

ITEM 12 - Information

January 18, 2012

Briefing on an Assessment of the Job Access and Reverse Commute for Low Income Individuals (JARC) Program and the New Freedom Program for Persons with Disabilities in the National Capital Region

Staff Recommendation: Receive briefing on the findings and recommendations from the assessment.

Issues: None

Background: In FY 2011, an independent consultant was engaged to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the TPB activity that has funded 35 projects between 2007 and 2010 under the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Job Access and Reverse Commute for Low Income Individuals (JARC) program and the New Freedom Program for Persons with Disabilities. The TPB became the designated recipient of these two FTA programs for the Washington, DC-VA-MD Urbanized Area in 2006. The assessment examined project impacts and benefits, lessons learned, and potential improvements for future project solicitations.

National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board

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Memorandum

TO: Transportation Planning Board

FROM: Wendy Klancher
Principal Transportation Planner
Department of Transportation Planning

SUBJECT: Findings and Recommendations from the Assessment of the Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) and New Freedom Programs Administered by the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB)

DATE: January 12, 2012

This memorandum provides a brief summary of the comprehensive report “Assessment of the Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) and New Freedom Programs in the National Capital Region” developed by Nelson/Nygaard Associates, dated January 2012. The full report, which provides many more detailed findings and recommendations than are provided in this summary, is posted under the [TPB Committee documents](#).

Background

The TPB obtained consultant assistance from Nelson/Nygaard Associates in Fiscal Year 2011 to conduct an independent assessment of the JARC and New Freedom programs administered by the TPB. These Federal Transit Administration (FTA) programs are intended to improve transportation for low-income persons seeking access to work or training opportunities and/or reverse commute strategies (JARC), and to improve transportation for persons with disabilities (New Freedom).

In 2006, the TPB became the designated recipient of FTA’s JARC and New Freedom programs for the Washington DC-VA-MD Urbanized Area. In 2007, the TPB created the Human Service Transportation Coordination Task Force (referred to in this memo as the Task Force) to oversee the development on the Coordinated Human Service Transportation Plan which lays out strategies to meet the unmet transportation needs for people with disabilities, those with limited incomes and older adults. The Coordinated Plan also established the selection criteria to be used in the competitive selection process. The TPB adopted the first Coordinated Plan in 2007 and an update in 2009.

JARC funding can be used for transportation services and programs that improve access to job sites for people with limited incomes. New Freedom funds are for transportation services and programs that improve the mobility of people with disabilities which go above and beyond what is required

by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Both programs require matching funds: 50% for operating and 20% for capital or mobility management¹.

Between 2007 and 2010, the TPB has funded 35 grants totaling over \$10 million, with approximately \$7 million provided in Federal funding and over \$3 million in matching funds provided by the project sponsors. The grants range from travel training on how to use the bus and rail system to door-to-door services to the purchase of wheelchair accessible taxi vehicles.

Purpose of the Assessment

The purpose of this assessment was to systematically review the grants funded between 2007 and 2010 in terms of their effectiveness in meeting the needs of low-income and disability communities, as well as to assess the process used for soliciting and selecting projects (the TPB role). The Task Force has reviewed lessons learned from the projects and each year has made changes to improve the solicitation and selection process. However, these JARC and New Freedom planning and implementation activities had never been formally or independently assessed. After four years of project selection and 35 projects from which to learn, a comprehensive and objective assessment was needed to examine the process and the projects, along with a comparison of experiences in other areas.

