



PLAN FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF TRANSPORTATION COORDINATION IN HUMAN SERVICES

SOUTH CENTRAL CONNECTICUT REGIONAL FORUM ON TRANSPORTATION

Hamden
July 28, 2005

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

THIS FORUM WAS FUNDED UNDER A GRANT FROM THE CONNECTICUT COUNCIL ON
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES TO THE UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT A.J. PAPPANIKOU
CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES EDUCATION, RESEARCH, AND
SERVICE

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

As stated in President Bush's Executive Order on Human Service Transportation Coordination released in February 2004, "Transportation plays a critical role in providing access to employment, medical and health care, education, and other community services and amenities. The development, implementation, and maintenance of responsive, comprehensive, coordinated community transportation systems are essential for persons with disabilities, persons with low incomes, and older adults who rely on such transportation to fully participate in their communities." In response to this directive the Connecticut Department of Transportation is committed to following through on this federal initiative through a grant entitled *United We Ride*. Developed jointly by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), and the Departments of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Department of Labor (DOL) and Department of Education (DOE), *United We Ride* is a human service transportation coordination initiative intended to break down the barriers among federally funded transportation programs, set the stage for local partnerships that generate common sense solutions, and help states and communities overcome obstacles to coordination of transportation systems.

The Framework for Action, developed by the FTA is a coordination self-assessment tool that states and communities can use to identify areas of success and highlight the actions still needed to improve the coordination of human service transportation. Core elements of the Framework for states include (1) evaluating the degree of existing State leadership and partnership; (2) determining whether current transportation resources have been identified, transportation needs have been assessed, and a strategic plan has been developed; (3) assessing the degree of customer focus; (4) identifying cost-sharing arrangements; (5) determining technology needs; and (6) assessing the extent of community-level mobility management arrangements. Using the Framework as a springboard, the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT), working with the Office of Policy and Management and the Department of Social Services, is committed to

developing a workable, consumer-driven, and cost effective plan for the coordination of inclusive, accessible transportation in the state.

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

THE PROCESS

The fifth PATHS Forum on Transportation was held in Hamden, CT at the Miller Senior Center. A representative from the Kennedy Center of Greater Bridgeport was on hand to present information about their travel-training initiative for individuals who are elderly or who have disabilities. Participants were also told about the travel training provided by the Board of Education and Services for the Blind for individuals who are legally blind. The Department of Transportation's United We Ride initiative was also described.

The nine (9) attendees were asked to respond to four specific questions in a round-table discussion. If individuals did not have an opportunity to share all of their ideas they were encouraged to write their comments, either during the Forum or at a later date. Attendees were asked to discuss issues they had observed on behalf of consumers if they themselves did not have a disability or do not experience a problem with transportation in the state.

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

- Attendees indicated that the training program for operators and supervisors is adequate. One individual who uses a wheelchair has designed a program to use with CT Transit District staff that includes sensitivity training and training from individuals with disabilities. One hundred sixty seven (167) drivers have been trained under this program. Operators are trained not to blame the person with a disability when problems arise. Practical training is offered such as having drivers take a bus ride in a wheelchair. On one occasion drivers tried the lifts in the new buses, and when they were not dropped off at a curb the chairs leaned over backwards due to the steepness. (Of those who tried it only two were able to make it down the ramp). The attitude of the drivers and supervisors towards the training has been good. New drivers are also trained. There has been an effort to make the experience positive

and the cooperation from the Transit District has been excellent. The Transit District has said they want to expand this program.

- There are cameras on most buses in the CT Transit program (Hartford, New Haven, and Stamford) which can be used later for training and to verify complaints.
- ADA transportation/My Ride does provide rides for many individuals.
- The Kennedy Center travel training program has been helpful to many people.
- At least some train stations are accessible on Shore Line East and Metro North. It is possible to get into New York round trip for \$20 with a disability discount. Employees are helpful when you request assistance. Metro North employees have requested additional training.
- It is possible to arrange for group travel into New York through private companies if you do it a month ahead.
- Bus travel in New York is accessible, free and operates all night in some areas. (It is more risky to use subway and ferry services, although it is possible).

