

**Re: Statewide Transportation Planning and Research Program
SFY 2022-2023 FTA Section 5305(e)
Nashua Regional Planning Commission
Regional Volunteer Driver Network Feasibility Study**

Fred Butler
Public Transportation Administrator
7 Hazen Drive PO BOX 483
Concord, NH 03302

Dear Mr. Butler,

The Town of Merrimack is pleased to provide a letter of support for the Nashua Regional Planning Commission (NRPC) application for Statewide Transportation Planning and Research Program funding.

NRPC proposes to evaluate the current level of volunteer driver programming in the region, identify gaps in service and strategies to support current services, and assess the need and feasibility of developing new volunteer driver programs to help fill those gaps. During this evaluation, NRPC will assess the feasibility of developing a coordinated volunteer driver - community transit network that will incorporate enhanced regional mobility management strategies.

The Locally Coordinated Plan for Community Transportation for the Greater Nashua and Milford Region indicated a need for additional public transit service in Merrimack. Whereas demand response paratransit service from Merrimack to Nashua is available to eligible residents, that service does not provide trips to destinations within the town. This proposed study will help determine the viability of creating a volunteer driver program that could fill these gaps in service.

Additionally, the enhanced mobility management network will provide valuable information about available transportation services and assistance with accessing those services. This is especially important to the elderly, individuals with disabilities, and residents with low income that we serve. Town of Merrimack staff believe that the enhanced network will be a valuable tool for use in our efforts to make sure that Merrimack residents have the basic needs of life.

The Town of Merrimack supports this funding proposal and urges the New Hampshire Department of Transportation to fund this important initiative.

Sincerely,



TOWN OF MERRIMACK, NH

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**Re: Statewide Transportation Planning and Research Program
SFY 2022-2023 FTA Section 5305(e)
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1/13/2021

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Sincerely,

Thomas P. Koenig, Chairman
Merrimack Town Council

Assessing P: 603-424-5136 F: 603-424-0461	Community Development P: 603-424-3531 F: 603-424-1408	Finance P: 603-424-7075 F: 603-424-0516	Human Resources P: 603-424-2331 F: 603-424-0461	Media Services P: 603-423-8561 F: 603-424-0461
Public Assistance P: 603-423-8535 F: 603-424-0516	Public Works Administration P: 603-424-5137 F: 603-424-1408	Town Council P: 603-424-2331 F: 603-424-0461	Town Manager P: 603-424-2331 F: 603-424-0461	

Greater Nashua Region Volunteer Driver Feasibility Study Proposal

Project Purpose and Need

The Nashua Regional Planning Commission (NRPC), in collaboration with the Region 7 Greater Nashua Coordinating Council (RCC) for Community Transportation and other partners, proposes to evaluate the current level of volunteer driver programming in the region, identify gaps in service and strategies to support current services, and assess the need and feasibility of developing new volunteer driver programs to help fill those gaps. During this evaluation, NRPC will assess the feasibility of developing a coordinated volunteer driver - community transit network that will incorporate enhanced regional mobility management strategies.

Mobility is necessary to engage with one's community and reach critical destinations, but the lack of available, affordable, and accessible transportation is a barrier for many. Age, physical and cognitive ability, income, and geography are all factors that can impede access to reliable transportation. Volunteer driver programs and networks are a way that communities are addressing these gaps. These programs and networks can be a cost-effective and flexible way to address the transportation needs of communities and can save money for both the organizations and the consumers. In addition to providing vital transportation, they provide an element of social connectedness for their riders and drivers. As the demographics of the United States continue to shift (the US Census Bureau predicts that persons 65+ will outnumber children under age 18 by 2035), volunteer driver programs expect to experience an increase in demand.

There are approximately twenty (20) publicly accessible volunteer driver programs (VDPs) in New Hampshire. They range from very small operations with just a few drivers and volunteer coordinators, to relatively large organizations with paid staff. Additionally, various membership and faith-based organizations utilize volunteer driver programs to assist individuals in need. The level of coordination among these programs in the Greater Nashua region is unclear.

The needs for improved coordination between transit providers and health & human service organizations as well as easier, more centralized information, referral and application processes were identified in the Locally Coordinated Plan for Community Transportation (LCTP) for the Greater Nashua and Milford Region (2020-2024, adopted in April 2020). During that planning process, community transportation users, providers, healthcare facilities, and human service agencies agreed that a coordinated regional volunteer driver network would be a key component of a coordinated regional human services transportation system. Moreover, the participants agreed that additional community transit resources were needed to meet the current and anticipated increased demand for rides to intercity and cross-regional destinations and appointments.

