

# Moving Rural Residents to Work

## Lessons from Eight Job Access and Reverse Commute Projects

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**Rural areas present special challenges for meeting the transportation needs of individuals, especially people without cars. Congress established the Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) program in 1998 to assist states and localities in developing transportation services to connect welfare recipients and other low-income residents to jobs and other support programs. There are key results of a study examining eight rural areas receiving JARC funding in Fiscal Year 1999. Specific program elements include the implementation process, transportation services provided, and solutions developed to deal with the challenges of distance and low population densities that rural transit systems frequently face.**

In 1998, Congress established the Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) grant program to support recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and other low-income residents transitioning to employment. JARC was part of the main highway funding legislation, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), and it provided incentives to encourage the use of new or existing transit systems as an alternative to the individualized transportation assistance usually provided by human service agencies.

To understand better how different rural areas implemented this federally funded transit program, the Economic Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture examined 8 of 47 rural JARC projects funded in Fiscal Year (FY) 1999. Case studies were non-randomly selected to represent differences among JARC implementing organizations, program partners, regions of the country, degrees of rurality, demographic characteristics, and client groups.

Because the JARC program required organizations to partner in providing new or existing transit-based transportation services, the study focused on organizational and coordination issues. They include planning and implementation, partnerships, funding, services, outreach and marketing, and sustainability. This paper highlights the opportunities and challenges to JARC implementation in rural areas as identified by the organizations carrying out the program.

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND RURAL JARC ISSUES

The literature on rural public transportation has focused on the issues of coordination, funding sustainability, and collaboration. Coordination is often constrained by multiple funding sources dedicated to specific clients of narrowly tailored human service pro-

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grams (1). However, Blumenberg (2) indicated that new federal funds have encouraged agencies to resolve the transportation needs of welfare recipients. Also, government agencies and researchers alike have provided transit providers with guidelines on how to coordinate rural transportation services (3–5).

By requiring coordination of multiple partners as a condition for funding, JARC responded to the recognition of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and FTA that the lack of coordination among human services transportation providers and public transit operators contributes to duplication and overlap of transportation services (6). JARC also responded to the need of TANF recipients for dependable transportation. JARC also addressed the long-standing criticism voiced by some studying transit (7) that low-income individuals frequently face lower-quality transportation service, by requiring new flexible routing to employment centers and other support services.

JARC also required programs to develop self-sustaining funding streams after project implementation. Simon (4) identified federal programs that can fund transportation for a variety of purposes. However, development of long-term funding requires collaborative planning among rural transit stakeholders. Innes and Booher (8) described how consensus building and collaborative planning are increasingly used to address fragmented decision-making processes facing transportation stakeholders funded by multiple programs.

TEA-21 addressed the fragmentation of transportation decision making by requiring states to develop transportation plans that involved participation of a wide range of stakeholders, setting the stage for collaborative planning of transportation services (9). However, Blumenberg (2) noted that the different goals, methods, and approaches of participating agencies may affect collaboration—and stakeholders may find it difficult to move beyond the interests of their individual organizations to identify and plan for the transportation needs of TANF recipients. Although many human services transportation providers had collaborated before TEA-21, the legislation formalized this practice as a condition for JARC funding.

### JARC AND RURAL TRANSIT

JARC was established in 1998 as an amendment to TEA-21 [United States Code (USC) *TEA-21, Federal Transit Act of 1998, Section 3037, Job Access and Reverse Commute*, 49 USC 5309]. Although the program aids both urban and rural areas, the legislation highlighted special needs in rural areas, indicating that, compared with urban access, rural access to employment is even more restricted by a lack of transportation. Providing access to jobs, training, and child care, transportation is consistently cited as among the most important issues for meeting the goals of welfare reform (10, 11). Yet rural areas present particular challenges for meeting individuals' transportation

needs, especially for people without vehicles. Longer distances between urbanized areas and low population densities create a spatial divide that often cannot be bridged without a vehicle—or without public transit. While 60% of rural counties have access to public transit, roughly two-thirds of these publicly funded systems are single county or city and town in scope, limiting the range of employment destinations available to the individual (12, 13). Also, few jobs are usually located in sparsely populated rural areas, and such locations are even less likely to have public transportation, leaving residents there with little choice but to travel long distances to work (10, 14).

The lack of transit may limit the ability of human service agencies to transport TANF recipients and other low-income residents to jobs, training opportunities, and other support services. Insufficient or nonexistent transit may also affect the local economy and its ability to support employment opportunities (15).

