

Affordable Housing and Transportation

How Two Sectors Join Forces to Support Low-Income Populations

Residents in subsidized-cost housing often have complex needs that necessitate a variety of supportive services. Transportation access is integral to these residents being able to connect with those services as well as key destinations such work, grocery stores, child care, and medical services. Recognizing this, nonprofit and public housing groups are stepping up their efforts to help residents find and afford transportation options. This brief examines different strategies employed to support the travel needs of older adults, people with disabilities, and low-income families in connection with housing.

Service Coordinators in Public Housing

In federally funded housing complexes, resident service coordinators have the responsibility for connecting residents with needed support services. Funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)'s [Resident Opportunities and Self-Sufficiency \(ROSS\) program](#), service coordinators provide case management services to residents of federally-funded housing programs, as participants work toward achieving greater economic and housing stability. In the case of older adults or individuals with a disability, service coordinators help improve living conditions and enable residents to age-in-place. Service coordinators are hired or contracted by the development's owner or management company and work in conjunction with the manager(s) and other management staff of the facility, with their salaries paid by the ROSS program.

Although many service coordinators do not identify themselves as mobility managers, their ongoing efforts to support the transportation access needs of the clients they serve indeed categorizes them as such. Following are some examples of the innovative, customer-focused approaches taken by service coordinators as discussed during a recent webinar offered by the [American Association of Service Coordinators](#).

- In Denver, a new mixed-income, multifamily private development, Lamar Station Crossing opened in 2014 along the Denver Regional Transit District's W-line light rail station. Eighty percent of apartment complex, developed and owned by nonprofit Metro West Housing Solutions (MWHS), are classified as affordable housing and the rest are priced for working families. An on-site resident services coordinator, employed by MWHS, provides travel information and discounted transit passes for the tenants. The passes, purchased from RTD and subsidized by MWHS, are available for eligible residents' use in traveling to employment or education. Up to three discounted passes per calendar year are offered for trips to employment and education. A minimal number of one-way passes are also available. In 2012, across all its properties, MWHS provided 92 passes and 210 one-way ticket trips to residents. MWHS further encourages residents' use of public transit by providing new tenants a welcome bag with light rail and bus maps, as well as providing bike storage facilities, and a shuttle.



Affordable housing near light rail, Lamar Station Crossing, Denver, Colo.

A service coordinator in **Ohio** routinely invites a representative from the regional transit authority to participate in on-site resident meetings and share information about transit routes and schedules. She also disseminates information about local paratransit providers to residents who qualify for those services.

- A number of service coordinators around the country have partnered with volunteer programs, universities, and human service agencies to expand access to various social and quality of life destinations for public housing residents. In **Arizona**, a service coordinator partnered with the University of Arizona, recruiting gerontology students to serve as visiting companions for senior residents at the public housing facility she serves. Students participating in the Senior Companion program routinely visit the site to spend time with older residents, and if needed, transport them to various activities.
- Another service coordinator working in a low-income, rural **California** community, secured bus service to a Meals on Wheels dining site for her clients. She identified this as a need by surveying residents and sharing the results with local elected officials and the Meals on Wheels program. A bus now transports housing residents to the dining site three times a week. Drivers for Meals on Wheels also routinely transport residents to various activities along their delivery route. Local veterans service organizations and the American Cancer Society's Road to Recovery program provide additional volunteer support. Outreach efforts initiated by a service coordinator in **Albuquerque, New Mexico** resulted in a partnership with the Department of Senior Affairs through which the agency makes vans available to transport residents to various community locations. Volunteer drivers operate the vans and the city covers insurance costs associated with operating the vehicles.
- Most often, coordinators provide residents with basic information about existing transportation options through one-on-one meetings and via flyers or newsletters. Many provide qualifying residents with transit fare passes for a limited period of time (varies by housing program), to support travel to educational, job training or work activities. Some also provide passes for other necessary trips, such as those to medical appointments.

Public Housing Authorities Partnering with Public Transit

Many service coordinators have reached out to local government officials, human service agencies and volunteer organizations to provide additional transportation options for their clients, as highlighted below.

The two public housing facilities under the jurisdiction of the **Ft. Worth Housing Authority (FWHA) Family Investment Center** are each located on a public bus route. FWHA purchases day bus passes from the Fort Worth Transportation Authority for distribution to residents who are employed, enrolled in training or educational activities, or actively engaged in job search activities. The passes are provided through a **Fair Aid grant** from the transit authority. In

addition to providing access to job training and employment, residents may also receive passes allowing them to make other necessary trips to shopping or medical appointments. New residents are provided with information about eligibility for the passes during meetings with their service coordinator and via routinely distributed flyers.

