

Successful Local Transportation Coordination Case Studies

June 2011

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Coordination Strategy: Contract between agencies

Arrowhead Transit Service Contracting



photo courtesy of Arrowhead Transit

Background

Operated by the Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency, Arrowhead Transit has been serving the Arrowhead Region of Minnesota since 1974. Originally created to provide low-cost transportation for the low-income, people with disabilities, and older adults, Arrowhead Transit is now the largest public rural transportation system in the United States, with nearly 70 routes in and around Northeastern Minnesota.

Arrowhead Transit serves travelers and commuters alike with scheduled service, dial-a-ride, and the Rural Rides program. Trained drivers are available to drive clients to work, medical appointments, shopping, school, etc. Each year they provide transportation to thousands of residents in eight Northeastern Minnesota counties: Aitkin, Carlton, Cook, Itasca, Koochiching, Lake, Pine, and St Louis.

Drivers must complete a comprehensive training

Service Area

- Serves St. Louis, Itasca, Lake, Cook, Aitkin, Koochiching, Pine, and Carlton Counties
- 23,486 square miles (excluding Duluth)
- 269,610 residents (excluding Duluth)
- No age or income guidelines; all clients are served

Financial

- 2010 operating expenses: \$3.9 million
- Funding from MnDOT (operated by Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency)
- Average fare: \$1.75 (passengers over 90 years old ride free)

Operational Characteristics

- Created in 1974
- 87 buses, all handicapped-accessible
- Staffed by 108 employees

Results

- 620,530 rides provided in 2010
- 533,257 total passengers in 2010

Lessons Learned

- Conducted ongoing outreach efforts; used press releases for local marketing

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program that includes defensive driving and customer service, and they must maintain their commercial driver's license.

Problem/Opportunity

High unemployment rates, extremely low-income residents, and a need for work-related transportation

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inspired the founding of the Arrowhead Transit program to help coordinate transportation issues.

Solution

Arrowhead Transit also works with a wide variety of agencies and organizations that contract for service from the transit system. These contractual services allow for the expansion of transit services into areas that otherwise would not be able to support regular service. They also generate revenue to support the operational cost of service delivery and help reduce Arrowhead Transit's reliance on state and federal operating funds.

Results/Benefits

In 2010, Arrowhead transit provided 620,530 rides.

Challenges/Lessons Learned

Although program implementation (organizing volunteer drivers, lining up funding) was challenging, outreach was considered the largest obstacle. ("Getting the word out and letting people know that this is a service available to them.")

The lesson learned in overcoming this challenge was to make outreach an ongoing, repetitive educational effort. As a non-profit, Arrowhead Transit found that sending out press releases to local newspapers and radio stations was a successful approach to free advertising. Working with job advocates, local workforce centers, and various other employment organizations also helped spread the word.

Coordination among the different types of transportation options was also a key factor in establishing the program.

Future Direction

The program is considering expanding into other counties that have demonstrated transportation needs, contingent upon future funding.

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Coordination Strategy: Contract between agencies

Rainbow Rider Service Contracting



photo courtesy of Rainbow Rider Transit

Background

Rainbow Rider Transit was created in 1995 to expand transportation access beyond the existing service center in Alexandria into the five-county region of Douglas, Pope, Stevens, Traverse, and Grant. Todd County was added to the service area in 2007. Rainbow Rider bus service is available to any destination within the six-county area, and a volunteer driver program is available for destinations outside of this area. The program is staffed by 40 full- and part-time employees.

The program is funded primarily through the state/federal 5311 program, which covers approximately 85 percent of operations and 80 percent of capital purchases. The remaining funding comes from fare revenues (8 percent), and contracts from schools and nursing homes (one bus is funded via a 5310 nursing home program).

Service Area

- Serves Douglas, Grant, Pope, Stevens, Traverse, and Todd Counties
- 4,000 square miles
- 65,000 residents
- Clients include older adults, people with disabilities, other adults, and children

Financial

- 2010 budget: \$1.4 million
- Funding primarily via state/federal 5311 program
- Cost per mile: \$1.92 (fare revenue covers about 15 percent of the cost)
- Fares: \$2 to \$5, depending on distance

Operational Characteristics

- Created in 1995
- 25 agency vehicles; also have about 25 volunteer drivers (use own vehicles)
- Staffed by 40 full- and part-time staff

Results

- 143,453 rides in 2010 (average of 750 rides per day)

Lessons Learned

- Created and adjusted the system to meet client wants and needs

Contact

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There are no income or age restrictions; all buses offer a child seat and are equipped with handicapped accessible lifts. Fares are \$2 for 0-5 miles, \$4 for 5-10 miles, and \$5 for 10-20 miles. In 2010, passengers consisted of 22,524 individuals with disabilities, 29,977 older adults, 39,022 other adults, and 3,212 children.

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Problem/Opportunity

The areas around Alexandria were lacking transportation options to and from the service center located there.

Solution

Rainbow Rider Transit began by coordinating with human resources personnel, businesses, nursing home communities, developmental day treatment centers, and veterans administrations in the surrounding five counties. The counties began by offering a community-to-community fixed route, but they eventually found that there weren't enough riders to sustain this approach in such a rural area.

Once the dial-a-ride system was established, ridership climbed, and now the program incorporates both fixed route and dial-a-ride approaches.

A volunteer driver program is offered in four of the six counties. Rainbow Rider runs background checks and vehicle checks on all volunteers and operates the ride schedules, which typically include trips to the Twin Cities or other locations outside of the bus service area. There are 25 volunteer drivers, and 15 to 18 of them are very active.

Results/Benefits

Benefits of the Rainbow Rider program have included getting clients to their medical appointments, work, shopping, and school. As the program's resources and vehicles have expanded, so has service to each of the communities. Ridership is on track to increase again in 2011.

Challenges/Lessons Learned

One of the early challenges was the lack of riders on the fixed route system. The program had to be altered to address what services the clients wanted and would use by offering dial-a-ride services to fill the more specific needs of each community.

This strategy has been implemented in a few other nearby communities, and now the program starts small and expands as needed. Administrators found that the communities in their service areas had different needs from areas with a larger population, where programs often know that riders will be there from the get-go.

"The challenge was adjusting what we thought would work to what actually does work," said Rainbow Rider Transit Director Harold Jennissen.

Future Direction

Rainbow Rider still has some communities that are relatively new to the program (e.g., Todd County) and whose transportation solutions have not yet been fully developed. Since there is not enough demand for the program itself to grow, future plans include cooperating with some of the local transit providers in that area. Some coordination is already done with Otter Transit, and more is likely in the future.

Additionally, Rainbow Rider is considering some regional dispatching, possibly helping out nearby transit systems that don't currently have their own dispatch center.

Successful Local Transportation Coordination Case Studies

Coordination Strategy: Coordinate agency schedules Kandiyohi Area Transit KAT Carriage



photo courtesy of Kandiyohi Area Transit

Background

The KAT Carriage program offers a paratransit bus and driver to area nursing homes and adult day care centers to provide rides to medical appointments, scheduled treatments, shopping trips, and other outings for residents. The program currently uses one vehicle, purchased under the 5310 program. KAT Carriage is a joint powers venture between the City of Willmar and Kandiyohi County.