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION OF JARC

The JARC grant program encompasses two components. The first, Job Access, encourages development of an array of transportation services, including shuttles, connector services, and new bus routes, while the second, Reverse Commute, focuses on providing transportation to suburban employment centers from urban, suburban, and rural locations. JARC has identified eligible recipients as individuals with incomes at or below 150% of the poverty line, as defined by the Community Services Block Grant program.

Congress authorized \$750 million from the Mass Transit account of the Highway Trust Fund and from the general fund for FY 1999 to 2003. TEA-21 set out a formula allocating funding according to population, with nonurbanized, rural areas receiving 20%. The maximum individual grant amount for nonurbanized rural areas was set at \$150,000. In FY 1999, 47 projects were funded in areas with populations of fewer than 50,000; 51 in areas with populations from 50,000 to 200,000; and 91 in areas with populations at more than 200,000.

JARC introduced several new factors into transit funding. First, it targets assistance to low-income individuals; but unlike other agency-run programs that provide assistance to these individuals by paying for vehicle repair, insurance, and taxes, JARC is operated by the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), and it provides funding to transit systems, not individuals.

Second, JARC funding parameters differ from other federal transit programs. The program requires a 50% funding match from the participating organization. However, JARC allows the use of certain federal funds, primarily TANF monies from HHS and Welfare to Work (WtW) funds from the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), as eligible matching fund sources.

Third, JARC emphasizes developing new transit routes and services to fill transportation gaps. Gaps can be geographic, where jobs are either inaccessible to existing public transit or where low-income residents live in areas lacking public transit. Or the gaps can be temporal, when transit does not operate during certain periods of the day when individuals need to travel to and from work.

Fourth, JARC requires coordination of transportation services by participating organizations as a condition of funding (16). Coordination is required during all stages, including planning, implementation, and over the long term. While many rural transit organizations already partner or coordinate with other local organizations, JARC explicitly emphasizes leveraging transportation funds for TANF recipients and other low-income residents.

Fifth, JARC did not limit funding to transit agencies. Rather, any local agency, authority, nonprofit organization, state entity, or regional transit authority that can provide transit is eligible for funding. [Eligible entities include states, local governments, public transit agencies, and tribal organizations (17).] JARC, however, does require the involvement of any existing transit systems in the area the JARC funded project will serve. By broadening the applicant eligibility pool, the program makes it easier to take advantage of existing local institutional capacity and leverages resources from multiple sources.

## JARC and Welfare Reform

JARC was designed to complement programs that implemented federal welfare reform. Two major programs are of note: (a) TANF, administered by HHS, and (b) WtW, administered by DOL (17). A third program, the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), does not directly address welfare reform, but it provides educational and training support for welfare recipients, among other eligible clients. The 1999 JARC program unfolded as these three new federal programs began implementation simultaneously at the federal, state, regional, and local levels.

### *Elements of TANF*

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), also referred to as the 1996 Welfare Reform Law, transformed the federal welfare system. While PRWORA reforms affected programs in several departments, TANF is key to implementing JARC objectives. TANF replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children, establishing new program requirements. Key TANF elements include lifetime benefit limits, work requirements for welfare recipients, greater flexibility for states to run the program, and strengthening of enforcement mechanisms for child support. TANF gives broad flexibility to states, tribes, and communities to provide a range of transportation services to individuals moving off welfare and into the workforce (18–20).

One TANF issue in particular affected implementation of JARC in FY 1999. Because TANF assistance counts toward the lifetime limit on benefits, questions arose about JARC service. HHS clarified the definition so that JARC benefits are considered “assistance” and count toward the 5-year lifetime limit on TANF, but only if they are received in conjunction with TANF benefits. If transportation is the only benefit received by an employed individual, it does not count toward his or her lifetime limit on welfare benefits.

### *Purpose of WtW Grants*

In 1997, Congress passed the Balanced Budget Act, which provided \$3 billion for WtW grants (split between FY 1998 and 1999). The funding was targeted to high-poverty communities where the employment objectives of TANF might be difficult to attain, and where the communities would bear increased costs when long-term welfare recipients had reached lifetime limits on welfare. WtW grants, administered by DOL, were narrowly focused on providing employment assistance to hard-to-employ TANF-recipients and noncustodial parents. Grants are provided to states, local communities, and tribes, and they can be used for job-readiness activities, including transportation assistance (17).

*Requirements of WIA*

WIA is the third program that affected JARC implementation. Congress enacted WIA to replace the fragmented federally funded employment and training system (21–23). WIA requires that 17 programs administered by four federal agencies (DOL, HHS, Department of Education, and Department of Housing and Urban Development) make their services available through “one-stop” centers and support the operations of these centers. WIA also requires its programs to develop partnerships to deliver its training services, including transportation. Six of the eight case studies involved WIA programs in JARC planning and implementation.

