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SUBJECT: ACCESS Pittsburgh and Improvements to ACCT

Introduction

ACCESS Transportation System in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania has been raised as a possible model for improving delivery of special needs transportation services in Washington. ACCESS is a countywide system that brokers transportation for elderly and persons with disabilities. Direct translation of programs from a countywide system such as ACCESS to a statewide program may not be workable. However it is useful to look at the successes and benefits of the Pittsburgh system to identify opportunities for improvement here in Washington.

ACCESS Transportation Systems¹

Location: Allegheny County Pennsylvania

Area Served: Large Urbanized area over 1,000,000 people

Governing Structure: Port Authority, 1978 started paratransit brokerage

Provider Types: Public and Private Providers, 120 agencies, 10 dispatching centers for coordinated dispatch

Service Description:

Access is a paratransit brokerage and a senior transportation program serving Area Agencies on Aging. Paratransit is lift service associated with fixed route transit service providing door to door service within 3/4 miles of a fixed transit route. ACCESS provides

¹ See <http://ftawebprod.fta.dot.gov/UsefulPractices/Practices/View.aspx?PracticeID=31>

door to door, advance reservation, shared ride transportation service for senior citizens and persons with disabilities. General public may ride at fully allocated cost.

Funding:	FTA §5310, §5311, State Lottery funding \$15 million annually of their \$30 million budget.
Staff:	35 full time people
Coordination Strategies:	Automated Billing and Reporting Centralized One Stop Customer Service Coordination between providers Customer information
Centralized Functions:	Design and maintain the service delivery structure. Monitor provider procurement and negotiations. Contract service. Train providers in passenger assistance training. Establish and maintain reporting and accounting functions. Provide information and referral services for customers. Determine eligibility and register customers. Sell subscriptions for customers of the brokers' user-side subsidy program.

Comparisons with Washington State

ACCESS service area and population is somewhat analogous to King County in Washington. Two tables following—a side by side demographic comparison of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, King County and the State of Washington and the performance metrics of ACCESS, King County METRO, and the average of all transit systems operating within the State of Washington

Demographics²

	Allegheny County	Pennsylvania	King County	Washington
Population estimate (2005)	1,235,841	12,429,616	1,793,583	6,287,759
Population, percent change (April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2005)	-3.6%	1.2%	3.3%	6.7%
Population (2000)	1,281,666	12,281,054	1,737,034	5,894,121
Land area, square miles (2000)	730	44,817	2,126	66,544
Persons per square mile (2000)	1,755.30	274	817	88.6
Persons 65 years old and over, percent (2004)	17.3%	15.3%	10.5%	11.3%
Persons with a disability age 5+, percent (2000)	16.7%	17.2%	15.0%	16.6%

Performance Metrics

	ACCESS ³	METRO ⁴	Washington ⁵
	Mixed service types ⁶	Demand response	Demand Response
Passengers per hour	2.38	2.6	3
Total trips per year (000's)	1,900	1,831	5,261

ACCESS Transportation serves a smaller area that is more densely populated, older, and poorer than King County. Housing is significantly more expensive in Seattle than Pittsburgh. The median income in King County is only 22% of the median house value. In Allegheny County the median income is almost 50% of the median house value. Transit service can be more efficient and trip sharing more likely in areas with greater population densities. Although ACCESS serves an area with a greater population density,

² See Appendix A for a summary of US Census Data

³ See <http://ftawebprod.fta.dot.gov/UsefulPractices/Practices/View.aspx?PracticeID=31> (2004)

