



U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Transit Administration



UWR/MSAA Demonstration of Coordinated Human-Service Transportation Models: Phase II — Phased Implementation Final Report

Background

The Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART) and many of its stakeholders, in partnership with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Human-Services Transportation Office, have been coordinating transportation services across multiple funding programs, communities, and demographics since 2001. The demography that MART and its partners support includes not only older adults and persons with disabilities, but also children, low-income individuals, and employment seekers.

This demonstration program provides a platform on which providers and travelers have access to the same system (using the Web) and can achieve more efficient transportation utilization. At the same time, providers can achieve a higher degree of cooperation by sharing resources and benefits. This project took the most practical and essential elements of a design created under the research and development phase (Phase I) of a United We Ride/Mobility Services for All Americans (UWR/MSAA) initiative and developed them into a working portal that met stakeholders' needs and provided an expandable platform from which development of an entire system could continue as future funding became available.

Objectives

The overall objective of UWR/MSAA initiative is to simplify access to transportation services for persons with disabilities and lower incomes, as well as older adults, by establishing a coordinated human-service transportation system that provides a simple point of access for consumers and is replicable and scalable. An additional object of Phase II was to seek alternative funding options for implementation of the full system. The project addressed in the UWR pre-award grant tested the feasibility of selected modules (trip booking, trip board, and billing) of the MART Integrated Traveler Services (M-ITS) coordinated model design submitted under the Phase I.

Three subprojects were included in Phase II: 1) Web-based call-taking and trip-management software for coordinating agencies that also provides the ability to manage clients and book trips directly into the systems of local transportation authorities to be scheduled on the agency's vehicles; 2) a Web-based Bulletin Board System implemented as the M-ITS Trip Board Portal on which participating entities can share travel requests and post acceptances of requests and communicate with each other via chat, messaging and other communication tools such as social media, in order to coordinate transportation; and 3) evaluation of the feasibility of implementing a

billing system, as proposed in Phase I, that ties together the service delivery and payment aspects of the trip. M-ITS users can manage fare payments, collections, billing, and reimbursements, depending on their affiliations, through this module.

Findings and Conclusions

Coordinating human-service transportation systems can provide a simple point of access for consumers, resulting in the provision of more transportation for more people.

The main findings of the project are as follows:

- Although several agencies (Easter Seals, C/W REST, Guild of St. Agnes, Town of Acton, Kiessling Transit) stepped forward to be test sites for software provided, funding cuts and staffing issues derailed the effort required to assist them.
- The main offering in all cases except Acton was “booking rides” on a Web-based system instead of sending faxes. The Town of Acton’s project was more successful in implementing a Web-based trip booking and scheduling/dispatch system to manage three vehicles from three different agencies and coordinating rides among them.
- M-ITS was used as a mobility management communication tool.
- The billing study successfully identified issues and challenges in the Payment Management, On-line Billing, Fare Card/Voucher Management, and Rider Accounting functions.

Overall, the implementation and testing phase proved to be very challenging in spite of the offer of free software and services, and some agencies were not able to maximize the benefits due to logistics issues.

Benefits

While the benefits in labor savings were significant, the biggest challenge in any automation project is the same: requiring people to change the way they do things. Having so many funding cuts and staffing-related back-outs created a lot of challenges. However, the Acton project was able to automate an existing relationship between the Town and its funding agency, the Lowell Regional Transit Authority. Granting coordinating agencies access to Web-based software that allows them to manage their clients and book trips means that the information can be transferred electronically to their providers. The other benefit was to observe how multiple groups can coordinate and develop a new transportation system using the communication tools developed in M-ITS. The two successful projects can be reproduced in other parts of the country, and economic benefits can result in more transportation to more people with the same resources.

Project Information

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