



VAN FORUM NOTES

August 9, 2005

GETTING THERE: TRANSPORTATION FOR VITAL AGING

INTRODUCTION. Dick Graham, the host, welcomed the participants in VAN's August forum to DARTS (Dakota Area Resources & Transportation for Seniors). A volunteer-based organization, DARTS works with others to pioneer and deliver high-quality services that support the full participation of seniors and all generations in community life.

Jan Hively, the meeting facilitator, asked the participants to introduce themselves by responding to the question, "What personal issues or problems come to mind when you think about transportation and vital aging?" Responses included:

- Becoming more easily distracted with age has generated concerns about one's own driving habits
- Fear of losing the essential freedom of using a car
- Funding is disparate and not enough. Incentives are needed to make it easy to blend funding streams and maximize potential
- Hearing stories of transportation needs and how one event can take away your driving and isolation generates major concern
- Public transportation not as user friendly for older adults as for others
- Concerned about employment issues related to transportation
- Transportation schedules may not match with scheduled appointments. Those who can help resolve the problem may not have come to the table
- Dementia and driving -- loss of ability to drive
- Continued growth of older adults in the county expands transportation needs
- Affordable options for people who can no longer drive
- Alleviating congestion by providing more public transportation
- Subsidized transportation stops at the borders of counties, etc. Older adults have difficulty getting from one city to another for appointments
- How can we advocate with providers so that they will see their role in funding?
- Suburbia can't get anywhere without a car. Light rail and transit services are necessary to maintain independence
- Desire to stay in own homes but transportation has not developed or worked with other sectors to develop coherent policies and programs. Coordination needed
- Suburban church wants to set up senior housing, but faces lack of transportation
- Son who needs transportation to employment doesn't drive but Dial-A-Ride and regular bus service not available in their suburb
- Congestion of traffic and discourtesy of drivers are growing
- Policy makers must increase funding for mass transit and user friendly transportation systems
- Lack of accessibility and mobility for seniors and people with disabilities

- Question of how to get family members in rural area to and from the metro area
- 70% live in suburbs and are car-centric. We should use models like Berlin, Germany
- Those too old and frail to drive, but able to stay in their homes, need volunteers to drive them
- Needs for transportation cross economic differences.
- Transportation needs that cut off use of public services, particularly libraries
- Reduced access to and within metro area due to increased traffic
- Gas prices today so that people can't afford a car
- Fear of losing the spontaneity that having a car allows
- Mobility critical for independence and vital aging – for opportunities to socialize
- Barriers that prevent access to necessary services -- grocery store, physician, etc. How can I get across the interstate?
- Change the focus from “transportation” to “mobility” for all Americans
- Creative collaboration among social programs could reduce isolation (i.e., after-school programs for children and seniors)
- Dislike driving and want to rely on public transportation, but value the spontaneity
- Timing is ironic – father in rural Minnesota did not pass driving test yesterday – spontaneity and independence has “left him”
- Car-centric culture is difficult to break out of
- Lack of affordable AND accessible transportation
- Getting people where they need to go in a timely manner
- Several participants noted the benefits of the European model of transportation.
- Need for livable communities encouraging pedestrians as well as transit.

Mark Hoisser from DARTS organized the forum and introduced the first speaker who spoke via a teleconference hookup.

KATHY FREUND, INDEPENDENT TRANSPORTATION NETWORK (ITN). Located in Portland, Maine (pop. 225,000), Kathy began by commenting that the participants' sentiments are echoed across the United States. Kathy's project is developing transportation to supplement public transportation through the Independent Transportation Network (ITN). Founded and directed by Kathy, ITN is funded by AARP, National Academy of Science, Federal Transit Administration and private philanthropies interested in social entrepreneurship – harnessing the power of the marketplace for social causes. The bottom line isn't making a profit – it is dignified and sustainable mobility oriented to personal and family needs.

An ITN is a non-profit membership organization. A transportation account is set up after someone pays the annual dues. When a ride is provided, the account is debited. Each member receives a monthly statement reporting remaining funds and suggesting the amount for the next deposit.

Services include 24 / 7 automobile escorted service that is door to door. Rides scheduled in advance (6:00 p.m. the day before) are charged ½ as much (\$1.00 / mile). Ride sharing with another member results in another ½ cost discount. Rides can be scheduled at any time, but earlier assures availability. The majority of consumers are over the age of 80. Last year, ITN

provided 16,500 rides with 60 volunteers, 1 executive director, 2 dispatchers, 6 part-time paid drivers, 2 VISTAs, 3 job trainees and a part-time community outreach person.

