

# ***Expanding Mobility Options for Persons with Disabilities***

A Practitioner's Guide

to Community-Based Transportation Planning



Funded by



Community  
**Transportation**  
ASSOCIATION

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## **Acknowledgments**

*We would like to take this opportunity to thank the thirteen planning grant communities for their fine work, the attention they gave to their final reports, as well as their willingness to continue to share their experiences with us and with other communities. We wish them the best as they strive to ensure accessible, affordable and reliable transportation for persons with disabilities and others in their communities.*



# Introduction

## The Role of Community-Based Transportation Planning

In communities nationwide, improving transportation options to meet the mobility needs of individuals and constituencies is a universal priority. Crucial to these common efforts is the need to effectively plan for new and improved transportation services. Certain fundamental concepts and activities are inherent when going about planning for community-based transportation. Methods and strategies to build community coalitions, gather information on resources and needs, and develop action plans are those fundamental elements in transportation planning.

Mindful of the important role that planning plays in improving mobility, the Community Transportation Association of America and Easter Seals Project ACTION partnered in 2003 to provide selected communities with grants for the purpose of demonstrating effective mechanisms for establishing community-based plans to expand transportation services for persons with disabilities. These planning grants funded projects to:

1. Evaluate the current state of transportation for people with disabilities,
2. Recognize barriers to mobility that people with disabilities encounter in their communities,
3. Identify future transportation needs of individuals with disabilities within those communities, and
4. Establish strategies to meet those transportation needs.

Each planning grant undertook comprehensive planning activities that resulted in proposed strategies to address the transportation service gaps and barriers that were impeding persons with disabilities' access to employment and full participation in community life. In doing so, these grant projects reinforce the evident — that sound planning for community transportation embodies a common framework, one rooted in a strong community collaboration, accurate and useful data collection, and a focused plan for action.

## How This Guide Can Help You

This publication is a tool for all communities to use in their own efforts to undertake planning activities. Provided here is a model approach for community-based transportation planning which incorporates methods and activities communities can employ in keeping with the framework discussed above. These processes and strategies are founded upon the practical experience of the 13 grantee communities. In their assessments of their projects – describing what worked, what didn't and the lessons they learned, models and concepts came forth from which other communities undertaking similar planning activities might benefit.

We intend this guide to be a resource for transportation professionals, staff of human service and workforce development agencies, those serving the disability community, community activists, and all others seeking to conduct a community-based process to adequately plan for new, more and improved transportation options in their community.

**“...sound planning for community transportation embodies a common framework, one rooted in a strong community collaboration, accurate and useful data collection, and a focused plan for action.”**



After this introduction, you will find “The Guide,” which identifies common and important elements inherent in planning community-based transportation options. It is broken down into three basic aspects of the planning process: encouraging and utilizing the involvement of community organizations, constituencies and leaders; devising, conducting and analyzing needs assessments and collecting relevant data; and building and deploying an action plan. Corresponding highlights from these projects are integrated into those broad areas to demonstrate the practical application of these planning approaches.

**Beyond This Book: Ongoing Assistance Opportunities**

Those conducting such planning efforts need not do so alone or in the vacuum of a publication. Both the Community Transportation Association of America and Easter Seals Project ACTION offer resources and technical assistance programs to aid communities as they plan for improved transportation options.

Part of this assistance includes access to the knowledge gained by our 13 planning grant communities. The final reports, analysis and other documentation from these projects are available to any individual or organization seeking to use them as an example for their own projects. Those documents can be found on the Community Transportation Association’s Information Station website at [www.ctaa.org/ntrc/planning](http://www.ctaa.org/ntrc/planning). (Printed copies are available upon request.)

Additionally, more in-depth information and staff resources of both organizations are available to help facilitate progress in planning activities. Easter Seals Project ACTION and the Community Transportation Association can provide communities with connections to professional expertise, relevant documents and publications, training programs, and a host of other assistance opportunities.

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# The Community-Based Transportation Planning Communities

Easter Seals Project ACTION and the Community Transportation Association of America received 94 proposals for the Community-Based Transportation Planning Grants in the summer of 2003. That August, the two organizations selected the following 13 communities:

## **Alaska Mobility Coalition**

Anchorage, Alaska

*Coalition:* Alaska Mobility Coalition

*Geographic focus:* One “on the road” community and one “off the road” community

## **Center for Independent Living for Western Wisconsin**

Menomonie, Wisconsin

*Coalition:* Area Consortium on Transportation

*Geographic focus:* Ten counties, including the City of Eau Claire

## **Community Association for Rural Transportation**

City of Harrisonburg, Virginia

*Coalition:* The Disability Coalition

*Geographic focus:* City of Harrisonburg and Rockingham County

## **Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments**

### **Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Planning Organization**

Kelso, Washington

*Coalition:* Lower Columbia Mobility Coalition

*Geographic focus:* Incorporates one MPO region -- the Longview-Kelso urbanized area, the cities of Rainier and Vancouver, as well as other smaller cities and rural areas in Cowlitz and Wahkiakum counties

