

Accessible Transit 2001: A Model for Building and Supporting Local Transit Coalitions

Easter Seals North Carolina



Creating solutions. changing lives.

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Overview of the Coalition Building Model

Recognizing that people with disabilities frequently find themselves and their opportunities limited by the lack of accessible public transportation, Easter Seals North Carolina embarked on a two year long project to bring people together in local communities to form transit coalitions that advocate for change. The project, called Accessible Transit 2001, empowered people with disabilities and other transit advocates to learn more about their local transportation system, brainstorm possible solutions, lobby elected leaders and educate the general public about transportation issues. As part of its strategy, Easter Seals funded coalition driven pilot projects with \$5000 mini-grants.

There were two phases to Accessible Transit 2001. Phase I involved developing a *statewide core group* of stakeholders in order to build capacity for subsequent activities. In January 1998, Easter Seals formed a 25-member *statewide core group* to build a productive partnership between people needing and using transit services and those people in state-level policy-making positions. Membership included people with disabilities, family members, local transit providers, disability organizations, and officials from North Carolina Department of Transportation. Easter Seals believes that an informed leadership leads to better services and infrastructures for all citizens. This core group received extensive training to develop leadership skills and expertise in transportation issues such as funding and operations. The first phase of Accessible Transit 2001 lasted six months and was funded through a grant from the North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities.

With a \$148,000 grant from Project ACTION, Easter Seals implemented the second phase of Accessible Transit 2001. Phase II of Accessible Transit 2001 built upon the work of the *statewide core group* by developing nine regional transit coalitions. The core group members served as organizers and local leaders of coalitions in their community. Easter Seals supported each developing coalition by providing the following resources:

- Funding to each coalition for coalition building expenses such as participant transportation, meeting expenses, training, etc.
- A coalition assistant for each coalition who worked part-time on coalition activities.
- Training, consultation, and technical assistance.
- An opportunity for coalitions' to apply for \$5000 mini-grants to implement a pilot project that addresses a transportation need in their community.

This document will explain critical components of the Accessible Transit 2001 coalition building model and the challenges the coalitions and Easter Seals faced. It will also discuss the pilot programs funded by the mini-grants, their outcomes and practical advice on making the model work in other states.

Statement of the Issue

The history of transportation accessibility for people with disabilities is one of small steps. Typically, people with disabilities are unserved or underserved, particularly in rural areas, by the public and/or paratransit system. This isolation, in turn, places social, economic, and political limits on people with disabilities. As a result, people with disabilities have not been able to engage in the full range of community life including education, work and recreation.

This is especially true in terms of public policy and interaction with key decision-makers where people with disabilities have not had a place at the table where their voices can be heard. They have not been involved in transit planning efforts and have not been able to influence those processes. Because they have not been included, many have not had the opportunity to develop effective leadership and advocacy skills. These were some of the issues Accessible Transit 2001 addressed.

Target Population

While North Carolina is a large state with several heavily populated urban centers, most of the state is predominately rural. Coordinated transportation exists in only a few urban areas, while other areas have limited services. These are often provided by local human services agencies. To complicate matters, each of the state's 100 counties has its own local transportation development plan, making coordination and uniformity difficult. Mass transit for all citizens is not yet a priority for state leaders and is not on the radar screen for the foreseeable future. All of this has implications for people with disabilities.

Because of the state's size and rural nature, Accessible Transit 2001 had to draw from across the state. For this project, the target population included adults with disabilities, transit providers, and human service agency representatives. The goal was to assure adequate representation from disability groups, people of all racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds and representatives from nine geographical regions of the state in the model.

Project Goals

The goal of Accessible Transit 2001 was to ensure that people with disabilities, who did not drive cars, could explore solutions to various transportation limitations in their communities. A second goal was to open a dialogue within the community and with transit providers about transportation limitations and how they affected people with disabilities in terms of:

- securing and retaining employment

- accessing a variety of housing options
- engaging in community-based recreation and
- participating in other aspects of community life -- such as utilizing libraries, stores, and places of worship.

The specific objectives of Accessible Transit 2001 were to:

1. Create nine regional transportation coalitions (RTCs) of people with disabilities and other transit advocates to advocate for improved and expanded local and regional transportation options for people with disabilities.
2. Empower the members of the RTCs, through training and skills building, to become active, effective, and welcomed in the transportation planning efforts within their respective communities and regions.
3. Facilitate the development of specific, but varied, strategies (such as a voucher system) that RTC members could create in their communities and regions to meet specific local transportation needs and deficiencies through technical and financial assistance.
4. Provide guidance and support to the RTCs to ensure their optimum effectiveness by employing a part-time regional assistant in each of the regions.
5. Evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the project

To accomplish the goals and objectives of Accessible Transit 2001, Easter Seals took the following steps:

- Easter Seals hired a project coordinator and an assistant for each Regional Transit Coalition to provide support services for all the activities of the Coalitions.
- The project director and regional assistants, with the help of statewide core group, identified and recruited members for each of the RTCs.
- The project director and regional assistants recruited disability advocates, state and local legislators, policy makers, transportation specialists, and service providers to serve on panels and share information and insights at conferences.
- Easter Seals developed a mini-grant process for the coalitions and awarded five \$5,000 mini-grants five to coalitions to develop solutions that best answered local problems.

Components of the Model

Recruiting Coalition Members

A critical component to successful coalition building throughout the Accessible Transit 2001 project was identifying people to participate in the project.

Statewide Core Group. During Phase I of the project, Easter Seals organized a group of 25 people, the ***Statewide Core Work Group***, to develop the leadership and the capacity necessary for local coalition building. Group membership included people with disabilities, family members, local and state transportation officials, and disability organizations. Easter Seals relied heavily on its existing informal network of disability advocates and disability organizations to develop the ***Statewide Core Work Group***. Staff looked beyond this network to include local and state transportation officials in the group.

Regional Transit Coalitions. During Phase II of the project, Easter Seals developed local transit coalitions in nine regions of North Carolina. Identifying local leadership was key to developing sustainable local transit coalitions. Easter Seals looked first to Statewide Core Work Group members for local leadership. In several target regions, core work group members returned to their local communities and led the effort to organize a local coalition. When Easter Seals was unable to find leadership from core group members, project staff used its network of disability organizations and disability advocates to identify local stakeholders. Project Staff marketed the project to identified disability organization professionals and disability advocates and asked for commitments from interested parties to help organize the local transit coalitions.

Once a core group (2-3 people) of coalition members was identified the coalitions began to direct the recruiting process with technical assistance from Easter Seals staff. For several coalitions, project staff facilitated a stakeholder analysis exercise that helped coalition members identify potential partners. (See **Appendix A** for the stakeholder analysis exercise, *Identification of Community Partners*). Another resource is the American Public Transit Association (APTA) ***Local Coalition Building Workbook 1999***. (See Appendix B for a complete bibliography and order information).

Diverse Membership. Diverse coalition membership is ideal but is difficult to achieve. While people with disabilities, disability professionals, and transit providers all have a stake in improved transportation, their motivators and interests are often different. Developing diverse membership is an art and was an ongoing challenge for each coalition.

For this project, the key stakeholders for each coalition were people with disabilities who use transit. Coalitions were more successful when people with disabilities provided leadership. Any organized grassroots advocacy effort should have real participation from people who are directly impacted by the issue being addressed. To achieve real

participation from people with disabilities in the transit coalitions, their involvement could not be an afterthought.

