

Senior Transportation Plan

Washington Township (Tazewell County) Initiative

2020

Senior Transportation (age 65+) has been identified as a critical need within Washington Township (Zip 61571), which includes the City of Washington. The following information supports what is currently available and what we can immediately do to improve service to seniors within the boundaries of the 61571 community. The broader need for general public transportation in our area is not immediately identifiable but is currently under study by the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission.

The Study

The Tri-County Regional Planning Commission (TCRPC) has identified Washington as a 'Grey Area'. This means Washington, and several other smaller incorporated communities in Tazewell County, are not 'large enough' for mass transit service. Not 'large enough', through previously completed studies, means ridership is not sufficient enough to financially support mass transit.

The TCRPC published (June 2020) their 'Peoria-Pekin Urbanized Area Transportation Study, Long Range Transportation Plan 2045'. This document identifies the needs of 'Grey Area' communities concerning "mobility and connectivity, public health, environment, freight, and economic development.

They also commissioned the Lochmueller Group (Spring 2020) to study urbanized area mobility issues with special emphasis on underserved 'grey areas', like ours. Per the TCRPC, "Outcomes of this study should identify priority areas for transit and/or paratransit service expansion, improvements for existing services, and funding sources to pilot mobility services to new, current 'grey' areas."

Though transportation service is currently available in our community for seniors and handicapped we believe the Lochmueller study will corroborate what we already know to be an overburdened, underfunded transportation system.

The Problem

There are multiple issues with the current senior/handicapped transportation system in the Washington community area. (1) Local medical clinics report that many senior citizens miss appointments due to lack of transportation. (2) Seniors are likely not aware of current alternate modes of transportation. (3) Current transportation services are underfunded and overburdened. (4) Current transportation services prioritize client ridership based on 'critical need' leaving many senior clients without means to get to local medical, dental and eye care clinics, rehabilitation services, grocery stores, exercise facilities, the library, banking facilities, senior events and more.

Current Services

Senior assisted living facilities in our area (zip 61571) all have their own paratransit vehicles meaning those senior needs, for all intents and purposes, are already met. We are discussing door to door, residential transportation services for seniors living in their own homes, an apartment or similar independent living quarters.

The following summarizes We Care, Agency on Aging and CityLift/Citylink services that are currently available for seniors, both handicapped and ambulatory (mobile) plus other persons with public transportation needs. Understanding the 'transit provider boundaries' established by grant stipulations (meaning pick up and drop off points based on where an individual lives) is confusing and complicates the process as stated below.

The existing senior/handicapped services provided by 'We Care' in Morton covers the 'rural' (*outside Washington city limits but within Washington Township*) area in our 61571 zip code area, as well as service to the remainder of rural Tazewell and Woodford counties. 'We Care' 'door to door' paratransit service is essential to transport handicapped, and ambulatory (mobile) seniors and others needing transportation to medical and other service providers outside of Washington, to include Peoria. 'We Care' has multiple vehicles to cover this large service area.

As a non-profit operation, they receive grants and pursue other fundraising efforts. However, they are limited to operating in rural areas only per state and/or federal grant requirements and cannot provide service in the City of Washington to another urbanized or larger city area. Seniors would contact 'We Care' directly to arrange travel and to make sure they qualify for the ride service declaring the destination and pick up points.

'Central Illinois Agency on Aging' is based in Peoria and provides these same senior handicapped and ambulatory (mobile) 'door to door' transportation services, for seniors and others in need, living *within Washington City limits* to service providers both within 61571 and outside the immediate area to include Peoria. The Agency on Aging has only one, four passenger vehicle to accommodate the transportation needs of our city as well as the other 'Grey Area' communities of North Pekin, Marquette Heights, Creve Coeur as well as other multiple surrounding counties.

Agency on Aging paratransit services are provided for seniors 60 years and older and others who have no other means of transportation. They also have limited areas (boundaries) they can service due to federal and/or state grant stipulations and do not provide rural service in our area currently handled by 'We Care'. Seniors would contact Agency on Aging transportation services directly to make sure they qualify for ridership and to arrange travel.

CityLift and CityLink, our Peoria based mass transit provider, provides bus service to Washington as far as the Washington (Sunnyland) Plaza. Handicapped individuals (seniors and otherwise) living between East Peoria and the Plaza are likely eligible for the low cost CityLift (paratransit, door to door) service. A call must be made to CityLink in Peoria to see if the specific address is in the service area. If so, CityLift (CityLink) will mail a handicapped application to the household to be filled out and returned for consideration of their door to door paratransit service.

‘Mobile’ seniors are welcome to ride the regular CityLink bus service at a reasonable cost from the bus stop at Washington (Sunnyland) Plaza to multiple points, either directly or through bus transfer points.

