RESIDENT PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSPORTATION FROM AGING ADULTS & ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES IN WASHINGTON COUNTY, MINNESOTA (2023)

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Executive Summary

In February of 2023, ACET, Inc., was contracted by the Washington County Community Services Department to design and conduct community research on public transportation use in Washington County, specifically examining challenges faced by aging adults and adults with disabilities. The research process included a 4-8-4 methodology during which four conversations were held with individual community leaders; eight listening sessions were conducted with Washington County residents (72 participants in total, and one of the eight listening sessions was conducted in Spanish); followed by four more in-depth conversations with individual residents. Additionally, a research partnership was undertaken with Biko Associates Inc., who conducted similar research, specifically within Oakdale. This report was funded in part by the Minnesota Department of Transportation through a Section 5310 Enhanced Mobility Grant.

The report includes four main sections:

1. An Introduction – to summarize the research methods used by ACET, Inc. (See Appendix A for the full methodology).
2. Challenges and Solutions - to describe the key findings derived from research activities conducted by ACET, Inc., to include information from the individual interviews, the community listening sessions, Biko Associates' research, and a workshop with county staff and partners.
3. Recommendations for Washington County - to outline the solutions suggested by residents, community leaders, and county workgroup participants into concrete short-term and long-term recommendations.
4. Appendices – containing detailed descriptions of data collection instruments and their respective methodologies, a more granular summary of focus group findings, a report Highlights Infographic, and the information regarding where to access the report from Biko Associates.

The following six challenges were identified through this research process:

All Transportation Options

- Limited Accessibility
- Lack of Information
- Safety and Comfort Concerns

Metro Mobility and Transit Link

- Complexity of Use
- Unpredictability and Reliability Concerns
- Limited Flexibility and Inefficient Scheduling

Solutions for all transportation options focused on a few central themes:

- Increase number of routes, as well as increase alternative transportation options (e.g., microtransit/on-demand options and volunteer driving programs), and expand circulator service;
- Improve partnerships with The Metropolitan Council and other local partners;
- Identify "transportation deserts," in which transportation options are needed but unavailable;
- Improve marketing and promotional efforts, as well as tools to improve accessibility, highlight safety, and help residents learn about transportation options and ridership (e.g., neighborhood cheat sheets or small cards, interactive tools, social media); and
- Provide training for drivers related to disability services and interactions with disabled riders.

While specific solutions focused on Metro Mobility and Transit Link included:

- Better and more frequent data sharing between partners;
- Increase public outreach and education;
- Strengthen partnership with The Metropolitan Council for improved advocacy, services, and policies;
- Seek additional funding to subsidize rides for those residents not meeting eligibility criteria for other programs, especially among those residents with limited access to transportation options;
- Continue iteration of strategic planning efforts related to using available data;
- Encourage the expansion of the driver pool for volunteer driver programs and microtransit options; and
- Investigate the use of mobility hubs which may serve as transfer points.

Based on the resident and workgroup participants' identified challenges and solutions, the following recommendations were suggested:

1. Enhance partnerships around transit issues;
2. Expand marketing and outreach efforts; and
3. Explore additional and alternative transportation options.

Greater detail regarding these recommendations, along with illustrative comments from residents and workgroup participants can be found within the sections of the full report.

INTRODUCTION

ACET, Inc., was contracted by the Washington County Community Services Department to conduct community research on public transportation use and mobility challenges for aging adults and adults with disabilities in Washington County. This report provides key findings from conversations with community leaders and Washington County residents to better understand their needs & challenges, and to explore opportunities to address the challenges. Funding for this project was provided in part by the Minnesota Department of Transportation through a Section 5310 Enhanced Mobility Grant.

ACET, Inc., employed a 4-8-4 research method to gather information through:

- Four Conversations with Individual Community Leaders
- Eight Listening Sessions with Community Members (72 participants)
  - One listening session was conducted in Spanish.
- Four Conversations with Individual Community Members

Four initial conversations were held with individual community leaders, in order to gain an understanding of the communities and to work in partnership with the leaders to recruit participants for the community listening sessions. In total, eight community listening sessions were conducted at different locations throughout Washington County. During those sessions, four community members were identified to participate in the final four one-on-one interviews. In all, participants represented nine communities: Cottage Grove, Forest Lake, Hugo, Landfall, Newport, Oakdale, Stillwater, Willernie/Mahtomedi, and Woodbury.

ACET, Inc., also collaborated with Biko Associates Inc., a research firm contracted by the Age Friendly Oakdale Task Force/Oakdale Wellness 50+, to conduct transportation conversations in Oakdale. Since these projects shared similar goals, ACET, Inc., and Biko Associates Inc., agreed to share information and findings.

Finally, ACET, Inc., staff met with participants of a Washington County workgroup to present findings and discuss potential solutions and recommendations.

Challenges and Solutions

All Public Transportation Options

The following challenges and solutions were identified by community leaders and community members during interviews and listening sessions, as well as by county workgroup participants during a discussion of the findings. It is important to note that many of the proposed solutions would require that Washington County add staff or resources, and/or that the Metropolitan Council or other partners provide additional support.

Challenge #1: Limited Accessibility

Residents agreed that the biggest barrier to using Metro Transit buses is a lack of accessibility. Several residents said that the routes are too limited and don't reach some neighborhoods or destinations. In particular, some noted that public transportation does not serve some low-income neighborhoods. Others said that the routes or stops are far enough away from their home or destination that they need a second mode of transportation (often an expensive Uber or Lyft ride) to complete their journey. Residents also noted that the timetables of the schedules do not meet their needs, as they are frequently geared towards 9-5 commuters.

