

Beverly Foundation

Fact Sheet Series

Vol. 1 (4)

STPs in Rural America

Highlights

- **Rural America**
Describes the population conditions of the rural United States
- **Senior Transit & STPs**
Provides a brief summary of transit needs and challenges and introduces the STPs approach
- **STPs in Rural America**
Introduces a profile of rural STPs and provides information on what they do, how they do it, and where they are
- **When Volunteer Programs Are the Answer**
Discusses the reason for volunteer driver programs in rural areas and volunteer contributions and cost savings they represent
- **Examples of STPs**
Includes summaries of 5 very different STPs in rural areas

October, 2008

For More Information Visit
www.beverlyfoundation.org



Beverly Foundation
Pasadena, CA

Rural America

Rural America (frequently referred to as non-metro areas) is defined as counties located outside the boundaries of a metro area and having no cities of 40,000 residents or more. Distance, declining infrastructure, and limited transportation alternatives often define the landscape of rural America. While the population of rural America is difficult to calculate, recent studies indicate that in 2000, 23% of America's older persons age 65+ lived in rural areas and made up approximately 18% of its population.¹ It is expected that aging in place and retirement to rural areas will result in an increase in the number and percentage of older adults residing in rural areas.

Senior Transit and STPs

Declining infrastructure and relocation of health, social, and business services from rural areas to larger communities or regional or urban centers often contribute to the problem of distance, which in turn complicates the ability of traditional transportation systems to provide transit services that meet the needs of older adults who no longer drive.

Transportation Service Needs of Older Adults²

Availability	can fulfill expectations (weekends)
Acceptability	can satisfy preferences (scheduling)
Accessibility	can provide assistance (door-to-door)
Adaptability	can offer flexible service (multiple stops)
Affordability	can meet financial needs (donation)

STPs (Supplemental Transportation Programs for seniors) often provide transportation that meets many of the 5 A's transportation needs (see above) of older adults in rural areas who are non drivers. Rural STPs that involve volunteer drivers are especially important in meeting the destination and assistance needs of people who have given up their keys.

¹*Transportation Innovations for Seniors: A Report from Rural America 2006 (A Beverly Foundation & Community Transportation Association of America Project).*

²*The chart includes the 5 A's of Senior Friendly Transportation identified by older adults and compiled by the Beverly Foundation in 2000.*

STPs in Rural America (2000-2007)

The Beverly Foundation began identifying STPs in America in 2000. The Foundation's current (2008)

Profile of 168 STPs in Rural Areas

General Information

Represented States **39 + PR**
 Average # Years Operation **16**
 Median Budget **\$16,689**

Senior Passenger Facts

Seniors Only **17%**
 & People w/ Disabilities **83%**
 & People w/ Dementia **63%**

Design Facts

Transit Service Only **11%**
 Offers Service Menu **89%**

Organization Status

Not-for-Profit **90%**
 Other (incl. govt) **10%**

Fee Structure

Fees **16%**
 No Fees **84%**
 Rider Donation **60%**

Top 3 Destinations

Medical
 Grocery Shopping
 Recreational Activities

database of 830 STPs is the result of eight national surveys (2000-2007). 520 STPs were identified with specific service area. The accompanying chart provides a data profile of 168 STPs that were identified as only serving rural areas. Of this group, the average number of 16 years in operation includes STPs that were organized more than 69 years ago and as recently as 2007. The fact that they average 16 years in operation suggests that STPs in rural areas can be sustained over time. The median budget is particularly noteworthy as a large

number are located in small communities and involve volunteer drivers and volunteer vehicles to provide some or all of their rides. The result is that 74% of the programs had budgets of less than \$50,000.

