



A Transportation-to-Work Project Findings and Recommendations for Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC) Funding

A Report by:

Work, Welfare & Families

An Illinois Coalition Working to End Poverty

Written by:

Janet Boryk, Transportation Project Director (through June 2005)

Dia Cirillo, Director of Policy Initiatives

Phyllis Russell, Executive Director

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**GETTING TO WORK IN
GREATER ROCKFORD
Transportation-to-Work Project**

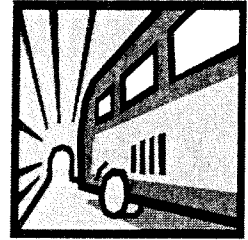


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Appendix A: Transportation Opinion Survey

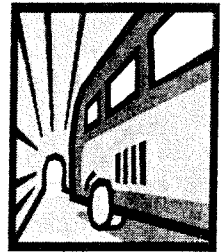
- Resident Opinion Survey Instrument
- Institutional Opinion Survey Instrument

Appendix B: Resource Documents

- Media Coverage and Outreach
- Selected Bibliography
- Rockford area maps (Rockford, Northern Winnebago and Belvidere)
- Employment opportunities per person
- Poverty Levels, Percent of Persons Living at or below 150% of Poverty, 2000
- Presentation at March 22, 2005 Forum

Getting to Work in the Greater Rockford Area

A Transportation-to-Work Project



The following organizations appearing in alphabetical order participated in community planning sessions conducted in 2005 to determine projects connecting low-wage workers to area jobs:

Access Services of Northern Illinois	Rock Valley College
*Boone County, Office of the Chairman	Rockford Area Transportation Study
Boone County Council on Aging	Rockford Business College
*Boone & Winnebago Workforce Investment Board	Rockford Early Childhood Head Start
*Careers, Etc.	Rockford Health Council
Center for Sight & Hearing	Rockford Housing Authority
Chicago Jobs Council	Rockford Jobs Council
Circles of Learning	*Rockford Mass Transit District
City of Belvidere, Office of the Mayor	Rockford MELD
City of Rockford, Office of the Mayor	Rockford Rescue Mission
City of Rockford Human Services Department	Shelter Care Ministries
City of Rockford Neighborhood Development	St. Anthony Medical Center
Fresh Beginnings	Swedish American Hospital
Love, Inc.	United States Department of Labor
Northern Illinois Electrical JATC	Village of Machesney Park, Office of the President
*Northwestern Illinois Area Agency on Aging	WAVE/PHASE
*Office of State Representative Dave Winters	Winnebago City Highway Department
*Office of State Representative Charles Jefferson	Winnebago County, Office of the Chairman
Plumbers and Pipefitters, LU23	
Prairie State Legal Services	Youthbuild
RAMP	*YWCA of Rockford
*Rock River Training Corporation	

*Indicates members of Advisory Team.

Getting to Work is a project of *Work, Welfare and Families - An Illinois Coalition Working to End Poverty* (A division of the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability) generously funded by the Grand Victoria Foundation. This project seeks to engage stakeholders in four areas of Illinois (Lake County, Greater Rockford, Elgin and Aurora) to identify gaps in transportation to jobs for low wage workers and develop fundable solutions. If you have any further questions regarding this project, please contact Dia Cirillo at 312-332-6522 or by email at dcirillo@ctbaonline.org.

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Getting to Work in the Greater Rockford Area: A Transportation-to-Work Project

Executive Summary

By connecting the local workforce to area jobs, transportation is a key factor in creating vibrant, sustainable local economies. However, most small urban transit systems have not kept pace with area job growth outside of urban centers and the shift in the economy to retail trades and the service industry. Service is typically infrequent, if nonexistent, on weekends and during second and third shifts.

