Community-Based Transportation: Designing a System for Minnesota

Provider & Rider Perspectives

Jennifer Menke Blanchard
Emily Schug

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Provider Perspectives on Coordinated Transportation Systems
Objective

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<th>SLPP Project Goals</th>
<th>DHS Project Goals</th>
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<td>• Determine the desires of transit providers and users.</td>
<td>• Identify barriers and successes of coordination.</td>
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<td>• Identify opportunities and develop strategies for implementing system improvements in the near and long term.</td>
<td>• Identify information providers can generalize and share with one another.</td>
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<td>• Identify options for coordination.</td>
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Study Participants & Methodology

• Providers
  – Seven recipients of transportation grants from DHS participated in this project, including transportation providers from rural, suburban and urban areas.

• Individual Interviews
  – Grantees participated in interviews, providing responses by phone or email.

• Focus group
  – Five of the seven grantees participated in a focus group discussion.

• Data Analysis
Research Questions

- Describe examples of partnerships you have with other transit providers.
- What are the challenges related to coordination?
- What are the benefits of coordination?
- How does funding affect your ability to coordinate transportation?

Findings

- Providers are Coordinating
- Benefits and Barriers of Coordinated Systems
- Funding Challenges and Opportunities
- Information Sharing
Reasons for Current Transportation Coordination

♦ Necessity: Funding requirements
♦ Reciprocity: Common interests, location
♦ Efficiency: Limited resources
♦ Stability: Funding fluctuation

Examples of Transportation Coordination

♦ Providers coordinate with RSVP to recruit volunteers
♦ Providers coordinate with other counties to cross county lines
♦ Transit providers share information, primarily informally through phone calls and email.
Transportation Coordination

**Key Benefits:**
- Best practices
- Advocacy
- The greater good
- Quality and expertise

**Key Challenges:**
- Time and trust
- Identity and turf
- Feasibility concerns
- Serving customers

The Impact of Funding on Coordination

- Funding issues were identified as a issue concern for providers.
- Funding was directly and indirectly related to providers’ opportunities for coordination.
Funding Challenges

- Efficiency
- Duplication
- Sustainability
- Understanding Providers’ Needs
- Mandated Collaborations

Efficiency

“We get Title III Older Americans Act money and they don’t allow us to charge for rides...we have to find creative ways of accounting so that one funding source doesn’t dictate our entire way of providing service and charging for that service.”

“You really have to be able to blend your funding or you have too many gaps in your service and you don’t have a critical mass to put the bus on the road.”
Duplication

"Senior homes get some kind of transportation funding, capital and operational. If we could do it, then we should get it. We could do more with the money than they could do with it."

"There are tons of busses out there that are 10 years old and less than 5,000 miles. Figure that one out."

Sustainability

"We struggle with the question of whether we can sustain this system if grants go away. A funding base is critical for this type of work."

"If you ask for operational funds, [funders] say, oh, gosh...that’s not fun. Putting a bus on the road, that’s fun...you can see the bus."
Understanding Providers’ Needs

“The various data that is required to be tracked for different funding sources can be very time consuming.”

“Funders have goofy reporting requirements...they all have their own form, they all ask for different things...it gets to be a logistical nightmare just to fill out reports to satisfy funders.”

Mandated Collaborations

“Almost all of them expect it...it always is a good ground for getting the funding. Even Mn/DOT expects that we coordinate, that’s one of their main objectives...I just think there isn’t real teeth to it, it’s one of those statements that has a lot of fluff in it, it sounds good, it feel good, it makes sense, but what happens when I want to borrow [another provider’s] bus...it doesn’t become a reality.”
Funding Opportunities: DHS Community Services/Services Development Grant

- Encourages creativity
- Promotes shared rides
- Supports sustainability

Encourages Creativity

“The funding has enabled us to focus on identifying gaps and has given [us] a real opportunity to try something different...to really address service needs.”
Promotes Shared Rides

“The DHS grant allows [us] to subsidize rides and also to really promote shared rides to community residents.”

