

Coordination: Community Models, Outcomes & Lessons Learned



The National Center for
Mobility Management

2017

Contents

About the National Center for Mobility Management	1
Introduction.....	2
Case Study 1: Vermont.....	3
Case Study 2: Minnesota	5
Case Study 3: Maine	8
Case Study 4: Alabama, Illinois & California.....	10
Summary.....	12

About the National Center for Mobility Management

The National Center for Mobility Management (NCMM) is an initiative of the United We Ride program, and is supported through a cooperative agreement with the Federal Transit Administration. The mission of the Center is to facilitate communities to adopt transportation strategies and mobility options that empower people to live independently, and advance health, economic vitality, self-sufficiency, and community.

The Center’s primary activities support Federal Transit Administration (FTA) grantees, mobility managers, and partners in adopting proven, sustainable, and replicable transportation coordination, mobility management, and one call–one click transportation information practices. NCMM provides assistance to communities through NCMM Regional Liaisons, a peer-to-peer network, short-term technical assistance, web resources, and one-on-one phone and e-mail support. NCMM staff deliver in-person and virtual trainings, a monthly e-newsletter, webinars, and conference calls while also disseminating descriptions of relevant promising practices, including “snapshots” of a particular topic or trend as well as a more in-depth database of practices. NCMM staff continuously collaborate with mobility management practitioners across the country and align and support the goals and activities of the Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM) and the Federal Transit Administration.

NCMM is operated through a consortium of three national organizations—the American Public Transportation Association, the Community Transportation Association of America, and Easterseals.

Cover photo: [www.pedbikeimages.org/Dan Burden](http://www.pedbikeimages.org/Dan_Burden)

Introduction

In the transportation services industry, coordination has more than one meaning and encompasses a variety of actions. Coordination can be as rudimentary as two or more people from the same agency or different agencies discussing options for funding, plans for how to provide service, or ideas on how to address a staffing concern. At its more advanced level, coordination may integrate all facets of administration, financing, and operations—including shared vehicles, adoption of common policies, service consolidation, joint maintenance and operations facilities, and joint financing. Transportation professionals so often speak of coordination and engagement as a transportation-only concern, forgetting that coordination is common across all industries. Transportation providers are not alone in their efforts to streamline operations, form public-private partnerships or save costs. The outcomes that come from coordination are outcomes desired by companies, local governments, and small business owners, and so, it makes sense that transportation systems can learn from the experiences and models of related industries.

In this brief, the National Center for Mobility Management takes a look at four coordination models—including one transit model—that offer lessons for public and private transportation managers. Outcomes from the models include:

- Creation of new foundation or state funding sources and initiative programs
- Tangible community buy-in during the planning process and project implementation
- Economic revitalization (including reversing or stemming brain drain and greying of communities)
- Leadership and project innovation
- Cost savings to provide services
- Better customer and citizen experience
- Creation of partnerships that last beyond the initial issue, project or pilot period

The case studies in this brief examine partnerships and initiative programs created during the Hurricane Irene disaster recovery period that continue to this day; consolidation of county transit services in Minnesota; planning and outreach in Maine to garner public support for mill town revitalization; and food program and local transportation coordination to help children access summer meals.

Case Study 1: Vermont

Public-Private Coordination in Vermont after Hurricane Irene: A Model for Partnership Building at the Local Level that Leads to Statewide Coordination Initiatives

As weather-related disasters have become more common in the United States, communities have learned that partnerships are vital for preparation and recovery stages. In the face of disaster, comes resilience, and many U.S. communities have had to learn how to coordinate and partner because they have been left with little choice. While this may not be an ideal way to consider coordination, extreme weather events can offer a chance to identify strengths and weaknesses, and lessons can be learned from natural disaster recovery. In 2015, the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) published a report called *Lessons from the Storm: Case Studies on Economic Recovery and Resilience*. The report includes case studies of six communities that used 'blue sky' periods to build partnerships, pursue non-traditional funding, and improve community engagement. The communities noticed that when businesses and industries fail, those they serve and employ also experience short-to-long-term impacts from lack of access to goods and services or jobs.

"We had good relationships with our communities before Irene, and that was evident from the number of calls we received. We knew we were being looked at as someone who could help them because we had a strong track record of doing just that."

