



Coordination Strategies

INTRODUCTION

The basis for any transit coordination plan is careful consideration of the realistic strategies. Financial plans and management options can then be developed to support the planned coordination. Each coordination strategy must be evaluated using a cost-to-benefit analysis and must meet state and federal requirements. Any strategy that does not end in a positive financial benefit or improved mobility to the community or does not meet state and federal requirements should not be considered for implementation. The following discussion presents potential transit coordination strategies for Sweetwater County transportation providers.

FEDERAL REQUIREMENT AND SUPPORT FOR COORDINATION

SAFETEA-LU includes a requirement that any funding for projects under the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5310 program, the Jobs Access Reverse Commute (JARC) program, and the New Freedoms program must be based on a local coordinated transportation plan. Some of the human services transportation providers in the study area may be eligible for funding under the Section 5310 program, while some of the enhanced services discussed may be eligible for funding under the JARC or New Freedoms program. Without support of a local coordinated transportation plan, these activities will not be eligible for funding under the specific federal programs.

The FTA has developed information for communities to use in creating coordination efforts to meet the federal rules. Federal support for coordination of transportation programs is primarily provided under the United We Ride (UWR) program. United We Ride is an interagency federal initiative that supports states and their localities in developing coordinated human service delivery systems. Coordination efforts were directed by a Presidential Executive Order in February 2004, which formed the Transportation Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility.

The UWR program provides both technical support and funding through state coordination grants. These grants can be used to assist states in conducting a comprehensive state assessment using the UWR Framework for Action and in developing a comprehensive state action plan for coordinating human service transportation. For those states with an existing comprehensive state action plan, grants can be used for implementing one or more of the elements identified within the Framework for Action.¹

COORDINATION STRATEGIES

The following section details the different types of strategies that could be implemented for the study area and reviews the benefits and implementation steps for each strategy.

Joint Procurement

Joint procurement (or bulk purchase) is a cost-effective approach to increasing purchasing power. Joint maintenance and fuel purchase is being more widely used across the country, especially given the rising costs of parts and fuel. Shared maintenance can be done quite easily between agencies in a given locale. Many times, human service providers and other local providers contract out maintenance to a local vendor. While there may be very few qualified maintenance professionals, it may allow a competitive process between agencies to perform fleet maintenance between multiple agencies. Insurance pooling is likely the most difficult joint procurement possibility.

Benefits

- Individual agency capital outlay will be reduced.
- An economy of scale in purchases will be created, thereby reducing the overall operational cost per agency.
- With a decrease in capital and maintenance costs, an agency may be able to shift funding from maintenance and capital to service hours, thereby increasing the level of service or operations of the transit system within the region.

¹ Federal Transit Administration at http://www.fta.dot.gov/legal/federal_register/2004/12174_15861_ENG_HTML.htm.

Implementation Steps

- The agencies need to meet in order to develop a basic understanding of how the procurement process will work.
- Intergovernmental agreements should be developed and agreed upon.

Shared Vehicle Storage and Maintenance Facilities

The agencies could share indoor storage space and maintenance facilities in geographic localities. Shared storage, especially if and when vehicles are stored outside, can aid in reducing engine wear during cold weather startup. Obviously, if a provider is conducting its own maintenance on vehicles, it can likely share maintenance costs with another local provider.

Benefits

- Maintenance costs will be reduced, resulting in additional funds available for operations.
- Lost time due to vehicles not starting in cold weather will be reduced, thereby improving the overall performance of the transit service.
- Sharing a facility or building a facility together increases the amount of local match, thereby increasing the level of FTA funding to the region.

Implementation Steps

- The agencies need to meet in order to identify the best existing facility among the coordinated agencies or the best location for a shared facility.
- The facility should be centrally located in order to reduce the possible dead-head time.
- The amount of space that each agency will get in the facility should be designated based on each agency's funding participation for the facility.
- A grant will need to be developed to purchase or upgrade the facility.

