

Coordinated Transportation – the “Ride Connection”

A Proposed Pilot Project for the Richmond Region

By Jim Congable – Transportation Coordinator

Many exciting things have been happening with regard to “special needs” transportation in the past year. A phase one needs assessment has been completed by the Richmond Regional Planning District Commission (RRPDC) and approved by the Richmond Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which clearly shows the need for more and better transportation options for the transportation disadvantaged, namely - **the elderly, persons with disabilities, and low-income people living in the Richmond region.** The next phase of the needs assessment will soon begin and will bring together all the necessary stakeholders including state and local agencies, transportation providers, community leaders, funding sources, business leaders, as well as interested citizens who working together as a coalition will help us develop a transportation plan, which will have as its main thrust - **Regional Coordination.**

The Federal Transportation Administration (FTA), the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) and the Richmond Regional Planning District Commission, working with consultants, are currently developing guidelines for long range planning. In order to increase efficiency and better enable seniors as well as persons with disabilities to access social and health services as these plans are developed, Senior Connections, The Capital Area Agency on Aging is leading a region-wide approach to transportation coordination. This effort supports the development of community-based coordinated transportation system called “**Ride Connection**”, and the formation of a coalition of stakeholders called the **Regional Transportation Association (RTA)**. The resulting coordinated program will improve transportation efficiency and effectiveness to maximize the use of community resources, including Medicaid, GRTC, CARE Van, C-Van, Community Action Agencies, for profit and non-profit transportation providers, Faith-based Organizations, as well as volunteers, so that more seniors and persons with disabilities can be served within existing and future resources, and available funding levels.

The FTA is now requiring as a condition of receiving transportation services grants, county governments to convene local planning forums and invite participation of all entities that provide transportation services to persons with special transportation needs. Counties are encouraged to coordinate their forums and planning processes with other neighboring counties, as they find it appropriate. The local community forums should be open to all interested parties to develop a process for open discussion and input on local policy decisions that may have an impact on the special needs transportation costs and service delivery of other programs and agencies in the community.

Ride Connection, a form of coordination broker, will strive to ensure that all organizations serving persons with special transportation needs share responsibility for ensuring that customers can easily access transportation services. There will be a single, central phone and/or web based entry process for customers to use to qualify and pay their share for rides, if appropriate, based on the state’s sliding scale. Trips will be arranged, scheduled, and dispatched so the customer does not have to contact different providers in different locations regardless of which sponsoring agency or program is paying for the trip. A process should be put in place by the RTA so that when decisions are made by service organizations

any new programs, affected agencies are given an opportunity to influence the decision impact is negative. This includes policy implementation affecting the costs of client, or other potential effects on the client; including transportation costs to other agencies or

tion will develop mechanisms to give all transportation providers and volunteers who meet standards an opportunity to participate in the program, and, in addition, allow for cost as so that agencies and other purchasers can select the least expensive trip most appropriate to customer's needs. (Do not send a lift van for someone who can walk to a volunteer's car.)
uld be flexibility in using the available vehicles in a community so that the ability to transport not restricted by categorical claims to vehicle use or funding sources. We should strive for an sharing of operating facilities and administrative services, to avoid duplication of costly elements. Trip sponsors and service providers should agree on a process for allocating costs ing when they share use of vehicles. Minimum standards and coordination should exist for e safety, driver training, maintenance, vehicle appearance, and technology to eliminate barriers ay prevent sponsors from using each other's vehicles or serving each other's clients.

system must be user friendly, and the fact that the system is supported by a multitude of programs agencies with different eligibility, contracting, service delivery, payment, and funding structures t not negatively affect the customer's ability to access service. Continued support and funding should provided to the RTA for research, technology improvements, and sharing of best practices from other communities, so that the system can be continually improved. There must be performance goals and an valuation process that leads to continuous system improvement and accountability. To assure successful implementation and operation of the best feasible program, the RTA, in coordination with takeholders, should form a **Transportation Task Force**, with committees and sub committees who will develop guidelines for local planning of coordinated transportation in accordance with the vision and stated goals of the RTA. The task force will initiate local planning processes by contacting the board of supervisors in each county of Planning District 15 and the Richmond City Council and encouraging them to convene local planning forums for the purpose of implementing a special needs coordinated transportation program at the community and regional level. Task force members will work with all local community forums to cooperate and coordinate with private and nonprofit transportation providers including faith based volunteer programs, local public transportation agencies, local governments, and user groups.

The RTA will provide a forum at the regional level (i.e. EDAC, CTAC, TAC, and MPO) in which all agencies will discuss and resolve coordination issues and program policy issues that may impact transportation coordination and costs. The RTA will develop guidelines for agencies to use in creating policies, rules, or procedures to encourage the participation of their constituents in Regional community-based planning and coordination. The RTA will facilitate regional level discussion and action on problems and barriers identified by the local forums that can only be resolved at the regional level. The RTA can become a forum to recommend to the legislature changes in laws to assist coordination of transportation services, make petitions to make whatever changes are deemed necessary to identify transportation costs in all agency budgets. A report to the MPO should be made by December 2006, on demonstration projects have been undertaken, how coordination affected service levels, and whether these efforts produced savings that allowed expansion of services. Reports should be made once every year thereafter, and other times, as circumstances deem necessary. The time is right to begin this coordination process and all the citizens throughout the Richmond region will benefit especially the and persons with disabilities.

