

Transportation Services for People with Disabilities in Rural and Small Urban Communities

Summary Report

Full text on CD-ROM



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Editor's notes

About the statistics

This report includes case studies with many statistics that are fluid in nature. The case studies should be viewed as a “snapshot in time,” with any technical details being current at the time the systems were examined.

What this report package contains

Provided in an inside pocket of this booklet is a CD-ROM of the full report from which this summary is derived. In addition to its fuller treatment of the topic, the CD is formatted to be searchable. If you are reading this notation and the CD is missing, please contact Easter Seals Project ACTION or visit EPA’s Web site at www.projectaction.org to obtain the entire report, “Transportation Services for People with Disabilities in Rural and Small Urban Communities.”

August 2006

Introduction and Acknowledgements

This publication provides an abbreviated summary of a final report of the same title, prepared for a contract project funded by Easter Seals Project ACTION. Readers are encouraged to explore the full document, which is attached to this booklet in CD-ROM format and from which this summary report is excerpted. The full report contains extensive research findings including examples of promising practices, detailed case studies of exemplary programs, useful contacts and documentation of the research methodologies used during the project.

Easter Seals Project ACTION acknowledges the excellent work of TranSystems Corporation, in cooperation with RLS & Associates and Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates, in developing the project and full report. In particular, Russell Thatcher, project manager, is recognized.

Easter Seals Project ACTION expresses gratitude to the Project Advisory Committee which oversaw the development of this project and provided guidance and input throughout. Their participation was vital to the success of the project. Members of the Advisory Committee and the organizations they represented are listed below.

Easter Seals Project ACTION (ESPA) Advisory Committee Members and Liaisons:

- **Ken Thompson**, ESPA Contracts Technical Assistance Specialist
- **Doug Towne**, ESPA National Steering Committee

Advisory Committee Members:

- **Sharon Davis**, Director, Professional and Family Services, The Arc of the United States
- **Beth Denniston**, Director, National Rural Transit Assistance Program
- **Charles Dickson**, Associate Director, Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA)
- **Alexandra Enders**, Senior Researcher/Policy Analyst, The Rural Institute, University of Montana
- **Marilyn Golden**, Policy Analyst, Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF)
- **Mary Holloway**, Chief Executive Officer, Resource Center for Independent Living
- **Betsy Kachmar**, Assistant General Manager, Citilink Public Transportation Corporation, Fort Wayne, Indiana
- **Kathy McGehee**, Transportation Program Administrator, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
- **Pete Spaulding**, Executive Director, California Association for Coordinated Transportation (CalACT)
- **Dennis Stombaugh**, Transportation Project Manager, The Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL)
- **Pam Ward**, Executive Director, Ottumwa Transit Authority, Ottumwa, Iowa

Transportation in Rural and Small Urban Communities: Development and Challenges

Development of Rural and Small Urban Transportation Services in the U.S.

Historically, the transportation services provided in rural and small urban communities arose from and for special populations – older adults, people with disabilities, and the clients of human service programs. There were few general public transportation systems in rural areas throughout most of the 1970s.

Among the agencies that were active in the 1970s and 1980s in providing transportation in rural and small urban communities were Community Action Agencies (CAAs), local senior centers and councils on aging, chapters of The Arc, and Centers for Independent Living (CILs). These agencies relied primarily on funding provided through a variety of programs financed through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to support both the operations and capital costs of these early transportation services.

Sources for growth

New sources of federal transit funding emerged in the 1970s that enabled human service transportation programs to grow beyond client-based services to meet more of the transportation needs of the community. The funding source known today as the Section 5310 program was established in 1974 to provide funds for purchasing capital (vehicles, two-way radio systems and related equipment) for use by nonprofit organizations providing services to older adults people and people with disabilities. What is today known as the Section 5311 program was created in 1978 to fund rural public transportation services.

In the 1980s, many nonprofit organizations that had been providing services to older adults and people with disabilities broadened the scope of their service to include the general public. They became – and remain – recipients of rural general public transit funding today. In some communities, local governments established county or city transportation departments which primarily served people who are sometimes described as “transportation disadvantaged.” These groups include low-income individuals, elderly people, people with disabilities, and human service agency program participants.

The passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 had a significant impact on the accessibility and usability of transportation services across the country, including services in rural and small urban communities. Meeting the requirements of the law and the regulations issued by implementing agencies also posed challenges for communities and transportation providers.

In small urban and rural communities where traditional fixed-route, fixed-schedule service is provided, transportation services have become much more accessible. This has been achieved through the replacement of older vehicles with accessible vehicles, and the implementation of ADA complementary paratransit services for those who are unable to use the fixed-route service. In other communities, the ADA provision that demand-responsive transportation must provide “equivalent” service to people with disabilities has had a significant impact in increasing the overall service accessibility.

Research to Identify of Current Challenges and Issues

The research that led to the development of this report identified the current challenges and issues facing transportation providers in rural and small urban areas in delivering cost effective accessible services to

the general public, including people with disabilities. A variety of techniques were used to accomplish this goal, including:

- **Literature Review** – An extensive literature review was first conducted to identify relevant reports, articles and papers on rural transportation programs.
- **Consultation with the Project Advisory Committee** – Each member of the Project Advisory Committee was also asked to provide reports, policy papers, articles, letters and other documents related to the project. Members were encouraged to conduct outreach through their organizations to get input from people with disabilities and transportation providers in small urban and rural communities.
- **Outreach to Communities of Interest** – Two techniques were employed in additional outreach efforts. First, a survey was used to solicit the input of various disability organizations and transportation providers. Second, study team representatives attended various conferences and meetings sponsored by major constituent organizations that represent disability groups and transportation providers.

The survey was distributed to various human service organizations and transportation providers in rural and small urban areas with the assistance of the Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL), the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), The Arc of the United States (The Arc), and the National Rural Technical Assistance Program (RTAP). A total of 121 completed Human Service Agency Surveys were received from agencies in 34 states. A total of 215 completed Transportation Agency/Provider Surveys were received from transportation providers in 29 states.

The detailed methodology and results of these efforts are documented in the full report.

Summary of Current Issues and Challenges

The project identified the following challenges and issues facing transportation providers in rural and small urban areas in delivering cost-effective accessible services to the general public, including people with disabilities.

- **Limited Funding** – There is limited funding for transportation in rural and small urban areas. However, the issue is larger than simple inadequate funding levels. Other facets include:
 - Restrictions on available funding, including program participation, trip purpose restrictions, and limited days and hours of operation.
 - Funding inequities in the distribution of monies used to support rural transportation, exacerbating the problem of inadequate funding in the first place.
- **Limited Trip Purposes** – Transportation in rural and small urban communities is often limited to medical or other “priority” trip purposes.
- **Client-Only Transportation** – Transportation is often limited to agency clients or people who qualify for specific funding programs.
- **Limited Days and Hours of Service** – Transportation is often limited in terms of the days and hours that service is provided.
- **Lack of Long-Distance Transportation** – There is often a lack of long-distance transportation to regional services. In many rural and small urban communities, transportation services are

community-based, while many essential services or jobs are located long distances from the community.

- **High Cost of Transportation** – Transportation costs are relatively high given the long distances that must be traveled and the low population densities that make trip grouping difficult.
- **Accessible Vehicles and Equivalent Service** – Additional accessible vehicles are sometimes needed and lower-cost transportation options such as volunteer driver programs or taxi subsidy programs might not be accessible.
- **More Limited Use of Advanced Technologies** – Utilization of advanced technologies is more limited in rural and small urban areas due to cost and available expertise.
- **Driver Training** – Driver training is sometimes limited due to a lack of state-of-the-art training materials or training resources.
- **Lack of Information** – People with disabilities often are not aware of transportation options that might be available.

Innovative Funding Strategies and Techniques

Federal transit funding through the Section 5311 and 5310 programs have been vital in broadening and expanding services and providing accessible vehicles in many areas. Funding under the New Freedom Program, created as part of SAFETEA-LU, promises to be an important source of funding specifically for services to people with disabilities. A number of states also have implemented programs that build on this federal funding to expand services for people with disabilities. Locally, many human service agencies and transportation providers in rural areas also have developed creative funding sources.

Selected examples of innovative and effective use of funding are provided in this summary report. The full report in the attached CD-ROM includes additional examples and details, including case studies of featured agencies, as well as contact information for federal, state and local programs.

Federal Funding

Section 5311 Funding

The Rural Transit Assistance Program (Section 5311) provides capital, operating and administrative funding to state agencies, local public bodies and nonprofit organizations (including Indian tribes and groups), and operators of public transportation services. Section 5311 funds have been used in many areas to expand from limited, “agency-based” programs to general public transportation systems serving all residents, including riders with disabilities. Funding under the Section 5311 program is allocated by FTA to each state, which in turn distributes funds within the state.

An important feature of the Section 5311 program is that revenues obtained through contracts with human service agencies, including federal human service funding, can be used to match Section 5311 funding. It is therefore possible to leverage Section 5311 funding with monies already allocated and being spent on transportation services to greatly expand existing services.

A look at examples of use of Section 5311 funding to expand services for people with disabilities and others include:



Access in America:

Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas

Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas, in coordination with two other agencies, obtained Section 5311 funding through the Kansas Department of Transportation to expand the services provided to the general public. A public transportation program, called the ACCESS Transportation Program, is now provided that goes well beyond what the three local agencies were able to provide in the past. With the additional Section 5311 funding, the ACCESS Program is able to provide a more comprehensive general public service to residents in Hays, Kansas and Ellis County, Kansas, that operates seven days a week from 6 a.m.-10 p.m. Also, a regional non-emergency medical transportation service called CAREVan connects communities throughout a 14-county area in Northwest Kansas.



Access in America:

Lane Transit District, Oregon

Lane Transit District, based in Eugene, Ore., uses Section 5311 funding, along with state funding, to offer a local general public route-deviation service that serves the small retirement community of Florence as well as a general public demand-responsive service in the communities of Cottage Grove and Creswell. Section 5311 funding also supports a rural regional route, the “Diamond Express” that connects the community of Oakridge to employment opportunities and other services in the Eugene/Springfield area. In the morning and afternoon, the Diamond Express operates as a commuter route. In the mid-day, it operates as a regional demand-responsive service connecting Oakridge residents to regional services.

