

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Report No. AL-11-0003

DEVELOPING LOCAL SUPPORT AND FUNDING FOR TRANSPORTATION SERVICE IN RURAL ALABAMA

Constance W. Jordan

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Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University
Normal, Alabama 35762



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FINAL REPORT

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URBAN MASS TRANSPORTATION ADMINISTRATION
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<p>16. Abstract</p> <p>This study was designed to examine the issues related to rural public transportation focusing specifically on gaining local support and funding. The concept involved the establishment of a local group that would guide the planning and development of a program to improve the mobility of the transportation disadvantaged in the target area. Next, a field survey was undertaken to diagnose the transportation problems. Using the survey findings, the local support group developed goals and objectives for a transportation program to address the identified needs. An analysis of the transportation resources existing in the immediate and surrounding areas was then made. Based upon the existing conditions, a set of alternatives were developed and evaluated. This evaluation utilized a cost-effective analysis. To offset the local cost of transportation provision, revenue-generating concepts were proposed. Recommendations for continued local support group actions were suggested along with a plan for transportation service improvement for the mobility-limited population.</p>			
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METRIC CONVERSION FACTORS

Approximate Conversions to Metric Measures

Symbol	When You Know	Multiply by	To Find	Symbol
LENGTH				
m	inches	2.5	centimeters	cm
ft	feet	30	centimeters	cm
yd	yards	0.9	meters	m
mi	miles	1.6	kilometers	km
AREA				
in ²	square inches	6.5	square centimeters	cm ²
ft ²	square feet	0.93	square meters	m ²
yd ²	square yards	0.8	square meters	m ²
mi ²	square miles	2.6	square kilometers	km ²
acre	acres	0.4	hectares	ha
MASS (weight)				
oz	ounces	28	grams	g
lb	pounds	0.45	kilograms	kg
	short tons (2000 lb)	0.9	tonnes	t
VOLUME				
teaspoon	teaspoons	5	milliliters	ml
tablespoon	tablespoons	15	milliliters	ml
fl oz	fluid ounces	30	milliliters	ml
c	cups	0.24	liters	l
pt	pints	0.47	liters	l
qt	quarts	0.95	liters	l
gal	gallons	3.8	liters	l
ft ³	cubic feet	0.03	cubic meters	m ³
yd ³	cubic yards	0.76	cubic meters	m ³
TEMPERATURE (exact)				
°F	Fahrenheit temperature	5/9 (after subtracting 32)	Celsius temperature	°C

* 1 in = 2.54 exactly. For other exact conversions and more detailed tables, see NBS Spec. Publ. 286, Units of Weights and Measures, Price \$2.75, SD Catalog No. C13.10.286.



Approximate Conversions from Metric Measures

Symbol	When You Know	Multiply by	To Find	Symbol
LENGTH				
mm	millimeters	0.04	inches	in
cm	centimeters	0.4	inches	in
m	meters	3.3	feet	ft
m	meters	1.1	yards	yd
km	kilometers	0.6	miles	mi
AREA				
cm ²	square centimeters	0.16	square inches	in ²
m ²	square meters	1.2	square yards	yd ²
km ²	square kilometers	0.4	square miles	mi ²
ha	hectares (10,000 m ²)	2.5	acres	acre
MASS (weight)				
g	grams	0.035	ounces	oz
kg	kilograms	2.2	pounds	lb
t	tonnes (1000 kg)	1.1	short tons	short ton
VOLUME				
ml	milliliters	0.03	fluid ounces	fl oz
l	liters	2.1	pints	pt
l	liters	1.06	quarts	qt
l	liters	0.26	gallons	gal
m ³	cubic meters	35	cubic feet	ft ³
m ³	cubic meters	1.3	cubic yards	yd ³
TEMPERATURE (exact)				
°C	Celsius temperature	9/5 (then add 32)	Fahrenheit temperature	°F

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This study is intended to examine the need for transportation in a small rural community, along with methods of gaining local support and funding to address those needs. The status and well-being of a category of persons, in this particular circumstance the rural transportation disadvantages, is inextricably related to the social, economic and cultural conditions of the society in which they live. Several important indicators of well-being are: the freedom and opportunity to interact with persons and groups of one's chose; th opportunity to pursue economic activities that can improve one's financial status; and the access to institutional services, i.e., educational, health service and leisure time activities. Thus, in order to improve the quality of life of the rural transportation disadvantaged, accessibility to those indicators must be increased. Specifically, this research involved a case study of a small rural community, North Courtland, Alabama, that due to several social and economic problems (the lack of adequate transportation being a one of those) is economically distressed. Most areas which can be described as such lend support to the hypothesis that there is a correlation between transportation efficiencies and a high number of economically disadvantaged people.

