

# An Introduction to Community Transportation

Managing Mobility Series

Technical Assistance Brief One

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**About the Managing Mobility technical assistance series:** As one-stop staff, you may well be the best asset to help dislocated workers and other unemployed people overcome their employment transportation barriers. You know individuals' family situations, neighborhoods and financial abilities. In addition, you understand the barriers that keep one-stop participants from reaching employment opportunities. Since accessing transportation to jobs, training, child care centers and other destinations often requires one-on-one counseling and assistance, job developers, case managers and other one-stop staff are a powerful support mechanism.

Successfully linking potential employees with transportation services is a local objective. For this reason, giving you the resources to be mobility managers is essential to connecting job seekers with employment and employment-related sites.

Designed for employment and training staff who have direct contact with program participants, this brief will:

- Familiarize the reader with the range of community transportation services that could be used to provide trips to work, and
- Describe the ways in which many communities are funding and planning transportation services.

## What is Community Transportation?

Community transportation is more a way of *innovative thinking* about transportation services than it is of *providing* those transportation services. Community transportation considers the human factor, and it is flexible, innovative, responsive and cost-effective. It is a practical alternative to the private vehicle, and it builds upon traditional mass transit.

Community transportation is an effective network of public and community-based agencies and coordinated services that connect the poor and unemployed with jobs and training facilities, offers the elderly access to needed services and ensures mobility for people with disabilities. For many Americans, this option includes: rural public transit, which provides 100 million trips a year; urban fixed-route buses, which provide 1 billion trips a year; and rail and subway, providing 4 billion trips a year. Community transportation means an opportunity to remain independent and self-sufficient and to participate fully in the life of the community.

## **I. Types of Transportation Services**

There are a variety of transportation options available to convey people to their particular destinations, including public transit buses, trains, commuter rail, light rail, taxis, shuttles, vanpools, bikes, carpooling and walking. Community transportation services are those that address the transportation needs of an entire community, including the needs of both the general public and special populations — like senior citizens, people with disabilities, dislocated workers and the working poor. The type of transportation service designed for a community depends on the mobility needs of residents, the availability of funding, existing infrastructure and basic service area geography.

Since the scope of transportation services and transportation funding opportunities may largely be unfamiliar to workforce development agencies, this section will provide an overview about how community transportation systems operate. This knowledge will enhance your ability to best determine the employment transportation services that fit the needs of participants in your network.

### **A. Fixed-Route Transit Service**

There are two main types of transportation services that characterize community and public transportation: fixed route and flexible transportation services.

**Fixed-route** services include any transit service in which vehicles run along an established path at preset times. Trains, subways and buses are the most common examples of this type of service.

Typically, fixed-route service is characterized by printed schedules or timetables, and designated bus or rail stops where passengers board and deboard. Most cities and some rural areas operate buses along fixed routes because their communities have high population densities, as well as frequently used origins and destinations that are concentrated along main arteries.

Many transit services offer **express fixed-route** services, typically designed with fewer stops so that commuters can reach employment sites quickly.

Because fixed-route bus and rail services do not extend to all neighborhoods or employment sites, employers, transit providers or other community members sometimes operate **feeder routes**, also known as **circulator routes**. Feeder services are designed to feed into existing transit routes by picking up passengers from locations in a neighborhood or at a job site and dropping them off at a stop along the bus and rail line. Feeder routes add another link in the community transportation network and help create a seamless system of transportation services for un- and under-employed job seekers. Of course, feeder routes often also necessitate a transfer (the switching of a passenger from one vehicle to another, typically to change routes), too many of which can render a transit service less useful to riders.

Other variations of fixed-route service include deviated-fixed route, point deviation and service routes, which are described in greater detail below.

## **B. Demand-Response Transit Service**

**Demand-response** transit services, often referred to as **dial-a-ride** services, are transit services in which individual passengers can request transportation from one specific location to another specific location at a certain time. Vehicles providing demand-response service do not follow a fixed route, but rather travel throughout the community transporting passengers according to their specific requests. Demand-response services usually, but not always, require advance reservations. Many communities offer demand-response van service to people with disabilities, and others who need special assistance. Taxi cab service is another common form of demand-response transit service.