**STUDY OBJECTIVES AND SELECTED SITES**

The study objective was to gather information on how selected rural organizations implemented the JARC program in FY 1999, the first program year. It focused on the following key program components:

- Planning and implementation,
- Partnerships,
- Funding,
- Program services,
- Outreach and marketing,
- Program sustainability,
- Opportunities and challenges, and
- Program implications and lessons learned.

Data were gathered from FTA, the DOT agency that administers JARC; individual implementing agencies for each of the eight case studies; the Bureau of the Census; and the Bureau of Economic Analysis. During late summer 2001 until February 2002, the Economic

Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture conducted interviews with the JARC program official of the grantee organization and two partners identified by that official. These interviews covered broad issue areas, and they allowed the organizational representative flexibility to address concerns applicable to local implementation.

Eight projects were nonrandomly selected to represent geographic and demographic diversity, organizational diversity of the implementing agency, and degree of rurality of participating communities. The study focuses on the implementation process from the perspectives of the rural organizations providing JARC services.

Study sites are spread across the nation, and they include communities in California, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Texas. During the study period, the Texas grantee was being reorganized, and JARC service was not implemented. However, important parts of the program were successfully completed, including planning, partnering, and securing funding. Hence, Texas was included in the study. Although the study counties were nonmetropolitan, 12 of the 40 study counties were completely rural, or they had an urban population of fewer than 2,500, which presented a challenge to providing transit services.

**Program Planning and Implementation**

TEA-21 required that JARC project planning be part of a coordinated transportation planning process, not an isolated event that pertained to the project alone. Planning was to be comprehensive and inclusive, as well as connected to a statewide transportation plan covering all types of surface transportation, including, transit, rail, and intercity bus (16). This planning process characterized the study areas, with each project included in its statewide transportation plan (as required by FTA).

The study revealed broad involvement by diverse rural organizations in the planning process, as shown in Table 1. Multiple units of

**TABLE 1 Participants in JARC Planning Process**

Grantee	Study Counties	Participating Organizations <sup>a</sup>
Del Norte County Dept. of Health and Social Services	Del Norte, CA	City; city/county transit agency; college; community action agency; county; transit contractor; transportation consultant
RIDES Mass Transit District	Edwards/Gallatin/Hamilton/Hardin/Pope/Saline/Wabash/Wayne/White, IL	College; county and regional human services agencies; employer representatives; regional transit authority; state transportation department; WtW agencies
Western Iowa Transit System	Audubon/Carroll/Crawford/Greene/Guthrie/Sac	Council of governments; Job Corps; regional transit system
York County Community Action Corp.	Oxford/York, ME	Chamber of commerce; community action agency; county and regional human services agencies; employers; nonprofit child care agency; regional planning commission; regional tourism association; state labor agency; TANF recipients; technical college
Spirit Lake Tribe	Benson/Eddy, ND	Employment and training program; housing authority; state and county human services agencies; state labor agency; tribal child support programs; tribal college and schools; tribal employers; tribal nation; tribal council
Area Transit Authority of North Central Pennsylvania	Cameron/Clearfield/Elk/Jefferson/McKean/Potter, PA	County human services agencies; county governments; planning commission; private industry councils <sup>b</sup> ; regional transit system
Southeast Tennessee Human Resource Agency	Bledsoe/Bradley/Grundy/McMinn/Meigs/Polk/Rhea/Sequatchie, TN	Child care broker; metropolitan planning organization <sup>c</sup> ; private industry councils <sup>b</sup> ; state and county human services agencies; state labor agency; transit authorities
Brazos Valley Council of Governments	Burleson/Grimes/Leon/Madison/Robertson/Washington, TX	Council of governments; county human services agencies; metropolitan planning organization <sup>c</sup> ; state workforce centers; transit authority

<sup>a</sup>Listed by levels of government and organization types.

<sup>b</sup>Private industry councils were replaced by workforce investment boards under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998.

<sup>c</sup>Metropolitan planning organizations carry out transportation planning for metropolitan areas.

SOURCE: Tabulated by Economic Research Service (ERS) with the use of material from interviews.

government often participated in planning, especially in those locations involving a council of governments, a regional organization, or a planning commission. Different departments within each government agency also participated. In some locations, state government agencies were involved, primarily human services agencies or labor agencies, or both. Colleges, a regional tourism association, and metropolitan planning organizations were also involved in planning the JARC projects.

