

Planning for Enhanced Transportation Access and Efficiency

Synthesis of 2011 Greater Minnesota
Local Human Services Transit Coordination Plans

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Executive Summary

The goal of transit coordination is to enhance transportation access and efficiency. Human services public transit coordination specifically aims to improve transportation access for people with disabilities, older adults, and individuals with low incomes. Coordination also encourages communities to make the most effective use of transportation resources funded through public and private sources. Local human services transit coordination plans are intended to improve a region's collective ability to provide transportation services to customers by bringing together diverse stakeholders to identify strategies to overcome local barriers to coordination.

To develop local coordination plans in Greater Minnesota, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) Office of Transit partnered with local planning organizations in Greater Minnesota's twelve economic development regions in 2011. These plans engaged diverse stakeholders in identifying strategies for regional transportation coordination and articulating specific projects that could advance coordination strategies in each region.

This synthesis highlights the themes found in the 2011 coordination plans, which include the need to improve the coordination of services and resources, increase public awareness, implement mobility management strategies, expand services, reduce expenses, and overcome regulatory barriers.

Strategies commonly identified to meet these needs in the future include convening regional coordination bodies, conducting educational campaigns, hiring mobility managers, expanding volunteer driver programs, and partnering for the joint purchase of vehicles. Regions would also like to encourage state and federal agencies to simplify procedures and allow more flexibility in the use of transportation dollars.

This synthesis also outlines the accomplishments and implementation challenges that have occurred throughout Greater Minnesota since the completion of the 2006 coordination plans. Accomplishments include raising awareness of transit coordination, expanding services and programs, coordinating services, and completing marketing initiatives. Common challenges included a lack of funding, leadership, local partnerships, and policymaker support. Policies and regulations were another barrier to coordination efforts.

Overall, the development of the local human services transit coordination plans in Greater Minnesota has identified coordination strategies that could be successfully implemented in many regions in the future. Continued support for these plans will advance coordination strategies throughout the state.

Full versions of the twelve local coordination plans completed in 2011 are available online at CoordinateMNTransit.org.

Background

The goal of transit coordination is to enhance transportation access and efficiency. Human services public transit coordination specifically aims to improve transportation access for people with disabilities, older adults, and individuals with low incomes. Coordination also encourages communities to make the most effective use of transportation resources funded through public and private sources. Strategies include minimizing duplicated services and facilitating the most appropriate and cost-effective transportation possible for each individual.

The key to successfully coordinating transportation is encouraging stakeholders from a broad range of organizations to work together. This involves agreeing on transit coordination challenges, identifying and implementing strategies to overcome barriers, and increasing the awareness of transit providers and users.

Local human services transit coordination plans are intended to improve a region's collective ability to provide transportation services to its customers. These plans are a federal requirement under the Safe Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). A project must advance strategies identified in a locally developed coordination plan in order to be eligible for transit and human services federal funding programs that target people with disabilities, older adults, and people with low incomes. These funding programs include Transportation for Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities (Section 5310), Job Access and Reverse Commute (Section 5316), and New Freedom Initiative (Section 5317). Full descriptions of these federal funding programs are available in Appendix A.

To develop local coordination plans in Minnesota, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) Office of Transit partnered with local planning organizations in Greater Minnesota's twelve economic development regions in 2011. In areas without a local planning organization, MnDOT district staff assumed this role. The process did not include the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area or East Grand Forks, where plans were completed independently by local metropolitan planning organizations.

As part of the 2011 planning process, regional planning organizations convened stakeholders to define future coordination priorities and strategies. The planning process also assessed results of coordination plans previously completed in each region in 2006, including what strategies had been successfully implemented and

Full versions of the 2011 local coordination plans are available online at CoordinateMNTransit.org.

