

POTENTIAL COORDINATION STRATEGIES

Using the United We Ride Framework for Action for communities as a foundation, strategies to implement transportation coordination generally fall into five (5) basic functional areas: leadership (making things happen by working together); data collection and planning (taking stock of community needs and moving forward); customer service (putting customers first, especially people with disabilities, older adults, and low-income riders); funding (adapting funding for greater mobility); and the actual provision of transportation services (moving people efficiently). Strategies within these five (5) areas vary in each region being studied depending on the resources available, the size of the market for each strategy, the availability of existing services, and the extent to which these services are duplicated or gaps exist.

Below are the five (5) functional areas and a description of the goals and/or activities which typically are associated with successful coordination for each area.

Leadership

In order for a transportation coordination project to be successful in any community, local leaders need to be committed to supporting the delivery of coordinated transportation services. This includes elected officials, agency administrators, leaders of community groups, etc. All must have a shared vision for improving services and resource management.

Typical coordination efforts to improve leadership in a community include the following activities:

- Education and marketing efforts aimed at government officials, agency administrators, community leaders and also the general public.
- Formation of a Coordinated Transportation Advisory Group which is comprised of local elected officials, agency administrators, consumers, and transportation providers. This body will provide the forum for discussing and deciding coordination issues, an opportunity for networking and a united group to conduct advocacy efforts at the state and even national levels.
- Application for grants which fund coordination activities/services.
- Development of written agreements or memorandums of understanding between agencies involved in the coordination project.
- Hiring of a transportation coordinator or mobility manager to oversee the coordination project.
- Ensuring transportation providers are “at the table” when government officials are making decisions regarding funding for transportation programs or programs to which clients will need transportation.

Data Collection and Planning

The gathering of data on vehicles, existing services, number of trips provided, number of employees, etc. is an essential element in the transportation coordination planning process. Existing conditions must be known so that planning on how drivers, dispatchers, vehicles and services can be brokered, shared and/or consolidated can move forward. The real “nitty-gritty” of coordination (planning on and figuring out how to work together) begins after existing conditions data is gathered and analyzed.

Typical coordination efforts to address data collection and planning include the following:

- Designation of a lead agency to head the data collection and planning processes.
- Incorporation of local planners (city, county, MPO) into the transportation coordination planning process.
- Utilization of the Coordinated Transportation Advisory Group/Committee to gather detailed data on existing vehicles, employees, services, technology, facilities, etc.
- Preparing and updating a coordinated transportation plan or strategic plan.
- Monitoring of successful completion of strategies in coordinated transportation plan.
- Members of the Transportation Advisory Group/Committee serve on other planning committees for local government and local social service agencies to ensure transportation coordination is a consideration in the planning process.
- Regular reporting to community leaders by representatives of the coordination project on coordination benefits and successes.

Customer Service

Coordination projects should ensure that consumers, especially people with disabilities, older adults, and low-income persons, have a convenient and accessible means of accessing information and transportation services. Consumers should play a vital role in evaluating coordinated transportation services and identifying unmet needs in the community.

Typical strategies used by coordination projects in the area of customer service to ensure consumer access to information and transportation services include the following:

- Creating a “one stop” type of information center where consumers can obtain information about coordinated services. This could be in the form of a website, a central call number for transportation providers, or an existing “one stop” social service agency office.
- Use of a mobility manager who is the central point of contact for consumers who need information and services and the providers who operate the services.
- Development of coordination system information in accessible formats – Braille, large print, audiotape, website, etc.

- Use of technology such as a dispatching software system or an interactive website to make reserving a trip or accessing information as easy as possible for the consumer and also making the coordination of trips easy for the coordination project providers.
- There is some form of consumer education program to assist consumers with accessing and riding coordinated and public transportation services.
- Coordination of fare payment systems to make switching from one service provider to another as “painless” as possible for the consumer.
- Representation of consumers/consumer groups on the Coordinated Transportation Advisory Group/Committee.
- Creation of a suggestion and complaint procedure regarding the services of the coordinated transportation system. This could be a procedure for each individual provider or a procedure established for the whole project through a central point of contact.
- Development of a marketing program to promote the coordinated transportation services available to consumers and how to use them.
- Standardization of policies and procedures as much as possible to ensure consistency for consumers among coordination project providers. These standard policies and procedures could include the following:
 - Fare policies
 - No-shows
 - Cancellations
 - Accident/incident procedures
 - Vehicle evacuation procedures
 - Seatbelts
 - Car seats
 - Inclement weather
 - Passenger behavior
 - Bags, packages/parcels on board
 - ADA-related policies – wheelchair assistance, oxygen transport, riding on lifts, service animals, etc.

