

COMMUNITY ACTION RESPONDS:

COVID-19

HELPING PEOPLE. CHANGING LIVES.

**SUPPLEMENTAL TRANSPORTATION REPORT
APRIL 2, 2020**



**Ohio Association of
Community Action Agencies**

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Summary of Needs



Waive match

Waive local match requirements



Protection

Increase environmental and driver protections



Flexibility

Provide service area and vehicle use flexibility



Reduce Reporting

Reduce burdensome reporting requirements during pandemic recovery



About Community Action Transportation Services

Transportation is a vital service provided throughout Ohio's urban, suburban, and rural regions. Because of population and geographic terrain, transportation is provided differently to meet local needs. Many Community Action Agencies and partners directly operate or support community transportation needs whether through fixed route transit, demand response, and other means.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a number of obstacles to maintaining safe and reliable transportation services. Though ridership has decreased, the need for transportation has not. Reduced and in some cases the complete loss of fare collection and contract services has

significantly impacted operating revenue. Not only is it necessary to transport essential personnel to and from work, but it is also crucial to transport individuals to obtain vital medical care.

Community Action Agencies and community partners operate transportation through multiple grants, a variety of contract services, and revenue generated from fares. Ohio Department of Transportation is a significant funder for these services, though it requires 50% local match funds. Those funds

are typically generated through fares, school partnerships, local partnerships, and contract service opportunities, many of which are no longer accessible or feasible to supplement operation costs due to the pandemic and Stay At Home orders.

Transportation is a vital service in Ohio

Recommendations

The CARES Act includes \$25 billion for public transportation subsidies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including \$2 billion specifically for rural transit. While this funding will assist operations, it in no way guarantee operations will be able to continue in its pre-pandemic form. Below are recommendations to enable continued transit operations across Ohio.

ODOT Waiver of Local Match Requirements

The Federal Transition Administration requires a 50% local match for transportation service funding. As explained above, local match income opportunities have been significantly reduced due to closure of partner programs (i.e., school transportation partnership, local transit grants, etc.) and elimination of fare collection to maintain safe and appropriate physical distancing requirements.

Recommendations

- Temporarily eliminate or significantly reduce local match requirements
- State supplements for expenses exceeding those covered by CARES Act

Eliminating local match requirements will allow transit operations to continue providing services without additional revenue services. If match requirements were to continue as was usual, transportation operations across the state could be forced to close when match funds can no longer be acquired.

Driver Protection Supplies and Vehicle Modifications

To compensate for physical distancing requirements and reduce the spread of COVID-19, ODOT eliminated fare collection requirements. The elimination of fare collection not only allows riders to enter vehicles from an alternate entrance where available, but it also removes touchpoints, thereby reducing opportunities for contamination. However, this also removed a significant operating revenue stream.

Alternate vehicle entry is not optional for many rural transit vehicles. For example, passenger vans and small buses have one accessible entry and one emergency exit. Alternate handicapped accessible entries are also not optional. Small vehicles do not allow for 6' recommended distance between passengers and drivers. In many cases, transit drivers are at high-risk for complications should they contract COVID-19, therefore, it is vital not only to protect drivers but to protect passengers and overall transit operations.

Recommendations

- Increase funding to allow sanitation supply purchases and driver protection:
 - Protective barriers/shields between driver and passenger to prevent airborne community spread (i.e. droplets) and equipment (e.g., gloves, masks) for drivers and passengers
 - Hand sanitizer for passengers as they enter and exit the vehicles
 - Disinfecting wipes for passengers to wipe down high touchpoints between routine and pandemic sanitation cleaning
 - No-touch thermometers
 - Professional sanitizing devices (i.e., steam cleaning machines) for buses and vans
 - Uniforms to prevent drivers from carrying contaminated clothing to their homes

Note: Hand sanitizer and cleaning supplies have been unavailable for purchase. It is vital supplies be made available to essential transportation programs.

Recommendations

Service Area and Vehicle Use Flexibility

Transportation options are typically limited within counties though rider's transit needs don't stop at the county line. With reduced funds to operate transit programs, flexibility within typical service areas could have a positive impact on neighboring transit departments or those without any public transportation options.

Through a directive by the Ohio Department of Health, hospitals have been directed to work outside of their individual systems to respond to the growing health needs of Ohioans in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Ohio's Hospital Preparedness Regions will move patients outside of their local hospital system into neighboring systems to counteract hospital overcrowding, ICU and respirator access, and more. This creates significant barriers to individuals who rely on public transportation options to seek urgent medical care and for medical personnel temporarily transferred to high-volume hospitals. Flexibility to provide services in partnership with neighboring counties who have transit services—and especially to those without public options—is vital to ensure individuals have access and obtain care at locations to which they have been directed.

Recommendations

- Allow flexibility to provide transit outside of regular service areas for emergencies, medical personnel transportation, or individual medical care
- Allow transit vehicles to be adapted for use to provide other vital services when not in transit service (e.g., food and emergency delivery)

Reduce Reporting Requirements

Providing emergency transportation outside of typical service areas to care for communities in response to the pandemic is necessary. When responding to emergency needs, reporting requirements in direct response to the pandemic will quickly become burdensome and prevent timely action. Reporting requirements in response to COVID-19 must be reduced to enable transit operators to respond and provide needed emergency service quickly.

Recommendations

- Reduce burdensome reporting requirements during pandemic recovery as it relates to emergency services, atypical services, and outcomes reporting



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