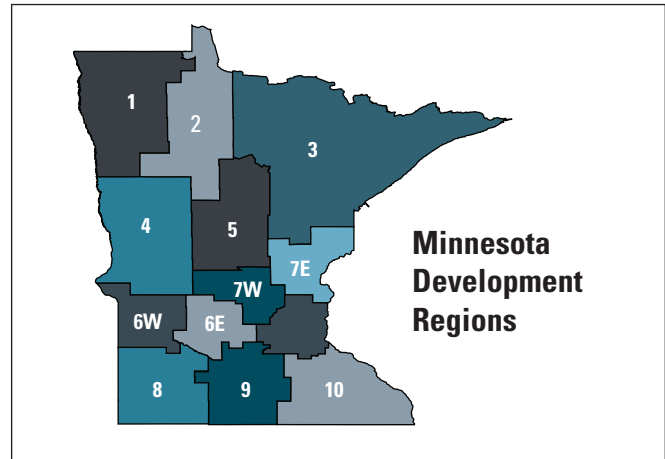


Figure 1 Minnesota's twelve Economic Development Regions (excluding the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area)

those that had not moved forward. A full description and analysis of the 2011 planning process is available in Appendix B.

Regional planning organizations that participated in the planning process were:

- Region 1.....Northwest Regional Development Commission (RDC)
- Region 2.....Headwaters RDC
- Region 3.....Arrowhead RDC
- Region 4.....West Central Initiative
- Region 5.....Region Five Development Commission
- Region 6E.....Mid-Minnesota RDC
- Region 6W....Upper Minnesota Valley RDC
- Region 7E.....East Central RDC
- Region 7W....MnDOT District 3 and St. Cloud Area Planning Organization (APO)
- Region 8.....Southwest RDC
- Region 9.....Region Nine Development Commission
- Region 10.....MnDOT District 6 and the Southeast Minnesota Area Transportation Partnership

Each region engaged public, private, and human services transportation providers; social services agencies; and members of the public in the planning process. These regional stakeholders brainstormed coordination project ideas and refined them in a collaborative setting.

The final project lists in the 2011 plans reflect the input of these diverse groups and provide a five-year blueprint for future coordination efforts.

This synthesis highlights the strategies outlined in Minnesota’s 2011 coordination plans and reviews the

accomplishments and implementation challenges of the 2006 plans. Full versions of the twelve local coordination plans completed in 2011 are available online at CoordinateMNTransit.org.

Future Strategies: Themes of 2011 Plans

Strategies and projects identified by stakeholders in the 2011 plans can be grouped according to the following themes: improving the coordination of services and resources, increasing awareness, implementing mobility management strategies, expanding services, reducing expenses and increasing efficiency, and overcoming regulatory barriers.

Plan strategies and projects were developed individually in each region through a uniform planning process that convened face-to-face stakeholder meetings and engaged diverse sets of transportation providers, human services providers, and public officials. As part of the process, stakeholders examined a common set of strategies and ranked those that would be most helpful for their region. They then identified specific projects that could help move their chosen strategies forward.

Improving Coordination of Services and Resources

Many 2011 plans identified strategies and projects aimed at improving the coordination of specific services and resources among transportation providers. Coordinating these individual services and resources could help estab-

lish a foundation for more centralized regional coordination throughout Greater Minnesota. In addition, it could foster communication and cooperation between providers that have not networked with each other since the 2006 plans were finalized. Implementing these strategies and projects could also make it easier for both providers and customers to recognize what services are available and how to use them most efficiently.

Preferred strategies identified by multiple regions include:

- Centralizing call taking, scheduling, rider services, and information and referrals among transportation providers
- Creating a regional provider database
- Expanding on existing steering committees by convening a regional coordination body with representatives from public, private, and human services agencies
- Creating a call center and/or website that could provide regional information and ride-planning services
- Sharing vehicles, facilities, support services, and other resources among providers

Table 1: Regions’ preferred strategies for coordinating services

Region	Centralize call taking, scheduling, etc.	Create regional provider database	Expand on regional steering committees	Create a call center or website	Share vehicles, facilities, or other resources
Region 1	X	X	X	X	X
Region 2	X		X		
Region 3	X	X	X	X	X
Region 4	X		X	X	X
Region 5	X	X	X	X	X
Region 6E	X	X	X	X	
Region 6W	X	X	X		
Region 7E	X		X	X	X
Region 7W	X	X	X	X	X
Region 8	X	X	X		X
Region 9	X	X	X	X	X
Region 10	X	X	X	X	X

Some regions also presented unique project ideas that could be applied in multiple regions. Region 3 (Arrowhead RDC) proposed the creation of a rural transit hub where smaller transportation agencies could bring passengers to a central location for pick-up by larger transit providers.