What They Do

According to a recent study by the Beverly Foundation and the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), in order to meet the needs of senior passengers, services need to: (1) have a customer focus; (2) provide one-on-one service assistance; (3) offer any purpose trips to life sustaining as well as life enriching destinations; and (4) make single purpose trips available to get customers to human and medical services such as nutrition programs and non-emergency medical services. The accompanying chart identifies special types of assistance and the availability of services offered by STPs in rural areas. Transportation assistance is especially important to older adults who no longer drive, for the physical limitations that often make it difficult or impossible to drive also can make it difficult to access transportation services without special assistance such as door-to-door, door-through-door, or someone to stay at the destination. Additionally, assistance by an escort also can be helpful, and 46% of the STPs indicate they provide escorts.

Service Features

Types of Assistance	Availability	
Curb-to-Curb	49%	Weekdays 97%
Door-to-Door	80%	Evenings 48%
Door-thru-door	83%	Saturdays 46%
Stay at Destination	77%	Sundays 42%

Drivers and Vehicles

Drivers		Vehicles	
Paid Only	13%	Autos	77%
Volunteer Only	63%	Bus or Van	21%
Paid & Volunteer	24%	Program Vehicle	27%
Age 65+	57%	Driver's Vehicle	87%

How They Do It

Driver salaries are said to constitute up to 50% of the operating cost of a transportation service, and vehicle purchase, maintenance and fuel require major capital expenditures and result in considerable operating costs. The low cost nature of STPs in rural America is related in large part to the high percentage that involve volunteer drivers

and their "volunteer" vehicles, or vehicles owned by passengers. However, the involvement of volunteer staff and contributions of space and equipment from sponsors and community groups also account for their low operating costs.

The rural STPs in the Beverly Foundation’s database are located in 39 states plus Puerto Rico. This compares with STPs in the Beverly

Where They Are

Minnesota	16	Illinois	8
New York	16	Arizona	7
California	14	Texas	5
Wisconsin	11	Michigan	5
Kansas	9	Nebraska	5

Foundation’s general database which includes all fifty states plus Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico. The states with the highest number of rural STPs are represented on the accompanying chart. As was the case in STPs in general and Volunteer Driver Programs, the study method of distribution through national membership organizations and networks of aging and transportation organizations

impacted on their number, location, and information related to organization and services.

When Volunteer Driver Programs Are The Answer

While 168 STPs identified themselves as providing service only in rural areas, more than 65% of the volunteer driver programs in the full database of STPs indicated they provided some service in rural areas. These volunteer driver programs are organized for a variety of reasons. (1) They provide rides to seniors who need transportation. (2) They provide assistance to senior passengers with limitations. (3) They fill “senior friendliness” gaps that cannot be met by traditional transit services. (4) They provide transportation services at a low cost. (5) They provide an organized method by which people who volunteer to drive can help their neighbors. Giving rides, offering assistance, and filling the gaps are central to any STPs, but volunteer driver programs afford an avenue for involving volunteers and for reducing the costs of providing transportation services.

Volunteer Opportunities

Although volunteer driver programs take many forms, their main

ingredients include individuals who volunteer themselves (and often) their automobiles to provide transportation to older adults (and sometimes others). In 2004 and 2005, the Beverly Foundation identified more than 700 volunteer drivers.³ They had considerable life experience (63% were age 65+) and driving experience (54% had driven more than 50 years). They made major contributions of time (35% contributed six or more hours a week), and also contributed their vehicles (85% said they drove their own

To help others	89%
To do something meaningful	73%
To give back	52%
To stay active	29%

vehicles). In addition to making transportation available to many destinations and assisting passengers, they also spent time socializing with their passengers, and received considerable satisfaction from their effort. The accompanying chart identifies the major reasons they said they volunteered to drive.

The chart on page 2 with data related to drivers and vehicles indicates that a large number of STPs in rural areas involve

Low Cost Services

Factors	Paratransit	Volunteer Driver
Budget	\$5,000,000	\$460,450
Cost Per Ride	\$37.94	\$7.73

volunteers as their only drivers or involve a combination of both paid and volunteer drivers. It also indicates that a very large number provide rides in vehicles owned by volunteer drivers. As drivers and vehicles constitute two major costs of providing transportation services, the elimination or reduction of such costs by organizing a volunteer driver program

can have a significant impact on budgets. Although other factors may come into play, the accompanying chart indicates the difference in demand response/paratransit services and volunteer driver services. The data were developed by a community transportation service that provides paratransit services to the general public, but also maintains a robust volunteer driver program.