Joint Grant Applications

The transit providers in the region should agree to submit a single grant to the state and/or FTA for transit funding for their capital and operational needs.

Benefits

- The amount of time that each agency needs to spend in developing a grant on their own will be reduced.

Coordination Strategies

- Local match funding for the state and FTA transit funding will possibly be increased.
- Agencies are able to use each other's knowledge in developing a grant.

Implementation Steps

- The agencies should review their needs and create a list of capital and operational requirements.
- The agencies should itemize their lists and determine a priority of needs.
- The grant should be developed based on the priority lists.
- The grant should be approved by each of the agencies' boards/councils, along with approval of the local match funding.
- Interagency agreements should be approved in order to allow the grants to be passed through a single agency.
- The agencies should submit one final grant.

Joint Training Programs

Joint training programs between agencies, in everything from preventative maintenance to safe wheelchair tie-down procedures, can lead to more highly skilled employees. Joint training can also lead to reduced training costs with agencies that each possess a specialized trainer who can be responsible for one or more disciplines. For example, one agency could provide Passenger Assistance Training (PATs), one agency could specialize in preventative maintenance training, etc. The agencies could also purchase special training from reputable organizations/companies and allow other agencies' employees to attend. Training costs should be shared between the agencies.

Benefits

- Each agency's training budget will be reduced.
- Drivers and staff have more opportunities to learn from each other.

Implementation Steps

- The training needs of each agency's staff should be identified.
- Training courses that meet the greatest needs should be determined.
- The agency or organization/company that could provide the needed training should be identified.

- State and federal grants that could assist in paying for the training should be determined.

Sharing Expertise

Similar to sharing training resources, agencies could share their expertise in such areas as grant writing, computer skills, and general assistance in operation of transportation services (such as tips for dispatching or accounting procedures). Sharing expertise may be as general as a list of personnel across the region who have some expertise in a particular field that may benefit another agency. A “yellow pages” of subject matter experts made available to each agency may be helpful in operating transportation service.

Benefits

- The need for costly training sessions for drivers and staff will be reduced, thereby decreasing lost production time.
- Knowledge is passed on to other staff members and agencies, thereby increasing the efficiencies for the region’s transit providers.

Implementation Steps

- The information, field of work, and expertise needed to operate an effective transit service should be identified.
- The individual in each agency that has expertise in each field of work should be determined.
- A yellow pages or contact list of the individuals in each agency that have expertise in certain fields of knowledge should be created.

Coordinating Council

Similar to a coalition, a coordinating council is made up of myriad agencies and partners with a common goal of coordinating transportation resources. This group differs from a coalition in that it is primarily made up of agencies that have a need for service and other groups (such as local municipalities) specifically formed to accomplish a strategic goal (such as to implement a new service). The coordinating council acts similarly to a Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) in either a local or regional area.

Benefits

- Greater input from the key transportation agencies in the region will be allowed.

Coordination Strategies

- Members could share information and knowledge on a one-on-one basis.
- Integration of transit planning within the region will be increased.

Implementation Steps

- Agencies interested in being members of the council should meet and develop by-laws for the council.
- Council members should elect a Chair and Vice Chair.
- Council members should develop a mission statement, vision, goals, and objectives.
- Council members should set a date for the monthly or quarterly meeting.

Joint Planning and Decision Making

Joint planning and decision making involves agencies working cooperatively either with other similar agencies or with a local provider in order to make known the needs of their clients and become involved in the local planning of services. For example, several local human service agencies may meet with the local transit planners in an area to develop operations plans that attempt to meet the needs of the agencies' clients.

Benefits

- The need for expensive planning documents for each transit agency will be reduced.
- More complex coordination in capital development and operational functions will be allowed.
- Duplication of services among the coordinating agencies will be reduced.

Implementation Steps

- Agencies should meet with regional transit and transportation planners to develop a scope of work for the planning process.
- The scope of work should identify the goals and objectives.
- A timeline should be developed for the completion of the planning document.
- The planning document should develop recommendations for making decisions regarding operation services, capital, funding, coordination process, and administration functions.

