



# Southeastern Massachusetts Transportation Alliance

Focus Group Summary

On Transportation Needs

February 22-25, 2010

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

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

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Brian Foss	Community Care Services
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Brian Pastori	Community Economic Development Center
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Joanne LaFerrara	Greater Attleboro-Taunton Regional Transit Authority
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Sarah Alden	Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission
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Donna Kulpa	SRPEDD Commissioner
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**Southeastern Massachusetts Transportation Alliance  
Summary of Focus Group Discussions  
February 22-25, 2010  
Transportation Needs, Barriers and Solutions**

The Southeastern Massachusetts Transportation Alliance (SMTA) is a project initiated by the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District and other agencies that see the need to expand transportation services in the region and realize that more public transportation funding is an unlikely solution at this time. The work of the SMTA is to find ways to coordinate existing transportation resources and to increase information about transportation options in order to increase mobility to all. It is hoped that the outcomes of this effort will include sharing resources; mobility management activities and ultimately, mobility improvements for everyone in the region.

“Mobility” can be defined as “the ability to move freely”. Roughly a third of the population does not have that ability. It can be argued that lack of mobility results in higher dropout and unemployment rates, less involvement in the community, a lack of independence and social isolation. All of a city or town’s programs to help youths, elders, people with disabilities or low-income citizens don’t help if those people can’t get to them.

“Mobility Management” is an approach that focuses on customer needs, not just a single mode of transportation. It looks at a wide range of services and providers to achieve efficiency in delivering services. Mobility management helps all kinds of transportation needs—not just one type of person or trip. It uses multiple providers to offer the most efficient and effective service to all individuals.<sup>1</sup>

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

Members of the SMTA team who attended the Massachusetts Transportation Coordination Institute in October 2009 include: Sarah Alden, Mass Rehab Commission; Brian Foss, Community Care Services; Louise Hardiman, SRPEDD; Deborah Jenkins, Fairhaven COA; Donna Kulpa, SRPEDD Commissioner; Joanne LaFerrara, GATRA; Felice Monteiro, New Bedford COA; Liza Tobojka, New Bedford Disability Program Navigator; Corinn Williams, CEDC; Marguerite Zarrillo, UMass Dartmouth. Members who joined SMTA since October include: Ann McCrillis, Coastline Elderly Services; Tanja Ryden, Massachusetts HST Office; and Brian Pastori, CEDC.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.unitedweride.gov/Mobility\\_Management\\_Brochure.pdf](http://www.unitedweride.gov/Mobility_Management_Brochure.pdf)

The SMTA team developed a one year work plan, which included a task of hosting focus group meetings with discussion revolving around identification of transportation needs in the southeastern Massachusetts region. Invitations to attend a focus group were distributed to 400 representatives of the following population groups: seniors, people with disabilities, youth, low income persons, jobs/employment programs, community action programs, housing, veterans, higher education and transit users not represented in the other groups. Fifty individuals participated in the discussions, representing all of the above groups, with representation from area towns as well as the four cities in the region.

Five focus group meetings took place during the week of February 22-25, 2010. One afternoon meeting was held in each of the cities of New Bedford, Fall River, Attleboro and Taunton. An additional meeting was held in New Bedford in the evening due to demand. Focus group sizes ranged from 8-12 participants to allow in depth conversations.

Each focus group was facilitated by Charles Rutkowski, Assistant Director of the Community Transportation Association of America. Participants were told that they may answer questions on behalf of themselves or on behalf of their agency or organization and who they represent. The following questions were asked at each of the five meetings:

1. How many here use transit? How do you currently get around?
2. What are your specific transportation needs: Where do you need to go, when, how often, for what purpose?
3. What are the transportation barriers you face? Physical, location, time, cost, advance notice, weather, other people, information are possible barriers.
4. What are some other problems that you see with current transportation services?
5. What are some possible solutions to the problems you've described? Some additional services?
6. How does transportation that you currently use work well to meet mobility needs? How does it not work well?
7. What are the top three transportation priorities, of those mentioned?

