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Developing Coordination Policies for Paratransit and the Transportation Disadvantaged

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Many social service agencies, for example, those serving the elderly, people with mental illness, or those in poverty and looking for work, operate their own van service for their own clientele. That type of service, if viewed regionally, is often duplicative and inefficient. The duplicative approach toward serving transportation-disadvantaged people has led to coordination as a policy response. However, key elements that policy makers need to consider are usually not well understood or delineated. There are four key factors and six subfactors that should be addressed in the pursuit of statewide policies of transportation coordination. The four key factors are to explicitly define what coordination means, to pursue efforts of coordination at the state level, to understand the political climate within which coordination policy will be presented, and to promote decisions on local coordination support. Finally, a new model of service delivery, the Community Support Organization, is presented as one way to better achieve positive results when coordination is pursued as a strategy for improving the efficiency and reach of local services to the transportation disadvantaged.

There has been a general policy shift from the early 1980s to today to an environment of devolution in which federal responsibilities for social service provision have been shifted to state or local government or to nonprofit organizations directly (*1*). Some policy makers believe that because local nonprofit and social service organizations often know the needs of their clients and communities better than do policy makers at the state or federal level, funding and programmatic decision making are better placed at the most local level.

One unintended consequence of the increase in local authority has been a prevalence of duplication in providing transportation service for transportation-disadvantaged populations served by social service organizations. Many social service agencies, for example, those serving the elderly, people with mental illness, or those in poverty and looking for work, operate their own van service for their own clientele. If viewed regionally, paratransit services for the transportation disadvantaged are duplicative and inefficient.

Such a duplicative approach toward serving the transportation disadvantaged has led to a policy response of coordination. There are limitations in the commonly held policy attitudes toward coordination, namely, that coordination is a task that can be extracted from a grantee as a stipulation for receiving governmental funding. Generally, current policy approaches toward coordination fall short because of the gap between the language of coordination and the local capacity to carry it out (2). This research thus asks this question: What are the key elements that policy makers need to consider when they pursue coordination as a strategy toward improving the efficiency and reach of local services to the transportation disadvantaged?

Discussed are four factors that a state may want to consider in facilitating or catalyzing transportation coordination activities at the local level. These factors and some probing questions are meant to help policy makers think about transportation coordination in its complexities, rather than as a simple goal readily achievable by inserting the words "grantees shall coordinate," into policies, as is often found in policies affecting transportation-disadvantaged people today.

BACKGROUND

Transportation has been identified as one of the key barriers for the poor to access jobs (*3–5*), for poor women to access prenatal care (*6*), for the elderly to access health and social engagements (*7*), and for disabled and otherwise disadvantaged people to access important life-sustaining destinations (*8–10*).

Social service agencies have long known that transportation barriers are significant obstacles for their clients in obtaining needed services, remaining socially involved, and politically engaged. The role of the social worker is increasingly viewed as a vital component in linking the needs of disadvantaged clients with available transportation resources (*9*). Nonprofit organizations now deliver a larger share of health and human services, by dollar expenditures, than the government does (*11*).

Yet transportation services provided by these local social service agencies—which were not primarily formed to be transportation providers—are generally inefficient and duplicative (*12*). It is common for the undercapacity vans of multiple agencies to mirror one another as they bring their clients to and from similar places. It is not uncommon for fewer than two seats per hour in an agency van to be occupied (County Transportation System Management, unpublished data, 1995) (*13*).

Past government efforts have addressed the uncoordinated approach to social service-based transportation (*13*), but renewed calls for coordination have emerged since the 1996 reform of the nation's welfare laws. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996—commonly referred to as Welfare to Work—essentially gave a fixed time line of 2 years for welfare recipients to find a job and discontinue welfare benefits. Thus, greater attention to the need to efficiently serve transportation-disadvantaged populations has urgently emerged (*4, 14–16*). Furthermore, it has been suggested that states take the lead role in facilitating local efforts of transportation coordination (*8*).

