

**SAFETEA-LU Regional Coordinated
Public Transit-Human
Services Transportation Plan**

**For The La Crosse
Transportation Service Area 2008-2013**

(La Crosse, Buffalo, Trempealeau, Monroe, Jackson, Vernon, and Crawford Counties)



**Prepared by the Mississippi River Regional
Planning Commission**

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Table of Contents**

Introduction	1
Coordination Planning Process	1
Public Meeting.....	2
Demographic Information	2
Assessment of Available Services	4
Identification and Analysis of Service Gaps and Service Needs	4
Strategies and Actions	4
Impact of Regional Transportation Planning and County Transportation Initiatives	6
Conclusion	6

TABLES

Table 1 Population Projections Age 65+ - 2000-2030	2
Table 2 Median Income and Poverty Rates of All Ages by County	3
Table 3 Disabled Persons in Region	3
Table 4 Worker Commuting Patterns in Region	3

Appendix A – Regional Meeting Invite Listing, Regional Meeting Attendee Listing, & Public Meeting Notice

Appendix B – Meeting Minutes from 07/31/08 SAFETEA-LU Regional Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Meeting

Appendix C – Regional Meeting Evaluation Forms

Appendix D – 65+ Year of Age Population Distribution by Census Tracts

Appendix E – Vendor Inventory Forms

Introduction

In August of 2005, Congress passed the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient, Transportation, Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), reauthorizing the surface transportation act. As part of this reauthorization, grantees under the New Freedom Initiative, Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) and Elderly and Disabled Transportation Program (5310) were required to meet certain planning requirements in order to receive funding. Federal transit law requires that projects selected for funding under the various programs be “derived from a locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan” and that the plan be developed through a process that includes representatives of public, private, and non-profit transportation and human services providers and participation by members of the public. In 2006, counties prepared plans meeting the federal requirements. It is now required that the 2006 plans be updated and the purpose of this document is to serve as the 2008 updated plan.

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) in collaboration with a workgroup of Regional Planning Commission planners developed a new transportation coordination planning process for the 2008 update based on the final guidance on coordination from the Federal Law SAFETEA-LU. The focus of the 2008 process is on developing multi-county regional plans. A regional transportation coordination plan will include assessments of available services, gaps in service and service needs for individuals with disabilities, older adults, and people with low incomes. From the assessment data, a transportation coordination plan with implementation strategies will be developed.

Based on input from the 2006 SAFETEA-LU planning process a Regional Transportation Coordinating Committee (RTCC) has been formed in the La Crosse transportation service area. In 2006, the seven counties (La Crosse, Buffalo, Trempealeau, Monroe, Jackson, Vernon, and Crawford Counties) in the La Crosse transportation service area prepared individual county Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plans. Since the 2006 planning meetings a more regional approach to transportation coordination has been developed and is being implemented. The 2008 update to SAFETEA-LU coordinated plans is being done regionally with the development of a Regional Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan. The plan has been developed through the framework of the RTCC. It is intended that all transportation activities conducted on a regional, county or agency level will be consistent and derived from the strategies developed in this plan. Based on successful efforts in the region to begin to regionally coordinate transportation it seemed counter productive and inefficient to develop individual county plans that essentially would reiterate the same strategies. The most important aspect in the development of this plan is that all parties involved (regardless of county or agency affiliation) have worked together and have created the regional strategies and the action steps illustrated in this plan.

Coordination Planning Process

The 2008 coordination planning process was conducted regionally for the seven counties that make up the La Crosse Transportation Service Area (Buffalo, Crawford, Jackson, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau, and Vernon Counties). Peter Fletcher, the Transportation Planner, for the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission, facilitated the planning process and public meeting activities. It is important to point out that the counties that make up the La Crosse Transportation Service Area have formed a Regional Transportation Coordinating Committee (RTCC) in the past year, which put the region ahead as far as regional transportation coordination and the development of the SAFETEA-LU “Locally Developed Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan. The RTCC over the past year has become and will continue to be the “Coordination Plan Keeper” and plan “Champion”. The coordination planning process required by SAFETEA-LU in reality has been on going in the La Crosse Transportation

Service Area over the past year as quarterly meetings of the RTCC address transportation needs, gaps, as well as strategies and activities to reduce gaps and meet the transportation needs of the region. To formally meet the requirements of the SAFETEA-LU locally Developed Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Planning Process a regional meeting was conducted on July 31, 2008.

