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COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION PLANNING IN ESSEX COUNTY: A SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Final Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

In 1996, Congress passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. The Act was designed to overhaul federal welfare programs by shifting the emphasis from welfare support services and aid to work responsibility. Welfare reform both nationally and in New Jersey has raised numerous public policy questions and has highlighted a range of personal and institutional barriers that make the transition to work difficult for welfare dependent individuals. One significant barrier is the lack of adequate transportation services allowing transit dependent populations access to jobs, services, goods, health care and recreation in an increasingly dispersed and suburbanized landscape. This problem is often referred to as the spatial mismatch.

In New Jersey, the challenges of the spatial mismatch problem are acute. Approximately two-thirds of New Jersey's existing population and job opportunities are located in suburban counties. Accessing jobs in suburban locations is exceedingly difficult for Newark residents. More than forty-four percent (44.3%) of Newark households are zero-vehicle households – the leading indicator of transit dependency in the United States. In addition, Essex County has the largest TANF (Temporary Aid to Needy Families) and GA (General Assistance) programs in the State and the programs are disproportionately large. Essex County represents only 10% of statewide population, while it has 26% of the state TANF recipients and 30% of state GA participants. While Essex County has an extensive transportation network, there are significant unmet transportation needs related to transit dependent populations.

In preparation for implementing the WorkFirst New Jersey initiative, the state embarked upon a multi-agency, statewide project designed to develop county-based community transportation plans for all twenty-one of New Jersey's counties. This effort, which began in July 1997 and was completed in October 1998, is recognized as a national model of proactive multi-jurisdictional planning. The planning process was intended to profile transit dependent populations, examine the residency characteristics of WorkFirst New Jersey participants, examine the location of employment opportunities, document the public and private transportation services available in each county, identify transportation service gaps, estimate demand for transportation services; investigate and develop alternatives for enhancing transportation services and service delivery systems; and prepare a final plan for the selected alternatives. The Essex County Community Transportation Plan was completed in October 1998.

Recognizing that transportation is a key linkage between city residents and economic opportunity, in January of 2001, the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice hired the Voorhees Transportation Policy Institute(TPI) at Rutgers University to conduct a situational analysis of community transportation planning efforts in Essex County, New Jersey. The scope of the study was focused primarily on employment-related transportation issues and the actions that have been taken to meet the transportation needs of WorkFirst New Jersey clients and the working poor in Essex County. The following is a summary of the opportunities and challenges highlighted in the analysis:

KEY FINDINGS

- Essex County lags behind some New Jersey counties in terms of community transportation planning, process and implementation; however, the recent creation of a position within the Essex County Division of Training and Employment to oversee the implementation of special transportation projects is encouraging and presents an important opportunity to reinvigorate a collaborative community transportation planning process.
- Essex County is split between the service areas of three transportation management associations (TMAs), which, in some regions of New Jersey have played a pivotal role in the community transportation planning process.
- Neither the Essex County nor the City of Newark Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) have a standing committee on transportation. Consequently, it appears that transportation concerns are seldom considered in the critical context of WIB activities.
- The City of Newark recognizes the importance of community transportation needs and services as evidenced by the work of the Mayor's Office on Employment and Training which has engaged specific employers and city workers on an ad-hoc basis, however no policy initiative exists aimed at addressing these issues in a comprehensive way.
- The scope of federal funding resources available for community transportation services is significant. A 1996 study conducted by the Community Transportation Association of America identified "90 programs across 11 Federal departments and six independent Federal agencies that can be used to support community transportation efforts in planning, capital purchase and operating services." Many of the identified programs are not traditionally thought of as programs that support transportation initiatives. In New Jersey, a diverse mix of state, county and local funding options add to the list of resources that could be tapped to support community transportation initiatives. It is important to note that some researchers have asserted that creative leveraging of existing resources and a concerted effort to address redundancies and inefficiencies inherent in our current system of providing transportation services could yield significant improvements in the level of service provided to transit-dependent populations without requiring significant increases in the total funding available.
- In Federal fiscal years 1999 and 2000, Essex County received \$1.3 million in Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC) grants and matching funds toward the implementation of three new employment transportation services. These services included a "night owl" shuttle service from Penn Station Newark to surrounding neighborhoods, a Meadowlands job access shuttle, and a Route 10 job access shuttle. While there were significant implementation delays, the three services are now operating and early interest indicates that the three services hold a great deal of promise.
- In calendar year 2000, Essex County received \$2,175,168 in TANF block grant formula funds. This represents 25% of the \$8,778,599 TANF transportation funds available statewide. The County was unable to deploy these funds. Using the estimated costs of

the new feeder services proposed for the JARC grants as a guide, in concept, this funding could have been used to support at least four new employment-related transportation services.

- The County received a similar allocation of TANF transportation funds for CY2001. These funds were used to launch a shuttle service to transport social service clients between service agency locations in the County. While it is noteworthy that this initiative was not part of the 1998 Essex Community Transportation Plan, the shuttle, known as the WAVE, has performed well in its first year of operation.

CONCLUSIONS

According to national community transportation experts, there a number of critical elements that are central to a successful welfare-to-work transportation project or program. These include: collaboration, leadership, communication, creativity and sustainability (Multisystems, 2000). In a very real sense, these characteristics come together to create a “recipe for success” that can be used to evaluate the community transportation planning and implementation efforts undertaken in Essex County.

Collaboration

One significant ingredient for a successful planning and implementation program is a high level of collaboration and coordination between human service providers, transportation providers and other organizations at the state, regional and local levels. In addition, national experts note that involvement of faith-based, community and grass-roots organizations is an important factor in ensuring program success. They also suggest that “building in coordination from the top” can help to “narrow” the distance between agencies and organizations not accustomed to dealing with one another (Multisystems, 2000).