Section 5307 Funding

The FTA Urban Formula Program (Section 5307) supports public transportation in urbanized areas with a population of 50,000 or more. Funds are dispersed to urbanized areas on a formula basis in two different ways. For urbanized areas under 200,000 in population, the funds are primarily apportioned to the governor of each state for distribution, although a few small urban areas have been designated as transportation management areas and receive apportionments directly from the FTA. Urbanized areas under 200,000 population are eligible for capital, operating and administrative funding under Section 5307.

SAFETEA-LU extended a feature of the rural program that has historically not been available to urbanized area transit systems. Beginning in FY 2006, local match to Section 5307 may be comprised from revenues received under a service agreement with a state or local social service agency or private social service organization, even if the original source of those revenues was another federal program.

SAFETEA-LU also established a new “Small Transit Intensive Cities” (STIC) program that provides funding beginning in 2006 to urbanized areas under 200,000 in population that operate at a level of service equal to or above the industry average level of service.

Section 5310 Funding

The Elderly Individuals and Individuals With Disabilities (Section 5310) program funds specialized transportation services for older people and people with disabilities in rural and urban areas. The program provides grants for 80 percent of the cost of capital equipment, such as vehicles, radio systems, computer scheduling systems and other equipment, and in some states, purchase of service. Eligible applicants include private non-profit corporations and, in some states, public bodies. The state agency designated by the governor in each state has the principal authority and responsibility for administering the Section 5310 program. Eligible nonprofit organizations or public bodies must apply directly to the designated state agency for assistance under this program. The program requires coordination of federally assisted programs and services in order to make the most efficient use of federal resources.

The Section 5310 program has been a vital source of funding for vehicles and equipment for thousands of human service and transportation agencies across the country, including ten of the agencies highlighted as case studies in full report.

New Freedom Program (Section 5317)

Another potential source of new funding to improve transportation services for people with disabilities was made available under SAFETEA-LU. The New Freedom Program is a newly authorized program aimed specifically at providing services to people with disabilities above and beyond that required under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Final rules governing the New Freedom Program are expected to be published in 2006.

Authorized levels of spending under the New Freedom Program start at \$78 million in FY 2006 and rise to \$92.5 million in FY 2009. Sixty percent of funds appropriate annually will be earmarked to urban areas with populations of more than 200,000. Twenty percent of the funds will be allocated to urban areas with fewer than 200,000 population while the remaining 20 percent will be allocated to nonurbanized areas. The funding allocated to small urban and non-urbanized areas will be provided to state administering agencies for final distribution. Once so allocated, individual areas will receive an amount of funding based on ratios involving the number of disabled individuals in the area. Existing urbanized area transit systems and the states (who in turn will make funds available to nonurbanized area public transportation projects) are eligible recipients.

Beginning in FY 2007, a recipient will be required to certify that New Freedom funds are being expended in accordance with a locally developed, coordinated public transit/human services transportation plan and that the plan was developed through a cooperative process that included the representation of public, private, nonprofit transportation provider, and the general public.

In addition to the coordination planning requirements, the New Freedom Program also contains the unique matching provisions discussed above for the Section 5311 program. Under the New Freedom Program, federal funds derived from a social service program can be used to meet the local matching share of project costs.

State-Level Funding

A number of states have recognized that funding for general purpose transportation in rural and small urban communities and have taken steps to establish separate programs specifically for that purpose. Some of these programs focus exclusively on the transportation needs of people with disabilities, seniors

and other “transportation-disadvantaged” individuals, while others are broader in scope. Examples include:



Access in America:

Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania Department of Transportation Persons with Disabilities Program – a state-funded program established in 2001 for rural counties for providing expanded service for people with disabilities. The program subsidizes shared-ride fares for individuals whose transportation is not sponsored by another funding source or program in 28 counties.



Access in America:

Florida

Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged – State funds are used to subsidize trips for transportation disadvantaged individuals who are not sponsored by another program or funding source. Funding is provided to 47 rural counties as well as urban counties.



Access in America:

North Carolina

North Carolina’s Elderly and Disabled Transportation Assistance Program – designed to provide transportation services for seniors and people with disabilities by funding trips for individuals not affiliated with a human service agency program. Funds can also be used to supplement transportation services for human service agency recipients when necessary.



Access in America:

Oregon

Oregon’s Special Transportation Fund – Created in 1985, this program uses cigarette tax revenues to provide formula and discretionary grants to counties or transportation districts. Funds provide transportation services for seniors and people with disabilities who are unable to access fixed-route transportation and have no personal means of mobility.



Access in America:

New Jersey

New Jersey's Senior Citizen and Disabled Resident Transportation Assistance Program – uses casino revenues to support the provision of transportation services for seniors and people with disabilities. A portion of the designated funds are used by NJTransit to improve the accessibility of its fixed-route system, but the majority of the funds are allocated to the coordinated paratransit systems operating in each county.

The above state programs in Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Oregon are described in detail on the full report.

Other Innovative Local Funding Strategies

With limited federal and state funding, many rural and small urban transportation providers also have had to be innovative in identifying local sources of support. Such sources include significant contributions of goods or services from local organizations or businesses, and financial contributions from new partners such as tribal governments, community foundations or service clubs, or faith-based organizations. Innovative strategies for generating additional revenues also include the sale of advertising space not only on vehicles, but also on Web sites or rider's guides, and the provision of vehicle maintenance services for other transportation providers for a fee. Examples include:



Access in America:

American Council of the Blind of Nebraska

The American Council of the Blind of Nebraska (ACBN) has worked closely with the Abbott Foundation and with Lions Clubs throughout the state to develop private funding for a voucher transportation program. Funding from these sources has supported ongoing voucher programs in Lincoln, Omaha, and the Grand Islands/Hastings area. In 2005, the funding provided by these private organizations was combined with funding received from the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually-Impaired to provide transportation for more than 760 individuals with vision disabilities throughout the state. ACBN also is working with the Lions Clubs to identify club members willing to serve as volunteer drivers, an important part of the voucher program. As a member-based organization, all of the local voucher programs are also staffed and managed by volunteer members of ACBN and local CILs. ACBN reports that its fund-raising efforts have been successful partly because it can ensure that all monies provided are used in direct service provision (rather than administrative costs).



Access in America:

Area Transportation Authority of North Central Pennsylvania

The Area Transportation Authority of North Central Pennsylvania (ATA) actively markets available federal commuter tax credits through which employers can give employees up to \$60 per month tax-free contribution toward the cost of transit tokens, tickets, or passes. The program, called “Company Car” generates revenues from area employers. ATA works with employers to market the program and provides documentation needed by employers to claim tax benefits. ATA also generates additional revenues by providing freight and small package delivery throughout its area.



Access in America:

Cabs to Augment the Bus System, Iowa

Cabs to Augment the Bus System (CABS) of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, uses funding from a variety of unique sources to offer accessible taxicab service throughout Linn County. Funding from a private parking company (Five Seasons Transportation & Parking) provided matching funds for an accessible taxicab. The local taxicab company that operates the vehicle donated a radio, meter and dispatch and personnel costs. The county MHDD agency covers the cost of insurance for the accessible taxi. Contributions toward marketing and brochures are also provided by the local United Way, the Center for Development & Disabilities at the University of Iowa, and the Governor’s Developmental Disabilities Council. The taxicab company also has set up a capital replacement account and sets aside a certain amount of fare box revenues into this account to allow for the purchase of replacement accessible taxicabs in the future.



Access in America:

Churchill Area Transportation Authority, Nevada

Churchill Area Transportation Authority (CART) in Fallon, Nev., receives an estimated \$30,000 each year in donations from a variety of sources. The local phone company donates vehicle maintenance services. The county school district allows CART to use its bus washer free of charge. A local community college provides parking space for a transfer hub for an inter-city bus service. Local radio and TV stations provide free spots for public service announcements. The county donates legal services. The City of Fallon provides fuel used in the transport of seniors. Currently, CART also receives Federal Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC) funding to support local and regional employment transportation.



Access in America:

Community Connections, Inc., North Dakota

Community Connections, Inc. (CCI) in Bismarck, N.D., has established a website that provides information about statewide public services, including transportation services (called NDInfo.org). To fund the maintenance of the site, CCI is selling advertising space on the transportation page to car rental companies, private bus and taxi companies and other private businesses. Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC) funding to support local and regional employment transportation.



Access in America:

Kootenai County, Idaho

Agencies in Kootenai County, Idaho, worked cooperatively to develop funding to continue a public transportation service as the area transitioned from a rural area (funded under Section 5311) to a small urban area (funded under Section 5307). A major challenge was generating non-federal funds to match Section 5307 funding. A key partner in the effort was the Coeur d'Alene Tribal Government, which agreed to both operate the service as well as provide a \$400,000 operating and capital match. Other local partners who agreed to support the service include the Kootenai Medical Center, the North Idaho College, and Aging and Adult Services. Each agency recognized the benefits that it would receive from having access to the transportation service and agreed to be partners in funding it.



Access in America:

Lane Transit District, Oregon

The Lane Transit District (LTD) in Eugene, Ore., works with the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) to leverage federal Medicaid funding to maximize support trips for Medicaid-eligible riders traveling to and from Medicaid-supported programs – particularly programs for people with developmental disabilities. Through coordination with local Developmental Disabilities Services agencies, DHS reimburses Lane Transit District for 60 percent of the total fully-allocated cost of these trips and LTD provides local funding for the remaining 40 percent. DHS passes through 50-60 percent of the trip cost from Medicaid funding.

Paratransit/Human Service Transportation Coordination

Transportation providers in rural and small urban communities have long relied on local partnerships and coordination to develop and maintain transportation services. In many ways, agencies in rural and small urban communities have been leaders in the development of coordinated transportation services. With limited funding and the daunting challenge of providing cost-effective services in large areas with low population densities, coordination and partnerships often are developed out of necessity.

What is Coordination?

