

Project Technical Report

COMMUNITY OUTREACH PLAN

Coordinated

Public Transit-Human Services

Transportation Plan

For Summit and Portage Counties

And the Doylestown Area of Wayne County

Prepared for the

**Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study
METRO Regional Transit Authority
Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority**

February 2007

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Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plan



In association with



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INTRODUCTION

Metropolitan areas across the country are developing plans to coordinate transportation services offered with funding from federal programs across departments and agencies. The focus of the planning is on the transportation mobility of three target groups: 1) older persons, 2) persons with disabilities and 3) persons from low income families. In the Akron metropolitan area, this plan is being developed by the Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study, the METRO Regional Transit Authority in Summit County and the Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority in Portage County. The plan will recommend strategies that improve travel mobility by making better use of federal programs to meet the needs of these target populations.

The coordination plan must address the following elements:

- An assessment of available transportation services and the transportation needs of older persons, persons with disabilities and people with low incomes
- Strategies and activities to address gaps and overlaps in transportation services
- Priorities for implementation based on resources, time and feasibility for implementing the specific strategies and activities

The development of a successful plan will require significant community outreach to the three target populations, agencies and advocates serving them and providers of transportation and human services funded by other federal programs. Community outreach, collaboration and consensus building will be important in ensuring that the coordination plan is responsive to needs and consistent with the resources that are available.

The central purpose of the community outreach plan is to ensure that key organizations and individuals with responsibility for serving target populations and their mobility needs are involved in the development of the coordinated transportation plan. All parties with a stake in the planning and subsequent implementation of coordinated transportation services in the region should have an opportunity to participate in the planning.

COMPONENTS OF THE COMMUNITY OUTREACH PLAN

The main goals of the outreach process are to:

- Encourage public participation in the overall planning process.
- Offer stakeholders an opportunity to help define overlapping services
- Bring stakeholders together to help identify gaps in transportation services

- Enable stakeholders to suggest and prioritize potential solutions or strategies

Community outreach will have four key components:

- Project advisory committees
- Interviews of key stakeholders
- Focus groups with target population groups
- County and regional forums and workshops

Methods and activities early in the planning will be different from methods and activities later in the project:

- Early in the project
 - key stakeholder views on unmet needs, gaps in transportation services, knowledge of coordination activities already in place, issues, concerns and problems
 - focus group discussions with target populations to understand travel behavior, problems meeting mobility needs and solutions they feel would help them meet needs
- At a key project mid-point, a reporting back to key stakeholders on the evaluation of unmet needs, gaps and overlaps in transportation services, potential solutions and an expression of priorities for further exploration
- Upon completion of technical tasks, a presentation to the community of conclusions on unmet needs and gaps and overlaps in services, potential solutions evaluated and recommendations for implementation and the rationale for implementation strategies, actions and timing

Project Advisory Committees

The project advisory committees will focus on the following:

- Identification of organizations and stakeholders that should be involved in the coordination planning
- Advocacy within their respective counties for outreach and involvement in the planning process
- Participation in general community outreach, county workshops, regional forum
- Access to transportation needs analyses and studies completed by other agencies focusing on target populations
- Knowledge of and insights about unmet needs, gaps in service, overlapping services, solutions and priorities

Two committees will be recruited; one for Summit County and one for Portage County. Membership will be targeted to 15 members, but without an upper limit. Total membership will be driven by individual and agency

interest and commitment to participation throughout the planning. Member will ensure representation from individuals and agencies serving and advocating for the target populations - older adults, people with disabilities, and people with low income – that are the focus of the planning.

In its planning guidance, the Federal Transit Administration recommends agencies and groups from the following for involvement in community outreach:

- **Transportation partners:**
 - Area transportation planning agencies, including MPOs, States, and local governments;
 - Public transportation providers (including ADA paratransit providers and agencies administering the projects funded under the FTA urbanized and non-urbanized programs);
 - Private transportation providers, including private transportation brokers, taxi operators, van pool providers, and intercity bus operators;
 - Non-profit transportation providers;
 - Past or current organizations funded under the JARC, the Elderly Individuals and Individuals with Disabilities (Section 5310) and/or New Freedom programs; and
 - Human service agencies funding, operating, and/or providing access to transportation services.

