Final Report
State Coordinating Council Strategic Planning Session
February 6, 2014

Background

In late 2013, the State Coordinating Council (SCC) decided to reassess the state's strategy for coordinating public transit and human services transportation. While some of the "action steps" in the 2006 statewide coordination plan have been successfully implemented, changing circumstances have prevented as much progress toward a truly coordinated system as the plan called for and the SCC desired.

SCC members recalled that a retreat held in 2011 had been helpful in focusing discussion on a more limited reassessment of the SCC and its role, and decided that a similar session devoted to reconsidering the coordination strategy itself would be useful. A subcommittee met and developed a summary of what the SCC had accomplished, the strengths and weaknesses of the coordination strategy, and what remained to be done.

At the same time, the Regional Coordinating Councils (RCCs) were surveyed on the status of coordination in their regions and on the major obstacles they faced in implementing the statewide strategy. The SCC subcommittee distributed its summary of the status of coordination and a summary of the RCC feedback to members and other stakeholders invited to the February 6 strategic planning session, and prepared an agenda to cover the major issues in coordination. The intent was to decide if the 2006 coordination strategy was still appropriate and achievable, and, if changes were needed, how the SCC should go about revising the strategy. It was felt that an open, honest discussion of the obstacles to coordination was important if progress was to be made.

Strategy Session Agenda

10:00 Welcome and Introductions

10:15 Overview of Retreat

10:30 General discussion
Coordination talking points
Survey of regions: results

11:05 Breakout discussions on coordination questions:
What is coordination?
What coordination practices have worked so far, and why?
What coordination practices have not worked so far, and why not?
How can we move coordination forward in a meaningful way?

12:30 Lunch

1:00 Reports from breakout discussions

1:50 General discussion on coordination questions:
What were the key assumptions in the 2006 statewide plan?
Do we need a new or revised statewide plan or coordination model?
If so, what basic assumptions should be used to develop the revised plan?

2:30 Implementation and next steps

3:00 Adjourn

Participants

Fred Roberge, Easter Seals
Roberta Berner, Grafton County Senior Citizens Council
Phyllis Brooks, Granite State Independent Living
Van Chesnut, Advance Transit
Mary Ann Cooney, NH Department of Health & Human Services
Kerrie Diers, Nashua Regional Planning Commission
Bill Finn, NH Department of Education
Patrick Herlihy, NH Department of Transportation
Rad Nichols, COAST
Beverly Raymond, Tri-County CAP
Jeff Donald, COAST
Shelley Winters, NH Department of Transportation
Matt Waitkins, Nashua Regional Planning Commission
Pat Crocker, Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission
Terri Paige, Belknap-Merrimack CAP
Pam Jolivette, Belknap-Merrimack CAP
Rebecca Harris, Transport NH
Tim White, Southern NH Planning Commission
Ellen Avery, Contoocook Valley Transportation Company
Janet Langdell, Souhegan Valley Transportation Collaborative
Scott Bogle, Rockingham Planning Commission
Tierrah Hussey, Transport Central
Patsy Kendall, Transport Central
Doug Grant, Transport Central
Kit Morgan, Facilitator

Meeting Summary

The first part of the discussion dealt with general coordination issues on the state level and within regions as reflected in the RCC survey results. Among the general issues raised were:

- The differences between rural and urban areas in fostering coordination, including distances, varying number of providers available, and different perceptions of what is meant by coordination. Underserved areas include rural "pockets" in southern New Hampshire.
- The challenge in complying with changing state and federal requirements that accompany transportation funds.
- The challenge in attracting transportation providers and volunteer organizations to participate in coordination.
- The need to combine multiple sources of funds to cover the costs of transportation, and to allocate costs among different funding programs.
- The existence in some areas of more than one "coordinator:" the regional transportation coordinator envisioned in the 2006 plan, and the lead agency established to manage FTA purchase of service funds. This seems inconsistent with coordination.
- Project selection for DOT funds at the regional level is problematic in some regions. The process seems to be one in which the funds are distributed among participating agencies -- "who shows up."
- There is a need for advocacy at the regional level to draw attention to unmet needs.

Three breakout groups then discussed coordination, how it has and has not worked, and how it can be moved forward. The groups listed many forms of coordination, from full brokerage in which multiple funding streams are consolidated and trips are booked through multiple providers to more informal collaboration such as trip referrals, to shared maintenance or purchasing, to an enhanced volunteer driver program. Maximizing and effectively combining resources and avoiding duplicative services is a key goal of coordination.

Among the successes listed during this discussion were:

- Better information is available through directories and websites; awareness has also led to some foundation funding of transportation, and better information for health care providers on transportation needs and constraints.
- Better use of resources through contracting for agency assets.
- Trust building and information sharing in regions.
- Some involvement by private sector providers.
- Information sharing and technical assistance on performance standards and other details.
- The existence of a statewide infrastructure to assess and develop regional services, and a network of stakeholders who advocate for community transportation.

- Growth in volunteer-provided trips through new networks.

