

CHAPTER SEVEN

A SURVEY OF TRANSPORTATION PROVIDERS REGARDING COORDINATION BARRIERS

Federal guidelines for the use of Access to Jobs (ATJ), Welfare-to-Work (WTW), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds for transportation mandate the coordination of public and human services transportation. To meet this requirement, not only must the State know the transportation resources and needs of TANF recipients and have an up-to-date inventory of all publicly funded passenger vehicles that transport the general public or special populations, but also it must know what barriers to coordination exist within agencies or programs.

In 1999, the ATR Institute (ATRI) made an assessment of the barriers to coordination within agency programs. The survey asked administrators how they felt about interagency transportation coordination, whether such coordination was already taking place, what transportation services the program provides, and obstacles the program faces in coordinating transportation with other programs. Surveys were conducted with the following program managers and providers:

- ❖ A survey of 35 Head Start providers;
- ❖ A survey of 102 senior center program managers; and
- ❖ A survey of 16 rural and 3 urban public transit providers.

Information from these survey responses, combined with the vehicle inventory, can be used to identify transportation resources that could be used by more than one agency or program. This information will enable the State to implement the federally mandated coordination of transportation services for TANF and WTW clients.

Perceptions of Transportation Coordination by Head Start Programs

Established in 1965, Head Start is a national program that provides comprehensive developmental services for America's low-income, pre-school children aged three to five, and social services for their families. The Early Head Start Program was established in 1994 for low-income families with infants and toddlers, aged zero to three years. Specific services for

children focus on education, socio-economic development, physical and mental health, and nutrition.¹

The ATRI's representatives attended a meeting regarding transportation issues with Head Start Providers from around the state on March 4, 1999. In order to develop a thorough inventory of Head Start transportation services, ATRI surveyed the directors of Head Start programs throughout New Mexico. Directors from thirty-one programs responded to the survey, an 89 percent response rate. Survey responses indicate that there are many common concerns among Head Start providers.

Head Start directors identified the following transportation barriers:

- ❖ There are no vehicles (or not enough vehicles) equipped to transport children with physical disabilities. In some areas, the local school district will transport children to Head Start centers.
- ❖ Some children must spend hours every day commuting on the buses.
- ❖ There are not enough vehicles to meet the demand for transportation. Not all children who need transportation to Head Start programs can be served. Only 39 percent of the grantees are able to transport all of the children who are eligible for transportation. There are not enough spare vehicles to cover for vehicle breakdowns.
- ❖ There are not enough qualified drivers. It is difficult to attract qualified Commercial Driver's License (CDL) drivers due to the low pay and competition from school bus operators. When drivers are absent, and/or vehicles break down, classes must sometimes be canceled.
- ❖ When bus service is canceled due to insufficient buses or drivers, some parents must skip work.
- ❖ There is very little flexibility in providing transportation service once the school year begins. If a Head Start family moves during the middle of the school year, it is very difficult to provide transportation for its Head Start students, since the buses are already filled.

¹ US Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start Bureau. <www2.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/hsb>.

- ❖ There are insufficient funds to transport children to Head Start classes. Many parents cannot afford to provide transportation for their children.²

Head Start Directors also identified common concerns about transportation coordination:

- ❖ There are not enough buses and qualified drivers.
- ❖ To expand Head Start transportation services, a formula is needed to reimburse Head Start for vehicle depreciation and operating costs.
- ❖ A driver wage rate for expanded transportation services may be difficult to set. Currently, staff members are frequently assigned to drive, in addition to their other duties. They are sometimes paid less than “official” drivers.
- ❖ A system of assessing which Head Start parents should receive additional transportation services is needed. The need for additional transportation is so great that the demand for service may well exceed the ability of the Head Start grantees to provide it.³

Youth Development Incorporated (YDI), the Head Start provider in Bernalillo, Taos, and Rio Arriba Counties, is already exploring options to serve a broader population of the general public with its transportation services. YDI has been working with Bernalillo County and the City of Albuquerque Transit Department to obtain funding to implement these programs. These options include:

- ❖ Utilizing Head Start Centers as meeting and parking areas for carpools, vanpools, and buses.
- ❖ Utilizing Head Start buses to provide bus service from Head Start centers to job training centers, other support services, and work sites.
- ❖ Providing welfare recipients with CDL training as part of the Head Start CDL training program.
- ❖ Utilizing Head Start buses to transport parents to their children’s Head Start centers where they can then use carpools, vanpools, and buses. The Head Start grantees who were present at the meeting indicated, however, that their buses were already full. Some

² The ATRI Head Start Provider Survey (1999).