Coordination of resources among public and private transportation providers and human service agencies is one way to provide more or better mobility with existing resources. Often the aim of coordination is increased efficiency and a lower cost per passenger trip for participating agencies. In some cases, coordination has been shown to result in significant reductions in cost per vehicle hour or passenger trip, which may lead to lower transportation expenditures. For many participants, increased coordination may enable them to serve more customers, or offer a higher level or quality of service for the same amount of expenditure.

Typical coordination activities may include:

- Reciprocal customer information and referral
- Cooperative grant applications, staff and driver training, maintenance and vehicle storage
- Coordinated procurement of vehicles, insurance, maintenance, fuel, training, hardware/software
- Coordinated procurement of contract service providers
- Inter-agency purchase of supplementary service
- Consolidation of programs, including the establishment of a regional paratransit brokerage or Mobility Manager

Coordination activities do not represent a single strategy, but a continuum of strategies from simple to complex. This coordination continuum ranges from information sharing to the consolidation of services under a single provider.

The U.S. Department of Transportation and the Department of Health and Human Services have worked together for nearly two decades to foster increased coordination among the transportation services that each agency sponsors. In recent years, there has been renewed interest in transportation coordination at the national level, now led by the FTA's United We Ride program (<http://www.unitedweride.com>).

State government agencies continue to pursue the coordination of human services transportation at different rates and to different degrees. State-level coordination activities are typically a result of formal directives such as legislation or an executive order and/or initiatives that are implemented by human service or transportation agencies.

At the regional or local level, coordination efforts can involve any combination of public providers of fixed-route transit and paratransit service, non-profit transportation providers, private transportation companies, and public or non-profit human service agencies.

Examples of Successful Coordination Initiatives

Selected examples of successful local coordination initiatives are provided in context of the benefits they best illustrate. Additional examples and details are found in the full report.

Coordination Can Maximize Utilization of Existing Resources



Access in America:

ACCESS Transportation Program, Kansas

ACCESS Transportation Program, Hays and Ellis Counties, Kansas –ACCESS Transportation originated as a collaboration of three entities that were providing transportation to their clients in and around Hays: Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas, Inc., the Western Kansas Association on Concerns of the Disabled and the City of Hays (which provided service mainly for older adults to travel to a local senior meal site). In 1989, in response to a concern of the Kansas Department of Transportation, Office of Public Transportation, that there were too many uncoordinated vehicles in Ellis County, the three providers established a partnership. Kansas state regulations require that any recipient of federal or state grants (including Section 5311 grants) that provide rural public transportation services shall be required to be a member of a Coordinated Transit District. ACCESS Transportation was created as a single transportation service under one roof with Developmental Services serving as the lead agency. Since that time, ACCESS has continued to increase service levels and introduce new services, introducing a number of innovative services to enhance consumer access to medical facilities.



Access in America:

Western Community Action, Minnesota

Western Community Action, a Section 5311 rural transit provider serving a five-county area in Minnesota, is an example of an organization that has worked with local human service agencies to improve the quality of service provided by all providers in the region. The organization, whose services and customer service philosophy embody coordination, have developed flexible, coordinated services that strive to meet all transportation requests either directly with their regularly scheduled bus service, through their 125 volunteer drivers, the use of a special “traveler’s cheque” voucher program (described in the next section) or through referrals to other operators. As part of the organization’s efforts to coordinate services, Western Community Action is also working with the State of Minnesota Region 9 Development Commission to establish standards and protocols for all systems to follow.

Coordination of ADA Paratransit Services May Lower Costs and Make Service Available to Other Paratransit Users



Access in America:

Lane Transit District, Oregon

Working with state and local agencies and with the regional planning agency, Lane Transit District (LTD) has developed a broad range of services to meet the transportation needs of people with disabilities as well as seniors and other transit-dependent people, including an ADA complementary paratransit service that serves the larger communities of Eugene and Springfield, Ore. LTD's paratransit service, called RideSource, serves both ADA paratransit eligible riders as well as seniors. ADA paratransit has been provided in full compliance with all regulatory requirements, including the requirement to operate service without capacity constraints, since September 1993.

LTD contracts with Special Mobility Services, Inc., a non-profit transportation company for the operation of RideSource. One unique aspect of the system is that LTD and SMS work more as partners in providing paratransit service rather than strictly as contracting agency and contractor. As a local non-profit company, SMS has a long history of providing paratransit services in the area. SMS also is a vendor for some agency transportation that is provided outside of the RideSource program and coordinates the delivery of these trips with RideSource.

Coordination Can Reduce the Cost of Transit Services



Access in America:

Arrowhead Transit, Minnesota

Arrowhead Transit, based in Virginia, Minn., is a rural, Section 5311-funded public transportation service provided by Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency. Arrowhead Transit serves seven counties in northeastern Minnesota. Most of these counties are quite rural, with population densities of under 10 people per square mile in four of the counties.

Most of the public and private agencies in the service area contract with Arrowhead Transit for route service at an hourly rate. When feasible, consumers of different agencies are co-mingled on contract routes. Arrowhead Transit also has a policy of adding in general public trips to contract routes when space and time permit. Ride-sharing arrangements such as these ultimately result in fewer hours of contract service for the purchasing agency, thus resulting in cost savings.

Challenges in Sharing Resources Among Agencies or Programs

While there are many benefits associated with the coordination of transportation services, it is not without its challenges. One of the main obstacles for agencies is determining how to share resources or allocate costs among participating agencies in an equitable and mutually agreeable fashion. Programs legislated at the federal or state level are typically authorized and funded to provide specific services to specific groups of populations for specific needs. Agencies must work within these various regulatory requirements while coordinating different funding programs and ensuring that costs are fairly allocated to the different participating agencies.

This can be difficult when federal program legislation and regulations are vague about how vehicles and other resources may be used to serve more than the client group or type of trip for which they were originally obtained, and how costs for shared use are to be divided among programs or agencies. State and local organizations may be unaware of the options they have.

Both the Federal Transit Administration and the Department of Health and Human Services allow grantees to use vehicles and other resources to benefit individuals other than those for whom the resources were acquired to serve, as long as such service is incidental and does not prevent or detract from service to the original funded group. Sharing of resources in this manner is consistent with federal program cost principles, and interagency guidance on this issue is being developed by a work group of the Interagency Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility.

Transportation Voucher Programs

One approach to improving mobility for people with disabilities that takes advantage of existing transportation resources is the use of transportation vouchers. Successful voucher programs have been implemented in a number of areas throughout the United States in recent years, thanks in part to technical and financial assistance from organizations such as the Rehabilitation Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Education, Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL), and the University of Montana's Rural Institute.

What Are Transportation Vouchers?

Transportation vouchers can be issued or sold to eligible individuals and used to purchase trips from public or private transportation providers, or to reimburse volunteer drivers. Typically, sponsoring agencies subsidize the cost of the trips so that riders are able to receive service at a reduced cost. Eligibility can be based not only on disability, but also on income criteria or the need for a specific type of trip, such as employment transportation.

Similar to other types of programs that provide subsidies to individuals rather than transportation providers, transportation voucher programs often have a "self-directed" philosophy that allows participants to control resources directly and to make their own decisions about service providers. Other advantages include low start-up and administrative costs, support for existing transportation providers and services, and flexibility.

How Can Transportation Voucher Programs Help to Address Rural Transportation Challenges?

Among the potential benefits and advantages in the use of voucher programs are:

- Vouchers offer a cost-effective way of expanding options for people with disabilities, and thus make the most of limited funding.
- Programs utilizing volunteer drivers can help to make up for the limited availability of general public transportation, or private transportation providers, in an area.
- Voucher programs can provide a means of making long-distance trips that otherwise would be prohibitively expensive for riders.

This section profiles voucher programs that expand mobility options by helping individuals afford alternative transportation resources (typically volunteers and/or taxicabs), to obtain services beyond the hours and days of service of existing public transit services, or obtain transportation in areas where public transit services do not exist.

Examples of Successful Transportation Voucher Programs



Access in America:

APRIL's Traveler's Cheque Program

APRIL has been a leading proponent of increased options, including voucher programs, as a way to improve transportation for people with disabilities in rural areas. Using Rehabilitation Services Administration funding, APRIL developed a program called the Traveler's Cheque Program. Ten rural projects located throughout the United States have been funded since 2001 to demonstrate and develop the concept. A primary purpose of the program is to facilitate employment and community participation of people with disabilities through improved transportation. Key elements of the voucher programs are:

- *A **Sponsoring Agency** in each area that establishes eligibility criteria and other policies and assists in providing appropriate insurance coverage for the local project.*
- *A **Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC)** identified by the Sponsoring Agency (typically an employee of the agency) that establishes a Transportation Interest Network which includes local transportation providers, consumers and community leaders. The Transportation Interest Network provides coordination and local advocacy for the project. The CTC also provides day-to-day management of the voucher program including identifying and working with consumers, distributing vouchers to eligible program participants, identifying and working with transportation providers, and redeeming vouchers used by participants and processing payments to local service providers.*
- *An **Individual Transportation/Employment Plan** for each identified program participant. This plan, developed by the participant and the CTC in consideration of individual transportation needs, sets an allocation of resources for each person, and provides instruction on using the vouchers that are provided.*

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- *A mix of available and appropriate transportation providers. Local projects make use of available public and private transportation providers as well as volunteer drivers, depending on local conditions and needs. Vouchers can be used to purchase rides on local public and private van and taxi services or can be used to reimburse volunteers.*

In its first four years of operation, the Traveler's Cheque Program provided 92,587 trips for 588 participants and more than 1 million miles of service. A total of \$401,636 in payments were made to volunteers and transportation providers during this period. The average cost per trip has therefore been \$4.34 and the average cost per mile of transportation has been \$0.39. Significant use of volunteers results in relatively low trip and mileage costs. Volunteers are typically used for longer, more expensive trips, while public transit and taxis are typically used for shorter trips.

Support for independent living activities, training, employment and community participation have been a primary focus of the Traveler's Cheque Program. Most trips have been work-related, with travel to or from school, medical, shopping, and social activities also provided. Impact on employment has been closely tracked by APRIL and the local Sponsoring Agencies. Over the four years that it has been in operation, the Traveler's Cheque Program has allowed 171 of the 588 participants to become gainfully employed.

