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**PUBLIC TRANSIT – HUMAN SERVICES
TRANSPORTATION COORDINATION PLAN FOR
GREENE, MIAMI, MONTGOMERY, AND
PORTIONS OF NORTHERN WARREN COUNTY,
OHIO**

***BENEFITS OF COORDINATION
TO PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS***

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BENEFITS OF COORDINATION TO PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS¹

Coordinating transportation services is a great way to get more results from limited resources. Coordination requires that agencies share resources and responsibilities to create cooperative agreements that lead to greater efficiency and productivity. Coordination works best when improvements in both efficiency and productivity seem warranted.²

Does your agency ever find itself in any of these situations?

- You have requests for transportation that you cannot fulfill?
- There are times when you can not provide your agencies services to persons who needed them because those individuals cannot get transportation to your facilities?
- It's difficult to serve some persons with special needs, such as persons who use large wheelchairs?
- There are times when your drivers and vehicles are not used to their full capacity?
- You could provide more or better transportation if there was another organization willing to help share the costs?
- There are times when you would like to turn the responsibility for operating transportation services over to someone else? That the need to manage drivers, maintenance, dispatching, funding, billing, vehicle acquisition and storage, and all the rest just seems like a great big hassle?
- The costs of providing transportation are a concern for you?
- You need to hire more drivers but you don't have enough funding?
- You need help in grant writing?
- You see a need to become more competitive in applying for transportation funds that now give more weight to coordinated applications?
- You see a need for additional driver training? And don't know how to get it?
- You need help in recruiting and retaining volunteers?
- You would like to extend your service hours or service area?

Do any of these situations apply to you?

¹ This document was written by Jon Burkhardt and Dr. Joohee Yum of Westat. Mr. Burkhardt edited this memorandum and supervised its production.

² More information on the definition of coordination is found in the companion technical memorandum for this project entitled *Best Practices in Coordination*, which describes coordination's basic features and what it can achieve in various communities. Readers are also referred to the technical memorandum entitled *Transportation Providers, Purchasers, Costs, Origins, and Destinations* which includes detailed information on agencies that provide or purchase transportation services in the Greene, Miami, Montgomery, and portions of Northern Warren County, Ohio.

If you answered “yes” to any of the questions above, it’s probably worthwhile to explore how coordination arrangements with other organizations could help your agency. Those agencies that are comfortable with their current transportation services but have some unused capacity and a need for additional funds could become the transportation providers for other agencies. On the other hand, those agencies with numerous trip denials and feeling burdened by the need to provide transportation may wish to consider contracting with another organization for at least some of the trips that their customers need.

This document was created to help you understand general concepts of the transportation coordination. It can also be a guide when you work with other agencies to achieve successful transportation coordination. Throughout this memorandum, you will find examples on how agencies can work together and what they do to make it work. You may come across new strategies you have not previously used or attempted that could potentially benefit your agency and ultimately your clients. Feel free to pick and choose ideas that you think the most appropriate to your organizations and talk to your colleagues about them. Talk to the transportation service providers outside of your organizations and ask what their situations are. The goal is to increase efficiency, productivity, and service quality by working together.

COORDINATION: WHAT IS IT?

Coordination is a **technique for better resource management**, in which improved organization strategies are applied to achieve greater cost-effectiveness in service delivery. **Coordination is about shared power**, which means **shared responsibility**, **shared management**, and **shared funding** among the agencies involved in the coordinated efforts. Coordination also involves sharing the **benefits** of its application among the coordination partners.

Coordination of transportation services is best seen as “**a process** in which two or more organizations (that may not have worked together previously) interact to jointly accomplish their transportation objectives. Coordination is like many other political processes in that it involves power and control over resources, and coordination can be subject to the usual kinds of political problems and pressures, such as competing personalities and changing environments.”³ Coordination of transportation services usually involves forging partnerships among agencies that typically did not previously work together in delivering transportation services. Such agencies often include various human service transportation providers and public transit authorities.

Coordination can improve transportation services by eliminating duplicative efforts and improving the efficiency of transportation operations. Coordinating transportation means doing better (obtaining more results, such as trips) with existing resources. It requires that professionals from various human service and public agencies work together with persons from different agencies and backgrounds.