The lack of involvement by community-based and faith-based organizations providing social services and transportation services in Essex County is a critical deficiency in the Essex County community transportation planning process. While not a comprehensive inventory, a survey of groups providing transportation services conducted as part of the 1997/98 planning process revealed that at least 27 nongovernmental organizations provide demand-responsive transportation services in Essex County. Given the depth and breadth of the groups operating in the greater Newark region, it is likely that these groups could significantly enhance the process with knowledge, energy and leadership.

The foundation of ongoing collaboration put in place as part of the state-initiated planning process was never seized upon by any of the participants in the planning process and has never been built upon. The recent creation of a position within the Essex County Division of Training and Employment to oversee the implementation of special transportation projects is encouraging and presents an important opportunity to reinvigorate a collaborative planning process.

Leadership

The second and perhaps most critical element of successful community transportation programs in New Jersey and nationwide is leadership. National experts note that “the committed leadership of an individual or organization can help to carry a project from planning to implementation,” and suggest that “a strong leader can motivate diverse stakeholders and ensure that their differences enrich the planning process.” (Multisystems, 2000)

In Essex County, there has been inconsistent leadership with regard to community transportation planning. From the public perspective, until recently, the provision of community transportation services has not been a high priority. In part, this situation is facilitated by the extensive nature of the public transportation system in Essex County. While not ideal, it is theoretically possible to reach a substantial number of employment destinations via traditional public transit services. Unfortunately, as noted in the County Community Transportation plan, significant gaps in traditional services do exist and should be addressed.

Simply put, Essex County lacks a transportation champion. In other regions of New Jersey, this role is sometimes filled by transportation management associations (TMAs). Essex County is unique in that the county is split between the service area of three separate TMAs. Two of the TMAs have their primary focus on a larger area outside of Essex County. The other TMA which is charged with servicing both Essex and Union County is operated by NJ Transit. This dilution of focus appears to have created a situation where there is no singular voice uniquely focused on addressing the transportation issues facing Essex County. With refocused attention, the City of Newark, Essex County, any of the three TMAs serving Essex County, or another nongovernmental organization serving the county could play an important leadership role.

Communication

A third important element of successful community transportation planning is open and continuous communication throughout the planning and implementation process. National good practices emphasize “the importance of maintaining communication among program staff, participants and stakeholders.” (Multisystems, 2000) The lack of collaboration and leadership referenced above have resulted in an almost complete breakdown of communication between the parties involved in the community transportation planning process after the plan was completed in 1998. In addition, there appears to be no communication between the County and the City of Newark or other transportation providers operating in the greater Newark region.

Creativity

Another characteristic of successful employment related community transportation initiatives is creativity. National experts note that traditional transportation services do not easily meet the transportation needs of welfare recipients and as a result, innovative responses are required.

The statewide community transportation planning process, through which the Essex County plan was developed, is nationally recognized an example of creative collaboration and the recommended options for addressing unmet transportation needs presented in the Essex County plan are typical of many of the responses to filling transportation service gaps presented in the national literature as examples of best practices.

Two models often showcased as best practices were not included among the recommended options presented in the Essex County plan. These are: 1) creative partnering with non-traditional agencies and organizations; and 2) coordinating transportation services through the use of a “mobility brokerage.” Both concepts seem particularly well-suited to the Essex County context.

Sustainability

The fifth and final characteristic of a successful community transportation initiative is sustainability. Successful programs have incorporated strategies to ensure that results can be sustained over time for both targeted clients and, whenever possible, the general public. Integral to meeting this sustainability goal is comprehensive service planning that includes a focus on the long term.

The *Transportation Services Alternatives and Options* section of the Essex County plan presents seven recommended options for meeting unmet transportation needs in the County. The options are described in general terms and implementation issues are outlined; however, the plan notes that “more detailed planning and analysis is needed to implement the options.” This planning has not occurred, yet the County is moving forward with the implementation of three of the recommended services. This failure to follow through with more detailed planning prior to implementation could compromise the sustainability of these services beyond the seed funding provided by the JARC grants.

In summary, a great deal of work must be done to realize the potential of community transportation initiatives in Essex County. Notwithstanding a number of challenges, it appears that significant opportunities exist to improve the level of transportation service available to county residents.

INTRODUCTION

In 1996, Congress passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. The Act was designed to overhaul federal welfare programs by shifting the emphasis from welfare support services and aid to work responsibility. It set lifetime benefit limits and required that welfare recipients either find work or participate in work related activities such as job training and vocational education (TCRP, 2000). To implement these federal welfare reform mandates, in March of 1997, New Jersey adopted the WorkFirst New Jersey (WFNJ) initiative.

Welfare reform both nationally and in New Jersey has raised numerous public policy questions and has highlighted a range of personal and institutional barriers that make the transition to work difficult for welfare dependent individuals. One significant barrier is the lack of adequate transportation services allowing transit dependent populations access to jobs, services, goods, health care and recreation in an increasingly dispersed and suburbanized landscape. This problem is often referred to as the spatial mismatch.

In New Jersey, the challenges of the spatial mismatch problem are acute. Approximately two-thirds of New Jersey's existing population and job opportunities are located in suburban counties. In 1995, less than half of all private employment opportunities in Essex County were located in the City of Newark. Newark lost nearly 16,000 jobs between 1980 and 1995. This reflects national and statewide trends toward the continued decentralization of jobs to suburban communities.

Accessing jobs in suburban locations is exceedingly difficult for Newark residents. More than forty-four percent (44.3%) of Newark households are zero-vehicle households – the leading indicator of transit dependency in the United States. In addition, Essex County has the largest TANF (Temporary Aid to Needy Families) and GA (General Assistance) programs in the State and the programs are disproportionately large. Essex County represents only 10% of statewide population, while it has 26% of the state TANF recipients and 30% of state GA participants. While Essex County has an extensive transportation network, including 46 fixed route bus and light rail services, two commuter rail lines, private carrier routes providing service to New York City, as well as demand responsive and ridesharing services, there are significant unmet transportation needs related to transit dependent populations.

