

Passenger Transportation Plan - Regional Planning Affiliate 1, UERPC
Transportation Advisory Group Meeting Notes
January 25, 10:00 a.m. - 325 Washington Street, Decorah, Iowa

Present: Fern Rissman (WIA, UERPC), Dee Hosek (Howard Cty. VA), Earl Henry (NEICAC Transit), Katie Angell (Helping Services of NE Iowa), Pamera Kezy (Intern w/ Helping Services), Jan Heikes (Winneshiek & Allamakee County CPC), Karn Pankow (NEICAC Transit), Lynda Springer (IDHS), Rachel Jaster (G&G), Karla Organist (UERPC)

Invited but unable to attend: Carol Keune (Fayette County CPC), Heather Homewood (Allamakee Cty. VA), Shanna Hale (Opportunity Homes), Bruce Butters (Northland Agency), Daniel Rotto (Hometown Taxi), Lori Matter (Howard Cty. Res. Care Facility), Jean Gage (Clayton County CPC), Chalsea Carroll (Howard County CPC),

1. Introductions and a review of the notes from the October 12, 2012 meeting (motion by Henry, second by Pankow, to approve meeting notes, all ayes)
2. Review of PTP Draft:
 - A draft of the 2013 PTP Update was distributed for comment and discussion. Minor changes were discussed and noted.
 - Motion by Hosek, second by Rissman to approve and submit the Draft FY14 Annual PTP Update, all ayes.
3. Job Access Mobility Institute Update:
 - Karn provided a handout (attached) describing the three concepts the committee is working on.
 - Next steps for the committee will be to collect feedback by creating prototypes of the concepts to present to potential users to determine the feasibility of implementation in the real world.
4. Updates on PTP TAG Projects:
 - Mobility Manager: Karn reported that Transit has expanded the hours of its in-town service in Cresco to run from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. Ridership has more than doubled. They are now planning to do the same in Decorah, extending the hours to run from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. These new hours will start on February 1st. She provided everyone with an In-town Services schedule.
 - Marketing: With the expansion of hours in the Decorah area, the committee discussed options for marketing. In addition to newspaper inserts, the committee recommended posters or fliers on public access bulletin boards throughout the community and at some common or more popular rider destinations. The Luther College campus and their electronic communications were also mentioned.
 - Collaborations: Karn shared information about a regular service to Iowa City medical destinations being provided by Region 2. NEICAC Transit can transport riders to the pick-up sites and help coordinate rides with Region 2.
 - Stakeholder Outreach: Days on the Hill have begun. Organizations were urged to share how transportation impacts their clients. White papers were mentioned and faxing to representatives rather than mailing or emails was suggested. Groups were urged to inform federal representatives too, as Iowa is a donor state in road use taxes, and our rural areas need more attention. Fact: Iowa has the second oldest fleet of public transportation vehicles in the nation and the federal replacement funds Iowa is receiving will barely cover a bus and a half! Karn and Karla will pull some data from the survey results for people to share. The 30th is Transportation Day on the hill and a busload of people from the area are going – we will try to send it along. Jan mentioned that with the current conversation about mental health and the need for early intervention, she notes that the two biggest barriers are transportation and stigma.
5. Hearing no additional items from committee members, the next meeting was set for April 19th, 2013, 10:00 a.m. at UERPC's Decorah office

This is a quick summary of the 3 concepts that the NE Iowa Team developed during the Job Access Mobility Institute. These ideas are rough ideas that we developed based on all of the research we did at the beginning of the institute. The team will now go through and fine tune, challenge, and pull some of the strongest elements out of to help us decide which ideas are worth testing.

1. Project Flex-route:

There are 2 main highway corridors that run through our region; one that runs North & South and one that runs East & West. Both corridors connect multiple towns, including smaller communities with limited resources and larger communities that have major employment locations and colleges, as well as shopping and medical services. We propose setting up a daily scheduled flex service that runs up and down these corridors offering pickups & drop offs at designated locations. The service would also allow for integrated demand-response trips within a certain perimeter. We feel this type of “flex” service will maximize efficiency and will get as many people on the vehicle at the same time as possible, to help keep the per ride cost down.

2. Project E.A.R.L.:

Public Transit needs an image makeover in NE Iowa. We need to overcome misconceptions about who can use public transportation and attract people who have never considered using it before.

Getting more people in a vehicle at the same time is going to be a key component to lowering the per ride cost and increasing the success of public transportation projects we implement.

We have to be creative to engage a broader audience. Many people in our area think about people, not modes, when they need transportation. “Who can they call to get a ride.” Instead of trying to change that mindset outright, we think we can bridge the gap by making Public Transit into a “Who”.

Our initial concept is EARL - Easy, Affordable, Reliable, Life-changing Transportation. By personifying the service and developing a fun, interesting, and likeable marketing campaign focused around “riding with EARL”, we think we can drum up interest and engage a whole new audience.

In addition to humanizing the public transit brand, we also feel like we need to add some services / perks that will add to the “cool factor” of public transit and heighten the experience for the rider. Some of our ideas are:

- adding free Wi-Fi on the vehicles
- adding easy payment options that embrace the newest technologies (swipe cards, mobile wallets, smartphone apps, etc)
- using social media to engage and connect with the riders
- developing apps that allow tracking of real time updates of bus arrival times, scheduling a ride, etc.

3. Project Organize and Engage:

While one of our goals is to build ridership with the existing Public Transit provider, we know that not everyone is going to choose that mode of transportation, nor is it practical in every case. Ultimately we feel that choices need to exist so that every person can identify a mode of transportation that works best for their situation. There are several state and local projects already being implemented that should give people access to information about transportation options. Locally, there is a “one stop” transportation website being developed that will give information on public transit options in the area (including biking and walking routes). This website will eventually also link in with a statewide rideshare website that is being developed by the Iowa DOT.

We plan to leverage these online resources and improve education and awareness by putting together “tool kits” for different stakeholders (employers, economic development, employees, job seekers, legislators, etc). These toolkits will help the recipients better understand why transportation is an important part of building a strong community and local economy and will outline transportation options that currently exist in our community. We will also use these toolkits to recruit people for our Transit Advisory Group (TAG) and to help us start alternative funding conversations.