- **Passengers and advocates:**
 - Existing and potential riders, including both general and targeted population passengers (individuals with disabilities, older adults, and people with low incomes);
 - Protection and advocacy organizations;
 - Representatives from independent living centers; and
 - Advocacy organizations working on behalf of targeted populations.

- **Human service partners:**
 - Agencies that administer health, employment, or other support programs for targeted populations. Examples of such agencies include but are not limited to Departments of Social/Human Services, Employment One-Stop Services; Vocational Rehabilitation, Medicaid, Community Action Programs (CAP)
 - Agency on Aging (AoA); Developmental Disability Council, Community Services Board;
 - Non-profit human service provider organizations that serve the targeted populations;

- Job training and placement agencies;
 - Housing agencies;
 - Health care facilities; and
 - Mental health providers.
- **Other:**
 - Security and emergency management agencies;
 - Tribes and tribal representatives;
 - Economic development organizations;
 - Faith-based and community-based organizations;
 - Representatives of the business community (e.g. employers);
 - Appropriate local or State officials and elected officials; and
 - School districts.

Invitations for advisory committee participation will include representatives from these types of agencies and groups. Please see Appendix A for a list of agencies and groups in each county that have been or will be contacted about participating on an advisory committee. These lists are not exhaustive. More extensive lists will be provided by Info Line, Inc. in Summit County and the United Way of Portage County 211 information and referral service.

Representatives from these organizations will be encouraged to participate in other outreach activities as well such, including forums and workshops discussed later in this plan. Finally, it is expected that additional representatives will be recommended for inclusion as the planning proceeds.

An organizational meeting of the committee will be held. At the meeting, the following will be discussed:

- The goals and objectives for the plan
- The method and approach to be used to complete the plan
- The role and responsibilities of the committee
- Stakeholders who should be added to the committee
- Other organizations that should be involved
- The best ways to reach target populations
- The project completion schedule
- The next steps – stakeholder interviews and outreach strategy

Also, at the meeting, discussion will focus on:

- Issues and needs with transportation services for the target populations. We expect to learn of target population needs
- Analyses that have been completed by represented and other organizations

Subsequent meetings will focus on reviewing the completion of technical analyses and evaluations, so that committee members have the benefit of these as they provide advice on future outreach activities. The thinking of committee members will be helpful as a follow-up and de-briefing of completed outreach activities, as well.

Personal Interviews Of Key Stakeholders

Stakeholder interviews offer an opportunity for early expression of views on issues and concerns. Initially, a list of key stakeholders and stakeholder organizations will be developed. Stakeholders should encompass a broad range of interests and affiliations related to the target populations, starting with other groups, committees and associations identified by the project team and other stakeholders. The list will be shared with the project team for review and discussion. Members of the project team will be interviewed as well.

The interviews will focus on stakeholders' perceptions of the transportation services environment, key strengths, key weaknesses and their vision of the role that coordinated service delivery could or should play in improving the delivery of transportation services regionally and within counties.

Focus Group Discussions With Target Population Groups

Focus group discussions will be held with older persons (2), persons with disabilities (2) and persons with low income (2), for a total of six focus groups. We believe that conducting these groups will be the most effective way to enable existing and potential customers of coordinated transportation services to participate early in the identification of unmet needs and ideas for improving transportation services. In these discussions, current travel behavior, satisfaction with the means of transportation available to them, unmet needs for travel, strengths and weaknesses of current transportation services, opportunities for improvements, and threats to achieving those improvements.

Members of the Advisory Committees will help with recruitment of participants in each target focus group and to establish the location and timing of the discussions. The focus groups will be held at stakeholder agency locations.

Internet-Based Feedback Capability

An internet-based feedback capability, most likely a web-site, will be created. This will be designed so the older persons, persons with disabilities

and persons with low income are able to express their needs and ideas throughout the project. Participating advisory committee members and other stakeholders will be able to publicize the availability of this feedback mechanism. People in the human service delivery system and advocacy network and will be able to express their views. They will be able to submit comments and review the comments of others. They will be able to check on the status of coordination plan development and review documents that are posted as project milestones are reached and tasks are completed. Finally, existing providers of transportation services, including private operators, will have a feedback mechanism.

