

Neponset Valley RCC meeting

September 16, 2015

10:00 – 11:30 AM; Hosted by HESSCO, 1 Merchant Street, Sharon, MA 02067

Participants: Anne-Marie Gagnon, HESSCO; Aniko Laszlo, MassDOT; Pat Gavin, HESSCO; Steve Olanoff, Westwood Planning Board; Cindy Curran, MA Commission for the Blind; Vicki Lowe, Foxboro Council on Aging and Human Services; Mary Basilone, GATRA; Nancy Weiner, Sharon Adult Center; Karen Dumaine, Neponset Valley TMA/Transaction Associates; Tom O'Rourke, Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce; Vi Ho, The Kraft Group; Damon Chaplin, Department of Public Health; Kathy Jonsen, Reebok; Rachel Fichtenbaum, MassMobility/EOHHS

Travel Training by GATRA

Mary Basilone, Mobility Manager from GATRA provided detailed information about GATRA's travel training program. Mary brought a "Best Practice Guide" for travel training that GATRA developed with the help of and material from Easter Seals and the Kennedy Center, Inc.

Who is being trained?

- Anyone who requests it but trainees are mostly elderly, adults and/or students with disabilities in special education classes.
- Group and 1:1 training are available
- GATRA reaches out to Councils on Aging and housing authorities to both recruit those who could benefit from travel instruction but also trains people who want to become travel trainers. In previous years GATRA trained staff at Pride, Inc. and Co-Op.
- Trainees pay 50% discounted fare when going through training by GATRA.

What are the elements of training?

- System familiarization provides information for trip planning – e.g. reading route maps, paying for fare, transferring between bus lines, using an on-line trip planner
- Understanding emotions: there is a lot of anxiety, especially for adults and kids with disabilities when they use the system the first time
- Teaching stranger danger for students with disabilities and help them figure out their own support system who can be called on if needed (e.g. family, teachers, neighbors, friends, etc.)
- Safety on the road and in the community: crossing streets, traveling with confidence in urban areas
- Rigorous evaluation process at the beginning, during and after completing travel training

GATRA does not train people who are legally blind but refers these consumers to the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind.

If someone requests training in Boston, the GATRA travel trainer helps them with the commuter rail and then hands over the training to Ways2Go representative at South Station in Boston. Ways2Go provides training for the MBTA system. Mary mentioned Linda Shepard Salzer, Ways2Go, who is one of the best trainers in the State. Linda has a tactile quilt to help travel trainees with visual impairments understand the MBTA system.

GATRA does not provide a completion certificate to those who do not demonstrate safe use of the system after completing 1:1 training. For those individuals paratransit use is suggested and GATRA modifies eligibility rules for paratransit in such cases.

Travel Training as part of Orientation and Mobility by the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB)

Cindy Curran from MCB presented information to the group.

- MCB teaches all elements of training similar to those of GATRA to people who are legally blind, but consumers do have to be legally blind to qualify for services from MCB.
- MCB employs Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists to provide the Orientation and Mobility services, including the travel training components.
- 93% of the consumers they work with have some vision. It may only be light perception or seeing shadows.
- They always train 1:1, never in a group.
- Some consumers are elderly, and some of them use a wheelchair or walker.
- Caseload of trainers: the 7 trainers have high caseloads: 35-70 people. There are 4 trainers in Boston, 1 in Fall River, 1 in Worcester and 1 in Western MA.
- In 2014 MCB had about 1200 referrals.
- The trainer on the South Shore trains on paratransit routes mostly because there is either no fixed route nearby or there is no safe crossing in busy intersections that would take people to the other side of the road where the bus stops.
- MCB consumers do not train each other. There are support groups available throughout MA for people with visual impairments.
- MBTA provides an access card for training – valid for 1 trainer + 1 consumer.

There are problems with existing but new infrastructure as well – Sharon commuter rail station – the bright yellow strip is missing for the top step on the stairs. Since the majority of legally blind people can differentiate between light and shade, this is a crucial deficiency in the system. MCB has conveyed its concern to the T.

Overview of the Clean Air Challenge

Rachel Fichtenbaum and Karen Dumaine discussed the Clean Air Challenge taking place September 20-27, 2015, and encouraged all present to take part in biking, walking or ride-sharing to work: www.macleanairchallenge.com/. Log your trips in NuRide to win prizes: www.commute.com/nuride. Some employers in the region have planned events in conjunction with the Clean Air Challenge. The Berkshire RCC has planned a series of events for the Clean Air Challenge in Berkshire County including free fares on a senior transportation service.

Round Robin

Pat Gavin of HESSCO commented on the difficulty of consumers traveling to the Cancer Center in Foxboro from Norwood. THE RIDE doesn't go to Foxboro, so it's easier for people to get to Boston even though Foxboro is much closer. The group wondered if the solution is some type of shuttle service like the one that existed many years ago. The group wondered if Foxboro will get THE RIDE if the commuter rail starts operating in Foxboro.

Steve Olanoff of Westwood commented that the University Station shuttle service is in process. They are continuing to work on outreach to employers. The shuttle will start in November. For now, it is only open to employees.

Tom O'Rourke of the Neponset Valley Chamber reported that at a recent Chamber meeting everyone is hiring and noted transportation as an important need for the region. Transportation is a way for businesses to be competitive when hiring.

Vi Ho of The Kraft Group reported that they are working on the yearly employee survey and working with the planners in Foxboro to gather information about shuttles.

Vicki Lowe commented that at the Foxboro COA they only are able to provide paratransit services from 8-4 with no evening or weekend service. GATRA has proposed fixed route service that would offer a loop around town. The COA has an extra vehicle that they use to get people to healthcare appointments in Attleboro. She serves on the GATRA Advisory Board.

Kathy Jonsen of Reebok commented on the need to improve traffic congestion at 128, particularly with new hotel planned for that area. They are trying to help young workers who want to live in Boston but work in Canton. They have a shuttle, but it gets stuck in the same traffic as all the cars.

Nancy Weiner of the Sharon COA mentioned that their center receives many requests for rides Wrentham and Norfolk. The Sharon COA van runs only 20 hours per week.

Karen provided an update on the Neponset Valley TMA, which works with businesses and municipal partners in five towns to look at alternatives to driving alone such as shuttles. They are currently expanding a community bus in Dedham. They also started a shuttle for Eversource in the University Station area. As more businesses join, the cost goes down and ridership goes up.

Rachel facilitates a network open to anyone who is travel training or wants to start a travel training program. It's an opportunity for travel trainers to share resources and information with each other or connect with peers to brainstorm solutions to shared challenges. The network worked with MassDOT to design and procure a workshop for travel trainers on travel training, led by the Kennedy Center of Connecticut. They conducted their fourth workshop in Massachusetts in Fitchburg Sept 16-18. There is funding for more workshops if there is interest from 20-25 people in attending a 3-day workshop. If you are interested in a workshop like this, contact Rachel at rachel.fichtenbaum@state.ma.us for more information.

There was a question about whether people with a temporary medical need for transportation can get approved for temporary RIDE service without waiting to make an appointment. Aniko will look into this.

Future Planning

From conversations, the RCC is looking to hold a late Fall Forum on Medical Transportation, and is considering forming 2 subgroups in Spring 2016: 1 to address Human Services need and 1 to address employer concerns.

Next Meeting

Wednesday, October 21, 9-11 AM

Dedham Town Hall, Lower Conference Room

26 Bryant Street, Dedham