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Improving Paratransit for Johnson County

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Field Problems
May 12, 2004

Property of Urban and Regional Planning
University of Iowa
Acknowledgements

We would like to express our most sincere thanks to a number of people who helped to make this project a success. The faculty and staff of The University of Iowa who listened, advised, and answered our endless questions. The transportation professionals at Cambus, Johnson County JC SEATS and JCCOG who took time out of their busy schedules to provide us with invaluable information regarding local paratransit operations. Finally, the paratransit riders of Johnson County who volunteered to participate in our focus groups.

Sincerely,

Nate O'Leary-Roseberry
Jason White
Robert Keehn
Daniel Nolin
Executive Summary

Since the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, all communities that have a fixed route transit service must also provide a complementary paratransit service. Johnson County, Iowa City and Coralville fulfill this requirement through Johnson County SEATS and the Cambus “Bionic” service. These services help the elderly and people with disabilities improve their mobility and hopefully improve their quality of life by providing them with an alternative to traditional fixed-route transit.

The purpose of this project is to research innovative ways to improve Johnson County’s paratransit systems. Our client, the Johnson County Council of Governments (JCCOG), has asked our team to evaluate transportations alternatives using the criteria that any recommendation must improve service without increasing costs, or reduce costs without sacrificing service. Our research focused primarily on public documents and the activities of advocacy groups such as Easter Seals Project ACTION. Our Findings showed that Johnson County’s paratransit service goes beyond the requirements that the ADA has set forth and that they provide a valuable service to the community. The focus group showed us that while user satisfaction is generally high, there are some improvements that are desired. These include low-floor buses, flexible payment options, and the implementation of a flex-route service.

Based on these findings, we have drafted three proposals that might improve the already high level of paratransit service provided in Johnson County. These proposals include:

- Coordination of service alternatives for off-peak periods involving the redistribution of trips made in the evenings between JC SEATS and Bionic.
- A Ridership Training and Attendant program, similar to the service implemented in Eugene, OR, could reduce the number of individuals using paratransit services by training them to use the fixed route system.
- Finally, the stability of funding for Johnson County paratransit could be improved through a public relations campaign aimed at increasing the community’s awareness of existing paratransit services.
In addition to these proposals, the following list of possible improvements was compiled which focuses on changes that may be beneficial in the daily operations of Johnson County’s paratransit services.

- The existing ride reservation system could be improved to reduce the amount of time required to schedule rides.
- Alternative methods of payment would improve the convenience for riders.
- Implementing a flex-route service would provide paratransit users with regular access to transportation without having to make a traditional paratransit reservation.
- Introducing low-floor buses into the existing fleet would decrease pick-up and drop-off times.

Given that there is currently no additional funding for projects such as these, our proposals should be viewed as suggestions to consider for future improvements.
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Purpose of Project

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed in 1990 and requires any city with a fixed route transit system to provide transportation options for people with disabilities. Johnson County has fulfilled this requirement by making all buses lift equipped and providing complementary paratransit services known as Johnson County SEATS and the Cambus Bionic services, commonly known as the Bionic bus. JC SEATS and Bionic give people that have difficulty using the traditional transit systems greater mobility. Johnson County updates its paratransit plan annually to achieve the goal of providing disabled citizens a greater degree of mobility.

Johnson County Council of Governments (JCCOG) asked our team to evaluate transportation alternatives using the criteria that any recommendation must improve service without increasing costs, or reduce costs without sacrificing service. Our goal is to research, develop, and present innovative paratransit solutions that could improve Johnson County’s transit system. By researching paratransit alternatives, investigating other cities, and conducting a focus group, we have identified possible areas to improve Johnson County paratransit. Our recommendations aim to increase mobility, user satisfaction, and operational efficiency for Johnson County residents.

1.1 Johnson County Paratransit Today

There are three separate lift-equipped fixed route services operating within Johnson County. Iowa City and Coralville both operate traditional fixed route services that have 75 cent one-way fares and operate almost exclusively within their municipal boundaries. The University of Iowa provides a free service to the public that encompasses its campus and surrounding areas. Each of the services terminates at downtown Iowa City, where transfers are possible. As per the ADA regulations, each of three providers also offers a complementary paratransit service to persons with disabilities and the elderly.
Johnson County SEATS

Johnson County SEATS is a service for paratransit riders in Iowa City, Coralville, and rural Johnson County. JC SEATS provides a door-to-door service for the elderly and persons with disabilities who fulfill eligibility requirements set by JCCOG. The current fare for a one-way trip is $1.50, twice the fare for fixed route transit, which is the maximum amount that can be charged under ADA requirements. Drivers accept cash or punch cards, which riders can purchase for $15.00 and are good for ten one-way trips. Residents of Iowa City only pay 75 cents for trips within Iowa City.

Cambus Bionic

The other paratransit service provider for Johnson County is the Bionic service, operated by The University of Iowa. This service is available for the students, faculty, and staff of the University. Anyone affiliated with the University can utilize this service after meeting the pre-established eligibility requirements. This includes all persons with a temporary or permanent disability. All rides on Bionic and Cambus’s fixed-route service are free. The Bionic service covers a much larger service area than the regular fixed route operation and allows its riders many different trips for other than academic purposes. The service area includes Campus, Iowa City, Coralville, and University Heights.

2 Methodology

Our project was designed to find strategies for improving paratransit within Johnson County and to determine alternatives for traditional operational procedures. During the course of this project, our goals and objectives changed in response to the limitations and restrictions we encountered. Some of our original thoughts on what would be important turned out to be irrelevant or infeasible.

We reviewed plans and documents explaining local paratransit operations and regulations from the Johnson County Council of Governments, Johnson County SEATS, and The University of Iowa. The next step was find national sources of information about innovative paratransit operations. Three major sources were helpful - Transportation
Cooperative Research Program (TCRP), Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), and the Easter Seals Project ACTION. Each of these innovative alternatives identified were evaluated for their local applicability and financial implications.

A second strategy was to investigate paratransit in other communities. Iowa City and Johnson County are unique in that they have a very diverse population because of the University of Iowa and its associated hospitals. It also has a level of accessibility that is uncommon for the State of Iowa. This results in Johnson County having a higher percentage of persons requiring paratransit. We focused our efforts in finding comparable cities in the Midwest and used climate, population size, and demographics as criteria. We centered our search on college towns in the Upper Midwest with populations between 100,000 and 300,000.

A crucial element in the success of this project was public participation. To recommend sound alternatives for Johnson County, we needed to collect input from users. This was accomplished through a focus group, consisting of paratransit users from JC SEATS and the Cambus Bionic service. This input allowed us to identify needed operational improvements and create solutions for these problems.
3 Findings

This section presents findings that may not constitute stand-alone recommendations. However, this information does provide relevant information regarding Johnson County paratransit. This was done by comparing Iowa City with other Midwestern cities and collecting user’s perceptions of the services through a focus group.

3.1 What do other similar cities do?

Twelve cities were studied, all in the Upper Midwest and all of comparable size to Iowa City. Whenever possible, we identified cities with a college or some other unique characteristic that made providing paratransit similar to Johnson County. The cities are listed in Table 1. A complete summary of the information collected from interviews with these city paratransit providers may be found in the appendix.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Population (Urbanized Area)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Champaign / Urbana</td>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>123,938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ames</td>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>50,726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Des Moines</td>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>370,505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Iowa City</strong></td>
<td><strong>Iowa</strong></td>
<td><strong>85,247</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawrence</td>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>79,647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rochester</td>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>91,271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Cloud</td>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>153,516</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbia</td>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>98,779</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springfield</td>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>91,305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lincoln</td>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>226,582</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eau Claire</td>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>91,393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LaCrosse</td>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>89,966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madison</td>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>329,533</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Johnson County has characteristics that are very similar to the cities in the study. Our study did not identify any significant innovations in the services these cities offer. It isn’t that the other cities we selected aren’t doing a good job at providing paratransit. Most cities provide a reasonable service at a minimal cost. They can provide door-to-door service and are willing to assist riders with packages, while using less costly equipment, such as converted vans as opposed to low-floor buses. Many of the cities also have incorporated computer software packages (such as Trapeze or Strategen) to increase
efficiencies. However, most still far short of covering much of the costs through fare box revenues. Table 2 compares Johnson County services with the norm for those cities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paratransit Characteristic</th>
<th>Johnson County</th>
<th>Comparison Cities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of Vehicle</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mini Vans</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Converted Vans</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy Duty Vans</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Floor Buses</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Price of Vehicle</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under $100,000</td>
<td>$45,000 - $50,000</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000 - $200,000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over $200,000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dispatch / Reservation System</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper and Pencil</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Software</td>
<td>Strategen</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spreadsheets</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fare Collection Method</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take Cash</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take Tickets</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take Smart Cards</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer Monthly Billing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ADA Fare</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1.00</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1.30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1.50</td>
<td>$1.50</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$2.00</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cost covered by farebox</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 10%</td>
<td>5.60%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% - 14%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15% - 19%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20% or more</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Door to Door, Curb to Curb</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Door to door</td>
<td>Door to door</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curb to Curb</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Drivers carry groceries</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Annual ADA Riders</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 50,000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50,000 - 100,000</td>
<td>86,636</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 100,000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2 What problems do Johnson Co. Paratransit Users face?

We collected information on user perceptions through a Focus Group comprised of several JC SEATS and Cambus Bionic users at the Iowa City Civic Center. Elderly persons and persons with disabilities participated. Our intention was to identify any day-to-day local paratransit concerns. The Focus Group helped identify short and long term needs, and helped us evaluate the feasibility of some potential solutions over others.