Functional changes that limit the ability to drive also tend to limit the ability to use mass transit. Mass transit is on a schedule and available in high density areas. It is inconvenient, however, if you have to walk to the stop with bundles to carry or are not feeling well.

Approximately fifteen percent of riders are couples and each person pays (more like a bus than a taxi). It is expensive transportation but the fares are highly subsidized, particularly in lower density areas. It is ITN's philosophy that a reasonable amount must be charged. If you rely only on volunteers, you typically run into problems associated with a volunteer program (scheduling, loss of volunteers, geographic boundaries, etc.). The ITN system is as reliable as a private automobile.

While ITN recognizes that it is expensive transportation, the fares charged only cover ½ the cost. The rest is raised through donations and innovative payment plans (copayments from stores, clinics, or other service providers). ITN is attempting to leverage funds not used by the social service sector. ITN uses a very broad look at resources – comparable to energy. Like energy (batteries, outlets, etc.), resources change form and can be accessed in any form. Some examples include:

- People who stop driving give ITN their cars in return for credit in their account.
- Volunteers get credit for providing rides. They can store the credit and then turn it into rides for themselves, family members, or low income seniors (Roads Scholarship Program). Providers can receive debits in the same manner.
- Municipalities recruit volunteers for a town account in the Roads Community Scholarship Program.
- Gift certificates for rides can be given as gifts. Often the monthly statements are sent to family members who cover the costs for the ITN accounts.

There ARE a lot of resources – there needs to be a means to channel the resources into mobility accounts.

ITN has created an experience that people prefer – that people need. It took several years to build the program and the largest piece has been the computer technology to support the system. Without that efficient system, the process would be administratively impossible. Their system uses Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to map rides, send statements, manage volunteers – creating a diversified support system.

A comprehensive community assessment has been completed. Replications are occurring in CA, FL and NJ. There are 20 communities in some stage of developing the model. In addition, Dublin, Ireland is reviewing ITN's services. Replication sites receive a community outreach computer module program to assist start up.

Kathy explained that spontaneity is very expensive. When you are no longer able to drive the spontaneity is gone. The question becomes, "How much does it cost to replace your car?" The

answer is, “Very expensive.” ITN has tried its best to provide flexible transportation, but it won’t be the same as jumping in a car and going off by yourself.

Adjustment to transportation is a change caused by aging; no one talks about it and no one prepares for it. The average American family spends 19% of their household income on transportation (\$6,000). It is the second highest cost after housing...ahead of healthcare! More information about ITN can be obtained from their website at www.itnamerica.org.

DRIVEWELL PROGRAM. Kathy then described the DriveWell Program developed by the National Highway Transportation & Safety Administration (NHTSA) and the American Society on Aging (ASA) to educate the public about the changes that can affect the ability to drive as we age. It presents transportation as a family and community issue. It gives ways of understanding the problem of limited driving abilities. The conflict has been “test them” or “don’t test them” and the focus now is developing a measured, supportive approach for older drivers. DriveWell is being tested all over the country as a “train the trainer” program. If found successful (early measures show yes), there are plans to implement more broadly.

DriveWell has a curriculum for older adults that calculates costs, provides information on age-related changes, and presents a conglomeration of tools for trainers. DriveWell should not be confused with driver’s training courses like the AARP 55 Alive. DriveWell is a proactive approach to planning for changes related to aging.

A DriveWell “train the trainer” program is scheduled at Sister Kinney in September. Look in the September VAN Bulletin for the date and time.

More information about DriveWell be obtained from ASA at www.asaging.org.

HOURLCAR, MARY MORSE. HourCar is a new car-sharing program developed in Minneapolis and St. Paul by the Non-Profit Neighborhood Energy Consortium. It grew from the concept that people do not want or need to own a car personally. The director, Mary Morse, started the program a year ago.

The audience for HourCar lies in high density housing areas in the two cities, where people bike and use public transit but still need a car for trips to the grocery store or lumber yard, etc. Minnesota residents pay approximately \$8,000 per year to maintain an automobile. Some people don’t want or can’t afford to own a car, but need one now and then.

HourCar owns 13 Toyota Prius cars, purchased with federal funds. Members join HourCar by paying \$150 and participating in an orientation process. It includes a driving record check. After the screening, an individual will receive a key fob. There are 2 membership plans:

- \$20 a month plus \$4.95 / hour and 39 cents per mile
- If you travel less, \$5 a month plus \$6.95 / hour and 65 cents per mile

Members go online and enter a schedule and select a car. The key is in the car, based at an accessible location. The key fob unlocks the car and allows a member to drive. At the end of the month, each member will receive a bill. The cars cost \$20,000 each and were modified with

technology for security. HourCar downloads information into a laptop which is fed into a central computer. The information details member usage.