This report summarizes the discussions of unmet transportation needs and barriers. It also includes how existing services are working, travel alternatives currently used and possible solutions.

## Summary of Focus Group Discussions, February 22-25, 2010

### Regionwide Transportation Needs and Gaps

#### #1) EVENING HOURS OF SERVICE

- For Mass Rehab Commission (MRC) clients and all people with disabilities to employment
- For people with disabilities to attend functions in the evening
- For UMass Dartmouth (UMD) students to work or volunteer
- For UMD Workers' Education Program evening students
- For families who can't enjoy AHA night in New Bedford or other free community events for families (especially in summer)
- For seniors who can not drive at night
- For consumers to go shopping and do errands
- For ESL class at the New Bedford Community Health Center (6:30PM, 2x/week)
- For workers of 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> shifts at Industrial Parks and for jobs at Malls and retail areas. People with entry-level skills and lowest incomes have the least opportunity to work.
- For youth programs (e.g., YWCA, Boys & Girls Club) and after school activities. Evening rides to take kids home from programs, when kids need it most. Service to 8PM to have kids take part in sport programs.
- For college courses, even at downtown campus; or evening educational programs (e.g., Middleborough classes for unemployed at Library)
- For civic participation

"We have lots of programs, but some kids can't get to them, so they hang around and get in trouble. That's a shame!"

#### #2) EXPANDED SERVICE TO MEET EMPLOYMENT NEEDS

- Evening retail and 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> shifts at Industrial Parks.
- Holiday and Sunday transportation.
- Early morning transportation for work trips.

#### #3) LONG-DISTANCE MEDICAL TRANSPORTATION

- Long-distance medical transportation from every community, for veterans to VAs, seniors, people with disabilities, people with wheelchairs—who do not qualify for Mass Health. (Mass Health pays for transportation to all medical appointments.)

#### #4) CONNECTIONS ACROSS THE REGION

- Connections to the region's cities from neighboring towns for medical services, agencies, Courts. Connections from cities to suburban employment areas (e.g., Dartmouth, Somerset, Swansea, Fairhaven, Freetown, Westport). Connections between the four cities in southeastern Massachusetts and between the Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs) for employment, education, medical, social services, Court and Department of Transitional Assistance requirements—especially as offices have consolidated, but without provision for transportation access of the poorest populations.

- Southeastern Massachusetts residents without cars can't get to higher education in the area, including Bridgewater State College.
- Connections from MBTA stations to jobs in the region.
- Connections to Lakeville MBTA commuter rail station from New Bedford.
- Connections to jobs in Industrial Parks.

#### #5) INFORMATION ABOUT TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

- Better signage, information and communication for the public, including people with limited English proficiency (LEP) and people with visual impairments.

#### #6) DEMAND RESPONSE SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS

- In rural-suburban areas, there are no options for youths or the unemployed to get to work or other activities. There is limited transportation for people in wheelchairs to get to doctors, services, groceries, physical/occupational therapy, and supportive day programs in other towns.
- Demand-response is not a reliable enough option for employment especially when work schedules change every week, as in retail.
- Demand response is not an option for short-notice transportation needs (24 hours or less) for when "life" happens. "Everything has to be on someone else's schedule."
- More individualized, special services are needed for seniors who increasingly need door-to-door or even door-through-door assistance. Escorts are needed to go with elders and people who are ill from treatment.
- No evening and weekend service prevents elders and people with disabilities from visiting family members and taking recreational trips.
- Many seniors who should give up driving will not do so unless better options are available to them.

"Sometimes seniors don't feel well and need a same or next day doctor appointment. They use an ambulance instead, or wait until the problem gets worse."

#### #7) CONNECTIONS TO PROVIDENCE AND BOSTON

- Train for Fall River and New Bedford.
- Coordination of commuter bus and commuter rail schedules.

