

# **BARRIERS AND CONSTRAINTS TO IMPROVED TRANSPORTATION AND COORDINATION IN THE LAREDO REGION**

There are a variety of public transportation and human service transportation providers in the Laredo region. Public Transit operators include Laredo's El Metro, Webb County's transit service (both primarily fixed route in nature) and Community Action Council of South Texas, which operates public service in Starr, Jim Hogg and Zapata Counties. In addition each county provides service funded by the county and the Area Agency on Aging (Title III) and also in each county there is a separate Medicaid transportation operator selected by TxDOT. In essence each county has three different operators: public, aging/nutrition and Medicaid.

There are a variety of barriers and constraints to improved transportation cited by committee members and other interested parties. These categories of barriers and constraints include; institutional barriers, funding barriers, knowledge/communication, and other. The barriers and constraints are prioritized as high, medium and low priority. Along with each barrier and constraint is an estimate of the impact it has on service, and recommendations to make change happen.

## **INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS**

- **Institutional Resistance To Change/Turf Protection** - among human service agencies, counties and transit systems, there is a reluctance to turn over service to another entity. This is one of the greatest barriers to coordination. A recent Transit Cooperative Synthesis Report (TCRP) on coordinating Medicaid with public transit cites barriers to coordinating transportation. A key barrier is attitudinal and trust. There are many different operators. In Starr, Jim Hogg and Zapata counties there are three different providers serving the elderly, the general public and Medicaid clients. MEDIUM Priority.

### **Estimate of Impact**

- The cost of inaction in coordinating trips is hard to quantify. Where the human service agency believes they are getting a less expensive price using another contractor, they are in actuality reducing their client's options for travel by weakening the coordinated public transit operator. In addition, safety can become an issue.

## Possible Solutions

- The solution to this constraint is at both the local and the state level. First, local entities need to educate each other on their needs and capabilities. Each human service agency and transit system should work together to gain an understanding of the benefits of a coordinated network. TxDOT should mandate that human service agencies purchase service (where possible) from the transit system in a “fair share” arrangement.
- **Medicaid Transportation Is Now Fragmented** – Significant duplication of services exists due to TxDOT’s decision to select a new provider for the region. Previously this service was coordinated through the rural transit district. LOW Priority.

## Estimate of Impact

- This duplication of effort has two sets of operators serving many of the same clients, with little opportunity to coordinate trips as was done previously. There is also duplication of management
- Loss of Credibility – TxDOT loses credibility locally when coordination is stressed at the local level then something else is done at the state level.
- Safety Issue – In the transit industry one often sees problems associated with transitions of service from one provider to another. Fragmented service delivery makes driver training and other functions much more expensive.

## Possible Solutions

- Change the procurement strategy for Medicaid procurement and ensure local participation in the decision-making process. It is recommended that TxDOT follow the recommendations of the Draft PTN strategic plan that calls for awarding Medicaid contracts (through inter-local agreements as is done in other areas) to the willing and able rural transit districts.
- TxDOT should closely monitor service quality of Medicaid providers to ensure a high level of safety. TxDOT should define, monitor and track accidents, incidents, missed trips as well as inspecting vehicles, vehicle files, drivers and driver files on a regular basis. The safety

records should be compared to public operators on a 100,000 miles per accident rate measure (is the standard in the industry).

## **FUNDING BARRIERS**

- **Local Level Funding Is An Issue** – New service requires proper local funding to match the FTA/State funds available. This will require new approaches to securing local funds. The loss of Medicaid was a double problem because the transit system also lost the Medicaid funds as local match. HIGH Priority

### **Estimate of Impact**

- As a whole, the need for local level funding makes it harder for the transit system to match the available federal dollars.

### **Solution**

- See above comments

## **UNDERSTANDING COORDINATION – KNOWLEDGE/COMMUNICATION CONSTRAINTS**

- **Communication** – Communication is the key to success; the transportation providers must work closely with human service agencies to understand each other's issues. HIGH Priority
- **Coordination Activities Must Make Business Sense** – Any attempts to coordinate service must make business sense. A transit system, like any other business, must not and cannot operate at a deficit. HIGH Priority
- **Human Service Agencies Do Not Always See The Value Of Coordination** – Often choosing alternative methods that may be more effective and cost less (from their perspective). Unfortunately often these other services do not have the driver training and quality maintenance practices used by the transit system. Safety records may not be as good either. LOW Priority
- **Human Service Out Of Pocket Expenses** – Adult Day Care is a prime example of a program that does not fund transportation, yet mandates transportation service. These organizations either perform the service themselves by minimizing out of pocket costs or pay the general public fare of a paratransit program, shifting the cost to the transit system. Often these expenses are minimal as costs are often shown as much lower than transit systems due to the hidden costs (e.g. A driver that is also general staff support and would be on the payroll whether or not they were driving). LOW Priority

### **Estimate of Impact**

- Recognizing when coordination can and when it should not occur is a key to making coordination successful. Coordination for coordination sake may result in a poor business decision that could undermine the financial stability of a transit system.
- The time involved in futile coordination efforts can be extensive. This time can be better spent exploring realistic solutions.
- By using alternate low cost transportation vendors, human service agency transportation may operate at a lower level of safety than public transit operators. This safety issue can be quantified by TxDOT by comparing audited safety records of non – public transit Medicaid vendors with public transit districts.

### **Possible Solution**

- Again for the most part, this is a local level issue that requires communication among all parties. The key is to understand each others abilities and needs. This planning process will go a long way towards making this successful

### **OTHER CONSTRAINTS**

- **Vehicle requirements.** If state funding from TxDOT is involved, the vehicles must also meet state requirements for use of alternative fuels as defined by TxDOT. TxDOT does not recognize the use of other options such as clean fuels approved by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). HIGH Priority

### **Estimate of Impact**

- The use of certain fuels is inefficient and often it is difficult to find adequate fueling stations. These vehicles have a short range and often need to be refueled multiple times in the day. In addition due to fueling limitations, these vehicles cannot be used for emergencies such as hurricane evacuation – not knowing if fueling will be available.

### **Possible Solution**

- One possible solution would be the relaxing of TxDOT rules regarding the purchase of these vehicles in areas with limited fueling and maintenance capabilities (typically in rural communities).

- **Fragmented Technology** – Currently the different providers use different software (although Lefleuer and El Metro use the same paratransit software). The different software systems make coordination with other programs difficult. Low Priority.

#### **Estimate of Impact**

- Operational coordination is inhibited by different technology that will not interact.
- While coordination can still happen, the power of technology will be negated.

#### **Possible Solution**

- Plan for a common set of technologies in the future. Make sure all procure together