



WORKSHOP SUMMARY

Event: Texas Workforce Commission: TANF Transportation and Welfare Reform Workshop

Date: November 12, 1998

Location: Stephan F. Austin Building, Austin, Texas

I. Overview

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network conducted this workshop in collaboration with the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC). The purpose of the event was to provide and share information on Welfare-to-Work (WTW) transportation and related issues. Furthermore, the workshop provided a forum for discussing the effectiveness of current initiatives, which provide the foundation for solutions to as yet unresolved transportation dilemmas. Specific topics addressed included building upon existing resources; providing affordable, accessible, and reliable transportation to all urban, suburban, and rural areas; coordination between transportation, workforce development, and human service agencies to overcome transportation barriers, and combining resources to achieve these objectives. This summary highlights the main points from the workshop presentations and discussions in these areas.

II. Participants

Approximately 115 individuals participated in this workshop, including one representative from the ACF Region VI office, TWC State and local staff, representatives from the 28 TWC local workforce development boards, and State Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) representatives from Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, and Oklahoma.

I. Session Summary

A. Needs Assessment and Overview of State Challenges—Larry E. Temple, Director of Welfare Reform Initiatives, Texas Workforce Commission.

Mr. Temple provided an overview of the Texas Workforce Commission's concerns regarding Welfare-to-Work transportation. The purpose of this workshop was to identify and overcome barriers to transportation. He stated that by identifying initiatives that are already in place and working, we can develop innovative solutions to specific unresolved transportation issues in Texas. Finding jobs for those on welfare is not that difficult; getting people to the work site is the key. Peripheral concerns include job retention, childcare needs, funding, and viability of programs to sustain themselves after funding expires.

Job Retention Initiatives include:

- Post-employment/retention education
- Early intervention
- “World of Work” tips

Childcare concerns include:

- Parents' ability to get children to daycare and arrive to work on schedule.

Funding has been provided by the Department of Labor, Welfare to Work grant:

- \$76 million total funds
 - a. 15% (\$11.4 million) held at Governor's level as discretionary funding.
 - b. \$7 million allocated to childcare.
 - c. \$2.4 million allocated to TexDOT to study transportation issues.

B. National Perspective on Employment Transportation: *Achieving Solutions that (get people to) Work*—Carolyn Jeskey, Assistant Director, Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA).

Carolyn Jeskey provided a national perspective on employment transportation and addressed issues specific to Texas public transportation. Ms. Jeskey identified Texas as having one of the strongest public transportation networks in the country. However, she urged attendees to build upon existing resources when developing WTW programs, rather than initiating completely new programs and compromising the efficiency of both. The foundation is already in place; build upon what is already there.

The Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) is a national nonprofit membership association committed to providing **affordable** and **accessible** transportation

in urban, suburban, and rural areas. CTAA membership consists of nationwide networks that include public and private transit providers, human service providers, transit associations, State and local officials, and individuals directly or indirectly affected by transportation. CTAA and its members believe that mobility is a basic human right that equalizes employment opportunity.

CTAA has been working on the employment-transportation link for approximately six years. Now in the third of a three-year Department of Transportation grant, CTAA has actively participated in sixteen nationwide demonstration projects designed to provide jobs and job training to unemployed and underemployed people.

The effectiveness of the *Joblinks* program is largely attributable to coordination of resources and cooperation of personnel. These resources include demand-responsive (dial-a-ride) van service, “reverse commute” express buses, volunteer driver networks, dedicated van service (with many common-destination riders), and remote scheduling. Additionally, express bus routes to suburbs need to be established; demand-responsive taxi service and van service micro-businesses are required.

Cooperation is critical to successful operation. Dedicated leadership and the willing participation of employers are essential. Job opportunities and the availability of qualified personnel are also necessary. CTAA studies revealed higher success in situations where cooperation had been previously established.

The *Employment Transportation Technical Assistance Tool Kit* was designed to update workers on transportation. It is intended to promote cooperation between transportation, workforce development, and human services agencies. To this end, four regional workshops to address transportation, rural assistance, and human services are scheduled for this spring.

Transportation for the Welfare-to-Work community has become a high priority as more jobs become available in suburban and rural areas; this dispersion creates a “spatial mismatch.” Transportation barriers also exist for those without access to reliable vehicles. A two wage-earner household with only one vehicle has an obvious problem, especially if the job sites are in opposite directions of their residence. Furthermore, public and private transportation is typically unavailable to those working during “nonbusiness” hours.

Inadequate or nonexistent public transportation is a major obstacle in many rural areas and small cities. Nationally, 40% of rural communities have no public transportation; 25% have low-level service (Funding only accommodates peak usage hours.), and 25% of small urban counties have no access to public transportation.

