Staff time for the Rural Transit GIS Initiative has involved 10 to 50 percent of the time of one key staff member in charge of the program over two years, as well as assistance from up to seven part-time interns.

Results

Results of GIS applications have given the smaller operators new tools for improving service planning and operations. The smaller operators have used GIS analyses to assess existing services, plan wel-

fare-to-work services, and evaluate coordination opportunities.

One of the smaller operators was able to closely examine ridership on its demand response and fixed-route system. Once origins of demand response riders were geocoded and mapped, the operator found that fully 50 percent of the riders lived within one-half mile of a fixed-route but were not using fixed-route service. This was compelling data when clearly depicted on a map of the local area. And while this data did not map the functional mobility of those riders, it is likely that some of the paratransit riders could use fixed-route, offering a more cost-effective service.

The transit operator is now able to use the GIS results to work with the community and its rider base to determine the most appropriate services for its riders.

Welfare-to-work applications have also been important. By geocoding locations of “work ready” individuals in conjunction with available transit routes and common destinations, social service agencies can better assist such individuals in finding public transit options for work travel.

The GIS results have also been very useful when transit operators must present their case to local political bodies. For those who do not use public transit, the service may be transparent, particularly in rural areas where bus stops, if any, are dispersed. However, the service becomes more real to elected officials when attractive maps can be presented, showing the extent

and geographic coverage of local routing, as well as the range of destinations served.

Barriers/Constraints

The primary constraint to the Rural Transit GIS Initiative has been the limits of staff time. It has not been possible to complete all the work requested by the smaller operators. Another constraint has been lack of Journey-To-Work data for the rural areas. This data was important for the database design and development for the urban areas and very useful for GIS applications, but was not available for the rural areas through the 1990 Census data.

Another issue has been training and education on GIS, because the operators are spread across a large state. NYSDOT has been able to provide some training in-house and on-site at some of the local operators. The State has also used RTAP funds to allow staff at some of the smaller operators to attend outside training courses. And recently, the State has provided training opportunities through the software company's "virtual campus." Through the licensing agreement, staff at local operators can access free, interactive courses on GIS, provided on-line. Additionally, NYSDOT can offer its own transit staff to assist, and the larger systems with developed GIS expertise can be resources and mentors, roles that reportedly they have been happy to take, particularly when encouraged to do so by the State.

Transferability

GIS is a powerful tool for managing transit information relating to planning and operations, with capabilities for improving the efficiency and productivity of transit. New York has found that its investment in support and development of GIS technology is a logical extension of the state's role as manager of the statewide transportation system.

New York's experience suggests that the state department of transportation should have good working relationships with its transit operators, particularly with the larger ones with established GIS capabilities if it wants to build on existing transit GIS knowledge. New York's experience also shows the benefits which can be achieved when the state takes the lead, particularly for the smaller transit systems. As statewide agencies, state departments of transportation (DOTs) can achieve economies of scale in procurement of data needed for GIS applications. State DOTs can tap into national resources such as TRB, ITE, and ITS America more readily than can individual transit systems. And importantly for the smaller systems where limited staffing is a constant concern, state DOTs can pool staff resources and also use interns to efficiently develop initial GIS databases for multiple operators.

New York's experience shows that GIS applications can be developed and provided to individual smaller operators without the systems having to reinvent the wheel each and every time.

However, the State suggests that care should be taken when promising assistance to the smaller operators. In hindsight, NYSDOT believes it took on too much work initially. Even with the assistance of part-time interns, staff time is needed to manage their work. And for the one staff person heading up the GIS project, two to three interns would be more manageable than the seven that were assisting at one time.

The State also suggests that such an effort must recognize the major commitment to database maintenance. For GIS to work effectively, the data must be current, and keeping the databases of multiple transit systems across the state current is a major undertaking.

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Additional Resources

For GIS technology, several organizations were identified for more information:

ITS America: www.itsa.org
ITE: www.ite.org
TRB: www.nas.edu/trb

Finding the “Winners and Dogs”: Countywide, Web-Based Performance Reporting System

*San Bernardino
Associated Governments
San Bernardino, California*

Organization Highlights

Among the largest counties in the nation, San Bernardino County, California, encompasses 20,000 square miles, from the urbanized edge of Los Angeles County to mountain communities above the Los Angeles basin, across vast desert expanses through very small towns and Indian colonies and reservations 200 miles to the east along the Colorado River. Six public transit systems operate within this geographically diverse county.

San Bernadino Associated Governments (SANBAG), as the county transportation commission, supports transit planning and operations of the different systems, ranging from the one-vehicle *Needles Area Transit* to *Omnitrans*' 230 vehicle operation in the San Bernardino Valley. SANBAG utilizes a variety of management and technical assistance tools to both support and monitor the County's diverse transit operations.

Background/Objectives

Documenting transit performance at the greatest level of sensitivity - the route level - is critically important to SANBAG. SANBAG, the operators, and their boards use a standardized performance reporting system, called *Transit Operations Performance Reporting System* (TOPRS) to find the “winners” and the “dogs” in the operation of transit services across the county.

In the low-density small urban and rural areas in which most of the operators provide service, operating transit at sufficiently productive and cost-effective

levels is difficult. Transit board members and elected officials are often confronted with hard-to-serve transportation requests typically requiring low productivity service over long distances. Route-level performance information helps policy makers determine whether individual routes are feasible to continue operating or service expansion can be considered. Are productivity and cost per passenger indicators within acceptable ranges? Urban and rural operators are not compared to each other, but to themselves, over time. By determining route performance and monitoring it over time, rather than overall mode performance, operators can make more effective management decisions. Board members can more readily make difficult policy decisions. SANBAG can make better regional planning decisions.

Several objectives contributed to TOPRS' design, although SANBAG considered the management tool capabilities of the software to be most important. Providing transit operators with current, route-level performance assists policy makers and their managers in making difficult resource allocation decisions. SANBAG's formal purposes for TOPRS are to:

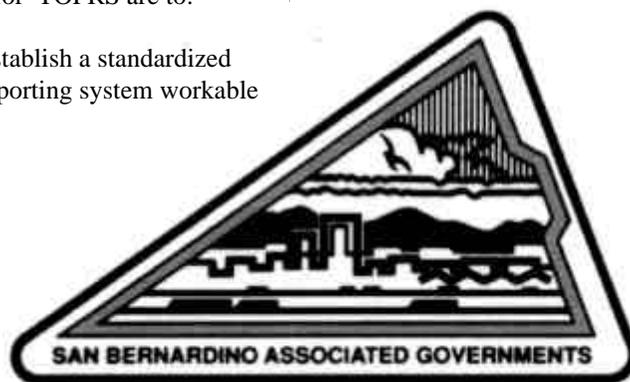
- Establish a standardized reporting system workable

for large and small operators alike,

- Provide operators and their boards with a tool to track route-level performance,
- Establish operating norms for individual service areas, and
- Provide the county transportation commission with a standardized reporting tool to facilitate regional transportation planning.

Description

TOPRS version 2.02 is a customized database constructed in Microsoft Access and used by each of the county's six transit operators. The transit agencies load detailed operating and expense data defined largely but not exclusively by the National Transit Database (NTD). Route-by-route and mode level performance reports are printed from TOPRS, showing performance across a variety of indicators and over time. These indicators are standardized by mode. There are selective performance indicators for fixed-route, for ADA complementary paratransit or general public paratransit, and for deviated fixed-route service.



TOPRS began as a standardized spreadsheet application into which the operators entered monthly totals for NTD-type data elements. This was upgraded to the Windows environment, converting to a customized Microsoft Access database. General data categories include:

- Passenger boarding information for weekdays, for weekends, and holiday days;
- Revenue information, including fare types and other revenue totals;
- Operations information such as revenue hours and revenue miles, for weekdays, weekends, and holiday days;
- Road call and accident counts;
- Service area and service provider information (e.g., different contractors).

Most operating information is input at the “route” level, for example, the number of passenger boardings, revenue hours, or revenue miles for the reporting period. Some information is input at the “mode” level and is allocated back down to the route level. For example, fare information for some systems may be available in aggregate forms by the mode. It is then disaggregated down to the “route” level, based upon fare type or revenue hour formulas.

Actual route operating and financial information is presented showing comparisons to budget projections (for both expenditures and for service performance). Loaded information is contrasted with prior year per-

formance of that route for the same periods (by month, by quarter, or annual totals). Performance indicators are calculated at each of the levels at which data are reported - route, mode, or system levels. The indicators include various cost measures, productivity measures, and use by weekday versus weekend. Standard road call and accident performance indicators are included. At the system summary level, the highest reporting level, only summary performance and expenditure information is presented with just a handful of performance indicators.

The standardized format of the database means that the data from the individual operators can be received on disc or over email and compiled into a county-wide database to then present summary mode level information for each of the county’s transit systems.

Resources

SANBAG funded the construct of the original spreadsheet database as an element of a triennial audit activity, for approximately \$10,000. The upgrade of the database to the Windows environment required additional countywide funding of \$30,000. The operators received the software, and some introductory training, at no cost to them. Ongoing technical assistance was provided to the operators during a year-long process of working out bugs and refining reporting capabilities. An additional \$4,500 technical assistance contract has been established to provide continued technical support to the operators as they use the ACCESS

database software. The operators work through the website of the contracted consultant to email their questions and receive guidance. Labor to collect and enter the data is a cost assumed by the operators.

TOPRS 2.02 is a stand-alone piece of software that currently requires a CD from SANBAG to operate. It will run on any computer sufficiently powerful to operate ACCESS 2000, such as a Pentium II or III with at least 128 megabytes of RAM. This software is anticipated to become available through a hot-link from SANBAG’s website in late 2001:

www.sanbag.ca.gov

Results

Because of TOPRS’ detailed route-level information, various changes to operators’ services were implemented. These include:

- Increasing the frequency of off-the-mountain transportation, a 50 mile round-trip linking the Lake Arrowhead and Big Bear communities with the San Bernardino Valley, as TOPRS data showed adequate ridership levels for selected runs over time.
- Removing from service the rural Lucerne Valley deviated fixed-route service in the high desert where route-level information revealed very low productivity and high per-passenger subsidies.
- Adding Saturday service, but determining not to add Sunday service, in parts of the Morongo Basin

(Twenty-nine Palms, Joshua Tree, Yucca Valley) where TOPRS documented high weekday ridership sufficient to suggest adequate levels for Saturday-only service.

