

National Directions in Community Transportation Alternatives

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In preparing for today, I defined “directions” broadly to include what direction, we -- people working on issues of transportation and aging -- think senior transportation *needs* to take as well as a report on current trends.

I am usually somewhat hesitant to talk about the future of senior transportation and future needs, because as important as planning for the future is, talking about it can shift attention away from what we need to do *now* to meet existing needs. Today, however, I have no such concern because of the recent STPP (Surface Transportation Policy Project) report, *Aging Americans: Stranded Without Options: The Need for Public Transportation*, that Linda Bailey, its author, has just discussed. That study does an excellent job of connecting present and future needs.

The United We Ride (UWR) Campaign of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA)

The federal government through the FTA’s (Federal Transit Administration’s) United We Ride (UWR) Campaign and Executive Order 13330 (February 24, 2004) are bringing national attention to the need to coordinate transportation. This year the FTA will award a small UWR grant to every state that applies that the states can use to further their statewide coordination efforts.

AARP’s New Transportation Initiative

Transportation is now part of *AARP’s Ten Year Social Impact Agenda*. One of the two goals of its Livable Communities program is that “Americans 50+ are able to sustain mobility as they age.” The other goal of the Livable Communities program is that “Americans 50+ have adequate housing options which enable them to age in place.” I mention the second goal, because – unlikely as it may seem -- only recently have people begun to connect the issue of aging in place with transportation options.

Environmental, Health, and Transportation Advocates Are Beginning to Work Together

The *Stranded Without Options* report is a prime example. We are finding out that many of our goals and desired outcomes are the same. Public and community transportation can help to reduce pollution and congestion. Planned growth creates communities that can be readily served by public and community transportation. Older people can use sidewalks for exercise walking, for running errands instead of driving -- and for getting to bus stops.

Transportation Options for Older Drivers

Increasing concern about older drivers – especially since the Santa Monica crash – has brought new attention to providing viable transportation options for older people. It is important, I think, to have community and public transportation that blends into the lives of older people as they cut back on driving and not to wait until they completely

stop. It just doesn't seem realistic to say to an 87 year old, "You are losing the only way of travel you've ever had. Welcome to the world of public transportation."

Cape Cod is one good example of blending community transportation into older persons' lives. Older residents drive safely within their own communities – for errands and social trips. When, however, they need to travel on Interstate for appointments with medical specialists, they don't drive: they use the B Bus.

Recognition of the Diversity of the Transportation Needs of Older Persons

In creating new senior transportation, we need to be aware, certainly, of the diversity of people 50+ and their diverse transportation needs: medical transportation, special escorts for the frail elderly, transportation to work (six of eight Boomers say they plan to work beyond retirement age); transportation for shopping and general life activities. We also need to recognize that individuals have diverse needs. The same person who needs medical transportation also probably need transportation for social occasions and recreation.

Two Examples of Transportation Providers That Are Meeting Diverse Needs

St. Johns County Council on Aging in St. Augustine, Florida runs two excellent transportation services: One is a demand-response service, primarily for medical transportation; and the second is a public transportation service – the Sunshine Bus. And the buses are indeed sunshine yellow. The Sunshine Bus serves the general population as well as older people. It provides connector service to commuter buses taking people to jobs in Jacksonville and within-County service. Within the county, passengers can board a Sunshine Bus at any street corner along its route. Many people -- frail older persons, anyone who has trouble walking -- who can not use fixed-route transit -- are able to walk to a nearby corner and wave down a bus.

The day I rode a Sunshine Bus, an older woman with a walker waved the bus down. After she got on, another passenger kindly explained to her that St. Johns also had a demand-response service. The older woman responded: "I know that. I take it to go the hospital. I don't need it to go to Wal-Mart."

CART (Community Association for Rural Transportation) in Harrisonburg, Virginia has a fleet of wheelchair-accessible vans that it uses primarily for non-emergency medical transportation. Evenings and weekends, the CART vehicles are available for social trips – especially overnight trips and trips outside the county. CART cannot afford to pay drivers for these trips so it created a Designated Volunteer Driver Program. Older persons can designate a volunteer, usually a family member. CART checks the driving record of potential volunteers, makes sure they know how to secure a wheelchair, and then places them on CART's insurance policy. Through the Designated Volunteer Driver Program, CART's passengers are now able to attend social events such as family reunions, weddings, and graduations.

Volunteers and Senior Transportation

The use of volunteers by public and community transportation is a growing trend. Although some transit providers have used volunteers for years (Wheels for Wellness

in Philadelphia has used volunteer drivers for at least forty years), transit and volunteer programs have more often been separate. Today more and more programs are using volunteer drivers. I recently learned about two transportation providers that use large volunteer driver programs: one in Arapahoe County, Colorado, and another in Auburn, Maine. Transportation brokerages and one-stop call numbers often offer volunteer drivers as a transportation option. The Seniors' Resource Center in Denver has received a three-year \$200,000+ grant from the Rose Community Foundation to develop a volunteer driver prototype program.

Annapolis Transit in Maryland has a fulltime AmeriCorps volunteer who has developed a volunteer driver program for older persons too frail to use public transportation, but who are ineligible for ADA-paratransit. The AmeriCorps volunteer has worked with a local non-profit social service agency, Partners In Care, to expand its original volunteer driver program and to create a new transportation service for persons who need to make longer distance trips that may go outside the county, and for those who need recurrent transportation.

An Insurance Aside

Obtaining insurance to cover volunteer drivers can be difficult, but it is usually not impossible. I state for the record that I will offer technical assistance to anyone who is trying to get insurance for their volunteer drivers or who wants to explore the issue.

Innovations in Senior Transportation

New innovations, new models, new approaches to providing public and community transportation to older people are being implemented all over the country. Last year the Beverly Foundation and CTAA undertook a survey of innovations for seniors in public and community transit. The purpose of the study was to identify, document, celebrate, and disseminate information regarding innovative public and community transportation. Out of 167 inquiries, 96 surveys were received, representing 33 states. The report on that survey, *Transportation Innovations for Seniors*, is available from CTAA and the Beverly Foundation. This year we are undertaking a new survey to identify innovations in rural transportation and to do in-depth profiles of five innovative transportation providers.

Direction for the Future?

The future direction of transportation for seniors is – at least to some extent – up to us. I say that - knowing as you do -- all that is outside our control. Here is my closing upbeat example: a public transportation program I have already mentioned -- the Sunshine Bus in St. Johns County. The Jacksonville Transportation Authority published a study -- it cost \$200,000 to prepare – that found that St. Johns County would lack adequate population density to support public transportation until the year 2030. That finding is probably correct...for fixed-route transit, but St. Johns County Council on Aging came up with public transportation that is *not* fixed-route: its buses stop at any corner along their route when someone waves for them to stop. By being innovative and resourceful, St. Johns County determined the own direction of their public transportation.