



Information Brief

NATIONAL AGING AND DISABILITY TRANSPORTATION CENTER

Coordinated Transportation Planning: Requirements, Strategies and Tools for Meaningful Engagement for Older Adults and People with Disabilities

Background

For more than 25 years, the transportation community and the disability community have collaborated to make the tenets of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) a reality for the 56.7 million U.S. residents who have disabilities ([U.S. Census Bureau, 2012](#)). The ADA ensures that all people who need accommodations to use public transportation have access to such service. During the quarter century following passage of the ADA, the federal government passed additional legislation that continues to support, and in fact mandates, collaboration among the organizations, agencies, and institutions that provide transportation services to people with disabilities, older adults, and people with limited income.

“The public is a rich source of ideas, full of people who can contribute to improving their transportation systems. Community members intimately know their region's transportation issues...”

Federal Highway Administration
[Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decisionmaking](#)

In 2005, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) created a new place at the transportation planning and coordination table for citizens with disabilities. It contained provisions on coordination and guidance on ways to enable greater coordination among agencies that serve the public. New requirements in the federal transportation authorizing legislation called for a Metropolitan and Statewide Planning (MSP) process that would increase cooperation and coordination of transportation among the various constituencies associated with accessible transportation.

Then in 2012, the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century act (MAP-21) introduced a number of changes to the MSP process included in SAFETEA-LU. On December 4, 2015 the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act ([FAST Act](#)) was

signed into law as P.L. 114-94, which includes requirements related to planning that build on the changes made by MAP-21. The final MAP-21 rule on the [Statewide and Nonmetropolitan Transportation Planning and Metropolitan Transportation Planning](#) was published on May 27, 2016.

The FAST Act provisions support and enhance the MAP-21 reforms. In an effort to engage all sectors and users of the transportation network, the FAST Act requires that the planning process include public ports and private transportation providers, and encourages MPOs to consult during this process with officials of other types of planning activities, including tourism and natural disaster risk reduction. The FAST Act continues requirements for a long-range plan and a short-term transportation improvement program (TIP), with the long-range statewide and metropolitan plans now required to include facilities that support intercity transportation, including intercity buses. MAP-21 and the FAST Act also requires that MPO officials give public transit provider representatives equal decision-making rights and authorities and allow those representatives to serve as the representative of a local municipality.

Coordination is about shared responsibility, shared management, shared power, and shared funding. Coordination of transportation services is best seen as a process in which two or more organizations interact to jointly accomplish their transportation objectives. Coordinated transportation systems leverage shared resources to increase rides, reduce costs, streamline access, and increase customer satisfaction. Engaging all members of the community in the coordinated planning process at all levels—national, state, and local, however, is essential for success.

Although many gains have been made in transportation coordination, the need remains to reach out to people with disabilities, older adults, and people with low incomes to incorporate their wisdom and experience into the planning process. These people have a perspective that is essential to the success of coordinated planning because they have first-hand experience traveling in their communities and, thereby, first-hand knowledge of the ease of access to and usability of the transportation available. They can help shape the transportation services to best meet the needs of their community.

MAP-21 Coordinated Planning Requirements

All human services programs funded through the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) that support transportation services for people with disabilities, older adults, and people with low incomes (e.g., Section 5310) have coordinated planning requirements under MAP-21. Local agencies applying for such funding must include projects that are

part of a locally developed, coordinated public-transit human-services transportation plan. The plan must be developed through a process that includes representatives of public, private, and non-profit transportation and human services providers, and members of the public. Specifically, the planning process and resulting plan must adhere to the following rules.

1. Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) serving an area designated as a transportation management area must include, among others, officials of public agencies that administer or operate major modes of transportation, including representation by providers of public transportation. The requirement to include providers of public transportation was added in MAP-21. (23 USC 134(d)(2)).
2. MPOs and States must establish a performance-based planning process with performance targets that address national performance measures established by the [U.S. DOT] Secretary that are based on the national goals outlined in the legislation.
3. MPOs may elect to develop multiple scenarios for consideration in development of the metropolitan transportation plan. If the MPO chooses to develop these scenarios, it is encouraged to consider a number of factors, including, among other items, potential regional investment strategies and assumed distribution of population and employment. (23 USC 134(i)(4)).
4. States may establish and designate Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs). RTPOs shall be established as multi-jurisdictional organizations, comprised of volunteer nonmetropolitan local officials or their designees and volunteer representatives of local transportation systems. The RTPOs can assist the State in addressing the needs of nonmetropolitan areas. (23 U.S.C. 135(m)).

