



Study Process

PROJECT INITIATION

The State of New Hampshire has begun to take steps to coordinate human services transportation programs and public transit programs throughout the state. Tri-County Community Action Program (TCCAP)/North Country Transit (NCT) was working to coordinate services with other transportation providers throughout northern New Hampshire. TCCAP/NCT efforts to coordinate with other providers were in line with the efforts of the State of New Hampshire for the past five years.

The State's plan called for dividing the state into regions for coordination of services. The regions were generally identified by the State, but actual regional boundaries would be determined as the organizational structure developed. A State Coordinating Council was formed to oversee the coordination efforts on a statewide basis and was made up of representatives from state agencies, human service agencies, and transportation providers. Within each region a Regional Coordinating Council would be formed. The Coordinating Council would be responsible for all coordination efforts within the region. The Coordinating Council would select a Regional Transportation Coordinator through a competitive process. The Transportation Coordinator would then be responsible for coordinated transportation services, acting as a broker or transportation provider.

TCCAP/NCT was championing the initiative in the northern part of the state, and it became evident that coordination practices would need to begin to make services seamless and more productive and efficient for the providers and for the state. Although TCCAP/NCT met with several groups and provided information on the benefits of coordination, it became obvious that there were many gray areas where TCCAP/NCT staff did not have the answers. This difficulty presented an obstacle that TCCAP/NCT could not overcome without some type of educational program that could provide more explanation and information about how a coordinated system could work.

The opportunity to apply to the Federal Transit Administration Public Transportation Participation Pilot Program for funding the development of an educational program was presented. TCCAP/NCT applied and was awarded the funding to pursue the task of hiring a consultant to put together the educational programs. Along with the educational programs, TCCAP/NCT would work to recruit participants in the process and as potential members of the Regional Coordinating Councils. TCCAP/NCT would also make improvements in software and technology to facilitate coordination of transportation services.

SELECTION OF CONSULTANT

To develop the agency and provider educational programs, a professional consultant was sought through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process. TCCAP/NCT, in conjunction with FTA representatives and with the assistance of representatives from the Community Transportation Association of America, worked together on the RFP. The RFP was completed and distributed to a mailing list of consultants on August 13, 2007. The mailing list of consulting firms was obtained from Community Transportation Association of America.

Representatives from the NH DOT, NH DHHS, CTAA, TCCAP/NCT (Executive Director, Deputy Director, and Transportation Director), and a philanthropic organization were the members of the committee that reviewed the proposals. Each representative was provided with a questionnaire and criteria to rank the two consulting firms which had submitted proposals. A conference call was held with all the committee members for discussion. After a discussion of the proposals, the decision was made to hire LSC Transportation Consultants. The firm was hired in September, and the contract was signed on October 23, 2007.

DEVELOPMENT OF MAILING LISTS

To gain the widest participation in this process, mailing lists were compiled from a variety of sources. The TCCAP Transportation Director had knowledge of many providers through various meetings and working with the regional planning commission to gather information on transportation providers. The Internet was a source used to research human services agencies, and the regional phone book was used as well. Public transportation providers such as taxis, human service

groups such as senior centers, and volunteer groups were found through the resource meetings attended by the Transportation Director. Local organizations such as the American Cancer Society, the Disabled American Veterans, and hospitals were contacted because of their need for transportation service and because some were also providers of services.

The TCCAP Transportation Director attended all the regional resource group meetings to announce the project and promote participation. It was also necessary to meet with representatives from the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) and the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (NHDHHS). Support from the NHDOT and NHDHHS was of utmost importance because of their efforts toward statewide coordination of transportation services.

In conclusion, mailing lists of agencies, providers, volunteer groups, businesses, town officials, and local state representatives within the TCCAP/NCT service area came from research done prior to the coordination project. Additional individuals were added during the study process as LSC made contacts with the various agencies and organizations.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

A study Advisory Committee was formed based on responses to the initial contacts and expressions of interest. The Advisory Committee met at key points during the study process to give feedback and direction for the development of the education programs. Dates that meetings were held are:

- November 28, 2007 in Berlin to recruit participants and initiate the project.
- March 4, 2008 in North Conway to discuss approaches for the education programs. Participants provided feedback on the approaches and material which should be included. A draft of the public community assessment form was discussed.
- May 13, 2008 in Tamworth to present the draft programs for Carroll County participants. Participants provided feedback to improve the education programs.