The Need for A Local Senior Transit Service

We Care, Agency on Aging and CityLink / CityLift are all vital in providing door to door paratransit transportation for individuals needing medical and other service needs within and beyond the 61571 area. However, limited agency funding for expansion of their services plus current complicated transit boundaries do not allow ‘mobile seniors’ to move around and within 61571 for local services.

Local medical care providers continue to comment that local seniors still miss appointments due to lack of transportation. It’s also hard for seniors to make local grocery or shopping trips, visit local dentists, eyecare professionals, meet for local therapy or counseling sessions, exercise at Five Points and Park District programs, do banking, go to the library, get to the bus stop or just simply visit friends.

It should also be noted that AARP and many other professional studies show social isolation is a large contributor to early senior mental and physical health deterioration. Keeping senior’s mobile is healthy for them and healthy for the local economy.

Local ‘Mobile Senior’ Service Providers Examined

We have looked at multiple and economical ways to increase transportation within the 61571 service area for ‘mobile’ seniors (65+) who do not require fully handicapped transport but may have (or not) some mobility issues. Transport programs reviewed include Teleport, Uber Central, Uber Assist, Smart Ride, Lyft, Arrive Rides, Liberty Mobility, Silver Ride, Ride With Via, YeYo Medical, INT America, GoGo Grandparent, AARP 50+, Feonix Mobility Rising and others. Most of these services help you set up your own senior transit system, which is something we are not structured to do.

Cost and ease of program administration without us committing a staff and equipment were the biggest considerations in selecting a partner. We needed a service who would verify that clients were 61571 clients, being transported within 61571, were 65 or older and provide us with reports to that effect.

GoGo Grandparent was one entity that could do this through the Uber and Lyft rideshare system using first available driver services. They would provide monthly central billing with reports to support the billing. The issue with GoGo was that neither Uber nor Lyft drivers do not assist the client in and out of their vehicles and stated services were a bit apprehensive about handling portable wheelchairs and walkers. It would also be problematic asking the drivers to qualify the riding individuals based on age verification and zip code.

At first the GoGo cost seemed relatively inexpensive but by the time the 'add on' monitoring, timed billing system and driver assistance issues, it became more expensive, especially trips from one end of the 61571 area to the other.

Morton/Washington Taxi turns out to be the best option. It is a Washington based business run by a local Washington resident. After discussing the local senior transportation need with them, they were more than willing to accommodate.

Morton/Washington Taxi will transport any 'mobile' senior resident age 65+ that is not fully handicapped or connected to a medical device, living in 61571, to any other location in 61571 for a flat rate of \$11 one way. This is the most cost-effective service we researched and found.

At client pick up, the drivers will have the client show identification verifying they are 65+ and live in the 61571 area. The taxi drivers will then help (if needed) the clients in and out of their cabs both at their residences and the point of exit. The drivers will also fold up the walkers and wheelchairs, if needed, store them for the trip and get them out at the arrival destinations.

The Township will be provided with monthly trip sheets to pay from. The trip sheets verify qualified ridership and monitors the service delivery points most frequented to possibly further refine the need.

The taxi service to qualifying resident seniors would be provided free of charge within 61571 boundaries and would run Monday through Friday from 7am to 5PM. Caretakers or other family members accompanying the senior would also ride free. It should be noted the taxi service can and would provide additional ride service to points outside of 61571 but that cost would be fully paid by the rider.

Washington Township will provide full funding support for this free senior ride service for a 12 to 18 month time frame to determine the actual senior need.

It should also be noted that the vehicle liability insurance carried by Morton/Washington Taxi will reflect Washington Township as Additional Insureds to help protect our interest as a funding agency.

Next Steps

Multiple marketing pieces need to be developed explaining all the transport services available to 61571 seniors and how those services can be contacted. This piece needs to be distributed through all available local channels a couple of weeks before the free ride service begins.

Marketing distribution should include mail, newspaper, chamber of commerce, city hall, township offices, businesses to include medical and other professional service points, Five Points, the Park District, churches, grocery stores, restaurants, banks, etc.

We should also create a story for the newspaper to show what we are doing for our local senior population. This might also give 'Shop Washington First' a boost.

Cost to the Township is at the \$11, one-way rate and billed monthly to the Township. Not sure what the need and cost will be over time, but 500 one way or 250 round trip rides would translate into \$5,500 a month.

Ridership will likely start slow and many never reach the \$5,500 monthly level. If ridership continues to be too low, consideration might be given to dropping the qualifying age to 62, 60 or even 55, as some AARP transit programs currently offer.

Using a local business to provide local transit for local seniors to local businesses is the best scenario possible for our 61571 free senior ride service. However, should we find the local senior service is not needed to the extent we believe it is, financially supporting the existing service providers to broaden their capabilities may be the answer.

The **final step** before marketing is to make sure we have not left anything out, covered all 'what if's' and that all parties, township and any others, are on board with the service.

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