The participating users suggested improvements in several areas: equipment, reservation system and operations, payment options, and personnel. Equipment suggestions ranged from costly improvements like low-floor buses, to issues relating to the “experience” of the ride, such as making sure ventilation was adequate. Suggestions for the reservation system and operations included making sure that the 30-minute drop-off and pick-up window belongs to the user, not the system. For example, if the bus arrives earlier than 15 minutes before the reservation time, the driver should be patient and respective of the user’s time. Riders would also like to see more reservation and cancellation options, such as through email and the Internet reservation systems.

Riders also had suggestions for payment options and service. Riders currently have the option to pay in cash or with a punch card. Users suggested a monthly billing procedure, or a double punch for round-trip rides. In terms of service, riders would like more travel options available to them, such as more frequent trips to Coral Ridge Mall or Cedar Rapids. Several riders also expressed a continuing need to improve client-driver relations, possibly by increasing driver training and clearly defining the agency’s mission statement.
4 Recommendations

The main purpose of our field problems project was to research, formulate, and introduce a number of paratransit operation alternatives to Johnson County. Our intention was to discover innovations in the paratransit community that could be easily adapted for use with local agencies. We believe that the following paratransit alternatives can be used to further augment an already successful transit system and provide additional benefits for the end user of the service.

Our team developed several different recommendations to improve Johnson County paratransit, and grouped these into two categories of alternatives: immediate and strategic. An immediate solution can be implemented quickly and at minimal cost to Johnson County. Strategic solutions, on the other hand, may require an investment in time and resources to ensure their proper development and future success. We feel that our strategic solutions correspond with the future trends of the paratransit industry and will make a valuable contribution to achieving Johnson County’s transportation planning goals.

4.1 Immediate Alternatives

The immediate alternatives we recommend for Johnson County include programs that we believe can have a direct impact on current paratransit operations. We believe that cooperating agencies could quickly implement these solutions into their procedures with positive results for their clients. Our immediate solutions include four different strategies: operational improvements, a coordinated transit approach with Cambus Bionic, a service to teach paratransit riders to use fixed route buses, and a public relations campaign.

4.1.1 Operational Improvements

Operational improvements are programs that we feel are important elements in strengthening local paratransit activities, but were not comprehensive enough to warrant an intensive investigation. These programs can be quickly implemented by local agencies
at minimal cost and effort. These programs, which include alternative payment options, weekly shopping trips, and customer service training, will improve the mobility of local paratransit users and enhance their ability to use the system.

Payment Alternatives
The payment options currently available to JC SEATS users are limited. Users may either buy punch card passes at the JC SEATS office or pay with cash on the bus. The focus group participants revealed that additional payment options would help make paratransit services more convenient. A feasible solution to this problem would be to offer users the option of paying for paratransit trips through a monthly billing program. This would require JC SEATS to collect and retain trip information for each client enrolled in the program and send a bill for services at a selected date each month. Another payment possibility would be to increase the number of outlets where paratransit tickets are sold. This could be easily accomplished by allowing the sale of paratransit tickets at facilities where fixed-route passes are already sold. The following map shows locations where monthly passes for Coralville and Iowa City may be purchased, along with the locations where JC SEATS punch cards may be bought.
Weekly Shopping Trips
During the focus group, many of the participants expressed their desire to make occasional trips to destinations such as Cedar Rapids. While it is not possible for JC SEATS to serve every destination a rider wishes to travel to, there are some trips that could be feasible with high ridership levels. Trips could also be planned during off peak periods when there is less demand for service.

One example of a weekly planned trip service is in Eugene, Oregon. The RideSource Shopper is an option for paratransit users for their grocery shopping. The trips are done on a weekly basis, with sections of Eugene done on different days. To encourage more use of the service, the fares are half of the normal rate, because all trips are already round trip. With a little work, a compromise between JC SEATS and their clients could be reached that would provide more trips at a lower cost for service.

Customer Service Training
It was also generally agreed that the drivers, at a minimum, should be required to participate in a customer training program to improve service levels. Focus group participants expressed concerns that drivers were not entirely responsive to their needs. It is possible that customer service training would help ameliorate any real or perceived problems in this area. Customer service training would help JC SEATS drivers to better understand who their clients are, what they need, and how to satisfy those needs in a way that reflects positively on the organization.

4.1.2 Coordinated service alternatives for off-peak transit periods
At the current time, both Bionic and JC SEATS provide duplicate services for clients going to grocery stores, medical appointments, and entertainment venues (for example). On many occasions vehicles from both agencies are parked side by side to deliver clients to their desired destinations. The costs incurred for equipment, fuel, and labor that provide these duplicated services could be earmarked for other paratransit related expenditures if the agencies could find ways to work together to provide paratransit
services jointly. This is especially apparent during off peak hours of service demand when both agencies are required to operate vehicles that transport relatively few passengers.

Past efforts to coordinate paratransit activities and responsibilities between JC SEATS and Bionic have failed. This was due primarily to the fact that each transit agency operated independently of the other and neither organization was willing to concede operating or financial resources to the other. An additional concern was a decline in service levels. This arose from the fear that streamlining paratransit activities within Johnson County might lead to an erosion of operational processes within the different agencies and facilitate a decline in service levels.

Another barrier to collaboration has been apportioning the cost burden. It is difficult to determine how the costs of operating a dual paratransit system would be divided between the two agencies. This is further complicated by the fact that The University of Iowa paratransit service, Bionic, is a free service provided to the students, staff, and faculty of the University. JC SEATS, on the other hand, charges a nominal fee for its transit services. Finding a way to streamline the operational procedures of these two very different transit agencies was not considered to be feasible and the idea of a coordinated paratransit program for Johnson County was eventually abandoned.

Our analysis found many similarities between JC SEATS and Bionic, as well as a few operational procedures unique to each agency. The University of Iowa developed its own transit system to accommodate the transit needs of students, faculty, and staff. This system began as a fixed-route, large bus system. However, as the system matured the University recognized that the disabled population needed a more specialized transit system. Bionic, the paratransit segment of the Cambus transit system, officially began in 1976 to better meet the specialized transit needs of the disabled University population. The Bionic system offers free paratransit services for clients traveling to and from the University, as well as for shopping trips and other nonacademic related transit. All Bionic vehicles are operated and dispatched by students of the University.
Johnson County SEATS is a more conventional paratransit agency. JC SEATS provides transit services for all ADA (non-emergency transportation) eligible recipients living within Johnson County. The JC SEATS users consist of the elderly, mentally disabled, or physically disabled citizens of Johnson County that are unable to find other means of transportation. JC SEATS provides paratransit services seven days a week to clients living within the Coralville and Iowa City region. More limited transit opportunities are available for rural county residents with variable schedules depending upon location. JC SEATS charges a minimal fee of $.75 for paratransit trips originating within Iowa City and $1.50 for all other trips. The JC SEATS staff consists of professional drivers and dispatch operators and is located in Coralville, Iowa.

The standard operating procedures of both agencies are very similar. They provide comparable hours of operation for weekday paratransit service. Weekend operating hours, however, do differ with JC SEATS opening and closing earlier than Bionic. Their funding sources are very different. Bionic’s entire operating budget is received directly from the University’s general transit fund. JC SEATS is funded through federal government transportation programs and a variety of Johnson County government entities. These entities contract with JC SEATS for paratransit service, provide funding, and contribute vehicles to JC SEATS.

There are opportunities to coordinate paratransit activities that could benefit both agencies. Our primary area of emphasis was during times of low demand, particularly off peak weekday service hours when equipment and personnel at both agencies were not being fully utilized. We discovered that JC SEATS averaged approximately 12 – 13 paratransit trips per weeknight between 5:30 and 10:00 pm. These trips require that one JC SEATS vehicle remain in service during those times. JC SEATS does not operate dispatching services during these hours and evening drivers are given their instructions before the close of each business day. Dispatchers for JC SEATS are required to be “on call” to handle any problems or emergencies that may occur during evening service. Bionic also has equipment operating during this period and paratransit drivers and supervising dispatchers are available each weeknight until 12:00 am. Currently, Bionic
operates one bus for paratransit trips between 6:30 pm and 12:00 am. This vehicle handles an average of 7–10 rides per evening.

Our team determined that it would be operationally feasible to coordinate all evening paratransit services for both agencies. Because Bionic service is fully operational, with both drivers and dispatch working during the evening, this agency could handle the evening JC SEATS clients. However, coordination will require some policy changes. First, full communication between the agencies will be necessary to create a successful coordinated paratransit system. Second, the distribution of costs will have to be agreed to by Bionic and JC SEATS management, and the sponsoring agencies. Finally, the question of how to collect ridership fees from JC SEATS riders will need to be solved.

**Improving Communication**

It will be necessary to create guidelines that determine how crucial information will be shared between the two systems. This is especially important for Bionic dispatchers who initially will not be familiar with the needs of JC SEATS passengers. JC SEATS management will need to provide Bionic personnel with the personal information and driving directions of every paratransit client. The following operational guidelines could help ease coordination:

- Preliminary meetings must be held between the management and dispatching staff of each agency. Staff members from each agency will need to become familiar with the operating procedures and fundamental guidelines of the other.

- Information sharing systems must be established. This will enable staff to establish the general rules and time lines for clients to order paratransit services. Once established, a procedural manual can be created that will provide Bionic staff with instructions on how to provide service for JC SEATS riders. A rider manual should also be created to explain to recipients how the new service will affect them and explain how to schedule rides.
• Training and informational sessions will need to be scheduled for employees of local nursing homes and adult day care centers as well as for all other affected parties involved with paratransit activities. Care givers need to understand the new paratransit procedures.

