

Meeting Older Adults' Mobility Needs Transportation Planning and Coordination in Rural Communities

Rural America and Transit Needs

Mobility is a crucial component of older adults' quality of life. Public transit and other affordable, easy-to-use and flexible transportation options are essential so older adults can access local grocery and retail stores, health care services, establish and maintain social and family contacts and preserve independence and well-being. For the 10 million older adults living in Rural America, transportation alternatives to driving one's own car become ever critical, but are often limited by the challenges of geography and available funding.



Transportation planning is
the first step
towards ensuring responsive
public transit and other
transportation options
for older adults
in Rural America.

Transportation Planning for Rural Communities: Why Is This Important?

Transportation planning involves public participation which provides important opportunities for older adults and others to influence how available funds are spent and where improvements can be made.

Transportation planning identifies needs in the rural community. Where do the seniors need to go? To what medical facilities do they need to travel? What are the transportation needs on weekends, such as to religious services and social activities? Transportation needs must be identified so that public transit services and other transportation options can be developed. Once services and options are developed, the rural community can seek dollars for implementation.

Planning should address **transportation coordination**. In many communities, even small ones, there may be a number of organizations providing transportation to older adults and others with specialized needs. The transportation service is typically restricted to the organization's clients and may serve

only certain types of trips, with the vehicles idle on weekends or other times when not serving those clients. Transportation coordination aims to make better use of those transportation resources, such as vehicles.

Messages for Policy Makers on Planning and Coordination

Encourage Constituents to Participate. When community residents participate in local transportation planning, their involvement will lead to strong, responsive plans. Participation can involve writing letters, testifying at public hearings, surveys, or participating in focus groups, citizen advisory groups and public forums. These may be sponsored by community groups, public transit agencies and regional councils of government.

Support Public Transit Improvements To Assist Older Adults. Public transit may compete with other forms of transportation, such as road and highway improvements for funds. However, funds for public transit in rural areas are necessary to provide mobility for older people who can no longer drive.

Support Effective Plans to Maximize Funding. Good plans will articulate community needs and outline transit services or other options to meet those needs. This helps to transform needs into "projects" which can provide a catalyst for leveraging funding when funding sources are identified or new funding becomes available. This can maximize funding resources coming to a rural community, the result of a well-thought out plan.

Monitor How Plans are Utilized. It is important to ensure plans are implemented. Policy makers should ask how new actions address needs identified in previously-developed plans. Sometimes a good plan may "sit on the shelf" if policy makers and advocates don't help secure funding and support for its recommendations.

Support One Plan in Particular. The *Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan*, now prepared in almost every county, is a key planning tool for rural areas. It must be completed to secure specialized federal transportation funding that can extend the capacity of rural transit services. By identifying the mobility needs of the community and strategies to address those needs, the *Coordinated Transportation Plan* points the way towards addressing gaps in existing transit service.

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Coordination means the different organizations work together to provide transportation in the community, sharing their resources, which will provide more transportation options and improve mobility for those with specialized needs, such as older adults.

- Participation in planning processes by older adults informs them, while ensuring their voices are heard.

Benefits for Older Adults

- Good planning addresses gaps in existing services.
- Good planning ensures that destinations, travel corridors and transportation modes used by older persons and those providing caregiving assistance are considered and included in transportation plans.
- Good planning helps make sure that the diverse needs of older adult populations are addressed. Frail older adults may need assistance getting to and from the transit vehicle; others may need to get to a doctor's office or an evening or weekend event.

Benefits to Rural Communities

- Strong plans improve a community's livability by bringing about improved mobility and safety for all.
- Well-conceived plans support economic development for the community.
- Plans help to ensure that transportation modes are linked within a community and that neighborhoods are connected to the broader region via an efficient road and transit network.
- Planning is a prerequisite for transportation coordination. Stakeholders in the community should collaboratively explore and plan options to coordinate and share transportation resources which will expand service for the community.

Levels of Transportation Planning

Transportation planning processes differ in urban and rural areas. Key elements common for rural areas are highlighted below.

1. Local and Regional: Public Transit-Human Services Coordinated Transportation Planning

What is it? With the 2005 federal transportation legislation, SAFTEA-LU, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) requires every county or region to prepare a **locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan** as a prerequisite for receiving federal funds from three programs that are targeted to older adults, people with disabilities and those with lower incomes.

- **FTA Section 5310:** Capital grants benefitting older adults and people with disabilities .



- **FTA Section 5316 (JARC):** Capital and operating grants for *Job Access and Reverse Commute* opportunities benefitting low-income persons.

- **FTA Section 5317 (New Freedom):** Capital and operating grants to benefit people with disabilities for services that go beyond the ADA.

Coordinated Plan Requirements:

Plans are developed through a coordinated process with local stakeholders, including seniors.

