



Plan for the Achievement of Transportation Coordination in Human Services

SOUTHWEST CONNECTICUT REGIONAL FORUM ON TRANSPORTATION

Bridgeport

August 16, 2005

HELPING SHAPE THE STATE ACTION PLAN FOR A
COORDINATED TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

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THE UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT A.J. PAPPANIKOU CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES
EDUCATION, RESEARCH, AND SERVICE

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

As stated in President Bush's Executive Order on Human Service Transportation Coordination released in February 2004, "Transportation plays a critical role in providing access to employment, medical and health care, education, and other community services and amenities. The development, implementation, and maintenance of responsive, comprehensive, coordinated community transportation systems are essential for persons with disabilities, persons with low incomes, and older adults who rely on such transportation to fully participate in their communities."

In response to this directive the Connecticut Department of Transportation is committed to following through on this federal initiative through a grant entitled *United We Ride*. Developed jointly by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), and the Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS), Labor (DOL) and Education (DOE), *United We Ride* is a human service transportation coordination initiative intended to break down the barriers among federally funded transportation programs, set the stage for local partnerships that generate common sense solutions, and help states and communities overcome obstacles to coordination of transportation systems.

The Framework for Action, developed by the FTA is a coordination self-assessment tool that states and communities can use to identify areas of success and highlight the actions still needed to improve the coordination of human service transportation. Core elements of the Framework for states include (1) evaluating the degree of existing State leadership and partnership; (2) determining whether current transportation resources have been identified, transportation needs have been assessed, and a strategic plan has been developed; (3) assessing the degree of customer focus; (4) identifying cost-sharing arrangements; (5) determining technology needs; and (6) assessing the extent of community-level mobility management arrangements. Using the Framework as a springboard, the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT), working with the Office of Policy and Management and the Department of Social Services, is committed to developing a workable, consumer-driven, and cost effective plan for the

coordination of inclusive, accessible transportation in the state.

In order for this Transportation Coordination initiative to be successful it must be based on the needs of all of the people who use the system, including people with disabilities. The University of Connecticut A.J. Pappanikou Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research and Service (UConnUCEDD) has received a grant from the Connecticut Council on Developmental Disabilities to work with ConnDOT and other transportation partners to ensure the interests of people with disabilities are represented in the action plan. The funding from this grant is being used to support a series of seven **Regional Forums** for consumers with disabilities who use transportation services. Invitees represent a wide range of disabilities and come from urban, suburban and rural areas of Connecticut. Conference calls will be set up in order to get input from consumers unable to attend the Regional Forums in person.

THE PROCESS

The sixth PATHS Forum on Transportation was held at the North Branch Library Community Center in Bridgeport, CT. The event was co-sponsored by the Disability Resource Center of Fairfield County and the Western Connecticut Association for Human Rights (WeCAHR), an organization founded to *advocate for the civil and human rights of people with disabilities*. A representative from the Kennedy Center of Greater Bridgeport was on hand to present information about their travel-training initiative for individuals who are elderly or who have disabilities. Information was also distributed about the travel training provided by the Board of Education and Services for the Blind for individuals who are legally blind. The Department of Transportation's United We Ride initiative was also described.

The thirty (30) attendees were invited to participate by dividing into groups of five to eight (5-8). Each group was asked to select a recorder. Participants were reminded to allow everyone to have an opportunity to speak. If individuals did not have an

opportunity to share all of their ideas they were encouraged to write their comments, either during the Forum or at a later date. Four specific questions were asked of participants, and following each question the groups were given approximately ten minutes for discussion. The recorder for each group then reported back to the larger group.

WHAT PROGRAMS/SERVICES/INITIATIVES HAVE YOU SEEN WORK WELL EITHER IN CONNECTICUT OR ELSEWHERE?

With regard to schedules and bus stops attendees reported the following:

- One participant noted that the availability of routes to and from “popular places” is good
- The frequency of the schedule during the week was felt to be adequate.
- The region has a Coastal Link fixed route that connects Norwalk to Milford.
 - This service announces stops, roads, etc.
- Some buses stop directly in front of buildings that provide services to people who are seniors or people with disabilities

With regard to drivers the following was noted:

- Some of the bus drivers are well informed and helpful at curbs
- Some drivers call ahead to let passengers know they are on the way
 - This has also been helpful helped people know when and where to be for pick up
- One attendee felt that customer service and communication has improved
- Some drivers tell passengers what stop is next

Some of the positive things about the buses included:

- Technological advancements have improved service
- The inside of buses is cleaner than before
- Some buses have route labels displayed and big bus numbers on the back
- Some attendees mentioned that there are bike racks on the front of buses and

wheelchair ramps

Additional comments about Connecticut included:

- A number of attendees mentioned that they can get discounts and prepaid bus passes
- Passengers can call ahead to a service line and get help to plan their route in some areas
- Flyers, brochures, and a website (trips123) are available to get access routes
- Travel training has been helpful to many people
- One provider (who is deaf) gives her clients a wallet sized card with the bus number, street names, the name of the stop and a picture of where they are going
- One attendee mentioned it is helpful to have friends drive her
- Some agencies in Connecticut get grants to provide their own transportation

Attendees noted positive things they have found in other states:

- In Portland, Oregon transportation planning is centered around public transit
- In San Francisco monthly passes are available which adds to the convenience.
- Individuals showing their Medicare card receive 50% off the cost in some areas
- In Buffalo buses have GPS units that announce stops automatically
- Some buses in other communities have pre-recorded stop announcements; other states call ahead when near by.
- Some states set aside a percentage of their transport projects for pedestrian amenities which improves accessibility.
- Some trains on other lines have new trains with digital displays

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST GAPS/BARRIERS/OBSTACLES YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED?

