



## **Tompkins County Office for the Aging**

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### **Strategic Planning-2014 Transportation Consensus Conference**

A Consensus Conference on the topic of Transportation of Older Adults in Tompkins County was convened at the Tompkins County Public Library on August 25, 2014.

Facilitator: Dwight Mengel, Tompkins County Department of Social Services.

Participants included:

Ardie Bennett, Longview Resident  
Ralph Guggenheim, Longview Resident  
Eleanor Carey, FISH  
Fran Spadafora Manzella, 211/Human Services Coalition  
Chris Georgaroudakis, George Company  
Larry Roberts, Finger Lakes Independence Center  
John Krout, retired, former ICGI Director  
Teri Reinemann, ICGI  
Deanna Bodnar, DSS  
John Maceli, Gadabout  
Jonathan Maddison, Way2Go, Cooperative Extension  
Lai-Siu Leung, Tompkins Community Foundation and Office for the Aging  
Barbara Bills, Lansing Older Adults Program  
Kristen Wells, Gadabout  
Fernando de Aragon, Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Council  
Pat Woodworth, Tompkins Learning Partners/RSVP  
Charlie Tilton, Disabled Veterans Transportation  
Lisa Holmes, Director, Tompkins County Office for the Aging  
David Stoyell, Tompkins County Office for the Aging  
YooKyung Esther Kim, Tompkins County Office for the Aging Intern

#### ***Introduction and Demographics***

*(slide presentation by Lisa Holmes, Director of the Office for the Aging)*

Most of the increase in the population of older adults (age 60+) in recent years is due to the first wave of the baby boomers hitting the age 60-65 age band. This may, in part, account for the increase in the percent of Tompkins County older adults (88%) who drive themselves, a 10% increase since 2004. Similarly the percentage of older adults reporting transportation problems decreased from 11% in 2004 to 7% in 2012.

Regarding the possible use of technology to access transportation, 82% of older adults in Tompkins County now have computers with internet access; 80% of older adults have both landline and a cell phone.

Planning for transportation and other services will have to take into consideration the increasing needs of numbers of older adults who will be in their 70's-90's in the years 2020-2040 as the baby boomer cohort ages and more give up driving.

### ***Strengths and Highlights***

*(The following is taken from the ITNE report, which was made available to attendees prior to the consensus conference.)*

Ithaca is a transportation-rich community with both public and private transportation options supporting safe, affordable, and green transportation. Residents benefit from air and bus service to travel to out-of-county destinations. TCAT is the major provider of fixed-route bus service within the county.

Area colleges offered incentive programs for carpooling. Zimride and other ridesharing services are active at area campuses. Ithaca Carshare provides, in addition to area car rental companies, the opportunity for participants to drive vehicles without having the costs of ownership.

Paratransit service is offered by Gadabout, Friends in Service Helping (FISH), the TCAT Paratransit service and the Lansing Senior Van. Particular organizations provide van service or rides to their members/clientele including GIAC, some senior housing operators, Disabled American Veterans, and the American Cancer Society. Area taxi service includes a wheelchair-accessible taxi. All TCAT buses are wheelchair accessible.

In addition to the services previously mentioned, several organizations in Tompkins County provide resources that help people access transportation. Catholic Charities provides transportation support through free and discounted bus passes and car repairs. Cooperative Extension's Way2Go Program aims to empower and strengthen the community and to help Tompkins County residents to be more healthy and green by embracing alternative transportation. The Department of Social Services provides emergency assistance, including bus passes and assistance with the cost of car repairs, to those on temporary assistance as well as participants in the "Wheels to Work" program.

## ***Needs, Challenges and Opportunities***

*(The following is a summary of the discussion and findings of this Consensus Conference.)*

We should take care that existing transportation services are sustained as well as enhanced to meet unmet needs and the anticipated increase in demand with the demographic shift. We need to develop sustainable local funding, including from municipalities, for transportation services. In addition to supporting larger providers (e.g., TCAT, Gadabout), we need to sustain other existing services (e.g., van services such as offered by Lansing, GIAC and Titus Towers, wheelchair accessible taxi).

We should explore the feasibility of partnering with existing commercial transportation during off hours (e.g., limos, school buses) to increase services, and engaging businesses and medical providers to help pay for transportation provided to their clients. There is a growing market for Carshare which will require more equipment such as warehouses and office space.

