

North Jersey Regional Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**North Jersey
Transportation Planning Authority, Inc**



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A. Introduction

The North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority's (NJTPA) Regional Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan (CHSTP) provides a regional perspective for ongoing efforts by the region's 13 counties to develop individual local coordination plans as required by the federal *Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users* (SAFETEA-LU) of 2005. The Final Report includes analysis, a thorough "3-C" (comprehensive, cooperative and continuing) planning process, and suggests potential activities to further improve access and mobility opportunities for transportation disadvantaged residents and travelers in the region.

The overall goal of this planning effort is to provide an opportunity for those with an interest in human services transportation to convene and collaborate in the development of regional strategies to improve and enhance specialized transportation services. The Final Report becomes part of the Regional Transportation Plan for the NJTPA, formalizing the process of coordinating the broad interests of the region, including the human services and public transportation communities.

B. Purpose

In February 2004, President George W. Bush issued an Executive Order aimed at improving human services transportation coordination for individuals with disabilities, older adults and people with lower incomes. The Executive Order established the Interagency Transportation Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM), representing 11 federal departments. A broad range of federal funding provides for transportation services – in fact, 62 different federal programs were identified that support human services transportation. The CCAM, in turn, launched United We Ride, a national initiative intended to simplify and coordinate rules and regulations regarding access to and provision of transportation services, and improve the productivity of existing programs through increased cost efficiencies.

SAFETEA-LU requires local jurisdictions to develop a coordinated plan as a condition for receiving formula funding under three FTA programs. The three programs include 49 U.S.C. Section 5310: Special Needs of Elderly Individuals and Individuals with Disabilities; 49 U.S.C. Section 5316: Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC); and 49 U.S.C. Section 5317: New Freedom. SAFETEA-LU also requires that projects proposed for funding be derived from a "locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan." The coordinated plan must be developed through a process that includes representatives of public, private, and non-profit transportation and human services providers. The other program to be considered is the Section 5311: Rural Transportation Assistance Program. Although USDOT does not require that the Rural Transportation Assistance Program be included in the CHSTP, the state of New Jersey feels strongly that the transportation disadvantaged segment of the rural population should be included in the 3-C planning process and the CHSTP.



NJ TRANSIT has stated that these plans will satisfy the coordination planning requirements of the state funded Senior Citizens and Disabled Residents Transportation Assistance Program (SCDRTAP), funded through casino revenues.

C. Final Report

The Final Report includes:

- Information from the individual county plans. Each county plan was reviewed and a series of meetings with representatives from each county significantly enhanced this information, which includes discussion of services, programs, practices and issues.
- Results of focus group meetings, including comments from the intended users of the services - elderly, persons with disabilities and those with low income seeking employment. Discussions were also held with the region's rural counties where needs and services, as well as issues and opportunities, were identified.
- Sixteen themes identified in New Jersey that currently impede the coordination of services. (see Figure 1)
- Development of potential regional coordination strategies based on the recurring themes and needs indicating how these ideas can be more fully developed as alternatives.
- Final recommendations for demonstration programs.
- Presentation of demographic and other data to reinforce the input received from the focus groups and county plans to develop the alternatives and recommendations.





Figure 1
Regional Themes

| Regional Themes | Theme Categories | | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------|------------------|
| | Institutional & Policy Issues | Services/ Eligibility | Public Information/ Customer Service | Financial | ITS & Technology |
| 1. Need for both spatial and temporal service expansion (e.g. more evening/weekend service). | X | X | | X | |
| 2. Insurance/liability barriers that inhibit coordination. | X | X | | X | |
| 3. No mechanism in place for inter-county and interstate trips; impact on programs and customers. | | X | | | |
| 4. Funding constraints, partnerships and issues. | | | | X | |
| 5. ITS opportunities, yet inconsistent infrastructure throughout the region. | | | | | X |
| 6. Improved program connection (e.g. Access Link and Medicaid coordination is currently limited). | X | X | | | |
| 7. Stakeholder roles today and in the future. | X | | | | |
| 8. Limited NJ TRANSIT service in some areas; impact/differences between rural, suburban and urban counties, also need to improve access to fixed route services including rail. | | X | | | |
| 9. Closing/re-locating of medical facilities driving longer trip distances across county boundaries. | | X | | | |
| 10. Eligibility differences or restrictions that affect customers. | | X | | X | |
| 11. Need to improve communication among counties; potential role for COST. | X | | X | | |
| 12. Continued education of clients and agencies of changing federal program requirements. | X | | X | | |
| 13. Informal coordination in place in some counties; expand consistency of these activities. | X | X | | | |
| 14. Need for fare integration, including potential utilization of smart card potential, for example. | X | | | X | X |
| 15. Incentives to increase agency coordination. | X | | | | |
| 16. Regional job access issues. | X | X | | | |



