



PLAN FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF TRANSPORTATION COORDINATION IN HUMAN SERVICES

SOUTH-EAST CONNECTICUT REGIONAL FORUM ON TRANSPORTATION

**Groton, CT
May 19, 2005**

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

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DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES TO THE UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT A.J. PAPPANIKOU CENTER
FOR EXCELLENCE IN DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES EDUCATION, RESEARCH, AND SERVICE



BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

As stated in President Bush's Executive Order on Human Service Transportation Coordination released in February 2004, "Transportation plays a critical role in providing access to employment, medical and health care, education, and other community services and amenities... The development, implementation, and maintenance of responsive, comprehensive, coordinated community transportation systems is essential for persons with disabilities, persons with low incomes, and older adults who rely on such transportation to fully participate in their communities." In response to this directive the Connecticut Department of Transportation is committed to following through on the federal initiative through a grant called *United We Ride*. Developed jointly by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), and the Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS), Labor (DOL) and Education, *United We Ride* is a human service transportation coordination initiative intended to break down the barriers among federally funded transportation programs, set the stage for local partnerships that generate common sense solutions, and help states and communities overcome obstacles to coordination of transportation systems. The Framework for Action, developed by the FTA is a coordination self-assessment tool that states and communities can use to identify areas of success and highlight the actions still needed to improve the coordination of human service transportation. Core elements of the Framework for states include (1) evaluating the degree of existing State leadership and partnership; (2) determining whether current transportation resources have been identified, transportation needs have been assessed, and a strategic plan has been developed; (3) assessing the degree of

customer focus; (4) identifying cost-sharing arrangements; (5) determining technology needs; and (6) assessing the extent of community-level mobility management arrangements. Using the Framework as a springboard, the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT), working with the Office of Policy and Management and the Department of Social Services, is committed to developing a workable, consumer-driven, and cost effective plan for the coordination of inclusive, accessible transportation in the state.

In order for this Transportation Coordination initiative to be successful it must be based on the needs of all of the people who use the system, including people with disabilities. The University of Connecticut A.J. Pappanikou Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UConnUCEDD) has received a grant from the Connecticut Council on Developmental Disabilities to work with ConnDOT and other transportation partners to ensure the interests of people with disabilities are represented in the action plan. The funding from this grant is being used to support a series of six **Regional Forums** with consumers with disabilities who use transportation services. Invitees represent a wide range of disabilities and come from urban, suburban and rural areas of Connecticut. Conference calls will be set up in order to get input from consumers unable to attend the Regional Forums in person.

THE PROCESS

The first Forum on Transportation was held in Groton, CT at the Town Hall Annex. The event was co-sponsored by the Groton Real Choice Task Force and the Disability Network of Eastern Connecticut. A representative from the Kennedy Center of Greater Bridgeport was on hand to present information about a travel-training initiative.

The twenty five (25) attendees were invited to participate by dividing into groups of five to eight (5-8). Each group was asked to select a recorder. Participants were reminded to allow everyone to have an opportunity to speak. If individuals did not have an opportunity to share all of their ideas they were encouraged to write their comments, either during the Forum or at a later date. Four specific questions were asked of participants, and following each question the groups were given approximately ten minutes for discussion. The recorder for each group then reported back to the larger group.

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

Regional Public Transportation

- South Eastern Area Transportation (SEAT) was reported as useful, including 6 day/ week transportation on accessible buses, and an existing “flag down” system. There is also a bus that goes from Norwich to New London to Groton every two hours.
- Senior transportation is available in some locations 5 days a week, or for scheduled events.
- Dial-A-Ride is being expanded.
- Commuter rail is available in some locations.

Work Related Initiatives

- Eastern Connecticut Transportation (ECTC) has a “Rides for Jobs” program which used taxis, vans and buses for transportation that is employment related. ECTC will also pay 80% up to \$500 towards repairs and insurance to activate a car, provide mileage reimbursement and pay for a license.
- RIDESHARE/EASY RIDE can provide accessible vehicles as a commuter service to and from work with a percentage of the transportation also used for recreation.
- Money for transportation to work can be deducted from Income Taxes.

