



**VOLUNTEER DRIVER PROGRAM
FEASIBILITY STUDY**
For the Greater Nashua Region

June 30, 2023

Prepared by the

Nashua Regional Planning Commission

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INTRODUCTION

Mobility is necessary to engage with one's community and reach critical destinations. The Nashua Transit System (NTS), Souhegan Valley Transportation Collaborative (SVTC), various volunteer driver programs, and other agencies and organizations provide transportation services in the region. However, the lack of available, affordable, and accessible transportation is still a barrier for many. Age, physical and cognitive ability, income, and geography are all factors that can impede access to reliable transportation.

This study is an outgrowth of the *Locally Coordinated Transportation Plan for the Greater Nashua and Milford Region* prepared by the Nashua Regional Planning Commission (NRPC) in 2020. The Locally Coordinated Transportation Plan identified several needs as well as gaps in existing transportation services in the region for elderly, disabled, and low-income individuals who lack access to a personal vehicle. These needs and gaps are outlined below.

Community Transportation User Needs

Regional Needs

- High-priority needs for transportation to medical appointments, grocery stores, and pharmacies.
- Additional need for transportation to employment, education, job training, shopping, and after-school activities, as well as social, cultural, and other community activities.
- Need for transportation service hours to be adjusted or expanded to earlier in the day, later in the evening, and/or on weekend days, as possible.
- Need for transportation service to key destinations outside of the NRPC, NTS, and SVTC service areas including:
 - Manchester-Boston Regional Airport (MHT) – Manchester.
 - Elliot and CMC Hospitals – Manchester.
 - Monadnock Community Hospital (MCH) – Peterborough.
 - Various other specialized medical facilities throughout New England.
- Need for regularly scheduled service to destinations such as grocery stores, shopping, and entertainment centers, and or places with social interactions for those located outside of the NTS area.
- Need for local and regional coordination that includes all relevant stakeholders.
- Need for a centralized location and convenient access to comprehensive information about available transportation services and resources for riders, providers, facilitators, and relevant groups.
- Need for increased outreach and awareness of the unique transportation needs of high school, college, and generally younger populations.
- Need to work with the Statewide Coordinating Council for Community Transportation and the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) to ensure coordinated efforts and build upon services like 211 and similar sources.
- Improve and simplify the application process for determining passenger eligibility for paratransit services.

Within the NTS Service Area

- Reduced wait times at fixed route bus stops.
- Reduced wait times between paratransit passenger drop off and pick up.
- Access to mobile platform options or integration with Uber, Lyft, taxis, and other on-demand ride-hailing services, using a smartphone, tablet, or other technologies.
- Access to real-time bus information using a smartphone, tablet, electronic ride boards, or other technologies.
- Earlier start time for morning service and later service into the evening on weekdays and Saturdays.
- Weekend service (especially to retail employment centers).

Served by the NTS - Merrimack and Hudson

- Need to evaluate and adjust paratransit services for destinations within each community and not just to and from Nashua.
- Daily or weekly service for Merrimack residents to destinations within Merrimack and Nashua. Destinations may include locations that cater to grocery, shopping, entertainment, etc.
- Daily or weekly service for Hudson residents to destinations within Hudson and to Nashua. Destinations may include locations that cater to grocery, shopping, entertainment, etc.

Within the SVTC Service Area

- Expanded public transportation service along the Route 101A corridor that connects employment centers within the greater Milford area with transit-dependent populations along the corridor and into Nashua.
- Maintain the existing service to the Amherst Walmart
- Establish service to key destinations in Peterborough, the Monadnock Region, and Manchester.
- Reduce wait times between paratransit passenger drop-off and pickup.

This feasibility study has been prepared by the Nashua Regional Planning Commission (NRPC), in collaboration with the Coordinating Council (RCC) for Community Transportation and other partners, to evaluate the current level of volunteer driver programming in the region, identify gaps in service, and assess the feasibility of developing a new volunteer driver program to help fill those gaps. Volunteer driver programs and networks are a way that communities can address at least some of these gaps. These programs and networks can be a cost-effective and flexible way to address the transportation needs of communities and can save money for both the organizations and the consumers.

A Volunteer Driver Program (VDP) offers door-to-door services, feeder services, and transportation services to the elderly, disabled individuals, low-income people, and those without vehicles. Volunteer drivers assist in bringing people to medical appointments, shopping, and

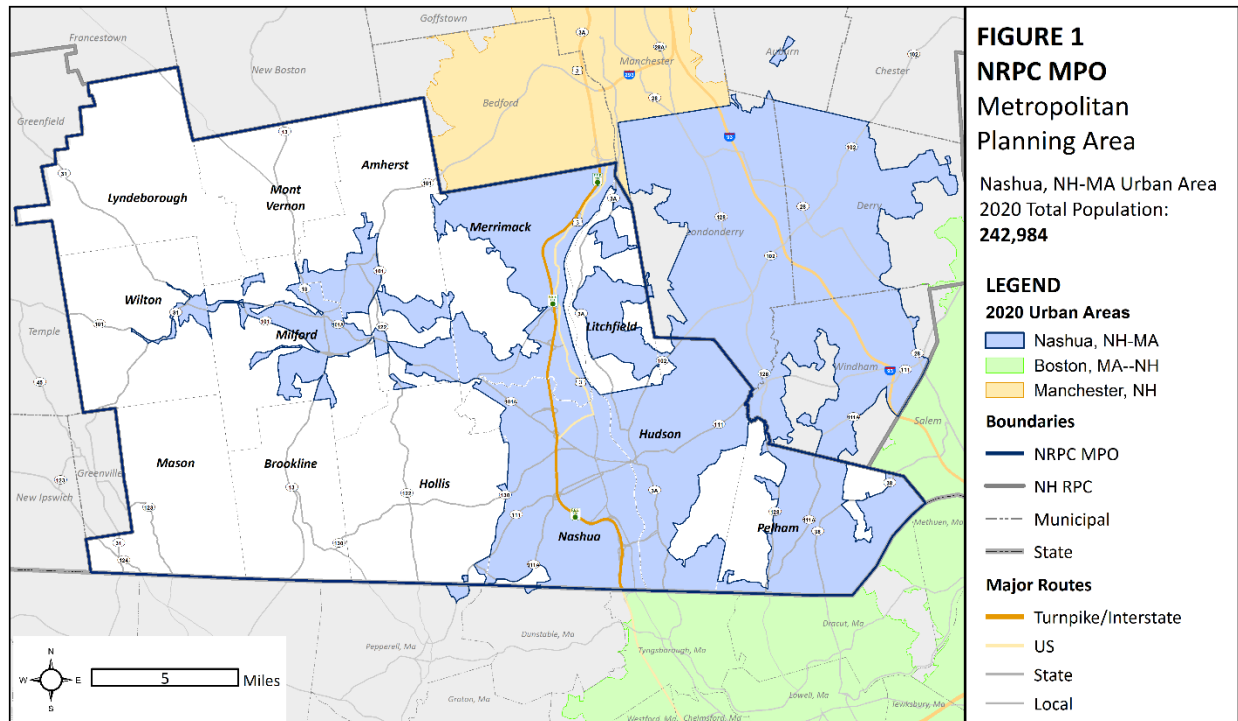
other critical trips. Communities nationwide rely on volunteer driver programs as a cost-effective and flexible way to address these unmet transportation needs. A VDP uses volunteer drivers to transport persons with special transportation needs, who because of physical or mental disability, income status, or age, are unable to transport themselves or afford transportation. Volunteer drivers frequently use their own cars to provide door-to-door transportation assistance.

VDPs can save money for transportation providers by lowering or eliminating certain costs. In addition to providing vital transportation, they provide an element of social connectedness for their riders and drivers. However, a VDP may be a supplement within a larger coordinated transportation system that provides flexibility in filling gaps for senior citizens, residents living with a disability, and individuals with limited vehicle access. As the demographics of the United States continue to shift, there is an expected increase in demand for volunteer driver programs.

There are approximately twenty (20) publicly accessible volunteer driver programs in New Hampshire. They range from very small operations with just a few drivers and volunteer coordinators, to relatively large organizations with paid staff. None of the publicly accessible VDPs have offices in the Greater Nashua Region and only 3 provide limited service to selected communities within the region.

The Nashua Transit System provides both fixed routes and on-demand responsive transportation services in the Nashua region. However, in several communities, the lack of available, affordable, and accessible transportation is problematic for senior citizens, residents living with a disability, and individuals with limited vehicle access.

EXISTING CONDITIONS



Existing Public Transit Services

The following public and non-profit transit providers serve the Greater Nashua region.

Nashua Transit System (NTS)

The Nashua Transit System (NTS) is a public bus system that serves the City of Nashua. The NTS city bus system is a fixed route service with more than 400 bus stops running several routes Monday through Friday, 6 a.m.-9:45 p.m., and Saturdays, 9 a.m.-6 p.m.

Single adult fare is \$1.25. Monthly passes, tickets, and discounted rates for students, veterans, and persons with disabilities are offered. Persons aged 60 and older, and children under age 5 ride for free.

In addition to its fixed route service, NTS offers ADA Complimentary Paratransit and Demand Response Services. ADA Complimentary Paratransit is provided through the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act. This service is for persons with a physical and/or mental condition that makes it difficult for them to ride a fixed-route bus and/or access a fixed-route bus stop. ADA Complimentary Paratransit service covers $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile of NTS' fixed route bus line. Pickups and drop-offs must be made at locations within $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile of a city bus stop. The fare is \$2.50 each way. Passengers can pay cash, exact change, or purchase tickets in advance of their trip.

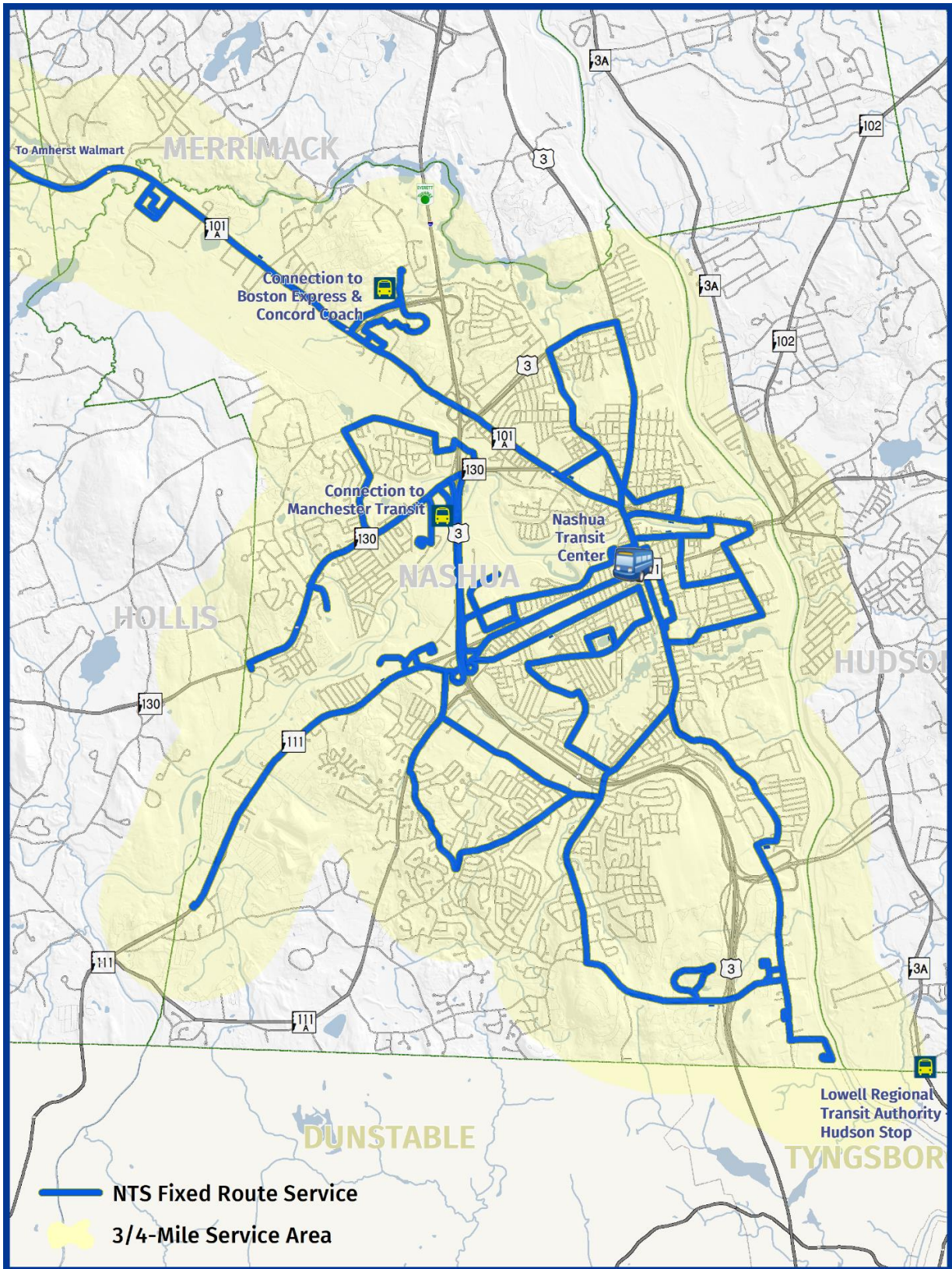
NTS Demand Response Services transport residents of several surrounding towns, Merrimack, and Hudson, into Nashua, as well as within their communities, for medical and non-medical trips. Fares and hours of operation differ between the various demand response services.

All NTS vehicles (city buses and paratransit vans) are 100% ADA accessible.

Boston Express

Boston Express is a subsidiary of Concord Coach Lines that operates between southern New Hampshire and Boston. The only service location within the Nashua region is from their bus terminal at 8 North Southwood Drive near Exit 8 on Everett Turnpike. Service is provided between Boston South Station and Boston Logan International Airport. The first departure from

Figure 2: Fixed-Route Transit Serving the NRPC Region

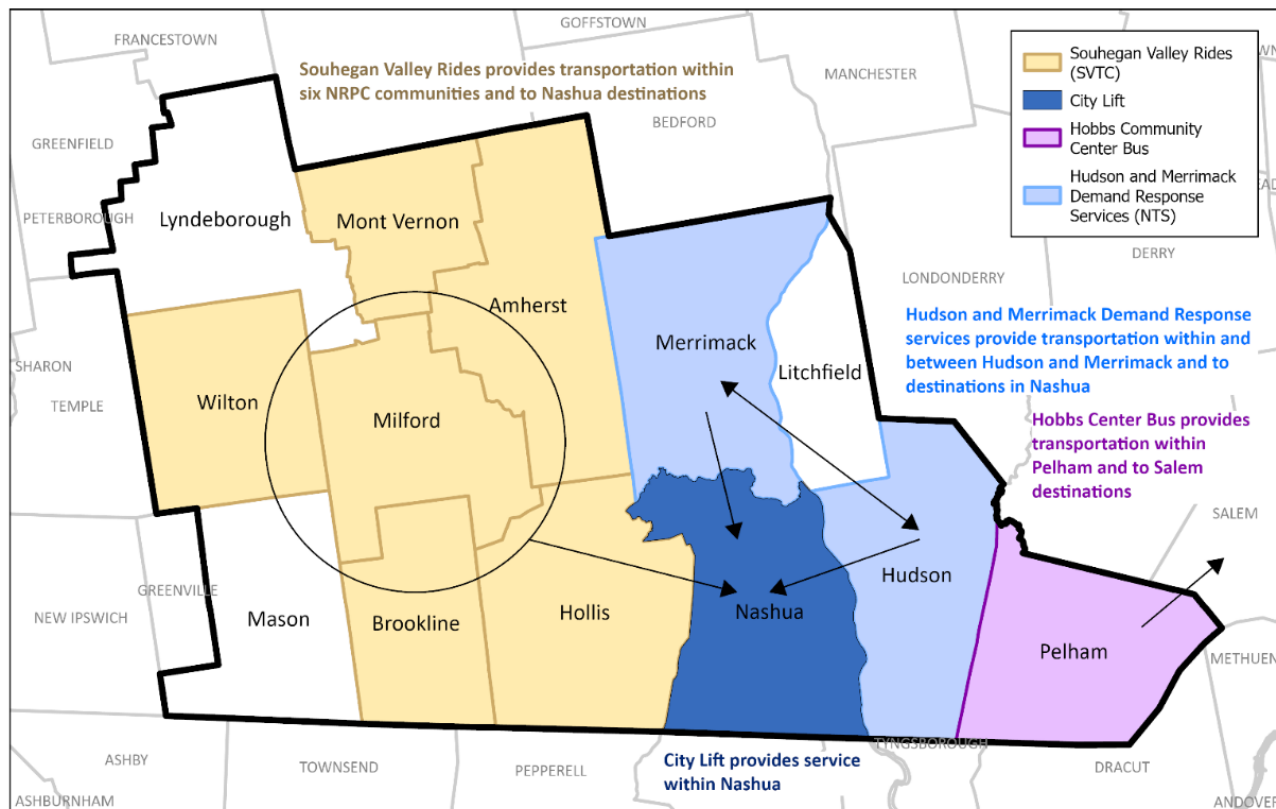


The Nashua station going southbound leaves at 5:20 a.m. while the last one leaves at 8:30 p.m. on weekdays (6:00 a.m./8:30 p.m. first/last departures on the weekends). Arrivals into the Nashua station are between 9:45 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. on weekdays and weekends. Fares start at \$20 per trip with discounts for multi-trip passes. All Boston Express buses are wheelchair lift equipped. Boston Express also provides reasonable accommodations for storing and handling mobility aids, oxygen, respirators, and other assistance aids. In addition, service animals are welcome. The stop at Boston South Station provides convenient access to the MBTA and transfers to most of the medical centers in Boston.

Souhegan Valley Rides

Souhegan Valley Rides is a demand-response transit service that is available to residents of Amherst, Brookline, Hollis, Milford, Mont Vernon, and Wilton. This service is provided in collaboration with the Nashua Transit System. Rides are provided within these towns, as well as, to and from Nashua. The vehicles, drivers, and call center services are subcontracted from the NTS. Their buses are wheelchair accessible and operate Monday through Friday from 8 AM to 6 PM. Pre-registration is required to use the service. Fares are \$2 per trip and rides need to be scheduled at least 48 hours in advance on business days. Souhegan Valley Rides is unable to provide service to individuals permanently residing in licensed assisted living or long-term care facilities. Ride priority is given to senior citizens and those living with a disability and for non-emergency healthcare appointments. Rides to other types of destinations, such as social service agencies, municipal offices, local courts, senior activities, and shopping locations are available. Non-seniors and able-bodied individuals are eligible to use the service provided they do not displace priority riders.

Figure 3: Demand-Response Transportation Service in the NRPC Region



Existing Volunteer Driver Programs in the Greater Nashua Region

There are several Volunteer Driver Programs (VDP) that provide at least some service in the Greater Nashua region. The VDP organizations and services require *pre-registration* with an application form – they then require a certain amount of lead time to *schedule* a ride. Those programs are briefly described here and then are described in more detail later in this document.

Caregivers

Caregivers is a non-profit program of Catholic Charities NH that assists the frail, elderly, and disabled with non-medical support and transportation in the immediate Nashua area, Greater Manchester area, and the Lakes Region in New Hampshire. In our region, Caregivers serve Amherst, Hollis, Hudson, Litchfield, Merrimack, Milford, and Nashua. Their Caring Rides program provides transportation assistance for rides - health-related and other essential appointments. There are no fares, but donations are encouraged. Rides require pre-registration to schedule a trip.

Community Volunteer Transportation Company (CVTC)

CVTC is a non-profit organization that provides transportation in Cheshire County and the Monadnock Region to those who do not have access due to age, ability, economic situation, or other limiting circumstances. A part of their service area includes Mason in our region. Trip purposes include non-emergency medical and social service appointments and trips to the grocery store and the pharmacy. CVTC provides these services through its VDP. Rides are free

and do require pre-registration to schedule a trip. Trips are restricted to a two-hour drive time radius of the CVTC service area.

Greater Salem Caregivers

Greater Salem Caregivers is a VDP that assists homebound adults and elders to maintain independence by providing services such as transportation to medical appointments, grocery shopping, and friendly visiting. A part of their service area includes Pelham in our region. The Greater Salem Caregivers serves Pelham and Salem. It does provide limited volunteer service for residents for travel outside Pelham and Salem – if a volunteer driver is available. Transportation is their single most requested service. Most of their transportation services are directly linked to the client’s health. There are no fares, but donations are encouraged. Rides do require an unknown amount of pre-registration to schedule a trip.

Hobbs Community Center Bus

The Hobbs Community Center (HCC) Bus is available free of charge to all Pelham Senior residents and is run by the Pelham Senior Center. The bus provides round-trip service to the HCC for lunch and activities, and transportation to local retail, service, and medical facilities is also available. The Hobbs Community Center Bus is handicapped and wheelchair accessible. Door-to-door service is provided for each rider. Personal care attendants can ride the bus. There are no fares, but donations are encouraged. Rides do require an unknown amount of pre-registration to schedule a trip.

Figure 4: Volunteer Driver Programs Serving the NRPC Region

such as the Gate City Bike Coop. Other groups that have recently attended the RRC7 meetings include the NAACP, Nashua’s Public Health Community Workers, the United Way, and the International Institute Agency.

The Mobility Manager’s activities include, but are limited to:

- Making referrals to individuals and case managers from social service organizations.
- Participating in state and regional transportation meetings and subcommittees, such as the Volunteer Driver Program networking group.
- Building partnerships with representatives from low-income, elderly, and disabled adult population segments, veterans’ groups, and housing complexes serving transit-dependent populations.
- Collaborating with the other Mobility Managers in New Hampshire to find solutions to individual mobility challenges.

The Mobility Manager has responded to the following transportation-related requests between August 2022 and May 2023.

Mobility Management Requests	
Type of request	# of Requests
Trip to Medical Need	33
General Transportation Info	18
Trip to Work	8
Bike	6
Trip to School	4
Transportation to Food	3
Travel Training	3
Bus Pass Info	3
Bus Employment	2
Trip to Church	1
Trip to Court	1
Trip to Voting	1
Trip to Social	1
Total Requests:	84

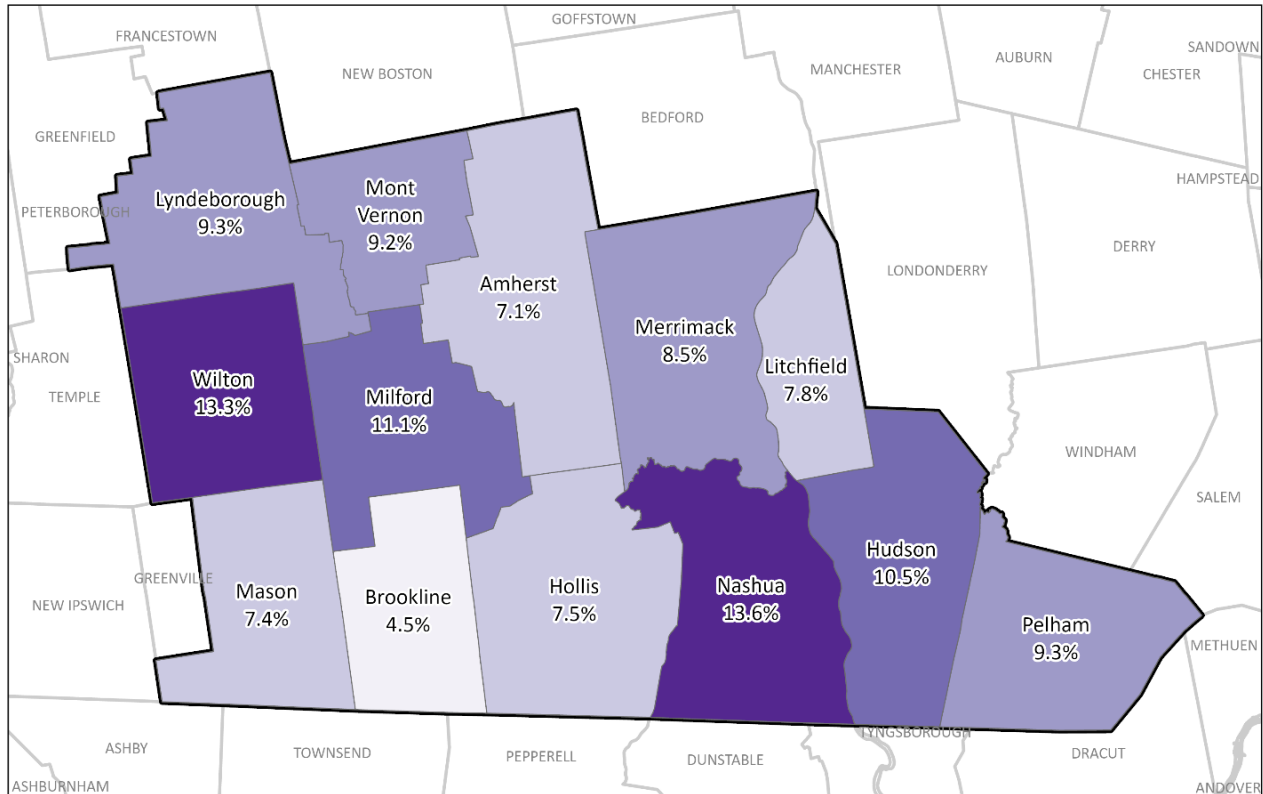
Demographics

The population groups that typically depend on VDPs are senior citizens, residents living with a disability, and residents with very low incomes. Statistics were gathered from the US Census Bureau to assess the need and gain insight into where these target populations are located within the Nashua region.

Public transit access can provide a lifeline for those who live with disabilities that can significantly limit mobility, including visual impairments, physical handicaps, or mental health

conditions. Approximately 9% of NRPC region residents live with some form of disability.¹ Within the region, the highest concentrations of disabled residents live in areas already served by public transit. Smaller concentrations of disabled residents can be found near the Hudson Town Center, the east side and downtown areas of Milford, the Daniel Webster Highway corridor of Merrimack, and Wilton. Disabled populations appear to cluster in areas with higher shares of multi-family and institutional housing and with close access to commercial uses and public services.

Figure 5: Percentage of Population with a Disability by Town, NRPC Region



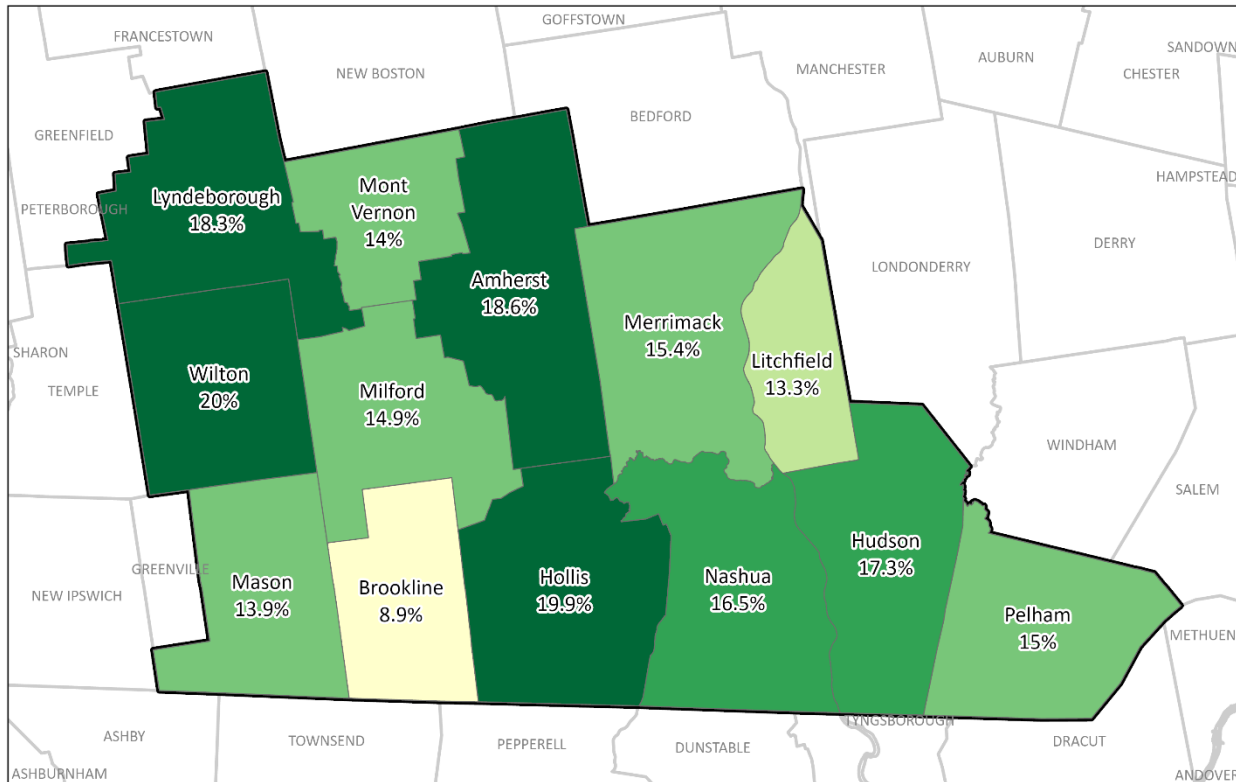
Source: 2020 ACS 5-year estimates, Table S1810

The largest group of residents who typically utilize VDPs are older adults, so they can maintain their independence while still having access to medical and other essential services. Roughly 15% of the population in the NRPC region is aged 65 or older. Amherst (18.6%), Hollis (19.9%), and Wilton (20.5%) are the towns in the NRPC region with the highest population percentages falling into this age bracket. A single bus from Nashua to the Walmart in Amherst is the only fixed route service in this area. These towns have paratransit rides by Souhegan Valley Rides demand response buses.

¹ The US Census Bureau includes six different kinds of disabilities: hearing difficulty, vision difficulty, cognitive difficulty, ambulatory difficulty, self-care difficulty, and independent living difficulty. Respondents who reported any one of the six types are considered to have a disability.

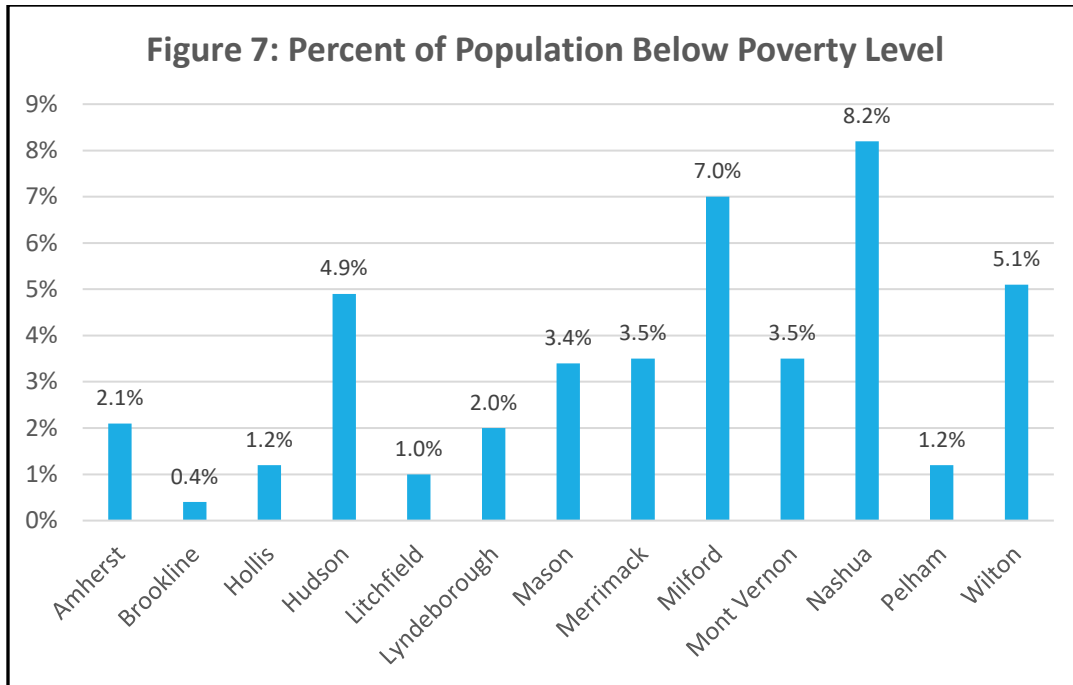
On average, roughly 3% of the population in the NRPC region is below the poverty level. An annual income of about \$36,000 or less is considered within the poverty level for our region. The communities with the largest percentage of the population falling below the poverty level are Nashua (8.2%), Milford (7%), and Hudson (4.9%).

Figure 6: Percentage of Population Age 65 and Older by Town, NRPC Region



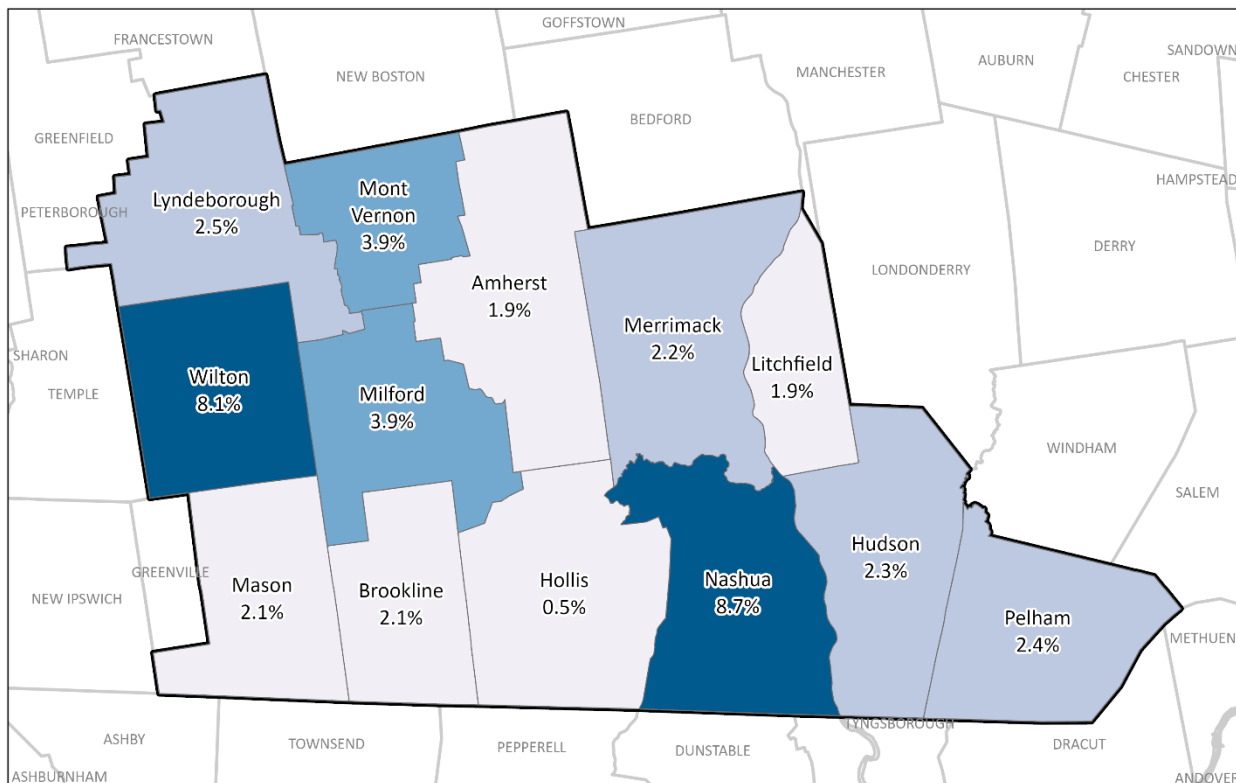
Source: 2020 ACS 5-year estimates, Table S0101

Another important measurement when considering the need for transportation services is the ability of households to access a personal vehicle. Regionally and statewide, about 5% of households do not have access to a vehicle. About 71% (2,903) of the 4,071 households that do not have a vehicle in the region – reside in Nashua. The observation can be made that the most densely packed tracts along major transportation networks with access to public transportation and other services, tend to have higher percentages of households without access to a vehicle. An exception is the town of Wilton, which is a rural community but has the second-highest percentage of households without access to a vehicle in the region.



Source: 2020 ACS 5-year estimates, Table S1701

Figure 8: Percent Occupied Housing Units with No Vehicle Available by Town, NRPC Region



Source: 2020 ACS 5-yr estimates, Table S2504

TRANSPORTATION PLAN REVIEW

The proposed projects, goals, and recommendations from several regional and statewide transportation plans were reviewed so that previous efforts to address gaps in the transportation system via a VDP and through enhanced regional mobility management could be considered. The following summary of these plans verifies the need for additional transportation options, such as a VDP in meeting the transportation needs of the Nashua region.

2019-2045 Nashua Region Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)

The MTP is a comprehensive, multimodal “blueprint” for transportation systems and services aimed at meeting mobility needs and improving the overall quality of life of residents in the region over a 20+ year planning horizon.

The MTP vision is to promote a comprehensive and reliable multi-modal transportation system that enables universal access for all travelers, including disabled, youths, and seniors to all points within and beyond the region.

This VDP study addresses several of the *mobility* goals that were adopted for the MTP, including improving the availability of transportation options for people and assuring that all communities are provided access to the regional transportation system.

Locally Coordinated Transportation Plan for the Greater Nashua and Milford Region (LCTP), 2020 - 2024

The purpose of the LCTP is to streamline and improve the planning and coordination of transportation services for older adults, individuals with disabilities, and people with low incomes, and to assist state agencies, transportation providers, transportation coordinators, and other community agencies to help individuals meet their transportation needs. The goals of the LCTP are to provide strategies for meeting local and regional needs, including addressing gaps in service, to prioritizing project implementation and funding.

New Hampshire Statewide Coordination of Community Transportation Services Plan – Final Report

The New Hampshire Statewide Coordination of Community Transportation Services Plan (January 2017) states that the main goal of the RCCs should be to encourage true coordinated transportation. This includes implementing applicable best practices to increase funding opportunities, trips, and individuals served. The report goes on to suggest that centralized mobility management strategies can facilitate more effective resource coordination and improved community transportation services. A regional VDP will provide an additional transportation service that could then be coordinated with the transportation services already operating in the region. Continued development of an enhanced mobility management network among transportation providers and referral sources would improve service delivery and public access to needed rides.

Nashua Transit System Comprehensive Plan 2016-2025

This NTS Comprehensive Plan evaluated the condition and effectiveness of existing transit services and facilities and prioritized future service expansions and the corresponding capital requirements over a 10-year planning horizon. The study concluded that the City of Nashua is

currently well served by public transit and may benefit from additional service hours on Saturdays and future service on Sundays. The Comprehensive Plan has medium and long-range goals for service outside of the City of Nashua, but these all depend on increased funding.

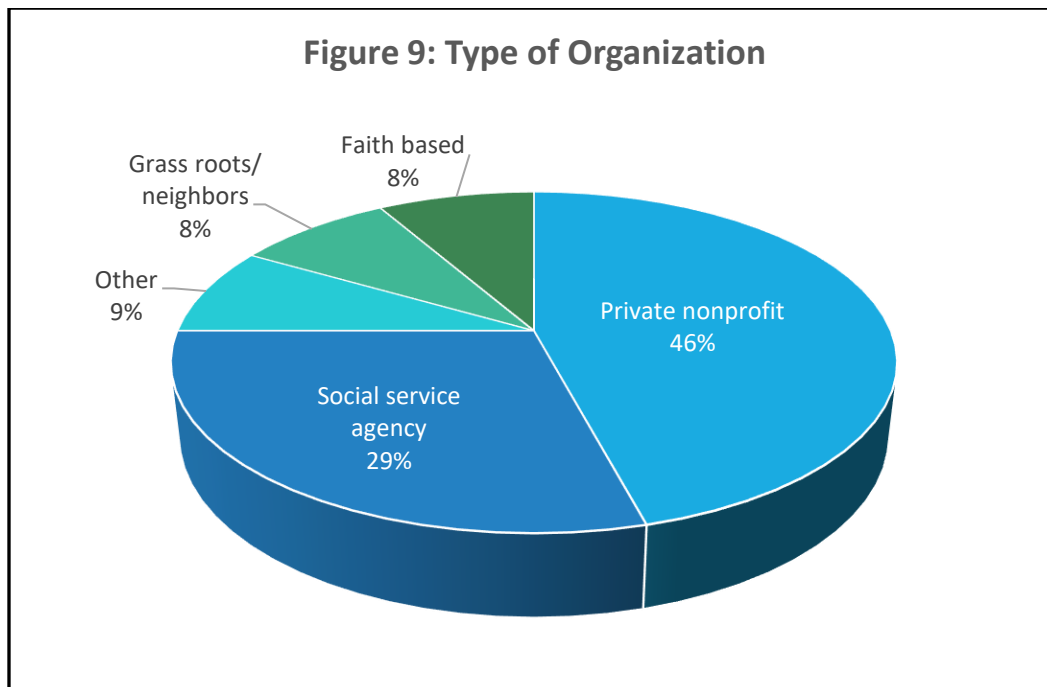
OUTREACH

Survey of Existing VDPs

In the Fall of 2021, a survey was distributed to all known VDPs in New Hampshire. All the organizations in the Nashua region and 13 of the 22 organizations outside the region responded. One organization reported that they use only professional drivers, so their answers have been excluded from this summary. The response rate for the survey was 70%. In addition, calls were made to update this information during this research.

Organization Type

Of the 17 VDPs that completed surveys, 15 self-identified as a nonprofit and or social service agency. The 2 remaining programs were identified solely as a faith-based organization and the other as a community action program.



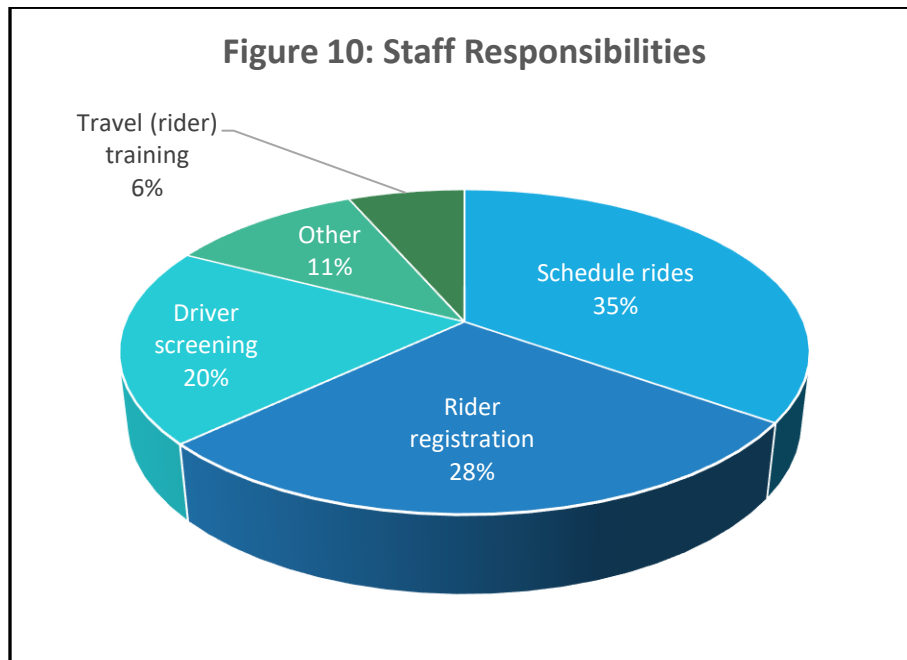
While a few of the VDPs focus just on transportation, most are part of larger organizations that provide a variety of services. Other services range from fuel assistance to food deliveries, housing support, social calls, mobility equipment loans, friendly visiting, and phone support.

Most of the VPDs are well established: 71% of the survey respondents have been operating for more than 10 years. Within the NRPC region, only one program began operating within the last 10 years.

Staffing

Engaging at least 1 person to manage administrative tasks is essential: 100% of the VDPs surveyed utilize non-driver support staff. Approximately 50% of the VDPs have 2 or fewer non-driver staff. Non-driver staff are often paid: 71% of the VDPs have at least 1 paid non-driver staff (see Figure 2). Four of the VDPs utilize only volunteers to help with non-driver tasks.

Scheduling rides is what non-driver staff help with most often. They schedule rides at 16 of the 17 VDPs and help with rider registration and driver screening at more than half of the VDPs. VDP non-driver staff also help with travel training, managing driver reimbursements, marketing, driver recruitment, and data entry.

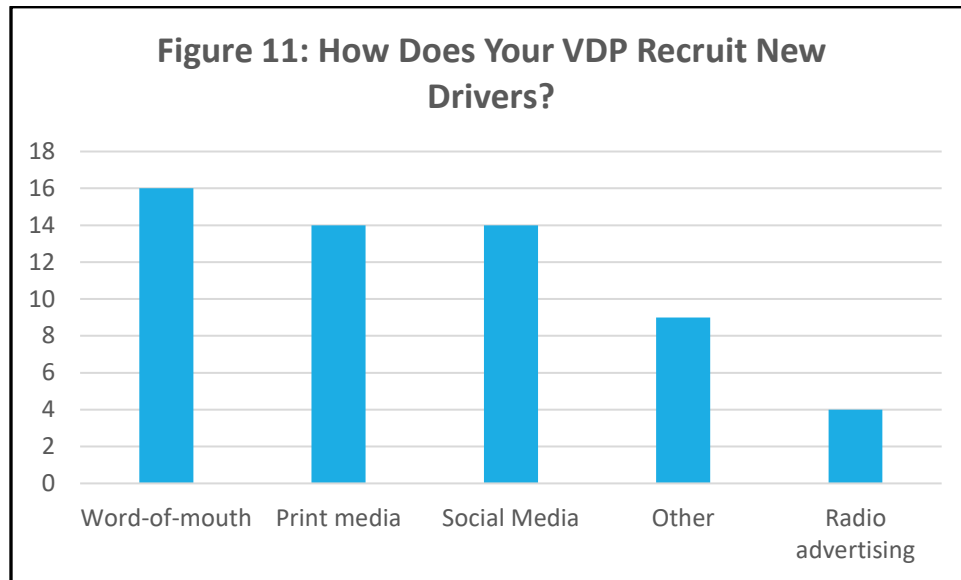


To coordinate rides, 8 VDPs use scheduling software and 9 do not use software. Of those that use software, they use different applications: 2 VDPs use *Route Match*, 2 use *Ride Scheduler*, 1 uses *Assisted Rides*, 1 uses *Q Rides*, and 1 uses a custom application. Using scheduling software does not appear to correlate with the number of volunteer drivers. Some VDPs with as few as 5 to 15 drivers use scheduling software, while some VDPs with more than 50 volunteers do not use scheduling software. Budget does appear to correlate with software: the VDPs that use scheduling software typically have an annual budget of at least \$40,000 while those that do not, typically have budgets below \$25,000.

Volunteer Drivers

Drivers are recruited from and through many different venues. Currently, most programs recruit from the public via word-of-mouth, print, and social media. Radio advertising is less utilized (Figure 4). VDPs also leverage flyers and connections with organizations such as faith

communities, senior centers, and community centers. Two VPDs mentioned using existing volunteer networks including the Retired Senior Volunteers Program (RSVP) and Volunteer NH.



59% of the surveyed programs provide mileage reimbursement to volunteer drivers. Mileage reimbursement rates range from \$0.35 to \$0.56 per mile. The present federal rate is \$0.655 per mile. Volunteers are expected to use their vehicles at all the VDPs; three VDPs also provide some vehicles for volunteer use.

Volunteer drivers are expected to carry their insurance. All 17 VDPs require their volunteer drivers to carry a personal auto insurance policy, and 11 of the VDPs also have a general liability insurance policy or umbrella policy. Four carry additional insurance including insurance to cover the volunteers themselves.

In addition to requiring proof of car insurance, almost all VDPs review the driver’s motor vehicle record and conduct a criminal background check. Five programs require proof of an annual vehicle inspection and 7 check the Bureau of Elderly and Adult Services (BEAS) state registry.

Some VDPs utilize just a few volunteer drivers, but 13 of the VDPs have at least 15. The number of volunteer drivers at the VDPs ranges from 3 to 116.

Services

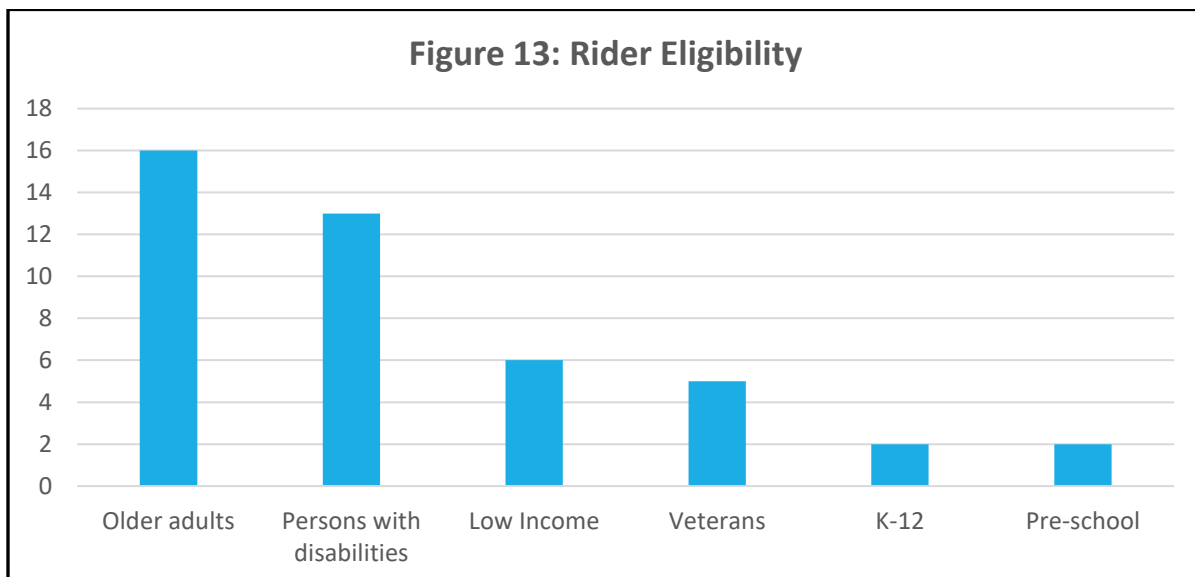
All the VDPs provide rides on weekdays; 8 of 17, or about 48%, also provide rides on weekends. VDPs typically provide rides to only certain types of destinations. All the VDPs that responded provide rides to health care appointments, and most provide rides to pharmacies, grocery stores, and social service offices. Many also provide rides to social activities, faith-based events, and court appointments. Only a few provide rides to school or employment. Six respondents also specified that they offer rides to destinations such as banks, the post office, and hair salons (listed under *others* in Figure 8). The VDPs in our region offer similar services.



Eligibility

VDPs approach ride eligibility in a few different ways. Some, like Community Volunteer Transportation Company, offer rides to anyone who lives within a specific town or group of towns, with no other limitations. On the other end of the spectrum, some VDPs offer rides only to specific populations, such as women just released from prison or people with visual impairments. More typically, VDPs determine eligibility based on a combination of factors, often including age, disability, income, and location.

Almost all the VDPs offer rides to older adults. Some of the VDPs require the older adults to also fall within certain income restrictions. Most VDPs offer rides to individuals who are either older adults (55+ or 60+) or have a disability.



Despite offering rides to individuals with disabilities, a few VDPs specify that riders must be able to transfer independently into the volunteers' private vehicles and those wheelchairs cannot be accommodated.

Annual Budgets and Miles Driven

Many of the organizations noted that the COVID-19 pandemic reduced the number of drivers, mileage, and number of rides since March 2020. Some shared recent totals as well as totals from 2019.

Not all VDPs disclosed their annual operating budget or kept track of annual miles driven. Of those that shared these metrics, reported annual budgets range from \$700 to \$228,000. Reported annual miles driven range from 5,500 to 260,000. The average number of miles driven annually was 31,000. A VDP that averages that many miles per year and reimburses mileage at the federal rate of \$0.655 would need a minimum of \$20,305 annually just to reimburse drivers. 8 municipalities in Greater Nashua have VDP programs.

Existing VDP Service in the Nashua Region

In our region, eligible riders who live in Amherst, Hollis, Hudson, Litchfield, Mason, Merrimack, Milford, Nashua, and Pelham can call for rides from at least one VDP. 9 municipalities in Greater Nashua have VDP programs.

Residents of Brookline, Mont Vernon, and Wilton are not eligible for rides unless they are visually impaired and qualify for assistance from Future in Sight, an organization serving the blind, are veterans or have cancer. Lyndeborough residents have no service from either a VDP or a demand response transit service. An additional factor to consider is that some VDPs offer rides to destinations only within their service area or within a limited geographic area, so just because a resident is eligible for a ride does not mean their destination is within an organization's service zone.

What Works

When asked, "What works well for your program?" more than one VDP noted that offering flexibility for volunteer drivers was essential. Drivers like to be able to choose how often, how far, and when they want to drive. It should also be easy for volunteers to sign up for rides. A few VDPs stressed the importance of having at least one paid non-driver staff person to oversee volunteers and coordinate tasks. Another strategy that works well for at least one VDP is to partner with a transit agency to utilize their call center. At least one respondent emphasized that using a database or some sort of software is critical for collecting data and developing statistics for strategizing.

When asked, "What does not work well for your program?" Some respondents noted that short notice rides or same-day requests do not work well for their drivers. The downside of offering flexibility to the drivers, which is good for the driver experience, is that it can lead to time-based gaps in service. COVID-19 restrictions and concerns were a major challenge for many VDPs.

Other Stakeholders

NRPC conducted a robust public outreach to local human service agencies, transportation provider agencies, health care providers, local welfare directors, community transportation users, and the general public in the Greater Nashua RCC area during the development of the Locally Coordinated Transportation Plan for the Greater Nashua and Milford Region in April 2020. The purpose of the outreach was to understand the needs of these stakeholders and identify gaps in transportation services. The findings from the outreach effort were used to inform this study.

The primary tools of this assessment were surveys and follow-up interviews with major health care providers and human services providers including interviews with municipal welfare officers, faith-based groups, transitional housing, and youth-supporting entities. Three surveys were developed and used.

The following sections summarize the themes of each endeavor and some general observations of the responses.

Welfare Officer Survey

This survey was crafted for Welfare Officers in the Nashua region to gain insight into their unique perspective on the daily transportation needs of their clients.

The survey asked questions about the number of applications they receive for municipal welfare funds, the approximate percentage of applicants that have difficulty obtaining transportation to their desired destinations, why applicants have difficulty obtaining transportation, and the destinations they are not able to get to. The Welfare Officers were also asked to provide general comments about transportation issues for their clients.

The following is a summary of responses:

- Approximately 24% of welfare applicants have difficulty obtaining transportation to their desired locations.
- 83% said their clients do not have access to a personal vehicle.
- 67% said their clients do not have access to public transit.
- 50% said their clients can't drive themselves, can't rely on others to drive them, and can't afford Lyft/Uber/private taxis.
- 25% said their clients do not have access to a volunteer driver network, do not have a driver's license, and are not aware of any volunteer driver network.
- Only 8% said their clients do not have difficulty obtaining transportation.
- Less than half of Welfare Officers said their municipality offers financial assistance for obtaining transportation services.
- Recognizing the steps that have been taken by many municipalities in the region to meet the needs of an aging population include supporting Souhegan Valley Rides, funding paratransit service from NTS, organizing interest group discussions, offering fixed route public transit, and providing paratransit service for the elderly and disabled.
- Some Welfare Officers said there is a relatively low volume of clients who lack transportation, but others cited the need for the following:

- Provide demand response services to residents within Hudson and Merrimack to grocery stores, senior centers, and doctor appointments within those towns and to Nashua,
- Provide public transportation connections between Milford and NTS to access employment,
- Provide public transit between Nashua and Manchester on US Route 3 through Merrimack that would provide a connection between two major cities and additional connections to transportation that can take riders to destinations outside of the region.

Human Service Agency and Transportation Provider Survey

This survey was directed at human service agencies and transportation providers in the Nashua region. A link to the online survey was emailed to as many human service agencies and transportation providers in the Greater Nashua RCC region that could be identified. NRPC staff followed up with additional emails and phone calls to encourage participation.

The survey asked questions about the client groups each agency works with, the geographic area covered, whether the agency provides transportation, and if so, what type of transportation, funding sources, percentage of clients that have difficulty obtaining transportation to desired destinations plus the reasons why, and other general comments.

Twenty-nine agencies completed the survey including the Nashua Soup Kitchen and Shelter, SHARE Outreach, Bridges Domestic, and Sexual Violence Support, St. Joseph's Community Services (SJCS), NTS, SVTC, Servicelink, Partnership for Successful Living,

The following is a general summary of responses:

- 71% of clients are individuals with disabilities, 68% are low income, 61% are senior citizens, 57% are women, 50% are veterans, 50% minorities, 46% are homeless, 36% are youth, 32% have mental health issues, and 32% victims of domestic abuse.
- 82% of responding agencies are private nonprofits.
- Only 59% of the responding agencies provide some form of transportation.

Responses from agencies that *do* provide transportation:

- Of the 16 agencies that do provide transportation, 11 of them provide transportation using their vehicles, 3 use third-party providers, 1 reimburses clients, and only 1 uses a VDP.
- Less than 40% of their clients have difficulty getting to their desired locations.
- Nine provide door-to-door demand response service, 7 provide deviated routes, 4 provide curb-to-curb demand response, 4 provide fixed-route, and 2 provide door-through-door.
- The most pressing needs cited are transportation to medical appointments within and outside the region, grocery shopping, employment, and basic needs in general.
- Specific destinations cited include Southern New Hampshire Medical Center (SNHMC) in Nashua and Milford, Opportunity Networks programs, medical facilities outside the

area such as Massachusetts General Hospital, Brigham and Women's, Beth Israel Deaconess, Holy Family Hospital, St. Joseph's in Nashua, and Derry Medical Center.

- Obstacles include reluctance on the part of other groups/organizations to engage in cooperative ventures that might create change or new processes. Limited volunteer and staff time to champion new initiatives. Limited funding. Limited flexibility of drop off and pick up times of NTS paratransit service.
- There is some interest among agencies in coordinating purchasing rides for clients, coordinated planning, and cooperative funding development.

Responses from agencies that do not provide transportation:

- Of the 11 agencies that do not provide transportation, all of them said their clients can't afford Uber/Lyft/private taxi, 10 agencies said clients can't drive themselves, 10 said clients don't have access to a personal vehicle, 9 said clients can't depend on others to drive, 8 said clients don't have a driver's license, 7 said clients don't have access to fixed-route bus and 7 said clients don't have access to volunteer driver network.
- Approximately 52% of their clients have trouble getting transport to a desired destination.
- These agencies reported that access to employment, health care/counseling/mental health appointments, social services and state assistance appointments, grocery shopping, pharmacy, social or civic activities, and court appointments is somewhat significant to a significant problem because of lack of transportation.
- Most agencies said they would be interested in being part of an ongoing planning process to improve community transportation service options.

Youth Outreach

NRPC attempted to gather information from entities that support young people, including transitional housing groups and staff at schools that manage the McKinney-Vento (K-12) program. The populations of youth represented by these entities are homeless and underserved. The consensus about the transportation needs of underserved youth is the following:

- Homeless youth live in transitional housing shelters, on a friend's couch, or in a camp.
- They need transportation to Milford, Merrimack, Hudson, and Manchester
- They need transportation to work, housing, and training.
- Lack of transportation limits where they work, live, and train.
- The bus is an issue because it can take 2 hours to get to a location that takes 15 minutes to drive to.
- They like Uber because they are comfortable with the app.

General Public Survey

This survey was directed at the general public to identify the needs of actual and potential users of community transportation. The survey was distributed to numerous agencies, senior centers, and senior housing locations. 290 individuals completed the survey.

The survey asked questions about where individuals reside, how significant a problem obtaining transportation is, if they are aware of community transportation options, if individuals use some form of community transportation if they would use community transportation if it were available, and the activities to which they would travel.

- 42% of respondents are from Nashua, 20% from Milford, 19% Merrimack, 6% Wilton, 5% Brookline
- 75% were 65+ years old, 22% are between 36 - 65 years old. The skewed response from people over 65 is factored into their responses and has skewed the results. People over 65 generally do not have young children, have completed schooling, and are probably retired.
- A relatively sizable percentage of respondents said that getting to the following destinations is not a problem: school (90%) childcare (87%), court appointments (82%), employment (80%), social services (64%), social activities (62%), pharmacy (52%), grocery store (48%), health care/counseling /mental health appointments (48%).
- Additionally, a small but significant percentage of respondents said that getting to the following destinations is a big problem: health care/counseling /mental health appointments (30%), grocery shopping (30%), pharmacy (23%), social services (20%), social events (16%), employment (14%), court appointments (9%), childcare (6%), and school (6%).
- 40% said their community is somewhat or very well served by community transportation, 10% said underserved, 20% not served at all, and 30% said they did not know.
- 32% currently use community transportation, 68% do not.
- Specific destinations cited included CMC, SNHMC, Dartmouth-Hitchcock, St. Joseph's (Milford and Nashua), Nashua Coliseum Avenue, Merrimack Pain Clinic, Radiation Center of Greater Nashua, Hannaford's, Shaw's, Nashua Primary PCP, SHARE.

VOLUNTEER DRIVER PROGRAM MODELS

Caregivers

The [Caregivers](#) is a program of Catholic Charities NH that assists the frail, elderly, and disabled with non-medical support in the Manchester, Nashua, and Lake Regions areas. Clients must be at or below 130% of the poverty level (approximately \$20,000) and over the age of 62 or have a verified disability.

Support includes several services and programs for individuals who may not receive aid through a private human service group and do not qualify for government assistance programs or sliding fees. Also, Caregivers provide service to those individuals who may be receiving assistance from other agencies but have additional needs that have gone unmet or unrecognized.

Caring Rides is the most requested service. Caring Rides provides free transportation assistance to medical appointments, and trips to the pharmacy via a VDP. Service is provided to eligible residents in Alton, Amherst, Auburn, Bedford, Candia, Goffstown, Hooksett, Hollis, Hudson, Litchfield, Manchester, Merrimack, Milford, Nashua, and Wolfeboro. Volunteer drivers use their own vehicles to provide rides and do not receive mileage reimbursement. Drivers must have car insurance, a clean driving record, and must agree to a criminal background check. Paid staff provide driver screening, rider registration, ride scheduling, and travel training. The program uses computer software to schedule rides.

The Caregivers - 2022 Service Data

Categories	
Completed Rides	4,494
Riders served	217
Volunteer Drivers	116
Miles driven	21,450
Volunteer hours donated	4306
Value of miles at \$.625/mi. IRS rate	\$13,406
Value of donated hours @ \$18 per hour. DOT value	\$77,508

Community Volunteer Transportation Company (CVTC)

CVTC is a 501(c)(3) non-profit established in 2008. CVTC has been providing VDP services ever since from their office in Peterborough. Most of CVTC’s funding comes from the Federal Transit Administration 5310 program via NHDOT.

From 2008 through June 2016, the CVTC VDP served the 13 towns in the Monadnock Region (3 in Cheshire County and 10 in Hillsborough County). Starting in July 2016, CVTC absorbed the American Red Cross transportation program in Keene and now serves 34 towns, having added Mason to the service area in 2017.

The VDP is the only CVTC program. It provides no-fee rides to non-emergency medical and social service appointments, and basic need destinations (grocery store, pharmacy, post office, and bank) for residents who do not drive or do not have access to a vehicle because of their age, ability, income and/or life circumstances. CVTC serves all who call, with an emphasis on seniors and people with disabilities. CVTC also provides rides for people whose mobility is dependent on a wheelchair by way of a subcontract with regional wheelchair-van providers at no cost to the rider. Volunteer drivers use their own vehicles to provide rides and are provided the option for mileage reimbursement. Drivers must have car insurance, a clean driving record, and must agree to a criminal background check. Paid staff provide driver screening, rider registration, rider scheduling, and travel training. The program uses computer software to schedule rides.

CVTC staff register riders’ requests in *TripList*, a proprietary web-based software system. Driver’s login to select the rides that fit their availability. CVTC does not dispatch trips. After the ride is complete, drivers log their miles and volunteer hours into *Triplist*. Their monthly reports are generated for mileage reimbursement and data collection. Drivers donate their time and, if they choose, receive mileage reimbursement from funds provided through the Federal Transit Administration 5310 program through NHDOT.

CVTC actively participates in regional efforts in coordination and collaboration for community transportation and has been a member of the Monadnock Region Coordination Council on Community Transportation (MRCC) since its inception in 2006.