Ongoing county-wide results fall into several areas:

- **Reporting procedures** - SANBAG continues to work with the operators to change their basic data collection forms and procedures to support route-level reporting. Additionally, modifications to the software enable certain numbers to be “allocated down” to the route level, such as administration costs and certain aggregate labor and maintenance expenses.
- **Reporting consistency** - Each of the county’s operators now collect and input data into formats that are comparable over time, using common definitions. This supports standardized analysis, both within individual systems and at the regional level.
- **Informed decision-making** - Standardized reporting formats educate a variety of audiences as they see the same reports formats, over time. During annual transit service public hearings, TOPRS data helps guide decisions about continuing, removing, or adding services.

Barriers/Constraints

Barriers limiting TOPRS usefulness from the operators’ and SANBAG’s viewpoints include:

- **The timeliness of reporting** - Getting the operators to load data in sufficiently routine ways such that reports are available to them at critical decision-making points is an ongoing challenge.
- **Quality and reliability of the data** - It’s been a challenge to obtain clean, accurate data from the operators, both financial and operations data. SANBAG continuously encourages operators to verify their data and to look for data inconsistencies.
- **Bug-free software** - Software problems with the windows-based version of TOPRS have been slow to resolve. While TOPRS 2.0 improved upon limitations of the spreadsheet format, its more complex structure has taken time to de-bug. This limited the operators’ confidence in using data reports from TOPRS and slowed their early use of TOPRS as a management tool.

The most difficult continuing constraint is the relative reliability of operations data in transit. Data reported, through TOPRS, have not been as consistent as expected. Specifically, there are differences among operators’ formalized reports filed for the same time periods (*National Transit Database* for the two urbanized operators and the *California Controllers’ Reports* for all). SANBAG continues to work with the operators to refine procedures leading to consistent, accurate reporting of key operations and cost data elements.

Transferability

While the TOPRS software is expected to become available through SANBAG at some point in 2001, the concepts of TOPRS performance-based reporting at the route level is readily applied to other settings, even in the absence of this particular piece of software. Developing reliable, clean data to identify those parts of the system that are working well and those that are not remains a challenge but one critical to effective service planning. Small systems can also utilize the spreadsheet versions of TOPRS, with the powerful linking capabilities of current spreadsheet software, to create their own route-level, mode and summary system level reporting.

SANBAG anticipates that TOPRS, with recent software improvements, will have increasing value to the public transit operators of San Bernardino County, particularly those smaller operators who cannot afford planning staff. As confidence in TOPRS grows, several San Bernardino County operators anticipate ceasing use of other reporting systems to rely solely on TOPRS for key performance information.

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INITIATIVES AND INNOVATIONS IN EFFICIENCY

For public transit service, efficiency refers to providing services with a minimum of expense and effort - “doing things right.” When funding resources are limited, improving efficiency is an important objective of smaller transit systems and has driven many of the creative initiatives in this next section of the Guidebook’s Part II. For example, in the State of Illinois, concerns about maintenance for paratransit vehicles in rural areas sparked the *Regional Maintenance Center*. Smaller transit agencies in rural areas of Illinois were having continual problems maintaining their small and mid-sized lift-equipped vehicles. The state, in conjunction with a larger urban transit system, built upon the maintenance capability of the urban provider and estab-

lished a regional center where the smaller transit systems in the region could bring their vehicles for specialized repairs they could not find in their rural communities - an efficient approach to both solving problems for the smaller providers and to maximizing resources of the larger urban system. This initiative and others are presented next.

PRESENTED IN THIS CATEGORY:

1. ***Regional Maintenance Center for Paratransit Vehicles*** - Illinois Department of Transportation, Division of Public Transportation and Springfield Mass Transit District
2. ***School Buses Providing Public Transit Service*** - Mason County Transportation Authority, Shelton School District, and North Mason School District, Washington
3. ***Evening General Public Dial-A-Ride: Cost-Effective Alternative To Fixed-Route Service*** - Citibus, Lubbock, Texas
4. ***Sharing “Risk” In Volunteer Transportation Program: Waivers, Indemnification, and Agreement-To-Participate Forms*** - Council on Aging & Human Services, Colfax, Washington
5. ***Successful Transportation Brokerage in Rural County*** - Malheur Council on Aging, Ontario, Oregon
6. ***Insurance Pool*** - Council on Aging & Human Services, Colfax, Washington
7. ***Formal Volunteer Transportation Program: Required Training and Uniforms for Volunteers*** - Voluntary Action Center, DeKalb County, Illinois
8. ***TRIP: Cost-Effective Supplement to Public Transit*** - Partnership to Preserve Independent Living, County Transportation Commission, and SunLine Transit, Riverside County, California
9. ***SoonerRide: Statewide Brokerage for Rural Medicaid Trips*** - Tulsa Transit Agency, Tulsa, Red River Transit, Frederick, and Other Agencies across Oklahoma
10. ***RegionalRide: Coordinating Inter-County Trips and Maintenance Through Regional Brokerage*** - Bay Area Transportation Authority with Other County Transit Agencies in Michigan

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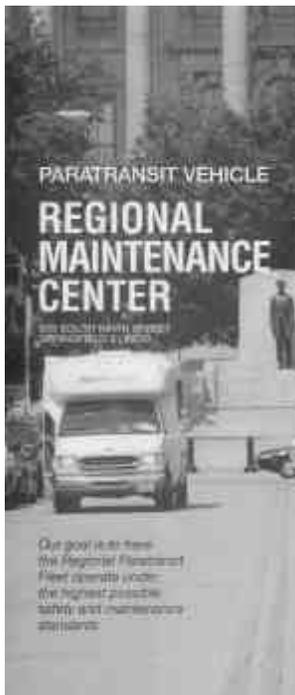
Regional Maintenance Center for Paratransit Vehicles

Illinois Department of Transportation,
Division of Public Transportation and
Springfield Mass Transit District

Organization Highlights

The Illinois Department of Transportation (DOT), Division of Public Transportation is one of four modal divisions of the state's transportation department responsible for administering federal and state transportation programs across the state.

Springfield Mass Transit District (SMTD) is an urban transit system, serving the City of Springfield, Illinois, which has a population of approximately 130,000 and a 50 square-mile service area, operating a fleet of 46 buses and 15 vans.



Background/Objectives

Interested in ensuring safety and quality maintenance of paratransit vehicles operated by smaller agencies in rural areas, the Illinois DOT wanted to offer more sophisticated maintenance

capabilities to such smaller agencies than was available in the rural areas. Over the years, the DOT had been hearing repeatedly from smaller and rural operators about their problems with maintenance of paratransit vehicles, typically that they were not able to find maintenance capabilities needed to repair their vehicles at local facilities that were not familiar with such specialized vehicles or not capable of more than routine repair work.

As a demonstration project, the Illinois DOT in partnership with the urban transit agency in Springfield established a regional maintenance program available to all agencies operating paratransit vehicles in the Springfield region. The stated goal of the *Paratransit Vehicle Regional Maintenance Center* is to have the region's paratransit fleet operate under the highest possible safety and maintenance standards. With limited sophisticated maintenance service available to many of the smaller paratransit operators in the outlying areas, the Springfield transit agency is able to provide its maintenance expertise to the small rural operators, with the opportunity for quality maintenance at cost effective rates.

The DOT also hopes that the maintenance work performed at the center will allow the State to learn, over time, about recurring problems with vehicles or other maintenance issues that should be addressed when vehicles are procured through the State's grant programs.

Description

The Regional Maintenance Center offers non-routine maintenance and repair service for paratransit vehicles. The program is not intended to compete with local private repair facilities and routine maintenance is not conducted unless the following conditions apply: (1) if during the completion of major repair it is determined, by both parties, that it would be advantageous in cost, time, and/or safety to have the routine work done at the same time; (2) if the paratransit vehicle owner determines that the routine maintenance could not be done satisfactorily by another source.

A loaner vehicle is available at no charge to the smaller agencies that bring in a vehicle to the Regional Maintenance Center. The state purchased a 14-passenger lift-equipped vehicle for this purpose. Because many of the smaller rural agencies do not have adequate spare vehicles, the availability of a loaner allows the agency to continue its transportation service while its own vehicle is in the shop. Moreover, it means only one staff member has to bring the vehicle in (without the loaner vehicle, a second vehicle and driver are required to take home the driver of the vehicle brought in for repair).

The Regional Maintenance Center's services are open to the following: (1) any non-profit grantee within a 60-mile radius of Springfield, with agencies receiving federal Section 5310 and 5311 paratransit vehicles through the state having first priority; (2) paratransit vehicles



operated by other non-profits such as nursing homes and hospitals can receive service on a space available basis; and (3) any member of the Illinois Association for Community Transportation regardless of distance from Springfield, however, such agencies are not eligible for the loaner vehicle unless located within a 60-mile radius of SMTD.

Agencies wishing to use the services of the Regional Maintenance Center call the SMTD service department, scheduling a convenient time and, if needed, use of the loaner vehicle.

SMTD maintenance staff complete an overall vehicle inspection and inform the agency of the extent of the repairs needed and estimated cost of such repairs. Work is not initiated until agency approval of the work and cost is provided.

A complete set of written policies and procedures has been developed to guide the program.

Resources

The primary costs for the Regional Maintenance Center involved start-up. Ongoing costs are covered primarily through payment for maintenance work by participating agencies, though there are some minor administrative costs to SMTD

when an agency first registers for maintenance service.

The start-up costs involved included: administrative staff time; marketing, which included development and production of a brochure explaining the program; and the purchase cost of the loaner vehicle. Most of the staff time for start-up was state personnel, with SMTD staff time involved as well to address various issues, such as legal authority for their mechanics to repair another agency's vehicle, liability, insurance, and data reporting.

