



The Impact of COVID-19 on Transportation Services for Older Adults and People with Disabilities: A Conversation with Section 5310 Programs

Questions and Responses from the Panelists

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Q: How do you handle a customer that does not want the car filled with chemical cleaning solutions?

Knoxville-Knox County: My suggestion would be that you're doing it to protect the individual and all the individuals that you're serving. If it's something that maybe they don't want to be around, or they can't smell or whatever the situation may be because of their immune system, you would hate to lose that person but maybe suggest a different transportation option, but it is for their protection.

Q: What is the recommendation at this time for public transit reopening?

Sonoma County: We have three different paratransit operators. I know that one of our paratransit operators is only taking one person per vehicle. So, it's essential trips only with one person per vehicle for their paratransit.

Knoxville-Knox County: Our Paratransit locally, which is Knox County CAC are in the same building and we get to converse quite often about what's going on with upcoming changes. They were only limiting four people to a paratransit bus and they were also seated every other seat, for the social distancing and requiring mask. It just depends on your agency. I would promote the social distancing and mask and other PPE for their precautions.

Action in Maturity: We have 14 passenger buses and we distance people on them, and you know require masks, but our public transit is really limited at this time in Baltimore. It's just essential only.

Q: How are thermometers being used? Are they being used by drivers or for pre-boarding by service providers?

Sonoma County: I can speak to one of our volunteer driver programs that is operated by the city of Healdsburg and the city provides the vehicles for the volunteers to drive. So, the volunteer drivers need to come to the senior center to pick up the vehicle and at that time they are using thermometers to screen the drivers.

Action in Maturity: We all have our temperature taken at the nursing home location every morning and answer questions about where we've been and whether we are symptomatic. It's just a sort of a screen. We don't interact with our riders like that in any way.

Knoxville-Knox County: At this time, we are not using thermometers. Pre-screening questions is all that were asking.

Q: Who decides how many passengers per vehicle and the spacing of the passengers on the vehicle?

Sonoma County: We have the 6-foot social distance requirement. Since the Area Agency on Aging is not a provider of transportation, it's up to our operators to decide. Most of our providers have one per vehicle. The size of the vehicle whether it's a van or compact care should be taken into consideration. If a person needs a caregiver to ride with them, that's also something you want to consider when you match your riders with drivers.

Action in Maturity: We've just begun taking folks to the grocery store again, and typically they are residences of a senior center. We talk to the service coordinator first to say that we can't take 14 people at a time. We can send two buses and do six people and six people, but were not going to crowd people on the bus. Everybody has been super understanding about this. They understand we are trying to protect everybody.

Q: Can you explain the "no-touch" policy some agencies have implemented? Is this possible for people who are visually impaired and those who do not have mobility devices?

Sonoma County: This issue came up in the San Francisco Bay area. We have a regional Mobility Management Group that meets, and one of the Bay Area providers has addressed the needs for the blind and mobility impaired, and they will not be assisting. If someone needs hands-on assistance, they will have to find another provider that does it because they have a hands-off policy. I know other transit providers have said their drivers have shields and gloves, so if they need to help somebody with a wheelchair, they have provided the PPE for that.

Q: How do you coordinate employee pick up? Do you use a specific software? Are people grouped together according to work start time and pick up location?

Action in Maturity: We don't have specific software. The way we coordinate is extremely manually. My transportation coordinator works with someone at Keswick who has everybody's schedule and shifts. We try to group people together according to their start time and pick up location, so that one driver is going to one or two zip codes. It has been a very labor-intensive activity. Every day is different, and we can't get it quite down to a science. We don't want to put more than a few people on the bus at a time. Software would be great, but I don't know if software will help us with so many variables.

Q: Are your vehicles purchased with 5310 funding? If so, have you verified with MTA that you can use them to transport workers instead of seniors and persons with disabilities?

Action in Maturity: We discussed this with our MTA contact, and she did not think it was problem. We know it's temporary and we are getting people to seniors and people with disabilities. In addition to that driving, were doing the regular driving that's part of our programming in our proposal. The people that we're driving are front-line workers with seniors. Also, Maryland and Baltimore seem slated to open in the next 30 days and we'll be back to normal.