Regional Forums and County Workshops

Broad community outreach and involvement will be achieved through the following:

- County Public Forums – in Summit and Portage Counties, to introduce the coordination planning project to stakeholders, target populations and the general public
- County Workshops – separately in Summit and Portage Counties, to review early technical work completed to identify unmet travel needs and gaps and overlaps in transportation services; to engage in shared conversation about needs, gaps and overlaps; communicate and understand next steps in the planning
- Regional Workshop with County Breakouts - Two sets of county-level workshops and a final regional forum will be held to review results of technical analyses on solutions, strategies and priorities and brainstorming and consensus building on proposed solutions, preliminary recommendations, key strategies for implementation and priorities for action
- Regional Public Forum - following completion and distribution of draft transportation coordination plan recommendations, to present project findings and strategies, seek group consensus on community standards for transportation coordination and seek group consensus on solutions, strategies and priorities

Please refer to Appendix B for details on method and approach in each of the forums and workshops. All workshops and the forum will be well-staffed by the team in order to allow break-out groups in which participants can engage in valuable discussion that goes beyond the high-level discussion that may occur in the larger setting. Many implementation issues are

addressed at the county level. Such county-level discussion and decision-making is necessary for the implementation of regional actions.

The workshops and forum will be well-publicized, including press releases, notices through agency communications, Internet postings and other mechanisms.

The integration of community outreach with technical tasks will be achieved by a detailed project schedule. This schedule will present key milestone dates for the completion of technical tasks and sub-tasks necessary for each element of community outreach. Conversely, the schedule will present key milestone dates for the completion of community outreach necessary for the completion of subsequent technical tasks, especially the development of recommended solutions, strategies, actions and priorities.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Implementation of the Community Outreach Plan should achieve the active and broad involvement of key stakeholders and target populations in

- Development of the coordination plan
- Formulation of specific strategies and solutions to meeting unmet needs and reducing overlaps in transportation services
- Establishment of priorities and actions to take to put in place
- Determination of the organizational and service structure preferred by key stakeholders to coordinate transportation services in the future

We fully expect that there may be differences in implementation strategies in Summit and Portage Counties and the Chippewa Township area of Wayne County.

Appendix A

Stakeholder Organizations

Advisory Committee Members

SUMMIT COUNTY

- AARP
- Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study
- Akron Community Health Resources
- Akron Community Service Center and Urban League
- Akron General Medical Center
- Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority
- Akron Summit Community Action
- Akron Urban League
- AMATS Citizens Advisory Committee
- American Red Cross
- Area Agency on Aging, 10B
- Buckeye Community Health Plan
- Children's Hospital Medical Center
- City Hospital
- City Yellow Cab Company
- Community Health Center
- Community Health Center
- County of Summit, Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities
- County of Summit, Department of Job and Family Services
- East Akron Community House
- Easter Seals Northeast Ohio
- Greenleaf Family Center
- Healthy Connections Network
- Info Line
- Interval Brotherhood Home
- Mature Services, Inc.
- METRO Regional Transit Authority
- Mobile Meals, Inc.
- Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission, Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation
- One Stop Center
- Rehabilitation Services Commission
- Social Services Advisory Board
- St Thomas Hospital
- Summa Health System
- Summit County Board of Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services
- Summit County Board of Health
- Summit County Children's Services Board
- Summit County Department of Job and Family Services
- The Arc of Summit & Portage Counties
- The Goodwill Industries of Akron, Ohio, Inc.
- The Job Center
- Tri-County Independent Living Center
- United Disability Services
- United Way of Summit County
- Visiting Nurse Service
- Workforce Investment Board

PORTAGE COUNTY

- AARP
- Access to Independence
- Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study
- AMATS Citizens Advisory Committee
- Area Agency on Aging, 10B
- Association of Programs for Independent Living (APRIL)
- Coleman Adult Day Services
- Coleman Professional Services
- Community Action Council
- Easter Seals Northeast Ohio
- Emerald Transportation
- Family & Community Services
- Family and Community Service
- Mental Health & Recovery Brd. of Portage County
- Mobile Meals
- One Stop Center
- Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority
- Portage Area Senior Services
- Portage County Board of Commissioners
- Portage County Board of Mental Health
- Portage County Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities
- Portage County Department of Job and Family Services
- Portage County Easter Seals
- Portage County Metropolitan Housing Authority
- Portage County Regional Planning
- Portage County Senior Services Center
- Portage Metropolitan Housing Authority
- Portage Workforce Connection
- Rehabilitation Services Commission
- Robinson Memorial Hospital
- Senior Nutrition Program
- Tri-County Independent Living Center
- United Disability Services
- United Way of Portage County, Inc.
- Workforce Investment Board

