

COORDINATION AS A STRATEGY FOR SERVING THE TRANSPORTATION DISADVANTAGED A Comparative Framework of Local and State Roles

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Given many public services previously delivered by federal and state entities continue to devolve to more local levels of service delivery and programmatic control, interorganizational coordination serves as an approach for the public sector to ensure that services are efficiently delivered in a nonduplicative manner. This article explores the issue of coordination by examining three different policy approaches toward local coordination of transportation services for the transportation disadvantaged. Local transportation services for the disadvantaged are often delivered by a variety of nonprofit organizations, operated independently by multiple entities in a community, and result in duplicative, overlapping, and uncoordinated services. The analysis concludes that although coordination sounds like an easy and magical policy solution to be effective, state-level policies must, at a minimum, target and fund the coordination process. Differing examples of how this goal is to be reached, along with an exploration of state-level and local-level activities, are presented.

Keywords: *transportation disadvantaged; coordination; paratransit; nonprofit organization; social exclusion*

As many public services previously delivered by federal and state entities continue to be devolved to more local levels of service delivery and programmatic control, inter-organizational coordination has been put forth as an approach for the public sector to ensure that services are efficiently delivered in a non-duplicative manner.

The public sector wishes to oversee many public goods delivered by private means (either by the private or nonprofit sector). Examples may include the delivery of health care, the provision of affordable housing, or the delivery of transportation services to transportation disadvantaged. As many public services previously delivered by federal and state entities continue to devolve to more local levels of service delivery and programmatic control, interorganizational coordination constitutes an approach for the public sector to ensure that services are efficiently delivered in a nonduplicative manner.

To explore the issue of coordination, this article examines three different policy approaches toward the local coordination of transportation services for the transportation disadvantaged. Local transportation services for the disadvantaged are often delivered by a variety of nonprofit organizations, operated independently and by multiple entities in any given community, resulting in duplicative, overlapping, and uncoordinated services. Recent federal initiatives by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) encourage local organizational coordination as a strategy to better serve the transportation disadvantaged and to reduce the burdens of individual organizations that have become de facto transportation providers. Bringing together these multiple organizations repre-

senting different clientele (the poor, people with mental disabilities, the elderly), different sectors (public, nonprofit, private), and different organizational missions create barriers to coordination that the federal policies seem not to recognize. The question thus arises, given a broad federal desire to foster better interorganizational coordination around services for the transportation disadvantaged, how do states and local communities carry the desire out?

For this research, the process by which policy supports local community coordination, rather than the actual results of the coordination, is of primary interest. Increased coordination is a stated policy goal of many federal policies aimed at populations who are transportation disadvantaged. Two assumptions are entrenched in the policy goal: (a) that coordination will lead to better outcomes (e.g., more efficiency) and (b) that coordination is a relatively simple endeavor to achieve. Although, ultimately, such coordination efforts will be judged on their more objective measures of success, equal consideration needs to be given on analyzing how coordination can even be facilitated. This article focuses, then, on how different statewide policy approaches address the goal of developing working examples of coordinated approaches to transportation, and not on whether the resulting coordinated efforts represent an improved state of being. The main question, therefore, asks: What policy and administrative approaches do differing states take and how do those state-level policies affect local efforts of transportation coordination? Some objective measures of transportation service change over time and demonstrate the basic effects of the coordinated approaches; however, such objective measures are not the focus of this article.

Answering this question analyzes state policies in three states (Michigan, Ohio, and Florida), local implementation of those policies, and the interaction between stakeholders at the local and state levels. Archival data research, directed interviewing, and focus groups are among several different data collection methods used for this research. At the local level, directors of nonprofit agencies and local transit officials were interviewed. A document analysis of the various coordination efforts used meeting minutes, annual reports, policy statements, and other relevant documents. At the state level, officials responsible for transportation support of nonprofit organizations were interviewed. Initial interviews with stakeholders at the local and state level revolved around some core questions but were generally open ended and lasted 1 hour. Follow-up interviews were conducted when necessary as the multistate comparison evolved. Statewide policies, regulations, and programmatic documents were also analyzed. Answers were coded and grouped into themes, which are presented later in this article.