Demand-response service vehicles include small buses, vans and cars. Rural areas operate demand-response services because of low population density and long distances between destinations. Demand-response services in urban areas are usually reserved for specific populations, typically those whose disabilities prevent them from accessing fixed-route services. Transit providers often use the term "paratransit" to describe demand-response services, especially those services provided for persons with disabilities.

## **C. Hybrid Service**

When planning transportation options for job seekers wishing to reach destinations located "off" the fixed-route line, variations on fixed-route services may be an attractive alternative. Here are three examples of hybrids of fixed-route and demand-response services:

- 1) A **deviated-fixed route** service operates a bus or van along a fixed route and keeps to a timetable, but the bus or van can deviate from the route to go to a specific location, such as a house, child care center or employment site. Once the pick-up or drop-off is made, the vehicle goes back to the place along the route that it left.

2) **Point-deviation** services also keep to a timetable, however, vehicles do not follow a specific route. Rather, vehicles will stop at designated bus stops at scheduled times, but during the time between two scheduled stops drivers will pick up and drop off passengers with advanced reservations over a dispersed area.

Deviated-fixed route and point-deviation services accommodate spontaneous unscheduled rides at designated bus stops as well as provide scheduled demand-responsive rides over a larger area. Operating one deviated service rather than two separate services (fixed route and demand response) is a cost-effective transportation alternative.

3) **Service routes** are characterized by deviated times, rather than deviated routes. Service routes allow riders to hail a vehicle and request a drop-off anywhere along the route. **Jitney** services, which operate along a fixed route but without fixed stops, provide this type of flexibility. So do partnerships which permit transportation disadvantaged job seekers and employees to flag down school buses to help them reach destinations.

**Guaranteed Ride Home programs:** Often, job seekers could readily use public transit buses and trains; however, they don't want to use them because they feel vulnerable riding to the suburbs so far from home — what if their child is sick and they need to get home, or what if they have to unexpectedly work late and the bus has already stopped for the day?

Guaranteed Ride Home programs help lower the apprehensions of low-income parents who don't feel comfortable taking jobs in the suburbs, especially if service is limited or there is no midday service. Guaranteed Ride Home programs provide a ride home on demand, and typically cost very little to implement.

#### **D. Specialized Transportation Service**

Many human service agencies operate their own transportation services specifically designed for their own clients. Some, however, open their services up to other members of the community. Here are specialized transportation programs that may be operating in your community:

**Head Start:** A program of comprehensive services for economically disadvantaged preschool-age children. Services, including transportation, are provided by local Head Start agencies and are funded by the Administration for Children and Families, part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). The same agencies that operate Head Start often provide other services for economically disadvantaged families, which may include transportation.

**Health Care:** Medicaid is a health care program for low-income and other medically needy persons. The Medicaid program pays for emergency ambulance service and transportation to

non-emergency medical appointments if the recipient has no other means to travel to the appointment. Medicaid is jointly funded by state and federal government, and is administered by the DHHS's Health Care Financing Administration. Medicaid-funded transportation is available in every part of the country, and is provided by a large network of for-profit, nonprofit, and public transportation providers.

**Services for Older People:** The Older Americans Act (OAA) established a network of services and programs for older people and provides supportive services, including transportation services, to meet the needs of older individuals. Public and private agencies, such as senior centers and Area Agencies on Aging, are recipients of OAA funds and many operate transportation services. The DHHS's Administration on Aging administers OAA funds, while many organizations for the elderly also receive Section 5310 (see below) money to purchase vehicles.

**Sheltered Workshops:** Another group in your community that may be providing specialized transportation services is the workshops for people with disabilities. Like programs for the elderly, sheltered workshops may receive Section 5310 funds to purchase vehicles.

Sharing vehicles belonging to one of the specialized programs described above might be an option to link your constituents with employment-related destinations. In fact, many of today's rural public transit systems began as providers of specialized transportation, but due to the transportation needs of other community agencies these providers expanded their services.

#### **E. Other Flexible Transportation Services**

Ridesharing and volunteer programs may also meet the travel needs of workforce development and one-stop participants and are examples of flexible service.

**1) Ridesharing** involves setting up transportation by combining known passenger groups in a single vehicle. Vehicle options include vanpools, carpools and shared ride taxi services.

**Vanpool** services are designed to allow groups of people to travel on a prearranged, regular basis by van. Vanpools may be publicly operated, employer operated, individually owned or leased. They can be more readily set up than fixed-route services and are cheaper to operate because the driver is not a paid employee but rather a rider in the vanpool. In an unsubsidized vanpool operating costs are shared equally among the passengers. Employment programs may also elect to subsidize vanpool costs, either for passengers or an entire vehicle.

