

Including People with Disabilities In Coordinated Transportation Plans

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Background

The United States is home to more than 54 million people with disabilities. ⁽¹⁾The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) ensures that public accommodations must be made to ensure access to accessible transportation. For more than eighteen years, the transportation community and the disability community collaborated to make the tenets of the ADA a reality. Then, in 2005, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) created a new place at the transportation planning and coordination table for citizens with disabilities. SAFETEA-LU contains provisions on coordination and guidance on ways to enable greater coordination among agencies that serve the public.

New requirements in the federal transportation authorizing legislation increased cooperation and coordination of transportation among the various constituencies associated with accessible transportation.

These include people across the transit, aging, employment, education, social services, recreation/leisure, community and land-use planning, housing, healthcare and disabilities communities. The goal is to reduce service silos and streamline programs to increase transportation options for people with disabilities, older adults and persons with limited income.

Coordination is about shared responsibility, shared management, shared power, and shared funding.

Coordination of transportation services is best seen as a process in which two or more organizations interact to jointly accomplish their transportation objectives.

Locally developed, coordinated plans that take the needs of diverse constituents into account are required. The plans will be used to determine funding priorities and support competitive bidding for human service transportation grants.

Coordinated transportation systems leverage shared resources to increase rides, reduce costs, streamline access and increase customer satisfaction. However, engaging all members of the community in the coordinated planning process is essential for success. Although many gains have been made in transportation coordination, the need remains to reach out to people with disabilities to incorporate their wisdom and experience into the planning process at all levels—national, state and local.

People with disabilities have a perspective that is essential to the success of coordinated planning, because they have first-hand experience traveling in their communities and, thereby, first-hand knowledge of the ease of access to and usability of the transportation available. They can help shape the transportation services to best meet the needs of their community.



Today, many transit systems and human service agencies are working together to increase residents' mobility options in their shared communities.

Customers are enjoying more transportation choices and better quality of life, including increased access to necessary destinations such as health care, education and jobs. ⁽²⁾ And as important, they are gaining access to a variety of places that can enhance their lives, such as friends' homes, shopping malls, movie theaters, sports venues, and places of worship.

Requirements of Coordinated Planning

Local agencies applying for funding under applicable sections of SAFETEA-LU must include projects that are part of a locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan. Specifically, the plan must:

- Identify the transportation needs of individuals with disabilities, older adults and people with low incomes;
- Provide strategies for meeting those local needs; and
- Prioritize transportation services for funding and implementation.

The plan must be developed through a process that includes representatives of public, private, non-profit transportation and human services providers and members of the public.

All human services programs funded through the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) that support transportation services for people with disabilities and other riders have coordinated planning requirements under SAFETEA-LU. The plan also plays a major role in determining what transportation services are funded under the following three FTA programs.

SAFETEA-LU's New Freedom Program (NFP, Section 5317), which supports new public transportation services and public transportation alternatives beyond those required by the ADA, requires coordinated planning. The NFP 5317 assists individuals with disabilities meet their transportation needs, including transportation to and from jobs and employment support services.

In addition to NFP 5317, other human services transportation programs funded through FTA include the Elderly Individuals and Individuals with Disabilities program (Section 5310) and the Job Access and Reverse Commute program (JARC, Section 5316).

Elements of the Plan

A coordinated transportation plan is an agreed-upon list of goals and steps that a community wants to take to improve transportation in their area. Under the federal requirements, a local coordination plan must include, at a minimum:

- An assessment of available services that identifies current public, private and non-profit transportation providers;
- An assessment of transportation needs of the target population groups for the funding programs addressed in the plan;
- Strategies, activities and/or projects to address the identified gaps between current and needed services, as well as opportunities to improve efficiencies in service delivery; and
- Priorities for implementation based on resources, time, and feasibility of specific strategies and/or activities identified.

Beginning a Successful Coordination Process

Successful coordination takes time and work. For the individuals and representatives of various organizations recruited to participate in the planning process, coordination frequently means working with people with whom they have not worked before. Often, they have different political jurisdictions, agency responsibilities, professional interests, funding sources, and even vocabularies that must be understood before barriers can be removed and joint activities proceed.

