

2015

Community Transportation Survey

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11/15/2015

Introduction

Transportation to work is essential for finding and maintaining employment. For those who depend exclusively on public transit services to get to work, limited services can narrow available employment options, creating a major roadblock to securing a viable livelihood. Personal reports suggest there are limited public transportation options in Iowa City, Coralville, and North Liberty for workers, including those accessing public services such as emergency shelters, food pantries, and neighborhood centers. The Community Transportation Committee conducted a survey at several of these locations in order to investigate whether transportation problems are a widespread phenomenon. Improving transportation options for workers has many benefits both for individuals and for the economic prosperity of the region.

This report explores the results of research on barriers to employment related to public transit in Iowa City, Coralville, and North Liberty for individuals accessing public services. The purpose of our research was to provide a clearer picture of whether there are gaps in transportation services for workers and, if gaps exist, to determine which transportation services are most needed. This report also provides examples of transportation programs in other communities and suggests how they might be used as models for future transportation initiatives in Johnson County.

Public transportation provides personal mobility and freedom for people from every walk of life. – American Public Transportation Association

Linkage between Transportation and Employment

Providing inclusive transportation options benefits workers by increasing job opportunities, promoting self-sufficiency, and extending pathways for career advancement. According to the National Coalition for the Homeless Employment Report, 30% of survey respondents reported that transportation was a barrier to employment (Acuña and Erlenbusch, 2009).

Providing more transportation options also benefits the local economy by providing an adequate workforce and enhancing investment. According to the American Public Transportation Association, every \$1 invested in public transportation generates approximately \$4 in economic returns, every \$10 million in capital investment in public transportation yields \$30 million in increased business sales, and every \$1 billion invested in public transportation supports and creates more than 50,000 jobs.

Home values performed 42 percent better on average if they were located near public transportation with high-frequency service (American Public Transportation Association, 2016).

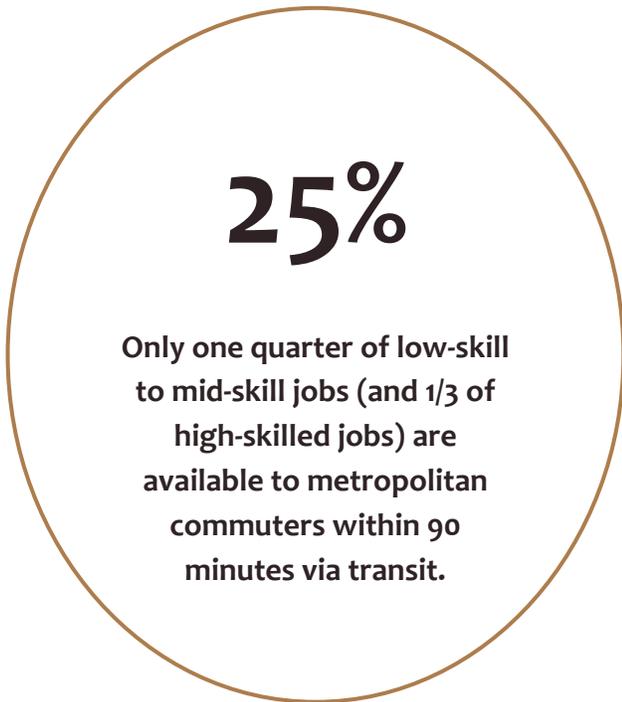


Figure 1– Tomer, Kneebone, Puentes, & Berube, 2011

Another benefit of improved public transportation is the "agglomeration economy effect" to which it can lead. The agglomeration economy effect refers to increased population density and access, which can increase businesses' potential employees and customers, as well as facilitate collaboration and innovation through increased sharing of information (Weisbrod & Reno, 2009).

Current Public Transportation Options

Current public transportation services in Iowa City, Coralville, and North Liberty consist of fixed bus routes and on-demand services, including a free fixed route bus service for students of the University of Iowa. Iowa City and Coralville both have daytime and night time bus service; however Coralville buses run an hour earlier and later than Iowa City buses. Bus service to North Liberty is provided by Coralville transit and currently runs twice daily.