³ The ATRI Head Start Provider Survey (1999).

of the grantees mentioned that a long-term solution to meeting the need for higher carrying capacity would be to purchase larger vehicles.⁴

There appeared to be a general consensus that providing Head Start drivers with the option of additional work hours would encourage at least some drivers to remain Head Start drivers, thereby decreasing driver turnover.⁵

Current Coordination Efforts by Head Start Providers

Head Start representatives were asked to describe some of their current coordination efforts. In Taos Pueblo, Head Start buses are used to transport children to other childcare programs. The Taos Municipal School District uses K-12 public school buses to transport Head Start-identified children from the Head Start facility to the school district's special education pre-school for additional classes. Isleta Pueblo uses its K-12 school buses to transport children to Head Start. These buses also are used to transport high school students to summer programs. The operating costs are covered by funds received from a foundation grant.⁶

Coordinating transportation services with other agencies offers opportunities to improve the efficiency and reliability of Head Start transportation services. Continuing efforts to coordinate with other agencies may create opportunities for Head Start programs to improve cost-effective transportation services for TANF clients.

Attitudes of Senior Center Administrators to Transportation Coordination

Senior center administrators were asked to respond to questions about attitudes to transportation coordination. The survey asked administrators how they felt about interagency transportation coordination and whether such coordination was already taking place. Twenty-seven percent indicated that they would be interested in offering transportation to other members of the public for a fee. Another seventeen percent are already offering transportation to people other than senior citizens. Seven percent of the respondents are planning to provide transportation to others.⁷

⁴ The ATRI Head Start Provider Survey (1999).

⁵ The ATRI Head Start Provider Survey (1999).

⁶ The ATRI Head Start Provider Survey (1999).

⁷ The ATRI Senior Center Survey (1999).

The State Agency on Aging (SAOA) allows senior centers to transport disabled adults based on their ability and capacity. Examples of such additional transportation services include the following:

- ❖ Alamo Senior Center provides transportation for caregivers and associate members who are not senior citizens as long as seniors are not displaced. It is currently working on a plan to provide transportation for people with disabilities.
- ❖ Baca Senior Center in Prewitt provides transportation for people with disabilities who live with a senior citizen.
- ❖ The City of Las Cruces Senior Program provides transportation for persons with disabilities, regardless of age.
- ❖ Crownpoint Aging Services transports persons with disabilities.
- ❖ Fort Defiance Agency transports volunteers for senior citizen programs.
- ❖ The Lordsburg-Hidalgo County Commission on Aging is developing plans to transport individuals as part of the Medicaid Waiver Transportation program.
- ❖ Maxwell Senior Center provides limited transportation for people with disabilities.
- ❖ The Navajo Area Agency on Aging provides transportation for people with disabilities who live with seniors.
- ❖ Torrance County Senior Program provides Medicaid transportation for seniors and others.
- ❖ Sierra Joint Office on Aging provides limited transportation for persons with disabilities.
- ❖ The two senior centers in the Village of Ruidoso transport persons with disabilities.⁸

Although some senior centers are beginning to coordinate transportation, barriers remain. The following list, based on senior center directors' responses to the survey, illustrates these barriers. Funding is the most substantial barrier to transportation coordination. Almost half of the senior centers do not offer transportation to other individuals because their program specifically prohibits it. High vehicle use also poses a significant barrier to coordination. Vehicles at senior centers are in very high use for passenger transportation and for running errands.

⁸ The ATRI Senior Center Survey (1999).

The “Other” category gave the respondent the opportunity to include any barriers to transportation coordination not listed. The directors gave the following responses in the “Other” category.

- ❖ Other agencies do not always give special care or attention to those receiving transportation services, nor do they always have a cooperative attitude.
- ❖ Vans for the handicapped and more powerful utility vans are necessary to extend transportation service to special-needs clients and areas that have rough terrain.
- ❖ Village insurance often will not cover volunteer drivers.
- ❖ There is a lack of full-time drivers and steady volunteers.
- ❖ It is difficult to get replacement vehicles when service vehicles are no longer in good condition.
- ❖ More vehicles are needed to transport clients for shopping and other personal business. (Several respondents mentioned the need for additional vehicles to adequately cover their service areas.)
- ❖ There is not enough money to buy and service vehicles.
- ❖ Older seniors require more assistance than the average senior citizen.⁹

When asked to describe their service area, over half of senior center administrators responded that their service area covers “a five-to-seven-mile radius from the center of town.” An approved area plan and the capacity of the program to provide services to seniors in the area govern Service area.¹⁰

Vehicles used by senior centers are a potential transportation resource for the community as a whole. In rural areas senior centers may be the only agencies, other than school systems, that are providing any transportation service in the region. In addition, the size of the senior vehicle fleet, 566, is second only to the public school bus fleet.¹¹

⁹ The ATRI Senior Center Survey (1999).

