

OCL Study Session, August 19, 2015: How CNY Moves those in need

Meeting held at SUNY Oswego Metro Center at 100 South Salina Street, Room 129

Co-chair: Heidi Holtz

Attendees: Elizabeth Allen, Kim Armani, Tom Carlin, Mario Colone, Eric Ennis, Travis Glazier, Donna Knapp, Annette Krisak, Megan Lee, Stan Linhorst, Sarah McIlvain, Aaron McKeon, Melissa Menon, David Michel, Peter Sarver, Jai Subedi, Nancy Zarach, Kim Zhang, Loretta Zolkowski

OCL: Sandra Barrett and Renée K. Gadoua

Program: "Unmet Transportation Needs of Low-Income People and Persons with Disabilities." Unmet transportation include job/employment travel, getting to/from medical appointments and other service sites, improving accessibility for educational opportunities [including Pre-K in SCSD], transporting children for other activities, and of course, trips for shopping [especially food needs, in light of "food deserts" in the city], and participation in the life of the community such as civic events is also among unmet needs.

Moderator: Peter Sarver, ACTS Convener for the Moving People Transportation Coalition (Although the elderly have been typically included in this topic, the planning group felt that given the time constraints, we should focus on the other two. However, the reality is that the elderly are in significant measure among the low-income and disabled persons and so you can reflect in that context on their unique needs. We also believe that in general, we can cast the needs of the refugee population with those in the low-income category, recognizing that there are special circumstances such as language and cultural barriers for refugees.)

Panelists: Aileen Balitz, St. Camillus; Deborah Hundley, Providence Services; Linda Wright, Salvation Army

(Invited, but not present: MAMI (Multicultural Association of Medical Interpreters) representative)

1. Two-minute report by Deborah Hundley on reports from Federal Reserve Bank, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and National Partnership for Women and Families on the effect of transportation on employment for women, refugees and long term unemployed. (Full report attached.)

2. Two-minute report by Annette Krisak of Jobs Plus on Onondaga County Wheels for Work (Full report attached.)

3. Three panelists responded to these questions:

- What has been your experience with these unmet needs and what is your role in dealing with them?

- How big is the scope of these unmet needs from your assessment, including recognition of prevailing barriers?
- What solutions have been tried and what should be studied further as potential solutions?

Note: Related issues addressed in SMTC report Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Plan, updated 2013-2014:

http://www.smtcmpo.org/docs/reports/Final_Coordinated_Plan_2013.2014.pdf

Balitz: St. Camillus is 3 miles west of Syracuse. Employs 690 people, 530 on site.

Threatened Centro cuts earlier this year would have cut service after 9 p.m. and on weekends. That would have affected dining service workers, housekeepers, transport workers, health aides. Workers make 80 Centro rides on weekends and 100 rides on weekends.

Centro's one-shot funding this year does not solve the problem: "It presents a critical issue for us and for all health care providers if it happens again."

St. Camillus a home-care provider, and most home-care aides are low-income. If the job is not on a bus route and they don't have a car, they can't work. (Currently have 10 openings for health aides.)

"Our goal is to keep more people at home," Balitz said. "We can't do that if workers don't have transportation. The result could be more people in nursing homes who don't need to be here."

St. Camillus has 13 vans and buses to transport people in Onondaga and Cayuga counties to services. (90 percent of people attending programs at St. Camillus are on Medicaid.)

The agency does not have the capacity to transport all the people who need to get to medical services. "We need to look at the capacity as a community," she said.

Wright: Salvation Army serves 30,000 people a year. Many people receive long-term support. Mission is to serve those with the most needs. Major challenges of the agency: Finding adequate housing for clients, home care for frail elderly.

"We do a lot of transportation even though we're not a transportation provider."

Agency owns buses, vans and sedans. Two large buses are outfitted with lifts for wheelchairs. Agency tried contracting with bus services, but now owns buses.

Agency uses the buses about two hours in the morning and two hours in afternoon. "How can we better use these buses and spread the cost? How can we coordinate better/collaborate on sharing resources?"

Needed:

- Transportation to Brittonfield medical park.

- Need transport companions for frail elderly and disabled.
- Low-income families need transportation to social events/zoo/festivals/etc.
- Transportation to child care/preK: “We know getting children to care every day is critically important developmentally,” Wright said. “Transportation issues are critically important for low-income families.”
- Even if transportation is available, it’s expensive. “High risk families need to take advantage of social and cultural opportunities, but often must rely on public transportation to do so.”

What we can do: There’s an opportunity for us as an agency that transports people to figure out a more coordinated effort. Shared routes? Share vehicles?

The Medicaid cab system can be overwhelming to clients. Can that be better coordinated?

Note: Human Services Leadership Council is considering addressing these issues, per Loretta Zolkowski.

Hundley (Providence Services of Syracuse): Mission is to help resolve transportation obstacles for disadvantaged people who want to get a job. We have offered a Ride to Work shuttle for New Americans who were offered full-time jobs but could not accept jobs without our service. After three months, they are transportation independent for work.

The Need: Our city and county, like many others in the U.S., have significant numbers of unemployed residents who want jobs but cannot take them due to lack of transportation. Study after study comes to the same conclusion. (This issue links to 2014 study on employment gaps.)

Real peoples’ stories:

- Breyanna, a new single mother who wanted to get a job to care for herself and her child, was offered a job at a Nursing home in Dewitt, but she would have to work some evening shifts and there would be no bus to bring her home.
- Clay, a young man who lives in Mattydale who had a job opportunity in Manlius but the bus did not run there at times that would allow him to get to/from work. He wants to save for a car but needs a job to save.
- Two women offered full-time jobs for 3rd shift. Their shifts end at 3 a.m. and the bus does not come to that location until 6 or 6:30 a.m.
- Kelly, on the Near West Side, had a job opportunity at Armory Square, but no bus to take her home at night and walking is too dangerous.
- New Americans who get jobs at Destiny that end at 1 or 2 a.m. and the only way to get home is to walk an hour in very dangerous neighborhoods.
- Restaurants on Erie Blvd again close after the bus service ends and there is no way to get home, so no job opportunity. Sonic will be opening on Erie Boulevard, but many of those jobs will not benefit people who do not have personal transportation.

