



CHAPTER I

Introduction

The Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), on behalf of the Leech Lake Band of the Ojibwe, contracted with LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc. to complete a Technical Assistance project. The plan focuses on developing a coordinated public transportation system for Leech Lake Reservation residents, specifically throughout the Reservation Boundaries and the surrounding areas. The plan also examines transit needs, alternatives, and programs for the community within the area, and the potential for coordinated transportation services to meet the needs of local residents.



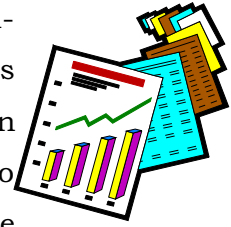
This Final Report presents a summary of the process for developing a general public transit plan for the Leech Lake Reservation and surrounding areas. This Plan represents a blueprint for implementing a phased approach to providing transit services through coordination with the local casino transportation program. There exists a substantial investment by the Band to provide for employee transportation services from outlying areas to the local casinos. The challenge to providing public transit to a greater number of Band members was ultimately accomplished by working with the casino transportation program and using the contracted revenue from several existing routes as a means to leverage federal transit funding and provide general public service. The final implementation plan incorporates a phased approach to providing services over the short-term, six-year planning horizon. It will be necessary for the Band to engage other local entities and encourage future coordination of services for the benefit of residents. This foundation lays the groundwork for establishing a small general public system with hopes of increasing services in the next several years.

ORGANIZATION OF PLAN

This Final Report is organized into 13 chapters covering existing conditions on the Reservation to the final implementation plan. Chapter II reviews previous plans

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and studies for the area. Chapter III presents those existing conditions related to transportation services and how those services are delivered. The report includes a description of the Reservation as well as a review of existing transportation resources available to residents in the area. The report focuses on transportation for the general public, elderly, disabled, and school children. There are existing transportation resources for both tribal and non-tribal members, which is provided mainly through the Casino Shuttle System, a system designed to meet the need for access to employment at the various casinos on the Reservation.



For some residents, this service is their only link to work, shopping, health care facilities, and other necessary services. However, there are other human service agencies that provide specialized transportation for their clients' needs. There is some duplication of services in the area, and the need to effectively and efficiently coordinate and/or consolidate services to form a seamless transportation system have been examined throughout this planning process. A significant amount of tribal funding is allocated to providing this important transportation link; however, there remains a greater need for services to access healthcare, shopping, and child care. Chapters IV and V review various socioeconomic conditions and transit demand for the area.

Chapter VI presents the peer communities analysis that LSC conducted in order to determine the operational structures and costs of other Native American Reservations and communities which are operating public transit services. These include Reservations in Montana and Oklahoma. Chapter VII reviews the different types of transit services that the study area could implement. This information was used in the determination and analysis of the transit service alternatives presented later in this document.

Chapter VIII reviews the various transit vehicles that could be purchased for the transit service. The type, size, cost, seating capacity, and general description of the different vehicles are discussed.

Chapter IX offers transit service alternatives for meeting the existing and future transit demands. The alternatives include: no change in the existing transit service; flex routes; demand-response service; and regional service. Also reviewed are the advantages and disadvantages of each transit service alternative, along with the level of capital needed to implement each alternative.

Chapter X presents several coordination strategies that could be implemented in the area to fulfill the SAFETEA-LU and Minnesota Department of Transportation (MDT) coordination requirements for receiving Federal Transit Administration (FTA) 5310, New Freedom, and JARC funding.

Chapter XI reviews various financial and organizational alternatives appropriate for the area, such as federal transit funds and organizing the new transit program as a Tribal Department. Chapter XII provides the Short-Range Transit Recommendations for the Band. This includes flex-routes and demand-response services. Finally, Chapter XIII provides a summary of implementation elements needed to start the new services.

This document should be reviewed by all concerned with the future of transit services within the study area. Comments should be submitted to either LSC or the Steering Committee. Comments from Technical Memoranda #1 and #2 were incorporated into this Final Report. The Final Report synthesizes the work of the two Technical Memoranda, plus provides a detailed operating plan for the recommended transit service alternatives.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to analyze and recommend strategies for the development of a coordinated public transportation system for tribal members. This technical assistance project describes the existing conditions in the region related to transportation services, discusses service and other alternatives for meeting public transportation needs into the future, identifies a locally-preferred set of alternatives, and presents an implementation plan for the next six years.

Introduction

The inception of this study was the result of a technical assistance grant from CTAA. The Leech Lake Band of the Ojibwe was one of three Native American Tribes to receive an assistance grant from CTAA in 2007. This study can ultimately be used by Tribal Planners to develop a general public transportation system both within the boundaries of the Reservation and additionally with links to regional destinations. The information from the preferred plan can be used to meet Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT) requirements for Federal Transit Administration grant funds for the purchase of capital equipment and operating funds.