Coordination involves building relationships with individuals who sometimes are unfamiliar with the missions, objectives, terminology, and regulations of agencies other than their own. At the same time, the differing opinions and perspectives bring depth to decision making and the completed coordinated plan.

Tools from the FTA United We Ride initiative, such as the Framework for Action, have been used across the United States to facilitate the planning process. The Framework for Action includes an introduction to coordinated planning, a self-assessment tool for communities, a self-assessment tool for states, and a facilitator's guide. It is recommended that coordination begin with these three actions.

- Allot substantial time at the beginning of the process for team members to introduce themselves, their agencies' missions and objectives.
- Explore many team building exercises; use them as ice-breakers and ways to demonstrate that everyone is valuable and contributes something important to joint efforts.
- Promote and encourage comments and ideas from everyone at the table.

Serious coordination efforts constitute a new way of doing business outside the traditional programmatic boundaries of service delivery.

Although coalition building is not always easy, experience is showing that it yields new ideas, new solutions, innovation, increased teamwork, increased understanding of shared goals, and usually results in its intended goal: increased access to transportation options for people with disabilities, older adults, and people with limited incomes. (3)

Role of People with Disabilities in Coordinated Planning

For the individual or organization representing the disability community, contributing successfully to the coordinated plan begins with a well-established relationship with the agency developing the plan in your community. Regardless of the planning process, meeting with transit providers occasionally to take stock of current needs and existing resources is the best way to stay knowledgeable about the available resources and can take full advantage of them.

A tool that can help an individual or organizational representative of the disability community prepare to get involved in the planning process is the United We Ride Framework for Action coordinated planning self-assessment. Reading through the document will provide the representative unfamiliar with the planning process a base of information about it. The self-assessment tool has five key steps:

- Making Things Happen by Working Together
- Taking Stock of Community Needs and Moving Forward
- Putting Customers First
- Adapting Funding for Greater Mobility
- Moving People Efficiently

To get involved with coordinated planning, first determine what organization is leading the process in your community. If unsure where to begin, the nearest FTA Regional Office can provide contact information for the appropriate state agency, the organization leading the coordinated planning effort, as well as the designated recipient(s) of FTA funding in the area. FTA's regional offices and contact information for each are listed at: http://www.fta.dot.gov/regional_offices.html

A transportation user from the disability community brings unique expertise to the table and can be a well-informed contributor to the planning process. Such a representative can help increase the efficiency and coordination of transportation resources in your community by:

- Volunteering to participate in the process
- Sharing experiences with transit service including both strengths and weaknesses
- Describing gaps in services, with as much specificity as possible relating to destinations, frequency of service, routings, travel time, and other relevant detail
- Sharing knowledge of the ADA rights and responsibilities for customers with disabilities who use public transportation
- Contributing insight about local customer service practices that either do or do not support people with disabilities
- Describing any environmental barriers to transportation that exist between customers and the ride, such as poor bus stop placement and lack of sidewalks
- Participating on task forces and working groups that support coordinated planning efforts
- Assisting with outreach to other members of the community

- Suggesting approaches for meeting transportation service gaps and solving problems.
- Helping to prioritize the needs for service improvements in the community
- Assisting in the development of documents and resources noting community transportation options and, if applicable, unmet needs and suggestions for improvement
- Being open and honest with the group in a constructive way

Role of the Leader in Coordinated Planning

It is important for the leader or lead agency of a coordinated planning effort to make getting a full complement of representatives from the community's transportation spectrum a priority. In many communities, the lead agency may be a transportation provider, and ensuring the involvement of individuals with disabilities in coordinated planning is also an important part of the transportation provider's role in the planning process.

Sources to consider when identifying potential representatives from the community include:

- Public transportation planners and operations managers
- Private transportation providers (brokers, ADA paratransit providers, taxi companies)
- Area transportation planning agencies
- Human service agencies that fund and/or support client transportation services
- Human service agencies for whom transportation is a secondary, or non-central part of operations
- Human services agencies or government agencies that employ people with disabilities

