

ONE CALL-ONE CLICK Profiles

LANE TRANSIT DISTRICT, OREGON

BACKGROUND

This program is an example of a transit district that has developed a one-call service (known as RideSource), and has an array of programs supporting accessibility among individuals with disabilities. In the last two years the RideSource Call Center has expanded to a one-call service that serves as Medicaid non-emergency medical trips (the Oregon Health Plan Plus program), as well as ADA paratransit, which means that the one-call center serves an unusually wide group of clients.

Lane Transit District (LTD) operates within Lane County, primarily within the Eugene/Springfield urban area, with service to nearby rural communities. Through LTD's Accessible Services, programs for older adults, people with disabilities, and those with low incomes are extended throughout the entire county. The service area covers more than 4,700 square miles and has a population of 347,000. The largest cities are Eugene (population 155,000) and Springfield (population 58,000).

DEVELOPMENT OF ONE-CALL SERVICES

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Lane Transit District has a long-standing culture of providing services to individuals with disabilities and coordinating with other organizations in the community. It "lives and breathes accessibility" and has an Accessible Services Department within its Service Planning, Accessibility, and Marketing Division.

LTD was an early adaptor of coordination, with activities spanning 30 years. By 1981, LTD had identified full accessibility of fixed-route buses as a key solution to providing mobility to people with disabilities, and began to implement this service.

MISSION STATEMENT

LTD enhances the community's quality of life by:

- Delivering reliable, responsive, and accessible public transit services.
- Offering innovative services that reduce dependency on the automobile.
- Providing progressive leadership for the community's transportation needs.

LTD views itself as a partner agency in improving the quality of life in the community as illustrated in its mission statement. The LTD web page describing the organization is also illustrative: "We are honored to

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serve a diverse community of commuters, students, seniors, and families on our buses every day. We work with many partners, from city, county, and state agencies, schools, chambers of commerce, and area employers to provide transportation services that improve the quality of life in our community.”

LTD has a single advisory committee for services geared to individuals with disabilities and older adults. It is open to agencies and consumers.

SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

LTD’s role in enhancing the community’s quality of life is illustrated in the range of services it operates: local and regional bus service, a bus rapid transit line, a full range of commuter services (carpools for commuters and students, emergency-ride-home program, education and resources for employers and employee transportation coordinators), and RideSource paratransit services. The system provides more than eight million rides annually – an average of 30 annual rides per capita.

RideSource is LTD’s complementary paratransit service. In addition, programs have been developed to support the use of fixed-route services for individuals for whom this is an option. Training programs include:

- Lift-use training;
- Transit host services;
- One-on-one individualized training;
- Life skills field trips for students; and
- Bus trainer support for agency personnel.

In addition, LTD provides training to private providers, volunteer drivers, and human service agencies. The Bus Buddies Program has been integrated with the individualized training services. These training services include defensive driving, drug and alcohol testing, and practical skills in serving people with disabilities.

LTD has served as a regional coordinator for many years, with a working knowledge of other transportation resources. Staff described their services as a “mini” call center, as call-takers were able to use their working knowledge to refer passengers needing other services to appropriate resources. As LTD has taken on broader responsibilities through its one-call service, its staff are developing a definitive list of transportation resources.

EXPANSION TO A ONE-CALL SERVICE

Since 1990, reservations and eligibility for RideSource services have been provided with a focus on ADA Paratransit. Two years ago, LTD expanded to a full one-call service that includes Medicaid Non-Emergency Transportation (NEMT) for all Oregon Health Plan Plus participants.

The State of Oregon understands the value of coordination, and its support for transportation coordination has enabled the development of this one-call service. The state started looking at a brokerage model

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for non-emergency medical trips 12 years ago. The first was established in Portland, and Lane County was the last. Oregon Department of Human Services had agreed to work with a local agency partner – either a transit agency or human service agency – in a coordinating role for transportation services. The agency wanted to work with a single partner in a region through an Intergovernmental Agreement to serve as a broker for trips¹.

While LTD was a logical choice because of its role in providing transportation and accessible services, it had to address critical questions about how to take on such a program. It also had to evaluate the impact of what would be a phenomenal expansion in terms of responsibilities for determining eligibility (a completely different set of rules than LTD was used to) and in sheer call volume. The program would more than double call volume, adding 42,000 people to the system.

LTD's decision to take on this service as a broker was built on a foundation of its mission, years of coordination activities, and support from local agencies that worked with persons eligible under Medicaid.

Program implementation required LTD staff to address many issues and details. It has resulted in some different approaches to effectively meeting the needs of customers. Some key points are identified in the next section.

CHANGING PERSPECTIVE

The addition of brokering Oregon Health Plan Plus transportation services has resulted in LTD developing new perspectives. While LTD had always supported coordination, taking on this service expansion required that it step into the role of providing transportation for a large, complicated human service program. One of the changes is that LTD is doing more outreach.