Region 8 (Southwest RDC) expressed the need for affordable technology and software that could help schedule and organize client rides. This technology could also facilitate communication among providers in the region and make it easier to share resources and information.

Increasing Awareness

Another common theme of the 2011 plans is the need to increase the awareness of riders, social service providers, and transportation providers. Nearly all plans mentioned that more education is needed throughout the state to help riders and providers understand the range of available transportation options and how to access them. Locally preferred strategies to improve

Coordinating services and resources could help providers and customers better understand what services are available and how to use them most efficiently.

awareness focused mainly on education, marketing, and training initiatives.

Strategies identified by multiple regions include:

- Offering travel training to potential riders
- Educating regional officials and human services professionals about transportation resources and needs
- Conducting marketing campaigns and community outreach to the general public to increase knowledge and change perceptions about available transportation services
- Developing or improving training programs for drivers and volunteers to help them better assist and educate riders

Table 2: Regions' preferred strategies for improving awareness

Region	Offer travel training	Educate officials or other providers	Conduct marketing or educational campaigns	Develop a driver training program
Region 1	X	X	X	X
Region 2	X		X	
Region 3	X	X	X	X
Region 4	X	X	X	X
Region 5	X	X	X	X
Region 6E	X	X	X	
Region 6W	X	X	X	X
Region 7E		X	X	X
Region 7W	X			X
Region 8	X	X	X	X
Region 9		X	X	X
Region 10		X	X	

One example of a project idea to improve awareness comes from the Region 9 plan. The plan outlines a project involving the establishment of education roundtables to help transportation agencies, human services agencies, advocates, and community members determine how to educate the public about available options. The region's plan also proposed an open house that would convene transportation providers, existing customers, and potential customers.

The Region 6W (Upper Minnesota Valley RDC) plan suggests a campaign to market transportation

Nearly all regions identified strategies to educate the public, local officials, or human services agencies to increase awareness.

services at schools, community organizations, daycares, and human services agencies. This could help parents become more aware of available transportation options for children.

Implementing Mobility Management Strategies

To meet the transportation coordination goals of enhancing access and efficiency, all regions proposed implementing new mobility management strategies or enhancing existing strategies in the 2011 plans. Both case management and systemwide mobility management strategies were recommended by a number of regions.

Implementing mobility management could help improve overall coordination and education efforts in each region. Case management strategies, such as hiring a mobility manager, could specifically assist agencies in consolidating business functions and securing new funding. For example, a mobility manager could work on creatively piecing together funding from a variety of sources—a strategy that many entities currently struggle with because they lack dedicated staff time.

All regions cited the need to implement mobility management strategies, either on a case management or systemwide level.

Eight regions suggested implementing mobility management on a case management level by hiring a mobility manager to oversee the education of riders about available services. Six regions proposed a systemwide approach to facilitate coordination among transportation and human services providers and ensure the availability of a range of transportation options. At least two regions cited needs for both types of mobility management.

Table 3: Regions’ mobility management needs

Region	Case management mobility management	Systemwide mobility management
Region 1	X	
Region 2		X
Region 3	X	
Region 4	X	
Region 5	X	X
Region 6E		X
Region 6W	X	
Region 7E	X	
Region 7W	X	X
Region 8		X
Region 9	X	
Region 10		X

Expanding Services

The need to expand available transportation services to riders was another common theme of the 2011 plans. The most important outcome of expanding these services is improved transportation access for riders. Limited service hours in the early morning, evening, and on weekends throughout much of the state can make it difficult for many riders to access the transportation they need. In some rural areas, transportation services may be limited to certain days or times of day, making it difficult for riders to access convenient options.

Specific services that regions proposed expanding in the future include:

- Morning, evening, and/or weekend service
- Door-through-door service
- Service to smaller communities and rural areas
- Service that crosses county (or state) lines

The most important outcome of expanding services is improved transportation access for riders.

