

Barriers and Constraints Identified in Region 10

A report to the Texas Department of Transportation

September 30, 2006

Concho Valley Transit District

Introduction

When the Regional Service Planning initiative started, the purpose was to help coordinate regional public transportation across Texas. Emphasis was placed on current providers of transportation, which included health and human services organizations. The initiative is audacious—to have all interested parties to sit at the same table and discuss how to best serve the transportation needs of clients and communities in the most efficient way possible. Texas Department of Transportation wisely divided the tasks among the different COG regions of the state. The regions were being asked to create a plan for coordination, which in effect meant facing the difficulties of coordinating and deciding how best to address the difficulties and be successful.

This report will document barriers and constraints that were identified by Region 10. These barriers and constraints can and do impede progress and full coordination. By documenting these issues, the region is better able to create a realistic coordination plan that can work and be sustained. Some of these impediments may be able to be removed through legislation and proactive policy alignment at the federal, state, and local level. However, it would be unrealistic to assume that all barriers and constraints will be diminished. Constraints will prove to be the most problematic, since their removal will involve a true shift in culture, local interpretation of policy, and historical and political realities.

Background

Our region is a very rural region. Because of our low population density which results in funding that does not adequately address our needs, Region 10 agencies and nonprofits have a history of coordinating services. It is the only way to accomplish mission and goals. Our low population also creates a small town effect, one in which “everyone knows everyone”, even in the major population center of San Angelo. While this coordination takes place in an informal manner, there is some resistance to formalizing the process. Historically, when Health and Human Services local agencies are asked to coordinate for efficiency, the process end result is a loss in funding after generating these efficiencies. This result is frustrating and counterintuitive. If a private citizen budgets well and save resources (time, money, etc. . .), their employer does not cut their salary as a result of their stewardship. Yet, this has been the case for all state agencies and nonprofits in this area. As a result, many of the Regional Planning Committee members may be willing to coordinate, but still very protective of their resources and reserved in their participation.

This process is asking a community to change the way they do business. This change can be beneficial for many. Instead occupying their time with managing transit for their consumers, coordination would free up that time for case management that is more in line with the stated mission of the agency. But for many of the HHSC local agencies, they are already trying to get their clients on public transportation. The HHSC agency transportation programs exist because public transportation cannot satisfy every client’s needs. On the other hand, members of transportation agencies and groups are keenly aware of the duplication of services and the inefficiencies that this duplication creates. The end result is members of the group are at different stages of change.

Some of the committee members are at the precontemplation stage. At this stage, the participant does not see the need for change and is not interested in changing. It could be that change was attempted in the past, and they feel that that attempt was a failure. Other members are at the contemplation stage; in other words, they would like to see change happen but are not ready to change at the moment. This group is aware of the pros of change, but they are acutely aware of the cons. This type of cost-benefit analysis can produce ambivalence and paralysis. Another section of the committee members are in the preparation stage. This group is ideal for this process. They want change to occur soon and are willing to do the initial groundwork to create a plan. The action stage is where people have made specific overt modifications to their way of doing things recently. This seems like the completion of change, but action does not always constitute change. The final stage is the maintenance stage. The groups at this level are concerned with keeping the benefits of the action stage and managing the negative aspects that could cause people to give up.

The most difficult part of this model of change is moving groups from one stage to another. The move can be spontaneous or forced. If change is forced, resistance is higher. The Regional Service Planning initiative is hoping that awareness and information exchange will create a demand for change. The Region 10 committee has active and non active participants. The region already has experienced a consolidation of the urban and rural public transportation systems—the quintessential expression of coordination. There is much hope and high expectations that this consolidation will remove a number of barriers and constraints.

During the time that the Region 10 Regional Service Planning Committee is forming, the Concho Valley Rural Transit District and the City of San Angelo Transit entered into negotiations for consolidating the two transit systems. For many of the members of the committee, this effort seems to be the beginning to fixing many of the transportation issues of Region 10. Improved delivery of public transportation in the Concho Valley will help alleviate many concerns, but it is not the answer to every transportation need that exists. Since the consolidation, there seems to be a dropping off of momentum on the committee. The Concho Valley Transit District's goal is to improve both rural and urban public transportation, but this will not happen overnight. Many of the challenges will take much time and money to correct. While the consolidation is a source of renewed hope for many, the danger is that high, unrealistic expectations will not be fulfilled. This could cause renewed frustration. Communication from the CVTD will be key to keeping expectations realistic and participation on-going.