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The term "coordination," though, can take on many meanings depending on who uses the term and what they are trying to accomplish. Terms that sometimes are interchangeable and sometimes refer to different concepts include collaboration, partnership, network, alliance, or coalition (*17–22*). Such a variety of terms can be seen in current policy that addresses the transportation needs of those transitioning from welfare to work, reflecting a view that is ignorant of the different approaches toward multiple organizations working together and the context within which such activities are pursued. For example, Bridges to Work, a program of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, identifies "collaboration" among transportation and social service agencies (*3*), FTA and the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) identify local stakeholder collaboration and coordination of local service (*23*), and the Volpe Center—the research component of DOT—identifies coordination that includes all interested organizations and a collaborative coalition of diverse agencies and organizations to develop regional solutions (*16*) to be keys to serving the transportation disadvantaged.

METHODOLOGY

In-depth case analyses were conducted on the policies and practices toward the transportation disadvantaged and toward coordination of local transportation services within Florida, Michigan, and Ohio. These cases represent a spectrum of state-level transportation coordination involvement ranging from state-based mandated coordination to very little active state involvement in local coordination efforts (see Table 1).

Michigan is generally representative of a class of states that have limited direct involvement with the transportation disadvantaged and coordination issues. The general approach is one of preferring to leave decisions about the adequacy or inadequacy of local service provision to local officials. If there is duplication of effort within a county, then the state believes that it should be up to the officials of that county to address the problems. Ohio has a unique approach in that it offers specific, modest transportation coordination grants, up to $75,000 for 3 years, and technical assistance to local, rural counties. Local coordination is not mandated, but through the Ohio Coordination Program, the state specifically funds local transportation coordination efforts through a competitive statewide funding program. Florida takes the most governmentally involved and most geographically comprehensive approach to transportation coordination nationally. In Florida, all agencies receiving federal, state, or local funds for transportation services are required by law to coordinate with other local agencies or organizations that also provide transportation and receive state funds. To achieve the statewide goal of unduplicated and coordinated transportation to the disadvantaged, the state created an independent state-level agency called the Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged (CTD).

State-level policies and the coordination effort of a local county (a three-county area in the Florida case) within each state were analyzed through the use of directed interviewing, focus groups, and an analysis of historical documentation. This research analyzed in what ways coordinated transportation has evolved or not evolved in communities operating within three different state policy regimes. The process by which local communities are achieving coordination, rather than the actual results of the coordination, is what is of interest. Although any coordinated approach will ultimately be judged as to whether it represents an improvement compared with that of a previously uncoordinated state, this research accepts the policy assumption that coordination is a desired goal. Some question, however, whether the costs of coordination may outweigh any benefits derived from it (*24–27*).

FINDINGS

A set of four factors has emerged from this research (see Table 2). These factors can be used to guide the thinking and types of approaches that a state may want to take in facilitating or catalyzing transportation coordination activities at the local level. It is important to keep in mind that Florida has had extensive coordination success throughout the state, Ohio has had selective areas of coordination success, and Michigan is characterized by a general lack of coordination success.

Define Coordination

As mentioned, the term coordination is often used interchangeably with other, similar terms such as collaboration, partnership, network, alliance, or coalition. Some scholars place these terms on distinct points along a rough spectrum of interdependence, ranging from sharing of information to complete integration of two or more entities (*20*). However, the distinctions can be rather slight. For example, collaboration can be defined as "a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations

TABLE 1 Transportation Coordination Cases

State	General Approach Toward Coordination	Description	Level of Coordination
Florida	State mandate	Florida mandates that local counties coordinate their social service–oriented transportation, and funds a local transportation coordinator in each county.	Very High
Ohio	State support, no mandate	Ohio offers specific, but modest, transportation coordination grants and technical assistance to local, rural counties, but does not mandate coordination statewide.	Moderate
Michigan	Informal state committee	Michigan offers no specific statewide transportation coordination program, but has established a state committee to study the issue and to operate as an information exchange agent.	Very Low