¹⁰ Bunkley, Dolph Program Manager, SAOA. Interview. (2000, February 8).

¹¹ The ATRI Composite Database (1999).

Perceptions of Coordination by Urban and Rural Transit Providers

Map 7.1: Urban and Rural Public Transit Systems by County shows the location of TANF household concentrations and the location of the State's rural and urban public transit systems. The urban systems—Santa Fe, Albuquerque, and Las Cruces—provide service within their respective city limits, and may, under contract, provide service to contiguous areas within their county. For example, the City of Albuquerque Transit System, in an agreement with Bernalillo County, provides some transit routes to residents in unincorporated areas of the South Valley portion of the County.

Many rural systems operate only within their town limits. Examples include Roswell and Hobbs. No New Mexico County has public transit service within walking distance of the entire County residents. Consequently, there are large numbers of TANF clients in rural areas and small towns who cannot use public transit to access jobs, childcare, and support services.

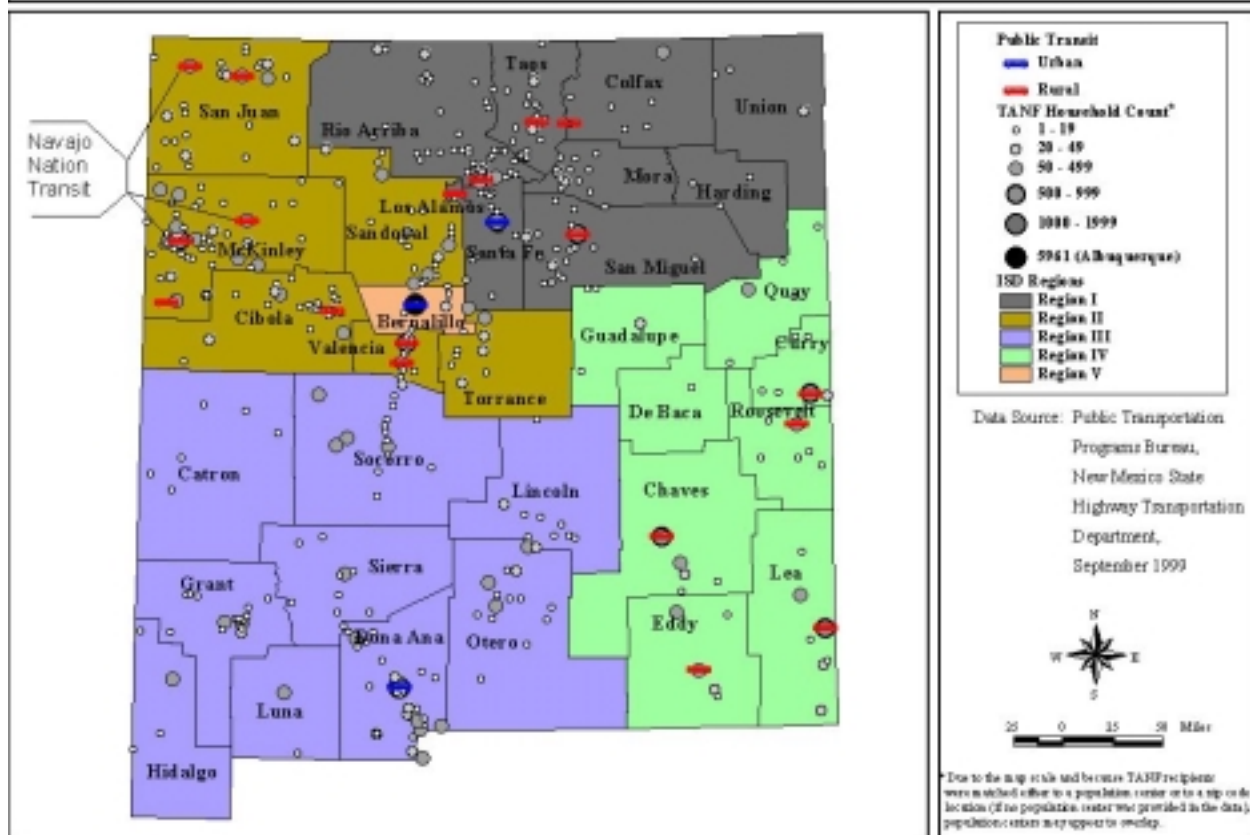
While the public transit systems, as currently funded, cannot serve all the people who need affordable, reliable transportation to move from welfare to work, many systems are making significant strides in coordinating with other agencies and business and in using new funding strategies to expand service. Since the ATRI first gathered coordination information and attitudes from these providers in surveys conducted during the summer of 1999, new programs and service have started. This expansion is due in large part to the flexible funding provided by the NMHSD to the PTPB and the influx of FTA Access to Jobs grants to the PTPB, the City of Albuquerque, and the City of Las Cruces.