The following are the working definitions of key terms:

- *Coordination*: Coordination defines an active, mutually beneficial relationship among organizations that potentially includes sharing organizational resources (financial, personnel, and capital).
- *Social service agencies*: Social service agencies are organizations that provide services designed to assist populations who are marginalized in some way and need extra assistance to participate fully in usual domains of social life (work, family, etc.). Interchangeable terms in the current article include *human service agencies*, *community-based organizations*, and *nonprofit organizations*, although in some studies, *social service agencies* can be conceived of more broadly to include schools and health care organizations, for example.
- *Paratransit*: Paratransit is a category of nonstandard, flexible-route transportation services that generally include vans, taxis, and other wheelchair-equipped vehicles. For the current report, *paratransit* mostly refers to flexible-schedule van services. Social service agencies generally operated the vans to provide a more-customized transportation experience than one would find on traditional fixed-route public transit systems.
- *Transportation disadvantaged*: The current article uses the following Floridian definition of the transportation disadvantaged:

Those persons who because of physical or mental disability, income status, or age are unable to transport themselves or to purchase transportation and are, therefore, dependent upon others to

obtain access to health care, employment, education, shopping, social activities, or other life-sustaining activities, or children who are handicapped or high-risk. (Florida, 2000).

The Challenge of Coordinated Social Service Transportation

Transportation in general and social service paratransit, in particular, is increasingly recognized as a key element in meeting social goals. Transportation is one of the key barriers for the poor to access jobs (Anderson, 1998; Danziger et al. 2000; Holzer, 1991; Kain, 1968; Lacombe, 1998), for poor women to access prenatal care (McCray, 2000), for the elderly to access health and social engagements (Straight, 1997), and for the disabled and otherwise disadvantaged to access important life-sustaining destinations (Denmark, 1998; National Governor's Association, 1995; Rosenbloom, 1992). These different categories of people for whom transportation is a key barrier in accessing important life-sustaining events can be grouped into the term, the *transportation disadvantaged*. In some cases, existing public transit adequately meets the needs of these populations to access desired destinations; however, often social services agencies must provide additional transportation assistance. These van services are referred to as *paratransit* and are often used to help individuals access the social service programs themselves or other health, recreational, and life-sustaining activities.

The demand for services to the transportation disadvantaged has resulted in scores of independently operated, nonprofit-based, transportation services (often in the form of social service agency vans) providing services to various types of transportation disadvantaged in any given community. Nontraditional transportation providers, such as social service agencies, have long known that transportation barriers are significant obstacles for their clients in accessing needed services and remaining socially involved and politically engaged. In some instances, the role of the social worker expands from a person who provides one-on-one or small-group counseling to a social planner who is a vital component in linking the needs of clients who are disadvantaged with available transportation resources (Community Transportation Assistance Project [CTAP], 1997). Although social service agencies are not typically interested in being transportation providers, their missions of providing human services, such as counseling and job skills training, are dependent on transportation (CTAP, 1997; National Governor's Association, 1995; University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute, 1997). In fact, "When examining barriers that prevent the poor, jobless, and welfare dependent from gaining self-sufficiency and ending public assistance, lack of transportation is almost always at or near the top of the list" (Metropolitan Affairs Coalition, 1997, p. 1).

The operations of these transportation services, however, are often duplicative in nature and inefficiently operated (U.S. Government Accounting Office, 1999), leading to "the creation of one-dimensional and uncoordinated transportation services . . . [that] has promoted development of a confusing web of transportation that no one knows how to access and that wastes substantial amounts of money to transport only a few riders" (Metropolitan Affairs Coalition, 1997, p. 4). This duplicative and confusing nature of paratransit van services has, in part, led to new policies on coordination by FTA, DOT, HUD, and DHHS. Since the 1996 passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, many policies toward transportation coordination have been adopted. For example, HUD's Bridges to Work program identifies collaboration among transportation and social service agencies; the FTA and DOT identify local stakeholder collaboration and coordination of local service; and the Volpe Center—the research component of the DOT—has identified coordination that includes all interested organizations and a collaborative coalition of diverse agencies and organizations to develop regional solutions to be keys to serving the transportation disadvantaged (Anderson, 1998; U.S. Department of Transportation, n.d.; Volpe National Transportation Systems Center, 1998). Recent community and faith-based development initiatives proposed by President Bush further bring these issues to the forefront (Bush, 2001).

