

Maricopa Association of Governments Human Services Coordination Transportation Plan



Draft Final Report

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MAG Human Services Transportation Coordination Plan

INTRODUCTION

The Maricopa Association of Governments presents this plan to coordinate human services transportation, a critical need in the MAG region. Transportation significantly contributes to one's quality of life and the well-being of a community. The inability to adequately access transportation options diminishes a person's opportunity to be self-sufficient and to connect with external support systems. This is the beginning of an ongoing activity with evolving elements.

The goal of the plan is to ensure all people, especially those with disabilities, low incomes and advanced years, have equitable access to appropriate transportation options by offering coordination strategies. This includes people who are elderly, who have disabilities or who have low incomes. This plan was developed in conjunction with a diverse group of stakeholders including transportation and human services providers, local governments, and state agencies such as the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT), the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES) and the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS).

This document will explain the three major initiatives behind this effort, provide a vision for the region, offer information about the existing environment and needs in the MAG region, identify short-term strategies, suggest viable strategies for future consideration and detail some steps that can be implemented immediately to enhance current efforts to coordinate human services transportation. Attachments include extensive detail about the funding sources affected by this plan, related initiatives, a survey of transportation providers, a needs assessment and information about relevant practices.

This plan was driven by three major initiatives at the federal, state, and regional levels. The next session will review those activities.

MAJOR INITIATIVES

Federal

New federal regulations mandate that any organization seeking funding under Section 5316 (Job Access and Reverse Commute [JARC] program), Section 5317 (New Freedom Program), or Section 5310 (Elderly and Persons with Disabilities Program) must participate as a component of a locally prepared coordinated plan.

Guidance for the preparation of coordination plans to meet new federal (SAFETEA-LU) requirements were promulgated on March 15, 2006, with an update issued on September 6, 2006 in the *Federal Register*. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has stated the plan must address:

- ◆ An assessment of transportation needs for individuals with disabilities, older adults, and persons with limited incomes;
- ◆ An inventory of available services that identifies areas of redundant service and gaps in service;
- ◆ Strategies to address the identified gaps in service;
- ◆ Identification of coordination actions to eliminate or reduce duplication in services and

MAG Human Services Transportation Coordination Plan

- strategies for more efficient utilization of resources; and,
- ◆ Prioritization of implementation strategies

FTA has also indicated that plans must include outreach to a broad range of human service and public transit interests. MAG has addressed the participation and outreach process by establishing the “Transportation Coordination Stakeholder Group” (TCSG). This group met regularly from August 2006 through February 2007 in preparing this plan. Details about existing services are available in the attachments.

State

Coordination is an important activity of the Arizona Rides Program. Arizona Rides is the state’s response to the FTA’s United We Ride program. Arizona Rides strives to ensure better cooperation and collaboration between transportation providers that serve human services and other special needs populations.

Regional

Human services transportation has been identified by the community as a critical need in the MAG region. The 2006 Regional Human Services Plan engaged more than 500 individuals through focus groups, community hearings and surveys. Overwhelmingly, people expressed concern about not being able to access appropriate transportation. This document is the first step to achieving that goal.

The next section will offer a vision for coordinating human services transportation in the region.

VISION

The vision for this plan is to create a seamless human services transportation system that will result in greater knowledge, access, and coordination. People will benefit by having increased mobility and enhanced quality of life.

This plan lays the foundation for supporting activities that promote coordination throughout the MAG region. These efforts will be based on existing and emerging services for older adults, persons with disabilities, and low income individuals.

Notably, this plan is consistent with three goals articulated by the federal Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM) set forth on February 7, 2007 to increase ridership for the target population by using existing assets; simplifying access; and increasing customer satisfaction.

Specifically, this plan:

- ◆ Creates a comprehensive inventory of service providers.
- ◆ Establishes a formal process to build sub-regional collaborations that will focus on improving the coordination within the MAG region.
- ◆ Establishes coordination strategies as a priority for funding under specified FTA programs.
- ◆ Builds the foundation to consider more expansive coordination strategies in later years.

