

Approaches to Linking Rural Communities with Rural Regional Transit Services

Presentation at
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and Intercity
Bus
Transportation
Conference

NCHRP 20(65) Task 56

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NCHRP 20-65(56): Rural Regional Transit Services

- Definition of rural regional services
- Literature review and analysis of national data
- Survey of state DOT's
- Case studies
- Tool kit



The Need for Regional Services

- Employment trips: increasing demand for commuter transportation from rural areas to employment centers outside immediate service area
- Education: Regional community colleges or other training programs may be located in other counties
- Medical: Particularly more specialized providers, or those accepting Medicaid may be in other jurisdictions—typically in regional centers, or Veterans Administration medical facilities, closing of local rural hospitals
- Social and Recreational: Activities, family, sites (parks, theaters, etc.) may require non-local travel
- Necessary shopping—closure of stores in rural areas



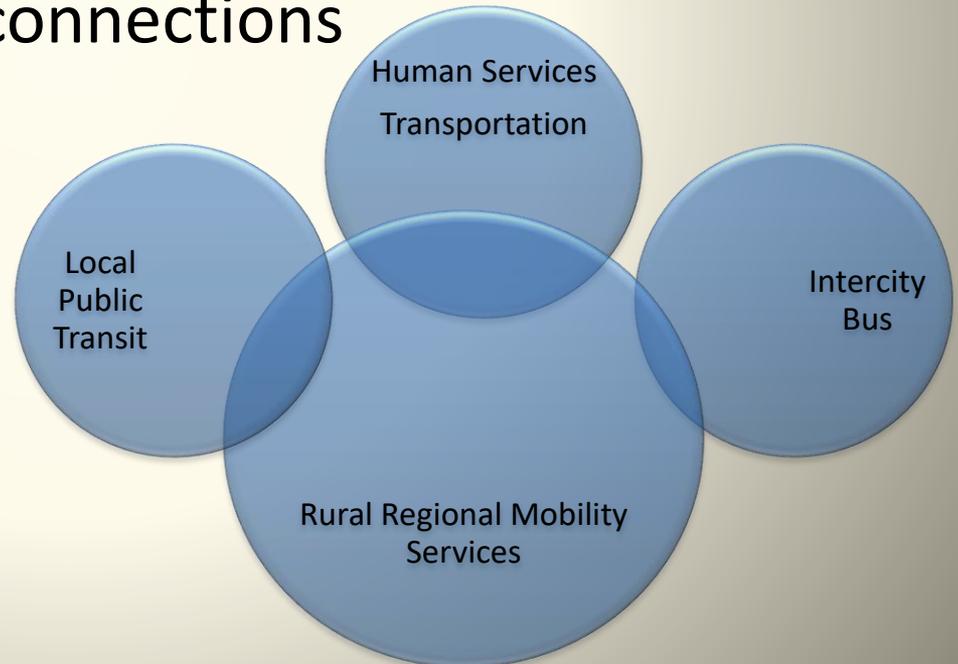
Not Local Services, and Not Intercity Services

- BUT- programs funding or providing local transit systems say they can't address this need,
- AND – intercity bus services (provided by the market or funded by Section 5311(f) don't really meet this need either
- Therefore there is a need to identify cases or examples where these needs have been addressed, and develop tools to help fill this gap.



Typology of Transit Services to Include Regional

- Intercity services
- Regional commuter services
- Rural regional services
- Essential mobility connections
- Local transit





Rural Regional Defined

- Transit services that are scheduled
- Open to the general public (though they may also carry agency clients)
- Operate on longer routes that cross county lines
- Connect Non-urbanized areas (under 50,000) to each other and to Urbanized Areas (over 50,000)
- Are scheduled to permit a round-trip within a day, allowing for the user to spend several hours at a regional destination



State Roles

- Top-down approach:
 - Legislation requiring regionalization
 - Direct state provision of regional services
 - Statewide planning
- Bottom-up approach:
 - Legislation allowing regionalization or removing barriers
 - Funding for regionalization feasibility studies
 - Technical assistance with implementation
 - Incentive funding (higher level of match, more state aid for buses, technology)
 - Mobility management funding for regions
- State focus is often on creating regional organizations



Rural Regional Case Studies

- Variety of organizational structures
- Use of different funding sources
- In states with different approaches to regional services/organizations
- Serving multiple and varying needs