FTA states that performance management and performance-based planning and programming increases the accountability and transparency of the federal-aid program and offers a framework to support improved investment decision-making by focusing on performance outcomes for national transportation goals. State DOTs and MPOs are expected to use the updated regulations to make better-informed transportation planning and programming decisions. The new performance aspects of the federal aid program allow FTA and FHWA to better communicate a national performance story and more reliably assess the impacts of federal funding investments.

MAP-21 Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program (Section 5310) Coordinated Planning

Overview: As stated in [FTA Section 5310 Program Circular 9070.1G](#), projects selected for funding under the Section 5310 program are required to be “included in a locally developed, coordinated public-transit human-services transportation plan” and that the plan be “developed and approved through a process that included participation by seniors, individuals with disabilities, representatives of public, private, and nonprofit transportation and human services providers and other members of the public.” Many states have established United We Ride (UWR) plans that may form a foundation for a coordinated plan that includes the required elements outlined in this section and meets the requirements of 49 U.S.C. 5310. In addition, states and designated recipients may have coordinated plans established under SAFETEA-LU, and those plans may be updated to account for new stakeholders, eligibility, and MAP-21 requirements. FTA maintains flexibility in how projects appear in the coordination plan. Projects may be identified as (a) strategies, (b) activities, and/or (c) specific projects addressing an identified service gap or transportation coordination objective articulated and prioritized within the plan.

A locally developed, coordinated public-transit human-services transportation plan (i.e., coordinated plan) identifies the transportation needs of individuals with disabilities, seniors, and people with low incomes; provides strategies for meeting those local needs; and prioritizes transportation services and projects for funding and implementation. Local plans may be developed on a local, regional, or statewide level.

Required Elements: Projects selected for funding shall be included in a coordinated plan that minimally includes the following elements at a level consistent with available resources and the complexity of the local institutional environment.

1. An assessment of available services that identifies current transportation providers (public, private, and nonprofit).
2. An assessment of transportation needs for individuals with disabilities and seniors. This assessment can be based on the experiences and perceptions of the planning partners or on more sophisticated data-collection efforts, and gaps in service.

3. Strategies, activities, and/or projects to address the identified gaps between current services and needs, as well as opportunities to achieve efficiencies in service delivery.
4. Priorities for implementation based on resources (from multiple program sources), time, and feasibility for implementing specific strategies and/or activities identified.

Tools & Strategies: States and communities may approach the development of a coordinated plan in different ways. The amount of available time, staff, funding, and other resources should be considered when deciding on specific approaches. Regardless of the method chosen, seniors; individuals with disabilities; representatives of public, private, and nonprofit transportation and human service providers; and other members of the public must be involved in the development and approval of the coordinated plan. The following is a list of potential strategies for consideration.

1. **Community planning session.** A community may choose to conduct a local planning session with a diverse group of stakeholders in the community. This session would be intended to identify needs based on personal and professional experiences, identify strategies to address the needs, and set priorities based on time, resources, and feasibility for implementation. This process can be done in one meeting or over several sessions with the same group. It is often helpful to identify a facilitator to lead this process. Also, as a means to leverage limited resources and to ensure broad exposure, this could be conducted in cooperation, or coordination with the applicable metropolitan or statewide planning process.
2. **Self-assessment tool.** The [*Framework for Action: Building the Fully Coordinated Transportation System*](#), developed by FTA, helps stakeholders realize a shared perspective and build a roadmap for moving forward together. The self-assessment tool focuses on a series of core elements that are represented in categories of simple diagnostic questions to help groups in states and communities assess their progress toward transportation coordination based on standards of excellence. A Facilitator's Guide that is included offers detailed advice on how to choose an existing group or construct an ad hoc group. In addition, it describes how to develop elements of a plan, such as identifying the needs of targeted populations, assessing gaps and duplication in services, and developing strategies to meet needs and coordinate services.
3. **Focus groups.** A community could choose to conduct a series of focus groups within communities that provides opportunity for greater input from a greater

number of representatives, including transportation agencies, human service providers, and passengers. This information can be used to inform the needs analysis in the community. Focus groups also create an opportunity to begin an ongoing dialogue with community representatives on key issues, strategies, and plans for implementation.