> Note: All resident comments included in this report (indented and italicized text) are transcriptions of oral comments, not written statements. Wording is intentionally unedited, as spoken during community conversations.

Comments included:

> *For those working in St. Paul, Minneapolis, they do have their own buses. But for the people who work odd hours, get off at 2:00.*

> *Even if I wanted to get into Downtown St. Paul, first, I'd have to figure out how to get over to the bus place, right? I don't even—I wouldn't know how to do that. How would I do that? I don't know.*

> *And so there was one night I closed the library and there he is walking the three and a half miles back, he's 75 years old. And so the next time he came in, I was just like, hey, did I see you walking home? He goes, I couldn't get any of the cabs to come get me, so, yeah, that was the only way I had to go and it's after dark and cold and whatnot.*

There's those routes. A lot of young folk can't go to many places, can't access a lot of services. No fixed routes to Government Center.

I live over here at Briarcliff, and people living there, they don't take a bus because they can't walk that far. Or if they could walk to the bus, that there's one right on the corner, they would probably—they might do it. I don't know.

Solutions for Challenge 1: Limited Accessibility

While listening session participants had many suggestions for how Metro Transit could solve these issues by adding more routes and increasing schedules, Washington County Transportation workgroup participants focused on brainstorming solutions that are within their purview to act. These comments included:

- **Increase the number of routes.** Identifying the areas (especially low-income areas) that are underserved by Metro Transit could be a first step toward advocating for more robust service. While the county completed a Transit Needs Study in 2018 that informed the current circulator routes, residents in many areas indicated that they continue to have unmet needs.

- **Increase access to routes in the evenings.** Older adults noted that limited access to evening routes creates challenges when utilizing transportation to return from medical appointments and when accessing public services (e.g., libraries).

- **Create and enhance on-demand transit options.** Expanding the volunteer driver program(s) capacity is the most flexible of the options. Exploring on-demand microtransit options such as the Metro Micro pilot program currently happening in North Minneapolis could also be considered.

- **Expand City Circulators:** Expanding circulators is an easy option to execute. They are popular and ridership could increase with more options for day/time of travel.

- **Explore private partnerships for support services.** Options that could be considered include working with local businesses to create employer-provided shuttles, or developing vanpooling or vehicle-sharing options with an overall goal of creating diverse opportunities that move away from expensive options such as Lyft and Uber.

Challenge #2: Lack of Information

Participants noted that there is a need for information about public transportation to be shared with residents. This includes information about the availability of services (routes, schedules, cost, etc.) as well as information about how to take the bus. As some listening session participants noted, not everyone (and especially those new to the country or with limited English skills) knows how to use public transportation. Related comments from residents include:

If you enter a bus and they're not speaking your language or you're new to the country, how do you even figure? When I first came to the U.S. . . . I would miss the bus all the time because I'd go and the bus already left, so you have to wait an hour or half an hour depending on how—so like that education piece of here, they really follow time.

Many of us don't know, well I don't know how to use the transportation system. Truth be told, they say the time, the bus number and letter and the destination. It is confusing. [Translated from Spanish]

I don't even know what Metro Transit is to tell you the truth. I just need to be honest. So maybe one of the challenges is even just an awareness that these transportation options are available.

The big thing with transportation is, especially here, like nobody knows about it. Like, it's not simple. Like if you want public transportation, you got to make it simple for people.

I feel like it's called public transportation and it's not even really public. Like, it's kind of like a secret. Like you said, no one knows. Make it more visible to people that need it.

You could send it by mail. Maybe a paper or something with the routes and the times at which the bus arrives. I think that a lot of the information is on our phones. We do not really know how to use our phones. [Translated from Spanish]

Solutions for Challenge #2: Lack of Information

Residents and county workgroup participants agreed that enhancing outreach efforts could improve transit experiences. They noted that raising awareness by providing more information about available services, clearer instructions on how to use public transportation, and details on routes and schedules could increase ridership. Suggestions included:

- **Expand transit training sessions.** Both residents and workgroup participants suggested that increasing education opportunities about how to access and ride public transportation would help. Transit orientations could be delivered by county employees or residents. Communities could create a buddy system for residents to support each other. Workgroup participants noted that advertising the training opportunities would be important also.

- **Create inclusive marketing materials.** Workgroup participants suggested creating "neighborhood cheat sheets" (also referred to as "small cards"). Residents suggested developing informational materials in Spanish and other languages. Paper communication or mailers may be better for older people.

- **Enhance the county's website pages on transportation.** Workgroup participants said they are open to all ideas about making pages easier to navigate. One suggestion was to further research the functionality of an interactive tool for riders to enter their starting and end points to find transportation options.

- **Invest in social media and other creative marketing options.** Both residents and workgroup participants noted that expanding the inclusive marketing of transportation options and education materials is important. Collaboration with partners and providers could expand the reach of messaging.

- **Create a shared marketing plan with partners.** Workgroup participants noted the importance of figuring out how to share the load with partners such as the Metropolitan Council. They suggested creating an elevator speech that could be shared among partners for consistent messaging to the public. They also suggested working with state and regional organizations on marketing initiatives and perhaps leveraging the 211 system.

- **Expand outreach to youth.** Workgroup participants suggested connecting with schools as a way of encouraging young people to use public transportation. Young people are also helpers and caregivers for aging adults in their families.