Results

The program began as a pilot in June 1999, with the demonstration period intended to be one year. However, after just six months, initial results were very successful, and the pilot transitioned into formal program status.

During its first year, the Regional Maintenance Center provided maintenance for 18 rural agencies, making more than 40 different repairs. The loaner vehicle has been used on 14 different occasions.

Based on the success of this center in Springfield, the state DOT plans to open its second maintenance center by 2001, to be located at the Rockford, Illinois transit agency - Rockford Mass Transit District. Again, this center will serve rural agencies within a 60-mile radius. Ultimately, the State hopes to have the entire state served, so that all of its grantees are within a 60-mile radius of a regional center. Based on the positive

results so far, the State should have no problem in finding transit agency partners to provide the maintenance expertise - as word of Springfield's Regional Maintenance Center has spread, various other urban agencies have approached the state DOT asking if they can become a maintenance center as well.

Barriers/Constraints

In planning the regional maintenance center, the state anticipated a number of issues and potential constraints:

- Legal authority of SMTD to work on non-SMTD vehicles: The SMTD attorney determined that state law allowed this under a section providing legal authority for SMTD to participate in cooperative programs with other governmental and not-for-profit private entities.
- Insurance on the loaner vehicle: Agencies using the loaner vehicle must bring written assurances that they have appropriate insurance.

The state DOT also worked out accounting and reporting issues for both state and federal grant funds associated with the regional maintenance center operations to ensure proper accounting of public funds.

An additional constraint surfaced as the program began:

-
- SMTD mechanics were somewhat resistant to working on other agencies' vehicles. State and SMTD management were able to assuage this resistance by stressing the fact that more maintenance work was essentially job security.

Transferability

The concept of establishing regional maintenance centers for paratransit vehicles is viable for many areas where there are larger transit systems that have an interest in sharing their maintenance expertise with smaller agencies in their region. While state leadership was the impetus in Illinois, state involvement is not a requirement, because an entrepreneurial transit system could establish such a program itself.



In Illinois, the state took the lead role and was able to anticipate and work out many of the issues and possible constraints to the project during the planning months.

Where the state takes the lead, a good working relationship with the partnering transit agency is a prerequisite for an effective planning and start-up process.

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School Buses Providing Public Transit Service

Mason County Transportation Authority, Shelton School District, and North Mason School District, Washington

Organization Highlights

Mason County, Washington, with almost 1,000 square miles and a population approaching 50,000 (1999) lies on the less populated, western edge of the Puget Sound. The only incorporated community of Shelton has a population of under 10,000 and the balance of the county's residents live in remote areas. This very rural county is adjacent to the urbanized areas of Olympia to the south and Bremerton to the north, each with important destinations to which Mason County residents travel. Bisected by the Hood Canal, with many lakes, islands and various tributaries, Mason County has a topography which is difficult to serve with public transit.

The county public schools are organized in six school districts, each of which has a student transportation service. These have been the focus of a coordinated after-school transportation project for middle and high school students and for general public riders.

Background/Objectives

Mason County Transportation Authority (known as MTA) has entered its second year of integrating school district vehicles into the general public transportation system for residents of Mason County.

This coordinated service provides after-school transportation, sorely needed by students participating in after-school activities but not within the school districts' transportation budgets. The service is open to general

public riders boarding along the routes or requesting deviated pick-ups within certain distances of the routes. An element of the project is to show that it is feasible to combine youth and adult populations on school buses. One of the three routes of this cooperative service operates where no public transit service is provided. Organizers hope that improved transportation for low income residents will afford them better access to entry-level jobs and job training opportunities.

Description

Responding to citizen input requesting after-school transportation, MTA opened dialogue with the Shelton School District and its transportation provider, the Mason County Transportation Cooperative (MCTC), a cooperative of four school districts in the southern part of the county. An initial demonstration was implemented during the FY 1999-2000 school year and then formalized the following year, enriched by what was learned during the first six months of operation. In the second year, the northern part of the county joined through an agreement negotiated with North Mason School District. This expanded the coordinated

service to almost the entire county.

School district vehicles provide this coordinated service. Runs originate at the middle schools and high schools around 5:00 p.m. each weekday and leave service about 6:30 p.m. Each school bus is affixed with a large magnetic sign that says "Mason Transit," indicating they are now in general public service. Students board the buses at their respective schools. General public riders board at bus stops along the route or can request deviations of up to three quarters of a mile for pick up or drop-off. The service generally follows routes served by MTA at other times of day, although on one route the coordinated school bus service travels to areas not at all served by public transit. One southern route connects with another MTA route. All routes end near their respective school district yards, so there is very little deadhead time and mileage. Currently, there is no fare for the service, although administrators anticipate that may change. While some buses are lift-equipped, not all are and a district-provided accessible vehicle is used when needed by a passenger.



The transit authority pays the school district, through the agreement executed between both parties. Payment by the transit authority is based upon a fixed hourly cost and flat per mile cost for revenue service. For the Shelton School District, their FY 00/01 hourly rate of \$19.86 and a per mile cost of \$0.85 translates to a cost per run of about \$60 (an hour and a half revenue service plus 35 revenue miles per run). Subsidy per passenger costs are approximately \$2 when the projected 30 passengers per run are transported.

MTA and MCTC have resolved a number of issues to get the service operational, some of which they continue to monitor closely:

- ***On-board safety of school district passengers*** was of considerable concern to the school superintendents. An on-board monitor rode the routes during 1999/2000 until it was determined that this was an unnecessary added cost.
- ***On-board safety of general public riders*** did emerge as a concern, with school kids intimidating some of the older, more frail passengers. Drivers now have authority to request that a student rider leave the bus, at any point during the route, if the student's behavior seems to warrant removal. This has proven very successful, very quickly, given the rural areas and distances the buses travel.
- ***ADA compliance*** was complicated in that not all school district buses are lift-equipped. The agreement between the parties states

that the school district will provide a lift-equipped vehicle when needed. This has been easy to implement as ridership numbers are small and dispatch usually receives calls in advance for lift-equipped service.

- ***Alcohol and drug testing compliance*** was another potential barrier. MTA managers report that FTA has agreed that it is acceptable to include the school bus drivers in the MTA's drug testing program. Related to other training requirements, it is sufficient to simply certify that school bus drivers are participating in their training while MTA general public drivers have their own training.
- ***Counting of passengers by type*** has been complicated. It is difficult to register a "student" when the rider boards at the school but in fact is a "general public" rider, not a student. Similarly, when students go off-campus during the day and then board the bus at the library, it is difficult to count the students.
- ***Flashing lights and School Bus signs*** are not operational on these school district vehicles in service to the MTA, per the requirements of the school districts. There is concern about confusion on the part of passing motorists who may stop anyway when they see a stopped school bus. Similarly, the youth passenger may expect autos to stop as they do at other times of day, running

across traffic. MTA management continues to work with school bus drivers and district representatives to monitor this safety concern.

Resources

Funding for this project comes from demonstration funding through the Washington State Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation, which provided a first grant of \$40,000. A second grant of \$48,000 has provided for the second year of service. Both grants included some federal Section 5311 funds. Continuation beyond the demonstration grant phase is of major concern to all parties, particularly given the reduction in transit funding as a result of Washington State voters' action during 1999. Discussion is underway about various state and local funding options, including sales tax options.

Vehicles are provided by the school districts. Depreciation costs are not included in the public transit hourly rate, on the assumption that these vehicles are fully paid for through school district service.

Dispatch is provided by MTA, which acts as a trip broker for consumers requesting a deviation pick-up. These requests are forwarded to the appropriate school district provider.

Marketing costs are not budgeted by either party, aside from notices going out through the school districts to the students and their parents about the availability of this new after-school transportation. Also,

Mason County Transit's newsletter The Transit Dispatch was an existing marketing tool to use. The new service has attracted many consumer questions about the school buses with Mason County Transit signs affixed to their sides. Several newspaper articles have been one consequence, providing free marketing.

Legal counsel proved to be the same individual for both the school districts and the transit authority, because all were part of county government. This proved to be very useful because the individual reportedly had "debates with himself" to work through an agreement that was fair and equitable to all parties.

Results

This service has had considerable success at mixing populations, despite the concerns of school representatives early in the process. In fact, the opposite concerns arose, with some admonishment of student riders necessary to make elderly general public riders more comfortable. It is noteworthy that at this early point in the service, the riders are predominately students, estimated at 90 percent

students and 10 percent general public.

Ridership levels have been somewhat sporadic. Projected at 7,500 passengers total for the 10 operating months of the 2000/2001 year, this translates to an estimated 30 to 35 passengers per daily run. The after-school runs are getting such ridership at certain times, during particular sports seasons or theatre productions. It then drops as particular activities end.

The North Mason County Superintendent of Schools is excited by this partnership. From her viewpoint, the service addresses a very real problem by allowing students to stay after school for additional tutorials or to participate in extra-curricular activities. That it provides new general public service to some very isolated areas where her students live, communities not previously served by public transit, is an additional bonus. She sees this type of partnership as a model for similar relationships between the school district and other community service agencies.

Coordination opportunities are also emerging around other trip

needs. MTA is authoring a larger coordination plan and, as such, has identified a range of transportation needs. These include special event transportation, such as outings for nursing facilities, which may be feasible for school districts to serve during summers and winter/spring school holidays.

Barriers/Constraints

School district constraints were related to concerns about passenger safety that are dealt with through use of the yellow school buses, built to school use specifications, and the experiment of the on-board monitor whose services were discontinued at the end of the initial demonstration period.

The transit authority's constraints, and by extension the FTA's, were somewhat more involved, but have also been addressed, including:

- *Americans with Disabilities Act compliance*
- *Alcohol and drug testing compliance*
- *Private operator/ competition rules* - This is addressed by defining the school district and transit property relationship as "resource sharing" in the agreement; therefore, this does not constitute a lost competitive opportunity for the private sector.

The lack of marketing funds has challenged the system's ability to build general public ridership. The transit authority is working to develop alternative ways to get the word out about



the new service. School bus drivers have proven a helpful resource, stopping at all stops with passengers to inform them that they are allowed to use the yellow school buses that say Mason County Transit on the side.

