Welfare to Work: Integration and Coordination of Transportation and Social Services

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Executive Summary

In 1996, federal welfare reform legislation created a new emphasis on moving individuals from welfare to work. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act replaced the Aid for Families with Dependent Children program with block grant funding and mandatory work requirements. As states and localities began to implement their welfare-reform programs, it quickly became apparent that providing reliable and affordable transportation to jobs, to job training, and to other employment support services was critical to the success of these programs.

This is the final report for Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) Project H-15A, *Welfare to Work: Integration and Coordination of Transportation and Social Services*. The project's goal was to examine the role of transportation in supporting welfare-to-work initiatives and to identify practical strategies to improve access to job opportunities for former welfare recipients making the transition to work.

Research activities to support this project included an extensive literature review, focus groups with stakeholders in welfare-to-work activities, and a series of on-site case studies. The research team identified traditional and innovative approaches to welfare-related transportation, including modifications to existing mass transit services, better coordination and integration of available transportation services, ride-sharing programs, automobile ownership programs, and subsidies for transportation costs. Of particular interest were the new collaborations between social service and transportation providers, involvement of faith-based and community-based organizations, and creative use of public and private funding sources to support improvements in mobility.

Issues and Needs

Welfare reform legislation changed the structure of the American welfare system. The strengthened emphasis on moving individuals from welfare to work has had significant implications for a wide range of support services, from child care to job training to transportation. Some of the transportation barriers that welfare recipients encounter:

- Nationally nearly three out of four welfare recipients live in center cities or in rural areas, while job growth has focused on the suburbs.
- Jobs in the retail and service industries typically require entry-level employees to work at night and on weekends.
- Most welfare recipients do not own cars.
- While urban residents generally have convenient access to transit services, those systems were never intended to get city dwellers to the suburbs – especially at night or on weekends.
- More than half of rural residents live in areas with minimal transit service or none at all.
- Women with young children – especially single mothers – are especially likely to incorporate multiple stops into their work trips.
- Many welfare recipients have difficulty using a bus schedule because of limited basic skills.

States, counties, and local communities have responded to these concerns in traditional and innovative ways. This report explores some creative approaches to planning, operating, and funding new services for the growing market of welfare-related transportation.

Planning Initiatives

New planning initiatives have been established to develop welfare-related transportation programs.

Partners in Planning

Welfare-to-work transportation programs have called upon the expertise and resources of diverse participants, many of whom are new to the transportation planning process. These stakeholders generally include representatives from agencies and organizations that have a vested interest in the outcome of the program and may include any or all of the following participants:

- **Transportation providers**, including public and private transit and paratransit operators serving the general public and agency clients, vanpool programs, private shuttle operators, and taxi services
- **Social service providers**, including agencies administering TANF program benefits and support services (e.g., training, placement, child-care)

- **Departments of transportation,** which may oversee multimodal planning and operations at a state, regional or local level

- **Planners**, including representatives from metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), councils of governments (COGs), or state, county, or local planning departments

- **Community- and faith-based organizations** that work with members of the targeted population and may have transportation resources available

- **Employers and job developers**, including representation from the area private industry council or workforce investment board

- **Elected officials**, who can play a key role in obtaining community and political support for recommended programs

Many of these stakeholders may not have worked together before, and may not be familiar with the special challenges of welfare-to-work transportation. Through the planning process, stakeholders can share their specialized knowledge as they develop transportation strategies that incorporate the best elements of their differing disciplines.

Needs Assessment

Before developing new transportation services, many states and localities have conducted studies to document gaps between transportation needs and service availability. Many of these used **geographic information systems** (GIS) to illustrate the residential location of TANF clients in relation to available transit services and potential jobs.

Learning from Welfare Recipients

As the target customers for transportation services, TANF participants know their transportation needs better than anyone else and involving them in the planning process has yielded enormous benefits. Strategies for assessing the transportation needs of welfare recipients include **surveys**, **questionnaires**, and **focus groups**.

Service Strategies

The range of service strategies that have been developed to support welfare-related transportation needs include the following:

- **Modifications** to existing services, including changes in route alignment or schedule to serve job sites, meet work shifts, or minimize transfers

- **Shuttles, circulators, and feeder** services to improve mobility within a local area or to provide connections to the regional transit network

- **Night owl** services for late-night workers
- **Coordination** among existing public and private transportation services
- **Mobility manager** to coordinate the delivery of a range of transportation programs and services
- **Ridesharing** and subscription services
- **Automobile-based** strategies, including vehicle donation and purchase programs
- **Travel information**, including multilingual materials and computerized trip planning services
- **Child-care transportation**
- **Fare subsidies** and incentives
- **One-stop centers** that consolidate transportation and support services for welfare recipients
- **Entrepreneurial** services that train welfare recipients to provide transportation services to other community members