Five STPs in Rural America

***OATS, Inc. - Columbia, Missouri** OATS was organized as the Cooperative Transit Service (CTS) shortly after the 1970 White House Conference on Aging. In 1973, CTS made the transition to a private, not-for-profit corporation with the name Older Adults Transportation Service (OATS, Inc.) The OATS service area includes 87 counties, covers more than 50,000 sq. mi., and is almost as large as the country of Greece. About 80% of its service area is considered rural. The service operates a fleet of 682 vehicles, and employs 534 paid drivers. In 2007 its operating budget was \$17.5 million. It operates its services primarily on grants and contracts, and receives some funding from foundations. OATS does not include volunteer drivers or volunteer vehicles in its transportation services. www.oatstransit.org

***St John's County Council on Aging - St Augustine, Florida** The Sunshine Bus Company was created in 1999 to respond to the county's transportation needs by offering a deviated fixed-route public bus system featuring two routes. Today the Sunshine Bus Company operates six routes, offers the possibility to flag-down the vehicles or to call ahead for pick ups at designated locations. It has a monthly ridership of over 12,000. In 2007 its budget of \$2,000,000 consisted of 80% grants, 10% tax revenue, and 10% of rider fees. In addition to the Sunshine Bus, SJCCOA managed veterans' transportation to the nearest VA Hospital in Gainesville, FL. SJCCOA is responsible for recruiting and training the volunteer drivers, and scheduling the trips using the Veterans' van. In 2006 SJCCOA was awarded the FTA Administrator's Award for Outstanding Public Service in Rural Public Transportation. www.stjohnscoa.com

Prairie Hills Transit - Spearfish, South Dakota Prairie Hills Transit was organized in 1990 as Spearfish Senior Transportation and became Prairie Hills Transit in 1992. It includes a service area of more than 12,500 sq. mi., an area that is more than six times larger than the state of Rhode Island and almost as large as the country of Italy. PHT operates 24 vehicles and employs 25 paid drivers. In 2007 its budget was \$1,261,124. It is funded with state DOT funds, aging services money, Medicaid non-emergency medical service funding, funds from the city and county, fare box revenues, and from donations and fundraising activities. It has a history of involving volunteer drivers for special activities, and currently is in the process of adding a volunteer driver program to supplement its paid driver program. www.prairiehillstransit.org

Jefferson County Service Organization - Oskaloosa, Kansas which covers a service area of 484 sq. mi. is the only public or paratransit service available in the county. Its transportation services were established in 1975 with funding for 80% of the purchase of one vehicle from the Kansas Department of Transportation. Although it was organized to provide rides for all county residents, today 85% of the riders are seniors and most are age 75 and older. The Jefferson County program provides special door-to-door and destination assistance with 9 vans and 17 part-time paid drivers. Its 2007 budget of \$189,000 consisted of 68% grants, 18% tax revenue, and 14% donations. The program provided 10,003 rides to 634 seniors (who accounted for 85% of all rides) in 2007. *(no website available)*

Rum River Interfaith Caregivers, Inc. - Princeton, Minnesota was organized in 1996. It offers transportation as part of a menu of services that also include cancer support, home maintenance, telephone assurance, meal delivery and a thrift store. In 2006, the Rum River transportation program operated on a budget of \$68,050 and provided transportation to 102 senior riders, and involved 157 volunteer drivers, 26% of whom were age 65+. Its service area is 100% rural and covers 800 sq. mi. It does not charge for rides, and its major sources of funding include community donations and earned income (74%), grants (20%), and rider donations (6%). Drivers use their own vehicles to provide curb-to-curb, door-to-door, door-thru-door, and destination assistance to passengers. In 2006, the program provided 5,000 rides. www.rric.org

**Not included in the database reported in this fact sheet since it does not serve rural areas exclusively.*