4. **Survey.** The community may choose to conduct a survey to evaluate the unmet transportation needs within the area and/or determine available resources. Surveys can be conducted through mail, e-mail, or in-person interviews. Survey design should consider sampling, data collection strategies, analysis, and projected return rates. Surveys should be designed taking accessibility considerations into account, including alternative formats, access to the Internet, literacy levels, and limited English proficiency.
5. **Detailed study and analysis.** A community may decide to conduct a complex analysis using inventories, interviews, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping, and other types of research strategies. A decision to conduct this type of analysis should take into account the amount of time and funding available. Communities should consider leveraging state and MPO resources for these undertakings.

Strategy Selection

When deciding on a strategy or combination of strategies to use, planners should consider whether a strategy provides an opportunity for engagement and facilitates informed participation of older adults and people with disabilities that results in planners acting on their comments and feedback. Each of the five potential strategies listed in the Section 5310 Circular should incorporate accessibility considerations so that the older adult and disability communities can provide meaningful review and input into the decision making process. Planners may want to “survey before they survey” when deciding on a strategy. Before assuming that stakeholders and community members would prefer a particular planning strategy or to receive communication through a particular medium, they should be asked how stakeholders would like to receive information, what time of day would be most viable for meetings, and what types of



Stakeholders include advisory group members and the general public. For older adult stakeholders, transportation availability, time of day, weather, and meeting location are key considerations for participation in planning events.

planning activities would be most effective for them. Stakeholders should have the opportunity to first express concerns and identify issues and needs before the step of being invited to identify solutions. When stakeholders are asked before a strategy is chosen, they have early opportunity for input and are more likely to be invested and interested in outcomes.

Each strategy has its own pluses and minuses. As indicated in the FTA Section 5310 Circular, planners will need to consider time, staffing, funding, and other resources needed before embarking on a particular strategy or combination of strategies. Consider the following elements when reviewing strategies. The green text indicates positive or neutral aspects of each strategy, orange text indicates potentially negative aspects, and black text indicates required aspects.

Hosting a Planning Session

- Allows in-person discussion or comment.
- Increases visibility and awareness of the needs of seniors and people with disabilities among session participants.
- Allows for questions and answers.
- May not allow for anonymous feedback.
- [ADA, Title VI](#), and [Environmental Justice requirements](#) must be observed (e.g., ADA-accessible facility, accessible by public transportation, time of day, AV considerations, interpreter, foreign language and alternative format materials).

Using a Self-Assessment Tool

- Includes a facilitated process with prescribed format.
- Requires detailed explanation of planning tools and concepts to stakeholders.
- May be too data-oriented and lacking in spontaneity for certain audiences unless used in combination with other strategies.

Holding Focus Groups

- Encourages interaction and vocalization of ideas in a small-group setting.
- Helps people make connections and network with others in their community while participating in a planning process.
- Does not reach as broad a constituency as some other methods so focus groups may need to be combined with other strategies.

Conducting a Survey

- Reaches a broad audience at one time.
- Provides people time to think about their responses.
- Stakeholders are familiar with the concept of taking a survey.

- Can be conducted in paper form, on-line, in-person, or over phone.
- Some audiences may not want to take the time to complete a survey and this could affect return rates.

Conducting a Detailed Study and Analysis

- Provides data tables, maps, and graphics that are useful for visual/reading learners.
- Requires funding and staff resources that may not be available in every community.
- Requires time commitment.