Key Points

- ***Stakeholders are people who have an interest and/or commitment in or to the issue.***
- ***Identify and develop local leadership in order to develop sustainable local coalitions.***
- ***Use your existing network of relationships to identify and recruit a few local partners to help develop a coalition.***
- ***Conduct an analysis with your core group of local partners to identify other stakeholders who should be involved.***
- ***Real involvement from people with disabilities who use transit is essential for effective transit coalitions.***

Staff Support

Project staff consisted of a Project Director and nine part-time coalition assistants. The project director's responsibilities included ensuring that project objectives were met and timeline tasks were completed as outlined. As well, the director monitored and approved budget expenditures. The position was responsible for project evaluation and project reports. The director hired and supervised nine part-time regional assistants who provided direct support to Regional Transit Coalitions.

Coalition Assistants were hired to provide clerical and administrative support such as recording minutes, answering mail, organizing meetings, etc. From Easter Seals perspective, coalition assistants were not to be substitutes for local leadership but a support person for the coalition. A paid position would ensure someone would devote time each month to carry out organizational tasks. However in some cases, coalitions had different expectations of assistants. Some coalitions expected coalition assistants to direct or mentor the coalitions rather than act in a support staff role. This led to some confusion about roles and responsibilities.

Key Points

- ***Someone (paid or volunteer) should be responsible for completing necessary organizational duties such as organizing meetings and coordinating expenses.***

- *Coalitions may benefit from a local mentor/sponsor to provide in-person technical support and the organizational capacity to house funds for the coalition. It is difficult for a statewide organization to provide this type of support. For example, a local Arc organization sponsors and mentors a local coalition. Easter Seals could allocate resources to support this sponsorship.*

Training Support

Training for this project occurred both statewide and locally. During Phase I of the project, Easter Seals conducted six training sessions for the Statewide Core Group. This group was organized to develop leaders who could organize transit coalitions in their community. Training sessions were developed to accomplish the following learning objectives:

- To gain a better understanding of transportation funding and operations at the federal, state, and local level.
- To gain a better understanding of the state legislative process
- To gain experience working with elected officials
- To develop leadership skills

To kick off Phase II of the project, Easter Seals held a two-day training event for representatives from the nine target areas. At this event, speakers talked about rural transportation, urban transportation, and community organizing. Also, project staff introduced participatory planning exercises that participants could replicate in their community with coalition members. These exercises are designed to take a community group through a participatory planning process. The planning process consists of establishing a vision for an improved transit system, defining the current transit system, defining and prioritizing issues by analyzing the gaps between the vision and reality, and developing an action plan. These exercises were modified from *Participatory Planning For Action* (Lee & Balkwill, 1996). Guidelines for each exercise are included in Appendix A.

As coalitions began to organize locally, members began to organize their own training activities. Coalitions brought in local and state speakers, such as state and local transportation officials and disability advocates. However, our project evaluation showed that most coalitions wanted more formal individualized training on topics such as conducting effective meetings, lobbying, and writing grants.

Key Points

- *Conducting statewide training is both labor intensive and costly.*
- *It may be more effective to direct energy and resources to local training tailored to the specific needs of each coalition.*

- *Use simpler strategies such as teleconferencing and email to facilitate statewide information exchange.*

Leadership Retreat

To conclude the project, Easter Seals held a one-day leadership retreat for the leaders of the eight Regional Transit Coalitions. This retreat was designed to recognize coalition members for their contributions and to give participants the opportunity to share successes, difficulties, and next steps. The entire day was very participatory and creative. The day created a safe place for participants to tell their stories. The RTC leaders were encouraged to go back to their own groups and conduct the same sort of retreat for their own coalition. This process was very effective and received positive feedback from participants.

Financial Support

Easter Seals recognized that an emerging coalition would benefit from access to funding to cover various operating expenses. Easter Seals allocated approximately \$2250 per coalition to cover participant transportation, meeting expenses, training expenses, etc. These funds helped eliminate barriers to participation for people with disabilities. When affordable public transportation was unavailable, people with disabilities were able to participate in coalition activities because Easter Seals helped members arrange and pay for alternate transportation. Also, these funds enabled coalitions to conduct meetings, attend conferences, and conduct public awareness activities such as community forums and community presentations.

Mini Grants. Easter Seals gave Regional Transit Coalitions an opportunity to apply for five, \$5000 mini grants. These grants enabled coalitions to implement a pilot project in their community that addressed a specific transportation issue. While \$5000 is not a lot of money on its own, a mini grant can lead to new partnerships, citizen participation, and pilot projects that demonstrate new ways of moving people in communities. A successful mini grant project could leverage local resources and commitments that would lead to an improved transportation system in target communities. The mini grant strategy was a dynamic aspect of this project. Specific mini grant projects are described in more detail in the section, *Overview of Regional Transit Coalitions*.

Key Points

- *Access to funding gave Regional Transit Coalitions increased clout in the community and bought leverage.*
- *Access to funding provided an incentive for collaboration*
- *Coalition members gained valuable experience by developing and implementing a grant project.*
- *Funding for transportation enabled people with disabilities to participate.*

- *Coalitions did not require a large amount of funds to support their activities.*

Evaluation

Easter Seals hired a consultant to conduct a project evaluation. The following process was used by the consultant.

- Conduct a mail survey for all project participants.
- Conduct on-site group evaluation meetings with 3 of the transportation coalitions representing western, central & eastern North Carolina.
- Conduct phone interviews with representatives from each of the remaining transit coalitions.
- Tabulate results of evaluation and write evaluation report.

This evaluation produced very useful qualitative information and creative ideas. The evaluation report and survey instruments are included in Appendix E.

Results

As a result of Accessible Transit 2001, people with disabilities have participated in the policymaking process and have created transportation solutions in their community. For instance, in Nash and Edgecombe counties, coalition members have distributed, by hand, approximately 8,600 surveys to community residents and local organizations to assess local transportation needs. As these counties investigate merging their transportation services into a regional system, the coalition will be at the table making recommendations based on the survey results and their personal experience.

In Ashe, Orange and New Hanover counties, 90 people with disabilities were able to better access work and recreation because of new transportation options created by three of the pilot projects implemented by the transit coalitions. In Orange County, County Commissioners agreed to fund their project for another year.

Also, people with disabilities are speaking out about the importance of quality public transportation. Four project participants presented to transportation officials from across the state at the N.C. Public Transportation Association's Annual Conference about the importance of including people with disabilities in transportation planning and decision-making. Members of local transit coalitions testified before local elected officials about the importance of quality transportation options for people with disabilities. Five project participants attended a statewide Transit Legislative Conference in Raleigh where each person had an opportunity to meet with state legislators and attend a legislative appropriations subcommittee on transportation.

Speaking out has been empowering for many participants. Deborah Baldwin, a representative from the Triad Transit Coalition, said the following about her involvement

in Accessible Transit 2001, "I could see how much my confidence in being an advocate has changed since I became involved in the Piedmont Triad Accessible Transit Coalition. The feeling of having some power and ability to affect change for persons with disabilities has changed my life completely from when I first became disabled." Debbie has recently been appointed by the Governor to serve on a statewide Independent Living Council where she can continue to advocate for better public transportation in North Carolina.

Overview of Regional Transit Coalitions

Region 9 -- New Hanover County and Pender County

Calling itself the Transportation Consortium of New Hanover County, the Region 9 Coalition applied for and received a mini-grant to subsidize the cost of transportation by taxis and private vans for a certain number of participants with disabilities in New Hanover County. The program was called Project RIDE and allowed participants to go anywhere in New Hanover County during the day and on weekends for \$1.