Trip Payment
Currently, the Bionic service provides paratransit trips to its recipients at no charge. An important difference between the two paratransit agencies is that JC SEATS riders are required to pay for trips and Bionic riders do not. Bionic drivers are not trained or equipped to handle cash payments for paratransit rides. The following guidelines could be used to ease the transition to coordinated paratransit.

• Bionic drivers may be trained and given authority to collect paratransit service tickets from JC SEATS riders. JC SEATS users would pay by using the rider tickets they are already familiar with.

• JC SEATS clients may be required to prepay for rides during normal business hours, or by reimbursement the day after the trip. These alternative means of payment would require JC SEATS dispatch to keep track of the travel patterns of their clients and would allow them to retain the burden of collecting payment from their riders.

Fiscal Implication
Our team has determined that the cost of fully staffing and providing these rides will be $15.00 dollars p/hour for each Bionic vehicle operated. This cost was identified as the price of adding an additional Bionic vehicle to accommodate the JC SEATS passengers. Discussions with Cambus management have established that two Bionic buses will be needed to transport the additional riders. The $15.00 cost p/hour is needed by Cambus to operate the equipment and personnel needed for coordinated transit. Assuming that Bionic absorbs all evening rides from the JC SEATS program, this will entail a cost of $97.50 per vehicle per evening shift. Currently, JC SEATS incurs an average operating cost of $17.00 dollars p/hour to operate evening paratransit service. If these trips were
handled by Bionic, a cost savings of $2.00 p/hour could be gained. This new coordinated system could initially provide JC SEATS with a cost savings of $2,860 per year. Even with the small amount of money saved through coordinated evening service, we feel that this program could be used as a pilot study to determine the success of the two agencies working together.

An alternative form of pricing coordinated paratransit would be for Bionic to charge JC SEATS for each trip provided. This payment could be assessed either by charging for the miles traveled or for each paratransit move. A p/mile billing option would be difficult to administer for Bionic staff because detailed records of the miles traveled with JC SEATS passengers on board would have to be collected. Charging for each JC SEATS trip provided by Bionic could become more expensive than an hourly charge. A trip on Johnson County SEATS costs $16.23 to provide. Charging per trip could nearly double the cost of JC SEATS for coordinated transit if demand for evening service remains at 12-13 trips per evening. Currently, Cambus management is only interested in providing coordinated transit on an hourly basis. We feel that this payment system will provide the best benefit to all parties involved because it provides the Bionic program with extra funding to pay for increasing its evening service and it saves JC SEATS money by retiring weekday evening services altogether.

4.1.3 Rider Training and Attendant Program

One of the major goals for any complementary paratransit system is to give its riders expanded mobility to make their lives as normal as possible. Johnson County SEATS gives its riders access to work, school, medical appointments, and recreational activities. Unfortunately, many of the riders become dependent on JC SEATS for all of their trips. A Rider Training and Attendant (RT&A) Program would educate users to better use fixed route service and offers them a network of support to become more independent.

Case Study Background
The RT&A alternative is based on a 1998 pilot study in Eugene Oregon, conducted by the Lane Transit District (LTD). The Rider Training and Attendant Project (RT&A) was
funded by grants from Easter Seal's Project Action and the Oregon Department of Transportation (DOT), Public Transit Division. The pilot study was documented through a review by the Lane Council of Governments (LCOG), and the Oregon DOT, Public Transit Division. The review evaluates the first year of operations for the RT&A Project including funding, enrollment, user feedback, and where to go next. The following discussion relies heavily on this document.

The program is still in operation, helping to give riders an alternative to RideSource (local complementary paratransit service). It no longer receives assistance from Easter Seal's Project Action. Its funding comes from the State of Oregon Special Transportation Fund (STF). Since its creation, there have been more than 19,000 one way trips taken by former RideSource users on fixed-route services as opposed to traditional paratransit vehicles. While there was a net cost for the first year of its operation, the cost savings for LTD in fiscal year 2003 was almost $50,000.

**Eugene Oregon**

Eugene and Lane County, Oregon are a city and county similar to Iowa City and Johnson County. Eugene has a population of approximately 135,000, and the county has approximately 320,000 people. The University of Oregon is located in Eugene, so there are similar expectations about providing an excellent public transit and paratransit service. One third of its residents have finished at least four years of college. There is one major difference between Eugene and Iowa City: the climate in Eugene is much milder, with an average temperature of 53 degrees, mild winters, and few drastic weather changes. However, the program may also be successful in harsher Midwestern climates.

While the overall goal of the RT&A program was to help its participants become more independent, the pilot study included other objectives. Through the pilot study, LTD wanted to determine how feasible it would be to continue the program after its first year. Some of the issues included: how much transfer assistance would be needed in perpetuity? Would there be any savings after accounting for all costs with training and transfer assistance? Would RideSource have any increase in capacity without purchasing any new buses?
The initial RT&A pilot project was comprised of three major parts: evaluation of a current system and selection of participants, rider training and attendant curriculum, and a rider monitoring and evaluation period. Before the training or implementation phases, the first step was to find a care provider qualified to handle the RT&A Project. It was determined that a local non-profit organization, Alternative Work Concepts (AWC), was the best candidate for the job.

**Rider and Trainer Selection**

The next step was to select riders and trainers for the project. Riders were selected using an at home assessment interview conducted by AWC. The Project coordinator and the person who would be working as the trainer were both present at the interview. Potential candidates were chosen based on how feasible it would be to train them to use fixed-route service, based on the following considerations:

- Physical and geographic barriers
- Proximity of bus stops to points of departure and arrival
- Previous rider training experience
- Fears and barriers to participation
- Medical/physical/emotional issues that might affect participation
- Communication styles and techniques most familiar to each individual
- Learning styles
- Stranger and safety awareness
- Street crossing skill level and experience

To encourage a higher level of participation LTD offered many different incentives, including:

- A transit attendant accompanying the rider during the course of training
- Identification badges for each trainee, imprinted with rider and trip information
- Free bus passes for the duration of the training period
- Assurance that participation in the RT&A Project would not affect an individual's eligibility as a RideSource rider, and that participation was not a commitment to continue to use LTD after training was completed
- Availability of back-up plans
- Assurances about confidentiality
- A certificate of completion for each participant, presented at a graduation event

For the pilot study, 17 different people were interviewed, half of whom seemed likely to benefit from the RT&A Project. Of all the interviewees, seven people made it through the entire program.

All trainers selected to assist with the program were already familiar with the needs of persons with disabilities. Many of these people had been working in the public service sector in positions such as social service, rehabilitation, or had a background in special education. Each person also needed to show credentials with respect to health and safety including: First Aid/CPR certification, abuse report training, blood born pathogens training, and stranger awareness training.

**Rider Training and Attendant Curriculum**

The rider training and attendant curriculum was set up with three major parts, each moving the participant closer to independence from RideSource than the last. The steps included:

1. One-on-One interview

   The participant was given a chance to meet and get to know their trainer. Each participant had to feel comfortable in the program for it to be successful. Time was given to ensure that good relationships were formed between the trainer and trainee. This was done by each trainer making sure to show that they cared for the safety and well being of their trainee.
All training was conducted at the same stops and for the same routes that the trainee would use after finishing the training. The trainer was present to assist with any transfer help needed. Even though AWC used one basic curriculum, each trainee had their own learning styles. The curriculum was flexible enough to accommodate those unique characteristics.

2. Training in a real environment
   a. Repetitive practice
      This was conducted over a one month to three month period. During this period, the trainee used fixed-route by themselves with trainers attending in case their assistance was needed. A trainee was ready for the fading part of the curriculum once they could achieve 100 percent independence over a ten day period, with or without natural supports that did not include the trainer.
   b. Fading
      This was conducted over a two to four week period. Over the period, there would be progressively less support provided by the trainer. The trainer would evaluate progress by assessing how aware the trainee was of their presence. When it was apparent that the trainee was no longer aware of the trainer's presence, the trainee was ready for shadowing by the trainer.
   c. Shadowing
      This portion of the project took two to four weeks to complete. The only difference between the shadowing and fading segments was that the trainee never knew of the trainer's presence. To assist, AWC provided trainers that the participant was unfamiliar with, used disguises, and had the trainer observe from long distances. After the trainee could complete ten consecutive days of 100 percent independence, the trainee was ready for full use of the fixed route service.

Evaluations and Relevance to Johnson County
The RT&A pilot study completed by the Lane Transit District had some useful findings. At the end of the year, seven people had completed the course, and six use fixed-route
service independent of any assistance. Those six individuals took 615 one-way trips that would have otherwise been taken on RideSource. This showed a cost savings of $7,503, by utilizing fixed-route over paratransit. However, when all training costs were factored into the equation, there was a net cost of $4,372 for the first year. For each participant it would take a year and a half to recover all costs.

One of the largest obstacles for the project was to overcome resistance from care providers and family members. The project must not be presented as simply a cost savings mechanism. If family and care providers are anxious about the project, they will pass that skepticism on to the program’s riders. Any potential participants must live and work close enough to a bus stop to set their family and care providers at ease.

Much of this skepticism is overcome as the participant advances through the program. Many of the trainees lost all feelings of fear and began to believe that they could achieve full independence. It is still critical to ensure full attendant assistance even if some participants are doing well, and not all will be able to be to achieve 100 percent independence. This assistance can come from more than just one-on-one help from the hired trainers. Bus drivers and buddy systems, where two participants use the same trainer, are both ways to save costs.

