



Community Involvement

STUDY APPROACH

As in many regions, the Central Kenai area has taken a closer look at public transportation services and has sought to find the most effective means of providing those services. A key element in the plan has been to clearly evaluate the unmet transportation needs of local residents and clients. The current effort focuses on the feasibility of providing public transit services to meet the community's needs based on coordination efforts already completed. One important step toward providing an integrated community-wide transportation system has been and will continue to be community involvement.

Community involvement means just that, including everyone possible. For this transportation plan study, this has primarily meant a focus on two sets of meetings—Working Group meetings and public meetings. The Working Group has primarily consisted of City of Seward staff, staff from agencies or companies providing transportation, and staff from agencies providing human services that rely on others for transportation. Elected officials and the news media were kept apprised of the study process and welcomed to attend meetings.

Public meetings have reached out to individuals, transportation customers, and employees of transportation providers. Feedback was received from each of these groups during the course of the study.

PROJECT INITIATION

An initial kick-off meeting was held on January 19, 2010. Various transportation and human service agencies met with LSC representatives to discuss the project goals, priorities, and a time line for completion of the final study. This project team also discussed the local stakeholders who would be critical in completing the transit study for the area. Outreach methods, meeting locations, and communi-

cation suggestions were also given. The initial issues identified by this group are discussed below.

Initial Issues Identification

From the initial Working Group meeting, the following were discussed as some of the strengths and weaknesses of the existing transportation system. This list has been updated to reflect input from the community.

Strengths

Common Strengths

- Ability to do the transit is there.
- We have organized public transportation in the area.
- Year-round service.
- Good general service by CARTS and other transportation providers.
- Passion and dedication to customers, customer service.
- Some coordination is already occurring between providers and among different regions on the Peninsula.
- All services are generally provided with no more than 24-hour notice required.
- All services are generally safe, reliable, and dependable.
- Highly skilled/educated/trained staff, most featuring background checks, first aid, chair transfer.
- Vehicles to operate the variety of services are generally available enough to meet needs safely.
- On-demand service is provided.
- Some funding available.

Strengths for Customers

- Try to keep folks in their [own rather than group] homes.
- Prevent isolation by offering activities that gets folks out of their homes—i.e., 18 seats on a bus going.
- Services are generally affordable for all consumers.

- Services provide basic transportation for all who need it.
- Service delivered with respect.
- Hands-on service.
- Identified routes.
- Token program.
- Door-to-door or door-through-door - help assist folks if they need it - personal assistance.

Agency-Specific Strengths

- For some services, same-day service is provided, with the best service requiring no wait time.
- Skilled staff attuned to specific client/customer needs.
- A familiar/consistent driver aware of specific client/customer needs is important.
- Access to tribal services.
- Independence of agencies is valued as the way to deliver varied services to varied populations with specialized needs.
- Staff transports in private vehicles [within parameters]. Personal vehicles provide flexibility and staff is reimbursed for mileage, no problems have been encountered with this to date.
- Small agency does it all.

Other Strengths

- Frail/disabled/dementia – condition of clients is varied.
- Provide for patient in need, try to estimate when to ask CARTS to come back.
- Mission central.
- Demand for services centered.
- No call offs.

Weaknesses

Common Weaknesses

- Big service area.
- Climate.
- Not enough communication.
- Not enough coordination.
- Duplication or inefficient services.
- Multiple agencies passing each other on road.
- Difficult policies.
- Time it takes to provide service.
- Misunderstanding of current services.
- Equal playing field.
- State officials don't understand funding source requirements (requested Memorandum of Agreement [MOA] – providers must meet insurance and legal requirements, the agreements take time).
- There is little local government buy-in. They want economic development, attractive communities, tax base, but need to recognize that mobility is important.
- Attitude of homesteaders— independent.
- Population (of clients) is difficult to educate.
- Can't reach clients.
- Physical distance between door and road.
- Scheduling return trip.
- 24-hour notice problematic.
- Mobility is very difficult for populations mentioned.
- On-demand rides—not responsive, especially for seniors.