⁴ See *Washington State Summary of Public Transportation 2005*

⁵ Ibid

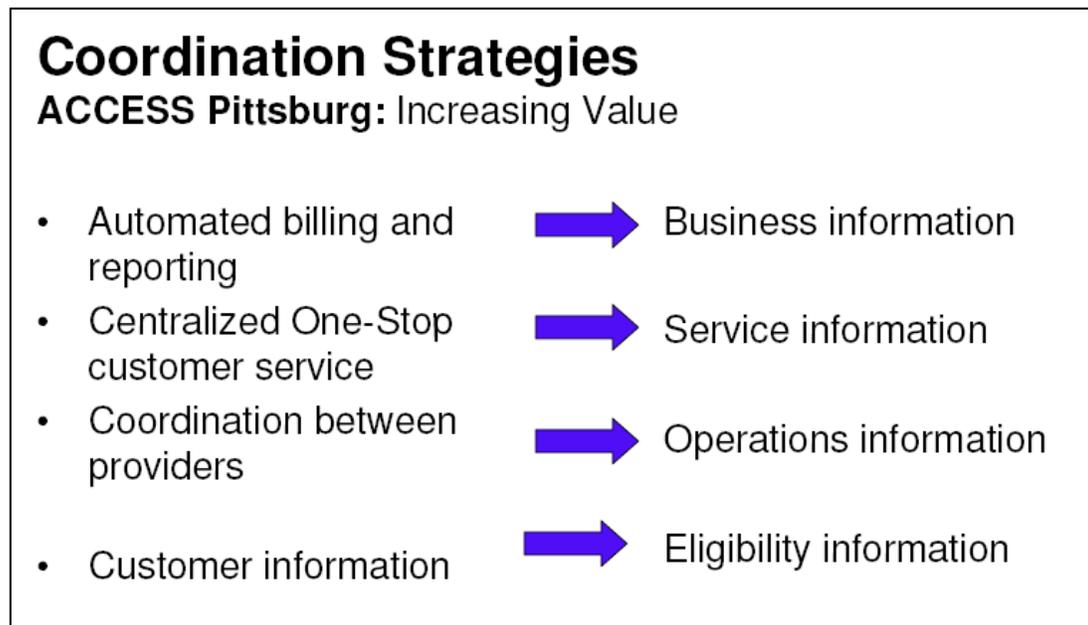
⁶ Mixed service types means fixed route, volunteer, demand response services are included in that calculation.

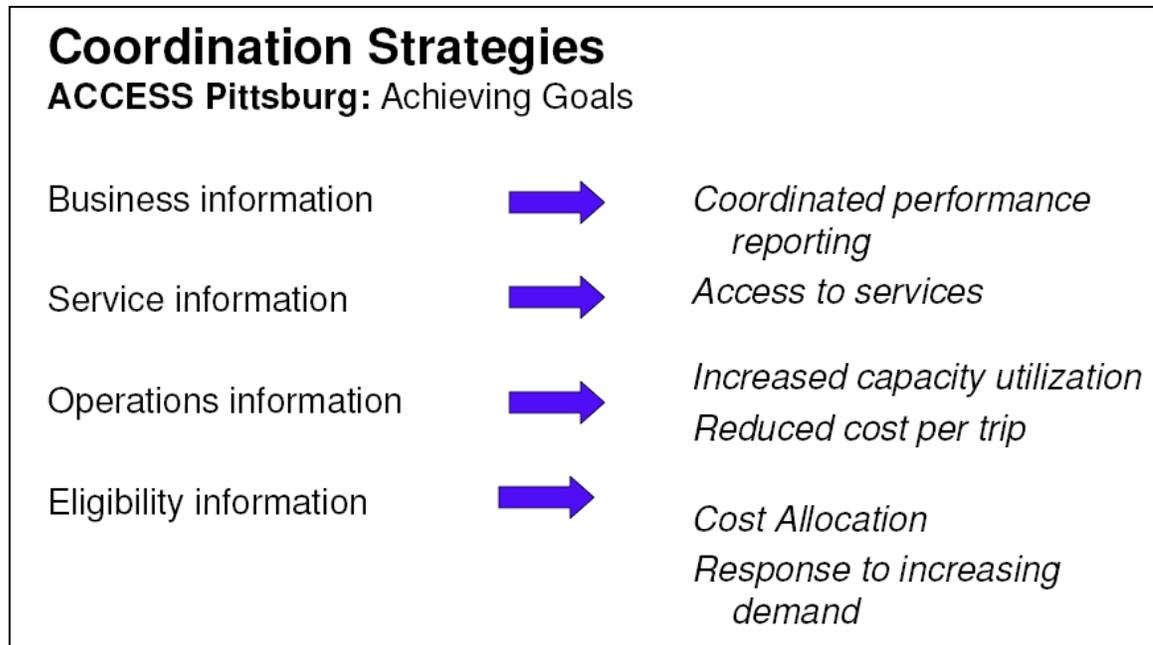
King County METRO and the State of Washington are achieving greater transit service efficiencies. ACCESS uses a mixed service brokerage, a combination of fixed route, volunteer, and demand response services. However, ACCESS does not put more people on vehicles than METRO or public transportation agencies in general in Washington.