#### #8) OTHER UNMET NEEDS

- Serving patients receiving dialysis, radiation or chemotherapy, or other outpatient treatment that requires follow-up appointments.
- Serving the visually impaired who generally have two different types of transportation needs: 1) retirement age, newly affected, to medical appointments, loved ones work full time; 2) younger age to potential employment or education.

## **Examples of Specific Needs**

- Wareham MRC clients to employment that is outside of town or falls outside of transit hours, and to training at Cape Cod Community College.
- A better timed connection between the Fairhaven bus to New Bedford and the bus to UMass Dartmouth.
- From Attleboro to Taunton for Department of Transitional Assistance (21 Spring St.) for food stamps, Taunton Court, Morton medical/dental clinic; for seniors and people with disabilities who cannot take the big bus.
- From Attleboro to Fall River for family probate and housing courts; Catholic Social Services (help with housing); Legal Aid moved to Fall River; Bristol Community College.
- From Taunton to colleges within the region (Bridgewater State, Bristol Community College, UMass Dartmouth).
- From Taunton to Brockton VA to connect with other VA shuttles to Jamaica Plain and West Roxbury.
- Middleborough out-of-town trips for medical trips to Boston, Plymouth, Taunton, Brockton; Dialysis in Taunton and Plymouth.
- Cooperative Productions has 14 residential programs; getting residents to medical appointments, and around the community.
- Fall River school transportation. Kids with no income, who are self-reliant to get to school, can't afford the bus. If they need to transfer buses to get to the High School, it costs them \$2 per day to get to school.
- From Fall River to Providence.

## Transportation Barriers

### #1) COST OF TRANSPORTATION

- Cost to passengers
  - People with low incomes can't carve out \$55 for SRTA's unlimited monthly bus pass. Cost is an issue.
  - The cost for a Mom with 2 kids to go to Dartmouth Mall = \$9.80-14.70 (round trip, if 2 or 3 zones each way). Transfers are not available.
  - Paying a bus fare is a problem for some of the veterans at the transition house.
  - There is a stigma for students receiving a free pass at school—Fall River needs a better process.
  - Taxis are not an option for many due to cost.
  - The cost to get to dialysis is a problem.
- Cost to agencies to provide transportation (fuel, insurance, maintenance).
  - Town budget cuts affect the number of hours town drivers can work.
  - Agency budget cuts affect staff available to give rides.
  - Unable to cover drivers during vacations or illness.

### #2) INCONVENIENCE

- Length of public transportation trip vs. driving.
- Multiple transfers to complete a trip, especially for people with physical or mental health issues or people traveling with young children.
- Using transit with young children is a challenge. "95% of clients on AFDC are women with children, who need child care too. "If they don't have a car, they have to drop their kids off at child care before and after work and the bus schedule does not allow that. They start work at 7AM or 8AM at the latest. They have to take 2 buses to get to work. They can't make it on time. If the bus stops at 5:30 or 6PM, they have all that drama again at the end of the day." Sometimes this results in people losing their job.
- The public transportation schedule does not mesh with work schedules.

### #3) LACK OF INFORMATION/MARKETING

- "There is a lack of information about available services."
- Fear of getting on the wrong bus and missing the right stop, particularly for non-English speaking passengers.
- Signage and schedules are not readable by older adults.
- SRTA schedules are not helpful.
- People do not know what is available to them or where to look for the information. "It is hard to get the word out about existing services." People don't know how to use existing transit services or where it goes. People do not know how to connect the dots; they need instruction on how to use it.
- There is confusion over the demand response rules.
- Service is not consistent in all service areas, which makes it difficult to understand.

"Kids say public transportation is only for elders."

#### #4) PHYSICAL BARRIERS

- Physical ability to get to a bus. Lack of safe sidewalks to bus or train.
- Bus stops blocked by snow or other obstacles for people who use mobility devices.
- Physical ability to use the bus. Elders can't use steps on buses. No benches to sit and wait at bus stops. Elders and people with disabilities can't walk the distance from home to a bus stop.
- People with visual impairments have security issues and travel training requirements.

