Executive Summary:

Regional Transportation Study Recommended Enhancements to Regional Mobility Services

Prepared For:

Regional Transportation Planning Coalition

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Background and Findings

Introduction

The Regional Transportation Study was an ambitious undertaking generated by the Regional Transportation Planning Coalition, RTPC, a group of persons from different agencies, organizations and perspective interested in improving transportation mobility options. The RTS work plan included interacting with a number of transit, human service, educational, planning and administrative agencies and organizations in the region that included Cayuga, Chemung, Cortland, Schuyler, Seneca, Tioga, and Tompkins counties. Diversities in the region include many demographic, socio-economic and topographic factors which influence mobility needs, even extending beyond the seven County region to destinations such as Rochester, Syracuse and Binghamton.

Working with a consistent group of dedicated professionals called the Client Committee, which were representatives of the RTPC that volunteered to provide input from operator, sponsoring agency and customer perspectives, a number of ideas and concepts were able to be transitioned into priorities and then, through the development of a series of smaller working groups, framed as policies and programs that could result in phased implementation to sustain the RTS goal:

> "Formulate a strategic plan of programmatic and policy solutions to address transportation infrastructure, systems and/or operational improvements and enhancements needed to accommodate projected transportation needs from all sectors in the Study Area."

The RTS process reinforced the importance of communication, especially when working in a diverse seven county region. Since there had been limited and sometimes no prior interaction between Client Committee members and since many of those affected agencies were planning or implementing projects or programs that impacted the RTS, an internal Client Communiqué was developed. That document was intended to assist the members and agencies in understanding the actions and activities occurring in the region which could foster additional discussions regarding collaboration and coordination, best practices etc. One strong recommendation is to continue lines of communication between the Client Committee participants and seek to expand the group to include more partnering agencies and entities.

It was evident as part of the RTS discussions that although individual counties and agencies or organizations within those counties had been successful in securing a number of traditional and non-traditional funds, that those funds were typically strictly targeted for that county and also typically excluded inter-county travel. In addition, many intergovernmental agreements, where they did exist, were actually narrowly worded in a way that diminished the potential benefits of inter-county travel, such as limited stopping points at the end of a route and the passenger loading restrictions elsewhere along the route. Thus, there is a clear opportunity to develop a more consistent inter-county agreement process.

