New NCSL Report on Regional Coordinating Councils

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In Jan. 2012, NCSL—with support from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the U.S. Department of Labor—released Regional Human Service Transportation Coordinating Councils: Synthesis, Case Studies and Directory. To better coordinate human services transportation activities, at least 29 states have one or more coordinating councils at the regional level. The new report offers an overview of the regional coordinating council approach, including factors that can support councils' success; case studies of regional councils in Calif., Colo., Fla., Idaho and Iowa; and a comprehensive directory of regional councils nationwide.

State Activity

Some legislative action was seen late in the year, but most states geared up for 2012 by pre-filing bills to be introduced when sessions convene.

- In the District of Columbia, Chairman Kwame R. Brown (D) introduced a bill on Dec. 20 to establish a Wheelchair Accessible Taxicab Program, requiring 10 percent of the taxicabs in companies with 10 or more cabs to be wheelchair accessible. It also would create an incentive for serving geographically underserved areas and a taxi driver training program that reviews legal requirements, sensitivity awareness and passenger assistance techniques that apply to persons with disabilities.

- The next day, a bill passed in New York that also concerns mobility through taxicabs. Introduced by Asm. Carl Heastie (D), the new law authorizes the NYC Taxi and Limousine Commission to issue up to 1,500 new taxicab licenses, provided that 569 of them are restricted to vehicles accessible to individuals with disabilities. The bill—sent to the governor on Dec. 22—would also create a task force on areas of New York City now underserved by medallion taxicabs. Another New York bill—signed into law on Jan. 3—will provide a tax credit to taxi companies of up to $10,000 per vehicle for purchasing a new vehicle or upgrading one to make it accessible for individuals with disabilities.

- On Dec. 21, Rep. Dan Frankel (D) introduced a bill in Pennsylvania that would allow the DOT to study consolidation of local transportation organizations as a means of reducing annual expenses; a similar bill was previously introduced in the Senate. Gov. Corbett signed a law on Dec. 22 that defines and limits the eligibility of persons receiving methadone treatment for mileage reimbursement and paratransit services through the county-run Medical Assistance Transportation Program. The measure also requires procedures for detecting reimbursement fraud; development of an

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exceptions process based on medical emergency, physical health, safety issues and availability of the closest provider; and biennial reports on the costs and cost savings of implementing these provisions.

- On Dec. 21, Rep. David R. Burns (R) pre-filed a bill in Maine that would direct the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to review reimbursement to MaineCare recipients for transportation to methadone clinics. DHHS would also be required to adopt rules to ensure uniform reimbursement statewide and reduce fraud. The bill was introduced in the House on Jan. 4.

- Rep. Ronald Mariano (D) pre-filed a bill in Massachusetts on Nov. 14 that would remove barriers for nonprofit organizations providing transportation options to seniors. No bill number or text was available at the time of writing.

**Pennsylvania Regional Transit Coordination Study Released**

In November, the findings were released from an 18-month Regional Transit Coordination Study in Pennsylvania. The study analyzed transit in a nine-county area, with the goal of increasing mobility options through coordinating transit services. Among other findings, the report recommends seamless service across county borders, to be achieved through partnerships with local governments and employers, and calls for legislation to separately fund inter-county transit service coordination. It also identifies a need for more express services and multimodal linkages.

**Surface Transportation Reauthorization Delayed**

Before the Senate adjourned for the holidays, Senate Environment and Public Works Chairwoman Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) announced that Senate Democrats would pass a surface transportation bill soon after reconvening in late January. Boxer said Senate Finance Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) had put together a variety of funding proposals to cover the $12 billion gap between revenues and proposed funding levels, making progress toward introduction of a long-term plan.

In the House, Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman John Mica (R-Fla.) announced on Nov. 29 that his committee would not introduce a reauthorization bill until late January or early February. The legislation had previously been expected for Dec. 5. SAFETEA-LU is set to expire on March 31. The House reconvenes on Jan. 17 and the Senate on Jan. 23.

**Voters Nationwide Choose to Pay More for Transit**

According to the Center for Transportation Excellence, at least 21 out of 28 ballot measures were approved across the nation on Election Day 2011 that funded public transportation. Of these, voters approved seven transit finance measures totaling nearly $30 million in new, annual funding. Another survey found that 90 percent of Washington state residents surveyed think that “maintaining an effective transportation system is urgent,” and about half were willing to pay increased taxes or fees to fund transit.

**FTA Awards $1 Billion to Local Transit Agencies**

On Oct. 17, U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood announced that transit providers across the nation would receive a total of $928.5 million in federal funds for more than 300 public transportation projects in urban, suburban and rural areas. The grant awards were made from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) FY 2011 Alternatives Analysis, Bus Livability, and State of Good Repair programs. Grant awards were highly competitive; recipients were selected from more than 800 project applications requesting almost $5 billion for transit upgrades.

