

REVISED - Ways to Improve Transportation in the Northern Berkshires

Focused on Needs of Residents without or with Limited Access to Private Vehicles

The Northern Berkshire Community Transit Study identified a range of actions communities and organizations may wish to pursue. The focus was to improve transportation for people without vehicles or with limited access to them, such as people with low-incomes, teenagers, senior citizens, handicapped people, families with young children, and others. Many of the recommendations would benefit the entire population by providing a greater range of transportation options and increasing efficiency. The study area is Adams, Cheshire, Clarksburg, Florida, New Ashford, North Adams, Savoy, & Williamstown.

Overview

(from most regional to most local; see attached pages for fuller descriptions)

- 1) Assistance getting and keeping a car for people who can't afford it but whose needs can't be met otherwise. This includes publicity for existing programs (such as Access to Jobs) and development of a new program, perhaps based on New Hampshire's Wheels to Work, Vermont's Good News Garage, or the Tennessee approach.
- 2) Single point of contact for transportation services, complaint resolution, and marketing. This service could function as a broker for setting up rides or start as a referral center.
- 3) BRTA bus service every half hour during peak travel times
- 4) BRTA service on Sundays & holidays
- 5) BRTA route deviation service, also known as flexible routes
- 6) BRTA service until midnight designed for second shift employees (M-Sa)
- 7) Have child safety seats available through taxi and other transportation services. Encourage development of family oriented taxi service(s).
- 8) Assistance getting to medical appointments in and out of the Berkshires, especially for on-going treatment. A related issue is getting to human services such as literacy training or Alcoholics Anonymous. The most efficient approach may be further coordination of volunteers and trying to mobilize more of them by providing inducements such as paying for gas or lunch.
- 9) Grocery shopping transportation such as a van from a supermarket to houses, perhaps a day at each store, perhaps with a helper. The fare should be between that of a bus and a taxi.
- 10) Helping coordinate rides can assist a variety of people but may have special potential in the Hill Towns, such as for bringing students home from teams and activities at regional high schools
- 11) Hill towns may wish to consider operating or contracting for a town van, and further utilizing existing vehicles (such as of the council of aging vans)
- 12) Build on the efficiency of people already gathered, for example at councils on aging for meals or town halls, as a starting point for weekly trips out of town in more rural areas

Further Information on Each Recommendation

Assistance Getting & Keeping A Car

Some people’s transportation needs are most efficiently served by helping them get and keep a car, such as large families in very rural areas or people working late shifts. This has been done in a number of places through combinations of low/no interest loans, people and car dealerships donating cars for tax benefits, involvement of volunteer groups (such as Rotary), vocational technical students, local garages, banks, and human service agencies. The standards for who qualifies are generally quite stringent and oriented to getting people to their jobs. There is also an existing program through the BRTA Access to Jobs program that might be further publicized. An additional possible outgrowth of this idea is to look for a way to stabilize the future of the few garages in the Hill Towns that provide especially needed services for people with undependable cars. It may be possible to work with garages to help them be certified to do maintenance on local agency vehicles such as for BRTA certification to do minor work on COA vans.

Category:
Getting a car

Mainly Helps:
Low-Income

Time Frame:
Medium/Long

Project Cost:
High

Cost/Ride:
Medium

**Definitions are
on p. 13 &
background is
in appendices**

Pros

- May be the most cost-efficient way to help some people with transportation
- May be the most desired solution for some people

Cons

- Maintenance and insurance need to be addressed
- Helps only a small number of people

Rough Numbers (also see Appendix 1) & Who Might Do It

A program that could be used as a model is the Good News Garage. They solicit tax-deductible donations of used vehicles, repair them, and sell them to economically-disadvantaged applicants, prioritized towards people who need them to get to work. Recipients pay for necessary repairs, typically \$400 - \$1,200. They also run a mechanic training program. They estimate it would cost approximately \$200,000 to start up such an operation, repair, and distribute 60 –70 cars the first year. Source: www.cartalk.cars.com/About/Good-News/tips.html

In the Berkshires it would make sense to start smaller and build a coordinated local approach. Such a program might be facilitated by the single point of contact (see that recommendation) working with State Senator Nuciforo (he has expressed interest in such a program), local garages, and schools. Assume a budget of \$100,000 for the first year. There should at least be funds for three years so the program can establish itself and seek additional permanent funding. Assume 30 households get cars per year. The 1990 National Personal Transportation Survey data estimates 2.6 trips/person, 2.5 people/household. Even with the conservative assumption that the car will mainly be used by one person, 2.6 trips per day for thirty people is approximately 28,000 trips.