We need to look at the needs of students, working families, and low income folks and ask the question: “Where do their needs intersect with the needs of older adults?” and explore economies of scale to meet common needs. When considering changes, we also need to ask how will changes made for those over 60 affect those who are under 60. Sometimes “aging” and “disabilities” are viewed as separate things when they are not. This can lead to one group not accessing benefits because they erroneously believe the benefits belong to the other group/category; or vice versa, some may take advantage of a benefit that does not apply to them.

Ways might be found to expand insurance/liability coverage so that organizations that have vehicles can allow them to be used, not only for the members/clients, but also by others when not in use. There may be an opportunity for a county-wide program that would distribute the cost of insurance, fuel, etc. and allow more volunteers to use their own cars without affecting their private auto insurance coverage.

It is hard to get volunteer drivers. We need to support and retain volunteer drivers and find ways engage the collective talents of the young and old, especially retiring baby boomers, as volunteers. Training should be provided to both volunteer and paid drivers of people with mobility issues and other disabilities. We should look at possibility of the ITN Everywhere model of incentivizing volunteering by offering credits to volunteer drivers.

Credits or other incentives may also encourage people to use Carshare or give up their cars.

Carshare might consider vehicle donation in exchange for driving credit. This would be limited to late model cars with relatively low mileage, but it may be a way for a senior to use their vehicle asset to cover their driving costs access for a long time. Carsharing also answers the insurance/liability question raised about volunteers using their personal vehicles. However, it isn't a great solution to transporting riders in frail medical situations.

Perhaps the Ithaca Carshare member pool may be a source of volunteers if provided incentives. This could be difficult if the member is expected to cover the cost of the rental. Easier if the person being driven can pay for the trip. Carsharing could then serve as a bridge for retiring from driving. If you drive as a volunteer in your early senior years perhaps you could build up "credit" for being driven after you can no longer drive.

Many older adults are choosing to give up their licenses. Some need a way of having their driving needs assessed. We need to support aging drivers and those retiring from driving.

There is a need to find ways that people in rural areas can make a connection to and from TCAT buses. People in rural areas and many others in the county, especially the increasing numbers of those age 85+, need improved, affordable access to regional medical services. We need to explore more regional and multi-county solutions so that residents in rural areas can get to locations in neighboring counties.

We also need after-hour, weekend, and same-day medical transportation service for urgent needs (e.g., getting needed medication) that don't rise to level of a 911 call. We need a better system for serving people who need help with transportation after outpatient treatment (including dialysis). We need to insure that transportation needs are being considered when new housing is being developed for older adults.

A centralized system may be a better way of handling the array of requests for transportation. With the fast pace of technology change, we need to evaluate how older adults are accessing information and availing themselves of new applications and explore ways of expanding use of new transportation options that involve technology (e.g., Zimride). Are there intergenerational opportunities with our student populations that are very comfortable with technology?

Consumer education and outreach is important. Include discussion of transportation in retirement planning offered to 50+ age cohort. We need to identify the special needs of older adults who may be able to utilize fixed route transit systems to determine how we can accommodate them better (e.g., easing dealing with grocery bags, making sure priority seating is vacated for eligible seniors and other persons). Then we need to advertise improvements and accommodations made on public transit that benefit older adults (and others needing accommodations). We need to educate and inform family and caregivers who can help older adults learn about transportation options for day-to-day as well as emergent situations. Also, we should use peers to pass information to those experiencing transportation difficulties.

Finally, some analysis of available data may help quantify the transportation demand in the senior market. Find out whether data supports the prevailing assumption that seniors are moving into Tompkins County because it is seen as a desirable location to live or age-in-place. Evaluate each town's capacity for retirement-friendliness so that people considering relocating to this region can know where they are going to have better

transportation options. This evaluation should include availability of parking as well as whether there is an ability for older adults to walk to needed services. Find out what the trends of senior ridership are on TCAT and utilization of the wheelchair accessible taxi.

## **Recommendations and Priorities for Action**

*(Participants combined the ideas/issues into 10 affinity groupings which are listed below and they then ranked the 10 groups according to which had highest priority for action. The groups are listed from highest to lowest according to the number of votes received.)*

### **Money/Resources**

1. Grow resources/equipment to meet growing demand for services.
  - Engage businesses and medical providers to help pay for transportation provided to their clients
  - Develop sustainable local funding, including from municipalities, for agencies providing transportation services to help meet the increase in demand.
  - Prioritize funding recipients based on the qualifications each company has.
2. Provide incentives for people to use Carshare or to give up their cars