## **Delaware Transit Corporation**

Dover, Delaware

*Coalition:* The Sussex County Transportation Improvement Working Group

*Geographic focus:* Sussex County, the largest of Delaware’s three counties

## **East Central Intergovernmental Association**

City of Dubuque, Iowa

*Coalition:* Dubuque Fringe Area Public Transportation Services Improvement Project

*Geographic focus:* City of Dubuque and rural “fringe areas” of Dubuque County

## **East Texas Center for Independent Living**

Tyler, Texas

*Coalition:* Greater East Texas Transportation Association (GETTA)

*Geographic area:* Situated in Northeast Texas, includes the small-urban areas of Tyler and Longview, as well as rural counties

## **Easter Seals Colorado**

Denver, Colorado

*Coalition:* Community Action for Transportation Solutions

*Geographic focus:* Ten counties in the Denver metropolitan area, including two mountain communities. Note: The Denver metropolitan region is one of the fastest growing urban areas in the country.

## **Elmview Residential Services**

Ellensburg, Washington

*Coalition:* Kittitas County: The Transportation Access Project

*Geographic focus:* A rural setting adjacent to the small-urban areas of Yakima and Wanache and the Seattle metropolitan region

## **Fort Peck Transportation**

Fort Peck, Montana

*Coalition:* Fort Peck Transportation Initiative

*Geographic focus:* Fort Peck Indian Reservation

## **Harford County Department of Community Services**

Bel Air, Maryland

*Coalition:* Harford County Project Steering Committee

*Geographic focus:* A growing suburban community in the Baltimore metropolitan area that includes the City of Bel Air

## **North Country Health Consortium**

Littleton, N.H.

*Coalition:* Committee for Public Transportation in the North Country

*Geographic focus:* Rural multi-county region of northern New Hampshire

## **Texas Citizen Fund**

Lubbock, Texas

*Coalition:* Lubbock-South Plains Community Transportation Planning Collaborative

*Geographic focus:* Lubbock metropolitan area



# The Guide

## I. Setting the Stage: Initiating Community-Based Transportation Planning

### Focusing on Planning

While a variety of funding sources, generally a mix of federal, state and local investment, fuel the implementation, continuation and expansion of community transportation projects and services, support for the initial plans and designs for these efforts is often challenging to come by, to say the least.

The Community Transportation Association and Project ACTION funded these Community-Based Planning Grantees to deliver active rather than passive models to address planning challenges. By intentionally focusing on planning considerations, these communities were able to develop and deploy advisory groups and committees, assess resources and mobility needs, collect data, and devise action plans to prepare for improved transportation options in their communities.

For instance, with its grant the North Country Health Consortium in N.H., was able to pay for the work of one staff person, who was able to complete a thorough needs assessment that demonstrated the great need for expanded transportation in the community. As a result of this planning, support grew from community and public officials and new sources of investment were secured to launch a demand-response bus service. In fact, North Country received a health foundation grant from the Endowment for Health (a spin-off from Blue Cross/Blue Shield) to help initiate this new service.

Clearly, this New Hampshire community reaped the benefits of up-front planning efforts.

In the early stages of its planning grant, Coordinated Association for Rural Transportation in Harrisonburg, Va., created so much community support and momentum for its transportation plans that it was able to secure the needed funds to implement new services after only a few months of comprehensive planning work.

**“While dedicated sources of funding for local planning projects are not always readily available, any action toward effective planning may better ensure that communities will meet the mobility needs of persons with disabilities and others.”**

These experiences, similarly encountered by many of the other grant recipients, demonstrate that the investment of time, energy and resources to conduct a focused planning campaign pays dividends. Successes may include new public and private partnerships, new funding opportunities to pay for capital investments and operating costs and, perhaps most importantly, committed support by the community-at-large for improved transportation options. While dedicated

sources of funding for local planning projects are not always readily available, any action toward effective planning may better ensure that communities will meet the mobility needs of persons with disabilities and others. Such planning efforts may yield a course of action to improve mobility options that could ultimately result in new or improved delivery of services.