The use of an RT&A project for Johnson County is practical for a number of reasons. There is a good existing network of support staff and riders that could be tapped for an assistance project. Every year there are more trips completed than the last. Cost savings could be seen through increased use of fixed-route service along with delaying the need for more paratransit vehicles. While there would be some up front administrative and training costs associated with such a program, there are definite cost savings for the long run.

**Fiscal Impact**
The RT&A project depends on cost savings from riders using a less expensive form of transportation to make it viable. For instance, from a conversation with Kevin Doyle of JCCOG, a trip on JC SEATS costs $16.23 per ride on average. This cost compared to
only $2.21 for a ride on Iowa City Transit makes it very apparent that some cost savings are possible. However, to realize those savings, there are some up front costs.

Including all costs, RT&A cost Eugene $31,860 in 1999, its first year of implementation. This left Eugene with a net loss of $24,357 in the first year of the project. By 2003, this loss had been turned into a large gain. There were a total of 5,336 total one-way trips taken on fixed-route as opposed to RideSource. For fiscal year 2003, there was a cost differential of $16.50, which amounted to $88,000 in cost savings. Including costs for training new participants and assisting RT&A graduates, there was a net savings of $49,000.

To determine how beneficial an RT&A program would be for Johnson County, it is important to look long term. Table 3 calculates likely costs and benefits of implementing a similar program in Iowa City. We assume Iowa City and Eugene would have similar results for their first year of operation. Using that assumption, all costs and benefits for Eugene were applied to Iowa City for Fiscal Year 2004. A constant 3 percent inflation rate was applied.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>RT&amp;A Project Costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City</td>
<td>Eugene (1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Iowa City (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training Costs</td>
<td>$11,875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs Per Trainee</td>
<td>$1,696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Costs</td>
<td>$31,880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs Per Trainee</td>
<td>$4,551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ride Sharing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost Savings Per Ride</td>
<td>$12.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Trips on Fixed-Route to Break Even</td>
<td>$14.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training Costs</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Costs</td>
<td>373</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If one only includes training costs, the break even point happens about a year and a half after the start of the project. Including total costs, it would take a little over four years to break even. The difference between total costs and training costs comes from the
administration needed to run the project. For the pilot study in Eugene, all of these tasks were handled by Alternate Work Concepts. It would be expected that many of these costs could be reduced by JC SEATS conducting the service, or at least providing the administration services. If the project continues to enlist new participants, this break even point would be much sooner. As soon as riders graduate from the program and use fixed route, they are saving the system money.

There are some long term operational costs that should be mentioned. Some riders are unable to ride fixed-route without help. For those individuals, an assistant is necessary in perpetuity to make sure they get on and off the right bus at the correct stops. For Eugene, this cost has become an expected part of their budget. For 2003, it cost LTD only $25,596 to pay the wages for the assistants. However, because the graduates of the program made 3,455 one way trips using transit, there was still a cost savings of $57,008 over those individuals using paratransit. Even paying an assistant $8.50 per hour (half hour in the morning, and a half hour in the evening) to help a rider, there is still a cost savings per ride of $9.77.

4.1.4 Public Relations Campaign

The focus group meeting revealed that there may be some disconnect between users and the larger Johnson County community. The discussion revealed that, to some extent, riders and drivers have differing notions of what the service should be. An example is whether the primary mission to serve disabled riders, elderly, or all riders utilizing the services. A paratransit public relations campaign could define the paratransit mission more clearly.

At the same time, the struggle for resources continues for local governments. Communities are constantly involved in prioritizing local projects and programs. Groups that can build coalitions of support are most likely to survive. The ridership of JC SEATS has increased in recent years, but the funding has not. Community support for JC SEATS would be more likely to stabilize funding into the future.
A public relations strategy can help improve the quality of communication between paratransit providers, governmental entities, the elderly, people with disabilities, and the community at large. For our project, this entails JC SEATS, Bionic, Johnson County, Coralville, and Iowa City, paratransit users, and the community at-large. A public relations campaign should enhance JC SEATS's image and reveal paratransit's importance for the community.

It should be noted that this recommendation is for a "Public Relations Campaign," not "Marketing" campaign. As explained eloquently by Karin Rexroad of the City of Lawrence, Kansas Transit, paratransit systems struggle to maintain a high level of service to riders on a low budget, and each additional rider of the system puts a paratransit system budget one step further into the "red." A public relations strategy strives to highlight the benefits of paratransit to the community, not to encourage higher ridership through marketing. A successful public relations campaign could generate enough support for paratransit to fund improved technologies or new equipment. This could enhance the quality of life for the users of JC SEATS.

**Elements of the Public Relations Strategy**

1. **Emphasis on a Strong "Mission Statement"**

Any organization should strive to embody its mission statement. Ron Meshanko, an Ecumenical Resource Consultant, has advised many non-profit religious and social service agencies on strategic and organizational planning. Mr. Meshanko gives training sessions all over the country. He begins each session with a quiz, and the first question is, "write your agency's mission statement." Unfortunately, 99 percent of the time no one can actually write down the mission statement of the agency. A mission statement should be a clear concise statement that says who the agency is, what it does, for whom and where. It
should be simple, easy to remember, and something that board members, staff and volunteers can effectively use to lobby on behalf of the organization.

JC SEATS’ short version Mission Statement is “to provide a reliable, dependable transportation service that treats each rider with respect.” This statement is very easy to remember, and indicates to everyone that each rider has the right to be treated with dignity. It is important that each driver know this statement by heart.

A review committee could be formed including users, staff, and community members, including politicians. The committee would review the mission statement and solicit comments from outside groups. A revised mission statement could be placed more prominently on the JC SEATS web page, brochures, in the office, on vehicles, hand-out materials and stated at public meetings.

JC SEATS also has a long Mission Statement:

Johnson County SEATS is a community investment by Iowa City, Coralville, University Heights, and Johnson County. We are a specially designed transportation service for handicapped, elderly, and otherwise disadvantaged citizens so we can meet their physical, social, and psychological needs, and to promote their health, security, happiness, and usefulness in longer living. We are continually striving to be a model transportation service in innovation and growth, which is recognized by the improved lives of our customers and dedicated work of our employees. JC SEATS is a shared ride service that goes door to door. For a resident of Iowa City, Coralville, or University Heights, to ride they need to call Iowa City Transit at 356-5151 or Coralville Transit at 248-1700 to be certified for eligibility. Johnson County provides rides for the general public three times a week for those who live outside Iowa City, Coralville, and University Heights. To find out those days and more information call the JC SEATS office at 339-6128.

This more detailed statement is very long and most likely is used mostly for Board and executive planning and instructing potential users. Nonetheless, it might be worthwhile to review the mission statement for ways to make it simpler and more concise, and therefore easier to remember and recite, or publicize in operational and training manuals, or in the media.
2. Proactive Public Appearances & Board Expansion

The JC SEATS Executive Director should strive to make regular appearances at service club meetings like Rotary or Optimist and those affiliated with the University of Iowa, and others, to offer updates for the system, and explain the benefits JC SEATS provides to the community. Tom Brace, JC SEATS Executive Director, says that they are listed at most Human Service Departments, and make presentations to groups that may be interested. A power point presentation is available for public viewing. JC SEATS staff also produces press releases, appear on radio shows, and hold public forums.

The problem is that due to a lack of time and resources, JC SEATS does not proactively reach out to groups as much as it might. In addition to the Director, Board members and volunteers could also appear on behalf of JC SEATS. JC SEATS could also expand its Board membership. Johnson County's Advisory Committee consists of nine members: two appointed by the Iowa City City Council; one member appointed by the Coralville City Council; two members appointed by the Johnson County Board of Supervisors; and four JC SEATS consumers to be appointed by the Board of Supervisors. This composition, in other words, includes politicians and/or politician-appointees. This helps for providing government involvement, but lacks community-wide involvement that could provide technical assistance or creative thinking. If JC SEATS would expand its Board membership to include representatives from a cross-section of the community, the members could also represent the organization in a wider range of public forums.

As an example, Mason County Transit in Shelton, Washington, has a planning process that includes speeches with groups such as the AARP, Grange, Senior Activity Center, Landlord Associations, Lions and Rotary clubs, and many other organizations to gather input and explain the advantages of taking the bus. Volunteers on the 17-member Mason Transit Advisory Board speak with these groups about the types of recreational and social trips that can be made using the connections to other transit systems. They also discuss the increased use by seniors and need for public transit. These meetings are an excellent
opportunity for the public to learn more about riders' needs and the importance of paratransit services to the community.

3. Service Award Recognition and Human Interest Stories

As a way to boost morale and provide a higher level of services, awards to “driver of the month (or year)” could recognize those that go above and beyond to help riders. This person would be voted for by users and recognized at the Board meeting, as well as possibly city council meetings (Iowa City and Coralville) or county supervisor meeting, whichever is most appropriate. Awards such as these provide positive publicity.

Each quarter, JC SEATS could print a newsletter highlighting successes stories about paratransit riders, from the perspective of their employer. The articles could discuss the role paratransit played for the rider getting to work, and the great work done by him or her. A press release could be prepared for the local media. This could be an opportunity for the business to publicize their contribution to the social welfare of disadvantaged residents of the community.

Fiscal Impact
This strategy would be of minimal cost to JC SEATS. By expanding the number of Board members, and making them active representatives and advocates of JC SEATS, the public value of the organization would be made clearer to taxpaying-citizens. More effective Public Relations could improve the stability of funding by ensuring widespread support.