To enhance access to public transportation services, the City of Iowa City provides 1,220 free bus passes monthly to low-income individuals through social service agencies. Iowa City Transit also has discounts for people who receive Medicaid and people over 60 years of age (\$0.50 per ticket versus \$1.00), and people who have disabilities receive free services during off-peak hours. Coralville Transit provides service to Coralville and North Liberty with discounted fares for people who are 65 or over, or have a disability, at \$0.50 per ticket, versus \$1.00. Neither city currently provides free bus tickets to service agencies.

Transportation Service	Service Type	Hours of operation	Population Served
Iowa City Transit	Fixed Route	6:30 am to 11:00 pm M-F 6:30 am to 7:30 pm Sat	General Public
Iowa City Transit Low-Income and Disabled Discounts	Fixed Route	6:30 am to 11:00 pm M-F 6:30 am to 7:30 pm Sat	Low-income and people with disabilities
Coralville Transit	Fixed Route	6:00 am to 11:45 pm M-F 7:15 am to 7:30 pm Sat	General Public
North Liberty Service (Through Coralville Transit)	Fixed Route	6:30 am to 7:30 am M-F 5:00 pm to 6:00 pm M-F	General Public
Cambus (University of Iowa)	Fixed Route	6:00 am to 12:40 am M-Sun	Free to public
Bionic Bus (University of Iowa)	On- Demand Paratransit	6:30 am to 12:30 am M-F 12:00 pm-12:30 am Sat-Sun	Faculty, students, and staff with permanent or temporary disabilities.
Safe Ride Service (University of Iowa)	On- Demand	Friday and Saturday nights from 12:10 am to 2:10 am during the academic year (end of August to mid-May)	Free to general public
Johnson County Seats (Iowa City)	On- Demand Paratransit	6:00 am to 11:45 pm M-F 7:15 am to 7:30 pm Sat	Open to the general public
Johnson County Seats (Coralville)	On- Demand Paratransit	6:00 am to 11:45 pm M-F 7:15 am to 7:30 pm Sat	Open to the general public
Johnson County Seats (North Liberty)	On-Demand Paratransit	7:00 am, 11:00 am, & 4:30 pm M-F	Open to the general public
Johnson County Seats (Morse, Solon, Shueyville, Sutliff, Swisher)	On- Demand Paratransit	Monday, Tuesday & Thursday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.	Open to the general public
Johnson County Seats (Oxford, Tiffin, Cosgrove)	On- Demand Paratransit	Tuesday and Thursday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.	Open to the general public
Johnson County Seats (Lone Tree, Sharon Center, Hills, Frytown)	On- Demand Paratransit	Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.	Open to the general public
Elder Services Medical Transportation	On-Demand	As scheduled	People who are 60 years of age or older

Figure 2 Transportation Services in Iowa City, Coralville, and North Liberty

Assessing Gaps in Transportation Services: Community Transportation Survey

Purpose

The purpose of the Community Transportation survey was to assess whether transportation was a barrier to employment for workers in Iowa City, Coralville, and North Liberty. And, if transportation was a barrier to employment, to determine what gaps in transportation services were the most common.