TABLE 2 Guiding Questions for Developing Transportation Coordination Policy

	Coordination Consideration	Guiding Questions
1	Define Coordination	What does the policy maker mean by coordination? Sharing of financial resources? Sharing information? Interjurisdictional coordination?
2	Pursue Efforts of Coordination Within State Governments	Is the state interested in establishing coordination at the state level as well as at the local level? If so, in what form? Regularly attended meetings by state departments? Permanent advisory board to the governor? Ad hoc committees? Is the state interested in reviewing policies that may obstruct local coordination? If so, how might those duplicative policies be addressed? Special regulation-free zone? State committee to identify and recommend programmatic changes?
3	Understand the Political Climate	How forceful is the state willing to be in achieving coordination (what is the political climate)? Hands-off? Incentives? Mandates?
4	Promote Decisions on Local Coordination Support	What type of financial support is the state willing to put forward? Policy directives only? Incentive money? Permanent, ongoing financial support? What additional types of support is the state willing to provide? Technical expertise? How much? How often? By whom? Will the coordination process be specifically supported at the local level? If so, how? Designating a full-time local coordinator? Awarding grants to a community support organization that will in turn be the convener?

to achieve common goals" (*18*), whereas coordination is evident when there are shared resources to address common issues or to create something new (*28*).

Accordingly, coordination has been used in different ways by the states in this study. In the statute establishing the CTD in Florida, coordination is defined as "the arrangement for the provision of transportation services to the transportation disadvantaged in a manner that is cost-effective, efficient, and reduces fragmentation and duplication of services" [Florida (Amended) Chapter 427, *Florida Statutes:* 427.011 (1), 2000]. Florida's definition is rather broad and can conceivably include various forms by which multiple parties can work together, and indeed it does. In some instances in Florida, a local organization that acts as a community transportation coordinator (CTC) engages in local coordination simply by acting as a broker for several transportation providers. In other cases, the CTC may act as an administrator for various transportation providers. In still other cases, the CTC may actually provide its own transportation as well as schedule and optimize trips on several other transportation providers.

In Ohio, the DOT, through its Transportation Coordination granting program, places coordination at three levels:

- "Type I coordination, referred to as cooperation, occurs where two or more persons or agencies work together toward a common end."
- "Type II coordination, joint use arrangements, occurs when one or more of the resources belonging to one participant are made available to other participants according to agreed upon terms and conditions."
- "Type III coordination, consolidation, occurs when two or more participants combine resources for the benefit of all participants" (*29*, p. 2).

In Ohio, coordination represents a spectrum of approaches from the least integrative in organizational interdependence (cooperation) to full integration of multiple services (consolidation). This situation contrasts with a nontransportation definition of coordination—that coordination is "characterized by more formal relationships and understanding of compatible missions [between organizations] . . . Authority still rests with [an individual organization], but there is some increased risk to all participants" (*18*).

In Michigan, the Specialized Services Coordination Team (SSCT) is the predominant vehicle within the state governing structure that deals directly with the transportation disadvantaged, and it is the only area in which the coordination issues of human service providers are discussed. The SSCT is made up of volunteer participants representing a range of transportation interests statewide, including those from the Michigan DOT (MDOT), formal public transit operations, and nonprofit community-based organizations.

The SSCT has some broadly defined goals, including focusing on the special needs of the elderly and disabled through greater coordination (*30*). However, the SSCT has limited authority within the state decision-making process, has no funding to dedicate to coordination issues, and is not actively involved in local coordination projects. Rather, the SSCT attempts to achieve its goals through quarterly roundtables and traveling town hall meetings. The primary goal of these meetings is to disseminate information about new and existing funding opportunities and about any rule or eligibility changes within existing state funding structures (MDOT Specialized Services Coordination Team, meeting minutes, May 8, 1998, Lansing). The SSCT is coordinated by a staff person at MDOT, but the responsibilities of the SSCT are estimated to take up less than 5% of that staff person's total job responsibilities (L. Funk, unpublished data, 2000). Consistent with its more informal approach toward transportation coordination issues, Michigan has not explicitly defined coordination or the expectations that flow from such a definition.

