

YAKIMA COUNTY FORUM ON COORDINATION OF SPECIAL NEEDS TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

**May 5, 2008 -- 1:00 – 4:30 P.M.
Fellowship Hall, Englewood Christian Church
511 N. 44th Avenue, Yakima, WA**

The Yakima Forum was one of two regional forums held in May 2008 as part of the Special Needs Transportation Coordination Study sponsored by the Joint Transportation Committee (JTC) of the Washington State Legislature. A second forum was convened in Everett (Snohomish County) on May 7, 2008. Two additional forums will be convened in September, as the project nears conclusion.

The primary goal of the two initial forums was to gather input from local stakeholders in four topic areas:

- (1) clarification of how well the special needs transportation system is working in their area;
- 2) identification of the greatest barriers to improved coordination in the system, both from the perspective of riders, and from the perspective of those agencies that are part of the transportation delivery network;
- (3) documentation of stakeholder ideas for overcoming these barriers; and
- (4) identification of system strengths and other ideas that could help improve special needs transportation services.

Agenda and Materials:

The meeting agenda and materials were developed with input from two local agencies involved in special needs transportation planning in Yakima County: People for People (a Yakima County private non-profit transportation service provider) and the Yakima Valley Conference of Governments (YVCOG), as well as through discussions between the consultant team and JTC staff. These materials are included as **Attachment A**.

Attendees:

The invitee list for the Yakima meeting was also developed with the assistance of People for People and YVCOG. Invitations were sent to local transportation providers, city and county staff, human service agencies, school districts, advocacy groups and other stakeholders involved in planning for or delivering human service transportation. In addition, members of the Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation (ACCT) and the Community Transportation Association of America Northwest (CTAANW) were invited. Invitations were issued by e-mail to 155 individuals on April 11, 2008, under cover letter co-signed by Senators Mary Margaret Haugen and Representative Judy Clibborn, co-chairs of the JTC. Follow-up telephone calls were made to encourage attendance, and two reminder e-mails were also sent out. Special effort was made to invite transportation system users by contacting Yakima Transit's Citizen Advisory Committee.

Thirty-five (35) stakeholders attended the meeting, representing a broad spectrum of transportation providers, the Medicaid broker, state service agencies, local government representatives and local non-profit agencies working with persons with special needs.

A list of stakeholders attending the meeting is included as **Attachment C**. Four ACCT members as well as several state government representatives attended, but no customers were in attendance.

Meeting Set-Up:

As attendees signed in for the meeting, they were asked which of four categories they were best associated with: transportation riders (no attendees); transportation providers; agencies serving special needs populations (other than transportation providers); and “other” (local government officials, state officials, etc.) Each attendee was then assigned to a specific table to assure that each table had a mix of participants representing different perspectives and experiences. There were five tables of stakeholders, with seven stakeholders at each table. Three of the four ACCT members in attendance were seated at the various stakeholder tables. Other state representatives and the fourth ACCT member were seated at the back of the room as observers.

Deliberations:

The forum facilitator, Karen Reed, (Karen Reed Consulting LLC) welcomed the group and provided an overview of the purposed of the study and the forum. All those present were then invited to introduce themselves and indicate the agency they work for, and their role in special needs transportation.

Representative Judy Clibborn, Chair of the House Transportation Committee and Co-Chair of the JTC gave some opening remarks focused on the goals of the legislature in funding the study, as set forth in the authorizing legislation.

Connie Soper, Principal with Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates and project manager for this study, gave a brief Power Point presentation to provide: an overview of the purpose of the study, the goals of the regional forums, and a “snapshot” of the special needs transportation system in Yakima County.

First group exercise: *Assessing how well the system works today*

The entire group was asked to consider ten (10) characteristics of the special needs transportation system in Yakima County, and to rate the condition of these characteristics by show of hands. The purpose of this exercise was to create a real-time group assessment of how the special needs transportation system is working in Yakima County.