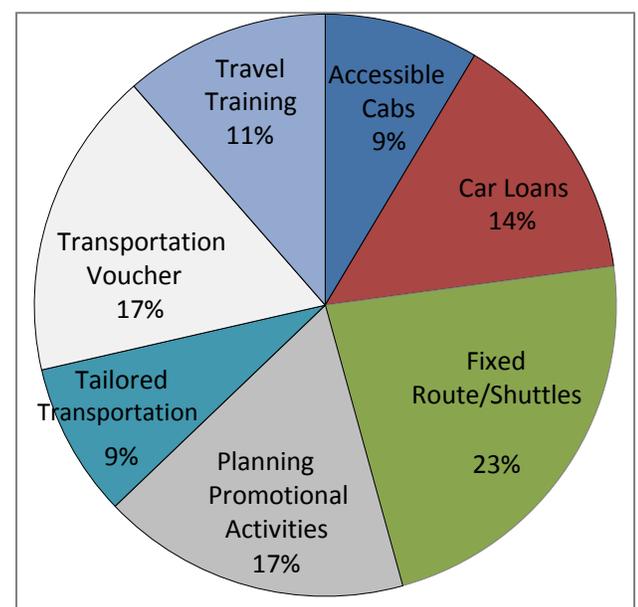
Nelson/Nygaard conducted the assessment between March and November 2011. The consultant team interviewed grantees, customers and the Task Force. The consultant team also assessed data from the 35 grants using FTA-required quarterly financial and milestone reports and annual performance measurement reports. A comparison of the process and grants of nine peer agencies helped inform the findings and recommendations. The TPB's Human Service Transportation Coordination Task Force reviewed and helped finalize the findings and recommendations.

Information on the Grants

The assessment found that a wide variety of grants were funded between 2007 and 2010. These 35 grants totaled \$10.3 million (\$7.0 million in Federal funds plus \$3.3 million in matching funds). The grant funding amounts ranged from \$75,000 to \$1 million. The majority, over two-thirds, of the total grant amounts are less than \$300,000. Figure 1 shows the percentage breakdown of all 35 JARC and New Freedom programs by seven types:

- **Fixed Route or Shuttles** (23%), five grants that provide new or extended bus routes or shuttle service that serve targeted populations;

Figure 1: Percentage of All Grants Funded by Type (2007 to 2010)



¹ FTA describes mobility management as a strategic approach to service coordination and customer service which enhances the ease of use and accessibility of transportation networks. One-stop information services and travel training grants qualify as mobility management and therefore only a 20% match is required.

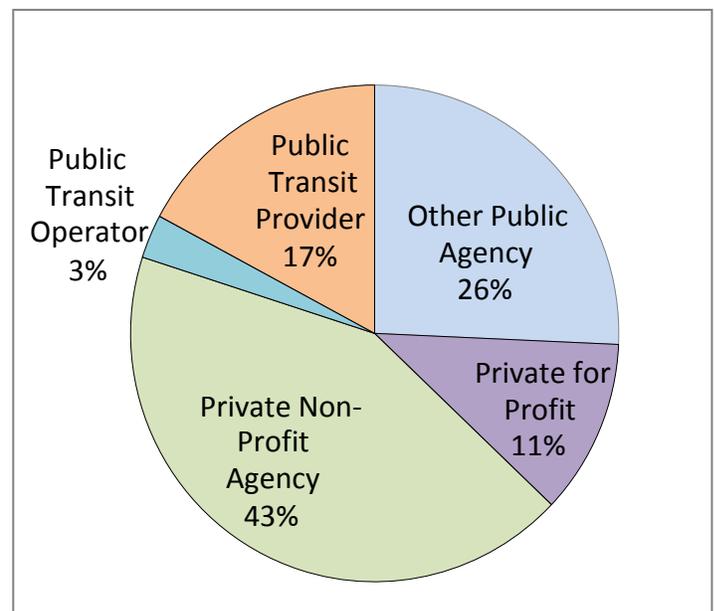
- **Planning and Promotional Activities** (17%), four grants that involve human service and transportation coordinated planning or marketing of existing transportation services;
- **Transportation Vouchers** (17%), five grants provide a coupon for people to use taxis or other alternative transportation resources;
- **Car Loans** (14%), five grants that assist low-income individuals to purchase autos, many with low-interest loans, in areas with poor access to public transit;
- **Travel Training** (11%), four grants train individuals with disabilities on how to use the bus and rail systems;
- **Tailored Transportation Services** (9%), eight grants operate transportation services to specific markets or services, such as door-through-door passenger assistance; and
- **Wheelchair Accessible Cabs** (9%), four grants provide assistance for wheelchair-accessible taxis in the District of Columbia to accommodate individuals in wheelchairs unable to transfer to a sedan.