Problem/Opportunity

Kandiyohi Area Transit, operator of KAT Carriage, took inventory of the types of transportation and vehicles used in the county. Many organizations had buses but did not use them enough to justify the cost of owning and maintaining them. Furthermore, these organizations were using the same types of vehicles but were not coordinating with each other to make ownership and operation more cost effective. As these vehicles aged, maintenance costs often exceeded the resources of each organization.

Kandiyohi Area Transportation considered provid-

Service Area

- Serves the City of Willmar and Kandiyohi County
- 796 square miles
- 42,293 residents
- Primary clients are local nursing homes and adult day care centers

Financial

- Budget: Approximately \$10,000 per year
- Funding mostly from county transit, local share dollars
- Older Americans Act transportation funding for 2011: Kandiyohi Area Transit received \$31,000 from MNRAAA
- Fee for community use: \$45 per hour (no matter how many riders)

Operational Characteristics

- Created in October 2008
- One vehicle, purchased under 5310 program
- Staffed by six part-time employees (administration and drivers)

Results

- 1,424 rides in 2010

Lessons Learned

- Motivated community partners to rethink how they provide transportation to residents

Contact

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ing transportation with city buses. However, an analysis of Kandiyohi County's demographics showed an increasing number of individuals with disabilities. The county needed a bus that could provide transportation for more than two people in wheelchairs at a time, so Kandiyohi Area Transit applied to get funding for a paratransit vehicle.

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Solution

Kandiyohi Area Transportation applied for and received a paratransit bus through the 5310 program. KAT Carriage can use the accessible bus all day to serve the needs of multiple organizations, allowing for better use of the vehicle. Kandiyohi County worked with agencies in the area to get them on board so that they would use the program rather than continue to provide the services themselves.

Organizations must request the vehicle ahead of time and pay \$45 per hour to use the vehicle.

Coordination of the program is an ongoing task, as agencies need to request services and the schedules of multiple agencies need to be accommodated.

Results/Benefits

The KAT Carriage program is used by organizations throughout the City of Willmar and Kandiyohi County. Many agencies no longer have their own vehicles and rely solely on KAT Carriage. In 2010, KAT Carriage provided 1,424 rides.

Challenges/Lessons Learned

One challenge the program encountered was how to get agencies to use and rely on KAT Carriage rather than continuing to use their own vehicles. At first, it was difficult to convince area organizations to use the service because of the inconvenience of reserving the bus ahead of time.

Also, since the cost is upfront, as opposed to ownership and operating costs that are absorbed into an organization's budget, it was hard to

convince area organizations that the KAT Carriage was a cost-effective alternative. Thus, the lesson learned was to make sure the service is on time, efficient, and reliable so that organizations continue to use it.

Currently KAT Carriage uses just one vehicle. While this can be a challenge at times, users have been flexible. Kandiyohi Area Transit has also used public transit buses to supplement service if needed.

Kandiyohi Area Transit has found it beneficial to have public transit and KAT Carriage housed in the same building. Staff has been able to assess on a case-by-case basis if a user may be able to efficiently use public transit rather than KAT Carriage to get to a destination.

Future Direction

Moving forward, KAT Carriage plans to continue to provide transportation services at the current level. When financially feasible, KAT Carriage would like to provide more hours of operation.

While there are no current plans to purchase an additional paratransit bus, research on the need for second bus may begin in the next few years.

Successful Local Transportation Coordination Case Studies

Coordination Strategy: Contract with common carrier SmartLink Transit Medical Assistance Travel

Background

SmartLink Transit started its Medical Assistance (MA) Travel program as part of a larger overhaul that led to the combination of the transit operations of Scott and Carver Counties into one entity. SmartLink Transit is now the MA transport coordinator for both counties. SmartLink MA Travel provides rides for older adults and people with disabilities to medical appointments. It has standing relationships with assisted living facilities in the area to provide rides.

Problem/Opportunity

As Scott and Carver Counties began to consolidate their transit services, the state of Minnesota decided to pass the cost of brokering MA transportation—done by Minnesota Non-Emergency Transportation (MNET) at that time—to the counties. Scott and Carver Counties, as part of the overhaul of their transit services, decided to coordinate MA rides through their own program.

Solution

SmartLink decided not to continue to use MNET to broker MA travel, as SmartLink was already providing many MA transit services. SmartLink improves efficiency by utilizing one vehicle to provide rides for all of the different transit programs it offers, including MA Travel and others. Thus, multiple types of riders may be riding one bus at any given time.

Occasionally, SmartLink may be unable to provide a ride to a medical appointment, usually because the destination is outside of Scott and Carver Counties. On these occasions, SmartLink works with other carriers to provide these rides. SmartLink coordinates 1,000 to 1,500 rides per year with other carriers.

Service Area

- Serves Scott and Carver Counties
- 703 square miles
- 220,970 residents
- Primary clients are older adults and people with disabilities

Financial

- 2010 revenue: \$541,031, which covered 100 percent of expenses
- Cost per ride to SmartLink is \$14.52
- Fare varies based on mileage

Operational Characteristics

- Created in 2010
- 33 vehicles
- 15 full-time and 20-25 part-time drivers; 7 full-time operations staff

Results

- 224,000 rides in 2010 (all programs)

Lessons Learned

- Used technology to improve efficiency

Contact

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Results/Benefits

Cutting out the brokerage and coordinating MA travel with other travel programs has provided a savings of \$127,000 since the beginning of the program. However, because all types of riders are on one vehicle, it is difficult for SmartLink to determine how many individual rides from each program it provides.

Challenges/Lessons Learned

SmartLink had minor challenges while getting the

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program up and running, including coordinating with the Department of Human Services and getting SmartLink staff trained in MA rules and regulations. They also did not anticipate the increased number of phone calls SmartLink would receive regarding MA rides. SmartLink also had to negotiate contracts with private transportation companies to provide rides to destinations outside of the counties.

Another challenge for SmartLink has been collecting data about the types of riders and destinations. To increase efficiency, all riders from across all programs ride any bus. However, SmartLink has not yet found a way to track which rider goes where.

One important part of providing efficient travel to all riders has been the installation of mobile data computers on each bus. Through a grant from New Freedom, SmartLink has installed these mobile data computers on buses. These computers show real-time positioning, allow instant dispatching to each bus driver, and improve efficiency.

Future Direction

SmartLink wants to continue providing efficient transportation services across all its programs. At this time, SmartLink staff is closely watching MA legislation that could require MA transport to be managed by a central entity.

Successful Local Transportation Coordination Case Studies

Coordination Strategy: Contract with common carrier; coordinate dispatch
Nobles County Heartland Express/Worthington Taxi: Prairieland Transit System

Background

The Prairieland Transit System involves a partnership between a local private business, Worthington Taxi, and the county's public transit provider, the Nobles County Heartland Express. The two providers offer subsidized rides to the general public and use a central dispatch operated by the public provider. The dispatch center accepts calls from the public between 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. Monday through Friday and dispatches all rides to the taxi provider and transit buses as needed.

