



Kansas RTAP Fact Sheet

A Service of the Kansas Rural Transit Assistance Program — for Transit Agencies



Developing and Marketing a Travel Training Program for Older Adults

By Pat Weaver

“Dad, I just don't feel you're safe to drive any more. You've had too many close calls lately, and I'm worried about you and Mom. We have to figure out another way for you to get around town.”

Have you ever had to have that conversation? Making the decision to give up the keys is not an easy one. Sometimes we get to make that decision for ourselves; in other circumstances, someone may make it for us (or at least try). Some of us have had to make the decision for a family member—and it has not been easy.

What makes that decision so difficult, even when it's obvious it's no longer safe to drive? Many factors might delay the decision to stop driving, even when it is suspected, or known, that it's no longer safe. One of those reasons may come from the belief that there is no other option for transportation. How to get to the grocery store, to the doctor, to the bank, to visit friends? As a transit manager, you can play a key role in your community to help relieve anxiety around the belief that access to the community will be gone once those keys are gone. So, what can you and your transit agency do?

This article provides an overview of a recent project completed by the Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) titled *Travel Training for Older Adults* (TCRP Report 168, 2014). Travel training is just one strategy, but a useful one in the toolbox of strategies to make older persons and others using our roads safer.

Older driver safety and the Kansas Strategic Highway Safety Plan

As the Kansas Department of Transportation works on strategies to improve older driver safety through its work on the Kansas Strategic Highway Safety Plan, it is important to consider how transit services in both urban and rural areas can play a prominent role in providing options when an individual transitions from driver to non-driver (for any reason). However, transit is only a

viable strategy if the individual in need of transportation knows about the services and knows how to use them. That's where travel training services can help.

The recently released TCRP report provides some useful guidance to transit agencies considering ways to make their services more “visible” and accessible to older adults in their communities—those who have never ridden transit, and may not even know it exists in their community. And service certainly doesn't exist for them, or so they believe.

What is travel training?

The simplest definition of travel training is education and training to encourage and support individuals to use public transportation, particularly fixed route services, independently. Not only does travel training make the individual more aware of public transit travel options in their community, but it is also intended to teach each individual how to use the services: read bus schedules, find bus stops, make transfers, and get back home. “Taking the keys away” from an older adult whose driving skills have deteriorated is a particularly daunting task when no mobility alternative is offered or available.

Travel training programs grew in urban areas to provide individuals with limited mobility (e.g. persons with disabilities) and limited resources to be able to make use of the transportation resources in their community, to increase independence, reduce the costs associated with paratransit service by encouraging more fixed route transit use, and increase the capacity of paratransit service to meet the needs of those who cannot use fixed route service.

For older individuals who may have recently lost access to or the ability to drive a car, travel training services may have even broader application. As the authors of Report 168 point out, many individuals in rural communities, particularly older residents, probably have had very

limited or no experience with public transportation. An individual may not fully understand what transit services are available, understand how to use them, or even know that they exist in their community. Complicated by the more limited transportation resources in rural communities and the typically longer distance travel required in rural communities, establishing an effective travel training program may be quite a challenge (Burkhardt 2014). Travel training in rural communities usually will focus on helping the individual to identify the resources that are there (usually not fixed route) and helping them feel comfortable in making use of those services to meet their needs.

What makes the program successful? What outcomes are we looking for?

From the older adult's perspective, and from their family's perspective, the desired outcome is that the individual is able to travel safely and conveniently in their community, even when they are no longer able to drive. Transit provides the possibility of maintaining independence. Lack of mobility may mean the difference between staying in their own home or being forced to consider an alternate, less-independent living arrangement.

The TCRP report identified seven particularly important components to successful travel training programs. While the researchers found that travel training is not a mature industry and there is little standardization in how services are reported, they were able to identify characteristics important to the success of a travel training program, generally. These apply whether a service is urban or rural, or whether it targets any specific population.

Successful travel training programs:

- Hire travel training staff with the right “people” skills,
- Tailor their training to the individual's needs and their capabilities,
- Focus on customer service,
- Obtain sustainable funding,
- Partner with community stakeholders,
- Monitor and analyze program impacts on an ongoing basis, and
- Integrate travel training into agency marketing and branding efforts.



What is the definition of travel training?

The authors of TCRP Report 168 define travel training for two different kinds of travelers:

- One-to-one short-term instruction provided to an individual who has previously traveled independently and needs additional training or support to use a different mode of travel, a different route, mode of transit, or travel to a new destination; or
- One-to-one comprehensive, specially designed instruction in the skills and behaviors necessary for independent travel on public transportation provided to an individual who does not have independent travel concepts or skills to go from point of origin of trip to destination and back.

Source: Burkhardt, Jon (2014), p. 64.

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Travel training for older adults in rural communities: What's different?

