



COUNTY OF HUNTERDON NEW JERSEY

HUMAN SERVICES ADVISORY COUNCIL LOCAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON ALCOHOLISM & DRUG ABUSE YOUTH SERVICES COMMISSION MENTAL HEALTH BOARD



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REFERENCE:

- ☐ Council
- ☐ Mental Health
- ☐ Youth
- ☐ Disabled
- ☐ Substance
- ☐ Use Disorder
- ☒ Transportation

Approved November 9, 2022

TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Regular Meeting

Wednesday, September 14, 2022, 1:30 p.m.
Via Conference Call

MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT

M. Westlake
T. Shepherd
S. Lax
M. McDonough

EX-OFFICIO

B. Miguel

STAFF

E. Neukum
M. O'Reilly
K. Fullerton
K. Melchers
K. Tustison

GUESTS

L. End
C. Titus
B. Pasko
A. Horn
K. Hillman
S. Fittante

I. CONVENE: OPEN PUBLIC MEETING STATEMENT:

"This meeting is being held in accordance with the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 – 10:4-21. Notice of this meeting has been provided in the Hunterdon County Democrat and the Courier News. A public notice announcing this meeting has also been placed in the lobbies of the Hunterdon County Department of Human Services, the first floor of the Main Street County Complex, 71 Main Street Building #1, Flemington, NJ; the first floor of the Route 12 County Complex, building #3, 314 State Route 12, Flemington, NJ and County Clerk's Office."

E. Neukum read the Open Public Meeting Statement and Opened the Transportation Advisory Committee at 1:30 p.m. with a quorum present.

II. MINUTES: M. McDonough made a motion and S. Lax seconded to approve the minutes of July 13, 2022. All were in favor. The minutes for the July 13, 2022, meeting passed.

III. CORRESPONDENCE: No correspondence at this time.

IV. PRESENTATION: Transpo – LINK Analysis Program

C. Titus introduced himself as a Senior Trip Planner with Transpo Group and Project Manager

for this project. He also introduced S. Fittante, who is working with Transpo on this project. The purpose of this presentation is to provide an update and explain the Consolidated Transportation System Study. The project commenced in mid-spring and gained traction over the summer. C. Titus stated he will be explaining the project for those members and guests who are not familiar with the project, walk through the analyses they are conducting, and share some of their project conclusion. C. Titus conveyed

The Key Project Objectives

- Identify **opportunities** to modify existing Shuffle routes to address nearby but currently **unserved trip residential origins and desired destinations** to increase system efficiency.
- Develop **recommendations** that address the **unmet mobility needs** of members of the general public and specialized needs of older persons and individuals with various abilities that are currently unserved or underserved by the current LINK system services.

Scope of Work

- Project Management
- Existing Conditions
- Agency Outreach and Public Engagement
- Assessment of Existing Services
- Recommended Plan

The scope of work has five primary tasks, the first being the Project Management Task. C. Titus stated the real nuts and bolts happen under the Existing Conditions Evaluation which was conducted in the late spring of this year. The Public Engagement and Agency Outreach task took place in early summer and is being finalized now. The project is currently in the middle stage of Assessment of Existing Services and C. Titus will be sharing some of those findings shortly. Creating a Recommended Plan will be the last task. Engagement Activities took place a few weeks ago and they are looking to finish up the Assessment of Existing Services. October and November will be spent walking through and developing a plan and another public engagement session will be held to hear the thoughts of the general public. The project is reported to be on track with the timeline.

Under the Existing Conditions Analysis, C. Titus reported the first step was to gather data and intel of the services offered by the county. The focus is on the LINK services, gathering ridership data, existing routing information, creating GIS geodata for the LINK routes, documenting scheduling, documenting service parameters, understanding the fleet composition, identifying, and isolating route deviations. A broad and comprehensive understanding of all service providers and parameters were collected. Demographic data was also collected from the services themselves. The data sets gathered included: population density, percent zero car households, Hispanic and Latino populations, limited English proficient populations, and lower income communities. This data is difficult to analyze individually, therefore the data collected was analyzed collectively and a Transit Propensity was created. Transit Propensity is an index used to determine the likelihood of a certain area's population is to use public transit services. S. Fittante reported the darker colors on the maps tend to be in villages, borough areas, and along highways within the county.

