

COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION COORDINATION
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FOUR COUNTY TRANSIT OF APPALACHIAN AGENCY
FOR SENIOR CITIZENS
CEDAR BLUFF, VIRGINIA

MOBILITY FOR ALL: A MODEL APPROACH FOR THE COMMONWEALTH

BEST PRACTICES & EXPANDING MOBILITY
OPTIONS FOR THE TRANSIT DEPENDENT

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This work was performed as part of the Cumberland Plateau Community Transportation Coordination Demonstration Project of Four County Transit in cooperation with Virginia Board For People With Disabilities.

The contents of this report reflect the views of the authors who are responsible for the facts and accuracy of the data presented herein. The contents do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Virginia Board For People With Disabilities or Four County Transit of Appalachian Agency for Senior Citizens. This report does not constitute a standard, specification, or regulation.

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" ... ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION IS NECESSARY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES TO GO TO WORK, GET AN EDUCATION, RECEIVE MEDICAL CARE, AND... HAVE AN ACTIVE, INCLUSIVE ROLE IN SOCIETY. BARRIERS TO TRANSPORTATION INCLUDE A LACK OF AVAILABLE TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS, SUCH AS PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION, AND A LACK OF ACCESS TO EXISTING TRANSPORTATION SERVICES."

- NEW FREEDOM INITIATIVE: A PROGRESS REPORT

THE WHITE HOUSE (MAY, 2002)

Mobility for All: A Model Approach for the Commonwealth

FOREWORD

The fact is irrefutable: A quantifiable need for comprehensive, flexible public transportation services, especially by transit dependent populations – the elderly, individuals with low-incomes, and people with disabilities – is well documented. Lack of access to mobility has an adverse affect on quality of life. The intent of the information contained in this report is to provide a framework for community-based planning and deploying of transit services for people with disabilities throughout Virginia’s communities.

Unfortunately, quantifiable research can’t put a face on the pain and agony people with disabilities experience when they can’t get where they need and want to go.

During the course of assessing the need for comprehensive coordinated transportation services, people with disabilities shared their stories of frustration before public transit was available in their community. A 42-year old woman explained that she had three children and a dependent mother to care for; she said she was fired from her job because she could not count on someone to pick-up her mom from a day facility. A young man with limited income said he’d often go without medical treatment and food because he could no longer afford to pay his neighbor \$35 to transport him to the supermarket and his medical appointments.

Conveying the feelings of elation, gratitude, and hope expressed by the people who later accessed affordable, comprehensive transportation options has proven difficult within the confines of this study.

However, when the remote possibility of eliminating their frustrations was transformed into probability, the time and effort it took to plan, implement, and refine an efficient coordination effort was well worth the commitment demonstrated throughout our communities. Coordination of transit services in our community hasn’t happened overnight; in fact, we’re still working on it. And, like all worthwhile endeavors, we will continue to search for innovative ways to continue expanding mobility options for people with disabilities in our community.

As people of action, so will you.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Transportation provides independence, community connections, and access to life-sustaining activities. For most Virginians, transportation means getting in the car. But for others, it's not that easy.

According to the 2003 American Community Survey, an estimated 939,000 (14.1% of the total population) people in Virginia have a disability. Affordable, accessible transportation is especially important for people with disabilities, many of whom rely on it to get to work and actively participate in their communities. Their independence and quality of life largely depends on their capacity to get where they need to go when they need to get there.

By maintaining a steadfast pursuit of public transit service improvements and expansion within Virginia's communities, individuals with disabilities will enjoy greater access to employment, recreation, and all that Virginia's communities have to offer.

Virginia funds numerous services to support people with disabilities. These include vocational rehabilitation; behavioral science; occupational, speech, and physical therapies; independent living skills; sheltered workshops; supported employment; adult day services; and caregiver services. In order to receive these services, people need to be able to get to the organization providing the service. And, if a person with disabilities doesn't receive supportive services, he or she may need public transportation to participate in other life activities.

With this in mind, the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities funded a two-year pilot project, *Community Demonstration Coordination Demonstration Project*, to develop a model approach for community-based transportation planning and deployment. The intent is for the methods and strategies detailed in this study to be utilized by transportation professionals, those serving the disability community, human service employees, and all others seeking to conduct a community-based process to improve transportation options for the transportation disadvantaged.

There are forty public transportation systems in operation in Virginia. Although political influences, organizational infrastructures, socio-economic characteristics, and population trends vary greatly among Virginia's communities, a common framework exists for planning and implementing a community-based transportation system.

This report is intended to provide guidance garnered from one community's practical experiences with coordination efforts; strategies and methods are offered assuming a "common framework" approach.

METHODOLOGY

Research methods utilized to create this report included literature and World Wide Web searches of pertinent laws and regulations relating to transportation for individuals with disabilities and innovative solutions to the problems they face; a customer satisfaction survey; discussions with service providers, disability advocates, technology experts, and transportation planners.

FINDINGS

1. Individuals with disabilities have well-established legal rights to access publicly and privately funded transportation.
2. Numerous State Departments and agencies fund, administer, oversee, or guide programs for individuals with disabilities.
3. Transportation is the critical link between consumers and services; coordination across program boundaries at the community level increases transit options and facilitates better access to public transportation for people with disabilities.
4. Effective, efficient coordination of transportation services in the context of community-based planning and deployment embodies a common framework which can be replicated in rural and urban areas taking into account “local infrastructure”.
4. Evaluation of public transportation services provides practitioners with insight to better plan for meeting the future needs of an influx of transit-dependent Virginians.
5. The State should consider all-inclusive innovative solutions to mandate coordination of transportation services to benefit all transit dependent populations.
6. In Virginia’s present disability services system and public transportation system, data collection strategies differ from agency to agency and at the state and local level. Consequently, there is no uniform system for gathering meaningful information for planning and developing transportation services that meet identified needs of diverse populations of people with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study makes the following recommendations:

1. Enable coordinated transportation services to increase mobility options for people with disabilities and the general public.
2. Establish by statute, fund, and staff the Virginia Transportation Coordination Council (VTCC) to mandate coordination among health and human services agencies that provide transportation to clients.
3. Facilitate a consumer-service link by utilizing technology to enhance future State-wide coordination planning and deployment. Local and state agencies providing critical support services for people with disabilities could be visualized (at the local, regional, and state level) on a series of maps that enable determination of location of support services in relation to location of clusters of people with disabilities.
4. Mandate uniform data collection at the State level to gather meaningful information for planning and developing transportation services that meet identified needs of diverse populations of people with disabilities

THE FEDERAL FOUNDATION AND THE RIGHT TO ACCESS

OVERVIEW

In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) were signed into law, mandating accessibility requirements for transportation providers. Beginning with the passage of the ADA and ending with the reauthorization of the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000, the 1990s will long be remembered as pivotal years in the fight for civil rights. By prohibiting discrimination based on a disability, federal legislation has provided the legal foundation for people with disabilities to more effectively engage in life and provide for themselves.

THE FEDERAL FOUNDATION

The U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Disability Rights Section published *A Guide to Disability Rights Laws* in 1996. This guide provides an overview of seven federal civil rights laws that ensure equal opportunity for people with disabilities. To stay within the boundaries of the scope of research pertinent to this report, the review is limited to four major federal laws that have produced important changes in transportation service and policy for people with development disabilities, including:

- The Rehabilitation Act
- Americans with Disabilities Act
- Inter-modal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA)

- Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21)

Beyond federal law, court rulings can create major policy changes in services for people with disabilities across the nation. On June 22, 1999, the United States Supreme Court rendered the *Olmstead v. L.C.* ruling, which, in appropriate circumstances, stated that the ADA requires the placement of persons with disabilities in a community-integrated setting whenever possible. In the case of *Anderson v. Rochester-Genesee Regional Transit Authority* (Rochester, New York), transit systems became accountable for delivering on ADA paratransit regulations. The case determined that transit authorities were obligated to “design, fund, and implement a paratransit program that will fully meet the anticipated needs of the ADA-eligible individuals for next-day paratransit services.” It notes that capacity constraints address a transit provider’s responsibilities from a practical prospective. Trip denials will occasionally occur in the best planned transit system, but “substantial numbers” or “patterns of trip denials that significantly limit the availability of ADA paratransit eligible persons are prohibited. The Federal Transit Authority determines on case-by-case basis whether a transit authority has denied a substantial number of trips.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as Amended

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in programs conducted by federal agencies, programs that receive federal financial assistance, in federal employment, and in the employment practices of federal contractors. The Rehabilitation Act authorized formula grants to states for vocational rehabilitation, supported employment, independent living, and client assistance. It also authorized a variety of training and service discretionary grants administered by the Rehabilitation Services Administration. **Transportation is a support service that can be offered under various rehabilitative programs.**

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and the Developmental Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000

The ADA is the cornerstone of civil rights for people with disabilities. The ADA prohibits discrimination on the basis in employment, state and local government, public accommodations, commercial facilities, transportation, and telecommunications.