Public transportation in the City of Wilmington offers limited routes that do not reach the city boundaries in many directions. There are limited hours of operation during the daytime Monday through Saturday.

The Consortium first had to find its participants for Project RIDE. Wendy Exposito, regional assistant, said the Coalition developed an application and distributed them via local governmental agencies. However, the Coalition only received 10 applications from potential participants during the first round. Seeking a wider audience, the Coalition extended the application deadline, placed the forms in more areas and increased the use of public service announcements. In the end, the Coalition received 40 applications for Project RIDE.

In hindsight, Exposito said the Coalition could have found a greater audience by going to parents groups and support groups for people with disabilities and even the university system.

Weather conditions also came into play during the Project RIDE program. New Hanover County, a coastal community, was hit by three hurricanes in seven weeks in September and October 1999.

Exposito developed and designed a colorful easy-to-read and follow packet of information -- a How To Guide -- on using Project RIDE, some advice on rules of the road and telephone numbers in case problems arose. Participants could call Exposito and a volunteer who is accessible by cellular phone. That volunteer, a woman with disabilities who works at home, also established an email address for Project RIDE so the

participants could email her at anytime. That one-on-one contact has allowed for lots of opportunities to work with people on problem solving and self-advocacy.

Region 8 -- Nash County and Edgecombe County

Calling themselves the Citizens Transportation Advisory Group, Region 8 received a \$5,000 mini-grant to conduct a survey to identify individuals who, because of a disability, age or other reason, were in need of public transportation. Region 8 planned to use the survey data to demonstrate to county/city government the need for and viability of expanded public transportation.

Kim Stewart, is a recreational therapist who serves clients who could benefit from more accessible transportation in the two counties. She said, this RTC was a strong and self-starting team from the beginning. The group was meeting prior to Easter Seals receiving the Project Action Grant and had strong leadership and a committed group of members. That leadership and group cohesiveness remained throughout.

The City of Rocky Mount lies in both Edgecombe and Nash County. The city bus system serves both and runs a para-transit service three quarters of a mile past the last city bus stop. However, there is only limited service on Saturday and no service on Sunday, severely limiting a person's access to recreational, spiritual and other opportunities.

Citizens Transportation Advisory Group hired a consultant to develop the survey to find out people's needs. Stewart said the Coalition hoped to place the survey in the city's utility bill but city officials turned the idea down, saying that that type of information was already available. Region 8 is now distributing the surveys through various agencies including the department of social services, libraries, and senior centers. and even the local mall via an information table set up from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. One member of the Coalition has committed to getting 10,000 surveys out himself.

Stewart said that the Coalition is happy with the results from the survey even though it was not mass distributed. However, there are some things the Coalition would have done differently with the survey. The type could have been larger for the visually impaired and could have been printed on both sides. The survey didn't explain what the Coalition was trying to accomplish. Some people thought it was intended for only people with disabilities. Stewart said the group's intent was to have people think futuristically about their own transportation needs in case of illness, a car problem, or other unforeseen circumstances.

"It has been a live and learn experience" Stewart said. The Citizens Transportation Advisory Group will present the survey results to elected officials in Edgecombe and Nash Counties. The Coalition has also held a community forum to which local leaders, transit officials, consumers, and agency representatives were invited. This was a success, Stewart said.

The reaction from elected official officials and professional staff in the counties and the City of Rocky Mount has varied. Stewart and other advocates have spoken before the Board of Commissioners meetings and the City Council meetings. Those appearances resulted in articles in the local newspaper.

The Coalition also worked with bus drivers on sensitivity, which was a major issue for consumers who frequently encountered problems with drivers who didn't understand their needs. Seven drivers for the Nash Edgecombe Transit System turned out for the training, which included a Power Point presentation and a question and answer session.

"It turned out very well," Stewart said. "This whole process has been wonderful. It's been an eye-opener for a lot of people."

LESSON LEARNED: Strong leadership and a group of committed volunteers are critical to a Coalition's success. Attention to printed materials is extremely important especially surveys. Make sure they communicate what the group wants to achieve. Think about how and where the survey will be distributed and have a backup plan if the first doesn't work. Have a plan for communicating the results to the general public, the media, elected officials and others you identify.

Region 7- Cumberland County and Robeson County

Calling itself the Regional Transit Coalition, the Region 7 group focused their efforts on educating the general public and elected officials about the transportation needs of people with disabilities in Cumberland County. The Coalition did not receive a mini-grant.

The assistant, Joan Timberlake, along with an active Coalition membership of 12 people have had great success in meetings with leaders in the transit community and spreading the message through the media.

"We've had pretty good attendance, lots of agencies," Timberlake said. "The Fayetteville Area System for Transit (FAST) has been very positive and very responsive. They either sent the head of the system or the assistant to our meetings."

Timberlake said that the Coalition had more credibility and clout in the community because of Easter Seals' reputation for sponsoring quality initiatives throughout the state. In March 1999, Timberlake and Coalition members attended a statewide Transit Legislative Conference. Coalition members were able to speak on panels about Accessible Transit 2001 and the transportation challenges people with disabilities face everyday. Coalition members went to the Legislative Building in Raleigh to meet with General Assembly members.

The Coalition also used the media extensively to ask people with disabilities to share their stories and to volunteer to serve on the Coalition. Ads were placed in the newspaper and on the radio. People with disabilities did respond to these ads and discussed their

need for more transportation options. However, some people with disabilities feared that if they spoke out publicly and advocated for change they could possibly lose the little service they currently receive.

The Coalition also held a public forum that was attended by state department of transportation officials, consumer rights groups, representative from the Governor's Advocacy Council on Disabilities, consumers and agency folks. The forum received newspaper coverage.

Region 6 -- Wake County

Calling themselves the Wake County Transit Coalition, Region 6 has focused on sensitivity training for bus drivers on the existing routes and exploring expanded service options to major employment areas between the cities of Raleigh and Durham. The Coalition did not receive a mini-grant. "We've made a lot of good contacts, but it will take a lot more work," said the regional assistant Lamar Long. "I feel we are getting somewhere but slowly."

The sensitivity training was a huge success. Every bus driver for the system, 100 people in all, attended either a morning session or an evening session. Speakers from the Coalition talked about the challenges people face when they use public transportation. Speakers emphasized the need for bus drivers to announce the stops, connecting routes and major intersections, to have patience when people with a disability enter or exit the bus, and to remember to identify the bus when making a stop for passengers. Not everyone can read a number on a bus.

Most importantly, Long said, speakers thanked the bus drivers for the job they do and the sensitivity they show already. Several bus drivers describe their own awkwardness on how to best meet the needs of passengers with disabilities. Some said that they are reluctant about announcing bus stops because of embarrassment about their own pronunciation and speaking skills.

The bus drivers loved the idea of "The Talking Box" whereby they could press a button and an automated voice would announce the bus stop and major route crossings. The system would cost \$4,500 for each bus. Long has talked to the city manager of Raleigh about the idea. The Coalition also sent a questionnaire to the candidates for City Council about transportation.

Like several other Coalitions, Region 6 has had only a core membership of six people. Long said she isn't sure why recruiting people to serve on the Coalition was difficult. One reason could be that Wake County does have some level of service.

LESSON LEARNED: Identifying an activity quickly that can be achieved with success, such as sensitivity training, can help keep a group's momentum going. Members need to feel like they are contributing and achieving something rather than just meeting.

