Peer Review & Best Practices

Berrien County Transit Service Integration Plan

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NELSON
NYGAARD

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1 INTRODUCTION

Berrien County has made strong efforts for years to provide effective transit for its residents. Low population density throughout the service area means that traditional fixed routes are not an attractive choice, while financial constraints mean that simply servicing the entire county is expensive, much less expanding or improving existing service. Complicating this picture is the relatively high number of transit agencies in operation in Berrien County. Four agencies provide primarily demand response service to Berrien residents: Twin Cities Area Transportation Authority, Berrien Bus, Niles Dial-A-Ride, and Buchanan Dial-A-Ride.

To better understand how to address the transit needs of county residents, a variety of studies in recent years has examined the pitfalls of the existing transit network. These include countywide studies like the *Overview of Transportation Services in Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren County* and *Moving Forward: A Plan for Public Transit in Berrien County*. Further studies have examined the needs of specific local populations like the *Pokagon Band Potawatomi Indians Transit Feasibility Study* and the *Berrien County Coordinated Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan*. These studies highlighted the high (and growing) proportion of transit-dependent users and the difficulty of using transit to travel cross-county or across county lines. Taking a trip spanning multiple agencies, each with its own service area, fare system, and hours cannot only be complicated, but may also create an unreasonable time burden for passengers.

The clear solution both financially and logistically is to consolidate into a single transit agency for the county as a whole. The most obvious benefits include financial savings through the elimination of redundant routes and labor, while simplifying the user experience through a single fare system, map, and schedule. However, moving toward consolidation is a complicated process with many factors, contracts, and intentions. In order to help the Berrien County better understand how to start and carry through with this process, the following document looks at other cities that have tackled the integration of multiple transit providers. While the unique circumstances of Berrien County means that no perfect peer exists, lessons can be pulled from a variety of peer experiences. In addition, broader best practices are outlined to highlight lessons to learn from all types of transit agencies which operate in low-density, mostly rural environments.

2 PEER REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This section presents a review of peer transit agencies to understand how other regions have approached transit consolidation. The review presents the initial problems each region sought to solve with transit consolidation as well as challenges and lessons learned along the way.

The technical advisory committee and the consulting team selected the following agencies for review:

- **Minnesota River Valley Transit**
- **Butler County Regional Transit Authority**
- **Luzerne County Transportation Authority**
- **Green Mountain Transit**

Figure 1   Peer Agencies Reviewed

Agency	Location	Number of Agencies	Transition Complete	Low Population Density?	Absorption into Existing or New Agency?
Minnesota River Valley Transit	Blue Earth County, MN Saint Peter County, MN Le Sueur County, MN	2	Yes	Yes	New Agency
Butler County Regional Transit Authority	Butler County, OH	3	Yes	Yes	Absorption (operating contracts)
Luzerne County Transportation Authority	Luzerne County, PA	3	Yes	Yes	Revised Agency (new structure with old name)
Green Mountain Transit	Chittenden County, VT Washington County, VT Rutland County, VT Franklin County, VT	2	Yes	Yes	New Agency

MINNESOTA RIVER VALLEY TRANSIT[1]

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Figure 2   MRVT bus

About

Le Sueur, Nicollet, and Blue Earth are three sparsely populated, rural counties in Minnesota located southwest of Minneapolis. Before 2017, three transit providers serviced the area:

- **Le Sueur Transit**
  Le Sueur Transit provided dial-a-ride (DAR) and deviated fixed route service within the City of Le Sueur, located in Le Sueur County

- **Saint Peter Transit**
  Saint Peter Transit provided dial-a-ride and deviated fixed route service within the City of Saint Peter, located in Nicollet County, and within the neighboring city of Kasota (in Le Sueur County) as well as between Saint Peter and Kasota (even though there was no formal agreement between Kasota and Saint Peter).

- **VINE**
  VINE is a volunteer-based ride service offering transportation to people over 60 years of

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[1] http://www.dot.state.mn.us/transit/reports/system-studies/pdf/be-sp-ls-report.pdf

age and people with disabilities. It operates in Blue Earth and Nicollet Counties and will transport individuals anywhere within the state. VINE also operates a demand-response service called *People to Jobs* for low-income workers.

Problems

Certain problems across these transit services sparked consideration of some type of collaboration or consolidation. First, Le Sueur, Blue Earth, and Nicollet are three very small counties with a small population, making delivering effective service difficult. Second, the three separate transit systems were very small and had services, operations, fares, and administration organized chaotically throughout the area. Prior to the merge, the counties collaborated on a survey asking local residents about their thoughts on the transit services. Survey respondents stressed the following were weaknesses of the transit agencies:

- **Le Sueur Transit**
  Saturday service was too limited.
- **Saint Peter Transit**
  - Service was needed earlier throughout the week and later on the weekends.
  - The route deviations took too long.
  - Not enough service in the morning.
- **VINE**
  Advanced notice for DAR is a problem for emergencies and *People to Jobs* buses are crowded during rush hours.

The agencies recognized that shortfalls and unmet needs of one provider could potentially be met by the services of the other providers. For example, Le Sueur Transit could provide the later service that Saint Peter Transit needed while VINE could help with emergency trips. These and other complementary service alignments pushed the agencies to collectively look at a more formal consolidation.

Goals

The three counties sought to consolidate the existing transit agencies into a region-wide agency that would engulf the existing agencies. The counties established goals for the consolidation that can be split into three categories: service, riders, and administrative.

- **Service**
  Service goals included connecting the three main urban areas of Le Sueur City (within Le Sueur County), Mankato (spanning all three counties), and Saint Peter City (in Nicollet County) by transit, as well as allowing Le Sueur and Saint Peter Transit riders to travel outside city limits. This would require additional service times and service areas.
- **Riders**
  Goals surrounding riders included ensuring the residents were aware of existing and new services, meeting the demand for wheelchair accessibility, and expanding user groups. The transit agencies were also interested in increasing service for specific populations such as older adults, people with disabilities, adults residing in foster care and assisted living facilities, homeless people, immigrants, and youth.
- **Administrative**
  Lastly, administrative goals were heavily focused on drivers. Many volunteer drivers of

VINE needed reimbursement for empty vehicle miles and wait times. There were inconsistencies between programs, where some volunteers received an hourly rate for wait times, others were paid a stipend, and some volunteers were not reimbursed at all. Solving these problems by standardizing rules between counties and municipalities would also help to eliminate confusion among administrators and drivers, and help to recruit and retain sufficient volunteer drivers. The agencies also sought to increase, or merely retain the same quality of service and cost-effectiveness with the new consolidation of services.

Challenges

Le Sueur, Nicollet, and Blue Earth counties are very sparsely populated, and the majority of the concerns and challenges with the implementation of consolidating agencies to make a region-wide agency were related to this.

- Each agency's services had little to no overlap or duplication, and the service areas were largely separate and not contiguous, so existing formal collaboration/integration was limited, meaning many consolidation efforts would need to start from scratch.

- Many were concerned that expensive Dial-A-Ride services would be the only feasible type of transportation for this type of rural area, requiring a sizable amount of funding. The cities were concerned that the general public would not see rural transit as a priority to support increasing its funding.

