



Coordination and Organization

INTRODUCTION

One of the principal challenges facing any transit service is developing a funding system that supports capital investment (buses, maintenance facility, etc.) and provides a stable source of revenue for operations and maintenance. This chapter briefly discusses the various coordination and organizational alternatives. The main focus is to determine the operations of a pilot project in the Charlestown area for brokered/coordinated services between various providers.

An important objective of this study is to present recommendations for an organizational framework for public transit and coordination that are acceptable to the parties involved and that can be realistically implemented. With this goal in mind, the following discussion presents an analysis of the most appropriate organizational alternatives and a basis for making a decision.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

The identification of a cost-effective and geographically appropriate organizational structure is a key element in the improvement of public transportation services. With various providers and agencies involved in providing transportation services in Sullivan County, it is necessary to determine how best to organize these groups and how operating schemes are developed among the various providers.

Sullivan County has a solid base for the organization of service in terms of the Sullivan County Community Mobility Project (CMP). While the focus of this study is on service alternatives appropriate to meet the residents' needs, without a doubt, the coordination and organization of those services is equally important. As part of the Sullivan County CMP, one of the leading goals for this group is to develop a pilot project in Charlestown for the effective and efficient delivery of services to residents. This type of alternative is discussed later in the chapter.

Criteria For Institutional Structures

The history of transit organizations serving scattered areas with low population densities indicated that the following criteria should guide the selection of the institution for managing and operating transportation services in Sullivan County.

The institutional structure should be an entity:

- whose structure is legitimate and whose policy-making actions are authorized and defensible;
- which can limit the exposure of the participants to suits and claims of liability;
- which can be responsive to the complete policy-making and management needs of the transit organization;
- which has political and financial support and can endure more than one year at a time; and
- which can annually perform proactive planning to improve the system and effectively identify and implement improvements regularly and easily.

Alternatives

The following alternatives were analyzed for Sullivan County:

Nonprofit Organization

One option is for the service to be operated entirely by Community Alliance Transportation Services (CATS). CATS is a nonprofit agency that currently operates transit services within Sullivan County. The agency is interested in providing additional transportation services to the Sullivan County area. The advantages are that CATS is very familiar with the New Hampshire area, works with the general public but specifically meets the needs of the elderly and disabled population, has the ability to receive funds from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), and has the capability to generate local revenue to fund transit services.

Department of County Government

A government department is one alternative to consider and has worked well in other areas of the country, but it has drawbacks. A government department can contract with human service agencies or private entities to provide specified transportation services. This can be done effectively by having a central reservation line and dispatch center.

The main advantage of a government department is that it has legitimate authority to conduct transit services within its political boundary. The disadvantages of a government department are that the local council or governmental body has the final decision-making power regarding the management, operation, and financing of transportation services (which may or may not be a high priority) and may provide little long-term stability in the funding of transit services.

The Sullivan County government has not expressed strong interest in operating a public transit service. Under this organizational structure, the Sullivan County government can contract services with CATS or through a competitive bid process. This will allow not only CATS but also other interested transit operating companies to bid on providing transportation services in the Sullivan County area. This is likely not the structure which should be pursued.

Regional Transit District

The Regional Transit District (RTD) is a complex organization. New Hampshire cities and towns have the authority to join and establish the RTD according to Chapter 38-B of the New Hampshire statutes. The establishment of the district needs to be recommended by the Regional Planning Commission. In the case of Sullivan County, the RTD will need to be recommended by the Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission (UVLSRPC). The establishment of the RTD then involves a vote of the local legislative bodies that represent the municipalities which intend to establish the RTD.

The advantage of the RTD is the capability to bring several towns or cities together in operating a transit system. Another advantage is that only a vote of the local governing body is needed to set up the RTD, rather than a vote by the residents. The RTD is authorized to receive federal grants and to enter into a contract with a public or private transportation operator for management and operation of public transit services. The disadvantage of the RTD is that it has no power to generate revenue for the funding of transit services.

Intergovernmental Transit Agency

An Intergovernmental Transit Agency (ITA) can be formed by Sullivan County and the communities of Sullivan County (such as Claremont, Newport, Sunapee, Newbury, Charlestown, etc.). The governing board should have equal representation from each entity. An ITA has been successfully implemented in other locations and will build upon the working relationships already established between the cities and the county.