Researchers argue that interagency cooperation can create solutions to social problems that span across organizational boundaries or missions (Aldrich, 1976; Alexander, 1993; Gray,

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1985;) and that interorganizational partnerships can balance needs of local autonomy and achieve economies of scale (Bardach, 1998; Graham & Barter, 1999). Others note that coordination often leads to mission confusion, that coordination tends to drain resources from organizational participants, and that there are organizational disincentives to coordinate (Gray, 1989; Pitt, 1998; Thacher, 1998). In the end, it is important to understand that coordination among differing organizations is difficult, time-consuming, and full of risks to each participating entity; however, effective coordination can lead to successful outcomes.

It is also important to recognize that *coordination* takes on many meanings depending on who uses the term and what she or he is trying to accomplish. Terms that sometimes are interchangeable and sometimes refer to different concepts include *collaboration*, *partnership*, *network*, *alliance*, or *coalition* (Arsenault and National Alliance for Nonprofit Management, 1998; Dluhy & Kravitz, 1990; Ginsler, 1998; Mattessich & Monsey, 1992; Wallis, 1994; Winer & Ray, 1994). Often, though, "Working definitions of 'collaboration' provide little guidance on how to establish effective inter-agency planning processes and to overcome the institutional barriers" (Blumenberg, 2000, p. 27). The analysis that follows, therefore, gives some examples of how state and local stakeholders, trying to provide better services to the transportation disadvantaged, translate the policy goal of coordination.

Brief Description of the Three Study Areas

The three cases differ in their original dispositions at the local level in terms of the desire to coordinate and in the state-level approaches toward transportation coordination (see Table 1). After the interviews with multiple stakeholders in each community, it became clear that the organizations that had responsibility for transportation disadvantaged had varying thoughts on the need to be better coordinated with other agencies. In Florida, local agencies (within Walton, Washington, and Holmes Counties) were not interested originally in working together to provide more coordinated and efficient transportation services to their clients who are transportation disadvantaged, yet the state adopted a mandate to force local organizations to comply. In Ohio (Ottawa County), local agencies wanted to coordinate; however, there was a lack of a staff person from any one agency who had the time to dedicate to the coordination endeavor. At the state level, Ohio developed a small grant program that essentially paid for a full-time coordinator (and not much else) for a small number of counties that were interested in coordinating social service transportation. In addition, in Michigan at the Washtenaw County level, a local transportation coordinator, a part of a larger social service agency, was attempting to develop coordinated approaches toward providing transportation regionally. At the state level, Michigan has no formal programs around coordination of transportation disadvantaged services.

Table 2 provides some basic sociodemographic characteristics of the three local areas being analyzed in this article. The local case in Michigan (Washtenaw County) has the greatest total population and is, by far, more urban and affluent than the other two areas. Accordingly, it also has a higher number of senior citizens (a cohort of people who often depend on specialized transportation services for their basic mobility needs), albeit the lowest of the three local situations. The Michigan case falls in the middle of the three cases in terms of its poverty rate; low-income households represent another user group of nonprofit-based transportation services (among other transportation alternatives). The Florida counties under study (Holmes, Walton, and Washington) are more rural in nature and of lower density. Along with the Ohio case (Ottawa County), 16% of its population is age 65 or older. Median income in the Florida case is the lowest of the three regions and has an accordingly higher poverty rate (16%).

Policies of Incentives and Support

One policy approach that offers incentives to entice and encourage coordinating behavior addresses the fragmented and duplicative transportation services at the local level. Of the three

Table 1: Original Local Disposition, State Support, and Local Results

	<i>Michigan</i>	<i>Ohio</i>	<i>Florida</i>
Original local condition toward coordination	Wanted coordination and had local coordinator in place who was also part of a larger social service agency	Wanted coordination but had no excess staff to facilitate	Did not want coordination
Policy framework followed	Informal state committee Michigan offers no specific statewide transportation coordination program but has established a state committee to study the issue and to operate as an information exchange agent.	State support, no mandate Ohio offers specific, but modest, transportation coordination grants and technical assistance to local, rural counties but does not mandate coordination statewide.	State Mandate Florida mandates that local counties coordinate their social service-oriented transportation and funds a local transportation coordinator in each county.
Targeted state-level legislation	No	No	Yes
Targeted state programs	No	Yes, part of the state	Yes, statewide
State financial support for coordination	No	Moderate	Yes
State-level staff expertise on coordination	Limited/part-time staff	Extensive	Extensive

Table 2: Basic Sociodemographic Characteristics of Local Cases (Data Based on Census 2000)