Public Meeting

On July 31, 2008 a regional transportation coordination meeting was held in West Salem, Wisconsin. The meeting notice was published in the regional newspaper and over 150 invitations (list of meeting invitees, participants and meeting notice is attached as Appendix A) were sent out to transportation providers, agencies and advocates. Approximately 50 people attended the meeting and participated in the planning process. A review of the coordination process was provided to participants as well as information on the regions demographics. The group then had a discussion on service gaps and needs in the region. The second part of the meeting involved two break out sessions. The first break out session involved individuals being grouped by county and reviewing the 2006 plan and determining where progress has been made. The second break out session focused on regional activities and identifying regional transportation coordination activities. The meeting record which summarizes the meeting activities is attached as Appendix B. At the conclusion of the meeting participants were given meeting evaluation forms in an effort to evaluate the effectiveness of the meeting and planning process. In general the evaluations were positive and participants felt the meeting was productive. Appendix C attached contains the individual meeting evaluation forms.

Demographic Information

An important component of the planning process is the analysis of the regions demographics and associated trends. Table one illustrates the regions Age 65+ population and projects the future population out to the year 2030. As the information demonstrates, the regions Age 65+ population will increase by more than 80% by the year 2030. It is obvious that such an increase will significantly increase the need for public transportation and further illustrates the need for a coordinated transportation system. Appendix D-1 through D-4 attached includes a map of each county showing the Age 65+ population distribution by census tract.

Table 1 Population Projections Age 65+ - 2000-2030

County	65+ 2000	65+ 2005	65+ 2010	65+ 2015	65+ 2020	65+ 2025	65+ 2030	% Increase 65+ 2000-2010	% Increase 65+ 2010-2020	% Increase 65+ 2020-2030	% Increase 65+ 2000-2030
Buffalo	2,313	2,333	2,416	2,689	3,084	3,563	3,867	4.5	27.6	25.4	67.2
Crawford	2,753	2,736	2,883	3,240	3,801	4,334	4,699	4.7	31.8	23.6	70.7
Jackson	2,844	2,801	2,912	3,209	3,622	4,200	4,617	2.4	24.4	27.5	62.3
La Crosse	13,440	13,788	14,673	17,101	20,540	24,249	26,947	9.2	40.0	31.2	100.5
Monroe	5,690	5,773	6,159	7,076	8,207	9,490	10,680	8.2	33.3	30.1	87.7
Trempealeau	4,435	4,347	4,499	4,893	5,615	6,359	7,143	1.4	24.8	27.2	61.1
Vernon	4,769	4,684	4,847	5,362	6,141	7,112	7,726	1.6	26.7	25.8	62.0
Region	43,406	43,794	46,119	52,118	60,934	70,794	78,489	6.3	32.1	28.8	80.8

Source: WI DOA Final Pop. Proj. for Wisconsin Counties by Age: 2000-2030

Table 2 illustrates the counties and regions median household income and poverty rates. In general the counties in the region median household incomes are less than the state and nation. Poverty rates in two counties (Buffalo and Trempealeau) are lower than the state rate, but the remaining five counties have a higher poverty rate than the State of Wisconsin.

County	Median Household Income 2004	Persons Below Poverty 2004 (%)
Buffalo	\$42,126	9.3%
Crawford	\$36,196	11.6%
Jackson	\$39,650	11.3%
La Crosse	\$42,202	11.9%
Monroe	\$41,669	11.7%
Trempealeau	\$42,203	9.4%
Vernon	\$37,587	12.4%
Wisconsin	\$46,142	10.9%
Nation	\$44,334	12.7%

Source: US Census Quickfacts for Wisconsin 2004

Table 3 shows a breakdown of percent of disabled persons in the region by two age categories and the number of disabled persons ages 21-64. In the region there are over 21,000 disabled persons between the ages of 21-64. The percent of disabled persons age 65+ in the region is 37.9. If we utilize the projection of the Age 65+ population for the region from Table 1 and multiply that by the region's current rate of disabled persons ages 65+ it can be projected that by the year 2030 the region will have close to 30,000 residents that are Age 65+ and disabled.