Title II of ADA extends the prohibition of discrimination established in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act to cover all activities of state and local governments, regardless of the government entity’s size or its acceptance of federal funding. State and local governments must give people with disabilities an equal opportunity to benefit from all government programs, services, and activities, including transportation. Public entities are required to make reasonable modifications, if it does not cause undue financial burdens to policies, practices, and procedures where necessary to avoid discrimination.

The transportation provisions of Title II cover public transportation services, such as bus systems, public rail transit, subways, commuter rails, and Amtrak. Public transportation authorities may not discriminate against people with disabilities and must comply with requirements for accessibility in newly purchased or leased vehicles or re-manufacture buses to make them accessible. Unless it would result in undue burden, transit operators must provide paratransit where fixed-route bus or rail systems operate.

The Code of Federal Regulations provides guidelines and requirements for meeting the transportation provisions of the ADA. Among the topics covered are: accessibility guidelines for transportation vehicles, standards for accessible transportation facilities and bus stops, priority seating, paratransit plan updates, paratransit eligibility for community residents and visitors, and equivalent facilitation.

Literally translated, the term “paratransit” means “alongside” transit.” It is a complementary transit service for those individuals who are unable to use the regular transit system independently due to a physical or mental impairment. Paratransit is a demand-response service; the transit provider responds to the passenger’s request for a trip made at least 24 hours to the trip.

The required complementary paratransit service area is three quarters of a mile on each side of and at the ends of each fixed-route corridor. The fare charged may be up to twice the fare charged for an individual who pays the full fare for a trip of similar length, at a similar time of day, on a transit operator’s fixed route.

The Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act were reauthorized on October 30, 2000. One of the significant changes from the previous act was to identify transportation services as a federal priority area of emphasis. The Act outlines the role of public transportation in the lives of people with developmental disabilities:

“Individuals with developmental disabilities need to have access to and use of public transportation, in order to be independent and directly contribute to and participate in all facets of community life.”

The Act defines transportation-related activities as “advocacy, capacity building, and systematic change activities that result in individuals with developmental disabilities having access to and use of transportation.”

Federal law defines developmental disabilities as a physical or mental impairment, manifested at infancy or during early years of life, and lasting for a person’s lifetime. Likewise, a person with a developmental disability may have other types of disabilities, including physical challenges that impede mobility.

The Inter-modal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) & TEA-21

In 1991, Congress enacted the Inter-modal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), which required each state to develop a statewide transportation plan that considered all modes and connections. In 1998, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) reauthorized the provisions of ISTEA with some refinements. One of the key federal program requirements continued under TEA-21 is the statewide transportation planning process. TEA-21 identifies seven broad areas to be considered in the statewide planning process. The areas relevant to public transportation service mandates in statewide planning are:

- Increase the accessibility and mobility options available to people and for freight;
- Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight; and
- Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.

In addition, TEA-21 requires a continuing comprehensive statewide planning process, which involves Federal, state, and regional agencies, as well as the public.

AT A GLANCE: VIRGINIA'S DISABILITY SERVICE SYSTEM, AND THE STATUS OF PUBLIC TRANSIT SERVICES FOR VIRGINIANS WITH DISABILITIES

OVERVIEW

While federal legislation and *The Virginia Code* provides protection for people with disabilities, the complexity and lack of cohesiveness between governing bodies negatively affect both Virginia's disability service system and transportation service system. There are highly diverse levels of leadership, commitment, resources, and accountability at both the state and local level. In Virginia's communities, the high level of fragmentation in service delivery proves challenging for local transportation systems charged with planning and deploying community-based transportation coordination.

VIRGINIA'S DISABILITY SERVICE SYSTEM

According to the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities (VBPWD), services for people with disabilities in Virginia are managed and administered in highly compartmentalized systems at both the state and local level. Critical disability services are provided by an array of over 15 agencies – each separately administered but which together operate hundreds of

local field offices, programs, boards, councils, commissions, and so forth throughout the Commonwealth.

Services at the state level are administered by numerous organizations. As a result, system oversight and opportunities for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery for people with disabilities are weakened by the lack of a formal management structure that plans, manages, administers, and coordinates related activities on behalf of people with disabilities in Virginia. An overview of Virginia's disability service system follows:

- At the Gubernatorial level, the Olmstead Community Integration Implementation Team and the Special Advisor for Workforce Development are charged with disability-related planning and oversight;
- At the Legislative level, The Disability Commission is charged with identifying and recommending legislative priorities and policies for adoption by the General Assembly. Recent priorities of the legislator/citizen advisory body include transportation.
- At the Secretariat level, six out of ten secretaries in the Governor's cabinet are charged with oversight responsibility for disability service-providing agencies and/or programs.
- Secretariat-level Advisory and Planning Councils are charged with planning and policy-making considerations pertaining to services for people with disabilities under their respective cabinet secretaries' agency. These Boards and Councils include: the Workforce Investment Council, the Board of Education, the State Council for Higher Education, and the Council on Technology and the Center for Innovative Technology. The Virginia Board for People with Disabilities is Virginia's Planning Council for People with Developmental Disabilities;
- 19 Agencies and Departments that plan and provide direct services to people with disabilities and other populations; these bodies are responsible to a Secretariat. Councils, commissions, and boards related to disability service provision and oversight are located within disability agencies; and,
- 3 Independent Agencies operate with some administrative independence to address issues pertaining to people with disabilities, including the Assistive Technology Loan Fund Authority, the Virginia Office for Protection and Advocacy, and the Virginia Housing Development Authority.

VBPWD notes the lack of a formal management structure poses a noteworthy problem at the "Secretariat" level of the state system. The "Secretariat" includes the six secretaries on the Governor's cabinet with oversight responsibilities for disability service-providing agencies and/or programs. These include the Secretaries of Commerce and Trade, Education, Health and Human Services, Public Safety, Technology, and Transportation. While the Secretary of Health and Human Services oversees a large number of the Disability Service Agencies, a significant number of services are provided under other Secretariats. At

the time this report was published, there was no authoritative planning or policy entity for people with disabilities across Secretariats, as noted by the VBPWD.

VIRGINIA'S PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

In Virginia, the oversight of transportation services for people with disabilities is distributed among the Department of Transportation, Department of Rail and Public Transportation, the Transportation Research Council, and the Department of Medical Assistance Services. An overview of the governing bodies follows:

- *Department of Transportation*, with responsibility for building, maintaining and operating the state's roads, bridges and tunnels and for overall state transportation system planning;
- *Department of Rail and Public Transportation*, with responsibility for planning, establishing, maintaining, improving, and promoting public transportation services, rail passenger and freight transportation systems;
- *Transportation Research Council*, with responsibility for the study and development of advanced transportation-related engineering technology and improved management and operational practices; and
- *Department of Medical Assistance Services*, with responsibility for non-emergency, specialized and medical transportation services for Medicaid recipients.

About VDOT

The mission of the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) is to “plan, develop, deliver and maintain, on time and on budget, the best possible transportation system for the traveling public.” The Commonwealth Transportation Board guides VDOT’s work. The Secretary of Transportation serves as chairman and the Commonwealth Transportation Commissioner as vice-chairman. The 17 Board members are appointed by the Governor and approved by the General Assembly. The Director of the Department of Rail and Public Transportation also serves as a non-voting member of the board.