The assessment found that 15 grants out of the 35 funded were 50% or more complete as of June 2011, as evidenced by funds expended. The findings from the assessment are based on these 15 projects, since the other 20 were not far enough along to be properly assessed.

Each year the Task Force establishes priorities for the JARC and New Freedom grant solicitation to respond to unmet transportation needs. The assessment identified that 80% of the funding went to grants responding to priorities set by the Task Force.

**Figure 2: Project Sponsor by Type
(2007 to 2010)**

Figure 2 shows the diversity of project sponsorship, with the private non-profit agency being the most common type of grantee. Public agencies, like Area Agencies on Aging, affiliated with a local government, make up about one-quarter of the projects. Six projects have been sponsored by public transit providers, which are the District Department of Transportation, Montgomery County Ride On, and the Prince George's County TheBus. One public transit operator, WMATA, has received funding for a joint JARC and New Freedom project. Private for profit companies have also been given grants for the purchase and operation of wheelchair accessible taxis in D.C.



Potential Regional Impacts

A central finding from the report is that the grants successfully expand mobility options for people with disabilities and those with limited incomes. In many cases, the grants are providing better options for consumers at a lower cost than traditional public transit or paratransit services. The

following grants are good examples of grants with regional impacts that increase the mobility of people with disabilities while lowering the demand for costly paratransit services:

- **Regional Travel Training:** WMATA and several non-profit agencies provide customized in-depth training to people with disabilities and older adults on how to use the local bus systems, Metrobus, and Metrorail under five grants funded between 2007 and 2010.
- **Regional Bus Stop Access Improvement Program:** WMATA will start work early this year to improve the accessibility of 50 bus stops and nearby pedestrian pathways for persons with disabilities across the region;
- **D.C .Wheelchair Accessible Taxi Pilot:** Since May 2011 the Nation’s Capital has wheelchair-accessible taxi service like it’s neighboring jurisdictions that provide ramped minivan taxi service for wheelchair-users that are unable to transfer to a sedan; and
- **Reach-a-Ride:** The new website (www.reacharide.com) and call center launched in November 2011 is the only regional resource that provides a searchable database for specialized transportation options in D.C., Suburban Maryland and Northern Virginia.

Comparison of the TPB Program to Peer Agencies

The consultant team compared the TPB program and grants to nine peer agencies throughout the country that administer JARC and New Freedom programs. The nine peer agencies are similar to TPB in terms of population, geographic area, and number of jurisdictions. The peer agencies are public transit operators, Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), and one state Department of Transportation. The nine agencies are the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA-Chicago), the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG-Dallas), the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC- Philadelphia), the Metropolitan Council (Minneapolis), the Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon (TriMet-Portland), the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC-San Francisco Bay Area) and the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT).

The assessment found that compared to the nine peer agencies, the TPB has a more proactive role in program administration because of responsibilities for developing the coordinated plan, annually determining a set of priorities, soliciting for project sponsors, providing technical assistance, and actively managing grantees. The TPB has funded a wider range of projects than peer agencies, and has attracted a wider range of project sponsors. The TPB and MTC in the San Francisco Bay Area are the only ones out of the nine peer agencies to conduct a comprehensive assessment of their JARC and New Freedom programs. The TPB has also been successful in obligating all of it’s JARC and New Freedom funds, unlike other agencies that have lost some funding because they weren’t able to obligate it before it expired. Although the majority (six out of nine) of the peer agencies use a quantitative scoring in the selection process, the TPB has a formal selection committee and the membership includes a wide range of representatives of public and private transportation, human services, and people with knowledge of transportation issues for persons with disabilities and those with low-incomes. The TPB was the only agency out of the nine that has the Selection Committee chaired by a Board Member.

Similar to the TPB, the peer agencies found FTA regulations and processes to be cumbersome. The 50% match requirement for operating projects was often mentioned as an impediment to attracting project sponsors. The peer agencies identified that the lag time between when projects are selected and FTA approval can be too long, and cause future delays as conditions change from the time the applicant proposed the project to when they get notice to proceed. The peer agencies also stated that the Federal limitation on how the funds can be spent is a challenge.