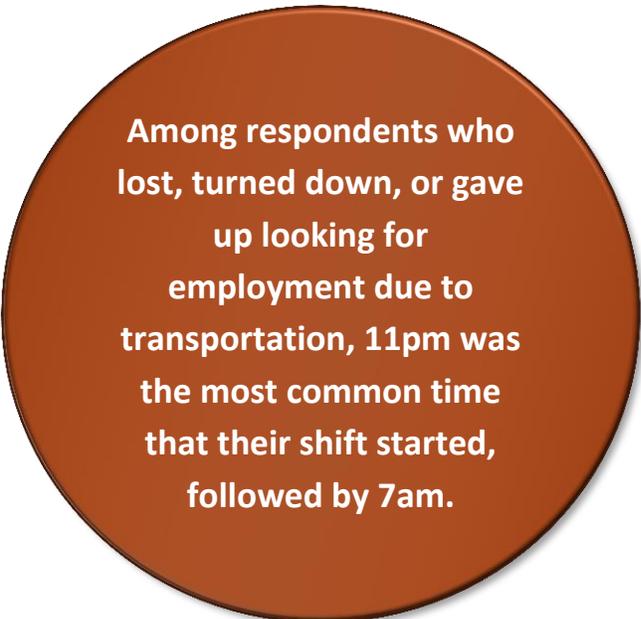
Methodology

Community Transportation Surveys were collected during the first two weeks of November in 2015. A total of 157 surveys were collected from six locations including the North Liberty Community Pantry, Coralville Ecumenical Pantry, The Crisis Center of Johnson County, Shelter House, the Center for Worker Justice, and at the Homeless Stand Down event held at the Robert A Lee Recreation Center. Surveys were conducted in the lobby or waiting area of each location. As individuals were seated in the waiting area, each was offered a survey. Surveys were distributed in English and Spanish.

Results

Residence

The largest group of respondents consisted of residents of Iowa City, followed by Coralville. A smaller number of surveys were collected in North Liberty than Iowa City or Coralville because fewer individuals visited the North Liberty Pantry compared to the other survey locations.



Among respondents who lost, turned down, or gave up looking for employment due to transportation, 11pm was the most common time that their shift started, followed by 7am.

Barriers to employment

Respondents were asked whether, in the past year, they had lost a job, turned down a job, or given up looking for a job they wanted due to poor transportation options. **Forty percent** of respondents reported turning down a job because of poor transportation. **Thirty-five percent** reported that they had lost a job and **thirty percent** reported that they gave up looking for a job they wanted (n=140). Among respondents who had lost, turned down, or gave up

looking for employment due to transportation, 11pm was the most common time that their shift started, followed by 7am (n=77).

Gaps in Transportation Services

The main challenges accessing public transit to get to work or a job interview reported by respondents were that the bus did not run when they needed it and did not run as frequently as needed (n=142). The most difficult days to get to work or a job interview using public transit in order of difficulty were Sunday, Saturday, and Friday, as reported by respondents. The most difficult times to get to work were late night (9pm to Midnight), early morning (Midnight to 7am), and evening (6pm to 9pm), which fall outside regular hours of operation for Iowa City Transit and Coralville Transit.

Demographics

Sixty percent of the survey respondents reported their race as White, thirty percent Black, four percent Latino, two percent American Indian, one percent Asian, and two percent multi-racial. Seventeen percent of respondents reported they were of Hispanic origin. Twenty percent of respondents had a disability that made it difficult to use a car, bus, or required a wheelchair lift. Fifty-six percent of respondents earned less than ten thousand dollars per year.

Thirty-five percent of respondents reported that they had lost a job due to limited transportation choices.

Discussion

Gaps in Transportation Services

Early morning and late night services were the most requested transit features according to our survey. Specifically, 7:00am and 11pm were the most frequently requested times. Frequency of service was also an issue.

Though the sample size of respondents living in North Liberty was small, many respondents who were not residents of North Liberty requested better bus service to the city.

Consistent with the 2009 findings of the National Coalition for the Homeless, 30% of respondents we surveyed reported that they had lost, quit, or gave up looking for a job due to lack of transportation (Acuña and Erlenbusch, 2009).

Financial Barriers to Transportation and Employment

One challenge faced by workers accessing public services is that bus passes are often out of reach for financial reasons. Agencies such as Shelter House and the Crisis Center give out bus passes, but this service is a

burdensome expenditure for small non-profits and the demand for passes far exceeds the supply. Another financial difficulty is the paycheck gap. Even when employment is found, without an immediate source of funding available, workers still may not be able to afford to ride the bus until they receive their first paycheck. This narrows employment options to those that are within walking distance, limiting both type of jobs people can apply for and the pay rate they can achieve.

