

Working in Partnership: Transportation as the Vital Link

Managing Mobility Series

Technical Assistance Brief Three

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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:

- Suggest ways that one-stop staff can work in partnership with transportation providers to facilitate customers' use of available transportation services. Activities include sponsoring joint job fairs, providing transportation orientations and travel training sessions, and promoting transit ridership.

I. Try Transit First: Promote Existing Transportation Services

Many communities have public and private transportation services that are readily available to one-stop customers to use to get to work. Many dislocated workers and other job seekers actually live within walking distance of fixed-route transit services and can reach jobs and training with a reasonable commute time. In less urban settings, un- and under-employed people have access to dial-a-ride van and bus service. Moreover, existing ridesharing services are an available option in communities large and small.

Oftentimes, however, people are unaware of the existence of these services, where they go, or how to use them. In these cases, the barrier to reaching employment has more to do with a need to raise the awareness about transportation services than it does of not having transportation available.

If your community is fortunate to have available bus, van and rail services, here are some suggestions for making the transportation link between job-ready customers and the jobs they seek. These efforts include:

- Informing job seekers about available transportation services,
- Providing orientations and travel training to accustom one-stop staff and participants to the transit services, including how to read a bus map and schedule, and
- Sponsoring joint job fairs with transportation providers.

By placing job seekers in jobs that are served by existing transportation, job developers are able to strategically minimize transportation as a barrier to getting and retaining jobs.

When Job Seeking, Think Transit First

Many transit providers are urging job developers — where possible and practical, to be conscious of location and match job seekers with jobs on bus and rail lines first.

Transit providers may be able to make certain needed changes to transit routes and hours of service to accommodate the travel needs of your participants. However, due to limited funding and the time it takes to acquire new vehicles, hire drivers and start new routes, many of these changes, if possible, may not occur immediately.

By thinking transit first, one-stop customers will be able to reliably and affordably reach their jobs.

Action 1 — Educate participants about available transportation options

By taking an inventory of transportation services you have valuable information to help meet the transportation needs of the people in your program. Share this information with job seekers, especially those who live along bus lines or in the service area of a dial-a-ride service.

Option: Create a transportation center within the one-stop

A center displaying transportation information will allow participants to avail themselves of bus and rail schedules, route maps, and phone numbers of transportation services. The list of transportation services that you completed on the vehicle inventory form should also be featured. It may also prove useful to have a map on display so that participants can locate job sites, child care centers and travel routes from the communities where they reside. With these resources, job seekers will have tools to manage their mobility.

Note: Many participants may not be able to afford the cost of certain transportation alternatives. Examine any sources available to help the participant to afford the ride and include this information at the transportation center. (See the programs on **Pages 6 & 7** below.)

Keep in Mind: Since there is no such thing as “regular” business hours, be sure to include information on the operating hours of all available transit services so that second- and third-shift commuters know whether they can use a service or not.

The **Nia Center** in Louisville, Ky., is a campus in which the Transit Authority of River City (TARC) Nia Neighborhood Travel Center is housed with the Workforce Development Partnership Center. This travel center is a focal point for West End Louisville public transportation services and information. The Nia Center is adjacent to the intersection of two of TARC’s most heavily traveled bus routes. In addition, three neighborhood circulator routes, an express service to an industrial park and a late-night bus serve the Nia Center.

A Nia Travel Center coordinator is available on site as a liaison to the agencies of the Workforce Development Partnership Center and to the surrounding community, including employers and government agencies. The transportation coordinator works cooperatively with employers to design and deliver specialized, cost-effective transportation service for employees living or working in the area.

Option: Take advantage of transit's one-stop trip planning capabilities

Many transportation providers have customer service numbers or web sites which list route and schedule information, and other information for planning trips and directly scheduling rides.

