TRANSPORTATION FOR SENIORS IN THE LAS VEGAS METROPOLITAN AREA

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TRANSPORTATION FOR SENIORS IN THE LAS VEGAS
METROPOLITAN AREA

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SECTION I

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION
BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2003, four southern Nevadans joined the Easter Seals Project Action’s 2003 Mobility Planning Services Institute program in Washington, D.C. and they accepted the challenge to join colleagues from across the country to share unique ways to improve mobility choices for people with disabilities and others, especially seniors, who use shared transportation.

The following individuals represented the Nevada team:

- Susan Joseph, Senior Management Analyst, Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada
- Jean Peyton, Vice President, Nevada Council of the Blind
- Sandy Stanko, General Manager, Laidlaw Transit Services, Inc. (now with the Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada)
- Jim Wolf, General Manager, ATC of Las Vegas

The team traveled to the Institute and worked under the premise that entire communities are responsible for improving mobility options for people who use shared transportation. Throughout the program, the members used a detailed worksheet to assist them in planning action items when they returned to Nevada. While at the Institute, the Nevada team established as its goals:

- Formalize a senior transportation taskforce
- Conduct an inventory of transportation services available
- Present the findings to the task force*
- Determine the next step(s) for the task force*
- Write the results*

* (These goals were to be formalized after the full Nevada team was formed.)

Upon returning to Clark County, the team invited AARP Nevada, Southern Nevada Easter Seals and the State of Nevada Division for Aging Services to complete its senior transportation task force.
Representing those organizations were:

- Larry Spitler, Associate State Director-Advocacy, AARP Nevada
- Karla McComb, Director of Governmental Affairs & Grants, Easter Seals Southern Nevada
- Carrie Roberts, Elder Rights Advocate, State of Nevada Division for Aging Services

The full team began meeting in early 2004 and discussed projects that would further the established goals and focus on the overall objectives of Easter Seals Project Action.

The team chose as its first project a bifurcated approach to analyzing existing transportation issues for both shared transportation service users and providers. As a result, two important projects evolved. The first was a survey of seniors aged 62 and older and persons with disabilities, who were randomly selected primarily from senior centers, housing complexes for seniors and agencies that provide services to seniors and/or persons with disabilities throughout the Las Vegas metropolitan area. Both users and non users of shared transportation systems were surveyed with 600 responses received and compiled. The second project was a summit focused on providers of shared transportation.

The team chose these projects after long discussions and careful analysis of the senior community in the Las Vegas metropolitan area. Before we discuss the transportation user survey, the summit and the findings, it is important to examine the situation and demographics of older adults in Clark County.

**WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT OUR SENIOR COMMUNITY**

Seniors constitute the largest and fastest growing Clark County subpopulation. The impact of this demographic reality is compounded by the rapid increase in numbers of early retirees or those nearing retirement. The rising age of Clark County residents and the subsequent demographic changes will have a profound impact on important public policy issues including transportation for southern Nevada at both the local and state levels.
In the 1990s, Las Vegas became one of the nation's top retirement destinations. The 2004 Las Vegas Perspective estimates that 37.2% of the Clark County adult population (age 18+) is age 55+, and nearly half of that group is 55 to 64. Of the 61,187 newcomers who moved to the Las Vegas Valley in 2003, one of every four (25.9%) were 55 or older, and most were retired or nearing retirement. The population growth in this age category is not expected to slow. The combination of the indigenous population aging in place and the strong in-migration of retirees will result in the "graying of America" having a very significant impact on Las Vegas.

National statistics show that seniors, who move to retire, have incomes averaging $30,000 per year and Las Vegas reflects this trend. Retirees who relocate from other areas are often much wealthier, with an average estate value of more than $300,000, making them attractive residents as their incomes tend to be recession-proof. New retirees moving to southern Nevada initially provide an economic boost to the community.

It is important to note that not all southern Nevada seniors are wealthy. There is a sharp economic contrast between the seniors who move to Clark County to retire and the aging indigenous population, which has a large number of workers primarily from the service sector, who may lack substantial pensions. Lower salaries, multiple job changes, and less retirement planning could make their retirement years a struggle from the beginning, in contrast to retirees who relocate from other areas. Another important characteristic of the migratory senior population is the likelihood that they do not have traditional family support structures. This has serious implications for publicly funded social services such as transportation.

Public transportation will play an increasing role in the quality of life of this population as they age and lose the ability to drive their own vehicles. A crucial issue concerns their transition to fixed-route and emergency public transportation.