In preparation for implementing the WFNJ initiative, the state embarked upon a multi-agency, statewide project designed to develop county-based community transportation plans for all twenty-one of New Jersey's counties. This effort began in July 1997 and was completed in October 1998. It is recognized as a national model of proactive multi-jurisdictional planning. The planning process was intended to: profile transit dependent populations; examine the residency characteristics of WorkFirst New Jersey participants; examine the location of employment opportunities; document the public and private transportation services available in each county; identify transportation service gaps; estimate demand for transportation services; investigate and develop alternatives for enhancing transportation services and service delivery systems; and prepare a final plan for the selected alternatives.

The Essex County Community Transportation Plan was completed in October 1998. Subsequently, the County was awarded several million dollars in formula and block grant funds to implement several of the plan recommendations. Unfortunately, as of December 2001, more than three years after the plan was completed, little progress had been made in implementing the improvements outlined in the plan.

Recognizing that transportation is a key linkage between city residents and economic opportunity, in January of 2001, the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice hired the Voorhees Transportation Policy Institute (VTPI) at Rutgers University to conduct a situational analysis of community transportation planning efforts in Essex County, New Jersey. The scope of the study was focused primarily on employment-related transportation issues and the actions that have been taken to meet the transportation needs of WorkFirst NJ clients and the working poor in Essex County.

This report is intended to present the findings of VTPI's investigation and to make recommendations for shaping the future of community transportation planning in Essex County.

THE NEW JERSEY STATEWIDE COUNTY AND COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION PLANNING INITIATIVE

In 1997, the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT), in cooperation with NJ TRANSIT, NJ Department of Human Services, NJ Department of Labor and the State Employment and Training Commission launched a year-long initiative designed to develop county-based community transportation plans for each of the state's twenty-one counties. The planning process was intended to profile transit dependent populations, examine the residency characteristics of Workfirst New Jersey participants, examine the location of employment opportunities and document the public and private transportation services available in each county. The emphasis of the planning effort was on employment-related transportation issues in the context of the Workfirst New Jersey initiative.

As part of the project, each county was asked to complete the following tasks and was provided with the technical support of a planning consultant hired by the state:

- establish a county steering committee to oversee the planning process;
- adopt planning goals and objectives;
- identify barriers to service coordination;
- prepare an inventory of existing transportation services;
- identify WorkFirst NJ and transit dependent populations and identify major origins and destinations for these groups;
- identify transportation service gaps;
- estimate demand for transportation services;
- investigate and develop alternatives for enhancing transportation services and service delivery systems; and
- prepare a final plan for the selected alternatives.

The Essex County Community Transportation Plan

The Community Transportation Plan for Essex County was completed in October 1998. The plan was developed in consultation with a steering committee composed of representatives from the Essex County Workforce Investment Board, Essex County Department of Citizen Services, Division on Aging, Division of Planning and Economic Development, NJ Department of Labor, NJ Department of Human Services, NJ TRANSIT, Meadowlink TMA, Programs for Parents, NJ Division of Family Development, the Mayor's Office of Employment Training and Jewish Vocational Services. The goals of the plan are:

1. To develop improved local, county and statewide services that can help to meet the transportation needs of the Workfirst New Jersey program.
2. To improve services for other transit dependent populations such as seniors and persons with disabilities.
3. To provide improved mobility for all community residents.
4. To improve the coordination of separate services (e.g., transit and human service client systems) in order to provide efficiencies and capacity to meet additional needs.
5. To develop public support for the funding and implementation of services and changes to address the above objectives.

Regarding transportation needs, the demographic and public assistance profile of Essex County is noteworthy. Essex has the largest TANF (Temporary Aid to Needy Families) and GA (General Assistance) programs in the State and the programs are disproportionately large. Essex County represents only 10% of statewide population, while it has 26% of the state TANF recipients and 30% of state GA participants. 25% of WorkFirst New Jersey participants reside in Essex County. It is not surprising then, that 44.3% of Newark's households are zero-vehicle households – the leading indicator of transit dependency in the United States.

In the context of Essex County demographics, the plan notes that the county has an extensive transportation network that includes 46 fixed route bus and light rail services, two commuter rail lines, private carrier bus services providing express service to New York City, as well as demand responsive and ridesharing services. The plan also cites the finding that 99.5% of Essex County TANF recipients live within a ¼ mile of a bus route or rail station and that 94% of jobs in Essex County are within a ¼ mile of a bus route and 98% were within a ½ mile. Despite this seemingly comprehensive network of transit services, there are significant unmet transportation needs in the county. The Plan identified the “major” transportation service gaps in Essex County as follows:

1. There is a need for improved transit access to jobs at Newark International Airport, including improved coordination of NJ TRANSIT services and private shuttle services;
2. There is a need for additional transportation in the City of Newark between the hours of 1:00 and 5:00 AM to connect with all night service provided on NJ TRANSIT Route 62 and PATH;

3. There is a need for transportation to jobs in the Fairfield/West Caldwell area, the Route 10 area of Livingston and West Hanover, and in the Meadowlands area, at appropriate shift times for several companies; and
4. There is a need for a better information system to assist WFNJ staff to match clients and jobs with transit and ridesharing options;

In addition, the plan notes that the need for improved transportation services to access child care is unclear and should be re-evaluated as more WFNJ participants become employed and that the demand for paratransit services exceeds the current capacity of transportation service delivery systems for senior citizens and disabled persons for non-medical trips.

Based on the analysis conducted in support of the planning process and with the assistance of the local steering committee, a number of transportation service alternatives and options were explored. The Plan includes seven specific options for addressing unmet transportation needs, resolving issues related to uncoordinated transportation services and initiating new or enhanced transportation services. The options include:

1. Create an airport job access committee;
2. Initiate a Newark “night owl” feeder service;
3. Develop a Fairfield/West Caldwell job access program;
4. Develop a Route 10 job access program;
5. Develop a Meadowlands job access program;
6. Institute a WorkPass program; and
7. Implement a system to provide transit information for WFNJ job placement counselors.

