

Transportation Services Coordination Plan

Greater access to transportation services for people with disabilities, older adults, and individuals with lower incomes begins with a coordination plan. Elements of a plan include (1) an inventory and assessment of available transportation resources and community and customer needs; (2) goals and strategies for meeting those needs, including better coordination of existing services, development of a “family of transportation services,” and a mechanism to measure progress; and (3) a means to share and coordinate resources. A well-designed plan also prioritizes transportation services based on the availability of funding resources and the feasibility of implementation.



Identify and Assess Resources and Needs

The starting point for building a coordination plan involves identifying and assessing available resources (services, providers, and funding) and customer and community needs. An inventory of resources and needs can include the following information:

Resources

- Types of services available
- Capacity of existing services
- Funding sources currently used

Needs

- Types of services needed
- Frequency of need
- Geographic need
- Reason(s) for service need

Set Goals, Identify Outcomes, Develop Strategies, and Build a “Family of Transportation Services”

The primary focus of setting goals and developing strategies is to meet community and customer needs. The process of setting goals and developing strategies can vary from community to community. (Suggestions for involving customers and stakeholders in building a coordination plan are on page four.) Self-assessment tools help states and communities assess their readiness and progress in developing and implementing a coordination plan. One such tool is *The Framework for Action: Building the Fully Coordinated Transportation System*.

Developed for the United We Ride (UWR) initiative, the Framework is based on analyses of transportation coordination efforts and successful models in states and communities as well as on advice and guidance from a panel of experts in the human services and transportation fields. The Framework includes a facilitator’s guide that offers advice on selecting a stakeholder group and managing the process. Sometimes an external facilitator or technical assistance provider familiar with the collaborative process is engaged to identify shared goals, outcomes, and strategies and to maximize opportunities for increasing resources.

Set Goals

Successful planning processes begin with an overall goal that the entire community can support. This typically involves defining the intended long-term change that will occur in the community as a result of sharing resources, identifying strategies, and taking actions prescribed in the coordination plan. UWR uses the following overall goal:

Increased mobility, accessibility, and ridership through the integration of transportation services and resources.

Communities can reach this long-term goal by developing a coordination plan that provides easier access to more rides with improved customer satisfaction in service quality for people with disabilities, older adults, and individuals with lower incomes. A coordination plan also will help the community identify short-term outcomes to measure progress, as well as strategies they can support.

Identify Outcomes

An important step in the development of a coordination plan involves describing the positive changes, or “outcomes,” that are likely to occur as a result of working together. Changes may occur in practice, policy, condition, action, service, operation, and/or status. Outcomes are a measurement of change in the short term and are designed to lead in the long term to a goal. UWR has identified three goal areas and a specific outcome for each related to the overall desired goal:

1. Increase the number of rides for older adults, people with disabilities, and individuals with lower incomes (efficiency outcome);
2. Increase the number of communities with easy access to transportation services for older adults, people with disabilities, and individuals with lower incomes (effectiveness outcome); and

3. Increase the quality of transportation services for older adults, people with disabilities, and individuals with lower incomes (customer satisfaction measure).

Each of the above outcomes has been further refined with specific indicators of progress for each goal area. These goals, outcomes, and indicators are reflected in the UWR Logic Model, which was developed using input from many stakeholder and advocacy organizations. Logic models are widely used for program planning and change management. The UWR Logic Model provides communities with the tools needed to take concrete action and measure progress.

Develop Strategies

Coordination plans focus on strategies that will achieve desired outcomes. Strategies can be activities, processes, events, tools, or technologies and include the use of available resources. Examples of UWR strategies include the development of coordinated policies and funding strategies, the establishment of a “family of transportation services,” and the integration of technologies to enhance mobility management concepts.

Build a “Family of Transportation Services”

Building a family of transportation services is an important strategy for improving transportation services through a coordinated approach. Communities that have a family of transportation services in place use a broad range of transportation options and specifically match modes of travel to community demographics and needs, particularly assessing the needs of older adults, people with disabilities, and individuals with lower incomes. Access to the family of transportation services is best achieved when all transportation providers and sources of funding are considered, and when providers communicate and coordinate with one another. (The Family of Transportation Services fact sheet is available at www.unitedweride.gov.)

Build Partnerships and Share Resources

A variety of resources are needed to ensure the success of a coordination plan. These resources include the knowledge, expertise, financial resources, and technological know-how of a myriad of organizations and agencies working in the human service, transportation, financial, and technology fields. Building partnerships is one way to tap these resources.

Partnerships

Partnerships among human services agencies, non-profits, workforce investment agencies, transportation providers, regional economic development organizations, customers, and other community groups are an essential component of developing and implementing a coordination plan.



Partnerships are needed to pool resources, maximize the use of vehicles and other equipment, develop a better understanding of community needs, and improve service. Since many state, regional, and local agencies finance or provide transportation services in one way or another, the most logical step is to bring them together to discuss opportunities for partnerships.

There are dozens of models for increasing coordination and building partnerships. Several governors, for example, have established interagency task forces. Another model involves the creation of a local coordination body to oversee development of a coordination plan. No single model is right for every community. The process of coordination can even begin as modestly as when two agencies work together to leverage their resources. As participants become more comfortable with the process, collaboration can be expanded to include additional participants.