³ Burkhardt, Nelson, Murray, and Koffman, *Toolkit for Rural Community Coordinated Transportation Services: TCRP Report 101*, Transportation Research Board, Washington, DC, 2004.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM COORDINATION EFFORTS

When transportation resources are coordinated in a community, it is usually done with the **expectation of positive outcomes**. By working for greater efficiency in the use of transportation resources, coordination can **lower the costs of providing services**. Most communities apply these cost savings to increase the numbers of trips served, thus **increasing overall service effectiveness**. The combination of increased efficiency and increased effectiveness can create great improvements in unit costs, such as costs per trip, per mile, or per hour. The range of benefits commonly observed from coordinated transportation services includes the following:

- Lowered trip costs for travelers and for human service agencies;
- Extended service hours;
- Services now provided to new areas or new communities and to more people;
- More trips made by persons needing transportation;
- Services more responsive to customers' schedules, points of origin, and destinations;
- Greater emphasis on safety and customer service;
- More door-to-door service; and
- More flexible payment and service options.

There are three kinds of results that can be expected from the process of coordinating transportation services: First, coordination changes **institutional structures** (numbers of providers, funding sources used, etc.) **and services** (service types, hours per day, areas covered, etc.). Next, these structural outputs are reflected in the **performance measures** typically used to assess transportation services (efficiency, effectiveness, and cost-effectiveness). Finally, these changes lead to **beneficial outcomes** such as increased consumer satisfaction, and greater community mobility and its associated benefits, such as increased health and well-being, more economic activity, and decreased institutionalization.

SOME KEY COORDINATION STRATEGIES

Key coordination strategies include those that decrease unit costs so that the savings can be applied to expanded services. The combination of these activities increases the overall cost-effectiveness of transportation services, measured primarily by average cost per trip. Here are some of the strategies that you should consider.

Increase Labor Productivity

Labor is the largest component of the overall costs of providing transportation. Because drivers' salaries typically account a very large portion of the total system cost (35 to 50 or even more), the possibility reducing the overall number of drivers should be explored as a significant way to generate cost savings. Many agencies have found that their current driver assignments overlap, meaning that vehicles from multiple agencies are traveling on the same routes at approximately the same times and no one is generating enough rides to fill their vehicles. By coordinating trips, more passengers can be served by fewer drivers. There are obvious savings here in terms of driver salaries and benefits.

When the number of drivers decreases, there are other types of increased efficiency in personnel management. From an administrator's perspective, there is less training required for drivers and less time involved in supervision and monitoring. In addition, if a new focus is placed on hiring more experienced drivers (who may more often hold full-time positions), their job skills are likely to be greater and job performance may be improved.

Of course, not to be missed in this discussion is the possibility of reducing administrative labor costs paid to managers, dispatchers, and other office staff. When agencies work together, they may find that not every agency has to have their own transportation director, dispatchers, bookkeepers, office staff, and maintenance personnel in those instances where such persons were not really working to full capacity every day. Cost savings for the salaries and benefits previously paid to such persons can be substantial.

How many times has your professional staff had to drive clients because they could not secure rides for them from other sources? Professional case managers at multi-service agencies provide more of their intended services when their responsibilities for transporting clients are transferred to a trained driver. Professional workers who offer specialized services such as counseling, treatment, assessment, or evaluation very often do not maximize their skills while giving rides to clients. Assigning the right person for the right task naturally increases the overall productivity and efficiency of an agency's performance.

With well-coordinated partnership, you can refer your clients to other agencies instead of using your professional staff as drivers. This benefits you, your staff, and your customers because it allows your staff to do what they are hired for. It also benefits other agencies with significant numbers of trained drivers because they can increase their volume of transportation services.

Coordinate Dispatching

The process of coordinating dispatching can save capital as well as labor resources. While capital expenses are often not a large part of an overall transportation budget, this benefit is still significant as well. If agencies coordinate the times and routes that vehicles serve a particular locale, fewer vehicles will be needed. Also, there will be fewer dispatching resources

needed, including dispatchers, computers, telephones and telephone lines, office space, computer programs, and all the other equipment associated with dispatching and vehicle assignments.

Expand Service Hours

You may have experienced receiving travel requests when transportation services are not available. What do you do when clients request rides for weekends or evening hours? If your agency offers evening and weekend hours without getting large volume of travel requests, it may feel like financial burden to offer such a comprehensive schedule. If you are part of the coordination partnership, you may not only begin to offer evening or weekend hours that you couldn't afford before but also may reduce your duty for weekend and evening hours. With coordination in place, the hours when service is provided each day and the days when service is provided each week can both be expanded.

Instead of excluding weekend transportation hours from operations, agencies can rotate weekend responsibilities among themselves. For instance, transportation service for the first weekend of each month could be covered by Agencies A, B, and C and the second weekend of each month could be provided by Agencies D, E, and F. While planning a coordination schedule, one can group agencies with different vehicle types and capacities (large vs. small, accessible vs. non-accessible) in one shift. Doing so, on any given weekend, smaller and larger vehicles with or without accessible equipment may be in service.

If your agency previously excluded transportation during weekend hours, you may now be able to offer additional weekend trips through coordination agreements. If your agency has been offering weekend or evening trips in the past, you may continue to do so while the operating costs of such services are shared.