Region 5 -- Orange County

Calling itself the Orange County Transportation Coalition for People with Disabilities, this region received a mini-grant to establish a voucher system to improve access to transportation in Orange County for persons with disabilities for non-medical travels. People with disabilities were able to apply for this voucher system after they determined how much they could pay for transportation and what means of transportation they would use.

This system relied heavily on the use of natural support including rider assistance from friends, families, neighbors and co-workers. Once approved the applicant received funding for up to a three-month period. After this period, the applicant could reapply and negotiate for additional funding.

The program had several goals:

1. To improve transportation for people with disabilities within Orange County.
2. To increase self-sufficiency by involving persons with disabilities in the process of determining transportation options and the cost of services.
3. To serve as leverage for other public funds or resources to meet ongoing transportation needs.
4. The Coalition used the Elderly Disabled Transportation Assistance Program eligibility form to determine eligibility for this voucher program and then developed a simple application for people to use. Working with the Human Service Transportation Advisory Board, The ARC, and people with disabilities, the Coalition formed a committee to review applications and developed guidelines for voucher administration.

The Coalition presented this model to the Orange County Board of Commissioners for continued funding through the EDTAP, to which the Orange County Board agreed.

Region 4 -- Forsyth County, Guilford County and Davidson County

Calling itself the Triad Transit Coalition, this group focused its efforts in Guilford County. One of the problems mentioned by members was the difficulty in working with more than one or two counties. To be successful, the Coalition had to limit its scope. This Coalition concentrated on Guilford County.

Triad Transit Coalition received a mini-grant, which it used to train a number of people with disabilities as trainers on using the local transit system. As trainers, these people would train other people with disabilities to better access existing services. The intent was two-fold -- give the trainers more confidence themselves and give the wider audience of people with disabilities trainers who had a disability.

Approximately 10 people were trained as trainers. These 10 trainers have already provided training to 10 people with disabilities interested in using the fixed route service. The sessions included a tour of the bus, general information about riding the bus, how to best communicate with a driver about individual needs, and what the transit has to provide people with disabilities.

Throughout the project, this Coalition has been very productive despite a small number of committed members. Small membership has meant a lot of work for the coalition members.

LESSON LEARNED: A small committed group of citizens can accomplish a great deal. There is a void of citizen participation at the local level. A few voices can be effective.

Region 3 -- Counties Rowan, Cabarrus, Stanly, and Union

The Southern Piedmont Transportation Coalition initially struggled to identify a target issue and create a workable structure. Therefore, the group narrowed its focus to one county where a proposed public transportation system is being considered. The coalition believes they have a real opportunity to support this proposal and impact the planning process.

LESSON LEARNED: Forming coalitions may need to narrow its scope and take action quickly on one issue. This approach enables the coalition to develop commitment from members and keeps the members from becoming overwhelmed.

Region 2 -- Counties of Avery, Watauga, Ashe, Alleghany, Caldwell, Wilkes

This Coalition worked with an existing agency called the Ashe County Transportation Authority. That agency received a mini-grant to develop a transportation service for children with disabilities and disadvantaged youth in the community. The project called “Wheels for Youth” helped young people access recreational and enrichment activities. Activities included swimming, visits to shopping centers, local fire and sheriff’s department, and structured activities through parks and recreation and the 4H program.

Region 1 -- Buncombe County and Henderson County

Despite a concerted effort, Easter Seals was unable to develop a coalition in the far western area of North Carolina. Eventually, a decision was made to invest resources in the other eight coalitions.

APPENDIX

Appendix A

Community Planning Exercises

The following exercises are designed to help coalitions develop a plan of action.

Exercise 1: Identification of Community Partners

Part I. Identifying those affected

Take the issue or issues your group has identified as priority and respond to the following question:

Who affects or is affected by the issue?

1. Group members should spend time silently considering the question and generating ideas. (Some group members may want to write their ideas down.)
2. After step 1, the recorder goes around the circle and asks each group member to share an idea. Each idea is recorded on the flip chart. The process is repeated until each group member has shared all of his or her ideas.
3. Spend time clarifying the items on the list.

Part II. Determining who should be involved

Consider the following question:

Among the people identified in Part I, who should be involved in the coalition?

1. Spend time answering this question for each item on your list.
2. Once you have agreed on who should be involved, determine a strategy for involving them. Decide who will contact each person and set a date by which the contact should be made.

Other questions for groups to consider.

- Who is already working on transportation issues in the community? How might we link up with these people?
- What strategies have been successful in the community for encouraging citizen involvement?

Exercise 2: Defining Reality: Mapping Your Current Transportation System

The purpose of this exercise is to help participants analyze the current transportation system in their community. The size of the group is not fixed but should include as many participants as possible from the community.

Draw a picture of your existing transportation system using the following guidelines.

Step 1

Think about the current transportation system in the region. Here are some things to consider:

- Different agencies involved. Relationships between agencies (i.e. County and city government)
- Different counties, towns, cities and communities in your region.
- Who are the consumers of public transportation? Where are the consumers located?
- Where do they need to go?
- What are the informal transportation networks?
- Different transportation systems (route systems, paratransit systems, human service systems, etc.)
- Characteristics of the systems (routes, costs, days and hours of operation, areas not included in the system, etc.)

Step 2

Pose the following questions about your transportation system.

- Are there areas where two or more organizations are working in ignorance of one another?
- Are there issues on which organizations or people could be collaborating?
- Are there areas of potential conflict (competition for funding, for example) among agencies and groups.

Source: Lee, B & Balkwill, M (1996), *Participatory Planning for Action* (pp. 47-52). Toronto: CommonAct Press.

Exercise 3: Defining Vision

The purpose of this exercise is to help participants determine a vision and basic goals for a project. The ideal work group is eight to 10 people. Therefore, if you have more than ten people participating, break into smaller groups.

Steps

- 1.** Each group members should take five minutes to themselves to think of the things he or she sees as key characteristics of an ideal transportation system (regardless of resource or political constraints).
- 2.** As a group, draw a picture of your “visioned” transportation system using the characteristics each member has developed in Step 1. The picture drawing is important as it helps the group to fit the individual ideas together and/or see where there may be contradictions that must be addressed. It also provides a sense of the vision as a dynamic or action system.
- 3.** When the pictures are completed, reconvene as a large group. Each group should present its picture. Other participants can ask questions for clarification about particular ideas in the vision.
- 4.** When the presentations are complete, the facilitator assists the participants in identifying the common threads of their vision as well as areas where there appears to be divergence. Participants may all have one or two similar goals, but have a variety of sub issues about which there may be disagreement. It is important that the common goals are identified because the group can fall back on those when they attempt to negotiate differences. It is also important, however, to point out differences because then participants will be in a position to realistically deal with them.

Source: Lee, B. & Balkwill, M (1996), Participatory Planning for Action (pp. 21-32). Toronto: CommonAct Press.

Exercise 4: Identifying and Prioritizing Strategic Issues

The purpose of this exercise is to come up with a manageable group of strategic issues for planning by answering the following question. *Based on the transportation realities in your community and your transportation vision, what issues should this transit coalition be addressing/responding to?*

Step 1: Identifying and categorizing issues

1. Each group member should respond to the above question by either writing their ideas on index cards or having someone else write their ideas on index cards.
2. Place all index cards on the wall where all group members can see them. Someone reads each index card to the group.
3. Take a minute to think about the issues and then suggest categories in which to group them. Limit your categories to 3 or 4. One of the issues may be broad enough to serve as a category. Write the categories on index cards.
4. Take the issues one by one and decide which category it fits in. Keep the discussion of each issue focused. However, it is important to make sure that your group has covered all the possibilities before consensus is reached.
5. As consensus is reached for each issue, place it under the appropriate category heading.