Findings

The report stated that “administration of the JARC and New Freedom grant process is straightforward, clear and effective” and that “no significant changes are called for at this time”.

Based on the quantitative and qualitative data from the 15 grants that were 50% or more complete by June 2011, the consultant team found that the implementation of the grants was slower than expected. About one-third of the grantees were not able to complete the grant activities within the two-year time frame, and needed no-cost extensions. Reasons cited for implementation delays include a high-learning curve to establish new programs or services, recruiting program participants took longer than expected, mismatches between grant and agency cycles and staff turnover. As a result, most grants did not meet the estimated number of people to be served originally stated in application. Some customer benefits from the grant programs were significant but hard to quantify. For example, each person who is successfully travel trained can be expected to take many trips over time, also resulting in cost savings for the transit agency not providing more expensive paratransit services; likewise, a low-income person who is provided a loan for an automobile will not only be able to access job sites, but is also better positioned to have more options that may result in obtaining a higher paying job.

The grantees told the consultant team that their agency had challenges in identifying matching funds, that the administration of the federal grant took more time than anticipated, and that there is a reluctance to start new services when future funding is uncertain. Grantees stated that the economic downturn has resulted in more clients that need services, fewer staff to help with the grant implementation and less overall funding. The grantees also reported that the grants provided a variety of benefits for clients.

Recommendations and Next Steps

The following recommendations from the report are proposed for the JARC and New Freedom grant solicitation scheduled to occur from February to April 2012:

- **Provide project templates to assist potential applicants** in considering keys to success and how to set up a new program when developing a grant application. Templates are being prepared to support applications for Travel Training (New Freedom), Auto Loan programs (JARC), Vanpooling and Ridesharing (JARC), and Volunteer Driver Programs (New Freedom).
- **Ensure Selection Committee members are rotated more often** and that there is adequate representation by organizations that serve both low-income persons and persons with disabilities.

After the grant solicitation has concluded, in late-summer 2012, these report recommendations are proposed:

- **Update Task Force membership** to ensure there is a good balance of Task Force members representing low-income persons, and persons with disabilities.
- **Conduct the project selection process every two** years rather than on an annual basis, taking into account future extensions and reauthorization of the surface transportation program. The longer funding cycle could be used to provide increased technical support to program sponsors after funding has been allocated. The approach may result in fewer, but more targeted and more regionally-orientated programs.
- **Provide technical assistance by offering workshops or peer-to-peer** exchanges to allow grantees to learn from each other about lessons learned and creative ways to address common challenges.
- **Modify existing FTA-required reports so they better document program outcomes** without adding onerous reporting requirements to the grantees. The reports could be tailored for the type of project, and include both qualitative and quantitative outcomes.

Suggested Changes to Federal Requirements

The assessment identified federal guidelines and processes as significant challenges to providing innovative transportation that responds most efficiently and effectively to the travel needs of persons with disabilities and those with limited incomes. The report recommended that the TPB suggest the following changes to Federal requirements to address the most significant of these challenges:

- Build on the success of SAFETEA's mobility management category of project that allows a 20% match (instead of 50 % for operating projects), and expand this lower level of matching funds to all JARC and New Freedom project types;
- Streamline and reduce administrative requirements which were originally designed for conventional transit programs (such as procuring transit capital);
- Expand the eligible activities for JARC funding. Eligible JARC activities are limited, and do not adequately address the transportation concerns of lower-income workers, particularly those with young children. As an example, JARC funding cannot be used to purchase transit passes: this restriction on using JARC funds to purchase transit passes should be eliminated. Transportation costs related to childcare for low-income workers should also be an eligible expense; and

- Provide a national independent evaluation that identifies best practices in program oversight and types of grants to help program administrators, like the TPB, and project sponsors.

For More Information

The full assessment report and the details for the 2012 grant solicitation can be found at the TPB Coordination website: www.tpbcoordination.org.