

2014

Writing a Public Transit-Human Services Community Coordinated Transportation Plan

Your Guide to Coordinated Transit in Alaska

A local developed coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan is required in order to be eligible for Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities program (5310) funding and for Alaska Mental Health Trust (AMHT) funding.



INTRODUCTION

The Alaska Community Transit (ACT) office manages and administers both state and federal transit grants to transit agencies across the state, such as public transit (5311) and human services (5310 and Alaska Mental Health Trust). The Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) was signed into law on July 6, 2012 and is the current federal transit funding legislation which authorizes the funding for federal surface transportation programs. MAP-21 replaces the previous transit legislation, Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users, commonly referred to as SAFETEA-LU.

MAP-21 Title 49 U.S.C 5310 authorizes the formula assistance program for the Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program and provided formula funding to states and designated recipients to improve mobility for seniors and individuals with disabilities. The projects selected for funding under the 5310 and AHMT must be “included in a locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan” that was “developed and approved through a process that included participation by seniors, individuals with disabilities, representatives of public, private, and non-profit transportation and human services providers and participation by other members of the public” as stipulated in the new transit funding legislation, MAP-21.

Coordination is a technique for better resource management in which improved organization strategies are applied to achieve greater cost-effectiveness in service delivery. Coordination is about shared power, which means shared responsibility, shared management, and shared funding. Coordination of transportation services is best seen as a process in which two or more organizations interact to jointly accomplish their transportation objectives. Coordination is like many other political processes in that it involves power and control over resources, and coordination can be subject to the usual kinds of political problems and pressures, such as competing personalities and changing environments.

The goal of coordination is to not only improve transportation system performance by eliminating duplicate efforts and improving the efficiency of transportation operations, but to offer better service for your riders as well. Coordinating transportation means doing better with existing resources, it requires working together with persons from different agencies and backgrounds. Coordination can be the best way to stretch scarce resources and improve mobility for everyone.

The purpose of this document is to act as a guide for rural communities in Alaska to develop a coordinated plan that will be able to satisfy Federal Transit Administration (49 U.S.C. 5310) and Alaska Mental Health Trust (AMHT) planning requirements in connection with human service transportation programs and funding.

REQUIRED ELEMENTS

In order to be eligible for 5310 and AMHT funding, an approved coordinated plan must contain at a minimum the following:

- ✓ An assessment of available services that identifies current transportation providers (public, private and nonprofit);

- ✓ 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;
- ✓ Participation from seniors, individuals with disabilities, representatives of public, private, and nonprofit transportation and human service providers as well as other members of the public.
- ✓ 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;
- ✓ Priorities for implementation based on resources (from multiple program sources), time and feasibility for implementing specific strategies and/or activities identified; and
- ✓ A resolution adopting the plan from the local governing body.

GETTING STARTED

States and communities may approach the development of a coordinated plan in different ways. The amount of available time, staff, funding, and other resources should be considered when deciding on specific approaches. Regardless of the method chosen, seniors; individuals with disabilities; representatives of public, private, and nonprofit transportation and human service providers; and other members of the public must be involved in the development and approval of the coordinated plan. The following is a list of potential outreach and assessment tools for consideration:

Community planning session

A community may choose to conduct a local planning session with a diverse group of stakeholders in the community. This session would be intended to identify needs based on personal and professional experiences, identify strategies to address the needs, and set priorities based on time, resources, and feasibility for implementation. This process can be done in one meeting or over several sessions with the same group. It is often helpful to identify a facilitator to lead this process, for example the local governing body or the lead agency.

Self-assessment tool

The Framework for Action: Building the Fully Coordinated Transportation System, developed by FTA and available at www.unitedweride.gov, helps stakeholders realize a shared perspective and build a roadmap for moving forward together. The self-assessment tool focuses on a series of core elements that are represented in categories of simple diagnostic questions to help groups in states and communities assess their progress toward transportation coordination based on standards of excellence. There is also a Facilitator's Guide that offers detailed advice on how to choose an existing group or construct an ad hoc group. In addition, it describes how to develop elements of a plan, such as identifying the needs of targeted populations, assessing gaps and duplication in services, and developing strategies to meet needs and coordinate services.

Focus groups

A community could choose to conduct a series of focus groups within the community that provides an opportunity for greater input from a greater number of representatives, including transportation agencies, human service providers, and passengers. This information can be used to inform the needs analysis in the community. Focus groups also create an opportunity to begin an ongoing dialogue with

community representatives on key issues, strategies, and plans for implementation.

Survey

The community may choose to conduct a survey to evaluate the unmet transportation needs within a community and/or available resources. Surveys can be conducted through mail, e-mail, or in-person interviews. Survey design should consider sampling, data collection strategies, analysis, and projected return rates. Surveys should be designed taking accessibility considerations into account, including alternative formats, access to the Internet, literacy levels, and limited English proficiency.

