

2016 Massachusetts Community Transportation Coordination Conference

Employment Transportation for Lower-Income Commuters

Presenters

- Mark Whitmore, North Shore Career Center
- Gail Farnsworth-French, Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation (QV CDC)
- Tim O'Day, SCM Elderbus

Facilitator

- Jana Hunkler, BerkshireRides/Berkshire Community Action Council

Transportation and the Job Search – Mark Whitmore

- Focus: How to integrate transportation into services provided to the jobseeker
 - Transportation is the 2nd largest expense behind housing, and the expense is even higher for people who are low-income or have a disability
 - A lot of the low to mid income jobs are further away such as in Beverly or Danvers. These locations are auto dependent
 - Lack of transportation limits access to jobs in auto-dependent locations, resulting in reduced economic opportunity and longer unemployment
- Plan: Ask questions during assessment process
 - A jobseeker who comes into the career center has to go through an assessment process that reviews the jobseeker's job history and identifies any shift issues, skills gaps, or transportation issues
 - During this process, the job specialist will try to help address any transportation barriers by discussing preferable commute time, budget, commute options, etc. For example, if a jobseeker is not willing to commute more than 45 minutes each way to work, then the job specialist will keep in mind to advise the jobseeker of the travel time on certain job opportunities
- Employment Express is an employment transportation service that serves around 60 individuals who are low income and have disabilities
- Goal for the future: Create a shuttle bridge to industrial parks in Danvers. Danvers has a lot of job opportunity but limited transportation

Individual Development Accounts – Gail Farnsworth-French

- QV CDC serves towns such as Ware. In Ware, getting around to work, doctor's appointments, or even grocery shopping can be a challenge because there's no public transit
- QV CDC offers Individual Development Account (IDA) Program that can help participants save to buy their own car
 - It is a monthly saving plan that matches the amount deposited by the participant up to \$3000
 - The match amount is funded through private donations

- The program also provides financial coaching that teaches individuals about saving money, car purchase procedure, insurance saving, etc.
 - The program is free of charge to Massachusetts residents
- Visit www.massAssets.org to learn more about IDAs
- QVCDC is currently finishing their 1-year pilot of match saving program

READYBUS – Tim O’Day

- SCM Elderbus is a private, nonprofit company that provides transportation for seniors and disability to anywhere from work, health appointments, shopping, etc. It’s funded by the Worcester Regional Transit Authority.
- Issue: limited public transportation in the area
- Opened empty seats on Elderbus vehicles in four towns to people who didn’t qualify as seniors and didn’t have a disability but needed transportation to work. New service “Readybus” provides work-related transportation in Spencer, Southbridge, Sturbridge, and Webster.
- To build ridership, they partnered with local career services and targeted employers with large numbers of employees who might benefit from the service
- In-town rides cost \$1.25

Q&A

- Is anyone exploring new service options such as Uber/Lyft?
 - Gail: Currently using MassRides but is definitely interested in Uber
 - Jana: Uber is coming to the Berkshire region. However, the cost is too high for low income individuals. If surge charge goes away, then it might be an option, especially off hours when the public bus isn’t running
 - Attendee comment: Uber/Lyft services require a smartphone, which some low-income/elderly individuals don’t have
- Can we have public policy that forces employers to pay higher wages?
 - Gail: we don’t have the authority or power to do so. However, a Massachusetts community college has been given a \$20 million grant to develop a stackable certificate program to help individuals get a higher education degree, which will result in higher-paying jobs
 - Mark: Create a better career path to allow individual to move up the ladder