VDOT has an annual budget of approximately \$2.9 billion for FY05. Nearly 60% of this amount goes toward highway construction, with 37 percent going for maintenance. VDOT funds are also used for mass transit, airports, seaports, payments to localities for maintaining their own roads, and administration. Funds also are allocated for debt payments on the state's toll roads and for operations, maintenance and improvement costs for these highways. The money comes from gasoline taxes, license tag fees, and a portion of the general sales tax.

As the Commonwealth’s chief agency for maintaining the state highway systems, VDOT’s role in supporting the transportation needs of people with disabilities, while important, is indirect, and the agency has no programs, projects, or initiatives specifically targeted toward

servicing the needs of people with disabilities except in areas of ensuring compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act in all its highway-related facilities.

About DRPT

The Code of Virginia (Title 33.1, Chapter 10.1, §§ 391.1-391.5) provides the legal basis for the creation of the Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) along with authorization for its duties. Formerly a division within VDOT, DRPT now reports directly to the Secretary of Transportation and is subject to the policy oversight of the Commonwealth Transportation Board. The agency is also represented on the state's Olmstead Implementation Team. State statute directs DRPT:

- To formulate and implement plans and programs for improvement, development and coordination of innovative technological transportation initiatives with the Department of Transportation;
- To coordinate research, policy analysis, and planning with the Department of Transportation to ensure effectiveness, safety, and efficiency;
- To develop uniform financial and operating data on and criteria for evaluating all public transportation activities;
- To provide training and other technical support services for improvement;
- To maintain liaisons with state, local, district and federal agencies or other entities, private and public, having responsibilities for public transportation programs;
- To receive, administer, and allocate all grant program monies from the Federal Transit Administration, the Federal Railroad Administration, the Federal Highway Administration, and other agencies of the US government as well as all state grants;
- To promote the use of services to improve the mobility of Virginia's citizens and the transportation of goods and safety in the delivery of the services;
- To represent the Commonwealth on local, regional, and national agencies, industry associations, committees, task forces, and other entities, public and private, having responsibility for services; and
- To represent the Commonwealth's interests and coordinate with the Department of Transportation in the planning, location, design, construction, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, purchase, and rehabilitation of facilities and services that affect or are used by passenger and freight rail, transportation demand management, ridesharing, or public transportation.

DRPT's three primary areas of focus are on Rail, Public Transportation, and Ridesharing. The department also works closely with VDOT and other state agencies responsible for other modes of transportation such as aviation, shipping and waterways. DRPT provides advice, technical support, and funds for passenger rail and public bus operators, including paratransit services.

EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE COORDINATION STATEWIDE

The Commonwealth of Virginia does not mandate coordination of transportation services nor does state funding for public transportation have any requirement for coordination. However, Virginia provides state funds to leverage Federal funds for public transportation services. The Federal Transportation funds that Virginia receives through TEA-21 are required to be coordinated to a certain degree. The amount and degree of coordination are not specifically defined.

The Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation along with the Virginia Department for the Aging, and the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities have had a positive influence on the development of coordinated public transportation systems.

DRPT specifically encourages the coordination of transportation service through its distribution of Federal Section 5310 funds. In order to receive Section 5310 funds, a recipient must demonstrate its level of coordination for transportation services.

The Specialized Transportation Council (STC) was created in 1992 under Title 9, Chapter 40 of the Virginia Code. STC was created to support the development of safe, cost-effective, coordinated specialized transportation services for elderly and disabled Virginians. The Secretary of Health and Human Services is designated as the chairman of this interagency council, and the Secretary of Transportation is the vice-chairman. The purpose of the council is to recommend strategies, standards, policies, and guidelines for the development of coordinated specialized transportation services for people with disabilities and the elderly. The STC was only active between 1994 and 1996.

Although efforts to coordinate transportation services exist, transit dependent populations would benefit from a legislative mandate of state and local public transportation systems. States such as Florida, New Jersey, and Ohio have enacted legislative mandates to coordinate human services transportation services. New Jersey and Ohio have mandated that counties develop coordination plans and submit them to the state. In Florida, the legislature created an independent agency charged with overseeing the transportation activities of state and local agencies.

Suggestions for Coordination at the State Level

Statewide transportation coordination requires a close working relationship among diverse public transit and human services providers to demonstrate positive benefits for all participants. One of the major challenges confronting efforts to coordinate at the state level is that transit service delivery takes place at the local level.

Several states have convened regional transportation coordination summits to garner stakeholder support, including local and regional transit operations, city and county transportation and human service agencies, health care providers, employers, etc. This approach has been successful in a number of states in educating stakeholders on the benefits of coordination and in generating enthusiasm to pursue efforts at the local level.

For example, The Maryland Mass Transit Administration, in conjunction with state and regional human services and transportation agencies, held a series of regional transportation summits across the state. Each forum included an introduction of the concept of coordination, an overview of the process, and a facilitated discussion aimed at initiating a local coordination process in each region. Following these meetings, transportation coordination efforts were initiated in several regions and counties throughout Maryland.

A MODEL APPROACH FOR VIRGINIA'S COMMUNITIES

ISSUES THAT AFFECT TRANSPORTATION SOLUTIONS

In communities throughout Virginia, improving transportation options to meet the mobility needs of individuals, particularly transit dependent populations, is a need. The need will continue to increase as Virginia's population continues to age.

The planning and deployment of transit services for transit dependent populations can not be met with a "one size fits all" philosophy. Each Virginian with disabilities needs a set of transportation solutions tailored to his or her life, travel needs, and desires. Among the factors that will determine the best options are the consumer's type of disability or disabilities, age, residence type and location, employment status, financial resources, degree of physical mobility, the transportation resources of the household, and the transportation options available in the individual's respective community. Communities throughout the Commonwealth will need to take these factors into account when planning and deploying coordination activities.

For instance, an individual may have one or more disabilities. These include developmental, physical, mental/emotional, cognitive, and other health-related disabilities. Disability type and the degree of mobility can determine the consumer's ability to board a vehicle, the level of comfort and safety experienced when riding in a vehicle, the ability to interact with people, knowledge of how to use transportation, and the types of extent of personal assistance needed.

The consumer's location within the State and the consumer's proximity to jobs, training programs, and rehabilitation centers will influence the cost and availability of agency-sponsored or alternative transportation services. Work location is a factor. Sheltered workshops often operate their own vehicles and transport employees in an agency vehicle. Employment centers in urban areas are more likely to be accessible through a municipal transit system than are employment opportunities in rural communities. In addition, more varied options in transportation services exist in areas of greater population density.

GUIDING STANDARDS

According to the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), past success stories indicate concepts and activities are inherent when planning for community-based transportation. Methods and strategies to build community coalitions, gather information on resources and needs, and develop action plans are those fundamental elements in transportation planning.

Mindful of the important role that planning plays in improving mobility for people with disabilities, the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities awarded Four County Transit of Cedar Bluff, Virginia, grant monies to demonstrate effective mechanisms for establishing community-based plans to expand transportation services for Virginians with disabilities.

Four County Transit used the “Guiding Standards” as indicated by CTAA to detail the organization’s model approach for public transportation coordination. The “Guiding Standards” are illustrated followed by the transit system’s innovative approaches and outcomes.

A BRIEF HISTORY

Four County Transit is a fully coordinated public transportation system serving a rural four county area. In the organization’s seven year history, it has grown from a little known broker of Medicaid Transportation services to a vital community agency with a diverse client base, a focused mission, and multiple funding sources.

Four County Transit is not only required to serve multiple rural county jurisdictions but is also situated so that it serves multiple states (VA, Tennessee, and Kentucky). Coordination across jurisdictional lines is simply a way of life.

Given the organization’s unique experience, Four County Transit has become an outstanding model within the Commonwealth of Virginia to demonstrate community-based coordination that increases public transportation in rural communities. The program typifies the Federal Administration’s focus on transportation as a strategic community investment that strengthens the economy, protects the environment, and maximizes the freedom of mobility for all citizens.