Worthington Taxi provides most of the rides within the City of Worthington. The Heartland Express buses are used mostly for rides in other Nobles County communities, but the buses can be used in the city if they are available or if the individual requesting a ride needs an accessible vehicle. The Heartland Express buses also provide subsidized rides on twenty established routes throughout Nobles County, offering bus access to each of the fourteen Nobles County communities five times per week. Many riders are repeat customers who use the service on a daily or weekly basis. The most common destinations are medical appointments and places of employment.

The regular fare for a taxi ride in the City of Worthington is \$4.50. Through Prairieland Transit's subsidized system, passengers pay \$2.50 and the public transit subsidy pays \$2. The taxi provider receives the full cost of the fare, and passengers get a lower-cost trip. Passengers receiving a subsidized ride on a Heartland Express bus also pay \$2.50 for scheduled rides or route service. If passengers wish to schedule a taxi ride outside of the city, the subsidy will pay for \$2 and the passenger is responsible for the remainder of the fee (based on a per-mile charge).

At the end of each month, Prairieland Transit

Service Area

- Serves all of Nobles County
- 715 square miles
- 21,378 residents
- All county residents are eligible for a subsidized ride

Financial

- 2010 budget: \$290,000
- Funding from MnDOT public transit funding
- Fare: \$4.50 per ride (passenger pays \$2.50, grant covers \$2)

Operational Characteristics

- Created in 2002
- Four Worthington Taxi vehicles and two Heartland Express buses
- Two full-time and five part-time drivers (Worthington Taxi) and two full-time-equivalent and three part-time staff (Heartland Express)

Results

- 35,000 subsidized rides per year

Lessons Learned

- Developed a partnership between a public and private agency

Contact

- Karen DeBoer, 507-376-3322, kdeboer@smoc.us

reconciles the rides that were actually given with the calls that came through the dispatch center. Worthington Taxi then receives a subsidy payment based on the reconciliation.

Problem/Opportunity

Worthington Taxi was receiving an annual subsidy to help offset rides it was providing in the City of Worthington to older adults and those with disabilities. The Nobles County Heartland Express provided

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transportation to the same groups outside of the city, and there was no coordination between the two entities. Discounted rides were available to residents only if they qualified for a discounted taxi coupon through senior services or as a person with a disability. Subsidized transportation was not available to people with limited incomes or those who were otherwise unable to drive.

Solution

The Prairieland Transit System allowed the existing private provider to connect with the public transportation provider in a coordinated system. The single system allows all county residents to access transportation in a fair and equitable way. Instead of offering subsidized service only to select groups, Prairieland Transit offers discounted rides to the general public.

Results/Benefits

Prairieland Transit provides an average of 35,000 subsidized rides per year to the residents of Nobles County. In 2010, 5,586 rides were provided with Heartland Express buses, and there were 33,948 subsidized taxi rides. Prior to the system's formation, only about 15,000 subsidized rides were provided per year.

By creating a public-private hybrid service, Prairieland Transit has been able to provide these rides more cost-efficiently than the public transit provider could have on its own. The taxi vehicles are located in the City of Worthington and can serve city residents more cost-effectively and more quickly than a route-based bus service. Connecting

with Worthington Taxi and taking advantage of its existing equipment and service has allowed the Heartland Express to provide more individual rides without hiring additional drivers and purchasing more vehicles.

Challenges/Lessons Learned

Developing a partnership between a private company and the public provider was the greatest challenge faced when forming Prairieland Transit. In the beginning, the taxi company did not want to feel like it was being taken over by a public entity; it wanted to remain a private, for-profit business.

It took years of meetings and communication to develop a partnership that worked well and met the needs of both providers. For example, the taxi company was used to receiving its own calls and dispatching its own rides, and it took a period of adjustment before it was comfortable with another agency handling this portion of the service.

In the end, the two providers were able to work together to create a system that offers the best of both worlds. The taxi company maintains its autonomy, and the public service is able to provide the most cost-effective rides in the most efficient way possible so passengers can access the services they need.

Future Direction

In the future, Prairieland Transit would like to expand the availability of subsidized rides and add more weekend service to better serve the needs of county residents.

Successful Local Transportation Coordination Case Studies

Coordination Strategy: Coordinate dispatch

Hubbard County Heartland Express/Paul Bunyan Transit Joint Dispatch

Background

The Hubbard County Heartland Express offers on-demand bus service within the City of Park Rapids. The city buses are 12-passenger, wheelchair-accessible vehicles that run Monday through Friday, from 7:15 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. Anyone is eligible to schedule a ride. About 25 percent of riders are children, 33 percent are people with disabilities, 26 percent are older adults, and 16 percent are other adults.

Beginning in February 2011, Hubbard County contracted with Paul Bunyan Transit, located in Beltrami County, to provide dispatch services for its city buses. Paul Bunyan Transit used dispatch software, automatic vehicle locators (AVLs), and mobile data terminals to make a direct connection with the Heartland Express vehicles. Residents of Park Rapids call the same phone number for service, but calls are transferred to Paul Bunyan Transit for dispatching.

Problem/Opportunity

Originally, the Heartland Express offered service to the City of Park Rapids using one bus. The bus driver also acted as the dispatcher, with all incoming calls going to a cell phone carried by the driver. When the Heartland Express added a second bus to the service, it became clear that safety, efficiency, and coordination would be compromised by the continued use of this system. One driver would have to answer all of the incoming calls and then dispatch both buses by placing calls to the other driver.

Solution

Contracting with Paul Bunyan Transit to provide dispatch services for the two city buses helped improve the safety and coordination of the city bus

Service Area

- Serves the City of Park Rapids
- 6 square miles
- 3,709 residents
- Anyone in the city may schedule a ride

Financial

- \$33,000 initial capital expenditure to install dispatch equipment in Heartland Express buses
- \$15,000 budgeted for dispatch in 2011
- Fare: \$1.50 for a one-way ride

Operational Characteristics

- Began on February 1, 2011
- Two Heartland Express city buses
- Two full-time-equivalent bus drivers (Heartland Express)
- One full-time dispatcher at Paul Bunyan Transit dedicated to Heartland Express

Results

- 1,800 rides from February – May 2011

Lessons Learned

- Adjusted to needs of new system; tailored dispatch to fit smaller community

Contact

- Linda Bair, Hubbard County, 218-732-9328, lbair@co.hubbard.mn.us
- Gregory O. Negard, Paul Bunyan Transit, 218-751-8765, pbtrans@paulbunyan.net

service. Paul Bunyan Transit's dispatch system allows each Heartland Express bus driver to receive dispatch instructions on a screen rather than via a cell phone.

Results/Benefits

The joint dispatch has allowed the Heartland

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Express to maintain a more efficient dispatch service for its city buses. Because of this improved efficiency, city ridership increased by 18 percent in the first three months of the joint dispatch.

The partnership has also given the Heartland Express inexpensive access to dispatch software and AVL technology. The Heartland Express was able to avoid the expense of purchasing an entire system by taking advantage of Paul Bunyan Transit's existing core equipment and software. Access to AVL technology has also provided the Heartland Express with the tools to track its buses at all times and create reports of each bus's activities.

In addition, hiring a dispatcher dedicated to the city service would have cost Hubbard County an estimated \$38,000 per year. The \$15,000 budgeted in 2011 for dispatch services means that Hubbard County has saved about \$23,000 in 2011 staff costs by using the joint dispatch. Paul Bunyan Transit has also benefited, both from the added revenue from the dispatch contract and the addition of a staff person who can help with other administrative duties.