Step 2: Discussion of Issues

The idea of this step is to see if these issues will help accomplish your purpose. Ask the following about each issue on your list.

- Does the issue move people to action?
- Does the issue help people gain something?
- Does the issue attract new members to the effort?
- Is it appropriate to the stage of development of the coalition?
- Will it strengthen the coalition overall functioning?

Step 3: Prioritizing of Issues

This step is designed to help group members prioritize the issues.

1. Each group member is allotted a certain number of sticky dots.
2. From the index cards, choose the issues you feel are most important.
3. Indicate the importance of the issues you selected by placing a portion of your dots on the index card. For example, if you have five dots, you may identify two important issues and place four dots on one issue and one dot on the other.

Source: Lee, B. & Balkwill, M (1996), *Participatory Planning for Action* (pp. 21-32). Toronto: CommonAct Press.

Exercise 5: Tell Your Local Transportation Story

To better understand your local transportation system, work through the following questions.

1. What public transportation services are offered in your county or city?
2. How many vehicles are used? (Don't forget school buses, taxies and ferries)
3. Is there passenger rail service?
4. Who owns, maintains, and operates the public transportation services in your county (Collect their brochures and schedules and talk with the manager and policy-making board. Ask them about future plans)
5. How many people are served daily?
6. What areas are covered?
7. Is there a rideshare program that encourages carpooling and vanpooling? If so, how many people do they serve annually and how many van or bus pools do they assist?
8. Who pays for these services -- local, state and federal public funds, private dollars, fares? How much is the local fare.
9. What private agencies or businesses provide transportation for their clients, employees or customers?
10. How are people with disabilities served?
11. How many life-equipped vehicles run in your county?
12. Who is in charge of transportation planning in your community?
13. Is transportation planning coordinated with land use planning?
14. Why, from your own experience, would you like to see improved public transportation?

Where to Find Answers

City/Town/County government (planning departments, city/town manager)

Scan the Internet for Web pages on your City/Town/County government. It could save you a phone call or trip.

- *City/Town/County elected officials.* Call your local councilman or county commissioners. Sometimes they can get an answer from staff quicker than you can.
- *Area Transit Authority.* Again check to see if they have a web page and/or consumer advocate.
- *Providers of Public Transportation*

Appendix B

Resources

Local Coalition Building Workbook 1999. American Public Transportation Association.

Order information:

American Public Transit Association

1201 New York Avenue, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20005

www.apta.com

Lee, B. & Balkwill, M (1996), *Participatory Planning for Action* (pp. 21-32). Toronto: CommonAct Press.

Appendix C

Mini-Grants

Providing mini grants to local transit coalitions was a dynamic aspect of Accessible Transit 2001. Included in Appendix C are both the Request for Mini-Grant Applications sent to every local transit coalition and a sample application from one local transit coalition.

Request for Mini-Grants Application

Due Date: Prior to March 31, 1999

As a result of Accessible Transit 2001, a project funded by Project ACTION and operated by Easter Seals NC, regional transit coalitions have been established across North Carolina. Participants in each of the transit coalitions are developing leadership skills by advocating effectively for transit innovation and change at the local, regional and state levels. It is anticipated that coalition members will educate and influence those in key decision-making positions, enhance the understanding of the transit needs of people with disabilities, and prompt policy makers to make transit decisions that are in the best interests of North Carolina citizens with disabilities.

As such, mini-grants of up to \$5,000 are available to Coalitions as “seed” money to demonstrate effective means of providing targeted transportation services. These mini-grants are to be used to help demonstrate that when individuals in need of transportation are given resources to make choices as customers, more community options develop to meet transportation needs. These mini-grants are also intended to serve as a challenge to each regional coalition to seek out resources and supports as well as solicit the input of potential customers with unmet needs for transportation services. The following goals and examples should serve as a guide to securing a mini-grant.

Time Frame

Projects must be completed by the end of October 1999.

Goal

Mini-grant funds shall be used as follows:

1. To develop customer driven transportation services that expand the publicly funded transportation options.
2. To serve as leverage for potentially larger financial or other resources to meet ongoing transportation needs.
3. To demonstrate to local policy makers the fiscal soundness of an increase in services.

Requirements

A. The application shall demonstrate the involvement of persons with disabilities who are now or could be users of the service. Example: Informal focus groups of five to six individuals with disabilities could be called together and interviewed.

B. Mini-grants must demonstrate the potential of reallocating other funds or increasing new allocations from local or state resources, or private sources. Example: Elderly Disabled Transportation Assistance Programs (EDTAP) dollars are allocated based on a local plan. Many communities automatically allocate these funds to the traditional human service agencies that historically provide transportation for their consumers. A proposal that demonstrates alternatives that would increase access, use and alternatives for local policy makers would be fundable, even if there is not a commitment at this time from these policy makers to reconsider the allocation process.

C. Transit providers should be encouraged to collaborate.

Guidelines

1. Mini-grants should not be used for one-time capital expense or activity unless it demonstrates potential for overall improvement or access to local services. Example: Purchase of a lift or a contributing match to a state purchase plan would not be approved. However, participating in communication technology that improves access (cable/phones/Internet) would be appropriate.

2. Mini-grants may be used to fund a trial project or activity to determine potential ridership in order to establish costs and rates for a new service. Example: Sometime a provider will not assume the risk for expanding the operational hours or territory, or decline to provide a rate that recoups less than 100 percent of the anticipated cost for the service. Therefore, a rider's cost may vary daily from \$.50 to \$12, based on ridership. This forces the potential rider to assume 100 percent of the risk. An activity that encourages entrepreneurial activities and shares the risk would be fundable.

3. Mini-grants may be used to assist providers to revamp pricing or operations if it results in lower costs, increased ridership, or better service. Example: Some providers' cost allocation systems actively discourage the addition of new services or routes. Providing for the development or encouragement of new rate setting systems that provide for shifting the risks away from the rider and increase utilization would be considered.

4. Mini-grants may be used to demonstrate other community solutions that place choice and greater customer control in the user's hand, which may include vouchers. Example: Funding activities that increase the use of natural supports -- riding assistance from friends, families, neighbors, or co-workers which reduces costs and creates alternatives would be fundable. Some communities have successfully used voucher programs to provide limited assistance to a user to purchase services from a bus system, paratransit provider, or neighbor (natural supports) for a limited time. These vouchers may pay 100 percent for three months, 75 percent for three months and phase out to zero with the intention that the user will have developed their own resources to meet ongoing needs.

5. Mini grants may be used to do local market research as to potential users. Example: Sometimes local systems have limited resources to examine demographic data, present users, potential customers, as well as present providers to determine the impact of proposed transportation options. This may include pre- and post-examination of the impact of a particular activity.