Disability Considerations When Selecting a Strategy

When deciding on strategies, planners and facilitators should consider all ability levels, keeping in mind people with sensory and cognitive disabilities in addition to physical disabilities, particularly when holding planning sessions, focus groups, or conducting surveys. Accommodations to assist stakeholders with sensory disabilities include providing materials (e.g., agendas, handouts) in advance through electronic format or braille and large print, using an American Sign Language interpreter, real-time captioning, and making a transcript of discussions available. In cases where transcripts, captioning, and/or sign-language interpretation is used, planners need to determine the primary languages spoken in the region and make arrangements to accommodate the non-English speaking stakeholders based on those languages. To accommodate all participants and to facilitate recording, microphones should be available and all speakers and commenters asked to use them. All meeting locations should be physically ADA accessible (e.g., positioned on safe streets and crossings, reachable by accessible transportation options). In addition, any meeting facility should have an accessible entrance, corridors, meeting rooms, and restrooms.

Accommodations for [stakeholders who have cognitive disabilities](#) include using visual images or hands-on tools to communicate program content or project information. Outreach, handouts, and presentation materials should be written for a fourth to fifth grade reading level. During forums, focus groups, and meetings, staff and volunteers should be available to assist with questions or explanations of materials and activities. All information pertaining to the process should be posted on a website that meets [Section 508](#) compliance requirements. In preparation for advisory groups and public forums, request information about accommodations and needs in advance, and to mitigate miscommunication provide staff or facilitator training on communicating with people who have disabilities in advance of the planning sessions. ([NACCHO](#))

Older Adult Stakeholder Considerations When Selecting a Strategy

Many of the accommodations needed by stakeholders who have disabilities will be the same as those requested by older adults. Specific considerations for older adult participants include:

- time restrictions associated with daylight and personal safety issues that may affect meeting attendance depending on time of day, season, and weather conditions;
- limited transportation options may make attendance at meetings difficult;
- need for large print materials and/or help hearing; and
- use of online features (e.g., social media, surveys, online dialogues, listservs, and websites) may be lower among older adults and people with disabilities. A 2010 study found internet usage rates lower among people with disabilities (54%) in comparison to people with no disabilities. ([NCHRP 710, 2-37](#))

Learning Type Considerations

The learning, listening, and participation styles of adult stakeholders transcends ability and age. Consider the four primary learning types of the Visual, Auditory, Read/Write and Kinesthetic (VARK) method during the planning process. ([FHWA](#), p.21)

- **Visual** learners think in pictures or study facial expressions and body language. These learners like graphics, maps, pictures, and models.
- **Auditory** learners like to listen and often prefer group activities, listening to transcripts, and discussing problems in a focus group setting.
- **Read/Write** learners use written information and prefer visual information organized in text. A Read/Write learner would appreciate an information brief, flyer, or planning exercise involving lists and flipcharts.



Hands-on planning activities help visual and kinesthetic learners stay engaged in the planning process and provide an opportunity to convey ideas through graphics rather than speech or text.

Photo: www.pedbikeimages.org/ Dan Burden

- **Kinesthetic** learners use activity and hands-on learning, movement, and frequent breaks. Planning games, models, and mobile workshops or walking tours are useful for kinesthetic learners.

It may be difficult to meet the needs of all learners in any one planning event; however, a mix of methods can solicit more interest and willingness to participate and provide feedback.

Intersection of Age and Ability Considerations

No matter the strategy selected, the following planner and facilitator practices will improve participation and engagement of older adults and people with disabilities.

- Provide text-friendly project or staff phone numbers for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Use videos that are captioned.
- Label colors for those who are color blind; use caution when selecting colors for electronic communication.
- Read all information on slides and describe photos and graphics.
- Be specific in giving directions to a facility or within a facility or meeting space.
- When serving refreshments, keep the needs of all participants in mind (e.g., offer drinking straws, accessible tables, food that is easy to consume).
- Provide nametags, branded lanyards, or color-coordinated shirts for planning staff and volunteers so that they are identifiable during planning events.
- Use a variety of media for messaging: flyers, billboards, or banners, variable message signs, and radio interviews.
- Take your planning on the road by having information available at shopping malls, football games, fairs, festivals, farmers markets, community gatherings, schools, faith-based institutions, and faith coalitions.
- Balance technology with other means of communication and data collection. Web 2.0 interactivity is useful for gathering input online or through smart phones and should be a part of outreach strategies, but planners should bear in mind that some stakeholders may be infrequent technology users.
- Don't assume that a large forum is the only type of meeting to hold for public comment. Individuals may not want to participate in open-house/open-forum formats due to cultural or language concerns whereas they may like the anonymity of a survey or small neighborhood groups.
- Offer technical training to planners, advisory group members, facilitators, and volunteers on how to communicate with stakeholders of different ages and abilities.