Other Community Services:

- Walking/bike trails connect some communities “Rails to Trails.”
- Niantic has a program called “Driving Miss Daisy” which provides volunteer transportation although not accessible transportation.
- Mystic has the Mystic Shuttle and accessible sidewalks in the tourist section.
- Rhode Island offers people with disabilities and seniors accessible, flexible service across the state for an annual fee.
- An initiative is being developed to form a collaboration of the 35 United Way agencies in Southeastern CT in order to coordinate their transportation services; a meeting was held following the forum of parties interested in participating.

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

- Several participants brought up the infrequency and limited hours of ADA/paratransit service.
- In most communities transportation is provided only Monday through Friday

(some Saturdays), but not in the evenings or on Sundays.

- Accessible services frequently do not go to community locations such as the mall. Many towns are not interconnected by any transportation.
- Some towns such as Old Lyme and East Lyme do not have any transportation services.
- Much of the transportation is work related and is not related to community participation and recreation.
- Public transportation does not always have enough buses to reduce lengthy waiting time, and buses do not go “off route.” More adequate and inexpensive vehicles that are accessible are needed.
- Shoreline East is very expensive, doesn’t have enough stops, and doesn’t go far enough (e.g. into Rhode Island).
- Medicaid transportation services are expensive, are frequently unreliable, and Medicaid will not always cover ‘necessary’ transportation.
- For individuals who need to pay privately for accessible van service, livery service or taxis, the services are very expensive and often unreliable.
- Many agency vehicles operate empty with limited coordination, networking or sharing resources.
- Some people noted that not everyone knows how to use Public Transportation and many find it intimidating. One individual expressed concerns that the Dial-A-Ride transportation is unsafe. Other participants mentioned that a number of people are unaware of the services and benefits that are available to them.

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

- Several Forum participants mentioned that they felt routes should be increased and new ones established.
- Greater consistency of services across the state was a concern since some areas have either plenty or others have no transportation.
- The process of utilizing transportation services needs to be streamlined and the guidelines for utilizing services needs to be clearer
- Some participants stated they feel a need for support staff on Dial-A-Ride and other vehicles.
- Drivers need more training in sensitivity, security, and how to operate lifts.
- There is a need for visual displays for people who are deaf and hard of hearing, especially at bus stops.
- TTY and Braille accommodation should be available at transportation centers.
- Transportation centers and bus enclosures need to be accessible.
- One person is finding the new buses to be inaccessible due to the poor turning radius available for a power wheelchair.
- Education and better sources of information on available transportation were recommended (e.g. advertisements, public service announcements, radio, and education of professionals on the criteria for using services).

- One person suggested there be a Regional “Transportation Guru” who has common information and a data base be available to coordinate disability transportation regionally, with consistency across regions. The individual needs to have authority.
- And lastly increased funding was felt to be a need; however the importance of collecting good data to document the use and need was recommended.

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

Finally, the Forum participants as a whole were asked to list their priorities for action.

The final suggestions made by the group included:

- Increase coordination of services
- Increase hours, flexibility and frequency of services and service to all communities
- Address insurance liability issues
- Increase public information on services - Education! Education! Education!

NEXT STEPS

In October 2005, Forum attendees will be invited to attend Transportation Institute.

This day-long Institute on Transportation will be organized to review and consolidate recommendations from the six Forums, foster cross-agency collaboration, develop action steps, and formalize the formation of Technical Advisory Committees. Invitees to the Institute will include: consumers; representatives of State Agencies such as the Office of Policy & Management, Department of Social Services, Department of Mental Retardation, BESB, DMHAS and other relevant agencies; key legislators; and representatives from the Office of the Governor.

Priority areas for action will be developed. These will be based on the priorities identified through the Regional Transportation Forums by consumers. The list will be narrowed by Institute attendees to a maximum of five top priorities around which Technical Advisory Information/Committees can be formed.

The Technical Advisory Committees will assist the State in the development and implementation of a State Human Services Transportation Action Plan.