



Kansas RTAP Fact Sheet

A Service of The University of Kansas Transportation Center for Rural Transit Providers

What Does a Mobility Manager Do All Day?

By Chris Wichman

Over the last few years a growing profession has evolved in the transit management field. According to United We Ride Ambassador JoAnn Hutchinson, the term “mobility manager” has only recently come to refer to a profession of its own. Is your agency prepared for this new direction in regional transit coordination?

In truth, mobility managers may be new in title alone. The day-to-day activities of a mobility manager are common to most coordinated transit agencies, or as Ms. Hutchinson stated, “You may very well be a mobility manager and not even realize it.” This article will further describe the work of mobility managers, discuss an existing mobility management program in southwest Kansas, and provide a set of resources for transit managers considering mobility management for their agency.

What is mobility management?

Mobility management has developed at the intersection of health-care, human service provision and public transportation. It seems that every national organization promoting mobility management defines it differently, depending on whether the focus is at the customer level or at the system level. A relatively concise definition comes from the National Resource Center for Human Service Transportation Coordination: “a process of managing a coordinated community-wide transportation service network comprised of the operations and infrastructures of multiple trip providers in



A mobility manager's job is all about building and maintaining relationships with transportation providers and with customers.

partnership with each other.”

A common responsibility of the mobility manager is to identify and collaborate with the disparate providers in their region. At the customer level, Hutchinson describes a mobility manager as a community travel agent—someone who identifies all available service providers to make recommendations for the customer to reach his or her destination in a number of different ways, by a number of modes. Just as a person might deliberate among

several airlines for an upcoming vacation, it is ultimately left to the individual rider to choose the preferred transportation option to get to their destination in a timely and efficient manner.

At the system or organizational level, the mobility manager might not work one-on-one with customers; rather this person would be responsible for working within the service area to identify gaps and help to close those gaps by facilitating inter-organizational agreements, identifying additional resources or bringing additional transportation partners together. Mobility managers might work at a community, county or regional level to help improve transportation service.

Mobility management is unique in this balancing act of both customer needs and operating efficiency. It requires an adept professional to meet the individual service needs of customers without compromising the bottom-line of partnering service providers. The right person for this job is out there and might even be one of your current staff members. The following section will identify the skills and characteristics that define an effective mobility manager.

Key traits of mobility managers

As state and local budget cuts to public services continue around the nation, any manager who can simultaneously provide a high level of service while cutting costs will be held as an asset to their organization. This holds true for mobility managers. In fact, the profession is built on

the principle of coordination to maximize efficiency. As a result, the field is growing, with more and more successful programs to be found around the nation.

To reach a cost efficient level of service that also meets customer needs, the American Public Transportation Association has outlined three main goals of any mobility management professional:

- 1) Creating partnerships between a diverse range of community organizations (public, private, non-profit, for-profit, etc.) to ensure that transportation resources are coordinated effectively.
- 2) Using these partnerships to develop and enhance travel options for customers in the community or region.
- 3) Developing ways to effectively communicate those options to the public to inform customers' decision-making, focusing on enhancing customer service.

Who are mobility managers?

The ideal professional to fulfill these goals does not always come from within the transportation industry. Hutchinson stated that mobility managers are not typically transportation people, rather a lot of them come from health care and human services. In her opinion, it really just takes a good facilitator, a good salesperson, someone who is willing to identify resources, and beg, borrow and steal until they see a result, while nurturing other people to continually solve problems. The ideal mobility manager would have the ability to lead, ability to be flexible, be an advocate for all people, have no fear of failure, be open to nontraditional options, be compassionate, and think outside the box.

A "Day in the Life"

Kathy Denhardt was hired as the mobility manager for the City of Dodge City and Ford County, Kansas in January 2011. This brand-new position was created to meet the need for better transit coordination in the region. With a new focus on mobility management, the Dodge City and Ford County partnership pursued and received a federal grant to

fund what became Denhardt's position as a mobility manager.

Once on the job, Denhardt's first task was to figure out what a mobility manager would do. Her background was not in transportation. She had worked primarily in organizational management as a professor and as a consultant to local governments. To educate herself in mobility management, she relied on resources from the Kansas RTAP and the American Public Transportation Association. With these tools at her disposal, Denhardt soon became familiar with the philosophy of mobility management and what needed to be done on a day-to-day basis.

Denhardt realized that as a mobility manager, she would need to think broadly about the whole system of providing transportation to those in need. Her efforts were not to be confined by the two demand-response vehicles owned by her organization. With an emphasis on this systems approach, Denhardt reached out to other entities including volunteer organizations, for-profit taxi services, and retirement communities with transit vehicles. She worked to build relationships with anyone in the community who could help her provide transportation to underserved populations.

To identify her potential customers, Denhardt organized public meetings in the region. This community outreach process required facilitation and collaboration skills. The importance of a mobility manager being able to work with different stakeholders and understand their needs cannot be understated.

Another part of Denhardt's whole-system approach was expanding her thinking and planning beyond defined political boundaries. Denhardt said that a mobility manager should not be limited to narrow geographies, but rather should focus on transportation needs of people no matter where they need to go. She finds this approach particularly important in rural areas where there may not be the resources to meet all the transportation needs. This is especially

true for transportation for specialized medicine that often requires travel to medical facilities in other regions. Mobility managers must be comfortable working across political boundaries, across organizations and across transportation systems to effectively provide transportation to all those in need.