Coalitions

A coalition is a group of agencies and organizations that are committed to coordinating transportation and have access to funding. The coalition should include local stakeholders, providers, decision makers, business leaders, council of governments, users, and others as appropriate. The coalition could be either an informal or formal group that is recognized by the decision makers and that has some standing within the community. Coalitions can be established for a specific purpose (such as to obtain specific funding) or for broad-based purposes (such as to educate local communities about transportation needs).

Benefits

- A broad base of support will be developed for improvement of transit services in the region.
- The coalition will be able to speak with community and regional decision makers, thereby increasing local support for local funding.

Implementation Steps

- Individuals in the region who are interested in improving transit's level of service and have the time and skills to develop a true grassroots coalition should be identified.
- A meeting of these individuals should be set up to present the needs and issues that face the agencies.
- Agencies should work with the coalition to provide base information and data on the existing and future needs of transit across the region.

Vehicle Sharing

Vehicle sharing requires that agencies own and operate vehicles. Memoranda of Understanding or Joint Agreements are needed for this strategy to work properly. Agencies that operate vehicles are able to share those vehicles with other agencies in a variety of circumstances, such as when one agency has a vehicle mechanical breakdown or when capacity for a specific trip is at its maximum.

Benefits

- The overall local capital outlay will be reduced.
- These funds could be shifted to cover operational costs or increase the level of service.

Coordination Strategies

- These funds could also be used for capital funding for facilities, equipment, and other capital assets.

Implementation Steps

- Each agency should identify its individual vehicle schedules and when its vehicles could be shared.
- Vehicle schedules listing the time the individual vehicles are available should be created and distributed among the agencies.
- A system of tracking the vehicles that are being shared should be developed in order to track vehicle miles, hours, and maintenance.

Contracts for Service

An agency could contract with another human service agency or a public provider to provide needed trips. This could be done occasionally on an as-needed basis or as part of scheduled service. One example is a local Head Start contracting for service with a local public provider. The contract revenue could then be used as local match for the local public provider, using the same drivers and vehicles as used previously. Many times the drivers are also Head Start aides or teachers.

Benefits

- The amount of local match that can be used to pull additional state and federal funding for transit services into the region will be increased.
- Duplication of services in the region will be reduced, thereby creating an economy of scale and improving the overall transit performance level.

Implementation Steps

- Agencies should meet to identify the needs and capacities of the contract parties.
- A contract should be developed detailing the responsibility of each party.

Provide Vehicles

An agency could provide a used vehicle, one that is either being replaced or retired, to another agency. This could be done either through a transfer of title, donation for a small price (in the case of a retired vehicle), or sale to a local agency in desperate need of a replacement vehicle.

Benefits

- The capital outlay for the agency that obtains the used vehicle will be reduced.
- The need to retire older vehicles in the fleet will be reduced.
- Human service transportation providers will be allowed to obtain vehicles that they would otherwise not be able to purchase, due to the cost of a new vehicle and the level of federal capital funding they are able to receive.

Implementation Steps

- The agencies should meet to determine the procedures for transferring a vehicle from one agency to another, as well as the level of overall need for vehicles.
- Agencies that receive federally funded vehicles should review their fleet and determine which vehicles can be transferred to other agencies.
- Agencies that wish to receive vehicles should review their fleet needs.

One-Call Center

A shared informational telephone line provides potential users with the most convenient access to information about all transportation services in the region.

Benefits

- Administrative costs for the participating agencies will be reduced.
- A one-call center is the first step to centralized dispatching.
- Users will only need to call one telephone number in order to obtain all the transit information they need, thereby improving customer service.

Implementation Steps

- Agencies should meet to determine which agency will house the call center, how the call center will be funded, and what information will be provided to customers.
- The telephone line should be set up and the needed communication equipment should be purchased.
- A marketing brochure should be developed detailing the purpose of the call center, hours of service, and telephone number.

