Accessibility to Transportation on Long Island Study
Seniors Issue Group

New York State Office Building
250 Veterans Memorial Highway
Classroom # 2, Basement Level
Hauppauge, NY 11788

January 17, 2006
1 PM to 3 PM

Meeting Summary

Scott Giering of Howard/Stein-Hudson (HSH) opened the meeting by welcoming the attendees and explaining the purpose of the Accessibility to Transportation on Long Island Study and the intended outcome of the issue group meeting. Mr. Giering introduced the members of the study team and asked the issue group participants to introduce themselves. He then turned the meeting over to Chris Ryan, of HSH, who led a discussion of the following questions:

*What are the major destinations and trip purposes for seniors on Long Island?*

Participants identified the following as major trip purposes:
- Medical related trips including dialysis, doctors’ appointments, counseling, and pharmacies
- Errands such as shopping, going to the Post Office, and banking
- Social activities
- Social services and social security related trips
- Jobs

Building on the trip purposes, attendees identified certain major destinations:
- Stony Brook Hospital
- Sloan Kettering satellite centers
- Local senior centers
- Nutrition and meal sites

*What transportation services are currently serving seniors?*

Several non-fixed route services are available for seniors in both Nassau and Suffolk Counties. Most can be classified as county, municipal, private for-profit, and private not-for-profit services
- County paratransit services
  - Able-Ride in Nassau County
  - Suffolk County Accessible Transportation (SCAT) in Suffolk County
- Municipal services
Consist primarily of local shuttle services to
- senior centers/adult day care
- shopping malls
- special events
- medical appointments
- Many services have to be scheduled at least one week in advance
- Most do not cross town lines

- Private for-profit services
  - Taxis
    - The Town of North Hempstead is looking into partnerships with taxis to encourage seniors to use them. One of the goals is to increase the predictability of service
  - Private services for persons with disabilities

- Private not-for-profit services include
  - Veterans and senior transportation
  - Church-affiliated organizations
  - Volunteer groups such as Fish of Wantagh

Four fixed-route service providers were identified
- MTA Long Island Rail Road
- MTA Long Island Bus (Nassau County)
- Suffolk County Transit Bus (Suffolk County)
- Huntington Area Rapid Transit (HART) (Suffolk County)

What role does each type of service play in meeting seniors’ mobility needs?

Attendees noted significant differences in the role fixed and non-fixed route services provide to seniors
- Fixed route buses and trains
  - An option only for people who live and have destinations along the routes
  - Primarily for jobs and shopping
  - Seniors who use the fixed routes are generally more mobile, healthier and younger
- Paratransit
  - Provides weekend service in Nassau County
  - Is not a viable option for job access
  - Often used for medical trips
- Private/non-profit providers
  - Provides service to
    - Senior centers
    - Nutrition sites and meal centers
    - Medical
    - Shopping
  - Non-profits usually limit the number of trips and most only transport clients within towns
  - Many non-profit providers are trying to fill in service gaps and not duplicate services
  - Most seniors use a combination of all these transportation options

How well are these services functioning? What and where are the gaps in service? What challenges does the current non-fixed route transportation system create?
Attendees felt that Nassau County is better equipped than Suffolk County to address the mobility needs of seniors. There was general agreement that this was most likely due to Nassau County’s smaller geographic area and longer service hours. However, there are functional issues, that create service gaps and challenges for seniors in both counties.

- Many seniors need door-to-door service
  - Most current services are curb-to-curb without a provision for assisting seniors from the door to the vehicle
- Inadequate service hours and coverage area
  - It is difficult for seniors to attend activities at night, when they do not like to drive
  - Weekend and evening services are too infrequent to use as a reliable means of transportation
  - It is difficult for seniors to attend Sunday church services
  - Most services do not cross jurisdictional boundaries which can create long transfer times between services
    - This is done as a means of providing more trips, with limited resources, within the town borders
- Fixed bus routes have an unfriendly waiting environment
  - Inadequate shelters
  - Few places to sit down
  - Bus stops that are often too far for seniors to walk to
- Several participants noted scheduling difficulties
  - Return trips are particularly difficult to schedule since some appointments may take longer than anticipated
  - Often an entire day will have to be reserved for a single appointment
  - Seniors often have to wait longer than expected after appointments for their ride to arrive
  - An attendee explained a situation of a dialysis patient who needs treatment on a regular schedule three times a week, but would have to spend three hours on the phone to schedule each trip
  - Another participant mentioned two neighbors who travel to the same medical facility, on the same day, at the same time, but are forced to use separate vans
- Jobs access, especially for low-income seniors is difficult
  - Particularly for those who cannot afford transit passes or cars
  - Job access is also important for displaced homemakers
- Many seniors are reluctant to use taxis
  - Per-person fares and gas surcharges make taxis too expensive
  - Taxis lack comforts that seniors need. They do not know in advance the type or quality of the car that will arrive
  - Many drivers are not willing to help seniors with packages. There is a perception among drivers that seniors will not tip
- Assistive aides and mobility devices (walkers, canes, etc.) are difficult to transport
  - Scooters and mechanical wheelchairs are especially difficult to accommodate because they are larger and heavier than manual wheelchairs
  - Assistive aids and equipment such as oxygen tanks take space that could be used for additional passengers
- Both Nassau and Suffolk County face increasing demand for transportation services
  - The senior population on Long Island is growing rapidly
  - Town resources are limited to provide additional services

When asked what seniors do in the absence of these services, attendees responded that seniors must rely on family and friends for transportation or, go without.
What are the transportation needs and issues of those who provide support services to seniors, such as visiting nurses, and in-home care workers?