- Aides and escorts for specialized and new clients
- Strategies to help meet expanded service goals include:
- Establishing or expanding volunteer driver programs
 - Implementing subsidized taxi-based solutions
 - Connecting regional population/trade centers with transportation routes
 - Coordinating worksite or educational rides, or coordinating schedules with common shift start and end times

Table 4: Regions' preferred strategies for expanding services

Region	Expand volunteer driver programs	Implement taxi-based solutions	Connect regional population centers	Coordinate worksite rides or schedules with start/end times
Region 1	X	X		X
Region 2	X			
Region 3	X	X	X	
Region 4	X	X	X	X
Region 5	X		X	X
Region 6E	X			X
Region 6W	X	X		X
Region 7E	X	X		
Region 7W	X		X	X
Region 8	X			X
Region 9	X	X	X	X
Region 10	X	X		

Region 2 (Headwaters RDC) identified a project that would expand service to a specific population. The region's plan suggests working with public transportation, human services agencies, and volunteer drivers to create a 24-hour, 7-day-a-week service for individuals with a mental illness who have a medical emergency after service hours. This would involve a collaboration of public transit agencies, disability advocates, volunteer drivers, and human services agencies.

Reducing Expenses and Increasing Efficiency

Many regions identified the need to reduce expenses and increase efficiency in their 2011 plans. Funding is a common issue for human service transportation, and implementing cost-saving coordination strategies can help providers make the most of limited budgets while

Cost-saving coordination strategies can help providers make the most of limited budgets while maintaining service.

maintaining service to riders.

Strategies include:

- Joint purchasing of vehicles to create savings and foster cross-agency consistency
- Coordinating the purchase of insurance, driver training, and substance abuse testing
- Contracting with a common carrier, such as a public transit agency, to allow clients of multiple agencies to ride on the same carrier's vehicles
- Outsourcing or consolidating business functions, such as accounting, billing, or dispatching

Table 5: Regions' preferred strategies for reducing expenses

Region	Joint purchasing of vehicles	Coordinate the purchasing of insurance, etc.	Contract with a common carrier	Outsource or consolidate business functions
Region 1	X	X	X	X
Region 2			X	X
Region 3	X	X	X	X
Region 4	X		X	X
Region 5	X			
Region 6E	X	X		
Region 6W			X	X
Region 7E	X	X		
Region 7W		X	X	X
Region 8	X		X	X
Region 9	X	X	X	X
Region 10	X		X	X

Region 1 (Northwest RDC) also proposed sharing mechanics between providers, a project idea that could be implemented in multiple regions. The Region 9 plan recommended the use of smaller vehicles for times of minimal demand.

Overcoming Regulatory Barriers

The need to overcome regulatory barriers—a commonly cited challenge facing regional coordination efforts—was another theme of the 2011 plans. Regulatory barriers often hinder coordination efforts by making it difficult for various agencies to pool resources or share clients.

Regulatory barriers from funding agencies can limit who is eligible to receive rides or constrain ridesharing due to data privacy regulations. The need for prior authorization makes it difficult to coordinate last-minute

Regulatory barriers may include eligibility or medical plan requirements.

rides, and differences between various medical plans and their coverage limitations can make it difficult to schedule trips far enough in advance to coordinate rides. Billing and payments between agencies can be another challenge. Most agencies lack the staff time and resources to dedicate to solving these problems.

To overcome these obstacles, the Region 4 (West Central Initiative) plan suggested encouraging state and federal agencies to simplify procedures and allow more flexibility in the use of transportation dollars. Region 8 (Southwest RDC) proposed the use of a website to work with insurance companies to set up policies that make ridesharing easier.

Recent Progress: Themes of 2006 Plans

In 2011, plan steering committees from most regions examined the actions outlined in their previously completed 2006 coordination plans. They assessed previously proposed coordination strategies and determined whether “action,” “some action,” or “no action” had been taken on each initiative. Nearly all regions had taken at least some action on more than half of their 2006 initiatives. This discussion allowed stakeholders to examine what strategies had succeeded, identify strategies to

continue pursuing in the future, and discuss the barriers to coordination each region had encountered.

Some themes of the 2006 plans were similar to those of the 2011 plans, such as coordinating resources, expanding services, and adopting mobility management techniques. Other 2006 plan strategies included pursuing additional funding for new vehicles or programs and making better use of volunteer drivers.