	<i>Population</i>	<i>Population Density</i> (<i>People/Sq. Mile</i>)	<i>#</i> <i>Age 65</i> <i>and Older</i>	<i>%</i> <i>Age 65</i> <i>and Older</i>	<i>Home</i> <i>Ownership</i> (<i>%</i>)	<i>Median</i> <i>Income</i> (<i>\$</i>)	<i>Poverty</i> <i>Rate</i> (<i>%</i>)
Local Michigan Case	322,895	442	26,271	8	57	51,990	10
Local Florida Case	80,138	37	12,473	16	54	29,417	16
Local Ohio Case	40,985	167	6,710	16	52	44,224	6

states in this comparative analysis, Ohio chose this incentive-based approach toward transportation coordination and addresses the issue through encouragement without any mandate. The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) is the lead agency in the coordinated effort supervising a Statewide Transportation Coordination Taskforce and the Ohio Coordination Program. The Statewide Transportation Coordination Taskforce is a committee comprising transportation, human service, and other state-level agencies that meet once per month to identify governmental barriers toward local area coordination. As a result of the Taskforce's involvement, for example, the Ohio Department of Human Services was mandated to allocate U.S. \$5 million of their caseload reduction funds to transportation programs (Ohio Department of Transportation [ODOT], 1999) and every Board of County Commissioners in the state became required to develop a transportation work plan (Community Transportation Association of America, 1998).

The other primary effort at the state level in Ohio is the Ohio Transportation Coordination Program administered by ODOT. The goal of this program is to "enhance and expand transportation through coordination in Ohio's counties with no public transportation system" (ODOT, 2000c, p. 1). It seeks to "increase efficiency and effectiveness of transportation's service delivery and develop coordination models which can be applied to other communities" (ODOT, 2000a, p. 1). The Ohio Transportation Coordination Program is a modest grant program (the maximum amount a grantee can receive per year is U.S. \$75,000 and the maximum number of years a county can receive money is 3 years) that supports community efforts to coordinate transportation. The primary goals are (a) to coordinate existing transportation services, (b) to

expand the availability of service, and (c) to eliminate the duplication of service among human service agencies and other transportation providers (ODOT, 2000b). As a condition of receiving the grant, a local, full-time coordinator must be designated for the entirety of the grant period.

Officials at the state and local levels also frequently interact and the technical assistance provided plays a significant role in achieving successful coordination results. This technical assistance comes in the forms of ODOT coordination briefs, ODOT coordination handbooks, ODOT roundtables, and an ODOT liaison designated to each local effort. The ODOT coordination briefs are relatively short documents distributed in paper format and through the Internet that give local coordination directors an introduction to some of the issues involved in coordination and transportation. Two handbooks on coordination, *A Handbook for Coordinating Transportation Services* (the Handbook) and *A Guide for Implementing Coordinated Transportation Systems* (the Guide) (Ohio Department of Transportation, RLS & Associates, CGA Consulting Services, 1997b, 1997a), provide detailed overviews of all the components that the person or organization responsible for implementing a transportation coordination program should know.

ODOT Transportation Coordination grantees attend roundtables every other month with ODOT representatives. The subjects of the talks are often directly the result of feedback that local counties have given ODOT on topics in which they are interested. The speakers are sometimes previous grant recipients who had successfully worked through certain issues, and sometimes the speakers are representatives of other organizations or states brought in by ODOT to address grantee concerns. And finally, each grantee of the Coordination Program is assigned an ODOT liaison that works in depth with local organizations to develop their coordination strategies as well as to provide technical expertise when needed. Each of these efforts purport to ensure that local coordination efforts understand the holistic environment in which they are operating—an issue that often hampers coordination efforts (Weiss, 1981).

At the local level, an analysis of the Ottawa County Transportation Agency (OCTA) was conducted. OCTA's primary goal developed a coordinated approach to local social service transportation and to a transition into a local transit agency with a continuous emphasis on the needs of the transportation disadvantaged. Some of the organizations involved in this coordination effort include Department of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, Department of Human Services, the Giving Tree, Oak House, Transitional Housing, Northcoast Cab, Edgewood Manor Nursing Center, Children's Action Network, and the WSOS Senior Center. The initiation of the coordination effort directly linked to two policy stipulations: the required designation and funding of a full-time local transportation coordinator. Without these incentives, local coordination would have remained a desire among local social service agencies; however, missing a realistic option to pursue because coordinating a diverse set of agencies requires more time and effort than any one person could add to her or his existing agency job responsibilities. Thus, the process of coordination at the local level itself was directly a result of state policy that encouraged and supported it. Because there was a designated person to guide the coordination effort, the multiple agencies involved in the OCTA project were able to see some positive outcomes. Over the first 4 years of OCTA's existence, the gross quantity of rides provided increased by 61%, the number of rides per hour of vehicle usage increased 64%, and cost efficiency has generally improved (KFH Group, 2000).