Supports Sustainability

“What I liked about the DHS funding was that it gave us the ability to put all age groups in there…”
Short-Term Solutions for Improving Information Sharing

Create Forums for Information Sharing

<table>
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<th>Why promote information sharing?</th>
<th>Suggestions for Information Sharing</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Promotes best practices</td>
<td>• Identify a network of providers</td>
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<td>• Saves time and resources for providers</td>
<td>• Organize regional transit meetings</td>
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<td>• Increase uniformity of information</td>
<td>• Develop a website for transit providers</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lays groundwork for more complex coordination</td>
<td>• Create a providers’ chat room and listserv</td>
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Long-Range Strategies for Systemic Change

Strategies for Funders to Promote Coordination

| Strategies for Funders to Promote Coordination                                                |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| • Examine the funding practices of organizations experienced in transportation coordination | • Understand feasibility of coordination |
| • Improve communication between transportation funders                                         | • Learn how to create incentives for coordination |
| • Review funding practices that may promote coordination                                       | • Reduce duplication and fragmentation |
|                                                                                               | • Increase opportunities for standardization among funders |
|                                                                                               | • Longer term funding relationships |
|                                                                                               | • Flexible funding |
|                                                                                               | • Understanding the big picture |
Community-Based Transportation: Designing a System for Minnesota

The Rider Perspective

Objective

- To learn from riders, as opposed to transit providers or funding agencies, about ways to improve quality and reduce the cost of specialized transit services.
- To find out from people who use the services what works well and also the challenges associated with using specialized transportation.
Research Process

- Facilitated focus group discussions with people who do not drive including seniors, people with disabilities, immigrants and people with limited incomes.
- Three of the four groups met in Minneapolis/St. Paul and one group was from suburban Hennepin county.

Focus Group Participants

- A total of 34 participants took part in the focus groups.
- People with disabilities, seniors, and people with limited incomes participated, including immigrants.
- Participants used a variety of modes of transportation including city buses, wheelchair accessible vans, senior vans, transportation provided by human service agencies, bicycles, taxi service, medical transportation, rides from friends and family, and walking.
Focus Group Questions

- Describe the type of transportation system you use most often during the week?
- What do you like about these systems?
- Does the current range of transportation services meet your basic transportation needs?
- What is the biggest problem you face regarding transportation?
- How could transportation systems be improved to better meet your needs?

Findings

- Population specific findings:
  - People with disabilities
  - Suburban residents
  - Low-income adults
  - Immigrants
  - Seniors
- Overall themes from focus group discussions.
- Users shared ideas for improving transportation systems.
People with Disabilities

- Riders value affordability, reliability, safety, efficient routes, same day scheduling, door-to-door service, and customer service (e.g. personal connection to schedulers and drivers).

- On-time service and convenience (e.g. same day scheduling) are important for maintaining a sense of independence and meeting basic needs.

Suburban Residents

- Transportation options are very limited—in some cases no local public transportation options.

- Children’s activities depend on having transportation—lack of affordable transportation options limit children’s activities.

- Public transit only works if you have a car to get to the transit station.

- Lack of transportation options means fewer job opportunities.
Seniors

- Seniors value polite, respectful, courteous and helpful drivers.
- Access to transportation systems helps seniors live independently and maintain control over their lives.
- Seniors value on-time service.

Adults with Limited Incomes

- Safety of public transportation systems is a big concern—personal safety (e.g. safety at bus stops and on the bus) and health considerations (e.g. walking long distances to and from bus stops).
- Lack of transportation options limits mobility and access to services, especially in the winter.
- Traveling with children is challenging.
Immigrants

- If you don’t speak English, it is difficult to get information about routes and schedules.
- Using public transportation in the winter is challenging—many immigrants are not used to ice and snow.
- Interpreters and translated information on transportation is not readily available.

Key Considerations for Designing a Better System
- Customer Service
- Safety
- Access
- Reliability/On-Time Service
- Ripple Effects of Changing Systems
- Independence/Choice
- Meeting Basic Needs
- Affordability
- Efficiency
- Small vs. Large Systems
Customer Service

“If your going to be professional enough to drive around with disabled people everyday all day long than have a better attitude. They don’t look at us as people, we are statistic to them. They do not know what it’s like to have to depend on people.”
- Woman who uses public transit and public transit ADA.

“[Public transit], yes they are now able to take wheel chairs but most of the drivers don’t want to take the time to get you on and help strap you down. They are rude and make it not safe to take the bus.”
- Man who uses public transit, public transit ADA, medical vans and taxi.

Customer Service

“I like the [agency van] driver, he is a honey, he is courteous, just a nice man, comes right to the door, he helps me turn off my lights, just a great driver.”
- Woman who uses public transit ADA, and an agency van.