The ten (10) characteristics were divided into two sets. The first focused on how well the system is working for riders. The second focused on how well the system is working as a system. Ratings were requested on a scale of 1 through 5, with “1” being the lowest rating and “5” being the highest. “Don’t Know” was also a possible response.

Results of the exercise are included as **Attachment B**, and are summarized below.

- Generally, the group rated the current special needs system as it works for users below-average to average (most ratings in the 2 and 3 range).
- The weakest ratings were for the availability of rides *where* they are needed, and for understanding eligibility rules.
- The group rated the transportation system as a system slightly higher—average to somewhat above average (most ratings in the 3 to 4 range).
- The strongest ratings were in the categories of agencies working together, and sharing information and assets.
- In each of these four system metrics, a large percentage of attendees voted “Don’t Know.” This suggests a need for ongoing efforts at communication between agencies and stakeholders.

In reviewing the information with the group, it was noted also that there is a significant difference in the perception of the effectiveness of the transportation system in terms both of client needs and system effectiveness depending on the location in Yakima County. In particular, the lower valley was noted as an area with particularly poor service and a large population living in poverty.

Second group exercise: *Table Discussion and Report Out*

Each table was assigned to answer one of two questions, and given approximately 40 minutes to work through the question. Supporting worksheets were provided for both questions to assist in the tables in their deliberations (see **Attachment A**). The two questions posed were as follows:

Question 1: What are the greatest barriers to effectiveness of the system from the perspective of riders? What are some ways to address these barriers?

Question 2: What are the greatest barriers to coordination within the transportation system? What are some ways to address these barriers?

Each group selected a table captain to keep track of the deliberations of the group and report out at the end of the exercise. Tables were asked first to identify **three of the greatest barriers** relative to their specific question (*i.e.* barriers from the perspective of riders, or barriers to coordination within the system); they then selected one of these identified barriers and **posed three solutions** that could help alleviate or otherwise address this barrier. At the end of 40 minutes, table captains were asked to report out, limiting their remarks to 5 minutes.

Of the five stakeholder tables, 3 were assigned to Question 1; 2 were assigned to Question 2. Results of the reporting out by tables are described below. Note that groups chose to select more than 3 barriers: each table selected 4 or 5. All results are included in the tables below.

Question 1: Most Significant Barriers to Riders
(Number of tables reporting: 3)

# of tables listing this issue	Barrier
3	Rural riders are underserved
3	Service is not available when or where it is needed
3	Program eligibility rules are confusing
2	Rides don't take people where they need to go
2	People don't know how to access the system
1	Multiple systems must be used to get to destination

Note: Each table identified 4 or 5 barriers, rather than limiting themselves to 3.

Question 2: Most Significant Barriers to System Coordination
(Number of tables reporting: 2)

# of tables listing this issue	Priority Barriers
1	Service providers are unable to better share their assets
1	Funding is too constrained
1	There is a lack of knowledge as to possible solutions or best practices to apply to solve problems
1	Special needs housing and services are often sited outside of transportation routes
1	It is difficult to obtain grants. Yakima is at a geographic disadvantage in competing for state and federal funds – it is the 2 nd largest county with only 3% of state population; it is also difficult to raise matching monies.
1	It is difficult to compete for state or other funding when funding is dedicated for congestion relief as opposed to basic human needs -- congestion relief is not the issue here.
1	Transit is not perceived as a priority issue in the community. It is a very car dependent area, given its size, and cultural factors.
1	Providers are unwilling to share assets and information. Rules associated with doing so are often a barrier.

Note: Both tables identified 4 barriers.

Table A below summarizes the response to the second part of each Question (1 and 2), in which tables were asked to **select a barrier and pose three ideas to address that barrier**. (The table numbers in Table A do not correlate to the table numbers assigned at the meeting.)