For policy makers, coordination may simply refer to monthly meetings among agency directors or it may imply an integration of organizational resources to create a new entity. Clearly, the term coordination itself has a history and meaning that can be extracted from multiple disciplines. It is thus important for policy makers to be clear and explicit about the meaning of the term.

Pursue Efforts of Coordination Within State Governments

There are actions that the state government can take independently of directly assisting local communities that improve the planning and implementation environment for local-level transportation coordination. Specifically, the state can develop a governmental infrastructure

that directly addresses the situation of transportation-disadvantaged people and the coordination of transportation services for them, can specifically encourage coordination through the allocation of funds and legal requirements, and can lead the effort in collecting data related to such transportation—data on which future policy and action can be based. These activities represent the first three factors for developing coordination policies for paratransit and the transportation disadvantaged.

State Infrastructure

At the state level, it seems that the most fundamental component of achieving transportation coordination is the existence of an infrastructure dedicated to coordination issues. States often look at their own bureaucratic barriers toward coordination. Frequently, state regulations prohibit or impede local organizations from developing any meaningful coordination relationships, and multiple governmental agencies are often in conflict, especially when it comes to transportation provision (*31*). New agreements to eliminate these programmatic barriers between state agencies can become an important part of local organizations' ability to share resources under a coordinated structure.

Both Florida and Ohio have taken steps to eliminate some of these regulatory inconsistencies at the state level, whereas in Michigan such actions have been extremely limited. Streamlining bureaucratic procedures and reducing programmatic barriers between state agencies is a key function of the Florida CTD as it continues to seek more coordinated and efficient ways to provide transportation throughout the state.

In Ohio, one of the primary goals of the Statewide Coordinating Task Force has been to highlight the programmatic barriers and inconsistencies among state agencies as they relate to social service transportation, and to create solutions that eliminate fragmented bureaucracy as a barrier that keeps local human service agencies from coordinating.

In Michigan, there has been no comprehensive effort by state agencies to analyze the regulatory conflicts across departments. Rather, only limited and programmatically distinct efforts have taken place. The SSCT does not advise state policy makers on duplicative policies nor does it fund coordination efforts at the local level. Moreover, the duties to carry out the tasks of the SSCT constitute only a small portion of the time of the SSCT staff person, who otherwise performs other noncoordination functions for MDOT.

Explicit Encouragement for Coordination

The second component of state-level coordination is how the states look at their policies toward local counties. One might ask this question: In allocating financial resources for local transportation endeavors, does the state provide guidance or requirements related to coordination, or does the state entirely allow the local communities to decide on their own the best way to use state transportation money? In Florida, any local organization receiving state transportation money is mandated to coordinate with other transportation providers in their area, and that coordination takes some form of brokerage model in which rides are channeled through a centralizing agency. Each county has a CTC (the centralizing agency) that is funded by the state to help facilitate the coordination. Within this mandate of coordination, each county is free to develop its own model of coordination that it believes is most appropriate to the local conditions.

In Ohio, no state mandate is present, but a small amount of grant money is available to counties that want to pursue coordinated approaches to transportation provision. If a county is selected from this competitive grant process, it must then dedicate or hire a full-time staff person to the coordination endeavor. As in Florida, the final model that a local county may use is a decision that is made locally. The existence of the targeted transportation coordination funding program and the explicit support of coordination by the Ohio DOT (ODOT) staff have been credited as keys to successful coordination at the local level (C. Galvin, unpublished data, 2001).

In Michigan, there is no mandate or program that encourages or supports local organizations to work together. Rather, local transportation providers can attend voluntary meetings hosted by their local transit agency or the state's Specialized Services Coordination Team. Both kinds of forums are created for exchanging information, not for creating more formalized linkages among providers.

What is essential, then, is not necessarily the final form of local coordination, but how the state addresses coordination—whether explicitly through mandates or funding opportunities, or implicitly through voluntary mechanisms and vague policy language.

