

Rural and Non-Metropolitan Paratransit Coordination

Asha Ramrakhiani
Chandrasekhar Swaminathan

Utah State University
Logan, Utah

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INTRODUCTION

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 included a requirement that public entities operating fixed route transportation services for the general public also must provide complementary paratransit service to persons unable to use the fixed route system. When this service is required, the ADA specifies when this service is required, eligibility criteria for the paratransit services, the level of service that must be provided, and standards for operation. The objectives of this project were to identify existing paratransit services in the Logan, Utah, area (located in the Cache Valley), describe services of these providers, and develop recommendations to improve the services.

BACKGROUND

Most communities receive small amounts of federal, state, and local public funds to provide transportation for needy individuals including elderly, physically disabled, and mentally disabled. The funds normally are obtained by means of annual proposals written by non-profit organizations for specific needs (i.e. Options for Independence provides transportation for the physically disabled). Typically, most of the money is restricted for the purchase of vans and buses, and little is available for operations. Consequently there has been a proliferation of small organizations, each with inadequate operating funds, and each owning a few vehicles that can be used only for their own designated purpose.

This causes especially difficult situations for small communities where pooling vehicles and combining the dispatching and other operations could provide significantly better service for everyone. One of the stumbling blocks to combining resources is record keeping and the reporting required by each sponsor. Merging the small, diverse record keeping systems is a

major obstacle. No organization is likely to give up direct control of its equipment without confidence in a central system. Most turnkey central systems for transit dispatch and record keeping cost far more than small communities can afford.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The transportation facilities provided in six counties — Juab, Millard, Piute, Sanpete, Sevier, and Wayne — were studied for the Utah Department of Transportation. The methodology adopted for conducting this study was to interview people associated with providing transportation. Population characteristics were analyzed. Resources for transit service were studied. Other inputs for the study included demand estimation for transit, service and institutional alternatives, financial issues such as federal, state, and local funding option. The feasibility study presents findings and recommendations after taking the issues into consideration.

Background

The six counties were studied to assess the need for public transportation services. There is no public transportation at hand in any of these counties. Analysis of the population shows a significant amount of need for transportation, which is approximately 128,400 passenger-trips per year or 500 passenger-trips per day. A few agencies in the counties provide transportation only to their clients. To foster public involvement, a public meeting was held in conjunction with the Economic Development District and Panoramaland Resource Conservation and Development Council. Comments were solicited on the project in general and ideas were welcomed from people present at the meeting. The main issues discussed were as follows:

- transportation needs for medical services, non-emergency medical, employment, and intercounty service
- importance of coordinated transportation
- maximum and effective use of equipment and available resources
- organizational and institutional issues between six counties
- inter-city bus services
- laws that allow one-quarter sales tax to fund roads
- questions such as who will drive, who will pay, and what kind of schedule will be operated

Certain other issues also were discussed. The analysis of alternatives available showed that since needs are numerous, they could not be met simultaneously for all of the regions.

On the other hand, good resources are available for transportation services in schools, senior citizen centers and other local transportation agencies. The survey shows that senior centers have 20 vehicles and schools have 194 vehicles in the six-county area, which are available for transportation. Many of the vehicles are underutilized. Some of the regions in the six-county area are remote and quite expensive to serve via public transportation. The main concern was focused on areas with highest transportation needs.

A series of interviews was conducted with key representatives involved with transit services. Each member was contacted and asked to answer 10 questions related to transit development. Comments received during these interviews can be summarized as follows:

- Identification of existing transportation issues and problems. A concern expressed was growth in the area that would bring more commuters and result in greater transportation needs.

- Realizations that better transportation infrastructure would help economy of the six-county area.
- The general consensus was that benefits of public transit were minimal.
- Financial support solutions varied from taxpayers to Government subsidy.

