

MAHONING AND TRUMBULL COUNTIES COORDINATED PUBLIC TRANSIT-HUMAN SERVICES TRANSPORTATION PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Delta Development Group, Inc., was retained by Western Reserve Transit Authority (WRTA) and Trumbull County to develop a new Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan (Coordinated Plan) for Mahoning and Trumbull counties. Previously, Mahoning County's Coordinated Plan was a joint plan with Mercer County, Pennsylvania and Trumbull County's was a stand-alone plan.

The Coordinated Plan is a requirement of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) under the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, signed into law as a reauthorization of surface transportation programs through Fiscal Year 2020. A one-year extension of the FAST Act through September 30, 2021, was enacted as part of the Continuing Appropriations Act, 2021 and Other Extensions Act.

The Coordinated Plan is an important component to state and federal transportation planning because it assesses the communities' transportation needs and gaps and prioritizes transportation project implementations. The Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) Section 5310 Program (Enhanced Mobility for Individuals and Individuals with Disabilities) provides funds "to improve mobility for seniors and individuals with disabilities by removing barriers to transportation service and expanding transportation mobility options." Projects selected for Section 5310 funds are required to be included in a locally developed Coordinated Plan.

Components of Mahoning and Trumbull Counties' Coordinated Plan include:

- Demographic Overview
- Summary of Current Public and Private Transportation Services
- Identification of Duplicate Services
- Summary of Community Transportation and Mobility Resources
- Identification and Assessment of Transportation Needs and Gaps for Underserved Populations
- Prioritized Strategies to Address Needs, Gaps and to Achieve Efficiencies in Service Delivery
- Strategies' Implementation Plan

The primary focus of this Coordinated Plan was to identify transportation needs and gaps experienced by seniors, persons with disabilities and low-income populations in Mahoning and Trumbull counties and determine ways to overcome those mobility barriers. The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) encourages coordinated plans to go beyond the requirements of Section 5310 funding and as such, this Coordinated Plan includes an assessment of mobility needs and resultant strategies to meet needs for the targeted populations as well as the general public. The needs and gaps were assessed separately by County to ensure the strategies would meet the needs of the individual Counties. The Coordinated Plan provides strategies to improve transportation services to meet the needs as well as maximize the efficient use of resources.

Development of the Coordinated Plan began in the second half of 2020 and consisted of assessing demographic and business data, reviewing previous coordinated and other relevant plans, developing contact lists, researching transportation providers and services, and analyzing demographics.

OVERVIEW OF TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

Transportation services are vital to residents of Mahoning and Trumbull Counties because it provides access to jobs, health care, education, human services, groceries, and other life sustaining destinations.

Mahoning County has a fully developed public transportation system providing fixed route and shared ride transportation services primarily in the County. WRTA is the public transit provider. WRTA historically has had at least one fixed route providing service to the City of Warren, Ohio which is located in Trumbull County. In March 2020, as a demonstration project, WRTA began providing fixed route and shared ride services in Trumbull County. Both Counties have private providers that perform human services transportation services.

STAKEHOLDER AND PUBLIC INPUT

This Coordinated Plan was locally developed and guided by a 35-member steering committee. In addition to providing guidance, the steering committee offered advice; assisted with outreach; disseminated surveys and contact information; reviewed survey results; assessed transit needs and gaps; developed and prioritized strategies; and created an implementation plan.

The steering committee included individuals with disabilities, seniors, low income and other underserved populations (minority), general public and agencies that represent underserved populations. Other committee members consisted of representatives from human service agencies, transportation (public and private) providers, Regional Chamber of Commerce, Hispanic Organization, Veterans Organization, as well as governmental agencies. The following lists the representatives' organizations:

- Boardman Township
- Comfort Care a Van
- Country Neighbor Program, Inc.
- Direction Home of Eastern Ohio
- Easter Seals
- Eastgate Regional Council of Governments
- Garwin
- Healthy Community Partnership
- Help Network of Northeast Ohio
- Howland Twp. TC
- Job and Family Services
- Mahoning County Public Health
- OCCHA, Inc. (Hispanic Cultural Organization)
- Rescue Mission of Mahoning Valley
- Senior Levy Board
- Trumbull County
- Trumbull County Board of Developmental Disabilities
- Trumbull County Combined Health District
- Trumbull County Metro
- Trumbull County Senior Levy
- Trumbull County Veterans Office
- Trumbull County Workforce Development
- Trumbull Neighborhood Partnership
- United Way
- Western Reserve Independent Living Center
- Western Reserve Transit Authority
- Youngstown Metropolitan Housing Authority
- Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation
- Youngstown-Warren Regional Chamber

Meetings and outreach methods used in developing the Coordinated Plan were limited to virtual meetings due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and associated restrictions on public gatherings. A series of steering committee meetings were conducted including the first which was held February 10, 2021. That first meeting consisted of project overview, steering committee member roles, identification of transportation providers, outreach plan, and strategies from previous coordinated plans. Subsequent steering committee meetings focused on outreach initiatives; surveys; plan goals; identification of transportation needs and gaps; development and prioritization of strategies to address needs and gaps; implementation costs of strategies; and implementation plan.

