Age-Friendly Transportation Domain: Report and Recommendations

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Transportation Domain

When we speak of the transportation domain, we are speaking of a system that includes mobility related services for all ages and levels of need in the community.

The domain is inclusive of private and non-profit transportation, public transportation, parking, walkability, and biking. Our concern must be with available, affordable, and accessible transportation that will support the health, mobility, activity, and participation of people *across* the lifespan. Age-segregated solutions to mobility lack the economy of scale that can be achieved by engaging all providers. Such solutions are, therefore, impractical and wasteful.

Given that transportation is a means to access life supporting/sustaining services and activities, we believe it is also important to consider how services can be accessed online or transported to residents. Food delivery, mobile health services, prescription delivery and other mobile services are therefore also included in the transportation domain.

Tompkins County Transportation Strengths and Highlights

Ithaca is a transportation-rich community with both public and private transportation options supporting safe, affordable, and sustainable transportation. Residents benefit from air and bus service to travel to out-of-county destinations. TCAT is the major provider of fixed-route bus service within the county. A growing network of bike lanes, mixed use trails and an active transportation advocacy organization encourage biking and walking.

Paratransit service is offered by Gadabout and the TCAT Paratransit service. Friends in Service Helping (FISH) provides rides to residents of Tompkins County, mostly older adults, to medical appointments in the county and the outside the county using a network of volunteer drivers. Particular organizations provide van service or rides to their members/clientele including GIAC, some senior housing operators, Disabled American Veterans, and the American Cancer Society. Area taxi service includes a wheelchair accessible taxi. All TCAT buses are wheelchair accessible.

Tompkins County actively encourages ridesharing by providing an online Zimride Rideshare portal to residents that helps people going the same way connect and share rides. Cornell, Ithaca College and TC3 also host Zimride networks to their students and faculty. Ithaca Carshare provides, in addition to area car rental companies, the opportunity for participants to drive vehicles without having the costs of ownership. Ithaca Carshare also provides an accessible Carshare membership for people at or below 150% of the Federal Poverty Line.

Several organizations in Tompkins County provide resources that help people access transportation. The Human Service Coalition’s 2-1-1 consumer helpline provides residents with one call access to transportation information and referrals to transportation providers. 2-1-1 is also partnered with FISH to receive trip requests. Catholic Charities provides transportation support to people looking for work through free and discounted bus passes. Cooperative Extension’s Way2Go Program educates and encourages residents to use accessible and sustainable transportation options through educational programming (mobility how-to videos, AARP Smart Driver classes, Streets Alive, Bike to Work day and more!) and an online transportation directory (way2go.org).

The Tompkins County Coordinated Transportation Plan and the Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Council foster integration and coordination among mobility providers. A committee of mobility providers and stakeholder meets monthly to implement this plan and is particularly focused on better serving the mobility needs of people with disabilities, older adults, people with limited English proficiency, and people in poverty.

The Need in Tompkins County: Integrated Mobility Solutions

In spite of the rich array of transportation resources in the county, we lack integrated mobility solutions that will appeal to, engage, and work for everyone in the community. A system that offers access to mobility for everyone will serve seniors efficiently and well. In particular, seniors need a system that is resilient (not subject to budgetary waves), redundant (if one avenue doesn’t work, there is another), and reliable, so they can have confidence, for example, that when they give up a car, they will not be isolated. This need applies to all Tompkins County residents and is particularly critical for low income and rural residents. For example, local Collective Impact efforts to support school-family connections, food security throughout the county, and positive re-entry from prison all identify transportation as critical and wanting.

There are numerous existing programs—volunteer as well as governmentally supported—and transportation providers within the County. To a great extent, these operate within “silos” of user/target populations. Past plans in the county, for example the 2014 Comprehensive Transportation Plan, have focused on filling gaps where there are needs. Now we need to focus on integrating what exists to make it both more accessible and affordable for users and providers alike.

By way of illustration, here are some of the observations and challenges we listed in our domain meetings.