Application Process

1. List the Regional Transportation Coalition members and the name of the RTC Coordinator
2. Project Narrative: A brief summary of the proposed project.
3. Problem Statement: Overall statement of the need that this project is planning to address.
4. Goals: Must include at least one of the project goals. Additional goals are encouraged.
5. Objectives: What specific activities will be undertaken?
6. Anticipated Outcomes: Should include who will benefit. Target area.
7. List of Collaborators:
 - Who participated in the preparation of the grant?
 - Must describe how persons with disabilities participated.
 - If local transit providers did not participate, detail under “Barriers” how group will secure future buy-in.
8. Barriers to success of project: Detail any known obstacles and what assistance the overall project could provide in the areas of training, contacts or coordination.
9. Time Line: Anticipated beginning and ending of the funded project.
10. Budget: List matching resources, which may include in-kind. If the proposed services were to be made permanent, list potential resources that could be used to fund.

Sample Mini Grant Application

Orange County Transportation Coalition for People with Disabilities (OCTCPD)

1. Coordinator:

Carrboro Transportation Advisory Board Chairperson

2. Project Narrative

OCTCPD aims to establish a voucher system to improve access to transportation in Orange County for persons with disabilities for non-medical travels. People with disabilities would apply for this voucher system after they have determined how much they could pay for transportation and what means of transportation they would use. This system would heavily rely on the use of natural support including rider assistance from friends, families, neighbors and co-workers. Once approved the applicant would receive funding for up to a three-month period. After this period, the applicant can reapply and negotiate for additional funding.

3. Problem Statement

Within Orange County there exists a need for greater access to non-medical transportation for people with disabilities who live outside the Chapel Hill/Carrboro city limits.

4. Goals

- To improve transportation for people with disabilities within Orange County.
- To increase self-sufficiency by involving persons with disabilities in the process of determining transportation options and the cost of services.
- To serve as leverage for other public funds or resources to meet ongoing transportation needs.

5. Objectives

- Use the Elderly and Disabled Transportation Assistance Program disability eligibility form to determine eligibility for this voucher program.
- Develop a simple application for people requesting assistance.
- Present voucher system to the Human Service Transportation Advisory Board, so that Orange Public Transportation will administer the project, while The Arc will work as the fiscal organization for receipt and distribution of funds.
- Form a disability voucher sub-committee to review applications. This sub-committee will include representatives from the Human Service Transportation Advisory Board, The Arc, OCTCPD, and people with disabilities.
- Develop guidelines for voucher administration.
- Formulate plans for advertisement and outreach about this new transportation option.

6. Anticipated Outcomes

- Assist a minimum of 15 people with disabilities in receiving transportation for non-medical travel over the period of the voucher program.

- Increase self-sufficiency for people with disabilities through involvement in decision making and use of resources.
- Increase the use of natural supports.
- Identify additional financial resources to continue the program after the mini-grant funds are exhausted.

7. List of Collaborators

Orange County Recreation and Parks Department
 Orange Enterprises (a community rehabilitation center for people with disabilities)
 Chapel Hill Transit
 Orange Public Transportation
 Orange Public Transportation
 Carrboro Transportation Advisory Board
 The Arc of Orange County
 The Arc of Orange County

8. Barriers to Success of Project

- High cost of public commercial transportation
- Lack of support systems for people with disabilities
- Lack of knowledge from people with disabilities about transportation resources that exist.

9. Time Line

Advertisement and outreach will begin during the month of May. The disability voucher sub-committee will meet and design the voucher application and guidelines by May 1, 1999. Applications for the vouchers will be accepted starting June 1. The committee will meet soon after this date to determine which applicants will receive vouchers. The vouchers will be given for up to a three-month period. On May 25, OCTCPD will make a presentation to the Human Services Transportation Advisory Board about applying this voucher system for use of EDTAP funds for non-medical transportation. This voucher system will continue through October.

10. Budget

The mini-grant will provide \$5,000 as the starting funds for this voucher system project. Hopefully, this project will be successful and future EDTAP funds will be funneled to continue this system.

The maximum amount the voucher system will spend on each person is set at \$100 per month. Over time, the goal will be to decrease the dollar amount of the voucher by increasing the individual's self-sufficiency and personal resources.

Since The Arc would be working as a fiscal organization, the normal administrative costs budgeted for this organization of 8.48 percent will be calculated as an in-kind donation to the voucher project

Appendix D

Dealing with the Media

Press Releases

Shoulds and Shouldn'ts

Good Press Releases Should:

Communicate information clearly and concisely

Give the time, date, place of the event

List the name and telephone number of at least one contact person.
Include a fax and email address if they are available.

Include a brief description of the importance of the issue or event.
Nearly 650 children with disabilities can not attend extracurricular events at the county's public schools because their families lack transportation and a public transit system does not exist.

Include a quote from one of the leaders of organization to put the problem in context.

Contact the media outlet you plan to use (television, radio, newspaper) to find out who to send the release to and the proper procedures.

Arrive at the media outlet well in advance of the event (about two weeks). This allows for more exposure for your event. Don't send out a notice for workshop with only a two-day notice.

Designate someone to work with the media who will respond to the release.

Tips for Dealing with the Media

Know the names of the people you want to be working with from reporters, to news anchors, to assignment editors, to editors, to public affairs editors and editorial page editors. Maintain relationships.

Know their deadlines and schedules. Treat their time with respect. Don't call them on deadline. They will respect this professional courtesy and be more open to your request when you do call.

Develop a media plan for your group. It doesn't have to be fancy or complicated. But it should include what you want to accomplish through media relations. Do you want coverage

of an event? Do you want an in-depth story on transportation needs in your area? Start with the end in mind.

Solicit media input by inviting key media to participate in a focus group. Find out what kind of stories they are interested in at different times of the year. Always ask what you can do for them.

Be pleasant. Be professional. Be friendly but not too friendly. The media has a job to do and it is not to be your organization's public relations department.

Many an off-the-cuff remark or pleasantry that you thought was off the record after the camera was turned off or the notebook was put away became the headline the next day. Learn to love the silence between a reporter's questions. You don't have to fill in the gaps.

Remember to contact the media only when you have a "newsworthy" event. Routine meetings or organizational meetings are not newsworthy. You can sour a good relationship by calling too often.

Don't try to badger a reporter into promising to run a story on a particular day or a particular day. It doesn't work. News is fickle and subject to change constantly.

If you have a problem with a media release or story call the reporter and tell him or her about your concerns. Make sure you do this when you are calm. If you don't believe the reporter took your issue seriously, you may want to contact the editor or news director.

Remember there is a difference between stories that appear in the newspaper and editorials. Editorials are written by separate writers and can reflect a whole different tone than a regular story. Remember too that newspaper reporters typically do not write their own headlines or cutlines to a photograph. Editors usually handle those tasks.

Believe in what you are "selling" to the media. Enthusiasm is the key. If you aren't excited about your project how can you expect them to be.

Always say thank you. Take the time to thank everyone involved in getting your story out -- the assignment editors, the news anchors, the news directors, the photographers, the video photographers and the reporters.

Ways to Communicate Your Message and Broaden Your Horizon

Civic organizations: Many civic organizations would be interested in the topic of transportation services for people with disabilities. Most civic organizations and their leaderships are listed in the local newspaper with contact numbers.

Leadership programs: Several agencies such as the United Way have leadership programs that could be utilized in identifying potential Coalition members. These groups may also

have contacts who could help Coalitions set up meetings with key community leaders and secure necessary information.

Articles: Newspapers and magazines in your community could be open to a guest column about people with disabilities and their transportation needs. This could be the perfect vehicle to place a face with an issue.

Malls, neighborhood fairs, church meetings: One Coalition tried this approach to distribute a survey and had great success. Malls and large department stores are chain stores bring together a wide cross section of the community.