TABLE A: Ideas to Address Priority Barriers

Question 1: Barriers to effectiveness of the system <u>from the perspective of riders</u>	
Table 1	<i>Barrier addressed: People don't know how to access the system</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish a combined eligibility brochure and make it available countywide, providing rider information • Advertise toll free numbers to get ride information • Sponsor "scavenger hunts" on buses to educate kids about how to ride the bus
Table 2	<i>Barrier addressed: Maximize services when and where needed</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consolidate assets of providers across the county—to merge revenues, fleets and management. Consider creation of a countywide system • The federal government must fund its mandates • Better coordination should occur between employers and service providers (example commute trip reduction partnership)
Table 3	<i>Barrier addressed: Rural riders are underserved</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek regional solutions through coordination between providers, others in the system • Support transportation benefit areas • Fund services before building sidewalks and shelters • Get information to rural riders that they need as to how to access the system
Question 2: Barriers to coordination <u>within</u> the transportation system	
Table 4	<i>Barrier addressed: Funding is too constrained</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agencies and funders need to make data-informed decisions • Update the Yakima County asset survey on transportation • Identify funding sources with flexibility and do a pilot program to show the benefits of flexibility (example: Special Needs Grant Funding or ACCT funding) • Inter-agency discussion to help identify barriers • Convene sessions with funding agencies around this issue—use survey data to inform the discussions
Table 5	<i>Barrier addressed: System Coordination</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take steps to enhance coordination between agencies as possible. For example, tie eligibility for funding to participation in regional coordination efforts • Work towards better communication between insurers and boards of directors of agencies

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work towards better communication between WSDOT and County, City DOT• State regulations should more realistically address the differences between rural and urban areas. Urban areas should be better informed of the challenges faced by rural areas.• More marketing to community locally about transit options and issues
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Themes that emerged from this exercise include:

- Challenges of the geographic and demographic diversity in the county: the needs are quite disparate depending on where one lives or needs to travel. Rural riders (those outside the immediate Yakima area) in particular are underserved.
- Difficulties that special needs riders have in understanding and accessing the system, and the importance of improving efforts here.
- Funding requirements at the state level make it difficult for a county like Yakima to access dollars, as compared to other more urban counties.
- Enhanced coordination at all governmental / agency levels around these issues is desirable.

Closing Discussion: *Open Forum*

The final 30 minutes of the meeting were dedicated to an “open forum.” Attendees were asked to focus their responses on two questions:

- **Because it is often helpful to improve a system by building on its strengths: what is one thing which works well now in Yakima County’s special needs transportation system?**
- **What is one change you think could make a substantial improvement in the way transportation for people with special needs is provided in Yakima County?**

Responses were varied, and informative. They are restated below:

1. We need a more sophisticated definition of what is “urban” and what is “rural.” Some counties classified as “urban” by the state are really quite rural and their needs are rural in nature.
2. Funds that were previously available through ACCT were very important to help Yakima County stakeholders initiate coordinating activities and begin sharing information.
3. The Medicaid Broker in this county works well; we should consider building off of its strengths to improve the coordination of existing transportation service providers.

4. Efforts to identify problems and priorities in special needs transportation in this county have been successful, for example the work for DRYVE and Transaction, and the efforts of the mid-county coalition to establish a number of partnerships between agencies.
5. Marketing to special needs persons and the general public regarding the rules for accessibility to transit is very important. We should clarify that there are inter-county challenges in this regard, particularly around access to health care facilities. We should explore the range of needs in the community through inter-agency dialogue.
6. Recently, a large low-income housing project, a public health office, and a new university were developed away from the existing transit service routes, which make it difficult for people to use public transit.
7. We should “think outside the box”—encourage environmentally appropriate development and transit solutions, including but not limited to “green” buildings. We should encourage public-private partnerships in special needs transportation. We need more unrestricted dollars to help solve problems: if we pool these dollars we will find better, broader solutions as compared to the highly compartmentalized approach to funding and grants that we see today.
8. Educating transit riders is a significant challenge. Brochures won’t always work, particularly given the population diversity in this county. One-on-one education is the most expensive approach, but it works—radio and television ads, case managers helping clients learn how to use the system by “ride-alongs”). More money is needed for public education in this county.
9. Can we use the 211 system to help inform the public about eligibility for various transit systems, and the availability of transit options generally?

