

Welfare to Work in Contra Costa, California Providing Creative Transportation Solutions

Lynn Osborn
Contra Costa Commute Alternative Network Program Manager
Central and Eastern Contra Costa, California
Losborn@cccan.org (925) 407-0353

A comprehensive program has been developed in Contra Costa County to provide a wide variety of options to address the inadequacies and gaps in the transportation system, as well as the corresponding transportation needs of CalWORKS¹ recipients.

Contra Costa Transportation Alliance

A committee of “stakeholders”, called the Transportation Alliance, met over a nine-month period to determine what transportation barriers were impeding successful implementation of the County’s CalWORKS plan. This group consisted of County staff from various departments (including the Administrator’s office, Social Services and Community Development Departments); faith-based and community-based organizations; transit operators; the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) private taxi and shuttle owners; rideshare agencies; the Contra Costa Transportation Authority; the three Contra Costa Commute Alternative Network Program Managers; employer representatives; and members of the public.

After identifying the transportation gaps in existing services and unmet needs of low-income residents, the goal was to determine not only what solutions could be developed, and which agencies would take the lead in providing the services, but also what funding could be secured. The group also recommended an on-going forum for discussion of transportation issues beyond the scope of the existing Alliance. The final list of recommendations and issues stretched well beyond the purview of the organizations represented, while addressing the complex difficulties associated with multiple gaps in the system, geographic and institutional constraints, and complex societal barriers which needed a broad-based and multi-layered series of strategies to help solve key obstacles. Unlike many transportation projects, the funding in this case proved to be the easiest part of the task. Providing viable transportation solutions became the challenge.

Funding

The County applied for Department of Labor grant funds and a Governor’s grant to provide funding for transportation projects and programs which had been prioritized by the Alliance. Both short term and long term projects were outlined, with lead agencies taking the responsibility of developing the internal systems,

¹ CalWORKS is an acronym for California work opportunity and responsibility to kids, the State’s welfare reform program.

methodology, tracking forms, etc. to get the projects up and running. In addition, the Transportation Authority allocated funds for the grant submittal consultation, as well as funding to support expanded fixed route service to an area with no existing service and yet a very high low-income population which could be served. Other agencies also provided assistance in numerous ways. The Contra Costa Commute Alternative Network (CCCAN) has been using some of the Measure C half-cent sales tax funds to support the administration and expansion of existing programs to serve CalWORKS participants.

Identified Transportation Needs

A list of 25 recommendations was produced which represented a broad range of programs, projects and services. The Alliance focused on improving existing services and programs in areas where there were existing programs in place which could be expanded or modified to meet the needs of this target population. The primary issues identified which were considered priorities to meet the needs of this group included:

- Access to transportation on nights and weekends
- Reduced travel time for bus trips, especially those combining child care drop-offs and work
- Penetration by public transportation into low income neighborhoods and job sites
- Centralized information about and assistance with all types of trip needs and all modes

Other issues on the expanded list included such problems as lower transportation costs for low income workers, a seamless system among operators in connections and fares, reliable private cars and the means to maintain them, and better matching of land uses with jobs and housing, to name a few.

Areas where the group determined immediate projects or services could be developed to address some of these obstacles included:

- Transportation information dissemination
- Transportation subsidies
- Extension or enhancement of fixed route public transit
- New demand-responses paratransit services
- Employer-based programs
- Vehicle programs

Ideas for short term projects included those which could be immediately developed and implemented (a two-year project completion timeline was a requirement of both grants). Long term projects included those which would either require more of a financial investment, long range on-going funding, or for which more political support or project planning would be required.

TDM Strategies

The three Contra Costa Commute Alternative Network Program Managers developed an Enhanced Commute Alternatives Program of incentives, based on existing programs, which could augment subsidies provided by the County and the State. This Program includes generous incentives for carpool gas scrip, SchoolPool scrip, transit passes, vanpool reimbursements, GRH; as well as training CalWORKS recipients to be transit planners to assist others in their commute or job interview trips. There is also a transportation information component which includes placement of five [TR@KS](#) transportation information kiosks at the five GAIN One-Stop Centers which include transportation information for the entire Bay Area, and can also be used for accessing employment information.

The Enhanced Commute Alternatives Program is a particularly appropriate transportation approach for this target population because it:

- focuses on those without access to an automobile
- introduces participants to an affordable commute option which they can eventually sustain themselves
- includes a component to address transportation of participants' children
- recognizes instability in participants' support systems, which may require emergency transportation
- involves participants' employers'
- mainstreams participants by including them in existing programs
- increases coordination between transportation and social service providers by utilizing agencies that already operate these programs and
- leverages federal dollars by avoiding administrative start-up costs for a new program

The CCCAN Programs provide the administrative support and ticket/gas scrip disbursement mechanism, in cooperation with the case workers at the One-Stop Centers. The case workers are supplied the tickets, gas scrip and vouchers from the Program Managers and are responsible for tracking the distribution of the incentives on forms developed specifically for this program. The incentives given to CalWORKS recipients include:

Transit Incentive- up to 60 days' worth of bus tickets needed to provide the entire trip length to and from work, and/or up to three \$32 BART passes (this may include any combination of multiple transit options necessary)

Carpool Incentive- Up to three \$100 gas coupons given for joining a carpool

SchoolPool- up to three \$25 gas coupons given in order to reimburse others who can take their children to school

Guaranteed Ride Home- allows up to 12 free taxi rides for emergencies, based on continued employment status

Finally, five [TR@KS](#) Transportation Information Kiosks have been installed at the five PIC locations in Contra Costa. Through the [TR@KS](#) website, case workers and CalWORKS recipients are able to access transportation information for the entire bay area. In addition, these computer systems have been set up so that the individuals can access employers who are working with the CalWORKS program. The CCCAN program tracks the use of the kiosks and their effectiveness and reports on a monthly basis, this detailed information to the County so that it can ultimately be reported to the State.