**Carpools** are similar to vanpools except that because the vehicle is smaller the rider capacity is less. Typically, the driver of the car is the car owner.

**Shared-ride taxi service** is a service in which riders with similar points of origin and destination group together to share the cost of a taxi trip.

2) **Volunteer services** draw upon drivers from the community. Drivers are not paid for their services, but may be reimbursed for their expenses. These programs are typically coordinated by a nonprofit agency or community-based program and allow flexibility.

While volunteer programs can be a dependable option to get people to job training, communities have faced many problems with using volunteers to get employees to employment sites. Before initiating a volunteer program designed for work trips, first explore the potential barriers. (Resource - Call the National Transit Resource Center at 800.527.8279 for the publication **Succeeding With Volunteer Transportation** which offers a detailed plan for establishing and operating volunteer services.)

By providing flexible transportation services communities can be responsive to the diverse mobility needs of job seekers and employees.

## **II. Federal Funds to Support Transportation Services**

This section provides information about federal funding for transportation, in order to help workforce development agencies understand how transportation services are supported.

### **A. Transportation Equity Act of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA-21)**

Spending on transportation is guided by congressional authorization language, known as the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century or TEA-21. This legislation, which was signed into law in 1998, sets transit and highway spending levels until 2003.

TEA-21 assures guaranteed spending levels for public transit and related activities in large- and small-urban (see Section 5307 below) and rural areas (see Section 5311 below). It also authorizes spending for transportation for the elderly and people with disabilities that includes vehicle procurement and the purchase of transportation services (see Section 5310).

One of the notable components of TEA-21 is its latitude on the flexible use of DOT funds. For example, the **Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ)** program is a flexible funding program administered by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) which funds projects and programs to reduce harmful vehicle emissions and improve traffic conditions. CMAQ funds may be flexed to fund transit projects, rideshare projects, high-occupancy vehicle lanes, or other purposes. Communities in many states have used CMAQ funds to buy buses and vans, subsidize bus operations, set up ridesharing programs, and more.

Another flexible funding program is the **Surface Transportation Program (STP)**. These funds can be used by states and local communities for, among other things, transit capital projects and public bus terminals and facilities.

TEA-21 also introduced the **Job Access and Reverse Commute** program which provides communities with money to develop transportation services, including reverse commute programs, to transport welfare recipients and other low-income people to employment sites. The program is funded at \$75 million in 1999 and is guaranteed to increase to \$150 million by 2003. Other federal funds such as TANF and Welfare-to-Work can be used as matching funds. (These funding programs will be described below.) For more information on the Job Access and Reverse Commute program, contact the National Transit Resource Center at 800.527.9279 or through the Internet at <http://www.fta.dot.gov/wtw/>.)

The **Commuter Tax Benefit** program enables employees to afford transportation services. Employers can reimburse employees \$65 dollars a month for their transportation costs on transit or in vanpools and deduct the reimbursements as an employee benefit. Beginning after December 31, 2001, the nontaxable transit and vanpool benefits will increase to \$100 a month. In addition, employers can directly pay for an employee's transit and vanpool expenses and the costs can be deducted from the employee's paycheck before taxes.

## **B. U.S. Department of Transportation Annual Appropriations**

Since 1964 the federal government has provided funding to support public transit services. This funding and guidance comes from the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) through the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). The 10 regional FTA offices and designated officials in each state DOT provide localized technical assistance, outreach and guidance on the use of these funds. (**Resource** - For the names and numbers of appropriate contacts in your state, call the National Transit Resource Center.)

In a way, programs and activities in federally supported transportation activities are similar to those in the employment and training arena. Like the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), the U.S. Department of Transportation uses regional offices for the delivery of its services. Where the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) might use the Employment and Training Administration (ETA), the DOT uses the Federal Transit Administration to administer its activities. Similarly, there are cases when both federal agencies work directly with local providers, in the way that the DOT does with larger transit providers. In other cases, both federal agencies work through state labor or state transportation agencies.

Each year Congress appropriates money to the U.S. Department of Transportation's FTA to fund the operation and capitalization of public transportation systems in the United States. Some FTA funding goes for starting up and operating transit services; other funding is allocated to research and planning.