Funding

Funding is one of the most important considerations when planning a coordinated transportation system. Without it, services cannot be operated and vehicles and equipment cannot be purchased. There could also be regulations attached to the receipt of funding which may restrict or hinder coordination.

However, with the recent increased focus on transportation coordination at the state and federal levels, regulations are changing to allow coordination (sharing of trips and vehicles, etc.) between different agencies/funding sources and local coordination projects across the country are developing innovative ways to combine local, state and federal funds to provide transportation services.

General examples of coordination efforts related to funding include the following:

- Creation of common financial and operating data definitions so that information can be shared among participating agencies – ability to compare “apples to apples”.
- Creation of a unified billing system among participating agencies based on a common agreed upon unit and price – per hour, per trip, per mile, etc.
- Creation of a common reporting system so that information on coordination project accomplishments can be collected for grant reporting purposes and reporting to local officials.
- Application for additional grants which support coordination activities.

Transportation Services

Transportation coordination involves creating a seamless transportation network for consumers with multiple providers and modes. That network must also be operationally and organizationally sound for the transportation providers.

The transportation services area deals with putting service “on the street” and the support services necessary to accomplish this. In this area, discussions will focus on sharing trips, providing additional services, vehicles, drivers, dispatchers, mechanics and facilities.

Typical strategies employed by coordination project participants in the area of transportation services are the following:

- Creation of a brokerage system – a central “clearinghouse” for consumers to schedule trips with various providers – non-profit agencies, public transit systems, private taxi companies, wheelchair van services, etc.
- Coordination of essential support services for transportation providers – dispatching, maintenance, information technology, etc.
- Joint purchasing and/or leasing of facilities and equipment.
- Development of a centralized dispatch system so that agencies and mobility managers can easily schedule trips for clients with coordination project providers.
- Establishment of pick-up locations which can be used by any transportation provider which are safe and accessible and preferably out of the elements.
- Sharing of trips by multiple agency clients and general public riders, especially for long distance and out-of-state travel.
- Coordination/standardization of driver training and driver/mechanic hiring requirements. In this regard, if agencies need to share drivers or mechanics, everyone will have the same basic qualifications and training. This also ensures a minimum level of quality service and maintenance throughout the entire region.

A suggested list of required training is as follows:

OSHA Bloodborne Pathogens
Passenger sensitivity training
Customer service/dealing with difficult passengers
Wheelchair securement training
Defensive driving
Accident/incident procedures
Vehicle evacuation procedures
First aid/CPR
Pre-trip inspection procedures
Safety and security
Substance abuse awareness
Radio or cell phone procedures
HIPPA training

A suggested list of hiring requirements includes the following items:

Minimum age
Minimum number of years of driving or maintenance experience
Knowledge of English
Possesses appropriate driver license
No criminal record
Meets certain physical requirements
ASE-certified or other similar certifications (mechanic only)
Ability to perform simple math
Reasonable knowledge of service area
Ability to read basic maps
Passage of a road test given by a supervisor
Passage of a written driving skills test.

- Development of a “pool” of qualified drivers from which agencies can draw when drivers are needed. A new non-profit agency or an existing agency could be responsible for employing the “pool” of drivers and then would bill the appropriate agency for hours driven for same. In this manner, drivers could accumulate more hours (more full-time than part-time) and a driver position may become more desirable to local residents seeking jobs.
- Working with a local technical school or other educational program to develop a driver training class where students could become “certified” drivers (and could even obtain their commercial driver license) and could work for local transportation providers after certification and/or be part of a driver “pool”. It can often be funded with monies from job programs for welfare recipients or low-income individuals.