References:

SECTION II

THE LAS VEGAS METROPOLITAN USER TRANSPORTATION SURVEY

Conducted July-August, 2004
The Las Vegas Metropolitan Area User Transportation Survey

A survey of “seniors and persons with disabilities” was conducted during July and August 2004. This was done prior to the summit on September 15, 2004 to create a basis for discussion topics. The assessment tool was available in both English and Spanish. The surveys were distributed by Easter Seals Project Action team members, Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada (RTC) staff and City of Las Vegas Neighborhood Services staff to 16 sites that included senior centers, housing for seniors, and agencies that provide services to seniors and/or persons with disabilities.

Survey Population

Six hundred (N=600) surveys from residents of 55 Las Vegas zip codes were returned. The Spanish surveys were completed by 35 of those respondents.

The only demographics requested of respondents were age and zip code. Five hundred sixty-four (564) reported their ages as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS</th>
<th>PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>81+</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71 – 80</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63 – 70</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62-</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding geographic distribution of survey respondents, we calculated zip codes and the number of participants from each area. We then examined the profiles of these participants’ zip codes regarding percentage of seniors and average income. Breadth of the community survey is reflected in the 55 different zip codes reported by respondents. Listed below are the 11 zip codes with 20 or more survey responses. These represent 65% of the respondents who provided a zip code (N=586).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ZIP CODE</th>
<th>PERCENT OF ADULTS AGE 55 AND OVER</th>
<th>MEDIAN INCOME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>89121 (60)</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>$ 36,402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89107 (54)</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>$ 36,913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89101 (51)</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>$ 19,428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89103 (45)</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>$ 33,856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89104 (28)</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>$ 33,972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89005 (27)</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>$ 46,136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89102 (25)</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>$ 28,831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89108 (22)</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>$ 42,645</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89032 (22)</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>$ 48,692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89030 (20)</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>$ 23,724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89110 (25)</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>$ 42,333</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The Survey Findings**

Of the respondents, 69% still have a driver’s license and 60% own an automobile. When the non-drivers were asked if they were concerned about transportation issues and getting around the community, more than 95% said yes. Those who still drive were asked, if they should become unable to drive anymore, would they be concerned about getting around? More than 80% said yes.

We also asked about barriers to using the fixed route system. Respondents were allowed to select as many issues that applied to their situation. The primary obstacle cited by 40% was, “the bus does not stop close enough to my residence.” The second most important difficulty reported by 36% was “it takes too much time to get to my destination.” Security was cited as a potential barrier to usage of public fixed-route transportation in the next two selections. Thirty-five percent had “concerns about security while waiting for the bus” and 24% worried about “security while riding on the bus.” The fifth highest ranked concern reported by 33% was that they don’t like to transfer from one bus to another.
When asked about their current mode of transportation, 58% of respondents use their personal vehicle, 42% rely on family or friends and 17% use a van service provided by their community or living complex. The remaining current modes of transportation, in declining order, are: fixed-route bus system 14%; taxi 13%; paratransit public services 11%; and, 5% each reported biking or walking.

We asked how far the closest bus stop was from their front door. Thirty-four percent of respondents said it was an easy walk and an equal number said it was too far for them to walk. Nearly one-fifth (18%) did not know where the closest bus stop was located and 9% reported difficulties getting to the bus stop.

We asked what changes would make it easier for those surveyed to use fixed-route public buses. The top four answers were: (1) reducing the waiting time; (2) allowing buses to deviate from their routes to stop closer to key facilities such as medical centers, shopping centers, etc.; (3) placing a bus stop closer to their residence; (4) and, using smaller buses that come close to their residence to take them to a bus stop.

In order to determine whether making the suggested changes in the fixed route system would convince respondents to ride the bus, 45% said yes and 27% said no. Of those who responded “no” to the previous question, 60% indicated they would never be convinced to use fixed-route transportation. Thus, it seems that 23.5% of those surveyed would not be persuaded to use the fixed-route system no matter what accommodations are made.

When asked about access to the Internet, 31% of those surveyed said they had access. The majority of that group (55%) said they would be willing to use trip planning computer software that would tell them what bus routes to take and assist in planning trips.

We also examined the subset of Hispanic survey participants from the Nevada Association of Latin Americans (NALA) Senior Center. Of the 51 NALA respondents, 35 completed the survey in Spanish. These results were included in the above analysis. However, when the sub-group is compared to the group as a whole, there were some major differences in responses. NALA is located in the 89101 zip code, reflecting the lowest median income of any zip code in the Las Vegas metropolitan area. These respondents were much less likely to have a driver’s license (35% vs the entire survey
population 69%) and less likely to own an automobile (14% vs 60%). Hispanic respondents also identified different barriers to fixed-route system usage. Their foremost concern related to security while waiting for buses. A comparison between all respondents and the NALA respondents is shown in the following chart:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BARRIERS TO USAGE OF THE FIXED ROUTE PUBLIC BUS SYSTEM</th>
<th>ALL RESPONDENTS (n=600)</th>
<th>HISPANIC RESPONDENTS (n=51)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bus stops not close enough to residence or destination.</td>
<td>Security concerns while waiting for buses.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes too much time to travel.</td>
<td>Bus stops not close enough to residence or destination.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security concerns while waiting for busses.</td>
<td>Take too much time to travel.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not like to transfer from one bus to another.</td>
<td>Do not like to transfer from one bus to another.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security concerns while on the bus.</td>
<td>Disability prevents me from bus access.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While 58% of the total respondents reported they currently use a personal vehicle, the majority of Hispanic respondents reported relying on family or friends and van service.