Table 6: Results from 2006 Local Coordination Plan strategic initiatives

Region	Total Number of Initiatives	Action	Some Action	No Action
Region 1	16	8	4	4
Region 2	10	6	3	1
Region 3	35	11	20	4
Region 4	15	5	8	2
Region 5	13	1	5	7
Region 6E	38	18	20	0
Region 6W	71	6	60	5
Region 7E	4	1	3	0
Region 7W	15	1	9	5
Region 8	112	23	48	41
Region 9 RDC	27	3	14	10
Region 10	9	2	5	2

Accomplishments

The 2006 plans raised awareness of transit coordination as a topic in Greater Minnesota. They also prompted many agencies to give more attention to coordination issues. After the creation of the plans, Greater Minnesota's twelve regions had a better understanding of their local coordination needs and service gaps. The planning process also helped stakeholders from a wide range of organizations form positive working relationships, often for the first time. This foundation was perhaps the most important success of the plans and helped state and local agencies work together more successfully in the 2011 planning process.

Individual accomplishments facilitated by the plans included the addition of new services and programs, the expansion of existing services, the coordination of services across agencies, and the completion of marketing efforts.

Expanded services and programs

Many regions experienced the most success with strategies aimed at expanding services to passengers and establishing new programs. Many public transit and nonprofit providers throughout Greater Minnesota added extra service hours, provided transportation on new days of the week, or offered services to new towns, cities, or counties that had previously been underserved.

Other examples of expanded services include:

- Purchasing additional transit vehicles to provide additional or specialized service (such as vehicles with wheelchair lifts for passengers with disabilities)
- Offering specific work-route and medical appointment transportation services
- Providing workshops and other trainings on how to use public transit
- Expanding volunteer driver programs to increase ride availability

Region 3 and Region 6E provide specific examples of how 2006 project ideas were implemented successfully. Both regions took action on projects to establish new programs. Region 3 (Arrowhead RDC) established its Rural Rides program, which funds staff at workforce centers in four counties. These staff members help low-income residents connect with volunteer drivers or co-workers who can take them to work. In Region 6E (Mid-Minnesota RDC), the creation of the SMART RIDE program—which includes bus, minivan, and volunteer driver service—has made service available

24 hours a day, seven days a week as long as there is a driver willing and able to volunteer.

Successfully coordinated services

Several regions also implemented efforts to coordinate services across agencies. Examples of coordinated services include:

- In Region 1 (Northwest RDC), two providers worked together to coordinate ride pick-up and drop-off locations
- In Region 2 (Headwaters RDC), providers created a web-based directory including locations, days, and hours of operation to facilitate information exchange and coordination
- Region 6E also encouraged coordination between school districts and public transit for students to attend after school events or activities
- Region 7W (MnDOT District 3/St. Cloud APO) facilitated increased communication between various volunteer driver programs to improve coordination
- Region 8 (Southwest RDC) identified opportunities for public transit agencies to coordinate services across county boundaries
- In Region 9, nonprofit agencies worked together to coordinate inter-county and long-distance rides to the Twin Cities or Rochester for medical appointments

In spite of these coordination successes, many regions acknowledge that there is more work to be done in this area in the future.

Agencies successfully coordinated rides to medical appointments and across county boundaries.

Completed marketing efforts

In many regions, marketing campaigns were conducted to educate riders about available services and increase overall ridership.

Specific initiatives included:

- Implementing marketing plans at the agency level
- Updating and distributing a brochure of transit providers
- Promoting transit services as user-friendly and cost effective
- Providing vouchers and gift certificates
- Identifying the misconceptions of potential riders

- and developing strategies to address them
- Working to improve sources of information available through non-provider websites, databases, and phone directories
- Promoting the availability of passenger assistants or escorts for first-time or infrequent users
- Using social media to promote available services

Many regions successfully implemented marketing strategies that led to increased ridership, but they also reported a need to expand these educational efforts in the future. Several regions noted that marketing efforts were only completed on an individual agency level. In the future, many regions plan to conduct a more strategic, coordinated campaign including multiple providers. Many regions also found that a travel trainer or other specialized rider training would be helpful as part of future efforts to educate new users about available services. There is also a continued need for the education of local officials and human services agencies.