Recommendations

Extend Current Iowa City Bus Services

Currently, Iowa City morning bus service begins at 6:30 am and night service ends at 11:00 pm, while Coralville morning service begins at 6:00 am and night service ends at 11:45 pm. In order to increase the ease of commuting for workers between the three cities, Iowa City could extend bus hours on some routes one hour earlier and one hour later, allowing time for passengers to get to and from work on time. This change would positively impact many industries such as restaurants, janitorial, manufacturing, grocery stores, retail, security, and many others.

Consider New Forms of Transit

New programs such as vanpools, subsidized taxis, and low cost transportation programs could provide many new options for workers to reach employers. These

programs should start small and scale to demand. Once demand can be assessed, more decisions can be made. City, County, State, and foundation funding sources could support more transportation options. Ideally, State special project transportation funding would be used to initiate programs and City and County funding would provide subsidies. User fees could be charged, except on low-barrier services.

Vanpool Services

A vanpool service would be beneficial if there are groups of people going to the same or closely located places to work. Vanpools can be operated by one or more organizations in order to serve workers who have limited options to obtain transportation to work, such as people who start or end work shifts outside of the operating hours of public transit, people who work at locations not located near a bus route, or people experiencing homelessness.

Typically, vanpools employ a driver who works at a particular employer to drive a van of other employees to work. The driver is allowed to take the vehicle home and is allotted a certain amount of extra miles.

A vanpool program would be beneficial to the city to complement an expansion of bus service hours, so that the two approaches could target community needs in a cost-effective way.

Subsidized taxis

A subsidized taxi service would be particularly helpful in cutting down transit time for people working and balancing other responsibilities at home, such as raising children. Transportation can take a long time if individuals do not live close to where they work or if they have to take one or more transfers to get to work, which can present challenges to working people. It would also be very helpful for people who work second or third shift, when buses are not running. The service would also benefit taxi companies, because they would get more business from it; the compensation would simply come from the subsidy instead of the client.

Low-barrier Transportation to Work Programs

A low-barrier transportation to work program can take various forms. It could be a free vanpool for those who qualify, a program which dispenses free bus passes to those who qualify, free taxi vouchers for those who qualify, or any other program which provides free transportation to individuals who do not otherwise have access (due to homelessness, loss of employment, etc.). The idea of low-barrier transportation to work programs is to provide initial transportation so individuals can apply for, obtain, and maintain employment. Once these individuals are self-sufficient, they would no longer qualify for the program and their spot would be taken by another qualified individual.

The idea of low-cost transportation to work programs is to provide initial transportation so individuals can apply for, obtain, and maintain employment.

Case Studies

Subsidized taxis

Olathe, Kansas Subsidized Taxi Program



The city of Olathe, Kansas also has a successful subsidized taxi program which was started in 1974. Olathe has a slightly larger population than Iowa City at around 130,000. The taxi program has roughly 500 participants and provides approximately 40,000 rides per year. The city of Olathe puts out a request for proposal every 5 years, and taxi companies apply for the contract.

In Olathe's program, there are three types of coupons for subsidized rides: personal coupon- must be 60 or older or disabled to qualify (21 rides per month allowed), medical coupon- must be 60 or older or disabled to qualify (21 rides per month allowed), and employment coupon- must be at 150% poverty level to qualify currently under Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) program funding standards; when JARC no longer funds the program, must be at 80% of HUD to qualify under community block grant standards. The work program is the most utilized with around 20,000 one way trips provided per year.

In order to participate in the program, clients must fill out an application and become accepted; riders then call dispatch to set up a ride. Once riders have established a relationship with a taxi

driver, many call that driver directly to set up rides. The price to riders is \$3.50 per book, with 10 rides per book (35% of normal fare). The riders purchase coupon books from the city transit authority and give coupons to the drivers, and then the taxi company submits bills for rides to the city and is reimbursed by the city. The city also provides two ADA accessible vans to the taxi company for the program.