Some of the unique features and strengths of the Traveler's Cheque Program are:

- *It is a consumer-driven program in which participants are involved in developing transportation options that best meet their needs and then managing their mobility and arranging for transportation with providers they select.*
- *The program is highly adaptable and flexible to local conditions. It also utilizes existing local transportation providers, so is coordinated with local services.*
- *Because it utilizes existing providers and volunteers, the program also can be started with minimal investment. The scale of the program also can be matched to available funding.*
- *By utilizing volunteers to supplement local providers, the program is not only more cost-effective, but allows for trips at times when local providers are not in operation (evenings, weekends) and trips to areas outside of the service area of local providers.*



Access in America:

Western Community Action and Southwestern Center of Independent Living, Minnesota

Western Community Action (WCA), a human service agency which operates a five-county transit system in southwestern Minnesota, is a provider organization in one of the APRIL transportation voucher program sites. WCA provides a full complement of transportation services, including demand-responsive services, flexible routes, a volunteer driver program and a referral program.

WCA worked with the Southwestern Center of Independent Living (SWCIL) in Marshall, Minn., to implement the APRIL Traveler's Cheque Voucher Program beginning in 2002. SWCIL administers the Traveler's Cheque Program and WCA is one of the major providers of service to individuals participating in the program. With a client base of people eligible for the traveler's cheques, the SWCIL assigns cheque amounts to eligible individuals. Eligible individuals take responsibility for finding and securing the rides they need and then they pay for them with the traveler's cheque vouchers. The WCA's transit program accepts the cheques from passengers as payment for their rides and then WCA submits the cheques to SWCIL for reimbursement.

The program was designed to integrate the needs of people with disabilities along with the needs of the general community. WCA provides accessible van and bus service and volunteer drivers are available to those who do not need special equipment to help them access services. A good working relationship between WCA and SWCIL enables staff to continually communicate suggestions and concerns. Staff from both agencies work together to find ways to minimize the extra record keeping of vouchers and to help passengers understand their responsibility for using the vouchers as payment for their transportation.



Access in America:

American Council of the Blind of Nebraska Taxicab and Volunteer Driver Voucher Programs

The American Council of the Blind of Nebraska (ACBN), a state affiliate of the national American Council of the Blind (ACB), is a member-based, volunteer organization that serves people with vision disabilities in Nebraska. It has long identified transportation as a major need of its members and has worked since the mid-1980s to develop expanded transportation options for residents with vision disabilities in several communities across the state.

In the mid-1980s, ACBN members identified a need to supplement the public transit services in the City of Lincoln. While both fixed-route and demand-responsive services were provided by the local transit agency, these services ended at 6:00 p.m. on weekdays and did not operate on the weekends. In response to this need, ACBN created the "Give-A-Lift" program that provided subsidized taxicab transportation to members for evening and weekend travel. A similar program was implemented in 1994 in Omaha, the state's other major population center.

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Building on the successes of the Lincoln and Omaha programs, ACBN began in the late 1990s to look at options for more rural areas of the state, particularly for transportation for purposes beyond medical appointments. In response to the survey of needs, ACBN developed a subsidized volunteer transportation service to supplement the cab-based program it already had in place. With pilot funding from the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, several local projects were started that provide subsidized taxicab service, subsidized volunteer driver service, or both.

ACBN now offers two transportation voucher programs: the Subsidized Taxi Program and the Supported Volunteer Rural Transportation Program. The Taxi Program was modeled after the successful programs in Lincoln and Omaha and is used in areas that have available taxicab services. The Volunteer Program provides an alternative in areas where taxicab services do not exist. It also can supplement limited local taxicab services.

Under the **Taxicab Program**, eligible individuals purchase taxi coupons at a 50 percent subsidy of the coupon value. Where local taxicab services exist, ACBN negotiates with companies to get them to participate in the program. Because it uses state and local funds, ACBN does not place additional insurance, training or reporting requirements on participating taxicab companies beyond those required by local regulators. Participating companies simply need to agree to accept program vouchers and submit completed vouchers to the local agency managing the program for payment. To allow local administering agencies to pay participating taxicab companies quickly, ACBN provides up-front funding to local managing agencies and works with the agencies to allow them to keep a positive balance.

The **Volunteer Program** is designed to be self-directed, allowing participating individuals to identify their own drivers and providing support for the transportation provided to these drivers. The Volunteer Program was modeled after Nebraska's Private Attendant Care Services program, another successful self-directed program.

To assist those eligible individuals without immediate access to volunteer drivers, ACBN works with local administering agencies to recruit volunteer drivers. State-level ACBN staff is also working with the Lions Club in Nebraska on recruiting members of that organization to serve as volunteer drivers. The names and contact information of available local volunteers are then shared with eligible individuals if needed. Volunteers are reimbursed on a per-mile basis. ACBN provides half of the reimbursement and the eligible rider must provide the other half.

Drawing from technical assistance materials from the Rural Institute at the University of Montana, state-level ACBN staff developed program guidance and resources:

- eligibility standards and a common application form;
- coupon and voucher formats;
- sample advertisements for recruiting volunteers;
- sample letters to eligible individuals describing the programs; and
- agreements with taxicab companies and volunteers.

Flexible Services

In rural areas in particular, low population densities and long travel distances can make traditional fixed-route and paratransit services either prohibitively expensive to provide, or ineffective. Alternative service designs that fall in between the conventional fixed-route and paratransit models can be a more successful way to meet transportation needs in rural areas.

What Are Flexible Services?

The most common types of flexible public transportation services, also known as flex routes, combine elements of traditional fixed-route service with elements of paratransit, or dial-a-ride, service.

Types of flexible services include:

- *Route deviation service*, in which buses follow a designated route and schedule, with specified stops and scheduled time points, but leave the route to pick up or drop off passengers on request, returning to the route with enough time to meet the schedule. Passengers wishing to be picked up at home rather than at a stop must reserve a deviation in advance.
- *Point deviation services* connect a limited number of scheduled time points, but do not follow any set route between stops, leaving vehicles free to pick up passengers who have made advance reservations at any point along the way.
- *Demand-responsive feeder service* to fixed-route stops provides access to a stop in cases where a person with a disability is able to use a fixed-route bus but is unable to travel to or from a bus stop.
- *Request stops* involve a limited number of designated stops nearby, but not directly on, fixed routes, which may be requested by passengers.
- *Flexible-route segments* are portions of conventional fixed routes on which vehicles change to demand-responsive service.
- *Zone routes*, in which demand-responsive service is provided within a corridor, with scheduled time points at the beginning and/or end of the corridor.

More information, including discussion of when these types of services are most appropriate, is found in the full report on the CD-ROM. In addition, TCRP Synthesis 53, “Operational Experiences with Flexible Transit Services,” provides an excellent overview of flexibly routed services along with several case studies.

How Can Flexible Services Help to Address Rural Transportation Challenges?

Flexible routes have been used in many areas to provide compromise in convenience and affordability in rural transit services. For example:

- Flexible services are good options for low-density areas — they are typically more effective than traditional fixed-route services that require a certain concentration of population, households or jobs.
- Flexible services can be more cost-effective than pure demand-responsive service, thereby helping to stretch scarce resources.
- A single flexible system or service, as opposed to a system that includes both traditional fixed-route and paratransit service, can provide mobility for people with disabilities and other riders.

Examples of Successful Flexible Services

Flexible Services as a Mode to Address Long Distance Transportation Needs

Many rural transit systems operate long-distance transportation to connect residents to regional medical and other essential services unavailable locally. Some transit systems have found that flexibly-routed services provide better “route” coverage and meet the needs of seniors and people with disabilities who might not be able to get to set stops along a route.



Access in America:

Churchill Area Regional Transportation, Nevada

An example of this type of service operated by Churchill Area Regional Transportation (CART), a private, non-profit corporation that is the public transportation provider for Churchill County, Nev. Churchill County and Fallon (its largest city and county seat) are located about 60-70 miles east of Reno. CART implemented an intercity route deviation service, called the Reno Shuttle, in 2000. The Reno Shuttle provides door-to-door service (with advance reservation), on Tuesdays and Thursdays only from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. This service is designed primarily for medical appointments, with other trips served on a space-available basis. Travel time to and from Reno is about 2 hours. The fare is \$10 for the general public and \$5 for seniors and people with disabilities, with personal attendants and caregivers riding free. Reservations must be made by 1 p.m. on the day before the trip, and are on a space- and time- available basis.

Local and Long Distance Flexible Routes for the General Public

Many rural transit operators have found that flexibly routed services provide a compromise between the convenience and cost effectiveness of fixed-route service and the realities of operating in low density or sparsely populated areas.



Access in America:

Lane Transit District, Oregon

Lane Transit District in Eugene, Ore., has used this concept to operate the “Rhody Express.” This service is offered in Florence, a small coastal community with a significant retiree population. LTD has implemented a community shuttle service on a route-deviation basis that is open to the general public. Riders can catch the shuttle on route or can call for door-to-door service. Service is provided weekdays from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m.

Flexible Routes as an Alternative to ADA Complementary Paratransit Demand

Flexibly routed services are considered “demand response” transportation services with respect to requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. As such, communities operating flexible routes are not required to provide complementary paratransit. For many small communities, the prospect of offering both fixed-route and complementary paratransit services presents difficult budget decisions. In such communities, operating flexible services may be a preferred alternative that offers both economy and a high level of responsive service to people with disabilities.



Access in America:

Mountain Line Transit, West Virginia

Mountain Line Transit provides public transportation services in Morgantown, W.V., and surrounding Monongalia County. It is an example of a small transit system that once provided fixed-route and complementary paratransit services but converted the system design to route deviation.

In 1997, Mountain Line was operating separate fixed-route and paratransit services, using eight fixed-route buses and three paratransit vehicles. The paratransit service was unable to keep up with demand, turning away some 50 percent to 75 percent of trips requested. The community determined that route deviation services could be more customer-responsive and address the high paratransit service denial rates, and the system began a gradual two-year transition process. This process included establishing a citizens advisory committee with representatives of the key agencies serving people with disabilities and older people, a rider from each bus route, a representative of the university student administration and representatives of the business community. There was resistance to the proposed changes, but these were overcome through public discussion and outreach.

