

Writing a Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plan

A Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation (HST) Plan is an important tool for community transportation planning. HST plans create a systematic way for communities to improve collaboration and communication across human service organizations and transportation providers – plans can improve access, efficiency, and effectiveness of community transportation systems. Although the process can seem daunting, the end-results are important. This technical brief summarizes the key steps in developing an HST Plan. Three FTA-funded centers, National RTAP, the National Center for Mobility Management (NCMM), and the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC) collaborated to update this brief. We hope the information and resources provided will support your work.

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In 2007, the Safe Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) required that projects funded under Individuals with Disabilities, Job Access and Reverse Commute Program (JARC), and New Freedom programs have a locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan. In 2015, the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act) included recommendations to increase participation by recipients of Federal grants in locally developed, coordinated planning processes. Today, Federal transit law requires that projects selected for funding under the Enhanced Mobility for Individuals and Individuals with Disabilities (Section 5310) Program be “included in a locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan.”

Details about what must be included in this plan can be found in the Section 5310 Circular, Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program Guidance and Application Instructions. FTA defines a Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plan as a “locally developed, coordinated transportation plan that identifies the transportation needs of individuals with disabilities, seniors and people with low incomes, provides strategies for meeting those needs, and prioritizes transportation services for funding and implementation.” FTA explains that the plan be “developed and approved through a process that included participation by seniors, individuals with disabilities, representatives of public, private, and nonprofit transportation and human services providers and other members of the public” utilizing transportation services. These coordinated plans identify the transportation needs of individuals with disabilities, older adults, and

people with low incomes, provide strategies for meeting these needs, and prioritize transportation services for funding and implementation.

Benefits of a Coordinated Plan

Beyond regulatory requirements, there are many benefits and valuable outcomes of Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plans, such as:

- Better utilization of resources through identification of strategies to address gaps and redundancies in service
- Finding agencies that can transport riders if one agency temporarily cannot
- Having a single, comprehensive document that lists goals and describes community demographics and needs
- Highlighting regional priorities
- Increasing community awareness of public transit and human service transportation
- Introducing new forms of specialized transportation
- Meeting a variety of transportation needs more efficiently and effectively through coordination
- Improving the health of the public through transportation service to healthcare providers, healthy foods, and social events that connect transportation-disadvantaged populations
- Potential costs savings for transit agencies, community organizations, and riders
- Being able to offer more transportation options and better service to riders
- Facilitating accountability by human service and transportation agencies to provide the services described in the plan
- Serving as a benchmark and inventory of community transportation services that can be improved, enhanced, or modified depending on consumer needs
- Creating a tangible platform and activity for community engagement and participation
- Using the plan as a framework and foundation by mobility management professionals
- Serving as a tool for transportation providers to identify all available sources of transportation options for potential coordination within a community or region

Required Elements of a Coordinated Plan

FTA outlines the following required elements of a Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plan in the Section 5310 Circular:

1. An assessment of available services that identifies current transportation providers (public, private, and nonprofit).
2. An assessment of transportation needs for individuals with disabilities and seniors. This assessment can be based on the experiences and perceptions of the planning partners or on more sophisticated data collection efforts, and gaps in service.
3. Strategies, activities, and/or projects to address the identified gaps between current services and needs, as well as opportunities to achieve efficiencies in service delivery.
4. Priorities for implementation based on resources (from multiple program sources), time, and feasibility for implementing specific strategies and/or activities identified.

Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plans must be updated at least every 5 years for participants to be eligible for Section 5310 funding.

Including Community Stakeholders

The key to developing a coordinated plan is to include all the stakeholders in your community, individuals from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors that represent both transportation and human service providers.

Suggested planning committee participants include individuals such as, but not limited to:

- Public and human service transit agency management and board members
- Private and volunteer transportation providers
- Mobility management professionals
- Community emergency response planners
- Chambers of commerce and economic development professionals
- Job service agencies and Departments of Employment
- State Departments of Transportation (DOT) staff
- Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO)
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Veteran services
- Vocational rehabilitation organizations
- Healthcare providers, including cancer treatment and dialysis centers
- Human and social service agencies
- Mental health and addiction services
- Community Action Programs (CAP)
- Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) and senior centers
- Centers for Independent Living (CIL)
- Long-term care and assisted living facilities
- Older adult and public housing representatives
- Faith-based organizations
- Parks and recreation offices
- Shelters
- Assistance programs such as Red Cross and Salvation Army
- Childcare and adult day programs
- Local universities, colleges, and technical schools
- English as a Second Language (ESL) programs
- Taxi and Transportation Network Companies (TNC) such as Uber/Lyft
- Advocacy groups
- Area employers
- Community members (riders and nonriders), including older adults and persons with disabilities
- Elected officials
- Tribal governments and leaders

Public participation can add extra benefits in developing a coordinated transit plan. FTA suggests several public outreach strategies to garner full participation from all interested parties that vary from flyers to newspaper announcements to email lists. Needs surveys can be distributed through print or electronic methods. For example, when West Virginia Region II began their needs assessment process, two general public and stakeholder meetings held at Tri River Transit were

advertised through mail, email, word-of-mouth, meetings, and newspaper announcements. Draft plans can be shared online to gather additional public input.

Additionally, any opportunities for public participation must be accessible and universally designed to meet the needs of a range of community members. Surveys and other materials that are distributed to the public must be available in accessible formats as needed, such as plain text, braille, or digital. Meetings must be held in facilities that are accessible to and usable by people with disabilities (including wheelchair users) and easily reached during hours when accessible public transportation is operating. Sign language interpreters and/or captioning services should be made available for attendees who need them.