Consistent Data Collection

Having a statewide infrastructure dedicated to facilitating local level transportation coordination seems to encourage a feedback loop between local areas and the state. Specifically, when the state is directly funding coordination efforts, it is also collecting data from the grantees in a consistent fashion. Such consistent results help the local organizations themselves as well as planners at the state level. The data help all parties understand the existing costs of providing transportation to the disadvantaged. By understanding these costs, state human service and transportation planners ascertain more accurate expenditure and service delivery capacities, which in turn can yield better policies. The local agencies, who themselves are often forced to collect transportation-based statistics for the first time, become aware of their own transportation costs and can begin to take appropriate actions as necessary.

Because transportation coordination is specifically funded in Ohio and Florida, transportation statistics relevant to improving the nature of the coordination and the transportation services provided are collected. In Florida, where transportation providers report to their local CTC, or in Ohio, where each participating agency reports to the lead local agency that then reports quarterly to ODOT, each transportation provider is mandated to report results in a consistent manner to a centralized data gathering entity.

In Michigan, where there is no overarching statewide transportation coordination scheme, individual human service transportation providers report on their transportation services differently, depending on which government agency requests the reports. Whereas a few government agencies may want statistics on the total number of rides a nonprofit organization provides, one government agency may want numbers of round-trip rides. Still another government agency may require an organization to report on one-way rides (R. Ward, unpublished data, 2000). Such inconsistencies across organizations make it nearly impossible to develop a true quantitative picture of the efficiency and effectiveness of transportation provision.

Thus, when the state has a more active role in local level coordination, it demands statistical reporting on a consistent basis. Also, the collection of such data provides important feedback to both the policy makers concerned with transportation for the disadvantaged and the individual human service organizations providing the ser-

vices. Moreover, the results gained from consistent and accurate reporting can be shared with counties within the state that are not currently coordinating or that are coordinating at less than optimal ways. Sharing these data may be one way to encourage places not already coordinating to do so—at least if the data support the notion that coordination brings about increased efficiencies and the provision of additional rides.

Understand the Political Climate

The political climate of a state or jurisdiction contemplating the development of policies for transportation coordination is of course important. Recommending statewide mandates may be unwise in a state that has a political climate opposed to such extensive government intervention.

Given that uncoordinated social service transportation is the norm that all states can address, if they recognize the situation to begin with, why do states choose different responses? It appears that two significant factors influence the adoption of state policy approaches:

1. The presence and pressure of an influential interest group directly on state legislators; and
2. The capacity for independent programmatic development within an administrative unit of state government, in this case the DOT.

In Florida, an organized interest group of senior citizens was able to pressure the legislature directly through a mock Silver Hair Legislature, which in turn legislatively brought about sweeping change in how the state addresses the situation of transportation-disadvantaged populations. Florida has some of the most densely populated areas of seniors in the nation, which represents a large and vocal political constituency.

Before the mandate, a statewide study was conducted that sought to document the extent of the transportation problem as well as to identify various transportation resources within the state. The study characterized the state as suffering from poor transportation policy for disadvantaged populations (*32*). As a result of this study, "coordination was seen as a must do. As the years progressed, it was clear there was a need to have a coordination infrastructure and someone independent to oversee it as well as funds to help those falling through the cracks. So between all these activities . . . it was felt a requirement or mandate was needed" (J. Hutchinson, unpublished data, 2000). Moreover, it was felt that voluntary agreements would not be able to adequately address the problem—that to obtain change throughout the state, there would need to be institutional and structural change that could be best achieved through a legislative mandate and supportive funding for the mandate's implementation (J. Hutchinson, unpublished data, 2000).

Ohio's tactic has been quite different from Florida's, in that Ohio has approached transportation coordination administratively and programmatically, and not legislatively. In other words, Ohio's legislature did not instruct ODOT to adopt a transportation coordination program. Rather, it was administrators within ODOT itself that crafted a solution to the problem of the lack of transportation coordination. Unlike in Florida, there has been little pressure from interest groups of any kind on the transportation-disadvantaged issue (P. Moore, unpublished data, 2001).