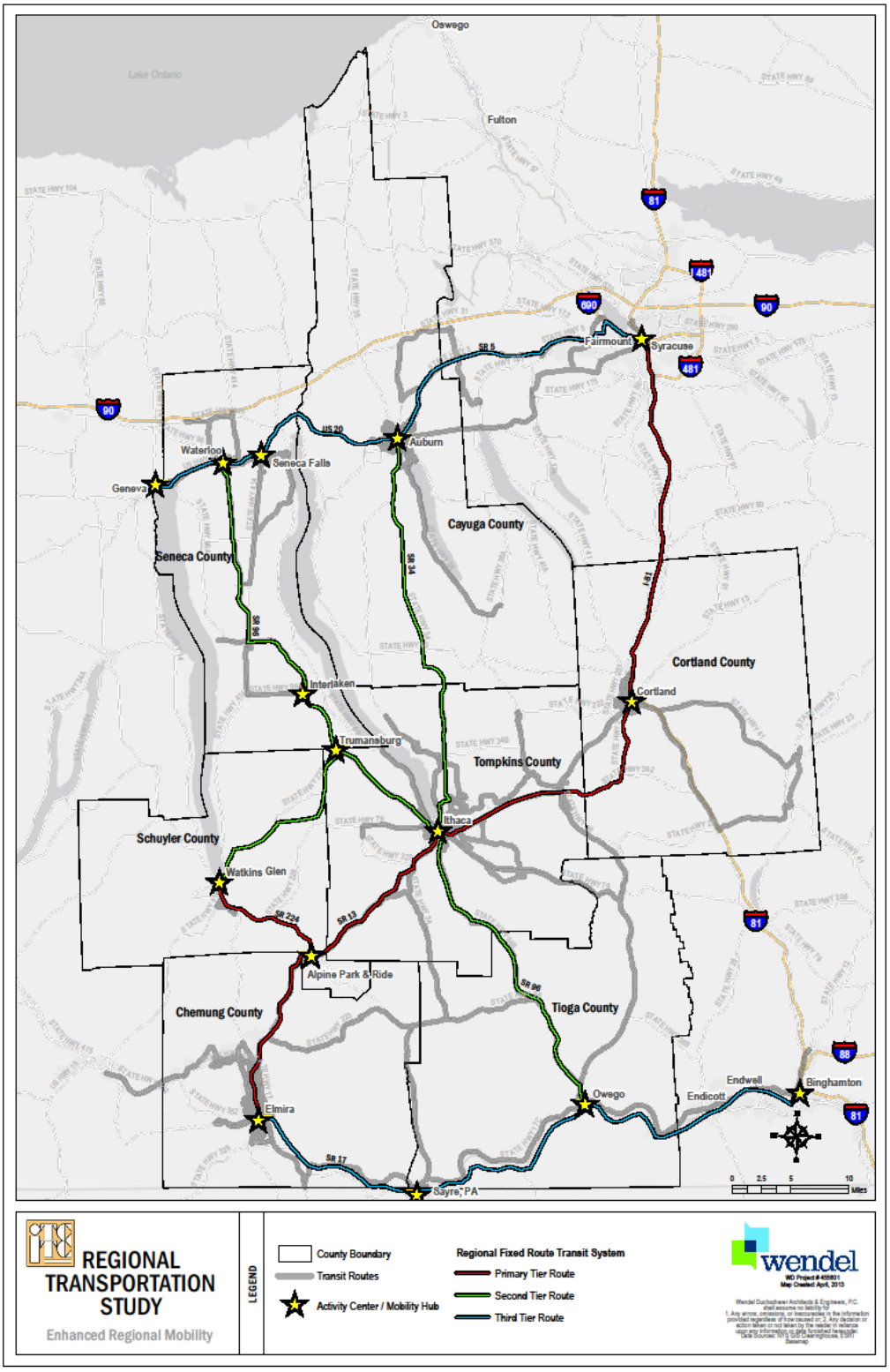
Recommendations

The framework for the system is a Virtual Regional Transportation Consortium consisting of:

- Multiple modes and operators
- Seamlessly connected services
- Common communication and information
- Effective marketing and branding
- Agreement in form (policy)
- Financial process/mechanism

The term virtual indicates that an overarching regional entity would not need to be created. Rather through the use of Intelligent Transportation System technology and forms of organizational management, such as consolidation, coordination and collaboration, the regional system can be formed with multiple participants using technology to communicate, connect services, etc.

With respect to service connections and opportunities, discussions with existing operators indicated some potential to do minor route and policy modifications that could increase mobility connections, but there was consensus that without additional resources and policies a true regional transit system could not be developed. By listening to a variety of trip and destination needs, the framework for a regional system was developed, as shown below, which could form the basis of a program of projects to be pursued by the affected agencies and the Regional Transportation Planning Coalition.


Oswego
Lake Ontario
Fulton
Fairmount
Syracuse
Auburn
Waterloo
Seneca Falls
Geneva
Cayuga County
Seneca County
Cortland County
Cortland
Interlaken
Trumansburg
Tompkins County
Ithaca
Schuyler County
Watkins Glen
Alpine Park & Ride
Chemung County
Tioga County
Owego
Endwell
Endicott
Binghamton
Elmira
Sayre, PA
REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION STUDY
Enhanced Regional Mobility
LEGEND
County Boundary
Transit Routes
Activity Center / Mobility Hub
Regional Fixed Route Transit System
Primary Tier Route
Second Tier Route
Third Tier Route
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These corridors contain the majority of trip demands communicated as part of the input from the Client Committee members and the public, which was also validated by other trip data. Demand for those corridors included work, medical, educational, and other trip purposes. The proposed network would be based on a foundation of fixed route connections between the major hubs along the corridors. Those fixed route services could then be supplemented and complemented by a series of either fixed route or demand responsive services that would include the human service transportation network and other community based services. These connections would occur at transfer centers, park and ride lots or mobility hubs (as shown below) that would be developed with a RTS brand or theme to reinforce the regional network concept. The incorporation of and coordination with inter-city carriers would also complement the network and expand mobility options.

The recommendation is that creating the fixed route framework along the priority corridors identified would set the foundation for initiating sustainable regional connections. The Client Committee discussions included the potential to prioritize the Elmira – Ithaca – Cortland – Syracuse corridor as the first in a series of linkages, and develop plans to build from existing services as the first pilot or demonstration project.