**“[Harford County, Maryland,] points to those elements common to successful groups, such as committed leadership, a group identity and appropriate community representation, as the foundation for the Steering Committee’s vitality and success.”**

## **II. Building Community Support**

A crucial component of any successful planning effort is achieving the involvement of constituencies, organizations and other interest groups that would have a stake in, benefit from or concern with any potential new services. Each of the grantees undertook measures, both similar and varied, to ensure the community had a role in their planning projects.

### **Committees Are Most Common**

All of the grantees formed a committee, consortium or group to further the development of needs assessment tools and an action plan. Many of these collectives often formed the heart of the effort and achieved meaningful action. The more successful committees and groups found a clear-cut purpose and identity, had committed leadership, and were comprised of representatives from relevant organizations and, most importantly, riders and potential riders.

Harford County, Maryland, considered its Steering Committee one of the grant’s major accomplishments. As opposed to other ad-hoc groups that had formed in the past to focus on changing and upgrading transportation systems, this group has remained intact and produced a plan which it is committed to implementing. The County, in its final report, points to those elements common to successful groups, such as committed leadership, a group identity and appropriate community representation, as the foundation for the Steering Committee’s vitality and success.

The Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments (CWCOG) in southern Washington State, found the emphasis on the purpose and identity of their consortium to be the factor which led to its ultimate progress. With the CWCOG as the lead agency, a collective was formed which included government agencies, service organizations and community groups, and quickly focused on the lack of transportation service options and means to address them. Accompanying this understanding of their common objective was a collective framework, which occurred through the group’s new title of the Lower Columbia Mobility Coalition. With the moniker, the group developed a stated mission, a website, letterhead, and other tools to make its presence more concrete.

Vital to the formulation of committees for a planning project is determining if one already exists, particularly one whose mission may be modified or expanded to include enhanced planning efforts. The Center for Independent Living for Western Wisconsin (CILWW) utilized its existing Area Consortium for Transportation when it undertook the needs assessment and action plan activities as part of the grant. This existing consortium aided in the selection of the independent consulting firm that conducted the needs assessment, received briefings on progress of the surveys, and then translated those findings into an action plan. The involvement of an existing group allowed CILWW’s project to have a head start on its efforts, while also maintaining and enhancing the group itself for future projects.

The Community Action for Transportation Solutions project undertaken by Easter Seals Colorado and the Colorado Mobility Coalition focused committee members in the key activities of the effort. These participants actually conducted the needs assessment processes, dividing into sub-groups to analyze existing services and destinations that could be better served. This hands-on involvement allowed the relevant organizations and constituencies to take ownership in the project and make an easier transition into building the action plan based on needs assessments.

### **Beyond the Table: Innovative Involvement Strategies**

While a committee is a useful convening tool, the grantees employed other methods to effectively involve community players, as well.

As much as attracting crucial participation in the planning process is essential, so is outward presentation of the activities, goals and strategies of the effort to the larger community. The Community Association for Rural Transportation (CART) found those interactions to be a boon to their project. CART staff participated in workshops on barriers to employment for persons with disabilities, state-level transportation policy

hearings, as well as volunteer, senior, and health care forums. They also related their progress through local and regional media outlets. The cumulative effect of this active engagement was a positive relationship with the community-at-large and a community perception that CART's work was beneficial for the community. Reaching out to the larger community set the stage for effective collaborations and support for the deployment of the action plan.

### Communication is Key

While a committee or a forum can constitute vital communications vehicles to engage key community players, they aren't the only avenues through which to receive the participation and support of all of the key constituencies. Several grantees witnessed that simply informing and keeping some parties who were not on the committee "in the loop" can go a long way.

For instance, in undertaking the Fort Peck Transportation Initiative, the Fort Peck tribe found that the process alone of notifying and updating community groups and agencies of meetings and developments of the project paid dividends. They termed this mechanism the "Community Grapevine Approach," where inclusion and involvement of community members were achieved even without their direct and active participation. When priorities and plans began to emerge out of the planning grant, the communication from the "Community Grapevine" yielded willing collaborators at best, and reduced obstructive behavior at least.

An important, but often unconsidered aspect of effective coalition activities are very practical limitations of participation by key players. Day-to-day concerns such as the inability to attend meetings due to workload or competing priorities, or even the weather, as evidenced in locations like Fort Peck, Montana, and Delta Junction, Alaska, can prevent participation where it otherwise might be possible. Thus, those involved with producing successful efforts must be reminded that just because an organization or person may not be able to attend meetings or respond to outreach does not mean their input or voice should be neglected. This can often be easily overcome by good, proactive communication by project leaders to keep important actors and the larger community abreast of the latest developments.

