

SUMMARY

Transportation Coordination Network Meeting

Wednesday, September 17, 2008

2:00 – 3:45 p.m.

Corpus Christi Regional Transportation Authority - Conference Room
5658 Bear Lane, Corpus Christi, TX 78405 Phone (361)289-2712

Members Present:

Brigida Gonzalez, CCMPO, Regional Transportation Coordinator
Martin Ornelas, Kleberg Health Center
Gloria Ramos, REAL, Inc.
Eloy Sosa, Consumer
Margie Del Bosque, Kleberg County Human Services
David R. Garcia, Kleberg County Human Services
Linda Stover, Corpus Christi RTA
Robert Gonzales, SERCO of Texas
Tom Niskala, CCMPO, Transportation Planning Director

Barbara Johnson, WorkForce Solutions
Irene Martinez, WorkForce Solutions
Pam Miles, WorkForce Solutions
Judy Telge, Coastal Bend Center for Independent Living
Oscar Vargas, Corpus Christi RTA
Betty Lamb, COG Area on Aging
Richard Bullock, CBCOG
Stephen Ndima, TxDOT, Transportation Planner

Coordination Update

“Building Partnerships: Moving Forward” July 23-24 Workshop in Austin

The primary purpose of this workshop is to provide guidance and share information regarding ways to enhance community transportation services through coordination. There were five different tracks discussed in the workshop and TCN members who participated provided feedback regarding these tracks:

Track 1: Building Partnerships provides the opportunity to learn how to establish relationships and partnerships in the community; how to introduce ourselves to members as well as stakeholders. Key in this workshop was creating good relationships to bring positive outcomes.

Track 2: Coordinated Planning outlined three required steps:

- a) Bringing stakeholders together to discuss their needs,
- b) Considering budget and funding resources
- c) Implementing coordination efforts with an awareness and interest for good communication

Track 3: Technology introduced the electronic means and methods available in the industry to make the role of the provider's service more efficient (e.g., electronic methods of payment, scheduling.)

Track 4: Marketing and Outreach, presented by an Austin-based public relations firm, was ideal for small transit providers who do not have money to hire marketing consultants, firms, or marketing staff. They presented the importance of getting a client's input and participation to make the program successful.

Track 5: Public Involvement, facilitators covered: keys to decision-making that identified points where the public can/should be involved; designing a public involvement plan & selecting techniques that identified involvement opportunities to create awareness, buy-in, political support, and is responsive to consumer input; problem solving and values discussed knowing how to tailor involvement to meet needs and interests; identifying and reaching out to stakeholders; effective communication that involves participants with a different perspectives; and overcoming barriers.

More information and presentation materials regarding these sessions can be found at the following link:

http://www.regionalserviceplanning.org/coordination/workshops/07_23-24_2008/

American Cancer Society

The Regional Transportation Coordinator, together with the American Cancer Society (ACS) and Bee Transit are currently discussing a pilot program to coordinate transportation trips for cancer patients from Beeville to Corpus Christi and then provide additional trips to cancer patients once the vehicle is in the urban area. The premise is that while the driver is waiting on passengers for their return trip to Beeville, the driver is able to provide transportation services to other passengers – i.e. cancer patients in Corpus Christi. Rural providers would be reimbursed their trip cost by ACS for transporting cancer patients. ACS is also committed to driver education. Since drivers will be assisting patients who may have special care needs, ACS will provide training for the driver. Discussions intent on addressing a range of issues are still on-going and the plan is to have something more definitive by year end. If this pilot program is successful, there is an interest to introduce it to others in the region. This is viewed as a “win-win” situation for both ACS and the community.

Questions regarding possible conflicts with passenger eligibility for medical transportation program (MTP) and charter rules were raised. Passengers that are eligible for MTP are not adversely affected by this program as they are not required to use the service as a condition of eligibility. The program would not be considered a charter because transportation is not going to be provided exclusively, fare is not being collected from the passenger, service will be provided as part of regularly scheduled service, and the passenger, not a third party would determine the origin, destination, and scheduling of the trip. Consensus was that there were more questions than there were answers and that together with the coordinator, providers, and ACS – a solution would be secured.

Phase II of Regional Coordination

As our local coordination moves from planning to a more program driven process, we have the funding needed to proceed. A primary charge, after being appointed to the coordinator role, was to secure funds for projects and the coordinator position. Currently, there are two grants – a 5310 and 5316 Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) Grant available to support the coordinator role through 2010, and a Public Transportation Division (PTN) Grant to fund outreach and training assessment programs.

- ***Public Transportation Division Funds Awarded for Outreach and Education***

PTN has awarded us approximately \$52,000 to assist us with a pilot program that will educate consumers and our partner – HHSC agency staff. Past surveys showed a lack of knowledge and information among agency staff as well as consumers. It is necessary to notify and inform the community residents and stakeholders of the kinds of services that are available in the region via website, handouts, posters, flyers, etc.

- ***Project Administration***

Tom Niskala, MPO Transportation Planning Director, explained the MPO’s need to focus on their internal planning process. He stated that after some preliminary discussions with the Coastal Bend Council of Government (CBCOG), Corpus Christi Regional Transportation Authority (RTA), and rural providers there was consensus on the need to place the coordinator post in an environment that was more operational and program driven. As preparations begin for the coordinator post to relocate, there will also be a change to transition Brigida Gonzalez from her Regional Transportation Coordinator position to her new role as an MPO employee. Ms. Gonzalez’s role as Transportation Development Specialist becomes effective October 6th, 2008. Because of the MPO’s continued commitment to the coordination effort, she will continue to support coordination until December 31, 2008 or sooner, if a coordinator is selected. After the transition, the MPO will continue to participate in a stakeholder role.

