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National Aging and Disability Transportation Center
contact@nadtc.org
866-983-3222



Engaging a Faith-based Organization Can Expand Community Outreach & Collaboration

**Regional Elderly Mobility Alliance & AAA 1-B,
Southfield, Michigan**

**July 2015
Information Brief**

*This information brief presents a snapshot of a project that effectively engaged a wide variety of organizations and agencies in an effort to expand community outreach and collaboration on maximizing mobility options and delivery of multi-modal transportation services for older adults. **An especially successful element of this collaboration was the inclusion of a large consortium of faith-based organizations, which multiplied the project's reach and success exponentially.***

INTRODUCTION

Beginning in 2007, the Area Agency on Aging 1-B (AAA 1-B) in Southfield, Michigan lead a project designed to build awareness among seniors and adults with disabilities in southeast Michigan about transportation-planning and -policy decision making and engage them in the processes. AAA 1-B and The Luella Hannon Memorial Foundation co-founded the Regional Elder Mobility Alliance (REMA). REMA is a coalition of agencies representing aging/disability and transit professionals dedicated to enhancing the quality of life in southeast Michigan by

maximizing mobility options and delivering multi-modal transportation services.



Photo: Metro Park outreach event participants

The Senior Mobility Outreach Project, being carried out in three phases, has been funded through grants from the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan (CFSEM) and the federal Administration for Community Living (ACL). The project will enhance communications messaging about the value of transit, make it easier to increase support for a regional transportation system, and coordinate and support participants' involvement in the transportation planning and implementation processes. This is especially important in southeast Michigan where a Regional Transit Authority that covers the city of Detroit and three surrounding counties has recently been established after many years of unsuccessful attempts.

PROJECT PURPOSE & BEGINNINGS

Goals & Players

The AAA 1-B took a lead in the development of this project by engaging the Regional Elder Mobility Alliance (REMA), a coalition of agencies representing aging/disability and transit professionals dedicated to enhancing the quality of life in southeast Michigan through the maximizing of mobility options and the delivery of multi-modal transportation services. In addition to AAA 1-B, this coalition's members include AARP, Adult Well-Being Services (AWBS), Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority (AATA), Area Agency on Aging 1B, Bridging Communities, City of Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT), Data Driven Detroit, Detroit Area Agency on Aging, Detroit Department of Transportation, Disability Network Oakland & Macomb, Hannan Foundation, Jewish Family Service of Metropolitan Detroit, Luella Hannan Memorial Foundation, Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), Michigan Office of Services to the Aging, Presbyterian Villages of Michigan (PVM), Regional Transit Coordinating Council (RTCC), Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG), Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART), The Senior Alliance, Traffic Improvement Association of Oakland County, and Transportation Riders United (TRU) The Metro Coalition of Congregations (MCC) and the Harriet Tubman Center were also recruited to support the project.

Goals of the project were to

- enhance communications messaging about the value of transit,
- make it easier to increase support for a regional transportation system, and
- coordinate and support participants' involvement in the transportation planning and implementation processes.



How It Began

Youth members of the Metro Coalition of Congregations (MCC) were looking for topics they could explore and support through which they might have a positive impact in their community. The group received a recommendation from a member of the *Transportation Riders United* that they invite Roberta Habowski, AAA 1-B Mobility Project Manager, to make a presentation to them on the importance of transit equity for all, including seniors and youth. Ms. Habowski made the presentation, which was well-received and generated a lively discussion

among the audience. She left, however, believing it was a one-time interaction.

Several months later the AAA1-B chief executive officer, Tina Abbate Marzolf, had a chance encounter and conversation with Marie Donigan, a former Michigan State Representative who had just joined the Harriet Tubman Center (HTC) as their transit project coordinator. Ms. Marzolf told Ms. Donigan about the Senior Mobility Outreach Project and enlisted her help in getting the HTC and the MCC involved in a leadership capacity. Ms. Donigan agreed to help.

