

Travel Training and Transit Host Program

BACKGROUND

In 1976, Lane Transit District (LTD), the local mass transportation authority in Eugene, Oregon, adopted a *Transition Plan* for eventual 100 percent wheelchair accessibility for fixed-route service, and by 1985, reached that goal. From the time the first lifts were installed, LTD has provided personalized lift use training. Organizations and individuals make arrangements to have an Operator-Trainer bring a bus to a location near their home or business to learn about and practice using accessible features. LTD coordinates with local agencies that serve people with disabilities to promote bus ridership. RideSource, the ADA “complementary paratransit” service, uses ride-by-ride eligibility criteria to further maximize the use of fixed-route. In addition, LTD’s Bus Buddies Program offers a friendly introduction to the bus for older guests, and every Tuesday is “Senior Ride Free Day,” sponsored by area businesses.

HISTORY AND INNOVATION

Even with LTD’s training efforts, promotion of fixed-route service as a more independent alternative to paratransit and adherence to strict eligibility requirements under ADA, the District continues to pursue strategies that help further manage increases in the demand for paratransit service. Perceptions of safety, the need for intensive training and re-training, and the complicated nature of making transfers between buses at LTD’s main stations topped the list of barriers that prevented paratransit riders from using fixed-route service. For some individuals, no amount of training makes independent travel possible.

Alternative Work Concepts (AWC) is a nationally recognized organization that assists people who have multiple physical and cognitive disabilities in finding employment throughout the community. A large part of securing employment was the travel training involved to teach clients how to get to and from their jobs.

In collaboration with AWC, LTD created a new program that provides the support, skill, and assistance needed to use the bus. Cost savings alone during a one-year demonstration proved the viability of the ***Travel Training and Transit Host Program***. The Transit Host assistance provided something more than traditional travel training and opened the door to a new group of bus riders.



Transit Hosts pose with a client

DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM

TRAINING

The goal of most travel training programs is to teach skills that result in independent use of public transportation. The underlying premise of LTD’s *Travel Training and Transit Host Program* is to train to the highest level of independence possible. Equally important is identifying “natural supports” and providing a formal support system that allows for successful travel. The availability of *Transit Hosts* at LTD’s Eugene Station enables people to achieve variable levels of independence as fixed-route transit users. Training includes

one-on-one instruction, training in a real environment, and a step-by-step curriculum. Before training begins, Alternative Work Concepts' staff will perform an assessment, coordinate with residential and vocational personnel, meet with concerned parents, and/or conduct other support activities.



Transit Host, Kathy, assists Henry with his transfer at the Eugene Station.

TRANSIT HOSTS

Transit Hosts maintain a daily schedule (Monday through Friday) to meet individuals who have been through the training program, as they come into the station and assist them in transferring to the next bus. Hosts alert training staff to schedule changes, are involved in initiating back-up measures in the event that a rider does not arrive on schedule, and assist in problem solving a variety of service issues.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS RECEIVED AND THE POSITIVE EFFECT ON THE ORGANIZATION

The *Transit Host and Training Program* has been in full operation since July 2001. More than 600 people have completed the one-on-one training. All participants were deemed eligible for ADA paratransit services, and most had been using *RideSource*. Each weekday, there are 37 individuals who use the fixed-route system with on-going support from the transit hosts and are listed on the daily transfer assistance schedule. The transit hosts perform nearly 60 assisted transfers each weekday.

Estimates of annual savings during this fiscal year (July 1 through June 30) include: ¹

- 3,557 training rides and 11,695 transit host assisted rides representing an annual cost savings of \$265,377

To put this in perspective, the annual cost of *RideSource* is \$2,653,047. An annual savings of \$265,377 is a corresponding 10 percent of the total paratransit budget. This figure does not take into account the number of rides being taken by people who have graduated the training program and are now traveling independently, but that would add significantly to the cost savings figure. The quantitative measures of the project show significant value. Of equal measure are the individual experiences of each participant that reflect a sense of accomplishment, confidence, and independence.

APPLYING THIS PROGRAM TO OTHER SYSTEMS

Training programs are not unfamiliar to other transit systems. It is the approach to training and the development of a culture that supports serving individuals with special needs on fixed-route that will lead to successful transition of people from paratransit onto fixed-route services. For example, riders must be able to trust that by participating in training, their eligibility for paratransit services will not change or that it will be there for different types of trips. This has not been a difficult program to implement. There has been a substantial return on the money invested.

¹ Based on actual ridership through June 30, 2007.