Each of the options is detailed in general terms, in the plan, but the plan notes that further refinement and analysis is needed in order to implement any of the options.

SITUATIONAL ASSESSMENT

The primary purpose of this study was to assess the current status of employment-related community transportation planning and implementation process in Essex County. To accomplish this charge, the VTPI project team reviewed relevant research and documents and interviewed individuals and representatives of organizations with knowledge of the planning and implementation process in Essex County. This section presents the key findings of that investigation.

Findings

Process and Plan:

- The statewide community transportation planning initiative undertaken in New Jersey is viewed as a national model for multi-agency statewide coordination and planning. The program recently received an award from the Washington, DC based American Public Transportation Association (APTA).
- The “options” presented in the Essex County plan for meeting the unmet transportation needs and resolving problems of coordination are typical of those presented in other NJ

county plans and those represented as “best practices” in the national literature. They are not, however, representative of the full range of planning and service alternatives available.

- In 2000, a number of counties reconvened their planning process to begin work on an update to the 1998 plans. The steering committee, originally convened to guide the development of the 1998 Essex County plan, has not met since the plan was completed, and until February 2001, the county had not begun the plan update process. In addition, there appears to be very little, if any, informal communication or coordination between the various members of the steering committee or between the City of Newark and Essex County in the area of community transportation services.

Public & Nonprofit Leadership

- An important component of successful community transportation initiatives is strong public or non-profit leadership. In New Jersey, this leadership is sometimes provided by nonprofit transportation management associations. Mercer, Burlington and Camden counties are described by NJ Transit as consistent performers in the area of community transportation planning, coordination and implementation. In Mercer and Burlington counties, the active participation of Greater Mercer TMA (Mercer) and Cross-county Connection TMA (Burlington) is an important factor in their success. In Camden County, while sometimes taking an unorthodox approach, the City of Camden plays an important role in attracting funding and following through on implementation. This leadership appears to be lacking in Essex County.
- In 1999, Essex County restructured its departments and divisions delivering workforce-related social services and made a policy decision to focus on local economic development and housing location as a way to address spatial mismatch issues related to welfare reform. The County’s strategy relies heavily on addressing spatial mismatch issues by pursuing policies designed to foster job creation in proximity to city workers and to create opportunities for affordable housing in proximity to suburban job centers. One of the first projects that will be undertaken by the county to assist in addressing the spatial mismatch issue will be the creation of an integrated database capturing the location of job opportunities, affordable housing, and transit-dependent populations, as well as the dollars spent by the county on various social service programs, including transportation. The idea is to create a map-able database available over the internet that will facilitate the tracking of spatial relationships and social service investments over time.

While the goals of this strategy are laudable, it appears to have several drawbacks. First, the long term focus may be at the expense of meeting the short term social service needs (including but not limited to transportation) of the working poor and the unemployed. In addition, this approach is extremely difficult, because to make perceptible gains, it would require significant bending of market and social trends that are far beyond Essex County’s control.

- The leadership gap is exacerbated by the fact that the county is split between the service areas of three transportation management associations (TMAs) – TransOptions TMA which serves suburban Essex County, NJ Transit operated Transit Plus TMA which serves the remainder of Essex and all of Union County, and Meadowlink which serves the Meadowlands region and facilities operated by the Port Authority of NY & NJ.
- Neither the Essex County nor the City of Newark Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) have a standing committee on transportation. Consequently, it appears that transportation concerns are seldom, if ever, considered in the context of WIB activities.
- The City of Newark recognizes the importance of community transportation needs and services as evidenced by the work of the Mayor’s Office on Employment and Training which has engaged specific employers and city workers on an ad-hoc basis, however no policy initiative exists aimed at addressing these issues in a comprehensive way.

Implementation and Funding

- It does not appear that community transportation needs/services have been a priority in Essex County since the county restructuring in 1999. Furthermore, the community transportation planning process has been given little attention in the two years since the 1998 CTP was adopted. As described by the County, the delivery of transportation services became secondary to other welfare reform issues such as child care and employment training, and larger initiatives such as economic development and housing location policies emerged as the priority policy response to welfare reform.
- There has been significant staff turnover in the City of Newark and Essex County since the Essex County Community Transportation Plan (CTP) was completed in 1998. In fact, among those presently charged with community transportation planning and implementation activities, none were directly involved in the development of the 1998 plan. Consequently, there is little, if any “ownership” in the existing plan. To make the situation worse, there is very little if any communication/coordination between Essex County, the City of Newark, the non-profit network of service providers and employers regarding community transportation needs and services.
- The net result of this lack of focus, communication, and coordination is that Essex County lags behind other NJ counties in terms of community transportation planning, process and implementation. Table 1 provides a comparative review and status report on the implementation agenda and schedule presented in the 1998 plan.
- The scope of federal funding resources available for community transportation services is significant. A 1996 study conducted by the Community Transportation Association of America identified “90 programs across 11 Federal departments and six independent Federal agencies that can be used to support community transportation efforts in planning, capital purchase and operating services”; however, three Federal funding programs make up the largest share of funding used for employment-related community transportation services. They are:

1. Temporary Aid to Needed Families (TANF) block grants administered by the US Department of Health and Human Services;
2. Welfare to Work (WtW) formula and competitive grants administered by the US Department of Labor; and
3. Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) grants administered by the US Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration.