Urban Transit Providers

Coordination in the City of Albuquerque

The City of Albuquerque Transit Department has contacted TANF providers, as well as homeless and domestic violence shelters in Bernalillo, Valencia, Sandoval, and Torrance Counties to inform them of all the services that are provided by the City's Transit department. The City of Albuquerque Transit Department is expanding its transportation services to meet the needs of welfare and low-income recipients by offering a subscription van service and subsidizing vanpooling. The Transit Department is working with others in the four-county region so that Job Access services may be interconnected. The Department recently received

Map 7.1: Urban and Rural Public Transit Systems by County



\$1,000,000 for further Job Access services and is working now to secure a local match of \$1,000,000.¹²

Coordination in the City of Las Cruces

Michael Noonchester, Director of the Las Cruces Transit Authority, commented that one of his primary concerns is the ability to transport WTW and TANF clients to job sites that are outside the City. Specifically, the Transit Department hopes to transport clients to new jobs in El Paso at the Santa Teresa border crossing west of El Paso. According to the New Mexico Economic Development Department, the Santa Teresa border crossing is expected to employ as many as 1,600 workers when in full production.¹³ The Las Cruces Transit Department will need to address any obstacles to interstate transportation.¹⁴

Coordination in the City of Santa Fe

Santa Fe Trails currently has no plans to expand services for TANF recipients. A new transit director recently was hired and Santa Fe Trails is in the process of reorganization. After this process is complete expansion of services may be discussed.

Rural Transit Systems

Angel Fire

In the summer of 1999 the Village of Angel Fire Transit System reported a limited ability to expand service for welfare recipients due to problems such as finding qualified drivers, additional vehicles, and drivers willing to work late hours. The Village has since decided to conduct a planning study to determine the feasibility of expanding public transit and to initiate a route on the “Enchanted Circle,” a circular route around Wheeler Peak that connects Angel Fire, Eagle Nest, Red River, Questa, and Taos. The Village transit director believes this would help address the transportation needs of seasonal workers and TANF clients who must travel to ski resort areas for employment. This travel pattern would qualify as a Reverse Commute under

¹² Matson, Dawn. City of Albuquerque Transit Department. Telephone interview. (2000, February 10).

¹³ The New Mexico Economic Development Department, <<http://www.edd.state.nm.us/TRADE/ISSUES/cross.htm>>. (Accessed 1999, September 9).

¹⁴ ATRI Metropolitan Transit Survey (1999, July).

Federal Transit Administration funding. The new route would also be a year-round draw for tourists.¹⁵

Coordination in Belen/Middle Rio Grande Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP)

The most significant obstacle to transportation coordination is that vehicles are in very high use. Despite this obstacle, this provider has expanded its services to meet the needs of welfare recipients by providing demand-response service for appointments, medical needs, and transportation to the grocery store.¹⁶ With additional vehicles and drivers who are willing to work late hours, services could be expanded.¹⁷

Coordination in Carlsbad

This provider has expanded service hours and boundaries to meet the needs of welfare recipients, offering service from 5am to 6pm Monday through Friday along with evening and weekend services available by appointment only. As a result, the provider is currently making around twenty trips daily, transporting primarily women and children, while filling vehicles completely. In reaching this objective, the provider cooperates with the local community council and the local TANF provider to address the effectiveness of the transportation service. The provider strives for a more effective service by improving client's access to transit information, providing reduced fares, and adjusting work schedules to accommodate shift workers. In addition to the transportation barriers indicated, the provider is competing with three other agencies for transportation rights in its area.¹⁸

Coordination in Clovis

The Clovis Area Transit System hopes to have expanded services to meet the needs of TANF recipients in place by March 2000. They have expanded service hours from 6:30am to 9pm Monday through Friday and also offer full service on Saturdays from 8am to 5pm. Expansion of other services is currently under discussion. This provider is involved with the Assisted Roosevelt/Curry Counties Welfare Reform Community Council and attends all

¹⁵ ATRI Rural Transit Survey (1999, July 20).

¹⁶ Demand-response is a type of transit service in which individual passengers can request transportation from a specific location to another specific location at a certain time.

¹⁷ ATRI Rural Transit Survey (1999, June 30).

¹⁸ ATRI Rural Transit Survey (1999, June 28), and Cooper, Mickie. Carlsbad Area Transit. Telephone interview. (2000, February 10).

planning meetings. The Clovis Area Transit System and the local TANF provider are taking steps to address operational concerns, such as offering a connection between Portales and Clovis, and providing more service flexibility, more destinations, and weekend services.