Coordination of multiple passenger trips is often difficult on demand response services. Grouping trips is easier on fixed route services or vans. For over ten years, Washington's transportation providers have been working on coordination of services and passenger trips. This does not mean that strategies that other systems are using cannot improve individual systems or our state average.

Coordination Strategies

ACCESS emphasizes information sharing and coordination strategies to achieve goals of coordinated performance reporting, access to services, increased capacity utilization, reduced cost per trip, cost allocation, and response to increasing demand. Depending on the priorities of the State or the local program, Washington needs to look at the information we want to share to implement specific coordination activities.





Automated billing and reporting

ACCESS Pittsburgh

The size of the area served and the limited number of providers makes consolidated billing and reporting possible. ACCESS has been able to serve their entire service area with one information system. This allows them to share eligibility, availability, access to capacity, and create system-wide metrics for performance measurement.

Washington Projects

–Washington does all billing and reporting by program. Each transportation provider and broker manages their own system.

–The *Washington State Summaries of Public Transportation and Community and Brokered Transportation Reports* are collected and managed electronically.

–The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and the Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation (ACCT) provide a web interface (Travel Options) for providers to collect and manage service and statistical summary report data.

Recommendations

For Washington to coordinate billing and reporting similar to ACCESS, it may be helpful to look at standardizing agreements and reporting requirements.

Centralized One-Stop customer service

ACCESS Pittsburgh

ACCESS has one telephone number for travel planning, reservations, and eligibility information to meet customer needs and simplify access to services. From the customer perspective there is one intake process and one phone number to call.

Washington Projects

–**211** Statewide Information and referral telephone number for social services including transportation. Launching spring 2007.

–**Travel Options** Statewide trip planning program to collect and manage transportation service information from Amtrak and Greyhound to local transit and taxi services. Launching spring 2007.

–**511** Statewide road and travel information telephone number provides transit call center numbers. Operating since 2000.

Recommendations

Nationally there has been a push to create three digit phone numbers for basic services: 911 for emergency services, 411 for directory assistance, 511 for road and travel information, and 211 for social services information and referral. Through linking projects and sharing information, Washington can support statewide access to transit customer service and special needs transportation reservations. Direct connect would allow residents in Washington to be one call away from reserving a trip or getting the travel information they need.

Coordination between providers

ACCESS Pittsburgh

Because all the trips are brokered through one agency, ACCESS can put people from different programs on the same vehicle and charge back to the agencies the cost of doing that trip. ACCESS contracts for the transportation with public, private, non-profit and volunteer services. ACCESS can aggregate demand through the call centers and aggregate service through dispatching to get the most people on each vehicle. The coordination of the providers happens through the information system where trip requests go in and rides come out.

Washington Projects

–**Medicaid Brokerages** DSHS administers the state’s Medicaid program and provides access to the lowest cost most appropriate transportation services for Medicaid clients.

–**www.findaride.org** Sound Transit coordinates the travel information for special needs and community services and makes them available in King, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties.

–**Beyond the Borders** Pierce Transit contracted with a Medicaid broker and used demand response service to increase access to fixed route service.