Today, Mountain Line Transit provides deviating fixed-route bus service on 17 routes. All of Mountain Line’s regular routes deviate on request for passengers with disabilities up to ¾ mile. This service allows riders to call for a pick-up as little as 15 minutes before the desired trip and is available to all riders. There is a small additional charge for route deviations. To be eligible to use the route deviation service, and the physical possibility of making the deviation in the mountainous terrain is determined in advance.

Concentrating Demand to Provide More Cost-Efficient Service

Innovative service designs have also been used to provide service at set times along a route or in established areas or zones. This allows for increased grouping of rides and for more cost-efficient service.



Access in America:

Link, Washington

Link, in Wenatchee, Wash., provides long-distance demand-responsive service at set times using a type of “zone route” scheduling concept. This service is provided between Wenatchee and Leavenworth and between Wenatchee and Chelan, the two most popular inter-community corridors. Beginning in March 2005, pick-ups for these trips were scheduled according to established time points with available pick-up times at each time point spaced two hours apart. The time points are posted in the call-taking and dispatch area in a format much like a fixed-route bus schedule for each inter-community corridor. By requiring riders to choose from among the available pick-up times, Link hopes to group inter-community trips, providing more transportation than would be possible by matching each caller’s requested time. This procedure applies regardless of whether the trip is assigned to a Link Plus vehicle or a non-dedicated vehicle.

Summary of Successful Flexible-Route Characteristics

While flexibly-routed services might not be appropriate in all areas and communities, they appear to be appropriate and successful in certain situations and areas. Many of the systems described in the full report have found that flexibly-routed services are particularly applicable to very long routes connecting outlying communities to regional services. In these cases, deviating off route can increase the coverage provided in the service corridor and can make the service useful to individuals unable to get to set stops due to distances or disability. The distances and times involved also can make deviations operationally feasible and acceptable to the public. The time going off route is relatively small compared to total route time and layovers and recovery time can be built into these types of routes.

Flexibly-routed services also appear to have applicability as a “stand-alone” local transportation option in selected small communities. The “Rhody Express” operated by Lane Transit District is one example. In this case, the local route deviation primarily serves the transportation needs of seniors and individuals with disabilities in this small retirement community. Deviations from a set route can be worked into a schedule without significantly affecting overall system design.

When used for local transportation in other small urban communities, flexibly-routed services often are part of a family of services rather than a single, stand-alone service. In these cases, traditional demand-responsive services supplement the flex routes. Both types of services are then employed to better meet all local needs. Where deviations can be made from the routed services to meet rider needs, the flex routes are used. If deviations cannot be worked into routes without significantly changing the overall operation, the supplemental demand-responsive services can be used. This combination of service options allows the needs of seniors and people with disabilities to be met while still providing more regularly-scheduled local service.

Ensuring ADA Compliance

As noted above, flex routes are considered to be a type of “demand-responsive” rather than “fixed-route” service under the ADA. Public agencies operating flex-route services therefore do not need to also provide complementary ADA paratransit service in the areas where flex-route service is provided. They do, however, need to ensure that the flex routes provide equivalent service to people with disabilities, meeting the equivalency standards defined by the ADA for demand-responsive services.

Use of Taxicabs

In rural communities where taxi services exist, taxicabs can be used to augment traditional public transit services to extend the days and hours of service, or offer a service mode that can be less expensive for some trips. Taxicabs can also be used to increase the transit system’s ADA complementary paratransit services.

There are a couple of typical approaches through which a transit system arranges service with a taxi company. The service may be contracted as part of an integrated paratransit system, or as a supplemental service that is arranged by the rider and subsidized by the transit system.

Using Taxis as Part of an Integrated Paratransit System

In many paratransit systems, customers reserve their trips through the paratransit system’s call center. The trip requests are then either scheduled onto that system’s vehicles or are assigned to a contract provider for subsequent dispatching to specific drivers/vehicles. Under this arrangement, the paratransit system has a contract with the taxi company and/or other companies, and the customer does not have a choice in who provides the ride – that decision is made by the provider organization.

This arrangement is generally cost efficient for the paratransit system. Since taxicab vehicles are typically not dedicated to the paratransit system (that is, they are being used in regular taxi service when they are not being used to provide paratransit trips), they can more efficiently serve some trips. These include “overflow” trips when demand exceeds normal capacity, and long, out-of-the way trips that cannot be operated in coordination with other trip needs.

Keep in mind that contracted taxi services and other contracted “non-dedicated service providers” that provide public transportation services become subject to certain federal requirements for public transportation providers, including drug and alcohol testing and ADA-required driver training. The local contract may also require a high level of insurance for the contractor in the interest of risk management.

In many locales, taxi companies – or their drivers who are independent contractors – have been unwilling to participate in drug and alcohol testing and programs and/or have been unwilling to “invest” in additional specialized training for drivers or higher insurance coverage. In these cases, the reluctance has led to the transit agency not being able to use taxi companies as contractors in an integrated fashion. In other locales, taxi companies have met the requirements in order to participate. Some taxi companies have designated a subset of drivers (who participate in the drug and alcohol testing and who receive the additional training) and vehicles (that carry the higher insurance coverage). Sometimes this has involved establishing a separate company (for insurance purposes). In some cases, the transit agency may train the taxi drivers. Some transit systems also have included the contractors’ drivers in a common pool (for

random selection) and have included these drivers in the transit agency's contract for testing services, and have provided ongoing oversight.

In the case of many taxi companies, the drivers providing service are not taxi company employees, but independent contractors; as such, they cannot be forced to receive special training, much less other requirements such as drug and alcohol testing. What the transit agency and taxi company can do to overcome this obstacle is to market the training and other requirements as an opportunity for the drivers. Specifically, in exchange for their willingness to participate, drivers would get more of a steady flow of trips in comparison to the non-participating drivers.

An excellent example is in Los Angeles County, where several taxi subcontractors identified drivers willing to participate in the regional ADA service. In Ann Arbor, Mich., the taxi contractor made the decision to require drug and alcohol testing – not for just a portion of its drivers – but for all its drivers (all independent contractors). Not only did this facilitate the dispatching function (as ADA trips could be dispatched to any driver), but the company used the “universal” drug and alcohol testing in its general public advertising in an attempt to upgrade the public's view of the company's taxi drivers.

Supplemental Use of Taxis

Taxis can also be used as a “supplemental” service that is not integrated with the paratransit service. This is an auxiliary service that may serve the same group of eligible riders as dedicated paratransit service (that is, those certified for ADA paratransit eligibility). However, it could also serve a wider customer group, such as a broader definition of people with disabilities, seniors, human service agency clients, or the general public.

The most common example of this supplemental service is a taxi subsidy program (sometimes called a “user-side” subsidy). With most taxi subsidy programs, the customer directly calls a participating taxi company to request service, while the sponsoring agency subsidizes a portion of the trip fare. Often, the sponsoring agency distributes vouchers or taxi “scrip” to customers. The customer typically pays a nominal fare (often equivalent to the fare of the ADA paratransit system), while the sponsoring agency subsidizes the rest of the fare. After the trip is served, the taxi company reimburses the driver and then turns in the signed vouchers for reimbursement from the sponsor.

If riders are provided a subsidy, but then arrange on their own for transportation with a taxi company using the subsidy, FTA has indicated in recent guidance that the taxi company is not subject to the federal drug and alcohol testing requirements. In this case, riders are simply using an existing service and the taxi company is not a “contractor” to the transit agency.

Rates for Integrated Taxi and Other Non-Dedicated Service

While the for-hire rates of taxis in many municipalities are regulated by a governmental entity, those rates generally apply to the for-hire trips requested by the general public. However, they do not necessarily apply to contract services, and the transit agency and taxicab company may be free to negotiate a contract-specific rate or rates.

Often, transit agencies adopt the regulated or established meter (or other) rate of the taxi company because it is administratively easy for the transit agency, the provider, and the driver. Other transit agencies negotiate separate rates: these can be per trip rates, zone- or distance-based rates, and even per-hour rates. Many transit agencies also include a no-show rate, for when the driver arrives on time at the specified pick-up location and the customer is not present. Some transit agencies also include in their payment to the taxi company a per-trip “bonus” for the drivers, as the drivers are generally not tipped for these trips.

Provision of Accessible Vehicles

Lack of accessible taxis can significantly limit the usefulness of taxicab services as a resource for the transportation of people with disabilities. And, while accessible taxis are becoming more and more prevalent in our urban, metropolitan cities, they still are scarce in small urban and rural communities.

To address this concern, some transit agencies have purchased accessible vehicles and leased them to one or more taxi companies in their area, as a way to augment their paratransit service, whether it is in an integrated or supplemental fashion. Other transit agencies have subsidized the difference in costs to taxicab companies as an incentive to introduce accessible cabs into the taxi fleet.



Access in America:

Soldotna-Kenai region, Alaska

In the Soldotna-Kenai region of Alaska, the Independent Living Center in Homer was instrumental in starting an accessible taxi subsidy program in the late 1990s. After efforts to develop a local coordinated system for the Soldotna-Kenai region broke down, the ILC, in conjunction with the local taxi company, applied for and received a Section 5310 grant to purchase an accessible taxi. The ILC leased the vehicle to the cab company at no cost, with the understanding that the vehicle would only be used for trips requiring accessible service. To stimulate the demand and make the trips more affordable, the ILC instituted a subsidy program, where people with disabilities could purchase \$2 tokens worth a \$7 metered fare, noting that multiple tokens could be used for a single trip, and also noting that participants were limited to 50 tokens per month. The demand for accessible taxis increased so much that the taxi company has since purchased three additional accessible vehicles. The ILC, which managed the program for six years, eventually transferred the management of the subsidy program to the local public transportation system (Central Area Rural Transportation System) that subsequently was formed to coordinate transportation in the Soldotna-Kenai region.

How Can Taxicabs Help to Address Rural Transportation Challenges?

While taxicab services may be a declining resource in rural America, where such resources exist, they can be effectively used to deliver transportation services. Taxicab services can be used to:

- Expand mobility options for consumers of existing public transit services by utilizing taxicab contractors to provide evening and weekend service;
- Expand the transportation service area into low-density areas outside a core municipality;
- Augment the accessible fleet used in the provision of demand response services.