Participation in implementation of the plan is required for agencies receiving 5310, 5316 and 5317 funds. Participation is highly encouraged for agencies not receiving these funds. Many

MAG Human Services Transportation Coordination Plan

examples demonstrate that coordination improves the quality and cost-effectiveness of service. Through promotion of the benefits of coordination at all levels of government, the nonprofit sector, and among faith-based organizations, it is envisioned that individual agencies and programs at the local level will embrace these strategies.

This plan further embraces the “family of services” concept that recognizes that no single mode of transportation can meet the needs of all people. In this method, a variety of services appropriate to client needs are provided.

EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

Many people in the MAG region lack the ability to provide their own transportation or have difficulty accessing existing public transportation where it is available. The term “transportation disadvantaged” is often used to describe persons who may have an age-related condition, a disability, or income constraints which limits their personal mobility.

In a large dynamic county, the demographics of the transportation disadvantaged can pose challenges. According to the 2000 Census, there were close to 170,000 Maricopa residents who were 75 years of age or older, which is the population least likely to drive. Approximately 176,000 residents 16 years of age or older reported a disability that limited mobility outside the home. Finally, 355,000 residents live below the poverty level, which may hinder their ability to own and maintain a private automobile.

Many federal programs authorize use of funds to provide transportation for transportation-disadvantaged people so they can access government programs. Programs that provide incidental transportation include health and medical service providers, job-training programs, or programs for older adults.

Recently, the General Accountability Office (GAO) documented sixty-two 62 separate federal programs – most administered by the Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor, Education, and Transportation – that fund transportation services for the transportation disadvantaged. This list has recently grown to 63 programs with the passage of SAFETEA-LU.

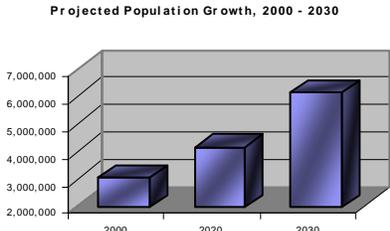
Despite this myriad of funding programs, mobility and access remain problematic for many residents. Far too often, these 63 programs contain very restricted eligibility criteria, limit trip purposes, or limit the type of transportation provided. The federal Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM) notes that this results in “*silo*” transportation systems that often only address the transportation needs of one specific group of riders. No less than eight federal departments and 16 program administrations manage these 63 programs. Often, these programs flow to a state agency that may further define client eligibility and program allowability standards.

The result is a complex infrastructure that inhibits consumer understanding of available resources to assist in personal mobility. Yet, it has been shown that better coordination among these programs can help provide more rides with the same dollars by minimizing service duplication and filling service gaps.

MAG Human Services Transportation Coordination Plan

CHALLENGES AND NEEDS IN THE MAG REGION

The MAG region will be assisted in its coordination efforts by two high profiles initiatives, the federal *United We Ride* initiative and Arizona Rides. Despite this support, there are significant challenges and needs, including:

- ◆ Maricopa County is larger in land area than seven states and rates as the 14th largest county in land area in the United States. This fact clearly presents challenges in any coordination solution that is meant to be “county-wide.”
 - ◆ Maricopa County is projected to increase from 3,072,149 people in 2000 to 5,164,100 people in 2020, an increase of slightly more than 2.0 million people. The estimated population for Maricopa County in 2030 is projected to be 6,140,000 people. This addition of 3,043,400 people over the 30-year period equates to nearly a 98.3 percent increase, or approximately a 3.28 percent growth rate on an annual basis.
- 
- | Year | Population |
|------|------------|
| 2000 | 3,072,149 |
| 2020 | 5,164,100 |
| 2030 | 6,140,000 |
- ◆ Such rapid population growth results not just in the influx of many people, but many *new* people who will need to assimilate and build local support systems. This creates a challenge as people will turn to services more readily when they have not yet established local personal support systems.
 - ◆ Population growth rates will significantly impact the target population for this plan, particularly older adults. MAG projects that this population, numbering around 400,000 in 2000, is expected to grow to almost 1.85 million seniors in the next 50 years.
 - ◆ Traditional public transit services are augmented by a network of dial-a-ride services that, in addition to providing ADA complementary paratransit services, may also provide service to other individuals in the target population (e.g., the elderly). Virtually all, however, are limited in geographic scope; only one of these programs is county-wide.
 - ◆ The existing network of human service transportation programs can be characterized by FTA’s depiction of “silo” systems – individual agencies operating single transportation programs designed and operated solely for the benefit of clients of a single organization. This lack of familiarity is an impediment to any kind of coordination strategy.
 - ◆ Transportation providers are very committed to serving their populations. This can result in very personalized care and quality service. However, this may also result in the providers being less willing to collaborate and have other agencies serve their clients. A survey indicated providers were very reluctant to consider coordination strategies.
 - ◆ While some written materials have been developed that document existing transportation resources in the County, there is no central location or so-called “one-stop” environment where consumers can easily find information on transit and human service transportation.
 - ◆ Jurisdictional matters and turf issues are a concern.

