



Plan for the Achievement of Transportation Coordination in Human Services

NORTHEAST CONNECTICUT REGIONAL FORUM ON TRANSPORTATION

**Mansfield
August 24, 2005**

HELPING SHAPE THE STATE ACTION PLAN FOR A
COORDINATED

TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

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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 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 seventh PATHS Forum on Transportation was held in Mansfield, CT at the Mansfield Senior Center. The event was co-sponsored by the Disability Network of Eastern CT. Information was distributed about the travel training program offered by the Kennedy Center of Greater Bridgeport and 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 ten (10) attendees engaged in a round-table discussion of four specific questions. 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. Attendees were asked to discuss issues they had observed on behalf of consumers if they did not have a disability or have not experienced a problem with transportation in the state. Four specific questions were asked of participants, and following each question the groups were given approximately ten minutes for discussion.

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

- Dial-A Ride provides transportation to seniors for \$2.00 suggested donation each way; people with disabilities under ADA transportation pay \$3.00 round trip
- Windham Regional Transit District had Dial A Ride before ADA Dial-A-Ride was mandated
- There is a free shuttle to the local soup kitchen for people who are 60 and over in who live in public housing in Willimantic because of a grant from the Area on Aging
- Some towns provide limited transportation within their town:
 - Eastford's Senior Group can use their small school bus when it is not being used for school trips
 - One town pays for transportation using a "special needs fund"
 - Some communities are successfully able to get volunteers to drive people
 - A few communities have their own vehicles available; for example, Ashford Senior Citizens has a van, as does Willimantic
 - Ashford provides transportation with a small charge to pay for gas
 - Under a grant from the Area Agency on Aging one community is able to offer free rides to seniors two mornings a week
- Coventry is purchasing a van under the 5310 program; they can get a maximum of \$35,000 (80%) to pay for the 8 passenger wheelchair lift van
 - Insurance is covered under the town fleet insurance
 - Coventry will need to pay for gas and maintenance and continue to use volunteer drivers (they presently have eight volunteers who use their own cars)

- The reason for an eight person capacity is because then drivers don't need special licenses
- Glastonbury has volunteers through church groups to "taxi"
- NY has excellent public transportation that works well for people with disabilities
- California uses community vehicles which can be used both by people who are elderly and by children
- England has networks of buses and trains that connect very small towns

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

Several issues arose regarding scheduling and the lack of availability of transportation, including:

- School buses will only carry children and not parents/grandparents.
 - Some parents/grandparents are not able to drive at night ; they may need to get to an event at the school for their child that occurs in the evening
 - People who work at the schools who are on the bus routes can not get a ride to the school to go to work
 - In some communities the school buses are the only transportation in town (School bus companies own the buses and not the towns)
- Fixed route service does not exist in many areas; many individuals can't get to work, educational events, church or social events
- Transportation on Sundays does not exist; the Saturday schedule in Willimantic is minimal
- There is no access after hours to allow for social participation such as going to the

movies or to the theater

- For example the Jorgensen Theater gives out free tickets to the Mansfield Senior Center and free companion tickets for seniors but individuals aren't able to get there
 - One suggestion was to offer the free ticket to someone who can drive
- There is no transportation to medical appointments outside the region
 - One attendee noted that individuals in Mansfield have to go to services in town even if the quality of care is poor
- The summertime schedule is minimal; it may be impossible to get a ride to an event or appointment.

- Individuals who need door to door assistance can't use dial a ride because the driver cannot leave the vehicle

- The waiting time is long for some transportation; some individuals arrive 35 minutes late for doctor's appointments.
 - Also, pick-up and drop-off times do not coordinate well with doctor's office hours - offices are typically closed during noon time hours, so individuals who have an am appointment cannot get a pickup time until around noon and must wait outside for this pickup

- Routes do not exist to connect the northeastern part of Connecticut to other areas
 - No connection from Storrs to Hartford
 - No connection to Vernon, Manchester (Rockville Hospital) for Alzheimer's support groups
 - No connection to New London
 - No connection to Farmington (UConn Health Center) for a geriatric assessment
 - No connection to Tolland for adult day care

- Lack of Coordination and regulations force towns to run several overlapping programs

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- Under the 5310 program a vehicle can only be used by seniors and people with disabilities and not children; some people with children can not do grocery shopping because they cannot bring their children with them

Issues related to costs were discussed such as the following:

- The cost of a taxi from Willimantic to Mansfield is \$24 each way for the Job Access Program
- The cost of door to door programs prohibits programming in many locals
- Most funding assistance is complicated and requires a local match which many communities are not able to make
- Medical transportation door to door is very expensive for those on Title XIX and individuals aren't able to go to non clinic physicians (It was suggested it would be cheaper to use cabs if they were accessible)
- Contracting with bus companies is very costly
- Towns need to have liability insurance on their volunteer drivers
- Some individuals choose not to use ADA transportation if they are also eligible for Dial-A-Ride; even though the cost is cheaper the hours do not go as late (4:00 - 6:30) because there is no fixed route at that time
- People on fixed incomes (some living on less than \$10,000 a year) cannot afford the fare increases
- The federal and state funding that is available does not match increased costs
- Gasoline prices are increasing and they are especially expensive for driving vans which get low mileage
- Each town has to provide a local match which is prohibitive for many communities
- Northeastern Connecticut includes many rural communities which do not provide transportation due to costs

The vans and buses are a problem as noted:

- Dial a ride vans are frequently bumpy and loud
- Vans do not have a bathroom which makes them difficult for people to use who are incontinent
- Perfume and diesel oil smells are difficult for people with breathing problems or other chemical sensitivities
- There are not any seat belts
- There may not be a place for an individual to put a cane or crutches
- Not all drivers do pre/post inspection of their vehicles
- Space is not always available for people who are elderly or who have disabilities
- One person used a van with children's seats

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

- Drivers need more training in issues related to sensitivity, medical needs using the lift and safety
 - One driver was smoking before picking up a passenger, and as the passenger had asthma this was problematic. (this particular driver said he was being considered for supervisory position)
 - Although some drivers do receive training the driver retention is low
 - There is not any training available for volunteer drivers.
- Consumers need information and training on what is available; some transit information is not always available or is inaccurate or confusing
- Drivers do not always report incidents

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

- There is a need for more subsidized flexible accessible transportation
 - This includes improved fixed routes between small towns
 - In addition services could be used as “feeders” to other services
 - Another person suggested having a pool of drivers as some school bus drivers might want to work during the day
 - One person recommended using aides on buses and vans (including people who work at the schools and need a ride to work or for people who need door to door assistance)

- Coordination was recommended such as when funds from the Area on Aging are used.
 - Another person recommended sharing transportation.

- Increased financial assistance is needed
 - The towns need to be sure they get their portion of the \$5 million available through the CT General Assembly
 - It was noted that if funds were used more efficiently there would be more money for other communities

- More education, training and information were felt to be a priority

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

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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.