Problem Studies

The Census Bureau defines "rural" as being all areas outside placed of 2,500 persons or more. The application of this definition places the majority of the population of Alabama within this category. Therefore the issue of rural transportation is an important one in this state. Although several Federal programs provide funds for transportation service, most particularly the Section 18 Rural Public Transportation Program, many rural communities are not receiving transportation benefits and therefore are not realizing any improvement in their travel capabilities. What then are those salient issues and/or obstacles that are hindering fuller participation of rural residents in transportation

programs? The two issues which the research team considered to be associated with the lack of participation were the (1) lack of a transportation advocacy group, i.e., a local support group formally established as a transportation steering committee; and (2) the identification of funds to supplement the cost of the transportation service.

Similar to other rural communities, the town of North Courtland has been grappling with the problem of transportation for the disadvantaged for several years. Research designed to elevate the level of local support and the funding sources for improving transportation was considered a critical missing link in resolving the problems found in this rural area. It was, therefore, the goal of this research to increase the level of support for and the awareness of funding sources to assist a rural transportation system. The means for obtaining this goal were arrived through the following objectives:

- (1) Organizing a support group to increase, within the local community, the awareness of the need for and the benefits to be derived from rural public transportation;
- (2) Developing strategies to "sell" the concept of public transportation to the community;
- (3) Assisting the target community in developing strategies to better utilize existing resources in providing public transportation; and
- (4) Providing technical assistance to improve the means of mobility in the community.

The town provided a fertile environment to study the impact of the lack of transportation on the social, economic and physical well-being of rural residents.

To determine travel patterns, attitudes and needs for transportation in North Courtland, a survey was conducted. The aim of the survey was to provide basic information regarding the following: (1) how people transport themselves, (2) where they go, and (3) if they would use a transportation system if it were available. The answers to these indicators would determine the design and type of service needed.

The following observations can be summarized from the survey results:

- 1) A significant number of the residents do not own a vehicle,

(slightly less the 50%)

- 2) A majority of the respondents indicated that the family had one vehicle, but that they (the respondents) had no access to the car during all, or a larger portion, of the day.
- 3) Trips which one-vehicle households needed to make had to be delayed or not made due to the lack of transportation during working hours.
- 4) The lack of transportation to major employment centers has impaired some citizens' ability to attain employment.
- 5) This lack of transportation has similarly impaired the search for employment among those who are physically able to work.
- 6) The health care needs of the residents may be suffering due to the lack of transportation to medical facilities.

The planning for and ultimate operation of a transportation service can be a timely process. Providing an interim transportation option that could potentially address the most pressing transportation needs of the town's transportation disadvantaged became an immediate goal of the research team. To that end, an inventory of transportation providers was conducted. Transportation services offered through various social service agencies and the County administered Section 18 Rural Transportation Program were studied to determine the potential of providing more service to North Courtland through the existing program.

Results Achieved

The survey results supported the initial hypothesis that the local situation required improved transportation services for those who could be classified as disadvantaged. In order to increase community support for the concept of public transportation, a steering committee was formed with persons representing the operators of transportation programs, funding agencies, administrators, local elected officials, private operators and grass roots citizens.

Organizing a group of local residents to assist in the further identification of transportation needs and the resources which maybe available to improve mobility was a key link in the research and planning process. The commitment of such a group was determined to be

essential if fruitful results were to be realized. Outsiders, such as the research team, could make assessments by surveying the target population, but the knowledge of local residents provided a more complete picture of the impact which the lack of transportation was having on the economic and social aspects of residents' lives. Getting the input of those citizens whose mobility is restricted due to the lack of some means of transportation was important. The nature of the problems and concerns which they brought out in committee discussions were valuable to the research goal of designing a system that would complement their lifestyles and travel behaviors.

The decisive role of the Transportation Steering Committee was to plan, with the technical assistance of the research team, a logical and well-thought-out approach for improving transportation for the disadvantaged in the community. To that end, the committee formulated a goal to set the direction for the development of a plan for improved transportation service. The following goals and objectives were established:

Goal: To provide improved mobility to all potential transportation disadvantaged (i.e., elderly, handicapped, young, carless) without resulting in a heavy burden to those citizens who will not use the system.

Objectives: (1) Provide maximum mobility (maximum defined as being the most efficient and economical) to the transportation disadvantaged in the community;

 (2) Maximize the ease of system implementation on system providers;

 (3) Maximize positive benefits to non-disadvantaged and the community as a whole by improving the employment potential through carpool/vanpool and other economic derivatives of transportation service.