Recommendations

The feasibility study recommends coordination among the communities, pooling the present transportation agencies, and forming a network of public transit system as part of the six-county Association of Governments (AOG). The AOG has all the requirements needed for the institutional entity to provide a coordinated service. This multimodal system will include all types of modes from ridesharing to services for the elderly and disabled populations to intercity transportation. The study focuses on coordination efforts for the administration of a multimodal system at all levels including private and public transportation providers within the study area. Nephi has a transit maintenance facility, which is seldom used. Here the plan is to pool all the vehicles at Nephi, which could provide space for transit dispatch operations and vehicle maintenance. A further recommendation is to provide for the post of a transit coordinator who acts as liaison and manager of all resources pooled under him or her.

This plan was discussed with the Transit Advisory Committee. The following recommendations were made to implement the plan.

- ***Establishment of a Transit Board:*** The AOG should agree to and approve implementation of public transportation services as a responsibility of the AOG. There also was a need to establish a Transit Advisory Board, consisting of local government officials, staff, and citizens of the region.
- ***Set Up of Service Contracts:*** Several transportation providers in the six-county area can be used to provide a coordinated transit service. Along with the setup of the multimodal system, service contracts should be established with providers for the appropriate services.
- ***Implementation of Community Circulator Services:*** The circulator service will provide a daily service as well as demand responsive service in the community

five days a week. A community like Richfield, the largest, would be given the highest priority.

- ***Implementation of Intercounty Service:*** This service could be provided directly by the AOG or through a service contract. Hours of service should correspond to UTA service and provide a connection to either the fixed-route service or demand-responsive service in Utah County.
- ***Consolidation of Transit Dispatch and Vehicle Maintenance:*** The transit maintenance facility should be used for routine maintenance and dispatch of vehicles used for the multimodal transit system. The vehicles should be consolidated into a single fleet, which may then be used to provide various services, including transportation to meal sites, community circulator service, and service to Utah County.
- ***Establishment of Local Funding:*** The major source of local funding is the counties and communities within the six-county area. Local funding is required to operate the public transportation. Actual budgets should be prepared and presented to the Local government for the funding.
- ***To Obtain Additional Funding:*** Local funding alone cannot support operation of the transit system. Therefore a grant application available from the Federal Transit Administration through the Utah Department of Transportation must be prepared for additional funding. Among other grants available is the Welfare-to-Work grant program. The transit coordinator should recognize potential sources and submit applications for funding.

- **Transit Budget:** As a part of the implementation program a detailed budget should be prepared and updated as the plan is implemented. This could help in tracking when and how the service can be improved.

For individuals to have access to employment, schools, businesses, and medical facilities in the communities, intercity circulators would be provided on a high priority. The secondary requirement would be to provide a regional service in the communities in six counties.

Preliminary estimates were made of operating the services and the capital budget to accomplish the recommended service.

PARATRANSIT SERVICE PROVIDERS IN LOGAN

There are number of providers of paratransit service operating in the Logan, Utah, area. In several cases, cooperative agreements exist between these organizations to share vehicles. Other public organizations or individuals can borrow the vehicles, but they can be used only on an as-available basis; however, costs of using the vehicles would be prohibitive for most organizations. Many of the providers also serve adjacent communities outside of Logan throughout the Cache Valley area. Advanced reservations are required to use the paratransit services. Table 1 lists major organizations providing paratransit services.

Table 1. Paratransit Services in the Logan, Utah Area.

Organization	Lift-Equipped Vehicle	Regular Vehicle
Logan Transit District	2 buses	
Options for Independence	1 van	
Senior Citizens Center		2 vans
Sunshine Terrace	1 van	1 bus

Bear River Mental Health Department	1 van	1 van
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Characteristics of the Clientele Served

Size

The size of the Logan paratransit market that is ADA-eligible is not precisely known.

Eligible persons who may use paratransit services include people:

- who are unable to ride a fixed route service due to inability to independently board, ride and/or disembark,
- who have a condition that prevents them from getting to or from a fixed route boarding or disembarking location,
- who have been certified by another transit provider,
- who are traveling as an attendant and/or companion of a person who is paratransit- eligible.

An example of an eligible individual is one who is unable to:

- identify the correct bus or stop,
- board or disembark from an accessible vehicle without assistance,
- maintain balance while seated on a moving bus,
- follow transfer directions needed to complete the trip,
- navigate paths of travel between transfer stations.