Regarding changes that would make it easier to use the fixed-route system, Hispanic respondents first cited lower fares, which was only the fifth most popular response for the group as a whole. They also cited the need to improve security as their third ranked concern, while the entire group ranked that barrier sixth.
SECTION III

TRANSPORTATION SUMMIT

September 15, 2004
TRANSPORTATION SUMMIT

Held at the Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada’s (RTC) building at the Clark County Government Center Campus on September 15, 2004, the Transportation Summit attracted 35 participants, representing more than 19 agencies.

The Summit was designed to bring together a small group of public and private, profit and not-for-profit organizations that provide services to seniors and/or those with disabilities that relate to transportation services. Their focus was to discuss ways and develop solutions for current and future transportation needs facing seniors and persons with disabilities residing in the Las Vegas Metropolitan Area. We found an unanticipated greater participation by agencies providing services to the senior population, with much lower participation by agencies providing services to persons with disabilities.

Key objectives of the summit included:

- An overview of the status of public transportation offered by the RTC, both fixed and specialized routing designed to serve seniors, aged 62 and older, and persons with disabilities.

- The exploration of partnerships in assisting seniors and persons with disabilities in door-to-door travel. For example, is it possible for public and private profit and not-for-profit organizations to expand their client base by serving as “routes” to public transportation options?

- The completion of a survey identifying transportation issues and options regarding how organizations can assist in providing access to public transportation for their senior clients and persons with disabilities clients served by their transportation programs.

- The compilation of material outlining how agencies may expand their transportation options by providing routes that are coordinated with public transportation and listing available options offered by public and private profit and not-for-profit organizations for seniors and persons with disabilities, including information on how to access those services.

The summit was designed to maximize participation by dividing the participants into discussion groups led by a facilitator and assisted by an individual taking notes at
each table. Each group was challenged to brainstorm ideas pertaining to the following eight questions:

- What transportation services are provided by partners attending the summit? (Also, include the names of agencies that provide transportation services, but are not in attendance today.)
- How are your transportation services funded?
- What are the geographic routing limitations? Availability and eligibility to qualify for services?
- How are transportation services documented?
- How could transportation services be improved?
- What are the barriers to transportation services?
- Other ideas regarding transportation related to seniors and persons with disabilities.
- How do you let people know about your transportation services?

Following opening remarks and a review of the agenda by moderator Larry Spitler, Associate State Director, AARP Nevada, the following speakers made brief presentations:

- Curtis L. Myles III, Deputy General Manager, Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada
- Jim Shampoe, Transit Mobility Specialist, Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada
- Brian Patchett, President and CEO, Easter Seals Southern Nevada
- Jean Peyton, Las Vegas Mobility Planning Services Team

Upon conclusion of the introductory presentations, the summit proceeded with the roundtable discussions. Each of the four groups was tasked with discussion of the eight questions listed above.

After discussion, the groups reconvened as a whole and each group reported its findings on transportation issues, need, and potential solutions.
SECTION IV

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FINDINGS

After lively discussions in each group, final remarks were recorded and facilitators reported their findings and recommendations. Each facilitator recapped major discussion points and turned in their written reports for inclusion in this report.

A summary of the responses to the eight questions follows:

Q.1. What transportation services are provided by partners attending the summit?

Transportation services offered by summit attendees ran the gamut from volunteers driving their personal vehicles to staff driving agency-owned buses and vans (some wheelchair accessible). Many of the agencies participating in the summit provide referrals only, or, in the case of Division for Aging Services (DAS), half-price taxi coupons.

Service schedules ranged from regularly scheduled runs, to same-day service, to reservations and seven-day advanced notice. The majority of the allowable destinations were medical appointments, community services and grocery shopping.

Q.2. How are your transportation services funded?

Again, summit participants reflected a wide variety of transportation funding sources from state (DAS, Medicaid); federal, county, cities (Las Vegas, North Las Vegas, Henderson and Boulder City); and non-profit organizations (Easter Seals, United Way, AARP, MGM Mirage Voice Fund); and grants such as Community Development Block Grants and Title B funds.

Q.3. Geographic routing limitations/availability/eligibility?