Access in America:

CABS, Iowa

CABS is an acronym for **Cabs to Augment the Bus System**. It is a supplemental, accessible i subsidy program available to people with disabilities who are residents of rural Linn County, Iowa. The CABS program was initiated to fill gaps in service for people with disabilities.

Management/oversight functions are shared among three entities: (1) Linn County Community Services, which has financial oversight; (2) the City of Cedar Rapids' Department of Transportation and Parking, which is responsible for issuing passes and tickets to registrants; and (3) Goodwill Industries of SE Iowa, which intakes and processes program applications, and assists with invoice processing. In addition, representatives of local disability organizations, such as the Conner Rights and Resources Center (Cedar Rapids Office), sit on the CABS Task Force that provides program oversight.

Prospective CABS customers register to participate through Goodwill. The City of Cedar Rapids is responsible for issuing passes and tickets to registrants. These include a work pass for those who need to use CABS to get to work, and personal use tickets, which may be used for doctor appointments, grocery shopping, and other personal/social purposes. Either allows the customer to call one of the two participating taxi companies to arrange service, and to pay a small fare subsidized by the CABS Program.

The program is funded by Linn County, through its MHDD funds, the City of Cedar Rapids and an FTA JARC grant. In addition, members of the CABS Task Force have donated volunteer hours to this project and provided project oversight. Federal and local funds also supported the purchase of an accessible taxi for use by a participating taxi company.

Taxi service is available 24 hours per day, seven days per week. The taxi subsidy program is coordinated with the other transportation resources, including Five Seasons Transportation and LIFTS.

The key to continued operation is that the program continues to provide a viable source of income for the taxicab company that is operating it. As a condition of its accessible taxi lease, the taxicab company was required to set aside funding each year for a vehicle-replacement fund.

In-depth descriptions of this and other successful programs are found in the full document, as well as in Easter Seals Project ACTION's "Moving Forward Together: A Workbook for Initiating and Increasing Accessible Taxi Services in Your Community."

Use of Volunteers

Relying upon volunteers to assist with the delivery of service can help to stretch transportation resources and offset the typically high cost of serving areas where population densities are low and travel distances are far.

How Can Volunteers be Used in a Transportation Program?

Volunteers may be reimbursed by a transportation provider, human service agency, or other entity for using their own vehicles to provide trips for people with disabilities. The rider may be responsible for identifying his or her own volunteer driver, or an organization may match a rider with a volunteer driver when the need for a particular trip arises.

A transportation provider may also utilize volunteers to drive its buses, vans or cars. Volunteers may also be used by a transportation provider as call-takers, schedulers, or dispatchers, as well as in local fund-raising efforts.

Travel voucher programs may allow participants to purchase trips from a volunteer driver, who may be a friend or family member, with a voucher. Participants may identify their own volunteer drivers or may be referred to available individuals.

The use of volunteers in a transportation program can help to keep costs low and the level of service flexible, and typically results in benefits for the volunteers as well as the riders and the service provider. However, volunteer programs are not without cost, and may present challenges to the administering organization. Factors to be considered include:

- The time and effort needed to recruit, screen, train and reward volunteers
- Insurance and risk management issues
- Acceptance of volunteer drivers by riders

How Can Volunteer Programs Help to Address Rural Transportation Challenges?

- Operating costs can be kept low when volunteers are used as drivers, call-takers, schedulers, and/or dispatchers by a transportation provider.
- Programs that reimburse family members and friends for providing rides take advantage of existing, low-cost transportation resources.
- Volunteers can provide a flexible source of transportation that can be called upon as needed for long-distance, out-of-area trips.

Examples of Successful Volunteer Transportation Programs

There are some excellent examples and resources available to rural and small urban transportation operators considering the use of volunteers in the delivery of transportation services described in the full report. The following examples illustrate the various ways in which volunteers can be used.

Providing Accessible Transportation Using Volunteers

One of the challenges with volunteer programs is to offer similar services to riders who need accessible vehicles. The research identified two programs that have addressed this issue. One program, Lane Transit District in Eugene, Oregon, is described as a case study in Appendix C of the full report.



Access in America:

Ride Connection, Oregon

The other is the Ride Connection in the Portland, Oregon area, a private, non-profit organization, was formed in 1988. The Ride Connection program works with and supplements the existing network of transportation providers in Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington Counties. It has grown to include a network of more than 30 agencies and senior centers and more than 370 volunteers providing 236,000 rides annually. As part of its volunteer driver efforts, Ride Connection will train volunteers to be able to drive accessible vans in the network's fleet. The volunteer drivers who agree to provide accessible service go through the same training as paid drivers and are covered under the program's overall insurance policy.

Volunteers in Non-Traditional Roles



Access in America:

Lane Transit District, Oregon

One non-traditional use of volunteers is Lane Transit District's "Bus Buddies" program. LTD works with two senior activity centers in the Eugene and Springfield areas to provide a senior companion travel program. This program links senior volunteers who are familiar with the fixed-route service with other seniors who want to travel on the buses. The volunteers serve as companions to assist these riders as well as to teach them how to use the service.

The LTD Marketing Department staff makes regular presentations about fixed-route service and about the Bus Buddies program at area senior centers. As part of the presentations, individuals interested in serving as Bus Buddy volunteers are recruited. Volunteers receive free bus passes for as long as they remain in the program. Seniors who are interested in having a Bus Buddy volunteer ride with them simply call the senior activity center in their area.

Volunteers as Service Providers



Access in America:

American Council of the Blind of Nebraska

The American Council of the Blind of Nebraska (ACBN) uses volunteers for service delivery as well as in project administration. The ACBN's Supportive Volunteer Rural Transportation Program allows participating individuals to identify their own drivers and then provides support for the transportation provided to these drivers. More information about this program is in the full report as well as in the section on Transportation Voucher Programs on page 17 of this summary report.

ACBN indicated that private fundraising efforts have been enhanced by the fact that transportation programs are managed locally by volunteers. The local ACBN chapters or the Centers for Independent Living that have committed to manage the programs do so with volunteer staff. Private donors can therefore be assured that 100 percent of the funding that they make available goes directly to services.



Access in America:

Arrowhead Transit, Minnesota

Arrowhead Transit, located in Virginia, Minn., employs a staff of 70 and utilizes a fleet of 55 accessible buses to provide transportation in a five-county area of Southwestern Minnesota. Arrowhead Transit also has an extensive volunteer driver program in three of the counties (Itasca, Koochiching, and Lake), currently utilizing 25 drivers. Volunteer drivers are usually used for Medicaid trips. Volunteers are paid based on the IRS-allowed reimbursement rate. This is passed through to the sponsoring County department that oversees Medicaid transportation (Itasca, Koochiching, and Lake Counties all utilize Arrowhead's Volunteer Driver program for this), along with an administrative fee per mile or a flat administrative fee.

Volunteers as a Supplement to ADA Complementary Paratransit



Access in America:

Lane Transit District, Oregon

Lane Transit District also uses volunteers in the provision of its ADA complementary paratransit service, called RideSource. LTD dedicates a fleet of 30 accessible body-on-chassis small buses to provide RideSource paratransit service. This fleet, however, is augmented by five ramp-equipped minivans, driven by volunteers who help provide ADA paratransit service.

Private Auto Support Programs

Another way to improve mobility in low-density areas in which public transportation service may be either unavailable or prohibitively expensive is to support the use of private vehicles by people with disabilities.

What Are Private Auto Support Programs?

Private auto support programs typically make it more feasible or more affordable for individuals to own and operate automobiles. Vocational rehabilitation programs have traditionally helped people with disabilities to resume driving by subsidizing vehicle modifications or, in some cases, purchasing specially equipped vehicles. Some states supplement this basic type of program with other funding that helps pay for vehicle repairs or insurance.

Recently, many welfare-to-work initiatives have included programs that assist transitioning welfare recipients, including individuals with disabilities, with the lease or purchase of a vehicle. Some of these programs solicit and repair donated vehicles and make them available at low cost to eligible program participants. In other areas, programs have provided subsidies for the purchase of fuel, insurance and vehicle repairs.

A variation of a private auto support program involves making rental cars available to eligible individuals and/or for eligible types of trips.

Finally, transportation voucher programs may include friends or family members using their own vehicles among the eligible providers of service for which vouchers may be used.

How Can Private Automobile Support Programs Help to Address Rural Transportation Challenges?

- Private automobile programs can promote independence and limit reliance on public and specialized transportation services where such services are inadequate, insufficient, or inappropriate to consumer needs.
- Private automobile programs can be more cost-effective for certain long-distance trips than demand response service provided by public transit agencies.

Example of a Successful Private Auto Support Program



Access in America:

Onslow County Department of Social Services, North Carolina

Onslow County Department of Social Services (DSS), located in Jacksonville, N.C., provides a range of social services, income assistance, job placement, and information/referral services, including an innovative program of funding rental vehicles for medical transportation services.

Transportation services in Onslow County have been provided by the Onslow United Transit System (OUTS) since 1978. The DSS is the largest consumer of OUTS services, including purchasing long-distance medical transportation. Because not all DSS clients can travel on those days when out-of-county service is scheduled, the DSS formulated an innovative solution in cooperation with Enterprise Car Rental in Jacksonville. DSS clients have access to Enterprise rental cars for use in medical transportation trips with the DSS serving as a guarantor in the rental agreement. Enterprise would, in turn, rent more cars.

Under the program, DSS approves Medicaid eligible clients who possess a valid North Carolina driver's license and who are over 21 years of age to use rental cars to drive themselves to medical appointments upon trip authorization from the Medicaid transportation specialist at the Department.

Since it is restricted only to out-of-county transportation, utilization of the program is relatively modest (less than 1 percent of total FY 2005 Medicaid transportation provided by the agency). Nevertheless, the DSS reports that use of Enterprise is the second most cost-effective option for the agency (only behind direct payments to clients) and is considerably cheaper than use of the community transportation provider, OUTS.