(<http://www.fta.dot.gov/wtw/uoft.html>)

Table 1 – Implementation of Essex County CTP Recommendations		
Option	Estimated Schedule	Status
1. Airport Job Access Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nov. 1998: organize ▪ Dec. 1998: startup 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No action taken.
2. Newark Owl Feeder Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nov. 1998 - Jan. 1999: refine service plan ▪ Feb. - May 1999: arrange funding ▪ June - Aug. 1999: negotiate service agreement ▪ Nov. 1999: startup 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ FY99 & FY00 JARC grants received; ▪ RFP for services issued in 9/01; <p><i>Note: Service initiated Spring 2002.</i></p>
3. Fairfield/West Caldwell Job Access Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Feb. 1999: Employer Transportation Summit ▪ 6-9 months: refine service plan / coordinate with Passaic County; arrange funding; negotiate service agreement, or make NJT schedule changes ▪ Late 1999: startup 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No action taken.
4. Route 10 Job Access Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Feb. 1999: Employer Transportation Summit ▪ 6-9 months: refine service plan; arrange funding; negotiate service agreement, or make NJT schedule changes ▪ Late 1999: startup 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No action taken on Employer transportation summit; ▪ FY00 JARC grant received; ▪ RFP for services issued in 9/01; ▪ Responses to RFP due 11/01; <p><i>Note: Service initiated Spring 2002.</i></p>
5. Meadowlands Job Access Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Feb. 1999: Employer contacts ▪ 6-9 months: refine service plan / coordinate with Hudson and Bergen County; arrange funding; negotiate service agreement, or make NJT schedule changes ▪ Late. 1999: startup 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ FY99 JARC grant received; ▪ RFP for services issued in 9/01; ▪ Responses to RFP due 11/01; <p><i>Note: Service initiated Spring 2002.</i></p>
6. WorkPass	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1999 state approval for block grant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Partially implemented for monthly passes only.
7. Transit Information for WFNJ Job Placement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nov./Dec. 1998: supply vendors with information ▪ Nov. 1998 - Jan. 1999: develop liaison with TMA's 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No action taken

- Another sizable source of potential funding in New Jersey is Casino revenue. Seven and one-half percent (7.5%) of casino revenue generated annually is dedicated to providing transportation services to the senior and disabled populations. For CY2001, Essex County received approximately \$1.8 million. While Essex County is currently using these funds to support traditional senior and disabled services, this funding source is being administered so as to maximize services for seniors and people with disabilities without precluding the use of equipment and services by other populations, and could be used to support employment transportation services.
- Essex County received a total of \$1,297,199 as part of the FY99 and FY00 FTA JARC competitive grant program. Table 2 provides a break down of funding received by Essex County.

Table 2 – Job Access Reverse Commute grants received by Essex County				
FISCAL YEAR 1999 – Competitive Grants				
<u>Project</u>	<u>JARC</u>	<u>State Match*</u>	<u>Other</u>	<u>Total</u>
Night Owl Feeder Service (Yr1)	\$106,000	\$136,099	N/A	\$242,099
Meadowlands Feeder Service	\$250,000	\$125,000	\$125,000	<u>\$500,000</u>
TOTAL				\$742,099
FISCAL YEAR 2000 – Competitive Grants				
<u>Project</u>	<u>JARC</u>	<u>State Match*</u>	<u>Other</u>	<u>Total</u>
Night Owl Feeder Service (Yr2)	\$152,550	\$152,550	N/A	\$305,100
Route 10 Feeder Service	\$125,000	\$125,000	N/A	<u>\$250,000</u>
TOTAL				\$555,100
* State match is comprised of 50% TANF and 50% WtW block grant funding passed through NJDHHS and NJDOL respectively.				

- There was a significant delay in the implementation of federal Job Access & Reverse Commute (JARC) competitive grants won by Essex County in FY1999 and FY2000. There appears to be many contributing factors related to these delays. These factors include: slow preparatory work and follow through by the County in responding to the notice of awards; a long delay in the actual funds being made available for use by the county from the federal government; and stringent regulatory guidance related to the administration and implementation of the program.

In this regard, the County described NJ Transit as inflexible and non-responsive to their needs as a small transit operating agency. According to NJ Transit, the JARC program is being administered by the Federal Transit Administration under guidelines that govern much larger funding programs associated with traditional transit operating support. According to NJ Transit, this administrative framework is inconsistent with the goals of the program that were intended to encourage local and county governments and non-governmental entities to apply for funding to operate services. The monitoring and

reporting requirements seem inconsistent with the level of funding provided which is comparatively small.

NJ Transit reported that those counties that received JARC grants and which had experience with the monitoring and reporting requirements of FTA funded programs, did not find the requirements of the JARC program extraordinarily burdensome. Essex County and Union County received JARC grants, but had no previous experience with FTA programs. Both counties found the requirements onerous. In fact, Union County declined the grant and opted out of the program.

- 12 New Jersey projects totaling \$3,652,136 were funded in FY99. 14 New Jersey projects totaling \$4,255,524 were funded in FY00. Table 3 presents the status of the FY99 JARC awards.

Table 3 – Status of FY 1999 JARC Awards	
<u>Project</u>	<u>Status</u>
1. Bergen County demand-responsive, fixed-route and subscription van service	Expansion of existing program, service began 1/00
2. Burlington County UEZ Mt. Holly – Pemberton Shuttle	Service began 6/00
3. Camden County job access shuttle	Expansion of existing program, service began 10/99
4. Essex County “Night Owl” feeder service and Meadowlands feeder service (2 projects)	RFP for professional services issued, no contract awarded.
5. Hudson County “2 nd and 3 rd Shift” shuttle service	Expansion of existing program, service began 1/00
6. Hunterdon County transportation broker/high-tech dispatching demo project	Scheduled to begin service in 2001
7. Mercer County Route 130 corridor shuttle	Scheduled to begin service in 1/01
8. Middlesex County transportation broker and information center	Service began 12/00
9. Ocean County Seaside Heights – Route 37 bus service and “South County” shared ride taxi service (2 projects)	Scheduled to begin service 1/01
10. Union County weekend/late evening shuttle	Declined grant.