Examples/References

Wheels to Work Program, New Hampshire
New Hampshire Community Development Finance Authority-Michele Talwani (603) 226-2170
NH Division of Family Assistance-Janis Ream (603) 271-3013
Rockingham Community Action – Bob Adams (603) 431-2911

Good News Garage
95 Allen Road S. Burlington, VT 05403 (also in Sturbridge, MA)
(802) 864-3667 or www.GoodNewsGarage.org

For a variety of other similar programs see pp. 5-27 to 5-30, TCRP #49 (1999)

Single Point of Contact for Transportation Needs

Anyone with transportation needs or services to offer would be encouraged to call this single phone number. The person answering the phone would know the different transportation resources available from public, private, and non-profit sources. The extent of services offered would be somewhere between brokering all transportation rides and only doing referrals. Additional services would include resolving complaints, marketing/outreach, carpool/ride matching, and volunteer coordination. An automated phone system could guide callers to recordings of appropriate contacts, and a web site would help provide information. Running an annual forum would help providers share ideas that are working and identify remaining gaps. The focus might be transportation to help people be independent.

Category:
Communication

Mainly Helps:
Everyone

Time Frame:
Medium

Project Cost:
High

Cost/Ride:
High

This service might follow the model of Community Transit Services (CTS) of Athol of requiring that providers sign an agreement to provide safe, clean, on-time and courteous service to receive referrals. Providers receive technical and business planning support services through the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA). CTS focuses on getting people to jobs and related activities. The same funding source that started CTS may be available to the Berkshires. This would need to be closely coordinated with the BRTA.

Pros

- Simple for users
- Helps use each available service fully and efficiently
- Improved marketing, business development services for participating services to help them grow and encourage needed new services.

Cons

- Many requirements of service would require broad knowledge & it could get spread too thin
- Orienting the service to North County may not be as efficient as County-wide, but is recommended by the Planning Group of this Study.
- Needs careful policy setting to avoid reducing current service to any group of individuals and to balance coordination with the independence of participating services

Rough Numbers (See Appendix 1 for Details)

A single point of contact office would require at least one full time staff person (guided by a volunteer policy board) plus an office, phones, computer, and a printing budget. CTAA helped set up CTS and managed the office until the organization was prepared to run itself. The CTS first year budget was approximately \$190,000. Given that some of the background work they needed to do there has already been done in the Berkshires and the smaller area involved, this may be estimated at \$150,000. Note this is a mix of operating and capital costs that could be separated and depreciated.

Who Might Do It

The Planning Group for this Study leaned to developing this as a non-profit North County transportation coalition. It would have a board of directors including transportation providers, human service organizations, and representatives of key user groups including teenagers. Word of its services should be spread appropriately, such as using teenagers to communicate with each other (for example through the design of the web site) and local people working within their communities. Plan B would be to have this operate through the BRTA office with a toll-free phone number.

Examples/References

Community Transit Services of Athol, Inc. – Fran Gromelski (978) 575-9966
573 South St.
Athol, MA 01331

BRTA Bus Service on Half-hour Headways

Currently most routes operate hourly, which can make for frustratingly long waits, especially if a person misses a bus to go to work. More service would cost more. An option to address the need while keeping costs as low as possible is running more buses just during the peak time for traveling to and from work. This could be expanded to all day half hour service if there were sufficient demand and funding. Communities are encouraged to assess the need for and likely level of use of a service before requesting it, such as through a community meeting or survey.

