

2008 Transportation Summit

The Departments of Transportation and Health and Human Services and the Statewide Coordination Council for Community Transportation sponsored a summit, "[Building Community Transportation in New Hampshire](#)," on December 9, 2008. Approximately 140 people participated in the event, held at the Grappone Conference Center in Concord.

Commissioners Nick Toumpas of Health and Human Services and George Campbell of Transportation, opened the summit with remarks stressing the importance of coordination of transportation services and the strong partnership between the two agencies. The Commissioners participated in the summit throughout the day.

Commissioner Toumpas said the success of his agency's programs depends on community transportation, calling it the "lifeblood" of human services. He said those participating in the coordination effort had invested considerable time, expertise and money in it, and that it would be an evolutionary process with not all the startup funding available at the outset. While transportation brokerage and calls centers are a deceptively simple concept, it will be a major undertaking to put coordination in operation.

Commissioner Campbell said providing transportation choices is critical to the DOT mission and that transit is part of the infrastructure, just like roads or bridges. He cited a survey in southwestern New Hampshire that found that lower income citizens pay 30 percent of their income for transportation, and even in areas like the Seacoast with several transit options, we need to provide more choices. Sufficient transit choices were not available during the period of high gasoline prices, and a strategic approach is needed to put in place a comprehensive transportation system.

Bill Finn, who represents Commissioner Lyonel Tracy of the Department of Education on the Statewide Coordinating Council, provided an update on the Council, which can be found [here](#).

Two panels discussed the status of coordination and community transportation development efforts in nine areas around the state. Panelists responded to questions about the background and status of their organizations, success stories and lessons learned, hurdles they have overcome, and tools and resources they need to succeed in their efforts.

A brief summary of Panel 1's discussion follows:

Matt Waitkins, Nashua Regional Planning Commission: the regional coordinating council had its roots with the regional coordination plan begun in 2006. Goals of the council are to meet an increasing need for transportation and improve the efficiency of the system. About 60 agencies were contacted at the beginning of the process, and 20-25 have stayed with it and are strong participants today. The council is seeking to recruit citizen/consumer members. Milestones include establishment of new service in the Souhegan Valley area. The council needs clear criteria for brokers, funding, and continuing local and high-level state commitment to make further progress.

Scott Bogle, Rockingham Planning Commission: The coordinating work in the Seacoast began with collaboration between the Strafford Network and COAST in a 2004 survey, and continued with a successful regional summit in 2007. Funding uncertainty is an obstacle to progress today. The goal is basic mobility throughout the 38-town region. The immediate priority is to coordinate trips for clients of agencies in the network. About 20-25 entities participate, including human services agencies, transportation providers, planning commissions, United Way, service consumers and others. The group counts as successes the development of trust among participants over time, strong commitment of the regional transit provider, and financial support from the Endowment for Health. A clear system of cost allocation remains an issue, along with funding, especially for trips not funded by an existing source. It is not feasible to try to raise money from 38 towns, and funding for transit in New Hampshire is near the bottom of the 50 states. He said clear direction and a timeline are needed from the state, along with information technology support. He also noted that there is confusion as to restrictions on hospitals contributing to transit.

Peter Dzewaltowski, Upper Valley-Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission spoke about coordination efforts in Sullivan County. These began with a Community Mobility Project three years ago, spearheaded by the Sullivan County United Way. This group is now making a transition into a regional coordinating council. Its goal is improved mobility and service in the county. The group includes human services and transportation providers, users, legislators, a faith based group and others. It has received funding from the Community Transportation Association of America to support its efforts to achieve a broad-based coordination (not just limited to one or two programs). He also mentioned success in achieving trust among member agencies and the need for funding to sustain the regional council. He said the state should be flexible to accommodate differences among regions.

Lee Maloney, Cooperative Alliance for Regional Transportation (Derry-Salem region): CART was created by the legislature in 2005 and began operation in 2006 as a demand-response system serving the general public. The system has grown and has reached out to the 9 member towns to be included in master plans and annual reports. It received seed money from the Endowment for Health and now receives Federal Transit Administration funding as well as town funding and donations. A fixed-route component of the system is planned to accommodate growing demand.

She advocated increased connectivity between modes and systems.

Panel 2 focused on grassroots efforts to improve transportation services in five areas. Theresa

Kennett discussed the Carroll County Transit Project. It began with a planning study that identified a proposed new transit system for the county. The current emphasis is on funding to implement the plan. The goals are mobility and access, lacking with no public transit today. The project also seeks to build better understanding of the need for public transportation. Several elected officials are involved, but the group is trying to broaden this participation. She said the group has many challenges: answering providers' concerns about the effectiveness and quality of the proposed system, raising startup funding when some local leaders don't see a need for the system, and answering many questions about grant program requirements, available funding.