#### #5) SECURITY

- Safety concerns at the SRTA bus terminal. The office is closed by 6PM, even though the DATTCO bus stops there at night. "Even in the daytime, it is not a pleasant place." There is no security presence. More lighting is needed. "You don't even see the person who works at the Terminal." There is no customer service. Parents won't let their kids use the bus terminal. The senior population is afraid to go to the Terminal because it's dark and because of the crowd.
- Unsafe waiting areas and pedestrian ways. Fear of riding on the bus is not from being on the bus, but from getting through the neighborhood to the bus stop and waiting at it.
- Remote MBTA train stations.
- Fear of getting stranded by demand response, which requires a phone call to get a return ride from the doctor; it is not always possible to make a phone call. Also, passengers have been stranded when they did not know the vehicle was there waiting for them and it left without them.

"It doesn't feel safe."

#### #6) SERVICES DO NOT MEET NEEDS

- Service is not available. Transit that exists covers a limited geographic area. People cannot get out of town. Transportation does not go beyond the town line.
- The demand for agency provided transportation to the elderly outweighs the resources.
- It is a problem to reliably get individuals with disabilities to work.
- Taxis, if they exist, do not have accessible vehicles. It is not cost effective for them to keep a trained driver for the accessible vehicle and demand is low.
- The Commuter bus to Boston is at capacity at times and you might get bumped to a later bus.
- The MBTA schedule doesn't work for students (mid-day and nights) or non-traditional employment. There is a big gap in the train schedule.

#### #7) POLICY BARRIERS

- Personal auto insurance issue and inadequate mileage reimbursement for volunteer drivers. Fewer volunteers available as seniors work longer.
- "Insurance regulations prohibit collaboration" between agencies.

- Medicare does not pay for non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT), which is a big problem for people who use wheelchairs, especially if they require frequent, regular medical trips. They end up calling an ambulance for short notice NEMT.
- Demand response drivers cannot assist elders at all due to liability concerns; some elders just need help putting a walker on the van. Some need assistance with groceries.
- SRTA demand-response often requires 6-7 days advance notice.
- Duplication and fragmentation of transportation resources among different programs or clientele. For example, Veterans' transportation is supposed to be available only for veterans, only to VA medical centers—even though the van has empty seats and non-veterans need to get to Roger Williams hospital across from the Providence VA. VA hospitals have empty vehicles sitting in their parking lot. DAV also provides transportation resources.
- Turf issues. “Organizations hide behind rules” and avoid coordination.
- Program grants don't allow the use of funding for transportation.
- Crossing the Rhode Island state line is a problem for transportation providers, due to insurance.

“Funders do not allow transportation costs in funding.”

#### #8) Other Barriers

- Stigma of using the bus.
- Stigma of using a Council on Aging vehicle for non-elders AND elders.
- Stigma of some people who may be eligible for disability transportation benefits, particularly young adults, in self-identifying as having a disability.

## Solutions

Estimated potential costs: H=High, M= Medium, L=Low, N=No

### #1) PUBLIC INFORMATION

- Especially in SRTA – create user friendly schedules and maps, color coded by route, showing where buses go. “How to ride the bus” guide, in English, Spanish and Portuguese. Provide user-friendly information on how to ride the bus and where and when it goes. Post system maps around the city. Signs, brochures, website. Make it easier to figure out how to use public transportation. Show bus routes and destinations, like Healthy Cities mapped out walking routes. L
- Put all transportation information, including all schedules, in one place, available online and with a phone call to a person. Similar to New Bedford’s Street Sheet through Community Development, which includes all available services, but not transportation. “People don’t know where to go to get the help.” L
- Travel training to teach those unfamiliar with how to use the bus to get where they want to go. “We need education about public transportation in our car-oriented society.” A cultural change is needed. Increase travel training opportunities, through field trips for youths, elders and non-English speaking persons. For example, the YWCA in New Bedford uses the bus as a tool to teach how to use public transportation, by using it for field trips, which also saves transportation costs. This could be another use of volunteers. L/M
- Continue to publicize transportation information, e.g. through monthly articles in local media about available services. “When the GATRA bus first came to Middleborough, there was something in the paper. I wouldn’t know today where to get information about it.” L
- Get information out to the public using Facebook, Twitter, churches, newspapers, and via email. L
- Increase awareness and use of ridesharing registration website such as: [www.alternetrides.com](http://www.alternetrides.com), [www.ridebuzz.org](http://www.ridebuzz.org), [www.goloco.org](http://www.goloco.org), [www.commute.com](http://www.commute.com). L

