

Camden County Workforce Investment Board Camden City Initiatives Committee

Transportation Focus Group Planning Session

August 8, 2007

Attendees:

Glenn Baker, NJ Workforce Development
Art Campbell, Camden Chamber of Commerce
Hilary Colbert, CPAC
Gregg DeBaere, Atlantic Coast Communications
Melody Dickinson, The Widing Group
Judith Everts, Respond Inc.
Donna Johnston, CCWIB
Anthony D. Lingo, Camden City
Fa. Joseph Messina, CCWIB, Faith Based Liaison
Melinda Sanchez, Coopers Ferry Development Corporation
Gloria Smith, Genesis School of Business
Leona Tanker, CCWIB
Robin Widing, Widing Group
Michael Willmann, WMSH Marketing Communications

I. Background of Focus Groups

This meeting kicked off the planning process for the focus groups that will be conducted by the Camden City Initiatives Committee. The sessions are not required as part of the grant; however, answering questions around unsuppressed demand and communication are vital to the success of the TMCC's development. Further, the Camden City Initiatives Committee's involvement centers around ensuring that city residents' needs are represented in the plan. The Committee will begin its outreach to community and faith-based organizations and businesses, then speak directly to transit systems users second.

Camden County's United We Ride Plan indicated that all human services transportation providers are currently operating at full capacity. Some providers have waiting lists; whereas, some do not, and some but not all providers are referring customers. This information indicates that there is unmet customer demand. However, what is not understood is the level of demand that is not presently met. Further, if customers are being referred to other transit services, it is important to ensure that they are being referred to the most efficient and cost effective mode of transportation.

II. Discussion on Focus Group Issues and Design

Discussion revolved around three areas that the focus groups will aim to address: issues related to suppressed demand and issues related to customer communications.

Issues Related to Suppressed Demand

As a starting point for future discussions, as well as the development of focus group questions, the workgroup began listing some of the unmet needs of Camden City residents.

- ◆ **Access to certain businesses for work-related trips**, in particular industrial parks. Locations include Pennsauken, Cherry Hill, Pureland, around 295 and also the southern part of Camden County. Bus stop can be 1-2 miles away from employer.
- ◆ **Off-hours transportation to those businesses**. Shift work is not aligned with bus schedules. Some employees arrive at work and have to wait for the workplace to open; whereas other employees have to leave work early to access transportation.
- ◆ **WorkFirst New Jersey bus pass transfers**. WorkFirst New Jersey customers are given a bus pass for NJ Transit. Could or does this pass get recognized for transfer to locations that NJ Transit does not service?
- ◆ **Service priorities for trips for seniors**. Anecdotally, dialysis and more urgent care medical trips are taking priority over other trips for seniors. Feedback indicates that it is increasingly difficult for seniors to get transportation for non-medical related trips.
- ◆ **Youth transportation, especially relating to after school programs**. To get to after school programs, many youth must walk unaccompanied for moderate distances. Camden City did apply for New Jersey's Safe Routes to School Grant last year but was not awarded. The Committee expressed a strong interest in incorporating planning for that grant into the TMCC model.
- ◆ **There is a general impression around Camden City that parents don't drive**. Respond, Inc., for example, has a small bus that it uses for parents who would not otherwise be able to get to the organizations.
- ◆ **Services for the homeless**. The homeless is another population that needs services.

Though not demand issues, two important concerns surfaced.

- ◆ **Efficiency**. Doctors have reported seniors who have had to spend all day in transit to and from an appointment, and individuals have reported having to make multiple transfers to get to an appointment.
- ◆ **Safety** is another important consideration. This overarching issue spans youth transit, passenger safety, location of bus routes and more.

Issues Related to Customer Communications

Customer communications are a key element of the TMCC system design. Suggestions for customer interface included:

- ◆ **Having multiple access points, including online access, telephone access and kiosks**. Camden City residents are likely to have access to a telephone and be comfortable using voice prompted services. Strategically located kiosks

- ◆ **Creating a “Map Quest” or “FedEx” model.** Individuals can access information on routes, schedules, what provider is coming when and even specific locations such as employers.

Also, issues surfaced around how information is currently communicated.

- ◆ **Improved naming of routes.** Bus routes are currently labeled by number; however, that does not indicate where the bus is going or the stops that it makes. There needs to be a simplified way of finding out this information.
- ◆ **Improved trip planning.** Staff at community organizations frequently provided one-on-one trip planning for customers, which includes planning for transfers and zones.
- ◆ **Real time bus information or a reverse 911 system.** There is no system for notifying individuals then a bus is late, and individuals are not easily aware of route changes or when buses are shut down.

III. Process for Information Gathering

Instead of launching directly into focus groups, it was recommended that two groups be surveyed first—community and faith-based organizations and employers. A survey will be developed for each, based on the questions in the discussion guide and feedback received.

The following recommendations were made for organizations to be surveyed. In addition to staff, talking to directors of organizations was underscored, because they would be familiar with how people get to their centers and any issues they may face.

- ◆ Catholic Charities
- ◆ OEO
- ◆ Volunteers of America
- ◆ BPUM Child Care
- ◆ School Districts
- ◆ Churches and other faith-based organizations
- ◆ Housing Authority
- ◆ Boys & Girls Club and other youth organizations
- ◆ CPAC
- ◆ STRIVE program
- ◆ One-Stop Service Providers
- ◆ CDCs
- ◆ DCCBs
- ◆ Organizations listed in the Jobs Resource Directory
- ◆ Additional organizations on the WIB’s list of 500 community and faith-based organizations.

In addition, the WIB will work with Art Campbell, President of the Cherry Hill Regional Chamber of Commerce, to survey employers, including those located at the business parks, nursing facilities and hospitals. Both the community and faith-based survey and the employer survey will be made available on the WIB's website, ccwib.com.

Bus drivers are another potential source of information, and they may be able to provide valuable input. The WIB will focus on collecting anecdotal feedback, if possible. Also, some apartment complexes have vans to connect tenants to public transportation, making it another important group.

IV. Next Steps

The next meeting is a full Camden City Initiatives session with Yehuda Gross, ITS Transit Program Manager, on Thursday, August 23rd at 2 pm. This meeting will be held in the One-Stop Conference Room.