In general, the steps for starting a travel training program in a rural community are not significantly different than for urban areas. However, rural programs are more likely to focus on how to use demand-response services if there are no fixed route services, and trips may be of much longer distances than in urban areas. Where fixed routes are available, the travel trainer will need to be aware of potential lack of infrastructure, such as

Resources on Travel Training

Cevallos, Fabian, Jon Skinner, Ann Joslin and Tekisha Ivy (2010). Attracting Senior Drivers to Public Transportation: Issues and Concerns. Miami, FL: Florida International University. http://www.fta.dot.gov/documents/TRANSPO_Attracting_Seniors_Public_Transportation_Final_Report.pdf

Project Action provides a number of resources, including online training, in-person training and printed resources on Travel Training. <http://www.projectaction.org/ResourcesPublications/TravelTraining.aspx>

McCarthy, Dennis P., Lucinda Shannon, and Karen Wolf-Branigan (2010). Current Practices Used by Travel Trainers for Seniors. Washington, D.C.: National Center on Senior Transportation. 12pp. http://www.seniortransportation.net/Portals/0/Cache/Pages/Resources/Current_Practices_Used_by_Travel_Trainers_for_Seniors.pdf

Getting Started: Tips for Creating Your Own Travel Training Program

The authors of TCRP Report 168 have this advice for creating an effective, sustainable program:

- Set clear goals.
- Develop the program with end outcomes in mind.
- Recognize that successful sustained use of public transportation often requires customized, one-on-one training to meet an individual's needs, in addition to group travel training.
- Identify stable and sustainable funding. Costs for travel training vary widely depending on the type of travel training program, and good data are not available assigned to typical training programs, or methods to determine benefits of travel training.
- Employ travel trainers with the right characteristics and qualifications: relevant experience, good knowledge of the transit system, good communication and connection with their customers, and an understanding of how travel training can improve quality of life.

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sidewalks, to make access possible.

In rural areas the proportion of the population that has no experience at all with transit is typically greater than in urban areas, and the service may need to be more personalized to develop enough travel options to meet their needs, coming much closer to the definition of a mobility management program. Indeed, there are many similarities between features of travel training and mobility management, and travel training can certainly be one of the tools in the toolbox for a mobility manager to help the older person become more independent in using transit to meet their needs.

Delmarva Community Services in Cambridge, Maryland provides an interesting example of travel training in a large, low-density service area (over 1,400 square miles). Delmarva Community Transit links their travel training and mobility management programs, operating from a “one-stop” community service area. The users of their travel training program generally have had no previous experience with public transportation and their focus is on “overcoming initial fears and misconceptions” about the services. Their program isn't limited to transportation, but focuses on access to a variety of community services. Their group training sessions are held in the format of “field trips,” going to enjoyable destinations—a strategy that has been particularly useful in reaching certain minority groups. The training is offered at no charge.

What about marketing?

According to the authors of the TCRP report, the key to marketing travel training program is to promote the lower cost of public transportation and, in the case of communities with fixed route service, increased flexibility, as an alternative to demand-response services. Marketing efforts let older drivers, their families and service providers know that there are mobility options in your community, and that loss of the ability to drive a personal automobile doesn't mean the end of mobility. Brochures with success stories are particularly effective, and training about your services to staff and volunteers of partnering organizations (senior centers, parks and recreation, libraries, health care facilities, etc.), will help get the word out.

In Kansas, as part of the Strategic Highway Safety Plan, one of the strategies in the works is for Department of Revenue staff to have a directory of public and specialized transit service providers in their motor vehicle license examining offices so that when an individual comes in and is deemed no longer able to drive, the examiner can provide options right on the spot (Kansas Department of Transportation 2015). The next step will be to encourage these programs to provide rider orientation and travel training when necessary to encourage the use of their services.

Conclusion

The data on travel training programs for older adults are limited. However, the case studies in TCRP Report 168 provide helpful guidance if you are considering implementing a travel training program. There is a growing awareness across states that a program that forcing older drivers to give up the keys without helping identify mobility options is not a viable option; it leads to more resistance to stop driving in cases where safety is an issue, or it leads to premature loss of independent living, or demands on family members than cannot be met. Rural public and specialized transportation services are key partners in helping to solve this dilemma, but often individuals who have not used transit as younger

adults, their families, and even community support services may not be aware of the critical resources available through transit agencies. A travel training program can help provide visibility for your services and increase peace of mind for your riders (or potential riders). Success with travel training in selected systems around the country should give systems in Kansas the go-ahead to move forward with travel training. ●

Reprinted from the April 2015 issue of the Kansas TransReporter, a publication of the Kansas Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) at the Kansas University Transportation Center.

Sources

- Burkhardt, Jon, David J. Bernstein and Kathryn Kulbicki. 2014. Travel Training for Older Adults. Washington, DC: Transit Cooperative Research Program. Accessed December 9, 2014. <http://www.trb.org/Main/Blurbs/171323.aspx>.
- Kansas Department of Transportation. 2015. "Older Driver" chapter. Kansas Strategic Highway Safety Plan. Topeka, Kansas.