Category:
Transit

Mainly Helps:
Commuters

Time Frame:
Medium/Long

Project Cost:
High

Cost/Ride:
High

There are various ways half hour service could be implemented during the peak travel hours. The three that seem to have most potential are two new runs in the morning and two more in the evening for:

- a. **All Northern Berkshire routes:** N. Adams-Williamstown (#3), Wal-Mart - N. Adams (#31), N. Adams-Hospital (#32), Mohawk Forest-N. Adams (#33), and Pittsfield-N. Adams (#1). This would require purchasing a new bus.
- b. **Three of the four local Northern Berkshire routes.** This would exclude service on the more regional #1 bus to Pittsfield and on one of the short local routes in order to be served without having to purchase a new bus (per BRTA).
- c. **An express bus between North Adams & Pittsfield** during peak travel times that would make the trip in approximately 50 minutes instead of just over an hour with approximately five stops (N. Adams, Adams, Cheshire, Berkshire Mall, Pittsfield). Note that the express idea was implemented between Pittsfield and Williamstown a few years ago and had so few riders it was canceled.

Pros

- Could make relying on the bus more feasible
- Would be more convenient for riders
- BRTA considers this possibly the most effective type of recommendation to increase ridership

Cons

- Only helps communities that are members of BRTA and in the area where they have routes
- Communities pay a local share of the cost of transit service. It also relies on state and federal funding availability
- Buying another bus involves cost and time to order and receive

Rough Numbers

See Appendix 1

Who Might Do It

BRTA with communities

Examples/References

Berkshire Regional Transit Authority - Chuck MacNeil
67 Downing Parkway
Pittsfield, MA 01201
(413) 499-2782

BRTA Bus Service on Sundays & Holidays

There has been expressed interest in bus service on Sundays & holidays. Here is some basic information on what that would cost to help communities consider whether to formally request it. Communities are encouraged to assess the need for and likely level of use of a service before requesting it, such as through a community meeting or survey.

Category:
Transit

Mainly Helps:
Low Income

Time Frame:
Medium

Project Cost:
High

Cost/Ride:
High

Pros

- People still need to get places on these days, especially as the service sector continues to grow.
- This is not quite as expensive as options that would require additional buses.

Cons

- Given that ridership is fairly low on Saturdays, it may not make economic sense on Sundays or holidays
- Communities pay a local share of the cost of service
- Only helps communities that are members of BRTA and in the area where they have routes
- It may be more efficient in terms of people carried to run weekday service later

Rough Numbers

See Appendix 1

Who Might Do It

BRTA with communities

Examples/References

Berkshire Regional Transit Authority - Chuck MacNeil

67 Downing Parkway

Pittsfield, MA 01201

(413) 499-2782

BRTA Route Deviation/Flexible Route Service

With route deviation, the regular fixed route bus has some fixed bus stops and a schedule, but will take people to or from their homes within a set distance of the route. It is also sometimes called Front Door service (although it is only near the fixed routes). In the northern Berkshires this might be approximately one-quarter mile, plus or minus depending on local conditions. Route deviation provides additional access without large additional cost. It should be noted that there is not a major difference in cost to operate a full-sized bus as compared to a mini-bus once salaries and depreciation are taken into account.

Implementing this service may slightly increase the amount of time a route takes. In the event that this service were to prove so heavily used that it made it difficult to keep buses to reasonable schedules it would be restricted. For example, under those circumstances it might be restricted to off-peak travel times.

Category:
Transit

Mainly Helps:
Everyone

Time Frame:
Medium

Project Cost:
Medium

Cost/Ride:
Low

Pros

- Makes the existing county-wide bus system more accessible for people who may live fairly nearby but too far to walk to a bus stop.
- Already under consideration by the BRTA with test applications in Pittsfield
- Could be further implemented in a short amount of time with low cost (BRTA)

Cons

- Only helps communities that are members of BRTA and in the area where they have routes
- Needs to be publicized and explained
- Could make routes slightly longer

Rough Numbers

See Appendix 1

Who Might Do It

BRTA in coordination with communities

Examples/References

Note: This has recently been put in place on some Pittsfield routes
Berkshire Regional Transit Authority - Chuck MacNeil
67 Downing Parkway
Pittsfield, MA 01201
(413) 499-2782

Later BRTA Service

Requests for later bus service seem to fall into two main categories; transportation for recreational/social activities (such as going to a movie) and getting home from jobs that end late (such as second shift at nursing homes which ends at about 11 pm). The trip between work and home is one that particularly lends itself to travel by bus as it generally occurs at about the same time with many of the same people. Nursing homes and hospitals offer, among other jobs, a variety of entry level and low skill jobs that assist in the move from welfare to work and for which transportation is seen as a significant barrier. Helping people get to and from jobs is a goal of many federal and state transportation programs.