The following is a description of the FTA's funding programs for which your community may qualify. However, **be advised** that the bulk of annual DOT appropriations have already been allocated to specific transit programs and aren't likely to be available for employment initiatives. Still, the more you know about all of the programs funding transit in your community, the more knowledgeable you'll be in discussions with your local transit provider.

**Urban Transit Formula Grants (Section 5307):** These are formula-based block grants to public transit systems in all urbanized areas. For areas with populations between 50,000 and 200,000, the FTA awards these funds to states for capital and operating assistance to small-urban transit systems. Transit systems in areas with populations greater than 200,000 receive their funds directly from FTA and cannot use these funds for operating expenses, except in specific circumstances. FY 1999 funding level: \$2.5 billion.

**Major Transit Capital Grants (Section 5309):** These are congressionally designated grants for capital projects such as bus purchases, bus facilities and rail system construction and improvement. FY 1999 funding level: \$2.3 billion.

**Capital Grants for Transportation for Elderly and People with Disabilities (Section 5310):** These are formula-based block grants to states for transportation programs that serve the elderly and people with disabilities. States distribute Section 5310 funds to local organizations in both rural and urban settings, that are either nonprofit organizations or the lead agencies in coordinated transportation programs. FY 1999 funding level: \$67 million.

**Rural Transit Formula Grants (Section 5311):** These are formula-based block grants to states for capital and operating assistance grants to public bodies and nonprofits to provide public transit services in non-urban areas with populations of less than 50,000. FY 1999 funding level: \$180 million.

It is likely that some or all of these funds are currently being used in your community. To learn more about what is already being done, contact the National Transit Resource Center at 800.527.8279.

If your community already receives these funds, your organization can still play an important role in maintaining or expanding transit services. The federal transit grants listed above require **matching funds** (e.g., state or local funds) to complement the federal funds for a service, project or purchase. These matching funds can come from townships, city and county councils, community-based organizations, and state legislatures, among others. Some funding sources allow services, such as the work of volunteers, to be counted as an in-kind funding match.

Federal programs normally require that local matching funds come from sources other than federal sources. The Job Access and Reverse Commute program (which has a 50 percent match requirement), however, allows TANF and Welfare-to-Work funds to be used as matching funds. In addition, the Section 5311 non-urbanized program allows contracts with social service



agencies to be used as a match. This means your program dollars can be matched with those of other programs to provide expanded transportation needed by your clients.

Most states also provide state dollars to support transportation services. In some cases, these state funding programs are larger than their federal counterparts. In states like New Jersey (which uses funds from its casinos to pay for specialized transportation), Pennsylvania (which taps lottery revenue to fund senior transit) and Florida (which levies a tax for every license plate for transit) specific funding pools are used to pay for transit funding. While in states like Texas and Virginia, state legislatures have made significant commitments to their residents' mobility. Clearly, state transit funds are a very real contribution to the overall funding picture for public transportation.

### **C. Using Other Federal Agency Funds For Transportation**

While the major source of federal support for community transportation comes from the U.S. Department of Transportation, many other federal agencies have programs which can be used to support community transportation activities.

Many human service agencies provide transportation to enable clients to access vital services. This includes transportation for the elderly, people with developmental disabilities or Medicaid recipients when the transportation is provided by an arrangement other than general public transit service. The United States Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) spends almost \$3 billion every year to ensure that these individuals can access needed services — primarily health care.

Other federal agencies such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) also have resources available for transportation purposes.

Below is a description of federal programs that have eligible funds to provide transportation services to program participants. Whether these funds are used for transportation services often depends on priorities set by federal agencies and the states. However, it is important that communities know what funding resources exist so that they may tap into them.

**Workforce Investment Act (WIA):** The WIA's block grants to states provide funds for placement, job training and support services, including transportation. (WIA replaces the Job Training Partnership Act.)

**Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF):** TANF funds are block grants to states, established by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. States have flexibility to use these funds to provide transportation to individuals transitioning from welfare to work. Guidelines on how states can spend TANF funds are available from DHHS' Office of Family Assistance through the Internet at <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/news/welfare/>.

**Welfare-to-Work Grants:** The U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Employment and Training Administration has awarded \$3 billion in Welfare-to-Work grants to assist the hardest-to-serve TANF recipients in preparing for and gaining employment. States received 75 percent of this funding as formula grants. Local communities received 25 percent of these funds in the form of competitive grants. These funds can be used for support services, job retention and post-employment services, including transportation assistance.