- In the past, unofficial collaborative agreements between agencies and organizations resulted in confusion and misunderstandings about responsibilities. Some had concerns that collaboration rather than a complete consolidation would continue these misalignments and result in a lower quality transit system.

- The three counties sought to represent themselves in a joint powers board, leaving no representation of the cities. Le Sueur and Saint Peter had already had city representation on their transit boards, and were not happy with the possibility of losing that power.

Outcome

Effective January 2017, Saint Peter Transit and Le Sueur Transit merged into Minnesota River Valley Transit (MRVT), while VINE remained a separate non-profit senior transportation provider, still operating today with volunteer drivers. MRVT has kept the same Saint Peter and Le Sueur routes, but have expanded hours and added a new route.

There are only 4 full-time staff members and 20 part-time drivers, so consolidating staff was not much of a challenge, according to Sandi Owen, former Transit Director of Le Sueur (now Operations Director of Minnesota River Valley Transit). Before the consolidation, Sandi and her colleague Wayne each ran Le Sueur and Saint Peter Transit operations independently. Sandi was in charge of all administration, budgeting, finance, and operations of Le Sueur, and Wayne for Saint Peter. Thus, when consolidating, Sandi instead took over the combined operations and human resources tasks, while Wayne took over the combined finance, procurement, and federal reporting tasks. In addition to operations staff, a joint powers board was established that includes two council members from each city and city administrators.

Consolidating assets such as offices, buses, and garages was relatively easy, as well, because MRVT has kept the two existing offices located in Saint Peter and Le Sueur. Each office has a three-stall garage that were kept with the existing leases.

The new agency included a variety of service changes, including:

- Expanded Saturday hours
- Next-day DAR rides available up until 3 PM the day before, and same-day DAR rides based on availability
- A new Le Sueur City to Mankato Corridor Route operates on Mondays and Thursdays, as well as the second Saturday of each month. The Corridor route stops in Saint Peter City and costs $6 one-way. The Corridor route stops were designed based on public input from a survey. The survey was distributed on buses, online, and through city newsletters.

Ms. Owen says that consolidation has gone smoothly. While the new service is still in its infancy, some days the Mankato Corridor bus runs empty, while on other days it has up to eight people on it at the same time. Some people have complained that the Mankato Corridor Route is too expensive at $6 one-way, but this money is needed to run the 25-mile (one-way) route. In order to attract new riders and increase awareness of its services, MRVT is working on new advertising methods and brochures to make sure residents are aware of the services they provide.

Lessons Learned

- The consolidation into Minnesota River Valley Transit only included the merge of Le Sueur and Saint Peter counties' transit agencies. These two small agencies were able to consolidate smoothly because they are extremely small with only four full-time staff members. All staff members stayed on, and Le Sueur took on finance and human resources, while Saint Peter took on procurement roles.
- Public input for the new Le Sueur to Mankato route was integral in designating stop locations along the corridor. The survey was available both online and in person. Respondents were asked to list businesses for which they would like to see transit service, which days, and how many times per week they would like to get there.
- It makes sense to create a board for representation of all the cities/counties that are included in the transportation agency to ensure that everyone is not only on the same page, but to mitigate political issues and distributions of service throughout the area.

BUTLER COUNTY REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY

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Figure 3   BCRTA bus

Source: http://www.butlercountyrta.com/schedules-maps

About

Butler County is located in southwest Ohio, north of Cincinnati along the Indiana border. The county is divided between the urbanized areas of Cincinnati to the south and Middletown to the North. The county is also the location of the urban cluster of Oxford, which is the location of Miami University. Outside of these areas, the county is largely rural.

Prior to consolidation, transit service was distributed across three providers:

- **BCRTA**
  The Butler County Regional Transit Authority (BCRTA) operated county-only service in the southern half of Butler County, prior to the merger. The service was designed to provide connections to the services in Middletown, Miami University in Oxford, and Cincinnati.
- **Miami University**
  Miami University provided localized fixed route service to university students and staff. The system was not open to the public, but provided key connections to local towns for students and faculty.
- **City of Middletown**
  The City of Middletown connected major destinations within city limits through local routes operating Monday through Saturday.

Problem

BCRTA was the established as the regional transit authority, but only provided service to the southern half of the county, providing only transfer connections to Oxford and Middletown.

Multiple providers within the county created challenges for riders. Additionally, the University of Miami and Middletown recognized there were significant efficiencies to be gained by collaborating with BCRTA. The transit authority provided transit expertise that both Miami and Middletown lacked. The authority was also able to leverage additional federal Section 5307 dollars through local match. Prior to the merger, Middletown was unable to generate enough local money to draw down the available Section 5307 dollars and as a private provider, Miami University was not eligible for Section 5307.

BCRTA, Middletown, and Miami University began consolidation and collaboration discussion in the mid-2000s. At the time, there were fears that local agencies might want local control over their community's services. However, there were growing demands from riders and some elected officials who saw opportunities to cut costs and gain efficiencies.

Goals

The goals of creating a unified system in Butler County were to: 1) create a single system and reduce transfers between agencies. 2) Leverage the transit expertise of BCRTA to improve financial stability, federal reporting, and capital procurements. 3) Bring in additional federal dollars by increasing the available local match.

Challenges

Throughout the process, there were several challenges related to ownership of service and vehicles. Existing collective bargaining agreements with the City of Middletown's maintenance department also presented a challenge. At Miami University, switching the student and faculty-only service to a citywide public service in Oxford proved to create some barriers to the initial integration.

Outcome

- In 2012, Miami University entered into an operating contract with BCRTA for the provision of transit service under the BCRTA logo. BCRTA assumed all assets and began reporting service statistics to the National Transit Database (NTD).
- In 2013, Middletown entered into an operating contract with BCRTA for the provision of transit service under the BCRTA logo. NTD reporting and the existing maintenance union was kept separate from BCRTA. Middletown also maintained ownership of all vehicle assets. Administration functions, including data analysis for NTD, finance, marketing, and procurement are administered by BCRTA.

Lessons Learned

- In both the City of Middletown and Miami University, strong leadership was needed to build consensus. In Middletown, this was the appointment of the transportation manager to the city manager position. At Miami University, this was part of a larger push for sustainability within the university.
- Region 5 of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has been supportive of the transfer of capital assets. BCRTA procures all transit vehicles for Middletown. The vehicles are then leased to BCRTA through a signed memo provide by Middletown and acknowledged by FTA.

- The single biggest limitation to combining NTD reporting between the existing BCRTA service and the service in Middletown is that the two are in different urbanized areas, and each provider was already assigned an NTD identification. This could be consolidated if Middletown would fully dissolve, however, at this time the city prefers to maintain a contract for service.

- Integrating the fare structure between the existing agencies was challenging. BCRTA established the same base fare in Oxford as existing service with the assumption of the Miami University service. Fares in Middletown are controlled by the city and are $0.75 cheaper than the existing services.

- BCRTA had originally planned to assume the existing Middletown maintenance union, however, since the agency did not offer health insurance the merger was not possible. Going forward the decision has been to dissolve the union through attrition and replacement with part-time employees.

- Prior to assuming operation of the Middletown service, the city of Middletown was unable to leverage enough local match to draw down the full amount of available Section 5307 dollars. Under BCRTA the transit authority is able to leverage its larger local match to draw down additional Section 5307 dollars and in turn provide additional service to Middletown.