Four County Transit’s “pipeline” for service expansion indicates coordination initiatives are working and expanding in our communities. Thus, the organization’s efforts exemplify how communities can increase public transportation services through greater community-based and regional coordination.

Four County Transit is proud of its deep commitment to promoting independence, and opportunity to access life sustaining activities through the successful coordination of transportation services among human service agencies and transportation providers.

CURRENT STATS

Sponsoring Organization: Appalachian Agency for Senior Citizens, a 4-county Area Agency on Aging

City, State: Cedar Bluff, Virginia

Service Area: Four County Transit provides demand responsive, fixed route service, and chartered transportation services in the rural counties of Buchanan, Dickenson, Russell, and Tazewell.

Service Area Size: 1830 sq miles in Buchanan, Dickenson, Russell, and Tazewell County

One-Way Trips Per Year: 94,060*

Annual Expenses: \$1.47 million*

Cost Per Trip: \$15.67*

Number of Vehicles: 53*

**Data presented is for program year July 1, 2004 – July 30-, 2005.*

Coordinating Agencies: Buchanan County Board of Supervisors, Buchanan County Department of Social Services, Buchanan County Disabilities Service Board, Clinch Independent Living Center, Clinch Valley Community Action, Cumberland Mountain Community Services Board, Cumberland Plateau Health District, Cumberland Plateau Planning Commission, Dickenson County Board of Supervisors, Dickenson County Department of Social Services, Dickenson County Disability Services Board, Dickenson County School Board, Generations Adult Day Care, Graham Transit (Town of Bluefield), Lebanon Town Transit, OXBOW Center, Russell County Board of Supervisors, Russell County Department of Social Services, Russell County Disabilities Service Board, Southwest Virginia Community College, Tazewell County Board of Supervisors, Tazewell County Disabilities Service Board, Tazewell County Department of Social Services, Virginia Department for the Blind & Visually Impaired; Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services, Visually Impaired Support Group (Riders), and Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation.

Services: Four County Transit provides regular route and door to door transportation services for general public riders with a focus on personal with limited transportation options. Services are provided from 7:30 a.m. through 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, and from 10 a.m. through 6 p.m. on the first Saturday of the month.

Riders include senior citizens, persons with disabilities, low income individuals, the general public, and children.

COMMUNITY COALITIONS

Recognizing the potential problems created by uncoordinated approaches to specialized and human service transportation, the **Cumberland Plateau Community Transportation Coordination Advisory Committee**, consisting of all relevant factions in Four County Transit's multi-county service area were asked to engage in a process to help determine how to improve and meet the transportation needs of people with disabilities.

Four County Transit has been the lead public transportation agency within our planning district for several years, so we did not hesitate to assume the lead role in fostering efforts to better coordinate services for people with disabilities. Essentially, 29 community-based organizations charged with the planning and implementation of a pre-established disability service continuum were called upon to provide a representative to guide a process that would:

- determine unmet needs, and identify barriers in our multi-county area,
- gain broad stakeholder input on transit service priorities, needs, and solutions in our community,
- develop a detailed accessibility plan and agreements involving all relevant providers,
- develop a comprehensive training program for all involved groups on steps to request transit service,
- provide a supportive outreach network to increase knowledge of transit service options , and
- form the basis for ongoing dialogue among all stakeholders.

Through the community-building process, a set of guiding principals was agreed upon by the advisory committee, serving as a measure of evaluation for the committee's success. These principles included that the priority setting process:

- be inclusive, building trust and support among stakeholders,
- evolve over time in its complexity and scope,
- have clear and reasonable expectations, and
- provide ongoing communication to all stakeholders in the multi-county service area and beyond when appropriate, by reporting actions taken by the project advisory team.

Stakeholders within the community along with input from riders with disabilities indicated a fixed route service would expand options for people with disabilities and provide for reasonable cost containment.

In order to proceed with the establishment of fixed route services, Four County Transit leadership attended Board of Supervisors' meetings in each County. Local support was attained from each county on a 3-month trial basis. With the assistance of technology, Four County Transit tracked services to reflect demand from riders for continued fixed route service. As a result, Four County Transit is providing seven fixed route services which include service throughout our multi-county area.

Beyond requirements of the ADA, Four County Transit offers a deviated fixed route system to better serve the needs of people with disabilities. Individuals can call Four County Transit 24 hours in advance and request that a van deviate (up to 2 miles) from the established route.

While Four County Transit did not attain Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with all committee representatives, informal arrangements and "letters of support" from community-based organizations did result in leveraging more vehicles and, most importantly, the lines of communication among service providers serving people with disabilities remain in tact. Local service agencies know who to contact to access transportation for their clients with disabilities and how to refer a client for transit services via a web-based request.

On the State level, we found that Maryland set a good example for statewide coalition building efforts. Governor Parris N. Glendening issued an executive order that created the Maryland Coordinating Committee for Human Services Transportation. The committee is composed of representatives of numerous government agencies, including the Department of Transportation, Maryland Mass Transit Administration, the Department of Human Resources, the Department of Human Resources, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and the Department of Aging. The committee has focused on creating successful regional networks to facilitate flexible and responsive transportation solutions among service providers. Four County Transit found Maryland's mechanism for creating viable community coalitions beyond "MOUs" to be more readily acceptable in our planning district.

Four County Transit's leadership continues to work diligently to develop and sustain partnerships with decision-making bodies and human service organizations in each of the communities we serve. As a result of calculating and communicating the benefits of establishing a coordinated system to community stakeholders, we have been particularly effective in collaboration across public transit systems and human service programs resulting in our ability to provide more citizens than ever before with access to affordable, convenient, and reliable transportation services.

Highlights of Four County Transit's coordination and comprehensive service provision for as a result of community partnerships include:

- Customers can cross jurisdictional boundaries on the Four Seasons Connection, an intercity service, with transfer capability with Graham Transit of Bluefield, Virginia, and Bluefield West Virginia Area Transit;

- An agreement with Mountain Empire Older Citizens and District Three Governmental Cooperative to provide a regional Veterans Transit service bridged another an unneeded boundary for our veterans;
- A contract with Greyhound Bus service allows Four County Transit to serve as a licensed ticket agent so that customers can easily access the Greyhound Bus terminals in Abingdon, Virginia, and Bluefield, West Virginia;
- The creation of seven fixed routes, made possible by partnering with multiple boards of supervisors and town councils, enables people to “catch the bus” five days a week and the first Saturday in each month within multiple rural jurisdictions;
- The SVCC Eagle Express, a deviated fixed route established through a partnership with the Buchanan, Russell, and Tazewell County Boards of Supervisors provides students with transportation to Southwest Virginia Community College. Participants of the Cumberland Mountain Community Services board and public transit also use the service to maximize trip coordination;
- Partnered with local Disability Service Boards and the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities to provide a total of 1,746 hours of transportation or 2,173 one-way trips for 144 individuals with developmental and physical/sensory disabilities;
- Partnerships include the provision of transportation to work for VIEW (welfare to work) clients and recurring transportation for elderly and disabled individuals to Generations Adult Daycare and Appalachian Agency for Senior Citizens’ senior congregate centers.

Four County Transit encourages systems to understand their planning district’s “local setting” prior to making key contacts for coalition building purposes. Four County Transit’s leadership considered the following groundwork prior to establishing advisory committee for this project: **local political structure, recent local history, transportation resources, community educational resources, and local political economy.**

INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES

Four County Transit’s Take on Technology

Four County Transit’s management team, support staff, and operators began collaborating with our Information Technology (IT) Department in 2001 to plan, develop, and deploy an

affordable yet powerful software solution that would help us achieve our goal of expanding services to meet the transportation needs from local residents in real-time. Coordination efforts were spearheaded by results from a 2001 Needs Assessment Survey in our area that indicated public transportation as the number one unmet need in our 4-county area.