### #2) TRANSIT ENHANCEMENTS

- Include information on bus stop signs e.g., which routes stop there and approximate times or frequency. Indicate where bus goes, transfer points. Make routes available electronically and on cable TV. (SRTA and GATRA are in the queue for Google Transit.) M
- Make Terminals brighter, welcoming and user-friendly. Employ a bus “ambassador” at the Terminal to help people. SRTA Improvements to the New Bedford Terminal. Lighting, security presence, customer information and assistance. M/H
- Review bus stop locations, accessibility, need for amenities and security improvements. Screen for use by elders and people with disabilities. L
- Safe and secure bus stops (snow removal, seating, lighting, maintenance). Bus stops should be comfortable, protected from weather. M
- Safe pedestrian connections to transit. L/M
- Run limited service schedule on Monday holidays and Sundays for workers. M

- Purchase smaller vehicles that can maneuver more quickly and that can stop more places. Purchase hybrid or other cleaner fuel vehicles with better gas mileage. Use trolley buses or other vehicles to attract people. H
- SRTA – bike racks on all buses. Coordinate with City effort for bike paths. L
- Provide rider assistance and door-to-door service for those who need it. M
- More training for drivers, especially for people with disabilities and with wheelchairs. M

“Bike racks on buses would open a whole world.”

### #3) CHANGES TO EXISTING SERVICES WITH PUBLIC INPUT

- Review Regional Transit Authority demand response service quality (timeliness, reliability of pickups, travel time, advance reservations) and recommend improvements. L/M
- Re-evaluate bus routes. Make routes more accessible to jobs for working population. Work with Cities, Career Centers, job placement agencies, new businesses and companies looking to hire to make routes available. Find and serve the best shift times at Industrial Parks. Identify and change low ridership routes. Try to cut down on travel time; does every route have to go to the hub? Coordinate existing services (Demand response, local bus routes, intercity bus and rail) L/M
- Create transfer centers across the region. M

### #4) PASS PROGRAM

- Seek partners to subsidize passes for clients, students, employees. Provide discount passes for students and others based on eligibility. Allow students to use their ID as a pass for any bus any day that school is in session, with service to be subsidized by school department. Allow adult students in worker education program a student rate. (MBTA allows 10% college discount.) Discounts for multi-ride passes. Deals for families to get to the Mall. L/M
- Provide up front monthly bus pass (first two months) through One-Stop, WIB, City Council or other source for people returning to work (Get a Job, Get a Ride program). L
- SRTA – create additional unlimited ride pass options (daily, weekly) L
- SRTA – allow free or discounted transfers and/or eliminate zones. The time and cost of taking SRTA when it takes 2 buses to get to a destination causes some people to say “I may as well take a taxi.” L
- Make it easier to buy passes. Work with agencies and employers to make bus passes more available. Allow discount price for bulk purchase and allow agency/employer to disseminate passes. L

### #5) COORDINATION OUTSIDE OF TRANSPORTATION

- Coordinate scheduling at local offices for agencies, courts, and clinics. Increase awareness that savings from consolidation of services are offset by increased transportation costs. N/L