To meet the current needs of the WTW community, reliable and consistent public transportation must be made available during early morning and evening hours to accommodate second and third shift employees. Weekend service is required for those who work Saturday and/or Sunday. Routes need to be within reasonable walking

distance of homes and work sites. Transportation should be flexible with convenient, numerous stops. Safety issues must be addressed, and emergency service needs to be made available. Community subsidies would help to reduce costs. These measures must provide long-term solutions.

There is no standard solution. Each community requires different services, which may vary within a given community. Existing modes of transportation (e.g., mass transit, cars, vans, bicycles, walking) and services must be coordinated. Financial incentives are in place to bring such coordination to fruition.

In June of 1998, the U.S. Department of Transportation authorized \$750 million over the next five years for *Job Access* and *Reverse Commute* grants. The DOT allocated \$75 million dollars for FY 1999. Each succeeding year (until FY 2003), \$25 million will be added to these projects. The *Job Access* program is intended to benefit welfare recipients and low-income workers. Reverse commute funds will be made available to the general public as well as the aforementioned groups. The \$75 million in funds will be distributed according to population density as follows:

- \$45 million—Major urbanized areas (200,000+ population)
- \$15 million—Smaller urbanized areas (50,000-200,000 population)
- \$15 million—Non-urbanized areas (less than 50,000 population)

To participate in these programs, communities are required to match the funding. The programs must also demonstrate sustainability. Grant monies will be distributed annually; amounts are determined by population density as follows.

- \$1 million (1 million+ population)
- \$500,000 (200,000-1 million population)
- \$200,000 (50,000-200,000 population)
- \$150,000 (less than 50,000 population)

Application deadline for funding: December 31, 1998; grant selections will be announced in February 1999.

Eligibility is open to local government agencies and authorities, non-governmental organizations, and public transit agencies. The nature of the activities is also restricted for the *Job Access* and *Reverse Commute* programs. Eligible applications of *Job Access* funds include new or expanded transportation, capital expenses (e.g., vehicles, computer schedule/dispatch systems, customer information systems), and operating expenses (i.e., service expansion, administrative costs, and transportation brokerage). Service expansion refers to early morning and extended evening services, van- and car-pool service, and extended routes. These funds may also be applied to promotional and marketing efforts. Employer tax incentives may also be provided. Eligible applications of *reverse commute* cover start-up costs, vehicle costs, and associated service costs. Regional Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) may be of assistance.

Additional information on these programs and grants is available from the National Transit Resource Center. Call 1-800-527-8279 for assistance, or visit the following Web site: www.ctaa.org/ntrc/atj. An eight-month complimentary subscription to *Community Transportation* magazine is also available.

C. The Wyoming Experience with Rural Transportation: *Welfare Reform Promising Practices*—Cindy Johnson, Director, Sweetwater County Transit Authority, Rock Springs, Wyoming.

Ms. Johnson provided an overview and analysis of Sweetwater County's *Welfare-to-Work* program. She identified Sweetwater County as the second largest (geographically) in the U.S. To cross the county at its widest point takes up to three hours by vehicle. For Sweetwater residents, the primary concern is being able to get a ride from one place to another. Ms. Johnson addressed the physical and financial limitations faced by the county and provided a cost-benefit analysis of providing the needed rural access to public transportation.

By combining mechanical (vehicular) and financial resources, Sweetwater County Transit Authority hopes to provide twice as many rides at no increase in cost. Scheduling adjustments will be required, and shared financial responsibility (i.e., matching funds) is needed. Anticipated new transit funding will come from *Job Access* grants, loan programs (vehicles, buildings, etc.), 38% increase in rural transit dollars, a formula change in calculating small urban transit funding, and ITS technology funding. Transit Authority data show that coordinating resources works. In 1990, providing a trip (using volunteer or minimum-wage drivers) cost the Transit Authority \$8.36 on average. In 1995, providing a trip (using drivers averaging \$8.50/hr.) cost the Transit Authority \$4.22 on average. Furthermore, the number of rides given in 1990 (1,717) increased to 8,471 in 1994.

Major benefits of the combined efforts included reduced ride time for children, reduced costs in assisted living, social security payments, and public assistance. Thirty people paying an average of \$3,000 per month for assisted living services were able to take jobs, saving \$1,080,000 over 12 months. The estimated hourly benefit to a single welfare recipient is \$9.18 (including housing, earned income credit, monthly checks, and food stamps). Twenty-eight additional people (i.e., 4 wheelchair users, 4 blind people, and 20 public assistance recipients) returned to work, reducing welfare payments by \$534,642 (28 x \$9.18 x 2,080 hours per year.). Of the twenty people who were able to get off of welfare, three saved enough money to buy used vehicles.