A valuable partnership was thus established with the HTC and MCC. The HTC's mission is to connect individuals, institutions, and organizations through community organizing to increase participatory democracy and create greater equity throughout all of Michigan. The MCC is an interfaith organization of clergy and congregations with several thousand members working together for the common good in Metro Detroit.

PROJECT DESIGN & ACTIONS TAKEN

The project was designed to be completed in three phases. Phase one began in 2010, phase two in 2012, and phase three in 2013. The first two phases of this project were funded through two grants of approximately \$5000.00 each from the CFSEM. During these phases REMA conducted transportation uses and needs surveys and focus groups to determine best practices for

marketing. In addition they developed a public engagement and awareness campaign plan, a tagline, and a variety of marketing materials.

Using the first round of funding from ACL, REMA was able to expand the outreach campaign and develop a brand, add a web-based presence, and initiate marketing and outreach activities. Rack cards [information cards] were produced and distribution begun, a website (www.seniors4transit.com) and a toll-free number (855-400-7362) were established, radio ads were aired, and assistance was provided to 17 individuals who needed help submitting applications to serve on the Regional Transit Authority's (RTA) Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC).

During the second round of funding, nearly 4,400 REMA rack cards were distributed, 64 radio spots were aired, one presentation was given at the North American Conference on Elder Mobility, and one roundtable discussion was conducted at the n4a conference. Also during this phase, a AAA 1-B staff member joined the RTA's CAC Senior and ADA subcommittee. This committee developed specific ways to ensure meetings are accessible for everyone, including individuals who have vision and hearing impairments. The subcommittee has also developed recommendations for establishing unified fare, ADA cards, and snow removal at bus stops.

Ms. Habowski and Debra Price Ryan, AAA 1-B Mobility Project Coordinator, were asked to join the leadership team for MCC and HTC's *Build Transit, Build Business* outreach campaign. The team is distinctive in that it has representation from a variety of organizations that are not traditionally gathered around the same table. Its tasks are to develop deeper engagement with the RTA, promote participation, identify liaisons, and organize an alliance with leaders from the business community; local-regional governments; higher education institutions; hospitals; and aging, disability, and faith-based organizations. As part of the campaign, HTC, MCC, and the AAA 1-B/REMA co-sponsored an outreach event—*Build Transit, Build Business* Transit Summit—at which Paul Hillegonds, RTA Board Chair, and Michael Ford, RTA Chief Executive Officer, were speakers and that drew over 300 attendees. The co-sponsors are planning similar event in the fall of 2015 for which their participant goal is 1000.

In addition to maintaining and building on outcomes from previous phases, phase three goals include: recruit and train peer travel trainers, identify new transit champions, establish a social media presence, host at least three outreach events, expand outreach to include people with disabilities in other age groups, continue partnership with MCC and HTC to expand and diversify outreach across populations, track and garner new support for RTA and funding, increase level of participant involvement in transit planning,

and expand outreach to education institutions.

***Build Transit, Build Business
Outreach Campaign***

by the Numbers

- 27-member leadership team recruited
- 388 people responded to invitation
- 323 actually attended the event
- 6 sector meetings planned for 2015
- 88 community meetings requested with the RTA in 2015

BENEFITS OF ENGAGING THE FAITH-BASED COMMUNITY

Due to the sizable membership (i.e., 60 congregations with a total upwards of 10,000 members) and the commitment and connections of the individual members, Ms. Habowski identified three specific benefits of collaborating with the MCC and HTC on the Senior Mobility Outreach Project, (a) the exponential growth of awareness about the project and its goals, (b) the speed with which project leaders could connect with the suburban alliance of businesses, and (c) the pure passion for community support and improvement that they brought to the project.

Although a community may not have such a large and active coalition of faith-based organization as the MCC, most communities

will have several congregations within it that are likely to hold a mix of people from a variety of family and cultural backgrounds and business/work experience. Connecting with them can open the door to broader community support for and participation in identifying transportation and mobility needs of community residents, including older adults, and planning to meet them. Members of a congregation likely have connections to other organizations, businesses, and social circles through which they could spread the word about local transportation initiatives and projects and within which they may recruit additional participants for transportation meetings and activities.