4.2 Strategic Alternatives

Strategic Alternatives are considered to be long-term programs that involve substantial funding increases and would require significant investments in time and personnel. We have included them in this report because we believe that these are important improvements in paratransit technology and that it would be beneficial for Johnson
County decision makers to consider them. Our strategic alternatives include the use of advanced reservations systems, Smart Cards, flex-route service, and low floor buses for the entire transit fleet. Because our research found that these solutions were simply infeasible to implement in the short run, each alternative is noted for its benefits, without a complete fiscal analysis.

**Reservations Alternatives**

An efficient, easily accessible paratransit reservation system is a high priority for many riders. Increasing the time frame during which someone can make a reservation enables users to schedule a ride more flexibly. Recent innovations in paratransit technology include interactive voice response systems (IVR), and reservation websites that allow paratransit recipients to order services 24 hours a day. These technologies are readily available to public transit agencies and are designed specifically for paratransit users.

For IVR systems, users simply dial a telephone number that connects them to the system. Once the call has been made a prerecorded message helps users navigate the system. This arrangement allows users to reserve and cancel rides, or be notified of valuable information about the paratransit services they are requesting. The IVR system eliminates the problems associated with traditional dispatch reservation systems. Recipients are no longer put on hold and forced to wait for a dispatcher to take the reservation manually. The transit agency also benefits from the use of the IVR system because their staff is free to pursue other activities. IVR systems do have some shortcomings: not all clients will be able to use them to complete a reservation. Staff will still have to handle occasional customer service calls to ensure that all clients receive the information they need to schedule their transit rides successfully.

Website reservation systems also provide efficient paratransit reservation coordination. They allow paratransit users to book rides and verify or cancel trips with a computer. This system provides a fast and convenient method for users to obtain paratransit services. The creation of a website for paratransit activities can also bring additional benefits for both users and transit providers. A reservation website allows transit agencies to inform clients about new policies and program guidelines and also provides a forum with which to
acquire feedback from users. Not all users will have access to the internet, but having the ability to schedule rides through this process will decrease the number of calls placed to dispatchers for reservations.

The cost of implementing these systems varies with the amount of support needed to operate them and the number of participating clients. At the current time, the cost of purchasing an IVR system is approximately $50,000. Leasing an IVR system from a technology provider is often more cost-effective. These arrangements can be negotiated with a number of companies with a price range of around $1000 p/month depending on the size of the client base. The creation of a website to reserve paratransit trips may be the most cost effective alternative for Johnson County. In-house information technology staff at JCCOG could be used to create this website and significantly reduce the cost of implementation and maintenance.

**Smart Card Implementation**

SMART cards could be coordinated with both paratransit and fixed-route services. A Smart Card is usually not much bigger than a credit card and contains a magnetic strip to store or process information. Local governments are trying to move towards using this system as a way to charge all types of user fees, such as transit and parking fees.

If implemented in Johnson County, a smart card system could be applied to both fixed-route and paratransit. This option may not be immediately feasible due to the significant investments in technology required. The Iowa DOT estimates that the equipment needed to implement SMART cards would cost approximately $5,000 per bus. However, various pilot programs have been established nationally, and Johnson County Council of Governments may consider monitoring these studies. New funding opportunities may arise that will enable Johnson County to implement a smart card system for all paratransit operations in the future.

A SMART card system could be very beneficial to some JC SEATS users who wish to pay monthly rather than with cash. There still may be some difficulties integrating smart cards until local paratransit agencies are equipped to handle this method of payment. Regardless
of the inherent problems of a smart card system, this could be beneficial to persons with disabilities as it is easier to insert a card than to handle change. The Iowa DOT also indicated that SMART cards can record user information with each card swipe. Such efforts to do this may create concerns about privacy, but could help the system make better investment decisions in the future.

**Flex Service**

A strategy that might be beneficial to JC SEATS is the idea of a flex-route service, which is a cross between traditional fixed route service and a demand-response system such as the one JC SEATS currently operates. A flex-route service has a defined route with regular stops that allow users to access the service without having to call in advance and make a reservation. Unlike traditional fixed route services, however, a flex-route service allows drivers to make small detours to pick up individuals who cannot make it to designated pick-up or drop-off points. This would create a more convenient system for riders who are capable of making it to the stops and would also reduce dispatcher workload by decreasing the number of people making reservations. A flex-route system could be used in both rural and urban areas and could help to reduce the cost of operation by increasing the number of riders on the bus as well as by reducing the number of separate trips made. The benefits for the users of the flex-route service would be more noticeable in rural areas where it is more costly for individuals to use other forms of transportation, such as taxi, to get where they need to go.

**Fixed route-low Floor**

For many elderly people and persons in wheelchairs, stairs are a formidable obstacle. This is no different with buses. While all of the fixed route buses are lift equipped, the time it takes for the lift to come down and back up can make riders feel self-conscious. For route timing, the lifts can throw a whole afternoon off its schedule because it can take anywhere from three to five minutes to load someone in a wheelchair onto the bus.

By using a low-floor bus, there are none of these problems. Loading and unloading of passengers takes less time. There are no stairs to deter passengers that may have difficulty climbing them. The result would be that some JC SEATS riders would also switch their
trips from paratransit to fixed route. Because paratransit service is so much more expensive, in the long run it could save some costs. The main problem for this solution is up front money and new infrastructure. To make it work, all buses would need to be low-floor. This type of investment is not something that can be accomplished over a short horizon. However, when the time comes for new equipment purchases, low-floor buses could be considered along with traditional lift-equipped buses.

Conclusions

Johnson County is blessed with a number of agencies and institutions dedicated to providing quality paratransit services to the local disabled and elderly populations. Their commitment to ensuring high levels of mobility for their clients ensures that these populations have the transportation resources they need to lead fulfilling, successful lives. The purpose of our project was not to disrupt the delicate balance between customer satisfaction and fiscally responsible paratransit operations, but to discover ways to further augment an already successful service. Our suggestions are designed to provide Johnson County decision makers with the tools and ideas needed to create new programs that will increase overall customer satisfaction.

We believe that our immediate alternatives could significantly improve local paratransit programs. We believe these programs can be incorporated within the current paratransit system and provide additional benefits for Johnson County. The strategic alternatives that we have outlined within this report are intended to inform local decision makers of the available tools and programs that exist within the paratransit industry that can be considered when making future transportation plans. We feel that the alternatives presented within this report represent a comprehensive look at the paratransit community and represent the most innovative and successful alternatives available today.
Appendix

4.3 Improving Johnson County Paratransit Handout

University of Iowa Graduate College
Department of Urban and Regional Planning
Johnson County Paratransit Users Focus Group
Lobby Conference Room, Iowa City Civic Center
Tuesday February 17th, 2004, 6:00 – 7:30 PM

Facilitator: Robert Keehn and Daniel Nolin, Graduate Students
Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Iowa

Objective: The objective of this focus group is to gather user feedback on the Johnson County paratransit system. We would like to gather your feedback on the current quality of service, equipment and technology. We would also appreciate any suggestions for improvement.

Background: The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 required all cities with fixed route transit to provide complementary service to persons with disabilities. Johnson County currently meets all ADA requirements. Our team is looking at ways to improve the service. Your input will allow us make better suggestions to Johnson County SEATS.

Discussion Topics:

1. Equipment
   The types of buses including low floor and lift equipped vehicles

2. Ride scheduling, reservations and service
   The timing of reservation calls, scheduling repeat trips, canceling trips, changing the time of a trip, pick up and drop off windows, and availability of service

3. Payment options
   Different means to pay for service including: cash, punch cards, smart cards, or monthly billing

4. Personnel
   Evaluation of drivers, dispatchers, and administration
5. Other paratransit service
   Have you used any other paratransit services, is there something you like better
   about it?

4.4 Summary of Focus Group

Background:
Our team conducted a paratransit rider focus group on February 17, 2004 to collect user
input from local transit recipients. The purpose of this exercise was to collect data to be
used in the creation of alternative solutions to strengthen current weaknesses within the
local paratransit system. This project was created to enhance our team’s knowledge of
local paratransit systems and to obtain a more user oriented perspective on current
operational procedures. We placed special emphasis on obtaining input from transit
recipients to further augment our ability to create positive alternatives for Johnson County
paratransit. Our team organized the focus group to gather recipient information on
subjects that were normally not addressed through traditional research channels.

Purpose of Focus Group:
This process began with the issuing of focus group invitations to the various organizations
attending the Johnson County Paratransit Advisory Committee quarterly meeting. At this
time, each agency was asked to provide their riders with information pertaining to the
focus group and to supply our team with the contact information of interested candidates.
After receiving the volunteer information from the paratransit agencies, we contacted each
of the focus group applicants and obtained verbal commitments to ensure that a quorum
of individuals was achieved.

The focus group was held at the Iowa City, Civic Center. We felt that this centralized
location would provide not only the space needed to conduct our meeting, but would also
give us a geographic location that is well known throughout the community and would be
easily accessible for persons with disabilities. Our team delegated the functional elements
of operating the meeting by selecting two focus group facilitators and two scribes from
amongst our ranks. This activity ensured that we were not only adequately prepared to
host the meeting should someone fall ill, but also allowed for a second person to check
that all comments by paratransit recipients were recorded and that all desired topics were covered.

The focus group was organized into a number of predefined questions to be discussed among the individuals at the meeting. These questions were attained through previous research by team members and from earlier conversations with local transit authorities. After serious debate, we constrained our questions to five concentrations in order to comply with time restraints and attendee conflicts. These concentrations consisted of the following: paratransit equipment specifications, reservation system and operations, trip payment options, administrative and vehicle personnel, and experiences with paratransit programs outside of Johnson County. With these guidelines in mind, our team assembled the meeting volunteers, conducted the focus group in an efficient and professional manner, and collected the data revealed in the preceding pages of this document.