Challenge #3: Safety & Comfort Concerns

While this was not as prominent of a challenge as overall accessibility and awareness, many residents did agree that personal safety is an issue on public buses. Some residents noted that they personally feel unsafe on buses, while others said that they know this is a concern of other community members. Some also reported experiences of drivers not being adequately trained in disability issues. Comments included:

Some of the public transportation—so like if I wanted to go to Minneapolis some people feel intimidated and afraid. And that's just a fact.

Maybe they could have a police officer on there. I think they do have plain clothes on some of them.

Sometimes there are people yelling on the bus. I don't feel safe.

They used to have plain clothes on different ones, but—and you wouldn't know that they were on there. But I don't even know if they even do that anymore. They're cutting back so much, I don't know if they do that anymore. Now, that was a good—you really felt safe when you had them.

And there's really no one to talk to, no representative you can speak with about possibly making an accommodation for a person with a disability. There are only the people that answer the phone who schedule the rides and their managers, and they are without any capability of doing anything except just mimic, just paring the current policy.

Solutions for Challenge #3: Safety & Comfort Concerns

While the county workgroup participants did not discuss these concerns, residents offered some suggestions in listening sessions. These included:

- **Highlight safety and safety measures in marketing campaigns.** Some residents suggested that the issues with safety might be more perception than reality and they noted that a public awareness campaign could help improve public perception.

- **Offer disability training to drivers and reservationists.** Some residents noted that small changes in the behavior of drivers and reservationists could help some riders feel more welcome and confident. One participant explained:

A lot of their people are disabled, and I don't think a lot of the drivers understand how to interact and how I interact... it's hard to communicate with them to tell them our needs.

Metro Mobility and Transit Link

The following challenges and solutions, specific to Metro Mobility and Transit Link, were identified by community leaders and community members during interviews and listening sessions, as well as by county workgroup participants during discussions of the findings. (Note: Metro Mobility service operates in areas of Metro Transit Fixed-Route bus service for persons with disabilities that prevent them from using fixed-route buses. Transit Link is for everyone and operates where fixed routes are unavailable or infrequent.) It is important to note that many of the proposed solutions would require additional staff or resources, and/or partner collaboration.

Challenge #4: Complexity of Use

When discussing Metro Mobility paratransit service and Transit link dial-a-ride service, residents indicated that overly complex processes and regulations are a barrier to accessibility. Listening session participants said that having to fill out an application and call many days in advance of needing transportation was prohibitive. Although the policy is to reserve a ride 1-5 days in advance, one resident said it was 10 days, reflecting not just frustration with the policies, but also indicating that the policies are complex enough that potential riders don't fully understand them. Other residents described frustrating interactions with call center staff who are not empowered to help riders solve problems, but instead reiterate policies over and over. One described how Transit Link was generally an excellent resource for their son with a disability, but the procedures related to rescheduling or canceling (if for instance, their son wanted to ride his bike to work one day) were overly complex and punitive, essentially making it impossible for their son to be able to ride his bike. The following comments represent the experiences of residents during listening sessions:

> Like, you do this Transit Link, or there's Mobile Mobility, you got to fill out an application, you got to call 10 days ahead. They might say no, they might say yes. It's like an hour and a half. They could be like within that 30 minutes or an hour. So it's not simple and it's not reliable and it's not known.

> And then you have all these, little rules, right? Where, "Oh, this is a rideshare, but only Stillwater School District or Metro Mobility. Only people with disability." And then it's like, you know, you get so complex that it's like, I'm not going to take a ride. I might as well walk before I get through all the applications and the trainings that I need to do for a damn ride.

Metro Mobility and Transit Link, sometimes the issue, and especially with Transit Link, the issue is the turnaround. So, if they have a medical appointment that's something acute in 48 hours, they can't always schedule, especially with us being in a standby zone out this way. They can't get that more on demand, shorter timeframe scheduled ride, which is a huge frustration.

There's no one to talk to that has any level of decision-making or they can advocate for you or work out an accommodation. With Transit Link, you have to run on their time. So if you have a time in mind and if it doesn't work, like if you have an appointment at a certain time and, and they can't pick you up until right before the appointment or if they don't have a ride, they often will put you on standby, which means you either get a ride or you don't get a ride. You have to call the next day between a certain time frame.

Solutions for Challenge 4: Complexity of Use

Participants of the Washington County workgroup brainstormed both short- and long-term solutions for the challenges of the complex processes for using Metro Mobility and Transit Link. They also acknowledged that coordination across multiple organizations such as counties, cities, and the Metropolitan Council can be complicated. Participants also noted that part of the issues may be due to low ridership and high rates of cancellation in Washington County. (The County has had "soft success" in the latter issue by working with the public to educate riders about cancellations).

Short-term solutions included:

- **Better and more frequent data sharing.** Participants suggested creating a more effective process for accessing or viewing collected data among partners and collaborating to support each other on process and service improvements.

- **Increase public outreach and education.** Participants suggested expanding ways to give support to residents, such as offering more Transportation 101 training to groups and engaging community ambassadors for support. As one participant said, "While we're working on the issues, can we have those with resources in the community sit down with people and help them figure it out?" Participants also suggested that encouraging the public to take more public transit could result in improved services due to higher demand and greater comfort levels.

While the potential solutions focus on implementation in the short-term, the sustainability of each may require a longer-term investment in collaboration, strategic planning, and the ongoing use of data to inform the individual and shared decision making of, and with, partner agencies.