Previously call-takers would respond with the services for which they had information, but were not trained to go beyond that. Advocacy is now a more important part of the one-call service. Another is that LTD has a new understanding of the standards, rules, and protocols of Medicaid nonemergency medical transportation and transportation for individuals in long-term care programs.

MEDICAID SERVICES

Taking on Medicaid transportation services was a major decision. There was “fear of the unknown” and the reality that the number of calls would double overnight. In Portland, ADA and Medicaid are handled separately – so this was a new model.

LTD has gone out of its way to create a transparent system that has a threshold of accountability accept-

¹ Oregon does not have a capitated system for Medicaid services. LTD staff noted that this approach would be more difficult to accomplish under a capitated system.

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able to Medicaid. Within Medicaid there is a view, likely influenced by a few high-profile cases, that contractors, and even consumers, might take advantage of the system. LTD has had to prove that it doesn't operate that way. LTD spent a year and retained a third-party consultant to develop a method for distributing costs across multiple programs fairly, but within the strict guidelines set by the Center for Medicaid Services (CMS). LTD now uses a "random moment sample" to allocate costs between call-takers for Medicaid services and other RideSource services. While each call-taker may record only a few sample calls a day, over the course of a year that call-taker will collect tens of thousands of samples upon which to base the cost-allocation.

There remains a lack of understanding between what the Department of Human Services asks for in making its system work within the transportation Call Centers throughout the State and what CMS auditors check for and how they conduct their audits. This is the sort of thing that takes time to understand and work through. Auditors typically come from a medical services background and do not fully acknowledge that transportation services are different. It is often necessary to find ways to bridge this gap.

Trusting relationships needed to be formed to make this transition successful. There were essential components that LTD required when incorporating Medicaid transportation within the Call Center. LTD uses a fully allocated cost rate for trips. Each service provided through the Call Center is different, depending on contracts and agreements. Each has different characteristics. For example, ADA Paratransit does not offer same-day service, but Medicaid requires same-day response for scheduling transportation to a covered medical service. Such distinctions help clarify differences between services and associated costs.

ELIGIBILITY

In order to determine eligibility for Lane Transit District's ADA transportation service, customers are required to participate in an in-person interview. This interview usually takes place in the customer's home and always with a well-trained, professional Transportation Assessment Coordinator present. During the in-person interview, the customer is asked questions about his or her ability to ride LTD fixed-route buses. The interview typically takes about one hour. The Transportation Coordinator explains how the service works, describes eligibility considerations, and answers the customer's questions.

When first introduced, Medicaid services program eligibility followed a different process. Program eligibility was verified first, and then an in-take process for transportation options was conducted by phone to determine the customer's ability to use the fixed-route service and what other options were available for eligible trips.

LTD's current project is integrating eligibility for Medicaid and ADA services. It has taken many steps toward putting this in place. The planned process begins with a functional in-person assessment that also identifies trip needs and explores how the individual currently makes trips.

LTD has developed a functional assessment form to aid in this process, although it is still being tested and may be further refined. It was based on a form used at a Community Transportation Association of

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America (CTAA) training session for coordinated transportation.

LTD also has developed a flow chart that illustrates the eligibility process, which is shown in Figure 1. The process begins with questions by the intake call-taker to determine if the individual is a bus rider or is potentially eligible for expanded services. If there is potential eligibility for expanded services, a questionnaire is sent and a functional assessment scheduled.

Another unique part of the eligibility process is that LTD is partnering with the Area Agency on Aging to have its case workers serve as transportation coordinators and complete the functional assessments. These area coordinators can assess customer needs for home-delivered meals, transportation, and other services at one time. These assessments are done in the home. An advantage is that it enables LTD to problem-solve with medical transportation managers.

At this point the process has been tested in one area. It has been refined, and LTD has a good understanding of what is needed. The logistical steps are being worked through, and basic agreements are in place. The plan is to train 10 people to complete these functional assessments.

The initial result is that the consumer process of obtaining eligibility is simplified. A common fear of transit agencies is that an advocate, such as a case worker, will “give away the bank” and not follow strict eligibility guidelines. LTD does the training, so the area coordinators know the guidelines. So far it appears that LTD is getting more conditional eligibility determinations than before this model was implemented.

TECHNOLOGY

LTD has complete information on accessible services and training options on its website at <http://www.ltd.org/ridingltd/accessibleservices.html>. From this address you also can access information on RideSource services (see the menu on the left-hand side of the page).

Technology is currently an important topic at LTD. The agency recognizes that a new software platform is needed due to LTD’s expansion and that the agency has so much invested in its current platform that it will be hard to find something comparable. It may be costly to adapt what is available to meet LTD’s needs. Over the years, LTD has adjusted its current platform so it uniquely meets its needs. But doubling call volume and trips is causing serious discussion about how to move forward with technology.

