

TPB's Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) and New Freedom Project and Program Assessment

Scope of Work

March 10, 2011

I. Introduction

The National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) has contracted with Nelson-Nygaard to conduct an assessment of the TPB's Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC) and New Freedom program and projects. As a first-time designated recipient of these Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funds, the TPB has conducted four annual solicitations from which 35 projects, totaling over \$10 million, have been funded for a range of transportation services for low-income commuters and people with disabilities.

This assessment will examine the effectiveness of the process and the projects, the specific improvements that could enhance the projects' impacts and to inform the region about innovative practices in serving the targeted population groups. Given the limited resources and overwhelming demand for specialized transportation, an objective assessment is necessary to ensure the region is receiving the maximum benefit from the JARC and New Freedom programs.

II. Background

The TPB became the designated recipient of the FTA's JARC and New Freedom programs in 2006; each program provides approximately \$1 million in Federal funds annually to the Washington region. The goals of these programs are to improve transportation services for low-income individuals and people with disabilities. Since 2007, the TPB has awarded 35 grants to support a range of projects such as travel training on how to use the bus and rail system, wheelchair-accessible taxis, low-interest car loan programs, reverse commute bus services and door through door transportation services. The services have lifted barriers to mobility that over a million people in the region experience every day.

The TPB established the Human Service Transportation Coordination Task Force ("Task Force") to develop a Coordinated Plan, which must guide annual project selections. The Task Force is comprised of human service and transportation agency representatives from each TPB jurisdiction as well as consumers and private providers. Each year, the Task Force establishes priorities for the annual solicitations and assists with outreach. The solicitation begins with an announcement and invitation to attend mandatory pre-application conferences. An independent selection committee comprised of national and local subject matter experts is convened to review applications and score them using the eight criteria established in the Coordinated Plan. The selection committee makes funding recommendations that are reviewed by the TPB officers, who are asked to concur with presenting them to the full board. The recommendations are then presented to the TPB for final approval.

III. Purpose and Need for the Assessment

The Task Force has reviewed lessons learned from the projects and each year has made changes to improve the solicitation and selection process. However, these JARC and New Freedom planning and implementation activities have never been formally or independently assessed. After four years of project selection and 35 projects from which to learn, a comprehensive and objective assessment is needed to examine the process and the projects, along with a comparison of other metropolitan areas' experiences. The assessment shall identify any recommendations for improvements to the process and evaluate the costs and benefits of the projects. Since many of the projects funded to date have been pilot projects to test new approaches to specialized transportation, this assessment shall also identify the new approaches that have worked well, those that haven't worked well and

why. The Task Force will use the findings from the assessment to identify changes to help both the targeted constituencies of the programs as well as the service providers.

The assessment shall also provide information about programmatic changes that would facilitate greater innovation and program efficacy for the next reauthorization of the federal transportation program. Discussions occurring at the federal level with regard to the next authorization indicate that increased emphasis will be placed on performance measures in these types of formula programs. Outcomes from this evaluation shall assist the TPB in providing meaningful suggestions on incorporating performance measures into the reauthorization bill to ensure they are appropriate and not unduly burdensome.

VI. Tasks

Task 1: Review the current JARC and New Freedom project solicitation and selection process and analyze the qualitative and quantitative effectiveness of the projects.

- For all 35 projects, examine readily-available information such as project type, cost, source of the required match and the type of agency sponsoring the project.
- Collect qualitative and quantitative data on the effectiveness of the past projects as well as those currently underway from the perspective of both the customers and the project sponsors:
- Interview JARC and New Freedom project sponsors, customers and transportation providers to identify the benefits and challenges of the project (including administrative challenges);
- Analyze FTA-required milestone, financial and performance data for the projects and collect any additional existing data from the project sponsors (e.g. customer survey results);
- Examine external factors influencing effectiveness;
- Identify populations or groups of customers that have not been served;
- Indicate which projects have been effective and identify the factors; contributing to program success (both during the grant period and in sustaining the program) as well as impediments; and
- Examine why some agencies or vendors have not applied for funding to assess whether program certifications and reporting requirement discouraged worthy applications from being submitted.

Task 2: Compare and contrast the TPB JARC and New Freedom process and projects with those in other metropolitan areas, including these elements:

- Priority setting;
- Outreach and project solicitation;
- Project selection;
- Project type;
- Project sponsors and participants (i.e. non-profits, social service agencies, local transportation agencies, transit agencies and private providers);
- Source of the matching funds and utilization of the lower federal match for Mobility Management projects;
- Project implementation;
- Project performance and monitoring; and
- How the federal requirements, including limitations on the use of the funding and the different matching requirements for capital and operating funds, have impacted JARC and New Freedom programs.

Task 3: Based on the results of Tasks 1 and 2:

- Suggest any improvements for the TPB's JARC and New Freedom solicitation and selection process to enhance customer benefits;
- Recommend innovative and effective JARC and New Freedom projects for consideration in future solicitations:

- To help ensure successful pilots that have been previously funded can be replicated and expanded, identify necessary project elements to ensure effectiveness; and
- To make it easier for grant applicants to apply for JARC and New Freedom funds, develop several templates for different innovative project types that applicants can use to submit an application. The template would include tips for success, a sample project or program scope, necessary elements (i.e. marketing), potential partners, a detailed budget example and possible sources of matching funds.
- Identify challenges with the Federal JARC and New Freedom requirements and make suggestions for consideration during the next reauthorization; and
- Recommend appropriate performance measures for various project types that are not unduly burdensome on project sponsors.

V. Timeline and Products

April 15, 2011: a memorandum with findings from Tasks 1 and 2;

May 15, 2011: a memorandum with the results of Task 3 including draft project templates; and

May 2011: a draft final report and revised project templates.

September 2011 – Final draft report and final project templates

The draft report and draft project templates would be provided to the TPB Human Service Transportation Coordination Task Force in May 2011 for comment.

Alternative formats of this document are available upon request. Please allow up to 7 business days to process requests. Phone: 202-962-3321 or 202-962-3213 (TDD). Email:

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