Models for mobility management

There are two commonly-applied models for mobility management. In the first model, the mobility manager is housed within a transit agency with a primary responsibility to reach out to other providers and fill in any gaps in service. In a second model, the mobility manager is outside of the transit agency, working for a city or county government, perhaps, with a primary responsibility to build partnerships among all possible providers to meet the service needs of an area.

Denhardt has found it helpful that her position is outside the context of day-to-day transit operations. In her opinion, it may be difficult for a mobility manager to be effective in building and nourishing the types of partnerships and relationships necessary for systems-building while also being responsible for supervising staff, drivers and focusing on fixed-routes in smaller geographic areas. To Denhardt, the mobility manager is better served spending time thinking more broadly across systems, but she noted that what works well for her may not be true in all cases. There is no "one" model to follow, as each rural area faces unique geographic, demographic and administrative challenges. Denhardt's advice is to get educated on best practices from programs around the country and to piece together a program that works well in your region.

A profession of networking

A national organization of mobility management professionals, called the Partnership for Mobility Management, has grown to around 400 individual members in the last few years. In speaking with Sheryl Gross-Glaser, director of the Partnership, she emphasized the

Funding Sources for Mobility Management

Primary FTA Grant Programs for Mobility Management

Program Title	Job Access and Revenue Commute Program (5316)	New Freedom Program (5317)
Type / Match	Capital, planning and operating expenses 80% federal, 20% local match	Capital and operating expenses 80% federal, 20% local match
Purpose	To address transportation challenges faced by welfare recipients and low-income persons in getting to work.	To address inadequate transportation as the primary barrier for individuals with disabilities going to work.
Mobility Mgmt. Activities Eligible?	Yes, can be used to fund mobility manager position.	Yes, can be used for new public transportation services to assist individuals with disabilities.

Other FTA Grant Programs for Mobility Management

Program Title	Transportation for Elderly Persons with Disabilities (5310)	Veterans Transportation and Community Living Initiative
Type / Match	Capital expenses 80% federal, 20% local match	Capital expenses to establish One-Call / One-Click Centers
Purpose Centers	Formula funding to states to meet transportation needs of elderly and/or disabled persons.	For the implementation of One-Call / One-Click and related transportation coordination
Mobility Mgmt. Activities Eligible?	Limited; states are the direct recipients.	No, mobility management coordination expenses are not an eligible capital cost.

Source: Federal Transit Administration. <http://www.fta.dot.gov/grants/13093.html>

importance of peer-networking and idea-sharing for effective mobility managers. She has noticed that many mobility managers work in isolation without much opportunity in their community or surrounding rural regions to network with professional peers.

It is important for mobility managers to be aware of all the resources out there and not try to “reinvent the wheel” in their own programs. To facilitate idea-sharing, the Partnership has formed a LinkedIn group and assembled various online resources including archived webinars, training sessions, and links to partnering organizations.

At present in Kansas there are only a handful of transit professionals who identify themselves as mobility managers, so it is especially important to look elsewhere for mobility management inspiration. Hutchinson advises transit agency managers who are thinking of incorporating mobility management into their programs to take the following steps:

1) **Join the Partnership for Mobility Management.** This is a joint effort of seven national organizations that work with national, regional, state and local leaders and organizations to realize the possibilities of improving transportation options to under-served populations. A

(free) membership allows professionals to interact and share ideas with colleagues in mobility management from around the country. The first step in developing a mobility management program is to look at what is being done and what has worked elsewhere. Visit the Partnership at: <http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/anmviewer.asp?a=1790>.

2) **Partner with local governments and explore funding opportunities through FTA.** A significant factor in the growth of the mobility management profession is support for transit coordination by Congress and the federal government. The Federal Transit Administration has shown

leadership in encouraging public transit agencies to move into a broader transportation-planning role in their communities and to coordinate a full range of mobility options that get both private and public operators on board (Dalton). The efforts of FTA were only reinforced when mobility management activities were made eligible for receipt of federal funding under SAFETEA-LU. See chart on page 3 for major sources of funding from FTA. Visit the FTA for more information on funding: <http://www.fta.dot.gov/grants.html>.



Mobility managers coordinate the different pieces of their region's transportation picture to match resources with needs.

3) Visit the website of APTA's Mobility Management Conference.

The 2012 conference featured sessions and workshops on performance measurement, forming partnerships with different organizations, non-emergency medical transportation and brokerages, customer focus, information technology, and integration of facilities. To download presentations, visit: <http://www.apta.com/mc/mobility/Pages/default.aspx>

4) Explore educational resources.

In particular, sign-up for a free National Transit Institute (NTI) membership. The stated mission of the National Transit Institute is to provide training, education, and clearinghouse services in support of public transportation and quality of life in the United States. This membership will provide access to a variety of classes on mobility management best practices, a transit trainers' workshop and "Connecting Communities" webinars. To register visit: <https://www.ntionline.com/user/>

Reprinted from the April 2012 issue of the *Kansas TransReporter*, a publication of the Kansas Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) at the Kansas University Transportation Center.

Sources

- Dalton, Dan & Hosen, Ken.(Fall 2008) "A Focus on Mobility Management". Transportation Leader Publication. http://www.tlpa.org/meetings/fta/articles/FTA_Article_Vol20_No4.pdf
- Hutchinson, Joann. "Expanding and Integrating Community Transit through Mobility Management Strategies". Presented on May 19, 2009. http://www.nctransit.org/09conference/09ConfPresentations/JoAnnHutchinson_MobilityStrategies.pdf
- Phone Interviews: JoAnn Hutchinson, February 9, 2012; Sheryl Gross-Glaser. February 15, 2012; Kathy Denhardt, February 17, 2012.