



Review of Previous Planning Efforts

This chapter presents a brief review of the existing documentation which has been, or is in the process of being, completed for Sullivan County. This review includes any and all available information relevant to the future of transit and coordinated transportation planning. This review highlights the process and outcomes from the following plans:

- Sullivan County Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plan - DRAFT
- Sullivan County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)
- Statewide Coordination of Community Transportation Services - 2006

SULLIVAN COUNTY COORDINATED PUBLIC TRANSIT HUMAN SERVICES TRANSPORTATION PLAN - DRAFT

The purpose of this plan is to “create a comprehensive strategy to assist state and community agencies, transportation service providers, and stakeholders for coordinating public transit and human service transportation efforts in Sullivan County.” The Plan is a result of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act - A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). A new requirement of SAFETEA-LU is that projects for the Federal Transit Administration Section 5310 program, the Job Access and Reverse Commute Program (JARC), and the New Freedom program must be derived from a local Human Services-Transit Services Coordinated Transportation Plan. This new requirement is consistent with other efforts at the federal level to coordinate transportation services, such as the United We Ride program and the President’s Executive Order on transportation coordination.

The Plan was prepared by the Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission. The Advisory Committee was made up of the Sullivan County Community Mobility Project (CMP)—a cooperative effort of 29 local service providers, elected

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officials, and community members formed in 2005 as a result of the United Way sponsored transportation summit.

In November 2006, members of the Community Mobility Project met to share best practices, identify areas of commonality, and to improve coordination for existing services. In addition, Community Alliance Transportation Services and Connecticut River Transit discussed regional cooperation and the potential linking of services in the area proximate to the Interstate 91 Exit 8 park-and-ride facility. The Community Mobility Project is investigating the possibility of forming the Sullivan County Regional Coordinating Council under the *Statewide Coordination Plan*.

Plan Outcomes and Findings

This coordination plan lays the foundation of inventory for transit and transportation providers which will be used through this planning process. Much of the inventory is very current and will be highlighted in Chapter III.

Services

The following presents the service findings from the draft coordination plan:

- The most prominent transportation service within Sullivan County is Community Alliance Transportation Services, which provides demand-response with route deviation and door-to-door paratransit services.
- While existing services are targeted to where the greatest demands exist, there are areas within the county that are currently underserved or not served at all.
- Transportation services in the population centers of Claremont, Newport, and Charlestown areas are provided by a relatively large number of human service agencies and volunteers, which has resulted in a complex system that is difficult for users to navigate.
- Coordination among providers has been limited or nonexistent until recently with the development of the Sullivan County Community Mobility Project.
- The historic lack of coordination has resulted in systematic inefficiencies, including redundant trips. With non-emergency medical transportation trips, clients are allowed to choose the provider of their choice.
- Funding systems, billing, and contracting procedures are complex, and reporting requirements for funding are often burdensome and not streamlined.

- Funding for transportation services in Sullivan County is inadequate. Community Alliance Transportation Services is reimbursed for approximately 5,000 trips annually; however, they provide in excess of 20,000 trips per year that would be eligible if there were enough funding. Currently, CATS is reimbursed \$5.01 when each trip actually costs over \$11.
- Existing funding sources have restrictions that make intergovernmental and public/private partnerships difficult, and hamper flexibility.

What is Needed?

The following provides highlights of mobility needs in the County:

