

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) legislation was passed in August 2005. SAFETEA-LU requires that projects selected for funding under the Section 5310 Elderly Individuals with Disabilities Program, the Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) Program, and the New Freedom Program be “derived from a locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan”, and that the plan be “developed through a process that includes representatives of public, private and nonprofit transportation and human services providers and participation by the public.”

The Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC) has a long history of coordination efforts, dating back to the 1970’s. Looking back through CDTC’s archived files, much progress

The Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC) convened a committee of stakeholders, called the Regional Transportation Coordination Committee or RTCC, to help develop a coordinated plan, identify areas of need and ensure that JARC, New Freedom and Section 5310 funds are spent appropriately.

has been made over the years to coordinate programs, while coordination on a regional level has always eluded the region. The requirements set forth in the SAFETEA-LU legislation have required CDTC to take a step back and review previous efforts and identify current coordination opportunities.

Toward that end, the Capital District Transportation Committee, the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Capital District, convened a committee of stakeholders, called the Regional Transportation Coordination Committee or RTCC, to help develop the coordinated plan, identify areas of need and ensure that JARC, New Freedom and Section 5310 funds are spent appropriately. The RTCC membership consists of the regional steering committee that was formed by the Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA) to guide the Job Access and Reverse Commute efforts and others that were added to ensure that representation fulfills the guidelines set forth in the SAFETEA-LU legislation.

In 2006, the RTCC, in cooperation with the Albany County United We Ride Effort, conducted a survey of human service agencies that either provide, contract or have clients in need of specialized transportation. Over 500 survey questionnaires were mailed to human service agencies located in the four counties. Ninety-three providers and eighty non-providers completed the survey. The survey data were used to aid in the identification of unmet need and to help craft a list of recommendations for future focus.

Fifty percent of the responding providers own or lease vehicles. Forty percent contract for service and nearly 40 percent provide CDTA *Swiper* passes or tokens. According to the 2006 survey, 49 reporting agencies owned and leased a total of 481 vehicles and slightly over 28 percent are wheelchair accessible. The existing vehicle fleet is fairly new, with about 61 percent of the 481 vehicles being model year 2002 or newer. The 2006 survey asked respondents to indicate the number of vehicles that would need to be replaced over the next five years. These 49 agencies responded that they will likely replace 226 vehicles, and that they will need 81 additional vehicles to keep up with the growing demand for service. The data collected strongly support a need for additional wheelchair accessible vehicles. Clearly the population is aging--fourteen percent of today’s population is aged 65+ and that percentage will increase to

Forty-nine agencies responded that they will likely replace 226 vehicles during the next five years, and that they will need 81 additional vehicles to keep up with the growing demand for service.

17% by 2020. Almost 3% of today's population has a physical disability. Survey respondents indicated that of their clients having a transportation limitation (transportation limitation was defined as any physical, developmental, mental, economic or other condition that limits a person's ability or causes difficulty in getting to places), 18 percent need assistance in getting in the vehicle, 15 percent need a personal attendant and 12 percent use wheelchairs.

Predominant mobility needs identified by survey respondents included assistance in getting in and out of the vehicle, personal escorts and wheelchairs. These data reinforce the notion that door to door service is desirable and that there is a need for additional mobility training.

Needs relevant to the human service agency community were identified from conversations with representatives from human service agencies participating in the RTCC, the 2006 survey data and from the history section of this report. Shared maintenance, driver training, mechanic training, group purchasing and pooled resources were all identified as needs from this community. Much of the 2006 survey data reinforce these findings. For example, 73% of

Shared maintenance, driver training, mechanic training, group purchasing and pooled resources were all identified as needs.

agencies that own or lease vehicles reported that maintenance is performed by an outside vendor. Group purchasing or pooled resources could help this situation immensely. With group purchasing, the cost of oil changes, brakes, tire replacements and other routine maintenance services could be

reduced significantly. Coordination/contracting with other human service agencies that provide maintenance in-house could also achieve monetary and service quality improvements.

The 2006 survey of human service agencies found that of the 55 agencies that both provide transportation with agency owned and leased vehicles and reported information about drivers and driver training, only 31 percent require driver CDL licensing. Obviously, for safety reasons, more CDL licensing would be desirable. These same survey respondents reported that they hire 400 drivers to provide transportation services to their clients, which is an average of 7 drivers per agency. Other training, such as defensive driving, wheelchair securement, is provided by almost 70 percent. This inconsistency in training standards presents several options to improve efficiency by coordinating training and/or pooling training resources.

Human Service Agencies have repeatedly cited that funding source issues prevent coordination/co-mingling of clients. Many programs are funded with very specific funding sources, or funding "silos" that make it difficult if not impossible to serve other clients. The

Funding "silos" were identified as barriers that cannot be addressed at the local level.

2006 survey tried to get at this issue by asking the question, "Do you restrict the use of your transportation assistance only to consumers of your own organization's programs and services? And, if yes, is this an agency or funding source restriction?" Of the seventy-one agencies responding "yes" to this question, 38 or 54% indicated that their restriction was due to an agency policy, 24 or 34% a funding source restriction and 9 or 12% reported that it was both an agency and funding source restriction. Only 20 percent of the agencies reported that they do not restrict their transportation assistance. This issue needs to be looked at in depth, to determine how agency policies can be changed to allow coordination of service. The funding source restriction aspect of this barrier needs to be addressed by state and federal authorities.