Q: How do you handle money when shopping for others?

Knoxville-Knox County: They can either give us a debit card, food stamp card or even a check. We've learned the challenges. I told them to ask questions and be specific, get the numbers and all the information they need. It can be a challenge to get to the store and have the wrong number or transpose numbers. We screen our volunteers, so that reassures our riders and our clients that they can trust them by giving out this information. They're going to the store to get what you need and making sure to keep the information confidential.

Q: How do you decide who to take on grocery trips during COVID?

Action in Maturity: We contact the service provider to try to get a list ahead, so we know how many buses to send, but we just say first come first serve. We have a service coordinator usually on the other end kind of running interference on that, so we are not making a decision on who gets food.

Q: Have any of the drivers expressed concern about wearing a mask while driving?

Knoxville-Knox County: I haven't had any concern and we can provide a face shield. I think that would be more distracting than a mask along those lines about PPE.

Q: Do you have documentation on what is appropriate PPE?

Knoxville-Knox County: We are providing n95 masks for our drivers and then providing a medical mask for our riders, if they don't have one, but they must provide their own. We're not providing 300 or more masks. They have to provide their own, but if they haven't been out of the house and they need a mask will provide them one. A face covering is required here in Knox County through the health department, if you're going to be next to somebody less than 6 feet of social distancing.

Action in Maturity: We go by what the CDC is recommending. That's our documentation.

Q: Can any of you speak to how rural areas or providers are navigating the situation?

Sonoma County: Our 5310 does have a rural component to it. We have a shuttle, an agency shuttle, that would normally take people into the city for shopping. However, since we've been sheltering in place that agency has now been able to deliver restaurant meals for our rural seniors and people with disabilities in their communities. They've partnered with an agency called Sonoma Family Meal with the funds that we've gotten for emergency COVID funding. It's a great partnership. It's a pilot project for our rural Western County only.

Q: Have there been changes in the way in which your drivers are providing assistance?

Knoxville-Knox County: We are providing gloves and a mask. We are trying to promote the 6ft distance, but if you're providing the one-on-one assistance to an elderly person, you have to help them. They are told to wear masks and gloves when helping someone because we are doing direct service. We are providing one-on-one assistance and taking extra precautions washing their hands, using hand sanitizer and just making sure that they sanitize after they helped them because these are the more-frail and the ones that need assistance.

A lot of places here locally, if you're taking them to a medical office, they're not letting us walk in with the individual. You can get them in the door, and the drivers are told to stay in the vehicle. They are not letting people sit in the waiting rooms and wait around. They are monitoring that and making people wait outside. If we have to help someone, we will because that's what we are there for. A lot of these elderly people don't have individuals to help them and stay with them, so we have to push a wheelchair in or hold their arm and make sure they don't fall or trip.

Q: Are you able to refuse service to riders who will not wear a mask? Are there funding restrictions that prohibits refusing service to riders who don't wear masks?

Knoxville-Knox County: I personally have not had to deny service because all of them have been pretty understanding that they will wear a mask, and this is to protect them. We were told if someone did, we would have to refuse service, if they refuse to wear a mask because it's to protect everyone around us. Again, that's coming down from the CDC guidelines. We want you to wear a mask and it's to protect everyone.

Action in Maturity: A lot of compliance for us.

Q: Why don't individuals want to go to the bus stop? Where do you pick them up instead and how close to the preferred pick up time could you match?

Action in Maturity: We pick them up from their homes. I can't remember why the bus stop idea ended up not working. It didn't make as much sense as going to their homes. We've been doing this for a month and a half, but the pickup from home seems to be the best and has been more efficient than anything for us.

Q: How do you seat clients on vehicles such as a minivan, 13 passenger van or a bus?

Action in Maturity: Ours are every other seat, staggered on either two seats on each side of the aisle, so there's one person instead of two people and then their staggered. There is a person and then not somebody directly behind them on the other aisle, so someone is on the window side of aisle one and then aisle two they're on the aisle side.