- Ten communities are currently underserved or unserved.
- Thirty-five (35) percent of respondents in a United Way survey indicated a need for evening service, 29 percent need evening service, and 15 percent reportedly need after-school service.
- A need for better access to employment and medical appointments, especially to the Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center in Lebanon and the New London Hospital in Merrimack County.
- United Way found that 16 percent of survey respondents had “lost or turned down a job” because they did not have reliable transportation.
- There is a need for access to the Town of Grantham which is currently not served by public transportation. The town’s central location along Interstate 89 between the Lebanon and Claremont Labor Market areas creates a potential opportunity for linking the transit systems of Grafton and Sullivan County. A park-and-ride lot with capacity for over 50 vehicles was recently constructed adjacent to Interstate 89 Exit 13, but currently is not served by public transit.
- There is a need to fully access available funding sources such as JARC funding.
- Sullivan County has a significant pool of dedicated citizens who volunteer their time and vehicles to transport people in need to medical appointments throughout the Upper Valley. To maintain this important volunteer resource, insurance restrictions on volunteer drivers should be eliminated.
- Government restrictions on funding must be eliminated.
- A coordinated marketing campaign for transportation services in Sullivan County is needed to eliminate confusion and increase public awareness of services. A print directory of existing services may also help to eliminate confusion.
- Residents must be made aware of car- and vanpool options. Upper Valley Rideshare maintains a database of commuters throughout 125 Vermont and New Hampshire towns (including all 15 Sullivan County communities) who are interested in carpooling.
- The Sullivan County Community Mobility Project will need to transition into a new role—Regional Coordinating Council.

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- There is a need for a centralized dispatch center. Community Alliance Transportation Services (CATS) has already begun facilitating dispatchers meetings in the county; however, due to funding constraints, these efforts have not yet resulted in the development of a centralized dispatch center.
- There is a need to investigate and implement advanced technology to aid in the delivery and coordination of services. One such advance would be the implementation of scheduling and dispatching software through the use of a central call center.

Coordination Strategies

The following presents a bullet point review of the coordination strategies discussed through the planning process.

- Continue investment in the Community Mobility Project as a means of fostering stable relationships with providers.
- Plan for technological improvements to improve service delivery such as GPS, GIS, and scheduling/dispatching software.
- Seek additional funding and support from communities and employers.
- Reevaluate and enhance existing service delivery systems.
- Expand existing services to areas where needs have been identified, including the Town of Grantham, Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center, the NH Technical College in Claremont.
- Expand services to include evenings and weekends.
- Expand service to include service to major employers in Claremont, Newport, and Charlestown.
- Create a Marketing Plan.
- Improve reporting to be uniform and streamlined.
- Overcome barriers to coordination.
- Overcome barriers to volunteerism.
- Strive for efficiency in the use of resources.

These strategies will be reviewed throughout this planning effort.

SULLIVAN COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (CEDS)

A Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is a plan required by the US Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration to be eligible for its planning and construction funds. The CEDS for Sullivan County

was drafted in January 2005. This brief overview presents highlights relevant to transit and transportation for the future.

Sullivan County has experienced a significant change in its economy over the past 40 years. Once a prominent center for the machine tool industry, the county is now struggling to keep up with the State of New Hampshire in terms of growth in employment and wages. The county has seen a decrease in the job market due to shifting employment patterns in New Hampshire and across the nation. There is a decreasing tax base, a higher service cost and property taxes, all of which have resulted in the larger employment centers in the county to seek development activities to encourage growth.

Population

Sullivan County is seeing very modest gains in the overall population, less than one percent per year. Projections for 2010 estimate the population will be nearly 44,500 persons, slightly higher than the 2005 population of 42,000.

During the early 1990s, Sullivan County lost about 2,100 jobs. Most of these were in the construction and manufacturing sectors; however, most employment sectors were impacted by the downturn in the economy to some degree. Between 2001 and 2002, the county lost about 300 jobs. Since the recent 1996 peak, 1,100 jobs have been lost.

- Manufacturing accounts for over 26 percent of the total employment.
- Government (18.6) and retail trade (16.6 percent) follow as the next highest employment sectors.
- Unemployment rates are between two and three percent. Such low unemployment may stifle new businesses from relocating to Sullivan County and prohibit existing business expansion.
- Sullivan County per capita personal income has fallen behind the state and national levels of the past decade. The 2001 per capita personal income (BEA) is \$28,042 (up from \$27,010 in 2000).
- The Sullivan County total average wage for 2002 equals \$569.74, about \$134 less than the New Hampshire wage of \$703.84, making Sullivan County the third smallest average weekly wage among all New Hampshire counties.
- Almost 20 percent of Sullivan County households earn less than \$20,000 compared to 16 percent for New Hampshire households.
- The number of “poor” in Sullivan County is decreasing.