Besides the traditional fixed and demand response service network, other connections would be provided through developing more coordinated rideshare programs which would offer a variety of carpool and vanpool alternatives, including the ever-expanding real-time dynamic ridesharing options that are developing in many areas of the country and the world. Many of those newer programs are especially popular with college students and younger persons and use a number of social media connections as their platform for connections. Currently, similar to the variety of fixed route and human service transportation providers, there are a number of different rideshare alternatives within the region and additional changes can be anticipated in the future. Although there is no requirement for one rideshare program to be identified for the entire region, there is a need for the options to be accessible from a centralized reference site. Developing that centralized reference site is another goal for the RTS. There are significant differences in these types of programs, including that some are fee-based, while others can be accessed without a fee. In addition, there are a range of pricing strategies associated with different variations within the rideshare infrastructure. A working group has already been exploring rideshare program options and alternatives, including the state's 511 NY system which includes a project in Chemung County. The Counties participating in this rideshare effort include Tompkins, Chemung, and Cortland.

One opportunity for coordinating communication and information would be through the Mobility Manager positions that have been created to serve all counties within the RTS. In general the concept of Mobility Management is to focus on the trip needs of the customers, finding the best transportation solutions from all service operators. As a result, there may be a variety of choices available to potential users, all of which would be communicated to these users. The Mobility Managers have been valuable resources during the RTS and assisted in the virtual town hall which was broadcast to all counties from a central location, with those Mobility Managers coordinating input from each county location. Continuing those service coordination and communication roles from a regional perspective would be an excellent process to sustain the RTS plan and implementation process.

Technical and Policy Elements

There are two elements required in order to sustain the RTS plan – one is technical and the other is policy. To be successful each needs to be appropriately developed with the technical element referring to ongoing and expanding work of the Client Committee and the policy element referring to engaging decision makers in the public and private sector to garner support for the projects and programs developed by the Client Committee.

In order to sustain the process, there is recognition that there needs to be policy level support from the Cities, the Counties, and Business Community. From similar work around the country, those efforts which have been successful, such as Middlesex County NJ, Go Triangle in North Carolina and others have had a champion or lead agency to nurture these types of efforts. Such leaders are necessary to ensure resources are available to complete additional work and fully develop plans and programs.

The policy recommendations in the report to be presented to the Coalition are as follows:

- Endorse the Virtual Regional Transportation Consortium in concept
- Empower Coalition representatives to work with counties, the business community and other affected entities to communicate the RTS ideas and recommendations, including potential opportunities for funding and inter-local agreements to facilitate service coordination
- Establish ITCTC as the lead planning entity and TCAT as the lead operating entity to develop a three-year program of planning and operations projects

The technical element would sustain the Client Committee work and especially the work of subject specific subgroups to continue to formulate potential projects that could be incorporated into the three-year RTS program described above. Initial representative candidate projects that could form the basis of a phased implementation plan would include:

- Operations
    - Year One- Two
        - Compile schedule information for all general public transportation providers
        - Collect information on fares, transfers, agreements or restrictions
        - Examine opportunities/impediments to improve processes and operations from a customer standpoint (e.g. overlaps and other duplication, opportunities to make connections (spatial and temporal), note all policy restrictions, etc.)
        - Consider potential for service modifications
        - Draft an inter-local/inter-county agreement for service coordination
    - Year Two-Four
        - Develop preliminary plans to implement corridor service. Discuss options such as multiple operators, single operator, etc. Select preliminary list of transfer sites for connections to local and community based services (using mobility hub concept)
        - Select a pilot project and draft budget for operations
        - Identify pilot transfer point projects and draft budget
        - Discuss organizational opportunities, lead regional operator, more informal virtual planning alternatives
- Human Services Transportation
    - Create shared data base of information on customers and services
    - Draft a regional process for long distance medical and other services
    - Develop methodology to communicate long-distance medical trip needs
    - Develop pilot corridor service to medical center (e.g. Syracuse)

- Monitor changes in state's NEMT processes
- Compare eligibility information inclusive of ADA paratransit
- Develop consistent ADA eligibility process

- ITS
  - Link connections to websites for RTS services/Provide referrals
  - Establish interagency collaboration and coordination protocols
  - Develop concept to migrate information to one site/Share client lists
  - Examine 211 opportunities for short term communication
  - Develop a longer term strategy including exploring interoperability
    - Include accounting and administration elements
  - Create virtual/regional call center/Establish single call center or equivalent
  - Improve interagency collaboration and coordination

- Mobility Management
  - Mobility Managers are key enablers for regional process (staff)
  - Develop sustained coordination process for participating mobility managers
  - Consider Regional Mobility Management - building on programs/best practices at the county level to be more regionally focused e.g. Veterans Transportation Community Living Initiative

- Rideshare
  - Continue working group activities regarding adaptation of NYSDOT 511 to consortium of Counties in the RTS
  - Zimride Consortium to decide on future of program
  - Consider connecting multiple rideshare programs into a regional collaborative

