



Southeastern Massachusetts Transportation Alliance

Key Findings from Focus Group

On Transportation Needs

February 22-25, 2010

Prepared by:
SRPEDD

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Southeastern Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization
Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District
Southeastern Massachusetts Transportation Alliance (SMTA)

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Fall River Boys & Girls Club
Attleboro Public Library
Greater Attleboro-Taunton Regional Transit Authority

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The Southeastern Massachusetts Transportation Alliance (SMTA) is a newly formed group that seeks to expand the mobility of people in the region by using existing transportation-related resources more effectively.

All levels of government as well as community agencies spend A LOT OF MONEY on public and private transportation for many user groups - elders, veterans, the disabled, the unemployed and people with low incomes. However, we are not getting the biggest bang for the buck due to duplication of services, lack of coordination, and a mismatch between services and needs.

The goal of SMTA is not to find ways to cut total spending; rather, it is to find opportunities to promote and use existing resources more wisely to better meet the transportation needs for more people.

We are sharing the results of our efforts so far, in order to: 1) raise awareness of current issues in transportation services; 2) gain your support in working toward solutions; 3) make transportation a priority on the local agenda; and, 4) identify potential benefits of transportation coordination.

SMTA was formed at a Massachusetts Transportation Coordination Institute in October 2009, which was sponsored by the Work Without Limits Initiative. The Institute was facilitated by the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA)—a national advocacy, education and technical assistance organization dedicated to improved public and community transportation choices.

In February 2010, the SMTA hosted focus groups in Attleboro, Taunton, New Bedford and Fall River that identified transportation needs, barriers and solutions. Attendees included representatives or members of the following groups: seniors, youths, veterans, public housing, people with disabilities, low income persons, employment programs, community action programs, higher education and transit users.

This brief summary identifies key findings from the focus group discussions. More detail can be found in the full report that is available upon request and at www.srpedd.org, under "Transportation Alliance".

Southeastern Massachusetts Transportation Alliance (SMTA)
Key Findings and Priorities
Transportation Needs Focus Group Meetings, February 22-25, 2010

Key Findings

- Many transportation service gaps exist, but access to underserved employment areas and evening transportation are a priority need.
- There are perceived barriers to transportation coordination, such as funding guidelines and insurance requirements, which need clarification or policy changes.
- Clients and frontline service workers want to be included in the planning and decision-making about transportation and other services.
- An aging population and a desire to create livable and sustainable communities are opportunities for partnerships between multiple groups with common goals.
- Many human service agencies do not want to be in the transportation business.
- Buying vehicles for departments and agencies is a band-aid, not a solution.
- The motivation to cut costs and use existing resources more efficiently is shared by many agencies, suggesting a willingness to support coordination.

TOP 3 UNMET NEEDS:

#1 Evening Transportation Service

#2 Cross-Regional Connections, including Medical Transportation

#3 Information and Marketing about Existing Public Transit

- Most existing bus service stops around 6PM and Council on Aging services stop at 4PM. This prevents residents of all ages from: obtaining employment, volunteering, attending evening classes, participating in after school programs and civic events.
- The lack of transportation connections between the cities in the region and to Providence and Boston limits employment, education and economic development opportunities and presents a barrier to medical and social services. Every community identifies long-distance medical transportation as an increasing need for its veterans, seniors, and people with disabilities.
- Information about existing transportation services is inadequate. Signage and schedules need to be understood by older adults, people with visual impairments, and non-English speaking. People do not know what is available to them, where to look for the information, or how to use the existing services.

TOP 3 BARRIERS

#1 Cost of Public Transportation to Passengers

#2 Physical Barriers, including Security and Safety

#3 Policy Barriers

- People with low incomes are not likely to carve out the cost for an unlimited monthly bus pass. In SRTA, the lack of free or discounted transfers also adds to the cost of the bus, particularly for families.
- Physical barriers to using the bus include: unsafe or nonexistent sidewalk connections to buses and trains, bus stops blocked by snow or other obstacles for people who use mobility devices, and the inability to walk long distances to bus stops by elders and people with disabilities. Security issues exist at the SRTA bus terminal due to a lack of security or other personnel, inadequate lighting and loitering. Existing MBTA stations are located in remote areas, which feel unsafe for people not waiting in cars.
- Examples of real or perceived policy barriers to a more cost-effective, comprehensive transportation system include:
 - Insurance policies/regulations that discourage vehicle sharing between programs, and deter employees and volunteer drivers from transporting passengers in their own cars.
 - Perceived barriers to ride-sharing and cost-sharing may result in duplication of services for different user groups and higher operating costs per trip.
 - Transportation is often an ineligible expense in funding programs; or, vehicle purchases are allowed but contracting for transportation services is not.
 - Consolidation or relocation decisions of agencies, departments and medical facilities do not consider the effect on transportation cost and accessibility for their clients.
 - Regional Transit Authority decisions are made with inadequate input from people who actually use or need public transportation.

SMTA Next Steps

In the coming months, SMTA will continue working on a Mobility Management Plan for the region by compiling a comprehensive inventory of transportation resources to be part of a one-stop transportation information center. Other efforts will include outreach about existing services, transportation gaps and policies that are obstacles to coordination activities as well as actions to address the gaps and barriers.

What SMTA is asking from you: Your Support!

- Get on the SMTA team contact list by calling Louise Hardiman at SRPEDD, 508-824-1367 or by emailing lhardiman@srpedd.org.
- Join a subcommittee to work on policy issues, increasing ridesharing, transit improvements or other solutions.
- Tell us your transportation story: how you or someone you know has difficulty getting around, or, how existing transportation services are important to you.