LUZERNE COUNTY TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY

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Figure 4   LCTA bus

Source: http://www.philadelphiatransitvehicles.info/LCTA.php

About

Luzerne County is a rural county in Pennsylvania located outside of Scranton. Before 2012, three public transportation agencies provided service in the area:

- **Hazelton Public Transit**
  Hazelton Public Transit (HPT) is a public fixed route transit agency.

- **Luzerne-Wyoming Counties Transportation Authority**
  The Luzerne-Wyoming Counties Transportation Authority (LCTA) consisted of public fixed routes for Wilkes-Barre.

- **Luzerne-Wyoming Counties Transportation Department**
  The Luzerne-Wyoming Counties Transportation Department (LWCTD) operated demand-response transportation.

In 2010, the services together operated more than 2.8 million revenue miles, transporting 2 million passenger trips. The departments directly employed over 150 personnel with a total budget of $12.6 million fir 2010.[2]

Problem

Some of the existing costs and services among the three agencies were redundant. The county sought to reduce overall costs through merging maintenance functions and administrative services and increase the efficiency of the overall system.

Goals

When first proposed, the County was interested in merging HPT and LWCTD into a revised LCTA Regional Transportation Authority. The plan called for all existing assets to be transferred to the new LCTA. This would eliminate redundant costs and services and allow the County to identify improved and lower-cost operations and practices while improving existing services. The County further hoped to have increased ridership and, in turn, revenue due to improved services. Additionally, the agency announced that it would avoid laying off staff, offering them comparable positions at the new agency.

Challenges

The first step was the merger of LCTA and LWCTD. The size of the agencies and their respective fleets made the merger a logical first step. This provided an opportunity to evaluate the merger before proceeding with the additional merger of Hazelton. However, as of April 2016, Hazleton announced that it had put its consolidation plans on hold as City officials take more time to analyze the potential impacts on the city.[3] After some deliberation, Hazelton officials concluded that their system benefited from privatization and the merger would negate those benefits. For this reason, merger talks were suspended.

Luzerne County and nearby Lackawanna County were originally studied together in terms of consolidation between the two counties. Full consolidation of five transit agencies (two counties and three cities) was thought to be able to produce the greatest benefits. However, local officials felt that the time was not right and requested a re-examination of opportunities at the county level in the summer of 2011. Thus, the study consisted of Luzerne County consolidation and Lackawanna County consolidation on two separate levels, and Luzerne County went forth and developed their own consolidation. In January 2017, the two counties announced that they were considering merging yet again, with an estimated $3 million savings per county. Luzerne County Councilman Rick Williams explained that they hope to become a model for other modes of transportation such as freight and passenger lines, which can only merge if there is an important regional approach to transportation.

Outcome

In January 2012, LCTA absorbed LWCTD consolidating all of their assets,[4] doubling the size of the previous LCTA. This introduced a shared ride human services department to LCTA, providing

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[2] http://www.lctabus.com/images/Transitconsolidation.pdf

[3] http://www.carcarebook.com/hazleton-transit-wants-to-hit-brakes-on-consolidation-with-lcta/

[4] http://citizensvoice.com/news/transportation-agencies-consolidate-1.1255451

public transportation to people who cannot use fixed-route stops such as the elderly and people with disabilities. This service was introduced without any increase in fares for demand-response riders.

The previous Executive Director Stanley Strelish estimated in 2012 that the yearly maintenance savings would be $250,000. The county's consolidation plan estimated a net reduction in operating costs of over $900k by fiscal year 2017.

Lessons Learned

- In the formation of LCTA, the largest efficiencies gained were from eliminating the outsourced maintenance cost of LWCTD and performing all of the maintenance in house, under LCTA. Additional cost savings were found through sharing information technology services and marketing services, but no staff positions were eliminated in the merger.

- LCTA and LWCTD merged rolling stock, information technology, and cash assets. The county facilitated the merger by signing over all LWCTD owned assets to LCTA at the time of the merger. The only asset not transferred to LCTA was the administrative building, which the county now leases to LWCTD for one dollar per year.

- LWCTD vehicles were not funded by FTA and as a result, cannot charge maintenance to FTA grants. LCTA maintains detailed work orders to ensure maintenance hours billed to each vehicle is accurately tracked. As LWCTD vehicles reach their useful life they are replaced with FTA funded vehicles, allowing the use of FTA dollars to support maintenance cost.

- As a fully locally-funded service, LWCTD did not report to the NTD prior to the merger. Since the merger, LCTA has incorporated all services into a single NTD report.

GREEN MOUNTAIN TRANSIT

Figure 5   GMT bus

About

Burlington is the largest city in Vermont, and located in Chittenden County, in the northwestern portion of the state. Along with Chittenden County, the central Vermont counties of Washington, Lamoille, Orange, Franklin, and Grand Isle make up the service area for Green Mountain Transit (GMT). Large sections of the service area are heavily rural with urban centers in Burlington, Montpelier, Barre, Middlebury, Milton, and St. Albans. Prior to 2016, two providers operated service in the area.

- **CCTA**

  Chittenden County Transportation Authority (CCTA) provided service to Chittenden County, including Burlington. The service included both local fixed route and commuter service.

- **GMTA**

  The Green Mountain Transit Agency (GMTA) provided service to the rural counties neighboring Chittenden County, including Washington, Lamoille, Orange, Franklin, and Grand Isle Counties. The service included fixed route, shuttle service, demand response, and commuter service.

Problem

Transit services in Central and Northern Vermont have been fragmented and difficult to sustain individually due to challenges related to the rural nature of the service area and available funding for transit. Additionally, the demand for travel between transit providers and intercity connections created challenges that were difficult to address under separate agencies.

Goals

The original goal of merging transit systems in Central and Northern Vermont was to focus on financial sustainability. Additionally most providers in the service area did not have the administrative staff or procedures in place to manage their federal/state grants properly. Through VTrans, the state of Vermont sought to find a means to continue to provide public transportation services in a more efficient and effective manner.

Challenges

There were several challenges through the merger process. During the formation of GMTA, many of the local providers being integrated feared losing local control. For this reason, separate financial accounts and a separate board of directors were created. This led to further difficulties with the tracking of funds and leadership direction. Fare integration and local funding support also continue to be a challenge.

Outcome

Starting in 2002, CCTA assumed the bankrupt transit service of the Montpelier/Barre area. This bankrupt service became a CCTA provided service branded as GMTA. In 2005, GMTA was transitioned to a separate entity as a 501(c)(3) non-profit with its own board. However, CCTA continued to operate GMTA's services through a management contract. Over the next several years, additional small transit systems were merged with CCTA and branded as part of the more rural GMTA service. In 2011, it was decided that CCTA would once again take direct control of all GMTA service. This would create a central board, and eventually, in 2016, created a single branded system, Green Mountain Transit (GMT).

Lessons Learned

- The merger of the two systems led to administrative savings of $200,000, through the elimination of duplicate positions and efficiency improvement.
- Since the merger, local funding has continued from most areas, however some local communities have lowered or discontinued support.
- Merging governing boards proved challenging. It was important to ensure that local communities had a say, while keeping the total number of board members as low as possible.
- In the creation of GMT, CCTA and GMTA were dissolved and a new NTD entity was created and registered with the FTA.
- Capital assets were signed over to GMT. This included vehicle titles, building leases, and property deeds. In all cases, FTA and the State of Vermont were made aware of the change and the proposed future use of the asset.