Challenges/Lessons Learned

The first challenge faced by the Heartland Express was making sure that bus drivers and passengers adjusted to the new dispatch system. Drivers were at times uncomfortable with the idea of placing control into unknown hands, and passengers had to adapt to longer wait times caused by the coordination of more group rides. The addition of group rides increased total capacity, but it also

meant that passengers had to allow for a 15-minute window on either side of a scheduled ride.

Drivers and passengers also had to start providing specific addresses for pick-up and drop-off locations. Under the old system, bus drivers in the small community were familiar with business names and even passengers' residences. The dispatchers at Paul Bunyan Transit, however, needed addresses in order to dispatch the buses.

Another challenge early on was adjusting to the differences in size between the City of Bemidji, served by Paul Bunyan Transit, and the City of Park Rapids. Paul Bunyan Transit dispatchers were used to working with a larger community, where drivers needed 15 to 30 minutes to complete a trip and get back across town. In Park Rapids, drivers only needed about 5 or 6 minutes to cross town, so rides could be scheduled closer together. Throughout the process, Paul Bunyan Transit was flexible about adapting their procedures to develop a system that met the smaller community's needs.

Future Direction

Currently, the Heartland Express only provides city service within the city limits of Park Rapids. Because of the increased efficiency and capacity achieved through the joint dispatch, the Heartland Express is considering expanding the service outside of the city to some nearby dense population areas. The Heartland Express is also hoping to increase its service offerings to groups that have not been served by the city bus in the past, such as older adult and assisted living facilities.

Successful Local Transportation Coordination Case Studies

Coordination Strategy: Share resources

Dakota Area Resource and Transportation Services (DARTS) Vehicle Sharing/Maintenance



photo courtesy of DARTS

Background

The Dakota Area Resource Transportation Services (DARTS) Vehicle Coordination Program lends a bus to area churches to provide rides to church for older and non-driving adults. DARTS currently has an agreement with the City of Farmington, and the Rambling River Senior Center also uses the bus on Fridays for special outings.

DARTS also has a maintenance program for its sizeable fleet of vehicles because of the expense of providing maintenance for paratransit vehicles. Simultaneously, DARTS realized that area non-profit organizations with paratransit vehicles may also benefit from access to specialized maintenance and has extended its services to area organizations.

Problem/Opportunity

The vehicle-sharing program came about after DARTS recognized that their community partners might not be able to own or rent a paratransit vehicle at an affordable price.

The vehicle maintenance program started after

Service Area

- Serves Dakota County
- 23,486 square miles (excluding Duluth)
- 587 square miles
- 400,000 residents
- Transit: Primary clients are older adults and people with disabilities
- Vehicle sharing: Buses used by area churches, City of Farmington, and the Rambling River Senior Center
- Vehicle maintenance: Used by area non-profit organizations

Operational Characteristics

- Transportation programs incorporated in 1977

Results

- 100 vehicle maintenance program customers

Lessons Learned

- Coordinated and collaborated with community partners; provided useful services in a cost-effective way

Contact

- Kevin Raun, 651-234-2276, kevin.raun@darts1.org

DARTS identified the high maintenance costs associated with paratransit vehicles. These vehicles cost a lot to maintain because of the parts and mechanisms inherent to their design, as well as their heavy use and their high number of miles.

Solution

The shared use of the buses through the vehicle-sharing program benefited both DARTS and the community partners. The vehicle maintenance service provides cost-effective maintenance to both DARTS and other area non-profits.

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Results/Benefits

The vehicle maintenance program currently has 100 customers.

Challenges/Lessons Learned

With the vehicle-sharing program, there was a challenge to find a community partner who needed the buses at a time when DARTS did not. There was a lot of coordination and collaboration with the community partners to bring about the shared program.

The vehicle maintenance program needed to build a strong customer base to sustain the program and offer enough business that all mechanical specialties were covered.

Future Direction

Both programs are running strong and in the future, DARTS would like to keep them operating efficiently.

Successful Local Transportation Coordination Case Studies

Coordination Strategy: Share resources Far North Transit Senior Medical Travel Program

Background

Far North Transit operates its Senior Medical Travel program with approximately 25 volunteers who drive their own vehicles. The volunteers drive older adults and individuals with disabilities to medical appointments across Minnesota. Riders pay what they can, up to the full reimbursement of \$0.51 per mile, for the ride. Riders are referred through social service agencies, which determine eligibility for the program.

Problem/Opportunity

Roseau County is very rural, and many people have a two-hour drive to anywhere with a population greater than 10,000 people. Many older adults and individuals with disabilities in the community do not have family that can drive them to appointments in major towns or cities, which are often a considerable distance away. Furthermore, many clients need to drive substantial distances for regularly scheduled appointments, such as dialysis or chemotherapy, and they are not able to make those trips on their own. In 1990, the Committee on Aging assessed the need in Roseau County and determined this type of service was needed.

Solution

Because Roseau County is rural and sparsely populated, a program with volunteer drivers was the only option considered. Many of the people utilizing the service would not be able to drive themselves to their medical appointments, some of which are life-sustaining, because of the distance, their general health, or other reasons. The program requires co-

Service Area

- Serves Roseau County
- 1,678 square miles
- 150,000 residents
- Primary clients are older adults and people with disabilities

Financial

- Volunteer drivers are reimbursed \$0.51 per mile
- Budget: \$40,000 from a combination of grants, donations, and private pay
- Roseau County Committee on Aging received \$8,000 in federal funding in 2011
- Revenue from rider fares in 2010: \$12,000

Operational Characteristics

- Created in 1990
- No agency vehicles; rely on about 25 volunteer drivers
- One part-time staff member

Results

- 1,373 one-way trips in 2010

Lessons Learned

- Utilized multiple funding sources to overcome challenges

Contact

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ordinating referrals from social service agencies and scheduling drivers.

Results/Benefits

The Senior Medical Travel program provided 1,373 rides in 2010 to locations such as Grand Forks, Fargo, Bemidji, Thief River Falls, Deer River, Minneapolis, and St. Paul.

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Challenges/Lessons Learned

Far North Transit's Senior Medical Travel program has experienced ongoing funding challenges. Currently, the program's funding comes from many sources—public funds, grants, rider fees, and funds from the local hospital.

Future Direction

The program is considering expanding into other counties that have demonstrated transportation needs, contingent upon future funding.

Successful Local Transportation Coordination Case Studies

Coordination Strategy: Establish/enhance volunteer driver programs

Additional Examples

EZ Ride Community Cars Program

Located in Baltimore, Maryland, EZ Ride Community Cars is a membership-based transportation program for older adults aged 60 and over. It provides door-to-door service in well-marked cars from Monday through Friday between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Reservations must be made at least 24 hours in advance.

Volunteer drivers provide personalized rides for any purpose. This service is currently available in the North Arlington and Lyndhurst neighborhoods of Baltimore, Maryland, with plans to expand to other towns in the near future.

All riders must register as members to ride. The annual membership fee is \$15. Discounts are offered for shared rides, early bookings (48 hours), and recurring trips up to a maximum of 50 percent.

