

# **Alliance for Community Transportation General Membership Meeting Minutes – May 4, 2016 , 9:00 AM McConnell Center, Dover**

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**Members Present:** Debbie Bartley (Lamprey Health Care), Scott Bogle (RPC), Carol Gulla (TASC), Colin Lentz (SRPC), Margie Longus (Ready Rides), Rad Nichols (COAST), Debra Perou (RNMoW), Sharon Reynolds (Citizen), Cheryl Robicheau (Strafford CAP), Meri Schmalz (Ready Rides),  
**Others Present:** Jeff Donald (COAST), Brinn Chute (City of Portsmouth)

## **1. Welcome and Introductions**

The meeting began at 9:01

## **2. Approval of Minutes from meeting on March 2nd 2016. {VOTE}**

S. Reynolds made a motion to accept the minutes,

Seconded by C. Gulla

Vote: all in favor with D. Bartley abstaining

## **3. Transportation Services Update from Brinn Chute, City of Portsmouth**

Brinn Chute gave an overview of transportation opportunities and challenges around the Portsmouth area. She began by saying that Mark Wentworth Home changed their name to Wentworth Senior Living (WSL) and that the new transportation manager at WSL has been a great partner for coordinating transportation services and organizing events in the community. B. Chute noted that Portsmouth subsidizes WSL to provide local senior transportation services for medical, shopping, and social events. She explained that ideally, Portsmouth would be able to support its own local transportation service, but for now the city is linked with WSL and will be for the foreseeable future.

C. Gulla asked about the schedule for senior transportation in Portsmouth, noting that TASC receives a lot of calls from Portsmouth residents who might be served by more local service. B Chute responded that WSL provides transportation 4 days a week - Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday – between 7:30am and 4:30pm. She added that WSL transportation will take riders to Seacoast Mental health, which is not on the COAST route.

M. Schmalz asked about the cost of riding the WSL bus. B. Chute responded that riders pay \$1.50 or \$2.50 per ride depending on their income, and riders purchase 10 ride punch-passes.

B. Chute explained that a primary challenge was persuading seniors to try public or demand-response transportation after being independent or relying on family and friends. She said people are reluctant to try something new, especially if they're not used to the time-sensitive process of using public transportation. S. Reynolds said many potential riders are anxious about being able to physically get on the bus, and are not aware that buses kneel and have ramps. She suggested that potential senior riders may respond well to a poster explaining the kneeling ability of buses. R. Nichols said COAST staff had been discussing the possibility of short-term, focused marketing and outreach in specific communities and to specific demographics.

J. Donald asked if ACT could target a specific group of seniors or a specific facility with travel training and outreach. B. Chute said that Keefe House is a good example of a group of very active seniors who might engage with travel training. She added that individual facilities may have residents who could help encourage their peers to take advantage of transportation services.

M. Schmalz said many Ready Rides clients appreciate the door-to-door service because they don't have to wait for the bus. She added that it has taken many years to reach a majority of seniors in some communities. B. Chute mentioned the Senior Health and Wellness fair in Portsmouth on October 11<sup>th</sup>. Other committee members referenced similar events in the ACT region that would be good opportunities for outreach. B. Chute also suggested that providers should contact the Public Health Advisory Council (which serves the entire seacoast area) and the Seacoast Collaborative.

D. Perou said the ACT and LHC call centers are great resources, but some seniors are uncertain about technology and it would be beneficial to ensure that transportation service management maintains a human aspect that resonates with seniors.

D. Perou said RNMOV provides funds to WSL to support transportation and works with Easter Seals in several towns in the southern part of the ACT service area. She noted that there is a strong difference between some locations in the level of participation from seniors and other clients. B. Chute responded with the example of Exeter vs. Portsmouth: where Exeter's Meals On Wheels center is located in the same building as the local senior center, Portsmouth's Meals On Wheels facility is in an inaccessible location with no signage. She said it was important to have nutritional services like MOW in the same location where seniors go to socialize participate in activities, noting that services in Portsmouth used to be integrated in one facility but are not currently. B. Chute said Portsmouth wants to acquire a new facility that could fill this roll and re-integrate local services. She said a senior "campus" near services and attractions would be a great improvement for the community and she has been investigating the possibility of purchasing the historic Doble Center. The center would require significant renovation and presents some unique challenges given that it is a historic structure, which limits the types of changes/improvements that can be done. B. Chute said for now, Portsmouth will continue to partner with WSL, with the long-term goal of acquiring and developing a centralized senior center that can house the transportation and other services that benefit seniors.

R. Nichols said Portsmouth had seen a 100% increase in para-transit over the past two years (from approximately 3,800 riders, to 7,600). He said once people find out about the service they love it because it's personalized and they spread the word to their friends. B. Chute agreed and noted that the senior population in Portsmouth is projected to double within the next 15-20 years, so demand for service will increase as well.

J. Donald requested ridership data from Wentworth Senior Living to add to regional data.

R. Nichols emphasized the opportunity for social interaction that riding the bus offers. J. Donald described a North Bus client who started riding the bus because her husband was a volunteer driver. He said after her husband stopped being a driver she continued to ride the bus even though she could drive herself because she liked interacting with the other riders.

D. Perou asked how ACT partners could help support Portsmouth senior transportation services growth. B. Chute responded that she appreciates continued collaboration with ACT partners, and added that Portsmouth would benefit from a volunteer driver program.

D. Perou asked if Portsmouth Hospital was a partner in providing transportation services. B. Chute said they were not.

#### **4. Membership Update**

J. Donald reminded meeting attendees of previous discussion regarding membership and improving attendance at meetings. He said he would be reaching out to other transportation providers to request

that they provide an update on their services at upcoming ACT meetings. J. Donald added that the NH Association for the Blind had contacted him with interest in utilizing the COAST call center.

