



PLAN FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF TRANSPORTATION COORDINATION IN HUMAN SERVICES

NORTH-EAST REGIONAL FORUM ON TRANSPORTATION

May 24, 2005

**HELPING TO SHAPE THE STATE ACTION PLAN
FOR A COORDINATED TRANSPORTATION
SYSTEM**

THIS FORUM WAS FUNDED UNDER A GRANT FROM THE CONNECTICUT COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES TO 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 is 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 the federal initiative through a grant called *United We Ride*. Developed jointly by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), and the Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS), Labor (DOL) and Education, *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. Papanikou Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (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 six **Regional Forums** with 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 second Forum on Transportation was held in Manchester, CT at Manchester Community College. The event was co-sponsored by Communitas, an organization founded to promote full community inclusion for individuals 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. A spokesperson from the Board of Education and Services for the Blind was also present to talk about their travel training program for individuals who are legally blind. The Department of Transportation had a representative who discussed their **United We Ride** initiative, and The Director of Connecticut Association for Community Transportation described their organization.

Participants were first asked how they arrived at the forum and the following responses were received:

Personal van - 5

Bus -7

Personal car -14

Paratransit -5

Agency Van - 4

Dial A Ride -2

The forty-one (41) 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?

Regional Public Transportation

- One person reported that CT Transit works by getting people where and when they need to “if you can read and understand the schedule.” Another participant noted that all fixed routes are affordable and many provide discounts and passes. The CT Transit website was found to be very helpful by another participant and said that you can call ahead for information. “Newer buses are accessible but there are still some older buses on some of the routes.” “Accessible buses are being phased in.”
- Several participants commented on their drivers including: “Drivers are courteous and helpful.” “City bus drivers are good.” (Newington, Manchester, Vernon, Hartford were noted). “Drivers point out stops and are very helpful.”

ADA/Paratransit Transportation

- “Paratransit drivers will wait for you if they are early.” Another commented that if you are a regular rider they will wait for you if you are a little late. The hours in some communities were felt to be convenient.

Work Related Initiatives

- A participant noted that Middletown can be used to get to and from school and work.

Other community services and benefits

Comments were made about specific communities such as:

- New Britain provides rides for people who are 55 or who have a disability,

- The Manchester Title 19 taxi service (ACE Taxi) will provide an accessible taxi with 24 hours notice.
- Dial-A-Ride in West Hartford will accommodate emergencies whenever possible.
- Meriden/Wallingford has both buses and Dial-A-Ride. They will give family members rides as well.
- City buses in Willimantic are on time and offer different pick up locations.
- Genesis provides travel training regarding schedules, routes, etc.

Additional information

One person reported owning a mini-van and not having to pay property taxes. She is able to get someone to drive her. This may be true in other towns as well if the individual with a disability is the primary user.

One individual commented specifically on how helpful the Kennedy Center Travel training program was.

One person noted that some areas such as Manhattan offer rides if you are registered in CT and they can document that you are registered. Access-A-Ride in Manhattan offers service 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to all areas for \$1.50/ride.

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

Regional Public Transportation

- One participant noted that having all fixed routes on a hub and spoke system may take an hour to get ten minutes away. If you want to go from one spoke to another you have to go through the hub. Transferring may be very complicated, resulting in taking the wrong bus. The frequency of services is not always adequate (e.g. long waits for second bus).
- There are not enough inter-modal connections such as between the bus and the train.
- Many towns are poorly covered and many have no transportation.

- Concern was expressed about the potential fare increases.
- Several participants noted environmental factors such as lack of adequate signage (including for individuals with low vision), shelters being inaccessible for someone in a wheelchair, lack of curb cuts causing problems and shelters lacking or having limited maintenance.
- In some cases “customer service” is not ideal on the telephone, from drivers and on the web.
- The Section 5310 program needs to be explored further. [Section 5310 of the federal Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA 21) provides Formula Grants for Special Needs of Elderly Individuals and Individuals with Disabilities.]