**Paratransit Equipment Specifications**

One of the largest fiscal requirements for paratransit deals with the physical equipment. The buses and their components including lifts have both large initial capital costs and can also have routine maintenance costs. It is very important that Johnson County SEATS select buses that satisfy the needs of their riders, while understanding the fiscal constraints.

The focus group touched on these issues through a series of questions to get at what types of buses riders prefer. There were some answers that were expected, such as a preference for low-floor buses such as an Orion. However, others noted that it was the little things, like working A/C for riders that are sensitive to heat, and a smoother ride with new shocks. Also, some riders felt it would be better to operate a more diverse fleet where smaller vehicles could be used for lower demand periods.

While there were no specific strategies for improvement discussed during the focus group, one major trend could be deduced; close attention should be given to the experience of each ride. Johnson County SEATS should continue to pay attention to what vehicles are not working as well and phase in the purchase of new one. Along with better maintenance of the vehicles, users will feel that their interests are being better satisfied.
Reservation System and Operations

By paying special attention to the ride scheduling system and the availability of service, Johnson County SEATS can reemphasize to its users that it cares about providing the best possible paratransit system that can be afforded. Another issue is if pick up and drop off windows aren’t taken honestly and reservation is a arduous task, Johnson County SEATS can be seen as not caring for its users. There must be an honest compromise between JC SEATS and its users, but each party must feel that they are working towards the same goals of providing an excellent service.

During the focus group, there were some rather heated comments about the reservation system and operations of Johnson County SEATS. There were also some remarks that praised the service. The topics fell into three basic groups, ride scheduling, pick up and drop off windows, and destination specific trips.

The ride scheduling service for Johnson County SEATS has changed dramatically over the past decade. All rides used to be scheduled by a person, while now each trip is entered into a computer program. Many of the users had minimal problems with subscription rides, but when it came to same day or out of the ordinary trips, it was much more difficult. Some users felt there was no means for negotiation between their interests and those of the dispatcher. One specific example that came up numerous times was same day trips due to medical needs. It was very hard for a rider to schedule a trip home from work if they were sick.

One alternative that was given would be to include the opportunity to for ride scheduling and cancels through email or the use of a website. It could free up some time for the dispatcher to handle the more difficult rides.

"Window belongs to the system, not to the rider." This was the major theme repeated throughout the focus group. While the users understood that a window was necessary for a door to door service, all the control was in the hands of the drivers. Both Goodwill and Systems Unlimited staff remembered times where riders were dropped off before the 15 minute
window and no one was around to unload the bus. At the pick up end, even if the bus would arrive before the 15 minute window, users were hurried onto the bus. For Johnson County SEATS to prove its commitment to providing an excellent service, it must ensure that the 15 minute window is abided to, and there is equal understanding on both sides of what is expected.

One alternative was to have drivers or dispatchers call if the drivers are running late or going to be early, so staff and users are prepared for the arrival of a bus.

Johnson County SEATS provides a good service to its users for access to work and medical needs. These are both vital reasons for having the paratransit service. However, it is the trips to visit friends, go shopping, or see a movie that makes life enjoyable. These trips are harder to validate, but just as important to ensuring the Johnson County SEATS riders are given every chance to live as normal of a life as possible.

Many of the riders have shrunken their traveling distance and eliminated many non-work or medical needs trips simply because they feel it isn’t feasible anymore. During the focus group, each person talked of how they used to make trips to Cedar Rapids, or the Coral Ridge Mall, and don’t consider the trips anymore. The solutions talked about focused on having planned trips to specific destinations or a flex route service. Both of these alternatives could be used and for different reasons. Planned routes could be done monthly or bi-weekly and coordinated either by JC SEATS employees or users. The trips could be as simple as a bowling night or a shopping Saturday at the Mall. Flex routes could be used daily or weekly. There would be a certain number of designated stops, but no specific route to get there. Common destinations could be serviced at certain times.

**Payment Options**

Another issue that elicited strong user feedback was the method of payment for each trip. The current methods of payment are cash and punch card, and no change is made for cash payments. While these methods are convenient for drivers, they can pose problems for the users. Since no change is made on cash payments, it is necessary for users to have the exact amount needed for each ride, and requires the users to have change handy.
The other option, punch cards, does alleviate this problem, but poses its own problems for those with developmental disabilities since the cards can be easily lost. This is not insignificant since the cards cost $15 for ten rides. Attendees from the user’s focus group, specifically from Goodwill and Systems Unlimited, stated that the punch card system would be much more convenient if they were able to hold on to the cards for their clients and have them punched twice by the drivers for daily trips to and from their facilities.

The idea of monthly billing for paratransit usage was discussed as another way to solve the problem of lost cards and also to make using the service easier in general. This would allow the users to easily pay for the amount they use the service without having to constantly have the available cash on hand or by making a special trip to purchase the punch cards. Finally, it was stated that it would be much more convenient for users if they could purchase the punch cards using a debit or credit card, and that there should be more locations available to purchase them from.

**Personnel**

User input concerning the personnel at Johnson County SEATS was generally satisfactory, though there was the feeling that a clearly defined mission statement is needed for the system. This was brought up because some users felt as though drivers were inconsiderate to users, though it was also pointed out that JC SEATS drivers have to cater to a more diverse group than other systems such as Bionic Bus, and this can make it more difficult to provide a personalized service. One way to implement this would be to have a mission statement posted on each bus so both drivers and users would be reminded of the service that JC SEATS is meant to offer. Related to this was also the suggestion that the JC SEATS drivers should undergo some sort of public relations training to insure that all users are treated in a dignified manner. This could also be reinforced through some sort of award program that recognizes drivers based on user input.