3 BEST PRACTICES

While Berrien County is considering a countywide consolidation of multiple agencies, many general transit best practices can be considered to improve transit even if these examples are not directly related to consolidation. The following highlights transit best practices for both regional consolidation specifically and transit systems generally.

AGENCY CONSOLIDATION

Consolidating multiple transit agencies into one is a complex process to ultimately simplify transit operations and use. The following outlines best practices specifically geared toward agency consolidation.

Garage

Many of the benefits and complications of consolidation come from issues related to the garage, or the storage, maintenance, and use of the vehicles. Garage costs offer one of the economies of scale from consolidation, providing cost advantages through certain fixed costs being shared by more users (e.g. all vehicles in the county sharing a single storage facility instead of multiple storage facilities). Cost centers benefiting from consolidation include fueling, maintenance, and storage.

Location

When consolidating agencies, garage location is critical. It should be carefully considered based on where it can operate for the least amount of money. Various characteristics can impact this decision:

- *Demand*
  The garage should ideally be located where demand starts earliest to minimize unnecessary driving time (i.e. fuel costs, labor costs, time, etc.) to transit starting points. In other words, if the transit vehicle has to travel far to get to the first transit stop, that represents budget spent for no service.

- *High-Cost Infrastructure*
  The decision of where to locate the garage should consider expensive infrastructure that is already present at a garage location. Three examples of high-cost garage infrastructure are a bus wash, a lift, and a fuel pump. The location of any one of these should be carefully considered in the placement of the new transit agency's garage.

- *Existing Sharing*
  Existing agencies in Berrien in some cases already share a garage location. If a substantial number of vehicles/agencies share a location, it may be more efficient to expand that garage location to incorporate all agencies, rather than choosing a different garage location. Garage consolidation should occur wherever it can save money.

- *Multi-Purpose Garages*
  If agencies involved in the consolidation are using a multi-purpose garage (e.g. the garage stores police vehicles *and* transit vehicles), there may be complications when removing transit vehicles.

While the decision of where to locate the garage is unique to each consolidation, ideally all of the above points would be considered. Ultimately, the agency should seek to cut costs and improve the efficiency of service.

Figure 6   Bus Lift – Sunset Empire Transportation District
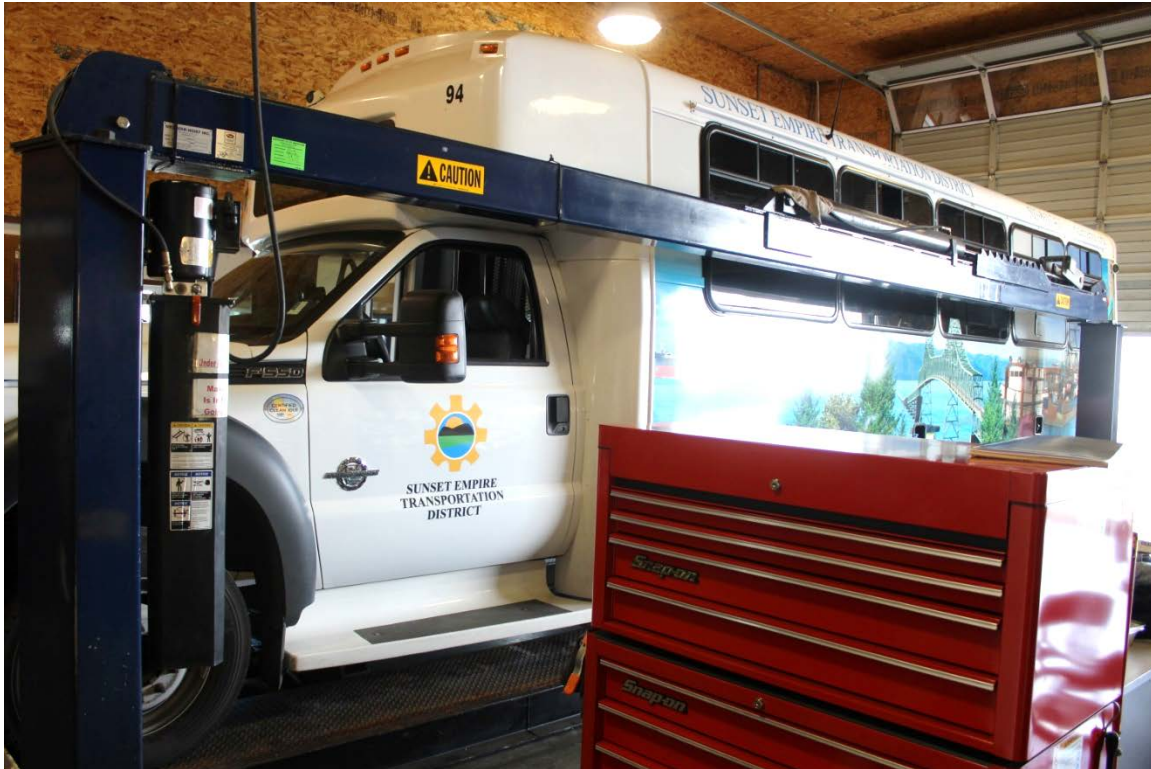
Vehicles

Vehicles also represent a cost center that can benefit from consolidation. Over time, the newly consolidated agency should work toward a consistent vehicle type (vs. the various types used by the original, separate agencies). A single vehicle type will help ensure that the agency's parts inventory and skills inventory is the same, resulting in lower costs. For example, if an agency has two different vehicle makes, that might require two different maintenance workers to fix the same problem.

Labor

Perhaps the most fraught aspect of transit consolidation is the consolidation of labor into a single agency. While representing potentially very significant cost savings, labor consolidation involves the elimination of duplicate positions while untying contractual knots that can vary wildly between circumstances. Many contractual obligations can be sorted out with a thorough legal review of contracts and policies. Outside of union contracts, however, there may be formal or informal seniority hierarchies imparting benefits that should be accounted for when merging staff from various agencies (e.g. if drivers get Sundays off after working there for 5 years, they will not want to lose that benefit when being absorbed into a new agency). Knowing these informal

policies is many times as or even more useful for negotiating labor transitions than understanding formal policies.

In addition to standard criteria such as who has more years of experience and more transit-based experience, it is, in general, best to prioritize management personnel from the local organization that is only or first and foremost a transit agency. This, in contrast to, for example, choosing the head of an organization that schedules local transit but also manages snow plowing and maintenance. If all agencies are run by contracting organizations, it is a best practice to ensure a single central authority has the power of administration over all contractors.

Management Structure

OTHER TRANSIT CONSOLIDATION

Outside of those considerations related to complete consolidation, there are other best practices for transit agencies to better consolidate their existing services to support both operators and end-users. The following is a collection of best practices focused on better integrating separate transit systems.

JOINT PROCUREMENT OF SUPPORT, NEEDS, AND SERVICES

Transit agencies are able to receive deals on many operation-related necessities if purchased in large quantities. Joint procurement of support, needs, and services is the cooperation between transit agencies to purchase these necessities and receive the discount, benefiting all parties. Examples include volume deals on insurance, maintenance, fuel, and contracted specialty services (e.g. driver training). Besides the clear benefit of reducing cost, procuring these necessities jointly enables agencies with limited resources to efficiently support their operation; it creates opportunities through federal section 5310 for funding partnerships; and it can provide an additional source of revenue for those agencies that have better financial standing (who may not need the partnership of those agencies with fewer resources).

