

Executive Summary

Transportation is a complex business in Franklin County. There are many entities – businesses, government agencies, non-profit organizations – involved in planning, funding and providing transportation service. Franklin County’s large size, in terms of population and economic activity, provides an opportunity to achieve economies of scale in the provision of transportation service. However, with so many people and entities involved it is easy to end up using transportation resources in inefficient ways resulting in duplicated services, underserved areas and underutilized vehicles.

This Franklin County Transportation Coordination Plan (“Coordinated Plan”) has been developed to determine how existing transportation services could be better coordinated and how new funding and other resources should be used to improve transportation services in a coordinated fashion. In addition, this plan is intended to satisfy the requirements of a Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan as laid out in federal law. By meeting these requirements, this plan gives Franklin County entities access to federal funds that can be used for the following transportation purposes:

- Access to jobs for low-income individuals (Job Access Reverse Commute, or JARC)
- Vehicles or other equipment for transporting seniors or people with disabilities (Specialized Transportation)
- New transportation services for people with disabilities (New Freedom).

The Coordinated Plan was developed through a partnership of public and private entities with extensive data collection from transportation funders, providers and users. The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) served as the lead planning agency, providing direction and staff support to the effort. The Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA) served as the fiscal agent responsible for handling and reporting on the federal funds used to develop the plan. An extensive data collection effort was undertaken by Community Research Partners (CRP). Data collection included surveys of transportation service funders and providers, interviews with human service agencies and focus groups of targeted populations. In addition, a survey was created to solicit information from the general public and public presentations were made at different venues over the course of the project.

There is a wide range of potential coordination activities for transportation providers. Franklin County has a few current coordination activities involving several transportation providers and funders. These activities represent specialized programs intended to meet very specific needs. There are somewhat different reasons for interest in coordination depending on the potential participant. Private transportation companies, both for-profit and non-profit, are interested in the reliable streams of passengers and money that coordination with public programs might entail while human services providers see the gaps in transportation service for their clients and hope this coordination effort may be a chance to address them. These two perspectives have the opportunity for mutually beneficial relationships.

There is wide agreement among agency officials that there are underutilized transportation assets and that there are many coordination activities that could be pursued immediately. However, there are a variety of obstacles (whether real or perceived) to improving coordination. This results in a guarded interest in increased coordination in Franklin County.

Based on the transportation resources and needs data, a number of transportation gaps were identified. Briefly, they are:

- Geographic gaps: some major employment and commercial centers, within neighborhoods, communities outside I-270, vocational and alternative schools, some senior housing and public housing, medical facilities and doctor’s offices in Delaware County, new low-income housing developments outside the central city.

- Capacity gaps: non-medical trips, transportation for people with lesser disabilities or impairments, transportation for ongoing treatment (dialysis in particular), overcrowded buses at rush hours, pool of qualified drivers.
- Service time gaps: Late night (workers on 2nd and 3rd shift), weekends, following afterschool activities.
- Awareness gaps: a variety of issues that demonstrate a lack of awareness or understanding by agencies or the public of available services.

The Coordinated Plan proposes to address transportation gaps through a variety of strategies. There are two major categories of strategies: those pertaining directly to transportation service and those that improve relationships or integration of other activities between organizations (e.g., mobility management activities). The strategies are presented here in priority order:

Service Strategies

- Provide late night transportation service
- Increase non-medical transportation options
- Increase service for after school activities
- Provide more transportation between suburban areas, particularly concentrations of employment and population.
- Increase reverse-commute service between the central city and suburban employment areas.
- Provide sidewalk links to connect people with transit and other components of the transportation system.
- Maintain existing transportation services and vehicle fleet.

Policy Coordination Strategies

- Establish a one-stop resource for transportation information.
- Conduct ongoing public outreach regarding transportation services
- Share information among transportation providers and funders in person and online; include benchmarking and best practices.
- Establish partnerships between the transportation sector and businesses/employers to improve the connection between transportation service availability and business location decisions.
- Conduct outreach and education with local governments regarding transportation services and the impact of development patterns on the ability to provide service.
- Study consolidation of transportation services, fuel, vehicles, etc., as a future step toward greater coordination.
- Establish a policy oversight group to recommend policy changes that would improve coordination among agencies.
- Create a position to spearhead coordination among agencies.

In order to carry out the intent of the Coordinated Plan, COTA is identified as the official Designated Recipient of the federal funds tied to the Plan. It will be COTA's responsibility to develop and conduct a competitive project selection process based on the strategies listed above. COTA proposes to utilize its Mobility Advisory Board, consisting of many of the Plan's stakeholders, to evaluate and recommend projects for funding.