Challenge #5: Unpredictability & Reliability Concerns

Residents also described negative experiences related to the reliability of Transit Link. Some listening session participants said the wait times for both pick-up and drop-off were frustratingly long. Others said the waitlist/standby process was cumbersome. One said that Transit Link sometimes brought their child to the wrong drop-off stop. Comments included:

They can be half an hour late so when you're just trying to get around town, it's best to book it 45 minutes before your appointment.

Transit Link and I think Metro Mobility is they have windows of time. They have up to an hour to [arrive]. . .And then-then you can sit on the bus up to two hours.

They ask me what time I have to be to the doctor and I tell them...[then they reply] Well, we can't pick you up at that time, we'll pick you up at this time. And they're always late, they're all—I mean, there's always a problem, always.

They're late quite often. I mean, today I was sitting at work for 40 minutes waiting to get picked up, and it was my birthday. And so I'm just wasting nearly an hour of my time just doing nothing. And then another time, I was late. They were late picking me up, so I was—by the time they dropped me off where I needed to go, it was already time to get back. So that defeats the purpose of going there if you don't have time to do what you're there to do.

I can't tell you how many times [my son's] been brought to the wrong place. And he doesn't know to speak up, he does not know how to text. All of a sudden, the bus stops and they're, like, you got to get off. Luckily, he can say, you're not at my house. And then all of a sudden, they call in and get the information correct.

And you don't always get the times you need, and then you put on standby for a ride and then you have to call the day before to see if you got the ride and then you don't. The whole thing is crazy.

Solutions for Challenge #5: Unpredictability & Reliability Concerns

Transportation workgroup participants agreed that challenges related to reliability require strengthening the county's partnership with the Metropolitan Council and community partners.

Suggested solutions included:

- **Increased advocacy** efforts to encourage the Metropolitan Council to improve services. One member noted that "We give up on this easily because it's complicated." One participant also suggested advocating for both Transit Link and Metro Mobility to adopt clear policies for compensation for unexpected expenses.

- **Pursue additional funding** for supporting residents such as subsidizing rides for people who don't qualify for other services, but who are unable to use public transportation due to service area or time limitations.

- **Support an expansion of the driver pool** for volunteer driver programs and microtransit options. Participants suggested moving away from volunteer-based rides to paid jobs for drivers, noting that the new Universal Drivers Licenses, coupled with the tight labor market, might facilitate hiring. Collaborating with the Workforce is important. Participants also suggested providing cars for volunteers and/or employees to drive.

Challenge #6: Limited Flexibility/Inefficient Scheduling

Residents also voiced concerns about scheduling inflexibility and inefficiencies. Some listening session participants noted that Transit Link's limited hours of service, in particular a lack of evening hours, is prohibitive for some riders. Others said it's frustrating that Transit Link asks riders to wait for up to a half hour for a scheduled ride, but the bus will only wait for three minutes for riders. One resident noted how frustrating it is to see a Metro Mobility bus drop off a rider but be not allowed to pick up other riders who then must wait longer for another bus. Comments included:

Transit Link is only a daytime function, it doesn't run into the evenings if you have a young person who wants to go to Hastings, to the gaming store and play magic, they can't get down there. If there was some sort of interconnectedness that was going St. Paul up and down 61 here, that would even be something more because they'd be able to get to it. So you're really limiting the amount of time that those people can go out and do things in the world, to what is convenient to not being around rush hour traffic.

We watched the Metro Mobility come into our apartment complex. There's two of them there at the same time, they're not picking up anybody, they're only dropping off. Why can't they pick up somebody who's waiting for a bus? No, you have to wait for the next bus. So those two buses leave and they got to wait another 15, 20 minutes to get picked up. If they're dropping off, why can't they pick up?

We had to somehow get him to his one-hour PT session, once a week, and we tried Metro Mobility and it was a nightmare. First of all, you couldn't pre-schedule rides in advance, you had to call up a certain amount of time. So he quit going to his workouts with his trainer just because we couldn't find any suitable transportation, and it was too far for him to ride a bike.

Transit Link, you get three minutes of buffer between your pickup time. So say, you ask for a 3:15 pickup, the latest they'll wait for you is 3:18, but they ask for about half an hour for you to wait for them to arrive. So that 3:15, they have until 3:45 to arrive.

Solutions for Challenge #6: Limited Flexibility/Inefficient Scheduling

Many of the solutions identified by workgroup participants in response to Challenges 4 and 5 would also address flexibility and scheduling concerns.

In their memorandum to the Age Friendly Oakdale Transportation Task Force, Biko Associates noted that mobility hubs can help address transportation shortcomings by serving as established transfer points. This could help alleviate wait times if multiple transportation options were coordinated more efficiently. They noted that the Metropolitan Council developed a mobility hub planning guide for local governments between February 2021 and June 2022.

Additional participant comments included:

- **Additional routes in the evenings.** Participants noted additional transportation options are needed when returning home from activities and appointments that occur during the day or late afternoon.

- **Explore additional partnerships for transportation across municipalities.** Participants noted that while their travel may originate within Washington county, they have a need to work, visit, or complete appointments in neighboring communities, and the coordination between transportation services across municipalities could be improved.

Recommendations for Washington County

These recommendations are based on the solutions offered by residents and workgroup participants, and fall into three main areas:

1. Enhance partnerships around transit issues.

2. Expand marketing and outreach efforts.

3. Explore additional and alternative transportation/connection options.

Enhance Partnerships around Transit Options

Working together with the Metropolitan Council and other entities to address transit issues will result in better outcomes, and the county workgroup discussed several aspects of these relationships. Within those parameters, recommendations include:

Short-Term:

- Share data between the Metropolitan Council, other providers, and Washington County more frequently.

