

Toolkit For Rural Community Coordinated Transportation Services

Executive Summary

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Many of us share a vision of improved mobility for all residents of rural communities. We look forward to a day of productive and cost-effective transportation services that enjoy a significant level of public support. However, many rural communities are still faced with meager transportation funding, multiple funding sources and service objectives, limited services, and inadequate public interest and transportation investments. Given this reality, the most intelligent strategy of the moment is to **do the best we can with the resources that we have** while still seeking more resources.

Coordination offers better resource management strategies to improve the performance of diverse individual transportation services, as well as the overall mobility within a community. Overlapping, duplicative, and inefficient services can be combined for more efficient service delivery. As a result, coordinated services may achieve economies of scale not available to smaller providers. Coordinated services may also provide higher quality services. Greater efficiency helps to stretch the limited (and often insufficient) funding and personnel resources of these agencies.

Coordination can lead to **significant reductions in per trip operating costs** for transportation providers. Persons with special transportation needs often benefit from the **greater amount of transportation** and **higher quality services** when transportation providers

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coordinate their operations. Coordinated transportation services often have access to **more funds and more sources of funds**, thus creating organizations that are more stable because they are less dependent on a single funding source. Coordinated services can offer **more visible transportation services for consumers** and a clearer picture of how to access services.

The *Toolkit for Coordinating Transportation Services in Rural Communities* is designed to enhance the abilities of rural communities to apply the benefits of coordination to their localities. The *Toolkit* makes coordination easier by providing information, instructions, and examples of lessons learned—both do’s and don’ts—from actual implementation experiences.

What is Coordination?

Coordinating

transportation services

has been called

“the best

way to **stretch**

scarce

resources and

improve mobility

”
for everyone.

—Ohio Department
of Transportation

Coordination—a strategy for managing resources—is a powerful tool for doing more with the resources you now have. Fundamentally, coordination is about sharing power among organizations that are working together to achieve common goals. Coordination means sharing all the key components of power—responsibility, management, and funding.

Coordination often means **working with people who are not used to working together**. This typically requires **crossing over long-standing barriers and boundaries**: different political jurisdictions, agency responsibilities, professional interests, and modes of transportation all need to be bridged. Issues of differing objectives, interests, jurisdictions, regulations, funding sources, and even vocabularies need to be overcome in order for joint activities to proceed. A key first step is to clearly define and communicate what is meant by coordinated transportation. It’s then necessary to find the combination of resources and stakeholders that uniquely addresses key transportation issues in each community. Coordination’s results—often beneficial—can include the blending of travel purposes, client types, travel modes, funding sources, vehicle types, and the needs of different political jurisdictions.

Coordination of transportation systems is thus **a process** in which two or more organizations interact to jointly accomplish their transportation objectives. A broad perspective is a key element: effective coordination requires a focus on the entire community, or maybe even on multiple communities.

Who Needs to be Involved in Coordinated Transportation Services?

Rural communities may have many public and private agencies and organizations that provide or purchase transportation services. Agencies and their representatives that need to be included in any transportation planning process include the following:

- Public, private, and agency transportation providers;
- Departments of human and social services;
- Departments of health and mental health;
- Area agencies on aging;
- Vocational and/or developmental disabilities departments;
- Departments of employment;
- Departments of education;
- Local business representatives; and
- Private nonprofit organizations, such as the Red Cross, the United Way, and faith-based organizations.

Rural riders and their representatives need to be included in any transportation process.

Goals for Coordinated Transportation Services

Community-specific goals guide transportation decisions; setting specific goals is thus a crucial step in the coordination process. Coordination can support the following kinds of goals:

- Doing more with limited resources; this includes reducing the costs of providing trips and increasing the trips per hour of transportation services.
- Enhancing mobility within the local community and among communities.
- Generating new revenues for transportation services.
- Preserving individual independence.
- Enhancing the quality of life.



How Coordination Works

The **goals** of coordinated transportation systems are to **increase** the numbers of **people served** and the numbers of **rides provided**.

The goals of coordinated transportation systems are to increase the numbers of people served and the numbers of rides provided. Coordination achieves these goals through better resource management.