Transferability

The fact that the transit authority and the school districts were all under the same organizational umbrella—county government—proved very useful to getting the coordinated service off the ground. The shared legal counsel was an important resource in working through to a reasonable agreement, acceptable to all parties. Finding such a liaison person might be an important element to transferring this model to other settings.

Also important is a positive relationship between the transit system and school district, with dialogue and communication, to address issues and regulatory aspects of such coordination between public transit and school bus transportation.

The availability of start-up funding was also critical in Mason County to getting the initial demonstration service in place.



This was particularly so in light of the loss of other state transit funding. Some seed money appears critical to pay for the direct costs of testing such a service, including the first-year on-board monitors, the magnetic signs, driver labor and additional fuel expense.

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Evening General Public Dial-A-Ride: Cost-Effective Alternative to Fixed-Route Service

*Citibus
Lubbock, Texas*

Organization Highlights

Citibus is a small urban transit system in Lubbock, on the high plains of West Texas. The system is managed by the city and operated by a private provider under contract to the City of Lubbock. Citibus operates both fixed-route and paratransit services with a fleet of 60 fixed-route and 22 low floor paratransit vehicles.

Background/Objectives

Citibus's fixed-route service operates from 5:45 a.m. to 7:30 p.m., Monday through Friday and Saturday from 7:15 a.m. to 7:15 p.m. These hours left the citizens of Lubbock without affordable public transportation during the later hours of the evening. Citibus management identified that evening transit service was important to the community, particularly to serve evening employment related trips. In an effort to meet the needs of the citizens, management developed a plan to operate paratransit vehicles in the evening to provide general public dial-a-ride service, rather than fixed-route service, reasoning that a dial-a-ride program would be more cost effective. Citibus implemented the evening service in January 1996 with three paratransit vehicles for a 90-day trial basis, to test its acceptance by the community.

Description

The pilot program quickly showed that evening dial-a-ride service was effective, developing a ridership base that justified continuation. The service has grown to four vehicles and has



helped many citizens seek and retain employment that typically requires non-traditional business hours, such as restaurants and retail establishments.

The evening dial-a-ride service operates from 6:40 p.m. to 12:20 a.m. The fare is \$2.00 from 6:40 p.m. to 9:20 p.m. at which time it increases to \$3.00 per passenger, resulting in one and two dollar increases from the normal fixed route fare. Riders call from 7 days to 24 hours in advance to schedule a trip, or they can be placed on subscription service. The evening dial-a-ride is operated by Citibus' paratransit department, using the same personnel and vehicles that are used during the daytime for ADA paratransit service.

According to Citibus, approximately 90 percent of trips on the evening dial-a-ride service are work related, with the largest number of trips centered around the 9:00 p.m. hour. Reportedly, there are a high number of cancellations and no-shows, but management accepts this as part of operating the service.

Resources

The evening dial-a-ride service costs considerably less than operating fixed routes to provide

similar coverage. Citibus uses its existing paratransit vehicles and staffing to operate the program, making the program easy to implement.

Marketing of the program has been extremely cost effective as well. Prior to program implementation, staff developed in-bus signage advertising the new service. The signs were placed on every fixed-route and paratransit vehicle. Citibus staff, operators, and riders are also a key factor to the success of the evening dial-a-ride service, as they continually market the service through "word of mouth" advertising.

Results

Citibus management considers the evening dial-a-ride service a success. At a cost far less than that needed to operate fixed-route service, the dial-a-ride has met many of the evening transit needs of the Lubbock community. In particular, this transportation service has assisted persons returning home from jobs in retail and restaurants. Ridership is 8,135 annually.

Productivity varies between 1.9 and 2.4 one-way trips per vehicle service hour. The annual cost of the service is approximately \$101,690 with a cost per trip of \$12.50.

Barriers/Constraints

To implement the evening dial-a-ride service, Citibus had to gain approval from the Lubbock Public Transit Advisory Board, a city-appointed board. Citibus also had to operate within the current budget, therefore the transit system started out on a trial basis with a minimal number of vehicles.

Marketing is another issue. Citibus' marketing and informational efforts needed to convince current and potential riders that the new service - different than the day-time fixed-route services - would meet their needs.

Transferability

For transit systems that currently do not operate any type of evening public transportation services yet have identified a need for such services, the concept of an evening dial-a-ride program may be more cost effective than extending their current fixed route system. Additionally, transit systems with existing evening fixed route service but limited ridership may find the concept of replacement general public dial-a-ride service transferable to meet evening needs in a more cost effective manner. For Citibus, the implementation of the dial-a-ride service was operationally simple, because the transit system already offered paratransit service - ADA paratransit service - to complement its fixed-route service. Minor policy and procedural changes were made for the evening service because it is designed for the general public, rather than just ADA certified individuals with disabilities.

Transit systems that are interested in implementing an evening dial-a-ride service first need to identify a demand for such service. A good way to identify the demand is through rider surveys. If a transit system is interested in replacing an existing evening fixed route service they would need to carefully analyze existing evening time transit usage for both fixed-route and paratransit services to determine origins and destinations, times of use, and special needs. This would help determine the number of vehicles necessary for service. In the Lubbock community, the 9 p.m. hour was found to be particularly busy due to the closing of most retail businesses and the fact that about 90 percent of evening trips are work related. Extended service hours were recently implemented to accommodate clients that are employed by eating establishments, manufacturing companies, and customer call centers.

Implementation will also require refinement of policies and procedures to ensure that the service is general public, not specialized. Public information and marketing are then needed, with strong emphasis on existing riders who will be impacted by the change.

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Sharing “Risk” in Volunteer Transportation Program: Waivers, Indemnification, and Agreement-to-Participate Forms

Council on Aging & Human Services
Colfax, Washington

Organization Highlights

CoA&HS is a not-for-profit, multi-service agency based in Colfax, Washington, providing social service, nutrition, transportation, and home care programs in rural eastern Washington state along the Washington-Idaho border. CoA&HS’s transportation program, known as COAST, provides specialized transportation to residents in four Washington counties as well as five Idaho counties along this border. The service area is very large - 23,000 square miles - and rural. In addition to direct transportation provision with a fleet of 21 vehicles, COAST provides a wide range of transportation services, including, among others, Medicaid transportation brokerage, van-pool services, and volunteer transportation.

Background/Objectives

COAST is the only non-emergency public transportation provider in most of its vast service area, providing, among other services, a significant volunteer transportation program. Given the overall social service mission of COAST’s parent agency, COAST tries to assist any person calling for transportation, but recognizes that there may be situations where it is not appropriate or safe for the organization to provide such transportation with its volunteer program.

To protect its volunteer transportation program, COAST developed waivers, indemnification forms, and agreement-to-participate forms specifically to safeguard its program and the volunteer drivers who make the

program possible. These forms are designed to provide protection to all parties involved in transportation. The objective is that the volunteer driver, the passenger and the referring agency all share responsibility to ensure the effectiveness and success of the volunteer transportation program.

Such waivers are not typically used with volunteer transportation programs, because many think they “do not work.” COAST’s director stipulates that it is a myth that waivers will not “hold” in court. He believes, through his legal opinions, that private firms (including non-profits) can be protected as long as they use reasonable practices and act prudently and professionally. He also believes that agree-

ment-to-participate and indemnification forms can be properly designed for use by public bodies, serving the same purpose, which is to make clear when there is shared responsibility among rider, the referring agent, and the transportation provider. (Any organization interested in such forms should seek its own legal advice.)

Description

When COAST receives a trip request for its volunteer transportation program where there appears to be above average risk (e.g., a nurse or doctor wants a patient transported 100+ miles to a diagnostic service over rough, rural roads), COAST requires that each party involved (COAST, the volunteer driver, passenger, and re-

**ASSUMPTION OF RISK
COUNCIL ON AGING & HUMAN SERVICES AGREEMENT FOR TRANSPORT**

The purpose of the following agreement is for a better understanding of the transport by all participants.

(To be completed by COAST staff member)

This trip is to transport _____ (rider's name)

_____ (address) _____ (phone #)

_____ (physician's name) _____ (phone #)

To: _____ (place)

_____ (address) _____ (date)

_____ (phone #) _____ (time of day)

Approximate length of time for travel _____
(length of time at appointments) is not possible to estimate)

Special Instructions/Directions: _____

For the purpose of: _____

If for hospital admission has Admitting Office been notified? Yes _____ No _____

Further instructions: _____

Vehicle used: COAST van _____ Private Auto _____

1. Rider: (Please indicated appropriate responses and sign)

ferring agency if there is one) sign a document that spells out the service that is being provided and shares responsibility for that service, protecting COAST, its volunteers, and its staff. Each party is fully informed regarding the meaning of the form. And the passenger is informed about the volunteer's skills, his or her level of training, the conditions of the trip, and that the driver may not have two-way communication.

Through the form, the passenger agrees to hold COAST, the volunteer driver, and the referring medical authority harmless. The medical authority attests that the passenger is stable enough for the trip and agrees to hold COAST harmless. The volunteer driver agrees to hold COAST and the passenger harmless. Importantly, each party has the right to refuse, including the volunteer driver and the passenger. If transportation is refused, there is a responsibility to offer other possible transportation services, such as non-emergency ambulance service. The signature of any of the parties cannot be coerced.

For COAST's program, all registered volunteer drivers have been screened for criminal offenses and traffic violations and are trained as well. COAST also uses the waiver/indemnification and agreement-to-participate forms for mini-van transportation with paid staff drivers whenever passengers are transported on a non-emergency basis between medical facilities.

Resources

For COAST's forms, the agency's director drew upon ex-

tensive risk management experience in another industry to draft COAST's waiver/indemnification and agreement-to-participate forms. Importantly, legal advice was then sought and all forms used have been reviewed and approved by attorneys.

Administrative time and effort are then required to ensure that the forms are used and signed when COAST believes there is more than average risk. Other resources include administrative efforts to disseminate information about the concept of shared risk to educate agencies, volunteers, and passengers.