**Other Paratransit Services**

This section was set up as fall back incase we ran out of things to talk about. By the time we actually got to it, the bus had arrived and people were scrabbling to get their things
together so they could go. We did get a few quick answers from the users, either praising or criticizing other cities. Ones that were praised included Orlando, Florida; Ames, Iowa; Berkeley, California; and Houston, Texas. Ones that were criticized included Ann Arbor, Michigan and Atlanta, Georgia. This in no means is an exhaustive list, but it does point out that Johnson County paratransit users have been to other places, and are aware of different services.
## 4.5 Comparison of Similar Cities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population (Urbanized Area)</th>
<th>Champaign / Urbana, IL</th>
<th>Lincoln, NE</th>
<th>St Cloud, MN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>123938</td>
<td>226682</td>
<td>153516</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make / Model of Vehicle</td>
<td>Low floor minivan Chevy Ventures, Dodge Caravans</td>
<td>Ford Glaval</td>
<td>Orion 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price of vehicle</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>$72,000</td>
<td>$214,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of vehicle</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of vehicle</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating of vehicle</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Great</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispatch / Reservation system</td>
<td>Scheduling Software</td>
<td>Computerized</td>
<td>Software</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Software or paper and pencil</td>
<td>Fleetnet</td>
<td>Trepeze, GPS, GIS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fare Collection Method</td>
<td>Magnetic farebox</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fare</td>
<td>$2.00 for ADA / $7.00 for general public</td>
<td>$2.00</td>
<td>$1.30 per ride and $45 for a 31 day pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost covered by farebox</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>15% - 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>Door to Door, Curb to Curb</td>
<td>Curb to Curb</td>
<td>Door to door</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drivers carry groceries</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coverage Area</td>
<td>Only Urban, University covers its own service</td>
<td>Only Urban</td>
<td>Only Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Part</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Part</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Riders</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>52,000</td>
<td>125,700 and 97,800 ADA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact Person</td>
<td>Mike Stubby</td>
<td>Larry Worth</td>
<td>Tom Cruikshark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone Number</td>
<td>(217) 384-8188</td>
<td>(402) 441-8600</td>
<td>(320) 529-4463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eau Claire, WI</td>
<td>Rochester, MN</td>
<td>Madison, WI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
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<td>Population (Urbanized Area)</td>
<td>91393</td>
<td>91271</td>
<td>329533</td>
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<tr>
<td>Make / Model of Vehicle</td>
<td>Modified Dodge Vans</td>
<td>Orien 2</td>
<td>Ford Glaval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price of vehicle</td>
<td>$214,000</td>
<td>$72,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of vehicle</td>
<td>Turtle Backs</td>
<td>Low floor</td>
<td>Cut-away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of vehicle</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>25'</td>
<td>28'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating of vehicle</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>Looking at Overland Coach Elf Low Floor, $145,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispatch / Reservation system</td>
<td>Looking at Trapeze</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Software or paper and pencil</td>
<td>Spreadsheets</td>
<td>Spreadsheets</td>
<td>Trapeze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fare Collection Method</td>
<td>Billing System, monthly billing, accept cash</td>
<td>Puch cards, looking at card readers that deduct from an account</td>
<td>Cash / Prepaid tickets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fare</td>
<td>$2.00</td>
<td>$2.00</td>
<td>$2.00, $3.00 for Peak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost covered by farebox</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Door to Door, Curb to Curb</td>
<td>Door to door</td>
<td>Door to Door</td>
<td>Door to Door</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drivers carry groceries</td>
<td>Only 2 bags upto 20 pounds</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coverage Area</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Serves all University trips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Part</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Part</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Riders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact Person</td>
<td>Gwen Van Dew Heuel</td>
<td>Tony Knauer</td>
<td>Crystal Martin, Steve Kelly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone Number</td>
<td>(715) 839-5111</td>
<td>(715) 839-5111</td>
<td>(608) 266-4904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td>910 Forest St, Eau Claire, WI 54703</td>
<td>Public Works, 201 4th St SE, Rochester, MN 55904</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population (Urbanized Area)</td>
<td>Des Moines, IA</td>
<td>Springfield, MO</td>
<td>Lawrence, KS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>37056</td>
<td>91305</td>
<td>79,647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make / Model of Vehicle</td>
<td>Sudan/Vans/Cutaway, body on chassis, heavy duty</td>
<td>1997 Thomas Diamond Coach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price of vehicle</td>
<td>Cutaway - $50K to $100K, low-floor heavy duty - $220K, Vans, cars -</td>
<td>$150,000</td>
<td>$38,000 to $43,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of vehicle</td>
<td>Low-floor/lift ramp</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Converted Van</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of vehicle</td>
<td>25' to 30'</td>
<td>25' or 26'</td>
<td>21'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating of vehicle</td>
<td>Nice mix accommodates all needs</td>
<td>Mechanically sound, but outdated</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispatch / Reservation system</td>
<td>Computer aided dispatch and reservation, but not automated</td>
<td>Online data systems</td>
<td>Software</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Software or paper and pencil</td>
<td>CadMus, but getting new software in the next year</td>
<td>Trapeze</td>
<td>Trapeze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fare Collection Method</td>
<td>farebox on bus</td>
<td>GSI electronic fare boxes</td>
<td>Manual Farebox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fare</td>
<td>Paratransit - $2; $1 (fixed route)</td>
<td>$1.50</td>
<td>$1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost covered by farebox</td>
<td>NA - 90% of passengers ride free</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10-12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>Door to Door, Curb to Curb</td>
<td>Curb to Curb</td>
<td>Curb to Curb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drivers carry groceries</td>
<td>Yes, assist</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>3 bags up to 15 pounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coverage Area</td>
<td>600 sq. miles</td>
<td>52 square mile</td>
<td>29.6 square miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Part</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Part</td>
<td>Polk, Warren, Dallas</td>
<td>18,319</td>
<td>45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Riders</td>
<td>185,000</td>
<td>45,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact Person</td>
<td>Donna Grange</td>
<td>Diane Hogan</td>
<td>Karin Rexford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone Number</td>
<td>(515) 283-8127</td>
<td>(417) 831-8368</td>
<td>(785) 832-3464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ames, IA</td>
<td>LaCrosse, WI</td>
<td>Columbia, MO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population (Urbanized Area)</td>
<td>90726</td>
<td>69966</td>
<td>96773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price of vehicle</td>
<td>$50,000 - $60,000</td>
<td>$50,000 - $60,000</td>
<td>$54,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of vehicle</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Cut Aways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of vehicle</td>
<td>29'</td>
<td>20'</td>
<td>29'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating of vehicle</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispatch / Reservation system</td>
<td></td>
<td>Computerized system created and used by Lad Law (Contractor)</td>
<td>Computerized, not happy with it, cannot perform multiple drops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Software or paper and pencil</td>
<td>Paper and pencil</td>
<td></td>
<td>TTMS Operating system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fare Collection Method</td>
<td>Cash or tickets</td>
<td>Smart Cards, Tickets, or Cash</td>
<td>Cash, tickets, smart cards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fare</td>
<td>$1.50 changing to $2.00 in March</td>
<td>$2.00 to $5.00 depending on service</td>
<td>$1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost covered by farebox</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Door to Door, Curb to Curb</td>
<td>Door to door</td>
<td>Curb to Curb or Door to Door, depending on client</td>
<td>Door to door</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drivers carry groceries</td>
<td>Carry to the door</td>
<td>Carry to the door</td>
<td>will help on and off the bus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coverage Area</td>
<td>Story County</td>
<td>All of LaCrosse County</td>
<td>Urban only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Part</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Part</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Riders</td>
<td>14,000 - 16,000</td>
<td>38,000+</td>
<td>29,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact Person</td>
<td>Tom Davenport</td>
<td>Gary with Lad Law</td>
<td>Mark Gindstaff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone Number</td>
<td>(515) 292-1100 or (515) 239-5564</td>
<td>(608) 781-3069</td>
<td>(515) 674-6261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td>PO Box N, Columbia, MO 65205</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.6 Annotated Bibliography

1. Assessment and Review of the Lane Transit District ADA Mandated Paratransit Services & Associated RideSource Services
   Prepared DMN Enterprises (Worthington, OH) for the Lane Transit District, August 2001

   Objective
   This report is an annual review of paratransit for Eugene, OR and its surrounding county

   Key Findings
   It contains information on the RideSource Shopper, the weekly planned trip provided by paratransit for its users.
   It also has the budget for paratransit over the past few years, including costs and revenues

   Relevancy
   It helps to better understand comparisons between Eugene and Iowa City

2. ADA Paratransit Handbook

   Objective
   Handbook to aid with implementation of ADA paratransit services

   Key Findings
   1. Provision of Law Title II: (Addresses public services)
      Prohibits public entities from denying individuals with disabilities the opportunity to use public transportation services, if they are capable of using the system. Also prohibits public entities from providing services which discriminate against persons with disabilities.
   2. Regulations & Enforcement
      Paratransit is not a substitute for fixed route service but a supplement for those who are unable to use it. Complaints concerning transportation under Title II must be filed with the USDOT Office of Civil Rights. USDOT then investigates and will attempt to resolve the problem. ADA gives private individuals the right to initiate legal action against entities that violate the law.
   3. Definitions
      “Disability” includes any physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. This also includes a record of such an impairment, or being regarded as having such an impairment. Major life activities include caring for one's self, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working. Two additions include persons with cognitive disabilities and those with contagious or non contagious diseases (including tuberculosis and HIV).
      “Designated public transportation” refers to transportation provided by a public
entity (other than public school transport) by bus, rail, or other conveyance. “Specified public transportation” refers to transport to provided by a public entity. “Fixed route” – Service provided along a prescribed route according to a fixed schedule.

“Paratransit” – Used to describe certain types of demand responsive services.

“Accessible” – Physical access to vehicles and buildings, with the following:
1. Ramps, lifts and other accessibility hardware properly designed to meet the needs of persons with disabilities and to accommodate different mobility aids.
2. Access involves proper training of personnel and proper maintenance of equipment.
3. Operating policies and procedures adopted by transit agencies are also an important part of an accessible service.
4. Means making public info and communications systems accessible to persons with vision and hearing impairments.

4. Complementary Paratransit Service
Required to serve those persons whose needs cannot be met by fixed route systems. Service is consistent with the underlying tenets of the ADA of equal opportunity, full participation, and independence. Requirement that each public entity operating a fixed routes system must provide paratransit or other special services to individuals with disabilities that is comparable to the level of service provided to individuals without disabilities who use the fixed route system. Only under certain conditions is complementary service not necessary.

Eligibility
1. Any individual with a disability who is unable to ride vehicles on the system accessible to persons without disabilities.
2. Any individual who needs assistance boarding, riding, or disembarking a wheelchair lift or other boarding assistance devices.
3. Persons with difficult conditions getting to a station or stop; visitors from other jurisdictions with disabilities; personal care attendant.

5. Tests to determine a disabled person’s eligibility
Overall Goal: Determine whether or not a individual’s disability prevents her from utilizing any of the services by a covered entity.
Test 1: Does the individual’s disability prevent getting to and from a station/stop at point of origin or destination?
Test 2: Can the individual board and utilize and disembark the vehicle at the station/stop?
Test 3: Can the individual recognize the destination and disembark?
Test 4: If a system involves transfers and connections, are the paths of travel between lines or modes accessible and navigable by the individual?

6. Alternatives to determining eligibility
USDOT ADA regulations permit the requirement of medical certification in determining ADA paratransit eligibility

Providers might want to consider retaining one or more professionals in the field to whom applicants can be referred for certification and classification.

7. Appeals
If a decision to deny is confirmed, the notice of denial sent to the applicant must include the reasons for the denial and procedures which may be utilized to appeal the decision.
8. Reciprocity
   An out of town individual seeking to utilize the ADA paratransit service may be
certified by another transit system.
   Eligibility must be presumed and reciprocity provided if an individual presents
certification from other system.

9. Service Area
   The basic service area is a corridor centered on the fixed route and extending 3/4 of
   a mile to either side of the route.
   The level of service provided must equal the level of service that would exist if
   separate services were to be operated, such as time and days.
   Reservations must be accepted on days that admin offices are closed if service is
   provided on the following day.

10. Types of service
    Paratransit feeder service – refers to providing an individual with paratransit for
    only that portion of their trip which they cannot manage.
    On-call bus service – Fares are equal to fixed route bus fares.
    Subscription – Providing trips over an extended period of time w/out requiring
    individuals to call to request each trip.
    Law does not allow more than 50% of trips to be subscription during any
    particular time.

11. Training
    Huge component of entire effort, and it is strongly recommended to involve
    persons with disabilities and orgs in the development of training programs.

Relevancy
Puts ADA requirements in real terms
Explains what it takes to create an ADA compliant paratransit system

3. Building Mobility Partnerships for People with Disabilities: Opportunities
   for Federal Funding and Promising Practices
   Prepared by Easter Seals Project ACTION, June 2002

Objective
To assist paratransit systems with examples for better operations and possible
funding for those programs

Key Findings
There are many different federal grants available from a range of federal offices.
Each of the grants has a particular goal in mind. While none of the grants apply to
our alternatives, there may be some possible for future solutions

Relevancy
This document gives a background of current trends for the operations and
funding of paratransit. It is a good place to start looking when trying to determine
what would be ways to improve paratransit

4. Freedom to Travel
Objective
The report outlines the 2002 National Transportation Availability and Use Survey. Especially the sections pertaining to persons with disabilities

Key Findings
Because most other national surveys tend to unintentionally exclude persons with disabilities, this attempt to quantify their movements through 5,000 interviews. 528,000 persons with disabilities never leave their homes nationally because of transportation difficulties. Persons with disabilities don’t travel longer distances (more than 100 miles) as much as the rest of the population.

