

Ride Connection



Photo courtesy of Ride Connection

Ride Connection employs a range of best practices to enhance mobility and accessibility for older adults and people with disabilities. These strategies use the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Formula Program (Section 5310) and other innovative funding solutions, coordinated planning, collaborative partnerships, training and technical support.

BEST PRACTICES

- Consider using volunteer drivers in addition to paid drivers to efficiently manage ride costs.
- Host mobility management staff at offsite locations, including hospitals and health clinics, to offer one-on-one travel option assistance when and where it is needed.
- Partner with other transportation programs to handle such functions as information and referral services, fleet management, driver training and vehicle sharing.
- Offer language assistance to address riders' language challenges.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Ride Connection is a nonprofit organization based in Portland, Oregon, created by Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District (TriMet). TriMet provides public transit, is the agency responsible for developing the region's coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan and serves as the designated recipient of Section 5310 funds for the Portland metropolitan region.

Ride Connection is a human services transportation provider of door-to-door rides for older adults, people with disabilities, low-income residents and those living in rural and underserved communities for purposes including medical, meals, shopping, recreation, and volunteering. The agency also operates community shuttles that are free and open to the public to connect residents in several outlying locales to grocery stores, community hubs and transportation stations. With both paid and volunteer drivers, Ride Connection is a cost-efficient service, filling gaps that mass transit and other providers haven't been able to fill, and the agency is committed to providing transportation options for all individuals in need in the City of Portland and Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington Counties.

FUNDING

As a nonprofit, Ride Connection pursues funding opportunities from such varied sources as the state, private donations, and ride fares. Nevertheless, funding from the Section 5310 Program is core to its identity.

Ride Connection is a subrecipient of Section 5310 under both the Oregon Department of Transportation (Oregon DOT) and TriMet, awarded through different competitive processes. As a subrecipient, Ride Connection reports to both entities. Oregon DOT allocates funds every two years. Ride Connection receives operating, mobility management and

capital funds. Capital funds are used for vehicle replacement, hardware and software, and security and cybersecurity.

Match requirements for Section 5310 funds are met through state funds, which are managed and awarded by TriMet's Accessible Transportation Funds Advisory Committee. To receive state funds, Ride Connection must also participate in the statewide transportation improvement plan, which then gets folded into the TriMet plan. Ride Connection specifically uses state funds to offer a separate first-mile/last-mile service to low-income veterans.

COORDINATION/PARTNERSHIPS

Coordination is integral to Ride Connection's success, from how the TriMet Advisory Committee coordinates providers to how the coordinated plan is completed and how services operate in the region. The TriMet Advisory Committee comprises a broad membership that in addition to Ride Connection includes older adults, people with disabilities, Area Agencies on Aging, Centers for Independent Living, transportation providers, and other nonprofits. The Advisory Committee meets regularly but at least monthly in grant application years, particularly during the grant review period. In 2025 the Advisory Committee met frequently to update the region's coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan, which includes the participation of all transportation providers in the area.

Ride Connection works directly with TriMet to identify portions of the metro area that are particularly hard for paratransit to serve. Ride Connection maintains offices and vehicles in outlying areas where they can group trips, set up shopping and

operate shuttle services—services TriMet's paratransit is unable to provide.

Ride Connection identifies as a network of eight partnering organizations, including social services, nonprofit agencies, community organizations and, more recently, culturally specific organizations. They support partners' transportation programs through a "one call-one click" centralized information and referral service that handles ride requests, scheduling and dispatching. They also offer partners centralized fleet management for 120-130 vehicles and provide technical support, driver training and credentialing, all of which tend to be administratively burdensome operations. In this way, small agencies can also offer transportation services and focus on serving their communities with limited funding while taking advantage of the economies of scale available through partnership with Ride Connection.

Ride Connection's mobility management services for its network of partners include the provision of one-on-one assistance,

offering ride alternatives and referrals and travel training. Several mobility management staff work offsite as “Mobility for Health” at health clinics and hospitals

in the region to assist with accessing transportation alternatives and arranging rides.

PROGRAM IMPACT ●

Ride Connection’s dedication to filling service gaps for its riders has resulted in development of a vehicle sharing service with senior centers and other nonprofits in Clackamas County for use after hours or on weekends. Ride Connection coordinates or partners with more than 40 organizations in the tri-county area to create a coordinated transportation system responsive to the varied travel needs of older adults and people with disabilities.

Ride Connection’s passengers, including Section 5310 riders, come from varied backgrounds, many of whom speak limited or no English. To overcome language barriers with riders who have difficulty

understanding how to schedule and use transportation, the agency has hired staff proficient in Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese and Japanese. They are currently working to address the language needs of the Vietnamese and Russian/Ukrainian populations in the region.

From its ability to match Section 5310 funds with state transportation funds to partnering with dozens of organizations in its service area, Ride Connection takes a leading role in providing comprehensive services for older adults, people with disabilities and low-income residents in culturally and linguistically varied communities in this geographically varied area which ranges from urban to rural.



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Who We Are

Established in 2015, the NADTC is a federally funded technical assistance center administered by Easterseals and USAgings based in Washington, DC.

The **National Aging and Disability Transportation Center** is funded through a cooperative agreement of Easterseals, USAgings, and the U.S Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, with guidance from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living.

USAgings is the national association representing and supporting the network of Area Agencies on Aging and advocating for the Title VI Native American Aging Programs. Our members help older adults and people with disabilities live with optimal health, well-being, independence and dignity in their homes and communities. USAgings and our members work to improve the quality of life and health of older adults and people with disabilities, including supporting people with chronic illness, people living with dementia, family caregivers and others who want to age well at home and in the community. Together, we are ensuring that all people can age well. Our members are the local leaders that develop, coordinate and deliver a wide range of home and community-based services, including information and referral/assistance, case management, home-delivered and congregate meals, in-home services, caregiver supports, transportation, evidence-based health and wellness programs, long-term care ombudsman programs and more.

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