- Work together to support each other and improve rider experiences through outreach, process changes, etc.

Medium to Long-Term:

- Collaborate across organizations for coordinated strategic planning.

- Collaborate across organizations to promote service or process changes and expansions (Metropolitan Council, local providers, the county, etc.).

Expand Marketing and Outreach Efforts

A lack of understanding about available services and how to use them was also identified as a challenge. Marketing campaigns that 1) advertise available services and 2) provide clear information about how to access them could improve satisfaction for many Washington County residents.

Short-Term:

- Offer additional transportation training sessions to inform residents about where and how to access and ride public transportation, and how to access the county website: GoWashingtonMN.com.

- Enhance accessibility of the GoWashintonMN.com website with clearer information about available transportation options.

- Revise outreach materials advertising transportation options.

Medium to Long-Term:

- Continue to enhance GoWashintonMN.com with tools for route planning as well as for understanding cost and what options a resident might qualify for.

- Explore connecting with schools to provide outreach opportunities for families.

- Explore creating a shared marketing plan with partners.

Explore/Implement Additional Alternative Transportation Options

Lack of available transportation options is a major challenge for many Washington County residents. Recommendations include:

Short-Term:

- Research and document "transportation deserts" within Washington County where residents have no or few public transportation options.

- Research options including:
  - Circulator expansion
  - Volunteer driver program expansion
  - Micro-transit pilots
  - Employer shuttles (in partnership with employers)
  - Vanpool or Hour-Car type services

- Select an option(s) to explore and identify action steps.

Medium to Long-Term:

- Implementation of new/expanded transportation services.
- Expand partnerships with other counties, municipalities, providers, and The Metropolitan Council to ensure implementation increases positive rider experiences.

APPENDIX A: Methodology & Data Collection Tools for Conversations with Community Leaders

ACET, Inc., conducted four sessions with community leaders identified by Washington County Community Services. The sessions were for thirty to sixty minutes and held at locations selected by the community leaders. Permission was granted for recording the conversations. The following questions were asked to the community leaders.

1) What is your primary mode of transportation to get around your community and what do you like about it?

2) We're interested in understanding more about the communities in Washington County that you serve.
   a) Do you serve aging adults?
   b) Do you serve people with disabilities?
      i) Within those two groups:
         (1) Do you serve low-income individuals?
         (2) Do you serve people living in rural places?
         (3) Do you serve new Americans?

3) How do members of the communities you serve primarily get around their communities?
   a) If you serve more than one community, do differences exist in terms of the modes of transportation across these communities?
      i) *[if they answer "yes," ask the following probe.]* Could you describe these differences?
   b) What do members of the communities you serve like about these modes of transportation? What is working for them?
   c) What could be improved? What isn't working for them?
   d) *[Ask the following probe if they do not mention these modes of transportation while answering Question 3.]* What about Metro Transit bus, Metro Mobility bus or vehicle, and Transit Link bus? Do members of the communities you serve rely on any of these modes of transportation to primarily get around their communities?

4) What do members of the communities you serve value when it comes to transportation? *[Ask the following probes if they do not mention these values while they answer Question 4.]*
   a) To what extent do they value **safety** when it comes to transportation?
   b) To what extent do they value **speed & reliability** when it comes to transportation?
   c) To what extent do they value **comfort** when it comes to transportation?
   d) To what extent do they value **affordability** when it comes to transportation?

5) Have you heard members of the communities you serve talk about why they *don't* use specific forms of transportation?
   a) *[If they answer affirmatively.]* What are these forms of transportation and why don't they use them?
   b) What would make community members more likely to use the forms of transportation that they don't currently use?
   c) *[Ask the following probe if they do not mention these forms of transportation while answering Question 5a. The way you ask this probe will also depend on how they answered Question 3.]* I noticed earlier in the conversation that you said members of the communities that you serve don't primarily rely on Metro Transit bus, Metro Mobility bus or vehicle, and Transit Link bus to get around their community. What would make community members more likely to use these forms of transportation?

6) In our community listening sessions, we specifically want to engage community members who currently use public transportation, potentially would use public transportation, or would benefit from public transportation. We want to host one in *[name of the municipality, when appropriate or name of the specific cultural community.]* with approximately six participants. Would you be willing to help us make this a success? *[If they answer yes, proceed to Question 6a.]*
   a) Could you help us Identify and invite 8-10 people to participate in this listening session?
   b) Could you help us by putting flyers (designed by ACET, Inc.,) in locations where you think the people we are hoping to engage frequently?
   c) Could you help us by hosting this listening session in your space (or suggesting a space)?

7) As a Washington County community member, what other geographies would you suggest that we engage in our listening sessions? As a reminder, we're specifically interested in hearing from aging adults and people with disabilities.

8) Is there anything that we didn't ask that we should have?

9) Do you have anything else that you'd like to share?

After conducting the four community leader sessions, the eight community listening sessions were held around Washington County. The sessions were for about an hour or more and permission was granted to record the sessions. Depending on the responses or cues from the residents, questions and exercises were adapted to assist with participation. The following are the creative prompts, questions, and exercises residents completed while engaging with ACET, Inc.