***NOTE: Status as of July, 2001**

- An RFP for professional services to design and implement the 3 Essex County JARC projects was drafted and issued by the Essex County Department of Economic Development, Training and Employment in the Fall of 2001. The county is in the process of reviewing responses and awarding contracts. *(Note: Services began operation in Spring 2002)*
- Based on our preliminary investigation regarding the FY99/FY00 JARC competitive grant funding, it appears that the FTA-JARC portion of the funding is secure and will not be lost due to non-performance on the grants; however, there is a possibility that the FY 99 Welfare to Work (WtW) state matching funds from the state Transportation Innovation Fund will be in jeopardy. This represents 50% of the state match presented in the above table. The state has applied for a two-year extension to use these and other welfare reform block grant funds. A decision in this regard is pending.
- The JARC program was 100% earmarked in FY2001. New Jersey did not receive any funding. The JARC program transitioned to a formula driven program in FY2002. New Jersey received approximately \$3 million in FY 2002. This funding will be used to maintain services previously funded with JARC funds and to initiate a limited number of new services on a competitive grant basis. It should be noted that the program will sunset with TEA-21 and may or may not be authorized in 2003.
- In calendar year 2000, Essex County received \$2,175,168 in TANF block grant formula funds. This represents 25% of the \$8,778,599 TANF transportation funds available statewide. The breakdown of CY2000 was as follows:

CALENDAR YEAR 2000 – Formula Allocations	
<u>Program</u>	<u>Allocation</u>
Grants to serve TANF population	\$1,583,984
Grants to serve post-TANF population	<u>591,184</u>
Total	\$2,175,168

- **The County was unable to deploy CY2000 TANF funds.** Using the estimated costs of the new feeder services proposed for the Essex County JARC grants as a guide, in concept, this funding could have been used to support as many as four new employment-related shuttle services.
- The County received a similar allocation of TANF transportation funds for CY2001. The funds will be used to launch two new transportation initiatives: 1) a shuttle service to transport social service clients between service agency locations in the County, and 2) a program designed to foster automobile ownership by soliciting and accepting the donation of vehicles and the distribution of donated vehicles to the TANF and post-TANF eligible clients. It is noteworthy that neither initiative was part of the 1998 Essex Community Transportation Plan. *(Note: Operation of the inter-agency shuttle service began in 2001).*

CONCLUSIONS

In 2000, the Federal Transit Administration, through the Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP), published a report entitled “Guidebook for Developing Welfare-to-Work Transportation Services” (hereinafter Guidebook). The TCRP Guidebook examined community responses to employment-related transportation issues from around the country. It provides a useful framework of “lessons learned” from the programs highlighted as best practices in the report. The lessons learned are presented in five general categories: collaboration, leadership, communication, creativity and sustainability. In a very real sense, these categories come together to create a “recipe for success” that can be used to evaluate the community transportation planning and implementation efforts undertaken in Essex County. Our conclusions have been organized around these five components of a successful program.

Collaboration

One significant ingredient for a successful planning and implementation program is a high level of collaboration and coordination between human services providers, transportation providers and other organizations at the state, regional and local levels. The guidebook notes that successful programs are characterized by agencies and groups “joining forces...to translate their agency-specific experience into cooperative efforts.” In addition, it notes that, for several programs, the involvement of faith-based, community and grass-roots organizations was an important factor in ensuring program success. Finally, the report suggests that “building in coordination from the top” can help to “narrow” the distance between agencies and organizations not accustomed to dealing with one another.

The lack of involvement by community-based and faith-based organizations providing social services and transportation services in Essex County is a critical deficiency in the Essex County process. While not a comprehensive inventory, a survey of groups providing transportation services conducted as part of the 1997/98 planning process revealed that at least 27 nongovernmental organizations provide demand-responsive transportation services in Essex County. Given the depth and breadth of the groups operating in the greater Newark region, it is likely that these groups could significantly enhance the process with knowledge, energy and leadership.

The Essex County community transportation planning process has a mixed history relative to collaboration and coordination. As previously noted, the planning process began under the framework of a multi-agency statewide initiative. This starting point clearly provided “coordination from the top.” In addition, the process included the collaboration of various social service and transportation agencies at the state and local level and included minor involvement by the nongovernmental sector; however, the involvement of nongovernmental organizations appears to have been limited to transportation management associations.

Notwithstanding the above, the most critical flaw in the on-going planning process is that collaboration and coordination appears to have ended when the County Community Transportation Plan was completed in October of 1998. At that time, control and “ownership” of the plan and process was intended to transfer from the state to the county. This transition never occurred. In fact, the project steering committee formed to facilitate on-going

collaboration was never reconvened. A reconstituted steering committee was convened in the fall of 2001 in response to a state required two-year plan update cycle and a plan update was submitted by Essex County in November 2001; however, Essex County and the City of Newark demonstrate little ownership in the plan and do not appear to be significantly focused on its implementation. The foundation of ongoing collaboration put in place as part of the state-initiated planning process in 1998 was never seized upon by the county or any other participant in the planning process and has never been built upon. *(Note: The recent creation of a position within the Essex County Division of Training and Employment to oversee the implementation of special transportation projects is encouraging and presents an important opportunity to reinvigorate a collaborative planning process.)*

Leadership

The second and perhaps most critical element of successful community transportation programs in New Jersey and nationwide is leadership. The TCRP Guidebook highlights the importance of leadership and notes that “the committed leadership of an individual or organization can help to carry a project from planning to implementation.” The Guidebook further suggests that “a strong leader can motivate diverse stakeholders and ensure that their differences enrich the planning process.”

In Essex County, there appears to be a significant leadership gap with regard to community transportation planning. As noted in our findings, both public and non-profit leadership is lacking. From the public perspective, the provision of community transportation services is not a high priority. This appears to be true for several reasons. First, Essex County has made a policy decision to focus planning efforts to address spatial mismatch issues with economic development and housing location strategies, rather than the provision of direct transportation services. Second, the sheer scope of social service needs in Essex County is so significant that other needs such as child care, employment training and health care are given precedence by both Essex County and the City of Newark. In part, this approach is facilitated by the extensive nature of Essex’s public transportation system. While not ideal, it is theoretically possible to reach a substantial number of employment destinations via traditional public transit services. Unfortunately, as noted in the County Community Transportation plan, significant gaps in traditional services do exist and should be addressed.