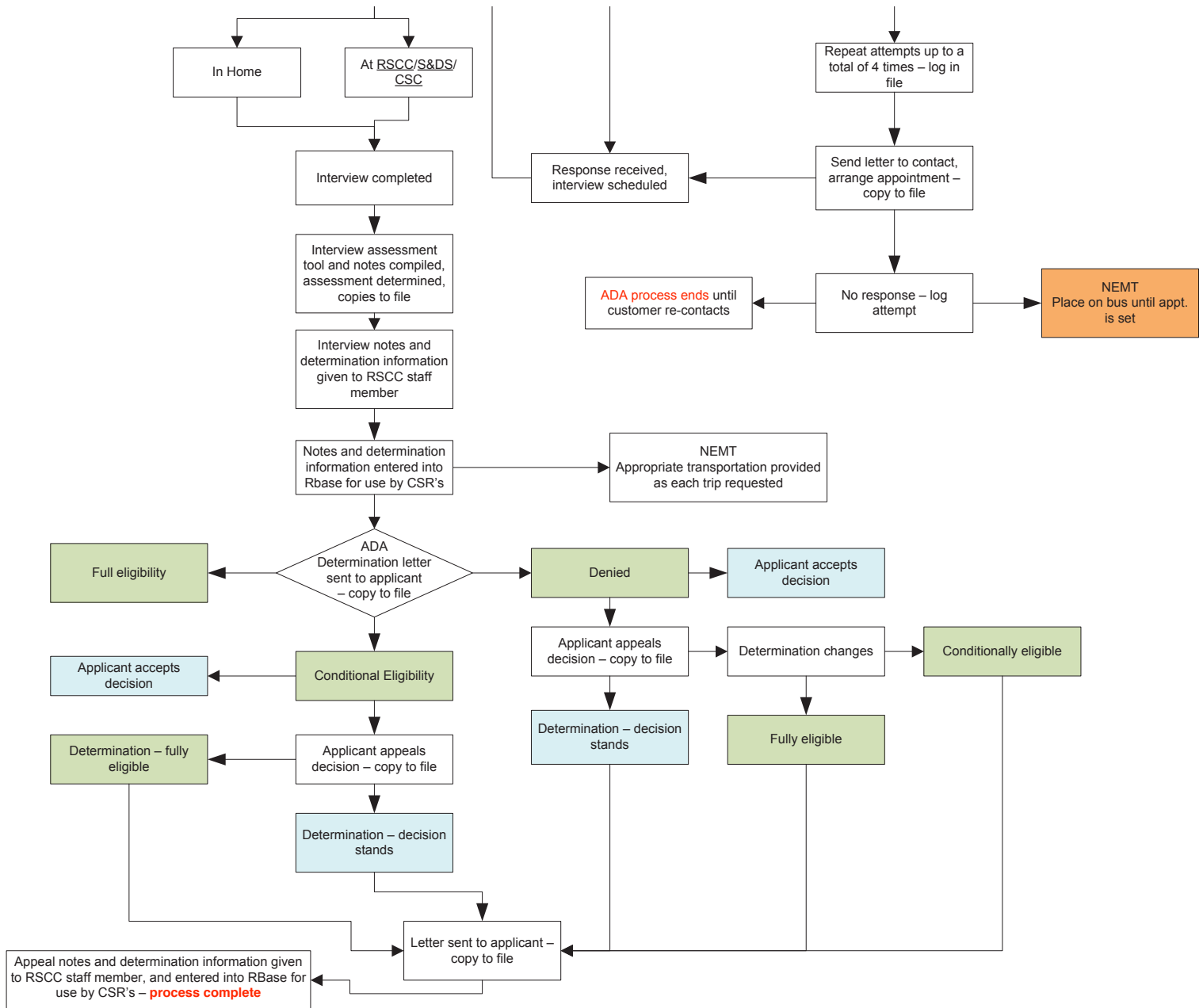
LOOKING FORWARD

Lane Transit District is actively integrating its eligibility processes, with a focus on identifying the abilities of riders to use the services they are capable of riding. Fully training Area Coordinators to conduct functional assessments and getting this system set up throughout the District is a major activity for LTD going forward. LTD is a good example of the time these processes take and how there is usually something around the corner to address in efforts to improve service for the rider and operating efficiencies for the

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FIGURE 1 (CONTINUED): Lane Transit District's Eligibility Interview Flowchart



Source: Lane Transit District

The Community Transportation Association of America is a national non-profit, membership organization working to ensure that our nation’s residents have reliable, accessible, affordable, convenient and safe transportation services. The Association is involved in several projects to provide information and technical assistance to communities, transportation providers, human services agencies and other groups to increase mobility through effective public and community transportation.

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