The New Hampshire Statewide Coordination of Community Transportation Services Plan (January 2017) states that the main goal of the Regional Coordinating Council's (RRC's) should be to encourage true coordinated transportation.¹ This includes implementing applicable best practices to increase funding opportunities, trips, and individuals served. The report goes on to suggest that centralized mobility management strategies can facilitate more effective resource coordination and improved community transit services. A regional volunteer driver program will provide an additional transportation service that could then be coordinated with the transportation services already operating in the region.

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Development of a mobility management enhanced network among community transit providers and referral sources would improve service delivery and public access to needed rides.

To address the need for a more complete and diversified transportation system in the Greater Nashua region, NRPC will assess the critical aspects that are necessary for a successful volunteer driver program in the region, including:

- 1) community context and collaboration,
- 2) driver recruitment and retention,
- 3) risk, liability, and insurance,
- 4) outreach and marketing,
- 5) data collection,
- 6) measuring and sharing impact, and,
- 7) funding.

This study will seek to inventory volunteer driver programs that faith-based, membership, and other types of organizations utilize to serve individuals in need of transportation. The objective would be to work with these groups to build upon their efforts, identify supportive strategies, and create a more comprehensive and coordinated transportation system that addresses gaps in underserved areas of the region.

NRPC will also assess the interest in and feasibility of enhanced mobility management that will include a client-centered regional provider network that utilizes a centralized mobility management position whose responsibility would initially be to maintain a comprehensive database of regional transit resources and contacts, provide client-centered and agency-based information and referral services, facilitate application processes, assist with regional outreach, and other related mobility management and coordination activities. This position could evolve to include among other services individual travel training, volunteer coordination for buddy system rides, a one-stop application and ride matching program, and so on.

The planning justification for this is extensive and found in various regional plans, including:

- Locally Coordinated Transportation Plan for the Greater Nashua and Milford Region (LCTP) – 2020 - 2024
- 2019-2045 Nashua Region Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)
- 2016 New Hampshire Statewide Coordination of Community Transportation Services Plan – Final Report
- Nashua Transit System Comprehensive Plan 2016-2025

The context and applicability of these plans relative to this proposal are discussed under Criteria 2 in the project justification section later in this proposal.

Scope of Work

The Scope of Work will consist of the following phases and tasks:

A. General Administration

NRPC will lead the implementation of the prescribed public input and planning initiative described in this proposal.

Task A1: Project Administration

- Oversee all reporting requirements to New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT),
- Serve as Project Manager and Point of Contact, and,

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- Administer all billing and financial management associated with the project.

B. Public Outreach:

The goal of the public outreach effort is to inform a thorough understanding of the current community transit related needs within the region, the operational challenges, and potential regional benefits of additional VDPs, and the level of interest and opportunity for improved networking and service coordination.

Public Outreach tasks will include:

Task B1: Outreach to existing volunteer driver programs located in or servicing residents of the Greater Nashua region

The purpose of this task is to inventory existing VDP resources including but not limited to eligibility, service area, types of rides provided, rider fees or charges, barriers to service, and strategies the organization believes would assist them in meeting their missions.

This will include outreach to publicly accessible volunteer driver programs as well as faith-based and membership organizations that have their own volunteer driver programs.

This could include surveys and one-on-one interviews.

Task B2: Outreach to human service agencies, major healthcare facilities, municipal welfare officers, local social service agencies, and other stakeholders

The purpose of this task is to fully understand the needs of these stakeholders.

This will include identifying gaps in transportation services that impact these facilities and their clients, and identifying an ongoing best point of contact for potential network implementation.

Task B3: Outreach to target populations – senior citizens, residents living with a disability, residents living with lower incomes, current public transit and VDP riders

This will include targeted outreach to 55+ communities, senior centers and groups, specialized service programs etc. using strategies such as listening sessions, public meetings, and surveys.

Task B4: Peer review of VDP's beyond the Greater Nashua region in New Hampshire and elsewhere

The purpose of this task is to identify and understand the characteristics and best practices of a successful program.

This could include surveys and one-on-one interviews.