The Clovis Area Transit System is currently is contracted to serve seven different agencies: the Foster Grandparent program/Retired Senior Volunteer Program; the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation; the Children, Youth and Family Program; the Workforce Training Center; the Older Adults Department; the nursing home of Clovis; and the shelter for victims of domestic violence. In addition to the barriers indicated in *Figure 7.1, Barriers to Expanding Transportation Services to Welfare Recipients*, on page 163, vehicle sharing would require additional funding, and both the city and county governments are hesitant to approve efforts to coordinate transportation services.¹⁹

Coordination in Española

The City of Española operates EL RATA which began service in Fall 1999. At this time they have not expanded services to meet the needs of TANF recipients, but they have an open dialog with the Rio Arriba Works Program and are working towards expanding services. EL RATA operates one route and also offers demand response service to meet the needs of those with special needs. The vehicles used by El RATA are not designed to meet the needs of those with special needs however; the local senior citizens center has a van that can accommodate the handicapped. EL RATA and the senior citizens center coordinate use of the van and together meet the requirements of those with special needs. There are many opportunities to coordinate service with adjacent systems (Los Alamos and Santa Fe) and to connect riders to the Northern New Mexico Park-and-Ride which is expected to be operational in the coming months.

Coordination in Farmington

In July 1999, Presbyterian Medical Services, the public transit provider, received funds from the State to expand transportation services to welfare recipients, but an exact starting date for these additional services has not been set. The provider works closely with the local community council and is under contract to serve other agencies.²⁰

¹⁹ ATRI Rural Transit Survey (1999, August 5).

²⁰ ATRI Rural Transit Survey (1999, July 23).

Coordination in Hobbs

The City of Hobbs contacted the local TANF provider when it submitted a Welfare-to-Work proposal to the New Mexico State Highway and Transportation Department (NMSHTD), but later had to withdraw its proposal due to insufficient funding. The provider is currently competing with three other service providers in the area. The provider's primary concern is that funding requirements prohibit vehicle sharing.²¹

Coordination in Laguna Pueblo

To coordinate transportation services with other agencies, greater flexibility is needed in both vehicle service area and hours.²²

Coordination in Las Vegas

In the past six months, Meadow City Express, operated by the City of Las Vegas, has taken great strides in expanding services to meet TANF transportation needs in San Miguel County. They are coordinating with the New Mexico Highlands University (NMHU) Work Program to provide clients with trips to meet with work coaches, attend education classes, and work. Meadow City Express is in the process of expanding TANF transportation services to Mora and Santa Fe Counties.

The area is benefiting from not only USDOT Access to Jobs funds and State matching funds, but also from a USDOL competitive grant awarded to New Mexico Highlands University. The multiple funding sources are permitting the area to use innovations not yet tried in other areas of the State. For example, the NMHU Works Program is acting as a transportation broker to refer TANF and WTW clients in several counties to a local transit provider and to authorize trip types and numbers. The public transit providers in Las Vegas and Taos are increasing local job opportunities by hiring all new drivers from a pool of qualified TANF recipients.²³

²¹ ATRI Rural Transit Survey (1999, July 6).

²² ATRI Rural Transit Survey (1999, June 30).

²³ ATRI Rural Transit Survey (1999, September 28), and Updates from PTPB meetings with Taos and Las Vegas rural transit, and NMHU Works Program Directors, (1999, December), and Trujillo, Linda, the PTPB. Telephone interview. (2000, February 10).

Coordination in Los Alamos

There are very few TANF recipients living in Los Alamos County. But the Los Alamos National Laboratory is the economic heart of north central New Mexico. People routinely travel from Bernalillo, Sandoval, Rio Arriba, Santa Fe, Taos, San Miguel, and Mora Counties to work at the National Laboratory. Los Alamos Bus System, Incorporated, a private non-profit organization, has not expanded services to connect with other rural transit providers such as the City of Española. Los Alamos County is undertaking a planning study to determine if the County should takeover operation of Los Alamos Bus System, Incorporated. Traffic management is one of the County's greatest concerns and they are interested in coordinating with other area transit providers to offer commuters alternatives to single occupancy vehicles for the drive into Los Alamos. Los Alamos County also supports the Northern New Mexico Park-and-Ride.²⁴