Results

In 2000, COAST coordinated 4,700 volunteer trips accounting for over 160,000 miles of service. Staff estimate that the waiver forms are used for about 40 trips per year. The volunteer transportation program has been in place for 25 years and has not encountered any problems or challenges to date. Management attributes a small part of the program's longevity to the shared risk and responsibility achieved through use of the waiver/indemnification forms. The use of the forms has elevated the dialogue related to the services. It has been necessary to educate the volunteers, the medical community, and the riders; however, the greatest benefit from the program is that COAST can say "Yes!" to a few more requests for services.

Barriers/Constraints

The main barrier to this approach was in the initial acceptance of the waivers/

indemnification forms. Once all parties were educated about the objectives and purpose of these forms, their use was accepted.

Transferability

Use of waiver/indemnification forms for a volunteer transportation program is a transferable concept. There are many organizations that provide volunteer transportation service, and in some cases, there is a perception that such programs may not be "safe." While there are various strategies to ensure safe operations (for example, vehicle safety inspections, initial and ongoing driver training), the use of waiver/indemnification forms takes the next step, providing a mechanism to share the responsibility of the volunteer trip. Moreover, the forms serve to help protect the volunteer transportation program itself, because there may be certain trips that should not appropriately be provided through such a program.

Any transit system interested in using waiver/indemnification forms should first contact an attorney specializing in these matters. Different states have different laws.

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Successful Transportation Brokerage in Rural County

Malheur Council on Aging
Ontario, Oregon

Organization Highlights

Located in Ontario on Oregon's eastern border with Idaho, the Council on Aging is a private non-profit corporation and the designated Area Agency on Aging. As such, the Council is involved in many activities, including operation of the local food bank, provision of emergency housing, development of low-income housing, and provision of transportation services. The Council serves all of Malheur County (extending over 60 miles west and about 180 miles from Baker County in the north to the Nevada state line in the south) and provides services to Idaho residents in communities across the Snake River. The total population of the agency's primary service area is about 30,000.

Background/Objectives

In 1988-89, the State of Oregon passed a 2 cent per pack tax on cigarettes to fund transportation for seniors and disabled individuals in each county. The Council on Aging approached Malheur County concerning these Special Transportation funds and, with county approval, organized an advisory board to oversee the use of these funds, amounting to about \$40,000 annually. The advisory board was comprised of representatives of existing transportation vendors and user groups and agencies, including local taxi providers, senior centers, and nursing homes.

At that time, there were very limited transportation resources available in the county - just a private taxi operator and the city bus in Ontario. As the Area

Agency on Aging, the Council is responsible for holding public hearings and assessing the needs of seniors and disabled individuals. This needs assessment indicated that lack of transportation was the number one problem among seniors and disabled persons in Malheur County.

The availability of Special Transportation funding coincided with federal Section 16(b) 2 Elderly and Handicapped assistance (now Section 5310) for the purchase of a van for each of the county's three senior centers. The Special Transportation funds supported planning and coordination as well as operational costs of the senior center transportation services. By about 1992, however, the limited use of these vans was seen as reducing the likelihood of securing additional transportation funding to expand services. To address these issues, the Council secured a "seed" Special Transportation grant for coordination and resource development and hired a consultant to assess opportunities and propose a plan of action for the Council.

Meeting with representatives of the senior centers and others, the consultant identified programmatic needs for documentation and paperwork, a need for the program to develop other contracts to provide necessary funding, and developed a coordination brokerage model centered on the Council.

This brokerage model included: continued operation of individual vans by the three senior centers, new service through direct operation of additional

vehicles by the Council, and centralized scheduling/dispatch by the Council for its own vehicles plus those of the senior centers and the City of Ontario's one-vehicle Dial-A-Ride.

Description

Implementation of the Council's coordination and brokerage plan began in 1993 but, according to staff, really came together in 1995 with a consolidation of staffing resources brought about by the bankruptcy of one of the intended brokerage partners and an agreement with a State organization - the Community Partnership Team—to consolidate the scheduling and dispatch of the two separate programs. This brought a skilled coordinator to the Council's program who was familiar with area agencies and able to provide the outreach which was necessary to obtain fee-based transportation referrals.

The Council now coordinates and dispatches the operation of more than 12 vehicles from the senior centers, Ontario city bus, the Oregon State Community Partnership Team, and its own fleet of eight vehicles (soon to be 10). On an average week-day, 60 to 70 trips are dispatched through the Council's brokerage program, providing services in response to contracts from individual clients and a



diverse range of agencies: local school districts, assisted living facilities, nursing homes, sheltered workshops, Medicaid, worker's compensation, and Welfare to Work programs. Staff sees the provision of Head Start transportation among its future opportunities.

Operationally, the Council accepts trip requests and refers trips to the senior centers and the Ontario city bus when possible. If a trip cannot be provided by another provider, the Council's own vehicles will be used for the trip. When volunteer drivers are available, these volunteers can be assigned trips using their own automobiles or the State vehicles available through the Oregon State Community Partnership Team.

The Council's transportation activities involve a full-time Coordinator/Dispatcher and seven drivers, several of which are volunteers. Other Council staff sometimes assist with taking telephone requests and the Council's Executive Director serves as the overall program manager and grant writer. Program outreach, marketing, and preparation of information materials are done through outside contracted assistance.

Malheur County insures the Council's vehicles and provides maintenance services and is reimbursed by the Council.

Resources

The Council on Aging's transportation annual budget is about \$250,000, with almost half of this amount coming from Medicaid reimbursement. The remainder is funding from the

Special Transportation fund and from contracts with the 16 agencies participating in the brokerage.

Per trip fees are collected from general public passengers based on the distance of the trip. Trips in town carry a fee of \$5 one-way up to \$35.00 into Boise, a distance of about 70 miles one-way.

The Council is willing to enter into a contract to provide transportation service for any local agency or organization, but, significantly, requires that the full amount of that agency's transportation funding and/or reimbursement be transferred to the Council as compensation. With this policy, the Council recognizes the disparate levels of transportation funding that may exist between programs and that some programs will subsidize others. This practice has served the Council well, allowing it to serve a wide variety of transportation services within its area while realizing a modest annual revenue carry-over.

Results

This brokerage program in rural Malheur County has successfully coordinated limited transportation resources, increasing transit availability in the county. The Council on Aging's transportation program currently provides an average of 65 daily trips for 16 agencies within Malheur County. These trips are provided by four different transportation providers using a combination of paid and volunteer drivers operating a variety of agency and state vehicles.

Staff indicate that, although the program provides valuable services, there is more that could be done. To that end, the Council on Aging is working to develop a more businesslike approach to the program, developing a business plan, improving its rate setting and fee structure, establishing procedures for billing and collections, and looking to initiate marketing of the program.

Barriers/Constraints

This brokerage and coordination program originated out of the presence of a huge need for transportation and the availability of few dollars to meet that need. Agency staff indicate that the absence of funding has forced agencies to coordinate their services to ensure their organizational survival and that this has resolved most "turf issues" found in other coordination projects.

From a planning standpoint, one barrier to the creation and success of this program has been getting agencies to understand each other's transportation needs and to be open to changes in how these are met in order to permit the coordinated system to succeed. Accepting and helping other agencies to meet their trip needs must be seen as of equal importance to meeting one's own agency needs.

Staff have indicated that quite a few barriers exist and continue to be faced in making this coordinated program work in operational areas and with passenger acceptance. For passengers, coordinated services require that they ride with other passengers,

often from other programs and agencies. This “shared riding” also requires that passengers make other stops before getting to their destination in order to pick-up and drop-off other passengers, which may be quite different from the services clients have come to expect from some agencies.

Operationally, the Council’s transportation program continues to work on the development of efficient routes and services in an extremely large geographic area. Scheduling and dispatch are presently done through manual procedures, although the Council has received a modest grant for scheduling and dispatch software. Finally, as the program expands and transports more and varied passengers, the Council recognizes the need to upgrade and strengthen driver requirements and training.

As their transportation program continues to develop and additional agencies are brought into the coordinated brokerage system, Council staff are beginning to question whether there is a role for private transportation providers versus continued growth of non-profit providers. Staff does not see this as an immediate issue as there are only a couple of small private providers locally.

Transferability

The scarcity of resources and need for transportation, particularly for long distance trips, which created the opportunity for the Council on Aging’s coordination and brokerage system, are similar to those found in most rural areas. The availability of “seed” funding in the form of

Oregon’s Special Transportation funding and the associated requirement for an advisory board introduced key ingredients in providing the resources for design and implementation of coordination while opening up participation in the process to other agencies and organizations through the advisory board.

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Organization Highlights

CoA&HS is a not-for-profit, multi-service agency based in Colfax, Washington, providing social service, nutrition, transportation, and home care programs in rural eastern Washington state along the Washington-Idaho border. CoA&HS's transportation program, known as COAST, provides specialized transportation to residents in four Washington counties as well as five Idaho counties along this border. The service area is very large - 23,000 square miles - and rural. In addition to direct transportation provision with a fleet of 21 vehicles, COAST provides a wide range of transportation services, including, among others, Medicaid transportation brokerage, van-pool services, and volunteer transportation.

Background/Objectives

Part of the mission of the transportation program sponsored by the Council on Aging and Human Services is to build community transportation resources, in keeping with the agency's motto, *Enhancing lives and building communities*. There are a number of programs provided by CoA&HS's transportation program - COAST - that serve this mission, including COAST's *insurance pool*. This program also supports COAST's innovative vehicle pool, helping to ensure that smaller human service agencies in the region with vehicles have access to affordable vehicle insurance.

The concept of an insurance pool developed in 1984, when COAST learned that a neighboring small human service agency

could not find affordable insurance for the one vehicle that it owned and operated. COAST contacted its insurance provider to find out if the small agency's vehicle could be covered under the COAST policy. When the answer came back in the affirmative, COAST began inviting other agencies to join. The objective of this insurance pool, similar to other COAST programs, is to build community transportation resources.

Description

COAST holds the master insurance policy that has grown from covering its own 21 vehicles to covering 46 vehicles for nine agencies. The basic vehicle coverage is \$1.5 million, with a \$5 million umbrella and \$250 deductible. Participating agencies pay about \$1,000 per vehicle per year for the coverage. Each agency is a "named insured" on the master policy.