Closing Remarks

Karen thanked the group for their time and input today. Representative Clibborn thanked the group and noted that the Joint Transportation Committee is also wanting to “think outside the box” in finding solutions to coordination. Attendees were encouraged to complete the meeting survey forms provided.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

Attachments:

- A. Agenda and Materials**
- B. Group Ratings of Transportation System in Yakima County: Results**
- C. Meeting Attendees**

ATTACHMENT A: MEETING AGENDA AND MATERIALS

**Regional Forum on Coordination of Special Needs
Transportation Services**

May 5, 2008

1:00 – 4:30 P.M.

Fellowship Hall, Englewood Christian Church

511 N. 44th Avenue

Yakima, WA

AGENDA

- 1. Welcome and Introductions, Opening Comments (20 minutes)**

- 2. Presentation: Overview of Special Needs Transportation Services in Yakima County (15 minutes)**

- 3. General Ratings from Attendees: Assessing how well the special needs transportation system works today (40 minutes)**

- 4. Table Discussion and Report Out (1 hour 35 minutes, including break)**
 - a. What are the greatest barriers to effectiveness of the system from the perspective of people who depend on the system? What are some ways to address these barriers?***

 - b. What are the greatest barriers to coordination within the transportation system? What are some ways to address these barriers?***

- 5. Open Forum: Tell us what you think we should know about making the system work better (30 minutes)**

- 6. Wrap up and Closing Comments (10 minutes)**

REGIONAL FORUM ON COORDINATION OF SPECIAL NEEDS TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

Yakima, WA, May 5, 2008

DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. **Welcome and Introductions. Opening Comments** (20 minutes)
2. **Presentation: Overview of Special Needs Transportation Services in Yakima County.** (15 minutes)
3. **Assessing how well the system works today** (40 minutes)

Part 1: How well do transportation services in Yakima County meet the mobility needs of older adults, youth, persons with disabilities, and those with limited incomes?

Instructions: By show of hands, rate each item 1-5, with 5 being highest (i.e., you agree strongly with this statement) (“don’t know” is also a possible response)

- a. Rides are available when they are needed
- b. Rides are available where they are needed
- c. Riders know how to get information they need to plan for, schedule and make a trip
- d. The system is responsive to complaints, questions and suggestions from riders with special needs
- e. Eligibility for transportation programs is well understood by riders and those assisting them
- f. Connections between systems (bus, van, inter-county) are efficient.

Part 2: How well do agencies and programs within the special needs transportation system work together in Yakima County?

Instructions: Again, by show of hands, rate each item 1-5, with 5 being the highest—i.e. you agree strongly with this statement. (don’t know” is a possible response)

- a. Agencies providing general services for special needs riders work well with transportation agencies.
- b. Transportation providers effectively share assets and information with each other to maximize services and minimize duplication.
- c. Federal and state transportation funding can be flexibly applied where it is most needed.
- d. There is common agreement between agencies that are part of the system as to the biggest challenges facing the system, and how to address these challenges.

4. Table Discussion and Report Out

(1 hour 35 minutes, including break and snack)

Question 1: What are the greatest barriers to effectiveness of the system from the perspective of riders? What are some ways to address these barriers?

Question 2: What are the greatest barriers to coordination within the transportation system? What are some ways to address these barriers?

Instructions: Each table will be assigned either Question 1 or 2. You will have 40 minutes total for discussion at the table, then each table will report out.

Step 1. **Select a volunteer to serve as table captain.** He or she will track your table's discussions, writing down conclusions on the form provided, and be the spokesperson for the table for reporting out. It may also be helpful to have a timekeeper.

Step 2. Working with others at your table, **identify the three (3) most significant barriers** for your Question topic. (20 minute for this part of the discussion).