APPENDIX B: Methodology and Data Collection Tools for Focus Group Exercises

Creative prompt: ACET Facilitator Script [5-10 minutes]

We're going to start off with a quick exercise. Does everyone have a piece of paper that looks like this and a writing utensil? *[Hold up a blank piece of paper with the exercise printed on it. Pause and make sure everyone has the materials they need.]* This exercise will get our brains and bodies warmed up for our conversation today.

On the left side of the sheet of paper, you'll see an image of a home on it. This represents your home or the place you live. The right side of the paper is blank. On the right side of the paper, we invite you to draw or write the name of a place that is important in your life. Drawing can be a fun way to communicate our thoughts and feelings visually without having to use words. But we know not everyone likes to draw; so you can write the name of the place instead of drawing it, if you prefer. Let's take 30 seconds to draw or write the name of this place. *[Pause for 30 seconds; read the room and make time adjustments as needed]*

Now, you'll notice a vertical series of icons in the middle of the page. The icons are also labeled with the mode of transportation they represent, for example, Transit Link, Uber/Lyft, and walking. We're curious how you usually get from your home (on the left) to a place that's important to you (on the right). Draw a line from your home to the place on the right side of the page through the icon that represents the mode of transportation that you usually use to get from your home to this place. *[Pause for 30 seconds; read the room and make time adjustments as needed]*

Now, you'll see a few prompts at the bottom of the paper, such as "I see" and "I feel". Please imagine yourself going from your home to this important place using the mode of transportation you indicated in your paper. Reflect on these prompts silently and jot a few words or phrases down for each. We'll pause for 1-2 minutes and then share back as a full group. *[Pause for 30 seconds; read the room and make time adjustments as needed]*

Creative prompt: Handouts

Metro Mobility

Bike/En bicicleta

Metro Transit

Uber or Lyft

Car/Auto

Other Transport/
Otro Transporte

Reflection Time

Pick one trip and fill in the below prompts:

I see...

I smell...

I hear...

I feel...

Full group discussion: ACET Facilitator Script [10 minutes]

1) In our group, let's debrief that exercise. Please describe how you get from your home to the place on the right side of your paper. What **works well** for you using this mode of transportation? *[Listen for: Independence, flexibility, affordability, and social connections.]*

2) What **doesn't work well** for you using this mode of transportation? What could be improved? *[Listen for the following:]*
   - a) *increasing car and fuel prices*
   - b) *increasing vehicle repair costs*
   - c) *lack of public transit near me*
   - d) *lack of knowledge about public transit near me*
   - e) *far distances/time to travel between my home and destinations*
   - f) *lack of experience with ride-hail (Lyft/Uber etc.)*
   - g) *disability*
   - h) *language barrier*
   - i) *negative/harmful implications of individual and/or institutional racism, sexism, ableism, ageism*

3) Let's zoom out. If you felt that more transportation options were accessible to you, would you regularly travel to more places? Raise your hand if so. *[Pause and count the number of raised hands. Verbally say the number of hands so that it's captured in the recording (e.g., "I see 4 hands raised out of six").]* Would this travel be within Washington County and/or outside of the county?

Bingo dauber exercise 1: ACET Facilitator Script [5-10 minutes]

Now we're going to reflect on a variety of ways to get around. Each piece of paper on the wall describes one mode of transportation: driving yourself in a personal vehicle; riding with a friend or family member in their personal vehicle; using Transit Link Buses; using Metro Mobility Buses or Vehicles; using Metro Transit Buses; using Uber, Lyft, and/or Taxis; and walking. If you use these modes of transportation, please use your dauber to reflect on five statements. Green is strongly agree, yellow is somewhat agree, and red is disagree, like a stoplight. So, for me, I use a personal vehicle, and I somewhat agree with the statement, "I feel safe using my personal vehicle." So, I'd put a yellow dot here. *[Gesture to where the yellow dauber dot goes]* Then, I would reflect on the four remaining statements and put one dauber dot in each rectangle. *[Gesture to each place on the post-it notes where they need to put a dauber dot]*

If you don't use a mode of transportation, don't put a dauber dot on the big Post-it notes and move on to the next big Post-it. For example, if I don't use a personal vehicle, I would skip this Post-it note *[gesture to the big post-it note with "If you use a personal vehicle" on it]*

Before we start, one note about the Metro Transit Post-it note; we understand that Washington County does have limited Metro Transit routes, but that you may use this mode of transportation outside of the County. Let's take about 5 minutes for this exercise.

Post-it One: If you drive a personal vehicle…

Green= strongly agree, yellow= somewhat agree, red= disagree
(Please put one dauber dot per row)

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree
I feel safe			
It is affordable			
It is easy to use			
It is comfortable			
It is reliable			

Post-it One Findings: Personal Vehicle Results

7 out of 8 sessions had residents with a **personal vehicle** experience	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Did not have experience with this transportation option or not enough experience to respond
I feel safe	51%	10%	0	39%
It is affordable	26%	21%	11%	42%
It is easy to use	53%	7%	0	60%
It is comfortable	57%	4%	0	39%
It is reliable	53%	7%	1%	39%

Post-it Two...: If you ride with a friend or family member in their personal vehicle... Green= strongly agree, yellow= somewhat agree, red= disagree

(Please put one dauber dot per row)

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree
I feel safe			
It is affordable			
It is easy to use			
It is comfortable			
It is reliable			

Post-it Two Results: Friend or family member in their personal vehicle

7 out of 8 sessions had residents with friend or family vehicle experience	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Did not have experience with transportation option or not enough experience to respond
I feel safe	33%	7%	7%	53%
It is affordable	32%	7%	6%	55%
It is easy to use	31%	7%	4%	58%
It is comfortable	35%	6%	3%	56%
It is reliable	29%	11%	4%	56%

Post-it Three: If you use Transit Link Buses...