Lack of transportation also affects residents without cars who work and want to go to OCC for education or training. Without a car it is impossible to get from a job and get to OCC in time. James had that problem until he was given a car. This same lack of transportation affects many people who wish to advance themselves.

Lack of transportation holds back returning Veterans, people coming out of the court system, young people who want to get their first job, and so many more.

Lack of transportation also effects ability to get to DR appointments, children's school functions and community celebrations.00

Northeastern University found limited public transportation adversely affected finances, job choices and the ability to get a healthcare appointment.

Fixing pothole-ridden roads and crumbling bridges is essential for a car-centric nation. But to broaden opportunity and address disparities, public transportation is equally, if not more, essential. If we improve infrastructure deficiencies, we will improve inequality in the country.

Harvard's Business School's Rosabeth Moss Kantor examined the issue and sees mobility as essential to opportunity. Access is the ticket. People in neighborhoods that lack reliable transportation are stuck and cannot take advantage of opportunities.

Private transportation costs such as cabs are too expensive. Subsidized shuttles for workers could have a significant positive effect on our local economy and residents lives. It could also reduce our county's social services' costs by \$10-15 million dollars.

When policy makers talk about solutions to inequality they usually focus on education and jobs. But, this conversation largely ignores the need for improved transportation infrastructure to provide access to these jobs and schools. Through better transportation, American cities can provide opportunities for millions to escape poverty.

Raj Chetty, an economics professor at Harvard University found that cities with the best chances for a person to move from the bottom fifth to the top fifth of income across generations are cities that were ranked the best public transportation.

Houston and Columbus, Ohio have redone transport systems using current funding streams.

We would hope that the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Committee would direct a study be conducted to develop solutions to this problem.

Questions/discussion

Wright: We see participation in senior center based on whether people can afford transportation that day: "I've seen seniors ride their bike in the winter to get meals because they don't have bus money."

"We love having the Centro hub in our neighborhood."

Mario Colone of SMTC: There are a lot of recommendations in the 2013-2014 Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plan. Staff will advance idea for further study.

“There are a lot of services, but not a lot of coordination.”

Krisak: Can Salvation Army employees use buses?

Balitz: Grants are for patients. Old vehicles may be able to be used for staff.

Wright: Should agencies ask for waivers? What can community study next to find solutions?

Salvation moved its daycare facilities from neighborhoods to S. Salina Street to make them more accessible to families.

Barrett: Was Rides to Work funded differently than Wheels to Work?

Krisak: Wheels to Work was self-sustaining until county budget problems.

Rides to Work used federal money via Job Access and Reverse Commute to provide transportation home to job and back for three months for people at 200% of poverty.

[This information was provided by Centro: The Centro Rides to Work program was funded through Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) grants and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grants to New York State. Both grant programs were provided by the federal government. The Community Solutions for Transportation (CST) grants were provided by New York State as a mechanism to provide the required matching funds to the both federal grant programs. Funding for the federal JARC program came to an end October 1, 2012 with the passage of the surface transportation legislation - Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21). With the elimination of JARC and the reduction of TANF funds available for transportation, funding for CST grants was reduced. In FY 2014, 63 individuals took 1,598 trips from the rides to work program. In FY 2015 no rides were provided.]

Sarver: Has spoken with at least one pastor about using church vans during the week.

Sarah McIlvain: How can we use city's new innovation group to study/resolve duplication or lack of services?

Zolkowski: Sept. 11 Human Services Leadership Council will feature Andrew Maxwell to address how 65 social service agencies can partner with new Office of Innovation.

Beata Karpinska-Prehn of ARISE: We need dependable local funding source for transportation. Currently comes from mortgage recording tax, which is often waived for big developers. “We’re missing out on millions. It takes away money from public transportation.”

Accessible vans/buses a big problem for people with disabilities. Need lifts on vans/buses.

Need to connect transportation to accessible housing in the suburbs.

Need accessible taxis.

Need accessible transportation to the airport.

Travis Glazier, director, Onondaga County Office of the Environment: Re: mortgage recording tax: PILOT money can be used for infrastructure. Is MRT the appropriate source of funding for transportation? “This is a public good that should be accessible to all.”

When transportation costs are based on fees, efficiency is favored over accessibility.

Barrett: Are there lessons learned re improving coordination of services in SMTC report?

Colone: Insurance and risks big concerns.

Hundley approached private transit companies to provide service during their off hours. They said it was too complicated for their system.

Sarver: Scalability is an issue. SU uses a fleet of buses to transport students. Can agencies find a way to coordinate needs to create scale that would make it work?

Upcoming Meetings

Tuesday, September 1, 4:30-6 p.m. How CNY Moves on two wheels: Room 203 at the Center of Excellence, 727 East Washington Street, Syracuse 13210. Bike racks outside the entrance; bikes also welcome inside the building for this meeting. Car parking is available along East Washington Street and in the SU lot on the south side of East Washington - map attached.

Please let us know if you would like to be part of a panel design subcommittee on any of the upcoming topics

Mini-Presentations: We invite folks to share articles, blog posts, videos etc. in 2-minute presentations at the beginning of each session. If you come across something that you think will be interesting, thought-provoking and/or worthy of further discussion, please let us know.

Submitted by Renée K. Gadoua, study writer