In 2004, TRACI (Transportation Resources and Coordinated Information) - an enterprise transportation management solution- provided the tools needed to foster greater coordinated transportation efforts in our community. TRACI provided the following benefits:

- Increase in productivity,
- Reduction in time spent on daily operations,
- Optimized human and capital resources,
- Improved service quality, and
- Ensured optimal use of our fleet,

The features of software demonstration deemed most beneficial by Four County Transit's staff included: advanced scheduling features, automated billing and reporting features, a comprehensive maintenance monitoring tool, and management reports to track ridership and plan for future needs.

Four County Transit is confident technology has been vital to the transformation of our core business processes and will be vital to the success of other transit systems charged with assuming the lead role in community-based transportation planning.

The Impact of Technology

In 2001 (pre-coordination), Four County Transit provided 25,444 one-way trips and accrued 1.19 million miles; in 2003(the first year we utilized our new technology and achieved full coordination), we provided 54,886 one way trips and traveled only 531,345 miles.

In addition, our rider-ship grew 36%; we hired 1 additional operator but provided 29,442 additional trips, and reduced deadhead mileage by 77%.

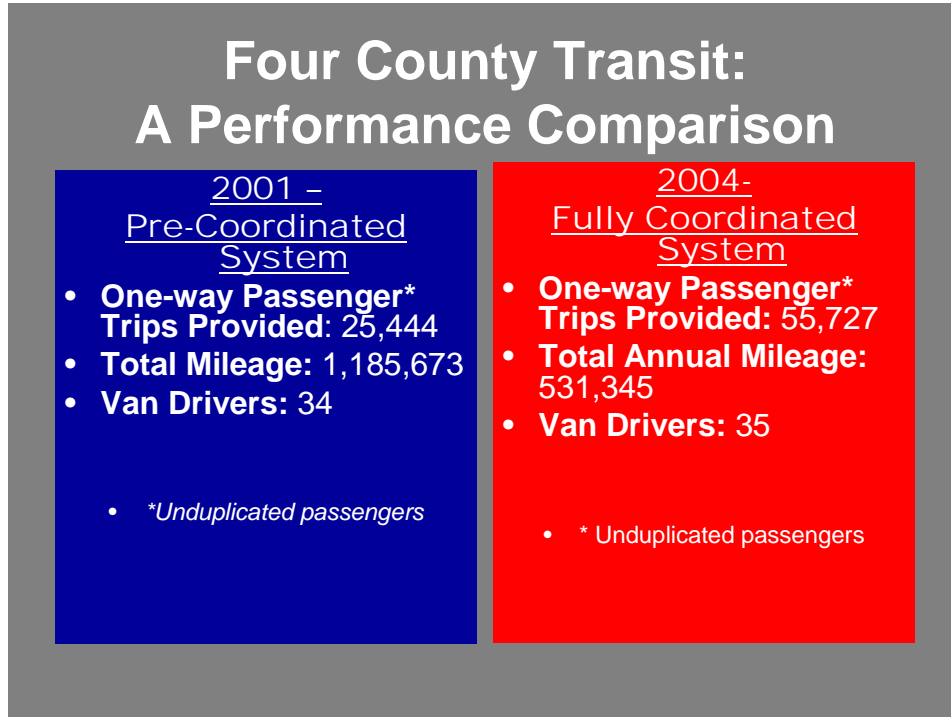
In a nutshell, our utilization of technology has enabled the routine documentation and communication the benefits of coordination to the public and community decision-makers.

The Quantifiable Results

Policy debates about transportation improvements typically focus on the need for increased resources to fund new initiatives. However, a growing number of states are using coordination to increase mobility and create a more seamless transportation system without new investments.

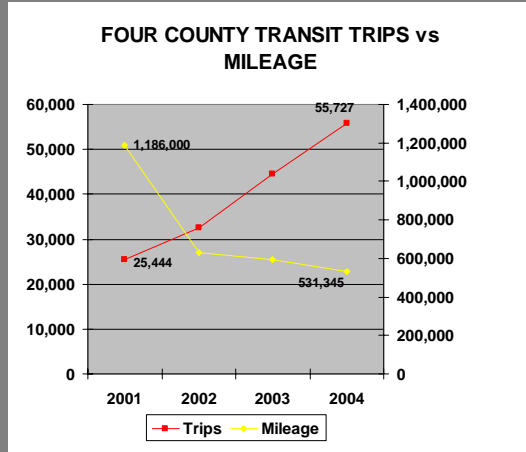
Greater coordination between public transportation and ancillary transportation programs frees up sufficient resources to substantially improve overall public transportation service delivery. In a comparison of the cost and efficiency of transportation services before and after coordination, CORI, Inc., a software solutions business, presented a case study

detailing significant improvement in resource allocations. Following are selections from a power point presentation CORI, Inc., showed at the Community Transportation Association of Virginia EXPO in Roanoke, Virginia, in October 2004, detailing the quantifiable results Four County Transit achieved following coordination:



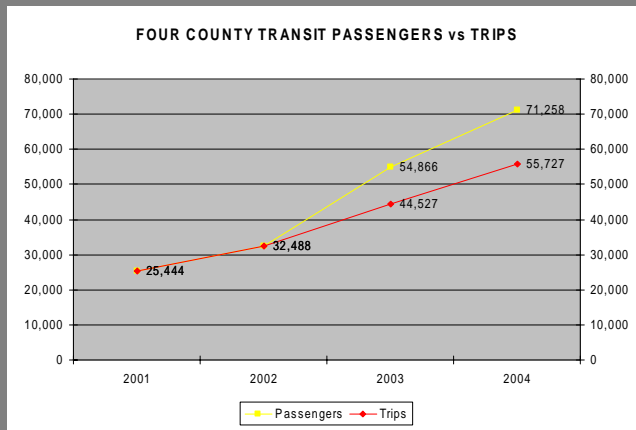
Upon achieving fully coordinated status, Four County Transit increased one-way passenger trips by 57% and reduced total mileage required to achieve increase in services by 71%.

Trips vs. Mileage: The Visible Difference Technology Makes Comparing 2001 to 2003

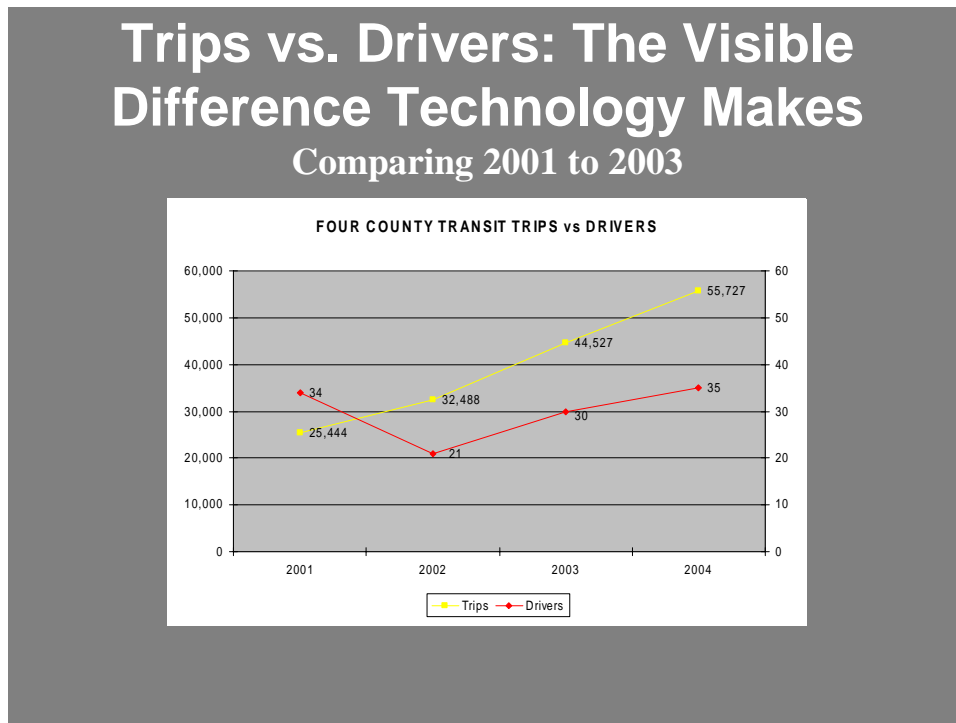


This chart further emphasizes how coordination will increase service delivery and make better use of available resources. By 2004, Four County Transit provided 55,727 one-way trips and accrued only 531,346 miles on our fleet.