Policies Mandating Coordination

An alternate approach to facilitating interorganizational coordination of paratransit services is the use of a statewide mandate. Such a mandate can create consistent expectations across all jurisdictions within a state and can cultivate enough experimental approaches to create a laboratory of best practices to emulate in underperforming regions of the state or in communities elsewhere. State mandates of this type require the capacity and will of state policy makers (and their constituents) to exert a high level of government involvement in the operation of local coordination efforts. In today's political climate that is generally less in favor of strong top-down influ-

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ence, a statewide approach that mandates paratransit coordination at the local level may be somewhat limiting as a policy option.

That said, Florida has decided to take a government-laden approach to local transportation coordination and has applied its policies universally across the state. The impetus for this decision weighs heavily on the large senior citizen population in the state and the variety of independent, publicly funded, or subsidized transportation services that serve the senior population. Nevertheless, the policy is applicable to the entire state, independent of a locality's senior concentration.

In Florida, all agencies receiving federal, state, or local funds for transportation services are required by law to coordinate with other local agencies or organizations also providing transportation and receiving state funds. The primary goal of this mandate is to reduce duplication of services, decrease costs if possible, and increase the amount of transportation services offered and consumed by the transportation disadvantaged within a particular jurisdiction. Each county designates a transportation coordinator funded by the state to meet coordination objectives.

To achieve and to lead this statewide goal of unduplicated and coordinated transportation to the transportation disadvantaged the state created the Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged, an independent entity housed within the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT). Begun in 1979 as the Coordinating Council on the Transportation Disadvantaged, Florida's Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged (CTD) works to "insure the availability of efficient, cost-effective, and quality transportation services for transportation disadvantaged persons" (Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged [Florida CTD], 1998, §2).

The CTD has two general goals: first, to coordinate state-level policy as it pertains to transportation services for disadvantaged populations (the disabled, the elderly, and the poor); second, to fund directly and to oversee the delivery of transportation services at the local level through a network of local community transportation coordinators (CTC) who are responsible for developing coordinated transportation in their counties or regions (Community Transportation Assistance Project, 1996).

On a statewide basis, the coordination mandate reputed to be a successful means to extract greater efficiency from existing transportation resources. Between 1991 and 1997, operating expense per trip decreased by 31% at the same time that annual trips increased by more than 200% statewide (Hutchinson, 1997). In 1998, there was a 14% increase in trips with a decrease in costs of 5% compared to the previous year (Volpe National Transportation Systems Center, Research and Special Programs Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation, 2000). In addition, in 1999, total trips increased another 5% resulting in a decrease of cost per trip of 11% (Florida CTD, 2000).

At the local level, Tri-County Community Council (TCCC or Tri-County), the CTC for Holmes, Walton, and Washington counties was analyzed. TCCC is a multiservice nonprofit agency that provides many services in addition to transportation, including Head Start services, Section 8 housing administration, a low-income home energy assistance program, emergency food and shelter programs, and domestic violence services, among others (Tri-County Community Council, n.d.).

At the time that TCCC was named as the local transportation coordinator, several other social programs were providing local transportation including Head Start, the Council on Aging, and the Association for Retarded Citizens (A. Stewart, Tri-County Community Council Transportation coordinator, telephone interview, April 3, 2001). Each of these agencies operated established transportation services and was not initially receptive to the idea of contributing to a local transportation coordination scheme. They were concerned about losing control of services for their clients and about relinquishing organizational funds to a third-party transportation coordinator or provider (A. Stewart, telephone interview, 2001). For 4 years, these agencies struggled with relinquishing control of their own transportation service provision and with accepting the ability of a third party to provide the required services. They finally came to realize that the pooling of their resources, and clients within the region, would give their organizations more transportation services than they previously had accessed (A. Stewart, telephone interview,

2001). Although the mandate to coordinate provided the policy impetus for agencies to work together, the key was designating a qualified local coordinator to work with multiple organizations and to develop a coordinated system that met a diverse set of agency needs. In this way, the Florida and Ohio programs are similar—the designation of a qualified local, full-time transportation coordinator was viewed as a key component in translating a policy desire for coordination into actual, tangible coordination activities. Over the years, through its coordinated approach, TCCC has continuously increased the number of trips and decreased the cost per trip (Florida CTD, 2000).