Three focus group meetings were conducted to learn about transportation needs and gaps. A fourth focus group meeting was held to review strategies and priorities for eliminating those transportation barriers. Focus group attendees included stakeholders and members of the public. Each focus group meeting had between 24 and 35 participants.

Three types of surveys were developed and distributed to gain a comprehensive understanding of transit assets available throughout the counties and solicit input about gaps in transportation and needs expressed by residents and agencies' constituents.

- 1) **ORGANIZATIONAL/AGENCY SURVEY** – Survey purpose was to determine unmet needs of consumers; identify transportation programs, providers, and services; and identify non-traditional transportation services. A total of 99 surveys were returned from 66 unique organizations. Nearly 75 percent (74.8) of the respondents indicated that their clients had unmet transportation needs.
- 2) **TRANSPORTATION PROVIDER SURVEY** – Intention of this survey was to obtain detailed information about transportation operations of public and private providers. Thirty surveys were completed.
- 3) **PUBLIC SURVEY** – Survey purpose was to identify transportation needs, gaps, and challenges. This survey was available in English and Spanish and available in a short and long version. The short version, available online and hard copy, was developed to accommodate individuals with disabilities if they preferred. The public survey was distributed by the steering committee, sent to over 1,800 organizations and businesses, advertised on stakeholders' website and social media, advertised on transportation provider vehicles, as well as a press release issued to local newspapers. A raffle of gift cards was used to encourage people to complete the survey. Overall, there were 436 completed surveys.

In addition to focus groups and surveys, one-on-one interviews and direct email correspondence with stakeholders were conducted to get additional and specific insight.

PLAN PRIORITIES

Resultant priorities that emerged from research and community outreach were analyzed and finalized and presented in priority order below.

- 1) **FUNDING** – Steering committee members emphasized that funding is the number one need because, without funding, priority transportation projects to improve mobility throughout the counties cannot be undertaken.
- 2) **SAFE ACCESS TO TRANSPORTATION SERVICES** – Implementation of sidewalks, shelters, lighting, curb cuts, crosswalks, and signals was deemed a critical action item to eliminate barriers and create safe ways for all people to access transportation options.

3) ENHANCED TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

- a. Mahoning and Trumbull Counties
 - i. More service or increased service on weekends
 - ii. Close gaps in service for people who work non-traditional shifts
 - iii. Shared ride service that is door-to-door, curb-to-curb and through the door
 - iv. Transition to carbon-neutral fleets
 - v. Newer vehicles especially wheelchair accessible vehicles
 - vi. Transportation services that are contracted, leased or secured by some other arrangement
 - b. Mahoning County
 - i. Add services on Sundays (fixed route and shared-ride)
 - ii. Extend service later into the evening hours
 - iii. Increase fixed route services
 - c. Trumbull County
 - i. Make WRTA's fixed route and shared-ride demonstration services permanent
 - ii. Add more fixed route service
 - iii. Need more wheelchair accessible vehicles
 - iv. Increase shared-ride service
- 4) REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION SERVICES** – Affordable transportation services are needed between counties as well as out-of-county.
- 5) MULTIPLE SERVICE DELIVERY MODES** – Efficiencies and conveniences offered by various modes such as fixed route and demand response services are needed in both counties.
- 6) CENTRALIZED AND CONSISTENT COMMUNICATION** – One central clearinghouse that keeps, publishes, disseminates and communicates all transportation information and options throughout both counties.
- 7) EDUCATION** – Programs that communicate awareness and information about public transportation to consumers, operators, community members and elected officials.
- 8) COLLABORATION** – Coordinate efforts that maximize transportation options available to the community and provide consistent services such as training, information, trip-sharing, education, technology, procurement, and dispatching.
- 9) PROCESS** – Implement policies and performance metrics to ensure the communities' transportation needs are being measured and met.

IMPLEMENTABLE STRATEGIES

From the priorities, the steering committee developed 10 approaches intended to address transportation needs and gaps; however, after further deliberation, the steering committee consolidated those approaches into four overarching implementable strategies.