With regard to drivers, it was noted:

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- Drivers sometimes act as if they have the right of way and pull out in front of cars unsafely
- Drivers don't always stop for people (One person mentioned specifically the bus driver did not stop for an individual in a wheelchair)
- Drivers do not always announce stops or streets
- Drivers take off too soon before people have a chance to sit down
- Drivers sometimes put the "Return to Terminal" sign on early
- On trains the conductor doesn't communicate with passengers who are deaf and tell them when stops are made
 - These passengers would also not know if there is an emergency
- Buses don't stop unless you are at the exact bus stop and wave them down
- Some paratransit drivers were felt to be rude
- Lack of communication is a barrier. In addition some drivers and conductors lack good interpersonal skills
- Some drivers get impatient. Drivers can be cruel or unresponsive to questions.
- Greater Bridgeport Transit Authority (GBTA) have refused to take a parent who has seven children
- Some drivers (paratransit) will not assist passengers

With regard to buses, shelters, trains, etc.:

- The sidewalks and curbs are not always accessible
- Snow is not always removed at bus stops
- Weather cancellations may be difficult. There are no wintertime delay announcements
- Several people noted the trains are dirty
 - Metro North especially was felt to be dirty and bathrooms smell. The buses were reported to be messy from eating and drinking.
- Some people identify their bus by the advertising. This changes frequently and thus creates confusion. Another participant mentioned that advertising sometimes blocks the view and passengers can't see outside
- There are fewer shelters at stops and they are poorly maintained

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- The route number on the buses are not bright enough
- The congestion at the bus station makes it hard to find the right bus
- Pollution at the bus station was mentioned.
- Lights on the buses aren't always on or bright enough
- Some of the buses are too crowded
- Many bus stops are not clearly marked
- The bus stop locations aren't always safe
- People park in bus stops
- Reserved seats are sometimes taken by people without disabilities

With regard to bus routes:

- There is limited access to routes in the suburbs
- There is limited weekend service and no transportation on Sundays
 - One individual is unable to get to work at 7:00 on Saturday
 - There is no evening or Sunday service in Waterbury
- Some small towns do not have any transportation services
- Some routes have been eliminated
- There are too many transfers
- Changes in the schedule of routes
 - One person did not feel there is consistency with scheduling. Making too many changes at one time confuses people
- During the changeover of drivers in the evening all the buses go in one direction

With regard to fares participants noted:

- The proposed fare increases will be difficult for some people to pay
- It costs \$60 to get to Hartford
- People to Places (ADA/paratransit service) was felt to be too expensive
- The cost of door to door transportation is high
- Cabs are very expensive

Additional comments include:

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- MY Ride and People to Places (paratransit/ADA transportation) sometimes arrive one hour early or an hour after scheduled to do so
- Some transportation companies have territorial issues and are unwilling to coordinate services
- Towns don't always plan ahead
 - They need to buy-in to the fact their residents need better ways to get around
- The state will not put in traffic lights where they are needed
- The focus appears to be on fixing highways and roads rather than public transportation

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS YOUR NEEDS FOR TRAINING AND CUSTOMER SERVICE?

Regarding driver education:

- There is a need for training in customer service, including teaching drivers to have more positive attitudes, patience and cultural sensitivity
 - Language is sometimes seen as a barrier
 - Drivers need to be sensitive to people who have disabilities
 - Communication with people who are deaf needs to be improved

With regard to schedules:

- TTY access is needed for schedules and to contact dispatch
- Having more copies of the bus schedules available and in different colors for different routes would be helpful
 - All forms and schedules should be available in alternate formats such as Braille and in other languages
- Information should be distributed to housing for people who are elderly or disabled
- A websites to plan trips would be helpful
- Schedules should be posted that tell when to expect the next bus
- Having an automated service of schedules after hours was suggested

Additional recommendations made by attendees included:

- Van drivers should have cell phones to contact riders ahead of pick-up
- Digital display of bus number at the bus stop so people who are deaf know when the bus is coming
- New buildings are not necessarily transit-accessible; one participant felt towns should require it.
- Make access to discount cards easier
 - The forms to apply for discounts should be easier to complete

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE MOST IMPORTANT AREAS FOR ACTION?

- Having input into decision making was felt to be critical
 - One way to do this is through voting and other forms of civic engagement
- Customer service/sensitivity training: good customer service makes other problems easier to handle
- Improve what services already exist, such as thorough snow removal
- More money should be put into mass transit to expand existing services

NEXT STEPS

In November 2005, Forum attendees will be invited to attend Transportation Institute. This **day-long Institute on Transportation will be organized to review and consolidate recommendations from the six Forums, foster cross-agency collaboration, develop action steps, and formalize the formation of Technical Advisory Committees.** Invitees to the Institute will include: consumers; representatives of State Agencies such as the Office of Policy & Management, Department of Social Services, Department of Mental

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Retardation, BESB, DMHAS and other relevant agencies; key legislators; and representatives from the Office of the Governor.

Priority areas for action will be developed. These will be based on the priorities identified through the Regional Transportation Forums by consumers. The list will be narrowed down by Institute attendees to a maximum of five top priorities around which Technical Advisory Information/Committees can be formed.

The Technical Advisory Committees will assist the State in the development and implementation of a State Human Services Transportation Action Plan.