Peter Gregory, Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional

After Hurricane Irene in 2011, 2,000 road segments in Vermont were damaged or destroyed and 13 communities were left isolated. Regional planning commissions in Vermont became coordinators, as they already had good relationships with local businesses before the storm, and the disaster resulted in stronger relationships with federal, state, and local governments. After the Hurricane Irene experience, the State of Vermont set up the Vermont Economic Resiliency Initiative (VERI) funded through the U.S. Economic Development Administration, Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development, Vermont Agency of Natural Resources and Transportation, and the state's regional commissions. In addition, new sustainable planning efforts surfaced after the Irene flooding in an effort to move forward proactively.

Coordination lessons from the Vermont Economic Resiliency Initiative are covered in Chapters 4 and 5 of the VERI final report. Recommendations include:

Management

- Have a mix of professionals and volunteers conducting assessments.
- Remove duplication of effort and silos.
- Establish training program specific to the tasks and issues at hand.

Communication

- Communicate information with user-friendly tables and no jargon.
- Communicate to other agencies and decision makers what resources you have available.
- Explain the language and terms your agency uses and learn how the process and funding used by other agencies to better coordinate strategies.
- Create webpages for effected communities tailored to provide a general overview of the project and to share community-specific information on meetings, reports and plans, and funding.

Coordination

- Conduct pilot projects together.

Resources:

Vermont Economic Resiliency Initiative Final Report, Chapter 4

<http://acd.vermont.gov/sites/acdnew/files/documents/CD/CPR/CPR-VERI-FinalReport-Chapter4.pdf>

Vermont Economic Resiliency, Chapter 5

<http://acd.vermont.gov/sites/acdnew/files/documents/CD/CPR/CPR-VERI-FinalReport-Chapter5.pdf>

National Association of Development Organizations (NADO), Lessons from the Storm: Case Studies on Economic Recovery and Resilience

<https://www.nado.org/lessons-from-the-storm-case-studies-on-economic-recovery-and-resilience/>

National Association of Development, East Central Vermont's Recovery after Tropical Storm Irene Paves the Way for Future Resilience

<https://www.nado.org/east-central-vermonts-recovery-after-tropical-storm-irene-paves-the-way-for-future-resilience/>

Case Study 2: Minnesota

Local Transit Coordination: Developing a New Administrative and Operations Structure

In 2011 the Minnesota Council on Transportation Access published *Successful Local Transportation Coordination Studies*. The report includes a variety of case studies including how coordinating agency schedules and sharing resources can make a difference.

Kandiyohi Area Transit (KAT), located in Willmar, Minnesota, approximately two hours west of Minneapolis, had one paratransit vehicle and driver. After an inventory of similar vehicles in the area, KAT found agencies that could not justify vehicle ownership or maintenance. KAT received an accessible vehicle through the Section 5310 program that could serve the needs of multiple programs. A program was set up so that other organizations could use the vehicle through request and pay \$45 per hour. Once the program was put into place, many other agencies no longer acquired their own vehicles and relied on KAT Carriage, but questions arose about how to get other agencies to regularly use and rely on KAT Carriage rather than their own vehicles. With other agencies having to pay costs up front to do so, there was some difficulty in getting commitment early on along with recognition that KAT is cost-effective. KAT found that its service needed to be “on time, efficient, and reliable” so that other organizations would want to continue to partner. (MCOTA Case Study)

In 2015, KAT and Renville County Heartland Express consolidated their services. Minnesota DOT commissioned a study to explore Meeker County, located east of Willmar, becoming part of the network with the goals of improved customer service, increased availability and destinations, combined facilities development, and stronger relationships and shared governance. All of the counties offer deviated fixed route, demand response, and volunteer driver services that are open to members of the public. Unlike the other consolidated transportation agency, Meeker Public Transit operated as a department within a larger agency.

When stakeholders were approached about the proposed consolidation, and asked about their concerns and perceived benefits of the consolidation, stakeholders identified both benefits and drawbacks. As noted on page 4-1 of the Meeker County study, “According to many stakeholders, the anticipated benefits of moving forward with Meeker County joining CCT were less service duplication and more efficient delivery of services. Potential drawbacks are that there may not be any cost savings at least in the short-term, although consolidation can provide ‘more bang for the buck.’” Another concern about a merger between CCT and MPT related to local control over the service. Costs and control over service area were considered to be two of stakeholders’ biggest concerns. (4-2) Localized concerns included wondering

how service could affect local business by making it easier for customers to get to other communities and their services. Additional stakeholder concerns included a loss of local knowledge and closeness of staff and passengers would change as the system got bigger. (4-2) Performance measures, and how each agency would meld together their performance measures.

