

# Transportation Toolkit: United We Ride Project

## Executive Summary

by

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Project sponsors:  
Montana Transportation Partnership  
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## Background

In recent years, there has been an increased interest in transportation coordination, which refers to two or more agencies working together to achieve more efficient and higher quality services. The concept of coordination can encompass a broad range of activities, such as joint purchasing groups, inter-agency referrals, vehicle and trip sharing, and collaborative information services.

Transportation coordination can be used to expand the availability of public transportation services in states like Montana with large rural and frontier areas. Local communities interested in improving mobility face unique challenges such as limited fiscal resources, scattered populations, and long distances between destinations. In fact, the Montana Rural Passenger Needs Study, conducted for the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) in 2001, estimated that only 17% of the statewide need for transportation was being met. Coordination can help public and private agencies work together to pool and share resources, sometimes resulting in an expansion of service without a major increase in total funding.

As a result of requirements contained within the national surface transportation bill (SAFETEA-LU), the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) now requires locally developed coordination plans for those applying for public transportation funds. However, many communities, agencies and individuals lack training or understanding of these issues, and need new tools to understand and comply with these processes.

## Previous Research

The Montana Transportation Partnership (MTP) is a coalition of transportation service providers, human service agencies and groups that represent senior citizens, persons with disabilities, and other groups considered to be “transportation disadvantaged.” Since its inception in 1999, the Partnership has encouraged and facilitated numerous coordination projects across the state.

MTP and WTI collaborated on the development of the Montana Coordinated Transportation Handbook<sup>®</sup>, which was funded through the Montana Council on Developmental Disabilities (MTCDD). The Handbook provides social service agencies and local transportation providers with a step-by-step process to effectively coordinate their transportation services. First completed in 2003, the Handbook was disseminated in hard copy and online. The electronic version included a search engine, links to related references, and a database of collected information from Montana agencies. The partners collaborated again in 2007 to update the Handbook to reflect Federal and MDT policies regarding local coordination plans.

MTP and WTI have provided transportation coordination technical assistance to selected Montana communities on a pilot basis. With federal funding from the Real Choices Systems Change Grant, MTP and WTI assisted two pilot communities in conducting a coordinated planning process. The project provided the communities with funding and technical support to

design and implement a coordinated transportation system and identify technology tools for local implementation.

## **Project Scope and Objectives**

The overarching goal of this project was to further enhance the coordination/consolidation process in Montana, in order to improve specialized and public transportation systems in more communities throughout the state.

Specific objectives included:

- Survey Transportation Advisory Committees (TACs) in the state to determine their needs
- Create a set of tools to assist TACs with their processes
- Provide training events for stakeholders

## **Project Activities**

### **Survey of Transportation Advisory Committees (TACs)**

WTI developed and distributed a survey to the members of all known Transportation Advisory Committees (TACs) in Montana. Survey questions were designed to:

- characterize attitudes about the coordination/consolidation process,
- determine why some agencies opted out of the process while others participated, and
- identify additional information and resources that would aid TACs in the coordination process.

Responses were received from 94 individual committee members, who represented transportation providers, human service agencies, other government or tribal agencies, and members of the public. Significant findings from the survey included:

- Almost 90% of the respondents served on TACs that submitted coordination plans to MDT in order to apply for federal funding
- 77% of respondents indicated that their TACs do not provide orientation for new members
- More than 2/3 of the respondents (67%) indicated that they did not receive specific training on the coordination process in advance
- 66% of the respondents indicated that their TAC used the Montana Coordinated Transportation Handbook in the planning process; of those that used it, nearly 88% responded that it contained the information they needed.
- A large majority of respondents indicated that it was important for the TAC to have ongoing assistance and support during the coordination process, including not only financial support (75% cited this as important), but also planning support (73%), advice from experts (73%), and a website where they could post questions (74%).

## Outreach and Training

Based on the survey responses, WTI and MDT recommended that a training tool be developed that TACs could use to educate new and potential members about the role and function of the committee, the basic concepts of community transportation, and an overview of the coordinated transportation planning process. The training tool would be designed to serve several purposes:

- Help state agencies communicate their transportation coordination goals to local communities
- Assist TACs with recruiting potential members
- Provide TACs with an easy-to-use tool for orientation and preliminary training of new members
- Help new members, particularly those without a background in transportation, feel more comfortable participating in the planning process
- Ensure that TAC members are aware of the resources available to help them with the planning process

For the format of the training tool, the project team selected a powerpoint presentation on a CD-ROM. This format has numerous advantages:

- allows the team to synthesize a large amount of guidance and expertise into one document
- enables MDT to present a consistent message regarding coordination processes and policies throughout the state
- provides TACs with a tool that can be easily used in a variety of settings
- allows project sponsors to disseminate the tool in a cost-effective manner

The creation and distribution of the CD was funded by the United We Ride program. United We Ride is a federal interagency initiative aimed at improving the availability, quality, and efficient delivery of transportation services for older adults, people with disabilities, and individuals with lower incomes.

## Deliverables

The training CD is complete and available for distribution, under the title “Community Transportation, Transportation Coordination and TACS: Montana Coordinated Transportation Compact Disc.”

The contents of the CD are summarized below.

### **Community Transportation, Transportation Coordination, and TACS: Montana Coordinated Transportation Compact Disc (CD)**

- Welcome (overview of disc)

- Introduction
  - What is Community Transportation?
  - What is Coordinated Transportation?
  - What Roles do TACS Play?
  
- Annual Process
  - Planning
  - Implementation
  - Evaluation
  
- Marketing
  
- Resources

Copies of the CD can be obtained by contacting:

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## Next Steps

Initial feedback on the CD has been positive, and there is interest in expanding its availability beyond Montana. The project team is working with the United We Ride program to explore avenues for greater distribution of the CD. Options under consideration include:

- Distribute CD throughout the Federal Transit Administration's Region 8
- Revise CD for national distribution
- Make CD contents available online