Centralized Functions (Reservations, Scheduling, Dispatching)

A single office could oversee the dispatching of vehicles and the scheduling of reservations for all of the participating transportation agencies in order to provide transportation service within a geographic area.

Benefits

- Duplication of administrative costs will be reduced, based on an economy of scale.
- Marketability of the region's transit service will be increased.
- Fleet coordination will be improved.

Implementation Steps

- Agencies should meet to determine which agency will house the centralized reservations, scheduling, and dispatching.
- Each agency's level of funding for the dispatching service cost should be identified.
- Intergovernmental agreements should be created detailing the responsibility of each agency.

Transportation Broker

A third-party agency could be created as a transportation broker to interface between the transportation providers and users. The transportation broker should centralize dispatching, record keeping, and possibly vehicle maintenance.

Benefits

- Duplication of administrative costs will be reduced, based on an economy of scale.
- Marketability of the region's transit service will be increased.
- Fleet coordination will be improved.

Implementation Steps

- Agencies should meet to determine if the broker service will be set up as a new agency or under an existing agency.
- Each agency's level of funding for the dispatching service cost should be identified.

- Intergovernmental agreements should be created detailing the responsibility of each agency.

Consolidated Transportation Program

A consolidated transportation program occurs when all transit services are provided by a single agency. This includes vehicles, facilities, administration functions, maintenance, and operations.

Benefits

- An economy of scale will be created, thereby reducing the cost per passenger, administrative costs, and operational costs.
- The level of local match funding available to obtain federal funding through contract services provided to other agencies in the region will be increased.
- Duplication of services and facilities will be reduced.

Implementation Steps

- Intergovernmental agreements should be created detailing the level of service that will be provided by the single agency for the level of funding detailed in the contract.
- Each agency's council/board will need to approve the intergovernmental agreement.
- A new board should be created for the consolidated agency. The board should consist of the participating agencies and should oversee the service.
- All vehicles and facilities should be transferred to the consolidated agency.

Outreach to Allow for Participation

Transportation stakeholders and local transit providers should review the above list of strategies and determine which strategies could be used to improve transportation services for the transit dependent. This outreach group should meet to identify needs (service gaps and duplication of services) and local resources, and then choose one or several of the strategies to implement in order to meet the identified needs. All efforts used to solicit involvement and participation should be documented. Note that in Chapters IV and V, LSC identified service needs along with transportation resources. The outreach group could use the information developed by LSC as the first step in the selection of coordination strategies.

Coordination Strategies

As a tool kit or guide in this coordination process, the outreach group should use the United We Ride Framework for Action to build relationships and work with partner agencies. The Community Self-Assessment Tool is available at: http://www.unitedweride.gov/1_81_ENG_HTML.htm.

The following agencies should be invited to participate in the local service area coordination meeting and in the development of any coordinated transit effort:

- Area transportation planning agencies
- Transit riders and potential riders
- Public transportation providers
- Private transportation providers
- Nonprofit transportation providers
- Human service agencies funding and/or supporting access for transportation services
- Government agencies administering health, employment, or other support programs for targeted populations
- Nonprofit organizations serving targeted populations
- Advocacy organizations serving targeted populations
- Security and emergency management agencies
- Appropriate local or state officials
- Business community representatives
- Community-based organizations
- Economic development agencies
- Job training and placement agencies
- Elected officials

Once strategies have been selected, the outreach group should determine a time frame for implementation of the strategies. These strategies were based on general information about the region and transit industry knowledge.

INITIAL COORDINATION STRATEGIES

Based on existing information, LSC has developed the following coordination strategies for the study area:

- Develop a coordination council

- Create a coalition of transportation stakeholders
- Continue and expand contract service
- Develop agreements that allow STAR to continue as the consolidated transit program

A coordination council or coalition will represent a step toward achieving coordinated transportation services within the study area. The coordination council or coalition should work with the human service providers to develop a basic understanding of the transit issues and how to work together cooperatively. Through this process, the area will be able to implement the other coordination strategies of contract services and centralizing operational functions.