Category:
Transit

Mainly Helps:
Low Income,
Commuters

Time Frame:
Medium

Project Cost:
High

Cost/Ride:
High

The next steps, if this recommendation is to be implemented, should include a survey of several of the likely employment sites where people might want bus service after it currently ends. The survey should evaluate likely level of use and whether late service is desirable on all Northern Berkshire routes or only on some. If this is to be implemented it should be coordinated with or be a shared program with employers for maximum usefulness.

Pros

- Large employers are efficient concentrations of potential riders to serve with transit. Also, even if ridership on the late buses is lower it may build confidence in relying on the bus overall at these employment centers.
- Other studies have found coordinating with large employers to increase transportation options for employees and increase ridership.
- By increasing transportation options at night, there is some potential for slight reduction of Driving Under the Influence accidents.
- Later bus service may be helpful for teenagers who may tend to have less traditional hours

Cons

- Ridership may be low
- Minor changes in routes may be appropriate so people can wait in safe, well-light places. This might do best combined with flexible routes taking people to their homes.
- Only helps communities that are members of BRTA and in the area where they have routes
- Communities pay a local share of the cost of service

Rough Numbers

See Appendix 1

Who Might Do It

BRTA with communities

Examples/References

Berkshire Regional Transit Authority - Chuck MacNeil
67 Downing Parkway
Pittsfield, MA 01201
(413) 499-2782

Child-Friendly Transportation

An adult with a small child and without a private vehicle may find it difficult to transport the child safely and in accordance with the law. A minimal approach is to make it easier/further publicize ways to rent child safety seats and to encourage one or more taxi companies to have child safety seats available. This may also be considered for public transit vehicles.

Category: Taxis, etc.
Mainly Helps: Families
Time Frame: Short
Project Cost: Low
Cost/Ride: Low

There may be a market for broader family-oriented transportation service(s). This might be as simple as a taxi service that focuses on reliability, no smoking, and more attention to day care and other schedules. A more specialized approach involves transporting children alone, with adults required to be present at either end. Precious Cargo is doing child transportation in the Pittsfield area and may have transferable knowledge for a north county firm. This could alternatively be done as a parents' cooperative.

Pros

- Subsidizing child safety seats for some part of the taxi fleet and a loaner program would seem to be a fast, low-cost way of improving safety
- There seems to be a specialized need with potential to make money that could be encouraged, for example through a low-interest loan and business planning support from CTAA
- Child safety is a high priority to many people so this issue could stir enthusiasm

Cons

- Taxi service is still expensive
- May be difficult for a company to have the capacity to transport many children at peak times

Rough Numbers (also see appendix) & Who Might Do It

1. Obtain child safety seats (25 as a rough number). These would be offered free or at minimal cost to transportation providers who would agree to provide them in their vehicles when requested and have them inspected once a year. The remainder would go into a loan or low cost rental program
Rough cost: \$0 -\$1,000 (may be covered in state program)
2. Publicize a meeting for private and non-profit services interested in taking on the niche market of child-friendly transportation with CTAA or another agency that can help with business planning and low interest loans, provide useful materials. Rough cost: \$400

Examples/References

Regarding programs with low-cost child safety seats:
 Berkshire County Regional Comm. Traffic Safety Program-
 Phoebe Sugarman
 51 Alfred Drive
 Pittsfield, MA 01201
 (413) 442-6862
 Jenny Barron (617) 973-8912

Lowell Regional Transit Authority runs a van with a monitor that picks up children and takes them to day care centers. They are running a 9 seater van with two staff at full capacity for about \$55/hour.