Relevancy
It is a good source of information for determining how persons with disabilities interact with transportation on a nationally aggregated level

5. Iowa City Urbanized Area Complementary Paratransit Plan

Objective
Formal plan to ensure compliance with ADA 1990 requirements
Used to guarantee federal funding for transit system

Key Findings
Plan must be updated annually
Historical Paratransit Service Data FY 1987 – FY 1991 (page 10)
Eligibility Certification Process (pages 22 – 24)

Relevancy
Most of the information is outdated for current transit situation
All projected data should be compared with current figures

6. JCCOG 2002 – 2027 Long-Range Multi-Modal Transportation Plan, for the Iowa City Urbanized Area

Objective
Long term plan for all transportation modes in Johnson County

Key Findings
Figures for annual revenue vehicle hours, rides per revenue, cost per ride, fare box / expense ratio, and operating deficit per trip for transit systems (pages 43 – 47)
All fixed route buses must be lift equipped for Iowa City, Coralville, and Cambus. (pages 41 - 42)
IC Fixed route service free or reduced for elderly and disabled at off peak hours and all day Saturday (page 41)
Free fare for elderly and disabled at all times for Coralville (page 42)
Funding information for transit systems (page 49)
Recommendation to not consolidate all three systems into one (page 50 – 51)
Possible internal Coralville paratransit system (page 51)
Possible paratransit consolidation for Iowa City, Coralville, and Cambus (page 52)

Relevancy
Clear understandings on what the directions are for each transit system.
Cambus would like to see some consolidation for paratransit
Iowa City has no long term paratransit alternatives
Coralville might want to look into internalizing paratransit
Funding is a major issue; costs are much higher for paratransit than fixed route services. (Johnson County JC SEATS)

7. Project ACTION Update, Accessible Transportation in our Nation, Summer 2003
Prepared by Easter Seals Project ACTION

Objective
The document is a quarterly newsletter explaining success stories from different paratransit services

Key Findings
Lane Transit District operates a transit host and training program. This program has saved $295,000 of its paratransit budget over the past five year of the program. There have been almost 19,000 rides taken on fixed-route as opposed to paratransit because of the program (pg. 6)

Relevancy
Johnson County could implement a similar program and experience some cost savings along with a decrease in demand for paratransit

8. Planning to Meet the Needs of Seniors, Community Transportation Needs a Plan
Prepared by Dave O'Connell at the Community Transportation Association of America

Objective
To show how more community involvement can benefit paratransit for everyone, not only the riders

Key Findings
This article speaks to the viewpoint of those who believe that paratransit services should be visible throughout a community, or Mason Transit in this case. Part of the planning process for Mason Transit is to speak at membership
meetings with groups such as the AARP, Grange, Senior Activity Center, Landlord Associations, Lions and Rotary clubs and many other organizations to gather input and explain the advantages of taking the bus. Volunteers on the 17-member Mason Transit Advisory Board speak with these groups about the types of recreational and social trips that can be made using the connections to other transit systems. They also discuss the increased use of public transit by seniors as well as the process to comment on the kind of transit service needed.

These meetings are an opportunity to learn more about riders' needs. These steps enhance the image of paratransit systems, so it might be wise for the agency administering paratransit services to take notice of the example step by Mason Transit and appear before service clubs and organizations that it might not typically appear before, and make paratransit more of a community project, rather than simply a relationship between government entities and providers.

Relevancy
The article applies to our public relations campaign, and how it can improve Johnson County paratransit

9. Rider Training & Attendant Project
Prepared by the Lane Council of Governments, and the Oregon DOT, September 1999

Objectives
This is a report outlines in the pilot study conducted in Eugene, Oregon to educate paratransit riders so they can use fixed route service

Key Findings
The Rider Training & Assistance (RT&A) program is a pilot study that looks into the feasibility of moving people from paratransit to fixed route through education. The program relies on attendants to teach riders how to use fixed route, and then assist them with their transfers after graduation from the program. Its first year, there were seven trainees who passed the program. Each road fixed route 615 times the first year, saving $7,503 because of them using a less expensive form of transportation

Relevancy
With a trainee program in Johnson County, JC JC SEATS could save some money and decrease the demand for service.

10. RideSource Operations
Prepared by the Lane Transit District, June 2000

Objectives
This is a bid document for companies who might be interested in providing paratransit services for Eugene, Oregon. It outlines the scope of work, types of service, and responsibilities for the provider
Key Findings

It has total paratransit ridership, types of services, types of equipment, and guidelines for the program

Relevancy

It helps to compare Eugene and Iowa City’s paratransit services

11. JC SEATS RIDER’S GUIDE Johnson County Paratransit System
Prepared by Johnson County SEATS, January 2002

Objective

To inform users of regulations of and opportunities to use JC JC SEATS

Key Findings

1. Urbanized Area Service Schedule
   Monday – Friday, 6AM – 10:30 PM
   Saturday, 6 AM – 7:30 PM
   Sunday, 8 AM – 2PM

2. Rural Areas Service Schedule
   North of Iowa City: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, 8:30 AM – 4:30 PM
   South of Iowa City: Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 8:30 AM – 4:30 PM
   East of Iowa City: Tuesday, Thursday, 8:30 AM – 4:30 PM

3. Cost of Service
   $1.50 per ride; $0.75 for trips that originate in Iowa City. Riders must pay exact change when entering vehicle. Personal care attendants and service animals ride for free. Cities are responsible for determining eligibility. There is a 21 day grace period for eligibility to be determined. Appeals go to JCCOG transportation planning department. All rural residents are automatically eligible. Rides should be scheduled one day prior to trip. Same day trips will only be accepted if space is available. Riders can schedule up to a week in advance. There is a 30 minute pick up window. Subscription services (when a rider requests the same trip every week) are allowed. JCS recommends that care facilities coordinate trips and medical appointments. Rides can be cancelled anytime. After hours cancellations can be delivered to the driver via a pager or on an answering machine at the office. Riders can call the dispatcher if there is a pick up failure. JC JC SEATS retains the right to keep a rider on the vehicle if there are no care takers present at the drop off location (page 11). Seat belts are required. Drivers cannot administer medical assistance or medication to passengers. Violent, illegal, or seriously disruptive conduct is not allowed on the bus. Service may not be refused to an individual due to their disabilities. This includes appearance of involuntary behavior. A rider can be suspended from the service or in some cases removed from the program (pages 15 – 19)

Relevancy

This document contains all the rules and regulations currently in use for paratransit service for Johnson County. Some come from the cities, and others were developed by JC JC SEATS

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12. Summary of Federal Register Part 37 – Transportation Services for Individuals with Disabilities (ADA)

Objectives
Develop requirements for transit systems that aid those with disabilities
All requirements must be met to receive federal funding

Key Findings
Comparable Level of service for disabled persons. A paratransit system is required for any place operating a fixed route service. The service provided must be at a comparable level of service to that of the fixed route system.

2. Eligibility
To be eligible to ride on a paratransit system, the user must have a disability (physical or mental), which makes he/she unable to board or ride another vehicle without the assistance of another. The only other exceptions are for personal care attendants to the disabled person, or additional persons accompanying the disabled person, provided that there is enough space, and riders have the same origin and destination. If an individual applies to ride paratransit, the person is required to be allowed service if a ruling is not made by the entity within 21 days. A disabled visitor that resides outside the service is allowed to ride paratransit if not riding for more than 21 days.

3. Fares
The fare for a trip is not to exceed twice the fare that would be charged to an individual paying full fare on the entity’s fixed route system. Accompanying individuals pay the same rate as the disabled person they ride with. A personal attendant is not charged for riding while looking after the disabled person. The city is allowed to charge a fare to a social service organization for agency trips.

4. Response Time
If a request for service is made up till a day before a trip, the paratransit provider must honor the request. Pickup times are negotiable, but can’t be one hour before or after the individual’s desired departure time. Reservations can be made up to 14 days in advance of a trip.

5. Maintenance
Paratransit providers are required to maintain the condition of their facilities. Criteria include lifts to vehicles, safety restraints, elevators, signage, and systems to facilitate communications with persons with impaired vision or hearing. They are also required to take a vehicle with an inoperative lift out of service and replace with another vehicle. If there is no replacement available, the vehicle with the inoperative lift can be used for a maximum 5 days.

6. Operations
An individual in a wheelchair is allowed, but not required, to take a regular seat on the bus. Otherwise, the person will remain in his/her wheelchair. Personnel must assist the rider with the use of safety restraints, ramps and lifts.
All locally written paratransit plans must be annually updated

Relevancy
Any paratransit system must at a minimum meet all guidelines set forth in the ADA requirement

13. What should our mission statement say

Objectives
Gives examples of how a mission statement can be written and how it can be used

Key Findings
The article presents information from an organizational trainer for how a mission statement can best be structured. Mr. Meshanko says that a mission statement should be short, remembered easily, and clear about what the organization wants to accomplish. Mr. Meshanko suggests indicates that there are a number of ways to draft a mission statement, from a retreat to an individual crafting it alone. Nonetheless, there needs to be consensus among members of the organization for what the mission statement is and who the target population is to be served.

Relevancy
Johnson County paratransit currently has a mission statement. However, there is some discrepancy between riders, staff, and the community what it stands for. It could be used better