#### **5. Purchased Transportation Update (January-March)**

J. Donald reviewed ridership data for all ACT funded services in spreadsheets handed out in the meeting packet. He noted that all providers had seen ridership growth thus far in state fiscal year 2016 except Community Rides. J. Donald explained that the drop in Community Rides ridership was partly due to Community Partners leaving ACT. He also noted that the asterisks in the SFY 2016 column were there because he extrapolated actual ridership numbers out to the end of the fiscal year [see spreadsheet with SFYs 2014, 2015, and 2016].

#### **6. SFY 17 5310 Formula Fund Grant Submitted**

J. Donald reminded meeting attendees that the proposal for SFY 2017 5310 formula funds had been submitted on April 20<sup>th</sup> and was awaiting approval by Governor and Council (G and C).

#### **7. SFY 17 5310 POS Amendment**

J. Donald explained that the current POS grant included SFY 2016 and 2017, and the midpoint of the contract was in June 2016. He reiterated the Community Rides had recently experience falling ridership, but that TASC and Ready Rides had experienced higher than expected growth. He explained that this had led to actual spending of grant funds being lower than expected. Because of this and the recent changes in ridership among providers, the Executive Committee was developing a proposal to shift unspent funds from Community Rides, to Ready Rides and TASC. This would support their observed growth and ensure grant funds were spent down. J. Donald invited all members to participate in the conversation at the upcoming executive committee meeting when the POS contract amendment would be discussed. He added that in July, ACT would be able to use 5310 funds for POS and loading fees.

#### **8. Cancelling the North Bus {VOTE}**

J. Donald reviewed the status of the North Bus, explaining that over the five years since it began operating, a very small group of people had consistently used the service. He said the North Bus serves between 4 and 8 clients per week. J. Donald expressed regret that the service would need to be discontinued but noted that all current clients are ambulatory and many of them live in communities that offer alternative services (e.g. Farmington). He added that no one from Brookfield had ever taken the North Bus.

C. Robicheau said Strafford CAP is looking for ways to increase income and could likely support clients who currently rely on the North Bus for grocery shopping. She noted that many clients are primarily using the service to get to Market Basket and Walmart. R. Nichols added that because the Granite Ridge Mall would include a new Market Basket next to the existing Walmart, this would make providing service all the more efficient for service providers.

M. Schmalz added that Ready Rides was trying to start service for medical appointments in Farmington, and she would love to include Milton where two of her volunteer drivers lived. R. Nichols said it was encouraging to see the growth of POS providers, as a priority for COAST is to shift more of the rural demand response clients to POS providers, who can fill client needs more efficiently.

R. Nichols asked for a motion to discontinue North Bus service at the end of September 2016.

C. Gulla made the motion,

Seconded by M. Schmalz

D. Perou said she was glad providers were making an effort to absorb existing North Bus clients.

Eight (8) voted in favor, with S. Reynolds voting in opposition. S. Reynolds explained that as someone who relies on public transportation, she was uncomfortable voting to end the service when clients were still in need. She said it was difficult for clients to depend on transportation services that start and end in such short timeframes. J. Donald said ACT would be fighting harder to sustain the service if more people were utilizing it. R. Nichols added that the lack of state financial support and the unpredictability of federal funding made it difficult to sustain experimental services. He said COAST is dedicated to providing valuable transportation services, and sometimes has to try out services that have uncertain long-term financial viability. R. Nichols said COAST should have considered discontinuing North Bus service at its third year but wanted to give it more of a chance.

## **9. SCC Report**

J. Donald said the State Coordinating Council recently surveyed the RCCs to get updates on progress and goals. He said staff from Transport NH would be touring the RCCs in the coming months to discuss regional and statewide collaboration. He said the SCC will be holding volunteer driver forums on September 30<sup>th</sup> (2016), and likely April of 2017.

## **10. Information Exchange**

C. Gulla noted that TASC is listed as “medical only” in the Community Transportation Directory and asked that it be updated since they provide rides for multiple destinations. J. Donald said he would update the directory as soon as copies of the current were distributed.

S. Reynold said she may be joining the board of Community Partners and asked if ACT or its partners had any communications to pass along.

C. Gulla announced that TASC was awarded the Star Award of Distinction by the Community Transportation Association of America. Everyone congratulated her for TASC’s achievement.

M. Schmalz announced that Ready Rides would be hosting a driver training at the Durham Library on May 11<sup>th</sup> at 1:00.

R. Nichols explained that COAST had recently started a 6 month strategic planning effort.

D. Perou said RHMOW is also doing strategic planning and is interested to see if transportation becomes more central to their mission.

## **11. Clients in Need**

No Committee members described any clients in need

## **12. Other**

J. Donald described COAST’s new business outreach program called “We’re on the Route”.

J. Donald said that in March, COAST began providing rides for Medicaid clients for Coordinated Transportation Services. He said they have been providing about 30-40 trips per week.

R. Nichols said he expects delivery of the 5 new cut-away vans ordered through a federal grant in the next month. The vans will hold 8-10 passengers (with space for wheelchairs). S. Reynolds asked how much rides will cost. J. Donald said rides will be free for Medicaid clients, and that insurance contact information should be on clients’ Medicaid cards.

D. Perou mentioned that the Bureau of Elderly and Adult Services had increased the rates for transportation at the request of the Title 3B providers and is considering a change to the current “people day” methodology that they use for reimbursements.

**13. Public Comment**

No members of the public made comments.

**14. Adjournment**

C. Gulla made a motion to adjourn, seconded by S. Reynolds

Vote – All in favor

Meeting was adjourned at 10:30 am