Expand Service Areas

You may have experienced the need to turn down ride requests because clients were traveling outside of your service area. If you would like to have more options than just trip denial, coordination may help provide the answer.

Clients' travel needs do not end where jurisdictional borders meet. Client needs are not well served if agencies only provide trips within limited service areas regardless of the clients' travel needs. To ensure adequate transportation ride services for individuals traveling to adjacent counties, agencies may work together to create flexible coordination plan.

There are multiple ways that you and others can expand service areas collectively. Agency vehicles may be able to travel beyond an agency's typical service area if the additional costs of such travel are reimbursed. If there is a system where such extra efforts are credited and properly paid, agencies may find that providing transportation services across jurisdictions is not different from providing services within their existing service areas.

By establishing a reliable record-keeping system, every provider will be assured of paying their fair share of the total costs. If rides are now made to destinations where multiple providers are providing trips, it may be possible for one provider to provide the trips and receive appropriate payments from the other agencies. The foundation of such agreement is equity: everybody pays their fair share. The coordinated system should be able to guarantee that each agency's contribution will be recognized and recorded at its agreed upon value.

Increase Funding Opportunities

It is not uncommon to encounter a shortage of funds for transportation services. Coordinated teams of partners may benefit by becoming more competitive for transportation funds. As you may have noticed from recent funding solicitations, more and more emphasis is being given to program efficiency and coordination efforts. Many federal and state funding programs give additional credits to applicant agencies that are more highly involved in coordination efforts. In fact, a number of federal agencies are now setting guidelines which specify that transportation agencies with collaborative efforts receive extra points in a competitive grant review process. Now that such policies are in place, agencies with collaborative efforts get rewards and increase their likelihood of getting selected for funding. Furthermore, you can not only highlight in your applicant package that you are part of coordination team but also you and your partners can submit applications as a team.

Strengthen Your Agency's Image

What kinds of things do you mention in your agency's public relations materials? Do you belong to any consortium, teams, associations or special interest groups? When you indicate that you are part of larger entity, it indicates your commitment to efficient management strategies and can enhance your credibility. It shows that you are well connected with professionals working in the same field. It also proves that you are committed to make changes for better outcomes. Working with transportation coordination team is an ideal situation where you can bring positive outcomes to your agency and use the publicity to boost your agency profile. Your donors, community leaders and clients are always interested in knowing how you are doing. In particular, they want to be informed about your productivity and efficiency. Involvement in coordination effort can be a perfect example to convey how your agency maximizes existing resources. As coordination efforts progress, all participating organizations should receive the benefits of increased publicity of their programs.

MORE POTENTIAL COORDINATION ACTIVITIES

In addition to the major coordination strategies discussed above, there are other important activities that often result in beneficial outcomes. These activities are as follows:

- Larger agencies can maintain vehicles for smaller agencies.

- A centralized information office can substantially increase the knowledge of transportation options among riders and their advocates.
- Centralized dispatching can raise the overall level of productivity (the number of seats filled on the vehicles).
- Smaller agencies can provide transportation service for clients with highly specialized needs.
- Managers should carefully plan the number of seats needed for each trip: small agencies can help other small agencies.
- Large agencies can help smaller agencies with dispatching.
- Agencies can offer unused vehicles to other coordination partners when needed.
- Trip requests to one agency can be referred to other agencies.
- Partner agencies can create multi-agency customer intake forms.

THE COSTS OF COORDINATION

Coordination is not free of charge. Coordination usually results in improving efficiency and effectiveness of services and programs, but it requires some start-up investments. It may be more expensive, difficult and time-consuming task than most participants think.⁴

For anyone interested in coordination efforts, it is important to understand these three factors. First, while some agencies may hope to find their revenue increased as a result of coordination, coordination does not necessarily bring money back to the participating agencies. In many situations, cost savings achieved through coordination tend to be used to address unmet transportation needs. Thus, any additional dollar earned or saved via coordination goes to increase the supply of transportation services rather than to reduce agency budgets.

Second, coordination requires on-going teamwork. “Coordination agreements can unravel over time, so that constant attention is necessary to ensure that all parties keep working together. Coordination depends on mutual trust, respect, and goodwill among all parties involved, so long-standing coordination arrangements can be jeopardized if antagonistic or self-serving individuals become involved in transportation activities.”⁵

Third, some costs may increase. Vehicle insurance is one of those categories. When coordinated transportation services expand to provide service to other geographic areas or other groups with special needs, insurance companies may see that as a change to a higher risk level. But while an increase in insurance could be a burden to the participating agencies, money saved from other operating costs may even out the overall expenditures.