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

- The new buses are set up to drop passengers using wheelchairs off at a curb, but otherwise the drop is too steep. The lifts are in the front of the bus, and in this location a passenger in a wheelchair requires using up five seats for one person. Only one or two people in wheelchairs can get on a bus at a time. The turning radius may be too tight for some power wheelchairs. One attendee mentioned he uses My Ride because he cannot turn his wheelchair on the public bus. One attendee suggested that drivers need to learn to let people with disabilities on and off first. If a crowd of ambulatory passengers enters first they sometimes take up the spaces which could be used for individuals who use wheelchairs, and then these individuals sometimes

resent being asked to move.

- Automobile drivers sometimes park at bus stops. Another person mentioned that the location of bus stops sometimes makes it difficult to get to where you need go.
- MY Ride provides rides on Monday through Friday and only occasionally for weekends. It was noted that they do not need to cover a route (even under the ADA) if there is no public transportation at that time. The ADA $\frac{3}{4}$ mile rule is meant as a minimum standard but is generally used as a maximum standard. One example given was that individuals are unable to get to a rehabilitation center in Wallingford because the center is over $\frac{3}{4}$ miles from the fixed bus route. Another example used is that there is no public transportation—and therefore no ADA transportation- to Camp Harkness, which is a State-run camp for people with disabilities. One participant mentioned that signing up to get a ride on My Ride is sometimes very difficult due to problems getting through on the telephone, space availability and the length of advance notice they require.
- Services not covered by ADA guidelines are frequently disjointed or non-existent. Even where transportation is provided it is not always coordinated and it is not always possible to go from one system to another.
- With regard to train travel participants noted that not all train stations and cars are accessible. Individuals may not always be able to travel together if they use wheelchairs. Amtrak has accessible bathrooms but is more expensive. The bathrooms on Metro North are not accessible. The ramp plates on older trains can be slid into place but need to be lifted into place on new trains. Placement of a ramp to get on or off then needs to be requested in advance. People who use wheelchairs have been forgotten on trains or boxed in by other riders. It is not possible to recharge a wheelchair battery in a new train car.

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

Participants made the following comments and recommendations about transportation services.

- Customers need more training in how to use transportation services. A “bus buddy” program was suggested. There is a need for passengers to get orientation to using the bus. Passengers need to learn the best place on their own chairs to secure tie downs. One person suggested using colored tape to mark the spots. Individuals who take transportation should be taught the “complaint process”; for example, if they are denied a ride with 24 hours notice they can contact the office of New Haven Disability Services for assistance. Individuals need to know transportation policy as well as how to change policy.
- More drivers, supervisors and dispatchers need disability awareness sensitivity training. Some of the issues raised included getting the drivers to refer to individuals who use wheelchairs (and not refer to them as wheelchairs) and for drivers to see themselves as advocates. It was also suggested that people with disabilities should be used as trainers.

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

- Participants felt there is a need for increased accessibility and money for services including improved access for people in power wheelchairs.
- It was felt that the community base of advocates working on transportation as a priority should be broadened. This needs to include senior citizens. There needs to be increased community awareness such as having articles in the paper, “access days” with buses available for consumers to try out and increased public education

such as programs on Citizen's Action TV.

- Operators need increased training such as having drivers "try out" being a passenger. Riders need increased training such as "How do you sign up for My Ride?" One suggestion was to have a video on training for both riders and operators.
- Accessible taxis and/or drivers willing to put wheelchairs in the car and not jam them in to the seat or the trunk would be helpful.

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, Bureau of Educational Services for the Blind (BESB), Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) and other relevant agencies; key legislators; and representatives from the Office of the Governor.

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

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