Task B5: Enhanced Mobility Management - Evaluate options for a client-centered regional provider network that utilizes a centralized mobility management position

This will include evaluating software options and other methods for matching rider requests with volunteer driver availability. This task will also identify the scope of regional mobility manager services that could include developing and maintaining a comprehensive database of regional transit resources and contacts, providing client-centered and agency-based information and referral services, facilitating application processes, assisting with regional outreach, and other related mobility management and coordination activities.

Task B6: Review current guidance from various National and New England sources

This will include, but not limited to, information from:

- Maine Council On Aging, Jess Maurer, Executive Director - Hosts the Tri-State Learning Collaborative on Aging
- National Center for Mobility Management (NCMM) – Mobility Management clearinghouse

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- National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC) – Volunteer Transportation Toolkit
- Community Transportation Center of America (CTAA) – National Transportation Resources
- National Volunteer Transportation Center (NVTC) - Volunteer Driver Program clearinghouse
- Massachusetts Department of Transportation Mobility Management Center

Task B7: Review various Nashua region transportation plans

This will include review of proposed projects, goals, and recommendations from, but not limited to:

- Locally Coordinated Transportation Plan for the Greater Nashua and Milford Region (LCTP) – 2020 - 2024
- 2019-2045 Nashua Region Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)
- 2016 New Hampshire Statewide Coordination of Community Transportation Services Plan – Final Report
- Nashua Transit System Comprehensive Plan 2016-2025

Task B8: Obtain additional public input

This could include additional input from social service agencies and networks in the region, and from the public and business community via targeted outreach, public meetings, and surveys.

Task B9: Summarize Public Input

Results from the surveys, interviews, and document review will be summarized.

- Compile feedback from public outreach effort for use in Operational Analysis and Feasibility Review,
- Summarize information into a “What We Heard” Report

C. Operational Analysis and Feasibility Review

Using the information and data collected in the public input phase of this study NRPC will evaluate the need and potential for successful Volunteer Driver Programs and Networks in the Greater Nashua region.

Tasks will include:

Task C1: Research and Data Analysis

- Review of public input and information gathered in Task B of this study.
- Conduct a peer review of volunteer driver programs in the New Hampshire and New England and provide summaries of service design, funding, and ridership.
- Research and summarize the characteristics of successful VDP programs including the accomplishments identified through the peer review task.
- Identify and map service gaps.

Task C2: Operation and Feasibility

- Coordinate with stakeholders to develop operational plan.
- Develop recommendations for how the VDP will operate:
 - Will the drivers be reimbursed through FTA Section 5310?
 - Will there be paid staff?
 - How will the VDP coordinate ride requests and volunteer driver scheduling?
- Develop recommendations for how the VDP-community transit network will operate:
 - Will a mobility manager be hired?
 - Will the mobility manager’s role include management of the new VDP?
 - How will the network support existing VDPs serving the region?

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- What will be the relationship between the RCC and the network?

Task C3: Financial Analysis

- Develop both short and long-term financial estimates for capital and operating costs,
- Research and propose current and future funding sources for the proposed operating costs and potential purchase of vehicles,
- Evaluate availability of Federal Transit Administration funding and models for sustainable match.

Task C4: Final Report and Maps

- Project report that summarizes study process and results, including,
 - Summary of public outreach,
 - Recommendations for best strategies to support existing VDPs,
 - Recommendations for intercity and cross-regional gaps in service
 - Recommendations regarding additional VDP service within the region including routes, service type, vehicle types, service schedules
 - Recommendations regarding VDP-community transit networks and enhanced regional mobility management services
 - Financial estimates for capital and operating costs for each recommended project,
 - Summary of funding sources.
- Map that illustrates the results of the final report such as a GIS story map.

General Criteria

Eligibility

NRPC is the MPO for the region and is therefore eligible to apply for this funding.

The scope of this project includes a significant amount of research and public outreach that would exceed the types of projects that are typically accommodated in the annual Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) and therefore would need an additional funding source to successfully complete this outreach effort and analysis. Additionally, MPO resources will be targeted at technical assistance to NTS (route maps, data analysis, etc.), follow-up implementation activities to the Transit Expansion Study and the continuing effort to work toward a passenger rail implementation plan. Addressing these requirements will prevent a project of this scope from being accommodated through traditional technical assistance support.

Weighted Criteria

Criteria 1 (25%)

The applicant provides clear details regarding the project, including schedule and breakdown of tasks based on approximate staff hours & budget per task as well as deliverables.