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- Growth in total housing units over the past decade (1990-2000) has been about three percent. Most of this growth has been in single-family units. Multi-family units have decreased by about seven percent. This may be attributable to the demolition of many units by the City of Claremont during the early 1990s.

Constraints to Economic Growth

There are several constraints to economic growth within the county. These include:

- Loss of high paying manufacturing jobs due to external forces such as the shifting of the global economy.
- Employment opportunities are available in the Hanover-Lebanon area to the north. However, no public transportation is provided to make this commute. Frequent public transportation is limited outside the Upper Valley population center. This makes it difficult for those that are unable to commute via passenger car (elderly, disabled, low-income, and the young) to reach employment in surrounding towns. Transit providers (Stagecoach, Advance Transit, and Town and Village Bus) have made tremendous progress in accessing much of this demand; however, there is still much work to be done before these stranded groups of our population are mobile. Community Alliance Transportation Services operates limited bus services within the county. But, improvements to inter- and intra-Sullivan County transit are needed as a resource to the workforce.
- High cost and availability of housing.
- Due to the types of employment growth, many of the jobs that are available are low-skilled. These jobs pay lower wages and underutilize a workforce that has skills better suited for manufacturing jobs that are no longer available in the same numbers as years ago.
- Limited inventory of land and buildings for new employers.
- Lack of suitable transportation infrastructure including rail, truck, airports, as well as poor infrastructure such as roads, water, and sewer.
- Energy costs.
- Lack of advanced academic institutions.
- Loss of local businesses.

Vision for Growth

The vision for economic stability and growth is a vital component to the CEDS. The “overall objective of regional economic development planning is to improve the growth possibilities of the regional economy by either enhancing the comparative or absolute advantage of the region to export products, or improving opportunities

and conditions for intraregional trade.” This is proposed to be accomplished through the following highest priority goals:

- Protect the county’s environmental and social quality by balancing development with preservation.
- Market Sullivan County as a whole.
- Direct development toward locally designated village and urban centers, and industrial parks in order to support existing businesses, attract new businesses to the region, and stimulate downtown/village revitalization and development.
- Encourage, support, and strengthen the development of a balanced, diverse, and healthy economy.
- Develop more housing options by promoting the sufficient availability of adequate, safe, and affordable primary housing for residents of the county, including those with special needs.
- Fully maximize use of existing systems and buildings to the greatest extent practical.
- Support and maintain the existing business base.
- Coordinate all regional economic development activities.
- Promote socially and environmentally conscientious development by using public investment to that end.
- Maintain and improve existing systems consistent with current technology and local and regional growth objectives.
- Maintain and enhance a globally competitive workforce by supporting and creating employment opportunities for the county’s population, including the un- and under-employed.
- Infrastructure expansion to serve economic development should be directed to growth centers and industrial parks.
 - i. Assist in facilitating transportation connections between employment centers.**
 - ii. Support new public transit routes where needed, possible connection with Hanover-Lebanon area.**
- Facilitate the development of local capital improvement programs so that future expansion and maintenance of infrastructure won’t place undue hardship on communities.

STATEWIDE COORDINATION OF COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

The *Statewide Coordination Plan* completed in October 2006 was designed to review previous efforts and to make recommendations on current and future

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needs. The New Hampshire Department of Transportation United We Ride Action Plan is made up of four major implementation stages which are needed to bring about the coordination model outlined in the plan. These include:

- Establish the Statewide Coordination Council (SCC)
- Establish the Regional Coordination Councils (RCCs) for each region
- Obtain funding for establishing pilots
- Implement pilots

The *Statewide Coordination Plan* is referenced throughout this process to determine the implication of RCCs and determination of future pilot projects.