In order to evaluate transportation service alternatives, the committee had to rank or weight the value of alternative objectives. Weights were assigned to the three objectives. This allowed each alternative to be ranked according to how well it would achieve the overall transportation goal and objectives for transportation service. The following weights were assigned to the objectives:

<u>Objectives</u>	<u>Weights</u>
1	3
2	2
3	1

The Committee agreed that mobility improvement must be realized in the community. They felt that the quality of life of the transportation disadvantaged residents could not be improved unless mobility to the maximum extent feasibility was improved.

The ease of the implementation of the system would provide a more timely response to the transportation problem. Therefore, objective number two received the second highest weight.

The third objective, which was considered to be highly desirable, was weighted lowest due to the pressing needs of transportation for all trip purposes by a large percent of the general population.

Once the objectives were ranked, the resource team developed three alternative system concepts. Alternative I offered the most autonomy in regards to the town's planning and implementation of the service. Alternative II would have provided the service under the umbrella of the Lawrence County Commission Public Transportation System. The third alternative would offer transportation service through a contractual agreement with a taxicab company.

The cost effectiveness evaluation approach was used in the selection of the preferred option. The committee decided that alternative III would be pursued only as a supportive element to the system that would be implemented; therefore only Alternative I and II were included in the evaluation process.

Alternative II dominated in the ranking process. Alternative I was more costly and ranked lower in regard to meeting the objectives. Given

the budgetary constraints the Town faces, it was agreed that Alternative II would be the best alternative to pursue.

Utilization of Results

The Town of North Courtland, guided by the Transportation Steering Committee, agreed to submit an application through the Lawrence County Commission for a Section 18 Rural Transportation Grant to the Alabama Highway Department. The routing of the system would be based on the survey results which indicated that doctor visits and shopping were the priority trip needs in the community. The details of intracity routing would be determined by the Steering Committee, with input from the local citizens. Given the county line restrictions associated with the operation of a Section 18 Program, the travel-desire lines which crossed into adjoining counties suggested by the survey could not be satisfied by the transportation service to be established.

The North Courtland Transportation Steering Committee must remain viable. The Committee will be responsible for the future of improved transportation for North Courtland. As a result of contacts developed during the course of the study, there are several avenues for the city to pursue. The committee members have been made aware of some transportation resources which are readily available through the CAA, the Tennessee Valley Rehabilitation Center, and the Yellow Cab Company. Use can be made of these resources while the Committee pursues its plans for a more comprehensive solution, a vehicle for the use of North Courtland residents.

The steps necessary for Section 18 application preparation, processing and actual delivery of a Section 18 vehicle could take up to 12 months. The pressing needs of the community led the research team to investigate what strategies could be developed to meeting the immediate transportation needs of the residents. The key element in accomplishing any or all of the identified "Interim Approaches" is coordination. The research team has served in the role of mediator in the transportation planning process. As a third party the team could look at the existing conditions and circumstances of two parties and help to identify opportunities that previously and not been evident.

Basic planning decisions which the Town of North Courtland has made and must continue to address if the transportation problems of the disadvantaged are to be made include:

- Determining the specific geographic area to be served.
- Establishing priorities and calculating available resources.
- Examining the feasibility of a public/private providership.
- Establishing a fare structure to off set operation cost.
- Identifying potential sponsors to subsidize cost of service.
- Maintaining an active and involved Transportation Steering Committee membership.
- Designing a system for evaluating the effectiveness of the transportation service.

Implication of Results

The Federal programs which support the transportation needs of specific client populations have proven helpful in bridging the gap between the population in need and their access to a particular service. In most instances, the same population groups that could not use a service without some level of supplied transportation are the same groups that experience travel problems in other areas of their lives. Rural transportation programs should play the role of opening up a broader range of travel opportunities that will reduce the isolation factor frequently associated with rural communities.

Federal programs, to be effective, must be complimented by strong local political support dedicated to the goal of transportation improvement. Communities must determine what resources are currently available. Once an inventory has been taken, an assessment of transportation needs must be made. A door-to-door survey or some other canvassing procedure can determine the travel patterns and demands. This information can supplement available statistical data to give an overview of community transportation needs. The community must solidly support the transportation effort in order to set things in motion. This takes local level leadership which can come from elected officials but often comes from private citizens who are affected by the project. The individual who is willing to step up and speak out for the community can

rally people to the cause. It is important to involve the citizens for whom the effective transportation system is being developed, the riders, for they know best their needs.

The key to effective transportation planning involves the coordination and communication among and between local citizens, organizations, community leaders, elected officials, and program administrators at both the county and state levels. This study illustrates how vital coordination is to improving transportation for a rural area. Often communities are isolated within a rural county and essentially "the left hand doesn't know that the right hand is doing." Through conversation and communication, untapped resources can be discovered. As funding for Federal programs diminishes, waste in local programs must also diminish. Improved coordination and communication can ultimately lead to more effective use of transportation resources.

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