Tribal representation characterized Spirit Lake, North Dakota, where the tribal council is the primary agent for all programs and services operated by the tribe. This planning process also included a government-to-government association with both state and county human services agencies and the state labor agency.

Based on the interviews, the planning process appeared to work well in most cases. In particular, long-established local contacts commonly found in rural areas often acted to expedite the planning process. Furthermore, the process frequently strengthened relationships with organizations that have a client base in common or that have a common mission, such as job training, transportation, or helping low-income residents or TANF recipients to attain self-sufficiency. Several organizations began to explore building new partnerships to serve customers in new ways as they learned more about common missions and complementary resources.

While most planning participants provided positive feedback, several commented that changes could improve future planning efforts. These changes involve program time constraints, length of the planning process, difficulties associated with expanding the planning group, and need to include employers and organizations that have experience in working with low-income residents.

The tight time frame required to complete the JARC application was mentioned most frequently as a problem. That situation can be attributed in part to the difficulties associated with establishing a new program. While FTA carried out extensive national and regional outreach to publicize the program, the application period was brief. The original posting of the program appeared in the *Federal Register* on November 6, 1998 (16), with applications required to arrive at FTA regional offices by December 31, 1998. Local organizations thus had little time to complete the application package.

The planning process also was time consuming, with the application requiring documentation of transit need and evidence of partnerships and financial contributions. Those grantees able to use the expertise of a regional planning commission, a transit operator accustomed to FTA requirements, or a transportation planning consultant had fewer difficulties in completing the application.

Several participants indicated that if the planning process were repeated, they would contact organizations or individuals with experience in working with low-income residents, particularly with those living in long-term poverty. Others mentioned that greater employer presence could have assisted in identifying employment locations and in designing more cost-effective transit schedules.

## Partnerships

A key component of JARC was its emphasis on partnerships among agencies sharing responsibilities for moving TANF recipients out of welfare and into employment. Partners included not only organizations funding JARC, but also those organizations involved in supportive or complementary roles. The latter organizations provided outreach, referred clients to the program grantee, donated meeting

space, facilitated information exchange, or supplied other services that contributed to implementation of the project.

The selected sites had developed partnerships, some new and some long-standing. In rural areas, the pool of potential partners was relatively small, and many of the partners, facing resource limitations, had cooperated in a variety of joint activities before JARC. However, one grantee pointed out that although subgroups of the partners had often previously worked together, JARC frequently provided the catalyst for partnerships to implement a joint program.

New partnerships involving a broad range of community and regional organizations were formed as a result of JARC. In some locations, JARC served as a springboard for further cooperation on issues unrelated to the program. Program partnerships met clients' and customers' needs, which could not have been accomplished by one agency's operating independently of the partnership. Grantees and their partners often reinforced throughout the interviews their newfound appreciation of the partnership approach to service delivery.

Grantees and their partners not only collaborated in preparing their applications, but they also maintained their partnerships throughout the implementation process. Successful implementation of JARC depended on maintaining organizational partnerships to sustain the project once the application had been funded. Grantees often displayed considerable energy, creativity, and level of commitment to maintain a working partnership throughout the project.

While partnerships demonstrated a range of organizational benefits, several opportunities for partnership were lost. These lost opportunities were attributed to time constraints, unexpected events, excessive red tape, missing partners, and limited perspectives about the role of rural transit. Following are some findings about partnerships:

- Partnerships take time to develop and maintain. Time committed to JARC was time not spent on other organizational priorities. None of the partners said the time commitment for the program was excessive, but they did indicate that both development and maintenance of the partnership required conscious time allocation to the project to produce service. Communication gaps were an issue for some participants working together for the first time. They were unsure about the adequacy of information shared by JARC organizations, indicating that more sharing of program details would have provided greater benefits for their clients.

- Partnerships can also be precarious, subject to change when funding cutbacks, reorganizations, or personnel transitions occur. Any agency could pull out at any time, disrupting the partnership. Personnel changes within the eight projects took place regularly, creating gaps in institutional knowledge and requiring new employees to acquire project information and to quickly develop relationships with existing partners to maintain a smoothly operating service.

- Several partners raised the issue of red tape. Overseeing the project through the approval phase with the involvement of multiple agencies was time-consuming and cumbersome. Because partners could include local and regional organizations, the approval phase could be either quick or lengthy, depending on how many subunit reviews and approvals were required. The local match requirement was also mentioned as an issue when several partners were required to provide funding.

- A focus on individual client needs may have interfered with developing a partnership that could serve the broader public, which, in turn, could generate broader community support and attract more riders. Also, several partners mentioned that reliance on existing

partnerships may have excessively narrowed the focus to traditional agencies.

