

**Orange / Northern Windsor Area meeting of the
ELDERLY AND DISABLED TRANSPORTATION PARTNERS
June 30, 2020 – 10:00AM - Noon via Zoom
DRAFT MINUTES**

Attendees – Jim Moulton, Tri-Valley Transit; Jade McClallan, Stagecoach; Mike Reiderer, Stagecoach; Sarah Wraight, Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission; Rita Seto, Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission; Jackie Cassino, VTrans; Tim Bradshaw, VTrans, Stephanie Reilley, VTrans, Jeanne Kern, Central Vermont Council on Aging; Paula Audsley, Thompson Senior Center; Julia O’Donnell, OSIP; Wendi Germain, Senior Solutions; Gretchen Cole, Scotland House Adult Day.

Regrets – Lisa Culbertson, Upper Valley Services; Gifford Adult Day (Judy Santamore retired); Dan Currier, VTrans; Deanna Jones, Thompson Senior Center; Gretchen Pembroke, Clara Martin Center.

Meeting Minutes

1. Introductions

2. Statewide E&D Survey Results - Jackie Cassino, VTrans

(Rita will circulate a copy of Jackie’s slides and post it on TRORC’s website.)

Jackie Cassino presented results of the statewide E&D Rider Survey. The overarching project goal was to gather baseline customer service data that can be used to establish benchmarks for the state program. The survey included 14 basic customer service and demographic questions. They were all completed pre-Covid (January – February), except for 1 region. No clients directly used the online version of the survey. Survey methodology was adapted to respond to regional needs.

Overall, statewide, there were low response rates from senior centers and adult day clients. The original goal was a 20% response rate from each E&D partner, but this target was changed to a 20% response rate from each E&D region. In this region, there was a 31% response rate (50 out of 162 clients). Most respondents were over the age of 75 and 54% lived in Randolph, Newbury, or Bethel.

Data summary:

Overall, respondents feel satisfied with the service they’re being provided; it’s meeting their needs, and they would recommend it to others.

Overall, respondents said they were very happy with their drivers. Statewide, respondents said they preferred volunteer drivers because they value the personal relationships.

What could stagecoach do better? Regional responses align with statewide responses.

- Miscommunication or misaligned expectations about timing or scheduling
 - In Chittenden County, they responded to this need by putting together a ride guide to explain what the process is, what to do if a ride needs to be rescheduled, etc.
- Service expectations - some clients want assistance getting to/from the car.
- Comfort concerns in larger vehicles.

Interactions with Stagecoach:

- Over 90% of respondents said interactions with Stagecoach are good / respectful.
- Over 50% of clients interact with Stagecoach staff frequently.
- Over 50% of clients said it was easy to get Stagecoach services.

What would make it easier to use services? Our region aligned with statewide responses.

- more trips allowed, especially personal trips
- reliable pick up and drop off
- easier scheduling and trip confirmation
- better information about what services are available

57% of respondents prefer volunteer drivers.

54% of respondents strongly agree that Stagecoach services are important to their health and wellbeing.

Next steps:

- Jackie will send a 2-page flyer summarizing survey responses from our region and explain long-term next steps. The flyer will be mailed out to everyone who completed a survey. This will happen over the next few weeks. She encouraged partners to share the flyer with anyone who might be interested.
- Over the course of the next year, a number of work program items are focused around doing follow-up with survey respondents who said they wanted to share more information than they did on the survey.
- Over the course of the next year, start putting together an annual work plan for the E&D committee.

Additional Discussion:

Jackie noted that the AOT Transit website has a new E&D webpage where resources (including survey results) are being made available.

<https://vtrans.vermont.gov/public-transit/E-and-D>

Jeanne noted that there were 60 people who were on the waitlist for the TTR program for most of the year and so they weren't surveyed. She advocated for reaching out to them. Rita suggested that surveying waitlisted people could be part of the portion of the workplan that focuses on addressing unmet needs.

Jeanne shared her disappointment in the low response rate from circulator bus clients. Jackie commented this was a statewide concern, and in future iterations of the survey the state will adjust the outreach timeline and methodology to try to reach low-response sectors.

Jackie explained that the state anticipates doing client surveys every 3 years. The state is open to including specific questions E&D partners would like to ask of their clients. Rita added that the partners' input will be very important for developing the next survey, particularly with regard to gathering information about unmet needs.

3. TRORC E&D Work Plan for FY21 – Rita Seto, TRORC

Working with transit providers and the RPCs, VTrans has been working to improve statewide E&D guidance.

Rita outlined the ways that RPCs will support E&D committees moving forward:

- Work with transit providers and E&D partners to develop a robust annual work program (including mission, goals, objectives, performance measures, roles) to support all E&D partners. The first work program will be developed between October 2020 and June 2021. VTrans will provide a template but supports committees adapting it to fit their region. The state guidance will help to create more consistency between E&D service delivery systems across the state.
 - Rita will begin drafting a work plan this summer and will circulate it to the group. A work group might be formed. At the next meeting in September, the group will review and discuss the draft.
 - Example work plan tasks:
 - Committee organization
 - Service area mapping
 - Evaluate existing membership and opportunities to add riders, etc.
 - Welcome packet for new clients

- Developing methodology to track unmet needs
- More information is available in the TPI work plan guidance packet.

4. COVID-19 Service Review and Update – Jim Moulton, TVT

Jim explained that at first, systems were changing very rapidly in response to COVID-19. At the beginning, Stagecoach shut down everything except critical care health trips. As the state reopened and personal protective equipment (PPE) became available, Stagecoach reinstated the volunteer driver program. Drivers are provided with hand sanitizer and PPE, and are trained on how to use it. Drivers also sanitize the vehicle, put clients in the back seat, and make sure clients have the appropriate PPE. Masks have been mandated for all bus riders, statewide. Hand sanitizer is made available to bus riders and drivers.