Funding Sources

Service providers have turned to a wide variety of funding sources – from federal grants to donated labor. Three major federal funding programs may be used to support welfare-to-work transportation programs. These are: the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grant program, administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; the Welfare to Work formula and competitive grant program, administered by the U.S. Department of Labor; and the Job Access and Reverse Commute grant program, administered by the U.S. Department of Transportation. Several states have used federal formula or block grant funds to support local or regional welfare-to-work transportation programs, often on a competitive basis. Some programs have received grants or donations from private funding sources, including foundations, faith-based organizations, and nonprofit community organizations.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were held with transportation stakeholders in Michigan, California, and South Carolina. Participants were especially clear in their believe that the transportation aspects of welfare-to-work extended well beyond transportation and included an array of societal issues. Problems associated with access to jobs are linked with issues of urban form, public

policy, and public services; any attempt to address transportation needs must also examine these other concerns.

Participants indicated that typical transit is not well suited to meet many needs, even when services are reasonably extensive. Consumers often have long trips to work, some that cross transit jurisdictions where the fit of schedules, routes, and fares is an issue. Chained transit trips – including child-care and school stops, work, and shopping – are particularly complicated for mothers with young children. Safety, accessibility, and affordability are persistent issues.

Finally, both social service and transportation providers stressed that they need to learn to speak each other's language, understand each other's needs, and develop shared goals and agendas

Case Studies

The following programs were profiled through case studies; all used creative strategies to address customer needs.

- **AC Transit Neighborhood Circulator**, which provides night-time connections between rail stations and a residential community in North Richmond, California.

- **AdVANtage**, in Anne Arundel County, Maryland, which trains welfare recipients to operate van services.

- **AdVANtage II**, at Sojourner-Douglas College in Baltimore, Maryland, which helps students at this community-based college to provide transportation services as van operators.

- **Contra Costa County Social Services Department**, in Martinez, California, which is making vans available to TANF participants to provide transportation services for community organizations and child care facilities.

- **Good News Garage**, in Burlington, Vermont, a faith-based program that refurbishes donated automobiles and turns them over to low-income residents.

- **Lower San Antonio Transportation Support Project**, in Oakland, California, which provides trip planning and support services to give community-based organizations in this multicultural neighborhood.

- **Metropolitan Transportation Commission**, in the San Francisco Bay Area, California, which is facilitating a county-based planning process

and developing transportation resource guides.

- **Pinellas County Metropolitan Planning Organization**, in Clearwater, Florida, which administers a menu of transportation options for TANF recipients.
- **San Diego Workforce Partnership**, which coordinates resources from church groups and nonprofit organizations to provide work-related transportation.
- **Santee-Wateree Regional Transportation Authority,** in Sumter, South Carolina, which coordinated new flexible work-related transportation services with existing services for clients of human service agencies.
- **State of New Jersey,** which developed a comprehensive county-based transportation planning process
- **State of South Carolina,** which developed an interagency planning program to support local efforts.
- **Transit Authority of River City**, in Louisville, Kentucky, whose services include a one-stop center and a late-night subscription shuttle to support second- and third-shift workers.
- **TransPac** in Pleasant Hill, California, a regional planning agency that provides transportation incentives and traveler information.

Program Evaluation

A limited cost-benefit analysis was conducted to assess program activities and outcomes at four sites using available information. The selected sites were AdVANtage II, Good News Garage, Pinellas County Metropolitan Planning Organization, and Transit Authority of River City. From these observations, the research team derived some conclusions regarding strategies that could be effective in other communities. Benefits assumed annual earnings for newly employed TANF participants along with reductions in public support. Costs were based on information received from the programs through the case studies. Three of the programs reviewed showed benefits in excess of costs, with benefit-to-cost ratios in the range of 2.5 to 1.0. The fourth program showed benefits equaling costs.

Lessons Learned

Because traditional transportation approaches often do not address the complex needs of welfare recipients, communities have developed a wide range of creative strategies. Although the program details vary, the lessons from these programs are quite similar and are summarized here.

- The challenges of welfare reform extend well beyond transportation.
- Welfare clients have complex transportation needs.
- Welfare reform has created new roles for transportation and social service providers.
- Welfare reform has fostered new cooperative relationships and collaborations among organizations. Of particular note is the participation of private sector organizations, especially nonprofits, community-based organizations and faith-based groups.
- Stakeholders stressed the importance of teamwork and flexibility in building successful partnerships.
- Transportation programs incorporate innovative solutions. Despite their diversity, these programs share one common trait: Program planners were "thinking outside the box."
- Automobiles are part of the solution.
- The committed leadership of an individual or organization can help to carry a project from planning to implementation.
- Successful programs maintained ongoing communication among program staff, participants, and stakeholders.
- Progress has been slower than expected.
- Many communities have not collected sufficient data to evaluate their progress.
- Successful programs have incorporated strategies to ensure that results can be sustained over time for targeted TANF clients and in some cases the general public.