- Partnership opportunities also may have been limited by organizations not involved in the projects. Grantees and their partners generally indicated that the organizations affected by the program were “at the table” when the application was developed, and while implementation took place. Yet there were exceptions. Some participants mentioned the potential benefits that greater employer representation could have brought in identifying employment locations and worker shortages more quickly in the program planning process. Workforce investment boards and local chambers of commerce were also recommended as organizations that should have been involved at the beginning of the project, because their input might have resulted in more realistic transit service routes. When a JARC project included or was adjacent to tribal nation lands, or a rancheria (a communal settlement), partners indicated that tribal leaders should have been involved in the original planning process, allowing for more effective route design.

- Although human services agencies working with low-income residents or TANF recipients, or both, were partners in all eight projects, some believed that broader involvement of organizations having direct experience in working with rural residents living in long-term poverty, especially with long-term welfare-dependent families, should have been included in the planning process. Better knowledge of their needs and preferences would have helped develop transit services more sensitive to the employment, training, and support needs of those people.

## Funding

JARC had different local match funding requirements than did other DOT transit programs. The local match was 50%. However, it could be met through the use of federal funds, a practice generally not allowed for other programs that require state or local matches.

As shown in Table 2, the projects demonstrated diverse funding sources. JARC complemented TANF and WtW funding by encouraging TANF recipients and low-income residents to obtain long-term employment and to make use of employment support services. But other funding sources were also used, including local businesses, a regional planning commission, county commission offices, a county office of United Way, and a housing authority. Funding for the eight projects can be summarized as using local, regional, state, mixed jurisdictional, or tribal nation resources.

## Services Provided

A review of grantee reports and interview material leads to the following observations about rural JARC services in the eight case studies (Table 3). Grantees showed considerable flexibility in adapting service to changing client needs and funding requirements, services were client oriented, service delivery mechanisms varied across the projects, and JARC service led to impacts beyond the program. These observations are detailed in the following paragraphs.

- Grantees demonstrated flexibility on many fronts. In Maine, the grantee provided JARC service by expanding already established rural door-to-door, pickup service and creating new collection points in urban areas. Transit service was also coordinated with other service providers in the local area. In Illinois, the grantee experimented with routes, established new routes when new employment opportunities became available, and canceled routes when ridership was low.

- JARC service in the eight study areas tended to be client oriented, providing a personalized service often adapted to individual riders. The North Dakota grantee had planned its service using bus stops, but after finding that the severe cold during the winter prevented people from using these stops, they began door-to-door pickups and thereby boosted ridership. The Maine grantee designed its

TABLE 2 Funding Partners for Study Counties<sup>a</sup>

Grantee	Funding Partners
Del Norte County Dept. of Health and Social Services (California)	Rural Human Services (WtW); California Department of Social Services (TANF)
RIDES Mass Transit District (Illinois)	Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS) (Office of Rehabilitation Services, local DHS offices (TANF)); Illinois Department of Labor (WtW); other sources; Southeastern Illinois College [Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), Project CHOICE, WtW]
Western Iowa Transit System	Denison Job Corps (U.S. Department of Labor funding)
York County Community Action Corp. (Maine)	Local businesses; Maine Department of Human Services (TANF funding); Maine Department of Labor (WtW funding); Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Social Services Block Grant); United Way of York County; York County Commissioners; York County Shelters, Inc.
Spirit Lake Tribe (North Dakota)	Fort Totten Housing Authority (TANF); North Dakota Department of Human Services (Child Care Development Fund, Native American Works Program); North Dakota Department of Labor (JTPA, WtW); U.S. Department of Interior/Bureau of Indian Affairs (adult vocational training financial assistance, higher education and employment assistance, tribal work experience)
Area Transit Authority of North Central Pennsylvania	County Assistance Offices (Cameron, Clearfield, Elk, Jefferson, McKean, Potter Counties); North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission; Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry (WtW); Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (TANF); workforce investment boards
Southeast Tennessee Human Resource Agency	Tennessee Department of Human Services (TANF); Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development (WtW); Tennessee Department of Transportation
Brazos Valley Council of Governments (Texas)	Brazos Transit District (WtW); Bryan/College Station Metropolitan Planning Organization (WtW); Texas Department of Labor (WtW)

<sup>a</sup>This list may not necessarily be exhaustive.

SOURCE: Tabulated by ERS with the use of material from interviews.