- Funding Issues/Opportunities
  - Develop pilot projects- be ready to approach state or federal agencies as funding opportunities become available
  - Consider state/regional designation for lead agency
  - Expand the RTS partnership to other agencies and organizations including connections with the business community and other community organizations
  - Monitor similar activities being undertaken both within and proximate to the RTS area
  - Initiate discussions with NYSDOT regarding potential state involvement in regional projects
  - Initiate a tool which could relate progress and evaluate performance on projects and process to the RTPC and the partnering County Executives on an annual basis

Analysis of Existing Conditions, Needs Assessment and Gaps

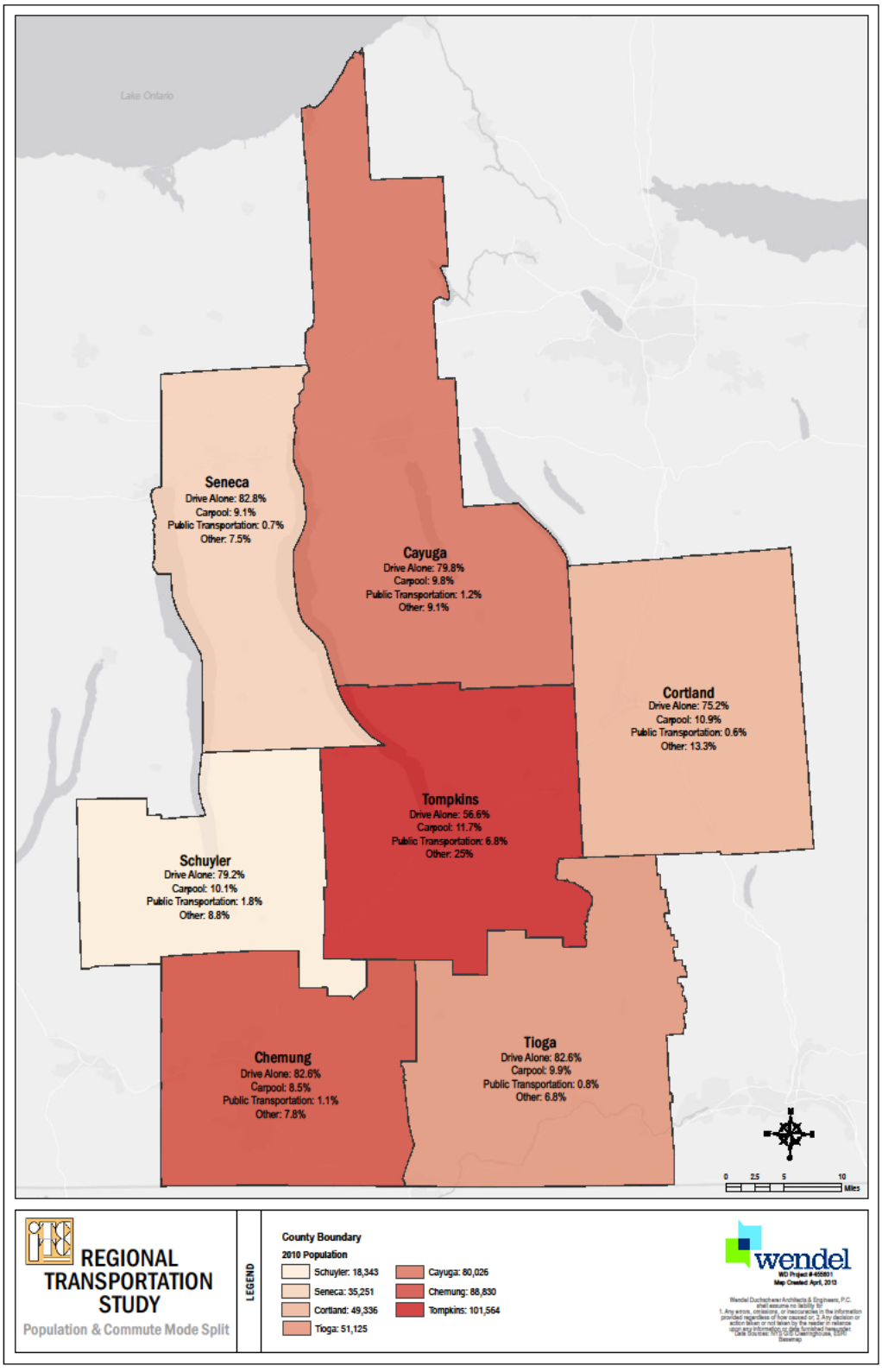
The RTS began with a series of interviews with representatives from the various stakeholder groups and a demographic analysis of the region. The study area included all counties that bordered on Tompkins County and it was immediately evident that many of the attractions and trip making activities centered on Tompkins County and Ithaca.