Green= strongly agree, yellow= somewhat agree, red= disagree
(Please put one dauber dot per row)

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree
I feel safe			
It is affordable			
It is easy to use			
It is comfortable			
It is reliable			

Post-it Three: Transit Link Results

5 out of 8 sessions had residents with Transit Link experience	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Did not have experience with transportation option or not enough experience to respond
I feel safe	6%	7%	6%	81%
It is affordable	7%	4%	4%	85%
It is easy to use	4%	7%	6%	83%
It is comfortable	7%	4%	6%	83%
It is reliable	6%	6%	6%	82%

Post-it Four: If you use Metro Mobility Buses or Vehicles...

Green= strongly agree, yellow= somewhat agree, red= disagree
(Please put one dauber dot per row)

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree
I feel safe			
It is affordable			
It is easy to use			
It is comfortable			
It is reliable			

Post-it Four Results: Metro Mobility Bus or Vehicle Results

4 out of 8 sessions had residents with Metro Mobility experience	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Did not have experience with transportation option or not enough experience to respond
I feel safe	1%	3%	6%	90%
It is affordable	4%	1%	4%	91%
It is easy to use	4%	1%	7%	88%
It is comfortable	0	4%	7%	89%
It is reliable	1%	3%	8%	88%

Post-it Five: If you use Metro Transit Buses...

Green= strongly agree, yellow= somewhat agree, red= disagree
(Please put one dauber dot per row)

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree
I feel safe			
It is affordable			
It is easy to use			
It is comfortable			
It is reliable			

Post-it Five Results: Metro Transit Bus Results

5 out of 8 sessions had residents with personal vehicle experience	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Did not have experience with transportation option or not enough experience to respond
I feel safe	6%	8%	7%	79%
It is affordable	7%	3%	7%	83%
It is easy to use	7%	1%	7%	85%
It is comfortable	7%	4%	4%	85%
It is reliable	7%	1%	8%	84%

Post-it Six: If you use Uber, Lyft, and/or Taxis...

Green= strongly agree, yellow= somewhat agree, red= disagree

(Please put one dauber dot per row)

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree
I feel safe			
It is affordable			
It is easy to use			
It is comfortable			
It is reliable			

Post-it Six Results: If you use Uber, Lyft, and/or Taxis...

5 out of 8 sessions had residents with personal vehicle experience	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Did not have experience with transportation option or not enough experience to respond
I feel safe	8%	7%	8%	77%
It is affordable	4%	4%	18%	74%
It is easy to use	7%	7%	13%	73%
It is comfortable	8%	8%	7%	77%
It is reliable	13%	6%	7%	74%

Post-it Seven: If you walk...

Green= strongly agree, yellow= somewhat agree, red= disagree
(Please put one dauber dot per row)

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree
I feel safe			
It is affordable			
It is easy to use			
It is comfortable			
It is reliable			

Post-it Seven Results: If you walk...

7 out of 8 sessions had residents with personal vehicle experience	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Did not have experience with transportation option or not enough experience to respond
I feel safe	36%	10%	4%	50%
It is affordable	22%	13%	14%	51%
It is easy to use	25%	18%	10%	47%
It is comfortable	29%	14%	6%	51%
It is reliable	29%	11%	6%	54%

Bingo dauber exercise debrief: ACET Facilitator Script [10 minutes]

1) What do you notice about the pieces of paper?
   a) Where is the most green?
   b) The most red? A mix of green, yellow, and red?
   c) Any reflections about how you felt doing this exercise? Any "ah ha" moments?

2) Let's look at the modes of transportation with the fewest dots, which means that fewer people use these modes of transportation. What are some reasons why you don't use these modes of transportation? *[Listen for: Implications of individual and/or institutional racism, sexism, ableism, ageism]*

3) What would make you more likely to use these forms of transportation? *[Listen for: safety, affordability, ease of use, comfort, and reliability]*

We have one more dauber exercise. In the first column, there are four transportation options. Reflect on each and put one daub per row.

Dauber Exercise 2

If it were safe, reliable, and affordable, I would…	I would never do this (red) I might do this (yellow) I would likely do this (green)
Ride alone in a car/vehicle with a paid or volunteer driver	
Ride in with 2-5 other passengers in a van, suv, or small bus	
Ride a bus or train with many other passengers	
Walk reasonable distances on safe paths and sidewalks	

Dauber Exercise 2 Results:

3 out of 8 sessions were able to fully complete this exercise	I would likely do this	I might do this	I would never do this	Listening session ran out of time and did not get to complete the final exercise
Ride alone in a car/vehicle with a paid or volunteer driver	17%	6%	6%	71%
Ride with 2-5 other passengers in a van, SUV, or small bus	14%	10%	6%	70%
Ride a bus or train with many other passengers	19%	3%	6%	72%
Walk reasonable distances on safe paths and sidewalks	15%	6%	7%	72%

1) What do you notice about the pieces of paper?
   a) Where is the most green?
   b) The most red?
   c) A mix of green, yellow, and red?
   d) Any reflections about how you felt doing this exercise? Any "ah ha" moments?

Wishes and hopes: ACET Facilitator Script [15 minutes]

We're going to end our time together reflecting on and talking about our wishes and hopes for the future of transportation in Washington County.