- Government agencies and non-profit agencies and organizations that are involved with transportation efforts, including motor vehicle administration, law enforcement, highway administration, and land use planning
- Agencies that administer health, employment, and other support programs for targeted populations such as older adults, individuals with low incomes, and people with disabilities (e.g., Area Agencies on Aging, Centers for Independent Living) if such agencies also help customers find transportation
- Individual transit riders and potential riders
- Public transit system, paratransit or accessible transportation advisory committee members
- Advocacy organizations for targeted populations including agencies that serve or advocate on behalf of people with both visual and hidden disabilities
- Security and emergency management agencies
- Local or state officials and elected officials
- Representatives of the business community
- Economic development agencies
- Job training and placement agencies
- Local transit operators
- Community rehabilitation providers
- One-stop career centers
- Independent living programs
- Disability advocates who may not be found within a particular organization, but who are known to newspaper editors, mayors, county commissioners, and other proprietors of public forums. Ask those sources for assistance in identifying potential participants from the disability community.

The leader should also provide information about the planning process to individuals and groups in the disability community and make sure the documents are available upon request in accessible formats (e.g., large print, CD-ROM, MP3, other audio files, Braille, accessible PDFs on-line).

The information should include route, schedule, fare and contact information about the meetings. Meetings should be held in an accessible venue and on an accessible bus or rail route.

Elements of Effective Coordination

Coordination requires pre-planning and once there is an understanding of the work at hand, and the team is selected, useful steps to consider when implementing or conducting the planning process include:

- Establish a clear communications process that includes:
 - o a schedule for meetings;
 - o a timeframe for accomplishments;
 - o a full list of participant contact information; and
 - o a plan for how communications will occur between meetings (e.g., email groups; recordings of discussion and decision making).
- Ask team members with disabilities if they require materials that are part of the process in an accessible format.
- Develop guiding principles and content elements for the coordinated plan.
- Incorporate information about coordinated planning into agendas of other events, such as workshops, conferences, and hearings, where people with disabilities participate and could provide input.
- Encourage everyone to actively participate in the meetings.
- Circulate drafts of the plan to all who request them and incorporate feedback.
- Solicit public review and comment on the final draft, perhaps using focus groups.
- Advertise that the process is taking place (e.g. notices in local and community newspapers, community Web sites).

Sources of Further Information and Technical Assistance

Easter Seals Project ACTION offers numerous resources, as well as training and technical assistance, to educate people about and support implementation of the transportation provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Visit www.projectaction.org to access and download, to an array of useful, no-cost products, resources and newsletters. You may also order products at projectaction@easterseals.com or 800-659-6428.

Many other useful links are noted in the following pages. Easter Seals Project ACTION would like to hear your planning process success stories or barriers you may encounter, so please email us your thoughts at projectaction@easterseals.com.

Other Useful Links:

Federal Transit Administration - www.fta.dot.gov
The Federal Transit Administration administers federal funding to support a variety of locally planned, constructed, and operated public transportation systems throughout the U.S., including buses, subways, light rail, commuter rail, streetcars, monorail, passenger ferry boats, inclined railways, and people movers. Links to more information about the Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC), New Freedom, and Section 5310 programs are found through the following Web page: http://www.fta.dot.gov/funding/grants_financing_263.html

United We Ride - <http://www.unitedweride.gov>
United We Ride is a federal interagency initiative that supports states and their localities in developing coordinated human service delivery systems. In addition to state coordination grants, United We Ride provides the Framework for

Action transportation coordination and planning self-assessment tool technical assistance, and other resources such as the Help Along the Way guide to national transportation technical assistance programs.

Federal Coordination Council on Access and Mobility - www.unitedweride.gov/1_3_ENG_HTML.htm

The Federal Coordinated Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM) was established to increase coordinated transportation. CCAM provides regional ambassadors that provide states and territories with hands-on technical assistance in the development and implementation of coordinated human service transportation plans. www.unitedweride.gov/1_973_ENG_HTML.htm
The ambassadors also work to build awareness among decision-makers, service providers, and consumers on key issues related to human service transportation and coordination, including those requirements and opportunities created by SAFETEA-LU.

Community Transportation Association of America Information Station - www.ctaa.org/ntrc
Through various federally funded national programs, CTAA offers technical assistance and training to help communities increase their transportation options. One of those programs, the National Resource Center for Human Service Transportation Coordination, also sponsors The National Consortium on the Coordination of Human Services Transportation.