Response to the Barriers and Constraints Forms

The lead agency distributed the barriers and constraint forms to the members of the committee. Very few of the committee members responded. There are numerous reasons for this. Some of the agencies may not be clear as to which law or regulation propose a barrier for them. Other HHSC priorities may take precedence at this time. State funding streams are being awarded during this period and, as it is with any state grant award, new reporting and procedure requirements are being implemented at this time. Lastly, most of the barriers and constraints that exist within the region have become so familiar that they are almost invisible. Many of the agency staff at this local level cannot point to a law or regulation that creates barriers that was reported to exist.

Some of it could be only policy, but there was uncertainty. The region will continue to encourage the participating agencies to complete the forms and will report this data to TxDOT.

Barriers

Texas Department of Transportation—Concho Valley Transit District

Barrier 1: Formalize the Accountability of TxDOT Funding

While all of the funding from TxDOT to HHSC is supposed to pay for the transportation of clients, most efforts at accountability disappears by the time the funding reaches the local operating unit of the various agencies. In some cases at the local operating level "where the dollars reach the people" there is no budget line item that is identified as transportation funding.

The local end users of the funding simply receive "X" amount of dollars for each client served. While it is recognized that a portion of that funding was intended to take care of the clients need to get to and from various services no records are delineated as to exactly what portion was used to provide client transportation.

Most of the legislation that created the transfer of dollars from the TxDOT "fund six" to health and human services operation is unclear as to how accountability of these funds is to be accomplished.

Barrier 2: Rolling Stock Purchasing Assistance

For the larger transit operation around the state the purchasing of vehicles is, while a time consuming and therefore expensive exercise it is still, one for which they are equipped and staffed and therefore handle in a routine manner.

For most of the small urban and rural operators this is a once a year, at most, exercise. These classes of operators do not possess the engineering expertise or knowledge of all of the innovations that are on the market since their last foray into the marketplace.

It would be of great assistance if some type of purchasing cooperative could be established that would allow transit agencies, health and human service agencies, and perhaps even non-profits to be able to obtain their rolling stock.

Perhaps this could become a function of the Texas Building and Procurement division or TxDOT could establish their own department. There are existing plans in other states that use various forms of centralized purchasing that assist transit agencies and others is getting the best price and assuring the quality and legal compliance of the units purchased, while still allowing a great deal of

latitude to ensure that agencies are able to obtain a vehicle that meets their specific need.

Barrier 3: Funding silos

The source for this barrier exists in every funding policy on the federal, state, and local level. With the advent of SAFETLU, transportation is being strongly encouraged to coordinate to generate efficiencies. Yet, if you do coordinate, it creates an accounting and reporting complication that spends whatever money you saved by coordinating on teasing out where to report the money.. The CVTD consolidated the rural and urban transit systems on September 1, 2006. The monies from 5307 are separated into 4 different silos. The District wants to use all of the vehicles, rural and urban, in the most efficient way possible to serve the most number of people possible. This mixed use effort is discouraged by the onerous and frustrating task of reporting.

Texas Workforce Commission—Concho Valley Workforce Development Board

Barrier 1: Lack of adequate funding to serve need in rural and large geographic area.

The source of the barrier is identified as a state funding policy of the Texas Workforce Commission and TxDOT allocations for eligible populations (TANF, Food Stamps, etc...), as well as the local agency policy of the Concho Valley Workforce Development Board. This barrier creates an inability to fund all eligible individuals for transportation assistance with most individuals receiving short-term assistance. Customer chooses between bus card, gas voucher, taxi (if no other reasonable means of transportation is available). We also fund transportation related expenses such as vehicle repairs, battery, etc. when funds are available to ensure transportation is available.

