

University of Michigan Technical Assistance Brief Neighborhood Transportation Systems

Purpose: The purpose of this brief is two-fold:

1. To call attention to the transportation barriers confronting youth and families in communities associated with the Good Neighborhoods initiative, and
2. To identify community practice models that may be useful in addressing these.

The overall goal is to increase the safe mobility and age-appropriate independence of youth and their families.

Background:

In March 2007, a survey of Metro Detroit residents on quality of life issues, conducted by United Way for Southeastern Michigan, revealed that 85% of respondents were dissatisfied with public transportation in the region and 75% were dissatisfied with public transportation in their own communities. Thirty-eight percent of respondents listed public transportation as the first priority needing to be addressed by community leaders, and 81% included it as one of their top three priority issues. In the year 2000, use of the public transportation system by Detroit residents had dropped from 22% in 1960 to 9%, in spite of the fact that 22% of them had little or no access to cars.

Inadequate transportation in neighborhoods was mentioned often in “tabletop discussions” of needs of residents in the Skillman Foundation Good Neighborhoods initiative. Particularly noted was the fact that the lack of transportation frequently serves as a barrier to participation in school extracurricular activities by neighborhood youth, placing them at a disadvantage compared to peers in other communities who have access to private transportation. Residents mentioned the need for a local, accessible system of frequent, safe rides for youth and for other residents.

Community Practice Approaches:

- I. Existing Models. Programs addressing the needs of older adults and persons with disabilities are frequent models that may be considered by residents in designing neighborhood transportation programs. Examples include the following:
 - A. Neighborhood House (Seattle, Washington)
As part of a program of comprehensive services to public housing residents, the agency’s “fleet of vans provides low-cost, door-to-door transportation to low-income people, the elderly and those with disabilities who need special help getting to medical appointments or community events. [They] also transport low-income people to job search and job training activities. They report that [their] vehicles are flexibly configured to allow [them] to make trips for both ambulatory clients and those who use wheelchairs [and they note that their] compassionate and professional drivers are trained by Neighborhood House trainers and have impeccable safety records” (Neighborhood House, n.d.).
 - B. National Senior Service Corps Transportation Activities (an arm of RSVP)

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- Located in cities and towns in Arkansas, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, and Utah, representatives of this organization provide direct driving services, on a volunteer basis, mostly to frail, seriously ill, and/or homebound elders for shopping or medical appointments but in some cases to non-elder adult mental health clients and to children (National Senior Service Corps Transportation Activities, n.d.).
- C. **The Independent Transportation Network (ITN America)**
 A community-based, non-profit service that relies on fares from the people who use the service, subsidized by voluntary local community support (including local businesses that return a portion of what they receive from the community back to the community in this way). Using insured volunteer drivers, the program is aimed at strengthening the mobility (and therefore the independence) of elders who are no longer driving. Good Neighborhoods Initiative residents may find it useful to inquire further about this model (ITN America, n.d.).
- II. If attempting to create a local neighborhood transportation program within the Good Neighborhoods Initiative, there are several possible approaches:
- A. ***Solicit consultation from university academic/research specialists.*** Residents may find it useful to collaborate with faculty and students associated with one of the University of Michigan units focusing on local transportation needs. Possible resources are:
1. The Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning’s Detroit Community Partnership Center supports projects by students and faculty addressing community-identified needs that advance the education and knowledge-building mission of the University. A current study is examining factors affecting transportation accessibility in the city of Detroit.
 2. The Taubman College also has a transportation planning concentration in which major themes addressed include “transportation needs of the poor and alternative approaches to public transit policy.” Residents may find it useful to collaborate with faculty and students associated with this concentration in formally studying needs and resources.
 3. The Transportation Research Institute was recently awarded a grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation to establish a University Transportation Center. One area of emphasis is “the transportation needs of young people.”
2. ***Seek technical assistance from national initiatives addressing local transportation needs.*** Residents may find it useful to communicate with federal programs in this regard. Among them is:
1. United We Ride, an interagency federal national initiative that supports human service transportation efforts at the state and local levels. Included are grants, a transportation coordination and planning self-assessment tool, help along the way, technical assistance, and other resources. Targeted populations include older adults, disabled persons, and those with lower income. Examples of coordinated transportation services are “dial-a-ride,” use of bus tokens or transit passes for fixed-route-scheduled services, accessing taxi vouchers, and/or mileage reimbursement to volunteers or program participants (United We Ride, n.d.).

Resources:

Death of Detroit: Harbinger of Collapse of Deindustrialized America. (n.d.). Retrieved September 24, 2007 from http://www.larouchepub.com/other/2004/3116detroit_dies.html

ITN America. (n.d.). Retrieved September 25, 2007 from <http://www.itnamerica.org/default.asp>

National Senior Service Corps Transportation Activities. (n.d.). Retrieved September 25, 2007 http://nationalserviceresources.org/filemanager/download/sc_initiatives/transportation.pdf

Neighborhood House. (n.d.). Retrieved September 19, 2007 from <http://www.nhwa.org/lookinside/index.php>

RSVP Senior Corps. (n.d.). Retrieved September 19, 2007 from <http://www.seniorcorps.gov/about/programs/rsvp.asp>

United Way for Southeastern Michigan. (n.d.). United Way Research: Taking the Pulse of Metro Detroit: Quality of Life Issues. Retrieved September 19, 2007 from http://www.uwsem.org/research/2007_04_QL.html and http://www.uwsem.org/research/index_research.htm

United We Ride. (n.d.). Retrieved September 19, 2007 from <http://www.ftawebprod.fta.dot.gov/UsefulPractices/>

University of Michigan News Service. (2006, October 11). U-M awarded federal transportation center to study safety and mobility. Retrieved September 19, 2007 from <http://www.ns.umich.edu/htdocs/releases/print.php?Releases/2006/Oct06/r101106b>

University of Michigan Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning. (n.d.). Michigan Urban and Regional Planning. Retrieved September 19, 2007 from <http://www.tcaup.umich.edu/urp/index.html>