A detailed Project Scope was provided earlier in this document. The project budget, project schedule, and a table of staff hours by task are provided here.

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Project Budget

Greater Nashua Region Volunteer Driver Feasibility Study								
Project Budget								
Task	Exec Dir	Pr Tran Planner	Sr Tran Planner	Sr GIS Analyst	Reg Planner	Bus Mgr	Total Hous	Total \$ by Task
A. Project Administration								
A1. Project reporting	10		10			10	30	\$2,250
A2. Billing and Financial Management		10				10	20	\$1,500
B. Public Outreach								
B1. Outreach to existing Volunteer Driver Programs			20		20		40	\$3,000
B2. Outreach to human service agencies, medical facilities, faith-based groups, etc.	2	2	20		20		44	\$3,300
B3. Outreach to target populations (potential riders)	2	2	20		20		44	\$3,300
B4. Peer review of volunteer driver programs	2	2	15		10		29	\$2,175
B5. Enhanced Mobility Management - Evaluate the feasibility and identify the scope of a regional mobility manager staff position.	8	2	20		10		40	\$3,000
B6. Review current guidance from various National and New England sources	2	2	10		10		24	\$1,800
B7. Review various Nashua region transportation plans	4	2	10	4	10		30	\$2,250
B8. Obtain additional public input	4		10	4	10		28	\$2,100
B9. Summarize outreach effort	4		20	20	20		64	\$4,800
C. Operational Analysis/Feasibility Review								
C1. Research & Data Analysis	10	4	40	20	16		90	\$6,750
C2. Operation and Feasibility	10	4	40	8	24		86	\$6,450
C3. Financial Analysis	10	4	40		8		62	\$4,650
C4. Final Report & Maps	10	6	40	40	26		122	\$9,150
Total Hours	78	40	315	96	204	20	753	
Labor and Indirect Expenses								\$56,475
Direct Expenses								\$500
Total Project Cost								\$56,975
*Staff assignments subject to change given employment status, staff work load, and programmatic changes during performance period								

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Project Schedule

Greater Nashua Region Volunteer Driver Feasibility Study
 Project Schedule

Task	Description	FY 2022												FY 2023											
		July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
A. Project Administration																									
A	A1. Project reporting																								
	A2. Billing and Financial Management																								
B. Public Outreach																									
	B1. Outreach to existing Volunteer Driver Programs																								
	B2. Outreach to human service agencies, medical facilities, faith-based groups, etc.																								
	B3. Outreach to target populations (potential riders)																								
	B4. Peer review of volunteer driver programs																								
B	B5. Enhanced Mobility Management - Evaluate the feasibility and scope of a regional mobility manager staff position.																								
	B6. Review current guidance from various sources																								
	B7. Review various Nashua region transportation plans																								
	B8. Obtain additional public input																								
	B9. Summarize outreach effort																								
Operational Analysis/Feasibility Review																									
	C1. Research & Data Analysis																								
C	C2. Operation and Feasibility																								
	C3. Financial Analysis																								
	C4. Final Report & Maps																								

Project Deliverables

- Summary Report of “What We Heard” in the Public Outreach Phase
- Project report that summarizes study process and results, including,
 - Summary of public outreach efforts,
 - Recommendations for routes, service type and vehicle types, service schedules,
 - Financial estimates for capital and operating costs,
 - Summary of funding sources
- GIS story map that illustrates the results of the final report.

Criteria 2 (25%)

The applicant provides sufficient justification for the proposed project (e.g., includes objective data, cites prior studies that identify a gap, etc.)

Justification

The planning process for the Locally Coordinated Transportation Plan for the Greater Nashua and Milford Region resulted in agreement among community transportation users, providers, healthcare

facilities, and human service agencies that a coordinated regional volunteer driver network would be a key component of a coordinated regional human services transportation system. Moreover, the participants agreed that additional community transit resources were needed to meet the current and anticipated increased demand for rides to intercity and cross-regional destinations and appointments.

