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Use of Section 5310 Transportation Resources in Urban and Rural America: A Baseline Assessment

Consistently, people with disabilities living in rural areas and those who serve them report the lack of transportation as a primary concern (Jackson, Seekins, & Offner, 1992; National Council on Disability, 2005). Section 5310 of the Federal Transit Act (49 USC 5310) authorizes a program of capital assistance to help local organizations acquire vehicles to transport elderly individuals and people with disabilities when other public transportation is unavailable or insufficient. To effectively maximize the availability and use of transportation resources, rural disability advocates and transportation planners need data on rural and urban distribution and use of Section 5310 funds (e.g., Gonzales, Seekins, & Kasnitz, 2001). The goal of this RTC: Rural study was to assess and compare the local distribution and use of Section 5310 funds in urban and rural areas.

Section 5310 transportation funds are allocated to states, which in turn distribute them to eligible local applicants. Local nonprofit organizations often use these funds to transport their clients to and from their service programs. While this agency-based model transports some people in both urban and rural areas, it does not directly address the general transportation needs of a community's elderly individuals and persons with disabilities. Critics suggest that agency-based vehicles may be underused, and that agencies may exclude non-clients from riding in the vehicles, even if their destinations coincide with an agency's route (e.g., Applied Resource Integration, Ltd., 1980; Sundeen, Reed, & Savage, 2005). These critics advocate developing cooperative transportation models.

Since 1987, Federal Transit Administration (FTA) programs have encouraged coordination of Section 5310-funded activities; and *Executive Order 13330* (2004) required government-wide coordination. However, implementation of collaborative arrangements has not been a central feature of state Section 5310 networks, and federal regulation has not yet required that Section 5310 recipients cooperate (Burkhardt et al., 2004; Government Accountability Office, 2003).

There is a particular need to determine whether resources are allocated equitably between urban and rural areas, and whether local coordinated systems are actually being implemented. Further, a baseline of such information is necessary in order to evaluate the effects of future Transit Act regulations and provisions. This RTC: Rural study provides such a baseline.

Method

We identified 4,835 Section 5310 recipients in 49 states and the District of Columbia (South Carolina has no Section 5310 program). From this list, we sent surveys to a random sample of 750 Section 5310 recipients, and 305 responded. Thirty surveys were returned as undeliverable, for an effective response rate of 45%. The survey asked about the characteristics of each responding organization, its service area and its vehicle fleet; the status of transportation services in the respondent's community; Section 5310 resources received; the amount of transportation provided; and various aspects of local coordination.

Results

Most respondents were private, non-profit organizations (79%; n=204). Of the remainder, 48 (19%) were local government entities; seven (3%) were state agencies; and one was a tribal organization. Most (60%) were senior services agencies or developmental disabilities services providers. One-tenth of respondents (n=26) reported being faith-based organizations.

Table 1 shows the number of counties served and the number of other transportation providers in these counties. The number of other providers is important for evaluating potential cooperative transportation arrangements. A one-way ANOVA showed that rural-only providers (M=3.35, SD=4.85) estimated significantly fewer other public or private transportation providers than did mixed-area transportation providers (M=12.93, SD=37.02; Mean Difference=-9.58, p=.005). There were no statistically significant differences among the number of riders per county or the number of mobility-impaired riders served per county.

Table 1. Average Numbers of Counties Served by Urban, Rural and Mixed-Area Section 5310 Providers, and Other Providers Available for Cooperation

Average	All respondents	Urban only	Mixed urban & rural	Rural only
Counties served	1.5	1.1	1.7	1.5
Other transportation providers	7.4	9.2	12.9	3.35

Key Terms

Section 5310 - Part of the Federal Transportation Act that funds purchase of vehicles by local organizations to provide transportation for elderly individuals and people with disabilities.

Urban, Rural, and Mixed Groups - Survey respondents who served: only large metropolitan areas (urban); only non-metropolitan counties (rural); or served both metropolitan and non-metropolitan counties (mixed).

Cooperation - any attempt by local organizations to work together to make transportation more efficient.

Coordination - independent organizations pooling purchases and/or coordinating service areas and target groups.

Brokerages - organizations coordinating schedules or "brokering" rides for clients between organizations.

Consolidated Systems - several organizations pooling all transit resources into a separate transportation agency serving the entire community.

Table 2 shows the number of urban, rural and mixed-area respondents reporting whether they do or do not participate in a cooperative system, and for those who participate, the type of system. Almost half (47%) of respondents participated in a cooperative transportation system, but only 13.7% participated in a brokerage system and only 4.6% participated in a consolidated system. Across geographic groups the likelihood of participating in a cooperative system was not significantly different.

Table 2. Cooperative Systems by Rural, Mixed, and Urban Provider Groups

Cooperative systems	Number and percent			
	All respondents	Urban services group	Mixed urban & rural group	Rural services group
Does not participate	138 (54%)	37 (64%)	33 (45%)	67 (55%)
Participates in coordinated system	68 (27%)	11 (19%)	21 (29 %)	35 (29%)
Participates in brokerage	36 (14%)	7 (12%)	15 (21%)	14 (12%)
Participates in consolidated system	12 (5%)	3 (5%)	4 (5%)	5 (4%)

Next Steps

RTC: Rural researchers plan to repeat this survey after states have responded to the changes and opportunities created by the new *Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act - A Legacy for Users* (SAFETEA-LU).

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