Detailed study and analysis

A community may decide to conduct a complex analysis using inventories, interviews, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping, and other types of research strategies. A decision to conduct this type of analysis should take into account the amount of time and funding resources available, and communities should consider leveraging state and MPO resources for these undertakings.

As part of the FTA regulations, the ACT office must certify that each coordinated plan was 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. Note that the required participants include not only transportation providers but also providers of human services, and members of the public who can provide insights into local transportation needs. It is important that stakeholders be included in the development, approval, and implementation of the local coordinated public transit-human service transportation plan.

A planning process in which stakeholders provide their opinions but have no assurance that those opinions will be considered in the outcome does not meet the requirement of “participation.” Explicit consideration and response should be provided to public input received during the development of the coordinated plan. Stakeholders should have reasonable opportunities to be actively involved in the decision-making process at key decision points, including, but not limited to, development and approval of the proposed coordinated plan document. The following possible strategies facilitate appropriate inclusion:

Adequate Outreach to Allow for Participation

Outreach strategies and potential participants will vary from area to area, especially in rural Alaska. Potential outreach strategies could include notices or flyers in centers of community activity, newspaper or radio announcements, e-mail lists, website postings, and invitation letters to other government agencies, transportation providers, human services providers, and advocacy groups. Conveners should note that not all potential participants have access to the Internet and they should not rely exclusively on electronic communications. It is useful to allow many ways to participate, including in-person testimony, mail, e-mail, and teleconference.

Any public meetings regarding the plan should be held in a location and time where accessible transportation services can be made available and adequately advertised to the general public using techniques such as those listed above. Additionally, interpreters for individuals with hearing impairments and English as a second language and accessible formats (e.g., large print, Braille,

electronic versions) should be provided as required by law.

Participants in the Planning Process

The requirement for developing the local public transit-human services transportation plan is intended to improve services for people with disabilities and seniors. Therefore, individuals, groups, and organizations representing these target populations should be invited to participate in the coordinated planning process. Consideration should be given to including groups and organizations such as the following in the coordinated planning process if present in the community:

- 1) Transportation partners:
 - a. Area transportation planning agencies, including MPOs, councils of government (COGs), rural planning organizations (RPOs), regional councils, associations of governments, state departments of transportation, and local governments;
 - b. Public transportation providers, including ADA paratransit providers and agencies administering the projects funded under FTA urbanized and rural programs;
 - c. Private transportation providers, including private transportation brokers, taxi operators, vanpool providers, school transportation operators, and intercity bus operators;
 - d. Nonprofit transportation providers, including volunteer programs;
 - e. Past or current organizations funded under the Section 5310, JARC, and/or the New Freedom programs; and
 - f. Human service agencies funding, operating, and/or providing access to transportation services.
- 2) Passengers and advocates:
 - a. Existing and potential riders, including both general and targeted population passengers (individuals with disabilities and seniors);
 - b. Protection and advocacy organizations;
 - c. Representatives from independent living centers; and
 - d. Advocacy organizations working on behalf of targeted populations.
- 3) Human service partners:
 - a. 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, workforce investment boards, Medicaid, community action programs (CAP), Agency on Aging (AoA), Developmental Disability Council, community services board;
 - b. Nonprofit human service provider organizations that serve the targeted populations;
 - c. Job training and placement agencies;
 - d. Housing agencies;
 - e. Healthcare facilities; and
 - f. Mental health agencies.
- 4) Other:
 - a. Security and emergency management agencies;
 - b. Tribes and tribal representatives;

- c. Economic development organizations;
- d. Faith-based and community-based organizations;
- e. Representatives of the business community (e.g., employers);
- f. Appropriate local or state officials and elected officials;
- g. School districts; and
- h. Policy analysts or experts.

Levels of Participation

The suggested list of participants above does not limit participation by other groups, nor require participation by every group listed. Communities will have different types of participants depending on population and size of community, geographic location, and services provided at the local level. The ACT office expects that planning participants will have an active role in the development, approval, adoption, and implementation of the plan. Participation may remain low even though a good faith effort is made by the lead agency to involve passengers; representatives of public, private, and nonprofit transportation and human services providers; and others. The lead agency convening the coordinated planning process should document the efforts it utilized, such as those suggested above, to solicit involvement. In addition, federal, state, regional, and local policy makers, providers, and advocates should consistently engage in outreach efforts that enhance the coordinated process because it is important that all stakeholders identify the opportunities that are available in building a coordinated system.

The ACT office staff is available to provide technical assistance throughout the planning process, We can provide answers to your questions, and be available by phone or in person as needed.

