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# I. *Introduction*

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## A. Problem Description

*For most of us, getting to work, getting to the doctor, or getting to church means getting in our car. But for many people, it's not that easy, there are often many challenges that individuals face when trying to "get a ride."*

*It's not that we – governments, community organizations – haven't tried to help. Nearly every human service program recognizes that transportation is important. In fact, there are 62 federal programs that fund transportation services. And we – through our taxes and through our charitable contributions -- are spending a significant amount of money in order to help. Ironically, for most people who need transportation help, the creation of more programs hasn't made getting around much easier! (Community Transportation Association)*

The rural nature of Allegany County makes it difficult for low-income residents without vehicles to obtain and maintain gainful employment, attend adult education programs, and readily access healthcare, human services programs, and retail stores to buy goods/services.

Although many similar forces contribute to the continuation of rural and urban poverty, transportation is a considerably larger factor in cycles of rural poverty. Any person needing help and lacking a car or car insurance is affected, and these three factors are likely to coincide: “94 percent of welfare recipients do not own cars...close to 40 percent of all rural counties are not served by public transit systems, and 28 percent of rural counties have minimal transit service” (Stommes, Brown, & Houston, 2002).

In Allegany County, NY, for instance, where in 2003 the unemployment rate was 0.5% higher than national average and the poverty rate was greater than national average by 2.3% (“USA counties”; “Allegany”), the Allegany County Transit system currently has six bus lines which have limited route and scheduling availability and additional transportation services are minimal. The solution is complicated by the fact that “since not many jobs are usually located in sparsely populated rural areas, and such locations are unlikely to have public transportation, this leaves residents there with little choice but to travel long distances to work” (Stommes, Brown, & Houston, 2002).

*In addition to the problems of helping people reach jobs or services, transportation issues have other impacts on the community's economy and, by extension, the local employment opportunities. Irregular public transport to and from more urban areas can deter industry, tourists and potential new residents from visiting or settling in an area. Furthermore, if people in the towns surrounding a community college, mall, or other consumer service are unable to reach and patronize such services, the service may last a while but could easily fall into bankruptcy (Stommes, Brown, & Houston, 2002).*

Should this problem not be addressed, the quality of life and economic condition of Allegany County will continue to suffer.

## **B. Purpose of Allegany County Coordinated Transportation Plan**

The quality of life and economy in rural Allegany County depends on an efficient, effective, comprehensive, and coordinated multimodal transportation system that provides choices for the movement of people and goods and allows quick transfers between modes when and where they are needed. The need to maintain transportation linkages between rural and urban areas is very important to the economy, public health and safety, and the social structure of rural America.

Coordinating transportation services takes careful, deliberate, proactive planning. In the planning process, local officials with a stake in successful transportation services come together to determine how the community's needs can best be met and how the skills and resources available to them can best be used to this purpose.

Many commonly observed benefits from coordinated transportation services may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Lowered trip costs for travelers and for human service agencies
- Extended service hours, services to new areas or new communities and to more people
- More trips made by persons needing transportation
- Services more responsive to schedules, points of origin, and destinations of customers
- Greater emphasis on safety and customer service
- More door-to-door service
- More flexible payment and service options

In May of 1999, the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) announced the Rural Transportation Initiative to ensure that rural areas and small communities share in the mobility, economic, and social benefits that many USDOT programs provide. The Initiative aims to increase the capacity of rural America to play a more integral role in planning and decision-making that shape transportation systems, and improve transportation safety in rural areas to reduce the incidence and severity of accidents and their associated costs.

The Rural Initiative objectives include the following components:

- Allow residents of rural areas and small communities access to the destinations and goods to attain their desired quality of life.
- Provide the transportation service that will afford rural areas and small communities the opportunity to reach their economic growth and trade potential.
- Enhance the social strength and cohesiveness of small communities and protect the natural environment of rural areas.
- Maintain the national security and border integrity necessary for the well-being of all Americans.

In February 2004, the Presidential Executive Order 13330 on the Coordination of Human Service Programs created an interdepartmental Federal Council on Access and Mobility to undertake collective and individual departmental actions to reduce duplication among federally-funded human service transportation services, increase the efficient delivery of such services and expand transportation access for older individuals, persons with disabilities, persons with low-income, children and other disadvantaged populations within their own communities. Recent federal regulations accentuate the timeliness and importance of this issue. Response by the New York State Department of Transportation emphasizes that a state-wide coordinated plan be developed by each of the sixty-two counties in New York State.