Door-to-door bus transportation is economical; however, the system needs further refining (e.g., current operating hours are from 6:00 a.m. to 6 p.m.). To further optimize the available equipment, vans were rented to nearby counties at \$0.65 per mile to subsidize operating costs.

In many cases, funding is available through CTAA loan programs; matching funds may be required. Various agency funds may also be available based on mileage, number of

rides, or hours. Ms Johnson encouraged the efficient use of available resources and stressed the need for cooperation in accomplishing transportation objectives.

D. Discussion of State and Local Initiatives

The Alliance Airport Project was intended to provide transportation and on-site childcare services to Fort Worth, TX. However, people were not using the routes, and few people actually rode the buses. The transit system was losing money by subsidizing costs; local funding was sought to finance taxi service to the airport. Fixed-route planning within a transit system needs to tap into an existing level of demand. Van services or vanpools and locally subsidized taxis could be used until established and increased ridership justifies fixed-route, fixed-schedule trips.

San Angelo has limited options and only five bus routes. The city manager and the transit authority collaborated on the expansion and addition of routes based on demand and calls from customers. The addition of a trailer park provided somewhat convenient living quarters; however, bus lines had to be extended by one mile to provide transportation to residents who still needed to walk ½ mile to meet the buses.

The *Get a Job, Get a Ride* Program in Detroit, MI was designed to provide affordable transportation services for welfare recipients rejoining the workforce. The program included discounted tickets through the Department of Social Services. Agencies in other areas offer free first-month vouchers. Sharing information and data is vitally important to the success of such programs. Furthermore, employers need to be targeted when marketing these plans.

E. Conclusions

Partnerships and cooperation are critical to the successful operation of any transit system. Federal, State, and local human and social service agencies, transportation agencies, and employers need to work together. By sharing information and data (e.g., using geographic mapping systems and zip code tracking), these agencies will be able to effectively analyze existing routes and plan for future needs based on the locations of riders' homes and workplaces. Incentives that promote ridership as well as funding at various levels are important. Financial feasibility and cooperation are also critical. Effective cost analysis can prevent premature failure.

Federal, State, and local funding are available, although different rules apply to the application of each. Availability of matching Federal funds has improved as regulations have eased up. Contract services community service block grants, and economic development funds may be eligible for such support. HUD funds used to create a shuttle service, for example, may be matched at the Federal level.

A successful transit system requires systematic marketing strategies. Public transportation is potentially needed by all segments of the market at one time or another.

Once the need has been established, people need to be educated about available services to a level at which they understand and are comfortable with it. Transportation development programs should be in place to expand service areas and extend service hours when necessary. In some cases, this may be cost prohibitive; share information. Investigate what has worked in other communities.

Programs are intended to provide safe, efficient, cost-effective transportation to those who need it, particularly to get to and from the workplace. No one transit authority or agency can succeed in this effort without assistance. Cooperation is available on Federal, State, and local levels:

- FTA—Federal Transit Administration
- PSC—Public Service Commission
- PUC—Public Utilities Commission
- DOT—Department of Transportation
- MPO—Metropolitan Planning Organization
- CTAA—Community Transportation Association of America

II. Workshop Evaluation and Feedback

Participants completed an evaluation feedback form, rating the Technical Assistance they received. The presenters were highly rated in terms of their knowledge, experience, and quality of information provided. Following are the participants' specific comments relevant to the content of the workshop and the benefits they expect to derive from it.

1. Describe any anticipated immediate benefits to your agency, resulting from the Technical Assistance provided.
 - Able to implement ideas and information already in use in other locations.
 - Developed a network and established new agency contacts.
 - Information on the increased availability of transportation
2. List and describe anticipated the long-term benefits of the Technical Assistance.
 - Able to implement information on transportation and *Welfare-to-Work* grant availability.
 - Expanded network of agency contacts.
3. Identify the most beneficial aspects of the Technical Assistance.
 - The value of the resources presented.
 - The enthusiasm, helpfulness, and expertise of the presenters.

4. How could the Technical Assistance have been improved?

- More transportation providers in attendance.
- Need more information on *Welfare-to-Work* grants.
- Need more information on the *Job Access* and *Reverse Commute* grants.
- Texas Workforce Commission needs to provide additional information on the location of eligible *Welfare-to-Work* clients.

5. Please provide additional comments or questions.

- Agency coordination is needed between TexDOT, TWC, and HHS.
- Additional workshops on this subject are needed.
- Follow-ups on this program are needed.