C. Titus reported a third-party company, Replica, was used to create a data set to provide modeled origin destination pairing. This data can be manipulated to identify and replicate

individuals who have high propensity for transit. This information is collected as location-based service data and cell phone data. The data collected and manipulated is validated against a series of other regional models in the area. This data set allows the Transpo team to understand travel patterns, and travel trends for specific groups. Replica also produced a heat map and two spider plots between origin and destination pairings. C. Titus stated these maps allow them to understand high intensity travel corridors for specific populations.

C. Titus conveyed data was also collected on the travel patterns of seniors. The maps C. Titus shared in his presentation included origin and destination patterns of the seniors as raw data before it was analyzed and entered into the spider map data shared in the previous slide. This set of data is based on Hunterdon County residents over the age of 65, with a household income below \$50,000, who have one or no vehicles available for their entire household. With these types of filters applied to several groups, the goal is to find the most potential communities that use public transportation. Additionally, the same information was collected for weekends because weekend service was heard to be desired.

The next stage of Analysis Program was a series of Engagement Activities. This stage was divided into two primary parts. The first part included a series of interviews with key stakeholders. Video conference interviews were conducted with goHunterdon, Fisherman's Mark, YMCA/United Way, Meals on Wheels, and two LINK Riders.

Findings from Stakeholder Interviews

The most frequently utilized locations included grocery stores, major retail locations, and medical appointments. Hours of operation were reported to be generally sufficient, but earlier morning and or later evening service would be helpful to those populations who may perform shift work or have hours outside of the typical 9:00am – 5:00pm. It was reported there is a strong interest for weekend service, particularly to and from the Flemington area. S. Fittante added it is recognized the Route 21 route does provide service within the Flemington area, but most of what they heard back was regarding service on the cross-county routes both locally and to major destinations in the Flemington area. Frequency of service was found to be a key challenge faced by riders. This is the time it takes to use the service due to the relatively infrequent service. However, it is financially challenging to provide public transportation at higher frequency in suburban and rural areas traveling across larger distances.

Deviated Fixed Stop Locations vs. Route Deviations is another finding from stakeholder interviews that C. Titus and his team are currently analyzing. He stated E. Neukum provided great data to aid with this process. The Deviated Fixed Stop Locations vs. Route Deviations questioned the utility of some fixed stop locations while noting that some of the requested route deviation stops may be utilized more than fixed stop locations. Key Transit Populations include seniors and those with mobility challenges. While these are incredibly important and dependent populations, minority populations are also key. However, Hispanic populations may be less inclined to utilize public transportation as vehicle ownership and being able to drive oneself is viewed as a pinnacle of independence. Stakeholders noted interpreting the LINK schedules can be confusing, especially for seniors and Limited English Proficiency populations.

A Pop-Up Workshop was also held in addition to the Stakeholder Interviews. The Workshop was held in the Hunterdon County Jury Lot on Wednesday, July 27, 2022, from 7:00 am – 5:30 pm. The Hunterdon County Jury Lot is the bus transfer facility where passengers can transfer between the seven -weekday deviated fixed bus routes (Shuffles). Clients and drivers were asked for input on how services could be improved, findings include but are not limited to the

following:

- Span of weekdays and weekend service hours
- Frequency of service
- Days of service
- Unserved destinations

The tools for obtaining input included several different means of obtaining customer and driver input including the following:

- Customer Rate Your Journey Worksheet
- Driver Questionnaire
- Recording of Customer Comments on Service Needs

Findings from Pop-Up Workshop

- Generally appreciative and satisfied with services.
- Need for some form of weekend or at least Saturday service.
- Need for later afternoon service on the #15, #17 and #18 routes and perhaps one evening with later mid-evening service.
- Need for improved passenger amenities at bus stops and Jury Lot transfer location (portable restroom, garbage can, benches at key stops).
- Increase frequency on the paired #18 Clinton-Whitehouse-Flemington-Milford and the #17 Milford-Flemington-Whitehouse-Clinton.

Engagement Lessons Learned

- The deviated fixed-route services generally serve the most transit-dependent populations. However, the hours and days of service can make using transit service difficult for some residents.
- There may be opportunities to provide more efficient service based on an evaluation of the designated stop locations and route deviations. More efficient service could reduce headways and make service more useable for riders.
- Regular and targeted transit education and outreach may be key to attracting new riders and more adequately serving residents.