**FTA Grants $15 Million for Tribal Transit and Coordination**

On Dec. 2, the U.S. DOT announced $15 million in grants from the FY 2011 Tribal Transit Program to American Indian and Alaska Native governments for public transit investments that help provide access to employment centers. From 116 applications, 67 projects in 25 states were selected, including:

- $475,000 to the Navajo Transit System in Arizona to expand and enhance service and improve coordination with other transit providers.
- $248,000 to the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde in Oregon to coordinate transit service with two area transit providers.
- Grants to the Sac and Fox Tribe of the Mississippi in Iowa ($25,000) and the Bristol Bay Native Association, a consortium of 31 tribes in Alaska ($75,000), to create coordinated transit plans.
NCSL Releases State Budget Update for Fall 2011

State fiscal conditions continue to improve, but at a very slow pace. A fall 2011 survey of state legislative fiscal officers found that the deterioration that dominated state finances in recent years has eased. Revenue performance has improved, expenditures in most states are stable and, in a significant departure from past years, few states are reporting budget gaps in the early months of FY 2012. Despite these positive developments, however, the effects of the Great Recession continue to linger. State tax collections still remain well below pre-recession levels.

The report is based on data collected from legislative fiscal officers in October and November 2011. It includes information on:

- New FY 2012 budget gaps;
- FY 2012 revenue performance;
- Revenue outlook for the remainder of FY 2012; and
- Spending overruns in FY 2012.

NCSL Offers Up-to-Date Transportation Resources

NCSL makes many of its resources available to the general public. These include searchable, online databases of state legislation and regular newsletters.

- The NCSL State Transportation Coordination Legislation Database tracks pending legislation, executive orders and statutes on various transportation coordination topics, dating to 2000.
- The NCSL Transportation Funding Legislation Database provides information about 17 different transportation funding issues under consideration in the states, including transit funding.
- The Transport Report, a semi-monthly newsletter from NCSL’s Transportation Committee and Programs, focuses on state and federal transportation news, trends and analysis. For more details or to join the distribution list, please contact Jaime Rall.

Calendar

- 2012 Training/Technical Assistance Conference & Roadeo – hosted by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), National Rural Transit Assistance Program (National RTAP) and National Tribal Transit Association (NTTA) – Scottsdale, Ariz. – March 18-21, 2012
- National Transportation Workforce Summit – hosted by the Council of University Transportation Centers – Washington, D.C. – April 24-26, 2012
- NCSL Legislative Summit – Chicago, Ill. – Aug. 6-9, 2012
New Resources

Meeting the Transportation Needs of Michigan's Aging Population
The Michigan DOT released a report in Sept. 2011 that explores the issue of mobility for the state's aging population and suggests measures for improving older adult mobility in Michigan.

Innovative Rural Transit Services
This Dec. 2011 TRB synthesis highlights transit and intercity bus service responses to changing rural community transportation needs, with an emphasis on innovation.

Analysis of State Rural Intercity Bus Strategies: Requirements for Utilization of S.5311(f) Funding
Section 5311(f), a component of the Rural and Small Urban Areas Program, funds rural intercity bus service. This Nov. 2011 National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) report gives a snapshot of the program’s status and recommendations for program implementation.

Connecting the D.O.T.S: A Guide for Connecting with Your Department of Transportation
This Sept. 2011 NADO Research Foundation report—intended to help policy makers, practitioners and other stakeholders—serves as a guidebook for creative problem solving, building stronger state and local partnerships, and understanding the unique opportunities that transportation and economic development projects bring to regions and communities.

Communication with Vulnerable Populations: A Transportation and Emergency Management Toolkit
This Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) toolkit describes how to create a communication process to reach vulnerable populations regarding their transportation options in emergencies. Released in Oct. 2011, the report provides a guiding framework for a communication process built on a network of public, private and nonprofit agencies.

Community Transportation Magazine: "What If...? A Day in the Life of Mobility"
The Fall/Winter 2011 issue of Community Transportation Digital offers a detailed, diary-style look at a single day of community and public transportation, and questions what would happen throughout the nation without it.

Addressing Elderly Mobility Issues in Wisconsin
In this Sept. 2011 report, the Wisconsin DOT assesses the state’s elderly mobility services, collects data from older residents, and reviews elderly mobility best practices.

Transportation for America's Veterans and Their Families
In this first report in a series on key issues in community and public transportation and human services transportation coordination, released in Nov. 2011, the National Resource Center for Human Service Transportation Coordination (NRC) addresses mobility- and transportation-related issues for veterans. It offers examples, best practices and a list of key resources.

Transportation Funding Reform: Equity Considerations for Older Americans
In Dec. 2011, the AARP Public Policy Institute released this report that discusses the inequity of current and proposed transportation funding sources at all levels of government for low-income people, rural residents, people with disabilities or older adults.