1) Picture your ideal world. What are your primary wishes for transportation options in your area? *[Listen for the following:]*

   a) *how far they want to be able to travel*

   b) *more on-demand service like dial-a-ride /affordable microtransit (public, small on-demand shared vehicles where drivers are background checked employees, vehicles are consistently labeled, well-maintained, and cost is affordable/similar to public transit)*

   c) *more on-demand private taxis, private drivers for hire (cost is not a factor)*

   d) *more volunteer driving and ride-share programs*

   e) *walkability, shorter distance between housing and necessities*

   f) *more convenient fixed-route services like buses and trains*

   more destination-specific loops/shuttles

Wrap up: ACET Facilitator Script [2 minutes]

1) Let's end by going around and responding to this phrase with one word or a short phrase: "When it comes to transportation in Washington County, I'm hopeful for …" *[Invite each person to share]*

During the eight listening sessions, several of the residents were identified and asked if they would be willing to have a follow-up one-on-one conversation to gain more insight about their perspectives of public transportation in the county. The sessions lasted for thirty to forty minutes, and permission was granted to record the sessions. The following questions were asked during the one-on-one resident conversations. Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

1) First, can you tell me what kind of transportation you use most often?

   i) And is there another type of transportation you use sometimes, or do you almost always stick with [the mode they mentioned]

   ii) [If mentioned 2 modes] Can you tell me a bit about how you decide to use either [mode 1] or [mode 2] for particular trips?

   iii) [if only use one mode] And what would you say is the main reason you choose this kind of transportation?

   iv) [Prompts: if they don't mention these, ask:]
      (1) Is cost a factor/reason for you?
      (2) How about independence?
      (3) Flexibility?
      (4) Social connections?
      (5) Anything else?
      (6) Is your primary mode of transportation to get around your community, and what do you like about it?

2) In your ideal life, what kind of transportation would you choose?
   a) Can you talk about why you would choose that?
   b) [If it's different from what they cited in #1]: Can you describe what keeps you from using this in real life?

3) [if they did not cite public transportation as the primary mode]:
   a) So you don't often use public transportation. Can you talk about the reasons why you don't?
   b) Can you think of any changes that could be made to public transportation that would make you choose to use it [probe for cost, convenience, safety, routes, etc]

4) [if they did cite public transportation as the primary mode]:
   a) Can you tell me about the things you like about [the bus/whatever the name of the transport they use is]?
   b) And are there things you don't like about it?
   c) [if not covered already] Can you think of any changes that could be made to public transportation that would make you choose to use it [probe for cost, convenience, safety, routes, etc.]

5) Can you talk about how your friends or family who live in Washington County use public transportation, or what they think about it?
   a) Do you think that overall it has a good reputation? [probe why or why not?]

APPENDIX C: Highlights Infographic

HIGHLIGHTS: PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSPORTATION

A report, "Resident Perspectives on Transportation from Aging Adults & Adults with Disabilities in Washington County, Minnesota" was prepared by ACET, Inc. for Washington County Community Services in 2023.

THE RESEARCH

4 Conversations with Washington County Community Leaders

+

8 Listening Sessions with Community Members

+

4 Conversations with Community Members

THE FINDINGS
Public Transportation Challenges in Washington County

ALL PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

» Limited accessibility

» Lack of information

» Safety and comfort concerns

METRO MOBILITY AND TRANSIT LINK

» Complexity of use

» Unpredictability and unreliability

» Limited flexibility/inefficient scheduling

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WASHINGTON COUNTY

SHORT-TERM SOLUTIONS

- Expand outreach and marketing efforts

- Work with partners to expand circulators and volunteer driver programs

- Support Washington County Public Works, The Metropolitan Council, and our other partners to promote microtransit options that align with the Public Works Transportation Strategic Plan

- Work with The Metropolitan Council and partners to improve relationships, services, communication, and processes by which data is shared and problems are solved

LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

- Continue to explore new and expanded transportation services

- Continue to explore funding sources and legislative action

ACET inc

COMMUNITY THEMES

Below are themes that emerged from resident conversations across the county.

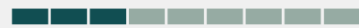## WANTS

DESIRE TO GET AROUND THE COUNTY
9 out of **9** Sessions

DESIRE FOR IMPROVED FEELING OF SAFETY
4 out of **9** Sessions

BIKING OR DESIRE FOR BIKING PATHS
3 out of **9** Sessions

DESIRE FOR ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION PROGRAMS
2 out of **9** Sessions

CONCERNS

CONCERN ABOUT LACK OF SUPPORT DUE TO SMALL/NO FAMILY OR SMALL SOCIAL NETWORK
6 out of **9** Sessions

CONCERN ABOUT DANGEROUS DRIVERS AND ROADS
6 out of **9** Sessions

CONCERNS ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN NO LONGER ABLE TO DRIVE
6 out of **9** Sessions

CONCERNS ABOUT DISABILITIES OR INJURIES THAT PREVENT DRIVING
5 out of **9** Sessions

APPENDIX D: Research Partnership

Biko Associates, Inc., conducted research in Oakdale during 2023, as contracted by the Age Friendly Oakdale Task Force. The findings from Biko Associates' memorandums have been incorporated into the Resident Perspectives on Transportation from Aging Adults & Adults with Disabilities in Washington County, Minnesota, report prepared by ACET, Inc., for Washington County Community Services (2023). If you would like a copy of the full report, please visit the City of Oakdale's website: www.oakdalemn.gov. You may also reach out to Oakdale Wellness 50+/Age Friendly Oakdale at: oakdalewellness50new@gmail.com.