COMMON COORDINATION STRATEGIES

Listed below are several different types of coordination strategies that could be implemented as a result of a coordinated plan. This is by no means a complete list, but just a few main strategies that could be implemented through coordination to help generate ideas.

Joint Procurement

Joint procurement (or bulk purchase) is a cost-effective approach to increasing purchasing power. Joint maintenance and fuel purchases are being more widely used across the country, especially given the rising costs of parts and fuel. Shared maintenance can be done quite easily between agencies in a given locale; however, this may become more difficult if there are great distances between providers.

Benefits

- Individual agency capital outlay will be reduced.
- An economy of scale in purchases will be created, thereby reducing the overall operational cost per agency.
- With a decrease in capital and maintenance costs, an agency may be able to shift funding from maintenance and capital to service hours increasing the level of service or operations.

Implementation Steps

- The agencies need to meet in order to develop a basic understanding of how the procurement process will work.

- Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) should be developed and agreed upon.

Shared Vehicle Storage and Maintenance Facilities

Shared storage, especially if and when vehicles are stored outside, can aid in reducing engine wear during cold weather startup. Obviously, if a provider is conducting its own maintenance on vehicles, it can likely share maintenance costs with another local provider.

Benefits

- Maintenance costs will be reduced, resulting in additional funds available for operations.
- Lost time due to vehicles not starting in cold weather will be reduced, thereby improving the overall performance of the transit service.
- Sharing a facility or building a facility together increases the amount of local match, thereby increasing the level of State and FTA funding to the area.

Implementation Steps

- The agencies need to meet in order to identify the best existing facility among the coordinated agencies or the best location for a shared facility.
- The facility should be centrally located in order to reduce the possible dead-head time.
- The amount of space that each agency will get in the facility should be designated based on each agency's funding participation for the facility.
- A grant may need to be developed to purchase or upgrade the facility.

Joint Grant Applications

If more than one agency is applying for funds from ACT, they should work together to coordinate grant submissions. Grants should be coordinated so that duplication of requests is minimized as this will look more favorable to ACT, the grant reviewers and make better use of grant funds.

Benefits

- The amount of time that each agency needs to spend in developing a grant independently will be reduced.
- The agencies are able to use each other's knowledge in developing a grant.
- There is a greater likelihood of funding received if the applications show coordination among providers.

Implementation Steps

- The agencies should review their needs and create a list of capital and operational requirements.
- The agencies should itemize their lists and determine a priority of needs.
- The grant should be developed based on the priority lists.
- The grant should be approved by each of the agencies' boards/councils, along with approval of any local match funding.
- The agencies should ensure each grant references the additional agencies/providers grants for the area.

Joint Training Programs & Sharing Expertise

Joint training programs and sharing expertise between agencies, in everything from grant writing, preventative maintenance, computer skills to safe wheelchair tie-down procedures, can lead to more

highly skilled employees and reduced training costs. The agencies could also purchase special training from reputable organizations/companies and allow other agencies' employees to attend. Training costs should be shared between the agencies.

Benefits

- Each agency's training budget will be reduced.
- The drivers and staff have more opportunities to learn from each other.
- The need for costly training sessions for drivers and staff will be reduced, thereby decreasing lost production time.
- Knowledge is passed on to other staff members and agencies, thereby increasing the efficiency of the area's transit providers.

Implementation Steps

- The training needs of each agency's staff should be identified.
- The training courses that meet the greatest needs should be determined.
- The agency or organization/company that could provide the needed training should be identified.
- The information, field of work, and expertise needed to operate an effective transit service should be identified.
- The individual in each agency that has expertise in each field of work should be determined.

Joint Planning & Decision Making

Joint planning and decision making involves agencies working cooperatively with either other similar agencies or a local provider in order to make known the needs of their clients and become involved in the local planning of services.

Benefits

- The need for expensive planning documents for each transit agency will be reduced.
- More complex coordination in capital development and operational functions will be allowed.
- The duplication of services among the coordinating agencies will be reduced.

Implementation Steps

- The agencies should meet with regional transit and transportation planners to develop a scope of work for the planning process.
- The scope of work should identify the goals and objectives.
- A timeline should be developed for the completion of the planning document.
- The planning document should develop recommendations for making decisions on the operation services, capital, funding, coordination process, and administration functions.

Vehicle Sharing

Vehicle sharing requires that agencies own and operate vehicles. Memoranda of Understanding or Joint Agreements are needed for this strategy to work properly. The agencies that operate vehicles are able to share those vehicles with other agencies in a variety of circumstances, such as when one agency has a vehicle mechanical breakdown or when capacity for a specific trip is at its maximum.