County	Number of Disabled Persons Ages 21-64	% of Disabled Persons Ages 21-64	% of Disabled Employed	% of Disabled Persons Ages 65+
Buffalo	1,240	16.4	67.9	35.8
Crawford	1,487	16.3	56.6	36.9
Jackson	2,088	20.6	54.1	40.7
La Crosse	8,015	13.4	61.5	35.4
Monroe	3,904	17.9	60.7	43.4
Trempealeau	2,599	17.5	67.8	35.5
Vernon	2,283	15.7	58.1	37.6
Regional Total	21,616	16.8	61.0	37.9

Source: 2000 US Census

Table 4 illustrates the commuting patterns of workers. As the information demonstrates La Crosse County is an employment hub for the region. The data further substantiates the need and importance of regional transportation coordination.

Worker County of Residence	Total Employees in Each County	Total Employees Traveling to La Crosse County for Work	% Employees Traveling to La Crosse County for Work
La Crosse Co. WI	55,971	51,206	91.5
Vernon Co. WI	12,930	2,719	21.0
Monroe Co. WI	19,927	1,825	9.2
Trempealeau Co. WI	13,863	1,352	9.8
Jackson Co. WI	8,750	256	2.9
Crawford Co. WI	8,127	164	2.0
Buffalo Co. WI	7,129	71	1.0
Juneau Co. WI	11,220	61	0.5
Richland Co. WI	8,794	23	0.3
Sauk Co. WI	28,694	428	1.5
Total	175,405	58,105	100

Assessment of Available Services

In order to conduct an assessment of available services, when public meeting invitations were sent out a request for provider information was also included. The provider information was requested in a format that the RTCC developed in its ongoing efforts to collect and maintain a regional provider database that providers and agencies in the region can access. A total of 38 provider response forms detailing the service provided were returned. Provider response forms are attached as Appendix E.

Over all, the region is served by many transportation providers as illustrated by the response forms. In assessing the available services, the challenge that continually faces the region and transportation providers is “space”. The region for the most part is very rural and providing transportation services to a rural community is challenging and expensive. Based on initial analysis, it appears that the number of vehicles and seats on the vehicles is not a significant issue. The challenge remains serving a rural region. In the region, existing services for the most part are not coordinated across county boundaries or regionally (some informal cooperation between agencies has taken place but with minimal success). The RTCC recognizes that in the future to better address the “spatial challenge” coordination of transportation services is vital in order to meet the increasing transportation needs of the region’s population.

Identification and Analysis of Service Gaps and Service Needs

At the regional transportation coordination meeting a general discussion among meeting participant’s focused on identifying service gaps and needs. The gaps and needs identified were derived from the experiences of the meeting participants and from a review of demographic data for the region. The information collected is listed below.

Service Gaps and Service Needs

- The homeless population is a growing population and the group lacks access to transportation services
- Individuals on SSI are not able to work and are also ineligible to get loans to purchase vehicles for their transportation needs.
- There is a lack of appropriate reimbursement for transportation to individuals on Medical Assistance.

- Impact of rising fuel costs etc - Taxi's and other forms of transportation are out of reach for many residents due to the cost.
- There is a need for more wheel chair spaces on mini-buses.
- A more coordinated effort of informing people about transportation services available is needed
- Spatial mismatches in transportation - as many people need transportation to and from work during regular shift hours scheduled by employers and there is no service available
- Lack of awareness by the general public and employers of the transportation needs for low income individuals
- Literacy is a problem for some populations that need transportation services.

In general, transportation providers do an adequate job of meeting the needs of the regions population. However, as illustrated there are service gaps and needed services in the region. Some of the gaps and needs are not able to be locally controlled such as fuel prices, reimbursement rates, etc. However, several items listed can be addressed locally and the challenge remains of how to address them. It is believed that coordination of regional services, information, education, marketing, etc. will go a long way in addressing the needs of the region. The next section of the plan "Strategies and Actions" lays out in general how regionally the service gaps and service needs can begin to be addressed.

Strategies and Actions

The following five year action plan was developed based on the Regional Transportation Coordinating Committees past efforts and input from the meeting conducted as part to the 2008 update to the SAFETEA-LU "Locally Developed Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan". It is important to point out that roadblocks to implementation of the strategies have been identified. For the strategies to be successful the roadblocks will have to be overcome. In numerous cases the roadblocks are not locally controlled, meaning that in order for local regional coordination to be truly successful rules, policies, and requirements of numerous non-regional entities will have to be modified or changed.