### Who Should Be Involved?

Regardless of the means by which a community coalition is developed, a certain cross-section of relevant organizations, agencies, constituent groups and others is needed for a vibrant partnership. Below is a compilation of the types of partners involved in the efforts of the 13 grantees to expand transportation to better serve persons with disabilities.

*Please note: We present this list not as a checklist, but merely as a guide to your efforts locally.*

Persons with disabilities  
 Riders and potential riders  
 Elected officials at the town, village, city, county and state levels  
 Public transit providers  
 Private transportation businesses  
 City, county, town or local transportation departments  
 Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs)  
 State transportation departments  
 Head Start agencies  
 Medicaid programs  
 State and county social service departments  
 Area Agencies on Aging  
 Senior centers  
 United Cerebral Palsy  
 Local Arc  
 Councils for the blind  
 Councils for the deaf  
 Faith-based organizations  
 Charity and community service organizations  
 Community action agencies  
 Neighborhood councils  
 School districts  
 Public housing directors and departments  
 Private housing developers and organizations  
 Homeowners associations  
 Child care centers  
 Chambers of Commerce  
 Business associations  
 Specific industry coalitions  
 Human services offices  
 Workforce development/investment boards  
 One-Stop Career Centers  
 Vocational Rehabilitation agencies and centers  
 Local Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) office

As a list of potential coalition participants is developed, an agency or individual must take the lead in organizing the partnership, in terms of arranging meetings, communicating with those involved, and helping the group decide and remain focused on its mission.

**“Those involved with producing successful efforts must be reminded that just because an organization or person may not be able to attend meetings or respond to outreach does not mean their input or voice should be neglected. This can often be easily overcome by good, proactive communication by project leaders to keep important actors and the larger community abreast of the latest developments.”**

### **Take Advantage of Opportunities That Arise**

Keeping the proverbial eyes of a planning project open can uncover unexpected supporters during the undertaking. While the grantees actively engaged leaders, organizations and members of general public to join in the project, sometimes cheerleaders emerged from beyond this group. These new faces added fresh insight, enthusiasm, and influence that aided the achievement of the project.

In Lubbock, Texas, for example, the Texas Citizen Fund encountered a Lubbock City Council member who quickly embraced the effort for the expanded transportation options the project committee was developing. The influence and credibility possessed by the leader allowed for the formation of a public transportation task force, including representation from agencies whose participation in the project had initially been limited. The endorsement by the council member paved the way for a transition from conceptual plans to actual commitment that translated into new legislation and policy to support the Texas Citizen Fund committee’s goals and priorities.

Likewise, as the Alaska Mobility Coalition worked on its project in Cardova (on-road community), they found the Cardova Community Medical Center to be an enthusiastic leader in the community and willing to help elevate the public’s attention to the plans to better utilize existing resources to more effectively provide transportation in the area. With the ability to reach a larger and more diverse segment of the community, the coalition seized on this new access with surveys and outreach campaigns to accurately reflect the views of the community. Armed with that new knowledge and feedback, the committee began to devise innovative and responsive plans to address those needs.

Delaware Transit Corporation (DTC) encountered a positive byproduct from the interaction among members on its Sussex County Transit Improvement Working Group. The Office of State Planning and Coordination invited DTC to participate in planning meetings with developers and other state agencies regarding land use strategies. Taking advantage of this opportunity will enable DTC to have a voice at the table to advocate for transit friendly developments.

### III. Taking Stock of Resources and Needs

A systematic look at a community's mobility needs is one of the most important aspects of sound transportation planning. Equally as important is to know exactly what resources are available to meet those needs. If assessments reveal that existing resources cannot adequately meet essential travel needs (e.g., commutes to work; travel to the doctors, food shopping and education), the community then has data to support the investigation into new sources of funding and new avenues to meet those needs.

#### Invigorating Existing Resources

In order to devise plans for meaningful and appropriate transportation services, communities must take an accurate account of the existing community resources. This might include an inventory of funding, vehicles, staff, marketing materials and technology, among other community assets. Leveraging what communities already have can extend available resources to more effectively provide transportation services.

Vital to investigating, and ultimately providing, better transportation options in a community is recognizing and integrating the valuable transportation services and networks that already exist. CART, for instance, decided that building on the established local transportation system should be the core structure for their efforts to better serve persons with disabilities in the Rockingham, Va., area. CART stated in its final report:

“Public transportation brings to communities a system capacity to address the steadily increasing demand for trips by transit-dependent populations. Incremental costs to expand public transportation are significantly less expensive than other transportation options.”

#### Assessing Mobility Needs

Like the involvement of the community through outreach and information sharing, the process of conducting a needs assessment of the target population was a fundamental component of all of the planning grant recipients.