Knoxville-Knox County: In our minivans, we're sitting clients in the very back seat and we just transport one person at a time. And as we are phasing in are sedans, they will be requested to sit in the back seat. They will sit on the opposite side as well and not behind the driver. They will sit in the backseat behind the passenger seat.

Q: How did you recruit more volunteers? Did you or any of your programs recruit additional volunteers?

Sonoma County: With our programs, when our senior centers had to shut their doors and our drivers were no longer driving and most of our employers had been laid off or people were at home, there were people wanting to volunteer and wanting to help. There were also partnerships with our local food bank, where people were available to help with the food delivery.

Knoxville-Knox County: I kind of put that on hold. But with June right around the corner, I think we're going to have to be recruiting more and trying to get more people involved. To be honest, some of these

individuals are older and seniors as well, so the reality is they may not come back, just depending on the situation of COVID-19. We have to be realistic and start recruiting more heavily.

Q: If any of the presenters has transitioned from transportation to delivery services, are there plans to continue to provide delivery services on a limited basis after limited transportation services resume?

Action in Maturity: We are doing a lot more food delivery than we've ever done before and were not part of a grant to do it. We are using operational funding to do it. I don't think it will need to continue because we were doing it for people who can't get out and won't get out during COVID-19. As they feel more confident about resuming their normal life, they won't need these delivery services. Our services are not necessarily for people who have lost their jobs and can't afford food. This is more for seniors who are more at risk and more vulnerable if they go out. We love partnering, and we've connected with lots of interesting organizations. And for me, kind of with my strategic hat on, I'm thinking where a funding opportunity is to have a project or program that can benefit people in that way.

Knoxville-Knox County: We are doing it temporarily depending on the individual. We might continue it because as COVID-19 goes on and we have a new normal, there's some people that may not want to get out and they prefer somebody going to get their items. It just depends on the need. We'll just have to see what happens.

Sonoma County: It is a concern for our program since we've been doing a lot of deliveries, but our senior centers provide the congregate meals. People usually come to the senior center to have their meals and now they're having their meals delivered. Most of our delivery services are being done from our Meals on Wheels program, which has seen an expansion since COVID-19. So, that's expected to go back to the organization that manages the Meals on Wheels program and the congregate dining sites that we have throughout our County. That agency will be responsible, if there's continued delivery as opposed to the people that would normally go to a dining site like at a senior center.

Q: Have any of your organizations had any funding issues at all and recognizing that the Cares Act provided funding for 5307, 5311 but not 5310?

Sonoma County: As far as funding goes with our 5310 program, we were ready for the next grant cycle having less funding for our program. It was kind of on our radar. The Area Agency on Aging is slated to receive funding for Cares Act, but that money has not come in right now. Everything is kind of on hold with our governor and things changing sort of minute by minute with the funding and more funding cuts. Our 5310 program did not get any more funding and we are preparing to do more with less.

Action in Maturity: We applied for PPD and received it which has been great to keep us going from a payroll perspective. We are not a transportation organization in the same way my fellow colleagues are here. We've been applying for grants from any funder that we think can assist. We've been getting little buckets of money from places like a small Johns Hopkins fund, not the Johns Hopkins University or medical center. It's from their Neighborhood Fund and something from the Fund for Educational Excellence, which had a health component in their RFP. So, we've been able to bring in some additional funding that we hadn't looked at before.

Knoxville-Knox County: No, we haven't had any funding issues. We've been very fortunate.

Q: Are 5310 program providers in other states looking for assistance in paying the local match? Are any of you all struggling or have you resolved the local match issue? Is that a concern?

Sonoma County: Not for us here in California.

Knoxville-Knox County: I'm not aware of anything here in Tennessee.

Q: Has the current crisis caused you think about increasing the diversity of your funding, in addition to 5310, especially from other federal agencies that could support non-transit types of activities that you're providing such as meal delivery and pharmacy?