Benefits

- The overall local capital outlay will be reduced.
- These funds could be shifted to cover operational costs or increase the level of service.

- These funds could also be used for capital funding for facilities, equipment, and other capital assets.

Implementation Steps

- Agencies need to work closely together to develop MOUs and agreements on vehicle usage.

Contracts for Service

An agency could contract with another agency or a public provider to provide needed trips. This could be done occasionally on an as-needed basis or as part of scheduled service.

Benefits

- The amount of local match that can be used to pull additional state and federal funding for transit services into the area will be increased.
- The duplication of services in the area will be reduced, thereby creating an economy of scale and improving the overall transit performance level.

Implementation Steps

- The agencies should meet to identify the needs and capacities of the contract parties.
- A contract should be developed detailing the responsibility of each party.

One-Call Center

A shared informational telephone line provides riders with the most convenient access to information on all transportation services in the area.

Benefits

- The administrative costs for the participating agencies will be reduced.
- A one-call center is the first step to centralized dispatching.
- Users will only need to call one telephone number in order to obtain all the transit information they need, thereby improving customer service.

Implementation Steps

- The agencies should meet to determine which agency will house the call center, how the call center will be funded, and what information will be provided to the customers.
- The telephone line should be set up and the needed communication equipment should be purchased.
- A marketing brochure should be developed detailing the purpose of the call center, hours of service, and telephone number.

Centralized Functions (reservations, scheduling, dispatching)

A single office could oversee the dispatching of vehicles and the scheduling of reservations for all of the participating transportation agencies in order to provide transportation service within a geographic area.

Benefits

- The duplication of administrative costs will be reduced, based on an economy of scale.
- The marketability of the area's transit service will be increased.
- Fleet coordination will be improved.

Implementation Steps

- The agencies should meet to determine which agency will house the centralized reservations, scheduling, and dispatching.
- Each agency’s level of funding for the dispatching service cost should be identified.
- Interagency agreements should be created detailing the responsibility of each agency.

MOVING FORWARD

After all the data has been gathered and analyzed, public meetings held, strategies made and project priorities determined, the last step is to adopt the plan. The lead agency in consultation with participants should identify the process for approving and adopting the plan, and this process must include participation by stakeholders identified in the law: seniors; individuals with disabilities; representatives of public, private, and nonprofit transportation and human service providers; and other members of the public. The coordinated plan must be updated every five years and re-approved by the local governing body.

A coordinated plan is valid for five years. In order to continue to be eligible for 5310 or AMHT funding, the locally developed coordinated plan must be updated and approved prior to the submission of a human services grant application.

Below is a chart that summarizes the five year timeline for updating a coordinated plan.

Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Coordinated Plan

Year completed and approved through a local governing body resolution

Original Plan	Year:	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Year 1:	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Year 2:	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Year 3:	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Year 4:	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Year 5:	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	
Updated Plan	July 1,						
Due:	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	
Applications							
for:	FY2017	FY2018	FY2019	FY2020	FY2021	FY2022	

Coordinated Plans must be submitted and verified by ACT prior to applying for 5310/AMHT funds.

SUMMARY

Coordination is a management strategy for improving the performance of various individual transportation services. It wrings inefficiencies out of the disparate operations and service patterns that often result from a multiplicity of providers. Overlapping, duplicate, and inefficient services can be combined for more efficient service delivery. As a result, coordinated services may achieve economies of scale not available to smaller providers. Coordinated services often provide a higher quality of service with greater efficiency that helps to stretch the limited (and often insufficient) funding and personnel resources of coordinating agencies. It is our hope that the information in this guide will give you the framework to create a viable coordinated transportation plan for your area providers and residents.

COORDINATED PUBLIC TRANSIT-HUMAN SERVICES TRANSPORTATION PLAN ELEMENTS

- Locally developed coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan, updated at a minimum every 5 years. Evidenced by:
 - Public participation
 - Participation must include seniors, individuals with disabilities, representatives of public, private, non-profit and human services transportation providers, and other members of the public.
 - Can be done through: Community planning sessions, self-assessment tools, focus groups, surveys, and/or a detailed study and analysis.
 - Certification of participants: List & signatures of participants in the creation/update of the Plan
- Published/Finalized Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan that includes:
 - Community Background
 - Location & Map(s)
 - Existing Transportation System(s)
 - Coordinated Service Element: Inventory of Resources & Services
 - Coordination Group Members
 - Inventory of Available Resources and Services
 - Needs Assessment
 - Demographics
 - Disabilities by age/type
 - Household income
 - Household Type
 - Gaps in Service
 - Strategies: Addressing Needs and Gaps in Service
 - Priority of Projects
 - Signature Page of Participating Agencies
- Resolution from local government adopting the Coordinated Plan