

Date: Tuesday, May 8, 2008

Iredell County Community Involvement Plan

On Tuesday, May 8, 2008 the Iredell County Area Transportation System in partnership with the United Way of Iredell County held a transportation Community Involvement Planning forum at the United Way office. Approximately thirty-five individuals representing human service agencies, the business community, the medical community, the community college, local government, and citizens/consumers were invited to the meeting. There were nineteen (19) individuals in attendance at the meeting and these participants provided a good representation of the target groups. The process was completed in approximately 2 ½ hours. At the conclusion of the meeting, individuals in attendance at the meeting were asked to participate in a follow-up meeting to review the results of the meeting and assist with planning for available grants.

Background:

In 2006-2007 the United Way of Iredell County conducted a community needs assessment. Private citizens, stakeholders, and community officials were given the opportunity to provide input as to the perceived needs within the community. Transportation was identified throughout the survey as a significant need. In fact, from 100% of all respondents, transportation was tied at number six out of ten top needs. The survey assessed needs by zip code, age of respondent, ethnicity, household, community leadership position, and service provider.

The survey also provided to us a tool by which to frame our community involvement plan. Of noteworthy mention is the finding that medical/health needs appear to rank highest in all survey groupings. When combining this finding with the reported need for transportation services in both the North Iredell and South Iredell areas of the county, and age grouping from 19 years old- 64 years old, the need for improved medical transportation in certain areas of the county becomes clear, especially as age increases.

Also, interesting is the finding that community leaders see transportation as number four out of ten in this survey which is a higher ranking than other survey groupings.

Because this survey was conducted in 2006-2007 before the time of rising fuel prices, one might conclude that transportation would be ranked higher if the survey were to be conducted in our present time.

Planning Meeting:

Introduction:

Mrs. Pat Stewart, Executive Director of the United Way of Iredell County opened the meeting with welcoming remarks and allowed each person present at the meeting to identify themselves and their interest in transportation.

Overview:

Jo-Anne Findt, Director of the Iredell County Information and Referral agency served as the group facilitator, and began the meeting by providing an overview of the United Way Community Needs Assessment conducted in 2006-2007. Particular attention was given to the transportation needs presented in the survey.

Assessment of available resources:

Following the overview by the meeting facilitator, Ben Garrison, Transportation Director for Iredell County provided information relating to the Community Involvement Planning process, the SAFETEA-LU grants available (JARC, New Freedoms, and Elderly/Disabled), and an assessment of available transportation resources. Specifically addressed were the hours of operation, the types of service provided, the service design, personnel and equipment resources, the FY 06-07 Operating Statistics, and the present/future technology resources. The group asked specific questions related to the types of service available, hours of operation, and existing funding.

Assessment of transportation needs of the target population:

The facilitator, Jo-Anne Findt then moved to the next meeting agenda item that was directly related to planning. The following questions were posed to the group:

What are our strengths/what is going well?

What are our barriers to service?

What are our transportation needs?

Strengths:

The following were identified as strengths of the transit system and transit in general:

1. Inexpensive for riders- the fare structure seems to be fair and within the means of most people.
2. Responsive to the needs of passengers
3. Open and accessible
4. Medical transportation is available in South Iredell/Mecklenburg County through the Red Cross and the transit system.
5. Well designed routes- especially the deviated fixed routes that serve low-income population areas
6. Consistency in routing

Gaps or Barriers to Service:

1. Health Department patients must schedule transportation for appointments from 9:00 a.m.- 2:30 p.m. This refers to scheduling during off-peak service hours.
2. Out-of-county medical trips must be scheduled on certain days. The transit system has a two-city out-of-county trip policy due to limited resources. Scheduling for out-of-county trips is on a first come, first serve basis.
3. Difficult to schedule/coordinate groups with a single destination and specific drop-off time. The comments are related to picking up multiple passengers from all over the county, and then have them arrive at a common destination at the same approximate time. Comments were specific to Services for the Blind and Mental Health groups.
4. Need improved distribution of printed service materials

5. Employment transportation for third shift and rotating shift workers, as well as expanded weekend service.
6. More transportation to out-of-county medical appointments
7. Need for expansion of service hours
8. Perception of public transportation as taxi service. In rural transportation it appears to be common for passengers to not comprehend that service is being provided to multiple passengers who may or may not be sharing a common destination.

Needs:

1. Funding for expansion of service
2. More drivers; bilingual staff; more vans; more staff (either paid or volunteer)
3. Expanded in-county service hours
4. Expanded out-of-county medical trips
5. Improvements in on-time service performance, especially medical and employment.
6. Education and information improvements.

Conclusion:

There was group consensus that there is a need for more medical transportation, both in-county as well as out-of-county. Our elderly, disabled, low-income, and homeless populations should be top priority. Particular attention needs to be given to individuals seeking Community Health Services, Health Department Services, Dialysis service, and Mental Health services. Also noted was that certain areas of the county need more access to service- more specifically, north Iredell.

Of equal importance to medical transportation is employment transportation for low-income workers within the county. It seemed to be the opinion of the group that out-of-county employment transportation should be low priority, and should be viewed as a regional issue instead of a county issue due to limitations in funding.

The group as a whole expressed their pleasure with the improvements in service since the county took over the system, and for the responsiveness of transportation in addressing the needs of the community.

Strategies, activities and/or projects to address the identified gaps:

1. Increase in-county and out-of-county non-emergency medical transportation for the elderly, disabled, and economically disadvantaged. Implementation priority: High
 - Increase transportation service in the North and South areas of the county for services at the Community Health Clinic, Health Department, and Mental Health centers.
 - Increase the provision of service for low-income and homeless citizens
 - Expand hours of service to target populations.
 - Consider options for additional out-of-county non-emergency medical transportation.

2. Continue providing transportation service to low-income populations for employment related needs. Implementation priority: High
 - The JARC grant has helped to meet the need for this type of service and will hopefully be continued.
 - Expand existing service for additional evening and weekend service

3. Improve on-time performance for medical trips, especially “will call” pick-ups. Implementation priority: High
 - Successful implementation of automatic vehicle locating and mobile data vehicle devices

4. Develop a plan for increasing the number of bilingual staff, both office and drivers through training or hiring process as positions become open. Implementation priority: High

5. Develop a plan for dissemination of information related to transit services.

Prepared by: Ben Garrison, Transportation Director