For many of the same reasons, nongovernmental leadership is similarly lacking in Essex County. Simply put, Essex County lacks a transportation champion. In other regions of New Jersey, this role has been filled by transportation management associations (TMAs). Essex County is unique in that the county is split between the service area of three separate TMAs. Two of the TMAs have their primary focus on a larger area outside of Essex County. The other TMA which is charged with servicing both Essex and Union County is operated by NJ Transit. This dilution of focus appears to have created a situation where there is no singular voice keeping transportation issues and needs on the public policy agenda and uniquely focused on addressing the transportation issues facing Essex County.

Communication

A third important element of successful community transportation planning is open and continuous communication throughout the planning and implementation process. The TCRP Guidebook advises not to “underestimate the importance of maintaining communication among program staff, participants and stakeholders.” The apparent leadership gap and lack of collaboration referenced above have resulted in an almost complete breakdown of communication between the parties involved in the community transportation planning process after the plan was completed in 1998. As previously noted, the community transportation planning steering committee has not met in more than two years. Presently, the only dialogue on community transportation planning in Essex County appears to be between the County and NJ Transit regarding the implementation of a WorkPass program and the three Job Access & Reverse Commute grants received by the county in fiscal years 1999 and 2000. In addition, there appears to be no communication between the County and the City of Newark or other social service and transportation providers operating in the greater Newark region.

Creativity

Another characteristic of successful employment related community transportation initiatives is creativity. The TCRP Guidebook notes that traditional transportation services do not easily meet the transportation needs of welfare recipients. As such, innovative responses are required. The report observes that a common trait of many

THE TRANSPORTATION BROKER MODEL

The transportation broker model is an administrative structure designed to help coordinate a wide range of transportation services funded and operated under the auspices of multiple social service programs by a variety of transportation service providers. It provides a cost-effective, politically neutral means of providing community transportation services. Similar to the concept of a Health Maintenance Organization for health care services, a transportation broker provides administrative services and sub-contracts for transportation services. This arrangement creates an incentive to keep the cost of transportation services low and provides the means to introduce competition among transportation service providers. In addition, the transportation broker can concentrate on marketing and administration, two essential and often neglected components of a successful community transportation system. Transportation brokers initially gained popularity in managing the transportation of Medicaid clients and have the potential to serve multiple programs, creating economies of scale as more programs and riders participate in their systems. Medicaid transportation brokers now operate in Florida, Maryland, Massachusetts, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington. Many of these brokers are expanding their client network and working toward the creation of community transportation systems, serving Medicaid and welfare participants as well as the general population.

In New Jersey, the closest equivalent to a transportation broker is Hunterdon County where the Department of Human Services provides suburban fixed route and demand response services to human services clients, seniors, individuals with disabilities, and the general population. It should be noted, however, that the low number of riders and suburban development pattern in Hunterdon County are very different from that of the more urbanized portions of the State. Few comparisons should be made for the purpose of planning and implementing a transportation broker in Essex County. In Hunterdon, a single provider is adequate and efficient. A true transportation broker separates the broker function from the service delivery function in order to create competition among service providers and drive efficiency.

In 1997, the New Jersey Department of Human Services issued an RFP for a transportation broker to broker TANF and non-emergency Medicaid trips. Only a few companies bid on the service, and the Department opted not to contract with any of the bidders. Informal feedback from potential bidders indicated that the lack of data about the number of trips made risk for investment too great.

successful programs is that planners were “thinking out of the box.”

The statewide community transportation planning process through which the Essex County plan was developed is recognized in the Guidebook as an example of creative collaboration. This creative context resulted in a number of innovative approaches to dealing with welfare-related transportation issues in New Jersey; however, the recommended options for addressing unmet transportation needs presented in the Essex County plan were typical of many of the responses to filling transportation service gaps presented in the TCRP Guidebook as examples of best practices.

Two models highlighted in the Guidebook that were not included among the recommended options presented in the Essex County plan are creative partnering with non-traditional agencies and organizations and coordinating transportation services through the use of “mobility brokers.” Both concepts seem particularly well-suited to the Essex County context. First, as previously noted, Essex has a well-developed network of community and faith-based organizations that have strong connections with the targeted population. This network could provide fertile ground for forging new partnerships. It does not appear that this opportunity was fully explored as part of the 1998 planning process.

In addition, our interviews revealed at least one example of an untapped opportunity to forge a new public-private partnership to fund and operate new transportation services. This example involves UPS which operates a worksite in Secaucus. UPS has expressed a willingness to fund an employee shuttle service, but they are not willing to take on the liability of operating the service. To date, the City of Newark has been unable to broker a partnership with NJ Transit to operate the service. UPS has initiated similar shuttles in other jurisdictions. Opportunities such as this one have not been fully explored and utilized in Essex.

The second model with potential for application in Essex County is the creation of a “mobility brokerage” whose purpose is to promote better coordination and integration of transportation services offered by a range of traditional and non-traditional service providers. There is a growing body of national research documenting the flexibility of transportation services funded by a wide variety of federal funding programs. The prevailing operating assumption by many, including Essex County staff and many transportation service providers, is that most federal and state transportation funding programs offer little flexibility in how funds are used and who can be served. Greater education is needed regarding the flexibility of funding programs to facilitate and encourage a more integrated system of delivering community transportation services that maximize limited resources and eliminate the duplication of services and administration.