- Leadership for developing coordinated plans will likely come from county or regional agencies.
- These plans must be developed through a coordinated process, requiring collaboration in order to identify *needs* and *strategies* to meet these needs.



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- Participants will include: transportation planning agencies, public and private transportation providers, passengers and advocates, human service agencies, emergency management service providers, faith-based organizations, and school districts.

In rural **Oxford, North Carolina**, with a population of almost 8,500, local planning efforts which were conducted to meet the requirements for a coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan, identified transportation needs for older adults in the community. The local **Area Agency on Aging** obtained grant funds through the federal New Freedom program and **partnered with the transit agency, KARTS**, to implement a new service designed to serve the town's older adults.



What is it at the Regional Level? Federal statute requires that regions, including metropolitan areas, develop a plan called a Regional Long-Range Transportation Plan (**LRTP**) or the Transportation Improvement Plan (**TIP**). These plans will:

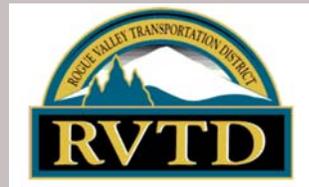
- Coordinate planning and programming activities to ensure that regional project priorities are reflected in fiscally constrained state transportation plans;
- Examine the benefits of public transportation service improvements before undertaking major road-building projects;
- Consider effects of transportation planning and land-use decisions on the community, including impacts on older adults and people with disabilities;
- Actively promote participation by consumers, including older people, in transportation planning decisions on a full range of issues related to transportation.

"The objective of coordination is more efficient management and improved service delivery of specialized transportation."
AARP Public Policy Institute

2. State and Regional Level Long-Range Planning

What is it at the State Level? State departments of transportation are responsible for planning activities outside of metropolitan areas, including all rural areas. State DOTs develop four- to six-year state transportation plans, known as **STIPs**. All projects to be funded with federal dollars must be in the STIP. For rural areas, there is considerable variation among states given different laws and jurisdictional structures, but often rural jurisdictions will deal directly with the state to ensure that their projects are "programmed" into the STIP.

"Programmed" means that projects are identified specifically, by name and by budgeted funding amount. Projects cannot be programmed unless the funding source is directly identified.



Rogue Valley Transportation District in Medford, Oregon, a small urban community set in a rural area in southern central Oregon, is updating its United We Ride Plan – the public transportation-human services transportation coordination plan necessary to fund New Freedom, Job Access and Reverse Commute and FTA Section 5310 vehicle capital grants. This Jackson County transportation provider plans a fairly significant update because of concern that some groups may have been under-represented in the original 2006 plan. The **RVCOG Senior and Disabled Services**, the County's primary older adults organization, will be an important participant in this intensive planning effort that anticipates **increasing ridership on the county's transit system by adding or promoting mobility choices for seniors** and the other target groups of these plans and **increasing awareness of transportation options for seniors in the county**.

Social Media and Community Involvement

Transit information is increasingly available through social network sites and resources. Although more common with urban transit, rural transit systems are using new social media tools, as well as traditional meetings, both to share information and gather input.

- **Facebook** - from one's own Facebook account, one can "Like" the transit agency and receive updates and news.
- **Twitter** – this requires an application to receive agency "tweets" (140-character messages) on one's own cell phone. Some agencies post their "tweets" on webpages.
- **Government 2.0 / e-Government** – is used to invite comment and responses by members of the public on any number of topics, including public transportation.



"We need to hear from the people who will use the service as to what works for them and what will improve it for them, how to make local transit services easier to use."

*Regional Transportation Planner
Central Valley California*



More information?

- AARP National and State Offices: www.aarp.org
- AARP Public Policy Institute: <http://www.aarp.org/research/ppi/>
- Community Transportation Association of America: Institute for Transportation Coordination and the National Resource Center for Human Service Transportation Coordination www.ctaa.org
- United We Ride: www.unitedweride.gov
- State Departments of Transportation
- State and County Departments of Aging
- County Transportation Commissions
- Councils of Governments and Regional Planning Agencies
- Regional Area Agencies on Aging
- FTA Circulars for Sections 5316, 5317, 5310 Programs www.dot.fta.gov
- National Cooperative Highway Research Program: Research Results Digest 354 – A Review of Human Services Transportation Plans and Grant Programs (July 2011)
- US DOT, FTA – Private Transportation Operators at the Table: A Guide to Participating in the Planning Process (January 2011)

AARP Rural Transportation Toolkit

Meeting Older Adults' Mobility Needs –

- 1 - Public Transit in Rural Communities
- 2 - Transportation Planning and Coordination in Rural Communities
- 3 - Additional Transportation Options for Rural Communities
- 4 - Funding Rural Public Transit
- 5 – Transit's Role in Livable Rural Communities
- 6 - Health Care and Transportation in Rural Communities