Rebecca Harris described the Contoocook Valley Transportation Cooperative's evolution from the local "Under One Roof" project from planning to implementation. The goal is a sustainable and inclusive service for the entire community, including ridesharing and coordination of existing resources. Partners include the Endowment for Health, the hospital, the regional planning agency, and providers. The project needs a commitment from the towns in its area, as well as participating agencies and individual citizens, and from state agencies. She said the cooperative's "bottom-up" approach has been successful thus far.

Sarah Jane Knoy described the Granite State Organizing Project as a community organization, not a transportation organization, which is active in several regions. Transportation, especially for medical care, was identified as a need in the Souhegan Valley (Amherst-Milford) area. The group brought many partners to the table, including the Nashua Transit System, and seeks to provide transportation in a 9-town area. A limited service three days a week has begun. The project has used focus groups and personal interviews, and has involved the planning commission and the transit system as well as local volunteer organizations. It has proposed warrant articles at town meetings to build support for the project and hopes to use the local

option at town meeting to raise funds. She called for leadership from the state to campaign for transportation and promote it as a true alternative for anyone, not a second-class option.

Donna Schlachman, Exeter Transportation Committee. This group began in 2007 with a well-attended citizens' meeting to discuss local needs. The committee is a voice for transportation in the town, and as an official town committee will work to ensure its goals are addressed by other town bodies. Partners include a regional volunteer organization, council on aging, the town, housing officials, and the public. As in some other regions, the hospital has not been a participant. As a service provided by volunteers, this group wants to know how it will be integrated in regional coordination. It has benefited from a community foundation grant that funded a survey of needs by UNH. The local option fee was approved by town meeting last year to provide funding, starting with trips for seniors. She mentioned several outreach techniques, including local cable TV, a newspaper column and a Web site.

Patsy Kendall, Transport Central. This group includes 19 towns centered around Plymouth. The group's goal is to make transportation "not an issue." A primary objective is transportation to the local hospital and distant medical centers. The group held a very successful summit this fall, exceeding the expectations of many, and has a number of partners – providers, planning commissions, the hospital – but finds that other stakeholders are not aware that they have a stake in transportation. The project has benefited from a collaboration with Plymouth State University, and will continue to work with the university and its other partners on outreach and education efforts.

Following the panel discussions, the audience had an opportunity to add comments or questions.

Several key points were raised, including the need to clarify the legal status of regional coordination councils, the need for start up funding, the need for a clear timeline from the state to implement the coordination system, a lack of intercity transportation in several corridors, and the need to clarify and establish the geographical definition of regions for coordination. Other areas, including the Manchester area, the Central region, the North Country, and the Southwest region, also reported on their progress toward coordination.

Will Rodman of Nelson Nygaard Consulting Associates, who wrote the state's coordination plan, spoke about action steps to implement the plan and improve community transit in the state. He spoke of coordination as a means to an end – better community transportation. He also offered three options to address the concerns about the legal status of regional coordination councils: forming a nonprofit organization, using a lead agency to sign agreements, or making

recommendations to the state council for broker selection or other decisions so that the state council would make the decisions. He urged a focus on cost allocation – how to divide the cost of a trip among agencies whose clients are on the vehicle – as an important issue for coordination.

Will also addressed FTA funding sources that can be accessed by the RCC's for start up funding.

His presentation can be found [here](#).

During the afternoon, a third panel discussed the role of the private sector and local institutions in community transportation.

Joe Kasper of Northeast Delta Dental described his company's involvement with rideshare and local transit in its service area. This includes providing matching funds for new trolleys in Concord. He said the company regards this as a priority for its employees, and a matter of corporate citizenship with environmental and other benefits. The company has participated in the local master plan, the Concord 20/20 planning process, and improvements in the area around its offices and Main Street in Concord.

Dave Juvet of the Business and Industry Association of New Hampshire said it is a relatively recent development for employers to consider their employees' cost of commuting, but that it will be more common in the future. He said larger employers are more likely to be interested in working with transit providers, and that it is important to hear success stories and make connections with interested employers.