Appendix B

Method and Approach for Public Forums and Workshops

Public Forum 1 – County Level

Objective: Education, input, and commitment.

1. Multimedia Presentation (audio, video, pictures)
 - Transportation leadership representation
 - Overview of project and preliminary data (e.g., demographics and target populations)
 - National perspective on data: How do we compare?

2. Feedback and Discussion
 - What are your reactions and questions?
 - Institutions and communities that look for opportunities do better. What opportunities do you see given this data?
 - Give examples of strengths and capabilities within agencies and the broader community that we might leverage. What other strengths that we might build on?

3. Next Steps
 - Technical analysis and evaluation
 - Importance of collaboration and workshops. Who we need in the room.

Workshop 1 - County Level – One in Summit; One in Portage

Data: Stakeholder Interviews, Focus Group Results, Transportation Survey, Demographic Work

1. Making Meaning of Data (Breakout discussion)
 - Overview on Using data
 - Small Groups working through chunks of data
 - Review data. Look for patterns.
 - How does this information fit with what you know from other data?
 - How does this information fit with your personal experiences?
 - What are possible reasons for why the results are what they are?
 - Create posters with needs, gaps, and overlaps and answer to “What are potential reasons for results?”
 - Walk around. Look at each poster
 - What stands out?

- What is surprising?
 - What requires more discussion?
 - Large Group Discussion
 - What did you learn?
 - What are the themes? (What themes were surprises?)
 - What themes were expected?)
 - What questions do you still have?
2. Understanding the legacy of change in our System: Past, Present, and Future (Whole Group)
- Technology, funding, customer interaction, decision making, collaboration among agencies, interagency contracting, customer focus
 - What has transpired in the past and how has it created our current structure?
 - What is happening in the present? What transitions or changes are occurring related to transportation? What still fits or doesn't fit?
 - What is the future?
 - What might our priorities be?
 - What strengths do we have to build on? Where can they take us in 5 years?
3. Wrap up and Next Steps
- What connections have you made? What do you feel compelled to move toward or act on?
 - What we will do next time?

Workshop 2 – Regional with County Breakouts

1. Presentation of Alternatives
2. Technical Analysis of Alternatives—Participants will be broken down into small groups to discuss one alternative.
 - Positive and negative elements related to alternative will be examined using a force field analysis
 - Driving Forces
 - What important problems does this solve?
 - What doesn't is solve?
 - What other existing processes and structures this action?
 - Who could lead this exercise?
 - Opposing Forces
 - What would we give up or loose?
 - What forces, processes, structures could make it difficult?
 - What are the barriers that need to be resolved?

- Who or what groups would we need to get on board to be successful?

2. Group Discussion of Alternatives

- Each team presents what they have done. Write on overheads or poster paper.
 - FIT analysis—Discuss each question as a group and then rate each solution individually on each of the following factors (Scale of 1 – 10)
 - Feasible- Can it be done?
 - Impact- Will the action make an important difference?
 - Together- Will it bring people together?
3. Where will we get the most bang for our buck?
- Each person votes on the solutions using Avery dots. Solution with the most dots is discussed further
3. What do we need to do to further test or develop this solution? How can we support this plan?

Public Forum 2 - Regional

1. PowerPoint Presentation
 - Recap of Process (How did we get to our solution...thoroughness of process)
 - Recognize role and contributions of advisory committee
 - Outcomes and insights from workshops
 - Focus groups, interviews, survey, and demographic analysis.
 - Priorities emerging from data
 - Recommended Plan and Solutions
2. Feedback and Discussion
 - Are we addressing Needs, Gaps, and overlaps?
 - Are we on target with priorities, solutions, and strategies?
 - What can be done to support the implementation of this plan?