Getting to Work, a project of the statewide coalition, *Work, Welfare and Families*, engaged a broad array of community stakeholders to develop solutions to gaps in transportation to area jobs in greater Rockford. For the purpose of this process, greater Rockford included Machesney and Loves Parks as well as Belvidere. Community planning forums were held on March 22 and May 3, 2005. Stakeholders included local government representatives, business, Rockford Mass Transit District, Rockford Area Transportation Study (RATS) community-based organizations and community residents. Over 160 stakeholders were directly invited to participate in this process. The solutions identified through this process will form the basis of a demonstration project proposal for funding under the federal program, Job Access Reverse Commute and other related funding sources. *Getting to Work* has been funded by the Grand Victoria Foundation to conduct this engagement and planning process in four communities in Northern Illinois which include in addition to the greater Rockford area, Lake County and Kane County (both Elgin and Aurora).

Getting to Work in the Greater Rockford Area

Getting to Work employed several methods to solicit feedback from community stakeholders, involving a half-day community forum and a report back session roughly a month later. This process built upon recent community planning studies completed for the area. A listing of those resources is included in the appendix of this report.

The lead local partners, YWCA of Rockford and State Representative Dave Winters convened an advisory team to guide and inform the process. State Representative Charles Jefferson contributed to the planning of this process. Advisory team members include:

Darcy Bucholz	<i>Boone & Winnebago Workforce Board</i>
Jennifer Jaeger	<i>City of Rockford</i>
Melinda Trier	<i>Northwestern Illinois Area Agency on Aging</i>
Steve Haight	<i>Promised Land Employment Service</i>
Dave Winters	<i>State Representative</i>
Mike Williams	<i>Rock River Training Corporation</i>
Lisa Brown	<i>Rockford Mass Transit District</i>
Jeff Allington	<i>Rockford Jobs Council</i>
Diana Bathelman & Gary Lawson	<i>Rock Valley College</i>
Dorla Bonner	<i>YWCA of Rockford</i>

Sixty participants attended the forum, and 25 additional surveys were completed by local residents. Stakeholder groups represented in the data collection process are as follows:

- 31 community residents
- 23 community-based and faith-based organizations
- 13 representatives of branches of local & county government

- 9 employment training agencies
- 5 employers, including 2 hospital systems and building trades
- 4 transportation professionals

A profile of community residents participating in the process was developed from a written survey:

- 22% reported using only mass transit or walking to get around;
- 50% reported use of some mass transit to get to work activities;
- 68% reported involvement in work or work activities
- 83% earn less than 150% of federal poverty guidelines

About twenty-five stakeholders attended the report back session.

Key Transportation-to-Work Issues

The most pressing challenges in getting to work and work activities identified during the forum clustered in two key areas:

1. **Need for increased flexibility in transportation options and services**
2. **Need for information and education about transportation options and use of the transit system**

Recommended Projects

I. Establish van shuttle services

Several community locations currently lacking access to public transit can be linked to RMTD's Big Loop via 7- or 15- passenger vans. Initially schedules can be developed at peak travel times for employment. The new services will require promotional efforts, targeted at both employers in affected areas and potential employees. Though JARC funding can be used for the purchase of capital equipment, the 50% match requirement may make other funding sources more attractive for investment in vehicles. JARC funding can also be used for operating expenses and can be matched to other state and federal funding.

The written survey results indicate a way to improve transportation options is to **encourage local entrepreneurs to offer transit** (34% - 3rd highest choice to improve transportation). Local government, RMTD, Rockford Area Transportation Study (RATS) and employers in the designated regions should be engaged to determine need, timing and resources for van/shuttle services. Job developers and business services representatives from the WIB and Rock River Training are sources of information about entry level jobs, workers and employers. In addition Rockford Jobs Council, a consortium of providers of employment-related services and training, is a source of both information and advocacy on behalf of the local workforce. Preliminary data collected indicate the following areas could benefit from the service:

- **Boone/Belvidere Routes:** Run service along US Business 20 to connect with Big Loop Routes at /State Street & Mulford Road transfer center (Mulford Village). Recent economic development in the region in the auto industry is a key opportunity for transportation providers, and Boone & Winnebago County government to engage the new employers and Chrysler Corporation in planning transportation that enables workers to get to and from these job sites.