By combining funds from different agencies, a community can create flexible and affordable transportation services.

For a list of other federal grant programs (e.g., Housing and Urban Development (HUD)'s Community Development Block Grants; and DHHS's Title XX Social Services Block Grants) that provide funds for supportive services which may include transportation services, refer to <<http://www.ctaa.org/ntrc/ctap/pubs/funding>>.

Federal money for transportation is, however, not the only source of funding available. Many community transit agencies have recently began looking toward local businesses and colleges and even hospitals to help support their services. Invariably, successful community transit agencies are supported with local funds, as well as with federal and state sources.

#### **D. Using TANF and DOL Welfare-to-Work funds for Transportation Services**

Seeking to foster coordination and the best use of resources, the U.S. Departments of Transportation, Health and Human Services, and Labor issued a joint guidance on the use of TANF and DOL Welfare-to-Work funds for transportation services on December 23, 1998. Through the guidance, the three departments encouraged workforce development agencies and human service agencies to support employment and job training transportation solutions that are systemic approaches to achieve transportation solutions.

As a result, this guidance clarifies how to use TANF and Welfare-to-Work funds for the following transportation activities:

- As a match for FTA's Job Access and Reverse Commute program;
- A contract for shuttles, buses, car pools or other transportation services;
- Reimbursement for work-related transportation expenses, such as mileage, fuel, public transit fares, and auto repairs;
- The purchase of vans, shuttles, and/or minibuses for the provision of transportation services to eligible individuals;
- Payment of start-up costs for new or expanded transportation services; and
- Facilitating the donation and repair of previously owned or reconditioned vehicles.

The guidance allows TANF and Welfare-to-Work funds to be used for other transportation services, as well. (For a complete text of the guidance, contact the National Transit Resource Center at 800.527.8279, or via the Internet at <http://wtw.doleta.gov/linkpages/10-98.htm>.)

### **III. Planning for Transportation Services in Your Community**

Although Workforce Investment Board staff have the responsibility for employment and training planning and would primarily be working with transportation entities to plan employment transportation programs, here is a brief look at the transportation planning process.

#### **Metropolitan Planning Organizations**

In urbanized areas, transportation decisions are made through a planning process carried out by **Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs)**. The MPO, like a workforce development board, has lead responsibility for developing transportation plans and programs that cover both highway and transit projects. Members of an MPO include public officials, transportation providers and a representative of local transit users.

There are more than 300 MPOs across the country, structured differently depending on the area. About half of the MPOs are part of regional councils that may house other planning bodies, such as Private Industry Councils and Area Agencies on Aging. MPOs are also set up as single-focused transportation planning bodies. Many MPOs are hosted by city or county governments.

One of the **new** requirements of TEA-21 is that MPOs coordinate their planning with the planning processes of other federal programs (e.g., Workforce Investment Act, Older Americans Act, Housing and Urban Development). For instance, the U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires its Community Development Block Grant recipients to submit a consolidated plan for investing HUD funds in the community. TEA-21 now requires the MPO and the HUD grantee to coordinate their respective transportation planning. In aging services, transportation needs addressed in the area plans, long required by the Older Americans Act, now must be coordinated with the MPO's transportation plan. Similar coordination now is a requirement under the Workforce Investment Act.

#### **Statewide Planning**

The statewide transportation planning process includes both urban and rural areas. These plans must incorporate the urbanized area plans developed by MPOs. In addition, since there is not an MPO process for non-urbanized (i.e., rural) areas, the statewide plans must address transportation priorities in all the non-urbanized areas of the state.

State plans must be developed in consultation with local officials and require public participation. This public involvement process is intended to include low-income and minority populations, in addition to other interested parties.

The next two **Managing Mobility** technical assistance briefs outline approaches to link one-stop participants with transportation services.

**Brief Two: Creating Individual Transportation Plans** provides guidelines on creating personalized plans for assisting one-stop participants in reaching employment-related sites.

**Brief Three: Working in Partnership — Transportation as the Vital Link** suggests ways that one-stop staff can work in partnership with transportation providers to promote greater mobility options for one-stop participants.

To request these technical assistance briefs, or to order additional copies of this brief, call the National Transit Resource Center at 800.527.8279.

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