The goals, objectives, and strategies from various planning documents include:

1. *Locally Coordinated Transportation Plan for the Greater Nashua and Milford Region (LCTP), 2020 - 2024*

This study will address several of the strategies identified in the LCTP, including,

- Develop a volunteer drive network for the greater Nashua region.ⁱⁱ
- Work with communities and individuals to create and manage their mobility options.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Create a staff position within an agency or other entity whose responsibility is to facilitate access to transportation services by providing individual support to prospective and current passengers through application assistance, issue resolution, information and referral assistance, and related mobility management and coordination activities.^{iv}

2. *2019-2045 Nashua Region Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)*

The study will address several of the *mobility* goals and recommendations that were adopted for the MTP, including:

- Improve the availability of transportation options for people and goods
- Assure all communities are provided access to the regional transportation system^v

3. *2016 New Hampshire Statewide Coordination of Community Transportation Services Plan – Final Report*

The study will address several of the RCC-related goals of the statewide plan, including:

- ... encourage true coordinated transportation...,
- ... foster coordinated transportation and meaningful relationships at the regional and local levels, such as relationships between providers.^{vi}

4. *Nashua Transit System Comprehensive Plan 2016-2025*

This NTS Comprehensive Plan evaluated the condition and effectiveness of existing transit services and facilities and prioritized future service expansions and the corresponding capital requirements over the next decade. Regional coordination is a key strategy of the plan.

Criteria 3 (20%)

The project addresses existing service or how to improve connectivity.

This study will identify meaningful ways to make transit and coordination connections between existing resources, including volunteer driver programs and the Nashua Transit System. For example, it may be that a gap in service could be more efficiently filled by improved integration of NTS paratransit service outside of Nashua as opposed to a new volunteer driver trip. Additionally, enhanced mobility management could improve connections between existing (and future) volunteer driver programs.

Criteria 4 (10%)

The applicant demonstrates involvement in and support for the project, financial and otherwise, on the part of citizens and local government (e.g. letters of support)

Support for additional transportation services and improved coordination of those services is well established in the region. The Region 7 Greater Nashua Coordinating Council has met regularly for more than a decade and provides a forum for stakeholders to discuss opportunities. NRPC has provided staffing since the inception of the RCC and stakeholders who have consistently participated include

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transportation providers, town welfare officers and planners, representatives from major medical facilities and social service agencies, and other stakeholders.

Letters of support from the following stakeholders have been attached to this document:

1. Nashua Transit System
2. Nashua Region RCC
3. Souhegan Valley Transportation Collaborative
4. Town of Merrimack
5. Radiation Center of Greater Nashua
6. St. Joseph Hospital

Criteria 5 (10%)

The applicant will provide entire cash match (20%).

NRPC is prepared to provide the local match but will utilize toll credits if available.

Criteria 6 (10%)

The proposed project addresses an FTA Planning Emphasis Area (PEA) or required plan (such as a Coordinated Public Transportation-Human Services Plan)

Addresses a Required Plan

This study addresses community needs that were identified in the required Locally Coordinated Transportation Plan for the Greater Nashua and Milford Region 2020-2024.

- These needs include those of community transportation users, providers, medical facilities, and social service agencies.

FHWA/FTA Planning Emphasis Areas

This project comprehensively addresses two of the three Federal Transit Administration Planning Emphasis Areas, including, *Regional Models of Cooperation* and *Ladders of Opportunity*.

Regional Models of Cooperation: Ensure a Regional Approach to Transportation Planning by Promoting Cooperation and Coordination across Transit Agency, MPO and State Boundaries

- This project will require outreach to adjoining RCC's and transportation providers in neighboring regions because one of the objectives is to identify how a volunteer driver program could provide transportation for individuals who need to travel to medical facilities outside of the greater Nashua region.

Ladders of Opportunity: Access to Essential Services - as part of the transportation planning process, identifies transportation connectivity gaps in access to essential services.

- This project will identify gaps in the connectivity of the transportation system in the greater Nashua region that could potentially be filled by a volunteer driver program. Additionally, this project will evaluate the feasibility of creating a staff position within and agency or other entity whose responsibility it will be to facilitate access to transportation services for any individual, including elderly, disabled, or of limited incomes.

ⁱ 2016 NH Statewide Coordination of Community Transportation Services Plan p.93

ⁱⁱ Locally Coordinated Transportation Plan for the Greater Nashua and Milford Region 2020-2024 p.52

ⁱⁱⁱ Locally Coordinated Transportation Plan for the Greater Nashua and Milford Region 2020-2024 p.50

^{iv} Locally Coordinated Transportation Plan for the Greater Nashua and Milford Region 2020-2024 p.5

^v Nashua Region Metropolitan Transportation Plan, 2019-2045 p.5

^{vi} 2016 NH Statewide Coordination of Community Transportation Services Plan p.94

DRAFT