However, it was also apparent that many of the counties and the cities and towns within those counties had transportation linkage and affinity outside the RTS area such as:

- Tioga County with Broome County and Binghamton
- Cayuga County with Onondaga County and Syracuse
- Seneca County with Ontario County and Rochester
- Chemung County with Steuben County and Corning as well as with Sayre PA

Although Binghamton, Syracuse, Rochester, et al were outside the study area, stakeholders from Tompkins, Cortland and Schuyler counties often referenced trip demands to those locales for long distance medical trips and other trip purposes.

Demographic factors of note included population, mode choice, employment and inter-county journey to work information as shown below:


Lake Ontario
Seneca
Drive Alone: 82.8%
Carpool: 9.1%
Public Transportation: 0.7%
Other: 7.5%
Cayuga
Drive Alone: 79.8%
Carpool: 9.8%
Public Transportation: 1.2%
Other: 9.1%
Cortland
Drive Alone: 75.2%
Carpool: 10.9%
Public Transportation: 0.6%
Other: 13.3%
Tompkins
Drive Alone: 56.6%
Carpool: 11.7%
Public Transportation: 6.8%
Other: 25%
Schuyler
Drive Alone: 79.2%
Carpool: 10.1%
Public Transportation: 1.8%
Other: 8.8%
Chemung
Drive Alone: 82.6%
Carpool: 8.5%
Public Transportation: 1.1%
Other: 7.8%
Tioga
Drive Alone: 82.6%
Carpool: 9.9%
Public Transportation: 0.8%
Other: 6.8%
0 2.5 5 10
Miles
REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION STUDY
Population & Commute Mode Split
LEGEND
County Boundary
2010 Population
Schuyler: 18,343
Seneca: 35,251
Cortland: 49,336
Tioga: 51,125
Cayuga: 80,026
Chemung: 88,830
Tompkins: 101,564
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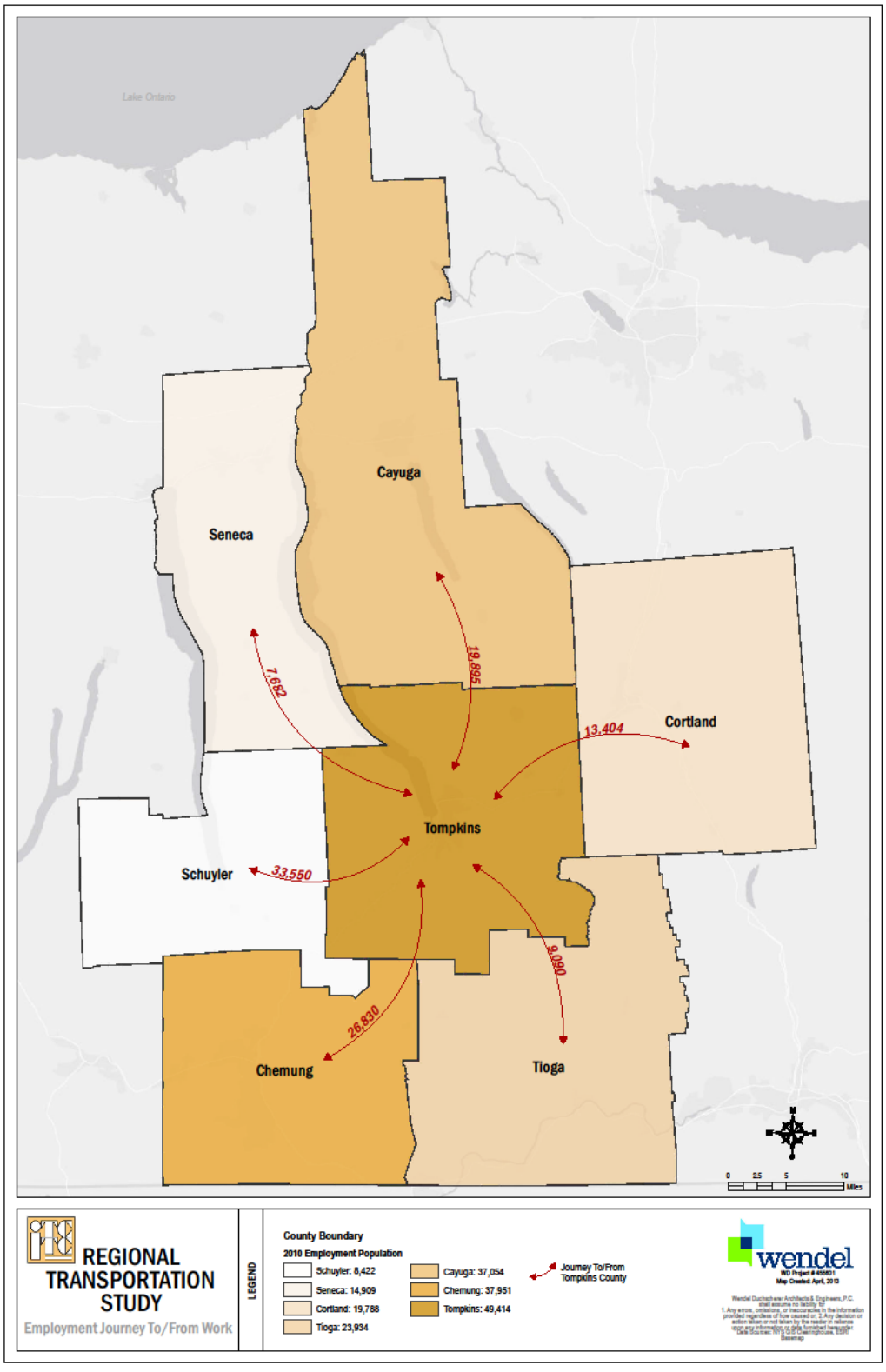
Lake Ontario
Cayuga
Seneca
Cortland
Tompkins
Schuyler
Chemung
Tioga
7,692
19,895
13,404
33,550
9,080
26,830
0 2.5 5 10
Miles
REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION STUDY
Employment Journey To/From Work
LEGEND
County Boundary
2010 Employment Population
Schuyler: 8,422
Seneca: 14,909
Cortland: 19,788
Tioga: 23,934
Cayuga: 37,054
Chemung: 37,951
Tompkins: 49,414
Journey To/From Tompkins County
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All of the demographics reinforced a centric role for Tompkins County/Ithaca with respect to travel patterns within the RTS area as well as the diverse locales for travel outside the RTS area. From a commute trip mode choice perspective drive alone auto travel dominated with over 80% of trips made in every county other than Tompkins (which had less than a 60% drive alone proportion). At 10%, carpooling indicated a potential growth market, with public transportation in Tompkins garnering almost 7% of trips, but other counties indicating results closer to 1-2%.