In terms of challenges, establishing a joint procurement process requires a formal interagency agreement, which can be challenging. In addition, calculating the cost of agency service is often a challenge and establishing a fair, understandable, and reliable system can be difficult.

Examples

- ▪ **DARTS, Dakota County, MN**
  Maintains vehicles for 80 -90 organizations located in the Twin Cities region
- ▪ **Kanawha Valley Regional Transit Authority, WV**
  Has a bulk-purchase program for fuel
- ▪ **Non-Profit Insurance Program, WA**
  Has a joint insurance purchases program for public and private non-profit transportation operators

TRANSIT FUNDING

Cost savings is generally a major motivation for transit consolidation. However, consolidation will not solve all financial problems experienced by a region. Diversifying funding for transit is an important step in ensuring effective transit. A central agency may have better access to funding

than any one of the individual agencies had when separate, providing an added bonus to consolidation cost-savings. In addition, the following outlines various methods for obtaining transit funding generally.

OPERATING ENDOWMENT

Creating a fund to contribute to transit operating costs, in certain contexts, can provide additional financial support for local transit service. Examples of revenues from which a fund can be started include a one-time sale like that of a piece of land or from a continuing income stream like from a lease or naming rights. Berrien County could explore the possibility of creating such an endowment for local transit service.

Example

Tampa Historic Streetcar

Tampa, FL

The Tampa Historic Streetcar in Tampa, FL created an operating endowment using the revenue from a one-time payment of $5 million (paid in agreement to remove the existing transit system) in combination with an agreement to sell the naming rights of the streetcar. Tampa Historic Streetcar, Inc. was created as an entity to oversee the operations of the system.

SPONSORSHIPS, NAMING RIGHTS, ADVERTISING

Creating advertising agreements with local organizations can provide additional revenue and community building/buy-in. Sponsorships, naming rights, and advertising can offer a variety of ways for organizations and businesses to receive exposure. Advertising can be placed inside the bus, on a temporary bus wrap, on the back of the bus, or at stations/stops. In addition, transit providers can sell website real estate to local businesses and organizations for advertising revenue.

Examples

- Quicken Loans, the Michigan-based mortgage company, bought the naming rights to Detroit's M-1 streetcar, changing the name to the Q Line.
- Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC) uses advertising to generate income (estimated at $156,000/year[5]) through the use of its transit vehicles.

JOINT DEVELOPMENT

Joint development could offer another revenue opportunity for the County's transit network. Under a joint development agreement, transit-owned land is developed by a private business or developer in return for agreed-upon transit-oriented features. Joint development is not constrained to vacant land. For example, selling development rights for the area above an established bus maintenance facility offers an opportunity for joint development even if vacant transit-owned land is scarce or nonexistent. The developers receive high accessibility for their development with the opportunity to charge higher rents while the public agency receives cash payments, higher ridership, and tax revenue.

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[5] https://ftp.dot.state.tx.us/pub/txdot-info/ptn/matching-funds-resource-guide.pdf

Example

Morristown Transit Village[6]

Morristown, NJ

New Jersey Transit initiated joint development of a commuter rail station parking lot in Morristown, NJ. Before releasing an RFP, NJ Transit and Morristown collaborated to create a TOD zoning overlay to facilitate denser mixed-use development at the site. The transit agency retained the parking spaces and was able to develop a mixed-use development on top by working with a local developer. NJ Transit and the developer agreed upon a Purchase, Sale, and Development Agreement creating two condominiums, one for transit parking and one for mixed-use parking. NJ Transit kept the transit unit and the developer kept the mixed-use unit. The developer agreed to build the parking structure, which has a total of 722 parking spaces, 422 of which are owned by NJ Transit. The agreement also contained easements to ensure NJ Transit could continue to maintain transportation operations on the site. The developer shares a portion of its commercial rental income with NJ Transit and pays the property taxes.

IMPACT FEES

Impact fees offer an agency or region a way to generate one-time fees to put toward transit operation. New developers are charged impact fees for new developments to pay for the impact/growth generated by the new development.

Example

Transportation Multi-Modal Impact Fees

Tampa, FL

Tampa City Council approved the Multi-Modal Transportation Impact Fee in July 2015 to fund bicycle, pedestrian, and transit modes in addition to funding automobile capacity throughout the local road network. Six districts were drawn across the city to designate zones where the impact fee would take effect. Each zone has a different fee schedule and collects fees for both residential and commercial development.

ASSESSMENT DISTRICTS

Transit assessment districts are another way to generate revenue for transit operation. Whereas impact fees are a one-time fee required at the time of development, assessment districts impose a tax or regular fee on local establishments to generate a regular revenue stream. Assessment districts for transit are usually located along high-service corridors where a tax can be justified to defray costs on the transit line clearly benefiting those businesses/organizations.

Example

Sound Transit Tax

King, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties, WA

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[6] https://www.nap.edu/read/14588/chapter/7

Sound Transit in Washington State levies taxes on those living and operating businesses in a designated taxing district to fund transit operation.[7]

BULK SALE OF TRANSIT PASSES

Transit agencies can create agreements with local universities and other large organizations to provide free transit service to students, faculty, and staff in exchange for funding. Sometimes this involves consolidating a university transit system into the local system and sometimes universities retain theirs as a separate system.

Example

Butler County Regional Transit Authority

Western Ohio

Butler County Regional Transit Authority provides transit service to Miami University in the Oxford, OH area. The 10-year agreement has Miami University paying $1.6 million annually to BCRTA in return for service. Miami University previously provided its own transit service. These routes were consolidated under BCRTA, as noted above. Miami University students, faculty, and staff ride transit free.

Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority

Washtenaw County, MI

University of Michigan students, faculty, and staff are able to ride Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority (AAATA) buses free with their University ID cards. This AAATA access is in addition to the University's campus bus service providing service across the multiple U of M campuses (which stayed separate rather than consolidating). The original agreement was valued at $1.8 million per year and was provided primarily through federal funds earned by University transit operations.

PROVIDING CONTRACTED SERVICE

Transit agencies can also contract with local employers to alleviate the need for employer-provided transit service. Employers may be willing to contribute to operating costs in return for employer-relevant routes and stops. The public transit agency then receives a new funding source and increased ridership.

Example

Brazos Transit District

Central TX

Brazos Transit District in central TX partners with Tyson Food to transport commuters heading to Tyson for work. In addition to funding provided by Tyson, Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) funding is also contributing to the cost of the additional employment-oriented service.

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[7] https://www.soundtransit.org/About-Sound-Transit/regional-transit-taxes

Example

Quaboag Connector, Central MA

The Quaboag Connector is a curb-to-curb shuttle serving the Quaboag Valley region of central Massachusetts, focusing on employment-, education-, and social services-related trips for local residents. The Connector was made possible by a MassDOT grant of $40,500, which required a local match. Baystate Wing Hospital Corporation provided $30,000 toward the match. The Town of Ware pays for registration and maintenance of the Connector vans, while the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission and the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission provide technical assistance.[8] The Quaboag Connector represents a shared effort on multiple levels: local, regional, state, and private.

