

Chapter 1

Introduction to the Coordinated Plan

1.1 Federal Requirements and OKI's Role

The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: a Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) passed by Congress in 2005 included a requirement to develop a coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan, hereafter referred to as the Coordinated Plan. At that time, the Coordinated Plan was expected to address three programs under Title 49 of the U.S. Code (U.S.C.): Section 5310 (Elderly Individuals and Individuals with Disabilities); Section 5316 (Job Access and Reverse Commute or JARC) and Section 5317 (New Freedom). While the Section 5316 and Section 5317 programs have ended, the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act), signed into law by President Obama on December 4, 2015 continues the Section 5310 program.

FAST Act maintains the requirement that projects selected for funding under the Section 5310 program be “derived from a locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan” and that the plan be “developed through a process that includes representatives of public, private and nonprofit transportation and human services providers and participation by the public.” While SAFETEA-LU and FAST Act do not define a coordinated plan, Federal Transit Administration (FTA) guidance defines it as a unified, comprehensive strategy for public transportation service delivery that identifies the transportation needs of older adults, individuals with disabilities and low-income individuals; lays out strategies for meeting these needs; and prioritizes services for these target populations.

As the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for transportation in the Greater Cincinnati Region, the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments (OKI) has engaged in multi-jurisdictional planning dating back to the 1960's, in a tri-state area with many jurisdictions, transportation providers and stakeholders. OKI began developing the first Coordinated Plan for the region in 2006. With the demonstrated support of transit and social service agencies in the region, OKI was identified in 2007 by the Governors of Ohio and Kentucky as the Designated Recipient for JARC and New Freedom federal funds in the Cincinnati urbanized area. In 2014, the Governors of Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana identified OKI as the designed recipient for the Section 5310 program in the Cincinnati urbanized area. OKI's responsibilities in southwest Ohio, northern Kentucky, and southeast Indiana consequently involve both developing a Coordinated Plan to improve mobility for these target populations and also using the plan to guide decisions on funding for eligible transportation improvements.

OKI prepares the Coordinated Plan in concert with public, private and non-profit transportation providers, human service agencies, passengers and their advocates, and other stakeholders who have an interest in the outcome of planning. OKI also leads the selection process in the region to determine which projects will be funded with the Section 5310 federal funds. These projects are then incorporated in long range metropolitan and statewide transportation plans, short range

Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs), and short range Statewide Transportation Improvement Programs (STIPs).

Several elements are involved in the Coordinated Plan, as follows:

- Assessing transportation needs for individuals with disabilities and seniors
- Inventorying available services to identify areas of redundancy and gaps in service
- Identifying strategies to address identified gaps in service
- Identifying actions to eliminate or reduce duplication in services and strategies for more efficient utilization of resources through coordination
- Prioritizing implementation strategies

OKI adopted the first Coordinated Plan for the region in 2007, updated the inventory information for the Plan in 2009, and engaged system users and stakeholders to create a comprehensive update to the plan in 2012 and in 2016. The Coordinated Plan has been and will be used both by funding applicants to document the need for their projects and by the responsible administrative agencies to make funding decisions.

1.2 Programs for Improving Transportation Services to Target Populations

The Coordinated Plan is aimed at providing transportation for older adults and individuals with disabilities where public transportation is not available or not adequate. Improvements to transportation for these target populations are funded through:

- Title 49, U.S.C. Section 5310/FAST Act Section 3006

The Elderly Individuals and Individuals with Disabilities Program (Section 5310) supports transportation services to elderly persons and persons with disabilities. It provides funds for capital improvement—mostly vehicles and equipment—where public transportation is unavailable, inappropriate, or insufficient.

As the Designated Recipient, OKI directly awards grants under the Section 5310 program. Eligible applicants include:

- ❖ private non-profit corporations incorporated through the state as a 501 (c) (3) agency,
- ❖ public bodies in a coordination effort, and
- ❖ public bodies where no private non-profit corporation exists (typically in rural areas).

Agencies, businesses, and organizations that provide specialized transportation for elderly and disabled individuals can apply for funds available, and their applications are then reviewed based on the needs and priorities in the Coordinated Plan.