Methods for collecting data on the existing resources that are meeting mobility needs, as well as on the unmet needs, consisted of two major tools: surveys and in-person data collection.

##### 1) Surveys

Nearly all of the grantees conducted surveys as a major aspect of their data collection process. Grantees devised survey instruments and coupled that with a plan to ensure the data from their target population would be statistically significant.

While approaches and strategies for survey-taking varied among the grantee projects the importance of surveys in undertaking a needs assessment cannot be understated.

*(Please note: The Community Transportation Association maintains the survey compilations used by the grantees. They are available upon request.)*

##### 2) Focus Groups and One-On-One Interviews

The use of in-person events to accumulate information was an equally significant tool for many of the projects. These types of activities consisted of focus groups and interviews. The former method generally meant a group of 6 to 10 representatives of the target population who gathered to discuss their mobility needs, offer perceptions of the currently available transportation, and give suggestions to meet the unmet transportation needs existing in the community.

The second in-person method, interviews, marked a one-on-one session between the data collector and a member of the target population, to relate similar information as collected in the focus group sessions. Among the grantees, the most in-depth practice of this technique was by the East Texas Center for Independent Living. The agency hired teams of individuals with disabilities as survey investigators to conduct one-on-one meetings with those most likely to use public transportation. In conducting interviews in this manner, the investigators found that participants were more at ease with sharing information and offered specific and thorough responses that they might not given otherwise.

Deciding which method of data collection to use is dependent on the specific context of the needs assessment, but is also based on factors such as timeframe of study, statistical significance, depth or specificity of response, and ease of deployment. The use of surveys and in-person methods were not mutually exclusive and often built on the same data collection instrument, namely a set of questions or information categories. A desire for consistency and representative significance, as well as budgetary and staffing resources available were some of the deciding factors grantees used when determining how to collect data for the needs assessment.

For a more in-depth account of data collection methods and case studies, please see the joint Community Transportation Association-Easter Seals Project ACTION guide to data collection in transportation planning. Additionally, all of the final reports from the Planning Grantees are available through the Community Transportation Association website ([www.ctaa.org/ntrc/planning](http://www.ctaa.org/ntrc/planning)).

**“A desire for consistency and representative significance, as well as budgetary and staffing resources were some of the deciding factors grantees used when determining how to collect data for the needs assessment.”**

### 3) Other Information Gathering Formats

In addition to the surveys and the interviewing techniques, grantees took advantage of other avenues for gathering information.

Harford County, Md., included a “Mystery Rider” program as part of its analysis of existing transportation services. The program allowed for observation of service assets, limitations and areas needing improvement from a perspective that was inherently uninfluenced by the presence of a survey taker or other “visible” observer. Harford County project staff combined this first-hand insight with data collected through environmental analysis, surveys, focus groups, and interviews to develop its action plan.

Both Easter Seals Colorado and Harford County conducted accessibility studies that gauged the travel environment that persons with disabilities must navigate. This included testing the physical accessibility of bus stops and streets (e.g., the presence of curb cuts, condition of sidewalks, signals, and signage), as well as access to buildings. In the case of Easter Seals Colorado, their main goal in the study was to investigate whether or not the Workforce

Centers were accessible to people with disabilities who were seeking employment. Environmental inventories were not just valuable to gauge general accessibility, but also were indicators of whether travel was actually safe for persons with disabilities and others.

During the course of its grant, the Delaware Transit Corporation (DTC) held two countywide working groups that were open to the public. The information gathered at these community

meetings supplemented DTC’s analysis of paratransit demand in Sussex County that helped determine corridors for needed transit expansion. DTC also held the “Sussex County Transit Forum” at which speakers covered the various aspects and challenges of providing transit to Sussex County in the midst of rapid population growth.

### 4) Collecting Usable Data

Once a framework for the data collection process is developed, several key elements are needed in order to successfully implement that process. First, the collection instrument, either a survey, focus group, or interview, must be deployed to an audience and in a location that will garner sufficient response. In practice, this means delivering the instrument to locations where significant portions of the target populations gather or receive services. Grantees found community centers, service agencies, religious and social institutions, and other such destinations to be the best areas to host data collection efforts. Locations where visits were in short duration or made for other purposes, such as most commercial and retail outlets, were less effective in returning sufficient response numbers.

Secondly, a specific person or group of people must take ownership of the data collection process. This is especially true for surveys, as experienced by several grantees. While an agency or organization may be supportive of the collection effort, perhaps even participating in the community coalition, their involvement in garnering survey respondents at their venue might be minimal. Where surveys were simply left on a desktop counter or in a common room for passive action, the rate of response was meager. In order for a survey process to be successful, an individual or set of persons should be tasked with actively engaging the target constituency in taking the survey. This allows for maximum visibility for the survey campaign and increases the likelihood of participation.