Trip fees are \$5 for one-way rides within town, \$8 to a neighboring town, and \$10 to a location more than one town away (within a five-mile radius). Riders may have their fees deducted from personal transportation account or may be billed monthly.

Volunteer-Assisted Transportation Program

Located in Knoxville, Tennessee, the Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee (CAC) is a public agency that provides programming in support of older adults, low- to moderate-income families, the unemployed/underemployed, persons with disabilities, and other individuals with special needs for services.

The area served consists of the City of Knoxville and the surrounding large suburban county, including a sparsely populated rural outskirt area. Knox County CAC Transit provides transportation to medical and other appointments and services.

This project demonstrates the use of agency-owned vehicles in the delivery of a volunteer driver program to limit liability concerns and the effectiveness of driver sensitivity training to improve transportation service delivery to older adults. CAC recruits and trains volunteers to drive and accompany older adults on medical and other trips.

The volunteer driver program consists of 35 volunteers that use company-owned hybrid vehicles and includes screening and training of volunteers. The program also utilizes RSVP Insurance on drivers for secondary coverage.

ElderCircle: Senior Wheels Program

Since its inception in 1990, ElderCircle has developed new programs and services to help meet the needs of older residents in Itasca County and to enable them to remain independent. ElderCircle partners with other agencies and networks to accomplish its mission.

Senior Wheels volunteers provide affordable transportation to medical or dental appointments for adults age 60 and older in Itasca County. Senior Wheels helps older adults who are unable to transport themselves, do not qualify for other transportation services, and do not have family members who can assist them.

To qualify for this service, the appointment location must be at least 20 miles one-way from the client's home. Cost of the service is based on a sliding-fee system that follows income guidelines. There is no exchange of money at the time of the ride. An invoice is sent to the client after the ride has occurred.

Volunteer mileage is reimbursed at the current federal rate.

KAT Volunteer Program

Kandiyohi Area Transit offers individuals 60 years and older the option of a volunteer driver. To be eligible for this service, the individual must be at least 60 years of age and register with Kandiyohi Area Transit for the use of this service. Individuals who use the program can do so up to two times a week or up to three times a week for medical appointments with a 48-hour notice.

The program's hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Suggested fare donations are \$2.50 for a one-way trip or \$5 for a round trip. Trips over five miles are based on a per-mile reimbursement.

This project is made possible in part under the Federal Older Americans Act through a contract with the Minnesota River Area Agency on Aging, Inc., under an area plan approved by the Minnesota Board on Aging.

Rainbow Rider Volunteer Program

Rainbow Rider offers a volunteer driver program for people who are unable to use the bus or who need transportation out of the six-county area of Douglas, Grant, Pope, Stevens, Todd, and Traverse Counties in Minnesota. Ride arrangements for the volunteer driver program can be made up to three months in advance.

Rainbow Rider volunteer drivers are unpaid volunteers who dedicate their time and efforts to helping others. These volunteers use their own vehicles to provide transportation and are reimbursed for their mileage.

Rainbow Rider volunteer drivers are subject to criminal background checks and annual motor vehicle record checks. All drivers have good driving records and must annually provide proof of insurance.

The round-trip fare for the Rainbow Rider volunteer driver program is based on an actual cost recovery formula. (Aides for passengers needing assistance travel at no charge.) Some assistance is

available for people on Medical Assistance or for older adults.

Cost example: Alexandria to St. Cloud, Minnesota: 120 miles at \$0.51 (IRS rate per mile) plus \$10 (administration fee) equals \$71.20 total.

SMART Volunteer Program

Trailblazer Transit provides general public transportation with a bus system and a volunteer driver program within Sibley and McLeod Counties and up to one mile beyond the county borders.

Trailblazer Transit supplements the 5311 general public program with another service called SMART (Sibley McLeod Auxiliary Regional Transit). The SMART program covers all of the transportation services provided by the Trailblazer Joint Powers Board that does not meet the criteria of Trailblazer's 5311 Service Plan. SMART is essentially a volunteer driver service funded entirely with local county dollars.

SMART allows people to go places where the 5311 program does not and allows people to be transported at times when the 5311 program does not, including times of the day and days of the week.

The fare for a SMART volunteer driver is based on round-trip mileage from the driver's home or starting point. The total cost is 61cents per mile for the total number of miles the volunteer must drive to accommodate the ride request plus parking expenses and meal reimbursements, which may not exceed \$7.50 per meal for every four hours the driver volunteers. The total cost for a volunteer driver is divided by the number of people being transported on each trip.

Successful Local Transportation Coordination Case Studies

Coordination Strategy: Establish/enhance volunteer driver programs VINE Faith in Action Mobility Management

Background

VINE Mobility Management provides transportation assistance to older adults (60 years and older), people with disabilities, and people with transportation challenges to access needed activities and social services. VINE provides transportation using volunteer drivers and assists people in navigating public transportation or other transportation options in Blue Earth and Nicollet Counties. VINE will provide assistance or transportation for any type of trip—medical appointments, social events, hair appointments, shopping, etc.

Volunteers drive their own cars and are reimbursed \$0.41 per mile, but they volunteer their time. VINE sends each rider a letter with the total cost of his or her rides and asks for a payment of whatever the rider can give towards that cost. VINE receives approximately 60 percent of the funds for the program this way. It also has had funding from the New Freedom Grant since 2008.

Problem/Opportunity

Because Nicollet and Blue Earth Counties do not have public transportation beyond the City of Mankato, there was a need to help people living in the more rural parts of the counties access medical appointments and shopping. There was also a need to assist people within Mankato and North Mankato who cannot ride public transit.

The authors of the 2006 Human Service Transit Coordination plan identified this gap in service and made it a goal to have a mobility manager in the area.

Solution

The mobility manager is knowledgeable about

Service Area

- Serves Blue Earth and Nicollet Counties
- 1,204 square miles
- 96,740 residents
- Primary clients: Adults age 60 and older, people with disabilities, and people with transportation challenges

Financial

- 2010 budget: \$58,000 in mobility management, \$83,000 in operations
- Funding from New Freedom grant
- Received 60 percent of budget from rider fares
- Volunteer drivers are reimbursed \$0.41 per mile
- Total cost to organization per ride: \$0.66 per mile

Operational Characteristics

- Created in 2008
- No agency vehicles; rely on about 2,005 volunteer drivers (various time commitments)
- Staffed by one full-time mobility manager and five part-time staff

Results

- 4,493 rides with volunteers in 2010

Lessons Learned

- Created transit advisory committee

Contact

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local transportation options and focuses on establishing and maintaining relationships with local transportation agencies.

The mobility manager coordinates with clients to let them know available options. There is also coordination with volunteer drivers to schedule rides to appointments in Nicollet and Blue Earth Counties and beyond.

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Results/Benefits

In 2010, VINE Mobility Management gave 4,493 rides with volunteers.

Challenges/Lessons Learned

One goal has been to create a resource guide for all the services and options for the mobility manager to use. However, it has been a challenge to find a good way to make it searchable and easy to use. Currently, the mobility manager uses a binder with an information sheet for each service as well as a more general list in an electronic spreadsheet.

Another challenge has been to get people to accept help, especially older adults in rural areas. To get the word out, VINE has worked with churches and city staff and given them information about the program so they can refer people who may need transportation help. VINE has also educated staff in clinics on transportation options for patients.