The annual cost of the program is approximately \$550,000. The program receives \$198,000 from city funds, \$198,000 from federal grant funds, \$140,000 in sales, \$15,000-\$40,000 in additional county block grant funds.

Olathe calculated the economic benefits of this program to the community. In 2015, Olathe had approximately 155 participants in the work program. For sake of simplicity, they assumed each of those individuals worked 20 hours a week and made minimum wage at \$7.25 per hour which would be \$145.00 weekly wages or \$7,540.00 yearly. $\$7,540.00 \times 155$ participants is \$1,168,700.00 per year in wages that wouldn't be in the community otherwise. Program administrators used these conservative numbers due to some of the participants who go to work preparation locations or workshops where they are paid a piecemeal rate that doesn't amount to much. (A. Hollister, personal communication, January 7, 2016)

Nobles County Heartland Express/Worthington Taxi Prairieland Transit System



Another example of a successful subsidized taxi program is the Nobles County Heartland Express/Worthington Taxi Prairieland Transit System. Part of the fare for taxi rides is paid by the transit organization, and rides in the city are provided by Worthington Taxi. Express buses are available for people who need ADA accessible transportation. The program is funded by Minnesota DOT Public Transit funding, and the partnership and shared dispatch system between the public and private agencies allowed the subsidy to be applied to users of both the express buses and taxis. (Minnesota Council on Transportation Access, 2011)

Low cost Employment Transportation Programs

HIRTA Public Transit



The Goodwill career connection center in Newton, Iowa was awarded a \$2,000 grant from Theisen's, which will be used to partner with the local Salvation Army and HIRTA to provide rides to eligible clients who need to go on job interviews and also for transportation to and from their new job for the first two weeks of employment. This is one of four projects that was awarded out of 330 applicants. (HIRTA, 2015)

Opportunity Center for the Homeless



Opportunity Center for the Homeless is an organization located in El Paso, TX consisting of two homeless shelters. The organization helps people who are homeless with a range of issues, including employment. To assist clients with their transportation needs, the Opportunity Center operates two 15-passenger vans, one dispatcher, and three drivers. Transportation services run five days a week starting at 5:45 am and continuing until 5:30 pm. This service averages 100 passengers a day.

Clients from all 29 El Paso Coalition for the Homeless agencies are able to call to schedule daily rides. The transportation office keeps an updated advance appointment book, and the dispatcher will make a reminder call the day before the client's appointment. The transportation program has been in operation since 1999, and the vans log well over 100,000 miles a year. (Opportunity Center for the Homeless, 2011)

Wheels to Work



Wheels to work, a program in Sacramento CA, is a collaboration between Paratransit Inc., Women’s Empowerment, the Sacramento Housing Alliance, Sacramento Steps Forward, the Department of Human Assistance, the California Department of Rehabilitation and other homeless and housing service providers. Two 14-passenger vans operated by Paratransit Community Outreach Ambassadors constructed a program that provide homeless people in Sacramento, California, with transportation, employment, search services, health resources and training about how to use public transit. The vans are used to transport homeless people to job interviews, training programs, access a mobile computer lab, and reach several key service sites. The program also employs formerly homeless women who utilize the program in an apprentice-style fashion, teaching them skills to work for the program. The program started in 2009, when a local casino donated 2 vans to Sacramento Steps Forward. In the case of Wheels to Work, Paratransit used JARC funds (as a sub recipient of the Department of Human Assistance) to register, insure, repair and retrofit the two vans, adding them to its vehicle fleet. (Hamameh, 2015)

Community Vanpools

Olympia, Washington Intercity Transit



Olympia, Washington Intercity Transit is a mid-sized system serving Olympia (population approx. 48,000) and its neighboring communities. Intercity's vanpool program began in 1982 with a grant from the state. Fare box recovery funds support all direct operating costs associated with the vanpool program. Additional support from the state department of transportation in the form of a 25 percent match pays for the cost of each van within five years. If needed, new vanpools are also supported with a 3/2/1 seat subsidy provided by Intercity. During the first month of operation, up to three empty seats of an eight-passenger van are subsidized. Two empty seats are subsidized during the second month and one during the third month of operation.