Funding Opportunities

TxDOT Public Transportation Coordination Call

TxDOT is requesting proposals for various public transportation projects relating to JARC, New Freedom, State Planning Assistance, Rural Transportation Assistance, Intercity Bus, and Rural Discretionary funds. This new procedure allows the applicant to request multiple projects through one proposal. A TxDOT Workshop will be hosted at the District office on October 21, 2008. The proposal should be submitted by December 12th, 2008.

Stephen Ndimma pointed out that there are funds available for JARC (Sec 5316) and New Freedom (Sec 5317). These grants can be used for services beyond ordinary and typical services. There are services needed in the community and TxDOT is ready to provide funds for these needs. He encouraged stakeholders to apply for funds and Transportation Development Credits (TDC) to alleviate the burden of matching. Contact Stephen Ndimma at 361-808-2351 for assistance with questions regarding these grants.

Reference was made to the recommendation of using TDCs for matching a grant request that would allow the upgrade and transitioning of Shah Software from a local network system to an internet based system. This change would shift the burden of upgrades and daily backups to Shah Software. Providers were encouraged to go back and review the information provided via e-mail regarding this possible upgrade. The suggestion is to apply for a grant that would help fund 2 computer stations per rural provider as well as the cost of supporting the new internet based system for 2 to 3 years. It is estimated that the cost per rural provider would be approximately \$1,800 (20% match) but that this amount could also be alleviated by applying for TDCs. The advantage of using Shah's software in an internet based environment would also ensure future ease with trip coordination among rural providers, and eventually the urban provider.

TxDOT 5310 funding

Stephen Ndimma indicated there are over \$260K available in 5310 funds which are intended to assist with the transportation needs of the elderly and people with disabilities. These funds can be used for purchasing service if the service is not being provided in your area, transportation related computer software, vehicles. The recipient of this fund should be a transit provider; however, non-transit providers can apply for this fund as a partner of a transit provider. If there are more projects than there is funding, TxDOT will send the projects to the Transportation Commission as Category B. All applications will be sent to Austin on October 1st, actual contract award for funding starts April in 2009.

The point of contact for the 5310 fund is Stephen Ndimma, TxDOT, 361-808-2351. The project information should be submitted to TxDOT by the end of this month.

Zachery Partnership Project

TxDOT's efforts to secure a public/private partnership to develop I-69 has lead to Zachery/ACS being awarded the initial planning phase of the project. It is expected to take 15 to 18 months to develop the detail plan. The first section of this project will be from US-77 and I-37 in Corpus Christi to Brownsville along US-77. The project would use only private funds and the estimated time frame for completion is 11 years. The project also includes private monies being used for the construction of toll projects in both Corpus Christi and Brownsville in exchange for the toll concessions over a 50 year period. The toll projects in Corpus Christi include the development of Crosstown out to Staples, managed lanes on S.P.I.D., and the building of the Southside Mobility Corridor. Zachery/ACS group is also interested in community-minded activities in the

upgrading area such as *Meals on Wheels* and *A Matter of Balance* by providing financial and/or manpower support. They are very interested in working with public agencies and could be a viable partner in a sustainable, long-term, maintenance, and operation of our regional transportation plan. Zachery/ACS group is interested in any kind of public infrastructure project that could provide a possible profit stream. This project will be a fascinating opportunity for South Texas.

There is also a new freight system developed by Texas Transportation Institute in discussion; a privately owned elevated conveyer railroad carrying containers directly from ships (refer to MPO website, *Automated Freight System*.) The construction of the first route will be in 2015 with the Panama Canal expansion opening. The route will be Brownsville-Corpus Christi-Houston-San Antonio-Laredo, and back to Corpus Christi. The primary customer who is interested in this is HEB. This new freight system saves on the cost of fuel and labor, as well as distributes goods efficiently within the South Texas area.

Discussion of additional needs/TCN member input

81st Legislative Visit & Initiatives

Originally, legislators from across the state were going to visit Corpus Christi in September but their arrival was postponed by Hurricane Ike. Now, they will be meeting in November, after the election. This is a great opportunity for organizations to let the MPO know of any initiative that could be presented as discussions about our community's needs (fuel issues, facility issues, etc.) are held.

Maintenance Facility Coordination

A question regarding Maintenance Facility Coordination in our region was raised. While there has been an interest in this project, it is currently in a transitional phase and on hold. Speculation on the projects resurrection was suggested after leadership at RTA is confirmed. RTA Manager of Planning and Development indicated an update for our next meeting. Past discussions have explored the possibility of getting funds to expand the contracting facilities – currently handling small vehicles – for major maintenance.

Reauthorization

The new transportation bill will come up in 2009. It is expected to see a major rewrite of the rules and regulations for the first time in over 18 year.

Evacuation for Special Needs Population

The issue of Hurricane Ike evacuation for special needs population with State assets was raised. Information regarding the use of local assets versus state assets, what is available, how use is prioritized, and the need for improved future coordination in this area was expressed. The evacuation for special needs population should be better organized, documented, and carried out by a specialized team. It was recommended that this area be discussed further.