FLEX SERVICES

Flex services can be an innovative and malleable solution to cost-effectively serve populations across rural areas where normal fixed-route services are not appropriate. Flex services are a hybrid of traditional fixed-route services and demand response services. Flex routes follow a fixed route, but can deviate from the route to serve special requests, usually within a defined range (e.g. requests are allowed within 0.25 miles of the fixed portion of the route). Flex transit can vary widely from system to system.

Example

Benzie Bus

Benzie County, MI

The Benzie Bus, operating transit service in Benzie County, operates multiple flex routes from 8 a.m. – 4 p.m. Monday – Friday. The Flex routes travel within and across Benzie County and have regular stops, but can deviate up to ¾ mile from the route to accommodate riders' destinations.

INTEGRATING TRANSIT AND COMPLETE STREETS

"Complete Streets" policies can establish clear policies aimed at improving transit and non-motorized access throughout the county. Complete streets are designed to accommodate all users, including transit riders, pedestrians, and cyclists. Facilitating comfort and safety for people traveling on alternative modes makes them more viable alternatives to driving.

Tactical Urbanism

A best practice noted by Nelson\Nygaard is to implement many complete streets projects as pilot projects using inexpensive materials that can be upgraded later (e.g. paint, planters, and temporary bollards). Known as Tactical Urbanism, this technique allows the community to experience the complete streets projects before they are permanent, many times easing the extensive public hearings and legal challenges associated with making major street design changes. Implementing impermanent complete street projects is also cheaper and quicker than making permanent changes (i.e. pouring concrete), and allows for experimentation and the ability to refine before infrastructure is more permanently put in place.

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[8] https://blog.mass.gov/transportation/massdot-rail-transit/massdot-announces-quaboag-connector-van-service-pilot/

Figure 7   Temporary Pedestrian Crossing - Poughkeepsie, NY

Source: http://www.street-plans.com/market-street-connect-demonstration-project/

Transit-Priority treatments

Including transit-priority treatments within complete street designs, such as bus-only lanes, allows buses to travel more quickly and stay on schedule. Transit priority treatments are relatively inexpensive as compared to other major corridor transit projects, and optimize management of city streets as a way to increase transit speeds while additionally minimizing impacts on other street users.

Examples of transit-priority treatments include:

- **Queue jumps with advanced stop bars**
  A queue jump with advanced stop bar at an intersection allows buses to re-enter traffic and jump ahead of other traffic. They can also help assist buses in crossing lanes ahead of other traffic to reach a left-turn lane without obstructions.

- **Lane striping treatments**
  Striping treatments can draw attention to bus-only lanes and ensure that cars do not enter.

- **Median transit lanes**
  Median transit lanes allow buses to operate in the center of a roadway, which helps avoid delay and potential vehicle turning conflicts that are associated with the curb lane.

Example

The Silver Line

Grand Rapids, MI

The Silver Line in Grand Rapids, Michigan is a bus rapid transit line that transports passengers from the busiest parts of Downtown to 34 designated stations and connections to other routes. The Silver Line operates on Division Avenue and Michigan Street using lanes that are designated for buses and right-turning vehicles only during peak hours, 7 a.m. – 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. – 6 p.m. Monday through Friday.

LINE AND SYSTEM-LEVEL BRANDING

Consistent branding and design can go a long way to make transit evident and identifiable across a distributed system. Strong colors and iconography are identifiable from long distances and using distinct colors and shapes allows them to be easily associated with the service provider. When beginning to consolidate multiple transit systems, different vehicles, stops, signage, and online information may look very dissimilar and present different visuals from one another, making it not obvious that the services are part of the same system. Implementing design interventions early on, to standardize (even if only partially) the branding of the services can communicate that the services are part of the same system and can be treated as such by the user. Elements like a shared logo, colors, and even font can send the message that even though the transit elements themselves look very different (e.g. different shuttle/bus types), they are part of the same system. In addition to providing communication about which elements (vehicles, stations, signs) are part of the same transit system, noticeable design and logos can provide subtle advertising for the new service, encouraging those who see the new design elements to seek out more information.

Communicating a new transit service involves a large number of individual products and changes. The checklist below can provide a starting point for service providers to think through the various aspects that need to be updated and/or created to implement a new transit service.

- Physical Elements
  - Route map
  - Stop signage
  - Stop schedules, or source for schedule (app link)
  - Printed maps for shelters
  - Print advertisements (billboards, posters, flyers advertising the new service)
- Online Elements
  - Creation or modification of local transit information websites
  - Email blasts and social media posts announcing the new service
  - Online map/ schedule and real-time schedule app
  - Create social media presence to provide service updates
- Outreach To-Dos
  - Define branding elements (Logo, Name, Colors, Font)

- o Partnerships with local organizations to advertise the new service's availability (e.g. inclusion on local university transportation resource websites/maps, small commercials/announcements on local radio and television news)
- o Outreach presentations
- o Distribute maps and schedules to local partners

ACCESS TO TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

Pedestrian Access

The first and last mile of every transit trip requires pedestrian access. Increasing pedestrian safety, especially in areas that connect to transit, is a best practice that ensures transit riders can get to their destinations. Less accessible facilities, such as incomplete sidewalk paths or stops located along high-speed roads can often deter transit riders even if the service itself is stellar. As the transit-dependent population of Berrien County continues to increase, with many low-income, aging, and disabled riders, focusing on improving pedestrian facilities is important.

The pedestrian environment is the foundation of transit access, and a safe environment will attract new riders, increase ridership among existing riders, and generally improve the travel experience. Many pedestrian improvements can help improve street safety, while also conveying the message that a street is a place that is designed for people in addition to cars.

- **Continuous sidewalks**
  Many times the sidewalks connecting to transit stops are discontinuous, creating not only annoyances but also real obstacles for those with physical limitations.

- **Sufficient lighting**
  Dark stops and transit pathways make using transit feel potentially dangerous. Adding lighting is a simple way to make transit more inviting for evening users.

- **High visibility crossings**
  Colored, textured, or raised paving at crosswalks help to make crossings more visible to oncoming drivers increasing awareness and safety, especially for those who may need extra time to cross the street.

- **Road Diets**
  Road diets and curb extensions can shorten crossing distances for pedestrians and reduce speeds for local traffic.

- **Pedestrian-only crossing phases**
  Pedestrian-only crossing phases allow pedestrians to cross the intersection in any direction while all vehicles at the intersection are stopped at a red light (sometimes known as a Barnes Dance signal).

- **Leading pedestrian interval**
  A leading pedestrian interval gives pedestrians a few seconds to cross the intersection before car traffic is given a green light (whereas normally the signals happen at the same time). The small time advantage gives pedestrians a head-start to claim the right-of-way ahead of turning traffic.

- **No right turns**
  Prohibiting right turns on red light further prevents vehicles from crossing while pedestrians have a walk signal.

- **HAWK signals**
  High-intensity activate crosswalk (HAWK) signals provide a protected crossing with high visibility lights for pedestrians through the push of the cross button by the sidewalk. The light signifies to drivers to slow down, prepare to stop, stop, and proceed with caution if clear.