- **CherryVale Mall Route:** Run service to- and from- Colonial Village transfer point to CherryVale Mall. New mayoral leadership in Cherry Valley and Rockford offers an opportunity to facilitate productive discussions with transit providers and the Mall Association.
- **East State Street Route:** Extend hours of service beyond 11 pm to provide access to third shift jobs at hospitals, retail, hospitality and eating/drinking establishments.
- **Machesney Park Industrial Centers Route:** Extend hours of service beyond 6 pm for IL173 corridor to industrial parks and key retail sites by running from Big Loop transfer point at Riverside Boulevard & Alpine Road.

II. Develop and implement a strategic communications plan

The plan should include the following components:

1. easily accessible information on bus service
2. outreach and awareness to employers and potential transit users
3. integrated strategies to educate potential riders about how to effectively use the transit system

The redeveloped RMTD system offers riders improved access and less travel time between destinations. At \$1 per ride (and a free, one-stop transfer) or \$35 per 30-day period for an unlimited ride pass, mass transit offers affordable transportation around the community, especially for youth and low-income people. However, a very small percentage of the public currently uses mass transit in the community (less than 1% of the population, *American Community Survey, 2003*).

The **promotion of current and new transit options is a fundable activity under JARC guidelines.** The workforce development system and nonprofits serving low-income populations are likely partners to develop a strategic communication and education plan.

A strategic communications plan should target residents, employers, service providers and youths. The messages should highlight both the benefits of using transit and education about the effective use of the system. **Good entry points for education activities could be employment training organizations, One Stop employment partners and local high schools. Developing employer transit cards would create an opportunity to energize communications and outreach.**

New resources and tools are needed to “get the message out” and should include redesigned, simplified brochures in addition to the schedule book, perhaps an interactive website, and presentations to targeted groups.

Some specific promotional ideas include:

- Poster-size bus system maps and a user-friendly take-away bus schedule - on display throughout the city where targeted populations go, such as :
 - Employment training sites
 - Department of Public Aid
 - IETC One Stop
 - Crusader Clinic
 - Public library sites
 - Grocers

Shelters and homeless providers

High schools

- Bus stop signage installed throughout the community marking bus stops, at least at major transfer points
- All printed materials (and bus stop signs) readily available in Spanish and English
- An ongoing training component on how to use the public transit system inserted in the community's job-readiness programs offered by various employment training and educational institutions
- Train the trainer education on the use and benefits of transit, targeted to case managers working with low-income individuals and families
- Ongoing PSAs that promote the benefits and use of mass transit

One organizational tool used successfully in other regions is the **transportation management association** (TMA). TMAs are area wide organizations developed for the purpose of providing customized services, coordination and activities to assist in getting workers to jobs and back home with dependable, timely and affordable service.

Mobility management services for low-income workers can also be provided. A mobility manager can provide one-on-one assistance to individuals, determining the most time-efficient and cost-efficient routes and schedules. Mobility management services could be offered at childcare centers, public library sites, employment training centers or via single centralized source for information, via phone or the Internet.

Other Recommendations

- A **review of the transfer policy** is recommended. Although a transfer is currently free, the one-hour time limit appears to limit usefulness of a transfer. The use of a transfer in a Big Loop system seemed to be confusing. "Abuse" of the current transfer system was mentioned – people using a transfer to ride round trip within the one-hour time limit.
- Working with local government departments, several **safety considerations** should be addressed. Bus stop sites should be clear of snow, well lit, and bus shelters installed at key stops, including transfer points. Crosswalks and sidewalks should be considered for areas where riders are dropped off and must walk to high-traffic destinations, especially along the East State Street corridor.
- **Some communities around the Rockford area appear reluctant to provide access via transit to their villages.** The villages of Cherry Valley and Roscoe were noted as examples of this reluctance. Dialogue between local government representatives is recommended to determine and mitigate the underlying issues that isolate these communities and deny transit dependent people in surrounding areas access to jobs, shopping and services.