To achieve greater efficiencies, the community needs to focus on reducing duplication and fragmentation in operating, administering, planning, and funding transportation services. Useful strategies include

- Reducing operating and administrative salaries.
- Reducing capital costs on vehicles and other equipment.
- Reducing other operating costs, such as maintenance and insurance.

To achieve more productive transportation services, the community should focus on improving the accessibility, affordability, and availability of transportation services. Useful strategies include

- Increasing days and hours of service.
- Increasing service areas.
- Increasing the kinds of persons and trip purposes served.
- Increasing the accessibility of vehicles in the fleet for persons with special needs.
- Increasing passenger assistance and customer service training for drivers and dispatchers.
- Increasing public information concerning services.
- Increasing funding to help pay the costs of specific trips.



Public transportation investments have **economic development** benefits, **efficiency** benefits, **mobility** benefits and **economic productivity** benefits.

—American Public Transportation Association

Coordination's Benefits

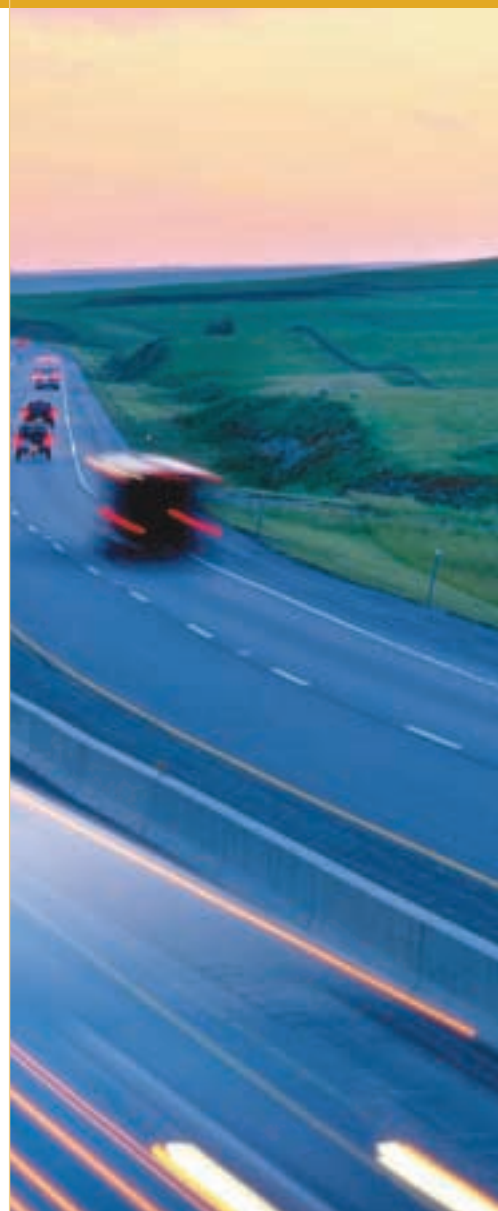
The specific benefits that are achieved in a given community depend strongly on local conditions, including the resources and activities of the transportation providers and other key stakeholders, as well as local political considerations. Nevertheless, within the vast majority of rural communities, the greatest benefits of coordination are

- Increased transportation funding,
- Increased trip cost efficiencies for programs and providers,
- Expanded travel, and
- Service quality improvements.

Rural public transportation services have demonstrated benefit/cost ratios of greater than three to one, meaning that **personal transportation services are a good investment for rural communities**. The most coordinated and comprehensive rural transportation systems generate substantial benefits for riders, the local economy, and the entire community. Additional benefits are the wages paid to transit employees, the costs of goods and services the transit system purchases locally, and the effects of wages and system purchases in the local economy.

Each rural community can make its own choices about how to apply coordination's benefits. If there are cost savings on a unit cost basis—that is, cost per trip, per mile, or per hour—the savings from these greater efficiencies can be used to serve more passengers. This is the approach used by the vast majority of communities simply because **more transportation service is needed in most communities**.

Thus, transportation service can be expanded to previously unserved portions of the community, to previously unserved population groups, or to previously unserved hours and days. Other communities have elected to offer the same level of transportation services at a lower total expense.



How to Implement Coordinated Transportation

Implementation Steps



The coordination process has a number of well-defined steps, stages, or building blocks. These are similar to those described in transportation planning handbooks, in marketing, and in operations research.