TABLE 3 JARC Transit Service in Study Counties

Grantee	Employment Transit Services
Del Norte County Dept. of Health and Social Services (California)	New single loop, fixed route service with expanded hours of operation; bus stop signage improvement
RIDES Mass Transit District (Illinois)	New routes for second and third shifts and weekend hours; service to employment centers located outside of transit service area
Western Iowa Transit System	New routes for Job Corps students traveling to multiple employment centers located outside of transit service area
York County Community Action Corp. (Maine)	New routes for second and third shifts; weekend service for TANF and low-income persons traveling to jobs located outside of transit service area
Spirit Lake Tribe (North Dakota)	New routes to employment centers located off the reservation
Area Transit Authority of North Central Pennsylvania	New fixed-route service from Clearfield to DuBois and from Brookfield to DuBois; redirected service for non-TANF recipients
Southeast Tennessee Human Resource Agency	New routes with stops for employers not previously accessible by transit; new stops reaching TANF/low-income persons
Brazos Valley Council of Governments (Texas)	Vanpool service for rural TANF/WtW clients traveling to small urban areas

SOURCE: Tabulated by ERS with the use of material from interviews.

service to ensure that individuals moving from welfare would gain access to necessary support services as they entered the workforce.

- While grantees were flexible in adapting service to changing rider needs, several expressed frustration at the difficulty of reaching remote rural locations and making jobs accessible. In particular, grantees and partners in California, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee talked about how distance and geographic barriers created a dilemma for transit. Long commutes resulted, leaving many riders frustrated at the length of time required to reach a job.

- Grantees demonstrated diversity in delivery practices. For example, several grantees provided JARC transit service directly. This was the case in Illinois, Maine, North Dakota, and Tennessee. In contrast, in Iowa and Pennsylvania, a regional planning organization applied for the program grant, with its subsidiary transit agency delivering transit service. Also, in California, a county human services agency contracted with a private, nonprofit transit company to provide service.

- Although estimates on the local economic impact of JARC are not generally available, some grantees provided information on the number of individuals transported under the program.

- In North Dakota, 75 individuals used the service to commute to new jobs at a local telemarketing firm; 20 others used it to get to work at health care facilities in the area. Although the numbers transported there were small—95 individuals commuted to jobs using JARC in a two-county area with an overall employment base of more than 3,900—none of these passengers had alternative means of transportation, so employment was affected positively in this highly rural area.

- In Illinois, approximately 450 individuals used JARC service for transportation to employment, child care facilities, job search, and training opportunities during FY 1999. Of these, nearly 60% were still employed at the end of the study period, and almost two-thirds of all individuals conducting job searches by using JARC had secured employment.

- In Maine, which provided daily program service, 15,400 trips were recorded for employment, training, and other support services during the study period—which translates into an average of 21 daily round-trip rides.

Despite these success stories, a survey conducted by the Tennessee grantee underscored the continuing unmet need for transit

services in study counties. The results indicate that 735 individuals there lacked transportation to second- and third-shift and weekend jobs, despite implementation of JARC.

### Sustainability

Each grantee and partner expressed concerns about the long-term sustainability of JARC if federal funding were to be discontinued. To deal with this uncertainty, alternative funding sources were frequently sought by grantees. Employers were sometimes seen as possible contributors, given their vested interest in having a ready source of labor. Generally, however, employer funding was not emphasized by the program, which focused instead on matching federal dollars with state and local funds from human services and workforce training programs. A second source of funding was state money. Foundations and local banks were also potential contributors. Furthermore, general public ridership fees were identified as another potential funding source, because routes could be marketed to local residents not already taking part in JARC-provided services. Overall, however, many grantees and their partners emphasized the difficulties of sustaining rural transit in general, not just in regard to the JARC program.

### JARC EXPERIENCE

The JARC program presented rural areas with a broad range of opportunities and challenges.

### Opportunities

As a result of interviews with grantees, their partners, state transportation officials, and FTA, a number of opportunities for the JARC program were identified (Table 4). [Reviews of JARC can be found in reports of the General Accounting Office (24–27)]. Such opportunities generally arose from existing familiarity and collaboration with partnering organizations, the leveraging potential offered by JARC funding, and enhanced community understanding of the importance of transportation in rural America.