- May 14, 2008 in Littleton to present the draft education programs for Coos and Grafton County participants. Participants provided feedback to improve the education programs.
- January 27, 2009 in Plymouth to review and revise education programs and draft reports. Recommendations were incorporated into the final education programs and project report.

Following the meeting in March 2008, it was decided to hold separate meetings in two communities for presentation of the draft education programs to encourage greater attendance and participation. Travel times across the region were identified as an impediment to participation in a single meeting.

CONTACT APPROACHES

Possibly the largest challenge in presenting the benefits of coordinated transportation service is recruiting agencies and individuals to attend. For many, coordination of transportation services is a low priority and possibly even a perceived threat to their organization.

As part of the pilot project for North Country Transit, several different approaches were used to recruit participants to observe the effectiveness of the different approaches. Outreach was conducted using e-mail, regular mail, and phone calls. Contacts were made by other local participants in the community and by staff from LSC. The following are observations and recommendations for recruiting participants.

Invitations sent by mail or e-mail were effective in informing participants about meeting times and locations. However, they were not very effective in actually recruiting participants. The e-mail and mail notices in some cases included letters from a local official encouraging participation and articles about the benefits of coordination. This approach did work well with those who were interested and had a desire to participate, but when this was the only approach used, attendance at meetings was very low.

Telephone calls were used to contact individuals as well. The phone calls were always used in addition to mail or e-mail contacts. Different approaches were used with phone calls. One approach was to complete a single follow-up call following the e-mail/mail notice. The second approach involved two telephone

calls. The first was a follow-up to the e-mail/mail notice to be sure they knew of the meeting and asking if they would attend. A second phone call was then made as a reminder approximately a week before the meeting.

The most effective approach was to use the e-mail/mail notice to inform possible participants and then to follow-up with at least two phone calls. The notice by e-mail or mail was easily missed or ignored. Phone calls, particularly from someone known to the individual, were much more effective in obtaining a commitment to participate. The second phone call helped reinforce that commitment and increased the level of participation.

TRANSPORTATION PROVIDER INVENTORY

As part of the pilot project, an updated inventory of transportation providers was completed. As in many coordination efforts, this was a challenge. Those agencies which have an interest in coordinating services responded, and those which have little or no interest were either slow to respond or did not respond at all.

A data collection form was prepared as an Excel spreadsheet. Agencies could enter the appropriate data in the spreadsheet, and then the data were automatically formatted for entry into a database. Thirty-nine agencies were contacted, and 28 were sent the data collection form. Responses were received from 12 agencies, and information was collected from an additional 13 agencies, either by telephone or from a recent inventory conducted for Carroll County. Part of the challenge in obtaining responses was that many agencies had recently submitted information for the project in Carroll County or for the regional Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plans.

The inventory of the existing transportation programs is presented in Appendix A with the individual agency responses provided in Appendix B.

The responses from the various transportation programs were entered into a database which was provided to TCCAP for their use. The data were also formulated for preparation of a Resource Guide. The Resource Guide was prepared for

use by transportation programs and the planned Regional Coordinating Council and Regional Transportation Coordinator.

Costs of operation were evaluated for the various transportation programs. This evaluation included identification of the full costs of providing transportation services and development of a cost allocation model. LSC representatives met individually with some of the key transportation providers, either in person or by telephone, to ensure the accuracy and validity of the reported information.

EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Two education programs were prepared. The first focused on educating transportation providers and human services agencies about the benefits of coordinated transportation services. The second program focused on educating the public about the benefits that users gain from coordinated transportation services. Drafts of each education program were prepared and used in northern New Hampshire.

Following presentation of the draft programs, feedback was obtained from the participants and the Advisory Committee for improvements to the programs. The final education programs were prepared as guides for use by facilitators to develop and present the program in other communities, both in New Hampshire and nationally. National examples of successful coordination efforts were used in the education programs because of the limited number of examples in New Hampshire, the breadth of examples from other states, and to enhance the transferability of the education program to other communities and states.