Considerations for Writing the Plan

The plan should address both regulatory and local community goals. The scope should address the needs of diverse groups, such as persons with disabilities, seniors, individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP), and those with low incomes. Progress made since the last plan and future goals should be part of the document. Ideally, plans should be updated on a regular basis, such as every 2 to 5 years, and should be viewed as living documents that can be used toward the goal of coordinated transportation.

Demographic data should be gathered from a wide variety of sources. For example, the Sitka Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Coordinated Plan, July 2020 to June 2025, used information gathered from the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development, Division of Community and Regional Affairs community profile database, and the Sitka Economic Development Association (SEDA). Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) used U.S. Census Bureau data, Portland State University population annual data, Google maps data on mileage and drive times, and Tribal data to inform its Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Coordinated Plan.

It may be challenging to obtain feedback from the community, but this is a vital part of the planning process. When Connie Sipe, Transit Program Coordinator for Center for Community, Sitka, Alaska, held a public meeting regarding transportation for seniors, she employed several methods to gather feedback. She asked for public comments during the meeting, but none were forthcoming. She also left pieces of paper on each table where people could anonymously write concerns or comments and solicited direct comments (she received feedback from both methods). For the subsequent plan updates, to gather more input, Sitka posted an online survey, advertised it in print and social media, and offered every survey respondent a chance to win a grocery gift card as an incentive to participate.

The first Sitka Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Coordinated Plan was written using an expert consultant, but since then, the planning committee was able to complete two updates independently. Sipe found that more community organizations have gotten involved in the coordinated plan through the years, even some that were not originally interested. To update the plan, they conducted new surveys, determined which sources of funding were currently available, and changed the narrative to reflect changes in the community. Sipe advises that sometimes

consultants and professional planners may want to include everything they can in the plan, and it is important to apply local knowledge to assure that the plan's goals will be realistic and achievable. Using language like "Should funding become available, then we may be able to explore this goal further" does not create an obligation to go forward with something that is unrealistic.

Several sustainable new initiatives arose from the Sitka coordinated plan. The first was a program of free vouchers for fixed route service to human service agencies – the plan identified low-income populations that were unable to even pay a low fee. The plan identified a new program that could provide grant funding for human service agencies to purchase vehicles, which became institutionalized and is currently relied on by transit agencies. Sipe developed an application form and each year agencies that need new or replacement vehicles apply in a collegial way so the committee can identify which agencies need the vehicles the most. In addition, the Sitka tribal government has adopted the coordinated plan and has become a supportive stakeholder.

Paula Smith, Executive Director of Tri River Transit in Hamlin, West Virginia found the process of updating their plan to be relatively easy. She assists with updating two plans, since their transit agency operates in two regions. West Virginia DOT hired a consultant to update the plans, who scheduled a few four-hour in-person meetings (before the COVID pandemic) for the planners. Surveys were distributed to riders on the buses. Data were also obtained from Google Maps and agency information was gathered on the service area size, number of vehicles, etc. The consultant consolidated all the research and meeting feedback, and the reviewers were easily able to finalize the documents with them.

Smith advises those involved in writing or updating coordinated plans to get as many people involved as possible, to introduce many different ideas. "Be open to new ideas," recommends Smith, "Something that might not have worked before may work now." She has used the coordinated plans in many ways – from looking at transportation needs for specific age groups to finding other agencies that can provide a ride for a passenger if her agency cannot provide one that day.

In addition to the benefits of a coordinated plan described above, some states use these plans to launch other programs. For instance, in New Hampshire, at the state level, the Statewide Coordination Council and the regional professionals who developed coordinated plans, launched a mobility management network in part based on the tenets of the coordinated plan. Mobility management professionals use the information and recommendations from the regional plans to garner the participation of diverse stakeholders, develop transportation solutions, and measure their progress based on the plan recommendations. In other places, content and recommendations from plans are used to support grant applications and funding requests. Importantly, coordinated public transit human services transportation plans should not sit on a shelf – they should be used across human service and transportation sectors to build, develop, and improve transportation services for the people in the communities served.

Numerous State DOTs have assisted counties, local regions, and transit agencies to develop and update their coordinated plans. For example, the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public

Facilities has created a Coordinated Plan Tool Kit with a plan template, sample forms and flyers, including an invitation to a public meeting, and additional resources. Many agencies also contract with consultants who have specific expertise and expertise in writing coordinated human services public transportation plans. Technical assistance in developing coordinated plans can also be found through FTA's Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM) web site. The Transportation Technical Assistance Coordination Library (TACL) at <http://transportation-tacl.org>, contains technical assistance resources on coordinated plans. Finally, the National Center for Mobility Management (NCMM) provides a list of states with links to their coordinated plans. See the Further Information section for links to these resources.

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Further Information

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The National Center for Mobility Management (NCMM; www.nationalcenterformobilitymanagement.org) is a national technical assistance center created to facilitate communities in adopting mobility management strategies. The NCMM is funded through a cooperative agreement with the Federal Transit Administration and is operated through a consortium of three national organizations – the American Public Transportation Association, the Community Transportation Association of America, and Easterseals. Content in this document is disseminated by NCMM in the interest of information exchange. Neither the NCMM nor the U.S. DOT, FTA assumes liability for its contents or use.



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