Assessment of Existing Services

C. Titus reported his team is currently conducting an Assessment. The Assessment of Existing Services is broken into two subtasks:

- Gaps and Needs Assessment
 - System Operational Characteristics
 - Swot Analysis
 - Gaps and Needs Identification
- Assessment and Development of Proposed Service Plan

S. Fittante reported how they organized the different types of gaps and needs into four categories.

Gaps and Needs Identification

- Compare observed travel patterns of populations with high transit potential against current services to understand gaps.
- Compare quantitative findings with experience of riders and input from stakeholders
- Examine:

- Geographic Gaps (geographic need, gap in existing service)
- Temporal Gaps (frequency, span of service)
- Operational Gaps (how the service is designed)
- Informational Gaps (communication with schedule information, advanced reservation service, information on fare structure)

Gaps and Needs Identification

- Geographic Gaps
 - Establishment of a time-point on Route 17 and Route 18 service at the Willows residential community in Whitehouse.
 - Establishment of a timepoint at the Willows at Flemington Junction.
 - Expand transportation to key out-of-county medical destinations.
- Temporal Gaps
 - Operate a later afternoon weekday trip on the #19 Flemington Shuffle Route.
 - Operate weekend service.
- Operational Gaps
 - Combine the #17 and #18 Cross County routes into a single route to eliminate some overlaps and increase available service frequency.
 - Extend #14 route to reduce excess recovery time.
 - Reduce #15 route length by eliminating stop and time-point at Hampton Rescue
- Informational Gaps
 - Amend fare and donation policy so that persons with disabilities are provided the same suggested donation as senior citizens for out of County trips.
 - Consider a discounted employment trip book for general public frequent riders.

S. Fittante conveyed the next step is to examine service delivery options. This may include creating a hybrid between the advanced reservation services being used for single medical trips and the route deviation services. This potential hybrid route provides service to the endpoint of a fixed route deviation. This next step will also include looking at the LINK's hours of service and determining where potential expansion of service may be needed.

C. Titus stated the project is schedule to complete by the end of the year. His plan is to schedule another public engagement meeting to share the teams' results and findings in early to mid-November.

Question and Answer:

M. Westlake asked how many people showed up to the Pop-Up Workshop. C. Titus stated they engaged with approximately 25-30 clients. S. Fittante added the 27 comments they received represented about 80% of the passengers that were at the transfer location. They also received comments all drivers currently operating.

S. Lax asked if those who are afraid to travel were interviewed as well. C. Titus conveyed yes; they were interviewed through the stakeholders. S. Fittante added those agencies represented their lead consumers.

K. Hillman stated there are quite a bit of buildings being constructed and that will be up in the next six (6) months to one (1) year and asked if this projection was accounted for. C. Titus stated a Desk Scan was done and conversations were held with E. Neukum discussing projects, major developments, and the impact they will have on public transit. S. Fittante conveyed the Junction

Outlet is something they are aware of, but there are other smaller projects that have been completed but are not currently served. C. Titus reported housing is directly tied to public transportation nationally.

E. Neukum thanked C. Titus and S. Fittante for their presentation.

V. **REPORTS:**

A. Transportation – Erin Neukum: E. Neukum stated the County of Hunterdon put out a bid for three (3) vehicles to enhance the current vehicle pool. The county currently has 23 vehicles in its pool, the contract with Easton Coach states the county is required to have 23-30 vehicles. E. Neukum stated if service is being run at full capacity, there are 21 routes. E. Neukum was excited to share the county has received back two out of the three proposals for vehicles. It has been awarded to Rohrer Bus Sales, and they will be providing three vehicles. She is hopeful they will be added to the pool by the end of this year or beginning of next year.

E. Neukum conveyed the County has received the SCDRTAP Application back from the Commissioners. They have approved the application, everything is complete, and it will be submitted to NJ Transit by the end of the week.

E. Neukum reported M. O'Reilly and herself attended the Cost Expo that was held September 13, 2022. They attended talks with topics of Autonomous Vehicles, these are vehicles that drive themselves. An attendant can either be on the vehicle or working remotely in an office to control the operations of the vehicle. There are some restrictions. It was stated the vehicles would not go over the speed of twenty-five (25) miles per hour. E. Neukum advised that with this restriction, this type of operation would work best as a "people gatherer" if this operation was to be used in Hunterdon County. She gave an example of the Autonomous Vehicle picking up several clients in a small area such as a complex and dropping them all off at one stop to be picked up by a different LINK bus.

B. Systems Operations – Easton Coach: L. End reported the driver situation is still a problem but they are seeing some activity. Easton Coach is still in the process of hiring. They have two applicants under evaluation for pre-employment. These two applicants do not have CDL Licenses so they will need to go through training. However, they can drive a Dodge Grand Caravan that is equipped with a wheelchair ramp while they undergo training. L. End was excited to announce Easton Coach has been approved to conduct CDL training. He stated he has been working with about eight drivers from another Easton Coach location, two of which have obtained their CDL Licenses. He conveyed they borrow these drivers when they are in a pinch.