Reorganization Ideas

As part of the study to reorganize and combine the transit systems, four options were explored: a) splitting operations and maintenance by in-house vs. contract management; b) keeping operations and maintenance together under same umbrella but still doing a split between in-house and third-party contract; c) bringing all operations and administration in house; and d) hosting a third-party contract for operations and maintenance and restructuring administration.

For combination operations, the types of service recommended include deviated fixed-route on a regional basis (at least three round trips on days of operation), local deviated fixed-route circulation in Willmar and Litchfield, and inter-community level service. (7-1) In addition to deviated fixed-route, the new system would provide both structured and general demand response service. Proposed changes overall would add an additional round trip and some Saturday service.

In the end, a uniform fare structure was instated for the three combined systems, with distance-based fares recommended as forming the base of the fare structure. Equitable fares were also important and discounted fare groupings were included.

The consolidation project included the following administrative questions and considerations that are important to coordination:

- Take measures to alter joint powers of agreement, secure formal approval of commissioners, public bodies, and transit boards.
- Determine how personnel will be affected. Support for existing staff and succession planning for administrative staff is important.
- Consider how capital and financial situations will be affected. Discuss whether additional funding is needed and what the long-term financial plan should be.
- Act on changes that affect public image. Do you need a new logo or messaging? How will vehicles, facilities, bus stops, etc. be affected by change?
- Change the website and media to reflect a coordinated system.
- Determine fare collection changes, if any.

- Prepare for combined service standards, performance measures, and employee training – building a culture.
- Consolidate reservation systems.

Resources:

Minnesota Council on Transportation Access, Successful Local Transportation Coordination Studies PowerPoint

http://www.coordinatemntransit.org/MCOTA/documents/LocalCoordCaseStudies_MCOTA_Jun2011.pdf

Minnesota Department of Transportation, Summary Report: Kandiyohi, Renville and Meeker Transit Restructuring Plan Final Report October 2015

<http://www.dot.state.mn.us/transit/reports/system-studies/pdf/cct-meeker-report.pdf>

Case Study 3: Maine

Local and State Coordination for Small Town Redevelopment in Mill Towns: A Model for Community Stakeholder Input

Across the state of Maine shuttered textile mills and shoe factories dot the landscape. These empty buildings tell the story of the rise and decline of American manufacturing. As mills began to close at the end of the 20th century, towns were left without an economic foundation, and young people moved elsewhere for job opportunities. The tide is slowly turning as Maine towns are forming partnerships and coordinating with public and private organizations to bring both jobs and vitality back to communities such as Biddeford, Saco, and Waterville.

In Biddeford, desperate times called for desperate measures, including accepting a trash processing facility in the community in 1987 in order to create jobs. After two decades of the unpopular facility, Biddeford residents and businesses spoke up. The incinerator facility is not what they wanted in the center of their town.

Through an Orton Family Foundation community planning process called Community Heart & Soul, Biddeford's residents, government officials, and business leaders developed a new community master plan in 2011. Residents voted on the outcomes recommended in the plan, and 80% of the plan's recommendations have since been implemented. The Heart & Soul program includes gathering stories from locals about their town and what's important to them and the community as a whole. In Gardiner, Maine, another Heart & Soul pilot community, food, local agriculture, and old building adaptation and restoration were among the stories important to citizens.

"Local government is the hardest form of government because it's your friends, it's your neighbors. It's people you see in the supermarket. It's very personal."

Thom Harnett, mayor, City of Gardiner, Maine

Seeing changes in peer communities and being asked about their thoughts have had an impact on community buy-in. For example, after participating in the planning process, volunteerism increased in Gardiner. (<https://nextcity.org/daily/entry/finding-the-heart-and-soul-of-planning>) And after seeing the changes in towns like Biddeford and Gardiner,

developers are now proposing redevelopment projects in Saco and on Saco Island. Along the way, community input and respect for the historical character of these communities is being encouraged. (Press Herald)

The Maine state legislature has also taken note. In May 2017, the Maine senate “...cut red tape on the redevelopment of former mill sites across the state to transform the unused buildings into new housing and commercial property.” A bill was introduced to no longer require a state subdivision review for plans to subdivide structures (e.g., mills) into multiple dwelling unit so that municipalities could approve such redevelopment through their own site plan reviews. After approval by the Maine House of Representatives and the signature of the governor, the bill was signed into Maine law May 30, 2017. (Mainebiz)

Considerations from the coordination process in Maine:

- Community buy-in affects community participation during all stages of the process—not just the early stages.
- People tell the stories that are important to them, and their stories highlight what they like and dislike about their communities. Take the time to listen to these perspectives.
- Examine local or state policies that pose obstacles to planning, public participation, and innovative financing or redevelopment.