Strategies ¹	Action Steps	Person(s) Responsible ²	Timeline By When?	Roadblocks to Implementation ³
Regional Communication/ Coordination of Transportation Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Maintain an active Regional TCC with regular meetings •Coordination of elderly disabled transportation services •Focus on coordinated transportation services to get people to work (employment buses, carpooling, etc.) •Explore one call regional ride scheduling •Develop regional brand name for coordinating transportation service •Continue to work cooperatively with neighboring counties (Juneau, Richland, Sauk) and neighboring regions 	A Regional Transportation Coordinating Committee has been formed and will be responsible for the coordination and completion of the action steps	On going through 5 year plan period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •cost to get to centralized meeting site •need volunteers, financial •lack of communication •revenue •shift workers –need a ride home •employer buying to programs •criteria for ridership •funding •travel habits •funding rules/requirements

¹ **Strategies:** The purpose of identifying strategies is to remedy the needs and gaps.

² **Person(s) Responsible:** Identify all potential partners and specific names.

³ **Roadblocks to Implementation:** Examples include lack of community support, financial constraints, political climate, etc.

Strategies ¹	Action Steps	Person(s) Responsible ²	Timeline By When?	Roadblocks to Implementation ³
Regional Technology Development and Information Sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Sharing locally developed transportation technology (tracking, accounting programs, SAMS reporting) ●Explore local/regional routing software ●Develop and maintain a regional data depository ●Regional summary of transportation options 	A Regional Transportation Coordinating Committee has been formed and will be responsible for the coordination and completion of the action steps	1-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●computer literacy ●cost of not having full bus ●software interface ●personnel to develop ●grant funding rules - lease vs. purchase ●data maintenance ●cost of technology
Local and Regional Communication of Services to Transportation Consumers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Explore shared marketing approaches to reaching consumers ●Increase regional awareness of the La Crosse County sponsored "Find a Ride" ●Increase awareness of "Rideshare" for carpooling purposes 	A Regional Transportation Coordinating Committee has been formed and will be responsible for the coordination and completion of the action steps	Begin in years 1-2 then ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●cost ●web access (providers and consumers) ●consumer literacy
Transportation Funding and Sustainability of Transportation Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Continue to pursue STRAP, New Freedom, WETAP, 5310 Funding ●Maintain/increase existing funding levels ●Expand employee and business support for rides 	A Regional Transportation Coordinating Committee has been formed and will be responsible for the coordination and completion of the action steps	On going through the 5 year plan period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●political support for funding ●open criteria for qualifying for grants ●competitiveness among local providers ●complicated processes (grants) ●need grant writers
Regional Information/Education on Transportation Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Medical Facility outreach ●Employer outreach (survey) ●Local, State, and Federal elected officials outreach ●Uniform understanding of program requirements/rules ●Uniform understanding of insurance requirements ●More information on internet ●Gather information on tele-medicine ●Homeless providers - outreach 	A Regional Transportation Coordinating Committee has been formed and will be responsible for the coordination and completion of the action steps	Begin in years 1-2 then ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●complexity of information ●complexity of rules ●getting people to the table ●elected officials being able to fund programs ●someone needed to represent all providers

Impact of Regional Transportation Planning and County Transportation Initiatives

As discussed previously, a Regional TCC was developed based on the La Crosse Transportation Service Area with the intent of coordinating transportation on a regional basis understanding that counties and agencies will continue to provide transportation services that are responsive to their consumers needs. It is also understood, that transportation programs and initiatives will still be developed within agencies/counties as consumer needs dictate. However, since the formation of an active Regional TCC has developed agencies and counties are more aware that they are part of a regional transportation system and will evaluate their services in both a local and regional context.

Conclusion

Regional transportation coordination is taking place in Western Wisconsin. County and agency boundaries are becoming less significant in the provision of transportation services, while consumer destinations and needs are becoming more important. It is the hope of the La Crosse Area Regional TCC that lessons learned locally will also be learned at the state and federal level (particularly by the funding and program rule makers) as true transportation coordination and service provision will not be achieved until that day comes.