Also keep in mind that as many American faith-based congregations typically include a high percentage (e.g., Christian 47.2%, Jewish 52%) of members 50 years of age and older (Pew Research Center, 2014), they can be an excellent venue from which to draw input on transportation and mobility issues of specific concern to seniors.

CONCLUSION

AAA 1-B and REMA are pleased with the process and progress of their Senior Mobility Outreach Project. With the funds from the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan and the federal Administration for Community Living, the project has enhanced

Photo: Community member completing survey at Metro Park outreach event



communications messaging about the value of transit, increased support for a regional transportation system, and coordinated and supported participants' involvement in the transportation planning and implementation processes. The engagement of local faith-based organizations expanded the reach within the community to identify and raise awareness of the transportation needs of older adults. Further activities of the project team include working closely with the Regional Transit Authority and hosting community meetings through which to engage more and more residents in discussions about and support for ways to expand transportation/mobility options that will benefit the entire community—with specific attention to the ever-increasing populations of older adults.

We are watching and talking but most of all we are praying that the leaders of our communities, whether in our government or business sector, will come together to pursue the common good. Today we have come to give our support for a reliable, affordable regional transit system. ~

Reverend Bob Cornwall, President MCC & Pastor, Central Woodward Christian Church

Resources

Coalition Members with Links to Websites

- [AARP](#)
- [Adult Well-Being Services \(AWBS\)](#)
- [Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority \(AATA\)](#)
- [Area Agency on Aging 1B](#)
- [Bridging Communities](#)
- [City of Detroit Department of Transportation \(DDOT\)](#)
- [Data Driven Detroit](#)
- [Detroit Area Agency on Aging](#)
- [Detroit Department of Transportation](#)
- [Disability Network Oakland & Macomb](#)
- [Hannan Foundation](#)
- [Jewish Family Service of Metropolitan Detroit](#)
- [Luella Hannan Memorial Foundation](#)
- [Michigan Department of Transportation \(MDOT\)](#)
- [Michigan Office of Services to the Aging](#)
- [Presbyterian Villages of Michigan \(PVM\)](#)
- [Regional Transit Coordinating Council \(RTCC\)](#)
- [Southeast Michigan Council of Governments \(SEMCOG\)](#)
- [SMART](#)
- [The Senior Alliance](#)
- [Traffic Improvement Association of Oakland County](#)
- [Transportation Riders United \(TRU\)](#)

Pew Research Center. *2014 Religious Landscape Study*. Retrieved 6/31/15 from

<http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/age-distribution/>

Stranahan, Dr. Susan. *Embracing the Age Wave*.

Retrieved 6/31/15 from

<http://www.shellpoint.org/villagechurch/papers/EmbracingtheAgeWave.pdf>

Attachment 1: Rack Cards for Senior Mobility Project

Attachment 2: Build Transit, Build Business Transit Summit Poster

National Center on Senior Transportation

www.seniortransportation.net

1425 K Street NW Suite 200

Washington, D.C. 20005

Telephone: (866) 528-6278

TTY: (202) 347-7385

Email: ncst@easterseals.com



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ATTACHMENT 1 - *Engaging a Faith-based Organization to Expand Community Outreach & Collaboration*

www.seniors4transit.com A service of REMA - Regional Elder Mobility Alliance



TRANSIT

Going where you want to go

Home About REMA Get Involved The RTA Find a Ride Latest News Contact Us



The Regional Elder Mobility Alliance (REMA) is a coalition of agencies representing aging/disability and transit professionals dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for southeastern Michigan elders, boomers (born 1946-1964), transit dependent adults, people with disabilities, and the general community through the maximization

We Need Your Input on Transit!

The Regional Transit Authority (RTA) of Southeast Michigan and the Harriet Tubman Center are hosting listening sessions throughout Macomb, Oakland, and Wayne counties to hear what you have to say.

