

Introduction

Recently, the role of public transportation in workforce development has gained increased attention because of welfare reform at the federal level. Changes in welfare legislation, as mandated by the federal government, have placed an increased emphasis on moving jobseekers off of temporary assistance and into jobs that will allow them to become self-sufficient. The barriers faced by these individuals and the public and not-for-profit agencies that serve them are substantial. Many temporary assistance recipients neither own cars nor have access to adequate public transportation. Without adequate provisions for transportation, many low income persons face a considerable (sometimes insurmountable) amount of difficulty in obtaining training, finding gainful employment, and fulfilling domestic and child care needs. This introduction provides a brief description of the changes in welfare reform and the concomitant challenges that arise due to these changes.

In August 1996, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program was enacted as part of President Clinton's Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). As the successor to the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, TANF replaced the open-ended publicly funded assistance programs¹ of the past with initiatives aimed at moving individuals into the workplace more effectively and efficiently through mandatory work requirements. The TANF legislation stipulates a maximum of 60 months² of cash assistance to low-income, poverty level persons in combination with mandatory work and training requirements. TANF is a state-administered block grant that allows states greater control over welfare spending and eligibility determinants than its predecessor AFDC. TANF encompasses Temporary Assistance and Safety Net³ programs.

According to the New York State (NYS) Department of Family Assistance's (DFA) Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, the effect of TANF on state welfare rolls has been dramatic. Between January 1996 and July 1998, the number of Temporary Assistance (formerly known as Public Assistance) cases in New York State decreased by 28 percent. A breakdown of the number of TANF cases for each county in the region over the same period is given in Table 1. A general consensus among county employment and training units in the region is that individuals currently receiving Temporary Assistance face multiple barriers with respect to transportation, training, and adequate provisions for child care, and thus will require a great deal of support to become self sufficient.

The Community Transportation Association of America⁴ reports that nationally, less than one out of ten temporary assistance recipients own an automobile and nearly 40 percent of persons using mass transit are considered low income. Mass transit, however, is

¹ TANF not only replaces AFDC, but also consolidates child support programs, supplemental security income, and food stamps under its provisions.

² Some states have periods shorter than 60 months in which individuals must find employment and become self-supportive.

³ Safety Net is a state and locally funded temporary assistance program.

⁴ CTAA website <http://www.ctaa.org>, August 12, 1998.

designed to meet the needs of the majority of the population. Public transportation provides services during normal or peak hours of commercial activity. Most public transportation does not account for second or third shift job opportunities because they do not create enough demand to warrant additional funding and services on a large scale within smaller metropolitan and rural areas. This conflicts with the needs of jobseekers who may be qualified for a job but cannot seize the opportunity because public transit does not provide service during the hours required by the position. Many firms run second and third shifts where new workers are usually placed when they begin. Retail establishments operate into the late evening to serve customers who work traditional nine to five jobs. For workers in retail firms, public transportation may provide a ride to work, but returning home presents a difficulty.

Table 1

| Temporary Assistance Cases - Genesee Finger Lakes Region | | | | | |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| | January 1996 | January 1997 | January 1998 | July 1998 | % Change 1/96-7/98 |
| New York State | 671,320 | 593,733 | 523,762 | 485,170 | -27.7% |
| Genesee/Finger Lakes Region | 31,142 | 27,815 | 24,815 | 23,226 | -25.4% |
| Genesee County | 567 | 492 | 357 | 328 | -42.2% |
| Livingston County | 1,109 | 905 | 701 | 612 | -44.8% |
| Monroe County | 24,951 | 22,413 | 20,657 | 19,668 | -21.2% |
| Ontario County | 1,335 | 1,097 | 852 | 755 | -43.4% |
| Orleans County | 767 | 664 | 564 | 518 | -32.5% |
| Seneca County | 324 | 371 | 249 | 196 | -39.5% |
| Wayne County | 1,416 | 1,297 | 1,037 | 831 | -41.3% |
| Wyoming County | 373 | 344 | 254 | 205 | -45.0% |
| Yates County | 300 | 232 | 144 | 113 | -62.3% |

Source: NYS Dept. of Family Assistance, Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, *Temporary and Disability Assistance Statistics* 1998.

The Welfare to Work Partnership, a national nonpartisan organization, regularly conducts surveys of businesses to determine what issues discourage firms from hiring persons on temporary assistance. A recent study⁵ revealed that just over half (51%) of the businesses responding to a survey rate lack of access to transportation as an impediment to hiring temporary assistance recipients. The vast majority (75%) of businesses that responded as such felt it was not only an impediment but also a major barrier to hiring individuals receiving temporary assistance.

This report focuses on increasing access to employment and training for temporary assistance recipients through the identification of where temporary assistance recipients are located, where training and child care services are located, where potential employment opportunities exist, and what public transportation services are currently available. By providing a spatial inventory of potential employers, training facilities,

⁵ The Welfare to Work Partnership, *Member Survey: 1998 Series 1*, p.2.

child care centers, and persons receiving temporary assistance in relation to public transportation services, adjustments to existing services and the introduction of new services can be explored based on timely and reliable information.

The purpose of performing an analysis of the spatial relationships of these factors is to determine if gaps in service create a mismatch between the needs of temporary assistance recipients and public transportation services. Improving access to jobs for current jobseekers receiving temporary assistance and other low income persons through improved transportation services is dependent on an identification of where these persons are and where they need to be to meet employment and domestic obligations.