This policy allows participating agencies lower cost insurance at a level of coverage typically higher than they could get on their own. The funds saved by the agencies are freed for operating service. COAST also ensures increased safety by requiring drivers that will be driving on a half-time level or more

to go through COAST's driver training program.

Resources

This is a relatively low cost program, with the only major expense being ongoing administrative costs to COAST to provide the insurance pool. To cover these costs, COAST charges each participating agency \$60 per year.

A transit organization interested in such a program would need an insurance agent or broker that is willing to make some adaptations. Also needed is an existing policy that can include additional agencies in the original policy. Additionally, the program benefits from COAST's driver training program, which gives mandatory training to drivers who drive on a half-time basis or more for agencies participating in the pool.

Results

The insurance pool has grown from one agency to nine and from 14 vehicles to 46. COAST management has indicated that this program reduces agency insurance cost by as much as 50 percent. The



program has also been instrumental as part of COAST's efforts to build community transportation resources.

Barriers/Constraints

Reportedly, there were no barriers in implementing the program.

Transferability

Insurance pools have been implemented in a number of areas across the country, particularly after the insurance crisis of the early to mid 1980s. COAST's program is different from some of these where the participating transit agencies essentially form their own insurance company, contributing a computed "premium" reflecting the cost of their projected losses plus an overhead contribution for claims management and administration. Rather, COAST's pool is smaller scale, building on the organization's existing insurance policy, which is structured so that other agencies can join as "named insured."

What makes COAST's insurance pool particularly noteworthy is its packaging with other COAST programs, especially the driver training program, that work to build up and support the transportation resources and capabilities throughout its very large region.

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Formal Volunteer Transportation Program: Required Training and Uniforms for Volunteers

*Voluntary Action Center
DeKalb County, Illinois*

Organization Highlights

DeKalb County is rural, with about 82,000 population, adjacent to the Chicago region. The Voluntary Action Center is a private non-profit agency with a board of 20 local individuals. The agency has a total of 31 vehicles, with seven used for the volunteer program.

Background/Objectives

In 1974, the Voluntary Action Center was founded in DeKalb County to address community needs and coordinate local volunteers. One of the most pressing needs at that time was specialized transportation for elderly and disabled residents, particularly for medical trips into the Chicago area some 60 miles away. To address this need, the Voluntary Action Center started up a volunteer "rideshare" service, where volunteers would transport needy elderly and disabled residents to medical appointments using their own cars. This program was very informal at the start but grew based on need and volunteer support.

By 1975, the agency became more sophisticated and applied for available grants through the state DOT and obtained funding for vehicles as well as operating assistance. With funding support, the agency's transportation program grew and the agency added a general public transit program serving all residents within the county on a pre-scheduled basis. However, the organization kept its original volunteer program and formalized it through a number of creative developments.

Description

With its long history of over 25 years of experience and success in serving long distance medical trips for senior and disabled riders, this volunteer program has been looked to as a model by other agencies considering volunteer transportation services. Key aspects of the service, known as MedVAC, are:

- The agency now supplies and maintains seven vehicles for the volunteers to drive, including standard station wagons, CaraVans, and 10-passenger raised-roof vans.
- Safety is of paramount importance. Volunteers must go through 20 hours of initial training, which includes defensive driving techniques and instruction on passenger assistance techniques. Additional training is provided to volunteer drivers of larger raised-roof vehicles.
- On-going training is also provided to the volunteer drivers, on such topics as first aid, updates on regulations affecting the service, and refreshers on passenger assistance techniques.
- The agency works with its insurance broker to ensure that the volunteers are covered under the agency's liability policy. Insurance for the program is not a problem, due in part to the training requirements for the volunteers as well as the agency's good record and years of experience with the program.

- The Voluntary Action Center actively recruits volunteers on an on-going basis within the community. For example, the agency does outreach to the local business community, seeking volunteers, and makes presentations at pre-retirement seminars, extolling to the soon-to-be-retirees the virtues of "life after work" and merits of providing transportation service on a voluntary basis. Its successful recruiting and outreach efforts result in about four to five new volunteers each year.
- Volunteers are outfitted with agency jackets and hats complete with the agency logo and professionally created name tags, enhancing the professionalism of the volunteer service as well as strengthening the tie of the volunteer to the agency.



- Extensive marketing of the volunteer service is done through publication and distribution of a brochure, local media coverage, and Public Service Announcements (PSAs) on a frequent basis. This provides high visibility for the volunteer transportation program, which both informs the community about the service and also acts as a marketing strategy to recruit new volunteers.

Resources

During FY 2000, the MedVAC program was budgeted at approximately \$100,000. This included all vehicle maintenance, fuel, training for the volunteers, and staff time for administering the program that involves, among other duties, scheduling riders and volunteers. In terms of staff time, it was reported that the program requires about 20 hours of administration effort per week.

Riders are asked to contribute 50 cents per mile. Various subsidy programs are used to fund MedVAC, including Medicaid. About one-third of trips are Medicaid eligible, with the Voluntary Action Center assisting with the required paperwork and processing needed for Medicaid transportation reimbursement.

Results

- About 6,000 one-way trips (3,000 round trips) were provided in FY 2000.
- On average, each round trip takes about six hours to complete, which includes

driving the passenger to and from the medical appointment and waiting during the appointment time.

- The involvement of the volunteers provides a direct connection between the agency and the community, keeping the community involved and building local support for the agency. This involvement also provides an important source of feedback to the agency from the community/volunteers. And the volunteers also help market the service.

Barriers/Constraints

- The agency reports there has been general concern and suspicion that volunteer drivers are not safe. The Voluntary Action Center has addressed this directly by requiring initial and on-going training of its volunteers to ensure safe and quality service. To increase the image and professionalism of the volunteer service, the agency has issued uniform jackets, hats, and name badges to be worn by the volunteers.
- The agency also reports that during winter-time, up to one-third of their volunteer drivers are not available. Since many of their volunteer drivers are retired, they leave for warmer climates during the harsh Illinois winters. Thus it is more difficult during the winter months to recruit and provide volunteer drivers.



Transferability

A volunteer transportation program is a viable option for a variety of transportation organizations trying to meet specialized needs. Several “words of advice” are offered by the Voluntary Action Center:

- Start small - even as small as one vehicle.
- Stress safety; recommend mandatory initial training and on-going training.
- Use volunteer involvement as a connection to the community, building upon the volunteers’ feedback, supporting them as they market the service, and acknowledging their involvement as a way to build political and community support for the organization.

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TRIP: Cost-Effective Supplement to Public Transit

Partnership to Preserve Independent Living, County Transportation Commission, and SunLine Transit, Riverside County, California

Organization Highlights

The *Transportation Reimbursement and Information Project* (TRIP) was established in 1993 through the *Partnership to Preserve Independent Living for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities* of Western Riverside County, California. Operated through the non-profit Partnership, TRIP is housed in the county area agency on aging offices and primarily funded by the Riverside County Transportation Commission. A related program, SunTrip, operates in the eastern part of Riverside County, serving the communities in the Palm Springs area dispersed across the transit agency's (SunLine) 1,000 square mile service area.

TRIP serves the 2,400 square miles of Western Riverside County with a population of 944,000 (1998), which includes many rural areas as well as low-density isolated suburban communities. The program serves individuals living in rural or suburban communities in three situations: where there is no transit service, where transit cannot serve inter-city trips needed, and where the consumer is too frail to use available public transit services.

Background/Objectives

Various transportation alternatives exist in the urbanized areas of Western Riverside County, but these do not extend to sparsely populated rural areas, and they are often non-existent in suburban neighborhoods. TRIP's overall goal is to enable seniors and persons with disabilities to maintain their independence and live independently

within their local community. Where transit is not available or it cannot be used because individuals are too frail for public transit, TRIP reimburses volunteers who transport participants.

Some TRIP users make inter-city trips, usually to regional medical facilities from areas not readily served by public transit. Others are making local trips but need extra assistance - through-the-door of their destination.

TRIP is a cost-effective alternative that supplements and extends public transit's ability to serve local trips and supplements transportation provided by public paratransit and fixed-route services through a formal volunteer transportation program.

Description

Referrals to the Program - A majority of referrals to the program come from the Riverside County Department of Social Services, In-Home Supportive Services program (IHHS) and other social workers involved with home-bound frail elderly or persons with disabilities. Participating social workers have an in-depth knowledge of TRIP.

Some individuals self-refer and their application process involves a lengthy telephone interview. Interviewers determine whether the individual is appropriate for TRIP or can adequately meet his or her

travel needs through one of the county's public transit programs. If referred to TRIP, the individual is sent an application packet to be reviewed by the Eligibility Determination Committee.

The Eligibility Determination Committee is staffed by professionals from several organizations, including a representative of the county transportation commission, whose funding covers approximately 75 percent of the project's budget. All applicants are screened with specific eligibility criteria, both as they enter the program and later if questions about their participation arise.

Volunteers - This program relies upon the availability of volunteers to assist seniors who have become isolated because health conditions deter them from driving or using public transit or because of their physical distance from transit services. Volunteers, per TRIP rules, cannot be family members or persons living in the same household. However, the Partnership estimates that about half of the participants who become inactive do so because they cannot find volunteers. TRIP has therefore initiated a



Partnership to Preserve Independent Living for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities

volunteer referral service to help connect TRIP participants with volunteers when they cannot otherwise identify a volunteer.

Volunteers, as drivers, are formally screened by TRIP staff. This includes a Department of Motor Vehicles driving record check and limited background check. The volunteer referral system “markets” the TRIP as a volunteer opportunity through a variety of sources, and builds a database of available volunteers.

Results

TRIP provided almost 600 individuals with 32,186 one-way trips, an average of 54 trips per person or about one trip per week per participant, through the end of 1999. Almost 600,000 miles of travel supported by TRIP translates to a 19-mile average one-way trip length. These trips are considered to be high quality service by the consumers they serve with many enthusiastic customer testimonials. They have also proven to be a cost-efficient way to supplement public transit. Over the last several years, average reimbursed costs are between \$4 to \$5 per one-way trip, compared with averages of \$13 per one-way trips for ADA services.