The last element for successful needs assessment worth mentioning is a vigorous data collection by the grantees. This entails frequent communication with any surrogate agencies or organizations assisting in the process, querying on the progress of the effort and providing any assistance they might need. Also included here is the prompt collection of completed surveys and in-person meeting results to prevent any information from becoming overlooked during data analysis.

In the end, when the data collection responses were robust, the grantees had ample information with which to go to the next steps in the planning process: undertaking a gap analysis and developing action plans.



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## Origins and Destinations

One mark of success for communities of all sizes is the capacity to facilitate quality-of-life mobility, regardless of a resident’s age, income level, or physical ability. All of the grantees cast wide nets, not prioritizing one destination over another. Instead, they built into their proposals activities designed to investigate the many destinations that riders and potential riders had for themselves. This open attitude was reflected in the diversity of partners with whom the grantees worked, the range of questions they asked in surveys and, in the end, the types of improvements they suggested for their communities.

### 1) Looking to Partners

In addition to including riders and potential riders on your planning committee, look to have representatives of key origins (e.g., neighborhood leadership, residents, staff from housing authorities) and destinations, such as employment sites, hospitals, senior centers, One-Stop Centers and houses of worship in your planning radar. In addition, have someone from the economic and community development offices join in discussions, as well. Moreover, forecasting future destinations, such as a new hospital, employment corridor or retail space, should also be a part of the planning process now so that residents will be able to reach these sites once they have opened. The goal is to understand where residents need and want to go and then devise transportation strategies to help them get there.

In addition to surveying persons with disabilities, grantee Harford County (Md.), for example, designed a survey targeted to area employers to gauge the demand for employees and to inquire whether they saw a need for evening and weekend bus service to employment sites.

### 2) Mapping the Results

Once information has been accumulated via the data collection process, many communities mapped their results. Mapping allows for the visual presentation of this compiled data, for both existing resources and unmet needs, to aid in drawing

conclusions about gaps in service, geographic locations of key populations, and linear connections between origins and destinations. It also provides an easy-to-understand depiction of current transportation services and potential improvement options to educate governmental leaders, media outlets and the community-at-large. The projects in Colorado, East Texas, Iowa, Maryland and Washington State, all deployed mapping components as part of their grant.

The scope and magnitude of a mapping effort depends on the needs and uses for a given community. Technology is nearly universally deployed in mapping, which allows for an efficient, accurate and professional-quality product. Many communities, particularly planning agencies and offices, already possess mapping technology, and relationships between agencies and organizations in the community coalition often develop around the sharing of these technologies.

**“The goal is to understand where residents need and want to go and then devise transportation strategies to help them get there.”**

*(Please note: More information and samples of mapping can be found on the Community Transportation Association website at [www.ctaa.org/ntrc/planning/](http://www.ctaa.org/ntrc/planning/))*

### Communicating the Findings

Don’t let the results of your needs assessment be the best kept secret. Once you’ve analyzed and drawn conclusions about the data, employ the results as a powerful tool to raise awareness of the needs among the community and its leadership. The results plus a plan of action can be a persuasive duo to effectuate improvements to community mobility.

Grantee Elmview Residential Services and its working group, the Kittitas County Transportation Access Project, for instance, built a community awareness campaign into its grant to inform the public and leadership about the need for improved transportation services for people with disabilities and others. One of the primary educational pieces was the results from the group’s needs assessment survey.

## IV. Moving Forward: Planning for Action and Implementing Plans

### Translating Meetings and Data into Action

With an understanding of the mobility needs of the target population and a thorough inventory of the availability of resources (e.g., marketing materials, vehicles, technology, staff, funding) to meet those needs, the grantees moved to the next phase of the community-based planning process: action plans.

#### 1) Design Models to Test Prospective Services

While ideas and concepts for new and improved services are crucial, testing prototype options can serve as a needed boost to translate planning into action. Two grantees found the deployment of pilot programs beneficial in responding to identified needs.

The Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments realized the benefit and ability to implement a community van service in Wahkiakum County, as the county had been devoid of any public transit services. Based on the decisive action by the community consortium formed under the grant, the group moved forward to identify funding, develop a budget, and procure

a vehicle and the personnel to operate it. In August 2004, a year after receiving the planning grant, the Wahkiakum on the Move Community Van premiered, operating weekday trips throughout the county, and connecting to four existing transit services in the region, including Amtrak trains. The service is supported in the short term as a demonstration project with local funding sources, while the consortium investigates, and hopefully receives, more dedicated financial support. Meanwhile, the project will serve as a model for the area as future services are studied to respond to other needs.