The statistical information was then augmented with a variety of qualitative input including a "Thinking Regionally" exercise that was conducted with the Client Committee. The discussion focused on five topic areas which included:

- What are client/customer trip needs?
- What are the types of services that will meet needs?
- How does availability of services get communicated?
- How do providers of services collaborate?
- What would be the components of the system?

The highest priorities identified included:

- Transportation for employment
- Better transit connectivity
- Establishing a regional call center/ mobility center
- Specific projects will help identify champions
- Develop a business model for implementation

After contemplating the results, additional feedback was received in the following areas:

- While employment transportation was given a high priority during the "Thinking Regionally" exercise, it is also important to understand out-of-county transportation needs for medical and other human service needs.
- A regional system should include inter-city bus carriers, volunteer driver systems, and rideshare strategies.
- The availability of fixed route transit to access medical appointments must also consider customer accessibility issues.
- A regional system could be based around regional transportation centers as nodes for transfers, such as Ithaca, Binghamton, Syracuse, and Elmira.
- There are other service providers that should be included as options and alternatives, e.g. some airport limousine service provides medical trips to Syracuse.

The RTS also included the opportunity for input from the public using a Virtual Town Hall meeting format which presented the RTS goals and vision statement, discussed what has been done to date, and received stakeholder feedback to advance the study. The online Town Hall was a first-of-its-kind approach to public outreach in Ithaca-Tompkins and provided a web-based mechanism to engage a geographically diverse audience. The "virtual meetings" originated from Tompkins County and were broadcast to the six additional counties in the region, with each broadcast hosted by RTS study or Client Committee representatives, providing convenient access for residents of each county. In addition access to the web broadcast was available online. Participants had the choice of two meeting times: 2:00 to 4:00 PM and 6:00 to 8:00 PM. During the two sessions of the Town Hall meetings approximately 100 comments were received from the seven meeting locations and via the internet.

Input from the public was similar to the comments previously received in stakeholder meetings and through the Client Committee which included the general interest to access activity centers in and out of the RTS area, the spatial and temporal disconnects of public transit services, a variety of human service transportation needs raging from better agency funded trips to how to serve other than medical trips, and the viability of offering alternative transportation options, such as the use of volunteers or social media based rideshare alternatives.