In addition to traditional vanpool service, the agency supports two other programs, Connectivity Vans and Village Vans. These programs provide access to employment and community services to populations that may otherwise lack affordable transportation options. Community Vans provides retired vans to human service organizations and government agencies located in the transit service area for use to transport workers, volunteers and customers. Village Vans assists low-income citizens with transportation to jobs or job search locations. Since 2006, vanpool ridership has increased by nearly 80 percent. In 2009, Intercity was named the best transit system in the nation in its size category by the American Public Transportation Association. (Transportation to Work, 2009)

JobJet in Carroll, Iowa



A more local vanpool example is JobJet in Carroll, Iowa. JobJet is a regional vanpool program serving six rural Iowa counties: Audubon, Carroll, Crawford, Greene, Guthrie and Sac. The program grew from a concept suggested by two local employers, Tyson's Food and Farmland Foods, and is marketed as one that supports local economic development in conjunction with providing transportation access to work. The program is organized and managed by the Region XII Council of Governments (COG). Region XII operates the local public transit system and strongly promotes regional economic and workforce development.

JobJet, modeled on similar vanpool programs in Des Moines and other municipalities in the state, is the first vanpool program to serve rural residents. The program coordinates work schedules and locations to arrange workers into groups of 4 to 10 people for each of the six vanpools. Vanpool members live in close proximity to one another, work in the same general location and have similar work hours. Riders meet at a central location and travel to and from work together, or set a route and time schedule. The driver is responsible for collecting fares and seeing that the vanpool runs smoothly. JobJet owns and maintains the vans.

Region XII staff trains drivers from among the participants in each group. Drivers ride free of charge and keep the vans at their home before collecting riders. They are allowed 100 miles of personal vehicle use each month, most likely for side trips in conjunction with their trip to work. If they exceed that limit, they are charged for additional miles on a per-mile basis. Program funding support includes an initial amount of \$146,000 from Iowa's Congestion Management and Air Quality Improvement Program funds and the Iowa Department of Transportation special project funding. (Transportation to Work, 2009)

Conclusion

Our research investigated transportation gaps in Iowa City, Coralville, and North Liberty IA in 2015. A survey was conducted at several locations to examine the most prevalent transportation needs in the community. The results of the study indicated that 7:00am and 11:00pm were the most frequently requested bus service times, and consistent with the 2009 findings of the National Coalition for the Homeless, 30% of respondents we surveyed reported that they had lost, quit, or gave up looking for a job due to lack of transportation (Acuña and Erlenbusch, 2009).

Based on these findings, we recommended that current bus services be extended at least one hour earlier or one hour later and that supplementary transportation programs such as vanpools, subsidized taxis, and low-cost transportation programs be piloted on a small-scale basis. These two recommendations are intended to help people obtain access to transportation to work, especially in the case of first or third shifts or to locations which do not fall near a bus route.

The last section of the report summarizes examples of successful supplementary transportation programs. Examples for subsidized taxi programs included Olathe, Kansas and Prairieland Transit's partnership with Worthington Taxi; low-barrier transportation programs included Opportunity Center for the Homeless and Wheels to Work; and community vanpools included Olympia, Washington Intercity Transit and JobJet in Carroll, Iowa. These programs were chosen as models of how similar programs could be implemented in Iowa City, Coralville, and North Liberty.

Transportation is a seldom considered, but highly important component of a productive adult life. Getting to a job requires a reliable, affordable mode of transportation, yet many do not have access to such a mode. Improving public transportation options ensures not only that more people will be able to find and maintain employment, but also that businesses will have a greater pool of employees and customers. Therefore, a healthy public transportation system is vital to the economy of any given place.

Resources

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