Participants in the summit reported service requirements that ranged from restrictions for agency clients only, to eligibility requirements based upon qualifications related to age, economic status or disability, to service open to all. Several providers required pre-registration with their agencies.

Geographic areas of service were confined in some cases to cities or subsections of communities, a specified mileage radius or zip code restrictions. Some provided transportation throughout the Las Vegas metropolitan area.
Q. 4. **How are your transportation services documented?**

Summit participants reflected a wide range of reporting methods. Some utilized daily manifests, daily visit reports, monthly logs of volunteer hours, volunteer self-reports, drivers’ mileage reports, calendar tracking, and signed client releases.

Others provided referrals only, but followed up to track success of the referral and services provided. A few kept no records of transportation services, as this was not their primary function.

Q. 5. **How could transportation services be improved?**

Many cited the need for emergency transportation services. They noted the lack of taxis in Boulder City and in some areas of Summerlin. As part of this discussion, many stated the need for quick response, same-day service for people not registered or enrolled in provider agencies.

Suggestions for improvement of the fixed-route service included expansion, more direct routes, more stops, better information about pick-up locations, and making the bus stops more accessible.

Most discussions cited the overwhelming need for coordination of services and better public information dissemination about available services.

Q. 6. **What are the barriers to transportation services?**

These barriers to usage involved both physical and psychological issues. Physical barriers included limited numbers of volunteers, vehicles, funding, routes, information access, and customer service, as well as a lack of sidewalks near some fixed-route bus stops. Suggested solutions involved the need for better training and ways to retain drivers, both paid staff and volunteers. Another solution to physical barriers would be to time traffic lights to allow seniors and the disabled to cross streets safely to access transportation pick-up sites and bus stops. Also specified as a barrier was the limitation with taxis, since only a small number were equipped to serve persons with disabilities.

Psychological barriers included the “western car mentality,” or belief that personal vehicles are the only valid means of transportation in sprawling communities without clearly defined and/or central work of commerce areas. Another psychological barrier in public transportation is the fear of not having a positive experience, of not being able to figure out the
system or not being able to make it work for them. Another major psychological barrier relates to safety fears. Lower income respondents expressed concerns about security both while waiting for and utilizing public transit. Residents of higher income zip codes were more concerned with safety issues while riding busses.

Q. 7. Other ideas regarding transportation related to seniors and persons with disabilities.

Matching previous research on needs of seniors was the overwhelming call for a central point of information. Seniors do not want to deal with a voice mail automated system but with a “real person.” This research included the Clark County Seniors Forum (Spitler, Collins, 2000) and work conducted to create a Nevada Single Point of Entry (SPE) to coordinate information, referral, and services for the elderly statewide – funded through National Family Caregivers Act through the state Division for Aging Services. This summit along with previous research found the need for a county wide central point of information, referral, eligibility determination, intake, funding, and driver training/recruitment.

Q. 8. How do you promote or provide information about your transportation services?

Participants indicated they used a wide range of outlets: broadcast media including radio and cable television, print media including newspapers, community publications, agency newsletters, service directories, and brochures. Also used were the Internet, senior fairs, speaking engagements, and old standbys such as word of mouth and referrals.

Provider Surveys

Responses to an earlier survey completed by providers of transportation services to seniors and persons with disabilities (n=6) supported the findings and recommendations of the roundtable groups. Results verified the need for more and expanded transportation services in Clark County.
Recommendations

As a result of this nearly year-long process—which included local participation in a national institute, a survey of users transportation needs and services, and a half-day summit attended by providers of both transportation services and senior service providers, with results supported by written provider surveys, we make the following recommendations.

Summit participants identified three major categories that need to be addressed as they work to develop transportation solutions.

1. **Central point of information** for referral, eligibility determination, intake, funding and driver training/recruitment.

2. **Volunteer enhancement**, with methods such as supplemental insurance, mileage reimbursement, and development of programs demonstrating how to recruit and train more volunteer drivers.

3. **Crucial need for emergency transportation (non-life-threatening)** especially for individuals who are not “already in the system.” Problems listed include limits on taxi service in Boulder City and in parts of Summerlin. These need to be expanded.

4. Differing needs of low-income and Hispanic transportation users. The majority of public transit users or potential users cited convenience as their major concern. However, Hispanic users cited the issues of transportation cost and safety both while waiting for and riding on fixed-route transportation.

Most participants in this process of examining public transit for seniors and persons with disabilities found unique challenges and a roadmap for future work. There was general agreement that the Transportation Summit was an important first step toward addressing the growing transportation needs of seniors, and to a lesser extent, persons with disabilities, in the Las Vegas metropolitan area. Merely the process of bringing together many important participants, who provide services and transportation for Clark County seniors, opened a dialogue that can lead to collaboration and solutions.