Passengers vs. Trips: The Visible Difference Technology Makes Comparing 2001 to 2003



This chart reflects the increasing number of passengers transported in 2003 and 2004 following Four County Transit's coordination efforts. As community-coalition building increased from 2003 to 2004, the number of passengers transported increased by nearly 77%.



Following coordination, Four County Transit was able to provide 46% more trips with one more van operator (comparing 2001 to 2004).

PERSONNEL TRAINING

As noted, people with disabilities come in all shapes and sizes with diverse abilities, needs, and preferences – just like every other customer. In most cases, the best way to learn how to accommodate people with disabilities is to ask them. However, from practical experience, providing training to staff and consumers produces beneficial results.

Under the ADA, all transit personnel must be trained to handle the needs of persons with disabilities. The regulations state:

Each public or private entity which operates a fixed route or demand responsive system shall ensure that personnel are trained to proficiency, as appropriate to their duties, so that they operate vehicles and equipment safely and properly assist and treat individuals who use the service in a respectful and courteous way, with appropriate attention to the differences among individuals with disabilities.

Although the regulations do not mandate specific training requirements, an effective transit personnel training program should include:

- Training on ADA requirements that are relevant to your system
- Interactive awareness-building and informational training for personnel, including leadership, drivers, schedulers, coordinators, and dispatchers.
- Training on the operation, maintenance, and preventive maintenance of accessible equipment, including wheelchair lifts.
- Training for drivers on the basic principles and mechanics of safe securement of wheelchairs and other mobility devices.

Below are some of the guidelines suggested by the Department of Labor to consider when planning customer service training. Four County Transit shares these guidelines with personnel in the organization's bi-annual *Sensitivity & Customer Service Training* sessions :

Serving Customers Who are Blind or Visually Impaired

- Speak to the customer when you approach him or her.
- State clearly who you are; speak in a normal tone of voice.
- Never touch or distract a service dog without first asking.
- Tell the customer when you are leaving; never leave a person who is blind talking to an empty space.
- Do not attempt to lead the customer without first asking; allow the customer to hold your arm and control his or her own movements.
- Be descriptive when giving directions, give the customer verbal information that is visually obvious to persons who can see. For example, if you are approaching steps mention how many and the direction.
- Make sure the customer has picked up all of his or her possessions before leaving.
- Offer assistance if the customer appears to be having difficulty.

Serving Customers Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

- Gain his or her attention before starting a conversation (i. e. tap the person gently on the shoulder or arm.
- Identify who you are (i.e., show them your name badge).

- Look directly at the customer, face the light, speak clearly, in a normal tone of voice, and keep your hands away from your face; use short, simple sentences.
- Ask the customer if it would be helpful to communicate by writing or by using a computer terminal.
- If the customer uses a sign language interpreter, speak directly to the customer, not the interpreter.
- If you telephone a customer who is hard of hearing, let the phone ring longer than usual; speak clearly and be prepared to repeat the reason for the call and who you are.
- If you telephone a customer who is deaf, use a TTY.

Serving customers with mobility impairments

- Put yourself at the wheelchair user's eye level.
- Do not lean on a wheelchair or any other assistive device.
- Do not assume the customer wants to be pushed – ask first.
- If a person uses crutches, a walker, or some other assistive equipment, offer assistance with coats, bags, or other belongings.
- If you telephone the customer, allow the phone to ring longer than usual to allow extra time for him or her to reach the phone.

Serving customers with speech impairments

- If you do not understand something do not pretend that you do; ask the customer what he or she said and then repeat it back.
- Be patient; take as much time as necessary.
- Try to ask questions which require only short answers, or a nod of the head.
- Concentrate on what the customer is saying; concentrate on listening and communicating.
- Do not speak for the customer or attempt to finish his or her sentences.
- If you are having difficulty understanding the customer, consider writing as an alternative means of communicating, but first ask the customer if this is acceptable.

- If no solution to the communication problem can be work out between you and the customer, ask if there is someone who could interpret on the customer's behalf.

Serving customers with cognitive disabilities

- Be prepared to provide an explanation more than once.
- Offer assistance with and/or extra time for completion of forms, understanding written instructions, and/or decision making; wait for the customer to accept the offer of assistance; do not “over assist” or be patronizing
- Be patient, flexible, and supportive; take time to understand the customer and make sure the customer understands you.

Proper Etiquette

- Remember to provide access services
- Relax.
- Listen to customer.
- Maintain eye contact without staring.
- Make the customer feel comfortable.
- Treat the customer with dignity, respect, and courtesy.
- Ask the customer to tell you the best way to help.
- Deal with unfamiliar situations in a calm, professional manner.

CONSUMER TRAINING

Many transit systems are taking an active role in training consumers to use transportation services and facilities. Some important considerations in developing and carrying out a consumer training program include the following activities:

- Providing hands on training.
- Giving information and guidance targeted at people with a variety of disabilities.
- Conducting training on requirements of the ADA pertinent to your system.
- Addressing safety issues and procedures, such as how to avoid personal injury and what actions to take in the event of an accident or emergency.

- Effectively communicating consumer needs to transit personnel.

From practical experience, consumer training will yield increased cost savings to Virginia's transit systems, as well as increasing community support. Sheltered workshops like those operated by Cumberland Mountain Community Service in Cedar Bluff can be utilized to train developmentally disabled workers to ride fixed routes; this will able transit systems to shift a significant portion of riders to more cost-effective fixed route service. It also increases the mobility of these riders, who are now able to ride Four County Transit vans to a variety of shopping and recreational destinations.

OUTREACH

Part of putting customers first is reaching out to the customer who may have no history of using transit or is more accustomed to program specific rides. Thus, Four County Transit has a major outreach program to target the general public and transit dependent populations. Components of our 2004 marketing campaign, *Need a Ride?*, include print advertising, a user-friendly website, news releases, collateral materials, direct mailings, billboard ads, and public service announcements. In every element of our campaign, we encouraged senior citizens and people with disabilities to call us and receive a free pass to utilize the service. Specific highlights from our marketing campaign include: six billboards located in communities that operate fixed route services hit the streets in November 2004, a series of three ½ page ads were run in relevant local newspaper(s) and the *Appalachian Mountaineer* (a publication targeting the local mature market) each time we launched a new fixed route, three additional print ads were released in local newspapers when fixed-route schedules changed, bus stops for each communities' fixed route service (i.e., Cedar Bluff Connection) were placed at stops along the scheduled route, news releases(i.e., "Four Seasons Connection: Local Systems Launch Partnership to "Bridge" Statelines", November 1, 2004, *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, *Richlands News Press*, *Tazewell County Free Press*) were printed, and news releases to publicize rider-ship and to encourage public attendance at town meetings were printed prior to the end of routes' 2-month trial period (i.e., "Lebanon Transit In Demand", *The Lebanon News*, December 13, 2004.).

Additional initiatives to build awareness include the distribution of a general Four County Transit brochures (AASC's care coordination team refills our brochure unit quarterly) as well as a summary detailing Four County Transit's progress and provision of service in the Appalachian Agency for Senior Citizens' annual report; these two items are distributed to all health care providers, civic organizations, and human service organizations. Public service announcements were aired on local radio stations, and we sponsored a weekly "rider giveaway" in December 2004 to encourage more people to ride transit. The local news media printed photos of contest winners.

Providing greater mobility for all residents is the vision driving Four County Transit's business philosophy. Four County Transit's marketing strategy aims to ensure the community is aware of the transit services available, and they have the opportunity to share their concerns and comments about our existing services and the need for service expansion.

Four County Transit has found that ongoing **public education activities** that both familiarize the general population with public transportation services and informs transit dependent populations about the benefits of using fixed route transit service is vital to the acceptance, and ultimately the success, of coordination efforts.