Marketing efforts included distributing a brochure, providing vouchers, and using social media.

Challenges

Although many strategies from the 2006 plans were implemented successfully, others encountered challenges. Some regions struggled to complete any action on some of their 2006 plan strategies, and other strategies were implemented but achieved limited results. Overall, the regions reported that challenges were not project-dependent, but the result of larger, more systemic issues that made it difficult to implement a wide range of strategies. Successful implementation typically hinged on the presence of a project champion, a stable source of funding, and strong regional support. This meant that strategies implemented successfully in several regions—such as mobility management—did not move forward in other regions where they had less support.

Examples of specific projects that had little or no action taken include:

- Holding regular meetings of a regional coordination body
- Creating an inventory or web-based provider directory
- Centralizing regional facilities or dispatch
- Sharing volunteers across agencies

- Standardizing volunteer driver training across agencies
- Developing a tool for user evaluation of services
- Increasing the use of technology, such as GPS, to improve tracking and management of vehicles

The most commonly cited barriers to successful implementation were a lack of funding, a lack of regional leadership or project champions, inflexible policies and regulations, and insufficient local partnerships. Many regions also struggled to educate and influence policymakers, in spite of increased efforts to communicate with local and state officials.

Funding

Many regions said that projects from the 2006 plans were not implemented because they lacked funding. Although federal funds through the Job Access and Reverse Commute and New Freedom programs are available to get projects started, other funding sources are needed to help programs remain stable and successful over the long term. Some projects rely on these specific federal funds repeatedly because there are so few other options. The lack of stable funding sources can also make it hard for local agencies to take over projects and coordination activities.

Funding is also often directed only toward specific initiatives, leaving a gap for ongoing or alternative activities. Some regions' plans state that more technical assistance to access funding streams and coordinate funding options—as well as more education about funding regulations—would be helpful.

Leadership

The lack of regional leadership or a project champion was also a barrier for regions when attempting to implement strategies from the 2006 plans. Regional leadership is needed to conduct large-scale efforts, develop regional standards and policies, search for available funds, and move implementation efforts forward. Based on the results of the 2006 plan strategies, stakeholders in several regions suggested that creating a regional coordinator position or holding regular meetings of a regional coordination body would help address this issue.

In multiple regions, ideas were not implemented because they lacked a project champion, and in some cases there was a lack of understanding regarding leadership roles. When reviewing the 2006 plans, stakeholders demonstrated varying understanding of the roles of state agencies and expectations of hands-on leadership

at the local level. Local stakeholders did not have a good understanding of what could or should have been done at the grassroots level, and agencies often did not take the initiative to get projects going independently.

Policies and regulations

Nearly all regions cited a need to overcome a variety of policy and regulatory barriers in order to more easily implement coordination strategies. Examples of specific policy and regulation challenges include:

- Inflexible state and federal funding policies
- Insurance policy challenges
- Inconsistent medical plan requirements
- Liability issues when sharing vehicles across agencies or using them for multiple purposes
- Prior authorization requirements from medical plans, which require prior approval from a health insurance provider before a passenger can receive transportation services
- Local restrictions against crossing county boundaries and federal regulations involved in crossing state lines
- Regulations that require extensive driver certification, drug and alcohol testing, and training

Inflexible funding policies, medical plan requirements, and liability issues can be regulatory barriers to coordination.

To overcome these challenges, some regions' plans suggest projects that would encourage insurance providers to revise policies so they facilitate rather than hinder coordination opportunities. At least one region's plan also proposed that state and federal agencies simplify regulations and procedures to allow greater flexibility in the use of transportation dollars.

Local partnerships

Another common obstacle for several regions was the lack of partnerships and networking among transit agencies and human services agencies. Human services agencies were not accustomed to transferring the management of their clients' transportation needs to transportation organizations. Human services representatives have also had limited or no participation in coordination efforts in some regions, making it difficult to form the partnerships needed to successfully coordinate rides and services. When reviewing the 2006 plan strategies, stakeholders in several regions identified a continued need for networking between different agencies to foster new ideas for working together, riding together, lining up billing and client services, and more.