Resources:

Graham, Gillian. (2017, July 24). Ambitious \$40 million Saco Island Project Could Reshape Community. Portland Press Herald. <http://www.pressherald.com/2017/07/24/ambitious-development-eyed-for-saco-island/>

(2017, May 10). Mainebiz. Bill Cutting Red Tape for Mill Redevelopment Gets Senate OK. <http://www.mainebiz.biz/article/20170510/NEWS01/170519995/bill-cutting-red-tape-for-mill-redevelopment-gets-senate-ok>

Case Study 4: Alabama, Illinois & California

USDA Summer Meal Programs: A Model for Using Existing Transportation Routes and Providers to Support Food Delivery

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Summer Meals Toolkit was developed by the USDA Summer Food Service Program to help agencies with program administration. SFSP is federally funded and state administered, providing nutritious meals to children in low-income areas during the months when school is not in session. One of the challenges identified by congregate meal participants is transportation to help bring children and meals together. Coordination and well-functioning vehicles are vital to these programs. Examples of coordination between the program and a local transit system can be found in several cities across the U.S.

In Effingham County, Illinois, for example, family members can register for the Call-to-Ride program and receive free bus ride vouchers for the days they want to attend the meal program.

In the Huntsville, Alabama Bus Passes program, the City of Huntsville provides shuttle rides on city buses to and from meal sites. Parents receive maps identifying the meal sites and the bus routes that serve those sites. The program's benefits are two-fold in that the children can access the meal program through existing transportation, and the children become familiar with using the public bus system.

In Humboldt County, California, United Parcel Service partners with the Food for People Food Bank, and the Humboldt County Transit Authority. UPS has offered to transport meals for free to rural locations up to an hour away. Food coolers are returned to the food bank for re-stocking, and UPS donates up to 225 miles per day to the program.

Ideally, lunch programs are served at community centers and facilities where little adjustment is needed to the existing bus routes, as is the case in Huntsville. In rural areas, transportation is even more of a challenge and sharing assets becomes even more important. These three coordination programs are examples of organizations sharing assets and vehicles. In the case of Humboldt County, UPS already has vehicles heading into the areas not within the city's transit service area, so the donation of UPS vehicles and fuel avoid duplication of effort if program vehicles or volunteer drivers were dispatched to make the meal deliveries.

Coordination lessons:

- Minimize duplication of effort and resources by using vehicles that are already in service for another purpose.
- View coordination as a way to share information and market existing services (e.g. exposing meal recipients to bus service may encourage them to try the bus for other trips).
- Look for public-private partnership opportunities. Many companies look for stewardship and community volunteerism opportunities, and transportation may be one way of giving back.

Resources:

United States Department of Agriculture, Summer Food Service Program Summer Meals Toolkit <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/summer-meals-toolkit>

United States Department of Agriculture, Summer Food Service Program Summer Meals Toolkit: Transportation Challenges <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/sfsp/smt-transportation.pdf>

Summary

The diverse set of case studies in this brief illustrate that *what* coordination is varies according to the desired outcomes of a community or agency, but *how* and *why* coordination occurs is similar across industries. Outcomes from Vermont, Maine, Minnesota, and the Summer Meals programs include:

- Creation of state funding sources, pilot projects, and initiative programs
- Community buy-in that leads to greater volunteerism
- Community support for both the planning process and the outcomes of the process
- Economic revitalization (including reversing or stemming brain drain and graying of communities)
- Leadership and mentoring for other communities (if this community did it and had success, maybe our community needs to try it)
- Cost savings to provide services
- Improved customer and citizen experience
- Creating partnerships that last beyond the initial disaster, project, or pilot

This list of outcomes would appeal to transportation professionals, economic development directors, or health, education, and human services professionals. Ultimately, coordination is about efficient use of funds and capital assets, and improving the experience for clients and customers. When looking for innovative coordination models, do not shy away from examples beyond the transportation sphere because there are lessons to be shared and learned from across industries.



The National Center for Mobility Management (NCMM) is a national technical assistance center created to facilitate communities in adopting mobility management strategies. The NCMM is funded through a cooperative agreement with the Federal Transit Administration, and is operated through a consortium of three national organizations – the American Public Transportation Association, the Community Transportation Association of America, and Easterseals.

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