- Communicate with medical community about transportation requirements to coordinate appointments, get patients out on time, and assist with call back for pickup. Be flexible when demand response does not get patient there on time so that patient does not need to reschedule appointment. Group doctor appointment trips for clients with same town of origin. Group dialysis appointments. N/L
- Build partnerships between community members (Malls, businesses) and transportation providers to provide transportation services that are available to the public for a fee. N
- Continue collaborating and networking events about transportation. Get partners to the table. Various agencies follow each other around to schools in the afternoon. In some cases, they are using a large passenger bus with 3 students onboard, a driver and a monitor. They have had no success in coordinating due to liability issues of who is responsible for all students and who is responsible if something happens to a student between vehicles. N
- Seek out employers for people with disabilities who can be flexible with start times and allow people to work from home. N/L
- Stagger start and end times of youth programs to better accommodate transportation schedules. N
- Communicate to charities/foundations/grantmakers re: need for transportation as part of program costs. N/L
- Ask all employment agencies to document the barriers to transportation and specific needs. L
- Empower people to make changes. N/L

“Legalities get in the way of what makes sense.”

#### #6) TRANSPORTATION COORDINATION

- Provide inter-community and inter-regional trips through Memoranda of Understanding between Transit Authorities. L/M
- Create a public or private service route between Attleboro, Taunton and Fall River for Bristol Community College and Fall River housing court with Silver City Galleria as a destination and pick up point.
- Work with intercity bus companies on connecting cities for colleges and jobs. N
- Vanpools for Evening Transportation: Many new vehicles sit unused in the evening. Provide vans for evening students and other evening programs, perhaps driven by a student, DTA client, volunteer, or Americorps worker. Allow tax credits for the use of idle vehicles by other users with a licensed driver and insurance provided. L
- Ridesharing: Contact Mass Rides about coordinating vanpools or carpools for people going the same way at approximately the same time. Increase use of social network ridesharing websites.
- Zip car or group rental vehicle shared by agencies/programs; housed at college or housing authority property. No state taxes on gas for these cars. Berkshire Rides model. N/L

- Encourage rideshare companies and rideshare taxis. Encourage accessible taxis. Use tax credit program or reduced fees as an incentive. N/L
- Volunteer driver network. Recruit students and underemployed in exchange for benefits or credits. City insurance likely covers drivers, if they are treated as volunteers. Costs include providing vehicle inspections, training, and insurance. Train people on public assistance as volunteers, if the State takes on insurance, satisfying the 20-hour job requirement. For boomers/retirees, tie volunteer driving to a tax credit, food voucher, or some other benefit. Include as part of a municipal tax credit/abatement program. Unite churches for volunteers. N/L
- Coordinate long-distance medical trips, scheduling group trips by day of week to a particular area. For example, a VA bus from White River Junction, VT travels to Boston 3 days a week and is full. Schedule a Brockton VA trip one or two days a week and have veterans schedule their appointments on those days. N/L
- Research barriers of using school buses for other transportation purposes. L
- Coordinate the Commuter bus schedule to Boston with the Lakeville train to allow more options to and from Boston with a connection from Lakeville to New Bedford and designated stops. N
- Employee shuttle, driven by an employee, from Dartmouth retail area to New Bedford. N
- Biking and walking lanes could help and are healthy options. L/M

#### #7) REMOVE POLICY BARRIERS

- Eliminate policy barriers (real or perceived) that limit use of vehicles and funding and prohibit coordination. Get Veteran’s Services and DAV to pool transportation funds with other needs to increase resources available for more people. Veterans, seniors and people with disabilities from every community all have long-distance medical transportation needs. Every community provides its own special education transportation. N
- Review insurance regulations with the Attorney General. Make it easier, less costly for Non-profit agency employees to use their own cars. Mass Commission for the Blind (MCB) recommends employees do not have clients in their own cars for insurance and liability issues. Therefore, clients are required to get a ride to meet a travel trainer at a training location, e.g. navigating an intersection. Another agency requires employees to use their own car to transport clients, but doesn’t want to talk about the insurance ramifications. N
- Build transportation costs within grants. Allow the purchase of transportation services from a company rather than buying a vehicle. Use funding from all programs to hire a transportation coordinator to make effective use of vehicles. One nonprofit has 15 vehicles and zero drivers. It is difficult for an agency to pay for a bus driver. N
- Incorporate transit friendly design and tax benefits of transit into planned Industrial Park expansions and mitigate the need for additional parking. N

“There needs to be something within the law to protect people using their own car to transport people.”