⁴ Burkhardt et al., 2004).

⁵ Burkhardt et al., 2004.

WHY INVEST IN TRANSPORTATION SERVICES?

Real improvements in transportation services are needed in the Miami Valley region NOW; even more will be needed in the future. The region needs a wider range of travel options and more cost-effective operations. Real transportation improvements are possible — other regions are succeeding in offering more cost-effective services. The costs of not making the improvements are huge; transportation investments save large amounts of money elsewhere. There are great opportunities for progress available now in the region; they should be seized and employed to the greatest possible advantage.

Transportation investments are much cheaper than

- Moving seniors and other persons in need into nursing homes.
- Keeping people on welfare.
- Providing routine health care in emergency rooms.

LESSONS FROM COORDINATION IN OTHER COMMUNITIES

The kinds of achievements that coordination has demonstrated in other communities across the United States include

- Increasing the number of trips they offer.
- Increasing the extent and the quality of service.
- Encouraging more communication among human service agencies and transportation providers; this should eventually lead to a high level of interaction.
- Overcoming a social environment that was hostile to transit and introduced transit into the minds of the public as a valuable and needed service.
- Increasing the amount of discussion between agencies and inspired them to think critically about 1) serving their clients in the best possible way, and 2) the potential benefits of coordination.

The kinds of cautionary advice offered by some of these other communities included

- Start small and build up operations over a substantial period of time – incrementally increasing the number of vehicles handled and the number of clients transitioned to the new service. A staggered launch could help ease clients and agencies into the program while offering the central system a chance to adjust its operations slowly.

- Encourage lead agencies to sit down and talk with stakeholders and prospective participants before taking action. Other communities have noted the fear that in joining the coordination process, smaller agencies would lose rides and that the “big transit agency” would absorb them.
- Understand that various agencies each kept track of records and scheduling in their own ways: some may use computer printouts, others may have online record systems, and others may still be using pencil and paper techniques.

There are several current examples of coordination within the Miami Valley region that can be used as a foundation for further efforts. In Greene County, Greene CATS operates as a consolidated transportation service that provides trips under contract to two of the three major transportation purchasers in the county. In Miami County, Miami County Transit provides trips for the Department of Jobs and Family Services, the major transportation purchaser in the county. In Montgomery County, the Senior Transportation Expansion Project, the City of Kettering’s Lathrem Senior Center, and the Wesley Community Center all offer transportation with various coordination attributes. Miami Valley decision-makers should build on this foundation to emulate the coordinated transportation successes found in other communities.

NOW WHAT?

Now, you are well informed about what coordination is, how other people do it, what to expect when you plan transportation coordination. Are you convinced that transportation coordination would bring positive outcomes to your organization? You are still unsure whether you would like to be partners in coordination or not? Either way, it is time to learn more about transportation coordination. Please read the rest of the memoranda from this project such as the *Final Action Plan* and *Best Practices in Coordination*. They include step by step instructions on how you go about transportation coordination and where you can get more information. If you have good ideas that are not included in these reports, let us know. We would like to learn from you. Your creative ideas may not only benefit your organization but many others in the nation. Perhaps, several years down the road, your story may be featured in our newest Best Practices in Coordination.

Please remember, anything is possible with coordination. When you look at the big picture, there are enough vehicles, staff, fund, and customers. It is a matter of how well you can coordinate all these resources. There is no cookie cutter answer for each coordination effort. Every region is different and every single coordination plan has its uniqueness. Be creative in addressing the needs of your customers and communities; that is how others achieved their success.

SUMMARY

This memorandum has addressed the key issues are in coordination. The efficiency-related cost savings derived through partnerships agreements are really the heart of coordination, the part that sets coordination apart from other management strategies. Without improved efficiency and cost savings, other benefits become minor issues. If some of the efficiency-related impacts cannot be achieved, coordination may not be worth the effort it requires.

Coordination can often result in a quantitative expansion of services, connecting more people to the destinations they need to reach at more times of the day or week. Coordination can also decrease the overall level of unmet trips and trip denials among transportation providers. Coordination is designed to reduce operating costs, enhance service effectiveness, and improve the quality of transportation services. With well-coordinated transportation services, services will be more visible, accessible and convenient to individuals who need them. Successful partnerships will produce an increased volume in ride requests and the amount of service delivered by participating agencies.

It's important to remember that coordination may not prove beneficial for all agencies in all communities. For example, agencies that rely heavily on volunteer labor may see trip cost increases if they are part of a more formal transportation program that relies on paid labor. But even for volunteer-based agencies, it may be cost-effective to coordinate with similar agencies instead of trying to provide transportation all by themselves. In situations where efficiency and productivity improvements can be made, coordination is a powerful tool.