TABLE 4 Opportunities and Challenges for JARC in Study Areas

Opportunities	Challenges
Existing grantee familiarity with partners created opportunities for implementation of program, allowing it to be implemented quickly.	The program application process provided a narrow window of opportunity for implementation, which limited data collection and partnership building.
JARC offered grantees opportunities to leverage resources among rural organizations sharing similar missions and serving overlapping clientele.	Funding disruptions at the national, state, and local levels hindered development of a transit service deemed reliable by local organizations, employers, and riders.
JARC increased community understanding of the importance of transportation in rural communities.	<p>Simultaneous changes in federal, state, regional, and local programs in welfare, workforce training, and transit led to program implementation slowdowns, frequent staff turnover, and confusion in reporting procedures.</p> <p>Multiple, changing regulations and evolving reporting requirements caused delays for some grantees. Nontransit organizations had difficulties with transit requirements. Partners had different client and service reporting requirements, adding to confusion about what items should be reported, to whom, how frequently, and in what format. Lack of trained grantee/partner staff contributed to reporting difficulties.</p> <p>Some employers were reluctant to participate in the program.</p> <p>Privacy concerns prevented some human services agencies from providing lists of TANF recipients to transit providers.</p> <p>Initial reluctance to support door-to-door JARC service was present in some study areas.</p> <p>Personnel changes occurring at the federal, regional, and local levels slowed program implementation as institutional memory and standard operating procedures were lost.</p> <p>Lack of client familiarity with transit procedures and job practices created confusion and conflict in some locations.</p> <p>General challenges to providing rural transit—long distances, light population densities, and high per-rider costs—created barriers to program implementation.</p>

SOURCE: Tabulated by ERS with the use of material from interviews.

Many rural areas have a relatively small cadre of organizations providing public service functions. Virtually all grantees and their partners indicated that they had already worked together on previous projects, and they knew who needed to come to the table to plan and implement the JARC program. Two variations on this theme can be identified. First, in some cases, organizations were familiar not only with the potential partners, but staff personally knew their partners' staff. Second, other cases illustrated instances in which new relationships were forged as a result of JARC.

Several grantees and their partners stated that participation in the program had enhanced community understanding of the importance of public transit for local quality of life. The California study area expanded its program ridership to include the general public, thereby providing tourists with easy access to local recreational attractions. Partners there also indicated that the local Native American community could benefit from an expanded community transportation system. Partners in Iowa, Illinois, and Pennsylvania also indicated the potential benefits of expanding JARC service to serve the general public.

### Challenges

Implementation of JARC service in the study areas faced many challenges, some caused by the nature of rural transit itself, some resulting from the difficulties associated with a new program start-up, and yet others brought about by changes in a range of federal, state, and local programs (Table 4). Nevertheless, many of these challenges can present opportunities if the program is adapted to meet the varying needs of rural areas. Several of the identified challenges may have been addressed in subsequent years.

Although FTA publicized the program widely before it was officially advertised, the *Federal Register* notice (16) provided a very

brief application period (less than 2 months in length). Many case study participants pointed to this brief application time frame, indicating that it restricted their ability to gather needed data in support of their applications, and that it limited the number of partners they could involve in the planning process. Disruptions in matching funds and uncertainty about future funding at the national, state, and local levels also impeded program implementation in the study areas.

Simultaneous changes in federal, state, regional, and local programs took place as part of the national legislative effort to "end welfare as we know it." These changes, including those implemented in TANF and WIA, led to JARC program slowdowns in several study areas. One grantee articulated the overall frustration created by these simultaneous program reorganizations: the regulations all changed so quickly that there was no time during the FY 1999 grant period when staff could catch up with the latest requirements.

Several observations about these simultaneous, multiple program changes can be made. First, while JARC focused on transporting both TANF recipients and low-income residents to work and other support services, TANF involvement in JARC varied among study areas. Given that JARC was established 2 years after welfare reform, some human services agencies had time to institute a variety of personal transportation options for individuals who lacked a vehicle (including providing money for vehicle purchase, lease, or insurance payments). Second, involvement of workforce training programs also varied among study areas. While workforce-training organizations were partners in most study areas, their visibility and involvement may have been reduced because of WIA reorganization and the focus on moving TANF recipients directly into jobs.

Multiple, changing regulations and different reporting and format requirements also cut across several organizational levels at the local, regional, state, and national levels, and they delayed program implementation in some locations. Each funding partner had different

reporting requirements for client characteristics, numbers, and service provision, adding to the confusion about what information needed to be reported, to whom, how frequently, and in what format. Nontransit grantees sometimes expressed confusion about standard FTA application and reporting requirements that would use unfamiliar transit measures. In these agencies, the required reporting of JARC transit services added another layer of administrative duties for organizations already having limited staff resources.

In some locations, employers appeared reluctant to take part in the program. Grantees and their partners expressed several reasons for this lack of involvement. Because employers or their representative organizations were not included in the initial planning process in several locations, they may have felt disenfranchised in regard to the program. Some grantees and partners also indicated that employers were unwilling to pay for transportation services or to complete required paperwork to bring employees to work. However, in locations characterized by low unemployment rates, employers were more likely to cooperate with the project by hiring workers located in surrounding areas with high unemployment.