There are two specific practices associated with this innovative service that benefit people with disabilities. First, DSS will permit non-Medicaid eligible individuals to serve as the vehicle renter if they are providing service to an eligible individual. Therefore, Medicaid clients with disabilities who are unable to drive, due to their disability, and have another individual willing to be the driver, can still take advantage of this service delivery option. Second, if the Medicaid client is able to drive, but only if adaptive equipment is installed in the automobile, Enterprise will supply cars with adaptive hand controls upon request.

Strategies to Encourage Use of Existing Transportation Services

When transportation options are limited, or funding constraints restrict the amount of service that can be provided, it is in the best interests of both riders and agencies for individuals to utilize the least specialized, most cost-effective transportation service that can meet their mobility needs. Use of fixed-route services can be encouraged by: (1) providing travel training to individuals who would be able to travel by bus if shown how to use the system safely and independently; (2) offering fare incentives; and (3) improving access to information about fixed-route services. Ensuring that potential riders are aware of all the transportation options that may be available to them is also important when an area is served by multiple transportation providers.

Travel Training

Travel training helps people to develop the skills and confidence they need in order to use fixed-route transportation services safely and independently. Once equipped with these skills, individuals are able to use fixed-route services to meet at least some of their mobility needs. The benefits of travel training programs can include not only cost savings to agencies from reduced dependence on more costly, specialized paratransit services, but also increased independence for people with disabilities and integration into transportation services utilized by the general public.

Depending on their abilities and travel needs, people may be candidates for route-specific training or more generalized training. Travel training can be provided on a one-to-one basis, or one trainer can provide instruction to a group of people who have similar training needs. Trainers can be professional instructors, individuals who have received instruction in travel training methods and techniques, or peers of the travel training student who already use public transportation services.

Examples of Successful Travel Training Programs



Access in America: Gogebic County Transit, Michigan

Gogebic County Transit, in Ironwood and Wakefield, Mich., provides demand-response and deviated fixed-route transportation service. Rather than operating separate services for people with disabilities, both types of services are designed to serve all residents of the county. The demand-responsive service is open to the public, and the fixed-route service deviates to better meet the needs of riders who cannot get to and from designated stops.

Local human service and disability service agencies provide travel training to teach riders to independently use the Gogebic County Transit system. The travel training is supported by local service characteristics. The transit system has worked to develop a culture where employees view riders as friends who deserve good, reliable service. Gogebic County Community Mental Health is involved in training transit employees in disability awareness and sensitivity. Also, transit operating policies allow drivers to provide door-to-door service and a high level of assistance.



Access in America:

Lane Transit District, Oregon

Lane Transit District contracts with Alternative Work Concepts (AWC), Inc., a local non-profit agency that provides job training and placement for people with disabilities, for travel training and “travel host” services. AWC has provided travel training instruction for many years as part of its job placement service, but funding from LTD enabled the agency to take additional referrals for training.

LTD and AWC have developed a variety of travel training services designed to meet the needs of individuals with various travel needs. AWC provides one-on-one “destination training” for individuals who need to learn a particular trip. AWC also provides general “orientation training” for people who have never used fixed-route buses and who need general instruction in trip planning and using lifts, ramps, securement systems and other access features. AWC also maintains a working relationship with local agencies that have Orientation and Mobility Specialists on staff. Individuals with vision disabilities who are interested in bus travel are referred to these agencies.

A unique feature of LTD’s travel training program is its “Travel Host” program. This program was developed to assist riders who have difficulty making transfers between buses. Transfers were identified as a significant issue as the travel training program was being developed since most of the bus routes in the Eugene area operate on a “pulse” system to and from a large downtown transit center. Two part-time “travel hosts” are located at the Eugene Transit Center who meet riders as they arrive and help them get to the next bus to complete their trips.

Fare Incentives

Fixed-route fare incentives are another cost-effective mechanism for encouraging paratransit customers to use the fixed-route system. Such programs go beyond the off-peak half-fare programs required by FTA by offering half-fare travel for people with disabilities all day, or making free transit passes available to ADA paratransit-eligible individuals or a broader group of people with disabilities.

Possible points of impact of providing fare-free transit service for individuals with disabilities include the following:

- Net cost savings
- Fare-free service can encourage riders to shift trips from paratransit to fixed-route service, especially where fixed-route services are accessible and support services like travel training are available
- Ongoing fare-free fixed-route service can be a more effective incentive than fare-free service offered as part of a limited special promotion
- Fare-free fixed-route service may generate additional transit trips by people with disabilities
- Loss of fixed-route fare revenues may occur when existing fixed-route riders take advantage of fare-free travel, but these losses are likely to be smaller than paratransit cost savings in most cases

Example of a Successful Fare Incentive Program



Access in America:

Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District, Illinois

The Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District, located in Illinois, offers a fare discount card called the DASH Card. This card allows older people and people with disabilities to ride free on the transit system's fixed-route service and to participate in the system's half-fare cab program. The DASH Card Program was initiated in 2001 in response to a significant increase in demand for complementary paratransit, to encourage riders to use the fixed-route services. The free rides did reduce the system's fare recovery ratio but the savings in the paratransit service expenses were significant. In addition, many of the system's passengers using the free fares or the half-price taxicab fares are on fixed incomes and the free or reduced rates provide these passengers an extra benefit.

Customer Information, Trip Planning, and Mobility Management

In any area, ensuring that riders and potential riders have easy access to timely and accurate information about available transportation services – both fixed-route and paratransit services – is an essential component of maximizing mobility. This is particularly important in rural and small urban areas in which services may be provided by a variety of organizations, perhaps with different policies regarding eligible riders and trip types, and trip origins and destinations may span multiple communities or counties. Good public information and close partnerships with local service organizations can help to increase the public's awareness of available transportation options.

Examples of Successful Customer Information Projects



Access in America:

NDinfo.org project, North Dakota

The NDinfo.org project, a statewide service directory, was the creation of the North Dakota Region VII Children's Services Coordinating Committee (CSCC). The NDinfo.org Web site is a community service directory with more than 4,000 member organizations that enable parents, youth and professionals to obtain information about agency services across the State of North Dakota. The Web site has a transportation section which includes basic and advanced search features, frequently-asked questions, a trip planner feature, tips, surveys, map and schedules. Transportation providers complete online questionnaires to be placed on the Web site. The trip planner feature allows users to enter a desired origin and a destination to see what transportation services are available in the city, county or region to accommodate that trip.



Access in America:

Lake County Transit, California

Lake County Transit (Calif.) shares information with the social services community through the Lake County Transportation Coalition. The coalition is composed of social service programs throughout the county who serve as an auxiliary to provide information and marketing of Lake Transit Authority services. Marketing efforts by the Coalition include responsibility for a “Ride the Bus Week” which featured volunteer ambassadors on every bus, free handouts from social agencies to promote their services, free rides for the entire week, news releases and editorials from local social services programs, and broad distribution of posters and posters. The week culminated with the Coalition hosting an open house at the new Lake Transit Authority operating and maintenance headquarters facility.

Use of Technology

Transportation providers today have many different advanced technology options available to help them increase efficiency, enhance customer information, streamline data collection, and improve other operational functions. The information presented in this section focuses on Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) components and other technology systems that can be useful to transportation providers in rural areas as they deliver services to people with disabilities and other riders.

What Kinds of Technology Are Applicable to Rural Transportation Services?

Operators of demand-responsive or flexible service may benefit from automated or computer-assisted reservations/scheduling/dispatching systems that can streamline the trip reservations process, improve the efficiency of vehicle schedules, enhance the capability of dispatchers, and upgrade the tracking and reporting of customer and trip data. Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) technology, which uses Global Positioning System (GPS) capabilities to identify the location of vehicles in real time, contributes to improved dispatching, and eliminates the need for voice communications between dispatchers and drivers to determine vehicle location. For larger systems, Mobile Data Terminals (MDTs) or Mobile Data Computers (MDCs) provide a means for dispatchers and drivers to exchange information about schedules, trips, passengers, or vehicles electronically, which can improve the accuracy of the information as well as reduce the need for voice communications.

Automated or computer-assisted reservations and scheduling systems are also useful tools for coordinated rural transportation services. These systems can make the job of scheduling trips among various providers easier and more efficient, and help with tracking, reporting, and billing of trips for clients of different agencies. The use of MDTs or MDCs further enhances data collection and reporting by increasing the accuracy of trip, vehicle and passenger data that is recorded at the time of each trip, and the ease with which information can be compiled and analyzed. AVL can make it easier for dispatchers to assign trips to the most appropriate vehicle in real time.

How Can Technology Help to Address Rural Transportation Challenges?

Reservations and scheduling software and MDCs can streamline the data collection and billing processes associated with demand responsive services. This can make tracking trips and costs by passenger or funding source much easier, thus increasing the feasibility of coordinating transportation services. Rural and small urban systems may not have the demand-responsive trip volume that would make reservations/scheduling software cost-effective. However, scaled-back versions of the scheduling systems used by larger paratransit operators may be useful to smaller operators or those who provide flexible services.

Vehicle location technology helps dispatchers assign trips to the most appropriate vehicle during the service day, which is especially important in operations serving large geographic areas. Better use of resources can lead to improvements in efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

The application of technology to the transportation industry in general has been a high priority for the U.S. Department of Transportation. In order to generate some standardization in the deployment of various technologies, USDOT has formalized the process through its Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) initiative.

Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) for Transit Services in Rural Areas

The use of ITS components and other technology systems can help transportation providers – particularly those who operate demand-responsive, coordinated, or flexible services – meet some of the challenges of serving people with disabilities in small urban or rural areas. Technology systems have the potential to contribute to more efficient and cost-effective operations and improved traveler information. However, such systems can be expensive and may not be the best solution to a particular transportation problem. The selection and successful implementation of the most appropriate technology solution, therefore, requires careful planning. Potential funding sources, technical assistance programs, useful publications, and other resources that may help small urban and rural transportation providers who may be considering the acquisition of a technology system are described in the full report.

Mobility Services for All Americans

In February 2004, President Bush signed Executive Order 13330 on Human Service Transportation Coordination, reasserting the federal government's commitment to improved mobility for transportation disadvantaged citizens and more efficient use of transportation resources. The Executive Order establishes a new Interagency Transportation Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility, composed of representatives of ten federal departments. The council's goals include eliminating duplication and overlap among federal transportation programs and services, facilitating use of the most cost-effective services available within existing resources, and developing policies and procedures to enhance transportation services.