Laissez-Faire Policies of Coordination

A third policy approach to facilitating local coordination of services in the public interest avoids crafting all definitive policies or programs at the state level. With this approach, the devolution spirit may be at its greatest—local stakeholders are responsible for identifying problems to solve and for developing the resources necessary to address the problems. In this context, each community is treated independently with no assumption about issues of transportation duplication; for example, one part of a state will be the same in another. State-level policy, therefore, is deemed an inappropriate mechanism to address what is truly a local issue.

Michigan follows this tactic and largely prefers a hands-off approach toward transportation coordination issues and allows decisions about the adequacy (or inadequacy) of local service provision to go to local agencies. At the state level in Michigan, no real governmental effort brings together state agency representatives on issues of the transportation disadvantaged, that is, there is no state-level task force charged with identifying legislative or programmatic barriers toward local-level coordination efforts. In contrast to Ohio, the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) is minimally involved in the promotion or assistance of local-level coordinated efforts.

MDOT does sanction a mild, voluntary forum for transportation coordination issues. At the state level, Specialized Service Coordination Team (SSCT) hosts meetings five times per year attended by various transportation officials, including representatives from MDOT, from local transit agencies, and from local human service providers from across the state. The primary function of these meetings provides a forum for participants to learn about new funding opportunities and legal requirements and to talk about issues of transportation coordination if desired by attendees.

Given the lack of any guiding state policies, the analysis of a local effort to coordinate within this broader policy framework is perhaps more important to understand. In other words, without a statewide policy framework to guide and support transportation coordination, what challenges does a local endeavor face? The local case study focused on Washtenaw County where RideSource, the primary organization, spearheaded transportation coordination efforts from the early 1990s until 2001, when its operations terminated. RideSource was one of many social service programs that were part of a larger nonprofit organization. RideSource had its own fleet of vans to provide transportation services and also engaged with other transportation providers and organizations without transportation in an effort to match available transportation with those in need. Multiple directors of RideSource had a vision of a completely integrated set of social service agency vans linking excess capacity to unmet need throughout the region. In 1995, RideSource (then known as County Transportation System Management [CTSM]) surveyed 65 social service agencies providing or needing transportation services in Washtenaw County to understand better the extent of transportation provision in the area (County Transportation System Management, 1995). Of the multiple organizations providing transportation to their own clientele, the survey indicated that less than two seats per hour per vehicle were being filled, and less conservative methods of data analysis produced even lower ridership rates.

Over a decade, RideSource consistently tried to organize and integrate the variety of social service paratransit services to increase efficiency and expand transportation options for many people and organizations that needed, but lacked, access to specialized transportation services.

Although the mandate to coordinate provided the policy impetus for agencies to work together, the real key was designating a local coordinator who could work with multiple organizations to develop a coordinated system that met a diverse set of agency needs.

Four underlying issues emerged as primary reasons why RideSource was never able to be more than an information and referral service for transportation services. First, directors of individual organizations were unable to see how a coordinated, interorganizational approach to transportation provision would benefit their particular organization. I would refer to this stance as “organizational NIMBYism,” the reluctance of individual organizations to sacrifice a portion of their own self-interest in the pursuit of a broader social goal (and one that might ultimately be in their own self-interest).

The extremely competitive nonprofit sector in Washtenaw County has led to an anticoordination mind-set and a second constraint. Nonprofit funding is limited, and many agencies serving similar clientele must compete for the scarce financial resources. Despite the atmosphere of compassion, sharing, and caring associated with the nonprofit community, nonprofit organizations are still corporations that seek to expand their operations, albeit to meet certain social needs. The pursuit of limited funding to facilitate this expansion (or at least the maintenance of their current operations) breeds an operational attitude counter to interorganizational coordination. Such competition is common in many communities where social needs outpace resources and where individual nonprofit, private, and public organizations often compete against each other for what resources do exist.

Third, there are major turf issues between some of the larger and more powerful nonprofit organizations in Washtenaw County. The major organizations are essentially split into two primary groups. Currently each grouping of organizations actively works to undermine the credibility of the other side. To develop a new, coordinated approach toward transportation requires a structure or person with capacity to be a neutral facilitator and organizer among these factions.