Case Studies

- California
 - Lake Transit Authority Routes 3, 4, and 7
- Colorado
 - Colorado DOT Regional and Intercity Bus Plan/Bustang
 - South Central (Colorado) COG service from Trinidad and Walsenburg to Pueblo/
- Iowa
 - Iowa DOT Regional Structure
 - Region XII Council of Governments/Western Iowa Transit Dennison to Harlan Commuter Service
- Kansas
 - Kansas DOT T-Works and Regional Transit Business Model Implementation Plan
 - Flint Hills Area Transportation Agency, Inc. (Kansas) routes from Manhattan, Fort Riley, and Junction City and western Pottawatomie County



Case Studies (Continued)

- Maine
 - Maine Strategic Transit Plan
 - ShuttleBus Zoom Intercity/Portland Service
- Michigan
 - ALTRAN (Alger County Transit) Alger County to Marquette Route
- Minnesota
 - Minnesota DOT “Transit for our Future” Initiative
 - Central Community Transit (CCT) rural regional consolidation
- Montana
 - Flathead Transit regional intercity service Missoula to Whitefish
 - North Central Montana Transit
- New Mexico
 - New Mexico DOT regional transit enabling legislation, regional services
 - North Central Regional Transit District



Case Studies (Continued)

- Oregon
 - Oregon DOT Transit Network Program
 - Northwest Oregon Connector Alliance five-system regional network
- Vermont
 - Vermont Agency of Transportation/CCTA and transit provider support for regional links,
 - Rt. 2 Commuter and Southeast Vermont Transportation Association/Green Mountain Community Network joint service Wilmington-Bennington
- Wisconsin
 - Scenic Mississippi Regional Transit three county regional system



Lessons Learned

- State policies can make a difference
- Organizational approaches can vary
- Local champions required
- Serve multiple markets
- Appropriate service design
- Connectivity and information
- Creative funding



State Policies Supporting Regional Services

- Direct state operation or contracting
- State programs providing incentive or demonstration funding for regional services specifically
- State legislation allowing funding for regional districts
- Section 5311(f) program—identifying regional needs, use of funds for intercity also meeting regional needs



Organizational Approaches

- Public transit authorities
- Joint powers agreements between public agencies
- Private non-profits
- Regional advisory committees with lead agency applicant
- Joint services by separate systems
- Tribal transit
- Direct state operation
- Regional planning agencies



Local Champions Required

- Local champions required—both individuals and organizations
- Case studies included champions from:
 - Local coordination committees (developed for coordination plan process)
 - Regional planning agencies—rural or MPO
 - Mobility managers
 - State DOTs
 - Tribal transit
 - Economic development organizations
 - Transit providers who recognize regional needs



Combine Markets

- Most case study services were designed to serve multiple markets
 - Employment trips
 - Medical trips
 - Medicaid
 - Dialysis
 - Community college/high schools
 - Intercity/commuter connections
- Impacts service designs
 - Weekday daily service for employment
 - Schedules/frequency



Appropriate Service Design

- Design services to meet needs of intended market
 - Weekday daily service for employment
 - Schedules to allow workday, school trips
 - Mid-day services for human service, shopping, early return home
 - Timely intercity connections
- May require special schedules for shift employment, educational trips
- Include desirable amenities
 - Wi-fi
 - Bicycle racks
 - Comfortable seating



Connectivity and Information

- Ensure connections with local transit at trip origins or destinations
 - Shared stops
 - Joint fares
 - Linked schedule information
- May need deviations at trip origin and destinations for last-mile, first-mile
- May need park and ride access
- Interline agreements with intercity carrier
 - Makes service information available to national market for inbound trips
 - May add revenue for intercity connections
- Importance of all types of service information



Creative Funding

- Section 5311
- Section 5311(f) intercity funding/in-kind match
- CMAQ funding
- State transit funds:
 - Feasibility studies/technical assistance
 - Operating assistance
 - Capital
 - Technology
- Department of Energy funding (Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant)
- Economic Development Block Grant
- Medicaid
- Sponsorships—Business support



12 Steps in Developing Rural Regional Services: The Toolkit

- Step 1: Identify Needs
- Step 2: Establish Planning Leadership
- Step 3: Goals/Vision—Public and Stakeholder Input
- Step 4: Identify Resources
- Step 5: Develop Alternatives
- Step 6: Assess Feasibility
- Step 7: Prioritize--Recommended Plan
- Step 8: Detailed Service Plan
- Step 9: Detailed Organizational Plan
- Step 10: Implementation Plan/Action Items
- Step 11: Initiate service
- Step 12: Evaluate and Fine Tune



Comments or Questions?

- Contact:

Fred Fravel or Lucinda Shannon

KFH Group, Inc.

4920 Elm Street, Suite 350

Bethesda, MD 20814

ffravel@kfhgroup.com

lshannon@kfhgroup.com