- **The Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART)** in Detroit, Michigan, began an over-the-phone information listing of job openings along bus routes. Detroit's largest radio station announces job openings and the bus line that an employee would take to access those jobs. During a given week, over 100 calls will be made to the job line.
- **The Ventura County (Calif.) Transportation Commission** uses computer technologies which allow caseworkers to directly schedule work trips for clients. In addition, Ventura County has an Internet web site <www.goventura.org> which provides the latest information on transportation options for riders.
- In addition to providing bus and subway schedules and maps, the **New York City Metropolitan Transportation Authority** offers its Human Resource Administration transit information desk as a resource for employment services staff to plan individual trips for recipients. This includes trip planning to two of the area's major employers: LaGuardia and Kennedy Airports.

Action 2 — Incorporate travel training into one-stop services

Since riding a fixed-route bus or using a dial-a-ride service may be a new experience to many participants, offer participants instructions for using available transportation services. For many people, simple unfamiliarity with transit keeps them from riding. Travel training will make the commuting experience understandable and more comfortable.

Travel training may involve verbal instructions or an actual demonstration of the process of using a fixed-route or dial-a-ride service. It may also include an orientation on using a ridesharing program or a Guaranteed Ride Home program.

Invite the transportation providers in your community to be involved in the travel training. This training might take place at a transit facility, a one-stop center or a social service center. Perhaps a job developer or caseworker knows about local transportation alternatives and can be designated as the travel trainer.

Resource: Call the National Transit Resource Center at 800.527.8279 for general guidelines on using fixed-route and demand-response services.

Training the Travel Trainer

The **Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA)** and the **Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (DPW)** are working together to make sure DPW participants are not only aware of SEPTA services, but know how to use them. In early 1998, SEPTA implemented an Access-to-Work Hotline. DPW participants can call one number to learn the routes and schedules for getting to a particular job site. SEPTA also published a series of How to Ride guides that explain commuting services. These guides are available in each Philadelphia Assistance Office. SEPTA has also developed a Train the Trainer workshop designed to teach case workers and job developers how to use SEPTA so they, in turn, can teach DPW participants.

As officials with the **Worcester (Mass.) Regional Transit Authority (WRTA)** began to discuss employment transportation issues with human service providers in its region, they realized that both staff and welfare recipients did not know much about WRTA transit services. As a result, WRTA and the Department of Transitional Assistance instituted training sessions for DTA staff that focused on how to read bus schedules, how to make transfers and how to use the services.

From: APTA Welfare-to-Work Survey, 1998

Action 3 — Invite transportation providers to job fairs

Job fairs are a tried and true method for enabling job seekers to find prospective employers. It is also an effective way for transportation providers to help maximize the employment opportunities of job seekers.

Invite transportation providers to job fairs and make the link many job seekers need — a way to get to work. By speaking with transportation representatives at job fairs, carless job seekers can immediately determine whether they can commute to a potential job site using public transportation or other established travel options.

Variation: Hold a job fair at a transit terminal, inviting employers from sites that can be reached from that transit terminal. This would assure that job seekers who meet employers at the job fair would be able to use public transit to reach employment sites.

Here are the benefits that may emerge from making transportation providers a regular partners at

job fairs:

- Job seekers can focus on job openings that are accessible using public transit and other transportation programs.
- Job seekers, employers and job developers become aware of existing transportation services.
- Transportation providers are available to answer travel questions.
- Transportation providers can learn what travel needs riders and potential riders have.
- Employers can learn about incentives to use transit and vanpools, such as the Commuter Tax Benefit.
- Employers can form a transportation plan for their employees which fosters public transit use.

Spotlight on North Carolina

- In North Carolina, both the Division of Social Services and the Department of Transportation encourage local transit and social service agencies to co-sponsor job fairs, along with local community colleges (providers of job readiness training) and employers.

North Carolina's Triangle Transit Authority and area county departments of social services have jointly sponsored job fairs. The job fairs give employers a chance to interview Work First participants as potential employees. They also give employees the opportunity to evaluate their transportation needs and alternatives when they are applying for the job. Job fairs coordinated by local transit systems and social services agencies have proven a successful way to hire new employees.

II. Try Transit First: Encourage Ridership on Transportation Services

Even when one-stop participants are aware of transportation services, they may still need other incentives to actually use the services.