Although instituting a transportation service can spur efforts towards a comprehensive and long-term transportation network, targeted testing of specific projects can yield valuable information and feedback that is essential before implementing the eventual service. After assessing the needs for transportation in the outlying areas of Iowa's Dubuque County, the East Central Intergovernmental Association conducted two pilot programs during their grant activities. The first offered a trip to residents in outlying Dyersville into the Dubuque County to connect with existing transit options. The second focused on increasing the compatibility between ongoing fixed-route and paratransit services, including such improvements as route deviation, more bus stops, and feeder service options. Project staff compiled the results and feedback from both efforts to advise more permanent changes and upgrades.

#### 2) Look for Sustainable Funding

After developing action plans, several grant projects began the transition from the planning phase to actual implementation of services.

The Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments, as described above, has instituted the Wahkiakum on the Move van service as a demonstration program for the near future. The community is now focusing on delivering long-term funding sources to make the service permanent. Possibilities include the Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) program through the Federal Transit Administration, funding through the Washington State Department of Transportation, as well as a dedicated local investment stream. These options will be studied by the Lower Columbia Mobility Coalition, following its efforts in designing and implementing the van service.

Likewise, the North Country Health Consortium is nearing implementation of its Littleton-Lancaster corridor bus service. As the committee progressed with plans for the route, it has investigated and applied for funding to support various aspects of the operation. Funds through the JARC program have been awarded for the service, while the required matching funds were provided through the Endowment for Health. Other investment from various federal, state and local sources have been approved

**“Based on the decisive action by the community consortium formed under the grant, the group moved forward to identify funding, develop a budget, and procure a vehicle and the personnel to operate it.”**

for dispatching software, the bus itself and operations.

Lastly, CART expanded service options during the course of the grant project by working with committee members to take advantage of existing opportunities to immediately improve service. They partnered with Friendship Industries, an agency that provides work-related skills development and support services to persons with disabilities, to open existing client transportation to the general public in the north of Rockingham County. CART contracted with Friendship Industries to serve the general public in addition to their own clients, while Friendship Industries gained financial assistance to operate their service. This cooperation expedited the initiation of additional transportation services, while transcending traditional funding streams.

### 3) Tap into Potential Investment Streams

While the appropriate mix of funding sources is dependent on the needs and plans for each community, communities could look to potential funding streams across all levels of government, as well as to non-governmental sources.

Here is a list of common Federal government sources that do, or have the potential to, support transportation services:

#### **U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT)**

Federal Transit Administration (FTA):  
*Urban Transit Formula Grants (Section 5307)*  
*Major Transit Capital Grants (Section 5309)*  
*Transportation for Elderly and People with Disabilities (Section 5310)*  
*Rural Transit Formula Grants (Section 5311)*  
*Job Access and Reverse Commute program (JARC) (Section 5337)*

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA):  
*Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ)*  
*Surface Transportation Program (STP)*

#### **U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS)**

Administration on Developmental Disabilities (ADD)  
 Community Services Block Grants (CSBG)  
 Head Start  
 Medicaid (Title XIX)  
 Older Americans Act (Title IIIB)  
 Social Services Block Grants (Title XX)  
 Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)  
 Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

#### **U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD)**

Community Development Block Grants  
 HOPE VI

“Targeted testing of specific projects can yield valuable information and feedback that is essential before implementing the eventual service.”

**U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)**

Workforce Investment Act (WIA)

In addition to the Federal resources listed above, here are other potential funding sources:

- State transit assistance
- Local transportation funds
- Farebox revenue
- Advertising and rental revenue
- Foundations and independent organizations
- Contracted service revenue

*Please note:*

- 1) Many of these funding sources might already be at work in your community.
- 2) For more information on funding sources, see *Building Mobility Partnerships for People with Disabilities: Opportunities for Federal Funding and Promising Practices*, a comprehensive resource on federally-funded programs, produced by Easter Seals Project ACTION and the Community Transportation Association. This publication is available online at <http://projectaction.easterseals.com> or by contacting the Community Transportation Association or Easter Seals Project ACTION.

**Outcomes from Action Plans**

**1) Strengthened Coordination**

Even with consensus among community coalitions on basic principles of cooperation and the need to expand transportation services, developing coordinated transportation services remains not quite elusive, but certainly challenging. A variety of inroads toward greater coordination of transportation services were made, not the least of which were successful seed planting efforts for future work.