Funding and Organizational Issues

As indicated above the foundation for the RTS system will be fixed route services. Although these services do not transport a majority of the trips in the region, they have the best potential to be recognized and understood by the public and also have the potential to act as nodes of access for other services and modes.

There are several different funding and organizational models that are used by agencies providing fixed route services Since funding is always a critical need and organizational relationships are important from policy perspectives, understanding those models is an important part of the RTS process.

The following offers an overview of the transit agencies in the RTS area:

- In two counties, Seneca and Cayuga, service is operated under contract by regional transportation authorities, the Rochester Genesee Regional Transportation Authority (RGRTA) and the Central New York Transportation Authority (CENTRO); Specific RTAs are referenced in State Legislation; Cortland County also has the ability, through legislation, to join CENTRO; funding provided includes mortgage tax fees in addition to federal and state funding.

- In Tompkins County, Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit (TCAT) is a 501C3 non-profit agency funded by the City of Ithaca, Tompkins County and Cornell University.

- Service in Chemung and Cortland counties is operated under contract by First Transit and in Tioga County there also is a contract provider.

- In Schuyler County, service is operated by the Arc of Schuyler.

Services in several counties that employ contract operators use a combination of state and Medicaid transportation funds to offer both fixed route and demand response services that provide mobility for a combination of commute, local and medical trips. In those counties, historically there has been limited use of county funds for public transportation and the non-state and Medicaid funds are typically provided by the contractor. The State is implementing a consolidated transportation program for Medicaid which is being phased in throughout the state. As part of that process a broker will arrange the trips for eligible participants. When enacted that could affect the funding available for the current systems and result in organizational changes or the need for additional public funds to sustain existing services. From a regional perspective, reevaluation and redefinition of existing programs or the creation of a new funding program would be required for service expansion.

Currently, there are limitations on service providers with respect to operating in other jurisdictions, for example limiting stops to a certain locale, or precluding operations altogether. Historically, there has been a mindset that operators from outside the county should not benefit from fare revenues that can be paid for services sponsored by that county. This mindset affects customers, especially those traveling inter-county and also inhibits inter-operator coordination. If a regional transportation system concept is to be successful, these limitations must be eliminated. There are examples of agreements that have been developed in many areas of the country, e.g. a one-page agreement between 15 counties in Michigan that can be emulated.

A table presenting specific tasks and projects, with estimated costs and the proposed responsible party to initiate work is attached as appendix A.

Conclusion

The RTS was developed as cited in the Request for Proposals as “a regional mobility study, not just regional transit study or a highway-based study. Its purpose is to generate recommendations that will lead to the increase and better management of mobility alternatives for inter-county travel in the Study Area” with the following objectives:

- Increase the efficiency and effectiveness of existing mobility services across all modes of transportation,
- Develop and market real mobility choices to the public, and
- Enable coordination among counties to provide the best possible cost effective transportation programs for the Study Area.

The Virtual Regional Transportation Consortium described above consisting of multiple modes and operators, seamlessly connected services, common communication and information, effective education, marketing and branding, agreement in form (policy), financial process/mechanism fulfills those objectives. The development of phased implementation beginning with some short term projects that can sustain the technical process and include the policy level component will further communicate the system concepts:

- Develop areas of congruence for short, mid, and long term
- Establish process for communication, collaboration
- Incorporate addition of other potential partners
- Build work plan for future years

However, in order to be successful the participants have to shift their perspectives from the current inward focused individual county, agency and project to an outward view that includes other counties, agencies and projects. This will require some prospective process planning working together to broach ideas and concepts to traditional agencies such as NYSDOT as well as other non-traditional sources.

Organizationally, participants will need to discuss and balance perhaps on a case-by-case basis the best use of these options:

- Collaboration - informal with voluntary participation
- Coordination – more formal, typically inter-local agreement or MOUs
- Consolidation – usually a designated lead agency with varying levels of participating partners

The RTS is a large area, not all potential parties will likely participate, but aiming high, to achieve significant results, while understanding that logically smaller results will occur can nonetheless initiate the regional process.

