

Veterans Transportation Services

The Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation (ACCT) has been involved in facilitating solutions for veterans in need of transportation for medical appointments. This involves collaborating with veterans' organizations and transportation providers; opening lines of communication; and the sharing resources, skills and experience.

ACCT participated in an October 2008 forum to discuss transportation challenges that veterans face. Hosted by the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), the forum provided an open dialog between veterans at Council members. Based on the veterans' individual stories, ACCT recognized that their needs required action. The Council leveraged the existing network of public transportation providers as a means to lower costs, shorten trips and provide transportation solutions where none had existed.

Shortly after the CTAA summit, the Council assembled a group of veterans and transportation providers to develop strategies to address some of the issues presented at the summit. The primary findings of this subcommittee were:

- Veteran's transportation on the Olympic Peninsula is principally conducted by a sole provider: Disabled American Veterans (DAV) volunteer vans. While DAV vans provide an important service, they are not the only option for veterans, and many veterans are unaware of their other transportation options.
- DAV routing is not connected with other transportation systems, which inhibits coordination with transit, paratransit, and private coaches.

The ACCT subcommittee divided into two groups to address these issues. One group focused on creating a communication tool to increase awareness of transportation options for veterans in the Puget Sound region. The second group was comprised of transportation planners from transit agencies on the Olympic Peninsula and representatives from DAV who joined to discuss how the two systems could be more efficiently integrated.

The planning group recognized the transportation challenges caused by the six-week closure of the Hood Canal Bridge. The loss of the Hood Canal Bridge as a primary travel option potentially would add a considerable amount of travel time to the scheduled trips for DAV vans traveling from the Peninsula to Seattle. This would substantially lengthen travel times. The planning group developed a feeder system for DAV vans that carry passengers into Port Angeles. Passengers could transfer to a Travel Washington Dungeness Line coach for the rest of the trip to the Seattle VA facility. WSDOT staff collaborated with social service providers at the Department of Veterans administration to obtain passenger travel vouchers that cover the cost of the Dungeness Line trip.

Clark County

Representation of the Southwest Washington Local Coordinating Coalition (LCC) is comprised of the Human Services Council, Region 7 Medicaid Brokerage (serves Clark, Cowlitz, Wahkiakum, Klickitat and Skamania counties), WSDOT, Health Recovery Services Administration, SW Regional Transportation Planning Organization, SW Regional Transportation Council, public transit and private transportation organizations and veterans agency representatives, including Vets Corp. and MCEDD Gorge Translink.

The group has held four meetings since June 2009 to discuss coordinated transportation needs of southern Washington and plan a pilot project. This pilot project is heavily dependent on in-kind work and support from participating agencies. The Human Services Council will lead efforts to identify potential grant funding opportunities for launching the project.

The pilot project

Pilot project organizers will identify primary transportation routes and coordinated, accessible transportation options in Region 7 to Vancouver and Portland VA sites. This will include developing outreach materials that provide information of transportation options to veterans, veteran groups and the general public.

Issue areas identified

The Southwest Washington LCC identified a number of barriers, including:

- A lack of cost effective, accessible transportation options for veterans traveling from home to the VA Campus in Portland
- A lack of information about where veterans are residing and their individual transportation needs

- A lack of knowledge by veterans agencies regarding existing transportation options that are available
- A lack of coordinated data on all available transportation options serving these counties (transit, private, VA).

Project action steps

To address barriers and propose solutions, the LCC will:

- Complete veterans transportation surveys in all counties
- Meet with VA representatives to identify existing transportation systems and identify primary transportation routes from each county to Vancouver and Portland
- Identify opportunities for coordinated and accessible transportation options that serve the routes identified, including options for combining trips with other community members and/or clients in need of transportation
- Develop outreach materials and information for veterans and veterans organizations