Television and radio: Many radio and television stations have community programs where they invite speakers to discuss issues or projects. This is an excellent communication vehicle for people who may not have the ability to leave their homes.

Web Pages: Many local governments and non-profit groups will let other organizations have a web page on their site. Or they will mention the group and then link to that organization's individualized web page.

Corporations: Many corporations have internal newsletters and magazines that feature articles about happenings in the community. This is especially true if a volunteer works at the company. This too is another way of prompting discussion of transportation issues in the community.

Making the Media Your Partner

The media will partner with organizations on projects or events that fit that the mission of the newspaper, radio or television. Finding those partnerships and making those relationships mutually beneficial takes some work. Here are some tips.

1. Research what projects particular media sponsor every year and how they view themselves and their role in the community.
2. Make sure your proposed project is well organized and clearly defined; it needs to run for a finite period of time so there are measurable impacts.
3. Approach the media with sufficient time before your project; large projects could take up to a year to plan.
4. Be aware of the media's slower season. Typically, broadcast media will not work with you during their ratings sweep.
5. At first, send your partnership request to only one newspaper, television and radio station. Offer the first right of refusal before approaching their competitors. Most partnerships occur because nonprofits approach the media. However, there will be

some instances where the media might actually approach you to partner on projects.

6. Your program or project has the ability to reach the majority of the media's target audience.
7. Your organization and staff are viewed as professional and experts in your field.
8. Media personnel work on tight deadlines, so the ability to deliver accurate information on a timely basis and be flexible is of utmost importance.
9. You've developed a year-round relationship. Add the media to your mailing list. The proper contact may not read your publications or press releases on a regular basis, but they will know you are out there. When it comes time to partner with agencies in the community, they will be more likely to think of you.
10. They'll remember positive experiences with past media partnerships. The first partnership is the hardest to develop. Once you achieve this it will be easier to present future ideas.

Appendix E

Accessible Transit 2001 Evaluation

Section 1: Introduction

The purpose of "Accessible Transit 2001" is to provide the education and the skills necessary to empower people with disabilities to become effective self advocates for transportation. In turn, these self-advocates can educate the leadership, promote innovation, and impact state and local budgets for expanded and enhanced transportation services that meet the needs of consumers with disabilities.

The ultimate goal of Accessible Transit 2001 is to ensure that people with disabilities who do not drive cars can access transportation within their own communities to enable them to:

- secure and retain employment,
- access a variety of housing options,
- engage in community-based recreation, and
- participate in other aspects of community life--such as utilizing libraries, stores, and places of worship.

The specific objectives of Accessible Transit 2001 for 1999 were to:

- Create nine *regional transportation coalitions* (RTCs) of people with disabilities and family members who want to advocate for improved and expanded local and regional transportation options for people with disabilities.
- Empower the members of the nine RTCs, through training and skills building, to become active, effective, and *welcomed* in the transportation planning efforts within their respective communities and regions.
- Facilitate the development of specific, but varied, strategies (such as voucher systems) that RTC members can put forth in their communities and regions to meet specific local transportation needs and deficiencies through technical and financial assistance.
- Provide guidance and support to the RTCs to ensure their optimum effectiveness by employing a part-time regional assistant in each of the nine regions.

To evaluate the effectiveness of this project, Easter Seals hired an external evaluator to conduct a multifaceted evaluation of the project implementation and outcomes. This evaluation consisted of the following phases

Phase 1: Development of the following survey instruments (see Section 4 for examples of instruments)

1. Survey targeting individual transit coalition members
2. Survey for use with group and telephone evaluation sessions

Phase 2: In February, 2000 Easter Seals mailed surveys to individual members of each transit coalition. Subjects mailed surveys back to Easter Seals, and the External Evaluator collected.

Phase 3: The external Evaluator conducted in-depth in-person group discussion sessions or telephone interviews with the following individuals:

1. 7 Coalition leaders
2. Project staff - Bryant Edgerton
3. 2 Transit coalition groups

Phase 4: The external Evaluator analyzed and interpreted the collected data, including demographic data provided by Easter Seals.

Phase 5: The External Evaluator will make a comprehensive oral presentation of the data, interpretations and recommendations for Easter Seal project staff.

Section 2: Evaluation Summary and Recommendations

Overview:

The project worked with 8 regional transit coalitions, as listed below:

Ashe/Watauga/Caldwell Counties	(Western North Carolina)
Cabarrus/Stanly/Union/Rowan Counties	(Western North Carolina)
Cumberland County	(Eastern North Carolina)
Guilford/Forsyth County	(Central North Carolina)
New Hanover County	(Eastern North Carolina)
Orange County	(Central North Carolina)
Rocky Mount (CTAG) County	(Eastern North Carolina)
Wake County	(Central North Carolina)

In regards to the effectiveness of the Accessible Transit 2001 project, 75% of members, responding to this evaluation, reported that they felt that their local transit coalition effectively advocated for access to transportation for people with disabilities in their communities. 63% reported that their local transit coalition was involved in their community's local transportation planning efforts. 63% reported that people with disabilities were more welcomed in the transportation planning process in their local communities as a result of the Accessible Transit 2001 project and their local coalitions' efforts. Results varied from coalition to coalition.

Only 48% of evaluation respondents felt that people with disabilities who did not drive cars could better access transportation in their communities as a result of the Accessible Transit 2001 Project. The majority of groups reported that they had made positive steps toward this goal, but they had only begun laying the foundation for more accessible transportation in their community and needed more time.

During the project, local transit coalitions reported conducting the following types of activities to address the transportation needs of people with disabilities in their local communities:

# of Coalitions	Activity
8	Conducted regular coalition meetings
8	Contacted local transportation officials/providers
8	Contacted county, town and/or city elected officials
7	Spoke at a public meeting (county commissioners, city council, etc.
7	Provided support or assistance for persons with disabilities to access transportation
7	Members served on other local boards, committees or commissions that addressed transportation issues (<i>64% of coalition members responding to this evaluation, reported that they personally were members of other boards, committees, commissions or civic groups that addressed transportation issues for persons with disabilities.</i>)
6	Wrote an article or letter to a newspaper or other written publication
5	Conducted training for transportation providers
5	Conducted a mini-grant project (train the trainer to teach individuals to ride the bus, voucher programs, etc.)
4	Contacted state elected officials
4	Conducted training for people with disabilities on strategies for accessing transportation
2	Appeared on a television or radio program
2	Conducted a public forum (very successful)

Training:

In regards to training, the majority of groups reported that they received no formal training under the Accessible Transit 2001 project. However, members representing local coalitions did attend statewide meetings hosted by the project, groups received written information, and groups

reported that project staff were very helpful. Most groups reported that there was a need for more formal training and direction by the project, especially for newly formed transit coalitions.

Training recommendations:

- New coalitions need a model they can use to set up their group
- Groups need in-person technical support or mentor to help them set up their group
- Training topic could include:
 - ❖ Motivating and assuring coalition members
 - ❖ Conducting effective meetings
 - ❖ Dealing with complaining during meetings in a constructive manner
 - ❖ Step by step process for starting a transit coalition
 - ❖ How to lobby
 - ❖ How to write a grant

Assistance provided to Transit Coalitions during the project:

Transit Coalitions reported receiving the following types of assistance during the project:

- Money (for postage, mailings, office supplies, transportation to meetings & conferences, refreshments)
- Mini grants
- Use of the Easter Seal Name (the project gave groups exposure in the community)
- Newsletter
- Local administrative assistant
- Written information
- Project staff support

Groups reported that the following assistance was **most helpful**:

1. Money for operating expenses
2. Funding to assist people with disabilities to attend meetings
3. Having the Easter Seals name associated with the project ("When we started, we could say the name EASTER SEALS and it was recognized. The name helped give us credibility, and a result, people were more open to work with us.")
4. Mini-grants (one coalition's voucher program was picked-up by their local county commissioners)
5. Project staff support
6. The project brought people together and got transit coalitions started
7. Local administrative assistant (However, this did not work well for some groups.)