Coordination in the Navajo Nation

Navajo Nation Transit provides services linking Gallup, Crownpoint, and Shiprock, New Mexico and Window Rock, Arizona. Although services to meet the needs of welfare recipients have not yet been expanded, a Memorandum of Agreement was signed between the Navajo Nation Workforce Development Office and the Navajo Transit System to provide transportation for Welfare-to-Work recipients. The local TANF provider contacted the Navajo Transit System with questions regarding transit information, rates, destinations, schedules, and hours. According to the provider, the major obstacle to coordinating transportation services is that many of the vehicles are not in good condition.²⁵

Coordination in Portales

This provider currently accommodates the needs of several welfare recipients and reports that the number of service users increases every week. Major concerns are that vehicles are always in operation and that the vehicle flexibility needs to be increased. Major obstacles identified by the provider include limited funding and the need for additional vehicles and

²⁴ ATRI Rural Transit Survey (1999, September 19), and Sarconi, Tony. Telephone interview (2000, February 10).

²⁵ ATRI Rural Transit Survey (1999, June 29).

drivers willing to work weekends and late hours. This limitation explains the need for part-time drivers in addition to its full-time drivers.²⁶

Coordination in Roswell

This provider has not yet expanded services to meet the needs of welfare recipients. The provider indicates that vehicles are already in high use and that there is a continuing need for more drivers, vehicles, supervisors, and training. Other limitations include problems finding qualified drivers and drivers willing to work on weekends and during late hours.²⁷

Coordination in Taos

In the summer Town of Taos Transit reported major obstacles to coordination, including a need for greater flexibility with vehicle use and the long distances that vehicles must cover. Limitations other than funding that affect this provider include trouble finding qualified drivers who are willing to work late hours and weekends. Taos Transit is now involved with coordination efforts with NMHU and Las Vegas Transit.²⁸

Coordination in the Zuni Pueblo

This provider is expanding hours of operation to accommodate the needs of welfare recipients. The major obstacles to transportation coordination are that vehicles are already in high use, clients do not want to mix with other clients, vehicle use would have to be made more flexible, funding sources prohibit vehicles from being shared, and current insurance policies would not cover other clients.²⁹

Transportation coordination and expansion is progressing in some geographic areas, while in others, barriers are still evident. *Figure 7.1*, on the following page, presents a detailed summary of the barriers to transportation coordination each of the rural transit providers reported:

²⁶ ATRI Rural Transit Survey (1999, September 9).

²⁷ ATRI Rural Transit Survey (1999, June 29).

²⁸ ATRI Rural Transit Survey (1999, June 28).

²⁹ ATRI Rural Transit Survey (1999, October 6).

Figure 7.1 Barriers to Expanding Transportation Services to Welfare Recipients

Provider	Hard to Find Qualified	Need Additional Vehicles	Hard to Find Later Hour	Hard to Find Weekend	Other
Angel Fire/Village of Angel Fire	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Belen/Mid Rio Grande RSVP		✓	✓		
Carlsbad Municipal Transit		✓			
Clovis Area Transit	✓	✓	✓		✓
Farmington/Presbyterian. Med. Services		✓		✓	
Hobbs Express	✓		✓	✓	
Laguna Pueblo/Shaa'srka Transit	✓	✓			
Las Vegas/Meadow City Express	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Los Alamos Bus System	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Navajo Transit System		✓			
Portales Community Service Center		✓	✓	✓	
Roswell/Pecos Trails Transit	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Taos/Town of Taos	✓		✓	✓	
Zuni Entrepreneurial Enterprises		✓		✓	
Total	8	12	9	9	3
Percent of Providers	62%	92%	69%	69%	23%

Data Source: The ATRI Rural and Urban Transit Provider Surveys, 1999

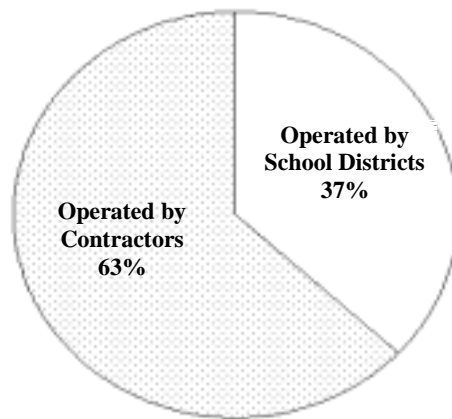
Potential Use of School Buses to Transport TANF Clients

In identifying potential transportation resources that could be used to provide transportation to TANF clients, the ATRI examined the public school bus fleet. According to information compiled in a New Mexico State Department of Education (NMSDE) database, 3,023 school buses are currently in use. Each is assigned to one of the State's 89 school districts. Some Counties are divided into several districts. *Figure 7.2*, on page 164, shows approximately one-third (37 percent) of these buses are operated by school districts, and the remaining two-thirds (63 percent) are operated by private contractors.³⁰ Statewide, 79 percent of school buses

³⁰ NMSDE, Finance, Transportation, and Administrative Services, School Transportation Unit, August 1999.

are used to transport students between their homes and school. Activity buses, which transport students to extra-curricular activities, account for nine percent of the total number of buses. The remaining 12 percent are spare buses used only when there are mechanical malfunctions in other school buses.³¹ *Map 7.2: Number of School Buses and TANF Household Count by County*, on the following page, illustrates the number of school buses and TANF households for each county in New Mexico.