L. End reported there has been an increase in ridership. He stated they are receiving on average three (3) to four (4) new riders with subscription trips. These additions are bringing them up to their maximum because they are going in as prebooks all while they are still receiving daily trips. On the upside, L. End reported the mobile app has been receiving some more activity. The app helps riders get to the bus on time. The app also sends out notifications to passengers that they are the next pickup and allows the riders to cancel trips, so drivers are not showing up for trips that have been cancelled.

L. End conveyed some of the buses are accumulating a lot of milage and require some more

maintenance. He hopes to receive the three (3) new vehicles soon, so they are able to get them out on the road to help improve their service.

- C. **Fiscal – Keith Tustison:** K. Tustison conveyed LINK is still not collecting fares. He stated ridership has increased significantly. Percentage deviations for the month were around 10%. E. Neukum conveyed looking at the percentage of deviations from the runs helps evaluate the set runs. A large number of deviations on one specific Shuffle Run would insinuate the run needs to be evaluated to see if the passengers are being picked up at the points already listed or is there a specific spot along the run that people are asking for on a regular basis. If they are asking for it, what time of the day and how many times a day are they asking for it.
- D. **NJT Report – Brian Miguel:** B. Miguel just wanted to thank and congratulate Hunterdon County for their performance and participation during the recent FTA Review. B. Miguel read a letter from Janelle Rivera, Acting Director of Minibus Support. The letter thanked E. Neukum for participating in the State Management Compliance Review conducted by CDI, LLC. The consultants that visited to review the program help NJ Transit fulfill oversight and compliance for FTA grants and subconscience. J. Rivera stated she is very appreciative to Erin for gathering documents, handling phone calls and everything else that was requested of her. She was prepared with postings for seniors and answers to the numerous questions. Everyone was impressed with E. Neukum and her colleagues' knowledge of the transportation system. J. Rivera went on to thank her for her participation and continued partnership providing community transportation to the residents of Hunterdon County. B. Miguel shared an update on upcoming Grant Funded Funding Allocations. The 2022 SCDRTAP allocation was \$414,649.00 with a close out of \$594,808.73. The 2023 SCDRTAP allocation is \$574,338.00. Applications are due September 23, 2022. The 2021 allocation for Section 5311 was \$362,719.00 and the allocation for 2022 is \$362,023.00. The upcoming NJ Transit SCDRTAP Public Hearing is scheduled for Thursday November 3, 2022 at 6:00 pm.

VI. **UNFINISHED BUSINESS:** None at this time.

VII. **NEW BUSINESS:** None at this time.

VIII. **PUBLIC COMMENTS:** A. Horne from Hunterdon Behavioral Health stated clients are returning full-time with in-person appointments. But a giant barrier with them being able to do this is the transportation system. She stated the LINK is the exception and has done everything it can do to help. A. Horne stated Modivcare has been a complete failure. She stated Modivcare is unreliable and has left people stranded. Hunterdon Behavioral Health has lost clients because they do not want to deal with Modivcare. Patients who have waited months to get their appointments will call Hunterdon Behavioral Health the morning of their appointment and say they are unable to make it because they do not have a driver. A. Horne expressed her praise for the LINK system and how much they have stepped up and accommodated for their clients. A. Horne stated even the complaint system for Modivcare is unmanageable. Quite a few of these patients are using cell phones with limited minutes and the minutes are wasted trying to reach someone. Patients shared the complaint system is not user-friendly. T. Shepherd stated she has been in communication with New Jersey Department of Human Services because this is an issue goHunterdon has been documenting for quite some time.

E. Neukum shared a statement from Allison Nardi, an Occupational Therapy student at Elizabethtown College. As part of her college credits and a current project, she has chosen to

advocate for seniors and those who are disabled. Her statement reads “I appreciate and acknowledge all the work that continues to be done to improve the LINK service. I would encourage further development to support residents with disabilities and their needs. In addition, I further encourage the exploration of a “Door to Door” service for seniors and residents with disabilities who cannot access the LINK due to mobility and safety challenges.”

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:36 pm. A motion was made by T. Shepherd and second by M. McDonough. All were in favor. The next regular meeting will be held on November 9, 2022, at 1:30 pm via Webex. Members are requested to call the Department of Human Services if they are unable to attend/be a part of the call.