

Transportation Needs For Seniors in Riverside County

Introduction

On January 8, 2003, the Services Planning Team, a subcommittee of the *No Wrong Door Team* convened a panel to explore building a seamless system for transportation services in Riverside County. Panel members included representatives from the Regional Transit Agency (RTA), Riverside County Veteran's Services, Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC), The Partnership, social workers, and consumers.

The purpose of the panel discussion was to promote dialogue among various transportation and aging providers and explore methods and creative solutions for better coordination of services to meet the transportation needs and preferences of older adults.

Findings

In 2000, there exists 46 million Older Americans, with a projected increase to 56 million by 2010 representing a 22% increase (US Bureau of the Census, 2000).

Locally, Riverside County has experienced a 24% growth in its older adult population between 1990 and 2000, and is projected to increase by 87.6% over the next ten years (US Bureau of the Census, 2000).

Approximately 9,000 people in Riverside County had had to cut back on desired activities since retirement due to lack of appropriate transportation with 33% due to mobility limitations (Riverside County Office on Aging, 2000).

The recent, significant increase in the aging population and people living longer with disabilities has prompted an escalation in demand for alternative, supportive transportation systems without adequate funding or staff. Furthermore, present transportation systems are ill equipped to provide transportation services for those seniors with severe mobility limitations or chronic illnesses.

Current transportation systems in Riverside County are fragmented, and often do not transport across city boundaries or regional areas (i.e., eastern versus western).

A rising proportion of the older population has relied on driving independently throughout most of their lives, peaking with the Baby Boom generation, as evidenced by the growing rates of persons age 65 and older who are licensed drivers (AARP & Beverley Foundation, 1999).

Moreover, cities and counties in integrating housing, transportation, and supportive services, such as markets, medical offices, or general stores, poorly plan urban areas. Bus stops are frequently in unsafe areas (e.g., having to cross busy streets to get to the

bus stop) or are dilapidated.

Older adults living in rural areas typically do not have access to public, fixed route transportation services, and Dial-A-Ride systems are slow and unreliable, leaving these individuals isolated and at risk of more expensive supportive care services.

Escort transportation has had favorable outcomes in meeting individual transportation needs: 84% were not always able to travel to their doctor when needed before using an escort transportation program; 94% said that it had been difficult for them to get groceries as needed before enrolling; 61% were only able to travel two times per month or less prior to the escort transportation program; and 19% said they never left their house, apartment or mobile home (TRIP, 2001).

Older adults, and especially those with one or more types disabilities, must be included in the discussions in creating and redesigning better transportation systems to meet their needs.

One of the major barriers to developing adequate and supportive transportation systems is that policy makers view public transportation as a last resort, rather than a viable means of travel, and that voters typically request road upgrades.

Variations such as the Transportation Reimbursement and Information Project (TRIP) program or the Social Services Transportation Resource Center that leverage drivers and equipment and share passenger load is an alternative that has been replicated throughout the country and has proven to be successful.

Recommendations

Several innovative ideas merged from the panel members in redesigning present transportation systems to be more responsive to older adults:

- Riverside County Transportation Commission should work with the Coordinated Transportation Service Agencies (CTSAs) to develop linkages between rural areas and public, fixed route system by using vans stationed in rural areas.
- Advisory Council on Aging, during the Riverside County general plan process, should advocate for more integrated community transportation planning efforts.
- Riverside Transit Agency and SunLine should provide additional training to fixed route operators on assisting older adults with mobility limitations.
- No Wrong Door Team should explore feasibility of implementing innovative transportation programs such as taxi services and door-to-door services.
- Riverside County Office on Aging should target Older Americans Act transportation funding to escort transportation.
- Riverside County Transportation Commission should continue to support grant shuttles in the cluster areas where seniors live, including those who have received retired buses through the Riverside Transit Agency Retired Bus Program.

Next Steps

1. Office on Aging will obtain additional data on older adult and diverse population needs in rural areas.
2. Advisory Council on Aging will hold public hearings with advocates and policy makers on older adult and diverse population needs and desires in accessing alternate, supportive transportation, including alternatives such as door-to-door transportation for seniors with physical and cognitive disabilities.
3. No Wrong Door Team will enhance its membership by adding nontraditional transportation partners, such as taxi cab drivers.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

Although the results of discussions with representatives in one geographic area cannot be generalized to the older population as a whole, the results suggest some implications for the direction of policy and systems development approaches. The preferences and perceptions expressed by the panel members imply the need for public policy to enhance the mobility of non-institutionalized older adults who live independently in their communities.

Panel Members

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William Densmore, Director, Riverside County Veteran's Services

JudyLynn Gries, Operations Manager, Riverside Transit Agency

Laurie Hoirup, Director, Community Access Center

James Howard, Senior Consumer

Tanya Love, Program Manager, Riverside County Transportation Commission

Steve Oller, Director, Transportation Specialist Incorporated

Gloria Ruffner, Social Services Worker V, Multi-Purpose Senior Services Program,
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