Legislative action was not an option in Ohio because, first, the legislature was generally unaware of transportation-disadvantaged and coordination issues and, second, there was no active interest group educating legislators and pressing them to take action on this issue. Without any probable action by the state legislature, ODOT became the next potential location from which some type of programmatic response could be undertaken. ODOT created a new program that could work within the existing budgetary restrictions, but it could also serve the needs of local communities. Also, the principal explanation as to why ODOT chose to innovate instead of retreat is that administrative staff saw the local communities, not the legislature, as their customers. They were able to craft programmatic responses, in the absence of legislative direction, to emerging community needs.

In general, Michigan can be characterized by the absence of any cohesive legislative direction and the absence of an administrative unit that is either adequately aware of duplicative social service transportation or positioned to adopt its own initiatives, given the lack of legislative guidance. Public transportation planning in Michigan is guided by *Strategic Planning for Public Transit in Michigan (1995–2015)*, and by the recent work of an appointed state-level committee (the Act 51 Committee) charged with reviewing the public transportation environment in Michigan and recommending changes. Neither of these efforts represents any type of overarching legislative direction setting. They each concentrate their attention on traditional public transit agencies, which represents only a small portion of the total transportation services serving transportation-disadvantaged populations (*33, 34*).

There also seems to be a lack of any large interest group in Michigan that would put pressure on the legislature or state administrators to address the needs of transportation-disadvantaged people. However, new effort, led by the Michigan Chapter of United Cerebral Palsy, is under way in the state to influence transportation policy on behalf of people with disabilities (K. Wisselink, unpublished data, 2001).

Thus, Florida's transportation policy development originated through a political process that encompassed outside political pressure from a key interest group, plus a statewide study of the extent of the problem. Ohio's approach favored an incentive-based method; it originated primarily at the hands of ODOT administrators. In Michigan, neither the legislature nor MDOT administrators have taken much action on the coordination issue. That is because there has been little political pressure placed on the legislature to act, and the administrators within MDOT see the legislature, not the communities themselves, as the entity that they serve. Understanding the nature of the local political climate is an important factor in developing transportation coordination strategies and policies, so that energies are directed to the appropriate institutional and implementing bodies.

Promote Decisions on Local Coordination Support

Within this factor are three subfactors to consider when strategies for transportation coordination are pursued. They pertain to support at the local level and involve three primary considerations: financial support for coordination, nonfinancial support for coordination, and support for local coordinators.

Financial Support for Coordination

In allocating financial resources for local transportation coordination endeavors, states have options of providing funding universally, selectively, or indirectly (or not at all). In Florida, any local organization receiving state transportation money is mandated to coordinate with other transportation providers in its area. Accordingly, each

county has a community transportation coordinator that is funded by the state to help facilitate the coordination. Additionally, the Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged, a statewide institutional backbone dedicated to transportation-disadvantaged populations and transportation coordination issues, has been developed and funded there. Thus, Florida has pursued a very explicit strategy of directly funding coordination initiatives at the local level.

In Ohio, no state mandate is present, but, as mentioned earlier, a small amount of grant money is available ($75,000 for 3 years) to counties that want to pursue coordinated approaches to transportation provision. Not all counties can receive funding at once; rather, the funding is distributed through a competitive statewide application process. One consequence of this staggered approach to achieving transportation coordination throughout the state is the process of "creaming." By having only a limited number of funds to distribute to a limited number of counties, the Ohio Coordination Program essentially identifies those counties that are best positioned to undertake coordination activities and provides funding assistance to those counties. As the initial batch of counties cycle through their 3-year grant, additional counties can begin to replicate the activities of their neighboring counties and position themselves for future grants. This process can be repeated until all counties in the state are eventually served through the coordination program, thereby targeting limited funds to areas most able to use the funding effectively.