[Click HERE for schedule](#)

Tell the Regional Transit Authority where you need and want to go, every day, on public transit, from where and how often!

Michael Ford, CEO, and the RTA team will be on hand to listen and discuss how a good regional transit system can best serve residents and businesses in Southeast Michigan.

Make sure YOUR VOICE IS HEARD as the RTA begins to plan a regional transit system.

[Click HERE to contact the RTA](#)

Plans for next summit with Michigan Coalition of Congregations

To be held Sunday, November 8, 2015 at Shaarey Zedek temple, would like to have 1,000 attend. RTA to reveal Draft of Regional Transit Master Plan and ask for feedback, first TV, radio and print ads for Public Education Campaign. Have a Call to Action to make regional transit a reality.

Continuing plans for other activities— produce radio ads for November 8th event, engage and inform seniors and PWD on transit issues and how they can have their voices heard in planning, and continue volunteer travel training program. We will also sponsor a travel training session for the Program to Educate all Cyclists (PEAC). PEAC empowers individuals with disabilities (generally middle/high school students) through cycling. The travel training is a comprehensive instruction and guidance to use public transportation. Through the Senior and ADA subcommittee, continue to provide RTA with information to accommodate PWD disabilities above and beyond ADA requirements.

ATTACHMENT 2 - Engaging a Faith-based Organization to Expand Community Outreach & Collaboration

Poster Announcement of initial Community Meetings

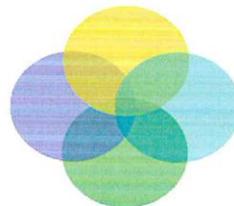
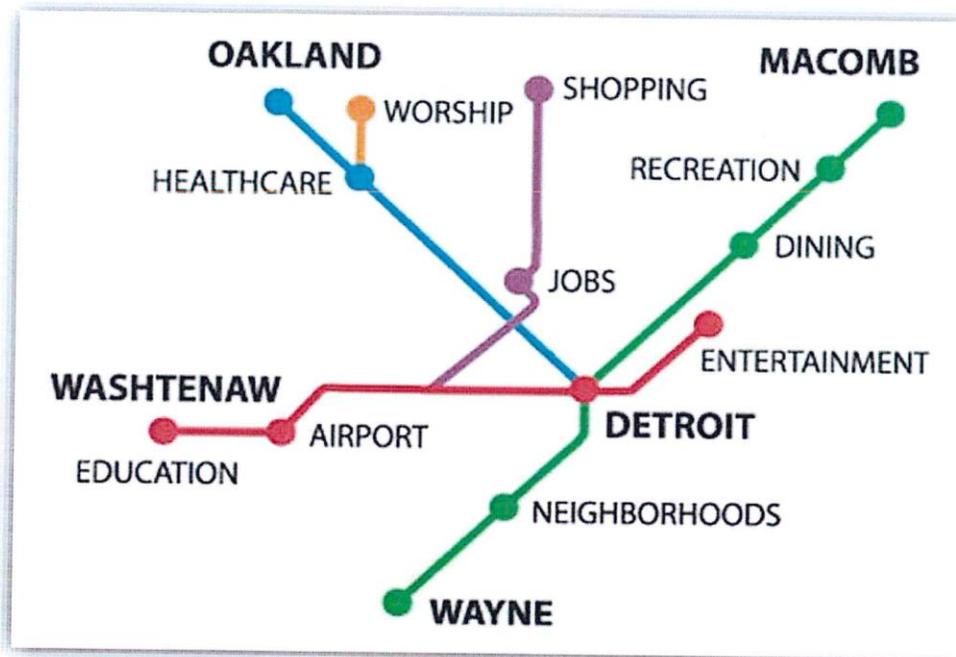


June 4, 2014 at the Detroit Zoo
(Pages 1 - 6)



November 18, 2014 at Ford Field
(Pages 7 - 24)

**Harriet Tubman Center's
Regional Transit Summits**



**Harriet
Tubman
Center**