“Because I ride different types of transportation I see how [public transit ADA] some drivers are lacking in sensitivity training. They should spend a few hours in chair to see what it’s like.”
- Man who uses public transit ADA, medical vans and taxi.
Safety

“Sometimes the bus stop is too far from my house and I have experienced being assaulted and that is what scares me.” — Women who used public transit and an agency van.

“The shelters are also a problem. Many stops don’t have them and babies get cold quick.” — Women who used public transit, public transit ADA, taxis and an agency van.

“I like taking [public transit] but in the winter I can’t take [public transit] because it’s too dangerous. The drivers can’t help you, it’s not their jobs.” — Women who used public transit and public transit ADA.

Access

“I lost my job three weeks ago, I was laid off and we’ve been without a car since last February. I’m in a situation that getting to the grocery store is difficult. To get to work I was relying on my legs or I was biking until they stole my bike. Being in the southwest suburbs, the transportation is difficult…it only works if you have a car to get there.” — Man who walks and used a bike until it was stolen.
Reliability/On-Time Service

"[Public transit ADA] will get you there because you need to get there but not because you have to be there at a certain time. However it's like a backbone; they are always going to be there for you." - Man who takes public transit ADA, medical van & taxi.

"I live in St. Paul and I do temp jobs all over the place and right now I'm in Minneapolis. It takes so much less time to get on [public transit] and go from St. Paul to Minneapolis than if you drive. Even if I had a car I'd still take [public transit] to work." - Women who use public transit, taxi & an agency van.

Ripple Effects of Changing Systems

"Like [public transit ADA], they have cut their hours, and the routes and the days they will come. They match their services to the city bus, so if I can't get a city bus, I can't get [public transit ADA]. We have been pretty much cut off. When I say anything about it they tell me to move. I've been told two or three times to just move. We'll I can't afford to move." - Women who use public transit ADA.
Independence

“I know people don’t understand... it’s not easy being disabled, having to depend on other people or other modes of transportation to get from point A to point B because I can’t drive... I’d like to spend more time with my kids and my parents but it’s not possible because I’m so limited. And it’s only going to get worse before it gets better.

-Woman who uses public transit and public transit ADA.

Meeting Basic Needs

“For me especially the route reduction has caused an increase in walking. It’s not that it’s long distances—maybe seven blocks instead of one—but if you have two bags of groceries instead of one or you have your kid with you... it’s hard. The two and from places you go to meet your basic needs is difficult.” -Woman who uses public transit and an agency van.
Meeting Basic Needs

“I desperately want to get a job but it’s the transportation thing. I’ve applied for a couple of places that have been close but truthfully with me if I’m walking that far I’m going to be sweating up a storm, my makeup will be all over... We are willing to work but it’s getting there and getting home.” — Woman relies on family and friends for transportation.

Affordability

“The next problem is the $5 fee for the peak hours... When you’re working you pay $10 a day just to get to work so you blow over half your pay check just getting to work. What gets me is the money piece... They [public transit ADA] is still cheaper than a cab but [public transit ADA] is costly.” — Man who uses public transit ADA, medical vans and taxis.
Efficiency

“The fees and the time in between is a big problem...[public transit ADA] needs to overbook to make sure it gets enough money but then, at the same time, you may be the only person on the bus. They should geographically set the rides so they could pick people up along the way so the buses aren’t running empty. What I hope happens with [public transit ADA] is that they will have a shot to get more reimbursement for medical rides.”

-Man who uses public transit ADA five days a week and taxis.

Small vs. Large Systems

“[In big systems] there are always problems with communication and pick ups—there is no efficiency. The smaller company can do a better job, stay in control. Having smaller companies will work better, they will compete, and individually they will work great. They are personable. The companies might not work well with each other but they will provide better services. They will be familiar with you. Instead of treating you like cogs in a system a smaller company can provide services based on our needs and their abilities.”

-Man who uses public transit ADA and medical vans.
Ideas for System Improvement

- Car Sharing Programs
- Language Specific Services
- More Efficient Routing
- Improve Customer Service (e.g. sensitivity training for drivers)
- Small vs. Large Systems
- Public transit routes that meet basic needs (e.g. transit stops in front of grocery stores)

Concluding Thought

“[All the transportation systems] have their good points. You do eventually get home. It does sort of work. Do you fix something that is sort of broken and then break it even more or do you stay with what you have? With everything being cut and everything going up in price...are we being realistic in this meeting or are we dreaming?”

-Woman who uses public transit, public transit ADA and an agency van.