Action 1 — Encourage use of daylong and monthly passes

Inform participants about monthly public transportation passes which can lower their transportation costs. In addition, assist participants with money management so that they can allow for the monthly bus pass expense.

By offering a pass that enables riders to make multiple stops on the way to and from work, riders

have a low-cost way to take children to child care centers, shop and reach job sites requiring many transfers.

- **Santa Clara (Calif.) Transit** offers a Day Pass that targets residents in Santa Clara Valley who are primarily low income. Riders pay \$1.50 for a day pass to travel to work. The pass enables riders to transfer between dial-a-ride service and a mainline feeder bus, without any restriction on the number of trips they take each day.
- **The New York City Metropolitan Transit Authority** offers free transfer passes so parents can drop their children off at child care and resume their commute on a bus or train without paying another fare. In addition, the Authority offers unlimited use 30- and 7-day passes so that riders can make multiple stops at child care centers, training programs, shopping centers and job sites.
- **Connecticut Transit (CT)**, the state-owned transit system which operates fixed-route bus service in Hartford, Stamford and New Haven, has initiated a number of programs to make using the bus service easier for riders. Although intended for the general public, CT's new One Fare Everywhere policy benefits new low-income workers since they only need to pay one low fare even when they cross from the city into the suburbs for jobs. This is part of a larger cooperative agreement between CT and its contracted services to coordinate fares so that the metropolitan regions promote a seamless transit system. CT also provides one-day and seven-day passes that allow riders to make as many stops as they need at one discounted price.

Opportunities to subsidize the cost of transit fares

Transit providers and social service agencies believe that the short-term expenses required to accustom new riders to public transit will serve long-term ends of increased use of public transit. Here are a few programs that provide free transit services to new employees.

- **SMART (Detroit, Mich.)** promotes its Get a Job, Get a Ride! program to new employees in the Detroit area. When eligible new employees get a job they can enjoy one month of free rides on SMART buses.
- **DART First State**, Delaware's statewide transit system, provides free rides on DART buses for the first three weeks of a new job. To be eligible for these free trips employers must first send a letter to DART indicating that the employee has been hired. While the first free pass and route information go directly to the employee's home, the remaining passes are sent to the employer who distributes the passes to the employee on the first day of work.

Action 2 — Develop a sense of comfort in using public transit

Reluctance to using public transit services may have to do with ensuring that potential riders feel safe and comfortable riding transit. Here are some low-cost ways that transit providers, employers, and employment and training agencies can encourage ridership on currently available buses and trains.

Guaranteed Ride Home Programs

Often, job seekers could readily use public transit buses and trains to get to jobs in the suburbs; 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 parents who don't feel comfortable accepting 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.

Typically, each public transit rider is given an ID number and 2 free trips home a year. The public transit provider contracts with a taxi company to provide that trip home during an emergency or if the rider is unexpectedly required to work late at night.

Request-A-Stop Programs

To enable riders to get off of the bus closer to their destination, some transit providers allow riders to get on and off the bus anywhere along the bus route. This not only promotes personal safety, particularly for workers traveling at night, but it also promotes flexibility on the part of the transit agency.

- **New Jersey Transit** has a request-a-stop program to promote safety for riders on NJ Transit buses statewide. At any time between 9:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m., riders can get off the bus anywhere along the bus route. On a case-by-case basis, riders in more remote areas such suburban and rural areas can take advantage of the Request-a-stop program during the day, as well as at night.
- The **Niagara Frontier Transit Authority (NFTA)** in Buffalo, N.Y., operates a request-a-stop program after 9:00 p.m. Since many inner city residents are employed in service industries which have night or evening shifts, the program allows riders to get off the bus anywhere along the route if the bus can safely stop.

Working in partnership with transportation providers in order to ensure that new employees who can readily use public transit know about the services and how to take advantage of them can be the vital link between one-stop participants and their new jobs.

Don't miss two other technical assistance briefs in the **Managing Mobility** series:

Brief One: An Introduction to Community Transportation familiarizes the reader with the range of community transportation services that could be used to provide trips to work, and describes the ways in which many communities are funding and planning transportation services.

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

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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