

OKLAHOMA ALLIANCE ON AGING

Education Committee, January 20, 2006

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION IN OKLAHOMA

Variations on the Theme in 2006

PRESENT: Dr. Ray Bishop (volunteer, retired physician, Alliance on Aging, Oklahoma City), Rick Cain (Metro Transit, Oklahoma City), Susie Daniels (DHS Area 1 FGP 729 Overland Trail Enid, OK), Jody Harlan (Public Administrator, Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitative Services), Larry Hopper (Metro Transit planner), Jean Heard Jones (Administrative Officer, Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitative Services), Steve Lalli (Executive Director, Oklahoma Transit Association), Vivian S. Smith (retiree volunteer, Education Chairman, Oklahoma Alliance on Aging, Yukon, Oklahoma), Helen Patrick (retiree volunteer, Oklahoma Alliance on Aging Newsletter Editor, Norman, Oklahoma), Coretha Viney (Sunbeam Emergency Shelter Administrator), Diane Wood (Advantage Case Manager, Giding Health Care)

BACKGROUND

Public transportation has been a major concern of the Oklahoma Alliance on Aging since 1989, when we helped to publicize its role during that year's state legislative session.

Highways, roads, and bridges have always been the priority of the Oklahoma Department of Transportation, ODOT, which has only a small office of public transit to administer a limited amount of federal matching funds to local transit programs. Federal funds for transit in Oklahoma are less than the amount we send to Washington in motor fuel taxes, making us a "donor state".

Federal Transit Administration funds go directly to cities that have major public transit systems serving 50,000 or more people. In our state, only Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and Lawton receive their 50% matching funds directly from the Federal Transit Administration.

The transformation of public transit in Oklahoma was described in an eloquent article written for the Aeronautics Commission by **Allen Leaird**, president of the Oklahoma Transit Association. The article was subsequently printed in the October 2003 Alliance on Aging newsletter. Leaird pointed out that public transit was an essential of daily life of Oklahoma citizens up to the World War II years, after which prosperity transformed our society to one in which there was an automobile in every garage, and new roads and interstate highways. Transit was considered mainly as a service for the elderly and disabled.

Public Transit System Directors are training as transit professionals. Four of Oklahoma's public transit systems started operation in the last five years. Mayors and city managers without a transit system are now working to attach their community to an existing system. Examples of progress in developing transit systems and related services:

RED RIVER TRANSPORTATION .A Service of **Rural Enterprise** Community Action Program, Inc . . . **Brent Morey, Executive Director, Frederick, Oklahoma**

Red River Transportation is a rural transit system operating in nine counties in southwest, south central and mid-west Oklahoma, -- Beckham, Cotton, Custer, Jefferson, Kiowa, Roger Mills, Stephens, Tillman and Washita counties.

In 2004, Red River serves nine Senior Citizens Nutrition Sites, twelve Head Start Centers, four Public School systems, two County Health Departments, one Hospital, and three State Agencies.

Contract services are the wave of the future for small rural transit systems. While demand/response door to door services will always be the heart of the small system, contract services provide the funds to keep the system moving. Red River now links with the Oklahoma Health Care Authority transit program to provide transportation to and from medical appointments in Tulsa.

Transporting meals to Senior Citizen Nutrition Sites is a contract service. Transit to senior centers for 60+ people is free.

Transportation to school for both mother and child is provided by Red River. Mom might attend Vo-Tech classes while her child goes to Head Start and then on to day care. A contract with the Oklahoma Department of Human Services Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program provides this Service.

There are special needs for persons with disabilities.

DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATIVE SERVICES..... Jody Harland and Jean Heard Jones

The Department of Rehabilitative Services has special concerns about transportation needs of persons with disabilities, and has been working actively to bring together people who care. Easter Seals has been a major supporter of initiatives to address the problems.

Key findings from a survey of 3,856 Oklahomans with disabilities were summarized in a report prepared by staff member Jean Jones, Examples:

* Almost two thirds of survey respondents reported there are persons in their households who depend on public transportation or rides from relatives and friends because they do not own a car.

* Lack of transportation linking urban, suburban, and rural communities was the problem cited most by survey responders.

* Respondents said making communities more accessible with sidewalks, curb ramps, and pedestrian-friendly traffic controls would make it possible for them to use public transportation more often to meet their travel needs.

Oklahomans for Public Transportation is now a statewide coalition of organizations supporting public transportation. Chairman is Joe Fallin, 6895 E. 56, Tulsa, Ok 74145, (918) 497-1234.

EXISTING SERVICES; OKLAHOMA CITY METRO AREA

While expanding its routes to include more and more of the metro area, an impressive group of special services has been developed to meet the needs of the elderly (60+) and the disabled. All of these programs require an application process. Applicants 60 years and older are automatically eligible for most services.

Services are funded in part by the Older Americans Act and Areawide Aging Agency. Fares vary.

Disability services require a METRO Transit "Medical Information" Form. Metro Transit contacts the applicant's physician for completion. A notice and instructions are mailed to the applicant when approved.

Services include:

Elderly and Disabled Metro Transit Discounts
Wheelchair Lift-Equipped Buses. 24 hour notice
Metro-Lift Vans. Fares modest; passenger disabled
Helpline. Emergency taxi service for the homeless
Step-Shopping for Elderly and Disabled. Donation based.
Conge gate Meal Transportation. Donation based.

INTERIM. Social Service agency referrals

RSVP volunteer drivers for low income elderly to
medical appointments

SCP Senior Companion program matches able seniors
with frail elderly

SHARE-A-FARE Low cost taxi service for elderly and
disabled, 24 hours a day

DAILY LIVING CENTER An adult day care program;
Transit provider contracted to provide round trip door
to door transportation for elderly & disabled citizens

We all need to educate our Oklahoma legislators on needs of older and/or disabled persons for accessible public transit services.

Vivian S. Smith, PhD.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN