



Greater Nashua Regional Coordination Council (RCC7)

DRAFT Meeting Minutes

Thursday, August 22, 2024, 10:00 a.m.

Attendees:

In Person:

Janet Langdell, Souhegan Valley Transportation Collaborative (SVTC)
Jessica Blanchette, Bridges
Wanda Ruiz, Caregivers
James Wilkie, Caregivers
Angelique Pandolph, Easter Seals NH
Don Paré, Gate City Bike Coop
Jon Eriquezzo, Meals on Wheels of Hillsborough County
Margaret Loret, City of Nashua resident
Camille Correa, Nashua Transit System
Pat Murphy, Town of Merrimack
Mike Apfelberg, United Way of Greater Nashua
Zafar Farooqui, Family-Centered Services Mgr., Southern NH Services

Remote:

Teri Palmer, NH Statewide Mobility Manager, RLS Associates

NRPC Staff:

Mary Brundage, Regional Planner III
Ned Connell, Senior Regional Planner
Kathy Kirby, Administrative Assistant
Donna Marceau, Regional Mobility Manager - RCC7

1. Call to Order & Introductions

Langdell called the meeting to order at 10:02. Introductions were made by the attendees.

2. Approval of July 2024 meeting minutes

The July minutes had non-substantive edits that have been made. A copy of the edited minutes was available at the meeting for attendee review. They replaced the minutes distributed in the agenda packet. Jon Eriquezzo made a motion to accept the minutes as edited. Pat Murphy seconded.

THAT the July 2024 RCC7 draft meeting minutes be approved as edited.

Approved unanimously with Apfelberg abstaining as he was not at the last meeting.

3. Locally Coordinated Transportation Plan and Nashua Transit 10-year Plan Progress Report

Mary Brundage, NRPC, gave an update on the Locally Coordinated Transportation Plan. There are 4 different surveys distributed to 4 different sectors - a general survey; welfare officers, human service providers, and health care providers.

General Transportation Survey:

- Target respondents for this survey: general public, but particularly seniors, individuals with disabilities, and underserved populations.
- Distribution in public buildings via a QR code, online and social media, as well as distribution by our social services partners (United Way, senior centers, Meals on Wheels), community and school events.
- There will be a deeper analysis of the results when the survey closes: so far 240 responses. All communities had some responses.
- 23% use community transportation; 63% are aware of it. Most would use it if it met their needs.
- In-person, paper surveys distributed by Marceau received the most responses.

Welfare officers, human service providers, and health care providers surveys (3 different versions):

- Distributed with the help of service partners, and the NRPC and service partner newsletters.
- Responses: Welfare Dept Survey = 7; Public and Non-Profit Human Service Agencies = 34; Health Care Provider Survey = 1.
- Most communities responded that 25% of their residents have issues accessing transportation.
- Top activities needing transportation: grocery shopping, pharmacy, jobs/employment.

Human Services Agency Survey:

- Distributed to public and non-profit human service agencies who work with the following populations: seniors, individuals with disabilities, youth, low-income, veterans, homeless, women, victims of domestic abuse, individuals with mental health issues, and people of diverse cultures.
- A survey has been distributed since July via e-mail and in-person
- 33 responses so far

Healthcare Provider Survey:

- distributed to local hospitals and health centers
- in progress; 11 responses to date.

Next Steps – close all the surveys by the end of September, analyze the results, and conduct follow-up interviews. A draft plan will be developed this fall, with the goal of an adopted plan by March.

Apfelberg asked about any interesting analysis results. Brundage stated that respondents admitted that they do not need community transportation now, but know they will need it very soon.

Langdell asked how this group could help with the completion of the plan. Brundage stated that having data from healthcare providers, i.e. doctor's offices regarding missed appointments would be helpful – who can provide that information? Also, it would be beneficial to have contacts in human services agencies who can provide similar data. Brundage has a contact list of human service agency providers but would like to build on it. Langdell suggested Brundage email the list to members for review and further suggestions.

Eriquezzo asked if the members could deliver the survey in person and let you know to whom we delivered it. Brundage stated we can email the Survey Monkey link or the survey can be printed and brought to a meeting, or copies can be picked up at NRPC. Brundage agreed to share with everyone the survey distribution individuals who were already sent the survey and links to the survey.

Apfelberg stated that they manage the Greater Nashua Community Connection page on Facebook, of which there are 3,000 people on that page. He stated that the survey could be posted on the page via a share, or become a member and post it.

Pat asked if there was a way we could see if an individual had already responded. Brundage stated that the survey does ask the respondents for their contact information so that information is not collected. As a follow-up, she stated she would be sending an email to the group.

4. Approval of new RCC7 member, Gate City Bike Co-op

Langdell stated that RCC7 has received a new memorandum of understanding (MOU) for RCC7 membership from Gate City Bike Co-op. Paré said that when Marceau first invited him, he thought she was crazy. Paré stated that there is not a lot of control in working with those who are substance addicted. Most cannot drive. Paré shared a story about a client who received a bike and used it to deliver pizza (food) while working for Uber. As a new member, Pare sees opportunities as being part of RCC7. He recommended to the members, if they have any clients who would like to work and make their own money, to refer them to the bike Co-op. Paré would like to hear from anyone interested in discussing the possibilities. Langdell thanked him for sharing another great story from the streets.

Apfelberg made a motion and Eriquezzo seconded.

THAT Gate City Bike Co-op is accepted as a member of RCC7. Approved unanimously.

5. RCC7 Executive Committee Meeting update with SCC 8/1/24 update

Langdell sent everyone the RCC7 Executive Committee (EC) meeting minutes. The EC will be meeting on the first Tuesday after our RCC7 meeting. Follow-up info and articles were included:

- *Keep NH Moving* website (KeepNHMoving.com). Palmer stated that there are over 2,800 clicks on the website, and 39 seconds is the average time people spend on the website. They are excited to get more website data.
- An article from the NH Commission on Aging newsletter about the Statewide Community Transportation Assessment – two studies are being launched - one for public/community transportation, and another to create a “multi-sector” plan for aging. A scope and intent document was shared.
- The Volunteer Driver Coalition in MN (volunteerdrivermn.org) – information about their work on the national volunteer driver IRS 1099 issue, as well as a call to action document

Palmer added the RFP for the needs assessment is closed now and a review is in process. Palmer stated that they will work with agencies and providers to get things going. Langdell stated that the *Keep NH Moving* website has broken links. Some information such as providers is missing. Information is available in one area, but missing in another area of the website where it should be as well. There is a real commitment on the part of the SCC & NHDOT to make this a premier site so please provide feedback. Pandolph asked about the RFP and when decisions would be made regarding projects and start dates. Palmer stated she does not have the timeline on that but will reach out to Rebecca Skye for the timeline and let all the RCC Chairs know. Work will most likely start in the spring.

Langdell stated the next 5310 funding cycle will start in the fall. NHDOT is working on modifying the algorithm used to divide the funding “fairly” between the 8 regions. The challenge is two regions are geographically wide for travel, and others are more condensed. Another piece: DOT does not yet have an operation plan on how to fund the statewide Mobility Manager Network. That is having an impact on planning for the next fiscal year. Additionally, two regions are facing a potential loss of their RMMs this fall. Palmer stated since the SCC meeting, a subcommittee is meeting tomorrow to discuss the structure, i.e. where would the regional mobility manager network sit? Does it make more sense for the regional mobility managers to sit within the regional planning commissions? Would the regional planning commissions be on board with that? The state mobility manager position is in limbo. For example: Palmer holds a contracted position through a state consulting firm, and Palmer needs to find someone with a checking account to apply for a grant. She feels that the state mobility manager position needs to sit within a state department so that way they can apply for funding to support the mobility manager network in their endeavors. She hoped to have some “pretty good options” tomorrow. Langdell noted that RCC7 is all set for FY25 funding of the RMM position.

6. RCC7 5310 FY24 End-of-Year Report & Provider updates

Langdell referred to the FY24 Fiscal Report (end-of-year) and asked everyone to open to page 2. Referring to an expenses grid through the 4 quarters of FY24 shared:

- NRPC’s mobility management contract management services – went over \$19 in total. The Regional Mobility Manager position billing went over slightly more than \$2000, which will be paid from FY25 revenue because it is a two-year contract.
- For the purchase of services for the Nashua Transit Service & Souhegan Valley Service – there is a little over \$16,000 left over so it will roll into FY25. Part of those funds will be going to Merrimack to fund the transit service to/from Merrimack in FY25.
- Caregivers were a bit under their \$10,000

Thus, we are within budget. The next two pages give an idea of the amount of service that was provided: NTS – the number of rides provided for SVTC shows 87 new prospective passengers, trending up. 2,462 was the number of rides – a little under the targeted 2,500 riders. SVTC provided 24% fare-free rides. Overall, NTS provided well over 14,000 rides last year for paratransit for nine of our thirteen communities. Break out is included by the community.

Volunteer Driver program data – additional data was provided by Wilkie. 965 rides were provided with 43 new applications under the banner of Caregivers just in our region. They also provide service in the Manchester and Lakes Region areas and those numbers are not included here. Greater Salem Caregivers shared their data: for Pelham, they had 8 new applications and provided 185 rides. For Mason – the impression of needing rides, and needing a source for rides, hasn’t materialized. We are not quite sure what the disconnect is there. Litchfield – no rides. Wilkie stated that with Brookline, we have had some special circumstances. When we get further away from Nashua, it’s hard to find volunteers who want to drive from wherever to Nashua. So that becomes an issue. We don’t actively solicit clients in Brookline. There have been rides given under some special circumstances, but we don’t sustain service. Wilkie will get FY24 data on the number of drivers by town July 2023 and June 2024 to Langdell to share with the members.

Discussion ensued about the need for data and how to collect it from the various volunteer driver programs and other ride providers. Data adds to the big picture. To have more data, will make an impact on how well we can tell the story about transportation needs to prospective supporters. Apfelberg stated their volunteer program drives (delivers) food, not people. There is never a person who is transported. He asked if that data would be helpful. Langdell stated that is an excellent and interesting point that broadens the story.

Eriquezzo stated if you do that, that will be open up to Meals on Wheels. Apfelberg recommended Langdell connect with Sara to get the number of rides for food delivery. Langdell will also follow-up with SHARE Outreach in Milford whose volunteers deliver food pantry groceries. Palmer stated she has been looking at food delivery too at the State level. She would like to survey clients who are picking up food at food pantries and soup kitchens. Are they delivering to multiple households? There are probably more people delivering food on a volunteer basis than we know. The Upper Valley is working with organizations to deliver to postpartum families.

Correa stated that they receive calls all the time for rides to the grocery stores and someone to assist them with shopping and loading the groceries into the car, so the riders will stay semi-independent. We are doing referrals. We would like to know the options to let people know what options are available to them.

7. October - New Hampshire Community Transportation Month

October 2024 is the second annual NH Community Transportation Month. Correa referred to Palmer to share the next steps at the NHTA meeting. Palmer stated the NHTA meeting was postponed until next week. She did have the following information regarding the month-long celebration in October because she is on the Committee:

- Week 1 is designated as A Week Without Driving. It is to bring awareness to drivers what it entails for someone who cannot drive to get around - what is necessary for them to get from point A to Point B? As soon as she has more info, she will send it to mobility managers.
- The mobility managers are going to have a contest among themselves. The focus will be on sustaining the use of public transportation beyond October. A Week Without Driving & CommuteSmart are connected. People can find rides on CommuteSmart to continue using public transportation or commuting. If people enjoy the week without driving, they can avail themselves of the CommuteSmart program.

Correa stated that within NTS, they thought about what is the goal of Community Transportation Month. How can we align it with CommuteSmart which has challenges twice a year? October is *Buses, Bikes, and Brooms* – riding the bus or riding bikes, and in the spring CommuteSmart has a business and individual challenge. Working from home is considered part of the challenge. Anything that takes people out of their cars is part of the challenge. There is a website that provides great information. Goal – inform the public about transportation options. The NTS group came up with a template and participants saved their information on what they were going to do each week. There were five weeks: public transit volunteer, driver demand response, bike and ped safety week, and Halloween. We wanted to make sure we thanked the drivers who provided the service, so we did a Staff Appreciation Week as well, and got the public involved in thanking the drivers. We discussed highlighting the Mobility Managers in each region and having them compete in the CommuteSmart Challenges. How did we meet the goal? We highlighted the organizations in the State through a brand awareness campaign. We encouraged riders to participate, and we highlighted stories and facts about who depends upon community transportation. Almost all the transit

agencies, volunteer drivers, and mobility managers participated. Some smaller agencies could not participate the whole time. In general, make sure that people know there are alternatives to riding in a car and the benefits of alternative transportation. United Way held an alternative transportation session in the library in October 2023. Pandolph says Easter Seals will be focused on fun, the alternatives, and involving staff. Correa stated buses take people to trails for recreation too. NRPC will be the lead for coordinating the CommuteSmart Challenge. Similar to last October, SVTC will be offering free-fare rides to Souhegan passengers in Oct.

8. RCC7 discussion of priorities for FY25 and the future including increased Funding SFY25 FTA 5310 RCC, and FY25 Regional Mobility Manager workplan

Langdell stated that we should think about our goals (needs, programming, etc.), the work of the regional mobility manager, and some potential additional funding (approximately \$23,000 through the 5310 RCC program). Marceau put forward the wheelchair funding program. Marceau gave an update on the program: St. Mary's Bank donated \$2,500 to the NRPC Foundation for wheelchair service in places that do not have wheelchair service. Many calls came in from Litchfield and there were no services available. Marceau connected with St. Mary's Bank and discussed the need. Marceau is researching wheelchair services - NTS does an excellent job. She would also like to use GSIL. There have been 5 calls - NTS handled two of them. For the other three calls, two appointments were canceled, and one of the individuals did not want to use the service to not use the available revenue.

Langdell stated the other piece is coming up with criteria, the process, and vetting providers which did not exist when we received the money. Marceau is working on the structural part of this with the NRPC Foundation. We are hoping to have a final approved version by mid-September.

Clarification on Litchfield – Wilkie stated we have no volunteer drivers in Litchfield, and we have not received requests for rides at Caregivers. Caregivers do have some clients in Litchfield that are grocery recipients.

Marceau would like to see some of the \$23,000 cover the gaps. She understands the money could go quickly but it is at least some money to offer people to fix the problem. If it works, we could move forward with filling the gaps that exist in other communities without wheelchair services. Langdell stated that the funds require a 20% match, and we should be able to use the \$2,500 already "in the pot" as part of the match. Pandolph stated Easter Seals provides wheelchair service.

Marceau submitted a grant request to Merrimack Valley Savings Bank. Part of that request was for funding to purchase NTS bus passes, to distribute to people in need, working with an existing program. Apfelberg stated that UWGN provides bus passes. He would like to have access to financing. Langdell reminded that 5310 funds can be used to purchase ride services but cannot be used to purchase passes or pay fares. Blanchette stated that they buy bus passes for clients.

The other program mentioned in this grant request was a voucher program to fund rides, for example, through Uber, local taxi services and other providers. Langdell stated it is important to put criteria around the process for distributing passes and funding on-demand rides. The next step is to reach out to potential partnering agencies to determine interest, process, roles and responsibilities. This should be a priority for our regional mobility manager soon.

Marceau stated that seeking and receiving private funding is less restrictive than 5310 funding. Marceau and Lafond are working with the NRPC Foundation. Correa stated she could reach out to the Nashua School System because they do buy bus passes and have them available for kids. Langdell stated that we should think about the first population we want to service – a pilot project.

Marceau passed out copies of her annual RMM report and gave the highlights: an increase in the number of incoming calls, and outreach events, and we solved a big problem – the wheelchair service. We participated in the October Community Transportation Month activities. If you have any comments, please let Marceau know. There is a section about transportation needs and people who do not drive cars. Marceau wants to get out to more of our regional town-hosted events. Marceau answered questions about the content of her report. She explained the DCU (Digital Credit Union) loan process. The loan amount is \$600 for low-income people for emergency funding. There are criteria and three people have taken a loan in the RCC7 area. The loan application via the computer can be a barrier. There is a wait time. It includes a promise by the borrower to pay it back. A suggestion for future reports would be to include the number of DCU inquiries and the number that result in an application and those outcomes.

9. Community & Member News and Concerns

Langdell noted that planning is underway for the annual in-person Volunteer Driver Program Network meeting to be held in October. More details are coming.

Loret asked about the NRPC Foundation. She would like to organize a group to get services from our region to the Boston hospitals. In the past, some of the volunteer driver programs would drive to Boston hospitals but that was based on volunteer willingness and availability (Langdell). Posting a request for transportation on the Rideshare section of CommuteSmart may help. Loret is looking for a scheduled van service that will drive a couple of days each month from Boston to Nashua. Currently, there are challenges with the Boston bus service, including buses being restricted from making stops. Loret stated that Massachusetts organizations (hospitals) restrict their transport services to Massachusetts areas. Correa suggested perhaps getting people to the Tyngsborough bus stop or the part of the Pheasant Lane Mall in MA so local Massachusetts transportation services/hospital vans can pick up passengers there. Marceau will schedule a meeting with Loret and other interested parties prior to the next RCC meeting.

Motion to adjourn made by Eriquezzo, and second by Correa at 11:54. Adjourned unanimously.