Publicizing the availability and quality of transportation service builds trust among stakeholders, and outreach efforts allow people with disabilities the opportunity to make informed decisions about using and/or identifying the support they need to use fixed route services.

Samples of Four County Transit's public education campaign materials are featured in the Appendix.

CONCLUSION

While innovative strategies will help attain quantifiable results and expedite coordination activities including increase of transportation availability and access, elimination of duplicative efforts, enhance system service quantity and quality, and improve cost effectiveness, there must first exist strong leadership, community partnership, and an ongoing forum that stays focused on overall transportation goals and responds to evolving needs.

THE SURVEY

ABOUT THE SURVEY

The Virginia Board for People with Disabilities requested that a customer satisfaction survey be conducted to evaluate the success of the project and to identify the problems that customers experienced. Four County Transit in collaboration with advisory committee members drafted a 10-question anonymous and confidential survey that addressed some of quality of life issues affected by transportation access. Participation was voluntary. The survey instrument included questions related to: the purpose of the trip, the frequency of use; transportation options that were most helpful; and the impact of improved transportation options on the subject's life.

In creating the survey, input was gathered by the Four County Transit from various agencies including but not limited to developmental disability service providers, adult day facilities, and Centers for Independent Living (CIL). After receiving final approval from the advisory committee, Four County Transit distributed 200 surveys in June 2005 to human service providers throughout the multi-county service area. The survey was limited to adult consumers.

Seventy-six (76) surveys were returned. Of these, seventy (70) had been completed. Six (6) of the original surveys were unusable and were omitted from the analysis. The number

of respondents from each county was dependent on the number of people served in the county and the level of interest of the agencies and consumers participating in the survey. The data provided by this number of subjects will provide a snapshot of the views of adults with disabilities residing in Four County Transit's rural multi-county service area.

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

A person with a disability or someone who assisted the person could complete the survey. Sixty (60) surveys out of the 70 surveys returned were returned with a box checked to indicate who had completed the survey. Of these, 55% were completed by the "customer" (person with disability); 20% by a parent, guardian, or friend; 15% by a case manager, and 10% by "other".

Surveys were analyzed according to the following three parameters:

1. **Global** – All surveys were analyzed for a regional view.
2. **Geographic** – Surveys were analyzed by respondent's county of residence.
3. **Mobility/ Special Needs** – Surveys were analyzed by the respondent's indication of boarding method (stairs or wheelchair lift).

Geographic Profile of Survey Respondents

At the top of the survey questionnaire, before numbered questions began, respondents were asked to check their county of residence. This information was sought to permit researchers the ability to locate respondents geographically while maintaining each respondent's anonymity. Of the 70 surveys returned and used for analysis, 60 respondents indicated county of residence. Respondents completing the survey indicated: 14 resided in Buchanan County; 12 resided in Dickenson County; 14 resided in Russell County; and, 20 resided in Tazewell County. Respondents living in rural areas are overrepresented as a whole on this survey; 27% of Virginia's total populations live in rural areas of the state (as opposed to urban areas).

Using Public Transportation

The survey included several questions about respondents' use and experience of public transportation. Question 1 asked survey respondents, "Do you ever use public transportation?" Possible answers were "Yes" and "No". If respondents answered "No," the respondents were asked to skip the subsequent series of questions and answer question 10. 90% of respondents indicated "Yes" they had used public transportation, 10% reported "No" they had not used public transportation.

Of those people who reported using public transportation:

- 10% use it one day a week;
- 15% use it 2 days a week;
- 12 % use it three days a week;
- 20% use it four days a week,
- and, 43% use it five days as week.

Nearly half of the respondents indicated they use public transportation 5 days a week, which is especially significant given limited weekend scheduling (at the time this report was issued, Four County Transit provided fixed route public transportation service one Saturday a month).

Availability of Service

As noted, **63 respondents reported having used public transportation, while 7 respondents said they have not used public transportation.** The 63 respondents who had used public transportation were asked, “*Is public transportation available on all the days and times when you need it?*” Possible answers were “*Yes*” and “*No*”. In response to the question, 40% of respondents answered “*Yes*” it is available when they need it. 55% answered “*No*” that it was not available on all the days and times when they need it; 5 % did not answer the question.

When the service availability question was analyzed, respondents from Tazewell County reported better availability of public transportation when they need it as opposed to respondents from other counties.

These results tend to indicate that over half of the respondents who are using public transportation would use it more often if it were offered when they needed it.

Method of Boarding Van

The 70 respondents who indicated they had used public transportation were asked, “*How do you get on the van or bus?*” Possible answers were “*use steps*” or “*use wheelchair lift*”. 5 respondents did not answer this question. **88% of respondents indicated they use steps to board the van when using public transportation; while 12% use a wheelchair lift.**

Service & Operator Rating

The 70 respondents who indicated they used public transportation were asked to “Rate the level of satisfaction with Four County Transit’s transportation service.” Possible answers were: *Poor, Average, Good, or Outstanding*. **80% of respondents rated Four County Transit’s transportation service as Average, Good, or Outstanding, while 18% of respondents rated the service poor, and 2 % did not respond to the question.**

The 70 respondents who indicated they used public transportation were asked to “Rate the courtesy and helpfulness of the drivers.” Possible answers were: *Poor, Average, Good, or Outstanding*. **Driver courtesy and helpfulness were rated as average, good, or outstanding by 85% of respondents. Fifty five percent of respondents rated driver courtesy better than average (good or outstanding).**

An overwhelming majority of respondents were satisfied with public transportation service and driver helpfulness and courtesy.

Usual mode of transportation to activities

In question 7, a multipart question, respondents were asked to “Check the appropriate box for the way you most often get to and from each activity.” Possible answers were: *Walk. Drive myself. Ride with family, friend, or coworker. Four County Transit. Taxi.* Six categories of activity were offered: *Medical. Leisure. Shopping. Employment Related. Education and Training. Attend A Meeting.* Respondents were told for this series of questions they could “Check only one box that applies to you.”

Method of Transportation for Medical Purposes

Of the 62 respondents answering this question, “*Four County Transit*” (**public transportation**) **was the method most often used for medical related purposes; “Four County Transit” was indicated by 38 respondents.** Of all modes transportation is used for a medical-related purpose following, “*Drive myself*” is the second most used method with 12 respondents followed by “*Ride with a family member, friend*”, or “*Coworker.*” with 4 respondents selecting , and “*Taxi*” was last method selected with only 1 respondent. Seven people answered incorrectly by checking more than one response.

Method of Transportation for Leisure Purposes

Of the 57 respondents answering this question, **23 of them indicated they “Ride with family, friend, or coworker.”; 20 indicated they use “Four County Transit”** to receive transportation for recreational activities; 8 indicated they “*drive myself*”; and, 3 indicated

that they “walk.” Three respondents answered incorrectly by choosing more than one response to the question.

Method of Transportation for Shopping

Of the 60 respondents answering this question, **27 indicated they “Ride with family, friend, or coworker” to go shopping; 18 indicated they shop via “Four County Transit” service;** 4 respondents selected “Drive Myself”; and, 1 Respondent selected “Taxi”. Ten respondents answered incorrectly by choosing more than one response to the question.

Method of Transportation for Education or Training

Of the 42 respondents answering this question, **29 said they received transportation to “Education and Training” from “Four County Transit”.** 6 respondents selected “Drive Myself”, 4 indicated “Ride with family, friend, or coworker.”, and 3 answered the question incorrectly by selecting more than one response.

Method of Transportation for Employment Related Activities

Of the 59 respondents answering this question, **32 said they accessed transportation for “Employment Related” activities by means of “Family, friend, or coworker”.** 7 respondents indicated “Four County Transit;”, 5 respondents indicated “Drive Myself.”; 5 respondents indicated “walk”; and, 10 respondents answered the question incorrectly by selecting more than one response.