D. Short Range Recommendations

In the process of reviewing existing plans, receiving stakeholder input through interviews, and conducting the focus group meetings, a series of 16 regional themes was identified. The themes are grouped into five general categories, as summarized on the following page in Figure 1. The 16 regional themes were key elements for the development of recommendations for the region.

Based on these 16 themes and significant input from the Technical Advisory and Stakeholder Committees, the counties and other participating agencies, ideas were developed which could facilitate agency participation in the initial pilot projects. As a result, the following two short-range recommendations were proposed as the initial steps in coordinating planning and services in the NJTPA region.

1. Create a Regional Coordinating Council (RCC)

Coordination is a process. One of the most important things necessary to move this process forward will be to continue the regional dialogue which was initiated during this study. Therefore, the primary recommendation is the development of a forum through which this can occur. The Regional Coordinating Council would be created to maintain lines of communication and continue the pursuit of a long term regional strategy for coordination. The Council could be hosted by The New Jersey Council on Access and Mobility (NJCAM) or the New Jersey Council on Special Transportation (NJCOST), and could include representatives from the NJTPA, NJ TRANSIT, the Transportation Management Associations (TMAs), and the 13 counties. The Regional Coordinating Council could provide the participating agencies a forum through which projects, ideas, issues and opportunities could be discussed on a more permanent basis.



In order to fully support this Coordinating Council, the NJCAM could establish a Mobility Manager Staff position. This position could possibly fall under the Department of Human Services, which co-chairs the NJCAM. This person could provide support for coordination efforts. Most members of the RCC have full-time jobs or commitments with time limitations. To continue to build and give momentum to the coordination vision and goals, dedicated staff could provide support and be the primary 'go-to' person for coordination. Dedicated staff could also monitor programs and complete mandated federal, state, and local reports required for different funding sources. The Mobility Manager could also assist participating agencies in the next steps of coordination.



2. Formalize Coordination Planning Process

Once the Regional Coordination Council is established, the next step is to formalize the planning process to ensure coordination projects are eligible to receive funding and are included in the appropriate documents. As local projects are identified, it is necessary to have a process for the region to move projects from concept to implementation. A structure for making recommendations will enable the region to meet the federal SAFETEA-LU requirements.

As mentioned above in Recommendation 1, having dedicated staff, such as the Mobility Manager, in place to facilitate this process could expedite and provide consistent attention to the planning process, in addition to responding to local agency needs and questions.

E. Pilot Projects

One of the steps within the coordination planning process is to solicit proposals for pilot projects. Using information gained from the 16 regional themes, ten potential project alternatives were developed.

- Improve Intercounty Travel Options
- Fare Coordination/Integration
- Coordination with NJ TRANSIT
- Develop a Human Service Transportation Resource Guide for Counselors and Providers
- Develop a Citizens Guide to Human Service Transportation for the Region
- Develop a Regional Process for Joint Purchasing
- Facilitate Implementation of County Call Centers for Coordinated Information, Reservations, Scheduling and Dispatch
- Conduct a Comprehensive Survey of Employers by Subregion
- Develop an Incentives-based Approach to Sponsoring Projects that Improve Coordination
- Establish Regional Brokerage for Coordinated Human Service Transportation

It should be recognized that many of the needs identified and discussed within the study are similar within the different counties and subregions of the NJTPA; therefore, similar projects and strategies for multiple areas should be considered eligible pilot projects. Eligible projects could be developed using like strategies to meet the needs identified throughout the Final Report, which provides a framework where multiple projects can be developed and would be eligible to submit for the different federal programs.

E. Conclusion

The Regional Coordinated Human Service Transportation Plan addresses the unique characteristics and environment of the 13 individual counties in the NJTPA region. The plan



assessed and evaluated local issues and provides opportunities for improvements within a broader regional framework. It looks to leverage existing funding sources and also to identify new resources to improve mobility for transportation disadvantaged populations within the region.

The plan represents the visions, the energies and the support of a vast group of local and regional stakeholders, populations, and service providers, which will be the key to successful coordination efforts in the future.