VINE also started a transit advisory committee with many people from different backgrounds and agencies. They have found it to be a helpful resource to talk about problems and possible solutions related to transit in the area.

Future Direction

VINE would like to search out more options for transit into rural areas in the future. They will also work with the City of Mankato to expand the fixed route transportation system.

Successful Local Transportation Coordination Case Studies

Coordination Strategy: Hire mobility manager Arrowhead Transit Rural Rides Program

Background

Four mobility managers are located in Workforce Centers throughout four counties of the Arrowhead Region of Minnesota. They work one-on-one with low-income persons (at or below 150 percent of federal poverty guidelines), assisting them in overcoming employment-related transportation barriers.

Mobility managers develop personalized transportation plans and provide temporary support through trip vouchers and volunteer rides. One program manager oversees the Rural Rides program. This project is well received and supported by the county human service agencies.

Problem/Opportunity

Rural Rides was developed partly in response to the 2007 Northeast Minnesota Human Service Coordination Transit Plan. It focused on two identified needs: the need for coordination and flexibility, and the need for transportation education and individualized planning. Information was also collected from area human service providers who reported that transportation for low-income job seekers and entry-level workers was often unavailable and unaffordable.

Solution

The Rural Rides program develops transportation plans for clients and provides trip vouchers or volunteer drivers for a limited period of time. The program utilizes bus services, taxi services, and volunteer drivers and offers support for ride sharing. This project was chosen because AEOA and Arrowhead Transit have a history of assisting persons to become employed and self-sufficient. Rural Rides coordinates with county human service providers, employment

Service Area

- Itasca, St Louis (excluding Duluth), Lake, and Cook Counties
- 13,000 square miles
- 170,000 residents
- Primary clients are the unemployed

Financial

- 2011 budget: \$475,000
- Funded by MnDOT via the JARC program (Job Access Reverse Commute grant)
- Cook County Council on Aging \$5,000
- 2010 cost per ride: \$8.64

Operational Characteristics

- Created in 2008
- No agency vehicles
- Six staff members

Results

- 45,041 rides provided in 2010; 467 clients served
- 79 percent of riders gained or maintained employment
- 8 percent advanced in their employment as a result of the program
- 18 percent of rides provided were for persons who were homeless, in shelters, or transitional housing (39 percent reported finding permanent housing)

Lessons Learned

- Overcame geography-related challenges

Contact

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and training counselors, transportation providers, employers, and RSPV/Northland Volunteer coordinators. These partners help provide comprehensive and meaningful assistance to low-income, transportation-challenged workers and job seekers.

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Results/Benefits

Persons previously unable to search for or accept a job were able to do so. Individuals at risk of losing their jobs because of unreliable transportation were able to continue working.

Challenges/Lessons Learned

The geography of the service area is challenging. Clients often have to travel long distances to their job, and many entry-level workers have several part-time jobs, which makes the commute more difficult.

Many program participants and job counselors have unrealistic expectations of reaching transportation self-sufficiency. There is a lack of comprehensive public transit between small towns and rural areas.

Future Direction

Program managers are satisfied with the direction of the program and, pending future funding, intend to continue to address the ongoing need for public transit in this area.

Successful Local Transportation Coordination Case Studies

Coordination Strategy: Hire mobility manager

Tri-County Action Program Transportation Resource Center/Mobility Manager

Background

The Transportation Resource Center (TRC) is a project of Tri-County Action Program Inc. (Tri-CAP). It was created in 2008 to be the central access point for transportation in the four-county region of Benton, Morrison, Sherburne and Stearns Counties. Wright County was added to the service area in 2011. The TRC connects passengers with available transportation resources in the area, offers ride referrals, and coordinates ride appointments. It is staffed by 1.5 full-time employees, including a mobility manager.

Tri-CAP partners with several faith-based organizations as well as the American Cancer Society and Central Minnesota Council on Aging to coordinate transportation services through the TRC. They also work closely with the St. Cloud Hospital, Coborn's Cancer Center, many adult day centers and assisted living facilities as well as Veteran's Affairs and county veteran offices, county volunteer driver programs, and public transit.

Although anyone is eligible to call the TRC, the current focus for assistance is on older adults and people with disabilities getting to health-related appointments. Individuals seeking assistance must also have no other funding source, such as Medical Assistance or an insurance program, available to meet their transportation needs. Qualifying passengers may receive transportation to locations within the TRC's five-county service area and also to the following destinations: Alexandria, Eden Valley, Litchfield, New London, Princeton, Rochester, Spicer, Willmar, and anywhere within the seven-county metro area.

The TRC fills numerous roles for passengers seeking transportation assistance. First, the mobility manager serves as a resource to individuals unable to

Service Area

- Serves Benton, Stearns, Morrison, Sherburne, and Wright Counties
- 3,975 square miles
- 435,490 residents
- Primary clients are older adults and people with disabilities

Financial

- 2010 budget: \$82,000 in mobility management, \$184,800 in operations
- Funding from New Freedom grant
- Average cost: \$4.75 per one-way ride, or 26 cents per mile
- \$135,170 in fare revenues in 2010

Operational Characteristics

- Created in 2008
- No agency vehicles; rely on about 175 volunteer drivers from various partner organizations
- Staffed by 1.5 full-time employees

Results

- 34,923 one-way trips in 2010

Lessons Learned

- Satisfied partner organizations; defined precise guidelines for service

Contact

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locate suitable transportation on their own. The mobility manager will attempt to locate an appropriate resource and provide a referral. If no other options are available, the mobility manager may coordinate, authorize, and fund a ride for individuals in need. These rides are generally provided by a local volunteer driver,

but the TRC will also contract with a for-profit company to provide an accessible vehicle if needed.

There is no required fee for assistance, but the TRC uses a subsidized suggested donation scale to determine the potential cost of each ride. For example, a round-trip ride of 20 miles or less has a suggested donation value of \$5 and a round-trip ride of 21 to 50 miles has a suggested donation value of \$10. A statement is created and sent to the passenger detailing their rides from the previous month, including a suggested donation amount for each ride received. If the passenger is unable to give at that level, any donation is appreciated. If the passenger is unable to make any donation, they are still eligible to receive ride assistance.

Problem/Opportunity

Around 2005, a lack of coordination was identified between the transportation services provided by Tri-CAP and other area nonprofit organizations that used volunteer drivers. For example, two volunteer drivers from separate organizations would sometimes originate in the same community and end at the same destination. A volunteer driver brought this issue to Tri-CAP's attention, pointing out that existing resources were not being used in the most effective and efficient way possible. In response, Tri-CAP organized a large transportation summit to bring together interested parties involved in local transportation efforts to determine how they could work together to become better coordinators.

During this process, the lack of funding for many of these local organizations was identified as a barrier to improved coordination. Many were in need of additional funding to keep their programs running, and some were even unable to reimburse volunteer drivers for their services.

Solution

In 2007, Tri-CAP used the information gathered from their local partner organizations to write an application for a New Freedom grant under the United We Ride program and create the TRC, which now serves as a multi-county, one-call resource center for transportation needs. The TRC and its mobility manager have provided a new coordinating level for transportation organiza-

tions in the area. The mobility manager keeps track of the overall transportation network, helping to eliminate duplicate or overlapping trips by different organizations and allowing each partner organization to make the most efficient use of its resources. By providing this coordination, the TRC has also helped connect more passengers with the services they need.