### **Supporting and Enhancing the Capacity of Existing and Future Services**

1. Provide after-hour, weekend, and same-day urgent medical transportation service for needs that don't rise to level of a 911 call (e.g., getting needed medication).
2. Explore feasibility of partnering with existing commercial transportation during off hours (e.g., limousines, school buses) to increase services
3. Insure that transportation needs and options are being considered when new housing is being developed for older adults.
4. Support TCAT and wheelchair-accessible taxis as usage increases by older adults.
5. Develop central coordination for handling array of requests for transportation.
6. Develop a better system for handling transportation needs of people after outpatient treatment (e.g., dialysis).
7. Sustain existing van services (such as offered at Titus Towers, Greater Ithaca Activities Center and Lansing Van).
8. Explore how people in rural areas can make a connection to and from T-CAT buses.
9. Develop more affordable transportation options for out-of-county medical appointments.
10. Find ways to expand insurance/liability coverage so that organizations that have vehicles can allow them to be used, not only for their own population, but by others when not in use.

### **Rural Community Mobility/Culture**

Address transportation needs of isolated rural persons, especially increasing population of persons 85+:

1. Improve access to regional medical services.
2. Explore more regional and multi-county solutions so that residents in rural areas can get to locations in neighboring counties

### **Consumer Market-Based Transportation Services**

1. There needs to be transportation available for people of all economical levels
2. Explore economies of scale to meet the needs of older adults. Assess where the needs of students, working families, low income folks, intersect with needs of seniors?

### **Consumer Education and Outreach**

1. Include education about transportation options in retirement planning for those age 50+.
2. When considering changes in transportation for those over 60, ask the question: “How will this impact younger people's ability to access needed t?”
3. Advertise improvements and accommodations made by transportation providers to the older population so that they are aware of them (e.g., wheelchair accessible buses)
4. Improve our existing processes in identifying older adults with transportation needs and getting them information about their options. Educate and inform people around them (e.g., families, caregivers, etc.) about options for day to day and emergent situations.
5. Help lower-income seniors know their supports and benefits in regards to transportation
6. Use peers to spread information to people who are having transportation difficulties.
7. Consider whether there are intergenerational opportunities with our student population who feel very comfortable with technology.

### **Technology Change**

Use changes in technology also to support older adults.

1. Evaluate how older adults access information and avail themselves of new applications.
2. Explore ways of expanding use by older adults of new transportation options that involve technology (e.g., Zimride, Carshare).

### **Volunteer Drivers, Support & Retention**

Where are we going to get drivers? It's hard to get volunteer drivers.

1. Recruit both the young and older as volunteers, with special attention to encouraging adults in early retirement (baby boomers) to volunteer.
2. Provide training to paid and volunteer drivers of people who have mobility issues or disabilities

3. Engage the collective talent and skills of the young and elderly so that they can get help when they need it. Volunteer programs such as collective credits should be looked at.
4. Consider adopting the ITN Everywhere model of credits for volunteer drivers, time banking, converting cars into credits for purchasing alternative transportation.
5. Explore possibility of blanket insurance coverage for county for volunteers at multiple agencies—or possibly a county-wide program that would distribute the cost of insurance and allow more volunteers to participate (without their private insurance carrier having to worry about the driver’s efficacy and safety). Such a county program might also purchase fuel or offer other coordination/efficiencies.)
6. Ithaca Carshare may serve as a bridge to retiring from driving. If members drive as a volunteer in their early senior years, perhaps they could build up "credit" for being driven after they can no longer drive.

## **Impact of Acquired Disability on Seniors to Access Transportation Modes**

1. Be careful of how language of “aging” and “disabilities” is framed so that they are not viewed as two separate categories. (There are benefits that one group may not know that they have because they believe it belongs to another group/category. Vice versa, someone may be taking advantage of a benefit that does not apply to them.)

## **Retirement from Driving**

A lot of older adults are choosing to give up their licenses.

1. Support aging drivers and those retiring from driving.
2. Develop ways people can have their driving skills assessed.

## **Demand Analysis for Senior Markets**

1. Uncover and share data establishing whether or not seniors are moving into Tompkins County because it is seen as a desirable location to live or age-in-place? Develop a way of evaluating each town’s capacity for retirement-friendliness. Let people who are considering relocating know where they are going to have better transportation options, or an ability to walk to services that will help them age-in-place easier. Are there transportation options for all income levels?
2. Find out what the trends of senior ridership on TCAT and on wheelchair accessible taxi.
3. Identify the special needs of older adults on the fixed-route transit system. How can we accommodate them better? (e.g., clearing priority seating area, easing their grocery shopping)
4. Assess how current providers are meeting the needs of 85+ age group.