Hubs are located at Lake & Hennepin (Calhoun Square), Uptown Y, Loring Park, Lowertown St. Paul, and St. Anthony Park. New hubs are being developed at Mill Place and Riverplace. Hub designation was determined by demographic data (low residents per dwelling). Growth will occur where demand is. It takes about 30 individuals to make each auto work. It takes about 6 months to start a hub and make it viable.

The system allows reservations and spontaneity. It can be shared by individuals. None of the automobile frustrations are the member's concern – gas, maintenance, insurance, etc. HourCar would like to continue to grow – replacing their federal subsidy and adding the purchase of trucks.

HourCar would be difficult to implement in the suburbs or other areas that cannot provide the minimum number of participants for sustainability. However, HourCar is exploring subsidy reimbursement.

HourCar recognizes that it is cheaper to rent from a for-profit rental company if you need a car more than a couple of hours in a day. However, there are drawbacks to a rental car, including insurance fees, etc. HourCar is meant for someone who needs to use a car that's reliable for the typical errands of life (grocery shopping, etc.).

For more information visit HourCar's website at www.hourcar.org. Interested individuals can request a hub through the website.

THE POWER OF COORDINATION, MARK HOISSER. A 30-year DARTS employee, Mark spoke about the initiatives of DARTS and their innovative work in transportation systems. There are 38 vehicles that provide door-to-door service in and outside Dakota County for older adults, persons with disabilities and at risk older adults. Beyond transportation, DARTS offers services for older adults to remain in the community independently (chore, caregiver services, respite, etc.).

Mark reported that the state legislative system added \$40 mil to public transportation this year. At the state level, the vehicle sales tax and gas tax goes to public transit. The current policy is to look at a balance between transit and roads. The congestion of riders is an issue congestion affects commerce as well – companies can't get their information through the Twin Cities.

SAFE-TEA (Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act) passed by the federal government will provide more funding for mass transit. The President passed a federal order to streamline departments to look at transportation – there are 63 different organizations that fund transportation and transit. The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) was challenged to look at transportation overall. MnDOT is collaborating with the Metro Council on a coordination study looking at mobility as a goal -- which is broader than transportation. Hennepin County is conducting a coordination study. The county has a new lease-to-own program for younger adults and individuals at risk of poverty (primarily to get to employment;

after 3 years of good standing they can own the car). Another model being considered is called “Transit Ambassadors.” Transit Ambassadors would be prepared to model the use of public transportation for their friends. It could encompass training for older adults (Mobility Mates).

DARTS is collaborating with the U of M, MNDOT and the Department of Human Services to look at concerns of older drivers. Other partners working with DARTS include the Metro Area Agency on Aging and AARP. Mark explained that there are generally two targeted audiences for planning: older people who currently drive and older people who no longer drive. Systems need to be developed for both of these groups.

Mark echoed sentiments by Kathy that transportation is not cheap. There must be a continuum in place for older drivers and a social service system in place that can assist with the personal impact of loss of driving. Social services have to be a part of the transition.

More information on DARTS can be obtained from www.darts1.org.

DISCUSSION. Jan mentioned that The Hartford Insurance recently released a publication entitled “We Need to Talk” which is a hands-on guide for older drivers and their families. The publication can be obtained from www.thehartford.com/talkwitholderdrivers/

Other ideas should be generated to take advantage of the fact that there are many cars sitting in garages and not being used. They present potential for volunteers and HourCar.

It was pointed out that private businesses were not represented at the forum today. Mark Hoisser suggested that businesses understand the impact of transportation and the importance. The difficulty arises when you begin to discuss funding transportation.

A MNDOT representative reported that transit systems in Minnesota were collapsing in rural communities throughout the state. The systems were developed to take people to work, but the jobs and workers may have moved away, leaving older adults unable to walk to the busstop. Rural systems need redesign. Aging in place is occurring and a reinvention must occur – perhaps through mobility managers.

CLOSING. On behalf of VAN, Jan thanked the speakers, stressed the importance of transportation for vital aging, and suggested that the topic be updated at a VAN forum next year. Ideas for local, regional and state changes for vital aging must be collected. Jan will lead a roundtable on “Policies for Vital Aging” at the 2005 Age and Disabilities Conference in Duluth.

Next month VAN welcomes Dr. Jan McCulloch from the University of Minnesota Department of Family Social Science. She will discuss “aging on the farm” as it relates to mental health issues. Join VAN for the next forum on Tuesday, September 13, 2005 at the Fridley Community Center.