The New Freedom grant has also provided an opportunity for local agencies to receive additional funding for their efforts. Each organization that provides rides to medical appointments for the target groups—older adults and people with disabilities—is eligible to submit a monthly statement to the TRC and be reimbursed for a portion of the ride cost. This has allowed the participating organizations to receive financial support for their participation and provided them with additional funds to support their programs. This support benefits the organizations as a whole, allowing them to provide transportation services as well as continue their work meeting other community needs.

Results/Benefits

From 2008 through May 2011, the TRC coordinated about 100,000 one-way trips to medical appointments for older adults and people with disabilities, enabling Tri-CAP and its partners to provide essential transportation services to a previously underserved population. The mobility manager acts as the designated staff person for individuals with the most difficult problems and is able to spend the extra time often needed in such cases. By tracking down resources and coordinating and funding rides when no other options are available, the mobility manager provides an important service to those who would otherwise receive no assistance.

The TRC has also encouraged the participating partner organizations to become financially invested in the coordination effort. The New Freedom grant provides a 50 percent fund match for each ride provided by the TRC, and each partner has committed to contributing the other 50 percent. This means that for every \$100 in transportation services a partner agency provides, it is responsible for \$50 of that cost. When the agency submits an expense form for that \$100 service to the TRC, it must also submit its \$50 payment so the TRC can

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obtain the additional \$50 from the grant. The agency then receives its \$100 reimbursement, which consists of its own \$50 in addition to \$50 in grant funding.

Challenges/Lessons Learned

One of the greatest challenges the program faced was developing a strategy to keep all partnering organizations satisfied. In the program's first year, Tri-CAP found that many partner groups believed they should receive a larger portion of the funding. To address this issue, the TRC adjusted the reimbursement policy. Each agency is now reimbursed based on a standard administration fee per trip, plus mileage over the base amount. This has been viewed as an equitable compromise by the partner agencies.

Another challenge was clearly defining the target group of clients and making the best use of available funds. The mobility manager often has to probe deeply to be sure that a person has no other funding source available. If a person lives on a bus line but can't afford the fare, it doesn't mean that the TRC will fund a volunteer driver as an alternative. They may instead focus on finding a way to make the bus a more viable option. Although it can be challenging to turn people down, the program's limited funds would be quickly depleted without adhering to service guidelines.

Future Direction

As the TRC progressed in providing transportation services for medical appointments, it began receiving numerous calls from

people in need of transportation to work. The mobility manager formed a task force in late 2009 to facilitate discussion among partnering organizations on options for filling this need.

In January 2011, the TRC received a 24-month pilot grant award to begin coordinating ride-to-work services. The TRC will use the funds to promote carpooling and ridesharing and once again have limited funds to provide rides for those with no other options available. This effort will be in addition to the medical transportation coordination services the TRC will continue to provide.

Successful Local Transportation Coordination Case Studies

Coordination Strategy: Offer customer travel training St. Cloud Metro Bus Travel Training



Travel Training session; photo courtesy of St. Cloud Metro Bus

Background

St. Cloud Metro Bus created its Travel Training program in January 2009. The program has two components: individual, step-by-step travel training sessions and larger community outreach efforts. All of the services provided by the program are free and tailored to the specific needs and skill level of the participating individual or group.

Training sessions are designed to teach individuals to use the fixed route bus system in the St. Cloud, Sartell, Sauk Rapids, and Waite Park area. Sessions are specifically designed for older adults, those with disabilities, the low income, and the multicultural, but anyone may schedule a session. Trainings can be completed one-on-one, in small groups, or in a classroom setting.

The outreach component of the program aims to educate the community about the services offered through the Travel Training program. Travel trainers visit area schools, older adult living sites, and agencies that serve those with disabilities and the lower income to talk about the program. School visit topics

Service Area

- Serves St. Cloud, Sartell, Sauk Rapids, and Waite Park
- 49 square miles
- 101,206 residents
- Primary clients are older adults, people with disabilities, and the general public.

Financial

- 2010 budget: \$106,792
- Funding from New Freedom grant
- Additional \$40,000 local Bremer/Morgan grant from 2010–August 2012 for multicultural trainings

Operational Characteristics

- Created in 2009
- One full-time and three part-time travel trainers, including two with multicultural experience

Results

- 40–50 travel trainings per month
- 2,922 clients served in travel trainings and outreach activities from January 2009–May 2011

Lessons Learned

- Worked through cultural and attitude barriers; asked bus drivers to provide more assistance

Contact

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range from introducing preschoolers to the idea of riding the bus to an integrated travel training curriculum at high schools. Outreach efforts with local agencies and organizations are designed to encourage referrals to the Travel Training program.

When an individual calls to set up a travel training appointment, the travel trainers collect information

to determine the passenger's specific needs. For example, the trainer will find out if the person is a first-time bus rider, is new to the community, or has physical or cognitive disabilities. After this initial information intake, the travel trainer meets the passenger at his or her home, determines a plan of action, practices the skills needed to ride the fixed route bus, and accompanies them on the bus to a destination of interest.

As part of the training session, the passenger learns how to pay the fare, board the bus, recognize landmarks along the route, and signal for a stop. Trainers explain what to do if a passenger gets on the wrong bus or gets off at the wrong stop. Individuals also learn how to read the bus schedule and put together their own routes. Throughout the process, passengers are reminded that the bus driver is always there as a resource if help is needed.

Some passengers complete the training in one session, but other individuals require multiple sessions before they are comfortable riding the bus on their own. In addition, some passengers require specific destination training rather than a complete system overview. For instance, an individual with a cognitive disability may only want to learn how to get to work at first and add other destinations later. Trainers will work with passengers as many times as needed to build their confidence and ensure that they continue to use the fixed route bus system.

Problem/Opportunity

St. Cloud Metro Bus has limited capacity on its dial-a-ride services, and many individuals in need were unable to receive service due to overwhelming demand. In spite of efforts to bring the dial-a-ride denial rate down, many passengers were still being denied a ride. In response, St. Cloud Metro Bus completed a recertification process to determine if all riders were truly eligible to receive service. Some passengers were subsequently denied or only allowed to ride under certain conditions.

Solution

The Travel Training program was implemented to allow passengers capable of riding the fixed route bus system on their own to learn how to use it. The program's goal is to work with such individuals before they apply for St. Cloud Metro Bus dial-a-

ride services, thus increasing that program's capacity to serve those with no other options. St. Cloud Metro Bus has worked closely with area agencies and organizations that serve the targeted populations, such as seniors and those with disabilities, to encourage referrals to the Travel Training program.

The program has also allowed St. Cloud Metro Bus to create other services targeted to this group of riders. For example, multiple passengers with the same destination now ride the fixed route bus system to a transfer point where they all board a dial-a-ride bus to the shared destination. By providing passengers with the resources to make the first part of such a trip on their own, the Travel Training program has helped decrease demand for dial-a-ride services. Instead of dial-a-ride buses picking up ten individuals separately at their homes, all ten can now be transported on a single bus.