Senior Citizens

The city of Logan has a fairly large senior citizen community, with approximately 10 percent (i.e., 10.2 percent) of its population more than 65 years of age. This community increases during the summer season as Utah State University students leave for summer breaks and senior citizens come from warmer climates to enjoy summer weather. It is not known what percentage of this transient senior citizen community has disabilities.

Disabled

The size of Logan's disabled community has been difficult to establish. It is estimated that there are at least 60 individuals using wheelchairs who live in the city and are not sufficiently mobile to use fixed route public transportation services. However, without a precise estimate of the number of people with mobility disabilities, it is difficult to project market and demand for a complimentary paratransit service. This also makes it difficult to project whether or not the existing service level is sufficient to handle demand or to project market penetration.

Records

Registration of the disabled who use paratransit services may provide the city an estimate of the disabled community. For instance, the Logan Transit District maintains records on disabled usage of the fixed route and demand-responsive services. These records establish a history of trip destinations, operational problems, and a list of disabled individuals in the city.

Coordination of Services

The Bear River Association of Governments (BRAG) has acted as a coordinating agency for the LTD and other providers in the area. Logan presently has limited cab service not equipped to handle the mobility disabled, and a limited number of privately operated lift-equipped vans dedicated to the use of specific organizations and residences. Utah State University in Logan provides shuttle bus service for its students in the campus area and has one vehicle equipped to handle the mobility disabled. None of the existing lift-equipped services are available to the general public. The LTD service complements and expands existing lift-equipped services.

DESCRIPTION OF EXISTING PARATRANSIT SERVICES

Four of the agencies listed in Table 1 cooperated in this study and were interviewed: the Logan Transit District (LTD), Options for Independence, the Senior Citizens Center, and Sunshine Terrace.

Logan Transit District Paratransit Service

Type of Service Provided

The paratransit service of the Logan Transit District (LTD), referred to as “Call-A-Ride,” provides curb-of-origin to curb-of-destination service. The document, *City of Logan Transit Department Policy 4.0*, includes guidelines and policies for the service. Since the fixed route service coverage area includes almost all neighborhoods of the city, the paratransit service is available to all residents of the city for any trip within the city. A separate telephone number is provided for scheduling or reserving this service. Demand responsive service also is made available to visitors with disabilities who have disabled identification from another provider.

Operator Assistance Policies

Buses are staffed with operators who are trained to handle the requirements of passengers with disabilities. LTD vehicle operators may assist ADA paratransit-eligible individuals in boarding and disembarking LTD vehicles, and may assist with cargo (e.g., baggage, bags of groceries, etc.) that may be reasonably carried aboard by one person. No LTD vehicle operator will enter a private residence or public facility to provide this service. The LTD may require that individuals provide an assistant where it is determined by the LTD staff that one is necessary for continued service.

Equipment

All buses are equipped with lifts that can handle loads of up to 800 pounds. Generally, lifts can deploy to all levels, including curbs, street level, and levels in between. Lifts are equipped with handrails to accommodate both people standing and those using wheelchairs. Seating for chairs are face forward. Controls interlock to ensure that the bus will not move during the loading of a chair. These buses provide two chair tie-downs with shoulder straps and a third chair tie-down without a shoulder strap. The bus uses Q straint and Aeroquip tie-down arrangements. Seating can accommodate the travel of attendants and companions. The buses are air-conditioned for comfort and made of structural steel shell construction for safety. Steps and floor walkways are covered with slip resistant flooring material. Buses include overhead handrails.

Fares

A 0.25 percent sales tax passed by the residents of Logan to fund the operation of public transit service is revenue dedicated to transit operations. Based on a revenue stream combination of federal capital funds that have been made available for equipment purchase and operating subsidy and sales tax revenues, the LTD determined that it could introduce and operate services for the first two years without charging fares. No fares are charged to use the LTD paratransit service.

However, other agencies, including Options for Independence, the Senior Citizens Center, the Bear River Mental Health Association, and Sunshine Terrace, do charge a minimal fare for the following reasons:

- to off-set operating costs,
- to provide revenues to extend service coverage,

- to provide a means to control random usage that may degrade operation of the service of the equipment.