Coordinated Planning Strategies Used at the State and Local Levels

How are Section 5310 program recipients implementing the Coordinated Planning requirements? Are there particular strategies that are being used more than others?

To answer these questions, NADTC reviewed a variety of resources including the [index of coordinated plans](#) on the FTA website, plans listed on state DOT websites, and the [NCHRP Results Digest 331](#) *Preparing Coordinated Transportation Plans: A Guidebook for State Departments of Transportation*, which examines the processes state departments of transportation have used to meet coordinated planning requirements. Twenty-seven states and the District of Columbia responded to a 2008 online survey about development of plans within the state—including plans prepared by agencies other than the state DOT. Common practices include involving regional or local planning groups in the process of identifying stakeholders and offering varying levels of involvement to increase chances and interest of participating stakeholders and the public. The most common methods of public participation used within the responding states were:

- community planning sessions to identify needs,
- using the United We Ride *Framework for Action* assessment tool or other self-assessment tools,
- conducting mail surveys,
- hosting focus groups,
- releasing surveys, and
- conducting outreach through websites, traditional media, and flyers.

Other less-common coordinated planning ideas shared by states include:

- holding training for individuals who are responsible for planning sessions so that they can work more effectively with stakeholders;
- hosting summits or forums to drum up interest in coordinated planning among non-traditional stakeholders;
- encouraging survey responses by using local community groups to assist, inserting surveys into utility bills, or offering a gift certificate for a restaurant; and
- having surveys available in languages other than English.

In [Alaska](#), where population is dispersed and the definition of *region* or *community* equates to a larger geographic area than found in many U.S. states, teleconferences and webinars are means of outreach and ways to discuss community needs without requiring travel to a meeting place.

In Texas, workshops were held throughout the state, and online communities were created for outreach and feedback (e.g., listservs, newsletters, regional groups, discussion boards). The 2011 [Alamo Area Regional Public Transportation Coordination Plan](#) is an example of one of 24 regional plans in Texas, and Section 3 outlines the strategies used—establishment of a work group, a needs and analysis study for plan input, deployment of a user needs survey, and a regional workshop.

The 2008 report titled [Assessment of Oregon Coordinated Transportation Plans](#) provides recommendations for future coordinated planning in Oregon that include reviewing membership rosters of existing stakeholder groups to determine if they include representation from the education arena, organizations representing minority and low-income populations, the hospitality industry, healthcare, and agricultural industries that hire employees with non-traditional hours and commutes. Innovative practices used in Oregon and other states include involving community groups (e.g., a scout troop) in distribution of surveys or outreach materials, provision of bilingual information and surveys, and regular use of maps and visual aids in plan information.

Section 5 of the [Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Coordination Plan for Orange County](#) provides a snapshot of how different strategies can be used in combination to solicit feedback. Orange County, California used a mail-back survey, interviews, workshops, and focus groups.

Summary

Coordinated planning efforts differ state to state and region to region depending on resources, funding, and staffing levels. No matter the size and scope of a planning effort, stakeholder participation should be conducted so that all participants can provide meaningful input. The five strategies listed in the FTA Section 5310 Circular are a starting point, but there is room for flexibility so that a broader group of stakeholders can become involved. The considerations listed in this brief are designed to raise awareness of accessibility features that are important to take into account when organizing a planning process or individual events and activities within that process. As noted in the beginning of this brief, the first-hand knowledge and experience that older adults and people with disabilities bring to the table applies not only to transportation issue identification, project prioritization, and plan implementation but to the overall design of the planning process itself.

References & Resources

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Sample Plan: [Alamo Area \(San Antonio\) Texas](#).

Sample Plan: [Juneau, Alaska](#).

Sample Plan: [Orange County, California](#).

Sample Plan: [Oregon Coordinated Plan Assessment](#).

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Who We Are

Established in 2015, the NADTC is a federally funded technical assistance center administered by Easterseals and the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging based in Washington, D.C.

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