Agency-Specific Weaknesses

- Taxi service is expensive.
- No H.S. contribution.
- One-way trip costs \$85 in taxi for one client. It doesn't cost that much in agency vehicle.
- CARTS service is expensive.
- CARTS—3 strikes out and you get penalized.
- Penalties for missed trips should be removed.
- Lack of funds to pay drivers.
- Seniors home—not allowing customers needs.
- Lack of funds to pay wages and operating expenses.
- Not enough money or drivers.
- Aging fleet of vehicles.
- Lack of funds to update fleet.
- Older vehicles break down a lot.
- Lack of funds to upgrade vehicles.
- Vehicles sitting.

Weaknesses for Customers

- Service hours do not align with customer needs.
- Lack of after-hours and weekend service availability.
- People/clients don't fit in funding categories.
- Vehicle recognition—customers won't get in vehicle they don't know.
- 24-hour notice problematic.
- Public transportation expensive.
- Change is difficult for clients.
- Clients have no money.
- Clients must be registered.

Other Weaknesses

- We have no fixed route for shuttles to feed into.
- All kinds of on demand – no fixed route – consider a loop.
- No fixed routes.
- Expanded medical services to Anchorage.
- Need transport to Anchorage, some VA and Medicaid is covered, others are not covered. Sometimes Medicaid requires that patients fly. Travel must be pre-arranged.
- Driver screening should be strengthened—drivers are perpetrators.
- Limited on-demand transportation.
- Environmental degradation due to CO₂ emissions and contaminants into waterways.
- Funds - “Suggested donation.”
- Turn to ride areas.
- MOAS: Not user-funded.
- Education

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Throughout the planning process, public involvement has been key to the plan’s success. At critical points during the process, public meetings were announced and held where citizen participation was openly welcomed and appreciated.

Six public open houses were scheduled during the six-month study. The open houses offered members of the community an opportunity to provide public input regarding transportation issues that should be and were addressed as part of the plan. Community residents were asked to comment on the existing and future transit services within the Central Kenai and Southern Peninsula areas. The public was given the opportunity to state which transit services and other alternatives they thought were necessary to address the identified issues and meet the established goals. Finally, the public was given the opportunity to comment on the Preferred Plan prior to the document being finalized.

Notices for meetings were posted, e-mailed, or placed two to four weeks in advance for people to be able to put them on their calendars. Meeting reminders were provided a few days to one week in advance of the meeting, often also announcing the availability of an interim report (Technical Memorandum). During each visit, public meetings were held in both Homer and Kenai/Soldotna.

Public Meeting #1

Meeting #1 was held on Wednesday, March 10, 2010 in Homer and on Thursday, March 11, 2010 in Kenai/Soldotna. The purpose of these meetings was to obtain feedback from the public on existing transportation services, both strengths and weaknesses. The purpose was also to understand what options and alternatives should be explored and developed in the next phase of the study to address weaknesses or other concerns. The meeting reviewed population and employment information and information that had been provided by existing transportation providers.

Public Meeting #2

Meeting #2 was held on Wednesday, April 28, 2010 in Homer and Thursday, April 29, 2010 in Kenai/Soldotna. The purpose of these meetings was to generate a preliminary recommendation. A variety of alternatives were suggested at the March round of meetings, seeking to address current unmet needs or near-future growth in demand for service. Those alternatives were developed to show how they might operate and to estimate costs. Additional information was also available on funding sources and organizational changes that might be necessary to make the alternatives work. The meeting considered which alternatives appeared most feasible to pursue. The narrower set of “feasible” alternatives form the basis for a preferred plan.

Public Meeting #3

Meeting #3 was held on Wednesday, May 26, 2010 in Homer and on Thursday, May 27, 2010 in Kenai/Soldotna. The purpose of these meetings was to refine the Preferred Plan. Between April and May, additional detail was provided for the Preferred Plan, including coordination steps, service hours, the proposed lead agency, the proposed local funding sources, and the benefits of taking action.

WORKING GROUP MEETINGS

The Working Group meetings were held around the same time as the public meetings. Both sets of meetings covered the same material with the same agenda. The Working Group meetings tended to delve more deeply into technical issues of

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service delivery. The list of participants in the Working Group meetings is provided in Appendix A.