Members reported that assistance to local Transit Coalitions **could be improved** in the following ways:

1. Provide a longer time period to complete projects (all groups recommended)
2. Need help learning how to run effective and organized meeting
3. Need mentor to provide in-person technical support and guidance
4. Need more structure and direction
5. Help getting more people with disabilities involved
6. Do more to contact & establish the core people for groups ("It would have been helpful if Easter Seals had sent out a press release to announce the project and solicit participation in our community.")
7. Local control of administrative assistant and money
8. More formal training to empower participants
9. Help groups, that do not have the structure to accept grant monies, find a local organization to adopt them and be their fiscal agent
10. Mini-grant guidelines were vague

Recommendations for future support of Transit Coalitions

Members reported that Easter Seals or other sources could provide the following types of assistance to help local Transit Coalitions continue their work in the future:

1. Mini grants - funds to get things started (even small projects)
2. Share information about the successes of other coalitions in NC
3. Easter Seals could play a lead role in alerting local transit coalitions of state and federal legislative issue and opportunities related to transit. This would give us more of an opportunity to support legislative change.
4. Web site and a list-serve that would enable Transportation Coalitions to get the most current transit related information and network with each other coalitions
5. Money to provide transportation for coalition members with disabilities to attend meetings and workshops
6. "The Easter Seal name carries a lot of weight. If we could still use the name as an umbrella, even if not financially, this would be helpful."
7. Identify materials that coalitions can use - videos, manuals, etc.
8. Provide model program materials with simple step-by-step instruction on conducting specific programs or activities related to transportation (i.e.: steps to getting media coverage of local Transit Coalition activities, sensitivity training for bus drivers, rider training, etc.)
9. Sponsor statewide meetings and organize groups to participate in public hearings.
10. Develop ways to encourage and recognize the efforts of local groups and their members
11. Help or training in writing grants
12. Help in recruiting new coalition members, particularly people with disabilities (publicity, strategies that local groups can use, etc.)
13. Provide Project Action materials to local Transit Coalitions
14. On-going training
15. Brochure that local coalitions could use to spread the message about the need for accessible transportation

Conclusion

Although each coalition's needs and challenges varied greatly, the majority of respondents to this evaluation felt that the Accessible Transit 2001 Project was a success. All Transit Coalitions reported that they were just beginning to effect change in their local communities. They felt that the project time period was not long enough, but the project was successful in getting local Transit Coalitions motivated and started. One member stated that their Transit Coalition would have never formed if it were not for the Accessible Transit 2001 Project. To continue their efforts and momentum, North Carolina Transit Coalitions report that they need additional assistance and support from a statewide agency such as Easter Seals.

Section 3: Survey Instruments

Instrument 1: Mailed Survey

Easter Seals NC Accessible Transit 2001 Project Evaluation

The Accessible Transit 2001 project began in the spring of 1998. The purpose of this project was to build and support local transit coalitions to address the transportation needs of people with disabilities. We want to know how this project benefited your community and how Easter Seals can continue to support your efforts.

Please fill out this survey and return it in the enclosed self-addressed envelope by February 18, 2000. If you need assistance completing this survey or you need this survey in alternate format, please contact Bryant Edgerton at 1-800-662-7119.

1. Which transit coalition are you a member of? (Check one)

Ashe/Watauga/Caldwell Cabarrus/Stanly/Union/Rowan Cumberland
 Guilford/Forsyth New Hanover Orange
 Rocky Mount (CTAG) Wake

**2. How many transit coalition meetings and/or activities have you participated in?
(Check one)**

More than 15 10 to 14 5 to 9 Less than 5

3. How do you feel the project was effective? (Respond to the statements below)

a) My local transit coalition effectively advocates for access to transportation for people with disabilities in my community. (Check one)

___ strongly agree ___ agree ___ neither agree or disagree ___ disagree ___ strongly disagree

b) My local transit coalition is actively involved in my community's local transportation planning efforts. (Check one)

___ strongly agree ___ agree ___ neither agree or disagree ___ disagree ___ strongly disagree

c) As a result of Accessible Transit 2001 and my local transit coalition, people with disabilities are more welcomed in the transportation planning process in my community. (Check one)

___ strongly agree ___ agree ___ neither agree or disagree ___ disagree ___ strongly disagree

d) As a result of the Transit 2001 project, people with disabilities who do not drive cars can better access transportation in my community. (Check one)

___ strongly agree ___ agree ___ neither agree or disagree ___ disagree ___ strongly disagree

Comments:

4. Over the past 12 months, what have you personally done to address the transportation needs of people with disabilities in your community? (Check all that apply)

- ___ Contacted local transportation officials/providers
- ___ Contacted county, town and/or city elected officials
- ___ Contacted state elected officials
- ___ Spoke at a public meeting (county commissioners, city council, etc.)
- ___ Wrote an article or letter to a newspaper or other written publication
- ___ Appeared on a television or radio program
- ___ Provided support or assistance for persons with disabilities to access transportation
- ___ Conducted training for people with disabilities on strategies for accessing transportation
- ___ Conducted training for transportation providers

____ Served on local boards, committees or commissions that addressed transportation issues

____ Others: _____

5. In addition to your local transit coalition, are you personally a member of any boards, committees, commissions or civic groups that address transportation issues? (Check one)

____ Yes ____ No If you answered yes, please list the names of these groups below:

6. Of all the assistance and support provided by the Accessible Transit 2001 Project, what has been most helpful to your local transit coalition?

7. What could have the Accessible Transit 2001 Project done to better support your local transit coalition?

8. What kind of assistance from Easter Seals or other sources would be most helpful to your local transit coalition in the future?

9. Is there anything else you want Easter Seals to know?

Instrument 2: Group and Phone Survey Questions

1. Over the past 12 months, what has your group done to address the transportation needs of people with disabilities in your community?

- Transportation voucher system
- Contacted local transportation officials/providers
- Contacted county, town and/or city elected officials
- Contacted state elected officials
- Spoke at a public meeting (county commissioners, city council, etc.)
- Wrote an article or letter to a newspaper or other written publication
- Appeared on a television or radio program
- Provided support or assistance for persons with disabilities to access transportation
- Conducted training for people with disabilities on strategies for accessing transportation
- Conducted training for transportation providers
- Served on local boards, committees or commissions that addressed transportation issues

2. What training did your group or individual group members receive from the Project?

- **What did you like best about the training?**
- **How could training be improved?**

3. What kind of assistance did the Transit 2001 Project provide to your Transportation Coalition?

4. Of all the assistance and support provided by the Accessible Transit 2001 Project, what has been most helpful to your local transit coalition?

5. What could have the Accessible Transit 2001 Project done to better support your local transit coalition?

- 6. What kind of assistance from Easter Seals or other sources would be most helpful to your local transit coalition in the future?**
- 7. As a result of the Transit 2001 project, people with disabilities who do not drive cars can better access transportation in my community.**
- 8. Is there anything else you want Easter Seals to know?**