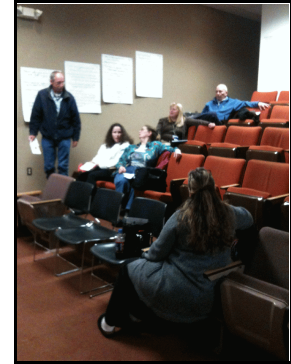




Community Involvement

STUDY APPROACH

As in many regions, the Seward 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 the 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.

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 20, 2010. LSC plus various transportation and human service agencies met to discuss the project goals, priorities, and a time line for completion of the final study. This project team also

Community Involvement

discussed the local stakeholders who would be critical in completing the transit study for the area. Outreach methods, meeting locations, and communication 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 was a beginning, with additional community input obtained as the plan was developed.

- | Strengths | Weaknesses |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private companies do a good job • Compact area to serve • Access to grants for seniors • School district meets student needs • Good taxi services • Teen program provides transportation • Church bus is available | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taxis don't go out of town • Winter - poor maintenance of sidewalks, snow removal • Lack of pedestrian/bike connections • No coordinated transportation • Lack of accessible vehicles • Limited opportunities for tourists/visitors to travel • Chamber trolley stopped 5-6 years ago • Inconsistent services year to year and season to season • Possible change of taxi ownership • Lack of money (users) • Limited local funding (providers) • Bus parking and coordinating bus queues • Lack of enforcement for disabled parking spaces |

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.

Three 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 Seward area. 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). An sample meeting reminder is shown at the right.



Public Meeting #1

Meeting #1 was held on Tuesday, March 9, 2010, beginning at 4:00 p.m. The meeting was held in the Auditorium of the AVTEC Campus located at 519 4th Avenue. The purpose of this meeting was to obtain feedback from the public on existing transportation services, both strengths and weaknesses, and 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 Tuesday, April 27, 2010, beginning at 5:00 p.m. The meeting was held in the City of Seward Council Chambers. The purpose of this meeting 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 formed the basis for a preferred plan.

Public Meeting #3

Meeting #3 was held on Tuesday, May 25, 2010, beginning at 11:30 a.m. The meeting was held in the cafeteria of the Seward Senior Center. The purpose of this meeting 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 on the same days 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 service delivery. The list of participants in the working group meetings is provided in Appendix A.