- If your table is assigned to Question 1—see page 4 for some ideas of system effectiveness barriers. Your group may choose to highlight other barriers.
- If your table is assigned Question 2—see page 5 for some ideas of system coordination barriers. Your group may choose to highlight other barriers.

Step 3. Working with those at your table, **pick one (1) barrier and identify three (3) potential solutions** to address this barrier (20 minutes).

Step 4. When you are done identifying solutions, take a short break, have a snack, and we will start with table report out (5 minutes maximum per table)

5. Open Forum: Tell us what you think we should know about making the system work better (30 Minutes—3 minute maximum per speaker)

We are asking for feedback on one or both of the following questions:

- ***Because it is often helpful to improve a system by building on its strengths: what is one thing which works well now in Yakima County's special needs transportation system?***
- ***What is one change you think could make a substantial improvement in the way transportation for people with special needs is provided in Yakima County?***

6: Wrap up and Closing Comments (10 minutes)

Question 1: BARRIERS FOR RIDERS

#	Item	Rating: High / Medium / Low – <i>how important is addressing this barrier to improving the system?</i>
1	People don't know how to access the system	
2	Rides don't take people where they need to go	
3	Service is not available when it is needed	
4	Rural riders are under-served	
5	Inter-County connections are weak	
6	Intra-County connections between suburban areas are weak	
7	Multiple systems must be used to get to where people want to go	
8	Housing is located away from transit service	
9	Housing is located where there are no sidewalks or pedestrian friendly amenities	
10	Needed services—medical or other—are not located close to transit routes	
11	Bus shelters do not accommodate needs of riders	
12	Users are afraid to ride the bus	
13	Program eligibility rules are confusing	
14	Users will not use the bus if they can get a personal trip service	
	OTHER:	

Selected Barrier for further discussion:

Ideas for removing or diminishing this barrier:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Question 2: BARRIERS INSIDE THE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

#	Item	Rating: High / Medium / Low – <i>how important is addressing this barrier to improving the system?</i>
1	Service providers are unaware of how to better share their assets when under-utilized	
2	Service providers are unwilling to share under-utilized assets	
3	More transportation vehicles are needed	
4	Providers can't find skilled drivers	
5	Providers sometimes can't insure skilled drivers or potential volunteers	
6	Funding is too constrained to target gaps and problems as they arise	
7	There is a disconnect or distrust between human services agencies and transportation service providers	
8	Special needs housing and services siting decisions are disconnected from transportation system planning	
9	There is no inventory of system assets and expertise to call on for problem solving or other purposes	
	OTHER:	

Selected Barrier for further discussion:

Ideas for removing or diminishing this barrier:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

ATTACHMENT B: GROUP RATINGS OF TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM IN YAMIKA COUNTY: RESULTS

Group Ratings of Transportation System in Yakima County: Results

Matrixes below show responses of attendees, by show of hands. A rating of “5” is the highest/most positive rating. Shaded cells show the 2 largest number of respondents for each question.

Part 1: How well do transportation services in Yakima County meet the mobility needs of older adults, youth, persons with disabilities and those with limited incomes?

RATING	1	2	3	4	5	Don't Know
Rides available <i>when</i> needed	2	6	13	3	0	3
Rides available <i>where</i> needed	3	15	6	2	0	1
Riders know how to get information needed to travel	3	10	12	1	0	1
System is responsive to rider input	0	2	10	6	0	8
Eligibility well understood	2	14	8	1	0	2
Connections between systems are efficient	5	7	4	3	0	7

Part 2: How well do agencies and programs within the special needs transportation system work together in Yakima County?

RATING	1	2	3	4	5	Don't Know
Service agencies work well with transportation agencies	1	1	6	9	1	9
Providers share assets and information to maximize services and minimize duplication	0	4	4	9	0	11
Federal and state funding can be flexibly applied as needed	0	8	4	0	0	16
Agreement on biggest challenges and how to address them	1	0	13	2	0	12

ATTACHMENT C: YAKIMA COUNTY FORUM ATTENDEES

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