

SERVICE PROVIDERS AND STAKEHOLDERS MEETING

Wednesday, April 2, 2008
Morningside Community Center
10:00 a.m.

ATTENDEES

Jill Baldwin, SE Behavioral Healthcare
Bob Bohm, DakotAbilities
Katie Fiech, Center for Active Generations/Workers on Wheels
Ardell Fiedler, South Dakota Rehabilitation Center for the Blind
Debra Gaikowski, City of Sioux Falls
Frank Hansen, Project Car
Randy Hartman, Sioux Falls Transit
Kim Hejna, Avera Prince of Peace
Kate Heligas, Project Car
Steve Hey, School Bus Inc.
Angie Hilton, South Eastern Council of Governments
Robin Husman, Good Samaritan Center
Kent Johnson, Sioux Falls Transit
Molly Keegan, Daybreak/Center for Active Generations
Laurie Knutson, YWCA
Tierza Lanham, Sioux Falls Transit
Major Mike Mills, Salvation Army
Tom Murray, Sanford USD Medical Center
John Nardini, Sioux Falls Transit
Ann Ogoreuc, URS Corporation
Jessica Pickett, Inter-Lakes Community Action
Jim Shafer, School Bus Inc.
Bill Troe, URS Corporation
Brian Wallin, Sioux Falls Veterans Center
Jessica Walters, Retired Senior Volunteer Program

INTRODUCTION

Debra Gaikowski, Transit Planner for the City of Sioux Falls, opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees to the first Service Providers and Stakeholders Meeting for the Sioux Falls Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan. The plan is being managed by the City of Sioux Falls and the South Eastern Council of Governments (SECOG), the metropolitan planning organization for the Sioux Falls area. Debra introduced Angie Hilton from SECOG and, Bill Troe and Ann Ogoreuc from URS Corporation, the consultants selected to develop the plan. Each of the attendees introduced themselves and indicated what agency they represent.

MEETING PURPOSE AND PLAN BACKGROUND

The purpose of the meeting was to provide background information on the plan and obtain stakeholder input on the unmet transportation needs in the community.

Bill Troe started the meeting by providing an overview of the plan. The stated purpose of the plan is to 1) identify the transportation needs of older adults, persons with low-incomes, and persons with disabilities; 2) identify gaps and/or overlaps in existing transportation services, 3) develop strategies for addressing the needs and overlaps, and 4) prioritize actions for funding and implementation. The plan will build on the coordination effort that was undertaken in 2002.

While coordinated plans are a good idea for all communities to undertake, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) now requires that projects proposed for funding from three FTA programs be derived from a coordinated plan. The three programs are:

- Section 5310 Transportation for Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities
- Section 5316 Job Access and Reverse Commute
- Section 5317 New Freedom program

The coordinated plan is also a required component of the MPO's long-range transportation plan.

Ann Ogoreuc provided a definition of "coordination" and gave examples of the three primary types of coordination; cooperation, joint-use agreements, and consolidation. She also described benefits of implementing coordination strategies as well as some common barriers and obstacles to coordination.

PROJECT GOALS

Ann reviewed the preliminary goals of the plan and invited comments on the goals.

Mission: The Sioux Falls Metropolitan Planning Organization seeks to provide efficient and effective local transportation services to meet the needs of the elderly, disabled, and low-income populations in the region.

Goals:

- **Coordination:** Capitalize on the human, capital, and service resources currently available through transportation providers in the MPO region.
- **Efficiency:** Identify and implement feasible actions to streamline transportation services provided by human service agencies, local transportation providers, and public transit.
- **Availability:** Increase availability, accessibility, and affordability of transportation services for the providers and the consumers.

- Conduct a comprehensive public involvement effort that solicits the input of:
 - public, non-profit, and private transportation providers;
 - human service agencies;
 - other stakeholders representing the transportation disadvantaged; and
 - the general public.
- Federal Funding: Ensure eligibility for federal funding programs to support transportation services in the community.

Bill encouraged input on the designated goals and requested that suggested changes be forwarded to the Project Team at coordinated_plan@urscorp.com.

PUBLIC INPUT

Throughout the course of the planning process, the Project Team will seek input from a wide variety of stakeholders including agencies that provide transportation for the target populations, agencies that serve the target populations, and the general public. Surveys and facilitated meetings will be held to obtain input. Information about the project will be posted on the City's website: www.siouxfalls.org/transit. A project email has been established: coordinated_plan@urscorp.com.

Ann reviewed two surveys that are being used to obtain information on available transportation services, the characteristics of the stakeholders' consumers, and unmet needs and service overlaps.