Most regions reported that their efforts to educate legislators and local officials achieved limited results.

Policymaker support

Most regions increased their efforts to educate and communicate with legislators and officials at the state, county, and city level about barriers to coordination, but most achieved limited results. Regions held legislative forums focused on the need for funding, testified about the positive impacts of investing in rural transit, and attended state-level workshops to discuss coordination and funding. However, most regions reported that their efforts had made a minimal difference. Moving forward, several regions suggested the need for a regional committee or policy group that could help influence local and state legislators and spark discussions about coordination issues.

Conclusion

Findings from the 2011 plans highlight the many common coordination needs throughout Greater Minnesota's twelve regions and outline regional priorities for future action. All regions cited the need to improve the coordination of services and resources, increase awareness, implement mobility management strategies, expand services, reduce expenses, and overcome regulatory barriers in order to improve overall transportation access and efficiency.

To meet these needs, each region identified strategies and projects that could be starting points for future action and improvement. Many of the strategies were common to most or all of the participating regions. Some of the most frequently identified strategies include centralizing call taking and scheduling, convening a regional coordination body with representatives from a variety of stakeholder groups, educating regional officials about transportation resources and needs, conducting marketing campaigns and community outreach to increase the knowledge of the general public, and

establishing or expanding volunteer driver programs to improve service and availability.

The development of the local human services transit coordination plans in Greater Minnesota has been valuable in developing relationships between local human services agencies and transportation providers and in identifying and implementing transit coordination strategies. Continued support for these plans will advance coordination strategies throughout the state. With reduced transit funding, it is essential to be creative about ways to derive maximum value from every taxpayer dollar. By continuing to improve transportation coordination in Minnesota, it is possible to reduce duplication of services and strive to give all Minnesotans access to transportation that meets their mobility needs.

Full versions of the twelve local coordination plans completed in 2011 are available online at CoordinateMNTransit.org.

Appendix A: Explanation of Federal Transit Funding Sources

Government spending that targets transportation for older adults, people with disabilities, or people with low incomes is distributed through a variety of transit and human services funding programs. Three specific transportation programs that mandate coordinated planning as a prerequisite for funding are the Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities (Section 5310), Job Access and Reverse Commute (Section 5316), and New Freedom Initiative (Section 5317).

Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities (Section 5310)

The Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities program is designed to serve older adults and people with disabilities. It is a capital assistance grant program that provides 80 percent federal funding for the purchase of wheelchair-accessible vans and buses. Eligible organizations include private nonprofits that serve older adults and people with disabilities, public bodies that coordinate services for older adults and people with disabilities, or any public body that certifies to the state that nonprofits in the area are not readily available to carry out these services. In Minnesota, the MnDOT Office of Transit funds approximately 30 to 35 new vehicle purchases annually through this program.

Job Access and Reverse Commute Program (Section 5316)

The Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) program was established to address the unique transportation challenges of people with low incomes seeking to obtain and maintain employment. Many jobs are located in suburban areas, and individuals with low incomes often have difficulty accessing these jobs from their urban or rural neighborhoods. In addition,

entry-level jobs may require working late at night or on weekends—times when conventional transit services are often either reduced or nonexistent.

JARC-funded projects focus on connecting low-income workers to job sites or employment training opportunities. Eligible organizations include state or local governments, nonprofit organizations, operators of public transportation services, private operators of public transportation services, and tribal governments. The local match requirement is 50 percent toward operating and 20 percent toward capital funds. Examples of Greater Minnesota projects funded through JARC include extending the hours of a fixed-route system to cover the needs of nightshift workers or adding a volunteer driver program specifically targeted to transporting employees to and from job sites.

New Freedom Initiative (Section 5317)

The goal of the New Freedom Initiative is to increase transportation access for older adults and people with disabilities. It is intended to provide funding for new transportation services and public transportation alternatives beyond the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. These services and alternatives must help individuals with disabilities and older adults access transportation. The local match requirement is 50 percent toward operating and 20 percent toward capital funds. In Greater Minnesota, New Freedom funds have been awarded to create mobility management positions, volunteer driver service coordinator positions, and travel training programs that target older adults and individuals with disabilities.