Barrier 2: Limited hours of the fixed route system

The source of the barrier is identified as a local agency policy of the San Angelo Street Railroad Company. The city busses run their schedules hourly, from 6:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M. Many of our clients without their own transportation need to drop off a child for day care and go to work or school, but the schedule requires over an hour commute both ways because of the hourly schedule. For instance, a client needs to catch the bus at 7:00 A.M. to arrive at day care. Then the client will wait for next bus at 8:00 A.M. and subsequently arrive late to work if he/she starts at 8:00. The client cannot leave earlier because daycare is not open until 7:00 or 7:30 A.M. The reverse commute is no different. The client leaves work at 5:00 P.M. to go to daycare and pick up the children. Hopefully, the client will catch the last bus, which has to be in the bus barn by 6:00 P.M. Further, we (CVWDB) cannot place clients in jobs that require shift work because the bus is not available before 6:00 A.M. or after 6:00 P.M. This barrier prevents many populations from self-sufficient employment which directly impacts the welfare programs.

Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services—Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Barrier 1: Fixed route problems

The source of the barrier is identified as a local agency policy of the San Angelo Street Railroad Company. Currently there are only 5 fixed route buses. Bus stops can be 6-7 blocks away from home of blind person. The fixed routes and the paratransit system run from 6:00 am-6:00 pm. There needs to be more transfer points on the fixed route system. Currently, routes can make a trip take over an hour.

Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services—Adult Day Care

Barrier 1: Adult Day Care of San Angelo has not been able to access the Medicaid Transportation Program

The source of the barrier is identified as a Texas Agency Policy in the Day Activity and Health Services Manual (item 5740). According to the manual, DAHS Medicaid client have access to transportation through MTP, yet the client must not be picked up or dropped off at the DAHS facility. However, many of the clients at the facility have medical appointments during the day. In order to access MTP, the client would have to stay at home alone and wait until the MTP could pick them up. On the return trip, the client would be in the same precarious position, at home unattended. Section 5740 requires the DAHS provider to coordinate the use of other transportation resources and yet this avenue is prohibited from their coordination strategy. In a major city, this may not be a problem. However, in our region where we have scant transportation resources, this becomes burdensome and requires the ADC to become a transportation provider.

Constraints

Texas Department of Transportation—Concho Valley Transit District

Constraint 1: Developing a comprehensive ADA paratransit systems plan

Staff changes as a result of the consolidation have meant that virtually all of the management team consists of individuals who previously worked for Thunderbird Transit. As a result, staff has limited experience with respect to managing both fixed route service, and ADA Complementary Paratransit Service as a Small Urban transit provider. Upon reviewing the various aspects of the ADA Paratransit Program (known as STS), we believe that an opportunity exists to take a comprehensive review of all services, and through analysis and implementation of a sound plan, reinvent disability transportation in the City of San Angelo. We believe that the opportunity to implement change now is ideal, since the new consolidation is a fresh start.

Constraint 2: There is no demand created by parent HHSC agencies to coordinate transportation.

The directive to engage in this planning process came from the Texas Department of Transportation. The HHSC organizations have not received any notification, directive, or enticement to participate. While it is true that Region 10 has had good participation from the local HHSC agencies, this is not a high priority initiative for them. The participation is voluntary. Like all voluntary participation, the effort is erratic and dependent upon available time from other HHSC priorities.

Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services—Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Constraint 1: Fixed route insufficient.

There is a need for more busses, shorter routes, consistent stops, more transfer points, more convenient bus stops. At the depot, our clients need the busses to park in the same spot each time so that at the bus station transferring people know where their bus is.

Constraint 2: Driver Training

The source of this constraint is the San Angelo Street Railroad Company. Drivers need training on best ways to work with the blind and deaf. Inconsistent on how stops are announced, if at all. Dispatchers do not seem to be able to answer questions. The SASR and the CVCOG have consolidated as of September 1. Driver training is being developed and implemented. Much attention is being directed to making policies consistent. The newly formed CVTD has applied for the United We Ride peer/mentor funds to get assistance on creating a comprehensive paratransit plan and to continue with driver training.

Constraint 3: Materials from public transportation is not appropriate for the visually impaired

Maps provided are too small. People with a hard time seeing need something bigger. Also the SASRC transit people run out of printed maps and hand out really bad copies that are very difficult to read.

Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services—Adult Day Care

Constraint 1: ADA Eligibility

The disabled must submit an ADA application signed by a doctor in order to use the Special Transportation Services (STS). The applications are only reviewed once a month. The applicant usually needs to use the service before the

application is approved. CVTD has been looking to streamline the application process in order to serve the need for paratransit in a timelier manner.

Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services—Area Agency on Aging

Constraint 1: Rural areas are still underserved.

The Thunderbird Rural Service provides rides into San Angelo either once or twice a week. While many riders are able to utilize this service, there are many times that the elderly in these areas need a ride into San Angelo on days that that service is not provided and their families are unable to take them.

Constraint 2: The need for door-to-door or door-through-door service.

The city service has historically only provided curb-to-curb service. However, many of the elderly and disabled need door-to-door or door-through-door service because of walking devices, no ramps at the destination, parcels, disabilities, or health problems.

Priorities

The order of need for Region 10 is as follows:

Developing a comprehensive ADA paratransit systems plan

The newly formed Concho Valley Transit District represents the consolidation of two transit agencies. Thunderbird Transit provided coordinated rural transit service throughout most of the Concho Valley Council of Governments area (Region 10); and the San Antonio Street Railroad Company delivered fixed route and ADA paratransit service within the City of San Angelo.

Consolidation of the systems has moved rapidly as the result of both the City of San Angelo and the Concho Valley Council of Governments wishing to expedite and complete the consolidation. Interim consolidation occurred on May 1, 2006, and full system consolidation occurred on September 1, 2006. The consolidation has been a challenging and exhausting process, but provides tremendous opportunity for CVTD to reinvent and improve service in a wide variety of areas for the City of San Angelo and the Concho Valley region.

Staff changes as a result of the consolidation have meant that virtually all of the management team consists of individuals who previously worked for Thunderbird Transit. As a result, staff has limited experience with respect to managing both fixed route service, and ADA Complementary Paratransit Service as a Small Urban transit provider. Upon reviewing the various aspects of the ADA Paratransit Program (known as STS), we believe that an opportunity exists to take a comprehensive review of all services, and through analysis and implementation of a sound plan, reinvent disability transportation in the City of San Angelo. We

believe that the opportunity to implement change now is ideal, since the new consolidation is a fresh start.

Effectively developing and implementing the approach for ADA paratransit can be best served by the mentoring assistance of an individual with an excellent level of experience and skills with respect to disability transportation. We strongly feel that Alan Rodenstein of A&R Consulting will be an excellent mentor for this effort. Mr. Rodenstein has suggested that we utilize the processes and tools available in developing a revised ADA plan as a framework for approaching the issues of customer access and eligibility. We concur that this approach should be highly effective. CVTD and Mr. Rodenstein have worked together productively in the past. The recommendation of Mr. Rodenstein in April 2006 to integrate the Medicaid and ADA trip itineraries in the City of San Angelo has led to more than a doubling of service hour productivity, saving CVTD in excess of \$50,000, and assuring that all ADA trip requests are provided. Recently, Mr. Rodenstein has developed a teambuilding approach for CVTD not only designed to integrate the two organizations, but to assure that they work together as a high functioning team in addressing both day-to-day and long-range challenges.

Internally, our goals are the following:

- Develop a comprehensive strategy to customer access, eligibility issues and accessibility for persons with disabilities within the City of San Angelo and the region.
- Create an effective outreach in partnership with the disability community and key stakeholders to develop the strategy on the aforementioned issues, with the long-term goal of creating an enduring partnership between CVTD and the disability community.
- Prepare an ADA Plan for CVTD that will address the specific community needs of the City of San Angelo and incorporate, where appropriate, Best Practices throughout the United States.

Another benefit of this project can be to assist either existing transit agencies or transit agencies which go through consolidation similar to CVTD. A framework will be developed which can be applicable in addressing the needs of persons with disabilities throughout Texas.

Formalize the Accountability of TxDOT Funding

Foremost among the barriers and constraints to coordination and accountability of efficient transportation are a combination of both agency regulations, practices and legislative dictates as to the use of funds.

While all of the funding discussed is supposed to pay for the transportation of clients most efforts at accountability disappears by the time the funding reaches the local operating unit of the various agencies. In some cases at the local

operating level "where the dollars reach the people" there is no budget line item that is identified as transportation funding.