* Transportation needs for the elderly are well documented in the survey completed by the County Office for the Aging and listed among Unmet Needs in 2014.
* Sustainable funding is critical for continued support of Gadabout, TCAT and other services
* Volunteer transportation programs (FISH, Gadabout) struggle to recruit and retain drivers
* Rural Connections to TCAT are limited
* Some facilities retain vans for their own use, vans that might be shared
* Insurance and liability coverage restrict how vehicles can be used
* There is a lack of service for the Urgent Medical transportation which doesn’t rise to the level of a 911/emergency
* Systems that handle transportation requests are separate and not integrated, leading to confusion and inability to connect to service when needed.
* There are concerns with downtown parking accessibility, especially among the elderly.
* There is a lack of same day accessible transportation within the county
* There is a need for coordination for out of county travel (Sayre, Syracuse, Rochester)
* Connection to the healthcare/wellness sector is currently weak.
* State funding is slow/contracts are held up which can impact transportation projects

Some of the opportunities we perceived

* There is room for coordination between different needs and sectors.
* Greater service and efficiency could be provided if there were a single phone number and website that could book transportation services, answer consumer transportation questions and provide support for complicated transportation requests (cross county trips for example.) (Note: the 2015 updated Tompkins County Coordinated Transportation Plan called for such a service.)
* A comprehensive system for which consumers pay must be available to those who cannot pay.
* We can begin with Identification of low hanging fruit.
* There is room to reinvent volunteer driver services - expansion to regional scope
* Individual service providers do not have the resources or, in some cases, the motivation, to initiate an integrated mobility system , however, they could be brought together to increase and streamline their provision of services.
* We need to develop new business models to serve transportation demand. These models exist in Europe.
* The Village model exists for one-call access to transportation services.
* Our challenge: to foster the political will to make significant change in existing transportation systems.
* A “third party” alliance of government, business, and citizens could lead an integration effort.

Our vision for Tompkins County Transportation by 2020

Integration of existing systems: coordination among existing resources that creates a seamless and comprehensive system offering access to people wherever they are in the county and whatever their transportation needs are. It follows that this will lead to more efficient and effective use of existing resources.

Recommended Goals and Action Plans\*

NOTE: Each asterisk in this plan refers to an as yet undefined group of Tompkins County individuals that would include community members, service providers, business, government, and education representatives. Such an alliance should be charged with facilitating the dialogue required to bridge current silos and gaps.

In our conversations we mentioned Cooperative Extension’s Way2Go, FISH/Gadabout, and others as possible leaders of this effort. However, it is too soon to name agencies which have not yet been consulted. Preliminary conversations about how such a group will be formed may begin at the Tompkins County Coordinated Planning Committee.

**Short term goals (2-3 years)**

1. Generate broader interest and acceptance of the vision of an integrated system

Actions:

* Present our conclusions at the TCCoordinated Planning Committee June 15th meeting.
* Support the County Office for the Aging in the Age Friendly Tompkins endeavor with this report.
* Catalyze and support the creation of an alliance for integration, as described in #2.

Responsible : individual members of this group

2. Establish and facilitate a group willing to develop and organize support for such an integrated system. This group should be representative of key stakeholders such as transportation service providers, government, business, education, health care, community members.

Responsible: to be determined\*

3. Increased integration of existing services such as Gadabout, FISH, LoveLiving at Home, and others.

Action: Focused dialogue with leaders of each identified service provider to discover and support steps toward integration

Leader: to be determined\*

4. Introduce one-call system to transportation system in Tompkins County

Actions:

* Research existing systems such as the one used by Villages across the country
* Research and document feasibility and costs of establishing such a system in Tompkins County
* Obtain funding for implementation, if advised.

Responsible: to be determined\*

5. Explore and develop transportation services that bring services and support TO people

Action: to be developed

Responsible: to be determined

6. Utilize NYSERDA grant to explore feasibility of MaaS in Tompkins County

Actions: Apply for grant

Responsible: Dwight Mengel, Chief Transportation Planner, TC Department of Social Services

**Long term goal (5 years)** an efficient integrated mobility system for the entire community of Tompkins County

Actions:

1. Continue to integrate systems through dialogue and technology.

Responsible: to be determined\*

2. Introduce MaaS, Mobility as a Service, concept and application to Tompkins County

Responsible: Dwight Mengel, Chief Transportation Planner, TC Department of Social Services