Privacy concerns in a few instances also may have prevented dissemination of addresses of TANF recipients to program grantees, limiting the use of the program. Some grantees dealt with this situation through the use of geographic information systems and through other techniques to identify the location of low-income residents, employment locations, training sites, and day care facilities.

In some locations, local resistance to door-to-door transportation of TANF recipients and low-income individuals was noted, with some charging that such a service represented a “glorified taxi service.” In Maine, although door-to-door service occurred in sparsely populated rural areas, collection points were designated in small urban areas, thereby combining individualized service with bus stops in more urban sites.

Personnel changes slowed implementation in some locations. These changes took place at the national, regional, and local levels. In several locations, grantees cited frequent staff turnover in their own and partners’ offices, resulting in a loss of “institutional memory.” Others cited situations in which program planning was performed by one organization and operations were delegated to a subsidiary organization. This required a second time-consuming round of partnership building at the operations level.

Client issues created confusion and conflict in some locations, with clients occasionally displaying behaviors that made transit service difficult to provide. Transient passenger bases, no-shows, cancellations, and rude behavior all contributed to disruptions in transit service. Also, public transit was sometimes seen as a stigma, used only by those too poor to afford a vehicle. Thus, while transit routes were designed and operated to serve low-income rural areas, they sometimes generated little ridership, for potential riders feared that their using the service would imply the riders were poor.

## LESSONS LEARNED

After discussing implementation of the respective projects, each grantee and some partners had the opportunity to provide overall feedback on the JARC program. What lessons did participants want to share about their JARC experience? The broad consensus of grantees and their partners was that overall the program worked well, but opportunities exist to improve the program.

## What Worked Well

There were a number of positive results from JARC.

- JARC generally worked well for the grantees’ clients. In Iowa, Job Corps students were able to access better on-the-job training, leading to higher employment rates and higher-paying jobs. In Illinois, vocational rehabilitation training and graduation rates were higher. Several grantees cited reduced welfare rolls.
- In all eight locations, JARC created more communication among partners about what more could be done to successfully place people into jobs.
- In Maine and Illinois, locations that had branded and heavily publicized the service, JARC visibly and publicly provided transportation to jobs, demonstrating a genuine need for transit. In California and Maine, it generated support from the local communities and local businesses to continue program services.
- JARC provided positive public relations for participating agencies. The local chamber of commerce and a regional tourism association in Maine received positive publicity by participating in JARC. RIDES, the grantee in Illinois, gave participating organizations the opportunity to promote their roles in adding jobs, increasing regional payrolls, and bringing dollars into their local communities.

## What Did Not Work Well

The areas that did not work well are the following.

- Some routes did not generate expected ridership because case managers were not involved in the planning process. But those managers could have provided a “reality test” of how proposed service would—or could—function, in contrast to other management staff removed from the day-to-day processes.
- Employer representation in the planning and implementation process should be broadened. Greater employer involvement would have made transit planning efforts more realistic by identifying actual job locations and gaining employer commitment to employing JARC riders.
- A nominal fee should be charged for ridership at all times to establish a precedent that the service represents a cost to the individual and to the program alike.
- Outreach to and inclusion of organizations working directly with people living in poverty should be emphasized in future projects. Involvement of these organizations may help to address multiple employment barriers facing the hard-to-place TANF client.
- Partners urged that uniform reporting requirements be set up across all agencies. Frequently, confusion is created by differences among the various federal agencies (including DOL, DOT, and HHS), and it is complicated by their counterparts at the state, regional, and local levels. Each governmental unit frequently requires a different set of data on clients and services, uses different reporting forms, and has different reporting cycles.
- Electronic reporting systems should be adaptable to rural users and rural capabilities. While electronic reporting systems appear to be approaching the norm in government, several problems associated with their use still exist in rural areas. Staff training may be an issue, given low staffing levels in many rural organizations. Time taken off for training is time taken away from other responsibilities, and staff turnover means further training. Rural agencies also may not be “wired” for easy electronic access.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, all grantees and their partners stressed that challenges facing rural JARC implementation reflected the difficulties of providing rural transit. Rural transit literature emphasizes coordination, funding sustainability, and collaboration as critical issues, an emphasis corroborated by this study of JARC implementation in eight rural locations. Long distances, low population densities, client-based issues, and high per capita costs make transit a costly transportation option in many rural areas. Very rural locations often face the greatest difficulty in obtaining and sustaining transit. Yet this study of eight rural JARC projects indicates that this new federal program encourages active partnerships among transit agencies and human services organizations that can implement new transit services quickly and effectively in rural communities.

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