In Michigan, there is no mandate or program that encourages or supports local organizations to work together directly. Rather, as mentioned earlier, coordination is encouraged indirectly through meetings hosted by local transit agencies or the state's SSCT. Both of these forums are created for exchanging information, not for creating more formalized linkages among providers. However, indirectly, it might be desired that such arrangements of coordination emerge among local providers attending these meetings. The lack of direct support for coordination at the state level has been cited as one of the primary deficits in local capacity to coordinate successfully and sustainably (S. Crabb, unpublished data, 2001).

Nonfinancial Support for Coordination

Aside from activities that occur exclusively at the state or local level, the transfer of knowledge from the state to local agencies is an important factor in developing more effective coordination solutions. The opportunity for state-provided technical assistance has been important in Florida's and Ohio's capacity to bring about coordinated change. In Michigan, the lack of providing technical expertise can in some ways be seen as an important limiting factor there.

In Florida, technical expertise is provided directly through the Florida DOT and through CTD via the local CTCs. The entire transportation-disadvantaged infrastructure has been established to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and technical expertise to local coordinators, who are then responsible by law for developing local coordinated efforts. Guidance has been given on methods for collecting data consistently, on establishing operating policies, on developing workable contracts and memorandums of understanding between multiple parties, on new transportation technologies, and on transportation innovations that have been successful elsewhere.

In Ohio, ODOT plays an important role in facilitating and aiding the local coordination efforts through educational opportunities for local officials who sometimes embark on formal transportation planning for the first time. This technical expertise is transferred through several avenues such as the publication of coordination briefs, the development of a coordination handbook, monthly roundtable discussions with all grant recipients, and the designation of an ODOT liaison to the local project who is often very involved in the development of the coordination effort. Local success has been attributed in part to the technical support of ODOT. That is, without ODOT's active involvement, beyond simply providing funding, local coordination efforts would not have been able to proceed as they have (R. Allen, unpublished data, 2001).

In Michigan, the relationship between the state and the local counties is characterized by an independent style in which local counties are left more on their own to develop and support their own solutions. Very little attention at the state level is dedicated to the needs of transportation-disadvantaged populations generally, and to the existing local provision of transportation services by human service agencies more specifically. MDOT has a single staff person who is responsible for transportation coordination issues, but no other staff people at MDOT work on coordination issues explicitly. Thus, they do not offer any technical expertise on multiorganizational coordination efforts at the local level.

Interorganizational coordination is a difficult objective to meet without skilled assistance given during the process. Supporting local coordination efforts with the skills to actually achieve coordination has been a primary element in the successful transportation coordination efforts in Florida and Ohio.

Support for Local Coordinators

At the local level, perhaps the single most effective element leading to successful transportation coordination is the presence of a dedicated coordinator that is outside of the existing fragmented system. Obtaining financial resources at the beginning of a collaborative process and dedicating a skilled convener to develop coordinated arrangements among multiple parties has been shown to be a significant contributor to successful collaborations in general (*18*). Moreover, creating an entity or designating a person who is central to an interorganizational network has been shown to be an important component of collaborative success (*35*).

So perhaps the most important element in developing arrangements of transportation coordination at the local level, and one of the primary elements for success in Florida and Ohio, is the support of a full-time coordinator who has the specific job of interacting with multiple organizations and crafting arrangements acceptable to the multiple parties. In Florida, the CTD funds local CTCs that are the coordinators in their respective counties. These CTCs are responsible for knowing what existing organizations provide transportation, what populations desire transportation, and what model of coordination would best meet local needs.

In Ohio, recipients of state coordination grants must designate a full-time coordinator as a condition of receiving the grant. This coordinator is charged with seeking ways in which community transportation providers can work better together. The coordinator is funded for 2 to 3 years, at which point the local organizations should be in a position to realize the benefits of coordination and agree to continue to fund it themselves.

In Michigan, there is no special state-based money to fund local coordinators either permanently, as in Florida, or temporarily, as in Ohio. Therefore, efforts to develop coordinated transportation have resided within local agencies that usually approach transportation coordination as a subprogram of some larger organizational structure.