Appendix B: 2011 Planning Process Analysis

The goal of the 2011 plans was to identify coordination strategies to improve transportation services that meet the needs of older adults, individuals with disabilities, and individuals with low incomes. The 2011 plans were developed individually in each region using a uniform statewide planning process designed to facilitate the identification of these strategies. As part of the process, a wide range of stakeholders met to discuss the outcomes of the 2006 plans, review the needs of their communities, and identify strategies for future action.

Plan Process

The 2011 planning process combined a needs assessment with public outreach tools to identify strategies for improved human services transit coordination in every region.

Needs assessment

The needs assessment established baseline conditions for each region by analyzing demographic trends and identifying available resources for human services transportation. Key elements of the needs assessment included:

- Identifying and analyzing regional demographic and transportation trends
- Mapping transit-dependent demographic groups, existing transit services, and key regional destinations
- Developing an inventory of public, private, and nonprofit transportation provider capabilities and resources

Public outreach

Public outreach informed the strategies and projects identified in each plan. Outreach occurred through regional steering committee meetings and regional public workshops held in the spring/summer of 2011.

The plans' steering committees closely guided decision making in each region. Steering committee duties included evaluating strategies and assessing outcomes of projects identified in the 2006 coordination plans, developing project ideas and identifying priority strategies as part of the public workshop, and prioritizing project ideas identified at the public workshop for inclusion in the final plans.

Strengths

One of the biggest accomplishments of the process was achieving uniformity and consistency in coordination

plans across all regions in Greater Minnesota—a great improvement from 2006. Leadership by MnDOT and state agency partners encouraged all twelve regions to use a similar process and template. This made the plans more readable and comparable across regions, helping to highlight regional coordination differences and similarities.

The process also encouraged representatives of diverse groups to join together in identifying specific projects that could advance coordination strategies throughout the state. Participating organizations included veterans' organizations, tribal representatives, and area agencies on aging. The final project lists reflect input of a broad range of regional stakeholders and provide a five-year blueprint for future coordination efforts.

The process helped establish relationships and ideas that can be continued or expanded on by each region in the future. Overall, stakeholders liked the process and expressed a desire to continue regional steering committee meetings to address coordination challenges.

Weaknesses/Challenges

Participants experienced a variety of challenges throughout the planning process.

One weakness was that certain stakeholder groups were not included in the planning process. For instance, public officials have traditionally been the agents of change within their communities, but these officials have not yet been heavily involved in the planning process. It is important to include this group in future planning because they could assist with implementation efforts.

Another issue is the level of participation that can be expected from county case managers and human services managers. Transportation is not a primary component of their jobs, so it was often difficult for them to dedicate substantial time to the coordination planning process. However, meetings attended by county human services managers were reported to be more productive. It was similarly difficult to get stakeholders from other related organizations (e.g., health plans, hospitals, and clinics) to an all- or half-day transportation meeting, especially if they had little prior education on the importance of transportation coordination.

Throughout the process, participants were often unclear about the differences between a coordination plans and an implementation plans. The coordination plans were designed to identify needs and strategies rather than specifically outline the steps for implementing

projects. Stakeholders often struggled with their desire to create implementation plans, which should lay out how to accomplish elements of the coordination plans.

An additional weakness of the process was that it did not capture information about any informal transportation coordination occurring in the regions.

In terms of project development, participants struggled to develop strategies for identifying potential partners and funding sources. Since the completion of the initial coordination plans in 2006, there has been a decrease in the amount of available dedicated funding.

This limited funding environment forces agencies to be more creative, which is often difficult because of limited staff time and knowledge.

Developing a complete provider inventory was also a challenging task for each RDC, mainly because it was difficult to get transit providers to participate. The information being requested by the RDC was often something these organizations already reported to MnDOT, and many providers questioned why they needed to provide it again.

This synthesis represents highlights and findings from the local coordination plans developed by local planning organizations in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Transportation Office of Transit in Greater Minnesota's twelve economic development regions. It does not necessarily represent the views or policies of the University of Minnesota or the Center for Transportation Studies.

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