Precious Cargo Bus Transportation Inc.- Eileen Greenleaf
 275 Williams St.
 Pittsfield, MA 01201
 (413) 445-8977

Unique Shuttle Services (in California) transports only children. They serve families who register for pre-scheduled trips under an annual contract and some on-call services. One-way trips were between \$7.50 and \$9.00 each way with discounts for additional children or two-way trips. Most drivers are mothers who work part-time and get free transportation for their children as a benefit. . (p. 5-24, TCRP Report 49, 1999)

Lowell Regional Transit Authority/Transaction Associates
 Cindy Ferne
 (781) 895-1100

Getting to Medical & Human Service Appointments

Getting to medical appointments is an issue that comes up regularly with agencies saying there is more demand than they can meet. This is particularly a problem for regular appointments, such as dialysis. Even households with a car may find it useful to have additional options for getting to on-going treatment. This problem is compounded when people need to go to the broader regional medical centers such as Albany, Worcester, Springfield, or Boston. A related issue is getting to human service meetings (especially at night) such as literacy or English as a Second Language training, Alcoholics Anonymous, or other important meetings.

This is a difficult need to meet. One idea is to further coordinate volunteers (perhaps with assistance at medical centers). This could help draw in new volunteers, perhaps assisted by offering to cover the cost of gas. Communities may wish to investigate other in-kind ways of rewarding volunteers such as filling at town gas pumps (where applicable) or providing vouchers to eat at local restaurants.

Category:
Overall

Mainly Helps:
Seniors,
Handicapped

Time Frame:
Short

Project Cost:
Medium

Cost/Ride:
Medium

Increased communication and education can also help. For example, there is an array of special transportation services provided by public and non-profit health-related agencies that may not be widely known. Also, some people eligible for Medicaid transportation report not knowing about it. There is some discussion in Washington of providing transportation for people with Medicare too. Medical offices may be able to work more efficiently with existing transportation services. For example, some organizations report volunteers are more available in the morning but this isn't necessarily considered at doctors' offices when appointments are made.

Pros

- There is a need being expressed and this may be a issue people care about enough to support
- There may be additional funding sources available

Cons

- People may not be willing to take a ride from a stranger
- Volunteers may be asked to commit to transporting one person on a regular basis
- Some offices and programs are concerned about helping coordinate rides for fear of liability.
- Medical office front desk staff may feel too busy to further educate themselves on medical transportation options

Rough Numbers

For a person to spend two hours per week on outreach and coordination (approximately 100 hours/year at total cost of \$25/hour would be \$2,500.

Copying & postage, especially for doctors' offices understand resources available \$500

Paying for lunch vouchers (\$5) or gas (\$5 coupons) at a total of 10 per week would cost \$50 times 52 weeks for \$2,600. Arrangements for discounts or donations might bring this down to \$2,000.

Rough cost total: \$5,000

Rough effects: 15 additional rides per week for a year would round to 800 people helped.

Who Might Do It

General volunteer coordinator (this is being discussed in different venues) or single point of contact staff

Examples/References

American Red Cross of the Berkshires-Joe Coates (413) 442-1506

Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) – Norma Powers (413) 499-9345

Grocery Shopping Transportation

Getting groceries has been described as a problem repeatedly. Even when people do live on a bus line, hauling a family's groceries that way is cumbersome. Getting groceries home by taxi also reportedly can be frustrating and expensive. A potential solution is to have a van or mini-bus making regular runs from supermarkets, perhaps with a second person helping get bags on and off. The cost should be lower than a taxi. This might be achieved by being on basically a fixed schedule of hourly stops at a specific supermarket on a specific day. The service might then rotate among different stores on different days. One idea is that able-bodied people going on the van could ride free in return for serving as the helper while they are en route. Some councils on aging, housing developments, and other groups already organize grocery runs. They should be further consulted before any new idea is finalized to learn from their experiences and promote coordination.