If provided with a dedicated local funding source, an ITA provides stability and helps ensure the continuation of transit service within the community. This type of organization requires cooperation from each entity and requires voter approval to establish a dedicated local funding source to support the transit agency. The ITA can create agreements with existing transportation providers in the surrounding counties to provide a portion of the transit service within the region, thereby linking several transportation providers together to improve access and mobility without creating a new agency.

COORDINATION

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.

SAFETEA-LU, the current Federal Transportation Bill, includes a requirement that any funding for projects under the 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, which 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, which can be used to assist states in conducting a comprehensive state assessment using the UWR Framework for Action and 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.

The following discussion presents potential transit coordination strategies for the Sullivan County transportation providers.

Strategies

The following section details the different types of strategies that can be implemented for the Sullivan County study area, and reviews each strategy's benefits and implementation steps.

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

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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 in the region.

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 can 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 transit 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 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 can provide Passenger Assistance Training (PATs), one agency can specialize in preventative maintenance training, etc. The agencies can 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 can provide the needed training should be identified.
- State and federal grants that can assist in paying for the training should be determined.

Regional Coordinating Council

Similar to a coalition, a Regional Coordinating Council (RCC) consists of various agencies and partners with a common goal of coordinating transportation resources. The RCC 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 RCC acts similarly to a Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) in either a local or regional area. The current Sullivan County CMP is the beginning of this RCC.

Benefits

- Greater input from the region's key transportation agencies will be allowed.
- Members can 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 RCC.
- 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.

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 can be shifted to cover operational costs or increase the level of service.
- These funds can 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 can 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 can contract with another human service agency or a public provider to provide needed trips. This can 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 can 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 contract parties' needs and capacities.
- A contract should be developed detailing the responsibility of each party.

Provide Vehicles

An agency can provide a used vehicle, one that is either being replaced or retired, to another agency. This can 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 will 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.

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- 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 county.

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 the 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 can 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 can 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.

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- 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.
- The intergovernmental agreement will need to be approved by each agency's council/board.
- 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.

INITIAL COORDINATION STRATEGY

The initial coordination strategy for the short term is to establish a pilot project in the Charlestown area as the groundwork for a countywide coordinated transit system. This project is based upon contracts/agreements for services between CATS and the other local elderly and disabled transportation providers. This coordinated system will be between CATS, the Red Cross, Pathways of the River Valley, and other agencies with needs. Pathways owns a number of vehicles housed in the Charlestown area used exclusively for its own clients (individuals with developmental disabilities). This collaboration between agencies may allow greater efficiencies of the operating services and vehicles. The Red Cross will either be the provider of regional long-haul services or additional services will be provided as mentioned in Chapter II. The following section highlights how the service can operate, as well as the costs and savings associated with this option.

CATS as Contracted Provider For Charlestown Area

CATS currently operates dial-a-ride services in the Charlestown area. Pathways has several housing units for developmentally disabled clients in Charlestown for day and employment services, and provides day and vocational support for adults with developmental disabilities or brain injuries. Services include employment, volunteer opportunities, and community-based activities and experiences that require transportation to and from the locations.

Under the agreement between CATS and Pathways:

- CATS will operate as the primary general public provider of this service in the area.
- Pathways will contract CATS to provide services as required on a subscription basis.
- Vehicles will be shared between CATS and Pathways. Pathways will be able to use CATS vehicles during the evening hours as needed. The vehicle operated by CATS will be jointly owned by CATS and Pathways and parked in Charlestown.
- Dispatching will be handled by CATS. The dispatch will then arrange long-distance trips from Charlestown for medical appointments using the Red Cross or other volunteers. These services will be reimbursed on a mileage basis to volunteers through a voucher program.
- CATS appears to be capable of providing trips for Pathways at a **savings of approximately \$3.00 per passenger-trip**. CATS and Pathways will negotiate subscription trips based on an agreed cost-per-trip basis.

There are several requirements for providing this service:

- Dispatch services (already provided by CATS, however updated software may be needed)
- Vehicles (shared between agencies, no new vehicles required)
- Operating and cost agreements
- Education on designing and scheduling subscription trips
- Limited staff time to coordinate rides between the agencies