“We are not a transportation company. We don’t know the logistics of routing. We don’t employ drivers.”

- Adopt Complete Streets design to allow bike lanes and pedestrian travel. It would help people's ability to get to bus stops and stations. N

#### #8) TRANSPORTATION DECISIONS AND PLANNING

- Increase involvement in transit planning and decision-making (vehicles, routes, service operators) by the public, Mayors and City Councils, economic development entities. N
- Change the structure of the RTA Boards or form a new advisory group to the RTA Board. Form an advocacy/support group of different populations with transportation needs to advise the Boards. N

“How can the Transit Board make decisions when they know nothing about using public transportation?”

### **What's GOOD about existing services?**

- The DATTCO bus is faster than driving, reliable. Now, it has Internet and wifi.
- The train works well, if you can get to it.
- "SRTA worked well to get youth to the beach in New Bedford, saving us money. Plus, kids learned how to use the bus."
- SRTA buses meet basic needs, getting people to downtown and to grocery stores. "With guidance and information, it works OK."
- SRTA works well for daytime students at New Bedford campus of UMD, located near the Terminal.
- GATRA works fine for a limited area during limited hours of operation.
- RTAs have accessible vehicles available and drivers who are trained to use them.
- GATRA demand response works well for BCC students with disabilities. "Kudos. It has made a difference in their lives."
- Community Care-a-Vans works well if you are in Attleboro and have MassHealth.
- "The MBTA system is logical and reasonably priced for seniors, although it is daunting to try to understand." You can get a Charlie card and photo ID now at GATRA and at the COAs.
- GATRA has had few fare increases.
- Some medical professionals (e.g., Taunton dialysis) are helpful about coordinating appointment times, if they know in advance.
- MBTA commuter rail "is not ideal, but it's wonderful". It works well for many people. You can do other things in that travel time. "Many more people are going to need it."
- "SRTA gets it right for Fall River Celebrates America, running all day long and in the evening."
- Most SRTA drivers are good.
- SRTA buses are right on time, reliable, and run in all kinds of weather.
- "SRTA works well; it just doesn't work enough. And it doesn't work for everyone."

### **Transportation Alternatives Used**

- Our program pays for cabs; it is the only way to get folks to the programs.
- In SRTA, "cabs are easier" for agencies serving people with disabilities.
- Those who hold night jobs walk back home after work. Parents in the program walk home after picking up their children from child care.
- "Agency vehicle and staff cars are the only way to consistently get people where they need to go." Staff members take their clients to work, social events and community errands.
- Ambulances to medical appointments.
- Family members are the primary transporters