The Mobility Services for All Americans (MSAA) initiative is among the efforts undertaken by the federal Interagency Transportation Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility. The vision of MSAA is to develop a design for a travel management center at which travelers can obtain travel information, plan a trip, and make reservations. Divided into five phases, the MSAA work plan calls for coalition-building, research, technology testing and evaluation through field operational tests, demonstration of a traveler management coordination center, and outreach activities. As of December 2005, the research was nearly

complete, and the development of a Request for Proposals for technology testing was to be under way in 2006.

For more information about MSAA, see the Web sites of the ITS Joint Program Office (<http://www.its.dot.gov>) or United We Ride (<http://www.unitedweride.gov>).

Technical Assistance and Training

The Web site of the ITS Joint Program Office (JPO) of the federal Department of Transportation includes a section devoted to technical assistance, training and information resources, at <http://www.pcb.its.dot.gov>.

The National Transit Institute at Rutgers University offers a one-day course on Rural ITS for staff members of transit providers and human service agencies. The course is provided free of charge to employees of federal, state and local governments, and is conducted periodically in various locations across the country. More information about the course can be found online at www.ntionline.com.

Examples of Successful Uses of Technology

ARC Transit/Ride Solutions in Palatka, Fla., has successfully implemented and integrated advanced scheduling software with MDTs and AVL to improve management, operations and reporting capabilities. The **Cape Cod Regional Transit Authority** in Massachusetts has implemented advanced scheduling software, MDTs, AVL and an advanced fare payment system that uses contact “Smart Cards” as well as magnetic stripe VISA cards. The **Aiken County Council** in Aiken, South Carolina also has implemented an advanced reservation and scheduling system along with magnetic strip cards for better tracking and reporting of trips provided for various funding sources. And the **Regional Transportation Program, Inc.** in Portland, Maine has developed an integrated trip planner specifically to assist riders with disabilities in planning trips on various service modes in the area.



Access in America:

JAUNT, Virginia

In Charlottesville, Va., JAUNT, which coordinates transportation services for more than 50 human service agencies in a four-county area, has implemented an automated, voice-enabled 24/7 telephone reservation system for booking, confirming and canceling trips. The system assists with scheduling, prepares driver manifests, and also provides automatic notification to riders via a telephone connection when vehicles are about to arrive. Several different technologies, including an advanced reservations and scheduling system, AVL, MDT, and IVR have been integrated in this state-of-the-art system.



Access in America:

Northern Shenandoah Valley Mobility Program, Virginia

The Northern Shenandoah Valley Mobility Program in Virginia is developing a web-based coordinated dispatching system that will support “mobility manager” efforts in the area. The system will allow transportation providers in the area to share scheduling and routing information with human service organizations that do not have vehicles. Human service agencies will then be able to request rides for their clients from transportation providers that are listed. The system plans to utilize AVL technology to display routes and vehicle locations. It also will include a Medicaid billing module that will facilitate automatic Medicaid billing and reporting.

These and numerous other examples of successful deployments of advanced technologies are detailed in ITS reports listed in the full report.

Employee Training

Driver and employee training are a key element in providing effective transportation for people with disabilities. Riders and disability service agencies should be directly involved in training programs.

Rural transportation providers often do not, however, have the resources to continuously develop and update employee training programs. A number of good state and national programs exist that can assist with employee training.

The National Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) is funded by the Federal Transit Administration. Through it, training and technical assistance products and services are developed nationally, for distribution and replication by the states to local transit agencies. A National Transit Resource Center is supported, which offers access to information and expertise. The National RTAP is directed by the American Public Works Association through a consortium arrangement with the Community Transportation Association of America. National RTAP modules can be ordered through CTAA and are listed at <http://www.nationalrtap.org/productstraining.asp>. National RTAP also maintains an online Training Resource Catalog at <http://www.nationalrtap.org/ResourceCatalog/>.

Most state RTAP programs assist rural transportation systems by providing information about and access to employee training materials and training opportunities. Rural transportation providers should contact their state RTAP program for assistance. State RTAP contacts are listed online through <http://www.nationalrtap.org/state.asp>.

At the national level, the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) also has developed an extensive library of materials with the rural and community transportation provider in mind. CTAA also has developed a series of training and certification programs for community transportation managers, operations staff, and drivers. For more information about available resources, training and certifications, go to the “Professional Development and Training” page of CTAA’s Web site at www.ctaa.org.



**Access in America:
 Gogebic County Transit, Michigan**

Gogebic County Transit (Mich.) indicated that the attitude of its drivers and the training provided to them was vital to the success of its services. Gogebic Transit works closely with County Community Mental Health program staff, in particular, to provide employees with a better understanding of riders with cognitive and mental health disabilities. The example of success in Gogebic County points out the importance of transit agencies working with local disability organizations and riders with disabilities when developing and delivering training to employees. Riders and agencies should be directly involved in training programs.



**Access in America:
 CABS, Iowa**

Cabs to Augment the Bus Systems (CABS) in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, also noted that the high degree of customer satisfaction reported for its taxi-subsidy service can be attributed, in part, to good driver training. Taxicab drivers are provided customer service training regarding transporting people with disabilities, especially people with mobility disabilities. Each of the taxicab drivers has also been provided a copy of ESPA's "Taxicab Pocket Guide."

Toward Increased Mobility and Accessibility

While the availability of adequate accessible transportation remains a significant need in rural and small urban communities, there is reason to be optimistic about the future. The research that led to the development of this report identified numerous examples of innovative and exemplary programs across the country that have greatly improved transportation for people with disabilities in rural areas.

At the federal level, funding under the Section 5311 and 5310 programs has been increased significantly in the latest transportation reauthorization legislation (SAFETEA-LU). Several new programs, such as the New Freedom Program, will also provide additional resources aimed specifically at the needs of people with disabilities.

Rural and small urban communities that have not yet developed comprehensive general public transportation systems now have an opportunity to utilize this new and increased federal funding. Implementing more comprehensive general public services using Section 5311 and Section 5310 funding can improve the accessibility of existing transportation services, broaden available transportation to include employment, social and personal travel needs rather than just medical or other "essential" needs, and ensure that all transportation dependent residents, rather than only a limited number of agency or program clients, have access to transportation. The case studies included in this report can be used as models to consider possible new services. A process that appears to be used successfully in many areas involves the following general approach:

1. Identify an agency or current service provider that can become a “lead agency” to coordinate and operate expanded general public transportation services. This might be an existing human services agency or transportation provider, or a transportation department within county or local governments. If no existing agencies appear appropriate, a new transportation agency might be needed, or (where state law provides) a new transit agency or authority might be established.
2. Encourage all agencies that are supporting or providing transportation services in the area to pool resources and funding. Involve all agencies in a process to work toward a coordinated transportation service plan and include potential riders, including people with disabilities, in this planning process. Seek assistance from regional planning organizations or state agencies (including the state RTAP program) in this planning effort. Note that beginning in 2007, all FTA-supported human service transportation programs will be required to be part of a “locally developed, coordinated human services transportation plan.” This new planning requirement, established in SAEFTEA-LU, will apply to the 5310, New Freedom, and JARC Programs.
3. Work with the state administering agency for Section 5311 and 5310 federal funding to make them aware of the area’s needs and efforts to develop a new coordinated transportation service. Once a plan and approach is developed, apply for available federal and state funding. Use pooled resources at the local level to leverage federal and state funding to the maximum extent possible.

In rural and small urban communities that have already established general public transportation programs, the new opportunities provided by increased federal funding and new programs such as the New Freedom Program should be explored fully to expand services to better meet the needs of all residents. Again, involvement of riders, including riders with disabilities, is encouraged to identify unmet needs.

Even if available federal funding is fully allocated, agencies and officials in rural and small urban communities should consider developing partnerships to discuss and study needs and to explore possible plans for new service. These needs and plans should be made known to state DOTs and human services agencies. Bringing local needs to the attention of state administering agencies is critical to the process of developing adequate levels of funding in the future.

To supplement available federal funding, local agencies can advocate for and state agencies and legislatures can consider developing dedicated funding to support expanded accessible transportation in rural and small urban communities. Considering the transportation needs of seniors, people with disabilities, and other transportation-dependent residents, and involving all of these groups and related service agencies, appears to be a particularly effective way to promote state-level funding. Programs can be started on a limited demonstration basis and expanded as resources are available. Relatively small state-level allocations for this purpose can have a significant impact on rural mobility.

Given the extent of the needs and the limitations on funding, transportation providers in rural and small urban communities must be innovative in developing and combining funding sources. Every advantage must be taken to fully leverage federal and state funding with limited local resources. Non-traditional sources of funding, including in-kind donations and private funding also are important. Volunteers also appear to play an important role in meeting some of the needs in rural areas, particularly in providing long-distance, out-of-area travel needs and providing non-emergency medical transportation. Volunteer driver programs can also be made accessible by training some volunteers to driver available accessible vans or minivans.

For More Information

The full report on which this summary report is based is available on a CD-ROM and may be downloaded through the Easter Seals Project ACTION Web site.

Easter Seals Project ACTION
1425 K Street, NW
Suite 200
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: 202-347-3066
Toll-free: 800-659-6428
Fax: 202-737-7914
TTY: 202-347-7385
www.projectaction.org
projectaction@easterseals.com



Easter Seals Project ACTION – The acronym stands for **A**ccessible **C**ommunity **T**ransportation **I**n **O**ur **N**ation – is funded through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, and is administered by Easter Seals Inc. The Project was established by the United States Congress in 1988.

ESPA promotes cooperation between the transportation industry and the disability community to increase mobility for people with disabilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act and beyond. All resources created for public use are free of charge. These include technical assistance and a toll-free telephone number (800-659-6428 between 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Eastern Time, Monday through Friday), Web site (www.projectaction.org), newsletters, a clearinghouse of more than 90 print, video and audio resources, and training activities at meetings and conferences.

Easter Seals Project ACTION
1425 K Street, NW
Suite 200
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: 202-347-3066
Toll-free: 800-659-6428
Fax: 202-737-7914
TTY: 202-347-7385
www.projectaction.org
projectaction@easterseals.com