MODEL OF COORDINATION: COMMUNITY SUPPORT ORGANIZATION

From the analysis of state transportation coordination policy and local implementation of that policy, it becomes clear that there are four primary areas in which policy makers need to concentrate when crafting strategies to meet the coordination challenge.

But the larger lesson to be understood from this research, and which is consistent with other research on organizational behavior, is that coordination is a difficult process. Bringing together multiple organizations representing various clients (the poor, people with mental disabilities, the elderly), various sectors (public, nonprofit, private), and various organizational missions can be difficult to achieve. So although the key factors as discussed are designed to guide policy makers in their approaches toward transportation coordination, perhaps a more fundamental approach to coordination is necessary.

One such approach to enhancing the capacity of local communities to reach coordinated solutions to problems in common is through the development of a community support organization (CSO). A CSO is an entity that directs its resources toward achieving communitywide solutions involving existing multiparty resources. As Conner and Kadel-Taras note, "CSOs seek to build the community's capacity to systemically address social problems by assisting efforts that work across multiple not-for-profits and across multiple sectors of the community" (*36*). Essentially, a CSO functions like the CTCs do in Florida or like the designated coordinators in Ohio, in that it is a community-based organization with a mission to facilitate and support coordination processes within the community.

Part of the responsibility of a CSO is to bring multiple organizations to the table, support coordination efforts with applicable research and background materials, and facilitate coordination processes, whether it is through providing additional technical expertise or other means. The basic idea of a CSO is to promote a more integrative approach toward addressing social issues within and across a community in much the same way that a metropolitan planning organization may coordinate highway projects across multiple governmental jurisdictions. What a CSO may provide in the case of transportation coordination is the presence of a party that is independent of existing transportation-disadvantaged service providers. It would have the capacity to be an independent arbiter and facilitator of a coordination process that in most communities does not and will not develop on its own. Such a model need not be limited to a singular topical area such as transportation coordination, but it may include a range of social issues that could be potentially better addressed through more integrated community approaches. Transportation, though, especially paratransit services provided by human service agencies serving the poor, the elderly, and the disabled, can be one primary area of focus for a CSO, and it can be one primary way to institutionally implement the increased policy directives of transportation coordination. Further research on the opportunities presented for a CSO to facilitate local transportation coordination is warranted.

CONCLUSIONS

It is possible to read the previous discussion and make a simplistic interpretation such as Michigan is bad and Florida and Ohio are good. Or one could look at the three cases along a spectrum of government involvement, with low government involvement associated with low coordination and high government involvement associated with high coordination. However, in the author's view, the lessons here are different. This paper highlights the complex nature of achieving transportation coordination and the multiple decision points that policy makers must confront if coordination truly is a policy goal worth achieving.

The lessons to be gleaned from this research are that coordination is a difficult process. Often the initiators of coordination are either federal policies that are often vague or broad, or local initiatives that rely on a unique set of local conditions (such as a community catalyzer, a particularly involved politician, an influential community institution). If the goal is widespread adoption of coordination strategies, neither source seems to be enough, however. What emerges out of this research is that one successful approach to local level coordination—whether transportation or some other element, especially in the social planning realm—is based on an active relationship between state and local level entities. In that way, funding specifically directed toward coordination can be applied, full-time coordinators can be designated at the local level, and technical expertise can be given to those local coordinators so that they are able to learn how to coordinate and sustain newly created coordinated relationships. The local coordinator, or convener, can take the form of a designated short-term coordinator (as in Ohio), a permanent coordinating agency (as in Florida), or some other type of general independent entity that can work toward coordination goals (e.g., a CSO). Also, although the specific subject area of this research has been on paratransit services for transportation-disadvantaged populations, the lessons apply more broadly to other contexts, especially under the umbrella of social or environmental planning, in which the solution to a pressing community concern is best addressed through a multiorganizational, collaborative process.

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