Figure 7.2 School Bus Operators



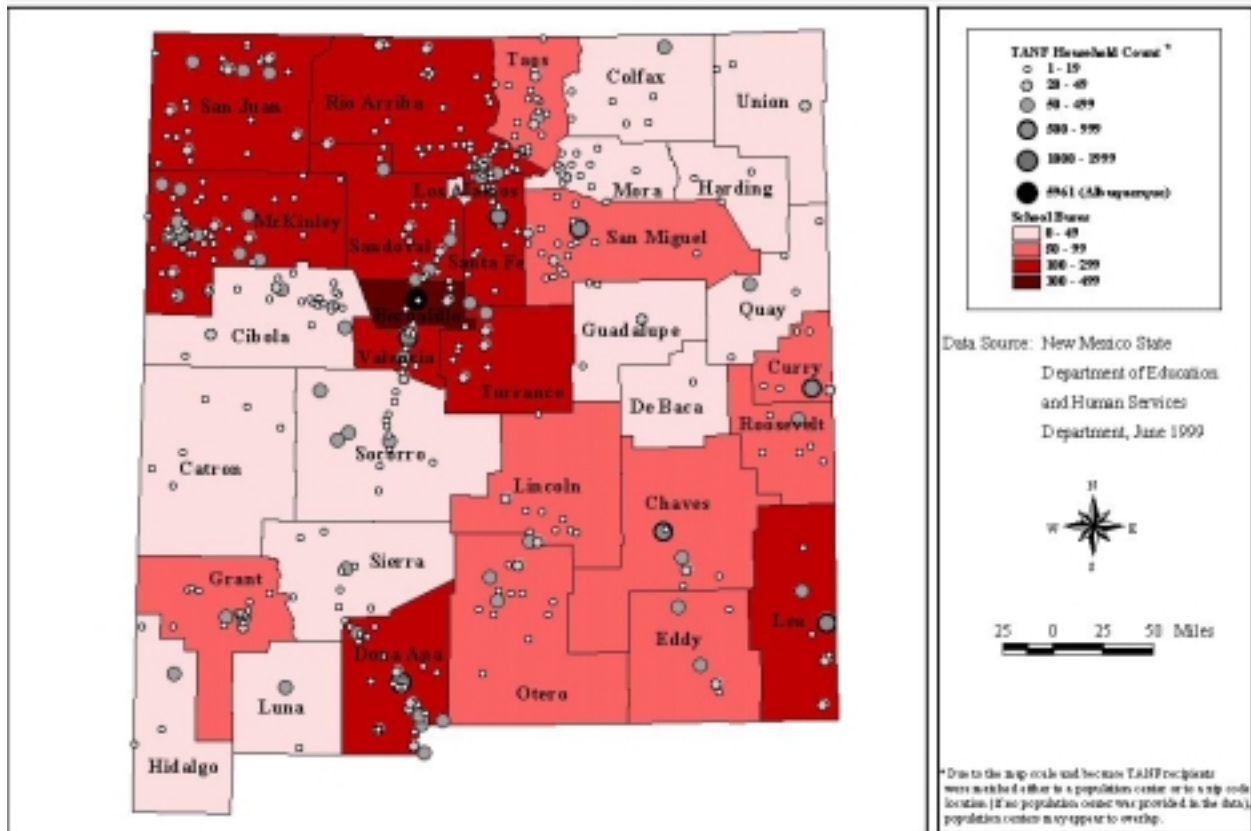
Data Source: NMSDE, Finance, Transportation, & Administrative Services, School Transportation Unit, August 1999

In October of 1997, the NMSHTD, Associated Contractors of New Mexico, and the Nova Bus Company sponsored *The New Mexico First: Integrated Regional Transportation*, a report of the 20th New Mexico First Town Hall in Gallup, New Mexico. The chapter on school transportation concluded with a statement that the use of school buses in New Mexico is “a case of underused assets.” The report also states, “On a typical day, a school bus will travel its designated route twice: once picking up pupils and again at the end of the school day on the return trip. Occasionally, the bus will transport students on field trips and for extracurricular activities. During other times, the bus remains parked.”³²

³¹ NMSDE, Finance, Transportation, and Administrative Services, School Transportation Unit, August 1999

³² New Mexico 1st Integrated Regional Transportation Report of the 20th New Mexico First Town Hall (1997, October 23-26).