1.3 Funding and the Project Selection Process

OKI has had three rounds of funding made available by the federal government for JARC and New Freedom programs, roughly two years apart, in 2007, 2009; and 2011, 2013; and anticipates

another call for Section 5310 projects in 2016. Capital projects require a 20% local match; operating projects require a 50% local match. Eligible applicants include:

- ❖ private non-profit organizations;
- ❖ state or local government authority; and
- ❖ operators of public transportation services including private operators or public transportation services.

In the selection process, project grant applications are reviewed and scored based on criteria and information derived from the Coordinated Plan. The scoring criteria were developed with help from a 5310 Oversight Team, composed of 10 members from local transit and social service agencies, who also helped to develop the original Coordinated Plan and this update. A copy of the grant application form is provided in Appendix A along with a list of the agencies represented on the 5310 Oversight Team.

1.4 The Updating Process for the Coordinated Plan and Targeted Outreach

OKI has continued to engage the public, private and non-profit transportation providers, human service agencies, passengers and their advocates, and other stakeholders who have an interest in the outcome of this plan and to prepare the necessary updates to the Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan. This engagement has included online and hardcopy questionnaires, public meetings, and various workshops to discuss needs and gauge the most effective and feasible strategies for addressing them.

Work on the most recent Coordinated Plan began in the summer of 2015 with systematic updating of contact information for transportation providers to the target populations and with a meeting of the 5310 Oversight Team in the fall to refine the updating process. The transportation providers were then contacted about their services so that OKI could compare their current information with data about and from the target populations to help identify areas of redundancy or gaps in service.

The results of inventorying transportation services currently available to the targeted populations are provided in detail in Chapter 2 of this Plan. Current information about the transportation needs of seniors and individuals with disabilities is provided in Chapter 3 of this Plan. Information about low income individuals, as previously required by Section 5316, has also been maintained and is included for reference in this Plan. The information about needs and gaps in service was obtained through four different methods, three of which involved extensive outreach to the targeted population and those agencies serving them.

One method to assess transportation needs was analyzing Census data about employment areas and the target populations on a geographic basis and comparing it with the existing extent of transportation services to the target populations. A second method was surveying agencies providing transportation services to the target populations or serving clients that need or use it about perceived gaps and unserved needs.

A third method was a public survey available in either hard copy or online versions, publicized through transportation and social service agencies and through Facebook and Twitter. The survey was provided on OKI’s website at www.oki.org and on Facebook for several weeks, was distributed electronically via Constant Contact, and hard copies were made available to transportation providers and social service agencies serving the target populations along with direct appeals from these providers and agencies to their clients to respond to the survey.

The fourth method was to convene a public meeting at OKI on March 10, 2016 that drew a total of 36 attendees, including representatives from transportation and social service agencies along with clients of these agencies who use their transportation services. The public meeting included remarks from a representative from the Southwest Ohio Transportation Workgroup (SWOT) facilitated by the University of Cincinnati University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UC UCEDD). This group includes over 70 members representing 37 organizations in the Ohio portion of the OKI region and has organized into three workgroups to address transportation gaps and needs of individuals with disabilities. Workgroup focus areas include pursuing a mobility management system, a provider consortium, and development of a provider training program.

The Workshop engagement of participants began with an overview of OKI’s assessment of transportation services in comparison to employment areas and target populations on a geographic basis. After the geographic overview was presented, facilitated small group discussion by target population interest captured input on specific user needs and service gaps across the region. Each small group had access to mapped and tabular information from OKI’s data analysis, and focused their discussion on a series of questions about service areas, gaps, overlaps, needs for coordination or other needs. Comments were simultaneously summarized and displayed on oversized tablets and easels by a recorder for each group.

Appendix B contains more detailed information about OKI’s outreach efforts and their results, including the agency survey and the public survey and summaries of responses to them; the public meeting agenda; the public meeting sign-in sheet; and the feedback from small group discussions at the public meeting organized by topic categories.

The responses to the surveys and the comments made at the public meeting were very helpful in giving OKI a better picture of how transportation for the target populations is provided; the providers’ interests, potential, and obstacles for making improvements; the level of interest in different kinds of transportation for the target populations; the improvements needed and those most needed. These responses and comments contributed significantly to OKI’s analysis, reflected in succeeding chapters. Chapter 2 is an inventory of transportation services currently available for the target populations in the region. Chapter 3 is a description of gaps identified and improvements needed in these transportation services. Chapter 4 identifies strategies and coordinated actions to make improvements and fill service gaps, and Chapter 5 identifies priorities for implementation.