MAG Human Services Transportation Coordination Plan

- ◆ Any change in routine to present users of paratransit and human service transportation could be disruptive to existing consumers.

While all these issues need to be addressed for any plan to be successful, the following short-term strategies will lay the foundation for coordination to occur.

SHORT-TERM COORDINATION STRATEGIES

According to federal regulations, there is a need to provide short-term strategies specifically for applicants of 5310, 5316 and 5317. While agencies applying for these funds are required to comply with these strategies, intensive work will be done to encourage all agencies providing human services transportation to utilize these concepts.

These strategies represent a starting point and will lay the foundation for increased coordination in the future. The providers, planners, advocates and consumers within the MAG Transportation Coordination Stakeholders Group identified these strategies as having the most potential for this region.

Online Comprehensive Service Directory

Both consumers and agencies need one comprehensive directory that offers information about all available services, whether publicly or privately provided. Such a directory currently does not exist. This resource will help streamline information about services and improve accessibility, which will ultimately empower people as a result.

In order to eliminate potential duplication and to maximize existing resources, this plan proposes to synthesize two current resources. A crosswalk between the two will be built, resulting in a comprehensive directory of both public and private human services transportation programs. This expanded directory will then be made available online to promote greater accessibility.

LIFE, formerly known as Easter Seals, publishes a transportation services directory. This directory lists the agencies, number of vehicles, hours and days of operation, rider eligibility, and fares from the private sector, including both not-for-profit and for-profit agencies. The directory is published in booklet form. It is proposed that LIFE be approached to partner on this expansion of their directory. Preliminary discussions indicate this may be a viable opportunity.

In addition, the Regional Public Transportation Authority (RPTA) publishes a directory of paratransit services. This represents a public sector response to human services transportation needs and lists information similar to the private sector directory.

A matrix will be developed to build an interface between these two resources. It will be based on the three primary segments of the target population (older adults, persons with disabilities, and people with low incomes) and the directory will be expanded to web-based distribution to provide greater consumer access. This web-based directory would be updated as needed by transportation service providers and systematically on an annual basis.

Outcome Measure

A web-based comprehensive directory of both public and private providers will be made available to the general public by FY 2008. This will result in greater knowledge, access and

MAG Human Services Transportation Coordination Plan

coordination of human services transportation as indicated by an online survey and focus groups.

Coordination of Sub-regional and Regional Meetings

One solution that will work uniformly throughout the region does not exist. The needs are too diverse and the geography too large. The strength of this plan is local knowledge informing regional coordination. Local stakeholders know their community best and are ideally suited to develop the coordination strategies that will have the most impact. These local plans can then be assessed for regional relevance and shared accordingly. Coordination can then take place on a regional level to reduce unnecessary duplication, leverage resources and replicate best practices.

Based on existing and emerging collaborations throughout the MAG region, a regional process will be formalized so that service providers will have a forum to discuss issues of common concern, explore opportunities for operational coordination, and discuss successful examples of coordination. Among the potential issues for discussion are:

- ◆ Examine methods to fill service delivery “gaps” (e.g., evening service, weekend service).
- ◆ Explore opportunities for joint procurement of common goods and consumables.
- ◆ Develop common training programs and standards.
- ◆ Define new service delivery options, embracing the “family of services” concept.
- ◆ Identify and advocate potential cost reduction strategies for existing service providers.
- ◆ Improve linkages among travel training resources to facilitate consumer mobility among providers.