Figure 8   HAWK Signal in Phoenix, Arizona

Example

Safe Routes to Transit

New York, NY

The New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT) developed three programs that aimed to more successfully integrate the transit network and the pedestrian network. Pedestrian access improvements were focused in the following areas: bus stops under the elevated subway structures ("Under the El"), subways and sidewalks, and bus stops and sidewalks. Basic improvements such as continuous sidewalks, waiting areas, and bus stop shelters were installed to attract more riders and make the experience more comfortable.

Figure 9   Bus Stop at Mosholu Parkway and Paul Avenue in the Bronx, NY

Before   After

Source: NYCDOT

Bicycle Access

Improving bicycle access to transit supports existing ridership and attracts new transit riders by providing additional connectivity. Enhancing bicycle access to transit can be a cost-effective way to help encourage the use of both modes. Designed in coordination with pedestrian improvements, upgraded bicycle access can result in higher uses of transit. Bicycle infrastructure should be safe and comfortable for people with a broad range of skills. Bicyclists need sufficient space and visibility for safe riding, balanced effectively with other street users.

Example of bicycle improvements for transit includes bicycle boulevards, bicycle lanes, bicycle racks on vehicles, and bicycle amenities at transit stops.

- **Bicycle boulevard**

  A bicycle boulevard is a low-traffic street that has been optimized for use by cyclists. Traffic calming elements and signage reduce traffic volumes and speeds in order to foster a safe cycling environment. Boulevards may make use of sharrows or shared-lane markings.

- **Bicycle lanes**
  Bicycle lanes are another strategy that provides a dedicated space for cyclists, making sure drivers are aware of cyclist presence. Coloring bike lanes and/or protecting them is another way to ensure cyclist safety and keep out vehicular traffic.

- **Bike parking**
  Installing bicycle racks on transit vehicles allows cyclists to bike to a transit connection and bring their bike with them to their destination. External bicycle racks are most frequently located in front of the bus. Furthermore, including bicycle amenities at transit stops such as bike parking and end-of-trip facilities increases cyclists' use of the transit. Bike parking that is secure, convenient, and weather-protected will yield more bicyclists who feel comfortable leaving their bike.

- **Other facilities**
  End-of-trip facilities may include locker rooms, showers, and secure parking. Cyclists are

more inclined to ride when there are end-of-trip facilities for drying off, storing clothing, and changing, especially in heat or wet weather.

Figure 10   Bicycle Integration in Oakland, California

Universal Access

"Universal design" of streets and transit seeks to ensure that people of all abilities, ages, and demographics can access the transportation network. This can be done by leveling grades and reducing cross slopes, as well as removing sidewalk obstacles including litter, utility poles, and trashcans. This also includes regular monitoring and maintenance of cracks, warps, and potholes. Transit stops should be accessible and have no barriers nor obstructions so that all people can access the network safely and seamlessly. These changes not only help seniors and those with disabilities but help everyone have a seamless experience reaching and using transit.

Wayfinding additionally helps pedestrians, transit users, and tourists find their way to key destinations including transit stops. Ensuring the visibility and consistent placement of signage makes wayfinding systems more easily navigable. Furthermore, curb extensions and road diets decrease the length pedestrians need to walk to cross the street, ensuring that there is adequate time for people of all ages and abilities to cross safely. Special attention must additionally be given to textured crosswalks to ensure that they do not hinder wheelchair movement.

ONE-CALL/ONE-CLICK LINKAGE SERVICES

One-call/One-click linkage services are hubs, often websites, that provide information on available community transportation options. Users are able to gather information regarding different modal options, see service maps for multiple providers, and in general, have a single

location in which to get information about the various modes within the community. This allows residents and visitors to have a broader sense of the different modes available for completing trips. Ideally, a linkage service will also allow the user to plan a trip using individual services (or even better in conjunction with one another) and then actually book a trip.

One-Call/One-Click linkage services simplify access to information about local services. They also offer an opportunity for local organizations to promote new services and programs. However, they do present certain challenges. For example, each service that is included must have up-to-date schedule and service information, sometimes requiring connections to individual scheduling software. In addition, if booking a trip is possible through the site, processes must be established to incorporate those new trip requests into existing agency protocols.

Example:

FindMyRidePA

Central Pennsylvania

FindMyRidePA is a trip-planning website serving rural counties in central Pennsylvania. Visitors to the website input their origin and destination after which the website outlines options for them to complete the trip. Services include both public transit systems and private operators like Uber (see screenshot below).

Figure 11   FindMyRidePA One-Click Linkage Service
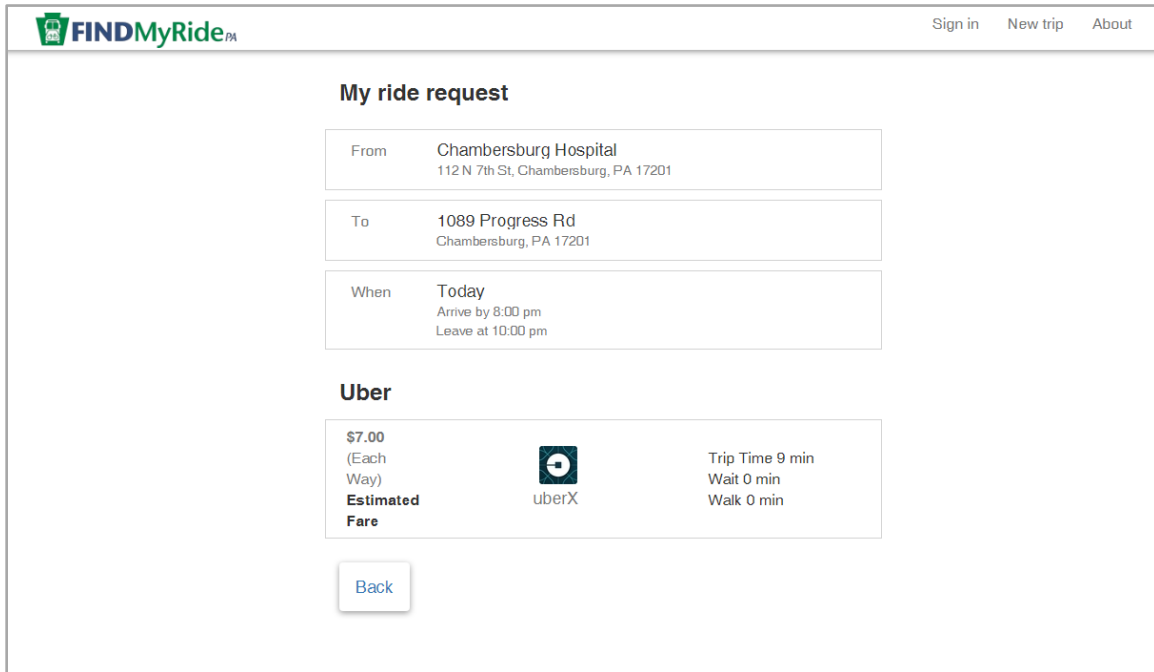
Other Examples

- ACCESS Allegany One-Stop Call Center, Allegany County, NY
- Transportation Link-Line Repository, Schuyler County, NY
- Athens Mobility Management, Athens, OH

TAXI/TNC PARTNERSHIPS

Many transit agencies nationwide have begun to use private taxi companies and Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) like Uber and Lyft to supplement existing service. Agencies put together agreements with the private providers and subsidize the cost of these services to users. Users receive real-time trips to where they need to go at a discount price (compared to using the private services unsubsidized) while the agency is able to offer users transportation to more areas without actually providing service themselves. In addition to being able to provide more tailored service to users, agencies also can reduce paratransit demand/cost by moving some trips to these private services, especially those that may be unproductive/high cost (e.g. long, out of the way trips; low-demand times; peak-overflow times; etc.).