Category:
Human
Services

Mainly Helps:
Everyone

Time Frame:
Short/Medium

Project Cost:
Medium

Cost/Ride:
Medium

Pros

- Getting groceries is a basic need and a limited scope of service that may be more manageable to address than the whole issue of access.
- Perhaps if the helper were to carry groceries to the door some additional people could remain independent in their homes, benefiting them and reducing public healthcare costs
- Supermarkets may be willing to pay all or part of the cost
- People often shop the same day each week. A subscription-type service can help with the scheduling, especially of longer trips, and create a "back-bone" to support the service (p. 34, TCRP Report 6, 1995)

Cons

- Capacity would be limited. However, this might encourage people to be ready. There would remain the fallback option of a taxi.
- This would only likely happen at supermarkets that wanted it
- This is most likely to work efficiently within five miles or so of a supermarket

Rough Numbers

A limited test service for the general public might be started based on the existing service for senior housing complexes in North Adams and Adams. It would pick up at low-income housing areas or other central locations where several people will regularly ride it. The once-a-week service for seniors picks up between 6 and 20 people per week. It drops people off at about 10 a.m. and picks them up about an hour later alternating weeks between Price Chopper and Stop 'n Shop. The cost is approximately \$250 per week, paid by the supermarkets (free fare). It is unknown whether the supermarkets would be willing to pay for broader service. As a planning tool, it is assumed participating supermarkets would pay half the cost and the service would start at a similar scale: 12 people, once per week, needing funding of \$125 per week. If a fare were charged of \$2 each way that would pay about a third of the cost, leaving a cost of approximately \$5,000 per year based on all the above assumptions. This would provide roughly 1,250 one-way rides annually.

Who Might Do It

Might be operated though a contract with a private firm or BRTA. Should be guided by a mix of likely users, supermarkets, and the provider of transportation.

Examples/References

JT Bus Lines - Joan Calvi (413) 663-7021

North Adams COA – Sandra Lamb (413) 662-3125

Community Transportation Association of America-Barbara Singleton (202) 661-0215 or www.ctaa.org

Ride Coordination, Especially for the Hill Towns

The Hill Towns are specially considered here because of the limited transportation options available and the level of need—people without cars in rural, mountainous areas may become dangerously isolated more quickly than in urban areas. Several ideas discussed under other headings are relevant to Hill Towns, such as building upon the efficiency of people already gathering at a council on aging, or trying to further utilize existing services through a single point of contact. There are, however, two ideas of special relevance to this area. They are ride coordination and having a town van (see next page)

Help coordinating rides may be useful and viable in a Hill Town setting where there is often a strong sense of community and likelihood of people knowing each other. One particular application would be to help local teenagers. Teenagers from the Hill Towns go to the regional high schools. Students on teams or doing other extra-curricular activities often need rides home. Perhaps there could be a ride board oriented to teenagers or contacts at the school or in the towns, perhaps as a PTA function. Ride coordination or carpooling can also help with other transportation needs.

Category:
Overall

Mainly Helps:
Rural

Time Frame:
Short

Project Cost:
Low

Cost/Ride:
Low

Pros

- Low cost
- Potentially supports community cohesiveness by helping people who go to school or work outside the town stay somewhat linked to a local resource center
- May be the most flexible and locally acceptable approach

Cons

- People may be unwilling to accept any kind of assistance
- Liability and safety are always concerns

Rough Numbers

Eight bulletin boards with cards & pushpins at \$25 each=\$200

Copies of one or two fliers to be distributed with a town or school mailing=\$200

Use: at five people per week getting 2-way rides for 50 weeks per year (to account for holidays)=500

Who Might Do It

Town or PTA

Examples/References

Regional ride-matching already available from Caravan for Commuters at 1-888-4-commute or www.commute.com

Hill Town(s) Van

The Hill Towns are specially considered here because of the limited transportation options available and the level of need—people without cars in rural, mountainous areas may become dangerously isolated more quickly than in urban areas.

Fixed route bus service is not viable in a very rural setting and taxi service in the Hill Towns has limited availability and high cost. The towns may find it worth further evaluating dial-a-ride van service and/or having a van for various local needs, such as youth recreation trips. This could be done by a town or shared by more than one community. It could be contracted through BRTA or operated by the town. In these towns with low populations, this could be done through further utilization of council on aging vans or those belonging to other agencies. Council on Aging vans are allowed to be used for other purposes after the needs of elderly or handicapped people have been met. The vans can be painted so the name of the council on aging can be covered with a magnetic sign when in more general use. This could be important in terms of sensitivity to what vehicle is seen driving up to a person's home.