STRATEGY #1: IMPROVE SAFE ACCESS TO TRANSPORTATION ROUTE SERVICES AND KEY DESTINATIONS.

Safe access includes sidewalks, lighting, signals, crosswalk, bus pull-out areas, automated digital cross signals, ADA curb cuts, shelters, and signage.

STRATEGY #2: EMPLOY A REGIONAL MOBILITY MANAGER.

The regional mobility manager would assume the following responsibilities: provide clear and consistent transportation information; maintain inventory and coordinate transportation services (public and private); develop comprehensive funding strategies; provide training, education and support programs; obtain political support for transportation projects and programs; establish collaborative efforts among providers; political liaison; maintain Coordinated Plan and manage implementation of strategies; oversee comprehensive complaint and resolution process; policy and procedure manual to ensure standardize services; establish an advisory committee; and develop and implement comprehensive marketing strategies. The committee realizes that it will take time for this position to undertake all of the responsibilities and he/she may need assistance. The committee believes that the advisory committee is a critical element and at least two members need to be residents/riders to represent Mahoning and Trumbull Counties and make decisions to improve/address gaps in transit service.

STRATEGY #3: IDENTIFY AND IMPLEMENT TRANSPORTATION SERVICE ENHANCEMENTS.

Transportation enhancements includes increasing fixed route and shared ride services; public and private services; out-of-county and regional services; and vehicle replacements.

STRATEGY #4: IMPLEMENT A "ONE-CALL-CENTER".

The one-call-center would offer customers a centralized place to contact that manages information on all public and private transportation services. WRTA is exploring the possibility of undertaking a multi-county one-call-center for public transportation services. If WRTA is successful with this initiative, there is the possibility that private transportations could be overlaid on the system.

To ensure that the identified strategies are implemented, Eastgate Regional Council of Government will lead the safe access initiative, the Trumbull County Transit Administrator along with WRTA will lead employing a regional mobility manager and service enhancements and WRTA will lead the one-call-center. The committee agreed that the initiatives will require the support of key stakeholders including human service agencies, private transportation providers, non-profits, and community leaders. Implementation of all of the strategies is expected to be initiated during the first year. The table on the next page summarizes the strategies, costs, lead agency/agencies and time frames.

TABLE 1: STRATEGIES, COST ESTIMATES, LEAD AGENCY/AGENCIES AND TIME FRAME

STRATEGY	COST ESTIMATE	LEAD AGENCY/AGENCIES	TIME FRAME
1. IMPROVE SAFE ACCESS TO FIXED ROUTE SERVICES AND KEY DESTINATIONS	5,500 to several hundred thousand dollars dependent on site and improvements – \$75 to \$110 for sidewalk installation and replacement per linear foot for a 5 foot wide sidewalk. – Shelters \$5,500 to \$12,000 \$8,600 to \$15,100 Shelter, lighting, signage, bench	Eastgate Regional Council of Governments	Year 1 – The focus will be funding. Working with the Mobility Manager, projects will be selected based on prioritized need and available funds.
2. EMPLOY A REGIONAL MOBILITY MANAGER	Annually \$50,000 to \$60,000 + benefits, office space with internet service (\$1,500 per month).	Trumbull County Transit Administrator and WRTA	Year1 – The focus will be funding and thereafter, initiatives will be based on funding and guidance from the advisory committee.
3. SERVICE ENHANCEMENTS	\$17,000 a year to add one hour of contracted on-demand service each weekday; Robust Trumbull County Public Transit System with fixed route and shared-ride services (\$2.3 to \$6.5 million).	Trumbull County Transit Administrator and WRTA	Year 1 and ongoing.
4. ONE CALL CENTER	Multi-County One Call Center \$1.5 to \$1.75 million over five years to complete.	WRTA	Stage approach beginning Year 1 with the objective to be fully operational in year 5.

POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES

FEDERAL

Federal Transit Administration grants such as:

- 5307 – Urbanized Area Formula Grant
- 5310 Program – Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Individuals with Disabilities
- 5339 Program – Buses and Bus Facilities Program
- Surface Transportation Block Grant Program – 23 USC 133
- Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE)
- American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) – County and Municipal Allocations
- Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality (CMAQ) Program
- Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act
- Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021
- Other specific programmatic grants

STATE OF OHIO

- Elderly & Disabled (E&D) Transit Fare Assistance Program
- Department of Developmental Disabilities

- Department of Medicaid
- Department of Aging
- Department of Veterans Services
- Rehabilitation Services Commission

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