

CHAPTER I

Introduction

The Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) contracted with LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc., to conduct a Technical Assistance Project focusing on transportation services within the four-county area of Buffalo, Jackson, Eau Claire, and Trempealeau Counties.



The study focuses on general public transportation issues within the four-county study area, herein referred to as the Western Dairyland Study Area. General public transportation service within the study area is very limited, and has only recently been provided by the Wheels for Work program. This program has provided access to employment for many disadvantaged residents of the study area. For some residents of the community, this service may be their only link to work. The demand for these programs is only one indicator of the need for transportation services in this rural area of Wisconsin.

STUDY APPROACH

Western Dairyland Economic Opportunity Council (WDEOC) provides a wide range of services as a designated Community Action Agency serving residents of Buffalo, Eau Claire, Jackson, and Trempealeau Counties. These services include Housing and Energy Services, Homeless Services, Project Employment, Head Start, and transportation, as well as many other services. The transportation program began by using volunteer drivers to serve the needs of the elderly and people with disabilities. Since the initiation of the Wheels for Work program, there is an evident need for more extensive transportation service to meet the needs for employment and access to human services.

Introduction

The initial effort of this project was to collect data and provide an evaluation of the existing services. The next step was to determine the demand for public transportation services within the region and then to identify potential alternatives for consideration and to evaluate those options. A draft plan was prepared and submitted to the community for additional input before a final plan was prepared.

Advisory Committee

An initial “Kick-off Meeting” of the Advisory Committee was held in Whitehall on September 4, 2002. This Advisory Committee met to discuss project goals, priorities, and a time line for completion of the final study. Representatives were invited to attend from each of the counties, municipalities within the four counties, social service agencies, employers, and interested citizens.



Additional meetings were held with the Advisory Committee at key points during the process. These meetings were to present initial findings and to discuss service alternatives. Three Technical Memoranda were submitted and reviewed by the Advisory Committee. Input from the Advisory Committee was used to direct subsequent steps in the study. The recommendations for service were developed jointly by the Consultant Team and the Advisory Committee.

Public Input

Input from residents of the four counties was sought in several ways. The first was through representation on the Advisory Committee. Second, public meetings were held to present draft recommendations and to seek input from citizens. These public meetings were publicized in local newspapers and on local radio stations. News articles were published in local newspapers.

All project information was presented on the Internet for easy access to any interested individuals. The Internet website address was published with project information. Meeting dates and interim reports were made available. Comments were sought by mail, telephone, and email.

SUMMARY OF THE ISSUES

During the September Kick-off Meeting, the LSC Team briefed the Advisory Committee on the study process to be undertaken. Key persons and agencies involved with or affected by public transit services were identified to the LSC Team. LSC contacted other agencies and met with various individuals concerned with public transportation issues in the region. Major issues and concerns for public transportation were identified. These issues, as well as others that were identified during the process, were addressed in this planning effort:



A number of issues were identified initially to be addressed as part of the Technical Assistance Project. As part of the process, additional issues were identified through the involvement of the local WDEOC staff, other local stakeholders, and the CTAA staff. Among the issues that have been identified are the following:

- What are the locations of services, employment, and residential areas which should be served?
- What is the level of demand for public transportation services? What are the current and projected unmet needs? How do the needs compare for service within the four counties as well as to adjacent counties?
- How can regional mobility be enhanced?
- What type or types of service would be appropriate to meet the identified needs?
- There is a need for transportation by people not eligible for other programs.
- How can enhanced public transportation services be integrated with the Wheels for Work program and the other services of WDEOC?
- What is the best operating plan to provide public transportation service?
- What are the vehicle and capital equipment requirements to provide the recommended service?
- What are the operating costs of the recommended service?
- What are the potential sources of revenue to sustain the proposed service?
- What is the potential for job creation as a result of implementing the enhanced service?
- What are the coordination efforts that could be undertaken to provide for effective and efficient use of available resources?

These and other issues were addressed as part of the Technical Assistance Project.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The WDEOC does not currently have established goals for providing public transportation within the study area. General goals and objectives derived from both WDEOC staff and the Advisory Committee. The objectives will also be used to evaluate the existing service and any potential changes.

Preliminary Transit Goals and Objectives

- 1. Provide efficient transit services within Buffalo, Eau Claire, Jackson, and Trempealeau Counties, as well as to and from surrounding counties.**
 - a. Provide transit service for the general public.*
 - b. Provide service when it is needed during the day.*
 - c. Provide regional transit service.*
- 2. To provide persons in need of transportation access to child care facilities, employment, and other social service agencies.**
 - a. Provide transportation for access to employment.*
 - b. Create additional employment through the use of transit service.*
- 3. To coordinate between various organizations, agencies, and governmental entities the most effective transit system within the rural Western Dairyland area.**
 - a. Coordinate the use of existing resources*
- 4. Locate additional funding sources for the provision of transit service within the area.**
 - a. Fund general public transit service using existing funds of numerous agencies.*
 - b. Locate new and innovative funding mechanisms.*

These goals and objectives were reviewed by the Advisory Committee and became the basis for evaluating service options.

REPORT CONTENTS



Chapter II presents the existing community conditions and demographics. Chapter III presents a summary of existing transportation providers within the four-county study area. Chapter IV presents the transit needs assessment for the study area. This includes an evaluation of the needs using both the Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP)

method and current program participation trip estimation method for estimating overall transit trip needs.

Chapter V offers service concepts for meeting increasing future demands. The concepts range from expanding the existing rideshare program to major service options, such as scheduled flex-route service. Each concept is evaluated in terms of its anticipated costs, ridership, capital requirements, and performance measures.

Chapter VI introduces the institutional and financial options for the WDEOC. Existing institutional arrangements and funding sources are reviewed. Additional funding sources are identified, some based upon the experience of similar agencies in other states. Chapter VII provides a summary of four regional transit systems serving rural areas. This comparison of peer systems provides information on how other areas have been able to meet public transit needs.

Chapter VIII presents the proposed service plan. This plan was developed based on the evaluation of the service concept options presented in Chapter V and review by the Advisory Committee. Chapter IX presents the recommended implementation steps.

Finally, Chapter X presents an assessment of the potential for job creation which would result from implementing the proposed transit services. Direct job creation, access to employment, and secondary employment are discussed.