The program manager said that a nimble operating model, no vehicle fleet, reimbursing volunteers for their mileage, giving drivers the flexibility in choosing the rides that fit their schedules, using scheduling software that provides online trip management, and good data for providing program metrics work well for the program. Additionally, allowing paid staff to work remotely during COVID-19 worked well. An ongoing challenge is running an organization that relies solely on volunteers, especially during a pandemic. Flexibility in scheduling is a strength, but this can also create a gap in service when rides are not selected and riders need to be notified (riders are given 48 hours' notice when a ride request cannot be filled).

CVTC - 2022 Service Data

Categories	Monadnock Region Total
Completed rides	3,253
Riders served	325
Volunteer Drivers	72
Miles driven	96,491
Volunteer hours donated	4,669
Value of miles at \$.625/mi. IRS rate	\$60,307
Value of donated hours @ \$18 per hour. DOT value	\$84,042

CVTC - 2022 - Operating Budget Snapshot

Income		Income Sources
- Public Support	\$101,491	Business, Individual, and municipal donations and special events Foundations, trusts, and other FTA/NHDOT 5310 Funding
- Grants	\$44,997	
- FTA NHDOT Funding	\$80,022	
Total:	\$226,510	
Expenses		
- Facilities & Equipment	\$9,574	Rent, utilities, office equipment Salaries, benefits, insurance, marketing, advertising... Background checks, mileage reimbursement, accessible van
- Operations	\$155,322	
- VDP Program	\$46,484	
Total:	\$211,380	

Greater Salem Caregivers

Greater Salem Caregivers assists homebound adults and elders to maintain independence by providing services such as transport to medical appointments, grocery shopping, and friendly visiting. Transportation is their single most requested service. Most of their transportation services are directly linked to the client’s health. The program allows individuals to practice preventative health care by making it possible for them to see a doctor regularly.

Eligible riders are Salem and Pelham residents only who are older adults or adults who have a disability or are low-income veterans. Volunteer drivers use their own vehicles to provide rides and are provided mileage reimbursement. Drivers must have personal car insurance, a clean driving record, and agree to a criminal background check. Paid staff provide driver screening, rider registration, rider scheduling, and travel training. The program does not use computer software to schedule rides. They do not have a contract for wheelchair transportation.

Greater Salem Caregivers 2021 Service Data

Categories	
Completed Rides	1,773
Riders served	192
Miles driven	49,380
Volunteer hours donated	4,430
Value of miles at \$.625/mi. IRS rate	\$30,862.50
Value of donated hours @ \$18 per hour. DOT value	\$79,740

Transportation Assistance for Seacoast Citizens (TASC)

The mission of Transportation Assistance for Seacoast Citizens (TASC) is to help people maintain their health, independence, and dignity by mobilizing volunteer drivers to provide rides to eligible residents of the NH Seacoast communities. TASC is a private non-profit neighbor-helping-neighbor organization. Service is provided to eligible residents of Brentwood, East Kingston, Exeter, Greenland, Hampton, Hampton Falls, Kensington, North Hampton, Rye, Seabrook, and Stratham.

TASC provides no-fee rides to non-emergency medical appointments, social service activities, and basic needs (grocery store, pharmacy, post office, and bank). Eligible riders are adults who are age 55 or older or have a disability or medical challenge that prevents them from driving. Adults under the age of 55 must fall into the disabilities/medical challenges category. Volunteer drivers use their own vehicles to provide rides and are provided mileage reimbursement. Drivers must have car insurance, a clean driving record, and must agree to a criminal background check.

Paid staff provide driver screening, rider registration, rider scheduling, and travel training. The program uses computer software (*RideScheduler*) to schedule rides.

The program manager said that good customer service for both passengers and volunteer drivers, making it easy for volunteers to sign up for rides, allowing volunteers the flexibility to choose whatever rides fit their schedule, and good communication between the office, volunteers, and passengers all work well for this program. Assigning volunteers to a fixed schedule does not work well.

TASC owns a wheelchair-accessible minivan which is only driven by a core of specially trained drivers.

TASC - 2022 Service Data

Categories	
Completed Rides	3,064
Riders served	145
Volunteer Drivers	42
Miles driven	54,431
Volunteer hours donated	2,948
Value of miles at \$.625/mi. IRS rate	\$34,019
Value of donated hours @ \$18 per hour. DOT value	\$53,064

TASC - 2022 - Operating Budget Snapshot

Income		Income Sources
- Public Support	\$128,514	Business, Individual, and Municipal donations and special events Foundations, trusts, and other FTA/NHDOT 5310 Funding
- Grants	\$26,400	
- FTA/DOT	\$0	
Total:	\$154,914	
Expenses		
- Facilities & Equipment	\$0	Rent, utilities, office equipment Salaries, benefits, insurance, marketing, advertising... Background checks, mileage reimbursement, accessible van
- Operations	\$103,862	
- Program	\$11,273	
Total:	\$115,135	

TRIP Metro North – Malden, MA

Hosted by Mystic Valley Elder Services (MVES), TRIP Metro North is a program where seniors recruit the drivers themselves. The program is based in Malden MA. TRIP stands for “Transportation Reimbursement and Information Project.” When MVES was first looking for a model for their volunteer driver program, they found the TRIP model, a successful program that originated in Riverside, California, and has been replicated in other parts of the country. MVES chose this model because it fits with the value of person-centered care by putting the person who needs transportation in control of finding a volunteer. Participants in TRIP Metro North are given mileage reimbursements for the trips they take. They then personally reimburse the drivers for the rides. All rides are negotiated between the rider and the driver. There are no limits on what kinds of destinations are allowed or when the trip occurs.

Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) – Community Driver Program

The Vermont Community Driver Program is a network of paid and volunteer drivers managed through regional public transportation providers to offer cost-effective transportation to community members in need of a ride. Volunteer drivers receive mileage reimbursement to provide rides for individuals who live beyond the regular fixed-route and ADA bus service and who do not have access to a car. Volunteer drivers must commit to a specified schedule of when they are available to provide rides.

The program serves those in need of transportation including seniors, individuals with disabilities, and Medicaid clients. Most trips are centered on medical needs; appointments typically range from preventative services to dialysis, radiation treatment, or physical therapy. Other appointments provide rides to senior centers, affordable food locations, and various human services programs. There is also a growing need to help those seeking addiction prevention treatment and counseling services. While most appointments are local, others can be as far as Manchester NH, or Boston MA. Drivers can determine the range of transportation services that they are willing and able to provide.

Local transit systems provide fixed-route and ADA paratransit services. The local short-distance trips that cannot be served by the transit agency, and are not popular with volunteer drivers, are provided by paid Community Drivers. The longer-distance trips are provided by volunteer drivers because those rides are more lucrative due to the mileage reimbursement.

Riders call the local transit provider call center to schedule rides. The dispatcher assigns rides to the transit system, a Community Volunteer Driver, or a volunteer driver.

Community Volunteer Drivers must have a valid driver's license, auto insurance, a solid driving record, and time to share. Drivers are reimbursed for each mile they drive.

The program manager said that a key to the success of the program is very aggressive marketing to attract volunteer drivers.

Ride-Hailing Services (Uber/Lyft)

Some communities are using ride-hailing services such as Lyft and Uber as a form of community transportation.

In 2018, United Way, through its 211 service, partnered with Lyft, to launch Ride United, providing ride-hailing services to people with transportation needs. The goal was to help people get access to essential medical services, complete education programs, get job interviews, and more. According to United Worldwide, since then, this program has served people in over 1,900 cities and towns and has provided over 110,000 free and discounted rides for different purposes.

With a Ride United program, a client calls United Way during office hours, M-F 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. The client's eligibility is determined over the phone. Eligible clients are given a code to enter the Lyft app, providing a certain number of rides. The Lyft driver does not know that United Way provided the ride.

United Way of Greater Nashua has submitted a \$50,000 grant proposal to the Microsoft Foundation to explore a ridesharing prototype that could fill transportation gaps in this region. United Way of Greater Nashua has received funding for this project and has asked for assistance from the Regional Mobility Manager to establish their program.

PROGRAM ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL VDPS

Understanding the appropriate use of a volunteer driver program. A VDP should not be regarded as the primary transportation solution for senior citizens, residents living with a disability, and people with limited access to a vehicle. Its best use is within a larger coordinated transportation system that provides flexibility in filling gaps for senior citizens, residents living with a disability, and individuals with limited vehicle access. A key fact that must be recognized for both current and future VDPs is that transportation is not guaranteed if a volunteer driver is not available.

Host Organization

Finding a host organization for a volunteer driver program is essential. A VDP can be run by senior service organizations, and medical advocacy groups, such as the American Cancer Society, or be stand-alone programs, such as the CVTC in NH. Generally, the host organization performs fundraising, grant writing, and community outreach, administrative work including running a criminal background check, a driving record check through the Registry of Motor Vehicles on prospective volunteers, scheduling rides, and administering mileage reimbursements, if applicable.

Vehicle Ownership

There are 2 general types of VDPs: 1) volunteers driving agency vehicles, and 2) volunteers driving their vehicles. The second type is the most common type of program and has two sub-types: a) passengers call the host organization to request a ride, and b) passengers find their volunteers and schedule their rides.

Program types have different implications for the agency hosting the program. When an agency supplies the vehicles, often there are more training requirements for drivers. If the vehicle was acquired through a state or federal program, there may be additional requirements (including drug and alcohol testing) that drivers must meet. Volunteers may prefer to drive an agency vehicle so that they do not increase wear and tear on their cars. When volunteers drive their vehicles, the agency must make sure that the vehicles are in good working condition, and that drivers are sufficiently insured.

Insurance and Liability

Volunteer drivers must have their insurance coverage when driving in their vehicles. The host organization typically carries an umbrella insurance policy that covers volunteers if a claim is not covered by the driver's auto insurance. Some VDPs offer umbrella liability insurance that extends to the driver and passenger in the volunteer driver's car as an incentive in recruiting volunteer drivers.

Program Cost

VDPs are generally seen as cost-effective because they eliminate some labor, maintenance, and capital costs as compared to a typical demand response transit service. Most programs do not require paying drivers or buying vehicles. However, it is important to factor in the cost of staff time, since most programs have at least a part-time coordinator who works on fundraising, grant writing, and community outreach for both awareness and VD recruitment, screening, and training volunteers, scheduling rides, and administering mileage reimbursement. If a program does not have a dedicated coordinator, one staff member will have to spend time performing such tasks

Sources of Funding

Sources of funding for volunteer driver programs include municipal budgets, private foundation grants, donations from individuals, and businesses, and individual fundraising efforts by nonprofit organizations. In addition to local sources, there is federal funding through Medicaid mileage reimbursement and public transit funding from Section 5310, the Bureau of Elderly

Services, the Department of Education, the National Center for Mobility Management, the CTAA, and AARP.

Recruiting Volunteers

Programs report that finding volunteer drivers is an ongoing challenge, thus they are not always able to fulfill transportation requests. Passengers and existing drivers can help recruit drivers with several different approaches including:

- Word-of-mouth through friends and families,
- Various newsletters of nonprofits, agencies, municipalities, local libraries, planning commissions, and other organizations,
- Outreach through social media,
- Presentations to community groups,
- Online programs such as Southern New Hampshire Services RSVP,
- NH Alliance for Healthy Aging (NHAHA) Volunteer Driver Initiative.