The consortium is an alliance of national non-profit organizations and associations dedicated to promoting mobility and the delivery of coordinated human services transportation to all individuals with disabilities, people with low incomes, older adults, and youth.

The Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations - www.ampo.org
AMPO is a nonprofit, membership organization established in 1994 to serve the needs and interests of metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) nationwide. Federal highway and transit statutes require, as a condition for spending federal highway or transit funds in urbanized areas, the designation of MPOs, which have responsibility for planning, programming, and coordination of federal highway and transit investments.

Publications

The following publications are available free of charge in print or by download through Easter Seals Project ACTION at www.projectaction.org/clearinghouse

Coordinating Transportation Services: Local Collaboration and Decision-Making

A "how-to" manual for coordinating local transportation services. https://secure2.convio.net/es/site/Ecommerce/683064011?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=1463&store_id=3863

Expanding Mobility Options for Persons with Disabilities: A Practitioner's Guide to Community-Based Transportation Planning

A guide that provides a model approach for community-based transportation planning based on a review of common elements in the experiences of 13 communities across the United States. <http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/anmviewer.asp?a=119&z=39>

Expanding Mobility Options for People with Disabilities: Strategies for Community-Based Transportation Planning

A brochure that outlines the steps that 13 grantees across the United States followed

in developing their community-based plans. <http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/anmviewer.asp?a=119&z=39>

You Can Really Go Places

A booklet introduces people with disabilities to public transportation, basic ADA provisions and the resources of Project ACTION. https://secure2.convio.net/es/site/Ecommerce/1002111130?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=1303&store_id=3863

Rights and Responsibilities of Transit Customers with Disabilities

This 16-page booklet provides transit users who have disabilities with a guide to their rights and responsibilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act. https://secure2.convio.net/es/site/Ecommerce/1219326146?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=2401&store_id=3863

Stories of Changed Lives – The Personal Impact of Transportation Access

Ten Americans with disabilities describe how transportation contributes to success in their lives. Illustrated, 12 pages. https://secure2.convio.net/es/site/Ecommerce/1750466620?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=1302&store_id=3863

The New Freedom Program: An Introduction

This four-page guide explains the basics of SAFETEA-LU's New Freedom Program. https://secure2.convio.net/es/site/Ecommerce/1439959273?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=2381&store_id=3863

Building Mobility Partnerships for People with Disabilities: Opportunities for Federal Funding
With its comprehensive list of federal funding

opportunities for accessible transportation projects, this reference guide places special emphasis on building partnerships across communities. https://secure2.convio.net/es/site/Ecommerce/394355793?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=2341&store_id=3863

Additional resource publications (may have an associated cost):

Framework for ACTION: Building the Fully Coordinated Transportation System. Department of Transportation, Coordinating Council on Access & Mobility, Federal Transit Administration, Washington, D.C. (2003) Available at no cost through the ESPA Clearinghouse: www.projectaction.org/clearinghouse

Report 101: Toolkit for Rural Community Coordinated Transportation Services. Transit Cooperative Research Program (2004) http://www.trb.org/news/blurb_detail.asp?id=4042

Building Communities From the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing A Community's Assets. John P. Kretzmann, John L. McKnight, (1993) <http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/publications/community/buildingblurb.html>

About Easter Seals Project ACTION

Easter Seals Project ACTION- the acronym stands for Accessible Community Transportation In Our Nation- is funded through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, and is administered by Easter Seals, Inc. The Project was established by the United States Congress in 1988.

ESPA promotes cooperation between the transportation industry and the disability community to increase mobility for people with disabilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act and beyond. All resources created for public use are free of charge.

These include technical assistance that can be accessed through a toll-free telephone number, 800-659-6428, between 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Eastern Time, Monday through Friday; a Web site www.projectaction.org; newsletters; a clearinghouse of more than 50 print, video and audio resources; and training activities at meetings and conferences.

This document is disseminated under sponsorship of Easter Seals Project ACTION (ESPA) in the interest of information exchange. Neither ESPA, nor the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, assumes liability for its contents or use thereof.

Sources

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4. Burkhardt, J., Koffman, D., & Murray, G. (2003). Economic Benefits of Coordinating Human Services Transportation and Transit Services (TCRP Report 91). Washington, DC: Transportation Research Board.