

Overview

Overall, public transportation in the Genesee/Finger Lakes Region does not adequately serve the needs of individuals moving from welfare to work. The rigid nature of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) regarding the length of assistance provided by public agencies (60 months) demands immediate attention to assisting individuals in moving from welfare to work. As stated in the introduction, transportation is only one of the factors impeding entry-level jobseekers receiving temporary assistance' movement to gainful employment but it is a significant one. Rural residents receiving public assistance face the greatest transportation barriers. Increased transportation services for these individuals will need to be developed. Five recommendations that would create better access to employment for jobseekers without the use of a private vehicle are described below.

1. Promote regional coordination of workforce development activities by building upon the measures developed by the Private Industry Council (PIC) Service Delivery Areas (SDA) and regional agencies such as the G/FLRPC, GTC and the regional offices of the NYS DoL and Empire State Development Corporation among others.

The coordination and work carried out by the PIC SDAs in the region has been substantial. Coordinated at a multi-county, sub-regional level, the Finger Lakes SDA (which includes Ontario, Seneca, Wayne, and Yates counties), the Genesee, Livingston, Orleans, and Wyoming (GLOW) SDA, and the Monroe County SDA meet regularly to evaluate, improve, and implement the workforce development activities of a number of organizations. A regional forum for planning workforce development activities would join the efforts of these SDAs and assist them in their goal of continual improvement of workforce development initiatives.

In addition to transportation, there are numerous other factors that contribute to an overall workforce development program. Coordination of training activities with economic development strategies, transportation planning, labor market indicators, and housing assessments on a regional level would be the optimal approach to workforce development. The G/FLRPC has designed *The Regional Alliance for Workforce Development*, a document that discusses the sectoral trends and their repercussions on the local and regional economy. It incorporates the aforementioned factors and outlines a process and system for monitoring evaluating the factors that contribute to a successful regional workforce development program.

2. Continue to utilize the services of the transit authority and the metropolitan planning organization.

Both GTC and R-GRTA have the expertise and knowledge necessary to develop and implement programs and services that can benefit jobseekers moving from welfare to work. Each organization has been involved in programs designed to provide better

access to employment for TANF and Safety Net recipients. To date, the majority of these programs and services have been focused in Monroe County.

R-GRTA has developed a *Welfare-to-Work Community Collaborative* that includes public agencies, elected officials, and business, community, and religious organizations. Most of its efforts (and justifiably so) have been on serving the largest portion of TANF and Safety Net recipients which are located in the City of Rochester and the surrounding municipalities in Monroe County. A number of programs have been developed to address the needs of persons moving from public assistance to employment. Specific R-GRTA services and programs for jobseekers receiving temporary assistance include free bus passes for TANF recipients and former TANF recipients just off of public assistance, specialized services for individual employers, expanded service to suburban employers, and identification of jobseekers without access to a private automobile needs to name only some.

GTC has undertaken *JOBLINKS* and the *Northeast Rochester Advisory Committee on Transportation Services (NERACTS) Access to Employment Study*. Pending funding, another program, *JUMPSTART*, will be introduced. These three programs have focused or will focus on providing public transportation for City of Rochester residents to locations either inaccessible by mass transit or during hours when RTS services were not available. *JOBLINKS* utilized taxi service to transport eligible residents to their place of employment. It used grant money provided by the Community Transportation Association of America to subsidize the cost of the rides and partially alleviate the financial burden placed on jobseekers who cannot access mass transit.

The *NERACTS Access to Employment Study* focused on two zipcodes within the City of Rochester that contained a significant concentration of public assistance recipients. Like this study, it focused on identifying the spatial relationships and subsequent mismatches between jobseekers, public transportation, employers, and child care. However, the geographic level of analysis allowed the study to be much more specific regarding these factors, particularly employers.

JUMPSTART would aid Rochester's jobseekers receiving temporary assistance in purchasing and maintaining a quality used car. The proposed program includes educating low-income persons about repairing credit history, car loans, defensive driving, and maintaining an automobile. The *JUMPSTART* programs involves public agencies, neighborhood and religious organizations, and local car dealers among others.

It would appear that the role of R-GRTA is to continue to integrate client specific transportation programs into their mass transit services. Simultaneously, GTC's role seems to be the development of alternative public transportation programs for those persons residing in areas where mass transit is neither economically feasible nor available to the general public.

Both organizations operate at a regional level and have the ability and expertise to significantly improve access to transportation for persons moving from welfare to work.

GTC and R-GRTA have acknowledged their responsibility and commitment to aiding TANF and Safety Net recipients outside Monroe County.