New Hampshire Alliance for Healthy Aging (NHAHA), www.nhaha.info/contact-us/ has launched a statewide volunteer recruitment effort to support NH's many VDPs. This initiative involves a collaborative group of non-profit organizations serving residents throughout New Hampshire.

Mileage Reimbursement

Some programs offer mileage reimbursement to offset the cost of vehicle use as an incentive for volunteer drivers. Mileage reimbursement is a common component of VDPs where volunteers drive their cars. Reimbursement rates range from \$0.35/mile up to the IRS reimbursement rate (currently \$0.655/mile. Also, the NHDOT provides 5310 RCC funding for mileage reimbursement.

Program Marketing

Successful volunteer transportation programs need drivers and passengers alike. Finding passengers can often be accomplished through the same methods as recruiting volunteers. It is helpful to have an up-to-date website where potential users of the service can find details about how to schedule a ride, who is eligible for the service, and whom to contact for more information. Even if passengers themselves do not look up information online, their friends, and family members may prefer online resources.

Scheduling Rides via Phone

Scheduling rides requires dedicated staff time. When a person calls to schedule a ride, the scheduler collects information including name, day and time of requested trip, origin, and destination, and contact information. Then the scheduler will call the list of volunteers until one is found who can fulfill the request. It is helpful for host organizations to ask each volunteer to give an overview of their weekly availability so that the scheduler knows when someone is likely to be able to volunteer for a ride. In most programs, once the ride has been scheduled, the volunteer then calls the passenger directly to reconfirm either the night before or the day of the trip.

Scheduling Rides via Software

In the survey of volunteer driver programs conducted for this study, 9 out of 18 said that they use various software programs to schedule trips. The riders enter the ride requests online or the rider needs to call, and the staff enter the ride requests.

The software choices included Routematch, Ride Scheduler, Qydes, Assisted Rides, and Triplist. Generally, software packages can help cut down on staff time needed to track ride requests, make volunteer assignments, look up each volunteer's availability, and call that volunteer personally. Software programs also capture program statistics, which helps with reporting. Access to comprehensive program reporting is particularly useful for funding applications.

CONCLUSIONS

While there is a demonstrated need for additional mobility services in the NRPC region, several factors would inhibit the establishment of a new VDP. These factors include:

- Economic factors, such as inflation and high gas prices, are impacting volunteer driver's willingness to continue driving for programs that already exist and will most likely limit the success of recruiting drivers for a new VDP.
- The lack of a sufficient number of volunteer drivers in existing VDPs is an indication that driver recruitment for any new program would be challenging.
- Recruitment of volunteer drivers for a new VDP may recruit drivers from existing VDPs.
- Additional services for wheelchair-bound clients may be beyond the capabilities of a new VDP.
- Recruiting volunteer drivers to cover gaps in evening and weekend service and for long-distance trips to Manchester, Boston, and other out-of-region destinations could be especially challenging.

VDPs that were surveyed mentioned that the lack of volunteer drivers is the most significant matter facing their programs. The scarcity of volunteer drivers is already a limiting factor for existing VDPs and will present a challenge to starting a new program. Some have suspended their programs until they can recruit more volunteer drivers.

Current economic conditions will impact the success of a VDP start-up, at least in the near term. With so many non-profit organizations in the Greater Nashua area, it may not be possible to find sufficient funds to operate a new program during a time of high inflation. Higher prices for gasoline and food among those who would normally volunteer may find themselves working longer to keep themselves financially solvent. Additionally, those who would normally donate to nonprofit organizations may not have the funds to do so, further limiting the capacity of a VDP.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the significant challenges noted above, a more viable approach to addressing the region's mobility needs would be to work with existing VDPs to expand their service areas and possibly, hours/days of service as well. The Caregivers – a Program of Catholic Charities NH, is interested in expanding its level of service in the Greater Nashua area. Instead of a brand-new program, more support could be given to Caregivers in its expansion. However, due to funding constraints, Caregivers does not serve all because of its income eligibility guidelines. Ideally, if additional funding sources could be secured, Caregivers could adopt a more expansive eligibility stance and eliminate its current income restrictions. Most of the other volunteer driver programs in the state have no income eligibility – just age and need requirements. Additionally, providing volunteers with mileage reimbursement could help expand the pool of available drivers and help encourage volunteers to accept longer-distance trips. Similarly, the Community Volunteer Transportation Company (CVTC) that provides service in the Monadnock region, which borders the western edge of the Greater Nashua region, could be encouraged to expand service and keep the dialogue ongoing to service the towns of Lyndeborough and Wilton.

Client-Centered Community Transportation and Mobility Management Network

The NRPC, as the lead agency for the RCC-7, currently employs a full-time regional mobility manager who works directly with residents with transportation needs while working closely with transportation service providers, social service organizations, local communities, and others. Given the number of VDPs, demand response transit providers, and public transit providers in the region, their differing service areas and eligibility requirements and costs, navigating available transit alternatives for seniors, residents living with a disability, and individuals with limited vehicle access will be require continued assistance and coordination. In addition, there is an unmet need for rides to destinations outside of the region. Such coordination necessitates a client-centered approach to coordinated community transportation that can benefit from a statewide regional mobility management network. The RCC-7 should continue to foster the development of this statewide network to promote the availability of and access to needed transportation resources by residents of the Greater Nashua region. The NRPC, as the lead agency for the RCC-7, currently employs a full-time mobility manager who works directly with residents with transportation needs while working closely with transportation service providers, social service organizations, local communities, and others.

FUTURE SERVICE RECOMMENDATIONS

On-Demand Service

The feasibility of providing subsidized on-demand transportation services to supplement existing transportation service offerings for qualifying individuals should be explored. What would an On-Demand service offer? An On-Demand service would be a flexible and on-call travel option for eligible customers. Boston's MBTA is using this type of service in its RIDE Flex program. The MBTA's RIDE Flex grew out of a pilot project and gives customers more options when planning their trips. Flex customers can schedule trips at any time directly with providers like Uber or Lyft or through the RIDE Access Center. To keep the RIDE Flex program affordable and sustainable, customers have a cap on how many subsidized trips they are allocated each month.

The MBTA determines the number of subsidized trips a customer can take per month using specific criteria, which is reassessed several times per year. At the beginning of each month, trips are reset and any unused subsidized trips do not roll over to the next month. RIDE Flex trips can be taken anywhere in their service area.

The RIDE Flex program supplements, rather than replaces existing MBTA paratransit service by allowing people to schedule trips on evenings and weekends when regular service is not provided. Further, rides can be scheduled for any trip purpose including social visits and recreational activities. Implementing a similar program in the NRPC region would go a long way toward closing existing service gaps and enhancing the quality of life for the region's elderly and disabled residents. Which organization or organizations would be best suited to operate an on-demand service, how subsidized rides would be managed, and potential funding sources are all issues that would require further study.

Subsidize External Trips for Critical Medical Treatment

The On-Demand service mentioned in the prior item could also be adapted to support external trips to critical non-emergency medical services outside of the region in Manchester, Boston, and other destinations. Unfortunately, these trips are likely to be very expensive and require some amount of oversight to contain costs and limit potential overuse of this trip option. In addition to working with private providers such as Uber and Lyft, subsidizing rides through private providers such as the local taxi services and companies provided in the Transportation Directory, www.nrpc.org which provides transportation for elderly and disabled people for medical appointments and nonmedical trips including shopping, employment, and social visits on a fee for service basis.

Appendices

Existing Volunteer Driver Programs Serving the NRPC Region

	The CareGivers	Community Volunteer Transportation Company (CVTC)	Greater Salem CareGivers
Office Location	Manchester	Peterborough	Salem
Year Established	1984	2008	1989
Service Area (NRPC municipalities appear in bold)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alton • Amherst • Auburn • Bedford • Candia • Goffstown • Hooksett • Litchfield • Manchester • Merrimack • Milford • Nashua • Wolfeboro 	All Towns in Cheshire Co Town in Hillsborough Co: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antrim • Bennington • Frankestown • Hancock • Greenfield • Peterborough • Sharon • Temple • New Ipswich • Greenville • Mason 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salem • Pelham
Eligibility	62+ years of age with a disability verified by a physician. Income eligibility is 130% or less of the poverty level	Clients must have no other means of transportation.	Riders must be disabled or elderly, vaccinated for COVID-19, and a resident of Pelham or Salem.
Types of Rides Provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical appointments • Grocery shopping <p>Since services are provided by volunteers, all requests may not be able to be met.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical appointments • Grocery shopping • Trips to the pharmacy • Trips to the post office • Trips to the bank <p>Since services are provided by volunteers, all requests may not be able to be met.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical appointments • Grocery shopping • Errands <p>Transportation to Boston, Burlington, MA, Manchester, and Nashua is sometimes available. Since services are provided by volunteers, all requests may not be able to be met.</p>
Wheelchair Accessible	No	Yes	No

	The CareGivers	Community Volunteer Transportation Company (CVTC)	Greater Salem CareGivers
How are Trips Scheduled?	<p>Clients call by phone and staff do intake. Trips must be scheduled 10 days in advance. Every Friday appointments that need rides are sent out to volunteers. The Caregivers do try to accommodate last-minute or urgent appointments if possible.</p>	<p>Clients must call the transportation coordinator at least five business days ahead of the trip</p>	<p>Clients must call to request services. Staff will meet with potential clients to determine their needs. Once a person becomes a client they can schedule a ride – typically a week’s notice is required, clients call a staff person to request rides, staff person finds volunteers for rides.</p>
Rider Fees or Charges	None	None	None
Software	Edge Fish Software/Ride Scheduler	TripList, Drivers use the organization's website to see what trips are available and to sign up for trips.	None – An Excel spreadsheet is used to track clients and trips.
Volunteers	No mileage reimbursement	Six-week vetting process followed by an orientation and training on TripList. Monthly mileage reimbursement.	Mileage reimbursement
Vehicles	Personal vehicles	Personal vehicles contracted wheelchair-vans	Personal vehicles, Greater Salem Caregivers vehicle.
Insurance and Liability	Drivers must have a personal auto insurance policy. Catholic Charities of NH also has general liability insurance.	Volunteer drivers are required to have \$100,000/\$300,000 liability on car insurance. CVTC also has general liability insurance.	Volunteers are required to have insurance. If a volunteer’s insurance does not cover full damages, Greater Salem Caregivers will cover the remaining expenses.

	The CareGivers	Community Volunteer Transportation Company (CVTC)	Greater Salem CareGivers
Funding	Catholic Charities <u>and FTA 5310 RCC via NHDOT</u>	Donations and grants <u>and FTA 5310 RCC via NHDOT</u>	Donations and contributions from the Towns of Salem and Pelham.
Unmet Needs	More volunteers are needed	More volunteers are needed	More volunteers are needed