ADA/Paratransit Transportation

Difficulties with available hours, transferring and available service were noted by many participants:

- The ADA/paratransit service hours are often limited to early evenings and are often not available on weekends (especially Sundays).
- CT Transit paratransit does not provide service for late night special events (e.g. going to watch a fireworks display).
- The hours may vary from one part of town to another. If you want to go to the movies you cannot get a ride home.
- Not all locations are served (e.g. you cannot get from Willimantic to the Manchester Mall).
- Several participants noted difficulties with transfers between ADA/paratransit programs.
- Many Dial-A-Rides are limited to city limits.
- There is no continuity between Dial-A-Rides.
- Another participant noted it is difficult to transfer between the 17 existing Transit Districts.
- Some towns only take seniors and other towns have very restrictive “rules.”

Some forum participants had difficulty with the services:

- Many paratransit systems require 48 hours notice and only give you a 15 minute window.
- Others may cancel due to weather (including heavy rain and not just snow). This is true even on regularly scheduled routes.
- Some people did not find the drivers to always be patient.
- “First Transit is not always on time resulting in missed appointments.”
- Paratransit limits taking service animals to appointments such as appointments with the vet or when an individual needs assistance in the evening for their service animal for an emergency.
- In some cases paratransit is cost prohibitive and since it is based on public transportation fares, concern was expressed about the potential fare increases.
- One participant noted that paratransit should supplement and not duplicate public transportation services.

Work Related Transportation

- There are employment difficulties with transit limitations.

Other Community Transportation

- Most taxis and liveries are not accessible so they cannot be used to fill in.
- Taxi drivers for Title 19 transport services (non-ambulance transportation to Medicaid-allowable medical services for all Medicaid eligible clients) do not always call to let you know they are there, leading to missed rides and missed appointments.

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

Participants made the following comments and recommendations about transportation services.

- Increased flexibility of present services is needed:
 - Individuals should have the ability to make last minute changes.
 - Access to a “Plan B” should be available such as accessible, affordable taxis so people have alternatives when no other service is available.
 - More weekend coverage is needed (especially on Sundays).
 - Better coverage between cities is important, (e.g. there are no buses that goes from Hartford to New Haven).
 - Services need to be on-time for connections.

Other comments included: “There needs to be better compliance with the ADA such as announcing stops.” “Dial-A-Ride needs to not make last minute changes or cancel abruptly.” “Door to door service is sometimes needed and not just curb to curb.” “Pick-up times for paratransit should be specified and reliable.”

- Improved communication and sensitivity was stressed:
 - Bus drivers should know basic sign language.
 - Drivers need better awareness training.
 - There needs to be better communication with the dispatcher in charge.
 - There needs to be better training and orientation for drivers and dispatchers.
- “Services in communities need to be more consistent.” One person recommended improved coverage for the State so towns can buy into services (e.g. for the smaller towns). “Side streets need to be served better.”

- People in restrictive settings such as nursing homes need increased access to transportation.
- Universities need emergency services for students.
- New users need packets and training. Rules and regulations are frequently hard to find or non-existent.
- People might benefit from making appointments on the internet the night ahead or from calling and leaving a message on an answering machine (some towns allow people to leave messages and others do not).

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

Finally, the Forum participants as a whole were asked to list their priorities for action.

- We need increased funding of transportation services.
- There needs to be wider coverage and expansion of services geographically and with schedules. This needs to include frequency and schedule efficiency.
- Transit routes should be realigned to better reflect commuting and living patterns.
- There needs to be increased dialogue between consumers and providers.
- Customer Service needs to be improved.
- ADA and paratransit Policies should be revisited to make consistent/best policies.
- Competition between/among bus companies might be important.
- Fares should be reduced.
- There is a need for special employment based bus services (e.g. services to cover retail hours).

NEXT STEPS

In October 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 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.