3. Explore the introduction of new public transportation services for the Genesee/Finger Lakes Region.

With the exception of the four cities of Batavia, Canandaigua, Geneva, and Rochester, everyday mass transit service during first-shift hours (including travel time to and from work) is not available. In the region's cities, extension of existing services or programs to meet specific employers' needs appears to be adequate. However, in the less urbanized and rural areas of the region the addition of new public transportation programs may be necessary to better serve the needs of jobseekers without access to an automobile.

Outside the four cities and the urbanized areas surrounding them, public transportation as a means of travel to work is extremely limited for the vast majority of jobseekers without access to an automobile. Outside of the aforementioned areas, transportation services are demand-responsive, flexible schedule/flexible route with limited times even within traditional work hours. With the exception of Monroe County, there is not service to each municipality on everyday of the normal workweek much less weekends. R-GRTA officials have set a high priority on developing a direct suburb-to-suburb circulator service in Monroe County that will serve the general public. Among the many objectives of such a system is easing time constraints on suburban employees who do not have access to private transportation and who work in suburbs other than where they reside.

Investment in mass transit as opposed to forms of public transportation that serve specific populations appears to be the key issue. Mass transit requires ridership that will justify the expenditure of public funds. In the case of welfare-to-work, alternative forms of public transportation seem to be the optimal solution since funding for additional mass transit services for special populations is not feasible. In Livingston and Wyoming counties, LATS and WYTS vehicles are used to serve jobseekers receiving temporary assistance on a very limited basis under specific circumstances. Investigating the use of these vehicles on an extended basis is necessary to overcoming the transportation barriers faced by TANF and Safety Net recipients. Outside the City of Batavia, Genesee County may also be able to utilize vehicles from its transit provider's fleet to serve jobseekers without access to a private automobile.

Discussions between Wayne County and R-GRTA officials regarding expanded WATS services have begun. Seneca County has also begun discussions concerning the introduction of public transportation on a limited basis. In Genesee, Livingston, and Wyoming counties public transportation does exist and discussions between county and R-GRTA and GTC staff should be initiated to investigate the possibility of adding new services. In Orleans and Yates counties public transportation of any kind is not currently being considered. Nationally, a number of innovative services (including vanpool services run by former TANF recipients) have been developed to serve jobseekers receiving temporary assistance. In Orleans and Yates counties the only option may be to

continue the use of private transportation providers. This option is considerably cost prohibitive, and ideally, other possibilities should be developed.

4. Increase coordination with agencies and organizations serving other special populations.

In Ontario County public transportation for Department of Employment and Training clients and non-emergency Medicaid recipients is coordinated and served by CATS. Wayne County has agreements between WATS, Association for Retarded Children, and local school districts to use their vehicles to transport TANF and Safety Net recipients. Utilizing existing transportation provisions for other special populations in combination with those for jobseekers without access to a private automobile is cost-effective and should be pursued (where applicable) by other counties.

Transportation services are costly and require considerable public funding. Combining services for these special populations as much as possible is an obvious way to improve efficiency and access for jobseekers receiving temporary assistance. Public bussing for school children reaches nearly every area of the region and could provide a feeder service to other transportation services. Issues prohibiting this option include available space on vehicles and insurance requirements for riders.

5. Plan for larger numbers of TANF and Safety Net recipients in the future.

At present, the Genesee/Finger Lakes Region (and New York State as a whole) is experiencing a tight labor market. While the availability of jobs is greater here than in the New York City and downstate area, an economic recession has the possibility of placing great stress on DSS and employment and training agency provisions for transportation and other services for jobseekers with a minimal set of skills.

Any development of services and planning of access for jobseekers needs to include contingencies for a downturn of the local and regional economies. Again, the stipulations of the PRWORA impose a limit of 60 months of assistance. Adequate provisions for transportation and other services need to account for this finality and must be intent on serving a greater number of jobseekers than are presently requesting services.

A joint project between the University of Rochester (UR) Public Policy Program and the G/FLRPC in 1998 produced a report entitled *Genesee/Finger Lakes Region Welfare Reform, Workforce Development and Transportation*. It describes a framework for assessing the impacts of welfare reform on public transportation and infrastructure. Included in the appendix, the report also offers a more detailed description of welfare reform than is given at the outset of this report.

In all aspects of welfare-to-work, coordination between multiple agencies is the key. The demands of preparing and providing access to jobs for jobseekers with a minimal set of skills includes county and regional agencies involved in social services, employment and

training, transportation, planning, and economic development as well as community and religious organizations. Overall, the agencies and organizations in the region that serve jobseekers receiving temporary assistance have recognized this and have been working together whenever possible. Continued and increased coordination among these agencies is crucial to serving the needs of jobseekers as they move into gainful employment and self-sufficiency.