The local end users of the funding simply receive "X" amount of dollars for each client served. While it is recognized that a portion of that funding was intended to take care of the clients need to get to and from various services no records are delineated as to exactly what portion was used to provide client transportation.

Most of the legislation that created the transfer of dollars from the TxDOT "fund six" to health and human services operation is unclear as to how accountability of the funds is to be accomplished.

One of the better processes to determine funding, demand accountability and assure inclusiveness is the process developed in connection with **section 5310** (elderly and disabled) funding. **The Concho Valley Planning Region 10** would like to see the state apply an adaptation of the same procedures to all health and human service contracts. This process is a formalized procedure designed to insure inclusiveness of all agencies public and private non-profit.

- The money is assigned by region, using a formula, by the TxDOT offices in Austin.
- The Local PTN conducts a specific series of outreach efforts, advertisements and public meetings to advise each agency in that PTN region as to the availability of funds and the regulations which govern their usage. In the case of section 5310 funding it is for the transportation of the Elderly and Disabled. In other cases it may be for Mental Health and Mental Retardation or rehabilitative services or any of the myriad other such programs currently funded with TxDOT dollars.
- Once the amount of funding available has been determined. Anyone who needs transportation funding is required **by regulation** as part of the planning process to set down with the local transit provider and ask that transit provider if they can provide the service.
- If it is probable that the local transit provider can assist the parties, the transit provider and the agency involved would then enter into negotiations to find a reasonable solution to the problems involved within the limits of funds available. The local transit provider and the agency then work out a vendor agreement which provides for the transit unit to provide the transportation needs of the agency at either a unit price or some other type of contractual arrangement that best meets the needs of that specific cliental.
- If the local transit provider cannot, because of lack of equipment or special needs or other reasons, provide the service, the transit provider would then

certify in writing why they are unable to meet the needs of the requesting agency.

- Any agency whose needs cannot be met by the transit provider would then return to the PTN who would work with all parties, the agency, the transit provider and the TxDOT officials in Austin to ascertain the best course of action. It could be a direct grant to the agency, a renegotiation of the terms of service or partial service from the transit provider with some direct transportation being provided by from the agency.
- This type system would create a trail of accountability of expenditures. It would also require everyone to be involved in planning and coordination of transportation activities open a continuous dialogue and decrease duplication thereby promoting fiscal responsibility.

Conclusion

The Regional Service Planning Committee is working on the action plan for transportation coordination of our region as of this date. While it may appear that the committee members were reluctant to document barriers and constraints, that reaction is the result of the culture of the Concho Valley. We are rural, geographically isolated, and populated by retired people, low income, and the working poor. This creates a independent and proud way of life. This area does not have the wealth, political clout, and growth potential of the I35 corridor or the ethnic diversity of the valley. But the local and state agencies and nonprofits here are tireless in their search of solutions that are homegrown and nurtured by our neighborly, small town outlook. At one time, San Angelo was estimated to have over 200 social and health groups. That number has diminished due to funding cuts. This area coordinates because it is a matter of survival that we do. Groups create coalitions here because the political realities that govern us demand it. Coalition and committee members are able to reach more of the people that need services by working together.

In former governor Ann Richard's book, [Straight from the Heart: My Life in Politics and Other Places](#), she tells the story of a woman she saw on the side of the road during one of her campaign stops in La Joya. She writes:

“. . . And as we were pulling away I saw a little woman, she couldn't have been over four and a half feet tall, probably in her early eighties, standing by the highway waiting for her ride. She was a frail woman in a cotton print dress that hung straight to her ankles.

I really thought, looking out that window, that that little woman is what our business of public service is all about. She has faith in us to do right by her and by the place where she lives. She will never know the intricacies, the machinations, the pull and tug and harshness of politics, and it doesn't matter.

What she does need to know is that there are people serving in public office who care about her and her community. That's all she needs to know.

And it's important that we be true to her. Because, in the big fights and big issues over how money is spent, if we lose sight of these people we have really lost sight of our goal."

Ultimately, our goal is to coordinate transportation. Barriers and constraints make that difficult, but not impossible. Our region will create an action plan taking into account what is possible.