UNMET NEEDS

The remainder of the meeting was an open discussion of unmet needs, service overlaps, and other transportation issues. The following is a summary of the unmet needs discussion:

- **Eligibility for transportation programs:** Many of the human services programs that include transportation service have threshold eligibility criteria including age, income, and disability. In cases, there are people that do not meet the threshold requirements, but these thresholds do not reasonably reflect a point at which people can provide their own transportation. Making a small amount more per month/year than the income threshold to gain access to transportation service does not mean an individual can really afford to supply or fund their transportation. It simply means they are not eligible for the transportation assistance program.
- **Transportation affordability for homeless/low-income individuals needing on-going transportation to employment:** Transportation is only one of the funded services for low-income persons through human services programs. As funding is very tight, agencies need to balance providing transportation with providing shelter and there is never enough funding to do both to a level that is desired. It was noted that Sioux Falls Transit offers the Pass-it-on Program which provides a courtesy bus pass to consumers of participating agencies to

help with transportation to employment (until they get their first paycheck), job training, housing searches, and agency appointments among others.

- **Paratransit pick-up policy:** Sioux Falls Paratransit provides a curb-to-curb service for eligible users. Some users are eligible for door-to-door service whereby the paratransit driver will go to the user's front door to pick them up. However, in apartment and condominium buildings, the driver only goes to the building's front door, which may not be the front door of the user's dwelling. It was noted that some users, due to memory or physical impairment, do not always know that they need to go to the building's front door to wait for the driver. Ultimately, the user could be considered a no-show if they are not waiting at the door when the paratransit vehicle arrives.
- **Transit route coverage:** For many persons that are tied to agency transportation or are transit dependent, their origins/destinations may not be near transit routes.
- **Transit service hours:** The lack of evening service hours and the one-hour midday service frequency make utilizing transit very difficult for non-traditional work shifts. For evening events/appointments, many have difficulty making the return trip. Sioux Falls Transit does not operate on Sundays, limiting some individuals from using transit to go to religious services and taking care of other needs. It was noted that a Sunday service was operated a few years ago and it had very low usage, possibly due to the level of fares. Some agencies have needed to adjust their consumers' work and/or appointment times in order to schedule a trip on paratransit.
- **Peak period use:** Need to review each agency's peaks/lows. Throughout the metro is there vehicle availability to share? Is there time of day availability (weekends/evenings)?
- **Youth transportation:** In order to participate in afterschool activities and programs, low-income children need affordable transportation in the afternoon hours.
- **Travel knowledge:** Many potential transit patrons do not know how to use transportation services. Where services are available, many do not know how to read and use schedules, access stops, pay a fare, make transfers, etc. It was noted that Sioux Falls Transit can provide a training video to agencies to help their clients learn how to use transit. In the past, the transit system also provided group training sessions using a spare transit vehicle (though the number of training sessions has decreased in recent years). In addition, the system provides transit passes to enable human service agency staff to provide travel training to their consumers.
- **Limited service between nearby communities:** Residents of many of the nearby communities rely on being able to get to medical appointments, work, or shopping districts in Sioux Falls. Travel schedules are limited.
- **Consistency and employment:** If a person cannot afford to drive or cannot drive, their ability to consistently get to work on time (unless they are within walking distance) is limited. Transit headways make it difficult to be timely. This issue is not an employee only issue; employers lose money when they need to replace a worker. Thus, a negative economic situation is created.
- **Trips outside of the Sioux Falls area:** On occasion, individuals need affordable trips outside of the Sioux Falls area. Lack of service outside the general area is a primary

concern in an emergency situation where a person has no means of transportation (either cannot afford to pay or does not know a person that can provide a ride).

- **Employers on committee:** Presently the committee is made up of agencies providing transportation or agencies that serve the target populations. In the course of the study, employers of the low-income, disabled and senior populations should be involved to get their perspective. Example: hotels.
- **Rising cost of providing transportation:** Agencies that provide transportation face increasing operating costs for fuel, insurance, and wages, including benefits, among others. Due to the increasing cost of purchasing vehicles, many agencies are delaying new purchases but are also struggling to pay for the maintenance of aging vehicles. Also, where an agency can afford to purchase a replacement vehicle, they may not be able to afford the operating costs. Agencies can get assistance for purchases, but much less for operations/maintenance.
- **Senior citizens:** Some senior citizens may not use transit due to being intimidated or confused about how to use the system and/or an inability to walk to bus stops.

RELATIONSHIP TO THE 2002 COORDINATION STUDY

A coordination feasibility study was undertaken in 2002. It evaluated potential options for coordinating or consolidating the services of agencies that participated in a survey. The current study process will update data that was collected during that effort in order to document any changes in the amount and types of services that are available.

As a result of the 2003 study, South Dakota Achieve and School Bus, Inc. partnered on the operation of an evening and weekend demand response system. Even though, prior to implementation, many individuals indicated that they would use the service, it was never able to attract a sufficient number of trips to make it cost-efficient. The fare for the service may have deterred some from using it.

The agencies that participated in the previous effort were and are interested in pursuing opportunities for making the transportation programs more efficient many do not have the staff resources to devote to identifying and implementing the changes.

There was the belief that good ideas came out of the 2002 effort. However, when it came down to implementation, the enormity of the task was too great. No agency had the resources to manage or take the lead on implementation. Thus, many ideas were never carried out. A major roadblock to advancing the recommendations of the 2002 study was the inability to use federal funding to contract with a private entity to provide the service.

MEETING CONCLUSION

The meeting ended at 11:45 a.m. All meeting attendees will be notified in advance of the next meeting.