

The Role of Transportation in Addressing Social Isolation in Older Adults: Program Example Series

N4 Connect and Ride on Time: Nevada

Neighbor Network of Northern Nevada, or N4, is a nonprofit agency in northwest Nevada whose mission is to provide “inclusive, community-based services, volunteer opportunities, and affordable transportation” to those living in its service area. N4 began with a transit initiative funded by the Health Care Access Mobility Design Challenge of 2015. This funding opportunity from the National Center for Mobility Management challenged communities to think creatively to build health care-specific transportation solutions for their residents. Beginning with its initial “N4 Connect” pilot program, N4 has expanded its transportation services to help older adults and individuals with disabilities connect to all that their community has to offer. N4 also operates a wide variety of other services.

Location, Service, Riders

N4's transit programs—N4 Connect and Ride on Time—operate in northwestern Nevada near Reno and Washoe County. N4 Connect offers older adults and people with disabilities discounted Lyft ride credits. These credits can be used to travel to more than just medical appointments; the program is designed to help users travel anywhere in and around their community to stay connected. Currently serving 200 eligible riders in Washoe County, N4 Connect allows users to request Lyft rides using either their personal smartphone or the N4 concierge service. The concierge service option is staffed by personnel who take calls from clients to set up rides and apply their Lyft credits. Riders choosing the concierge option pay a small dispatching fee when purchasing ride credits each month. However, this option removes technology barriers that prevent some people from using mobile application-based ride services.

The limited-term program Ride on Time, which ran from late 2019 to February of 2020 (interrupted due to the coronavirus pandemic) is another strategy to bring people to the N4 Connect program. Ride on Time partnered with low-income housing complexes in Reno to teach a group of residents how to use the Lyft ride service to access healthy living needs and health care services. These participants received training and ride credits free of charge, and could use free Lyft services for up to five months. As part of their onboarding, users completed an interview and baseline survey to review their health goals and set up checkups with a primary care physician. Program staff coordinated with participants to schedule shared rides with neighbors to accomplish their health care goals and create connectivity between participants. The Ride on Time pilot recognized the interconnectedness of transportation access and living a healthy and connected life, and provided sustained transportation access by connecting participants to N4 Connect after the pilot ended.

Fee

N4 Connect users pay a maximum of 50% of the cost for their Lyft rides. Depending on certain qualifications, some riders receive Lyft vouchers completely free of charge. Riders can use a maximum of \$160 in subsidized Lyft credits each month. N4 Connect hopes that users will use Lyft services to supplement other transportation options, as this service may not fulfill all of a user's transportation needs. The maximum value of monthly credits covers the cost of about four round-trip rides.

Transit Operations

N4 is not a public transit entity in itself, but it serves as a subcontractor to the Regional Transportation Commission (RTC), which administers the FTA's Section 5310 transportation grant program for the community, serving older adults and people with disabilities. N4 Connect's subsidized Lyft service for individuals with disabilities complements existing RTC programs and expands service areas and user bases. As an example, RTC offers a subsidized taxi voucher program to older adults and veterans in Washoe County. To further expand program accessibility, N4 is working with area drivers to add a wheelchair accessible vehicle to their Lyft fleet. In addition to receiving federal funding, N4 Connect is funded by state and local grants and donations.

Collaboration

N4 has set an example of community collaboration in designing its transportation initiatives. N4 works with transit partners, such as RTC, and community members to make sure that its N4 Connect services meet an existing need, leverage community assets, and provide real benefit to users. N4 Connect is a partnership with Lyft; the Ride on Time program is a collaboration between N4 and the Reno Housing Authority. Other N4 collaborators include the Washoe County Senior Services Advisory Board and the City of Reno Senior Citizen Advisory Committee.

In another federally funded initiative in which N4 is participating, Transit Planning 4 All, N4 staff gather information from older adults and community members with disabilities to create transit options that meet their needs. N4's inclusivity and human centeredness creates trust with the community and turns out desirable and widely used services.

Results, Lessons, Looking Forward

To track program success, N4 monitors the number of rides as well as rider comfort in using its services. The program estimates that it pays for about \$8,000-\$9,000 in Lyft rides each month, or about 200 total rides among the eligible riders. They also track program referrals and rider destination to measure impact on social connectedness. However, N4 recognizes the importance of maintaining rider privacy and understands that social connectivity can come from a wide variety of travel destinations. Staff are also expected to connect at least one user to a new service each month, improving their social connectedness further.

In the future, N4 staff are interested in expanding existing on-demand services to cover more destinations across county and jurisdiction lines. They hope to find new technology solutions to overcome certain travel restrictions and improve cost effectiveness of the N4 Connect services.