Because coordination is not really a linear process, some of these steps may be occurring at the same time, and others may have to be done again and again over the years.

- 1 Initiate the Improvement Process** – Form a working group, move forward
- 2 Analyze Existing Conditions** – Collect data, understand issues, needs, and circumstances; define local conditions
- 3 Establish Focus and Direction** – Agree on the problem, develop consensus, set direction
- 4 Design Alternative Courses of Action** – Develop alternative coordination strategies and service designs
- 5 Assess Alternative Options** – Select the best coordinated service option to implement
- 6 Implement the Preferred Choice** – Formulate action plans and implement coordinated transportation services
- 7 Evaluate and Improve the System(s)** – Review and evaluate progress; reconfigure services and strategies as necessary.

How to Succeed at Coordination

The first step is to establish measurable objectives—what are you trying to accomplish? Attempts to coordinate transportation services are more likely to succeed when specific objectives are identified. Major strategies include tapping currently unused sources of funding, decreasing the direct costs of providing transportation, increasing transportation system productivity, and expanding transportation services.

- Begin right away but be patient in the process. Invest sufficient time to decide the best way to set up and implement the system to provide quality service.
- Work with individuals and agencies that are committed to coordinated transportation and that have access to funding.
- Be realistic. Don't make promises you can't keep.
- Build trust among coalition members; search for consensus.
- Know the pros and cons of coordination.
- Do not stop when you encounter roadblocks; look for alternatives.

Throughout all the steps of the implementation process, keep asking, **“Are we accomplishing what we set out to accomplish?”**

State Level Success Strategies

- Offer significant financial, technical, and political support for planning and operations.
- Establish guiding principles, quality control standards, and oversight and monitoring practices early in the process.
- Create a comprehensive process and perspective, including all major human service and transportation programs.
- Streamline administrative procedures.
- Innovate with demonstration programs and grass-roots initiatives.

Local Level Success Strategies

- Establish an advisory committee with persons and agencies who share a common goal of meeting local transportation needs for their constituencies.

- Get a good mix of local elected officials together; ensure you have staffers who can respond to their needs.
- Offer services of real value; listen intently to customers and providers.
- Work closely with local decisionmakers to respond to changing markets and new opportunities.
- Cultivate partnerships. Establish strong relationships with partner agencies. Establish clear roles and responsibilities among all partners.
- Ensure that participating agencies are fully vested in the program.
- Secure funding to cover initial needs and to expand services once the initial funds are spent.
- Be flexible; maintain an ability to adapt to changing needs and conditions.
- Approach coordinated transportation like a business. Watch the bottom line!

Coordination's Challenges

Understand and explain the pros and cons of coordination—don't let potential partners develop unrealistic expectations. Coordination efforts need both a champion and a sparkplug for success. Coordination may initially be more expensive, more difficult, and more time-consuming than most interested stakeholders expect. Coordination may increase cost-effectiveness and reduce costs per trip, but that doesn't necessarily mean that any agency will be getting money returned to them. Constant effort will be needed to ensure that all partners continue to participate and coordinate over the years. While there are no true prohibitions or barriers to coordination, there certainly are some obstacles and challenges. Be prepared to address real issues concerning funding, personal relationships, political support and power sharing, and a lack of knowledge or misperceptions about coordination.

Summary

Coordination offers a great way to get more results from limited resources, but successful coordination takes real work.

Coordination offers a great way to get more results from limited resources. Coordinating transportation services can lower the costs of individual trips and provide more trips to more persons. Coordinated transportation services offer significant benefits for travelers, transportation providers, funding agencies, and all levels of government. Coordination offers substantial benefits in communities where transportation efficiency can be improved.

Successful coordination takes real work. Part of that work involves dealing with persons who are unfamiliar with the missions, objectives, terminology, and regulations of agencies other than their own. Serious coordination efforts constitute a new way of doing business, outside of the traditional programmatic boundaries of service delivery. These “bumps in the road” are worth handling and resolving because of the substantial benefits that coordination can provide.

Copies of the full report of this project, *“Toolkit for Rural Community Coordinated Transportation Services,” TCRP Report 101*, are available from the Transportation Research Board. On-line requests may be placed at www.tcrponline.org or at www.trb.org.

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