The LTD anticipates that in the future it may introduce fares for any of the above reasons.

Eligibility

All information about the eligibility process, materials necessary to apply for eligibility, and notices and determinations concerning eligibility are made available in accessible formats. If a request for a format not currently offered by the LTD is made, LTD staff will work with local accessibility groups to produce the requested media. LTD staff review applications and determine eligibility. As soon as a completed application is received by the LTD, the applicant may begin using the Call-A-Ride service. If, by a date 21 calendar days following submission of a completed application, LTD staff has not made a determination of eligibility, the applicant will be treated as eligible and provided service until and unless the entity denies the application. The LTD provides documentation to each eligible individual stating that he or she is “ADA Paratransit-Eligible.” The LTD may require re-certification of the eligibility of ADA paratransit-eligible individuals at reasonable intervals, or as needed.

Suspension of Service / “No-Show” Policy

The LTD will suspend the provision of service to ADA paratransit-eligible individuals who establish a pattern or practice of missing scheduled trips. A “no-show” is defined as a person missing a scheduled trip or failing to cancel a scheduled trip within 30 minutes of the scheduled pick-up time. When a “no-show” occurs, the LTD will make a notification on the passenger’s database card. If another “no-show” occurs within a 30-day period, the LTD will put the individual on a six-month probation.

Service Area and Response Time

The LTD provides Call-A-Ride service within Logan City limits. The LTD schedules and provides paratransit service to any ADA paratransit-eligible person at any requested time on a particular day in response to a request for service made the previous service day. Reservations are taken by reservation agents from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, 9:15 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturdays, and by mechanical means on Sunday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Trip requests made by mechanical means on Sunday for Monday service result in a call-back from a reservation agent on Sunday between 6 and 8 p.m. If the reservation agent is unable to contact the individual(s) on Sunday evening between the prescribed hours, further attempts are made on Monday to schedule the requested trip.

Subscription Service

A subscription service is available for scheduling repetitive trips over an extended period of time. The LTD allows Call-A-Ride customers to schedule rides for up to a 12-month period. However, the LTD will not schedule in a subscription context more than 50 percent of the possible/potential trips during any two-hour window. Statistics concerning LTD paratransit services are presented in Appendix A.

Options for Independence Paratransit Service

Type of Service Provided

Options for Independence (OPTIONS) serve people with disabilities in Box Elder, Cache, Rich, and Weber Counties. OPTIONS' policy is to make its vans available to accommodate consumer needs as often as possible. The service provided by this agency mainly facilitates recreational transportation for the disabled and elderly. One day of the week

(Tuesdays) is reserved for shopping trips. Recreational coordinators schedule weekly activities. A calendar of the activities is sent to patrons every two months. There are a minimum of two activities every week. Typical activities include shopping trips to various malls, trips to movies and dinners, visits to county fairs and rodeos, and picnics in the parks, etc.

Use of Van by Individuals with Disabilities

Individuals with disabilities may borrow a van when no other transportation is available to meet their needs. They must schedule the van through the recreation coordinator and complete all paperwork.

- Individuals with disabilities must sign an agreement with OPTIONS that outlines their responsibilities during the period that a van is borrowed.
- Drivers hired by individuals with disabilities must sign an agreement with OPTIONS and fulfill all OPTIONS requirements for drivers before driving a van.
- Individuals with disabilities may borrow a van free of charge, but must return the van in good order with a full tank of gas. They must sign an agreement with OPTIONS before the van is released to them. Donations are accepted.
- Use of a van by individuals with disabilities will be considered only when it is not scheduled for use in OPTIONS activities.

Use of Van by Disability-Related Organizations

- Disability-related organizations may borrow a van when no other transportation is available to meet their needs. They must schedule a van through the recreation coordinator and complete all paperwork.

- Disability-related organizations that use a van are subject to all OPTIONS requirements for use of the van.
- Disability-related organizations are charged \$0.42 per mile of usage beginning when a van is picked up, unless the executive director has negotiated a different rate.
- Use of a van for OPTIONS activities and by individual consumers will take precedence over use by a disability-related organization.