## **Lesser Known Transportation Alternatives and Other Information**

- Salvation Army medical trips to Boston from New Bedford.
- Coastline Elderly Services has limited funds available for medical trips, local and long-distance.
- M.O. Life contracts with Coastline for medical transportation for people 60 years or older, and contracts with MRC for work trips.
- MRC pays \$0.25/mile for gas to clients who drive and pays for bus passes.
- UMD Workers' Education Program in NB pays for bus passes (1 way trips).
- The Fall River Boys & Girls Club sends a bus to Maple Gardens 2 days a week to bring kids to the Club.
- New Bedford Veterans' Services provide transportation to the Providence VA for veterans and their spouse or an attendant. They leave at 7:30am and return at noon. They also help widows of veterans.
- New Bedford's Veterans Transition House goes to the Brockton VA.
- The Nathan Hale Foundation in Plymouth has a limited grant to take veterans to Brockton, Jamaica Plain and West Roxbury.
- Attleboro has a Veteran's van, donated from the City and organizations that goes to Brockton on Friday; Providence on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday; and Jamaica Plain and West Roxbury on Wednesday. There is also a small emergency fund for Houle's Taxi if nothing else works.
- Sometimes, DAV from Brockton comes to Taunton to take someone to Boston.
- GATRA MedWheels is a program funded by the United Way of Greater Attleboro and Taunton for people 60+ years old, within the United Way service area, for long distance medical when no other option exists. There is a suggested donation.
- Attleboro COA has a program for seniors to get to Boston 3 days a week with Foxfield Taxi.
- Bristol Elder Services receives federal and state funding for income eligible elders to get to doctor's appointments.
- Mass Rides ridesharing and vanpools at [www.commute.com](http://www.commute.com)
- Ridesharing websites: [www.alternetrides.com](http://www.alternetrides.com), [www.ridebuzz.org](http://www.ridebuzz.org), [www.goloco.org](http://www.goloco.org), [www.ridester.com](http://www.ridester.com), [www.craigslist.org](http://www.craigslist.org).
- 2008 SRPEDD Transportation Provider Directory at <http://www.srpedd.org/transportation/Directory%202008.pdf>.
- SRTA route maps are available at [www.srtabus.com](http://www.srtabus.com) and systemwide maps of routes are available from SRPEDD as a laminated sign for posting.
- CEDC has translated SRTA schedules and user's guide.
- Community Care-a-Vans can provide evening work transportation in the four cities. (funded by the JARC program).
- Dattco connects New Bedford and Taunton with a stop at the Silver City Galleria.
- Tax benefits are available to employers and employees for using transit.
- Some agencies will pay for cab rides, because it is more reliable than demand-response, but the money is used up quickly.
- Hospitals sometimes give taxi vouchers for hospital discharges.

## Next Steps

The focus group participants outlined a comprehensive list of transportation needs and barriers. Many possible solutions were also outlined in the discussion. Some of these solutions are easy, with little or no cost; others will need to develop over time. Some ideas are already in the works; others will require additional research.

This information provides a valuable inventory of transportation needs that will be included in the 2011 update of SRPEDD's Regional Transportation Plan and Coordinated Human Services Transportation (CHST) Plan. Any project to receive federal transportation funding must be included in the Regional Transportation Plan. Projects to receive funding from the Jobs Access and Reverse Commute or New Freedom federal transportation programs must be in the CHST Plan. In addition, this information will inform land use and transportation planning efforts at the community level. Finally, it is SMTA's intent to use this information to influence transportation policies and initiatives at a statewide level.

In the coming months, SMTA will be working on the task of compiling a comprehensive inventory of transportation resources existing in the region. This inventory will be collected from two types of agencies--those that provide transportation as a primary business activity, and those that provide transportation as an ancillary activity. The goal of collecting this information is to create a searchable and updatable online directory that is accessible by the public and by agencies seeking transportation options. A secondary goal is to identify opportunities for coordinating transportation resources in a way that produces cost savings or improved services.

Identifying customer needs and developing an inventory of available services are key steps in a regional Mobility Management plan. Mobility management is a new approach for providing transportation services that focuses on meeting individual customer needs through a wide range of transportation options and service providers through coordinating these services and providers. It also includes technology, land use changes, travel training and other strategies to improve mobility.

## How you Can Help

- Get on the SMTA team contact list by calling Louise Hardiman at SRPEDD, 508-824-1367 or by emailing [lhhardiman@srpedd.org](mailto:lhhardiman@srpedd.org).
- Join a subcommittee to work on policy issues, increasing ridesharing, transit improvements or other solutions.
- Share your transportation stories: what is or is not working for you.
- Consider becoming a SMTA Partner if your agency spends a lot of money on transportation and you feel strongly about the issue of improving transportation. We are seeking partners for implementing pilot program solutions.
- Tell us about other transportation alternatives and examples of coordination to share on the SRPEDD website, [www.srpedd.org](http://www.srpedd.org), under "Transportation Alliance".