The groups listed a number of challenges after their discussion of what aspects of the 2006 strategy have not worked:

- Funding programs from Health and Human Services, Education, and others have not been incorporated into a coordinated system. Heads of some agencies were not fully engaged.
- Startup expenses and administrative costs (at lead agency and provider level) have been a challenge.
- The coordination/brokerage software has not met expectations.
- Many parties are still not at the table: health care providers, some transportation providers, municipalities. Some stakeholders left when they saw there was no reason to continue, since only limited funds were being distributed for limited purposes.
- The proposed Regional Transportation Coordinator (RTC) structure was not implemented due to lack of startup funds or appropriateness in some regions.
- Momentum for coordination and a clarity of the mission was lost over time.
- Managed care for Medicaid was a major step away from coordination and created an added administrative cost.

Finally, the three groups discussed what steps could be taken to move coordination forward given these constraints. These included:

- Seek clarification of the intentions of DHHS for Medicaid and Older Americans Act funds, and try to work with Medicaid managed care brokers.
- Pursue less formal coordination efforts or an intermediate structure for coordination.
- Facilitate information sharing among volunteer driver programs.
- Engage more state agency partners with the SCC, and find a project or resource to demonstrate interagency coordination.
- Seek to partner with legislators, the creators of the SCC.
- Seek funding from local sources such as the $5 registration fee for transportation.
- Develop a new blueprint for coordination.
- Reach out to businesses and educational institutions concerning demand for travel to work or school.
- Offer an inducement to stakeholders to become involved (software, best practices, joint ventures).
- Electronic or remote meetings may be more efficient.
- Establish specific goals and timelines for initiatives.

Following presentation of the findings of the three breakout sessions, the group concluded with a discussion of the status of coordination and the structure that was recommended to implement a statewide coordinated system of community transportation. Several members of the group felt

that the 2006 plan should be reviewed or critiqued in detail in light of changed circumstances. For example, the RTC model should be evaluated with a focus on the administrative expenses it entails. Several participants felt that it is still appropriate for regions, rather than the state, to determine whether funding that becomes available should be used to support administrative expenses or additional service.

These suggestions led to the "next steps" the group felt that the SCC should take to carry the day's discussion forward. These steps included:

- The SCC should seek a commitment from its state agency members to participate in a coordination strategy.
- The SCC should revisit the 2006 statewide plan, review each of its recommendations and action steps, and determine how it should be revised.
- The SCC should reach out to legislative leaders.
- The SCC should discuss staffing to support its efforts, and how the SCC can be of value to state agencies. The SCC should consult with state agencies on programs relevant to community transportation.

Recommendations

1. Review coordination models and approaches to obstacles
   - Survey state DOTs for coordination status and progress
   - Survey state transit associations for successful strategies
   - Review GAO and other reports on coordination

The issues facing the SCC have arisen in many other states trying to implement coordination. The SCC should take advantage of research done at the national and regional levels to identify innovative approaches that may be effective in New Hampshire. Mechanisms exist through AASHTO or APTA to seek information from other states that may be instructive as well.

2. Seek renewed commitment to coordination on the part of state agencies
   - Request SCC role in review of BEAS RFP and funding proposals
   - Request SCC role in review of Medicaid managed care performance as it relates to access
   - Develop a list of other state activities and seek formal SCC role with the appropriate agencies
   - Continue or begin dialogue with state agencies on the importance of coordination as it relates to their programs, asserting the SCC's statutory role and authority

The legislation establishing the SCC envisioned a role that would include review of programs to see how they could improve coordination, within the constraints of federal requirements. Realizing this potential would strengthen ties between the SCC and state agencies involved in community transportation.

3. Review the 2006 statewide coordination plan
   - Evaluate the validity of the plan's assumptions in the absence of most funding programs
   - Focus on action steps to implement plan to review their relevance and feasibility
   - Reconsider RCC-RTC structure
   - Agree on an updated strategy with clear goals and objectives and a timeline for implementation

The SCC needs to decide if the model of coordination, one that sees economies from combining funding sources to meet increasing demand, is practical without multiple state-level funding sources. A focused review of the 2006 plan will lead to an updated strategy that providers should find more relevant to their local situations.

4. Strengthen SCC's ability to accomplish its mission
   - Seek strong partnerships with organizations involved in community transportation
   - Review and clarify the common interests the SCC has with current and potential

partners
- Identify SCC's priorities for how it would utilize staffing to develop coordinated community transportation
- Identify time and resources needed for staffing
- Research funding sources to support SCC staffing

The SCC needs help to relieve the burdens of over-committed members. Staffing would help, but it should be proposed only with clear objectives that will contribute to improving transportation services.

5. Improve public outreach to make the case for community transportation
- Work with providers and others to develop performance statistics on local transportation
- Develop clear data on the contribution of community transportation
- Emphasize the potential economic and quality of life impacts of losing existing services

Many SCC members and providers advocate effectively for their programs and the people who rely on them. They would benefit from better data and other tools to make the case. Similar benefits would be realized at the state level from improved data on community transportation.

6. Assist volunteer driver networks to expand and become sustainable
- Hold regular information forums for volunteer driver programs
- Seek technical assistance for volunteer driver programs

Volunteer driver networks have been a successful coordination initiative, but need information exchange and technical help to solve problems. They risk having demand outstrip their funding, and need help in operating efficiently and effectively to remain viable.

Report prepared by Christopher Morgan
kitmorgan5@gmail.com
(603) 224-9723