Participation will be based on existing and emerging collaborations. For example, the well established coordination consortium in the East Valley includes transit and human service agencies in Chandler, Gilbert, Mesa, Scottsdale, and Tempe. Similarly, the City of Phoenix constitutes a second sub-region. The West Valley Human Services Alliance could serve as the basis for a third sub-region. Communities not currently affiliated with one of these collaborations will be invited to join.

On an annual basis, all sub-regional coordination groups will meet as a region to report on coordination actions, successful strategies, and to identify methods to coordinate and improve inter-regional mobility options.

Outcome Measure

At least three sub-regional groups (East Valley, West Valley and Central) of agencies providing human services transportation will meet at least quarterly to develop local solutions to human services transportation coordination. All groups will report on their activities and plans at a regional meeting in June 2008. This will result in at least three new coordination activities being implemented by FY2008.

MAG Human Services Transportation Coordination Plan

On-Going Assessment and Evaluation

Under this plan, existing human services agencies will report their current coordination activities in the applications for 5310, 5316 and 5317. These will be assessed throughout the year by the agencies coordinating the application processes. Local practices will be analyzed for regional relevance. The most promising practices will be offered for inclusion in the update to this plan next year.

Outcome Measure

All agencies applying for 5310, 5316 and 5317 funds in 2007 will report their current coordination practices as part of the application process. These practices will be monitored and assessed for regional relevance. This will result in at least three of the most promising activities being included in the update of this plan.

POTENTIAL LONG-TERM COORDINATION STRATEGIES

There are several coordination strategies that might be viable in the long-term. The following have been discussed as having potential for this region. These concepts are presented at this time for discussion only for two reasons. First, the region needs to build a good foundation for these strategies to be successful. The short-term strategies will address this need. Second, other factors such as the RPTA paratransit study scheduled to be completed in September 2007 will greatly impact how human services transportation is coordinated in the future. These concepts will be reviewed as part of the update to the plan. At that time, the plan will identify the long-term strategies most appropriate for the region.

- A one-stop, centralized reservation and call center is now a high priority initiative of the federal *United We Ride* campaign.
- Regional service zones would allow for the sub-regions to adopt the strategies most appropriate for their area while achieving greater coordination regionally.

The following ideas were offered but not researched as fully as the prior two points. These would also be analyzed in more depth as part of the update to the plan.

- Procurement coordination
- Driver pool
- Coordinated hours of operation
- Maintenance pool
- Insurance pool
- Mileage reimbursement
- Taxi vouchers
- Mobility Manager

NEXT STEPS

1. MAG will work cooperatively with the City of Phoenix, as the federally designated recipient for 5316 and 5317 funds, to build grant application evaluation criteria into the process for competitive selection of Section 5310 (MAG), Section 5316 – JARC, and Section 5317 – New Freedom (City of Phoenix) program applications. All successful applications in FY 2007 must be derived from the coordination plan. Criteria should include:

MAG Human Services Transportation Coordination Plan

- ◆ Submission of transportation information to support the on-line matrix of available resources to enhance consumer awareness of services.
 - ◆ Active participation in the sub-regional and regional coordination meetings.
 - ◆ Reporting of current coordination activities to determine local best practices with the most potential for replication.
2. Key community stakeholders will partner to begin implementation of the three short-term coordination strategies.
 3. MAG will update the plan according to federal guidance. FTA has issued preliminary regulatory guidance on coordination planning that suggests that plans must be updated on a frequency consistent with the update cycles for metropolitan transportation plans (*i.e.*, four years in air quality non-attainment and maintenance areas and five years in air quality attainment areas). However, FTA also provides flexibility; plans may be updated consistent with local needs. Milestone events occur in the intermediate stage of this plan; therefore, it is recommended that a local update commence on a one to three-year cycle.

CONCLUSION

The real test of this plan will be its implementation. It can only move from paper to practice with broad community and political support, funding as needed, and the commitment of the transportation service providers to coordinate. Successful coordination strategies will have a significant impact on people and resources as the former become more mobile and the latter are utilized more efficiently.

This plan represents diligent work by many people. Many thanks to the providers, consumers and advocates who contributed to the plan's development. In the future, human services transportation will be more seamless and efficient as a result.

For more information, please contact:

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