

6 TRANSPORTATION

In recent years, transit agencies have begun to look more at connecting people experiencing homelessness with housing assistance and other services through outreach and engagement in lieu of costly arrests or law enforcement interactions. The American Public Transportation Association (APTA) says that addressing homelessness in local communities will require leveraging partnerships with other community services such as law enforcement, nonprofit organizations and social service providers.

APTA recommends that transit agencies implement strategies to address homelessness including aligning transit service with social service destinations, which may be operated free of charge. Depending on locations of those services, the City should consider operating a fare-free route. APTA also suggests cities partner with the business community to identify funding opportunities.²⁰

The City can enhance transportation services for people experiencing homelessness through the following actions:

- 6.A Establish a Microtransit Program
- 6.B Expand Bus Pass Program

6.A) ESTABLISH A MICROTRANSIT PROGRAM

The Federal Transit Administration defines microtransit as an IT enabled, private multi-passenger transportation service that serves passengers using dynamically generated routes. Vehicles can range from large SUVs to vans to shuttle buses. Microtransit provides transit-like service on a smaller, more flexible scale.²¹

Some communities across the country have implemented microtransit systems to better connect seniors, people with disabilities or other at-risk populations with jobs, healthcare and other social service needs. For example, The Rapid deployed Rapid On Demand, a six-month, app-based pilot program in Grand Rapids, Michigan to test the feasibility of on-demand ridesharing as a public transportation solution for seniors and persons with disabilities. To launch the pilot program, The Rapid received a grant in the amount of \$373,782 through the Michigan Mobility Challenge, which aims to

²⁰ Lacy Bell (Sound Transit), Gabriel Beltran (DART), Elayne Berry (MARTA), Derik Calhoun (AC Transit), Tera Hankins (BART), and Laura Hester (NJ Transit); American Public Transportation Association (2018, Sept 19) *Public Transit and Social Responsibility: Homelessness*. Accessed at: https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/Transit_Responses_Homeless/REPORT-2018-Leadership-APTA-Team-4-Public-Transit-and-Social-Responsibility.pdf

²¹ The following definitions are used in the FTA's Shared Mobility *frequently asked questions (FAQs)*. Many are based on TCRP Research Report #188: *Shared Mobility and the Transformation of Public Transit*. Accessed at: <https://www.transit.dot.gov/regulations-and-guidance/shared-mobility-definitions>

improve rider experience by shortening the trip duration and reservation lead time. The Rapid's project team consists of the City of Grand Rapids, Disability Advocates of Kent County, and global on-demand mobility provider Via. Using the Rapid On Demand app, GO! bus-eligible passengers in the pilot service area select their pickup and drop-off locations and confirm their ride. Trips cost \$3.50.²²

Strategy Description

Planning participants discussed establishing a social services microtransit option for people experiencing homelessness and other at-risk populations to better connect them with healthcare, mental and behavioral health, employment services and other support services. Planning participants discussed offering this service free of charge or for a reduced fare.

A project implementation team should work with EMBARK to establish a microtransit system.

Recommended Actions

1. Determine the technology necessary to establish the microtransit program, as well as if a fleet of small SUVs, vans or shuttle buses is required.
 - a. Establish program eligibility requirements and operating procedures.
 - b. Establish partnerships with relevant stakeholders and an on-demand mobility provider, if necessary.
 - c. Secure funding for the technology, fleet and maintenance of the program.
2. Establish the Microtransit Program.
3. Track outcomes such as number of riders and rider satisfaction.

Implementation Group

- Embark
- CoC Lead Agency (Oklahoma City Homeless Services)

Possible Performance Measures

1. Number of riders
2. Rider satisfaction with service

²² <http://blog.ridetherapid.org/new-app-offers-the-rapids-gobus-passengers-convenience-and-less-wait-time/>

6.B) EXPAND BUS PASS PROGRAM

Transportation is a barrier for people experiencing homelessness who have little or no income making it challenging to get to doctor appointments, mental health appointments, employment services and work. Many communities offer free bus pass programs for people experiencing homelessness to connect them with housing resources and other support services. For example, the city of Lexington, Kentucky's Office of Homelessness Intervention and Prevention partnered with Lextran to launch UpLIFT in August 2018. This free bus pass pilot program provided free one-year bus passes to individuals and families living in emergency shelters or transitional housing. Eligible applicants must be working on a case plan with a case manager to obtain housing.

Another example is the Transit Authority of River City (TARC) in Louisville, Kentucky, which has a history of working with social service organizations over the past 20 years. TARC's Executive Director said he was asked to provide free tickets for individuals experiencing homelessness to get to emergency shelters, but thought it was an opportunity to better understand how the community could develop a more robust program to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness in the community while still being mindful of the need for TARC to collect fares. TARC and the local homeless coalition agreed that TARC would provide two tickets for the price of one to the coalition. The coalition could then distribute those tickets to their member organizations and their eligible clients. TARC also agreed to provide free transportation to emergency shelters on days when temperatures fall below 35 degrees for more than four hours.²³

Strategy Description

Planning participants discussed the need to increase funding to expand the number of bus passes organizations can offer for people experiencing homelessness in the city. Planning participants said that the bus pass program can possibly be enhanced by streamlining the reduced fare application process or using less-restrictive funding sources.

An implementation team should work with EMBARK to expand the number of bus passes that can be offered to people experiencing homelessness in the city, as well as how best to streamline the reduced fare application process, if possible.

Recommended Actions

1. Evaluate feasibility of a streamlined reduced fare application process.
2. Secure less restrictive funding for the bus pass program through collaborative grant applications with service providers and EMBARK.
3. Establish the expanded bus pass program and track outcomes.

²³ Lacy Bell (Sound Transit), Gabriel Beltran (DART), Elayne Berry (MARTA), Derik Calhoun (AC Transit), Tera Hankins (BART), and Laura Hester (NJ Transit); American Public Transportation Association (2018, Sept 19) *Public Transit and Social Responsibility: Homelessness*. Accessed at: [https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/Transit Responses Homeless/REPORT-2018-Leadership-APTA-Team-4-Public-Transit-and-Social-Responsibility.pdf](https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/Transit%20Responses%20Homeless/REPORT-2018-Leadership-APTA-Team-4-Public-Transit-and-Social-Responsibility.pdf)

Implementation Group

- EMBARK
- Homeless Alliance
- CoC Lead Agency (Oklahoma City Homeless Services)

Possible Performance Measures

1. Number of passes distributed
2. Number of reduced fare application