Action in Maturity: Before covid-19, we were always looking for sources to diversify. State, local and Federal always an ongoing process.

Sonoma County: It's the same here in California. I know there's going to be budget cuts, with all this stuff going on. We've had several emergencies in our state and I'm sure other people have the same, so people are always looking for private resources and public resources as well.

Q: Currently there seems to be a big gap with providing transportation for those that need testing for covid-19. Have any of your programs been providing this transportation to older adults and/or people with disabilities? If so, what safety precautions?

Sonoma County: We have not right now. We are just providing essential medical trips.

Knoxville-Knox County: We have not, and our local transit has not as far as I know. Also, the local Paratransit will not. They will just refer them to an emergency services like an ambulance service or something like that.

Q: Given that under the ADA, Paratransit agencies are not allowed to prioritize trips in the current COVID-19 environment, how can we ensure that people get to where they need to go?

Knoxville-Knox County: Here in Knox County, our office also serves as what we call a Transportation Navigator. Anytime people call for transportation resources, we can always give them resources and contacts to get connected to transportation. If we have to turn them down, we can maybe connect them to a service that can help them.

Q: What are the pre-screening questions that are being asked before getting into vehicles?

Sonoma County: I have six questions that some of our programs. For our volunteer drivers we ask, within the last 14 days, have you experienced a new cough that you cannot contribute to a health condition? Within the last 14 days, have you experienced a new shortness of breath that you cannot contribute to a new health condition? Within the last 14 days have you experienced a sore throat that cannot be contributed to another health condition? Within the last 14 days, have you experienced new muscle aches that you cannot contribute to a health condition? Within the last 14 days, have you had a temperature above 100.4 or the sense of having a fever? Lastly, within the last 14 days, have you had close contact with someone who is currently sick with suspected or confirmed COVID-19?

Action in Maturity: We don't ask those questions, but the employees of the facility are asked exactly those questions every day. Me and our drivers are asked those questions too. Also, we have our temperature taken.

Q: Will there be new guidelines given to drivers about providing physical assistance to their passengers once regular service starts again?

Action in Maturity: We will follow the same guidelines for pre and post. Maybe post, we will wear gloves as long we're instructed by CDC or the Governor, but we have our protocols for touching which is minimal and will continue that.

Q: For blind customers, how are you able to maintain social distancing while helping them on and off the vehicle as they may require assistance?

Sonoma County: I would say when people call to request a ride and call to confirm their ride for our volunteer driver programs, we tell them that we're going to be giving only verbal commands. If they need assistance, they might want to reconsider another provider. We have different providers like Paratransit or Wheelchair Express that are more equipped than our volunteers.

Q: Is there any fare involved for any of the service provided and if so, how is that managed?

Sonoma County: Ours are all volunteer and they're free through our grant.

Knoxville-Knox County: We provide gloves, so they can use gloves if the person chooses to pay. We do charge a small minimum fee and sometimes there is cash or checks handled. Sometimes they already have it in an envelope. But if the driver chooses not to handle that money, they're more than welcome not to and the individual can mail their payment at the end of the month or just drop it in the mail. We haven't really had any issues with that.

Action in Maturity: There is no fare.

Q: Have you been able to use SNAP, EBT or WIC cards to help with grocery delivery? Are you taking the cards to and from the store?

Action in Maturity: We deliver free food distributed by the Maryland Food Bank.

Knoxville-Knox County: We are using their EBT cards and their SNAP cards. If the client has given them their pin number, then you just scan the card, put the pin number in and purchase their groceries and we've screened all our volunteers. It's just a matter of confidentiality and not sharing that information and trust. We reassure our clients that they can trust our volunteers.

Q: Is anyone using technology either you or through a collaborating partner to augment mobility and/or reduce social isolation? If so, what are you using and how?

Sonoma County: One of our providers has started a collection of iPads and they've been distributing them to seniors that are in nursing homes and assisted living homes, so that they can communicate with their families. For transportation, we just we don't have anything outside of our just phone calling our people that would normally ride with us. We've been calling them regularly.