–**Community Vans** King County METRO places lift-equipped vans in community organizations and, depending on usage, pays some operating costs. Several other transit agencies take retired vanpool vans and make them available to private non-profits to increase access to services at reduced cost.

–**Travel Options** WSDOT and ACCT will provide all call centers with information about transportation services available in their area. Reduces secret transportation.

Recommendations

Medicaid brokerages in Washington have been successful with facilitating coordination between providers with their contracted services and Medicaid trip requests.

Opportunities may exist for transit and community service providers to work more closely with Medicaid brokerages or clients.

Customer information

ACCESS Pittsburgh

ACCESS ties eligibility for service to agreements subsidized by specific fund sources. It is one system, so there is one set of customer information that can be shared by the all participating agencies. Because this is coupled with providing service, the system is able to allocate costs for each trip whether it is a senior nutrition trip covered by the Area Agency on Aging or a medical trip supported through federal money for the same person. There are opportunities to reduce barriers for customers and allocate costs on a per trip basis. ACCESS shares eligibility information to support this coordination strategy.

Washington Projects

–**Brokered Transportation in rural areas.** Some Medicaid brokerages also broker other types of trips. Brokers know the cost of the service, the needs of the clients and the area the vehicle is located.

–**Common Ground Project.** A cost sharing methodology developed by Medicaid and Pierce Transit. Limited sharing of information about specific client types.

Recommendations

Moving customers between providers and services is easier if eligibility information and trip requirements are shared.

Opportunities

Washington has a significant opportunity to move our state forward to the next level of coordination and benefit to individuals and communities. The Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation (ACCT) is a forum for multi-agency and stakeholder discussions about state programs and policies. ACCT has been a key part of Washington's success to date. This past year, ACCT had a chance to work more closely with communities and support local assessment and prioritization of need. WSDOT was able to expand the coordination network ACCT built over the last ten years to implement

the requirements of SAFETEA-LU⁷ and insure federal grant funds were available without interruption to WSDOT grantees. To get the benefit of proven coordination strategies statewide, Washington needs to reinforce regional understanding and provide additional resources to share information with the providers and users to support coordination strategies and leverage available funds.

To build on our current success Washington needs to:

- reauthorize ACCT;
- increase ACCT's role in coordinating Washington investment in special needs transportation;
- increase crosscutting accountability through comprehensive tracking and reporting to ACCT;
- increase the role of coordinated planning at the regional level to reinforce regional accountability and investment; and
- support local assessment of needs and resource priorities.

To benefit from successful in systems like ACCESS, Washington needs to think about how we share information about business, service, operations, and eligibility. These types of information will allow Washington State to achieve a variety of benefits including:

- increased capacity utilization,
- access to services,
- reduced cost per trip,
- cost allocation,
- respond to increasing demand, and
- provide increased crosscutting accountability

The result will be a better investment of state resources and a clearer picture of the benefits to Washington communities.

⁷ SAFETEA-LU is the acronym for *Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users*. For more information see: http://www.fta.dot.gov/index_4696.html

APPENDIX A

Demographics Details

	Allegheny County	Pennsylvania	King County	Washington
Language other than English spoken at home, percent of persons age 5+ (2000)	6.6%	8.4%	18.4%	14.0%
High school graduates, percent of persons age 25+ (2000)	86.3%	81.9%	90.3%	87.1%
Bachelor's degree or higher, percent of persons age 25+ (2000)	28.30%	22.40%	40.0%	27.7%
Persons below poverty, percent (2003)	10.8%	10.6%	9.4%	11.0%
Mean travel time to work (minutes), workers age 16+ (2000)	25.3	25.2	26.5	25.5
Median value of owner-occupied housing units (2000)	\$84,200	\$97,000	\$236,900	\$168,300
Median household income (2003)	\$41,346	\$42,952	\$53,414	\$48,185
Persons below poverty, percent (2003)	10.8%	10.6%	9.4%	11.0%
Federal spending, \$1000 (2004)	11,850,491	949,002,541	11,785,657	448,408,421

US Census Quick Facts