The fourth issue, and perhaps most important in terms of long-term solutions, focuses on the fact that no single entity in the County has championed the transportation issue nor is willing to move it forward. Although RideSource provided some limited centralized brokerage of transportation services, not a single entity has been designated or sanctioned with the responsibility of bringing together the decentralized and fragmented provision of services into something more centralized and coordinated. Without this sanctioned entity, no linkages between local effort and expertise at the state level have been made. In addition, because RideSource had to compete for its own financial survival at the same time it was attempting to expand its coordination services, it had limited time and resources to dedicate to developing a regional transportation system that better meets the needs of the population who is disadvantaged and relieves human service agencies of their need to provide transportation themselves.

In December 2000, RideSource decided that it could no longer provide its call taking, scheduling, and referral services without incurring a financial loss. RideSource was the sole voice for coordination in the region and was never able to develop the interagency relationships needed to make a coordinated approach succeed. After 10 years of operation, no significant in-county transportation coordination was ever able to develop, despite repeated dedicated efforts.

Reflection on State Role in Fostering Local Coordination

From these three cases, it appears that state-level activities can make a significant difference in facilitating local area coordination of fragmented and decentralized social service transportation providers. Although most successful efforts of interorganizational coordination can be traced to a skilled, competent, and trusted convener, the three local coordinators in these cases directly linked their capacities to succeed (Ohio, Florida) or fail (Michigan) with the level of state involvement and support. In Ohio, OCTA’s coordinator felt that ultimately their coordination efforts were successful because of the strong and active relationship of the state department of transportation. The director reflected that, “There would be no OCTA without the state coordination grant. . . . I cannot say enough good things about the staff of the public transit office at ODOT. They are very helpful [and] really want to see their locals succeed” (R. Allen, director, Ottawa County Transportation Agency, e-mail interview, March 21, 2001). An OCTA board member went on to observe that

support from ODOT was critical—the staff people, the mentoring, the assistance in accessing other resources, walking OCTA through the public transportation plan, opening doors to national planning conferences . . . the state coordination grant and the technical assistance from the state—it was the impetus for the coordination effort. (C. Galvin, board member, OCTA, telephone interview, March 13, 2001)

Finally, the active ODOT involvement provided the political support at the local level that was critical for OCTA's activities:

ODOT's active involvement gave credibility to the County Commissioners and helped them be more willing to participate. There is a different level of action that can take place when there is a government-to-government relationship (state to local) rather than a social services to government relationship only at the local level. (R. Allen, telephone interview, May 11, 2001)

Hence, much of the credit for OCTA's capacity to develop a coordinated approach to social service transportation can be linked to the statewide efforts of policy coordination, state-led technical assistance from the ODOT, and the required designation of a full-time coordinator dedicated to working out interorganizational conflict. Thus, the state's role was a crucial element in achieving local-level transportation coordination.

Similarly, Florida's policy framework of mandated coordination demonstrates a key tool in achieving local-level coordination (J. A. Hutchinson, executive director, Florida CTD, telephone interview, April 2, 2001). However, in Florida, more than a state mandate led to its successful efforts—political bodies often are very good at mandating things; however, that does not necessarily lead to any kind of positive change. In this transportation coordination case, Florida also directly funds and supports local efforts with technical assistance and full-time coordinators. These coordinators have full-time responsibility to coordinate; this is much different than most policies whereby (a) coordination is a partial solution to whatever problem needs a solution, (b) the process of creating a working collaborative is discounted itself, and (c) the job of being a coordinator is usually assumed to fall as an added responsibility to someone's existing full-time job. Moreover, in Florida, active efforts of coordination and synthesizing policy goals at the state level cultivate a consistency to the issue between local- and state-level interests, and a lead-in to a culture in which coordination becomes the default mind-set among agency staff and policy makers versus the more traditional segmentation and competition of interorganizational relationships. Finally, a statewide program established to meet transportation needs of disadvantaged populations enables Florida to accommodate a variety of transportation options: "Having such a law gives teeth to coordination efforts and forces new services—like welfare reform—to be dealt with in the context of what's already up and running" (Hutchinson, 1997). Thus by being active among state-level agencies and by creating strong linkages between state and local agencies, Florida, through the CTD, is taking an active and direct approach to assist populations who are disadvantaged who need access to necessary services.