- Home health care workers do not have enough transportation options
  - Options are better now than they were several years ago when home health aides would have to take two or three buses to reach their clients
- Since aides are not paid for their travel time, there is no incentive to service seniors in areas without public transportation
- Service providers need to provide rides for aides accompanying seniors, who takes open seats from other seniors
- Where care is needed 24-hours, service is impossible without a car. Night and weekend service is particularly difficult
- Aides are unable to assist seniors with shopping without a car

How are seniors accessing information about the transportation system? What are the challenges in access information? What is missing? What is working?

- The issue group members felt that knowledge of transportation services is not a significant problem. There are many opportunities for seniors to access information about transportation services.
  - Word of mouth and parish outreach are important means of disseminating information
  - The Town of Babylon produces a monthly newsletter with transit information that is circulated to local senior centers and libraries
  - Newsday runs weekend ads listing transit services
  - Bus companies provide literature to senior centers and carry mail-in applications on their buses
  - Municipal senior departments provide call-in numbers and some provide booklets with information
    - A participant noted that call-in numbers are understaffed and the caller often gets a busy signal
    - Human contact is better than automated systems for seniors
- A central clearinghouse for transportation service information would be helpful. This could help both users and providers understand the transportation options that are currently available
- The counties and municipalities could make better use of local cable and radio stations to broadcast schedules
- Websites are not an appropriate way to provide information to seniors. Most do not have regular access to the Internet
- Financial constraints, particularly in the number of buses and driver available, limit service provision much more than lack of awareness

For seniors, what are the main motivating factors in deciding where to live? What is the appropriate balance between government obligation to provide transportation services and people choosing to live in accessible locations?

Attendees thought that considerations other than transportation were of greater importance when deciding where to live and that the government does have a responsibility to provide some form of transportation to seniors

- For many, housing prices and taxes are the main motivating factors
• Proximity to family and friends is also important
• The government does have a certain responsibility to take care of its vulnerable populations. Many seniors have lived in the same area for decades and have contributed much in taxes and services to their communities. Transportation provision should not be seen as offering people a free ride
• People often do not think of future transportation options while they are still driving. Future planning often depends on the person and well-educated seniors are more used to thinking about future considerations
  o The Town of East Hampton is trying to encourage their seniors to think about future needs
• Some towns are trying to keep seniors in their homes as long as possible
  o The Town of North Hempstead has an “Aging in Place” program to support naturally occurring senior communities by facilitating nurses, gardeners, and other support services
• Many assisted living facilities and nursing homes have their own vehicles for transporting residents

What challenges and opportunities should be considered in exploring accessibility options in areas currently not served by fixed routes? How can we use existing services to provide increased service to underserved areas?

• Fixed route services
  o Reconfigure schedules and routes to be more comprehensive
  o Increase coordination between bus and train schedules to minimize transfer times
  o Acquire a more flexible bus fleet
    ▪ Smaller buses may be more economical on weekends and off-peak times
    ▪ An analysis of vehicle sizing is needed
  o Investigate off-peak discounted fares
• Non-fixed route services
  o Provide neighborhood circulator services as a means of traveling to fixed route stops and stations
  o Paratransit
    ▪ Buses are easier for older seniors to access than vans
    ▪ Increase technology for coordinating efforts such as ridesharing
    ▪ Develop a subscription service for paratransit
• Funding is a major issue for towns
  o Group purchasing may be an option to reduce equipment acquisition and maintenance costs
  o Transportation providers compete with local school districts for drivers
    ▪ School districts have higher pay rates and offer better benefits
    ▪ Perhaps there is an opportunity to coordinate the use of school buses for seniors in non-school hours
  o Partnerships
    ▪ Certain grocery stores already offer free rides home with purchases of $50 or more
    ▪ North Hempstead is investigating a taxi partnership initiative
    ▪ Partner with services and businesses used by seniors, including doctors

What would you consider to be adequate access to transportation – in terms of level of service, availability, and available choices?
• More frequent scheduling with a maximum of a 15-minute wait time
• Ability for seniors to travel within their communities
• Availability of comprehensive, real-time information
• Dependable service
• Proper infrastructure including bus shelters and seating
• Affordability

Dave Kletzman, NYMTC’s study project manager, ended the meeting by explaining the importance of the study to Long Island and that NYMTC recognizes that the transportation needs of Nassau and Suffolk County are different. To ensure the needs of both counties are taken into account, all of the major players in transportation planning and provision (including the MTA, MTA Long Island Rail Road, MTA Long Island Bus, New York State Department of Transportation, and the Nassau and Suffolk County planning departments) sit on the study’s Steering Committee.

Mr. Kletzman reiterated that the goal of the study is to develop a clear understanding of what constitutes adequate access to transportation in order to provide recommendations for policy makers, transportation providers, and possible future studies on accessibility.

Mr. Kletzman suggested attendees visit the study website at www.nymtc.org to keep informed about study updates. He explained that the summary of the issue group would be posted on the website and the final White Paper would be sent to all participants in the study.

Prepared by Howard/Stein-Hudson, 1/26/06