RTS
Cost Estimates by Project Type

			Est. Cost	Fiscal Year	Responsible Agency	Notes
Operations- Short Term						
1	Compile schedule information for all general public transportation providers	$	1,000	2013	TCAT	Work with operators to compile existing information
2	Collect information on fares, transfers, agreements or restrictions	$	1,000	2013	ITCTC- TCAT	Work with operators to compile existing information on fare policies and other restrictions to coordinationschedules for key locations
3	Examine opportunities/impediments to improve services from a customer perspective	$	5,000	2013	TCAT	Schedule connections and transfer locations
4	Consider service/functional modifications to meet needs identified	$	1,000	2013	TCAT	Develop regional transfer policy
5	Develop interlocal/inter county agreements for service coordination	$	5,000	2014	ITCTC- TCAT	Coordinate with County stakeholders
Operations Short Term Subtotal		**$**	**13,000**			
Operations- Long Term						
1	Develop preliminary plan to implement priority corridor and connector service	$	35,000	2014	ITCTC- TCAT	Survey corridor for parkand ride locations, roadway geometry, traffic, consider connections/meet with affected other local and regional operators and human service agencies and policy makers
2	Operation for for first year*	$	1,140,000.00	2015	TCAT	First year operation for initial corridor and connector- includes two am and two pm round trips plus one mid day trip
3	Supporting capital infrastructure for transfer/mobility hub connections	$	120,000	2015	TCAT	$20,000 per mobility hub- 6 hubs capital cost
4	Develop operating plan for next tier of corridor/connector services*	$	25,000.00	2016	ITCTC- TCAT	Survey corridor for parkand ride locations, roadway geometry, traffic, consider connections/meet with affected other local and regional operators and human service agencies and policy makers
5	First year of operations for next corridors and connectors	$	2,047,000	2016	TCAT	First year operation for next tiers of corridors and connectors, includes 2 am and 2 pm round trips, plus one mid day trip
6	Supporting capital infrastructure for transfer/mobility hub connections	$	160,000	2016	ITCTC- TCAT	$20,000 per mobility hub-8 hubs capital cost
Operations Long Term SubTotal		**$**	**3,527,000**			
Operations Total		**$**	**3,540,000**			

			Est. Cost	Fiscal Year	Responsible Agency	Notes
Human Services Transportation						
1	Create shared data base for customers and services	$	1,000	2013	ITCTC-Mobility Managers	Mobility Managers should select a lead amongst the group
2	Draft regional process for long distance medical trips	$	5,000	2013	ITCTC-Mobility Managers	
3	Develop methodology to communicate long distance medical needs	$	3,000	2013	ITCTC-Mobility Managers	Communicate with customers, stakeholders regarding availability, etc
4	Develop/operate pilot corridor service to medical center (Syracuse)	$	43,592	2014	Mobility Managers- TCAT	Planning $10,0000@ $64.50 = cost per hour, average 5 hours per round trip= $323/two trips per week/52 weeks
5	Monitor changes in State NEMT process	$	-	2013	ITCTC-Mobility Managers	Should be part of current work program
6	Review eligibility processes for ADA and other services	$	1,000	2014	Mobility Managers- TCAT	
7	Develop consistent ADA and other eligibility requirements for service	$	5,000	2015	Mobility Managers- TCAT	
Human Services Transportation Total		**$**	**58,592**			
ITS Program						
1	Create platform for linked connections to some or all websites	$	50,000	2014	ITCTC/Client Committee	
2	Migrate information to collaborative website	$	5,000	2015	ITCTC/Client Committee	
3	Examine 211 opportunities	$	1,000	2013	ITCTC/Client Committee	
4	Develop longer term strategy for inter-operability	$	1,000	2015	ITCTC/Client Committee	
5	Build regional virtual call center	$	500,000	2017	ITCTC, Mobility Managers, TCAT	Order of Magnitude estimate of capital and implemention for multi county MSAA, incl one year of license fees
ITS Program Subtotal		**$**	**557,000**			
Ridesharing Program						
1	Continue working group activities regarding adaptation of NYSDOT 511 to consortium of Counties in the RTS	$	-	2013	ITCTC/Client Committee	
2	Zimride Consortium to decide on future of program	$	-	2014	ITCTC	
3	Consider connecting multiple rideshare programs into a regional collaborative	$	-	2015	ITCTC/Client Committee	
Ridesharing Program Subtotal		**$**	**-**			
Marketing and Branding						
1	Decide on brand	**$**	**-**	2014	Client Committee	including what will be represented as part of brand
2	Develop and conduct education and marketing campaign	$	30,000.00	2015	Client Committee	develop materials, outreach campaign e.g.create speakers bureau
Marketing and Branding Subtotal		**$**	**30,000.00**			
	TOTAL PROJECT COST ESTIMATES	**$**	**4,185,592**			

Estimates should be reviewed each year to adjust cost variations or program scope changes.

Typically for public transportation capital and planning purposes, 80% of federal match money can be utilized

* fully allocated operating costs were estimated using TCAT reported operational information from 2010