Safety

- At all times, van users must strive to use good judgement with regard to the safety of all van passengers and must fully comply with OPTIONS safety requirements.
- OPTIONS will deny the use of a van under conditions considered unsafe, even if *it previously has been scheduled*.

Maintenance

- OPTIONS maintain the vans in good working order and will deny their use when they are not in good working order, even if previously scheduled.
- OPTIONS service their Dodge van according to the UDOT Preventive Maintenance schedule and their Ford van according to a generally accepted maintenance schedule.

Information concerning OPTIONS services and demographic data is presented in Appendix B.

Senior Citizens Center Paratransit Service

Type of Service Provided

The Senior Citizens Center schedules rides upon request and availability of a driver. Service is not provided during an emergency. Only door-to-door service is provided. The rides are provided on a first-come-first served basis. This service is available for people with disabilities and the elderly. Countywide transportation is available on specified days.

Passenger Assistance

Transportation provided is door-to-door service. The client must be ready when the driver arrives. The driver may provide assistance from the door to the vehicle. If the driver deems that the conditions are unsafe due to inadequate stairs, railings, ramps, or weather-related conditions, the ride will be denied. The driver may enter the passenger's home to carry light packages. The Senior Citizens Center does not provide a personal attendant. The passenger is allowed and encouraged to bring an attendant if needed. The drivers may permit scheduled quick errands or shopping, but only if time permits. Service animals will be allowed to assist passengers. Passengers are responsible for providing their own mobility aids. Mobility aides must be safe and in good working condition. The Center transportation service complies with the ADA by attempting to reasonably accommodate wheelchairs and mobility aids.

Service Area

Transportation is provided within Cache County only. Occasionally recreational trips in the state of Utah are offered, with funding by donations.

Reservations, Scheduling, and Cancellations

Reservations must be made during business hours at least one day prior to the ride. At the time of reservation, an approximate time of pick-up is given. The driver may arrive up to 15 minutes early, so the client should be ready at least 15 minutes early. In the event that the driver will be more than 15 minutes late, the client is notified. When the driver arrives, they usually wait up to five minutes before leaving. Unless other arrangements have been made, when the client is finished with the appointment, they call the Senior Citizens Center to arrange for a ride home. Only scheduled stops are made. The only exception may be prescription pick-up after a doctor's appointment. A same day transportation request is honored, depending on space and driver availability. A client is responsible for canceling a scheduled ride as soon as possible so that other people may be served. To provide more rides to a greater population, actual pick-up time may be adjusted to accommodate scheduling needs.

Days and Hours of Service

Office hours are Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The transportation hours are Monday through Friday 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. and 1 to 4 p.m. Priority is given to Senior Citizen Center lunch clients. Pick-up and returns are between the hours of 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.

Transportation is not available on legal holidays or other days that the Senior Citizens Center is closed.

Fares

Though the Senior Citizens Center does not charge fixed fares, they solicit a donation from patrons. The center can provide transportation because of donations. However, no one is denied a ride because they can not afford to donate.

Passenger Conduct and Responsibilities

The Senior Citizens Center policy rules regarding passenger behavior follows:

- Passengers shall be courteous and considerate of others.
- The driver is responsible for enforcing rules, and all instructions from the driver are to be followed.
- Passengers displaying inappropriate behavior will not be allowed on the vehicle. Inappropriate conduct (as deemed by the driver or Senior Citizens Center staff) includes, but is not limited to: use of tobacco, possession of open container of alcohol and/or illegal drugs, foul language, carrying weapons, and fighting and bothering other passengers.
- Passengers will not ask or expect the driver to “bend the rules.”
- The Senior Citizens Center reserves the right to refuse service based on violation of these rules.

Transportation Program Responsibilities

The Senior Citizens Center is committed to providing on-time, reliable, and safe transportation. Vehicles are kept clean and properly maintained for safety and to extend the life of the vehicle. The center is responsible for abiding by the policies detailed in the service policy. The center maintains an alcohol- and drug-free workforce.