The **Brattleboro (Vt.) Housing Authority** includes five sites in a rural community serving older adults, families and individuals with disabilities. Of the five locations, transit stops are located at both elder housing developments and at a facility that is home to young and older disabled individuals. Transit stops are also located near the developments that house families. Lucy Tell, the Family Self-Sufficiency Coordinator for the authority, is a regular participant in various community and human service agency meetings, where she promotes and advocates for extended services. Her efforts to expand service hours of local public transit have been somewhat successful, although second shift workers still face access challenges. In addition to working with local public transit, the housing authority promotes free weekly shopping trips offered by Brattleboro Taxi. Trips are made to multiple destinations on different days of the week. Information about these and other options is shared with residents via flyer.

Learning to Use Transit Near Housing Facilities

Most public housing facilities in **Montgomery County, Maryland** are located near WMATA Metro stops; many are also served by the local Ride-On service. Within the county, the Housing Opportunity Commission (HOC) partners with the local transit provider, WMATA, to provide public housing residents traveling to training or employment with tokens for use on Metro and Ride-On buses. Tokens are provided for the duration of an individual's training class or until the individual earns his/her first paycheck. Residents obtain tokens from on-site and other customer service centers within the community or when meeting with their case manager. To limit misuse, the availability of tokens is not widely publicized.

In **Denver, Colo.**, Mile High Connects, a group of private, public and nonprofit organizations, was formed in 2011 with the goal of developing low-income communities within walking distance of transit centers. The following year, the organization provided a grant to the Denver Housing Authority to support a Transit Ambassador Program designed to expand residents' knowledge and use of public transit and other transportation programs available to older adults and individuals with disabilities.

Modeled after a Welcome Neighbor program, the Transit Ambassador program is designed to inform new housing authority residents about neighborhood resources and ease their transition to their new homes. Ambassadors are fellow residents trained to provide their neighbors with one-on-one assistance to learn about and navigate the public transit system. The ambassador program has three goals:

- To inform peers about aspects of using public transportation
- To help identify individuals who may qualify for other programs such as Access-A-Ride
- To advise participants of options regarding best route and destination information

The ambassadors provide on-site education to residents about the best routes for their destination and encourage them explore and experience other modes of transportation in the neighborhood. A Fellow from the Latino AgeWave program and the Denver Regional Mobility Access Council (DRMAC) provide technical assistance, updating ambassadors about public transit options within the community. Ambassadors attend the local resident council meetings, distributing flyers and other information. They also partner with service coordinators to ensure an onsite RTD kiosk is filled with transit-related materials, and arrange for resident excursions.

The program is currently being piloted at two public housing sites that are home to a large number of older Latino residents—Hirschfeld Towers, housing older adults and people with disabilities, and Walsh Manor, a designated older adult-only building. There are two ambassadors at each site. Through classroom and on-board travel training, the ambassadors learn about the need to educate the Latino community about the various travel options available to them.

Other Housing Programs Serving Low-Income Individuals

Jewish Community Housing for the Elderly (JCHE) in the **Boston, Massachusetts** area builds and manages affordable, non-sectarian housing for mostly low-income seniors. Many of the units are HUD-subsidized. Currently, there are six facilities located in Brighton, Newton and Framingham. Each JCHE employs at least one resident service coordinator, many of whom are multi-lingual to better assist non-English speaking residents. The coordinators help residents apply for RIDE (area paratransit), for which a doctor's approval is needed. Access is provided via cab or van for a fee of \$4.00 each way. To assist residents of the Framingham facility, which is located in a more isolated area, Jewish Family Services of MetroWest provides volunteer drivers who transport residents to medical appointments. JCHE owns an accessible van used to provide trips to the supermarket, malls and cultural activities for the residents of all the facilities. The van is supported with funding from HUD and with private donations. Access to the van has greatly improved the quality of life for some residents, providing them with an opportunity to mingle with others.

Integrating Transportation Options with Housing Developments

Glisan Commons, Portland, Ore., is a newly developed, mixed-use, transit-oriented development in Portland's Gateway Urban Renewal District. The three partners involved include Ride Connection, a transportation provider, broker, and one-stop transportation call

center for three Portland-area counties that provides over 400,000 rides annually to seniors, people with disabilities and rural employees annually; REACH, a nonprofit affordable housing development and property management company; and Human Solutions, Inc., a nonprofit agency helping low-income and homeless families and individuals gain self-sufficiency through access to affordable housing, and other support services. The Housing Development Center is providing development consulting services for the two-phased project.

The Glisan Commons development brings affordable, rental housing and economic development to the neighborhood. It is also the new headquarters for Ride Connection. In the ten years since the formation of the Gateway Urban Renewal District, the area has seen little substantive economic development. More living wage jobs are needed to transform the district into the vibrant economic center the community has envisioned. By building its Resource and Operations Center in Gateway, Ride Connection will bring over 40 full-time, living wage jobs to the neighborhood, with anticipated growth to 60 employees in the years to come. In addition to the paid staff, 20-30 volunteers and visitors will visit Ride Connection's Resource and Operations Center every week. Ride Connection employees and volunteers will live, shop and dine in the district, increasing local spending and providing a direct benefit to community businesses.