Results/Benefits

From January 2009 through May 2011, the Travel Training program served 2,922 people through individual travel trainings and outreach activities. The program averages 40 to 50 individual travel trainings per month, and there is often a waiting list. More than 80 percent of passengers who have completed training sessions continue to use the fixed route bus system. Because more people are using the fixed route bus, rides have opened up on the dial-a-ride service and denial rates have dropped.

The Travel Training program has provided many other benefits beyond the initial goal of reducing demand for dial-a-ride services. For example, travel trainers are now available to offer specific trainings to the growing Somali population in the service area. The program also sparked the organization of area travel clubs to help groups of passengers travel to their favorite destinations together.

Challenges/Lessons Learned

One of the greatest challenges faced by the Travel Training program is that the area's culture does not always favor public transportation, especially for some of the program's targeted groups. For example, care providers and family members may be unsure about allowing those with disabili-

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ties to ride the bus independently.

In order to break these barriers, travel trainers worked closely with local agencies that provide care and other services to the target groups. These organizations recognize the importance of matching people with the right type of transportation and understand that dial-a-ride services are not the best fit for everyone. Other strategies have included allowing the passenger to demonstrate their ability to ride the bus on their own while the travel trainer followed in a car.

During the program's implementation, travel trainers also worked with fixed route bus drivers to hold them accountable for providing assistance to those in need. The trainers asked drivers to actively identify and assist those that might need extra help not only with boarding, but also with paying fares or acquiring route information.

Future Direction

The goal of the Travel Training program is to continue meeting the needs of the growing community in its service area. One possibility under consideration is the creation of a mobility assessment and training center to serve the region.

This potential facility would include an in-house functional and cognitive ability assessment that would allow travel trainers and others at St. Cloud Metro Bus to assess individuals' abilities and determine the appropriate mode of transportation for each passenger. This center could also provide travel training services on-site and possibly offer training to drivers from other area organizations.

Successful Local Transportation Coordination Case Studies

Coordination Strategy: Offer customer travel training Metro Transit Travel Training



Background

Metro Transit's travel training program utilizes two customer advocates to provide riding assistance to clients traveling on Metro Transit trains or buses. These customer advocates also speak to groups and do other marketing activities to promote Metro Transit ridership. The program serves anyone interested in learning more about riding Metro Transit to get to any type of destination.

Problem/Opportunity

In 1994, Metro Transit's general manager advocated for a new position called a customer advocate. Originally, these customer advocates helped with customer service issues, but over time these customer advocate positions have changed to be more proactive in helping people overcome barriers to riding and to market transit riding.

Service Area

- Serves Twin Cities metro area
- Clients are anyone interested in learning more about riding Metro Transit—especially school-aged children, older adults, and riders with disabilities

Financial

- 2010 budget: Part of customer relations budget of approximately \$1 million
- As part of Metro Transit, program funding comes from state and federal funds and the Metropolitan Council

Operational Characteristics

- Created in 1994
- Staffed by two full-time employees

Results

- 2010: 862 group presentations, over 20,000 participants
- 2010: Individual trainings for 20 people

Lessons Learned

- Coordinated trainings and schedules

Contact

- Pam Steffen, 612-349-7430, pam.steffen@metc.state.mn.us

Solution

The customer advocates have worked to help people become more aware of the services Metro Transit provides, to dispel fears or anxieties potential riders may have about riding, and to market transit riding to the general public.

Council Members

Office of the Governor

Minnesota State Council
on Disability

Minnesota Public Transit
Association

Minnesota Department
of Transportation

Minnesota Department
of Human Services

Minnesota Department
of Health

Metropolitan Council

Minnesota Department
of Education

Minnesota Department
of Veterans Affairs

Minnesota Board on
Aging

Minnesota Department
of Employment and
Economic Development

Minnesota Department
of Commerce

Minnesota Management
and Budget

Results/Benefits

In 2010, the customer advocates gave 862 presentations with over 20,000 people in total attendance. In that same year, customer advocates had 20 one-on-one travel trainings.

Challenges/Lessons Learned

The travel training program has been busy, and scheduling group and individual trainings with the current two customer advocates has been a challenge.

Future Direction

Metro Transit plans to continue this program in the future. They have also started handing out coupons to riders who attend trainings and will track the use of the coupons as a means of evaluating the program's effect on ridership.

Successful Local Transportation Coordination Case Studies

Coordination Strategy: Offer customer travel training Tri-Valley Transit Travel Training

Background

The travel training program offered by Tri-Valley Transit is an effort to remove barriers riders may feel about using public transit for trips around the service area. Through this program, Tri-Valley has a full-time travel trainer who does individual training sessions with riders as well as presentations to groups throughout the Tri-Valley Transit service area about riding the Tri-Valley Transit buses. The trainings and presentations are aimed at the general public and the trainer can help riders get to any destination.

Problem/Opportunity

Tri-Valley Transit first identified the problem from social service agencies in the area. These agencies felt that public transit would not work for their older adult clients or people with disabilities because they did not know how to ride the bus. As a result, riders used the volunteer driver program rather than public transit, which was more costly.

Solution

Through funding from a New Freedom grant, Tri-Valley Transit hired a travel trainer. The travel trainer speaks to groups and individuals about how to use the bus, operating hours, bus rules, and how to use the bus lifts. The travel trainer also answers questions about riding the bus and discusses barriers to riding with the goal of easing any apprehension or anxiety people may have about using public transit.

In addition, the travel trainer markets the public transit services to the general public. The goal is to dispel the stigma that the bus is only for people with disabilities or older adult riders. This could include

Service Area

- Serves Marshall, Polk, Red Lake, Kittson, Norman, Clearwater Counties
- 7,150 square miles
- 65,227 residents
- Anyone can receive travel training

Financial

- 2010 budget: \$122,000
- Funding from New Freedom grant

Operational Characteristics

- Created in 2008
- Staffed by one full-time and two part-time staff

Results

- Seven individual travel training sessions in 2010
- 56 group presentations (approximately 1,900 people) in 2010

Lessons Learned

- Used communication to market services; utilized a full-time travel trainer

Contact

- Cindy Pic, 218-281-0700, cpic@tvoc.org

helping current riders use transit to access more destinations, school-aged children use the bus to get to school and other destinations, and all riders to fit the bus into their schedule.

Results/Benefits

The travel trainer did seven individual sessions in 2010 and spoke to 56 groups with over 1,900 people in attendance. So far in 2011, their travel trainer has spoken to 26 groups with 990 people in attendance.

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Although it cannot be attributed to the travel training program alone, ridership in general on public transit has increased, as has the number of riders with disabilities.

Challenges/Lessons Learned

In the first year of the travel training program, Tri-Valley Transit had two part-time employees who were both travel trainers and dispatchers for this program. However, it was difficult to define their roles, and eventually Tri-Valley Transit hired a full-time travel trainer dedicated only to travel training and marketing.

An important lesson learned through the program is that it takes time for people to change from their current transportation to public transit. Through constant communication with the community, the travel trainer has been able to begin to break through these barriers.

Future Direction

Tri-Valley Transit hopes to continue this program and update and improve it as needed. Tri-Valley Transit will include the travel training program in the upcoming regional transportation coordination plan.