SECTION 5: STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVED SERVICE AND COORDINATION

Background

Many agencies involved in providing transportation services will agree that there are tangible benefits to coordination of services. However, barriers both real and perceived exist that constrain the ability of providers and other agencies to coordinate services and realize benefits both for themselves and their clients.

Common barriers to coordination include lack of resources, different training requirements or vehicle specifications, and funding requirements. Some, like the sharing of information across jurisdictions, are more easily addressed through structured, regular meetings among agencies and providers. Other barriers present greater challenges. Issues like insurance and liability are more complex challenges that require ongoing efforts and dialogue with numerous agencies, providers, nonprofits and insurers. Another significant barrier to coordination is the multitude of government programs and funding requirements. Over the past 30 years, federal, state and local governments have implemented various programs aimed at improving coordination of publicly funded transportation services for transportation disadvantaged populations, including people with disabilities, Medicaid recipients, and other human service agency clients. Unfortunately, barriers to coordination still exist, and many stem from the administrative and eligibility requirements imposed by government rules and regulations.

In fact, areas that have had the most success in coordination occur when coordination is mandated by state or local agencies and institutional support is provided to make the coordination happen. Given that this region includes two states and the District of Columbia, and multiple counties and cities, each with its own set of transportation programs and accompanying rules, coordination is challenging.

Opportunities for Coordination and Mobility Management

The AFA can play a role in facilitating discussions about coordination opportunities; however, local jurisdictions should explore opportunities for collaboration.

The region experienced successful coordination under Enhanced Mobility by funding and successfully guiding implementation of mobility management projects such as the Northern Virginia Mobility Access Project (NVMAP) and Montgomery County Maryland's Department of Health and Human Services' Enhancing Montgomery's Mobility project.

Both the NVMAP and Enhancing Montgomery's Mobility projects coordinated with various governmental departments with an interest or need for transportation and involved local non-profit providers of transportation to help identify and close gaps in service. Collaborative outreach efforts were used by both projects to get the word out about available options. Next steps for the NVMAP project include coordinating with a non-profit organization serving Vietnamese older adults to develop a language-specific transportation guide and with a transportation management

organization to help recruit and train bilingual drivers and volunteers, and to provide travel training in Spanish. In 2009 the Prince William County Area Agency on Aging worked with non-project agencies and transportation providers and developed county-wide mobility management plan that identified gaps in services that could be filled strategically.

These types of collaborative projects can be time and labor intensive but can offer important transportation information and services to individuals needing them.

Strategies for Improved Service and Coordination

FTA rules require that all projects funded under the Enhanced Mobility program must either address a strategy or a priority project in the Coordinated Plan. The strategies below were broadly defined to address the unmet transportation needs that the AFA previously identified under four themes: availability, accessibility, awareness and affordability. Proposals submitted for funding must be responsive to at least one of the following four strategies. Some projects may have a greater overall impact on unmet needs, and accordingly are a greater priority for funding.

The strategies have been developed to reflect the unique transportation needs facing both older adults and people with disabilities --with limited incomes and who are most-likely transit-dependent-- to reflect the importance of changes in demographics and in travel patterns; and to reflect the ongoing need for additional transportation options.

I. EXPAND AVAILABILITY AND COORDINATION OF TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS

- Coordinate transportation services and programs within and across jurisdictions:
    - o Make cross-jurisdictional transportation easier to access
    - o Coordinate transportation operations among providers such as vehicle-sharing, joint fuel purchase, shared maintenance etc.
    - o Involve private providers in service delivery
    - o Involve potential stakeholders during the planning phase
    - o Use mobility managers to promote coordination and help individuals plan the whole trip (determining available options, researching eligibility, and applying and scheduling if needed)
    - o Use Enhanced Mobility grants to jump start the planning process needed to make coordination happen
- Make services more frequent and reliable including those that address the East-West divide (promotion and addition of services that connect the eastern side of the region to the western side)
- Add more reliable and timely transportation options for those who cannot drive which address gaps when Metro is not running, particularly for:
    - o urgent and same day service
    - o weekend and evening service

- Improve the timeliness of specialized services so that wait times and time on the vehicle is reasonable

II. INCREASE AWARENESS OF EXISTING TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

- Provide better and centralized information about existing specialized transportation options, (e.g. one-call, one-click services). Target and customize marketing of services to particular groups, including neighbors and caregivers, and offer the information in a variety of formats, including in languages other than English.
- Transportation providers should support customer-empowered communication with clear and concise information using plain language about services, and customer rights and responsibilities
- Transportation agencies and providers should use customer satisfaction surveys to find out how effective their communication is and how satisfied customers are with their transportation services
- Create and revise websites to be user-friendly with easy navigation and provide access to a variety of users, including those with vision impairments and meet the highest standards for ADA website compliance
- Provide information on specialized transportation services in formats other than via websites (e.g. brochures and flyers)
- Provide safety education for users and drivers on pedestrians, bicycles, and other non-motorized modes of travel such as electric scooters
- Train front-line staff to improve communication, interactions and understanding of user needs and concerns

III. IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY OF TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS

- Create and maintain safe and accessible pathways to and from bus and rail stations
- Provide first mile/last mile connections to bus and rail stations (e.g. shuttle, taxi and ride-hailing services)
- Make ride-hailing services, taxis and microtransit accessible to people who use mobility devices and for those without smart phones
- Improve the accessibility and ease of use of payment-systems
- Provide training on transportation-related websites and technology (apps, payment systems).
- Consider accessibility in the planning and design phase of projects and involve people with disabilities and older adults

IV. MAKE TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS MORE AFFORDABLE AND SUSTAINABLE

- Offer affordable options for all income levels, i.e. people who don't qualify as low-income yet cannot afford some services. Transit fares, parking costs and tolls can be barriers.

- Subsidize rides for those who cannot afford the cost (user-side subsidies for transit, taxis, and ride-hailing services)

- Identify new revenue streams to sustain and increase specialized transportation options needed

- Make programs and services sustainable after grant funding ends

- Identify cost-efficient ways to provide specialized services (e.g. alternatives to MetroAccess)

- Prioritize projects that assist people with disabilities and older adults with limited-incomes

- Build on or duplicate efficient and effective existing transportation options rather than creating entirely new services

- Evaluate new transportation services or pilots to identify lessons learned and build upon successes