Since their inception, TNCs have provided transportation to members of the general public without specific partnerships with other organizations. However, both Lyft and Uber have increased their efforts—both through marketing and business development—to demonstrate their mutually beneficial relationship with public transit. Several formal partnerships have formed between TNCs, municipalities, public transit agencies, or private employers:

- General public and/or paratransit customer subsidies
- Replacement for low-performing fixed-routes
- Augmentation of public transit to address first/last mile access (both with or without public subsidies)
- Private partnerships with employers or other business groups (e.g. Transportation Management Associations) for first/last mile
- Subsidy programs for targeted populations, such as low-income or medical patients

Examples

- Houston METROlift Taxi Subsidy
- Chicago Taxi Access Program
- MBTA Pilot Subsidy Program
- Freedom in Motion, Gainesville, FL
- Senior-focused TNCs:
    - Go Go Grandparent
    - Liberty

Example

TD Late Shift[9]

Pinellas County, FL

Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA) began a partnership in August 2016, called "TD Late Shift," to provide unemployed or low-income residents up to 23 free Uber rides per month.

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[9] http://www.psta.net/press/07-2016/index.php

The program is intended to improve mobility options for late-shift workers (often working in the service or healthcare sectors) who cannot access other PSTA service that typically ends at 10 p.m. Rides must be between homes or workplaces between 9 p.m. and 6 a.m.

The TD Late Shift program was funded through a $300,000 state grant from the Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged.

PSTA estimates that at least 6,000 current riders are eligible for TD Late Shift. Weekly ridership is about 750. Riders without smartphones or unbanked riders are provided with a call-in number to hail rides from United Taxi, a conventional taxi company that does not require smartphones and accepts cash payment. In addition, one free ride per month during daytime hours is also included, as a means of accommodating job interviews, emergencies, or other infrequent changes to workers' schedules. PSTA has observed that TD Late Shift-eligible riders use the taxi option more commonly than users of Direct Connect, another partnership program with TNCs.

Figure 12   Pinellas County/Uber TD Late Shift

ERIDE BOARDS

Like traditional ride boards, eRide boards offer a place for people to request and offer rides. Generally, a webpage on an organization's website, eRide boards can be as simple as a hosted spreadsheet. Ride offers and requests can be regular (e.g. "Every Monday – Friday") or specific (e.g. "This Monday morning at 8 a.m.").

Examples

Community Volunteer Transportation Company eRide Board

Monadnock Region, NH

An eRide board hosted on the Community Volunteer Transportation Company's website serves the Monadnock region in southwestern New Hampshire. Individuals can post requests for rides and offers for rides. Other visitors then click on a posting that matches their needs/availability and are linked to contact information (only accessible after registering).

Figure 13   Monadnock Region (NH) Community Volunteer Transportation Company eRide Board

AGENCY-TAILORED TRANSIT

Agency-tailored transit is a practice to use public transit planning to support the origins and destinations of populations generally served by local agencies. One example is altering an existing bus route to serve a senior center, which was previously only accessible using the center's shuttles. The idea is that traditional public transit, by slightly altering service to provide access to specific locations can rely less on costly agency-operated or contracted paratransit service. However, there are challenges with implementing this type of tailored service. For one, the existing routes must already be nearby agency-serviced origins/destinations. In addition, even changing an existing route slightly could impact the efficiency of the route. Even so, the cost savings of the transit provider through slight changes could represent significant cost savings due to the high cost of agency-operated/contracted paratransit service.

Examples

Community Buses

Broward County, FL

Broward County in Florida has implemented Community Buses, which are designed around the origins and destinations of local seniors. In addition to having senior-relevant origins and destinations, community buses use accessible, wheelchair-ready vehicles and have drivers trained to work with elderly populations.

Lane Transit District

Lane County, OR

Lane Transit District operates a transit route with a scheduled deviation to serve Goodwill Industries. Lane Transit works with Goodwill to coordinate shift times, and keeps in contact to make sure that any changes in program start and end times are accommodated.

PUBLIC TRANSIT TRAVEL TRAINING

Travel trainings coach people on how to use local transit systems. Travel training can be an effective way to introduce basic transit use in a safe, no-stupid-questions manner, especially for youth and senior populations. Trainings can cover many different topics depending on the individual or group including how to read a schedule, pay a fare, book a trip, request a stop, transfer between services, and use the transit website. Depending on the needs of the area (and available funding), travel trainings could be one-on-one, group-oriented, or even regularly occurring (e.g. "Bus Buddies" programs). Travel trainings can increase ridership by reducing discomfort and making the process clear and understandable. In areas with higher transit-dependent populations, travel training can reduce costs by giving people more confidence with standard public transit thereby reducing their reliance on more expensive paratransit (or other supplementary transportation).

Example

Travel Training Program

Mercer County, NJ

The Greater Mercer Transportation Management Association (GMTMA) and the New Jersey Travel Independence Program run the Mercer County Travel Training Program. Aimed at helping people with disabilities and older adults, the free program helps people learn how to plan trips, read schedules, pay fare, use accessibility features and take safety precautions.[10] The Training program offers small group travel instruction, "Connect-to-Transit" seminars, and one-on-one travel instruction.

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[10] http://www.gmtma.org/pg-seniors-travel-training.php

Figure 14   Travel Training – Mercer County, NJ

Mobility Training Program - Paratransit Inc.

Sacramento, CA

Sacramento's Paratransit Inc. operates a Mobility Training Program that trains people who are learning how to use local transit buses and light rail. Trainings are intended primarily for older adults and people with disabilities through either one-on-one or small group interaction. Funding is provided through a variety of sources including federal community service block grants and the local MPO. These funding sources ensure that trainings remain free for participants.

FLEX VOUCHER PROGRAMS

In rural areas, flex voucher programs allow transit riders to purchase trips from other types of modes or services. In this way, the transit provider still facilitates transportation trips but may not provide the actual transportation. Flex voucher programs are traditionally associated with paying for taxi service when transit service is not available. However, they can pay for any type of transportation providers including reimbursing family members, expanding transportation options for those in areas with limited resources. Eligible individuals receive or buy vouchers that can be used in exchange for private transportation services like taxis or TNCs. The money for these vouchers, however, must be obtained somewhere, leading flex voucher programs to require subsidy money and labor to manage the program.

Example

Mobility Voucher Program

Cobb County, GA

CobbLinc provides the Mobility Voucher Program, which gives eligible participants the option to purchase a transportation voucher book ($10 for a $100 voucher book). Participants use vouchers as the payment for their trips and the transportation provider sends the vouchers to CobbLinc for reimbursement. Limitations for the Cobb County program include the need for participants to be paratransit eligible living outside the paratransit service area, the need for participants to schedule their trips ahead of time, and the need to use approved CobbLinc transportation providers.