

# **COORDINATION PLAN**

## **RIVER VALLEY TRANSPORTATION PROVIDERS**

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The River Valley Transportation Providers (RVTP) recognize and acknowledge the requirement to develop a local coordination plan as referenced in the November 27, 2006 letter from Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD). The Plan will incorporate elements from the State Action Plan, as well as related materials from the AHTD coordination plan overview meeting and the Local Transit Coordination Plan Guidelines provided by AHTD.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The RVTP was established through the formation of collaborative efforts between multiple entities and agencies. The focus group was inspired by discussions at an MPO Peer Review in April 2004. The group recognized the need to take the lead to dissolve boundaries and barriers, therefore invited multiple public, private and non profit providers of transportation to an informal round table meeting to discuss transportation issues abroad.

In July 2004, several agencies participated in a meeting at the Fort Smith Transit facility to discuss transportation issues, learn the active roles of each participant and establish a communication link between area providers. Presented was a list of benefits associated with local collaboration as well as a summary of the comparative goals of the federal government.

Discussion questions evolved around the greatest transportation challenges, service and/or service area limitations, barriers, policies, staffing, training and collaboration. A wealth of exchange took place during the meeting and resources were identified that would aid in training, background checks and general services.

The focus group was awarded a planning grant on January 3, 2007 to carry out project initiatives that would lead to a more secure and developed community with regard to transportation. Such initiatives would also serve as a catalysts for keeping the Providers actively involved in a collaborative setting.

In June 2007, the RVTP met to consider changes to the existing plan with the intent to expand the definition of the service area that is covered by this plan and to involve human service organizations in future transportation coordination planning efforts.

## BACKGROUND

### Regional Description

#### *Geography:*

The planning region covers the following counties: Crawford, Franklin, Logan, Sebastian, Scott and Polk. This is referenced as the “West” district of the Arkansas Planning and Development Districts. This planning region includes the River Valley which, for the purposes of this plan, encompasses the economic region of Fort Smith which extends outward approximately 50 miles.

*Planning Partners:*

The organizations that continue to take a lead in this planning effort and to secure the additional planning funds for the focus group consists of representatives from Fort Smith Transit and the Bi-State Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). Area Agency on Aging and the Fort Smith Pregnancy Help Center are two new organizations that have agreed to help represent the focus group.

*Current Public Transportation Providers:*

Attached is a list of the current members of the RVTP. It is important to note that this is a fluid list and that agencies sometimes expand or contract and agency contacts are more often subject to change.

## History of Regional Coordination of Public Transportation

*Past/continuing planning activities:*

The RVTP held three separate group meetings in Fort Smith. Franklin County members convened to discuss issues relative to their immediate area as well. The focus group has conducted an online survey, along with many meetings and presentations regarding the formation of the group and its associated initiatives.

*Past and current implemented project/services:*

Efforts established from the meetings enabled the Providers to become familiar with the Amber Alert system and to become certified through the Highway Watch Program. This type of collaboration helped to create a communication link that permitted Fort Smith Transit to pass through sensitive postings regarding security information during a period of elevated threat. Many of the providers also assisted in providing transportation during the Katrina relief efforts at Fort Chaffee.

# REGIONAL SERVICE COORDINATION PLANNING

## Planning Process and Work Plan Descriptions

*Organization:* RVTP

*Lead Entities:*

Fort Smith Transit and the Bi-State MPO

*Other Involved Entities:*

Fort Smith Transit and the Bi-State MPO have spent a considerable amount of time working with Jefferson Lines (OTR Carrier) Letsgo Charters (Willing and Able Provider), Kibois Area Transit (Eastern Oklahoma Transit Provider) and recently the A & M Railroad in an attempt to expand transportation beyond the limits of the region and to promote long distance travel.

*Group Structure Description:*

Routine meetings within the focus group are less formalized and often conducted over the phone or by email simply to share thoughts and ideas.

*Outreach/ Public Involvement Description:*

Outreach has primarily been word of mouth or phone calls generated from the focus group. The RVTP have been made public through various presentations, as part of the ITS plan development and as part of the local emergency planning process. In response to the geographic expansion of the regional area and reaching out to human service organizations, the RVTP has made, and will continue to make, formal contact with entities that should be informed about the process and encourage participation in future meetings.

## Coordination Plan Input to AHTD Grant Criteria

The RVTP recommended the following criteria be used when local organizations apply to AHTD for FTA local grant funding in response to Federal guidelines that require applicants to participate in local coordination planning efforts:

- è Attendance by a representative of the organization at the Annual RVTP meeting (held before grant applications are submitted each April)
- è The funding request helps the organization maintain existing services or it provides an opportunity to improve services to the organization's clientele while also contributing to improved transportation services in the region
- è Assess the mileage of the existing vehicles and vehicles that need to be replaced in the organization's fleet. Consider the nature of the road conditions (e.g., paved or dirt/rocks, highway vs. side streets, and distances the vehicles travel) when determining the appropriate timing to replace a vehicle.

# **COORDINATE TRANSPORTATION PLAN**

## Goals and Objectives

1. Marketing appears to be a common element that all agencies can benefit from equally. One on-going goal has been to establish a commercial that would incorporate all Providers serving transportation as a united team.
2. Consolidated fueling as listed in the project outline
3. Local Commercial Drivers License Testing
4. Automated Traveler Information Services
5. Purchase of Transit Service

# Regional Needs Assessment

## *Regional Transportation Resources: Overlaps and Gaps*

Fort Smith is largely industrial based and its economic region will soon overlay two major interstates which will crossover and provide a wealth of opportunities in all areas associated with transportation.

There are a multitude of transportation resources that currently exist in the River Valley which are common to most any metropolitan area similar in size. Fort Smith is fortunate in that the Arkansas River surrounds the city on approximately three sides which creates port and development opportunities not so common to all metropolitan areas.

Our primary focus is to increase the utilization and collaboration of passenger transportation service within the River Valley. Current needs are Sunday service, expanded service, twenty-four hour service, price breaks on fuel and insurance, timeliness CDL testing, marketing and communications including language barriers.

## *Strategies to Address Gaps and Needs:*

For the marketing aspect, we determined the production of a video would promote the Providers as a united team which could be used to inform the public of transportation possibilities within the community.

FST will assist in addressing the remaining initiatives such as consolidated fueling, onsite CDL testing, traveler information services and purchase of transportation service as part of the planning process.

## *Barriers and Constraints:*

The focus group has received enormous support from local, state and federal officials with regard to this program. The initial barrier was the inability to use federal operating funds to produce and air a marketing video that would also include private providers.

The reasons stated pertain to the use of federal dollars to sponsor a private entity. Attached are materials which outline our attempts to receive technical support. Regional officials have since taken the stand to allow the video to be produced, however cannot allow the use of federal operating funds to promote the video.

Barriers in coordination relating to the RVTP are common in the way that it is easy to focus solely on providing the level of service each agency is expected to provide. The focus group is working to create a network of incentives that will entice or encourage the Providers to participate jointly or even regionally.

## *Coordination Action Plan:*

Attached is a project outline and project budget that will illustrate the action items, anticipated services, priorities and evaluation of the River Valley initiatives.

The focus group is not able to comment on the coordination plan elements listed below until the program initiatives can be put into place.

*Inter-regional Coordination:*

*Action Plan Evaluation:*

*Sustainment of the Coordination Plan:*

Continuation strategies

Plan update cycle process

## **APPENDICES**

*Transportation Providers List:*

*Planning Budget:*

*Technical Support Correspondence:*

*Self Assessment:*

*Project Outline:*

*State Action Plan:*