STUDY APPROACH

As in many tribal areas across the United States, residents are taking a closer look at transportation services and are seeking to find the most effective means of providing those services. Currently, employment service is provided by local casino shuttles as well as a host of local programs and other “transit” providers detailed later in this document. A key element in the plan has been to clearly evaluate the unmet transportation needs of local residents. The current effort focuses on the feasibility of providing a more coordinated general public transportation system to meet the community’s needs. One important step toward providing an integrated community-wide transportation system is involving key players such as the Tribal Council, various tribal departments which either have a need for increased transportation services or currently provide services, local residents, local school representatives, and other agencies/organizations such as the MNDOT. Individuals from each key stakeholder department or agency served as members of the local Steering Committee for this planning process.

Project Team

An initial “kick-off meeting” was held in Cass Lake on February 27, 2007. The meeting was attended by key stakeholders in the Leech Lake area—MNDOT, the current transportation department, Veteran Services Department, Tribal Planning Department, and other local Tribal Departments within the area that have transportation concerns for the community. This



*Cass Lake Kick-Off Meeting,
February 27, 2007*

project team met to discuss the project goals, priorities, and a time line for completion of the final study. The team also discussed the local stakeholders who would be critical in completing the study for the area. The Veteran Services Department office took the initiative to be the primary point of contact and to pursue a services inventory, while the Tribal Planning Department indicated its willingness to aid in conducting the needs assessment through various survey initiatives and local contacts.

A second meeting was held in June 2007 with the Steering Committee. Additionally, public meetings were held in various locations across the Reservation. A third meeting was held to review alternatives in August 2007. The project team met with a Tribal Council representative and Casino Department Head to discuss the alternative for providing general public transit service. It was the discussion at this meeting which led to a Phase I operating concept and recommended plan.

There are existing resources in the area used by the casinos and human services agencies to provide transportation services for their clients. The existing resources represent a significant investment and provide some of the resources necessary to implement a general public coordinated transportation system. Coordination and consolidation of services typically allow local entities to provide additional and enhanced service to the community using existing resources. A key issue in this project has been to identify those existing resources that are available and any additional resources that may be needed to provide transportation service.

Stakeholder Meetings

The group of local stakeholders identified by the project team included the following departments within the Tribe, as well as others:

- Leech Lake Tribal Veteran Services
- Tribal Planning
- Tribal Youth Division
- Fleet Management
- Community Health Department
- Minnesota Department of Transportation
- Community Transportation Association of America

These groups represent departments that provide transportation services and those that may have specific transportation needs. As part of the process to identify local transportation issues, these stakeholders were provided the opportunity to provide input for the study. Appendix A presents a list of meeting attendees for the initial planning meeting.

SUMMARY OF THE ISSUES

During the February “kick-off meeting,” the LSC team briefed the Steering Committee on the study process to be undertaken over the six-month period. The key stakeholders involved with transportation services were identified. Major issues and concerns regarding public transportation were discussed. Following are summaries of the major issues:

- Lack of affordable transportation for low-income tribal members.
- Mobility to medical, employment, shopping, childcare, and youth after-school programs.
- Connections with other services, such as Grand Rapids and Bemidji services.
- Safety of waiting on roads for youth and others to reach current shuttle stops.
- The need for accessible and safe/reliable vehicles. Maintenance for older vehicles is costly.
- Obvious barriers to education, employment, and social activities due to lack of transportation services.
- High rate of depression due to income challenges and unemployment. Transportation is seen as a vital link to social welfare and independence.
- There are capacity and schedule issues for the current transportation system. Some overcapacity issues arise with casino shuttles.
- Long distance trips for major medical appointments are very costly. There is a need to provide these regional connections in an affordable manner.
- Non-emergency medical transportation is very costly. The lack of accessible vehicles for the general public inhibits travel for some. An example is of an ambulance being used to transport a patient home at a cost of over \$3,500 for a one-way trip.
- Tribal members may have vehicles to use; however, the limited amount of income makes maintenance and operation of private vehicles difficult for some.

VISION FOR GENERAL PUBLIC SERVICES

As part of the initial meeting held in Cass Lake, the Steering Committee developed general project goals that have guided the planning process throughout the course of the study. In developing a transportation system, it is necessary to recognize the goals and objectives of transportation in the community as this determines the direction to be taken in the study. The goals provide the specific direction for the development of appropriate strategies and implementation.