For the Center for Independent Living for Western Wisconsin, for instance, one of the action items developed called for the creation of a multi-county coordinated transportation system encompassing seven rural counties. Ultimate support was not given to this action recommendation since area transportation providers were concerned that there was not sufficient funding or other resources to implement the coordinated system. In the end, taking existing funding and vehicles away from the county providers to create a central coordinated transportation agency was not seen as achievable in the near term. Despite this decision, the coalition remained committed to a common mission and an overall common vision for the region, and supported a less financially disruptive action item: the development of a voucher system (see below) that the committee agreed would be funded with new sources of dollars.

Likewise, while Fort Peck Transportation strengthened its cross-county connections to have one county service agree to meet another county service at the county line to transport a rider from one county to another, actually having a transportation provider provide service into the neighboring county did not occur.

Lastly, after learning through its needs assessment process that many potential riders and agency partners were not informed about existing transportation services or how to access those services, and that many of the multi-county transportation services were not coordinated, Easter Seals Colorado and its coalition partners decided to pursue the following:

- A Colorado executive order on interagency transportation coordination that would mirror the Executive Order 13330 signed by President Bush in February 2004 (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/02/20040224-9.html>),
- The formation of a coordination process for the Denver region that would follow the model set forth by the Federal Transit Administration and its partner agencies in its Framework For Action (<http://www.unitedweride.gov>), and

**“What all of the communities have on their side is a sound planning process, one that is based in the community, with community input and support.”**

- a Denver Metro Region Coordination Center that would incorporate travel training and mobility training, a trip scheduling service for off-hours and cross-county trips along with multi-modal trips for hard to reach destinations, as well as customer service and information provision network.

## 2) Other Opportunities Developed in the Action Plans

While descriptions of positive results from various grantees were peppered throughout this document, here are a couple of other opportunities for improved transportation arising from the grant projects:

In Center for Independent Living for Western Wisconsin (CIL), a voucher program was chosen as an avenue to better use existing transportation services. The system would use a check-book-style voucher given to a rider that the rider would use to reimburse providers for the transportation they provided to the eligible rider. The vouchers would also be used for volunteer trips by family, neighbors and community members. The CIL

would operate the voucher program and would negotiate per-ride rates with the public and private transportation agencies.

Harford County came to see potential for developing a volunteer transportation program to supplement existing fixed-route and demand-response services. These volunteers would use their own vehicles to transport people for, mostly, medical trips, but also to social destinations and trips to employment. In addition, Harford County listed as an action item the initiation of a deviated fixed-route service for clients of various agencies with additional service expansion of bus service on Saturdays.

Translating action items into real action will depend on a whole host of factors, some that the planning communities will be able to anticipate and control and others that they will not. Regardless, what all of the communities have on their side is a sound planning process, one that is based in the community, with community input and support.

# Conclusion

Successful community-based transportation planning endeavors are built upon the foundations of community collaboration, assessing the resources and needs found in that community, and translating those partnerships and inventories into plans for action. Time and again, these fundamental aspects of transportation planning activities have proven to be essential when improving mobility options, and have been specifically demonstrated by the 13 grant communities highlighted in this guide.

These planning grants conducted by the selected communities can serve as models for other localities seeking to expand options for the transportation disadvantaged. Most of the experiences of the grantees are transferable to other communities since the key elements of transportation planning – local and regional partnerships, needs assessment and data collection, and developing action plans – are not only important, but also replicable in all communities. We hope this guide will be useful to maintain and build upon the momentum toward improving transportation services and options to allow everyone to fully access their communities.

## About the Funding Organizations

### Community Transportation Association of America

The Community Transportation Association is a nonprofit, membership association committed to removing barriers to isolation and improving mobility for all people. The Association is involved in several projects to provide information and technical assistance to communities, transportation providers, and other groups to increase mobility and improve the quality of community transportation.

Through a partnership with the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration and the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Transit Administration (FTA), the Association provides technical assistance designed to help communities overcome one of the most significant barriers preventing low-income people from getting and keeping jobs — transportation. This program, known as Joblinks, includes demonstration projects, technical assistance and conferences.



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### Easter Seals Project ACTION

Easter Seals Project ACTION (Accessible Community Transportation in Our Nation) is a national technical assistance project funded through a cooperative agreement with the FTA. The mission of Easter Seals Project ACTION is to encourage and facilitate cooperation between the disability and transportation communities with the goal of achieving universal access through transportation for persons with disabilities nationwide, including transportation to and from jobs. Easter Seals Project ACTION offers various resources, including a toll-free hotline, publications clearinghouse, and quarterly newsletter, as well as training and technical assistance.



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