Map 7.2: Number of School Buses and TANF Household Count by County



The ATRI did not survey the State Board of Education, the administrators and local school boards of the State's 89 school districts, or the 115 independent school bus operators. Their attitudes toward transportation coordination and their perception of obstacles to coordination should be assessed. Despite the relatively small number of school buses in rural and sparsely populated areas of the State, school buses may be the only viable transportation resource to serve TANF clients because no other transportation resources are available. The transportation of public school students is the largest public transportation program in the State. It transports more people, travels more miles, and operates more vehicles per day than all other public transportation carriers in the State combined.³³ In the 1998-99 School Year 66,208,032 unlinked student trips were provided.³⁴

The New Mexico Statutes, Chapters 22, 65, and 66, and *the Transportation Administrative Handbook* outline the State guidelines for the transportation of students and vehicle and driver requirements.³⁵ The NMSDE Transportation Unit oversees student transportation. The unit establishes standards for operation and equipment, inspects buses, conducts on-site accreditation visits to ensure accountability and compliance, and develops an annual appropriation request to finance the pupil transportation program. Audits are conducted to ensure that budgets, records, inspections, etc., are in compliance with regulations and safety procedures. Other duties include technical assistance, driver training programs, and accident investigation. Provision of safe, efficient, and economical transportation to all eligible students is the objective of the unit.³⁶

New Mexico Statute 22-8-26 states, "*Money in the transportation distribution of the public school fund shall be used only for the purpose of making payments to each school district for the to-and-from school transportation costs of students in grades kindergarten through 12 attending public school within the school district, and of three- and four-year old children who meet the state board approved criteria and definition of developmentally disabled, and for the transportation of students to and from their regular attendance centers and the place where*

³³ New Mexico 1st Integrated Regional Transportation Report of the 20th New Mexico First Town Hall. (1997, October 23-26).

³⁴ *School Transportation News*, New Mexico School Transportation Data Elements At-a-Glance, available online at <http://www/stnonline.com/stn/statesprovinces/unitedstates/2_nm.htm> (accessed 1999, December 13).

³⁵ For a comprehensive view of the statutes and regulations pertaining to transportation of students see the NMSDE's School Transportation Unit web .<<http://sde.state.nm.us/divisions/finance/Transportation/index.html>>.

³⁶ NMSDE Transportation Unit web site at <<http://sde.state.nm.us/divisions/finance/Transportation/index.html>>.

vocational education programs are being offered.” While this statute clearly outlines how funds allocated to the NMSDE for student transportation must be used, it does not address the use of the school buses per se. Local boards of education make policy decisions regarding who rides a public school bus in their district. For example, local boards decide whether teachers, bus monitors, nurses, parents, guardians, or guide animals may ride.³⁷

Two areas where coordinating public school transportation could make significant contributions to the State’s welfare to work effort are the transportation of children to before- and after-school programs and the transportation of TANF parents with their children from rural locations to a town, or a centrally located drop-off/pick up point for other transportation. One of the most common public concerns about using school buses for the transportation of no-students (or non-pupils) is the issue of child safety. States that are using school buses have confronted and solved this problem. In a Federal Transit Administration-funded 1998 survey, all State Directors of Pupil Transportation were contacted and asked to complete a detailed survey on the use of school buses for non-pupil transportation. Thirty-one state directors completed the survey.³⁸ Results include the following:

- ✦ 73% reported no prohibitions on the use of school buses to transport nonpupils;
- ✦ 49% reported it was legal to co-mingle pupils and non-pupils; and
- ✦ 71% reported school buses could be used to transport special populations, such as senior citizens.³⁹

Summary

Transportation service providers in New Mexico report the following as major barriers to coordinating services with other programs: the need for additional vehicles, the difficulty of finding drivers who are willing to work late hours, and the fact that many funds received come with the requirement that vehicles must not be shared with other programs. The continuing need that many programs have for additional vehicles is largely due to the programs’ expanding service areas. However, under a coordinated system of public and human services transportation, fewer new vehicles may be necessary because vehicles will be used more efficiently, and ridership will increase, while the cost of providing the service will decrease. To

³⁷ *School Bus Transportation Procedures*, Albuquerque Public Schools (1996, October 14).

³⁸ New Mexico did not provide information.

³⁹ *Integrated School Bus and Public Transportation Services in Non-Urban Communities*, TCRP Report 56, Transit Cooperative Research Program, (1999).

solve the problem of prohibitions against sharing vehicles, the funding sources will need to coordinate efforts with each other, as well as with State and local governments.