Successful Local Transportation Coordination Case Studies

Coordination Strategy: Contract with common carrier
SmartLink Transit Medical Assistance Travel

Background

SmartLink Transit started its Medical Assistance (MA) Travel program as part of a larger overhaul that led to the combination of the transit operations of Scott and Carver Counties into one entity. SmartLink Transit is now the MA transport coordinator for both counties. SmartLink MA Travel provides rides for older adults and people with disabilities to medical appointments. It has standing relationships with assisted living facilities in the area to provide rides.

Problem/Opportunity

As Scott and Carver Counties began to consolidate their transit services, the state of Minnesota decided to pass the cost of brokering MA transportation—done by Minnesota Non-Emergency Transportation (MNET) at that time—to the counties. Scott and Carver Counties, as part of the overhaul of their transit services, decided to coordinate MA rides through their own program.

Solution

SmartLink decided not to continue to use MNET to broker MA travel, as SmartLink was already providing many MA transit services. SmartLink improves efficiency by utilizing one vehicle to provide rides for all of the different transit programs it offers, including MA Travel and others. Thus, multiple types of riders may be riding one bus at any given time.

Occasionally, SmartLink may be unable to provide a ride to a medical appointment, usually because the destination is outside of Scott and Carver Counties. On these occasions, SmartLink works with other carriers to provide these rides. SmartLink coordinates 1,000 to 1,500 rides per year with other carriers.

Service Area

- Serves Scott and Carver Counties
- 703 square miles
- 220,970 residents
- Primary clients are older adults and people with disabilities

Financial

- 2010 revenue: $541,031, which covered 100 percent of expenses
- Cost per ride to SmartLink is $14.52
- Fare varies based on mileage

Operational Characteristics

- Created in 2010
- 33 vehicles
- 15 full-time and 20-25 part-time drivers; 7 full-time operations staff

Results

- 224,000 rides in 2010 (all programs)

Lessons Learned

- Used technology to improve efficiency

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Results/Benefits

Cutting out the brokerage and coordinating MA travel with other travel programs has provided a savings of $127,000 since the beginning of the program. However, because all types of riders are on one vehicle, it is difficult for SmartLink to determine how many individual rides from each program it provides.

Challenges/Lessons Learned

SmartLink had minor challenges while getting the
program up and running, including coordinating with the Department of Human Services and getting SmartLink staff trained in MA rules and regulations. They also did not anticipate the increased number of phone calls SmartLink would receive regarding MA rides. SmartLink also had to negotiate contracts with private transportation companies to provide rides to destinations outside of the counties.

Another challenge for SmartLink has been collecting data about the types of riders and destinations. To increase efficiency, all riders from across all programs ride any bus. However, SmartLink has not yet found a way to track which rider goes where.

One important part of providing efficient travel to all riders has been the installation of mobile data computers on each bus. Through a grant from New Freedom, SmartLink has installed these mobile data computers on buses. These computers show real-time positioning, allow instant dispatching to each bus driver, and improve efficiency.

**Future Direction**

SmartLink wants to continue providing efficient transportation services across all its programs. At this time, SmartLink staff is closely watching MA legislation that could require MA transport to be managed by a central entity.