A users’ survey showed that some individuals were still using their local dial-a-rides to certain destinations while using TRIP reimbursements for the longer-distance, inter-community and often medically-oriented trips. An analysis of TRIP membership by community (by zip code) showed that the geographic distribution of TRIP reimbursements generally reflected the

availability and non-availability of public transit resources.

There was less TRIP participation in metropolitan areas and considerably greater participation from suburban and rural areas without transit services. TRIP has helped strengthen other connections within the county, as a result of consumers’ need for information about transportation. The partners supporting TRIP are working more closely together than they ever had previously, actively looking for and cooperating on grant applications and other projects.

Resources

The bulk of the program’s resources come from a local retail sales tax, providing annual grants of \$240,000 over the last several years. An additional \$30,000 comes from the AAA, including in-kind contributions of space and overhead facilities (telephone, utilities, etc.). About \$15,000 has been generated from private sector contributions.

The Partnership is governed by a volunteer board of directors. Paid staff includes a half-time director and a three-quarter time assistant. An accounting service generates the monthly checks; several hundred are prepared each month.

Barriers/Constraints

Locating volunteers is an ongoing challenge to this program, although it is largely borne by the individual consumers. In their rural settings where many participants live, it can be difficult to find individuals available to provide transportation to

medical or shopping facilities, even when some form of reimbursement is available. The program relies heavily upon both a ready supply of volunteers and the ability of the individual to locate his or her own volunteer driver. When these are not available and/or cannot be located by the individual, the TRIP program at present has a very limited means of responding.

Procuring outside funding has been a less successful proposition than originally hoped. Evidence suggests that TRIP simply cannot sustain itself financially, in light of its seven-year history of modest private fundraising successes. While the notion that there are private funds to support such endeavors appeared viable, aggressive efforts to identify those funds for ongoing support have generated steady but only limited outside funding assistance.

Transferability

This program is funded primarily through a local sales tax, a portion of which is dedicated to transportation for seniors and disabled persons. However, even where such funding is not available, the general program design is transferable. In neighboring San Bernardino County, a related program called *Transportation Reimbursement Escort Program* (TREP) has begun with an annual budget of just \$20,000 and focused on two tiny, extremely isolated rural communities in the high desert. In implementing this neighboring program, the problem of available volunteers also presented itself. Here reimbursement of household

members is allowed, if the household income levels qualify. There is no public transit in these communities.

Careful enrollment in the program, and clear admissions and referral processes are necessary to combat potential abuses or misuses. Periodic review and “pruning” of the participant roles may also be necessary to identify possible patterns of consumer misuse.

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SoonerRide: Statewide Brokerage for Rural Medicaid Trips

Tulsa Transit Agency, Tulsa, Red River Transit, Frederick, and Other Agencies across Oklahoma

Organization Highlights

Almost one-third of Oklahoma's 3.3 million residents (1998 data) live in rural areas, across 77 counties and 69,000 square miles. The other two-thirds live in the two large urban centers of Oklahoma City and Tulsa.

A partnership of state-level agencies developed a new strategy for getting rural Medicaid recipients to regional medical facilities, usually far from individuals' homes. The Oklahoma Health Care Authority contracted with the Metropolitan Tulsa Transit Authority (MTTA) to broker a statewide Medicaid Non-Emergency Transportation program that built upon existing community-based agencies to provide Medicaid trips throughout the state.

Background/Objectives

Historically, medically-oriented trips for Oklahoma Medicaid recipients were provided by private companies and individuals receiving mileage vouchers or gasoline reimbursements. This was essentially an unregulated group of providers with numerous liability and public safety concerns, as well as some claims of misuse of public funds.

The Oklahoma Health Care Authority proposed an alternative: contracting with a broker to create a statewide network to provide Medicaid-reimbursed trips, using FTA Section 5311 operators, among others. Of the state's 220,000 Medicaid recipients, about 8 percent to 10 percent—9,000 to 11,000 persons—were estimated to be living in rural communities and in need of transportation. The brokering

agency was aware that there were many "vehicle assets" around the state, many operated by small social service agencies and 5311 recipients that could be part of a larger, coordinated network. These vehicles frequently traveled to and from populated areas, usually with lots of empty seats. The intent was to capture some of this capacity for Medicaid recipients through a more reliable, safer transportation network, while making a new transit funding source available to the 5311 operators, using equipment and vehicle capacity that are otherwise underutilized.

Description

The resulting program is a brokerage called *SoonerRide*. Eligible Medicaid recipients from across the state call a toll free number to schedule a trip. A single brokering agency, MTTA, is the centralized scheduler of trips. Trip requests must be made at least 72 hours in advance, unless there is good cause for shorter notice. MTTA, in its dispatcher function, then books the trips with the appropriate contracted Section 5311 operator in the consumer's county of the state.

Red River Transit is one of the state's contracting agencies that provides *SoonerRide* trips. It is the transit division of the Community Action Development Corporation (CADC) of Frederick in the southwestern corner of Oklahoma. CADC, providing a range of transportation services since the mid-1980's, has responsibility for a fleet of about 60 vehicles. Approximately 20 vehicles are regularly used by *SoonerRide* trips, although other vehicles can cover *SoonerRide* trips if demand requires. CADC's region is large, encompassing a 16-county region north and southwest of Oklahoma City and approximately 20,000 square miles.

On a daily basis, MTTA faxes to the Red River Transit dispatcher trip requests and a proposed schedule in its area of the state. The Red River dispatcher reviews the requests, resolving any problems with MTTA that the proposed schedule may represent. Sometimes MTTA schedulers, located over 200 miles to the east, do not always propose a workable schedule for the CADC's fleet and drivers; trip times or days requested must be re-negotiated as Red River finalizes the schedule for the requested trips.



This relatively new program, started early in FY 2000, has had a learning curve for the centralized dispatch, though it is reported that there have been improvements. In the case of Red River Transit, the local dispatcher attempts to serve all requested trips as efficiently as possible - a considerable challenge in this large service area. Consumers travel among primary medical destinations that, from Frederick where Red River Transit is based, may be in Lawton - 50 miles east, in Oklahoma City - 145 miles to the north, or in Amarillo, Texas - about 150 miles due west.

After any scheduling issues are resolved, the CADC dispatcher faxes the Trip Manifest to either of two route supervisors out in the field. These two individuals then book the driver and vehicle for the particular trips. CADC drivers are dispersed across this 16-county area, with vehicles similarly dispersed. *SoonerRide* trip vehicles, typically small 12- to 16-passenger vans, are stored at local police departments, City Hall, or city yards, among other locations, until needed to make a trip.

CADC is reimbursed by MTTA at a flat monthly rate of \$1.40 per eligible rider per month in each county. This rate was negotiated upwards when CADC presented details on actual trip costs and was able to show that the initial reimbursement rate did not fully cover the operating costs of the service, nor allow for any depreciation or contingency expense. CADC, and the other contract operators, have kept carefully detailed records to determine their actual costs. Rider complaints are channeled

to a number at the centralized dispatch in Tulsa. MTTA takes these complaints seriously and follows-up promptly with the local operator.

Resources

Accusations of fraud with the prior system and its inability to adequately meet rural medical transportation needs led to the statewide brokerage using the rural Section 5311-funded transit systems. The brokered approach requires significant responsibility of MTTA, one of just two large urban operators in the state, as administrator and centralized dispatcher responsible for working with the funding agency, the consumers, and the operators.

Results

SoonerRide is providing about 20,000 trips per month at the end of the first year of service. An estimated 160,000 trips are expected to be provided during FY 2001, largely rural, long-distance trips, often for isolated, medically frail consumers. Statewide costs of \$6 million represent some increase in total expenditures for the Medicaid transportation program, but these are offset by savings in administrative staff where these functions were absorbed into the Tulsa Transit administration contract.

Red River Transit, just one of the several contracted operators, provides more than 1,000 trips each month. Average trip lengths are between 75 to 100 miles one-way. Reimbursed cost per trip ranges among the contractors from \$35 to \$50 per trip, depending upon the agree-

ment in force. However, costs are negotiated on the basis of enrolled consumers and not miles or revenue hours traveled.

Barriers/Constraints

Organizing the *SoonerRide* network is complicated by a number of constraints:

Consumers: There was little information for providers on the level of trip demand that they might expect. Contracting agencies were given only countywide counts of eligible recipients from which estimates of trip volume might be made. A working rule of thumb that 8 percent to 10 percent of Medicaid consumers needed transportation assistance was used to project general trip needs. But these early estimates gave providers no information about trip length and frequency.

Costs: There was no initial information on actual costs for these trips, so the working assumption at the outset was that Section 5311 funds would help subsidize the full trip costs, thereby saving some Medicaid dollars. For administrative ease, a flat, per member per month cost was negotiated between the Oklahoma Health Care Authority and MTTA. The RTAP coordinator, aware that there was little historical information on costs, saw that building accurate cost information was critical to the long-term success of the program. The Oklahoma Health Care Authority also recognized that rates would need to be adjusted as experience with the program developed.

Operators: Because this was a top-down initiative, operators had to be encouraged to participate in the program. Although the early messages were that this was a new funding source for transit, Red River Transit realized, after careful analysis of actual costs, that it was losing money on *SoonerRide* trips. Its other programs were subsidizing the costs of the Medicaid trips provided, a practice the agency could not sustain. Again, ongoing communication between the contractors and the broker, MTTA, helped to keep the Section 5311 operators in the program by addressing their concerns and renegotiating their reimbursement levels.

Drivers: These long-distance medical trips, combined with the fact that the driver waits for the passenger to complete the medical appointment or treatment, can make for very long driver days. A driver day of 12 to 14 hours is not uncommon, where the driver picks up a passenger at 5 a.m., drives to a distant medical facility and then waits until the consumer is done before driving the individual back home. Long driver hours are a problem not readily resolved without cooperation from the medical facilities. Red River administrators report that repeat medical services, such as dialysis or cancer treatment facilities, are better about making scheduling accommodations for rural patients and their drivers than are regular physicians' offices.