Method of Transportation for Meetings

Of the 60 respondents answering this question, **22 said “Family, friend, or coworker” was the method of transportation used to attend meeting; 20 indicated “Four County Transit”;** 11 respondents indicated “Drive Myself”; and 6 respondents indicated “walk”. One respondent answered the question incorrectly by selecting more than one response.

The Most Helpful Transportation Options

In question 8, respondents were asked, “Has having access to transportation services improved your life?” The response to the question could be “No. Maybe. Yes. or Absolutely”. Of the 65 people who responded to the question, **52 respondents indicated “Yes” or “Absolutely” regarding the impact access to transportation services had on their quality of life. Only 8 respondents checked “No” to the question.** 5 respondents selected more than one answer to the question.

In question 9, Respondents were asked, “Do you prefer to schedule your trips by calling Four County Transit ahead of time or simply “catching the bus?”” The purpose of this question was to determine the value of new fixed route services to people with disabilities. **69 respondents answered this question. 41 respondents indicated they preferred to “catch the bus”; 20 respondents indicated they preferred to “Call Ahead to Schedule Trip”.** 8 respondents were rendered unusable, as both boxes were checked.

The survey reflects the likelihood that access to transportation dramatically improves quality of life for most people with disabilities; it also suggests that the fixed route system integrated into Four County Transit’s continuum of services is frequently used and preferred as opposed to demand-responsive service by people with disabilities.

Reasons for not using public transportation

The 7 respondents who had not ever used public transportation were asked, “*If you do not use public transportation, explain what not.*” Possible answers were: “*Do not need it, Not convenient, Not offered when I need it, Can not afford it, or other.*” 6 respondents indicated they did not need public transportation; one respondent indicated public transportation was not convenient. Respondents did not represent a significant segment of the population; therefore, an accurate estimate concerning reasons people do not use public transportation was not attained.

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

The survey of people with disabilities utilizing transit services near the end of the project grant period revealed the following:

- 80% of survey respondents ranked satisfaction level with public transportation service as average to outstanding;
- 90% of survey respondents said they used public transportation services at least one day a week;
- 60% of survey respondents indicated they preferred fixed route transportation services in the community over demand-response service;
- 85% of respondents indicated average to outstanding drivers’ courtesy level ; and,

- 55% of survey respondents indicated public transportation service was not available on **all** of the days and times they needed it.

The data are clear. Public transportation has a positive impact on the lives of people with disabilities who responded to the survey. The effects can be measured in terms of greater access to medical appointments, accesses to needed education, and other life sustaining services.

Respondents want convenient public transportation options. They want public transit services expanded beyond what Four County Transit is currently offering in fixed routes. However, they are using existing fixed route service and prefer this to demand-response scheduling. It is significant to note that only 12% of respondents required a wheelchair lift.

A copy of the survey instrument is presented in the Appendix.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study included the review of federal and state statutes pertaining to transportation for people with disabilities: an assessment of primary and support services, information gathered from providers, advocates, and clients; performance of client transportation survey; and a model approach to community-based transportation services.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Lack of transportation negatively affects a large number of Virginians with disabilities.

In all aspects of their lives, people with disabilities who are unable to drive or who cannot afford an automobile must find solutions to their transportation needs. Interviews with consumers and client survey results include how greatly the absence of affordable, reliable, and accessible transportation options affects individuals.

2. Public transportation is one of the most important modes of travel for people with disabilities who responded to the survey.
 - 90% use public transportation at least once a week.
 - 43 % of those who use public transportation use it five or more days a week.
 - 80% rate public transportation service as average to outstanding, but 55% report that public transportation is not available on **all** of the days and times

when they need it, suggesting an unmet need for expanded hours or greater frequency of source.

3. Transportation affects quality of life.

An individual's ability to travel wherever and whenever desired supports independence and enhances quality of life. Transportation to support services and medical care are essential to a person's life. However, the ability to visit friends and family and participate in community activities, the opportunity to interact with others is also vital to an individual's quality of life.

4. Transportation is vital for program and consumer success.

Providers of health and human service organizations agree that a consumer must have reliable, affordable, and accessible transportation to gain meaningful access to services and to move toward independence and self-sufficiency. Freedom of movement is a critical aspect and self direction for everyone, especially for people with mobility limitations. The consumers of health and human service programs can not succeed in their programs if they do not have access to transportation.

5. Coordinating transportation services across local and regional boundaries, when appropriate, has multiple benefits.

By coordinating trips at the local level, community-based transportation providers can improve health and human service clients' access to support services, better utilizing existing capital, increasing the number of riders served, reducing costs per trip, and providing more professional and safer transportation.

6. The demand for increased mobility options will continue to grow as Virginians age.

Consumers with disabilities throughout Virginia have already expressed a need for additional transportation options for access to employment, medical care, rehabilitation, and recreational and social events. As the population continues to age, and the knowledge that with age is an increase in likelihood of disability, the demand for public transportation service will continue to grow. Coordination of transportation services at the state and local level will be vital to providers charged with meeting the need for service.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Utilize coordinated transportation to integrate people with disabilities per the Olmstead decision.

While specialized transportation services are needed in some cases, many individuals with disabilities are able to ride public transportation, whether a fixed route or demand response service. These individuals benefit from opportunities to interact socially with other passengers. Special transportation services, in which each agency operates its own fleet of vehicles and transports only its own clients, are neither cost- nor capital-efficient, nor do they provide clients with the opportunity to mix with the rest of the community.

2. Require all vans and buses purchased with State funds, except for school buses used to transport students to and from school on a regular basis, to be available for joint use by health and human service agencies at the local level.

Passenger vans and buses purchased with state funds should be used as efficiently as possible to serve the transportation disadvantaged residents of the community. While some health and human service administrators may argue that they need their vehicles all the time, there are typically peaks and valleys in use through the course of a 24-hour period. When these vehicles are viewed as a resource available to the community 24 hours a day and 7 days a week, their underutilization becomes apparent. In addition, one program's low usage time may fall at another program's peak usage time. Interviews with transportation disadvantaged people indicate they want more, not fewer, transportation options.

In addition, several rural communities like southwestern Virginia, already have a publicly funded transit system with professionally trained drivers, regular vehicle inspections, and accessible vehicles. Many of these systems can and do provide contracted health and human service transportation more efficiently than the public agencies that are currently providing these services. Because cost for transportation in many human service agencies are not tracked by trip and passenger, as it is in a rural transit system, policy makers find it difficult to compare costs per unit of service. The experience of other states indicates that when rural transit systems provide client transportation, health and human service agencies save money that can be allocated to other direct client services.

3. An Information Technology service provider should be retained to utilize Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to create detailed maps of service organizations in relation to locations of people with disabilities throughout the Commonwealth. This may enable a visual link at the state and local level for service providers and foster increased opportunity for coordination of services.

Services for people with disabilities in Virginia are managed and administered in highly compartmentalized systems at both the state and local level. Each separately administered organization when considered as a whole operate hundreds of local field offices, programs, boards, councils, commissions, and so forth throughout the Commonwealth. GIS mapping of state and local service organizations in relation to a pre-defined segment of the population with developmental disabilities could prove beneficial to linking consumers and service providers.

4. A uniform method of data collection should be mandated by the State in order to enable coordination of transportation at the state level.

Through coordination at the local level, community-based transportation providers have improved health and human service clients' access to support services, better utilizing existing capital, increasing the number of riders served, reducing costs per trip, and providing more professional and safer transportation. Local providers are not using uniform methods of data collection, so there is not a universal method of evaluation for success of individual project's coordination efforts. A state-mandated system for data collection would serve as a "yardstick" for measuring success of coordination efforts for every transit system in the state.

5. Establish by statute the Virginia Coordinating Council to oversee state-wide transportation coordination activities with the public transportation entity in each planning district charged as local lead agency.

Virginia should mandate the coordination of transportation services with the public transportation system in each planning district charged as lead agency responsible for coordination deployment and sustainability at the community-based level. The State Council's overall goal should be to improve community transportation services through the coordination of public, health, and human service transportation planning, funding, services, vehicles, and procurement. As other states have proven, coordination of transportation services works, especially when implementation occurs at both the state and local levels.

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