Category:
Transit

Mainly Helps:
Everyone

Time Frame:
Medium

Project Cost:
Medium

Cost/Ride:
High

Pros

- A town van (could be called something more catchy) may be the most efficient transit solution in a rural area
- It may be most successful if it is operated by a local person or someone who becomes familiar
- This could start as a venture of two or more towns and change as needed over time
- There are different types of service that can be provided; subscriptions for regular trips, reserved rides set up in advance, real-time scheduling (the most like a taxi service but is the least feasible with few vehicles) or availability of a van for coordinated outings.

Cons

- It costs money to run a van
- COA vans are required to prioritize rides for seniors. BRTA will request that the vans also prioritize paratransit trips for handicapped people.

Rough Numbers (See Appendix for Details)

On average it costs roughly \$25,000 per year for a Northern Berkshire Council on Aging (COA) to run a van. A rough cost per passenger is on the order of \$5. Carrying more people generally lowers the cost per passenger. This recommendation assumes one community taking the lead on using a van for the general public and coordinating with other Hill Town communities. This might be in terms of allowing some shared use when capacity allows or helping nearby communities pursue a similar approach.

In 1995, the average cost (nationally) of running a rural transit vehicle was approximately \$27 per hour. Average cost per mile was \$2.35 (pp 42-43, TCRP Report 6, 1995)

Who Might Do It

BRTA, Town, Council on Aging

Examples/References

Southern Berkshire Elderly Transportation Corporation - Jane Green (413) 528-4773

Mass. Rural Transit Assistance Program
www.martap.org

Build on Efficiencies, Such as Council on Aging (COA) Gatherings as a Starting Point for Weekly Regional Trips

A significant issue in transporting people in the Berkshires (especially outside the urban areas) is getting people from their homes while not making an overly long trip for those already picked up. There are some instances where the initial gathering has already been done, and starting longer trips from there becomes more efficient. For example, people gather at many COAs for a meal a few times per week, often with the assistance of a van. Other places people may gather are libraries, post offices, a main local store, or churches/places of worship. People can arrive there at different times and be comfortable. It then becomes easier and cheaper to take a group by a larger van to a destination like North Adams, the Berkshire Mall, Pittsfield or other shopping or recreation sites. The larger van might be arranged by contract with the BRTA, another COA, or a private provider.

Category:
Transit

Mainly Helps:
Seniors

Time Frame:
Short

Project Cost:
Medium

Cost/Ride:
High

Pros

- Efficient way to gather people for trips
- Supports sense of community & COA activities/Elder Services meals if trips leave from there
- Can be open to the community or oriented to particular groups such as senior citizens or teenagers

Cons

- The people who were already driving to the gathering point may not want to get into a van
- This may not be enough people to be worthwhile
- Would probably want to market carefully

Rough Numbers

This could be set up using the local COA van or volunteers to bring people to and from the senior center and contract with BRTA or other provider for a once or twice a week van to North Adams, Pittsfield, a mall, or other destination (which could rotate). An inexpensive way to do this would be contracting with another nearby COA. A preliminary estimate is approximately \$85 for one eight hour day per week (phone, Sandy Lamb at N. Adams COA). That would involve roughly \$5,000 per year, including some advertising costs. If an average of ten people go once a week (round trip) year round, that would be approximately 1,000 rides.

Who Might Do It

BRTA or other service provider (possibly a nearby COA) in coordination with the local COA, town halls, or other community organizations.

Examples/References

Elder Services of Berkshire County – Lisa Udel or Penny Carey
66 Wendell Ave
Pittsfield, MA 01201
(413) 499-0524

North Adams Council on Aging/Spitzer Center – Sandy Lamb
116 Ashland St.
North Adams, MA 01247
(413) 662-3125

Notes

Definitions of Terms Used in Side Boxes

Time Frames

- Short – Weeks or months
- Medium – Several months to two years to implement
- Long – Two years or longer to implement

Project Cost

The following refers to overall project cost. It is also useful to evaluate cost per user or ride. Rough cost/ride is evaluated in Appendix 1.

