



Meeting Notes for the Steering Committee Meeting October 27, 2022

The meeting was held in-person only at the ODOT District 11 conference room with appropriate safety precautions available and was called to order shortly after 9:00 am by Deborah Hill, OMEGA Regional Transit Planner. Meeting housekeeping rules were shared, and the meeting was recorded only for the purpose of obtaining minutes. The agenda was presented and attendance, by roll call, was taken. 12 were in attendance, 6 excused absence, and 4 absent.

Macie Moore, ODOT, gave a brief ODOT update to include:

1. Federal Grants are being prepared now with the hope of having contracts out to recipients in early November.
2. ODOT is considering moving to a two-year contract cycle in 2024. Applications would be due late summer or early fall better allowing for more accurate project applications and forecasting. There will also be a new application platform being developed by ODOT IT to hopefully avoid many, or all, of the hardships experienced with the last funding cycle and applications. These decisions are to be made within a month or so.
3. The Mobility Ohio Pilot Project continues to move slowly forward. A meeting is being held in Cambridge later this week with the “contracting partners” (OMEGA, AAA9, and SEAT) to discuss roles and responsibilities. Details have not been ironed out yet, but the general structure is to have a commissioner-appointed Board of Directors who will hire an Executive Director. They will establish at least two committees, one TAC which will have local stakeholders possibly Steering members and one Citizens Committee of riders and stakeholders. Macie acknowledged that a lack of transparency and regional involvement were critical failures of our last regional pilot and that they want to ensure the same mistakes are not made so transparency and checks and balances will be put in place.

In regional updates, Ms. Hill reported that the region is continuing to prepare for the rewrite/revision of the Regional Coordinated Plan in CY 2023. To that end, the committee was presented with the Regional Survey of Unmet Needs survey results, year to date. Currently there have been over 1700 survey responses received and logged. The survey results serve as rider input when the regional SWOT and Regional Unmet Need are developed.

Several noteworthy insights were evidence in the survey results, including:

1. Public Transits are mainly being utilized for medical appointments, but the second most popular reason was a near tie between grocery/shopping and work/school, highlighting the continued strong regional need for employment transportation options.
2. How could public transit services be improved? The largest response was to “end service later in the evening” followed by “go places outside my county” and “operate on Saturday”.
3. Nearly 25% of riders stated they needed transportation out of the area and had trouble finding a ride. Those needs arose most strongly in Belmont County and generally were needs to go to Weirton, WV where the closest medical facilities and specialists are located.
4. The best way to get transportation information to the riders remained social media (which is surprising considering the average age of responders) and secondarily to put information in newsletters (Senior Centers often have weekly or monthly newsletters which are heavily relied upon and seen as trustworthy).
5. More than half of responders were 65 years or older with a large group over 80 years old and the oldest respondents 92 and 94 years old. The highest number of responses came from Tuscarawas, Belmont, and Coshocton counties. Of note, if you look at surveys per capita, Harrison County also participated at a percent equal to the other larger, more populated counties. Holmes county did not have any survey responses and Jefferson County had a low input.
6. What would make it easier to access transportation? The strongest answer was a “guardian or travel companion” followed by “wheelchair lifts”. The need for travel companions was also a strong need in last year’s surveys but was the top regional unmet need this year. Travel companions are also listed as high priority unmet needs in many of the county level results and ranks as a top need in the senior population. The need for wheelchair lifts are not a surprise since it is often difficult for persons with disabilities and seniors with mobility challenges to manage the vehicle ramps well. It is difficult for providers as well. Unfortunately, vehicles with wheelchair lifts have skyrocketed in cost especially over the last year making it difficult for providers to request them and difficult for ODOT to fund them.

After discussion of the Regional Unmet Needs Survey results to date, the Steering members considered the SWOT analysis. When updating the SWOT for CY2023 it was important for the group to consider the rider point of view (from surveys) in addition to local county level perspectives and the regional perspective as well. There was robust discussion of each SWOT section. There was discussion about the differences between “weaknesses” and “threats” with the group consensus being that “weaknesses” are situations/events where we can do something about the issue while “threats” are external events/situations that we have no effective control over. Following is a presentation of the proposed revised SWOT analysis – the proposed SWOT analysis was sent out to all members for a one-week consideration and comment period after the meeting. Any changes will also be sent to the membership. The final proposed SWOT analysis will be sent to RCC members for consideration, discussion, and approval at the November 16, 2022, RCC meeting.

See the proposed SWOT analysis on the following page.