The Allegany/Western Steuben Rural Health Network, Inc. (AWSRHN) is committed to effectively coordinating local efforts in order to produce a coherent coordinated transportation plan. These efforts will help to increase people mobility, attract future funding opportunities, build strong community support through partnerships, and achieve greater operating efficiencies. AWSRHN was founded in 1994, and is an established, highly-visible rural health network comprised of service providers and community leaders in Allegany and Steuben counties. In 2006, AWSRHN applied and obtained its 501C3 Charitable Organization status.

In the AWSRHN 2007 workplan, approved by the New York State Department of Health, Office of Rural Health, transportation was identified as a key issue to be addressed in order to impact quality of life, improve access to services and care, and increase cross-system collaboration via the Friendship House Community Resource Center. The Allegany County Transportation Task Force is a sub-committee of Friendship House Community Resource Center, working to achieve the Allegany County Coordinated Public Transit –Human Services Transportation Plan.

This document will serve as a framework for action and will include activities and outcomes of the Allegany County Transportation Task Force. In addition, the document will serve as a reporting source as information and activities are completed, and the document is updated. All members of the Allegany County Transportation Task Force will have access to the document, as well as the Allegany County Legislators and the United States Department of Transportation.

## C. Allegany County Transportation Task Force (ACTTF) History

The Allegany/Western Steuben Rural Health Network, Inc. as the lead agency of the Friendship House Community Resource Center has established the mission of aligning services within the area to overcome identified barriers to social, psychological, physical health, education and behavioral health development. Friendship House integrates the energy of Allegany County's human service agencies, government agencies, academic arena, mental hygiene providers and healthcare services to establish a "one-stop" location for greater coordination of services. It is through the vision of establishing cross-system collaborations to improve access to priority services, broaden networking opportunities, increase inter-agency referrals, expand opportunities for funding, and enhance case management services that the Allegany County Transportation Task Force was born.

The precedent for successful collaboration building was set forth by the creation of the Adult Education and Employment Task Force. This Friendship House initiative, based on the Ohio Department of Education model, "For the Common Good" was initiated in 2005. Through the collaborative efforts of educational institutions, vocational programs, basic literacy and high school equivalency organizations, employment agencies, human service agencies, local business and industry the educational and employment needs of Allegany County residents are met through comprehensive planning sessions and outreach activities.

The Allegany County Transportation Task Force is a collaboration of the Allegany/Western Steuben Rural Health Network, Inc. hereafter referred to as ACTTF, and was assembled in January 2007. ACTTF inaugurated their efforts with the intent to create a Coordinated Human Service Transportation Plan, hereafter referred to as the Plan, using the combined methods of United We Ride and the Toolkit for Rural Community Coordinated Transportation Services, TCRP Report 101, created by the Transportation Research Board of the National Academies. *TCRP Report 101 Summary*, "Many of us share a vision of improved mobility for all residents of rural communities. We look forward to a day of productive and cost-effective transportation services that enjoy a significant level of public support. However, many rural communities are still faced with meager transportation funding, multiple funding sources and service objectives, limited services, and inadequate public interest and transportation investments. Given this reality, the most intelligent strategy of the moment is to **do the best we can with the resources that we have** while still seeking more resources."

Although the mandate calling for the creation of a locally-developed, coordinated public transit human service transportation plan was not recognized until the efforts of the Task Force had been conceptualized, ACTTF has been able to perform much of the groundwork for this Plan through the collaborative efforts of Transportation Providers, Human Service Agencies, Allegany County Officials, Faith-Based Organizations and Members at Large. The efforts of ACTTF will be positioned according to the following ACTTF Mission and Vision Statements.

## **D. Allegany County Transportation Task Force (ACTTF) Mission/Vision**

### **Allegany County Transportation Task Force Mission Statement**

*Mission: To identify the transportation needs of the transportation-disadvantaged as well as reduce gaps and duplication of services. By doing so it is our intention to develop a plausible, consumer-focused Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan for Allegany County in collaboration with its neighboring counties.*

### **Allegany County Transportation Vision Statement**

*Vision: Through the development of a Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan the transportation-disadvantaged will have greater access to healthcare, human services, employment, education, commerce, social, and community services. In addition, there will be an opportunity for increased transportation funding, cost efficiencies for programs and providers, and service quality improvements.*