



PLAN FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF TRANSPORTATION COORDINATION IN HUMAN SERVICES

NORTHCENTRAL CONNECTICUT REGIONAL FORUM ON TRANSPORTATION

Newington
July 19, 2005

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

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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 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 six **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 fourth PATHS Forum on Transportation was held in Newington, CT at the Senior and Disabled Center. The event was co-sponsored by Independence Unlimited (the Center for Independent Living of North Central CT). A representative from the Kennedy Center of Greater Bridgeport was on hand to present information about the Center's 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.

Twenty-seven (27) people attended the Newington forum. They included self-advocates supported through Manchester Community College, several individuals with vision impairment, as well as a number of people who use wheelchairs. Attendees were invited to participate by dividing into groups of five to eight people. 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. Attendees were asked to discuss issues they had observed on behalf of consumers if they themselves did not have a disability or do not experience 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. 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?

- Attendees felt that bus travel, Dial-a-Ride transportation and ADA transportation work at least some of the time. Combinations of ADA, Dial-a-Ride and rides provided by friends were effective for some people.

- Some individual towns/programs have good services. One person noted the transportation in Rocky Hill is mostly on time. Another person commented on the “nice” drivers.
- Title 19 recipients can get medical transportation.
- It is sometimes possible to use taxis, although they are expensive.
- Under Section 5310, towns can apply for \$35,000 transportation grants. [Section 5310 of the federal Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA 21) provides formula grants for the special needs of elderly individuals and individuals with disabilities.] DOT has given out 28 vehicles this year. There are 120 vehicles (buses and vans) on the road in CT.
- The States of Washington and Rhode Island and the cities of Manhattan and New Orleans were noted as having good transportation for individuals with disabilities. In Washington D.C. transportation was arranged by a family member by telephone prior to the visit. Another person was able to get van transportation in New Orleans.

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

- With regard to vehicle safety, maintenance and size the following comments were made:
 - The tie downs are not always secure and/or are not always of good quality. (One person noted they nearly fell when the driver did a U-turn and another person commented her chair went over backwards and the driver lifted her and her wheelchair up from behind).
 - Some vehicles are not the appropriate size for the streets.
 - The lifts do not always work.
 - The bus shelters do not provide adequate protection.
- With regard to availability comments included:
 - There is hardly any transportation in the evening or on weekends

- Transportation in every town is different.
 - Some communities lack the financial resources to provide any transportation.
 - It is not always possible to get from town to town.
 - The frequency of buses has been decreased over recent years
 - Transportation to medical appointments out of town or to get to work is difficult.
 - Commuter buses and city buses are not always coordinated for transfer to get to work.
 - Some individuals need curb side and door to door transportation and are not able to get it.
 - Not being able to go where you want to was mentioned. (One respondent wants to get to Red Sox Games while another wants to get to Yankees games).
 - No transportation is available between Hartford and New Haven or between Middletown and Hartford.
 - Some transportation is very expensive.
- With regard to scheduling, comments included:
 - Some drivers are either too early or late. Individuals have to wait too long while others are being picked up.
 - Scheduling is a challenge due to varying zones that cannot be crossed.
 - Riders are not always notified of cancellations and changes or may get “dropped from the list” without notice.
 - There is sometimes a long wait for ADA transportation. One person had to wait for 1 ½ hours for her ride home from a previous forum due to a dispatcher error. (Two people from DOT did wait with her).
 - The drivers do not always have directions.
 - Finding a place is often difficult when there are several entrances to a building or complex.

- Dispatch requires an exact street address and won't take customers input as to location.
- Going into town to transfer to another bus takes a lot of time.
- Transportation is not always reliable.

- With regard to customer service and training:
 - There is a lack of consistency and continuity in training.
 - Some drivers are not trained in how to use the lifts.
 - One individual found it difficult to communicate with the driver as she is deaf.
 - Other attendees commented that the drivers may be insensitive such as playing "religious stations," not saying hello or giving their name and not believing that the riders knows where they are going.
 - One attendee mentioned that transit staff fed her guide dog despite her requests not to do so.

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

Participants made the following comments and recommendations about transportation services:

- Drivers need training in how to let people off safely, how to provide transportation to someone with a guide dog and how to communicate with people who are deaf or who are unable to read.

- Drivers need sensitivity training such as learning to be pleasant to riders and acknowledging when they themselves are late. They should listen to their passengers even to the extent of radio choice. Drivers should always announce stops. It would be helpful if dispatchers told you the truth about when your ride will come instead of saying they would be coming in a few minutes, and then it

actually takes much longer. Riders need to be notified of changes in schedule or availability of service.

- Other driver training needs mentioned included that there should be a certification and a re-certification process for drivers. Training should be given in first aid, such as what to do if someone has a seizure.
- Drivers need maps so they know where they are going and do not get lost. One person suggested drivers have radios. Another person suggested a GPS system.
- There is often a lack of knowledge by consumers about how to use the present system (both public and private).
- The need for additional travel training was noted. One person who is deaf and has a physical disability had previously taken the bus; however when she moved from West Hartford to Newington and had to go into Hartford to transfer she was concerned that she would get lost.
- Security needs to be improved.

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.

- Safety issues such as reliability of equipment and properly attached tie-downs were felt to be a priority. One person mentioned it would be good to have seat belts. There is also a need for security on buses. Vehicles need to be maintained appropriately. Drivers and passengers could benefit from an additional person in the vehicle to provide assistance.

- There should be mandatory and comprehensive training for drivers and staff including dispatchers and maintenance workers. Drivers should train with someone who uses the services. Drivers need to learn communication skills. Dispatchers should have directions and determine which door (not just the address) a person should be dropped off at. Drivers need training in using tie downs.
- Complaints and violations should be investigated with fines as necessary and feedback given about the process for filing a complaint, the process that is used to look at the complaint and the resolution.
- The need for more money in transportation services was discussed. There needs to be increased coverage from town to town and within towns. There needs to be increased frequency of transportation services despite the cutbacks over the years for fixed route buses. (It was noted that funding providers face cuts and can not lobby for increased money).
- Public Transportation should be promoted as an alternative and drivers need pay scale incentives.
- Transportation services need to remain up to date on new technology.

NEXT STEPS

In October 2005, Forum attendees will be invited to attend a 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, Bureau of Educational Services for the Blind (BESB),

Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (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.