



PLAN FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF TRANSPORTATION COORDINATION IN HUMAN SERVICES

NORTHWEST CONNECTICUT REGIONAL FORUM ON TRANSPORTATION

Torrington
July 14, 2005

**HELPING 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 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 (HHS), Labor (DOL) and 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 third PATHS Forum on Transportation was held in Torrington, CT at the Northwest Chamber of Commerce. The event was co-sponsored by Independence Northwest (the Center for Independent Living of Northwestern CT) and the Western Connecticut Association for Human Rights (WeCAHR), an organization founded to advocate for the civil and human rights of people with disabilities. 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. Information was also distributed 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 seven (7) attendees engaged in a round-table discussion of four specific questions. 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. 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. Four specific questions were asked of participants, and following each question the groups were given approximately ten minutes for discussion.

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

Several initiatives in the Northwest corner of the state were noted:

- One individual commented on the success of the Kennedy Center Travel Training program, saying that once people know the transit system it is effective for them. They

need to learn how to navigate the system. See Appendix A for a detailed description of the services offered.

- Public Transit 101 is a project under the Kennedy Center designed to teach human services professionals about accessible public transportation in order to help them “make job-development and travel training work hand-in-hand”.
- Publications entitled “Getting on Board” are available for the Northwest Connecticut, Southwest Connecticut and New Haven areas which provide information to individuals on skills such as reading schedules. These are published by MetroPool with funding from ConnDOT.
- The towns of Torrington, Litchfield and Winsted offer deviated routes within $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of their fixed bus routes. Individuals make a reservation through the driver or the dispatcher. (Flexible routing is also available along the Shoreline).
- The way fares are handled was felt to be a positive. For example there are prepaid passes that get stamped which can be worn around the neck. These have coding numbers. There are also tickets at discount prices such as ten rides for \$4.50. Monthly discounts are also available in some areas. Rides are available for free through Job Access for the first six weeks of work in some areas. Some individuals have Medicaid passes that can be “flashed.”
- The VISTA Vocational and Life Skills Center in Westbrook has its own transportation and wants to expand it. There is increasing collaboration with VISTA and other organizations that provide transportation
- A relay operator for individuals who are deaf and hearing impaired is available by calling 711 or 1-800-842-9710 from a non-business phone.
- One person commented that the Northwest area has a good quality coordinator.

- One initiative in the Waterbury area allows individuals to be picked up from work after 6 pm.

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

- Individuals do not always know what is available, how to use the available transportation or how to get all the information they need.
- Transportation companies do not always tell consumers about other programs they may be able to access. (e.g. Kelly Transportation services may only tell you about Kelly Transportation services).
- Too often individuals are given a number to call; this only results in having to call a second number, and then another number, leading to frustration and failure. This may keep people from using the available transportation services. (One recommendation made was that social service providers and transportation providers should have a list of phone numbers that are accurate and/or make the calls themselves).
- TTY machines are not always answered because the person on the receiving end of the line does not know how or when to answer it.
- Some individuals who are deaf do not know that they can call 711 in order to get a relay operator.
- Rural areas such as the Northwest corner have a “notorious” problem due the huge area covered and how spread out it is. A round trip to anywhere can be as much as 50 miles and to get to the post office can be 11 miles. The costs are high for a limited ridership. In addition there are “holes” where no transportation is available. Transportation for individuals who are both deaf and blind was felt to be especially difficult.
- People have to wait on vans and buses for a long time while others ahead of them may be brought home first. (An 80 yr old woman had to sit in the van all day to get a ride) There appears to be “no way to get around it” because the area is so huge: the funding is not available to put on additional drivers.

- Many transportation services will not cross over town lines. Buses are too often idle with drivers off duty when they could be working.
- Some people feel they have been “pushed” to live in Torrington in order to get transportation resulting in Torrington then feeling like a “dumping ground”. (The comment was also made that this is true in Bridgeport where 26% of the population have disabilities).
- Drivers need training in operation and awareness. Drivers do not always call out stops.
- When services are cancelled some individuals have not had anyone call to tell them.
- Lack of transportation sometimes prevents individuals from working.
- Transportation for seniors does not always match what they need. Transportation is only available once a week for most programs. In some instances individuals may have 2-3 appointments in one day. This is complicated by the limited number of physicians who are available and take specific insurance such as Medicaid. Some people are unable to get to the pharmacy to get their prescriptions filled.
- Requirements and benefits for each program are confusing. Sections 5310, 5311 and 5307 do not necessarily work together. Changes to these regulations require efforts from the bottom up as well as the top down however most individuals do not realize their impact and therefore do not comment or advocate for change.
- Transportation regulations limit resource sharing. In many instances the available programs can not overlap. The Department of Social Service regulations for example, limit the populations that can be served in various programs. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds are to be used for TANF recipients only--even if someone else needs a ride to the same place at the same time.
- Public/private coordination and collaboration is needed, as is getting other groups to bring their resources to the table. In most instances ConnDOT cannot give increased funding and transportation so companies must utilize what is already there. The more customized the transportation, the more expensive it is.

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

Participants made the following comments and recommendations about transportation services:

- Individualization is needed for door to door or curb to curb. It was suggested that having an aide or personal assistant might be helpful
- There is a need for more basic training for individuals. Some individuals have difficulty making a reservation. Potential riders need to be encouraged to try a bus at least once. “Many people just won’t even try to try to take a bus.” This might be facilitated by incentives such as free passes or movie tickets.
- There is a need for more basic training for providers such as “Train the Trainer” programs to prepare people who can then “Train the Trainee.” This must be ongoing due to the turnover with human service providers and case workers
- There needs to be improvements in driver training such as sensitivity training, training in using wheelchair lifts, fire safety training and defensive driver training. More frequent training is also needed due to high turnover in drivers. (Some transit districts do their own training or use the Kennedy Center training program).
- Having accessible taxis was suggested.

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.

- Increasing funding for public awareness was recommended. Promoting the use of

public transportation and increased advertising of workshops like this was suggested.

- Increased coordination and shared funding was suggested. Talking to each other and building better relationships would help this. Changing some of the regulations might result in increased sharing of funding and resources. Brokering services by utilizing the services of different resource providers was seen as a priority.
- Utilize the wealth of information within and outside CT

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 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.

APPENDIX A

The representative from the Kennedy Center briefly described the Center's travel training program for individuals who want to learn to take public transportation. Four full time and two part time staff are available to individuals with disabilities and people who are elderly who need training to take public transportation. (Note-Individuals who are legally blind are referred to BESBE due to their unique needs). The Kennedy Center presently has staff located in Bridgeport, Waterbury, Danbury, Torrington, New Haven and Hartford and are available to the entire state of Connecticut. Services involve one-on-one training and work in real time e.g. 6:30 in the morning if that is when someone needs to take public transportation to get to work. During the training program staff help individuals learn how to take the transportation, including learning to read bus schedules and how to call the transit companies for schedules. They help people get to know the drivers. They "shadow" individuals after the initial training and can return as they are needed. The Kennedy Center also has a curriculum for driver training which is available to transportation companies on request.