PROPOSED REGIONAL SWOT ANALYSIS for CY2023

STRENGTHS

1. **Regional commitment to provide excellent transportation services**
Including driver and transit staff commitment/passion for rider needs and satisfaction
2. Beneficial & collaborative relationships with stakeholders
3. Person-centric & supportive relationships with clients
4. Mobility Management Network & MM-Led Initiatives, such as Region 9 Resource Guide
5. Steering Committee and OMEGA support
6. History of reliable/dependable/caring services

WEAKNESSES

1. **Lack of drivers and staff**
2. Increased denials due to lack of vehicles, staff, and funding
3. Lack of, or very limited, same day, after hours, and/or weekend services
4. Lack of extended service hours and public transit routes to support coordinated employment opportunities (*primarily but not limited to 2nd/3rd Shift*)
5. Lack of transportation service coverage in more rural areas of counties
6. Lack of available/affordable Out of County (OOC)/Out of Region (OOR) transportation
7. Lack of transportation funding sources for those not qualified for Medicaid or other funding programs
8. Lack of travel companions for vulnerable populations
9. Lack of actual rider representation of seniors, disabled persons, and low- income persons
10. Negative public transit perceptions and stereotypes
11. Lack of ambulette and non-emergency ambulance services and providers

OPPORTUNITIES

1. Enhance rider experience through improved customer service
2. Create employment transportation initiatives
3. Create travel companion initiatives
4. Mobility Ohio Pilot Program (RTRC9)
5. Develop and include Social Return on Investment in all aspects of transit and regional coordinated plan
6. Expanding use of technology (operations and administration)
7. Develop creative transportation funding strategies for those riders who fall outside other transportation program guidelines but still face financial hardship in securing transportation.
8. Increasing rider advocacy and participation
9. Establish and enhance specific Transit Access Points between counties
10. Educate and inform the region (public and providers) to produce a common regional knowledge of transportation options
11. Partner and coordinate with all available resources to improve collaboration and enhance mobility options
12. Increase/expand transportation providers in very rural area
13. Meet regional performance measures

THREATS

1. **Loss/lack of adequate funding and local match**
2. Threat of the unknown and potential negative consequences from Mobility Ohio Pilot Program, including loss of personal connection with customers, loss of transit autonomy/identity, and loss of funding due to program changes
3. The inability to obtain new/additional vehicles sufficient to provide requested and expanding transportation services extending for an unknown period
4. Increased denials due to lack of vehicles, staff, capacity restraints, and funding
5. Loss of trips and reduced capacity for same day and short notice trips due to advanced trip-scheduling requirements (*transits scheduling 2-3 weeks out*)
6. Increased cost to provide services and lack of adequate reimbursement (loss of recovery)
7. Lack of broadband, and reliable cell phone service in rural areas
8. Federal, state, or local laws or regulations which threaten, or conflict with, multi-state transportation initiatives.

Next, taking into consideration the riders unmet needs from the regional surveys and the regional SWOT analysis reflecting both county level and regional perspectives, a revision of the Regional Unmet Needs for CY2023 was discussed. The proposed Regional Unmet Needs will be sent to all members after the meeting for a one-week consideration and comment period. The final proposed Regional Unmet Needs for CY2023 will be presented to the RCC for consideration, discussion, and approval at the November 16, 2022, RCC meeting. The proposed Regional Unmet Needs are copied on the following page.

Proposed REGIONAL UNMET NEEDS for CY 2023

REGIONAL UNMET NEEDS

1. **Adequate Numbers of Drivers/Staff to Provide Requested and Expanding Services**
2. Expansion of Transportation Services
 - Including, non-medical service hours
 - Saturday and Sunday services
 - Service options after hours
 - Coverage in rural areas
 - OOC/OOR transportation
3. Short Notice and Same-Day Trip Services
4. Employment Transportation Options
5. Adequate Funding Sources for Match Funding and Availability of Coordinated Funding Source
6. Creative Funding Strategies for those Financially Challenged but not Covered by Medicaid or Other Transportation Funding Assistance Sources/Programs
7. Available and Adequate Number/Sources of Travel Companions
8. Adequate Infrastructure including Sidewalks, Pathways, Shelters, and Lighting
9. Understanding and Measurements for Social Return on Investment Issues
10. Rider Advocacy and Participation Especially from the Senior, Disabled, and Low-Income Populations
11. Education of, Advertising to, and Increased Awareness by the Public of Available Transportation Options, Including Understanding of Funding Sources

Having concluded the business portion of the meeting, the next meeting date was presented. The November Steering Committee meeting will take place in conjunction with the RCC meeting on November 16, 2022, at the Tuscarawas Senior Center.

Announcements for the good of the region included a warm welcome back to Kevin Buettner who has returned to OMEGA as the Transportation Director and congratulations to OPTA awardees Valerie Shaw (Director, CCCTA, Coshocton) who was presented the "Under 40 Rising Star Excellence Award" and Region 8's Lisa Leckrone who won the "Mobility Manager of the Year" Award. Congratulations were also extended to Howard Stewart (Director, SEAT) who was elected VP of OPTA and will assume the President's position the following year.

Hearing no other announcements, the meeting was adjourned at 11:20am.