Safety

All drivers have proper licenses and receive training. All passengers are seated with seat belts secured properly. Wheelchairs are safely secured when the vehicle is in motion. A daily pre-trip inspection is completed on each vehicle used for transportation before the vehicle is put

into service. The Senior Citizens Center is committed to providing safe operation of its vehicles, including the safe boarding and de-boarding of the passengers. Passengers are required to follow instructions given by the driver to ensure safety for all passengers. Passengers must wait for drivers to open doors of vehicles.

Sunshine Terrace Paratransit Service

Type of Service Provided

The Sunshine Terrace includes a nursing home and an adult day care center.

Transportation services provided by Sunshine Terrace include the following activities:

- Drive residents of the Sunshine Terrace to and from doctor's appointments in and out of Cache Valley.
- Pick up new residents who are admitted to the facility. Also take discharged residents to the place where they are discharged.
- Take residents for shopping and to the bank. Also pick them up at a specified time at the store or bank.
- Drive for recreation therapy as needed.
- Drive for the Adult Day Care Center, bringing clients to the Day Care Center and taking them home at night.
- Meet resident's physical and emotional needs during transportation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Several paratransit service providers exist in the Logan, Utah, area. This report reviewed those services. A set questionnaire was prepared and the views of transit providers ascertained.

The LTD and the Senior Citizens Center offer the most service in terms of population served and

the number of rides offered. The LTD, with two vans, provides rides within Logan City only. Sometimes the LTD service is under-utilized. Options for Independence may provide rides to Salt Lake City, depending on the schedules. However, sometimes Options for Independence may have to deny a call for a ride because of an inadequate number of vehicles. Other agencies also at times cannot meet the demand for rides. During interviews, agency staff stated that if they had more vehicles, the service provided by their agency could increase the number of rides provided. There is not enough funding to buy new vehicles even though the present need for transportation cannot be met with available vehicles.

A similar study of transit feasibility was conducted for the six-county area, which includes Juab, Millard, Piute, Sanpete, Sevier, and Wayne Counties. The report was reviewed in an earlier chapter. The senior centers provided limited transportation only to the elderly in those counties. While good resources exist for transportation in senior centers, many of their vehicles are underutilized. On the other hand transportation locally available for the general public in the community and region is limited. The estimated need for transportation is high. Also since the needs are many, they cannot be met at the same time for all of the regions.

To improve paratransit services in Logan, it is suggested that agencies work together to provide a satisfactory service to the people of Logan. However, potential problems in developing this solution are as follows:

- All of these agencies have different sources of funding; in addition, several agencies (e.g., the Senior Citizens Center) have a donation policy.
- The agencies provide trips for different purposes.
- Areas covered and days of service are different.
- Maintenance of records and keeping track of service operations.

- Institutional issues such as delegation of authority and consensus among participating agencies may be difficult to achieve.

Despite these problems, agencies may be able to develop procedures for sharing vehicles during periods of non-use. For example, if the LTD is not using its paratransit vehicle and if another agency such as Options for Independence needs a vehicle to meet its demand for rides, then a policy could be implemented that would allow Options for Independence to use the LTD vehicle, and vice-versa. A central dispatch could be created to implement the exchange program. It also is suggested that uniform records be maintained of exchanges to improve efficiency of the program. Records could include documentation of clients served, pick-up and drop-off locations, miles traveled, date and time of trips, the people creating records, etc. Once the records database has been established, schedules and driver and vehicle assignments can be generated from the information. Pooling services would be in the interest of both the providers and provided. The post of transit coordinator can be created which would be responsible in coordinating services based on mutually agreeable guidelines.

Similar recommendations were made for the six-county area, where Six County Association of Governments (AOG) was recommended as the control office of this multimodal system. A formation of network system was recommended highly in this case. The AOG had all the requirements needed for the institutional entity to provide a coordinated service. A further recommendation provides for the post of a transit coordinator who acts as a liaison and manager of all resources pooled under him/her.

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APPENDIX A

Logan Transit District (Ltd) Service Data

APPENDIX B

Options for Independence (OPTIONS) Service Data