In Michigan, a more-independent style characterizes the relationship between the state and the local counties. Local counties are left more on their own to develop and support their own solutions. Very little attention at the state level is dedicated to the needs of the transportation disadvantaged in general, and at the existing local provision of transportation services by human service agencies in particular. The state reflects this missing knowledge and is neither a proactive support for local coordination efforts nor is it a helpful resource if called on by local agencies for assistance in the coordination arena (S. Crabb, former director of RideSource, telephone interview, January 18, 2001). The lack of support and the lack of any associative coordination buy-in incentives that state-level involvement would generate was seen as one of the keys to RideSource's inability to foster more collaborative approaches to providing specialized transportation services (S. Crabb, telephone interview, 2001).

Clearly it is inappropriate to make broad claims that state interest, expertise, and support of coordination will always lead to success for local interorganizational coordination efforts. Many other issues are at play and ask whether local efforts succeed. However, understanding that coordination and collaborative decision making are often focused on local environmental

Table 3: State and Local Factors That Facilitate Coordination

<i>Primary</i>	<i>Secondary</i>	<i>Tertiary</i>
Local-level keys to successful coordination		
Sufficient funds	Ability to compromise	History of collaboration in the community
Skilled convener	Collaborative group seen as a leader in the community Political/social climate favorable	Members see collaboration as in their self-interest
State-level keys to successful coordination		
Targeted state programs	Targeted state-level legislation	
State financial support for coordination (and a coordinator)	Availability of technical expertise on coordination State level agency coordination	

SOURCE: Adapted from Mattessich and Monsey (1992).

and participatory factors (Gray, 1989; Innes & Booher, 1999; Margerum, 2002; Mattessich & Monsey 1992). Although the local environment is important, focusing exclusively on the local level subjects all efforts of coordination to an ad hoc process that must be re-created from place to place. Using the examples presented in the current article, four additional, nonlocal variables can be added to Mattessich and Monsey's (1992) oft-referenced and important synthesis of keys to local efforts of coordination: (a) adequate personnel resources, (b) availability of technical expertise, (c) supportive policy, and (d) presence/support of higher administrative entity. Table 3 provides a listing of the key factors that helped cultivate (or their absence helped hinder) coordinated approaches to local transportation service provision.

Conclusion

Transportation has been recognized recently as a critical component in helping many clients of nonprofit organizations access the services needed to sustain their lives. Although many nonprofits have developed transportation services to meet their clients' needs, these organizations were not formed to be transportation providers and generally prefer not to be in the transportation business. Moreover, as multiple organizations develop their own in-house transportation services, if viewed regionally, the provision of transportation is often inefficient and duplicative in nature. The notion of interorganizational coordination has arisen as a means to increase systemwide efficiencies.

Although diverse organizations may share the same transportation frustration, the successful adoption of coordinated or collaborative approaches to service delivery cannot be simply based on the existence of common concerns that often arise in multiparty problem solving. Coordination is a difficult task to achieve. Without a full-time, dedicated entity (or person) addressing the issue, coordinated approaches will be unlikely to find wide adoption. A primary lesson of this research teaches that an outside convener must be employed and supported with the technical know-how to see coordination through, and that the state can play an active role in bringing such a convener about. This convener can take the form of a designated short-term coordinator (Ohio), a permanent coordinating agency (Florida), or some other type of general independent entity that can work toward coordination goals such as a community support organization (see Connor & Kadel-Taras, 2000a, 2000b). This analysis also points to three primary activities that can help sustain local efforts of interorganizational coordination: (a) the active involvement of a higher level administrative body (e.g., the state) in local coordination efforts; (b) parallel efforts of coordination at the state level; and (c) the development of an ongoing local entity that can dedicate itself to coordination activities. In this way, the overall state policy and programmatic approach to local coordination process can play a significant role.

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Given policy makers continue to think about the most effective ways to deliver public goods (e.g., transportation, health care, or environmental protection), in all likelihood, some form of multiple stakeholder coordination will be part of the solution for the near future. In today's era, the public sector has limited financial and political support to comprehensively address many community issues and will therefore be desirous of opportunities through which multiple types of stakeholders (private, nonprofit, or volunteer) can come together to work collaboratively on an issue. The process of developing such coordinated approaches, however, can be difficult and elusive, especially in the absence of a policy framework earmarked to guide and fund the coordination process explicitly. The lesson here, then, is that although coordination sounds like an easy and magical policy solution, its effectiveness must, at a minimum, target and fund the coordination process. No doubt isolated successful examples of local coordination transpired; however, from a policy perspective, the replication of such isolated successes is not feasible without an explicit commitment to the coordination effort itself.

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