Glisan Commons is located less than 1000 feet from a MAX light rail stop that serves three existing lines (red, blue and green). There are also six major bus routes within blocks of the site. The location of the new Ride Connection Resource and Operations Center at this site adds a unique layer of transit options to those living at or nearby Glisan Commons, further extending the transit-oriented aspect of the development to surrounding residents.

Walking/Pedestrian Initiatives

In some settings, a bicycle can be an effective, and lower cost, option for low-income workers. Cycling and walking also support healthy living among housing residents.

The San Antonio Housing Authority (SAHA) recently partnered with the San Antonio Metropolitan Health District to make 1,000 bikes available to residents engaged in the Family Self-Sufficiency Program or low-income housing programs through a Ride-to-Own program grant. The program provides eligible residents with an opportunity to earn bikes, helmets, and locks upon completion of bike safety and maintenance classes. Eligible adults must be employed or enrolled in a job training or education program, and children must be attending school. Ride-to-Own is part of a citywide effort to reduce obesity and increase physical activity, and it dovetails with the construction of about three miles of walking trails at five SAHA housing sites.

Seattle's Neighborhood Greenways started in August 2011 with three neighborhood groups in Beacon Hill, Bryant, and Wallingford. Greenways' objective is to make residential communities healthier, more livable places that offer comfortable mobility for everyone, across all stages of life. The greenways are non-arterial streets altered to give priority to bicyclists and pedestrians and to accommodate cars at reduced speeds. The movement has now grown to 19 neighborhood groups, which are advocating for greenways.

As part of an effort to create a more walkable community, the housing authority, the Denver-based **Colorado Latino AgeWave** has partnered with the Denver Regional Transit District, the Denver Regional Mobility Access Coalition, and Walk2Connect to create a series of walking maps for residential and community use. The maps indicate points of interest (e.g., libraries, grocery shops), walking and cycling trails, and transit stops within the community. The housing authority plans to assess the impact of the maps on transit access and community health by assessing their usage by community residents.

Housing and Transportation Tools

The **Transportation and Housing Alliance (THA)** is a statewide initiative in Virginia linking public and private efforts in the areas of housing and transportation. The alliance works to build collaboration between housing and transportation stakeholders to build transportation and housing access to people with disabilities.

Through a grant awarded to the Alliance by the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities (VBPD) in 2005, the Charlottesville-area Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission (TJPDC) developed a [Transportation and Housing Alliance Toolkit](#) to assess housing and transportation needs and develop workable solutions. The Toolkit provides a way to consider the needs of people who are often excluded from the planning process. Barriers that prevent people from engaging in the public process include:

- Lack of access to a car or the ability to drive
- Limited income
- Disability
- Age (young or old)
- Limited access to public information
- Limited education
- A feeling of being disconnected from the system

The Toolkit contains 40 questions that can help planners assess how well existing policies and plans address the needs of the elderly and people with disabilities in the community, such as

- What types of transit options exist in the community?
- Are there provisions for clustered housing around transit?
- How do you conduct a feasibility study to fill transit gaps?

Other questions related to the locations of assisted living facilities, adult day care, and other relevant locations contain links to mapping data to help determine proximity to public transit. Response options for each question range from excellent, good, fair or poor accessibility, when applicable. Other transit-related issues are also covered, such as pedestrian access, bike lanes, and transit involvement in planning.

In 2007, Va. Board of People with Disabilities awarded a two-year continuation grant to the TJPDC. The grant provided \$100,000 to complete 12 planning projects utilizing the toolkit that integrated the needs of people with disabilities into housing and transportation solutions and to provide better linkages to employment and services. An additional grant in 2009 allowed the Alliance to revamp the toolkit, incorporating comments and lessons learned from those projects. The Toolkit was further revised in 2011 to be more compatible to the changes in the way the 2010 Census collected data.

The THA Toolkit helps give a voice to people who cannot or choose not to participate in public workshops or meetings, who rarely respond to surveys, and who are difficult to reach through formal channels. Including a wide range of needs in the planning process makes it more likely that the resulting plans will create livable communities for all citizens.

The Center for Neighborhood Technology's [Housing and Transportation \(H+T®\) Affordability Index](#) provides a more comprehensive way of thinking about the cost of housing and true affordability. The Index examines transportation costs at a neighborhood level, and allows users to view housing and transportation data as maps, charts, and statistics for nearly 900 metropolitan and micropolitan areas—covering 89 percent of the US population.

The Index shows that transportation costs vary between and within regions depending on neighborhood characteristics. People who live in location-efficient neighborhoods—compact, mixed use, and with convenient access to jobs, services, transit, and amenities—tend to have lower transportation costs. People who live in location inefficient places that require automobiles for most trips are more likely to have high transportation costs.

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This brief has examined strategies to support the travel needs of older adults, people with disabilities, and low-income families in connection with housing. More information on using a mobility management approach to [understanding diverse mobility needs](#) and [cultivating partnerships with other community stakeholders](#) is available on the NCMM website.

About this series: This publication of the National Center for Mobility Management (NCMM) is intended to provide a snapshot of trending mobility management issues, along with examples of strategies in action and links to additional resources.

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