

ONE CALL-ONE CLICK Profiles

TRI COUNTY COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM, NH

BACKGROUND

The Tri-County Community Action Program (TCCAP), operator of North Country Transit (NCT), provides transportation one-call service as part of a coordinated public transportation program in New Hampshire's North Country region. The North Country includes 51 communities and 25 unincorporated places in three predominantly rural counties (Carroll, Coos and Grafton) situated between the White Mountain National Forest and the Canadian border. The area contains approximately 85,000 residents spread over 3,418 square miles.

CONDITIONS PRECEDING ONE-CALL SERVICE

TCCAP first developed its transportation one-call service in the mid-1990s. Prior to that, the vehicle-dispatching function in remote rural communities comprising much of the service area was decentralized, and customers interacted directly with drivers via telephone to obtain dial-a-ride transportation. As demand for transportation increased, TCCAP recognized the need to centralize NCT scheduling and dispatching and established a one-call center in Berlin, NH, using a toll-free "800" number. Some customers initially objected to calling Berlin, preferring to talk with drivers directly. This concern has been mitigated over time with marketing and procedural changes to make customers more comfortable with the one-call approach.

DESIGNATING A LEADER

The North Country region is predominantly rural and served by relatively few transportation providers. TCCAP is a private, not-for-profit "501(c)3" social service agency with a broad mission statement:

Tri-County CAP is dedicated to improving the lives and well-being of New Hampshire's people and communities. We provide opportunities and support for people to learn and grow in self-sufficiency, and to get involved in helping their neighbors and improving the conditions in their communities.

Establishing a coordinated public transit system fell within this mission, and TCCAP assumed a lead role largely in the absence of other ready and willing organizations. TCCAP partnered with the American Cancer Society, Office for Aging, and State Department of Health and Human Services to help create support for and fund public transit service.

Consistent with federal policy, the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NH DOT) has been actively promoting transportation coordination at the regional and local levels for more than a decade. In 2000, State initiative manifested in the formation of the Committee for Public Transportation in the North Country (CPTNC), following a successful summit meeting that indicated the need for more public transportation in the North Country. The Committee included representatives from local businesses, hospitals,

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human service agencies, transportation providers, and the North Country Council, which is the regional planning commission. The North Country Council and North Country Transit completed the Coordinated Transit Plan for the North Country Planning Region in September 2006. This study included an inventory of then-existing transportation services available in the region based on a mail-back survey of transportation providers. The survey included the following question:

“Do you think having one call center for trip requests for the North Country region would be helpful to your agency?”

The response was overwhelmingly favorable.

In 2007, TCCAP and Carroll County commissioned a feasibility study of community transportation options for Carroll County. With support from the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), NHDOT NHDHHS and the North Country Council, a consultant was hired to conduct a comprehensive transit needs assessment, develop goals and objectives, and determine a viable service solution. The new service began in late 2010.

GOALS SELECTED AND FUNDING OBTAINED

As noted earlier, the purpose of establishing the transportation one-call service was primarily to address the operational necessities of the transit system and to improve consumer convenience. TCCAP uses a combination of federal, state, local and private funds to support NCT. These include:

- FTA Section 5311 Formula Grant for Other than Urbanized Areas;
- FTA coordination (Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities, Section 5310; Job Access and Reverse Commute, Section 5316; New Freedom, Section 5317) grants, as available;
- Older Americans Act funds channeled through the State Office for Aging and Littleton Senior Center;
- Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF) employment and training grants; and
- Medicaid reimbursement for its volunteer program.

Also included are:

- State transit assistance;
- Developmental disabilities program revenue; and
- United Way and other charitable contributions.

TANF funds recently were used to match FTA Sections 5316 and 5317-funded projects. Long-distance medical transportation is partially funded by the Office for Aging.

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ONE-CALL SERVICES TODAY

The transportation one-call function is fully integrated into the NCT Service-delivery process. NCT provides the following services:

- Berlin-Gorham – Fixed-route and demand-responsive service is provided from 7:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. on weekdays and from 11:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. on Saturdays, excluding holidays.
 - Trolley – serves designated bus stops at scheduled times, and may also be flagged down as long as it is safe to stop. Drivers may also deviate a short distance from the route to allow access for people unable to make it to a stop, with prior notification.
 - Dial-A-Ride allows individual passengers to request transportation between specific locations at specific times. Both the origin and destination must be within the service area. A 24-hour advance reservation is requested for demand-response service. Same-day service may be available but is not guaranteed. Transportation to medical appointments is provided on a priority basis.
- Lancaster – Fixed-route and demand-response service is provided from 8:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. on weekdays, excluding holidays.
 - Tri-Town Bus – serves designated bus stops at scheduled times and may also be flagged down as long as it is safe to stop. Drivers may also deviate a short distance from the route to allow access for people unable to make it to a stop, with prior notification.
 - Dial-A-Ride is available between the towns of Groveton, Dalton, Whitefield and Lancaster.
- Northern Coos County – Dial-a-Ride service is available between the towns of Pittsburg, West Stewartstown, Colebrook and North Stratford from 8:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. on weekdays, excluding holidays.
- Long Distance Medical Transportation – TCCAP manages a volunteer-based service for patients requiring long distance nonemergency medical transportation (NEMT). The program currently has 20 volunteers who use their own vehicles and receive \$0.41 per mile for service provided.
- Carroll County Transit – TCCAP currently is implementing new service based on recommendations made in the Carroll County Transit Plan.

Other agencies referring clients to the NCT call center include the local American Cancer Society (ACS) chapter, Littleton Regional Hospital and Littleton Senior Center. NCT provides contract service for Littleton Hospital, and incoming calls for service ring to a dedicated phone line.

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The one-call service function is staffed primarily by two part-time NCT schedulers who accept reservations for directly operated and volunteer-operated trips, but not for other agencies. English and French speakers are accommodated. Use of technology is limited to a basic telephone system with a total of six incoming lines, including two for NCT, one for the Littleton Hospital contract service, two lines installed for the new Carroll County service, and a fax line used to transmit daily operating schedules to NCT drivers who do not report to the Berlin operating facility.

Additionally, NCT has used RouteMatch scheduling software since 2006 and currently has five user licenses. Reservations are scheduled immediately while customers remain on the phone. Customers are provided a confirmed reservation with estimated pick-up or drop-off time at completion of each call. TCCAP also maintains an informative website for customers (<http://www.tccap.org/thebus.htm>).

Communications between dispatch and drivers are via fax and a digital radio system. Due to the mountainous terrain, there are some coverage gaps in radio transmissions.

LOOKING FORWARD

TCCAP is working on a variety of ongoing coordination issues, including developing a better financial relationship with the State Coordinating Council and NHDHHS for Medicaid reimbursement for Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) service provided, and potentially trading service and passengers with the Littleton Senior Center, which operates its own van. The State of Vermont also is discussing the possibility of using NCT to provide NEMT service between the states, where needed. TCCAP is discussing with the regional 2-1-1 call center the possibility of advertising on NCT vehicles.

There are no definite plans to increase the use of ITS technologies with respect to TCCAP's one-call service. While management recognizes the desirability of moving forward with communications technology improvements, parts of the North Country region presently do not have access to broadband, which limits the ability to implement web-based scheduling and customer solutions. Nevertheless, TCCAP represents a good example of the benefits of a basic one-call service to customers and employees.

For more information on the Tri-County Community Action Program's one-call center, contact Beverly Raymond, Tri-County Community Action Program, Inc., 603-752-1741, braymond@tccap.org.

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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one call - one click
TRANSPORTATION SERVICES TOOLKIT