Bill Barr of Dartmouth College described the long association between the college and Advance Transit. The goal is to provide employee access and reduce the need for parking. The system's successes have included designing major changes when the Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center moved to Lebanon, and the transition from a limited fare-free shuttle to a completely fare-free system that has greatly increased ridership. These came about in part because of a strong working relationship among the partners, including the towns, college, hospital and transit system.

Cindy Frene discussed how her firm, TransAction Associates, works with employers through transportation management associations (TMAs) to provide transportation alternatives for employees. Some employers are motivated to participate by requirements to reduce congestion or air quality mandates, others see the benefit of reducing parking lot construction. In some cases employers have resisted supporting TMA transit programs but see the benefits once they

are in operation. Her organization tracks the performance of these alternatives through regular surveys.

Those at the summit were then asked to break into four groups to identify three or four answers to four questions. Answers to these questions are included.

1) What barriers do you feel remain that would prevent regions moving forward with the development of regional coordination and better transit? What should the state agencies be doing about these?

- Political will
- Sustainable, dedicated funding
- Educational sessions for legislators to understand progress and what remains to be done

Timeline for regional councils

- Information Technology for coordination system
- Clear guidance on structure of RCC, boundaries
- Assessment of need and resources, startup costs
- Guidance from state agencies on role of broker and RCC
 - Relief from Federal regulations
- Representation from other groups (e.g. environmental)
 - Local match for planning and startup grants
 - Leadership/Champion for RCC
- Confusion about privacy issues and medical transportation
- Lack of clarity on existing FTA funding matches, application process: need help
 - How to estimate initial start up costs

2) Is there legislation or other action at the state level needed to improve public transportation?

- State agencies should offer incentives to employees, "lead by example"
 - State staff must be available to help guide the process
 - Setting minimum standards for state funding
 - Raise volunteer reimbursement rate
- New way of thinking of revenue: Gas tax, dedicated funds to match federal funds, earmark rooms and meals tax to transit, impact fees to new businesses

- Access to state fuel
 - Guidance on risk and liability of participation
 - Transportation funding to transit, not just roads
 - Get the word out/marketing campaign
 - Incentives – state sponsored
 - Planning money
 - Help regions organize funding streams
 - Education re: Grant application and reporting
 - Visioning 10-20 years
 - Ruling from Attorney General on legal status of RCC’s
- Awareness of who is now getting transportation, make sure they keep getting it

3) What partners should be brought to the table at the state level? What do you think is needed to ensure regions have a diverse stakeholder group that includes members representing business, political subdivisions, providers and consumer groups?

- Hospital Association
 - Association of Counties/county government
 - Large and small business, local chambers of commerce
 - Municipal Association
 - General Public
 - Invite "naysayers"
- State agencies: Resources and Economic Development, Education, Environmental Services/Climate Change Task Force
 - Cultural Diversity
 - Sustainability groups, state environmental offices
 - Developers
 - Housing Authorities and affordable housing groups
- Local officials, fire and emergency services, selectmen, planners, libraries
 - State legislators
 - Economic Councils
 - Private transportation providers
 - Legal and justice system
 - Grocery stores, social centers
 - Mobile home/elderly communities
 - Pharmacies

- Refugee and immigrant population
 - Veterans
 - Faith-based groups
 - Unions
- Need ability to change land use to help fund local transit
- Outreach by Commissioner to Chambers on transportation need

4) What action items do you think the State Coordinating Council should include as next steps in its state action plan?

- Resolve legal issues: RCC status, privacy act issues, hospitals' funding to transit
- Establish clear timeline for coordination, including deadlines for regions and state
 - Commissioners meet with association of counties
 - Meet with legislators and establish legislative agenda
 - Build on 211 system to connect call centers
- Clearly define roles for SCC, RCC's, NHDOT, DHHS, other partners
 - Determine information technology system
 - Arrange annual transportation summit
 - Standardized full cost allocation system
 - Matching grant funds from SCC to new RCC's
 - SCC lend a "pro" to RCC's as SCC liaison
 - Focus groups to define need
 - SCC coordinate programs as well as money
 - Define what constitutes coordination
- Get out positive message about transportation value

The day concluded with closing remarks from Commissioners Campbell and Toumpas. The Commissioners reiterated some of the key points brought up during the day, including the need to

- clarify the status of regional coordinating councils and provide guidance on the coordination process;
- reach out to other state agencies, other levels of government, such as counties, and hospitals to support and participate in coordination;
- establish the state's needs for an information technology system to support coordination; develop an effective champion for coordination

- create an action plan from the steps discussed during the day

The Commissioners feel that the summit should be an annual event to track progress toward the goals.