Sustainability

The TCRP Guidebook suggests that the fifth and final characteristic of a successful community transportation initiative is sustainability, noting that “successful programs have incorporated strategies to ensure that results can be sustained over time for targeted clients and in some cases the general public.” Integral to meeting this sustainability goal is comprehensive service planning, that includes a focus on the long term. This is especially important for services funded via seed money such as Job Access & Reverse Commute grants. As previously described, the *Transportation Services Alternatives and Options* section of the Essex County plan presents seven

recommended options for meeting unmet transportation needs in the County. The options are described in general terms and implementation issues are outlined; however, the plan clearly notes that “more detailed planning and analysis is needed to implement the options.” This planning has not occurred, yet the County is moving forward with the implementation of three of the recommended services. This failure to follow through with more detailed planning prior to implementation could compromise the sustainability of these services beyond the funding provided by the JARC grants.

In summary, a great deal of work must be done to realize the potential of community transportation initiatives in Essex County. With that said, we believe that significant opportunities exist to improve the level of transportation service available to county residents. We also believe that NJISJ could play an important dual role as catalyst and watchdog in the community transportation planning process. Based on our investigation, there appears to be a significant leadership gap that needs to be filled. The challenge will be for NJISJ to decide what level of commitment it is inclined to dedicate toward future actions in this regard.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our recommendations are structured around a two phase “stepped” approach to intervention and participation in the Essex County community transportation planning process. The first phase includes near-term actions related to education, outreach and relationship-building, as well as an assessment of how supportive the “working environment” will be for implementing one or more of the Phase two options.

Phase I – Education and Outreach

As noted in the findings and conclusions section of this report, coordination, cooperation and collaboration are virtually absent from the community transportation planning framework that now exists in Essex County. This situation must be changed. An outreach strategy should be devised that will help to raise awareness regarding the importance of community transportation services to residents in the county. The outreach strategy should include interviews, meetings and other forums with elected/appointed officials, NGO service providers, employers and potential service users. In addition, the strategy should seek to foster relationship-building by providing opportunities for interaction between institutional decision-makers, those who need service and those who provide services. This could be done through brokered meetings between individuals and groups as well as sponsoring workshops and/or conferences.

The outreach effort should ideally result in three outcomes. First, community transportation planning is elevated on the public policy agenda of key decision-making entities such as the County, the City of Newark and Essex County Workforce Investment Boards, municipal governing bodies, and members of the Essex County NGO community. Second, new or enhanced partnerships are formed to facilitate future collaboration. Third, NJISJ is established as an institutional leader in the community transportation planning process in Essex County.

As mentioned above, phase one should conclude with an critical assessment of the post-outreach community transportation policy environment. This assessment should inform NJISJ’s decision regarding which of the four phase two options should be pursued.

Phase II – Institutionalizing Change

Phase two includes three “action” options and one “no action” option. While not our preferred alternative, given the complex and challenging set of problems set forth in this report a “no action” option will certainly be defensible. As you will see, each of the phase two options represents varying levels of commitment and resources on the part of NJISJ. We recommend that the range of possible actions be used to inform the outreach efforts; however, a decision as to which option is preferable should be reserved until after the outreach and education efforts are nearly complete.

Option 1 – This option would require the highest level of commitment and resources. Under this model, NJISJ would make community transportation in Essex County a priority and would provide much needed leadership in the planning and implementation process. Given the status of the current process and the posture of the County during our interview with them, it appears that NJISJ’s role would need to straddle a line between facilitator and watchdog. The County put forth a position that they did not see the need for intervention, nor did they see a role for NJISJ. The City of Newark, on the other hand, suggested that NJISJ could play an important role as an outside facilitator. The political implications of NJISJ intervention would need to be assessed.

The level of effort imagined under this option would require sustained commitment and outside funding; however, the need for leadership in this instance is significant and in our estimation, would lend itself to foundation support. This model could work under a variety of institutional frameworks. For instance, the effort could be sustained “in-house” and/or through NJISJ’s establishment of a new organization focused on keeping transportation and the needs of transit dependent populations on the public policy agenda in Newark and in Essex County. Specifically, serious consideration should be given to the concept of creating a “mobility broker” as part of this effort.

As outlined in the text box on page 20 of the report, a mobility brokerage coordinates and manages a range of transportation services provided by a range of service providers in a particular service area. In this case, the service area could include all of Essex County, a sub-set of the county or another region defined by operational boundaries rather than political jurisdictions. The brokerage would also coordinate a range of funding and fare-reimbursement programs. In simple terms, the mobility brokerage is a “one-stop” for information and resources on what is the most appropriate transportation service available to meet a particular client’s need and what options are available to pay for that service.

Option 2 – This option is a modification of Option 1 and would require a lower level of commitment and resources. Under this option, NJISJ would play the role of catalyst by cultivating a relationship with an existing organization (e.g., one of the existing TMAs or another NGO serving Newark or Essex County) to focus attention and energy on community transportation planning. In this case, NJISJ would nurture the needed leadership and actions without the burden of establishing a new institutional infrastructure. The trade-off would be a less visible role for NJISJ and less control over the process and outcomes. The concept of creating a “mobility broker” should again be given serious consideration under this option.

Option 3 – This option would require the lowest level of commitment and resources in the long term; however, in the short term it will involve a moderate level of programmatic attention. Under this option, NJISJ would act as a convener or facilitator. The effort would be a follow-up to the phase one outreach and education efforts and would include individual meetings with key stakeholders and nurturing relationships between various agencies and organizations. In the short term, this option would address a portion of the leadership gap and could foster sustainable collaboration, coordination and communication that does not presently exist. Ideally, in the mid to long term, this role would be transitioned to an existing public or nongovernmental organization.

“No Action” Option – As with any problem solving initiative, for a variety of reasons, it may be prudent to take no action at all. After reviewing our findings and conclusions, this option is clearly defensible. The magnitude of the challenges described above is significant. Making a sustainable change in the current community transportation planning and implementation process will require medium to long term institutional commitment and significant staff and financial resources.

REFERENCES:

Multisystems, Inc. Guidebook for Developing Welfare-to-work Transportation Services. Transit Cooperative Research Program, Report No. 64. Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2000.