Recommendations Included in the “Coordinated Plan

JARC and New Freedom require the recipient of funds in urbanized areas with a population over 200,000 to conduct, in cooperation with the appropriate metropolitan planning organization, an area wide solicitation for applications for grants. It is required that grants under these two programs be awarded on a competitive basis. All projects selected for JARC, New Freedom and Section 5310 must be consistent with the coordinated plan.

In March 2002, CDTA received the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) Welfare-to-Work Award for its Welfare-to-Work program. This award acknowledged CDTA for its innovative and creative efforts in providing access to job opportunities. **CDTA was one of only 10 transportation agencies nationwide to be honored.** CDTA was nominated for the award by the New York State Department of Transportation and the New York State Department of Labor.

The region’s successful use of JARC, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Community Solutions for Transportation (CST) funds for jobs access activities clearly supports continuation of these activities. Consequently, the coordinated plan calls for a solicitation for JARC projects that specifically continue those JARC activities that are eligible for JARC funding-- trip planners and a full-time coordinator and the Safety Net Brokerage. CDTC will develop the solicitation with the aid of the RTCC. Extra weight will be given in the evaluation of JARC proposals to those agencies that have been successful with these kinds of programs in the past. Local knowledge will also be given extra consideration. Multi-year programs and projects will be allowed and considered desirable to support program continuity.

The New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), through its Transit Bureau, administers the Section 5310 program in New York State. NYS has a well-established process, which includes an inter-agency review committee,

Those agencies submitting Section 5310 applications that <u>document</u> bona fide coordination activities will receive funding over those that do not pursue and/or document these activities.

for selecting fund grantees on a discretionary basis. CDTC is one member of the review committee that annually reviews grant applications for this area. With regard to the Section 5310 program, the RTCC recommends that a NYSDOT employee that works with the Section 5310 program continue to be a member of the Regional Transportation Coordination Committee. According to SAFETEA-LU guidelines, Section 5310 funding awards must be consistent with the criteria and recommendations set forth in the coordinated plan. CDTC’s review of the section 5310 applications will ensure that the Section 5310 funding awards are compatible with the coordinated plan. The coordinated plan criteria, as they relate to the section 5310 program are:

- Section 5310 funding will be awarded first to those agencies that pursue and document bona fide coordination activities, such as shared maintenance agreements, agreements to provide transportation to clients of other agencies on a *regular basis*, etc. In addition, these agencies should receive funding for their entire application request if that level of funding is available. Form letters to other local Human Service Agencies will not be accepted as documentation of coordination activity.

- Section 5310 funding will be awarded to those agencies that do not submit appropriate coordination activity documentation only if the needs of those agencies that do coordinate are met first.
- It will be mandatory for those agencies that are funded without documentation of coordination activity to submit documentation of coordination efforts at the time of their next application for funding. If coordination activities are not pursued by these organizations by the time of their second Section 5310 application, these agencies will not be funded, even if there are Section 5310 monies available.
- It will be mandatory for a representative from those agencies that are funded without documentation of coordination activity to attend quarterly or bi-annual coordination forum meetings that will be arranged by CDTC staff. Failure to attend at least half of these forums will make these agencies ineligible for section 5310 funding for up to two years.

The New Freedom Program is a new formula grant program for public or alternative transportation services and facility improvements to address the needs of persons with disabilities that go beyond those required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). New Freedom Funds can be used to cover capital and operating costs to provide new service. The

The solicitation for the New Freedom Program will “bundle” two-three years of funds to allow multi-year project proposals and to provide an opportunity for applicants to have an adequate time period to determine project success.

RTCC recommends that the solicitation for this program “bundle” two-three years of funds to allow multi-year project proposals and to provide an opportunity for applicants to have an adequate time

period to determine project success. The solicitation will encourage projects that request funds for operating assistance over capital projects to stretch the funding (operating expenses require a 50/50 match, whereas capital projects require an 80/20 match) and to promote fuller utilization of the existing Human Service Agency vehicle inventory, which the survey showed to collectively be a large fleet in good condition. Given the needs assessment documented in the coordinated plan, travel training, mobility management and driver training will be given higher consideration in the evaluation process over projects that do not specifically address the needs that have been documented in the coordinated plan.

Future Actions and Activities

The RTCC will continue to meet quarterly for the next year to oversee the project solicitation and evaluation for JARC and New Freedom projects. Frequency of second and third year meetings will be determined by the committee. The RTCC will review CDTC’s evaluation of Section 5310 applications to ensure consistency with the Coordinated Plan. The RTCC will serve in an advisory role to facilitate implementation of the Coordinated Plan. Additional needs and gaps in transportation services (not identified in the Coordinated Plan) will be identified as new information becomes available and the plan will be amended with these updates on an annual basis. New opportunities for coordination will also be identified and added to the Action Plan as appropriate.