Financial Resources and Other Assets

Sharing financing resources is another key component of a coordination plan. It makes the most efficient use of limited funding, vehicles, and services. Many sources of federal, state, and local funding can be used to support the development and implementation of a coordination plan. The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) requires the development of a coordination plan as a condition for receiving funding for programs serving older adults, people with disabilities, and individuals with lower incomes. SAFETEA-LU requires that plan development include input from public, private, and non-profit transportation and human service providers and the public.

Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) Technologies

ITS and other technologies can facilitate coordination by enhancing information sharing; streamlining reservations, scheduling, and dispatching; and improving reporting and billing processes. In addition to facilitating coordination, ITS technologies help transportation service providers respond more effectively to customer needs during major transportation incidents and community emergencies, such as hurricanes, tornadoes, and flooding. Many of these technologies are now employed by transportation service providers to increase accessibility, mobility, and safety.

- Vehicle arrival notification systems inform customers by phone or email when to expect the arrival of their vehicles.
- Wayfinding navigational systems assist those with visual and cognitive disabilities in locating bus stops, navigating facilities, identifying the correct vehicle, and boarding and alighting vehicles.
- Automated routing and scheduling systems make it possible to schedule trips with multiple destinations on relatively short notice.
- Real-time vehicle tracking makes it possible for transit agencies and drivers to pinpoint a vehicle's location and make changes to its schedule to meet passenger needs.
- Cost sharing, billing, and reporting software allows human service and transportation providers to calculate shared costs and automate billing and reporting functions.



Need Help Getting Started?

There are many approaches to developing a coordination plan. Availability of staff, funding, and other resources are important considerations for selecting the best approach for meeting a community's needs. Regardless of the approach used, it is important that a wide range of stakeholders and consumers are included in the process. The Interagency Transportation Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM) supports the use of federal dollars for coordination planning and resource sharing. Communities can begin their efforts by cataloging available state and federal resources. Various organizations are also available to assist communities in developing and facilitating a coordination plan. A link to these technical assistance resources is available on the UWR Web site.

Another important resource for getting started is the National Resource Center for Human Service Transportation Coordination. The goal of the Center is to provide communities with the support they need to coordinate transportation services for older adults, people with disabilities, and individuals with lower incomes. The Center's technical assistance functions include:

- Expanding the availability of UWR Ambassadors who provide hands-on technical assistance to States and territories in developing and implementing coordinated human service transportation plans;
- Maintaining an information clearinghouse on UWR activities;
- Coordinating activities of federal and non-federal technical assistance centers; and
- Delivering training and education classes.

The Center also provides technical assistance to CCAM and its member agencies. The Center is administered by the Community Transportation Association of America through a cooperative agreement with the Federal Transit Administration.

Resources

Technical assistance: National Resource Center for Human Service Transportation Coordination, 1-800-527-8279, www.unitedweride.gov

Framework for Action tool: www.unitedweride.gov/1_81_ENG_HTML.htm

UWR Logic Model: www.unitedweride.gov/FINALUWRlogicmodel_perfmeasure.doc

Federal Program Funds: [www.unitedweride.gov/FEDERAL_TRANSPORTATION_SERVICES_MATRIX_\(6\)MB.doc](http://www.unitedweride.gov/FEDERAL_TRANSPORTATION_SERVICES_MATRIX_(6)MB.doc)

How to Involve Stakeholders and Customers

Putting customers first requires input from a wide range of stakeholders and customers. Communities should consider addressing barriers to participation and using multiple strategies to and involve customers.

Address Barriers to Participation

Eliminating barriers to participation is the most effective strategy for involving customers. This requires a clear understanding of why and how customer involvement is wanted, attention to customers who show an interest in participating, and listening to and acting on what customers have to say. It also involves paying attention to planning and logistics that encourage customer involvement, such as:

- Holding meetings at convenient times for customers.
- Holding meetings in accessible and “neutral” locations.
- Ensuring that materials are available in advance and in alternative formats for customers who have hearing or vision disabilities.
- Ensuring that materials are available in languages other than English.
- Providing transportation assistance, child care, and food.
- Providing stipends.

Provide Multiple Avenues for Involvement

Decision making is strengthened when a variety of methods are used to gain customers’ input. Because some customers may not be able to attend meetings, it is essential to explore options that offer them access to information and the ability to provide input into decision making, including:

- *Planning sessions* that focus on identifying needs, developing strategies to address needs, and setting priorities. Participants typically include a diverse group of stakeholders from the community. A facilitator is helpful in leading the process that may take one or more sessions to complete.
- *Focus groups* that provide an opportunity to include a larger number of stakeholders in the planning process and to begin an ongoing dialogue on key community issues, strategies for addressing issues, and plans for implementation. Focus group input can be included in a community needs analysis.
- *Surveys* that collect information through interviews and/or questionnaires sent by mail and email. Surveys can be designed to reach a wide audience in a variety of formats to accommodate individuals with disabilities.
- *Detailed study and analysis* that rely on inventories, research, interviews, maps, and reports. Communities should consider the availability of resources before undertaking this complex approach.

Seek Advice from Customer Groups

Customers gain numerous advantages when they have an opportunity to meet together and build relationships. Using existing groups reduces access barriers and affirms the importance of customer organizations.