Vehicle Maintenance and Driver Training: Given the considerable distances across which many of these operators work, the logistics of both vehicle maintenance and ongoing driver

training are complicated. Vehicles and drivers must travel considerable distances for routine maintenance and driver training. As the *SoonerRide* service runs six days a week, scheduling available down time for drivers or vehicles is difficult. Close coordination with the centralized dispatcher has been important to efforts to release drivers for training sessions. Maintaining an adequate back-up fleet, something not easy for the smaller agencies, has been critical to meeting preventive maintenance requirements.

Program Successes: As word has spread about the program, there has been increasing demand for service. This is difficult for a provider with a flat rate who based that rate on a certain number of drivers and vehicles. Increasing the fleet size and fielding more drivers represent step-increases in costs that are not readily acknowledged by the current per-capita rate structure. Red River Transit reports that demand has been steadily increasing, pressing the operators to handle more, and stretching the agencies' resources with which to do so.

Medicaid Choice Requirements: An aspect of Medicaid regulations requires that consumers have choice about which service provider they will use. This is problematic for the transportation provider when the consumer does not wish to select the closest service. For example, while there is a dialysis provider in Lawton, relatively nearby, some consumers prefer to travel to Oklahoma City or Amarillo, Texas - trips of over 100 miles and 150

miles respectively, each way. Some changes in the regulations or guidelines that place some outer limits on consumer choice will help the operators provide more trips with existing resources.

Transferability

Among the early lessons learned from this still young brokerage program for Medicaid trips include:

Determine real costs - Develop a methodology to capture all operational costs for these trips. Include depreciation expense and a contingency expense (increased number of drivers, rising fuel costs) so that the operator has some degree of flexibility to respond to changes in demand.

Look at potential riders - Examine available ridership information to determine what is feasible in terms of deployment of vehicles and to develop best estimates on the number of vehicles needed.

Maintain some distance from trip scheduling with consumers - With these long-distance trips and complicated scheduling scenarios, Red River Transit administrators report that it is useful to have some distance from the consumer trip-scheduling process. However, an excellent centralized scheduler is critical and a good liaison-person at the operator level is very important to effectively schedule these long-distance trips.

Good mix of vehicles - Vehicles of varying sizes, some lift-equipped and some not, and some low-floor vehicles, are considered valuable for this program, because many trips are single passenger only. Maintaining a solid replacement schedule so that equipment can be replaced at appropriate times is also important. Red River Transit reports that it has logged 60,000 miles on many of the vehicles in *SoonerRide* service during the initial nine months of service. Related to this, clearly, is the critical importance of a very good vehicle maintenance program.

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RegionalRide: Coordinating Inter-County Trips and Maintenance Through Regional Brokerage

Bay Area Transportation Authority with Other County Transit Agencies in Michigan

Organization Highlights

In the little finger of the Michigan's mitten-shaped state are a group of counties bordering on Lake Michigan, each with isolated rural populations. The six counties of Antrim, Benzie, Charlevoix, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, and Leelanau cover 2,600 square miles of sparsely populated, forested countryside. Each county's population ranges between 15,000 to 25,000 persons, with the exception of Grand Traverse County's 74,000 residents (U.S. Census estimates 1999).

New state funding for transportation created an opportunity to address a perennial need for inter-county transportation in the rural region. A regional brokerage was developed, with the Bay Area Transportation Authority (BATA), the transit system in the largest county - Grand Traverse - serving a lead role.

Background

Inter-county transportation has been a long-standing problem in rural, far northwestern Michigan. New state funding was established in 1997 for regional demonstration projects, enabling the region to address the counties' inter-jurisdictional mobility needs. However, strings were attached to the state funding. Start-up funds were provided but at the end of the three-year demonstration period, programs had to be self-sustaining. For the first year, the state allocated 70 percent of total costs to the demonstration program. The second year 60 percent of total costs was state-funded. This dropped to just 50 percent for the third and final year. After the third

year, the project could continue only if half the operating expense could be generated from a mix of passenger fares, traditional transit funds (Federal Section 5311 funds), local general funds, and other funds raised from partnering agencies.

Prompted by the state transportation department liaison to this region who was aware of continuing requests for intercounty transportation, plans were drawn up for two types of regional services through a brokerage arrangement, including:

- 1) *Flex-routes* that deviate up to two miles from the route to provide general public service between the counties and connecting passengers with major trip generators in Traverse City (medical, major shopping, and state and federal offices); and
- 2) *HealthRide* to provide seniors and persons with disabilities with medically-oriented, demand response transportation. BATA is the lead agency for the brokerage, providing dispatch and scheduling service for the four providers (including BATA) operating in the brokerage.

These providers are county-based transit systems, each of which operates its own demand response service and two of the four also operate their own fixed-route service.

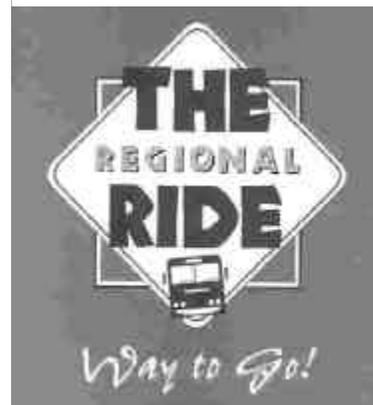
The new transportation services, known together as RegionalRide, were to provide affordable transit between counties, addressing the region's longstanding unmet

needs for inter-jurisdictional travel.

Description

RegionalRide established inter-county transportation using one common logo, different from the unique logo of individual counties' transportation services and thus distinguishing the services of the brokerage from those of the individual counties. Significantly, RegionalRide represents the first time any county has allowed a public transit vehicle other than their own to transport county residents.

RegionalRide's *flex-route service* was designed to provide semi-scheduled service between the counties, improving residents' access to a variety of destinations. Of the three flex routes implemented in 1998, only one has generated sufficient ridership to warrant continuing. The flex-route between Frankfort and Traverse City, which is the largest city in the six-county region, serves a mix of students, commuters, and shoppers and has shown sufficiently steady ridership that five of the six original counties are willing to contribute to a share



of the costs beyond the 50 percent state funding and passenger fares.

A partnership with the regional medical facility, Munson Medical Center, has also developed as a result of this brokerage. The hospital contributes to the operating costs of the brokerage's *HealthRide* service, partnering with the counties to help fund total costs of this service. *HealthRide* has been extremely successful and will continue beyond the life of the demonstration period, currently providing about 900 trips per month, over 200 trips weekly.

To book a trip on *HealthRide*, consumers call a toll-free number that reaches dispatch at BATA, the lead agency in the brokerage. Trips are booked at least one day in advance, no same day service is provided. BATA then faxes the trip requests to one of four operators in the brokerage, either in or adjacent to the county of residence of the passenger. The overall system handles between 30 to 40 such trip requests on a typical weekday. Each operator in the brokerage has one vehicle dedicated to the *HealthRide* service, paid for with start-up funds. In some cases back-up or general public transit vehicles may be used by the operators to handle overflow trip requests. Drivers are paid staff of the county transit systems. Marketing of *HealthRide* has been the responsibility of individual county transit agencies.

Resources

RegionalRide's total annual cost of \$380,000 funded the three flex routes, operating with three

buses, and *HealthRide*, with five vans. Ridership figures for the *flex-routes* are not readily available, because different reporting systems among the counties contributed to difficulties in collecting the data. However, *HealthRide's* continuing success is well documented at over 200 trips per week, with Monday through Saturday service. Passenger fares for the *HealthRide* are \$5.00 per one-way trip.

BATA has a contract for \$35,000 per year for the brokerage function, operating the dispatch function six days a week. A second maintenance contract with BATA for \$15,000 funds consolidated maintenance for the RegionalRide vehicles.

Results

This program represents an effective strategy to meeting inter-jurisdictional transit needs where local providers exist and a new approach for rural, northwestern Michigan, one that took considerable time and effort to implement, given concerns about funding, perceived inequities in regional trip-making where trips cross jurisdictional lines, and development of partner relationships. RegionalRide proved that the counties could develop a coordinated approach to their inter-jurisdictional transit needs. However, given the parameters of the funding, difficult decisions had to be made and agreements developed to retain those services that seemed successful. Five of six original counties are continuing *HealthRide*, the inter-county demand response service targeted to seniors and persons with disabilities. One of the

three original *flex-routes* has sufficient ridership to warrant continuing support from the counties involved. Long-term continuation of these services, however, cannot yet be reported.

Barriers

Developing a mix of partnering agencies has been a major objective of the RegionalRide program. Working relationships have evolved with the Area Agency on Aging, the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), and the United Way across the six-county region, related to RegionalRide services for their clients; however, these agencies are not yet providing funding. The brokerage and its participating transit systems fully expect that these agencies will contribute operating funds on behalf of their clients receiving transportation, but it is not yet clear to the social service agencies that they should do so. The medical center, however, does contribute funding for the successful *HealthRide* program. Efforts continue to translate relationships with various social service agencies into financial contributions to RegionalRide.

A second barrier involves the difficulty of getting multiple partners committed to doing the same thing, to achieving common mobility goals. One of the original six counties has chosen not to continue as a partner in the regional program, concerned that local dollars were needed to support the program's continuation. This was a contributing reason to the discontinuation of two of the three flex routes. The brokerage's

primary focus on the *HealthRide* component results, in part, because there is clearer agreement that this inter-county service meets an important need.

Finally, replacement capital is an area of some concern. The original vehicles were purchased with demonstration funding. Replacement at the end of their useful life will require adding to existing transit capital replacement lists where requests already exceed available funding.

Transferability

A critical lesson learned in this Michigan brokerage project is that a start-up demonstration project should obtain as much funding as possible up-front. New services take time to build sufficient ridership. Where passenger fares must pay a significant, continuing share of the operating costs, demonstrated strong ridership levels are critical. This makes larger, up-front subsidies vital to ensure adequate time for that ridership base to build.

Secondly, considerable investment of managers' time is spent in working with the prospective partners, in resolving issues of perceived inequity in regional trip-making, and in developing the necessary long-term funding base. This time can be easily underestimated at the outset, but is critical to devising an inter-community transit service that works over the long-term.

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