Action in Maturity: Our folks are not tech savvy. I think they're one of the last generations that's unwired. They don't have the equipment and they don't have the interest.

Q: What are some of the best tactics that you found for recruiting drivers for volunteer driver programs? Do they use their own Vehicles? Do you pay a base amount or reimbursement for mileage?

Knoxville-Knox County: All of ours are program vehicles. On occasion, somebody can use their own car, but during this pandemic we are not allowing that at all. To recruit drivers, we're doing various outreach anywhere we can let people know that we have a need, whether it be media or online. Right now, we have not been actively recruiting, but hoping to get back to doing that. No reimbursement for mileage.

Sonoma County: Our providers and our volunteer drivers, the ones that are willing to drive, are using their own vehicles. The way we recruit is through our local paper that has a community page. You can post a free announcement for recruiting volunteers. We also have a local volunteer center and then our senior center sends a weekly blog out requesting volunteers when needed. No reimbursement for mileage.

Q: How do you ensure that volunteer drivers are disinfecting their vehicles after a trip?

Knoxville-Knox County: I don't know how you can reassure yourself that someone is cleaning their vehicle. We would hope that they would, but during this time as we all know there's been a shortage of cleaning supplies, so if they're using their own cars, and if that's the only means of that program, you would hate to discontinue the program, but maybe for a temporary basis discontinue or limit. I don't know how to really manage that. Having our own vehicles has been very helpful.

Sonoma County: For our volunteers, there's no way to know that they're actually doing it between clients that they drive around. We do have recommended safety protocols and when rides are booked and confirmed those are reiterated each time of what they should be doing. The safety protocols would be wiping down the vehicles, the seats, the seatbelts, door handles and frequently touched surfaces.

Q: What is your sanitation requirement for your own vehicles?

Knoxville-Knox County: We are sanitizing them before and after they come back. Sometimes that car doesn't go out the next day. We have vehicles that we can alternate as well. We do spray them down and then we are wiping down the surfaces that are being touched.

Q: Is it possible to social distance in a sedan with the windows closed?

Sonoma County: I don't know how big the sedan is, but we recommend one person per vehicle outside of the driver.

Action in Maturity: We have a four door Ford Fusion, so we have one in the backseat and other person in the front seat. Everybody has on masks. It's not exactly 6 feet, but it's as far as we can get.

Knoxville-Knox County: That's the same thing with us. We're doing the best we can. You can always roll the windows down a little bit for some ventilation.

Q: Who do we talk to about trying to get funding for 5310?

Sonoma County: Our State Department of Transportation is Caltrans. On their website, you can sign up for grant announcements, they have a whole page on different types of grants for different types of transportation Services.

Knoxville-Knox County: We have a TPO which is a Transportation Planning Organization through our MPO which is Metropolitan planning organization. They handle our funding and they put out calls for projects and for grants, but that's who handles the money here locally.

Action in Maturity: There is a regional transit body. If anybody is interested in 5310, I would go to your MTA and they'll connect you to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

Q: Have you recruited volunteers online? And if so, do you mind sharing the name of the websites?

Knoxville-Knox County: The only one I've had some experience with is www.volunteermatch.org. Here locally, we have a volunteer Center that's regional and they have an online platform <https://www.volunteeretn.org/>. I've listed on Craigslist and Idealist as well. But those are the only platforms that we've used in the past.

Q: Any idea on when you be when you will be opening up to more than the 6ft guidelines that are in place now?

Sonoma County: We are following the recommendations from our state and county health officers. We have no idea when they will change that, but we follow the orders as they come out.

Knoxville-Knox County: It's the same here. I'm sure we'll all be practicing social distancing for quite a while. We will go by the recommendations of the CDC and the local health department.

Q: Is there any funding to purchase an electrostatic sprayer to sanitize vehicles quickly to keep them in service and timely? Are you using that equipment?

Knoxville-Knox County: We have a sprayer that were using, and we share this equipment with our local Paratransit. I don't know if it was under operating dollars. I would have to do some research on that.