- Low – Under one thousand dollars
- Medium – Between one thousand and fifty thousand dollars
- High – More than fifty thousand dollars

See Appendix 1 for explanation of the Cost/Benefit comments in the side boxes.

Related Projects in the Works

1. **Intermodal Center** – An Intermodal transportation center is being built in Pittsfield by the BRTA. It will be a hub for BRTA, inter-city buses (such as Peter Pan), Amtrak, and taxi services. If all goes well, ribbon cutting is scheduled for Fall, 2003. Contact BRTA, Chuck MacNeil
2. **Massachusetts Human Service Transportation (HST) Initiative** – State agencies are trying to improve efficiency by having a single transportation broker (BRTA for the Berkshires) schedule rides for state funded human service agencies (at this point Department of Public Health, Division of Medical Assistance, & Department of Mental Retardation). There will a local Advisory Board. Contact BRTA or HST Office, P.O. Box 8576, 19 Staniford St. 2nd Floor, Boston, MA 02114 – Tanya Ryden at 617-626-5140 or www.state.ma.us/hst.
3. **Inventory of Available Resources & User-friendly Guide** to Transportation in the Northern Berkshires are also part of this Community Transit Study. Similar work will also be done in the other parts of the Berkshires over the coming years. Contact BRPC, Zoe Neaderland
4. Update of the **Regional Transportation Plan** – Federally funded transportation projects need to be in line with the long range Regional Transportation Plan. It is updated regularly through BRPC staff effort (with input by the public & related agencies) then reviewed and adopted by the Metropolitan Planning Organization (BRPC, BRTA, MassHighway & the Mass. Executive Office of Transportation & Construction). Contact BRPC, Charles Cook
5. **BRTA Regional Transit Plan Update** – The Transit Authority expects to do an in-depth analysis of transit needs and future options within the next five years. Contact BRTA, Chuck McNeil.

A Few Possible Sources of Funding

1. Federal Joblinks Demonstration Funds - Funds are for starting up services to help people get to jobs. They are for starting projects that need to eventually sustain themselves.
2. Job Access and Reverse Commute - Not for planning, but for operating services that help get people to jobs
3. Low interest loans for improving the range of transit (in the broad sense) services available - through the Community Transportation Association of America/SBA for Massachusetts.

Bibliography

The following were useful resources in addition to the two surveys done for this Study (one of agencies & one of individuals), inventory of transportation resources, Census Data (1990 and early releases from 2000), and the meetings of the Planning Group and focus groups with organizations and individuals

“Athol-based Community Transit Services Spurs Economic Self-reliance”

The Resource November, 2000

Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility:

Planning Guidelines for Coordinated State and Local Specialized Transportation Services

US Dept of Health and Human Services & US Dept of Transportation

December 2000

Final Summary Report of The Lodestar Project - Seeking guidance for community action in Berkshire County

Berkshire United Way, August 1997

Guidebook for Developing Welfare-to-Work Transportation Services

(Transit Cooperative Research Program Report 64)

Transportation Research Board-National Research Council, Federal Transit Administration

National Academy Press, Washington D.C. 2000

Massachusetts Human Service Coordination Initiative:

Human Service Transportation Planning Study Executive Summary

March 2000

Problems of the Carless

U.S. Department of Transportation Publication DOT-TST-76-101

Office of University Research, Office of the Secretary, 1976

“Transit Market Focus: Transit Systems Look for Ways to Attract Senior Citizen Ridership”

Busline November/December 2000

Users’ Manual for Assessing Service-Delivery Systems for Rural Passenger Transportation

(Transit Cooperative Research Program Report 6)

Transportation Research Board-National Research Council, Federal Transit Administration

National Academy Press, Washington D.C. 1995

Using Public Transportation to Reduce the Economic, Social, and Human Costs of Personal Immobility (Transit Cooperative Research Program Report 49)

Transportation Research Board-National Research Council, Federal Transit Administration

National Academy Press, Washington D.C. 1999

“Wheels to Work Makes for a Smooth Ride from Welfare to Work”

Economic Development Digest October 2000

Appendices

Appendix 1. Preliminary Costs per Benefits

Appendix 2. Transit Data