All transit providers meet with VTrans every week to talk through reopening logistics. Stagecoach is working with the state to get all buses up to 50% capacity by modifying the vehicle interior to protect riders.

Jim expects that many of the safety protocols instituted in response to COVID-19 will become standard operating procedure for a long time to come. Normalcy won't return until a vaccine is available.

Transit received dedicated funding through the federal CARES Act. VTrans has also been extremely supportive. In FY21, Stagecoach expects approximately level funding. However, the state budget continues to evolve, so there may be mid-year amendments. Everyone will work together to make sure the safest maximum level of possible service is provided.

5. Ticket to Ride (TTR) Program Review – Jim Moulton, TVT

Jeanne has taken a leadership role advocating for the TTR program. In addition, Middlebury College students did an analysis comparing the E&D services through Stagecoach versus Addison County. They found that the two different approaches (i.e., giving a client a budget versus an allocated number of rides) yielded the same results, and it's administratively easier and slightly cheaper to allocate numbers of rides. It's also easier for clients to not have to track budgets; they think in terms of numbers of rides, not dollars per ride. The other advantage to the Addison County approach is that there's no waiting list; everybody gets into the program. If there are funding shortfalls and there are no safety net funds available, Stagecoach lowers the numbers of rides allocated per client.

Jim and Jeanne proposed altering the TTR program for FY21 to match the Addison County system. Stagecoach, with Jeanne's assistance, will use the available data and funding numbers to set ride allocations. Clients will not need to affiliate with an individual organization; eligibility will be based solely on age or disability. Jim and Jeanne will work together on enrollment procedures. Jim noted that in Addison County, clients don't need to re-enroll each year; they are on the list as long as they are eligible.

Jeanne advocated that the TTR program should not specify the type of allowed trips, but rather just give the client a total number of round-trips (above and beyond cancer or dialysis critical care trips). The clients should be able to decide their own breakdown between medical and social/personal trips (excluding, of course, those trips that are not eligible for the program).

Jeanne expressed support for creating a rider guide that explains what a client is eligible for, how the program operates, grievance procedures, etc. Neither Stagecoach nor Addison County have a TTR rider guide. Rita offered for TRORC to draft a rider guide and circulate for group review and input.

The group unanimously expressed support for the TTR proposal laid out by Jim and Jeanne.

6. Ridership Review – Jim Moulton, TVT

Stagecoach did not provide a ridership review because of COVID-19 disruption. Up until March, demand exceeded demand from the previous year. But the past benchmarks are now meaningless for the foreseeable future. New benchmarks for success will need to be developed. Stagecoach is committed to focusing on safety and prioritizing essential/critical travel.

7. Budget/Grant Review – Jim Moulton, TVT

Stagecoach hopes the partners who have historically provided local match funds will be able to continue to provide those funds, but they understand if doing so is infeasible at this time.

The FY21 partner grant agreements will mimic the past agreements, with some broad language to allow for flexibility as COVID-19 needs evolve.

8. Rides-To-Wellness Update – Jim Moulton, TVT

This program was launched in both Addison and Orange/Northern Windsor regions pre-COVID, funded through state grants. The program goal at that time was to reach people who weren't eligible for existing transport programs but still had transportation needs. The program shut down when COVID hit, and is now reopening. Stagecoach is in close communication with Gifford and Porter hospitals to help those people access transit.

9. Bradford Transportation Work Group Update

From Lisa Culbertson, Upper Valley Services:

Before COVID the team was gearing up to offer transportation training in May of 2020, to Service Coordinators across the state (with limited numbers from each organization). We were going to have speakers from Medicaid, Tri-Valley, and V-Trans to talk about current programs and up-coming projects and grants. We felt that this training would equip the service coordinators with information that would allow them to assist people more efficiently, that would in turn increase the number of people utilizing the various programs. We have not met since February and obviously had to put the training on hold. I would very much like to continue this quest and need to think about how to reengage this group and get the ball rolling again.

10. VTrans First Annual E&D Summit – July 10

The online registration is closed, but you can still email or call Jackie Cassino if you would like to attend.

11. Mobility Manager Update – Jim Moulton, TVT

VTrans is committed to hire someone for this coming fiscal year, through the statewide transit association. The position would assist each regional transit operator. They do not have any candidates at this time.

12. Next Meetings

Rita will send out a doodle poll to establish next meeting dates for the coming year to meet quarterly.

As we begin to allow for in-person meetings, we will continue this virtual capacity so that partners can still participate.

13. Other Business

- Lisa Culbertson, UVS reported in email: We are conducting risk assessments for everyone to begin to reenter the community and jobs. As we complete these for the folks that need transportation through Tri-Valley, I will be requesting them

directly. Our office is still closed, although Belinda is there to respond to management needs. We all continue to work remotely from home while we work on our reopen plan. As you know there is a lot to consider and also presents an opportunity to do things differently.

- The Park & Ride at Royalton Exit 3 is coming along very nicely. The Thetford Park & Ride is under construction as well.
- Wendi Germain has replaced Catherine Wisniewski at Senior Solutions in Springfield. She serves as the Nutrition and Wellness Director, and transportation falls under her duties.
- Bradford Bus Barn: The A&E team is working on final design documents. A local match funding plan is also in progress. The project just received a \$100,000 grant from a New England foundation. Permitting is in progress, and the project is on track for shovels in ground on Oct 1st. Construction estimates are pretty unpredictable at present. Having a new facility will make a difference in helping to keep everyone safe during the COVID-19 crisis and in future crises. The building will be net zero (solar power generated).

The meeting adjourned at 11:38 am.

Submitted by: Sarah Wraight & Rita Seto, TRORC