Project Goals

The following presents the paraphrased goals for the study and ultimately for services in the area:

- Should be a thorough needs assessment using locally developed and initiated surveys of community residents.
- Clearly defined sustainable funding commitments should be identified.
- Should identify what is wanted as well as what is needed.
- Should include an inventory of the existing service provided.
- Participation from the public is a key element.
- Local education is vital.
- Study should identify opportunities for coordination.
- The study should provide a general conceptual framework for service.
- The potential for enhancement of service and support.
- Development of partnerships and defining those roles.
- Identify what it would take to get people to use transit.
- Resources should be accessible to those who need services.
- Services should be evaluated in terms of cost-effectiveness and efficiency.
- Services should be reliable due to the constraints placed upon employees from the casinos.
- The fare for services must be in line with current income of residents. Most cannot afford to pay a high fare for service.
- The service should be flexible to meet the needs of residents.

LEECH LAKE PUBLIC TRANSIT VISION

In developing a transit plan, it is necessary to recognize the goals and objectives of public transportation the direction to be taken in the plan is determined. The

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goals and objectives, along with the corresponding performance standards, provide the specific direction for implementation.

LSC developed appropriate draft goals and objectives for the Leech Lake transit service based on the public transportation issues discussed at various meetings. These goals and objectives were discussed by the Steering Committee and the Tribal Council, and were used to refine and evaluate the transit alternatives, projects, and programs for the next six years (short term). The goals and objectives are the guidelines for the present and future transit operations in the area.

The planning process for transit services within the study area consists of a mission statement, a set of action goals, and the objectives for each goal. The goals and objectives are included in this report to support the future transit plans for the study area. The mission statement, goals, and objectives typically form a hierarchical structure with the mission statement being the most general. Goals support the achievement of the mission, and objectives support the goals.

Mission Statement

The mission statement establishes the overall direction of an agency and enumerates the most generalized set of actions to be achieved by that agency. The mission statement, as developed for the Leech Lake transit service, is as follows.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Leech Lake transit service is to provide quality transit service to residents, visitors, and those living near the Leech Lake Reservation by increasing the mobility and access for all residents and by linking transit services throughout the area.

Goals and Objectives

For planning purposes, a goal is defined as a purpose or need that should be attained to address a transportation issue. An objective is a specific method or activity that is designed to achieve an identified goal. The goals and objectives are very important parts of developing the transit plan, as they set the overall direction. Therefore, the goals and objectives must reflect the community's values and desires.

Based on the issues and concerns discussed during the meetings, as well as the existing and future transportation needs, the following goals and objectives were developed. The goals and objectives are meant to pertain specifically to the operation of local and regional transit service.

Goal #1: Develop a Transit Service that Aids in the Community's Economic Development

Objective 1.a: Create opportunities through improved access to employment, job training, and education.

Objective 1.b: Develop transportation linkages by implementing transit service, thereby allowing individuals to access employment and services more easily throughout the Reservation as well as those areas not included on the Reservation.

Objective 1.c: Develop a transit service to increase the mobility of seniors and individuals with disabilities.

Objective 1.d: Develop a transit service in order to allow all of the Reservation's residents to access medical, shopping, recreational, educational institutes, and special events. This service will be designed to first cater to the low-income households, disabled individuals, and seniors—and then to the general public.

Goal #2: Create Financial Sustainability of the Transit Service

Objective 2.a: Seek out and apply for state and federal grants which may be available for transit service capital or operating support.

Objective 2.b: Examine the possibilities of leveraging existing funding from other Tribal departments to be used as local match.

Goal #3: Coordinate and Integrate the Regional Transit Service With the Existing Human Service Agencies/Programs

Objective 3.a: The transit service should coordinate with the human service agencies/programs in order to improve the standard of living for the region's seniors and disabled individuals. The transit service should increase mobility and

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access to the senior centers, employment, shopping, medical, and recreational events.

Objective 3.b: The transit service should be discussed with the existing human services transportation providers on a quarterly basis.

Objective 3.c: The human service agencies/programs should train their clients to use the transit service, and could provide funding for the transit service provided to their clients through both formal and informal agreements.

Goal #4: Create Cost-Effective and Cost-Efficient Transit Service

Objective 4.a: Work to maintain and/or develop standards of performance measures in order to determine the efficiencies and deficiencies of the transit service. Use a comparison of peer communities in determining efficient and effective service.

Objective 4.b: Service should achieve a target productivity level of three to five passengers per hour by 2012 and eight to ten passengers per hour by 2015.

Objective 4.c: The transit service should have costs per revenue-mile, revenue-hour, and passenger equal to the peer communities. The costs should be reviewed and updated annually by comparing the regional transit service to other similar transit services.